

# A TAIWANESE LITERATURE READER

EDITED BY

Nikky Lin

**Literature from Taiwan Series**

in collaboration with

the National Museum of Taiwan Literature and  
National Taiwan Normal University



**C A M B R I A  
P R E S S**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword .....	vii
Introduction	
<i>Nikky Lin</i> .....	ix
Chapter 1: A Lever Scale	
<i>Loā Hô (trans. Darryl Sterk)</i> .....	1
Chapter 2: The Newspaper Boy	
<i>Yang K'uei (trans. Chris Wen-chao Li)</i> .....	15
Chapter 3: Autumn Letter	
<i>Zhu Dianren (trans. Darryl Sterk)</i> .....	67
Chapter 4: The Town Planted with Papaya Trees	
<i>Long Yingzong (trans. Kyle Shernuk)</i> .....	81
Chapter 5: Head and Body	
<i>Wu Yong-fu (trans. Edward Vickers)</i> .....	145
Chapter 6: Sweeping Torrent	
<i>Wang Chang-hsiung (trans. Chris Wen-chao Li)</i> .....	159
About the Editor and Translators .....	199

## CHAPTER 2

# THE NEWSPAPER BOY

*Yang K'uei<sup>1</sup>*

*(trans. Chris Wen-chao Li)*

1

“Now that’s more like it!”

It was as if a burden I had been carrying around was suddenly lifted off my shoulders, just as I was about to be crushed by the debilitating weight. That was how good it felt.

The truth is, after having arrived in Tokyo almost a month ago, I was nowhere close to finding work. From early morning until late night, I would make the rounds of every employment agency in town, sorting through job ads and circling their locations on a map, which I divided into different sections to visit in turn, but up until this point, I had yet to find an employer. What’s more, with only six dollars and twenty cents<sup>2</sup> left in my pocket, I was close to depleting the thirty dollars I had

brought with me to this city. I worried too that the ten dollars I had left with my mother a month ago to feed my three young siblings would be about used up now.

It was at this moment of uncertainty, at a time when national headlines led with scare stories about the army of three million unemployed, that I chanced upon an advertisement reading “Newspaper Carrier Wanted” posted on the storefront of the Osaki<sup>3</sup> Newspaper Agency. I practically leaped for joy!

“Time to show them what I’ve got,” I told myself.

My heart was leaping as I rushed towards the entrance, then slowly pushed open the door and bowed in deference.

It was three in the afternoon. The air was ringing with the back-and-forth “swish” of the printing press as a dozen or so workers sorted the sheets into sections. All but one of the people there were busy folding papers—the exception being a bald, middle-aged man in a suit, who was sitting at his desk smoking his pipe. Seeing me enter, he removed the pipe from his lips and barked, with a puff of smoke, “Can I help you?”

“Uh, the newspaper carrier job,” I replied, pointing at the ad in the window.

“So you want to give it a try, eh?” His tone was condescending, to the point where I couldn’t quite bring myself to answer.

“Uh, yeah... if it’s still available.”

“Read,” he said, pointing to a gaggle of rules in large print posted on the wall. “If you agree to the terms, we’re good to start.”

I started reading. Rule No.1. Rule No.2. Rule No.3—I was stuck on Rule No.3, which made my jaw drop. Rule 3 stated that a deposit of ten dollars was required at the start of work, which made my head spin. I could not believe my eyes.

“So what’s it going to be?” the proprietor asked, catching me in a daze. “Are you okay with the terms or what?”

“Uh, yes—the terms seem alright—it’s just that I’m four dollars short of the deposit you require.”

Upon hearing my explanation, the owner took the time to look me up and down, then said, “Just look at you, the way you’re dressed—what a sorry little fellow you are. How can I bring myself to say no? Just promise me you’ll work twice as hard as the next guy.”

“You got it. Thank you so much!”

I followed with a deep bow, where I bent my head so low it almost touched the tips of his loafers. I removed from my shirt pocket a five-dollar bill which had been kept in a billfold, then reached for my coin purse to retrieve the remaining one dollar and twenty cents, gingerly handing the entire amount over to the boss, adding, “You have no idea how much I appreciate this!”

The boss stuffed the money into a drawer and ordered, “Come wait inside. A guy called Tanaka will show you what to do. Listen to him.”

“Yes,” I nodded giddily, happy from the bottom of my heart that I had found a job. I sat around and waited, thinking to myself, “I wonder what this Tanaka fellow is like—wouldn’t it be nice if he turned out to be that kid over there in the school uniform...”

While we were talking, the print room workers had finished stacking their newspapers and left, one by one, for their delivery routes. The huge room was now empty. I sat there quietly next to the boss, lightheaded as I imagined the lives of business celebrities who had worked their way up the corporate ladder—that would be me. Whatever it takes, I was going to make it in this world.

## 2

In winter the days were much shorter—by five o'clock darkness had descended. The boss had already locked up all the drawers and left for the day. The place was completely empty. Left alone in these unfamiliar surroundings, I wasn't quite sure what to do with myself. I stood up and walked around, then sat back down again.

Without a cent on me, I was beginning to feel hungry, cold, and abandoned. I started to wonder whether I had been cheated out of my cash and left for dead.

But of course not. The money was still in the drawer, and the desk was still sitting in this room, on the official premises of the Osaki Newspaper Agency, out of which a dozen or so newspaper carriers had just left on their paper routes. The owner of this business had just agreed to take me in—my first offer of employment in close to a month, after weeks of aimless searching—I was not dreaming. I tried hard to get these bizarre thoughts out of my head and forced myself to recount motivational stories of successful people, so as to give myself a glimmer of hope.

After an extremely lengthy wait, light began to appear at the end of the tunnel. The light was turned on by the first carrier to return from his route. Then a second carrier returned, and a third...The empty room was once again full of noise and activity, which brought me out of my reveries and back into the here and now.

I had yet to locate this Tanaka character, so I grabbed a random carrier and stammered, "Ta-naka?"

The carrier did not answer me, but instead looked upstairs and shouted, "Tet-*chan*, you there?"

"Who's asking? What do you want?" came the answer as a friendly-looking fellow in a school outfit hurried down the stairs. I was partial to those in student uniform, as I, too, hoped to eventually attend school in the city.

“Mr. Tanaka? A pleasure to meet you. I was hired today and was told by the boss you would be able to show me what to do. Anything you could tell me would be appreciated.”

As I bowed and explained my intentions, Tanaka blushed and looked away.

“Awesome,” he said. “The pleasure’s all mine.”

He seemed a little overwhelmed by my formal introduction, as if he had never been addressed this way before.

“So, then, let’s head up to the sleeping quarters,” he said. With that, he scurried up the stairs, and I followed closely behind him. The stairs led to an area that was not so much a separate story, but more an attic space, with barely enough clearance for a grown man to stand.

Prior to this, I had been staying at a run-down boarding house in the suburbs. I remember one night a group of college students came by, making disparaging remarks as they passed through our digs. “What a dump! How can you fit so many people into such a cramped space?”

Well, if that was bad, this place here was ten times worse—simply unfit for human habitation.

The tatami mats were worn bare—the few straws that were left were dark and grimy. To think, this was where we would spend the night. There were a few carriers still up, yakking in groups of twos and threes, but the majority had already turned in, tucked snugly into their blankets. There were three bodies to a blanket, lined up neatly from one end of the room to the other.

In the farming village back in Taiwan, where my father worked his own land, we weren’t exactly well off, but our living quarters were spacious. I had my own room, which was always kept clean and tidy—nothing like the fleabag I was now in. Well, I suppose, if even King David<sup>4</sup> had to “sleep in caves and holes in the ground”, then I was prepared to rough it.



As I was lost in thought, coming up with reasons to accept my lot, I was startled by the sound of sobbing coming from a corner of the room. I turned to see a fourteen or fifteen-year-old sniffing and sniveling; next to him was a man with a baritone voice trying to comfort the youth. Though I could not hear what they were saying, I found the scene a tad disturbing. It was none of my business, I know, but I couldn't help wondering what had made them so miserable.

I mean, I had just been offered a job, for God's sake—a real job—I was in seventh heaven. What could possibly be so terrible about that?

The kid's just homesick, I convinced myself. He's just young and clueless and doesn't know how to cope. With that thought, I was able to drift into slumber.

I was barely conscious when the alarm started to buzz. It was eight o'clock.

"Time for bed," Tanaka whispered. "We have a long day ahead of us. The papers come in between two and three—we all have to get up super early."

## 3

From one end of the room to the other, bodies were lined up like logs—where all these people came from, I had no idea. Tanaka picked up a blanket and motioned for me to squeeze in, together with another fellow by the name of Sato. Boy, was it cramped—I could barely move, let alone switch posture! I was reminded of how, when porcelain is packed for shipping, each item is stacked tightly against the next, eliminating the space between them, so the items would not move during transport. We were packed like sardines in a can, squeezed and flattened until there was no room to wiggle.

Which brings me, again, to how spacious my room was back in the country, and how all was spic-and-span, the main reason for which was that I had a fear of fleas.

Here, though, fleas were in every nook and corner. They were crawling up my leg, running up my waist, dancing on my stomach, and cavorting on my chest, attacking in droves, making me itch unbearably. The boarding house out in the suburbs had its fair share of fleas alright, but none as vicious as these—and back there I was at least able to sit up and scratch for a while, whereas here in this attic, where we were packed to the hilt, any movement was out of the question—I could only clench my teeth and moan. My only consolation was that I had found myself a job—the first step on my path to an illustrious career, I kept telling myself. With this in mind, the trouble with the fleas seemed trivial in comparison.

“Promise me you’ll work twice as hard as the next guy...work twice as hard, you understand?” The excitement of having found work, together with the relentless attack of vicious fleas, had conspired to deprive me of sleep. The hour of nine came and past, then ten, and still I was wide awake.

I had run out of thoughts to ruminate on and started counting the number of heads sticking out of the blankets, which, with myself included, totaled twenty-five. The following morning, I counted the number of tatami mats in the room—a mere twelve, meaning more than two people had to be squeezed onto each mat.

Soon I was overcome with the urge to pee. As it happened, I was the man in the middle, sandwiched between Sato and Tanaka, both of whom were sound asleep. How was I to slip out? Considering it would be rude to wake either of them, my only recourse was to try to slowly back out, but I soon found myself backed up against the person in the next row—his huge skull was in the way. Pushing up with both arms, I was able to angle myself and slowly raise my head above his (it must have taken a good five minutes) until, finally, I managed to wrest myself free. I did, however, bump into Sato on the way up—he turned to his side, but thankfully was not awakened.

I was up now but had to figure out a way to get to the staircase. The boarders’ heads were so tightly packed there wasn’t room for me to plant my feet. I figured I had better find space between their legs—the legs,

thank God, took up less space than the torso. Only trouble is, people's legs were wrapped beneath their blankets—I couldn't make out what was leg and what was unoccupied space. I did my best to seek out the space and made my way towards the door one careful step at a time. I had almost reached the stairs when I stepped on the foot of some unfortunate fellow, who shot right up in surprise.

On the way back from the lavatory, I had another gauntlet to run. Moving back toward my spot proved no easier than tiptoeing away from it. When I finally made it to my space, I realized that Sato, who had rolled over when I nudged him on the way out, had now completely taken over my spot.

I couldn't just move him, for I barely knew the man, and didn't know what he would think. So I just sat there with a blank stare, at a loss as to what to do. After some time, when I was certain I wouldn't wake anyone, I slowly forced my way back into my space, a tiny inch at a time, and was finally able to make enough room to lie on my side. It was already midnight, and still I could not go to sleep.

I was drifting in and out of consciousness, slowly losing track of time, when, all of a sudden, I was grabbed by the shoulder and shaken to my senses. When I opened my eyes, the room was busy as a battlefield, alive with all manner of activity.

The alarm that had sounded the night before was once again ringing in full force. When the ringing stopped, the clock downstairs struck two. I had slept for less than two hours and was nursing a pounding headache.

The men put their blankets away and hurried down the stairs. Barely able to open my eyes, I followed Tanaka down the steps.

Down at the ground level, the early birds were already busy folding broadsheets. Others were cleaning their face with a dry towel or brushing their teeth with their bare fingers. There were no sinks, nor was there any toothpaste. I marveled at how these people, citizens of one of the most cosmopolitan capitals of the world, were living like barbarians from the

stone age. Having brought no towel of my own, I splashed some water onto my face and wiped it dry with the sleeves of my shirt. I then joined Tanaka beside the printing press, where he was sorting the newsprint into sections—which I tried to emulate. I was slow at first, but soon got the hang of it and was able to keep pace with the other workers.

“Swish—swoosh, swish—swoosh.” The cadence of the machine was mesmerizing and drew me into the rhythm of the day. My headache from the night before was subsiding, and, as the day wore on, I was feeling more upbeat.

## 4

When the sorting was done, the newspapers were bundled and tied with a strap, which the carriers then heaved onto their shoulders as they left for their paper routes. Tanaka and I were third to leave the room.

Once outside, the wind brought an icy sting that bit into my skin. All the clothes that I owned were on me, but that didn't stop my teeth from chattering. The snow was already knee-deep. Two to three days of snow had coated the landscape in a layer of white—so white that at three in the morning it was almost bright as day.

Out in the suburbs of Tokyo, our routes involved travel over uncleared roads, where the snow was easily up to my calves. Beneath the snow was a layer of slush, which seeped in through the holes of my shoes—before long my feet were frozen solid.

For the past month, I had been walking all over the city looking for work, which was hard on my feet at first, though after a while they turned completely numb. But now, as I walk these streets, I was filled with hope—hopes of bringing solace to my mother and siblings, and hopes of escaping the ranks of the three million unemployed. With this in mind, I was not afraid. What doesn't kill you will only make you stronger<sup>5</sup>. So I carried on and kept on trudging forward.

A few steps ahead of me was Tanaka, who was also forging ahead, in a manner I could only describe as comical. Whenever he slid a newspaper under the door, he would shout out the name of the customer. Then, with the aid of a flashlight, I would try to find the person on my subscribers' list and commit his name to memory.

It was in this manner that we went from one street to another, navigating the back alleys and side roads. By the time we had delivered all two hundred and fifty copies of the newspaper to our customers, daylight had already broken.

Hungry as ever, the trek back filled us with a sense of urgency. As I had spent all six dollars and twenty cents on my deposit, I was forced to go without dinner the night before. As for lunch—or was it breakfast—whichever it was, I was never able to eat my fill, for the sight of my dwindling funds made me fearful. Whereas now, with a delicious free meal of rice and miso soup awaiting me at the office—the mere thought of not having to go hungry made my mouth water. With food on my mind, the cold in my feet, the shivers in my body, and the pangs in my stomach were of little concern.

Tanaka, however, did not lead me back to the agency, but instead took me down a narrow lane, at the corner of which was a tiny eatery. I had no idea what we were doing there. All this time, I was looking forward to my free meal back at the workplace, yet Tanaka brought me here, to this little restaurant, when I didn't have a cent on me.

"Tanaka," I shouted as he was just about to push open the door.

"Tanaka, you got to understand, I don't have any money on me. I've spent all six dollars and twenty cents on the deposit for the job."

Tanaka hesitated for a moment, just standing there looking at me, then, as if he had made up his mind, instructed me to go in. "Just go. I'll lend you the money."

I was in shock. There goes my dream of free food in abundance. Just when I thought I could finally have a decent meal, we had come here instead. I was heartbroken; I was hugely disappointed.

Only after convincing myself that I had a job now and would be able to pay Tanaka back was I able to work up a modicum of an appetite.

“Are you sure that’s enough? Come on, have some more!” Seeing I had stopped after the first serving whereas he was well into his second bowl of rice, Tanaka goaded me on.

Tanaka was a much kinder person than I had thought. Though I was still hungry and would have loved to order another portion, I just couldn’t bring myself to do so.

“I’m fine, thanks,” I answered. As I did so, I looked away, for tears were forming in the corners of my eyes. I was feeling apologetic, ashamed, and grateful—all at the same time.

As it turned out, this was where our co-workers came to eat. The place was full of familiar faces: many were eating; some were heading out, while others were walking in.

After Tanaka had paid for the two of us, we headed out. His meal came to twelve cents, whereas mine cost a mere eight cents.

I tried to approach him to thank him for the food, but he pushed me away and changed the subject.

“How do you like the job so far?” he asked. “It may look easy, but it’s actually hard work, especially on a cold winter morning.”

“I don’t mind hard work.” I said.

“Just stick with it—things will get better.”

“I understand. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome—” he said, turning away and blushing ever so slightly, as if he was not used to pleasantries.

## 5

Back at the agency, we headed upstairs to find seven or eight of the men had already returned: some were switching into school uniforms; others were reading or chatting, while another two or three were jumping back in the sack for a few more hours of shuteye.

Tanaka was getting ready for school. Ah, school—how I wish I could go too! Which was little more than wishful thinking, considering I couldn't even afford to eat. Like a deflated balloon, I pressed my weight against the wall, staring wistfully out the window.

The streets were pleasant this time of day: sunlight reflected off the colorful signs of retail stores while traffic coursing through the roads made for an uplifting scene. People were on the move, some going to work, others going to school, looking ever so cheery and hopeful—you'd be hard put to tell there were a hundred thousand unemployed in this city alone, frantically looking for work, not knowing where their next meal is going to come from.

Suddenly, I felt something jammed into my hand. I turned around to see Tanaka, all dressed for school, slipping two quarters into my palm, telling me, "Take this. You'll need it for lunch. We'll work out something later."

Staring at the two quarters in my possession, I was lost for words—I stood motionless as Tanaka shuffled down the stairs. He was so good to me—I was so moved I could cry.

I'll just have to pay him back after I get my first paycheck, I told myself. As I was contemplating this point, I heard again the muffled sound of sobbing. I turned around to see the fifteen-year-old from the night before, who had now packed up all his belongings and was sniveling as he stumbled reluctantly down the stairs.

The kid's just homesick, I told myself, just as I had done the night before. He's too green for this type of work. With that, I turned back towards the window. I heard the door shut below me and saw him quietly

exit, walking out onto the street, looking back longingly every now and then as he moved further and further from view.

For some reason, I found this scene incredibly disheartening.

That evening, I was out again delivering papers with Tanaka.

From the second day on, though, I was lugging the bundles of paper, doing the bulk of the delivery. Tanaka simply followed behind me, reminding me only when I slipped up.

The morning of day three was extraordinarily cold—the slush from the days prior had now condensed into ice, making the roads extremely slippery. My hands frozen numb, I couldn't quite get the papers to land where they were supposed to. But despite this shortcoming, I was able to complete my route in more or less the allotted timeframe.

"You're doing great," Tanaka assured me. "Just two days into the job, and you already remember all two hundred and fifty subscribers." This he told me while we were walking back to the agency. I, too, felt that I had performed admirably, requiring reminders on only two or three occasions, when I had lost my way at an intersection.

It was Sunday—Tanaka did not have to return to school. We had breakfast together, after which he was tasked with going door-to-door to solicit new business, and he asked me along. We quickly became friends. As we walked, the conversation turned to where we came from and our many hopes and dreams. I felt fortunate to have found a friend like him, someone so selfless and caring.

After I got to know him better, I started to confide in him. "You know, I was hoping to someday enter a school, to acquire a skill..."

"You and me both. We can help each other. Let's go for it!"

And so the days went by. Tanaka would skimp on food to pay for my portion, and when he saw that my shoes were ridden with holes, he saved up enough to buy me a new pair of *tabi*.



## 6

We were walking the suburbs of Tokyo as usual, where, on this particular day, the air was crisp and the conversation lively, reminiscent of a scene from my childhood, where a friend and I were making our way up a hill to pick fruit.

Once at our destination, however, the mood was decidedly different: this was no apple-picking outing; we were here to sign up new subscribers.

The urban sprawl was fast expanding to the suburbs of Tokyo, where new constructions were popping up on every street and people were moving in by the day. Our target was these new residents and proprietors. We would knock on every door and greet every potential customer, explaining to them the merits of our newspaper, some of which were true, others completely bogus—while making up these bogus claims we had to sound utterly convincing, and when talking about our real strengths we knew to exaggerate beyond all possible measure. I was only there to watch, of course, but I must have blushed, or at least I think I did, for the sight of the Tanaka that I knew telling blatant lies without batting an eyelid was hard to stomach.

While some customers bought our sales pitch, others did not. “You have to tout your own horn—there’s no other way,” Tanaka would explain to me after each attempt, successful or otherwise, and I agreed.

Some customers were willing to give us a shot; others would shut their doors and tell us to get lost after learning we were salespeople, shooing us away like stray dogs. Not much we could do about that.

It was all new and interesting, considering I was only there to observe, even when we were barked at and ordered to leave. But the excitement wouldn’t last, for before I knew it, this would become my day job.

“Have you acquainted yourself with every customer on the list?” the boss asked as we returned from our errand.

“I believe so,” I answered proudly, pleased that in just two short days I had been able to memorize the names and addresses of all two hundred and fifty subscribers, subscribers spread over a vast, complex network of streets that was entirely new to me—I deserved to feel good about myself.

“Not bad,” he said, patting me on the shoulder. He laughed as he picked up the order forms of the new subscribers we had signed up.

“Not bad for a first-timer. Pretty impressive work!”

I immediately blushed. I knew full well I wasn’t the one who signed up these subscribers—it was Tanaka—I was only tagging along. But Tanaka, somehow, gave me credit for the whole batch.

“So, then, starting tomorrow, Tanaka will make the deliveries, and your job will be to sign up new customers. But you’ll stand in for Tanaka when he is unavailable. Understand?”

“Okay—” I answered hesitantly. I wasn’t thrilled to no longer share a route with Tanaka; but this was never a permanent arrangement to begin with. Once the reality had sunk in, I was resigned to my fate and determined to make it work. “Yes, sir!” I shouted.

Though we’d each have our own routes, we’d still be sharing the same sleeping quarters. And come Sunday, we could still explore the suburbs like we did today. As long as I could feed myself, go to school, and save a little money to send to my mother, what more could I ask? I was naïve, to be sure, but this was because Tanaka had told me that, with door-to-door sales, I would be paid by commission, unlike with delivery, where I was paid a fixed salary—which is to say, the more I sell, the more money I make. What’s more, solicitations for customers occurred in the daytime, thereby freeing up the later part of the day for evening classes.

So I started going door to door, hoping to sign up new subscribers.

I would leave at eight in the morning, pick up a sandwich *en route* to stave off my hunger, and return at around six in the evening. No point

in leaving any earlier or staying much later, for there would be nobody around to talk to. On the first day, I had only six new accounts to show.

The next day I signed up eight people, and the third day ten. After that my sales figures leveled off at seven to ten accounts per day. The boss was anything but pleased. As I handed him the completed subscription forms, he would be furious, telling me what a terrible job I was doing. By day ten, he had really lost it.

“What is this? Seven new accounts? Eight? I’m looking for a minimum of fifteen per day. How do you expect to earn a living with this level of performance?”

His talk of earning a living made my heart sink.

Fifteen per day. That would be twice the amount I was pulling—how was I supposed to manage that, considering most people just slam the door and shoo you away like stray critter?

There were those who flat out refused to buy our product, no matter how hard I pleaded—there was no way I was going to change their minds. Then there were those who felt sorry for me, who would sign up for a month’s subscription to keep my tears from falling. These “charity subscriptions”, however, were few and far between—hardly a steady source of income. I was starting to get worried.

The following day, I left before the crack of dawn to drum up more business, but to no avail. For this was not newspaper delivery—I needed to sell to live customers. And who would be up at this ungodly hour?

I had no choice but to walk the streets aimlessly, waiting for the lights to switch on before I started knocking on doors. And knock on doors I did, one house after another, greeting each potential patron with a graceful bow, then feeding them line after line about the benefits of a subscription, truthful or otherwise. I combed the streets from dawn to dusk, going so far as to push open doors that were unlocked—at times with tragic consequences. One family took me for a burglar and set the

dogs on me. I fell over trying to get away and almost got bitten by a ferocious little beast!

## 7

I had opened eleven new accounts that day, four short of the fifteen the boss was asking for. I wanted to keep looking, but the thought of hounds out of hell closing in on me gave me the shivers.

By the time I dragged my haggard self back to the agency, it was ten of ten. My fellow delivery workers had gone to sleep, and the boss had long since left the premises. After I cleaned my feet, I traipsed upstairs to find Tanaka still awake. He immediately cleared out a space for me and asked me to squeeze in.

“What happened,” he asked, genuinely worried for me.

I just shook my head without uttering a word. Totally disillusioned, I didn’t sleep a wink that night.

As before, the alarm went off in the early morning, following which the room instantly sprang into action. You could hear the sound of broadsheets sorted into sections. But it wasn’t until the latch downstairs had clicked for the last time that I was able to enjoy some peace and quiet. Now I had the entire place to myself. I could stretch my arms and turn in any direction I wished, perfect for a good night’s sleep—only I didn’t go to sleep, but instead just lay in the dark with my eyes wide open, lost in random thoughts. I didn’t get up until the first carriers had returned. I was waiting for the boss to come to work, to tell him about the new accounts I had opened the day before.

I sat in my usual spot and looked out the tiny window. The sun had just come out and lit the street golden. The air was crisp and clear—speaking of which, since my move to the city, I had always found it suffocating, for I was used to the open space of the countryside.

After a long wait, the boss, briefcase in hand, finally walked through the door. I ran downstairs to hand him the subscription forms from the previous day—eleven in total—not quite the fifteen he was looking for, but better than the last time. I explained to him that I had done my best, and had worked hard to acquire these new accounts. I wasn't expecting any compliments, but little did I know that after doing a quick count he would lash out at me like never before.

“Eleven? A measly eleven? This is just not going to cut it!”

It was a scary moment. Would I even be able to keep my job? Worried for my livelihood, I didn't dare talk back. I had become little more than an indentured servant.

“Yes, you're absolutely right,” was all I could muster.

What else could I do? I grabbed my forms and stumbled out the door with my tail between my legs, convinced that I was doomed. And, as luck would have it, the day's results were dismal—I had managed to sign up only six new subscribers, and mostly charity cases at that. I was so disappointed I could cry.

What was I to do? If eleven accounts had sent him into a fury the day before, what would he do when he sees I only managed to produce six? (I was later told that on occasions like this people would make up bogus accounts to boost their numbers—the subscription fees for these bogus subscribers would, of course, come out of your own pocket. People were known to have spent half their salaries paying for bogus subscriptions, which, I was sure, the boss would have no objection to).

The next day, I approached the boss in trepidation. The minute he heard I had only opened six accounts, he flew into a rage, slamming his hand on the desk.

“Six? You dare tell me you signed up only six? What the hell have you been doing? I took you in only because I felt sorry for you—why, you

didn't even have enough to pay for the deposit. And you promised you would work twice as hard as everyone else."

He gulped and took a sip from his mug, then counted the forms I gave him.

"You useless piece of crap! Get lost—don't ever show your face here again!"

I was not without my sense of pride and being called these ugly names made me furious. But the memory of having been jobless for a month and rumors of rising unemployment topping three million made me hold back on what I was about to say. Instead, I pleaded with the man.

"Look, I'll work harder. Please, just give me another chance—"

Plead was all I could do, although I really did not know how I could have worked any harder. Going from street to street, from house to house, in the past few days I must have visited every property in this suburb—the owners either had already subscribed or had no intention whatsoever of doing so. Then there were the charity cases who forked out subscription only to save me from tears—but there were only so many of them. The next few days my numbers plummeted, dropping to a mere three to five subscriptions—mostly from people who had newly moved into the area.

"You know, normally we don't pay people who have worked here less than a month," the boss explained, pointing to the rules on the wall. "But I feel bad for you, so I'm going to give you this. I really feel for you, but with these numbers, I'm afraid we can't keep you."

This was on day twenty. The boss called me in for a damning lecture, then sent me off with four dollars and twenty-five cents. After that it was business as usual—he returned to his desk and acted like he didn't know me.

In a state of shock, I looked down at the payroll slip in my palm:

Commission per new account    \$0.05  
 Number of accounts opened    (x 85)  
 TOTAL    \$4.25

I was speechless. Without work, what was I to do now? To think, twenty days of grueling work amounting to a mere four dollars and twenty-five cents—that can't be right. Figuring I had nothing to lose, I asked, "You sure this is correct?"

"Is there a problem with the amount?"

"Well, it's been twenty days."

"Twenty days—so? I don't care if it's a year, or if it's ten years. Unless you produce results, you're not going to be paid a cent."

I didn't know what to say, but simply stood there performing mental arithmetic: there's still the deposit of six dollars and twenty cents, which makes for a total of ten dollars and forty-five cents. I'll pay back the eight dollars I owe Tanaka and still have two dollars and forty-five cents to spare. No point in arguing with the boss. I'll just ask for my deposit back.

"But, there's still my deposit of six dollars and twenty cents."

At the mention of the deposit, the boss laughed and looked at me like I was some sort of imbecile.

"Deposit? You dare ask me for your deposit? You're lucky I didn't deduct the full amount from your paycheck. Look, you yourself agreed to these rules."

Which was another shocker for me. I stared back at the wall and realized I was indeed careless. When I first arrived, I was so worried about the deposit I never got past Rule No.3. This time around, my heart was pounding like a drum as I skipped straight to Rule No. 4, which stated clearly that "deposits will be returned only to those who have been in continuous employment for over four months".

The words made my blood boil—I was so furious I could explode.

The boss, meanwhile, was looking at me with a smug smile on his face.

“You get it now? Do you still want your deposit back? Don’t just stand there, get the hell out, or I won’t pay you a cent. You see, Rule No.7 states ‘salaries will not be paid to those employed for less than one month’.”

Again, I was stuck on Rule No.4 and failed to read on. Skipping ahead, I could see now that Rule No.7 was exactly as he had stated, meaning he was awfully generous to pay me the four dollars and twenty-five cents that I had made.

Well, he’s the boss around here. He makes the rules and enforces them. He holds sway over this place like an emperor over his dominion—what are we powerless lackeys to do other than accept our lot? I grabbed the four dollars and twenty-five cents and, with tears in my eyes, waddled out of the agency—this newspaper agency that, twenty days ago, was the source of so much hope and inspiration. Looking back at the large glass windows, the “Newspaper Carrier Wanted” ad still loomed large, broadcasting its evil message loud and clear. In this city full of hunger and mass unemployment, how could the poor not be lured by the promises it holds?

After leaving the agency, I hopped on a train and headed to Tanaka’s school. There, I waited to tell him what had happened.

“So here’s three dollars that I owe you. If you can give me a little more time, I’ll find a way to pay you back the remaining five. That’ll leave me with a dollar and twenty-five cents, or no, that’s a dollar and seventeen cents after deducting eight cents for the subway, to live on for the next few days.”

Tanaka, sighing and shaking his head, pushed the money back to me. “Hold on to it. I have enough to get me by—no rush to pay me. Desperate people like us have got to help each other out in times of need.”

He went on to make clear that, from the start, he never once expected me to return the money, and that I should perish the thought.



“Who’d have thought you’d get kicked out in such a way. Remember that kid from the first day, the fifteen-year-old crying in the corner? He, too, was lured in by the ad, but turned out to be no good at soliciting business. He lasted a mere six days and was robbed of his entire deposit of ten dollars. He left without a cent in his pocket.”

“Why, that bastard!”

“We’ve got to find a way to get back at him. With the ‘Carrier Wanted’ ad still up, who knows how many more innocent victims are going to fall prey to this scheme, especially in times like this, when work is so hard to come by.”

Tanaka bit hard on his lip as he said these words, looking resolutely determined—at which time the school bell rang. As he headed back to class, I felt immensely grateful for all that he had given me.

9

I was moved to tears by Tanaka’s magnanimity as I walked out of the school gates. All became painfully clear as I stood there with my back to the school. Here I was, with a maze of roads in front of me, yet I had no idea where to go.

I was clueless as to my next step.

I stood there for a long while but was no closer to finding an answer. I decided to mingle into the crowd.

There, lost in a sea of humanity, I began to see two very distinct personality types emerge, playing in a loop like a broken record. There was Tanaka, on the one hand, who would skimp on food to pay for my meals and buy me shoes, who, when he learned I was fired from my job, was ready to forgive any loans that had been made to me; and then there was that heartless boss of ours from the newspaper agency, who would lure in hapless jobseekers and rob them of their deposit, not to mention

profit off their labor before sending them packing. Money is all he sees; he couldn't care less about the welfare of his workers.

The thought of having to face another employer like this gave me the chills, nearly compelling me to abandon my dreams of attending school and head back home to the countryside. But the journey home was not cheap—fares for train and slow boat cost in excess of thirty dollars. How was I to find that kind of money in a city where I barely knew anyone?

Walking aimlessly, I ended up in Ueno Park, where I collapsed on a bench. Having been sapped of every last ounce of energy, I could no longer muster the will to get up. I was afraid to let my tears show, for there were people walking by, but deep down I was miserable as can be.

I could go home, but what then?

Come to think of it, wasn't I in Tokyo precisely because things back at home had gotten out of hand? Even if I were to come up with the money to journey back, I wouldn't be any better off.

I've got to tough it out. Like Tanaka said, we've got to give it our all—only then do we stand a chance of turning the tables.

The thought of Tanaka gave me renewed hope. Who'd have expected there'd be people like him here in Japan, alongside the likes of the newspaper baron. They say that malicious demons roam this earth, but so do our better angels<sup>6</sup>—I suddenly had a change of heart and was even more loathe to part with Tanaka.

I ruminated on in a lethargic stupor and was brought to the episode of my father's untimely death, which gave me the shivers. We had our fair share of blood-sucking, flesh-gouging demons back home—or else my mother would not have had the courage to send me all the way here, to see me struggling in this faraway land. To her, family was everything, and it was evident I was fond of home and country—were it not for the troubles back home, I would have liked to live the simple life of a farmer and bask in the joy of familial bliss with my mother and siblings.

Up until my father's generation, we were land-owning farmers, with two hectares<sup>7</sup> of paddy fields and five hectares of farmland. We lived frugally and diligently worked the land, never lacking for food or clothing.

Then, a few years ago, Big Sugar moved into town, looking to buy up land to run its outsize plantations. Save for those who were mired in debt, few people were eager to sell—for landowning farmers, as the name suggests, were attached to their land, and would not give it up without a fight.

Big Sugar, however, was in no mood to back down. With the full support of the Japanese government, it mobilized the neighborhood association and the police, who issued official notices to every holder of title, ordering them to present themselves, together with their personal seals, at an upcoming assembly of household heads.

I was only fifteen back then, a fifth-year student in secondary school—so this was quite a while ago. But the event was so horrific that I remember every moment in shocking detail, as if it happened only yesterday.

The town was swept up in a mood of fear. The purpose of the meeting, after all, was evident. Rumors were spreading that not selling would land you on the wrong side of the law, and the police would see to it that every parcel of land was surrendered. Every household to receive a notice was on high alert.

It just so happened my father was the neighborhood association chief, so those served with police notices naturally gathered at my house, some fearing for their lives, others wallowing in despair, asking, “What now?” “What do we do?” To which Father would always answer resolutely, “This is *our* land, the land to which we owe our livelihoods. If you don't want to sell, don't—no matter what the authorities tell you.”

He may have sounded defiant, but having served as neighborhood association chief for many years, Father was familiar with how the

Japanese colonial police operated. Was it really an option not to sell? Deep down I'm not sure he knew the answer. "How absurd! This makes no sense!" I would hear him tell his supporters. But this time, faced with the violence of authority, he would have to put his money where his mouth is and give up his life to defend his beliefs—which was why, more than once, I caught him sulking in a room by himself, trying to hide his tears.

Amidst rising tensions, the meeting was called to order at one in the afternoon the day after notices were served. Representatives from each household thronged the Matsu temple in the central square. The structure was filled to capacity as hundreds showed up for the gathering—those who failed to appear, they were told, would face the direst consequences. School was out for the day, so I hid in a corner and watched the events unfold. Never before had I seen my father cry like that—which had me worried.

As the clock struck one, a bald, paunchy fellow stood on a table and began to speak in the most pompous tone:

As you all know, for the benefit of the village, the corporation has drawn up plans to build a large plantation to the north of this town. A few days ago, we circled a region on a map, and asked all those who owned land within the prescribed area to come forth with their personal seals, so that we could negotiate a price for the purchase of the plot. Well, what do you know! Nobody showed. Members of our Acquisitions Committee went house to house, begging each owner of property title, but to no avail—it was as if there was a conspiracy to prevent the plan from going forward. I suspect somebody is behind this, and really ought to be sniffing out the co-conspirators. But no, I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt—which is why I've invited you all here today, to talk about what we can do. In a minute, the mayor and the chief of police will be speaking to you all, telling you about the new opportunities the plantation will bring. When they are done, I hope you will affix your seal on this sheet of paper here—we are willing to pay much more than the, ahem, market price for your land.

My fifth-grade homeroom teacher Mr. Tan<sup>8</sup> served to interpret from Japanese into Taiwanese, placing special emphasis on the words “conspiracy” and “co-conspirators”, sending a chill down the spines of all who were listening.

Next to speak was the chief of police, the head of the local precinct. He jumped onto the table and stared everyone down, then barked out a tirade in his hoarse voice:

You heard the man. The sugar company is doing this for your sake—for your sake, people! Think about it, if you sell your land to them—and we’re not talking nickels and dimes here—they’re going to pay you big money—once they buy your land and build the plantation, cash is going to start flowing into this community! There will be deluxe model ranches for visitors to tour. We’re going to put this little town on the map. Folks will be coming from near and far to check out our farms, to witness the power of progress. Life will get better by the day. You ought to be proud of what you’re doing! You ought to thank the company for bringing reform—but no, some of you are conspiring against this land purchase and don’t want to see this village prosper. Well, let me tell you something: the construction of these new plantations is government policy, designed to bring wealth to the village. Those who stand in the way are traitors—and we will show no mercy to the traitors among us!

Interpreting for the police chief was deputy Rin<sup>9</sup>, who, like before, gave undue emphasis to the expressions “conspiring”, “traitor”, and “show no mercy”, sending a hush through the crowd, making the villagers even more fearful, for deeply etched in their memory was the fate of guerilla fighter U Chheng-hong<sup>10</sup>, whose forces were massacred at Tapani by Japanese military police.

Last to speak was the mayor, a jolly old grandfather figure known for his eagerness to appease. In a calm, gentle voice, he urged:

At this point, I think it's clear the best course of action is to go along with the corporation's plans, and not make a mockery of their good intentions.

Following which he picked up a registry and started reading names. The first to be called were trembling with fear and had panic written all over their faces. Fearful of being labeled "co-conspirators", they were initially reluctant to come forward. Even after being excused, they stood there shuddering in disbelief—only after the chief shouted, "Get lost!" did they come to their senses and scuttle out of the premises. They kept on looking back, though, as they exited the temple, as if worried they might be called back again.

Some eighty people heard their name called this way and were subsequently excused—these were the folks who did not own land in the area targeted by the corporation.

Now it was those who had been spared the initial ruckus whose turn it was to get nervous, my father among them. A commotion rippled through the crowd. Villagers were whispering in each other's ears: "Are they going to call more names?" "Am I going to get called?" People were clearly anxious.

The mayor then announced,

In the next round, I want you to bring your personal seal when you hear your name called. Just affix your seal here, and you're free to go.

The first to be called, believe it or not, was my father.

"Ben Yeo<sup>11</sup>," called the mayor.

I was so nervous I could hardly breathe. I stood on my toes to get a better view of the action, clenching my fist as I waited. What now?

Father calmly walked up to the mayor and, with little hesitation, declared in his characteristically throaty voice, "This is *my* land, the land

to which I owe my livelihood. I have no intention to sell, so I didn't bring my seal."

A wave of panic swept through the temple.

11

"You're the neighborhood association chief, for God's sake! You, who ought to be spearheading the effort to implement policy! Instead, you've chosen to become chief conspirator. Tell me this isn't so!"

The head of the precinct was furious, yelling at my father and staring him in the face. But Father stood his ground and had no intention of backing down. His nonplussed demeanor infuriated the police chief even more.

"I dare you to repeat to my face what you just said."

"This is *my* land, the land to which I owe my livelihood. I have no intention to sell, so I didn't bring my seal." Father declared calmly.

"Goddamned Chinaman! Get him out of here." The police chief raised his hand and slapped my father across the face, then motioned for his deputies to drag him away.

Following this turn of events, the remaining villagers were terrified—the great majority simply did as told, presenting their seals when their names were called, and, without a second glance, headed straight out the door when the ordeal was over.

At the end of the day, so I was told, only five villagers refused to comply—all of whom met the same fate as my father, and, one by one, were dragged to the police precinct. When my father was taken away, I immediately ran home to tell my mother, who was so overwhelmed she passed out.

Fortunately, my uncle, who lived a few blocks away, was there to help and managed to nurse her back to consciousness. But in the six

days my father was gone, Mother refused to eat and hardly slept a wink, spending her days drowned in tears. She lost so much weight she was barely recognizable. There's a country hick for you, fearful of authority and even more fearful of lockup—no wonder the Japanese were able to have their way and not give a damn.

My father returned on day seven, looking a completely different man. The well-proportioned, smartly dressed gentleman that I knew came back with his face grossly distorted: his left cheek was swollen high and his eyes protruded from their sockets; his forehead was covered with scars. His clothes were a disheveled mess, and when he was changing out of them, my little brother, who didn't know any better, saw the black and blue marks all over his body and gasped, "Look, Daddy's turned into a spotted deer!"

Father's demeanor had changed too: the man who used to play and joke with us at every turn was now sullen and quiet, often looking at us with tears in his eyes. He who used to down three bowlfuls of rice in a sitting could now barely finish one. A few days later, he lay down and never got up from his bed again. What used to be the picture-perfect family was now a portrait of misery. It was as if good cheer had deserted us.

After having been bedridden for over a month, Father finally left this world, albeit with some regrets.

It was at this time that my mother also fell ill and trusted me with the care of my younger siblings—a one-year-old, a three-year-old, and a four-year-old—leaving me distraught and anxious. Luckily my uncle and aunt lived nearby and were able to help out every now and then—without them, this family would have fallen apart long ago. But they too had to sell their land and now had little to live on, forcing them to travel long distances in search of work, which added to the stress of an already barebones existence. The corporation had driven hundreds of farmers off their land, who were now all looking for work in neighboring towns, which made the competition especially stiff. There were long intervals between one job and the next, during which they were able to come and



help with my situation. But, constantly worried about the source of their next meal, they had to keep looking for work, which meant I had to make do with what little help they could offer.

What with my father's medical bills, my mother's medical bills, and Father's funeral expenses, we had more or less spent all of the six hundred dollars Father had brought back from the police station. When Mother made a turn for the better, we exchanged our farmland for cash to help get us through.

Though he never said as much, it was clear that the six hundred dollars Father had brought back—the money he so angrily flung onto the table—came from the sale of our paddy fields. The fields were valued in the neighborhood of two thousand dollars on the property market but were bought for a mere six hundred by the corporation, who claimed to be paying above market price.

The word was that Father refused to sell and never offered up his personal seal, despite brutal beatings by the police. Officers were then dispatched to my house, who told my mother to hand over the seal or never see my father again. Concerned only with my father's return, Mother looked all over for the seal but could not find it—as it happened, to ensure the seal does not fall into the wrong hands, Father had tossed it into the fireplace long before.

But the police would have their way no matter what. Unable to locate the seal, they had a new one made and registered the new design before using it to transfer title and record the deed—all of which was done without the participation of my father—so I was told by former Officer Tan, who was later relieved of his duties.

“Your father was quite the fighter,” he said. “The other four dissenters had all relented, only your father stood firm to the end. The fact that he had burned his seal, I told him, was not going to stop us, and we were making him a new one—to which he lost his calm and lashed out at the police, threatening to take us to court. Ultimately, I was fired for leaking

this detail, but I have no regrets, for I was in the presence of greatness: your father was a hero—a hero who, unfortunately, stood all by himself.”

12

After finishing elementary school, I went around looking for work like everyone else—but what money it paid was a drop in the bucket and brought little relief to our economic hardship.

I had been fond of reading since a young age and was particularly moved by stories of Japanese people working their way up from their humble beginnings to become shining pillars of society. I would often relate these stories to my mother, and tell her that, one day, I, too, would like to study in Tokyo and work my way up Japanese society. After Father passed, Mother, of course, was starved for company—so she was reluctant to say yes. She would tell me I was barely a teenager and wasn’t old enough to care for myself. It wasn’t until we had come close to using up the money from the sale of our farmland that she agreed to let me go.

By then we were on the verge of selling our livestock and farm implements just to get by—you see how hard up we were, and how difficult it was for her to agree to my travel plans. Here was a middle-aged woman who had never left the town of her birth, who had not even ridden on a train before—now told that her son was to journey by rail and boat across the oceans to a faraway land for school and work. How scary it must have seemed, and yet she was able to bring herself to consent—I cannot imagine the tears she must have shed.

We had sold everything except the house: the farm tools, the bicycle, the ox—anything that can be exchanged for money. After paying off our debts, we were left with seventy dollars. Mother kept ten for her daily expenses, then stuffed the remainder into my pocket and whispered, “Go get them!”

I remember the scene as if it were yesterday: Mother standing at the door, whispering in a sobbing voice sweet words of encouragement.

We were not the only ones to meet this fate. The families of the four men dragged to the precinct together with my father were in a similar predicament. Even those who had obeyed orders and affixed their seals, who were first to sell their land to the corporation in exchange for work at the new plantation, ended up working twelve-hour shifts for a paltry forty to fifty cents—meager wages that were anything but guaranteed, as the corporation had land and capital at its disposal, and employed machinery to plow the fields—why, even the oxen were out of a job! All they needed were temps; what work they offered was sporadic. In the end, villagers were forced to pawn their belongings to make ends meet. Everyone was consigned to this fate—it was only a matter of time. After they had exhausted the proceeds from the sale of land and property, they would travel to neighboring towns to look for work. The corporation had promised “cash flowing in” and “folks coming from near and far”; instead, they had drained the local economy and triggered a mass exodus.

Caught up in these nightmares of the past, I was scarce aware that the sun had gone down. The woods of Ueno were now veiled in darkness, whereas visible in the distance was the light of houses nestled in the foothills. The park was getting cold, and I was beset with pangs of hunger. I let out a big yawn before standing up to stretch, following which I walked down a slope towards a hole-in-the-wall restaurant in an alley—after all, I figured, at the end of an exhausting day my first priority was to restore my strength. So I ate a hearty meal and even ordered two shots of *shoju*. I then headed towards the boarding house I had been staying in, in the hope of getting a good night’s sleep.

No sooner had I stepped in than I was spotted by the owner.

“Well, well—if it isn’t Mr. Taiwan! Long time no see! Where have you been?”

Embarrassed to admit I had been working as a paperboy, only to be swindled out of my deposit and paid a paltry pittance, I made up a story.

“I was at a friend’s,” I said.

“A friend’s, eh? What kind of friend? Why, you look so worn and beat up.” He sounded as if he didn’t believe me but wasn’t quite ready yet to expose my lie.

“You know, I once had this Korean boarder who disappeared, only to show up at my doorstep days later. I asked him where he’d been, and he was upfront about it. He said he’d been in the can, put up courtesy of the Japanese government<sup>12</sup>. Fancy that!”

“The can? Where’s that?”

“You ignorant little hillbilly. He was in jail! The word was, he’d been wining and dining without paying a cent, and though he’d occasionally get roughed up by restaurant staff, it wasn’t a bad way to get his fix. But it wasn’t long before the law finally caught up to him. One night he woke up to find himself in lockup, rather than on the streets of Tokyo. But what a way to live!”

I felt much more relaxed after this exchange of banter.

“When you’re really hard up,” I added, “it probably wouldn’t be bad to crash at this ‘can’ you keep telling me about.”

The old man laughed out loud and invited me to enter. “You look tired. Go get a good night’s rest.”

“Yeo,” he called out to me again as I was making my way upstairs. “Have you been up to this type of thing?” He stealthily slipped his hand into his trouser pocket. Though I had struggled to understand what he was insinuating, this pantomime made it perfectly clear—he obviously thought I had made off with some stranger’s wallet and had spent the past few days in police detention. He was asking me if I was a thief, which goes to show the lengths to which those without work and on the brink of starvation are willing to go. I wasn’t offended though, despite the fact that the question made me blush.

“Get out of here! I would never do a thing like that.”

The elderly gentleman looked skeptical but made no effort to pry, acting as if this type of thing happened all the time. He simply laughed and showed me to my room.

## 13

Sitting in my room, I looked in the mirror at my sorry self. My appearance was disheveled and haggard—no wonder I was mistaken for a newly released inmate.

I stretched my back and was ready to turn in when the hostel owner suddenly snapped his fingers.

“Oh wait,” he said, “you have a letter—sent by registered mail. I kept it for you because I had no idea where you’d gone. Let me go get it—” And off he dashed before he could finish.

That was odd. Who would send me a registered letter?

The old man was back a few seconds later with a letter in his hand—which made me uneasy. Could it be from Mother? What could be so important as to require a registered letter?

My hands were shaking as I tore open the envelope. To my disbelief, it was a money order for one hundred and twenty dollars. I could barely believe my eyes—was I going mad? My heart was pounding as I tried to make out Mother’s illegible handwriting and read her letter one painful word at a time. It was too much to bear, and I could take it no longer. I broke down in tears, right in front of my host.

“Are you alright,” he asked, unsure what had happened. But I didn’t answer. Odd, he must have thought, to collapse in tears upon receiving a large sum of money. He kept on staring at me, but I paid him no notice, for my thoughts were preoccupied with my mother and what she had told me in the letter. I went straight to bed and cried my eyes out in the safety of my comforter.

This is what my mother wrote:

*The letter in which you speak of the recession in Tokyo and how hard it is to find work, I have already received. It pains me to imagine the dire straits you are in, with so little money and not a friend in the world, jobless and all alone—the mere thought tugs at my heartstrings and makes me anxious day and night.*

*But things are no better here at home. Since the plantations started operation, life has become much harder, and few can see a way out—which is why I need you to be strong for me: do not for a moment entertain the thought of coming back home.*

*We've sold the house for \$150, which is why I'm sending you \$120. Do your best to find work and study hard, and only when you've made it in this world do you come back and look after your little brother Manny—now your only brother. Lana and Teddy are no longer of this world—only Manny<sup>13</sup> remains, whom I've trusted to your uncle.*

*My health is fast deteriorating and I don't think I can hold out much longer. I've kept \$30 to cover my funeral expenses—that way I won't become a burden to anyone.*

*I'll be praying for you day and night, and remember, before you make a name for yourself, don't come back no matter what. Life here is hell—there is no future.*

*This is my one and only wish—be so kind as to honor it.*

Her words read more like a will than a letter, and soon morbid notions began to creep into my head. Perhaps she's already gone. No, that can't be. Stop it, I told myself.

I tossed and turned and talked to myself, trying to get these unpleasant thoughts out of my mind, but to no avail.

That night I was hardly able to get any sleep, nor was I bothered by vicious fleas nipping at my flesh, for my mind was crawling with thoughts of my mother and what was left of our family.

I got up to take a second look at the letter, which was sent prior to my employment at the newspaper agency, making it over twenty days old. Could there have been another letter in the interim? Now my mind was racing.

With money no longer an issue, I was eager to make the journey home, to see for myself what had transpired. Whether I'd be able to return to Tokyo was of little concern now. Though Mother had urged me to stay, telling me there were no prospects back home, I didn't see much of a prospect for myself here either.

Before I left though, I needed to take leave of Tanaka, and to return the money I owed him. Considering how good he was to me, I couldn't just take off without saying good-bye.

I spent the night preoccupied with these thoughts, eagerly awaiting the first subway service of the day. I left the boarding house early and had to endure a long wait before the train finally pulled into the station. It was barely light when I boarded. I stuck my head out the window to allow the crisp, cold air to jolt me out of the foggy daze brought about by a mix of anticipation and insomnia, and instantly felt better.

To think, this might just be my last view of Tokyo.

The thought of leaving this city made me nostalgic and erased from memory the many unpleasant experiences I had here, including the encounter with that nightmare of a boss from the Osaki Newspaper Agency.

The few people in my car all exuded a sense of purpose: those who smelled of sweat and grime had just finished their night shifts; those carrying packed lunches and dressed impeccably were heading to work. Despite high jobless rates, it would appear most people around here had managed to secure gainful employment. Why couldn't they make one more space for me in the daily workforce of this great metropolis?

With this thought, the plight of my mother and the urgency I sensed to return to my native land slowly faded into the backdrop. There was no future for me back home, and I wasn't to return until I had made a name for myself—the desire to honor my mother's wishes suddenly trumped everything.

14

I was of two minds. On the one hand, I was eager to go home—eager to leave Tokyo for Taiwan despite warnings that I wouldn't be able to find meaningful work. On the other hand, I couldn't help feeling that if only I stayed a little longer, I might just be able to find employment of some kind.

That I was able to come around to this new way of thinking was due, in no small part, to Tanaka, who, in my mind, was the perfect role model. Furthermore, while my boss at the newspaper agency was anything but honest, cheating me out of what little money I had (not to mention ripping off the fifteen-year-old who ended up leaving in tears), the majority of workers at the agency appeared to have done just fine, managing not only to stay on, but also to go to school at the same time.

I got off the train and, two blocks later, was at the little restaurant where we used to eat. There I had my breakfast, and, before long, Tanaka walked in, coming straight from his paper route.

Never a cheerful person to begin with, today he was gloomier than usual. With his head hung low and engrossed in thought, he entered and sat down opposite me, but failed to notice my presence.

"Tanaka," I called out, snapping him out of his stupor.

"Hey, buddy! What you up to? Where'd you spend the night?"

"I went back to my old boarding house, not too far from here."

"Yes—I forgot to ask for your address. Why, you're up early today!"

His tone was curious, as if eager to learn why I was up so early.



“It turned out my family had sent me some money, which arrived at the boarding house a while ago.”

I pulled the letter out from my pocket.

“Money? Well, then, you’d better hold on to it, at least until you find some work. Before then, keep it safe.”

“No, no—you see, they sent me quite a bit of money. How about you come with me to the post office and cash this money order—” At which point I was ready to announce my purpose.

“So, Tanaka, I wanted to tell you that—”

But Tanaka cut me short, with exasperation written all over his face. “Not again—you’re here to talk money with me.”

“No—not at all. You see, in the letter, my mother told me she was seriously ill. I wanted to make a trip back, to see for myself. So I’m here to say good-bye—”

He looked at me with a despondent stare. “Did she ask you to go back?”

“Well, not exactly. She actually warned me against it, saying there were no prospects for me back home. She told me to come back only after I had proven myself—”

“So then, things can’t be that bad.”

“No, no—things are very bad. The letter was sent twenty days ago, and since then I haven’t heard a word, which has been eating at me.”

Tanaka, too, was starting to get anxious—at which point, a co-worker seated next to us suddenly commented, “You know, there was a letter—a letter addressed to you. I saw it when I was picking up my mail yesterday.”

“So what are we waiting for?” Tanaka had not yet finished his rice, but was already out the door. “Wait here for me,” he ordered.

My hopes were up—I got up and headed to the door, anxiously awaiting Tanaka’s return.

Not long after, Tanaka was back, huffing and puffing. My attention, however, drifted to the envelope in his hand. I immediately reached for the letter, which, curiously, did not list my mother as the sender, but rather, my uncle—which was disquieting.

I tore open the letter. Goodness gracious! Mother was dead—and for half a month now. And it was with her own money that she paid for her burial.

The world around me was swirling. I was weak in the knees and could no longer support myself. Tanaka grabbed hold of me and carried me back into the restaurant, where he leaned me against the wall. Beset with grief and anger, I could not stem the tears flooding down my cheeks.

*My dearest son—my only hope in this world, I have come to the conclusion that there is no point in living on—to do so would do you no good. My existence would only add to your burden, and would not help your case in any way. Without me, you'd have one less worry on your mind. You'd be able to whole-heartedly pursue your passion.*

*My one and only hope is that you be strong, that you'd make a name for yourself and then come back to help the poor people of your village, to deliver them from this hellhole.*

*I cannot begin to describe the sufferings of the locals here. Since you left for Tokyo, many have hanged themselves; others chose to drown themselves in their backyard ponds. You remember Uncle Adam<sup>14</sup>—well, he and Mrs. Adam, together with their three sons, have perished in a house fire.*

*When I ask that you succeed, it isn't so that you can flaunt your wealth and become the talk of the town. Rather, I'd like to you lend a hand to these struggling families—they have helped me in ways I cannot repay. I hope you will be able to return the favor someday.*

*I asked your uncle to withhold this letter from you for fear that you'd rush home at the news of my death—thereby spending all of our hard-earned cash, all for nothing.*

*Take care, my son.*

*Mom*

Those were my mother's final words. All her life, she had been reluctant to stir the hornet's nest, what with her fear of the authorities and law enforcement—after all, she had fainted at the mere mention of my father's detention. But when backed into a corner, when there was no way out, she was no pushover—she would stick to her guns and feared nothing and no one. She would stand up for her beliefs and deliver what she promised, with little regard for her own well-being.

I had an older brother who joined the police force, who would aid in the oppression of local villagers in order to suck up to the Japanese. After hearing of his behavior and learning for certain that it was true, Mother cut off all ties to my brother and kicked him out of the house—that was the kind of woman she was. Even after I left for Tokyo, when she was penniless and struggling just to get by, she refused to ask my brother for help, even after two of my younger siblings had died and the remaining survivor had to be left with my uncle—such was her sense of dignity.

15

Come to think of it, if only Mother had a few more years of schooling, if only she had read about the salting of the earth at Carthage<sup>15</sup>, or about revolutionaries imprisoned in the flesh but not in the spirit, or about champions of the proletariat who stood up against oppression—if only she was armed with this knowledge, she would not have fainted when Father was taken into police custody, but would have fought back with practical countermeasures.

Having just read my mother's last words, I was an emotional wreck and wasn't in the mood for anything.

I lay in bed for a very long time, and only after my mood had settled somewhat did I venture to pick up the second letter in the envelope, written by my uncle.

*Your mother hanged herself on day X of the month of Y. My initial instinct was to cable you the instant I found her in this wretched state, but upon reading the letter she held in her hand, in which she described her state of mind, I decided to honor her final wishes and waited until now to reach out to you.*

*Your mother had high hopes for you. In her mind, were you to travel back to mourn her death, you'd be wasting precious time and money, not to mention miss out on opportunities for work.*

*She has pinned all her hopes on you. Your older brother is a lost cause, so abominable and self-centered, whereas your younger brother is still a child, and doesn't have a clue what is going on.*

*She said she chose this path so as not to become a burden to you, so that you may fully focus on work and study, and pursue the bright future you have long aspired to, with nothing to hold you back.*

*She said if you were to give up on all the hard work you've put in and jeopardize your career to come home, then her sacrifice would have been for naught—it would have done more harm than good.*

*Your little brother is in my hands. I will raise him well—of this, you can rest assured.*

*Promise me you'll honor your mother's final wishes, and not make the hasty decision to come home—there is nothing for you here, nothing to do, nothing to live on.*

*Your mother is no longer of this world. Even if you were to make it back, there would be little you could do for her.*

*Take care of yourself.*

*Your uncle*

My mother is no longer of this world—I'll never get to see her again. It was this simple fact that finally put me off the idea of journeying back—back where? With no place to call home, I vowed never to return until I could find a way to help the people of my village.

Tanaka was sitting next to me, propping me up and watching over me the whole time I was reading the letter and experiencing this rollercoaster of emotions, grieving one minute, excited the next. Only after I had put the letter back into my pocket did he dare ask, "So, what did it say?"

"It said my mother's dead."

"She's dead?" he asked, with moisture in his eyes. "So when do you leave? Do you have to go right away?"

"No, I actually plan on staying."

"What are you talking about?"

"She's been dead for half a month now—there's no way I'm going to be able to see her. What's more, she told me in the letter not to go back."

"Half a month, eh? Do letters from Taiwan take that long to get here?"

"No, no—it was because my mother specifically instructed my uncle to keep the news from me until now."

"And why is that?"

"Because she was afraid I would abandon my plans here and rush back. She was hoping I'd stay and make a name for myself. She said that if I went back, all would have been for nothing."

"What a wise mother!" Tanaka sighed.

Though we wanted to finish the food in front of us, we were both too agitated to eat. I settled the bill despite Tanaka's objections and dragged him to the post office to cash my money order. There, I paid him back the money I owed—literally stuffing it into his pocket because he refused to

take it. It was as if a weight had been lifted off my chest. I wrote Tanaka my address and headed back to the boarding house.

Once in the boarding house, I jumped straight into the sack. I was so exhausted I could barely hold out, yet in my groggy stupor my mind was swimming with thoughts of my mother and her insistence that I find a way to help the folks back home—but how? I could try to save money and offer them cash—but no, that would be ridiculous and utterly unworkable. What have I managed to save so far? After a month of unemployment and twenty days of newspaper delivery, I could barely support myself, let alone have the discretionary income to help out others.

By then I was completely worn out—it was as if the exertion of the past two months had suddenly taken their toll, and before I knew it, I was fast asleep.

## 16

Funny how, when you're immersed in sleep, the slightest noise can draw you out, as if you're brought up from the ocean depths to the shallows. Many times I was brought to the brink of wakefulness, only to be powerless to open my eyes and fall back into deep slumber.

“Yeo!”

I could vaguely hear someone call out my name and might even have answered in my semi-conscious state, but lacked the strength to follow through, and subsequently slipped back into sleep.

“Yeo! Yeo!” I heard again, this time accompanied by the sensation of someone shaking my legs. I mustered the strength to open my eyes but was far from fully conscious. Gradually transitioning from lethargy to full awareness, I felt like I was standing in the morning mist, slowly waiting for the fog to clear. After a long while, I could sense a person sitting next to me—it turned out to be Tanaka.

I pushed my blanket aside and sat straight up, hazily surveying my surroundings.

Smiling and standing at the door was the owner of the hostel, who seemed amused by my bewildered state.

“Have you been placed under hypnosis? You’ve been asleep for hours!”

“Huh? Is it already evening?”

“Evening? Why, it’s already past noon! That is, noon the next day!” The proprietor burst into laughter.

It turned out I had fallen asleep just before noon the day prior, and was in bed until noon the following day, having slept for a full twenty-five hours—I found it hard to believe myself.

After the owner had left, I turned to face Tanaka, who looked a bit tense, as if he had something to tell me.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting.”

“Nah,” he answered, and quickly got to the point. “I have some important news.”

“The newspaper carrier ad claimed another victim yesterday. After you’d left, I’d been asking myself how we could get back at the boss. But before I could come up with a plan, yet another hapless jobseeker had been lured in. So last night, I made an effort to speak to the new guy and warn him of the dangers. But he didn’t seem to care, asking me if it was so, and calling the owner an outright bastard, but not sounding the slightest bit worried.”

“So I continued. I told him to look for work elsewhere, otherwise he’d be cheated out of his money just like everyone else. I told him there were no vacancies for newspaper carriers, and that in a day or two he’d be switched to door-to-door sales—the result of which, inevitably, would be that he’d get kicked out of the agency after being stripped of his deposit.”

“But he seemed not the least bit concerned. He held on to my hand and said, ‘I appreciate the advice, but tell me something, when you see a co-worker being taken advantage of like that, how can you stand to just sit back and do nothing?’ I was offended, answering, ‘I’m not just sitting back and doing nothing—why do you think I’m telling you about this?’”

“To which he said, ‘Thank you for the heads up, buddy, but I’m not going to just walk away. If I walk away, there will be countless other poor folk stripped of their ten dollar deposit. That can’t be right.’ I asked him what else there is to do. ‘Oh, there’s something you can do alright,’ he said. ‘The question is, are you willing to stand with me?’”

“I pledged my support and he taught me how to fight back. He said, ‘Faced with bullies of this sort, the trick is to stand together. As individuals, we’re subject to the whims of the big bosses and are powerless to do much. But together, that’s a different story. When we present a united front, there is little anyone can do to stop us—you get what I’m saying? So if we’re going to stand up against this rascal, we’re going to have to coordinate our actions.’”

“The guy seemed wise beyond his years and spoke with a deep conviction. I told him about your experience at the agency and what had happened to your folks in Taiwan. He was extremely interested, saying he wasn’t aware that even the Taiwanese had fallen victim to exploitation. He said he wanted to meet you, and asked me for an introduction.”

## 17

When I was told by Tanaka that this new fellow (whose name I later learned was Ito) wanted to meet me, it was a much-needed boost to my sagging spirits. I was like an oil lamp about to burn out when the oil well was suddenly replenished—my hopes were instantly renewed.

How excited I was to learn there was a way to get back at that flesh-eating, blood-sucking vampire of a boss; on top of that, the fact that the brainchild behind it all took an interest in me piqued my curiosity—I



couldn't wait to meet the man. If he really knew how to give it to that newspaper mogul, then, who knows, maybe he'll even give me a tip or two about how to help my folks back home.

Back in Taiwan, I used to think all Japanese people were evil, and exhibited a certain animosity towards them. When I first arrived in Tokyo, I was still wary of the natives—but all that had begun to change. The Japanese people I'd met here, with, perhaps, the one exception of the newspaper baron, were mostly good people: the owner of the boarding house was jolly and good-natured; those customers who paid a dollar's subscription for no reason other than to help me out were kind at heart; and then there was Tanaka, who was much more than a brother to me—ininitely more brotherly than that policeman sibling of mine—to speak of the two in the same breath would be to tarnish his good name—which made me realize, just as Taiwanese people could be good or bad, the same was true of the Japanese.

Tanaka and I quickly left the boarding house and set out to meet with Ito.

We entered Ueno Park and headed straight for the meadows in the rear. There, sitting under a tree, was a man who, upon seeing Tanaka and me, got up and walked towards us. He extended his hand and gripped my palm with a firm shake. "A pleasure to meet you, Yeo!" he said.

"A pleasure to meet you," I echoed, not entirely sure who I was talking to, for I wasn't expecting to run into anyone in the park. Turning to look at Tanaka, I realized only then that it was Ito whom I was greeting.

We soon got talking, and it was as if we had known each other all our lives.

"I've lived in Taiwan for some time," he said, and went on to ask me bluntly, "So, how do you like the Japanese?"

Having been put on the spot, I wasn't sure how to explain my mixed feelings. After all, I was meeting this person for the first time. But here

was someone who had actually been to Taiwan, with whom I felt a strong affinity. I had a good feeling about this guy—why had I never met anyone like this back in Taiwan?

After much deliberation, I answered, “My buddy Tanaka here is a hell of a guy—there isn’t a bad bone in his body! But I have to admit, back in Taiwan, I had never come across anyone like him.”

“That’s right—your typical Japanese worker is like Tanaka here, down-to-earth and agreeable. Ordinary citizens in Japan are against the government’s exploitation and oppression of the Taiwanese people. It is only the privileged classes that engage in this type of abuse, like the newspaper baron who robbed you of your deposit and kicked you out—Japanese officials sent to Taiwan tend to be of this type. Not only have the Taiwanese people fallen under their yoke, Japanese workers here at home are also subject to their whims...There is no shortage of bullies like these in the world, ever eager to profit off the labor of the poor, eager to trick the working classes into submission. People like this have no regard for your personal well-being—their purpose is to strip you of every last penny, and, to this end, they will not hesitate to intimidate you and deprive you of your personal freedoms.”

His every word was making an imprint in my mind—I was learning more in a single sitting than in the entire six years of elementary school.

Our mayor back home was Taiwanese, as was my policeman elder brother, both of whom sold out to the Japanese and aided in the oppression of the villagers, contributing to the predicament we were in.

I told Ito all about the troubles back in the village, describing the confiscation of peasant land by the authorities in all its gruesome detail. He listened attentively, and when I was done, he was red in the face.

“You know,” he said passionately, “those bastards exploiting your people are the same ones exploiting my people—they are of the same kind. Let us join efforts and bring down this common enemy of ours!”

Three days after our initial meeting, Ito found me work at a toy factory in Ueno, which finally brought some stability into my life. Thereafter, when I had free time, I would go to him with my problems, and he would always take the time to counsel me to my satisfaction, thanks to which I no longer lived in fear, and was able to have greater faith in my abilities.

He introduced me to many like-minded friends and took me to meetings and political rallies. On one occasion I was even invited onto stage to speak about the troubles in my village in front of a crowd of thousands.

A few months later, workers at the Osaki Newspaper Agency went on strike. That pompous, condescending prick of a boss was brought to his knees by workers standing in unison. How I rejoiced to see his face turn pale as he gave in to every one of the strikers' demands.

How I wanted so much to land my fist on his big fat face and knock the snot and tears out of him—it was this conviction that moved me forward. But, in the end, I never did, because, ultimately, it meant more to extract out of him the demands of his employees than to use him as an emotional outlet for my frustrations.

Think about it: the “Carrier Wanted” poster used to lure in the poor had been torn down; the uncharitable rules for joining the workforce were now removed; the commission for signing up a new subscriber had been raised to ten cents; in the sleeping quarters, each individual was now entitled to his own blanket and guaranteed a space of two mats—to this end, the owner had rented the building next door and replaced the threadbare tatami mats with new ones, as well as hired exterminators to remove fleas and lice.

So there you go—who says workers have to be resigned to their fate? Who says workers have to live like pigs in a sty? Who says workers are powerless to advocate for their rights?

At our celebration party, I was once again invited onto stage to talk about the troubles back home—it was there that I announced my decision to return to my village to lead the struggle against the oppressors. The

further I got into my address, the more passionate I became, as did the audience, who were fired up like a mob. By the time I got to my conclusion, the crowd was chanting, “Go, go, go...” as it erupted in applause. Before I knew it, the occasion had transformed into a farewell party—a send-off for me as I sounded my battle cry and sailed off into the unknown.

I was dressed in my work clothes as I set off the next day—not exactly girded in armor or crowned in a laurel wreath, but a crowd had gathered to see me off at Tokyo Station, an assortment of faces familiar and unfamiliar. The mood was one of jubilation, with none of the grief usually associated with parting.

The lessons I had learned in the past months, I was beginning to feel, had fully vindicated my mother’s hopes for me.

Confident of my abilities, I stood on the deck of the ocean liner Horai Maru as the splendors of the Taiwanese coastline slowly drifted into view. It was spring on this beautiful island, an island the Japanese had painstakingly built into a bastion of progress and prosperity—a prosperity which, when pricked with a pin, starts to ooze foul-smelling blood and pus.

## NOTES

1. There are a number of Japanese- and Chinese-language variants of this novella currently in circulation. The Japanese-language original, titled “Shinbun Haitatsufu” 新聞配達夫, was initially published in part in Taiwan, appearing as installments in the Japanese-language newspaper *Taiwan People’s News* 台灣新民報 in 1932. The complete novella later appeared in 1934 in the Tokyo literary journal *Bungaku Hyōron* 文學評論, having been awarded second prize in its annual literary award (no first prize award was given out that year). Both Japanese-language versions (Yang, Kui 楊逵, “Shinbun Haitatsufu” 新聞配達夫 [The Newspaper Boy], *Taiwan People’s News* 台灣新民報, May 19–27, 1932; and “Shinbun Haitatsufu” 新聞配達夫 [The Newspaper Boy], *Bungaku Hyōron* 文學評論 1.8 (1934): 199–233), it is believed, were subject to heavy censorship. The Chinese-language version, titled “Songbaofu” 送報伏, made its debut in 1935 in a translation by leftist critic Hu Feng in the current affairs journal *Shijie Zhishi* 世界知識 (Yang Kui 楊逵, “Songbaofu” 送報伏 [The Newspaper Boy], trans. Hu Feng 胡風, *Shijie Zhishi* 世界知識 2.6 (1935): 42–53). Forty years later, the author himself produced a Chinese-language rewrite, substantially lengthening the piece and dividing it into sections. Yang’s reworking, which purportedly restores parts of the story removed by Japanese censors, first appeared in the 1975 anthology *Ê-mama Chujia* 鵝媽媽出嫁, edited by Liangze Zhang (Yang Kui 楊逵, “Songbaofu” 送報伏 [The Newspaper Boy], in *Ê-mama Chujia* 鵝媽媽出嫁, edited by Liangze Zhang 張良澤, Tainan: Daxing Chubanshe, 1975: 75–134.). Since then, some fifteen other Chinese-language versions of “The Newspaper Boy” have appeared in print (for a complete list, see Terukazu Tsukamoto 塚本照和, “Tracing the Different Versions of Yang Kui’s ‘Newspaper Boy’” 楊逵作品『新聞配達夫』(送報伏)的版本之謎, trans. Xiang Yang 向陽, *Taiwan Wenyi* 台灣文藝 94 (1985): 166–180; and Liu Shu-qin 柳書琴, “Newspaper Man’ in China: The Reception of *Mountain Spirits: Selected Short Stories from Korea and Taiwan* and Yang Kui’s Short Story” 〈送報伏〉在中國:《山靈:朝鮮台灣短篇集》與楊逵小#的接受, *Bulletin of Taiwanese Literature* 台灣文學學報 29 (2016): 1–38.), but most are reprints of or minor variants on the 1935 Hu translation or the 1975 Yang rewrite. The current English translation is based on the author’s 1975 revision.

2. The Japanese monetary units “yen” and “sen” are translated as “dollar” and “cent”, considering the real values of the two currencies were similar in the period between 1929-1940 with purchasing power parity factored in.
3. Proper names of Japanese persons and institutions are transcribed in Japanese *romaji*, as are the names of Japanese officials in Taiwan.
4. Functional equivalent of the Chinese idiom *wòxīn chángdǎn* 臥薪嘗膽 “sleeping on twigs and ingesting bile”, a reference to King Gōujiàn of Yuè, who, in Spring and Autumn China, forced himself to live in discomfort until he was able to avenge his humiliation at the hands of the king of Wú.
5. Functional equivalent of the Chinese proverb 吃得苦中苦·方為人上人, literally “he who has suffered the bitterest of the bitter will rise above all.”
6. A more literal translation would give “The Japanese say that there are demons in the human world, but there are also buddhas.”
7. The source text uses a Taiwanese unit of land measurement known as the *kah* 甲 (a legacy of the Germanic “morgen”, acquired during the period of Dutch occupation, 1624-1662), roughly equal to 0.96992 hectares.
8. Surname 陳 given in Japanese *romaji*—equivalent to Chen in Mandarin, or Tan in Taiwanese dialect.
9. Surname 林 given in Japanese *romaji*—equivalent to Lin in Mandarin, or Lim in Taiwanese dialect.
10. Name 余清芳 given in Taiwanese dialect Peh-oe-ji (POJ) romanization—equivalent to Mandarin Yu Qingfang.
11. Names of the protagonist’s family members are Anglicized for effect, based on Taiwanese dialect pronunciation.
12. In the Japanese source text of 1934, the pun that the protagonist initially fails to comprehend is as follows: the Korean boarder, it is said, was locked up for his *musen* 無線 (literally “wireless” = radio), a term homophonous with 無錢 (literally “pennilessness” = inability to pay a restaurant bill).
13. Names are Anglicized according to Taiwanese dialect pronunciation. In the source text, the names of all three younger siblings contain the diminutive prefix *ah-*, which is replaced in the translation, where possible, with an equivalent English diminutive. Younger brothers Ah-Thih and Ah-Bian are rendered as Teddy and Manny; younger sister Ah-Lan is rendered as Lana.

14. Name Anglicized according to Taiwanese dialect pronunciation. Originally “Ah-Thiam” in Taiwanese Peh-oe-ji romanization, where “ah” is a diminutive prefix used as a term of endearment.
15. The source text cites a Chinese example of resistance and revenge: that of King Gōujiàn of Yuè, who, in the late Zhōu dynasty, forced himself to “sleep on twigs and ingest bile” until he was able to avenge his humiliation at the hands of King Fūchāi of Wú.

# ABOUT THE EDITOR AND TRANSLATORS

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

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