

An English Translation of “A Picture Book in Springtime” (Ehon no Haru) by Izumi Kyōka⁽¹⁾

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「絵本の春」の英訳、泉鏡花 作

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キーワード

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もとの^{やしきまち}邸町の、荒果てた土塀が今もそのまま
になっている。……雪が消えて、まだ間もない、
乾いたばかりの——山国で——石のごつごつ
した狭い小路が、霞みながら^{ひとすじ}一条煙のように、
ぼっと^{たそが}黄昏れて行く。

Along the ancient streets of this town, here in the
old samurai district, you can still see the antiquated
garden walls covered in earthen plaster and
weathered by the centuries. The snow has melted
and the streets have dried, but only just—this is
mountain country, after all. My story begins here on
a narrow, rocky lane that threads away hazily, like
a single strand of smoke, dissipating into the fading
light of dusk.

弥生^{やよい}の末から、ちっとずつの遅速はあって
も、花は一時に咲くので、その一ならびの塀の
内に、桃、紅梅、^{つばき}椿も桜も、あるいは満開に、
あるいは初々しい花に、色香を装っている。石
垣の草には、^{ふき}蔦も^{とうも}萌えていよう。特に桃の
花を真先に^{まっさき}挙げたのは、むかしこの一廓は桃の
組といった組屋敷だった、と聞くからである。
その樹の名木も、まだそっちこちに残っていて
^{うららか}麗に咲いたのが……こう目に見えるようで、

It's the end of March and the trees have started to
bloom—all at once it seems, though certainly some
buds open earlier or later than others. Standing in
front of one of these long walls, I can see blossoms
in the garden on the other side—peach and plum as
well as camellia and cherry, either in full bloom or
with fresh new petals. And I wouldn't be surprised
if there were *fuki* sprouts—those harbingers of
spring—growing in the grass in the cracks of

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それがまたいかにも寂しい。

二条ばかりも重^{かさ}って、美しい婦^{おんな}の虐^{しいた}げられた——旧藩の頃にはどこでもあり来りだが——伝説があるからで。

通^{とおりみち}道というでもなし、花はこの近^{きんじよ}処に名所さえあるから、わざとこんな裏小路を捜^{さぐ}るものはない。日中もほとんども人通りはない。妙^{ひなか}齢の娘でも見えようものなら、白昼といえども、それは崩れた土塀から影^あを顕^{あら}わしたと、人を驚かすであらう。

その癖、妙な事は、いま頃の日の暮方は、その名所の山^{らくえき}へ、絡繹として、花見、遊山に出掛けるのが、この前通りの、優しい大川の橋を渡って、ぞろぞろと帰って来る、男^{はだぬ}は膚脱ぎになって、手をぐたりとのめり、女^{なまめ}が媚^{としごろ}かしい友染^{ぜん}の袂^{つまばしより}端折^{くわえよう}で、脚楊枝^じをした酔^よ払^{ばらい}まじりの、浮かれ浮かれた人数が、前後に揃って、この小路をぞろぞろ通るように思われる……まだその上に、小橋を渡^{あしおと}る足音^{あしおと}が、左右の土塀へ、そこを踏^ふむように、とろとろと響いて、しかもそれが手に取るように聞こえるのである。

the stone walls. The reason I mention the peach blossoms first, though, is because this particular residence used to be the living quarters of the *Momo-no-Kumi*, loyal retainers of the daimyo, who referred to themselves as the Society of the Peach. And in their neglected garden—here and there—a few very nice peach trees still remain, blossoming prettily. And yet, to my eyes how sad and lonely the place seems.

I suppose I feel this way because of the legend—really two legends, one building upon the other—that attach to this place. For here a woman was treated most cruelly, an occurrence that was all too common in the old days before the return of the emperor.

This little lane is not a thoroughfare by any stretch of the imagination. Who would come down such a backstreet alley to look at blossoms? There are more popular places in town for blossom-viewing. Even in the daytime almost no one comes down this lane. If you did happen to see a young girl walking here, even in broad daylight, you might think her an apparition sprung from one of the crumbling old walls to scare passersby.

What is odd, however, is that there are plenty of people around. Just one street over you can see droves of people who have spent the day looking at the spring blossoms, hiking on the nearby hills, and are now returning home via a small bridge that crosses over the gentle river near here. The men have taken off their shirts and dangle their arms in complete exhaustion. The women, seductively clutching up the bottoms of their *Yuzen kimono*, walk with their bare legs exposed. Together they are a merry lot: some looking drunk and others satiated, toothpicks dangling from their mouths. The long,

continuous line of revelers looks as if it will come right down the narrow little road where I stand. And what's more, their footsteps on the bridge, echoing off the walls on both sides of me, sound so close—as if they were walking right there in front of me. I feel as if I could reach out and grasp the sound.

——このお話をすると、いまでも私は、まざまざとその景色が目に浮ぶ。——

As I recount this story, the scene appears vividly before my eyes.

ところで、いま言った古小路は、私の家から十町余りも離れていて、縁で視^{なが}めても、二階から伸上っても、それに……地方の事だから、板葺^{いたぶき}屋根へ上ってしても、実は建連^{たてつらな}った賑^{にぎやか}な町家^{まちや}に隔てられて、その方角には、橋はもとよりの事、川の流^{ながれ}も見えないし、小路などは、たとい見えても、松杉の立木一本にもかくれてしまう。……第一見えそうな位置でもないのに——いま言った黄昏になる頃は、いつも、窓にも縁にも一杯の、川向うの山ばかりか、我が家の町も、門^{かど}も、欄干^{てすり}も、襖^{ふすま}も、居る畳も、ああああ我が影^{もうろう}も、朦朧^{もうろう}と見えなくなって、國中^{ひとすじ}、町中にただ一条、その桃の古小路ばかりが、漫々として波の静な蒼海に、船脚を曳いたように見える。見えつつ、面白そうな花見がえりが、ぞろぞろ橋を渡る跫音が、約束通り、ととと、どど、ごろごろと、且つ乱れてそこへ響く。……幽^{かすか}に人声——女らしいのも、ほほほ、と聞こえると、緋桃^{ひもも}がぱッと色に乱れて、夕暮の桜もはらはらと散りかかる。……

But the old narrow lane of which I speak is actually several miles away from my house, and even if I strained my neck from the second floor, I wouldn't be able to see it. My house is just too far away. I could get up on the plank roof and still not be able to see it for the jumble of townhouses blocking the view in that direction. The bridge and the river are obviously too low to be seen, and even if the little alley were within sight, it is narrow enough to be completely hidden behind a single standing pine or cedar tree. Nonetheless, it never fails that around this time of the evening, when the sun is setting low and I look out from my window or veranda to take in the view—not just of the mountains on the far side of the river but of the town too and the gate in front of my house and the handrail I hold and the room with its sliding doors and the straw mats upon which I stand and, yes, even my own shadow—everything fades from view, all across the countryside, all across the town, except for that little lane of peach blossoms, which alone, like the wake of a ship sailing across the wide waves of an azure sea, becomes visible to my eyes. And as I keep looking, I begin to hear the sound of those revelers on their way home, their disorderly footsteps scampering and plodding (just as promised) across the bridge. And indistinct voices. Female voices, too, laughing. And when I hear them the color of the peach blossoms flare up, and the cherry blossoms come fluttering down in the

直接に、そぞろにそこへ行き、小路へ入ると、寂しがって、気味を悪がって、誰も通らぬ、更に人影はないのであった。

氣勢はしつつ、……橋を渡る音も、隔って、聞こえはしない。……

桃も桜も、真紅な椿も、濃い霞に包まれた、朧も暗いほどの土塀の一処に、石垣を攀上るかかと附着いて、……つつじ、藤にはまだ早い、——荒庭の中を覗いている——緋の筒袖を着た、頭の円い小柄な小僧の十余りなのぼつんと見える。

そいつは、……私だ。

夢中でぼかんとしているから、もう、とつぶり日が暮れて塀越の花の梢に、朧月のやや斜なのが、湯上りのように、薄くほんのりとして覗くのも、そいつは知らないらしい。

ちょうど吹倒れた雨戸を一枚、拾って立掛けたような破れた木戸が、裂めだらけに閉じてある。そこを覗いているのだが、枝ごし葉ごしの月が、ぼうとなどった白紙で、木戸の肩に、「貸本」と、かなで染めた、それがほのかに読まれる——紙が樹の隈を分けた月の影なら、字もただ花と苔を持った、桃の一枝であろうも知れないのである。

twilight.

I stroll in that direction and enter the little lane, but when I get there that lonesome, uneasy feeling returns. There's no one there. Not a soul in sight.

I sense something I cannot ignore, but I can no longer hear anything—not even the distant sounds from the bridge.

The peach and cherry trees are wrapped in a dense haze, as are the bright red camellia flowers. I approach the wall, which is now almost dark in the hazy mist, and I put my body up against the earthen plaster, as if I were going to climb over. I peer across the wall into the overgrown garden, where the azaleas and wisteria have yet to bloom, and there I spy a small round-headed boy of about ten years of age, wearing a splash-patterned kimono and standing all alone.

That boy—you see—is me.

He seemed dazed and dreamy and not to notice that darkness had fallen or that the bleary moon, its thin pale light peering through the blossoms in the treetops above the wall, was slightly aslant, looking very much like it had just arisen from a hot bath.

There was a rickety old garden gate, its wood splintered and full of cracks, looking as if a strong wind had blown a rain shutter off the house, picked it up, and then set it down perfectly in place as a gate. The boy was peering at this gate lit up like a white sheet of paper by the moonlight shining through the tree branches and blossoms when he noticed the characters 貸本 dyed upon the upper half of the gate and faintly legible. Since this “paper” was being written upon by the moonlight shining through the

そこへ……小路の奥の、森の覆った中から、葉をざわざわと鳴らすばかり、脊の高い、色の真白な、大柄な婦が、横町の湯の帰途と見える、……化粧道具と、手拭を絞ったのを手にして、陽気はこれだし、のぼせもした、……微酔もそのまま、ふらふらと花をみまわしつつ近づいた。

巢から落ちた木菟の雛ツ子のような小僧に対して、一種の大なる化鳥である。大女の、わけて櫛巻に無雑作に引束ねた黒髪の房々とした濡色と、色の白さは目覚しい。

「おやおや……新坊。」

小僧はやっぱり夢中でいた。

「おい、新坊。」
と、手拭で頬辺を、つるりと撫でる。

「あッ。」
と、肝を消して、
「まあ、小母さん。」

バソを搔いて、顔を見て、
「御免なさい。御免なさい。父さんに言っでは可厭だよ。」
と、あわれみを乞いつつ言った。

nooks and crannies of the trees, it is impossible to tell if the characters for “Books for Lending” belonged to the blossoms and buds or if they had been spelled out by a single branch of a peach tree.

Out of the canopied forest at the end of the lane came a big-bodied, white-faced woman who was so tall that the leaves of the trees rustled as she passed. She looked as if she were on her way home from a nearby bathhouse. With her make-up pouch and wrung-out washcloth in hand, she had a cheerful air about her. Indeed, she seemed light-headed—perhaps even a little drunk. She walked unsteadily towards the boy, looking around at the blossoms as she approached.

Beside the boy, who seemed but a tiny owlet that had fallen out of its nest, the woman appeared to be a species of monster bird. The large woman was a sight to see, with her thick lustrous black hair pinned up loosely with a comb and set against her white face.

“Ah! What are *you* doing here?”

The boy was lost in a dream, as was his habit.

“Can’t you hear me, boy?” she asked. Getting no response, she brushed her washcloth against his cheek.

“Ahh!” the boy shouts, startled. “Oh, Obasan!”

His eyes well up with tears, and he cranes his neck up at her, pleading for mercy. “I beg you! Whatever you do, don’t tell Papa that I was here!”

不気味に^{すこ}凄^い、魔の小路だというのに、^{おんな}婦^が一人で、湯帰りの捷徑^{ちかみち}を^{あやし}怪^{しい}んでは不可^いい。……
実はこの小母さんだから通ったのである。

つい、(乙)の字なりに^{うね}畝^{った}小路の、大川へ出口の小さな二階家に、独身で^{すま}住^{って}、^{かど}門^に周易の看板を出している、小母さんが既に魔に近い。婦^{おんな}で^{うらない}卜^筮をするのが怪しいのではない。小僧は、もの心ついた四つ五つ時分から、親たちに聞いて知っている。大女の小母さんは、娘の時に一度死んで、通夜の三日の真夜中に^{よみがえ}蘇^生った。その時分から酒を飲んだから酔^{うた}っ^たて^ね転^寝でもした気でいたろう。力はあるし、^{かん}棺^{おけ}桶^をめりめりと鳴らした。それが高島田だったというからなお稀有である。地獄も見て来たよ——極楽は、お手のものだ、と^{うらない}卜^筮ごときは^{たなごころ}掌^{である}。且つ寺子屋仕込みで、本が読める。五経、文選すらすらで、書がまた好^い。一度冥途^{めいど}を^てつ^たて^たらからは、^{もんぜん}仏^教に親^しんで^{した}参^禅もしたと聞く。——小母さんは寺子屋時代から、小僧の父親とは^て手^{なら}い^{ほう}ば^いで、そう毎々でもないが、時々は往來^{ゆきき}をする。何ぞの用で、小僧も使いに遣^やられて、^{せんべい}煎^餅も^{もら}貰^えば、小母さんの易を^みト^る七星^{ししゅう}を刺^{しゅう}繡^{した}黒い幕を張^つった部屋も知っている、その往戻^{ゆきもど}りから、フトこのかくれた小路をも覚えたのであった。

You are probably wondering why a woman alone would choose to take a shortcut down such a spooky, foreboding alley, but you shouldn't—for this is no ordinary *obasan* we are talking about.

The middle-aged woman lives alone not far from here down the narrow alley, which twists and turns like the letter “z” until it reaches a two-story house beside the river. There she has a sign hanging out front that says, “Divinations Performed Here.” So, you see, she is herself somewhat spooky and foreboding. It is not particularly odd that a woman should be engaged in such an occupation. The boy had heard about her from his parents; it was one of his earliest memories, from when he was no more than four or five years old. Once, when the big woman was just a young maiden, she actually died. But, on the third night of her wake, and at that deepest, darkest time of night, she suddenly came back to life. Some said that she had probably just gotten drunk and fallen asleep—she is a drinker, after all, and she drank even at that young age. Whatever the reason, she is a powerful woman, and she split open her coffin. Everyone stared in astonishment, for her hair was done up in Takashimada style, like a bride at the altar. “I’ve been to hell and back,” she said. Sorcery comes easy to a woman like that—she has the otherworld at her fingertips and augury in the palm of her hand. And she can read, too, thanks to the education she received at a temple school. She breezes through the Confucian classics as well as anthologies of Chinese poetry and literature. And her writing is equally good. She is familiar with Buddhism and has practiced Zen meditation, or so they say. She and the boy’s father were schoolmates at the temple, and they still sometimes visit each other, though less frequently of late. The boy too has been to her house, sent there on errands, where he was treated to rice crackers and a chance to

この魔のような小母さんが、出口に控えているから、怪い^{あやし}可^{おそろし}恐^いいものが^{あら}顕^{あら}われようとも、それが、小母さんのお^{なか}夥^ま間の^な気が^まする^まために、何^ことなく^{ころ}心^{やす}易^くくって、いつの間^いにか、小^こ児^{ども}の癖^{くせ}に、場^ば所^{じょ}柄^がを、さ^はして^ば憚^ばらない^かでいた^かのである。が、学^が校^がを^なま^まけて、不^ふ思^し議^ぎな木^き戸^どに、「か^かし^しほ^ほん」の^に庭^にを^{のぞ}く^のを、父^{ちち}親^のの傍^{はた}輩^{ばい}に^み見^みつ^つか^かつ^つた^たのは、天^{てん}狗^ぐに^あ逢^あつ^つた^たほ^ほど^ど可^お恐^そしい。

「内へお寄り。……さあ、一緒に。」

優^せしく^な背^せを^お押^した^のだ^けれ^ども、小^{せう}僧^{じゆう}には^あ襟^{えり}首^{くび}を^{つか}ま^まで^ひ引^ひ立^たて^られ^る気^がが^して、手^て足^{あし}を^すく^めて、宙^あを^あ歩^あ行^いいた。

「肥^ふつ^つて^いても、湯^ゆざ^めが^する^よ。
——もう春^{はる}だ^がな^あ、夜^よは^まだ^さ寒^さい。」
と、納^ひ戸^ふで^ひ被^か布^ふを^かけ^て、朱^{しゆ}の^{なが}長^{なが}煙^{えん}管^{くわん}を^かた^てに、
「新^あ坊^{ぼう}、——あ^んな^あ処^{どころ}に、一^{ひと}人^りで^な何^{なに}を^して^いた^か? ……小^{せう}母^ぼさん^が易^{やす}を^たて^て見^みて^あげ^よう。
二^{ふた}階^{かい}へ^おい^いで。」

月^{つき}、星^{ほし}を^{ひだり}左^さ右^{みぎ}の^ま幕^{まくら}に、祭^{まつり}壇^{だん}を^{かた}背^せに^して、詩^し經^{きやう}、史^し記^き、二^{じゅう}十^{じゅう}一^{いち}史^し、十^{じゅう}三^{さん}經^{きやう}注^{ちゆう}疏^そな^んど^ど本^{ほん}箱^{ばう}

see the place where she performs her divinations, a room with black tapestries on the walls, stitched with seven stars. It was on one of these comings and goings to and from her house that he happened upon the little hidden alley.

He felt somehow comforted knowing that this woman with magical powers was standing guard at the end of the road. That way, if any strange or terrible creatures did appear, then they would more than likely turn out to be associates of hers. He eventually lost his fears and inhibitions of being there, as children often do upon getting used to a new place. Still, to be caught by an acquaintance of his father's skipping school and peeping into the mysterious "book lending" garden was a fate as horrible as encountering a *tengu*.

"Please come along to my house," she invited. And when he hesitated, she insisted, "Okay, here we go, together!"

She gave him a gentle shove on the back, but the boy felt as if he had been picked up by the scruff of the neck. His arms and legs recoiled, and he seemed to float down the street.

"Even a fat person like me can cool down quickly after a bath," she joked, slipping on a house coat from the closet. "It may be spring, but the nights are still cold." Holding a long, thin red pipe in one hand she asks, "So, boy, what were you doing in a place like that, all alone?" He remained silent. After an awkward moment she suggested, "Shall I try and divine the answer to my question using the ancient arts? Come on up to the second floor."

The moon and stars were hanging from the walls on the left and right. There was an altar at her back.

がずらりと並んだ、手習机を前に、ずしりと一杯に、座蒲団ざぶたんに坐すわって、蔽おひのかかった火桶ひづくを引寄せ、顔を見て、ふとった頬ほでニタニタと笑いながら、長閑のどかに煙草たばこを吸ったあとで、円い肘ひじを白くついて、あの天眼鏡てんめんこうというのを取って、びたりと額かぶに当てられた時は、小僧せうは悚然おそとして震ふる上あがった。

大川の瀬がさっと聞こえて、片側町の、岸の松並木に風が渡った。

「……かし本。——ろくでもない事を覚えて、此奴こいつめが。こんな変な場処ばりまで捜たづしまわるようでは、あすこ、ここ、町の本屋ほんやをあら方あらしたに違ちがいない。道理こそ、お父ちちさんが大層おどろな心配だ。……新坊しんぼう、小母おむすさんの膝ひざの傍そばへ——気をはっきりとしないか。ええ、あんな裏土堀うらどほりの壊れ木戸きどに、かしほんの貼札はりふだだ。……そんなものがあるものかよ。いまも現に、小母さんが、おや、新坊、何なにをしている、としばらく熟じつと視みていたが、そんなはり紙かみは気も影もなかったよ。——何だといえ？……昼間ひるま来て見ると何にもない。……日の暮くれから、夜へ掛かけてよく見ると。——それ、それ、それ見な、これ、新坊。坊ぼうが立たっていた、あの土堀の中は、もう家うちが壊こわれて草くさばかりだ、誰も居いないんだ。荒庭あらいに古い祠ほこらが一つだけ残のこっている……」
と言いいかけて、ふと独ひとりで頷うなずいた。

Book boxes lined the walls, full of the classics of poetry, history, and literature. She plops down with her full weight on a floor cushion in front of a study table and pulls out a covered heating box. She grins creepily at the boy with her fat cheeks. Her fleshy white elbows resting on the table, she calmly finishes her tobacco and picks up one of those magnifying glasses used by physiognomists. She places it squarely on his forehead, sending a chill down his spine and causing his whole body to shiver.

The rippling sound of the river was suddenly audible, and a wind blew across the water from the line of pine trees and houses along the far bank.

“Umm, *kashi-hon*,” the woman says with complete confidence, evidently divining the Chinese characters that they boy had seen. “What in the world were you thinking, my boy? Let me guess—you were looking to borrow one of those trash picture books you’re always reading, weren’t you? No doubt you’ve rummaged through all the bookshops in town, and now you’ve come creeping around here looking for one. Now I see why you were so worried about me telling your father. Come here and sit by my knee—you look upset. Am I to believe what I hear? You think you saw a sign saying books for lending. In a place like that? Plastered on a broken old gate of a forgotten old wall? Do you really think such a thing is possible? You know, earlier when I saw you in the alley I thought, ‘Oh, look, there’s Shinbo! I wonder what he’s up to.’ But then I stopped and spied on you a while. You were standing there staring at blank space—at nothing. Huh, what’s that you say? You can’t see it in the daylight, but when twilight falls you can.” She sat back and chided him, “Come back down to earth, boy. Can’t you see? The spot where you were standing inside that old wall...well...

there is nothing there. The house is falling down and the garden has gone to grass. All that remains is a tiny old shrine overgrown with weeds. There's nobody there, except perhaps the god living inside the shrine.” The big woman, who was just getting warmed up to her admonition, nodded assuredly to herself.

「こいつ、学校で、勉強盛りに、親がわるいと言うのを聞かずに、夢中になって、余り凝るから魔が魅した。ある事だ。……枝の形、草の影でも、かし本の字に見える。新坊や、可恐い処だ、あすこは可恐い処だよ。——聞きな。——おそろしくなつて帰れなかったら、可い、可い、小母さんが、町の坂まで、この川土手を送ってやろう。

The boy remained silent as she continued to examine him with the magnifying glass. “Listen, boy! You should be applying yourself to your studies, instead of getting lost in such fantasies and ignoring your parent’s warnings. Don’t let yourself get carried away in a dream, or an evil spirit might get inside you. What you saw could have been anything—the shape of a branch, the shadow of a blade of grass—all of these things could easily form the characters for 貸本.”

She could tell that the boy remained unconvinced, and so she decided to change her tactics. “Oh, Shinbo, it is a scary place, a terrible place! And you leave me no choice but to tell you all about it. Afterwards, though, if you are too frightened to walk home, it’s okay—I will take you down along the river and make sure you get up the hill to town.”

——旧藩の頃にな、あの組屋敷に、忠義がった侍が居てな、御主人の難病は、巳巳巳巳、巳の年月の揃った若い女の生肝で治ると言つて、——よくある事さ。いずれ、主人の方から、内証で入費は出たろうが、金子にあかして、その頃の事だから、人買の手から、その年月の揃ったという若い女を手に入れた。あろう事か、狙はなかろうよ。雨戸に、その女を赤裸で鏝で打つたとな。……これこれ、まあ、聞きな。……真白な腹をまっしろまっしろと刺いて開いた……待ちな、あの木戸に立掛けた戸は、その雨戸かも知れないよ。」

She took a deep breath and started her story.

“During the Edo Period, you see, a samurai lived in that residence. He was a retainer to the daimyo. Now, this daimyo happened to be born at a very inauspicious moment: four snakes, that is, the year, month, day and hour of the snake. Because of this he got the notion in his head that his disease could be cured by the living liver of a woman born in the year and month of the snake. People really used to believe this kind of thing, you know.”

The boy nodded, listening attentively.

“Anyway, the daimyo made a sum of money available, secretly. And as they say, money talks—a

fact that was especially true back then. The loyal retainer made inquiries and eventually found a purveyor of humans who provided a woman that fit the bill. I doubt, though, that he could find a suitable cutting board for the job, so he probably used a rain shutter from the house or something similar. After stripping her naked he secured her arms and legs to this ‘cutting board’ with metal clamps.”

The woman noticed the boy becoming squeamish.

“Sit still, boy, and listen!” she scolded.

“Next, he stabbed her pure white belly several times as he sliced her open. Oh, wait...I think I’ve got it now! That shutter—you know, the one that got blown by the wind and ended up as the garden gate—it must be that very same rain shutter!”

“Ugh, ugh, ugh,” the boy gasped for breath.

「う、う、う。」

小僧は息を引くのであった。

「酷むごたらしい話をするとお思いでない。——聞きな。さてとよ……生肝うがいを取って、壺つぼに入れて、組屋敷ばいしんの陪臣うがひは、行水うがひ、嗽うがひに、身をあさがみしも潔め、麻上下あさがみしもで、主人の邸へ持もって行く。お傍そばいしや医師いしやが心得こころえで、……これだけの薬くすりだもの、念ねんのため、生肝うがいを、生しやうのもので見みせてからと、御前ごぜんで壺つぼを開あけるとな。……血肝ちぎもと思おもった真赤まっかなのが、糠袋ぬかぶくろよ、なあ。麝香じゃこう入いりの匂袋においぶくろでもある事ことか——坊ぼくは知しるまい、女おんなの膚身はだみを湯ゆで磨こく……気取きとったのは鶯うぐいすのふんが入いる、糠袋ぬかぶくろが、それでも、殊勝じゆせうに、思おもわせぶりに、びしょびしょぶよぶよと濡ぬれて出でた。いづれ、身勝手みかたな——病やまいのために、女おんなの生肝うがいを取とろうとするような殿様でんさまだもの……またものは、帰かえって、腹はらを割さいた婦おんなの死体ひまをあらためる隙ひまもなしに、やあ、血ちみどれになっなって、まだ動うごいています、とおおのが手足てあしを、ばたばたと遣まりながら、お目通めどおりにわさきで斬きられたのさ。

“You must be wondering why I am telling you such a dreadful story. Well, never mind that now—just listen to what I have to say. Where was I? Ah, yes...next he cut out her liver and put it in a jar. She was still alive, you know. Then the retainer cleaned himself up, gargled and purified his body. Next, he put on his ceremonial robes and went to his lord’s residence with the jar in hand. The daimyo’s personal physician knew the value of the medicine but expressed caution, telling the retainer that, since the liver was cut fresh from a human, the jar should be opened in his lordship’s presence, just in case. But when the jar was opened, instead of the bloody red liver they expected, there was just a *nukabukuro*. You’re probably thinking it was filled with something wonderful like musk-scented perfume, but it wasn’t. You don’t know what I’m talking about, do you, Shinbo? A *nukabukuro* is just a common scrubbing bag—the kind women use when taking a bath. They

are usually filled with rice-bran, but the really good ones come with sweet-throated warbler droppings. In any case, the scrubbing bag did an admirable job of imitating the wet, flabby feel of a human liver when delivered from the jar. But no one was fooled. So, by now there should be no doubt in your mind that this daimyo was the most despicable, selfish kind of man you can imagine—a man who was willing to steal the liver from an innocent woman to save his own skin. The retainer ran back to where the woman's body lay, sliced open, but it was too late to set things right. Oh, it was such a pitiful sight: her body all bloody and pinned to the rain shutter, but still moving! The retainer, in fear for his life, ran about the garden flailing his arms and legs wildly. And there, right in front of the residence and before the eyes of the daimyo, he was cut down."

いまの祠は……だけれど、その以前からあったというが、そのあとの邸だよ。もともと、幾たびも代は替った。

"Do you remember the little shrine I mentioned earlier? Well, I don't want to get ahead of my story, so let's just say the shrine had been there a long, long time before these events unfolded. The residence was built later and changed hands many times over the years.

The woman paused here to give the boy time to let it all sink in.

——余りな話と思おうけれど、昔ばかりではないのだよ。現に、小母さんが覚えた、……ここへ一昨年越して来た当座、——夏の、しらしらあけの事だ。——あの土堀の処に人だかりがあって、がやがや騒ぐので行ってみた。若い男が倒れていてな、……川向うの新地帰りで、——小母さんもちょっと見知っている、ちとたりないほどの色男なんだ——それが……医師も駆附けて、身体を調べると、あんぐり開けた、口一杯に、紅絹の糠袋……」

"You may think this story too terrible to believe, but it is not a tale that belongs only to the distant past, you know. I myself have memories related to these events. I remember it was a summer morning, right at daybreak. A crowd had gathered at the wall, making quite a commotion, so I went to see what was the matter. There lying on the ground was a young man. He had obviously been out drinking in the new part of town across the river. I didn't know him, but I had seen him around. He was a real lady's man, though a bit lacking in wit. Well, anyway, a

doctor comes running up and when he examines the young man he discovers that his gaping mouth is stuffed with a red silk scrubbing bag.”

「……………」

“A *nukabukuro*?” the boy muttered, without any real sound coming from his lips.

「糠袋^{ほおぼ}を頬張^つって、それが咽喉^{のど}に詰^{つま}って、息^{ふさが}が塞^{ふさが}って死んだのだ。どうやら手が届いて息を吹いたが。……あとで聞くと、月夜にこの小路へ入る、美しいお嬢さんの、湯帰りのあとをつけて、そして、何だよ、無理に、何、あの、何の真似たか知らないが、お嬢さんの舌をな。」

と、小母さんは白い顔して、ぺろりとその真紅^{まっか}な舌。

“With his mouth crammed full like that, down to his throat, he suffocated to death. Thankfully, the doctor arrived in time and was able to revive him. They asked him later what had happened, and he told them that he had gone down the narrow alley, the moon was out, and there he saw a beautiful young woman, who looked like she was on her way home from a bathhouse. He followed her, and then... well...how should I say...using force...somehow...I don't know how, but she put her tongue, you see...” Here the *obasan* stuck out her bright red tongue from her white face.

小僧は太い白蛇に、頭から舐^なめられた。

The boy felt like he was being licked from head to chin by a fat, white snake.

「その舌だと思ったのが、咽喉へつかえて気絶をしたんだ。……舌だと思ったのが、糠袋。」
とまた、ぺろりと見せた。

She continued, “He thought it was her tongue, and yet something got stuck in his throat and he fainted. He thought it was her tongue,” she repeated. “but it was the scrubbing bag.” She took another big lick with her tongue.

「厭^{いや}だ、小母さん。」

“No, Obasan!” the boy cried.

「大丈夫、私がついているんだもの。」

“It's okay. I'm right here,” she said soothingly.

「そうじゃない。……小母さん、僕もね、あすこで、きれいなお嬢さんに本を借りたの。」

“No, Obasan, that's not what I mean. I also met a beautiful young woman there. She lent me a book.”

「あ。」
と円い膝に、揉^もみ込みむばかり手を据えた。

“What's that you say?” she responds, interested, kneading the thick flesh on her knees. “You've seen her? I can't believe my ears! She's about eighteen

「もう、見たかい。……ええ、高島田で、紫

色の衣ものを着た、美しい、気高い……十八九の。……ああ、悪戯いたづらをするよ。」

と言った。小母さんは、そのおばけを、魔を、鬼を、——ああ、悪戯いたづらをするよ、と独言ひとりごとして、その時はじめて真顔になった。

私は今でも現ながら不思議に思う。昼は見えない。逢魔おうまが時からは朧おぼろにもあらずして解わかる。が、夜の裏木戸は小児心こどもごころにも遠慮される。……かし本の紙ばかり、三日五日続けて見て立つと、その美しいお嬢さんが、他所よそから帰ったらしく、背せなへ来て、手をとって、荒れた寂しい庭を誘って、その祠ほこらの扉を開けて、燈明の影に、絵で知った鎧よろいびつのような一冊の中から、一冊の草双紙を。……

「——絵解えときをしてあげますか……（註。草双紙を、幼いものに見せて、母また姉などの、話して聞かせるのを絵解と言った。）——読めますか、仮名ばかり。」

「はい、読めます。」

「いい、お見ね。」

きつね格子に、その半身、やがて、たけた顔

or nineteen, right? Beautiful. Very dignified. Wearing a purple kimono with her hair done up in Takashimada style. Oh, my boy, this is going to come back to haunt you,” she said. “I know this ghost, this sorcery, this demon.” Then, quietly to herself, she added, “Oh, this is going to come back to haunt us both.” For the first time, her face became truly serious.

Looking back, even after all these years, I still think it strange, even when my head is clear. The sign was not visible in the daytime, but during *oumagatoki*—that twilight time of the day when one can meet with ghosts and demons—the characters were clearly legible. Even as a child I knew better than to visit that old wooden gate at night, and yet for three or perhaps as many as five nights in a row I stood there staring at the “paper” on the gate, not taking my eyes off it. There it was: 貸本. Books for lending. Then, at last, there she was—appearing out of nowhere, walking up behind me. She took me by the hand and led me into the sad, abandoned garden. She opened the door of the old shrine and by the light of a lamp took out a bound volume of *kusazoushi*, a kind of old-fashioned manga, from a samurai’s armor box, which I recognized thanks to having seen them in old pictures.

“Shall I read it aloud to you?” she offered. “Or, can you read it yourself? It’s all in *kana*.” (Author’s note: The picture books known as *kusazoushi* were often read aloud to young children by their mothers or older sisters.)

“I can read.”

“Such a good boy.”

With these words, she stepped behind the shrine

が覗いて、見送って消えた。

その草双紙である。一冊は、夢中で我が家の、階子段を、父に見せまいと、駆上る時に、——帰ったかと、声がかかって、ハッとと思う、……懐中に、どうしたか失せて見えなくなった。ただ、内へ帰るのを待兼ねて、大通りの露店の灯影に、歩行きながら、ちらちらと見た、絵と、かながきの処は、——ここで小母さんの話した、——後のでない、前の巳巳巳の話であった。

私は今でも、不思議に思う。そして面影も、姿も、川も、たそがれに油を敷いたように目に映る。……

大正…年…月の中旬、大雨の日の午の頃から、その大川に洪水した。——水が軟に綺麗で、流が優しく、瀬も荒れないというので、——昔の人の心であろう——名の上へ女をつけて呼んだ川には、不思議である。

明治七年七月七日、大雨の降続いたその七日七晩めに、町のもう一つの大河が可恐い洪水した。七の数が累なって、人死も夥多しかった。伝説じみるが事実である。が、その時さえこの川は、常夏の花に紅の口を漱がせ、柳の影は黒

door, her body half hidden, her dignified face peering through the door's wooden lattice, and then with this silent farewell, vanished.

As for the book of *kusazoushi* she lent me, well, I was hurrying up the stairs at home, lost in a dream as usual, trying not to let my father find it when he shouted out, “You’re home, are you?” and surprised me. I put my hand to my breast—the sleeve of my kimono where I had stashed the book was empty. It was gone. You see, it is just because I couldn’t wait till I got home to read it. Walking along the main road, I had leafed through the book page by page, reading the *kana* and looking at the pictures by the light coming from the street peddlers’ booths. This is when I noticed it—the story that the *obasan* had told me—not the second one, but the first one with the four snakes. It was in that book!

Even now I find it all so strange: these shades of the past, the girl’s ghostly appearance, and even the river. They all appear to my eyes like oil spread out on the dusky light.

One rainy day around noon, during the days of the Taisho Emperor—I don’t remember the exact date—that river flooded. It was very peculiar because it is such a gentle, beautiful river, whose flow is ever so sweet, whose rapids are never too rough. I suspect this is why people living along its banks long ago decided to call it the “woman river.” It is the female counterpart to the larger, more masculine river in town.

The “man river” flooded, too, back during the Meiji Period. It was on the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventh year—a heavy rain fell continuously. On the seventh night of the seventh day the male river experienced a terrible flood. The

髪を解かしたのであったに――

もっとも、話の中の川堤^{かわづつみ}の松並木が、やがて柳になって、町^{めぬき}の目貫へ続く処に、木造の大橋があったのを、この年、石に架^{かけ}かえた。工事七分という処で、橋杭^{はしぐい}が鼻の穴のようになったため水を驚かしたのであろうも知れない。

僥倖^{さいわい}に、白昼の出水だったから、男女に死人はない。二階家はそのまま、辛うじて凌^{しの}いだが、平屋はほとんど濁流の瀬に洗われた。

若い時から、諸所^{さすら}を漂泊^{はて}った果に、その頃、やっと落着いて、川^がの裏小路に二階借^{かり}した小僧の叔母^{おば}にあたる年寄^{としより}がある。

水の出盛った二時半頃、裏向^{むき}の二階の肘掛窓^{ひじかけまど}を開けて、立ちもやらず、坐りもあえず、あの峰へ、と山に向って、膝^{ひざ}を宙に水を見ると、肘の下なる、廂屋根^{ひさしやね}の屋根板は、鱗^{うろこ}のように戦いて、――北国の習慣^{ならわし}に、圧^{おし}にのせた石の数々はわずかに水を出^{かわら}た蹟であった。

sevens had piled up; many people died. It sounds like the stuff of legend, but it really happened. Along the female river, however, the little pink flowers on the banks barely got their petals wet, and the dark willow branches just hung down like a woman's loosened black hair.

Heading downstream, the row of pine trees gradually gives way to willow trees, and at the place where the road crosses the river and leads towards the center of town there is a bridge. It used to be made of wood, but that year they were putting in a three-arch stone bridge, but at the time of the flood it was only about two-thirds finished. The two arches looked like the flaring nostrils of a dragon. Who knows, maybe this is what kept the flood waters away.

Fortunately, the flood in the Taisho Period arose in the daytime, and there were no fatalities, neither male nor female. Two-story houses escaped intact, but just barely. Most single-story homes were awash in the muddy waters.

I have an elderly aunt who, in her younger days, roamed far and wide until finally settling down just before the time of the flood. She had rented the second floor of a house on a backroad near the river.

At about two-thirty in the afternoon, when the flood waters were at their peak, my auntie was at the short, elbow-high window on the second floor at the back of her house. She had opened the window but was so agitated that she could neither stand nor sit. Looking toward the mountains she seemed to want to fly to the ridge in the distance, her knees floating on the air, looking down at the water. The planks on the porch roof just below her trembled. In this part of the country there is a custom to put stones

つい目の前を、ああ、^{しまだまげ}島田髷が流れる……^ひ緋鹿子の切が解けて浮いて、トちらりと見たのは、^{ひとすじ まっか}一条の真赤な蛇。手箱ほど部の^{かさな}重った、表紙に^{さいしきえ}彩色絵の草紙を巻いて——鼓の転がるように流れたのが、たちまち、^{べに しずく}紅の雫を挙げて、その並木の松の、^{なかんずく}就中、山より高い、二三尺水を出た幹を、ひらひらと昇って、声するばかり、水に^{ひせ}咽んだ葉に隠れた。——瞬く間である。——

そこら、屋敷小路の、^{くずれど}荒廢離落した低い崩土塀には、おおよそ何百年来、いかばかりの蛇が巣くっていたろう。^{まむし}蝮が多くて、水に浸った軒々では、その害を被ったものが少ない。

高台の職人の^{くつきょう}屈竟なのが、二人ずれ、翌日、水の引際を、^{ぞい}炎天の下に、大川添を見物して、^{ながれ}流の末一里有余、海へ出て、暑さに泳いだ豪傑がある。

荒海の^{いそばた}磯端で、肩を合わせて一息した時、息苦しいほど蒸暑いのに、^{ざあ}颯と風の通る音がして、思わず脊筋も^{ぞっ}悚然とした。……振返ると、

on the roof to add weight. The water had risen so high that now these stones resembled rocks along the river bank.

And then something came floating by right before her eyes. Oh dear! A Shimada wig—its scarlet ribbons loose on the water. She also caught a glimpse of a long, thin, bright red snake that had wrapped itself like a string around several volumes of bound papers with colorfully drawn covers, forming a collection about the size of a curio box. It tumbled like a small, red-tasseled *taiko* drum in the water, but in an instant the snake had slithered up one of the pine trees along the bank and was dangling there like a red drop. The line of pine trees normally looked taller than the mountains, but in the flood their trunks only stuck out two or three feet above the water. The snake hid in the pine needles, which made a sound like sobbing in the streaming water. This all happened in the blink of an eye.

I wonder how many hundreds of years snakes have nested in the low, decrepit, crumbling, earthen plaster walls along these narrow streets. There were a lot of pit vipers, and not a few people in the inundated houses fell victim to their venomous bites.

The next day, after the waters had receded, a couple of hardy workmen who had escaped the flood, thanks to living on a hill, walked along the big river to survey the damage. They hiked a few miles downstream under the scorching sun, and when they got to the sea—being the daring sort of men they were—decided to go for a swim to escape the heat.

The two were resting shoulder to shoulder on the storm-battered, seaweed-strewn shoreline when, despite the stifling heat, they could hear a whoosh

白浜一面、早や乾いた蒸気の裡に、透なく打った細い杭と見るばかり、幾百条とも知れない、おなじような蛇が、おなじような状して、おなじように、揃って一尺ほどずつ、砂の中から鎌首を擡げて、一斉に空を仰いだのであった。その畝る時、齒か、鱗か、コツ、コツ、コツ、カタカタカタと鳴って響いた。——洪水に巻かれて落ちつつ、はじめて柔い地を知って、砂を穿って活きたのであろう。

きゃッ、と云うと、島が真中から裂けたように、二人の身体は、浜へも返さず、浪打際をただ礫のように左右へ飛んで、裸身で逃げた。

大正十五（一九二六）年一月

sound, like a sudden gust of wind. A chill ran down their spines. Turning around to look behind them, through the steam rising up from the quickly drying land, they could see that the entire beach was covered with what looked like thin nails that had been hammered into the sand. I don't know how many hundreds of them there were. They were all snakes, and they were all the same kind. They all looked the same and they were all spaced evenly about a foot apart. They were sticking their heads out of the sand and simultaneously looking up at the sky. Whenever they writhed up from their holes, they made a sound like the grinding or clattering of teeth. After having been caught up in the flood and washed out of their nests in the walls, it was probably their first experience of soft earth, and there they had dug new lives for themselves in the sand.

The two men screamed bloody murder, and like an island splitting in two, one ran one way and one the other, down the beach, naked as two pebbles tossed by the waves at the water's edge.

January, 1926 (15th year of the Taisho Period)

注

- (1) 底本：「泉鏡花集成 8」ちくま文庫、筑摩書房 1996（平成 8）年 5 月 23 日第 1 刷発行

