

Translation of “Yojō” by Yamamoto Shūgorō

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Abstract

This is a translation of Yamamoto Shūgorō (1903-1967)'s “Yojō (1952),” a short work of historical fiction that depicts the famous master swordsman Miyamoto Musashi (c. 1584 – 1645) from the point of view of an out-cast protagonist, Iwata. In spite of his popularity in Japan, Yamamoto's works have been little translated into English. An English translation of “Yojō” entitled “Another View of Bushidō” was published by Senjo Publishing in 1985, but it is out of print and not readily available. This translation aims to provide a more readable and accessible translation of “Yojō” to accompany and supplement my article “Un/Making of a Hero in ‘Yojō,’” *Waseda Rilas Journal* No. 6, 259-269, Waseda University, Research Institute for Letters, Arts and Sciences. The article discusses how Yamamoto conveyed contemporary themes relevant to contemporary audiences, rather than traditional Japanese values, through his historical fiction, by examining “Yojō” in conjunction with Yamamoto's essays and its historical context. While some English critics consider Yamamoto's works untranslatable because of their “traditional” and “uniquely Japanese” nature, some Japanese critics argue Yamamoto's works are reminiscent of foreign writers, such as Georges Simenon (1903-1989), André Gide (1869-1951), and O. Henry (1862-1910). I hope that this translation can open up interest in Yamamoto's works (both in terms of translation and academic research), and possibly contribute to academic interest in comparative literature, especially historical fiction and popular literature.

The translation includes a brief introduction and some footnotes to provide more context and information. Considering that the original story is a comical/satirical story to entertain readers, this translation also aims for fluency and entertainment. In addition to its scholarly purpose to accompany my article and possibly inviting other scholars' interest in Yamamoto's works and the function of historical fiction, I also hope that this translation may be of interest to general readers looking for fun short stories, as well as teaching material for world literature courses that seek short fiction that resists the reductive, stereotypical view of Japan as singularly represented by “samurai spirit.”

Introduction

Yamamoto Shūgorō⁽¹⁾ (1903-1967), born Shimizu Satomu, was a popular writer who prolifically published short stories, novels, and essays, in both the pre- and post-war periods. Born in an impoverished home, Yamamoto started working as a live-in apprentice at a pawnshop immediately after graduating elementary school. The owner of the pawnshop encouraged Yamamoto's literary activities, and he started writing for self-publishing magazines while working there. His pen name was taken from the name of the pawnshop and its owner.

For English readers interested in Japanese popular fiction, Yamamoto Shūgorō may be more familiar as the author of the original stories of some of Kurosawa Akira's films such as *Red Beard* (1965), or the namesake of the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize (first awarded in 1988) awarded to popular fiction writers, such as Yoshimoto Banana (1964-) and Minato Kanae (1973-).

The majority of Yamamoto Shūgorō's works are historical fiction, often set during the Edo period (1603-1868),

(1) The Japanese names in the introduction and the story are presented in “family name, first name” order.

depicting the everyday lives of commoners or low-ranking samurai, and giving voice to those who are usually ignored by history. Even the works that depict historical figures tend to focus on a narrative that is not the mainstream, questioning the “norm” and the “authenticity” of the predominant ideas and history, and siding with the marginalized, the weak, and the outsiders. Although historical fiction, Yamamoto’s stories bore contemporary themes and were intended to convey messages relevant to contemporary audiences.

“Yojō” was written in this spirit to give an alternative view of the well-established image of the famed historical swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi (c. 1584 – 1645), while shedding light on an outsider protagonist, Iwata. When “Yojō” was published in 1952, the image of Musashi as a hero swordsman was the predominant view. Yoshikawa Eiji’s extremely popular pre-war novel, *Miyamoto Musashi* (1935-1939), had been revised and reprinted in 1949 and became a bestseller again. Written in the context of this almost religious adoration towards Musashi, “Yojō” humorously betrays popular expectations, questioning the heroism of Musashi while taking sides with the unheroic no-name protagonist, Iwata.

Yamamoto experimented with the format when writing this story – repeating simple phrases and themes to build up a bigger theme and story. This is reflected both in the overall structure of the story, especially the mirrored, deceptively brief opening and closing chapters, as well as throughout the story when two successive sentences almost repeat each other with slight variation. These repetitions give music-like rhythm to the story, and, at the same time, through slight difference in repetition, underscore the theme of an alternative, unconventional viewpoint.

For more detailed background on “Yojō” and Yamamoto Shūgorō, please see my article on “Yojō” (Shiho Takai, “Un/Making of a Hero in ‘Yojō,’” *Waseda Rilas Journal* No. 6, 259-269, Waseda University, Research Institute for Letters, Arts and Sciences).

Yojō⁽²⁾

1.

In the corridor of the main palace of Kumamoto Castle in Higo, a master swordsman named Miyamoto Musashi slew a certain cook. It was hardly worthy of comment. The cook attempted to test Miyamoto Musashi’s skill as a swordsman.

“No matter how good he is, it would be impossible for him to avoid a small rock in the dark –”

“No, that’s not true!”

“Seeing is believing.”

And so, in the evening, when Miyamoto Musashi came back along the dark castle corridor, the cook laid in wait and ambushed him. Miyamoto Musashi, for his part, cut the cook down with a single stroke, without uttering a word. There’s nothing more to it. That’s all.

2.

About two hours earlier, that same day, in the maidservants’ room of an inn called Ibuki-ya, in the Kyōmachi district⁽³⁾ of the castle town, a maid named Okita was talking with her visitor, a young man called Iwata.

The pleasant smell of fish and vegetables grilling and simmering drifted in from the kitchen. And, just as one would expect at dinner time at such an inn, the air was full of the lively sounds of the trays, plates, and bowls, and the footsteps and cries of busy workers. Maids came in and out of this room several times. They came to fetch this or to leave that, but they pretended not to see these two. Okita had authority; Okita had good customers; and she was also the head of the maids at Ibuki-ya.

She was twenty-six, three years older than Iwata, a fairly good-looking girl with sharp features. Too many

(2) The Japanese title of the story is よじょう in *hiragana*. While the meaning of the title is revealed in the end of the story, the meaning would not be immediately clear to contemporary Japanese audiences. To avoid spoiling the story and to keep the spirit of the original title, I left the title as is.

(3) A district immediately north of Kumamoto Castle.

moles, and her chin and nose were a bit turned-up, but they added charm to her face nevertheless.

“Oh hell no!” Okita said. She had just finished tying her hair. Straightening her slim, white fingers, she adjusted here and there; she did not seem to like her bangs or the hair near her temples. Taking a mirror from the stand, she examined herself from different angles.

Iwata was sitting on the open veranda. Sideways, one knee raised, and fidgeting, he looked at Okita imploringly. “Don’t be cruel! I’m beggin’ you. Even said ‘please,’ eh?”

“Hell no, I said!”

“It’s just a loan, I’m gonna return it to you when I make a profit. I know I’m gonna win tonight, I feel it. I’ve never felt this strong that I’m gonna win.”

“I’m saying, ‘hell no.’” Okita touched the hair at her temples. “You say you’ll return the money when you win, but only people who win can say that. Ever since you started playing that stupid game, have you ever won, even once? You’re always just an easy mark.”

“Don’t preach at me when you don’t know anything!”

“You’re an easy mark, all the time,” she repeated for emphasis. “Kaku-san always tells me it’s not your thing at all; that gambling’s not for you. That’s why you suck at it.”

“Kaku-san? Which Kaku-san are you talking about?”

“He says you don’t even like it. When you’re gambling you just stare off into space and you don’t really get into it at all. He says you look like you’re just there to throw your money away.”

“Kaku-san? Which Kaku-san are you talking about?”

Okita didn’t answer. Iwata felt dejected, then became angry and stood up.

“So that’s a ‘hell no,’ no matter what?”

“If you’re thinking of going to Yodo-ya Inn, you’d better not.” Okita looked into the mirror. “— or Miss Oyone in Hashimoto Inn, or the one in Hanabata.”⁽⁴⁾

Iwata became rather startled. “What, who, huh?”

“The other day, you bought me a comb, and took my hairpin, and told me you wanted to borrow it, didn’t you? And you also bought me a kimono and took my *obi* belt instead, didn’t you?”

“Well, ’twas for the gambling.”

“Don’t lie to me!” Okita turned to face him. “The comb you said you bought came from Miss Ohan at Yodo-ya Inn, didn’t it? You gave me the comb you took from Miss Ohan, and you gave her the hairpin you took from me, didn’t you? The kimono and the *obi* belt, too. If not with Miss Ohan, then Miss Oyone in Hashimoto Inn, or the one in Hanabata, bringing this one to there, that one to here, four girls in turn... I’m not that stupid!”

“Well, I meant, for me, you...”

“Go away. I know what you really are. Never come back, ya hear?”

“Whatever!”

It’s over. No doubt. Iwata shrugged his shoulders, and went out through the wooden side door.

“Hmpf, really fucked *that* up...”

There were many people coming and going on the main street. He cut through the ally to the backstreets, and walked miserably toward the Tsuboi River.⁽⁵⁾ Wearing a dark winter kimono with a casual *obi* belt and worn out straw sandals, with his arms tucked in his kimono, walking bent forward, he looked like a winter crow whose feathers had all fallen out. The crown of his head and his beard were unshaven, but he had an oval face and fair skin with a childishness remaining around his eyes and mouth – the kind of face twenty-something women liked.

“I’m in deep shit,” he muttered, almost starting to cry, “— Nowhere to go at all.”

It was a gloomy time in the evening. The color of the setting sun had already faded, and Mt. Honmyōji⁽⁶⁾ and

(4) A district east of Kumamoto Castle.

(5) A small river running from northeast to southwest along the southwest edge of Kumamoto Castle. Lies due east of the Kyōmachi district.

(6) A mountain northwest of the castle.

Mt. Reiju⁽⁷⁾ were already becoming dark. There was a farmer still plowing with a hoe in a misty field, but that only made a lonesome evening even more lonesome.

“Nowhere to go, I’m fucked.”

He came to the Tsuboi River and stopped. The water of the river was shining; flowing and shining. It was already March, so the water must have been rather warm. But it looked awfully cold; the metallic shine of the flowing water looked piercingly cold... He gazed at it. He stood miserably, and stared at it for a long time. The cold crept into him from his toes, and he shivered spontaneously. He thought he should do something to raise his spirits. He imagined a bright fire and the smell of hot *sake*... warm, bright fire, and the hot, almost choking, thick smell of *sake*... the feeling on the tongue, almost burning, when *sake* goes down the throat... It was extremely effective. His stomach started grumbling. He grinned.

“Heh, what wuzzit she said?” Laughing mockingly, he started walking. “‘This one to there, that one to here,’ huh? ‘Four girls in turn,’ she said... how the fuck did she find out?” He turned red. “—said not to come anymore, that fucking mole-face. Who wants to go there anyway, I’m the big man, Iwa-san. Don’t mess around with me!”

But he nevertheless had nowhere to go. Iwata thought of himself as a *yakuza*. Society looked at him that way. He was full of debt, and full of ingratitude. “So what?” he thought. But, to his surprise, he could not get away with delinquent debts or being ungrateful even among his *yakuza* friends. He didn’t become a *yakuza* because he wanted to be one. Even now, he didn’t care for it. He went astray, half-desperately, because he didn’t have anything else to do. But, in less than a year, he’d hit a dead end, and he could not get away with unpaid debts or being ungrateful, so being a *yakuza* became just a stupid, unimportant thing to him.

“Maybe I should become a beggar,” Iwata muttered. Just then he came to the edge of the Shirakawa River,⁽⁸⁾ so he turned towards the town of Sendanbata.⁽⁹⁾

3.

Iwata was drunk, in the corner of a filthy noodle shop. It was already around nine. It was a really simple restaurant on the outskirts of the town called Sendanbata. Usually only packhorse men, palanquin bearers, and peddlers went there to have a drink and eat bring-in meals. At night, however, the back room turned into a gambling den, and gamblers gathered almost every night.

By now, a game had already started in the back. The sound of gambling and laughter floated from the room. This shop was under Kaku-san’s protection, and thus was safe as a gambling place. Kaku-san was a spear-holder of Sir Nagaokasado,⁽¹⁰⁾ who was a longstanding retainer of the feudal domain.

Though the back room was lively, the restaurant was dim and quiet. One sooty lantern hung on the pillar behind Iwata, illuminating him dimly from behind. “What’s the fuss about women, three or five,” he groaned. “—Women, humph, there are more than enough, love ’em and leave ’em. What the hell does she know?”

He was completely drunk. Resting his cheek on one hand, he poured *sake* and drank with the other, but he sloppily spilled *sake* whenever he poured or drank. His face was pale, his eyes were sunken, and he was slavering from the edge of his mouth.

“Hey, please call big bro Kaku-san!” Iwata suddenly slurred. Nobody answered, but a man with a six-foot staff came in, opening the side door in the closed sliding shutter. It was a local officer on patrol.

The mistress of the establishment jumped out from the kitchen. “Hello, sir. Thank you for stopping by.”

“Anything amiss?” The patrolman looked towards the back room.

“All is well, thank you. We just have closed the restaurant, as you can see. Please sit down for a while. I will bring you some *tea*.”

“Well, I don’t have much time, but...” The patrolman sat down on the edge of the step at the entrance. The pro-

(7) A mountain of this name is not found on historical or present-day maps, but it is probably the mountain adjacent to Mt. Honmyōji where Reiju-an Temple used to be (and where one of Musashi’s purported tombs exists). Present-day Shimasaki, Kumamoto City.

(8) A larger river due east of Tsuboi River, running roughly parallel to it.

(9) The district between Tsuboi River and Shirakawa River, southeast of the Castle.

(10) Formally known as Sir Matsui, one of the important retainers of the Higo domain (Kumamoto).

priestess went back to the kitchen.

As he set down his six-foot staff by his side, the officer saw that Iwata was there, and looked away glumly, but then quickly turned again to Iwata with a look of surprise. “What on earth are you doing here?” the patrolman said hastily. “—Your family is looking for you. This is no time to be drunk in a place like this. Go home right away.”

Iwata looked up. “Whatcha talkin’ ’bout? Who the fuck are you?”

“Go home right away,” the patrolman said. “—Tell them you heard it from Sakuma Takehei – Patrol Officer Sakuma Takehei. You’re drunk in a place like this while your family is in such trouble. You ne’er-do-well. Hurry, go home, now.”

The proprietress came in with a big cup on a tray, and gave it to the officer, with a side dish of flattery. The patrolman took only the cup, took a sip, and cringed.

“Would you please call big bro Kaku-san!” Iwata slurred again.

Sakuma Takehei thought for a while, had another sip, and tilted his head. “Right, maybe I should nab him,” he muttered.

The moment Takehei emptied his cup, the proprietress brought another, with uncanny timing. She casually said, “Isn’t it very cold for spring?” or something to that effect, and left the cup with the tray. Takehei cast a side glance at it, and made a glum face, for there was no accompanying snack.

“OK, I’ll do that,” Takehei murmured. “—Yes, I will nab him. Maybe it won’t be entirely wasted labor.”

A voice sounded from the back room. Opening a sliding door, a man of about thirty-four or thirty-five came out into the restaurant. “Oh, isn’t it Officer Sakuma?” he said.

The patrolman turned back and made an awkward ingratiating smile, and almost started to say something, but the man had already made his way over to Iwata.

“What’s up, Iwa-san? Drinking well?”

“Oh, big bro.” Iwata clumsily waved. “—You came, big bro Kaku-san. I was waitin’ for ya.”

“I just got here.”

“I was waitin’ for ya. I, well, sorry, but please drink with me, big bro. I feel like I wanna die.”

“Well, wait. You’ve gotta go back home now,” Kaku-san said. “Gee, he’s frickin’ drunk!” he muttered to himself, and then yelled to the kitchen, “Ms. Okane! Please bring my sandals here; they are at the back.”

Sakuma Takehei butted in, “I was also telling him that. I was telling him to go home. Mr. Suzuki’s men came to the patrol station and told us to let him know when we find Iwata.”

“Well, we can’t do anything, he’s dead drunk,” Kaku-san muttered to himself.

Kaku-san had a stoutly-built body with strong bones, thick in the shoulders and waist. Dark skinned, squared chin, stern face, and he also had a considerably big sword scar on his forehead, which added to his dignity. Even though a spear-holder is of low rank, because of this scar he was favored by his master, Sir Nagaokasado, and he was also popular among his co-workers. Kaku-san was kind to weak people. He didn’t like local officers like Sakuma Takehei, but he was particularly kind to a man like Iwata. At that time, only Kaku-san spoke this young scoundrel’s name with the honorific “san.”

“Hey, stand up, Iwa-san.”

Having put on the sandals that the proprietress brought, Kaku-san drew close and patted Iwata’s shoulder. Iwata resisted, and held on to the table. Kaku-san whispered something in Iwata’s ear. Iwata groaned and shook his head. Kaku-san whispered again. Then, this time, Iwata opened his mouth languidly, and looked up at Kaku-san with knitted brows.

“Here, I’ll walk you home. Pull yourself together.” Kaku-san offered his arm to Iwata. Iwata stood up.

When they went outside, it was completely dark. The weather seemed about to change, like it would start raining, for a tepid south wind was blowing. Kaku-san walked, with a lantern in one hand and supporting Iwata with the other.

“I heard from a man named Inō in the mansion,” Kaku-san said. “There can be no mistake, for he saw the scene in the castle himself.”

“I can’t believe it’s true.” Iwata shook his head. “How the hell did it happen?”

“Well, I don’t know the details, but I heard that your old man tried to test the man of Chiba Castle.⁽¹¹⁾ He wanted to test the swordsmanship skills of the man of Chiba Castle, so he was lying in wait in the corridor and jumped out of the dark.”

“No kidding, he couldn’t have done such a stupid thing.”

“The man’s a master, you know. Without a word,... you know. Though your old man was a samurai, he was working as a cook. He made his living with a kitchen knife. It was like a god of strength crushing a baby under his heel.”

“I can’t believe it’s true. It’s too stupid to be true.”

“He shouldn’t’ve done that. Nobody should poke their nose into the man of Chiba Castle’s affairs,” Kaku-san said. “This is a story my boss at the mansion (Sir Nagaokasado) told me. Right after that man moved from Kokura,⁽¹²⁾ there was a drinking party in the ballroom in the castle. Don’t know if it was in front of the lord. Anyway, one of the important retainers brought up the thing at Ganryū Island, the fight with Sasaki Kojirō,⁽¹³⁾ you see... ‘According to what I’ve heard,’ the important retainer said, ‘I’ve heard that Kojirō’s sword slightly cut your head at the fight, but is it true?’... He probably just asked to amuse everyone at the party, but a fierce look came over the man of Chiba Castle. He made this fierce face, grabbed a candle stand, and went up to the retainer, saying, ‘I had a boil on my head when I was a child, so I still do not shave the top of my head,⁽¹⁴⁾ and keep my hair like this, so I do not deny that there is a mark from the boil, but when it comes to a scar from a sword cut, there is no such mark. I would like you to examine very carefully.’ And he thrust his head forward, parting his unshaven hair. How fierce his face was... the retainer went pale and said, ‘I understand, the story I have heard must have been wrong,’ but that man was unforgiving. He held the candle stand and thrust his head forward, and said, ‘you couldn’t have understood without examining carefully. Here, look carefully. Examine very closely,’ he pressed the retainer. The fierceness of his attitude was inhuman, and everybody shuddered with fear.”

“Can’t believe it’s true.” Iwata shook his head again. “But it may be true. That old man flares up real easy, gets angry at silly little things.”

“The man of Chiba Castle is that kind of person. Nobody should mess around with him. Your old man shouldn’t’ve done that.” Kaku-san looked up at the sky. A raindrop hit his forehead. Drip! A raindrop hit the scar on his forehead. It had started raining.

4.

The body was laid in the place of honor in the room.

The incense smoke was so dense that the candlelight was blurry. The room was perfectly tidy, and there was no furniture but for a sutra table. A branch from a ritual herb tree and a smoking incense burner were on the table. The incense burner seemed too big, and its emissions too plentiful. It was chokingly smoky inside the room. Likely to suppress the bloody smell of the body.

Iwata was watching over his father’s body. It was laid on a new straw mat and covered by a kimono bearing the family crest. Since there was no pillow, his head bent backwards, and his sharp chin stuck out. His face looked as if he were sleeping, and there was no trace of suffering... There were purple spots on the side of his nose and forehead, and his teeth were visible between his lips. While the color of his dry skin was grotesque, there was no trace of suffering... Iwata’s older brother, Kazuma, was sitting to his right, wearing a formal kimono bearing the family crest and *hakama* pants that were neatly folded around his legs.

Kazuma was twenty-five years old. His face resembled his father’s; his skin was dark and he had a pointy chin. His eyebrows were habitually knitted, leaving a deep wrinkle. The sharp eyes and wrinkle between the eyebrows tellingly reflected an irritable and rash nature like his father’s.

(11) A sobriquet for Musashi.

(12) A town in present-day Fukuoka.

(13) This refers to the famous sword duel between Musashi and his rival, Sasaki Kojirō, at Ganryū Island in the Kanmon Straits between the main island and Kyūshū.

(14) Shaving the top of one’s head (the *sakayaki* part) was a common hairstyle for samurai.

“What a fucking unfair thing he’s done!” Iwata said. “It wasn’t fair to slice him up like that. That man is a so-called master swordsman, and this old man was just a cook.”

“The way of the sword is unsparing.”

“That man is a so-called master swordsman or something. Nobody surrounded him with bows and guns. Just one lowly cook attempted to test his skill. He could’ve just sidestepped him, or thrown him. There’s no reason he had to slay him like that.”

“How can a nobody like you understand Sir Miyamoto’s heart,” Kazuma said coldly. “The way of the sword is unsparing, and Father infringed on its dignity.”

“I cannot understand that man’s heart, you say?”

“Sir Miyamoto is called the ‘saint of the sword.’”

“You say I cannot understand that man’s heart,” Iwata said. “Cut the crap. I don’t care if he’s called the master or the ‘saint of the sword.’ For me, he’s just a poseur, an ostentatious poseur, and a *lunatic* made of showiness.”

Iwata told Kazuma the story he heard from Kaku-san, the one about how Musashi bullied the retainer to examine his head. Since he hadn’t listened carefully, the story might have been a bit mixed up, but he still had a vivid impression of Musashi menacing the retainer with a fierce look.

“It’s the same for this story: He could’ve just said that the rumor was wrong and let it go. But ’cause he’s a poseur, he can’t do that. Held a candle stand, shoved his head forward and told that guy to examine it. Because of his showiness he can’t let things go, and that’s why he cut down our old man. This isn’t about dignity and shit. He got pissed ’cause a nobody like our old man jumped him. He got pissed, and he cut down our old man, ’cause he couldn’t let it go thanks to his showiness and this ‘master swordsman’ crap. That guy’s just a showy *lunatic* with a sharp object.”

“Truly, a vulgar man’s opinions are vulgar,” Kazuma sneered. “Father made an error, but he still understood the spirit of the sword. Someone like you would never understand it. I’ve heard that, when they found him, as he was dying, Father said he was satisfied.”

“Said he was satisfied, our old man?”

“Father discussed Sir Miyamoto’s skill with his colleagues, arguing that, no matter how great Sir Miyamoto was, he could not possibly deal with a sudden attack. But there were many others who thought Sir Miyamoto could, so Father attacked Sir Miyamoto to test his skill. And then he understood Sir Miyamoto’s true skill. Having seen it, Father would have been satisfied at heart, even though he was slain.”

“Did you really say that? Said you were satisfied?” Iwata said to the body of his father in a choked, nasal voice. “Were you really satisfied, old man?... So pathetic that you weren’t upset to get killed over such a stupid thing as skill with a sword?... You died saying you were satisfied?... I didn’t know you were such a pathetic fool.”

“Stand up, now,” Kazuma said. “Your vulgar words disgrace my father. Bid farewell and leave.”

“I haven’t seen anybody yet.”

“I called you here to disown you in front of my father’s body. Now that I have disowned you, you’re not needed here.”

“I can’t even see Ma, you say?”

“I certainly will not let you see my mother, and not even my sister Kofuji.”

“Which is it – Ma says she won’t see me, or you won’t let me?”

“Ask yourself the reason why.” Kazuma looked at Iwata menacingly with sharp eyes. “A person who is less than a beggar has no parents or siblings in the house of Suzuki.”

“A beggar,... you say I’m worse than a beggar?” Iwata bristled with anger. He clenched his fists, but then said “alright,” nodded, and smiled. “Fine, if that’s what you think. I was just thinking about becoming a beggar. It’s true. When I was walking along the bank of the Tsuboi River, I thought about becoming a beggar, no lie. I think I’ll really go become a beggar once and for all.”

“If you must speak nonsense, go outside and do so. Leave.”

“Yes, I’m decided. I will become a beggar once and for all.”

Iwata stood up, and looked at his father’s body again. He said to the body, “Sorry old man, you can’t get in my

way this time. Not my bro here, either. If I'm disowned, we're not related anymore. See ya."

5.

"I wanted to be a cook."

"You can come to my place," Kaku-san said. "I can deal with one more person."

"I'd like to work as a cook." Iwata took a bamboo stick. It was one of eight he'd made splitting an eighty-foot green bamboo piece. Iwata stuck one end in the ground, bent it in an arch, and stuck the other end in the ground. One by one, he erected bamboo sticks like this, at six-inch intervals. "My old man wanted to make me a samurai," Iwata said while anchoring a bamboo stick. "That old man was a cook, and I took after my old man. I like to dress fish and birds, cut them up, and grill or stew them really nice. Just give me a knife and some seasoning; I don't want anything else, and I'm sure to do a better job than anybody else... But my old man told me this: 'It is a despicable job to fix food for somebody else, and it is bad enough for me to take this job, so you should become a samurai by all means.'"

"You never told me that."

"He said I should become a samurai by all means," Iwata said. "After some quarrel with him, I ran away from home and worked as a live-in cook in Yodo-ya. I'd often gone there since I was a kid, and did what I liked in the kitchen. My old man had a lotta pull in that inn, so they used to call me 'young master' and let me do whatever I wanted; I learned a lot of things then. And I could imitate my old man's Nijō-style knife handling I learned from spying and eavesdropping. So the Yodo-ya people weren't entirely unwilling to hire me; they said they could take care of me if I'd be patient."

"Secretly from your family?"

"Secretly from my family." Iwata took another bamboo stick. "But my old man found out after half a year or so. He got mad and yelled and screamed at the master of Yodo-ya. With nothing else to do, I beat feet from Yodo-ya, and worked at Shimada-ya in Hanabata as a live-in cook. Worked there for about a year, and my old man came the same as before. If you're on Lord Hosokawa's cook's shit list, your inn will go out of business. So I lost my job in Hanabata as well."

A structure of bamboo arches was complete, a semi-cylindrical frame about four feet tall, by three feet wide, by six feet long. Iwata examined it, whether it stood solidly on the ground, whether it was level. Then he took a straw mat, put it on the frame, and lashed it to the bamboo sticks with a rope. He opened holes in the straw mat with his finger, pushed the rope through, and wrapped it around the bamboo sticks. Repeating this, Iwata said, "Hashimoto after Hanabata, and then Ibuki-ya in Kyōmachi. I thought he would give up chasing me, but he didn't. That old man came and yelled. When I lost the job in Ibuki-ya, it was me who gave up. He won."

"You never told me that." Kaku-san said. "I thought you screwed everything up because of women. In Hanabata, and in Yodo-ya... and also Okita in Ibuki-ya. I misunderstood, thought it was about women."

"Well, now I've screwed up about women too. Without a kitchen knife, I'm trash. I don't have any skills and I can't even be a *yakuza*, right big bro?" said Iwata. "Okita told me that, and I think you told her this, but, gambling is not my thing at all. Well, that's totally right. Not just gambling; I can't get excited about anything. I can't put my heart into anything else but kitchen knives and cooking."

"Problem's solved now, then. Nobody's gonna come and yell at you anymore."

"No, it doesn't work that way. I've tried, but they all say they should 'honor the late master.' Gimme a break. Even my own fucking brother, my own flesh and blood, told me I'm worse than a beggar. The women deserted me, and I'm a bum anywhere I go. You'd understand, Kaku-san, my big bro. Even I feel like giving up on myself."

"You can come to my place," Kaku-san said again. "I really can handle one more person, Iwa-san."

"Thanks, but please let me do what I wanna do. I'm tired of society and people all together." Iwata continued affixing the straw mat to the frame. "Stupid old man, satisfied to get killed. The way of the sword is solemn, and a killer is a master and the 'saint of the sword.' Nobody wonders why. Samurai are great, and cooks are vulgar... Screw 'em all, I'm tired of everything. I'll become a beggar, and I'll laugh at the whole world from this hut."

"You say that, but I don't think you can bear this for long."

“I’ll laugh at them,” Iwata said, pushing the rope through the straw mat. “It’s my turn to laugh.”

Kaku-san shook his head. The scar on his forehead glistened dimly. The arch-shaped hut approached completion little by little.

6.

On the road to Suizenji, east of the castle town, there was a bridge over the Shirakawa River. The feudal lord’s second mansion, called Jōju-en,⁽¹⁵⁾ was in Suizenji, and there were many second houses of important retainers along the way. Naturally, the road saw heavy traffic.

A patrol officer discovered a newly-built beggar’s hut about sixty feet past the bridge on the right side, on grassland about three feet lower than the road. Since the feudal lord passed along this road to Suizenji, as did many important retainers, the road should be kept clean. Tolerating a beggar here was out of the question. The patrolman got angry. If he let it go, he would be blamed. The patrolman jumped down from the road, walked in front of the beggar’s hut, and banged his six-foot staff on the ground. “Hey, come out!” the patrolman bellowed. “You can’t make such a thing here! How outrageous! Come out, scoundrel!”

Iwata came out. He had a stubbly beard and the top of his head was unshaven, and his hair was unkempt. His face and limbs were already filthy, and his kimono was dirty and oily, and very wrinkled.

“Where did you come from, beggar?”

“I’m a local, sir,” Iwata said sullenly. “My father died, but he was Suzuki Chōdayū, the cook. I’m his second son, Iwata.”

“Suzuki Chōdayū... Mr. Suzuki’s second son.” The patrolman’s eyes grew wide. He gazed at Iwata’s face with astonishment. His mouth dropped open, and his dirty brown teeth appeared. “I remember seeing you, you’re the second son of Mr. Suzuki,” the patrolman said to himself. Then he suddenly made a solemn face, and nodded. “Indeed, I see.” From the look in his eyes, the officer seemed touched. “That master has a second house in Kokubu, I see, I see.”

Iwata remained silent with a sullen look.

“Oh, I’m sorry to have disturbed you.” The patrol officer bowed shallowly. “In that case, I don’t mind. I can explain it my boss. Really dignified, with that reason. Please, ... I will go back now. Excuse me.” The patrol officer bowed again, and left, carrying his six-foot staff humbly.

“What the hell?” Iwata spat. “What a weirdo. What’s going on, and what the hell did he want?”

As Iwata watched the patrolman walk away, the officer turned at the bridge and bowed at Iwata. Iwata bowed back reflexively, then came to his senses, felt vexed, and spat again.

What’s gonna happen to me?

Iwata hadn’t noticed that this was the road to Suizenji until he heard the patrol officer yell at him. He thought he’d be rousted for sure. He really couldn’t complain about being removed from *this* road. But the patrol officer also said strange things. Things like “In that case, I don’t mind,” and “really dignified.” Besides, he apologized and even bowed.

“What was he thinking?” Iwata scratched his head. Then he yawned, and crept back into the hut. “Hmmm. It doesn’t make any sense.”

Things that didn’t make sense kept happening. The next morning, around eight, the retired master of Yodo-ya Inn came to visit Iwata, bringing a servant with a nested box full of food. The retired master was already in his seventies, bent, and hard of hearing. Since he was once fat, the skin of his chin and cheeks was flabby, and drooped around his chin. He was unsteady on his feet, so he walked cautiously with the help of a cane.

“Just as they said,” the retired master said, watching Iwata. His voice was hoarse, and his speech was slurred with age. “It is true, indeed. I thought I couldn’t trust what people said, but then I thought, ‘well, it might be true, he

(15) 成趣園. Although the original publication in *Shūkan Asahi Magazine* (March 1952) does not have any *furigana* for these *kanji*, some versions, such as the one in *Yamamoto Shūgorō Zenshū* 3 published by Kōdansha in 1964 have *furigana* that read “Seishu-en,” which seems to be incorrect.

is a samurai's son,' thought 'blood will out when the time comes'..."

"Densuke, gimme that thing," the retired master yelled at the servant.

Iwata watched them silently; the retired master could not hear what other people said. He'd been having one-sided conversations for a long time now. He was Iwata's old acquaintance; they were congenial when Iwata often visited Yodo-ya's kitchen as a child. They were close until Iwata's father stormed into Yodo-ya in a rage.

"Give it to the young master," the retired master said to the servant.

Then, he looked over Iwata intently with his bleary eyes. "I see, just as I thought, Sir Suzuki's son, you are. Blood will out. Samurai truly are indomitable. You have been different since you were a child."

"Why're you bein' so slow, Densuke, just give it to the young master, will ya?" the master yelled again.

Iwata received the nested box full of food. As he talked, the retired master took out something wrapped in paper and pressed it in Iwata's hand. Then he slowly doddered off with his cane, still talking. Iwata could still hear him say "Indeed, it is true" even as he neared the bridge.

"I don't get it, what's going on?"

The wrapped paper held one *ryō*⁽¹⁶⁾ worth of small gold coins. The box was full of grilled rice balls and stewed food.

"Blood will out' ... 'indomitable' ... 'when the time comes'?" Iwata was puzzled. "'Indomitable' am I? For daring to become a beggar, huh? He said, 'indeed, it is true'... This doesn't make sense, does it?"

One *ryō* was a lot of money at the time. While promptly eating the contents of the box, Iwata pondered how to use the money. As he happily daydreamed how he might spend it, he had another visitor.

Iwata came out, and found yesterday's patrolman, and there was also an older samurai behind him. He was a small skinny man, and his mustached face looked bony and dismal. Guessing from his fine dress and a hint of dignity, he must have been the head of the patrol. *So I will finally be kicked out*, Iwata thought.

"I'm sorry for yesterday," the patrolman said. "This is the captain of the patrol, Sir Kinoshita Shuzen."

Shuzen stepped forward. His face was gloomy. He bowed a little, and said in a low voice, "You are Mr. Suzuki Chōdayū's second son, are you not?"

Iwata nodded silently. Shuzen also nodded, and his mustache twitched to one side. He started to say something, hesitated, and coughed. "Good," Shuzen said. "I will bear responsibility for you. Should someone give you a hard time – though I don't think anyone would – please tell them you have permission from the captain of the patrol... Yes, please tell them that. I will take responsibility." And then he lowered his voice, "Please, do what you will... do your best, please." Then, he said he had a little token to offer, and gave Iwata something wrapped in paper, and departed with a gloomy face together with the patrolman. There was a one-*bu*⁽¹⁷⁾ coin wrapped in the paper.

Iwata looked up at the sky. "They won't kick me out," he muttered vacantly. "That man will take responsibility, no matter what people say... plus one *bu*. I wonder if I'm bewitched."

Iwata sunk into thought. He was full of debt and completely neglected social obligations, he had nowhere to go, and no one cared for him except Kaku-san. Iwata was a dreg of society. Kazuma, his older brother, berated him as worse than a beggar. This was Iwata's standing until just yesterday. Until just yesterday...

7.

"But suddenly everything's fucking changing." Iwata knitted his brow. Why were things changing? It couldn't be because he became a beggar, but, empirically, that was the only plausible reason. *It is true*, Iwata thought, *that it's not easy to become a beggar, not anyone can just up and do it. In order to be a beggar, one has to be determined to be one. It takes courage. To become a beggar may be evidence of an indomitable spirit.* "Fuck! It may be, it may not." Iwata scratched his head. "Even that doesn't make any fucking sense. But I can't help it. And it's good for me, so I'll just let it be."

(16) *Ryō* was the largest denomination of gold coin used in the Edo period. The value of a *ryō* differed depending on the time and what goods or services one uses as a standard of comparison, but it was a large sum of money. For someone like Iwata, it was probably around a year's wages.

(17) One *bu* is one quarter of a *ryō*.

It was still puzzling.

There came the master of Hashimoto Inn. This one also brought a nested of box full of food, two *bu* worth of gold, and a rug, though an old one, for Iwata to lay out to sleep on. “No, don’t say anything, I understand completely,” the master of Hashimoto said. “I understand completely, so I won’t say anything, either. Please don’t hesitate to tell me when you need something. I might stand out too much, so I’ll send someone, I’ll send you someone every day.” Then he said in a lower voice, “Please do your best, please...”

Iwata silently accepted what was given. It seemed to be better if he kept silent. The master of Hashimoto left, nodding to himself.

For five days after that, there was one visitor after another. There were people Iwata knew, and there were people Iwata didn’t know. There were more people Iwata didn’t know, and they were mostly samurai. Everyone greeted Iwata politely, and left something or other for him. They left something, money, or other things... People who didn’t bring anything looked sorry, and Iwata felt like he lost out as well.

“Oh fuck, I’ve gotta expand the hut,” Iwata said, looking around. “There are so many gifts it won’t all fit. I’d better reject shabby gifts from now on.”

On the evening of the fifth day, Iwata counted the money he had received. There was about seven *ryō*, three *bu* and two *shu*.⁽¹⁸⁾ It was the first time in his life he’d had such a sum. He’d never before imagined that he could have almost eight *ryō* at once. “The saying ‘one cannot quit being a beggar once one begs for three days,’ is so fucking true,” Iwata sighed. “Indeed, that old adage is no lie. I really can’t quit being a beggar anymore.”

He heard a voice outside right then. “Oh, Iwa-san –” It was a woman’s voice. “Are you in there, dear Iwa-san?”

Iwata hid the money and went out slowly. Okita of Ibuki-ya was standing there hesitantly, holding a parcel wrapped in cloth. She was blushing, moles and all. Iwata kept silent; silence was becoming a habit, and came naturally to him. Okita stole a glance up at Iwata, twisting the knot of the parcel she was holding.

“I am so sorry about the other day.” She lowered her eyes. “I was jealous; I told you something I didn’t really mean, out of jealousy. Please forgive me, dear Iwa-san.”

Iwata did not say anything. It seemed better if he kept silent, especially on this occasion. Okita was downcast and almost started crying, but she squatted down and opened the cloth parcel. There was a white flower petal on her hair. From behind, her neck was unexpectedly long and supple-looking. She probably had put powder on; her neck was supple and vividly white in the rusty light of the twilight.

“I brought a change of kimono and underwear for you,” Okita said in a sweet voice. “Please take off the dirty ones, I will take them away and wash them for you. Is this *obi* okay for you?”

Then she took out small things such as *tabi* socks, sandals, tissues, a razor, nail scissors, and so forth. Woman as she was, she chose the things Iwata would need right away.

“Now, please change.” Okita held the kimono she brought, and stood behind Iwata. Iwata loosened his *obi* belt silently. Helping him with his kimono from behind, Okita suddenly, impulsively wrapped her arms around him. “You’ll be alright, right, Iwa-san?” Holding him, her hands trembled. Her voice fluttered, and her breath was hot on the nape of his neck. The scent of her skin and perfume smotheringly enveloped Iwata. “You’ll be alright, right? You’ll do it well, right?” Okita said. “Your opponent is not an ogre nor a demon, he’s just a person; you can see things through and take revenge, right, Iwa-san?”

“What!?” Iwata was surprised. “What the hell you talkin’ ’bout!? Taking revenge?”

“I’m sorry, my mistake.”

“What the hell?”

“Please forgive me.” Okita pressed her cheek against Iwata’s back. “I’m nervous, I got carried away. I don’t know what I said. I won’t say that again, and I will never say that to anyone, okay? Sorry. Please change quickly.”

For the first time, everything started making sense. Not all at once, but as Iwata sat on the grass that had started to grow behind his hut, gazing across the darkening moor, everything coalesced, crystallized, and the “facts” gradu-

(18) One *shu* is one sixteenth of a *ryō*.

ally came into focus: *Iwata was on a quest for vengeance.*

That's it. People believed that Iwata planned to take revenge for his father. We commonly hear stories of those who become beggars in furtherance of a vengeance plot. People say that it is more common than not for those seeking revenge to become beggars. "Revenge" and "beggar" are almost a matched pair.

That patrolman came up with this idea first. "That master has a second house in Kokubu," he said. There was a place called Kokubu on the way from the hut to Suizenji, and Miyamoto Musashi's second home was there. He usually lived in his main house in the city, which was called Chiba Castle. That is why he was sometimes called "Sir Chiba Castle." But it was not uncommon for him to spend time at his second house. That strengthened the patrol officer's misunderstanding. He firmly believed it. He could not conceive of any other reason for Iwata to become a beggar.

"That's it, that's it, that's the fucking reason!"

Iwata found it funny. Five days of constant visitors, their polite attitudes, and the way they spoke, gifts and encouragement. They believed it. They believed that Iwata was going to take revenge for his slain father, that Iwata was going to take revenge on Miyamoto Musashi. They believed that this was part of Iwata's vengeance plot. "So funny!" Iwata started laughing. "Morons! They are all fucking idiots!" Iwata cackled. The more he laughed, the funnier it seemed. He laughed until his belly hurt.

However, suddenly he stopped laughing. He stared ahead. The muscle motion of laughter continued, but it no longer came out as laughter. Iwata jumped up. "Oh fuck! This is no laughing matter! It's fucking awful!" Iwata shuddered. "What if that showy *lunatic* comes? What if he comes and says 'let's fight,' glaring at me with his horrible big eyes? Shit! Oh hell no! I've gotta run away!"

Iwata jumped into the hut, trembling. He was muttering to himself while grabbing his things. "Just as I thought. It was too good to be true; so good it was like a dream. Damn it, that showy *lunatic*! I was happy, but he's ruined it."

Iwata came out from the hut. He had a small parcel and his kimono was tucked up. It was already dark. He looked around, hesitated, then briskly set out east on the road towards Suizenji.

8.

"I get the gist," Kaku-san said. "I accompanied my master to Kokura. He wanted me to stay, so I stayed for half a month, and I just got back late last night."

"Well, I haven't finished, I'm almost to the funny part."

"So, you didn't run away?"

"I didn't," Iwata said. "I started running away, but turned back half way. I had second thoughts. Between you and me, bro, there's no other way I can have such a fucking great life. 'No way I can give this up. There must be some way of getting out of this without running away,' I thought."

Young grass had proliferated behind the shabby hut. It was especially thick where Iwata and Kaku-san were sitting, and comfortable.

"I suddenly realized that he is a tremendous fucking show-off," Iwata said. "He wouldn't come. That poseur wouldn't come on his own. He would wait. He must be waiting for *me* to attack *him*."

"Yeah, that makes sense."

"Better yet, he is called a 'master.' He is an exceptional master, people say," Iwata grinned. "Which means, I can't just kill him. Maybe I couldn't wait for eighteen years like those Soga brothers,⁽¹⁹⁾ but society won't get impatient with me for a couple of years. They would support me for a couple of years, don't you think, big bro?"

"You're right. No doubt you're right."

"Yes, I am." Iwata shrugged his shoulders. "And things are going as I thought. First of all, that old fellow moved into his second house."

"The man of Chiba Castle?"

(19) "The Vengeance of the Soga Brothers" is one of the most famous vengeance stories in Japanese history from the medieval period. It was remade into a fictionalized story, and adapted into popular literature, theater, and art in the Edo period.

“That Miyamoto Musashi, showy old Niten⁽²⁰⁾ guy. He probably heard a rumor, and the day after I ran away and came back, he moved into his second house, and, since then, he passes along this road every day. Going to the castle in the morning, returning home in the evening; he passes along this road twice a day.”

“Aren’t you worried?”

“Not at all. I watch for him from inside the hut, and then—” Iwata started giggling. “And then, the old fellow comes, from this way in the morning, from that way in the evening. He has seven, eight attendants with him, but the old man walks way ahead of them near this hut. He makes the attendant samurai stay as far as fifty yards behind, comes way ahead alone, and stops suddenly and completely in front of the hut. He doesn’t turn his head this way. He stares forward and stays still. He stands rigidly still for about ten counts.”

“‘Come if you’re ready,’ he means?”

“‘Come if you’re ready,’ he means. It’s hilarious. That pose he makes is pure, distilled showiness. And he bothered to move to his second house because of his showiness, to ‘give me a chance,’ heh, heh!” Iwata rubbed his hands. “There’s no mistaking it, just as I thought, he won’t strike the first blow. Whatever happens, he could never do that. So I’m damn sure I’ll be fine.”

“How about the others?”

“That’s also fine. They tell me not to hurry. Everyone is like ‘I support you,’ and ‘Sir Miyamoto is the world famous master. Don’t hurry. Haste makes waste.’ Well, between you and me, bro, they’re playing into my hands.” Iwata smiled, and slapped his knee. “Oh, I have something good. Yodo-ya sent me a sea bream. I also have *sake*, so please have a drink.”

“But, hey, the sun is still high.” Kaku-san protested.

“It’ll get dark while we drink. The old fellow will come soon. That pose is worth seeing, and somebody’ll come to serve *sake* when it gets dark.”

“Someone’s coming? Don’t scare me like that.”

“It’s not worth freaking out over.” Iwata stood up and went into the hut. “They’re all chicks you know, big bro. Okita, Ohan, the one from Hanabata, Oyone... That bunch who all dumped me are totally fighting over me nowadays. Heh, I wonder what Lord Hosokawa thinks of that.”

Kaku-san plucked a leaf. It was a yew leaf. Chewing on the leaf, Kaku-san looked up at the sky, narrowed his eyes, and muttered in a low voice, “Society is strange, indeed. You can never tell what’ll happen next.” Then he said in a loud voice, “It looks like it is indeed your turn to laugh.”

9.

Iwata was happy. It was a definite happiness. Every circumstance supported Iwata’s happiness. He was on a quest to avenge his father. His target was a world-famous master, a peerless expert of the sword. While Iwata was a son of a cook, disowned, alone and unaided. His target was an invited master of the feudal lord, the governor of Ecchū, and was surrounded by numerous students. Nevertheless, Iwata would take revenge. Society sympathized with him, and respected him. Society looked forward to “the time,” and would support him until then. People always protect the contestants in order to see the best match. The contestants would surely be protected till the day of the match. Iwata was in the position of being protected.

Iwata’s popularity had increased markedly since that man moved to his second house; “The time” had drawn near. The avenger and his target saw each other twice per day. The attacker and the attacked saw each other twice per day, about twenty feet apart. The match had already started. Moreover, society did not rush Iwata. The bigger the expectations for the match, the longer people hope it lasts.

— “Don’t rush, don’t.”

— “Just take your time to do it right.”

So society said. The target was not the sort who would run away, and he was a well-known master. “Society supports you, so there’s no need to rush,” they said. They secretly brought things for him, and always left quickly.

⁽²⁰⁾ “Niten” is the name of the style of swordsmanship that Musashi perfected, and thus refers to Musashi himself.

Since the enemy was an invited master of the feudal lord, they couldn't have openly protected Iwata. So they came secretly, leaving goods and money, and always left quickly. They never stayed too long, and were never too vexing.

Iwata was completely free except for a short moment twice per day, in the morning and in the evening. He could do whatever he wanted. There was no one to give him a lecture, there was no one to keep an eye on him. He had more than enough money and goods, and they were bound to keep increasing. "Fucking awesome!"... But he wasn't stupid. He was a little puffed up at first, but he had Kaku-san as his adviser, and he had the sense to take Kaku-san's advice. He didn't waste money. He tightened his budget. He saved all the money he could, and he sold any extra goods and saved that money as well.

"Expect this will last half a year at most," Kaku-san said. "It won't last any longer. Run away if you think you're in trouble. When that happens, money is the only thing you can depend on." Iwata followed this advice as well. And now, in the beginning of fall, the money he saved had grown to nearly one hundred *ryō*.

"Fucking awesome." Iwata rubbed his hands. "Now I can run away anytime I want. I can go wherever I want, north or south, and yes, if there is any inn for sale, I will buy it, and I will show off my skill as a cook. Yeah, my skilled technique as a cook. I will always stay in the kitchen, and leave the customers in the hands of my wife. Yeah... my wife... I guess it should be Okita, after all."

The women had been visiting patiently. The one from Hanabata gave up, but Ohan, Okita, and Oyone kept coming. Okita was the most earnest. She even came late at night and got jealous and cried when it looked like another woman had visited earlier. Her looks, too, were the best of the three, and her hospitality skills had the signature dignity of Ibuki-ya.

"Okita it is, I should say," Iwata muttered. "She would not let customers get away. She has a knack for business, and she's neither too young nor too old, well – Oh, here he comes."

Iwata came out of the hut.

It already felt like autumn in August. The day was still long, and the heat was still severe, but signs of fall could be felt in the color of the sky and the wind in the morning and evening, especially at dusk. It was around dusk. Iwata sat beside the hut. At some point, it had grown into a custom. The straw mat was spread on the left of the hut facing the road. Iwata sat down on it, holding a sword in his left hand, and putting his right hand on his knee.

Iwata had put on considerable weight. His fair cheeks were plump, and his appearance had become much more sophisticated, since he shaved every day. He had transformed almost beyond recognition.

That man came from the castle town. He had already crossed the bridge, and was in the shade. This side of the road was low-lying grassland, but the other side of the road was higher, and thickets were scattered here and there, so the road became shady in the afternoon. The man walked through the shade towards Iwata.

"Square-shouldered way of walking, as usual," Iwata murmured bemusedly. "Does he walk like that all the time? Or just when people are watching him? Wouldn't he get tired?"

The man had already arrived. Alone. The seven attendants trailed him by about thirty yards. The man was already in his sixties. Though he was skinny, he was also muscular; his body was bony and tough. His skin was dark, and his eyebrows were low, as if they were covering his eyes. His eyes were sharp slits that glittered under his eyebrows like a hawk's. He always looked squarely forward, but he didn't miss anything in his field of vision. Because he shut his mouth tightly, a deep wrinkle formed in his forehead. This wrinkle sometimes tightened firmly, showing his inner tension.

His unshaven head had some white hairs. His mustache was black. Though it wasn't glossy, it was black, if thin. He wore a casual unlined summer kimono of rough hemp dyed pale yellow. The hem was very long, and it almost covered the instep of his feet. He walked very quietly, and the long hem didn't flutter at all. The hem was always stroking the instep. The man was walking that quietly. He was already right in front of the hut.

This is the part where he stiffens, Iwata thought.

The man stopped. His waist, on which he wore only a short sword, settled into a stable position, while his loosely-balled fists hung gingerly at his sides. His eyes stared squarely forward. His whole body was a lump of tense nerves, yet, at the same time, fluid. Fluid to the utmost, yet tense without fail.

One, two, ... seven... nine... Iwata counted silently.

That man didn’t move at all. It was an enjoyable show for Iwata. The man was prepared for danger, standing before a threat to his life. His stance was charged with potential to shift to counter any kind of attack. It was the excellent posture of a peerless master. For his part, Iwata did nothing, did not even think about doing anything, it was too absurd. However, that man was prepared for danger. With his mythical stance, he was confronting a threat.

Twelve, thirteen, ... nineteen...

While counting, Iwata thought, *What would Kaku-san say if he saw this?*

That man started walking. The man thought that he could start walking by now. At a quiet pace, staring forward, the man started walking slowly. As for the man himself, he also looked somewhat satisfied.

“Heh, doesn’t know he’s my entertainment,” Iwata murmured. “Look at that pose, so fucking proud of himself.”

10.

“Mr. Suzuki! May I be admitted into the presence of Mr. Suzuki?”

Iwata jumped up. Jumped up and rubbed his eyes. Day had broken, and it was already bright inside the hut.

“Right away,” he answered. “I’m coming right away.”

Iwata tightened his *obi* belt. His body shuddered. It was already late enough in the year that it was cold in the morning. However, it wasn’t only on account of the cold that he shuddered. Nobody ever visited his hut this early in the morning and woke him up so augustly. Something unusual must have happened, something that would force him to run away, he thought. He combed his hair, straightened up his kimono carefully, and came out of the hut.

There was a samurai in a ceremonial kimono outside. Behind him was a servant waiting with a clothes box. The samurai’s face was pale and blanched, and his lips were also pale and dry.

“You must be Mr. Suzuki,” the samurai said, “I am Ōta Kurōdo, an attendant of Miyamoto’s.”

“Yes, I am Suzuki Iwata.”

“As you may have known, my master was on his sickbed, and he finally passed away late last night.”

Iwata opened his mouth. It was true he had not seen that man passing along the road for a while, and Iwata thought he might be sick, but Iwata had never imagined he might die.

“Wherefore, my master has a gift for you.” The samurai turned back, opened the clothes box, and took out a kimono. It was that unlined summer kimono of rough hemp dyed pale yellow, the long-hemmed kimono that the man was always wearing.

“My master said on his death bed,” the samurai intoned, “It was admirable that you sought this Niten’s life to avenge your father. I intended to die by your hand if you were able, but disease claims me now before your chance to strike. You will no doubt be mortified. Yet, I cannot do anything about it now. On this account, I will grant you the kimono I have worn; have your revenge on me in accordance with the story of Yojō from the Shin dynasty.⁽²¹⁾ This is what my master said.”

“Oh, that is...” Iwata became restless.

“I understand that this cannot be enough to satisfy you, but would you please kindly accept this gift in sympathy for my master’s intentions?”

“Oh, yes, of course, of course.” Iwata received the kimono. Not comprehending what was going on, he accepted it and bowed. The samurai named Ōta Kurōdo bowed as well.

“So...” Iwata looked dazed. “In short, that man died, right?”

“I sincerely sympathize with you.”

“He succumbed to illness, you say?”

“I sincerely sympathize with you.”

The samurai bowed respectfully again, and departed with the servant, as if he was trying to leave this grief-stricken person alone as soon as possible.

“Hmpf, he up and died.” Iwata stared at the kimono. “He died, and, well, there’s no helping that, but what the hell is this? So strange. What does he want me to do with it? He meant to give it to me as a memento?” He scratched

(21) This translation uses the Japanese reading of Chinese proper nouns, such as Yojō, Shin dynasty, etc., for consistency.

his head.

“Wait, he said something strange, something like ‘in accordance with the story of Yojō.’ Told me to take revenge in accordance with the story of Yojō, he surely said so,... What’s Yojō, anyway? Yojō... Said silly phony stuff like that. What does he want me to do with it – Oh?”

Iwata looked up. The captain of the patrol (from the other day) was coming down the road. That captain named Kinoshita Shuzen. The captain had heard the news. He was on his way back to his office after learning about it at Miyamoto’s house. Shuzen approached Iwata and bowed.

“I have no words, but I sympathize with you,” Shuzen said. “I heard about the kimono he gave you. It is fitting for the great Sir Niten to think of the story of Yojō. How considerate a gift it is. Please, sir, take revenge through it as you wish.”

“My mind is too occupied.” Iwata was quick-witted. “So I can’t even remember the story. I can’t think of anything right now.”

“Indeed, that’s understandable,” Shuzen nodded. “The story is about Yojō’s slashing his enemy’s clothes. Since that famous Yojō in the Shin dynasty could not take revenge for his former master, Chihaku, instead he slashed the clothes of his enemy, Jōshi, and took revenge at last. It is about that renowned incident.”

“Oh.” Iwata’s face contorted. “Oh, please leave me alone, please, please go away now, please.”

Shuzen was moved to tears with sympathy, started to say something, hesitated, bowed in silence, and left hastily.

Iwata leapt into the hut. Leapt in, tossed aside the kimono, and fell over laughing. “That old geezer, that showy old geezer, pretentious till the day he died, till he died!” He laughed so hard he was taken with a fit of coughing. “The story of Yojō! He couldn’t even die without being pretentious! Still showy and putting on airs... with that stiff-ass pose... Oh man, it’s too funny, I can’t take it, it hurts, help!” Iwata shrieked. His laughter still didn’t stop. He rolled all over the floor of the hut.

11.

In Kyōmachi, the castle town of Kumamoto, an inn called “Yojō” opened for business. Miyamoto Musashi’s kimono can be found at this inn, and is shown to customers who wish to see it. The unlined kimono is made of rough hemp dyed pale yellow, and bears three sword slashes. It was slashed by the master of the inn. The master of the inn slashed the kimono three times to take revenge for his father, in accordance with the story of Yojō. The inn’s proper name is “Iwakita,” taken from the names of the master and his wife. But, because of the kimono, people started calling it “Yojō.” There’s nothing more to it. The inn has prospered because of it.