

TRANSLATION

“Dust in the Wind,” by Takagi Kyōzō

Translated and Annotated by Joshua Lee SOLOMON\*

Saruwatari Heisuke 猿渡平助 had been shamelessly practicing unlicensed medicine in Hōten’s South Market (a bustling Manchu neighborhood) right up until the Manchurian Incident.<sup>1</sup> The police started cracking down in short order after the founding of Manchukuo, and now, at long last, he was being forced to take down the fading sign from his establishment. It displayed the now barely legible characters reading Hall of Medical Rejuvenation.<sup>2</sup>

Saruwatari had been in a sour mood since early morning, and he simply could not set his mind to do the deed. He would step out of the front door and turn right around and go back inside. Ultimately, he decided to remove the sign only after dark. Once he had had his evening drink and a light nap, he put on a padded kimono and took to pulling down the sign. The nail affixing the bottom of the sign was broken, and so he went about beating and banging on it with a hammer, relying on the light from the electric lamp under the eaves of the house. A strong, wintry wind whipped up, and suddenly his legs were buried in a swirl of dried leaves. Images of his entire pathetic existence—everything that had taken place before the moment he first raised this sign—subsequently began to flicker, unbidden, across the back of his mind.

The warehouse he was running in his little Tōhoku hometown had ended in failure. That was the beginning of his uprooted existence. Leaving wife and child at home, he meandered up through Hokkaido to Karafuto, but, unable to achieve anything there, he darkened his doorstep once more. Next, he started planning a move to Manchuria, but his wife outright rejected the thought of leaving, charging that “You’re the type of man who would drag me to the ends of the earth, a place like Manchuria, and I just don’t know what you would put me through, or if you would even abandon me out there,” cradling their son in her arms and watching over their medicine stall all the while.

When Saruwatari arrived in Mukden, he first landed a job as an accountant for a sugar refinery. However, overwhelmed by the constant demand to produce capital for the business, he was caught lodging fraudulent numbers in the books and summarily fired. Then, on the advice of some friends, he made a good start running a shop re-stuffing cotton batting, as

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\* Takagi Kyōzō 高木恭造, “Fūjin” 風塵, *Sakubun* 作文 41 (1940). Reprinted in *Takagi Kyōzō shibunshū*, vol. 1. Tsugaru Shobō, 1983, pp. 75–87. Joshua wishes to express his appreciation to Takagi Jun, as well as to Itō Yumiko of Tsugaru Shobō, for granting permission to translate and publish the late Takagi Kyōzō’s work.

1 There are several possible readings of the protagonist’s family name, written with the characters for “monkey” and “traverse.” Hōten 奉天 is read Fengtian in Chinese.

2 Huichuntang Yiyuan 回春堂醫院.

there were none operating at the time in the South Manchuria Railway Zone. However, he quickly lost the trust of his customers because he had a habit of cheating the difference in weight between the original and repaired fabrics. Soon, he no longer felt welcome in the occupied district. He left, and moved to a no-name, inconsequential non-Japanese neighborhood. One day, a local man fell off a roof, grievously injuring his leg. Saruwatari had been a medic during his stint in the military and was able to provide some basic first aid. His actions were reciprocated with great appreciation and awed respect, and so he came upon the idea to take up practicing unlicensed medicine.

While this was all a completely unforeseen turn of events, the practice wound up turning into a stable livelihood. Not only that, but once he had put away some extra money, he even started selling black-market morphine, making cash loans to the locals, and was able to remodel his house into three apartments to let. (He referred to it as “his house,” but in actuality, during the chaos of the Manchurian Incident, he had simply ousted the original owner and claimed the building as his own.) What was really eating at him as he was removing the sign was not that he was simply losing a single business, but that he felt like the silver lining of his life was peeling away, and that for some reason or another, a dark shadow was being cast over his future. Shuddering, he broke out into a violent fit of sneezes.

At that moment, he noticed that a horse-drawn cab had stopped along a nearby street, and that the passenger was wrangling with the driver over the fare. He recognized the large, boisterous, intoxicated man, in Chinese dress and a shaved pate, as one of his tenants: a door-to-door insurance salesman by the name of Makino Torazō 牧野虎三.<sup>3</sup> Saruwatari silently mused to himself as he watched the scene unfold: *Hey, hey! The man must've gotten himself a new client today.* The scene concluded with Makino brandishing his hefty walking stick and hollering a shower of invectives at the driver as the cab drove off. Once the cab disappeared, Makino approached Saruwatari, laughing raucously, without restraint, as he recognized his landlord standing like a bump in the street, the placard tucked under his arm.

“So, Dr. Saruwatari has finally closed up shop, huh?”

“Yeah, a forced retirement,” he replied bitterly.

“Well then, how’s about we have a retirement party tonight? This time it’s my treat!” His breath foul with alcoholic vapors fuming left and right, Makino waltzed through Saruwatari’s front door as if it was his own.

Makino came from the same town in the same prefecture as Saruwatari; they had even been schoolyard chums. Now, though both nearing fifty, Saruwatari was wizened like some dried-up old tanuki, whereas Makino’s alcohol-flushed face still appeared boyish and full of life.<sup>4</sup> His fat neck, characteristic of an apoplexy patient, was swelling with vitality. Times were hard now as he was lowered to selling insurance, although he carried the pride of having graduated from the Imperial University’s humanities department and had made a name for himself as the adopted son-in-law of the popular novelist, Akaiwa Ryūkō 赤岩龍香.<sup>5</sup> However, Makino had squandered the entire Akaiwa fortune and been run out of the

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3 Makino is written with Chinese characters meaning “pasture,” and his given name means “tiger.”

4 Sometimes translated as “raccoon dog,” tanuki often play the part of magical, transmuting tricksters in Japanese folktales.

5 This person appears to be a fictional creation based on Kuroiwa Ruikō 黒岩涙香 (1862–1920), a journalist, translator, and writer of popular fiction. Kuroiwa was politically active and a strong proponent of Japanese nationalism and the Russo-Japanese War.

family. He subsequently took up with some Pan-Asianist comrades and wandered aimlessly about northern China for nearly twenty years before finally absconding with some rich Chinaman's second or third concubine and fleeing to Manchuria.<sup>6</sup> Then, by chance, he ran into Saruwatari one day while making his sales rounds and stuck to his side, moving into his apartment for good measure.

Makino now stumbled up into Saruwatari's entry hall, fairly collapsing against the door to the examination room. Facing toward the inner chamber, he called out in a raspy voice, "Madam! Tonight we're having a retirement party for Dr. Saruwatari! We won't trouble you for anything. Tonight, I bring the wine. Hey, Madam!" Kiku キク, Saruwatari's common-law wife, was already lying in her futon, but that did not mean that she was asleep: she simply refrained from responding, lest she be forced out of bed and put through the trouble of serving the men alcohol.

"Hey, Madam! I got a customer today—first one in a while. So I've had a bit to drink here, a bit to drink there . . . I went into a dance hall and, wouldn't yah know it, had a round with your daughter, Missy Yae. But don't let the old ball-and-chain know!"

Kiku reacted strongly to the mention of her daughter's name. Yaeko 八重子 had not come by the house recently, and, wondering how her daughter was doing, Kiku thrust the sheets aside and got up. Saruwatari made his way into the examination room . . . if it could rightly be called that. It was a pathetic display: a single squeaky chair, a table covered in peeling paint, an examination table with straw poking out of its mattress, and a cabinet lined with rusty scalpels and a frayed set of tweezers. The only thing worthy of note was a dust-covered human skull sat up on the highest shelf; a decapitated criminal's head which Saruwatari claimed he had picked up several years prior, somewhere near the Shōsaimon Western Gate, a bustling market district.<sup>7</sup> Makino rolled over onto the examination table, face up toward the ceiling, continuing: "Missy is already a full-fledged woman. Of course, she was still stiff—it was like cradling a wooden pillar in my arms—but, wearing that white evening gown, she really looked the part. I pretended not to notice even as I stood right in front of her, but then she grinned and called me a gross old guy! That grin, it was so completely mature."

"Oh? That slattern?" Saruwatari's eyes blazed as he lowered himself onto the seat. He was about to follow this with another remark, but Kiku appeared in the doorway in her bedclothes and undersash, and so he fell silent.

Saruwatari took Kiku as his own shortly after arriving in Manchuria. He knew nothing of her parentage beyond the fact that she was born in Korea. Her kidneys had been weak ever since they had Yaeko and Shōzō 正造 (currently in his first year of middle school). Her complexion was sallow year-round, and she spent all day sulking in bed. However, she was fiendishly shrewd when it came to the finances, and whenever he tried to spend a penny,

6 China here is translated from *Shina* 支那. This is a period term used to displace the Chinese word *Chūgoku*, which posits China as the "Central Kingdom." Today, *Shina* is considered an offensive slur. The word is used here because Makino was in China proper, rather than Manchuria, at that time.

7 This may be an allusion to an incident in Takagi's real life, around 1935. According to his serialized autobiography, he was commanded by his head clinician to cooperate with the special police and cut the eyes from freshly decapitated criminals for "research purposes." He frames this event in terms of his "character formation," and only confesses guilt and regret over the episode many installments later.

Saruwatari felt like he was being pinned beneath the weight of his “White Sow” 白豚 (the words he himself used to refer to her, in reference to the impression of corpulence she gave).

Last spring, Saruwatari heard a rumor that the son of the Manchu proprietor (who was a regular beneficiary of Saruwatari’s services) of the local barbershop “Fuhai” had engaged in some particularly sinful behavior with Yaeko one evening. In fact, the two had simply been up to some relatively innocent necking, but Saruwatari nevertheless burst into the barbershop screaming bloody murder, and nearly beat the life out of the poor boy. Of course, the barber turned cold toward Saruwatari and quit patronizing his clinic after the incident, and Saruwatari pulled Yaeko out of the Women’s School of Home Economics. Since she had previously expressed a desire to become a professional dance-hall girl, Yaeko used this as an opportunity to nag her mother into letting her give it a try.<sup>8</sup> Her father figured if she was going to dance, they might as well sell her out on contract as a geisha. Yaeko begged her parents, refusing to eat for several days, lamenting that if they would not hear her out, she would be better off dead. Kiku prattled on about how the profession of geisha was so passé, and furthermore that it would be a wretched thing to send a girl off to fend on her own. Saruwatari was eventually worn down and notarized a permission slip.

He tried to steer the subject of conversation away from their daughter when Kiku entered the room, but Makino’s phrase “full-fledged woman” was still echoing in her ears.

“What do you think? Will she get a patron?”

Taken aback by the bluntness of the question, Makino responded: “Madam, that’s out of the question! Wasn’t she apprenticing until just recently? She’s still just a wallflower. You know what *wallflower* means, Madam? She’s there just twiddling her thumbs.”<sup>9</sup> Kiku’s mouth clapped shut at the brusque words.

She had disliked Makino intensely from the start, because he never paid a single cent’s worth of rent, and yet went on pretentiously about his higher education, blowing fanciful smoke about expecting to “receive an invitation to lecture for the Manchukuo legislators any day now,” and even impertinently hanging the arms of his massive frame about the couple’s shoulders as he did so. This got on Kiku’s nerves, and she would use every opportunity that Makino was absent to put his woman through the ringer. One time, they got into a hell-raising row out where she was drying the laundry, Kiku railing at her, “I don’t want you dryin’ yer filthy pajamas out here. This ain’t some grungy fleabag hovel . . . Goddamn unbelievable! And, a woman your age, jumpin’ in the sack every night, disgraceful! Dogshit!” But, when she realized that the subject of her vitriol could not even comprehend her words, she snatched the laundry down, balled it up, and flung it into the dirt at her doorstep.

“It’s a lie when he says he hasn’t any money—because that woman has it all. If he’s really broke, why would the Tiger (that is what Kiku called Makino) stay with such a frail little consumptive? The nights the Tiger’s around, she always sobs out loud, just like clockwork . . . that’s because he’s so cruel to her, beating her for drinking money.” Kiku spoke as if the act had been perpetrated right in the open before her, but in reality, on some

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8 Dance hall girls, technically called “taxi dancers,” were employed by dance halls to be hired out as social dance partners.

9 A *kabe no onna*, literally “wall-woman,” engaged in *ocha-hiki* (tea-leaf milling) is a hostess who has no patron and spends her time waiting in the wings preparing tea.

nights, while on the way to use the outhouse, she would deliberately squeeze herself up next to Makino's window in order to spy on his domestic situation.

When Kiku said something that was simply too much to take, Saruwatari would look her straight in the sallow, puffy face and reply, "Honey, keeping so tense all the time is not doing favors for your longevity!"

Kiku had fallen into sudden silence. Knowing that he had soured her mood, and not knowing what she would throw at him next, Makino raised his head off the examination table, and said,

"You know, Madam, I think your daughter will improve right away. She's got your caliber of looks; hell, better than the top ten percent. Before you know it, she'll be beating off patrons with a stick, and you, Madam, will have nothing to go on worrying about. It's quite a blessing, given that Dr. Saruwatari Heisuke has resigned from his many years of quackery. You see, for this physician, if your head hurts and you have a fever, it's aspirin; if your stomach's in a state, sure enough, it's sodium bicarbonate. For anything else, anything at all, he calls it syphilis and gives you a shot of Compound 606. Utterly naïve. When a human gets sick, if he's gonna get better, he's destined to get better from the start. If he won't, he'll never get better. Er . . . frankly, what made Dr. Tanuki's underground practice so remarkable was how completely he understood that fact, never got distracted by the details. Hey, hey! Tanuki! It's a boon!"

What was Saruwatari thinking, as he sat there listening with a scowl, before suddenly bursting out in a guffaw? It was this: "If I'm a tanuki, then you're like the sea pineapples (*hoya* 海鞘) we used to catch in the ocean back home!" He said this, visualizing the sea pineapple's unsavory mottled reddish orange color, its body like a fat, wart-covered ventricle, and appearing so alien in its habitat, suckered onto rocks beneath the water's surface. For just an instant, Makino's expression turned dour, before snapping back into a mocking countenance, accompanied by a self-deprecating retort.

"Oh, a sea pineapple, huh? That's a perfect dish for a tippler. Too bad I've already forgotten the taste of it . . . it's been twenty years! To say that I remind you of them . . . you know, when they are still larval they have tails and can swim around freely, but later on they turn into something like a ventricle and lose the ability to move. They really are just like me, huh?" For a little while after that, the two aging men sat grinning at each other, while outside they could hear the sound of the wintry wind blowing around fallen leaves.

In addition to Makino, Saruwatari's other tenants were Samejima 鯨島, who handcrafted firecrackers, and Oana 小穴, who raised guinea pigs.<sup>10</sup> The two tenants both ran businesses profiting from residents of the railway zone. Because Samejima dealt with gunpowder all year long, he was always in danger of combustion. Indeed, once the powder did explode, and although it did not become a major incident, it left half of Samejima's face disfigured with burns. As for Oana, one's senses would be assaulted by an animal stench even when standing outside his front door; if it was slid open, the first thing visible would be a room swarming with free-roaming guinea pigs. White, black, mottled . . . all mixed up together, showing off their sleek fur as they raced around; or, they would clump up together,

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<sup>10</sup> Samejima literally means "shark island." Oana could be translated as "little hole," reminiscent of a guinea pig's burrow.

peeking feverishly out from beneath some scraps of straw at the visitor. Furthermore, the Oana family—four of them altogether—had to live out of the closet, such that to anybody's eye it would seem that it was the guinea pigs who were breeding them, rather than the other way around. (Oana used the animals to supply the laboratories of the medical school.) Saruwatari would mutter to himself about how *living things aren't meant to be kept as pets* whenever he saw Oana fidgeting with them. That was because when he was running his failing whorehouse back in Japan, a deadly epidemic one year came and infected his girls, killing them one after another.

Whenever Makino crossed paths with Oana, he would say “Augh, you smell freaking awful!” to which the reply would simply be, “Oh, sorry, boss,” with a bobbing of his head in apology. He would take any abuse at all, and never return a barb. He would always sit with his legs carefully folded under him in the presence of others, appearing more and more like one of his guinea pigs, winking his eyes in his diminutive face, trying his best to simply stay out of the way. It was like he was a person who always chose to live his life out of the way, in a corner.

Samejima spent the whole year trying to devise a way to make the loudest bang with the smallest amount of gunpowder, experimenting with the length of the tube, the amount of stuffing, the way the paper covering was wrapped: he was obsessed. But the look of him as he turned that disfigured face to stare up at the ceiling suggested a man pondering various ways how he might lob his own mighty explosive against society itself.

These four men, swept up together like dried leaves in the wind, did, on one occasion, have a drinking party together. It was two months prior, on the evening of the fifteenth of the eighth lunar month. Makino said he had, for the first time in a long time, brought in a big new client, so he treated everyone to some rice wine for a moon viewing. They spread out a rush mat in the narrow little inner courtyard and sat in a circle. Unsurprisingly, Oana had declined the invitation several times, and Samejima had to practically drag him out by the scruff of his neck. They sat around a pot filled with a jumble of boiled pork and fish, sipping at some Chinese liquor. Although the moon had long risen in the sky, the men could not see it from where they sat in the shadow of the house. The night wind cut into them, sitting still as they were, and so the men warmed their hands on the earthenware brazier and took to their cups in earnest. At one point, someone exclaimed “It's so dark my chopsticks missed my mouth for my nose . . .” But only Makino, gulping down drinks left and right, commented, “I suppose the two of us are both a bit too familiar with working under the shadow of darkness.” He laughed, turning back to Saruwatari, as if the words carried some special significance. The clamorous sounds of a Chinese opera arose from a temporary stage the Chinamen had set up in the neighborhood. Samejima, unimpressed, remarked that it was just as offensive and grating as a Tanuki's “nutty little ditty.” He overheard Makino stifling a chuckle, and, in order to hide his embarrassment, he quickly turned to Oana and offered him another drink. Oana, sitting bolt upright even outdoors on a mat, began muttering, “Oh, I think I've had quite enough. You know, since I've come to Manchuria—and it has been quite a number of years—I have yet to poke my nose into one of those Chinese operas, or however they are called. Listening to other's descriptions, I can only wonder at what exactly could be so interesting about them?” Makino, in turn, began a long-winded discourse on the subject of Chinese opera: “If you wanna know about Chinese opera, ask *me*. When it comes to watching opera, if you don't have a handle on the

conventions beforehand, you'll never have any clue about what's going on . . ." Everyone adopted theatrically sober expressions, and, attending closely to his words, was deeply impressed by how the learned really are somehow *different* than everybody else. The noisy operatic accompaniment clanged and banged on throughout, and Makino arose in the middle of his speech, grabbing a stick from beneath the eaves. The next moment, he was flailing it about like a glaive, gesticulating wildly, he said, in the manner of an operatic fight-scene. Seeing the giant man in his Chinese-style clothing, brandishing the staff, with the moon just now shining over his bald pate, the men simply went giddy with delight.

By the time the moon illuminated the spot where the men were sitting, all save Oana were well into their cups. Then, for some reason or another, the discussion turned to the topic of guinea pigs. Samejima, basking his burn scars in the moonlight, made a strange remark,

"So what the hell are those guinea pig buggers anyways? Are they like rabbits? Or are they kinds of rats?"

"Well, of course they're rats. Right, Oana?" Saruwatari replied with an aloof certainty.

"Hum . . . I think they are rats, yes, but in some ways they do resemble rabbits . . ." Because Oana was pussyfooting around a clear answer, Saruwatari and Samejima took to arguing back and forth as to whether they were really rats or rabbits.

Sneering, Makino said "You two dimwits . . . they're called *rodents*—rabbits, rats, and guinea pigs all belong to the same biological order." In response, Saruwatari and Samejima both shifted the target of their attacks to Makino.

Samejima casually remarked, "Oh, really? Is that really possible? Well, if rabbits and mice are the same thing, then maybe tanuki and hogs are the same as well . . ."

In response to which Saruwatari shrieked back: "Hey, Mr. Firecracker! You son of a bitch, all day it's been tanuki-this, tanuki-that . . . how many times you gonna say it?" Since this terrible mess had grown out of a discussion of his guinea pigs, Oana decided to flee the scene, surreptitiously slipping back into the house before the hot potato landed in his lap again. He bolted the door, but left the closet door slightly ajar, peering out from his hiding spot through the glass window, into the garden. He heard the three of them erupt into a clamor about something, and then saw them suddenly rise to their feet. Startled, he held his breath and watched:

"Yeowch! I guess rabbits'll stamp on yer balls, but a rat will gnaw on you like this!" Saruwatari bellowed as he seized upon Samejima and bit him in the shoulder. Samejima let out some kind of yelp, and the two of them went crashing down. Then, inexplicably, Makino stood straddling the two men like a horse, raining punch after punch down upon them. For the next half hour, all three men lay jumbled together in that cramped courtyard, bathing in moonlight, not saying a word. Throughout the whole scene the blaring Chinese opera continued to ring out. Oana reflected upon Makino's lecture from inside the closet, supposing that Chinese opera—which he had yet to see in person—must look something like this, and let out a stifled chuckle.

After the regular New Year's celebrations, during the approach of Chinese New Year, Saruwatari occupied himself with setting up a money-lending business for the locals. He wore a fashionable astrakhan hat, the authenticity of which he never failed to boast of to every acquaintance he happened upon in the street. He walked his rounds wearing a coat

with an old, worn out collar of sea-otter's fur, and tall boots. However, he despised the notion of anyone witnessing him collecting on debts, and always attempted to appear as composed and professional as he was when he was practicing unlicensed medicine. But he could not stand to let a deadline go even one day late, and so whenever it was time to come and seize the collateral, he threw any semblance of composure to the wind. So unhinged would he become that any bystander would describe him to be in a frenzy. Yet, despite all of this, he was unable to collect from his debtors as successfully as he wished, receiving for collateral once some cheap costume jewelry bracelets and rings; another time, a box stuffed with raggedy old clothes. The only venue he had for procuring even a little profit was by selling black-market morphine.

This was Kiku's job. She was happy enough to do it because all she had to do was sit by the vending window of the old pharmacy and wrap single doses of the stuff in the desk drawer there in some wax paper and exchange them for money without saying a word. Particularly in the evening, when the coolies came swarming in droves, they could actually sell enough to make it worthwhile.

One day, Saruwatari received a summons from the police. Glancing over Kiku's sallow face and restless eyes, he said, "I guess we've been found out," his lips trembling a bit. And yet, when he was stood before the officer in charge, he acted completely nonchalant. His words were excessively humble, but his projected attitude was anything but. "I see," said the officer, with a sharp glance toward Saruwatari, his tone clearly expressing the fact that he had been waiting for quite some time. Saruwatari felt a shiver run up his spine as it dawned upon him: *Now I'm done for*. But to his surprise, the discussion developed in quite an unexpected direction, as the official informed him that his son Shōzō had taken up with a gang of juvenile delinquents in town. Saruwatari was caught completely off guard, but at the same time his momentarily pale countenance flushed red with anger. His pretense of decorum immediately fell to pieces, and, as he had no notion of how to address the subject, began to sputter and stammer out seemingly random nonsense as he feverishly bobbed his head in a series of ungraceful obeisances. According to an article in that morning's paper, some young gang leader named Kim, a Korean waiter working at a café, and his group of hoodlums had been caught shoplifting from a bookstore and an athletics shop. Saruwatari protested that he could never have even dreamed of his boy joining such a group. His lone saving grace was that while Shōzō was affiliated with the gang, he had not been a direct party to the incidents this time around. When the boy, whom Saruwatari always assumed had been properly attending school, was thrust before him, he felt his face burning with rage once more. The moment he recognized his father, Shōzō let out a wail and burst into tears. The unsightly scene of the lanky boy standing there in his middle-school uniform bawling his eyes out stirred a new kind of anger in Saruwatari.

Once they were out of the police station, Saruwatari smacked the boy once on the cheek, and then took off ahead without a word. It was a bitterly cold day. As he walked among the evening crowds of the South Market, he glanced back, expecting to see a somewhat crestfallen Shōzō following behind. The boy, however, had a bald smirk pasted across his face. Saruwatari balled up a fist in his jacket pocket, with instinctual thoughts of violence. But at the same time, he made a stinging realization: *What was it the police official was just saying? Something about discipline in the home? The love of one's parents? And what I said . . .* "Well, yah know, discipline in the home is certainly at fault, now isn't it? After all,



*my wife and I have no education to speak of. But furthermore, that boy's whole life, he's been playing with Korean and Manchu kids, so it's—that's right, I used this really great phrase—it's the environment where we live, and we can't change it." But what the hell does environment mean, anyways? Gazing up at the turbid winter sky, mixed with clouds of tobacco smoke, Saruwatari muttered aloud, "I suppose this environment has had an effect on me, too . . ."*

Around this time, Makino started sleeping in all day, almost never going out to work, although he never complained of being ill. This resulted in an unending stream of bickering between him and his woman day in and day out. Kiku had suddenly felt intimidated by the police, and seemed to want to withdraw from the morphine business, preferring to spend the day sulking in bed. She even started pestering Saruwatari to go to Yaeko just once to ask her to help out with the family finances.

Saruwatari finally decided to visit his daughter at the dance hall one evening. When he first entered the building, he simply stood in the corner, somewhat overwhelmed by the sight of the men and women clinging to each other's bodies, spinning and whirling and dancing along with the raucous music. With an empty laugh, he waited for the girl to come over. When Yaeko approached, she pointedly spat out, "If there's something you want, send me a letter!" Saruwatari ogled his daughter, her oily, thickly made-up face, and her body wrapped in a tight dress that left little to the imagination. Thinking to himself, *Damn girl's looking more and more like her mother*, he delivered Kiku's entreaty. Yaeko knitted her brow into an exaggerated scowl as she listened.

"Are you thinking you can fall back on me again in the future? I can't believe it! I suppose you'll be coming around here a lot, huh? You know, I can only give what I have . . ." With these words, she drew a five-yen note from her handbag, folded it into a minute package, and surreptitiously extended her arm out to her father. After which, she protested, "You shouldn't be bothered to come all the way out here by yourself next time; just send Shōzō in your stead! And don't come here during business hours, it's completely inappropriate!" Saruwatari felt eyes around the room turning in their direction, and wondered what everyone must think of the two of them. For instance, if they thought there was some kind of sexual perversion going on, it would certainly interfere with the hall's business. Even as Yaeko stood there talking to him, she was greeting the young men passing by with her eyes—some of whom would come in close and paw at her near her breasts—and there were also middle-aged men who were up to no good. Saruwatari witnessed all of this, thinking to himself, *I see, this is evidence that my daughter is a full-fledged woman*, while at the same time broiling with a vile anger at the thought that the young men were making a fool of his person, coupled again with a sickening sense of embarrassment. He could not help himself from groaning that *I, too, have come to ruin*.

In contrast to the changes in Saruwatari's and Makino's lives, Oana and Samejima were living the best of times. The price of guinea pigs had risen, and Oana's product had been fruitful and multiplied itself several times over. Thus, whenever he ran into Saruwatari, he would gleefully remark, "If you notice how plentiful the guinea pig brood is, they really do seem like rats, or like rabbits, you know." Samejima in particular was overwhelmed with orders for his stock as the Chinese New Year approached. He even hired some Manchu laborers and worked regular evenings.

It was the last night of the lunar calendar. The houses of the Manchu people resounded with the popping of firecrackers intended to scare away evil spirits. Saruwatari and his wife had gone to bed early, but they both awoke, complaining to each other of the racket. Suddenly, there was a thunderous boom. Concerned, Saruwatari lifted his head, only to see a scene outside his glass window glowing blood-red. The roof over the apartment was roiling with flames. Clad in his pajamas, Saruwatari grabbed a bucket from the kitchen, filled it with water, and ran. Knowing that it was already too late, he splashed the water up at the flames crawling along the eaves—only to have it fall right back down on his head. After that, he simply stood numbly, watching the fire climb higher and higher, letting it do as it would. Inside the house, the firecrackers sounded off *Snap! Pop! Snap! Pop!* Makino hollered out “Samejima has been terribly injured!” And Oana was crying about something else. Soon, they could hear the siren of a fire engine. Saruwatari’s body was overtaken by a fierce shaking as he began to realize *This is really bad.*

The fire only spread through the rental apartments (Samejima and Oana’s were completely destroyed; Makino’s was burned halfway through). Samejima was taken on a stretcher to the Red Cross Hospital, and his wife repeatedly charged that “Those Manchu laborers did the deed. It was because they resented their low wages.” The Oana family were all safe and sound, but the guinea pigs were nearly completely wiped out. The only one saved had been grabbed by Oana’s seven-year-old son as he ran from the house. The whole family stood dumbfounded before the horde of dead animals. Saruwatari dimly mumbled his sentiment that *I said that living things aren’t meant to be kept as pets!* over and over again while stumbling aimlessly about. Makino was picking through the great disarray of tools and other sundries, again bawling out his sobbing woman before striking her in the face. The frigid night gradually broke into day.

Saruwatari knew that he had to give up his house now, but he continually made up reasons one way or another to delay his exit. And he continued, as before, his aimless rounds of collecting on debts.

Around the end of the second month, Yaeko turned up unexpectedly with a surprisingly propitious job offer. It was for an on-site doctor in some far-flung prefecture in northern Manchuria. The job merely required a person with an unspecified level of medical knowledge. They would provide equipment and medicine and offer a stipend of thirty yen a month for syphilis and other regular medical examinations, and he was guaranteed that medical consultation fees would land straight in his pocket. Hearing this, Saruwatari accepted without a second thought.

The night he was about to depart for that distant land, he stopped by Makino’s place to give a final salutation. After the night of the fire, Makino had come to Saruwatari in tears begging him for help, and had stayed in the disused examination room ever since. He had laid his futon out directly in the ceremonial alcove and was wrapped up inside fast asleep. The woman was in the corner of the room, boiling some stew over a charcoal brazier. Without so much as lowering his head in greeting, Saruwatari spoke:

“I’m leaving tonight.”

“Is that so . . . finally taking off? Once you’re gone, I’m certain to be run out of here before long . . . we really ought to have one last drink together, I think.” Makino’s beaming face poked out from beneath the covers.

“You’d better take care of yourself,” Saruwatari said as he searched about the room. All of the medical instruments and other miscellany that had populated the exam room had long been sold off, to the last piece. The only exception was the skull, which he spied mixed in among Makino’s junk.

“Ah, methinks I’ll use this to decorate my new examination room,” he said, taking it into his hands and batting away the accumulation of dust.

“Good for you! From now on, you’ll be a practicing tanuki on the up-and-up.”

“Just like the tanuki-in-disguise fairytale . . . once my tail is out, there’s no going back to hiding.<sup>11</sup> It’s just as they say, you know—learn a trade, and you’ll never starve.”

“That’s true, you’ve acquired quite a useful trade. Speaking of which, before you leave, could I trouble you for a once-over? It’s not that there’s any one specific thing that’s wrong, but . . .”

“Well, it’s syphilis, my friend—don’t you know? It’s started quite recently. The treatment for syphilis is Compound 606. If it’s not taken care of quickly enough, it will enter your brain, and that’ll be it.”

“Oh . . . I suppose that’s it . . .” Makino spoke in an unusually docile manner, without opening his eyes.

“Seems like the wind is pretty rough tonight . . .” Saruwatari tried to signal his desire to take his leave.

“But for you, friend, they are the winds of a new spring. The ice is going to melt soon. Once you’ve settled down over there, find some kind of work somewhere that I can do. Even in this condition, I can still . . . no . . . I was, what, a sea pineapple? I can’t move anymore . . .” Makino fell silent. The woman in the corner of the room fell into a harsh fit of coughing.

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11 He is referring here to *Bunpuku chagama* 分福茶釜 (or 文福茶釜, “the lucky tea kettle”), a story in which a tanuki repays a man’s kindness by transforming himself into a fancy *chagama* teapot and allowing himself to be sold in the local market. A priest buys the pot-shaped tanuki, but when he puts it over a flame, the magic animal’s legs and tail reappear, and it dashes back to its original benefactor. In a common version of the story, the animal is stuck in a half-tanuki, half-teapot state, and becomes a kind of circus attraction. The conclusion is considered auspicious for all parties.

