

2009

Mirrors On The Walls, Eyes In The Sky

Derek Petrarca

University of Massachusetts Amherst, dpetrarc@asianlan.umass.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses>



Part of the [East Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Petrarca, Derek, "Mirrors On The Walls, Eyes In The Sky" (2009). *Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014*. 275.
<http://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/275>

This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

MIRRORS ON THE WALLS, EYES IN THE SKY: 13 TALES BY MIYAZAWA KENJI

A Thesis Presented

by

DEREK PETRARCA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

MAY 2009

JAPANESE

MIRRORS ON THE WALLS, EYES IN THE SKY:

13 TALES BY MIYAZAWA KENJI

A Thesis Presented

By

Derek Petrarca

Approved as to style and content by:

Stephen Miller, Chair

Amanda Seaman, Member

Stephen M. Forrest, Member

Zhongwei Shen, Director
Asian Languages and Literatures
Department of Languages, Literatures and
Cultures

Julie Candler Hayes, Chair
Department of Languages, Literatures and
Cultures

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help and guidance of Professors Stephen Miller, Amanda Seaman, Stephen Forrest, and Doris Barga, and the rest of the department of Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Special thanks are also in order to David Petrarca and Annette Pashley for the kind of unconditional support that only parents can provide, to Emily Cousineau for giving it all meaning just by being herself, and to Matt Coppellotti for being a great friend for no reason whatsoever.

This is and always has been for my nephew, Dave “Buggies” Petrarca III.

ABSTRACT

MIRRORS ON THE WALLS, EYES IN THE SKY: 13 TALES BY MIYAZAWA KENJI

MAY 2009

DEREK PETRARCA, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Stephen Miller

Translations of thirteen assorted fairy tales by early 20th century Japanese poet/author Miyazawa Kenji. These tales are preceded by a short analytical introduction that explores the presence of "the agent of the outside" in the majority of the author's work and how this literary concept serves to encourage the reader to escape subjective viewpoints.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
CHAPTER	
1. ANALYTICAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Odd Duck – Introduction.....	1
How to Contribute Without Saying Anything.....	6
A Tale By Any Other Name.....	8
Mirrors on the Walls, Eyes in the Sky – The Agent of the Outside.....	13
Agents of the Outside in this Collection.....	20
Finding Kenji's Voice: Translating Miyazawa Kenji.....	29
2. TRANSLATIONS.....	34
A Mouse Tale: Fuu and Professor Bird-box.....	34
A Mouse Tale: Ku.....	40
A Mouse Tale: Xe.....	50
Akita Highroad.....	59
Gingko Nuts.....	62
Kenjū's Grove.....	67
Night of the Festival.....	77
Official Government Business.....	84
Shellfire.....	93

The Ant and The Mushroom.....	118
The Four Forests.....	122
The Porcelain-Berries and the Rainbow.....	133
The Wildcat and the Acorns.....	138
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	149

CHAPTER 1

ANALYTICAL INTRODUCTION

The Odd Duck – Introduction.

Early in the twentieth century, Hanamaki, Japan was a place where the long since settled dusts of the past had been hardly stirred by the whirlwind of modernization to the south. A world on the fringes of a rapidly modernizing, industrializing, nationalizing Japan, the small Iwate community enjoyed a few choice glimpses of the fruits of the last 50 years of rapid change. There were streetlights and telegraph poles adorning dusty roads, though for the most part the concepts of the modern era were a vague set of ideas reserved for the backs of the minds of a select and privileged few. For the rest of the population of Hanamaki, the farming poor, the big talk of the modern age was little more than an annoyance, detached from the real business of farming the land and surviving. It was in this town that Miyazawa Kenji was born on August 27th, 1896.

The eldest son of a successful merchant family that thrived off of the economic suffering of the local farmers, Miyazawa was an outsider even to these marginalized locals. Hanamaki was a place so far removed from the ports and centers of development that the locals simply couldn't keep pace with the changing demands of the time. The area had been basically pushed back and forgotten. Although the people of present day Hanamaki look fondly upon the family name of Miyazawa, it is documented that the farmers of the time had little affection for the merchant family and their pawn shop.¹ As is often reflected in his poetry written during his years dedicated to helping improve the lot of the farmers, the locals had little tolerance and patience for the “teacher turned seed

1 Toriyama Toshiko. *Kenji no Gakkō* (Tokyo: Sanmaku Shuppan, 1996), 15.

collector”² and often saw him as little more than the spoiled rich boy frivolously playing farmer.

As if this were not enough, Kenji³ spent the majority of his life in a 'classic father-son split,'⁴ at ends with his father regarding ethics and core religious philosophy. These differences resulted in radically conflicting ideologies and life plans between the two men. This is not to say that the author was completely cut off from his family. On the contrary, Kenji's continued acceptance of his family's financial support, which he put towards education and travel, suggests in some manner at least that there was civility among the Miyazawas.⁵ Never were things completely peaceful between Kenji and his father, though. Even within his own family the author remained, at least in some regard, an outsider.

As an adult and a teacher, it is said that Miyazawa seemed to live in “another universe,”⁶ and was sometimes ostracized by his peers who did not understand his viewpoints and lifestyle. He remained a man seemingly unable to conform to any one particular set of cultural norms, instead dabbling in nearly every pursuit available to him. This openness to learning and diversity has become one of Kenji's most oft-celebrated attributes.

2 Hiroaki Sato. *Miyazawa Kenji: Selections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 147.

3 In keeping with the tradition in recent Japanese scholarship, the author at hand is in this collection sometimes referred to by his given name. This is rather strange by most standards: a fact I more than readily admit. Even in Japan it is unusual to discuss a figure by his first name unless the scholar has actual familiarity or intimacy with the subject at hand. The majority of sources I have dealt with discussing Miyazawa Kenji, however, have referred to him as simply “Kenji.” Personally I believe this to be due to the internalization of “Kenji” within Japanese scholarship as a concept that extends beyond the lifetime of a single historical figure. As I am not a Japanese scholar but would like to put forth this same feeling, I have sometimes referred to the author by his given name, sometimes by his family name.

4 Pulvers, Roger. "Miyazawa Kenji, Rebel with a Cause" *Japan Quarterly* 43 no. 4 (1996): 30.

5 Toriyama, *Kenji no Gakkō*, 54.

6 *Ibid*, 72.

Since the start of scholarship into Miyazawa's life there have been a number of key, classic images that come to mind in regards to the man. For some time the image of Miyazawa Kenji has been that of a man who devoutly studied the Lotus Sutra and worked tirelessly to aid the local farmers. While these images remain wholly substantiated, they are now being supplemented with other images of the man. As research has revealed, we can now imagine Kenji as a young teacher, climbing in through the classroom window (to the shock of his students) and sleeping with a copy of Einstein's Theory of Relativity by his bedside.⁷

It has been suggested that Miyazawa Kenji was a man that never closed off his mind to anything, much like a child.⁸ While this idea was promoted in particular by the educational reformist Toshiko Toriyama, an apologist for Miyazawa Kenji, it is not entirely without merit. Miyazawa's continual divergence from societal norms, his apparent inability to accept that anything simply is the way that it is “just because,” suggested a child-like openness to the man. Kenji's famous dabbling into every pursuit from language, myth and art to geology and chemistry suggest a man unable to let his vision of the world sit still. Often times he would wander the fields and mountains of his home prefecture and simply observe the world. Much like Kenjū of “Kenjū's Grove,” included in this collection, it is said that he was enraptured by the moment, mystified and overjoyed. Often times these observations would provide the inspiration for a poem, fairy tale or play. “Ginkgo Nuts,” for example, a classic tale of the inevitable event of leaving home that we all must face, is one in which one can read and clearly envision Miyazawa

⁷ Gregory Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 171.

⁸ Toriyama, *Kenji no Gakkō*, 52.

crouched down by the trunk of a tree, imagining a story for all of the natural events he described. For Kenji there was always something more to explore, some new way to examine a situation or phenomenon. This approach to life often proved incompatible with the society that surrounded him, a society that wished for him to run a business or use the door to enter a building. In turn, remaining on the outside of integrated societal groups and systems through much of his life, he was never driven to buckle down, shape up, and narrow his visions on life and the universe. This resistance created a cyclical relationship between the author and the rest of the society. The more driven Kenji was to find a new viewpoint on things, the further he seemed to find himself from societal acceptance. The further he was from integration within the acceptable social spheres of family, class and occupation, the more apt he was to draw away, observe things from a distance, and seek objectivity. He was a man without a home.

Being unable to find a true group of his own did not weaken the author's views of interdependence and universality, as displayed through witness testimonials and Miyazawa's own writings.⁹ Rather, his outsider status strengthened this resolve; Miyazawa reportedly never felt truly alone despite the way he was treated for his beliefs and odd behavior. The comfort he gained through feeling connected to the universe as a whole, even as he walked the hills and valleys of Iwate alone, daydreaming about militant ants and talking rainbows, justified the society that had ousted him. There is nothing that functions independent of the rest of the universe, he envisioned, and there is a rhyme and reason to everything.¹⁰

9 Toriyama, *Kenji no Gakkō*, 57.

10 Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 170.

The literature of Miyazawa Kenji, his poems and fairy tales, were at the very best on the fringe of the literary world. His “mental sketches¹¹” did not conform to any specific poetic form, Japanese or otherwise. According to Miyazawa himself, though, this was just as well. He was not seeking to create poetry but rather reproduce without alteration the world that he encountered before him—a world that reflected the world inside each and every one of us. Repeatedly he is quoted admitting that his mental sketches were not for his contemporaries; they were recreations of natural phenomenon as they were perceived by his human eyes, intended for use in a future psychological study.¹² As for his prose fiction, fairy tales were far from the most respected form of “pure literature,” or “*junbungaku*,” though Kenji was not concerned with their acceptance, as shall be explained further in subsequent sections. A great many of Miyazawa’s works, including a number in this collection, stress the importance of not sacrificing one’s own ideals in order to appeal to society. He explores the dangers of becoming too entangled in complex societal relationships based on misguided pretenses. Miyazawa’s works express a keen insight into the world around him by examining issues from a vertical point of view, attempting at all costs to avoid the purely subjective. Just as Kenji was often on the outside looking in on the rest of society, his fairy tales often contain what I have come to call an ‘agent of the outside,’ a character or device that places the reader on the outside of familiar systems and situations and offers an insight that could not have been attained by one still adorning the blinders of society and belief.

11 *Shinshō sukecchi*, the name Miyazawa gave to his free-verse style of poetry. It is notable for its efforts to make the narrator completely anonymous and in doing so writing from no particular specific viewpoint. The poetry collection *Haru to shura* is an excellent resource for those interested in learning more about this peculiar style of poetry.

12 Toriyama, *Kenji no Gakkō*, 102.

Kenji's life and works both reflect a strong relationship between the outsider's perspective and the progression towards an understanding of the universe free of subjective bias and prejudice. Only by taking a step outside of ourselves can we truly gain an understanding of our own true natures and gain insight as to how we fit into the great interconnected puzzle of the universe, such as is outlined in Kenji's *Nōmin Geijutsu Gairon Kōyō*.¹³ This is not to say that the literature of Miyazawa Kenji necessarily has the power to cure us of misguided beliefs and assumptions, of course. That is for the individual to work out on one's own. What these tales can offer, however, is a window through which to attain a better comprehension. Aside from their sheer cleverness and likability, they can assist us in understanding our own madness before we take the next step to try and outgrow it.

How to Contribute Without Saying Anything.

The true aim of this project has always been to provide a collection of Miyazawa's tales, some of which may not have been available in English before this time, and with them contribute to the study of the author and to scholarship of Japanese literature as a whole. From the start I had felt that Kenji received a lack of attention from the English-speaking audience, particularly in regards to his short fiction, though this is not meant in any way to undersell the efforts of translators such as John Bester and Sarah Strong, whose work has been both inspiring and extremely helpful in shaping my own translations.

As much as possible, I wanted the content of this collection to remain the work of

¹³ Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 168.

the original author, open to interpretation. I had become extremely wary of making suppositions or superimposing my own thoughts and beliefs about the author and his fiction; such discourse I have always found more suitable for coffee shops and classrooms rather than academic journals and graduate school dissertations. The latter places, I have always felt, are where one goes to find professional understanding of a matter, rather than individual conjecture. This places an enormous problem before the scholarship of literature, of course, which is based entirely on critical thinking. After all, what is a written work if not the individual conjecture of a single mind? However misguided I may or may not be in such a mode of thinking, I envisioned a collection of tales that let the translations, for the most part, speak for themselves. For as many sources as one may consult about the author, the majority of them remain the words of those who never knew him, who have only read his works as I have and developed their own ideas. In no way did I ever wish for my own pondering on the meaning and depth of Miyazawa's fiction to be mistaken for true academic rigor, whatever that may actually be.

Thus I have been constantly confronted with the task of contributing to scholarship on Miyazawa Kenji without letting my own voice slip into the discourse. This is, however, a Master's thesis, and as such requires an analytical introduction that stands alone, independent of the tales it accompanies. It is upon this concession that I have come upon a compromise. Though there was no particular rhyme or reason to the manner in which these tales were selected—I picked them entirely based on title from a very long list of works—there began to emerge what I observed as a recurring theme. This theme has since evolved into the critical stance of this introduction: the manner in which the

tales of Miyazawa Kenji invite the reader to step outside and observe herself along with her personal surroundings from an outsider's point of view. In doing so the reader is able to better understand the way she has come to think about the world and perhaps readjust her actions within it. This process, of course, shall be explored in further detail in sections to come.

The concentration on this approach has provided a decent balance between the original motives behind this project and the demands of a Master's Thesis. Rather than attempt to bend the words of Miyazawa Kenji into a specific shape, I have instead focused on exploring how they encourage the reader to seek to understand things for what they are rather than what others think them to be. Paradoxically, I invite the reader of this thesis to keep this in mind in regards even to this analytical introduction. What I hope to have created is a collection of thirteen stories, selected as randomly as possible, that provide a glimpse into the world of Miyazawa Kenji. Along with it comes a short set of suggestions regarding what this world may have to teach us.

A Tale By Any Other Name.

The popular classification for the format in which these tales are written is *dōwa*, popularly translated as “fairy tale” or “children's tale.” As Bester is quick to point out, however, mere children's tales could not have commanded, for what is now nearly a hundred years, such an increasingly wide following among adults both domestically and abroad.¹⁴ The word “fairy tale” also carries with it a particular set of baggage, suggesting

14 John Bester, *Once and Forever*. (New York: Kodansha International, 1993) vii.

the western literary tradition of tales grown from the folklore of the European past.¹⁵ In this section, first I would like to briefly explore this baggage of the fairy tale tradition and then compare it to the actual structure and usages of Miyazawa's written works during his lifetime.

In his lengthy analysis on children's literature, Seth Lerer identifies a number of key set pieces in the tale of "Rumpelstiltskin," a yarn he feels exemplary of the genre. In it he identifies such things as the father and daughter, the riddle, the strange creatures and the undiscovered, mysterious forest from which they come. It, like so many of its kind, came from the French *conte de fées*, the genre that arose in the salons to narrate social criticism and offer moral instruction under the guise of fantasy. This interestingly mirrors Bester's supposition of why Miyazawa chose this particular format for his prose fiction. Bester paints Miyazawa as a poet "seeking to tell stories concerned with particular beauties and general truths, impatient with the provisional truths and temporizations of "real" society."¹⁶ In order to tell the stories that he sought to tell, Kenji required an escape from the stage of reality, whose norms and social sets would not support the weight of some of his intentions.

It is in this way ironic that 'fairy tale' is the name ascribed to Miyazawa's fiction. Western fairy tales, by traditionalist standards, are cautionary tales that instruct the reader in morality and etiquette; Leher even goes as far as suggesting that the reader is intended to see herself as the princess whilst envisioning "Rumpelstiltskin" and all of his kind as the unsavory, frightening, and misunderstood elements of life, such as the homeless and handicapped.¹⁷ A fairy tale, then, is an allegory directed at the reader to prescribe a certain

15 Seth Lerer, *Children's Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 210.

16 Bester, *Once and Forever*, vii.

17 Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 210.

mode of thought and behavior.

In truth the same can be said for a number Miyazawa's tales that follow the classical fairy tale formula. "Shellfire" and "The Four Forests," for example, both included in this collection, feature easily identifiable protagonists that encounter strange and untamed elements that border on the supernatural, especially in the case of the former tale. Both tales definitely encourage a certain line of thinking of the reader. "Shellfire" delivers a mythical and legendary treasure into the hands of its protagonist, then follows his decline into selfishness and despotism, encouraging the reader to be mindful and responsible with the privileges she enjoys. "The Four Forests" centers entirely around an innocent community of farmers as they deal with their constant encounters with strange and alien forces. However, much to the contrary of the western fairy tale tradition, they do not restrict themselves to an inside/outside viewpoint. Even when they are robbed and their children are kidnapped, the Koiwai farmers seek understanding and mutual respect with the denizens of the surrounding forests. In such a way, the darkness of the unknown melts away and the very act of understanding sweeps away the ghosts and goblins of the dark and foreboding forest. This kind of thought never crosses the mind of the protagonists of "Rumpelstiltskin" and its contemporaries. No one ever considers *why* the imp is the way that he is; instead he is simply assumed evil by nature and therefore must be dealt with as such. This kind of fantasy, though introducing new and fantastic elements, primarily reinforces a logic that is ground entirely in the "real" world; the princess and her father of "Rumpelstiltskin" have decided how the world works, regardless of whether or not they are correct, and encourage the reader to act accordingly. The fiction of Miyazawa Kenji, on the other hand, resists this entirely. In none of these

thirteen tales can one find a clearly identified villain. As Bester points out, there *are* wrongdoers and tormentors, though their acts are almost always balanced out by the forgiveness and understanding of more innocent, kind-hearted characters.¹⁸ What is missing in Kenji's fiction that is so characteristic of classical fairy tales is the traditional concept of conflict—the struggle between good and evil. What we find here instead is a different kind of conflict: one that almost entirely internal. The mice of the first three tales of this collection all meet with an untimely end, though they are clearly not depicted as heroes at odds with the makers of their undoing. Instead they are presented as flawed, imaginary characters with vices that might be applied to the real world.

This is not to say that such a formula has never been followed in the western tradition. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, John Locke's adaptations of *Aesop's Fables* shared some interesting elements with Miyazawa Kenji's tales. With nearly all of the main characters depicted as animals, these fables were stripped of elaborate details, history and subplots in order to make them more accessible to an audience of children.¹⁹ These stories became direct statements that address the actions of one particular character, be that character deserving of praise or derision for said actions.

Whatever their similarities or differences to forms of literature that have served similar purposes, I feel this analysis wouldn't be complete without an exploration of what Miyazawa actually did with these stories. However eager one may be to classify and corner Miyazawa's work into a specific genre, what could be more important than answering exactly what a *dōwa* was to Kenji himself?

On December 1st, 1924, Miyazawa Kenji, 27, self-published a collection of tales

18 Bester, *Once and Forever*, xi.

19 Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 111.

entitled *Ihatov Dōwa: Chūmon no Ōi Ryōriten*, or *Fairy Tales of Ihatov: The Restaurant of Many Orders*.²⁰ In the preface of this collection, Miyazawa explains that these stories are neither inventions of his own nor are they exact depictions. The reader is asked to accept the concept that these tales are faithful descriptions of discoveries made under specific conditions of time and place,²¹ such as when “walking through a green oak forest” or “shivering in the November mountain wind.”²² This volume, along with its companion poetry anthology *Haru to Shura*, or *Spring and Chaos*, was a commercial failure and earned the author little but mockery and chiding from his father, who had provided much of the money for the project.²³ It is clear, however, that Miyazawa did not write for commercial profit or monetary success. Though he did publish these two works within his lifetime, Miyazawa also implemented these tales within the classroom, having his students read many of them as scripts for short plays.²⁴ In this way, Miyazawa brought his students directly into the world of his writings and used his fairy tales as educational devices. Also, as the numerous revisions and drafts of his works contained in his surviving notebooks show, these tales sometimes underwent years of revisions before Kenji was satisfied with them, if ever he was at all.²⁵ Many of his tales, some of which are included in this collection, continued to be worked upon until the day of the author's death.

Those are the facts surrounding the written works of Miyazawa Kenji. In the spirit of this analysis, I would hope that those are the concepts one keeps in mind when reading these tales, rather than holding them up against some grander backdrop of literary

20 Miyazawa Kenji, *Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru*. (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985) 5.

21 Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 166.

22 Ibid.

23 Abe Takao, Shoji Kawamori, Atsumi Tashiro, *Spring and Chaos: The Life Story of Kenji Miyazawa*.

24 Toriyama, *Kenji no Gakkō*, 122.

25 Bester, *Once and Forever*, viii.

tradition or inheritance. Though they undoubtedly owe a great deal to the works that have come before them, these stories are only what they are. What is thus to follow is merely an exploration of what that might mean.

Mirrors on the Walls, Eyes in the Sky: The Agent of the Outside.

The recurring theme of Miyazawa's poetry and fiction that is the key focus of this analysis is the interaction that sometimes occurs between characters, sometimes between the author and the reader. In each case, Miyazawa consistently presents a character or set of characters that are locked in to a particular set of behaviors that are based on a subjective, limited understanding of their relationships with nature and/or the surrounding characters. They live according to the rules of a perceived world that exists only in their minds and requires an external force to help them see the misguided nature of their ways. Of course not even Kenji, who apparently sought to be ever mindful of this product of subjectivity, was ever free of it. This is where literature plays its role. By creating a narrative that places the reader, or a specific character—an “agent of the outside”—in a role where she can shed light on the misconceptions of another character or the readers themselves, Miyazawa is able to produce a viewpoint outside of ourselves that we may not have seen otherwise. Gregory Golley touched upon this notion in his analysis and coined the term *orientation* to describe the onset of spatial awareness for characters within Kenji's fiction.²⁶ Specifically, Golley was referring to the classroom scene in “*Ginga Tetsudō No Yoru*” (“Night on the Galactic Railroad”) where the students are presented with a map of the galaxy from the *outside*. This ability to picture one's own galaxy from the outside was a new concept to the children and likely to the readers of the

26 Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 180.

time as well. The act of viewing oneself from the outside and appreciating the true layout of the world as it contrasts with our initial preconceptions is the driving force behind this concept of orientation.

I suggest taking Golley's logic one step further. This act of orientation persists throughout the majority of Miyazawa's prose fiction and poetry, though it is not always so clearly laid out as it is in "*Ginga Tetsudō*," the author's magnum opus. This theme remains consistent throughout most of the tales in this collection, though included here are tales of various styles and formats. For reference I would like to apply this analysis to one of Miyazawa's 1925 poems, "Residence" ("*Sumai*.")

In the crescent-shaped village south of it
with a blue spring
and many abandoned houses
they say they don't want to accept
a teacher turned seed collector
. . . wind's light
and grass seed's rain
Even daytime, barefoot and drinking
those blar-eyed old men. (9/10/1925)²⁷

These "blar-eyed old men" about whom Kenji writes have seen a life of suffering and hardship. They've likely lived their entire lives within the same small farming community in Hanamaki. In doing so they would have lived through the countless droughts, famines, and crop-failures that had famously plagued the land since before Miyazawa was born.²⁸ Kenji, in all his sincerity, wants nothing but to help these men and improve their lot. A life of hardship, suffering, and repetition, however, has fastened on tight the blinders of human experience; they are nearly hopeless to see the bigger picture

27 Hiroaki Sato (ed.), *Miyazawa Kenji: Selections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

28 Pulvers, "Miyazawa Kenji, Rebel with a Cause", 30.

of the world in which Kenji's help should logically be welcomed, not shunned. In his rejection, Kenji is all too aware of the farmer's affliction; they have been from birth conditioned in their individual societal system and are thus naturally less likely to ever attempt to look *beyond* that system. Kenji, however, who is outside the system of the farming community, is all too aware and can do little else but write about it in hopes of elevating himself and his readers out of the same rut.

Upon first analysis it may seem as if Kenji actually harbors a measure of resentment against these farmers for not accepting his earnest offers to work with them and attempt to alleviate their suffering. When one takes a closer look at his other writings, however, and keeps in mind the overarching theme of a universal connectivity between beings rendered invisible by human perspective, his resentful words are transformed into laments of sympathy. This is not to say that it is out of the question that Kenji may have written this poem solely out of frustration for not having been immediately accepted by these locals, though it is highly unlikely. An account from a fellow teacher, commenting on the outsider status Kenji had earned for himself even at the Agricultural School a few years prior, stated that “though Kenji was often alone he was hardly ever lonely.”²⁹ This alludes to his pervasive faith in the oneness and essential beauty of the universe that needed only its inhabitants to “dissolve the parameters of the human experience that set the limitations on human knowledge”³⁰ responsible for exclusion, comparison and prejudice—basically all of the things that keep the beings of the universe from embracing one another as equally important pieces to the same grand cosmic puzzle. Therefore, minding this aspect of Miyazawa's character at this particular time in his life, let us

29 Toriyama, *Kenji no Gakkō*, 75.

30 Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 168.

reexamine the final two lines of the poem:

*hiru mo hadashi de sake wo nomi
me wo urumaseta toshiyoritachi*

Even daytime, barefoot and drinking
those bleary-eyed old men.

Rather than looking down on these locals for drinking in the afternoon, Miyazawa more likely feels empathy for them. He recognizes the desire for escape that the act of drinking in the day time normally implies. Their bare feet similarly reflect the destitute nature of their situation, as they are left to work hard under the late summer sun with not so much as shoes on their feet. Lastly, perhaps most provocative of all points of analysis of this poem, is that the eyes of these poor old farmers are not *urumu* but *urumaseru*—they are not merely bleary or wet but there is an implied sense that something has *made* them that way. One might assume that this be taken literally and that the alcohol or the hard work of the day has moistened the eyes of these men. Another reading, however, is that the figurative vision of these men has been blurred or clouded. They are faced with desperate conditions and stripped of most of the things that in the past made their local culture a comfort to them, as Kenji extols in his *Introduction to Peasant Art (Nōmin Geijutsu Gairon Kōyō)*.³¹ Still, despite this, they refuse the help of an eager agronomist simply because he once made his life as a teacher, a man who could never understand anything about true labor. Kenji must have seen this callous, unwavering stubbornness as a result of the blinders placed upon these men by their own experiential limitations and a society that had certainly not created a pleasant niche for them.

The following poem, written by Miyazawa following the death of his sister Toshi and just prior to his long journey that would provide the inspiration for *Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru*, deals with the same concept in a far more personal light:

³¹ Ibid, 168-169.

“Why do you try to grasp firmly in the human
what you can get only in religion?

.....
Come now, wipe your tears, collect yourself.
You must not love in so religious a mode.”³²

This poem places the author in much the same role as he had designated for the old men of “Residence.” Overcome by the grief of his loss, Kenji has lost sight of his view of the world as a single metabolizing system in which human beings are just as much a single, ephemeral and integrated part as anything else. Instead he seeks his sister, whom he wants to view as a special entity that was once there and now has been robbed from him. In his writings he bemoans feeling as if she were still present somewhere, hidden away from him. With this poem the mourning author attempts to re-orient himself and escape the subjective viewpoint into which grief had pushed him. Written by one so often lauded as a religious author, this important poem indicates a mindset that is key to understanding the works of Miyazawa Kenji. It is likely that Kenji viewed religion—the tendency to imagine aspects of the world that may or may not exist regardless of actual understanding—on the same level as the hardships experienced by the old men of “Residence.” Both lead people to believe in and act according to conditions that do not necessarily reflect the world in which we live and further separates us from the rest of the universe. Though he acknowledges the limitations impressed upon him by the human perspective, Kenji reminds himself that there is no reason to apply the blinders of religion to further hinder one's understanding. To do so would limit the love of which Miyazawa speaks to a few select parts of the universe, rather than the overall interconnected whole. The love that he sought to feel, however, unbound by religion, was for all of the dynamic universe of which we are all individual parts. I would insist that Miyazawa wished to

32 Hiroaki Sato, ed. *Miyazawa Kenji: Selections* (Los Angeles: University of California Press: 2007) xviii

remind himself—and whomever would come to read this poem—that Toshi, his sister, was not truly gone from him, nor was she likely a unique soul floating up to heaven, nor was she an ethereal essence traversing the six realms of Buddhist existence. Instead, the particles that had been the makeup of Toshi had been many things since the beginning of the universe and would assuredly go on to be countless other things. Like everything on Earth, she is very much a part of him and the rest of the world as there is nothing in the world that exists in a vacuum. Overcoming grief and orienting oneself in such a way is no easy task, however. That is why this poem, and indeed much of Miyazawa's work, exists. They provide voice to the act of “orientation.”

The act of orientation that we find in Kenji's tales and poetry is an act of 'unblurring' the eyes of the world, one might argue. On the role of Kenji's poetry in his lifelong quest, William E. Naff writes, “He deliberately used himself up in the pursuit of a better life for his friends and neighbors and for his former students. His poetry had been an integral part of that effort as well as a revelation of its emotional and intellectual depths.”³³ These emotional and intellectual depths to which he refers direct us towards an aspect of Kenji's work that must be explored in order to understand just who the author is addressing with poems such as the one above.

The old men of “Residence,” we can assume, are not the intended audience for his words. They, like Kenji himself in the second poem, are the misguided, unpleasant and unfortunate mice that feature in the first three tales of this collection. The farmers do not open their arms to Kenji's help by the end of the poem, nor do the mice learn to change their ways by the end of their own tales. The true audience is anyone who happens to read

³³ William E. Naff, Review of *Poems of Kenji Miyazawa* by Hiroaki Sato. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 98, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1978), 300 – 301.

Miyazawa's work. The average reader is able to turn an eye upon herself should she recognize traits of the farmers or mice in themselves. These written works help the reader place herself in a reality that is neither *constructed* by humans, nor even necessarily always *perceived* by them, but which nonetheless exists somehow.³⁴

There is a conscious effort within Kenji's prose and poetry to take the human frame of reference out of the picture and present a world—Ihatov—as things truly are. As such the old men of “Residence” are subjects—examples—of beings blind to the underlying connections that exist between all things outside the perception of the human experience. Although Kenji himself, by merit of being a human being, was not gifted with the eyes necessary to see things in such a light, he was able to create literature that granted a glimpse into the world through such a viewpoint. Tales such as “Donguri to Yamaneko” or “The Wildcat and the Acorns” provide this glimpse by creating a microcosm for life and involving an outsider, in this case a young boy named Ryōji. This boy, by merit of being uninvolved in the world of afflicted characters (the acorns) is able to help them see above their misguided quarrel and guide them out of it. In this way the acorns become the humans and Ryōji assumes the role of the objective observer outside of the human experience. Much the same could be said for the returning scholar of “Kenjū's Grove,” who, having severed his connections to the customs of the city, is able to appreciate Kenjū's deeds, which the denizens of the city had previously condemned. In other tales, however, the main characters are left blind to wallow and often times suffer the consequences. Homoi of “Shellfire” is the primary example of this, a protagonist whose mistakes serve to caution and save future readers, though the rabbit himself suffers the consequences. In either case, the reader assumes the viewpoint of the outsider even if

34 Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, 167.

there is no character physically embodying the agent of the outside. As such, the reader is offered a chance to stand removed enough from the goings-on of the characters to understand the causes and nature of their plight. The majority of the tales included in this collection contain some identifiable instance of this.

In “Residence,” Kenji is an outsider to the closed-off world of these farmers, a world that views privileged city folk with a great deal of resentment. He is able to see above the perspective of the farmers that turn him away and for it feels all the more sorry for them and is that much more determined to help them with his knowledge of soil science and like. Whether the outsider comes from within the story or exists only in the reader's mind there is a single constant: an agent of the outside remains a necessity for understanding our true nature. Without others to look down upon us and triangulate our position in the world it is unlikely that we would ever surpass the bonds of our own subjectivity. Who better than Miyazawa Kenji, one so compassionate and yet so often left alone and on the outside of the communities surrounding him, to lend us an extra set of eyes?

Agents of the Outside in this Collection.

Kenji often found himself on the outside of a great many of the social and societal circles that surrounded him, apparently leading the author to seek a more objective viewpoint on existence. Though study of the author's remarkable life is certainly essential in understanding this connection, it is equally if not more important to explore how this connection manifested itself within his writings. Collected here are a purely random assortment of the author's tales, chosen entirely on face value. Admittedly, not every tale chosen fits perfectly into the frame of this analysis. Remarkably, though, the vast

majority of them do. This is important to remember in realizing how prominent this feature—the orienting agent of the outside—is in Miyazawa's fiction. Below is a series of short analysis of the many tales in this collection in regards to how they encourage the reader to view herself and her situation as she may not have previously thought to do. The only tale excluded is “The Wildcat and the Acorns,” which has already been effectively explored in the above section.

“Fuu and Professor Bird-box,” the first story in this collection, contains a very deliberate orientating agent of the outside, the Cat Boss. This is one of the more interesting of Kenji's recurring characters. In this tale, not only does the Cat Boss point the reader's attention out of the perception of the main characters, but he sticks the issues dealt with in the very face of the modern reader. The theme of education—more specifically the theme of the corrupt and misguided teaching the next generation—is not restricted to this one story. At the end of “The Slug, the Raccoon and the Spider,” a tale not included in this collection but available in John Bester's *Once and Forever*, the wise owl says something nearly the same. One cannot be surprised when a faulty tree bears faulty fruit. Nothing here is presented as necessarily beyond saving, however. Professor Bird-Box is surely the way he is because of his life of loneliness and darkness. It's quite natural for him to seek out a profession for himself that will boost his self esteem, even if he is at best ill-suited for it. Just the same, Fuu surrounds himself only with friends to which he can feel superior. In both cases, a mindset based on comparison to others leads to undesirable results. The Cat Boss represents the outsider in this case, pulling the characters out of the world that they've created for themselves by viewing it from the top down. Miyazawa, through his writing, displays traits in the characters that readers may

not otherwise recognize in themselves and others.

The second in the Mice trilogy, “Ku the mouse” also deals with the danger of blindly placing importance solely on comparison with others. This is a fault to which Kenji hopes to find a remedy by way of these two stories. In the tale, Ku can only feel good about himself if he knows he has a leg up on other people. He's profoundly selfish, caring only about himself and even going as far as to draw a certain satisfaction out of the misfortune of others. In contrast, the other mice all seem driven to utilize knowledge for the good of all mouse-kind. Here again, the Cat Boss is brought in as our guide to show us the error of Ku's ways and, ideally, lead us away from them. What Ku likely realizes by the end of the tale (when it is far too late) is that it is useless to place value upon yourself solely based on comparison with others—a lesson somewhat clairvoyant in a society that would go on to become notorious for students putting themselves through examination hell in order to make the necessary marks and distinguish themselves by entering a prestigious school. Ku's arrogance leads him to be easily deceived by the Cat Boss, who plays on his sense of pride and leads him straight to his doom. Though Ku learns the futility of comparing apples to oranges far too late it is not necessarily so for the reader.

The title character of “Xe the Mouse,” far from able to work with others for the benefit of all, demands compensation from even his friends when their kind-hearted favors go awry. Xe seems to feel as if he is entitled to a great deal and feels cheated with things don't go exactly his way. This is a vice we have all been prone to at least once or twice. The mouse's relationships diminish until he has hardly even any inanimate friends left, yet he does not understand his situation as encouragement to change his ways. The

character of the Wire Mousetrap proves interesting in that it actually identifies with the mice and genuinely wishes to help them. A strong tone of anti-prejudice is felt; one cannot judge another by looks and assumption alone. Even one as kind as the Wire Mousetrap can only be pushed so far, though. He gets what is coming to him and we, the audience—the outside observers—are left to consider the nature of blame and finger-pointing in our own lives. What purpose does blame serve if the accused party has nothing to learn?

“Kenjū's Grove” is perhaps one of the best examples in this collection of an agent of the outside drawing the characters out of their subjective views. Who is the fool and who is the wise man? This recurring theme in Miyazawa's works is perhaps most prominent in this story. The way in which the outsider's perspective works in this tale should be quite apparent by the end of the story. Though shunned in his youth as a simpleton, Kenjū is the only one in the village who goes on to create anything with actual lasting value—a value to which the people of Kenjū's time are blind to see. Kenjū is presented as someone who is quite benevolent and unaffected by the influences of his society. That purity leads him to plant and maintain his cedar grove and also to celebrate it along with the children who use it as their playground.

An outsider who comes to explain what Kenjū's grove truly accomplished in the big picture is introduced by way of the scholar returning to the village from America. His influence is hardly necessary by that point in the story as the reader has no doubt already grasped the true moral; lacking in vision and foresight as we are, there is not one among us qualified to shun the harmless act of another for no good reason, such as the neighboring farmers taunt and berate Kenjū simply for his effort to raise a grove of

cedars. For all we know, all that seems important to us may prove frivolous and all that strikes us as frivolous may turn up the only thing of importance.

In “Night of the Festival,” the Mountain Man stands in stark contrast to everything that modern society has brought the people of Ryōji's village. While they are buried in the rituals and technology of modern life, the Mountain Man remains, for lack of a better word, pure. He sees no need to lie to anybody nor would he ever antagonize anyone or anything for no good reason. Ryōji, presumably assuming the voice of Miyazawa himself, harbors an immense admiration for this simpler man and doesn't count his uninitialized nature as a flaw in the slightest. Instead, with the earnestness of a child not yet trained by the world to antagonize outsiders, he wishes to find some way to make the Mountain Man happy. The Mountain Man in this tale is the clear agent of the outside, drawing our minds and the minds of the characters away from the bright lights and social pressures of modern times.

The Director General and the two Government Officials of “Official Government Business” all represent newly appointed men of power in the Meiji government, which would have been little more than a mere half-century old at the time of this story. Though a true story,³⁵ this tale, like the others described above, also allows the reader to observe herself from a more objective standpoint. In this tale, life for these powerful men is literally what they create it to be. It doesn't matter to them if a tree is not a chestnut tree; they only care about maintaining the image of such a tree. They don't care about actually getting the mushrooms to the Director General. Instead they only fuss over how they must be delivered to him and create a silly, unnatural mushroom field. The agents of the outside in this tale could be considered Miyazawa and his childhood friend Keijirō.

³⁵ This tale is assumed to be true due to the autobiographical style in which it is written.

Though they are not quite able to open the eyes of the government officials, they do effectively open the eyes of the reader, even if Miyazawa's intention was only to get a chuckle. Still we are led to ask: how much of our own lives are spent stressing over minor details that really don't mean anything or are grounded in misunderstanding and presumption?

“Shellfire,” despite its length, is a surprisingly little celebrated tale in the Miyazawa canon. This is perhaps because of the straightforward nature of the story. It is a bittersweet cautionary tale that warns of the dangers of absolute power corrupting absolutely. Homoi's intentions are—at least in the beginning—altruistic. As the power granted him by the stone increases, however, he grows into something of a corrupt dictator figure, almost a cult of personality. In the end, though, he is but a child. In this tongue-in-cheek way Miyazawa seems to be hinting at the idea that even the most powerful ruler is but a child at heart trying desperately to earn the attention and respect of the people. As if addressing the reader directly, Kenji places the hero in front of our eyes, endears us to him, and then makes us sit helplessly by as he falls fast and hard from grace. In this tale, Homoi continually tries to remind himself that what he is doing is for the greater good, for the benefit of others, though it is clear for us to see that all he truly desires is fame and respect. It is not so easy for any individual to tell when she has crossed the line between altruistic leadership and self-righteous despotism. This story, however, puts the fall from grace into perspective quite clearly.

The presence of the mushroom in “The Ant and the Mushroom” fits quite well with the recurring theme of an outside perspective ridding the characters of subjective assumptions that we are exploring throughout these stories. All three characters that we

meet are convinced that the strange, rapidly growing object they encounter on the base of the oak tree is a kind of alien structure. As such, the adult ant is quick to assume that the unexplained structure is a threat and treats it with caution, as he has been trained to do. It's not until the children come running back with the explanation from the superior officers that they learn that not only is the mushroom harmless but it's extremely commonplace. Once understanding trumps belief they are able to look at the structure for what it really is—a big, droopy mushroom—and are able to have a good laugh about it.

“The Four Forests” is a layered work that reads quite unlike a great many others tales in this collection. With the omnipotent narrator and the use of repetition throughout, this story reads much like a western fairy tale.

This work has two dynamic relationships at its core, the first of which is represented by the oft repeated exchange between the farmers and the forests. These conversations imply a deeply rooted respect that the farmers held for—and one might insist owed—the natural world. The people of Koiwai never encroach upon the forests without permission and are mindful of the forest's needs when they begin farming the land and building their homes. This is a direct representation of Miyazawa's own beliefs about the way things ought to be. In stark contrast to many of the environmental policies of today, these farmers ensured that all was kept in balance and considered not only their own (the farmers') needs but the needs of all other natural systems as well.

The second dynamic to consider with “The Four Forests” is that between the human farmers and their counterparts: the wolves, the Mountain Man and the giant thief. Much like the farmers, all three have cultures of their own. Unaccustomed to the ways of humans, they can only presume and use their best judgment. This leads to conflicts such

as the abduction of the children and the thefts of the tools and millet. None of these acts are out of pure malice, however. The wolves simply do not know any better, but they do learn from the encounter. As both sides are able to treat one another with respect there is no bad blood formed between the groups. They are instead mindful of one another's needs and the humans take it upon themselves to deliver treats to the wolves every winter. Much the same, the Mountain Man, an archetype who we also encounter in "Night of the Festival," steals the tools out of pure ignorance. Knowing only that the wolves were rewarded with sweets after stealing from the humans he is conditioned to believe he will receive the same should he steal something as well. Instead of growing angry, the humans recognize this clear chain of cause-and-effect. They befriend the Mountain Man and pursue a path of understanding. Notably lacking in their encounter is any sentiment of entitlement or religious purpose. It is only too easy to imagine how the encounter might have gone had the farmers or the Mountain Man thought themselves entitled to the land or the tools by some higher religious power. The sides opt for understanding rather than faith, though, and are able to coexist peacefully because of it. This tale, rather than presenting the reader with a problematic situation of conflicting, entangled subjective biases, presents a world where such things hardly come into play. By remaining conscious of their own limited understanding, the characters are all able to find a peaceful solution to their problems and coexist. The world created in this story is a great deal simpler than our own, however. In what ways could this simple solution untangle the complex problems of our own modern, global society?

"The Porcelain-Berries and the Rainbow," a little known Miyazawa story, struggles with the concepts of mortality and social inequality, yet frames them both

within a perfectly safe fairy tale format and largely follows the same formula as has been explored throughout this collection.

The heavy emphasis on the unity of all beings coupled with its discussion on impermanence makes this tale one that readers might assume is deeply rooted in Buddhist thought. This is not so. In fact, there is actual mention of “children of god” in the original text (I have altered this phrase to imply one is “blessed by the heavens”) giving the original version a distinctively Christian flare. Toriyama pointed out this Christian influence in *Kenji's School*. I believe, however, that the teaching that the rainbow attempts to impart upon the bushel of berries is not dogmatic in the least. No religious explanation is needed for what the rainbow has already observed to be true; nothing lasts forever, everything changes, and nothing is truly separated from anything else. The berries are not in a position where they can readily understand this. Just the same, not every human being has the opportunity or vantage point to understand these observable truths.

Quite obviously, the rainbow of the story acts as the agent of the outside sent to deliver the berries and us, the readers, from our limited viewpoint. It is all too easy for one to feel unaccomplished and irrelevant when faced with a peer whose abilities overshadow your own. The rainbow attempts to lift us from this manner of thinking, though this proves quite unsuccessful at reaching the berries, who will likely go on feeling sorry for themselves. The world in which we live cannot be likened to a flat terrain. Some find themselves soaring high like the rainbow and others are stuck feeling bland and shackled like the porcelain-berries. Some are human beings, dominating the planet and remodeling its many systems, while others are mice scurrying about the

garages and taking lessons from a bird-box. The truth remains, however, that none of them exist independent from the others and that none will exist as they are for very long. Through the “eyes of the greater reality,”³⁶ an objective viewpoint free of bias and perspective, we all appear as different parts of the same universal organism, a single functioning system. We and the berries lack such eyes and thus must fill in the blanks of the world for ourselves, aided sometimes by tales such as these that sometimes serve to remind us to continually look at things differently, skeptically, and with a desire for understanding.

Finding Kenji's Voice: Translating Miyazawa Kenji.

The process of translating the works of Miyazawa came with a unique set of challenges. Translating in any case requires a certain level of responsibility on the part of the translator regarding what liberties to take with the text. Especially in a format such as this when the works are accompanied with an analytical study, there is the constant danger of the translator bending the attitude of the work towards his or her own interpretations. Secondly, the scientific terms and phrases that have become such a distinctive marker of Miyazawa's poetry are also present in his prose fiction. In order to fully appreciate these terms a fair bit of investigation was required. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, there is the issue of dialect. The biggest liberty I have taken with Miyazawa's works is the adaptation of character speech into equivalent modern slangs and dialects. As far as I am lead to believe, this has not yet been incorporated into previous professional translations of Miyazawa's fairy tales.

³⁶ The phrasing of this quote is slightly altered from the original. An explanation of how and why can be found in the next section.

It wasn't until nearly halfway through the project that I'd concretely formulated the theory regarding the influence of a systemic outsider drawing the characters and/or readers out of their own misguided beliefs and routines. Once this became a noticeable pattern, however, it became necessary to take caution in not *looking* for this kind of influence. To date the closest I can remember having come to imposing this viewpoint on the translations was a change I imposed in “The Porcelain-Berries and the Rainbow.” One of the key phrases in the story is *makoto no hitomi*, or “the eyes of truth.” I have altered this phrase and made it “the eyes of the greater reality.” There is strong reason to believe that Miyazawa was implying the presence of intransitive objects, objects in the universe that exist as they are regardless of whether or not they are within human perception. The concept of a reality existing objectively, outside of the human sphere was a generally new concept at the time. The rainbow is imploring the bushel of berries to consider how connected the two of them really are when considered from the perspective of objective reality. *Makoto no hitomi* was surely an accurate way to convey this sentiment at the time, though I feel it bears religious connotations when translated directly into English.

The inclusion of scientific and hyper-descriptive language is something of a cornerstone of Miyazawa Kenji's literature. “Kenji's World,”³⁷ a database of essays and information about the author, contains a number of pieces exploring instances of poetry encountering science in Miyazawa's works. Two of the author's longest pieces, “The Biography of Gusuko Budori” and “Night on the Milky Way Railroad”³⁸ (“Gusuko Budori no Denki” and *Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru*) are both, in their own right, perfect examples of that encounter. The former revolves around the life of a volcano expert that

37 <http://www.kenji-world.net>.

38 Strong, Sarah M., and Karen Colligan-Taylor. *The Masterworks of Kenji Miyazawa* (Tokyo: International Foundation for the Promotion of Languages and Culture, 2002), 84.

seeks to end famine and crop failure by studying the relationship between climate and volcanic activity. The latter, likely the most famous and widely translated of Kenji's works, incorporates references to astronomy to supplement the narrative. Just the same, I have encountered a number of these terms in the course of these translations, a few of which I would like to discuss below.

There is a brief passage within the tale “Night of the Festival” where Ryōji, the main character, stops to ponder the acetylene lights. The translation of this tale included in Bester's *Once and Forever* preserves the rhythm of the original text by including the word *acetylene* and moving on. This word would have seemed modern and intriguing and been in no need of further explanation in the early 1900s. In modern day, however, I find it unlikely that the common reader would understand how an acetylene lamp works and be able to imagine its light and so I have included a footnote.

A trained geologist and amateur stone collector,³⁹ Kenji's description of the celebration over the find of *andesite* in “Akita Highroad” is unsurprising. Andesite is a form of cooled igneous volcanic rock. As it is characteristic of western South America it is understandable that young geologists would be excited to find it in Japan. The wording in this passage was quite specific geologically, though to my best understanding it has been translated here faithfully. Again, though, this required a fair bit of research and investigation to capture exactly what Kenji was talking about.

Similarly, “The Porcelain-Berries and the Rainbow” mentions the shine of a stone called *malachite*, which might be a shine unfamiliar to common readers. I have included footnotes for this as well as a few lesser known botanical references.

Lastly there is the issue of slang and dialect in certain stories within this

39 Abe Takao, *Spring and Chaos: The Life Story of Kenji Miyazawa*.

collection. On more than one occasion there are characters in this collection that will casually refer to 'stuff.' Less than perfect English is used to express the Porcelain-Berries and the Rainbow thoughts. In “The Wildcat and the Acorns,” Ichirō even goes as far as to greet the mushrooms of the valley as “shrooms.” This is all done for a single, specific purpose. For the most part, the dialogue within the original texts of Miyazawa's fairy tales is easy to comprehend and straightforward, hardly ever incorporating slang or imperfect language. I feel that translating this manner of speaking directly, however, would have aided in making the tales feel distant and unreal. This collection is not the first instance of Miyazawa's work has been adapted in such a way to reach a wider audience.

There is a 1985 interview⁴⁰ between Sugii Gisaburō and Masumura Hiroshi, the director and the manga artist that inspired the art style of the *Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru*. On drawing an actual face and visage for the characters of the story Masumura had this to say: “...the first thing I did was to try to put a face on Giovanni and Campanella, like you did. But I just couldn't come up with anything. If you try to force your own image onto those characters, it winds up changing what Kenji was trying to get across by this story through the characters.”

What Masumura is discussing is the reasoning behind the usage of animal characters in Miyazawa's fairy tales and subsequent theatrical representations. In short the universal appeal of the characters would not have been the same had the characters shared features with any particular group of people. Rather the goal is to have the audience appeal to the characters as fellow creatures of the universe. They will seem more real to the viewer because of it. This is similar to the reasoning behind my handling

40 A translation of this interview is available online at <http://www.pelleas.net/aniTOP>.

of dialogue in these stories. I feel that a stiffness of dialogue would serve to flatten the characters and make them less believable to the average reader.

Admittedly, this change felt at first counterintuitive. After all, adapting the character's speech to fit one particular dialect or age group would have done little but further alienate entire groups of readers. This is not my intention, of course. What I aim to create here is a more realistic, updated representation of speech that serves to endear the characters to the reader and makes it easier to get involved. If left unchanged, I fear the dialogue would have fallen somewhat flat and the reader would have been keenly aware that they were reading an “old” text. Though I do not believe that the liberties I have taken go as far as to render this collection as an 'adaptation,' I do feel that an acknowledgment of the deliberate change is necessary. It is done with the goal in heart to open these stories to as many readers as possible, which was undoubtedly Kenji's intention as well.

A Mouse Tale: Fuu and Professor Bird-box

In a certain home there was a single birdcage.

Less of a bird *cage*, you might get a better picture if we call it a bird-*box*. You see, it had a roof, a floor, and three walls all made of thick wooden boards. The front face was made of a wire mesh, doubling as a door.

There was also a small glass window along one of the sides. One day, a solitary brown-eared bulbul chick was put into that box. Not caring all too much for being placed somewhere so small and dark, the bulbul flapped his wings furiously and made quite a commotion.

“You can’t make such a fuss,” the birdcage was quick to say. Nevertheless, the bulbul continued his rabble-raising until he was too tired to move anymore. He was then reduced to just calling out for his mother amidst his sobs.

“No crying,” snapped the birdcage again. That was when it hit the birdcage: “Ha ha, I’m some sort of teacher, now,” he thought.

If you look closely, the little glass window was like the birdcage’s face; the wire mesh in the front could be called a fancy vest. It was apparent that the birdcage couldn’t contain itself for another minute.

“I’m an educator! They call me Professor Bird-box! I’m gonna teach you a thing or two...” it said. The bulbul, with little alternative, called Professor Bird-box as such from then on.

In truth, however, the bulbul really hated the Professor. Since he was trapped inside of the Professor’s belly day in and day out he really began to detest the very sight

of it all, so he took up shutting his eyes all the time. Even with his eyes closed, if he happened to accidentally allow something regarding the professor to wander into his mind, a chill would run down his back. Still, at one time, the bulbul hadn't received even one grain of millet in seven days. Everyone had forgotten about it. Finally, wasting away, it died snapping its beak open and shut in hunger.

“Ah, what a pity,” said Professor Bird-box. The next bulbul child to be brought in died too, but its manner of dying was just a tad bit different; it received some bad water and died of dysentery.

The bulbul the came after that one was so sad and so longed for the skies and the forest that it gave itself a heart attack in despair.

As for the forth, well, the Professor was a little negligent one spring day and left its wire mesh gate—its vest—wide open. While the Professor napped, the brazen, violent cat boss came along and suddenly snatched away the bulbul.

“Hey! You can't do that! Bring me back my student!” shouted the bird-box, eyes snapping open. The cat boss, however, only snickered and padded off into the distance.

“Ah, that's a shame...” said the Bird-box. From that point on, no one had any faith at all in Professor Bird-box. All of a sudden it found itself carried into a storage room and placed on a high shelf.

“Phew, the air circulation sure is lousy in here, huh?” it said, having a look around. The shelf was full of cracked flowerpots, old red lacquer buckets, and similar junk. Right behind Professor Bird-box was a small, pitch-black hole.

“Now what on earth could this be? Maybe a lion's den? Small, but it could be a dragon's lair...” the Bird-box talked to himself.

From that point, day turned to night. From that hole, a mouse emerged and gave the Professor a little bite. The bird-box was terribly surprised, but forced itself to keep its voice cool.

“Oi, oi! Haven’t you ever heard the old saying: don’t go biting things without a good reason⁴¹?”

The mouse, startled, retreated three steps and bowed very politely.

“This is a very useful bit of wisdom; thank you very much for teaching it to me. I feel that one right down to my liver. It really is bad to bite things without a good reason. You see, last year, I tried to bite Lord Piggy Bank without a good reason and I ended up losing my two front teeth for it. Then, earlier this spring, I chomped into a human’s ear for no real reason at all; I thought I was a goner for sure! I’m truly indebted to you for showing me the light, here. Say, I have a son by the name of Fuu who’s dumb as a rock; would it be alright if I sent him here every day to receive some of your venerable teachings?”

“Sure, just leave him to me. I’ll make a fine mouse of him for sure! I only just recently came here, but previously I lived in a great big house of glass. That was where I raised and educated four little bulbul chicks. Every one of them was a real terror at the beginning, flapping all over the place and making such a racket, but because of my influence, they’re nice and quiet now. They’re off to a very comfortable future, sure to be full of luxury and splendor,” said Professor Bird-box.

41 This is the literal translation of the saying. A few English equivalents were tested out but all felt rather forced and fake.

The father mouse was so overjoyed he was rendered speechless. Lowering his head reverently, he quickly dove into his hole and once he had retrieved Fuu, his son, he returned to Professor Bird-box.

“This is the child. Please, I leave him to you.” The two of them bowed their heads respectfully.

“Ha hah, sharp little guy we have here, eh? Looks like he has a good head on his shoulders,” said the Professor. “I’ll teach him. Absolutely.”

One day, when Fuu made to speed by in a hurry, Professor Bird-box, caught off guard, called out to stop him.

“Hey! Fuu! Wait a second, there! What are you doing? You’re to walk with nobility and excellence! A man has got to walk with strength, dignity, and purpose!”

“Yeah, teach, but there isn’t one mouse in all my friends that walks like that! I’ve got the most swagger out of them all.”

“These so-called friends of yours, what kind of creatures are they?”

“Lice, spiders, and a tick.”

“So those are the kinds of folks you’re associating with, huh? Why don’t you spend your time with more upstanding creatures?”

“’Cause I hate cats, dogs, lions, tigers—their kind—can’t stand ‘em.”

“Is that right? Well in that case I guess there’s just no helping it. But I do want you to act a little more respectable, though.”

“I get it, teach,” said Fuu, beating a retreat as quick as his legs would carry him.

Then, after five or six days had passed, Fuu tried to dash sneakily around the back of Professor Bird-box when the teacher yelled out.

“Hey! Fuu! Wait a second! What are you doing, looking every which way while you walk along? A man is to look straight ahead where he’s going and proceed straight forward. Furthermore, you are not to be casting sideways glances at things or anything like that.”

“Yeah, but teach, all of my friends are always looking around.”

“Who are there ‘friends,’ now?”

“Like, the spider, the lice, and the centipede,” said Fuu.

“You’re still rubbing elbows with worthless wretches like them? That’s no good at all. You’re to become a fine, upstanding mouse, so if you don’t get away from them, we’re going to have trouble.”

“But that’s how all of my friends are. I’m the most proper and upright among them!” With this, Fuu took off at full speed for the hole and dove in, vanishing from sight.

It was after another five or six days had passed when Fuu made to speed by the Professor again, in a big hurry just like always. The Professor rattled its wire vest and called out to stop him.

“Hey! Fuu! Wait a second! Whenever I try and tell you something, you always end up running away. Today lets try and calm down a bit. Come sit here. Why are you always so hunched over like that? Why is your back always curled up?”

“Well, teach, my friends are even more hunched over all the time. Their backs are even more curled up.”

“You say your friends, but even the millipede has to straighten out into order to walk, am I wrong?”

“No. Well, that’s true for the millipede, but not for my other friends.”

“What kind of ‘other friends’ do you mean?”

“The poppy seed, the millet pellet, the perilla seed—those guys.”

“Why is it that, without fail, you only compare yourself with those so unworthy?”

Huh? Hey!”

This had all become bothersome for Fuu, so he made a mad dash for the mouse-hole.

Professor Bird-box, this time truly infuriated, rattled all over the place as he called out.

“Fuu’s Mom! Hey! Fuu’s Mom! Get on out here! You’re son is hereby expelled from school! I’m handing him over to you so get on out here!”

Fuu’s Mother came before Professor Bird-box, dragging her trembling son along by the collar.

Professor Bird-box, beside himself with anger, banged his mesh vest around as he spoke.

“I have educated four bulbul children, but up until today I have never encountered such retched disrespect. This student is truly just a bad egg.”

Just then, something yellow appeared and leaped up like the wind, grabbed hold of Fuu and landed upon the earth. Its whiskers twittered. It was the Cat Boss.

“Ha ha ha,” laughed the Cat Boss, “If the teacher is rotten, then so will be the student. This teacher is always spouting his lies with such a straight face. The student’s will to learn is going to be smaller than a poppy seed! This is why people are really bothered about the future of this land.”

A Mouse Tale: Ku

There was once a mouse named Ku. A very conceited and deeply jealous mouse, he fancied himself to be the greatest scholar of all mouse-kind. If any of the other mice ever got cheeky with him, he had a bad habit of silencing them with a haughty “*Ahem, ahem.*”

Once day his friend Tah came along and showed up at Ku’s house.

“Good day, Ku! Nice weather today!” said Tah to Ku.

“It is nice out. Have you found anything good?”

“No, we’re in a bit of a dry spell. How about it? Do you imagine it’s going to stay like this?”

“Well... what do you think?”

“Hmm... I think it might gradually get better from here. The financial flow of Europe and the Americas seems to have gradually-”

“*Ahem, ahem,*” Ku suddenly cleared his throat loudly, causing Tah to jump in surprise. Still facing sideways, Ku intuitively stroked one of his whiskers. Under his breath, he then muttered “Oh? And so...?”

When he’d finally settled down again, Tah sat back down with his paw on his knee.

Ku finally faced forward, and said “that earthquake a while back was a real surprise, wasn’t it?”

“Completely.”

“I’d never seen one that big before then, either.”

“Surely; that one was positively a significant tectonic shift! The epicenter was apparently east longitude 42 degrees, south latitude...”

“*Ahem, ahem,*” shouted Ku, again.

Tah was once again taken aback, though not as much as last time.

Ku finally fixed the mood by saying “The weather really improved, too. Have you set anything up in preparation?”

“No, I haven’t got anything set up. I am, however, hoping to get out into the fields, if this good weather sticks with us.”

“Is there anything worthwhile out there in the fields?”

“It’s autumn, so I think there should be something or other that we can harvest at any rate. All the better if the weather is nice, right?”

“How about it? Do you think we’ll have clear skies?”

“Well, they say that the regular heat wave that originates on the archipelago of Okinawa is gradually progressing north by northwest, and...”

“*Ahem, ahem,*” Ku once again overpoweringly cleared his throat, completely catching Tah off guard. Tah stood halfway up shaking and blinking, completely silenced.

Ku turned to the side and, stroking at his whiskers again, cast a sideways glance at Tah’s face. After watching him just stand there for a while, Ku muttered “Oh? And?” in the lowest voice he could utter. Tah, however, was already too shaken to say anything, anymore, so he just gave a single, quick, polite bow.

“Goodbye,” Tah said in a very hoarse little voice and departed Ku’s house.

Ku laid down flat on his back right there and reached for today's "*The Competitive Mouse*" Newspaper. "Ha, no sign of Tah," he said to himself and spread open the pages.

In all truth, "*The Competitive Mouse*" really wasn't a bad newspaper. By reading it, one could find out about any and all of the different rivalries amongst his or her fellow mice. Whether it was how Peh, the mouse who had pilfered and accumulated a huge amount of cornmeal, had entered a competition of obstinacy with Hah, who had a whole stockpile of sugar, or if was about how Hah, Hii, and Fuu's three daughters had entered into quite the scholarly rivalry, by which at long last the three of them ultimately burned themselves out when it came to problems of proportion; whatever the case, it was all completely covered and reported on.

Now, now, everybody; this might be a little rude, but let's listen in on what Ku's newspaper had to say, that day:

"Hmm, the aircraft of the Kamajyn Republic have attacked the country of Puhara. Wow, that's big. This is no good... but hey, there's no reason that they would come all the way *here*, so it's alright. Hmm... Xe has gone missing. Xe... he was that bully, if I remember correctly. Well, *this* is interesting.

Xe the mouse, missing from No. 1, Attic Street. According to the earliest reports from headquarters, Xe had had associations with a certain **Mr. Wire Mousetrap**, which brought them to a small measure of conflicting feelings on both sides, one night before last. According to Ne, of No. 4, Kitchen Street, it seems like Xe paid a visit to **Mr. Mousetrap** once again, last night. Furthermore, Po, from No. 29,

Under the Bed, reported hearing the sounds of heated quarreling between Xe and **Mr. Mousetrap**, as well as occasional noise of fist fighting from late last night until this morning. Finally, what headquarters has been able to gather of this incident is that **Mr. Wire Mousetrap** was deeply involved. HQ has expressed a strong desire to investigate this suspect further on top of discovering just what is the truth behind Xe's disappearance. Ha ha ha. Well, there's no doubt about it; this Xe fellow was eaten by the mousetrap. Interesting. Alright, next up... Teh, the new member of the Mouse Counsel... Huh? Well, forget that. That's not interesting at all! Heck, I'd be just as good on the mouse counsel. Booo-ring; I'm going for a walk."

From there, Ku the Mouse went out for a stroll. On his way to Attic City, in a huff, he happened to overhear two centipedes discussing the filial piety of spiders.

"Honestly! It's got to be just impossible!"

"...right, right, totally! On top of that, there's something or other wrong with her kids' health, too. In spite of it all, she's up at two in the morning giving them their medicine, cooking for them, and it's always got to be a late night. Probably around three in the morning! She probably doesn't have a single second to relax. It's really touching, isn't it?"

"The dedication of that spider is just..."

"*Ahem, ahem,*" Ku suddenly sounded, pulling his whiskers out to the side.

The two centipedes were caught off guard and, surprised, cut their talk short, fleeing off in separate directions.

Ku then went on making his way gradually up to Attic City. Teh was there talking with another mouse, there in the big, wide, empty open space of Attic City.

Ku hid in the shadow of a broken dustpan and eavesdropped.

“And so you see, by my own thinking anyway, however we proceed must be with a unanimous, unified will in favor of reconciliation...” spoke Teh.

“*Ahem, ahem,*” coughed Ku, low enough as not to be heard. “I see...,” said the mouse talking with Teh, seemingly thinking over his words.

Teh continued on.

“If not, the development and growth of this world will fail to advance, but instead stagnate,” he said.

“*Hem, hem, ahem!*” quietly coughed Ku, again.

“Ah,” pondered the mouse listening to Teh.

“Should worldwide civilization’s growth and progress slow and stagnate in such a manner, politics and, of course, economics, agriculture, business, industry, education, the fine arts; sculpture, painting, as well as literature, theater, let’s see...all the dramatic arts, art itself, entertainment, and other things like health; phew... they’ll all deteriorate,” Teh seemed to be fit to burst with self-satisfaction, having used so many intelligent-sounding words. “*Hem, hem,*” coughed Ku, as loud as he could manage without being heard. He balled up his irritation tightly into a fist.

“Goodness...” said the listening mouse.

Teh started up once again.

“And once the economy and entertainment industry go bad, we will face the resulting invocation of a societal partition born of dissatisfaction. Such a thing is

something that is to us unthinkable, something we are unwilling to allow; therefore, it is with unified cooperation and a will of reconciliation that we must proceed with things, or else not at all.”

Ku, aggravated by the power and logical sense of Teh’s words, finally sounded off an “*Ahem, ahem,*” as loudly as he could muster. Upon his doing so, Teh, alarmed, shook and trembled, closed his eyes, and shrank down very, very small. However, he then slowly, gradually uncoiled himself, and cautiously opened his eyes.

“This mouse is the embodiment of that partition!” he bellowed in a huge voice. “Tie him up! Tie him up!” With this, the listening mouse came flying at Ku with the speed of a loosed sling stone. Pulling out a length of rope, he wrapped it round and round Ku, completely binding him to the spot.

Ku struggled furiously to the point of tears, but when it seemed apparent that nothing was going to work, he stood there rooted to the spot for the moment. Teh pulled out a scrap of paper and scribbled something down on it, handing it off to the other mouse.

The mouse appeared before his prisoner, who was flopping and rolling about on the floor. In a stately voice, he began to read aloud:

“As the mouse Ku has been found a separatist, he is to be executed before everyone.” Ku could only squeak in his tears.

“Well, separatist; walk! Hurry up now!” said the other mouse. Defeated and small, Ku dejectedly rose to his feet. Mice came and gathered around from every which direction.

“There’s a sight for sore eyes; it’s that mouse that’s always ‘*ahem, ahem*’-ing all the time.”

“So he was a separatist after all!”

“His death would be one more step towards purification!” All of the voices expressed similar sentiments.

The mouse that had bound him rolled up his sleeves and began preparations for the execution.

Just then, there came a terrible sound from behind all of the mice, and there appeared two eyes, sparkling like fire. It was the Cat Boss.

The mice all screamed in panic and fled, scattering off into every direction.

“Yer’ not getting’ away from me! Rawr!” roared the Cat Boss, chasing after one mouse. The mouse, however, had already dived into a deep, narrow crevice and hidden, so no matter how many times the cat swatted and reached, his efforts attained him nothing.

“Darn,” the Cat Boss clicked his tongue and walked back. Upon seeing Ku, however, tied up and now the sole remaining mouse, he was surprised.

“Just what do they call *you*?”

“I’m Ku,” said Ku, already calm.

“Ha, is that right? An’ just what are you doin’ here?”

“I’m here to be executed.”

“Ha ha ha, really now? Well that’s a pity, ain’t it? Alright, I’m gonna get you out o’ here. Come on over to my place. I got four kids, y’see, an’ we could really use a tutor. C’m on.”

The Cat Boss ambled away.

Ku timidly followed after him. The cats' home was really something to behold, indeed. Made of purple bamboo, the inside was cheerfully done up with straw and strips of cloth. There were even cooking supplies, to top it all off!

When they arrived, the Cat Boss' four kittens opened their eyes at long last and began meowing.

After giving them each a lick, one at a time, the Cat Boss said "The four of you can't go on without an education. I brought a teacher here, so you all learn well, you hear? And whatever you do, *don't* eat him, 'zat clear?"

"Thanks, Daddy! We'll definitely learn lots! We promise not to eat our teacher!" said the kittens amidst giddy laughter.

Ku trembled without thinking.

"Teach them, please. You can start with arithmetic," said the Cat Boss.

"Oh, eh... s-s-sure," answered Ku.

In the best of moods, the Cat Boss gave a meow of satisfaction and walked off.

"Teacher, please hurry and teach us arithmetic! Teacher! Hurry!" shrieked the kittens.

Thinking he had to finally teach them something, Ku spoke quickly.

"One plus one equals two."

"That's right!" said the kittens.

"One minus one equals zero."

"Got it!"

"One times one is one."

“Definitely,” answered the kittens, still wide-eyed.

“One divided by one is one.”

“Okay, that’s good!” cried one of the kittens, ecstatically. With this, Ku began to feel dizzy.

“One plus two equals three.”

“Correct!”

“Take two from one, and…” Ku began, but froze up, at a loss.

At this, the kittens shouted as one.

“You can’t take two from one!”

Ku started speaking rapidly again, completely befuddled with the cleverness and aptitude of the kittens. When he’d first started, it’d taken him a good half a year to remember that one and one made two!

“One times two makes two.”

“That seems about right.”

“One divided by two makes…” Ku once again froze in his tracks, stumped. The kittens once again leaped at the chance.

“One divided by two makes one half!” they shouted.

Frustrated with the shrewdness of the kittens, Ku unthinkingly let out an “*Ahem, ahem, hem, hem.*” When he did so, the young kits seemed surprised for a moment, exchanging glances, but before long they all rose up as one.

“What’s this, little mousey? You’re a jealous little wretch, aren’t you?” they said, each one of the four biting down onto one of Ku’s arms and legs.

In a terrible panic, Ku struggled wildly, suddenly letting out another bout of hemming, though it did him no good.

Ku the mouse was slowly devoured from all four directions until finally, in the end, the four kittens bumped heads over his guts.

When the Cat Boss came home, he asked “So, what did you learn?”

“We learned how to catch mice!” answered all four kittens.

A Mouse Tale: Xe

Once, in the pitch black attic of an old house there lived a mouse named Xe.

One day, while having a gander around, strolling along Under-the-Bed Highway, he caught sight of a weasel, running like the wind towards him carrying a great deal of something good or another. When he spotted Xe, the weasel paused and spoke very quickly.

“Hey, Xe! There’s candy overflowing all over the place from a hole in the cabinet over there! Hurry up and go grab some!”

Xe, already so excited that his whiskers were standing on end, ran off towards this candy mountain without even a single word of thanks to the weasel. However, once he reached the area beneath the cabinet, his feet suddenly came screeching to a halt. A small, sharp voice rang out.

“Stop! Who goes there?”

Xe, caught off guard, took a good look around and found that the voice belonged to an ant. A number of warrior ants had already formed a square perimeter around the fallen sweets, all of them brandishing black battle axes above their heads. Twenty or thirty of them were meticulously breaking apart, dissolving, and carrying the candy back to the colony. Xe shook, afraid.

“You are not permitted to enter. Go back immediately! Go, go!” said the master sergeant of the ants in his low, thick voice.

The mouse scrambled to turn tail and flee towards his home up in the attic as fast as he could. Once he had reached his nest, he threw himself down and lay in bed for a while, but somehow that just seemed so boring; so boring that he couldn’t take it

anymore. Those ants were soldiers, and they were strong, so there was no helping it. Still, it irritated Xe to think that it was because of that quiet weasel that he had gone running off to the cabinet and gotten scolded by the ant captain. So, the mouse trickled on out of his hole again and traversed over to the weasel's home, towards the rear of the little wooden house.

When he arrived, the weasel was there, grinding away at the kernel of corn with his teeth. When he noticed Xe, he looked up.

“How was it? Wasn't there any left?”

“Mr. Weasel, you're a terrible person, playing a prank like that on a weakling like me...”

“Prank? There was no prank about it, it was definitely there!”

“Sure it was there, but the ants had already gotten to it!”

“The ants, eh? Is that right... quick little buggers, aren't they...”

“The ants took every bit of it! Tricking a weak little mouse like me... you pay me back! I demand compensation!”

“What do you want me to do? You're the one who was too slow!”

“I dunno! You tricked me, the weak little mouse! Compensate! Pay up!”

“Something's wrong with this guy, holding grudges against people who try and do him a favor,” said the weasel. “Alright, alright. I'll let you have some of my candy.”

“Pay up! Compensation!”

“Ugh. There. Take that and go. Take as much as you can carry and get out of my sight! I don't even want to see your face as it's headed out the door, you spineless excuse for a mouse⁴². Take what you can carry and *go!*” The weasel hurled pieces of candy at Xe

42 Literally this read “otoko” or “man” in the original.

in a huff. Xe gathered up as much as he could carry and bowed. Finally infuriated, the weasel bellowed “Oh? Hurry and get out of here! Go and give the leftovers to the *maggots!*”

With this, Xe turned tail and sped home for his nest in the attic at top speed, where he nibbled timidly at the candy.

Xe gradually grew to be disliked by others because of this disposition, and soon hardly anyone would ever even associate with him. With no alternative, he started to form relationships with things like ceiling pillars, broken dustpans, buckets, and brooms. He was especially good friends with the ceiling pillar.

One day, it spoke to him.

“Mr. Xe, seems like winter is already upon us. We here have got to dry out and get to creaking. It’d probably be best for you to prepare some warm bedding, too. Luckily, the sparrows have left feathers and all sorts of other warm things up just above my head, so how about you take some of it down there and use it? Sure, my head might get a little cold, but I’ll think of something.”

Xe thought it sounded only natural, so he wasted no time in climbing up the pillar and bringing things down, starting from that day.

However, in the middle of his third trip there was a sudden slope, causing the mouse to stumble and fall with a *thump*.

The pillar was alarmed.

“Mr. Mouse! Are you hurt? Are you alright?” it asked, bending its body as much as it possibly could. Xe finally got to his feet, his expression twisted nastily.

“Mr. Pillar! You’re really awful, you know that? How could you do this to a poor little creature like me?”

The pillar, truly apologetic, said “I’m so very sorry, Mr. Mouse. Please forgive me.”

Xe just pushed it farther.

“There’s no forgiving this! If you hadn’t given me those impudent instructions, I wouldn’t have gotten hurt like this! You make up for this! Compensation! You hear? Compensation,” he said.

“I don’t really think that’s going to work... please forgive me!”

“No way! I hate it when people bully the weak around, so you pay up! You pay me back! I demand it!”

The ceiling pillar, deeply troubled, broke down into tears. Resolute to have none of it, the mouse returned to his nest. From that point on, the pillar was too afraid of the mouse to ever speak to him again.

And so after that, the dustpan one day gave half of a bean jam wafer cake to Xe. The next day, Xe’s stomach rebelled against him. Well, of course, Xe, the same as always, demanded reparations one hundred times over. Upset, the dustpan too cut off all relations with Xe the mouse.

Later, after that, the bucket offered some laundry detergent to Xe, saying “Wash your face with this every morning.” Xe was overjoyed, and the very next day started using it every day to wash his face. Unfortunately, after a while, Xe’s face-fur started to come out by the clumps. The mouse immediately paid a visit to the bucket and demanded he be compensated two hundred and fifty times over. Unfortunately, the bucket didn’t

have any face-fur to give him, and didn't have any real other way to repay him, so he retreated, apologizing over and over in his tears. From then on, not a word would pass between the two.

Xe's friends among the furnishings and household objects all in turn met with this kind of experience. Whenever one of them would see his face, it would purposefully turn the other way.

However, there was one among the household objects that would still spend time with Xe. That was the mousetrap made of manufactured, twisted wire.

Mousetraps are for all intents and purposes supposed to be an ally of the humans, but recently there had been daily appearances even in the newspapers of mousetraps along with cats with little captions under the pictures that read 'things to offer the junk dealer.' Plus, they were advertised. Even if none of that were so, this Wire Mousetrap would essentially never once have been treated warmly by the humans. Yes, that was for certain. On top of that, it was thought offensively dirty by everyone. So, in actuality, this Wire Mousetrap had more in common with mice than it did with humans. Still, the common mouse was just so scared of it, it wouldn't be caught dead even going near it. Every day, the Mousetrap would call out in a kind voice: "C'mere, mousey. Tonight's dinner is head of mackerel! I'll even keep the trap pulled back for you while you eat, okay? Come on, rest assured! You think I'll snap shut on you as soon as you step up, huh...? Well you know what? I'm fed up with the humans, too. Come on over here. Hey!"

He'd call on the mice like this, but they'd all reply with the likes of "Yeah, sounds *real* nice," or "Oh, oh. I understand completely; just let me ask my dad and I'll get right back to you," before slowly retreating away.

When night came along, a red-faced manservant came to check the mousetrap.

"Nothing, again; the mice must already know about it. They probably learn about it in their little mice schools... but oh well, let's give it one more day," he said, replacing the bait.

That night, the Mousetrap shouted, "Come on over! Come on over! It's pounded fish cake, tonight! I'll just give you the bait! It's safe! Come on over here!"

Just then, Xe came passing by.

"Hey, Mr. Mousetrap, you'll really just give me the bait?" he asked.

"Well now, you're a rare sort of mouse, aren't you? That's right! You can just take it; go on, eat up!"

Xe pounced right on into the trap, gobbled up the fish cake, and bounded on out of it again.

"That was great! Thanks!"

"Is that right? Well, I'm glad. Come back tomorrow night, you hear?"

The next morning, the manservant came by to check the mousetrap again.

"Huh? It took the dang bait and went along its merry way? Devious little mouse, this one! Still, it's great just to know that something went into the trap. Alright, today it's gonna be a sardine."

He attached half a sardine for bait and went along his way.

The Mousetrap, holding onto the sardine, sat tight, waiting for the coming of Xe the mouse.

When night fell, Xe quickly came along again. “Good evening! Here I am again, just like I promised,” he said as if he were truly doing the Mousetrap a favor.

The Mousetrap was a tad offended by this, but forced it not to show in his voice when he answered only “Well then, go ahead and eat.”

Xe pounced into the trap again, wolfed down the bait, and again sprang out.

“Well, I’ll be back again tomorrow to eat that bait for you, too,” he said with a great flourish.

“Meh, whatever,” grumbled the Mousetrap in reply.

The next morning, the manservant came to check again, now getting angrier and angrier.

“What? The conniving mouse again! But there’s no way it’d be able to pull off that kind of stunt *every* night. Seems like this Mousetrap has got to be taking bribes from the mice or something!”

“I’m not! I’m not! Don’t you go misjudging people!” yelled the Mousetrap, but, of course, its voice did not reach the manservant’s ears. He just baited the trap again with some spoiled fish cake and left.

The Mousetrap had been subject to a preposterous accusation, and so he fumed over it all day long until nightfall. Xe came along again, and as if it were a big ceremony, said, “Phew, it’s so far out of my way to come all the way over here every single day. Besides, it’s never anything better than a fish head. I’m starting to get a little sick of it.

But, oh well, I've come all the way over here, anyway, so I guess I might as well eat the bait for you. 'Evening, Mr. Mousetrap.'

The Mousetrap was shaking at the wires in his anger, so he said just one word in response: "Eat."

He dove on into the trap, but got into a big huff when he saw how the fish cake had spoiled.

"Mr. Mousetrap!" he shouted. "This is incredibly mean of you! This fish cake has gone bad! Tricking a poor, weak little creature like me! Terrible! You should be ashamed of yourself! How are you going to make up for this? You pay me back!"

Without a thought, the Mousetrap became so angry that his wires rattled noisily. It was a bad rattle.

"*Ching! Snap!*" the trigger attached to the bait suddenly released and the door to the trap slammed shut. It was already too late.

He seemed to go totally crazy.

"Mr. Mousetrap! You're so cruel! You're awful! Oh, it's horrible! Mousetrap, you're the absolute worst!" he shouted, biting at the wires of the trap, running around in circles, stamping at the ground, hollering at the top of his lungs. Still, he didn't have the energy enough to even shout his demands for compensation.

It wasn't easy for the mouse trap, either. All night long, he was achy and irritated; he rattled, shook, jangled and trembled, until morning came along.

The next morning, when the red-faced manservant came along, he did a dance for joy.

“It closed! It closed! It finally caught something! Ha, looks like a mean little bugger, doesn’t he? Well, come on out, you little...”

Akita Highroad

They're lonely houses where everybody exchanged fertilizer, coal, and firewood. They're small, black houses scattered here and there around the highroad. All of their doors are closed.

I look back sadly in the direction from which I came. The lights of Morioka were lined up, faintly wavering, flickering as if sleepy, leaving only the arc light of the park giving off transparent waves of liveliness. Anyhow, the reckless leaf beetles are now gathering together, stumbling about and bumping into each other. I suddenly stop and look up at a sky full of big, gray metal poles—decorations of the barber shop that look like buds of the onions originally brought here from Holland. These things too are completely unreliable.

The road gives way to a bridge. A firefly suddenly takes flight. Someone from behind raises their hands and lets out a big sigh. I don't know if that's right, either. Anyhow, the sky grew a little brighter. Daybreak was still ages away, and the clouds were definitely thinning out, allowing the moonlight to shine through more clearly.

In the distance ahead is Koiwai farm.

Everyone is pitter-pattering together up the mountain.

More than an illusion, the scent of the evening primrose floats over from that area with some cheerfulness. A match ignites into life—the pale smoke of tobacco rises up into the wind.

The mountains of Iwate shot jet black out of the ground. There seems to be a great many birds or something sleeping upon one of them.

The roadside trees all turn to pine and begin arguing about something. *If that's the case, you can go right ahead and get your head chopped off.* That's what somebody said. *Fine. That's just fine.* Someone answers lethargically.

The road is rough so we walk in the fields. We step countless times in a black puddle in the middle of the field. Before long, however, the moon appears overhead and the flowers of the evening primrose send distant dreams hovering into the air as an ivory-silver moon is reflected in the puddle amidst the humus soil. Somewhere, a leaf beetle flaps its wings.

Still, in the supreme moonlight, something standoffish begins to hang in the air. That cold force seems like none other than the white light of dawn.

It's become glaringly white in the east. The moon, somewhat losing interest, came down to rest high upon the green treetops of the pine trees.

We'd come upon the beginning of the sour dawn of Nanatsumori. The road suddenly turns, green and lush. As we walked the angle of the turn, I was again looking up at the long grains of grass floating in the air. Suddenly, a tanned soldier stoops down in a thicket that appears in the distance. Oh. That's where the well is.

It's a beautiful, chilly morning with the many drooping clouds shimmering in the sky. We've come upon the distant Shizukuishi Inn. A dog let loose a volley of barking. Despite it all, everyone seemed to be arguing amongst themselves.

We head for the bank of Kakkonda river. The dew upon the field horsetail all condenses together and glimmers beautifully—the field horsetail of this fresh morning.

At one point everyone was sleeping. Only Komoto is still awake. He's splashing about the cool water. Strangely, he's exercising, his naked form looking pale and hard.

He excitedly tossed big stones at everyone's bedside. *Vertically cooled Andesite!*⁴³
Horizontally cooled Andesite! We grunted hollowly, awakened by wave after wave of cool water. Surprised, we stagger about under the silver clouds. Then we get angry. Now we're laughing despite ourselves. Under the silver clouds.

On the way home, there was a day shower followed by a return of glittering sunshine. That shimmering field of clouds—

This is the day; let's fly up there and step foot upon those clouds.

Then I'm standing upon an abandoned cart left in the road, opening my umbrella.

A terrible shouting voice. The owner of the cart, no doubt. He comes running towards us, angrily. His cheeks look like black, rotten plums, and even now the holes seem to be growing. It's leprosy, without a doubt. It's terribly sad.

A rainbow has appeared. Even at the foot of the rainbow, the evening primrose is blossoming, just as it is at our own. One at the time, the accumulated puddles from the day shower are sparkling. It fell onto the crunchy, withered brown leaves of last year.

It became distinctly hotter as the sun fully came out. The stone wall of Shizukuishi River wavers in the steamy heat amidst the hardy grasses. That's where I doze off.

In the white clouds above a distant willow, a cuckoo sang out.

"That bird's been calling all night, huh?"

"Yeah, it has," somebody answers.

43 Igneous, volcanic rock. The name is a derivative of the Andes mountain range.

Ginkgo Nuts

The sky above was a chilly sheet of solid metal. Stars filled it entirely. Soon, though, a shaky, deep glow the color of a balloon flower began to stir in the east.

Below that dawning sky frost like diamond dust was swept up in the wind, higher than even the day birds dare to fly. It carried down towards the east with a rustling sound.

Truly, it's a dawn so serene that the faint sound of it is heard all the way to the ginkgo tree at the top of the hill.

The nuts hanging upon the ginkgo tree all awoke at once. They all nearly jumped out of their shells. Today was definitely the day to set off. Everyone had been thinking this since before. Plus, that's just what the two crows who visited last night had said.

"My eyes probably aren't going to be much good on the way down, huh?" said one Ginkgo nut.

"It's better to keep them closed," answered another one.

"Oh, that's right. I forgot. I was distracted, filling up my canteen."

"I, y'see, prepared some peppermint water, aside from the canteen. Want to try a bit? Mom always says it's good for the nerves if you have a little when you're ever feeling nervous before a big trip."

"I wonder why mom didn't pack me any, then..."

"Cause I'm here to give you some! Let's not speak poorly of mom."

That's right. This Ginkgo tree was that mom of theirs.

This year, she'd born a thousand gold-colored little children.

Today was the day they were all to set out on their journey together. Their mom was such a wreck over it. She'd been losing her gold, fan-shaped leaves, the last one having shed yesterday.

"Hmm, I wonder what sort of place I'll end up in," mumbled a little girl nut, looking up at the sky.

"I don't know—if you ask me, I don't want to go anywhere!" answered another.

"I don't care what we have to go through, I just want to be here where mom is."

"It can't be like that; the wind comes and tells us that every day."

"I don't like it..."

"So we're probably all going to part from one another, scattering all over the place..."

"That right. I'm... ready to go. I'll be okay."

"Me too. Sorry I've been so selfish up until now."

"Oh, me too. Same goes for me—please forgive me."

The petals of the balloon flowers in the eastern sky had been losing gusto as if deflating as the light of the morning sun started to show itself. One by one, the stars vanished into the sky.

At the tip-top of the ginkgo tree there were two little boy nuts.

"Sky's already brightened; that's good. I'm gonna become one of those stars up there for sure—a golden one."

"I'll be one too. Soon as we fall from here, the northern wind is sure to pick us up and carry us away, right?"

“I don’t think it’ll be the northern wind. The Northern Wind isn’t all that kind. I think it’ll be Mr. Crow that helps us out.”

“That’s right. It’ll definitely be Mr. Crow. Mr. Crow is really great. He’ll carry us from here to a place we can’t even see—all in a single breath. If we ask him to, I’d bet he’d carry even the both of us all the way up into the blue sky.”

“Let’s try asking him, then. I hope he gets here soon...”

Just below them, two more nuts were talking.

“First, I’m gonna visit the castle of the Apricot king. Then, after I nab the princess, I’ll go and slay the monster. There’s got to be a monster somewhere, right?”

“Yeah, probably, but isn’t that dangerous? Monsters are pretty big, you know. One of them could probably just blow us away with one puff from his nose.”

“I’ve got just what I need, so it’s okay. Say, you wanna see? Here, take a look.”

“This mesh isn’t made out of mom’s hair, is it?”

“You bet it is. Mom gave it to me. If ever I come across something really terrible, all I’ve got to do is hide in here. I’m gonna keep this net in my pocket and go right over to the monster. –Hello! Think you can eat me today? I don’t think so—something like that, I’ll say. He’ll get mad and gobble me up quick, probably. That’s when I’ll pull out this net from inside his stomach, see? I’ll cover myself with it completely. Then, I’ll make a terrible mess of his insides—I’ll really tear the place up. He’ll probably get typhoid and die. That’s when I’ll jump out, grab the Apricot Princess and bring her back to the castle. The king will give me his daughter for sure.”

“That’d be great, huh? Will it be okay if I come and stay as a guest at the castle?”

“Yeah, sure. I’ll split the kingdom in half with you. And we’ll send lots of sweets and stuff to mom every single day.”

The stars had totally vanished. It was as if the eastern sky was burning with a white flame. A hush suddenly fell over the tree. The moment of departure was imminent.

“Ugh, my shoes are too small. What a bother... I’ll just go barefoot.”

“Hey, if that’s the case, how about we switch? Mine are a little too big.”

“Great, let’s do it. Hey, they’re perfect! Thanks!”

“I’m in a tight spot... I can’t see the new overcoat that mom gave me anywhere!”

“Hurry and look for it! Which branch did you leave it on?”

“I forgot!”

“This is a tight spot. It’s going to get terribly cold from here on out. We simply have to find that overcoat.”

“Hey, look there! That’ll make some good bread... those Star Grapes are starting to show their faces a bit... hurry and stow some away in your bag for souvenirs. The sun is already coming out.”

“Thanks, I’ll get them. Thank you, let’s go together.”

“I’m really in trouble! I can’t find it anywhere! What am I gonna do?”

“Come with me; I’ll lend you my overcoat sometimes—if it freezes, we can die together.”

Burning white, the eastern sky began to sway ever so slowly. Like a dead tree, their mother was standing there stiff and rooted to the spot.

Suddenly, bundles of golden light came shooting at them all at once like so many arrows. The children sparkled to the brink of practically leaping off of their branches.

From the north, an invisible, icy wind blew in with a *whoosh*.

“Farewell, mom! Goodbye, mom!” The children all leaped as one from the branches like so much falling rain.

The northern wind laughed.

“With this year comes another start of farewells and goodbyes,” it said, flashing its cold, glass mantel across the sky before blowing off into the distance.

The sun sat in the eastern sky like a giant burning gem, beaming as much shining light as it could down upon the saddened mother and her wayward children.

Kenjū's Grove

Kenjū was always happily wandering about the fields and woodlands in his shabby clothes with a piece of rope tied around his waist instead of a belt.

Overjoyed to come across a pale grove in the midst of the rain or a falcon soaring off into the infinite reaches of the sky, Kenjū would clap his hands together and run off to tell everyone all about it.

The children, though, were not so kind to him. Thinking him a fool they'd laugh and make fun of him, and so Kenjū came to try and hide his laughter more and more with his discoveries.

He'd open his mouth wide and take big breaths to contain his boisterous happiness upon catching sight of the light shining through the leaves of the beech trees as they wavered about in the wind. Keeping it all inside as best as he could Kenjū would just stand there and gaze up in wonder.

Sometimes he'd have to pretend to be scratching his face in order to cover up the laughter that came spilling out against his best attempts.

This worked if watching him from afar, of course. From far away it might seem like he's scratching his face or yawning, but it was a different story up close. Up close it was obvious by the sound of his breath coming out in gasps of mirth and the twitching movement of his lips; Kenjū was laughing. Thus, when up close, the children took this as just another part of Kenjū's foolishness and made fun of him for it.

If his mom had told him that they needed five hundred buckets of water Kenjū would have gone and drawn every single one. He also would have weeded their entire

field if asked. Kenjū's parents, though, never asked these kinds of things of him.

You see, behind Kenjū's home was a great big grassy field about the size of a sporting field that hadn't yet been made into farmland.

One year, when the mountain was still whitewashed with snow and the field had yet to yield any new grass or flower spouts, Kenjū suddenly came running home to ask this of his family, all of whom were tilling the land at the time.

“Hey mom? Could you please buy me about seven hundred cedar seeds?”

Kenjū's mother stopped the movement of her metal hoe, sparkling in the sunlight, and stared intently upon her son.

“Seven hundred? And just where would you plant all of these cedars?”

“The field behind our house,” he said.

“Kenjū,” said his older brother, “That land back there isn't even any good for cedars. Anyway, it'd be a help if we could even get a little farmland out of it; we should try that instead.”

Put out, Kenjū's eyes drooped down to his feet as if he'd done something wrong.

“We'll buy them,” said Kenjū's father. “We'll buy them. Kenjū hasn't ever asked us for a single thing before. We'll get them for you.”

With this, Kenjū's mother looked quite relieved and smiled.

Beside himself with happiness, Kenjū immediately took off straight for the house.

After grabbing his hoe from the shed, he set off to begin vigorously digging out the holes for his cedar seeds right then and there.

“Kenjū,” his brother followed him out to the field. “That's not how you dig holes for planting cedar. Just wait until tomorrow; I'll get you your seeds, okay?”

Adopting the put-out look of someone who's done some wrong once again, Kenjū set down his hoe.

The next day the sky was so clear and bright that the snow on the mountains shimmered. The skylarks could be heard calling out overhead as they soared further and further into the sky. Kenjū couldn't keep from beaming as he started digging holes down from the northern boundary of the field just as his brother had taught him—evenly spaced and perfectly in line with one another. His brother followed, planting one seed into each hole.

To the north of the would-be cedar grove was a patch of farmland owned by a man named Heiji. He came along with pipe in mouth and shoulders hunched over as if it were cold outside. Heiji was more or less just a peasant like them, though he made it his business to be as much of a pain in the neck to others as he could.

“Oy! Hey Kenjū! You must really be dumb to try and start up a cedar grove right here! First off, yer gonna block off the sun to my field!”

Kenjū went completely red in the face. He looked as if he wanted to say something, though the words just refused to come out.

“Mornin’, Heiji,” greeted Kenjū’s big brother, rising up into Heiji’s line of sight. As soon as he did, the man slunk back away grumbling to himself all along.

Heiji certainly wasn't the only one who thought that trying to grow a Cedar Grove in that grass field was laughable. Cedar won't grow in a place like that! they said. The ground is far too rough for that, they said. An idiot is an idiot to the very end, they said.

It was exactly as they said. Within five years the little green sprouts were reaching up towards the sky, but it was extremely slow going after that. By the time seven, then

eight years went by the cedars were still just under a meter tall.

Kenjū was standing before the grove one morning when another farmer came along.

“Hey there Kenjū,” he quipped. “Aren’t you going to prune these things?”

“Prune them? What’s that mean?”

“Pruning is when you hack off the lower branches with an ax, you know?”

“Then I should be pruning them, huh? Alright.” Kenjū ran off and retrieved an ax.

So, one after another, Kenjū made his rounds of the Cedar Trees, brushing off the lower branches from each of them. They were all less than a meter tall, though; he had to stoop down pretty low under each tree in order to get at the lower branches.

By the time evening came along each tree only had three or four branches left; all the rest had been shorn off.

With all of the dark green branches covering the grass below from view, the little grove looked much brighter and emptier.

Kenjū’s heart ached from the very sight of it; something just wasn’t right with the grove looking so empty like that.

Just then Kenjū’s older brother came along on his way home from working in the fields. Without thinking, he burst out laughing at first sight of the reduced grove. He turned to his brother, who was standing there blank-faced.

“Hey, those branches will make for great firewood. And the grove looks really great now, doesn’t it?”

Kenjū felt like a great weight had been lifted from his chest. Together with his brother he went about ducking under the little trees and gathering the fallen branches.

The grass below was short and tidy; soon enough it looked like the kind of place you might find some old hermits playing *go*.

The next day, though, after he'd picked out the rotten soybeans from the shed, Kenjū heard some sort of loud commotion coming from the direction of the Cedar grove.

There was someone shouting out orders this way and that, then the sound of someone imitating a honking bugle. This was followed by a thunder of footsteps and a piercing peel of laughter that sent all of the birds in the area shooting up into the sky. Startled, Kenjū headed over to see what was going on.

Surprisingly enough, what he found were fifty children fresh out of school for the day all marching in cadence amidst the cedar trees.

Every single corridor between the trees was like a perfect tree-lined path. The perfectly spaced trees in their green uniforms, of course, also seemed to be marching as they went along, which amused the children to no end. Their laughter cut the air like the shrill cries of a shrike as they went along marching the paths between the trees.

Before they knew it, they weren't paths between lines of trees but streets like Tokyo Avenue, Russia Boulevard, and Western Drive.

Kenjū got a huge kick out of it, too. Hiding behind one of the outer trees he let his laughter out in great big woops.

From that point on this became a regular occurrence. The children came back to fill the busy streets after school every day.

The only time they didn't come was when it rained. That day Kenjū was out there in the grove all by himself. He got soaked to the bone under the pounding raindrops standing alone amidst the cedar trees.

“Mr. Kenjū? You’re watching over the grove even on a day like today?” laughed passersby in their big straw raincoats.

Coming off of the cedar branches were reddish-brown pine cones. At the branches fine green tips formed crystal-clear droplets of rainwater that would come splashing down once big enough. Kenjū could only stand mouth agape, laughing out loud in wonderment. Standing out there in the cold rain, he’d laugh until steam rose from his body. This was always just the way he was.

There came along, however, one misty morning when Kenjū came across Heiji once again, this time in the field where people came to gather rush for thatching.

After quickly taking a look around to make sure that there was no one that could overhear them, Heiji snarled at Kenjū like an angry wolf.

“You cut down those trees of yours, Kenjū!”

“Why?”

“They’re blockin’ the sun to my fields!”

Kenjū looked down at his feet without a word. Blocking the sun...? None of the cedar trees could have had a shadow longer than twenty centimeters at the most. And anyway—if anything—the cedars were protecting Heiji’s fields from the strong southern winds!

“Cut ‘em down, you hear? Cut them down!”

“No,” Kenjū raised his head a bit timidly. “No, I won’t,” he said, lips trembling as if he were ready to start crying at any moment. All told, this was the one time in Kenjū’s entire life that he would ever deny anyone anything.

Heiji, who hated to be denied by anybody—especially somebody as easygoing as

Kenjū—quickly grew very angry and, squaring his shoulders, punched him full on in the face. Relentlessly he kept the blows coming one after another, again and again.

Kenjū simply tried to cover up his face and took the hits, though before long everything around him started to fade away and he began to lose his footing. At this, even Heiji seemed a little put off and he stopped. Folding his arms, he sauntered quickly back off into the mist.

Kenjū died that following fall from typhoid fever. Heiji was already dead at the time, also having fallen to the same illness just ten days earlier.

That didn't matter one single bit to the children that continued gathering to play in Kenjū's Grove every day after school.

The story picks up quite rapidly from there.

The following year the railroad came along to the village; the station was built only about half a kilometer from Kenjū's house. Everywhere you looked there was a new construction site for a new earthenware or silk shop. In the blink of an eye the crop fields and rice paddies were crushed and flattened to make way for new houses. Before anybody knew it the village had become a full-blown city. Amidst it all, though, the one thing to somehow survive the entire process perfectly intact was Kenjū's Grove. By then all of the cedars were just over a whole three meters tall. Just as before the children of the city still gathered there after school to play amidst the rows of trees. Since the school had been built right nearby, Kenjū's Grove and the grassy lawn just to the south of it soon became part of their school playground.

By this point Kenjū's father was an entirely white-haired old man. Could it really have been almost twenty years already since Kenjū died?

One day, a learned young scholar that had once lived in the village but now taught at a university in America came back for the first time in fifteen years.

The fields...the woodlands... Where in the world could they have all gone? It wasn't anything like he remembered. Even the people were new, most having come from outside the area to live in the new city.

Even so, the scholar had been summoned to the auditorium of the local elementary school to give a talk about his experiences abroad.

After his lecture, he took a walk with principal and other school workers onto the children's playground and towards Kenjū's Grove.

The young scholar couldn't believe his eyes. Over and over again he checked his glasses, though there was no mistake about it.

"This place," he whispered half to himself. "This place is still just the same as ever. Everything, even the trees themselves—they're the exact same ones as before. They seem shorter than they did before, though. Oh—and they're all still playing in there. I almost feel like you'd still find my friends and I from back in the day in there."

As if just realizing something the young scholar let out a laugh and turned to the school principal.

"Is this part of the school playground?" he asked.

"No, actually," he replied. "It officially belongs to the people in that house right over there, though they don't have any problem at all with the children gathering there to play. It seems like it's an extension of the school grounds when you look at it, but really it's not."

"That's rather strange, isn't it? I wonder why..."

“They’ve been pressuring the old man in that house to sell the land ever since this place became such a city, but his answer is always the same. No matter what they do. It’s Kenjū’s, he says, and he can’t sell it. No matter what.”

“Oh, that’s right! Now I remember. Everyone always used to think that Kenjū wasn’t quite all there. He always had that breathy way of laughing, that one. He was out here watching us play every single day. They say he’s the one who planted every single one of these trees. Who’s a sage and who’s a fool...we really have no way of telling, do we? Say, why don’t we always keep this place beautiful and keep it as a park for the children? How about it? We can call it *Kenjū’s Grove* and make sure it always stays just the way that it is.”

“That’s a great idea. The kids are all sure to love it.”

It all happened just as the young scholar had suggested.

In the middle of the lawn, right in front of the children’s grove, they put down a light green peridotite⁴⁴ stone sign that read '*Kenjū’s Grove*.'

The school was able to gather all kinds of funds from upstanding lawyers, army officers, and small farm and landowners from far overseas—all of which had once been students at the school playing in Kenjū’s Grove.

Kenjū’s family was driven to tears of joy when they heard the news.

The dark wood and noble green of these cedar trees with their crisp scents and cool shadows in summer and the cool moonlight-colored grasses below—there was no telling to how many people’s lives they would bring true happiness in the years to come.

And so, whenever it rains, the crystal-clear raindrops still fall upon the branches of the cedar trees and fall upon the short grass below. In turn, with the shining light of the

44 A dense, coarse-grained igneous rock, consisting mostly of the minerals olivine and pyroxene.

sun, Kenjū's Grove gives us a fresh batch of crisp, clean air—just as it did in Kenjū's time.

Night of the Festival

It was the night of the Autumn festival of the Mountain God.

Tying off the *obi* of his new light blue kimono, with fifteen *sen* recently having found its way into his pocket, Ryōji headed out for the traveler's inn. The show called "The Air Monster" was positively thriving.

A man with long hair and baggy trousers was standing in front of the curtain of a small structure, shouting "Alright! Everybody, come on in, come on in!" with a swagger. When Ryōji unthinkingly drifted close to the attraction, the man suddenly hollered, "Hey, kiddo! Hurry up on in here! You pay on the way out!"

Without a thought, Ryōji flowed right in through the wooden entranceway. Inside, everyone was making strange and serious faces, looking upon the platform in the center of the room. It was because the Air Monster was there, stuck to the platform. A wide, flat, groggy mass, it was impossible to tell where its head or mouth was. When the speaker poked it with a big stick from the left, it would swell out to the right. When poked from the right, it would swell out to the left. When prodded right in the center, it would swell out in all directions at once. Ryōji, finding it all a bit ghastly, made to quickly beat his retreat out of the room when one of his clogs got stuck in a dip in the dirt floor. The one thing that stopped him from plummeting to the floor was whacking hard into the burly man next to him. Ryōji looked up at him in surprise. He was a boney, reddish man, wearing what looked strangely like a straw raincoat over an unlined kimono with white stripes. He looked down at Ryōji. His eyes were perfectly round and the color of sooty gold. After staring down wonderingly at Ryōji for a moment, the man's eyes suddenly flared up and he dashed off towards the wooded entranceway. Ryōji followed after him.

Opening his huge, tightly clenched right hand, the man handed over ten *sen* in silver coins to the attendant at the entranceway. Ryōji did the same, handing over his fee, and exited to be met by his cousin Tatsuji, outside. The wide shoulders of the man from before vanished into the crowd.

“You went in to see this show there? Listen, they’re calling this load ‘the air monster,’ right? Really, man, I hear it’s nothing but a big cow’s stomach filled with air. You’d have to be pretty dense to go in for a scam like this,” said Tatsuji secretively, pointing at the sign.

While Ryōji was vaguely looking at the oddly shaped sign for the Air Monster, Tatsuji spoke once more.

“We still haven’t prayed at the traveling shrine, so I’ll see you tomorrow,” he said, then went bouncing off on one leg into the thrumming crowd.

Ryōji hurried away from there. That area was full of food carts lined with green apples and grapes, sparkling in the light of burning *acetylene*.⁴⁵

Ryōji passed through, thinking of how the acetylene flames were beautiful, but gave off such a horrible smell, like how a giant serpent might smell.

At the *kagura* hall that Ryōji happened upon, five paper lanterns were lazily hanging, and it seemed as if the performance were just about to start, as the only sound around was the quiet ringing of finger-cymbals. “Shōichi was going to be in this one,” thought Ryōji, standing there blankly for a little while.

Just then, in the direction of a teahouse in the shadow of a cypress tree, a loud din of voices sounded, sending everyone running over that way. Ryōji too fell in step with

45 A gas created by the reaction of calcium carbide with water. The hottest burning common fuel gas. Towns came to use acetylene lamps for lighting in the late 1890s for outdoor lighting. They are now more commonly known as carbide lamps. They burn extraordinarily bright.

them, getting a peek at the scene through the sea of people. It was the large man from earlier, his hair all tussled and messy, being ruthlessly harassed by some young people of the village. Sweat ran down his brow, and he repeatedly lowered his head.

It looked as if he were struggling to say something, but somehow the words just refused to come out.

The youths, with their hair so neatly parted down the middle, grew even more severe in their antagonizing when they realized that everyone was watching.

“Look at this guy, here! Not from around these parts, are you, pal? Hurry and pay up! Cash! What? Oh, you don’t got none? Check this guy out! If you ain’t got the cash, how do you eat? Huh?”

Finally, in a panic, the man spoke up, stuttering.

“I’ll b-b-b-bring firewood wit’ me... a hund’red pieces.”

The owner of the tea shop was a little man hard of hearing, but despite this, he seemed to fully hear every single word and, unable to contain himself, shouted out.

“What this? Well, it was just two sticks of *dango*; it was no big deal to give them out to him, but I can’t stomach the things coming out of this guy! Pheh! What a bum! Isn’t that right, ya’ lazy lout!”

The man, wiping away his sweat, spoke again.

“I’ll bring the hund’red pieces by later, so leave me be!”

This angered the youths.

“This guy is a *liar*! Who in the world would pay for two little sticks of *dango* with a hundred pieces of firewood? Just who does this guy think he is?”

“D-d-d-d-don’t say that; come on, give me a break!” he repeatedly wiped away

the sweat pouring off of him, his eyes blinking incessantly. It seemed like he was wiping away his tears, as well.

“Slug him! Slug him!” someone hollered.

Ryōji understood completely.

(Aah, he was really hungry, but he forgot he was broke after the ten sen that he'd paid to see the air monster and didn't remember until after he'd already gone and eaten the dango. He's crying... he's not a bad guy. In fact, he's pretty honest. Alright, I'm gonna help him out...)

Ryōji secretly withdrew the single remaining copper piece from his change purse and, grasping it firmly in his fingers, made his way through the crowd towards the man, feigning casual indifference. Head drooping, hands lowered neatly to his knees, the man was muttering something under his breath, over and over.

Ryōji crouched down and silently placed the coin onto one of the man's huge, flat straw sandaled feet. The man looked surprised at this and stared down into Ryōji's face, but no sooner than he had stooped and picked up the money, he clanked it down in front of the shopkeeper and shouted in his booming voice.

“Look! 'Ere's your money! Now will you please forgive me? I'll bring you the hundred pieces of firewood! I'll bring you 38 gallons of chestnuts!”

Perhaps it was something in what he'd said, as suddenly the young ones thrust those in the crowd aside and fled like the wind.

“It's a mountain-man! It's a mountain-man!” everyone screamed, making a great ruckus as they scrambled to follow after them, but they were already gone without leaving behind a trace.

A rumbling wind blew through, shaking the pure black cypress. The bamboo shade of the teashop flew closed, and the light from within vanished.

That was when the whistle from the *kagura* began. Ryōji, however, did not head that way, and instead hurried his way down a solitary, dimly white path cutting through a rice paddy, heading home. He wanted to tell his grandfather all about what had happened with the mountain man. The stars of Pleiades⁴⁶ had already lazily risen high into the night sky.

When Ryōji passed by the stables and entered his house, his grandfather was there alone, stoking a fire in the hearth, boiling some green soybeans. Ryōji hurried to sit across from it and let loose to his grandpa everything that had happened. At the beginning, his grandfather was silent, looking intently upon Ryōji's face and listening, but towards the end he let out a laugh.

“Ha hah, he was a mountain man. Very honest folk, those mountain men. I've also met one once or twice, up in the mountains when there's a deep fog. This is the first one's ever come down to see the festival, though. Ha hah. Naw, maybe it's just 'cause one's never been caught until now,” he said.

“Grandpa, what do they do, up there in the mountains?”

“They say that they make fox-traps up in the tree limbs, things like that. They'll hang the bait, like a fish, at the end of one limb of the tree and let it dangle while they wait on another big branch, keeping it pulled back tight. Then when a bear or a fox comes along, thinking of taking it, they let go, letting the branch snap down and kill it.”

At that time, there was a thud and a loud clattering from outside, as if the house were in the middle of an earthquake. Without thinking, Ryōji latched onto his

⁴⁶ Star cluster in the Taurus constellation.

grandfather. His grandfather too went a little pale and hurried outside with a lamp.

Ryōji followed him out. The lamp was soon extinguished in the wind.

Instead, there was the light of the great big full moon that had climbed up silently from behind the black, eastern mountains.

When they looked there in front of the house, a pile of thick pieces of firewood had been thrown there, piled up like a mountain. The pieces were from branches and roots alike, all thick and ripped apart from one another. For a while Ryōji's grandfather just stared at the pile as if in shock, but all of a sudden clapped his hands together.

“Ha ha ha, the mountain-man brought you some firewood. He was thinking he'd probably already paid the shopkeeper. Those men of the hills are clever, aren't they?”

Ryōji took a step forward to get a better look at the firewood, but slipped on something right away and tumbled to the ground. He looked to discover the entire ground was covered with shining, sparkling chestnuts. Ryōji got to his feet.

“Grandpa! He brought us chestnuts, too!” he hollered.

“He even brought us chestnuts? That's just too much. We've got to return the favor by bringing him something, now. How about a nice kimono? That'd be good,” he said, also surprised.

For some reason, Ryōji wanted to weep, he started to feel so sorry for the mountain man.

“Grandpa, the mountain men have it so rough because they're so honest. I want to give him something really good.”

“Yeah, let's bring him some bedding next time. He might wear it instead of putting padding in there, though. Let's bring him some *dango*, too.”

“Just stuff like *dango* and clothes isn’t good enough!” Ryōji hollered. “I want to bring him something even better. I want to give him something that’ll make him so happy he’ll spin and jump around so much he just takes right off for the stars.”

His grandfather picked up the extinguished lamp.

“Yeah, it’d be nice if there were such things. Well, let’s head in and eat those beans. You’re dad’s going to be home soon, too...” he said, disappearing into the house.

Ryōji silently gazed up at the moon.

The wind sounded with a whoosh from the direction of the mountains.

Official Government Business

Kazeo Field was really spectacular in those days.⁴⁷

It was full of tall, pale grasses and shining thorns with smoky ears. Here and there were little groves of chestnut trees and alder.

Now, the parts of the field have become a military parade ground, a millet field, and a seedling garden, and it's really all rather beautiful with its shining cavalry horses, white-shirted workers, and passing trains. Still, it was truly spectacular back then.

When September came along we were all out in the field every day. I usually went off with Fujihara Keijirō. Since the kids from town only come down to the field on Sundays, we were free to go any day we liked and collected whole bunches of chestnuts and the *hatsutake* mushrooms. We usually headed out pretty far, but especially so on Sundays.

It was one Sunday towards the end of September, though, that I invited Keijirō out to the field like always that we came across a bulletin posted up in front of a chestnut tree. As we were already in fifth grade at the time we were able to read it without a problem:

Today the Director General of the Tohoku Region and his party will be using this area for an outing. Do not enter beyond this point.

–Tohoku Prefectural Government

I was terribly disappointed. Keijirō was too; his face flushed as he read the

⁴⁷ Official Government Business is the name that I have given this account, though the original translates literally as 'The Two Government Officials.' I felt that the silly, ironic tone of the new title brought out the original intention of the author and pointed a finger at the haughty nature of much of serious, adult life.

message over and over again.

“Shucks... Somebody important is coming; we can't get in trouble with them. Let's get out of here, huh?” I said.

“Like we care?” Keijirō answered, a little angry. “Let's go. This is the emperor's land, and it's got nothing to do with any police inspector or anybody else. Come on, let's head all the way in there.”

I was all of a sudden quite interested.

“I do kind of want to get a gander at the ‘Director General of the Tohoku Region.’ What do you think he looks like?”

“He's got glasses and a beard. That's what they say the Cabinet Minister that came around here before looked like.”

“Want to try and hide someplace?”

“Let's do it. How about Temple Grove?”

Nowadays, the place we used to call Temple Grove is towards the north of the parade grounds, but back then it was the prettiest place in the whole field.

The alder all grew intertwined with one another and formed a big circle around the level bed of soft grass in the middle. It was just like some place you might find in a city park.

We thought that we'd try hiding amidst all the alder.

“Let's do it. We've got to hurry or they'll see us.”

“Let's run!”

We ran as fast as we could along the field single narrow path. We ran ourselves right out of breath and stopped to rest a bit, then went on walking with our eyes on the

sky. Then, when we would look back, we'd end up sprinting off again. Running and running, we reached Temple Grove. There, far from the path, we were shrouded from sight amidst the alder. The bugs were buzzing all over us, though, and every now and then a huge flock of birds would soar by—clumped together as one. It didn't seem like anybody at all was going to come along. Our fear quickly faded away and we started rustling through the tall grass, looking for mushrooms. Like always we found tons of them, so it wasn't before long that I'd forgotten all about the Director General.

Just then Keijirō came barreling along and grabbed a hold of me. He got right in my ear and whispered.

“They're here, they're here! They finally came—see?”

Peering out from within the tall grass, we looked back towards the way we'd come. Two Government Officials were coming down the path in a huge hurry. On top of that, they for some reason parted from the path and seemed to be heading right for our hiding spot.

We didn't dare let out a breath. They were getting closer and closer!

“Probably this grove here. This is definitely the one,” said the first of the two, a red faced man in good physical condition wearing navy blue.

“Yeah, you're right. No doubt about it,” answered the other, this one in black. Well, we're totally dead, I thought. We'd thought that they'd just walk right on by a grove like this one? And all the while they were keeping careful watch over the area. Even if by some chance they didn't do us in, we were absolutely resigned to the fact that they'd tie us up at the very least. Looking over at Keijirō, he was as pale as a ghost; even his lips had dried up and gone white. I didn't want to be forced to carry the mushrooms we'd

taken all over the city when they tied us up...

“They’re gonna tie us up. They’re definitely gonna tie us up! The mushrooms—
dump the mushrooms,” I said quietly.

Keijirō didn’t say a word, but just relinquished his basket of mushrooms. Just the
same, I let go of the strap of my own mushroom basket and let it fall to the ground.

However, it didn’t seem like the two Government Officials had come to nab us
after all.

Their eyes were here and there around the tops of the trees, first off. Plus, it
seemed like they’d come to a sudden dead stop right in front of the grove. They seemed
to be occupied with something there. Straining to catch a glimpse from my spot among
the ears of grass, I saw that the two of them untying the string around what seemed to be
a flour bag.

“This is a great spot,” said the first.

“Yeah, it’s good,” said the second. Just then there was a sound of something or
other pelting down. They’d definitely poured something out. I wanted to know what
they’d poured out more than life itself. But scary stuff is scary stuff, after all.

The two of them steadily walked away along the alder trees, all the while
sprinkling whatever it was they were sprinkling until one of them spoke up.

“Hey, it’s no good. We really messed up. Are there still a lot left in your bag?”

“Why? Was this the wrong kind of grove?” asked the other, seemingly surprised.

“I dunno what this kind of tree is called but it’s not chestnut; I can tell you that.
Chestnut trees will have the nuts scattered all along the ground—it’s the tell-tale sign.”

The other answered calmly.

“Meh, don’t worry about that. I’ve noticed that since the very start. If it comes to him asking how they all got here we’ll just say that the wind blew them here.”

“What? We can’t do that. They’ve got to be under a real chestnut tree. Aha! See, here’s a good one. This here is a chestnut tree. We’ll say that they all fell from this one. Phew, we’re saved. Sprinkle a whole bunch here.”

“Sounds good to me.”

For a while there was the racket of chestnuts pouring down and bouncing off of the trunk of the tree. Without thinking, Keijirō and I looked at one another. It’s alright! The government officials aren’t here to kill us. They don’t even know that we’re here! The world suddenly seemed so much brighter to the two of us.

If we’re going to make a break for it now is the time, we both thought as one. As proof of our mind-meld, we were both on our feet as soon as our eyes had met for just a moment. We slowly began to creep towards the rear of the grove to make our escape. Just then came a shouting voice from one of the Government Officials.

“There’s somebody over there! Even though we said do not enter!”

“Who is it?” called the other. We’d made a total blunder of it. Now we’ve really gone and done something stupid, I thought.

The two Officials had already come hurrying up from the tall grass a way off. Just then golden points of sunlight came flecking into the grove through the trees.

“Hey, who is that? How did the two of you get in here?” the one in the blue asked us.

We were like the walking dead from the very start, but as they grew closer and we got a better look at the officials with their red faces all covered in sweat—especially

around the nose—they somehow seemed even more terrifying than before.

“From that way,” I said, pointing towards the path. The Official answered back in a serious tone.

“Huh? There’s a path over that way? We should have put up a sign over by that way too, then. Right?” the Official said to his black-clad counterpart clutching the withered flour bag.

“Yeah, some kids got in here, huh? I don’t really mind, though. Hey, you kids. There’s a really super-special person coming through here today, so you’ve got to stay away from this area for a while. It’s fine if you want to be out here in the field, but just make sure you’re far enough out that you can’t be seen from here, okay? And don’t make too much noise either.”

Keijirō and I exchanged glances. Then, grabbing hold of our baskets again, we made to beat our retreat.

Keijirō gave a quick bow, so I followed suit. The navy-blue Official rolled the flour bag up to about the side of a dumpling and stooped down.

We made to leave, but the black Official called out from behind us.

“Hey! Did you two take those mushrooms from in here?”

Oh no. Not again. We were frozen in our tracks.

I couldn’t tell him no, no matter how much I wanted to.

“Yes,” Keijirō answered hoarsely. With this the two Officials came up to us and glanced into our mushroom baskets.

“I wonder if there are any left. Can you help us find a place around here that has a lot of them? We’ll give you a reward if you do.”

We were absolutely enthralled.

“There’s plenty left! We’ll go get some for you,” I said, but the navy blue official stopped me with a wave of his hand and a shout.

“No no, you mustn’t pick them. It’s fine if you just show us where we could find a good bunch of them. Go ahead and look.”

As if electrically powered, Keijirō and I cut right through the tall grass as we walked across the field. Soon, I came across a spot with three Hatsutake mushrooms lined up in a row.

“Here they are!” I called.

“Oh yeah?” The Officials came and had a look.

“What? Just three? The Director General is bringing his family of six with him. Three just isn’t going to cut it. Even if each person only had ten, we’d still need at least sixty of them.”

“Sixty? That’s just fine. We can get sixty,” said Keijirō from a ways off, wiping away some sweat on his sleeve.

“No, we can’t go off looking in every which direction, you see. They’ve got to be all grouped together in maybe one or two places.”

“Hatsutake mushrooms don’t grow like that, though,” I said emphatically.

“Sheesh...in that case how about we try and stand up all of the mushrooms that the two of you picked over there?”

“That’d work,” said the black-clad official, rubbing his thin beard thoughtfully.

“Hey, bring together all of those mushrooms from your baskets. I’ll give you your reward afterwards, alright?” The official in the navy blue smiled as we pulled out our

baskets. The two of them squatted down and flipped all of the mushrooms upside down, counting them as they went along. The smaller ones were returned to the baskets.

“Perfect, we’ve got seventy here. Let’s stand them up here.”

The navy blue official tried to stand a mushroom amidst the grass but it quickly toppled over.

“Ah, I bet it’ll work if we skewer them on the grass stalks. Here, like this,” said the one in the black, taking a short ear of grass and sticking it into the earth. When he skewered it on the grass, the stem of the mushroom stood straight up.

“Great, great! Perfect. Hey, you two, grab me a bunch of grass stalks about this long, will you?”

We couldn’t help but laugh. The officials laughed too. Before we knew it, they’d stuck a mushroom on every single little stalk of grass that they’d planted into the ground. It really was quite an amazing, if ultimately odd sight. First of all, the grass stalks were falling over. Plus, you could see the torn parts of the mushroom stems. As we laughingly looked them over, the black-clad official made a slightly troubled face.

“Well then, you two go ahead and run on out of here. Here, take this bag.”

“Yeah, that’s right. That’s your reward there.” They handed off the flour bag to us.

I was going to refuse out of politeness at first, but the two officials looked so serious and scary again that I just kept quiet and took the bag.

And so Keijirō and I left the grove. Casting a look back, we saw the two of them standing there overlooking their little man-made park of rigid mushrooms. Suddenly one of them spoke up.

“It’s no good. These mushrooms—it’s just not going to work. If he figures it out

we're in big trouble.”

“Yeah, I agree; it's just way too risky. Let's give up on this and pick them again. We'll hide them over there and then later on we'll say that we picked them and give 'em to the Director General. How about that? It's much safer that way.” This much we heard loud and clear. Keijirō and I looked at each other once again.

The two of us burst out into raucous laughter.

And so we ran off as fast as we could.

Despite that, though, the two officials didn't chase after us. It wasn't until late that night that the two of us returned home, having taken a roundabout way to stay out of the restricted area. As we heard, though, the Director General came sometime in the afternoon with his family; they had a great time in the field, and then returned home some time that evening.

The next year we entered into the city junior high school, but we still ran into the two Government Officials now and then. The two of them would be carrying or waving their walking sticks, red-faced and shouting after getting drunk at the horse races. We remembered everything about them. Still, even though they definitely knew who we were too, they always carried on as if they did not know who we were in the very slightest.

Shellfire

All of the rabbits were already wearing their short, brown kimono.

The grassy fields were sparkling, and the birch trees here and there were adorned with white flowers. The field was truly full to the brim with good smells.

“Phew, smells great, eh! Fantastic, fantastic! These lily of the valley are top rate!” said Homoi the bunny while dancing about the field, overjoyed.

The wind had come along, causing the flowers of the lily of the valley to rustle against one another.

Homoi, already in high spirits, held his breath as he hopped around the grass.

Then, pausing for a moment, he brought his arms together and chuckled to himself.

“It’s totally just like I’m doing tricks atop the waves of the river!” he said.

In actuality, Homoi did indeed come across the bank of a small river.

The cool water there thrummed along and the sand at the bottom glittered.

Homoi turned his head a bit.

“How ‘bout if I jump all the way to the other side of that river! Well, there’s really no reason to... since there’s just something lousy about the grass on the other side,” he said to himself.

Just then, a shrill voice unexpectedly rose from the surface of the brook.

“Burururu- pii- pii- pii- pii- burururu- pii- pii- pii- pii,” something that looked somewhat like a scruffy, shadowy bird was writhing about noisily as it moved along with the flow of the water. Homoi hurried to the bank on the river and waited at the ready.

The creature being carried along with the flow was definitely a thin skylark youngling. Without a moment of hesitation, Homoi leaped out in the middle of the river and grabbed onto him tightly with his front legs.

As he did so, the young lark finally opened his yellow bill wide, and in surprise let out a squawk so loud that it fell deafeningly on Homoi's ears.

In a flurry, Homoi kicked at the water with his hind legs with everything he had.

"It's alright! It's alright!" Even as he spoke, when he looked upon the bird's face, Homoi was so startled that he nearly let go of the young skylark. It was because his entire face was covered in wrinkles, his beak was enormous, and to make matters worse he somehow looked like a lizard.

Still, that strong little bunny didn't let go of that hand for anything in the world. Even as he swallowed down his fear with a grimace, they reached the surface of the high water.

And so the two of them were carried off by the flow. Homoi was overtaken by waves not once but twice, and so took in great deal of water. Still, he did not let go of that young bird.

Then, right at the corner of the bend of the river, a single branch from a small willow tree appeared, splashing about in the water.

Homoi quickly bit so deeply into the branch that the green bark underneath could be seen. Then, full of strength, he hurled the lark child upon the soft grass of the riverbank, and then leaped over in a single bound.

The lark child's eyes were white and rattled about as he lay fallen upon the grass.

Homoi too was exhausted and staggered in his fatigue, but he forced himself to

endure, plucked a white flower from the willow, and used it to cover the young lark. As if saying thank you, the young lark raised his dark gray head.

At what he saw, Homoi shuddered and suddenly jumped back. With a yelp, he began to run away.

At that time, with a whoosh, something came shooting down from the sky like an arrow. Homoi paused, looked back, and found that it had been the mother skylark. Without saying a thing, she was hugging her child as tight as could be, trembling.

Thinking everything was alright, Homoi ran as fast as he could back to his father's house.

When he returned home, his mother was neatly arranging bundles of white grass. When she took a look at Homoi, she seemed surprised.

“Goodness! Whatever is the matter? You look pale as a ghost!” she said, reaching to pull down the medicine box from the shelf.

“Well ma, ya see, I saved this shaggy bird kid from drowning,” Homoi said. Mother Rabbit drew one dose of all-purpose medicine and handed it to Homoi.

“A shaggy bird youngling, you say... was it a skylark?”

Homoi took his medicine and said “Probably was. Oooh, my head is spinning. Mom, it's like the whole world is going in circles...” As he spoke, he abruptly collapsed. He had come down with a terrible fever.

* * *

The lily of the valley all had green berries on them by the time Homoi recovered, thanks to the care of his father, mother, and the doctor rabbit.

One quiet, cloudless evening, Homoi tried leaving home again for the first time.

In the southern sky, a red star came racing across towards the horizon. Homoi was fascinated by it, staring enchanted. Then, out of the blue, the flutter of wings could be heard from the sky, and two little birds came down to the earth.

The bigger one carefully placed a round, shining red object onto the grass and respectfully joined his hands together.

“Most honored Homoi, we are the parent and child that have benefited from your gracious help.”

By the light of the glowing red object, Homoi looked upon the face of the bird and spoke.

“Might you be the Skylark from before?”

“Indeed. We sincerely thank you for what you did that day. We are indebted to you so much for saving my son’s life. You even became ill from the ordeal, but are you feeling any better?”

The mother and child larks bowed many times as she went on.

“We’ve been flying over these parts every day in wait for the time when you could come outside. This is a gift from our king.” As she spoke, she placed the red, glowing gift in front of Homoi and undid the thin, smoke-like fabric. Underneath was a perfectly round sphere about the size of a local berry. Inside, a flickering red fire was burning.

“This is the jewel called ‘Shellfire’. By declaration of our king, it is to become yours to do with it whatever you would like. Please have it.”

Laughing, Homoi replied.

“Mrs. Lark, I don’t need anything like this. Please take it back with you. It’s so pretty, it’s really plenty reward to just be able to see it. Whenever I want to take another

look, I'll come right on over to visit.”

“I'm afraid not. We wish you to have it, as it is a gift from our king. If you do not accept it, my son and I will have no other choice but to do away with ourselves. Now then, my son, we take our leave. Right then. Bow. Thank you again.”

The two larks bowed twice, three times, and hastily disappeared off into the sky.

Homoi held up the sphere and had a look at it. Though it seemed to burn restlessly with a red and yellow flame, it was actually quite cool and beautiful to behold. When he put it up to his eye and looked through it at the heavens, there was no longer any flame, and instead the beautifully clear river of heaven could be seen. When he pulled it away from his eye, the beautiful flames would once again flicker up into life.

With a lift of the sphere in quiet thanks, Homoi went back home. He showed the sphere to his father. When he did so, Father Rabbit took it in hand, took off his glasses, and examined it closely.

“This is the famous treasure, Shellfire. This is a real handful of a sphere; they say that as of now, out of all of those who have beheld it, only two from the larks and one from the fishes have been able to be satisfied with just having it like this. You make sure to be careful not to lose its light, you hear?” he said.

“It'll be alright. There's no way I'm going to lose it! The Skylarks said something like that, too. I'll make sure to polish it with a sparrow feather a hundred times a day,” said Homoi.

Mother Rabbit also took the sphere in hand and gazed upon it concernedly.

“They say that this sphere is very delicate. However, in the days when the late Chancellor Eagle held it, there was a great eruption, and while he was walking about here

and there giving out directions for how to get the birds to shelter, though this sphere was hit by rocks the size of mountains and covered in red-hot lava, it wasn't hurt or smudged one little bit. Instead, they say it had become even more beautiful than before!"

"That's right. It's a well-known tale. You'll probably become a well-known person, too, just like Chancellor Eagle was. You've got to make sure you don't go bullying others or anything like that!" Father Rabbit said.

It'd been a long day and Homoi had become sleepy. As he lazed upon his own bed, he said "It's gonna be alright! I'm going to do just fine; it's a sure thing, 'cause I'll be holding on to this sphere even while I'm asleep. Can I, please?"

Mother Rabbit handed him the sphere. Homoi was soon fast asleep, clutching it close to his chest.

That night, Homoi had a wonderful dream. The sky was ablaze with fires yellow and green, the whole field had changed golden-yellow, countless little pinwheels were fluttering faintly about the sky like so many bees, and Chancellor Eagle, gifted with the spirit of justice and duty, was watching over the field, wearing a glittering, golden cape. Over and over again, Homoi wanted to shout out "Oh! I'll do it! I'll do it!"

* * *

The next morning, Homoi woke up around seven o'clock and looked first and foremost to the sphere. It was even more beautiful than it had been the previous night. He spoke to himself, gazing upon the sphere.

"I can see it, I can see it. That's the crater, over there. Fire shot out of there... it shot out! That's neat, huh? Just like fireworks. Oh, oh, oh! Flames are starting to gush out of there. It split in two. That's pretty, huh? Fireworks. Fireworks! It's just like lightening.

It all flowed out of there. It turned completely golden-yellow. Awesome, awesome! It spit fire again!”

Father Rabbit had already left home for the day, and Mother Rabbit came along, smiling with delicious white grass roots and green rose-berries.

“Now, you hurry on and wash your face, we’re going to be getting a bit of fresh air, today. Now hold on, look up here and show me? Oh, so handsome. Do you mind if I watch while you wash your face?” she said.

“Yeah, that’s alright. This is a treasure of the household, so it belongs to you too, mom,” said Homoi. And so, standing and bounding out of the house, he washed his face completely with a big drop of dew that was waiting on a lily of the valley flower outside their home.

Once he had finished breakfast, Homoi polished the sphere with a fine red sparrow feather one hundred times. Then, he carefully wrapped it up red sparrow breast-down and closed it tight in a rabbit seeing-glasses agate box and gave it to his mother. Then, he headed outside.

The wind was blowing and sending bits of dew scattering about. The temple bell rang out with its morning address.

“Ding, Ding, Ding Dong, Ding Dong,” it sang.

Homoi went hopping along the tops of the birch trees.

In the midst of his hopping, an old wild horse came meandering along from afar. Homoi, a tad bit frightened, made to return home when the horse bowed politely and spoke.

“Might you be the illustrious Homoi, sir? I understand that the Shellfire recently

came into your possession. It's already been one thousand, two hundred years since that sphere came to me. Alas, it is the truth that when this morning I heard of how it had come to you, tears flowed from these old eyes." The old horse broke down into tears once more.

Homoi was shocked, but since horses were hardly the cry babies of the animal kingdom, he was unexpectedly drawn in and couldn't help but poke his nose a bit further into the matter. The horse pulled out a light yellow cloth.

"To you, good sir, I owe everything. Please be sure to take good care of yourself," he said, wiping away his tears. With this, he politely bowed once more and walked off into the distance.

While somehow feeling simultaneously happy and strange, aloof in his thoughts, Homoi wandered into the shadow of a red-berried elder tree. In the tree were two young squirrels, who like good friends were sharing some sweet rice paste. When they saw that Homoi had wandered under them, however, they hurriedly stood up, fixed the collars of their kimono, and took to the serious business of trying to gulp down the snack as quick as possible.

"Good morning, Mr. Squirrel, Mr. Squirrel!" Homoi greeted them like always, but the two squirrels just stiffened and didn't say a word.

"Mr. Squirrel? Why don't we go off somewhere and play together?" Homoi asked, confused. The squirrels, however, only looked round-eyed and aghast at one another as if in some silent communication, and then suddenly fled as quickly as they could off into the distance.

Homoi was totally flabbergasted. Flush-faced, he returned home.

“Mom, everybody is acting so weird today, for some reason! The squirrels don’t want to be my friends anymore.”

Mother Rabbit smiled.

“That’s right. You see, you’ve already become such an upstanding rabbit. Creatures like squirrels are embarrassed to be around you. So you be careful to make sure that nobody, but nobody, laughs at you from here on out,” she said.

“Oh, then, that’s fine, mom. Does that mean that I’ve already become the boss?”

“Hmm, well I suppose it does,” said Mother Rabbit happily.

Homoi jumped up and danced gleefully.

“Awesome, awesome! Everybody’s become my underlings, now. I’m not afraid of foxes or anybody! Mom, I’m gonna make the squirrels my generals. And the horses... I think I’ll make the horses captains, yeah?”

“Alright then, but don’t you go swaggering about all proud, okay?” she said, laughing.

“Okay. Mom, I’m gonna go out for a little bit. Be back soon!” Homoi said, flying off towards the fields with a leap. As soon as he was out there, a bullying fox appeared before his eyes, flying in like the wind.

Quivering in fear, Homoi mustered up his courage and yelled up at the fox.

“Hold on there, fox! I’m the boss around here now!”

The fox, caught off guard, did a double-take. He went a little pale.

“So I’ve heard. What, would you have me for something, sir?”

Homoi spoke as dashing as he could.

“You always bullied me around, huh? Well from now on you’re gonna be my

bodyguard, you hear?”

The fox seemed like he would faint and raised his hand to his head as he answered.

“Oh, I’m so very sorry. Can you somehow find it in your heart to forgive me?”

Homoi was exhilarated.

“I’ll give you a break this time. I’m making you my ensign. Don’t let me catch you slacking!”

The fox spun around four times, happily.

“Oh, thank you so much! I’ll do anything you ask! Shall we go off and pilfer a bit of corn?”

“No, that’s wrong. You can’t go around doing that kind of stuff.” Homoi said.

“Okay, okay—I definitely won’t do that kind of thing from now on. I shall await your orders!” said the fox, scratching his head.

“Exactly. Now, I’ll call for you if I need you for anything, so you just get on out of here,” said Homoi. The fox spun round and round, bowed, and ran off.

Homoi was too happy for words. He spent so much time wandering the fields, talking and laughing to himself, thinking of all sorts of fun things to do, the sun soon took shape of a great cracked mirror as it sank behind the birch trees. Homoi hurried home.

Father Rabbit had already returned home, and that night they had all sorts of delicacies at dinner. That night, too, Homoi’s head was full of wonderful dreams.

* * *

The next day, Mother Rabbit sent Homoi out in the field with a bamboo colander to gather berries from the lily of the valley.

“Harrumph, it’s not right for the boss to be out here picking berries,” he said to himself. If somebody were to see me, I’d be the laughing stock of the valley. I hope ensign fox comes along...”

Just then, something wiggled under Homoi’s feet. He looked to find a mole passing gradually through the earth, just trying to make his way along.

“Mole! Mole! Little Mole, are you aware of my rise to greatness?”

“Is that Mr. Homoi up there?” asked the mole from under the ground. “Oh, I know of it very well.”

“Is that right? Well good. I’m making you my sergeant, so will you do me a little favor?” Homoi said, inflated.

Jittery, the mole asked “What might you have in mind?”

“Gather these lily of the valley berries!” Homoi suddenly spat.

Below the ground, the mole broke out into a cold sweat and scratched his head. “Erm, I’m really very sorry, but I’m really terrible at working in bright places.”

“Really?” Homoi snapped angrily. “Well fine, then. I won’t depend on you for a single thing. Just you watch! Oh all the...”

“Please forgive me. It’s just that if I stay out in the sun for too long, I’ll die,” he said in honest apology.

“Enough! That’s enough out of you. Just be quiet,” Homoi said, stamping his feet.

Just then, five squirrels came bounding along from the shade of a red-berried elder tree. They quickly lowered their heads and spoke.

“Lord Homoi, please allow us to pick the berries!”

“Yeah, alright. Go ahead and do it. You’re all my generals.”

The squirrels shrieked with glee and dove into their work.

Then, six ponies came rushing up and came to a stop before Homoi.

“Lord Homoi, we also await your orders,” said the biggest among them.

“Okay then. You’re all my captains, now. When I call, you make sure to come running,” ordered Homoi, just as happy as the ponies who then leapt for joy.

“Lord Homoi, please give me something that I can do for you,” said the mole through his tears underground. “I’ll serve you excellently!”

“I’ve got no need for you,” said Homoi, still angry. “Once the fox comes around, I’m gonna make sure that everybody knows just where you and your kind stand, and how you should be dealt with! Just you see!” he said, putting his foot down.

The underground voice vanished into a quiet stillness.

And so the squirrels gathered the berries until nightfall and made a big commotion of bringing them back to Homoi’s house.

Mother Rabbit, surprised by all of the din, went out to investigate.

“Goodness! My good Squirrels, whatever are you up to?”

“Mom! Look what I have wrought before me! There’s nothing that I can’t do!”

Homoi spouted from the side. Mother Rabbit was speechless in wonder.

Just then, Father Rabbit arrived home and gaped at the strange scene.

“Homoi, are you daft? I heard that you threatened the moles something terrible. Everyone is crying like crazy over at the mole’s home! On top of that, who in the world is going to eat all of these berries?”

Homoi burst into tears. The squirrels stood there looking terribly sorry for him for a moment or two, but eventually they all snuck away.

“You’ve already gone bad. Go take a look at Shellfire, ‘cause I bet you anything that it’s all clouded over now,” said Father Rabbit.

Even Mother Rabbit was crying. As she quietly wiped away her tears with her apron, she retrieved the beautiful gem from the agate box in the cupboard.

Father Rabbit took the box, opened the lid, and was met with quite a surprise.

Even more so than the night before, but the fire within the ball was now burning even redder and quicker.

Everyone stared at it, enchanted. Without a word, Father Rabbit passed the ball back to Homoi and went to start in on dinner. In time, Homoi’s tears also dried, and the three of them spent the evening laughing, merrily tucking in together before going to sleep.

* * *

Early the next morning, Homoi was back out in the fields.

The weather was again pleasant. Still, the lily of the valley that had been stripped of berries did not rustle their leaves as they once did.

From the distant, distant outskirts of the green field, Fox came running at top-speed and came to a stop before Homoi.

“Mr. Homoi. I heard that yesterday you had the Squirrels gather berries from the lily of the valley for you. How about you let me go and bring you something nice, too? It’s yellow, and, well, it’s stolen, but I tell you it’s something that you’ve never seen before in your life! And oh yeah, I heard that you were looking to give the moles just what they deserve. Those guys have been lazy from the very start, so how about I chase them right into the middle of the river?”

“I’m gonna give the moles a break. I already forgave them this morning. Still, I’ll try a little bit of that tasty yellow stuff you were talking about,” said Homoi.

“Roger that, roger that! Just give me ten minutes. Just ten minutes,” said the fox, utterly like the wind in his departure.

Homoi then yelled aloud from where he stood, “Mole! Mole! Little Mole! I’m cutting you a break! You can quit crying, now.”

Not a single sound came from underground.

Fox again came running from afar.

“Alright, try this out. This is what they call the tempura of heaven. This is absolutely first-class cuisine,” he said, presenting the square bread that he had stolen.

Homoi tried nibbling a bit of it, and all told it was one of the best things he’d ever tasted.

“What kind of tree does this grow on?” he asked. The fox turned away and gave a sharp laugh.

“It’s the ‘kitchen’ tree. Heh heh, k-i-t-c-h-e-n tree, yeah. If you like it, I’ll bring you some every day!”

“You make sure to bring me three of these every day, alright?”

Fox’s eyes were ablaze as if signaling his full comprehension.

“Oh? Very well. In exchange, you’ll do nothing about it when I pilfer myself a chicken or two.”

“That’s fine,” said Homoi.

“In that case, I’ll come right along with today’s other two,” sneered the fox, taking off like the wind once again.

Homoi pictured what it'd be like to bring the fruit of the Kitchen Tree back to share with his mom and dad.

“When dad gets a load of this, it's gonna be like nothing else he's ever tried... I'm really such a thoughtful son.”

When fox returned, he was carrying the other two square breads in his mouth. He placed them before Homoi, then hurried away with only a “Goodbye, now.”

“Just what does fox go off and do everyday, I wonder,” Homoi muttered to himself as he returned home.

Mother Rabbit and Father Rabbit were outside, in front of the house, drying the lily of the valley berries in the sunlight, that day.

“Hey dad, I brought something good home, today. Care to have some? Please, try a little bit of this,” said Homoi, presenting the square bread.

Mother Rabbit took the bread, removed her glasses, and inspected it thoroughly.

“You got this from the Fox, didn't you? These are stolen goods; I don't eat stolen goods.” With this, Father Rabbit motioned as if to pass his bread to Mother Rabbit, then suddenly snatched the bread from her hands and threw it to the ground with his own. He crushed them both under his feet.

Homoi broke into tears. Mother Rabbit was quick to join him.

“Homoi, you've already gone bad. Go take a look at the shellfire. It's definitely all clouded over, now,” said Father Rabbit, pacing here and there.

In tears, Mother Rabbit pulled out the little box. Taking on the light of the sun, the gem burned so brightly and beautifully that it seemed to be reaching up to the heavens. Silenced, Father Rabbit passed the sphere back to Homoi. Homoi, too, somehow forgot

all about his tears as he gazed upon the shellfire.

* * *

The next day, Homoi was out in the fields once more.

Fox came running along and passed Homoi the three square breads. When Homoi came back to the fields after hurriedly loading them onto the top shelf in the kitchen, fox was still there, waiting for him.

“Mr. Homoi, how about we do something fun, today?”

“Like what?” asked Homoi.

“How about we go show the Mole what’s what? He’s really just a parasite to this prairie, you know. On top of that, he’s lazy. Since you forgave him once, you just be quiet and watch while I go rough him up once. That’s only right, right?”

“Yeah, I guess. I mean, if he’s really a parasite, it’s probably okay if you go bully him a little bit.”

Fox spent a little while sniffing the ground here and there, tapping at it with his feet now and then, until finally he flipped a big rock. In doing so, he revealed a mother Mole and her seven children, huddled together and quivering in fright.

“Well now, start running. If you don’t run, you will meet your end by these teeth,” menaced the fox, beating the ground with his feet.

“We’re sorry! We’re sorry!” pleaded the moles as they futilely tried to make their escape. On top of being blind, none of them had legs suitable for running on land, so all they managed to do was kick and scratch at the grass.

It looked as if the smallest of the little moles had already fallen down on its back and fainted. Fox gnashed his teeth.

“Yeah, yeah,” said Homoi without thinking, thumping his feet.

Just then, a huge voice bellowed out.

“Hey! What in the world are you doing?” Fox spun round and round four times before turning tail and fleeing.

Homoi looked to discover it was his father coming.

Father Rabbit quickly herded the poor moles back into their hole and restored the rock at the mouth of the tunnel. Grabbing Homoi by the scruff of the neck, he carted him home in a flurry.

In tears, Mother Rabbit clung to her husband.

“Homoi, now you’ve done it. Now the Shellfire is shattered. Pull it out and take a look.”

Wiping away her tears, Mother Rabbit retrieved the box. Father Rabbit opened the lid.

He was dumbfounded. The Shellfire had never been as beautiful as it was on that day. Licks of fire of solid red, green, blue, and other colors battled fiercely, setting off great explosions, sending off smoke formations, as great flashes of lightening streaked about and shining rivers of blood flowed. Just when he thought twice about it, the entirety of the sphere would be all at once engulfed in light blue flames, and renewed, would be filled then with red poppy flowers, yellow tulips and bellflowers, seeming to waver and shift as if caught in a breeze.

Speechless, Father Rabbit handed the sphere to Homoi. Before long, Homoi had forgotten his tears and gazed happily into the Shellfire.

Finally relieved, Mother Rabbit went off to prepare for dinner.

Everyone sat and ate the square bread.

“Homoi, you’ve really got to be careful about that fox,” Father Rabbit said.

“Dad, it’ll be fine. Commoners like the fox are really nothing, since I hold the Shellfire and all. It’s not broken or clouded at all, is it?” said Homoi.

“Truly—it really is a handy stone, isn’t it?” piped up Mother Rabbit.

“Mom, it’s getting to be like I was born to never part with the Shellfire. Like whatever I do, wherever I go, it’ll come right along and follow me; do you think that sort of thing could really be? I mean, I am giving it a good polish a hundred times a day,” said Homoi.

“That’d be nice if it were really like that, huh?” mused Father Rabbit.

That night, Homoi had a dream. He was balancing on one leg at the very tip-top of a tall, tall, narrow mountain shaped like a drill.

He was surprised to awaken in tears.

* * *

The next morning, Homoi again went out to the fields.

A gloomy mist had somberly settled over everything. The trees and grasses were all completely dead silent. Not even the leaves of the beech trees were moving one tiny little bit.

The only thing to sound off into the heavens was the temple bell, ringing to signal the start of a new day.

“Ding, ding, ding-dong, ding-dong-ding,” it sang. The final diing came echoing back from far off.

And so the fox came along bearing three square-breads and sporting a pear of

knickerbockers.

“Morning, Fox,” greeted Homoi.

“Ugh, that was quite a surprise yesterday, huh? Your dad can sure be a completely pigheaded sod, now can’t he? But how are you? Bounced back in no time at all, have you? I’ve got something really fun for us to do, today. How do you feel about the zoo?” said the Fox.

“Oh, I don’t mind the zoo,” said Homoi.

Fox pulled a small net from within his breast pocket.

“Look here! With this handy gadget, we can catch dragonflies, bumblebees, sparrows, jays, heck, stuff even bigger than that! Why don’t we get them all together and make ourselves a zoo?”

For a moment, Homoi pictured what kind of zoo they could make. It seemed just too good, the more he thought about it.

“Let’s do it! But you’re sure you can catch them all in that net, there?”

Fox made quite a strange face.

“I’m pretty sure. Just you hurry home with that bread, and by the time you get back here I’ll have already caught a hundred things!” said the fox.

Homoi quickly grabbed the square-bread and ran it home, left it on the top shelf in the kitchen, and hurried back.

He found the Fox amidst the fog, in a birch tree, brandishing the net and bellowing with laughter.

“Hahahaha! Check it out! We’ve already caught four!”

Fox pointed to a large glass case that he had brought from somewhere.

It was the real thing; a jay, a nightingale, a red sparrow, and a finch were hectically thumping about in the glass case.

When they took one look at Homoi's face, however, a calm suddenly settled over all of them and they went quiet.

"Mr. Homoi, please use your power to help us out of here. The fox caught us and put us in here; he's going to eat us tomorrow, for sure! Please, Mr. Homoi!" said the Nightingale through the glass.

Homoi immediately tried to open the box.

As he did so, the fox darkly furrowed his brow, raised his eyes, and shouted.

"Watch it, Homoi! Just try sticking your hand in there and I'll devour you right here and now, you stinking little thief!"

It seemed like his jaw would tear at the seams with his strain.

Terrified, Homoi fled home as fast as he could. Today, however, Mother Rabbit wasn't home since she had gone out to the fields as well.

Homoi's heart was about ready to beat right out of his chest, so in desperation to see the Shellfire, he pulled the lid open on the box.

It was still blazing like a real fire. However, Homoi spotted just teensy-tiny little white cloud about the size of a pinprick, so small he thought he might even just be imagining it.

No matter how much Homoi worried over it, there was nothing he could do. Like always, he polished it with his breath and lightly rubbed its surface with a soft red sparrow feather.

Still, nothing worked. Just then, Father Rabbit returned home. Seeing how pale

and worried his son looked, he said “Homoi. Has the Shellfire gone cloudy? You look deathly pale... let me see it.” With that, he peered into the sphere and laughed.

“Is that all? We can fix that, no sweat! Those yellow flames, we’re going to have them burning even brighter than before, you’ll see. Could you hand me that sparrow feather, there?” And so Father Rabbit began furiously polishing the sphere. Still, it only seemed as if the spot he aimed to get rid off just gradually grew bigger.

Mother Rabbit came home. Silently, she was handed the Shellfire by Father Rabbit, peered into it, and tried using her own breath to polish it.

In complete silence, the three of them took turns on the sphere, rubbing at it with all they had.

Night had already fallen upon them. As if he suddenly noticed something, Father Rabbit rose to his feet.

“Well, let’s have dinner. We’ll try soaking it in oil all night. They say that that’s really the best thing for it,” he said.

“Oh, I’d forgotten all about preparing dinner,” said Mother Rabbit with a start. “I haven’t got anything made up at all; shall we just eat the berries from the day before yesterday and the square-bread?”

“Sure, that sounds pretty good,” said Father Rabbit. With a sigh, Homoi placed the sphere in its box, eyes transfixed to it and unmoving.

Everyone ate in silence.

“What sort of oil should we use...” said Father Rabbit, pulling down the jar of daylily oil from the shelf.

Homoi took hold of the jar and poured the oil into the Shellfire’s box. Then,

putting out all the lights, everyone went off to bed early.

* * *

Homoi woke up in the middle of the night.

Timidly, he sat up in bed and quietly stole a look at the Shellfire by his pillow. In the oil, it glowed yellow like a fish's eyeball. The red fires burned no longer.

Homoi burst noisily into tears.

With a start, Father and Mother Rabbit woke up and turned on the lights.

The Shellfire had become like a ball of lead. Amidst his tears, Homoi told his father about the episode with Fox and his net.

In a terrible tizzy, Father Rabbit hurriedly changed into his kimono.

“Homoi, you fool! I've been a fool, too. You received that gem for saving the little skylark, right? The day before yesterday you said it was meant to happen since birth. Well, let's head out to the fields. Fox might still be out there with his net. You're going to fight him at risk of your own life! Of course, I'll be there to help you.”

Crying, Homoi rose to his feet. Also in tears, Mother Rabbit followed after the two of them.

The fog had broken, and already nighttime was well upon them.

Fox was still under the birch tree with his net. When he saw the three approaching rabbits, his mouth twisted into a loud, crooked fit of laughter. Homoi's father yelled out to him.

“Fox! How dare you deceive my son like that! Let's settle with a duel here and now!”

Like a true scoundrel, fox sneered and said “Oh? I'd just love to kill and eat all

three of you, but it'd be such a bother if you managed to scratch me or anything. I've got much better things to eat, you see!"

Then, carrying the glass box, he made to run off.

"You wait right there!" Homoi's father grasped onto the glass box, causing Fox to stagger and eventually forced him to leave it behind as he made his escape.

When Father Rabbit looked into the box, he saw over a hundred birds, all crying their eyes out. Sparrows, finches, nightingales, and even an owl, much bigger than the others. On top of that, even the Skylark mother and her child were imprisoned in the glass case.

Father Rabbit opened the lid of the prison.

Every bird in the box came flying out, landed upon the solid ground, and chirped in unison,

"Thank you so much! We all owe you our lives!"

At this, Father Rabbit said, "You're very welcome. No thanks or anything are necessary; it's just that the sphere that we received from your kind has now clouded over."

"Hm? What could have happened? We'd like to take a look," the birds said as one.

"Please, go right ahead," Father Rabbit said as he guided them all to the rabbit household. The birds all filed behind, following him. In the back of the pack, Homoi dejectedly followed in tears. Lumbering along with long strides, the owl occasionally cast frightening glances back at him.

Everyone entered the house.

The birds filled up every available inch of the house, perched on the floor, desks,

shelves, and anywhere else they could fit. Turning his eyes towards the extraordinary sight, the owl cleared his throat with a great “Hoo, hoo.”

Father Rabbit raised up the Shellfire, now nothing more than a white stone.

“It’s already been reduced to this. Everyone, please, laugh and smile! Show it you’re happy!” As he spoke, though, the Shellfire let out a sharp *Kaching!* and broke in two.

Before one could even think, it let out a terrible crackling sound and shattered like smoke before their very eyes.

In the entranceway, Homoi let out a cry and fell to the floor. Some of the dust from the shattered sphere had gotten in his eyes. Shocked, as everyone made to run to his side, the smoke slowly gathered in one place and solidified into fragments. In the end, the pieces joined together as one and the Shellfire of old reemerged. Utterly bursting with erupting fires, sparkling like the setting sun, the sphere shot out the window with a whoosh, flying all on its own.

Losing interest, one bird made his exit, then two. Out they filed until only the owl remained. Staring hard all about the room, he hooted.

“Just six days, eh? Hoo! Just six days, eh? Hoo!” he scoffed rocking his shoulders back and forth, then stooped out of the rabbit home.

Homoi’s eyes had clouded over with white, just as the Shellfire had, and had gone completely blind.

Mother Rabbit was crying throughout the entire ordeal, from start to finish. At first, Father Rabbit crossed his arms in intense thought, but eventually just patted Homoi on the back.

“Don’t cry... this sort of thing happens all of the time. You knew that very well, and were as lucky as you really could be. Your eyes will get better. Your dad is going to make them all better, okay? Don’t cry, now,” he said.

Outside the window, the fog had lifted, and the berries of the lily of the valley were shining brightly in the sunlight.

“*Ding, ding, ding-dong, ding-dong-ding,*” rang out the temple bell’s morning address from up high.

The Ant and The Mushroom

Amidst the descending fog, an ant sentry, upon his patch of moss, glared at the surrounding area with his sharp eyes from under the visor of his metal helmet. He paced back and forth just before a giant, pale glen of fern trees.

From behind, a single ant soldier came running up.

“Halt! Who goes there?”

“Messenger of the 128th Regiment!”

“What is your destination?”

“The headquarters of the 50th!”

The sentry, keeping his Snider Bayonet⁴⁸ trained on the other’s chest, carefully inspected the look of his eyes and shape of his chin, then scrutinized the pattern of the sleeves of his shirt, the condition of his shoes, and other aspects of the uniform, one by one.

“Alright. You’re clear to proceed.”

The messenger busily ran into the forest of ferns.

The droplets of mist grew steadily smaller until ultimately it changed to a thin, milky smoke in the air. Trees and grass from hither and thither could be heard readily sopping up water. After a while, the messenger began to feel dizzy with his sleepiness.

Two youngster ants came along, both carry strange, mischievous grins upon their faces. Suddenly they stopped to stare in surprise at the foot of an oak tree.

“Tha- that’s gotta be it! That’s the sort of spot where the pure white house was built!”

48 A breech loading rifle used first in the 1850s. They would likely have been considered only slightly archaic in Miyazawa's time.

“It’s not a house, it’s a mountain!”

“It wasn’t here yesterday!”

“Let’s try asking that soldier.”

“Alright.”

The two ran over.

“Hey Sarge, what’s that over there?”

“Wha? Noisy kids, go home!”

“Huh? You taking a nap, sarge? What is that, over there?”

“Ugh, persistent little buggers... where, now—woah!”

“Yeah. That wasn’t here yesterday.”

“Hmm, this is bad. Hey you. The two of you may just be a couple of kids, but you’ve got a chance to be real useful to your people now. Okay? Seek out Lieutenant Colonel Alkyl. Then, I want you to run to the ground surveillance department and tell them this: Twenty-five degrees north, six leagues east—unidentified structure discovered. Now you two try.”

“Twenty-five degrees north, six leagues east—unidentified structure discovered.”

“Right. Okay then, get a move on. In the meantime, I’m going to stay right here and keep watch.”

The two ant youngsters took to their heels as quick as they could muster.

Brandishing his blade, the messenger stood rooted to the spot, never taking his eyes off of the structure with the thick, pure-white pillar and the big roof.

It seemed to be gradually growing larger. You could tell first off by the way its features, shiny and white, lazily wavered and shivered.

Suddenly the sky was darker, the moss under foot had grown wobbly and unsteady, and the ant messenger, dazed, wrapped his head in his arms. When he looked again, the pure white structure had broken at the support beam and completely collapsed and fallen sideways on the ground.

The two youngsters came running in from both directions.

“Sarge! Seems like they don’t really care! They said it’s just something called a mush-room. Nothing to worry about, they said. Lieutenant Colonel Alkyl even laughed, then commended me!”

“That thing’ll be gone soon, he said. You don’t even have to make a mark of it on your map. If you wrote and erased every mushroom that sprang up and fell down, even a hundred Ground Surveillance Divisions wouldn’t be able to keep up, he said. Hey! It fell over!”

“It just now collapsed,” said the messenger, a little awkwardly.

“Huh? Hey! He showed up, too!”

A little ways away, another strange, fishbone-looking gray mushroom emerged from the ground, gradually stretching upwards and shining dumbly. The two ant youngsters pointed at the sight and practically laughed their heads off.

Behind the mists, a big red sun rose into the sky, the ferns and moss turned green in a flash, and the Ant Messenger sternly brandished his Snider Bayonet once again towards the south.

Translator's Note: I have included this strange short story as an example of one of the interesting recurring elements in the land of Ihatov. Just as they were presented in

“Xe, the mouse,” the ants here form a distinct militaristic society. Kenji envisions them putting enormous emphasis on the importance of form and detail. Considering the complexity and organization of any typical real-world ant colony, it isn't hard to imagine where the author's inspiration may have come from!

The Four Forests

There are four forests to the north of the Koiwai farmlands.⁴⁹ Farthest south is the Forest of Wolves, with the next up being the Forest of Zaru—bamboo colanders—with the Black Hill Woods after that. Finally, farthest north of them all, is the Forest of Thieves.

The only one that knows anything about exactly how and when these forests got there, or why they were given such strange names is the giant boulder in the middle of the Black Hill Woods. One day he was kind enough to relate the tale to me.⁵⁰

In the days long, long ago, Iwate Mountain would erupt time and time again. The ash from it all covered the land entirely. The pitch black, giant rock of Black Hill Woods said that even he had at one time been thrown from the mountain.

When the eruptions finally subsided, the grasses of the fields and hills came growing in force from the south. When, in the end, grass had come to completely cover the area, beech and pine trees started to sprout up. Eventually, they came to form the four forests that we have now. None of them had been given a name, though, and each was content to just think of itself as “me.” Then, one autumn, a cold wind like so much invisible water came blowing in through the dead birch leaves. The big, black shadow of a cloud fell on the silver crown of Iwate Mountain.

Four farmers with axes, hoes, and rakes—all the weapons one needs in the mountains and fields—strapped tight to their bodies, came lumbering over the eastern-

49 This is a small deviation from the actual title. The Japanese title simply lists the names of three of the four forests featured in the story. It is with great apprehension that I have changed the title to something that, in English, sounds more comprehensive with regards to the story content.

50 It is not unusual for the narrator to sometimes refer to himself in the first person among Miyazawa's fairy tales.

sprawling Flintrock Mountains and happened into a small field, surrounded by forest on all sides. If you looked closely, you could see that they all wore big swords, too.

The lead farmer pointed here and there, all over the fantastic landscape, which looked straight out of a movie.

“How ‘bout it? Pretty nice, huh? We’ll be able to make a fine field of it mighty quick; it’s right near the woods, it gets plenty of sun, and there’s a real beauty of a river right there. Me, I’m quick on these things, so my hat’s been in on this one,” he said.

“But what about the soil?” asked one of the farmers, digging up a wad of pampas grass. He took a bit of the soil from the root and dropped it into his palm. He kneaded it between his fingers for a moment, and then gave it a little taste.

“Hmm... well, it’s not terribly terrific, but I don’t suppose it’s terribly terrible, either.”

“Well, does that mean we’ve finally decided?”

One of the other farmers gazed thoughtfully around the field. “Alright, let’s do it,” he said. He’d been the only one of the four to be completely silent this entire time, only now first speaking up.

Happily, the four of them tossed down all of the equipment they had been bearing on their backs, turned back towards the way they’d come, and yelled out.

“Hey! Hey! It’s gonna be here! Hurry up and get over here! Hurry on over!”

Just then, three fluster-faced wives bearing great loads upon their backs appeared from amidst the pampas grasses. Noisily running after them were nine children.

The four men turned towards the direction of the four forests, and then raised their voices as one.

“Is it alright if we till the land here?”

“You may,” answered all the forests in a single voice.

The four called out again.

“Is it alright if we build homes here?”

“You may,” answered the forests.

The four again aligned their voices for another request.

“Is it alright if we light fires here?”

“You may,” answered the forests.

They called out yet again.

“Is it alright if we take a little lumber from your trees?”

“You may,” answered the forests.

The four men excitedly clapped their hands. The fluster-faced women and children, all who had been silent a moment before, returned to their original color and suddenly burst out into rabble-raising. Some of the children started pushing and shoving each other in their fits of happiness and were met by some warm berating from their moms.

Until nightfall, they worked on building a little thatched log hut. The children happily hopped and skipped around the building site all the while. From the next day on, the forest watched those farm folk frantically working. The men’s hoes flashed in the sunlight as they dug up the field grass. The women gathered together all of the extra chestnuts that the squirrels and field mice couldn’t carry and cut up some pine logs to make firewood.

Then, before long, a single layer of snow had fell on the land.

The forest tried its best to kindly defend these people against the harsh northern winds, but still, some of the smaller children, being weak against the cold, would often bring their little reddened fingers to their necks and cry out against the chill.

By the time spring came, the one hut had become two.

They'd sown buckwheat and millet. White flowers blossomed in the buckwheat, and black ears of millet sprouted up. In the fall of that year, the grain came up very well, the field was expanded anew, and a third hut was finished. By that point, absolutely everybody was so overjoyed with their success that even the adults were bouncing around on the tips of their toes. Then, however, there was the morning when the soil was hard and frozen. Without warning, four of the small children out of the nine vanished in the middle of the night.

Everyone went completely out of their minds with worry; they searched every inch of the surrounding area, but they didn't find a single trace of any of the missing children.

The farmers all joined together their voices once again and called out.

"Do you know where our children have gone?"

"We know not," answered the forests.

"Then we're coming to search," the people again called out.

"Come," spoke the forests.

Then, grabbing all sorts of farming tools, the farming folk headed for the Forest of Wolves, the closest of all the Forests. As soon as they had entered, they were blasted with chilly winds and the smell of decayed leaves. Abruptly, they all began the assault.

Beating the ground underfoot, they flooded into the forest.

Just then, there came a crackling sound from deep within the woods.

Rushing towards the sound, the farming folk came upon a great raging fire the color of transparent roses. Dancing round and round the flames were nine wolves.

Barreling closer for a better look, the farming folk found the four missing children; they were sitting around the fire, eating roasted chestnuts and milk cap mushrooms.

Singing their songs, the wolves ran around the fire as if it were the summer lantern festival:

Oinomori no man'naka de, (In the middle of the Wolfwood,)

hi wa dorodoro pachipachi, (the flames crackle and shift,)

hi wa dorodoro pachipachi (the flames crackle and shift,)

kuri wa korokoro pachipachi (the chestnuts crackle and roll,)

kuri wa korokoro pachipachi (the chestnuts crackle and roll.)

Everyone brought their voices together and called out.

“Our good neighbors: wolves, wolves, please give us back our children!”

The wolves, every one of them surprised, all stopped singing and turned their heads towards the farming folk.

Just as they did, the flames suddenly died down. The area was suddenly pitch black and still, which brought displeased outbursts from the children sitting by the place where the fire had been.

The wolves looked about for a time, obviously lost and confused as to what they should do. Soon, though, they all fled as one back into the woods.

The farming folk grabbed hold of the children’s hands and made to lead them out

of the forest. As they did, though, the voice of one of the wolves sounded from deep in the woods.

“Please don’t think badly of us,” they yelled. “We were treating them to chestnuts and mushrooms!”

Upon returning home, the farming folk made up some *awamochi*⁵¹ and sent it off to the Wolf Forest as a way of saying thank you.

Spring came, and the nine children turned into eleven. Two horses came to live with them, too. In the fields, the grass and decayed leaves entered the soil along with the horse manure, which brought about a strong, healthy start for the buckwheat and millet.

They were able to collect plenty of chestnuts, too. The farming folk had never so happy as they were at the end of the fall of that year.

Still, there was the morning when the ground frosted and the air hung chilly.

This time, the farming folk set out to do the day’s work of expanding the fields only to find that that every ax, hoe, and rake had gone missing.

Everyone searched around the area as best as they could, but they couldn’t find a single thing. Not knowing what else to do, they all turned and raised their voices as one.

“Do you know what’s become of our tools?”

“We know not,” answered the forests.

“We’re coming to search for them,” called the farming folk.

“Come,” answered the forests.

This time, as they had nothing to carry with them, the farming folk filed along towards the forest. As it was the closest, they first went towards the Forest of Wolves.

51 A kind of pounded rice cake that first became popular in the Edo Period (1603-1868) and is still made today.

As they did so, a group of nine wolves was suddenly upon them. They all looked very serious and seemed restless.

“Nothing here, nothing here! There’s definitely nothing, nothing! Go search elsewhere; if there is nothing to be found there, then come back here again.”

Everyone, thinking that this sounded plausible enough, headed for the Forest of Zaru to the north. As they traversed deeper and deeper into the woods, a big *zaru* made for carrying oil was found on a branch under an old oak tree.

“I’ve got a bad feeling about this. Makes sense that a colander would be found here in the Colander Forest but there’s no telling just what’s in it. Lets just have a quick look inside,” one of the farming folk said, opening up the colander. He looked inside and found all of the missing farm equipment stashed away.

Not only that, but there was also a Mountain Man, his eyes flashing golden and face bright red, sitting there cross-legged. Upon laying eyes on everyone he opened his large mouth wide and let out a fearsome noise.

The children shrieked and made to run away, but the adults, unflinching, raised their voices as one.

“Mountain Man, please stop playing your dirty tricks from now on! We humbly ask of you, please stop playing your dirty tricks!”

The Mountain Man, seeming very apologetic, turned his face away and got to his feet. All at once, everyone took back their own farming equipment and made to exit the forest.

The Mountain Man called after them.

“Bring me some *awamochi*, too!” he yelled, hiding his head in his hands and

running off into the depths of the forest.

Everyone got a good hearty laugh out of this, and when they returned home, they made up and sent off some *awamochi* for both the Forest of Wolves and Forest of Zaru.

A year passed by and summer came upon them. By this time, all of the level ground had been completely converted to crop fields. Along with them were shelters big and small, and even a big storage barn. The two horses had become three. The harvest of that autumn brought monumental joy and celebration.

This year, too, we'll be able to make as much *awamochi* as we please, they thought.

As it would turn out, though, something quite mysterious did happen after all.

One winter morning, all of the millet that had been stored away within the storage barn, now covered in a layer of frost, vanished without a trace. Though the farming folk searched with everything they had, overturning every stone in the area, they couldn't find any trace of a single grain.

In their disappointment, the farming folk all joined their voices as one and called out.

"Do you know where your millet has gone?"

"We do not," answered the forests.

"We're coming to look for it," called out the farming folk.

"Come," answered all the forests in a single voice.

All together, the farming folk gathered together their weapons and equipment and headed first for the Forest of Wolves, the forest closest at hand.

The nine wolves were all there waiting for them when they arrived. They laughed

merrily upon seeing the farming folk.

“We’ll have *awamochi* again today! Not here, not here! Your missing millet is definitely not here! If you don’t find it even after searching the other forests, come on back here.”

This seemed sensible enough to the farming folk, who headed off towards the Forest of Zaru.

When they arrived, the red-faced Mountain Man was already waiting, smirking in the entrance to the forest.

“*Awamochi! Awamochi!* You won’t find any millet here, I didn’t take nothin’! If you wanna find it, you gotta head north and look there!”

This also seemed reasonable, and so the farming folk this time headed up into the Black Hill Forest—the forest that told me this story, in other words—to the north. At the entrance to the woods, they shouted.

“Return our millet! Return our millet!”

Without showing itself, the Black Hill forest answered back.

“This morning, I saw something with great big, pitch black legs take off towards the north. You should try looking a little more in that direction,” it said. It didn’t mention a single word about any *awamochi*, as I’m to understand. I think that’s exactly right, too. You see, when the forest had finished telling me the story, I tried to offer it a few bills from my wallet as a way of saying thanks, but it had no intention of accepting. It had a very plain, open disposition.

Well then, since the farming folk found no argument with what the Black Hill Forest had told them, they went on ahead a little farther north.

It was there that they came upon the Forest of Thieves with its pitch black pine trees.

“This place reeks of thieves! Even the name!” shouted the farming folk, heading into the forest.

“Hey, give us back our millet! Give it back!” they hollered.

Just then, from the depths of the forest appeared a long armed, enormous man—the man of the Forest of Thieves — who bellowed in a deafening voice,

“Just what is this, now? You callin’ me a thief? I’ll crush and smash anybody who says anything of the sort! Just what kinda proof do you have?”

“Witnesses! We have witnesses!” answered all of the farming folk.

“Who? Just who the heck is running their mouth like that?” roared the man of Forest of Thieves.

“The Black Hill Forest!” yelled back the farming folk, unwilling to back down.

“Y’can’t put all yer faith in that rock’s word! Y’can’t! Can’t, can’t, can’t! Sheesh!” bellowed the Forest of Thieves.

Everybody, thinking that seemed rather logical, grew angry and, exchanging irritated glances all around, started to flee back out of the forest.

“Hold on, hold on,” a stately voice rang out from overhead. “That just won’t do.”

When they looked up, they found that the voice had come from the silver-crowned Iwate Mountain. The dark giant of the Forest of Thieves fell to the ground, holding his head.

“The culprit is without a doubt the man of the Forest of Thieves,” said the mountain in a low voice. “I caught sight of him myself at dawn, in the shining of the

eastern sky and the fading moon. But still, all of you were ready to just go on home? I'll definitely make him return the millet, so don't think poorly of him. It's just that the Forest of Thieves wanted to make some *awamochi* of his own so badly that he couldn't stand it. That's why he came and stole your millet. Ha ha ha..."

And so Iwate Mountain again calmly turned to the sky. When he did, the giant man of the Forest of Thieves was already nowhere to be seen.

Once the farming folk arrived back home to the Koiwai farmlands, making much hullabaloo on their way back, they found that the millet had been properly returned and was just as they had left it. Right then and there, they jollily made up some *awamochi* and carried it off as presents to all four of the forests.

Yes, even to the Forest of Thieves. In fact, that was where they brought the most. Supposedly this came at the price of their being a little bit of sand included in the gift, but I suppose there was just no helping that.

And so, they were the best of friends with each and every one of the forests. At the start of winter of every year, they brought *awamochi* to each of them.

Still, these days, that yearly offering has grown very small indeed, but I suppose there's really no helping that either. Or so that's what the great big black rock in the middle of the Black Hill Forest told me at the end of his story.

Translator's Note: The four forests described in this tale are four actual woodlands that exist nearby Koiwai farms in Iwate, Japan.

The Porcelain-Berries and the Rainbow

The flowers of the plantain shrubs growing in the ruins of an old castle closed up, the red-eared grasses turned brown and withered, and the millet of the fields came to be harvested.

“It’s harvest time!” shouted a little field mouse, showing its face out in the open for only a moment before dashing back into her burrow.

The golden pampas grass⁵² up on the cliff top was shining with the glare of the sun as it swayed back and forth like waves in the wind.

In the very middle of the ruins, upon a tiny square-shaped mountain, was a bushel of porcelain-berries⁵³ so ripe they seemed to glow in every color of the rainbow.

Presently, since there was a tiny day-rain, the grasses were absolutely brilliant, glistening in the sun. By comparison, the mountains in the distance seemed quite dim.

The grasses shined on once the rain had stopped. The mountains again smiled broadly in the daylight and shined almost blindingly.

From there came a shrike flying through the air, scattering about notes of song hither and thither as it passed by overhead. Everyone went motionless. Even the pampas grass stopped swaying for a moment.

The Porcelain-Berries were extremely moved by it all. They took a deep breath and shed a few drops of rainwater, which pitter-pattered down to the ground.

With a gust of cool wind, a rainbow gently stretched itself over the mountain

52 *Miscanthus*, a golden-eared perennial grass native to Asia. A good prospect for biofuel.

53 Initially I was lead to believe that mekurabudō was a “blind grape,” but further investigation has revealed that it is actually the modern “nobudō,” a berry found all throughout Japan and northern Asia. It isn’t edible, but is pleasant enough to the eyes. There is a common western equivalent called the ‘porcelain berry.’ The scientific name is *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*.

range to the east like a bridge between dreams.

At this the pale sap of the porcelain berries began to flow in waves.

That's right. Today, like every other day, all the berries wanted was a chance to speak to that rainbow. That little bushel of porcelain berries up on the hill wanted so dearly to send one heartfelt, devoted lamentation up to that rainbow—so beautiful was it that it overshadowed even the smoldering sun that passed by, sinking overhead in the evening sky. If they could only reach it... Oh, it didn't matter one bit what happened after that. Not even if the whole bush got ripped apart by the wind. Not even if the frost of winter came washing over them and blanketed their entire world in oblivion. They could even deal with getting cut down just as they were. None of that would matter so long as they could reach that rainbow.

“Oh, rainbow! Won't you please look upon us if only for a moment?” The berries cried out to the rainbow with their faint, ordinary voices. Half of their call was swallowed by the wind.

The kind rainbow, gazing dreamily off into the blue expanse of the western sky, heard the berries' call and turned its big blue eyes to them.

“Oh, can I help you? You are the porcelain berries, aren't you?”

Shaking and shimmering like the huffy leaves of a beech tree, the berries were utterly speechless. They lost entirely what it was they wanted to say.

“Please accept our worship and reverence!”

The rainbow took an enormous breath, causing its violet and yellow bands to shimmer.

“Worship? Why, you are just as deserving of it as I am, my friend. Why is it that

you look so dreadfully gloomy?”

“Because I might as well be dead.”

“Why would you ever say something like that? Aren’t you still so very young? I mean it’s still a whole two months before the snow begins to fall. You’ve got plenty of time left, haven’t you?”

“That’s not it. It’s just that my life is so meaningless. If it would help you in the slightest bit—to make you greater and more magnificent—I would gladly die a hundred times over.”

“Oh, but don’t you see just how magnificent and great *you* are yourself? You’re like a rainbow that will never fade away. You’re like a permanent version of myself. I’m truly quite unreliable, you see. I might be here and gone in a measly ten minutes, perhaps fifteen. Sometimes I only last a mere three seconds!

“You, however... your colors will never fade away like mine.”

“No, they will! They’ll vanish! The wind will soon come and rip us from the bush. The snow will fall, too, and all of our colors will be reduced to a frozen sheen of white. That is if we’re not buried underneath the mounds of cut grass next time around.”

The rainbow unintentionally let out a laugh.

“Ah, that’s true. I suppose the truth is that there really isn’t anything that will remain the same forever. Please, have a look over there. The sky. It’s a deep green right now, isn’t it? It’s like a sheen of malachite.⁵⁴ Soon enough, though, the sun will come crossing the sky and dip behind the mountains and the whole sky will take on the shade of evening primrose petals⁵⁵. Even then it won’t be long before dusk falls and the heavens

54 A naturally green mineral commonly known as *copper carbonate*.

55 *Oenothera*, a generally yellow plant also known as the sunflower.

flare golden with twilight. The stars will then come out to stud the sky and before you know it it'll be nighttime.

“Where will I have gone when that time comes around? Where will I have disappeared to and where will I be born again? And the beautiful hills and plains that I now see before my very eyes? They'll fade and fluctuate with the passing of every second. Still, perhaps the reality of all of this will show us that the frail, the transient, and the momentary are all part of the same eternal life force. Even I, flashing across this reality for a mere three seconds or for an hour—I always feel the same joy, regardless.”

“But you're all the way up there shining in the sky. Everyone—the grasses, the flowers, the birds—they can all see you and sing your praises.”

“And it is the same for you. All of those things that come to me, that illuminate me, they make you shine as well. Every word of praise that comes to me is in turn then sent on to you. Please look. Those who look at things through the eyes of the greater reality,⁵⁶ even when considering a ruler of men at the apex of his or her glory, will not attempt to compare such things to even a single field lily. It's because they've seen that worldly glory—the kind for which people scheme and plot—is completely different from true power, the power of the eternal life force. In that light of the greater reality, even a single speck of dust billowing up from the suspicious cloud surrounding worldly extravagance is equal to the divine lily, praised by the heavens as it is.”

“Please teach us! Please take us with you! We'll do anything!”

“No my friend, for I'm not going anywhere. I'll always be thinking of you. Living together in the light of the greater reality, people will never be separated from one another. Nothing is ever gone forever. But I've probably already become too dim to see,

⁵⁶ Literally “the eyes of truth.”

haven't I? The sun is very far from me now. The shrikes are going to take flight. I'll soon have to part from you."

The sharp whine of a whistle was heard from the direction of the train station.

All at once, the shrikes took to the sky in an enormous symphony of beating wings and squawking beaks. As one, they flew off towards the east.

The berries cried out as loud as they could.

"Rainbow! Please take us with you! Please don't go!"

It seemed like the rainbow might have smiled faintly, but it had already grown so dim that it was impossible to tell for sure.

And with this the rainbow disappeared entirely.

The evening sky gave rise to a glow of gold. The shrikes were so loud that the skylark had no choice but to follow suit and take to the air. The song it sang was slightly off-key.

The Wildcat and the Acorns

One Saturday evening, Ichirō received quite a strange postcard in his mailbox.

Mr. Kaneda Ichirō---September 19th

Hope you doing all right.

I got a tough call to make so come by please.

Please bring no projectiles.

Sincerely, the Wildcat

That's how it was. The writing was very sloppy. The ink was rough and flaked off on his fingers. Even so, Ichirō was beside himself with happiness. Sealing away the postcard in his school bag, he was all over the house, practically bouncing off the walls.

Even after crawling into bed he couldn't shake the images of the wildcat's wanton face or this so-called 'tough call' from his mind. It wasn't until late that night that he finally drifted off to sleep.

Despite his excitement, the sun had already come up completely by the time he opened his eyes. Taking a look outside, he saw all of the surrounding mountains glittering and shining as if they'd just sprouted up at that very moment, lined up under the perfectly blue sky. Ichirō ate his breakfast in a hurry and set out on the one path running parallel to the mountain stream.

A nearby chestnut tree rustled and shook in the crisp morning breeze, dropping some of its nuts. Ichirō looked up at the tree.

“Chestnut tree! Chestnut tree! Did the wildcat happen to come passing along this

way?”

“The wildcat? He came blowing on by here early this morning. Went roaring on eastward in a carriage, he did,” the chestnut tree answered during a lull in the rustling.

“East, huh? Well wouldn’t you know it? That’s where I’m headed. Guess I’ll try heading on a little further. Thanks, chestnut tree!”

Without a word, the chestnut tree rustled once more, scattering another batch of chestnuts to the ground.

After going a little farther, Ichirō had already come across the Whistling Waterfall. In the pure white rock precipice there was a tiny hole from which water shot out, blowing like a whistle. Further down it was a full-fledged waterfall running into the valley, and this was how Whistling Waterfall earned its name.

Ichirō turned to the waterfall and bellowed.

“Hey! HEY! Whistler, did the wildcat happen to come by here?”

The waterfall tooted back.

“The wildcat? He was by earlier heading west in a big hurry.”

“West, huh? Isn’t that strange? That’s the way back to my house. Oh, well. I’ll try pressing on a bit further anyhow. Thanks, Whistler.”

The Whistling Waterfall just went on tooting along like before.

Heading along a little further Ichirō came across a patch of mushrooms sprouting up underneath a single beech tree. They were all playing together very oddly in what was apparently an orchestra of mushrooms.

“Hey there ‘shrooms,” Ichirō said, stooping down. “You haven’t seen the Wildcat around here today, have you?”

“The Wildcat!” they all answered, “He came flying through here heading south in a carriage just this morning.”

Ichirō tilted his head.

“That’s weird. Heading south of here leads right into that mountain. Well, I might as well try going along a little further. Thanks, mushrooms.”

Seemingly very busy, the mushrooms resumed their band practice from where they had left off.

Again, Ichirō went along a bit further. Overhead, a squirrel was bounding from branch to branch at the tiptop of a walnut tree. Ichirō gestured up to it.

“Hey there, Squirrel! Did the Wildcat happen to come by this way?” he asked.

The squirrel waved back from the treetop. “The Wildcat? He came hurrying past here heading south in his carriage this morning when it was still dark out.”

“Heading south you say? That’s awful strange to hear from two different people...but what the hey, I might as well press on a little while longer. Thanks, Squirrel,” Ichirō called, but the squirrel was already gone. All that was left to show he’d ever been there were a slight wobble in the very highest branch and a commotion in the treetop of the nearby beech tree.

As Ichirō went along a little further, the path parallel to the mountain stream grew narrower and narrower until it vanished altogether. He started hiking along a new path, one leading to the pitch black forest of nutmeg trees to the south of the mountain stream. As Ichirō hiked, the path very quickly became a very steep hill. The branches of the nutmeg trees were so tightly packed together and so dark that the perfect blue sky that Ichirō had seen earlier vanished entirely from sight. Sweating and red in the face, he

pressed on. Suddenly, though, Ichirō almost had to cover his eyes from the brightness of it all. He'd come upon a clearing of beautiful golden grass swaying gently in the sighs of the wind. Surrounding the clearing were olive-colored nutmeg trees stranding strong and dignified.

In the very center of the grassy clearing stood a short, very odd-looking little man twisting his beard with his fingers. He held a leather whip in his other hand. He was silent, looking about.

Ichirō had been meandering in his direction and came to a sudden stop, surprised to see the little man. He had only one eye, the other a blank moving sheen of white. He wore something akin to a tunic above his waist, and his legs were like those of a mountain goat. His feet were the oddest of all, looking very much like the ladle one would use to scoop rice. Ichirō had a bad feeling about all of this, but he still calmed himself enough to ask the man a question.

“Do you know the Wildcat?”

When he did so, the man gave Ichirō a sidelong glance and worked his jaw into a sneer.

“His Lordship the Wildcat will be back ‘ere any minute now,” he said. “And yer probably Ichirō, huh?”

A bit startled, Ichirō retreated back a step.

“Eh? Oh, yeah, Ichirō—that’s me. But...how do you know my name?”

At this the strange little man let out a snicker.

“Did ya get that there postcard?” he asked.

“I did; that’s why I’ve come.”

“Wasn’t the grammar really lousy?” the man said, turning his eyes downward a little sadly. Ichirō felt sorry for him.

“Well now, it was actually pretty good.”

At this the little man seemed so overjoyed that he ran short of breath and turned completely red all the way to the tips of his ears. He pulled at the lapels of his tunic to air himself out a little.

“And the handwriting? Was that any good?” he asked.

Ichirō let out an unintentional laugh. “Very good. A 5th Year student wouldn’t even be able to write that well, I bet.”

“Like a fifth grader?” the little man asked, suddenly adopting a sour expression.

“Oh no no, I mean a 5th year college student.”

At this the little man was again overjoyed and smiled so wide that it seemed as if his mouth would overtake his entire face. He began to laugh uproariously.

“Well I’ll have ya that it was me that wrote that there postcard!” he shouted.

“And just what are you?” Ichirō asked, holding back his urge to laugh. The little man suddenly took on a serious expression.

“I be the one who handles his Lordship the Wildcat’s carriage,” he said.

Just then, at the same time as the wind blew causing all of the grasses to shift to one side, the stableman bowed very formally.

Thinking this was a little odd, Ichirō took a look behind him. There he was. Standing there was the Wildcat, green eyes wide and wearing something akin to a yellow military jacket. The Wildcat’s ears, Ichirō realized, were really quite pointy, just as he’d imagined they’d be.

The Wildcat gave a quick bow. In turn, Ichirō greeted him very formally.

“Good afternoon, sir. Thank you very much for the postcard yesterday.”

Tugging at his whiskers, the Wildcat puffed out his stomach as he spoke.

“Good afternoon, and you are extremely welcome. To tell you the truth, this terribly troubling dispute has been going on since the day before last. I decided that it should all be settled with an outside judgment, and that your thoughts would be quite invaluable to that end. So please, relax. The acorns should be along any time now. You know, I’m bothered with this little quarrel every year.” With this the Wildcat withdrew a carton of cigarettes from his inside pocket and picked one out. “Care for a smoke?” He asked, offering it to Ichirō.

“Uhm, no thank you,” Ichirō said, a little surprised.

The Wildcat chuckled. “Nah, you’re still young.” He struck a match, lit the cigarette in his mouth, and blew out a gust of pale smoke. The little man—the Wildcat’s carriage’s caretaker—was doing his very best to maintain good and proper posture, but it seemed like his desire for a smoke was getting the better of him. Tears of addiction began to wad up in his eyes.

Just then, Ichirō heard what sounded like rocks of salt grinding together by his feet. Startled, he noticed little sparkling round things scattered here and there, all about the grass. After close inspection, it became clear that they were all acorns in red trousers. There had to be at least hundred of them! The noise was actually the dull roar of all of them talking at once.

“Ah, here they are. Look at them all, like little ants. Alright now, hurry up and ring the bell. The sun is hitting that spot there quite nicely today, so cut a clearing, would

you?” The Wildcat flicked away his cigarette and hurriedly instructed his carriage driver.

Flustered, the carriage driver quickly drew a scythe from his belt and cleared away the spot in the grass before the Wildcat. The shining acorns practically stampeded in from all directions to fill the clearing, chattering all the way. The little man then jingled his bell a few times, its jingling resounding all the way to the nutmeg forest. The golden acorns fell quieter at the sound.

Ichirō looked to the Wildcat. He was already seated before the crowd of acorns and had donned a long, black satin garment, giving him a haughty sense of importance. It all looked like it'd come straight out of painting, Ichirō thought. The acorns were like the masses of visitors coming to see the statue of the Great Buddha in Nara. The little man cracked his whip a few times for order.

Shining in the clear air under the perfectly blue sky, the acorns were really all quite beautiful.

“Today makes the third day of this trial. How about we all try to make up and get along now?” said the Wildcat, trying to maintain his proud demeanor despite a shadow of concern passing over his face.

“No way! No matter what they say, the ones with the sharpest caps are the best, and mine is the sharpest!”

“Wrong! The rounder the better, and I just happen to be as round as they come!”

“It’s all about size! More is more, you know! And I’m the biggest, so that clearly makes me the best!”

“You’ve got it all wrong. The judge definitely said that I was way bigger than you just yesterday, or have you forgotten?”

“What are you saying? It’s all about the tallest. It’s height that matters.”

“Let’s wrestle for it! A wrestling match will settle this!” It was like someone had taken a thwack at a beehive. Nobody could tell what was going on anymore.

“Order! This is a trial! Quiet down, quiet down!”

It wasn’t until the carriage handler snapped his whip again that the acorns finally quieted down.

Pulling at his whiskers, the Wildcat tried again.

“I say that this has been going on for three days now! How about you all be good and learn to get along now?”

At this, the acorns again all burst out at once.

“Not a chance! I don’t care what they say; the sharpest caps are the best!”

“That’s not it! The roundest are the best!”

“You’ve got it wrong; bigger is better!”

Again, it all fell apart into one big confusing mess of chatter.

“Silence! Order!” the Wildcat shouted. “What do you think this is? Quiet down! Quiet down!”

The little man snapped his whip again. Once more, the Wildcat pulled at his whiskers.

“This is now the third day of this dispute! How about you all be good and get along?”

“No, no. That just won’t do! The sharpest caps are clearly...”

On and on and on they went.

“Order! This is a trial, here! Quiet down! Silence!”

With another crack from the little man's whip, the acorns once again fell silent.

"This is how it is," the Wildcat huffed at Ichirō. "What do you suppose we should do?"

Ichirō knew just what to do.

"In this kind of situation, here's what we should rule: Whoever here is the dumbest, clumsiest, most useless acorn is the best. I heard it in a sermon once."

The Wildcat's face lit up. Still, he reapplied his former air of grandeur, pulled open the lapels of his satin garment a bit and exposed the yellow fabric of his military garment.

"Very well then! Quiet down everyone! I'm the one speaking now! Let it be hereby ordained that the dumbest, clumsiest, most utterly useless, ugly and unrespectable one amongst you be deemed the greatest."

The acorns were absolutely silent. More than silent, the lot of them were practically petrified stiff.

With this, the Wildcat removed his black satin robe and, wiping the sweat from his brow, grasped Ichirō by the hand. His stableman too was overjoyed, happily cracking his whip five times in the air.

"Thank you so much," said the Wildcat. "In just a minute and a half you cleared up that entire troubling matter. Please, you simply must be my honorary judge for these kinds of matters from now on. Won't you kindly come back should this kind of dispute ever arise and I write to you again? You'd have my unending gratitude."

"I'd be glad to," Ichirō said. "No need to thank me at all."

"Please, you must allow me to thank you somehow; my reputation depends on it,

after all. From now on I'll address the postcards to 'The Honorable Kaneda Ichirō' and they'll be from 'The Court.' Does that work for you?"

"Sure, that's fine," said Ichirō. Still, it seemed like the Wildcat had something else on his mind. He again pulled at his whiskers pensively. Finally, seeming to have made up his mind, he spoke up.

"And what if I write with instructions to report to court the following business day, weekends and holidays excluded? How would that be?"

"Well now," Ichirō chuckled, "That'd be a little weird, wouldn't it? You could probably leave that part off."

The Wildcat looked a bit downtrodden at this. Continuing to stroke his whiskers, his eyes drooped down to his feet.

"Very well," he sighed. "I'll write them just like the last one, then. Now then, as for your reward for today—would you prefer a bushel of golden acorns or a head of salted salmon?"

"I think I'll go with the golden acorns."

Looking relieved that Ichirō hadn't chosen the tasty fish head, the Wildcat promptly instructed the little man.

"Bring us a bushel of golden acorns. Quickly now. If there aren't enough, go get some gold plated ones. Hurry! Off you go!"

The stableman scooped up the acorns from earlier and measured them out.

"There should be exactly enough," he shouted.

The Wildcat's military jacket fluttered about in the wind. He stretched his arms out wide, closed his eyes and let out a little yawn.

“Alright then, hurry up and ready the carriage,” he said.

The little man came along pulling a carriage made of big white mushrooms led by some sort of gray, odd-looking horse.

“Well then, lets get you on home, shall we?” said the Wildcat.

Once Ichirō and the Wildcat had entered the carriage, the stableman loaded in the bushel of acorns.

Crack went his whip. And they were off.

As the carriage pulled away from the grassy clearing, the trees and bushes visible out the sides wavered and shimmered in the air like smoke. Ichirō cast a glance down at the bushel of golden acorns. Wearing his mask of indifference, the Wildcat simply stared off dreamily into the distance.

As the carriage moved further and further along the shine of the acorns began to dull. By the time they came to a stop the bushel had changed to the ordinary brown that acorns normally wear. Then, all at once, the Wildcat, his stableman, and the Mushroom Coach all faded from view, leaving Ichirō standing there alone in front of his house with the bushel of acorns in his arms.

From that day on, Ichirō never again received a postcard from the Wildcat.

Maybe it would have been better, Ichirō wondered, if he had said it was okay to write with “instructions to report to court the following business day, weekends and holidays excluded.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Spring and Chaos: The Life Story of Kenji Miyazawa, DVD. Directed by Shōji Kawamori, 2000, Iwate, Japan: Tokyopop, 2000.
- Conroy, Hilary, Sandra T. W. Davis, and Wayne Patterson. Japan in Transition Thought and Action in the Meiji Era, 1868-1912. Rutherford; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1984.
- Fundo Junsaku. Miyazawa Kenji no Bungaku to Hokekyō. Tokyo: Mizu Shobo, 1981.
Golley, Gregory. When Our Eyes No Longer See. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Hagiwara Takao. "The Bodhisattva Ideal and the Idea of Innocence in Miyazawa Kenji's Life and Literature." *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 27, no.1 (1993): 35-56.
- Hagiwara Takao. "Innocence and the Other World. The Tales of Miyazawa Kenji." *Monumenta Nipponica* 47, no. 2 (1992): 241-63.
- Karatani Kōjin. *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Keene, Donald. *Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- Lerer, Seth. *Children's Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Masashi Shimizu. *Miyazawa Kenji no uchū*. Tokyo: Juyo Kenkyūjo, 2002.
- McLaren, W. W. *A Political History of Japan during the Meiji Era, 1867-1912*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965.
- Miyazawa Kenji, *Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985.
- Miyazawa Kenji, and John Bester. *Once and Forever: The Tales of Kenji Miyazawa*. Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, 1993.
- Okazaki Yoshie. *Japanese Literature in the Meiji Era*. Tokyo: Obunsha, 1955.
- Pulvers, Roger. "Miyazawa Kenji, Rebel with a Cause." *Japan Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1996): 30.
- Sato Hiroaki. *Miyazawa Kenji: Selections*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

- Strong, Sarah M, and Karen Colligan-Taylor. *The Masterworks of Kenji Miyazawa*. Tokyo: International Foundation for the Promotion of Languages and Culture, 2002.
- Toriyama Toshiko, and Cathy Hirano. *Kenji's School*. Tokyo: Intl. Foundation for the Promotion of Languages and Culture, 1997.
- Toriyama Toshiko. *Kenji no Gakkō*. Tokyo: Sanmaku Shuppan, 1996.
- Tsuzukihashi Tatsuo. *Miyazawa Kenji Kenkyū Shiryo Shusei*. Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Senta, 1990.
- Yahata Yo. *Miyazawa Kenji no Kyoikuron Gakkō, Gijutsu, Shizen*. Tokyo: Chobunsha, 1998.
- Yamazato K. "Establishing a Sense of Place: A Comparative Study of Two Eco-poets, Miyazawa Kenji and Gary Snyder." *Tamkang review* 34, no. 1 (2005): 113-28.