Demon Pond

Setting
Kotohiki Valley, village of Shikami in the county of Ono, Echizen Province

Time
The Present; midsummer

Cast of Characters
HAGIWARA AKIRA, keeper of the belfry
YURI, a maiden
YAMAZAWA GAKUEN, man of letters
PRINCESS YUKI, mistress of Demon Pond
MYRIAD OF YUNOO, Yuki’s ancient retainer
ART CARP
NAT CRAB
LADY CAMELLIA, of Kinome Pass
JACK MACKEREL
MICK MACKEREL
FRIAR RUSH, of Itadori
TOM SKELETON, of Thirteen Barrows
PHANTOMS, several
REVEREND BLACK, catfish; emissary of Sword Peak
YOJÜ, peasant of Shikami village
TAKUZEN OF SHIKAMI, a Shinto priest
GONDÖ KANPACHI, member of the village council
SAITA HATSUO, primary school teacher
HATAGAMI KADENJI, village headman
DENKICHI, gambler
KOGARASU FUROSUKE, welterweight sumo wrestler
ANAGUMA KÔZÔ, representative of the prefectural legislature others, as they address themselves in the drama (courtiers from Sword Peak and Serpent Pond in the region of Mt. Hakusan)

In a hamlet at the foot of Three Province Peak, the vesper bell is heard.
The curtain opens.

HAGIWARA AKIRA is standing in the belfry and gazing into the sunset. He wears a grey wig. The belfry is overgrown with vegetation, vines around its pillars, moss on its stone staircase, grass sprouting on its roof beam. Presently, AKIRA slowly descends the staircase and walks over to YURI, who is washing rice in a spring. He stands behind her.

AKIRA: The water is so beautiful. Always ... so beautiful.
YURI: Mmm.

(There are irises growing by the waterside, two or three small flowers now in blossom.)

AKIRA: How clear the water is. (Smiles)
YURI: (Combing back a strand of gray hair with her fingers) No, it’s white.
AKIRA: Well, you’re rinsing the rice in it. (Sits down on the threshold of their cottage) You’ll ruin your pretty hands with all this housework. Here, let me help you.
YURI: I’ll be fine, thank you.
AKIRA: Yes, but just now I happened to see your reflection there in the water among the irises. You were prettier than ever.
YURI: What’re you talking about?
AKIRA: A compliment, my dear. Nobody hates to be praised, surely.
YURI: You’re only making fun of me. Besides, it’s not right for the master of the house to be in the kitchen. Hurry back to your desk.
AKIRA: It’s a weird kind of master who makes his living ringing bells. I’d sooner change my name to Gonsuke and fall to my supper like any good peasant. I’m so famished it occurred to me that wooden bell clapper would do me better service as a cane. Of course, I could just sit and wait to be served.
YURI: Be patient. Your supper will be ready in a moment, you’ll see.
AKIRA: Don’t tell me you’re a magician too. It ain’t like the rice you’re rinsing can cook itself.
YURI: My, but you are persistent. This is tomorrow’s rice I’m preparing.
AKIRA: Breakfast? Ah, that’s as it should be — the model housewife. What a relief to hear you say that. Still, I’m empty handed, and my belly’s emptier than ever too.
YURI: Such a fuss! ... I’ve got your favorite tonight, some broiled eggplant, so settle down. People would laugh to hear you go on like that.
AKIRA: (Stepping onto the veranda) Now who might you be worrying about? I’ll tell you folk laugh at us when ...
YURI: Yes? ...
AKIRA: When they catch us sleeping in together.
YURI: I don’t know what you’re talking about. (Looks down and smiles)
AKIRA: Damn the mosquitoes! I’ll go smoke out the room in back. (Turning away and gazing up at the mountain from the cottage) ... The heat has burned the clouds clear out of the sky, and Three Province Peak looks like it’s on fire. All the mountains and peaks—Omi to the west, Kaga to the north, and far-off Mino too—they’re all burning in the drought, like a chain of tens of thousands of torches. Demon Pond must be aglow with their flames—the evening star high above it is red too. Not a whiff of rain up there.
YURI: They say our water comes from Demon Pond, the pond where that dragon dwells. Perhaps it’s just my fancy, but it seems even our spring has been running terribly thin. The village folk have been having a bad time of it too, what with the dreadful heat and all. ... We’re so cut off up here in the hills, it’s hard to find enough to eat, but I do so worry about your health.
AKIRA: What do I care that our stream’s a bit thin? What concerns me is you. Don’t you go losing any more weight than you have already this summer. Yuri, see for yourself, touch those moonflowers there.
YURI: All right, but why? (Touches the petals)
AKIRA: You’ll find dew on the flowers and the leaves.
YURI: My, how cold it is! As cool as my hands from washing the rice. The flowers are drenched through.
AKIRA: In this world folk need money, or land, or rain for sure, but we won’t die of thirst even if the sun bakes us for a hundred days straight. As long as we have the dew, we’ve got plenty. (Closes the front shōji)
YURI: Won’t you be hot, my dear? You can leave them open; I doubt anyone will be passing by at this hour.
AKIRA: Really, do you think I’m worried about that? When I shut all the doors before dark and light a bit of incense, the mosquitoes aren’t near as bad.

(There is a waft of smoke from the insect repellent. Enter GAKUEN, in sun-bleached panama hat and suit jacket; he is a dignified and thoughtful-looking man. He wears a large kerchief slung across his back, leggings, and straw sandals. Using his umbrella as a walking stick, he advances to the belfry, stops, and gazes up at the bell.)
GAKUEN: This morning I crossed the matins bridge, and now I hear the vesper bell.¹

*(YURI transfers the rice into a bamboo colander.)*

GAKUEN: *(Calling out)* Hey, that's the spirit!
YURI: Oh, hello. *(Turns toward him)*
GAKUEN: No sooner had I passed the bamboo grove along the footpath than I heard it—just now, as it was getting dark. This'll be the bell that marks the hour, eh?
YURI: That is correct.
GAKUEN: And such a fine sound! ... An excellent bell. You don't mind if I climb up and have a look, do you?
YURI: *(Stands, the colander under her arm)* Not at all. But you mustn't be foolish, sir, and strike it with your cane or what have you.
GAKUEN: I'm not in the market for watermelons. I swear I won't try to tap it. *(laughs)*
YURI: You jest with me, sir. ... No, you don't look like a gentleman who plays pranks. I hope you're not offended, but I just wanted to let you know. This bell is rung only three times a day and never more than that—at matins, vespers, and the mid watch of the night. Please, be my guest, climb up and have a look. *(Goes to the little enclosure of moonflowers and makes to enter it)*
GAKUEN: Ah, Madame ... Please don't go. I'd like to see the bell, but now that I have your attention,² would you mind sparing me a cup of tea? It's awfully brash of me, I know. Even hot water would do.
YURI: Nothing simpler. Come over here, sir, and sit down.
GAKUEN: Thanks.
YURI: Our house is nothing to be proud of, really.
GAKUEN: Why, not even a temple kitchen, by the looks of it. The main hall, is it someplace else?
YURI: No, it burned down a long time ago, they say. This hasn't been a temple for years.
GAKUEN: Just the bell?
YURI: Yes.
GAKUEN: Just the bell ... I see, that business with the watermelon. *(Takes off his hat. His hair is cropped so short as to seem he has had it all shaved)*

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¹ *Kesa akemutsu no hashi o watatte, koko de kuremutsu no kane o kiita. Akemutsu no hashi*: a reference to a bridge that existed between Fukui City and Sabae.
² *Futo kotoba o kawashita goen ni*: literally, "(taking the advantage of) the karma of our exchanging words."
off. He rubs his forehead.) Speaking of melons, you wouldn’t happen to have any, would you, even a sweet marrow? —Doesn’t look like I’ll find a tea stall around here. (Looks about)

(The night is settling in below the mountains. The light of a lamp glows through the shōji of the cottage with its low thatched roof.)

GAKUEN: I’ll not put you out and ask for my supper too, but I swear I’m famished.

YURI: (Laughs out loud) Ha ha. Under the water trough, there are some pears being chilled. Would you like some? (Withdraws into the shadows of the moonflowers)

GAKUEN: (Gulping down his tea, he pulls from his pocket a folding fan. Fanning himself with it, he peers over.) Ah, the moon-faces have opened! They must’ve caught a glimpse of your own.

YURI: Huh? (Turns around)

GAKUEN: Or rather, the color of your hair.

YURI: I’m getting on in years, certainly I’m no flower. I’ll soon dry up like an old gourd—that’s all I have to look forward to now.

GAKUEN: Pass me the knife, I’ll peel them. Come, come. I don’t want to cause you any more trouble than I have already. . . . I travel light and I’m all thumbs, but given the proper tool I can still do a decent job of peeling fruit. Ah! These are colder than ice! Cutting a jewel would be like this.

YURI: I take it you are a traveler, sir. . . . Where are you from, and where might you be headed?

GAKUEN: And you I take it must be the barrier guard asking for identification.\(^3\) As you see, ma’am, I’m just a school teacher on a summer field trip. . . . On my way home, as a matter of fact. If it’s cool, I’ll cross Kinome Pass, or maybe go by the famous Naka no Kawachi.\(^4\) No, if it’s true the girls in the mountain tea stalls at Yunoo Pass wear red aprons, then that’s the way I’ll go, even if the god of smallpox has set up shop there. My destination’s Kyoto.

YURI: And tonight sir. Where will you stay?

GAKUEN: Watch what you say there, ma’am, for I’m not above taking a hint and asking you to put me up. Ha ha ha! No, just a joke. You needn’t

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3. *Sate nanori o age te, nan no tōge o kosu to in demo arimasen:* a reference to the need to identify oneself at barriers posted at mountain passes before the Meiji era.

4. *Oto ni kikoeta Naka no Kawachi:* Located roughly halfway between Tochinoki Pass in Fukui Prefecture and Kinomoto in Shiga Prefecture, Naka no Kawachi was famous for its deep snow. For reference to Kyōka’s traveling by this route in the late years of Meiji, see my discussion of his 1924 essay “Tochi no mi” in the commentary that follows the play.
worry. But tell me, do the tea girls at Yunoo Pass still wear those red aprons?

YURI: What goes on deep in the mountains may sound very strange, but it’s true I’m told.

GAKUEN: Since the so-called “maiden lilies” that grow in these valleys have scarlet blossoms, I’ve no trouble believing that story. But if I take this route, then it’s one mountain piled atop another, and come to think of it—that peak up there—the rock looks as if it’s been set on fire by the sunset. It might just be I’m better off going by way of Naka no Kawachi instead, scared as I am of the snow-maid more than the red aprons. Wherever, it sure is hot. Only here have I finally caught my breath.

YURI: There have been some deaths down in the valley, I hear. It’s the worst drought in years.

GAKUEN: I’ve been slogging through it since morning. It was hard going there for some eight, nine leagues in this heat. What almost did me in was, I couldn’t find any real water, not a drop till I got here. This looks like springwater.

YURI: The spring runs down here from the cliff behind, through a bamboo pipe. . . . It’s only a little stream, but when it strikes the rocks it makes a lovely ringing sound. That’s why this valley’s called Kotohikidani, “Koto Strumming Valley.” Shall I pour you some? This is cold, sweet water, sir.

GAKUEN: What? Do you really think I could’ve held off this long? When I first laid eyes on the stream—and that was before I knew anything about the bell tower—I dunked my head right under with my mouth and hands latched onto the trough and guzzled as much as I could.

YURI: How awful of me! There I was, washing the rice!

GAKUEN: Nonsense. The irises strained the rinse water clean, making a pretty powder for the moon-faces’ toilet. Downstream the water was as clear as crystal. Still, I could swear the whole village was in a hard way for water, and yet none of them come here to draw water from the spring, it appears. Really quite remarkable . . . I suppose they’ve got their reasons . . .

YURI: Ah. The spring is in the cliff behind—

GAKUEN: So you said.

YURI: But the water’s source is higher up the mountain, a dreadful deep place called Demon Pond. People say a dragon lurks there—they’re afraid of the water, and say it’s poison. It’s too late for you to see clearly, sir, but

5. Actually, eight or nine li; approximately twenty miles (one li equals 2.44 miles, or 3.93 kilometers). One league measures about three miles, slightly more than a li.
you'd find little pebbles among the rocks where the water strikes them, purple and green and rouge—very pretty they are, but they fill the villagers with horror, for it's said they're the fishy scales of those who serve the mistress of the pond.

GAKUEN: Those pretty stones are the scales of poisonous serpents? Lord I was a fool then, for I must've guzzled a good gallon. *(Beats his chest with his fan)*

YURI: But *(Smiles)* all these years we've been drinking the very same, morn and night. Despite their doubts.

GAKUEN: Well said. To doubt, ma'am, is human nature. I'll take your word and not worry about it. So, you've been drinking it morn and night—all these years . . . *(Studying her more closely)* Just how old are you?

YURI: . . .

GAKUEN: Well, sorry to be rude, but how old?

YURI: Forgive me, sir . . . I've forgotten.

GAKUEN: *(Laughs)* Even the proverb has it, one can ask a woman when she'll die, but never when she was born. That was much too brash of me . . . I'll not ask again how old you are. Now then, how much?

YURI: How much . . . ?

GAKUEN: What do I owe you?

YURI: What for? There's no charge, sir, for the tea or anything else. I won't accept a penny.

GAKUEN: So the tea's a teat—bah! I'm all tripped up, like some old codger with a loose set of store teeth. What I mean to say is, not just for the tea, ma'am. I also had my fill of your fine pears. I'd be hurt if you didn't take something, even if you're not in the business. If I'm out of line, I'll drop it, but as you see, I'm on the road. Go ahead and charge me.

YURI: If it really troubles you, then perhaps I should—just a token, mind.

GAKUEN: Certainly.

YURI: But, ah, my charge, as you call it, doesn't have to be in coin? Could I prevail on you instead to offer me a story? Something short will do.

GAKUEN: Tell you a story . . . What d'you mean exactly?

YURI: I'm sure you must have heard something interesting on your travels. . . . Something out of the ordinary.

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6. Mono o utagai no wa ningen no narai desu yo: a paraphrase of utagai wa ningen ni ari, a line from the Noh play Hagoromo.

7. Cha mo cha ja ga, iyaa kore wa, hige no yō ni mojamaja to kikoete okashii. Gakuen inadvertently speaks as if he were an old man mumbling his words. In the original his lines are those of a toothless old graybeard. In the English I've felt obliged to give him false teeth, so as to convey not only the meaning but the sense as well.
GAKUEN: A story.
YURI: Yes, for the tea and pears. You're not alone, sir. All kind of folk come by—medicine peddlers, ascetics, and pilgrims, even people from down in the village—I offer them refreshments, and those who ask me what they owe—whoever—I ask for a story in return. And if they're generous, sometimes I even offer them a place to stay for the night.
GAKUEN: Hmm. So that's what you mean. (Slaps his thigh) Fair game, I'll give you a story. . . . A story, a story, let me see—something short and sweet ought to do. Ah, I have it. And one from this province too.

(AKIRA opens the shōji a crack and peers out. He is sitting at his little desk. He opens a notebook, takes up his brush, and is about to write down the story the guest will tell. For a moment, he and GAKUEN look at each other; AKIRA blows out the lamp.)

YURI: What kind of story? Sir?
GAKUEN: There wouldn't happen to be anyone else here listening in, would there?
YURI: Why, no—just the moon.
GAKUEN: To be sure, a light went out in your cottage and, ah, I couldn't see well for the smoke, but—yes, it must've been the moon.

Where was I? Ah. I was about to tell you a story from here in Echizen. Here goes: Once there was a peony bun sitting under the veranda of a house, and it was bewitched. For example, say I said something. Well, a voice under the veranda would parrot what I said. The villagers banded together. "Who'd that be talking back?" they said. "Is it a fox?" No, came the reply. "A badger?" Uh-uh. "Otter?" Wrong again. "A devil? A goblin?" Nope. . . . Finally they asked, "Is you a peony bun?" Ye-es, it said, and up and disappeared.8

Well, that was my tale. . . . But since I've got the moon as well for my audience, I've a mind to start afresh and tell you another one. Listen well. This was only two summers ago. For some years, a good friend of

8. The authenticity of this folktale has been pointed out by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, "Bakemono-zuki no ben: Izumi Kyōka no Yashagaike kōen ni yosete," Shingeki 25.9 (September 1978): 86. The tale is from Echizen and is found in an Edo collection, Tōyūki (The Journey East) by Tachibana Nankei. Nankei was a Kyoto doctor who collected strange stories on his travels through the provinces. Tōyūki, and its companion volume, Saiyūki, were published in 1795. Kyōka may have read this work in a Meiji-era reprint, the Zoku-teikoku bunko, an invaluable edition of many premodern Japanese works. My source for information on Nankei's work is Nihon koten bungaku daijiten (Iwanami Shoten, 1984), 4:441, "Tōyūki, Saiyūki." The tale of the peony bun has a wonderfully naive quality.
mine had set his heart on gathering up all the most interesting, strange, and wondrous tales, tales handed down from province to province. Not a place in Japan was to be left out, that was his aim. Well, that summer on school break, he left Tokyo bound for the North Country, deep in the mountains over valley and peak. And that was the last we’ve seen or heard of him. His family did all they could to find him, but he was gone. Not even a hint of a trace. Even his friends, I among them, had given him up for dead, and so we set the day he left Tokyo as the anniversary of his death. And that was the end of it—actually, it wasn’t. There was a terrible fuss for a while, even made the papers.

Was it suicide? An accident, or death by misadventure, as they say? Whenever my friends and I met, we’d weep and grieve for the poor man! He had no cause to be on the run, or die, surely. Ah, but in this world, ma’am, strange things do happen . . .

YURI: (Curtly) Ah. I thank you, sir. Really most kind of you.

GAKUEN: D’you mean to say I’ve paid up for the tea?

YURI: That was quite enough.

GAKUEN: And you liked my story.

YURI: I preferred the one about the bun. I didn’t care for the second.

GAKUEN: Yes, but my story’s just begun. That was just the prologue.

YURI: Thank you, but I’ve heard all I want. . . . Now sir, it’s getting dark and you may have a hard time finding a place to stay.

GAKUEN: Why, I could swear you offered to put me up, provided the story was good. Give me shelter for the night. This story has weight, I tell you.

YURI: Sir! Didn’t you warn me a while back not to offer you a place for the night? And I took you for a gentleman. . . . Surely you know that you’ve put me in a most delicate position. A single woman, all alone, and you demand shelter! Enough, you give me the creeps.

GAKUEN: Give you the creeps? I’m no witch. 9

YURI: Here in the mountains we’re less afraid of witches than of city folk. Go on, get out.

GAKUEN: You’re throwing me out! This is an outrage! (Stands to leave, most reluctantly)

YURI: (Following behind, bustling him out) Go on. Leave.

GAKUEN: Can I say nothing at all, just because you’re a woman? You’ve no cause to treat a fellow mortal so cruelly. Besides, you’ve got your sto-

9. Botamochi no baketa no de wa nai desu ga: literally, "I'm not the bewitched peony bun."
ries mixed. This isn’t The Potted Tree. Why, you’ve even got the kindling to burn for the mosquitoes. At least it’s not snowing. YURI: I couldn’t care less if it did from this drought-ridden, midsummer sky! *(Standing, she looks toward the cottage. She glances back at Gakuen.)* Farewell.

GAKUEN: Good-bye.

AKIRA: *(Looming suddenly out of the smoke from the mosquito incense)* Yamazawa! Yamazawa!

GAKUEN: Hey! Hagiwara, is that you?

YURI: Oh Akira! *(Runs to him and, as if to stop him from bolting, kneels and holds him back with her hands)*

AKIRA: *(In a low voice)* I won’t leave you. Don’t be afraid. Really, I don’t know what to say, Yamazawa. Please do join us.

GAKUEN: I’m at a loss for words myself. Nine out of ten it was you, I thought. Now I’m sure, of course, but before, well, I could scarcely believe my eyes. *(Turns back and approaches the threshold)* But your head—what have you done to it?

AKIRA: You must think I’ve gone mad. Please, do forgive me.

GAKUEN: Sorry, I’m all covered in dust. *(Wipes his feet and goes to sit)* About your head, be that as it may. But your hair, it’s gone white.

AKIRA: This? You’d think living in the mountains I must’ve been swallowed up by a serpent. It’s a wig. *(Pulls it off and throws it away)*

GAKUEN: Ah . . . *(Glances furtively at Yuri)* But of course. And what about . . .

AKIRA: Oh. This is Yuri.

*(YURI has flung herself onto AKIRA’s lap.
He is now sitting; she clings to him.)*

GAKUEN: Yuri, is it? A wife, no less . . . You got married.

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10. Gakuen’s speech here makes reference to the Noh play Hachinoki, a genzai-nō, or “contemporary play,” set during the Kamakura period. A priest, Saimyōji (really the Hōjō regent Tokiyori in disguise), begs for shelter in a lonely cottage one snowy night. The cottage’s owner, Tsuneyo Genzaemon, drives him away saying that he and his wife are too poor to entertain guests, but his wife protests her husband’s cruel treatment of a man of the cloth. The conscience-stricken Genzaemon then offers to use his precious bonsai as firewood in order to keep the priest warm. He tells the priest that he has seen better days, but unscrupulous relatives had confiscated his estate and he is of a mind to take his case to the regent. The priest then mysteriously makes to leave, only telling Genzaemon that he shall be rewarded if he lives up to his promise to serve the regent. Six months pass. Genzaemon has enlisted in a levy of soldiers ordered to Kamakura in support of the regent Tokiyori, who recognizes Genzaemon and duly rewards him for his loyalty *(see Yōkyoku-shū 2 (IKBT 41):407–14. See below, n. 12, for a further allusion to this play.*
AKIRA: What are you crying about, Yuri? Dry your tears now, and greet the man properly.

(AKIRA's words make YURI feel self-conscious.
She runs and hides in the cottage.)

AKIRA: She's afraid you'll tap me on my shoulder, and I'll wake from my dream and go back to Tokyo.

GAKUEN: (Touched by Yuri's love, he can no longer hold back the tears) No, Hagiwara, there's little chance one look at my face will tear you away. Why, I dare say if it's so good, by all means dream on. . . . But even so, surely you haven't forgotten your folks back home in Tokyo.

AKIRA: Hmm.

GAKUEN: Of course, worry over you has shortened their years I'm sure, but all the same, they're well.

AKIRA: Ah. My thanks.

GAKUEN: No need to be thanking me.

AKIRA: Forgive me, that was silly.

GAKUEN: Now tell me. What's going on here?

AKIRA: I'll tell you, but you'll think it's a dream.

GAKUEN: Of course it's a dream.

AKIRA: I could go on all night if I told you everything. You know, I set off for the north hoping to gather tales from the countryside. The fact is, I've turned into one of those stories myself. They say a witch can take a mountain and set it down into the sea, or turn a man into a tree, a rock, or the rock into a leaf. . . . Just by coming here, no doubt you've been turned into a character from an old folktale. . . . As for me, well, I've gone a step further. I myself have become one of those tales.

GAKUEN: Don't give me the shivers, man. But, what about the missus . . . ? (So saying, he lowers his voice)

AKIRA: (Looking back into the cottage) Changing, or putting up her hair, I imagine. . . . There's just a screen between us and inside, so I guess she's gone out back.

GAKUEN: (Stretching out, peers through to the other side) She's just taken off her wig, and her hair glistens, her comb catches the moonlight among the reeds. Is it the water, I wonder? Or is it because of this talk about snow country? It's as if the nape of her neck, the line of her back, were as white as snow—transparent, even. . . . It's so lovely, it's scary. . . . What, she's not a witch, is she?

AKIRA: Nonsense. Don't put us to shame.

GAKUEN: Hmm!

AKIRA: I was about to tell you—this whole place, both hamlet and valley
around, is bewitched. Yamazawa, did you hear about the pond up there? Demon Pond.

GAKUEN: Sure I heard. What’s more, I made a point of coming to see it, getting off at Imajō and trekking five leagues to get here.

AKIRA: I did too, the year before last. I came alone, to this valley, and this is what happened to me. There’s a bell here. . . .

GAKUEN: Indeed there is! Rung twice by day and once by night, at matins, vespers, and the mid-watch? The rule is, it mustn’t be rung any other time, I was told. . . .

AKIRA: That’s right. It must never be rung, except for those three times.

GAKUEN: . . . Well?

AKIRA: There’s a legend: long ago, when water fought with man and was about to lay waste to the hamlet below, Saint Taichō of Etsu used his magical powers to lock up the dragon goddess in Demon Pond. The goddess said: “Take away my freedom, lest mortals drown and the land be turned to sea. So be it. But cast me a bell, set it up at the mountain’s base and ring it twice by day and once by night. Rouse me and remind me then of my promise. . . . My nature is to crave freedom, liberty, to have my way. But should I do so and forget my vow, such a little pond as this could flood the seven roads of Hokuriku. Neither man nor beast would be spared for my freedom. But I’ll not go back on my promise or break my vow. Nor must you forget. Do your duty and ring the bell.”

And that, Yamazawa, is the reason for the bell. So, if it was forgotten, even once, why then, sure as you stand here, a huge wave would rise from Demon Pond with rain and wind and lightning in its wake, and bury both village and hamlet deep under water, and the goddess would be free as she pleased to run abroad on earth and in the heavens. That’s the story told here, and that’s why the bell is struck at matins, vespers, and the mid-watch of the night. . . .

GAKUEN: (Entranced) Wow!

AKIRA: Not just “wow.” It’s important.

GAKUEN: Quite. I’m sure it is.

AKIRA: Now who d’you think rings the bell?

GAKUEN: You?

AKIRA: That’s right. The bell ringer is Hagiwara Akira.

GAKUEN: I’ll be damned.

AKIRA: You see the cottage here—

GAKUEN: Uh huh.

AKIRA: This is the bell ringer’s cottage. Till I came two summers ago and took his place, there was an old man by the name of Yatabei living alone.
here. For all of fifty years of his seventy-nine, he’d ring that bell twice by
day and once by night, and never missed a single day of duty.

I’ll tell you, Yamazawa. Just as men’s eyes and hearts are drawn to
flowers and water, so it was that Demon Pond lured you here—you said so
yourself. Me too—when I came to see the pond, I heard the vesper bell
ring. Old Yatabei offered to put me up in his cottage for the night and
guide me to the pond in the morning, and so I spent the night here, and
he told me all about the bell.

That night, he’d just rung the mid-watch and come down the
steep steps of the belfry to the veranda here, when he was struck down by
sudden illness. Poor man, he hadn’t long to live—and his suffering was
terrible. “I can’t die yet,” he gasped. “The world’s in a sorry state and
there’s not a soul in the village who believes in the bell anymore. . . . If I
died, there’d be no one to ring it, and if but once it was forgotten, then in
a wink of the eye all the earth—both fields and paddies—would turn to
water, to bog, to the deep. The lives of thousands, tens of thousands . . . I
can’t die, knowing this.” His voice was weaker than a bug’s and still all
those years he’d kept the faith, sweated blood to serve that bell. Why, the
old codger was nothing but skin and bones.

His words rang in my ears as if the bell had tolled of its own
accord. . . . The agony of his last hour was dreadful, and taking pity on
the man I up and said, “Don’t worry, gramps, I’ll ring the bell.” No sooner
had I said it than with what joy I cannot tell you, a big grin lit up his face,
and, with his hands pressed together in prayer, he passed away. Even now
I can’t forget the look on his face.

Still, I thought, damned if I’ll die ringing that bell. The mid-
watch had been rung. I’ll do it just the once at dawn. My intention didn’t
go any farther than that. And yet, the old man’s dead, and even to call the
villagers for help, well, the next house is a ways away. Come flood or fire,
I can’t ring the bell any more than the three times it’s been commanded.
GAKUEN: It can’t be rung more than that. What’s the story there?
AKIRA: The bell’s high up, and they say it casts its shadow on the blue
waters of Demon Pond itself. . . . Though even the north wind won’t
ruffle its surface, each time the clapper strikes the bell, the sound lashes up
little waves on the water, or so I’ve heard. And since the whole purpose of
ringing the bell is to rouse the dragon, it’d be tantamount to breaking the
promise if she were disturbed more than three times a day.
GAKUEN: So that’s the reason. Uh huh.
AKIRA: I couldn’t even ring the bell as an alarm. Now, I knew nobody in
the village and nobody knew me. Still, I ran about gathering them to-
gether. We buried old Yatabei, but no one said he'd agree to ring the bell. I warned them. I went on about the legend the old man told me, how their ancestors had commanded it and such like. The villagers burst out laughing. All right for the youngsters. But even the elders, old as they were, why, even the temple priest, scoffed and said, “If it's an old tale you want, then you'd just as well make off with Momotarō’s treasure.”¹¹ That did it. “Go to hell then,” I said, and I took my straw sandals there (Points at the threshold), laced them up, and turned my back on this valley once and for all. Or so I thought, for at the edge of town, standing under a hawthorn at the foot of the bridge, (Lowers his voice) there she was, the only one sad to see me go.

That day the school children were the first to laugh and point, but I rang the matins bell. Given the way things were, I thought, there'll be no bell at vespers. . . . And what if a great wave were to rise up and over the mountain? Or at least, let's say, what if the village were destroyed by a mighty storm? I'll confess—I couldn't care less for the others, but this girl would be swept away with the rest. . . . All right, I'll serve the bell for a couple of, days or so, I thought. Then it was four or five days, then a fortnight and a month, and so the time's flown by and this'll be the third year. Till you came, I'd clean forgotten. . . .

Let's say I've tried to forget. I've hidden myself from the world and made myself look old, and resigned myself to my fate. That's why I wear the wig. . . . But no, that's not all. . . . I do 't to beguile my companions in solitude: the geese in the sky, the swallows under the eaves, the eyes of passersby.

GAKUEN: (Gazes at Akira, silent)
AKIRA: (Breaking off his speech) Don't look at me that way, you embarrass me.

GAKUEN: (Finally speaks, overwhelmed by concern) And so, ah . . . it was for Yuri, it was for her sake you went into hiding here.
AKIRA: . . . I'm so ashamed.

GAKUEN: No call for shame, man. But what d'you say, why don't you bring your lady and come back to Tokyo?
AKIRA: I . . . can't. If we abandoned them, what'd happen to this village, this hamlet, the lives of everyone living below the mountain, to say nothing about Echizen and the other two provinces?
GAKUEN: Hagiwara. (Edges closer) You believe this?

¹¹ A reference to one of the most famous Japanese folktales, that of the Peach Boy who, having conquered an island inhabited by demons, lugged back its treasure to the old couple who had adopted him.
AKIRA: I believe it. I didn't, but I do now. Hagiwara may not, but this is Kotohiki Valley, beneath Echizen's Three Province Peak, and Yatabei the Second, guardian of the bell and Yuri's husband—he believes.

GAKUEN: (Clapping down his hands on his lap) I won't say a word. Go ahead and believe it, with all your heart. Who knows? The very sight of your wife's unearthly beauty makes me think: maybe heaven made Yuri for this village, gave it a bell ringer too. You and she are the gods, the pillars of this village. To be sure, Yuri's a goddess.

YURI: (Enters, lamp in her hand; her black hair is beautiful) Whatever will become of me?

GAKUEN: . . . Well, well . . .

YURI: What were you talking about just now?

GAKUEN: I say, pleased to meet you ma'am . . . ha ha.

YURI: Oh dear! (Blushes)

AKIRA: Yuri! "Oh dear" is not the word. Greet him properly. He's practically a brother.

YURI: (Bows, speechless)

GAKUEN: Good, good. We're through with the introductions. Doesn't gossip ever make you sneeze, ma'am?

AKIRA: One false sneeze and we'd stir up the mosquitoes.

YURI: Please, that's enough joking.

AKIRA: You've put the powder on a little thick, haven't you?

YURI: You say the most hateful things! (Glares at him, but with no malice, and hides her face)

GAKUEN: Whatever, you make a fine couple. (Laughs) It was rude of us to be talking behind your back, but tell me, what about your folks? Any brothers or sisters?

AKIRA: She has no one, Yamazawa. The only child of the priest of the village Hachiman shrine, and he's dead too. An orphan. She does have an uncle who now looks after the shrine. . . . I shouldn't say this in front of Yuri but—he's not a good sort.

GAKUEN: My, my.

AKIRA: He'd thrust his niece on anyone handy—altogether a bad customer.

YURI: Really, I'm quite helpless, you see. I'm slow-witted and awkward, but please sir, take pity on me. (With all sincerity, bows to the floor at Gakuen's feet)

GAKUEN: (Touched to tears) Madame, you've won me. Never will I think of you as a stranger.

AKIRA: (Also deeply moved, he fights back the tears) Now then, that's what they mean by "kin." Dispense with formalities and you lack for nothing.
Treat the man to our speciality—broiled eggplant—and give him a drink. You really ought to try our vegetables, Yamazawa, they’re delicious. We’ve plenty of time for talk.

GAKUEN: Madame, don’t lift a finger. Which reminds me, Hagiwara, I’ve a mind to go see Demon Pond, though it’d take the whole night’s climb. That was my plan and now I’ve heard so many strange tales, I’m all the more eager to see it. Some home cooking would be much appreciated, but no saké please. As you know, I can’t touch a drop.

AKIRA: Well, it was to see Demon Pond that you came here, after all . . . I’d suggest tomorrow. The trail’s about a league or so, but it’s a steep climb. In this heat, it’s better at night. Still, you can stay a few days, so why not tomorrow night?

GAKUEN: School. I’m no longer a student, so my time’s not my own any more. I’ve dawdled too long as it is and used up all my break.

AKIRA: Pity. . . . School? I thought you said you were headed for Kyoto.

GAKUEN: That’s right, been there since last year. . . . Court service shows no mercy. So . . . I’d best be going.

AKIRA: Very well then, I’d be happy to guide you.

GAKUEN: You’ll come?

AKIRA: Let’s get a start on it.

GAKUEN: In that case, I’m sorry for the missus.

AKIRA: Don’t be an old bore.

YURI: Do go . . . *(She says, but then, dejectedly)* Tell me you won’t be long, dear. . . . What about your dinner?

AKIRA: We’ll pick up some *nishime* down at the shop by the earthen bridge. That’ll be quicker. Sound good, Yamazawa? Some stewed herring and broiled tofu?

GAKUEN: Splendid.

AKIRA: That’s settled. The sooner the better then. Thongs will do for Genzaemon, but straw sandals for my Lord Saimyōji.12

GAKUEN: Now you’re talking! Fix us up something, ma’am, for when we get back. Myself, I’m very fond of miso soup—put some nice, fresh veg in it for me, will you? Just when d’you think we’ll be back?

AKIRA: Hmm. The night’s short. Not till dawn, I expect.

GAKUEN: *(Tying up his straw sandals)* Dawn. Fine by me. . . . Hold on, here we are traipsing off, but what about the mid-watch bell?

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12. *Genzaemon wa zōri de yoshi, Saimyōjidono wa owaraji, owaraji*: another reference to *Hachinoki*. Here Akira picks up Gakuen’s earlier allusion and compares Gakuen and himself with the two old comrades in the Noh play.
AKIRA: Yuri will take care of it. I'm not old Yatabei, no magician either. Just a man, prey to illness and the like. Sometimes Yuri takes over for me.

GAKUEN: Good, we'll hear the bell up at the pond. Madame, we beseech you.

YURI: I'll do my duty, sir. Please . . . think of me . . . (Her voice is choked with tears.)

AKIRA: Listen, put out old Yatabei's gourd—you know the one, the family treasure—we'll buy some saké. And get the sickle too. The path's hardly used at all—we'll not get far if we don't cut our way through all the sword-grass . . . Be quick now.

YURI: Coming! (Returns)

GAKUEN: (Examines the sickle) Yikes! Sharp as a razor.

AKIRA: Look at it in the moonlight—(Holds it up) how the blade catches the light. I've learned how to sharpen a sickle too. Come along. This way. (Starts ahead)

YURI: Please be careful . . . (She calls after them in a tear choked voice, holding a pretty doll in her arms.)

AKIRA: (Looking back) What've you got there?

YURI: Taro wants to say bye-bye. (Clutches the doll in her sleeves) Hurry home. He'll miss Uncle too. (As she speaks she gazes steadily at Gakuen and points inside the cottage. Then she looks down and weeps.)

GAKUEN: (Raises his hand in a comforting gesture) Why, certainly. Don't fret, you have my word . . . . (Turns back to face Akira) She's worried that I've brought back your past, and now you'll go off never to return.

YURI: (Embarrassed, turns her back on them)

AKIRA: So that's why she's been acting up . . . Silly child.

GAKUEN: How 'bout it? Aren't you going to kiss her good-bye?

AKIRA: You take me for a gentleman? Why, I be Yatabei, yer bell ringer, sir.

(They leave.)

YURI: (Stands motionless for some time) They'll be back, um, Taro? Why, my pretty one, you've shut your little eyes as if to say, Yes, Papa's coming home. (Clutches the doll to her cheek) Have some milk, my baby. Mama doesn't want dinner all alone. We'll clean up and mind the house while they're gone. The village folk would bother us if they knew we're on our own, so let's blow out the light and lock the door. The moon'll be enough for us.

(She goes straight inside and firmly shuts the rain shutters. The sound of a key in the lock. Then the light is snuffed out. A song is heard.)
The things that go bump in the night.
Long neck and little one-eye,
River sprites and otter spies,
The black cowled priest of the deep blue sea,
And the demon fox of Himeji.
The goblin cat has her pretty red kerchief,
The fox of Shinoda’s up to mischief.
Badger belts out a tattoo on his belly:
In the night, in the night, go bump in the night.

Play your flute and call up some rain,
Then run along, boy, and buy us some wine.
Cackle away, you black-toothed dame—
Here’s a peasant, a goblin just the same . . . 13

(Enter YOJU, carrying a carp in his upturned bamboo hat,
looking pleased with himself. He enters chuckling.)

YOJU: Oh, I got me a big’un. They says snow’s a sign of a good ’arvest, but when they’s a drought, they’s fish to fry. Our marsh is but a puddle, so’s I was able to scoop up my dear fishy with a splish and a splash, right up in me ’ands. . . . (The carp writhes.) Hah! Look at ’em silver scales! Scales say I? Why, I bet this catch’d fetch a good thirty pound in the weighing. 14 He’s a giant, bigger by ‘alf than that cascade climber the village headman has as a pot hook over his hearth. Come to think of it, I’d be better off if I didn’t have ’im for dinner but sold ’im instead to the graybeards on the village council. Come carp. You’ll be fine ransom for

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13. Deru bakemono no kazukazu wa . . . : Kyōka’s “catalogue of goblins.” Kyōka’s demonic menagerie here presents an assortment of goblins well known through popular legend, literature, and drama. This song, unlike the other songs in this play, is purely Kyōka’s invention. My translation is a free one. Many of the creatures described here—foxes, tanuki (badgers), kappa (river sprites), and otters—are thought to possess magical powers and delight in making mischief for humans. Umi bōzu: this goblin appears in Kyōka’s Kajin bessō as oki no sōzu, a “Sea Priest.” Tenshu ni osakabe: a reference to the Osakabe fox, said to haunt Himeji Castle. The latter is the setting for Kyōka’s later play Tenshu monogatari, translated here as The Castle Tower. See my discussion of related legends in my commentary to that play. Shinoda ni kuzu no ha: another fox spirit, featured in the kabuki play Ashiya dōman yuchi kagami. Tanizaki’s novel Yoshino kuzu (Arrowroot, 1930), draws upon this play, and other plays such as Yoshiisune senbon-zakura and Inoseyama, for his story. Sato no otoko waopperabō: literally, “The man from the hamlet is a faceless goblin.” This line provides a transition to the entrance of the villagers Yojū, who, characteristically of Kyōka, is just as grotesque as any of the author’s supernatural creatures and is associated with the faceless phantoms in Yuki’s retinue.

14. Shikanme aru bei: “four kannme,” just under thirty-five pounds. One kannme equals 8.72 pounds, or 3.75 kilograms. Yojū’s speech is in a heavily rustic dialect.
the graybeards. Bring me coin, bring me coin. *(Carp writhes)* Ha! look at 'em silver scales! All glittering gold say I.

Now—talking 'bout scales and what glitters . . . *(Looks toward the cottage)* The bell ringer here, he's clapped his hands on a fine one, he did—the priest's daughter, and when she was still living at home—enshrined, as it were—her back, they says, was all covered with scales like a serpent. —At night, a prowler spied on her while she was asleep, and—I swears it's the truth—the man sees a long white snake coiled and wrapped around the girl and, why, he rolled his eyes right back in his head and fell in a dead faint at the sight of it. Mind you, ain't nothing wrong with the bell ringer, by the looks of it. Still fit as a fiddle, so no way she can swallow 'im up.

*(Takes a good look at the carp)* Look at you now! A fine catch, like pennies from heaven you are. If I thought you was goblin or serpent, I never would've touched you, but then I'd've been out a drink, wouldn't I? Mind you, the girl's as good as gold. Hang on! Damned if it ain't all dark, and at this hour. Well, I'm sure she won't lick me dead. *(Creeps up and peaks in the crack between the shutters)*

*(Enter NAT CRAB. Vermilion-faced with bushy red beard, dressed in crimson in the fashion of a mountain hermit.)*

*A cigarette, hand rolled in a burdock leaf, juts out the corner of his mouth.*

*Puffing out little puffs of smoke, his arms thrown up over his head and bent inward like scissors, he edges his way forward, crab-wise, bow-leggedly, and tweaks YOJū's calf in a pincer.)*

YOJū: Ouch! *(Screams; bolts around, flinging the bamboo hat with its cache of carp into the moonflowers)* Yikes! It's the monster crab from the scrub bog! Help! Murder!

*(Beats a hasty retreat. NAT takes off after him, sideways.)*

*Enter ART CARP, slipping out of the shadows of the moonflowers. He is wearing a hempen costume with a design of scales in black and white and bag trousers of a similar design. His socks are splayed out in the shape of fins. He enters covering his face with YOJū's bamboo hat, which he now flings away with a clatter on the stage. His face is white; two black whiskers dangle from his upper lip. Seeing him, NAT retreats a step.)*

ART: *(Flapping his lips and heaving a great sigh)* Ah. Methinks the drought gives mortals a taste for blood. They look no better than beached carps themselves. —Hello, crab. Ye saved my life. I thankee.

NAT: We're both out of our element here, it's the least I could do. What are you up to anyway? Looks like you mistook that hat for another cascade of yours.
ART: I took me a shortcut and leapt into a stream too small to accommodate me, you might say. Me fins slipped on the rocks and they was nothing to get a grip on. That’s when the rascal boxed me.
NAT: This here’s the culprit? *(Catches the fallen hat in his pincer and holds it down)*
ART: Not since young Oniwaka have I been in such a bind.¹⁵ Damn that peasant! Take that! *(Tramples the hat)*
HAT: *(Just a voice, as if it were coming from underneath)* ’Tweren’t me! ’Tweren’t me! ART: I s’pose you ain’t to blame after all. Be gone with you—and thank me for it. *(Fling the hat away. Hooked to wires, it flutters off.)* There you go! Do service as a scarecrow come harvest time! Ha ha! Look at him fly! Look at him fly! Hey, he’s crashed into a pumpkin patch.
NAT: Why, looks like a head took off! Serves you right, numbskull! *(Cackles)* Hey, Art. Where you, um, be headed now?
ART: Well, I’ve got a bit of business to attend to in the village. By the way, I came down, not up, that waterfall. What with the drought, it’s like the peasants was kicking up a storm, swarming about the pond—home to the little princess—and crying ‘Water! Give us rain!’ Fine, but now—I’ll be damned if I know what magic they’re at—they be bringing nails and iron fire sticks, rusty swords and bits of broken cooking pots.¹⁶ And if that weren’t bad enough, their blood runs mad with their “offerings”—now they be giving us the heads of dogs and cats, all glassy-eyed with their tongues flopping out. Go give the kappa in Hino River a cucumber to nibble on, say I! It’s an outrage!—stinking, filthy things—it’s all the ladies-in-waiting can do to clean up the mess.

So, the princess’s nurse, Lady Myriad, gave me an order: “The rain won’t come till it’s good and ready for it to come. But we won’t let it pass if you strew your filth around.” Proclaim it to the villagers, she said. And all for the sake of that I got my fins pinched. Blasted mortals!
NAT: So that’s why. Good work, my friend. Tell me though—the little princess, is she still reluctant to give us some rain?
ART: Hanged if I know. Whatever, she’s got nothing to do with the drought. You yourself know the story. The princess has fallen for her kin, the young master in Serpent Pond over by Sword Peak at the foot of Mount Hakusan. She pines and she pines and can’t think of a stitch else.

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¹⁵. *Oniwakamaru irai to iu, nangi ni awaseta*: a reference to the fearless young Yoshitsune, who, according to the Gikeiki, fought with a tengu.
¹⁶. The dragon’s legendary aversion to metal may have something to do with its geomantic association with wood, which is conquered by metal. In China as well, iron objects were thrown into pools to draw out the dragon and induce rain (personal communication with Raymond Dragan).
D’ye think she gives a fig for mortals and their bloody droughts?
NAT: She’s almighty—I for one know that. No need for the lady to suf-
fer, she can spread her sleeves and fly straight this moment to Sword Peak.
What’s holding her?
ART: There’s the rub. Should the little princess choose to transport her
throne, why, a dreadful wave’d rise up and plunge the village—mortals,
horses, everything—down to the deep.
NAT: And why not, say I! It’d give me more room to stretch my legs. So
what’s stopping her from turning the village into a mud-flat? I’m all for it!
ART: Have you forgotten the bell—her solemn promise with the mortals
not to destroy the village so long as they ring it night and day, three times?
This is Heaven’s vow, one kept since the days of our ancestors. Even the
little princess is bound to it. Surely you haven’t forgotten how sad, how
out of sorts the poor girl is.
NAT: Bless me! Here we are, under the belfry and I’d clean forgot—
almost stepped on the bell’s shadow, I did. But look at that moon! The
mountains and fields sparkle. Unless we get some damp to keep the ash on
my cigarette, I’ll leave my bog for your barracks in the pond up yonder.
Carp, let me come with ye.
ART: I’ll drink to that! My mission to the village is terrible lonely. Join
me brother.
NAT: So I shall, and back to the pond too.
ART: As we follow the footpath in the moonlight, let’s sing a song.
NAT: What shall we sing?
ART: How ’bout “We’ll turn the mountains to rivers”? 
NAT: I like it!

(They begin to sing “We’ll turn the mountains to rivers,” ART CARP
flapping his fins, the NAT CRAB puffing smoke rings; so they continue,
then suddenly break off, gazing ahead.)

ART: Hello, what’s that coming our way down the path? I never laid eyes
on such before.
NAT: (Teeth chattering) Something strange, for sure. Let’s take cover and
find out.

(They hide.)

YURI: (Cutting a charming figure, she opens the door and steps outside; she is
holding the doll in her sleeves.) Oh how long the night, how long . . . Why,

17. Yama o kawa ni shiyō: a Kanazawa song sung at the Obon dances.
surely a summer night is short, or so I thought. Can't you sleep either, Tarō? (Sings) "How old are you, old moon? Thirteen nights or seventeen?" Did you hear someone just now singing "We'll turn the mountains to rivers"? Ah, it must be the villagers, no doubt they'd be wishing for even that. Poor things! . . . My what a lovely night! In this moon you can even see the grass on the mountainside. We might even catch a glimpse of Akira and our guest up among the pines. Let's climb up the belfry and look. . . . On second thought, better not. A touch of my sleeve would set the bell a-ringing. We'll go out into the fields instead.

(She goes back behind the cottage.)

(Enter CATFISH, by the hanamichi. He is wearing a charcoal-gray cowl. His face is pitch black; two long white whiskers grow from his upper lip and droop down on either side as low as the hem of his ink-black robe. He wears gray socks in the shape of fins. He totters out, carrying in one hand a reed staff and in the other a fine letter box tied with scarlet tassels.)

CAT: I've come a long way. . . . This scandalous drought has made my journey more arduous than I thought. (Gazing into the distance) Ah, there's mist in the sky over yonder peak. That'll be Demon Pond, there's no denying. It does my heart joy.

(CATFISH continues on. ART CARP and NAT CRAB step up and block his path.)

ART: Halt! Who goes there?
NAT: This here be the first barrier afore the pond, and the guard from the scrub bog bars your way. Show yourself.

CAT: (Wrapping his sleeves around his staff and eyeing them) Why then, you're creatures not strange to me. Gentlemen, I hail from that holy mount in the North Country, the unparalleled Hakusan—an emissary of the young prince of Serpent Pond by Sword Peak, on a mission to your princess here in Demon Pond. I deliver a letter.

ART: Oh, Reverend Black, is it? We've heard of you.
NAT: Is the catfish a priest, then?
CAT: And you be both kin of the princess. Retainers from Demon Pond, are you? Well that we met here, sirs. Lead the way, I beg you.

18. Otsukisama ikutsu, ojīsan, nanatsu: a nursery rhyme popular around Kanazawa. The singer of the song is asking the moon whether it is waxing or waning.
19. Anna o tanomimashō: the catfish's style and diction, to say nothing of the format of the comic dialogue here, closely accords with the language of kyōgen. Here, as later in the exchange between Trencher Cinnabar and the other goblins in The Castle Tower, Kyōka borrows from the medieval farces.
NAT: Thanks for coming, emissary.
ART: I myself was entrusted with a message and was on my way to the village, but an embassy from the young prince—by all means, join us, sir. I can already see the happy face of our little princess. We'll be honored by your company. Come, Reverend.
NAT: Come, Reverend.
CAT: (Suddenly stumbles, falters) A moment, sirs, a moment!
ART: Reverend, if you're tired I'll take your hand.
NAT: Maybe we ought to push him from behind.
CAT: No no, I'm quite fine, I assure you. My flagging fins still serve me, but the strangest thing happened just now, and it troubles me.
ART: What that be, Reverend?
CAT: Why, I came this far and I thought to myself "The pond's in sight," when suddenly this letter box I carry was a terrible load, so heavy did it become. That is the long and short of it, sirs.
ART: "Love's heavy load" you say? If the prince poured out his heart in the letter, then the closer to the pond, the closer in spirit grow the two lovers, so grows the weight in your letter box. It's natural.
NAT: Ha. It's the presents the little princess has set in store for the Reverend—gold and silver, rice and millet overflowing—I bet you be feeling the weight of the magic millstone.
CAT: (Shocked) Nay, gentlemen, I've but just now had a premonition of what the cause of this burden is. I'd be all too happy were the lady to reward me, millstone or no. But what if the letter reads: "Cut up this priest in rings and make mock turtle soup of him. Dine on him when you rise from your siesta, my dear." Heaven forbid! (He and his reed staff begin to tremble uncontrollably.)
ART: This is nonsense! Reverend . . .
CAT: No nonsense, I can assure you. Just then, when I felt the great weight of the letter box, why, I recalled the weight of my own crime, sirs. Ah, 'tis a hard tale to tell, but I'll confess to you my shame. (Tucks in his neck, turtlelike, and rubs his head) . . . Stop your ears if I shock you, gentlemen. Of late, a mountain maid in her prime came to our palace. Riding a bear she was, come to wash her black tresses in Sword Peak's Serpent Pond. When I saw her naked white body, why, I almost melted, and—shame on me!—I slithered and groveled after the woman for all I was worth. Ah, but of course there was a scandal, and the young prince was

20. Koi no omoni: a joking allusion to the Noh play of the same name.
most displeased. I'd been confined to my mudhole when I was called to
deliver a letter, and so happy was I to do his bidding that out I popped like
a fool, and came. It gives my fins pins and needles to think of it now.

(Trembles again)
ART: Hya! hya! hya! (Cackles) Aren't you a cold fish, Reverend! Would I
had your luck!
CAT: You're a cruel one to laugh at me. I'll be bound if the letter's plea-
sure is, if not my life, then to have my tail and fins cut off and my whiskers
plucked out. I'm done for now! (In despair, weeps)

(NAT and ART, watching this spectacle, whisper, nodding.)

ART: Well, that may be the case, Reverend. There's an old tale told of a
horseman on the highway to Ōmi. He met a strange woman standing on
the bridge who entrusted him with a letter, bidding him give it to another
waiting at the milestone ten leagues thence. He took it, but it troubled
him, so he broke the seal. It read: "To my sister. Item—one horseman. I
send you this bag of bowels." And if he'd handed the letter over sight
unseen, so he'd have ended up his innards unzipped. 22
CAT: Oh!! (Falls flat on his haunches)
NAT: Ha ha! Sucker! (Cackles)
ART: You're in luck—NAT's got the scissors . . . Just a snip to break the
seal. A look won't hurt us.
CAT: Lord! That's all I need, you pranksters! Now I'm in for it!
NAT: Why, certainly.
ART: Still . . . (Lowers his voice) A love letter, something sweet and tender
. . . Get to work, we want to see this.
CAT: (Trembling, reverently holds up the box to his brow, then slips loose the
knots)

(NAT and ART press close. They pull off the lid and peer inside.)

CAT: Good heavens!
ART: My, my.

22. Another authentic folktale. A similar tale, in which the letter is exchanged with a new one
promising its bearer a reward, and which ends happily with the traveler receiving a magic
millstone, is recorded in Yanagita Kunio, Tōno monogatari, Yama no jinsei (Iwanami Bunkō, 1985),
no. 27. Elsewhere, Yanagita mentions that Kyōka himself had approached him after the release
of that book and told him that he knew a number of variations on that story; see "Ono ga
inochi no hayazukai," Yōkai dangi (Kōdansha, 1977), 124–28. There, Yanagita traces the story to
its T'ang source. The Chinese tale tells of how the god of Mt. T'ai entrusted a traveler with a
letter for his daughter, the goddess of the Yangtse. Yanagita lists several other variants. See my
discussion in the commentary.
NAT: Lord love a duck!
CAT: There's nothing in the box but water!

(As he says this, a stream of clear water spills out.)

ART: Look to it, lads! The little princess!

(In a flurry, ART and CATFISH fall to their bellies and bow.
NAT kneels, his arms frozen in midair.)

(Enter PRINCESS YUKI OF DEMON POND, by a lift trap on main
stage. She wears, under snow-white gossamer, a pale blue court robe and long
train with scarlet flames dyed in. Her obi is of black satin with an appliqué
design in silver of fish scales, without an undercord. Fastened in her obi is a
metal scepter that glitters like a jewel. Her skirts are sweeping, her black hair is
longer than she is tall. Her feet are shod in silver shoes. A letter scroll dangles
unfurled from her hands, trailing on the ground. On her right, LADY
MYRIAD OF YUNOO PASS, the princess's nurse. Her gray hair is thin
and disheveled. She wears a hemp garment the color of fallen leaves, and over
it a red apron. On the princess's left, her maid-in-waiting, LADY
CAMELLIA OF KINOME PASS. She is wearing a pale green crested
kimono, and in her high coiffure in the bunkin style, a scarlet wild camellia
flower. Both she and MYRIAD kneel at either side in attendance on the
princess. A full moon, the moon of the fifteenth night, emerges.)

YUKI: What a bore, having to read a letter by the light of the moon!
MYRIAD: Use the light of your own body, ma' am, to look at it.
YURI: (Slips an arm out of her gossamer robe and holds up a flame hidden in the
sleeve of her court gown; finishes reading and sighs)
CAMELLIA: My lady.
MYRIAD: Your Majesty?
YUKI: Ah, what dear, sweet, loving, happy words he writes! . . . Nurse,
I'm leaving.
MYRIAD: On one of your walkabouts in the village, m'lady?
CAMELLIA: Or back, perhaps?
YUKI: Back where?
MYRIAD: Why, home.
YUKI: What?
MYRIAD: Demon Pond, of course.
YUKI: What are you talking about? I'm going to Sword Peak.
ALL: Sword Peak, m'lady?
YUKI: No matter if you're not listening, but don't play innocent. I'm
going to Serpent Pond, where this letter comes from, of course. (Rolls up
the letter and slips it in her bosom)
MYRIAD: (Starting) Again this willful talk, m'lad. What of the bell here?
YUKI: What of it? (Glances up and stares at the belfry)
MYRIAD: You haven't forgotten, surely. Mountains and rivers notwithstanding, should you please to move your court, thousands, tens of thousands of lives would be snuffed out. Your young gentleman is no more at liberty to travel here than you are to go to him: were he to quit Serpent Pond, then the Valley of Hakusan would become a lake. It breaks my old heart, I assure you. Still, much as you desire it, you cannot go.
YUKI: What logic! Are you friend to mortals, old woman?
MYRIAD: (Scoffing) Ha, ha! Those tailless apes? Who'd side with them? . . . Call them hateful, wretched upstarts, the enemy—still you can't go back on your promise. You mustn't break your vow.
YUKI: And who made the vow?
MYRIAD: Your ancestors, ma'am. But surely you remember your own parent's last words.
YUKI: I do. (Pouts)
MYRIAD: My lady, my lady. Even those wretched mortals have kept their vow, for going on five, seven hundred years. Isn't that so? And it's because they don't forget that they ring the bell at matins, vespers, and the midnight watch. So long as the bell rings, you cannot drown the village.
YUKI: Hateful thing . . . If only . . . (Glares at the bell; quite suddenly her mood brightens) Where are my retainers? Call them.
CAMELLIA: (Stands and calls in one direction) Our mistress calls us!
ART: (Stands and calls in the other direction) Hurry!

(Princess YUKI's suite enter in waves from stage right and left. They each bear some unique weapon or trophy, each attired according to his or her fancy: some in armor, others donning skulls upon their heads. A veritable portrait of Pandemonium.)

RUSH: Friar Rush, of Itadori.
JACK: Jack Mackerel.
MICK: Mick Mackerel.
BOTH: (in unison) Brothers!
TOM: Tom Skelton, the bone picker of Thirteen Barrows.
NAT: The barrier guard of the scrub bog—on duty, ma'am.
CAMELLIA: And divers sprites, gods, goblins, hobgoblins—both friend and bane of wayfarers.

(Enter PHANTOMS, all attired similarly. They have no eyes or noses, only a gray cloth covering their faces.)

PHANTOMS: Phantoms. all here.
ART: All kin present and accounted for.
CAT: I too, my lady, a humble priest.
YUKI: Ah, good Reverend! Thanks for coming so far. I'll give you my reply anon. It's for that I called you all here.
MYRIAD: You called us all to answer to him? What is your will madame?
YUKI: Nurse, I'm going—I must go—to Sword Peak, no matter what you think. If only for the bell, there'd be no vow. . . . Brothers, take that bell and throw it down, smash it!
MYRIAD: (To retainers) Hey! Don't make a move, even if she tells you! ( Regards YUKI, her eyes sparkling) And still you go on with such nonsense! . . . Is this what you call on your kin to do? No good will come of nonsense. Why, the gods in heaven would shudder if they but heard of this! Be prudent, I beg you, my Lady. The lives of how many mortals are at stake.
YUKI: What should I care about them! I'd gladly give up my own life for love's sake. . . . Nurse, be good and let me go.
MYRIAD: You poor dear. Still, it cannot be . . . Be patient, your majesty, another thirty, fifty years, nay not even so long as that. This is the Latter Day of the Law, when even the saints forget their pledges and vows. Faith now hangs from that belfry as if by a vine, which the birds peck at day by day. It's only a matter of time before the fetters and chains are cut. Wait—your time will come.
YUKI: I'd sooner turn to stone. Say the gates of hell lie between a lover and her beloved, would she wait out the night before passing through? Fair enough, then. If I can't prevail on any of you, I'll do it myself.
CAMELLIA: Why, your majesty!
MYRIAD: Madame, stop. . . . If that bell is but scrap to you, then this is no task for your delicate hands—nor, might I add, for any of your household. Why, this old nurse, though just a bag of bones, can dispose of this six hundredweight or so of bronze for you with a snip of her skinny fingers. Yet it's not the bronze, but your duty, madame, that weighs on us.
YUKI: Duty, rules . . . Mortals can meddle with these; they only fetter themselves! I'm called many things—a demon, devil, beast, and serpent—but neither sleeves nor skirts, not a single cloud, nothing can bar me from my love! . . . My ancestors, my parents, could do as they pleased with

23. Mappō, hijiri no gyōki: that time when, according to Buddhist teleology, faith in the dharma wears thin and evil is in ascendance prior to the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya (J. Miroku).
such pledges and vows. Good for them, I say! Time passes and mortals themselves despise the promises they've made, so what's to stop me now from undoing them? Ah, my beloved's letter burns my heart! Nurse, forgive me!

MYRIAD: Indeed, you are madly in love. But should the mortals fail but once at matins, vespers, or the mid-watch this very night to ring the bell, we'll not wait for even the blink of an eye. I, Nurse, will take you on my back straight to Sword Peak, and not a tuft of cloud will catch on those pretty shoes. Let them die, let them drown, let the mountains crumble and the valley be heaped up; it's but a single leap. . . . As so long as the bell is struck, should my lady break her vow, then all the Gods and Buddhas will unleash their curse on you. What would you do then?

ART: Here in this province, there is the mighty Hino River, which joins the streams of Itadori, Kaeru, and the Nine-Headed Dragon—

NAT: And in Mino, the far-famed river of Ibi.24

MYRIAD: Over these two rivers you reign—

CAMELLEILIA: A domain of five million bushels of rice.

MYRIAD: Your willfulness—

ALL: Must not run its course!

MYRIAD: I beg you, ma'am—

ALL: Beware!25

YUKI: Enough! What spoilsports you all are! Obey duties and obligations; go ahead and live as long as you like! . . . I won't throw away love just to stay alive. Out of my way! Out of my way!

(There is a commotion as they all attempt to bar her way. YUKI fends them off, waving her sleeves, pushing through the throng. In the end, she is completely surrounded.)

YUKI: Out of my way, I tell you! Ah!

24. These rivers are formed by the watershed of Mikunigatake (Three Province Peak), just above Demon Pond; the Ibi flowing outward through Mino (present-day Gifu Prefecture), and the Hino flowing northward through Echizen (Fukui Prefecture). The Nine-Headed Dragon River is, in Japanese, Kuzuryū. It is also called the Shirakijo, or White Demon Lady. For further discussion of local legends and the symbolic associations of geographic names, see my commentary.

25. Here, and elsewhere in this play, Kyōka resorted to watari-zerifu, "passed-along dialogue," a performance technique typical of kabuki theater. This is yet another indication that Kyōka's dramatic models were more premodern than modern; in later plays, however, he abandoned this technique, as if it were too obviously a dramatic anachronism.
(Frustrated, she draws her scepter; there is a flash of silver in the moonlight. Her suite draws back in terror. The princess saunters over to the belfry and begins to climb the staircase. She pauses, clinging to the pillar, gazing straight at the bell.)

YUKI: What do I know of Gods and Buddhas? I'd be all too happy to call down heaven's punishment, that this body, the snow that is my namesake, would melt in the morning sun into the waters of love! Crush my flesh and bones to dust, tear me limb from limb, spill my blood on my beloved! Even if my burning spirit became the faintest spark of a firefly, d'you think I wouldn't fly to Sword Peak?

(The scepter held high in her hand flashes brilliantly. Then, from afar in the moonlit night, a song is heard.)

—Sleep, baby, sleep.
Where has your nanny gone?
She's crossed the mountains
and on to her hamlet.
And what from the hamlet
has she brought for you?
Pipes and drums for our baby boy—

YUKI: (Listens intently, entranced by the song. The flame burning in her sleeves goes pale and weak. Presently, she turns and calls down.) Nurse, whose voice is that?
MYRIAD: That is Yuri, the shrine maiden.
YUKI: Ah, pretty Yuri, is it? I wonder, what is she doing?
MYRIAD: Her lover Akira is away, and so to soothe her spirit, she holds a doll and sings a lullaby.
YUKI: Far from her beloved, can just a song beguile her?
MYRIAD: Just as you say, my lady.
ALL: Will you not try the same, Your Majesty?
YUKI: I was so upset, I'd quite forgotten. Were I to drown this village, this lovely creature, too, would be no more. This couple ring the bell; they are my enemies . . . (Descends the staircase) Oh, how I envy them! How jealous they make me! There's a lesson here. I'll be good.
MYRIAD: (Weeping freely) Sweet girl, this is happy news!
YUKI: (To CAMELLIA) Will you sing for me too?
CAMELLIA: Yes. I know many songs.
ART: All well and good, lady, but there's one—how does it go? a hit now— "Oh carp in the pond, Oh crimson carp, Come out and have some
bread.”26 Whatever, don’t sing that one! No thanks! It makes a mockery of us all and will spoil our mistress’s mood.

CAMELLIA: Really! All you ever think of is yourself!

(The entire suite bursts out laughing.)

YUKI: Give me a doll to hold; I’ll sing too, emissary from Sword Peak—
CAT: Ah. Here, my lady.
YUKI: I’ll give you my answer. . . . Come with me. Lady Camellia, you look after the letter box. You’ve all been most patient.

(They all bow respectfully as they listen to the song.)

—Pipes and drums for our baby boy,
And a pinwheel to play with when he wakes—

(They split into two groups, trailing offstage to left and right.
The foxfires are all extinguished. Only the moonlight.
Far off, the barking of a dog; closer by, the call of a night heron.)

(Enter YURI, running, out of breath, her skirts flying behind her.
She rushes into the cottage and hides. She is pursued by:
HATAGAMI KADENJI, village headman; GONDŌ KANPACHI, member of the village council; SAITA HATSUO, primary school teacher.
They are accompanied by other villagers. They in turn are followed by
TAKUZEN OF SHIKAMI, Shinto priest, and KOGARASU FUROSUKE, welterweight sumo wrestler. TAKUZEN and
KOGARASU enter from the opposite side, together with five other villagers,
attired as minor functionaries in a ritual, in court hats and gaiters.
They lead in a black ox, the sumo wrestler drawing it by the reins.)

VILLAGER 1: She’s inside! She’s hiding inside!
VILLAGER 2: It’s pitch black.
HATSUO: Flush her out then, like the vermin she is.
KANPACHI: Break in and get her!

(Four or five villagers burst in. Cries inside the cottage.
The rain shutters fall off with a clatter, and there,

26. *Ike no koi yo, higoi yo, hayaku dete fu o kue*: a popular song during the Meiji era, first published in 1911 in a collection of school-children’s songs, *finjō shōgaku shōka*. The version in that text reads as follows: *dete koi dete koi ike no koi. kishi no yanagi no shidareta kage e, nageta yakimochi nietara koi. nietara koi* (“Come out, come out, oh carp in the pond. Come out under the willow by the bank, come out if you see the cake I’ve thrown”). Kyōka himself appears to have been no great fan of this song. It is also referred to disparagingly in *Kusa meikyū* (1908), KZ 11:206.
(The villagers surround her. YURRI stands about, attempting to escape.)

KANPAACHI: Come on, Hey!
TAKUZEN: Take her by force.
KANPAACHI: What ill do, please?
KADENI: It's not just for the villager, yet, but for the whole township.
KANPAACHI: If you don't listen, we'll use you up.

YURI: Where are you taking me? I'll be too late. Hurry up, let's be.

TAKUZEN: To hell with your Akira! Look—the moon, the hues.
YURI: Oh uncle, for Gods sake, what ill Akira come home.

HAITSO: Our with it, still.
KANPAACHI: What she saying?
you—?

Everyone, be patient with me... I beg of you. H-How, how could
YURI: Please, uncle, I ask you, wait till Akira, my husband returns, please.

Excuse me here, our village headman. Come, come along now,
us: That's all there is to it. You'll bear with us. Surrender yourself to His
us: That's all there is to it. Never once, since the days of our ancestors, has it failed
come back to life. Never once, since the days of our ancestors, has it failed
in the black and it pours for these days. That why the Heels and paddles
and the whole village feasts and drinks, and when yours done the sky goes
above up his head and hours, done with it tall. Then we take its fresh
off the mountain, rope dispense with the rope. So, we head up the mountain and make our
round by hemp rope—Well, if you're weak and accept your face, we can

TAKUZEN: Mount her bareback on a black ox, and thus her up with a
YURI: Ah! (Trembles)
est in the village, whip her naked...

you were a child, that it times of devastating drought, we take the pretti-
sand trees—you've got to be our sacrifice for rain! You're known this since
in the valley. Two hundred and fifty thousand bushes of rice, right down
while weather, so you can't go back on it. There's not a drop of water left
become you: Sinking up (Curse, wind—why make such a fuss? It doesn't

HAITSO: Are scoured earth, the Heels like tinder.
KANPAACHI: It's as much ours as anyone's. All six villages in Shikani!

YURI: How dare you burst into someone's house?

on both sides is YURI)
Standing motionless, fleeing off the villagers
FUROSUKE: (Swaggering in) You won’t get anywhere that way. Leave her to me.

(With no effort, hoists YURI up in his arms. A lackey helps him mount her onto the ox’s back, face up.)

YURI: (Writhing) Let me go! Let me go!

(They wind the rope around and around YURI and the ox. YURI twists her body to avert her face. Her long black hair spills over, trailing the ground.)

KADENJI: Hey! Takuzen! You sure it’s all right if she’s still dressed?
TAKUZEN: Sure. Now, the next step is to go to the sacred forest and get down to the real ceremonial business. Our right honorable member of parliament, lately become a wealthy landowner in these parts, is waiting in the shrine office. So are the local bigwigs. Everyone’s concerned for the village’s well-being. They’ve gathered to witness the outcome of our prayers for rain.
KADENJI: That be the case.
HATSUO: Then we must hurry.
KANPACHI: So, “Boys be ambitious,” eh? Ha ha.

(They break up and begin to leave.)

(AKIRA bursts in, barring their way. He drives off the lackeys to the left and the right, fixing them with a steely look. Taking the ox by its muzzle, with a jerk of the reins he leads it straight back to the cottage. Still silent, he flashes out the sickle at his waist and cuts YURI’s bonds.)

YURI: (Glancing) Oh, Akira! (She rolls off and hides behind Akira’s back, clinging to his obi.) Just in time! But, so soon! Why . . . how . . . ?
AKIRA: (Shielding YURI, he holds the sickle like a dagger and stares down the villagers; speaks calmly under his breath to YURI.) Ah. On the way to Demon Pond—about third of the way it was—you could just make out where the pond was on the far side of the peak—we heard a lullaby, a voice singing a child to sleep. . . . Imagine that voice in the moonlight. It strung the beads of dew and weaved them with weeds into a bolt of cloth so green I could see it before my very eyes. . . . Yamazawa was so moved—he’s got a three-year-old at home. . . . “Lord, I miss my family,” he said. “In the thick of the mountains with scarce the moon to light our way, wandering about in some far-off, unknown, land—No let’s leave this venture for another year. The wind’s against us and I’m chilled to the bone.” I, too,
my heart was racing. So, we turned and came straight back. *(Stands erect,
tips the gourd up to the moonlight, and drinks deeply)*

*(YURI stretches on tip-toe and lifts off the hat that AKIRA has slung
around his neck by a cord. She tugs at the gourd; AKIRA passes it to her,
and she puts them in the threshold. Then, swiftly, she attempts to take the
sickle. AKIRA brushes her away with his hand, not letting go of it.
YURI clings tightly to the hand holding the sickle.)*

AKIRA: What're you doing here? Go home!
HATSUO: Sorry, but we can’t oblige. Leave our village. You’ve been here
long enough.
AKIRA: You won’t let me stay, huh?
HATSUO: Right. You’ll agree, I think, but I’ll have to call you fool if you
don’t. It’s this drought. No rain. . . . A drop of water’d be worth a thou-
sand, no, ten thousand in gold right now. And then there’s that bell you’re
so spooked up about. Miss ringing just once, and the village—well, it’ll
turn into a lake. A lake . . . Fine! Just what we need! So, then, uh, in other
words, there you have it. As I was saying, from tonight on, we’d be much
obliged if you didn’t ring the bell. Don’t ring it and what the day brings,
well, when we see what the day brings, you . . . You, you’re the bell ringer,
so what’ll I call you anyway? how about Gonsuke. Ahem!
VILLAGERS 1&2: Hear! Hear!
VILLAGERS 4&5: *(Heckling) Claude Clapper! Fred Log!* 27
HATSUO: Ahem! In this village, you’re no better than a turd’s leftovers,
and what’s more—or less, that being the case—you’re no worth to us
whatever. And so I say . . . as I was saying, ah, we’re gathered here to give
you notice we don’t want you ringing the bell. And besides, you can get
out of town too.
VILLAGERS 2&3: That’s right! You tell ‘im!
AKIRA: That’s fine by me. Since I was told to do as I pleased, ring it or
no, the vow was mine. . . . I did it out of duty. Who’d ring the bell for the
love of it? Fine, I’ll leave right now.
VILLAGERS 4 & 5: *(Jeering) Go on! Get out!*
AKIRA: Yuri, let’s be gone. *(Watching her hastily attend to her dress)* Come
as you are, girl—barefoot. I’ll carry you over the thorny path. *(Leads her by
the hand)*

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27. *Shumoku yarō, marutanbō:* the villagers are reduced to childish name calling. Kyōka reserves his
satire here for the incoherent speeches of men like Hatsuo, supposedly intelligent and respon-
sible citizens.
(Wrapped in AKIRA’s sleeve, YURI steps before the crowd. GAKUEN, till then hidden in the shadows, suddenly appears. He has seen what has been going on.)

KANPACHI: (In low, malevolent tones) Now wait a minute. (AKIRA strides past, ignoring him.) Wait, you!
AKIRA: (Bolting around) What?
KANPACHI: Leave what’s ours, you.
AKIRA: You won’t find a leaf or speck of dust on me.
KANPACHI: That woman belongs to the village. You can’t take her.
AKIRA: Yuri? She’s my wife.
KADENJI: Shut up. She’s from the village.
AKIRA: I don’t care where she’s from. Yuri’s coming with me because she wants to. . . . If she wants to stay, then stay she can. See for yourself, she’s clinging to me and won’t let go. (Smiles) She’d die if I left her behind. . . . People have to live as their hearts guide them, but how can I expect you all to understand that? Let’s get going.
TAKUZEN: (Trudges forward) Why, young fellow, a hot head won’t do you no good. My niece here isn’t just a part of the village, you see. She holds in her hands the fate of six villages in this county—eight thousand souls in all. She’s our sacrifice for rain, you see. . . . So, if you was to run off with our sacrifice, it’d be the same as if you’d snatched away the lives of all eight thousand of us. We can’t let you go a step further till you hand Yuri over. Well now, how ’bout it?
GAKUEN: Just a moment! (Runs in and joins AKIRA, with YURI in the middle) Hagiwara can’t answer that, so I’ll speak for him. It’s true, Yuri is the very life of this village. Don’t you see, that’s why Count Hagiwara—he’s of noble blood, though the third son—took a vow to serve the bell all his days, for the sake alone of this beautiful girl? Gentlemen, you’ve already ridden roughshod over this good woman’s reputation, so I feel I’m appealing to deaf ears. And yet, to strip the clothes off her back before this very assembly, and drag her about on a moonlit night! Never, anywhere east or west of the wide ocean, have I heard of such an outrage! Not even the most heinous crime committed against God or man—say, the murder of one’s lord or father—matches this!

Say it does rain, say the black clouds boil in the sky. Why, that is because heaven weeps, the moon hides her face, unable to watch this girl made sacrifice on the back of a black and terrible ox. Can you, gentlemen, who made heaven weep, who hide the light, can you be allowed to live? So the ears of rice will flourish, yet man will starve. Water will spring from the earth, yet man will thirst. Gentlemen! Should you hound Hagiwara
and his wife and neglect your vow to the bell, should you commit such acts of violence—what would you do, heaven forbid! if the ground you stand on be turned into a sea of mud? Six villages, eight thousand lives, you say. You yourselves would be to blame for such a loss. The same old superstition, you say? Say it, then. Still, this loving couple harm no one, least of all themselves, if they spend their lives hidden away from the world, serving this bell.

KANPACHI: Shut up. 'Tain't none of your business.

HATSUO: Who the hell are you, anyway?

GAKUEN: Me? I'm an old friend of Hagiwara's.

TAKUZEN: A jack-in-the-box, or is that a jack-in-the-pulpit?28

GAKUEN: Indeed, sir. I'm a preacher, a priest from the Honganji sec., and a man of letters, a professor of Kyoto University. My name is Yamazawa Gakuen. I've been loath to tell my name, but this province is the well-spring of the Pure Land faith. So I spoke out, thinking I'd find among you gentlemen fellows in the same faith, even some of like mind. (To Hatsuo) And you, sir, are you not a school teacher? Then we're colleagues. I adjure you, don't treat me as a stranger. (To TAKUZEN) You too, sir. We're kin in our paths of preaching. (To KADENJI) Village headman, sir, I appeal to your good name. (To FUROSUKE) Hey, here's a gallant! The sumo wrestler's a true man of chivalry. I humbly beg you all, give up this sacrifice.

(Hearing this, all the villagers hesitate.)

(Enter ANAGUMA KŌZO, member of the provincial legislature, nonchalantly puffing on a cigar)

KŌZO: They're crooks the both of 'em. Even if they're not, what good are a count and a scholar to you? What'll you do for food? How will you live? I alone am responsible for your welfare, and I say do it! Strip her naked, de-bone her for all I care. Who of you would weigh this hussy against eight thousand citizens? Perform the rite.

(The villagers, with the sumo wrestler in the forefront, set upon YURI.)

GAKUEN: Tie me up! (Throws off his jacket) I've said all I could but you wouldn't listen. Tie me to the ox's back!

AKIRA: (Tosses away the sickle) No, if you need a scapegoat, take me. Draw and quarter me, I've no objection. Put me on the ox and take me up to

28. Yabu kara bōzu ga nani o nukasu: a pun on yabu kara bō (literally, "a stick from a bamboo grove"), an expression for someone or something unexpected and incongruous.
Demon Pond. If you need a sacrifice for your rain, I'll put in a word for you to the dragon goddess.

YURI: No! Akira, Mr. Yamazawa, I'll go. Let me do it.

AKIRA: Never. I'll never sell my wife and damn the dragon and the eight thousand! For the Gods or Buddhas even, I'll not sell my love. I don't care if you're willing to do it! I'll stop you!

KÔZÔ: (Sidles over, tapping his walking stick) Friends! Friends! Let's be sensible. Stop all this tomfoolery. A woman's a woman. How d'ye think she takes a bath? Bah! What nonsense. (Laughs loudly) Listen, like it or not, it's the duty of any man worth his salt, if it be for his country, to stick his wife and go off to war. That, my friend, is the spirit of our fatherland—Bushido, in other words. You too would be willing to lay down your life for your fellow man, to save your village, 'cuz it's all for the state, our fatherland. Compared to that, what's so hard about letting the missus ride an ox for a night? I've got an open mind, I'll tolerate a sniveler or two, but someone with a quick temper'd take you for traitors. Take me, Kôzô, I've always said I'd stake my life for the good people of this village, and I would. I'd do it again and again!

(The villagers now bow in respect. KADENJI strokes his chin; KANPACHI swells with pride.)

AKIRA: Die! (So crying, he snatches up the fallen sickle and lunges at the screaming KÔZÔ.) Die! Die! Die then for your bloody citizens! Die a glorious death! You first, I'll follow. Only then will I hand over Yuri. Die! What're you waiting for?

(KÔZÔ edges back with every step AKIRA takes toward him.

YURI clings to AKIRA's hand, which is shaking.)

AKIRA: If not, then fight!

(The villagers press forward in a wave; AKIRA pulls back with a cry.)

AKIRA: Don't get too close to me, you swine! Your breath stinks. You've all sold out to this profiteer. Listen! This happened once before, long, long ago. Yuki—there was a girl by the name of Yuki, living in this hamlet. Power and tyranny took her against her will, they bound her naked to an ox and drove her up to Demon Pond. "I'm too ashamed to go back to the hamlet alive. You too have been driven to the slaughter," the maid said to the ox, stroking its muzzle. "Give me your life—it's no different from mine." All night long she cut and gathered bales of grass. She stacked them on the ox's back, then, striking two stones together, set fire to it all. No need to lay the whip on him. She raised her white hand as if to point the
way to the hamlet below. The ox took off like a bolt of lightning, set fire to the hamlet from one end to the other. When she saw the red flames burst in the valley like swirling specks of dust, Yuki smiled, then drowned herself in Demon Pond. Haven’t you heard that story? Forgotten it? Bastards! If you lay a finger on us, it won’t be rain you get, but flames! Ignorant bastards!

KÔZÔ: Baby talk! The village’s already in flames. That’s why we’re praying for the bloody rain, stupid! Come on, you sluggards! (Sees they all hesitate) What’s the matter with you all? (Shouts) Denkichi, get over here!

(Enter DENKICHI, a gambler. He flashes a long dagger.
His henchman enters, also brandishing a weapon.)

DENKICHI: Finish ’em off! Finish ’em off!
HENCHMAN: Right, boss.
AKIRA: Yamazawa, watch out!

(The three run up into the belfry, the men’s arms around YURI. AKIRA stands at the top of the stairs, then YURI, and GAKUEN behind her, each acting as a shield for the others. AKIRA pushes the other two back. His feet firmly planted, he wields his sickle. The gamblers, together with all the villagers, surround them from below. YURI clings to the arm in which AKIRA holds the sickle.)

ALL: Get ’em! Give it to ’em!
GAKUEN: Citizens? What rot. Never in my life have I known such a pack of blood-thirsty bigots! Oh heaven—you silver river of stars above! Become a waterfall and dash down on us. I pray you.
AKIRA: Run for your life, Yamazawa! Run!

(As AKIRA shouts this, DENKICHI climbs the steps. Blade strikes blade twice, three times. DENKICHI retreats. Then someone hurls a stone at AKIRA. Struck on the forehead, he cries out. Stanching the blood, he drops his sickle.)

YURI: (Sweeps up the fallen sickle) Look! all of you! I’m ready to die!

(As she says these words, she slashes her breast.)

AKIRA: No! (Wrests the sickle away)
YURI: Akira . . . Farewell . . . Akira. (Collapses)

(Everyone turns pale, stunned.)

AKIRA: I’ll not leave you! I’ll carry you over the thorny paths. Wait for me in the Underworld. (Stands up, holding YURI in his arms. Face to face with
GAKUEN, he speaks; no trace of emotion in his voice) What time is it?
GAKUEN: (Coolly glances at his watch) Three past two.
AKIRA: Uh huh. I know by the stars, I see them every night. The mid-watch, precisely. . . . Right. (Glares up at the bell, his spirits high) Yamazawa. I think—I'd rather not ring the bell. What d'you say?
GAKUEN: (Pondering a while) Ah. Don't ring it. For Yuri's sake, don't ring it.

(AKIRA raises his sickle and slashes the rope. The wooden clapper tumbles down. At once, an unearthly roar. Cries of "Earthquake! The mountains are shaking! Look up! look up at Demon Pond! Storm clouds!" With the cries there are flashes of lightning, continuous, brilliant as day. The terrified villagers mill about, their legs giving out from under them. The ox bucks, kicks its hind legs, and bolts away.)

KÖZÖ: The bell! The bell!
KADENJI: Help us, someone! Ring the bell!
TAKUZEN: Save us! For pity's sake, save us!

(Screaming, they run about seeking an escape. The heavens go black as night. Two or three villagers stagger, stumble up the staircase.
AKIRA drives them off with swings of his sickle. Then he and GAKUEN pose motionless as statues, serenely gazing up at the mountain peak.)

AKIRA: Look, a wave!

(As he speaks, GAKUEN throws himself down; then AKIRA slits his throat and falls face down.)

(Enter YUKI. She appears for a moment in a brilliant flash of light, standing on the roof of the cottage. Then, just as quick, she disappears into the blackness. Then, once more she appears in an unearthly flash of lightning, standing tall in the belfry. She wields her iron scepter and thrusts her other hand up to grasp the bell. The bell swings back and forth, then topples over. The villagers all dart here and there, struck with terror, no longer in command of their senses. The nurse MYRIAD now enters, together with YUKI's entire suite. They set upon the villagers, slaughtering them down to the last man.)

YUKI: Oh nurse, how happy I am!
ALL: (Severally) My lady!
YUKI: And the mortals?
MYRIAD: All to fishes. Look at them swim! Even a few loaches and mud snails among them.

(They all burst out laughing.)
YUKI: This new Lake of the Bell will be home for Yuri and her man. Come everyone, I leave for Sword Peak. I can come and go as I please now. Yuri, oh Yuri. Let's sing a song together.

(Suddenly, dark again. The great bell now sunken deep in the water. AKIRA and YURI pose together; he with his cheek resting on the cannon of the bell, she below, kneeling, looking up at him, leaning back and supporting herself on one hand. They gaze into each others' eyes and smile.

The moon emerges, radiant. GAKUEN poses high atop the belfry, peering down into the water. He bows, his hands clasped together in homage.

The moonlight grows ever more brilliant.)

(CURTAIN)