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DAZAI OSAMU:

Selected Stories and Sketches

Translated by James O'Brien

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Finally, I am grateful to Tsushima Michiko, for permission to publish these translations of the work of her late husband. The text I have used is the 1962 edition of the Dazai Osamu Zenshū, published by the Chikuma Shobō in Tokyo.

A NOTE ON THE FORMAT

I have generally referred to desk dictionaries, such as Webster's New World Dictionary, in deciding whether to regard a word as foreign. This decision was taken in the expectation that this book would be read primarily by college students, who would more readily refer to such dictionaries than to Webster's Third International Dictionary.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I

Dazai Osamu, whose real name was Tsushima Shūji, was born in 1909 at Kanagi, a small town in the northernmost province of the main Japanese island of Honshu. The Tsushima family owned some of the most extensive lands in the area, and the taxes on its holings entitled Dazai's father Gen'emon to move eventually from an elective seat in the Lower House into the Upper House of the Diet. Absent from Kanagi during legislative sessions and occupied with financial matters when home, Gen'emon had little time for Dazai, the tenth of his eleven children. Furthermore, Dazai's mother Tane, worn out by the successive pregnancies, was unable to tend her latest child. Dazai was initially given over to a nursemaid; eventually he was looked after by a favorite aunt and a host of servants.

As was only natural, the Tsushima groomed their older sons to undertake the responsibility of maintaining the family fortune and reputation. During childhood Dazai enjoyed more freedom than an older son would have been allowed. However, once he demonstrated marked intelligence as a young schoolboy, the family insisted that he excel in his studies. Dazai diligently met this obligation throughout his elementary schooling in Kanagi. But when on the secondary level he encountered the competition of more select students, as well as the severe scrutiny of teachers relatively indifferent to his prestigious name, he began to founder.

Billetted in the higher school town of Hirosaki, some twenty miles from the family home, Dazai began to cultivate certain fashionable tastes, perhaps as an escape from the relentless scholastic demands confronting him. He would dress in a flamboyant style and attend the local teahouses. He took lessons in ballad chanting and even paid court to a young geisha named Oyama Hatsuyo. When he insisted a few

years later on marrying Hatsuyo, the family was horrified.

During his years in higher school Dazai did not confine his study to the conservative curriculum of the schools. Radical ideas made considerable headway in Japan during the 1920's, a period of economic difficulty throughout the country. Like his older contemporary, Arishima Takeo, Dazai came to feel a profound guilt towards the tenant-farmers who worked the family lands partly to support his priviledged existence. One of his earliest stories, published in 1930, depicts a youngster who joins with a peasant band in rebellion against his own older brother, a rural landowner of tyrannical arrogance.

The twenty-one year old Dazai was now in Tokyo, ostensibly to major in French literature at the university. The constraining influence of his family virtually gone, Dazai presently abandoned his studies. Though receiving an allowance from home on the pretext that he was steadily working towards a degree, he hardly ever attended classes. Much of his time was spent with radical student groups, to whom he gave some financial assistance and in whose behalf he claimed to have carried out seditious acts. By his own admission, however, Dazai was incapable of becoming a full-fledged revolutionary. But he could not seek a genuine reconciliation with his family, either, and so he continued to deceive them about his studies. Desperate to escape this bind, Dazai attempted suicide three times and became so addicted to drugs that he was briefly committed to an asylum. The tendency towards consumption which he shared with certain members of his family was aggravated during this period of his life too. By 1937 Dazai was living alone in Tokyo in a shabby boarding house. His ties both with his family and the university had been formally severed, and the geisha he had boldly insisted on marrying had gone back to her home in northern Japan.

Slowly Dazai began to hope for a reconciliation. The feeling came partly from a recognition that the Tsushima family, despite its political standing and economic status, was marked for tragedy. The two oldest sons had died even before Dazai's birth, and during his

first decade in Tokyo two of his brothers and two sisters, as well as a nephew and a cousin, also died. Gen'emon too had died in 1923, when Dazai was only thirteen, and though Tane survived until 1942, she remained in frail health to the end. The family encountered mundane problems, too, notably an accusation that Bunji, the oldest surviving son and present head of the family, had won election to a Diet seat through fraud.

Concern over Dazai's notoriety prevented any dramatic move by the family toward reconciliation. Nonetheless the Tsushima tried to promote his rehabilitation by quietly sanctioning efforts to bring about a marriage between Dazai and Ishihara Michiko, a schoolteacher from the city of Kōfu in central Japan. The wedding took place in January, 1939, after which Dazai settled down to a relatively stable life. A few months after the marriage, he and his wife moved to Mitaka Village near Tokyo. A daughter was born in 1941, the first of three children.

During the years of World War Two, Dazai gradually established his reputation as a leading writer of the time. In his case such recognition brought special satisfaction. Dazai's oldest brother Bunji enjoyed literature and even wrote an occasional piece himself. From the late thirties Dazai had wished for success as a means of compensating in the family's eyes for his academic failure, if not for his earlier radicalism. Apart from this strategy, Dazai tried forthrightly to cultivate the good will of his older brothers, returning to his birthplace in Kanagi several times during the final years of the war. When his house in Mitaka was severely damaged in a bombing raid, Dazai went back home with his wife and children, and there he remained until November of 1946.

Having returned to Tokyo for the last time, Dazai began to neglect his family for a life of reckless dissipation. The explanations for this lapse are many--a foreboding that he, like certain of his kin, was marked for an early death; an inability to handle the fame which his postwar writings earned; susceptibility to the machinations of discontented women. One such woman, Yamazaki Tomie, evidently persuaded Dazai to commit suicide by entering the swollen waters of the Tamagawa

Canal with her. Dazai's body was discovered by the police on June 19, 1948, thirty-nine years precisely from the day of his birth.

II

Dazai Osamu is often considered a shishōsetsuka, or, as the term has been rendered of late in English, a writer of personal fiction. This genre of personal fiction evolved out of certain strange permutations which European Naturalism underwent early in this century in Japan as it encountered the persistent strain of personalism evident in such classic literary forms as the diary, the "wayward essay," and the travel journal. Complicated in its history and varying markedly from one writer to another, the shishōsetsu almost defies attempts at definition. Writers so different from one another--indeed, so antagonistic toward one another--as Dazai Osamu and Shiga Naoya are both regarded as writers of personal fiction.

Although criticism and scholarship on the shishōsetsu tend to be as diverse as the genre itself, one persistent direction of interest dominates much of this work. This is the close scrutiny directed upon the author's life, the main source of material for the writing. Sometimes the process of investigation becomes the reverse of what it ought to be, the work of so-called personal fiction becoming an unquestioned source of detailed information on the author's life.

Until approximately a decade ago most scholarly writing on Dazai assumed that any work that referred in some degree to the known facts of the author's life was autobiographical in a thoroughgoing way. This credulity was called into question by an occasional article or two, but only with the recent and highly focussed documentary research into Dazai's life by Sōma Shōichi has the attitude been broadly challenged. Soma's research provides indisputable evidence that Dazai did not feel bound to the facts in writing about himself and reinforces an impression, which the translations in this book should convey on

occasion, that the author sometimes used his persona more for special effects than as a reflection of his actual life. When, for example, the Dazai figure in "Memories" tries to predict his fate by turning over the cards in a deck or by spinning a wheel of fate in the temple graveyard, the laws of probability give way to the desired pose of sardonic self-abasement.

Even when he does write factually about his life, Dazai exercises a high degree of selectivity. Though because of his style Dazai often appears to be working in a mood of spontaneity, in fact he deliberately highlights certain experiences--his suicide attempts, for example, or the trauma of his drug addiction and temporary confinement to an asylum. When it suits his purpose, he will omit events which, on purely factual grounds, deserve treatment in the narrative at hand. In "Eight Views of Tokyo," an evocation of the places he has lived in the city, Dazai omits any account of the political deeds that purportedly led to his frequent changes of residence. Restricting his experiences to certain main themes, stressing the role of his persona within the memoir-like narratives to the detriment of the supporting characters, Dazai writes relentlessly of himself and repeatedly of certain crucial episodes in his life.

On a superficial level Dazai seems attracted to many subjects other than himself. He was constantly in search of new material, scanning the newspapers and pumping his friends for promising anecdotes. He dipped into the Japanese classics and into various literatures of the West for stories to retell and elaborate. And he sometimes took historical figures as subjects for his pen. These methods did not in the least draw him away from the self-obsession so evident in the memoir-like writings. In recreating Hamlet, or the 13th century Shōgun Sanetomo, each in a major and lengthy work, Dazai portrayed to a marked degree the quirks and ideals so commonly predicated of his own persona. Lu Hsun, the protagonist of Dazai's novel Parting Regrets, scarcely represents the celebrated founder of modern prose writing in China. He exists, in some measure at least, as another Dazai surrogate

in disguise, a roving figure subject to moods of loneliness who experiences during his stay in Japan certain language problems reminiscent of the provincial Dazai's reported trials in mastering the ultimate subtleties of standard Tokyo speech.

One might well argue, then, that Dazai's self-obsession was so intense that he could see in others only reflections of himself. But, more to the point, these hints and flashes of Dazai in other guises reveal how the author used similar techniques in treating the figure designated as himself. For in the memoirs, too--"Toys" being the best example in the selections that follow--Dazai often uses his persona in a coy manner, showing certain facets of the psyche while concealing others in a kind of hide-and-seek exercise. Certain of Dazai's memoirs (and other of his works too) might be regarded as exhibitions and performances, to borrow the terms employed by Donald Fanger in a recent discussion of Gogol. In such works the main action is not so much between the characters in the narrative as between the "author and his story, on the one hand, and between the author and the reader on the other."[1] In reading Dazai we acquaint ourselves with the attitudes and the speech, the gestures and the physical appearance of a figure the author invites us to identify with himself. This knowledge carries over from story to story, the initiated reader recognizing in certain familiar traits his old friend Dazai even under a different name. As in the case of Dazai's reworking of the conflict between the badger and the hare in the traditional tale entitled "The Crackling Mountain," the author's surrogate can even appear in the guise of an animal.

To what purpose does Dazai assume this intermediary role between tale and reader? Partly, I would suggest, to rescue the depiction of his life and trials from the monotony that would otherwise tarnish it. Often a game is being played between the author and his surrogate in the tale. In "Eight Views of Tokyo," for example, Dazai writes about himself up to that moment in his life when he sat down to write, the concluding sentence slyly rejoining this author with himself. By such diverting tactics can Dazai approach his readers time and again,

the search for rapport constituting, for certain Japanese critics, a prime impulse of his art.

"Memories," one of the earliest works, introduces themes and moods that characterize many of the later writings. On occasion the Dazai persona seems tongue-in-cheek as he recalls episodes from his childhood and youth. But the author's seriousness in "Memories" is undeniable, too, humor often serving merely as the hero's inevitable response to problems he cannot otherwise manage. This persona enjoys periods of camaraderie with his brothers and his boyhood friends; he also experiences moments of security and contentment within the family, and he entertains hopes for love and marriage as he matures. By and large, however, and increasingly as time passes, it dawns on him that he is condemned by his own pride and self-awareness to awkwardness and uncertainty in his dealings with others.

The need for friendship is such a dominant theme in the stories and sketches which follow "Memories" in this volume that it hardly needs emphasizing here. A few words might be in order, however, as the theme is sometimes handled in an indirect, if not an obscure, manner. Adopted from an idea in Ueda Akinari's classical story, "The Carp That Came to my Dream,"[2] Dazai's "Transformation" might seem a mere series of vivid scenes in simple yet telling language, as a story mystifying rather than complete. In fact, as a careful reading should confirm, this tale of a young girl living an isolated and unsatisfying existence with her stolid father embodies a rather definite and characteristic statement by Dazai. The girl Suwa derives an intimation of friendship from the people she has known of: the student in search of rare ferns whom she saw but probably never met, and the brothers Saburō and Hachirō whose story is narrated by the girl's unresponsive father. In the end Suwa plunges into the waterfall pool to escape her brutal father, but also to seek the only friends she has known.

"Transformation," by virtue of its taut structure, understated manner, and simple language, might seem wholly divorced from the

previous work "Memories," with its somewhat loquacious and meandering style. A little reflection, however, will uncover the extent to which both deal, albeit in a different context entirely, with questions of solitude and loneliness, with the need for friendship and love along with the difficulties of fulfilling that need, especially within the family. The author's pessimistic bent is expressed not only in the general drift of events, but also in the ironic reversals which declarations of intent eventually suffer in the action of each work. Coincidentally, the most striking reversal in each case involves a seduction: the father's violation of Suwa in "Transformation" reversing his earlier impulse to "let her be" as a woman, the seduction and dismissal of the housemaid Miyo in "Memories" nullifying in a wry manner the narrator's concern not to involve the girl even in a tenuous and mental fashion in his practice of masturbation.

There is, then, a distinct unity to Dazai's outlook on things and even a similarity of writing techniques common to his entire range of narration, from the most immediately and directly personal modes to the seemingly objective ones. More striking on a first reading, however, might well be Dazai's virtuosity with language, a talent which, in Masao Miyoshi's words, can make his style "dance with such rare grace."[3] Dazai, in fact, wrote a number of "aphoristic diaries" (none of which is included here), and the pithy style of these works is employed now and again in other of his writings. He had a masterly control of numerous styles, and it is unfortunate that the present volume does not give indications of the sonorous formality throughout Sanetomo: Minister of the Right, the ecstatic lyricism of the moonlight stroll scene in "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji," or the breathtaking impetuosity with which Judas delivers his apologia in "Heed My Plea." As befits a stylist, particularly one with a comic gift, Dazai wrote all manner of parodies. In "Righteousness and Smiles" he slyly parodied the classroom confession scene in Shimazaki Tōson's famous novel, The Broken Commandment; in "Taking the Wen Away" he wrote a pastiche of verses that again echoes Tōson (the poetry in this case, however) as well as the Nō drama. Dazai also enjoyed playing around with titles,

"Mekura no sōshi" ("The Blind Book") parodying Makura no sōshi (The Pillow Book) of the eleventh century court lady, Sei Shōnagon, and Udaijin Sanetomo (Sanetomo: Minister of the Right) being glossed in the phonetic script to read Yudayajin Sanetomo (Sanetomo the Jew). Often Dazai shifted his style radically from one work to the next, as with the aforementioned "Memories" and "Transformation," or with "Homecoming" and "What It's Like to Abstain," the first a tightly written and somber account of Dazai's visit to the deathbed of his mother, the latter a sardonic and rollicking description of a drinker enduring the trials of the wartime rationing of sake. It is not at all uncharacteristic of Dazai to make radical stylistic shifts even within a single work. "The Sound of Hammering" is wrought of such shifts, and the reader will encounter many other occurences of it, expecially in pieces like "Putting Granny Out to Die" and "Osan."

In certain extreme instances the lively phrasing becomes a virtual raison d'être of a Dazai work. "Standard Bearer of the Twentieth Century," a tour-de-force in which the Dazai narrator mockingly portrays himself in a jesting tone, seems to me an almost untranslatable performance of this stripe. The selections in this volume probably include enough phrases--on occasion whole paragraphs and more--to give some indication of Dazai's talents in this line. It should be mentioned, however, that my selection of works necessarily underplays the degree to which language draws attention to itself generally in Dazai.

The work in this selection which best illustrates a sustained use of language at this level is "Das Gemeine," published in 1935 just over a year before "Standard Bearer of the Twentieth Century." With a cast of three main characters more or less equal in prominence, and a fourth with a billing greater than his role by being named Dazai Osamu, "Das Gemeine" is deprived of the narrow focus which a single Dazai surrogate, regardless of name, imposes upon many other narratives. Indeed commentary on the story sometimes relies upon the Freudian derived concept of "bunshin,"[4] with the aforementioned quartet of individuals

representing various aspects of Dazai's own psyche and life. Apart from this, however, the characters in "Das Gemeine" seem to be employed as the instruments of wit and narrative exuberance. Admittedly, Dazai again brings to this tale his pre-occupation with solitude and loneliness, and his quest for the kind of friendship that endures (paradoxically!) by virtue of its unpredictability. If, however, he had not written of these matters so insistently, "Das Gemeine" might be read for its language and frivolity, and then dismissed. As it is, the initiated reader can see the entire story as embodying Dazai, the manner of his presence more diffuse here--identical with the language, perhaps?--than in the protean-like revelations of other works.

Often Dazai's presence takes a more definite form, especially in the blunt authorial intrusions that occur so predictably in his writings. These intrusions can be more dramatic and extensive than anything encountered in these translations. When he re-casts pre-existing works, Dazai is often quite brazen. In "The Women's Duel," he castigates the German playwright Herbert Eulenberg for a lack of sympathy towards character, and then he lays out his own narrative strategies by lengthening the original and commenting extensively on it. Particularly when writing about the more painful trials of his life, Dazai occasionally interrupts the narrative to talk about himself authoring the work, as he does in "The Flower of Buffoonery," a narrative based on his survival of a lover's suicide attempt in which the woman perished.

Dazai's pose in certain episodes of intrusion is a curious one. In the face of his own abundant talent--his deftness at narrative composition, his facility with language, his creative method of adapting material from his own life and elsewhere in lieu of invention--Dazai could insist, and in a voice that for the moment carries conviction, that he was little more than a hack doing the only thing he knew how. In this volume he does not appear even once in this extreme guise, my own conviction being that rapport with Dazai is best maintained when one is not quite sure who he is.

III

Dazai Osamu was introduced to Western readers in the 1950's. During this period Donald Keene translated two postwar novels, The Setting Sun and No Longer Human, as well as Dazai's celebrated story, "Villon's Wife," also composed in the aftermath of the war. In the intervening decades various translators have attempted a Dazai story or two. About twenty works are available in English, but they remain scattered in sundry journals and somewhat inaccessible to the general reader. The number of translations produced in other Western languages, mostly of the postwar works, is also limited.[5]

The unwillingness of any translator to devote sustained attention to Dazai since the 1950's is especially striking when one considers the work accomplished on other modern Japanese writers. Natsume Sōseki, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and Kawabata Yasunari, novelists of a generation or two earlier than Dazai's, have been translated time and again. And writers of a generation later--Mishima Yukio, Ōe Kenzaburo, and Endo Shūsaku, for example--have received such sustained attention that their work too is better known outside Japan than Dazai's is.

Whatever the reasons for this relative neglect, Dazai's standing in the history of modern Japanese letters is not among them. Reputations fluctuate in Japan just as they do elsewhere, and the significance of Dazai Osamu is endlessly discussed. On occasion critics give voice to certain doubts and reservations about the permanence of his work, but the very uniqueness of the man should guarantee a lasting interest in him--surely in his own country and, one would hope, even beyond.

Most studies of Dazai in English devote attention mainly to the postwar literature, especially the two aforementioned novels, which are commonly regarded as an expression of the pessimism and despair pervading Japanese society in the wake of the surrender. Studies of this kind acknowledge that the characters of the postwar fiction embody certain traits of the author, but these characters are ultimately seen as vital and suggestive in their own right, with an existence independent of the

author's, J. Thomas Rimer's essay, "Dazai Osamu: The Death of the Past," represents an agile treatment of this view with reference to The Setting Sun.[6] Rimer refers Dazai's utilization of such personal forms of writing as letters and journals in this novel, and the memoir-like quality of the overall narrative also, to the limits on conversation which the author imposes upon the characters. What these characters reveal in writing about themselves stands forth in bolder relief, as it were, precisely because of their reticence in the company of one another.

Recently two attempts have been made in English to devise a critical approach relevant to the entire range of Dazai's career. Given the diversity of works, it is hardly surprising that these studies are cast in terms other than those oriented to the postwar literature. The two critics in question both view Dazai as a relentlessly personal, if not a self-obsessed, author whose persona is palpably present even in ostensibly "fictional" pieces.

There is, declares Masao Miyoshi, a "monomaniacal 'first-person' quality about everything" Dazai wrote.[7] Though dealing principally with The Setting Sun, Miyoshi's provocative and exciting essay in Accomplices of Silence insists on the personalism concealed beneath a variety of masks employed throughout his career by Dazai. Professor Miyoshi lauds the stylistic virtuosity, especially the dextrous manipulation of tone, that permitted Dazai to markedly vary the self-portrait. All the same the enclosed nature of his writing leads ultimately to annihilation. Dazai is a "cannibal, his compulsion to nullify the distance from his work--and from his reader--amounting to eating them up and eating himself up too."[8] Though rejecting any autobiographical approach that merely seeks out correspondences between the life and works, Miyoshi does conclude his essay by suggesting that art such as Dazai's can easily lead its creator to suicide.

In contrast to the ambivalent view of Miyoshi, Phyllis Lyons reads Dazai in a way which, while accomodating the possibility of boredom and even disgust in the reader, stresses the value of Dazai's unique

manipulation of self. Lyons' initial study of Dazai focussed on his writing in relation to the death urge so evident in his life.[9] Singling out certain works which clarified the argument (two of them, "Memories" and "Eight Views of Tokyo," happen to be included here), Lyons unfolded the saga of Dazai--a complex interplay between the author himself, the real-life boy Osamu, and the grown-up Shūji, the last of these a kind of prodigal son, though one who could no longer return to the refuge of his childhood home. In a recent and brilliantly suggestive article, Professor Lyons has argued that the elimination of distance between author and reader is precisely what makes Dazai a uniquely personal author. By virtue of his intimate narrative voice, Dazai creates a "permeable self" that invites a kind of participation, the reader too becoming, along with the author, a conscious artist. Isolated early on from his own family and adrift throughout his adult life, Dazai serves as an "observant scapegoat in a society that ritualizes all forms of interpersonal expression . . . ."[10]

IV

The stories in this collection lend themselves readily to a personalist view of Dazai. This is so for the simple reason that they were chosen from the entire career, their principal continuity thus being the presence of a certain personality implied by the narrative manner, if not actually taking part in the action. Indeed, one of the main impulses behind these translations is the wish to show a side of Dazai's art hitherto obscured for non-Japanese readers by a lack of accessible translations from all but the final years of the author's life.

With at least one selection from each of the nine volumes of Dazai's mature writings, the translations divide into a number of story types. Inevitably the emphasis falls upon the memoir-like works, some of them a combination of episode and commentary covering a substantial part of the narrator's life, others more in the nature of anecdotal re-creations of brief adventures. The depiction of current events and conditions defines another subject genre in the

Dazai canon. The author usually selects a single mode of narration from his stock-in-trade, an exchange of letters for one of the two works from this genre included here, the quaint recollections of a one hundred yen note for the other. Neither of these stories incorporates the author or his persona in a substantial fashion. "The Sound of Hammering," based on letters Dazai actually received, strikingly evokes the mood of deadening nihilism among the Japanese after World War II, while "Currency" affords a glimpse of the postwar black market. The latter tale, incidentally, is probably the least characteristic of the author among the selections here translated, the editor of Dazai's Complete Works, Okuno Takeo, regarding it as "mediocre."[11]

A third and final category of works in this collection might be loosely termed the retelling. Despite his occasional pose as an unlearned bumpkin, Dazai did read extensively in both foreign and Japanese literatures. Besides Hamlet and Eulenberg, his canon includes a work based closely upon Schiller's "Die Burgschaft." And his Sanetomo: Minister of the Right shows a good familiarity with the Azuma Kagami, a chronicle of the Kamakura shogunate. Dazai's finest accomplishment in the genre of retelling is probably his Otogi Zōshi, four stories adapted by him from an extensive miscellany of medieval tales. Purportedly based on an illustrated children's version of the tales, Dazai's versions preserve certain marvelous effects even while giving a complexity of theme to the original tales. The one tale included here, "Taking the Wen Away," illustrates the author's gift for creating diversions and raising interpersonal issues at one and the same time. Ihara Saikaku, the 17th century novelist, also afforded Dazai's talents a good opportunity for reworking classic texts. Two stories, "A Poor Man's Got His Pride" and "The Mound of the Monkey's Grave," have been selected from among the twelve which Dazai retold from various collections of Saikaku. Dazai's sense of humor and pathetic touch fully transform the brief, anecdotal accounts of Saikaku. Integrating his own concerns into the retelling, Dazai

complicates the action and intensifies the mood in ways which are beyond Saikaku's brisk narrative manner.

If he had not turned his obsession with self into such a variety of literature, Dazai would indeed be a limited if not a tiresome author. If, on the other hand, he had not implicated himself so insistently even in his fiction-like writing, he might be slighted as a lesser novelist, anecdotalist, and mere teller of eccentric tales. The recent emphasis on Dazai's personal and ongoing involvement in the writings serves to clarify the actual state of things. However, the reader prompted to look so continuously for Dazai or his persona might well miss the craftsmanship which rendered the obsession in such intriguing diversity. It is my hope that these translations will suggest a part of that diversity.

MEMORIES (Omoide, 1934)

I

I have never forgotten how peacefully the twilight descended the evening my aunt spoke to me of the Emperor's death. We were by the front gate of the house, and my aunt appeared to be carrying an infant on her back, beneath the folds of a nursery coat. The Emperor was a Living God, she said, and that's why He had merely Gone into Seclusion. I whispered these curious words, a Living God, but in repeating the rest I must have spoken too bluntly. She scolded me right away, insisting that I say, Gone into Seclusion. I remember making her smile, though. Gone into Seclusion where, I asked, even though I knew already.

The Emperor had been reigning forty-two years the summer I was born and he passed away shortly after my third birthday. Wasn't it about then that my aunt took me to visit relatives in a village several miles away? I remember a waterfall in the nearby mountains, with a shrine below. Against the moss-covered cliff, the falls seemed very broad and white. The man who held me on his shoulders as I watched was a total stranger. As he pointed to the various holy images in the shrine, I felt utterly bereft and cried out for my auntie. She was off in the hollow picnicking with the relatives, but at my cry she sprang to her feet. Suddenly she slipped on the rug which the party had spread over the ground and stumbled as though making a bow. The people teased her about being drunk, but the jest seemed to me so pathetic as I gazed from above that I cried out all the more.

Also, I dreamed one night that my aunt was going away and leaving me behind. She stood in the front gate, blocking my way, her expansive breasts wet with perspiration. When I heard her grumbling about what a brat I was, I ran to her crying, pressed my cheek to her breast, and begged her to stay.

When my aunt shook me awake, I hugged her and cried. Even after I was fully awake, I sobbed for the longest time; but I didn't tell a

soul about the dream, not even my aunt.

I have other memories of my aunt, but I remember nothing from childhood of my parents. Ours was a large family--Greatgrandmother, Grandmother, Mother and Father, my three older brothers, four older sisters, my younger brother, my aunt and her four daughters; except for my aunt, however, I don't recall anything about my family before the age of four or five.

There seem to have been five or six large apple trees in the back garden, and I faintly recall a number of girls climbing them on a dark, cloudy day. And wasn't there a group of girls--my cousins and sisters probably--who took me under their umbrella to view the chrysanthemums in a corner of the garden in the rain?

From around the age of five my memories become more definite. There was the maid Take, so anxious about my education that she taught me to read and helped me through all sorts of books. I was a sickly child and often read in bed. When there were no books at home, Take would go to the village Sunday School and borrow lots of them. I learned to read silently and could finish one book after another without getting tired.

Take also gave me moral instruction. We would go to a temple which displayed Buddhist hell paintings, and there I could observe sinners undergoing all sorts of punishments: arsonists were made to shoulder flaming baskets; paramours writhed in the grip of a huge, green snake with two heads; pale, thin wretches occupied various sites--the lake of blood, the mountain of spikes, the bottomless pit of white smoke--and whimpered through barely opened mouths. Told that liars were sent to hell and their tongues plucked out by demons, I burst into tears.

There was a graveyard on the knoll behind the temple, with a cluster of requiem tablets alongside a hedgerose or some such plant. A slot cut into each tablet held a black, metal wheel, a wheel which seemed to me then about the size of a full moon. You spun the wheel, Take said, and if it stopped without revolving back, you went to Heaven. But if the wheel

started back, you were destined for Hell.

Take would give one of the wheels a push, making it turn with an even sound. Invariably the wheel stopped without turning back. When I pushed it, however, the wheel sometimes turned back. I recall going alone to the temple one autumn to try my luck. Regardless of which wheel I spun, it turned back as if the matter were settled. Controlling my temper, I stubbornly pushed one wheel after another. But as evening fell I gave way to despair and left the graveyard.

My parents were living in Tokyo during this period, and I was taken there by my aunt for a visit. I am told we remained a considerable time, but I remember nothing of my stay, except for the occasional visits of an old crone. I couldn't stand her and cried every time she showed up. She once gave me a toy postal truck, but I wasn't the least interested.

My life underwent a complete change the year I entered the elementary school in our town. For one thing, Take dropped out of sight. Engaged to a man in a nearby fishing village, she left suddenly and without notice, afraid I might otherwise try following her. I think it was the next year, during the Festival of the Dead, that Take returned for a visit. She seemed a different person, and when she asked how I was doing in school I didn't answer. Evidently someone else told her. She merely cautioned **against negligence and didn't praise me at all.**

About the same time circimstances compelled my aunt to leave also. The oldest of her four daughters had married a dentist who was being adopted into the family, while the next daughter had left home, also to marry. After the third daughter died, my aunt took her youngest girl and, with the oldest daughter and her dentist-husband, moved to a distant town to establish a branch house. It was winter, and I remember going along, buried in a corner of the sleigh next to my aunt. Before the sleigh set off, an older brother repeatedly slapped my rump where it pressed against the hood of the sleigh and taunted me by shouting, "They're adopting you too!" I endured this insult with clenched teeth,

for I thought I had indeed been adopted by my aunt. Nevertheless, when it was time to begin school, I was sent back home.

From the moment I entered school, I was no longer a child. One lovely summer day, my brother's nurse taught me a breathtaking game in the tall grass that grew about the vacant mansion behind our home. I was about seven years old, and the nurse could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen. She easily got rid of my four year old brother, mentioning the local word for clover and telling him to find one with four leaves. Then she embraced me, and we tumbled over and over. Thereafter we played our secret game in the family storehouse or even in the closets. My younger brother was ever a nuisance. On one occasion, abandoned outside the closet, he let out such a wail that an older brother came running to inquire what the trouble was. When my older brother opened the door, the nurse blithely remarked that she had lost a coin in the closet.

I myself told any number of lies. During the second or third year of elementary school, I once told my teacher that I had been ordered home to help prepare the dolls for the Girls' Festival and left before the first class hour was over. Back home I told the folks that school was closed for the Peach Festival and proceeded to offer my unneeded assistance in taking the dolls from their boxes.

Again, I had a fondness for certain kinds of bird eggs. I could always find sparrow eggs by removing several roof tiles from the family storehouse, but starlings and crows never roosted there. When classmates found me these two kinds of eggs--one had strange speckles, the other a green hue which seemed to glow--I handed over several bundles of books in return. My collection of various eggs, wrapped in cotton, came to fill a desk drawer.

Apparently, my next older brother had some inkling of this clandestine exchange, for one evening he asked to borrow two books--a certain volume of Western fairy-tales and a second title which escapes me now. I despised my malicious brother; having invested in eggs, I no longer possessed either book. My brother seemed ready to go after

the books if I confessed they were gone, so I said they were around somewhere and I would look for them. Lamp in hand, I searched my own room, then the entire house. My brother followed me, laughing.

"They're gone."

"They're still here," I stubbornly insisted.

After I had climbed to the topmost shelf in the kitchen, my brother told me to forget it.

My school compositions might be called haphazard. I tried depicting myself in the best light, in order to win everyone's applause. I plagiarized. "The Silhouette of My Younger Brother," lauded by my teacher as a masterpiece, was in truth a prize-winning work which I took unrevised from a certain magazine for youth. After reading my plagiarized version, the teacher told me to make a good copy with a brush and submit it to a contest. When a bookworm among the students discovered the fraud later, I prayed that he might die.

In "Autumn Night," a sketch from these same school days likewise extolled by my teachers, I wrote of a headache brought on by too much study. For relief from the headache I went out to the veranda, where I could watch the goldfish and the carp swimming in the moonlit pond. I was enjoying the quiet of the garden when Mother's laughter echoed from a nearby room and I realized the headache was gone. That's what I wrote--a complete pack of lies. Actually I copied the garden scene from my sister's composition notebook, and I have no recollection of a headache from studying. I hated school and never opened a textbook. The family thought I was studying whenever I read; but in fact the books were for entertainment.

When I wrote the truth, things turned out lamentably. The disciplinarian summoned me to the teachers room and delivered a scolding after I wrote how my parents refused me their love. I fared no better when assigned the topic, "If War Breaks Out?" I wrote of war as more frightening than earthquake, lightning, fire, or one's old man.[1] I would take to the hills and urge my teacher to follow, since as a fellow

man he would have the same fear of battle as I.

This time both the assistant disciplinarian and the school principal examined me. Questioned as to why I had written those words, I replied with some prevarication that I had only been jesting. The assistant disciplinarian made an entry in his ledger: I was over-inquisitive! A dispute then arose between the assistant disciplinarian and me. He asked whether a teacher and myself could really be thought of as <u>fellow</u> humans. Somewhat hesitantly I replied that I thought we could. (I was slow-witted, really!) Later I had to think a moment when this same disciplinarian asked why, if they were fellow humans, the principal and he were paid different salaries.

"Is it because your work is different?" I ventured.

The narrow-faced disciplinarian had his steel-rim glasses on as he recorded my words in his book. (And to think that until now I had felt friendly towards this man.) Then he put another question to me.

"Would you call your father a fellow human along with you and me?"

I couldn't answer that one.

A busy man, my father was seldom at home. When he was, he ignored his children anyway. I was so frightened of him I couldn't say a word the time I wanted a fountain pen like his. One night, at my wits' end, I pretended to murmur in my sleep as I lay in bed.

"Fountain pen . . . fountain pen . . . ."

I knew my father was talking intently to a guest in the next room, and I faced in their direction. But not a single murmur reached my father's ear, let alone his heart.

When my younger brother and I were frolicking in the family storehouse piled high with bags of rice, Father once appeared in the doorway shouting at us to get out. I shudder even now to recall his large frame silhouetted against the outside light.

I never felt close to Mother either. In fact I didn't really get to know her until the second or third year of elementary school--long

after I had been weaned from my nurse's breast and outgrown the lap of my aunt. One evening, as Mother slept by my side, she became suspicious of the moving blanket and asked what I was about. Two of the menservants had taught me something, but I could only stammer that my hip was sore and I was massaging it.

"Rub gently, don't pound." Her voice seemed drowsy.

I remained silent, rubbing my hip a short while.

I have many gloomy memories of Mother. Once I put on the suit my older brother kept in the storehouse and strolled about the flower garden tearfully humming a plaintive tune of my own making. Eager to display myself, I sent a maid for the live-in student who helped with our family accounts. Even when he didn't come, I continued to wait. I ran the tip of my shoe along the bamboo fence until my patience gave way and, with my hands stuffed inside the pockets of my brother's pants, burst into tears. I was further humiliated when Mother arrived, got me out of that suit, and gave me a spanking.

My fascination with dress goes back to childhood. I refused to wear a shirt unless there were buttons on the cuffs. I was especially fond of white flannel shirts, and my undershirt collar had to be white, for I took pains to let it show a trifle about my neck. On the Festival of the Full Moon, when the students in our village dressed in their best clothes, I never failed to put on a good flannel kimono with large, brown stripes and glide in a girlish manner along the corridor of the school building. I always performed in secret, though, to keep the others from knowing what a fop I was. Since I was considered the ugliest boy in the family, everyone would enjoy a joke at my expense if such conceit became evident.

I fooled everyone by pretending not to care about my appearance, but this made me seem stolid and uncouth. My brothers and I sat in a row for dinner, a tray before each one of us. It was annoying on these occasions to hear Grandmother and Mother both speak in earnest of how homely I was.

I was self-confident all the same. Often I put this conviction to

the test by asking the maidservants to evaluate the boys in our family. They generally replied that my oldest brother was the finest and I next. I was disheartened as well as embarrassed, for I wished them to say that I was a better fellow even than my oldest brother.

Grandmother and the others criticized my clumsiness as well as my poor looks. At every meal Grandmother warned me to hold the chopsticks correctly; she also claimed that my rump stood out in a disgraceful manner whenever I bowed. Compelled to sit properly before her, I would perform one bow after another. No matter how many times I bowed, she never once expressed herself satisfied. Needless to say, Grandmother was one more tribulation for me.

When a theatrical troupe from Tokyo came to perform during the opening of our village playhouse, I went every day without fail. Since my father had built the playhouse, I always had a good seat for free. Returning from school, I hurriedly changed into a soft kimono and, with a pencil dangling from my sash on a thin chain, I rushed off to the playhouse. I learned of kabuki for the first time in my life; in my excitement I shed tears over and over while watching a kyōgen performance.

Once the troupe had gone, I attempted, with the help of my younger brother and several cousins, to produce my own plays. Fond of creating entertainments, I had summoned the household servants on earlier occasions to listen to my stories and to watch my films and slides. For the current theatrical production, I came up with three kyōgen numbers: "Yamanaka Shikanosuke," "The House of the Dove," and a comic dance.[2] The first of these plays had a Valley Teahouse scene, during which Shikanosuke gains a follower named Hayakawa Ayunosuke. I made an adaptation from the published text of this scene, casting the words in the rhythmic style of kabuki with great care: "Your humble servant/A man known to the world as/Shikanosuke." From The House of the Dove, a long novel which brought tears to my eyes on each reading, I selected an especially pathetic passage to render as a two-act play. I decided to end the program with the comic dance merely because the Tokyo troupe,

calling upon its entire cast, invariably finished its performance in this manner.

We practiced five or six days, the wide veranda in front of the library-storehouse serving as our stage. We had hung a small curtain and were carrying out our final rehearsal one afternoon when, to our misfortune, Grandmother caught her jaw in the curtain wire. There was acid in her voice as she demanded whether we were trying to murder her. She peremptorily put a halt to our rehearsal, calling us a pack of river-bums.[3]

That evening we nevertheless performed for an audience of about ten servants. Mindful of Grandmother's words, I could summon little enthusiasm for playing the title role in "Yamanaka Shinkanosuke" or the boy in "The House of the Dove." Subsequently I produced such plays as "The Rustler," "The House of the Broken Plate," and "Shuntoku Maru,"[4] but on every occasion Grandmother regarded the proceedings with disgust.

I didn't care much for Grandmother, but I had reason to be grateful to her on sleepless nights. Insomniac from the third or fourth year of elementary school, I often lay in bed weeping until two or three in the morning. Various remedies were suggested by the family--licking sugar before bedtime, counting the strokes of a clock, cooling my feet in water, putting a leaf from the "sleeping tree" beneath my pillow--but none seemed to have any effect. A bundle of nerves, I worried about all manner of things, and this made the insomnia worse. I spent a succession of sleepless nights after breaking my father's pince-nez.

I was once examining some frontispiece illustrations among the small selection of ladies magazines at the notions shop two doors from my home. A yellow mermaid caught my fancy, and I began to stealthily tear out the page. When the young manager shouted my name, I flung the magazine to the floor and rushed home. This blunder kept me awake nights on end.

Lying in bed, I felt an unremitting fear that fire might break out and burn down the house. The very thought guaranteed a sleepless night.

Heading for the lavatory before bedtime, I once saw our live-in student alone in the counting-room with a movie projector. A scene no larger than a matchbox flickered on the sliding door of the room, a polar bear about to plunge from his ice floe into the sea. As I watched, the fellow's manner came to seem unbearably melancholic. After going to bed I could not forget what I had witnessed. My heart was pounding as I thought of the student and agonized over what measures to take if a blaze started from the projector. It was on nights such as this when, unable to sleep till dawn, I found reason to be grateful to my grandmother.

A maid usually put me to bed about eight o'clock. Realizing that she must lie next to me until I fell asleep, I always took pity and closed my eyes. As the maid slipped away, I prayed fervently that I would indeed fall asleep soon. About ten o'clock, after much tossing and turning, I would break into a whimper and get up. Everyone in the family was asleep by then except Grandmother.

Grandmother was always in the kitchen talking to the night watchman as he sat on the opposite side of the large, sunken hearth from her. I would join them in my padded kimono and listen dejectedly to the village gossip. As I sat there one autumn night, the beat of a large drum commemorating the Insect-Expulsion Festival echoed from afar. I have never forgotten how reassuring it was to know that many other people were still awake.

That reverberating drum brings to mind other memories. My oldest brother was already attending the university in Tokyo, and whenever he returned for the summer vacation he spread the word in our locale concerning the latest trends in literature and music. My brother was a student of drama, and his one-act play entitled "The Struggle" created a considerable stir among the village youth when it was published in a local magazine. Earlier, when he had read the finished script to us, my brothers and sisters had all complained of its obscurity. I alone understood, even to the curtain line, "Ah, how dark the night is!" But I did believe the title should be "The Thistle" rather than "The

Struggle," and I recorded this opinion in miniscule letters in the corner of a discarded piece of the manuscript. Perhaps my brother didn't notice, for he published the play without changing the title.

Whenever my father gave a party, he sent to one of the larger towns for geisha. I remember being hugged by these women from the age of four or five, and I also remember their songs and dances, "Once Upon a Time" and "The Tangerine Boat from the Province of Ki." My oldest brother had a record collection of both Japanese and occidental music, and maybe I liked his Japanese music best because of my early familiarity with these geisha melodies. As I lay in bed one evening, the melody that came floating from my brother's room was so lovely that I lifted my head from the pillow to listen. The next day I rose early and went to put one record after another on the phonograph. At length I discovered the melody which had so moved me the previous night, a Shinnai composition entitled "Ranchō."

All the same I preferred my second brother. He had graduated with honors from a business school in Tokyo and come home to work in the bank controlled by my family. He was accorded the same callous treatment as I, Grandmother and Mother regarding him as the second worst son in the house. I attributed this lack of favor to his looks, and I remember him murmuring to me half in jest how the two of us would be perfectly well off if only we were better-looking. But I never once thought my brother so ill-favored, and I considered him the smartest one of us. I loathed my grandmother for quarreling with him when he drank--and he seemed to drink almost every day.

With my third and last older brother, I was constantly at odds. He knew many of my secrets and this made me feel uneasy. There was a facial resemblance between him and my younger brother, everyone praising them both for their good looks. To be wedged, as it were, between these two handsome brothers was almost unbearable. When the older went to Tokyo for middle school, I breathed a sigh of relief.

Since he was good-looking as well as the family baby, my younger brother enjoyed the affection of Mother and Father. Occasionally I

would hit him out of jealousy, and then Mother would scold me. Eventually I came to hate her. I believe I was nine or ten the day my brother seemed amused by the lice crawling about my collar. I literally knocked him down, then anxiously fetched an ointment labelled "Not for Internal Use" and applied it to the lumps rising upon his head.

When I was very small, my sisters showered me with affection. But my oldest sister died, while my second sister left home to marry. The two younger girls went away to school, each in a different town. They left for their separate destinations from the same railroad station, which was in a village several miles from home. For trips to this station our family used a carriage in the summer and a sleigh in the winter; we walked in the spring when snow was melting and in the fall when hail was blowing. But my two youngest sisters walked from the station even in winter, so ill did a sleigh ride make them. Whenever the two girls returned for the winter vacation, I went out to where the lumber was piled at the edge of the village. Even after the sun went down, the road remained bright in the snow. As my sisters emerged with their flickering lanterns from the woods of the neighboring village, I threw up both arms and let out a whoop.

The school of the older sister was in a relatively small town, and the meager souvenirs she brought back could not compare with those of the younger. Once she took from her basket five or six packets of incense-sparklers and handed them to me blushing so apologetically I almost broke down with compassion. Within our family this older sister too was often spoken of as homely.

Until she went away to school, she spent so much time in a detached room with my greatgrandmother that I almost thought her the old lady's daughter

My greatgrandmother died just as I was finishing elementary school. I caught a glimpse of the small, rigid body dressed in white as it was being lowered into the coffin. I was in agony over how to conduct myself if that fearful image remained very long before my eyes.

When I finished elementary school the family decided, in view of my frail health, to send me to a special elementary school. Father said I would go on to middle school the following year if my health improved. Even so, I would not be allowed to study in Tokyo like my brothers. I didn't much care for going to middle school anyway, but I wrote of my wretched health in an essay to win the sympathy of my teachers.

A town system of government was being established in our area, and the special elementary school had just been built with funds from all the nearby villages. The building was in a pine woods, over a mile from our village, and I was often absent because of illness. Yet, as the pride of my own elementary school, I had to compete against the other bright students who had come here from their own villages.

As usual I didn't study. How disagreeable to be wasting time in elementary school when I should soon be in middle school. I drew a serial cartoon in class and entertained my schoolmates during recess by impersonating the cartoon figures. My drawings eventually filled four or five notebooks.

Sometimes I would prop my arm on the desk, settle a cheek in my palm, and gaze outside the classroom for an hour. My seat was next to the window, where I could observe a single fly which had been crushed against the pane. From the corner of my eye the fly seemed amazingly large, like a pheasant or a mountain dove.

Instead of attending class, I sometimes loitered with four or five friends at the edge of a marsh beyond the pine woods. We would start talking about girls, then roll up our kimono skirts to compare the tufts of hair each of us was sprouting.

Our school was co-ed, but I never associated with the girls on my own initiative. Already my sexual impulse was strong, and I tried my best to suppress it. Two or three girls liked me, but I was timid and I pretended to be unaware. Occasionally I would take from my father's bookshelf a volume of Paintings from the Imperial Collection and gaze with flushed cheeks upon a certain picture concealed among

its pages. I also allowed my pair of pet rabbits to copulate often, knowing that my heart would pound at the sight of the male's humped back.

Since I was a fop, I didn't tell anyone about the massaging. I tried to stop after reading how harmful it was, but I couldn't. Actually my body grew more sturdy with the daily hike to school and back, but at the same time pimples no larger than millet grains began dotting my forehead. Embarrassed, I smeared on a red ointment called Hōtankō, but this led to greater humiliation. When my oldest brother married, my younger brother and I stole toward the bride's room the day of the wedding. She was sitting with her back to the door as she arranged her hair. I caught a glimpse of the pale, white face in the mirror, then fled, dragging along my younger brother.

"Well, she's hardly something to brag about!" I swaggered, so repelled was I by my own self.

As winter approached, I had to begin studying for the entrance examination to middle school. After looking over the book ads in the magazines, I ordered a variety of reference works from Tokyo. But they merely lined my shelves; not a single one got read. In the principal town of our province, the school to which I applied had two or three applicants for each student admitted. The prospect of failing the exam sometimes frightened me, and then I studied in spite of myself. A week of steady effort would restore my confidence. During my bouts of study I stayed up almost until midnight and rose at four in the morning. I kept a maid named Tami by my desk to attend the charcoal fire and boil the tea. No matter how late she stayed up, Tami always came to awaken me at four o'clock the following morning. While I struggled with an arithmetic problem involving a mouse giving birth to numbers of offspring, Tami sat quietly by reading a novel. Eventually a fat, elderly maid replaced Tami. I frowned upon hearing that my mother had suggested this as a precautionary measure.

The following spring, while the snow was still deep, my father coughed up blood in a Tokyo hospital and died. Our local newspaper

published a special obituary edition, an event which moved me more than the death itself. My own name appeared in the paper among the list of nobility.

Father's body was brought home in a large coffin aboard a sleigh. I went along with a great crowd to meet the hearse near the next village. I watched the long procession glide from the woods, the hood of each sleigh reflecting moonlight. The scene was very beautiful.

The following day our family gathered in the altar room where the coffin rested. As the lid was removed everyone burst into tears. Father seemed to be asleep, the bridge of his nose very straight and pale. The weeping eventually coaxed some tears from me.

For the next month our house was in an uproar. Having ignored my studies I wrote senseless answers on the final examination at the special elementary school. I did end up in third place or thereabouts--owing to the examiner's consideration for my family. My memory was beginning to fail already, and I would not be able to write an exam without preparing. It was the first time I had ever felt this way.

II

Although my scores were low, I managed to pass the entrance examination for middle school that same spring. When I left home for the harbor town where the school was located, I wore black knee socks, laced boots, and a new hakama. In place of the blanket I had hitherto used, I now wrapped about my shoulders a woolen manteau, the buttons left open in front. In the school town I sought out a certain draper's establishment, one with a tattered shop curtain hanging in the doorway. I doffed my traveling garb and settled in with the family who ran the store, distant relatives of ours who offered me unfailing help.

It's my nature to get easily excited about anything. During the matriculation period I donned my hakama and school cap to visit the public bath, greeting my reflection in the storefront windows along the way with a faint smile.

The school building, which was painted white, stood facing the

Tsugaru Strait in a level park at the edge of town. The place was thoroughly enjoyable, with wide corridors and tall classroom ceilings. Even from the classrooms one could hear the breaking waves and the wind in the pines. Unfortunately the lessons were dull, and the teachers persecuted me.

From the first day of school the gymnastics instructor called me a smart aleck and began slapping me around. More than anything, my feelings were hurt, since this teacher had been so sympathetic during the oral part of the entrance exam. I had even bowed for him when, referring to my father's recent death, he acknowledged how trying the exam preparation must have been. Eventually the other instructors were also hitting me--for grinning, for yawning, and for various other infractions. So conspicuous was my yawning in class that it supposedly became a subject of conversation in the teachers room. I marvelled at the asinine subjects discussed in that inner sanctum.

One day a student from my village called me over to the sand dune in the schoolyard and warned that I would surely flunk if the teachers kept hitting me. When he mentioned the smug look on my face, I was dumbfounded. Once school was over I hurried down the seaside road toward home, sighing as the waves washed about my shoes. As I raised my sleeve to wipe the sweat from my brow, there passed before my eyes a grey, wavering sail so large that it startled me.

I was a petal about to fall, quivering in the slightest breeze. I felt like dying whenever someone showed the slightest contempt for me. I counted on achieving eminence quite soon and could not overlook any stain on my honor. To flunk would be absolutely fatal, and thereafter I took instruction in fear and trembling. Aware of a hundred invisible enemies within the classroom, I could not relax my guard even a little. Before leaving for school in the morning, I sought my fortune for the day by turning over cards on my desk top. Hearts were lucky and diamonds promising; clubs were forboding and spades meant certain disaster. For me spades turned up day after day.

With the approach of final exams I struggled to memorize each word

of the texts--whether in natural history, geography, or ethics. Except for keeping my record unblemished, such a method was worthless. Study became inevitably boring, and I lost all flexibility the day of the exam. In some cases I answered to perfection; in others I stumbled along word by word until my mind grew confused and I soiled the test booklet with mere gibberish.

Nonetheless, the first semester I placed third in the class. Even in deportment I received an A. Having tortured myself with the prospect of failing, I seized the report card in one hand and, holding my shoes in the other, dashed joyfully out to the beach.

The semester over, I made ready to return home for the vacation. To my younger brother and his friends, I wished to portray my brief middle school experience in the most splendid light possible. So I stuffed all my possessions into the trunk, down to the last cushion. As the jostling carriage emerged from the woods of the last village before my own, a sea of green rice fields opened, and I saw, towering beyond, the roof of the family home with its red tiles. It seemed I had been away ten years. Never have I been so elated as during the month of that vacation. I described the middle school to my brother as something one might see in a dream. In my telling even the school town seemed a vision.

I roamed the fields and valleys, sketching the landscape and collecting insects. Our assignment for the vacation was to compose five water-color paintings and collect samples of ten rare insects. My younger brother carried the collector's box with its tweezers, jar of poison, and other supplies while I took charge of the net. I would spend the entire day outside chasing after locusts and cabbage butterflies. When night fell I kindled a blaze in the park and, with a net or broom, ambushed one by one the insects that flew near.

This was the summer during which my next older brother, a student of the plastic arts, spent every day beneath the large chestnut tree in the garden fiddling with clay. He was making a bust of my youngest sister, who had already graduated from school. I would stand beside him,

sketching my sister's face and trading insults on our work. My sister faithfully carried out her duties as a model, but not without showing a preference for my efforts. My brother made light of my abilities, claiming that people always say children are talented. He even ridiculed my writing as the work of a grade-schooler, so it's hardly surprising I developed an undisguised contempt for his creations.

This brother knew I was making a collection of rare insects for school. One night he came into the room where I was sleeping and whispered, "Osa! I've got a strange bug for you!"[5] Squatting on the floor he slid a tissue wrapping beneath the edge of the mosquito net. The rustle of the insect's legs struggling inside the tissue bespoke my brother's affection. As I roughly undid the wrapping, he gasped, "Watch what you're doing! He'll get away!" Upon inspection it proved to be a common stag beetle, which I submitted to the teacher as one of my ten rare insects.

I became depressed as the vacation drew to an end. When at last I found myself alone opening my trunk in the room above the draper's, I nearly broke down and cried. At such lonely moments I would head for a bookstore, and on this occasion I hurried to one nearby. The mere sight of books in long rows miraculously bouyed my spirits. In the corner of this particular bookstore stood five or six volumes which I coveted, but could hardly bring myself to buy. Occasionally I lingered before them and, with knees trembling, took a peek inside. But I didn't go to the bookstore simply to skim articles on anatomy. During this period of my life any book was a source of consolation.

School work became more and more monotonous. To be cursed with such chores as coloring the rivers, mountains and harbors of an outline map! I would spend three to four hours on a single map, so finicky was I about anything. Our history teacher had us take notes on our reading, notes which were to be enlarged with a summary of each lecture. As the lectures repeated the book, I could hardly avoid making a verbatim copy of sentences I had already studied. But since I was still attached to grades, I diligently performed such tasks day

after day.

In the autumn students from every middle school in town participated in a sports tournament. A mere rustic, I had never seen a baseball game; to me, center field, deep short, and bases loaded were only words I had read. Presently I learned how to watch the game, but I never worked myself into a frenzy. As a member of the cheering section, I had to root for our champions in judo and tennis as well as baseball. This only made me dislike all the more the life of a middle school student. Our head cheerleader, his uniform purposely shabby, would climb the knoll in the schoolyard corner and harangue the crowd. As he twirled his folding fan with the Rising Sun insignia, the students gleefully cried, "Slob!" Whenever a match took place and there was a pause in the action, this head cheerleader, his fan quivering, called in English for everyone to stand up. We obediently stood and, waving our little triangular flags of purple, sang the fight song, "Our Foe is Worthy, But . . . ." Such antics were embarrassing, and when the opportunity arose I would leave the cheering section and head for home.

This is not to suggest that I myself never engaged in sports. There was a faint darkness to my complexion, something I put down to the massaging. Anyone who spoke of my complexion seemed to be hinting at this embarrassing secret. Anxious to improve my color, I took to athletics.

My struggle with a bad complexion goes back to the fourth or fifth year of elementary school when contact with democratic ideas first gave rise to certain doubts and perplexities. My next older brother spoke of the democratic philosophy, and even my mother complained to visitors that taxes under our new democracy were so great a landowner's entire harvest ended up in government granaries. I myself taught the menservants about democracy as I helped them scythe the grass in the summer and shovel the heavy snows from the roof in the winter. Such help, I discovered later, was unwelcome; they had to redo my portion of the grass. This magnanimity was a guise, anyway. I performed these strenous tasks hoping to improve my complexion, but it didn't help in the least.

I decided to become athletic after entering middle school. During the summer I always went for a swim in the ocean on the way home from school. I favored a breast stroke and would propel myself frog-like with my legs held wide apart. Head thrust above the water, I watched the delicate shading of the waves, as well as the floating clouds overhead and the green leaves on the shore. Like a turtle I swam with head outstretched; I would bring my face closer to the sun, hastening my tan if only a trifle.

In the large graveyard behind the house where I stayed, I measured a one hundred yard course and began to work seriously at sprinting. If I got tired, I could walk about the grounds with its tall hedge of poplars and examine the requiem tablets letter by letter. Even now I have not forgotten such phrases as "The Moon Penetrates to the Bottom of the Pool" and "There is But One Intention in the Three Worlds."[6] One day, on a dark, moist gravestone covered with liverwort, I managed to make out the posthumous name of the man buried there--Jakushō Seiryō.[7] Disturbed by the suggestion of utter stillness in the name, I put some mud on my index finger and daubed an inscription on the fresh white paper shaped like a lotus leaf which adorned the grave. The words, in thin ghostly script, were adapted from a French poet: I am in the ground now, together with the maggots.[8] I made a pilgrimage to the grave the next evening before sprinting practice. The melancholy words had been washed away by a morning shower; not even a trace remained to bring tears to the surviving kin. The lotus leaf paper had torn in places.

Even as I played such tricks, my running improved. My leg muscles began to bulge, but my complexion remained as before. Beneath the facial tan there lingered a faint and disagreeable darkness.

I took a considerable interest in my face. Whenever I grew tired of reading I picked up a mirror and gazed endlessly at myself. I would smile, then frown, and finally brood, my hand pressed against a cheek. I learned to make faces which never failed to amuse others. When I was confused or displeased, I narrowed my eyes, wrinkled my nose, and pointed my mouth like a darling little bear.

During this period my youngest sister was a patient at the provincial hospital in town. Whenever I demonstrated my repertoire of faces, she would roll about in bed, helpless with laughter. Her only companion was a middle-aged maid in the family employ, and my sister became lonely in the hospital. That's why she quickly livened up whenever she heard my heavy footsteps steadily approaching down the long corridor. If a week passed without a visit, my sister sent her maid to somberly announce that her fever was running high and her general condition very unpromising.

Veins had begun dimly appearing on the back of my hand, and the sense of my own body was growing intense. When I was fourteen or fifteen, a fellow student and I developed a secret liking for one another. He was short with a dark complexion, and he always walked home with me, each of us blushing whenever our fingers grazed. As we walked along the road behind the school one day, he found a lizard floating in the ditch that irrigated a field of chickweed and parsley. Without a word he scooped it from the water and gave it to me. I couldn't stand water lizards, but I gaily wrapped this one in a handkerchief as though I were quite pleased. Back home I released the creature in a small garden pond, where it swam about in circles, the tiny head wavering. The next morning I looked for the lizard, but it was gone.

Because of my pride I was invariably reserved toward my friend. In fact I never even thought of telling him how I felt. With the skinny girl from next door, it was even worse. Indeed I treated her with contempt, turning my head away whenever we passed on the street.

One autumn night a fire broke out in the rear of the neighboring shrine, and I left my bed to join the crowd of spectators. Beyond the flames and showering sparks of the shrine loomed a dark cedar grove where small birds flew frantically about like innumerable fluttering leaves. I realized the girl was watching me as she stood in her white pajamas by the gate of her house, but I kept my eyes on the fire. I figured the side of my face visible to her would look magnificent in the red glow of the flames.

This guarded attitude kept me from deepening my relations with anyone, whether my classmate or this girl. And yet I proved to be quite a live wire when alone. I would wink and laugh at my face in the mirror. Once I cut a thin pair of lips on my desk top with a knife and kissed them. Later, when I painted the lips with red ink, they turned so dark and ugly I gouged them out completely with the same knife.

One morning during the third year of middle school, I stopped on my way to class and leaned against the round, lacquer-stained railing of a bridge. Below, the waters of a river very like the Sumida moved gently on, drawing me into a reverie the like of which I had never known. A presence seemed to be watching from behind, impelling me always to strike one pose or another. With my every gesture, regardless of how slight, he would stare at his palms in embarrassment and whisper a few words of interpretation into one or the other of my ears. Thus it was that I lost the ability to act unfettered.

I emerged from the spell lonely and trembling and began thinking about whence I had come and where I was going. As I walked on, my geta clattering against the floor of the bridge, I recalled all sorts of things. Indulging my fancy, I wondered whether I could indeed achieve prominence.

From about this time I became very fretful. Dissatisfied with everything, I struggled constantly, but to no avail. As many as ten or twenty masks had gained a hold on my face, and I could no longer tell which of my selves was grieving, let alone how intense the grief was. At length I found a wretched escape in writing. Here were my many kindred, all of them entranced as I was by some mysterious pulsation. Over and over I prayed that I might be a writer.

After discussing the matter with my younger brother, who was living with me while he too attended middle school, I assembled five or six friends and started a magazine. The printing shop across the street from my lodging produced a splendid lithograph for the cover, and we began distributing the magazine to our classmates. I myself

wrote a piece for each monthly issue. At first I wrote stories on ethical problems, as though I were a philosopher; eventually I proved adept at a few fragmentary lines in the manner of the "wayward essay." The magazine had survived a year when an unfortunate incident arose between my oldest brother and me.

Uneasy over my literary zeal, this brother sent a long, solicitous letter. In chemistry or geometry, he pontificated, one understands through equations and theorems exactly what is taking place. But this is not so in literature. Without a certain maturity and the right environment, one could not apprehend literature correctly. I agreed with him and, convinced that I was someone duly favored, sent an immediate reply.

His words were true, I wrote, and I was certainly fortunate to have such a splendid older brother. But I did not neglect my other studies for literature. With a fervor almost too intense, I claimed that literature inspired me to study harder.

I did study, but only because a threatening conscience insisted that I outdo the others. From the third year on I was at the head of the class, a difficult feat to pull off without becoming known as a grind. Moreover, I learned how to take charge of my classmates, even the judo champ nicknamed Octopus. In one corner of the classroom stood a large jar for wastepaper. Occasionally I pointed to it and wondered aloud if an octopus might fit inside. The champ would stick his head in the jar and let out a strange, reverberating laugh.

The handsome lads in the class were also attached to me. None of them poked fun at the small plasters in triangular, hexagonal, and flower shapes which covered my numerous pimples. The number of pimples kept increasing, and every morning upon wakening I moved a hand over my face to ascertain their condition. I bought all kinds of medicine, but none did any good. Whenever I went to the pharmacy I felt obliged to write the name of the medicine on a slip of paper and ask the clerk whether he had such a product on hand--as though I were doing someone else a favor.

Fearing the pimples were symptomatic of sexual desire, I grew dizzy with embarrassment. And sometimes I even thought I'd be better off dead . . . . My face attained its greatest notoriety among the members of my own family. My eldest sister, having married and moved away, supposedly said that no woman would ever marry me. I applied the medicine all the more.

My younger brother was sympathetic and went time after time in my stead to buy medicine for the pimples. As children my brother and I had been on bad terms, and when the time came for him to apply for middle school I prayed that he would flunk the entrance exam. But once we were living together away from home, I came to appreciate his even temper. By adolescence he had become taciturn and shy, and the essays he occasionally wrote for our magazine were quite listless.

He worried endlessly about how poor his record in school was compared to mine, and trying to comfort him only made things worse. He also detested the widow's peak which made him look so feminine. He sincerely believed that a narrow forehead had turned him into a dunce. I had complete trust in my brother, however. During this period, whenever I was with someone, I asked myself whether to pour forth my thoughts or keep them back. In my brother alone I confided; to one another we spoke of everything.

One dark night in early autumn we went out to the harbor wharf. The breeze came in from the Tsugaru Strait as we spoke of the red string which a teacher in my Japanese language class had once described. We boys each had an invisible string tied to the baby toe of the right foot, a long string unfailingly knotted at the opposite end about the same toe of a girl. No matter how far apart were the boy and girl, the string would never break; and no matter how close they came, even if they met on a street, the string would not tangle. It was settled, the teacher concluded, that each of us would marry the girl at the end of his red string.

Excited over this vignette, I had rushed home to tell my brother. And during that early autumn night, as we listened to the waves and the

cries of the seagulls, I spoke of the matter again, asking him what his future wife might be doing this very moment.

My younger brother shook the wharf railing two or three times with both hands.

"She's walking in a garden."

There was something sheepish in his voice. Yet the thought of a girl in large, garden-style geta, holding a fan as she gazed at the primroses, seemed entirely appropriate to my brother.

Then it was my turn to speak.

"My wife's wearing a red sash . . . ." Then I held my tongue, my eyes fastened on the dark sea where a ferry boat rocking upon the waves conveyed the impression of a large, well-lit inn.

One thing alone I had kept from my brother. On my return for vacation the previous summer, a petite maid wearing a red sash over her yukata had helped me remove my shirt and tie. Her movements were very abrupt; her name, I soon discovered, was Miyo.

Before going to sleep I would light a cigarette and contemplate various ways of beginning a story. Miyo had discovered this habit and, after spreading the quilt one night, she placed a tobacco tray very precisely by my pillow. When she came the next morning to clean the room, I scolded her.

"I smoke on the sly, so don't bring that tray in here again."

She looked sullen as she replied.

That summer a Naniwabushi troupe came to town. The servants all went to hear the performance, and my brother and I were urged to attend. But, having outgrown such provincial amusements, we headed instead for the rice paddies to catch fireflies. We were almost to the woods of the neighboring village, but the dew was so heavy we turned back after collecting about twenty specimens in our firefly cage. The servants too came drifting back, and I had Miyo spread the quilt and hang the mosquito net. Then my brother and I turned out the light and released

the fireflies inside the net. As the fireflies glided to and fro, Miyo stood outside the net watching. I sprawled on the bedding along with my brother, more conscious of the pale figure of Miyo than the faint firefly glow.

"Was the performance interesting?" It was the first time I had ever addressed a maid about anything other than her chores, and the question sounded a little awkward.

It had been dull, Miyo calmly mentioned. Then I broke into laughter. My brother, however, only waved his fan in an attempt to rouse a firefly clinging to the edge of the net. I found his silence disturbing.

From this time I became more aware of Miyo. Thereafter she came to mind whenever someone mentioned the vignette of the red string.

III

From the fourth year of middle school several classmates visited me almost every day. Along with the wine and cuttlefish I served them a hefty portion of hokum. I spoke of a recent book on lighting charcoal; I smeared oil on a fashionable volume entitled The Brute Machine[9] and exulted that books with the strangest covers were now being sold. I also cut out passages from a translation entitled My Handsome Friend and composed certain outrageous sentences in their place. I had the printer make a copy of this revised edition and presented it as a rare book.

Miyo gradually faded from memory. To my brother and my friends I normally spoke ill of women, but about Miyo I kept quiet altogether. I became angry with myself when distracted by even an occasional memory. Besides, any infatuation between two people in the same house made me uncomfortable.

I had second thoughts, however, upon reading a famous Russian novel.[10] The book described the career of a woman destined for prison, whose downfall began when a university student, the nephew of her own master, seduced her. I have forgotten the larger themes of the book, but a withered leaf still marks the page where the lovers kiss for the first time beneath a wildly blooming lilac. Unable to read a novel

with detachment, I thought of Miyo and myself. If I were less cowardly, I would act as this bold student had done. My life had been uneventful, and now I would sacrifice it as a sterling example to mankind.

I revealed these hopes to my younger brother after we went to bed one evening. Trying to speak gravely, I became too aware of myself. I tapped my neck and rubbed my hands together; I spoke flippantly--and the knowledge that it could not be otherwise troubled me deeply. My brother's tongue ran lightly across his lower lip as he lay in bed unmoving and listened to my words.

"Will they let you marry her?" It seemed a difficult thing for him to ask.

For some reason his words came as a shock. I tried to sound dejected as I wondered aloud whether the marriage was possible.

My brother answered that it was possible, but hardly probable--surely a circumspect reply for one so immature as he.

While he was speaking I became aware of what my attitude should be. I told him I had been wronged. My dander was up, and I would fight for what was mine. I virtually hissed the words as I sat up on the bedding. My brother twisted about underneath the dyed, calico cover and was about to speak when he glanced at me and smiled faintly.

I laughed and extended a hand. "Wish me luck," I said.

He sheepishly brought his hand from under the cover. I let out a gutteral laugh as I joggled his limp fingers two or three times.

I had less trouble obtaining the consent of my friends. They pretended to rack their brains as I spoke, in order that their approval would carry some weight. In the end they endorsed the plan, just as I had foreseen.

During the summer vacation of the fourth year, I came home with two of my friends. Supposedly we would prepare for the entrance exam to high school, but my real motive in bringing them was to show off Miyo. I prayed that these classmates of mine would not seem unsavory

in the eyes of my family. The friends of my older brothers were all from well-known families in the province, while any chum of mine had several buttons missing from his jacket.

A watchman's cabin stood alongside the large chicken shed behind our house, and here my friends and I spent our mornings studying. The exterior had been painted green and white, and a newly varnished table with chairs had been carefully arranged on the wooden floor inside, an area roughly the size of four tatami mats. There were two large doors, one to the east and one to the north, along with a foreign-style window to the south. We kept the window and doors wide open so the wind could blow through and riffle the pages of our books. In the grass which grew thick as ever about the hut, the yellow chicks of our large flock would disappear and reappear.

Eagerly awaiting the hour for lunch, we three friends wondered aloud which maid would announce the meal. If someone other than Miyo came, we beat upon the table and clicked our tongues. When Miyo appeared we remained silent, only to break down laughing once she left. One fine day when my younger brother had joined us to study, we began as usual to discuss which maid would come. Seeing my brother keep to himself by the window while he memorized his English vocabulary, the rest of us started to crack jokes, throw books at each other, and stomp on the floor. I myself went to such an extreme that I began feeling sorry for my brother. I turned a glaring look upon him, lightly bit my lip, and tried to draw him into our circle.

"Why the hell are you so quiet? I wonder if you're not . . . ."

"Shut up!" he bellowed, waving his arm.

Several vocabulary cards flew from his hand. I turned away in amazement. In that moment I made an unpleasant decision to quit this business about Miyo, at least for today. Moments later I was howling with laughter, as though nothing had happened.

Fortunately another maid came to announce lunch. As we took our way back to the house on a narrow path through the bean field, I lingered merrily behind tearing the round leaves from any number of plants.

To be victimized was the furthest thing from my mind. This was terrible. Someone always pulls the clusters of white lilac to the ground, but it's especially depressing when the prankster is your own flesh and blood.

I was in agony the next few days. Didn't Miyo walk in the garden? And the handshake had almost embarrassed my brother. To be blunt, I had been a dimwit--and for me nothing was so humiliating as that. During this period one misfortune followed another. As we began lunch one day, Miyo stood by holding a round fan decorated with a red sketch of a monkey face. Now I would learn where her affections lay. When she fanned my brother more often than me, I felt a wave of despair and let my fork hit the plate with a clatter.

Everyone was against me. My two friends must have known from before, and I could hardly trust them. I decided I had best forget Miyo.

Two or three days later I suddenly realized I had left a pack with five or six cigarettes at my pillow when I came to the cabin that morning. I rushed back, only to find the room made up and the cigarettes gone. Now I was in for it. I called Miyo and demanded what had become of them, but she merely looked gravely at me and shook her head. Only moments later, though, she reached as high as possible, stuck her hand behind a panel at the top of the wall, and brought out something. I recognized the small, green cigarette pack with the two golden bats in flight.

With this incident I regained my courage a hundredfold. Once again I was awake to my earlier resolve. An uncomfortable reserve had arisen between my younger brother and me, however, and it was disheartening to think of his role in this affair. I quit making a fuss with my friends on Miyo's account. I would refrain from coaxing her, and simply wait for her to speak up. I gave her plenty of opportunities. Often I would call the girl to my room and instruct her to perform unnecessary chores, assuming a relaxed, carefree pose each time she entered.

I considered the role of my face in winning her affections. My pimples were gone now, but I maintained the earlier treatment from mere

habit. With the aid of my compact, a wonderful, silvery object with a lid elaborately carved in the pattern of a long, twisting vine, I continued to give myself an occasional facial, but with greater concern for the result.

Now that it was Miyo's turn, the proper moment never seemed to arrive. Occasionally I stole from the cabin while the others were studying and went back to the main house. I would peep at her flailing away with a broom and bite my lip.

Eventually the summer drew to an end. Compelled to leave with my classmates and younger brother, I prayed for an incident which she would remember me by--at least until the next vacation. But not a thing happened.

On the day of departure we boys piled into the family carriage with its black hood. The entire household, including Miyo, lined up by the front gate for the farewell. Miyo had unfastened the cord which held her kimono sleeves back during work. Her eyes on the ground, she kept fingering this cord as if it were a rosary. Even as the carriage pulled away, she looked neither at my brother nor me. I left home with deep regret.

My youngest sister had been ill, and Mother had taken her to a hot spring for convalescence. The resort was on the sea, only thirty minutes by train from the town where I attended middle school. That autumn my brother and I went to the cottage Mother was renting, and I stayed for some time preparing for another exam. You're in a fix the moment people label you intelligent. I had to demonstrate I could go from the fourth year of middle school into higher school. My hatred of school grew more intense, but I studied with the passion of one haunted.

During this period of study I commuted to the school by train. The two friends who had spent a summer vacation with me visited the resort each Sunday, but nothing was said about Miyo. We always had a picnic at the same place, a large flat rock down on the beach. My brother had a fine voice and knew a large repertoire of the latest

songs. He would teach us some of them after the beef stew and the wine were gone, and then we would all sing together. Later we dozed off, only to awaken as if to a dream. The tide had come in and cut off our rock from the shore. If a day went by when I did not see these friends, I became depressed.

One autumn day when a brisk wind was blowing, a teacher struck me on both cheeks. An arbitrary reaction to some gallant deed of mine, the punishment enraged my friends. The entire fourth year class gathered in the natural history lecture room after school to discuss ways of having the teacher fired. When a certain student finally began clamoring for a strike, I fell into a panic.

I didn't want a strike on my account, I told the class. I didn't hate the teacher, and the episode was trifling. But as I pleaded with the students, my own friends rebelled and started calling me an egotist and a coward.

Scarce able to breathe, I left the school and went back to the resort. The plantain tree in the cottage garden had been stripped almost bare in the wind, but as I entered the bath I noticed how the few remaining leaves outside the window lent a greenish tint to the water. After soaking awhile, I sat on the edge of the tub, drifting into a reverie.

To shrug off embarrassing memories, I would go off by myself and murmur, "Oh well . . . ." This was a mere trifle, I whispered now. Imagining that scene with myself running about among the students, I scooped and spilled some bath water over and over. "Oh well . . . oh well . . . ." I kept repeating.

The teacher apoligized to the class the following day, and the strike never occurred. The quarrel with my friends was soon patched up, though it left me more glum than ever. Miyo was constantly in my thoughts, and I saw my life getting worse and worse unless I could be with her.

On the Saturday my mother and sister left the resort, I managed to

accompany them home by claiming they needed an escort. I did not tell my friends I was going, and I concealed the real motive even from my brother. (I thought he would know anyway.) My brother was obligated to the family at the draper's just as I, so he came with us as far as the shop to pay his respects. Later, when the train carrying my mother, my sister, and me left the station, my younger brother brought his forehead with its widow's peak to the window pane and shouted a word of encouragement. This I blithely acknowledged with a nod and a wave of the hand.

I lost my self-assurance as the family carriage, having passed the last village but one, drew closer to home. The sun had gone down, the sky and the surrounding mountains were dark. My heart raced as I listened to the autumn wind rustling the fields of rice. I kept my gaze on the darkness outside, except for the time a clump of pale susuki grass floated up and startled me.

The entire household was gathered beneath the dim entry lamp to welcome us. As the carriage stopped, Miyo came running out, her shoulders hunched against the cold.

Later, having gone to bed in a second floor room, I started thinking about mediocrity until I was quite depressed. Wasn't I playing the fool in this Miyo affair? Anyone could fall for a woman. And yet, mine was a different sort of love. You could hardly put it in a word--the feeling wasn't vulgar, that's all. But didn't anyone in love make that claim? I nonetheless doggedly stuck to my guns as I coughed on the cigarette smoke: in my case, I concluded, there's a **cognitive** dimension!

Aware that my family would inevitably oppose this marriage, I gained that night an almost chilling sense of courage. Mine was a respectable position in society, and I would not stoop to mediocrity. But I continued to wonder why I was lonely until, unable to fall asleep, I had recourse to a massage. I put Miyo out of mind, for I could not defile her.

When I awoke early the next day, the autumn sky was clear. The

weather was perfect for picking grapes in the field across from our house, and I got out of bed forthwith. I told Miyo to come along and to bring a large bamboo basket. I spoke with the utmost nonchalance, so that no one would get suspicious.

Approximately the size of a large living room, the arbor was located in the southeast corner of the opposite field. The usual enclosure of reed screens had been set up as the grapes ripened, and we went inside through a wicket gate. A few yellow bees buzzed noisily in the warm air, while sunlight filtering through the screens and the grape leaves lent a pale green cast to my companion.

I had tried to lay my plans on the way over, my mouth twisted in the manner of a stage villain. But so nervous and ill-tempered did I become when entering the arbor alone with Miyo that I deliberately left the gate open. Tall enough to reach the arbor roof without a ladder, I began clipping the grape clusters straightaway and handing them to Miyo one at a time. She swiftly wiped the dew with her apron and put each cluster in the basket. For what seemed the longest time neither of us spoke, and I became more and more on edge. The basket was nearly full when Miyo, reaching for the last cluster, abruptly withdrew her hand.

I thrust the grapes out and shouted at her, my tongue clicking in disapproval. When she cradled her wrist in the other hand, I asked whether she had been stung.

"Yes," she replied, squinting at me.

"Fool!" I scolded.

She smiled, without saying a thing.

I couldn't endure the strain. "We'll get some ointment for it," I proposed and hurried out the gate.

Once we were back in the house, I searched the medicine cabinet for the ammonia. I found the purple-tinted bottle and handed it over as roughly as possible. I made no attempt to apply the ointment myself.

That afternoon I left home in the lurching public carriage with the

grey hood which had recently begun to serve our area. Everyone urged me to take our own carriage, but the family crest and shimmering black color of that vehicle were too lordly for my taste. I was content to hold in my lap the basket of grapes which Miyo and I had gathered and to savor the sight of the fallen leaves along the country lane. Having summoned my entire strength to instill a memory, I was now secure in the knowledge that she was mine.

That winter brought my last vacation as a middle school student. I was to go home with my brother, but as the day of our departure drew near we began to feel a distinct coldness for one another. After we arrived home, we sat by the kitchen fireplace with our legs crossed and looked furtively about. Our eyes, searching for the absent Miyo, met several times.

After supper my second oldest brother invited us to his room. We three brothers huddled about the charcoal brazier and started playing cards, but to me every member of the deck seemed blank. When an opportunity arose in the conversation, I mustered the courage to put a question.

"Seems like one of the maids is gone . . . ?" I spoke casually, without taking my eyes from the cards in my hand. If my older brother began to probe, I would confess everything. It was fortunate that my younger brother was present.

My older brother cocked his head this way and that, debating which card to play next.

"You mean Miyo? She had a fight with Granny and went home, the obstinate bitch."

He threw down a card, grumbling. I threw one of mine, and my brother, without a word, played one of his.

Four or five days later I went to the cabin by the chicken house and heard from the young watchman who liked to read novels exactly what had happened. One of our servants had seduced Miyo, and when the other maids learned of it she could not bare to remain. A mischief-maker in many ways, the man had long since departed.

My informant proved to be more explicit than necessary, repeating the seducer's boast that Miyo had begged him to desist--as soon as the feat was accomplished.

When New Year's was past and the vacation nearing its end, my younger brother and I went into the family library where we could examine various book collections and scroll paintings while snow fluttered down on the skylight overhead. Since Father's death my oldest brother had been gradually altering the house, and with each visit home I stared in wonder at the redecorated rooms and the new arrangement of our books and scrolls. I now unravelled a newly arrived scroll, a painting of yellow roses scattered on a pond.

My brother had discovered a large box of photographs, and he was rapidly looking through them, pausing now and then to breathe upon his frozen fingertips. After awhile he handed me a newly mounted photo, one evidently taken when Mother and Miyo called upon my aunt. Mother was sitting by herself on a low couch, while Miyo and my aunt, who were both the same height, stood behind. In the background of the photo, the roses in my aunt's garden were blooming in abundance.

We drew close to the photograph and gazed upon it for some moments. My brother and I had already become reconciled--or so I thought--and I hesitated to tell him the truth about Miyo. I could now observe her image with a degree of calm. She had moved during the exposure, and the outline of her head and shoulders was blurred. My aunt, hands folded upon her sash, was squinting. I saw a certain resemblance between them.

TRANSFORMATION (Gyōfukuki, 1934)

The rolling hills of the Bonju Range lie at the northern tip of Honshu. About a thousand feet high at the most, the range seldom appears on an ordinary map.

It was over the vast sea that once covered this area that Yoshitsune and his retainers tried to sail as they fled northward toward the distant shores of Ezo. The mark where their boat ran aground still remains, a patch of red cliff about thirty feet square quite distinct from the heavy foliage of the central hill.

People claim this hill looks like a galloping horse from the village below. Actually the hill resembles the profile of a decrepit old man, but it's called Bald Horse Mountain nonetheless.

Bald Horse Mountain is known throughout the region for its fine scenery. A rivulet flows by the village, a mere hamlet of twenty or thirty homes, and several miles upstream a waterfall almost a hundred feet high descends from the back side of the hill in a stream of white. Early in autumn the trees take on lovely hues, and the hill becomes alive with sightseers from several nearby towns. Near the foot of the waterfall there stands a small teahouse.

Toward the end of summer this year a man died at the waterfall. He was not a suicide; he fell by accident. The area about the waterfall has many rare ferns, and people often come to collect specimens. The victim was a pale student from the city seeking plants for his collection.

The pool beneath the falls is surrounded on three sides by steep cliffs. A narrow gap opens to the west, and here the water rushes against the rocks as it pours into the rivulet. The cliffs are wet with spray from the falls, and the ferns which grow in patches on the cliffs quiver unceasingly as the waterfall roars down into the pool.

The student had been scaling one of the cliffs. It was afternoon,

and the early autumn sun was still shining overhead. The student was about halfway up when a rock the size of a man's head suddenly gave way beneath his foot. Down he plunged, as though torn away from the cliff. He struck the branch of an aged tree, and it broke off, sending him down into the pool with a sickening splash.

Four or five people near the waterfall witnessed the plunge. The fourteen year old girl who took care of the teahouse saw it best.

He sank into the pool; then his body slid halfway out of the water. The eyes were shut, the mouth slightly open. His blue shirt was torn in places, and the collector's box still hung from his shoulder. Then he was pulled into the depths.

II

From spring until fall columns of white smoke visible in the distance rise every fine day from Bald Horse Mountain. The sap flows abundantly in the mountains during this period, and charcoal-makers are busy at their kilns.

There are about ten huts with charcoal-making kilns on Bald Horse Mountain. The one kiln worked by a man who came to this area from elsewhere is located near the waterfall, away from the others. This man lives the entire year with his daughter Suwa, the girl who looks after the teahouse.

Suwa's father had built the teahouse with small logs and a reed screen when she was twelve. Everything within the diminutive shop was arranged in rows--the lemonade and crackers, the rice jelly and various sweet candies.

With the approach of summer people began to appear in the mountains. Suwa's father carried the provisions to the teahouse in a basket every morning, the girl skipping along behind him in her bare feet. Left alone as her father went back to the kiln, Suwa cried out to each wayfarer to stop awhile at the teahouse. She was only following her father's instructions, but her pretty voice was drowned out in the roar of the falls, and people seldom paid attention. She could not collect

fifty sen in a day.

When her father returned at dusk, his entire body was black as charcoal.

"How many did you sell?"

"None."

He looked up toward the waterfall, muttering. Then father and daughter placed the teahouse provisions in the basket and left.

Such was their routine until the frost began to form.

Suwa was accustomed to the wilderness, and her father felt no anxiety leaving her alone at the teahouse. She would never lose her footing on a rock and be plunged into a pool. Indeed, when the weather was right, Suwa swam naked to the very edge of the falls. If someone came along while she was in the water, she paused a moment and, pushing the short brownish hair from her forehead, cried out for the wayfarer to stop awhile at the teahouse.

On rainy days Suwa dozed in a corner of the teahouse, a straw mat pulled over her. A giant evergreen oak spread its leafy branches overhead, providing good shelter from the rain.

Gazing at the roaring falls when she was very young, Suwa had thought the water would someday be used up. And why, she would muse, did the shape of the falling water never seem to change.

Lately her reflections had become less naive. The pattern of the falls was never the same. Watching the flying spray shift and vary almost made her dizzy. The billowing form seemed more like a cloud than like water; besides, water could never be so white.

Suwa had lingered by the waterfall pool on that one day too. The sky was cloudy, and the autumn wind made her cheeks redden and smart. She recalled a story her father had told long ago as he held her in his lap and watched over the kiln.

Once there were two brothers, Saburō and Hachirō, who worked as woodcutters. Hachirō, the younger brother, caught some trout in a

mountain stream and took them home. Before Saburō returned from the mountain, Hachirō grilled one of the trout and ate it. So flavorful was the fish that he ate two or three more, and then he couldn't stop until he had eaten the entire catch. Now a terrible thirst came over him, and he drank all the water in the well. Then he ran to the river at the edge of the village and continued to drink. Immediately scales began appearing over his body. By the time his brother came running up, Hachirō was a fearful serpent swimming in the river.

Saburō called from the bank, "Hachirō!" Hachirō!"

The serpent shed tears and called back from out in the river: "Saburō!"

Weeping and wailing, the elder brother on the bank and the younger brother out in the river called back and forth to one another, "Hachirō!" "Saburō!" But nothing could be done.

When Suwa heard this tale she was so overcome with pity that she thrust one of her father's charcoal-blackened fingers into her small mouth and wept.

Now, as she woke from her reverie beside the falls, her eyes blinked in amazement. The water seemed to be murmuring, "Oh Hachirō . . . ah Saburō . . . oh Hachirō. . . ."

Then, pushing the leaves aside, her father emerged from the red ivy that hung to the foot of the cliff.

"How much did you sell, Suwa?"

She did not reply. Instead she vigorously rubbed her nose, wet and gleaming with spray from the falls. Her father silently gathered up the provisions, and the two of them trudged back to their hut along a mountain lane overgrown with bamboo grass.

When Suwa's father switched the basket from his right hand to his left, the lemonade bottles clicked against one another. "It's time to close up," he said. "Winter's coming on, and no one's around."

As the sun disappeared, the sound of the wind filled the mountains.

In certain places the withered leaves of oak and fir would scatter down on the two wayfarers like a burst of hail.

"Papa," Suwa called from behind. "What are you living for?"

Her father shrugged his huge shoulders. "I don't know," he muttered, gazing into his daughter's determined face.

Suwa bit off part of the susuki leaf in her hand.

"You're better off dead then."

His hand flew up. "I'll teach you to. . . ." He paused, and his anger gave way. For some time now Suwa had been overwrought, and he realized that she was gradually becoming a woman. He must let her be.

"All right."

His lethargy infuriated the girl. She spat out bits of susuki leaves. "Fool!" she screamed, "You fool!"

III

The Festival of the Dead was over, and the teahouse had been dismantled. For Suwa this was the most difficult time of the year. Every four or five days her father would head for the village, a sack of charcoal over his shoulder. He might have hired someone for the task, but this would have cost fifteen or twenty sen. Leaving Suwa alone, he went himself to the village at the foot of the mountain.

When the weather was fine Suwa would hunt mushrooms during her father's absence. A straw bag of charcoal brought five for six sen at the most, not enough to support the two of them. So her father had Suwa pick the mushrooms, which he then took to the village.

The nameko mushroom, a moist pea-like variety, fetched a good price. When Suwa found a cluster of them growing amidst decaying ferns, she invariably remembered the one friend of her life. She would fill her basket, then sprinkle moss over the mushrooms. Heading toward home, she felt very content.

Whenever he got a good price for either charcoal or mushrooms, her father returned with sake on his breath. Occasionally he brought back

for Suwa a gift such as a paper purse with an attached mirror.

One day a cold wind blew over the mountain from morning till night, and the straw mats which served for curtains swung back and forth within the hut. Her father had left early for the village, and Suwa remained inside the whole day redoing her seldom-tended hair. Twisting the unruly strands, she tied them at the root with the paper ribbons in wave patterns her father had once given her. Then she built a great fire and awaited his return. Amidst the soughing of the trees she could often hear the wild animals howling.

After the sun went down she ate her supper of brown rice and fried bean paste all alone.

Finally the wind died down, the night became cold and still. It is during these times of unearthly quiet that strange things occur in the mountains: Tengu bring trees crashing down, a creature polishes red beans outside the door, a wizard on a distant mountain sends his echoing laughter through the air.

The forlorn girl wrapped herself in a straw quilt and lay down by the hearth. As she dozed, something occasionally lifted the doorway curtain and peeped in. Thinking it a wizard, Suwa pretended to be fast asleep.

In the light of the dying fire, white flakes could be faintly seen fluttering to the ground just inside the door. Suwa was entranced by the first snow of the year.

She was in pain. And numb from the heavy body. Then she felt the reeking breath.

"Fool!" she screamed. Instinctively she fled.

Whirling snow struck her face, and she crumpled to the ground. Already her hair and clothes were white.

She struggled to her feet, panting. On she trudged, her clothes whipped by the gale. The sound of the falls was near, but still she kept going, wiping her nose over and over with the palm of her hand. Now the roar was directly underneath. As she leapt from the narrow

gap in the grove of moaning wintry trees, Suwa murmured one word: Papa.

IV

She regained her awareness in a dim, shadowy place. The reverberation of the waterfall was subdued and seemed to come from far above. Her body wavered with the rhythm, her very bones felt a chill. When she realized she was at the bottom of the pool, she felt utterly clean and refreshed.

She stretched her legs and slid forward without a sound. Her nose almost bumped the edge of a rock.

A serpent, she thought, that's what I've become. How fortunate that she would never again return to the hut. She set quivering the whiskers which had sprouted around her mouth.

Actually she was a small carp. All she did was nibble at the water and wiggle the wart on her nose.

The carp swam around in the pool. With the aid of her pectoral fins she rose toward the surface; then, tail thrashing, she swiftly dove for the bottom.

Presently the carp ceased to move. The pectoral fins occasionally quivered, but the fish itself remained still, evidently pondering a question. Then it flittered straight toward the falls until the waters were suddenly swirling and sucking it down like a leaf.

THE ISLAND OF MONKEYS (Sarugashima, 1935)

Imagine how lonely it felt to end the long sea voyage on an island so enshrouded in fog. Was it night? Or was it day? I blinked and stared trying to tell what the place was like. Eventually there emerged the contours of a steep cliff, one naked rock piled on another, here and there the dark mouth of a cave. Was this island a mountain, a mountain without a single blade of grass?

As I stumbled along the beach at the foot of the cliff, a strange cry occasionally went up from somewhere nearby. Was it a bear? Or perhaps a wolf? I kept walking along the perimeter of the island, heedless of the cries. I was exhausted from the voyage, but this made me all the more intrepid.

The island was surprisingly uniform. The road before me was six feet wide with a hard, level surface. A rocky cliff rose to the right side of the road, a coarse pebbly wall to the left. On and on I boldly walked, more tired and confused than I can describe.

Had I already come a mile? Since I was standing exactly where I started, the road evidently looped around the foot of the rocky mountain. I had probably made the circuit twice; I realized now that the island was smaller than I first imagined. The fog was lifting, and the entire mountain loomed overhead. There were three distinct summits, the rounded one in the middle perhaps thirty or forty feet in total height, well above its smaller neighbors. Strewn with varicolored flat rocks, this ridge lay above two slopes radically distinct from one another. One slope ran gently down toward a low but rather steep summit, while the other dropped precipitously for half its own height before swelling upward into a third, moundlike summit. A thin waterfall descended from the trough formed by the upward turn of this slope, and near the falls the rocks were even more dark with moisture than elsewhere on this fog-prone island. Two trees were visible. One of them resembled an evergreen oak and stood near the crest of the falls; the other, a

totally unfamiliar tree, rose from the top of the mound. Both trees were bare.

For a time I stared vacantly at the desolate scene. The fog continued to lift, and the wet summit began to gleam in the sun. It was the morning sun. I can tell the morning sunlight from the evening by the different fragrance. So this was the dawn?

Then I was scrambling up the mountain. The slope had appeared steep from the bottom, but I climbed briskly from foothold to foothold and presently reached the crest of the falls.

Here in the sun I could feel a breeze blowing against my cheek. I went over to the tree that resembled an evergreen oak and sat down. Was it really an evergreen oak? Or a Japanese oak instead? Or perhaps a fir? I looked all the way to the tip. Thin, dead branches stood out against the sky all along the trunk, but those toward the bottom were bent or broken.

The blowing snow
Is calling me.

The voice of the wind? I began scooting up the trunk.

Calling me
From captivity.

Fatigue often makes one hear melodic voices. I reached the treetop and shook a dead branch.

Calling me
From a wretched life.

A branch snapped underneath my foot. I grabbed the trunk and slid recklessly down.

"You broke it!"

The words, which came from above, were very distinct. I stood up, clinging to the tree trunk and blankly searching the whereabouts of the voice. A shudder ran along my spine as a lone monkey nimbly picked his way down the cliff which gleamed in the sun. At that moment something hitherto dormant flashed inside me.

"Come on down, you! I'm the one who broke it!"

"That's my tree!"

He had finished the descent and was now coming toward the waterfall. I made ready for a fight, but he merely stared, his forehead wrinkling in numerous folds. Eventually he bared his white teeth in a broad, irritating grin.

"What's so funny?"

"You are."

He asked whether I had crossed the sea to get here. It was a wide sea, but he didn't know its name.

With my eyes fastened on the mist that billowed from the mouth of the falls, I recalled the long sea passage inside my narrow, wooden box.

"That's right," I nodded.

"Yep, just like me."

He scooped some water from the falls and drank. Eventually we were sitting side by side.

"We're from the same place, you can tell at a glance. All the fellows from our land have ears that shine."

He had seized my ear and was tightly pinching it. Angrily I knocked his hand away, but then we looked at one another and broke into laughter. Somehow or other I felt comfortable with my new companion.

A shriek went up nearby. Startled, I looked around until I noticed a flock of hairy, thick-tailed monkeys standing guard atop the mound. I leapt up as they continued shrieking at us.

"Stop! It's not a challenge. They always face the sun and howl like that in the morning. That's why we call them howlers."

I kept standing, dumbfounded. Monkeys had gathered on each of the summits, basking in the sun and bowing towards it.

"Are all of them monkeys?" I felt as though I were dreaming.

"Yes, but a different species from us. They come from another place."

I looked closely at the **howlers**, one by one: a mother nursing a baby, her fluffy white hair riffling in the wind; a crooner humming a tune, his large, red nose lifted toward the sky; a lover mounting his mate in the sun, his gorgeously striped tail wagging; a frowning malcontent busily striding about.

"Where are we?" I whispered.

My companion faced me, his eyes full of compassion.

"I'm not certain. It doesn't seem like Japan, though."

I wondered about that--and sighed. I also pointed out that the tree behind us was very similar to the evergreen oaks in Kiso.

He twisted about, rapped on the trunk, and looked toward the treetop.

"No, the branches grow different on this one. The Kiso oak isn't so dull in the sunlight too, don't you agree? Anyhow, you can't really tell until it buds."

I had remained standing. Now I leaned against the trunk and asked why the tree wasn't budding.

"It's been dormant since the spring. Let me see--April, May, June--that's three months since my arrival, and it just gets more shriveled. Maybe it's a cutting, there's no root. That other tree is worse--it's covered with their dung."

He pointed toward the **howlers as he spoke. Already they had fallen silent.**

"Sit down and we'll talk this over," he suggested.

I snuggled up to him.

"It's a nice spot here, the best on the island. There's a tree and sunshine, and you can listen to the waterfall."

He turned his gaze on the miniature falls just below and went on

speaking.

"I was born in northern Japan, barely close enough to the strait to hear the waves breaking on the shore at night. It's a splendid sound which becomes more beguiling with the passage of time."

I wanted to speak of my own home.

"I was born in the mountains of central Japan," I said, "and I'm more attached to the woods. For me it's the fragrance of new leaves that's really fine."

"Absolutely! We're all fond of the woods. Every fellow on the island wants to be near a tree, even if it's the only one around."

As he spoke he divided the hair in his crotch to show me a number of large, dark-red scars.

"It took some doing to make this place mine."

"Sorry, I didn't realize . . ." I stammered and made ready to leave.

"That's all right, you can stay. I'm so lonely I could use a friend. Just don't break any more branches."

The fog had lifted completely, and a wondrous scene stood revealed. Green leaves caught my eye first, and I knew it was the season when the oaks of my own region were fresh and lovely. I gazed in ecstasy at the long row of trees--but only for a moment. For beneath the leaves, on a gravel path sprinkled with water, a number of blue-eyed people dressed in white were drifting by. I stared in amazement: a woman wore gaudy feathers in her hat, a man waved a snakeskin walking-stick as he smiled in all directions.

I was trembling as my companion embraced me and whispered: "Don't be frightened. It's like this every day."

"But they'll be after us. What will happen?"

I remembered the wretched ordeal--my capture in the mountains, the journey to this island--and bit my lower lip.

"It's a show, a show for us. Be quiet and you'll enjoy it," he hastily concluded.

Thereupon my companion put his arm about my waist and, pointing with his free hand towards various people, began gossiping in a low voice. One of the people was called a wife, and she was either her husband's plaything or his boss. (Perhaps, my informant suggested, that odd word "belly button" meant a woman like her.) Someone else was a scholar, an eccentric who earned his daily bread footnoting a dead genius or sniping at a living one. My friend got drowsy every time he saw the fellow. An actress appeared too, an actress whose dramatic gifts were more evident in her daily life than on the stage.

He groaned about a toothache before resuming his account.

A landlord came next. With his tedious claim that he worked like anyone else, the landlord was as irritating to my friend as a procession of lice crawling along the bridge of the nose. But a man sitting on a bench and wearing white gloves drew the greatest scorn. I was told that when he appeared, it was as though a geyser of foul yellow dung had **erupted.**

I listened halfheartedly, my attention drawn to something else. For several moments two young faces had been peering over the pebbly wall that ran about the island enclosure. The clear blue eyes, greedily fastened on the island, seemed like four flaming spots. Evidently the two observers were boys, with short, blond hair that danced in the morning breeze. The nose of one boy had dark freckles, while the cheeks of the other were like peach blossoms.

Each boy simultaneously tilted his head and seemed to ponder a few moments. Then the boy with the freckled nose pursed his lips and whispered excitedly to his friend. I shook my companion with both hands and shouted. "What are they talking about? Tell me! What are those boys talking about?"

The stunned monkey immediately ceased his jabbering and looked back and forth between the boys and myself. He worked his mouth to

and fro for several moments, absorbed in his own thoughts, and I knew from his look that this was more than a minor perplexity. Even after the boys shouted something I couldn't understand and disappeared behind the wall, the monkey remained hesitant, one hand alternately touching his forehead and scratching his rump.

"Everything's the same regardless of when they come--that's what they were grumbling about." He spoke deliberately, the twisted corner of his mouth suggesting a malicious grin.

Everything's the same--I saw it all now. My suspicion had been borne out. Everything's the same. So they had complained, and we were the show.

"You lied to me earlier then." I felt like strangling him.

The arm about my waist tightened as he responded. "The truth is cruel."

I sprang upon his wide breast, indignant over this nauseous solicitude, but angry even more at my own stupidity.

"It won't do any good to cry. Stop it." He was patting me on the back, and his voice was weary.

"You see that narrow wooden sign on top of the wall? It's only the back side with the weatherbeaten grain that faces us, but can you imagine what's written on the front, the side that people read? The specimen with shiny ears is known as the Japan Monkey--or something even more degrading."

I could not listen any longer. I fled from his grasp and scrambled up the withered-looking tree. Clinging to a branch at the top, I surveyed the entire island. Here and there a haze was forming, while underneath the cloudless sky a hundred monkeys were frolicking in the sun. I called down to my companion as he crouched by the waterfall.

"They don't know?"

He responded without looking up. "What do you expect. I suppose we're the only ones."

"Why haven't you fled?"

"Is that what you're planning?"

"Yes."

Green leaves. A gravel path, with people drifting by.

"You're not afraid?"

I shut my eyes tight. He had spoken the forbidden words.

A low, melodic voice echoed in the breeze caressing my ears. Was my companion singing once again the song which had brought me down from the tree? I kept my burning eyes shut and listened.

"Oh no, you must come back to this lovely spot. There are trees, sunshine, falling water--and, best of all, no worries about your next meal." The beckoning words seemed to come from afar. And also the low laughter which followed.

They were plausible words and possibly true. I felt something ready to totter inside me, but a certain turbulence in my mountain blood was too compelling.

I would not stay.

In mid-April, 1896, the office of the London Museum Zoo announced an escape from the Japanese Monkey Cage. Two monkeys had escaped, not merely one, and both remained at large.

TOYS (Gangu, 1935)

Something must yield. I pass each day hoping that something will yield, but aware of those unavoidable cases when nothing does. When at last nothing yields, I drift toward home like a kite with a broken string. Hatless, and still in my everyday clothes, I sidle with folded arms into my parents' house more than four hundred miles from Tokyo, push the parlor door aside, and stand immobile. Father, a magnifying glass in his hand, reads the political news in a low murmur, while Mother sits at his side, sewing. Their facial expressions change. They rise, and sometimes Mother emits a brief cry--like silk being torn. They stare a few moments. And once they see my pimples and legs still in place and realize I'm no ghost, Father turns into a raging demon and Mother collapses in tears.

From the moment I leave Tokyo I habitually act as one dead to the world. Regardless of how much Father rails or Mother pleads, I respond with an enigmatic smile--nothing more. People refer to the pain of "sitting on a bed of spikes;"[1] I feel instead like one "resting on fog and clouds" as I gaze into space.

It happened again this summer. I needed almost three hundred yen, two hundred seventy-five yen to be precise. I can't stand being poor. As long as I'm alive I want to treat people to a meal and dress in fancy clothes. Of course my parents wouldn't have even fifty yen in cash. But stashed away in a far corner of the family storehouse were twenty or thirty valuable objects which I might steal. Already I had committed three such thefts, and this would be the fourth.

Of what I've written to this point I'm unshakeably confident. But how do I act now? Do I assume a calm exterior for this tale entitled "Toys," or do I reveal the pattern of emotion inside? Well, there's no end to these abstractions, so I must eschew them whenever possible. The moment one escapes, you're off on an endless chase. You pursue one theory after another until you've finally got a whole

collection. And also a headache and fever, along with the reproachful feeling that you've made an ass of yourself. In the end you thrash about as if to keep from drowning in a jar of night soil. Take my word for it.

I want to write a story as follows. By a simple trick this fellow called I revives certain memories from the time he was three, two, and one. Describing such memories need not be merely bizarre. Children are tantalizing puzzles, and I can make something of that. I spread the manuscript paper before me to record the crux of the matter--the memories of a man from the ages of three, two, and one--and nothing more.

"I remember that I was three years old when . . ." After that beginning I carry the memoir to the age of two, then one, and conclude with the recollection of my birth. But even as I contentedly put my brush aside, the earlier problem persists: to assume a calm exterior, or to reveal the pattern of emotion inside? It's hardly necessary to say that this calm exterior is mere artifice. I tell my tale by soothing, coaxing, and sometimes bullying the reader. When the time is ripe I abruptly dismiss my own image with a word or two of seeming profundity. Oh, not that I wholly dismiss it. The image merely slips behind a sliding door. And when the smiling face innocently reappears, the reader's exactly where I want him. Such are the ways of artifice, the object of each writer's diligence. I'm not averse to artifice of this kind. Indeed, I was counting on a skillfull use of it for my infant-memoir.

Well, this house of cards is ready to collapse, so I had better decide on my outlook. I pretend to lose sight of my calm exterior, but I've taken precautions to recover it at some point without incurring a loss. Even if I leave these opening lines unerased, people will readily enough surmise what's going on. And to bind a reader with the golden chain of my unshakeable pride in a page or two is no mean feat.

To be honest, I planned on continuing the portrayal of that same

fellow. I was going to tell why he set about retrieving memories from ages three, two and one; how he could effect this; and what happened to him once he did. With such materials would I create a tale combining the calm exterior of a man with the pattern of emotion inside.

You can drop your guard now, I don't feel like writing anymore.

Shall I write? Well, only if you'll accept mere memories from infancy. Just five or six lines per day. And none but yourself will peruse them. All right? In honor of the commencement of this roguish work--irrespective of when it does commence--let's just the two of us have a drink. Then, to work!

I remember the first time I ever stood by myself on the ground. The sky clear after a shower, the soil still wet and dark. Plum blossoms. Yes, the garden out back. A woman had brought me cradled in her arms and placed me gently down. I had taken two or three fearless steps when my eyes suddenly noticed the ground spreading to infinity. The soles of my feet felt the endless depth of the earth, my body froze, and down I plopped. Unbearably hungry, I howled at the top of my lungs.

I'm making it all up. The only thing I truly remember is a faint rainbow in the heavens after the shower.

Even though one listens halfheartedly, he instinctively comprehends the meaning of something rightly named. I listen with my skin. The word 'thistle' crawls over me whenever I gaze distractedly upon the plant. Certain dull words, however, have no effect. I can't absorb a word like 'person' no matter how often I hear it.

During the winter of my second year I suffered a momentary spell of insanity. Fireworkers no larger than azuki beans seemed to burst inside my head, and I instinctively placed both hands over my ears.

Then I couldn't hear a thing, except for the occasional sound of water flowing in the distance. Tears began to flow, and eventually my eyes were smarting. When the colors about me began to change, I thought a piece of tinted glass had entered my eye. Over and over I picked at the lid. Actually I was gazing at the flames in the hearth as a woman held me in her bosom. Suddenly the flames turned black and took on a strange aspect, like a cluster of kelp swaying on the ocean floor. Then there were green, ribbon-like flames and a veritable palace of yellow flame. Finally I noticed a flame white as milk and almost forgot myself. I recall someone grumbling, "Oh, he's done it again. He trembles like that whenever he's wet." It tickled me to command attention. My breast swelled, and I tasted the joy of being king. "It's all right," I mused, "no one knows about me." I wasn't being contemptuous, either.

Two equally strange episodes occurred thereafter. I would occasionally exchange a few words with my toys, and late one night when a chilly wind was blowing I turned and asked the daruma doll on my pillow if it was cold.

The daruma said, "No, I'm not cold."

I asked again. "You're certain you're not cold?"

And the daruma answered, "I'm not cold."

"You're certain?"

"I'm not cold."

Someone dozing nearby looked at us and laughed. "The child loves his daruma. He keeps staring at it without uttering a word."

I knew that once all the grownups were sound asleep, forty or fifty mice would start scampering about the house. Sometimes four or five garden snakes were crawling about on the tatami. The grownups, breathing heavily in their sleep, were oblivious to everything. And they remained

unaware even when the mice and snakes crawled into their beds. I was wide awake throughout the night. During the day I would sleep a little while everyone watched.

No one realized that I had become insane; when I recovered nobody could tell the difference.

A certain event from a time when I was even younger revives in memory whenever I see the undulating grain in a field of barley. I was watching two horses deep in the barley. The mare was red, her partner black. And were they ever active. Impressed by such strength, I had no chance to resent their rude neglect of me.

I saw another red mare--or perhaps it was the same one. The mare seemed to be sewing something. After awhile she stood up and brushed the front of her kimono, evidently removing bits of thread. Then, twisting about, she pricked my cheek with a sewing needle. "Does it hurt, little fellow? Does it?"

It certainly did.

When I try in various ways to calculate on my fingers the date of Grandmother's death, I always arrive at the eighth month after my own birth. I have a clear memory from that day: a triangular patch opening in the mist above, the transparent noon sky presenting a glimpse of its prized complexion.

Everything about my grandmother was small--her figure, her face, even the arrangement of her hair. As she held me in her arms that day, she was wearing a crepe kimono with a pattern of scattered cherry petals the size of sesame seeds. I was inhaling her strong perfume and watching the birds quarrel in the sky when Grandmother suddenly shrieked and threw me to the tatami. I saw her face as I tumbled down. The skin

beneath her jaw quivered; the white teeth clicked together two or three times. Then she fell flat on her back. People came running up. They crowded about her and began lamenting together in the faint tones of the bell-cricket. I lay next to Grandmother silently inspecting the face of a corpse. Tiny wrinkles rose on both temples and spread in waves over the entire area of the pale, refined countenance. When people die their wrinkles start to move, and they keep moving as if they possess a life of their own. That's all I have to say.

Eventually an unbearable odor crept from her body.

Even now my ear is caressed by the lullabies Grandmother sang--"The wedding of a fox, the bridegroom gone . . ." Oh, spare me the rest!

(Unfinished)

DAS GEMEINE (Dasu Gemaine, 1935)

I. Magic Lanterns

At the time each day seemed my last.

I was in love--the first time this had ever happened. Heretofore I used to fuss over how to display my manhood. I would try my left profile on a woman, and if she hesitated even a minute I would whirl about and be off like the wind. Now I neglected the entire sham. The wise and almost invulnerable manner which had become second nature to me could not be maintained. I was wholly, madly in love. A gutteral voice whispered to me, "Love is Blind," and that's all there was to it.

I was reborn at twenty-five. I was alive, and living to the full. I was the truth. Love is blind, but mine was unwelcome from the beginning. I was about to reach a bodily understanding of that old-fashioned practice, Double Suicide by Coercion, when my companion mercilessly jilted me and dropped out of sight.

Friends call me Sanojirozaemon,[1] Sanojiro for short. It's an old, historical name.

"Sanojiro--a good name after all. Gives you some class, a name like that does. And when you've got class after being jilted--well, you must've been spoiled by people from the beginning. It'll do."

I'll never forget it was Baba who said this, though he himself was surely the one who began calling me Sanojiro. Baba, incidentally, is the fellow I met at the sweet sake stand in Ueno Park, the small one near Kiyomizu Temple with red cloth coverings on the two benches.

Between lectures I would slip out the back gate of the university for a stroll in the park. It was because of the waitress that I often went as far as the stand. Kiku was sixteen; she was also diminutive, bright-eyed, and alert. Something about her was strikingly similar to my love, and since it required a trifling sum to enjoy the latter's

company, I would content myself when penniless by gazing upon Kiku as I sat on the bench sipping a cup of sweet sake.

Early this spring I noticed a strange man at the sake stand. It was a beautiful Saturday, and when the lecture on French poetry ended around noon I devised a stupid verse and melody of my own and made my way through the park humming and crooning. Are the plums blooming, the cherries hardly in bud?--a verse utterly different from the French poem I had just learned.

I was astonished by the strange appearance of this new customer. He was of average height, though extremely thin, and wore an ordinary jacket of black serge. But the overcoat hanging over his jacket was grotesque; I couldn't tell the style, but it seemed at first glance the sort of coat Schiller might have worn--a baggy thing of splendid grey and numerous buttons.

Now for the face. A fox trying to disguise itself as Schubert, if you'll permit an off-hand expression. A forehead of incredible prominence, small steel-rim glasses, wild curly hair, a pointed jaw, the stubble of a three-day's beard. There was no luster whatever to the skin, and one might with only partial exaggeration invoke as a comparable example the pale, unsavory color of a warbler's wing. At first he merely sat in the center of the bench with his legs crossed and pompously sipped from a large teacup; then he was waving his arm and calling me over. The longer I hesitated the more uneasy I would be, so I feigned a meaningless smile and sat down on the edge of his bench.

"I tell you it's that hard cuttlefish I ate this morning." His voice was low and husky, as if he were trying deliberately to suppress it.

"This back molar on the right side--I can't bear the pain. Nothing confounds a person like a toothache, don't you agree? If I took some aspirin, it would clear up right away. . . . Say, did I call you over here? Sorry, but . . . ." He looked toward me, a faint grin at the corner of his mouth. "I'm so blind I can't tell one person from another.

No, that's not true, I'm just mediocre. You realize I'm only putting you on--it's a bad habit I can't correct. Whenever I meet someone for the first time I always do this silly act. You know the old saying: give him enough rope and he'll hang himself. Stop! I'm ill! How about yourself? Literature? Graduating this year?"

"No, I've got another year. I flunked once."

"Oh, I see, a writer!" Gravely he moved the cup to his mouth and took a long sip. "I've spent almost eight years in the music school across the way. Can't graduate. I haven't even gone through the exam ritual once. You understand how rude it would be for one person to test the talent of another."

"Of course."

"I'm only jesting. The truth is I'm stupid. I often squat here and watch the crowd going by. At first I couldn't endure it--all those people and every last one of them ignorant of me, paying no attention at all. And when I realized that . . . oh hell, you needn't agree with me so readily, I'm only trying to humor you. I don't mind them anymore; in fact, I like it this way. To me they're like a clear stream flowing beneath my pillow. I'm not resigned, I'm simply content after the manner of a prince."

He gulped the drink and shoved his cup toward me.

"See the words on this cup: the white horse is too proud to gallop? I should stop, this is too embarrassing. Tell you what, you can have this cup. The antique dealer in Asakusa charged me plenty, and the concession here keeps it for my exclusive use. You know, I like that face of yours. Deep color to the eyes, a dreamy look. When I die the cup is yours. And I'll probably be dead tomorrow."

Well, to make a long story short, we ran into one another at the sake concession quite often. And Baba not only survived, he put on weight. His dark cheeks puffed out like ripening fruit, and he whispered to me very confidentially one day that alcoholic fat was especially dangerous.

Day by day we became better friends, even as I wondered why I didn't flee. Did I believe in his talent? Joseph Szigeti, the celebrated violinist, arrived from Budapest last autumn to give three recitals in Hibiya Hall. Angered by the unfavorable reception he received each time, this proud and solitary middle-aged genius wrote a letter to the Asahi News claiming the Japanese ear for music was no better than that of a donkey. But Szigeti had one reservation to this scathing attack on his audience: in a verse-like refrain repeated over and over, Szigeti excluded a certain youth from this blanket condemnation. The youth's identity was the subject of intense debate in music circles at the time. But in fact the youth was Baba.

Baba was in a well-known Ginza beer hall when he noticed, in the corner beneath a potted tree, the large reddish dome of Szigeti's head. Szigeti had been humiliated for the third time at Hibiya Hall earlier in the evening, but he was smiling and feigning unconcern as he sipped his beer. Without a moment's hesitation, Baba went over and sat at a table near this famous but unappreciated artist.

They liked one another, and before the night was over they had made the rounds of the best cafés from one end of the Ginza to the other. Szigeti not only picked up the tab, he remained a perfect gentleman no matter how much he drank. His dark bow tie stayed firmly in place, and he never touched a waitress.

Szigeti was of the opinion that art unrelated to the analytical intelligence was pointless. In literature his favorites were Thomas Mann and André Gide, the latter name rendered by him as "Cheed." After mentioning these writers he began biting the nail of his right thumb in a joyless manner.

The two friends took leave of one another by the lotus pond in the front garden of the Imperial Hotel. It was already dawn when they limply shook hands, their faces turned away from one another, and immediately parted. Later that day Szigeti boarded the Empress of Canada in Yokohama and sailed to America for his next engagement. The letter with the refrain appeared in the Asahi News the following day.

Listening to Baba relate this exploit--his eyes blinking rapidly in understandable embarrassment, his mood turning peevish toward the end--I began to feel somewhat incredulous. It was unlikely that Baba could sustain a conversation in a foreign language throughout the night. And once this doubt was implanted, I began having endless others. I really didn't know the most basic things about him. How well did he play the violin? What sort of compositions did he write? What of his theory of music? Occasionally Baba came by carrying a shiny black violin case under his left arm, but there was never anything inside. According to him, the cold, empty case symbolized man's present condition. As he spoke these words, I wondered if the fellow had ever once taken a violin in his hand. Regardless of whether I believed in his talent or not, there was no way to measure his playing skill under these circumstances.

I too belonged to the party which was more concerned with the case than with the violin inside; so perhaps it was Baba's appearance and joviality which attracted me, rather than his abilities or his character. He often turned up in a different costume. He wore business suits of all kinds, as well as a student uniform or even a pair of overalls. To my consternation and embarrassment, he once appeared in white tabi, with a stiffened sash around the waist of his kimono. He told me without batting an eye that he changed his clothes regularly to keep people from having a definite impression of him.

I forgot to mention that Baba lived on the outskirts of Tokyo in Mitaka Village and came to the city every day without fail. His father was a landlord or someone with lots of money, and that's why Baba could afford all these clothes. So Baba was merely one more pampered son of the rich, and his extravagance hardly accounted for my interest in him.

Was it his ready cash then? I don't like to mention this, but he would pay the entire bill whenever we went around together, even if it meant knocking me aside to reach the cashier. With us, there was a constant and delicate interaction between money and affection, and his prosperity undoubtedly had a certain charm. From the beginning our relationship was one of lord and retainer, with me as the docile

creature always led about by the nose.

Well, now the truth is out. As I've hinted earlier, I had no will of my own. Baba was a goldfish and I was his turd; he would start swimming in some direction and I would follow waveringly along. On the last day of spring, for example . . . . You know it was a funny thing with Baba. He was acutely aware of the calendar, and he would remark wistfully that Buddha's death occurred today or that the sexagenary cycle had already entered the zone of the Elder Brother of Metal. Then he would turn right around and begin grumbling for some inexplicable reason that the Boys Festival or the Darkness Celebration was upon us.

One day near the end of spring I was drinking a beer alone at the usual concession in Ueno Park and savoring the mellow warmth which brought out cherry tree leaves and caterwauling cats, showers of falling blossoms and hordes of wooly worms, when suddenly I became aware of Baba. He was sitting directly behind me in a bright green suit ready to murmur in his husky voice that today was the end of spring. Then he suddenly rose in obvious embarrassment and made a vigorous motion with his shoulders. And so, having decided for no particular reason to commemorate the last evening of spring, we set out with a laugh for Asakusa. We visited five or six cafés, and during the evening I suddenly discovered in Baba an inseparable friend.

Baba spoke interminably of the quarrel between "Doctor Prague" and the Japanese musical world, as if he wished to chew up the matter and spit it out. Prague was a great man, and Baba would tell me why. As he mumbled the reasons to himself, I became restless for my woman. I invited Baba along.

"Let's go see the magic lanterns," I urged. He didn't know about magic lanterns, but I said it was all right, I would be the leader and show him the way on this last night of spring. Covering my embarrassment with such banter, I shoved Baba into a taxi while he continued mumbling over and over about "Prague."

Hurry! Hurry! Oh, the unvarying thrill as I cross the river and enter the District of Magic Lanterns. It's a spider's web, identical

lanes conveniently radiating from the center, a row of houses on each side of a lane, a young woman gaily laughing at each tiny window. One step into this area and the weight on my shoulders immediately lightens. Here one can leave his manners behind and spend the entire night in peace, a sinner in refuge.

It seemed to be Baba's first time. But he showed little surprise as he strolled slightly apart from me through the district, inspecting one by one the face in each window. We go in one alley and come out, turn a corner and head down another. In this alley we stop, and I gently nudge Baba in the ribs.

"Here's my favorite," I tell him. "She's been my girl for some time."

My love moved her thin lower lip to the left and gazed unblinkingly as I whispered to Baba. He had stopped in his tracks, his arms hanging limp, and was now scrutinizing my woman. Presently he turned around and almost shouted, "Just like her! Exactly!"

I turned numb when I realized what he meant. "Oh no, she doesn't come close to Kiku," I proclaimed.

Baba seemed mildly perplexed. "It's not a question of comparing." He laughed a moment, then scowled. "One mustn't compare things. It's just a stupid tendency."

He mumbled these words as if he were trying to convince himself, then walked away.

The next morning, sensing that we might provoke a fight with one another, both Baba and I remained silent awhile in the taxi. Only when the automobile was easing its way through the milling crowds of Asakusa did we feel at home.

"That woman told me something last night." His low, earnest voice imitated the woman's. "The life we girls lead is not so easy as it seems."

I tried to laugh as best I could. Gradually a beaming smile spread over Baba's face, and he slapped my shoulder.

"That's the finest district in Japan. Every one of them holds her head high. What a surprise to find they're not ashamed. They live to the hilt each day."

For the first time in my life I felt I had gained a friend; thereafter I cozied up to Baba as though he were my own brother. But the moment I gained a friend, I lost my love. She fled in a manner almost humiliating to speak of. But others talked about it enough that I finally ended up with this silly name. I can talk easily now, but it wasn't a joke then. I even thought about dying. With the disease I had caught in the District getting no better, I expected to become a cripple any moment. I could not understand why a person must go on living. When the summer vacation arrived, I returned to my home among the mountains of northern Honshu, five hundred miles from Tokyo. I passed each day sprawled in the garden, smoking as many as seventy cigarettes and gazing into space.

I received a letter from Baba. He began by asking whether I wouldn't consider his feelings and hold off on suicide. The letter went on:

If you commit suicide I'll fancy myself the cause of your spite. If that's all right, then go ahead and die. I was never excited about living, but I won't commit suicide. I don't want anyone fattening his ego on my account. Illness or catastrophe will do me in someday, but not for a while. My only present illnesses are a toothache and hemorrhoids, and catastrophes don't happen often. I've tried passing an entire night near the window in my room waiting for a robber to attack, but the only creatures to steal in were the moths and the winged ants, some beetles and a host of mosquitoes. (You're probably telling yourself that we're two of a kind.) Shall we publish a book together? I'll pay off all my debts with the profit, then have myself a good sleep for three days and nights on end. Debt's the very heart of my good-for-nothing life. There's this dark, empty feeling gnawing at my breast, and publishing a book might let it burrow even deeper. But that's all right. I'm only trying to give myself a way out of this

dilemma.

The book will be called The Pirate.

We'll talk later about the precise nature of the work, but I'm planning to publish it as a magazine for sending abroad, probably to France. You certainly seem an outstanding linguist, so you'll translate our manuscript into French. Perhaps Gide will critique a copy for us. We'll get a dispute going directly with Valéry. And perhaps we should confound the somnolent Proust. I hear you sighing that Proust is dead. Cocteau is still alive. If only Radiguet were still kicking. . . . Shall we delight Professor Decouvre with a copy? I pity that man.

Isn't this a captivating dream? And so easy to make happen. (The ink dries as I write, and the style is peculiar to letter-writing. It's not precisely description, narration, or dialogue, but a strange combination of things that nevertheless stands on its own. Oh, what stupid things I say!)

I spent the entire night doing calculations. Three hundred yen and we can put out a splendid book. I can manage a sum like that on my own. Why don't you write some poems to send Paul Fort? I'm contemplating a symphony in four movements. I'll call the work The Pirate and publish it when it's finished just to upset Ravel. As I say, one can always effect something with the necessary cash. What's to prevent you from achieving anything? Let your mind expand to the limit with wondrous visions. How about it? (Why must we Japanese end our letters with a prayer for the recipient's health. There's a strange tale of a stupid, illiterate, tongue-tied fellow who was good at one thing only, and that was letter-writing.) Well, what do you think? Am I a good or a bad letter-writer? Be seeing you.

On a different subject--let me ask something that just came to mind. It's a question of the ancient philosophers: Does knowledge bring happiness?

To: Mr. Sanojirozaemon.

From: Baba Kazuma

II. The Pirate

See Naples and die.

When I reminded him that the term pirate had a shabby meaning in the world of publishing, Baba immediately replied, "So much the better." We decided to use French for the title, and thus our magazine became Le Pirate. There were any number of models--La Basoche of Mallarmé and Verlaine, La Jeune Belgique of the school of Verhaeren, La Semaine and La Type, all of them periodicals in which young artists of an earlier day first addressed the world, red roses blooming in the garden of international art, so to speak. Baba's "pirate fever" became more and more intense when I returned to Tokyo after the summer vacation. Eventually I too caught his enthusiasm, and whenever we were together we spoke of our wonderful vision for . . . no, I mean our plans for the magazine.

Four issues a year, one per season. Sixty pages in octavo and glossy paper throughout. Each member of the group would wear a pirate outfit, the flower of the season in the lapel. A number of passwords: Never swear to anything. Happiness is . . . ? Render no judgements. See Naples and die. Etc. The membership to be composed exclusively of handsome fellows in their twenties. The finest techniques in each area of the arts. Taking a cue from The Yellow Book we would find a gifted painter to rival Beardsley and provide the illustrations. We would display our talents abroad without the benefit of an International Cultural Exhibition. As for capital, Baba had two hundred yen, and I had a hundred. We would squeeze two hundred out of the other fellows.

About those other fellows--well, Baba was to introduce me first to Satake Rokurō, a relative of sorts who was studying at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. When I arrived in the park at four o'clock on the appointed day, Baba was already seated upon a bench. He had dressed for the occasion in a style from the Meiji Restoration, his Kokura hakama over

an unlined kimono of dark blue and splashes of white. Gazing into his face as she leaned over to serve him was Kiku. She was wearing a kimono with a leaf-pattern sash of red hemp. A white flower was pinned to her hair. The sun fading in the west gave a slight luster to Baba's pale, dark face, while the evening mist rising about the two figures lent to the scene an air of smoky enchantment.

I drew near and roared at Baba, causing Kiku to immediately jump up. She turned and greeted me with a smile, but her cheeks were flushed with embarrassment. I wavered a moment, then impulsively asked whether I had upset her. Kiku's expression changed abruptly, and her eyes were about to assume a grave look when she pivoted about and ran inside, the tray held over her face.

I felt as though I were watching a marionette perform. After she was gone I sat down by the grinning Baba.

"She really believes me," Baba said. "She's got a nice way about her."

I replied that she seemed to me absolutely trusting.

Then Baba sipped some ordinary tea from one of the porcelain cups customarily used at the stand. Evidently embarrassed by the fancy inscription, he had long ago abandoned his special cup.

"She asked how many days it took me to grow this beard. I said two and then told her if she looked closely she could see the hair growing ever so slightly. You saw her there, stooping and looking at my jaw with those big saucer-eyes. I couldn't believe it. I wonder if she's so naive out of ignorance or wisdom. Let's write a novel on the subject of naiveté. A trusts B. Enter C, D, E, F, G, H, and lots of other characters. We'll lay the plot in such a way that B gets slandered. But A's trust in B remains unshaken--no doubts whatever. A's a woman, B's a man. Pretty deadly, isn't it?"

He let out a strange laugh, and I knew I must simply listen while pretending to be unaware of what was going through his mind.

"It sounds promising. Why don't you give it a try?" I spoke as

earnestly as possible, my eyes staring blankly upon the great bronze statue of Saigō Takamori.

Baba seemed relieved. His face slipped into its usual sullen expression.

"But . . . " Baba paused momentarily. "I can't write a novel. You like ghost stories, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. Ghost stories excite my imagination like nothing else."

"How about this one?" Baba licked his lower lip. "There is such a thing as ultimate knowledge. It's like a Bottomless Pit[2] that makes the hair stand on end. One glance and you become speechless. Try to write and you end up scribbling a self-portrait in the corner of your manuscript paper. Our protagonist plans to write an incredibly frightening novel all the same. The moment he formulates the plot, all other novels become hollow and monotonous. This frightening novel of his confronts the problem of self-consciousness: how, for example, to find the right position for your hat when you don't like it pushed back on your head, you can't relax when it tilts forward, but you feel more uncomfortable without it. The book is a cool and refreshing interpretation of the problem, a small stone sharply placed on a go board. A cool interpretation? Unruffled perhaps? Cut glass. White bone. That's the sort of interpretation. Well, let's just say an interpretation and be done with it. Without a doubt there is such a novel. But from the day the author conceives it, he becomes markedly debilitated and ends up insane, suicidal, or mute. You realize Radiguet committed suicide. Cocteau's pretty far gone too and spends his entire day with opium, while Valéry's been deaf ten years already. Even in Japan many have gone under for just one book. As a matter of fact . . . ."

"Hello, here I am." The narration was cut short by a husky voice. I turned around, startled. To Baba's right stood a diminutive figure in the blue uniform of a student.

"You're late," Baba growled. "Look here, this is Sanojirozaemon of Tokyo University. And this guy"--he pointed toward the newcomer--"is the

art student I told you about, Satake Rokurō."

Satake and I both smiled wryly as we nodded to one another. To me his smooth, delicate face gave the impression of a milk-white, highly polished Nō mask. The pupils of the eyes seemed like tinted glass, with no definite focus. His nose was knifelike, a cold ivory miniature, his eyebrows long and narrow like willow leaves, his thin lips strawberry red. . . . For someone with such a striking face, his arms and legs were surprisingly meager. He was barely five feet tall, with the small, shriveled palms of a lizard. He remained standing and began speaking to me in the soft, dead voice of an old man.

"Baba's told me about your troubles. I think you're quite a fellow."

He was already getting under my skin, and I took another good look at his shiny, white face. It had no more expression than a box.

"Look, Satake, stop your teasing! It's a nasty sign. If you want to abuse someone, do it with a vengeance."

Satake's response was gentle. "But I wasn't teasing him, you see." Then he took a purple handkerchief from his breast pocket and slowly wiped the sweat from around his neck.

Baba let out a great sigh and rolled over on the bench. "You see . . . Isn't that so? Can't you finish a sentence without an exclamation. They're useless and they give me the creeps."

I felt the same way.

Satake carefully folded the handkerchief and slid it into his breast pocket. "Next thing you'll give me that nasty remark about my 'morning glory' face. Isn't that so?" He spoke as if he didn't really care.

"I don't feel like arguing with you today," Baba responded. "We'd play to the audience, both of us. You know that for a fact, don't

you?" Baba was sitting up again, and his voice was louder. There was something between him and Satake that I didn't know about.

Satake grinned a moment, showing his porcelain-like teeth. "Well, I suppose you don't have any need of me, then."

"We don't." Baba turned deliberately away and let out a slow yawn.

"If you'll excuse me . . . ." Satake stared at his gold-plated watch as though pondering his next move. "I'm off to hear a new symphony at Hibiya Hall. That fellow Konoe is really good at selling tickets. This young foreign lady's been sitting next to me every time, you see. It's been fun."

He scurried away nimble as a mouse.

"I'll be damned! Hey, Kiku, your lover just left. Bring me a beer. How about having one yourself, Sanojiro? I've brought a bore into the club, and he's the type you don't shake off easily. When I argue with him I can't win no matter what. He doesn't put up any resistance, he merely clings to every punch you throw." Baba's voice suddenly dropped to a whisper. "That fellow held Kiku's hand, cool as you please. Guys like him make easy sport of somebody's wife. But I wonder if he's impotent maybe. We're not related by blood, either. I don't want to argue when Kiku's around, especially with the likes of him. I'm telling you, that pride of his makes me shudder." A glass of beer was still in his hand as he gave a deep sigh and concluded: "You've got to admit it, though. The guy's a real painter."

I had fallen into a reverie. As dusk fell, all sorts of lights came on, shedding a spectrum of colors over the crowd milling in the Hirokōji neighborhood at the foot of the park. Baba's monologue seemed miles away as I gazed upon the scene, the victim of a commonplace emotion. Ah, I told myself, here's the real Tokyo!

Five or six days later the newspaper carried an article about a pair of tapirs the zoo at Ueno Park had recently bought for mating. I wanted to see them, and after my last class at the university I

headed for the park. It was near the great fenced enclosure for the waterfowl that I noticed Satake seated upon a bench and drawing in a sketchbook. Reluctantly I went over and tapped him on the shoulder.

He let out a groan and twisted slowly toward me. "Oh, you startled me there for a moment. Have a seat. I'm in a hurry to finish this, but I've got something to tell you. You can wait a few minutes, can't you?"

He spoke in a strange, aloof manner. Then, taking up his pencil, he turned away and went on sketching. I stood there hesitant, then sat resolutely down and peeked at the sketch.

Satake seemed to know I was watching. "Pelicans," he mumbled as the pencil continued rapidly sketching a variety of poses in bold strokes. "Twenty yen apiece, and there's a man who will buy any number." He grinned stupidly and continued: "I don't talk nonesense like Baba always does. I suppose you've heard about 'The Moon over the Ruined Castle'?"[3]

"'The Moon over the Ruined Castle'?" I didn't follow him.

"Not yet, eh?" He was making a large sketch in the corner of the paper--a pelican looking behind itself. "Baba composed the melody for 'The Moon over the Ruined Castle.' His pseudonym was Taki Rentarō, and he sold the entire rights for three thousand yen to Yamada Kōsaku."

"You mean the famous song?" My heart was soaring.

"The whole thing's a lie." A sudden breeze riffled the pages, showing me a glimpse of flower sketches and nude women. "Baba's famous for his nonesense. You see, he's quite clever at it, and he can take in anyone who doesn't know him. You've heard about Joseph Szigeti?"

"I'm afraid so."

"And the letter he composed with the refrain?" He put the question wearily, then closed his sketchbook. "Thanks for waiting. Let's take a walk."

So I would give up on the tapirs for today and listen instead to a tale from Satake, a creature more bizarre than any tapir.

We had gone beyond the waterfowl enclosure, passed the seal pool, and were approaching the cage which held a brown bear as large as a knoll when Satake began to speak. He seemed to be reciting something already told time after time. Written down, the words might have carried some conviction; as it was, they merely gurgled along in that low, somber tone of his.

"Baba is no good. Does there exist a musician who knows nothing of music? I have never once heard the man carry on a discussion of the subject. I have never seen him hold a violin. Does he compose? I doubt whether he can even read a note. He's the cause of much grief in his own home. It's not even certain whether he's enrolled in music school. A number of years ago he wished to become a novelist and studied to that purpose. But he says he read so many books he could no longer write. Ridiculous. Lately he's learned about self-consciousness and goes about parroting the term without the least embarrassment. I can't talk about it in fancy terms, but I know what self-consciousness is all about. Several hundred coeds, for example, are lined up in rows on both sides of the street, and you find yourself approaching and making the effort to walk past with an air of unconcern. Then everything becomes awkward. You don't know how to hold your head or where to direct your eyes and you begin to feel terribly put upon. Self-consciousness such as this is truly excruciating, and you don't go around babbling about it. Tell me, don't you find it strange the way he can talk so casually about publishing a magazine? Pirate! What's the meaning of that? He just likes the carefree sound. There'll be problems later if you put too much faith in Baba. I predict trouble, and my predictions always come true."

"But. . . . "

"What is it?"

"I trust Baba!"

"Ah, no doubt." And he went on, his face showing no response whatever to my heartfelt words. "I don't believe a word he says about this magazine. He must think I'm crazy, asking me to contribute fifty yen. There's not an ounce of sincerity in the guy, all he wants is to raise a little hell. Maybe you haven't heard, but the day after tomorrow Baba and I are coming to your place, and we're bringing a fellow Baba met through an older classmate at music school. He's a young writer named Dazai Osamu, and Baba says the four of us are going to make the final arrangements for the magazine. I suggest we look as bored as we can and keep the discussion from getting off the ground. We could put out a splendid magazine, but we won't look any better in the eyes of society. Our efforts will come to nothing. I'm no Beardsley, and I really don't care. I'll do lots of sketches, sell them for plenty, and have fun. That's enough for me."

We were passing the mountain lion cage as he finished. The big animal had arched its back, and the green, glittering eyes were fixed upon us. Satake stretched out an arm and crushed his partially smoked cigarette right on the lion's nose. His posture at that moment seemed to me as natural as a rock.

III. The Gateway to Fortune

Beyond this point the shellfish are cheaper.

"I hear it's going to be a magazine to end all magazines."

"No, just a pamphlet."

"There you go again. I've heard plenty about you, and I've got your number. Imagine! A magazine that will put Gide and Valéry to shame!"

"Did you come here to poke fun?"

During the few minutes I was downstairs, it appeared that Baba

and Dazai had already begun to quarrel. When I re-entered my room with the tea kettle and cups, Baba was sitting hunched over the desk in one corner, an arm propped against his cheek, while Dazai lounged in the corner diagonally opposite, his back against the wall, his legs with their long hairy shins flung out across the floor. The eyes of both were half-closed and drowsy, and their speech was slow and unvaried; but I could tell from the gleam at the corner of the eye and from the way certain words came flicking out like the tongue of a snake that each of them was seething with anger and that the duel was indeed a dangerous one. Satake was lying sprawled out next to Dazai, a bored look on his face, a cigarette in his mouth, eyes roaming about the room.

From the moment Baba invaded the room to awaken me early that morning, I knew this meeting wasn't going to pan out. He had come in neatly dressed in a student uniform, with a bulky, yellow raincoat pulled on over this. The coat was drenched, but Baba did not remove it as he paced about the room reciting as if to himself.

"My nerves are shot. Get up, my boy, get up right away. I'll go crazy in this rain. My weight's already down from merely thinking about The Pirate. I've just met this fellow Dazai. My senior classmate recommended him as a brilliant novelist, but the fates have been cruel and now we're stuck with him. He's absolutely dreadful. An abomination! There's something revolting about him. He's cropped his hair to the scalp, as though he were some sort of pious monk. Vulgar taste. That's it, taste! He's decorating himself. Are all so-called novelists like him? Their thinking and learning and passion mislaid and forgotten? Yes, a hack writer from the word go. He's got a big, sallow face that glistens with oil. And his nose--I've read of a nose like that in Regnier. Something about a supremely precarious nose, with deep wrinkles on the side that barely keep it from collapsing into a 'dumpling nose.' Exactly! Regnier's got it exactly. The eyebrows are wide and black, and almost bushy enough to cover his tiny, darting eyes. The forehead seems stubbornly narrow, with two deeply-carved wrinkles--incredible! He's got a thick neck, and that

hairline . . . ! Just like a dunce, really. Let's see, I noticed three red pimple scars on his neck immediately below the jaw. I'd figure him to be about five feet seven and a hundred twenty pounds. A size eleven sock and still in his twenties. Oh, I forgot to mention those remarkably stooped shoulders--a virtual hunchback. Close your eyes a moment and picture him. . . .

"Never mind, it's just faking on his part--every bit of it. He's a great dissembler, no doubt about it; but these piercing eyes of mine can see through a counterfeit. He's got this sparse, unkempt beard. Oh, what am I saying! He's hardly capable of leaving anything unkempt. He must train it that way. Which guise am I describing now? It's as if he's saying: look as me, now I'm this, now that. He can't move a finger or clear his throat without underlining it. Revolting bastard! The guy's got a face as smooth as an egg--no eyes, no mouth, no eyebrows. Or rather, the eyebrows seem painted on, the eyes and nose glued on. And the art he makes of showing you his nonchalance. Christ! The first time I looked at him, I felt as if someone was wiping glue across my face.

"Consider the group we've brought together: Satake, Dazai, Sanojiro, Baba. An epochal event even if the four of us merely stood in a row without uttering a word. It's destiny, and I'm going ahead with it. Anyway, disagreeable companions can be fun. My life ends this year, and I'm staking everything on Le Pirate. Will I become another Byron? Or a bum? The Lord will grant us five pence. Satake can go stuff his rebellion."

All of a sudden he lowered his voice. "Time to rise. I'll open the shutters. The others will be here soon, and I'm anxious to complete the arrangements today."

Baba's enthusiasm was infectious, and I began to stir underneath the cover. Then I leapt up, kicked the bedding aside, and helped him push open the creaky, rotting shutters. The vast array of roofs in the Hongo quarter looked blurred in the rain.

Satake arrived about noon. He wore a jacket of light blue wool over his velvet slacks. He had neither a raincoat nor hat, and the cheeks of his rain-drenched face had a wondrous, moon-like luster to them. Without a word of greeting, he sank like a dying glowworm into a corner of the room. Finally he said he was tired and asked that we excuse him.

Moments later the door slid open, and Dazai Osamu moved indolently into the room. One look at him and I turned away in consternation. This would never do. From Baba's description I had drawn two images, a favorable and a negative one; the real Dazai matched the negative in every detail. To make things worse, wasn't he decked out in precisely the sort of costume Baba most abhorred? A tie-dyed sash and brightly-colored kimono in the flecked style of Oshima, his sports cap a bold checkered pattern, his undergarment composed of pale yellow silk just long enough to give a glimpse of the hem. Dazai gently raised the hem as he sat down and pretended to look out the window.

"The rain falls on the town," he intoned, his voice thin and reedy as a woman's. The sentence concluded, he turned with his bloodshot eyes and gazed narrowly at the rest of us. When he displayed a smile, wrinkling his entire face, I fled the room.

As I mentioned, Dazai and Baba were arguing when I returned with the tea utensils. Dazai, his hands clasped behind his shorn head, was speaking. "Say whatever you please, the only question is whether we have the will."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"The magazine! If we do it, we do it together."

"Why did you come?"

"Maybe the wind blew me here."

"I'm warning you, quit playing the comedian and prophet. And wipe that silly grin off your face."

"Well, let me put a question. Why did you ask me here?"

"You come whenever you're called?"

"Yes, I suppose I do. I tell myself I have to."

"A man's calling has top priority, don't you agree?"

"As you please."

"What spiteful docility. Yes, you've a rare gift for words. Oh . . . let me be--not in the group with you, I mean. Now the ball's in your court, jester! What a bother!"

"We're both at fault. It takes two to tango."

"Here I am, this huge pair of balls hanging between my legs, and I don't know what to do with them. That's the feeling you give me."

"I don't mean to exaggerate, but you're just babbling as far as I can tell. Is something wrong? Perhaps you fellows have learned about writers' lives, but you don't seem to know anything about their work."

"Are you slamming us? Or merely announcing the results of your research? Maybe it's an exam answer, and I'm supposed to give a grade."

"Vilification, pure and simple."

"Well, since you brought the matter up. . . . Babbling's a speciality of mine, a rare speciality at that."

"Indeed, the epitome of babbling."

"Your skepticism's depleted. Oh, why don't you cut it out. I don't much care for comic skits."

"I guess you don't understand the piercing sorrow that comes with exposing your carefully prepared wares in the marketplace. Or the emptiness of the heart once you've prayed to the Harvest-God. You're only passing under the gate to the shrine."

"Again the prophet! I've never read your novels, but I imagine they're only cheap jokes. Take away your sentiment, wit, humor, and posturing, and nothing's left. The world and the flesh--that's the feeling you give. You've no soul, no artistic dignity, no . . . ."

"Of course, but I've got to live. And I have this feeling that artistic works must bow before society and beg its indulgence. I don't write for fun. If I could afford that, I would never have written a word. Once I start, I realize the work will turn out well. But I wonder beforehand whether it's really worth the effort, and I make such a fuss examining the project from every angle that I never get started. That's why I don't accomplish anything."

"Then why did you urge a few minutes ago that we work together on the magazine?"

"Are you trying to analyze me? For no particular reason, I simply wanted to get worked up. I craved some shouting."

"Oh, I see your game. You want to stand guard and use the rest of us as a shield. But it won't work, you can't put up any resistance."

"I like you. I still don't have my own shield, I always borrow one. If I had even a dilapidated one of my own. . . ."

"I know one!" Impulsively I broke into the conversation. "Imitation!"

"Right! Score one for Sanojiro! The inspiration of the century! A silver-plated shield with a moustache pattern for Dazai. Now he calmly lifts the shield, leaving the rest of us exposed."

"This may seem an odd question," Dazai ventured, "but which do you take pride in: strawberries prepared for market or purely natural ones? The gateway to fortune's another name for the entrance to hell, and it sends you straight into the marketplace. I know the plight of prepared strawberries, and lately I've begun to respect them. I'm not going to flee. I'll go wherever I'm taken." His mouth twisted in a painful grin. "And when I wake up. . . ."

"Wait! Don't!" Baba limply waved a hand before his own face, interrupting Dazai. "If you wake up, the rest of us won't survive. Hey, Sanojiro, let's call a halt to this. Sorry, I'm quitting. I don't want to become fodder for this guy's appetite. He'll have to

look elsewhere for feed. Dazai, The Pirate is herewith suspended. And in its place. . . ."

Baba rushed at Dazai and slapped him hard on the cheek. "Monster!"

The look of a child in anguish spread momentarily over Dazai's face. Then, drawing his dark lips tight, he turned a proud expression toward Baba, and suddenly I was in love with his face. Meanwhile, Satake pretended to drowse, his eyes lightly closed.

That evening, as the rain kept falling, Baba and I passed the time drinking in a gloomy odenya-style bar. At first we were both silent, but after a few hours Baba became gradually communicative.

"Satake has already brought Dazai over to his side, no doubt about it. You know, he came to the meeting with Dazai today. His kind will do that sort of thing. I'm on to him, though. He's probably had one of his confidential talks with you, hasn't he?"

"He has." I filled Baba's cup, wishing to offer him comfort.

"Satake tried to take you from me. And for no reason at all. He's a vindictive person, and I'm no match for him. Well, I'm not sure, but maybe he's just a man of the world. Certainly, that's what society would call him. Oh, the hell with it! I'm glad we gave up on the magazine. Tonight I'll prop my pillow high and sleep without a care in the world. Besides, I'm about to be disinherited, and I'll wake up one morning to find myself a helpless beggar anyway. I never had my heart in the magazine, I just tossed out the idea as a way of holding on to you--because I like you. Oh, the plans that crowded your brain! Just to watch your eyes water as you spoke of The Pirate! That's what kept me going until now. From you I've learned the real meaning of love, learned it for the first time. You're utterly open and pure--and a beauty besides. I sense in your eyes a sort of ultimate adaptability. Yes, you're the one who can see into the Well of Wisdom. Only you, and not Dazai, Satake, or me. Damn! Am I babbling like this from mere frivolity? Kiku told me that true love remains silent, even

to death. I've got some thrilling news. Kiku's in love with you, but she won't confess even at the risk of death. She prattled on about dying for your sake, then she poured a bottle of cider over my head and howled with laughter. But who's your favorite? Dazai? H'm. . . . Satake? Hardly him, right? Me. . . ?"

I sought an end to the matter. "Kiku's my favorite. I can't stand the rest of you. I feel I've known Kiku even longer than the woman across the river."

"All right, that will do." Baba smiled wanly. Then he suddenly covered his face with both hands and began sobbing.

"I am not crying, I am pretending to cry. The tears are fake." He spoke in a singsong voice, as though he were on the stage. "Goddamit, let them laugh at me! I'll carry on the farce from birth to death! I'm a ghost. . . . Oh, don't forget me! I have my qualities. Who composed 'The Moon over the Ruined Castle'? There are people who say I'm not Taki Rentarō. Must they be so mistrustful? What the hell if it is a lie. . . . I take that back, we've got to insist on the truth. And I don't tell lies."

When I staggered out of the bar, the rain was still falling. The rain falls on the town--wasn't that how Dazai put it earlier? Yes, I must be tired; forgive me, if you please. But that sounds just like Satake. Dammit! Ha-hah, Baba's turn to cackle now.

A wretched doubt had come over me, and I wondered with a shudder just who I was. My other self had been stolen from me. What was this so-called ultimate adaptability? I started to run straight ahead. The dentist's . . . an aviary . . . the chestnut vendor . . . bakery . . . florist's . . . a roadside tree . . . the used book seller . . . an occidental-style building . . . . As I ran, I became aware of my own low voice. A train, run . . . run, Sanojiro. A train, run . . . run, Sanojiro. Over and over, a chant of erratic rhythm. My creation. My one and only poem. A mess. A ruin, thanks to my stupidity. A mess and a ruin. Headlight . . . Explosion . . . A star . . . A leaf . . . The signal . . . Wind . . . Aa!!!

IV.

"Satake, have you heard that Sanojiro was struck by a train last night and killed?"

"Yes, it was on the morning news."

"A lucky accident, if there ever was one. It won't be over for me unless I put a noose around my neck."

"You'll live longer than all of us. You'll see, my predictions always work out. By the way . . . ."

"What is it?"

"I've got two hundred yen here. I earned it to go drinking with Sanojiro. Sold all of my pelican sketches."

"Hand it over."

"Take it."

"Kiku! Sanojiro got himself killed. He's gone, and we'll never find him. No tears, now."

"I'll try."

"Here's a hundred yen. Buy yourself a nice kimono and a sash to match. Water takes the shape of the vessel, and you'll get over Sanojiro. Satake, let's you and me be friends, at least for tonight. I'll take you to an interesting place, the best in Japan. I'm getting sentimental over our mutual survival."

"We all die someday."

Then she protested, "Don't bother, I'll settle this on my own. My mind's been made up all along. It's all right, really."

There was something peculiar in her voice.

"You're up to something--I can tell. Suicide maybe, or else just going to ruin. And all on your own. But it won't do. You have such fine parents and a younger brother too. I can't just sit here stupidly agreeing with you when I know the mood you're in."

Even as he uttered these judicious sounding words, Kishichi too suddenly felt like dying. "Shall we die together, then?" he suggested. "The gods are forgiving."

They began the preparations in earnest.

The wife had made love with another man, her husband having driven her to this by his own shattered life. By dying they would settle the matter. The season was early spring, and they had fourteen or fifteen yen to pay the monthly bills. Except for what they wore, the only clothes still unpawned were Kishichi's quilted dressing gown and Kazue's lined kimono and two sashes. She wrapped these articles in cloth and cradled the entire bundle in her arms. Then husband and wife went out side by side--truly a rare event.

Kishichi did not have a coat. All he had to wear outside were his sports cap and blue silk muffler, the latter wrapped about the collar of his Kurume style kimono. His geta alone were new, and very clean looking. Kazue, who didn't have a coat either, wore a silk kimono and haori, both with an arrow-fleck pattern. She also wore a pink shawl of foreign make, a shawl so large it hung to her waist.

They parted a few doors before the pawnshop.

Kishichi waited before Ogikubo Station, silently smoking a cigarette as people slipped in or out of the building during the noon hour. Kazue returned, her eyes moving about in search of him. Suddenly she saw him

and rushed forward almost stumbling.

"I've done it! He took everything!" She could hardly contain herself. "He's lent us fifteen yen, the fool!"

She's not going to die. I won't let her. She's not crushed by life as I am. There's lots of strength in her, and she won't die. She'll make amends just by planning to die. That's enough. She'll be forgiven, which will be fine. I alone shall die.

"Good work!" He smiled and almost patted her shoulder. "Doesn't that make thirty yen altogether? It looks like we'll be making quite a trip."

They bought tickets for Shinjuku.

After leaving the train, they rushed to a pharmacy and bought a large box of sleeping pills. Then they went to another pharmacy for a second large box of a different sort of sleeping pill. This time Kishichi went in smiling and all alone, so the clerk's suspicions were not particularly aroused. Afterwards they approached the pharmaceutical counter in the Mitsukoshi Department Store together. Emboldened by the jostling crowd of shoppers, Kishichi asked for two large boxes. The saleslady had a thin earnest face with dark eyes, and the faintest wrinkle of suspicion crossed her brow as she took the order. Kishichi found her unpleasant, and his show of joviality collapsed. She handed over the pills with a cold look.

Aware that the saleslady was on tiptoes watching, Kishichi deliberately pressed close to Kazue as they moved into the crowd. He found it deplorable that people could detect something strange in his person, even when he tried to be nonchalant. Kazue bought herself a pair of white tabi at the bargain counter, and Kishichi purchased a pack of the finest imported cigarettes for himself. The couple left the store.

A taxi took them to Asakusa, where they entered a movie house to watch The Moon over the Ruined Castle.[2] As the children's chorus broke into song, and the roof and the fence of the rural school appeared on the screen, Kishichi was moved to tears.

"Let's pretend we're lovers," he quipped. "They're supposed to hold hands in the dark while watching a movie."

He drew Kazue's tiny hand underneath his sports cap and held it tightly in his own. But it struck him as indecent for a husband and wife in their painful dilemma to be holding hands. With a feeling of dread he gently released her hand.

Kazue laughed softly--at the routine movie comedy, not this clumsy gesture.

A good simple woman who can enjoy a movie. It wasn't right that she should die. He couldn't do it.

"Shall we drop it?"

"If that's what you want." Absorbed in the movie, she answered firmly all the same. "I'll die by myself."

How strange were the ways of woman.

It was dark when they left. Kazue wanted some sushi, but Kishichi didn't like the smell of fish. Anyway he wanted a fancier meal tonight.

"Not sushi," he declared.

"But I want some."

Kishichi himself had long ago taught her the virtue of selfishness. A smugly submissive face, he had announced, was merely a sign of hypocrisy.

Yes, he mused, everything turned against him.

Kishichi had fried oysters at the sushi shop, along with a little sake. He told himself, with a cynical smile, that this was his final Tokyo meal.

"How are they?" He was asking about the tuna filets over rice which Kazue was eating.

"Terrible!" Her tone was one of utter disgust. She took another mouthful and repeated the words.

After that, neither one said much to the other.

The vaudeville theater came next. Every seat was taken, and the crowd overflowing the exits pushed and shoved in an attempt to see the stage. The standees remained in high spirits nevertheless, and now and then the hall shook with their laughter. Jostled by the crowd, Kazue gradually became separated by some distance from Kishichi. She was petite and seemed a mere country girl as she struggled among the other spectators for a view of the stage. Kishichi too was shoved about, and he stood on his tiptoes pathetically trying to keep track of her. Indeed he looked at her more than the stage. And Kazue too occasionally turned to look for him even as she busily moved her head about to watch the performance, the boxes that contained the pills wrapped in a dark cloth and held tightly to her breast. Neither of them smiled when their eyes met, but they felt relieved to see one another.

I owe her plenty and won't forget it. Everything's my fault. If people reject her, I'll do anything whatever in her defense. She's a good woman, that I know. I'm convinced of it.

And this business? Well, it won't do, not at all. I can't just laugh it off. No, it's the one thing I can't take in stride. Impossible.

Forgive this final bit of ego. Ethically I can cope with this, but not physically. I can't endure it.

When a wave of laughter spread through the hall, Kishichi winked at Kazue, letting her know it was time to leave. When they were together again, he suggested that they head for Minakami.

He remembered their stay last summer at Tanikawa, a hot spring nestled in the mountains about an hour's walk from the depot at Minakami. Those days had in fact been so difficult they now seemed nostalgic in memory, like the vivid and unreal colors of a postcard. With silvery showers descending upon the mountains and streams in the evening, the area seemed appropriate for dying. Kazue perked up the moment she heard the name Minakami.

"I must buy some roasted chestnuts. Remember how Auntie kept saying she wanted some."

The mistress of the inn had seemed genuinely fond of Kazue, even to the point of indulging her. With only three rooms and not a single bath, this inn hardly seemed like a business. The easiest place to bathe was the large inn next door. But one could also climb down to the open-air pool in the river valley, taking an umbrella in the rain and a lantern or candle at night. A somewhat older couple, the mistress and her husband evidently had no children; but they were so busy when all three rooms were occupied that Kazue would look into the kitchen and sometimes lend a hand. Unlike the typical inn, this one often served salmon roe or some fermented bean curd on the meal tray.

Kishichi had been comfortable during their stay. When Auntie had suffered a bad toothache, he had given her some aspirin, whereupon she had fallen almost immediately into a profound sleep. Her doting husband had lingered in the room looking so distraught that Kazue had burst into laughter. Once Kishichi had been walking alone in the grass with his head bowed. Suddenly he looked up toward the entrance to the inn and saw Auntie. She was squatting on the floor in the dim hallway, just beneath the stairs, and gazing at him. Kishichi had kept this memory secret.

Auntie was younger than the name suggests, forty-three or four perhaps. She had a radiant look, and a manner that was composed and graceful. Her husband had evidently been adopted into her family. At Kishichi's urging, Kazue bought more chestnuts than she had intended.

Ueno Station had a provincial atmosphere, and Kishichi always worried that he might come upon someone from his own locale. He was particularly afraid he might be noticed that night, for there were shop clerks and maids from the provinces roaming about on their night off. Kazue purchased a special magazine edition of Japanese detecive stories, while Kishichi opted for a small bottle of whiskey. Then they boarded the ten-thirty train for Niigata.

Once they were settled in opposite seats, they smiled faintly at one another.

"What do you think?" Kazue asked. "Won't this outfit seem strange

to Auntie?"

"It doesn't matter. Tell her we went to a movie in Asakusa and that I got drunk afterwards and insisted we head for Minakami to see her."

"Well . . . all right," she shrugged.

"And don't you think Auntie will be surprised?" Kazue inquired further. Apparently she was anxious for the train to depart.

"Auntie will be pleased, I'm sure."

As the train pulled away, Kazue glanced fearfully at the receding platform for the last time. Then her courage seemed to revive, and she began paging through the magazine she had taken from the bundle in her lap. Kishichi took a swig from his bottle as though he were drinking a potion. His legs felt heavy, and the tension in his chest was unpleasant.

If we had some money, she wouldn't have to die. And if that fellow had been more decisive, things would have turned out different. I can't bear this . . . a woman foolishly taking her life.

"I'm in the right then?" he blurted out. "Or maybe I'm just trying to make it look that way?"

Kazue was taken aback, so loud was his voice. She looked severely at Kishichi, who responded with a silly grin.

"And yet. . . ." Playing the fool now, he lowered his voice more than was necessary. "You're not so bad off. You're just an ordinary woman, no better than most. And no worse either. Just ordinary through and through. With me it's different. I'm something else--and way below average too.

The train had passed Akabane and Ōmiya, and now ran on through the darkness. The whiskey and their rapid progress moved Kishichi to eloquence.

"I know how shabby it looks when your wife's fed up but you can't help following her around all the same. It's stupid. I'm not trying to be nice either. I can't endure nice people. I'm a soft touch, so a

woman deceives me. And yet I can't give her up even as she drags me into a suicide. My artist friends will say I was pure, and the others will think me a pleasant sap. I'm not looking for such haphazard sympathy, though. I'll die by my own griefs, and not for you. There's plenty that's wrong with me too. I'm dependent, and I put too much faith in people. I'm well aware of my other embarrassing faults too. But don't you realize just a little that I've wanted to live a normal life? And how hard I've worked for it? I've been hanging by a thread, and it'll break with a bit more weight. I tried my best to be careful, though. You see that, don't you? I'm not weak, my troubles are just too heavy. It's stupid to talk like this. But if I don't speak out loud and clear, people are taken in by my cheeky manner. Even you are. 'He's only acting when he talks about his troubles'--that's how casually you all take me."

Kazue was about to respond.

"Don't bother," he went on, "I'm not attacking you. You're a good person. You always speak your mind and you trust what others say. I wouldn't think of criticizing you. Some of my oldest friends have far more education, but even they don't realize how I suffer. They don't trust my friendship, either. But that's no surprise. It's just that I'm no good at saying things."

As he smiled wryly, Kazue seemed to grow exultant. "Yes, I see what you mean. But that's enough, the others will hear. . . ."

"You don't understand a thing! To you I'm just a fool. You know, right now I may only be trying to make it look right. It's awful to know something like that could be lurking in my mind. We've been together six or seven years and never even once. . . . No, I won't blame you for that. It was only natural; it wasn't your fault."

She turned a deaf ear and went back to her magazine. Kishichi, a stern look on his face, confronted the darkened window and carried on his monologue.

"Me?!! Make it look right? What a joke! Look at what they've

called me--liar, swellhead, lecher, idler, squanderer. A host of worse names too. But I kept silent, without making any excuses. I had faith in myself, but couldn't breathe a word of it. So nothing's to come of it. Well, I've got destiny in mind anyway. One can't live just for his own pleasure, and I considered playing the role of villain in history. Christ's glory was all the greater because Judas was so evil. I saw myself as one of those self-destructive types and tried to be a violent antagonist. The more we destructive demons let our evil show, the brighter would shine the light of the coming world. I believed that and prayed for it. I didn't care what happened to me personally. I was content to die as long as my antithetic role enhanced a little the radiance that was to come. I suppose anyone would find this amusing, but I was such a fool I believed it. But life's not a stage play, and maybe this was only a pipe-dream. A pompous one too. I'll lose out pretty soon and be gone. But urging someone else to carry on the fight is probably a mistake. The feast you earn by sacrificing your life is so putrid not even a dog would touch it. And anyone to whom this is given will probably not welcome it. Unless I prosper along with others, the whole affair will seem meaningless."

The window did not respond.

Kishichi rose and stumbled toward the toilet. He slammed the door and, hesitating a moment, brought his palms together. This was not acting; he was a figure at prayer.

It was still dark when they reached Minakami at four o'clock in the morning. The snow had mostly melted, only a few patches lying grey and silent in the shadow of the depot. Probably they could walk the mountain road to Tanikawa, but Kishichi played it safe by rousing a cabbie in front of the station.

The sky began to lighten as the taxi climbed the twisting road. At this elevation the slopes and fields were covered with snow.

"Brrr. . . . We didn't think it would be so cold. In Tokyo they're even going about in serge already." And, having explained their attire, she told the driver, "You turn right over there."

The closer they got to the inn, the livelier she became. "I'll bet you they're still sleeping." And then, with a look toward the driver, "Just a little further."

"This is close enough." Kishichi interposed. "We'll walk the rest of the way."

From here, the road was narrow. Once the taxi had turned back, they removed their tabi and sloshed barefoot in their geta through the layer of melting snow. Kazue, who had fallen behind, rushed up just as Kishichi was about to knock on the door of the inn.

"Let me knock. I can wake Auntie up." She seemed a child competing for some prize.

The couple who ran the inn were surprised, even slightly confused, by this unexpected arrival. Kishichi marched straight upstairs to the room they had occupied the previous summer. As he switched on the light, he could hear Kazue's voice below.

"Yes, he wouldn't listen to reason. 'Let's go to Auntie's place,' he said. You know how childish these writers are." She seemed blithely unaware of the lie she was telling. And then she started in on how they were already wearing serge clothing in Tokyo. . . .

Auntie tiptoed upstairs. "We're happy to see you," she remarked as she slowly pushed the rain shutters open. It had grown lighter outside, and the snowy mountain peak loomed close. Mist was rising from the valley, and one could see at the bottom the dark line of a stream.

"This cold weather is unbearable." Kishichi knew he was exaggerating. "I suppose a drink would help."

"Are you well?"

"Yes, I'm fine now. I've put on weight, haven't I?"

Kazue suddenly appeared with a large portable brazier. She set it down with a thud.

"I borrowed it from Uncle. It's so cold, and he said I could use it." She seemed to be enjoying herself, utterly unmindful of Kishichi.

When they were alone, her mood turned grave. "I'm exhausted. I think I'll have a bath and go to bed."

"Can we make it to the open-air bath?" Kishichi inquired.

"Uncle said they were going every day."

Uncle was kind enough to pull on his big straw boots and trample a path for them through the snow which had fallen the previous day. Kishichi and Kazue followed him into the valley, then took off their clothes and placed them on the mat which Uncle provided. As they slid into the warm bath, Kishichi observed how plump Kazue had grown; she hardly seemed like one destined to die that very evening.

After Uncle left, Kishichi nodded toward a mountain wreathed in heavy, floating mist.

"How about there?"

"But the snow's too heavy. We can hardly climb up."

"Perhaps we should head downstream. The snow isn't bad toward Minakami."

The debate on where to die went on.

When they returned to the inn, the bedding was already laid out. The foot of Kazue's quilt had been spread over a large brazier to warm, and she immediately crawled in to read her magazine. Kishichi wrapped himself in the other quilt and sat with crossed legs in front of a table, clinging to the small hibachi and drinking sake. Dried mushrooms, canned crabs, and some apples had been provided as a snack.

"Shall we postpone it an evening?" Kishichi suggested.

"It's fine either way," Kazue responded without looking up. "But can we afford it?"

"How much is left?"

He felt ashamed of his question. It disgusted him to be so hesitant. Irresolution was the worst thing, and there was no point in delaying. Then he thought of getting into bed with her, and again he

was perplexed.

Did he wish to go on living with this woman? What was he to do about those guilty debts then? And the disgrace which his partial but notorious insanity had incurred? And how does one treat an illness when one's own friends are skeptical? There was also the family.

"You lost out to my family. Isn't that what happened?"

Kazue replied without even looking up. "Yes, they never did like me."

"That's not the whole story. You didn't meet them halfway."

"Enough! If you don't mind. . . ." She had thrown the magazine aside. "All you do is make excuses. That's why you're so disliked."

"Ah, yes. You didn't like me, isn't that it? Well, I beg your pardon." Already the sake seemed to be taking effect.

I wonder why I'm not jealous, he mused. Am I all that self-conceited? And do I really believe she shouldn't despise me? I'm not even angry. Maybe it's because that fellow is such a coward? Or perhaps this is mere self-conceit on my part? Well, my thinking's messed up and so is my life. Why can't I simply hate them, without being so sympathetic and forgiving? Wouldn't jealousy be a restrained and beautiful thing in this instance? And wrath the supremely gentle emotion? And suicide the finest lament for being made a cuckold by your wife? But what am I up to? All this about irresolution, respectability, hypocrisy, morality, debts, responsibility, assistance, opposition, historical duty, my family. . . no, it won't do!

Kishichi felt like hitting himself over the head with a club.

"We'll have a short nap and then be off. This is it."

He spread the quilt roughly on the floor and dove under the cover.

It was slightly past noon when he awoke from his drunken sleep. Unable to bear the solitude, he leaped from bed and went downstairs. He mentioned the cold weather again as he asked for more sake.

Upstairs, he called to Kazue who was still sleeping with her mouth

slightly parted.

"Wake up, it's time to leave."

Her eyes flew open. "It's already time?"

"No, it's barely past noon. I couldn't stand the wait." He didn't want to think; he only wished to die.

Things went rapidly after that. Following Kishichi's instructions, Kazue told Auntie not to call a taxi. The weather was perfect, and they had decided to hike down the mountain, viewing the scenery and looking in at the various spas along the way. Minutes later, they had left the inn and were turning around for a final glimpse when they spotted the woman running toward them.

"Here comes Auntie," Kishichi murmured anxiously.

When she caught up with them, Auntie blushed and handed Kishichi a paper parcel. "I forgot to give you this silk cloth," she exclaimed. "I spun and wove it myself. It's only a trifle, but. . . ."

"Thank you," Kishichi declared.

"Auntie, you shouldn't have taken all this trouble."

They were relieved that it was nothing more serious.

Kishichi strode off just as Auntie was urging them to be careful. Then, as the two women exchanged farewells, he suddenly wheeled around and came back.

"Auntie, your hand."

She seemed embarrassed and then frightened as Kishichi gripped her hand tightly in his own.

"He's drunk." Kazue could think of no better excuse.

Drunk he surely was. He parted from Auntie with a smile and went down the hill, pointing hither and thither as the snow depth lessened and whispering to Kazue for an opinion. She thought it would be less forbidding closer to the depot, and so they continued on until the town appeared, a dark patch immediately below.

"No more rain checks, okay?" Kishichi was wearing his lighthearted manner.

Kazue solemny agreed and followed him as he stole into the cedar grove to the left of the road. The snow had almost disappeared, and they advanced over a heavy layer of sodden leaves. Then they crawled up a precipitous slope; even to die took some effort. Above, they discovered a small grassy opening just large enough for two. A spring was flowing, and a few rays of sun fell upon the ground.

"This will do," Kishichi remarked.

Though exhausted, he could not help laughing when Kazue neatly spread a handkerchief on the grass. Without a word she took the sleeping pills from her bundle and broke the seal of each box.

"I'll see to that," Kishichi declared. He had already seized the pills and was counting them out for Kazue.

"That's not very many," she protested. "Will it be enough?"

"Enough for a beginner. I'm always gulping them, so it'll take ten times as many to kill me. If we survive we'll be the laughingstock. . . ."

If he survived it would be like living in prison anyway.

But wasn't it a mean sort of revenge to let her survive alone? Well! This was beginning to sound like a dime novel now. . . .

He scooped some water and angrily gulped down a handful of pills. Kazue, despite an unpracticed hand, managed to ingest her portion too.

They embraced and lay down side by side.

Good-bye, he silently declared. May the survivor flourish!

Kishichi knew the sleeping pills alone would never kill him. Easing himself to the edge of the embankment, he undid his sash, looped one end about his neck, and tied the other to the trunk of what seemed a mulberry. He would slide down as he fell asleep and be choked to death. Indeed he had chosen the site with this in mind.

He fell asleep, faintly aware that he was slipping down.

Cold. His eyes opened. Darkness, then moonlight pouring down. Where? he wondered. . . and realized that he was still alive.

He put a hand to his throat and felt the sash wrapped about his neck. His rump was chilled, he was in a puddle fed by the spring. He saw that he had not fallen, merely rolled to the side and into a hollow. The bubbling water was chilling him to the bone along his entire back.

He had failed to die--that was the awesome truth. Now he regretted the risk Kazue had run and hoped that she too had survived. His limbs were so weak he could not pick himself up. Finally, exerting his entire strength, he managed to sit up and undo the sash from his neck. He looked around from his vantage point in the puddle, but Kazue was nowhere to be seen.

Crawling about in search of her, Kishichi noticed something like a small, dark puppy at the foot of the slope. He slid down and discovered it was Kazue. Her legs were cold to his touch, and he wondered if she were already dead. He placed a hand in front of her mouth. No breath. Done for, dammit! He was beside himself with rage. Thinks only of herself. He grabbed Kazue's wrist and felt the pulse barely move. Well, she's alive after all. He thrust his hand inside her kimono. Warm! So she had pulled through! At the moment, this seemed quite important to him. He had known she could hardly die from such a dose, but as he lay down next to her, he felt somewhat relieved and at peace.

When he awoke a second time, Kazue was snoring--so loudly indeed as to embarrass him.

"Hey, Kazue! Pull yourself together! We're alive, both of us!"

He managed a smile as he shook her by the shoulder. Despite his efforts Kazue remained in what seemed a peaceful sleep. About her the mountain cedars rose into the silent night, a cold moon above their slender height. Tears came to Kishichi's eyes, and he began to weep. He was still a child, and he wondered why a child must undergo such adversity.

"My chest! Oh Auntie, my chest hurts so!" Kazue had suddenly

cried out in the high, shrill tones of a flute.

Kishichi froze a moment. It would go hard on them if someone below heard. "Kazue, we're not at the inn! Auntie's not here!"

Oblivious to his words she continued to scream, her body twisting as if in deep pain. Then she was rolling--rolling with enough momentum to reach the road at the bottom, even though the slope was gentle from this point. Forcing his own body to roll in pursuit, Kishichi managed to catch up as she clung to the trunk of a cedar blocking her way.

"Auntie, I'm freezing. Move the brazier here," she pleaded.

He saw in the moonlight that she had been transformed. Her unravelled hair had collected a multitude of dead cedar leaves and now lay spread out and wild like the mane of a lion or the tresses of a shamaness.

I must get hold of myself, I must. . . . He staggered up, put his arms about Kazue, and tried dragging her toward the center of the grove. Lunging and crawling, slipping, clinging to roots and clawing the dirt, he brought her closer and closer. How many hours passed as he struggled antlike with his burden?

Stupid! She's too heavy. A good woman, but too much for me. My strength is gone. Must I struggle for her sake my entire life? Impossible! I'll leave her, I'm all worn out!

He made up his mind then and there.

It's no good. I must rely on myself for everything. I don't care what people say, I'm leaving her.

It was almost dawn, and the sky was beginning to lighten. As mist filled the grove, Kazue became gradually quiet.

Be simple and direct, Kishichi counselled himself. I must not snicker at the simplicity of that venerable word, manly. A man can't live by any other word.

He picked the cedar leaves one by one from the hair of the sleeping woman.

I love her, love her so much I really don't know what to do. My troubles began with her, and now they're over. I've gained the strength to leave even while loving her. If you want to live, you must sacrifice love. Well, isn't that a startling discovery! Hell, it's the same for everyone. You live like other people, no other way. I'm neither a genius nor a madman.

At noon Kazue was still asleep. Kishichi, in spite of his weakened condition, had already performed his chores. He had dried his kimono, searched for Kazue's geta, buried the empty sleeping pill box, and wiped with his handkerchief the mud on Kazue's kimono.

After Kazue awoke and learned what had happened, she amused Kishichi by tilting her head and saying, "I'm sorry, Father."

Kishichi was now able to walk normally, but Kazue could not stir from her place. For a while they merely sat discussing what to do next. Kishichi urged that they return to Tokyo with the ten yen left over, but Kazue insisted she could not board a train in her filthy kimono. Eventually they agreed that Kazue would return to the inn by taxi, explaining that she had stumbled in the mud while walking about one of the spas. In the meanwhile Kishichi would take the train to Tokyo, returning with more money and a change of clothes for Kazue. Since his kimono was now dry, Kishichi went out of the grove to Minakami and bought crackers, caramels, and cider. They were eating together back among the trees when Kazue took a sip of cider and immediately threw up.

They slipped out of the woods at dusk, when Kazue could barely manage to walk. After sending her to the inn by taxi, Kishichi caught the train for Tokyo.

He described the situation to Kazue's uncle and asked him to arrange everything. Taciturn as ever, the old man mumbled his regrets and went off to fetch Kazue. After his return he told how Kazue would spread her quilt between the innkeeper and his wife and sleep there calm as you please, just as though she were their daughter. The uncle then shrugged his shoulders and chuckled, but didn't say another word.

A good man, he did not hesitate to go drinking with Kishichi even

after the separation. Now and then a memory seemed to revive, and he would let out a sigh for Kazue.

At such moments Kishichi felt irresolute and ashamed.

MY OLDER BROTHERS (Anitachi, 1940)

I was thirteen years old when Father died. My oldest brother, just out of the university, was twenty-four, my second brother was twenty-two, and my third brother nineteen. They were all grown up and so accomodating that I hardly felt the loss of my father. My oldest brother was a father to me, and my second brother a solicitous uncle. I was the family baby, and my brothers would cheerfully forgive my every remark, no matter how rude or selfish. They let me behave as I pleased and did not tell me what was going on. No doubt they were struggling behind the scenes to protect both the political influence and the more than sizeable wealth of their deceased father. They had no uncle to depend on either; my oldest brothers had only their combined strength. My oldest brother became the mayor of our town at twenty-four and, after gaining some practical experience of politics, secured a place in the prefectural assembly at the age of thirty. Reportedly the youngest prefectural delegate in the entire country, he became known as the Prince Konoe of A Prefecture and was even featured in a popular cartoon.

But his heart was not in politics, and he always appeared somber. His bookshelves were crammed with the complete works of Wilde and Ibsen as well as the plays of various Japanese writers. He wrote plays himself. Occasionally he called his younger brothers and sisters together and read one of his works to them, his genuine delight evident. I was young and didn't understand very well, but I did sense his usual theme to be the sorrows of fortune. A long play entitled "The Struggle" was so vivid I can clearly remember the characters, even down to their facial expressions.

When my oldest brother was thirty, our family started a little magazine with the odd title of Wan Face. This title was the brainchild of my third oldest brother, a student of the plastic arts who served as the magazine's editor. This brother also designed the magazine cover, a haphazard and incomprehensible surreal motif with a heavy sprinkling

of silver dust.

For the first issue my oldest brother dictated to me an essay entitled "Eating." Even now I can recall the words my brother spoke as he slowly paced the room, his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Ready, aren't you? Ready? I'm going to begin."

I nodded.

"I am now thirty years old. Confucius said that he stood firm at thirty, but I have no place to stand. I'm about to collapse, and I no longer feel with itensity the will to live. To put it forcibly, I'm alive only when eating. And I mean by eating neither some universalized activity nor the general craving for life. I'm speaking directly about a heaping bowl of rice, what you feel the moment you chew the grains. Animal pleasure. It's a vulgar story . . . ."

I was only a student in middle school, but I felt extremely sorry for my brother as I hurriedly took down his thoughts. Though people referred fawningly to him as the Prince Konoe of A Prefecture, no one knew how lonely he truly was.

My second brother didn't publish in this first issue. This brother admired the works of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō from the earliest period on, and he applauded the personal appearance of the poet Yoshii Isamu. He had that open-hearted magnanimity of someone-in-charge, as well as a zest for sake. Drinking never got the better of him, however; he was a modest person who looked after things earnestly and always served as adviser to his older brother.

At the same time he seemed to cherish the gallantry expressed in Yoshii Isamu's poem,

> The sort of man
> Who goes to a Licensed Quarter
> And never comes back,
> Thus I fancy my real self.

When he published his essay on doves in the prefectural paper, a recent

portrait photo appeared along with the text. "Well, how about that? I look like a man of letters, don't I? Some resemblance there to Yoshii Isamu," he jested, proudly showing off the photo. His was a splendid face, quite in the manner of the famous Kabuki actor Sadanji.[1] Our family often took note of my oldest brother's face too, with its narrow lines in the manner of the equally renowned Shōchō.[2] Both brothers were aware of these peculiarities, and when deep in their cups they sometimes began to impersonate the sort of dialogue Sadanji and Shōchō would exchange in The Love Suicides at Toribeyama or The House of the Broken Plate.[3]

This would occur in the occidental-style room on the second floor. At the same time my third brother would lie on the sofa, listening to the impersonation from a distance and sneering. This brother was enrolled in art school, but his health was so poor that he devoted little energy to his speciality in modeling. He absorbed himself in novels instead and, with help from his many literary friends, published a little magazine entitled Crossroads. He drew his own cover design and wrote feeble stories with such titles as "It All Ends in a Bitter Smile." For his pen name he selected two pairs of Chinese characters with the reading "Yumekawa Riichi." Though his older brothers and sisters laughed and said it was a terrible name, he went ahead and had the printer make up name cards in Roman letters, one of which he offered to me with a mildly pompous air.

Even I noticed that the name read Riichi Umekawa. "Didn't you say 'Yumekawa'?" I asked my older brother. "Or did you have it printed this way on purpose?"

"Damn! I'm not Umekawa." And his face turned red.

He had already distributed the name cards to friends and teachers and even to his favorite coffee shops. It appeared that my brother had specified "Umekawa," and the printer was not at fault. After all, a Japanese might write a "U" anywhere in a word, thinking that it would be read as "YU." In any event the episode became a huge joke in our house, and thereafter everyone in the family started speaking of Professor

Umekawa and Doctor Chūbei.[4] As I said, his health was poor, and he passed away ten years ago when he was just twenty-seven. A marvel of beauty, his face always brought to mind the slim girl with large eyes who appeared every month on the frontispiece of a current magazine read by my sisters. At times I would gaze idly at my brother, not with envy, but with a feeling of almost ticklish pleasure.

Grave and severe, this brother harbored within himself a genuine sense of integrity. All the same he enjoyed giving an impression of rakishness and satanism of the kind once practiced in France. He would recklessly sneer at people or feign a proud indifference. My oldest brother's wife had already given birth to a girl, and when summer came the child's young uncles and aunts arrived for the vacation from schools in Tokyo or the cities of A and H. Everyone would assemble in one room and compete for the child's attention. Come to your uncle from Tokyo . . . . Come here to your aunt from A . . . . In the midst of the clamor, my third oldest brother would stand slightly apart and poke fun at the infant. She's still got that pink skin . . . ? Gives me the creeps . . . . But finally, as if he could no longer restrain himself, he too would stretch out his arms and call out, Come to your uncle from France.

At suppertime each member of the family sat on the floor in designated order facing his own tray: on one side, my grandmother, mother, my first, second, and third brothers, and me; and on the opposite side, the family clerk, my sister-in-law, and my sisters. Even on the hottest days of summer, my two oldest brothers persisted in drinking sake. Each of them kept a large towel nearby, for they perspired freely as they drank the warmed liquor. Between them they consumed more than a magnum bottle every evening, but they were such strong drinkers that their posture never once slackened. My third brother invariably ignored them. He would pour some wine in his elegant glass and smoothly sip it down. Then, hurriedly finishing his meal, he would bow with excessive solemnity and take leave as though he were disappearing forever. It was assuredly a splendid performance.

As editor of Wan Face my third brother had me collect manuscripts from various members of the family. Normally he read the manuscripts with a sneer. I felt a certain elation as I delivered the essay on "Eating" which my oldest brother had dictated, but the editor simply sneered again. "What's this! Sounds like he's giving instructions. Confucius said . . . Incredible!" He knew perfectly well how lonely his brother was, but he abused him because of that satanic impulse.

He condemned the efforts of others, but when it came down to his own writings . . . well, in fact they were quite dreary. As editor he prudently refrained from publishing any of his own stories in the first issue of this quaintly titled magazine, and the two lyric poems which he did print were hardly noteworthy by whatever measure. Trying to fathom why, of all people, an older brother of mine would publish such stuff, I feel the deepest regret. It is not easy to do this, but here are the poems. There are two, "The Red Canna" and "The Pretty Flower by the Arrow Wheel." The first goes:

There is a red canna flower.
It resembles my own heart.
Etc., etc . . . .

This is trying, but here is the second:

The pretty flowers by the arrow wheel.
One, two, three,
I put them in my sleeve.
Etc., etc . . . .

What sort of poems are these? Wouldn't my stylish brother have served his reputation better by leaving them deeply and carefully buried in the bottom of his memento box? That's what I now believe, but at the time they seemed masterpieces, so taken was I with my brother's rakishness and literary ways. He did belong to the Tokyo coterie which published Crossroads, evidently a well-known journal, and he was so confident of his own skill that he sang the words of "The Red Canna" to a strange melody as he made corrections in the text at the printer's shop. Other fond memories of Wan Face come rushing to mind, but I can't be bothered today. So I'll take leave of my readers by describing the events

surrounding the death of my third brother.

During his last two or three years, as the tuberculosis spread through his body, my brother was in need of frequent rest. He remained active, however, refusing to be hospitalized or even to return home. He rented an entire house in Tokyo near Toyamagahara, let one of the rooms to a married couple from our home town, and lived carefreely by himself in the rest of the dwelling. From the time I entered high school I never returned home for vacations, but went instead to see my brother and walk about the city with him. He told all manner of fibs. "Look!" he exclaimed, as we walked along the Ginza, "Kikuchi Kan!" His expression was so earnest as he pointed towards an elderly, corpulent gentleman that I could hardly doubt him. We were drinking tea at the Fujiya Confectionary in the Ginza when he nudged me with his elbow and whispered: "Sasaki Mosaku![5] At the table right behind you!" Some years later I met both Sasaki and Mr. Kikuchi and realized that my brother had been fibbing.

This brother owned a volume of short stories by Kawabata Yasunari entitled Adoring with the Emotions, the title page of which bore an inscription in brush writing: "To Yumekawa Riichi. From the Author." According to my brother Kawabata had given him the book when they made each other's acquaintance at a spa in Izu. I wonder about that one too, and I'll ask Kawabata the next time I see him. I'll be relieved if my brother was telling the truth. Unfortunately there seems to be a slight variation in the calligraphic style between the letters I've received from Kawabata and the inscription on the book as I remember it.

Unable to let down his guard in the least, my brother was constantly playing innocent tricks. Mystification was reputedly one of the pastimes of the French Satanists, and my brother seemed incapable of overcoming this vice.

My brother died the very year I entered the university. On New Year's Day, a mere six months before his death, he hung a scroll with his own calligraphy in the parlor alcove. My brother's visitors guffawed when they read the poem running down one side of the scroll.

My mind this spring
Is at one with the Buddha.
I shall enjoy
Neither wine nor appetizers.

But this was not his customary mystification; despite the grin, my brother was serious about those words. The visitors had no anxieties about his health, and they laughed because he was always playing tricks.

Presently my brother was going about with a small rosary tied around his wrist and styling himself the "Lowly Monk." So somberly did he repeat these words that his friends began imitating him and referring to themselves in like manner, giving rise to a momentary fad. My brother's behavior was not a mere stunt, however. In his own heart he realized that his days were numbered. But that satanic streak forbade any tears, and so he worked desperately to mock his fate. He amused us by piously fingering his beads. It was shameful, he said, still to be agitated over a certain woman, but it proved withal that he wasn't quite withered yet. On one occasion he invited several of us along as he staggered off toward the coffee shop in Takatanobaba. On the way the stylish "Lowly Monk" suddenly realized he had forgotten to wear his ring. Without a moment's hesitation he whirled about, returned to his home, and having reappeared with the ring on his finger, nonchalantly thanked us for waiting.

The room in which I lived while attending the university was very close to my brother's house in Tozuka. Nevertheless we met only once or twice a week, each of us hesitant to interfere with the other's study. Whenever we did meet, we'd go off to a vaudeville house or make the rounds of the coffee shops. My brother was attracted to one of the waitresses, but he had an overbearing and cavalier manner that left any girl indifferent. He was distressed that the girl in the house at Takatanobaba seemed unlikely to return the affection he harbored for her, but such was his pride that he neither glared at her nor played any cheap tricks. Time after time he merely dropped in, drank his cup of coffee, and quickly left.

One evening the two of us entered the coffee house together. Again the prospect seemed unfavorable, and we left after drinking our coffee. On the way back my brother stopped at a florist's and bought a large, expensive bouquet of carnations and roses. He came out of the shop clutching the flowers, and as he stood there fidgeting, I sensed what he was going through. Flinging myself into motion, I snatched away the bouquet and sped like a jackrabbit down the road. From the coffee shop door I called the waitress over. "You remember my brother, don't you? You'd better not forget. Here's something from him." She merely gazed as I blurted out these words and handed over the bouquet. I could have thrashed her right on the spot. I left the premises despondent and wandered back to my brother's place. He had crawled into bed and sullenly buried himself under a blanket. My brother was twenty-seven at the time, and I was twenty-one.

In April my brother began to work at his sculpture with a passion. He had engaged a model, apparently to fashion a large torso. I did not wish to annoy him, and so I mostly stayed away from his place. When I did drop by one evening, I found him buried in bed, his cheeks somewhat flushed.

"I've decided to give up on Yumekawa Riichi. From now on I'll be rightly known as Tsujima Keiji." It seemed so unlike my brother to pronounce his real name with gravity. And I suddenly felt like crying.

Two months later, before he could finish the torso, my brother passed away. The couple who lodged in the house had expressed their concern, and I too found his appearance unpromising. I was overwhelmed when his physician calmly declared that it was only a matter of four or five days. I immediately sent a telegram to our oldest brother back home, then stayed by my sick brother removing with my own finger the coils of phlegm that gathered in his throat. When our oldest brother arrived two days later, a nurse was called in and various friends began to come by. Their presence lifted my spirits, especially after those two nights of lonely vigil which even now seem like a time passed in Hell. As he lay beneath the dim light, my brother had me

open one drawer after another and remove various letters and notebooks. I wept aloud as I tore up these mementoes, and my brother watched me with a strange expression. I felt during those hours that no one existed in the entire world other than my brother and myself.

Surrounded by friends and two of his brothers, Keiji was about to breathe his last when I called to him. He responded in a firm voice, bequeathing me his diamond tie pin and his platinum chain. To the very end he would not abandon his stylish ways; he was trying to deceive me with his fancy words. I knew my brother didn't have a diamond tie pin, and his dandyism struck me as so pathetic that I burst into tears. My dear brother. You were a leading performer who left behind no permanent art, a handsome man of parts unloved by a sole woman.

I had planned to write of events following immediately upon this death. Then I realized this melancholy was not mine alone, that everyone experiences it upon a death in the family. To write so grandly would amount to a special claim in my case, and I quailed at the thought of offending my readers. Even now my wasted body shudders when I remember how my oldest brother, thirty-two years old at the time, broke down while composing the telegram: Keiji died at four o'clock this morning. My brothers command sizeable wealth, but I pity them all the same for having lost their father so early in life.

EIGHT VIEWS OF TOKYO (Tōkyō Hakkei, 1941)

For one who has suffered

A mere village in the southern part of Izu, with only a hot spring to recommend it. About thirty households, one might surmise. The third of July, 1940. With only a trifling sum to spare, I settled on this desolate place knowing it would be cheap.

The future, however, seemed utterly dark. Probably I wouldn't be able to write at all. If I couldn't come up with a story in the next two months, I would be penniless as usual. Small comfort when you think about it, but for me this was the first breathing spell of any kind in a decade. When I settled in Tokyo in 1930, I was living with a woman. My older brother sent us plenty of money each month from the country, but H and I were fools; though warning each other against extravagance, we invariably had to pawn one or two articles at the end of the month.

After six years together we parted. I had nothing except my bedding, a desk and lamp, a wicker trunk--and some frightful debts. Two years later a conventional marriage was arranged for me through the help of a certain mentor. And two years after that, I was on my feet once again. Nearly ten volumes of my mediocre writings had been published, and even without a definite commission, I felt that I could peddle two of every three pieces if I really tried. From now on I would cease to be engaging; I would write only the mature works I wanted to.

The breathing spell was a desolate one fraught with anxiety, but I was happy to the depths of my being. For at least a month I could write whatever I wanted to without a care for money. The situation seemed unreal, and I felt a strange tension, a commingling of worry and joy. It was difficult to begin work, so restless had I become.

Eight Views of Tokyo--that's the theme I wanted to do a metic-

ulous sketch of. Describing the places I had lived, I would write of my ten years in the city. I was now thirty-one, on the threshold of middle age as we Japanese reckon. I could not, alas, deny how well this tenet applied to both my body and my emotions. It would be well, I told myself, to keep this in mind. My youth over, I was now a grave-looking man in his thirties. Eight Views of Tokyo. I would not indulge anyone in sketching the theme, this farewell to my youth.

There's a stupid rumor going around that I've gone over to the philistines. Whenever I get wind of it, I just tell myself that I've been a philistine all along. You merely overlooked it, my friends. The dimwits were also wrong to think they could easily handle me once I decided to write for a living. I merely smile. Perpetual youths live on the stage, never in literature.

My subject is Eight Views of Tokyo. I've no commitments for a while and more than a hundred yen on hand. This is not the occasion to pace about a tiny room emitting both joyful and worried sighs. I must go forward.

After buying a large map of Tokyo, I boarded the train for Yonehara. This is not a pleasure trip, I told myself repeatedly, I'm going off to fashion a memorial to my life. At Atami I changed trains for Itō, and from Itō I took the bus to Shimoda. For three hours the bus jostled me about as it headed south along the eastern shore of the Izu Peninsula. When I got off at this forlorn village of thirty households, I figured a night's lodging would cost no more than three yen. There were just four inns standing in a row, all of them pathetically small and primitive. The one called F seemed a trifle better than the others, so I chose it. When the slovenly, ill-tempered maid had led me upstairs and shown me the room, I felt like weeping in spite of my age. I remembered the single room I had rented at a boarding house in Ogikubo three years earlier. The boarding house was low class even for Ogikubo, but my room there was not so cheap and gloomy as this six-mat affair next to the bedding closet.

"You don't have anything else?" I inquired.

"No, everything is taken. Anyway, it's cool here."

"Oh?"

She seemed to be trifling with me, perhaps because I looked so shabby.

"The rate's either three yen fifty sen or else four yen per night. And lunch is extra. You would like . . . ?"

"I'll settle for three yen fifty sen. And let you know when I want lunch. I'll be here about ten days. I want to get some studying done."

"Just a moment." She went downstairs and returned shortly. "Er . . . if you're staying awhile, we collect before you move in."

"I see. How much do you need?"

She mumbled that any sum would do.

"Shall we make it fifty yen."

"Okay."

I laid the bills out on top of the desk. Then I could no longer contain myself.

"Here, take it all--ninety yen. I'll keep just enough for cigarettes." I wondered why I had come to such a place.

"Thank you. I'll look after it."

The maid left the room.

There was important work to do, and I must remain calm. I told myself that, in my present straits, I could hardly expect a better reception. Then I took from the bottom of my bag a pen, ink, and writing paper.

So my first breathing spell in ten years had come to this. But every misfortune is ordained by fate. I had come for arduous work, not for pleasure. And stiffening my will, I set about my business.

When I spread open the map of Tokyo that evening beneath the dim

lamp, I was immediately carried back to the past. How much time had gone by since I had last gazed on such a large map of the city? When I first arrived ten years ago, I was very shy about buying one. Afraid of being taken for a bumpkin, I hesitated time and again. And in making the purchase at long last, I spoke in a rough tone of self-derision Thereupon I slipped the map inside my kimono and stalked back to the boarding house. Later that night, having shut the door and the windows, I stealthily unfolded the paper and beheld an amazing pattern in blue, red, and yellow. I ceased breathing and gazed intently--the River Sumida . . . Asakusa . . . Ushigome . . . Akasaka . . . . They were all here, and I could go anytime I felt like it. I seemed to be witnessing a miracle.

Today the city appears like a mulberry leaf eaten away by silkworms. Whenever I gaze upon the map, I think of the inhabitants and their peculiar ways. People push into this monotonous plain from the entire country, dripping with sweat as they crowd and jostle one another; they fight for a scrap of land and taste some joy in the midst of their trials. They glare at one another, and they quarrel. The women call to the men, and the men merely walk about half-crazed. Suddenly and without reason, I remembered a forlorn passage from a novel entitled Living in Obscurity.[1] "Love . . . To dream of beauty and do what's squalid." The words had no immediate bearing on the subject of Tokyo.

Tozuka, where I first settled. My next older brother had rented a house in the area and was studying sculpture. I had graduated in 1930 from Hirosaki High School and enrolled in the French Department of Tokyo Imperial University. I couldn't read a word of French, but I was in awe of Professor Tatsuno Yutaka and wanted to hear his lectures on French literature. I rented a back room in a newly-constructed boarding house about three blocks from my brother's home. There was between us a tacit awareness that misfortune could occur when two brothers, no matter how well disposed, live under the same roof away from home. So I decided that, even though it was the same neighborhood,

I would live three blocks away. Just three months thereafter my brother fell ill and died. He was twenty-six. I remained at the boarding house in Tozuka after his death, and from the second semester, I almost ceased going to school. Without troubling much about it, I had begun to assist in the shady activities of the movement society fears above all else. I had nothing but scorn for the sort of literature that styled itself, albeit with a certain exaggeration, a wing of that movement. For the time being I was an unspoiled man of politics.

That autumn the woman arrived from the country at my request. I had known H from early autumn of the year I had entered high school. She was a geisha, the innocent kind, and our friendship had lasted three years.

We had not yet become intimate, so I rented a room for her on the second floor of a carpenter's house in Higashi Komagata in the Honjo District. My father had been dead seven years, and it was my oldest brother who eventually came from home to inquire about the woman. We two orphaned brothers met in the somber room of my Tozuka lodging. When he saw how brutish I had suddenly become, my brother broke into tears. I had determined to yield the woman only on the condition that we be eventually allowed to marry. Without a doubt the negotiation was more painful for the older brother who was to accompany the woman back home than for the arrogant younger brother who handed her over.

Before giving her up, I took this woman named H into my arms for the first time. But after returning to the country with my brother the next day, she virtually ignored me. She wrote a brief, dutiful note that she had safely arrived, and not a word thereafter. I was annoyed by her indifference. Look, I wanted to say, this struggle horrified my relatives and gave my mother a taste of Hell. How shameful of you to lounge about now in stupid self-content.

She should write every day and express her affection for me. But she was the sort who didn't like to write, and I despaired. From early morning till late at night, I busied myself with politics. I never refused a request. Yet my limitations in this line of endeavor gradually

became apparent, and I despaired a second time.

It was a bar girl from the Ginza who fell for me. Each and every one of us goes through a stage of being liked--a squalid stage. I persuaded her to leap with me into the sea at Kamakura. The time to die is when you're beaten. And I was almost beaten by that unholy work I just mentioned. Fearful of being called a coward, I had taken on tasks that were physically impossible to accomplish. H thought only of her own happiness, but I was determined to show her she wasn't the only woman in my life. This, I would in effect be saying, is what you get for ignoring my anguish. Serves you right, too. For me it was most distressing to be alienated from my family. Thanks to H, I had been abandoned by my mother, my brother, and my aunt--and this realization, more than anything else, gave rise to the suicidal impulse. The woman died and I survived. The affair left a black mark on my life, and I've written of it a number of times already. I was thrown into jail, but the investigation resulted in a stay of prosecution. This was near the end of 1930.

My older brothers treated their would-be suicide junior with consideration. The oldest, faithful to his word, paid off H's contract and sent her to me in February. H arrived with a casual expression on her face, then bustled about diligently performing the household chores. We paid thirty yen in monthly rent for a house in Gotanda built on land subdivided from Prince Shimazu's estate. I was twenty-two at the time and H was nineteen.

Gotanda was an idiotic phase in my life. I had no will power whatever, no desire for a fresh start. I lived merely to humor the friends who occasionally dropped in for a visit. Instead of shame, I felt toward my sorry criminal record a touch of pride. Seldom in attendance at school and loathe to exert myself in any way, I passed the time gazing unconcernedly at H. Stupid! I did nothing. Gradually I slipped back into the movement, but the old enthusiasm wasn't there. A nobody with time to spare--that was me during the days I first occupied a house in a corner of Tokyo.

We moved in the summer to Dōhōchō in Kanda. As the end of autumn approached, we proceeded to Izumichō, again in Kanda. By early spring we were at Kashiwagi in Yodobashi. Nothing worth mentioning occurred. I concentrated on writing haiku under the pseudonym of Shurindō, as if I were an old man. Thrown into jail twice for that other activity of mine, I took the advice of friends and moved my domicile each time I got out. During this period I felt neither gratitude nor aversion. Mine was an excessively lethargic temper that did things for the good of all. Each of my homes was a lair in which to pass the days. H, on the other hand, was full of life. Every day she would scream at me two or three times, then turn serenely to her English lessons. I had devised a study schedule for H, but her memory didn't seem up to the task anyway. She had just gotten the alphabet down when she gave up. She was hardly good at writing letters and didn't want to try. I drafted them, while she seemed to enjoy partronizing me. Even when the police hauled me away, she was scarcely perturbed. Indeed on certain days she took delight in regarding the movement as a service to the downtrodden. Dōhōchō, Izumichō, Kashiwagi--and, in the meantime, I turned twenty-three.

Late in the spring, I had to move once more. The problem had gotten a bit involved, and the police were about to call me in when I bolted. Thanks to a cock-and-bull story I fed my brother, H and I had a two-month's allowance on hand as we pulled out of Kashiwagi. The furniture was placed in the safekeeping of various friends, and with only our smallest possessions, we moved into an eight-mat room on the second floor of a lumber dealer in Hatchōbori, Nihonbashi. I passed myself off as Ochiai Kazuo from the island of Hokkaido. It was an austere time, and we watched our money carefully. I put my anxiety to rest with the vague hope that things would somehow improve. I gave no thought to the future; I could do nothing. Occasionally I went to the university and napped for hours on the grass in front of the lecture hall.

One day I heard a disagreeable tale from a student in the Economics Department who had graduated from the same higher school as myself.

It seemed as though I were swallowing boiled water. I couldn't believe it, and I loathed the student for telling me. Mindful that H alone could clear up the matter, I hurried back to our second floor room over the lumber dealer, but I found it difficult to speak up. It was a late afternoon in early summer, and the setting sun was pouring its heat into the room. I sent H out to buy a bottle of Oraga Beer for twenty-five sen. I drank the bottle, but when I told her to get me another, she exploded. Thereupon my spirits rose. In a voice as off-hand as I could manage, I told her what I had heard that day from the student. She grumbled something in our dialect about scuttlebutt and frowned momentarily. Then she went quietly on with her sewing. There was no sign of guilt, and I thought her innocent.

That evening I read the wrong book. It was Rousseau's Confessions. When I came upon the passage where the author suffers a bitter disillusionment by learning of his wife's past, I could stand it no longer. I ceased to believe in her innocence. That very evening I made her confess. Everything I had heard from the student was so. And the real truth was even worse. There seemed to be no end as I probed on and on. So I called a halt midway.

Of course I was hardly qualified to criticize anyone on that score. How about my own incident at Kamakura? I nonetheless spent the night seething in anger. I realized I had hitherto cherished H as though she were a veritable jewel. Proud of my woman, I had managed to survive for her sake alone. I had rescued her while she was still innocent--or so I thought--and, like a hero of old, I had believed her every word. I even boasted to friends that I had taken her in because she was so steadfast. No words can describe my innocence. I was stupid as they come, with no comprehension at all of women.

I did not despise H for her deceit. On the contrary her confession was so touching that I wanted to pat her on the back. It was just too bad, and that's all there was to it. So intolerable was my life that I would, so to speak, grind it to powder with a pestle. I surrendered to the police. When the prosecutor's investigation was suspended, I

returned still alive to walk the streets of Tokyo. There was no place to go other than H's room, and so I hastened to her. It was a dreary reunion. We smiled abjectly at one another and exchanged a limp handshake.

We left Hatchōbori for a single-room cottage in the garden of a large, vacant house in the Shirogane section of Shiba Ward. My older brothers were running out of patience, but they secretly continued my allowance. H perked up as though nothing were amiss, and I gradually awoke from my stupidity. I put together a one-hundred-page manuscript as a kind of last will and testament. Now regarded as my maiden work, "Memories" was an effort to describe without embellishment vices that went back to childhood. I wrote this memoir in the fall of my twenty-third year, as I reposed in our one-room dwelling and observed the wild grasses in the large, abandoned garden. Having lost the ability to laugh, I had once again resolved to die. If someone calls this a pretence, so be it. I was content. I had come to regard life as a drama--or rather, to regard drama as life. I was of no use to anyone. My one and only H had been soiled by the hand of others; my will to live was gone. I was one of the fallen masses, a mere fool. I decided to die and thus carry out faithfully the role which history had brought me, the pathetic role of always losing out to others.

But life is not a drama, and no one knows the second act. Some men come on stage in the role of the defeated, but never exit till the very end. I undertook this trivial confession in "Memories" for one purpose only--to show that such a squalid child as myself had actually lived. Against all expectations, the testament began to prey on my mind, and a light began to glow dimly within my own emptiness. It was too soon to die, for I could not rest content with this one work. I had written part of my tale, and now I must write the whole of it. I would make a clean breast of my entire life. There was plenty to write about, and I chose for my next attempt the incident at Kamakura. But something was missing, and so I wrote another work. Dissatisfied a second time, I let out a sigh and set to work once again. I could punctuate my writing with commas, but I could not put a period to it. A demon would beckon, only to devour me. I was making no headway whatever.

It was 1933, and I turned twenty-four. By all means I must graduate from the university this spring. But what were the chances of graduating when I didn't even take the examinations? My brothers back home were unaware of this. They appeared to think me dutiful enough to graduate, at least to atone for past blunders. But I betrayed them absolutely; I had no intention of graduating.

To betray a trust is a maddening kind of Hell, and during the next two years I lived in Hell. Give me one more year, I pleaded with my oldest brother, and I will graduate without fail. He did--and I betrayed him. The following year the same thing happened. A prey to fear and self-loathing, subject to suicidal reflections, I devoted myself to that group of egotistical works, my so-called last will and testament. If only I could bring this off. . . . Perhaps my stuff was childish, affected, and sentimental; but I was staking my life on that sentimentality. I placed each work I finished--the third, the fourth--in a large paper bag. The number slowly increased until finally I took up my brush and wrote on the bag "Final Years." This deliberately chosen title meant that things would come to an end with these writings.

Early that spring there was talk of selling the house in Shiba, and so we had to move again. Unable to graduate, I suffered a considerable reduction in my allowance from home. Retrenchment was unavoidable. One of my friends, a solid citizen who worked for a newspaper, offered to rent us a single room of his house in Amanuma, a section of Suginami Ward. Again I hadn't the least intention of graduating, and during the two years we lived in his house, I caused my friend much anxiety. In my desire to conclude the book, I was like one possessed. I avoided embarrassment by telling both H and my friend I would graduate the following year. Once a week I donned a student uniform and left the house. I would go to the university library, randomly select a book and flip through it, take a nap, jot down rough drafts of my stories. In the evening I left the library and returned to Amanuma. Neither H nor my friend doubted me in the least. On the surface, everything was fine; but within me a struggle was taking place. There wasn't a moment to waste. I must finish, I told myself, while the money was still coming. And the work was hard. I would

write something, then tear it up. I was being devoured by that hideous demon to the very marrow of my bones.

A year went by, and I failed to graduate. My older brothers were furious, but I made my customary plea all the same. I was duping them again as I promised to graduate the following year, but there was no other way. I could hardly make my benefactors a party to the deception by telling the truth. Like the prodigal son, I preferred to go my own way. Surely I could not come straight out and say I needed another year to finish my last will and testament. Absurd! They would think me a self-conceited, poetic dreamer, and I wanted above all to avoid that. A desperate entreaty would simply force my brothers, whatever their feelings, to cut off my allowance. If they continued the payments in the face of the truth, they would eventually be regarded as accomplices in my shame. I didn't want that. I know this is going to sound like a crook's apology, but I must perforce be the cunning, cajoling younger brother deceiving my elders to the end. That I firmly believed.

Once a week I put on my uniform and went off to school. My friend and H believed in me with a kind of nobility--and that made things difficult. One dreary day followed another. I was no criminal, and deceiving others was pure Hell.

Presently the three of us left for another part of Amanuma. My friend had found the earlier location inconvenient for getting to work, and so he moved in the spring to a house near Ogikubo Station, just behind the marketplace. At his urging we rented a room on the second floor. Unable to sleep, I drank raw sake and coughed up phlegm. But I could not worry about being sick, for the works inside the bag required urgent attention. I know this sounds conceited, but I wished to bequeath these works to everyone as a kind of apology. Devoting my whole strength to the task, I managed to finish late in the fall. From the twenty or so works inside the bag, I chose fourteen. The rest I burned, along with the manuscript paper I had scribbled on. There was exactly one trunkful. I took the load into the yard and burned it completely.

"Why did you burn those things?" H suddenly asked in the evening.

"I don't need them anymore." I was smiling.

"Why did you burn them?" she repeated. And she was crying.

I began making the necessary arrangements. I returned borrowed books to my friends, sold my letters and notebooks to a dealer in scrap. Along with the works I slipped two letters into the bag labelled "Final Years." Everything now seemed in order. It was frightening to be with H, so I went out every evening to drink cheap sake.

In the meantime a classmate came to me and inquired about starting a journal. I was indifferent to the idea, but agreed to cooperate if the journal was named Blue Flower. This quip set the game in motion, and people came forward from every quarter to join. Two of them soon became close friends of mine and helped me rekindle my earlier enthusiasm for the final time. It was all a mad dance the night before death. We got drunk together. We thrashed our duller classmates and made friends with the coarsest women. The contents of H's chest of drawers disappeared even before she noticed. A collection of genuine belles-lettres, Blue Flower appeared for the first and last time in December. By then, the other members of the group had gotten so fed up with out senseless antics that they scattered, leaving us behind. We became known as "the three fools." But we remained lifelong friends, and I learned plenty from those two.

It was now March, and with the day for graduation drawing near once again, I tried to appear lighthearted. I took a qualifying exam with a newspaper company, amusing both H and my friend by claiming that I would become a reporter and live a commonplace life the rest of my days. I would eventually be found out, but I wished to sustain our happiness, if only for another day or even a moment. More than anything else, I was afraid of shocking people, and when the occasion required it, I would tell desperate lies. It was always thus. Finally I would be cornered--and think of suicide. I could not get the wrenching truth out, even though delay simply meant that people would be all the more shocked and enraged. From moment to moment I fell further into this hell of desperation. Needless to say, I had no intention of joining a newspaper company. I could

hardly pass the exam anyway. My policy of deception had been flawless, but now it collapsed. By the middle of March it was time to die, and I went off alone to hang myself in the hills near Kamakura. It was 1935, five years after I had caused such an uproar by leaping into the sea, again near Kamakura. It was because I could swim that I had not been drowned then. This time I chose hanging, a method said to be foolproof. Again I failed. My neck was apparently thicker than average, and I revived. I returned absentmindedly to the house in Amanuma, the rope-burn still red about my neck.

Unable again to determine my own fate, I tottered home to a strange, unknown world. H greeted me at the door and gave me a gentle pat. The others were sympathetic too--and glad that I had survived. I was amazed at the generosity of people. My oldest brother hastened from the country, and despite the abuse he poured on me, I could not but think him fond and loving. You might say I was experiencing certain marvelous feelings for the first time in my life.

My fate continued to be unpredictable. A few days after my return, I felt severe pains in the stomach. I endured a full day and night without sleep and applied a hot water bottle to the painful region. Only on the verge of fainting did I finally call the doctor.

I was carried in my bedding to an ambulance and taken to the surgical hospital, where an appendectomy was immediately performed. I had been tardy in calling the doctor, and the hot water bottle had been a mistake. The inflamation had spread to the peritoneum, and the operation proved difficult. Two days later, the earlier ailment in my lungs became active, and I began vomiting blood. I was more dead than alive, and even my physician gave up hope. But a dire villain such as myself could hardly die. Gradually I began to recover, and within a month the wound in my abdomen had healed.

As the ailment in my lungs was contagious, I was transferred to the hospital at Kyōdō in Setagaya Ward. During this period H never left my side. She told me with a smile how the doctor had said she must not kiss me. The director of this hospital was a friend of my oldest brother,

and I therefore received special consideration. All of our household goods were brought into two large sickrooms, allowing us to set up a domicile right in the hospital.

May . . .June . . .July . . . . The striped mosquitoes had arrived, and a white net had just been suspended in the room when the doctor recommended a move to Funabashi on the Chiba coast. H and I rented a new house on the edge of town, but the change of scenery proved deleterious. The damnable habit had already been formed at the surgical hospital in Asagaya, but the truly hellish torment started here. My bandage had been changed morning and evening at the hospital, and the doctor initially used the anesthetic to deaden the pain. Presently I was unable to sleep without the drug, and I became so miserable that I appealed to the doctor night after night. Having despaired of my recovery, he kindly gave in to my every plea.

At the second hospital I pleaded obstinately with my brother's friend the director, who went along reluctantly about once every three times. I no longer sought the medication for the pain, but merely to relieve guilt and irritation. I hadn't the strength to endure solitude. After the move to Funabashi, I got the drug from a local doctor by complaining of insomnia and toxic symptoms. Later I forced this coward to write a prescription allowing me to purchase it directly from the pharmacist. Before I realized, I had become a wretched addict pinched for money. I was receiving ninety yen a month from my brother, and he refused to provide for any additional expense. That was only to be expected. I had merely toyed with my own life, without repaying my brother's affection in any way.

That autumn I began to appear occasionally on the streets of Tokyo. I am fully aware of the bedraggled, half-insane demeanor I bore at the time. I could hardly forget. I had become the coarsest youth in all Japan, ready to flee to the city whenever I needed ten or twenty yen. I wept before one member of a magazine staff; from another I received a scolding for begging so persistently. During the time I was recuperating in the hospitals at Asagaya and Kyōdō, my friends got a respectable

magazine to publish two or three works from my last will and testament inside the paper bag. My manuscripts could now earn some money, as well as words of censure and praise. Dizzy with consternation and worry, I found myself ever more dependent on the drug. When the torment became overwhelming, I would see a magazine staff member or even the manager and try wheedling an advance. In my distress I overlooked the simple truth that others too were struggling for all they were worth. Eventually the manuscripts from inside the paper bag disappeared. There were no more to sell, and I couldn't immediately come up with another work. I had exhausted my material and could write no longer. The critics called me a decadent with some talent, while I saw in myself the seed of virtue, but no talent. In brief I was a rustic with no gift for writing, and all I could do was plunge ahead.

To some of us the rigid demands of obligation are so intolerable that we react in desperation and begin leading lives of shame. I was raised in a highly conservative home, and for me going into debt was the worst kind of vice. Attempting to repay my debts, however, I simply created larger ones. To cure my addiction and eliminate the shameful burden of debt, I exerted myself more and more. But the amount going to the druggist merely increased. There were tears in my eyes as I walked about the Ginza in broad daylight lusting for money. In piling up debts I had in effect plundered about twenty people. I could not die, not until I had paid every debt.

By the autumn of 1936 my friends were beginning to desert me. It was then, just one year after the move to Funabashi, that I was placed in a car and driven to a certain hospital in Itabashi Ward in Tokyo. We arrived during the night, and I awoke the following morning to realize I was in an asylum.

I was released one splendid afternoon about a month later. H had come to meet me, and we got into the taxi together. Separated during the month of my confinement, neither of us spoke at first. The car had gone some distance before H mentioned that I would probably stay off the drug now. She sounded peevish.

I uttered the one lesson I had learned in the hospital--that I

wouldn't trust anyone hereafter.

Ever the pragmatist, H understood me to be speaking of money. "It's true," she remarked, her head vigorously nodding, "people never help you out."

"I don't trust you either."

A look of embarrassment crossed her face.

The house in Funabashi had been given up during my hospital stay, and H was again living in a single room apartment in Amanuma. Two magazines had each commissioned a story from me, and I set to work that very evening. Having finished the stories and collected my payment, I went off to Atami and spent an entire month drinking. I had no idea what to do next. My oldest brother had agreed to send a monthly allowance for the next three years, but the mountain of debts from before my hospital sojourn still remained. I wanted to write a splendid novel at Atami and pay off the most worrisome of my debts with the earnings. But I could hardly endure the desolation of the place, let alone write a novel. All I did was drink. An utter cypher when I arrived, I went further into debt at Atami. Whatever I did turned out wrong. Defeat appeared to be total.

Bedraggled, all hope gone, I returned to the apartment at Amanuma and threw myself on the floor. I was already twenty-eight. I owned nothing but a padded gown, and H had only the clothes on her back. I had fallen to rock bottom. Like an insect I lived in silence, clinging to the monthly sum from my brother.

But it wasn't rock bottom yet. Early that spring my advice was sought on a totally unexpected matter. The inquiry came from a close friend, a painter in the occidental style, and I almost choked as I listened. H, it turned out, had already committed the lamentable deed. Suddenly I remembered how upset she appeared in the cab when I let fly with that philosophic cant after leaving the cursed hospital. I had given H plenty of trouble, but I intended to stay with her as long as I survived. Yet, so poorly did I express my feelings that neither H nor the painter knew that I loved her. When asked for advice, I hadn't the slightest

notion what to say. I didn't want to harm anyone. Among the three of us I was the oldest. I must be calm and come up with a brilliant directive. But I was so stunned and unsure that H and the painter began to feel contemptuous of me. I could do nothing. In the meanwhile the painter was making ready to flee. In spite of my own anguish, I felt sympathetic toward H. It was apparent that she wished to die, and when I couldn't take it any longer, I too thought of dying. Let's die together, I proposed, the gods are forgiving. So, like a brother and sister on close terms, we set out for Minakami Hot Spring. The evening after our arrival we made as if to commit suicide in the mountains. She must not die, I told myself, and I saw to it that she did not. But she wasn't the lone survivor. I tried taking my own life with drugs and failed miserably.

That's when we parted for good. Lacking the strength to keep H any longer, I abandoned her. I could have acted the forbearing altruist and kept her, but our life together would have been one hell after another. H returned to her mother's home in the country, and no one knows what happened to the painter. I remained alone in the apartment, cooking my own meals. I remember drinking rot-gut. My decaying teeth began to fall out, and my face grew ugly. I moved to a nearby boardinghouse. It was the most squalid kind of place, perfect for me. I would drink alone in my room of four and a half tatami mats. Once I was drunk, I would go outside to lean against the boardinghouse gate and murmur haphazard lyrics: "I stand by the gate bidding the world farewell; the pines stay in place, while withered, moonlit fields flit through my mind." Except for two or three loyal friends, no one sought my company. Little by little I came to understand how others saw me. I was an ignorant blackguard, a crackpot, a cunning vulgar libertine, a counterfeit genius, and a swindler. I would live off the fat of the land; then, in a pinch, I would intimidate my benefactors in the country by carrying out a mock suicide. I had abused my virtuous spouse and finally driven her away, as though she were some stray cat or dog. And there were other stories about me, all of them told with indignation and scorn. Having been put away like some invalid, I hardly felt like going outside. On nights when the sake was gone, I

found a mild pleasure reading detective novels and munching rice crackers. The magazines and newspapers no longer asked for my manuscripts. I didn't feel like writing anything; I couldn't write. Although nobody pressed me for payment, I agonized in my very dreams over the debts piled up during my addiction. And I was now twenty-nine years old.

At what point did things change? Perhaps it was the misfortunes of my family that gave me the strength to live. My oldest brother was accused of election fraud right after winning a Diet seat. I stood in awe of my brother's severe nature. Surely there were evil men around him who had done this. An older sister died and a nephew too. My younger cousin also died. All this I learned through hearsay, for personal correspondence between home and myself had ceased long ago.

This series of misfortunes gradually drew my sprawled body from the floor. I had always felt encumbered by my family's wealth; indeed, the very immensity of our house had made me uneasy. From early in life, certain misgivings about my undeserved good fortune had turned me into a servile, melancholy youth. I believed that the son of a wealthy man would be cast into Hell, and rightly so. To flee this eventuality would be cowardly, and thus I struggled to die with glory as the child of evil. One evening, however, I came to the realization that I was hardly a favored son. An indigent without a decent kimono, I had been eliminated from the family register, and my allowance would terminate at the end of the year. Indeed, the family itself had greatly declined, and I had none whatever of those shameful privileges of birth. On the contrary, I was a minus. As I lay in my boardinghouse room devoid of even the strength to die, my body miraculously regained its vigor. A number of factors can play a role in the overall transformation of a man: age, war, the overturn of historical values, hatred of indolence, humility towards the act of writing, a belief in God, and much else; but in my case this physical transformation was absolutely crucial. In any event theories about why people change are empty; even the most authentic explanations give off a faint smell of falsity. People do not select a way through steady deliberation and judgement. In most instances they merely end up walking in a new direction.

Early in the summer of my twenty-ninth year, I felt a serious aspiration to become a writer. This belated aspiration set me to writing industriously in my unfurnished room of four and a half mats. I worked late into the night, sustaining myself with a snack from the leftover rice on my supper tray. I wasn't writing a last will and testament anymore, I was writing in order to live. I received encouragement from an older man, a writer who had quietly supported me even while the others were jeering. I had to prove myself worthy of his precious trust.

Presently I finished a work entitled "Putting Granny Out to Die," a candid account of how H and I had gone to Minakami Hot Spring to commit suicide. A certain editor had been faithfully waiting, and I sold him the piece directly. I did not squander this commission. I went forthwith to the pawnshop, redeemed one of my best kimonos, and left the city. With a fresh outlook on life, I would live in the mountains of Kōshū and write a long novel. I spent a full year in Kōshū; though I failed to complete the long novel, I did send the publisher more than ten stories. Voices of encouragement sprang up on all sides. The literati were generous, and one who could spend his life among them was fortunate indeed.

In January of the following year, that same writer arranged a conventional marriage for me. Since I didn't have any money, perhaps it wasn't all that conventional. My wife and I rented a small two-room house on the outskirts of Kōfu City for six yen fifty sen a month. I published two more volumes and, with the small surplus after expenses, began to clear up those worrisome debts. It was a struggle, however.

Early that autumn we moved to Mitaka Village near Tokyo. A total break had occurred in my life from the time I left the boarding house in Ogikubo, a lone suitcase in hand. I was now living by my pen. On an overnight trip I would simply describe myself as a writer on the inn register. I had troubles, but seldom spoke of them. I put on a smile even when those troubles were greater than before. The fools said I had become a philistine. Well, the setting sun is huge every day from Musashino and simmers upon the horizon. Sitting on crossed legs in the three-mat room which faces this sun, I supped on our meager fare and told

my wife I would rather watch over our home than be rich and famous. Then I suddenly remembered the Eight Views of Tokyo. And the past moved within my breast like a revolving lantern.

Though beyond the city limits, Inogashira Park is considered one of the notable places of Tokyo. Since the park is close to my home, I could rightly include the Evening Sun from Masashino too among my Eight Views. To determine the other Seven, I went through the album of memories in my own heart. In this case, however, it was not the scenes of Tokyo that made for art. It was myself in the midst of those scenes. Did art hoodwink me, or did I hoodwink art? Neither, for art and I are one.

The Rainy Season at Tozuka. Twilight over Hongo. The Kanda Festival. First Snow at Kashiwagi. Fireworks over Hatchōbori. The Fall Moon at Shiba. The Cicadas of Amanuma. Lightning over the Ginza. The Cosmos Flowers at Itabashi Asylum. Morning Mist in Ogikubo. The Evening Sun from Musashino. The dark flowers of memory dance and scatter, and one can hardly gather them. It would be unbecoming to arrange the whole in Eight Views anyway.

This spring and summer I came across two additional views. On the fourth of April I visited Mr. S, an important man who lives in Koishikawa. Five years ago, when I was suffering from the addiction, I caused Mr. S such anxiety that I was severely scolded and banished from his presence. This New Year's I managed to pay him a courtesy visit and offer an apology. I didn't see him again until April, when I went to request his presence at a reception commemorating the publication of a friend's book. After he kindly agreed to the request, I asked some questions about painting and the literature of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. Mr. S spoke of the past in his usual solemn tone and apologized for being so hard on me. But he thought I had benefited from this and said that he was glad.

Then we took a taxi to the art museum at Ueno, where we examined an exhibit of occidental-style paintings. I stopped before one of the many tiresome works, and presently Mr. S himself came up. He looked at the painting closely and murmured offhand, "Saccharine, wouldn't you say?"

"Nothing to it," I pronounced.

The painter was H's friend.

After we left the Museum Mr. S escorted me to Kayabachō for the premiere showing of a film entitled Conflict. Next we proceeded to the Ginza for tea. As evening came on, Mr. S announced that he would return home by bus. We were making our way to Shimbashi Station as I described to him my proposal to portray Eight Views of Tokyo.

"Indeed," Mr. S responded, "the setting sun is huge from Musashino."

He paused on the pedestrian bridge before Shimbashi Station and motioned toward the bridge at Ginza. "There's a painting for you," he whispered.

I stopped and gazed along with him.

"There's a painting," he repeated, as if to himself.

More than the scene at which we were gazing, I wished to include in my Eight Views of Tokyo the observing Mr. S and the derelict disciple he had once banished.

Two months later I encountered a scene even more cheerful. "T will be leaving tomorrow" read the special delivery letter from my wife's younger sister. "We'll be able to see him a moment in Shiba Park. Come at nine and speak to him for me. I'm such a fool I won't have anything to say."

She was twenty-one years old and so small she seemed like a child. She had become engaged last year, but shortly after the exchange of presents, T had been conscripted into a Tokyo regiment. I had once spoken to him a half hour when he was in uniform. He was an alert, polished young man, and he was now evidently going off to war.

Less than two hours later a second letter arrived. "After some thought, I realized how bold my earlier request was. It's fine if you don't say anything to T. Just come and see him off."

My wife and I could picture a whirl of activity, and we burst out laughing as we read these words. For two or three days now, my wife's

sister had been lending a hand at the home of T's parents.

We rose early the next morning and left for Shiba Park. A large crowd of well-wishers had gathered on the grounds of the Zōjō Temple. Anxious to inquire about T, I caught hold of an old fellow in khaki who was bustling about and elbowing his way through the crowd. T's regiment, I learned, would approach the main gate, stop five minutes to rest, and then depart. My wife and I were standing by the gate watching for the regiment when her sister arrived clutching a small flag. T's parents had also come along, and I met them for the first time. We were not yet definitely related, and I was awkward with people anyway. I merely nodded, without greeting them properly, and turned to the girl.

"How about it? You're not nervous?" I inquired.

"This is nothing," she replied, laughing gaily.

Frowning, my wife scolded her sister for acting so merry.

Many people had gathered to see T off. A row of six large banners, each emblazoned with his name, stood by the gate. The men and women who worked in the factory run by T's family had been given a holiday in order to be present. Feeling out of place, I moved toward the end of the gate, away from the crowd. Some of my teeth were missing, and I was dressed like a slob. I was an indigent man-of-letters, with neither cap nor hakama. T's wealthy parents were doubtlessly wondering about this sorry-looking relative of their son's fiancée who had come for the occasion. When my wife's sister approached, I chased her away, remarking that she had an important role to perform today and should remain with T's father.

Ten o'clock passed, then eleven and twelve, but still no sign of T's regiment. A row of sightseeing buses rolled by, a poster for a different girl's school fastened to the door of each vehicle. One of the schools was near my family's home, and my brother's oldest daughter probably went there. Maybe she was even on the bus and had caught sight of her foolish uncle loitering before the gate of this famous temple without even realizing who he was. The buses went past at intervals; and on each

vehicle a young woman in uniform pointed towards me as she explained another sight on the tour. Apathetic at first, I was surely striking a pose toward the end. I folded my arms in the grand manner of the famous statue of Balzac, and thus did I too become one of the famous sights of Tokyo.

One o'clock was drawing near when shouts of "they're coming!" rose from the crowd. Within moments a truck filled with soldiers pulled up to the gate. T, who knew how to drive a Datsun truck, was in the cab.

I was gazing absentmindedly at the scene when my wife's sister edged up and, appealing to me as her elder brother, began shoving forward. Then I realized that T, after descending from the cab, had apparently spotted me standing at the rear of the crowd and was throwing a salute. Hesitating, I looked over the people nearby. Yes, it was me he was hailing. Along with my wife's sister, I pushed decisively through the crowd until the two of us were standing directly in front of T.

"Don't worry about a thing. My little sister may be silly, but she knows what a woman has to do. Don't worry, we'll look after her." I spoke without a trace of my usual smile, then turned to the girl. She was looking up, a tense expression on her face. T blushed a trifle and silently threw another salute.

"Don't you have anything to say?" This time I smiled at the girl.

"No, not anymore." And she lowered her gaze.

Shortly thereafter, the order came down for the men to depart. I tried to slip back into the crowd, but my wife's sister kept shoving me back. Emerging from the crowd, I found myself standing with T's parents alongside the truck.

"Don't worry about anything," I called up to T. His father turned and stared, the sullen look demanding to know just who this meddling fool was. But I did not flinch. Didn't I know myself well enough to say: A man's greatest pride is in suffering one thing and another to the utmost. I was indigent, and the draft board had turned me down

because of my health; but I wasn't going to hang back now. The celebrated sight of Tokyo let out another exclamation: "DON'T YOU WORRY!" After all, I was such an outcast already that, if any problem arose concerning the marriage, I would be ready to help these youngsters with all my strength.

With this scene from the main gate of the Zōjō temple, I feel that my story has been elaborated to the tautness of a bow drawn to full-moon. It was several days after this event that I sallied forth with pen, paper, and a large map of Tokyo. And what's occurred in the ten days since my arrival at this hot spring on the Izu Peninsula? I still seem to be at the inn, but what am I up to?

ON THE QUESTION OF APPAREL (Fukusō ni tsuite, 1941)

During my freshman year at Hirosaki High, I was momentarily fascinated with apparel. I would walk about wearing a stiff sash over my striped kimono, and travel to a certain lady's house for lessons in ballad chanting. This shameful conduct lasted one year, after which I threw away my stylish clothes in disgust.

Not on principle, mind you, not at all. But something happened one evening in Tokyo during the winter vacation of my freshman year. The scene was an odenya bar, and I was dressed to the hilt as I flung aside the rope-curtain hanging in the doorway. A jug of warmed sake, I told the girl--properly warmed sake too. The nonchalant tone was in imitation of a haughty man-about-town.

In due course I managed to swallow some of the heated wine. Then, my tongue partly loosened, I let go with some bluster memorized for the occasion. Nothing was omitted. And when I concluded with my challenge --What the hell do you mean by that?--the girl suggested with a smile, "Tōhoku?" Intended as a compliment, this reminder of my provincial speech quite sobered me. I'm not a fool by nature. From that evening I gave up on stylish clothes and strove instead to dress unobtrusively. Still I'm a lanky fellow--more than five foot seven by the tape, but I don't quite believe that!--and I seem conspicuous merely when walking down the street.

Even during my university days I tried to dress normally, but certain friends found occasion to issue their warnings. They said high rubber boots were out of place--and that was that. But I found them convenient. You don't need any socks, you simply wear the boots barefoot or with tabi, and no one ever knows the difference. Generally I wore mine without socks, and they kept my feet plenty warm. When you leave the house, there's no need to squat at the front door and fiddle around forever tying up the laces. You shove one leg into a boot, then the other, and off you go. And when it's time to remove them, you needn't bother taking your hands from your pockets. Give a kick and the boot's

off. While they're on, you can go through a puddle or along a muddy lane without a care. Eminently useful, these rubber boots of mine, so why shouldn't I walk about in them.

But, my solicitous friends replied, the boots are simply outlandish, and I must give them up. Wearing such boots in perfect weather seemed to them mere eccentric display. But if they thought I was playing the fop, they were badly mistaken. Ever since that freshman year, when I learned to my sorrow that I wouldn't qualify as a man-about-town, I had earnestly followed a code of utmost simplicity in food, dress, and shelter. It was only that I'm taller than most men, and my features--my nose, for example, or my entire face--are larger than average. For some reason people seemed upset over this; I would put on a sports cap in total innocence, and friends would clamor that I get rid of it. You're trying to flatter yourself, they claimed; the cap didn't suit me, it was merely odd.

So what was I to do? Evidently a man must discipline himself in proportion to his size. I would have gone quietly into hiding, but people would not permit it.

In desperation I considered growing a full beard in the manner of His Excellency Hayashi Senjurō,[1] but the sight of a big bearded fellow prowling in and out of the three rooms of my diminutive house would be strange indeed, so I had to give up the idea.

George Bernard Shaw would have failed in Japan, a friend solemnly informed me on one occasion. I thought he was commenting on the introspective nature of Japanese Realism, and so I agreed, observing that it was a question of psychology. I was about to say more when the fellow laughed and said: "Oh no, I mean his height. Almost seven feet tall, isn't he? A writer that size just couldn't make it in Japan." My friend had taken me in completely with his innocent tomfoolery, but I could not easily laugh it off. After all, if I had been a foot taller . . . ! I thought this too close for comfort.

Anyway, having realized as a freshman how unreliable fashion could be, I resigned myself to wearing whatever was on hand and to walking

about in everyday dress. But with friends commenting on this and that, I lost my poise and came at length to feel particular about my appearance. And yet, having been told ad nauseum that I lacked refinement, I never again felt like wearing something special or having a haori tailored for myself from antique cloth. The craving for style was gone, and I continued to wear without comment whatever was available. I'm not sure why, but when the time comes to buy a suit, a shirt, or a pair of geta, I become miserly in the extreme. To spend cash on such things literally cuts me to the quick. With five yen for a pair of geta in my pocket, I pace back and forth in front of the shoestore utterly bewildered, only to rush into the beer hall next door and spend every cent. Evidently I'm convinced that clothes and footwear are a waste of money.

Until three or four years ago, Mother would send me clothes and other things each season of the year. But she had not seen me for over ten years, and I could tell from her choice of gaudy patterns that she did not realize I was now a man of taste who sported a moustache. A certain kimono in the flecked style, loose-fitting and unlined, made me seem a sumō wrestler of low rank, while the nightshirt dyed all over with peach blossoms transformed me into a doddering actor of the shimpa stage.[2] Her selections were unacceptable; and yet it was my policy to wear whatever clothes were given to me. Appalled by my own appearance, I nonetheless sat gravely on folded legs in the middle of my room and puffed on a cigarette. Friends who dropped by could hardly keep from laughing. I was not amused, however, and so I eventually pulled myself together and took the offending clothes to a certain kind of storehouse.

Mother can no longer send me even one kimono, and I must depend upon the income from my writings. But I'm so stingy about clothes that I've bought just two kimonos the last three or four years: an unlined, flecked garment in the Kurume style and a white, summer kimono, also flecked. When I need something else, I draw one of Mother's selections from the storehouse. For summer wear I've another flecked kimono with a white background, and as autumn draws near, I alternate between two

unlined kimonos--one of a patterned fabric, the other of silk. At home I always wear a yukata, the kind one usually wears with a tanzen.

When I walk about in the silk kimono, the hem of the skirt rustles pleasantly. Unfortunately it always rains if I go out in that garment, a warning perhaps from my dead father-in-law who once owned it. I've encountered veritable floods in that kimono, once in southern Izu and again at Fuji-Yoshida. The Izu incident occurred in the early part of July, when a rampaging stream almost swept away the tiny inn where I was staying. I was drawn into the incident at Fuji-Yoshida toward the end of August after a friend had invited me to the Fire Festival. Actually I had first refused the invitation, with the hot weather as my excuse. But my friend would not hear of a delay. The Fire Festival occurs only once a year, he wrote. The weather was already cool at Yoshida; in another month it would be chilly. The indignant tone sent me scurrying in his direction. My wife warned of a flood as I left in my silk kimono, a poor joke which gave me a sense of forboding.

The weather was fine as far as Hachiōji. But from the moment I boarded the train at Ōtsuki for Yoshida, the rain came down in buckets. The passengers on their way for sightseeing or mountain-climbing were so packed in they could barely move. Hearing each and every one of them grumble about the rain, I was so overcome with guilt for having worn my late father-in-law's kimono that I kept my eyes on the floor. At Yoshida the rain came down even harder, and my friend and I flew headlong from the station into a nearby restaurant. He was apologetic, but in fact I was the one to feel contrite, knowing as I did the real cause of the storm. But so great was the transgression I could hardly confess my guilt.

The Fire Festival was a shambles.

On the day Mount Fuji closes for the winter, each household in Yoshida heaps up kindling at the front gate, hoping to start a blaze greater than all the others. The spectacle was a customary way of rendering thanks to Princess Konohana Sakuya,[3] and I had looked forward to seeing it for the first time. But the downpour had ruined the

preparations, so my friend and I remained in the restaurant drinking and waiting for the rain to slacken. In the evening as the wind picked up, one of the waitresses opened the shutter a crack and exclaimed about a faint red glow in the sky.

My friend and I stood up to watch. In the midst of the raging storm, at least one person had managed to light a beacon for the princess. But the sight of a lone fire brought little joy to me, knowing as I did the ultimate cause of the whole catastrophe. If I merely hinted to the waitress that the man standing before her had come brazenly and unnecessarily from Tokyo, ruining one of the few annual pleasures to which all the citizens of Yoshida--both young and old, male and female--looked forward, I would probably be letting myself in for a thrashing from the townspeople. But, a blackguard forever, I confessed my transgression to neither the waitress nor my friend.

When the rain eased up late that evening, my friend and I left the restaurant to spend the night at a large inn near the lake. By the next morning the weather had cleared, so I bade the friend farewell and took the bus that ran to Kōfu through Misaka Pass. We had left Lake Kawaguchi behind and were perhaps twenty minutes into the pass when the bus halted before the awesome debris of a landslide. I got off along with about fifteen other riders. Hitching up our kimono skirts, we started picking our way over the landslide in groups of two or three. We found the road again and trudged on, hoping to encounter the bus from Kōfu. It never came, however, so we went back to our own bus and returned with the remaining passengers to Yoshida--all because of this cursed silk kimono of mine.

The next time I hear of a drought, I'll put on the kimono and go to the affected area for a stroll. The rain will come down in torrents--an implausible service from one so generally incompetent as I.

In addition to the Rain-maker, I still own the first kimono I ever bought with a manuscript payment, an unlined garment in the Kurume style. I take special care of this garment, wearing it only for the most important occasions. The others don't pay much attention, however, and

any business I conduct in the kimono turns out poorly. I must appear to be wearing everyday dress, so offhandedly am I regarded. On my way home after the meeting I begin to feel defiant. The example of Kasai Zenzō comes unbidden to mind,[4] and I firmly swear never to give up my unlined kimono.

The period during which I change from unlined to lined clothing is a difficult one. For about ten days, from late September through early October, I'm totally alone with my miseries. I have two lined kimonos sent by Mother, one of a patterned fabric, the other of some kind of silk. The design of both is so delicate and the color so subdued that I keep them at home, without putting them in storage. However, I'm not the sort to turn out in a silk kimono with felt sandals, twirling a cane as I stroll along. In fact I've worn the silk kimono only twice in the last year or so--to celebrate the New Year at my wife's home in Kōfu and to assist a friend at a meeting with a prospective bride. In both instances I had misgivings about the kimono, and a cane and felt sandals were simply out of the question. I dressed instead in hakama and a new pair of "single-block" geta.

It wasn't the need to demonstrate my barbaric ways that made me dislike felt sandals. Sandals look elegant, and they don't make a racket like geta do. So you needn't leave them at the cloakroom when entering the theater, the library, or some other quiet place. I once tried wearing a pair, but I couldn't endure the slippery straw matting beneath the soles of my feet. I was very irritated, and five times more weary than when I wore geta. Since then, I haven't put on a pair of felt sandals.

To walk about twirling a cane gives one a feeling of importance, and that's all to the good. But I'm taller than most, and canes are always too short for me. I've got to bend somewhat to make certain the tip strikes the ground. I must seem an old lady on her way to visit a grave as I go along bent over, my cane tapping at every step. Five or six years ago I came across a long, narrow pickel, as the Germans call it, and started using it as a cane, but quickly gave it up when a friend grumbled about my poor taste. It wasn't a question of taste, however.

Since the typical short cane wouldn't let me walk resolutely, I soon became irritated with it. For one with my physique, a long, sturdy pickel was a necessity.

I've been told a cane should be carried so as not to strike the ground. But then it becomes luggage--and onerous to persons like myself who travel only if they can board the train emptyhanded. Life in its entirety is bound to be dreary if you carry a lot of baggage about. The less the better. Having spent each day of my thirty-one years more and more weighed down, I wonder why anyone would willingly take an extra piece of luggage on a walk.

As a rule I stuff any small article inside the front opening of my kimono, even if it creates a bulge above the sash. But I obviously can't do that with a cane. A cane's got to rest on the shoulder or hang from the hand, a bother in either case. Besides, a dog will probably mistake a cane for some barbaric weapon and begin barking furiously. Well, no matter how you figure it, I'm simply a beggar utterly out-of-place with a silk kimono, felt sandals, white tabi, and a cane.

You would think I might make the grade in European dress, then. But, in the seven or eight years since I quit school, I haven't worn any foreign clothes. It's not a question of dislike, far from it. With my yearning for simplicity and lightness, I would willingly wear European clothes. Unfortunately Mother never sent any.

Since I'm five foot six and a half inches tall, a suit ready-made in Japan wouldn't fit. And to have a tailor make one would surely cost more than a hundred yen, with the shoes, shirt, and other required accessories. I'm stingy about the necessities of life; I'd rather hurl myself from a cliff into the raging sea than throw away over a hundred yen on a suit of clothes.

Once, when I had nothing to wear other than a tanzen, I borrowed from my friend Y a complete foreign outfit: Suit, shirt, necktie, shoes, and socks. I attended a celebration in honor of the publication of Mr. N's book, an obsequious smile on my lips; but not a single acquaintance seemed favorably impressed with my appearance.

"The suit's different, but hardly an improvement."

"Doesn't agree with you."

"What! Again . . . ?"

Finally Y himself whispered to me in a corner of the room.

"Thanks to you, my suit's getting rapidly notorious. I don't think I'll be wearing it to go out anymore."

That's what happened the one time I tried wearing foreign clothes. Since I'm not about to waste a hundred yen on a tailor, it will probably be a long time before I try again.

For now,I have no choice but to wear the Japanese clothes on hand. As I said earlier, I have two lined kimonos, but I don't like the silk one. I prefer my patterned kimono. Anyway I'm comfortable in the poorest kimono, the sort a student might wear, and I would gladly spend the rest of my life living as a student. When I have a meeting scheduled for the next day, I fold my patterned kimono and place it under my mattress that night. I feel somewhat edgy, as though I were about to take the college entrance exam, but at least the kimono will appear to be pressed. It's a fine garment, one for special occasions. I breathe a sigh of relief as autumn wanes and I can begin going proudly about in this kimono.

Any transitional period creates problems for one so feckless as I; but the shift from summer to autumn, from unlined to lined clothing, is the most befuddling of all. I'm anxious to get into my patterned kimono, but the days are still too warm for a lined garment. Yet, the unlined clothing I persist in wearing makes me feel cold and desolate. It's only natural that I shiver and hunch my back in the face of a chilling wind, and so the criticisms start all over. I'm "advertising my penury" or "menacing as a begger" or "acting from spite." It's wrong to upset people by looking like Kanzan and Jittoku in the Zen paintings,[5] and I long to dress with the utmost propriety. The trouble is, I don't have a serge kimono, and that's what I need above all. To tell the truth, I do have one; but it's something I bought on the sly during my fashionable days as a high school student, with pale red stripes running both down

and across. When I awoke from the spell of fashion, I realized a fellow couldn't wear such a garment. It obviously belonged on a woman.

I must have been insane. There was no word for the kimono, be it gaudy or whatever. Could I have been so devoid of sense as to stroll languidly about in such a garment? I can only hide my face and groan. I never should have worn it. I can't stand the sight of that kimono, and I've left it a long time in storage now.

Last autumn I reduced the goods in storage--my clothes, blankets, and books--selling off the useless items and bringing home those I needed. I opened the large cloth bundle in front of my wife, embarrassed to reveal how slovenly I had been before our marriage. Out came an unlaundered yukata, then a rolled-up tanzen with a tear in the backside. Nothing was presentable. The garments had strange, gaudy patterns, and they were filthy and mouldy to boot. This was not the legacy of a solid citizen, and I cringed in self-contempt as I unpacked the bundle.

"I guess we can sell this stuff to some rag-picker," I ventured.

"No we won't!" My wife ignored the filth as she inspected each article. "Look! This one's pure wool! Let's remake it."

The serge kimono! I almost fled in horror. What was it doing here? It should have remained in storage. I had picked up the wrong article at some point. Blunderer!

"I wore it years ago. Rather flashy, wouldn't you say?"

I hid my embarrassment and spoke calmly.

"What luck! You don't have a single serge kimono, and now you can wear this."

I couldn't. During the ten years in storage, the kimono fabric had turned a strange color, something on the order of bean jelly, while the red stripes had faded to an unhealthy persimmon color. An old woman's kimono, and I looked away in disgust.

This autumn, about a year after the incident, I leaped out of bed one morning to get an early start on a story due at the publisher's that

very day. Cool weather was imminent, and the serge kimono lay neatly folded alongside my pillow. Washed and resewn, it was more presentable than before, but there was no mistaking the bean-jelly fabric and the persimmon colored stripes. With work to be done, however, I couldn't bother about my apparel. I dressed in silence and started writing without any breakfast. I finished slightly past noon and was just breathing a sigh of relief when an old friend unexpectedly dropped in.

His timing was perfect. We ate lunch, talked over various matters, and went out for a walk. Just as we were entering the woods at Inogashira Park, I suddenly remembered and let out a groan.

"Oh no, I shouldn't be out like this."

I stopped and my friend looked at me with concern.

"What's the trouble? Upset stomach . . . ?"

"No, nothing like that." I forced a smile. "It's an odd kimono, don't you agree?"

"Well . . . " His tone was somber. "It seems a bit flashy."

"I bought it ten years ago," I mentioned, moving forward a step or two. "It's a woman's pattern, I suppose, but the color has faded. . . ." I couldn't walk any further.

My friend was consoling. "Relax, it's not all that noticeable."

"You think so?" I was already feeling better.

We went through the woods, descended the stone steps, and strolled around the pond.

But the thing kept bothering me. Here I was, a big hirsute fellow, thirty-one years old, with some experience of hardship. How could I be ambling through this park in a pair of worn-out geta and a tasteless kimono? A stranger might take me for a hoodlum, and friends would assume I'm up to my old tricks again. They would go on regarding me as some oddball, as they've done for years, and wonder when I would grow up.

"How about going to Shinjuku?"

"Are you joking? If someone sees me around Shinjuku in this outfit . . . ." I shook my head.

"No one will think the worse of you."

"Count me out," I stubbornly insisted. "How about stopping at the teahouse?"

"I need a drink. C'mon, let's get out of here and head for town."

"They serve beer at the teahouse."

I didn't feel like heading for town--not in this kimono. Besides, my story needed revision, and that made me uneasy.

"It's too chilly at the teahouse," my companion countered. "I want to relax with a drink."

I had heard he was having a bad time of it recently.

"Well, Asagaya maybe. But not Shinjuku."

"You've an interesting place in mind?"

It wasn't especially interesting, but the tavern at Asagaya had its advantages. I had been there occasionally, and my credit was good till the next visit whenever I was a bit short. A strange outfit would not arouse suspicion; in fact, since there were no hostesses, one could pretty well ignore how he looked.

Dusk was beginning to settle when we left the train at Asagaya. As I walked along the street with my friend, my mood became unbearable. Reflected in the store windows, my figure was still reminiscent of Kanzan and Jittoku. The kimono seemed bright red, and I recalled the colorful undergarment an old man puts on to celebrate his 88th birthday. I was useless as a citizen in these difficult times, and my writing was unrecognized too. It was as though I had spent every day of the last ten years loitering about Asagaya in a pair of worn out geta. And today, I had punctiliously put on this red kimono, ever it would seem on the losing end of things.

"It's the same no matter how old you get. I wanted to do my best. . . ." I blurted out my grievances against life as we went along.

"Maybe that's what literature is all about. But it won't do, walking about in this outfit."

My friend looked at me sympathetically. "Right, you've got to dress properly. I've suffered plenty of setbacks at the office . . . ."

He worked for a company in Fukugawa, but he wasn't the sort to spend money on clothes.

"It's not merely a question of dress," I tried to argue. "It goes deeper. I wasn't educated properly. Take Verlaine's case, though . . . ."

What did Verlaine have to do with my red kimono? An abrupt shift of thought even for me, and I felt quite sheepish about the remark. But whenever I'm feeling down and out, I remember Verlaine's doleful countenance, and it helps. The very weakness of the man gives me the strength to keep going, and I recover the will to live. I firmly believe that true glory can emerge only after the most timid introspection. In any event I want to live on, to have a life bereft of means but filled with pride.

"Was I stretching things with that Verlaine business?" I asked. "Well, regardless of what I say, this kimono is out of the question."

I was at my wits' end, but my friend merely chuckled as the street lights came on. "Forget it," he counselled.

That evening at the tavern I struck my friend in the face--an awful blunder. For this, the kimono was surely to blame. Of late I had disciplined myself to laugh off just about anything, and even violence--up to a certain point--had no effect on me. But that night I acted. I believe the red kimono was entirely at fault, a good example of the frightening influence clothes can exercise over a man.

I was so depressed when we entered that I took a seat in the darkest corner, abjectly ignoring the tavern keeper as I drank my sake. My friend, on the other hand, was in exceedingly high spirits. He denounced all artists--Ancient and Modern, Eastern and Western--and ended up

lashing out at the tavern keeper. Now the latter, I knew, had a temper. On one occasion a young fellow had gotten out of hand, just like my friend, and begun to shout at the other patrons. Didn't he realize what the country was going through? the tavern keeper scolded, his face suddenly stern. He had then ordered the youngster off the premises, with a warning never to return.

Tonight my friend was defying the formidable tavern keeper, and I shuddered to think that both of us might be thrown out at any moment. Normally I would have added my own bombast to his, and to hell with the ignominy of getting tossed out of a tavern. But I cringed over my appearance. Pst! Pst! I quietly hissed, while keeping an eye on the tavern keeper. Sharper and sharper became my friend's tongue until we were just one step away from expulsion. Then a desperate course of action occurred to me--**the precedent of Ataka Barrier and the blow which** Benkei delivered in order to save Yoshitsune's life.[6] My mind was made up, and taking care not to hurt him while making the contact resound as much as possible, I slapped my friend twice on the cheek.

"Behave yourself! You don't usually act this way; what's the matter with you tonight? Behave!" I shouted loud enough for the tavern keeper to hear and was just sighing with relief that we would not be thrown out when Yoshitsune arose and came at Benkei.

"You won't get away with that!" he threatened.

The plot had gone awry. Poor Benkei stood up, utterly befuddled as he dodged blows left and right, and hoped that someone would come to his rescue. Finally the tavern keeper approached.

"You're bothering the other customers. Would you mind leaving?"

I wondered why this verdict was directed at me. I had started the fracas only as a desperate countermeasure on Benkei's part, yet no one seemed to realize it. To all appearances, I was simply the perpetrator of violence.

Filled with chagrin, I left my friend drunk and raving in the tavern. Once again, my appearance had failed me. If I had been in

proper dress, the tavern keeper would have understood my disposition to some extent, and I would not have suffered the humiliation of being driven away. Thus did Benkei reason as, with hunched shoulders, he trudged in his red kimono through the Asagaya Quarter. I want a serge kimono, I want something in which I can stroll about without a care. But I'm so stingy about buying clothes that my troubles will never end.

Assignment: How about a citizen's uniform?[7]

HOMECOMING (Kokyō, 1943)

The summer before last I went home for the first time in ten years. And this autumn I finally completed and sent to the editors of a certain periodical a manuscript of forty-one pages describing the visit. Shortly thereafter, Kita and Nakabata, both of whom appeared in the account, came to my humble house in Mitaka to announce that my mother was in grave condition back home. I had been expecting this sometime in the next five or six years, but the news still caught me by surprise.

My oldest brother Bunji was absent when I visited my home with Kita. However, I did meet my second brother Eiji, my oldest brother's wife, my nephews and nieces, my grandmother and my mother. Mother was sixty-eight and growing senile. She didn't appear to be steady on her feet, but she was certainly not ill. She would last five, six--or perhaps, I imagined in my zeal--as many as ten years.

Entitled "To Home and Back," my narrative represented an attempt to describe the visit as honestly as possible. For various reasons I had been able to remain only three or four hours, and as I concluded the sketch I spoke of my wish to see more. I had merely glanced at the area and still wanted to visit this place or that. When would I again be able to view those streams and hills of my native region? If my fears for Mother's health proved true, I could someday go back and look around. The thought was distressing, and I left off writing any more. But soon after dispatching the manuscript, the dreaded opportunity to return home had suddenly materialized.

"I'll take the responsibility again," Kita tensely declared. "And this time you must bring your wife and child."

The summer before last Kita had taken me alone. But now there would also be my wife and Sonoko, our infant girl of one year and four months. I have written in detail of Kita and Nakabata in "To Home and Back." Kita is a tailor in Tokyo, while Nakabata runs a dry goods store in my native town. Both have long been on friendly terms with my family, and one might expect them to have a hostile view of me.

I had erred five or six--no, the occasions were indeed beyond number. But even after my ties with the family were severed, these two men were the soul of kindness, offering assistance over the years and never once showing any dissatisfaction with me. Indeed, it was Kita and Nakabata who, after some discussion, had decided to risk my oldest brother's wrath and work out a plan whereby I had been able to visit my home after an absence of ten years.

"But will it work? I'll look like a fool if I get turned away at the door after bringing along my wife and child." I expected the worst--as ever.

Both men earnestly dismissed such a prospect, and yet I persisted. Evidently I was the sort of coward who must look before making the slightest leap.

"What about last summer? You mean to tell me neither of you heard anything from my oldest brother Bunji after that visit? How about you?" I asked Kita.

"As the family head," Kita cautiously replied, "your brother must consider all your relatives. He can hardly welcome you with open arms. I think everything will be all right if I go along, though. When I met your brother in Tokyo after our visit, all he did was shake his finger and call me a rascal. He wasn't the least bit angry."

"And how about you?" I turned to Nakabata. "You haven't heard from my brother?"

"Not a word. And he always had a sarcastic remark before about any favor I did you. This is the only time he hasn't said anything." Nakabata looked directly at me as he spoke, and I felt somewhat relieved.

"If it's not too much trouble, I'd like to have you both along. I must visit Mother, and maybe I'll get to see Bunji this time. I'd be grateful if you both came. And how about my wife? If I talk to her, there'll be complaints about needing a new kimono and whatnot. After all, this will be her first meeting with the family. Could you talk to her for me, Kita? If I say anything, she's bound to grumble."

This problem was settled more easily than I expected. I called my wife into the room, and Kita spoke to her of Mother's condition. When he mentioned that Mother should see her grandchild once, my wife placed her hands on the tatami and, with a bow, requested Kita's help.

Turning to me, Kita asked, "When can you leave?"

We decided on the 27th, a week from that very day.

Even though her younger sister came to help, that week in December was a busy one for my wife. So many new purchases had to be made that I almost went broke. And all the while Sonoko tottered about the house, oblivious to the fuss.

The express train that left Ueno Station on the 27th at seven o'clock in the evening was so crowded we had to stand the first five hours. During the trip Kita showed me a telegram that had been delivered to his house that morning. It was from Nakabata, who had left ahead of us. CONDITION WORSE. AWAIT DAZAI'S EARLIEST ARRIVAL. NAKABATA.

We reached Aomori the next morning at eight o'clock and transferred to the Ōu Line. At Kawabe Station we caught the train which ran between the apple orchards to Goshogawara. This year's harvest seemed an abundant one, and my wife's sleepy eyes widened as she marvelled at the beauty of the apples. She exclaimed how she had always wanted to see an orchard when the apples turned red. The trees were so close to the track that one could almost reach out and pluck the ripening fruit.

It was eleven o'clock when the train arrived at Goshogawara. Nakabata's house was here, and his daughter was at the station to greet us. We would rest awhile, allowing my wife and daughter an opportunity to change clothes. Then we would proceed to my family home in Kanagi. Kanagi was north of Goshogawara, about forty minutes away by the Tsugaru Line.

As we ate lunch, I heard the details of my mother's condition from Nakabata. It appeared that death was imminent.

It was strange that Nakabata should thank us for having come. "I kept worrying when you would arrive," he said, "and now I can rest easy. Your mother hasn't said anything, but she seems to be waiting anxiously."

The Biblical tale of the Prodigal Son came to mind.

When lunch was over and we were ready to depart, Kita addressed me in a firm voice.

"You had better leave your luggage here. Don't you agree? If you show up carrying a suitcase when your brother hasn't given his permission . . . ."

"I see."

Kita went on to warn that it wasn't clear yet whether I would even be allowed to see my dying mother. And so, except for Sonoko's diaper bag, all the luggage was left behind as we departed for Kanagi with Kita and Nakabata.

I grew more depressed by the moment. Everyone else was so good, not a wicked soul among them. All this unpleasantness had arisen because I had behaved irresponsibly in the past and lacked a certain discretion even now. I was a notorious literary hack living a hand-to-mouth existence.

"It's a beautiful place," my wife exclaimed as she gazed out the train window. "More cheerful looking than I thought it would be."

"Well, it doesn't look very cheerful to me."

The grain had been gathered, and the paddy fields appeared cold and bare as far as the eye could see. At the moment I felt no pride whatsoever toward the region of my birth. My earlier visit had been less an ordeal, so enlivening had been the effect of viewing scenes from my youth after a ten-year absence.

"Mount Iwaki's over there," I remarked. "They say it resembles Mount Fuji, so we call it Tsugaru Fuji." I forced a smile and went on commenting. "The low hills are called the Bonju Range. And there's

Bald Horse Mountain." All in all, a lukewarm, haphazard performance on my part.

"This is my native village. And if you go four or five lanes further. . . ." Thus does Chūbei, with a touch of elation, comment upon Ninokuchi Village in a moving episode from The Courier from Hell.[1] But Chūbei eventually goes into a rage, and my case is very different from his.

A red-tiled roof came into view beyond the paddy fields. "There!" I was about to add, "My house!" when I thought better of it. "My brother's house."

But it proved to be the roof of a temple.

"No, it's to the right . . . that large roof over there."

Mere babbling.

My young niece, along with a somewhat older pretty girl, was waiting for us at Kanagi Station. When my wife asked about the girl in a low voice, I replied that she was evidently a servant and we needn't bother greeting her. The summer before last I had taken a similar girl for my brother's oldest daughter and had greeted her politely with a low bow. To my chagrin I had later learned that she was a servant. This time I would be more careful.

The niece was my brother's second oldest daughter. She was seven years old, and I remembered her from the previous summer. "Shigechan!" I called. The girl smiled without hesitation. I was relieved to see that she didn't know of my past.

When we arrived at the house, Kita and Nakabata went immediately upstairs to my brother's room. I took my wife and daughter to the Buddhist Sanctuary where we offered a prayer to my ancestors. Then we withdrew to the Everyday Room, which was set aside for the family and close friends. We were sitting in a corner of the room when the wives of my two oldest brothers entered to greet us with warm smiles. Then my grandmother, eighty-five years old and leaning on the arm of a servant girl, came by to welcome us. Her hearing was impaired, but she

was otherwise healthy. My wife tried to make Sonoko bow, but the girl absolutely refused and tottered about the room instead, causing everyone to worry that she would fall.

My oldest brother emerged and passed straight through the room. His pale face had a stern look, and I was shocked to see how thin he was. He entered the far room and exchanged a few words with someone who had come to inquire about my mother. After the visitor left, my brother came back to the Everyday Room, and before I could say anything, he had recognized me, lowered himself to the tatami, and made a slight bow.

I stiffened as I bowed in return and asked his forgiveness for all the trouble I had caused. Then, turning to my wife, I exclaimed: "This is Bunji, my oldest brother."

Before she could bow, Bunji had turned and bowed to my wife. I almost panicked as he finished his greeting and quickly went back upstairs.

I suspected trouble. Only when he was in a bad mood did my brother act so decorously and bow so formally. Neither Kita nor Nakabata had returned from upstairs. Kita's made a blunder, I thought, and suddenly I felt so lonely and frightened that my heart began thumping.

Then my oldest brother's wife appeared. She was smiling as she asked us to come along. I stood up, greatly relieved. We would see Mother after all. Permission had been granted without any unpleasantness. This was hardly an ordeal, and maybe I had been too anxious all along.

As we crossed the hallway, my sister-in-law remarked that Mother had been hopefully awaiting our arrival for two or three days now.

Mother was in the ten-mat room built as a separate wing to the house. Lying upon the huge bed, she seemed no more than a withered leaf. But her mind was clear as she welcomed me home.

As my wife greeted her for the first time, Mother raised her head and gave a nod. And when I held Sonoko up and pressed the child's tiny hand against the shrivelled palm, Mother's trembling fingers closed in a

firm clasp. My aunt from Goshogawara stood by the pillow, smiling and brushing away her own tears.

There were a number of other people in the room, including two nurses, my oldest sister, Eiji's wife, and a woman called Granny, a distant family relative. When we withdrew to a neighboring room to exchange greetings, everyone mentioned that I looked the same as ever, or even that I seemed younger with the little extra weight. I didn't trouble about Sonoko, for she was relaxed and friendly with everyone. After we had all gathered about the brazier and begun conversing in whispers, the tension slowly disappeared.

Someone asked whether I'd be staying longer this time.

"Well, I'm not sure. It will probably turn out to be two or three hours just like my visit last summer. Kita said that would be long enough, and I'm going to do whatever he says."

"But you can hardly go back right away when Mother's so ill."

"I'll have to talk to Kita about whether to stay or leave . . . ."

"This doesn't involve Kita . . . ."

"Yes it does. He's been a great help."

"Perhaps he has. But surely he wouldn't . . . . "

"No, I'll talk to Kita because he's helped me. I won't make any mistakes if I follow his advice. He's still upstairs talking to my brother, and I wonder if some problem hasn't come up. After all, for the three of us just to walk in without permission . . . . "

"You needn't worry about that. Didn't Eiji send a special delivery letter telling you to come right away?"

"When? I didn't see anything."

"But we thought you came after receiving that letter. . . ."

"What a shame! The letter must have passed us on the way. Kita looks as if he's butting in."

I seemed to understand the entire matter now. We had not been very

lucky.

"What do you mean, a shame? Wasn't it better to get here a day early?"

I was disheartened. Poor Kita had closed his business and come along just so we would be welcome. And my brothers, since they were to contact me at the proper time, were understandably upset. Truly an awkward situation.

The young girl who had met us at the station entered the room and bowed towards me with a smile. I had blundered again--blundered this time for being overcautious. She was no servant, but the daughter of my oldest sister. I had known her until she was six or seven as a tiny girl with dark skin. She had changed, though, and was now graceful and slender.

My aunt smiled as she mentioned Mitchan's name. "And isn't she pretty?" my aunt inquired.

"Yes, she is," I answered gravely. "And her complexion's fair too."

Everyone laughed, and I felt more relaxed.

At that moment I happened to notice my mother in the next room. Her mouth hung feebly open, and her thin hand wavered in the air, as though she meant to chase away a fly. Something was wrong. I stood up and went to her side, and all the others gathered about her pillow with worried expressions.

"She seems in pain at certain moments," the nurse whispered. Then, as the nurse put her hand under the quilt and diligently rubbed my mother's body, I crouched by the pillow and asked where it hurt. Mother barely managed to shake her head. Overcoming my timidity, I told Mother she must live until Sonoko was bigger.

Granny suddenly took my hand and firmly placed it over Mother's. The aged hand was so frigid I tried to warm it in both of my own. Granny buried her face in the quilt and wept, and then my aunt and sister-in-law were also crying. I twisted my mouth, trying to control

my own feelings. After a time I could bear it no longer. I rose from Mother's side and went into the hallway.

When I entered the Western-style room off the hallway, it was cold and deserted. Two oil paintings, a poppy and a female nude, hung on the white wall, and a poorly done wood carving stood alone on the mantelpiece. A leopard skin was draped over the sofa, and the chairs, table, and rug were the same as ever. I walked about the room telling myself over and over what a sham it would be to weep now. A splendid performance, this retreat by the thoughtful son into the Western-style room to shed a private tear or two. Sheer pretense. A cheap movie oozing with consequence. You turning soft at thirty-three, old man? The maudlin act's gone far enough. Too late now to become a dutiful son. You were selfish, and got arrested for it. So quit faking the tears. Arms folded across my chest, I walked about the room, telling myself not to cry. But I seemed ready to break down at any moment. In desperation I smoked a cigarette, blew my nose, and persevered in various ways. In the end I did not shed a single tear.

I remained lying on the sofa even as it grew dark. The Western-style room, isolated from the rest of the house, seemed to be seldom used now. The light didn't come on when I threw the switch, and I remained alone in the darkness. Evidently Kita and Nakabata were still upstairs, while my wife and Sonoko remained in Mother's room. What was going on? And where would the three of us spend the night. Kita had suggested that Sonoko, my wife, and I pay a brief visit and then return to Goshogawara to pass the night at the home of my aunt. But with my mother's condition this serious, wouldn't it prove awkward to leave so hurriedly? I wanted to speak with Kita, but what the devil was keeping him? Was the discussion with my brother getting more and more involved? Perhaps, I mused, there was no place for me after all.

My wife entered the room. "What are you doing? You'll catch cold."

"And Sonoko?"

"She's asleep." My wife explained that the child had been put to bed in the antechamber to Mother's room.

"She won't be cold? You made sure she was warm?"

"Your aunt lent me a blanket for her."

"What do you think? They're nice people, aren't they?"

"Yes." Then a look of doubt crept into her face. "What's going to happen?"

"Don't ask me."

"Where do we stay tonight?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. I'm doing everything on Kita's advice. After ten years it's become a habit. If I leave Kita out and talk directly to my brother, there'll be trouble for certain. Don't you see, I have no rights here whatever. I can't even bring a suitcase."

"You seem a bit resentful toward Kita."

"Nonsense! I realize how kind he's been. It's just that I've got to go through him to reach my brother, and sometimes that complicates things. Everyone's so good, and I can't betray Kita in the least . . . ."

"Certainly not." Even my wife seemed to be getting the point. "When Kita asked me to come along, I thought it would be wrong to refuse. And he's gone through so much trouble to bring Sonoko and me here . . . ."

"That's quite true. Maybe one shouldn't undertake a favor lightheartedly, and I'm a particularly difficult case. I really sympathize with Kita this time. It would be terrible if everyone proved ungrateful after he's come this far. . . . We've got to figure out a way to rescue him, but we don't carry any weight here. And if we start meddling, the whole thing might collapse. We'll just have to wait and see what happens. You go back and rub Mother's feet. Don't think of anything else but her."

But my wife lingered on in the dark, with her head bowed. It would not do for us to be seen here, so I rose from the sofa and went into the hallway. This was the northern tip of Honshu, and the cold was severe. Not a single star was visible as I looked through the glass doors. The sky was simply dark and imposing. I suddenly wanted to get back to my

work. I'm not sure why, but I needed something to do. The feeling was very intense.

My brother's wife came looking for us.

"Heavens! What are you doing here?" she exclaimed. "Supper's ready. You come, too, Michiko."

My sister-in-law did not seem at all wary, and this was a hopeful sign. Perhaps I could avoid mistakes by discussing any problem with her.

She took us to the Sanctuary Room, where places had been arranged for some guests as well as for my two oldest brothers. Kita, Nakabata, and my aunt's adopted son were seated to one side, their backs toward the tokonoma; facing them from the opposite side were my two older brothers, Michiko, and myself.[2]

"Your special delivery letter crossed us on the way." These words slipped out the moment I noticed my second brother. He gave a slight nod in response.

Kita was normally a lively participant in any party, and for that reason the gloomy look on his face tonight was particularly marked. I was convinced something had come up.

At least the adopted son of my aunt became tipsy, and his high spirits enlivened the party somewhat. Stretching my arm, I poured sake for both my older brothers. I shouldn't worry any longer whether or not they forgave me. I didn't deserve forgiveness ever, and I wasn't going to become a sycophant and beg them. The only thing that mattered was whether or not I loved my brothers. How fortunate are those who love. It was enough if I merely loved my brothers. I should give up this lingering selfishness. And, putting down one drink after another, I kept up this foolish dialogue with myself.

With Mother ill, the household had become chaotic. Reluctant to complicate things further, Kita had decided to spend the night at my aunt's house in Goshogawara. I accompanied him as far as the station.

As we went along, I thanked him for his help. There would be no one to advise me now, and I was sorry to see him go. Did he mind, I was prompted to ask, that my own family was staying behind in Kanagi? He shrugged off the suggestion. It would not be right for me to leave my mother now. But even as he spoke, I sensed in him a certain coldness. I decided to ask whether it was presumptuous of me to remain even for two or three days.

"That depends on your mother's condition. Anyway I'll telephone tomorrow, and we can discuss your plans then."

"And you?"

"I'm going back to Tokyo tomorrow."

"That's a shame. You had to go back right away last summer, and this time I wanted to show you the hot springs around Aomori."

"Oh no, you can't be thinking about hot springs when your mother's so ill. She's much worse than I expected. By the way I'll figure out what I owe for the train ticket and pay you back later."

He mentioned the train fare so abruptly I was taken aback.

"Oh, come now. Don't bother about that. I'm buying your return ticket too."

"No, I'll figure it out exactly. And I'll have the luggage you left at Nakabata's sent to Kanagi first thing tomorrow. That will take care of my obligations."

He marched steadily on through the dark.

"The station's this way, isn't it? You needn't see me off. I mean it, I've . . . ."

"Kita!" I quickened my pace to catch up. "Was it something my brother said?"

"No, not at all. Kita's pace slowed, and he spoke to me very gently. "You needn't worry about that any longer. I feel very good tonight. When I saw you and Bunji and Eiji sitting next to one another,

I was so happy I almost wept. I don't want anything more, I'm satisfied. You know I never hoped to gain anything from this. I only wanted to see you three boys sitting together again. I'm happy. From here on, you've got to be strong, Shūji. You see, it's about time we old folks were leaving."

I saw Kita off and went back home. When I realized I could no longer depend on him and would have to deal directly with my brothers, I felt more frightened than happy. I was anxious lest I behave rudely and incur their wrath again.

The house appeared to be crowded with visitors, and I went around to the kitchen door. I was on my way to Mother's room when I suddenly noticed my second oldest brother sitting alone in the alcove by the Everyday Room. As though drawn by some fearful force, I went towards him and sat down. I felt an inward tremor as I asked, "Will she die?"

I knew it was a terribly abrupt question. Eiji looked about with a wry expression, and he said: "It's going to be a struggle this time."

My oldest brother appeared. He seemed perplexed as he walked about, opening and closing a closet door before sitting down cross-legged next to my second brother.

"It looks bad this time, really bad." And lowering his head, he pushed his glasses to the top of his brow and pressed a hand against his eyes.

I became aware at some point that my oldest sister had been quietly sitting behind me.

A POOR MAN'S GOT HIS PRIDE (Hin no iji, 1944)[1]

In the olden days of Edo there lived in a thatched hovel near the Wisteria Teahouse of Shinagawa a huge middle-aged man with a fearfully thick beard and glaring bloodshot eyes. Now certain intimidating men are so embarrassed by their own grandeur that they turn into weaklings, and despite his heavy eyebrows and superb countenance, Harada Naisuke was a sham. He would take a position vis-à-vis his fencing opponent, then shut his eyes and rush with a howl in the wrong direction. Every collision brought a cry of surrender from Harada and merely heightened his reputation as "the wall-breaker." When a young, wily pedlar concocted a tale of woe, Harada broke into tears and bought up the fellow's entire supply of clams. Scolded by his wife, his diet confined to clams for three days running, Harada developed a case of stomach cramps that caused him to roll about on the floor. He turned for comfort to the Confucian Analects only to lapse into drowsiness with the words, "To learn and . . . ."[2] Harada also had an abhorrence of caterpillars. The mere sight of one caused him to back off with a shriek, his hands spread wide. Flattery affected him almost immediately. He would fidget for a time, as if possessed by a fox, then hasten to the pawnshop so he could treat the sycophant to a meal.

On the final day of the year, when all debts were due,[3] Harada would begin drinking early in the morning and scare off the bill collectors by making as if to commit suicide. The thatched hovel, by the way, was not delapidated from any aesthetic preference; it had fallen naturally into ruin. Harada was an embarrassment to his relatives, a lazy pauper whose life was devoid of both grace and substance.

Fortunately there were two or three prosperous relatives whose help was available in a pinch. Most of this was spent on drink, and so Harada remained penniless and so desperate as to miss out on everything, be it the cherry blossoms of spring or the tinted leaves of fall. Now a man might do without cherry blossoms or tinted leaves,

but he cannot easily ignore the perennial approach of New Year's Eve. As the day drew near once again, Harada Naisuke imparted a strange look to his eyes and began his lunatic act. He fondled his long useless sword while emitting a wierd chuckle, a rehearsal of his tactic for making the bill collector uneasy. New Year's might be just two days off, but Harada neither cleaned the soot from the ceiling nor shaved his beard. Leaving his wafer-thin quilt on the floor, he muttered as though in a delirium, "Come on, if you dare." One more wierd chuckle from him, and his wife found the nightmare unbearable. Normally she could endure Harada's periodic lunacy, but this time she had to flee by the kitchen door and run to her older brother, a physician named Nakarai Seian who lived in a lane near the Kanda Myōjin Shrine. Weeping and complaining over her predicament, the wife begged for help. Though fed up with these recurring troubles, Seian still retained his sense of humor. "Every family should include one fool, just to keep in touch with reality," he laughed, and promptly wrapped ten koban coins[4] in a sheet of paper. Before handing the money over to his unfortunate sister, he wrote on the paper: "Pills for Monetary Use. Effective for Poverty and a Variety of Ills."

Far from rejoicing, Harada Naisuke stared morosely as his wife displayed the medicine. He declared in a hoarse voice that he would not accept the money, a remark so astonishing that the woman wondered whether her husband wasn't truly insane. But no, it was merely the prospect of good fortune, which brings out the worst in a counterfeit like Harada. Embarrassed by unexpected luck, such a man raises endless quibbles and grows irate, finally ridding himself of the prize or whatever.

"Good luck will do me in," Harada said. "I can't just go ahead and spend it."

He looked very solemn for a moment, then turned those bloodshot eyes upon his wife and asked whether she wasn't trying to murder him. With a grin he went on. "No, you're not a devil. I need a drink--that'll keep me going. Ah, the snow is falling, and I haven't conversed

with my genteel friends in some time. Why don't you take a turn about the neighborhood and invite them in. There's Yamazaki, Kumai, Utsugi, Ōtake, Iso, Tsukimura--invite those six. Wait! Tankei the priest makes seven. Hurry and invite them all. Pick up some sake on the way back. And whatever they've got for a snack."

So nothing was the matter after all. He simply felt such tingling pleasure he craved a drink.

Yamazaki, Kumai, Utsugi, Ōtake, Iso, Tsukimura, Tankei--all of them former samurai living in poverty in nearby tenements. For one of the men, this invitation was akin to gaining Buddha's compassion while in Hell. He would avoid the torment of remaining home on New Year's Eve. Smoothing the wrinkles of his paper garment, he poked his head in the closet in search of an umbrella and socks, pieced together an outfit of odds and ends, and left wearing his warrior jacket over a yukata. Another claimed to be protecting himself from a cold as he put on five unlined kimonos and wrapped an old cotton cloth about his neck. Still another turned his wife's kimono of padded silk inside out and rolled up the sleeves to conceal the shape of the garment. And one of them put on a short undergarment, surmounted by a riding skirt, and a summer haori with an embroidered crest, while yet another appeared with a quilted cloak hitched about his waist, his hairy shins exposed and cotton stuffing protruding from the torn hem of the garment. In spite of the strange dress, no one enjoyed a laugh at the expense of a fellow samurai. Instead, each of them exchanged stern salutations, and when the appropriate seating order was settled, old Yamazaki in his warrior jacket and yukata slowly approached Harada the host and thanked him liberally on behalf of the entire group.

Conscious of the tear in the paper sleeve of his own garment, Harada was nevertheless able to respond. "I'm glad to see all of you. I thought you would like to spend New Year's Eve watching the snow and having a drink away from home. This invitation is my apology for having ignored you so long. I'm happy you all came so readily. Please make yourselves comfortable."

As Harada was urging his humble fare upon them, one comrade, a

sake cup in his hand, started to tremble. Asked what was the matter, the poor fellow wiped his tears and replied with a melancholy laugh. "Oh, don't mind me. I haven't been able to afford any sake in a long time. I'm ashamed to admit I've forgotten how to drink."

The guest in a riding skirt edged forward on his knees. "That's right. I've had just two or three cups, and I'm feeling queer already. I'm not sure what to do next. I've forgotten how to get drunk."

This was evidently the general sentiment, and the room grew quiet as the men exchanged drinks hesitatingly. Eventually, however, the company became lively and jovial. The art of getting drunk had apparently been recovered.

At this point the host Harada brought out the paper in which the ten coins were wrapped. "I've a surprise to announce this evening. We all suffer through New Year's Eve, and myself most of all. The rest of you are strong-willed, and when your pocketbook's feeling the pinch, you give up drinking and live frugally. But I'm the sort who craves a drink all the more when broke. That's why I pile up a mountain of unpayable debts and confront the Eight Hells every New Year's Eve. In the end I abandon my pride as a samurai and run tearfully to one of my relatives for help. For once, I can welcome the New Year like anyone else, thanks to a gift of ten koban coins. But good luck would do me in if I kept it to myself. So I invited the rest of you to help me carouse."

The guests each breathed a sigh of relief at Harada's exuberant speech.

"Damn! If I had known that from the beginning, I wouldn't have held back. I was so worried a fee would be collected afterwards I ruined my drinking pleasure."

"Now that I've heard this, I'll drink up in hopes of sharing your good fortune. Who knows? I might go home and find a registered letter from an unexpected quarter."

"Fortunate the man with good relatives. It's just the reverse

with me. The relatives all take aim at my purse. Humpf!"

Harada felt immensely pleased as the guests became bright and lively. Wiping a few drips of sake from the edge of his beard, he exulted. "Ten koban coins feel heavy in your palm when you've been broke awhile. How about passing the coins from hand to hand? Since they only look like money, you won't find them abhorrent. See the writing on this white paper? It says, 'Pills for Monetary Use. Effective for Poverty and a Variety of Ills.' He's a real wit, that relative of mine. Here, pass them around and have a good look."

Harada virtually forced the coins, as well as the wrapping paper with its inscription, upon his guests. All were amazed by the weight of the coins and impressed with the clever inscription. As the money passed from hand to hand, one guest produced a verse, which he duly recorded with borrowed pen and ink. The portion of the wrapping left blank by the doctor was then filled in with a poem which read: "One takes his medicine for poverty in the light of the shimmering snow." Now the gaiety heightened, the cups went back and forth. Once the coins had made a complete circuit and were back on the floor beside Harada's knee, Yamazaki sat up straight and, with a knowing look that befitted his position as the group's senior member, expressed his gratitude to the host.

"Thanks to you, I have managed to forget my years and remain away from home longer than I expected." Having felt a cold coming on, he had wrapped his neck in old cotton quilting; nonetheless he threw out his chest and broke into a rousing song, his comrades marking the rhythm for him by tapping on their knees. When the performance ended, everyone revealed his samurai breeding--gathering the warming pans, tier boxes, pickling jars, and other utensils at hand and taking them to Harada's wife in the kitchen. In truth, departing birds leave no trace.

At the urging of his guests, Harada casually swept together the coins scattered by his knee. When he noticed a coin was missing, his face turned pale. He was a drinker, but a coward nonetheless--a man

whose timid anxiety not to offend belied a fearful countenance. Though startled over the missing coin, Harada would pretend nothing had happened and let the matter pass.

"Just a moment." Raising a hand, old Yamazaki mentioned that a coin was missing.

"Huh . . . . No, it's . . . ."

Harada appeared embarrassed, as if caught in a crime. "It's . . . huh . . . I spent one of the coins at the wineshop. When I passed them around earlier, there were only nine left. Nothing's missing."

Yamazaki shook his head stubbornly. "That's not true," he said. "When I held them in my palm, there were surely ten coins. The lamp may be dim, but there's nothing wrong with these eyes of mine."

The other guests agreed with Yamazaki. Together they stood up and, moving the lamp here and there, searched the room from corner to corner. But the coin was nowhere.

"There's only one thing I can do now--strip to the skin and prove my innocence." Though thin, shrivelled, and poor, Yamazaki clung to his shred of samurai honor with the obstinacy of age. To be falsely put under suspicion was an unending disgrace and affront. He removed his warrior jacket and shook it. Then he took off his threadbare yukata and, naked but for a loincloth, waved the garment with such a flourish that he seemed to be casting a net.

"You see for yourselves now, don't you?" His face was quite pale.

The remaining guests could hardly let the matter rest there. Ōtake stood up next and, after shaking out his summer jacket and short undergarment, removed his riding trousers. Though without a loincloth, he absolutely refused to smile as he turned the trousers upside down and shook them. By the time the priest Tankei finally rose, hairy shins exposed below the kimono tucked about his hips, the tension in the room had reached a high pitch. An angry frown spread over Tankei's face, as though he were suffering an attack of stomach pains.

"My time has come," he groaned. "I've composed a paltry verse: 'One takes his medicine for poverty in the light of the shimmering snow.' Yes, there's a koban coin in my kimono--no point in shaking out the garment. An unforseen disaster. It would be cowardly to explain . . . . Accept my life in . . . ." Leaving his speech unfinished, the priest stripped to the waist and fingered the hilt of his sword.

With Harada in the lead, the group rushed forward and seized his hand. "No one suspects you," they said. "Despite our poverty, we've all had a coin or two once in a while. We are your indigent comrades, and we understand why you would vindicate yourself in this manner. But isn't it foolish when no one suspects you?"

They tried to calm him, but Tankei only grew more bitter over his misfortune. In an excess of sorrow he gnashed his teeth and asserted himself again. "I shall carry your words of sympathy into the next world. How embarrassing to have a koban coin in my kimono at the very moment of this investigation. Though none of you suspect me, this embarrassment will not go away. Ridicule means utter defeat, and one cannot live without honor. No matter that I earned this koban coin and half again besides by selling my Tokujō[5] blade yesterday to Jūzaemon, the foreign goods dealer in Sakashita. As a samurai I'm ashamed to make this tardy and foolish sounding appeal, so let me die without a word. If you pity your poor friend, I ask that you go to the store in Sakashita after my death. Discover the truth. And look after my corpse."

Taking hold of his sword anew, he struggled against the efforts of his fellows to restrain him.

"Look!" Harada suddenly exclaimed, "there!"

The coin lay glinting directly under the lamp.

"How in the world did it get there?"

"It's dark by the bottom of the lampstand."

"Lost articles turn up in the most obvious places. One should

always behave properly and avoid being suspected of something." This from Yamazaki.

"Well, this coin certainly created an uproar. I'm sober now. Let's all have another drink," Harada urged.

The guests were helpless with laughter when Harada's wife suddenly squealed and came bustling in from the kitchen. "Look!" she exclaimed, thrusting a tier-box lid before the group, "the koban coin!" At the sight of the glinting metal the men looked at one another dumbfounded. The wife pushed a stray hair from her flushed brow and smiled in embarrassment. "When I brought out the kettle of boiled potatoes earlier, my husband forgot his manners and put the steaming lid directly on the floor. I picked up the lid and placed it beneath the tier-box, but the coin must already have been sticking to the underside. It was careless of me not to have noticed at the time. Anyway, I went ahead with serving you, and when I was washing the dishes afterwards, why . . . the coin was right here . . . ."

Now there were eleven coins. When the wife had finished her breathless tale, Harada and his guests could only give one another long, suspicious looks.

After a few moments old Yamazaki sighed. "Ah, another stroke of luck. Congratulations. It's not impossible that ten coins turn into eleven. It often happens. Do keep it."

Yamazaki was evidently growing senile, and the other guests were appalled by this drivel. However, they all felt it best to urge the coin on Harada.

"Take it. Your relative doubtless wrapped up eleven coins from the very beginning."

"Yes, didn't you say he was a wit? After showing you ten coins, he slipped an extra one in as a joke."

"Ingenious. I've never heard of a prank more clever. Keep the coin."

With such humbug each guest tried desperately to sway Harada; but,

for the one time in his entire life perhaps, the fainthearted tippler proved obstinate. "You can coax me all you want," he began, "I won't be made a fool of. I was uneasy over acquiring the coins when--you'll pardon me for saying this--my friends are poor. I felt guilty before Heaven too, and I couldn't manage without a drink. I invited you this evening, hoping to relieve myself of this cursed bounty, and now a second disaster ensues. Don't be so cruel as to force another coin upon a man who already has too much. Harada Naisuke may be poor, but there's still a particle of samurai spirit in him. He doesn't want money or anything else. Take back this coin--and the other ten along with it."

Here indeed was a strange manifestation of wrath. Offered the merest opportunity for gain, a spineless man begins perspiring in consternation and embarrassment. In an instance promising loss, however, he becomes a different person, marshalling fine-sounding arguments and working to bring the loss about. He listens to no one and so persists in quibbling that his inverse pride finally begins to stick out from behind. Harada insistently shook his head and, in a stammering voice, reiterated his position.

"I won't be made a fool of, so you can just leave off this bad joke about ten coins turning into eleven. One of you secretly added the extra coin, no doubt about that. Whoever it was couldn't bear to see Tankei suffer and came to the rescue. Yes, someone with an available coin played this cheap trick. My coin stuck to the lid of the tier-box, and the one by the lamp is a donation. It's senseless to force the coin on me. Do you think I'm so mercenary? A poor man's got his pride. Let me say again that I was distraught over the ten coins, and to have another one forced on me when I'm already disgusted . . . . Have the gods taken their leave that a samurai such as I should come to this? Even if it means committing seppuku, I must salvage my honor. I may be a fool and a drunk, but I'm not such a complacent dotard as to think coins give birth to offspring. Will the person who contributed this coin please take it back?"

When he straightened up and spoke austerely, this man with the

naturally fearful countenance was truly impressive. The guests cringed and remained silent.

"Come, speak up!" Harada declared. "I will become the lifelong servant of this fine compassionate man, whoever he may be. On New Year's Eve, when one regrets squandering even a mon,[6] he rescued Tankei by quietly leaving his koban coin by the lamp. Harada Naisuke is filled with admiration for such nobility. The man who silently and generously yielded his precious coin to rescue a comrade-in-poverty from suffering is here among us. I ask that he reveal himself without hesitation."

In a situation of this kind Harada Naisuke was useless. After he had spoken, it was all the more difficult for the benefactor to reveal his identity. The seven guests sighed and fidgeted while the matter remained unsettled. Having recovered from their intoxication, the guests were merely numb. Harada Naisuke, eyes bloodshot and glaring, urged again and again that the benefactor reveal himself until, with the rooster's call hearlding the dawn, he too went numb.

"It's been rude of me to keep you. If the man won't speak up, there's nothing we can do about it. I'm going to place this coin on the tier-box lid and leave it in the corner of the vestibule. If you depart one at a time, the owner of the coin can silently pick it up on his way out. Does this meet with your approval?"

The seven guests looked up at Harada as though greatly relieved. "That's a fine idea," they all replied. Indeed, for the dim-witted Harada it was a brilliant scheme--the sort of proposal for action to his own detriment that a weakling brings forth at certain moments.

Harada appeared pleased with himself as everyone watched him place the coin on the tier-box lid, then take the lid into the vestibule. "It's on the far right side of the step," he explained upon his return. "The area is dark, and those who don't own the coin won't be able to see if it's there or not. Would you leave now? And will the owner kindly search out the coin with his hand and take it away without any fuss. Old Yamazaki first, please."

After cautioning Yamazaki to close the sliding door to the

vestibule, Harada instructed the others to wait until the old man's footsteps could no longer be heard. Each of the remaining guests quietly left as his turn came.

Afterward Harada's wife went to the vestibule with a candle. The coin was no longer there.

"Who was it?" she asked with a shudder.

Harada looked at her sleepily and replied: "I don't know. Is the sake all gone?"

Though fallen, a samurai continues to excel. With this comforting thought, Harada's wife goes proudly to the kitchen and warms the sake.

THE MOUND OF THE MONKEY'S GRAVE (Saruzuka, 1944)[1]

Many years ago there lived in Dazai Town in the province of Chikuzen a wealthy man named Shirazaka Tokuemon, the owner of a wine shop run by the same family for generations. He had a daughter named Oran, a beauty so peerless that from her seventh or eighth year no man could look at her except in amazement and, recalling his own snivelling daughter, drink himself into a stupor. She was now sixteen or seventeen, and the neighborhood took on life from the spring-like radiance of her slender figure in a long-sleeved kimono. Even her own mother, in the midst of a conversation with the girl, would fall silent and gaze in admiration. Word of this fragrant blossom spread throughout the country, and many fell in love without even seeing her.

Our tale begins with the son of the owner of a thriving pawnshop in a neighboring section of town, a young and not uncomely fellow named Kuwamori Jiroemon. An honest man to all appearances, he had a beard, a large nose, and eyes that slanted in the outer corners. But there was nothing all that special about him, and perhaps it was merely the charming smile that enabled him, when he dropped in at the wine shop during a rain shower, to gain the unthinkable prize. Well, people remark that love is strange, foolish, and blind.

None of the parents knew of the affair, and Jiroemon sent a regular customer of his, a fishmonger named Denroku, to ask Tokuemon for his daughter's hand. Now Denroku had long been in debt to the pawnshop. Undertaking what Jiroemon could hardly do himself, the fellow might put off the day of reckoning on those interest payments of his. And since the other family ran a wine shop, he might drink to his heart's content for bringing about the match.

Buoyed at his prospects, Denroku shamefully decked himself in a ceremonial kimono from the pawnshop. Assuming such an air of distinction that strangers might wonder who he was, he marched onto

the premises of the wine shop. "Heh, heh," he chuckled, snapping his fan open and shut, and praising the rocks in the garden. Questioned somewhat warily, he smoothly responded that, no, he wasn't there on any errand. But eventually he hinted of Jiroemon's hopes. This was a wine shop, the other a pawnshop; and they were certainly not without some affinity for one another. After all, you went to the pawnshop before heading for the wine shop; and coming out of the pawnshop, you always went toward the wine shop. There was surely a kinship, and cooperation between the two businesses was like a priest and a doctor working to strengthen each other's calling, to the detriment of the pious patients, all of whom would finally die. Drawing upon resources utterly beyond him, Denroku pressed the case so vigorously that even the impassive Tokuemon was tempted.

"I don't mind as long as Mr. Kuwamori is the oldest son. By the way, what is his religion?"

"Let's see . . . . It's . . . ." The unexpected question caught Denroku unprepared. "I'm not certain. Probably Pure Land."

"In that case I must decline his offer." Tokuemon's mouth curled with a kind of malice. "My family's been in the Lotus Sect for ages, and in my own generation our devotion to St. Nichiren has become so deep that we recite the invocation to the Sutra both day and night. My daughter was brought up to recite the invocation without fail, and I can't allow her to marry into another religion. You should investigate such matters before you play the go-between."

"But, huh . . . . I'm . . . ." Denroku felt the cold sweat on his back. "My family's followed St. Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra for generations too. And we chant the invocation morning and night."

"What are you prattling about? I'm not marrying my daughter to you! As long as Mr. Kuwamori's Pure Land, the answer is no. I don't care how much money he has or how good-looking and clever he is. There's nothing worthwhile in that gloomy Pure Land Sect. Why, it would be an insult to St. Nichiren. You've got your nerve asking for

the daughter of a family so long devoted to the Lotus Sutra. Makes me sick just looking at you. Would you please get out."

So Denroku withdrew in utter defeat and went dejectedly back to the pawnshop. Jiroemon, however, took the news lightheartedly.

"Oh hell, that's no problem. We don't mind converting to a religion. The family's been agnostic for generations. Lotus or Pure Land--it's all the same to them."

Providing himself with a tasselled rosary, Jiroemon went home and began reciting the invocation to the Lotus Sutra. And his father and mother, though ignorant of what was going on, were so indulgent of him they did exactly as he urged--themselves reciting the invocation even as they gawked about and let out one long yawn after another.

Denroku went back to Tokuemon and proudly announced that Jiroemon, along with his family, worshipped St. Nichiren and practiced the invocation.

But Tokuemon was no fool. "A faith without root is a shallow thing. He's converted only to win Oran. Anyone can see that. Disgraceful! St. Nichiren himself would surely frown upon such conduct." Then he delivered the cruelest cut of all. "I've already made my decision. I'm marrying her into a certain family I know--a family of true believers."

Jiroemon was aghast when he heard the news. Immediately he wrote to Oran. "So you're going to marry some other Lotus believer, and Denroku hasn't accomplished a thing. Damn, I recited that disagreeable prayer and blistered my hands pounding a drum just for your sake. I've never been able to stomach this name of mine. I could easily be taken for Sano no Jirozaemon of the Eastern Province,[2] the man who got jilted wherever he went. If I encounter a fate such as his, I'll probably have to brandish my sword and take a hundred heads. I'm determined about this, so don't poke fun at me!"

Jiroemon had wept in composing this letter, and Oran replied in haste. "I'm puzzled by your words. About all I can say is, don't be

reckless with your sword. You'll be cut down before taking a single head, let alone a hundred. And if something happens to you, what will become of me? You shouldn't frighten me like this. It's the first I've heard of another engagement. You're too conscious of your nose and your slanting eyes. When you lose confidence, you begin doubting me on some flimsy pretext or other. Put your mind at rest. Where would I go? If Father intends that I marry another, I'll flee this house and come to you. A woman can be determined too, and don't you forget it."

Although Jiroemon smiled to himself, he still remained uneasy. Then, forcing a scowl, he began to shriek the invocation and wildly beat the drum, a genuine desire to cling to St. Nichiren having at length taken hold of him.

The following day Oran was summoned to the parlor, where her father solemnly informed her that she was engaged, by the providence of St. Nichiren, to one Hikosaku, a paper merchant from the Honmachi District. Instructed to enter thankfully into this eternal bond, Oran turned pale with fear. After a grateful word or two, she left the room and rushed up to the second floor. I must be brief, she scribbled. It's come, the day of decision is here. I'm going to flee. Come meet me this evening, I beg you. Then she ordered the clerk to run the message to the next district.

Jiroemon scanned the note and started trembling. He went to the kitchen for water, then sat with his legs crossed in the center of his living room. He knew he must reflect before taking the plunge, but not a single thought came floating into his head. He got up and changed his kimono, then went to the counting-room and started ransacking the drawers. Questioned by the watchman, he mumbled, "Er, nothing at all." Then, hurriedly thrusting some money into his sleeve, he rushed blindly from the shop. Halfway to Oran's he realized his clogs were mismatched, but fearing to return, he entered a store and bought the cheapest pair of straw sandals he could find. With nothing but the money in his pocket, he must be frugal; yet so thin were the soles of his new

sandals that he seemed thenceforth to be walking barefoot. He wept all the way to Tokuemon's rear gate, and when Oran flew straight from the house, seized his hand, and started off without a word, he simply followed her like one blind. He continued to sob as the sandals slapped against the ground.

Well, so far this has been the paltry tale of an undiscerning, rather foolish couple, but it's not over yet. The hardships of life still lay ahead.

That night they walked more than fifteen miles, the Sea of Hakata spreading out on their left like a vision. There was nothing to eat or drink, and every time they heard footsteps to the rear, their insides froze for fear they were being pursued. Staggering forward more dead than alive, they finally made their way through a field to the house of a man known slightly to Jiroemon. The field was bordered by some hills and was called Kanegasaki, The Promontory of Temple Bells, a name often prefixed by a formula suggesting the decline of the rich and the absurdity of life itself. As a cool reception was only to be expected, they were better able to endure it. Jiroemon spoke of how rude it was of him, but he handed over some money wrapped in paper all the same and received permission to spend the day in the backyard shed. Only now did they realize what poverty meant, and each of them sighed while gazing into the pale, haggard face of the other.

Then, patting the back of the tame monkey raised by her own hand, Oran sniffled as she held back her tears. Named Kichibei, this monkey had been so petted from infancy by Oran that he followed after her as she hurried with a man into the night. Even when Oran noticed him several miles later and tried to chase him back by scolding and throwing stones, Kichibei kept loping after them. Finally Jiroemon took pity and suggested that they bring him along. When she beckoned to him, the monkey raced happily into Oran's arms, then looked with mournful and blinking eyes into the faces of his two companions. When they settled into the shed later, he became their loyal servant, bringing their meals, shooing the flies away, and combing the loose hair of the

mistress. Though a mere animal, he strove to console the lonely couple, performing additional services that were hardly necessary.

They had rejected the world, but could not live forever in a narrow shed. Though it took most of the leftover cash, they had the coldhearted acquaintance build them a cottage on a nearby plot of land. The couple moved in with their monkey-servant and began cultivating a garden barely sufficient to supply the table with vegetables. When time permitted, Jiroemon went to chop tobacco while Oran remained behind spinning her skeins of cotton. The foolish and brief dream of young love which had induced them to flee house and kin had come to nothing. They barely survived. Theirs was just another poor home, where husband and wife find nothing appealing in one another. When a clatter came from the kitchen, they would both stand up with an angry look, knowing that mice or similar pests were soiling the red beans once again. To them, neither the autumn leaves nor the spring violets were of interest.

Kichibei, seizing the opportunity to repay the master for his kindness, would go into the nearby mountains to gather oak branches and fallen pine leaves. Back home, he would squat before the stove and, turning his face away from the smoke, kindle a fire with rapid strokes of his persimmon-dyed fan. Presently a cup of lukewarm tea would be ready for his benefactors. Kichibei showed a touching concern for their poverty in other quaint ways too. He would eat only a morsel for supper, then roll over and sleep as if he were content. When Jiroemon finished his meal, the monkey would massage the master's shoulders and rub his legs. Then he was off to the kitchen to help Oran clean up and to lower his head in shame whenever he broke a plate.

With this monkey as their one consolation, the couple sometimes forgot their wretched fate. In the autumn of the year after they had eloped, a baby named Kikunosuke was born, and peals of laughter came rolling from the thatched hut. Life had once again become worth living. They fussed over the child's every movement. And Kichibei too leaped delightedly about whenever the infant opened its eyes or

let out a yawn. Kichibei would put into the baby's hand the nuts and berries he gathered in the mountains, even though Oran scolded him for this. But the monkey so marvelled in the child that he rarely left its side, peering into the sleeping face, or running to fetch Oran--he would pull on the hem of her skirt--whenever the baby woke up crying. On these occasions he would gesture to her that it was nursing time, and as she gave the infant her breast, he would sit on folded legs and watch in amazement.

The parents were amused that Kikunosuke had such a fine keeper. But if the poor child had been born a year earlier in the Kuwamori house, he would have slept on silk and suckled from two or three different nursemainds. Well-wishers would have sent him a veritable mountain of swaddling clothes, and guardians tended him so carefully that not a single flea would have touched his jewel-like skin. But the birth occurred a year late, and so he slept in a thatched hut unprotected from wind and rain, with nuts and berries for playthings and a monkey as his keeper.

Forgetting how their own rash love was at fault, Jiroemon and Oran took pity on the child. Yes, they were poor at the moment, but before the child became aware of things, they would somehow or other make their fortune and return home, to set things right. Excited for his child's sake, Jiroemon went to a neighbor and asked what sort of businesses were thriving at present.

The hut was now bustling with activity. Kikunosuke grew plump and jolly, and like his mother he fairly shone with beauty. Kichibei would gather autumn grasses and playfully dangle them over the infant's face. The parents went into the field to dig radishes confident their child was in good hands.

They looked forward to a windfall that very autumn, their hopes encouraged by the news that a local farmer had devised a profitable scheme of some kind. One clear day late in the season, they went to question the farmer, leaving Kichibei to watch the house. The monkey realized it was almost time for the infant's daily bath, so he stood

up with a knowing look, lit a fire in the stove, and brought the water to a boil--just as he always observed the mistress do. When bubbles began to rise, Kichibei poured the steaming water into a basin to the very rim. Without bothering to test the water, he stripped Kikunosuke naked and lifted him ceremoniously. After gazing at the face and gently nodding several times in imitation of Oran, he plunged the child into the water.

"Waa!" The parents, hearing the shrill cry of the scalded baby, glanced at one another and came running back to the house. The baby lay submerged in the basin, and Kichibei stood there fidgeting. Oran scooped up the child, but could not bear to gaze upon the corpse, already crimson as a boiled lobster. She fell down, shrieking that she be sacrificed in place of the child, if only she could see his lovely face once more. Then she seized the stunned Kichibei and, despite her frail physique, raised a heavy log over his head, ready to kill him as the child's assailant. Jiroemon too was crushed and his tears never ceased; but with manly generosity he yielded to fate and took the log from Oran. Her wish to slay the monkey was quite natural, but vengence on behalf of their lost child would only harm his chance for salvation. Kichibei had only meant to perform a service. His animal intelligence was limited, however, and nothing could be done about that. Even as he reasoned with Oran, the master sobbed. And Kichibei wept too as he gratefully brought his hands together in one corner of the room. When they noticed the weeping monkey, the couple became even more distraught than before. What sinful deed from a previous existence had wrought this tragedy, they wondered, utterly bereft of the will to go on.

After burying Kikunosuke, both Oran and Jiroemon became ill and took to bed. Kichibei maintained a constant, sleepless vigil over them, and every seventh day after the death of Kikunosuke, he visited the grave to offer a memorial bouquet of flowers picked by his own hand.

A hundred days after the death, when Oran and Jiroemon were somewhat better, Kichibei went abjectly to the grave and made a final offering of water. Thereupon he took his own life, thrusting the point

of a bamboo spear straight through his neck.

Suspicious about the monkey's absence, Oran and Jiroemon hobbled on their canes to the grave of Kikunosuke. One glance at the monkey's wretched corpse and they realized what they had lost. With Kikunosuke gone, they had come again to rely on Kichibei as their one consolation. Now they could only lament as they gave him a proper burial, heaping up alongside their infant's grave a mound in honor of the monkey.

They abandoned the world for religion . . . . But what do I say next? Did they invoke the Lotus Sutra or the Buddha Amida? In Saikaku's story it is written that "the invocation to the Sutra was chanted without pause and a voice reciting the Scripture never ceased." This tale of woe will break down if Tokuemon's stubborn advocacy of the Lotus Sutra asserts itself at this point. An awkward problem, indeed! Well, anyway . . . to go on living in the hut was depressing, and making their way through the autumn grass, the couple set out for an unknown destination.

TAKING THE WEN AWAY (Kobutori, 1945)[1]

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS AN OLD MAN WITH A LARGE CUMBERSOME WEN ON HIS RIGHT CHEEK.

This old man lived in Awa on the island of Shikoku, at the very foot of Sword Mountain. At least I think he did, but the book doesn't say. Evidently the episode of the old man's wen first appeared in the Tales of Uji, but I can hardly look up things here in the family bomb shelter. But there are other stories I know about. The tale of Urashima, which I plan to tell next, appeared first in the Nihon Shoki, as a real story too. Even in the Manyōshū there's a chōka about him, and a similar legend has been transmitted in such documents as the Tango Fudoki and the Biographies of the Taoist Immortals.[2] More recently there's the play by Ōgai, and didn't Shōyō set the tale to music for dancing? Anyway Urashima often appears in Nō, Kabuki, and the stylized dances of the geisha.

I give away books after reading them, or else I sell them. So I've never had a library of my own. At a time like this I must go around looking for books I read long ago, with only dim memories to guide me. Unfortunately such excursions are difficult under present circumstances. So I squat in the shelter with a single picture book open on my knees, ready to give up these scholarly queries and let the story unfold in accord with my fancy. Perhaps the tale will be more lively if told that way.

His obstinate soliloquy over, this weird excuse for a father crouches in a corner of the shelter and, as he turns over the pages, conceives a story wholly at odds with the one in his illustrated book.

ONCE UPON A TIME . . .

There was an old man who loved his sake. But when he drinks at home, it's usually by himself. Does he drink because he's lonesome? Or is he lonesome because his family despises him for drinking? A

mere pedantic inquiry, on the order of trying to determine which of two clapping hands makes the noise. In any event, when he's at home, the old man always pulls a long face.

Not that his family is malicious. Almost seventy years old, his wife is still in good health, with clear eyes and a straight back. They say she was very attractive. And she has diligently done the housework, a quiet woman from her youth on.

The old man cheerfully reports that spring has arrived and the cherry trees are in bloom. "Oh?" the wife replies, as if she doesn't much care. Then she asks the old man to move aside, she's trying to get the place clean.

The old man pulls a long face.

He has one son, close to forty years old now. The conduct of this son is almost uniquely impeccable. He neither drinks nor smokes; furthermore, he never loses his temper, never laughs or rejoices. He goes silently about his work in the fields, and the people in the vicinity can only revere him. Known far and wide as the "Saint of Awa," he refuses to shave and to seek a wife, as if he were virtually a stick or stone.

Exemplary--that's the word to describe the old man's family.

The old man is unhappy all the same. Though hesitant to offend his wife and son, he cannot resist the urge to drink. But drinking at home only makes him more miserable. Not that his wife and saintly son scold him for drinking; on the contrary they eat their supper in silence, the old man sipping his wine next to them.

"By the way, you know what . . . ?" When tipsy, the old man wishes to talk so badly that he blurts out the most inconsequential remarks. "Spring's here, the swallows are back."

Better if he hadn't said anything.

His wife and son remain silent.

"One moment of a spring evening--isn't it worth a fortune in gold?" Again, he mutters something better left unsaid.

"I'm much obliged for the meal. If you'll excuse me . . . ." Having finished, the Saint of Awa utters the usual courtesies and leaves.

The old man wearily puts his cup aside and asks for supper. Things usually turn out this way when he drinks at home.

ONE BEAUTIFUL MORNING HE WENT TO THE MOUNTAIN TO GATHER FIREWOOD.

In fine weather this old man enjoys going up Sword Mountain in search of firewood, a gourd-bottle at his hip. When he is somewhat weary from gathering wood, the old man sits down on a rock, crosses his legs, and makes himself comfortable. Then, with an authoritative grunt, he speaks aloud of the fine view and begins imbibing from the gourd-bottle. A look of contentment spreads over his face; he is a different person drinking away from home.

The only thing that doesn't change is the large wen on his right cheek. One autumn about twenty years ago, as the old man was passing the milestone of his fiftieth year, a feverish sort of itch spread over his right cheek. Very gradually the cheek began to swell. Even as the old man rubbed, the protuberance grew larger, and he finally conceded with a rather wistful laugh, "Well, now I've acquired a fine grandson."

The Saint of Awa gravely pointed out that the birth of children doesn't occur from the cheek. With a straight face the wife inquired, "It won't kill you, will it?" Aside from this question, she showed no interest in the wen.

The neighbors, on the other hand, have made a number of sympathetic inquiries. Where in the world did such a wen come from? Does it hurt? Isn't it an annoyance? The old man laughs and shakes his head. An annoyance? Why, he regards the wen as a darling grandson, the sole consolation of his lonely existence. Washing his

face each morning, he is especially careful to use only the cleanest water on the wen. For drinking bouts on the mountain such as today's, the old man finds the wen an indispensible companion. He gently touches it as he sits comfortably on the rock and pulls at his gourd-bottle.

"Ain't nothing to be afraid of," he tells himself. "No sense holding back. Everyone ought'a get drunk now and then. After all, sobriety has its limits. Oh, Saint of Awa, you put me to shame. I didn't recognize you. Such greatness, really!" The old man murmurs his resentments to the wen, then clears his throat with a forceful hawking.

SUDDENLY THE SKY GREW DARK, THE WIND AROSE, AND THE RAIN BEGAN TO POUR.

A sudden evening shower is uncommon in the spring. But one must realize the weather is erratic on the higher elevations of Sword Mountain. The mountain grows hazy in the rain while pheasants and quail speed like arrows toward the sheltering woods.

The unperturbed old man is smiling. He won't mind if the rain cools off his wen.

He remains comfortably perched on his rock, gazing at the scene. But the rain comes down harder and harder as though it will never end. So the old man rises, grumbling about the cold. Shouldering the gathered firewood, he sneezes heavily and creeps into the woods.

The woods are thronged with birds and animals seeking shelter from the rain. "Oh, sorry. Beg your pardon." The old man cheerfully greets each creature--the monkeys, the rabbits, the mountain doves--as he moves deeper into the grove. Finally he crawls into a large hollow at the base of a wild cherry tree.

"Here's a fine parlor!" he exclaims, then turns to the rabbits. "How about it? Make yourselves at home. No upstanding old lady or saint is coming here."

Despite his high spirits the old man is soon fast asleep and snoring softly. And thus it goes--a drunk will spout nonesense, but he generally turns out to be harmless.

AS HE WEARILY WAITED FOR THE EVENING SHOWER TO PASS, THE OLD MAN FELL ASLEEP. EVENTUALLY THE CLOUDS MOVED ON, AND THE MOON SHONE BRIGHTLY OVER THE MOUNTAINS.

A spring moon, already in the final quarter, drifts in a pale-green watery sky, shedding its light through the entire woods like a shower of pine needles. The old man sleeps peacefully on even as the bats flutter out from the hollow trees. Finally he awakes, surprised to see that night has fallen.

"Now I'm in for it," he groans. There floats before his eyes the somber face of his wife and the austere countenance of the saint. He has gone too far. They haven't scolded me yet, but coming home this late is certain to be unpleasant. H'm, any sake left? And he starts shaking the bottle-gourd. There's a faint plashing at the bottom, and he swills the wine without leaving a drop. "Ah, the moon is out. One moment of a spring evening . . . ." he mutters in his drunkenness. Then he crawls from the hollow.

OH, WHAT NOISY VOICES. WHAT A STRANGE SIGHT. WAS HE DREAMING?

Look! On a grassy clearing in the woods, a wondrous, otherworldly spectacle is taking place . . . . At this point the father halts his narration to ask himself what a demon is. From childhood on I've seen more than enough illustrations of them, he muses; but I've not had the privilege of meeting one in the flesh. Apparently there are various kinds of demons, those despicable creatures we call "bloodsuckers" and "cutthroats" for example. But the book reviews will speak of the "demonic talent" evidenced by certain men of letters, and then I'm confused. Surely this strange, sinister phrase isn't meant to warn society against Mr. So-and-so's talent for meanness. In extreme instances the review will employ that crude phrase, "literary demon." I marvel at how furious the author must be, but this doesn't seem to

be the case. Despite the ugliness of the epithet, Mr. So-and-so is rumored to be secretly pleased rather then annoyed. In my stupidity I'm more confused than before.

I've never been able to fathom why our God of Fine Arts should be a red-faced demon in a tiger-skin loincloth who wields a misshapen club of steel.[3] In my humble opinion one should avoid such crabbed terms as "demonic talent" and "literary demon." But demons of every kind do exist, and my resistance to these terms doubtless comes from inadequate observation. If I checked the Japan Encyclopedia at this moment--as those generally considered erudite would do--then I too would become a learned scholar respected by young and old, by women and children. With a knowing look I would immediately discourse on demons. But I'm crouched here in the shelter, and my verdict on demons must derive from the illustrations in the storybook lying upon my lap.

Look! There in the grassy clearing deep in the woods. Ten or more strangely shaped . . . would you call them "people"? . . . or "creatures"? In any case these huge red beings were sitting in a circle enjoying a moonlit feast, and each of them indubitably wore a tiger-skin loincloth.

At first the old man is startled. Though worthless when sober and devoid of self-respect, a drinking man often demonstrates considerable courage in his cups. At the moment the old man feels gay. What's so frightening about that severe old woman and the impeccable saint? The old man has come upon a grotesque scene, but there is no indication that he's unnerved by it. He crawls from the hollow, his feverish eyes on the marvelous banquet before him.

They seem contentedly drunk, the old man murmurs. Then a wondrous feeling of joy surges within his breast. A real drinker is probably not self-centered; just to watch a stranger getting drunk makes him feel good. There's something benevolent in him that would toast the happiness of a neighbor. This drinker too wishes to get high, and so much the better if his neighbor will join him. Even the

old man realizes these things. He perceives that the huge red beings before him, neither human nor animal, are members of that frightening tribe called "demons." Just one tiger-skin loincloth would make that clear. But the demons are contentedly drunk, and the old man too is drunk now. Between them a sense of harmony will arise without fail.

Still on his hands and knees, the old man looks more closely at the marvelous moonlit banquet. Yes, these are demons, but ones without the perverse temperament of a "bloodsucker" or a "cutthroat." They have fearful red faces, but the old man can tell they are friendly demons and utterly without guile. In this assessment he is generally on the mark. These are gentle demons, the very opposite of devils, with no dangerous weapons such as a steel club. Save for their ignorance, they might well be termed "The Anchorites of Sword Mountain." These recluses are wholly unlike the famous Seven Sages who withdrew to the Bamboo Grove embarrassed by their learning. Incidentally, I've heard that a sage, as the graph for the word shows, is anyone who lives among the hills. If we accept this, then we should award the title of sage to these recluses of Sword Mountain in spite of their ignorance. It's entirely appropriate that, rather than demons, we call these large red beings making merry at a moonlit banquet sages or hermits.

Admittedly, their behavior indicates a painfully low level of intelligence. They cry out inarticulately, they laugh and slap their knees. Some of them stand and leap wildly about, then bend over double and roll from one end of the circle to the other. The movements are suggestive of a dance, but a dance so primitive as to show that terms like "demonic talent" and "literary demon" are pointless. Why, I wonder, should an ignorant, unaccomplished demon be God of the Fine Arts?

The old man is so flabbergasted by this moronic dance he cannot keep a straight face. Should he give them an example of his own skill?

THE OLD MAN IMMEDIATELY LEAPED OUT AND BEGAN PERFORMING ONE OF THE DANCES HE LOVED SO MUCH, AND THE WEN ON HIS CHEEK FLOPPED BACK AND FORTH IN A CRAZY AND AMUSING MANNER.

A drink or two has given the old man courage. Moreover, he's beginning to feel at home with the demons. He breaks into the circle, not in the least afraid, and begins the Dance of Awa in which he takes such pride.

> The young women in Shimada coiffures--
> It's no surprise
> Red cords about their sleeves
> Tempt old women in wigs.
> Come, come, daughter-in-law,
> Put on your straw hat.

The words are in Awa dialect, and the old man sings them beautifully. The demons are delighted. They give forth a strange staccato call, then roll on the ground laughing, weeping, and slobbering.

> Across the great valley filled with stones,
> Over the high mountain of bamboo grass . . . .

The old man has lost all restraint. His voice ascending another octave, he dances on and on.

THE DEMONS WERE GREATLY PLEASED. "COME EVERY MOONLIT NIGHT AND DANCE FOR US. BUT WE'LL NEED SOME PRECIOUS THING OF YOURS AS A PLEDGE."

The demons take council, whispering to each other. Doesn't the wen glimmering on the old man's cheek seem a precious jewel? They fatuously assume the old man will return if they hold the object as a pledge. And so, they tear it off his cheek. A stupid act, no doubt about it; but, having lived deep in the mountains for so long, they apparently take the wen for some magical charm. They tear it off cleanly, without making a mark on the cheek.

The old man is horrified. "No! Not my grandchild!"

The demons give a joyful shout of triumph.

MORNING. THE ROAD GLISTENING WITH DEW. HIS WEN TORN OFF, THE

OLD MAN DESCENDED THE MOUNTAIN LISTLESSLY STROKING HIS CHEEK.

The old man is disheartened now that the wen, the one companion with whom he could talk, has been taken from him. Still, his cheek has been relieved of a burden, and the morning breeze feels pleasant on his skin. Is there both a loss and a gain, then? A balance of debit and credit? To dance and sing to the heart's content after so many years--isn't that a gain? He comes to the foot of the mountain and is heading home with a feeling of relief when he suddenly encounters the saintly son on his way to work in the fields.

Removing his hood, the saint gravely bids his father good morning.

Perplexed, the old man responds with a grunt.

Then they pass one another by.

The saint has noticed that the wen is gone. He is somewhat baffled, but to speak discerningly about the appearance of either parent goes counter to the Saintly Way. So he passes on without a further word, pretending not to notice.

When the old man reaches home, his wife calmly welcomes him and begins to prepare his breakfast. "The miso soup is cold," she mumbles, but of his absence during the night she makes no mention.

"That's all right. Don't bother heating it," the old man says. As he sits down to his breakfast tray, he feels very small and sheepish. While eating the meal served by his wife, he cannot but feel an overwhelming desire to describe the wondrous events of last night. But so cowed is he by the old woman's stern manner that the words get stuck in his throat. Head bowed, he eats his meal in glum silence.

"So the wen finally withered away."

That's all she says. And the old man, the urge to speak having passed, simply nods.

"I guess," she casually goes on, "the water oozed out when it broke."

He nods again.

"It'll swell up again if water collects."

"I suppose."

In truth the wen is of little concern in the old man's house.

In the neighborhood there lives a second old man with a troublesome wen, this one attached to the left cheek. This old man hates his wen, for it has kept him from getting on in the world. He looks in the mirror countless times every day and sighs over the scorn and contempt the wen has inspired. Hoping to submerge the thing, he once grew a full beard. But, alas, the tip of the wen, vivid as the dawning sun on New Year's Day, appeared among the white waves of his beard--one of the truly wondrous spectacles of the world.

The second old man is no mean figure, both in his physique and bearing. He has a sturdy body, a large nose, and piercing eyes. Dignified in speech and conduct, he seems to possess his share of good sense and discrimination. As to clothes--well, he wears the best. He also appears quite knowledgeable and is rumored to be far more wealthy than the old tippler. People in the neighborhood treat him with respect, addressing him always as "Master" or "Sir." He would be an upright citizen in every way, except for the troublesome wen on his cheek which depresses him both night and day.

This old man's wife is just thirty-five years old. Though far from stunning, she has fair skin, a plump figure, and is ever laughing merrily. She is, in fact, something of a coquette. The couple have one daughter, eleven or twelve years old, and this girl is a real beauty. She is also headstrong, but gets along with her mother nonetheless. The two of them are always laughing hysterically over something or other. So, in spite of the old man's scowling face, the home generally gives an impression of gaiety.

"Mother, why is Father's wen so crimson--like the head of an octopus?"

The pert daughter tells her sentiments without any hesitation.

Her mother, far from scolding, titters momentarily and responds with a jest of her own.

"Well . . . . But to me it looks like he's hung one of those fish-shaped wooden drums from his cheek."[4]

"Shut up!" The old man glowers at his wife and daughter, then springs to his feet and strides off. In one of the darker rooms of the house, he examines his face in a mirror. "Hopeless," he grumbles, his anger giving way.

He has decided to apply the knife, even at the risk of death, when he hears that the old tippler's wen has suddenly disappeared. One night he steals over to the thatched hut and hears the tale of that wondrous moonlit night.

WHEN HE HEARD THE STORY THE OLD MAN WAS OVERJOYED. "WELL, WELL, THEN I TOO CAN SURELY HAVE THIS WEN REMOVED."

He is encouraged, and as fortune would have it, the moon is out that very night. Mouth set in a grimace, eyes glaring, he sallies forth like a warrior heading into battle. Come what may, I will perform a splendid dance and impress those demons tonight, he vows. If by some chance they're not impressed, I'll slaughter every last one of them with this iron-ribbed fan of mine. They can hardly amount to much, those foolish drunken demons.

Either to subjugate the demons or perform a dance for them--for one purpose or the other, this fellow bounds off toward Sword Mountain, shoulders set square, an iron-ribbed fan in his right hand. But a grim determination in the artist hinders his performance. Owing to the old man's very ardor, the dance will fail utterly.

Marching solemnly into the circle of demons, he announces himself as their "humble servant." Then he flips open his iron-ribbed fan and gazes up toward the moon. After pausing momentarily as if he were some great, silent tree, the old man starts to move his feet ever so lightly and to proclaim in slow, groaning tones:

A priest am I
Performing my late spring meditation
By the Straits of Naruto.
It pains me to realize
That in this locale
The entire Heike Clan met its end,
And every evening
I come to this shore
To read the holy sutra.
As I wait among the rocks of the dune,
As I wait among the rocks,
A boat--whose I do not know--
Goes rowing with a plash of oars
Amid the white-capped waves.
How still the inlet this evening!
How still the inlet this evening!
But yesterday has passed,
Today draws to an end,
And so too will tomorrow.[5]

He performs several slow graceful steps during this recitation; then he looks rigidly toward the moon once more.

THE DEMONS WERE DUMBFOUNDED. THEY ROSE ONE AFTER ANOTHER AND FLED INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE MOUNTAIN.

"Wait!" The old man runs after the demons, calling in a pathetic voice. "I can't let you flee now."

"Run! Run! It's that demon-queller, the bearded Shōki!"[6]

"No! I'm not Shōki!"

Catching hold of a demon, the old man pleads in desperation. "Remove this wen! Please . . . I beg of you!"

"What? . . . Return the wen?" The startled demon mistakes the old man's request totally.

"Ah-hah! You mean the treasure we've been keeping for the old man. Well, you can have it if you want it so bad. Spare us the dance, though. A perfect drunk simply shattered! Let go of me, please. We'll take our drinking somewhere else. Please, please, let me go . . . . Hey, someone give this loony the wen we got the other day. He wants it."

SO THE DEMONS ATTACHED THE WEN THEY HAD BEEN KEEPING TO HIS RIGHT CHEEK. THERE, THERE! THE OLD MAN NOW HAD TWO FLOPPING WENS AND THEY WERE HEAVY. HE RETURNED TO HIS VILLAGE IN SHAME.

Truly a pathetic ending. Punishments in fairy tales are generally imposed upon evil-doers; but this man didn't do anything particularly evil. Didn't his dancing take on an eccentric quality merely because he was too anxious? And, come to think of it, there was no villain in his home. The old tippler did nothing wrong, either. Nor his family and the demons on Sword Mountain, for that matter. That is, there is no instance of wrongdoing in the tale, and yet people come to grief. Try drawing a moral from "Taking the Wen Away" and you run into trouble.

And so, the impatient reader asks what in the world this story is about. If pressed, I can give only one answer: the comedy and tragedy of personality, a problem which always runs through the depths of our lives.

CURRENCY (Kahei, 1946)[1]

Certain foreign languages distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns. Words for currency are feminine.

Glance at the one hundred yen notes in your purse and maybe you'll find me--no. 77851. I'm completely worn out. I don't know whose pocket I'm in, or whether I haven't indeed been placed in a trash container. A modern style bill has made its appearance of late, occasioning a rumor that we older bills are scheduled for burning. At the moment I don't know whether I'm dead or alive. Better to go up in smoke than have this doubtful feeling. I'll leave it to God where my remains end up, but it will probably be in Hell.

I was not born in this condition, by the way. In fact, at the time of my birth, a one hundred yen note was queen of the currency. Only later did more welcome denominations like the two hundred or thousand yen note emerge in abundance. The first time I passed through a teller's window, the customer received me with a trembling hand. Oh yes, that's the truth. The bank was one of Tokyo's largest, and the customer a young carpenter. He put me unfolded into the front pocket of his overalls and walked out holding his left hand gingerly over the pocket, as though he had a stomach-ache. All the way home, while riding the train or going down the street, he kept his hand lightly pressed to his front pocket. Inside the house he placed me forthwith on the family shrine and offered a prayer. Such was my auspicious entry into life, and I would willingly have remained forever in the carpenter's house.

Unfortunately, I could stay only a single night. The carpenter was in fine fettle that evening. He put down a number of drinks, then turned to his young, diminutive wife.

"Keep your mouth shut! I'm doing a man's work," he blustered.

Now and then he got up and took me from the shrine, making his wife laugh by pretending to receive me gratefully in both hands. Eventually a quarrel arose between them, whereupon I was folded twice and placed in the wife's purse. The next morning I was exchanged at a pawnshop for ten of her kimonos.

The pawnshop vault was cold and damp, and I felt chilled from end to end. My stomach was also giving me trouble when I was finally taken out into the light of day. This time I was exchanged for the microscope of a certain medical student, who proceeded to take me on a long journey. The lodging where he abandoned me was located on a small island in the Inland Sea. I remained inside a chest of drawers by the front desk for nearly a month, and during this time I chanced to hear the maids gossip--something about how the student, after leaving me here, had drowned himself in the sea.

"It's foolish to die alone. I'd die anytime with a handsome fellow like him." About forty years old and chubby, her face covered with pimples, the maid who spoke these words gave everyone a good laugh.

During the next five years I aged considerably as I wandered about Kyushu and Shikoku. People were gradually losing their regard for me, and presently I found myself drifting back to Tokyo in a state of deep self-loathing. In effect I now worked as a female runner on the black market. But, if I had changed, what about Tokyo itself!

It was eight o'clock in the evening when I left the train station upon my arrival in the city. A certain broker, mildly intoxicated, took me past Nihonbashi and Kyobashi, then walked me up the Ginza as far as Shimbashi. It was so dark we seemed to be moving through a deep forest. There was no one else on the street, and not a single kitten crossed our path.

In a matter of hours this forbidding, death-like atmosphere gave way to the usual hubbub and clamor. Encompassed by the daily uproar, I never once found a moment's peace. Like a relay baton I passed from hand to hand until I was dizzy. I became crumpled in the process,

and I also picked up odors of various kinds. I was ashamed and desperate. And, as you know, this was a period during which the country too was desperate. All of you know what sort of people passed me from hand to hand. You know what they were after and what they talked about. As you're probably tired of hearing and seeing such things, I won't go into detail. It does seem to me, however, that the militarists or whatever weren't the only monsters about.

You would think that people who might die that very evening would forget entirely about greed and lust, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Having wandered into the blind alley of life, they contend with each other without ever laughing together. I think this is a serious problem for all people, not simply for the Japanese.

A person of genuine feeling cannot rejoice so long as one other person is wretched. But the general run of people, merely to obtain brief comfort for themselves or families, will abuse, deceive, and shove aside their neighbors. (Yes, dear reader, you were guilty once too. How frightening that you were unaware of it. You should be ashamed. As long as you're human, you should be ashamed. After all, shame is something humans alone can feel.) A sorry, comic spectacle--that's what people make of themselves quarreling with one another like a pair of grappling demons. But even while serving as a lowly runner in the black market, I once or twice felt as though my birth was not a misfortune. Even now when I'm so old and decrepit I don't know where I am, I cannot forget certain dim memories of pleasant moments.

An old crone operating in the market once took me to a small town some three or four hours from Tokyo by train. Over the years I have gone from one black market dealer to another, but the women among them got twice the return out of me that the men did. There's something horrible about a woman's greed, and the old crone too was someone to be reckoned with. She had acquired me from a man in exchange for a bottle of beer, then set out for the small town. Upon our arrival the old woman edged up to a certain dealer in wines and, with an occasional lascivious smile, conducted a long and confidential monologue. The

usual black market price seemed to be fifty or sixty yen a magnum bottle, but the old lady ended up with four bottles in exchange for me. She hoisted the case to her shoulder, as if she could easily carry the weight, and walked off. Her skill had brought her four magnum bottles of wine for one bottle of beer. By adding a little water to the wine, she could fill almost twenty beer-size bottles. There's no end to a woman's greed, however. Instead of smiling, the old crone went away mumbling about how difficult the times were.

Placed inside the huge purse of the black marketeer, I was dozing off when someone pulled me forth. This time I passed into the hands of an army captain in his late thirties, evidently an accomplice of the dealer. The transaction involved a hundred cigarettes, the brand called Glorys that were usually reserved for servicemen. The marketeer reputedly discovered later that the package contained only eighty-six cigarettes, whereupon he flew into a rage at that "swindling rascal," the captain. Exchanged, then, for a package labelled "One Hundred Cigarettes," I was stuffed unceremoniously into the pants pocket of the captain and taken along that very evening to the second floor of a shabby restaurant on the edge of town. A heavy drinker, the captain sipped an unusual wine called "brandy." He customarily got out of hand when drinking, and eventually he began to revile the serving-lady.

"Nothing but a fox--that's your face, no matter how I look at it. (He said 'fox' almost like 'fuchs,' and I wondered where he was from.) You better remember. A fox has a snout and whiskers. Three whiskers on the right side and four on the left. His fart's unbearable, yellow smoke all over the place. A dog smelling it'll run around in circles and drop dead. I'm not making this up. Your face is yellow too. Wierd! My fart made it like that. Phew!!! So you're cutting loose as well! Don't you have any manners--farting right in front of a captain? Unthinkable! And it gives me the creeps. I can't let you fart on me."

When this vulgar outburst was over, the captain's ears picked up the sound of a baby crying on the first floor. "Noisy brat! Spoiling

a good time. I'm a bundle of nerves, and I won't be made a laughingstock. Yours? Incredible! The fox's child wails like any ordinary urchin. You're not ashamed? In this business, and a child in your arms! Selfish! Japan's losing the war because you slummy women don't know your place. Half-wits, every one of you. That's why you think Japan is winning. Fools! There's no sense even talking about it. The fox and the dog. They go round and round and drop dead. Win the war?!!! That's why I drink every night and buy myself a woman. Anything wrong with that?"

"There certainly is," the woman responded, her face turning pale. "What's all this grumbling about foxes? You needn't come if you don't like it here. No one can drink in Japan nowadays and tease women except you and your kind. And where do you think the money comes from? No idea? Well, most of our pay goes to the government now, and that's why you and the rest can drink as you please. You'd better watch your tongue. I'm a woman--that's why I can bear a child. You've no idea how horrible a woman feels trying to nurse these days. There's not a drop of milk in our breasts anymore, and the child sucks in vain. Lately the children don't even have the strength to suck. Oh yes, he's a fox child all right, with a pointed chin and a wrinkled face. And whining all day long. Shall I bring him to you? We'll manage, we mothers will . . . . But what's that to you . . . ?"

Suddenly the air-raid siren went off, and a moment later the droning planes could be heard overhead. Bullets whistled through the air and struck the building. Then the sliding door of the room burst into flame. The captain jumped to his feet. "It's here," he cried, "It's finally come." He staggered about, the brandy evidently too much for him.

The serving-lady flew downstairs, nimble as a bird, and returned in a moment with the child on her back.

"C'mon, let's get out of here. Be quick, too. And watch out."

She gripped the captain's heavy, limp body from behind and urged him down the stairs. Helping him into his shoes, she took his hand and fled with him to a nearby shrine. Here the captain collapsed onto his back. Lying with his legs spread apart, he sent violent curses toward the droning in the sky. Then a shower of sparks fell, and the shrine itself began to burn.

"Come on, captain, let's be off," the woman cried. "I don't want to die here like a dog. We'll run away as far as you can go."

This haggard woman with the pale-dark skin, her occupation normally regarded as the ultimate in degradation, performed the noblest deed I have ever seen throughout my somber life. Greed begone, and Vanity too. Ye have laid this country low. But the serving-woman, free of either vice, struggled to rescue her drunken guest. Exerting all her strength, she pulled him to his feet. Then, holding him to her side, she stumbled toward the paddy fields, leaving behind the sea of fire as it engulfed the grounds of the shrine. She dragged the captain into a field where the barley had just been cut and settled him upon a low embankment. He was already snoring loudly as she sat down exhausted beside him, her breath heaving.

That night the town burned from one end to the other. It was almost dawn when the captain opened his eyes and pulled himself up to gaze at the still smoldering ruins. When he suddenly noticed the lady dozing at his side, he jumped to his feet in confusion and made as if to flee. But after five or six steps, he turned away and came back. From the inside pocket of his jacket he took five of my companion hundred-yen bills and from his pants pocket he took me. He folded the six of us into a single wad, shoved us underneath the innermost layer of the child's underwear, and then bolted.

I felt a surge of joy. If only we bills were always so used, how happy we would be. The child's back against which we lay was bony, the skin dry and flaky. But I could say to my companions: What a blessing! We couldn't have a finer place. I want to stay forever,

warming this child's back and helping him put some flesh on those bones.

With a smile the others nodded in accord.

THE SOUND OF HAMMERING (Tokatonton, 1947)

Dear Sir,

I'm twenty-five years old and something is bothering me. I need your help.

I was born and raised in the Teramachi Section of Aomori City. You're probably not familiar with the little Tomoya Florist Shop alongside Seikaji Temple, but I'm the second son of the florist. I graduated from Aomori Middle School and went to work in the office of a munitions factory in Yokohama. I worked in the office three years and then spent four years in the army. After the surrender I came back home, but our house had been burned down. My father, my older brother, and my brother's wife had already built themselves a hut in its place. My mother had died when I was a fourth year student in middle school.

Life would have been even more difficult for the others if I squeezed into their hut. Following a talk with my father and brother, I took a job at a third-class post office in the coastal village of A about five miles from Aomori City. The post office is run by my deceased mother's family, and her older brother serves as postmaster. Over a year has gone by now, and I feel more trivial with each passing day.

I started reading you when I worked at the munitions factory office in Yokohama. Having come upon the stories you published in the journal Style, I fell into the habit of searching out your writings. Eventually I realized that you were a class or two ahead of me at Aomori Middle School, and that you had lived during your school days in Mr. Toyota's home in Teramachi. My heart almost burst. If this was the Toyota who ran the dry goods store--why, we live in the same neighborhood and I know him well. Old Mr. Toyota is chubby, so his personal name Tazaemon fits him exactly![1] His son is also named Tazaemon, but he should have a Kabuki actor's name--Uzaemon, for

example--since he's thin and dapper. They're both good men, aren't they? And it's a shame their home too burned down in an air raid. Even the storehouse was destroyed. When I realized you had lived in their home, I thought of asking the young Mr. Toyota for a letter of introduction. But I never got beyond dreamimg of a visit. I was a coward without the nerve to act.

In due course the army drafted me to help defend the Chiba coast. I was put to work digging fortifications day after day until the war finally came to an end. Occasionally I obtained a half day's leave, time enough to hunt for one of your books in town. I repeatedly took up my pen to correspond with you. But once I had written "Dear Sir," I was at a loss. Gripping the pen, I realized we were perfect strangers and I had no particular business with you. With the unconditional surrender I returned home and went to work in the post office. I found your latest works while visiting Aomori City. When I read how you also had endured the hardships of war, returning to your birthplace in nearby Kanagi, my heart almost burst once again. But I lacked the courage to pay a sudden visit and, after due deliberation, I decided to send a letter. This time I'm not at a loss after writing "Dear Sir." Because I've a purpose in writing you, a crucial purpose.

Something is bothering me and I need your help. I should say, we need your help, since I've a hunch that others have a similar worry. I thought incessantly of writing you from both the factory in Yokohama and the army. And now that the time has finally arrived, how unexpectedly mirthless this first letter is turning out.

We were ordered into formation before the barracks at noon on August 15th, 1945, to hear the emperor himself on the radio. The static was bad, however, and hardly a word got through. When the broadcast ended, a young lieutenant mounted the reviewing stand.

"You heard it? And you understand? The nation has accepted the Potsdam Declaration and surrendered. But we're not concerned with politics. As soldiers of His Imperial Majesty, we must resist--

vindicating ourselves in the end by suicide. That's always been my intention, and I call upon the rest of you to follow. Is that understood? All right, dismissed!"

Then the lieutenant stepped down, removed his glasses, and walked off shedding tears. Maybe a word like solemn best describes the moment. As I stood at attention, the surroundings grew misty and dark, and a cold wind blew in from somewhere. I felt as though I were sinking into the depths of the earth.

I thought of dying, for death alone seemed right. The woods before my eyes were dark and quiet. A flock of small birds arose from the treetops and flew off, exactly as though a handful of sesame seeds had been scattered in the air.

Ah, that was the moment. From the barracks behind me came the faint sound of hammering. A strange feeling accompanied the sound--as if the scales had fallen from my eyes. I had been freed from a spell, and nothing seemed grave or pathetic anymore. It was noon in midsummer, and I was gazing across a sandy plain utterly bereft of emotion.

I packed my duffel bag to the seams and drifted home.

That sound of hammering, distant and faint, miraculously stripped me of every militarist illusion. Never again would I be intoxicated by such a mad dream with its apparent gravity and pathos. But the faint sound of hammering continues in my brain to this moment, and I have become like one subject to bizarre and disgusting epileptic seizures.

Not that I ever become violent. On the contrary, whenever I feel inspired by something, the sound of hammering comes faintly from one direction or another, and the scene before me suddenly shifts. The mirage disappears, and I stare hopelessly upon a blank screen, absurd as ever.

When I first came to my present job, I felt like pursuing whatever

project struck my fancy. I decided to write a narrative and send it to you. During slack periods in the post office, I diligently recorded my memories of military life until the manuscript was almost a hundred pages long. Another day or two and it would be finished. Or so I thought, as I left the post office one autumn and headed for the public bath. I was enjoying the warm water, excited by the prospect of a final chapter in the high tragic manner of Onegin or perhaps in the concluding pessimistic mode of Gogol's The Quarrel, when I looked up at the naked lightbulb hanging from the ceiling and heard from afar the sound of hammering. At that moment a ripple rose along the surface, and I knew I was merely another bather splashing in one corner of the dimly lit pool.

I crawled forlornly from the bath and, washing the dirt from the soles of my feet, listened to several other bathers speak about rationing. Pushkin and Gogol seemed utterly insipid, like the names of some foreign-made toothbrush. I left the bathhouse, crossed the bridge, and went home. After eating supper in silence, I withdrew to my own room where I thumbed through the nearly one hundred page manuscript on my desk. Appalled by the absurdity of the writing, I didn't have the strength to rip the pages. I use the paper for tissue now, and since that day I haven't written one line.

For some time thereafter my life lost its vitality. Occasionally I took a work from the collection of Meiji-Taisho Literature which my uncle's small library contained. Sometimes I was impressed and sometimes I wasn't. Lacking in diligence, I went to bed early whenever it snowed. And, while browsing through some volumes of World Art, I was unmoved even by the French Impressionists I had once admired. But I stared in wonder at the works of Ogata Kōrin and Ogata Kenzan, Japanese painters of the Genroku Period. The azaleas of Kōrin seemed better than the paintings of anyone else, whether Cezanne, Monet, or Gauguin. Gradually I regained my old zest, but without the bold ambition to become a master such as Kōrin or Kenzan. I would be a dilettante in this remote village and devote whatever energies I could summon to

counting out money for my customers as I sat from morning to evening by the post office window. A person devoid of both talent and learning would not necessarily be demeaned by this task. Perhaps, I told myself, there's a crown for those who serve, and the highest life is one spent faithfully carrying out onerous, routine chores.

I was beginning to take pride in my life when the conversion of the yen currency was implemented. Even our third-class post office became busy. Indeed, owing to the lack of help, a small, remote office such as ours was severely pressed. From early each morning, we were so busy handling savings deposits and stamping old currency notes that we could not rest no matter how tired we became. Obliged to my uncle for generously taking me in, I worked especially hard. In due time my hands became numb from overwork, as though encased in a pair of steel gloves. They no longer felt like my hands at all.

Working so hard by day, I would sleep through the night like one dead. In the morning I would spring from bed as the alarm went off by my pillow and hurry into the office to begin cleaning up. This chore was normally done by a woman, but I was a dynamo during those busy days of the yen conversion and threw myself into every kind of task. I kept accelerating the pace from day to day until I was rushing about like some half-crazed beast. The day on which the conversion was to end, I rose as usual in the dim pre-dawn light, frantically cleaned the entire office, and sat down to work at my assigned window. As the rising sun came directly into my face, I narrowed my sleepy eyes and, with a feeling of immense content, recalled the dictum about work being sacred. I had just let out a sigh of relief when I heard in the distance the faint sound of hammering. That was it; henceforth everything seemed absurd. I stood up, went to my room, crawled into the quilt and slept. I refused to get up even for meals. To every inquiry I curtly replied that I wasn't feeling well.

That final day was apparently the busiest of all, and with their most talented member slugabed, the other workers in the offices were sorely tested. I dozed the entire day, a self-indulgence which only

increased the debt of gratitude owing to my uncle. Having lost the zest for work, I slept late the next day, too. Indeed, after finally sitting down to my window, I gave one yawn after another and left most of the tasks to the girl at the next window. The following day and the day after too, I was extremely sluggish and morose. I had become, in other words, a typical post office clerk.

"Still not feeling well?" my uncle inquired with a faint smile.

"I'm all right. It's only a case of nerves."

"Exactly as I thought," he exulted. "It's because you read those difficult books. When a fellow's a dunce like you or me, it's better not to think about difficult things."

I tried to laugh along with my uncle. Although a graduate from a technical school, he seemed totally indifferent to education.

And then . . . . Incidentally, doesn't that phrase crop up often in my writing? Doubtless a stylistic quirk in the writing of a dunce. But it's second nature now, and I'm resigned to using it. And then I fell in love. Don't laugh at me. Well, I can't blame you for laughing. I was living in a daze, like a minnow near the bottom of a goldfish bowl, suspended and immoble. The affair quite startled me, as though the minnow were suddenly embarrassed to find its belly full of eggs.

Music fills the soul of one in love. I believe that's the surest sign of the affliction.

Though meeting with no response, my feeling for her was so strong I could not control it. She seemed to be in her late teens and worked as a maid at our only village inn. My uncle the postmaster was a great drinker who regularly went to parties at the inn. He and the girl evidentally got on well; whenever she appeared at the post office window to take care of her savings or insurance, my uncle teased her with some stale joke or other.

"You seem to be doing well," he would say. "I like the way you work at saving money. Haven't found a nice man, have you?"

"Silly!"

She looked as bored as the nobleman in a Van Dyke painting. Her name, Tokita Hanae, appeared in her savings book, along with an address in Miyagi Prefecture now pencilled through with a red line. According to the girls in the office, Tokita's home in Miyagi had been damaged during the war, and she had arrived in this village shortly before the surrender. She was a distant relative of the woman who ran the inn, and her behavior was less than perfect. People said she was too clever for an adolescent. But not a single refugee from her area enjoyed a good reputation, so I refused to believe a word about her so-called cleverness. All the same, Hanae's savings were not exactly meager. We employees aren't supposed to reveal this sort of information; but, while the postmaster was jesting with her, Tokita would be depositing two or three hundred yen in new currency. The total rose steadily week by week. I certainly didn't think this was because she had found a nice man. But every time I recorded those two or three hundred yen sums and stamped her book, I felt my heartbeat quicken and my face turn red.

Eventually I was in real distress. Hanae wasn't clever; the villagers simply had it in for her. Wouldn't the men spend their money to destroy her? The mere thought of it once startled me from sleep and brought me bolt upright in the middle of the night.

Nevertheless, Hanae contentedly brought around a deposit about once every week. Eventually, as I counted out the soiled ten yen notes pasted with stamps, I no longer felt my heartbeat quicken and my face turn red. Instead I became deathly pale, and sweat seemed to ooze from my brow. The impulse to tear the money to shreds assailed me I don't know how often. I wanted to recite to her the famous words from Kyōka's novel--Don't be subject to a man, even if you must die for it. That would be mere faking, though. An uncultured bumpkin such as I could hardly utter these words. But I could not keep myself from longing to speak them. Don't be subject to a man, even if you must die for it. Of what use are material goods? Or wealth?

Isn't it true that, if you like a girl, she will come to like you? The middle of May had passed when Hanae came demurely to the post office window and handed me money and her savings book. With a sigh I took them both. After dolefully counting the soiled bills, I entered the sum and silently returned the book to her.

"Are you free around five o'clock?"

I wondered if the balmy spring air had played tricks on my hearing, so softly and quickly had she spoken.

"Come to the bridge if you're free." After a fleeting smile, Hanae looked as indifferent as ever and walked away.

I saw from the clock that it was barely past two. This may sound unmanly, but I don't recall in the least how I spent the next three hours. Presumably managing to look solemn as I fidgeted with my work, exclaimed to the girl clerk what a beautiful day it was, glared at her look of surprise (it happened to be cloudy), rose and went to the toilet. In short, spent the afternoon like a fool and left at seven or eight minutes before five. Along the way I noticed my fingernails were overgrown; I can remember even now how sorely I wanted to cry.

Hanae was standing by the foot of the bridge. Her skirt seemed rather short, and catching a glimpse of her long naked legs, I lowered my eyes to the ground.

"Let's go toward the shore," she calmly proposed.

Hanae set out first, and I followed five or six steps behind. I went along slowly, trying to maintain the interval; but eventually we fell into step with one another, much to my embarrassment.

It was a cloudy day with a breeze, and the sand swirled along the beach.

"This will do," Hanae exclaimed. She slipped between two large fishing boats which had been pulled up on the beach and sat down right on the sand. "Come, you'll be warm if you sit here. It's out of the wind."

I sat down about six feet from where Hanae had settled with her legs outstretched.

"I'm sorry to call you out like this," she began, "but there's something I must say. You're suspicious about my savings account, aren't you."

Here it comes, I thought. I told her, my voice somewhat hoarse, that I was.

That was only natural, she said. Then, letting her head drop, she scooped a handful of sand and poured it along her leg. "It's not my money, though. If it were mine, I wouldn't save it. Too much trouble making all those deposits."

That made sense and I silently nodded.

"Don't you see? The savings book belongs to the landlady at the inn. That's a secret, though, and you mustn't tell a soul. I have a vague idea why she handles it this way, but it's so complicated I don't want to talk about it. You realize what a hard time I've had here, don't you?" She smiled, and then her eyes glistened strangely. I realized she was crying.

I couldn't help wanting to kiss her. With her I could undergo any hardship.

"The people here are terrible, aren't they. I thought maybe you were mistaken about me too. I've been meaning to speak to you and today I made up my mind . . . ."

At that moment the sound of hammering came from nearby. I wasn't hearing things this time. Someone had indeed begun pounding a nail inside Mr. Sasaki's ocean hut. The sound echoed over and over, and I stood up trembling. "I see. And I'll keep it secret."

A stray dog had left a sizeable pile of dung just behind the spot where Hanae was sitting. I debated some moments whether to tell her.

The waves undulated slowly, and a boat with a bedraggled sail

tottered through the shallows.

"I must be going now . . . ."

A vast emptiness lay before me. What did I care about her savings? She was a stranger, and whether she was subject to a man was no concern of mine. It was stupid. And I was hungry besides.

Hanae has continued to make a deposit every week or so, and her savings now amount to thousands of yen. But I don't care. It's all the same whether the money belongs to the landlady or to Hanae herself.

Which of us was the disappointed lover then? I imagine that I was in the end, but I'm not especially depressed about that. It was a strangely conducted affair in any event, and I've since gone back to being your typically idle clerk.

In June an errand took me to Aomori City, and there I ran into a workingmen's demonstration. Till then I had little interest in political and social causes. In fact I felt towards them something close to despair. It was the same irrespective of the organizer. Whatever movement one joined was betrayed by the supposed leader for the sake of his fame and power. With magnificent gestures and no hesitation at all, he would ask your allegiance--and, without fail, you and your family, your village and your country, nay, the world itself would be secure. Ignoring my words will bring disaster, he bellows. And then a favorite prostitute gives him the cold shoulder time and again, until in desperation he calls for the abolition of the trade. Indignant, he gets into scuffles with his better-looking colleagues. After much confusion and turmoil he sometimes receives a medal. Whereupon he races home and proudly proclaims, "Here it is!" as he opens the little case for the lady of the house. What! Only a Fifth! A Second or nothing, she insists, leaving him so chagrined he can no longer tell what's going on.

It's this sort of man who throws himself into a political and social movement. And so, when all the clamor about democracy or whatever arose before the general election in April, I didn't believe

a single candidate. The Liberal and the Progressive Parties, with their old-fashioned partisans, were hardly an issue. Though the Socialist and Communist Parties put on a lively show, weren't they merely playing politics with Japan's defeat? I could not avoid the unsavory impression of maggots breeding in the corpse of a nation that had surrendered. On April 10th, the day of the election, I was told by my uncle the postmaster to vote for Kato of the Liberal Party. I agreed as I left the house--only to stroll along the beach and return. I have always felt that the gloom of our everyday lives could not be dispelled, no matter how one declaimed about social and political questions.

When I saw the workingmen's demonstration in Aomori, however, I realized that my attitude was mistaken. Perhaps such words as "lively" and "vibrant" best describe the event. What a merry parade it was, with no sign that I could detect of servility or gloom. All was expansive and vital. Even young girls held flags and sang labor hymns. My heart overflowed and tears began to fall. How fortunate, I reflected, that Japan had lost the war. For the first time in my life I was looking on genuine freedom. If this was the outcome of a political or social movement, then people must study political and social ideas above all else.

As I watched the parade, I began to perceive unmistakeably the single gleaming path I must follow. I was overjoyed, and tears flowed agreeably down my cheeks. The scene turned an aquamarine color, as if I were watching it underwater. As I gazed at the pale shifting hues, the red flags appeared to blaze. Then I gave way to tears. I had just concluded that the memory of this moment would remain with me forever when the faint, distant sound of hammering arose once more and everything disappeared.

I want to know what this sound means. It can't be dismissed as mere nihilism. For the very illusion of hammering would itself destroy any conviction, even a nihilistic one.

When summer arrived, the youth hereabouts suddenly went crazy

over sports. Maybe it was the pragmatism that comes with age, but I thought sports quite silly. I never competed--whether in sumō wrestling where one got pummeled and bruised, or the hundred yard dash where you couldn't tell one sprinter's contorted face from another's.

This year there was a long distance relay in August. The course ran through every village along the coast, and many of the boys took part. One relay point, the first beyond Aomori City, was right in front of the post office. Around ten o'clock, just before the runners were supposed to arrive, the other clerks all went outside to watch, leaving the postmaster and myself behind to deal with some insurance accounts. When the crowd began shouting, I went over to the window. I realized immediately that here was that so-called final spurt. The first runner appeared, his fingers splayed like the webbed foot of a frog, his arms churning as if to pull himself along. Barefoot, utterly naked save for his shorts, he staggered forward with his chest outthrust and his face bobbing from right to left with an appropriate look of pain. In front of the post office he collapsed with a loud groan.

"Hurrah! You've done it!" the relay observer proclaimed. Then, helping the runner to his feet, the official brought him toward the window where I stood and splashed his body with pails of water. The runner seemed more dead than alive, and as I looked at his pale face and limp body, I felt a strange thrill.

How shall I describe it? "Pitiful" sounds too priggish. So maybe "touching" will do? Anyway, such a wasted effort seemed wonderful to me. People didn't really care who finished first or second, but the runners still went all out during that final spurt. The relay could hardly further the country's reputation. Yet the runners would speak of such an ideal, without really holding to it. They lacked the ambition to become great marathoners too and didn't expect any praise for their efforts. They realized this was only a provincial run and that the time they achieved wasn't important.

Back home even, the boy marathoner would worry about getting scolded by his father, and so he was hardly in a mood to boast. And yet he wanted to run. To run with all his might. It was all right if no one praised him. He simply wanted to run. As a child he had recklessly climbed a tree to get at the persimmons. But running was different, for there was no reward. This passion for nothing seemed very close to my own mood.

I began playing catch with my fellow employees. After a long session I felt tired but reborn. And thereupon the sound of hammering would immediately arise. That sound destroyed even the passion for nothing.

Lately I hear the sound more often--when I opened the newspaper to examine the new constitution article by article; when my uncle spoke of the personnel situation in the office and a brilliant idea occurred to me; when I tried reading your novel; when I rose from bed and raced to the scene of a recent fire in the village; when I feel like another cup of sake while drinking with my uncle before supper; when I seem to be losing my mind; and, finally, when I think of suicide.

Last evening, while the two of us were drinking, I turned to my uncle. "Give me a definition of life--in a word or two," I joked.

"I don't know about life," he responded, "but the world's mere greed and lust."

This unexpected reply was right on target. Instantly I felt like becoming a black marketeer. But the moment I imagined earning ten thousand yen in the market, the sound of hammering arose forthwith.

Tell me what the sound means. And how I can escape. I can hardly make a move. Answer me, please.

Finally, if I may add another word, I must tell you that I began to hear the sound of hammering before this letter was even half finished. Absurd to write such a letter, but I have persevered till now. I feel as though I've written nothing but lies, so desperate

did I become at the absurdity of it all. There was never a girl named Hanae, and I didn't see any demonstration. The rest of it seems like a lie too.

The sound of hammering alone seems true. I'm sending you this letter as it stands, without reading it over.

The recipient of this letter, a writer who lacked both reason and education, sent the following response:

Dear Sir,

You're faking this torment, isn't that so? I'm not very sympathetic. So many people point the finger and stare, while you seem to evade the inexcusable and ugly truth of the matter. Genuine thought requires courage more than intelligence. As Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." In this passage 'fear' means something like 'to hold in awe.' If you can sense the thunder in these words, you will not be hearing things anymore.

OSAN (Osan, 1947)[1]

I

I was in the kitchen cleaning up after supper, but I knew in my very bones that he had slipped out the front door and was making off in that aimless way of his. The plate almost slid from my hand as I let out a sigh and stretched to look out the latticed window. He was already in the alley with its border of squash vines, a plain narrow sash about his pale yukata, back turned unfeelingly this way as he floated off into the summer dusk like an otherworldly spirit.

"Where's Papa going?"

When she asked this innocent question, our six year old daughter was washing her feet by the kitchen door after playing in the garden. She favored her father and every night she spread her quilt alongside his in the six-mat room and slept under the same mosquito net as he.

"To the temple."

It was the first thing that came to mind, but once I had spoken, I realized how ominous the words were. I felt a sudden chill.

"The temple? But why?"

"It's the Festival of the Dead. He's gone to visit the graves." The lie came with incredible ease. Indeed it was the thirteenth, the opening day of the Festival, and all the other neighborhood girls were dressed in pretty kimonos, their long sleeves flapping as they romped about the front gate of their parents' homes. The best clothes of my children had gone up in flames during the war; even for the Festival they wore their everyday things.

"Will he be back soon?"

"I'm not sure. If Masako's a good girl, I suppose he will."

From the look of things, however, he was certain to stay out overnight.

Masako came into the kitchen, then went to the three-mat room where she sat down on the window sill and gazed mournfully outside. Then she murmured, "Mama, there's a flower on my bean plant."

I was so touched the tears welled up in my eyes. "Where? Where? Oh, you're right. Soon we'll have lots of beans."

There was a garden plot about twenty yards square near our front door. I used to plant all kinds of vegetables, but I could no longer manage with three children. My husband, who occasionally helped in the past, had ceased to care about any household matter. The man next door carefully tended his own garden and raised splendid vegetables of all kinds. Next to his, our garden seemed a shameful patch of weeds. Masako had planted a single bean from our ration and watered it faithfully until a sprout appeared. With no toys of her own, she took considerable pride in the plant. It seems she boasted about it even when playing at the neighbor's.

But we weren't the only ones in ruin and misery. Especially in Tokyo you could feel the weariness and pain in people no matter where you looked. The people moved about listlessly, as though they were tired of life. Our possessions too had gone up in flames, and we were reduced to utter poverty. But something far more threatening than poverty distressed me as a wife.

My husband had worked almost ten years for a magazine in the Kanda District. At the time of our arranged marriage eight years ago, rented housing was already becoming scarce. Eventually, in an outlying area on the Central Line, we found a small house all to itself in a field. We were still living there when the war began.

Since his health was poor, my husband escaped both the military and the labor draft. Every day he would journey to the magazine office from our remote home. As the war grew more intense, the airplane factories hereabouts were repeatedly attacked. Late one night a bomb struck the bamboo grove out back, destroying our three-mat room along with our kitchen and bath. With the birth of our first

son Yoshitarō, there were now four of us, too many to continue living together in the partially ruined house. Taking along the two children, I returned to my home in Aomori City, while my husband remained to live in the six-mat room and commute to work.

In less than four months, however, Aomori itself was bombed to the ground, and the things we had struggled so hard to bring along were all destroyed. With nothing but the clothes on our backs, the children and I sought refuge in the home of a friend which had escaped the air raid fires. The next ten days were like hell; I was utterly at a loss, a burden to my friend. Then the surrender was announced, and I longed for my husband in Tokyo. My children in tow, I returned to the city in rags. Since housing was unavailable, my husband had a carpenter roughly repair the partially ruined house, and the four of us settled down to our intimate life of old. I was beginning to feel at peace when my husband's luck took a turn for the worse.

The magazine had met with misfortune, and the directors were quarreling about financial matters. When the company was liquidated, my husband lost his job. But he and certain influential friends from the staff pooled their money to set up a new firm. After publishing several kinds of books, they took a heavy loss in buying some paper. Burdened with a large debt, my husband wandered from the house every morning and came wearily back in the evening. He had always been reserved, but now he lapsed into gloomy silence. He somehow managed to clear the debt, but his zest for work was gone. Not that he spent the entire day thereafter at home. He would stand on the veranda thinking of something, his eyes fastened on the far horizon as he smoked a cigarette. I would fret that trouble was brewing once again. With a deep sigh he could no longer contain, my husband would flip his half-smoked cigarette into the garden and withdraw the purse from our desk drawer. Then, in that furtive and aimless way of his, he would steal out the front door, usually to remain away the entire night.

He was a good, a gentle husband. He would drink a half-pint of sake or a bottle of beer at most, and he never smoked more than his

ration of cigarettes. During the nearly ten years of our marriage, he never beat or reviled me. Of course, there was the time a guest was visiting, and Masako--she was about two then--crawled into the room and upset the man's tea. My husband must have called to me, but I was so intent on fanning the charcoal fire in the kitchen I did not hear him. He came in carrying Masako and, with a scowl I have never seen before or since, put the girl down on the wooden floor. Then he stood straight up and for several minutes silently glared at me with murder in his eye. Finally he whirled around and left, slamming the door with such violence that I felt the vibration in the marrow of my bones and shuddered to think how menacing a man can be. I don't recall any other occasion when my husband was angry. Like other people I underwent various hardships during the war; but mindful of my husband's kindness over the years, I consider myself among the fortunate.

When did the change occur? There was something craven in his smile, and his eyes nervously avoided mine from the very day I returned after four months in Aomori. I thought he was tired and lonely, and my heart went out to him. Perhaps during these four months . . . but I mustn't dwell on that. The more I think, the deeper I fall into this slough of despair.

So now, with my husband away for the night, I merely spread his quilt next to Masako's and hang up the mosquito net.

II

Shortly before noon the following day, as I was crouching by the well near the front door to wash the diapers of our youngest girl Toshiko, my husband came creeping along like some burglar anxious to avoid detection. He noticed me and nodded slightly, then suddenly tripped and plunged headlong into the house. My heart overflowed with pity for this man who instinctively avoided his wife's gaze, and I could no longer attend to washing. I stood up and followed after him.

"It's warm, so why don't you take off your kimono? I've had

several bottles of beer on ice since this morning. They're for the Festival. They should be chilled by now."

He smiled uneasily. "That's really something," he said. "Shall we each have one?"

This awkward attempt at flattery was quite transparent.

"I'll join you," I said.

I could handle a drink better than my husband, maybe because my father used to drink heavily. Right after our marriage, my husband and I would walk about Shinjuku together and drop into the bars. His face would soon turn red, and he would be finished for the night. Except for a strange ringing in the ears, I didn't feel a thing.

The children joined us in the three-mat room to eat lunch. Having removed his kimono, my husband draped a wet towel about his neck and sat down with a beer. I drank a glass to keep him company, but refrained from wasting any more. When I gave my breast to Toshiko, who had been born only last March, the picture of domestic bliss seemed complete. The tension, however, did not go away. My husband avoided my eyes, and I could not speak freely to him for fear of touching a raw nerve. Masako and Yoshitarō knew something was wrong; they remained very quiet as they dipped their steamed bread into tea.

"A drink for lunch gets to you right away," my husband ventured.

"Yes, look at you--red all over!"

As I glanced at him, I noticed a purple moth clinging to the skin by his throat. Then I remembered something mothlike from the early days of my marriage--a mark on my own skin--and I realized with a start that this too was no moth. Aware that I had noticed, my husband hurriedly tried to cover the bruise with the wet towel. I realized he had intended the towel for this purpose from the very beginning, and I tried to pretend I hadn't noticed.

"Masako likes her bread better when she can eat with Papa, doesn't she?"

Even this jest sounded critical. The tension inside me had reached the breaking point when the radio next door began playing the Marseillaise.

My husband listened a moment, then spoke as if to himself. "Ah yes, it's Bastille Day."

Then he laughed softly and resumed his explanation, partly to Masako and partly to me. "The fourteenth of July . . . today . . . the revolution . . . ." Then he stopped, his mouth awry and tears in his eyes. He fought to keep from crying before proceeding in a voice choked with emotion.

"It was the Bastille they attacked . . . the prison. The people rose up from all over, and that was it for the party at Versailles. It was over and done--gone forever. They had to destroy it. They understood that a new ethic, a new order, could never be built. And yet they had to destroy the old one. Even as he died Sun Yat-sen claimed the revolution in China was not over. A revolution never is, I suppose. But we've got to start them. They're sad and beautiful in their nature. That's what comes of a revolution--beauty, sadness, and . . . love . . . ."

The Marseillaise played on and my husband wept even as he spoke. Finally, in his embarrassment, he tried to laugh away his tears. "Well, look at this. The old man's begun to cry in his cups." Turning away, he stood up and went into the kitchen. There he splashed water on his face. "Damn. I've drunk too much already--weeping over the French Revolution. I need a nap." He went into the six-mat room. The house fell quiet, but surely he continued his silent weeping.

Not over the French Revolution either. But there seemed to be a similarity between family love and the revolution. I understood the agony of overthrowing the elegant court or a peaceful household, but I too loved my husband, if not so intensely as the Osan of old.

> Does a demon reside in a woman's breast?
> Ah, does a viper there reside?[2]

A philosophy of revolution and destruction passes on heedless of this lament. The wife is left behind, in her usual pose within the same house, with nothing to do but sigh. What's to become of me? Must I simply endure, trusting to heaven and praying for a shift in my husband's feelings? Having borne three children, I can hardly leave now.

After two nights out, even my husband would stay home. When supper ended, he played with the children on the veranda, trying to win their favor with servile compliments. "My, aren't we getting chubby," he cooed, awkwardly cradling our infant daughter. "And so pretty too."

"She is sweet, isn't she," I remarked. "When you look at a child, don't you want to live a long while?"

A strange expression came to my husband's face. I was startled and ashamed when, in evident distress, he merely replied, "H'm."

My husband spread the quilts for Masako and himself in the six-mat room and hung the mosquito net by eight o'clock. Although Masako still wanted to play with him, he dressed the girl in her pajamas and put her to bed. Then he too lay down and turned off the light. Thereafter, all was quiet.

I put our other two children to bed in the four-and-a-half-mat room and sewed until eleven o'clock. After hanging up the mosquito net, I lay down between the two small children.

I could not sleep. And neither could my husband in the next room. Hearing him sigh, I could not help sighing in return as I recalled Osan's lament.

> Does a demon reside in a woman's breast?
> Ah, does a viper there reside?

When my husband came into the room, I stiffened.

"What happened to the sleeping pills?" he asked.

"I took them all last night. But they didn't do any good."

"They won't work if you take too many. Six is just right."

He seemed rather moody.

III

I was so apprehensive I could barely swallow my food. And the heat, continuing day after day, only made things worse. My cheek bones became more prominent, and the milk in my breasts turned thin. My husband lost his appetite too. His eyes sank and began to glitter terribly.

One day he said he would rather go crazy than be so troubled. He laughed as if to mock himself.

I told him I felt the same way.

"But good people shouldn't have to suffer," he remarked. "I really admire people like you. How do you stay so upright and serious? Are some people born to succeed and others to fail?"

"No, it's merely that we're stupid. But . . . ."

"But what?"

He stared at me as though he were truly insane. I stuttered momentarily, unable to speak my mind. I was afraid to be definite.

"When you suffer, I do too."

"That's all?" He smiled as though greatly relieved.

I felt a kind of pleasure long absent from my life. I knew I could be happy just by making him comfortable. There wasn't any right and wrong. One had to relax, that was all.

Late that night I crawled under his mosquito net.

"It's okay," I insisted, "I'm not after anything." I lay down next to him.

"Excuse me," he jested in English, his voice quite hoarse. He was now sitting up on his haunches. His legs were outside the quilt and

crossed at the ankles. "Don't mind, don't mind," he added in his clumsy English.

The summer moon was full that night. Four or five narrow rays came through the crevices of the shutter doors, filtered past the mosquito net, and lit upon my husband's thin bare chest.

"You've lost some weight," I teased, sitting up on the same quilt as he.

"So have you. From worrying too much, I suppose."

"I already said it's okay. I'm not after anything. I'm clever enough, you see. Just be nice to me once in a while."

His teeth glinted in the moonlight as he laughed along with me. I had told him soon after we were married of my grandparents and their frequent quarrels. Though still a child when they died, I could remember how Grandmother invariably exclaimed during their fights, "Just be nice to me once in a while." The line had amused me as a child, and my husband and I would burst out laughing whenever I mimicked it.

This time he laughed a moment, then looked grave.

"I try to do right by you, to protect you. You're a good person. Be proud and don't bother about trifles. I'll never forget--you can be sure of that."

The jesting could hardly continue in the face of such solemnity.

"But you've changed," I protested feebly, my head bowed.

--I told myself how much better it would be if he ignored me, or indeed hated and despised me. It's hell to know he's aware of me as he embraces another woman. A husband might consider it noble to think of his wife, but isn't he wrong about that? Must he soothe his conscience by claiming he doesn't forget even as he takes a mistress? When he starts agonizing over a new love and the melancholic sighs emerge before his wife, she too becomes gloomy and sighs in return. If the husband were blithe and casual about the affair, the wife would

be spared this hell. If there's someone else, love her and forget about your wife--

My husband laughed meekly at the suggestion that he had changed. "Me? Changed? Not in the least. I just can't take the heat. This summer . . . well, just excuse me."

I could do nothing with that English phrase of his. So I smiled and said he was impossible. I made as if to hit him, then slipped out from the mosquito net. I returned to my own room and lay down between the two children.

Having coaxed my husband to laugh and talk even a little, I was content. The tension within me eased somewhat, and I slept through till morning untroubled by any worries for the first time in a long while.

Thereafter I always took this light approach. I played up to my husband and joked with him, little caring that he was deceiving me. I didn't bother about right or wrong. I only hoped for a brief respite, an hour or so of contentment. We had reached the stage where I could occasionally pinch him and hear his laughter echoing through the house. Then one morning my husband suddenly announced that he wished to go to a hot spring.

"It's that place in Nagano," he said, "where one of my friends is living. He told me to come anytime and not to trouble about food. This heat is giving me a constant headache, and I need to rest for two or three weeks. I'll go crazy in Tokyo, I've got to escape."

Was he escaping <u>her</u>?

"And what if a burglar with a pistol comes in?" My own words made me reflect on how often melancholic people jest.

"Tell him your husband's crazy. An armed burglar's no match for a lunatic."

There was no reason to oppose the trip, so I looked in the closet for my husband's summer suit. When I could not find it, I felt myself

turning pale. "Your linen suit's not here. What happened to it? Did a prowler get in when we were away?"

"I sold it." My husband gave me a mournful smile.

I was taken aback, but still managed to appear calm. "Well, that was fast work."

"Better than any burglar."

I realized that the woman was behind his surreptitious need for money. "What will you wear, then?"

"A sports shirt will do."

It was about noon when he left. During the morning he seemed anxious to be off as soon as possible, but a shower--unusual during a Tokyo heatwave--delayed his departure. With his shoestrings tied and a rucksack over his shoulder, he sat in the doorway frowning with impatience. "Is it every other year that the myrtle blooms?" he inquired.

He seemed disappointed that the tree near our front door was not in bloom this year.

"I suppose."

It was the last thing I said to him.

When the shower ended, he virtually fled the house. Three days later a brief notice appeared in the newspaper: my husband and his mistress had drowned themselves in Lake Suwa. His final letter, posted from the inn by the lake, reached me in due time.

"I'm not dying with this woman for love," the letter began. "I'm a journalist, the sort of man who stirs up rebellion and slips away to wipe his brow once the devastation begins. A strange creature, the journalist, really the Satan of our time. I so detest myself that I've decided to take up the cross of a revolutionary. A journalist caught in a scandal--unheard of, isn't it? But if my death makes Satan a little ashamed and aware of himself, I shall be content."

And so it went, a trivial stupid letter. Must a man cling so proudly to his so-called values? Must he lie and strike poses to the very end?

From one of my husband's friends I learned that the woman was twenty-seven years old and a reporter for the magazine in Kanda. During my evacuation, she had come often to our house. Now that she was pregnant . . . . Well, that's the whole story. Regardless of the fuss about dying a revolutionary death or whatever, the man was simply a loser.

Revolutions are supposed to make life easier, and I don't trust a revolutionary who pulls a long face. Why couldn't he love the woman joyfully and openly, so that I too could be happy? When a husband's love for his mistress becomes a hell for him, the wife is the first bystander to be affected.

A nimble adjustment of feeling--that's a genuine revolution. There's nothing difficult if one can manage this. As I headed for Suwa with the children to claim the body, I was more appalled than I was sad or angry--appalled at the utter stupidity of a husband who, unable to adjust his feelings, thought revolution a terrible cross to be borne.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1] Donald Fanger. The Creation of Nikolai Gogol. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1979, p. 21.

[2] For a translation of the Akinari tale, see Ugetsu Monogatari. Tr. Leon Zolbrod. Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1977, pp. 132-8.

[3] Masao Miyoshi. Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, p. 139.

[4] On "bunshin," see William F. Sibley. The Shigo Hero. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp. 212-3.

[5] For translations from Dazai into Western language, including those by Professor Keene, see Modern Japanese Literature in Translation: A Bibliography. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1979.

A briefer list of translations, as well as extensive materials on Dazai's life and writings, is to be found in my own Dazai Osamu. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975.

[6] J. Thomas Rimer, "Dazai Osamu: The Death of the Past," Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 182-99.

[7] Miyoshi, p. 123.

[8] Miyoshi, p. 127.

[9] Phyllis Ilona Lyons, "The Osamu Saga: The Autobiographical Fiction of Dazai Osamu," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago), 1975. A revised version of this work is forthcoming from Stanford University Press.

[10] Phyllis I. Lyons, "'Art Is Me': Dazai Osamu's Narrative Voice as a Permeable Self," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 41, no. 1 (June, 1981): p. 100.

[11] Dazai Osamu Zenshū. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1962, p. 344.

MEMORIES

[1] Based on a common saying in Japan that earthquake, lightning, fire, and Father are, in that order, the things most to be feared.

[2] Yamanaka Shikanosuke was a rōnin or masterless samurai of the sixteenth century. He became a popular hero for his role in resisting the incursion of the famous general Hideyoshi into his native province of Izumo. "The House of the Dove" refers to a novel of the same title by Satō Kōroku (1874-1949) serialized in the Yomiuri News in 1914. The comic dance mentioned in the translation takes its popular Japanese name of "Kappore" from a set of syllables recited by the participants.

[3] A reference to the origins of kabuki. For some comment on what Earle Ernst calls "river bank beggars," see The Kabuki Theatre. New York: Grove Press, 1956, p. 30.

[4] The Rustler is a kyōgen play based on a folktale about stealing sheep. "The House of the Broken Plate" is a well-known ghost story about a wife who deliberately breaks a plate to test her husband's love. After he kills her, she returns as a ghost to haunt him. Shuntoku Maru is a character in the kabuki play Sesshū Gappō Ga Tsuji. For a summary, see Aubrey S. and Giovanna M. Halford, The Kabuki Handbook. Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1966, pp. 256-9.

[5] The use here of the familiar name "Osa" for Dazai derives from one of the ideographs used to write the author's given name, Shūji.

[6] The first phrase is from a work called The Records of the Zen Master Seppō. "Though the moon's reflection penetrates to the bottom of the pool, it leaves no mark." Seppō is the Japanese reading for Hsüeh-feng, a Chinese priest of the T'ang Dynasty. The second phrase is from a verse in the Avatamsaka Sutra: "In the triple world of past, present, and future there is but one Mind. Outside of Mind there is no separate reality."

[7] The ideographs for this name mean, a Buddhist layman of quiet disposition, lovely and pure.

[8] A line reminiscent of some of Villon's poetry. I have not been able to track down the source, but it might be worth mentioning that Dazai was a student of French at the university--albeit a rather negligent one--and wrote a celebrated story after World War II entitled "Villon's Wife."

[9] Both The Brute Machine and My Handsome Friend are either very obscure works or else titles fabricated by Dazai. Given the tone of this particular passage in "Memories," I am inclined to favor the latter possibility.

[10] Tolstoy's Resurrection.

TOYS

[1] A common way of describing a situation which requires one to attend to many things without being able to relax. The following phrase about "resting on fog and clouds" is evidently of Dazai's making.

DAS GEMEINE

[1] A farmer of the early Tokugawa Period who reputedly killed a number of courtesans out of jealousy. His career gave rise to several kabuki plays.

[2] The worst of the Eight Hells in Buddhism, to which the greatest

sinners are condemned. The term also serves as the title of an interesting early story by Dazai.

[3]A famous poem by Doi Bansui (1871-1952) set to music by Taki Rentarō (1879-1903). Yamada Kōsaku (1886-1917) composed such famous songs as "The Red Dragonfly."

PUTTING GRANNY OUT TO DIE

[1]The title refers to a custom in pre-modern Japan, whereby aged villagers would go off to die in the mountains, thus relieving the community of the burden of supporting them. In certain tales based on this custom the oldsters are rescued in the end, particularly by their children who awaken to a sense of filial duty.

[2]A film sufficiently prized in Japan at the time of Dazai's story that it was entered in the Venice Film Festival in 1937. See also note 3 to "Das Gemeine."

MY OLDER BROTHERS

[1]Dazai most likely refers to Ichikawa Sadanji II, (1880-1940).

[2]Probably a reference to Ichikawa Shōchō (1886-1940).

[3]Although there exist two kabuki plays with the title, The Love Suicides of Toribeyama, the one mentioned by Dazai is probably the modern version by Okamoto Kidō (1872-1939), written in 1915 specifically for Ichikawa Sadanji II. Concerning The House of the Broken Plate, see note 4 of "Memories."

[4]A reference to the character Chūbei in Chikamatsu Monzaemon's puppet play, The Courier from Hell. For a translation, see Donald Keene. Major Plays of Chikamatsu. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 161-194.

[5]Novelist and editor, who is often considered a disciple of the celebrated short-story writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. His dates are 1894-1966.

EIGHT VIEWS OF TOKYO

[1]A work by the Czech novelist Ossip Schubin (1854-1934), translated into Japanese by Mori Ōgai (1862-1922). Ossip Schubin is a pseudonym for Aloysia Kirschner.

ON THE QUESTION OF APARREL

[1]Army general who served as Minister of War and, from February to June, 1937, as Prime Minister.

[2]A modern form of drama, at the height of its popularity in the middle of the Meiji Period.

[3]Popular name for the guardian diety of the Asama Shrine on Mount Fuji.

[4]A native of Hirosaki, where Dazai attended higher school, Kasai was a noted shishōsetsuka. Born in 1887, he lived a deprived and rather alienated life until his death in 1928.

[5]A pair of Chinese priests often depicted in Zen paintings. Jittoku customarily carries a broom while Kanzan unravels a sutra scroll. Strictly speaking, the Chinese names of these two figures, Shih Teh and Han Shan, ought to be used. However, having opted for the Japanese term Zen, in preference to Chinese Ch'an, I felt it best to be consistent.

[6]An incident from the kabuki play The Subscription List. The warrior Benkei takes it upon himself to strike his master, Yoshitsune, in hopes of convincing the guards manning a barrier that Yoshitsune is an underling. The guards had been alerted by Yoritomo to capture his younger brother Yoshitsune as a fugitive.

[7]A reference to the drab, khaki clothing which many Japanese were wearing in 1941, from both patriotism and necessity. The universal adaption of such clothing would eliminate the trials undergone by the protagonist of this sketch.

HOMECOMING

[1]See note 4 to "My Older Brothers." The first line mentioned by Dazai is in the text of the play; I have not, however, been able to locate the second line.

[2]The guests are allowed positions of honor, with their backs to the alcove known as the tokonoma.

A POOR MAN'S GOT HIS PRIDE

[1]The story is based on a tale of the same title in Ihara Saikaku's Tales from the Provinces (1685).

[2]I have translated somewhat freely the phrase Dazai quotes from The Analects. It seemed better to avoid the phrase, "Chapter One," which is part of the passage Dazai uses.

[3]A custom which creates a dilemma for many insolvent characters in early Tokugawa literature, especially in Saikaku.

[4]A small gold coin which served as the basic monetary unit in the Tokugawa Period. In a book on Saikaku published in 1963, Ivan Morris calculated that one coin was worth $46.00. See The Life of an Amorous Woman and Other Writings. Norfolk: New Directions, 1963, p. 300.

[5]Fifth generation member of a celebrated family of metalworkers. Sometimes known as Gotō Shirobei, he died in 1631.

[6]Ivan Morris calculated the value of a mon at about one penny. See Morris, pp. 299-300. Thus, Tankei's benefactor is showing extreme generosity.

THE MOUND OF THE MONKEY'S GRAVE

[1]Saikaku's tale, from The Pocket Inkstone, 1687, is titled "The Monkey, Imitating People, Gives a Bath."

[2]See note 1 to "Das Gemeine."

TAKING THE WEN AWAY

[1]The only tale of the four in Dazai's Otogi Zōshi translated here. In a brief preface to his four tales, Dazai describes the circumstances behind his adaptations. As the American air raids intensified late in the war, Dazai often had to seek safety with his family inside a small bomb shelter. His older daughter, five years old during the year of the raids, would become restless. Dazai would read to her from an illustrated book of tales, concocting in his own imagination the idiosyncratic versions that became his own Otogi Zōshi.

[2]The Tango Fudoki was one of a number of gazetteers on individual provinces compiled in the early eighth century. The one for Tango survives only as a fragment. Biographies of the Taoist Immortals is a collection of marvelous tales compiled at the end of the eleventh century by Ōe Masafusa (1041-1111).

[3]A very obscure being, if indeed it does exist. Possibly Dazai is coining the term "God of Fine Arts" in conjunction with the common phrase, "Demon of Literature."

[4]Mokugyo, literally a wooden fish, is a fairly common style of drum, often hung from the eaves of a temple building.

[5]A pastiche of verses suggested by such diverse sources as the Nō and the poetry of Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943).

[6]A fearsome looking hero of T'ang China, famous for his ability to subjugate demons. The Chinese name, which I would rather not have Japanese demons utter, is Chung K'uei.

CURRENCY

[1]The rampant inflation of the immediate postwar period provides the background for this story. The prefatory remark on European words for currency shows how the author can slight the facts in his attempt to be sly.

THE SOUND OF HAMMERING

[1]Because the first ideograph of the name means obese. The first ideograph of the son's name, Uzaemon, means "feather" or "wing."

OSAN

[1]The figure of Osan is derived from Chikmatsu's The Love Suicides

at Amijima, one of his most exciting and involved plays. Osan is the wronged wife who, in the course of the play, comes to feel an obligation to the courtesan-lover of her own husband. The sense of obligation impels her to see that her husband Jihei is able to fulfill his love for the courtesan Koharu. Certain passages in Dazai's story, the disappearance of the husband's traveling clothes for example, are paralleled by events in Chikamatsu's play. For a translation of The Love Suicides at Amijima, see Donald Keene. Major Plays of Chikamatsu, New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 387-425.

GLOSSARY OF CERTAIN JAPANESE TERMS, MOSTLY FOR CLOTHES, USED IN THE TRANSLATIONS

Daruma — plump doll of paper-maché representing Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who reportedly brought Ch'an, or Zen, Buddhism to China. With no legs and weighted on the bottom, the doll naturally assumes a sitting position, as in Zen meditation.

geta — wooden clogs commonly worn outdoors by the Japanese. They come in a variety of styles.

hakama — trousers of rather stiff silk worn by men on formal occasions.

haori — a silk jacket worn along with a hakama.

odenya — a tavern serving oden, a kind of stew made with tōfu, taro, octopus, and other ingredients. The fragrant steam and bubbling pot make oden a favorite winter dish.

sen — a unit of money from pre-war Japan. One hundred sen made one yen. For its value, refer to the entry for yen.

susuki — eulalia, or Miscanthus sinensus. Variously translated as pampas grass, silver grass, and plume grass, the last being most suggestive of the plant in flower.

tabi — cotton anklets, usually white, with a sole of canvas-like material. Worn with geta or other types of footwear on more-than-casual occasions.

tanzen — padded kimono for the winter.

tatami — rush mats of standard size, the most common floor covering in a traditional Japanese house.

Tengu — legendary human-like demon, with a red face and long nose, which often lives in the mountains.

yen — the standard monetary unit of Japan. The value of the yen varied greatly during Dazai's life, a fact which readers ought to note. During the thirties the yen was valued generally at about 50 cents, though in 1932 it fell to about 20 cents. Rampant inflation following World War II brought about a drastic devaluation of the yen, finally pegged at 360 to the dollar by the American Occupation authorities.

yukata — a light cotton kimono for summer wear.