

Hara Castle

Ishimure Michiko

Introduction and Translation by Bruce Allen

2018 Kyoko Selden Translation Prize Announcement

On the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Kyoko Selden Memorial Translation Prize through the generosity of her colleagues, students, and friends, the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University is pleased to announce the winners of the 2018 Prize.

“Honorable Mention in the category of “Already Published Translator” has been awarded to Bruce Allen, Faculty of Seisen University, Tokyo, for his eloquent translation of Chapter Four of Ishimure Michiko’s historical novel about the Shimabara Rebellion, *Hara Castle* (Haru no shiro), which he is currently translating in its entirety. Allen’s rendition of the text is enriched by his long-standing engagement with the writings and powerful ecocritical vision of Ishimure, who passed away in 2018.

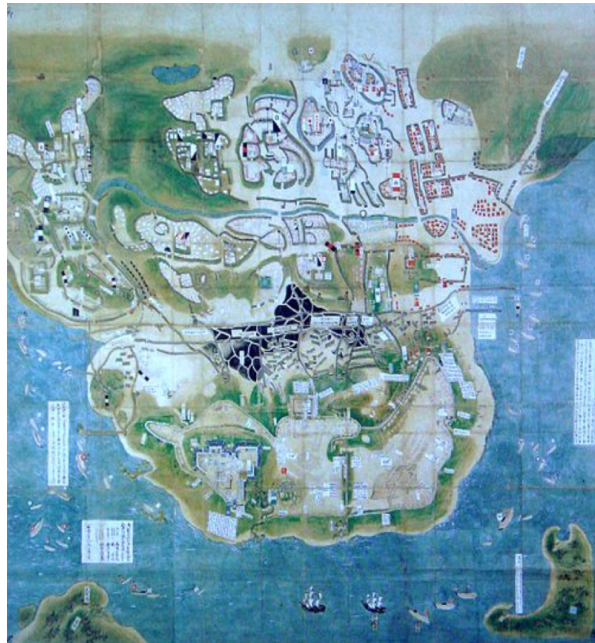
In the category of “Already Published Translator,” the prize has been awarded to Dawn Lawson (Head, Asia Library, University of Michigan), for Nakajima Shōen’s *A Famous Flower in Mountain Seclusion* (Sankan no meika, 1889). Lawson’s translation makes available in English for the first time a full translation of the novella by the woman who, under the name Kishida Toshiko, was a powerful orator of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement and a key figure in early struggles for women’s rights in Japan. The

translation renders into delightfully readable English Nakajima’s witty satire of Meiji mores, as well as her depiction of the isolation often endured by women who, like herself, pursued lives that did not entirely conform to patriarchal norms.

In the category of “Unpublished Translator,” the prize has been awarded to Max Zimmerman, of Nikkei America, for translating the short story, “[An Artificial Heart](#)” (Jinkō Shinzō, 1926) by Kosakai Fuboku. Like the Lawson translation, Zimmerman’s text makes available in English for the first time the work by an acclaimed pioneer of science fiction in Japan. Zimmerman’s meticulous and concise prose well captures the style of this breakthrough piece by Kosakai, a renowned researcher in physiology and serology, whose fictional account of the construction of an artificial heart anticipated the first successful heart transplant by almost sixty years.

Introduction to Ishimure Michiko’s novel *Hara Castle*

Hara Castle (春の城, *haru no shiro*) is Ishimure Michiko’s historical novel based on the events that led to the Shimabara Rebellion that took place from 1637-1638 in the regions of Shimabara and the Amakusa Islands in Kyushu.



Seige of Shiro Castle

This uprising ended with the killing of some 37,000 Japanese—mostly Catholic peasants—in one day, when the Rebellion was finally crushed by government forces. The novel is based around the story of the historical figure Amakusa Shirō (1621-1638), a charismatic youth who at the age of fifteen became the leader of the Rebellion. It deals not only with religious persecution, but also with a wide range of economic and social issues, including the exorbitant taxes levied on peasants by the central government. The events occurred nearly 400 years ago when Japan was looking outward and experimenting with international trade, new religions, and cultures. Ishimure spent fifty years writing *Hara Castle*. A monumental work of 530 pages in Japanese, it has been considered by many to be Ishimure’s most important work.



Remains of Hara Castle. Source [here](#).

Ishimure Michiko (1927-2018) has long been strongly associated with her pioneering novel *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow* (苦海浄土: わが水俣病), which exposed the Minamata Disease incident of industrial poisoning. Ishimure went on to publish over fifty volumes in a wide range of genres, including novels, poetry, essays, noh dramas, children’s stories, and memoirs. Along with Ishimure’s association with the Minamata Disease incident, her writing has been strongly associated with her concerns for animism, Buddhism, Shinto, and local Japanese myths and folklore. In *Hara Castle*, Ishimure addresses historical events that took place 400 years ago during the early Christian era in Japan—relating them to her ongoing concerns for justice, environment, culture, and understanding among humans.

Here we present Chapter 3, “The Tree on the Hilltop” and Chapter 4, “Vocation” from *Hara Castle*.

Note on the title:

This novel was first published in serialized form in newspapers under the title *Haru no Shiro* (春の城). In book form, it was first published in

1999 under the title *Anima no Tori* (アニマの鳥) by Chikuma Shobo Co. Later, it was republished under the title *Haru no Shiro* (春の城) in 2017 by Fujiwara Shoten. *Haru no Shiro* is included in Fujiwara Shoten's 18-volume critical edition of the collected works of Ishimure Michiko. My translation of the title as *Hara Castle* is based on the Japanese title *Haru no Shiro*. I chose to work from this title because, of the two Japanese titles, it is the one that Ishimure Michiko preferred. The title *Haru no Shiro* would translate, literally, as *Spring Castle*, but I translated it as *Hara Castle* the name of the castle that has central importance in the novel—the site of the historical massacre—and because Ishimure's use of the word *haru* carries multiple, nuanced meanings that refer to the historical Hara Castle, to the image of its green fields in the time of spring, and to the Shimabara region, where the events took place and where the remains of the Hara Castle can still be seen.

Brief synopsis of characters and events leading up to Chapter 3, “Tree on the Hilltop,” in *Hara Castle*, by Ishimure Michiko

The story of *Hara Castle* begins when Okayo, a young woman who comes from a Buddhist family but also has Christian relatives, marries Hasuda Daisuke, from a Christian family that lives in a neighboring village in the Amakusa Islands of southern Kyushu. They are brought together by Yazō, the leader of the local fishermen and a trusted facilitator of relations among people in the local communities.

We learn of the growing troubles—economic, political, and religious—facing people in the Amakusa region, a historical center of Japanese Christianity. The local farmers and fishermen have been struggling with food shortages and with exorbitant taxes demanded by the central government and collected by local magistrates. In recent years, the Order of Expulsion of

Christian Priests (1614) has led to the widespread suppression of Christian beliefs and practices. Increasingly onerous taxes have been levied by local officials to support the Shogun's expansionist plans including waging distant campaigns in the Philippines.

The Hasuda family, comprised of Okayo and Daisuke, along with the father Jinsuke, the mother Omiyo, and their adopted daughter Suzu, plays a leading role in maintaining their community during the difficult times. Jinsuke goes to the local government magistrate to protest against the grain tax but is rebuffed. The people face worsening conditions of drought, crop failure, and the threat of starvation. Their Christian principles are continually tested and threatened. Nevertheless, they continue to carry out charitable activities such as maintaining a “Mercy House” for elders who have no other relatives to support them. They try to maintain their Christian faith, secretly, amidst the increasing conditions of its suppression.

The Ninagawas are another leading family in the town. Their son Ukon became a close friend of a charismatic young boy named Shirō—who will eventually be chosen as the leader of the Shimabara Rebellion—when they met during a visit to Nagasaki. The two share interests in study and religion.

On his boat, Yazō has just brought Shirō to the village of Kuchinotsu and introduced him to the townspeople. After a long period of drought, the weather changes and a great storm approaches.

Brief synopsis of characters and events leading up to Chapter 4, “Vocation”

We are introduced to Okatchama, a woman born in poverty in a Christian family. She had been a prostitute, but later became a powerful, respected businesswoman in Nagasaki. She

plays a major role in supporting the Christian community, as well as in helping immigrants and children of “mixed-blood” marriages. She also has a major influence on Shirō and Ukon; introducing them to each other, and teaching them about practical matters of living in the world.

The area suffers a major typhoon that seriously damages houses, fishing boats, and crops. It also claims the lives of all the elderly residents of the Mercy House. Increasingly, the people suffer from bad weather—both drought and flood—and they come closer to starvation. In these desperate conditions, Hasuda Jinsuke petitions the local government for a deferment in paying the grain tax; both for the current year and for the amounts owed from recent years of poor harvest. He also asks for an emergency allotment of rice, as the people face starvation.



**Ishimure Michiko and Bruce Allen;
Ishimure Studies Center, Kumamoto,
2007**

Chapter 3 : Tree on the Hilltop

Swirling over the cape off Kuchinotsu harbor, the first strong gusts of wind swept along with big drops of rain. After so many days of scorching heat, the rain came as a great relief as it fell on the sweaty men. Soon after, to their surprise, the wind died down, and here and there, the sound of hammering started up suddenly. And then, as it fell silent, the light of day faded.

The roaring of the sea drifted in from the coast nearby. Okayo, more agitated than usual, looked at her husband’s face with a forlorn expression. Daisuke was sitting next to his father, and turning the pages of the accounts ledger. The light from the oil lamp was weaker than usual. As a precaution, on account of the wind, its wick was trimmed low, and he was reading the small characters in the dim light.

“Hmm, the tide’s out. Sounds like it’s kicking up more than usual out at sea.”

As Daisuke said this, he sensed Okayo’s gaze fixing on him. Matsukichi, who had been weaving straw sandals in the dark earthen-floored room, stood up, holding his work in his hands.

“Looks like the tide’s going to run real strong tonight. When it comes in, it’ll be a high one.”

With Matsukichi’s talk of the sea, Okayo felt a bit relieved. Jinsuke stopped writing and looked up.

“Well, I’m glad to see it’s gotten dark enough.

Now's the time. We'll get some people together. You ready?"

The men all stood up. In preparing for the storm, while working together in the room with the attached dirt entryway, they had been keeping their ears tuned for signs from outside. Daisuke nodded to Matsukichi, and, as if being sucked into the hushed silence outside, they headed out.

As she watched the men starting to move quickly, Okayo also worried about the supply of grain. She imagined they must be trying to get the grain that Yazō had unloaded from the ship earlier in the day. When the high tide came in, they wouldn't be able to use the road along the beach. When Jinsuke said, "Now's the time," he must have been talking about their going to get the grain, and sharing it with the villagers without being noticed by the government officials. If they went now, there would still be time before the tide was high. And the darkness would help keep the movements of Daisuke and the others unseen.

The government grain storehouses were on the other side of the inlet, across from the boat. If the guards noticed the movements of Daisuke and the men, they would confiscate the grain, wouldn't they? Okayo heard the sounds of the whirling sea growing louder, as if pressing down on her, and she glanced at her mother-in-law.

Despite all the consternation of the night, Omiyo was starting to sew a finely decorated ball. In the dim light, she continued sewing the strands of red thread into it. In the darkened room, with the men gone, the small ball cast a faint light.

On a straw mat, Oume was slowly crushing dried mugwort. Sorting out the bits of down that came from the leaves, she was preparing *mogusa* for moxa treatment.

"What with the storm and the drought both

coming together, we've had quite a time of it, and today's been so crazy. But if we get enough rain, and it doesn't bring too much trouble, let's celebrate."

Omiyo said this to Jinsuke, who looked worried about Daisuke's absence. Just then, a tremendous gust of wind struck as if it might pull the roof down.

"Whoa!—here it comes! Looks like it's hit."

Biting off the end of a strand of red thread, Omiyo glanced toward her husband. Her mother-in-law smiled gently. While Okayo was musing on how much Omiyo resembled the Kannon at Nie no Ikawa, the lamp went out. Remaining in the back of Okayo's eyes was the impression of how the ball in Omiyo's hand looked so much like the sacred orb of Kannon-sama. The remaining group relit the little lamp below the creaking ceiling, and held evening mass.

In Ninagawa Sakyō's house, in the midst of the storm, his family passed the time as if buoyed up by the depths of an enormous wave.

Ever since their son Ukon had met Shirō in Nagasaki in the spring, the two had formed a close relationship. Already, Ukon had become worried that, along with the eviction of the missionaries, the Christian books that had been printed in Amakusa, Katsusa, and Nagasaki were being scattered and lost. He hoped to collect the remaining books and other documents, and save them. Henmi Juan had strongly urged him to do this. He had requested:

"While I'm still alive, please collect as many of the writings as possible, and ask me about anything in them. I want to pass on all that I learned at the seminary and the college."

And then, he had visited the Ninagawa house, and discussed academic matters. During the past thirty years or more of oppression, a

number of people had been imprisoned just for possessing Christian writings. Some had burned the books and documents before they were found, and Juan worried that if books such as the *Doctrina Christiana* and other writings on the faith's important points were lost, all the carefully-preserved essence and spirit of the prayers would come to naught. His worries also reflected certain pressures that sometimes overrode the pleasure he took from scholarly work in his old age.

Fortunately, Yazō had made good use of all his connections in Nagasaki, and had been searching patiently for any Christian books that had been hidden away in secret. In the spring, he attended a tea ceremony to which Juan had invited Ukon, and with great joy, he announced, "I found these. They were all in one place." Juan was so happy he almost spilled the hot water from the wooden ladle he was holding.

Soon after, Ukon had gone with Yazō to Nagasaki, and they met Shirō in the house where he was living temporarily.

First, they were introduced to the slender woman who was in charge of the house. As Yazō had already explained to Ukon, she had been one of the supporters back when the town village ran the Mercy House.

With a sense of fondness, as if already knowing a lot about Ukon, the woman had said, "Well, I'm so glad you've come. I've been hoping there might be someone who would keep these things. You've arrived at such a dangerous time."

Looking at the two, who at first, were surprised to hear her warning, she continued:

"Yes, listen—yesterday, the police raided a Chinese ship. Someone must have informed them."

"Really? Did they find anything on it?"

"They found a Christian book. A Chinese sailor had it, but nobody could read it—or so they said."

"They couldn't read it because it was written in Chinese?"

"No, it was in some European language—and its cover had some prohibited Christian designs on it. They took the sailor off the ship, and threw him in jail.

"We'll have to be careful."

"I've been so worried, waiting for you to come. Unless we get these religious writings away from Nagasaki, and hide them somewhere, I'll be too ashamed to face the priests."

"Well, thank you so much for taking care of them until now.

"It's a relief to me—a big load off my mind. Will it be you keeping these books?"

The woman had appeared to be a bit over fifty. With a long, deep sigh, she gazed at Ukon.

"I'm so grateful you've been looking after these precious books."

"Don't mention it. I've heard such good things about you from Yazō-dono, and now, from meeting you, I can see you're the person I've heard about."

Ukon blushed.

"Well, anyhow—my thanks to you. Now could I ask you to wait just a bit longer?"

The woman stooped, and went off into the back of the house. Outside, it was already starting to get dark.

He had heard that this was a shop that dealt in Chinese goods, and in the back, there was an earthen-floored room with shelves on both sides. On them were placed an old statue of the

Buddha, a beautiful brass flower vase, pieces of ivory, and other such things. The room had an indescribable fragrance. Ukon found himself sniffing the air, wondering if these might be the smells of musk and aloeswood that Juan had spoken of to him.

When his eyes had adjusted to the dim light, he realized that the room also contained various lustrous fabrics decorated with woven designs. He wondered if these might be the damask silks and figured fabrics his mother had told him about. And then Yazō, rubbing his thigh, called out:

“You find them interesting?”

“Very much so. And do they also sell fragrant woods?”

“Yes, they do. Ah, that’s right, Ukon-dono, you studied tea under Juan, so you must have a special interest in such woods.”

“I’m not especially interested, but a while back, my master said he wanted to try burning some aloeswood.”

On Christmas Day, after the ceremony, Juan had the custom of offering tea to his friends. Although he didn’t burn aloeswood at most tea ceremonies, he had a special feeling for it on Christmas, and he burned it in the tea room. He used to say that Father Valignano was very knowledgeable about the tea ceremony. He explained:

“Some of the Christian daimyo were among the most distinguished followers of master Sen no Rikyū and they tried to obtain the finest incense for burning. But Valignano-sama used to say we shouldn’t make a lot of smoke when we burn an aromatic wood, even if it’s a good one. Instead, we should burn it as a faint, refined incense.”

Together, the two men recalled such comments they had heard from Juan.

I’ve never seen it, but I’d like to burn some aloeswood incense, even just once.”

When Juan mentioned this, Chijiwa Bannai, who had been present at the tea ceremony, called out abruptly:

“Speaking of incense, these days we don’t hear any more about putting it in our armor when we go off to battle.”

“In armor for going off to battle? Hmm.”

Falling silent, a faint light shone from Juan’s deep-set, half-opened eyes.

Being in this shop filled with smells so different from those in most homes, Ukon had felt as if he were hearing Juan’s voice from that time, calling out in his ears. When Ukon looked up, he found a young boy standing silently right in front of him, holding a lamp covered with a paper shade.

“Might you be Ukon-sama?”

Reflexively, Ukon stood up.

“The Okatchama asked me to show you in. Would you please come this way?”

“Okatchama” was Nagasaki dialect, meaning the woman of a large household. Though it was still before sundown, the inner garden, which extended out from the dirt-floored entryway, and was lined with trees, it was quite dark. Turning the paper-shaded lamp around, the young boy turned his head back.

“Watch out for the roots of the wisteria vines as you walk.”

In the lamplight, the vines of the wisteria seemed enormous, like giant snakes. Beyond the trees, a brighter light was shining from another room.

Okatchama, who had been waiting, opened and spread out a purple cloth *furoshiki* on the top of

a sturdy desk.

“Well, now I can show you these books—at last. First, could you check them, please?”

She called out to the young boy, who was about to stand up.

“Let’s bring in the candle stand we use when we read the *Oratio*.”

Ukon watched the boy closely as he left the room, nodding.

“That boy’s a bit different. I’ve been looking after him.”

Despite the woman’s words, Ukon remained concerned about the boy, since he acted so differently from most merchants’ sons.

Under the light from the candles the boy brought in, Ukon was finally able to take a good look at the treasured books such as the *Guia do Pecador*, the *Hidesu no Kyo*, which was the first chapter of the *Symbolum Apostolicum*, the *Apostles’ Creed*, and the *Spiritual Training*.

“Please, take these in your hands and read them.”

After looking over the covers of each book carefully, one by one, front and back, Ukon began turning their pages. Seated beside him, the young boy also gazed at the books. Touched with deep emotion, Okatchama watched the two. Glancing at Yazō, they had both nodded.

On the evening the storm hit, in the Ninagawa house where Yazō brought Shirō, and amidst the gracious reception he received there—so gracious that it had almost made him writhe in pain—Shirō had felt a certain heaviness. Later, he learned that the Ninagawas’ second son, who had been the same age as he, had died the year before in an epidemic. Perhaps when the family looked at Shirō, they saw their son

superimposed on him.

Now meeting again, the two young men recalled their deep feelings from that evening in Nagasaki. The creaking and groaning that came from above sounded to them like the cries of a monumental trial from God.

“I wasn’t able to ask about the landlady at the house in Nagasaki then. What sort of person was she?”

The reason Ukon wished to know about the Nagasaki landlady was because he had been so impressed by her parting remarks. On the morning after he received the books from her, just when he was about to say goodbye, suddenly, with strong emotion, she had said to him:

I’ve taken care of these books until today, and I’ve been praying every day, morning and night. Twenty years ago—you weren’t even born yet—I’ll never forget. It was in the year of the tiger, and here in Nagasaki, at risk of our lives, we held a sacred procession. It had been reported that the Nagasaki governor had boasted that he was going to destroy the cathedral—down to its very last stone—and that he was going to force all the Christians—to the very last one—to renounce their faith. And so, in groups, the believers got up, and swore an oath of allegiance to their faith, and asked Deus for mercy and for forgiveness of their sins. And then, they marched through the city from church to church.

The seven groups kept up their marches for a number of days, and in the procession, some did penance. Clothed in purple, they carried crosses on their backs, such that the muscles of their shoulders were ripped and torn. They scourged themselves with whips until blood flowed. Children, too, dressed in purple, marched along chanting prayers. It was such a moving procession. Resigned to their fate, and with a beautiful statue of the infant Jesus placed on a carriage stand, they marched with

their palms pressed together in prayer. Even people of other faiths formed lines, and watched in silence.

These books were given by the padre who stayed at my house at that time. I joined the procession. Soon after, the padre, too, was hung on a cross . . . These books bring back memories of that day in Nagasaki, and of the repeated voices of prayers. I would like to present these books to you—along with their eyes, their images, and their spirit.

After some hesitation, Shirō's voice broke through Ukon's reminiscences.

"That Okatchama—I don't really know what sort of person she was. Her name was Onami-sama, and she was both extremely strict and kind."

"Onami-sama, was it? I've never met another woman like her, and I can't forget her. It was an unusual house."

"It sure was unusual. And there were lots of women in it."

"Because it was a merchant's house?"

"No. They came to ask for her advice. I heard from people who knew about it that she'd been a prostitute."

Ukon looked at the young boy with deep seriousness.

"Magdala Maria—she had been a prostitute. She shed tears on Christ's suffering feet, and anointed them with scented oils, and wiped them with her long hair."

"I remember hearing that name."

"She was the woman who, after Christ was hung on the cross, went to the cemetery, where she met an angel, and heard the prophecy of his resurrection."

"You know lots about it."

"I think of Onami-sama as a reincarnation of Magdala Maria."

"Why is that?"

"Other women who look like they, too, might be prostitutes come to see her, and she listens to their stories. They get some peace of mind after their stories have been heard. Okatchama sees them off in tears."

Reflecting the candles' wildly flickering light, Shirō's eyes, with their long eyelashes, stared at Ukon, deep in thought. It seemed strange to hear such a story from someone as young as Shirō. Ukon pondered, *I've never thought about the lives of prostitutes—never even considered that their world might have any connection to mine. Yet here, this young boy has been trying to spread the light of the Savior, in order to help the lives of prostitutes.* Ukon realized the depth of Shirō's spirit.

Come to think of it, that time when I left, the landlady whispered to me, "That boy has been my guardian angel. Please consider him a brother, and always help him."

After the churches were destroyed, the groups of believers gathered together in the invisible temples of their hearts. That landlady's house must have served as one of Nagasaki's invisible temples.

"Okatchama laughed, and said you weren't cut out for business. But what she did there, even though it was in a merchant's house, was something entirely different from business."

Shirō smiled with an almost angelic expression.

"If you just rely on numbers, then everything around you becomes limitless, and finally, it becomes empty."

"Empty? Well, perhaps you're right."

“But if you say that, then reality is empty. It becomes meaningless.”

Ukon stared at Shirō’s mouth, trying to understand what his words meant.

“Everything—and not only humans—once it’s born into this world, it causes something else, and this brings about an effect, and, in turn, this effect becomes yet another cause, and so, everything is bound together without limit. I, too, am also bound up in this endless chain of cause and effect.”

A dense cloud seemed to hover about Shirō’s eyebrows, hinting at his feelings. It seemed that this boy was trying to speak about the kinds of things that had never appeared in Ukon’s thoughts. After a silence, during which Shirō seemed to be looking for an appropriate time to speak, he began:

“To tell the truth, in that Chinese ship, I saw the leg of a child in chains.”

In silence, Ukon watched his face.

“According to Okatchama, that child must have been either sold or kidnapped.”

“ . . . Come to think of it, now that you mention it, I too heard they were trafficking humans on the Portuguese ships.”

“That child was sold and sent here, but from where? What kind of parents did he have? His toes were all caked with dirt. One of his ankles—he must have been about ten years old—was shackled in iron chains.”

Ukon thought of his younger brother, who died in the epidemic the year before. He had often washed his ankles when he was an infant. And before laying him in the grave, he had carefully washed his toes and wept. Suddenly, he recalled the story he had heard a number of times from his mother about the martyred family of Hayashida Sukezaemon. The image of

the eleven-year-old boy and his parents being burned to death rose up before his eyes. The flames had touched the boy’s clothes and hair where he was tied to a post, separated from his parents, and together, they were chanting the name of Santa Maria And as the rope that tied him burned and fell away, he was calling out for his mother, who was also engulfed in the flames. With excruciating breaths, the mother called out to her child, as if embracing him, and looked up to heaven. And then she said:

“Let us go there together.”

Ukon wondered if it was right for him to feel happier about the child who had been called up to heaven in front of all the people, compared to the child whose leg Shirō had seen. The thoughts weighed so heavily on him that he could not speak.

“The *kapitan* of that ship bought and sold people—and the sailors did it too—all of them could read the Scriptures, couldn’t they?” Shirō questioned.

Ukon just nodded.

“Our world’s in great chaos now.”

“You were talking about emptiness.”

“Right—there’s emptiness, a bottomless void.”

“And do you think it’s from there that the world will be created anew?”

“I suppose that’s the way all things are born and pass away.”

“But if that’s so, then is there no need for *Deus-sama*?”

“No, that’s not how things are. Actually, that’s the very reason for the existence of the One who contemplates the order of the entire world. It seems that people reflect various aspects of the world, and what they show to others is only one aspect.”

With a grave expression, the boy listened to the storm howling above him.

“*Inferno*—what do you think about it?”

“By knowing about *Inferno*, people can know about their own sins. When I saw the chain on the leg of that faceless child, I realized, deeply, our sins and faults.”

“And at such times, where is *Deus-sama*?”

“*Deus* exists, there—*beyond* such things.” The sounds of the wind pressed on the feelings of the two young men. Oily beads of sweat formed on Ukon’s brow. The depths of his eyes turned pale, and he sighed deeply.

As if struck by a bolt of lightning that sent shivers through his entire body, Ukon pressed his palms together forcefully. This was the first time he had ever felt such emotions. Gazing at Shirō with affection, as he realized the undeniable similarity to his younger brother’s face, he found himself at a loss for words. *It seems that this boy, here in front of me, has come to this land that has become so wrapped up in the sufferings of the world, and that he is being used to atone for everyone’s sadness. How can I place such an image on this person who is barely fifteen?* Staring at Ukon as he considered these thoughts, the boy projected the image of a flame in water.

Even as the storm raged and howled, Ukon’s mother heard the two young men in the adjacent room talking, and occasionally breaking into quiet laughter. She remarked to her husband:

“You know, these days we’ve hardly ever seen Ukon with such a happy face. What do you suppose they’re talking about?”

“Well, they’re young, and they have all sorts of things to talk about. But I wonder if they’re paying enough attention to the wind and rain. We can’t let those precious books get wet.”

A strong gust of wind blasted up from beneath the floor, such that it felt as if the entire house was being lifted up. The husband and wife glanced at each other.

Mizuna shrieked, “Brother—our house—it’s blowing away!” and ran into Ukon’s room. The candle in the stand flickered, and then, suddenly went out. This was the old candle stand from Portugal that their father took such pride in.

“We’re not going to be blown away.”

Ukon said this in a cheerful, reassuring voice to Mizuna, who was standing in the dark, looking petrified.

“I’m scared. Let’s stay together.”

“Mizuna, what’s this fuss about? Calm down.”

Lowering her voice, their mother entered. Holding a hand-held candlestick, she was carrying something heavy on one side. She felt her way forward with her toes, while the entire house sounded as if it was just barely holding together.

“Mother, is our house going to be blown away? It’s making such terrible squeaking sounds.”

“You’re right. It is making sounds.”

“I’m scared.”

“You’re scared? How old are you now? Act your age.”

Mizuna was two years younger than Shirō.

“Brother, let’s stay with Mother.”

“Your brother and our guest have important things to talk about. And it will be better if we sit in several places to help hold the house down—isn’t that right, Ukon?”

The hand-held candle cast its flickering light on

the laughing faces of Ukon and the guest.

“Here’s some oilpaper.”

Setting down the load she had been carrying at her side, the mother looked up at the ceiling.

“Looks like the rain hasn’t gotten to them yet. Talk’s important, too, but those books—could you ask our guest to help wrap them in this oiled paper? And, Mizuna, don’t just stand there, why don’t you fix the candles in the stand?”

Around daybreak, Ukon woke up, vaguely sensing some sort of commotion going on around him. It sounded like fragments of people’s voices. He had talked on long into the night, and worked hard at taking care of the books, and then fallen into a deep sleep. When he woke and looked around, he noticed that straw had fallen from the ceiling and lay scattered all over the tatami floor, and there was a smell of soot. The soot was strewn over the edges of Shirō’s futon.

“Last night, Ukon talked on so long—you mustn’t have gotten much sleep.”

Ukon’s mother’s face expressed a look of apology.

Mixed with the odors of soot, the smell of porridge wafted into the room, and then, breakfast was underway.

“That was one heck of a storm. Today, the sea’s still rough, and the boats won’t be sailing.”

“Please stay with us as long as you like.”

With this, Sakyō, the father, entered the conversation. He presented an image of conscientious seriousness, but when he spoke, his look was pleasant.

When Ukon stepped outside and looked around,

he was astonished. The house’s straw roof had become twisted and warped. On top of it lay broken branches from a large bough that had blown over from the neighbor’s camphor tree. Limbs and branches had been broken and tossed through the front garden, blown along the street such that it looked like it would be difficult to get away from the house without doing some cleanup work. While Ukon was surveying the situation, Kumagoro, a worker at Jinsuke’s house, came rushing up, his hair disheveled.

“The old people at the Mercy House! They’ve been swept away by the waves!”

“What?”

“And the house—the house was swept away too!”

Everyone stood bolt upright.

“Osuzu and Okayo-sama—they’re at their wits’ ends. They’ve been going back and forth to the beach. We couldn’t hold them back.”

“So what’s happening there now?”

Sakyō urged Kumagoro to continue.

“We’ve formed groups, and they’re out searching the coastline. But my master, he says he has something urgent he needs to talk to you about. He said he should have come directly, but, as you can imagine, he’s completely caught up in the work, and so, he asked if you could come to him.”

Asking on bended knee, as he looked up at Sakyō, Kumagoro’s shoulders were shaking. After drawing a breath, Sakyō replied.

“I understand. I’d like to go there now, but we have a lot to deal with here too. Tell him that as soon as we clear things up a bit here, I’ll go.”

Sakyō turned to his son.

“All right then, let’s get to work. First, we need to take a look around this place, and find out what’s happened. Ukon, I want you to go out and check on things.”

“Okay, right away.”

“I don’t want you to rush and overlook anything.”

“I’ll be careful. And will Shirō-dono go with me?”

“I’ll go with you.”

During this short discussion, people had been coming in to report on the damage. Shirō soon had a clear understanding of this family as the center of the *confraria* group of believers. Mizuna came in, and immediately started cleaning up the rooms that had been covered in soot. She worked briskly, looking very different from how she had looked the night before. Messengers came in, one after another.

“As far as I can see, there are no houses that have escaped damage.”

“The embankment and the roadway to Ushikubo’s place—they’ve been washed out.”

“Jisaku’s fields are so covered in mud they’re not recognizable.”

“And the tide washed up over Yozaemon’s fields, and pushed the gravel and debris all the way up along the river.”

Hearing these reports, Sakyō spoke in what sounded like a moan.

“Yozaemon’s fields?”

Yozaemon was one of the leading farmers of Kuchinotsu, and one of the leaders of Sakyō’s *confraria* group as well. His rice fields were set along a small river that led into the ocean, and people knew that, even in times of drought, the little water wheel there would be turning and

drawing water into the fields. By means of various contrivances, he had made sure that water reached the neighboring fields as well, but people couldn’t help noticing the different color of the rice in his fields, and even if the water dried up in the river, the grains of rice in his fields were full, and he could still get a decent harvest.

He lived simply and frugally, but a number of times, when things had gotten hard, he had opened his grain stores and given freely to others. And so, people spoke quietly of “Yozaemon’s storehouse of compassion”.

Sakyō remembered Jinsuke’s messenger, and considered the gravity of the situation. His wife, with her kimono sleeves tucked back, brought in tea, and silently placed it in front of her husband. Then, in a small voice, she spoke.

“I have to say, our grain stores—they’re almost empty. Last night, Yazō brought us about five portions mixed with *azuki* beans for the guest, and so, for breakfast this morning, I made some porridge with beans for the first time in ages.”

Sakyō’s face snapped back to attention, and he returned his wife’s look. Until that moment, his wife had hardly ever mentioned the state of affairs in the kitchen.

Sakyō thought, *Haven’t I just taken it for granted that my wife would take care of things all the time? I’ve been so wrapped up with things like the land taxes and the rice levy that I haven’t even asked her about our own household affairs. How has she managed up to now?*

“So, you’re saying . . . our stores are empty?”

“I didn’t say they’re empty. We still have a little millet and some soybeans. And we have a few of those small summer beans from last year.”

“That bad, is it?”

“Well, yes, but with all this rain we’ve had, perhaps we can plant an autumn crop of vegetables like daikon and some other things.”

They held this quick conversation while people were coming and going. Sakyō felt uneasy, since, once again, he realized how he was not only the leader of a group of Christians, but also, the head of his own household. While he watched over the people who passed in front of him, he thought of their rules and faith, which connected all of the believers. For them, he would certainly give his life. But even if he put all of his effort into memorizing and putting into practice all of the rules, it seemed of no use in the terrible situation they now faced. No, he didn’t say it was futile, but in the rules alone, he couldn’t find the strength he needed to step forward, and clear a path to resolving their predicament.

That happy time they spent at breakfast together with the young guest, thanks to the grace of God, mixed with the good smells of *azuki* bean porridge—what had that been? Sakyō told himself to stop feeling weak, and he raised his head.

In the field, an old holly tree had been completely uprooted, and lay upturned and leaning on its side. There was a hollow in it, covered with little green berries. When winter came and the berries turned red, birds would flock to it and pick at them. But he had never heard of humans eating them. Sakyō chided himself for thinking such stupid things.

Sakyō was glad that Ukon, who was normally absorbed in his studies and didn’t pay much attention to mundane affairs, now showed a different look and stepped outside the house. Sakyō thought, *The Christian teachings don’t come from the written books. It’s at times like this that Ukon has to find the true, living meaning of the teachings, through his actions. He needs to find it himself.*

Sakyō continued, *But what should I do, and*

how should I do it? I hear starvation is hitting all the villages around here, and that in other places, people have started whipping themselves, in penance and to ask for help. I’m not thinking of doing that, but if it’s God who does the whipping, I’ll take it. The whip, it seems, will come from both outside and inside. I’m ready to stand up and take the pain.

With a serious expression, Sakyō listened attentively to the grave reports. There could be no doubt that other villages were also in a critical situation. He thought it necessary to call an emergency meeting with all the village heads and leaders who had been summoned to the governor’s place the other day, so they could make plans and take some countermeasures.

Sakyō would be able to go to Jinsuke’s house a little after mid-day, once he finished looking after things here—for the time being at least. One elderly person from Sakyō’s group had been sent to the Mercy House, which was now washed away. Soon after Kumagoro got back, Sakyō had sent some people to Jinsuke’s house to search for the missing old ones. But because of the huge waves—the likes of which people living by the coast had never seen before—other houses too had been washed away. And more than ten of the boats, which people had drawn up onto the land or tied to sea fig trees, had been washed away and were missing, too.

Jinsuke and Daisuke were talking to the people who had come to help, and all looked distressed.

“Building that Mercy House so near the coast, it certainly was a mistake. That place was the home for our precious people. There’s no excuse for it.”

Jinsuke knelt on the ground, and for a while, was unable to raise his head. The decision to build the house there had not been Jinsuke’s alone. The leaders had decided on it together after going to check the site out.

The people in the area, even those who lived in the mountains, had loved going to the seashore since their childhood. They enjoyed watching the boats coming and going, and the many people who passed by there. On days of good weather, they enjoyed digging for shellfish, and listening to the voices of children playing. They had chosen the site thinking of how the old folks would enjoy such things, and how the area had no places with dangerous footing. And so, they had put up a simple building there. But now, these considerations had turned out for the worse. They should have built it on higher ground.

Without raising his head, Jinsuke said, “I regret it deeply. . . It looks as if I built the house there so it would be washed away. . . .”

“Don’t say that. Don’t talk that way. It was a natural disaster. It couldn’t have been helped. Everybody knows the old people in the house were well taken care of.”

As he spoke these words of consolation, Sakyō looked about for Suzu. She was an orphan who had been taken in by this family. People knew she thought it her responsibility to take care of the old people in the house, and actually she did much more than the adult caretakers. But she was nowhere to be seen.

Kumagoro said that Suzu had lost her mind. It was understandable. She was probably off somewhere, hiding and crying.

Sakyō added, “It can’t be helped. First, just stand up. There are lots of urgent matters we have to take care of.”

Jinsuke now looked as if he had shrunk in size. Daisuke was standing quietly behind him with his mouth shut firmly. His normally easygoing face had turned pale.

“Daisuke-dono, how many years apart are you and my son Ukon?”

“I’m five years older. But I don’t know anything about studying.”

“Well, all he knows comes from books. He doesn’t know the first thing about farming, or about people. You think you might teach him something about the fields and the eggplants’ flowers?”

All around, people chuckled a bit, and suddenly the heavy feeling was relieved. Then, Yazō came tramping in with a group of young people.

Those who had been seated rose to half-standing. They wanted to express thanks to Yazō for the grain he had brought in the night before, and they also wanted to express their sympathy for his missing boats. But above all, just seeing the face of this man renewed their spirits.

“Well, that sure was some wind we had last night.”

Both groups spoke of the same thing together.

The village chiefs and family groups had all met from time to time in the past, but today’s gathering was an especially varied group. In part, this was owing to their having rushed in without time to fuss about clothing, but it brought them cheer to see each other. And now, thanks to Yazō’s appearance, everyone’s spirits were suddenly revived. And when Ukon and Shirō came in, the place gained an even greater liveliness.

Noticing the unusual young man that Ukon had brought in, people focused their attention on him, and the boisterous room turned quiet. In the back of the room was Juan, puffing smoke from a long-stemmed pipe.

“Sensei—thank you for taking the trouble to join us,” Ukon said to Juan, and he started to bow in greeting with his hands on the floor. Between puffs on his pipe, however, Juan just

said, “Well, no,” and with his jaw jutting out, he gestured in the direction of Jinsuke, as if to indicate that Ukon and Shirō should greet Jinsuke first.

Yazō, watching the two, glanced respectfully toward Jinsuke and his son, and then, broke out in a smile. It was clear that since the previous night, they had formed an easygoing relationship. He was glad that Shirō had stayed with Ukon’s family. Perhaps, he thought, the bad weather had provided a good chance.

After Ukon finished reporting on what he had seen, the crowd that had assembled before his arrival began to head back to their homes. They all felt worried about what was happening around them. Those who had left old family members at the House took particular care in offering words of consolation to Jinsuke before heading home. This made a deep impression on Ukon.

If three days passed and there were no signs of survivors, they would do a burial on the top of the hill facing the sea. Until then, they would concentrate on taking care of the casualties. And together, they would make sure there would be no more mishaps. Hearing everyone talk together in this way, Daisuke felt deeply grateful. A casually-asked question from one of the people stuck in his chest.

“Haven’t you seen Suzu?”

“She must be heartbroken.”

Hearing these words brought tears to Daisuke’s eyes, and he felt ashamed. Seeing his father dejected like this, for the first time, he clenched his fists tightly and thought, *I have to get a hold of myself*. Having received silent encouragement from the Ninagawa father and son, and from many others, he could not do nothing.

They found four people who had died together. But any thoughts of how the leaders might have

built the old people’s house on a higher spot were now just the wisdom of hindsight. The House was proof of their unceasing faith, and it had been built according to the rules of their beliefs.

The okite commandment says, “Care for your neighbors as you would for yourself.” But “as you would for yourself”—what does that mean? Daisuke put the question to himself. And then, he noticed his father’s back.

Looking from behind, he could see that his father’s neck was completely bent over. It seemed his father must also have been taking the questions of the *okite* to heart. *Confession before the Lord—this feeling now—is this what it’s about?* Daisuke asked himself if he was truly a believer.

Since I’ve been brought up in a Christian family according to its rituals and beliefs, I’ve become accustomed to foreign practices, and accepted them without doubts. In town, there are some Buddhists. But even when I hear the old folks reciting their namu-Amidabu prayers, it seems like they’re just practicing some old-fashioned tradition. Well, the padres used to say those peoples’ beliefs were the talk of the devil—though I don’t agree with that. But those “heathens”—they also came running to help us, and they’ve helped with the search and the distribution of food to the victims.

Any feelings of superiority I might have had towards “heathens” now seem vain and pointless. And when I think of what Suzu has been doing, I feel ashamed that I’ve just acted on the surface, as if I were her protector, since I’m the son of a village chief. Isn’t it Suzu, who, with her own body, has followed the okite “Care for your neighbors as you would for yourself?” Me, I’ve only mouthed the words, and recited them as a matter of form. There’s been no spirit behind my beliefs and my faith.

When I held Suzu—she was clinging to a sea fig tree, shaking and looking at the sea—I felt as if

I'd been struck by a bolt of lightning. With her body shaking, that child—she wasn't even ten—she went off searching for the old people who, until just yesterday, she'd taken care of. And now, she can't eat or drink.

She was staring the adults in the eye questioningly—realizing that she couldn't get answers from them, and not knowing how she could appeal to anyone about all the things she couldn't hold in her young heart—facing the sea and shaking.

Not knowing how to take care of her, I . . . I couldn't approach her easily, or quickly. Could it be that this orphan has been sent in the service of our Lord? When I held Suzu, the words of the okite rung in my head like reverberations from a cracked bell. I wonder if we can ever truly care for our neighbors as we do for ourselves. Those are truly frightening words.

What sort of people were those old ones washed away by the high tide? I'll have to ask Suzu about it again. This is my own confession.

Gazing at his father's back, Daisuke took these things deeply to heart. Then, he realized that someone was approaching him. When he glanced around, he saw that Yamada Yomosaku, the artist, was approaching, sliding toward him on his knees. Thrusting his head forward, Yomosaku spoke to the Ninagawas.

"With all that's going on now, I'm sorry to ask you, but I wonder if all those books and writings you have in your house are safe."

Since most of the former crowd of people had already gone home, those who were still left heard the voices clearly.

"Well, fortunately, they're all right."

When Ukon lowered his head, Yomosaku heaved a sigh of relief.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. As for me, ten or so of my paintings and canvases got rainwater on them."

"That must be a disaster for you."

Seated at his side, Sakyō leaned forward, and expressed his words of sympathy.

Yomosaku nodded slightly. He rolled the thumb of his right hand, moved his mouth, and spoke quietly—as if talking to his fingers.

Yomosaku had studied painting at the art school connected to the Shiki Seminary, and he was one of the artists who had painted the altar of the cathedral. The believers had called it the "holy figure," and they displayed it at every ceremony. During the Arima era, he had been supported by the clan leader, but he had stopped serving the Arima after the apostasy of their lord, and the fief's transference to Hyuga. He showed up occasionally at the gatherings of the believers.

Even after the change to Matsukura rule, he had continued to do well, and people in power continued to pay for his art supplies, commissioning him to paint screens and such, so he was able to make a living. He was of a different temperament, apart from both the samurai and the farmers, so he was seen as a somewhat unusual sort of person, and treated as a special case.

With arms folded, Juan asked, "So will you be able to get some canvas to make up for it?"

"Well, there might be some ways," Yomosaku answered, gazing off vaguely into space. Juan and Sakyō worried that this matter might become another burden for Yazō. It was said that his canvas was made of a specially woven sort of silk material. For the farmers and fishing folk who could not read written words, the "holy figure" held a particularly important significance. For the sake of the *confraria* as well, it was essential that Yomosaku continue

painting.

As Daisuke listened to this discussion, he realized how even among the believers, there were unusual sorts of people. He felt this enabled him to look at things with a wider perspective. As he watched Yomosaku leave, and as the remaining people began to stand up, a young voice called out,

“Thanks for all your help since we met yesterday.”

Shirō was placing his hands on the floor greeting Jinsuke.

All the visitors heard somewhat muffled voices, and looked closely at the two.

“I heard about what happened at the old people’s house. Everyone says you’ve taken it to heart for so long. It pains me too. This terrible event will remain with me throughout my life.”

All the adults thought that they, too, had been talking about the same things. And yet somehow, there was a difference. In Shirō’s voice, his soul spoke out. At first, Jinsuke seemed lost in thought, but then, he replied, “Yes, what should I say . . . ?” And then, he stopped speaking and bowed. Even after bowing, he could not control his feelings, and he blinked his eyes.

“Sorry to interrupt, but I have something I’d like to ask Daisuke-dono.”

“All right.”

“Since yesterday, I’ve been wanting to meet that girl Suzu.”

Daisuke nodded as if he already understood.

He replied, “Could you wait a bit?” and then stood up.

Having become concerned about the two, Juan

slowly sat down again. Watching him, the others, too, sat down with puzzled expressions.

Soon after, Suzu came in with Okayo holding her shoulder. She seemed surprised to have everyone’s eyes focused on her, and stepped backwards, stumbled a bit, and then sat down. Completely different from the way she’d appeared the evening before, when she gave Shirō the white spider lily, now she looked timid.

No one spoke. From the back of the room, Yazō could be heard clearing his throat. A few moments later, Shirō sat down with his legs crossed.

“So we meet again.”

He said this in a gentle voice, and Suzu, looking very surprised, said nothing.

“I’ve heard from everyone that you did tremendous work at the Mercy House.”

Suzu looked up at Shirō with expressionless eyes. It was as if she hadn’t understood what he said.

“You’ve been searching all over for the old men and women. You must be exhausted.”

With his neck tilted to the side, Shirō glanced at her and continued:

“They must have cared for you.”

He held her wrist and patted the back of her hand. The young girl looked up in surprise. A tiny ray of light, as thin as the eye of a needle, glimmered from her eyes. It twinkled, and seemed as if a dark storm was gathering behind them.

“You worked hard. You worked so hard picking cranesbill and angelica flowers.”

Suzu shook her head at his remark.

“You know, Maria-sama appreciates your hard work. Look—this is a small reward from her for you. Now, won’t you cheer up, Suzu?”

It didn’t seem like they were having a conversation in a room filled with people. It looked like a gentle scene with an elder brother humoring a sister who couldn’t pull herself out of a bad mood, as if it were taking place on a grassy plain with a breeze blowing, or on a boat in the sun.

From beneath his collar, Shirō removed the rosary that had been hanging from his neck, and hung it around the neck of the young girl. Its small blue beads shone in the light here and there.

Suzu accepted it, and glanced around at the men with a strange expression. Then nervously, she touched the rosary hanging from her neck, and, after noticing Jinsuke, tilted her head to the side. Jinsuke held both of Suzu’s shoulders, turned her around toward Shirō, and spoke in a somewhat choked voice, one word at a time:

“Suzu, this is a reward for Suzu. Maria-sama appreciates your hard work—it’s from her.”

Hearing this, the girl faced her adoptive parent, and held out both of her hands as if asking for help. Deeply moved, Jinsuke embraced her, and started to weep silently.

In silence, the people behind them watched the scene attentively. The man of nearly fifty years and the innocent young girl embraced each other, weeping. Ahh—they all thought—this, too, will help Jinsuke a bit.

A group of people who worked for Jinsuke had come to see off the visitors, and had just happened to witness this scene. Kumagoro thought back on events, *Since yesterday morning, unusual things have been happening. There was that strange sunrise. And, just as Suzu announced, a ship with a red flag came, carrying a dazzling-looking man. And, in the*

midst of the big storm, the grain was delivered. Until that time, that little house was still standing there.

Running up to the door, he had knocked and called, “Hey everyone, the grain’s here. Tomorrow you’ll have some nice porridge. Would you open the door? Open up!”

Answering his shout, the old woman Onatsu called out, “Grain—ah, the grain. Well, thank you. I’d like to open the door, but the wind tonight is strange. We asked for the door to be boarded up. We can’t open it from the inside because it’s nailed from the outside.”

Matsuyoshi and Kumagoro pried the door open. It was a small, unlit room.

“Oh—the grain!”

And as they said this, several of the elderly had crawled toward them and touched them with their warm hands.

“Thank you ever so much. Bringing it—to us, even—all this way, and on a night like this.”

And then the men had left, boarding up the place securely again as they had been asked to do.

“Tomorrow morning, early, we’ll come back and open the door.”

And with those words, they had gone back home.

The voice with the words, “Thank you ever so much—to us, even,” rang in their ears. Taken in by Suzu and Jinsuke’s tears, Kumagoro, too, began to weep.

Silently, on bended knee, Shirō made the sign of the cross on the two people, and then, in a barely audible voice, he began reciting,

“In the name of the Sacrificed One who opened the gates of heaven, grant us strength. Grant

us a helping strength. We pray for them for eternal life in heaven. Amen.”

As if suddenly taking notice, Juan brought his hands together and started to chant. After the *Oratio* was finished, all the men started to pray with their heads bowed, and the women came in from the kitchen and joined them. And so it happened that the house was turned into a place of worship.

Okayo was behind Daisuke. Though everyone felt exhausted from the past night, and they would have been expected to have been hazy and sleepy, Okayo had the strange impression that a pure light was streaming out from their bodies, and from her own body as well. It seemed they were all praying for the sake of the dead, for Suzu’s sake, and for everyone’s sake.

People recalled the scene as they headed back to their homes. In past situations like this, Juan had been given the role of a priest. But on this night, they had the strong impression that they had been led by the voice of the young boy, and that the venerable samurai had humbly followed him. And not only had those present felt that there was nothing strange about this, it was if they had all been joined in rapture.

With everyone wondering and asking who this young person was, and where he had come from, the members of Jinsuke’s family and the Ninagawa family felt proud. Even Juan, who normally maintained an unchanged countenance, smiled and joined in the questioning.

“We’ve found a great brother. With this fine young man, we’ll now be able to pass on Western learning. Perhaps we can’t build a *Seminario* or a *Collegio* like the old ones did, but we can call together the people who were connected to those institutes, and we can start a *confraria* where young people can study. I, too, want to realize this dream—even this once.”

Juan spoke in high spirits and with undaunted expression.

Yazō’s boat was found where it had been pushed up onto the shore near the outlet to the sea, but it was damaged beyond use. In the fields around the bay, there were other boats that had been washed up, along with broken parts and debris. Tatters of clothing could be seen amidst the wreckage. But even after digging through the debris, no more bodies were found. When the main cleanup work had been mostly finished, funeral rites for the dead were carried out on a hill overlooking the sea. Since old Onatsu had been a Buddhist, a Buddhist priest, one from a temple her family had been connected to, was called in, and he recited sutras.

Having a Buddhist priest come presented some trouble, since some of the people said that the funerals should not be held with Buddhist priests, whom the padres had called “devils.” They should be done separately.

At that time, Oume, who normally would never have spoken at such a place, stood up slowly. Wiping her hands on her apron, having just come from the kitchen, she stood in silence for a moment, but then, she turned and faced those who had spoken.

“Excuse me, but— ”

With her swollen eyelids blinking slowly, she began to talk.

“Are you going to leave old Onatsu alone even after her death?”

Her words brought silence to the entire gathering.

“We all know Onatsu was a Buddhist. And so am I.”

Omiyo glanced up anxiously at Jinsuke, and

then, looked down. Oume appeared larger than ever.

“As all of you know, when she was young, she went to Nagasaki, and became a prostitute to support her family. When she got older and came back here, she had no family left to look after her. Many times, she used to cry because she didn’t have enough money to pay the temple, where the graves for her ancestors were, to hold memorial services for her parents. She also worried that she would be punished sometime because she had been fortunate enough to receive food, and a place to stay at the house for the elderly, along with the others, even though she was a Buddhist and not a Christian. She confessed these things to me one time.

“She always worried about how she would live. She said she was happy to have been well cared for by the Christians. And so, at this time, are we now going to say we’re going to cut our ties with her, and just get rid of her? I don’t understand what you’re thinking.”

Oume-san, who had spoken so forcefully, turned silent, apparently cooling her heated feelings a bit. And then, slowly, she looked up, gazed around, and in a lowered voice, continued:

“I, too, have a different religion. But I respect the *okite* that you observe, about caring for neighbors. “Care for your neighbors as you would for yourself”—that’s what I am aiming for in my life. On this point, there is no difference in our beliefs. That is the way of people. That’s what my parents taught me, and that’s why I’m saying this now. We must treat all people as being just as important as our own selves. Now, as for Onatsu-sama, this talk of holding her funeral in a separate place—it is something I just cannot understand. Those who had no relatives were living together there, and died together on the same day . . . Is it all right for Christians who say “Amen” to suggest such a thing? Would you feel good about throwing

someone down into the *Inferno*? Has our spirit of mercy been washed away along with that flood?”

With her body shaking, Oume drew her bony wrist from the opening in the sleeve of her kimono, wiped away her tears, and clutched her apron.

Jinsuke and Daisuke both thought, “Now she’s said it. Oume-san’s done it. Oume, the Buddhist, has gotten us to straighten things out.”

The murmuring and commotion subsided like the ebbing of the tide. From then on, serious discussions proceeded unhindered.

They spoke of many things. Funerals are held for comforting the souls of the dead. They would hold all the funerals beneath the big camphor tree at the top of the hill, facing the sea. Thinking about the spirits of old Onatsu’s ancestors, they would have a priest from her family’s temple come and recite sutras for her. Even if the ties had grown weak, in the old days, her people had been connected to the temple there. After that, they would recite prayers from their own faith.

Beneath the great camphor tree at the top of the hill—that will truly be a good place. From there, you can see the ocean all around. It’s the right place for calling out to the souls of the dead. And—that’s right—that’s the tree where all the young children have always come, climbing up and down, cooling off under its shade and having their lunches, where they’ve always looked for boats out at sea and chatted together. The old folks from the Mercy House who died will be facing the sea and talking, and the young folks will be running all around—why, it will be in the very sight of heaven.

As they talked on, the bitter edge of the earlier discussions wore off. The talk about the old folks had created an image of making a heaven

on earth. It was wonderful to see how it brought peace to their hearts. Okayo, nodding from time to time without softening the serious expression on her face as she watched Oume-san, wanted to talk about something with Daisuke. But noticing the strained expression on his face, she decided to wait until later.

About the time when the commotion over the typhoon was settling down, she realized that she had become pregnant. For some reason, when she first felt the movement of the baby in her body, the thought of Oume-san's solemn face came powerfully to mind. And at the same time, the image of the great camphor tree at the top of the hill after the funeral, with no one there, flickered through her thoughts.

Okayo could read simple characters written in *hiragana* lettering, but she couldn't read Chinese characters like her father-in-law and Daisuke. Oume could understand even fewer of the Chinese characters. What, Okayo wondered, was the history of that great camphor tree? Had the tree's history been written down in words? Didn't that tree and Oume have some connection to each other? And, it seemed to her: *I've known about that big tree, and about Oume-san from way back, even before I was born.* She wondered how Daisuke would respond if she spoke of such things to him.

Okayo spoke about the great tree to the child in her womb. She saw the image of the tree in her dreams. Its top branches, drawing in the rays of sunlight from across the sea, murmured gently, while white clouds came and went above them. Beneath the tree, Oume, her eyes squinting in the sunlight as she gazed out over the sea, was cradling a baby in her arms and playing with it. It was the baby that she, Okayo, had birthed. When she awoke from her dream, she told Daisuke about it.

"Your dream, it seems it was a pretty deep one. It must have been a blessing from God. And the baby—did it look like me?"

"Well, I can't really say if it looked like you. It was a baby . . . I can't really tell."

"Really? Was it that unclear?"

"I would say that *Deus-sama* and *Kirisuto-sama* are the most revered beings in the world—but that big camphor tree is a special case. It seems to me it might be a god."

"Well . . . that tree certainly is something special."

"It seems to me it wasn't *Deus-sama*; it was that camphor tree that showed me our unborn baby, and yet . . . I can't say who it looked like. But it sure was an adorable baby."

"I envy you—having such a nice dream."

Probably, Okayo had wanted to say something more about her dream's connections to the deeper world of things, but their conversation ended there.

A rumor that the verdict from the governor's office might be eased had spread among the farm workers. Daisuke mentioned to his father that Kumagoro had come in with such news.

"No—it's not going to happen. Though we *want* it to get easier, it's just not going to happen."

With a pained look, Jinsuke spoke to Matsukichi and Kumagoro.

"We can't take it easy just from hearing a rumor like that. Once we find out the truth, things are going to feel even tougher."

The rumor had been brought in by Sadaichi, a friend of Kumagoro. Sadaichi's voice was animated when he rushed in for shelter from the rain.

"Those officials, they aren't completely blind. If they just take a look at all the rubble and

damage around here, surely they'll see, won't they?"

"Right. If they just look at the ruins of what used to be fields—even fools like us can understand."

"We have the eyes of moles, but when the officials look with their eyes, can we really expect them to see? What do you say, Kumagoro?"

That wasn't just Sadaichi's hope. Matsukichi and Kumagoro had also heard rumors when they were going all over the area, repairing roadways and clearing fallen trees. But no matter what people's hopes were, they had to face reality. People hoped that, for once, the officials would hold off on the land taxes this year, and give them some rice assistance. And so, hopes had led to rumors that the governor would actually do such a thing.

"But look, just hoping for things like this, we can't really expect things will go our way, can we?"

While Matsukichi spoke, his voice unmixed with emotion, Oume nodded.

"We might have expected such things with the former lord, but this one, he won't do it. When we think of what he's done, we can't expect much good."

While this exchange was going on, Oume was thinking about teaching Okayo and Suzu how to soak and flavor the wild verbena leaves that she had boiled and dried.

Jinsuke often accompanied Daisuke on his rounds, doing things like visiting the Ninagawa family and the neighboring Minami Arima village. When they went to Minami Arima, they would row there in Matsukichi's boat. At those times, Jinsuke would talk to Daisuke, whose face had become well-defined and manly. Both Omiyo and Okayo found this closer relation

between father and son reassuring, yet they also felt as if something was pressing on the men.

From time to time, Daisuke reminisced.

"These days, I've been thinking a lot about the teachings of our Lord—about taking care of our neighbors."

"So have I. And you've become a lot more important than before."

"Well, please don't talk like that in front of other people."

"What's wrong with it? You're not the only one. Since these things have happened, my parents-in-law, Oume, and everyone else have become more important. And they seem more thoughtful. We may die soon, you know."

"You tend to jump from one extreme to another."

"What I'm saying isn't extreme. If we don't care for other people, we can't go on living. That's what "important" means, don't you think?"

Impressed by what Okayo had been saying, he gazed at her face. He realized that, in an instant, Okayo had understood the true meaning of Ninagawa Ukon's lectures on the *Doctrina Christiana*. Or, even more so, she had understood it when she was watching and listening to the words of Oume-san.

"These days, Suzu has often been sitting beside father-in-law, rubbing his back."

"Yes, that's right."

Daisuke spoke out in a somewhat embarrassed voice.

"Come to think of it, these days, I often hear people calling out to Suzu."

"Right. Suzu's gotten a lot stronger because of

it.”

“If you ask Suzu about her work these days, she’ll say she’s become Oume’s apprentice.”

“Ah, so that’s why she’s been going out, picking mugwort and verbena lately.”

“Right . . . both of those plants are past their peak, and they’re starting to dry out.”

Doctors would come from Amakusa to buy mugwort moxa from Oume; they said hers was easy to use. They said it crumbled beautifully and curled up nicely into balls when they used it. And it didn’t leave burns on the patients when used in moxa treatment.

Oume told Suzu, “Even after all these old folks are gone, there will still be no lack of patients. If we make moxa, it will help others.”

Oume, of course, had been taking the moxa to those who could not see a doctor, and she made her rounds everywhere. She said, “When I crumble the mugwort to make moxa, I recite *Namu Amida butsu, Namu Amida butsu*. Then, one by one, the spirit of Amida-sama will burn in each of the moxa preparations, and soon, you’ll be well again.”

Suzu’s eyes opened wide, but when Oume saw her face, she smiled with happiness. Then, she lowered her voice and continued:

“But Suzu, if you prefer, it will be all right if you say *Amen*. I wonder what *Deus*-sama thinks about me being your teacher. But surely, He won’t cause any problems for the patients.”

Already it was harvest time, but the storm had damaged things considerably, and they hadn’t recovered well. Nevertheless, there were some little places that had escaped the damage of the winds and water, where they could still gather some millet, buckwheat, and other grasses and wild grains. People talked with envy about the wild rice in the few lucky fields. Though the

wild rice ears, with their small grains, had fallen onto the ground, people had been able to go out and gather them. They realized it was a meager harvest, and it would not be enough to carry them through until the next year. They wondered how they would deal with the scarcity they faced and survive.

It was decided that they would hold a meeting at Yazō’s house, where they would tell everyone in town about the decree from the governor’s office the other day, discuss how they could work together, and decide what action to take.

“I’m usually away from my house, so when folks ask for me, I’m always a bad host. But this time, since I need to spend some time here working on my boat, let me invite everyone to my place. Whether they come by sea or land, I’ll have some young men welcome them.”

Yazō had already been thinking about how he might deal with the shortage of food and provisions. In carrying out his responsibilities, it was essential that he have the understanding of everyone in his household. And for that purpose, holding the meeting at his place would be the quickest way. And now, during the break times in the discussions, he could provide a little food to warm their bellies. These were his plans.

When people heard of this, they thought, Well, people in the samurai class have their big houses, but everyone feels easy about going to Yazō’s house—it has a kitchen that’s easy for the women to work in, and even if the meeting is a hard one, at least we’ll be able to feel at ease.

On the night of the meeting, there were more people present than expected. The smell of boiling water mixed with smoke filled the room. And then, as people were starting to relax—after having arrived so tired—Yozaemon, one of the leading farmers, made his late appearance, accompanied by his son. His face looked unusually dark. Greeting him just with

his eyes, Yazō wondered what to say. He had heard that Yozaemon’s fields had been ruined, but he hadn’t yet been able to pay him a visit. Then Ninagawa Sakyō stood up.

“In the midst of all the trouble that’s been going on, it’s great that all of you could join us. We’re going to have to make all sorts of plans, but first, we need to hear from all of you what the situation is in the villages.”

The heads of all the villages—Kushiyama, Ariie, Minami Arima, Kita Arima, Katsusa, and the others—all stood up, one by one, and reported on what was happening in their areas. Their reports were rather different from the actual state of things. The leaders mostly just reported on what they had learned by going around and talking with people. They all agreed that things were getting more serious day by day, and that the real extent of the damage would only be known later.

As they heard more reports, the genial mood began to fade, and groans slipped out here and there. Once they had been told about the general state of things, Jinsuke, noticing that the meeting had grown silent, stood up and began, in a restrained voice, to recount what had happened at the governor’s place the day before the typhoon. Perhaps because he was trying so hard to control himself, his voice sputtered from time to time, and he almost lost the thread of the story, but everyone was drawn into each of his words and listened intently.

After Jinsuke sat down, no one spoke for a while. The silence was broken by the summer screeching of cats, which was much more noticeable than usual. The white-haired Juan stood up with his rosary in his hands.

“Well, it looks like we’ve finally reached the moment of truth where we’ll live or die. We have to gather our courage, make up our minds, and get things in order. And then, we have to choose people to represent us and

make good plans.”

For a while, people separated into groups of their own village members, and held discussions. No matter what happened, they needed to inform the governor’s office of their situation as clearly as possible. The government had to redress the unfair land taxes that had been imposed on them for many years now, and unless they were given an extension for the payment of taxes, the villages could not survive. If the officials would just look at the destroyed houses and the washed out, rubble-strewn farmlands, surely even they would realize that the situation was unjust and inhumane. Before they received any strange summons, the people would write petitions and sign a joint statement.

Ukon had remained quiet at the back of the meeting, but presently, he was called on to assist with the writing, together with Daisuke.

It was decided that separate statements should be written from each area, and then, they would take them all to the local government office, and present them on the same day. The statements would describe the conditions of the local areas, and they would call for agreement on two points: reduction of and exemption from the land taxes for this year, and emergency allotments of rice.

At that point, a man stood up. It was Isayama Chūbei from Kita Arima village, whose hair was flecked with white.

“After the storm, did any anyone from the government offices come around to check on the villages?”

“Well . . .”

Both Sakyō and Jinsuke spoke up together, but it was Sakyō who continued.

“It’s strange we haven’t heard anything from them.”

In the group from Arima village, there were quite a few samurai, and having them there, remaining silent with their arms folded, created a rather oppressive atmosphere.

“In Arima, two officials working for Kurōbe came and took a look around, but I hear that all they did was poke around a bit, and write something down, without asking questions of the local people, and then, they left. As for what they wrote, I have no idea, but it left everyone puzzled.”

Then someone from the Kushiyama group spoke.

“Well, speaking of officials, some of them came to our place, too, and certainly, they took out their note books.”

This was met with a ripple of laughter.

“What do you suppose they wrote down?”

“We were ready to answer any questions they asked, but they just left without even looking at us.”

“Hmm . . . it was as if they were purposely pretending not to see anything. A lowly lot they are.”

“First of all, Kurōbe should have come here himself, and seen the disaster with his own eyes.”

All at once, multiple voices cried out, such that the two men recording could not follow all that was being said. But then, Isayama Chūbei signaled with his hand, and brought some order to the commotion. He began to speak.

“It looks like the governor’s office has no intention of looking into our troubles seriously. I don’t have any objection to making a joint statement asking for redress from the taxes, and for getting some food assistance, but judging from how they’ve acted so far, I can’t hold out much hope that they’re going to act

favorably on it. Talking about things in the future, what are we going to do if that’s the way things turn out?”

A silence, like that from the depths of a well, spread through the room. Chūbei’s question had touched the hidden question that had been harbored in everyone’s hearts. A short time later, Juan stood up.

“Isayama-dono, certainly, it’s appropriate to ask us to have strong determination. I imagine that each group has its own ideas. But we’ve discussed what we need to do now. That’s good enough for today. If the governor’s office turns down our petitions, then we’ll have to deal with it when that happens. Let us go back to our villages. In each of our *confraria*, let us make plans, and then, let us meet again soon.”

Voices laden with sighs were heard all around, and it was as if the room had been enveloped in a deep fog.

With the meeting over, people from other villages started to leave, but some who didn’t feel like going yet stayed on. Because of the topic of the day, most of those who had spoken up had been from the samurai groups, while the small-stake farmers and fishermen had mostly remained quiet, but now, they felt more at ease and started talking.

Ukon, who had hardly ever taken part in such a discussion, remained excited by all the talk that was filled with premonitions about their grave situation, and he listened intently. While Jinsuke was waiting for a chance to say some words of comfort to Yozaemon and his son, from behind, he heard a voice he remembered.

“I was worried about getting rice assistance, but thanks to everyone, now we don’t need to worry about it. Right, Saizō?”

When Jinsuke turned and looked around, he saw it was Sadaichi, one of the farm workers. Saizō was somewhat stout, and Sadaichi looked

quite comfortable. Basically, Sadaichi loved attending get-togethers, and Jinsuke supposed that was why he'd come now. But Jinsuke saw nothing wrong in Sadaichi's presence.

Since he didn't own land, Sadaichi was not directly responsible for paying the land taxes. However, he was worried about the rice assistance, and he had attended the meeting under the pretext of helping Yazō's household. When he spoke at meetings, his talk was often off the mark, and it invited scorn, but some of the women enjoyed hearing him. One said:

"There he goes. Sadaichi's spouting off again."

Sadaichi was regarded as a cheerful fellow. He hadn't been entitled to attend the formal meeting this evening, so no wild remarks had been heard from him there. Nonetheless, it seemed that he wanted to say something before he went home.

"You know, Sada, we can't just take it easy yet. You must've heard we're still in the dark about whether we'll get any rice, or sand, or whatever—you know what I mean? You get it, right?"

As expected, after being scolded by Saizō, Sadaichi pulled his head back. Saizō was a farmer who owned just a small scrap of land.

Ukon realized how he'd never heard the talk of farmers and fishermen like these until now. Starting on a new sheet of paper, he rushed to write down the comments being exchanged among the four or five seated men.

"I've been holding back my feelings, but getting together like this now, it makes me feel a little better."

"Hmm, well, you may *feel* a little better, but in the past, we'd never been grilled like this about paying the land taxes. Why d'ya suppose things have come to this?"

"Don't be a fool—ever since the new lord came, everything's gone bad."

"Yeah, I know that already. For one thing, it seems a shadow has crept over our religious beliefs."

"Right. I remember how, in the old days, our masses were glorious and festive."

"Um, my parents used to take me to Easter services—we went to them so many times."

The men went on trading stories from their memories.

"On the days of celebrations for Kirisuto-sama our old lord granted us rest from working in the fields, and we dressed up in holiday clothes, walked together in a procession, and everyone looked so beautiful."

"But now, since things have gotten so tough, I miss the old times. We hardly ever hear children singing hymns nowadays."

"When you think of it, it seems like, in the old times, when we praised Deus-sama it felt like we were praising the sun."

"Hmm, that's how I felt, too."

"It's not that we've given up our beliefs, but it seems like the celebrations, the teachings of the doctrines, and the catechism have been put in the shade."

"Right, and come to think of it, when we're working in the fields and we're in the light of *Hii*-sama—the sun god—and of *Deus*-sama, it sustains our body and spirit, and our crops do better too."

"When we get to talking like this, it seems we're pretty much thinking along the same lines."

"Seems to me, in recent years, with the strange changing weather, the continuing bad harvests,

and all, like we're living under a shadow."

"It's like the growing and the withering of the crops mirrors the feelings of the people tending them."

"My old man worries that *Deus-sama's* punishment will come."

With arms folded, Saizō, who normally didn't speak up readily, started to talk:

"You too? My mother, too—she says the state of things in our world now is no laughing matter. This condition was caused because we've been hiding our faith too much. When we cut off the light from *Hii-sama* and *Deus-sama*, we couldn't raise our crops. We see proof of this when we remember how, back when we had a Christian lord, the grains and beans did well. And the festivals for *Maria-sama* were full of life and fun.

"She keeps saying that if we could harvest our crops and pay the taxes, then the investigations of Christians might decrease, but we haven't been able to harvest any grain, and we've been hit with all sorts of disasters. She blames herself, and talks of how it would be easier for everyone if she weren't here, and there was one less mouth to feed. When she talks this way, everyone in the family feels so dark."

"So it's like that at your place, too? To tell the truth, my mother also says similar things. She heard a dark rumor from her nephew, who lives near the castle in Shimabara. They've been cutting off Christians' noses and ears, or hanging them upside down, but now, it's getting worse—the blacksmith shops are making even worse tools for torture. While there's still a chance, my mother tells us to send our children off to our aunt's place in Chikugo. She says she doesn't need to be saved, since she doesn't have much longer to live anyway. If things get too bad, she says, she can be arrested, and she's ready to be boiled or burned. She cries and says she has a feeling

the time for leaving may be coming soon."

"I hope it doesn't happen, but I can't help wondering if that's what's coming."

After saying this, Saizō held his breath for a moment, and then, quickly let it out.

"Looks to me like there's no other way, other than going back to the old Christianity here."

Jinsuke sat down next to Yozaemon and his son, and then, spoke.

"Your fields suffered terribly. I'm sorry I couldn't go and visit you, so please excuse my rudeness."

"Please don't worry about it. Your family has also been going through so many troubles. You must be under such strain."

"Don't mention it. Why, it was your fields that kept us going even in times of drought. This is really too much to take."

As he said this, the two men let out a sigh together. Four or five days ago, when Daisuke's bride had come, Yozaemon's son had gotten married, too, and his bride was also from Amakusa, and so, both families had developed an even closer relationship than before.

The fields of Kuchinotsu's leading farmer had been destroyed by the high tides on the sea side, and on the river side by the surge of gravel, trees, and debris.

"Actually, I have something I need to talk to you about in private."

Yozaemon lowered his voice, and on his knees, he moved closer to Jinsuke. His son was behind him. For the son of a farmer, he was slender in build, but he had a look of wiry, masculine toughness.

Jinsuke felt this was not the right place to have their talk, so he whispered to Yazō, and then,

led the two off to another part of the room, where they could talk privately. Shortly after, Yazō also came in, and then, closed the *shoji*. Yozaemon got right to the point.

“The night of the storm, you brought that precious grain to our place as an offering to Maria-sama. It brings tears to my eyes when I think of your kindness. And that’s why we decided to do this.”

Yozaemon looked back at his son.

“You see, actually, we still have a small store of old grain left at our place. Since we’ve had to defer payments these past few years, the number of bags for back payments to the governor has increased to thirty bags. But we also had to keep a little separated out, enough so we wouldn’t starve. We still have about eight bags of the old grain left. And so, after discussing things with my son, we decided to come here, and offer it to you—or rather, offer it in the name of Maria-sama, during this time of troubles, and before it’s eaten by the insects. If these were normal times, we’d give more, but this year, this is all we have. But we’ll be pleased if you accept it. For so long, you looked after the old man I asked you to take care of, and you kindly buried him. At the very least, as a token of memory for him, would you please accept this old grain?”

Yozaemon stammered as he spoke, and, together with his son, touched his hands to the ground. It was a most unexpected offer. Yazō replied, “Oh, oh, that’s . . .” but he could not finish the sentence. Jinsuke had a deep realization of how Yozaemon maintained the spirit of the community as a farmer of the same area, even though he wasn’t involved much in the daily affairs of the *confraria*.

On the appointed day, the petitions from the six areas were delivered to each of the respective local government offices. People waited in

hushed anticipation for a reply.

The village representatives were summoned to the main government office, and the reply they received was that, only for damaged fields would there be even a slight reduction in the taxes, but as for emergency rice assistance, well, their lord, too, was now in difficult straits, so they would not be able to carry out such matters any time soon.

At first, Tada Kurōbe expressed sympathy about the typhoon damage, which surprised the leaders. But then—despite their fury—they all became speechless when they heard the heartlessness of the official reply, iterated in so patronizing a fashion. Before a chorus of voices rose up from everyone present, Kurōbe stretched open his normally sleepy-looking eyes, and stared at all of them.

“This matter has been decided on by the top officials, so you cannot make any further demands about it. Actually, we, too, are trying to make the best of things, and we will do what we can under these difficult conditions. Because you will be receiving some tax reduction, it is essential that you pay the land taxes. We are all suffering through this together.

“If you defer in paying your taxes this year, we’ll add the amount to the other back taxes, and you will have to pay it all back next year. I hope none of you is so foolish as to think that your debts will be cancelled if you keep on delaying.

“Don’t underestimate the Matsukura family. Although I have been dealing with you leniently so far, it would be a mistake to think that we will continue to act like this all the time.”

At the edges of the room, where the village representatives were seated, a row of the governor’s samurai were waiting, their swords held in the sashes of their kimonos. Out in the garden, just beyond the veranda, lower-ranked

samurai were also waiting, the naked blades of their spears glistening in the sunlight.

Filing out from the gate, all the men were silent. The groups from Arima and Ariie went off in boats. Ninagawa Sakyō's house was near the Kuchinotsu harbor.

"Won't you stop in at my place for a bit? I feel miserable about all this."

Everyone agreed readily to the idea. Not knowing if he should sit or not, Chijiwa Bannai held back his anger, and spoke in a low voice:

"Well, that's what we heard, but what do you think? We'll have to see all the villagers who are waiting for us. This isn't any sort of answer to bring back to them."

Matsushima Sawatashimori, the village chief from Kita Arima, spoke up.

"I never expected things would turn out like this But even so, the government office knows the wretched state we're in. Even if they reduce our taxes by, say, half, it still won't be enough."

This man was the leader of the Arima *confraria*, the group that had the largest number of samurai. Ezaki Minbu from Kushiyama added:

"This isn't just a decision that comes from a local office—Kurōbe spoke for the whole government in saying it."

"Well," someone added, "that's true, isn't it?"

The entire gathering nodded in agreement to these comments.

"Lord Matsukura is going to take whatever he can from us, even if we make ourselves live off the roots of grass."

Bannai exploded in anger.

"And just how can they take what isn't even

here? And what about those samurai? Did they think we'd be frightened off when they showed their spears, with their naked blades shining?"

"Today I felt so miserable, too. If they're looking for it, I can make blood fall like rain from those government houses."

Sawatashimori's words stirred a commotion among all present.

"All right, but, Chijiwa-dono, even if it does eventually come to blood, we're not at that point yet. For now, it seems we still need to be patient."

Sawatashimori fixed his eyes on each person one by one, as if ascertaining their mood. Ninagawa Sakyō added:

"That's a good point to keep in mind. If we follow what Kurōbe says, surely we'll fail. We have to find a way to live without shedding blood. That's up to us."

"I'm not saying we should rush into a fight with Matsukura. Anyway, how can we think about fighting now when we have to find food for tomorrow? But if the bad harvests continue, and Matsukura keeps pressing for payment, if things come to extremes, we won't be able to go on like this. Both of you must realize this, don't you?"

Responding to Bannai's question, Sawatashimori shut his eyes, but then, slowly and deliberately, he opened his mouth.

"If Matsukura continues like this, then it looks like a time will come when we won't be able to go on living. We from Arima, too, are ready for that. But for now, we're thinking about whether we should keep quiet and go along with the governor's decree, or if we should ask the opinions of the people in our areas, and then, go back to the office to try to renegotiate. How about you in Kuchinotsu, what are your thoughts on this?"

Sawatashimori was the head of Kita Arima village, where many samurai warriors lived, and he was a formidable figure, yet his martial face also betrayed signs of worry. Sakyō answered:

“Well, we haven’t decided on it yet. We can’t expect our people will go along with the government’s response. And if we petition again, just sending a joint statement, it seems we’ll just be repeating the folly. We’re going to have to show our true colors to each other, honestly. Today, we’ve had plenty of discussions, so how about we relax a bit now? We don’t have a feast of food today, but I have a little sake, so let me bring it out.” And with this remark, Sakyō stood up.

In the drinking session that followed, the men took in the seriousness of their decisions. Hayashida Shichizaemon from Arima, probably because of drinking too much, gave vent to his feelings.

“I feel like quitting as village leader. I just can’t take all this bad news back to my people. It’d be easier if I were agitating for a rebellion. But dealing with all these negotiations, it’s too nerve-racking.”

Breaking through the sinking mood, Sawatashimori spoke out, smiling impishly like a naughty child.

“Whenever I come here by boat, I can never take my eyes off the rice storehouses of Kuchinotsu.”

“Same with me.”

Nanasaemon asked:

“How many bags d’ya suppose they hold?”

Grinning, Bannai replied:

“Maybe a thousand or so, don’t you think?”

“You think there are guards there at night?”

“There are some, but they’re always dozing off.”

Hearing Bannai's reply, Sawatashimori flashed a rebellious smile, and drained the last of his sake.

Chapter 4 : Vocation

In the end, the efforts to petition for a reduction in land taxes were abandoned. Filing pleas and petitions proved to be of no avail in achieving the people’s goals, and they came to no conclusion about either refusing the payment of taxes by force, or organizing an abandonment of their lands in protest of the exorbitant taxes. The villagers saw no other option than to defer payment of taxes, and hope for better crops next year. People began to lose hope. A sense of despair quietly settled in. They had the feeling that, no matter how they appealed their case, the Matsukura administration would remain unmoved.

A coming of age ceremony was held for Shirō when he returned to his home in Ebe, on the outskirts of Udo Village, at the time of the Christmas nativity celebration.

“Now you, too, have reached the age of fifteen. You must realize that from now on, you’re going to be treated as an adult.”

Shirō was seated in the place of honor, and Jimbei, his father, spoke.

On the ceremonial table in front of him was a large sea bream that Watanabe Kozaemon, the village chief of Ōyanoshima, had brought with him. People in his neighborhood who had cared for him since his early childhood also came to see him, bringing things from the seashore, such as crabs, octopus, and turban shells.

Jimbei questioned Shirō in the presence of the others who remained, Kozaemon and his younger brother Satarō, who was the brother-in-law of Shirō's elder sister, and Yamazen Uemon, who had been invited from Senzokujima Island.

"We sent you to Nagasaki to study business and academics. All this has been for your future. But it seems you're not really cut out for the business world, and, well, that's all right. But if you're thinking of supporting yourself through your studies, you won't be able to get a position in the government service because you're Christian. I can see that your goals are not insubstantial, but I'd like you to tell us just what you're really hoping to do."

After thinking for a moment, Shirō replied:

"From now, I'd like to understand the how the world of people works—but directly, from the people, and not just from books."

"From the people, and not from books?"

"Yes, but I don't mean throwing away the books and writings."

Hearing this unexpected response, Jimbei got the feeling that perhaps his way of raising the question had been, somehow, too simple.

"And why do you think this?"

"I'd hoped that by reaching the heights of academic studies, I could understand the ways of the world, but it seems that in doing this, I may only be looking at the distant stars, while remaining blind to all the things this land has been giving me. I become ashamed of myself as I come more into contact with the people around me. "

"What sorts of people?"

"Well, for example . . . "

"Who, for example? "

Shirō wanted to reply, "Grandmother," but he hesitated because she was so near.

"Yesterday, at sundown, I saw Rokusuke from behind."

"Oh, Rokusuke—the fellow who lives out at the edge of town? What was he doing?"

"Well, the sun was going down, and I was walking along one of the paths by the terraced fields at the edge of town, and I heard someone reciting an *oratio*. As I listened, I realized it was Rokusuke."

"Yes, he's such a faithful believer."

As he said this, Jimbei tilted his head to the side.

"Since the sounds of the *oratio* were so impressive, I became more amazed by his little rice field. "

At the same time, both Shirō's father and Kozaemon broke into a pleasant laugh.

"He really cares about that little field."

"Yes, that's what I thought when I saw him."

His face expressing interest, Kozaemon asked:

"Which *oratio* was he reciting?"

"It was part of a familiar one—'Hail Mary, full of grace.' Rokusuke was praying on his knees in the fading sunlight. He's an ordinary-looking old man, one you can see anywhere, but for that reason, the sight struck me even more powerfully."

While Shirō was thinking about how to describe the scene, his grandmother entered and sat next to his father. She faced her grandson, who was seated in the position of honor, then straightened her back.

"Shirō, I'm so happy to see you today all

dressed up in your coming of age clothes. Here, now, I want you to take a drink from your grandmother's sake cup."

The old woman held the wrist of her grandson, who had taken the sake cup, and stroked it again and again. Shirō released his hand from her grip, then opened the palm of her wrinkled hand, and placed his sake cup in it.

"Grandmother, your hands have worked hard in the fields."

"Not just in the fields. They've changed your diapers, and wiped your rear end as well!"

Friendly laughter rose up all around.

"I suppose you must have done all sorts of things I don't know about."

"Well, it's nice to hear you say so. My work has been my happiness. I put these hands together and prayed for you."

"Yes, you've prayed for me."

This time, Shirō patted her aged palm as he began to speak. A long time had passed since they had been able to have a good talk together.

"Grandmother, I've just been reading things in books, and I haven't looked at the real nature that's in the fields. It's only yesterday that I really started to think about the fields. What did I really learn in Nagasaki?"

"Well, since you studied in Nagasaki—that's why you could see the fields."

When she said this, everyone smiled.

"That hillside there—that's where Rokusuke-san built up the sides with stones to stop the mudslides, and that's how he made the rice field. It took him more than ten years." Nodding her head, Grandmother spoke emotionally, unable to hold back her deep

feelings.

Rokusuke, a peasant, worked for one of the big farmers of the village, but he had his own small fields scattered in three different places. Some of his fields were only about two *jō*, the size of two tatami mats, and even the biggest one was, at most, about five *jō* in area. After his work was finished, he would climb up above his rice fields—on some nights, with the moon, and on other nights, with the stars. He gave great attention to doing this, and when his work was done, he never forgot to say a prayer to Maria-sama. Grandmother said that, looking up at his terraced fields in harvest time, she was amazed to see the golden tips of the wheat ears that he had raised with such care, soaking up the light of the setting sun, and shining in the evening sky.

"Everyone says it's as if the light of *Deus-sama* is shining on Rokusuke-san's fields alone. They're such lovely fields—they receive a divine blessing."

Oine, Shirō's mother, also joined the conversation in excitement.

"And around the rocks, you can see lots of wild strawberries, with their tendrils drooping down, and just when the wheat is ripening, the red strawberries are also ripening. That's his great pleasure."

Quietly, Shirō entered the discussion. His voice had not yet changed to a man's pitch.

"In our religion, we respect poverty. When I was on the boat on my way home this time, while I was looking up at the mountains of Amakusa, I thought about a lot of things. It seemed as if a hand from heaven had reached out to these impoverished islands of Amakusa, and covered the land with plants and trees. And it seemed that these islands were created as places for living simply and modestly, according to the wishes of God. Even if our crops of grains are scant, and we're often hit by

storms, this is a pure garden granted by God to us, for the people, and raised with kindness. That's how it all looked to me.

“And when I saw Rokusuke in his little field, and heard his voice reciting his prayers, it seemed to me a clear sign, showing that it was a gateway, an opening to heaven. The wheat was just sending up fresh shoots, and, Grandmother, it was such a beautiful field.”

“Yes, yes—the earth there is soft and fresh, and there are no stones in it. And with Rokusuke praying there, it's beautiful.”

“The Bible speaks of ‘being saved from death by just one grain of wheat,’ and with a person like Rokusuke praying there in the field, the words became living words. That was the first time I'd ever realized such a thing.”

“That's wonderful to hear, Shirō. Now you've become worthy of being celebrated for your coming of age.”

All around, the men remained silent and listened to the discussion between the two. They realized that Shirō had become an adult—or, more than that, that he was becoming a man possessed of a deeper understanding of things, deeper even, than those of the other adults.

“I'm so glad I could join this ceremony. It seems our future is looking up—don't you think, Jimbei-san?”

When asked this by Kozaemon, his cheeks flushed with red. Jimbei shut his eyes and nodded deeply.

After the ceremony, Jimbei took his son Shirō to visit their relatives on Ōyanoshima Island. This was the place where Jimbei had lived when he was still one of Lord Onishi's retainers, where the village headman, Watanabe

Kozaemon, and many other relatives and in-laws still lived. When people learned that Shirō was staying at his brother-in-law Satarō's place, he received a stream of invitations from distant relatives. Having been regarded as a prodigy since his early childhood, Shirō was the pride of his family and extended relatives. The coming of age ceremony had taken place when he returned home from his studies in Nagasaki. Everyone was amazed to see what an impressive young man he had become. The men spoke of how he would be the joy of the family in the future, and the women were especially eager to see how he had been changed by city life in Nagasaki.

Moreover, most of the islanders were hungry for contact with others. When they heard that Shirō was making visits to homes here and there, neighbors, too, gathered. Among them were some of the lordless samurai of Konishi, who were living in places like Sensoku and the Zōzō Islands. They were people who had been close to his father Jimbei, as well as to the Watanabe brothers Kozaemon and Satarō, for a long time, and they served as spiritual guides when they welcomed Shirō and prayed together.

When they recited the *oratio* with their accents, it sounded so different from the crisp diction Shirō had heard in Ninagawa Ukon's recitations in Kuchinotsu, and he felt as if he were listening to the chanting of the earliest Christians.

When he visited Oyanoshima he was able, for the first time, to comprehend the seriousness of the crops failing throughout the Amakusa region. At the time of Shirō's coming of age ceremony, Yamazen Uemon, an especially close friend of his father, who had been invited from Sensoku Island, spoke of the time when they went to the local office to appeal for rice assistance from the government stores. The man's drooping eyebrows lent him an amusing expression as he spoke.

“Things were really heated up. Though we were mostly farmers, there were also some whalers with us, and the mood was pretty rough. Back in the Konishi days, the land taxes weren’t so bad, and if the crops got damaged by wind or rain, the officials cut our payments. So we all assumed it was only natural that we’d be granted some rice again. The Ōyano people, including myself, get upset easily. Compared to other groups, we had some tough characters with quick tempers.”

In saying this, it seemed as if Uemon had been expressing his hopes to Shirō in his own way.

While Shirō and the others were passing their days on Ōyano, the new year arrived. It was the fourteenth year of the Kanei era.

One day, Kozaemon announced that he had something he wanted to show, and he pulled out an old document written on heavy paper.

“This is from back in my father’s days. It’s a copy of a letter that Padre Couros asked my father to write and send to Rome. I’ve been keeping it carefully. Would you please take a look?”

The letter showed how the Jesuit priests had devoted themselves to missionary work. It stated, “During and after Ieyasu’s persecution, we have not thought of our lives at all.” After some mention of matters about propagating the faith and devotion to the religion, there were the names of the leaders from the villages of Kōtsuura and Ōyano, including the elder Kozaemon, from the previous generation.

While Kozaemon was showing this document to Shirō in the presence of his father, Shirō imagined Kozaemon’s thoughts. It was dated twenty years ago in the third year of the Genwa era.

“They presented this document to Padre Couros, the acting head of the priests, after Padre Marco Ferraro left his church in

Kōtsuura. It was written to show that they were able to keep their faith, in spite of the severe persecution everywhere, thanks to the visits and care of the padres. And there are still a few people alive today whose names are written here.”

Jimbei, too, leaned forward and looked at the names on the document.

“I, too, recognize about half of the names here. Denbei—he became one of the leaders who kept our faith alive, here in Ōyano.”

Denbei had formerly been called Kozaemon the Elder. Now, he was retired.

“But that’s not how it really was. Twenty years ago, I was just a kid—only seven or eight. My father passed on the name Kozaemon to me, but he thought I wasn’t responsible enough yet, so he often asked me if I had consulted with Jimbei-sama. He really relied on Jimbei-sama.”

Jimbei was already sixty-three, and the difference in age between Jimbei and the younger Kozaemon was as much as that between a father and son.

“No, no—I was always away somewhere, and I couldn’t really help out. But seeing this paper now, it makes me realize again how long it’s been since Father Marco Ferraro left.”

“It’s already been twenty-five or -six years now. When I think of it, ever since the padres left, we’ve been holding onto our faith, but if the persecution continues, what do you think will become of it from hereon in?”

“I heard Father Marco say, before he was forced to go to Macau, that in twenty-six years, a truly good person would be born. And that person would make the sign of the cross on many people’s heads. Isn’t it now twenty-six years this year?”

“I heard that, too. Then, too, some farmers said

a man would appear, and he would restore the Christian world. They also said a strange, red light appeared around the time of the big storms last year, as an omen of a disaster to come. But if our faith is weak, the good person won't come. I showed you the letter relating to Father Couros because I have the feeling that, compared with our parents' generation, we're losing faith."

"You're right. Even if I recite the *oratio* in the morning and evening, it seems I'm just going through the motions."

Jimbei turned toward Shirō again.

"At your coming of age ceremony, you spoke of Rokusuke. Well, in our daily lives, it's hard for most of us to be as utterly devoted to God as Rokusuke, but it seems you're suggesting we should all live the way he does. Is that right?"

"Rokusuke seems to have built an invisible temple in his heart. I was deeply impressed by his actions, but I can't follow his example and become like him."

Shirō's cheeks reddened.

"What do you mean by that?"

"The important thing is to make the world in which we're living a country where people can live by our faith. And to create such a country, we first need to create it within our hearts."

"You're saying we need to make a *paraiso* on Earth?"

"Heaven isn't a place on this Earth. Being reborn in heaven is something we have to leave to God. We can't speak about such a thing as depending our actions. What I believe is that there is another world that lies beyond this world.

The two adults looked at each other in silence. It was as if a sacred light had suddenly appeared in Shirō's eyes.

"Nonetheless, in order to cross over the boundaries of this world, we have to use all our strength—if we want to pass through that gate."

He paused for a few moments, slowly looked up, and then continued.

"We have to walk the path that Iesus walked. No matter how many times we confess our sins, we can never take away our sin. Iesus died on the cross to atone for our sins. Going to that other world is like passing from a burning field into one of flowers. I can see the fire burning in the fields and villages. It seems that unless we make our way through that cosmic fire, we won't be able to reach the land of true faith."

In silence, the two adults stared at each other, wondering about what they had just heard. Then, with some hesitation, Jimbei asked:

"Are you saying you're planning to be burned in that cosmic fire?"

The boy shut his eyes tightly, and a tear trailed down his cheek.

Jimbei and Kozaemon often worried about an insurrection breaking out. The word had come up, and it lingered in their thoughts when they saw the state of affairs during the plundering of the Terazawa governor's offices in Tomioka—and when they saw what happened to the people in Ōyano, who had been driven to their limits because of the crop failures in the past few years. Moreover, they were worried about people's faith and future if things continued on in uncertainty. They now realized that the boy had been speaking of a kind of fire from heaven.

When Jimbei and Shirō returned home to Uto, three of the former samurai living in Ōyano stopped in to see Shirō, perhaps because they'd heard rumors about him.

"Excuse us for our tardiness, but we'd like to

express our congratulations on your son's coming of age."

Their words sounded somewhat stiff, but their main intention—along with getting a look at Shirō—stemmed from a hope to help relieve the discouragement in their daily lives. Among them was a man named Yanagi Heibei, who loved to discuss the state of affairs in the world, often getting carried away and talking on about things like the causes behind the Toyotomi forces' defeat at Osaka. One of the men said:

"But you're talking about ancient times—it's not going to help the situation we're in now."

After being interrupted by his friend, the man sat down properly.

"Well, with Shirō-dono here, that's about all I can say about it, so that'll have to do for my take on things. In this world, we're going to have to rely on the young folks from now on. For us, our duty is just to serve our lord *Deus-sama*. But to tell the truth, I'd like to serve a man we can look up to as a lord. I can't ignore this hope."

"I understand your feelings."

Jimbei responded calmly to Heibei and continued.

"As far as I know, there is no daimyo in this country who will employ people like us. Just think about it. When the Katō clan had their samurai status taken away, the daimyo connected to the Toyotomi clan disappeared from the entire Kyushu area. And now, with the Shimazu clan in power, they, too, are always currying favor with the central government. The world now is full of *rōnin* like us. And as for the old retainers cast adrift after the downfall of their Toyotomi-connected lords, still lying in wait all over the place, we can't really imagine that they're going to start stringing their bows, and rising up against the Tokugawas, can we?"

"That's right, isn't it, Jimbei-dono?"

Heibei raised his reddened face.

"I, too, am just a lowly Christian. At this point, I don't hope to serve a lord who curries favor with the Tokugawas. But, just once, I'd like to hear the neighing of the war horses beneath the banner of the cross."

Heibei tried to gauge Jimbei's feelings, and Jimbei smiled.

"That's really bold of you, Yanagi-dono. Seems you're still as tough as the young folks."

Shirō rose quietly from where he was seated. He realized that they were talking so that he might hear them, and for that reason, he left. It was hard to accept that his own feelings were different from those of the others in this conversation.

Shirō was not unaware of the poverty of the *rōnin*. His family, the Masudas, owned a considerable number of fields, and their men and women worked hard, so for the time being, they were still not too badly off, but it seemed clear that these *rōnin* were much harder-pressed. Supported by the generosity of the farmers and fishermen, they had been able to survive, but through all this, their way of living had been affected, and even their appearances seemed to have become twisted, like the hermit crabs along the seashore.

Oine noticed that her only son's inner self had changed during this trip. Quietly pulling away the *ozen* dining table from which he had hardly eaten anything, she gazed at the profile of his face, wondering about him.

She wanted to prepare all the dishes for her son every time he came back from Nagasaki—as if he were still a growing child. She asked him briefly about his studies there, but she was more concerned about whether he had had enough to eat there, and if he had

missed any foods while he was away.

Oine accepted that boys have to become independent and leave sometime, yet she could not imagine the place her own son would leave for. Since his infancy, she had been able to fully savor their days together, which had been granted through the grace of God. From the beginning, Shirō had been different from other children. From time to time, Jimbei had said, “He’s our child, but perhaps he was sent here from another world.”

Maria-sama offered her only son Jesus to atone for the sins of humankind. Oine regarded that as a laudable deed, and yet, on the other hand, she also felt like she wanted to shut her ears and not listen. When she heard people praise her child as extraordinarily bright, she felt more scared than happy. When she heard them call him “God’s child,” she felt like hiding him behind the sleeves of her kimono.

She couldn’t get rid of the thought that he would, at some time, be gone from her. Of late, she had felt it difficult to speak to him. She thought her son had begun to entertain some rather preposterous thoughts. She was afraid she would receive replies she couldn’t bear if she asked him things without thinking. The best she could do was to just cook the foods he’d liked since childhood, and perhaps keep an eye out to make sure he dressed properly.

Thinking back on it, he had been a well-liked child since his infancy. The women and girls in their neighborhood would take his hands, and carry him on their backs. And still, today, whenever he came back from Nagasaki, the old women would call out to him with a big grin and say, “Got some tasty shellfish here—won’t you try some?”

At such times, she couldn’t help thinking of how Shirō had also been taken care of by all these people.

The morning of his departure came. She made

him take some dried sea lettuce for Okatchama—despite Shirō’s protests that she already had everything she needed.

“Maybe so, but the sea lettuce here has a different smell. I’m sure it’ll make her happy.”

Pestering him, Oine placed the bag in Shirō’s hands.

From the deck of the boat bound for Nagasaki, Shirō gazed out again at the coastline. Although he had grown accustomed to the sight from his regular trips, this time, he saw the towns and their communities, and all that they meant to him, with completely different eyes. Leaving from Sankaku no Ura, passing between Yushima and Ōyanoshima Islands, the ship stopped at Kōtsuura on Amakusa Kamishima Island and at Oshimako. The ship changed its stops according to where its passengers wanted to get on or off, and where cargo was to be loaded. They left at low tide, when the sailing was fast, and the sea breeze felt cold. It wasn’t yet even the middle of January.

On the shore to the right, the Shimabara Peninsula in the Matsukura domain stretched out, with Mount Unzen rising high in the distance. Shirō could also see the rise of the Susono Plateau and what looked to be houses in the villages of Ariie and Minami Arima.

An elderly passenger commented to the captain of the boat, “Today you can see the ruins of Haru Castle from real close.”

“Right. You can see them up close today.”

As the sun broke through an opening in the clouds, he could hear the gentle sounds of rowing from a boat.

“During the cherry blossom season, when you look at the remains of the castle from Yushima Island, you can see the cherry trees that you

wouldn't notice at other times."

"Ah yes, the cherry trees—when they're in blossom, you can see them from far away."

"Even now that the castle is gone, you can still see the trees blossoming."

After the conversation had ended, the sounds of rowing continued. At low tide, women and children could be seen here and there along the shore. As they came closer, faces became visible, and voices filled with laughter could be heard. The currents at low tide around the Straits of Hayasaki were known to be very fast, but as the boats headed for Kuchinotsu, they would pass near the shore, so as to avoid the rocks. With fresh eyes, Shirō gazed at the people and houses along the shoreline. The thatched roofs that had been pelted with sea spray looked as if they were withering away. All the roofs, without exception, bore the marks of the recent typhoon. How different they looked from houses along the streets of Nagasaki. Beneath those roofs, what kinds of lives were the people inside leading?

Along the coast, people crouched, hanging on to the light green rocks on the shore, picking up oysters and sea lettuce. Since their houses looked so shabby and sad, Shirō felt a bit relieved to see the peaceful scene of people working among the rocks, which had begun to take on color. The wind was chilly, but signs of spring showed along the bottom of the sea.

Perhaps hearing the sound of rowing, a woman looked up. She appeared to be a bit younger than his mother. Trying to wipe away the spray as she opened an oyster, she brushed back some loose hairs with the back of her hand holding her knife. The glimmer of her smile sunk into his heart. In Nagasaki, he could rarely see such a touching, smiling face. The woman began to speak.

"The wind's cold, isn't it?"

The sides of the boat and the rocks on the shore were about the same height. Exposed to the cold wind, her hands and feet had turned red. Instinctively, Shirō returned her smile. When traveling by boat, his eyes would often meet those of the people on the shore. As when meeting someone on a pathway in a town, both would nod their greetings, but since he was the one riding in the boat, he took the role of the one being seen off. It left him with an inexpressible feeling of sadness.

The woman's voice and smile lingered. The image of her arm's movement remained imprinted upon his eyes, overlaid and mixed with the image of his mother, from whom he had just parted. Seeing her with her body bent over, he wondered if, at this same moment, his mother and sister might also be gathering seashells, and with the same rounded figures—back there in the shadows of the cliff by the boat dock. Although his trip would not be a particularly lengthy one, his mother had looked sad and lonely, as if he were leaving for the rest of his life. This bothered him because she hadn't mentioned it to him clearly in words.

In front of the fields and houses that extended beyond the shore, the willow shoots and peach blossom buds were swelling. Around the feet of the children who stood bending over, he could see piles of seaweed covering the rocks along the coast. Glancing at the camellia bushes bobbing in the wind, he saw that the little white-eyed birds, nestled in the rocks along the edge of the tide, had started flying back and forth. Now, last year's drought, which had scorched everything, seemed little more than a bad memory.

In the early-planted fields, sprouts of wheat were already poking up. And the smile on that woman's face—it must have reflected the coming of spring at last. The children's voices, echoing over the surface of the sea, shimmered with joy as they welcomed the spring. And the reddened hands and legs of that woman—it

seemed as if they, too, had been caught up in the joy of early spring, tossed about in the sea winds.

A camellia flower floated alongside the boat, buoyed by the waves. Its red color struck Shirō's eyes. The face of his mother was reflected on the waves, and it rose and fell in the space around the flower. He was pierced to the depths of his heart. Perhaps this was his first intimation of one day being cut off from his mother.

Oh, Mother who gave me life!

Although he would return home again later, even when he was passing peaceful moments with his mother, he would always feel a pain deep in his heart, stemming from the premonitions he had felt that time. He couldn't help picturing her freckled cheeks.

Ever since Yazō had introduced him to the houses of Hasuda Jinsuke and the Ninagawa family in Kuchinotsu the year before, he had been unable to avoid overthinking. It was as if arrows of light were constantly striking him, deeply piercing his breast. He felt as if he had become a target suspended in the air—as if an unseen hand in the dark was drawing a bow, and firing test arrows at him.

I haven't become like the trees standing high on the cliffs, clinging firmly to rocks, exposed to the elements. Unless I can root myself to the rocks and earth, I'll just be wandering about in my dark, frustrated mind, like a kite without a string. But these days, my wavering has lessened a bit. I've been getting messages about my path—they've hit me like trial arrows, and become stitched into the core of this void.

Shirō sat immersed in such thoughts as he rode on the boat, surrounded by the creaking sounds of rowing.

This feeling, he now realized, had started around the time he had learned of Okatchama's

past in Nagasaki. This woman was a friend of his father's cousin. Originally, they had planned to have him stay at the cousin's house, but thinking about Shirō's background and talents, they had arranged to have him stay with Okatchama. And thus had this unexpected connection come about. Probably, Jimbei had suggested that it would be better for him to stay in a Christian home.

According to the foreigners, no other woman in Nagasaki was held in such high esteem as a tradesperson. She knew business inside out. By overlooking some things when necessary, she gained some benefits, but she always let others profit from it. They said she was good at gambling, too, but also said that when she dealt with aggressive, greedy people, she would just smile, and brush them off with words such as:

"Well then, this will be the end of our relations."

At times like these, Okatchama's smile was truly fearsome. Smiling broadly, she would just cut the relationship.

Yang, a Chinese man who had taught Shirō some magic tricks, had told him this, shrugging his shoulders.

"You mustn't take money from doing tricks. Okatchama cut relations with me for doing that. Tricks—you should only use them at very important times—you hear me?"

Although Yang had told Shirō to use tricks only when necessary, and not for money, he had urged Shirō to play some tricks when they met his favorite prostitute. Shirō dressed as a foreigner when he visited such places, and he didn't even speak a word. When a young, short-haired girl touched Shirō on the sleeve of his kimono, wondering who this foreigner was, Yang glared and scolded her.

"Don't touch him—he's an Acha-sama, from India."

In Nagasaki, foreigners who spoke different languages, as well as people who couldn't speak at all, were called Acha-sama. The young girls' crimson-colored mouths opened absent-mindedly as they stared at the blue silk handkerchief fluttering in and out of Shirō's fingers. They gazed without blinking their eyes.

Shirō pondered, If I hadn't met Yang, I'd never have seen the child chained by the leg on that Chinese ship. And I think of Suzu, the orphan at Jinsuke's house in Kuchinotsu. I remember her gaze. Her eyes became white flowers that floated softly to me, and flew into my heart. It would be fitting if the white amaryllis flower that Suzu picked should someday blossom in the soil above my buried body.

Shirō showed the tricks he'd learned from the foreigner—making eggs and doves appear before the young girls. But what he really wanted to show the people—what he really wished to show them, right before their eyes—was that dirty, chained leg. It seemed to him that just from that one sight, he had fully realized the extent of his sins. There was no more room left in his mind. All right then, he thought, may that hand in the darkness strike my heart.

He decided to take hold of the arrow that was piercing him and pull it out. Using his utmost strength, he would make that arrow shine and hurl it back. Would it strike the devil—or God? But no, he pleaded, let it fly back and light the land where Suzu, Rokusuke, Mother, and Grandmother are living.

With the sea spray striking his cheeks, Shirō was pulled back from the depths of his thoughts. Lifting his head and looking around, he could see the mountains of Ōyano and the Yushima Islands far in the distance. As he gazed at the soft, fresh grass of early spring that covered the higher reaches of the islands, his thoughts were pulled back to the reality of the present. When did people start to live here, and for how long will they continue? How will

the people of the future feel when they look upon these islands? Will they listen to the voices of these islands as we do now?

Such were the thoughts of this young man who had just finished his coming of age ceremony, as the boat swayed in the waves.

When Shirō appeared at the shop in Hakata Machi, Okatchama was walking through the wisteria trellis in the inner garden, seeing off some customers. She was a person who never raised her voice, no matter what happened, and this time, too, she quietly placed a water bucket, which she had been holding in one hand, by the roots of the wisteria, and gazed at the young man from head to toe.

"I'm back."

"Well then, welcome back."

As she nodded, she continued gazing intently at Shirō's face. Somehow, his eyes looked a bit hollowed, his face a bit gaunt. There was a slight shadow beneath his eyes, and a small wrinkle that stretched across his face. When Okatchama noticed the wrinkle on his fresh skin, which looked like it been etched there by the point of a needle, she felt a pain in her heart. She imagined that Shirō had passed some sleepless nights, thinking too much, as ever.

"Well, it must have been cold out there on the sea. Come on inside now."

Greeted by this quiet, unflattering woman, he was seized with nostalgia. The house put him at ease.

"I was pretty sure you'd come back," said Okatchama.

Hope, Shirō thought, is the eternal essence of women. Besides my mother and grandmother, she's the woman who represents it.

First, she congratulated him on his coming of

age ceremony. “Your grandmother must be happy and relieved about it.”

Her voice, as always, was gentle.

“Is your mother getting along well?”

As she asked this, he placed in front of her some sea lettuce.

“My goodness—it has such a wonderful smell. It’s so different from that of other places. I suppose the sea and winds must have been cold.”

She raised her hands in gratitude, and touched them to her nose.

“By the way, I heard that last autumn, on your way back, there was a terrible storm, and all sorts of things happened. You had to wait for the boat in Kuchinotsu, and you had quite a time of it, didn’t you?”

“That’s right. And I have a message from Ninagawa-sama, so I came here to tell you about it first.”

With hesitation, Okatchama asked:

“Were those writings I gave you of any help?”

“Yes, they brought a lot of happiness. Since Kuchinotsu is the birthplace of the Christians, receiving those writings was a great honor for the village.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear you say that.”

“Since the padres haven’t been able to come for such a long time, all the believers who’ve been confined and living there in secret—not only the Ninagawas—are so pleased. They feel that the writings will serve as a guiding light, and bring happiness to everyone. They say that, right now, Ukon-dono is planning to gather the young people from all the *confraria* groups and read from these writings.

“So people are using them. It’s really made a difference . . .”

Her voice was trembling, and her words trailed off. Certainly, the priest hung on the cross after entrusting the writings to her would be filled with joy to know this, and Okatchama wanted to say so, but her tears overflowed, and the words would not come.

“Did you become friends with Ukon-dono?”

“Yes. I’m sure he’ll teach me lots of things. I feel my understanding of the world is growing a bit deeper. He’s a great older disciple.”

“I’m happy to hear this. From the first time I saw Ukon-dono, I knew he’d be like an elder brother for you. With him looking after the books and teaching them, a divine light will lead the Christians in Amakusa.”

With eyes glimmering like the lights of fishing boats far off at sea, Okatchama looked at Shirō.

“Amakusa is where I was born.”

A slight smile, tinged with a note of sadness, rose in her cheeks. It was the first time she had spoken of her place of birth.

“So . . . where in Amakusa were you born?”

“A place called Tsuroro.”

Shirō felt a sudden twinge. He had never been to Tsuroro, but he had passed it on the sea. As he went by those small villages, where people lived squeezed together in poverty, the bleak windswept shore had suddenly appeared to him. Beneath the towering rocky cliffs, in windswept haunts where white waves crashed, and where it looked difficult for either boats or people to pass through, houses and people were hidden away in what, from a passing glance, appeared to be remote and forlorn hamlets.

He thought about how hard it must have been

for someone to leave such a place, and, once that person had left, how hard it would be to return. This difficult and desolate landscape had made him feel this way, and it had burned its impression in his eyes.

“Even in a town like that, there were Christians. That’s what both of my parents were.”

With such parents, whatever had led her to become a prostitute in Nagasaki? For a moment, Shirō was taken aback. Okatchama blinked her eyes, and tossed back the frayed strands of her hair, flecked with white. How could he ask her about her past?

“There are many poor villages in that area. People there have survived on their faith.”

Shirō sensed she was trying to teach him things that he, a young man, needed to learn.

“When I was a young girl, I thought of throwing myself on the rocky windswept coast. I folded my hands, looked past the cliffs, and prayed to find the *paraiso* of which my parents had spoken.”

Okatchama remained silent for a while. Then, words she spoke to herself began to slip out.

“The boat to *paraiso* never came, and so, instead, I went to the pleasure land of Nagasaki. I was eleven at the time.”

Shirō swallowed hard.

“The prayers of the people living in villages like those are heartbreaking. Throughout their lives, they rely on Kirisuto and Maria-sama in heaven. They yearn for them, and then, they die.”

After saying this, Okatchama bowed her head, apparently sunk deep in thought. Her words pierced Shirō’s heart. Those Christian writings had no doubt been the mainstay of her spirit. Barely eking out a living without much

happiness in a village on the cliffs, people had seen a vision of a temple in a heaven beyond the seas, longed for it, and died. It was with this spirit that this woman had preserved and protected the writings. She must have realized her most fervent wish when she handed the writings to Ukon.

As Shirō stared intently at her kimono collar, she suddenly raised her head and asked:

“Now that you’ve had your coming of age ceremony, will you continue your studies with a new spirit?”

“Well, yes This is the first time that I’ve seen with my own eyes the conditions in Kuchinotsu, Udo, Ōyano, and other areas, with all the droughts and damage from wind and rain. And it’s the first time that I’ve really thought deeply about the meaning of human life.

“I read two of the books I borrowed from Ukon-dono, and I realize that my way of learning has changed. True faith comes from the places where people are born and live. I need to go and take part in things in the places where people are actually living. I still have deep feelings for Nagasaki, but this time, I’ve come to say goodbye. I want to take a good look at the places here that have been the foundations of our faith, and then, I’m going back to Kuchinotsu to help Ukon-dono.”

Okatchama was overcome with an inexpressible feeling of loneliness. From the beginning, she had never thought that she could keep the boy with her forever, yet today, she was shocked to hear him suddenly announce his departure. Would he ever come back?

Okatchama thought, This boy was brought here at the age of twelve, and I was taken in at the first sight of him. It was a stroke of fate that I met him. I was born to carry not only the sorrows of my own life, but those of my

parents, and of my parents' parents. I've been walking along streets that have led me here and there, unknowing, with the sounds of the waves from my far-off hometown. When I think of it, it's this child who has become my guide, at this age. I've been blessed by a miraculous connection to this boy.

"I understand—that's your decision. And, if that's the case, then please just relax, and take your time during your last days here. There are many things that I, too, would like to talk with you about."

Wanting him to enjoy as much time as possible relaxing in Nagasaki, Okatchama prepared a detached room. When he was not busy outside, he stayed in this room, sunk in thoughts about his past.

The initial agreement had been that he might pursue academic studies, alongside his apprenticeship to a merchant family. But things hadn't worked out as planned. Okatchama realized clearly that he wasn't suited for a merchant's life, so instead, he worked with her, aiding in negotiations with foreigners. Sitting together in silence, they made quite a nice picture. While judging art and curios, she kept him at her side. The boy turned out to be quite a good judge.

When he was taken onto the Chinese boats and taught magic tricks by Yang—that, too, had stemmed from Okatchama's interests.

"Performing magic may have nothing to do with business, but it shows a more refined taste."

When Yang said this, Okatchama's eyes shone with delight.

"Is that so? Well, in that case, I'd like you to teach this boy the arts that are refined beyond the arts of business."

When people at Okatchama's house worried that Shirō was taking too much interest in

books, she smiled and replied, "That child, he'll be the joy of my life. It's different from the pleasure I get from trading. It's like I'm caring for a tree in heaven. Think of it as a kind of divine protection."

One time, with a mischievous look, Okatchama said to Yazō, "When it comes to studying Japanese and Chinese literature, his teachers are astonished by his talent, but as for using the abacus and business matters, well . . ."

It wasn't that he couldn't use the abacus if he had to, but when he did, he became absent-minded and couldn't concentrate. Since his first year in Nagasaki, while practicing on the abacus, he'd stop and say things like, "Numbers—what meaning do they have?" and, "Even if I do calculations with visible numbers, the invisible ones continue on and on. Beyond them, nothingness is always there, hiding. When I think of how everything in the universe comes into being from the infinite mother, the lives of things in this temporal world seem pitiful." And in saying this, a tear would drop onto the beads of his abacus.

In a similar way, he had reacted strongly to the stories of the Christians' march, which had taken place in this town twenty years ago. He wanted to hear what had happened.

"Well, it seems he isn't made for a merchant's life. Here in Nagasaki, there are people with refined sensibilities. And here, we still have the foreigners' influence, so I'd like to let this child, who has come to me from my dreams, enjoy himself."

Yazō saw the look in Okatchama's eyes as she gazed at the boy, sensing something extraordinary in her look.

One day, Okatchama brought out a thick roll of paper, and showed it to Yazō and Shirō.

"Before he passed away, the leader of my group insisted on giving me this letter. Would you like

to see it?”

When rolled out and read, it was evident that the letter was similar to the one Watanabe Kozaemon had shown them. As they read on, they saw that the document had been submitted by the Rosario Jesus group, directed by the Dominican priests in the eighth year of the Genwa era. The letter was written by Japanese believers, whose spirits had been starting to weaken during the persecutions, expressing their deep appreciation for the Dominican priests who had made their way to Japan, supported them, and had not left them forsaken. It continued, remarking on how the majority of imprisoned priests had come from the Dominican order, and how that gave evidence of their endless and exceptional work. The letter described, too, the amazement of the Japanese believers at these accomplishments, which they praised with all their hearts. At the end were the names of the signatories, and the villages in which they had lived.

Pressing a finger over the names of those believers, Okatchama continued, “By the end of the year, Ishimoto Rōsai-sama was beheaded, and Tanaka Paulo-sama burned at the stake. During their lives, both were close friends of mine. I’ll never forget how their lives ended. This letter we’re looking at now is a copy of the one sent to the pope in Rome, attesting to the good work of the Dominicans. Since all of the religious groups were devoted to serving *Deus*-sama they all made this kind of document with joint signatures. In fact, both the padres and we, the believers, have risked our lives for our faith.

The letter had been written in the eighth year of Genwa—five years after the one that Kozaemon had shown them. Shirō was impressed by the fervor he saw in the writings of the believers—an ardor evident even in the handwriting of those who had been executed. At the same time, he was disquieted by how the Japanese believers had been called on to prove

the achievements of the Jesuits at one time, and the Dominicans at another. Around areas like Himi and Arima in Nagasaki, troubles had broken out among the missionaries of the Jesuits, Dominicans, and also, the Franciscans, and he had heard stories about how this had troubled the thoughts of local believers. Shirō thought the padres should be respected for their missionary work, for undergoing persecution, and for embracing martyrdom. Still, he wondered about the Japanese believers who had been pressed to testify to Rome about the success and fervor of those from different religious orders. Who possessed more virtue—the padres who had believed steadfastly, and had enlightened the Japanese believers by sacrificing their lives, or the believers who had sheltered the padres, and learned, with all their hearts, to become faithful?

Like spoiled, blackened ears amid a green wheat field, divisions and seeds of discontent had been sown among the religious orders. We know that Christ, himself, was visited throughout his life by the same sort of problems.

Shirō decided to climb Mount Inasa, a place he’d had in mind for some time. It was not far from the town, and looking down from it, one could see the harbor. It wasn’t really a hard climb. As he slowly climbed, he looked back on the buildings and the sea. Around the trailhead were some modest, shingle-roofed houses, with red buds of quince just coming into blossom.

He had heard that the harbor was shaped like the neck of a crane, and when he climbed about halfway up the mountain, he could see this clearly. In front of him was Nobosaki Point, but the mountain blocked his view of it. With foreign ships passing along the narrow sea-lanes, it called to mind a painted scene, a landscape of great rivers. The low line of the mountains stretching out into the distance lent it a feeling of tranquility and beauty.

He wondered, What must foreigners think as they gaze out from ships passing slowly through these straits, as they first see the inner harbor surrounded by the mountains? He had heard stories about the great waves far off across the seas, but those were beyond his imagining. Fishermen had told him how, when they went out to the seas beyond, each wave appeared like a great mountain, how, when they piled upon each other to swell and heave, it was truly frightening.

When the padres first came from foreign places, over huge waves to this harbor, could they have imagined that this was the place to which they had been led by their promise to God? As if entrusting their lives to a great and gentle river, they had been carried along with the grace of God, unable to imagine the hard days to come.

The early spring sun cast a wide halo upon the harbor. The surface of the sea stirred with faint sounds, and the sunlight showed clearly the outline of the banks leading into the East China Sea. What lay beyond remained unseen, lost in the blazing haze.

Last September, when Shirō was in Udo, a number of boats had gone out from this harbor. The whaling crew from Ōyano had pulled into the harbor, and he had been able to watch the scene from the trailhead leading up Mount Inasa. Word of ships carrying people into exile had spread quickly and reached Udo. Children born of Nagasaki mothers and Portuguese or Spanish fathers were expelled, deported to Macau, along with their parents. Shirō thought about those who had left this beautiful harbor, exiled to a land they had never seen.

At those times, the people seeing them off swarmed the banks like clouds, and as the boats left, they cried out in peals of lament that sounded like gongs beaten to bits, and the strange, pained sounds rose up into the skies above.

“It’s too cruel, separating them like that and sending them away, forever cut off from their hopes. I couldn’t see them up close, but I watched them go from Mount Inasa. As I walked down, I could still see many of them, gathered along the seaside, stamping their feet, keening and crying.”

One of the whaling crewmembers, who had stopped in at Shirō’s house, had explained the situation to him.

It was likely that some of the people close to Okatchama had been among those sent away. Among Shirō’s friends and acquaintances, too, there were some children of mixed blood. He wanted to find out what had happened to them, but he hesitated to inquire.

He watched laundry wave in the breeze in nearby yards, beside little thatched houses that looked even neater and tidier than those he’d seen along the shores of Amakusa.

His eyes turned again toward the village. He had heard from the Ninagawa family about how, in the past, Nagasaki had been the center of Christianity for believers who had never seen Rome. Okatchama had said this too.

“In the old days, the bell at the Church on the Cape and the bell of the *misericordia* clock used to sound throughout the town. Now that they’re gone, we realize their real value.”

The Church of Saint Mary of the Mountains, the Church on the Cape, and the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin had all been destroyed some twenty years before, and nothing remained of them now.

“The believers who came to pray at the foreigners’ churches in Nagasaki climbed Mount Inasa. They asked in which direction the pope lived.”

In those days, from Mount Inasa, you could see a number of churches, but now, it was hard to

even find their remains. Shirō heard the rustle of footsteps in the leaves from someone climbing, and then, sensed them coming to a stop. Turning around, he saw a young girl holding a hand basket, looking as if she were about to run away. They both reacted with words of surprise.

“Ah—you’ve been in Nagasaki?”

The girl seemed even more surprised.

“Well, my teacher, yes.”

Then, she fell silent, her hand reaching into the ferns growing among the rocks. The pupils of her eyes were colored a green that looked like it had sprung from the depths of the sea. Her skin was uncommonly fair. Her dark, black hair was tied up simply in the back, and she was wearing pantaloons that could easily have been mistaken for those of a man—probably they were worn for gathering leopard plants and water celery. She had placed what she had gathered into the hand basket. She looked up with eyes colored as though they belonged to a being from the spirit world. Then she bowed.

“Welcome back.”

No words of reply came quickly. Until this moment, Shirō had been thinking about what had happened atop the waves that lay below his eyes. Because he thought she had been one of the girls put on a ship and sent into exile, her sudden appearance now seemed an apparition.

Realizing how astonished Shirō was from the look on his face, the girl smiled.

“Last year, people with Portuguese relations were sent off to Macau. But my father’s Dutch, so we were able to stay.”

But then, without further comment, the girl looked up at him anxiously, and her shoulders sagged. During the time they hadn’t met, her way of speaking had become more like that of

an adult.

Since Shirō’s arrival at Okatchama’s place until his return to his hometown the previous fall, he’d been teaching children how to write. Saya had been one of his students.

Her Dutch father worked on ships authorized for foreign trade, and was often away to places like Luzon, Annam, or Cambodia, so her mother took care of the household while he was away, and supported it by taking in sewing work. Okatchama said that her mother had a pure heart, and had done a good job of bringing up her daughter.

Nagasaki had respected its foreign connections, and taken good care of children from mixed marriages, so Saya, with her different colored eyes, had seemed to grow up freely. She was only a year younger than Shirō, the oldest among her classmates.

Saya worked well with the younger children. She not only did things like practicing brush writing and preparing the ink, she even led the children in cleaning the toilets. Okatchama thought highly of her work.

“I . . . I thought that you, too, had been sent off, but I’m glad that’s not so.”

“I’ve been waiting for you to return.”

Shirō had only ever seen her in the midst of many children, acting as a big sister, so coming upon her here, suddenly, amidst camellias, he was filled with feelings unexpectedly painful and pleasant.

He had never asked whether her father was Portuguese or Dutch. It wasn’t unusual to meet one of the mixed-marriage children in Nagasaki, and he had found her looks, with their foreign touch, charming. But now, coming upon her in this way, he felt, for the first time, a pain that ran through his chest.

“Saya.”

“Yes, teacher. “

“You’re only a year younger than me, so would you please stop calling me your teacher?”

“But—my teacher.”

“Well, I will no longer be”

He was about to say that he’d climbed the mountain with the intention of taking leave of Nagasaki, but when he looked at Saya’s eyes, he could no longer say that. What was this feeling? A pain he had never felt before pierced his heart, and, as he turned and looked toward the sea, he knelt beside her. Then facing the sun, illumined by a slight halo, he began to recite an *oratio*.

“Merciful, gentle, sweet Maria-sama, and blessed Son of virtuous Maria-sama, whose purity is beyond that of this world, fairest among all beings, O gentle humble Lord, we beseech thee to remember our pain and poverty. Amen.”

Not quite understanding, Saya was invited to join in the prayer, spoken in a low voice, echoing with sadness. She, too, knelt down.

Although she knew that the young teacher was of her mother’s faith, this was the first time that she had heard him recite an *oratio*.

For some reason, whenever her Dutch father was at home, her mother didn’t pray. When he was away, she recited prayers to Maria-sama, both morning and night, and taught them to her daughter. In a hushed voice, looking into her eyes, her mother often warned her never to recite the prayers where others might hear her, lest they both be crucified.

When this teacher, whom she secretly admired, stood right in front of her, looked up at the sun, and knelt down, she had the anxious sense that something was beginning. Then, quite beyond

her imagining, from his mouth came words similar to those her mother had used in her prayers. Quickly, Saya glanced all around. She feared her teacher might be crucified if someone saw or heard him.

Quickly, Saya moved behind him, looked around carefully to make sure that no one was near them, and then, knelt down and prayed.

It was too difficult to follow Shirō’s prayer, so she chanted, in a low voice, the prayer she had often used with her mother. It was her first time to pray outside, and she was tense. Saya wondered what he was praying about. The prayer sounded very serious.

Saya, who had been kneeling behind Shirō, stood up. Shirō waited while she brushed off the moss and dirt, and then, asked, “What were you praying for?”

The sun must have been dazzling, for she repeatedly placed her fingers over her eyes.

“I prayed that your *oratio* would not be overheard, that you would not be punished for it.”

His face showing surprise, Shirō spoke in an amused voice, “Well, thanks—I’ll be careful from now on. You, too!”

“All right. And may I ask you?”

“Ask me what?”

“What sort of *oratio* was it that you were reciting?”

“Since I’m such a weak person, I was asking the Lord and Maria-sama for help.”

Hearing that even he, her teacher, was lacking in strength, Saya felt troubled. It was only natural, she thought, to consider her mother and herself to be sinners before Maria-sama, but—to hear these words from her respected teacher—it made her feel as though no virtuous

people were left in the world.

Saya was attracted by the unusually sorrowful prayer she had just heard. She felt a tremendous sense of pity. She imagined that he, the teacher, must bear even greater suffering—not only his own sadness and sins, but also, those of all others as well.

“Let’s sit down over there.”

Shirō stood by the trunk of a big camphor tree, placed his palm on its bark, and pointed at a rock beneath a camellia tree. The two remained silent for a while. Small birds called out from the thicket of bushes, and sunlight, filtering gently through the trees, played about them.

“What a surprise to meet you here.”

Saya nodded, and fingered the handle of the basket on her lap.

“We can’t be sure there’ll be other days like this to come.”

Today, the teacher had spoken in a voice that sounded somewhat dejected. It seemed to Saya that he must be keeping some very painful things to himself. She wondered how to reply. Her hair hung down loosely as she lightly shook her head. Then, as if caused by that faint movement, a camellia blossom dropped down from above, right in front of her. Taking this as a sign of warning, she was startled, and her expression paled. She spoke:

“I . . . I’ll pray to Maria-sama.”

Their eyes met. Shaking her head, she said again, “I’ll pray to her. Please let me meet”

Shirō seemed to search for words.

“Who is it you hope to meet?” . . . he wished to ask, but the words wouldn’t come from his mouth.

“In this world, we can’t know what happens next.”

Hearing this, Saya showed her sorrow. Her green eyes gazed at him, as if staring from the bottom of the sea.

“Teacher, will I be able to see you in the world of *anima*? Will I be able?”

The thought lodged in Shirō’s heart—Saya is precious. And her position is pitiful. For how long, he wondered, would the *bakufu* government, which had so mercilessly expelled the mixed blood children of the Portuguese, allow the children with Dutch parents to remain? He thought for a moment of taking her back with him to Udo. What if he hid her, what if he took her, in the balmy autumn weather, to the fields of colza, and placed her, a white veil atop her head, beneath the heaven’s gate in Rokusuke’s field?

When Shirō at last opened his eyes, released from grief, he showed determination to look clearly into the world beyond. He pointed toward the currents in the ocean shining like a great river.

“Saya, Maria-sama will help you in the world of *anima*.”

“Then I’ll pray that I’ll be on a boat that will take me to *anima*.”

Saya knelt and prayed—her fingertips covered with the juices of grass. On the widely spreading branches of the old camellia tree, flowers were in bloom, and in the shadow of the tree where she knelt, the space was filled with a golden-tinted fog of nectar. Her shoulders, covered with a pale jasmine-colored kimono, looked tired.

“In the country of *anima*, you’re sure to be one of the followers of Maria-sama.”

Shirō spoke with his eyes closed.

“Are there many followers of Maria-sama?”

“Yes, many.”

“Why will I follow Maria-sama?”

“Because you suffer.”

“Suffer . . . ?”

Saya repeated the word, her face confused.

“Since I have done so little learning, I can’t understand these difficult things.”

“Learning? You’re better off without it. It’s better not to understand.”

“Well . . .”

She stopped talking.

“Try to say something.”

This was the teacher’s usual way of speaking.

“When my mother prayed the *oratio*, she said she was a sinner. She asked me to say that I’m a sinner too. What is my sin?”

“Maria-sama is surely watching over you. And Okatchama praises your mother’s goodness, does she not? Real sin is judged by *Deus-sama*, and so it’s best if we remain humble at all times.”

It seemed to Saya that her teacher was different today—he looked much sadder. At school, he used to close his eyes in thought. Now, he was closing them again.

“A young woman like you shouldn’t climb a mountain like this alone. I can watch you from here, but please go down quickly. You must go quickly.”

Half in tears, Saya looked down at her basket. Probably, she had hoped to fill it.

“It’s dangerous here in the mountains. I’ll pick

wild parsley to fill your basket, so don’t worry, but please, you must go down. ”

As she turned and looked back, she thought how Shirō was like a brother, picking parsley for her. Thinking of how they might ride together on the *anima* boat helped restore her spirits.

Shirō saw that there was another person who prayed to God for what she could not achieve in this world. He imagined that Saya’s mixed-blood background may have caused her to feel this more than most others did. At her age of fifteen, some women would already be married. Knowing it wasn’t right to speak carelessly about what might trouble others, Shirō tried to calm his agitated feelings.

People in Nagasaki were used to seeing children of mixed races, and for the most part, didn’t discriminate against them. Saya, however, with her Dutch father, would have to manage her own fate. Because Maria-sama had given up her beloved son Kirisuto to be crucified upon the hill of Calvary, it was said that she had become an image of compassion. Her compassion must have sprung from that extreme sorrow. We, her exiled children, pushed out of paradise, are held in the trembling arms of the suffering Maria-sama. The sorrows of Saya, a mixed-blood child, will someday become the eternal spring of love, just as Maria-sama found. These were the things that Shirō had wanted to say to Saya.

As he watched the sunlight on the sea, Shirō stood up.

From this harbor, the sea-lanes led to Luzon, Cambodia, Jakarta, and Goa. They led even to the hill of Calvary, where Kirisuto was taken, and to Rome, where the pope lives. But Shirō could imagine the boat that Saya had called “the boat to the country of *anima*” more vividly than any of the boats that sailed off to other countries.

Saya's mother, who always prayed her sins would be forgiven, had likely taught her, in prayers, about the "boat of *anima*." Or had Saya uttered this phrase spontaneously? Shirō hadn't known that there was a boat of *anima*. It was a boat that isn't known through ordinary means. Shirō thought his troubles in this world might be lightened if he could ride on that boat together with Saya. He followed Saya as she descended through the shade of the trees, looking back again and again. She walked as far as the harbor, and then, her head hanging down as if she was having trouble making up her mind, she suddenly turned, and, facing him with a beautiful smile, called out, "Take care, my teacher."

Calling in her clear voice, she bowed her head politely, and then, walked away.

Shirō felt he'd climbed Mount Inasa in order to meet Saya. It was the best possible gift, before leaving Nagasaki. These days, he sighed and felt weighed down as he thought about difficult matters of doctrine. Saya's words came as a breath of air, fresh and sweet.

Still, he wondered, What kind of inspiration can I give her in return? As she passed out of sight, he began to walk, and he tried to shake free of his thoughts. A slight smile formed on his lips as he thought, I'd like to ride on that same *anima* boat with Saya.

At the water's edge, by the wharf, tiny petals of spirea from the houses on the hill drifted around, fluttering back and forth.

He told Okatchama about his talk with Saya. At first, she seemed to listen with pleasure, but then her face showed sadness.

"To tell the truth, I've been worrying about her."

"You mean, because . . ."

"Right. Lately, there's been talk that we have to write down all sorts of details, like the number of households, or the goings-on in town. People here already know that her father's Dutch, but if we have to write it down for the magistrate's office, that could lead to trouble."

"I've heard that the sect of the Dutch is different from that of the Spanish and Portuguese—and that of our own, as well."

"But even so, we're all Christians. And now that the government has expelled all the people with Portuguese relatives, they're not likely to overlook the wives and children of the Dutch."

Shirō understood that his fears were swiftly becoming real.

"In two days, I'll be leaving. I've received your teaching, which is more important than what is taught in many books."

"Oh, don't say that—it's thanks to you that I feel the sun shining on my remaining days. I treasure having had this chance to know you."

Shirō deeply appreciated the words from this woman, whose life experiences had been so vastly richer than his own.

"I wanted to prepare something for your coming of age celebration, but this was all I could think of."

Okatchama brought out a bundle wrapped in a large *furoshiki* cloth. In it, neatly folded, were a *kosode* kimono with the figure of a bird woven in silver colored silk, a pair of *hakama* trousers in dark blue, their barely visible flower pattern embroidered in silver-violet, and a sleeveless *haori* half-coat made of the same material but in a slightly pale shade of green. On top was a small box made of paulownia wood. Wrapped around it was a rosary made of ivory. Attached to the rosary was an ebony cross that shone in the light with a quiet elegance.

“What’s this?”

Immediately, he sat up and straightened his back.

She urged him, “Go ahead—hold it and have a look. It was a gift from the priest who stayed here and was martyred.”

“Such an important thing?”

“Because it’s important, it’s fitting that it should be entrusted to you. It is most right for you.”

As Okatchama spoke, she drew the small box toward her, and lifted its cover. His eyes were struck by the clear light that shone from it. In the box was a crucifix made of finely crafted gold. Reverently, she raised it high with both hands.

“I’ve regarded this as a family treasure, but the time has come to pass it on. If you would kindly accept it, I’m sure its former owner would be

pleased. This originally belonged to a trading merchant.”

Gently, she interrupted Shirō, who seemed about to speak.

“This crucifix shines so brightly that when it’s worn, it may stand out too much. But I imagine you could use it at times when people gather for ceremonies.”

In saying this, Okatchama’s expression turned deeply serious.

“Your departure will be my departure, too.”

Shirō felt tense as he watched her face.

“Until now, I’ve traveled many roads, and had experiences I cannot adequately express in words. Talking with you, I finally feel that I, too, am standing at last at the entrance to the country of *anima*. My legs are weak, and I need to shed a lot of baggage from this world as I set off on my way.”

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