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❖ The American School

(*Amerikan sukūru*, 1954)

It was past eight-thirty and still the official had not appeared. The teachers had been told to assemble by this hour for their excursion to the American school, and most of them had come twenty minutes or so early. Having made their way to the Prefectural Office through the morning throngs of commuters, all thirty of them were now left sitting here and there on the deserted stairs and around the gravel drive. There was one woman among them. She had apparently gone to some trouble to dress for the occasion, but her high heels, hat, and new plaid suit only made her look more sad and shabby.

As soon as they were all present, the teachers went en masse to the Office of Education on the second floor, only to be driven back down to this place which had not even been mentioned at the organization meeting a week ago. Right after the roll call the chairman of that meeting, an administrator from the Office of Education, had read off a list of instructions. The first was to assemble promptly at the appointed time. The second was to dress impeccably. The latter had created a stir which did not die down until the promulgation of the third point, that they must maintain a solemn silence at all times. Finally, they were to pack a lunch, for they would have to march to and from the school, a total distance of some eight miles, and even teachers had learned to feel proper hunger pangs in the three years since the War.

An American jeep ploughed through the gravel of the driveway, rounded the sharp curve, and came to a stop in front of the prefectural building. A teacher who had been sitting just inside the door jumped to his feet and moved away.

There was one man who had all the while been standing straight as a ramrod. The best-dressed and healthiest-looking of the group, he was conspicuous in an almost disconcerting way. At the previous week's meeting he had repeatedly raised his hand with questions for the chairman, a man by the name of Shibamoto. "Are we only supposed to observe?" he had inquired at one juncture. "What do you mean?" Shibamoto asked. "I was just wondering," he said, "if we might not give them a demonstration of our oral method." With a slight swagger that accentuated his heavy judo wrestler's build, the official reiterated loudly that the purpose of the excursion was to observe. He added that the Office of Education had gone to considerable lengths to secure permission for the visit. The man, whose name was Yamada, had at last given up this line of questioning.

He seized the floor once again in the commotion that followed the remarks on proper dress. "Quite right, sir," he said. "We must all present a neat appear-

ance, whatever the cost. Any sloppiness would reflect on the profession. Worst of all, it would raise serious doubts about our competence to teach English. They despise us as a defeated people to begin with, and when they see the clothes we wear—I know, because I interpreted for the inspectors when they came to our school—they just look the other way. Not to mention the toilets." His speech was interrupted at this point, and by now everyone was staring at him, with particular attention to his feet. There was scarcely another pair of leather shoes in sight. Undaunted, he resumed as soon as the mutters died down. They should avoid speaking Japanese in front of their hosts, he insisted, in order to display to the fullest extent their command of English. This was greeted by more general muttering, and a shrill outcry from the man sitting next to him. "What nonsense!" Yamada turned to face the heckler. But before he could launch into a longwinded defense of his proposal, Shibamoto called for order with the request that both Mr. Yamada and Mr. Isa refrain from intemperate language.

Isa had once been pressed into service at election time as interpreter for the Occupation inspection team (all elections were to be conducted impartially under the watchful eyes of the authorities). He was taken by jeep from one small village to the next, and was expected to keep his American counterpart informed of what was going on. Still only about thirty years old, he had never had a single conversation in English, occasional attempts at practical application of the language in the classroom had left him tingling with embarrassment, and when word came that the Americans would soon be visiting his school he had feigned illness, lying in bed for several days with an icebag pressed against his forehead, where there was not the slightest trace of fever. Only fear of unknown reprisals at the hands of the Occupation officials had deterred him from a similar stratagem at the time of the elections.

The moment he was packed into the jeep with a Negro soldier, he had turned to the fellow and said, in English: "I am truly very sorry to have kept you waiting." This was met with silence, and when he repeated the words three times over, the soldier only stared at him coldly and incomprehendingly. The phrase he had prepared several days ago and practiced constantly since was clearly too formal and correct. From then on he limited himself to two words, "stop" and "go." For those five hours he felt as if he were being boiled alive, though outwardly he appeared to be merely loafing on the job. And in either case, the result was that he was of no use to anyone.

As soon as they approached the first polling place, he fled. He tried to reason with himself, before sneaking off to hide, that it would go still worse with him than if he had refused to come in the first place. But the prospect of being addressed in that unfamiliar language in front of a crowd made his knees quake. By the time the Negro noticed his absence and came back to find him, he was long gone.

Isa was not by nature so craven, indeed, as the jeep drove into the village he had felt a strong impulse to do violence to his keeper. But after they slowed

down, it seemed easier to escape, and so he jumped off the rear and made for the wooded slope above the road. On discovering that his passenger had fled, the soldier went after him, partly out of fear at being left alone in these dark hills. Deep in the woods Isa saw the man coming. He called out to him in Japanese: "You'll have to speak our language. Speak Japanese or else! What would you do if someone really said that to you?" As the face of his adversary drew near, a neatly trimmed beard, features strained in an effort to make out the indistinct words, it gave a feeling of loneliness. The beard contributed an incongruously civilized air, and as the face moved still closer it seemed almost to show some understanding of the stream of Japanese that issued forth from behind the trees. Isa babbled on as fast as he could. When the Negro at last realized that the words were not in his language, he threw up his hands and shrugged his shoulders. Seated behind the wheel again, he looked even lonelier than before, as if unaccountably intimidated by this creature who spoke scarcely a word of normal English, and who would lapse without warning into Japanese gibberish. He ceased to pay any attention at all to Isa, and proceeded as though chauffeuring an honored guest around the countryside. A pointless errand on the whole, but at least, it occurred to him, the man might be of some service in helping him deal with hostile natives.

Each time an American jeep drove up, Isa drifted a little away from the prefectural building. Yamada's foolish suggestions at the organization meeting were still fresh in his mind, especially the proposal of a demonstration class, which had aroused in him an instant panic that persisted to this moment. Well, he would simply keep a close watch on Yamada and shut him up if necessary. He had, however, already yielded on one point: he was wearing a pair of black leather civilian shoes. They were an odd match with his khaki uniform, but he had wanted at least to spare himself the embarrassment of army boots. Likewise, having set out with his lunch box in an old army bag, along the way he had taken the box out, folded up the incriminating bag, and stuck it under his arm.

Yamada continued to stand alone surveying the scene expectantly. Whenever a jeep pulled up he would bustle over to explain the situation. "We represent the English teachers of this prefecture," he would begin stiffly. "We are very devoted to the English language. We work very hard to teach the English. We are now utilizing the latest methods of instruction, just like you have in your country."

"If you work so goddam hard, what are you hanging around for at this hour?" one driver replied, reaching down with a look of extreme boredom to hand him a cigarette.

"I do not smoke," said Yamada.

"Are you the chief?"

"Our leader is an official of this prefecture. He is very late for our appoint-

ment. Government officials are lazy people. But you must not think that all Japanese are like that."

The soldier, who was black, threw up his hands in disgust. "I am truly very sorry to have kept you waiting," he said, and drove off.

Yamada did not know what to make of this parting remark. The American had perhaps been mocking Japanese officials. He looked at his watch again and muttered to himself. What would their hosts think if they arrived late at the school? Something must be done. He called out to those of his colleagues who were sprawled within earshot, "Will some of you come up to the Education Office with me? If we don't do something we'll be late. They have our names on file at the school. We'll be disgraced. 'What can you expect from a defeated people?' they'll say."

Yamada noticed that Isa, who was sitting only a few feet away, kept his back turned as though preoccupied with some important business. He went over to investigate and found him with his lunch box open on his lap. Isa had been up since three, riding his bicycle to the nearest station, then taking a combination of streetcars and trains until he reached this distant city. He was hungry; rather, he thought he ought to be hungry by now.

Yamada stood for a moment in silent amazement. "This is no time to be eating," he said. "Come with me to the Education Office. If the officials there won't cooperate, we'll speak to the Occupation personnel."

The bare mention of the local Occupation force was enough to upset Isa. He had already noticed the bearded Negro in one of the jeeps, and had seen Yamada accost him. Indeed, it was one reason for beginning his lunch now. This was a high-risk area where he might be addressed in English at any moment. A mouthful of food would, he sensed, offer some defense against any demand that might be made of him. And so he did not answer Yamada, and regretted having challenged him at last week's meeting, thus attracting his attention. Isa had decided not to speak a word in any language today, for if he began by conversing in Japanese he would surely end by having to speak English. The best strategy was a tight-lipped silence that would lead people to believe he was indisposed. Then no one, neither official nor colleague, would think it strange if, when his turn came to talk at the school, he had nothing to say. Without looking up from his lunch he waved his chopsticks in the air by way of a reply.

"What kind of answer is that?" Yamada put his question in both languages and waited for an answer. Isa pretended not to hear. Yamada was given to venting his wrath in English. "Oh, for shame!" he exclaimed, stalking off towards the overdressed instructress, Michiko, who capitulated on the spot and followed him up the stairs.

On their way into the office they bumped into the tardy official. Shibamoto was wearing his Sunday best, which consisted of a long overcoat and a soft felt hat. As he led them out of the building, he blew a whistle to assemble the others.

Yamada protested that the whistle would sound a shrill note of unreconstructed militarism, furthermore, for the same reason, they should not march in a solid phalanx. Shibamoto granted his point and ordered the group to fall out. When the command was given to reassemble in loose ranks, Yamada placed himself like a staff adjutant at Shibamoto's side. The rest of the teachers straggled behind in a long procession, with Isa bringing up the rear.

Shibamoto made a brief announcement: "We received notification that the time for our visit had been changed. Sorry for the inconvenience. They were very pleased with the first group. Try to keep up the good record. Ready?"

It was about four miles to the American school down an asphalt road that ran straight as the crow flies from the outskirts of the city. Strung out like a chain gang, the teachers set out with Shibamoto and Yamada in the lead. Isa, at the other end, made no effort to move up. He found himself walking beside the woman, and this was somehow reassuring. Within ten minutes they had reached the asphalt road. There was an uninterrupted flow of traffic traveling to and from among the various installations of the large base that stretched out for miles around the school. A sigh rippled through the group at the sight of this long black ribbon which was clearly not made for walking.

Isa watched with secret admiration as Michiko took a pair of sneakers from her cloth bundle and put them on. What foresight! The men around him were all wearing long overcoats, with a sprinkling of army issue such as he himself had on. The poverty revealed in their bulky clothing showed up starkly against the hard pavement. "I don't want you in rows, but do move closer together," Shibamoto cautioned. "You mustn't look so straggly—there are Occupation personnel all around you." Cars and jeeps were in fact flying by, thick and fast, though there was not another pedestrian to be seen anywhere on the forbidding road.

The presence of a single woman in their midst was enough to mitigate the ragged, faintly subversive spectacle created by the twenty-nine men. Before five minutes had gone by, a car coming from the opposite direction pulled up beside Michiko. A soldier stuck his head out the window and spoke to her. "What are you people doing here?" he asked, echoing the question put to them several times in front of the prefectural building. Michiko stated the purpose of their excursion in clear, correct English. "You're an English teacher, are you? Well, you're pretty damn good, I'd say." The soldier thrust some cans of cheese in her hands and drove off.

It was not until Michiko laughed out loud and tugged at his sleeve that Isa turned to face her. With eyes studiously averted from the exchange with the soldier, he had begun to reconsider his choice of companion. Walking beside the woman, he was easy prey for any number of foreign soldiers. He felt the weight of the can that Michiko had stuffed into his pocket while he was staring at the rice paddies below the road. Living in an era when true goodwill was translated into gifts of food, he was naturally pleased and flattered, and especially so for

having failed to notice that she had received two cans from the soldier and had to give one away to keep the other. What if he was a little more vulnerable being next to her, he had only to look the other way when the enemy approached, and there were these unexpected benefits.

It had occurred to Michiko as they started down the asphalt road that she had forgotten something. In her rush this morning to change after sending off her son, her only child by the husband she had lost in the War (he too had been a teacher), it must have slipped her mind. She poked around in the cloth bundle and her suspicions were confirmed. Luckily the missing article was one that could be borrowed in a pinch; and at the moment the two cans of cheese plopped into her hands, she had picked Isa as her most likely benefactor.

Tranquilly and with unexpected warmth, the winter sun shone down upon the black surface until the glare began to affect one's eyes. Cars continued to pass by in both directions, and then a jeep drove up, this time from behind, and slowed down almost to the pace of the procession. Two soldiers, one white, one black, leaned out to look the group over. Yamada turned around and waited until the jeep drew up beside him. "Haro boys! What are you doing?" he hailed them.

With a look of mild surprise one of the soldiers asked in return: "Only one woman?" Having verified with their own eyes, without listening to Yamada's reply, that the woman they had passed was the only one, they stopped the jeep in the middle of the road and waited. As Michiko approached they called out to her: "Ojosan! Ojosan!" They asked where she was going and told her to get in. Her quick response was livelier than when she spoke in Japanese, her face more expressive, even distinctly feminine. "I'm on a group excursion," she said. "I really can't go ahead by myself."

The soldiers exchanged an approving glance as they inspected the proper Japanese lady from top to bottom. They tore the wrapper from two bars of chocolate and, with a parting nod full of regret, tossed them down to Michiko. She broke one of the bars into pieces and passed them out to a few people around her, this time omitting Isa. Afterward the teachers who had dropped back toward her at this point showed no disposition to move up again.

They had not been marching in close ranks from the outset, and by now the group had split into two separate platoons: Shibamoto, Yamada, and their followers in the lead, Michiko and her attendants in the rear, with a gap of over a hundred yards in between.

It came to Isa by slow degrees that his shoes hurt. Each step brought new pains. He began to regret having worn these ill-fitting genuine leather shoes; and when he reflected that he had put them on to please Yamada, to speak the foreign tongue in the right style—simply to hold down his job—his regrets gave way to anger. The pain grew more and more acute. He struggled to keep up with Michiko, but even this was too much for him. He now noticed with a twinge of envy how smooth and easy her stride had become since she abandoned her high

heels for sneakers. No one else, either in his platoon or the group up front, showed signs of suffering from the same problem. He himself had never paid much attention to shoes until this moment. The offending pair, on loan from a colleague, had seemed just right when he first tried them on. A tiny discrepancy was enough, it appeared, to cause a great deal of pain. Isa became suspicious of the colleague who had lent him the shoes. For all he knew, the man could be in league with Yamada.

There was no telling how much farther they had to go, for the view ahead was blocked by a rise in the road. When Isa looked back to see how much ground they had covered he was distressed to find the prefectural building looming still quite large behind them.

About fifteen feet ahead, Michiko stood looking over her shoulder in his direction. "Is something wrong?" she asked when at last he caught up with her. At his mumbled reply apropos of shoes her face took on a look of utmost gravity. Having set out in new shoes herself, she had more than an inkling of what she would have endured but for the sneakers. "That will never do. We still have a long way to go. Maybe you should hitch a ride—why don't you stop one of these jeeps?"

Isa's pain yielded to astonishment and terror. What she suggested would not have occurred to him in his wildest dreams. "If it ever came to that!" he muttered as he stumbled forward in an effort to keep up, putting as much weight as possible on his toes to relieve the pinch on his insteps. He hoped to set her mind at ease and avoid further suggestions of drastic remedies, but he soon realized that his awkward gait only made matters worse.

Michiko slackened her pace and walked silently at Isa's side as if to subdue his pain by force of her own calm will. Until now she had found him a tedious companion, thoroughly wrapped up in himself for no apparent reason. But as soon as she began to share in his suffering, faint memories stirred within her of the love, long forgotten, that a woman can also share with a man. She did not, however, lose sight of her objective. She meant to have from him that homely article left behind in her haste. What love she felt for him was bound up with her hopes of getting it, and seemed to emanate like hunger pangs from somewhere near the pit of her empty stomach. While mere cars whizzed by she spoke to him again in a soothing tone, as if to stroke his heaving back. "You really ought to get yourself a lift," she said. "Shall I ask for you?"

"No! No thank you! Never mind! I'd sooner go barefoot."

"Now really, I don't see why..."

Isa felt like biting his tongue for breaking his vow of silence. Yet had he kept quiet Michiko would no doubt have hailed a jeep immediately, and at her fluent English they would have picked him up without further ado. Then where would he be? No matter how dire his need, the very thought of riding next to a foreigner again made him sick. He remembered all too vividly his day of torture with the black soldier. He had felt as though at any moment he could murder the man,

and if it had gone on for another day he surely would have done so, unless, of course, he had first found a way to escape.

The tender feelings which Michiko had summoned up from deep within her subsided in the face of Isa's stubborn refusal. The sweat now trickling down her body served as a nagging reminder of her impure motives. Very well, she thought, she would get what she was after anyway. And even that didn't really matter so much, she could if necessary do without. Resolved to not so much as look back at him, she forged ahead toward Yamada's platoon. The others followed in her wake, leaving Isa far behind.

Up front, Yamada and Shibamoto were trading boasts. Shibamoto, by his own account, had been one of a handful of judo experts in the prefecture before the War disrupted things—a fifth-degree black belt, no less. And contrary to malicious postwar propaganda, devotees of the martial arts were not all war criminals. One had only to consider himself, holder of a prominent post in the administrative section of the prefectural Education Office. Moreover, he taught judo not only to the local police, but to the Occupation personnel themselves, and had in fact got the job through his American supervisor.

Yamada's ears perked up at the mention of Occupation personnel. He was intensely interested in every kind of contact with the Americans, though so far his own had been restricted to interpreting. He had a consuming ambition to study abroad, to which end he schemed and fretted the lifelong day.

Eager to establish his credentials with such a well-connected man, Yamada explained that he had conducted any number of demonstration classes at his school; that although they were supposedly professional teachers of English, few of his colleagues made a good showing. . . . Yes, said Shibamoto, he had heard about all that. From a leather briefcase the likes of which were seldom seen in these times, Yamada removed a mimeographed schedule of a typical demonstration class, which he happened to have brought along.

"Rook heah, see for yourself," he said, breaking momentarily into English. "I hope sometime soon to hold a teaching seminar here in the city—with the backing of the administrative section, of course. And we would certainly welcome cooperation from the Americans." He handed Shibamoto his card. His name and titles appeared in Japanese script on one side, Roman on the other. "I might not look it now, but I hold a second-degree black belt in fencing," he volunteered.

"Is that so? I suppose you've had some experience in your day," said Shibamoto.

"You bet I have!" Yamada slashed the air with an imaginary sword. "This might not be the time to mention it, but when I was in OTS I got to whet my blade a bit, if you know what I mean."

"It must be hard, cutting off heads."

"Not really. It takes a good arm, a sharp sword, and practice, of course. That's all."

"How many did you polish off?"

"Let's see..." Yamada paused and looked around. "About twenty, I guess. Half of them must've been POW's."

"Any Yanks?"

"Naturally."

"How did they compare with the Chinese?"

"Well, there's quite a difference in how they take it. When you come right down to it, they show their lack of what you might call Oriental philosophy."

"You're lucky they never caught up with you."

"... I was only following orders."

Yamada was suddenly aware of the dangerous turn in the conversation. What had he been saying? He fell silent. Noticing that Shibamoto had removed his overcoat, he hastily took off his own and stuck it under his arm. He looked over his shoulder at the disorderly procession and his taut, swarthy features collapsed into a disdainful grimace.

"What do you think of this mess?" he said to Shibamoto. "If the War were still on and this were a real march...! But what can you expect from a bunch of high school teachers?"

Yamada fixed Isa hawklike in a distant gaze. In this perspective the laggard could not fail to arouse contempt and indignation. While Yamada stood at the side of the road the group straggled by in little clumps, their pace so listless that he wanted to ask with the Americans what business they had on this highway. He made up his mind to stay where he was and wait for Isa to come along. Over the past week he had not forgotten Isa's vague but unmistakable hostility. As he waited, the word "insubordinate" popped into his head. It seemed to furnish a key to understanding this queer fellow. With his own tales of martial valor still ringing in his ears, Yamada became again the company commander he had been until three years before. But for all the brutal self-assurance restored to him in this transformation, he did not bark out a reprimand to Isa, preferring to take him by surprise.

Michiko passed by first. "His shoes pinch," she explained, pointing back at Isa.

"His shoes pinch? Ridiculous!" This went beyond simple insubordination. To dawdle over such an infantile triviality was inexcusable. At this rate he was likely to start whining about his bladder or a sore throat and fall still farther behind. Well, what was the matter with his shoes? Yamada stared at the black blobs of Isa's feet scraping across the asphalt in the distance. He waited till the dusty shoes had shuffled up diffidently under his nose before he spoke. "Are those your shoes?" he snapped, in English.

Isa had not noticed Yamada at the side of the road. His eyes were wide open with the effort of bearing the pain, but he could not see a thing.

"It's your fault this group is in such a shambles. It only takes one straggler like you to throw everyone out of step."

Michiko came back and repeated to Yamada her suggestion that Isa ask for a ride.

"From the Americans?" Yamada's shoulders fell as he studied Isa's feet. Ignoring Michiko, he lashed out again at Isa: "That is out of the question. Mistah Isa, have you no pride? Maybe for ap-pen-di-ci-tis. But for shoes?"

Several other teachers had wandered back to see what was holding things up and stood looking over Yamada's shoulder. "He'd do better to go barefoot," one of them said. This solution had occurred to Isa any number of times since the pain began. But each time he had rejected it for fear of being spotted by the Americans, who were sure to question him about his bare feet and force him to ride in a jeep.

Yamada changed his tone. "Try to keep moving, at least. You've got everyone stopped in their tracks wondering what to do about you—Oh, Mr. Shibamoto. What do you think, sir?"

When Yamada failed to return to the front rank, Shibamoto had planted himself at the roadside like a stone Jizo. Once the leaders dropped out, the rest of the procession ground to a halt.

"If this keeps up we'll be late, sir. We'll be disgraced. The main thing is to make sure the Americans don't see him. Oh, for shame!"

"What seems to be the trouble here?" Shibamoto had not yet grasped the cause of Yamada's excitement. When the problem was put to him he proposed that Isa go ahead and remove his shoes. Yamada and a few others would walk along on either side and shield him from the passers-by.

Shibamoto's proposal was duly adopted and Isa was promptly relieved of his suffering. It even struck him that this pavement could have been made for bare feet, which were not, after all, without some resemblance to the rubber tires of a car.

Michiko brooded over the man who was once more walking beside her, though likely soon to lag behind again. Isa seemed as unresponsive as ever, and she made no attempt to speak to him. But his stubborn streak had begun to remind her of her late husband. Surrounded by Yamada and the others, he strode along unshod and full of purpose, a shy but spirited little man in the jaws of adversity. That is what her husband had been when he went off to war.

Her thoughts drifted back to that day when she had struggled to keep up with the column of soldiers bound for the front as they marched the five miles from their base to the station. They had not paused once along the way, pushing ahead at an unrelenting pace that did not allow for last-minute farewells. Her husband marched with clenched teeth and scarcely cast a glance in her direction. The only time he turned his head to face her, he made a curt gesture with his hand as if to drive her away. There had of course been others besides herself, among them aged mothers calling out their son's names as they stumbled after the swift procession.

Michiko had understood her husband's embarrassment then. The feelings

of the barefoot man next to her now were no doubt of the same kind. Perhaps she would speak to him once they were at the school. She was suddenly aware again of the high heels pressing through the cloth against her hands like hard little buds about to flower. Yes, after she had changed her shoes at the school she would have a word with him.

Isa showed no sign of faltering, indeed he fairly loped along, with none of the strain that was beginning to tell on the others. He was, however, still shy of foreign eyes, though his fears were very different from Yamada's, and he walked somewhat stooped over. He hurried ahead driven by the desire to reach his destination at the earliest possible moment, and in the happy expectation of freedom from any further need to propel himself. He was too absorbed in the delicate task of simultaneously staying out of sight and rushing forward to reflect that he would still have to move about at the school, and then make the trek back to the city.

Taking but small comfort in Isa's return to the fold and the restoration of some semblance of order, Yamada dwelt on the disgust which the man's every action stirred up in him. He decided the time had come to broach to Shibamoto the subject that had been in the back of his mind all day. "You know, sir," he began, "we really ought to give a demonstration class while we're there. It's a rare opportunity to show them what we can do, and maybe we can get them to evaluate and rank us while we're at it."

Shibamoto was busy surveying the buildings of the American school, which had come into view as soon as they passed the crest in the road. He gave Yamada a doubtful look and did not reply. When Yamada pressed the point by suggesting that he himself could make the request, Shibamoto wearily repeated that their hosts might find the exercise troublesome.

"I don't see why it should be any trouble. It will be our show—a demonstration of what English teachers in this country are capable of. Afterwards we'll let them give us a few pointers, that's all. As a judo expert I'm sure you can see the wisdom of our taking the offensive, so to speak."

This was a thrust that Shibamoto could not parry. He would have to let the man have his way. He had never met such a cocky instructor, he thought, as Yamada announced once again that he would take the bull by the horns.

Isa did not miss a word of this exchange. When he saw Shibamoto weaken, his thoughts turned instinctively to escape. Slipping easily through the loose cordon they had strung around him, he sidled off to the edge of the road and unbuttoned his fly. Yamada was still preoccupied and failed to notice this dereliction; the others were too tired to bother with him.

Just then Michiko was accosted by another jeep. She broke into a cold sweat as she ascertained that the melancholy black face looking down at her wanted to know about Isa, who stood relieving himself up the road. But her fears were set to rest when she heard the soldier ask, "What's with the bare feet?" She explained, and the jeep rumbled off in Isa's direction.

Isa wheeled around in alarm, and at one glance recognized his old adversary. He backed away, stunned by the accuracy of his presentiment that he would see the man again today. When he reached the shoulder of the road he turned and leaped into the field below. Here he was far less protected than he had been on that wooded slope. The soldier was beckoning to him with a miniature package of cigarettes. The next moment Yamada was yelling at him. "He's only trying to do you a favor. What's the matter with you!" Joining forces, the soldier and Yamada clambered into the field. Together they dragged Isa back up to the road and bundled him into the jeep. The vehicle bearing the solitary captive soon vanished in a cloud of sand, and raucous laughter swept through the ranks.

Above the road ahead some crows flocked and veered off to one side as if to clear a path for the car passing far below. Or perhaps they were preparing to scavenge around the American school. Michiko watched this scene and savored a certain relief, accompanied by a quiet, private laugh, at the removal of the burden that Isa had become for her. She no longer imagined that she could understand his excessive timidity, unless, she speculated, he had done something awful during the War.

Isa sat hunched up in the back of the jeep. He quickly averted his eyes from the driver's seat and peered out at the dwindling faces of his colleagues. Although their features were already blurred, he could clearly see that they were laughing. Yet, for all their scorn, their company was far preferable to the predicament that now filled him with despair. The general laughter left little doubt that Yamada would succeed in squeezing out of him some sort of performance in English. As far as he was concerned, it was now all but inevitable; that is, it seemed quite within the realm of possibility, which was for Isa tantamount to inevitability.

On their first encounter the Negro had mistaken Isa's cowed silence for sullen contempt, with overtones of a personal animus against himself. Afterwards he had Isa's credentials checked through the Education Office, without bothering to state the cause of his curiosity, and when the record showed no reason for the man's refusal to speak English, he felt that his suspicions had been confirmed. This unlooked-for second meeting was a stroke of luck: he would have a little revenge for that business in the woods.

The jeep screeched to a halt and Isa found a pistol pointing into his face. Then came the command: "Speak English, man. Let's hear it again. I am truly very sorry to have kept you waiting."

Isa trembled all over and stammered out the phrase as dictated. Below the trim moustache the mouth of his captor opened in a loud guffaw. The pistol was only a toy, he said. Humming a jazz tune, he started up the engine and drove on.

At the American school the soldier bade Isa a friendly farewell as he climbed out of the jeep. "Maybe we'll meet again," he said, with some appreciation, it appeared, of the karma that had already brought them together twice. Isa felt weak inside at the mere suggestion.

As soon as the jeep was out of sight Isa, still barefoot, ran toward the fence enclosing the school playground. After a few moments' rest he put on his shoes and crouched down to look around. The children at recess on the playground, boys and girls mixed together, ranged from the early grades through junior high school. Even now, in midwinter, they were scampering about in a colorful assortment of light clothes, a sweater here, a blouse and jumper there. Isa retreated into the shadow of one of the buildings to continue his inspection from a less public vantage point.

Along with a sense of relative security, he experienced an overwhelming mental fatigue. He closed his eyes for fear of fainting and felt the tears well up behind his eyelids. At first he could not tell what had brought on his tears, but he knew it was a joy so intense as to be close to sorrow. With his eyes still closed he slowly discerned the source of his bliss in a murmuring of soft voices, sweet and clear as a mountain stream. They seemed to come from another world, perhaps in part because the words made little sense to him.

Isa opened his eyes and saw a cluster of young girls, twelve or thirteen years old, chatting with each other about fifty feet from where he was hiding. He concluded that he and his colleagues were members of a pathetic race which had no place here.

Listening to these mellifluous English voices, he could not account for the fear and horror which the language had always inspired in him. At the same time his own inner voice whispered: It is foolish for Japanese to speak this language like foreigners. If they do, it makes them foreigners, too. And that is a real disgrace.

He pictured clearly to himself the outlandish gestures that Yamada affected when he spoke English. There was no dignity in talking just like a foreigner. But it was equally demeaning to speak a foreign tongue like a Japanese. This was the fate that awaited him today, he knew, if he were called upon to talk at the school. The few times that he had begun his class with a halting goodo-moaning-ebury-body he had afterward flushed crimson and felt himself at the bottom of some dark ravine. No! That was not for him. He would sooner make himself over into a whole new man.

Enrapt with the schoolgirls' merry fugue, Isa did not hear the jeep return. The soldier got out, whistling another tune. Some distance from where Isa remained hidden, he stood leaning over the fence and searched out his son. Having been on urgent business to the barracks that adjoined the school, only after it was finished did he remember Isa's feet. The boy, who looked to be of junior-high-school age, came running to his father, and a few moments later disappeared into the school.

Presently a beautiful tall lady of a type one often sees in American movies appeared before Isa's eyes. With the black boy in tow, she advanced swiftly and purposefully toward the fence. Isa stole off into the shade of a nearby grove, lest

she find him crouching there and take him for a thief. He shut his eyes and mentally blocked his ears, to no avail, he could distinctly hear her footsteps and the sound of her voice calling out as she came closer and closer. Although he suspected that her call was meant for him, and had in any case resigned himself by now to being caught, he still did not respond. He kept his head down and his eyes closed until he felt a touch on his shoulders and heard the word "... shoes?" At this he stood up and bowed.

When he opened his eyes and saw the lady standing right beside him, he was all but blinded by the look of abundance on her face: features that spoke of an ample diet, material well-being, and pride of race. She was for all that only human, and a fellow schoolteacher as well. So he tried to tell himself, but he could not quite believe it. Next to her—she stood at least a head taller than he—Isa felt weak around the knees, and in reply to her questions he only nodded and bowed. In the end, like a timid servant with his mistress, he allowed himself to be led off toward the school.

Isa caught enough of the cascade of soothing words that poured from her lips like melting snow to realize that he had that meddlesome Negro to thank for his new predicament. "I only want to do something about those feet," the lady said. "I'm not going to poison you." He wanted to say thank you—that much he could manage. But once he had opened his mouth she would expect him to keep up a steady conversation. He had better just play dumb and follow her like a dog.

Isa sank back into despondency when he thought of the interrogation to which, as a solitary Japanese among a horde of foreigners, and an English teacher of sorts, he was sure to be subjected. He was too busy brooding to notice the gaggle of students that trailed behind him as he limped along, until a few sharp words from the lady sent them shouting and laughing back to the playground.

She kept smiling at him and making what sounded like friendly remarks, which required him to play deaf as well as dumb. But he had begun to receive contradictory signals from his conscience. To atone for the appearance of incivility he had given so far, he was tempted to fall down and kiss the lady's feet, or at least the ground beneath them. Caught between these conflicting impulses, Isa took it into his head to carry her books for her. He moved abruptly to her side and, without a word, tried to wrest the heavy books from her arms. He had the appropriate phrase on the tip of his tongue but was too embarrassed to say it. Perplexed by this dumbshow, the lady clutched the books to her breast. When he continued to tug at the books, bowing and grinning abjectly, she eventually guessed his intention and thanked him; but she would not surrender her burden.

It was enough for Isa that she had recognized his gesture. Hereafter, however incompetent he might appear at the school, he would not be considered a barbaric ingrate. As they approached the building, he felt something like the relief of a condemned criminal who had made one last plea for forgiveness from his fellow men.

Since the nurse was not to be found in the dispensary, the schoolmistress led Isa to her own office, where she shut the door firmly and turned the key. Once again Isa had a sinking feeling, such as the toy pistol had produced in him a while ago. "Sit down," said the lady, whose name, he gathered from the sign on the door, was Emily. "We lock the door so we can smoke," she explained. "Even the men do. It sets a bad example for the students, you see."

It took Isa some time to decipher this statement. From the moment he entered the room he kept his eyes glued to the floor and let his ears tune out her speech, which he dimly imagined to be a reproach for his earlier rudeness. In any case the words seemed to have nothing to do with his feet, and it was not until he raised his head, afraid of appearing very rude indeed, that he saw the smoke and half grasped their meaning. Still standing in silence, he traced the upward spiral of smoke with his eyes, the better to extricate himself from Miss Emily's gaze.

Out of the clear blue sky came the order: "Take off your shoes!" Or so he interpreted her sharp utterance. But no sooner was he down to his army socks than she burst out laughing and murmured something about coffee. Then he thought he heard her say, though it made little sense to him, that he should "help himself." When Isa, thoroughly confused, began to pull up his socks, in a single violent motion Miss Emily lunged at him and stripped them off. She gaped at his exposed feet, at first with simple curiosity, then with a look of distress on detecting the raw wound where the skin had been scraped away. "Dear me," she exclaimed, putting out her cigarette.

It was by no means easy for Isa to make such a spectacle of himself in front of a foreign lady, here in this secret room. But so long as he was not obliged to speak, he was resigned to suffering these minor indignities. Nevertheless, he was desperately eager to return to the group, to become again only one among many.

After drinking a cup of coffee by herself, Miss Emily went out into the corridor, locking the door behind her. As she left, Isa understood her to say that she was going to consult with the nurse, which was encouraging—but why had she locked the door? Only then did he finish puzzling out her remark upon entering the room, to the effect that they mustn't let the students see them smoke. Yet that was only part of it, he knew. She was also worried about his wandering around the school on the loose, or still worse, escaping again, like a wounded animal that runs away when one is only trying to help it. As soon as Isa reached this point in his train of thought he felt an irresistible impulse to flee that very moment. He immediately opened the window, jumped out, and started to run.

After a few steps he felt the ground against his bare feet and remembered his shoes. He could not just leave them there, they did not belong to him. As he was hoisting himself back up through the window, the door opened across the room and he found himself face to face with Miss Emily.

While Isa was still lurking behind the trim modern buildings of the American school, Yamada wasted no time in approaching Michiko. In the past he had seen her from a distance conversing with foreigners in a free and easy manner. Since the beginning of today's excursion, when he dragged her off to the Education Office, he had been scheming for a chance to examine her English at first hand. It was not uncommon for members of his profession to test each other's mettle on some trivial pretext, like samurai picking quarrels simply to show off their prowess. Yamada was a past master at this sort of thing. And when he came up against colleagues whose English was better than his own, especially if they were women, he would try to defeat them on other grounds, to browbeat them if need be with the brute strength of his manly will. But in the end he often lost anyway.

Yamada had bided his time while Isa was tagging along beside Michiko, with what seemed to be warm encouragement on her part. Now that that nuisance had been removed, he could proceed with his interrogation. He unleashed a barrage of questions in English that left her scarcely a moment to catch her breath. What schools had she gone to, where did she graduate, had she taken special lessons in conversation, how many American friends did she have????

At first, even Michiko, with her considerable abilities, could not bring herself to reply in kind to her countryman's tirade in a foreign language. She answered only haltingly, and half in Japanese. But when Yamada showed no sign of relenting, she saw what he was up to, and resented his contempt for her sex.

And what, if she might inquire, was the big attraction of English for him? Would he like to try a demonstration class with her sometime? Wasn't it curious that he pronounced certain words with a kind of Boston accent, others in a sort of Southern drawl, which was a little like mixing Kyushu speech with the slow country dialect of Aomori?

Yamada was staggered by the woman's counterattack, delivered in rapid-fire, thoroughly natural English. It was not so much her fluency as the substance of her remarks that defeated him. She was more than a match for him, he conceded; he would have to find some other weakness. In his experience, when dealing with women, food and clothing were the best bet.

"That's a fine outfit you're wearing," he said, lapsing back into Japanese. "Did you get it before the War?"

"Yes," she answered softly. "That is, the material comes from a robe that belonged to my husband. He was killed in the War."

"I'm sorry to hear that. It must be hard for you," Yamada peered shrewdly into Michiko's face as he added: "If you need rice, I can get it fairly cheap."

"That's very kind of you," she said. "May I have your card?"

"And if you'd like a little piecework to do at home, perhaps I could find you something."

"I would certainly appreciate it. Men really are much better at arranging these things, aren't they!"

The procession had at last come to a halt in front of the gate to the school compound. As soon as Yamada noticed the guard looking over their credentials, he burst in with the information that one of their number had preceded them by jeep. Turning back to Michiko, he then announced in English: "I imagine that he is still barefoot, and has concealed himself somewhere behind the school."

"What makes you think that?" asked Michiko.

"Elementary," said Yamada. "The man does not know the language." Lowering his voice, but still speaking English, he suggested that the time had come for her to change her shoes.

Michiko did not need prompting; it had been on her mind all day long. Yet Yamada's sharpness surprised her. He must have been watching her closely since the march began. From now on, she in turn would have to keep an eye on him. Maybe he had Isa pegged, too, she thought. But was it possible that the poor fellow was still slinking around behind some building? She searched the corners of the compound as their final destination came into full view.

At the center of a large tract of land traversed by neat rows of houses stood the long-awaited school, an almost solid wall of glass on the side facing south. The fields that once occupied the site had been leveled away without a trace. An American observer would not have found the compound remarkable, much less luxurious. But the solid houses planted sparsely over the landscape, the spacious bedrooms illuminated by lamps even in broad daylight, the young Japanese maids attending to the needs of American babies—all of this was clearly revealed at a glance, and impressed the weary visitors as a vignette of some heavenly dwelling place.

Michiko reflected that her command of a foreign language and her general level of education might set her far above most of the residents; nevertheless, it was she who had walked four miles for the privilege of visiting their school, she who had reveled secretly in the pathetic expectation of showing off her high-heeled shoes. Surrounded by this verdant park, she now saw herself as too small and destitute even to set foot in such a place.

"What's the point of our sitting in on their classes?" she overheard a colleague complain to Shibamoto. He was the one, she recalled, who had been so quick to urge Isa to go barefoot. "What can we hope to learn from classes held in a place like this? The only lesson we'll leave with is the one we've learned just getting here: we lost! These magnificent buildings that we're only allowed to peek at—they were built with our taxes. Doesn't it make you want to cry?"

Michiko turned away, ashamed that she had perhaps been noticed before with her hands pressed sorrowfully over her eyes. She felt equally awkward in her present pose, and so she moved a few steps apart from the group, bent over and, though it scarcely mattered anymore, put on her high heels. The first thing she saw as she raised her head again was Isa, shoes still dangling down from one hand,

coming toward her across the playground—and standing motionless in the background, the beautiful figure of an American schoolmistress. Michiko wanted to change back into sneakers.

The long march on an empty stomach had reduced some of the group to sullen anger, others to a numb exhaustion. Their leader rose up to his full height, and with a few heaves of his broad shoulders began to harangue them: "You mustn't forget that you're here by special invitation. We in the administrative section worked hard to get it for you, and if anyone misbehaves we are the ones who'll be blamed—You there, what do you think you're doing?" As he spoke, Shibamoto's roving gaze was arrested by a man sitting on the ground with his back to the group. It was Isa. Shibamoto resumed in the same lecturing tone: "I must ask you not to sit down right in front of the school. You look like a beggar. When did you get back?"

"You see, sir, that's what I meant," Yamada interjected. "We have to put our best foot forward, bargain from strength. Otherwise we might as well not have come in the first place. Leave it to me."

Shibamoto cut him off with a vague "We'll see," and quickly moved on to the next item on the agenda. He took a sheaf of printed questionnaires from his briefcase and passed them out to the teachers. As they studied the form he explained that they were to use it to record in detail their impressions of the school; afterwards it would be collected and put on file for future reference.

"What can we possibly write down? What would it prove, anyway?" cried Michiko in a shrill voice. She was visibly overwrought.

"Never mind," Yamada interrupted again. "You can just put down what I have. I intend to comment very critically on the instructional objectives of this school, the aptitude of their teachers, and so forth. I'll show it around when I'm done, and everyone can use it as a model. You needn't worry about that. Instead you might give some thought to . . ."

"No, no, you've missed the point," said Michiko impatiently.

"Well, then, what is the problem?"

Michiko fell silent. There was no use trying to explain to the likes of Yamada. And Isa—what a timid little soul! But he did seem to have a way with women. She would have to get to the bottom of this business with the schoolmistress. For the moment Yamada and Isa were confused in her troubled thoughts.

Just then the iron gate in front of the school opened and a thirtyish, bespectacled man stood before them with a welcoming smile. He introduced himself to the group as Mr. Williams, the Principal. At his appearance the teachers ceased their idle chatter and prepared to begin their visit. Yamada barged through the gate ahead of the others, who hesitated and deferred to one another before following him in. Isa came last, dragging his feet, as the gate swung shut behind them.

Hardly any doubt remained in Isa's mind about Yamada's devious plan,

which he had sniffed out from its inception, to face off with him in a demonstration class before the day was over. He was determined to silence Yamada on this subject and prevent the encounter at any cost. But so far no suitable defense had suggested itself, and he approached the potentially fateful classrooms with ever more halting steps.

The group advanced in double file so as not to interfere with the students passing to and fro. Yamada had already attached himself to Mr. Williams. After the Principal's every utterance he would raise his hand as if to call for attention, turn to the person behind him, and communicate his version of the remark. This would be relayed in some form or other from one teacher to the next until it reached the end of the line: a procedure arrived at spontaneously, whether as a throwback to the rigid military chain of command or by simple analogy with a bucket brigade. It took some time for the message to be transmitted to Michiko and Isa in the rear, and in the interval all but the most provocative implications were filtered out.

Mr. Williams's opening remarks, that is, Yamada's rendering of them, went as follows: "Since the school was to be built with Japanese funds, we had little choice but to go along with the specifications given to us by some Japanese architects. The results, as you can see for yourselves, were less than satisfactory. To begin with, the budget was barely twenty percent of what would be considered normal back in the States. In our country we place great emphasis on bright and cheerful surroundings, and this school certainly does not meet those standards. We have twenty students in a class here, which is three too many. The ideal is seven-teen. Now I understand that in your country there are seven-ty in a class. Imagine! Classes that size are really out of the question. They necessitate regimentation, and this inevitably leads to militarism."

Here Yamada's voice trailed off into silence as Mr. Williams's expression took on a sudden severity, accompanied by a pudgy finger pointed at Yamada's forehead. When Yamada resumed interpreting, he spoke at first in tremulous tones.

The subject had changed to salaries, which, Mr. Williams assured them, were paid by the American government. The lowest salary level at the school, the one for beginning instructresses, was still about ten times the average wage of Japanese teachers, according to the figures he had heard. This was, it was true, a bit more than they would receive in comparable jobs at home; but things were a good deal more expensive in such a remote country; and if the discrepancy seemed excessive, it should be borne in mind that the standard of living which American teachers had to maintain was, after all, extremely high, so it was only natural that the basic salary be of a different order.

The only part of this speech to reach Isa's ear was the startling information, passed down the line with a collective sigh, that the teachers at this school got ten times as much money as they did. This so amazed Michiko that as she repeated it to Isa she had to lean on him to keep her balance. "We should have

listened to our colleague there," she commented. "We should have just turned around and gone home."

"Right. That's so," said Isa.

"Did that woman do something about your feet?"

"Right. She did."

"What did you talk about?"

"Nothing."

"Look at those two over there—how disgusting!" Michiko muttered censoriously.

Isa looked in the direction she had indicated and focused on two students who stood holding hands in a corner of the corridor, their eyes closed in mutual infatuation. Miss Emily came up behind the couple and tapped them both gently on the back, not so much to chastise them, it appeared, as to alert them to the presence of visitors. Afterward she turned toward Michiko and smiled.

"It looks like paradise from the outside," said Michiko, "but there's no telling what goes on between these walls."

"Right. That's so."

Michiko did not know what to make of Isa's laconic responses. She looked at his frightened, rabbitlike eyes and recalled what Yamada had said about him. Then he broke his silence.

"Why must I go through this humiliating ordeal?"

"What ordeal? You mean having to go barefoot before?"

"No. I mean having to look at all this beauty."

"Beauty? From a certain point of view, I suppose."

"I'll tell you why. Simply because I'm a so-called English teacher."

"Oh? You don't like speaking English?"

"I d-d-detest it!"

Michiko was not surprised. There were a lot of men like that, the opposite type from Yamada, and Isa must be one of them.

Although the teachers had been told that they should each choose a class to visit and go their separate ways, they preferred to stick together. In the end Shibamoto divided them arbitrarily into three subgroups and dispatched them to different classrooms, with the veiled threat of force that was always present in his judo master's bearing. These smaller units soon congealed so that each proceeded as one, like flocks of peasants being herded around the capital.

Michiko hovered next to Isa. She could hardly forget the small favor she had yet to beg of him, after dwelling on it the length of that asphalt road. Moreover, it was reassuring to have him by her side—here, where almost anything might happen, and now, while she felt so despicably drab in the shadow of the foreign lady. Isa seemed to her the perfect companion for the occasion.

Meanwhile, Isa stayed as close as possible to Yamada, watching his every move, and fervently wishing that he might fall down some stairs and break his

neck. He was even prepared, should the opportunity arise, to give him a little nudge. Failing that, in his present position he could at least intervene without delay if Yamada broached the subject of a demonstration class. And as one of his entourage, Isa was spared the necessity of pronouncing a single word of English, for Yamada had appropriated the role of spokesman for their party.

Isa and Michiko followed hard on Yamada's heels as together they entered the designated room, where they found a drawing class in session. Yamada soon retired to the supply closet to note down his observations. When he had finished he faced Michiko and whispered slyly: "Take a good look. With all their money and their fancy buildings, the children can't draw worth a damn."

There was a meek chorus of agreement from several colleagues who stood nearby, hanging on Yamada's every word. Michiko herself shared his opinion of the drawings, but she did not wish to be associated in any way with these people. They were the mean and cunning sort of Japanese, she and Isa were different, Michiko told herself, looking to Isa for confirmation. She caught him stooping over his shoes again: a new pair of sneakers which, she quickly deduced, must have come from that schoolmistress. They were much too big for him and he was trying to compensate by lacing them up tight. The moment Isa's eyes met hers, he blushed and turned the other way.

Michiko proposed that they have a closer look at the work now in progress. As they moved into the classroom and studied the drawings, they found themselves submerged in a waterless sea teeming with fish of various colors, shapes, and sizes. They were all unique, each one the product of a collaborative effort by a small group. Over by the window a few junior-high-school students of both sexes were sketching the thatched-roof cottages which appeared in the distance, beyond the confines of the American compound. They began to steal glances at the visitors over their shoulders, then one of the boys pointed at Shibamoto with his right hand while with his left he indicated a drawing of a seadevil. On closer inspection of other drawings, it was discovered that Yamada had been turned into a shark, Isa into a flying fish, suggested, perhaps, by his emaciated figure, and Michiko a goldfish. In the same fashion the whole party emerged within the next few moments as a school of highly distinctive fish.

As soon as they were back in the corridor, Yamada said to Shibamoto: "What kind of school are they running here, allowing such insulting behavior—and even toward a lady! I think we should submit a written protest. How about the rest of you? And you, Mrs. . . .?"

"I didn't really mind it so much," said Michiko. "In fact, we sort of asked for it, with our down-and-out attitude."

"Down-and-out? I'm talking about a serious failing in their instructional objectives, a complete lack of discipline. That art teacher ought to be severely reprimanded. But why should I waste my breath! If you don't mind being turned into a goldfish, that's your business."

Not a glint of amusement alleviated Yamada's peevisish expression as he finished berating Michiko and began to make further notations in his little book. "What did they do with you?" he asked Isa, looking up from his book. "Oh yes. It was a flying fish, and quite a masterpiece, too. They must have got the idea from the way you were flitting around in your bare feet."

Isa was at the moment too intent on his malevolent wishes to hear.

Isa stood at the door of the classroom in his borrowed sneakers and listened to the lady whose initials they bore teach English. Michiko had gone inside with the others, this time without trying to coax him into coming along. After a while the group filed back into the corridor one by one and clustered together to exchange comments in a half-whisper.

"You might almost say that our English is better than theirs," Yamada observed to Michiko in Japanese. "Weren't you amazed at all the mistakes in their grammar?"

"But the teacher is pretty, isn't she?"

"Hmm. It's like hiring a movie star to teach at a ridiculous salary."

"You were right about *him*—he really does hate English," said Michiko, switching languages as she again changed the subject.

"I know all that. I am also aware that he harbors some malice toward me."

Michiko acknowledged to herself that in referring to Isa as "him" and making her remark in English she had stilled the pangs of guilt which she would normally have felt in this betrayal of trust. And that, she reflected, was no doubt one reason for Isa's hatred of the foreign language: when you spoke it you stopped being yourself. It was too easy to be carried away by the titillation of the words, words not exactly your own. She knew she ought to get away from Yamada, the sooner the better.

When Michiko was back at Isa's side again she startled herself by blurting out, "If you hate speaking English so much, you must hate me too."

"It's different with women," said Isa.

"Women make good mimics. Is that what you mean?"

Maybe that was what he had meant, Isa could not be sure.

Without warning Michiko leaned over and whispered something in his ear. She had reverted to Japanese, to Isa's relief, but he could still make out only the general drift.

"You mean even you . . . ?" Isa blushed a deeper hue than Michiko, though she had brought the matter up.

"Have I embarrassed you again?" she asked.

It was perhaps in part the extraordinary scene now unfolding before their eyes that had driven her to divulge such a delicate matter, and so impetuously. They were now in the gymnasium, where, in preparation for tomorrow's basket-

ball game with a neighboring school, a rally was being conducted by a spirited cheering section. A trio of girls in uniform, sixteen or seventeen years old, stood in front of the others calling out the names of the players with mounting fervor. When the shouting had risen to a high pitch of frenzied excitement, like a line of chorus girls they all began to lift up their skirts while the cheerleaders launched into cartwheels and somersaults.

"It's all set for the demonstration class this afternoon—you and me," said Yamada, who had appeared out of nowhere and taken Isa by surprise.

"I-I-I don't know what you're talking about. I have nothing to do with it."

"Well, you know now. Shibamoto decided on the two of us. I'll meet you after lunch, as soon as the hour for visiting classes is over. And don't try to run away. Shibamoto would not be pleased." Thrusting his jaw out toward Michiko, he added in an insinuating tone: "I'm sure you can get some coaching from her."

Yamada had in fact not the slightest desire to stand in front of a class next to Isa. The man was sure to bring disgrace on the whole profession. But in the middle of the rally he had caught sight of Michiko whispering in Isa's ear, then watched as Isa blushed and nodded in agreement. At that moment he had declared war.

Yamada went directly to the Principal and made his proposal with the same lunatic zeal he had shown to Shibamoto. Shibamoto stood by, wondering anxiously how the Principal would react to this bizarre request, which sounded less like a bid for a classroom demonstration than a demand for satisfaction by a man whose honor had been challenged. Yet, whether because like Shibamoto he saw no way out, or because he was soon to return to America and hoped it might yield a piece of Japanese bravado to regale his friends with, the Principal had accepted the proposal on the spot.

Yamada took leave of Isa and Michiko with a few curt instructions as to where they were to eat their lunch: on some benches in the schoolyard, about three hundred feet outside the gate—and nowhere else.

With quivering lips Isa stared vacantly after Yamada as he retreated across the gymnasium.

"Isa-san. I'll take your place this afternoon," said Michiko.

"It's too late for that," Isa replied. "Either I knock him out, or I quit my job . . . or else I go ahead with the class and just stand there without saying a word."

Isa made as if to run after Yamada, but the sores on his feet seemed to be acting up again, and he had barely managed to limp forward a few steps when Michiko seized him by the hand and held him back.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Please don't forget the little favor I asked you a moment ago. If you'll let me have them now, I'll wash them right away."

Isa's immediate response was a blank look and an incessant blinking of his rabbit-eyes.

"You know, what we talked about before," Michiko prompted.

Isa finally understood what she wanted. All right, she could have them. But only after he had finished with them. Even at this juncture, on the brink of coming to blows with Yamada, he could not ignore his other concern, one from which he was never altogether free.

With sudden resolution Isa removed from his satchel a small bundle wrapped in newspaper and thrust it toward Michiko, all the while keeping his eyes on Yamada's vanishing figure. Michiko reached out in some confusion to take the coveted article from him—hardly ten seconds had passed since he had at last seemed to grasp her wish. But like an overcager relay runner, Isa had moved too soon, and he was off before the bundle was safely in her hands. Uneasy about the transaction to begin with, Michiko now blushed furiously, fumbled, and in the end lost her balance. Her high heels slid out from under her, and with a piercing shriek that filled the corridor she toppled over onto the floor. The bundle lay open where she had hurled it aside in her fall, revealing a pair of black chopsticks.

It remained a secret shared by Isa and Michiko alone that she had fallen while clutching at this homely artifact of their native land. As soon as Mr. Williams arrived on the scene, he loudly ordered the Japanese who had gathered around to disperse, whereupon up and down the corridor foreigners came rushing out of every other door. The Principal drove off this new crowd, leaving only a few women to help Michiko to the dispensary.

Afterward, as he questioned Shibamoto about the accident, Mr. Williams kept adjusting his glasses in an irritable gesture that suggested he found it all very regrettable. What had Michiko and Isa been up to? he wanted to know. Yamada, having rejoined them, interpreted stiffly for Shibamoto to the effect that the man with the limp had been struggling to catch up with yours truly to request that he be allowed to substitute for his colleague in today's demonstration class, meanwhile, the lady, who cherished similar aspirations, had been strenuously attempting to dissuade her colleague from his determined course when she slipped and fell. "It all proceeded from their pedagogical dedication," Yamada concluded on Shibamoto's behalf, "and their devotion to the English language."

"Ah yes. The old *kanukaze* spirit," said the Principal.

The heavy irony was lost on Yamada, who took the remark as a compliment, and presented it as such to his superior. Shibamoto fluttered his eyelashes in silent modesty.

Seeing that his sally had been deflected by misinterpretation, Mr. Williams pushed back his glasses again and turned on them with his sternest expression. "From now on, there are two things which I must strictly forbid," he announced. "The first is for any Japanese instructor to conduct a class here, to engage in any attempts to do so, or in any way to involve himself in the educational process at this school. Secondly, in the future high heels will not be permitted on these

premises. If there are any violations, we will have to terminate all further visits."

After spitting out these injunctions with an air of finality, the Principal strode rapidly down the corridor to the door of the dispensary. He showed no inclination to enter, merely surveying the situation from outside.

A long pause ensued during which Yamada neglected to translate Mr. Williams's last pronouncement. When he was summoned back to reality by a poke in the ribs from Shibamoto, he spun around and fled toward the exit, without so much as a word of explanation. Then, with Shibamoto in the lead, the rest of the group hurried after, as though suddenly reminded of some vital errand. Only Isa was left behind, alone once again.

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM F. SIBLEY