

A Collection of Japanese Short Stories
Translated into English by Jayelon Lasseigne and Yoshiki Chikuma

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JAYELON LASSEIGNE

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Advisor: Yoshiki Chikuma

Table of Contents

❖ Preface	i
❖ 魔法 芥川龍之介 <i>Magic</i> by Ryûnosuke Akutagawa	1
❖ 狐 新美南吉 <i>Fox</i> by Nankichi Nîmi	9
❖ 川 新美南吉 <i>The River</i> by Nankichi Nîmi	17
❖ 種山ヶ原 宮沢賢治 <i>Taneyama Plateau</i> by Kenji Miyazawa	25

Preface

I first started down the road to competency in Japanese during my junior year in high school, with private lessons about once every two weeks. This eventually became only one lesson a month which, needless to say, does not do much in the way of learning a language. However, I continued with Japanese into college, studied abroad in Japan with a host family for six months, and finished my college career with a Bachelor's Essay in my Japanese Studies minor. This document is the product of not only my past year working with my advisor, Professor Chikuma, on translating Japanese short stories, but of the constant learning process one undertakes in studying a language as well; things learned in a textbook are not always applicable in real speech or writing, something I realized very quickly when looking at authentic texts.

This desire to read authentic texts and evaluate my Japanese language skills was my primary motivation for doing translation as my Bachelor's Essay. I chose my stories at random from *Aorzora Bunko*, a Japanese website that turns books whose copyrights have expired into free e-books and documents for anyone to enjoy them. My selections for choosing stories were twofold: they could not have been translated into English before, and they had to be about 11-15 pages. There were some stories that were not in the page range, but I was confident a few more pages would not matter. That being said, I soon found that not only would a few pages make a huge difference as translating was much harder than I anticipated, but also because I did not know what to look for in a short story, I ended up choosing stories that were much more complex than I originally intended; one story in particular, *Taneyama Plateau* by Kenji Miyazawa, is written completely in a dialect that neither I, nor Professor Chikuma, have much experience with. The result is that these stories are translated to the best of our abilities. At times I have inserted 'Translators' Notes' to help clarify parts or explain sections that could not be translated perfectly into English. I would also like to note that I kept the format of the stories true to their originals, which is why the first story, *Magic*, is indented while the others are not.

I hope that you enjoy reading this selection of Japanese short stories!

よろしくおねがいします。

Jayelon Lasseigne

Magic

Ryûnosuke Akutagawa

It was a drizzling, late-autumn night. The rickshaw that had picked me up went countless times up and down the steep slope of the Oomori neighborhood until finally being lowered in front of a small, western-style house surrounded by bamboo. The paint in the cramped entryway was already fading away, and in the light of the rickshaw driver's lamp I saw the name of an Indian man, Matiramu Misura, in Japanese letters on a hanging nameplate of earthenware (this alone was new).

If you said Matiramu Misura quite a few may know him even amongst those reading this. Misura was a patriot born in Calcutta who had been trying for many years to make India independent; at the same time he became a young expert of magic, learning the secrets of the famous Brahman, Hasan Kahn. Starting a month ago, I met Misura through a friend's introduction but, even though we had many discussions about politics and the economy, I was never there when he used the magic, which I was most interested in. So tonight, since I asked him in advance by letter to show me his magic, I made a rickshaw come quickly to take me to the lonely edge of Oomori city where Misura lived.

While I was getting wet in the rain, I pushed the button for a buzzer under the nameplate, relying on the light of the uncertain rickshaw driver's lantern. Soon after, the door opened and a face appeared in the entryway, that of a short, elderly Japanese woman who was taking care of Misura.

"Is Misura here?"

"He is. He has been waiting for you."

While the old woman spoke hospitably, she guided me to the end of the entryway where Misura's room was.

"Thank you for coming even though it is raining."

The dark skinned, big eyed, soft mustached Misura energetically greeted me while twisting the wick of an oil lamp on the table.

"No, if it were possible to just see your magic, this rain would be worth it."

After I sat down I looked around the gloomy room in the dim light of the oil lamp.

In Misura's simple Western room there was a single table in the very middle, a nicely-sized bookshelf alongside the wall, and a desk in front of the window – besides this were only some ordinary chairs that had been lined up for us to sit in. Moreover, those chairs and the desk both looked old; even the loudly colored, woven table cloth with a red flower pattern toward the edge had its individual threads exposed to the extent that it could be torn to shreds.

After we finished our greetings, we could hear the sound of the rain falling on the bamboo outside in the background for a while, but before long the old woman came in carrying the (black?) tea set. Misura opened up the lid of a cigar box, and,

"How about it? Have one," he offered one to me.

"Thank you," I said.

Without holding back I picked up one cigar and while I was lighting a match,

"If I remember correctly, the spirit that you use was named Gin or something, right? If that's the case, the magic I will see now is to be done by borrowing Gin's power?"

Misura also lit a cigar for himself and, smiling meaningfully, breathed out some of the pleasant smoke,

"The time when people thought spirits like Gin existed was many hundreds of years ago. You could say it was the time of the Arabian Nights. As for the magic I learned from Hasan Kahn, even you could use it if you wanted to. That's because it's merely an advanced hypnotism. Please look. With only one hand you could do it."

Misura raised his hand and drew a triangle shape in front of my eyes two or three times and before long he placed that hand on the table, pinched a fabric flower on the tablecloth, and it rose out. I was surprised and unintentionally pulled the chair closer to gaze at the flower. There could be no mistake that this flower was supposed to be in the tablecloth; but when Misura brought the flower up to my nose, I smelled a heavy scent. I was overcome by wonder and countless times expressed my astonishment. Misura, still smiling, casually dropped the flower onto the tablecloth. Of course, when he dropped it, it became part of the patterned tablecloth, and I couldn't move a single petal, let alone pinch and raise it. "How about that? It's not a big deal. This time please look at the lamp."

While Misura was asking this, he repositioned the lamp on the table and it began, for whatever reason, to rotate around and around just like a spinning top. In addition, while staying in one place and using the chimney of the lamp as if it were the stem of a top, it started spinning at a high speed. In the beginning I was petrified and

got scared it would create a fire, but even though I got scared many times, Misura drank his tea in silence, not looking flustered in the least. So I too, gathered my courage, and continued looking at the movement of the lamp, which was becoming fast, without taking my eyes off of it.

In reality, while the lamp's lid lifted and turned with a wind, a single yellow flame was lit without flickering, and it was a beautiful and strange spectacle; while this was happening, the lamp's rotation became increasingly faster until, when I thought it had become transparent to the extent I couldn't see it rotating, it sat as before on the table. Not even the lamp chimney appeared to be distorted.

"Were you surprised? Things like this only fool children. Or if you wish, I could do one more thing you want to see."

Misura looked behind him at the bookshelf on the wall, and before long his hand extended in that direction; as if beckoning, he moved his fingers, and the books that were lined up on the bookshelf came one-by-one automatically and flew over to the top of the table. The way they flew with both covers opened, they flew around in the summer evening like bats, fluttering and soaring through the air. Holding the cigar in my mouth, I looked on dumbfounded as the countless books, in the dim light of the lamp, flew orderly over to the table one by one and piled up in a pyramid shape. Moreover, when I thought that all of them had moved to the table, the books quickly started returning to the bookshelf beginning with those that had come first.

The most interesting thing was that one book with a temporary binding also opened its covers like wings and softly rose into the sky, and for a moment started to draw a circle above the table. Suddenly the pages were rustling and it plunged down towards my lap. "What's wrong," I thought, and picked up the book; I remembered it was one I had loaned to Misura only a week ago, a new French novel.

"Thank you for letting me borrow the book for a long time."

Misura's voice still contained a smile as he told me his thanks. By this time most of the books had already gone back to the bookshelf. With the feeling as if I had woken from a dream, I couldn't even reply to Misura's thanks; but in a while I remembered his words that, "As for my magic, even you could use it if you wanted to."

"Why, I've heard about your reputation for some time, but I never thought your magic would be this mysterious in reality. You said that even a person like me could use it if I try; that wasn't a joke, was it?"

"Of course you can use it. Anyone can use it without trouble. But --" Misura started to say while looking fixedly at my face, and his voice became unusually serious,

"But people with greed cannot use it. If you think you want to learn Hasan Kahn's magic, first throw away your greed. Can you do this?"

"I think I can."

I replied with this but because I felt an uneasiness for whatever reason, I quickly added more words after.

"If only you will teach me."

Even after this Misura still looked doubtful in his expression, but he must've thought that asking more would have been impolite. Soon, while leisurely nodding,

"Well then let me teach you. But, even though I said there won't be problems, it takes time to learn it so please stay here tonight."

"Thank you for going through the trouble."

I was happy I was going to be taught the magic and many times expressed my gratitude to Misura. However, Misura gave no indication of being concerned about my gratitude, quietly stood up from the chair, and called the old woman.

"It turns out that we have a guest that will be staying here tonight, so please prepare a bed for him." While getting excited, I forgot to let the ash drop from my cigar and looked up at the kind face of Misura, which was bathed in the light of the oil lamp.

X

X

X

It has been only one month since I learned the magic from Misura. It was of course a night when it was pouring rain, but in a room in a Ginza club with five or six friends, I indulged in some lighthearted chatting while taking a place in front of the fireplace.

As you know, this place was in the heart of Tokyo, and because the rain falling outside the window continuously wet the roofs of automobiles and carriages, lonely sounds (like the sound of splashing water in a bamboo forest in Oomori) weren't audible.

The joyousness inside the room, with the bright electric lights, big Moroccan chairs, and the smooth, bright, wooden mosaic floor, could not be compared to Misura's room, which looked as though spirits might appear.

In the cigar smoke we told hunting and horse racing stories for a moment. While this was happening, a friend, throwing his half-smoked cigar into the fireplace, looked in my direction, and said,

“Lately there’s been a rumor that you have been using magic; how about it? Do you think you could show us?”

“Of course,” I replied in an arrogant manner while leaning my head on the back of the chair, just as a master of magic would do.

“Well then, by all means since we are trusting you, please show us strange techniques that normal magicians can’t do.” The friends all looked on approvingly, and each of them drew their chairs closer, looking at me expectantly. So I slowly stood up from my chair and said,

“Please watch carefully; the magic I use has no secrets or tricks.”

While I was saying this, I rolled up my cuffs and casually scooped up some of the blazing coal inside the fireplace into my palm. The friends surrounding me, at only this, were already startled. As they looked at each other everyone started to recoil uncomfortably, thinking that it would be painful if they got closer carelessly and were burned.

Therefore, I increasingly kept calm, and in a moment the fire of the coal in my hand, after showing it in front of everyone’s eyes, fell quickly and scattered over the wooden mosaic floor. At this moment the sound of the falling rain outside the window was suppressed by a different sound which, also sounding like rain, started on the floor.

My friends looked as if they just saw a dream, were overcome with surprise, and forgot to applaud.

“This was a piece of cake.”

I expressed a triumphant smile and calmly lowered myself back into my chair.

“Are all of these real gold coins?” One of my dumbfounded friends finally asked me about five minutes after the coins fell.

“They’re real gold coins. If you think I am lying, please pick one up in your hand.”

“There’s no chance of getting burned, right?”

This friend timidly picked up a coin from the ground and looked at it,

"Indeed this is a real gold coin. Hey, server, please bring a broom and dustpan and gather all of this up."

A server quickly came and collected everything from the floor and piled it up on top of the table. While my friends all gathered around the table,

"That looks like about 200,000 yen."

"No, it looks like more. If this were a delicate table, this would be enough to break it."

"In any case, you learned some considerable magic. The coal's flames quickly became gold coins."

"Well then, in less than one week, someone could become a millionaire who is not less than Iwasaki or Mitsui," and out of everyone's mouths came praise for my magic. But I, while leaning on the chair and calmly breathing out cigar smoke, said,

"No, the thing about magic is that once you develop desire, it can't be used again. Since you've already looked at the coins, you want them, but we need to put them back in the fireplace."

My friends heard my words and began to oppose them. They said it was unnecessary that I make this much money back into coal. In order to keep my integrity (I had promised Misura), I stubbornly argued with my friends that no matter what, the coins must be thrown into the fireplace. When I was arguing, the one among my friends rumored to be the sneakiest snickered in my face,

"You say turn the gold coins to their original state. We say we don't want that. No matter how long this takes, it's natural the argument won't end. So, I was thinking that you play a game of cards with us, using these coins as the pot. If you win, make them coal or whatever, you can get rid of the coins freely. But, if we win, you hand over the coins as they are to us. In that case both opinions stand and we will be satisfied, right?"

Nonetheless, I still shook my head and wouldn't easily support this proposal. However, this friend's ridiculing smile only grew and, staring at me and the gold on the table like a sneaky person, he said,

"In other words, the reason why you won't play cards is because you don't want to give us the gold, right? If that's the case, your resolution to throw away greed to do magic will become doubtful, right?"

"No, I'm not changing the coins to coals because I want them."

"Then please play cards."

As my friend had said, I ended up being in a situation where I had to play cards using the coins on the table as the pot. Of course, my friends were very happy, and as soon as they quickly sent for one set of playing cards, they surrounded the card table in the corner of the room, urging me (who was still hesitating) to join.

Because of this, I didn't have a choice and grudgingly played cards for a while. But somehow, on this particular night, I, who is not usually good at cards, kept winning as though it wasn't real. When this happened, it was strange, and though in the beginning I didn't want to, in less than 10 minutes I had forgotten everything and began to draw cards enthusiastically.

Since my friends started playing cards with me specifically intending to take away all of those gold coins from me, everyone was impatient and started to focus on the competition to the extent that I thought their faces would almost turn red. But, no matter how desperate my friends became, I couldn't lose even once, and to my surprise I ended up winning about the same sum of those gold coins back. When I did this the mean friend from before, with the force of a madman, pushed a card in front of me,

"Come, please draw. I will wager all of my assets. My land, house, horse, automobile, all of these will be bet. In exchange, wager everything that you have won until now, in addition to those gold coins. Come, please draw."

In that moment, my greediness came out. If I lost from bad luck this time, not only the coins but even the money that I had put so much effort into winning would be taken by my opponent. Not only this, if I won, I would be able to obtain all of his possessions. If I didn't use magic in a situation like this, where were the rewards for the efforts I took to learn it? Once I thought of this, I couldn't suppress the desire, and while I secretly used magic, in the attitude of starting a duel, I said,

"Alright. You draw first."

"Nine."

"King."

While raising a triumphant voice, I showed the card I had drawn in front of the eyes of my opponent, whose face was becoming pale. When I did this, mysteriously the king in the card, as if a soul had entered it, lifted his head wearing the crown and smoothly moved his body out of the card. When he did this, well-manneredly holding a sword and showing a broad, creepy smile, he called to the old woman.

"It looks like the guest is leaving, so you don't have to make a sleeping arrangement."

This was said in a voice I had heard before. When I thought this, for some reason, the rain falling outside the window suddenly started to sound like the lonely rain splashing in that bamboo forest.

Suddenly I came to, and upon looking around, Misura, expressing a smile just like that king, was sitting across from me bathed in the dim light of the oil lamp.

When I looked at the fact that even the ashes from the cigar between my fingers had not fallen and collected, what I thought had been about a month must have been a two-or-three-minute dream. However, within those short two or three minutes, the fact that I was not a person who has the qualifications to learn the secrets of Hasan Kahn's magic became regrettably clear to both me and Misura. Keeping my head lowered embarrassedly, I couldn't speak for a while.

"If you thought you could use my magic, first you must throw away greed. You're not ready for this."

Misura had a pitiful look in his eyes and, putting his elbows on the tablecloth with the red floral pattern woven on the edge, quietly chided me.

Fox

Nankichi Nîmi

I

Seven children were walking in a moonlit night. Big children mingled with little ones.

The moon shined down from above. The children's short shadows were projected on the ground.

The children looked at their own shadows and thought, "they have very large heads and short feet, huh."

Then, finding the shadows funny, a few of the children began to laugh. Because the shadows looked strange, there were also children who ran a few steps to watch the shadows move

On this moonlit night, the children were apt to think about dreamy things.

Starting from a small village, the children were only two kilometers away from the city center and were going there for a night festival.

When they climbed onto a sunken road, a whistling, flute sound was audible, riding on one of the light, spring night winds.

The children's pace naturally became faster.

When this happened, one child unfortunately fell behind.

"Bunroku, hurry up!" another child called.

Even in the moon light, Bunroku was a child you could tell was thin, pale skinned, and big-eyed. He was hurrying to catch up as much as he could.

"But I'm wearing my mom's clogs!" he said at last, acting a little upset. Indeed, he was wearing large-adult clogs on his long and narrow feet.

II

When they entered the city center, the clog shop was soon on the roadside.

The children went into that shop. The reason was to buy Bunroku's sandals. Bunroku's mother told him to.

"Umm, excuse me," Yoshinori said, pouting, to the clog shop's woman owner.

"It's him, the child of Sei from the barrel shop. This child, just give him one pair of clogs. Afterwards, Mom will definitely bring you money."

The other kids, looking at the barrel shop's child, pushed him out in front. That was Bunroku. Bunroku was just standing there and blinked twice.

The owner burst into laughter and took down some sandals from a shelf.

You won't know whether or not clogs fit if you don't put them against your feet. Yoshinori, acting like Bunroku's father, put the clogs next to Bunroku's feet.

She didn't know if she had to guess which clogs fit well on feet. Yoshinori, like his father, supplied Bunroku with clogs. After all, Bunroku, an only child, was spoiled.

Just when Bunroku put on the new clogs, an elderly woman with a bent back came into the clog shop. Then, she suddenly said this:

"Oh dear, I don't know whose child you are, but it is said that when new clogs are worn at night a fox will possess you."

The children were surprised and looked at the face of the woman.

"That's a lie," Yoshinori said before long.

"It's a superstition," said another child.

Even so, the children's faces had anxiety on them.

"Ok, well then, I'll do a magic spell for you," the lady owner said lightly.

The owner imitated holding up a match and touched Bunroku's new clogs.

"Now, that's good. With this, both foxes and raccoon dogs won't possess you."

Then the children left the clog shop.

III

While the children ate cotton candy, they watched a child performer dance while spinning two folding fans very fast on the stage. Even though the child performer had a thick coating of face powder on, if you looked closely, it was Toneko from the bathhouse.

"Huh, it's Toneko, hehe," they whispered.

When they got tired of looking at the child performer, they went into a dark place and lit ground-spinning fireworks and threw firecrackers at a stone wall.

In the glow of the electric lights that shined on the stage, lots of bugs came and surrounded the area. When they looked, a huge, ashen-colored moth was tightly clinging right under the eaves of the stage front.

Around the time when the third puppet came out and began to dance in the narrow area in front of a festival float, the people on the grounds of the Shinto shrine had decreased. Fireworks and the sounds of balloons had also decreased.

The children lined up under the tip of the float, looked up, and saw the faces of the puppets. The children couldn't tell if the faces were of an adult or a child. They could only think that the black eyes had life. From time to time the eyes blinked because there were people manipulating the puppets by pulling strings from behind. The children knew this well. But when the puppets blinked, the children, somehow, felt a sad or ominous feeling.

As this was happening, suddenly the mouths opened wide, and the puppets' tongues came out before going back, back into their bright red mouths.

This, too, was done by the people pulling strings from behind. The children knew this well. If it was daytime, the children would be amused and would laugh at it.

But the children weren't laughing right now. In the shadowy light of the paper lantern, the puppets were completely real; the puppets' winking and sticking their tongues out..... how eerie.

The children remembered about Bunroku's new clogs. They remembered the old woman saying that if you wear new clogs at night, foxes will possess you.

The children realized that they had been playing for too long; they realized that there was a two-mile path in the middle of the field where they had to go home.

IV

It was also a moonlit night when they returned.

However, for whatever reason, the moonlight on their way back was somehow not as exciting. The children were silent – every child walked quietly, just as though looking inside their hearts.

When they came to the top of the sunken road, one child brought his mouth close to another child's ear and whispered something. When this happened, the child who was whispered to went to a different child and whispered something. That child whispered to yet another child. Thus, other than Bunroku, the children sent word of something from ear to ear.

This is what they were saying: “The lady owner of the clog shop didn’t really do a magic spell for Bunroku’s clogs. She only pretended.”

After this, the children still walked quietly. When it was quiet, the children thought:

“I wonder what it is to be possessed by a fox. Does it mean the fox enters Bunroku? Does the fox become his heart, while the shape is still Bunroku? If that’s the case, Bunroku could already be possessed by a fox. Because Bunroku has been silent, we don’t know, but his heart could already be possessed by a fox.”

In the same moonlit night, on the same road in the middle of a field, anyone would tend to think about these same things. So the children’s pace became faster.

The road came next to a pond surrounded by short peach trees. Amongst the children, someone said, “Kon,” and gave a small cough.

It was not possible to miss even this small sound because they were walking quietly. So the children stealthily searched for the person who coughed. Then they realized that Bunroku had done it.

Bunroku said “Kon”¹ and coughed!

That being the case, the children thought that there must be a special meaning behind that cough. When they thought hard, it seemed that it wasn’t a cough. It seemed it was a fox’s bark.

“Kon,” Bunroku said again.

“Bunroku has become a fox,” the children thought. “A fox is among us,” the children thought, terrified.

V

The house of Bunroku of the barrel shop was at a place a little distant from everyone else’s homes.

The residence had become surrounded by a wide mandarin orange plantation and stood alone in a swamp. It had become routine for the children to always take a slightly longer way around, starting at the water wheel, and take Bunroku to the gate. The reason was that Bunroku was barrel maker Seiroku’s only son, a spoiled child. The reason the children were nice to Bunroku was because his mother often gave them things like mandarins and snacks and asked the children if they could do her the favor

¹ In Japanese, the onomatopoeia word for ‘cough’ and the sound that a fox makes are the same word: ‘kon.’

of playing with Bunroku. Tonight also, when they went to the festival, the children came to that gate to pick Bunroku up.

Anyhow, everyone finally came to the place by the water wheel. Next to it, a narrow path branched out and went down through grass. This was the path that went to Bunroku's house.

However, tonight, as if completely forgetting about Bunroku, there was no one who wanted to take Bunroku home. It wasn't that they had actually forgotten about him; it was that they were scared of him.

Even so, he thought that at least Yoshinori, who was always kind, would follow him, and he repeatedly looked back as he moved into the shadow of the water wheel.

In the end, nobody went with Bunroku.

So Bunroku went alone down the thin path that led to the moonlit swamp.

Since Bunroku was close to his house from where he was, even if no one came he wouldn't have a problem. Only tonight no one came.

Even if Bunroku seemed absentminded, he already knew exactly what everyone said to each other about his clogs and what had happened because he coughed.

"Until we went to the festival, everyone had been so kind to me; but now, not one is concerned about me anymore because I might be possessed by a fox, having worn new clogs at night." To Bunroku, that made him feel miserable.

As for Yoshinori, even though he was four years older than Bunroku, he was a nice child, and if Bunroku looked cold, he always took off the haori he wore over his clothes and gave it to Bunroku (boys from the countryside wear haori over their clothes when it is cold). Even so, tonight Yoshinori never lent him his haori, no matter how many coughs Bunroku had.

Bunroku came to the hedge that became an outer fence around his residence. While he opened and entered into a small, wooden back door, Bunroku looked at his own small shadow, and suddenly he felt that worry.

"In the very rare chance I might have been possessed by a fox, I wonder what mother and father will do with me."

VI

Bunroku's father had left for the barrel maker's guild, and because he had not yet returned Bunroku and his mother decided to get ready for bed before him.

Even though Bunroku was in the third grade, he still slept with his mother. It couldn't be helped; he was an only child.

"Now then, please tell me what you did at the festival!" said his mother while fixing the collar on his pajamas.

His mother asks him about school if he returns from school, town if he comes back from town, and the movies if he comes home from the movies. Because Bunroku was bad at storytelling, he told them in a scattered way. Even so, his mother said they were very interesting and listened to the happy Bunroku's stories.

"Oh, the child performer, when I looked closer it was Toneko from the bathhouse!" Bunroku said.

His mother said, "Really?" and laughed, finding it funny. "Did you recognize anyone else who appeared after that?" she asked.

Bunroku, as though trying to remember, opened his eyes wide and sat still, but soon he stopped talking about the festival and said this:

"Mom, if someone wore new clogs at night, would a fox possess them?"

His mother thought about what he had said, and for a moment she looked at Bunroku's face in disbelief; but tonight she was able to guess what had happened.

"Who said such a thing?"

Bunroku became more serious and repeated his last question.

"Is it true?"

"It's not true. People used to say that a long time ago."

"It's not true?"

"Yes, it's not true."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

Bunroku was silent for a while. While he was silent, his eyes went in circles as he thought. After that, he said this:

"If it was true, what would you do?"

"What do you mean 'what would I do?'" his mother repeated.

"If I actually became a fox, what would you do?"

His mother started laughing as though finding the question funny from the bottom of her heart.

"Well? Mom? Mom?" said Bunroku, and with an embarrassed face he pressed his mother's chest with both hands.

"Well indeed," she said after thinking a little. "If that was the case, we couldn't keep you at home anymore."

When Bunroku heard this his expression became sad.

"If it was true where would I go?"

"You could go in the direction of Mt. Karasune because I've heard that there are still foxes there."

"What would you and Dad do?" he asked, and his mother, as adults do when they tease a child, said in a serious manner with a completely serious face,

"Dad and Mom would discuss with each other, 'because our cute Bunroku has become a fox, we too cannot find any happiness in this world,' and we would stop being humans and decide to become foxes."

"You and Dad would become foxes?"

"Yes the two of us, tomorrow night, would go to the clog shop to buy new clogs and become foxes together. After that we would take you to Mt. Karasune."

Bunroku's large eyes were sparkling. "Is Mt. Karasune to the west?"

"From Naruwa it's the south-west mountain."

"Is it deeply wooded?"

"The place where the pine trees grow."

"Are there no hunters?"

"By 'hunters,' do you mean people with guns? Because it's in the middle of the mountain they might be there."

"If the hunters attack, what will we do, Mom?"

"We'll go into a deep cave and if the three of us huddle, they won't find us."

"But when snow falls, there won't be any food, right? If we leave to find food and a hunter's dog finds us, what will we do?"

"If that happens, we'll run for dear life and escape."

"But you and Dad are fast, which is good, but I'm a child fox and I'll fall behind."

"Dad and I will both pull you with our hands."

"What if you're doing that and a dog comes up behind us?"

His mother was a little quiet. After that she spoke slowly. Again, she spoke in a serious voice.

"If that happens, Mom will be lame and we'll go slowly."

"Why?"

"The dog will bite at Mom and while he is, the hunter will come and tie her up. Meanwhile you and Dad will run away."

Bunroku was surprised and took a long hard look at his mother's face.

"I don't want that, Mother! If that happens, doesn't that mean you will die?"

"But it can't be helped. Mom will be a cripple and moving slowly."

"I don't want that, Mom. Won't you die?"

"But it can't be helped. Mother will be a cripple and moving slowly, slowly....."

"I don't want that! I don't! I don't!"

While Bunroku was yelling, he clung to his mother's chest. Tears suddenly started flowing.

His mother, too, wiped the edge of her eyes secretly on the sleeve of her pajamas; then she picked up the small pillow that Bunroku had sent flying and placed it under his head.

The River

Nankichi Nîmi

I

When four children came to the edge of the river, Otojirô, the child of the pharmacist, who seemed to have been following silently until now, took out a large persimmon from his pocket and said this:

“I will give this to the person who has been in the river the longest.”

The three children who heard this were not particularly surprised. The silent Otojirô from the pharmacy was a strange young boy, and he had a habit of saying strange things completely separate from the things everyone else was talking about. The three children directed their attention towards the prize more than anything.

When you peel the shiny skin thinly, right away the yellow-orange flesh appeared. Everyone called this a certain type of persimmon. Among the persimmons you can pick in this area, it's the biggest and most delicious kind. On Otojirô's house's spacious grounds, things like persimmons, mandarin oranges, and pomegranates are plentiful. The reason the children went to his house to play, despite his being strange, was because they could get the fruit.

Anyway, while there are no complaints as far as the prize is concerned, what about the river? Because the end of autumn is close, the water isn't flowing. However, this river, although the width was narrow, the red-clay riverbed was deeply hollowed out, and the clear water inside filled it fairly deeply. In summer, because they often came to bathe in the water, they could guess the depth of the river. It seems it would come up to the belly button area.

The three children exchanged a few glances and, discussing what to do with their eyes, concluded, “Let's do it.” When the discussion wrapped up, Tokuichi from Mori Clinic loosened his belt. Just as if he had done a prank worth doing, his face was shining. Heitarô the exaggerator, because he was wearing a kimono, first unfastened his bag, then rolled up his kimono to his waist and pulled off his underwear. Kyûsuke, not wanting to fall behind, took off his pants and threw them away on the green and yellow grass.

When they took off their clothes, their lower bodies felt lighter. The wind felt cold on their feet.

With Tokuichi in front, all three clung to the grass at the riverbank and slipped down into the river. When they put their first foot into the water, it came up to above their kneecaps.

“It’s cold!”

The chill that started in their feet and spread through their body made them almost want to say this. It wasn’t that they only wanted the persimmon. The fact that they had rolled up the bottom part of their kimonos and gone into the water at this time of year was funny. The three children, without being told to by Otojirô, who was looking down from above, moved further towards the middle of the river. It was as expected. The water crept up, lapping, and only stopped a centimeter below Kyûsuke’s navel.

The three stood facing each other, looked at their belly buttons and then at each other’s, and chuckled at how silly they looked. However, when they spoke, their teeth clattered and strangely it seemed as if their strength gathered in their back. When they moved, they felt all the more cold.

For a while, everyone was silent. From somewhere, an evening cow mooed, lonesome. Seeing this as a cue, Tokuichi wore a serious expression and slowly began to move in the direction of the shore. He moved slowly in order not to get anymore wet. Kyûsuke and Heitarô looked at each other but didn’t laugh.

When it had become just the two of them, Kyûsuke, who thought this game was silly, decided to surrender to Heitarô even though he could endure longer. Just as Tokuichi had done, he slowly stepped up to the direction of the shore, hung onto the grass, and went up.

When Kyûsuke stood on the grass, he could tell that his feet were numb. Using a hand towel, he quickly dried himself off starting with his feet and going up to his waist and pulled his underwear and pants on. Because his body was trembling, he stumbled and bumped into Tokuichi, who had been putting his pants on as well.

Heitarô was still in the river. Since his victory had already been decided, he must not have been pretending; but he probably wanted to show off. Kyûsuke thought, “This kind of behavior is why he’s stupid,” looking at Heitarô. Heitarô feigned composure and stood facing the south.

The two who lost, wanting to tease, cheered from above, “Keep going, keep going Hei!” Otojirô, for whatever reason, started to cheer as well.

Tokuichi’s eyes brightened, and he whispered, “Let’s eat the persimmon.”

However, Kyûsuke felt conflicted. He felt that while Heitarô didn’t deserve it, it would also be fun. They all knew from experience that it was fun to provoke Heitarô.

Heitarô overheard from the river. "That's not fair!" he shouted.

"He's already started his routine. Hurry up, hurry up!" said Tokuichi, who quickly snatched the persimmon from Otojirô's hand and took a bite. Sure enough, the beautiful yellow-orange flesh was exposed. Kyûsuke then received it from Tokuichi and nibbled on the opposite side. After that Otojirô too took a bite. Heitarô could tell that Otojirô was participating in this prank.

Heitarô realized that even if he shouted now, he wouldn't be able to get the persimmon back. Like the other two had done, he slowly approached the bank. Then he held onto the grass at the edge. However, while he was holding on, he stayed still. It appeared he was deliberating something.

The other three looked at each other. The playfulness in their faces hesitated for a moment, then left. They became silent.

Heitarô, whose face had gone pale, frowned. Then as if he were sick, he bent over at the waist.

"What's wrong, Hei?" said Tokuichi nervously.

"Come over here," Kyûsuke also said.

Even so, Heitarô, while holding onto the grass with one hand, didn't move. The place underneath his cheekbones was white as though he had rubbed chalk on it, and in Kyûsuke's eyes he looked pitiful. "This is terrible," he thought.

The three went closer and grabbed Heitarô's cold hand; when they pulled him up he was feeble like someone almost dead and was at their mercy. Even after he had gotten up, because he was absentmindedly standing and looked like he had cried, they knew they had to take care of him. Tokuichi and Kyûsuke each offered a hand towel and dried one of Heitarô's legs. Otojirô picked up his underwear from on top of the grass. Heitarô let them do anything and everything. He even let them put on his hat for him. Incidentally, even though Heitarô was completely dressed, he wouldn't start walking. From time to time he would frown and bend his body over from the waist, as if he was in pain.

The other three looked at each other's faces, thinking, "Hmm, this is a problem." However, they were half in doubt about whether or not there was actually something wrong with Heitarô. That was because Heitarô had acted dead and pretended his stomach had hurt before, and he was very good at it. A soccer ball had once hit his head and he became unsteady and staggering, fell anywhere on the ground, and made himself appear to have died because the location of the hit was bad. That imitation was true to life. Although Kyûsuke had not yet seen a person be hit by a soccer ball and die,

he thought, "Supposing that were to happen, surely that person would act in the way Heitarô has demonstrated." Even those who had been tricked by Heitarô before, once he pretended to be dead, would think, "Surely this time he has died." It was common for Heitarô to revive himself, screaming, "Got you!" about the time when everyone started to worry.

Because of this, today the three thought about whether or not this was a trick. In revenge for being cheated of the persimmon prize, his acting today was more intricate and longer than usual, wasn't it? However, in reality the color of his face was paler than usual. The situation was different from the time he was hit with the soccer ball in the sense that Heitarô had had his lower belly in the water for quite a long time. There was a real possibility that he had become sick.

That being the case, Kyûsuke began to worry about his own stomach because if their stomachs were cooled in the water as well, there was a chance that they were sick too. It seemed as if there was a dull pain in his stomach when he thought this.

"All right, get on my back," said Tokuichi, who squatted and turned towards Heitarô. Heitarô, without strength, climbed on.

Otojirô carried Tokuichi's backpack and Kyûsuke carried Heitarô's dirty clogs which had fallen off his feet. Kyûsuke kicked the half-eaten persimmon, which had been dropped on the ground and covered in sand in the confusion, into the middle of the river. After that, the three of them departed.

II

The next morning, Kyûsuke went to the animal pen to feed the goats, and when he clutched the wet grass with his hands, he remembered the events of yesterday at the river. At the same time, the worry over the well-being of Heitarô weighed heavily on his heart.

Before long, he had already forgotten it. However, while he forgot everything else, the heaviness of worry remained in his heart, and he felt unhappy.

When it was seven thirty, he left his house like always. When he ran in a straight line towards thin path at the back of the school, about 50 meters before it, he saw Otojirô from the pharmacy who, walking as though thinking about something boring, was clapping and kept letting his right hand stretch out after each clap.

Thinking that the two of them would share the worries and avoid suffering alone, Kyûsuke ran to him. However, Otojirô looked as though he had completely forgotten about yesterday's events. Kyûsuke thought, "Oh, I have been overreacting," and felt relaxed. There was nothing to worry about.

Even after Kyûsuke joined Otojirô, he still continued clapping while following the train of his own thoughts. Before long, someone came running up behind them, making the sound of a full backpack. It was Tokuichi from the Mori clinic.

While the brim of his brand-new hat shined, he said good morning and cheerfully came over. After that he asked, "There wasn't a math assignment for today, right?" Tokuchi, too, did not care about yesterday's events. In reality, there was nothing to worry about. In this world strange things did not happen that easily.

The three of them went into the classroom. Everyone else had mostly already arrived. In the classroom there was about ten children. Kyûsuke noticed with a glance that within those ten, Heitarô was not there. Heitarô's seat was right next to Tokuichi's. Kyûsuke was thinking about the school supplies that were surely in Heitarô's desk and when he looked that way he discovered that Tokuichi was looking at it with the same eyes. Otojirô was also looking at the seat. Kyûsuke knew that all of them held the same concern in their hearts.

Tokuichi lifted the lid on Heitarô's desk a little. Kyûsuke's heart beat anxiously. There was nothing inside.

Heitarô stopped coming to school after that day.

The days passed, five, seven, ten, and Heitarô never appeared at school. However, no one spoke about Heitarô. Kyûsuke thought that was strange. Even though a person they had known for five years had suddenly gone missing, everyone was as calm as if nothing had happened. However, he also thought this was natural.

Kyûsuke knew that at least Tokuichi and Otojirô felt heartache about Heitarô, just like himself. Even so, these three never said a word about Heitarô. This wasn't all; they were strangely afraid of looking at each other's eyes and began to avoid seeing each other.

For these reasons, Kyûsuke was at a loss. For example, "what if I confess to the teacher about everything and apologize? Wouldn't my heart then become lighter? But if Heitarô actually became sick based on the events at the river, there is no reason why he would be quiet. Heitarô must have told his parents. If that's the case, his father or mother would surely get the information to the teacher. Perhaps if that happened, it is possible the teacher already knows everything. May the reason the teacher is purposefully pretending not to know be that they are waiting for us to surrender ourselves?" Kyûsuke thought about that and without knowing, without knowing, he peeked at his teacher's face while ducking his head.

At that time, he felt a horrible urge to turn himself in. It was during National History class. Kyûsuke could usually listen to the stories with interest, but because of the struggle in his mind, he was scattered and didn't find it interesting at all; when he

thought about the fact that, "I have to go through such a miserable experience because I have secrets, and if I talk about it, I could release my worries," then he wanted to stand up and shout, "Teacher, the three of us tricked Heitarô and he became sick!"

However, the atmosphere around Kyûsuke, which was not changed from usual, stopped those impulses. Even though it was daytime and even though his mind was clear, he clearly saw the illusion of another Kyûsuke standing up and starting to say, "Teacher!" right next to himself, three or four times. His ears were ringing and his hands sweating.

Two or three months passed. Heitarô still hadn't come to school. In that time, Kyûsuke had heard nearly nothing about Heitarô. Only once, this happened. One morning, as Kyûsuke came into the classroom, he passed two students leaving, carrying a desk to the hallway.

"Whose is this?" When he casually asked this, one of them replied,

"It's Heitarô's." That was all. After that, something like this happened once more. One afternoon, Otojirô from the pharmacy waited for Kyûsuke outside the back gate and asked, "I'm going to Hei's place to bring him medicine, would you like to come?" Kyûsuke was startled, but agreed and they left. The medicine was aspirin, which he heard gets rid of fevers. "If Heitarô's sickness was originally the cold, if you remove the fever, he'll soon be completely better," Heitarô said with confidence like a doctor. "That must be it," thought Kyûsuke who strongly agreed. "Even so, if it's a very effective medicine, why didn't Otojirô take it to Heitarô much earlier?" Before long they came before the Jyonen Temple on the outskirts of the village, which they didn't usually pass by. At the south-west corner of the Jyonen Temple's wall, a small house was built as if leaning against the earthen wall (in fact, it was slightly slanted). That was Heitarô's house. The two of them walked along the wall. They came to the front of Heitarô's house. The door was open and it was dark. They weren't sure if there were people in there as there wasn't a single sound. A cat was on the threshold on which the sun was shining. Neither of them stopped. Rather, their pace became faster. They passed the house and that was it.

Kyûsuke had come to dislike laughing and talking with his other friends. The amount of time he had spent absentmindedly by himself had, therefore, increased. Furthermore, he became terribly forgetful. Things like starting something and then forgetting about it had grown. When he suddenly noticed the book that was in his hand, soon it was not there. It appeared that no matter how much he racked his brains, he couldn't remember where he had placed it. He would run errands, forget what he was supposed to buy,

then buy random things and return home; it sounded quite like a *rakugo*² you'd hear on the radio.

Originally, Kyûsuke sometimes felt that certain scenery and people whom he was used to seeing looked drearily dull. He felt that his soul was hurt just like a hand that has been thrust into a thorny bush; however, it recently had become more frequent and worse. There were times he would look at the street outside the garden, thinking why people have to be born in such an absurd and detestable place. It seemed to him that humans who got sick and died just by being in cold water for a mere five minutes (Kyûsuke could only think that Heitarô would die) were even more miserable and absurd.

Toward the end of the third term, Kyûsuke finally heard of Heitarô's death. After lunch Kyûsuke was sunbathing near the raised platform in the front of the class. While he was doing this, from within a group that was talking in a corner opposite him,

"Heitarô is dead," one said.

"Really?" said another. They didn't look particularly surprised. Kyûsuke, too, was not surprised. His heart was too tired to be surprised.

When the first one said, "He actually died in the straw hut in the back when he was pretending to be dead," the others laughed cheerfully and talked for a while about Heitarô's skill at imitating stomach aches and death.

Kyûsuke was no longer listening. "Ahh, has it finally happened?" he thought. He put his hand in the sunlight on the floor, and it looked dry, tired, sad, and ugly.

III

It was twilight.

Inside Kyûsuke's body, an obscure sadness hovered. The remains of the light of day and the first signs of the darkness of night, as if not coming together well on the surface of the ground, gave a strangely mismatched feeling.

Kyûsuke's soul was tracing the continued long chain of sadness like an exhausted traveler.

The outdoors was filled with an abundance of various sounds on that June twilight. And yet it was quiet. Kyûsuke opened his eyes and leaned against a support on his house. He had a feeling that something good would happen. No, no, he also had a feeling that his sadness would continue.

² A *rakugo* is a form of comedy that is performed sitting down.

As he was thinking this, he could hear one voice mixed in with the background noise, that of a young goat's cry. Kyûsuke thought, "Oh no." He had taken a young goat who had been alive for about 20 days upstream during the day and, while bug hunting, had forgotten it. Oh no. At the same time he thought "Oops," he thought it had probably come home by itself.

Kyûsuke started running next to the goat pen. He looked in the direction of upstream. The young goat was coming along from over there.

Nothing else entered Kyûsuke's field of vision. He could only see the dainty goat – only the distance between it and the position where he was standing.

The young goat stopped and ate a little grass on the riverside, then walked a little more and stopped, innocently playing while it came.

Kyûsuke didn't think he should go meet it. Surely it would come this far. The young goat came to cross a railroad. There was no train. It crossed the rail and came home without being run over by a train. It crossed where the bank was broken without falling into the river. It did well to not fall in.

Kyûsuke's chest had become warm, and tears were overflowing from his eyes, falling down in thick drops. The young goat came back by itself.

Kyûsuke felt as though the first spring of this year had come.

IV

Since Kyûsuke was certain that Heitarô was not dead, he was no longer very surprised.

When he entered the classroom, there ----- in the place where Heitarô always was, a Heitarô with different clothes was smiling with a face that had become pale while sitting down.

When Kyûsuke arrived at his own seat and put down his backpack, he stood looking at Heitarô while keeping his eyes wide open. In a moment, he naturally started to grin and started laughing with Heitarô.

Kyûsuke heard that Heitarô had been adopted and went to a relative's house, which was common, but he hadn't liked it there so he came back. That was all Kyûsuke heard. He didn't know whether or not Heitarô had gotten sick because of the events at the river. However, those events really weren't anything to worry about because Heitarô had come back.

Taneyama Plateau

Miyazawa Kenji

Taneyama is a plateau located in the middle of the Kitakami mountain range made of smooth, blackish-blue serpentine and solid peridotite.

At the bottom of the valleys, which stick out in all directions off the edges of the plateaus, exist villages with five or six houses each.

When spring comes, many horses are brought along and placed in the care of the village people from here and there in the northern river valleys. Then they are released in the upper fields. Even so, at the end of August they all return to their individual owners. That's because in September the grass in the fields begins to die and frozen dew forms on it.

For about half of the four months that the horses graze, the field is engulfed in fog or clouds. Indeed, the continuation of the plateau is the very place where the wind and moisture from the eastern sea and the wind and moisture from the west collide; because of this, clouds, rain, thunder, and fog always happen very quickly. This means that travelers who come in the direction of this plateau from the banks of the Kitakami River often see stone monuments for the thunder god here and there as they get closer. They may be called travelers, but except for the people who took care of the horses, there were only a few people who came this way such as pharmacists, foresters, fossil-searching students, and surveyors.

Already, the transparent autumn flour had started to scatter across the sky.

The clouds were scattered, the wind blew, and summer vacation was only one more day.

Starting the day after tomorrow, Tatsuji was going to wear the small, straw sandals he had made himself, pass through two valleys, and go to school.

He had finished all the homework, caught all the crabs, made charcoal, and was tired of all these types of play. Tatsuji leaned against the Japanese cypress in front of his house and thought. (Ahh. During summer vacation, the most interesting thing was bringing the ponies up to the upper plateaus with Grandpa; another was by all means the sword dance. I wore a hood decorated with black chicken tail feathers and wore that red battle coat from a long time ago. After that I put on a *hakama*³ with a hard plank in it, tied up the leggings and straw sandals tightly, was surrounded by paper lanterns with 'Taneyama Sword Dance Association' written largely on them, and I went to town to

³ Loose, formal pants for men; see Google for pictures.

dance with everyone. *Dum, dum, da-dum, dum, dum.* I danced, I danced. My sword glittered in the bright red flame at the town gate. When I was with Narao, our swords really knocked together at times.

Hey, ho,

The ancient prince of bad paths at Takkoku Valley,

In a pitch black cave two ri deep,

The thing that crosses our dreams are evil spirits,

Someone's head is chopped and buried in a red-orange bucket.

I did it, I did it. Dum, dum, da-dum, daa-daa,

Showing off with a blue mask,

The sword comes down and something is dead,

Spider dance at the bottom of the night wind,

Stomach throws up. ⁴

Yes, as though...)

"Tatsuji. Are you there? Tatsuji," Tatsuji's mother called into the house.

"Yes, I'm here," Tatsuji came running.

"You're a good child. Take lunches to your grandfather and older brother because they're cutting grass at the base of the upper plateau. Please? At the same time can you also take the cow with you so it will eat the grass? Ok? Don't get separated from your brother."

"Ok, I'll go, I'll go. I'm putting on my sandals now." Tatsuji jumped up.

His mother took two circular containers for rice and Tatsuji's small lunchbox, wrapped them in several papers, and then wrapped all of them up in a large cloth. Then, while Tatsuji did the preparations and shouldered the bundle, his mother drove out the cow from the barn.

"Well, I'm off," Tatsuji said and got the cow.

"Be careful. Don't get separated from your brother."

⁴ This song was difficult to translate, so our translation here is nothing but our best guess.

"Ok." While Tokuichi took a branch from a willow tree next to the fence, tore off the bark, made it into a whip, and quietly herded the cow, they gradually climbed the path to the upper plateau.

"Daa-daa, suko, daa-daa."

The night hood is made with black chicken tail feathers and the moon light is....

Shoo, walk! Shoo."

The sun shined brightly. Even so, somewhere in that light there were blue things that looked like worn oil and from time to time a cold wind blew from somewhere like a string; but it was still very hot. Tatsuji was a little irritated because the cow kept stopping again and again.

"After we get to the top, you can eat good grass. Walk quicker. You're stupid, huh."

However, every time the cow saw beautiful grass, it would lower its face and spread its tongue over the grass. (It's strange that this kind of tongue is the most delicious part of a cow. The drool is sticky. What's more there are black spots. Walk. Hey!)

"Walk. Walk!"

There were only a few white clouds in the sky. By now, they had already climbed a lot. If you looked straight down into the valley hamlet, the roof of Tatsuji's small wooden home shined white.

The path went into a forest, and Tatsuji stopped at that pretty spring. From the white limestone, cold water came bubbling and gushing out; *that* spring. Tatsuji wiped his sweat and, squatting, scooped water many times and drank it.

The cow, without drinking from the spring, licked up stagnant water from within the moss instead.

When they started walking again, the spring, as if informing him about something, sounded loud, and the cow mooed quietly.

"It might start raining," Tokuichi muttered, looking up at the sky.

He went to the space between bushes at the edge of the forest and went several times by the small place where the rock was crumbling in small pieces; he was almost at the entrance to the field.

In the shade and in the light, beyond the rolling hills, the northern field was, as though in a dream, filled with a dazzling green. The river, like the obi of a god, flowed a glittering silver.

Then Tatsuji and the cow came to the entrance of the field. His brother's bag made with braided rope had been thrown under the tree and bundles of grass were scattered here and there.

Two horses saw Tatsuji and snorted with their noses. "Brother! Are you here? Brother! I've come!" Tatsuji called while cleaning off his sweat.

"Hey, hey! Stay there! I'm coming to you!"

His brother's voice was coming from a hollow way on the other side. Even though the cow saw lots of grass, it didn't look particularly happy.

The sunlight suddenly became bright, and his brother came laughing from within the grass.

"Good job! Oh, you also brought the cow? You brought lunch too? Good job! Today will surely become overcast. I'm going to collect grass for a little longer so stay around here. Grandpa is coming now."

His brother was about to go, but turned around and said,

"If you're hungry, eat your lunch before us. Tie the lunch bag to the horse and leave it. When it's noon, I'll be back."

"Ok. I'll stay here."

Then Tatsuji's brother left. Thin clouds hung throughout the sky and the sunlight became like a white mirror and ran opposite to the clouds. A wind came and began to make a wave on the surface of the uncut grass.

For reasons unknown to Tatsuji, the cow suddenly began to run to the north. Tatsuji was surprised and, while chasing after it with all his strength, turned in the direction of his brother and yelled, "The cow is escaping! The cow is escaping! Brother! The cow is escaping!"

The cow ran rapidly, splitting the tall grass. Tatsuji chased after it for a long time, focused. After a while his legs became kind of stiff and he started not to know whether or not he was running. Then his surroundings became blue, began to spin, and he finally fell over in the deep grass. He glimpsed the cow's white spots at the end.

Tatsuji rolled onto his back and looked at the sky. It shined white, and there were thin grey clouds a little closer that were quickly moving here and there. He heard his head throbbing.

Tatsuji finally got up and, while moving in the direction of the cow, breathed restlessly. From within the grass there was a thing that looked like a faint path as though a trace of

where a cow had come through. Tatsuji laughed. Then, "Ha, it is standing still somewhere," he thought.

From there Tatsuji tried to trace the path with all his might. However, even before he had taken 100 steps, the path divided into two or three branches in the grass and the beautifully tall thistles; he started not distinguishing which way was right. He continued resolutely into the middle path. Even so, every once in a while the path disappeared, and in steep places where a cow wouldn't go Tatsuji had to go through sideways. Tatsuji thought, "If the cow is standing in the grass over there, it must be standing quietly facing me," while he forcefully continued.

The sky had become terribly dark and heavy, and the surroundings became hazy and blurry. A cold wind began to cover the grass and already clouds and mist steadily passed through in pieces before his eyes.

"Ahh, this has become bad. All the bad things will start coming towards me, one after the other now," Tatsuji thought. Indeed, it was true; suddenly the signs of the cow's path disappeared in the grass.

"Ahh, this is bad, this is bad." Tatsuji's chest pounded. The grass leaned on his body, crackled, and rustled. The mist had grown especially thick, and his kimono was completely soaked.

Tatsuji filled his lungs with air and yelled.

"Brother! Brother! The cow escaped! Brother! Brother!"

He did not hear any reply. Like white, chalk powder falling from a blackboard, the dark and cold mist beads danced around in the air and everything was suddenly quiet; it became very gloomy. From the grass he heard the dripping sound of drops of water.

Tatsuji quickly tried to return to his grandfather's place and hurriedly turned back. However, it seemed somehow as though it was different than the way he had come. First, there were lots of thistles; in addition, there were rock pieces that were scattered here and there that hadn't been in the grass before. Then, finally, a valley he had never heard about suddenly appeared in front of his eyes. The pampas grass rustled and like a bottomless valley, Tatsuji found to his dismay that the area over there was disappearing into the mist.

When the wind came, the tips of the pampas grass fully extended their thin hands and shook them.

"Ah, Mr. West, ah Mr. East, ah Mr. West. Ah, Mr. South. Ah, Mr. West." Such things appeared to be said.

Since Tatsuji couldn't keep looking, he closed his eyes and looked away. Then he hurriedly went back. A small black path suddenly appeared in the grass. It was made from the tracks of many horse hooves. Tatsuji, focused, gave a small laugh and walked steadily on that path.

However, the path wasn't dependable and the width changed from five *ri* to three, and to make matters worse he thought the path was just going in a circle for some reason. Then at last, when he came before a large chestnut tree with a burned top, the path split aimlessly into many.

That could possibly be a gathering place where wild horses are collected, as he could see something like a wide clearing in the mist.

Tatsuji felt disappointed and began to return to the black path. An unfamiliar grass quietly trembled and as though something signaled somewhere, the entire field of grass bent over to avoid the coming wind.

The sky shined and rung in a high pitched noise. After that, from the mist in front of his eyes, a huge, black, house-shaped thing appeared. Tatsuji doubted his eyes for a moment and stopped walking; but since no matter what he did, it still looked like a house, he cautiously got a little closer, and when he did, it was just a large, cold, black boulder.

The sky spun and wavered, and all the grass moved down and brushed off the drops of water.

"If I make a mistake and go down, I'll surely die," Tatsuji half thought and half said. After that he yelled.

"Brother, brother, are you there? Brother!"

It became bright again. All of the grass simultaneously drew a delighted breath.

"The child of the electrician from Isado town had his limbs tied by a giant." He could clearly hear the words that someone had said some time ago.

Then the black path suddenly disappeared. The surrounding area became very quiet in only a moment. An extremely strong wind began to blow.

The sky flapped and shined in the wind like a flag and sparks burned with a crackling sound. Tatusji had, at some point, fallen over into the grass.

It looked like everything had happened inside the dim mist. He also couldn't tell whether the cow escaping had been a dream or not. As for the wind, was it really blowing?

Tatsuji was walking on the prefectural road at twilight with everyone.

The orange moon quietly rose from the mountains they had come from. At Isado town the fire that was burning was flickering red and shaking.

"Now, is everyone ready?" someone yelled.

Tatsuji tucked up his sleeves with a *tasuki*⁵ string and quickly stepped on the ground. Mr. Narao turned to the sky and yelled.

"Daa, daa, daa, daa, daa, daasuko-daa-daa." After that the adults hit drums.

Tatsuji took off his sword and jumped.

"Daa, daa, daa, daa. Daa, suko, daa-daa."

"It's dangerous. Who drew out the sword? We haven't left town yet, you're too early." Seisuke, who wore a blue monster mask, was bossy and yelled this at Tatsuji. Many red lanterns had been lit and Tatsuji's brother had come carrying one; he walked alongside Tatsuji. His brother's legs looked skinny and absurdly long, as if in a dream.

"Daa, daa, daa, daa. Daa, suko, daa-daa."

Small, pretty children came out and laughed. More and more adults performed seriously.

"Hey, ho, do it. Daa, daa, daa, daa. Daa, suko, daa-daa."

"Boom, boom."

Evening wind blows fast with force, the trees are crashing against each other,

The moon pours and shoots bundles of silver arrows,

Whether you hit or perish, it's one life,

Before the sound of the swords disappears. Hey, ho, hey, ho.

The sword glowed blue. The leaves of a Japanese pear tree moved restlessly in the moonlight.

"Daa, daa, suko, daa-daa, do, doon, do, doon. The movement of the sword is lightning, the grass rustles and burns..."

The group split into two groups and the swords clinked. The blue masked man came out and in the posture of someone being drowned, he jumped around. The children started crying. Tatsuji laughed.

⁵ Simply a string that is used to tuck up sleeves on a kimono. See Google for pictures.

The moon suddenly became an unkind eye. After that it became white like a silver sake cup and then disappeared.

(That must be the teacher's voice. Yes, that's right. It's because school has already started) Tatsuji thought.

He was in a classroom. The teacher looked somewhat thinner.

"Everyone. The fun summer break has already passed. From now on it's going to be a nice, perfect fall season. It's the best time of year to study. Starting tomorrow, study hard again. You all have your homework, right? Please raise your hand if you brought it today."

Tatsuji and Narao were the only two.

"Please be sure not to forget about it, everyone. Even if there are people who didn't complete the assignment, please bring it as is. Who didn't complete the homework?" No one raised their hands.

"I see. You guys are excellent students. What did everyone do during their summer breaks? What was the most interesting thing that happened? Tatsuji."

"The time I went with my grandpa to gather up the small horses."

"Good. That's very nice. Narao. During your summer break, what was the most fun thing?"

"The sword dance."

"You danced the sword dance?"

"Yes."

"Where did you do this?"

"Isado and here and there."

"Is that so? That's good. Please sit down. Everyone. Is there anyone else who was in the sword dance?"

"Teacher, I was in it."

"Teacher, I was in it too."

"Tatsuji too? I see. Very nice. Everyone. The sword dance is by no means a bad thing. However, among you guys I assume there is no such person doing this, but you shouldn't receive money for performing it. That's because all of you are good students."

"Teacher. I didn't get any money."

“Ok. I see. Then.....”

Tatsuji opened up his eyes. Everything had been a dream. The cold fog and drops of water fell on his forehead. The sky was full of mist and nothing could be seen. Suddenly his surroundings became bright, then dark, again and again. A hanging bell plant stooped over and consoled Tatsuji.

Then Tatsuji fell into a doze again. There the mist became like lukewarm water. A cute-looking girl called to Tatsuji.

“Come here. I’m going to give you something nice. Look. It’s a dried out apple.”

“Thank you, who are you?”

“I’m no one. Let’s go over there and play. Please bring the donkey.”

“I won’t bring the donkey. It’s only a foal.”

“A foal is too big and no good.”

“If that’s the case, do you hate small birds?”

“Small birds? I love those.”

“I’ll give one to you. I’ll bring a siskin. Shall I give you one siskin?”

“Yes. I want one.”

“I’ll give it to you. I’ll bring it to you now.”

“Yes, hurry.”

Tatsuji ran as fast as he could to his house. He ran wholeheartedly through beautiful green fields and small streams. The field was bouncy like rubber.

Tatsuji’s house stood in the center of the field for some reason. He hurriedly opened up a basket and gently grabbed a small bird. Then when he tried to go back, “Tatsuji, where are you going?” his mother asked.

“I’ll be back soon,” he said while looking at the bird. The bird had changed at some point into sweets of a light green color. As expected this was a dream.

The wind blew and the sky was a dark grey color.

“The town of Isado’s electrician’s son was meandering.....” came from somewhere.

After that the sky buzzed like a cicada. Tatsuji again fell into a daze.

A giant poked his red face out from behind an oak tree. (Well, I'm not scared.)

"Well, a giant. Come out. I'll cut you," Tatsuji drew out his shorter sword and raised his arm to strike.

The giant was very scared, crawled on all fours above the grass, and came closer. Its hair rustled in the wind.

"I'm very sorry. I'll do anything."

Yes. If that's the case I'll forgive you. Catch 100 crabs and bring them here."

"Hmm. 100 crabs. Is that all?"

"After that catch 100 rabbits and bring them here."

"Hmm. Would you like me to kill them and bring them here?"

"No, that's no good. Bring them alive."

"Hmm, hmm. Understood."

While he was being careless, Tatsuji's legs were suddenly caught and he fell over. The giant pinned Tatsuji down and took his sword.

"Kid. Now, come. After this you're my servant. Come. This sword is nice, huh. Indeed the sword was quenched well."

"Stupid. I won't become your servant. If you're going to kill me, then kill me."

"You're quite a brave person, huh. If I say come, you must come."

"I won't go."

"Ok, if that's the case I will kidnap you." The giant held Tatsuji under his arm. Tatsuji nimbly took back his sword and stabbed it into the giant's side. The giant jumped clumsily around, spat up white foam, and died.

Suddenly it became dark and thunder could be heard intensely. Then Tatsuji opened his eyes again.

The ashen fog flew quickly. Then the cow was sluggishly standing up right in front of his eyes. The cow's eyes were fearful of Tatsuji and it turned around. Tatsuji yelled.

"Ahh, there you are! You're stupid, you are. Now, walk!"

From within the sound of the thunder and wind, his brother's voice could faintly be heard.

"Hey! Tatsuji! Are you there? Tatsuji! Tatsuji!" Tatsuji jumped up with pleasure.

"Hey! I'm here, I'm here! Brother! Hey!"

Tatsuji unfastened the cow's bridle from its neck and started pulling.

The black road suddenly appeared again within the grass. Then Tatsuji's brother suddenly stood up in front of his eyes. Tatsuji clung to him.

"I was looking for you. You went a long way away. Why did you leave without telling me? Grandfather was very worried. Now, hurry, let's walk."

"Because the cow escaped."

"The cow escaped? Ahh, I see. I wonder what made the cow surprised. You're completely soaked. Here, wear my jacket."

"I'm not cold at all. Your jacket is too big and I'll drag it so it's no good."

"Really? There, there. First, walk. Grandpa is lighting a fire and waiting."

Twice they went up and down the gentle slopes. After that they came to the large, black path and walked for a while.

Lightning flashed around two times and flickered a faint white. There was a burned grass smell and the smoke flowed in from inside the mist.

Tatsuji's brother called. "Grandfather! I found him, I found him! I found Tatsuji!" Grandfather stood up in the mist and said, "Ah, really. I was worried, I was worried. That's good. Hey, Tatsuji. You must be cold. Now, come in."

At the roots of a large, half-burned chestnut tree, there was a small enclosure made of grass, and a red fire was burning and flickering.

Tatsuji's brother tied the cow to an oak tree.

The horses also neighed.

"You've been through a lot, huh. Huh. I wonder how much you cried. There, there, eat some dango. Eat. Ok? I'm going to grill these ones now. Where on earth did you go?"

"To the top of Sasanagane," his brother replied.

"That's dangerous. That's dangerous. If you had gone down to the other side, you would have died. Now, Tatsuji. Eat some dango. Hmm. You are eating completely like a horse. Now, now, eat these too."

"Grandfather. Should I go clean up while he's eating?" Tatsuji's brother said.

"No, wait a little bit. It will clear up again soon. I will also eat lunch. Ahh, I was worried. I, too, went looking as far as the bottom of Tiger Cub Mountain. Anyhow it's good that Tatsuji was found. The rain is also clearing."

"The weather was really good this morning."

"Yes. It will become good again. Ah, rain is leaking in. Cover the roof with a little more grass."

His brother went out. The ceiling rustled. His grandfather laughed while looking up at it.

His brother came back again. "Grandfather. It has become bright. The rain has cleared."

"Yes, yes. I see. Now let's eat our lunch and clean up the grass. Tatsuji. Eat your lunch."

The mist abruptly broke up. The light of sunshine quickly flowed in. The sun moved towards the west a little, and the mist, like pieces of wax, failed to escape and reluctantly glittered.

From the grass drops of water fell sparkling and all of the leaves, stalks, and flowers were absorbing the last sunlight of this year. The faraway northern green field laughed radiantly as if it had just stopped crying, and the far away chestnut tree gave off a blue halo.