



YOKO TOMIYASU

2020 H.C. Andersen Award Nominee from Japan



CONTENTS

Biographical information	3
Statement	4
Translation.....	11
Bibliography and Awards	18
Five Important Titles with English text	
<i>Mayu to Oni</i> (Mayu & Ogree)	28
<i>Bon maneki</i> (Invitation to the Summer Festival of Bon).....	46
<i>Chiisana Suzuna hime</i> (Suzuna the Little Mountain Godness).....	67
<i>Nanoko sensei ga yatte kita</i> (Nanako the Magical Teacher).....	74
<i>Mujina tanteiktoku</i> (The Mujina Detective Agency)	100



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Yoko Tomiyasu

Born in Tokyo in 1959, Tomiyasu grew up listening to many stories filled with monsters and wonders, told by her grandmother and great aunts, who were all lovers of storytelling and mischief. At university she studied the literature of the Heian period (the ancient Japanese era lasting from the 8th to 12 centuries AD). She was deeply attracted to stories of ghosts and ogres in *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji), and fell more and more into the world of traditional folklore. She currently lives in Osaka with her husband and two sons.

There was a long era of writing stories that I wanted to read for myself. The origin of my creativity is the desire to write about a wondrous world that children can walk into from their everyday life. I want to write about the strange and mysterious world that I have loved since I was a child.

STATEMENT

Recommendation of Yoko Tomiyasu for the Hans Christian Andersen Award

Akira Nogami editor/critic

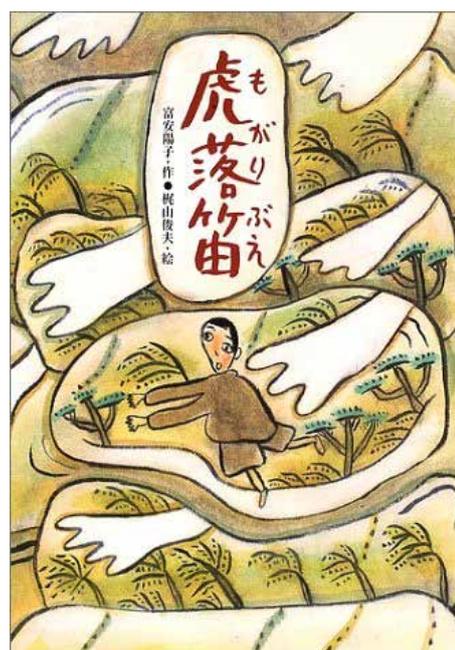
Yoko Tomiyasu is one of Japan's most popular authors and has published more than 120 works. Her stories are humorous and magical, filled with distinctive characters who often come out of Japanese folklore. Her unique world has enchanted countless numbers of children, and she is an overwhelming top choice for libraries and *bunko* reading groups.

Tomiyasu was born in Tokyo in 1959. Just before she turned three, her father's job took the family to Toronto where they lived until she was five. Even after her return, she was absorbed in books from the West, such as *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *My Father's Dragon*, *Pippi Longstocking*, and the Moonintroll books. Her very favorite, though, was *Mary Poppins*. The classic by P. L. Travers was what motivated her at age ten to write her own book. In an autobiographical essay, Tomiyasu describes some of her Japanese influences. "My grandmother and aunt from Sasebo Kyushu, the southernmost of the four main islands of Japan, lived with my family in Tokyo. They told me stories about the mythical *kappa*, mountain witches and badgers all with magical powers. These began my friendship with traditional fantasy characters."

While still in high school, Tomiyasu wrote many short stories. As a graduation present, her parents had three of them published as a collection: "Mogaribue (Flute that Fells a Tiger)," "Nanoko-sensei (Nanoko the Teacher)" and "Higashi-ike (The East

Pond)." One hundred copies were printed. It was 1977 and Tomiyasu was 18. When she was at university, a professor who taught written expression sent her self-published collection to a publisher. In 1979, "Mogaribue" and "Nanoko-sensei" were published in a monthly children's magazine *Kodomo no Yakata* (Fukuinkan Shoten). This was the start of Yoko Tomiyasu's career as a children's writer.

The characters used to write *mogaribue* mean "flute that fells a tiger," and it actually means "the sound of the fierce winter wind blowing through a bamboo fence." It is often used as a *haiku* "season" word. In the plot of this story, Tomiyasu cleverly uses both meanings of the word.



Mogari bue (The Winter Wind Whistle)
illus. Toshio Kajiyama | Akane Shobo | 2002

“Nanoko-sensei” is a science teacher who shows up on a windy day at a junior high school. She is short and thin and wears enormous glasses that make her look small and ineffectual. Students, are astounded, therefore, when she silences the shrieking wind outside and even more surprised when they find themselves floating in mid-air. After their amazing class, Nanoko-sensei is bathed in a ray of sunlight and disappears. Both stories share the magical powers of a strong wind. Her first two published stories give a glimpse of Tomiyasu’s future work, many of which have similarly prominent elements of nature and the four seasons. Beautifully written, one would never guess the stories were by a high-school student. In 2002, “Mogaribue,” illustrated by well-known artist Toshigo Kajiyama, was published by Akane Shobo. “Nanoko-sensei” was published in 2003 by Fukuinkan Shoten and developed into a series of book that are read and loved today.

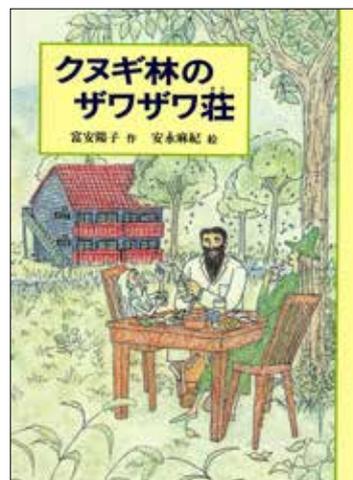
In 1984, Tomiyasu’s first book, *Kutsu nannte iranai* (I Don’t Need Shoes, Tomu Shobo) was published. Two years later, *Yamanba yama no mokko-tachi* (Mokko in Mount Yamamba) was released (Fukuinkan Shoten, 1986). The latter is about a mountain witch who is greatly feared, and more specifically the adventures of Mayu, the witch’s daughter, and her magical friends, the *Mokko*, *Tengu*, *Kappa*, Snow Woman and more. The



Yamanba yama no mokko-tachi (Mokko in Mount Yamamba) | illus. Nana Furiya | Fukuinkan Shoten | 1986

changing of the four seasons are the backdrop for this delightful tale. *Yamanba yama no mokko-tachi* has been a long-time bestseller, and the revised version was chosen for the IBBY Honour List in 2002.

Tomiyasu’s perhaps best-known early work, *Kunugi-bayashi no zawazawa-so* (Noisy House of Chestnut Woods, Akane Shobo) was published in 1990. The main character is Dr. Yanari, an employee at a *tofu* maker who is trying to create a cloud that people can ride around the sky on. Dr. Yanari is thrown out of his apartment because of his “suspicious” experiments. Looking for a new home, he visits an odd real estate agent who introduces him to the Noisy House in Chestnut Woods. Inhabitants of this secluded apartment house include *Azukitogi* who collects human spirits, a water fairy who escaped the Sea God’s Palace a century before, and other fantastical beings. The stories of Dr. Yanari’s life with his new friends are full of humor. This book also introduces one of the author’s best-known themes, folklore, folk beliefs and shared illusions from ancient Japanese society recreated to go with uniquely amusing, modern-day characters. *Kunugi-bayashi no zawazawa-so* was highly acclaimed and won the Shogakukan Children’s Publication Culture Award and the Newcomer Prize of the Japanese Association of Writers for Children.



Kunugi bayashi no zawazawaso (Noisy House in the Chestnut Woods) | illus. Maki Yasunaga | Akane Shobo | 1990

Kitsune yama no natsuyasumi (Summer Holiday on Fox Mountain) | illus. Yoko Tomiyasu | Akane Shobo | 1994

Next came

Kitsuneyama no natsu yasumi

(Summer Holiday on Fox Mountain, Akane Shobo) in 1994. Set on Mt. Inari, a ten-year-old boy is sent to live with his grandmother during summer vacation. The boy is protected by 108 mythical foxes with whom he has magical adventures. *Inari* is the god of grains and there are countless small shrines throughout Japan that bear the name. Foxes are believed to serve the Inari shrines and are respected for this role. This folk belief is at the core of the exploits in *Kitsuneyama no natsu yasumi*. Tomiyasu not only wrote the book, but revealed a whole new set of talents by drawing the illustrations for the book and the cover.

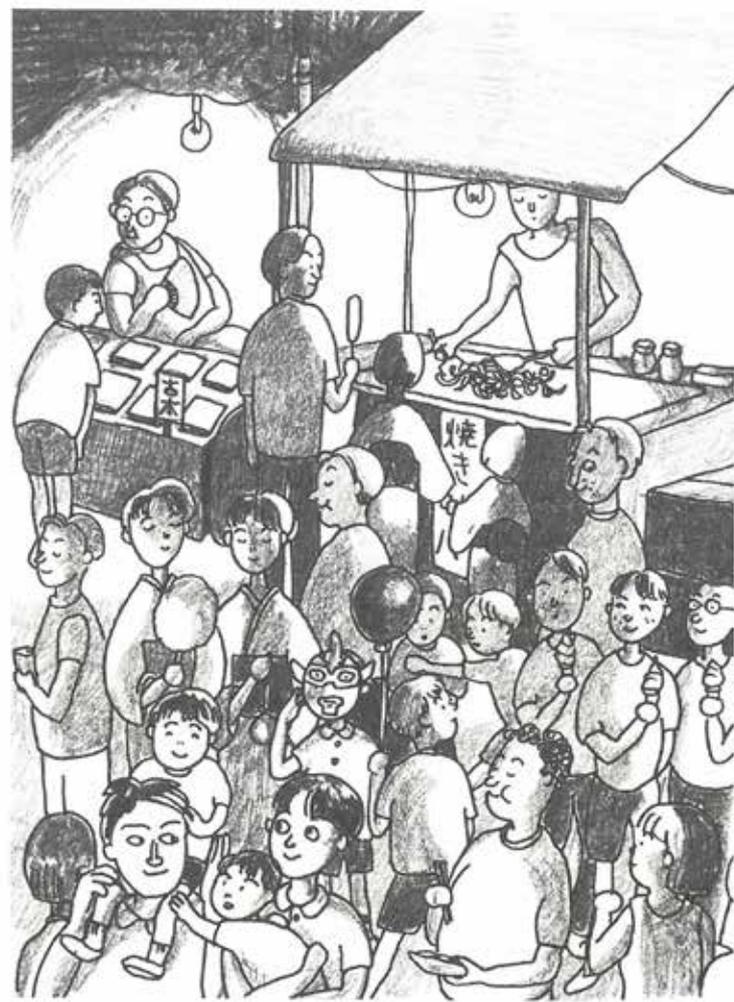


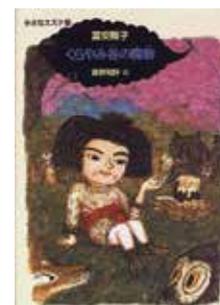
illustration © Yoko Tomiyasu, *Kitsune yama no natsuyasumi*

Chiisana yamagami suzuna-hime

(Suzuna, The Little Mountain Godness, Kaiseisha) was published in 1996. This was the first book in the *Chiisana suzuna-hime* (Little Princess Suzuna) series. Every mountain has a *yamagami*, or mountain god. It protects the trees, plants, insects and animals that live on it. The god makes sure the moon and sun operate properly and water circulates. Another important job of the mountain god is to turn the colors of the leaves in fall. The only child of one particular mountain god is Princess Suzuna. Her dream is to rule over one of the mountains in the range that her father

is master over. Suzuna's three-hundredth birthday is approaching. Her father has promised her that she can rule over Mt. Suzuna if she manages to create magnificent fall colors there. The princess rides a cloud far away, over the mountains until she arrives at Mt. Suzuna. There she obtains the cooperation of foxes and a wisdom owl to succeed in her task. Her father sees the colors his daughter has created and turns the mountain over to her.

In the sequel to the first volume, *Suzuna numa no oonamazu* (The Big Catfish in Suzuna Marsh), Suzuna calms the fury of



Little Mountain Godness series | Illus. Kazuyoshi Iino | Kaiseisha | 1996

a huge catfish that has dried up all the water in a pond. In book three, *Oogumo-barai no yoru* (The Evening of the Big Cloud Payday), something or someone makes off with the huge cherry tree that Mt. Suzuna is famous for. Book four, *Kurayami-dani no mamono* (The Devil of Darkness Valley), has Suzuna trying to solve a devil's puzzle to undo the curse that could destroy her mountain. Although Tomiyasu has written many other chapter books for children, this series was remarkable in that all four books were published in a single year, 1996. It won the Niimi Nankichi Children's Literature Award.

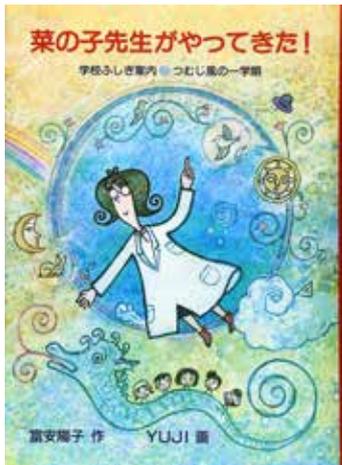
The books by Tomiyasu that we have looked at thus far are mainly set in the present day. The traditional culture that wells up from deep inside them brings back a magical world. Reality and the imaginative world of illusion are brought together and portrayed richly and humorously. Readers can fully enjoy the devices the author uses to show the allure of fantasy rooted in nature and native culture.

The *Mujina tantei-kyoku* (Mujina Detective Agency) series made its start in 1999 (Doshinsha). The main characters of this bestselling series are the eccentric Detective Mujina and his sidekick, a curious boy named Genta. Together they solve mysteries that take them into an amazing mythical world. In the

first story, *Shiroi kibako* (The White Wooden Box), of the first book *Mujina tantei-kyoku—meitantei tojo!* (Mujina Detective Agency—A Great Detective!) Detective Mujina, owner of Mujina-do, a used book shop, and young Genta are playing chess together in the back of the shop when a beautiful woman comes to visit. The woman saw a dream in which there was a white wooden box at an old estate. She tells Detective Mujina she has found the estate she saw in her dream and asks him to go there to find out what is in the box. When the detective and Genta pay a visit, they find the tail of a fox in the box. It turns out that the beautiful client is actually a fox who got into mischief and got her tail cut off. In the entertaining discussions between Genta and Detective Mujina and the development of the story itself the reader gets hints of environmental destruction and the contradictions that have led to the difficulties of foxes losing their natural habitats. In the second story in this book, *Chiisana abu* (The Little Horsefly), Detective Mujina is hired to go to an elegant mansion to sort out the books of a deceased man who had lived there. While at his task, Mujina is annoyed by a horsefly that refuses to leave him alone. He finally figures out that the horsefly is trying to show him where the old man has left a gift for his grandchild. The story is a combination of fun and pathos: the humor of the detective figuring out that the will of the old man has been passed on to a horsefly, and the boredom Genta senses in a child living in lonely opulence. This series has remained popular and has extended to thirteen volumes so far.



Mujina tanteikyoku (Mujina Detective Agency) series | illus. Rika Okabe | Doshinsha | 1999-



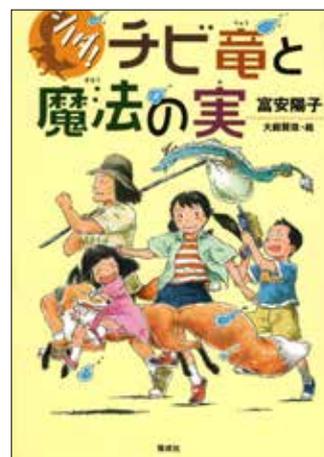
Nanoko sensei series (Nanoko the Magical Teacher) | illus. YUJI | Fukuinkan Shoten | 2003-

Nanoko-sensei ga yattekita! (Here Comes Miss Nanoko!, Fukuinkan Shoten 2003) is, as mentioned above, the first volume of a series that grew out of a short story Tomiyasu wrote as a high-school student. The volume contains five different stories grouped under the sub-title of "Guide to the School Mysteries: the Whirlwind First Semester." Students do not know where Miss Nanoko comes from or disappears to. In the first story, *Haruyasumi no kakurenbo* (Hide-and-seek During Spring Vacation), a young boy scheduled to transfer into the school when the new year begins in April comes to check it out during spring vacation. What should he find but a woman in white ordering the cherry trees in full bloom to "line up properly." Then the woman—Miss Nanoko Yamada—calls the boy's name, much to his surprise. She tells him to look for a pair of missing shoes and a book entitled *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder*, missing from the school library. The process the boy and the teacher follow to find the missing items is magical and comical. In each following story, Nanoko-sensei shows up in a different school. The first three volumes proceed from the first semester, to the second (*Nanoko-sensei oisogashi!* (Busy Miss Nanoko)) and finally to the third semester (*Nanoko-sensei ha doko e yuku?* (Where is Miss Nanoko Going?)) of the school year. The final volume is *Nanoko-sensei no kogai patororu* (Miss Nanoko's Off-Campus Patrol). Nanoko comes and goes as stealthily

as the wind. To readers, she is someone who can save them from the difficulties of school life, solving them all with fantasy and a smile. A spin-off series has Nanoko Yamada as a child telling about amazing things happening throughout Japan.

The number of series of books written by Tomiyasu is proof of how well her stories are loved and the great reader demand for sequels. The *Shinoda!* series begins with *Shinoda! Chibi ryu to maho no mi* (Shinoda! The Little Dragon with the Magic Fruit, Kaiseisha 2003). The series is now up to volume ten.

Three children of a fox mother and a human father are endowed with special fox powers. This chapter book is loosely based on *Shinodazuma*, a legendary tale performed in traditional *kabuki* and puppet theater. The settings of the series, of course, are original. The stories transcend time and space and take the reader into different worlds, all of which are exciting and leave you wanting more.

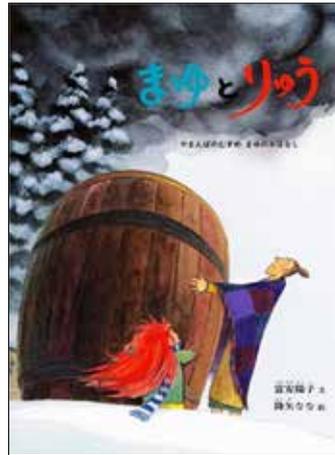
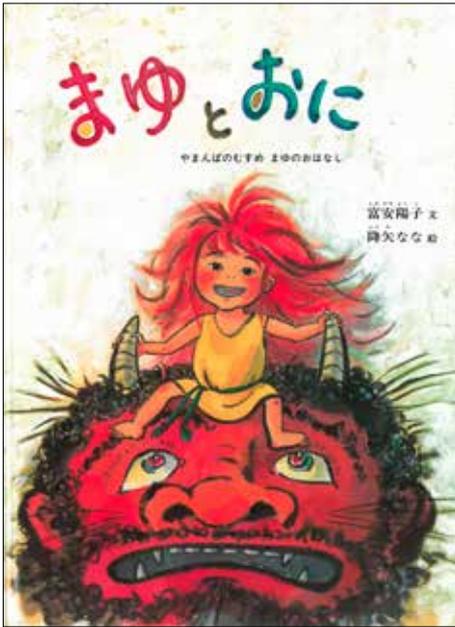


Shinoda! series-1-: Chibi ryu to maho no mi (The Little Dragon and Magic Fruit) | illus. Kenya Oba | Kaiseisha | 2003



Shinoda! series-10- (Latest): Yubikiri wa maho no hajimari (The Magic Starts with a Pinky Promise) | illus. Kenya Oba | Kaiseisha | 2016

Let's take a look at picture books by Tomiyasu. The main character of *Mayu to oni* (Mayu and Ogre, illustrated by Nana Furiya, Fukuinkan Shoten 2004) is Mayu, the daughter of a mountain witch. One day, she meets up

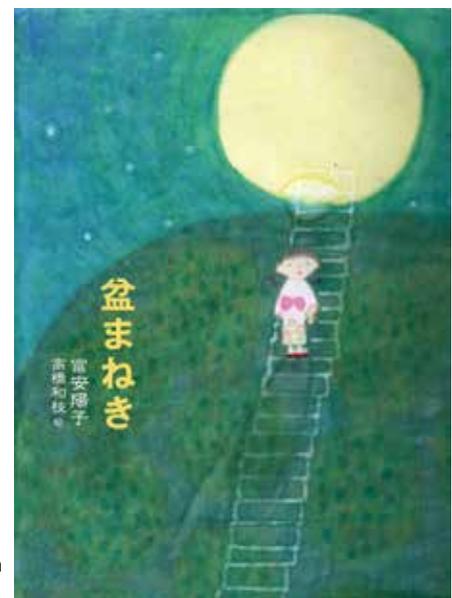


A Story of Witch's Daughter series | illus. Nana Furiya | Fukuinkan Shoten | 2004-
 ① Mayu to oni (Mayu & Ogre), ② Mayu to ryu (Mayu & Dragon), ③ Mayu to urinko (Mayu & a Little Boar)

with an ogre while in the woods. The ogre invites her to his home and the curious girl accepts. The ogre secretly plans to eat Mayu and sets a large pot of water to boil. Mayu is oblivious to his intentions, but in the end her enormous strength and quick wits have the ogre in the pot suffering serious burns. Worried about the ogre's injuries, the powerful little girl hoists the giant on her back and runs home with him so her mother treat him. From that day on, Mayu and the ogre become friends, with the ogre visiting her from time to time. The reader is held in suspense during the bargaining between the two characters and then relieved at the happy ending. Mayu has the trait of so many small children of asking "why?" over and over again. Mayu uses it to get out of her fix in a way the encourages young readers to be themselves. This story became the first of the series of "Stories of Witch's Daughter" which includes *Mayu to ryu* (Mayu and Dragon) and *Mayu to urinko* (Mayu and A Little Boar).

Bon maneki (Invitation to the Summer Festival of Bon, Kaiseisha 2011) is a fantasy chapter book Tomiyasu, who lost her grandmother and an uncle during World War II, wrote in an attempt to pass on her anti-war

sentiments to the next generation. In Japan, *Bon* is a three-day holiday in the middle of August when family gets together, eats good food and welcomes back the spirits of ancestors who come back to visit for the occasion. During *Bon*, a young girl listens to many thrilling stories told by her big grandmother and grandfather. The book is made up of the days the girl spends in the country village and the mysterious stories she is told. On the last night of *Bon*, a scaffolding is put up in the yard of the local temple and everyone dances around it. The girl sets out for the event, and is approached by a youth who turns out to be her grandfather's elder brother.



Bon maneki (Invitation to the Summer Festival of Bon) | illus. Kazue Takahashi | Kaiseisha | 2011

As an afterword, the author tells another story—a true story at the end of the book. Tomiyasu writes about her uncle on her father’s side who got in a Zero fighter plane equipped with a 500-kilogram bomb and only enough fuel for a one-way trip. He was a pilot in the special attack corps—better known in the West as *kamikaze*—who took off from his base and flew his plane into a US battleship. Tomiyasu writes, “This is not a story. Our country undeniably conducted a war.. More people than we can count died in the war. I want to remember this fact for as long as I can to do what I can to make sure people never have to die like that again.” Her words tell us how strongly she feels about preserving peace and never sending children into war again.

In her writing, Tomiyasu keeps her attention on people, beliefs, and characters rooted in the land. She expresses her objections to urbanization and the destruction of the nature through ghosts and fabled creatures from long ago. In a word, she uses fantasy to bring to the surface problems lurking inside the myth of technology. The same is true for her symbolically presented anti-war sentiment and prayers for peace as portrayed in *Bon maneki*. The colorful and fantastical literature of Tomiyasu is aimed at the extreme political turmoil of the 21st century, steering the reader instead towards a flexible and primeval ecology. This indeed is Tomiyasu’s message of peace for the future of the children of the world.

translated by Deborah Iwabuchi



illustration © Yoko Tomiyasu
Kitsune yama no natsuyasumi

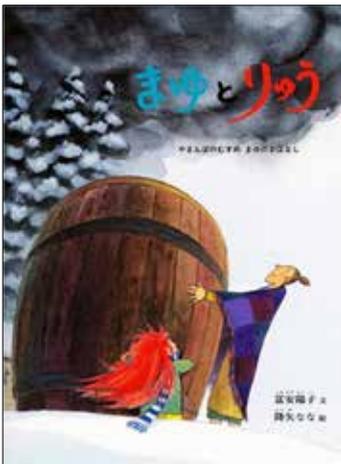
TRANSLATION



まゆとおに (Mayu to oni)

Mayu & Ogre | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 1999/2004

● KOREAN: 2000



まゆとりゅう (Mayu to ryu)

Mayu & Dragon | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2008

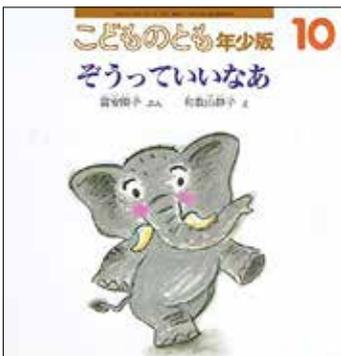
● KOREAN: 2006



ケンカオニ (Kenka oni)

Mess Brought By Two Ogres | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 1996/2014

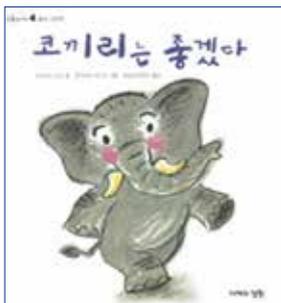
● KOREAN: 2006

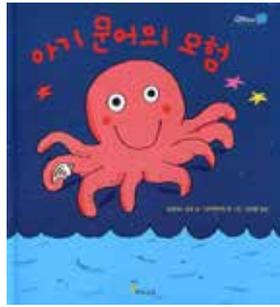


ぞうっていいなあ (Zo tte iina)

I'd like to be Elephant | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 1999

● KOREAN: 2009

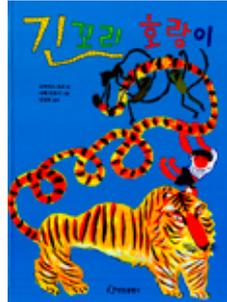




タコのオクトくん (Tako no Okuto kun)

Octo the Octopus Boy | illus. Jun Takabatake | Tokyo: Poplar | 2002

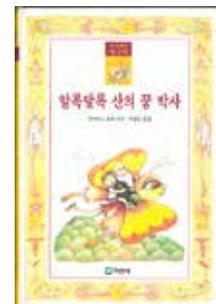
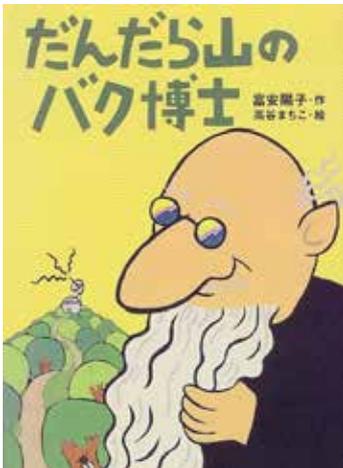
● **KOREAN:** 2009



トラのナガシippo (Tora no nagashippo)

Tiger with a Long, Long Tail | illus. Hiroshi Abe | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2013

● **KOREAN:** 2009



だんだら山のバク博士

(Dandara yama no Baku hakase)

Doctor Tapir of the Dandara Mountain | illus. Machiko Takaya | Tokyo: Rironsha | 1997

● **KOREAN:** 1998



ねこじゃら商店 世界一のプレゼント

(Nekojara shoten: Sekai ichi no purezento)

The Shop of the Cat: Greatest Gift in the World | illus. Tomoko Hirasawa | Tokyo: Rironsha | 2013

● **CHINESE (Simplified):** 2017



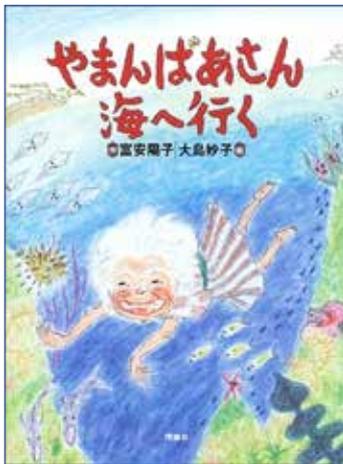
ドングリ山のやまんばあさん

(Donguri yama no yamanbaasan)

Mountain Witch of the Mt. Acon | illus. Taeko Oshima |

Tokyo: Rironsha | 2002

● **KOREAN:** 2012



やまんばあさん 海へ行く (Yamanbaasan umi e iku)

Mountain Witch Going to the Sea | illus. Taeko Oshima | Tokyo:

Rironsha | 2003

● **KOREAN:** 2012



やまんばあさんの大運動会

(Yamanbaasan no dai undokai)

Mountain Witch at the Sports Festival | illus. Taeko Oshima |

Tokyo: Rironsha | 2005

● **KOREAN:** 2012



オニのサラリーマン (Oni no sarariman)

Papa Works in the Hell | illus. Taeko Oshima | Tokyo:

Fukuinkan Shoten | 2015

● **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2018



竜の巣 (Ryu no su)

Dragon's Nest | Tokyo: Poplar | 2003

- KOREAN: 2005



盆まねき (Bon maneki)

Invitation to the Summer Festival of Bon | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2011

- CHINESE (Simplified): 2018



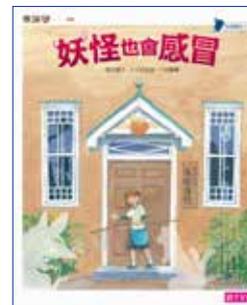
内科・オバケ科 ホオズキ医院 1

オバケだって、カゼをひく！

(Obake datte kaze o hiku!)

Hozuki Crinic 1: Ghost Catches a Cold! | Tokyo: Poplar | 2006

- CHINESE (Traditional): 2016
- VIETNAMESE: 2016



内科・オバケ科 ホオズキ医院 2

タヌキ御殿の大騒動

(Tanuki goten no oosodo)

Hozuki Crinic 2: A Big Trouble at the Raccoon Palace | Tokyo: Poplar | 2007

- CHINESE (Traditional): 2016
- VIETNAMESE: 2016





内科・オバケ科 ホオズキ医院 3

学校のオバケたいじ大作戦

(Gakko no obake taiji daisakusen)

Hozuki Crinic 3: Ghostbusters in the School | Tokyo: Poplar | 2007

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2016
- **VIETNAMESE:** 2016



内科・オバケ科 ホオズキ医院 4

鬼灯先生がふたりいる!?

(Hozuki sensei ga futari iru!?)

Hozuki Crinic 4: Two Doctor Hozuki!? | Tokyo: Poplar | 2008

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2016
- **VIETNAMESE:** 2016



内科・オバケ科 ホオズキ医院 5

オバケに夢を食べられる!?

(Obake ni yume o taberareru!?)

Hozuki Crinic 5: Ghost Eats Dreams!? | Tokyo: Poplar | 2010

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2017
- **VIETNAMESE:** 2017



内科・オバケ科 ホオズキ医院 6

SOS! 七化山のオバケたち

(Esu-o-esu! Nanabake yama no obake tachi)

Hozuki Crinic 6: Ghosts of Nanabake Mountain | Tokyo: Poplar | 2010

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2017
- **VIETNAMESE:** 2017



内科・オバケ科 ホオズキ医院 7

ぼくはオバケ医者助手!

(Boku wa obake isha no joshu!)

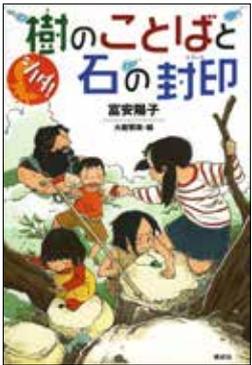
Hozuki Crinic 7: I am an Assistant of Doctor Ghost | Tokyo: Poplar | 2007

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2017
- **VIETNAMESE:** 2017



シノダ! 1 : チビ竜と魔法の実 (Chibi ryo to maho no mi)
Shinoda! 1: The Little Gragon and Magic Fruit | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2007

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2012
- **CHINESE (Simplified):** 2012



シノダ! 2 : 樹のことばと石の封印
(Ki no kotoba to ishi no fuin)
Shinoda! 2: Tree Words and Stone Seals | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2004

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2012
- **CHINESE (Simplified):** 2012



シノダ! 3 : 鏡の中の秘密の池
(Kagami no naka no himitsu no ike)
Shinoda! 3: The Secret Lake in the Looking Glass | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2006

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2013
- **CHINESE (Simplified):** 2013



シノダ! 4 : 魔物の森のふしぎな夜
(Mamono no mori no fushigi na yoru)
Shinoda! 4: A Strange Night in the Enchanted Forest | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2008

- **CHINESE (Traditional):** 2013
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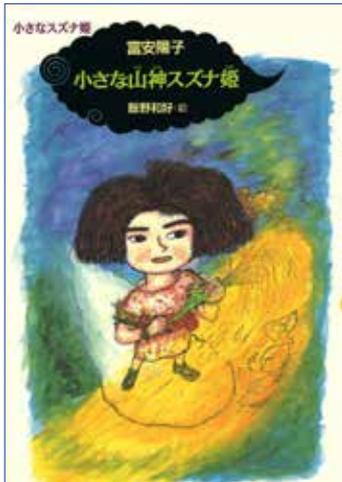
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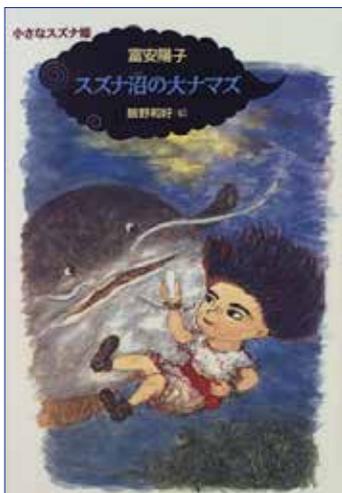
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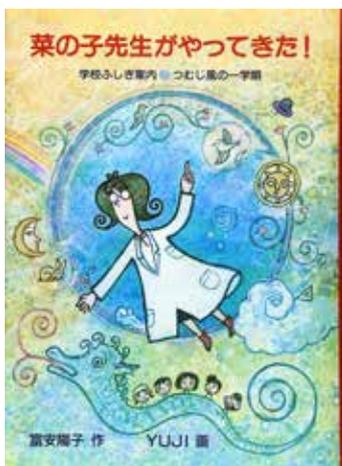
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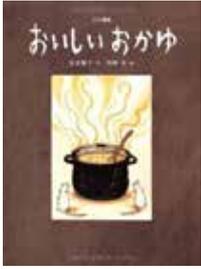
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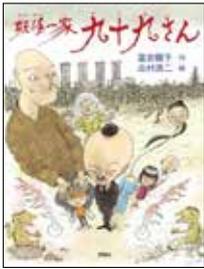
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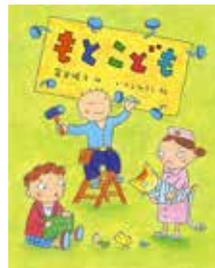
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rikishi)
Little Nanoko and The Fox Sumo Wrestler | illus. YUJI |
Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2018 | Nanoko the Magical
Teacher, Spin Off 3



あのくもなあに? (Ano kumo nani?)
What's That Cloud? | illus. Koji Yamamura | Tokyo:
Fukuinkan Shoten | 2018

もういいかあい? (はるですよ (Mo iikai? Haru des-
uyo)
Has Spring Come Yet? | illus. Mariko Matsunari | Tokyo:
Fukuinkan Shoten | 2018

オバケが見える転校生! (Obake ga mieru tenkosei!)
A Transfer Student Who Can See the Ghost! | illus.
Yoshika Komatsu | Tokyo: Poplar | 2018

妖怪一家の温泉ツアー (Yokai ikka no onsen tsua)
The Monster Family Go to the Hot Spring | illus. Koji
Yamamura | Tokyo: Rironsha | 2018 | Monster Family
series 8

サラとピンキー サンタの国へ行く (Sara to Pinky:
Santa no kuni e iku)
Sara and Pinky: Going to Santa Claus' Country | illus.
Yoko Tomiyasu | Tokyo: Kodansha | 2018 | Sara & Pinky
4

5 Important Titles



【1】 まゆとおに | Mayu to oni (Mayu & Ogre: A Story of Witch's Daughter) | illus. Nana Furiya | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2004 | ISBN 978-4834009989

【2】 盆まねき | Bon manekini (Invitation to the Summer Festival of Bon) | illus. Kazue Takahashi | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2011 | ISBN 978-4035306108

【3】 小さな山神スズナ姫 | Chiisana yamagami Suzuna hime (Suzuna, The Little Mountain Godness) | illus. Kazuyoshi Iino | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 1996 | ISBN 978-4035283102

【4】 菜の子先生がやってきた! | Nanoko sensei ga yatte kita! (Nanoko the Magical Teacher -1-) | illus. YUJI | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2003 | ISBN 978-4834006209

【5】 ムジナ探偵局 <名探偵登場!> | Mujina tanteikyoku: Meitantei tojo! (Mujina Detective Agency -1-) | illus. Rika Okabe | Tokyo: Doshinsha | 1999 | ISBN 978-4494014309

まゆとおに

やまんばのむすめ まゆのおはなし

とみやすようこ
富安陽子 文
ふりや
降矢なな 絵



まゆとおに (Mayu to oni)

Mayu & Ogre: A Story of Witch's Daughter | illus. Nana Furiya |
Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2004 | ISBN 978-4834009989

Mayu & Ogre

A Story of Witch's Daughter

by Yoko Tomiyasu

illus. Nana Furiya | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2004

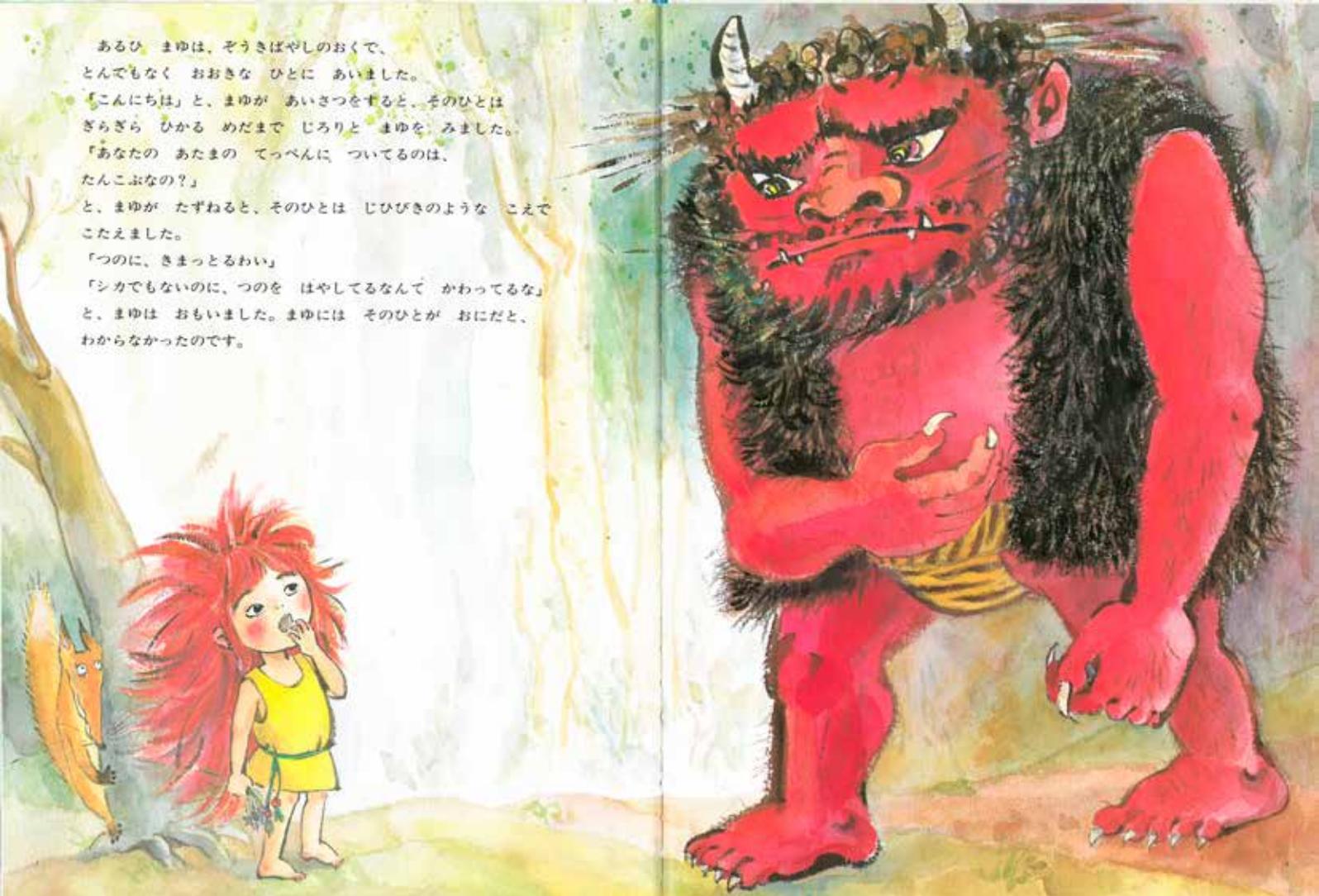


At the very top of North mountain,
just below the three cedars, stood a tiny little house.
A tall lanky *Yamanba*—a Japanese mountain witch—
lived there with her daughter, Mayu.



© Nana Furiya

あるひ まゆは、そうきばやしのおくで、
とんでもなく おおきな ひとに あいました。
「こんにちは」と、まゆが あいさつをすると、そのひとは
ざらざら ひかる めだまで じろりと まゆを、みました。
「あなたの あたまの てっぺんに、 ついてるのは、
たんこぶなの？」
と、まゆが たずねると、そのひとは じびきのような こえで
こたえました。
「つのに、きまっとるわい」
「シカでもないのに、つのを はやしてるなんて かわってるな」
と、まゆは おもいました。まゆには そのひとが おにだと、
わからなかったのです。



One day, Mayu met an enormous man, deep within the forest.

“Hello,” Mayu said politely, and the very large man’s eyes shone with a hungry light as he stared at Mayu.

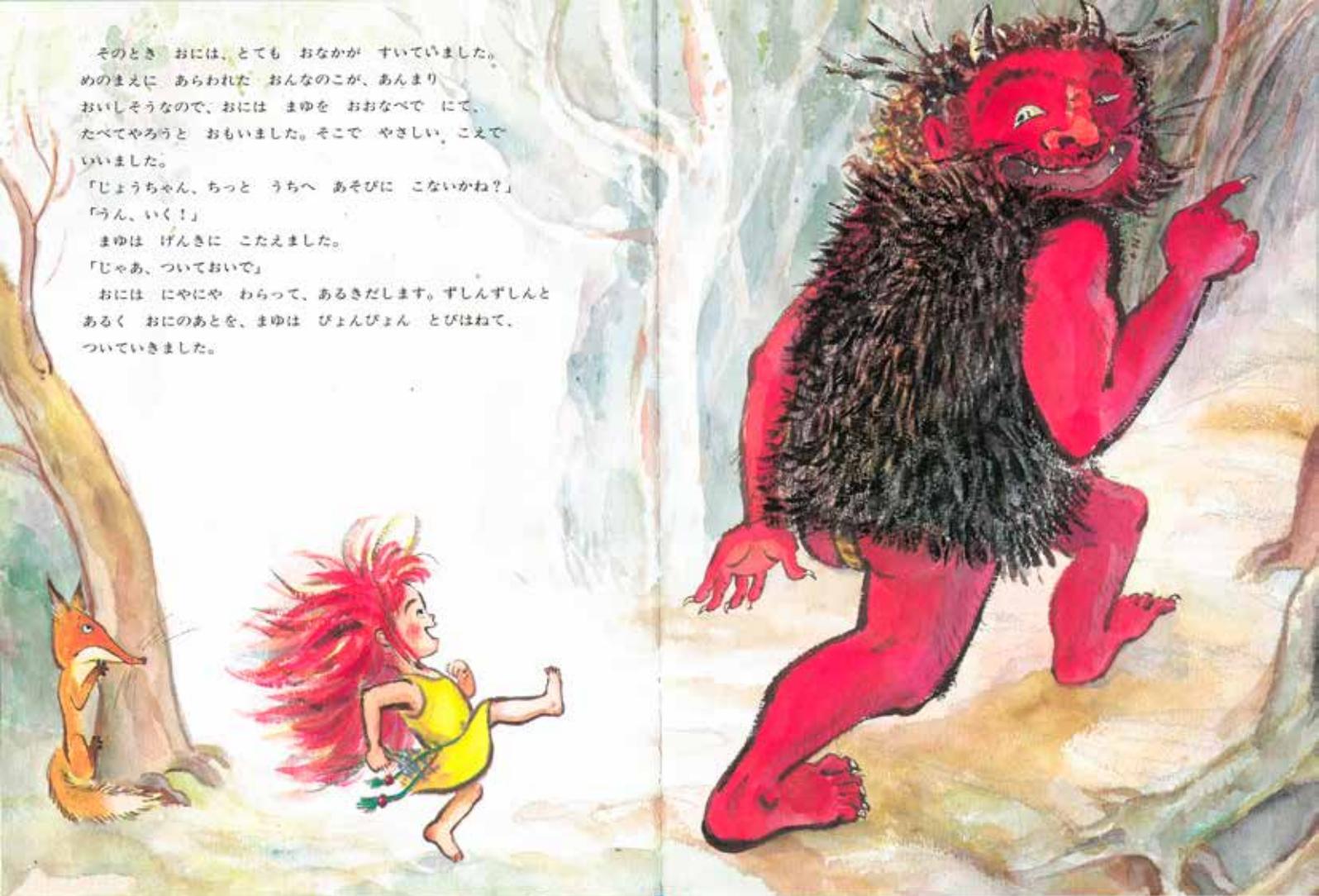
“Oh my! What are those bumps? Did you hit your head?” asked Mayu.

“They’re horns, you foolish child,” he answered in a huge voice that shook the ground.

“Pretty weird to have horns when you’re not a stag,” thought Mayu.

Mayu didn’t realize that he was an Oni—a wild Japanese ogre—that lived in the forest.

そのとき おには、とても おなかが すいていました。
めのまえに あらわれた おんなのこが、あんまり
おいしそうなので、おには まゆを おおなべて にて、
たべてやろうと おもいました。そこで やさしい、こえて
いました。
「じょうちゃん、ちっと うちへ あそびに こないかね？」
「うん、いく！」
まゆは げんきに こたえました。
「じゃあ、ついておいで」
おには にやにや わらって、あるきだします。ずしんずしんと
あるく おにのあとを、まゆは びよんびよん とびはねて、
ついていきました。



The Oni was very hungry that day.

Mayu looked so delicious that he immediately made up a plan to cook her in a stew and have her for lunch. He suddenly tried to sound friendly.

“Hey, little girl. Would you like to come over to play?”

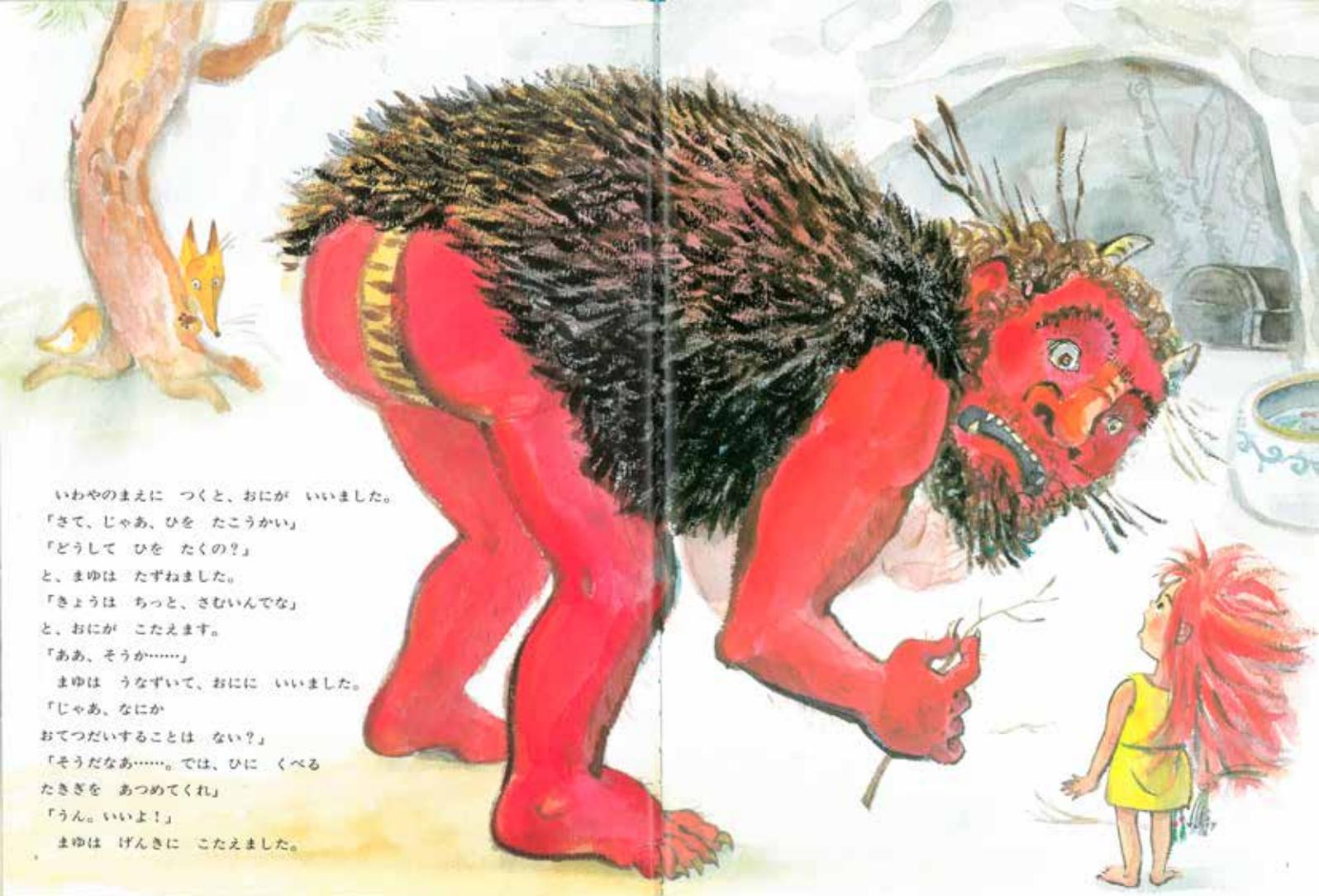
“Sure, mister!”

Mayu answered cheerfully.

“Follow me.”

Smirking, the Oni stomped his way through the forest.

Mayu jumped and skipped to keep up.



いわやのまえに つくと、おにが いいました。
「さて、じゃあ、ひを たこうかい」
「どうして ひを たくの？」
と、まゆは たずねました。
「きょうは ちっと、さむいんでな」
と、おにが こたえます。
「ああ、そうか……」
まゆは うなずいて、おにに いいました。
「じゃあ、なにか
おてつだいすることは ない？」
「そうだなあ……。では、ひに くべる
たきぎを あつめてくれ」
「うん。いいよ！」
まゆは げんきに こたえました。

Once they reached the Oni's cave, he said,

“Let's start a fire.”

“Why do we need a fire?” asked Mayu.

“Well, it's a little chilly today,” answered the Oni

“Oh, I see...”

Mayu nodded and said to the Oni,

“Can I help you with anything?”

“Let's see... Could you collect some firewood for the fire?”

“Sure!” Mayu answered eagerly.



そして、ちかくにはえていたふといまつのきを いっばん、
めきめきと わっこから ひっこぬいてしまいました。

She yanked a huge pine tree out of the ground,
roots and all.

「なんちゆう ちからもちの むすめっこだ」
びっくりしている おにのまえて、まゆは まつの きを
ばさばさと おって、たちまち たきぎの やまを つくりあげました。
おには たきぎに ひを つけながら、ちらりと まゆを みました。
「もっと おてつだいすることは ない？」
「そ……そうだなあ。じゃあ、ひを かこむ いしころを、
ふたつ みつつ、あつめてもらおうか」
「うん、いいよ」



“What an incredibly strong girl!”

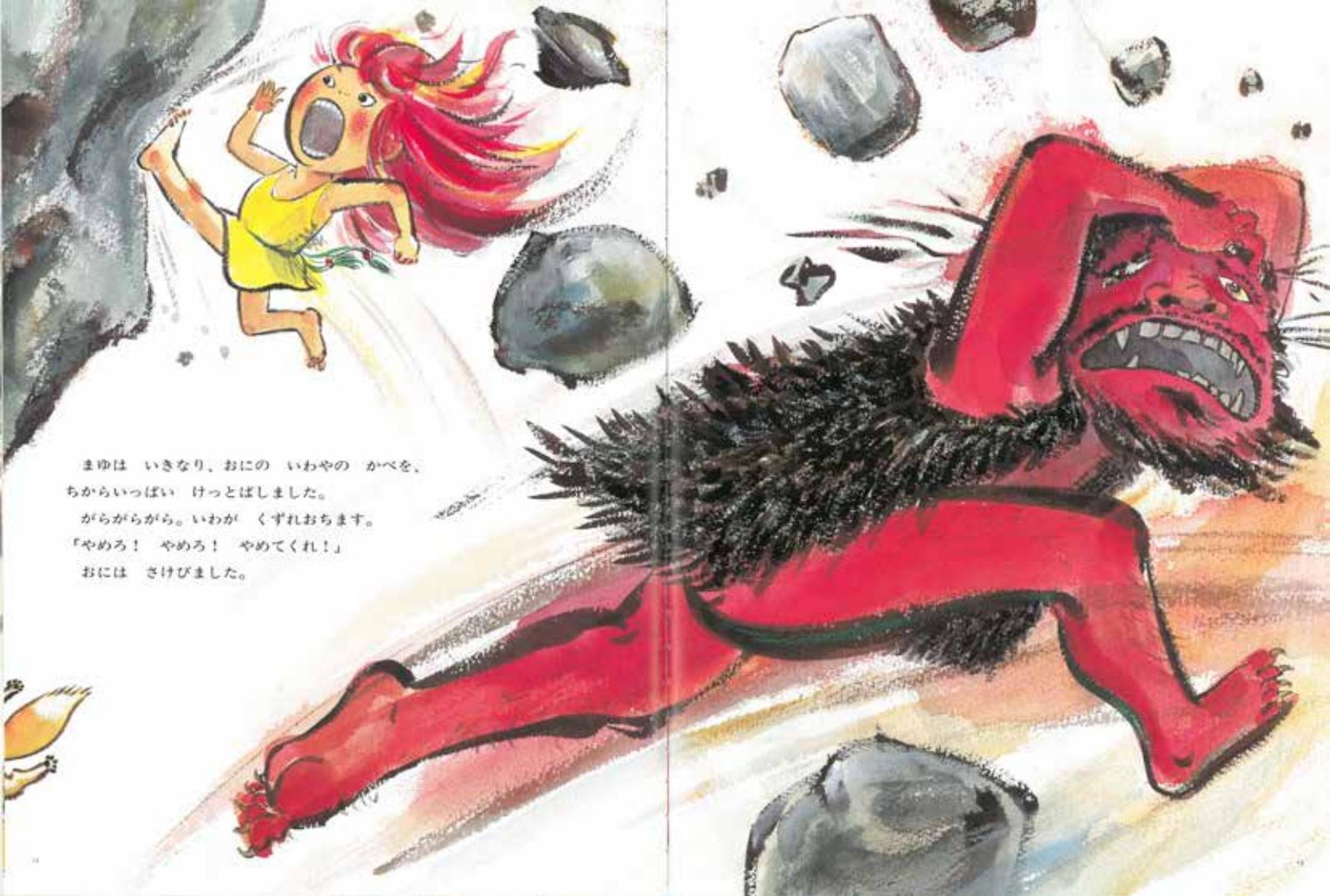
As the Oni watched open-mouthed, Mayu quickly snapped the pine tree into kindling and made a neat pile of firewood.

As he fed the wood into the fire, the Oni glanced at Mayu

“Is there anything else I can help with?”

“Umm...Well, would you gather two or three stones to put around the fire?”

“Sure thing!”



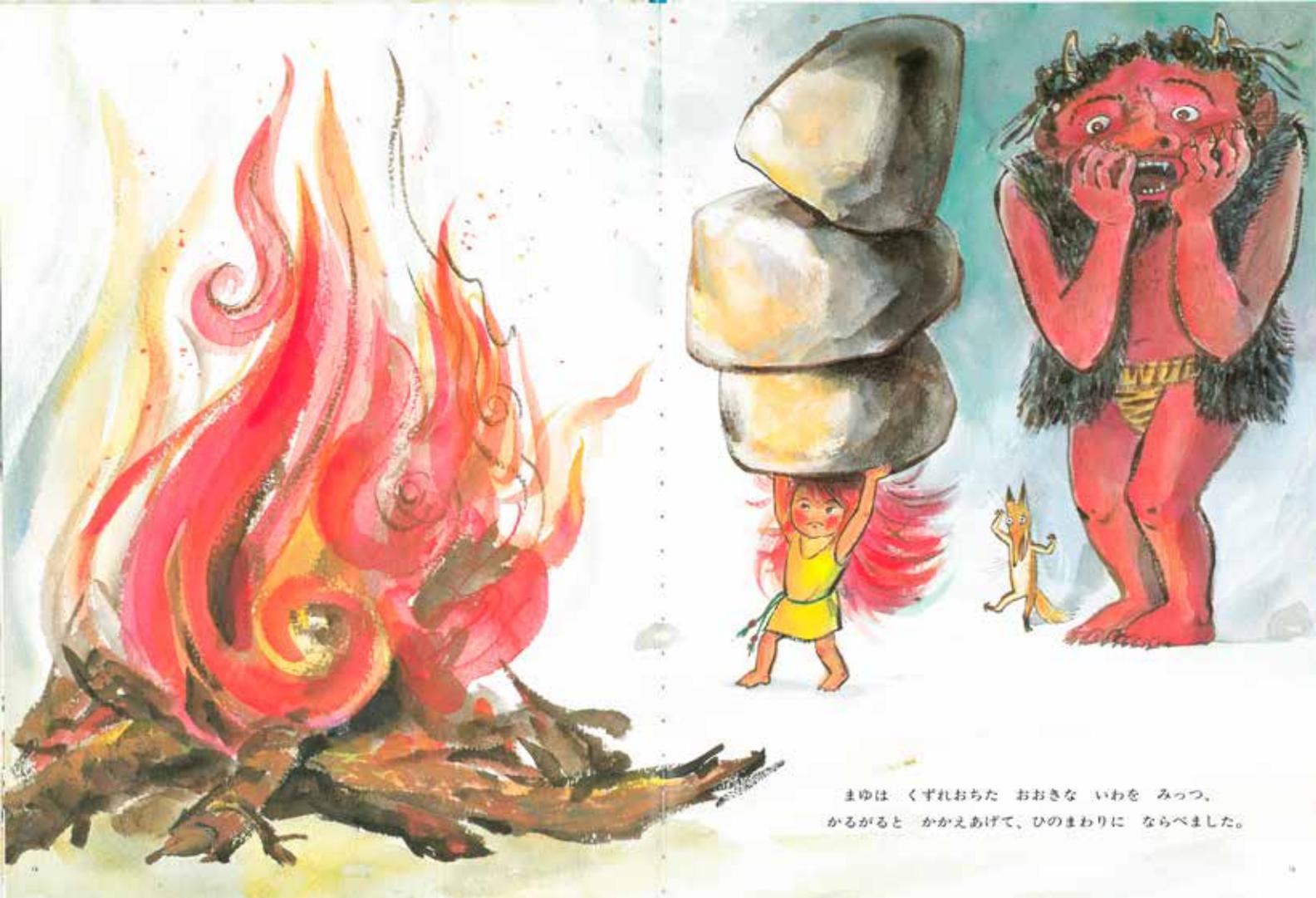
まゆは いきなり、おにの いわやの かべを、
ちからいっぱい けつとばしました。
がらがらがら。いわが くずれおちます。
「やめろ！ やめろ！ やめてくれ！」
おには さげびました。

Mayu took a sudden flying leap at the wall
of the Oni's cave.

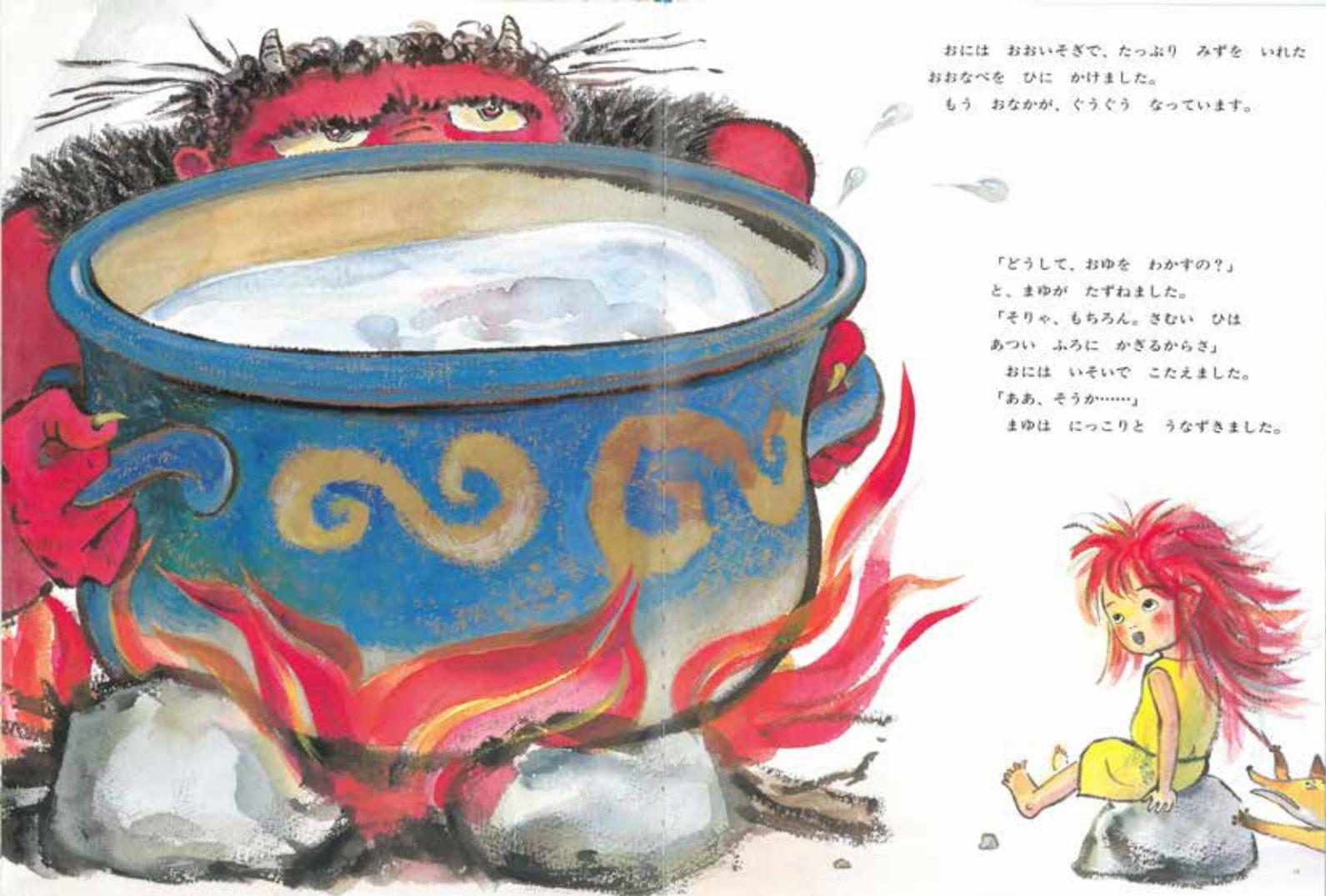
Rumbling, huge boulders came rolling down.

“Stop! Stop! Please stop!”

The Oni screamed.



Mayu scooped up three of the huge boulders she'd just broken off and arranged them around the fire.



おには おおいそぎで、たっぷり みずを 入れた
おおなべを ひに かけました。
もう おなかが、ぐうぐう なっています。

「どうして、おゆを わかすの？」
と、まゆが たずねました。
「そりゃ、もちろん。さむい ひは
あつい ふろに かぎるからさ」
おには いそいで こたえました。
「ああ、そうか……」
まゆは にっこりと うなずきました。

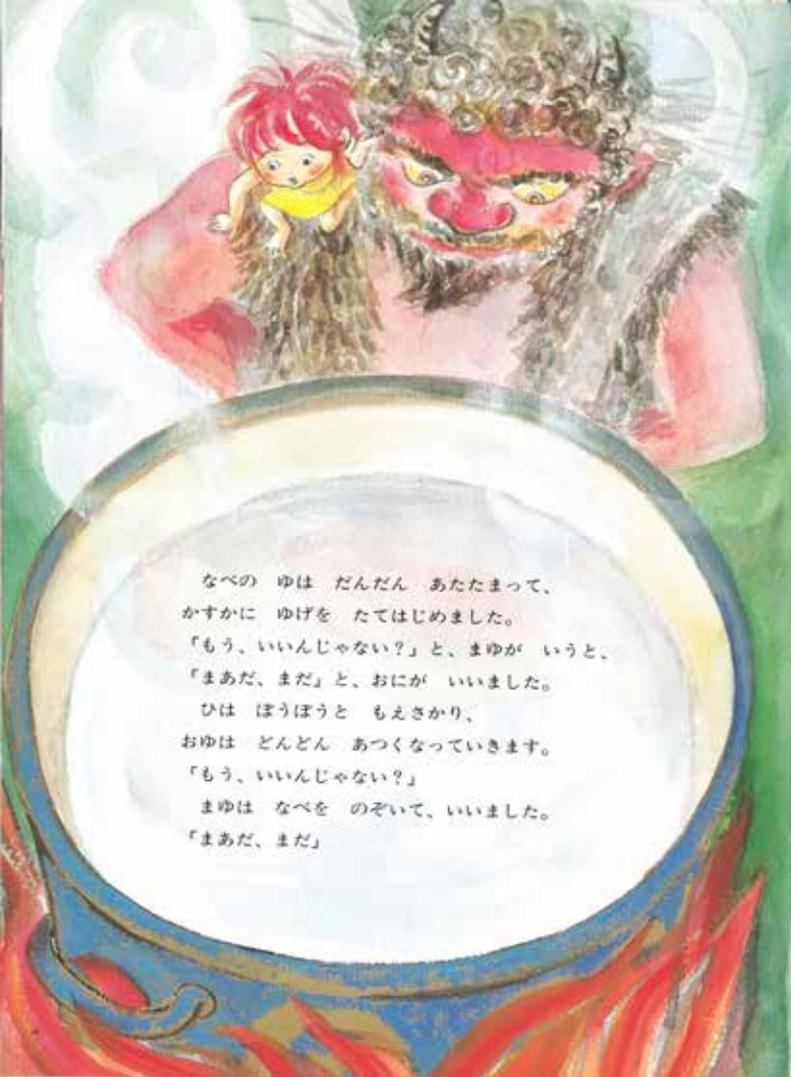
The Oni hurried to put a huge cauldron full
of water over the fire.

His stomach was beginning to growl with
hunger.

“Why are you boiling water?” Mayu asked.

“You’ve gotta have a hot bath on a cold day
like this, right?” the Oni hurried to answer.

“Oh, of course…” Mayu smiled and nodded.



なべの ゆは だんだん あたたまって、
かすかに ゆげを たてはじめました。
「もう、いいんじゃない？」と、まゆが いうと、
「まあだ、まだ」と、おにが いいました。
ひは ぼうぼうと もえさかり、
おゆは どんどん あつくなくなっていきます。
「もう、いいんじゃない？」
まゆは なべを のぞいて、いいました。
「まあだ、まだ」

なべの ゆは、もう ぐつぐつと にえてきました。
もう ちょっとで このむすめっこを、たべられるのかと おもうと
うれしくて、おには にやりと わらってしまいました。
「どうして、わらってるの？」と まゆが たずねました。
おには あわてて、こたえました。
「いや、なに、もうじき ふろに
はいれるかと おもうと、うれしくてな」
「ああ、そうか……」



The water in the cauldron grew warm and began to steam.

“It’s ready, isn’t it?” Mayu asked, but the Oni answered,

“No, Not yet.”

The fire was roaring and the water in the cauldron was getting hotter and hotter.

“Isn’t it ready, now?”

Mayu asked peering in.

“No, not yet.”

The water in the cauldron began to bubble.

He imagined himself feasting on the little girl in just a little while, and the Oni felt so happy he began to grin.

“Why are you smiling?” Mayu asked.

“The thought of taking a nice hot bath makes me smile,”

“Oh, of course…”



とうとう、なべの ゆは ぐらぐらと
わきかえりました。
「さあ、もう いいぞ、じょうちゃん。
あつい おふろに おはいり」
おにが そう いったとき、まゆは
おかあさんの ことばを おもいだしました。
「しんせつな ひとには、いつも、
れいぎたたくしなさい」
そこで まゆは、おもいっきり
れいぎたたくし いました。
「おさきに どうぞ」
そして まゆは――

The cauldron was finally boiling hot.

“All righty now, the pot’s ready for you, little girl. Why don’t you go ahead and take a nice hot bath?”

Just then, Mayu remembered what her Mama always told her.

“When someone is nice to you, don’t forget your manners!”

So Mayu decided to be extra polite and said,

“No no, after you, sir.”

And then Mayu...



ひょいと、おにを かかえあげ、
ざぶんと、なべのなかに
ほうりこんだのです。

...picked up the Oni and tossed him into the
boiling cauldron.

「ぎゃおー」
おには さげんで、なべから とびだしました。
「たいへん！」
と、まゆも さげびました。
「やっぱり、おゆが あつすぎたんだ！」



“Aaaaahhh!!”

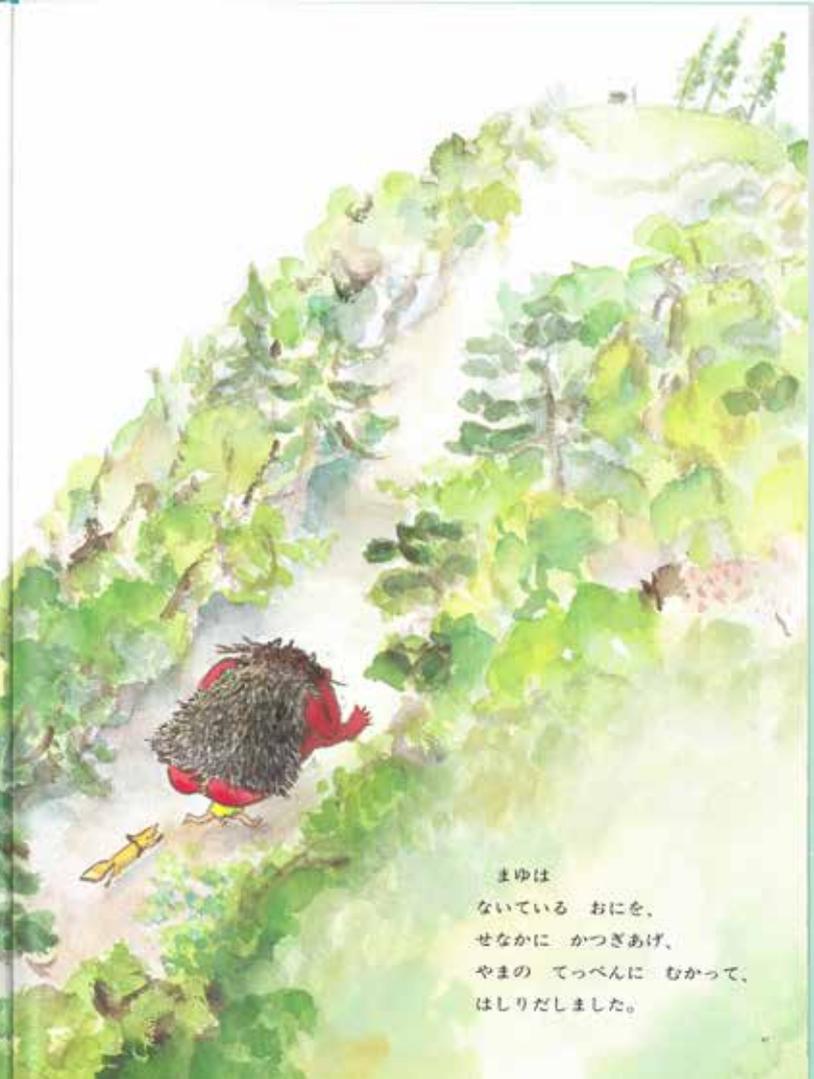
The Oni howled and jumped out.

“Oh no!” Mayu cried,

“I knew that bath water was too hot!”



おには おしりが あつくて いたくて、
おんおん なきだしてしまいました。
まゆは やさしく いいました。
「だいじょうぶ。だいじょうぶ。こんどは あたしの
うちに おいで。おかあちゃんが おくすり
ぬってくれるからね」



まゆは
ないている おにを、
せなかに かつぎあげ、
やまの てっぺんに むかって、
はしりだしました。

The Oni's backside was burned and painful
and tears streamed down his face.

Mayu said kindly,

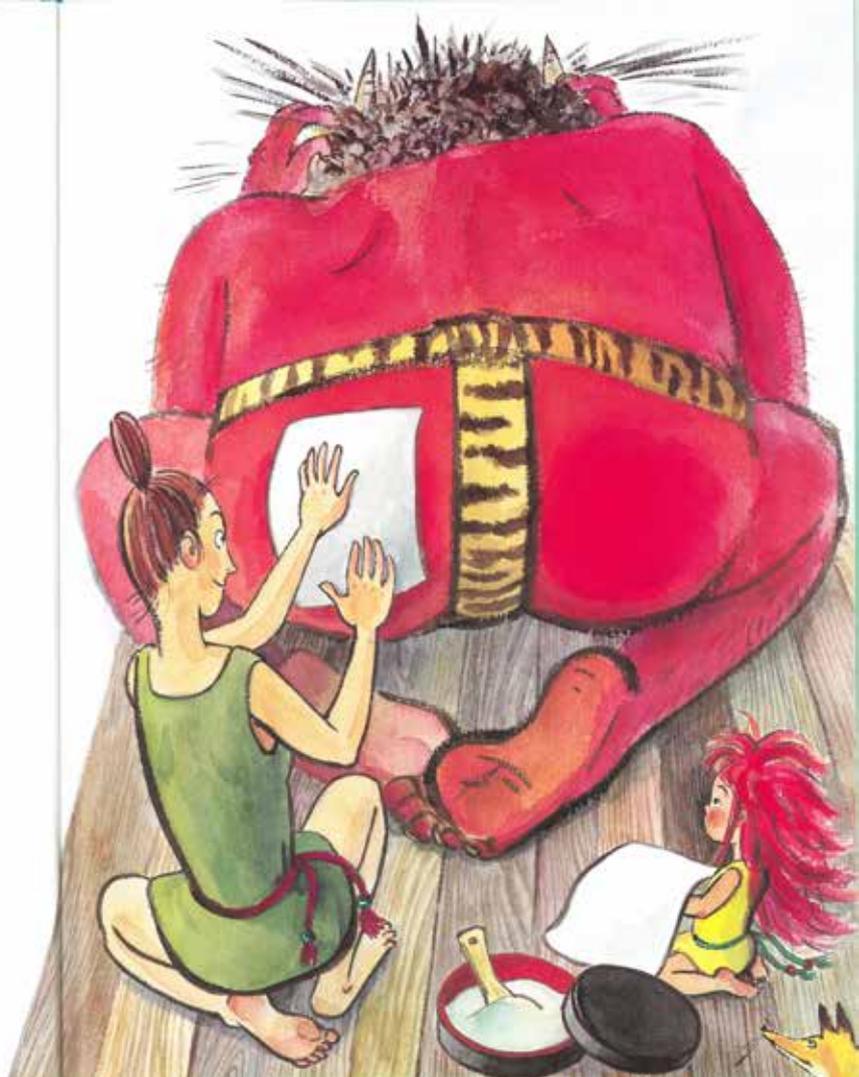
“Don't worry, mister. Please don't worry. You
can come over to my house. Mama will put some
medicine on your burn and make it all better.”

Mayu hoisted the crying Oni onto her back
and began running to the top of the mountain.



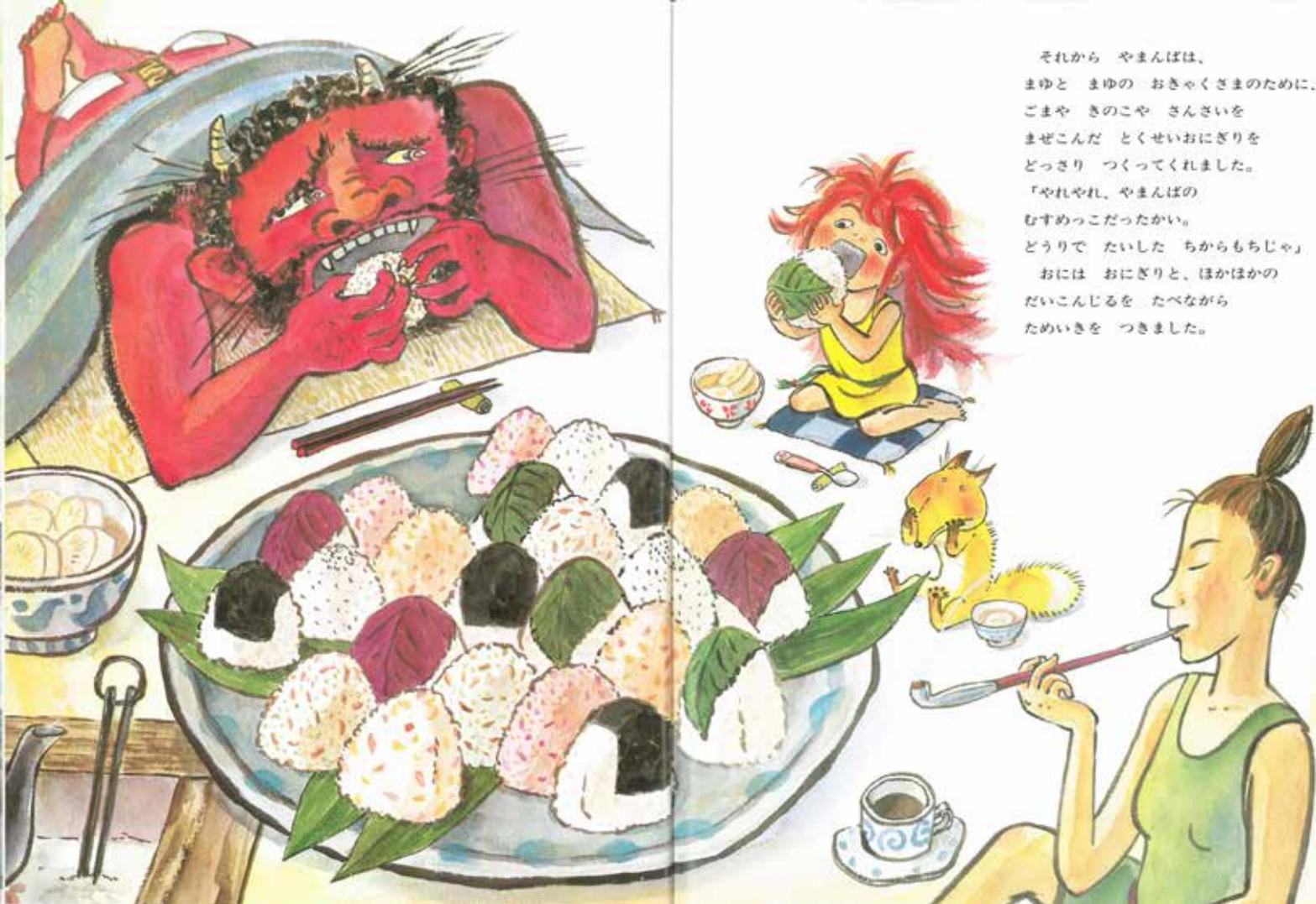
おにを おんぶして かえってきた まゆを みつけて、
やまんばが いいました。
「まゆ、おきやくさまかい」
「そう。おきやくさまだよ。おふろの おゆが
あつすぎて、おしりに やけどしちゃったの」

やまんばは おにの おしりに、こうやくを
べたべた はってくれました。



When she saw Mayu piggybacking the Oni,
Yamanba Mama said,
“Mayu, have you brought home a guest?”
“Yes, Mama. He’s my guest. His bath water
was too hot, and he burned his bottom real badly.”

Yamanba Mama put some nice cool plasters
on the Oni’s bottom.

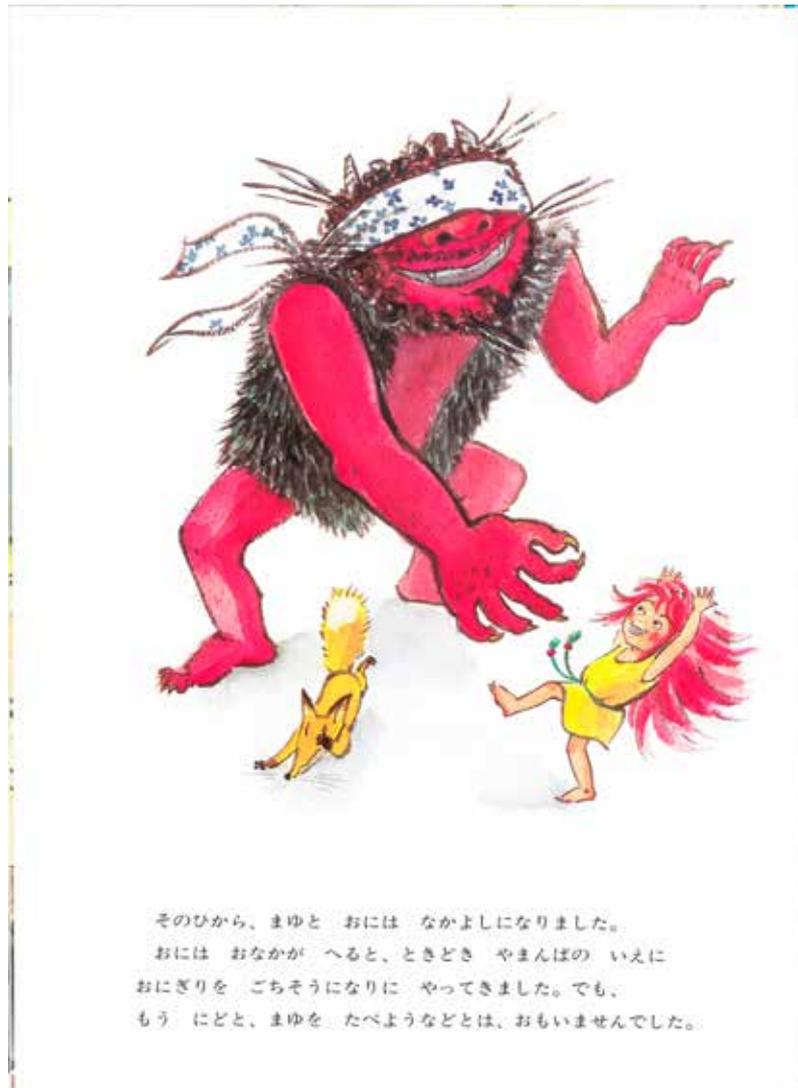


それから やまんぼは、
まゆと まゆの おきやくさまのために、
ごまや きのかや さんさいを
ませこんだ とくせいおにぎりを
どっさり つくってくれました。
「やれやれ、やまんぼの
むすめっこだったかい。
どうりで たいたした ちからもちじゃ、
おには おにぎりと、ほかほかの
だいこんじるを たべながら
ためいきを つきました。」

Then, she made some delicious rice balls for Mayu and Mayu's guest to eat. They were Yamamba Mama specialty rice balls with sesame seeds, mushrooms, and wild vegetables inside.

As he chowed down on the rice balls and hot radish soup, the Oni let out a sigh,

“The Yamamba's daughter. No wonder you're so strong!”



そのひから、まゆと おには なかよしになりました。
おには おなかが へると、ときどき やまんばの いえに
おにぎりを ごちそうになりて やってきました。でも、
もう にどと、まゆを たべようなどとは、おもいませんでした。

From that day on, Mayu and the Oni became good friends.

Whenever he got hungry, the Oni would visit the Yamamba's house for more of those delicious rice balls. But never ever again did he try to eat Mayu.

Translation by Sako Ikegami



盆まねき (Bon manekini)

Invitation to the Summer Festival of Bon | illus. Kazue Takahashi

Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2011 | ISBN 978-4035306108

Invitation to the Summer Festival of Bon

by Yoko Tomiyasu

illus. Kazue Takahashi | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 2011

The Invite to *Bon*

Every year just past mid-July, Natchan's family received a letter from Flute Blowing Mountain Grandpa. Natchan's Mum and Dad called the letter, The Invite to *Bon*.

"Hey, Natchan, we got that letter from Hot-Air Blowing Mountain Grandpa."

The Invite to was when the relatives were invited for three days in the middle of August for *Bon*, which is an event for the spirits of the ancestors to visit and relatives feast on great food. Hot-Air Blowing Mountain Grandpa was Mum's father.

Dad's mother and father lived only two towns away by train, but Natchan's Mum's parents lived far away in a big, old house in the country near Flute Blowing Mountain.

Natchan only saw Flute Blowing Mountain Grandpa once a year. And that was at *Bon*.

Dad always called Mum's father, Hot-Air Blowing Mountain Grandpa. That's because Mum's father, Grandpa Hide, was full of hot air and loves telling tall tales.

Grandpa Hide loved yoghurt so much, he ate it topped with

honey every morning for breakfast. Natchan once asked him why yoghurt is called 'yoghurt.' He blinked those big, round eyes of his a few times and replied, "After much stirring, someone yelled, 'you got it!'" Natchan, who's in the third grade, knows that this is can't be true. To prove it, the next morning she asked the same question. This time, Grandpa Hide rolled his round eyes and said, "The yoghurt was made with lots of energy, and someone ate it and said, 'You're good!'" So you can see how unreliable he can be.

Even so, Natchan, of course, loved her Hot-Air Blowing Grandpa Hide.

It was not only Grandpa Hide. Mum's relatives that gather at Flute Blowing Mountain Grandpa's over the three days of *Bon* are all funny and a bit peculiar. So Natchan loves spending her summer holidays with them.

This year, *Bon* had arrived. And, it was August, so Natchan would soon travel to Flute Blowing Mountain Grandpa's home with Mum and Dad, and her little brother Satoru, who was still only toddling around.

Chapter 1

Lazy John the Slug

Grandpa's Tale

August 12th

It was four hours by express train to Flute Blowing Mountain. From there, it was another hour by bus to Grandpa's house.

That day, one of Natchan's male relatives came to pick them up from the station. Natchan didn't really know who he was.

Over the three days of *Bon*, many people came and went at Flute Blowing Mountain Grandpa's place, and it was hard to remember who they were. Some relatives you saw every year. Some you saw every few years. And some you were meeting for the first time.

Whenever someone new arrived, everyone in the house erupted into a greetings contest. Even if you listen closely to what they were saying, it was hard to work out who was who. "This is Seizo's daughter Haruko's eldest son." Or, "you know, that side, the Suetsugu's eldest son's wife's younger sister." There's no way you can remember them all.

To be honest, Natchan was pretty sure that even Grandpa Hide and Grandma Michi didn't know who everyone was.

If there was one person who could properly recognize every single guest, it could only be Big Grandma.

Big Grandma was Grandpa Hide's mother. She was Natchan's great-grandmother who lives at Flute Blowing Mountain together with Grandpa Hide and Grandma Michi.

Since Natchan couldn't tell one guest from another, she had six different ways of calling the relatives visiting Grandpa's home when she didn't know their names.

It went something like this...

If the guest was male, she called him uncle, granddad, or older brother.

If the guest was female, she called her aunty, grandma, or older sister.

Today, the man who came in the car to pick up Natchan's family was somewhere between an uncle and an older brother in age, but Natchan decided to call him 'uncle' in the end. Natchan, Dad, Mum and Satoru rode in the uncle's car over several mountains until they reached Grandpa Hide and Grandma Michi's house.

As you turned the curve on the main road where the bus stop was, the road gently sloped downward, and the big tile roof of Grandpa's house came into view, right in the middle of bright green, rice fields. As soon as Natchan saw it from the top of road, she knew they'd finally arrived at Grandpa's house, and she felt happy tingles all over.

The sun was already in the west, and the waving ears of rice were bathed in gold. The cicadas in the mountain forest at the back began chirping as Natchan's family unloaded their things from the car.

Inside Grandpa's house, preparations had already begun for *Bon*, which was to start tomorrow.

Natchan's family greeted everyone and took their things to the tatami-floored room way in the back where they always stayed. Then, they all sat formally with knees folded in front of Grandpa's family Buddhist altar.

The altar was lit by a dim light and had two arrangements of lotus seedpods and flowers in vases on the left and right. On the one-legged table was an arrangement of large peaches and a bunch of marvelous Kyoho grapes. Over the three days of *Bon*, there would be a stream of relatives filing through to pay their respects, so the altar doors were left open for business 24 hours a day.

Mum lit a new stick of incense and Dad rang the bell once. Natchan sat up straight right behind them and prayed for ancestors whom she had never met.

Three memorial tablets were lined up on Grandpa Hide's altar. One was for Grandpa Hide's father, another was for his older brother, and the last one engraved with 'Generations of Ancestors' was for all the ancestors before them. *Bon* was when the souls of these ancestors returned home, and everyone gathered to welcome them back.

After they'd paid their respects, Natchan's mum immediately put on an apron and joined the preparations in the kitchen. In the spacious kitchen were Mum's two older sisters, Aunty Masako and Aunty Akiko, and Mum's younger brother, Uncle Shohei's wife, Aunty Ritsuko. Together with Grandma Michi, they were preparing food for the flood of guests that would arrive tomorrow.

The kitchen at Grandpa's house used to have a dirt floor. It now had proper flooring, but it was one step lower than the main part of the house. A large cooking bench stood immovably in the middle. Numerous large, steaming pots simmered on the stove giving off delicious aromas. You had the deep-frying smell of oil, the salty-sweet smell of fish stock, the sweet smell of glutinous rice steaming, and a bunch of other smells mixed in. All these delightful scents were gently stirred together by the breeze that came in through the window and

swept them through the house and into the reception room in the main house.

“Where’s Grandpa Hide?”

Natchan had been looking for him for a while. He wasn’t among the people who came to greet them when they arrived.

Grandma Michi, who was wearing a sleeved apron, turned to Natchan as she was shaking the water off the shiso leaves she had just washed.

“He went off with a dustcloth saying he was going to clean the altar room, Natchan. Didn’t you see him?”

Natchan shook her head from side to side. When Natchan and her family entered the room where the family Buddhist altar stands, it was empty.

Grandma broke into a bewildering chuckle and sighed.

“Dear me, he’s gone missing. Natchan go have a thorough look around. Oh, and Totchin’s here too. He was excited to hear you were arriving today, but he’s most probably with Grandpa right now, so go find them both.”

Totchin was Natchan’s cousin and Uncle Shohei’s son, and they were the same age.

Natchan immediately ran through the middle corridor, peeking into each of the rooms as she went.

She stuck her head into Grandma and Grandpa’s room, which faced the east garden, and found them.

“Grandpa, hel...” Natchan stopped and stared, swallowing the ‘...lo.’

Grandpa Hide and Totchin were side by side, lying face down on the tatami-matted floor.



© Kazue Takahashi

“Shhh,” said Totchin, turning only his face toward Natchan.

“Wha... what are you doing?” Natchan asked in a whisper.

“Snail rescue,” Grandpa Hide replied, without looking up.

“Rescue,” Totchin repeated, looking at Natchan.

“Sna-il, res-cue?”

Grandpa finally turned his head toward Natchan, whose head was tilted in surprise. He gave her a big grin and waved her over. Of course, without moving from the floor.

When Natchan heard the word ‘slug’ she became afraid, so she moved very cautiously toward Grandpa and sat down beside him.

“You can’t see it properly if you’re sitting. You have to lie on your stomach, like this, to see the slug’s trail.”

Grandpa Hide rested his chin on his folded arms on the tatami and tilted his head quizzically. Natchan stretched out beside Grandpa, opposite Totchin, crossed her arms, and placed her chin on top. She then tilted her head slightly and stared at the surface of the tatami from the side. There it was. She could see the shiny, slug trail.

“Hey, I see it now,” said Natchan.

“It’s over there. There, in the alcove, behind the doll,” said Totchin.

“All right. Wonderful,” said Grandpa, nodding with approval, as he slowly lifted himself off the tatami.

“We’ve located him,” he said and lifted the old ceramic doll from among the muddle of things in the alcove. He put it aside and looked behind.

“Here it is!”

Grandpa took the slug between two fingers and held it out to them. Natchan jumped up from the floor and backed away. Totchin leaned forward.

“It’s the slug!”

Totchin’s face brightened with joy. Natchan thought, ewww, and asked Grandpa Hide, “What’s a slug doing here?”

“This slug lives inside the pot on the verandah that holds the urn plant,” Grandpa Hide replied. He cradled the slug in both hands, like he was handling something precious.

“The rain yesterday must have put the slug in a happy mood. Slugs love damp, moist days. So a rainy day is a fine day for slugs. The weather must have been so good that it decided to go out on a little adventure. It left our potted plant, crossed the verandah, traveled through the tatami-floor desert, and made it all the way over here.”

Natchan and Totchin followed Grandpa Hide as he carried the slug in his hands to the potted plant on the verandah.

There was a dustcloth and a small, blue bucket filled with water on the verandah. Grandpa placed the small slug on top of the soil in the urn-plant pot. Then, he scooped up some water from the bucket

with one hand and sprinkled it over the slug's body.

That moment, Natchan was surprised to see the slug, which hadn't moved until then, begin to wriggle around.

"Awesome," Totchin whispered.

"Did it come back to life?" Natchan asked.

Grandpa nodded his head seriously.

"It did. It had dried out after its long adventure, so it was happy to have a shower. It's saying, 'Phew, you saved me. I feel alive again.'"

Natchan looked at Grandpa Hide suspiciously.

"So slugs can feel happy?"

"Of course, they can," said Grandpa Hide, nodding with confidence. He rolled his round eyes and said, "That reminds me. Long ago, my older brother and I had a pet slug. Did I ever tell you the story of the clever slug?"

"A clever slug?" asked Totchin in a daze.

"No, you didn't," Natchan quickly replied.

Natchan thought to herself, here it comes! She knew that when Grandpa started talking like this he was about to tell one of his favorite, tall tales.

Grandpa patted his wet hand on the seat of his trousers and sat down in the corner of the verandah.

Natchan and Totchin sat on either side of him.

"That slug was a really, really smart slug, I tell you. His name was Lazy John."

Grandpa started his story as the late afternoon breezes blew through the verandah.

"This happened long, long ago when Grandpa was a kid, just around Totchin and Natchan's age."

My older brother Shunsuke and I both kept lots of slugs. We put dirt and dead leaves in a big, square seaweed can and poked lots of holes in the lid with a pick. Inside, we placed the slugs we caught in the garden and raised them. We actually wanted a dog, but Mother said, no. So Shunsuke suggested we have pet slugs. It all started as an experiment.

Slugs would have to be the easiest pets to look after. They're happy even if you forget to feed them or anything, and they don't complain if you don't take them for walks. You don't have to clean up after they do a pee or poo. And they don't bark or make a fuss. They're well-behaved little kids.

The most we had at one time in that can was eight slugs. We could've put in more, but if we did, we wouldn't have been able to tell them apart, right? My brother and I could tell them apart because they were the big one, the tiny one, the long, slender one, the plump one, and we gave each of them names.

Of them all, the smallest and cleverest was Lazy John.

Lazy John was the slug Shunsuke found under a rock at the base of the persimmon tree in the garden. We place him in the tin can, gave him a name, and looked after him, too. We both soon realized that Lazy John was extremely smart.

Lazy John would come if you called his name. Even if he was hiding under dead leaves or under bark, when you called, "Come out, Lazy John," he would pop his head out and wriggle closer to you. And he would merrily slide the tentacles on his head in and out.

I wondered if Lazy John could actually understand human language.

So I put it to my brother, "Is there a chance that this guy

understands what humans say? Shall we give it a test?”

“Why not?” He straight away plopped Lazy John on the palm of his hand and asked, “Hey, Lazy John, if you understand what I’m saying, hold out one tentacle. If you don’t, hold out both.”

Well, what do you think happened? Straight away, Lazy John suddenly pulled in one of his two tentacles.

This meant he understood! But this may just have been a coincidence, and he was just about to pull it in anyway. It was my turn to try.

“Hey, Lazy John, which are you, a slug or a snail? If you think you’re a slug, two tentacles. If you think you’re a snail, one.”

Well, Lazy John instantly extended the tentacle he had just pulled in and turned to face me with two tentacles standing on top of his head.

This meant that he thought he was a slug. Lazy John understood us perfectly and knew what he was.

My brother and I were happy and excited. We thanked the gods that we were acquainted with such a smart slug.

From then on, we became great friends. It was thanks to Lazy John that we came to realize that slugs could be angry, happy, sulky, and sad. If we said something Lazy John didn’t like, he would pull in both his tentacles and look the other way. When he was happy though, he would extend his tentacles, and pull them in and out and wiggle them around, like he was really happy.

One day, Shunsuke wondered if Lazy John could talk. It was boring just asking yes or no questions and getting him to pull his tentacles in and out. He wanted to go further and teach Lazy John how to write. And this is what he did.

He dipped his finger in a cup of water on the table and wrote a letter with water, like 'a,' 'b,' or 'c.' He would get Lazy John to trace over the line of each letter and teach him writing.

And would you believe it? Lazy John soon learned the alphabet. He learnt all 26 letters in just three days, and that's a real feat. He was a genius slug, he was.

Now that he could write, we could have all sorts of conversations with Lazy John about many things. Lazy John would write, leaving a glistening trail on the verandah's wooden floorboards. "Let's go for a walk," or "I'm sleepy now." If I had fought with my friends at school and came home looking down, he would cheer me up with, "Don't worry." When my brother came first in a race at Field Day, Lazy John wrote "Congratulations."

Lazy John actually lived at our place for three years. I don't know what the average lifespan of slugs is, but I think three years is quite a long life for a slug.

One fall night in the third year, Lazy John disappeared. It was a very still night with the moon shining brightly. That night, for some reason, I suddenly woke up. I wanted to go to the bathroom, so I went out onto the verandah. There, glistening in the moonlight was a note for me.

It said, "Goodbye."

Can you imagine how surprised I was? My best friend wrote me a note, and left without saying where he'd gone... Well, Lazy John in general didn't talk, but... Where would he go?

I rushed into our room and shook Shunsuke awake, and we both searched high and low for him.

We peeked inside the can, we overturned the whole room and

looked throughout the house, all the while calling out Lazy John's name. And, we finally saw that Lazy John's rainbow-colored trail led straight outside through a gap in the verandah's glass-paned doors.

Of course, both my brother and I chased after him immediately. We desperately ran along the dark path, following his trail. The luminescent moonlight lit up the trail in the night for us. The glistening line continued on into the mountain behind our place.

... But when we got into the mountain, the fallen leaves that covered the ground got in the way and we lost Lazy John's trail.

Shunsuke and I headed deep into the pitch dark, mountain forest, calling Lazy John's name over and over. Our throats were so hoarse they were almost red raw, but we kept calling and calling.

Well, something strange happened just then. A small rainbow lit up the night sky. It was like a dream. The rainbow stretched from the top of the mountain toward the moon.

"It's a rainbow! A rainbow!" I exclaimed.

Shunsuke took strong hold of my arm and quietly said, "Hide, that has got to be Lazy John's trail. He's probably climbed into the sky from the top of that mountain."

Grandpa stared beyond the garden into the fading light of the day. He turned his gaze to Natchan and Totchin, and broke into a smile.

"That's the end of the tale of the cleverest slug. That was the only time I ever saw a night rainbow."

"Is that really, really, really a true story?" Totchin asked seriously, looking up at Grandpa with round eyes.

"There's no way it can be true. It's just a tall tale, right, Grandpa?" said Natchan.

Grandpa then blinked his big round eyes like he always does and grinned.

“Lies are slightly different to tall tales.

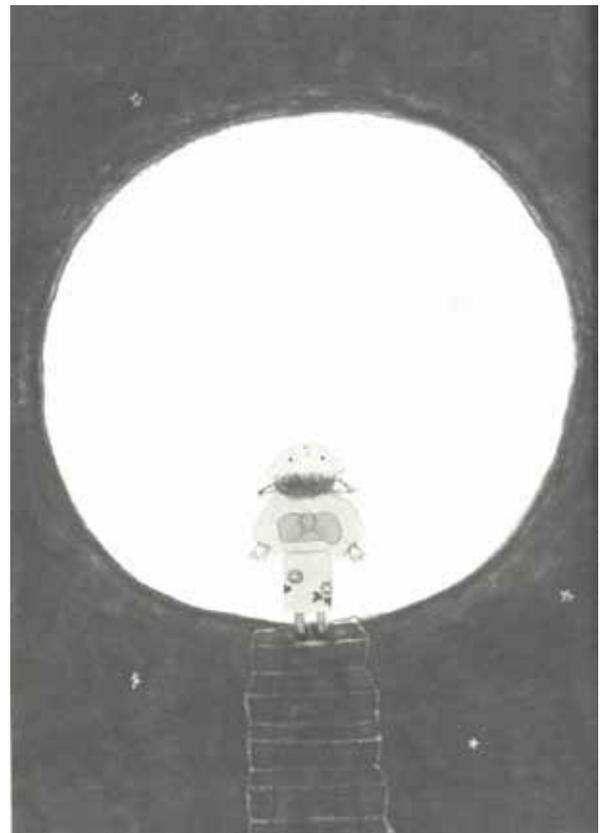
People are tricked by lies.

People are entertained by tall tales.

Even if it’s the truth, even if it’s not, if it’s entertaining, you’ve succeeded. That’s a tall tale.”

His reply didn’t sound like much of a reply. When he was done, Grandpa Hide got straight up off the verandah.

“So, let’s wipe the slug’s trail clean with the dustcloth, so Grandma Michi won’t find it. Grandpa’s pet slug is a secret from Grandma Michi.”



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another story—a true story at the end of the book



One More Tale

One final, true story

In this story, Natchan had a grandfather called Grandpa Hide. My father's name is Hide. Natchan's Grandpa Hide had an older brother called Shunsuke. My father also had an older brother called Shunsuke. In other words, I have an Uncle Shunsuke. So I'd like to share something about the real Uncle Shunsuke. Not a tale, but a true story.

My father's older brother, Shunsuke, took off from Kanoya Air Base in Kagoshima in a Zero fighter plane loaded with a 500-kilogram bomb and only enough fuel for a one-way flight on May 14, 1945, never to return. At the time, his family didn't know that he was a kamikaze pilot.

The family had no further news of Shunsuke until the day they received a notice that he had died in battle. But when they looked inside the box that was supposed to contain his ashes, it was totally empty.

Uncle Shunsuke just disappeared one day, leaving no trace of himself behind. No memento, not even a strand of hair or shard of bone. Three months later, World War 2 ended.

After the war against the Americans and their allies, some men from Shunsuke's unit visited his parents. They said to my heartbroken grandfather,

"Some pilots in the Special Attack Unit had to make emergency landings due to engine failure or bad weather after they took off, and those men wound up surviving. So, there is still a chance that Shunsuke survived, and he may come home someday."

They probably just said that to comfort Grandpa who was devastated about losing his son. But Grandpa pinned hope on those words and, right up to the day he died, he waited every day for my long-gone Uncle Shunsuke to come home.

Aunty Fumiko, my father's older sister, told me that she still remembers Grandpa dressed in his best clothes, standing up straight and waiting outside the front door, staring across the road. He believed Uncle Shunsuke would one day come walking around the corner and return home. He wore his fine clothes, because he wanted to look his best when his smiling son returned, shouting, "I'm home, Father!"

But Uncle Shunsuke never did. He took off from Kanoya Air Base and died at 6:56AM on May 14 when he crashed his plane into an American warship in the southern seas.

My family didn't hear about these details of his death until many years after it happened. Grandpa and Grandma had already died. Decades after the war ended, a man researching the Special Attack Unit learned about Uncle Shunsuke's final moments and contacted my father.

The day my uncle took off from Kanoya Air Base he headed for the seas south of Kyushu island. His target was an American aircraft carrier, called the USS Enterprise, and other American cruisers and

destroyers. The USS Enterprise was a strong, sturdy aircraft carrier that had survived many battles. The Americans fondly called it, 'The Big E.' Uncle Shunsuke was to fly his bomb-packed plane into The Big E to sink it.

On that fateful day, 26 planes, including Uncle Shunsuke's, took off from the Kanoya and Chiran military bases aiming to attack the American fleet positioned in the south.

As a dim glow began to lighten the eastern skies, faint engine sounds alerted the crew of The Big E to airplane shadows overhead. They immediately prepared to intercept the Japanese fighter planes.

The American fleet fired their heavy machine guns at the attacking planes, showering them with bullets. One by one, American fighter planes also took off from the deck of The Big E.

Six of the 26 Japanese planes were bombarded by flak and shot down. Nineteen lost the fighter plane battle and disappeared into the sea.

The one surviving plane was Uncle Shunsuke's Zero fighter.

According to the researcher, the identity of the pilot flying the Zero fighter had been a mystery for a long time.

This pilot didn't just recklessly crash into The Big E. He flew through the American attack and hid in the clouds to avoid being hit. When he was finally in the clear, he flew out of the clouds and into the blue skies, continuing to battle the enemy, and then flying back using the clouds for cover.

Just as the clouds passed over The Big E, the Zero fighter flew out of them for the final time.

It flew through the American fighter squad, rapidly dropping altitude. When the fighter was close enough to its target, it dived. At

the last minute, it looked like it would miss its target. It turned over, corrected its course, then flew upside down straight into The Big E.

A huge explosion erupted on the carrier's deck. Plumes of smoke rose over 130 meters, darkening the blue sky, and 13 members of the The Big E crew lost their lives.

Uncle Shunsuke also died.

When I first heard that Uncle Shunsuke died in the Special Attack Unit during the war while visiting my Tokyo grandma's house as a young child, I was overcome by fear and sadness. Until then, Grandma's house had always been cozy, fun, and peaceful, but now I felt as if something black and disturbing had seeped in.

Everything I loved, I found at Grandma's house—a water well with a hand pump, a small pond to play in, watermelon, ice cream, a bubble blower set, toys for playing house, my favorite grandma and my kind aunt.

The house that I thought had everything, was missing a precious someone, and that fact shook me. Think about it. If the plane he flew that day had been shabby and he'd been forced to make an emergency landing somewhere, or if the war had finished three months earlier, Uncle Shunsuke would still be alive today.

From that moment I sensed Uncle Shunsuke's missing presence in Grandma's house. You may find it strange that I'm talking about the lack of someone's presence but think about it. Imagine you're living as a family of four and someone goes away on a trip. You would notice that they were not there. I became very conscious of the fact that Uncle Shunsuke was missing since the day I learned about him.

When I was playing house, or when I was drawing in my picture diary, I became aware of the huge void Uncle Shunsuke left behind and

felt sad. The thought of never being able to meet him. I would often think about Uncle Shunsuke.

Did my uncle hate being part of the Special Attack Unit? What was he feeling as he took off from Kanoya Air Base? What was he thinking while waiting in the clouds for a chance to plunge into the carrier? Did he want to stay hidden in the cloud? Did he want to live instead of dying?

Even if I had wanted to ask, Uncle Shunsuke was no longer alive to answer these questions. Just like that day, long ago, when he left his younger brother playing hide and seek behind the shrine, Uncle Shunsuke left everyone behind and died alone.

I was born long after the war, and grew up without experiencing the horrors of war. So, I will never understand what Uncle Shunsuke was thinking at the moment he died, what he expected, or how he felt. And yet, why did I decide to write a story about him? Probably because I didn't want him to die a second death.

I've never met Uncle Shunsuke, but I've heard lots of stories about him from my grandmother, aunty, and father. How he was good at judo, what an expert he was on the harmonica, how he loved Auntie Fumiko's curry and rice, or all the fun he had camping out with his friends.

Although Uncle Shunsuke died in 1945, he remained alive in the hearts of his family. But in time, there will be no one left to remember him. When everyone forgets him, then and only then will he have truly disappeared from this world.

I didn't want my uncle who'd already lost his life in the war to suffer a second death. So, I wanted to write about the man called Uncle Shunsuke. How he had a family that treasured him. How they were

left with a void in their hearts after losing someone they cherished so dearly. About how good and happy their lives had been. This is a story about my family. But, after that war, there were probably many families like mine in Japan, no, actually, all over the world.

I've recently come to realize why we celebrate *Bon*. It is held to keep the spirits of those who have died, alive in the hearts of the living, so they don't die again. The extended family and relatives get together, pray in front of the family Buddhist altar for the souls of their loved ones, and have fun reminiscing about the old days. This is when the memories of the people they've almost forgotten, bloom to life in the hearts of those still here. This is when the spirits of the people who've died will return to touch those still living in this world.

Even after everyone who experienced the war has gone, I hope to keep the memory of that war alive.

Not as a story tale, but as hard fact that Japan once waged war. Not as a made-up story, but the true tale of how Uncle Shunsuke sacrificed his young life in that war. The fact that not only my uncle but also countless others died in the war. I want everyone who died in the war to always be remembered, so that they need not die again.

And I can't help but pray that my two sons, who are now nearly the same age as Uncle Shunsuke when he died, will never ever be sent off to fight in a war, encouraged with cheers of "Banzai!"

I pray that this year, next year, and all summers to come are forever full of peace.

Translation by George Bourdaniotis

小さなスズナ姫

富安陽子

つま かみ ひめ
小さな山神スズナ姫

飯野和好・絵



小さな山神スズナ姫 (Chiisana yamagami Suzuna hime)

Suzuna, The Little Mountain Godness | illus. Kazutoshi Iino

Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 1996 | ISBN 978-4035283102

Suzuna, The Little Mountain Godness

by Yoko Tomiyasu

illus. Kazuyoshi Iino | Tokyo: Kaiseisha | 1996



Did you know that a *yamagami*—a Japanese mountain god—lives on each and every mountain, keeping careful watch? The *yamagami* guard and cherish each and every life on their mountain, be it a tree, or grass, or bug, or beast, and ensures all bodies—the moon, the sun, and water—move and flow as they should.

Kisen Ooiwa no Mikoto was a great *yamagami* who guarded the soaring Kisen Mountain Range. Just south of the Mountain Range was Mount Suzuna. It is a little round mountain. Ooiwa no Mikoto had a daughter named Princess Suzuna who dreamt of one day guarding the mountain that shared her name.

Chapter 1

Little Princess Suzuna

Deep in the Kisen Mountain Range, where deeply wooded mountains folded into one another, stood one that soared high above all the others.

Called Kisenmine, its steep craggy boulders rose sharply, its peak always covered by mysteriously golden clouds.

Kisenmine was home to Kisen Ooiwa no Mikoto, the great and mighty *yamagami*, the mountain god who watched over the mountains to the North and to the South, to the East and to the West. Among the cloud-peaked craggy mountaintops, was a magnificent palace where Kisen Ooiwa no Mikoto lived quietly with his only daughter, Suzuna.

On that day, as on all days, Ooiwa no Mikoto rode off on a cloud to oversee the mountains under his guardianship.

His long, rich, pitch-black beard flowed down his broad chest as he sat on Speedy Cumulus of the Heavens, his favorite cloud, and smiled kindly upon Princess Suzuna.

"Suzuna my sweet, Papa has to go make his rounds of the mountains. You're still a tiny thing so be sure to stay indoors. Don't go off on your own, now, all right? Be a good little girl and wait here until my return."

Princess Suzuna gave a brief nod of her little black bob-haired head. "Yes, Papa."

Ooiwa no Mikoto seemed quite happy with her answer as he sped off from his palace in the heavens after sealing the gates closed.

He did this each time to protect the palace from tricksters and mountain demons and birds that fly on high, to keep them from entering the clouds of Kisenmine. Once Ooiwa no Mikoto spelled the doors shut, the golden cloud immediately armed itself with thunder and lightning, ready to strike any trespasser that might dare to try and invade the palace.

After Ooiwa no Mikoto had set off from his secret palace in the clouds, Princess Suzuna threw out her neatly folded legs and gave a big sigh.

"Day after day. Every single day!! All I do is stay at home! Here I am, stuck inside this puffy fluffy cloud, all alone. Poor me!"



© Kazuyoshi Iino

Of course, Ooiwa no Mikoto would sometimes take Princess Suzuna out for walks. Those rare occasions were wonderful treats when Princess Suzuna would ride Speedy Cumulus of the Heavens beside her Papa and fly all the way down to the mountaintops where she could see the spread of broad skies.

Green twigs swayed in the breeze and bright sunrays sparkled mountain streams, flowing silver between the deep valleys. Nesting birds, hidden inside thickly leaved trees, flew about busily to feed their precious young. Animals carefully made their way down to lap from valley streams, butterflies fluttered through the air, velvet wings on display, alongside dragonflies and other small bugs.

All *yamagami* are born able to see everything about the mountains they guard with just a glance, no matter how high in the skies they may be. A *yamagami* herself, little princess Suzuna could see raindrops sparkling on the web of a priest spider or the waving of antennae on an ant from above the clouds.

One day, Ooiwa no Mikoto pointed from his seat on the Speedy Cumulus of the Heavens towards a mountain to the south.

"See that little mountain? That is Mount Suzuna. You were named for it. What do you think? It's small, but round and friendly-looking, right?"

Suzuna held her breath. She couldn't take her eyes off that little mountain in the South.

Unlike all the craggy mountains around them, thick in cedars and pine trees, Mount Suzuna was a cute little mountain, round and covered in scrub.

The peak of Mount Suzuna had no forest and a sweet plain of fluffy lovegrass, making it look almost as if the little mountain wore a

golden crown.

At the very top of the crown, a huge camphor tree spread its branches offering kind shade.

One glance and Princess Suzuna fell completely in love with her namesake.

From that day on, Suzuna dreamt of one day becoming a *yamagami* worthy of watching over Mount Suzuna.

"I'm going to be 300-years-old in just three more days! Surely, I'm old enough to watch over a little mountain by myself, right? But Papa always calls me Little Suzuna and won't take me seriously at all!" (Now you may think a 300-year-old shouldn't be called "little" but gods age very slowly. Fifty years in god age is about the same as one of our human years.)

Princess Suzuna walked towards the window where the clouds parted and peeked outside. The breeze that blew through the mountains was already cold and clear.

The world outside the cloud was slowly approaching autumn. As she breathed in the wind that invited her to the outdoors, Princess Suzuna couldn't stand to stay inside another moment. She wanted to go out to experience the big wide skies.

"Birds and beasts, and even those slow-poke humans leave their nests once they've grown up. Why should I be the only one that has to stay locked up in the clouds forever and ever?"

If Papa thinks I'm still too little to be of use, I guess I'll just have to prove him wrong. I'll show him how sneaky I can be! How clever I am. How well I know the mountains and the living creatures that live within. And especially how well I know my spells."

Little Suzuna couldn't hide her sly smile.

Her papa probably couldn't even imagine that Princess Suzuna knew how to cast spells. Every time she begged her Papa, "Teach me," he would only say, "You're much too young to learn any spells yet." But Suzuna already knew some spells. She'd learned the spells her father used, secretly practicing them when he wasn't around. Of course, there were plenty of spells that were still too difficult for her. Even so, she'd have plenty of time to learn the hard ones once she became a proper *yamagami*.

First of all, she needed to show her father just how far she'd come all on her own. And to get her father to recognize her as the *yamagami* she was. Once she'd made up her mind what to do, Princess Suzuna was feeling very pleased with herself.

The sparkling skies, clear cold breeze, and mountain range lying below all seemed well within reach.

"I'm going to be 300-years-old soon. Then I'll be ready to go out on my own. You'll see. I'll be a proper *yamagami*," said Princess Suzuna in a sing-song fashion as she skipped through the palace in the clouds.

Translation by Sako Ikegami



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菜の子先生がやってきました!

学校ふしぎ案内 ◎ つむじ風の一学期



菜の子先生がやってきました! (Nanoko sensei ga yatte kita!)

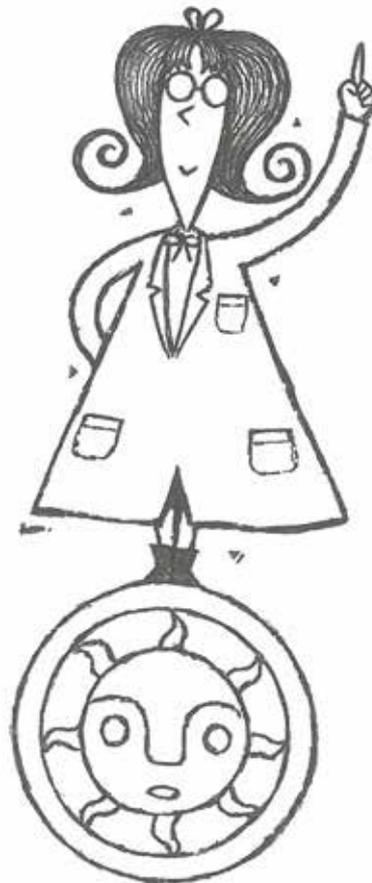
Teacher Nanoko Came!: School Mystery Guide | illus. YUJI

Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2003 | ISBN 978-4834006209

Nanoko the Magical Teacher -1- Here Comes Miss Nanoko!

by Yoko Tomiyasu

illus. YUJI | Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten | 2003



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Chapter 1

Hide-and-seak during Spring Vacation

It was spring vacation and the *sakura* cherry blossoms were in full bloom. Pale petals were already beginning to drift down at Minami Elementary School. It had been a warm spring and although there was still a week until the first day of class, the *sakura* in the schoolyard were starting to shed their flowers.

The school was completely abandoned and quiet amidst the quietly twirling snowstorm of petals.

Kento walked slowly around the schoolyard fence and looked up at the cotton candy-like branches of *sakura*. He'd just moved to this town today and would be starting the new school year in the fourth grade at Minami Elementary School in April.

This morning, his mom had been busy sorting away the moving boxes and suggested, "Why don't you go take a look at your new school?"

"That's a great idea!" Dad agreed. Their apartment was packed with cardboard boxes and Kento must have been in the way.

He looked out over the balcony of their apartment and saw the rectangular elementary school in the spring-hazed townscape. Light pink *sakura* petals swirled around the two buildings connected by a raised corridor like a cloud. Kento wanted to see his new pink cloud-

wrapped elementary school for himself.

This is how Kento found himself strolling down a gentle slope in his new town on that spring morning. He was on his way, all alone, to take a look at the elementary school.

The hands on the big clock over the school entrance pointed to 10:15.

His first impression of Minami Elementary School was that it looked a little faded and seemed to be older than Kento's previous school. The school building had settled itself under the light blue skies and seemed to be looking down at Kento as he arrived at the rear gate on the northern side of the schoolyard.

"Please get in line, all of you. Straight lines now, all in a row!"

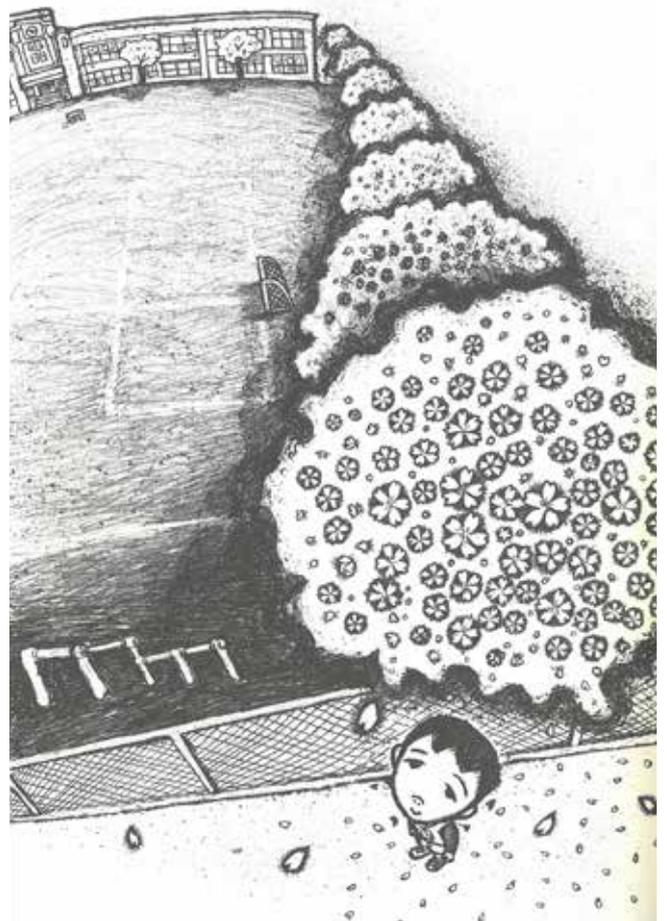
A brisk voice called out from under the *sakura* trees in the schoolyard.

Kento had thought the schoolyard was empty, so he stopped in his tracks, a little surprised.

A skinny tiny woman stood at the very end of a row of *sakura* trees that ringed the schoolyard. The *sakura* were growing along the north gate where Kento was standing. He hadn't noticed her because the woman had been hidden behind the thick *sakura* trunks.

"Now, let's count you all one more time. Please don't move your heads about. Stand up straight. In a proper row, if you please!"

The woman wore a scientist's white lab coat and had a pointy



© YUJI

nose upon which rested a pair of perfectly round spectacles.

What he couldn't make out, though, was who the woman was telling to "stand in a proper row." Even when he neared the fence and looked right and left, he couldn't see anyone in the schoolyard except for the woman standing under the *sakura* trees. Not even a cat wandering by.

Just then, a strong spring breeze blew past, shaking the candy cotton twigs of *sakura* in the school yard. Pink-white petals were swept up by the wind and came twirling down on the other side of the fence.

"No No! Silence! Would you please be quiet! Stand still! Honestly, you must stop this foolishness at once. Behave yourselves. I am going to count you so stand up straight and tall!"

The woman spoke firmly as if she were feeling quite put out and the *sakura* trees stopped rustling immediately.

It was almost as if they were behaving themselves because she'd told them to. Not a single twig or petal dared to move. The *sakura* in the schoolyard stood up with their backs straight and quietly stood in a row.

Kento stood there wide-eyed while the woman began to count.

"On—e Tw—o Thr—ee Fo—ur"

She seemed to be counting the *sakura* trees. ... which meant, oddly enough, that she had been lecturing the *sakura*, telling them to stand in line.

Kento felt quite confused. Before he knew it, he'd pressed his face up against the fence trying to see what the woman was doing.

Meanwhile, the woman was still counting the *sakura* trees one by one.

"...twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six..."

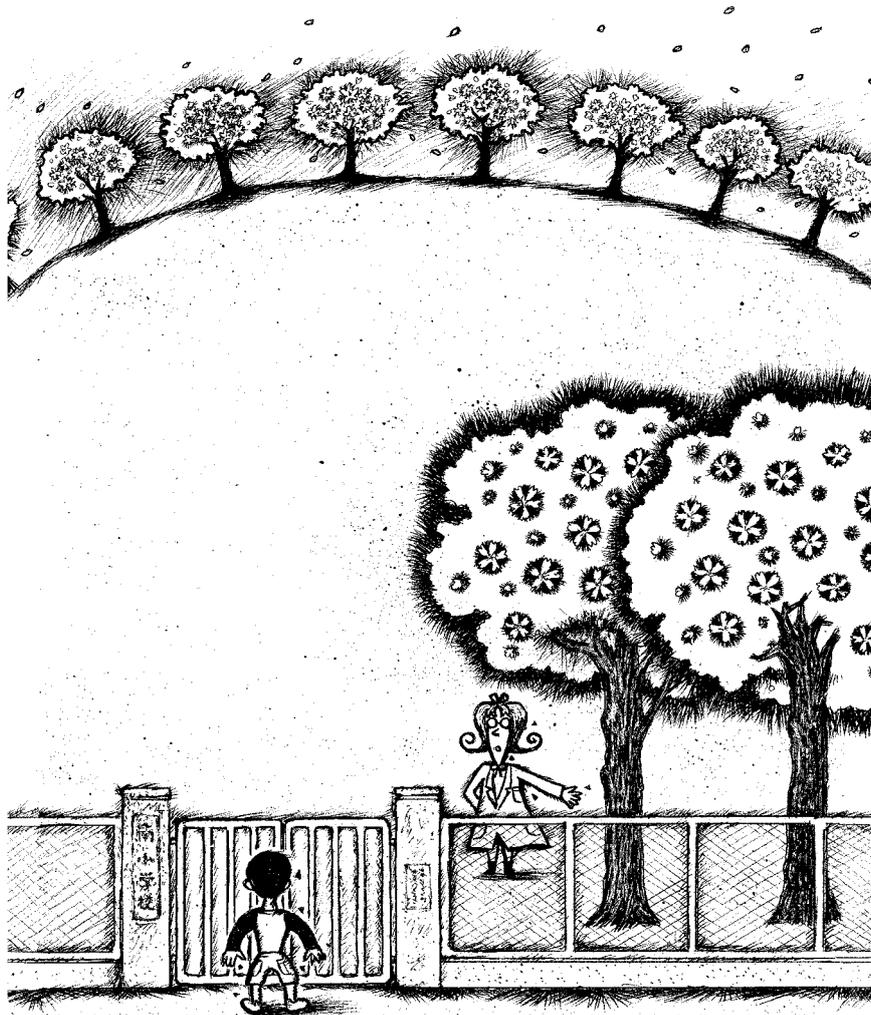
She let out a huge sigh after the twenty-sixth. The following moment, she twirled around towards Kento and said,

“Just as I suspected. One is missing. There ought to be 27 trees.”

Kento was so surprised he couldn't help jumping away from the fence. But the woman hardly seemed to notice. She left the trees and stalked up to the north gate.

“These things always seem happen at this time of year. We need to be particularly careful when the *sakura* are in full bloom. Spring winds make everyone lighthearted and gay and they lose all sense of propriety!” she said as she opened the north gate.

“Well, come inside”



“What?”

Kento became flustered, not knowing how to answer or what to say.

“My name is Nanoko Yamada. Everyone calls me Miss Nanoko and you’re welcome to do the same. You’re Kento Yamazaki, right?”

Kento drew his breath in sharply, shaken. He’d only just moved here. How in the world did this teacher already know his name?

Kento couldn’t utter a word and Nanoko repeated,

“Come, Yamazaki-kun. Please do come inside. We’re in need of your assistance.

You see, it’s not just a *sakura* tree that we’re missing. Only a week until the start of school, and it’s such a state of things...!”

Nanoko crossed her arms and heaved a great sigh.

“I can’t possibly take care of this all by myself.” Everyone is becoming quite ridiculous with spring fever. This is why the *sakura* season can be so trying,” said Nanoko as she smiled kindly at Kento. “Shall we start by taking a look around the school?”

She made it sound perfectly natural and Kento found himself walking into the school without even wondering what he was doing.

Before he realized it, the north gate had quietly closed behind him and Kento found himself in the quiet schoolyard standing under the *sakura* in full bloom with Nanoko.

“First, we’re missing a pair of indoor sneakers,”

Nanoko counted, folding a finger.

“We know the sneakers were last seen yesterday, sitting on top of the second-grade shoes cabinet, but they’ve been missing since this morning.

Next, we’re missing a library book. It’s a biographical picture

book for 6- to 7-year-olds called *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder*, which has also disappeared.

And... oh, of course. A *sakura* tree from the schoolyard. Who could imagine something as large as a tree could go missing!?”

Kento felt like he was the one who wanted to ask, “What?!” Missing sneakers or a book, he could understand, but how could something as big as an entire *sakura* tree disappear?

“And, I’m pretty certain there’s also something else missing as well...”

Nanoko tilted her head for moment, deep in thought, but seemed to give up right away.

“No matter, I’m sure I’ll remember. In any case, let us search for the indoor sneakers and picture book.”

“Bu....But where should we search?”

Kento asked hesitantly. He was in a completely new school that he didn’t know anything about, and he had no idea where to even start.

Nanoko frowned as she stared at Kento.

“We search, because we don’t know where to look. That’s the most ridiculous question I’ve ever heard, ‘Where should we search?’ Really!

You are supposed to use your head, not just let it sit on your shoulders! It’s not merely somewhere to put your hat, now, is it?”

Kento felt terribly sad to be so thoroughly scolded by a teacher he’d only just met.

But Nanoko continued without mercy.

“So, use your head. Where would you go if you were an indoor sneaker?”

It was terribly difficult trying to imagine himself as an indoor sneaker.



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“If you were an indoor sneaker and the weather was so warm and sunny and you were all on your own, would you want to be sitting on top of a shoes cabinet all by yourself? What would you want to be doing instead?”

Kento raised his eyes towards the corner of the schoolyard filled with soft spring light and then towards the entrance of the school. Inside the glass doors of the school entrance, it was dim and quiet.

Outside those doors, *sakura* twigs swayed in a balmy breeze. With the sun’s warm rays shining in, who would want to be stuck in such a dim and lonely place all by themselves, thought Kento.

Kento was finally imagining himself left all alone on top of the shoes cabinet.

“I...I’d...want to g...go outdoors... outdoors to play in the mud..., I guess?”

Kento mumbled in a tiny voice. Nanoko listened with her head tilted to the side and eyebrows scrunched together in a frown. For a moment, Nanoko just stood there silently while Kento braced himself for another scolding.

“Magnificent!” Nanoko exclaimed. “What brilliant thinking. Cheers to your excellent head!”

Kento looked up in surprise at Nanoko. Her eyes deep behind the round eyeglasses were shining like stars.

“Off we go! We now have a very good idea where the indoor sneakers must be.”

With those words, Nanoko suddenly began striding towards the school.

There was nothing else for Kento to do but follow the teacher.

Kento first thought she was going to enter the school building,

but instead, she walked past the entrance. Then, she disappeared around the corner of the school.

“Miss! Miss Nanoko! Where are you going?”

Shouting, Kento ran around the corner chasing the teacher and suddenly had to stop short. Nanoko was standing there on the other side of the corner.

“Shhhhh!”

Nanoko had sidled up directly against the school wall as she gestured to Kento.

“Quietly now. Look carefully without getting caught.”

Kento held his breath as he cautiously peeked out from behind Nanoko.

It was the entrance to the school’s center garden that stood between the north and south school buildings.

At the end of the long rectangular garden was a flowerbed for tulips and a small round pond.

Splash! Splash!

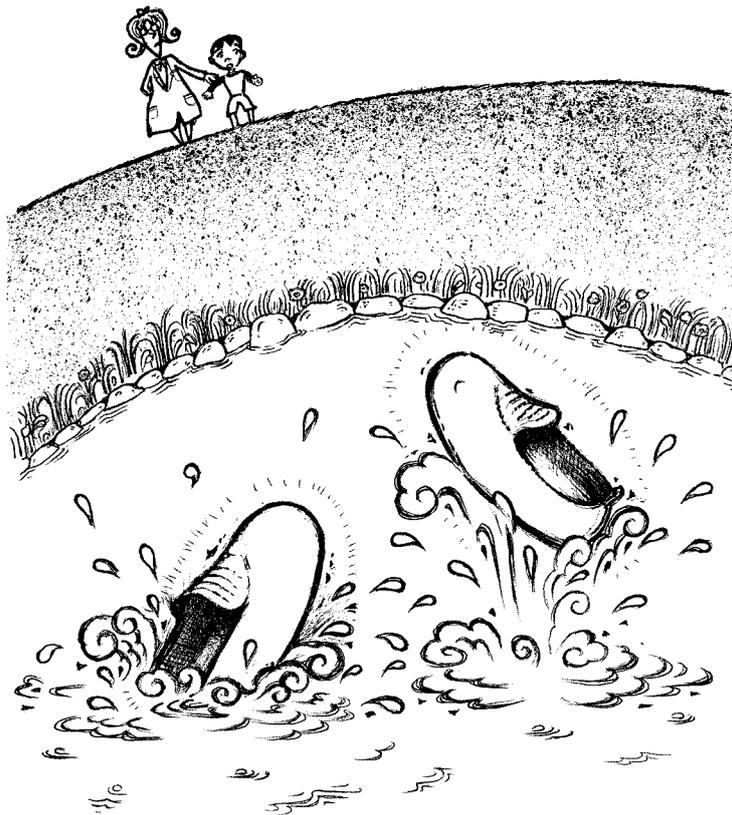
Kento could hear the sound of splashing water, and something jumping up and down. It came from the pond. Two small white shadows jumped into the pond from the surrounding stones.

“What is that?”

Kento squinted. The shadows that had jumped into the pond were now jumping and splashing about in the water.

“Woah!!” Kento couldn’t help shouting.

Those “things” were the missing white sneakers! Indoor sneakers splashing in the pond all by themselves?! Although their owner was nowhere near, the right and left sneakers were jumping up and down and enjoying the water, spraying it all about.



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“Shhhh!”

Nanoko warned again, but the moment Kento shouted, the pond went completely quiet.

“It seems we have been found out.” said Nanoko and let her tongue peek out. “Let’s get closer.”

Softly, the two of them approached the pond at the back of the center yard where the white indoor sneakers had been jumping in the water.

Tiny waves swam over the shiny surface of the pond. But the two shoes were completely still, as if nothing had happened and they remained floating in the pond.

“Well, well” said Nanoko sounding annoyed. She plucked the pair of shoes up out of the water with one hand after gathering them together.

The soaking wet sneakers were slick with mud. They were a pair of small, perfectly ordinary indoor sneakers, no matter how carefully you looked at them. No doubt one of the students in the younger grades had forgotten to take them home before spring break.

But Nanoko stared at the soaking wet sneakers and said in a firm voice,

“I hope you understand what you’ve just done. You may pretend that none of this concerns you, but we all know exactly what happened. I know perfectly well that the pair of you have been bouncing around on your own and playing in the mud and water.

See, you’ve left your footprints all around the pond and I can see how muddy you both are from playing in it. What naughty little shoes you are!”

It was exactly as Nanoko said. Kento could see that the little sneakers had left small wet shoeprints all around the pond.

The wet indoor sneakers seemed to be looking quite shamefaced in Nanoko’s hand.

“Ah well, no matter. It is such a lovely day and I can understand how anyone would want to go a little wild on a day like this. I shall wash you clean and leave you to dry, but I do hope that you will never ever again engage in such irresponsible behavior and go wandering about like this in future,” said Nanoko quite sternly as she shook the shoes around to rid them of the pond water.

“That’s strange...”

Kento, who had been looking at the little footprints in the mud, suddenly tilted his head in wonder.

“A petal...?”

The light pink *sakura* petal came floating down and landed in a

small wet shoeprint left behind by the sneakers. Looking more closely, Kento noticed there were petals gathered all around his feet.

“Where could they be coming from?”

Kento raised his eyes and looked around. But there wasn't a single *sakura* tree in the center garden between the two school buildings.

How could a flower petal from the trees in the schoolyard come flying all the way here?

Just then, another petal floated right past Kento's eyes.

And another, then two more...

Nanoko and Kento looked up towards the direction from which the gentle breeze was wafting. “What?!” they exchanged glances.

The flower petals weren't coming from the schoolyard! They were coming from deeper within the center garden on the other side of the connecting corridor. The petal appeared to have drifted over a tall wall. A shiny, white tile-covered wall.

They were coming from the pool!

Nanoko looked towards the tiled wall and Kento finally understood that the school's pool was on the other side of the wall that stood at the end of the center garden.

“Let's go see,”

Nanoko began tiptoeing carefully towards the pool, with the dripping sneakers still in her hand.

Kento followed his teacher quietly.

At the edge of the tile wall was the small gate that led into the pool. It was too early for swimming so the little gate was locked.

Nanoko went over the gate with no hesitation. She did it so easily that it looked to Kento for a moment as if Nanoko had floated

over. With her white lab coat spread wide, she rode the wind as she flew right over the gate.

On the other side, Nanoko held a finger to her lips and gestured, “Shhh!” as she lent Kento a hand to help him climb quietly over the gate.

Beyond the gate was a short concrete staircase.

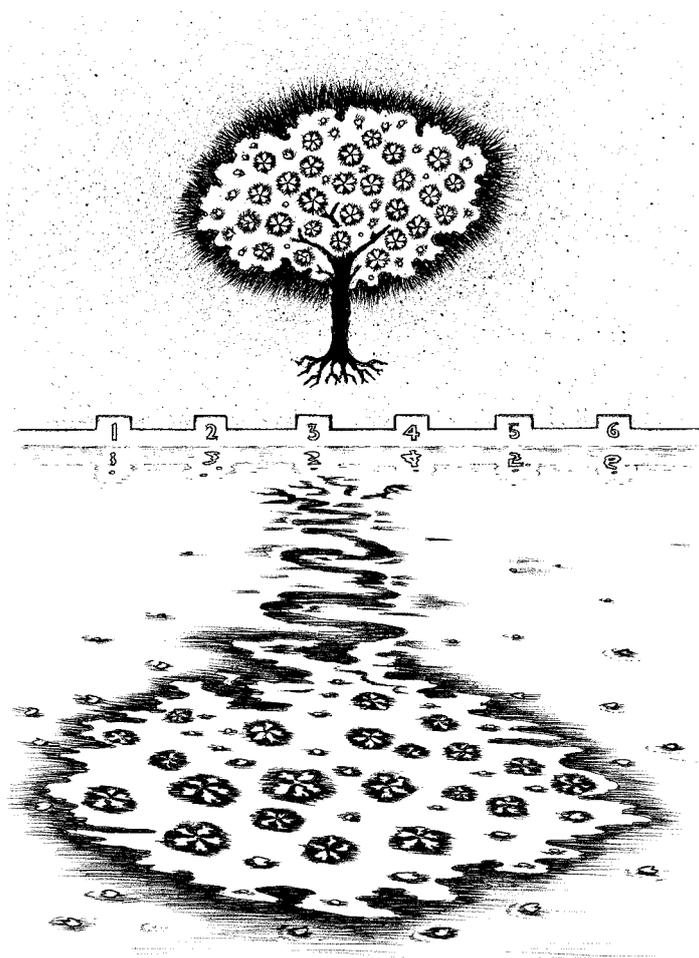
Softly, carefully they climbed those stairs.

A broad 25-meter pool spread out before them and on the other side of the deep murky water, a huge, light pink shadow was shifting.

A *sakura* tree spread its branches wide, its twigs bursting with white flowers in full bloom.

Kento swallowed and stared at the tree by the pool, up to its very top and down to its roots.

The tree wasn't planted by the pool or growing there. No, it



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wasn't rooted. Instead, its broad roots were hanging well above the concrete, floating in thin air. The thick trunk leaned towards the pool as it stood by itself, all alone. The green murky surface of the pool water clearly reflected the beautiful *sakura* tree in its full glory.

"Hey! You there! Go right back to where you belong!"

Nanoko shouted at the tree.

A burst of strong wind blew as if to wipe out her shout. The light pink *sakura* petals rose up in the air like a snow storm and formed a twirling funnel.

Blowing loudly, the wind trembled the water surface and roared through the little branches of *sakura*. For a moment, Kento's view was interrupted by the wild spring blast and dancing white flowers.

By the time the winds finally quieted down, the *sakura* tree had disappeared.

"I can hardly believe that a tree would go off on such an adventure. What a silly vain *sakura*!"

Nanoko muttered as the petals fluttered and twirled around her.

"The *sakura* was trying to see its own reflection in the water of the pool. It had bloomed so beautifully that it couldn't resist the urge to catch a glimpse of itself."

Kento nodded uncertainly and looked around the poolside from where the *sakura* tree had disappeared.

On the surface of the wavering pool water snow-like flower petals floated, thickly stacked on the water. The wind that had blown around Kento was still full of the sweet scent of *sakura* and two or three petals still lingered in the breeze.

"Well, let's wash the sneakers while we're here."

With those words, she took the sneakers to the sink by the pool.

Using cold tap water, Nanoko scrubbed away at the indoor sneakers while Kento watched her quietly.

“Well, thanks to you, Yamazaki-kun, we’ve managed to find two of the missing items.

All that’s left now, is the picture book. I do hope we find it soon. I’m sure that it, too, has wandered off and is taking a walk somewhere in the school,”

Nanoko declared as she glanced at the indoor sneakers, which were now clean as new.

Nanoko picked up the indoor sneakers and returned to the main entrance of the northern school building. She placed the shoes in a pool of sunlight under the eaves of the entrance, and then stood up straight as she looked around the schoolyard.

“One, Two, Three, Four...”

Nanoko began to recount the trees. This time, Kento counted along with her.

“Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen...”

Starting with the *sakura* along the north gate, they counted all of the *sakura* trees circling the schoolyard.

“Twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven!”

This time, all of the 27 trees were definitely there. Nanoko looked very pleased and smiled broadly.

“All right, now we’re set. All the trees are finally back where they belong.”

Kento tilted his head and asked,

“But Miss Nanoko, how can you tell which tree is the one that was missing?”

Kento couldn’t tell the trees apart and didn’t know how to

identify the runaway *sakura* from among the 27 trees lining the schoolyard.

“It’s that one over there.”

Nanoko pointed towards one of the trees.

“See? Look carefully at that tree behind the swings. Do you see how it’s the only one with a leaning trunk? That tree was peering at its reflection in the pool for so long that its trunk bent forward.

Just then...

Something large took off from the back of the Wisteria trellis right next to the swings.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh

Flapping its large square wings, the object began to fly merrily between the *sakura* trees.

“Oh no!” Kento couldn’t suppress a little shout.

“Blasted fool...”

He could hear Nanoko mutter under her breath. Kento looked up at the teacher in surprise and she apologized,

“Excuse my language,” with a completely serious expression.

“M...Miss...That...That’s probably...”

Kento began, and Nanoko nodded firmly.

“Exactly. That, without question, is *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder*. It’s completely lost its senses in this balmy spring weather and thought it should aim for the wide blue yonder. What an absolutely ridiculous book. We must capture it and teach it a lesson!”

Nanoko immediately set off down the main entrance stairs and began running towards the schoolyard.

“Wait! I’m coming, too!”

Kento chased after his teacher excitedly.

“Shame on you! Yes, you. That flying book up there! You are NOT the Wright Brothers! You are a picture book! You must immediately cease this nonsense of aiming for the wide blue yonder!”

Nanoko shouted as she ran across the schoolyard.

A wafting breeze made the *sakura* petals dance through the schoolyard. *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder* flapped its way through the trees, weaving through the *sakura* petals. The book was so happy flying through the trees that it didn't hear Nanoko scolding.

Beating its thick square wings, it flew over *sakura* branches and all the way up to the top of a nearby pine tree. And that's when it happened.

Caw Caw Caw!!!

Angry shrieks resounded through the entire schoolyard.

Kento looked up and saw two black-winged crows swoop down from the highest branches of a pine tree and begin cawing noisily while circling the picture book.

Caw Caw Caw!!!

One of the crows began to attack the flying picture book, pecking at it with its beak.

Caw Caw Caw!!!

The other clawed it, scratching the book cover.

The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder suddenly turned course trying to escape the two angry crows.

“Oh dear!”

Nanoko sighed heavily and stood next to Kento as she shaded her eyes with one hand, looking up at the battle in the skies between

the crows and the picture book.

“The foolish book has managed to infuriate the crow couple. The two crows built a nest in that pine tree at the edge of the schoolyard and their fledglings just hatched two days ago. And now, this strange flying object suddenly invades the skies near their home. No wonder the crow couple attacked it. That book isn’t *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder* any more. It’s now *The Weird Fighter Flying Object Being Chased by the Enemy*. What a catastrophe!”

No matter how hard the *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder* tried to escape, the crow couple chased it without cease.

The crows stabbed at the picture book with their fierce beaks and tore angrily at the cover with their claws. Finally, the picture book could take no more and flapping haphazardly, tried to flee to Nanoko who was standing in the middle of the schoolyard. The crow couple chased after the picture book, still cawing loudly.

The hunted and hunters were flying above Kento’s head when it finally happened.

Flap. Nanoko’s lab coat fluttered softly before his eyes. Nanoko had jumped up high into the sky.

Kento watched astonished as the tiny Nanoko flew into the air, quick as a bullet. The crow couple were gobsmacked to see a flying human appear before their very eyes.

Nanoko chose that moment to make her move as her hand closed around the wayward picture book.

Holding it firmly against her chest



to keep it from getting away, Nanoko floated down and landed gently on the ground.

“I’ve caught you now!”

She said proudly as she looked at the *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder* in her arms. Kento hesitantly peeked at the picture book. The cover of the thick picture book showed a picture of the Wright brothers smiling up at a bright blue sky. But that beautiful blue sky was now marred by bumps and scratches made by the crow attack.

“I did warn you, did I not? It’s because you came up with this absurd idea that you wound up like this.”

The picture book that had been flying about so gleeful and lighthearted was now very quiet and subdued inside Nanoko's arms. The husband and wife crows had continued to circle Kento and Nanoko suspiciously, but finally gave up and returned to their nest in the pine tree.

Nanoko carried the now-meeek book under her arm and turned to Kento smiling brightly.

“Well. It appears we’ve finally located all of our missing items. Thank you for being such a big help to me today, Yamazaki-kun. You’re a genius at finding things!”

He’d never expected to be praised like this. Kento felt a bit embarrassed and shuffled from foot to foot as he quickly shifted his glance towards the *sakura* trees.

In the schoolyard stood the 27 *sakura* trees with their roots firmly planted in the earth. Every time a spring breeze blew, it would quietly scatter the *sakura* petals through the air like snowflakes. The sweet scent spread out from the *sakura* trees in full bloom, steeping

the whole schoolyard with its soft scent.

Next to Kento, Nanoko said quietly to herself,

“I can’t help feeling that there’s something we’re still missing...
Ah well. Let’s leave it for now.”

Nanoko stood up straight, filled her lungs with the *sakura*-scented breeze, looked around at the straight rows of *sakura* trees with satisfaction, and then turned to look at Kento once more.

“Well, Yamazaki-kun, let me see you to the school gate. It seems everyone has finally settled down. I sincerely hope they will never engage in such reckless behavior again. Really! Wandering all around the school like sillies!”

She added looking around as if to make sure the *sakura* trees and the subdued picture book had learned their lesson. Nanoko began to lead Kento to the rear gate.

As he walked towards the back entrance of the school, Kento happened to look up at the big clock at the front of the school. The hands of the clock were just about to point to eleven thirty. Wait. What?... Kento stopped in his tracks and stared at the clock. A round black something was slowly crawling up the front of the school. Kento couldn’t quite tell what it was and rubbed his eyes to see better. That... What is that?

“Are you all right?”

Nanoko had already reached the gate and turned around to look at Kento. The round black something had just reached the center of the clock face.

The bold little thing sat squarely in the center of the clock, right where the long hand met the short hand.

“Umm...”

Kento pointed towards the big clock hesitantly.

“There’s a round dot at the center of that clock where the hands meet. I just saw it climbing up the clock.”

Nanoko looked up at the clock from under the *sakura* tree and her perfectly round glasses glinted.

“Ahhh...Now I remember,” said the teacher in a low voice.

“I could not seem to recall what was missing until just now, but here it is. The last missing thing.”

“What?”

Kento looked up at the black circle at the center of the large clock face. Was that the final lost object? But what was that black round thing?

“That, Kento, is the principal’s high hat. That hat always sits on top of the principal’s head and while he is at school, it sits at the top of the coat stand in the principal’s office.”

It appears the hat wanted to climb higher.

“You see, its name is “high hat,” and so it loves high places. Dear me! That cheeky rascal seems to be quite happy up there, high above us all. Should it rain, it would immediately be squashed flat as a soaking wet pancake. We’ll have to capture it right away and take it back to the principal’s office.”

Leaving Kento in the schoolyard, Nanoko began climbing up the stairs of the main entrance.

When she reached the landing in the middle of the staircase, he could see her stare up at the face of the large clock. And then, she began to jump. Up and down.

Jump Jump JUMP.

Higher and higher she went.

Jump Jump JUUMMPP

Higher and ever higher

She was like a popcorn kernel, popping up higher and higher with every jump.

Finally, Nanoko had jumped higher than high. She kicked off the concrete, flew above the protruding eaves of the entrance, and reached the top of the clock. Kento was so surprised that he stood there with his mouth hanging open, staring up as Nanoko jumped up up up.

Once she reached the large clock face, Nanoko reached out and grabbed the wayward high hat. Then, she drifted slowly down like a parachute. The bottom of her white lab coat turned like a bird wing. With the picture book in one hand and the high hat held firmly in the other, Nanoko landed on the landing, turned around to look at Kento with both hands high in the air and said,

“See! Now we *have* finally caught them all! Thank you, Yamazaki-kun! With luck, we may meet again in the new school year!”

With those final, mysterious words, Nanoko turned around, strode through the glass doors of the school, and went inside, leaving the bright spring light and disappearing deep into the dim of the building.

Alone now, Kento walked through the north gate of the schoolyard. The rear gate closed behind him, all by itself. As he walked the road along the fence where the *sakura* petals were beginning to fall, Kento turned around once more to look back at the rectangular school building where Nanoko had disappeared.

“This school looks like it’s going to be fun,” Kento thought to himself.

On the first day of school in April, Kento entered Class 4-2 in the fourth grade at Minami Elementary School.

But no matter how hard he looked through the school or asked the teachers, he couldn't find any trace of a teacher named Nanoko Yamada.

When he asked his new school mates about Nanoko, telling them that he'd met her during spring break, they all opened their eyes wide and said,

“Yamazaki-kun, did you really meet Miss Nanoko? That's super good luck. Only the really lucky kids get to meet her.”

Everything about that day during spring break seemed like a dream to Kento.

Kento peeked over the long tile wall along the walkway between two buildings to look at the pool on the other side. The surface of the 25-meter pool was covered with snow-like *sakura* petals which swayed with the movement of the water. And *The Wright Brothers: Aiming for the Wide Blue Yonder* still bore the dents from the crow attack...

Translation by Sako Ikegami



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ムジナ探偵局 〈名探偵登場!〉 (Mujina tanteikyoku: Meitantei tojo!)

Mujina Detective Agency -1-: A Great Detective | illus. Rika Okabe

Tokyo: Doshinsha | 1999 | ISBN 978-4494014309

Mujina Detective Agency -1- A Great Detective

by Yoko Tomiyasu

illus. Rika Okabe | Tokyo: Doshinsha | 1999

* * *

Did you say you're looking for the Mujina Detective Agency? Look here, you can just see it. It's that tiny house right where this street, Eccentric Lane, dead ends. Can you see the sign? It says "Used Books Mujina-do"? OK, there's another sign next to it that says "Mujina Detective Agency." Can you make it out? Right. That's the place. That's the Mujina Detective Agency you're looking for.

What's that you say? Why are there two signs? It's because it's a used book shop. The old man who ran it passed away suddenly. His son came back from some town out in the sticks, and before we knew it, he'd hung out a sign that said "Mujina Detective Agency." It was a bit of a shock for all of us.

The reason everyone calls this road Eccentric Lane has to do with that eccentric detective agency opening up—if you ask me, that is. This used to be called Electrical Lane because there was an electrical transformer here. Now it's Eccentric Lane. Makes it seem like the neighborhood is swarming with oddballs. That's not true, of course.

If you want to talk about eccentrics, that son of the man who ran the used book store is the one. I think his name is Yutaro Shima. But no one calls him that. All the people here on the lane call him Detective Mujina. He's like that mujina creature you hear about in stories, there's no figuring him out. Is he awake? Is he asleep? Just messing around or working hard? Who knows? The name Mujina suits him.

By the way, we just use "detective" as his name. The only work he does is sitting in that bookstore reading books or playing chess with the kids who come by. Otherwise he's taking a nap. Even if a client looking for a detective comes around, he almost never takes them on. They say he only takes on strange, eccentrical cases.

How about you? You say you've got business at that detective agency, so you must have a screw or two loose yourself. You can go if you like, but it'll just be a waste of time.



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Chapter 1

The Case of the White Wooden Box

With the gas heater on, the inside of Mujina-do is as warm as spring. A square of empty floor space is surrounded on both sides by shelves crammed full of books. Just beyond that space is a counter and an elevated two-tatami-mat room where the proprietor can sit to finalize sales and keep the books. That's where we find Detective Mujina in the middle of a chess game with young Genta, whose family runs the local bicycle shop.

Detective Mujina's long fingers touch the knight in the center of the board, and Genta lets out a screech.

"Wait...just a sec. Let me do that move over!"

Detective Mujina crosses his arms and his half-closed eyes shift over to Genta.

"Nope! You've already replayed that move twice," he says in a grumpy tone of voice.

Just then, the old glass door to the shop clatters open, but Detective Mujina doesn't even look to see who it is.

A cold wind blowing down the lane rushes in the open door and disturbs the warm air in the shop. It is a skin-piercing sort of wind, and Detective Mujina finally lifts his drowsy eyes when the cold air makes its way into the tiny tatami room.

"Close the door, please!" he growls.

The customer hurriedly turns around to pull the heavy door

shut, leaving the wind outside. It is a woman with long hair. Her thin, pale face peaks out from the collar of her tweed coat. She seems upset and looks nervously around the shop, as if she got lost the instant she walked in.

Not anyone I know. She doesn't look like she's going to buy used books, so what's she doing here? Genta thinks as he peers out at the woman. Detective Mujina rolls up a thin magazine and swats the nosy boy on the head.

"Ouch!"

At that moment the woman decides to finally speak.

"Uh, is this the Mujina Detective Agency?"

"Yes, it is."

Genta and Detective Mujina answer simultaneously. Detective Mujina glares at Genta, gives the boy and the chessboard a good shove and leans over into the shop area.

"So, are you... are you the... the detective agency?" the woman asks.

"Yes, my name is Shima."

The woman hunches over as if trying to hide herself in her coat. She holds on tight to the thick tweed collar. Detective Mujina gives her a piercing look, seems to size her up, and then reaches out his hand.

"No need to stand here chatting, please take a seat." Detective Mujina pulls a dusty round stool towards the edge of the raised tatami, and then looks over at Genta.

"Umm... Genta... lad?"

Genta is so stunned to be addressed in this unusually kind way that he just sits there with his mouth open.

"Lad, would you mind making us some tea?"

“Who, me?”

“Yes you, young man.” Detective Mujina waves him off. Genta stands and shuffles out the back door of the little space. Detective Mujina watches him disappear before turning towards his customer perched on the stool.

“All right then, let’s hear what you have to say. You seem to have some sort of problem.”

“Yes... you see...” the woman manages to say before going silent again. In the uncomfortable silence, Detective Mujina picks up the package of cigarettes next to the cushion he is sitting on and removes a cigarette. At that, the woman lifts her face in alarm and screws up her eyebrows.

“Ahh... no cigarettes... it’s my throat...”

“I see... pardon me...”

Detective Mujina has no choice but to put his cigarette back into the package, sighing in an injured way as he does so. The woman, though, does not seem to notice. Her lovely long eyes are staring down in the direction of her knees.

She speaks again in a low voice.

“What I want to say is... can something you see in a dream really happen?”

“Well, I think so. People have always talked about prophetic dreams, or messages they get in dreams. These days, you hear things like that too.” Detective Mujina, begins to answer her question, and then notices the woman shivering in her coat.

“I’ve... I’ve been seeing the same dream over and over lately,” she says.

“I see.” Detective Mujina nods.

The woman leans towards him and goes on in an even smaller voice.

“In the dream, I’m always standing in the same place, in front of an old house on a narrow road. The house, with a low tile roof, is surrounded by a hedge of juniper taller than me. I don’t know why I’m there or what I came there to do. I’m standing still in a space in the hedge with a little gate in it.

I’m gazing at the house. Inside the gate, I can see a garden with a plum tree. The house has a long porch facing the garden. Then one of the paper doors just behind the porch begins to open. The tatami room on the other side of the paper door is dark before a ray of winter sun lights it up a little. From inside the room I can smell... mothballs. My eyes are drawn into the room and to the tokonoma alcove in one corner. There’s a white wooden box in it and inside...”

The woman goes quiet again. She looks out into space and says nothing.

“Then what? Did something else happen in the dream?”

Detective Mujina asks, stifling a yawn. The woman seems to snap out of the trance and gives Detective Mujina a serious look.

“This house really exists. It’s not a dream, it’s reality.”

“I see,” Detective Mujina nods.

“I saw it two days ago. I’ve been working since last year in the office of a little electric construction company. Two days ago, on Thursday, I was sent to a client to deliver a price estimate. I went by myself to Iwane-cho. I took a bus there from in front of the station. On the way back, no bus was scheduled, so I walked. I took a short cut on a back street... and I saw that house.

It was exactly like the house I saw in the dream. There was a tall

juniper hedge, a small gate, it was the same. It was such a surprise that I ran over to the gate and peered inside. The garden, everything was just like my dream. The plum tree, the porch, the number of paper doors beyond the porch. Even that scent of mothballs. It was all the way I saw it in the dream.

I'd never seen that house before two days ago. I'd never even been to Iwane-cho. It's just so puzzling that a house I'd never seen before would be in a dream. I think I probably stood in front of it for a long time. Sure enough, the paper door began to open—just like in the dream. It was the third door from the edge of the porch. It opened without a sound.”

The woman stops to calm herself down. She puts a hand to her chest and breathes in deeply.

“A little old woman opened the door. I had been standing in front of the gate and staring in. She must have thought it strange. She opened the paper door and stood there looking at me. Beyond the woman was a dark tatami room. I couldn't see inside as well as I had in my dream, but there was a little tokonoma in it, and...a white box. The winter sun that fell on the white box made it stand out in the room... It was a long wooden box. I think it was made of paulownia wood.

I couldn't take my eyes off the box. The old woman finally seemed to get angry and slammed the door shut. I just couldn't take my eyes off of that box.”

The woman finishes her story, but in her mind she is probably still looking at that wooden box because she sits there staring off into a single point in space.

Bearing a round tray, Genta comes through the backdoor and into the little tatami room. The three cups on the tray clatter together

as Genta plops down next to Detective Mujina.

“Ah!” says Detective Mujina in a loud voice.

Both Genta and the woman look at him, but the detective is glaring at the tray.

“Genta... lad, where did you get these from?” Detective Mujina says indicating the three thick slices of yokan that accompany the three tea cups on the tray.

“They were on the shelf over the sink,” Genta says with a shrug.

“I only asked you for tea.” Detective Mujina shifts his glare to Genta’s face, but Genta ignores him and plucks up the thickest piece of the sweet treat.

Detective Mujina shakes his head, sighs disappointedly, and pushes the tray ever so slightly in the direction of the woman.

“Help yourself,” he says.

“Thank you.” Without hesitation, the woman, suddenly back to her senses, picks up the second thickest slice of yokan. Detective Mujina gives another sad sigh, settles for the smallest slice, and asks,

“So, what was it you came here to ask me to do?”

“I’ve got to know what is in that wooden box,” the woman responds smartly as she takes a big bite of yokan.

“I see.”

“I’m sure it sounds foolish to you. But I just can’t help feeling that the box was calling me to that place. Ever since I found out that the house is not a dream but actually exists, ever since I saw that white wooden box, I just can’t let it go. I’ve got to know what’s in there. I can’t even eat just thinking about it.”

So saying she gulps down the rest of her snack. Genta thinks this is very funny and can barely keep himself from laughing out loud.

The woman continues.

“Can you find out what’s in it?”

“What’s inside the box--?” Detective Mujina does not sound excited about this.

“Please! I’ll pay you for it. You don’t have to bring it to me. I just want you to look in the box and find out what’s inside. I’ve got to know.”

Genta watches the woman as she speaks intently and Detective Mujina who remains silent.

The detective finally lifts his head and nods,

“All right, I’ll accept this case.”

The woman’s face lights up.

“Thank you so much. And when will you have the results?”

“I won’t be able to say for sure until I’ve taken a look at the situation. Tomorrow is Sunday—how about if I give you a call on Monday. I’ll need to have your name and contact information. And of course, I’ll need to know where that house is.”

The woman thanks Detective Mujina over and over. She draws a map to the house from her dream, and then writes down her name and telephone number—all on the back of a newspaper flier the detective gives her—and leaves.

“Hiroko Shinoda...” Detective Mujina studies the paper as he sips his cup of brown tea.

“If this house is in Iwane-cho, it’ll be three train stops away,” comments Genta as he too looks intently at the map.

Detective Mujina gives him a dirty look.

“What made you think you could cut up the yokan you found in someone else’s house? Did you hear me ask you to do that?”

Detective Mujina is still cross about his dessert.

“You’ve got to have something to go with tea, don’t you? It’s not right to be stingy with a guest you rarely see. I was just being considerate.” Genta grumbles back and then changes the subject.

“Forget about that, let’s talk about what she said. She saw the actual house that was in her dream? What do you think is in that box? Could it be treasure or something?”

Detective Mujina remains silent. Genta goes on.

“Tomorrow’s Sunday, right? If you’re going to go see that house, I could go with you!”

“No. This isn’t a game.”

“Fine. But maybe when I go home I’ll tell my mom about this. She tells everyone everything. You know, she’s the one they call ‘the lane’s PA system.’”

It is true, Genta’s mother can never be trusted to keep a secret. When she starts talking about something, the entire lane knows about it in two days flat.

“...All right then...” Detective Mujina finally gives in.

“I’ll take you with me, but you’ve got to keep quiet. Don’t get in the way. Can you promise?”

“Sure, I swear,” says Genta brightly.

This was how, on Sunday morning, Genta and Detective Mujina come to visit the house Hiroko Shinoda saw in her dream.

... an omission of a middle part ...



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“But how did you know the box contained a fox tail? It was a surprise to me. But even before that, why did that box appear in that woman’s dream?”

“You really are clueless, aren’t you, Genta,” says Detective Mujina, furrowing his eyebrows.

“What about?”

“Listen carefully. That fox I caught back there was the woman who came to the shop yesterday.”

“Huh?”

“Let me put it another way. The customer who came in yesterday and gobbled down that yokan you cut up was the fox who lost its tail.”

“Wait... no way! No way!” Genta forgets all about the dried persimmon he was munching on and stands there with his eyes open wide.

“How can that be? Are you saying that woman was a fox who turned herself into a human being?”

“Exactly. She was trying to get her tail back. She—the fox—was well aware that old Mrs. Tsukishima had put the tail she lost in the trap in the wooden box in the tokonoma. But Mrs. Tsukishima had put a charm in it to keep foxes and other bad magic out, so the fox couldn’t open it by herself. She had to fool me into opening it for her.

I suspected as much, so when I snuck into the tatami room and peeked into the box, I was ready. Sure enough, the fox showed up and tried to snatch what was in the box. I managed to hold the fox down and catch it...That’s what happened.”

“But, but what about the dream?”

“The fox made it all up. She knew that if I agreed to look into the matter, sooner or later, I’d have to open the lid of that box. But I

caught her instead.”

“But still... what is a fox going to do with a tail that has been cut off?”

“It’s always been like this. Ogres, kappa, ghosts—all of the yokai. They come back to get parts of their body when they lose them. If they are missing something—an arm, a leg, a tail, any part of their body—they lose some of their magic power.”

“So you’re saying that fox you caught was a yokai and it had magic power?”

“Foxes aren’t yokai, but some of them can turn themselves into humans. Look at the foxes in the zoo. They’ve got nothing. They just eat and sleep. I knew our fox had to be magic because it couldn’t open the lid of the box with the charm on it.”

“So you’re saying, Detective Mujina, that you knew from the start what would happen? You didn’t think that woman was suspicious from the moment she walked in, did you?”

Detective Mujina just grins.

“Never underestimate me. She showed me her hand—or maybe I should say tail—right away, even though she didn’t have one. I became suspicious while she was telling her story.”

“What? What was suspicious?”

“All right, Genta, let me ask you a question. Have you ever been able to smell anything in a dream? She told us she smelled mothballs. That was the first clue. On top of that, she said that when she actually visited the house, she could smell the mothballs from in front of the gate. Did you smell mothballs when you were standing at the gate today?”

Genta shakes his head.

“Right? But when I opened the box, there were mothballs in with the fox tail. A human would never have been able to smell that from outside the gate.

That left me with two possibilities. Either the woman saw the old woman put the fox tail into the box along with the mothballs, or her sense of smell was really, really good.

We found out, though, that no one saw the old woman put the fox tail in the box. Surely old Mrs. Shikishima would never put away a tail while someone she didn’t know was in her house watching her. On the other hand, a fox has a sense of smell that is dozens of times stronger than that of a human.

The fox had to have used her nose to sniff out exactly where her tail was. When she smelled the tail, the mothballs were with it, and she made the mistake of adding that to her story about the dream. She let herself get carried away.”

“Wow, so that’s what happened,” says Genta, greatly impressed.

“There were other clues, too,” Detective Mujina goes on. “She was upset when I got out a cigarette. Foxes and badgers hate the smell of cigarettes. They always say when you run into a fox, the first thing you do is relax and light up a cigarette. Haven’t you ever heard that? The smell of cigarettes melts their magic away.

Then there was the way she ate that yokan. If it was a kid like you, I wouldn’t think twice about seeing you pick up the yokan with your hands and take a big bite out of it. But it looked very strange when an elegant young woman did it.

Just think, you gave that yokan I was keeping for a special occasion to a fox who made a feast of it.”

Detective Mujina frowns. Apparently he hasn’t forgotten about

that yokan yet.

Genta can't decide whether to believe what Detective Mujina is telling him, but as time passes, no customers named Hiroko Shinoda come to Mujina Detective Agency again. Genta tries dialing the number she gave, but all he gets is a recording that the number is out of use.

A month passes. One day when the wind is still cold but with a hint of spring sunshine, a pile of mountain vegetables is delivered to the doorstep of Mujina Detective Agency.

When Genta comes over to visit that day, he is surprised to find the mound of aralia shoots and flowering fern on the shop floor.

"Will you look at the size of those things! Who brought them?" he asks.

Detective Mujina, deep in a book, lifts his eyes with a look of annoyance.

"It was probably that fox. She told me she would pay me."

"You mean the one who got her tail back?" Genta reaches out for one of the flowering ferns.

"You can take home a little bit of that," says Detective Mujina from his seat in the tatami room. Genta looks at the plump rolled up stalk. On the tip of it is a tiny piece of mountain soil.

"So she went back to the mountain," he mumbles, looking at it.

He wonders if the fox is somewhere looking down on Iwane-cho. Is she living with her baby foxes? Just thinking about it makes Genta feel warm all over, like it was already spring.

Detective Mujina yawns loudly.

The spring sunshine coming through the glass doors lights up the corners of the tiny shop floor.



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Japanese Board on Books for Young People
1-32 Kandajimbocho, Chiyoda-ku, 101-0051 Tokyo Japan
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