The Early Cases
of
Akechi Kogorō

Edogawa Rampo
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The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

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This translation is based entirely on versions of the stories as published in the Kōbunsha library editions of the *Edogawa Rampo Zenshū* (Complete Works of Edogawa Rampo).

All names in this work are given in Japanese order, family name preceding given name. In accordance with tradition, Edogawa Rampo will hereinafter be referred to primarily by his chosen forename, “Rampo.”

In his writing, Rampo employs traditional Japanese units of measurement. As this translation is intended primarily for the general reader, who will have little idea what to make of a garden of “two *tsubo*” in area, a gap of “just one *ken,*” or a distance of “five or six *shaku,*” these figures have been converted into units of measurement with which Western readers will be more familiar. These conversions have been made in the Imperial system because its hodgepodge of inches, feet and yards resembles the old Japanese measurements more closely than the smooth, mathematical progression of metric units. In addition, because the metric system is widely used in Japan today, its use here would erase the features that distinguish Rampo’s early-twentieth-century writing from that of most contemporary Japanese authors.

One unit of measurement that deserves particular attention is the *tatami.* These are thick straw mats that cover the floors of traditional Japanese living spaces. The size of these mats is standardized at roughly six feet by three feet. The precise size varies slightly by region, but the mats are generally twice as long as they are wide. For this reason, *tatami* are traditionally used
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to express the size of rooms, and the area of Japanese apartments is sometimes given in this way even today. A four-and-a-half-mat room, like the one in which Akechi first makes his lodgings, is roughly three yards to a side.

In the mid-1920s, when the stories in this collection were written, the Japanese yen commanded a significantly higher domestic value than it does at present, or has been in the decades since the Second World War. In addition to the yen, smaller coins called sen, one hundred of which were equal to one yen, were in circulation at that time.
Introduction

No single author has had a greater influence on Japanese detective fiction than Edogawa Rampo (1894–1965). In addition to writing nearly one hundred and fifty short stories and novels, Rampo also produced a number of frequently autobiographical essays on the subjects of horror and detective fiction, especially as relates to their place in the modern Japanese literary landscape. Along with writers such as Okamoto Kidō and Kuroiwa Ruikō, Rampo’s work helped to transform detective fiction in Japan from a critically neglected genre of popular fiction dominated by translations of Western authors into a thriving and distinctive national tradition.

Born Hirai Tarō in 1894, Rampo was already enamored of detective fiction, particularly the works of Kuroiwa and those of Edgar Allan Poe, by the time he graduated from Waseda University with a degree in economics in 1916. He was 22 years old. Feeling that Japan offered no opportunities for the creation of original mysteries yet prevented by financial considerations from pursuing a career abroad, Rampo took up a series of odd jobs in Tokyo and Osaka, including stints as a used bookseller, a newspaper reporter and a noodle vendor. His life continued in this way until 1923, when his debut work, *Nisendōka* (“The Two-Sen Copper Coin”), was published in the magazine *Shin-Seinen* (New Youth). “The Two-Sen Copper Coin” was the first detective story by a Japanese author the magazine had published, and *Shin-Seinen’s* founder and editor-in-chief, Morishita Uson, billed Rampo as a Japanese writer capable of producing detective fiction equal to Western works, a fact that immediately drew a passionate critical response, both positive and negative.
With the exception of a prolonged interruption caused by the Second World War, Rampo continued to write steadily until shortly before his death of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1965, although in the postwar years his attention shifted somewhat away from fiction and towards commentary and the promotion of new authors. A yearly prize for excellence in detective fiction by a new author is awarded in Rampo’s name by the Nihon Suiri-Sakka Kyōkai (Mystery Writers of Japan), of which organization he was the founder and first president.

Although the better part of Rampo’s career took place during the Showa era (1926–1989), he is often remembered primarily as a writer of the Taishō period (1912–1926). All the stories in this volume come from this early phase of his career. Taishō was a period between the chaotic change of government of Meiji (1868–1912) and the militarism of early Showa characterized by a movement towards political and ideological liberalism known as the “Taishō Democracy” and by the influx of Western goods and ideas into Japanese life.

Rampo has sometimes been called the Edgar Allan Poe of Japan, and his nom de plume, being a phonetic rendering of the American author’s name in Chinese characters, certainly invites the comparison. Rampo was fond of wordplay and “liked Poe so much [he] could break into a dance,” but there is a deeper meaning in his choice of pen name than a simple literary game or acknowledgment of influence. Throughout his numerous works of detective fiction, and especially in his early pieces, Rampo continually asserts the right of his creations to be judged and considered on the same terms as those of prominent Western authors. His chosen name, in combination with his frequent allusions to works on crime and detection by mostly Western authors, demands that the reader or critic compare Rampo’s work with that of the famous Western writers he references and to consider them all as belonging to the same category. Rampo believed that a Japanese detective story could match the work of Western authors in the modern ratiocinative tradition that they had established. Some of his works bear directly on the debates surrounding this issue, such as *D zaka no satsujin-jiken* (“The Case of the Murder on D. Hill”), which
Rampo intended as a response to critics who argued that it was impossible to set the secret incidents and mysterious dealings which formed the core of the modern Western mystery in the open, wood-and-paper houses of Japan and that it was thus a natural result of the Japanese way of life that Japan should produce no strong mystery tradition of its own. By constructing a genuine locked-room mystery in a Japanese building, Rampo hoped to demonstrate that “the Japanese people who love the crime dramas of Ō Nanboku and adore Ruikō Kuroiwa’s translated mysteries don’t hate detective stories just because they live in houses of paper and bamboo.”

But the name of Poe—and the association with the tradition of Western detective authors it evokes—is not the only message incorporated into Rampo’s nom de plume. ‘Edogawa Rampo’ is not a double but a triple entendre. ‘Edogawa’ refers to the Edo River, which borders present day Tokyo to the south and was originally the lower course of the Tone River. It was diverted by the Tokugawa Shogunate in order to prevent flooding in the capital city and to provide a convenient route for the transportation of goods by boat. The Edo River also recalls the shita-machi, an area of old Tokyo inhabited by the merchant class, whose name evokes associations of a fluid world, unrefined and bustling with small businesses. In Rampo’s day, it was a place where traditional Japanese merchant culture mingled and collided with emerging twentieth-century modernity. Rampo’s pseudonym incorporates the geography of Edo, the old capital of the isolationist Tokugawa Shogunate, within the name of Poe, an American writer. This contradictory composition reflects Rampo’s own efforts to create a uniquely Japanese tradition in an imported genre.

The name “Rampo” comprises two Chinese ideograms, the first meaning “unrest,” “disorder,” or “disturbance” and the second “walk.” The name has been variously rendered in English as “rambler” (conveying an image of Baudelaire’s flâneur), as “staggering drunkenly,” as “chaotic rambling,” and as “staggering,” suggestive of roguishness and menace. All of these conceptions share the idea of erratic, aimless motion. This wayward movement is embodied in the aimless youths living in
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the less well-to-do districts of the capital who people much of Ramo’s detective fiction. Ramo’s narrators are educated layabouts, distinct from the working classes and the truly poor, but nonetheless far worse off than the wealthy merchant families with whom they associate. They are poor students, struggling authors, and recent graduates with no set course in life. These unsettled young men are part of ordinary society but detached just enough from its quotidian routines to provide an outsider’s perspective on events.

The most famous of these urban wanderers, and the subject of this collection, is Akechi Kogorō. Akechi is Ramo’s “great detective” (meitantei) and the character most strongly associated with Ramo in the public consciousness. Akechi’s fame in his native Japan rivals that of Sherlock Holmes in the English-speaking world. In addition to twenty-one novels and short stories written for an adult audience, Ramo penned a series of twenty-seven children’s novels starring Akechi’s young assistant, Kobayashi Yoshio, with minor appearances by Akechi himself. These popular novels cemented Akechi’s image in the minds of generations of young readers. They also gave Akechi a recurring nemesis in the person of Kaijin nijūmensō (The Fiend with Twenty Faces). A devious master of disguise who adheres to a strict code in his theft of precious artworks, Twenty Faces is not a Moriarty but a Lupin to Akechi’s Holmes. The Fiend with Twenty Faces has developed a following in his own right, and writers such as Kitamura Sō have produced a number of stories in which he takes on the protagonist’s role. Akechi himself has appeared in numerous films, television serials and comic books in the more than eighty years since his debut in “The Case of the Murder on D. Hill.”

The stories in this volume predate all of that. Readers familiar with the exploits of the great detective Akechi Kogorō might have trouble recognizing the impeccably dressed and universally respected man of action in the “amateur detective” (shirō-to-tantei), an eccentric twenty-something of little means with disheveled hair and a shabby kimono. The Akechi who appears in this volume is a hobbyist in crime whose identity is not yet fixed either in the eyes of the reading public or in the mind of
his creator. Supporting characters such as Akechi’s wife and his young assistant have not yet been introduced, and the first confrontation between the great detective and the Fiend with Twenty Faces is still a decade away.

Rampo initially conceived of Akechi Kogorō only as a protagonist for “The Case of the Murder on D. Hill,” never intending to make further use of the character. But the positive reactions of Rampo’s friends and colleagues prompted him to make Akechi a recurring protagonist in his detective fiction. The first five Akechi mysteries, “The Case of the Murder on D. Hill,” “The Psychological Test,” “The Black Hand Gang,” “The Ghost,” and “The Stalker in the Attic” were all published in the first half of 1925 as part of Rampo’s first serial for Shin-Seinen magazine. Rampo does not seem to have had any clear idea of what to do with the Akechi character following his initial unexpected popularity, and three of his immediate sequels to “D. Hill” feature the amateur detective almost as an afterthought, as a device to present the solution to a mystery rather than as a character in his own right. The pattern of these works is to develop some complicated crime in great detail, either from the perspective of its perpetrator or its victim and for Akechi to put in an unexpected appearance in the last few pages to explain the mystery and expose the criminal. The exception is “The Black Hand Gang,” which attempts to recapture the success of “D. Hill” by reusing the same narrator and introducing Akechi to the narrative relatively early on, although it too does little to further develop his somewhat hazy character.

Rampo originally based Akechi’s character on Kanda Hakuryū, the fifth professional storyteller to inherit that name, whose work he encountered while on a trip to Osaka. Rampo was taken with Kanda’s appearance and manner of speaking and thought that he would make an excellent model for an unusual detective. This capricious origin does much to explain the initial ambiguity of Akechi’s personal and professional situation. Nothing of Akechi’s family, early life, or education is established. Rampo’s narrator, Akechi’s only known friend at this early stage, confesses a total ignorance of Akechi’s background, and Akechi himself will say only that he is “studying humans.”
The source of Akechi’s income is equally mysterious. Although in later stories he earns his living through detective work, he initially seeks out strange cases only as an interested amateur and at the conclusion of “The Black Hand Gang” actually refuses any monetary compensation for his meddling. Aside from the appearance and mannerisms borrowed from the professional storyteller and his vast knowledge of crime and detection, Akechi is an enigma. It is little wonder, then, that Rampo significantly altered his protagonist as he came to occupy an increasingly prominent position in Rampo’s body of work.

A year after the Shin-Seinen serial, Rampo revisited Akechi in a longer serialized novel, Issunbōshi (The Dwarf). Akechi is said to have spent time in Shanghai and has traded his striped kimon for black Chinese robes. He is known as a professional detective, occupying lodgings far more spacious than his old crowded room above a tobacconist’s shop and employs a network of subordinates to collect information and shadow criminals. Aside from his manner of speaking and his interest in crime, no trace of the Akechi of the earlier short stories remains.

Following The Dwarf, Akechi did not make another appearance for three years, returning in Kumo-otoko (The Spider Man), in which his absorption of foreign elements continues. His three-year absence is revealed to have been spent in India, and his appearance has undergone another transformation. This time he resembles “an English gentleman in the African or Indian colonies, or perhaps an Indian gentleman used to living in Europe.” Later novels put Akechi in tailored Western suits and refer to cases he has solved on trips to Europe. Some post-war novels aimed at younger readers even adopted touches of popular science fiction, introducing fantastical devices such as a lifelike mechanical man and a helicopter backpack capable of sustained flight.

Rampo was in many ways a forward thinker, ready to champion the possibilities of works and genres most critics regarded as artistically worthless and quickly drawn to the possibilities of new technologies such as film. The progressive Westernization of Akechi Kogorō reflects this attitude in its relentless pursuit of
the shifting social landscape of twentieth-century Japan. In embracing the popular entertainment of the detective novel and the cinema, Rampo’s work also embraces the growing influence of the West on the Japanese society of his day. This acceptance, however, was not always uncritical or without trepidation. Just as Akechi’s move towards the West begins gradually, by way of China and India, the proliferation of European objects in Rampo’s works is gradual.

In *The Dwarf*, where Akechi’s transformation begins, the physical artifacts of Western influence exist exclusively in conjunction with the weird and sinister. Rampo’s stories tend to observe a definite spatial and temporal division between the bright, open spaces where people go about their ordinary lives by the light of day and the darkness where hideous crimes are committed and reality takes on a dream-like mutability. Added to this division of darkness and light is a complementary emphasis on public and private realities, which shows itself in the structure of some of Rampo’s works, such as the division of “The Black Hand Gang” into “revealed facts” and “hidden facts.” It can also be seen in his obsession with disguises, doppelgangers, multiple identities, and Jekyll and Hyde-like juxtapositions of respectable public faces with monstrous private crimes. It is the work of Rampo’s most dangerous criminals to bring artifacts of their sinister realities into people’s everyday lives, as in the case of the prominently placed severed limbs by means of which the antagonist of *The Dwarf* makes his crimes known. And it is the function of his detectives to impose the ordered reason of the world of light onto the dark realities that lurk beneath.

It is in these shadowy corners that objects of the West first appear. A murder is committed in a new, Western-style building adjoining a Japanese mansion; a terrible scene is witnessed after hours in a department store, then a novel departure from the traditional Japanese shop; a man feels impelled to don his only suit of Western clothes before encountering a sinister plot; a jar of imported cosmetics, alone among an assortment of Japanese articles, affords a clue to the identity of a killer; a dismembered corpse is concealed within a large, earthenware Kewpie doll. Unlike the telephones, automobiles and electric lights which
are taken as natural elements of daily life, these objects are still clearly alien to the Japanese space they occupy, and Rampo uses the otherness of these unassimilated Western artifacts to emphasize and enhance the uncanny otherness of his criminal.

Rampo’s crimes tend toward the outré and spectacular, and his criminals are often no less bizarre. In addition to Lupin-esque figures such as the Fiend with Twenty Faces and the decidedly more sinister Black Lizard, Rampo created a cast of femmes fatales, sexually-driven serial killers, and desperate youths. Rampo had a penchant for ero-guro-nansensu (“erotic, grotesque nonsense”), and this fascination often found an outlet in his stories of crime and detection. Graphic acts of violence both by and against beautiful women are a recurring theme, but Rampo’s disposition also led him to explore the extremes of ugliness. The disfigured or deformed appear repeatedly in his work as objects of the grotesque imagination, often in contrast with remarkable beauty and in conjunction with graphic scenes of violence and sexuality. Rampo’s depictions of such characters are not out of line with the attitudes of his time, although they may often appear horrifically insensitive by modern standards, as in the case of the titular character of The Dwarf, who Rampo consistently describes as a “deformed child.” Rampo’s concern is always more for the sensational effect of bizarre appearances and chilling deeds than for social realities.

Indeed, Rampo’s fiction practices a surprisingly lax morality for a detective story. Several of his stories, such as “The Psychological Test” and “The Stalker in the Attic,” portray heinous crimes from the perspective of their perpetrators. And in novels such as The Spider Man and The Black Lizard, he was in the habit of referring to his master criminals as protagonists alongside his detectives, rather than as villains. In Mōjū (The Blind Beast), which chronicles the serial murders committed by a wealthy blind man, Rampo is curiously unwilling to condemn the crimes of his creation and even suggests that the man’s contribution to the world of art might counterbalance his wrongdoings. Akechi Kogorō himself is from the first somewhat ambivalent in his relationship with to law and morality. Like Rampo, he is not amoral, but he does not always appear to attach serious
weight to his moral judgments. In both “The Case of the Murder on D. Hill” and “The Black Hand Gang,” Akechi decides against revealing the identity of the criminal to the authorities, a decision he makes several more times in his career. At the conclusion of *The Dwarf*, he suggests that he might be willing to deliberately subvert justice in the service of his own personal feelings. Akechi’s interest in crime is intellectual rather than moral, and like his creator he is unwilling to pass judgment in his study of human nature.

In many ways, Rampo’s work is not about crime but the writing of crime. His works are replete with explicit references to the works of other authors of detective fiction, and his characteristically conversational narration directly addresses the preconceptions and expectations of the knowledgeable reader. The history and traditions of the genre are alive in Rampo’s work. His stories are populated by devoted readers of detective fiction, who are often prompted by their love of the genre to take up roles as criminals and would-be sleuths. Even his own works put in an appearance: Akechi overhears a critique of Rampo’s stories concerning his exploits in *Nanimono (Who)*, and when the trick of “The Human Chair” reappears in *The Black Lizard*, characters are quick to recall the similarity to Rampo’s earlier story. This characteristic reflexivity goes hand in hand with Rampo’s love of play and marks him from the start as an author interested in not only the production but also the analysis of detective fiction.

This is a collection of stories that were, by and large, disliked by their creator. Rampo expressed no particular displeasure with “The Case of the Murder on D. Hill,” although it was far from his favorite work, but he regarded both “The Black Hand Gang” and “The Ghost” as failures. The former he at least considered to be of interest for the complex code based on the composition of Chinese ideograms that is central to its plot, but he found the latter to have no such redeeming feature. Rampo once described “The Ghost” as “rubbish” for which he had “taken up [his] brush in vain,” and paused only long enough in the afterword to the Tōgensha edition of his complete works to comment that it was the “least interesting” of his early piec-
es. Rampo was so dissatisfied with *The Dwarf* that he gave up writing for a year following its completion. He spent this time on “a wandering journey with no fixed course,” motivated by a self-loathing he attributed at least partially to his experience writing the novel.

Nevertheless, these stories represent an important stage in Rampo’s development as an author and in the formation of his most famous creation and as such are deserving of consideration alongside works with which he felt greater satisfaction. “The Case of the Murder on D Hill” remains both an engaging tale of crime and detection and a record of the cultural debates that surrounded the inception of modern Japanese detective fiction. While one would be hard-pressed to argue that “The Black Hand Gang” and “The Ghost” are not lacking both polish and ingenuity in comparison to Rampo’s better-known works, they reflect his first, faltering steps in the development of his serial protagonist. *The Dwarf*, while disliked by Rampo himself, was received with far greater enthusiasm by the general public. It became both the first and second of Rampo’s works to be adapted as a film and the only one to be filmed prior to the Second World War. *The Dwarf* also represents an early display of Rampo’s fascination with the erotic and grotesque, and several of the devices he employs in its construction were reworked in later novels such as *The Blind Beast*. Together, these stories span the earliest phase of Rampo’s career and mark the inception of a character who went on to become a cultural landmark.
Japanese Editions

English Editions

Films
THE EARLY CASES OF AKECHI KOGORÔ


**Secondary Sources**


Mystery Writers of Japan Organization website

http://www.mystery.or.jp/

The Early Cases

of

Akechi Kogorō
The Case of the Murder on D. Hill

The Facts

It was a sultry evening in early September. I was sipping cold coffee in the Plum Blossom House, a café I frequented near the center of D. Hill’s main street. At that time, I was just out of school, without a profession to call my own, and idling away my time reading at the boardinghouse where I lived or, when I grew weary of that, going out on aimless strolls to the neighborhood’s inexpensive cafés. This comprised my daily routine.

The Plum Blossom House was quite near my lodgings and situated such that I had to pass by it when I went out walking anywhere. For these reasons, it was the establishment I passed in and out of most often. Being an ill-mannered man, once I had entered the café it was my custom to remain until I had over-stayed my welcome. And as I have never had much of an appetite and generally had very little in my purse, I would spend one or two motionless hours there without ordering even a single plate of food, and instead drinking two or three cups of cheap coffee. Still, I don’t mean to say that I ever took a particular fancy to any of the waitresses or made to harass them. Well, it was gayer and more comfortable than my room in the boarding house. That night, I had taken up my customary position at a table facing the street and was gazing absentmindedly out the window.

Now, at the time of this story, D. Hill, where the Plum Blossom House was located and which had formerly been well known for its dolls made from chrysanthemum flowers, had
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just had its narrow lane widened into a broad avenue called Something-or-Other Street by the urban renewal of the Taishō Era, and both sides of the main street were still dotted with empty lots. It was a far more lonesome neighborhood than it is now. Across the main street, exactly opposite the Plum Blossom House, there was a secondhand bookshop. Actually, I had been watching its storefront for some time. Although this shabby secondhand bookshop in a rundown district was not particularly worth looking at, it held something of a special interest for me. That is to say, I had heard from an unusual man whose acquaintance I had recently made in this very Plum Blossom House that a woman who had been his childhood friend was now the wife of the proprietor. This man, Akechi Kogorō, was quite eccentric in his conversation and seemed to be very intelligent, but the thing about him which had so charmed me was his love of detective fiction. According to my memories of the two or three times I had purchased books there, the wife of that secondhand bookshop owner was quite a beauty. There was something sensual about her which fascinated men, although it would have been impossible to single out any particular feature of hers as the cause of this effect. Because she tended the store every night, she was certainly there this evening as well. However, although the shop was a small one, with only a little less than five yards of frontage, I could see no one inside. I watched and waited patiently, sure that she would eventually show herself.

But she never did. When I had grown tired of my vigil and was about to shift my gaze to the watch shop next door, I suddenly noticed that the sliding paper doors separating the store from the inner rooms were shut tight. (Because these doors were of the type specialists call *musō*, the central portions, across which paper would normally be pasted, had been made into a narrow vertical double lattice. Each lattice panel was roughly one fifth the width of the screen and could be opened and closed.) Well now, that was certainly odd. It is quite easy to shoplift from a secondhand bookshop, and the gaps in the sliding paper doors allowed the people in the inner rooms to keep a close watch even when they were not minding the store, so it was quite peculiar that they were closed. If the weather were cold it would
be one thing, but it was odd that the doors should be closed at all on such a sultry evening when it was only just September. As I tried to imagine the events that might be transpiring in the inner rooms of the secondhand bookshop to cause such a thing, I no longer felt inclined to divert my gaze.

Speaking of the secondhand bookshop owner’s wife, I once heard the waitresses in this café discussing a strange rumor. This is what I heard them say, although they were only repeating what they had heard from the ladies and girls they had met in the bathhouse: ‘The mistress of the secondhand bookshop is pretty, but when she’s naked you can see that her whole body is covered in bruises. They’re clearly the marks of being beaten and pinched. It doesn’t seem like her relationship with her husband is particularly bad, either. Isn’t it strange?’

Hearing this, another woman replied, ‘The mistress of Asahiya, the soba shop on that block, is often bruised as well. I’m sure hers are also from being beaten.’ I didn’t pay much heed to the meaning of that gossip and only thought to myself that their husbands must be quite cruel. However, dear readers, that was not the case at all. Later on, you will come to understand that this trivial matter has a strong connection to this entire story.

Be that as it may, I sat in the same place watching intently for about thirty minutes. You might call it a premonition, but somehow I felt that something would happen while I wasn’t looking, so I couldn’t have directed my gaze elsewhere even if I had tried. Right at that moment, Akechi Kogorō, to whom I have just referred, passed by outside the window, wearing a broadly striped yukata and swinging his shoulders strangely as he walked. Noticing me, he gave a nod of recognition, entered the café and, ordering an iced coffee, sat down beside me, facing the window as I was. Then, noticing that I was gazing at a single spot, he followed my line of sight and fixed his eyes on the secondhand bookshop across the street. The strange thing was that he continued to stare fixedly in that direction with apparent interest and without diverting his eyes even slightly.

While we stared at the same place as if by agreement, we exchanged idle talk. Because I have forgotten what topics we discussed and because our conversation had no relation to this
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story, I will merely say that I am sure we talked about crime and detectives. I will try to reproduce a sample of our discussion:

Akechi: “A truly undetectable crime should be impossible, shouldn’t it? But I think that it is quite possible. For example, take Tanizaki Junichirō’s On the Road. A crime like that could hardly have been discovered at all. Naturally, in that novel, the detective does discover it, but that discovery was only a product of the author’s magnificent powers of imagination.”

I: “No, I don’t think so. In the case of a practical problem, theoretically speaking, there’s no such thing as a crime a detective cannot solve. It’s just that there’s no detective on the police force now as great as the one featured in On the Road.”

It was roughly that sort of thing. But there came a moment when we both fell suddenly silent, as if we had agreed upon it in advance. For some time, an interesting event had been taking place at the secondhand bookshop across the way, from which our eyes had never wavered as we spoke.

“It seems you’ve noticed as well,” I whispered. His reply was instantaneous.

“It must be a book thief. That’s quite strange, isn’t it? I’ve been watching since I came in here. This is the fourth one.”

“It hasn’t been more than thirty minutes since you got here. Four in thirty minutes. It’s a bit odd, isn’t it? I’ve been watching that place since before you came. It was those paper doors, about an hour ago. I saw that those lattice-like parts were closed, and I’ve been paying attention ever since then.”

“Haven’t the family gone out, then?”

“Those doors haven’t opened even once. I suppose they could have gone out by the back entrance, but it’s certainly strange for them to be gone for more than thirty minutes. How about it, why don’t we go take a look?”

“Yes, let’s. Even if nothing is seriously wrong inside, there’s probably something going on.”

I exited the café, thinking that it would be interesting if this were a criminal case or something of the kind. I’m certain Akechi was thinking the same. He was more than a little excited.

As is often the case, the secondhand bookshop had a dirt floor and bookshelves reaching almost to the ceiling to the right
and left of the front. The back wall was lined with more shelves of books. An oblong table piled high with books stood like an island in the center of the dirt floor. There was a sliding paper door just three feet from the right-hand front bookshelves that opened into the inner rooms and corridors. Either the owner or his wife was always sitting quietly on the raised tatami-matted floor in front of this door, minding the shop.

Akechi and I went as far as this tatami-matted area and called out in loud voices, but there was no reply. Sure enough, it seemed no one was there. We slid the paper door open a crack and peered inside. Although the electric lights were off, leaving the inner rooms in total darkness, it appeared that a human figure lay collapsed in a corner of the room. Thinking this suspicious, we called out once more, but there was no answer.

“Why don’t we try going inside? They won’t mind.”

The two of us then stepped noisily up into the room. Akechi twisted the electric light switch on. Just then, we both cried out at the same time. In a corner of the now bright room, a woman’s corpse lay on its side.

“It’s the mistress of this shop, isn’t it?” I said at length. “Doesn’t it look as if she’s been strangled?”

Akechi came up beside me and examined the corpse.

“There’s certainly no chance of reviving her. We have to inform the police at once. I’ll go to the public telephone. You stay here and keep watch. It would probably be better if we don’t alert the neighborhood. We mustn’t destroy any clues.”

Leaving me with these orders, he flew off to the public telephone, which was only half a block away.

Although in theory I was reasonably familiar with crime, detectives and the like, this was my first time to encounter them in practice. There was nothing I could do. I merely stared fixedly at that corner of the room.

There was only a single six-mat room. Further inside and to the right, a narrow porch separated the house from a garden, which was only about eight square yards in area, and a lavatory. On the other side of the garden stood a wooden fence. (Because it was summer and the doors had been left open, I had an unobstructed view of all this.) On the left side of the room was a
hinged door, inside of which was a wood-floored area roughly two mats in size. I could see a small bathing area by the rear entrance. The tall, paneled sliding doors of the rear entrance were closed. To the right were four sliding screens, behind which were the stairs to the second floor and what appeared to be a storeroom. This arrangement of rooms was typical of a cheap tenement house. The corpse was lying against the left wall, with her head facing towards the shop. In order to avoid disturbing the scene of the crime any more than I could help, and because I felt uneasy, I made sure not to approach the body. But because the room was small, I couldn’t help looking at the body. The woman wore a wildly patterned yukata and lay facing upward. Although her clothing was pulled up above her knees, high enough to bare her thighs, there were no particular signs of a struggle. I don’t understand these things very well, but her neck appeared to be turning purple where she had been strangled.

The foot traffic on the main street in front continued. People went by peacefully and without incident, conversing in loud voices or drunkenly shouting out popular songs, their clogs clattering. Inside the house, separated from them by a single layer of sliding paper doors, a woman lay brutally murdered. How ironic it was. I felt strange and stood stock-still in a daze.

Akechi returned, breathing hard. “They say they’ll come soon.”

“Oh.”

Somehow, even speaking had become arduous for me. The two of us looked at each other for a long time without saying a word.

Before long, a uniformed policeman arrived, bringing a man in a business suit with him. The uniformed man was, I learned later, the chief judicial officer of K Police Station, and the other was, as I understood from his countenance and personal effects, a police surgeon attached to the same station. We explained the situation to the chief from the beginning.

Afterwards, I added this: “When Mr. Akechi here entered the café, I happened to look up at the clock. It was precisely eight o’clock, so I think that it was probably about eight when the lattices in these doors were closed. The electric light inside was
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certainly on at that time. So it’s clear that there was at least one
living person in this room at around eight o’clock.”

While the chief judicial officer listened to our statement and
wrote it down in his notebook, the police surgeon completed his
preliminary examination of the corpse. He waited for a pause
in our conversation.

“It looks like strangulation. It was done by hand. Look: These
purple spots are finger marks. This bleeding is from the places
where the nails were. Looking at this thumb mark on the left
side of the neck, it seems to have been done with a right hand.
Yes, that’s so. I dare say it’s been less than an hour since the time
of death. Of course, there’s no chance of resuscitating her.”

“It looks like she was held down from above, doesn’t it?” The
chief judicial officer spoke thoughtfully. “But there’s no sign of
a struggle. It must have been done quite suddenly and with ter-
rrible strength, I suppose.”

After that, he turned to us and asked what had become of
the master of the house. Naturally, we had no way of knowing.
Thereupon, Akechi, taking in the situation, called for the owner
of the neighboring watch shop.

The questions and answers that passed between the chief ju-
dicial officer and the watch seller were largely as follows:

“Where has the proprietor gone off to?”

“The owner of this shop goes off every night to the night
markets to sell his wares. He never comes home until around
twelve o’clock.”

“Where are these night markets he goes to?”

“I believe he often goes to Hirokōji in Ueno, but, unfortunate-
ly, I can’t tell you where he’s gone tonight.”

“You didn’t hear any sounds just an hour ago, did you?”

“What do you mean by ‘sounds’?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? Something like this woman crying out
as she was killed or the sounds of a scuffle.”

“I don’t believe I heard any noises of that kind.”

As this went on, the people of the neighborhood caught wind
of the incident and began to gather. Along with curious pass-
ersby, they formed a crowd that filled the road in front of the
secondhand bookshop. Among them was the mistress of the
neighboring tabi shop, who came to the aid of the watch merchant. She also declared that she had heard nothing.

During this period, the people of the neighborhood conferred among themselves and then sent a messenger running to inform the owner of the secondhand bookshop of the situation.

Afterwards, there was the sound of a car stopping out front, and a group of people poured noisily inside. This was the group from the prosecutor’s office, who had come rushing in response to an urgent message from the police. They were joined by the chief of K Police Station, who happened to arrive at the same time, along with a party including Police Detective Kobayashi, at that time famed as the ‘great detective.’ (Of course, I learned that later. That is to say, because I was friends with a police reporter who was very close with Kobayashi, the official in charge of the case, I was able to hear various things through him over the following days.) The chief judicial officer, having been the first on the scene, explained the situation thus far to these people. We were also required to repeat our statements.

“Let’s close the front door,” ordered a man in a black alpaca jacket and white trousers, with the look of a low-ranking company man, and the door was promptly closed. This was Kobayashi. Having thus repelled the rubbernecks, he began his investigation. His methods were incredibly arrogant, and he paid no attention whatever to the public prosecutor or the chief of police. From first to last, he acted alone. It seemed as if the others were no more than spectators, there to observe his clever actions.

First, he examined the corpse. He twisted the neck carefully, looking for anything out of the ordinary.

“These finger marks have no particular distinguishing features. In other words, there is no evidence to show anything other than that an ordinary human pressed down upon her with his right hand.”

He looked at the public prosecutor as he spoke.

Next, he proposed stripping the corpse. Thereupon, we spectators were driven out into the shop, as if from a secret meeting of the Diet. For this reason I do not know precisely what discoveries were made during that time, but I surmise that they must
have paid careful attention to the numerous fresh wounds on the corpse’s bare skin, the wounds the waitresses in the café had been gossiping about.

Before long the secret conference concluded and, although we were still prohibited from entering the inner apartments, we were able to peer inside from the small tatami-matted area between them and the shop. Fortunately, because we had been the discoverers of the incident and because it was necessary to take Akechi’s fingerprints, we were not driven out until the last. It would probably be more accurate to say that we were detained. Kobayashi’s activities were, of course, not limited to the inner rooms but ranged over a wide area both inside and outside the establishment. Although we were naturally unable to grasp the pattern of his search while we remained in one spot, the public prosecutor luckily took up his position in the inner room and barely moved from beginning to end, so we were able to follow the all results of the investigation as the police detectives filed in and out one by one to make their reports. Based on these reports, the public prosecutor had his clerk write up a record of the investigation.

First of all, a search was made of the inner room that the corpse had occupied, but no lost article, footprint or any other clue met the detectives’ eyes. There was just a single exception: “There are fingerprints on the electric light switch,” a police detective said after sprinkling some sort of white powder on the black ebonite switch. “Considering the circumstances, there can be no doubt that it was the criminal who turned off the electric light. Which of you turned them on again?”

Akechi answered that it had been himself.

“Is that so? Please allow us to take your fingerprints later. Let’s dismantle this electric light and carry the switch away just as it is, without touching it.”

After that, the police detective ascended to the second storey and did not come down again for some time. When he did come down, he went out at once saying that he was going to investigate the alleyway by the back gate. That took him a little more than ten minutes. He soon returned with an electric torch still lit in one hand and bringing another man with him. He was a
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filthy man of no more than forty, dressed in a dirty crepe shirt and khaki pants.

“It seems there’s no hope of footprints,” the detective reported. “The area around the back gate gets very little exposure to the sun and has become an awful quagmire too thick with the tracks of clogs to make any out clearly. By the way, this man,” he said pointing to the man he had just brought in with him, “runs a shop on the corner where the back alleyway comes out onto the street. It’s an ice cream shop. If the criminal had fled by the back gate, because the alleyway has only one outlet, this man must certainly have noticed him. You, answer my questions one more time.”

Accordingly, the ice cream vendor answered the police detective question by question.

“No one entered or exited this alleyway at around eight o’clock this evening, did they?”

“Not a one. Not even a single kitten has passed by this way since it grew dark.” The ice cream vendor’s answer was straight and to the point. “I’ve run a shop here for a long time, and even the ladies from around here don’t pass that way often after dark. After all, it’s hard to see, and the footing is bad.”

“None of your customers entered the alley, did they?”

“They did not. All of them ate their ice cream at my shop and went back the way they came. I’m certain of that.”

Because the ice cream vendor’s testimony seemed trustworthy, it now appeared that even if the criminal had fled by the back gate, he had not taken the one and only route out of the alleyway. Even so, he hadn’t gone out the front entrance either, which we were certain of because we had been watching from the Plum Blossom House. In that case, what could have become of him? According to Kobayashi’s way of thinking, the criminal might have slipped into one of the tenement houses that lined both sides of the alleyway, or he might be one of the tenants himself. Which could it be? Although there was also a way to escape across the roofs from the second storey, upon inspection the front windows were found to be fitted with lattices, which did not appear to have been moved even slightly. In that heat the rear windows of the houses were never closed, and there
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were people hanging clothes up to dry or enjoying the evening cool. So, it seemed that it would have been difficult to escape that way without being seen.

The investigators conferred among themselves as to how to go about their inspection and eventually decided to split up and make an examination of every house in the neighborhood. Although I say that, there were only eleven tenement houses behind the shop, so it was not a terribly difficult task. At the same time, the interior of the house was reexamined from underneath the porch to above the ceiling, leaving no corner unchecked. Unfortunately, the results of that inspection not only failed to produce any benefit but, on the contrary, appeared to make the situation more difficult. That is to say, it was discovered that the proprietor of a confectionery shop neighboring the secondhand bookstore had been up on his roof beside the drying rack, playing his bamboo flute from nightfall until that very moment, and from start to finish he had been sitting where he could not have missed seeing anything that transpired in the second storey of the secondhand bookshop.

Dear readers, the case had grown quite interesting. From where had the criminal entered, and from where had he made his escape? He had not gone by the front gate, he had not gone by the second storey window, and of course he had not gone by the front door. Had he never existed in the first place? Or had he vanished like smoke? Those were not the only mysteries. Kobayashi brought a pair of students before the public prosecutor, and they made a truly unusual statement. They were students of a certain industrial school and rented rooms in the neighborhood. Neither of the two men looked the type to talk nonsense, but in spite of that their statements were of a nature that rendered the case even more incomprehensible.

In reply to the public prosecutor’s questions, one responded as follows: “At exactly eight o’clock, I was standing in front of this secondhand bookshop and examining the periodicals on that table there. As I was doing that, a sound came from the inner rooms and, when we looked up at these doors, although the doors themselves were closed, because these lattice-like portions were open, I was able to see a lone man standing inside. I
couldn’t see him clearly because the man closed the lattices at almost the same time I looked up, but I am certain it was a man because of his sash.”

“Didn’t you notice anything about him besides the fact that he was a man, such as his height, or the pattern of his kimono?”

“I don’t know about his height because I only saw him from the waist down, but I could see that his kimono was black. Perhaps it might have had thin stripes or a splash pattern, but it looked all black to me.”

“I was also looking at books with my friend,” said the other student. “I noticed the noise just like he did and saw the lattices close just like he did. But I’m certain the man was wearing a white kimono. It was a whitish kimono with no stripes or pattern.”

“Isn’t that strange? One of you must be mistaken.”

“I definitely didn’t make a mistake.”

“I’m not telling lies either.”

As for what these two students’ mysterious statements meant, I dare say that my perceptive readers have already realized. Actually, I noticed it as well. But the public prosecutor and the police did not consider this point particularly deeply.

Before long, the deceased’s husband, the secondhand bookseller, heard the news and returned home. He was a delicate young man who did not look much like a secondhand bookseller. His faint-heartedness became apparent when he saw his wife’s corpse. Although he made no sound, tears trickled down his face. Kobayashi waited for him to calm down and then began his questions. The public prosecutor put in a word as well. But to their disappointment he said that he had no idea who the criminal might be. “There is no one who bears such a strong grudge against us,” he told them, sobbing. And he confirmed, after making various searches, that it had not been the act of a robber.

Although inquiries were made into his personal history, his wife’s background and various other matters, no particularly suspicious points were uncovered. As the results bear no real relation to the plot of this story, I will omit them. Last of all came the public prosecutor’s question regarding the numerous fresh
wounds on the body of the dead woman. Although the proprietor hesitated, at length he answered that he had inflicted them. Despite being coaxed and questioned, however, he was unable to give any clear answer regarding his reason for doing so. But because he had been out at the night market the entire evening, he could not be suspected of the murder in spite of the signs of ill treatment. The public prosecutor seems to have thought so as well, for he did not pursue the matter further.

With that, the night’s investigation was concluded for the time being. Our names, addresses and so forth were recorded, Akechi’s fingerprints were taken, and it was past one o’clock by the time we made our way home.

If the police had made no oversight in the investigation and none of the witnesses were telling lies, this was a truly insoluble case. According to what I learned later, the investigations Kobayashi began conducting the following day proved fruitless, and not even a little progress was made in the case after that night. All the witnesses were trustworthy, and there was nothing suspicious about the tenants of the eleven tenement houses. Although inquiries were made in the victim’s hometown, there was nothing unusual there either. Kobayashi (as I said earlier, he was called the ‘great detective’) had exhausted his abilities and investigated as much as he could and was finally forced to conclude that the case was completely incomprehensible. I heard later that even on the electric light switch, which Kobayashi had carried off as his one and only piece of evidence, he was unable to discover anything besides Akechi’s fingerprints. There were many fingerprints on the light switch, but because Akechi had been flustered and in a hurry, they were all his own. The detective decided that Akechi’s prints had most likely erased those of the criminal.

Dear readers, I wonder if some of you might not be reminded of Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* or Doyle’s *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* as you read this story. In other words, I wonder if you might not be imagining that the criminal in this case is not a human being, but an orangutan or a venomous Indian serpent or something of that kind. I actually considered that myself. But it was unthinkable that such things could live
in the vicinity of D. Hill in Tokyo. First of all, there were witnesses who said that they had seen the figure of a man, and if it had been an ape it should have left tracks or attracted some public notice. Moreover, the finger marks on the dead woman’s neck were certainly those of a human. If she had been constricted by a snake, no such traces would remain.

In any case, Akechi and I discussed the matter with great excitement as we made our way home. Our conversation went something like this:

“I know you’ve read Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and Leroux’s *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, and I’m sure you know of that Rose Delacourt case in Paris. Even now, a hundred years later, there are still mysteries surrounding that curious murder case. I’m recalling it now. Isn’t the way the perpetrator of tonight’s incident departed without leaving a trace somewhat similar?” said Akechi.

“That’s true. It really is mysterious. It’s often been said that the kind of serious crime you find in Western detective novels could never happen in a Japanese building, but I certainly don’t think so, because of incidents such as this one. Somehow or other, although I don’t know if I can, I feel that I’d like to try my hand at solving a real case, just once.”

After that, we parted ways at a certain bystreet. For some reason, Akechi’s quickly retreating figure as he turned down that bystreet with his characteristic shoulder-swinging way of walking, his loud, striped *yukata* standing out boldly in the darkness, left an impression on me.

**The Reasoning**

Now, one day, about ten days after the murder incident, I went to call at Akechi Kogorō’s lodgings. Over the course of these ten days, what had Akechi and I done? What had we thought and what conclusions had we come to regarding the case? The reader should be able to judge sufficiently for himself based on the conversation which passed between Akechi and me on that day.

Although until then I had only met Akechi at the café and it was my first time visiting his lodgings, because I had inquired about the place previously, the search was not a difficult one.
I stood in front of a tobacco shop closely resembling the one which had been described to me and inquired of the landlady whether or not Akechi was in.

“Yes, he’s here. Wait just a moment. I’ll call him.”

Saying this, she went to the foot of a staircase visible from the storefront and called for Akechi in a loud voice. He rented a room on the second floor. Thereupon, Akechi grunted a reply as he descended the creaking staircase. Recognizing me, he said, ‘Come on up,’ with a look of surprise. I followed him and ascended to the second floor. When I took a single unsuspecting step into his room, I let out a gasp of astonishment. The state of the room was simply too bizarre. I had not been unaware of Akechi’s eccentricity, but this was too strange.

The unassuming four-and-a-half mat room was buried in books. Although a little of the tatami was visible in the very center, the rest was a mountain of books extending in all directions to the walls and sliding screens, its base filling almost the entire room and its peak narrowing until it reached almost to the ceiling. Mounds of books pressed in from every direction. There were no other furnishings of any kind. It was enough to make me wonder how he could possibly sleep in such a room. There was not even enough space for host and guest to sit. Any careless movement would probably send the mounds of books tumbling down upon us.

“It’s very cramped, and I have no cushions to sit on. I’m sorry, but please seat yourself on a soft-looking book.”

I forced my way through the mountain of books, finally located a place to sit and, too surprised to speak, took a brief moment to survey my surroundings.

Before I go on, I must give a brief explanation of the person of Akechi Kogorō, the inhabitant of this eccentric room. Because our fellowship was a recent one, I was completely ignorant of his personal history, what he did for a living and to what purpose he lived his life. I am certain that he was some species of idler with no profession of his own. If I had to speculate, he may have been a scholar. If so, he was an exceedingly eccentric one. Although he had once told me that he was “studying humans,” I didn’t understand what he meant at the time. All I knew was
that he possessed a more than ordinary interest and a wealth of knowledge regarding crime and detection.

He was roughly the same age as I was and couldn’t have been more than twenty-five. He was a thin man and in the habit, as I said earlier, of swinging his shoulders oddly as he walked. His way of walking reminded me of the crippled storyteller Kan-da Hakuryū², although I do not mean to say that he was like a great man, but only to offer a comparison for his eccentricity. Speaking of Hakuryū, from his face to his voice, Akechi was his spitting image. (Readers who have never seen Hakuryū should imagine a man who is not what would be called handsome but has a certain charm about him and the face of a genius.) But Akechi’s hair was longer, shaggy and tangled, and he was in the habit of running his hands through it as he spoke, as if to make his tousled hair even more disheveled. He appeared to hold no regard for his attire and always wore a cotton kimono tied with a worn-out sash.

“I’m glad you came to visit. We haven’t seen each other in the little while since that case in D. Hill happened, but what has become of it? It doesn’t look like the police have much chance of catching the criminal, does it?”

Akechi ran his fingers through his hair in that way of his and watched my face intently.

“As a matter of fact, I came here today to discuss that matter with you,” I began, wondering how best to broach the subject. “I’ve thought about a lot of things since then. I haven’t only been thinking; I’ve also made investigations at the scene, just like a detective. And now, I’ve arrived at a single conclusion. I thought I should inform you of it.”

“Oh my, that’s splendid. I’d like to hear it in detail.”

I did not miss the look of both disdain and relief that crossed his face, as if to say, “And what would you know about it?” It encouraged my faltering spirit. I braced myself and began to speak.

“I have a friend who is a newspaper reporter. He’s on friendly terms with Kobayashi, who is in charge of the case. Well, I’ve been able to learn about the state of the police investigation through the reporter, but it seems that their methods have been
completely ineffective. Of course they’re trying various things, but they don’t have any definite clue to the identity of the criminal. About that electric light switch—it’s no use either. They discovered that your fingerprints were the only ones on it. Their idea is that your fingerprints must have concealed those of the criminal. What I mean to say is, because I knew the police were having so much trouble, I wanted to investigate more zealously than ever. Now, what kind of conclusions do you think I arrived at? And why do you think I’ve come to call on you before going to inform the police?

“Be that as it may, I’ve realized something since the day of that incident. I’m sure you remember it. Those two students gave completely different statements regarding the color of the kimono worn by the man who seemed to be the criminal. One said that it was black and the other that it was white. Unreliable as human eyes may be, isn’t it odd that they were able to mistake complete opposites like black and white? I don’t know how the police explain it, but I believe that neither statement is mistaken. Do you understand? The criminal was wearing a kimono that was both black and white. In other words, a *yukata*, or something of the sort, with thick black stripes, like the kind inns often rent out. If you ask why it looked entirely white to one and entirely black to the other, that’s because they saw it through the gaps in the lattice door and in that instant one of them happened to be standing so that only the white part was visible through the slats and the other happened to be placed so that he could see only the black portion. Although this is doubtless uncommon, it is certainly not impossible. Besides, I can think of no other way to explain the situation.

“Now, we know the criminal’s kimono was striped, and this has allowed us to narrow the scope of our search, but we still don’t have anything definite. The second grounds for my argument are the fingerprints on that electric light switch. Using my reporter friend, whom I spoke of earlier, as an intermediary, I had Kobayashi examine those fingerprints, your fingerprints, for me quite thoroughly. The result at last confirmed that my ideas were not mistaken. If you have an inkstone, would you lend it to me for a moment?”
I then attempted an experiment. Having first borrowed the ink stone, I placed the thumb of my right hand into the thin ink and then impressed my fingerprint onto a sheet of writing paper taken from my pocket. I waited for the print to dry and then dipped the same thumb into the ink once more and pressed it down on top of the first print, this time taking care to alter the orientation of my thumb. The two overlapping fingerprints were plainly visible.

“The police believe that your fingerprints overlaid the criminal’s and erased them. But, as we know from this experiment, that is not possible. No matter how hard you press down, fingerprints are made up of lines, and traces of the previous prints should remain in the space between those lines. Although it would be possible for the new prints to completely conceal the old if the prints were identical and there was not even a slight difference in their placement, such a thing is, in the first place, unbelievable and, even if it were so, it would not affect my conclusions in this case.

“But if it were the criminal who turned off the electric light, he must have left his fingerprints on the switch. I wondered if the police might not have failed to notice traces of the criminal’s prints in between the lines of your own. So I made an examination of them myself, but there was not even the smallest trace. In other words, yours were the only fingerprints on that switch, both before and after. I don’t know why the people of the secondhand bookshop left none of their own prints. Perhaps the electric light in that room was always left on and had never once been switched off.

“I’m sure you appreciate the meaning of the circumstances I have mentioned. I’ve been thinking along these lines: A man in a thickly striped kimono (it is conceivable that this man may have been the woman’s childhood friend, motivated by resentment from his unrequited love) knew that the owner of the secondhand bookshop went out to the night markets every evening and assaulted the woman while her husband was absent. Because there is no evidence of raised voices or a struggle, it is certain that the woman knew the man well. Then, having successfully accomplished his objective, he switched off the
electric light in order to delay the discovery of the body and took his leave. But he made one big mistake. He didn’t realize the lattices of the paper door were open, and when he went to close them in surprise, he was seen by the two students who happened to be standing in the shop. Once the man had gone outside, he suddenly realized that he must have left his fingerprints on the switch when he turned off the electric light. He had to erase them at any cost. But it would have been dangerous to sneak into the room the same way again, so he thought up an ingenious plan: He would become the discoverer of the murder himself. If he were to do that, not only would he be able to cast doubt on the earlier fingerprints by turning on the light with his own hand without seeming the least bit unnatural, but because no one would imagine that the discoverer of the murder was himself the criminal, it would be doubly to his benefit. In this way, he observed the methods of the police with an air of perfect innocence. He was even audacious enough to testify. The result was just as he had expected. Five days passed, and then ten, but still no one came to arrest him.”

What sort of expression do you suppose Akechi Kogorō made as he listened to me speak? I had expected that he would make some kind of strange face and cut me off. To my astonishment, however, his face was expressionless. Although it was not in his nature to display his feelings on his face, he was a little too calm and composed. From start to finish, he continued to tousle his hair in silence. Wondering just how shameless the man could be, I hastened on to the final point of my argument.

“I’m sure you will retort by asking me from where the criminal entered and to where he made his escape. Certainly, if this point cannot be clarified, knowing everything else would be meaningless. But, fortunately, I have sniffed out the solution to this as well. From the results of that night’s investigation, it appeared that there was no trace of the criminal taking his leave. But seeing that the murder did take place, it is impossible that the criminal neither entered nor left, so I could only think that the detectives had made some oversight in their search. Although the police are extremely diligent, unfortunately, they were unable to match the deductive powers of a single young man: me.”
“It was actually quite a simple matter, you know, but this is what I thought: To begin with, because the police had already investigated so thoroughly, there should be no reason to suspect the people of the neighborhood. Supposing that to be the case, might not the criminal have made his escape in such a way that, even if he were to catch some person’s eye, they would not realize that he was the criminal? That way, even if he were to be observed, it wouldn’t be a problem, would it? In other words, he probably made use of a blind spot in people’s attentiveness —just as our vision has blind spots, our powers of observation do as well— and concealed himself, just as a magician conceals a large object before the eyes of his audience. Accordingly, I set my sights on Asahiya, the soba shop located next door but one to the secondhand bookshop.”

To the right of the secondhand bookshop were a watch store and a confectionery shop, while a tabi vendor and the soba shop stood to its left.

“I went there and inquired if a man had come and asked to use their lavatory around eight o’clock on the night of the incident. I’m sure you already know this, but the dirt floor of Asahiya continues to a back door, and the lavatory is right beside that back door, so that it is impossible to use the lavatory without going out by that back door and returning the same way. Because the ice cream merchant has his shop at the corner where the alley meets the street, there would be no chance of being seen by him. And, because the place is a soba shop, it is quite natural that people would ask to use their lavatory. Upon asking, I heard that the mistress of the shop had been absent that evening and the owner had been minding the place by himself, so the situation had been ideal. Don’t you think it’s quite a splendid idea?

“I made inquiries and, sure enough, a customer had used the lavatory at precisely that time, although, unfortunately, the owner of Asahiya could recall nothing about the man’s face or the pattern of his kimono. I hastened to pass this information on to Kobayashi by way of my friend, the reporter. The detective investigated the soba shop himself, but he was unable to learn anything more.”
I briefly paused and gave Akechi time to respond. He couldn’t possibly fail to say something this time. But he maintained an air of indifference while running his hand through his hair just as he always did. I had been employing indirect methods out of respect for him, but I now had to change to a direct approach.

“You understand what I’m getting at, don’t you, Akechi? There is irrefutable proof pointing to you. I confess that, in my heart of hearts, I still can’t bring myself to suspect you, but I have no other choice in the face of the assembled evidence. I even wondered if there might not be a man wearing a yukata with wide stripes among the tenants of those tenement houses and took great pains to investigate, but there is not a single one. That’s only natural. Even if they owned a vertically-striped yukata, gaudy yukata that match those lattices are rarely worn. Besides, the trick with the fingerprints and that trick with the lavatory were quite ingenious; only a scholar of crime like you could have pulled off risky stunts like those. On top of everything else, the strangest thing was that, even though you told me that you and the murdered woman had been friends as children, that night, when they were looking into her background, you didn’t mention it, did you?

“Now we have arrived at the point when your alibi is all you can depend upon. But that is useless as well. Do you remember? On our way home that night, I asked you where you had been before coming into the Plum Blossom House. You replied that you had been strolling around that neighborhood for about an hour, didn’t you? Even if someone had seen you walking about, it would be perfectly natural to stop at a soba shop to use its lavatory while out for a stroll. Is anything I have said mistaken, Akechi? If possible, I would like to hear your own explanation.”

Dear readers, what do you think that queer fellow Akechi Kogorō did when I said this? Do you imagine that he prostrated himself in shame? At any rate, I was taken aback by his completely unexpected reaction: He suddenly let out a huge guffaw.

“Ah, how rude of me. I certainly didn’t mean to laugh, but you were being so serious,” Akechi said by way of explanation. “Your ideas are quite amusing. I consider myself lucky to have found a friend like you. But, unfortunately, your reasoning is
a touch superficial and material. For example, concerning my relationship with that woman, have you made a thorough and psychological investigation into what sort of childhood friends we were? Whether or not there had been a love affair between us in the past? Whether or not I bore a grudge against her? Those aren’t the sorts of things you can just guess at, are they? As for why I did not say that I knew her that night, the reason is simple. I did not know of any matter which could have been useful as a reference because she and I parted ways before we had even entered primary school.”

“Then, what should I make of, for instance, the fingerprints?”

“Do you imagine I have done nothing since then? I have made a bit of inquiry into this matter as well. I go wandering about D. Hill practically every day. In particular, I often go to the secondhand bookshop. I accosted the proprietor, and made various inquiries. I revealed that I had known his wife then, and it gave me an advantage in getting information out of him. Just as you learned the conjectures of the police by way of your friend, the reporter, I heard them from the owner of that secondhand bookshop. I also soon learned of the fingerprints and, thinking it quite strange, made inquiries, but, ha ha, it’s a funny story. The wires to the light bulb were disconnected. No one switched it off at all. It was my mistake to think that the light had come on due to my twisting the switch; the severed tungsten reconnected then because I jostled the light bulb in my haste. It’s perfectly natural that only my fingerprints were on the switch. You said you saw that the electric light was on that night through the gap in the paper door, didn’t you? In that case, it was after that time that the light bulb became disconnected. Old light bulbs do go out on their own without interference from anyone, after all. Then, as for the matter of the color of the criminal’s kimono, rather than explain that myself . . .”

Saying this, he dug about here and there in the mountain of books around him and, finally, excavated a single, worn out Western volume.

“Have you ever read this? It’s Münsterberg’s book, On the Witness Stand. Look at just these ten lines at the beginning of this chapter titled ‘Illusions.’”
As I listened to his confident reasoning, I began to become conscious of my own failure. I took the book from him and read, just as I had been told. What was written there was largely as follows:

There had been an automobile accident. Before the court one of the witnesses, who had sworn to tell “the whole truth and nothing but the truth,” declared that the entire road was dry and dusty; the other swore that it had rained and the road was muddy. The one said that the automobile was running very slowly; the other, that he had never seen an automobile rushing more rapidly. The first swore that there were only two or three people on the village road; the other, that a large number of men, women and children were passing by. Both witnesses were highly respectable gentlemen, neither of whom had the slightest interest in changing the facts as he remembered them.

Akechi waited for me to finish reading, and then spoke as he turned the pages of the book.

“That was something that actually occurred. Next, how about this chapter, ‘The Memory of the Witness’? Midway through there is the story of an experiment. You may find it bothersome, but it involves the color of clothing, so read a little of it anyway.”

It was the following account.

(I have omitted the first part.) There was, for instance, two years ago (this volume was published in 1911) in Göttingen, a meeting of a scientific association, made up of jurists, psychologists, and physicians, all, therefore, men well trained in careful observation. Somewhere in the same street there was that evening a public festivity of the carnival. Suddenly, in the midst of the scholarly meeting, the doors open, a clown in highly colored costume rushes in in mad excitement, and a negro with a revolver in hand follows him.
In the middle of the hall first the one, then the other, shouts wild phrases; then the one falls to the ground, the other jumps on him; then a shot, and suddenly both are out of the room. The whole affair took less than twenty seconds. All were completely taken by surprise, and no one, with the exception of the President, had the slightest idea that every word and action had been rehearsed beforehand, or that photographs had been taken of the scene. It seemed most natural that the President should beg the members to write down individually an exact report, inasmuch as he felt sure that the matter would come before the courts. (*I have omitted a section here, which explained that their memories were full of mistakes and indicated the percentages.*) Only four persons, for instance, among forty noticed that the negro had nothing on his head; the others gave him a derby, or a high hat, and so on. In addition to this, a red suit, a brown one, a striped one, a coffee-colored jacket, shirt sleeves, and similar costumes were invented for him. He wore in reality white trousers and a black jacket with a large red necktie. (*I have omitted the rest.*)

“As Münsterberg so cleverly deduced,” Akechi began, “humans’ observations and memories are truly unreliable things. Even the distinguished scholars in this example were unable to recall the color of clothes. Surely it is not impossible for those two students to have mistaken the color of a kimono? They probably did see someone. But that individual was not wearing a striped *yukata* or anything of the kind. Of course, it was not me. Your observation in imagining a striped *yukata* seen through the lattice is most interesting, but isn’t it a little too perfect? Is it really impossible for you to at least believe in my innocence over such an agreeable coincidence? Finally, there’s the man who came to use the lavatory at the soba shop. On this point, I had the same idea. No matter how hard I thought,
The Case of the Murder on D. Hill

there was no avenue the criminal could have taken other than through Asahiya. So, I also went there to investigate, but the conclusions I arrived at were the precise opposite of yours. Actually, there was no man who came to use the lavatory at all.”

As the reader has no doubt already realized, Akechi had, in this way, dismissed the testimony of the witnesses, dismissed the criminal’s fingerprints and even dismissed the criminal’s avenue of ingress and egress. He had done this to prove his own innocence, but hadn’t he denied the existence of the criminal himself at the same time? I had not the faintest idea what he was thinking.

“Then do you have an idea of who the criminal is?”

“I do,” he answered as he tousled his hair. “My methods are a bit different from yours. Physical evidence and things of that kind can take on all sorts of appearances depending on the point of view. The best method of detection is psychological: to see through to the depths of people’s hearts. But this is a problem of the detective’s own ability. In any case, I have tried to place importance on that this time.

“The first things which attracted my attention were the fresh wounds covering the body of the secondhand bookseller’s wife. Soon after that, I heard that the wife of the owner of the soba shop had similar fresh wounds on her body. I’m sure you know this as well. But their husbands did not seem to be thugs of that sort. Both the secondhand bookseller and the soba merchant are quiet, sensible men, after all. I wondered if there might not be a secret concealed there. So, first of all I accosted the owner of the secondhand bookshop and attempted to pry the secret from his own lips. Because I told him that I had been an acquaintance of his dead wife, he let his guard down and things proceeded with relative ease. Then, I succeeded in getting a certain strange fact out of him. But the owner of the soba shop was next and, because he is, despite appearances, quite a firm and level-headed man, it was rather hard going getting anything out of him. Nevertheless, by means of a certain method I succeeded splendidly.

“I’m sure you know that the associative diagnosis method of psychology has begun to be employed in the field of criminal
investigation as well. It is a method by which many simple trigger words are provided and the speed with which the suspect associates them is measured. But I don’t limit myself to simple trigger words like ‘dog,’ ‘house’ or ‘river’ as the psychologists do, and I don’t believe it is always necessary to employ the aid of a chronoscope. To one who comprehends the trick of associative diagnosis, such formalities are not particularly necessary. As proof of that, did not the people of the past who were called great magistrates or great detectives unwittingly apply these psychological methods using only their natural talents, before psychology had developed to its present state? Ōoka, Governor of Echizen, and his like were certainly of that sort. If we speak of fiction, in the beginning of Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Dupin correctly guesses his friend’s inner thoughts from a single movement of his body, does he not? Doyle mimics that in *The Adventure of the Resident Patient* where, although Holmes makes his usual deductions, they are all associative diagnoses in some way. The various mechanical methods of the psychologist are nothing more than tools created for the use of ordinary people who lack this natural insight. I digress, but I tried laying various traps in my conversation with the owner of the soba shop. It was quite a tedious chat, too. In that way, I studied his psychological reactions. But as this was an extremely delicate psychological problem as well as a considerably complex one, I’ll give you a full account when we can speak at our ease. In any case, I arrived at a single conviction as a result of that conversation. In other words, I discovered the criminal.

“I say this, but I don’t have a single thing that could be called physical evidence. Because of that, I cannot possibly go to the police. Even if I were to go to them, I doubt they would listen. Besides, I have another reason for looking on and doing nothing while I know the criminal, and that is the fact that the criminal had not a bit of malice. It’s a strange thing to say, but this murder was committed with the consent of both the killer and the victim. No, it may even have been committed in accordance with the victim’s own wishes.”

I considered various ideas, but I couldn’t understand what he
was thinking at all. I forgot my feelings of shame over my own failure and listened entirely to his wonderful reasoning.

“Now, I’ll tell you my idea. The murderer is the owner of Asahiya. He told you about a man coming to use the lavatory in order to conceal the evidence of his crime. But, no, that was not his own invention. We are to blame. You see, both you and I assumed that there must have been such a man, and we prodded the owner by asking after him. Moreover, he mistook us for police detectives or something of the sort. Well then, why did he commit the murder? I feel that this case has allowed me to see plainly what sad and surprising secrets lie hidden behind human life, whose surface appears so exceedingly innocent. It was truly of a sort I have previously been able to discover only in the world of nightmares.

“What a trick of fate it is that the owner of the Asahiya should have followed in the tradition of the Marquis de Sade, that terrible sadist. He discovered a female Masoch in the next house but one. The wife of the used bookseller kept pace with him in her masochism. Then, with the cunning peculiar to such illnesses, they committed adultery without being discovered by anyone. I think you will understand now what I meant when I said it was a consensual murder. Until recently, they had just barely managed to appease those abnormal appetites separately, each with a spouse who did not comprehend such tastes. That both the wife of the secondhand bookseller and the wife of the owner of Asahiya had the same fresh wounds is proof of that. But it need scarcely be said that this arrangement did not satisfy them. So when they each found the person they had been searching for as close as an eye is to a nose, it is not difficult to imagine that they came to an understanding with extreme quickness, is it? But the result of that understanding went beyond a trick of fate. Due to the synthesis of passive and active forces, their disgraceful behavior gradually doubled in its intensity. In the end, on that night, it caused an incident they never hoped for...”

Hearing Akechi’s bizarre conclusion, I shuddered reflexively. What a case this was!

Just then, the mistress of the tobacco shop below brought in
the evening paper. Akechi accepted it, examined the local news page and, before long, let out a gentle sigh.

“Ah, it seems he was unable to bear it, in the end, and has turned himself in. It’s an odd chance, isn’t it, that we should receive news like this just as we are discussing the matter?”

I looked where he pointed. There, in just a small headline and ten lines of type, it was noted that the proprietor of the soba shop had given himself up.
The Revealed Facts

This is another story of Akechi Kogorō’s exploits.

It happened about one year after Akechi and I became acquainted — a very interesting incident with a tinge of the dramatic. Not only that, but because it was centered on the household of one of my relatives, it is impossible for me to forget.

It was as a result of this incident that I discovered that Akechi possessed splendid talents of cryptanalysis. In the interest of my dear readers, let me reproduce the cryptogram he solved at the outset.

I’ve wanted to pay you a visit but have not had the opportunity to do so. We’re now enjoying a stretch of warm weather, so I’d like very much to drop by one day soon. I appreciate your gracious note thanking me for the small gift I sent. As a matter of fact, I embroidered that handbag myself. It’s a little hobby of mine. I was worried you might scold me for its crudeness. How are you doing these days with your poetry? Please take care of yourself.

All for now

These are the contents of a postcard. I have copied it faithfully. From the places where characters have been crossed out to the number of characters in each line, everything is as it originally was.
The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

Now, the story. At the time, I was wintering at an inn at the Atami hot springs and, incidentally, had a bit of a job. I used the hot springs countless times each day, took walks, rested, took up my brush in those leisure hours, and spent my days exceedingly carefree. One day, pleasantly warm from another bath, I had dropped into a rattan chair on the sunny veranda and was nonchalantly perusing that day’s newspaper, when a dreadful article suddenly caught my eye.

At that time, a band of robbers calling themselves the Black Hand Gang was running rampant in the capital. All the efforts of the police were to no avail. A very wealthy person had been done in only the day before. After an aristocrat was assaulted, rumor led to rumor. The people of the capital were in a panic, and their days were uneasy. The local news pages were filled with the matter day after day. That day three-column articles with big headlines like “The Elusive Phantom Thieves” were written in the usual sensational fashion. I, however, had already grown accustomed to such articles and they did not particularly attract my interest. But below that article, among the various reports of the Black Hand Gang’s victims, I was shocked to discover a twelve- or thirteen-line article with the small headline “Mr. X Assaulted.” You see, Mr. X happened to be my uncle. The article was brief, so I could not make much out, but it seemed that his daughter, Fumiko, had been abducted by the thieves, and that ten thousand yen had been taken as ransom.

My parents are very poor, so much so that I myself had to use the earnings from my brush just to visit the hot springs, but for some reason my uncle is quite rich. He served as a director of two or three large companies, so he was thoroughly qualified to become a target of the Black Hand Gang. I am usually indebted to my uncle in one way or another, so I had to give up everything and return to visit him and express my sympathy. It was thoughtless of me to go without even knowing that the ransom had been paid. My uncle had almost certainly made a telephone call to my boardinghouse, but I had come on this trip without letting anyone know where I was going. That was why I first learned of this terrible event from a newspaper.

I packed my trunk and returned to Tokyo at once. No sooner
had I taken off my traveling clothes than I set out for my uncle’s mansion. When I got there, can you imagine what I found? My uncle and aunt were seated before the household Buddhist altar, striking prayer drums and wooden clappers and chanting! They were devoted adherents of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism, and regarded the founder of the sect above all else. The unfortunate result was that even petty merchants were not permitted to come and go until their sect had been ascertained. Even so, it was not the usual time for chanting sutras before the Buddha, so I found their behavior odd. When I asked the reason, I was surprised to learn that the incident was still unresolved: Even though the ransom had been handed over just as the thieves had demanded, the girl had yet to come home. They were relying on fervent prayer to restore their daughter to them.

Here, it seems there is a need to explain the methods of the Black Hand Gang. It has only been a few years, so I think that there are some among my dear readers who remember the hulabaloo. For those who do not, the gang’s usual practice was to abduct the victim’s son or daughter and then demand a great sum of ransom money. There would be a threatening letter, with detailed instructions to bring a certain amount of money to such-and-such a place at some time on some day, and the chief of the Black Hand Gang would be lying in wait there. In other words, the ransom money was passed directly from the victim into the hands of the thieves. Wasn’t that an audacious manner of doing things? And yet, in spite of their audacity, they were always meticulously prepared. They kidnapped, threatened, received money, and did it all without leaving the slightest clue. In addition, if a victim notified the police in advance and had detectives lie in wait at the place where they were to hand over the ransom money, the thieves seemed to sense it and would never turn up. Afterwards, the hostage would be subjected to harsh retribution. In my opinion, these Black Hand Gang incidents were not, as is often the case, the caprices of delinquent youths but were certainly the work of an exceedingly sharp-witted and extremely bold group.

At my uncle’s home, which had received a visit from these villains, he and his wife were pale and flustered. The ransom
money had been taken, but the girl had not been returned. So even my uncle, a schemer who had been called the ‘old fox’ of the business world, was at a loss what to do. It was due to this circumstance that he relied upon and consulted with a novice like me. My cousin Fumiko was nineteen at that time and an extraordinary beauty. When I considered the fact that she had not returned even though the ransom had been paid, I suspected that the thieves may have played an underhanded trick and cruelly toyed with her. If that was not the case, then the thieves must have seen that my uncle was easily managed, and, not satisfied with one payment, decided to extort ransom money multiple times. In any case, my uncle had never been so worried.

Aside from Fumiko, my uncle had a son, but he had only just entered junior high school and would be of no assistance. So, for the time being, I acted in the capacity of my uncle’s advisor. We made every possible inquiry, but it seemed the methods of the thieves were truly as ingenious as rumored, and there was even a touch of the spectral about them. I have a more than usual interest in crime, detectives, and things of that kind, and, as I acknowledged in ‘The Case of the Murder on D Hill,’ I am also childish enough to put on the airs of an amateur detective at times. I wanted to try to compete with the professional detectives if I could and wracked my brains, but this was in vain. There was nothing that could be called a clue. There had naturally been a report to the police from my uncle, but could they really solve this case? When I looked at their results thus far, it seemed unlikely.

Then, I naturally remembered my friend Akechi Kogorō. He could probably put even this case into perspective for me. I consulted my uncle at once. He was ready to gasp at the slightest straw, and I was in the habit of praising Akechi’s ability as a detective. So, although it seemed that my uncle had no great confidence in Akechi’s talents, he told me to call him in anyway.

I immediately had myself driven to the tobacco shop over which Akechi made his lodging. Then, in that four-and-a-half-mat room on the second storey, in which books were piled up into a mountain, I met Akechi. Conveniently, he had been collecting all sorts of materials concerning the Black Hand Gang
for several days and was just in the process of drawing inferences - his specialty. Moreover, it seemed from what he said that he had managed to seize upon a clue. So, when I told him of my uncle’s troubles, he agreed to assist at once, as he could never have hoped to encounter such an example of the Black Hand Gang’s methods otherwise. He wasted no time in accompanying me back to my uncle’s house.

Soon, Akechi and I were sitting opposite my uncle in a tastefully designed parlor. My aunt and the houseboy, Makita, joined in the discussion. Makita was the man who had accompanied my uncle as a guard when he had gone to deliver the ransom money on the appointed day, so my uncle had called him over for reference.

Amid the bustle, black tea, sweets, and various other refreshments were carried in. Akechi chose one of the foreign-made cigarettes and modestly exhaled. My uncle still looked every inch the “old fox” of the business world, for all that he was grown fat thanks to the gourmet food and insufficient exercise natural to a great man, so there was still something about him that overawed those he met, even in a situation like this. My aunt and Makita were seated on either side of my uncle, and because they were both of slender build, Makita being an uncommonly small man, my uncle’s bulk stood out more than ever. When the usual greetings had been exchanged, Akechi wished to hear more details, although he had already heard the story roughly from me, and my uncle began his explanation.

“It happened, let me see, six days ago, on the thirteenth. At just about noon, my daughter Fumi said she was going to a friend’s place for a little while. She changed her clothes and went out but still hadn’t come home by evening. That was around the time we were first being menaced by rumors of the Black Hand Gang, so my wife here began to worry, and telephoned the friend’s house. But she replied that my daughter hadn’t been at all that day. Now that was a surprise. I had telephone calls made to the homes of all the friends I know of, but she hadn’t visited anywhere. After that, we rounded up the houseboys and the drivers who had been in and out, and searched everywhere. We didn’t sleep a wink that night.”
“Sorry to interrupt, but I wonder: did anyone actually see your daughter go out?”

My aunt answered Akechi in my uncle’s stead. “Yes, the maids and houseboys certainly saw her leave. In particular, a maid called Ume says that she well remembers seeing my daughter off as she went out the gate, so . . .”

“Everything after that is unknown, then. I suppose there is no neighbor or passerby who happened to see your daughter?”

“No,” my uncle replied. “My daughter didn’t go by car, so if she had met someone she knew they should have been able to see her face clearly. But, as you know, this is a quiet residential area, and the people of the neighborhood aren’t the type to go out for a stroll. We tried asking around, but not a single person happened to see my daughter. For that reason, we were of two minds over whether this was a matter for the police until the following afternoon. That was when the dreaded ransom note from the Black Hand Gang appeared. We had thought ‘perhaps, . . .’ but we were shocked when our fears were realized. My wife burst into tears. We took the ransom note to the police so don’t have it now, but it said, ‘At eleven at night on the fifteenth, bring ten thousand yen cash in ransom money to the lone pine in T. Field. The bearer of the money must come alone, and the hostage will be killed if you call in the police. Your daughter will be returned the day after we receive the ransom money.’ It was roughly that sort of thing.”

T. Field is a parade ground on the outskirts of that municipality. There is a little shrubbery in a corner of the field, and the lone pine stands right in the center of it. Although it is a parade ground, it is in an isolated area that almost no one passes through, even during the day, so it was perfectly suited to be a secret meeting place, especially then, as it was winter, and so lonelier than ever.

“Was no clue found as a result of the letter being examined by the police?” This was Akechi.

“As for that, they say there are no clues at all. The paper was common writing paper, the envelope was a cheap, light brown single-sheet, and there were no marks of any kind. The police detectives say that it is completely without distinguishing features, even fingerprints.”
“The equipment for examining that sort of thing at the Metropolitan Police Department is in good order, so there can hardly be any mistake. I wonder where it was postmarked.”

“It had no postmark. I mean, it didn’t come in the post; it seems that someone put it into our postbox out front.”

“I wonder who removed it from the box.”

“I did,” the houseboy, Makita, answered hurriedly. “I gather all the post and present it to the mistress. That ransom note was mixed in with the first afternoon delivery on the thirteenth.”

“There’s also the question of who delivered it,” my uncle added. “We even asked the policemen at the neighborhood police box and made various inquiries, but we haven’t an idea.”

Akechi pondered for a while. He appeared to be straining to discover something from among the senseless jumble of questions and answers.

“So, what did you do after that?” Akechi looked up and invited a sequel to the story.

“I had half a mind to take the matter to the police, but the letter threatened that they would take my daughter’s life if I did so, so I hesitated. My wife urged me not to as well. My precious daughter is irreplaceable, and, although it was unfortunate, I resigned myself to paying the ten thousand yen.

“The ransom note’s directions were, as I said, to go to the lone pine in T. Field at eleven o’clock on the fifteenth. So I got ready a little ahead of time, pocketed ten thousand yen in hundred yen notes wrapped in white paper, and set out for that lonely place. The ransom note said that I must come alone, but my wife was terribly worried and advised me to take a houseboy with me. So, just in case, I took Makita here as a guard, thinking that his presence couldn’t possibly be a hindrance to the thieves. Go ahead and laugh, but at my age, I bought a pistol for the first time. And I had Makita carry it for me.”

My uncle smiled bitterly. I imagined what things had been like that night and nearly burst into laughter in spite of myself. I could almost picture the comical scene of my uncle, this great man, accompanied by the shabby, small, and somewhat stupid Makita, timidly making his way in the dark to the scene of the crime.
“We got out of the motor car four or five blocks before T. Field, and I managed to make my way to the foot of the lone pine by the light of an electric torch. Makita tried to stay in the shadows of the trees as much as possible, although there was no worry of him being discovered on account of the darkness, and he followed behind me at an interval of ten or twelve yards. As you know, there is shrubbery around the lone pine, so I didn’t know where the thieves were hiding. It was quite creepy. But I stood there patiently. I suppose I must have waited for more than thirty minutes. Makita, what you were doing during that time?”

“I think that I was more than twenty yards from your position, sir, but I lay on my belly in a thicket, with my finger on the trigger of the pistol and kept my eyes fixed on the light of your electric torch. It seemed an extremely long time. I felt as if I waited for two or three hours.”

‘So, from which direction did the thieves arrive?’ Akechi asked eagerly. He appeared to be more than a little excited. Look, you could tell by the way he began to tousle his hair, running his fingers through it in that manner of his.

“The thief appeared to come from the direction of the empty field, from the side opposite the road we came by.”

“What was he like?”

“I don’t really know, but he was dressed entirely in black. He was pitch-black from head to toe. Only one patch of his face appeared dimly white in the darkness. I say that, but at the time I had switched off my electric torch in deference to the thief. But at least it’s certain that he was an extremely tall man. I’m five feet seven inches tall, but he looked to be three to five inches taller.”

“Did he say anything?”

“No. He stopped in front of me and stuck out one hand while pointing a pistol at me with the other. So, I handed over the bundle of money without saying anything. I tried to ask about my daughter, but when I began to speak, he shushed me in a deep, muffled voice, so I said no more.”

“What happened after that?”

“That was all. The thief slowly backed away, still pointing
the pistol in my direction, and vanished among the trees. For a while, I stood petrified, but I couldn’t stay like that forever, so I turned around and called Makita in a low voice. When I did, he emerged from the thicket with a rustle and asked nervously if the thief had gone.”

“Could you, Mr. Makita, see the thief from where you were hiding?”

“No, sir, because it was dark and the trees were thick, but I think I heard his footsteps.”

“What did you do after that?”

“Well, when I said we ought to go home, Makita said that he wanted to investigate the thief’s footprints. If we were to tell the police afterwards, it would be a valuable clue. Isn’t that right, Makita?”

“Yes sir.”

“Did you find any footprints?”

“That’s just it,’ my uncle said with a strange expression. ‘Strangely enough, try as we might, there was nothing to be found. The thief left no footprints. I’m certain we didn’t make a mistake, because it seems police detectives went there yesterday and searched the place as well. It’s a lonely spot, and it appears no one passed through after we left. But they say that while our footprints remain, there are no others.”

“Hmm, that is exceedingly interesting. I wonder if I might request a slightly more detailed account.”

“Prints only show in the area right beneath the lone pine. Fallen leaves have piled up in the area around it, and grass grows there, so no footprints will show. And on the part of the ground where they do appear, there are only the marks of my clogs and Makita’s shoes. Even though the thief had to cross the patch where footprints show in order to reach me and get the bundle of money, there are none. You see, the shortest distance from where the grass was growing to where I was standing was a good four yards.”

“Were there no animal tracks or anything of that sort?” Ake-chi asked meaningfully. My uncle looked puzzled.

“What, an animal?”

“The tracks of a horse or a dog, for instance.”
When I heard this exchange, it called to mind a tale of crime I had read long before in Strand Magazine. It was the story of a man who skillfully avoided suspicion by affixing horseshoes to his feet and making a round trip to the scene of his crime. I am certain that Akechi was thinking of the same thing.

“Well now, I wasn’t looking for anything like that. Do you remember, Makita?”

“I can’t seem to remember very well, sir, but I don’t think there was anything of that kind.”

Akechi again sank into silent contemplation.

As I thought when I first heard the story from my uncle, the heart of this case lay in this point of the thief leaving no footprints. It was truly uncanny.

We were silent for a long time.

“In any case,” my uncle said at last, “with that, I relaxed, thinking that the matter was settled, and returned home. I believed that my daughter would come home the following day. I had heard that the more distinguished a thief is, the more he is bound to keep his promises by a kind of thief’s honor, so I was confident that he wouldn’t lie. But what do you think happened? It’s been four days now, and my daughter hasn’t come home. It’s truly outrageous. I couldn’t bear it any longer, so yesterday I reported the particulars to the police. But they are occupied with many cases and haven’t had much success. Luckily, my nephew says that he is friendly with you, so I have troubled you with a truly great request. . . .”

With this, my uncle’s story ended. Akechi asked some clever questions concerning even more minor details and proceeded to confirm the facts one by one, but there was nothing in this exchange particularly worth telling.

“By the way,” Akechi inquired at the last, “have any suspicious letters or things of that kind arrived for your daughter recently?”

To this, my aunt replied: “I always look over her letters, so I would know at once if there were anything suspicious. Let me see, lately there has been nothing in particular.”

“Even something trivial would be fine. Please do not hesitate to tell me of anything you noticed.”
I think Akechi sensed something from my aunt’s tone and pressed for an answer.

“I think it is probably unrelated to this incident but . . .”

“Please tell me in any case. Unexpected clues are often found in these ways.”

“Then I will tell you. For the past month postcards have been arriving for my daughter from a person whose name we do not recall ever hearing before. I once tried asking her if it was a friend from school days. She said it was, but she seemed to be hiding something. I thought it strange. But, just as I was thinking of looking into the matter, all of this happened. I had forgotten all about it until your words reminded me. One of those strange postcards arrived the very day before my daughter was kidnapped.”

“May I have a look at that postcard?”

“Truly may. It is probably in the box where my daughter keeps her papers.”

So saying, my aunt went to search for the postcard in question. Upon inspection, the date was the twelfth, just as my aunt had said. It was signed simply “Yayoi,” probably a pseudonym. It had been postmarked at a local post office. Its content was printed at the beginning of this story.

I took the postcard in my hands and scrutinized it carefully, but there was nothing unusual. It appeared to be nothing more than a succession of pointless, girlish phrases. Nevertheless, Akechi said that he wanted to borrow it for a while, in a tone that suggested it was an extremely serious affair, as if he has suddenly thought of something. Of course, there was no reason to refuse him, and my uncle consented at once. But to me, Akechi’s thinking was completely incomprehensible.

With that, Akechi’s questions finally came to an end, but my uncle impatiently asked for his opinion. Akechi thought and thought, and answered as follows: ‘Having only heard the story, it’s difficult to give an opinion. But I’ll do what I can. I may be able to bring your daughter home within two or three days.’

Now, having taken our leave of my uncle’s estate, we made our way back, shoulder to shoulder. I tried various pretexts in an effort to get Akechi’s ideas out of him, but he would answer
only that he had grasped merely a part of his objective. Concerning this ‘objective’ he revealed not one word.

The following day, I called at Akechi’s lodgings immediately after breakfast. I was eager to know how he was going to go about solving this case.

I imagined him buried in that mountain of books and engrossed in the contemplation that was his specialty. We were on friendly terms, so I called out a brief greeting to the mistress of the tobacco shop and immediately made to ascend the stairs to Akechi’s room, when she called me to a halt.

“I’m sorry. He isn’t in today. He went out after breakfast.”

Surprised, I asked his destination, but she said that he had left no word.

Had he already begun his activities? Thinking it quite unprecedented for a late-riser like him to go out so early, I returned to my lodgings. But I was anxious in spite of myself, so after a short wait I called on Akechi a second and even a third time. But no matter how many times I went, he did not return. I waited until around noon of the following day, but he still had not shown himself. I began to be a little concerned. His landlady too was extremely worried and looked to see if Akechi had left a note in his room, but there was none.

I thought that I had better tell my uncle, so I visited his mansion at once. My uncle and aunt were reciting Buddhist chants and praying silently to the founder of the Nichiren sect as usual. But when I told them the situation, the effect was disastrous. Could Akechi have ended up becoming just another prisoner of these thieves? It was we who had requested that he investigate, so we shared the responsibility. If such a thing had happened, then I would have no excuse to offer Akechi’s parents. My uncle and the others were in a state of shock. I believed that Akechi would be the last person to make such a blunder, but the people around me were making such a fuss that I could not help but worry. Time passed while we wondered what to do.

The afternoon wore on. We were gathered in the living room of my uncle’s house and engaged in pointless discussion, when a telegram was delivered.

WITH FUMIKO. DEPARTING NOW.
To our surprise, Akechi had dispatched it from Chiba in Sōshū. We raised our voices in jubilation. Akechi was safe. The girl was coming home. The household that had been depressed was now cheerfully astir and in an uproar almost as if to welcome a bride.

We waited impatiently. It was dusk by the time Akechi’s smiling face appeared before us. The somewhat haggard Fumiko was following behind him. My uncle and aunt were worried that Fumiko must be tired, and, thanks to their solicitude, she retired alone to a bed in the living room. But the rest of us celebrated. Food and drink were carried in. My uncle and his wife wanted to take Akechi’s hand, give him the seat of honor, and shower him with a million thanks. It was awkward for him, but their reaction was natural. Even with the help of the national police force, no one had been able to do anything about the Black Hand Gang for a long time. However adept a master of detection Akechi was, no one could have foreseen that he would be able to recover the girl so easily. But, look, hadn’t Akechi succeeded in doing it with the ability of just one man? It was really quite natural that my uncle and his wife went all out to give him a reception as warm as if they were welcoming a triumphant general. What an astonishing man he was! He certainly had me beat this time. Everyone pressed to hear this great detective’s tale of adventure. Who could the Black Hand Gang really be?

“It’s extremely unfortunate, but I can’t say anything,” Akechi said with a slightly troubled look. “I may be reckless, I can’t possibly capture those villains by myself. After some consideration, I made a scheme to take your daughter back rather quietly. In other words, I found a way of getting the thieves to make a gift of her. So, a promise was exchanged between me and the Black Hand Gang. They swore to return your daughter and the ten thousand yen ransom and never to interfere with your family again, while I, for my part, promised to reveal nothing concerning the Black Hand Gang and never to assist in their arrest, that sort of thing. As for me, restoring your family’s loss fulfills my duty, so I thought that, rather than attempt two tasks and accomplish neither, I would accept the thieves’ proposal and return. So please don’t ask your daughter anything about the
Black Hand Gang, either. Here is the ten thousand yen. I hand it over to you.”

So saying, he handed my uncle a bundle wrapped in white paper. We would not be able to hear the detective story that we had been looking forward to. I, however, did not despair. He might not be able to tell my uncle and aunt, but, however firm his promise was, he would speak frankly at least to me, his close friend. When I thought that, I could not help but feel impatient for the banquet to end.

As for my uncle and his wife, as long as their family was safe, it made no difference to them whether the thieves were arrested or not. So another round of wine was drunk in thanks to Akechi. Akechi, who was not much of a drinker, turned bright red, and his usual smile stretched into an even broader grin. Flowers of innocent chit-chat bloomed, and cheerful laughter filled the room. There is no need to record here all that was said at that gathering, but I think the following conversation may interest my dear readers a little.

Looking like Ebisu, the god of commerce, my uncle passed another wine cup to Akechi and said, “You’ve saved my daughter’s life! I vow here and now that I’ll grant whatever you ask of me, however unreasonable. Isn’t there something you want?”

“Thank you,” Akechi answered. “For example, how about this? A certain friend of mine is awfully in love with your daughter. You wouldn’t mind even a request to give your daughter’s hand to that man?”

“Ha ha. There’s quite a bit more to you than meets the eye. No, as long as you vouch for that person, even offering my daughter isn’t out of the question.”

My uncle’s manner suggested that he was not altogether joking. “Even if that friend were a Christian?”

Akechi’s words seemed too serious to be for the amusement of the company. My uncle, who was fanatical about the Nichiren sect, made a somewhat sour face. “Very well. Generally speaking, I hate Catholicism, but if it is your request, I’ll try to consider it.”

“Thank you. I will certainly raise this matter someday. Please do not forget what you have just said.”
This conversation made a somewhat odd impression. It could easily be viewed as a joke for the entertainment of the company, but it could just as easily be considered serious. I suddenly remembered Barrymore’s play in which Sherlock Holmes falls in love with a girl he met on a case and finally marries her. I smiled secretly to myself.

My uncle tried to detain us, but it had grown quite late, so at last we gave him notice of our departure. My uncle saw Akechi to the entryway, and then stuffed an envelope containing two thousand yen into Akechi’s pocket, saying that it was a small token of thanks and ignoring his refusal.

The Hidden Facts

“Whatever you promised the Black Hand Gang, you should at least be able to tell me about the matter.”

I waited impatiently until we passed out of my uncle’s gate, and then began to question Akechi.

“Certainly I can,” he agreed unexpectedly easily. “Why don’t we discuss it at our ease over coffee?”

We then entered a café, chose a table at the back and sat down.

“Now, my point of departure in this case was the fact of those footprints not being there.” Akechi ordered coffee and began the detective story.

“There are at least six possibilities that might explain it. The first is that your uncle and the police detectives overlooked the footprints, because the thief left, for example, animal or bird tracks and was thus able to deceive our eyes. The second, although this is probably wild imagination, is that the thief hung from something, or even walked on a tightrope, and came to the scene of the crime in some manner that left no footprints. The third is that your uncle and Makita stamped out the thief’s footprints by mistake. The fourth is that the thief’s footwear happened to be identical to your uncle’s or Makita’s. These four possibilities can be verified by a thorough investigation of the crime scene. Moving on, the fifth possibility is that the thief did not come to the scene of the crime, in other words, that for some reason your uncle found it necessary to act out a one-man play, and the sixth is that Makita and the thief are one and the same person.
The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

“In any case, I felt it necessary to investigate the scene of the crime, so the following morning I set out at once for T. field. After all, if I were unable to discover some evidence of the first four possibilities, then only the fifth and sixth would remain, so I would be able to narrow the scope of my investigation significantly. As a matter of fact, I did make one discovery. Those fellows from the police had made a terrible oversight. That is to say, there were many marks on the ground as if it had been pierced by some kind of pointed object. But these marks were all hidden underneath the footprints of your uncle and the others - actually, it was mostly the marks of Makita’s clogs - and would not be obvious at first glance. While I was looking at them and thinking over various ideas, I suddenly recalled a certain matter. You might even call it divine inspiration. It was a truly wonderful idea. You see, Makita had on a wide muslin waistband tied with a large knot that doesn’t match his small body. When you look at him from behind, it makes a somewhat comical impression. I remembered that by chance, and when I did, I felt that I understood just about everything.”

Akechi said this and took a sip of coffee. Then, he gazed at me with a somewhat teasing look on his face. I, however, unfortunately still lacked the ability to follow his reasoning.

“So, how did it all turn out?’ I cried in frustration.

“What it all comes down to, you mean? Of the six explanations I just described to you, the third and sixth are correct. To put it another way, Makita the houseboy and the thief are one and the same person.”

“Makita?” I blurted out. “That’s absurd! Such a foolish, and honest man . . .”

“In that case,” Akechi said calmly, “try stating the points you think absurd one by one. I will answer them.”

“There are too many to count,” I said after considering for a while. “First, my uncle says that the thief was a large man, three to five inches taller than himself. In that case, he ought to be five foot ten or eleven. But Makita is, on the contrary, quite a small man.”

“We must also be a little suspicious of such an extreme contrast. On the one hand we have a man who is unusually large
for a Japanese and on the other a man who is so small as to be almost deformed. This is certainly a clear contrast. It’s almost too clear. If Makita had used slightly shorter stilts, I might actually have been led astray. Ha ha ha. It looks like you understand. You see, he prepared something like short stilts, made to be tied to the feet rather than held in the hands, and left them hidden somewhere beforehand. It was dark, and he was more than twenty yards away from your uncle, so whatever he did wouldn’t be found out. Then, after he had played the part of the thief, he went about searching for the thief’s footprints in order to cover up the marks of his stilts.”

“Wouldn’t my uncle have been able to see through such a childish trick? First of all, even though the thief was dressed in black, Makita always wears whitish, homespun cotton, doesn’t he?”

“That’s where that muslin waistband comes in. I think it a truly clever idea. When he wrapped himself from head to toe in that broad, black muslin, Makita’s small physique was easily hidden.”

The truth was so simple that I felt I had been made a complete fool of.

“Then, are you saying that that Makita has been working for the Black Hand Gang? Isn’t that quite peculiar? The Black Hand . . .”

“Oh my, are you still thinking about that? That isn’t like you. It seems you’re a bit slow on the uptake today. Your uncle, the police, and even you are all completely caught up in the morbid fear of the Black Hand Gang. Well, that’s natural enough in these times, but if you were coolheaded as you usually are, I think you would have been perfectly able to solve this case yourself without waiting for any help from me. This case has no connection to the Black Hand Gang whatsoever.”

There really must have been something wrong with my head. The more I listened to Akechi’s explanation, the less I understood the truth. Countless questions became jumbled in my head and got tangled up, and I had no idea which I ought to ask first.

“Then, why did you just tell my uncle that nonsense about hav-
ing made a promise with the Black Hand Gang? The first thing I don’t understand is, if this was Makita’s doing, why keep silent and let him get off? And given the sort of man Makita is, I can’t think that he would have the power to kidnap Fumiko and keep her hidden for several days. On the day Fumiko left, wasn’t he on my uncle’s estate all day without setting foot outside? Could a man like Makita plan such a major crime? And then . . .”

“You seem full of questions. But, you know, if you had unraveled the cryptogram in this postcard, or at least fathomed that it is a cryptogram, I think you would not wonder so.’

As he said this, Akechi took out the postcard signed ‘Yayoi’ that he had borrowed from my uncle’s place the other day. (I am sorry to trouble you, dear readers, but please reread the postcard, which is reproduced at the beginning of this story.)

“Without this cryptogram, I would certainly never have thought of suspecting Makita. So, you could even say that this postcard was my point of departure in making this discovery. But I didn’t know that it was a cryptogram at first. I only suspected. The reasons I suspected were that this postcard came the very day before Fumiko went away; that, although they were cleverly imitated, the fingerprints appeared to be a man’s; and that Fumiko behaved oddly when asked about it. Even more than that, look at this: Each line contains eighteen neatly written characters, just as if it were written on manuscript paper. Now, try drawing lines horizontally across it like this.”

As he said this, he took out a pencil, and drew horizontal lines, just like those on manuscript paper.

“When you do this it becomes clear. Run your eyes horizontally along these lines. There are some syllabic characters mixed in with every row, aren’t there? There is, however, one exception. All the characters in the first row are Chinese ideograms.”

一好割此外町袋自叱歌切

“Well, aren’t they?” He traced that row horizontally with his pencil as he explained. “This is really too strange to be a coincidence. After all, in a man’s writing it would be one thing, but in a woman’s writing, in which phonetic characters are far more numerous, it is impossible that there should be only a single example of such skillfully assembled Chinese ideograms. In
any case, I thought it was worth investigating. After returning home that evening I thought with all my might. Fortunately, I had made some study of codes before, so I was able to solve it with relative ease.

“Why don’t we give it a try? First, we’ll single out this row of Chinese characters and consider them. As they are, however, they’re like a game of chiìhâ, utterly without meaning. I checked to see if they might be related to some Chinese poem or sutra or something of that kind, but that was not the case. While I was trying various things, I suddenly noticed that there were just two characters crossed out. It is a little odd for there to be dirty erasures in such a neatly written composition. And both are the second character in their line. I know from my own experience that, when making cryptograms in the Japanese language, the most troublesome thing is the handling of voiced and semi-voiced sounds. So, I wondered if the deletion mark might not be a device to show that the Chinese character above it represents a voiced sound. If so, then each of these Chinese characters must represent just one syllable. I got that far with comparative ease. The rest was difficult. Well, let me omit the account of my hardships and proceed immediately to my conclusions.

“In brief, the number of strokes in the Chinese characters is the key. In addition, the left-hand radical and the remainder are counted separately. For example, the left radical of the character 好 has three strokes and the remainder has three strokes, so it becomes the combination ‘3, 3.’ When we make those values into a table, we get this.”

He took out a notebook and drew something like the following.

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“Looking at these numbers, we see that the left radicals go up to eleven, and the remainders only go to four. Don’t those numbers remind you of something? For example, couldn’t they express an arranged sequence, such as the fifty sounds of the kana..."
syllabary? As a matter of fact, when we line up the consonants of the kana syllabary, they number precisely eleven.

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* Indicates sound not used in modern Japanese.

“This might be a coincidence, but let’s try it. We’ll assume that the number of strokes in the left-hand radical expresses the consonant, and the number of strokes in the remainder expresses the vowel. In that case, 一, which has one stroke and no remainder, becomes the first character on the first line, i.e. ア. 好 has three strokes in its left-hand radical, so the ‘S’ line, and three strokes in its remainder, so the third character, ス. If we go on like this, we get

アスキチジシンバシヱキ

“I think that ウィ and エ must be substitute characters, because they aren’t used in modern Japanese. The lack of a one-stroke left-hand radical prevents the use of the first line, so they used
the ‘W’ line in its place. As I thought, it’s a code. It says ‘one o’clock tomorrow, Shinbashi Station.’ This man is quite an expert at encrypting. Now, a notification of a time and place comes in a cryptogram to a woman of marriageable age. Moreover, that cryptogram appears to be in a man’s handwriting. I wonder if there is any other way to consider this situation. Other than as an arrangement for a rendezvous, I mean. That being the case, doesn’t it seem unlike the work of the Black Hand Gang? At the very least, I think there is a need to investigate the sender of this postcard before searching for a band of robbers. Other than Fumiko, the owner of the postcard, however, no one knew the sender’s identity. That was a bit of an obstacle. But when considered in combination with Makita’s conduct, the problem disappears completely. What I mean is, if Fumiko ran away from home of her own volition, wouldn’t she be likely to send a letter of apology or leave behind a note? This point, when combined with the fact that it was Makita’s duty to collect the post, makes for a rather interesting plot. In other words, it was like this: Makita somehow suspected Fumiko’s love. In the case of a practically crippled man like him, I think that suspicion develops more than in others. So, he kept the letter from Fumiko and gave his ransom note from the Black Hand Gang to your uncle instead. This explanation also fits with the fact that the threatening letter didn’t come in the post.” Akechi paused briefly.

“I’m shocked. But . . .”

I was about to inquire concerning various further doubtful points, when he said, “Just wait,” and continued. “After investigating the scene of the crime, I went straight to your uncle’s estate and lay in wait for Makita just outside the gate. When he came out with the air of going on some errand, I deceived him and brought him to this café, to this very table we’re sitting at now. I had recognized from the start that he was an honest person, just as you did, so I suspected that there was some deep reason behind this case. I got him to relax by assuring him that I would not reveal his secret under any circumstances and that I would advise him about what to do with his spoils, and so finally got him to confess everything.
“I think you know a man named Hattori Tokio. Because he is a Christian, the unfortunate Hattori not only had his proposal of marriage to Fumiko rejected but was even prevented from going in and out of your uncle’s place. Parents are foolish creatures, so even your uncle didn’t notice that Fumiko and Hattori were in love. Fumiko is a charming girl, and she would still be so even if she had not been willing to go so far as to run away from home. She seems to have thought, with the frivolity of girlish innocence, that, whatever his religious prejudices, even your uncle would not force them to part once they were married. Or she may have had the cunning idea that your stubborn uncle would give in if she threatened to run away from home. In any case, the two pretended to elope to the place of Hattori’s friend in the country. It seems that they repeatedly sent letters from there. That fellow Makita has not allowed even one to slip through. I took a trip to Chiba and spent a night persuading the couple. They were drunk on nothing but sweet love and didn’t even know about the turmoil of the Black Hand Gang at home. I did my duty, but I wasn’t much admired for it. So, in the end, with a promise that I would manage things so that the two would be able to be together, I managed to separate them and bring the girl back with me. Still, I mean to fulfill that promise somehow using what your uncle said today, you see.

“Now, as for the problem on Makita’s side, as I thought, it has to do with a woman as well. Makita was in tears, poor man. I suppose even a man like that has a romantic side to him. I don’t know who the woman is, but Makita would probably say she was seduced by a businessman or somebody of that sort. In any case, a large sum of money was necessary in order to win that woman. When I asked him, he told me that he intended to flee before Fumiko returned. I felt the power of love deeply. It was none other than love which made that foolish man think up such a clever trick.”

As he reached the end of his story, I breathed a sigh of relief. Whether because of having to think about the case or because Akechi too was tired of chat, I was completely exhausted. We looked at each other in silence for a long while.

“The coffee is cold. Shall we go home?”
Akechi stood up and we took our separate ways home. But before we parted, as if he had suddenly remembered something, Akechi gave me with the envelope containing the two thousand yen that he had gotten from my uncle.

“Please give this to Makita when you have the opportunity. Say it’s for his dowry. I feel truly sorry for him.”

I willingly consented.

“Life is interesting, isn’t it? I’ve been a matchmaker for two pairs of lovers today.” Akechi laughed, sounding thoroughly pleased.
“Tsujidō is dead at last.”

When his trusted servant reported this with a look of mild triumph on his face, Mr. Hirata was more than a little surprised. He had heard that Tsujidō had taken to his bed some time ago, but even so, it seemed unimaginable that this rival (as Tsujidō had arbitrarily appointed himself), the man who had pursued him so irritatingly throughout his career, the Tsujidō whose favorite phrase had been ‘I can’t die until I stick this dagger into his guts,’ had died without achieving that goal.

“Can it be true?” Mr. Hirata asked his confidant.

“It’s true all right. I just came from seeing his funeral with my own eyes. I asked around the neighborhood, just to make sure. It’s absolutely true. Tsujidō lived with his son, and now he’s dead. His son accompanied the coffin with a pitiful, tear-stained face. He’s not like his father; he’s a weakling.”

Hearing this, Mr. Hirata felt disappointed. Surrounding the estate with high concrete walls, planting shards of glass on top of those walls, letting the gatehouse to a policeman and his family for next to nothing, keeping two burly houseboys, never going out except when business made it unavoidable - at night of course, but even during the day, taking a retinue of houseboys when he did go out: He did all this solely for fear of Tsujidō. Because Mr. Hirata had amassed a great fortune over his lifetime, he had occasionally done some reprehensible things. More than a few people harbored deep grudges against him. But they did not worry Mr. Hirata; it was only that half-mad Tsujidō who was too much for him. Hearing that his opponent was now dead, he let out a sigh of relief and, at the same time,
he felt lonely, somehow missing their rivalry.

The next day, just to make sure, Mr. Hirata set out for the neighborhood where Tsujidō lived and made discreet inquiries as to the present state of affairs. Thus, he was able to confirm that his confidant’s report had not been mistaken. Finally feeling himself safe, he relaxed his strict vigilance and savored a feeling of ease for the first time in a long while.

His family, unaware of the full circumstances, was more than a little bewildered to see that the usually gloomy Mr. Hirata had become suddenly cheerful. To hear laughter, never heard from him before, pass his lips! But this cheerfulness did not last long. The family soon had to worry about a head of household more melancholy than ever before.

After Tsujidō’s funeral, three days passed without incident. But, on the morning of the fourth day, as Mr. Hirata reclined in a chair in his study and casually perused that day’s mail, he discovered, among the many letters and postcards, a single letter, considerably battered but in handwriting he certainly recognized. He turned pale.

I think this letter will reach you after I am dead. My death has you dancing with joy, doesn’t it? I’m sure you thought “Well, well, now I can relax,” and have been feeling quite carefree. But wait just a moment; you mustn’t do that just yet. You see, even if my body has died, my spirit will never rest until I’ve put an end to you. It seems those absurd precautions of yours are indeed effective when it comes to living humans. I was certainly at my wit’s end over them. But you know, no matter how securely you shut yourself up, against a spirit, one that’s able to pass straight through it all like smoke, your plans can’t do a thing no matter how rich you are. Mark my words. As I lie in the grip of a grave illness, unable even to move, I have taken this oath: If I cannot finish you in this world, then I will become a vengeful ghost and haunt you to death. During these many days...
The Ghost

I have spent in my bed, I have been thinking of nothing else. What would I do if I couldn’t realize that wish? Take care: The curse of a vengeful ghost is far more terrible than the power of a living human.

The handwriting was poor and, other than the Chinese characters, the letter was written entirely in *katakana*, so that it was extremely difficult to read. The phrasing, though, was more or less as given above. Needless to say, there was no doubt that Tsujidō had put his soul into writing it as he lay groaning on his deathbed. The letter had surely been posted by his son after Tsujidō’s passing.

“What rubbish. Does he think I’ll be frightened by a childish trick of a threat like this? He’s old enough to know better. I suppose he must have gone a bit senile on account of his illness.”

Mr. Hirata laughed off the dead man’s threatening letter at first. But, as time passed, he was unable to prevent an indescribable uneasiness welling up in his heart. He was more than a little irritated by not having any way to defend himself, not knowing from where or in what way his enemy would strike, not knowing anything. He was tormented by wild, ghastly delusions day and night. His insomnia grew worse and worse.

Besides Tsujidō’s ghost, his son was also a concern. *Although it seems impossible that a man who appears so weak, so unlike his father, could do such a thing, if he’s following his father’s orders and keeping watch on me, that would be dreadful.* Realizing this, he called at once for the men he had previously employed to keep a lookout for Tsujidō to now observe the son.

The next several months passed without incident. Although Mr. Hirata did not recover from his oversensitivity and insomnia easily, nothing like a vengeful spirit’s curse appeared, and there did not seem to be anything untoward about Tsujidō’s son. Even the wary Mr. Hirata gradually came to feel the absurdity of his anxiety.

One evening Mr. Hirata was shut up all alone in his study, writing. His mansion was in a residential district, and even though it was still early evening the area had fallen silent as the
grave. Occasionally, the lonely howling of a distant dog could be heard.

The houseboy entered suddenly, placed a single parcel on the edge of Mr. Hirata’s desk, and said, ‘This has just arrived.’ Then he silently withdrew.

Mr. Hirata knew at a glance that it was a photograph. Just ten days before, when a celebration of the founding of a certain company had been held, the promoters had gathered and taken a photograph. Because Mr. Hirata had been among their number, they had undoubtedly sent him a copy of that picture.

Although Mr. Hirata had no great interest in such things, he had tired of writing just then and wanted to take a break, so he tore open the wrapping paper at once and took the photograph out to look at it. He had only been gazing at it for a short while when he suddenly threw it down on the desk as if he had touched something unclean. Then, with an uneasy look in his eyes, he gazed restlessly about the room.

A short time later, his hand inched towards the photograph he had only just thrown down. He unwrapped it, glanced briefly at it, and flung it away again. After repeating this curious behavior two or three times, he was at last able to compose himself and scrutinize the photograph.

It was certainly no illusion. He tried rubbing his eyes and even gently brushed the surface of the photograph, but the terrifying shadow did not disappear. A cold shiver crawled up his back. He tore up the photograph and, throwing the pieces into the stove, staggered to his feet and fled the study.

The thing he feared had come at last. The tenacious, vengeful ghost of Tsujidō had begun to show itself.

There, amid the clear figures of the seven promoters, hazy, stretching across almost the entire surface of the photograph, was Tsujidō’s ghastly face, projected gigantically before him. In that mist-like face, weren’t those two, pitch-black eyes glaring hatefully at him?

In his excess of fear, Mr. Hirata pulled his futon up over his head and lay shivering throughout the night, like a frightened child. The next morning, due to the sun’s remarkable power, he recovered just a little of his strength.
Something so ridiculous couldn’t possibly happen. Last night must have been my eyes playing tricks on me.

Forcing himself to consider such thoughts, he entered the study, which was flooded with bright morning sunshine. He looked up and saw that, regrettably, while the photograph had been completely destroyed and not a trace of it remained, the wrapping paper remained on the desk as proof that it had not all been a dream.

When he thought about it properly, the curse was a terrifying business either way. If Tsujidō’s face really had been printed across that photograph, well then, together with the threatening letter it made quite an ominous tale. There was no saying that there was nothing in this world that transcended reason. Or else, if it had really been just an ordinary photograph and had only appeared like that to Mr. Hirata’s eyes, then might he not be beginning to lose his mind as a result of Tsujidō’s curse? This idea frightened him even more.

For the next two or three days, Mr. Hirata thought of nothing but the photograph.

Perhaps if Tsujidō had been photographed by the same photographer, might not the negative have been layered on top of this one and printed together with it? Mr. Hirata even considered such absurd possibilities and expressly had a servant check with the photographer. But of course there had been no such oversight and, moreover, he learned that the name ‘Tsujidō’ did not appear even once in the photographer’s records.

The next incident occurred just a week later. Being told that the manager of a company with which he was connected was calling, Mr. Hirata brought the receiver of his desk telephone to his ear without giving it much thought and heard a strange laugh.

“Eh heh heh heh heh . . .”

It seemed to be far off, but, as soon as he thought that, an extremely loud voice seemed to be laughing right beside his ear. No matter how many times he called out, the other party only laughed.

“Hello? You aren’t Mr. XX, are you?”

As Mr. Hirata’s temper rose, the voice gradually faded away
and vanished quietly into the distance. It was replaced by the shrill voice of an operator: “Number, please. Number, please. Number, please.”

Mr. Hirata suddenly set down the receiver with a bang and remained motionless for some time. He stared fixedly at a single spot. As he did, an indescribable fear slowly welled up from the bottom of his heart: Hadn’t that been Tsujidō’s own familiar laughter? Mr. Hirata backed slowly out of the room, as if he could not take his eyes off the telephone receiver, that terrifying thing.

Mr. Hirata’s insomnia gradually worsened. Often, just as he felt that he would fall asleep at last, he would suddenly awaken with a ghastly scream. The family was more than a little worried by odd condition of the head of the household. They strongly urged him to see a physician. Mr. Hirata wanted to cling to someone, just as a frightened young child might cling to its mother. He wanted to tell someone of his dread and terror. But he would not placate his family and submit to a doctor’s examination because, were he to do so, the doctor would certainly say, ‘What? You must be having a nervous breakdown.’

Several more days passed. One day, there was a general meeting of stockholders for a company for which Mr. Hirata served as a director. He had to attend and make a brief speech. Because the company had posted record earnings over the past half-year and there were no problems that seemed particularly worrying, delivering a simple report would fulfill his duties. He stood before close to one hundred assembled shareholders and, because he was accustomed to doing that sort of thing, his speech proceeded in the tones of one well used to the stage.

Because his speech continued for some time, however, Mr. Hirata naturally gazed about at the faces of the shareholders in the audience as he spoke. Suddenly, he caught sight of something strange. When he saw it he stopped speaking long enough for it to be noticed by the people in the audience and stood bolt upright in silence.

Behind the crowd of shareholders, the familiar face of the deceased Tsujidō gazed fixedly in his direction.

“Concerning those circumstances . . .”
The Ghost

Mr. Hirata pulled himself together, spoke louder than before, and tried to continue his address. But no matter how much he tried to cheer himself up, he was unable to avert his eyes from that ghastly face. He gradually became flustered, and the thread of his speech became confused as well. Didn’t the familiar face of Tsujidō suddenly grin broadly then, as if to mock Mr. Hirata’s dismay?

Despite losing his train of thought, Mr. Hirata somehow finished his address. Abruptly bowing and moving away from the lectern, he ran towards the exit, heedless of what people might think, and searched high and low for the possessor of that frightening countenance. No matter how much he searched, though, no face was to be found. To make certain, he returned to where the special guests were seated and, from a spot near his original position, looked once more at the faces of the shareholders one by one. He could no longer discover a single face which even resembled Tsujidō’s.

The meeting hall was in a building that people could leave and enter freely, so it was conceivable that a person resembling Tsujidō had been among the audience and had taken his leave when Mr. Hirata made his search. But could there really be another such face in this world? No matter how Mr. Hirata tried to reconsider, he could not help feeling that it must be related to the dying Tsujidō’s terrible declaration.

From then on, Mr. Hirata saw Tsujidō’s face often: once in the corridor of the theater; once in the public park at dusk; once at his destination in the city, bustling with street traffic; even once before the gate of his own home. In this last circumstance, Mr. Hirata was in danger of fainting. It was late one night, when his automobile, on its way home, was just about to enter the gate. A figure suddenly appeared just as he was about to enter the gate and passed by Mr. Hirata’s car. As they passed each other, Mr. Hirata caught a glimpse of the man, whose face happened to be visible from the automobile. It was certainly Tsujidō’s face. But by the time Mr. Hirata reached the entrance, his spirits were a little restored by the voices of the houseboys and maids waiting to greet him. He ordered the driver to search the area, but the man was nowhere to be seen.
Perhaps that Tsujidō is alive after all. In that case, mightn’t he be putting on this show in order to make me suffer? Mr. Hirata suddenly wondered.

From the reports of the trusted servants who were keeping constant watch on Tsujidō’s son, there was not a single point worthy of suspicion. If Tsujidō were alive, he would surely turn up to see his own son at least once, but no such incident occurred. The strangest thing was the question of how anyone could know his whereabouts like that. Mr. Hirata had always been a secretive man and often only his servants and, of course, the members of his family were informed of his destinations. So there was no way for that face to appear everywhere he went except by keeping watch over his gate and following his automobile. The surrounding area was a lonely place, so another automobile could not pass through unnoticed. And, besides, there was simply no other place nearby to hire one. But following an automobile on foot was, of course, impossible. No matter how he thought about it, he had no choice but to believe that this was indeed the curse of a vengeful ghost.

Or perhaps it’s a trick of my imagination.

But, even if it were only a trick of his imagination, his fear was unchanged. He was forever at a loss. But as he racked his brains, mulling over the various possibilities, an ingenious idea suddenly came to his mind.

“If I do that, I can be certain. I wonder why I didn’t realize it earlier.”

Mr. Hirata excitedly entered his study, took up his writing brush and, using the name of Tsujidō’s son, wrote a request to the town hall in Tsujidō’s hometown for an official copy of the family register. If Tsujidō’s death had not been recorded in the family registry, it would account for everything. Mr. Hirata prayed for that to be the case.

Several days passed, and the official copy of the family register arrived from the town hall. To Mr. Hirata’s disappointment, however, there was a red “X” over Tsujidō’s name, and the date and time of his death, along with the date of notification, were clearly recorded in the row above it. There was no longer room for doubt.
The Ghost

With worried looks on their faces, everyone who met Mr. Hirata said, “Everything these days just makes it worse, doesn’t it? Even his health is giving out.” Even Mr. Hirata himself felt that he had somehow aged remarkably. There seemed to be more white hairs on his head than there had been a few months before.

“How about going away somewhere to recuperate?”

Because he refused to see a doctor no matter how many times he was asked, his family was now recommending a change of air. Mr. Hirata no longer felt safe in his home since encountering that face at the front gate and thought a trip really might improve his mood, so he accepted that advice and sought out the warmer climes of the nearby coast for a change of scenery.

Dispatching a postcard to his favorite inn to reserve a room, preparing his necessities, selecting personnel to accompany him—these things made Mr. Hirata feel cheerful for the first time in a long while. Although it was a little forced, he made merry as if he were a young man going on an outing.

Then, having gone to the coast, his spirits rose just as he had expected. He was pleased with the bright seaside scenery, and also with the rustic simplicity and frank character of the townspeople. His room at the inn was comfortable. It was on the coast, but the place was famed as a resort town rather than a swimming beach. He spent his days bathing in the hot springs and strolling along the warm beach.

It did not seem that the face which had worried him would show itself in this cheerful place. Mr. Hirata was not afraid now, even when he walked along the deserted beach.

One day, he strolled rather far, farther than he had previously gone. As he walked carelessly along, he suddenly realized that it was growing dark. Nearby was only the broad, sandy beach, without another soul upon it, and the sound of the waves pounding in and then returning with a hiss. Although it might have been his imagination, the scene made an unpleasant, almost sinister, impression on him.

He retraced his steps to the inn with great haste. It was a considerable distance, and, unfortunately, the day would most likely end before he had gone even half of it. Sweating, he hurried along at a steady pace.
His own footfalls sounded as if someone were following him and, taken aback, he couldn’t help looking over his shoulder. He felt uneasy about the dim shadows under a row of pines, which looked as if they might be concealing something.

After going on for a little while, he caught a glimpse of someone on the other side of a slightly elevated sand dune. That reassured Mr. Hirata a little. Thinking that his mood might be restored if he went to that side of the dune and had a talk with the person, he hastened all the more and approached the figure.

Drawing closer, he saw that it was a man, and that he seemed to be considerably advanced in years, although he was facing away and crouched motionlessly. From his posture, he seemed to be single-mindedly brooding over something.

Hearing Mr. Hirata’s footsteps, the man turned suddenly around to face him as if startled. Amid the grey scenery, his white hair seemed to stand out.

“Ah!”

Mr. Hirata let out a cry as if he had been crushed. Then he suddenly ran off. Despite being in his fifties, he dashed off recklessly, like a schoolboy running a race.

The thing which turned to face him, from which he had believed himself to be finally safe here, had been Tsujidō’s face.

“Watch out!”

Seeing Mr. Hirata running in a daze, trip over something and fall, a young man came rushing over.

“What’s the matter? Oh, it looks like you’re hurt.”

Mr. Hirata, who had lost a toenail, groaned in agreement. The young man skillfully dressed the wound with a handkerchief taken from the sleeve of his kimono. He then put his arm around Mr. Hirata, who was too weakened from the extremity of his terror and the pain of his wound to walk even a single step, and carried him back to the inn.

Mr. Hirata was worried that he might be bedridden for some time, but that was not the case, and the next day he was able to rise from his bed in comparatively good health. He could not walk about due to the pain in his foot, but he took his meals as usual.
Just when he had finished his breakfast, the young man who had aided him the day before came to look in on him. The young man was staying in the same inn. Following inquiries after each other’s health and after expressions of gratitude, they gradually moved on to gossip. Mr. Hirata wanted someone to talk to at a time like this. Feeling grateful, he spoke with uncharacteristic cheerfulness.

With the departure of Mr. Hirata’s servant, who had been sitting with them, the young man’s demeanor changed slightly, as if he had been waiting for that.

“As a matter of fact,” he said, “since you first arrived here, I have been observing you with interest. I was sure something would happen. I wonder if you might be willing to tell me about it?”

Mr. Hirata was more than a little surprised. Just what could this young man, whom he had just met, possibly know about his affairs? In any case, wasn’t it a rather impolite question? Until now, he had not spoken of Tsujidō’s vengeful ghost to another person even once. He had been too embarrassed to speak of something so ridiculous. Naturally, he would not confess the truth in response to this young man’s question either.

But as they chatted for some time, well, what a mysterious trick of conversation it was! Almost as if he were a magician, the young man easily heard everything from the mouth of the obstinate Mr. Hirata. It began with just a little slip. If his adversary had been an ordinary human, Mr. Hirata would have been able to smooth it over easily, but that was useless with this young man. With extraordinary skill he drew out the story bit by bit. Perhaps because it was the morning after that terrifying incident, although Mr. Hirata repeatedly tried to change the subject, he gradually sank ever deeper into a discussion of his problems, almost as if he had lost his own will. In the end, he told everything about Tsujidō’s vengeful ghost, without omitting a single incident.

Having heard all that he wished to hear, the young man now turned the conversation to other gossip with a trick of conversation no less skillful than that with which he had drawn out the tale. After he apologized for his long stay and left, not only did
Mr. Hirata not feel displeased at having been made to confess, but, somehow or other, that young man seemed worthy of his trust.

Ten more days passed without incident. Mr. Hirata had already grown weary of the area, but because his wounded foot still pained him and he thought it somewhat more congenial to stay in this lively inn rather than overtaxing himself by returning to his lonely estate in the capital, he prolonged his stay. For one thing, the young man whose acquaintance he had made was quite an entertaining conversation partner.

The young man was visiting Mr. Hirata in his room again when suddenly he grinned strangely and said, “You will be safe wherever you go now. The ghost won’t appear again.”

For an instant, Mr. Hirata was at a loss to understand the meaning of those words. Mixed in with his dumbfounded expression was the discomfort of a person who has been touched in a painful place.

“You’re quite right to be surprised at my saying so, but I’m not joking. The ghost has been captured alive. Please look at this.”

The young man unfolded a telegram clasped in his hand and showed it to Mr. Hirata. It said: AS YOU PREDICTED. HE HAS CONFESSIONED EVERYTHING. REQUEST FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.

“This came from my friend in Tokyo. This ‘everything’ that has been confessed is the confession of Tsujidō’s ghost. No, not a ghost, but the living Tsujidō himself.”

For a moment Mr. Hirata merely looked dumbfounded back and forth between the young man and the telegram.

“To tell the truth, I go about seeking problems like this. Seeking out and solving secret happenings and mysterious cases from the far corners of the world is my pastime.” The young man smiled as he explained quite off-handedly.

“When I heard that ghost story from you a few days ago, my habit led me to wonder if there might not be some sort of trick to it. From appearances, you did not seem so weak-minded that you would invent a ghost on your own. Although you may not have noticed it, wasn’t the ghost somewhat limited in the places it would appear? You see, although it followed you to your
various destinations and seemed to be able to appear anywhere at will, if you consider carefully, you will notice that it was limited to the outdoors. Even when it did appear indoors, it was limited to places anyone could enter or leave, like the corridor of a theater or the inside of a large building. If it were a real ghost, wouldn’t it have done better to appear inside your home rather than only showing itself outside? But aside from the photograph and the telephone call, it only showed its face briefly at your gate, where anyone could come and go freely. Surely that sort of behavior is contrary to the nature of a ghost, is it not? Accordingly, I considered various possibilities. There was a point which gave me some trouble, and it took me a bit of time to sort out, but I have finally captured the ghost alive.”

Mr. Hirata could not quite believe his ears. He himself had once wondered if Tsujidō might still be alive, even going so far as to check the official register. After that he had lost hope. Just how had this young man been able to determine the true identity of the ghost so easily?

“Oh, it was actually a simple trick. You most likely didn’t understand it because it was too simple. But it seems that you weren’t the only one taken in by that credible-looking funeral. After all, it’s scarcely imaginable that such a drama could be staged, not in a foreign detective novel, but in the center of Tokyo. After that, Tsujidō cut his ties with his son. This is an extremely important point. This is true in the case of other crimes as well, but the key to deceiving one’s enemy is to suppress one’s own emotions and to act entirely contrary to ordinary human nature. Because humans tend to judge the thoughts of others against their own, once they make a mistaken judgment, they do not notice their own error. And so, the process of revealing the ghost went smoothly. Just as you said the other day, being pursued from destination to destination like that would make anyone uneasy. To make matters worse, there was the official copy of the family register. All his props were in place.”

Caught up in the young man’s talk, Mr. Hirata said, “That’s it. But if Tsujidō were still alive, what I can’t understand is, first of all, that strange photograph. And even if that were just my own mistake, there’s his knowing my destinations, as you said just
now. And there’s also that official copy of the family register. Isn’t it unthinkable that there could be a mistake in the official register?”

“I thought mainly of those three points as well. I wondered if there might not be a way to take these seemingly irrational facts and make them rational. In the end, I discovered a common point among these three different matters. It was really quite a trivial thing. But it was extremely important to the solution of this case. It was that they are all connected to the post. The photograph came through the post, did it not? The official copy of the family register was the same. Then, as for your destinations when you went out, weren’t these also related to your daily correspondence? Ha ha. It seems you’ve caught on. Tsujidō was working as a mail carrier for your local post office, although, of course, he must have been in disguise. I wasn’t sure of it until just now. There is no doubt that he saw all the post coming to and from your home. There was no other way. If one applies steam to the seal of a letter, it’s possible to open it without leaving the slightest trace. So he played tricks with the photograph and the official copy of the family register in this way. He naturally knew your destinations by looking at various letters. So, on days when he was not on duty at the post office or when he invented some pretext to take leave from his work, he would go to your destinations ahead of you and play the role of the ghost.”

“The photograph would be possible with a little effort, but can something like an official copy of the family register really be forged so easily?”

“It was not a forgery. It was enough just to mimic the handwriting of the censor and make a little addition. Although it is certainly difficult to erase what is written in the family register, to make an addition is no trouble at all. It is a strange thing to say, but an official copy of the family register cannot prove that a person is alive. It wouldn’t work with the head of a household, but if it is anyone else, if one crosses out the name in red and fills in a report of death in the row above it, a living person becomes adead person. Because everybody is in the habit of blindly trusting official documents, they won’t notice a thing.
The Ghost

I sent a letter to Tsujidō’s permanent residence, which I asked you about on that day, requesting one more official copy of the family register, and when I examined the one that was sent it was just as I thought.”

Saying this, the young man drew an official copy of the family register from the breast of his kimono and placed it in front of Mr. Hirata. In the first column was Tsujidō’s son, the head of household, and the Tsujidō in question was recorded in the next. He had already retired before feigning death. There was no red line over his name; only his place of retirement was recorded in the row above. The word “death” was nowhere to be seen.

This is the story of how Akechi Kogorō, the amateur detective, came to be counted among the friends of Mr. Hirata the businessman.
The Corpse’s Arm

Kobayashi Monzō staggered drunkenly out of the Misono Theater. A mysterious chorus—the desperately high pitch of the girls on stage and the splendid bellowing from the responding audience—clamored inside his head, and even after leaving the shack he still tottered with a feeling like seasickness. The narrow lane lined with nighttime stalls suddenly seemed to be closing in on him. He walked hurriedly along the bright avenues in the direction of the public park with his chin pressed to his breast, avoiding the faces of the passersby as much as possible. He felt uneasy at the thought that he might be seen stealthily quitting his usual seat in the theater. His pace quickened.

After walking half a block, he reached the entrance to the dimly lit public park. Foot traffic at the wide crossroads had grown sparse. Monzō checked his wristwatch by the light of the red paper lantern of an *oden* vendor’s stall near the iron railing which surrounded the pond. It was already ten o’clock.

“I suppose I should go home, but there won’t be anything to do once I get there.”

Recalling the still air of the house in which he rented a room, Monzō did not feel inclined to return. Besides, a spring night in Asakusa Park held a strange fascination for him. Walking uncertainly, he entered the park, going in the opposite direction from home.

It was the wonderful charm of this park that one could walk and walk in it without ever seeing everything. Monzō suddenly
had the feeling that he might chance upon some unthinkable happening in one of its corners. It seemed to him that he would be able to discover something magnificent.

He walked along the pitch-black avenue which transverses the park. To the right were several plazas wrapped in forest; to the left a small stream paralleled the path. From time to time, the splashing sound of leaping carp came from the stream. A small concrete bridge, roofed in a wisteria trellis, appeared whitish in the gloom.

“Hey, mister.”

Monzō realized someone was calling to him out of the darkness. It was an odd, strangled voice.

“What?”

Monzō turned involuntarily with exaggerated surprise, as if he had come upon a holdup.

“Just a minute, mister. Don’t tell anyone; it’s highly confidential, this is. It’s wonderfully interesting, so please be generous and spare me fifty sen.”

A man who looked to be about thirty, dressed in a striped kimono and a hunting cap, huddled close to Monzō, grinning broadly.

“What’s that?”

The man responded with a low chuckle.

“You say that, even though you already know. You certainly won’t fool me like that.”

The man glanced restlessly about and then showed a scrap of paper against the illumination of a distant streetlight.

“Well then, take it.”

Although Monzō had no reason to desire such a thing, he exchanged a silver fifty-sen coin for the scrap of paper out of a sudden impulse of idle curiosity and walked off.

“That’s a good omen for tonight,” he thought, cowardly yet adventurous.

A company of four or five men who seemed to be drunken merchants on their way back from Yoshiwara passed by, tunelessly shouting out popular love songs.

Monzō veered off into a plaza by a public restroom. As always, vagrants were preparing to sleep on the public benches in
The Dwarf

its corners. Beside every bench lay innumerable banana skins, trampled underfoot: the vagrants’ evening meal. In the center two or three people were sharing scraps of food gotten from a nearby restaurant. Tall streetlights cast a pale illumination on the scene.

When he had taken two or three steps, meaning to pass through, he sensed the presence of something squirming in the darkness nearby. Although he could not make it out clearly on account of the darkness, he lingered there seized by an exceedingly strange, somehow abnormal feeling.

For a moment, Monzō felt a mysterious sensation. He wondered if something might not be wrong with his head. But as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he gradually came to grasp the nature of his object. There, standing motionless, was a single, pitiable dwarf.

A fine adult face sat like a borrowed thing atop the body of a child of ten. Monzō found the way it stared back at him with the air of a “living doll” to be both exceedingly humorous and bizarre. Monzō felt that it was wrong of himself to stare like that. Besides, he had become a little afraid, so he casually walked off. He hesitated to look back over his shoulder.

After that, he walked about from plaza to plaza as usual. The weather was good, so all the benches were full. Most of them were occupied by lone figures in faded workmen’s livery, lying down. Some of these men were already snoring, sleeping soundly. The inexperienced vagrants feared police officers and made their beds in the dim thickets enclosed by the iron railing.

It was that time of the day when strange wanderers were about: vagrants searching for a bed, police detectives, uniformed policemen rattling their sabers as they made their rounds every thirty minutes. Seekers after the bizarre such as Monzō were the chief part of them, but there was always another odd race of people who did not belong. They would sit down on a nearby bench for a minute, then immediately stand up again, and repeat this course countless times. When they encountered other wanderers on the narrow paths through the dim groves, they would peer meaningfully into their faces and try to borrow a match, even if they had some themselves. They were well-shav-
en, with smooth, slippery faces. Most wore a striped kimono tied with a stiff sash.

Monzō had felt a kind of interest in these people before. He wanted to try to ascertain their identities. It was strange that, although it could never be guessed from their way of walking, they were all squalid, elderly men in their thirties and forties.

As he passed by a public bench styled like a roofed arbor, voices which seemed to be quarreling issued from the darkness within it. The vagrants in this public park were uncharacteristically timid, so Monzō, who had thought that there was no possibility of danger, felt a little surprised. Peering inside while preparing to flee, he saw that it was not a fight after all, but a lone gentlemen in Western clothes being made to sit down by a police officer. While a few angry words were shouted, the gentleman was easily restrained with a rope about his waist. The pair walked off in the direction of the local police box in cordial silence. But the gentlemen attempted to conceal the cord with his spring coat as he walked. In the pitch-black public park, there were no rubbernecksers to follow after them. On the same bench, a man with the air of a laborer sat lost in thought, as if nothing had occurred.

Monzō climbed a flight of irregular stone steps and came out on top of a hill. In an area about forty yards square, surrounded by a sparse grove of trees, three or four benches were lined up, and three silent, resting figures dotted the place like isolated bronze statues. Aside from the occasional red glow of a cigarette, no one moved. Monzō summoned his courage and sat down on one of the benches.

Even the moving picture houses had closed some time ago, and the brilliant illumination had almost entirely vanished. The scattered streetlights were the only lights in the spacious park. Even the orchestra of Mokuba Hall\(^4\), which could be heard anywhere during peak hours, and the commotion of the people in the theater district had already subsided. As might be expected of an amusement quarter, the public park late at night was especially lonely, and it caused Monzō to feel a strange ghastliness. His wristwatch pointed to almost twelve o’clock.

Seating himself, Monzō began to cast sidelong glances at
the others who were already there. On one bench was a mustachioed man in formal Western clothing. On another bench was a hatless man with the air of a carouser, who might have been the supervisor of a fish market. And on yet another bench, much to his surprise, that mysterious dwarf he had seen earlier was sitting all alone.

“Perhaps he’s been dogging my footsteps like a shadow since I came across him earlier,” Monzō thought suddenly, without knowing why. It was strangely uncanny. In addition, the streetlight was inconveniently just at Monzō’s back and, filtered through the branches of the trees, illuminated only the area around the dwarf, so he could see the whole body of this deformed child with comparative clarity.

Beneath the thick, disheveled hair was an unusually wide face. Its complexion was deathly pale, and the eyes were absurdly large, out of proportion with the mouth. The features were mostly those of a fully formed adult, but the muscles in the face had a tendency to stiffen, as if with a sudden convulsion. The face seemed sometimes to scowl with a feeling of unpleasantness and sometimes to be taken by a bitter smile. Just then it gave the general impression of a wasp spider that had been crushed by a foot.

The dwarf wore a kimono in a large splash pattern. His arms were folded, but because they were extremely short in relation to the breadth of his shoulders, his fingers did not reach his upper arms and met just in front of his breast, as if he were grasping a sword. It was as if his whole body was made up of head and torso and he wore his limbs merely by way of apology. His short, thick legs, shod in high rain-clogs with magnolia wood supports, swung two or three inches above the ground.

Monzō’s own face was fortunately in shadow, so he was able to gaze at the other as if he were viewing an exhibition. He was somewhat uncomfortable at first, but as he watched, he gradually became fascinated by the apparition. The dwarf was most likely employed by a circus troupe or something of the kind, but it made Monzō feel strange to imagine what sort of thoughts this cripple might be carrying inside his large, flat-crowned head.
The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

From the first, the dwarf continued to gaze in one direction with a queer, thieving look in his eyes. Following that gaze, Monzō realized it was falling on two men seated upon a shadowed bench. The gentleman in Western clothes and the man with the air of a carouser had lined up on the same bench without his noticing and were talking together in hushed voices.

“It’s surprisingly warm, don’t you think?” The one in Western clothes spoke in a muffled voice, stroking his beard.

“Yes. It’s been very warm for two or three days,” the carouser answered in a quiet voice. It looked as if this was their first meeting, but the pair seemed somehow to have formed an odd companionship. Although both appeared to be nearly forty, one was a formal man with the look of a petty official, and the other was a pure Asakusan. It was truly odd that they should be carelessly discussing the weather so late into the night that even the trains must have stopped running. Almost certainly, they had some mutual scheme. Monzō felt his curiosity slowly mounting.

“How’s business?” Western Clothes enquired indifferently, intently surveying the plump body of the other man.

“Oh, the usual.” With both elbows on his knees and his head rested upon them, the fat man answered restlessly. This tedious conversation continued for some time. Taking a lesson from the dwarf, Monzō did not take his eyes off the pair.

Eventually, Western Clothes stretched with a gigantic yawn and stood up, staring at Monzō. But, mysteriously, he sat down once again on the same bench, almost touching the fat man. Sensing this, the fat man looked in the direction of the dwarf and quickly returned to his original posture. Then, although he was a balding man in his forties, he fidgeted coquettishly, as if he were ashamed of something.

Western Clothes suddenly stretched his protruding, monkey-like elbows—they really did give one the impression of a monkey—and took the fat man’s hand.

Then, after whispering together for some time again, they came to an unspoken agreement, stood up from the bench and went off down the hill practically arm in arm.

Monzō felt a chill. It was an odd comparison, but it resembled the chill he had felt when viewing waxwork anatomical models.
of the human body at an exhibition on public hygiene. It was a feeling of indescribable discomfort and fear. And the most awful thing was that, in the dimness before him, the dwarf let out a chuckle as he watched the descending pair. (Monzô was unable to forget that uncanny laughing face for a long time afterwards.)

The deformed child went on laughing, putting his hand to his mouth and twisting his body slightly like a young girl. Monzô was unable to flee, however much he struggled to do so. He felt as if he had been bound in a world of nightmares. In his ears he could hear a pounding noise, like the distant roaring of the sea.

A short while later, the dwarf got down from the bench with a comical motion and approached him with unsteady steps. Monzô stiffened involuntarily, thinking that he was about to be accosted. But, luckily, the bench on which he sat lay in the shadow of a large tree, so that the dwarf passed by him, seemingly unaware that anyone was there, and walked over to the top of a flight of stairs.

When the dwarf had taken two or three steps, however, something black tumbled from his pocket. It was a long, thin thing about one foot in length, wrapped in something like a satin cloth. One corner of the cloth had come untied, and Monzô caught just a glimpse of the contents. It was clearly a pale, human hand. The five delicate fingers were grasping at the air in an expression of death agony.

The cripple, perhaps thinking no one was looking, picked up the bundle without any particular concern and, thrusting it into his pocket, set off at a brisk pace.

Monzô sat blankly for a moment. It seemed to him quite ordinary for the dwarf to be carrying a human arm. “What a fool, keeping a dead person’s arm in his pocket as if it were valuable,” he thought to himself. He felt it was rather humorous.

But the next moment, he grew extremely agitated. The combination of the mysterious cripple and a human arm suggested a gruesome scene. He got up suddenly and followed the dwarf, careful not to make a sound as he descended the stone steps. The retreating figure of the deformed child was visible directly in front of him. Without being noticed by his quarry, he shadowed the dwarf, preserving a moderate distance.
The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

Tailing the dwarf in this way, Monzō felt as if he were dreaming. It seemed to him that the dwarf would suddenly turn to face him in a dark place and say “boo.” But some strange force pulled him on. For some reason, he could not avert his eyes from the dwarf’s retreating figure.

The dwarf hobbled along with a mincing gait, walking with unexpected speed. They turned down several dark, narrow lanes, crossed the grounds of the temple of Kannon and emerged from a back lane, headed in the direction of Azuma Bridge. As Monzō passed from lonely place to lonely place without knowing why, the dwarf, walking all alone down silent streets practically devoid of passersby, appeared even more like a demon.

Finally, they drew near Azuma Bridge. The bridge was practically devoid of people, in stark contrast to its daytime hustle and bustle, and its iron guardrails were visible from a long way off. From time to time an automobile would pass by, shaking the bridge.

The cripple, who had come this far in a hurry, looking neither to right nor left, came to a sudden halt in the middle of the bridge. Then he turned suddenly about. Monzō, tailing him at a distance of just twenty yards, was startled by this surprise attack. The view on the bridge was unobstructed, and he had no time to conceal himself. So he had no choice but to pretend to be an ordinary pedestrian and to keep walking. The dwarf, however, seemed fully aware that he had been followed. He had inserted a hand a little way into his pocket and was taking out the bundle, but, seeing Monzō, he hastily withdrew his hand and walked off again with an air of innocence.

“It looks as if he planned to throw the woman’s arm into the river.”

Monzō realized at last that this was no trivial matter.

He had once read an article concerning time-honored methods of concealing corpses. It said that killers often cut them up and that for the purpose of carrying off a corpse it is most convenient to divide it into six or seven parts. It then went on to enumerate many examples of crimes in which a head had been buried under a paving stone, a torso thrown into a flood
gate, or legs tossed into a ditch. According to the article, it seemed that criminals wanted to conceal the different parts of a corpse separately and as far away from themselves as possible.

The thought that he had been perceived by his quarry frightened Monzō a little, but he was determined not to give up the pursuit, so he followed nervously after the dwarf at a much greater distance than before.

There was a police box at the end of Azuma Bridge and a single uniformed officer was idly standing watch under its red electric light. When he saw that, Monzō wanted to begin running to it at once, but a certain thought compelled him to hold his ground. It would be rather disappointing to inform the police now. He certainly hadn’t undertaken his pursuit for the sake of justice; it was merely a hunt for something out of the ordinary, into which he had allowed his fervently adventurous heart to persuade him. He wanted to push further on his way and see a gory spectacle. Not only that, he would not have minded being caught up in the whirlpool of a criminal case. Though he was a coward, there was at the same time a part of him that was reckless and desperate.

Monzō cast a sidelong glance at the police box and, feeling a slight pride grow within him, he continued his pursuit. From the main street the dwarf entered into the many back lanes of Nakanogō. There were slums thereabouts, and the place had become so labyrinthine as to make one think, *There are places like this even in Tokyo?* His quarry turned back and forth through the maze countless times, so that shadowing him became more and more difficult. Before he had walked even three blocks from the police box, Monzō began to have regrets.

On one side were dark houses with closed doors, and on the other a cemetery surrounded by a sparse cryptomeria hedge. Only a single five-candela street lamp illuminated the fallen stone monuments. There, the big-headed monster, hurrying with unsteady steps, seemed somehow unreal. Monzō felt that all the night’s happenings had been a dream. It seemed as if at any moment someone might say, “Hey, Monzō, Monzō,” and shake him awake.
For a long time the dwarf, perhaps unaware of his pursuer, did not look behind him even once. Even so, Monzō was cautious, not showing himself until after the other had turned a corner and sneaking along from shadow to shadow beneath the overhanging roofs.

As they turned toward the graveyard, the gate of a small temple came into view. There, the dwarf looked over his shoulder briefly and, having made certain that he was alone, opened a side door with a creak and vanished inside the gate. Monzō emerged from his hiding place and hurried up to the gate. After pondering the situation for a short time, he tried pushing gently against the side door, but it seemed to be barred from the inside and did not budge even slightly. The side door had not been locked, so perhaps the dwarf lived at this temple. But that was far from certain. He might have been making his escape through the graveyard at the rear of the temple.

In a great hurry, Monzō retraced his steps to the previous street and peered at the back of the temple through a break in the cryptomeria hedge. He saw a building which seemed to be the priests’ quarters on the other side of the graveyard. Just then its door opened and someone went inside. The figure illuminated by the light leaking through the gap of the door was undoubtedly that of the misshapen dwarf. As the figure vanished inside the priests’ quarters, a metallic sound like the fastening of a door was faintly audible.

There was no longer room for doubt. Much to Monzō’s surprise, the dwarf was a resident of this temple. But, just to make sure, he passed through the breach in the cryptomeria hedge and, drawing near to the priests’ quarters, kept watch for some time. No light was to be seen, as if the electric light inside had been turned off. Monzō strained his ears, but there was no sound, not even a songbird.

The next day, Kobayashi Monzō slept in until around ten o’clock. The daylight was filtering through the gaps in the shutters and shining dazzlingly off the tip of his oily nose when he was suddenly awakened by boisterous shouting from the athletic field at the neighborhood elementary school. Stretching a hand from his bedding, he half-opened the shutters and began
to smoke a cigarette while still lying on his belly in the futon.

“I wonder what I was doing last night. Perhaps I spent it at the
theater,” he said to himself, his words jumbled by waking.

It was all like a dream. As he stood before the darkened priests’
quarters, guessing at the situation within, his excitement cooled
by degrees. It was as if the midnight chill had pierced his body.
Backlit by the distant street lamps, the pitch-black outlines of
the stone monuments looked like a crowd of goblins. A different
fear began to assail him.

Somewhere, a chicken squawked unpleasantly, as if it had
been crushed. Hearing that, he could stand it no longer and
fled. When he passed through the cemetery he had a feeling
that he was being pursued by something. After that, he man-
aged with great difficulty to make his way through the compli-
cated labyrinth, which was like the streets in a dream, with no
way of escape no matter where he went, and finally arrived at
the main street along which the railway tracks ran. He flagged
down a vacant taxi, which happened to be passing by just then
and seemed to be on its way home, and returned to the board-
inghouse. When the driver asked his destination as if it were a
bother, he almost gave the name of his place of play by accident,
but changed his mind and informed the driver of the name of
the neighborhood in which the boardinghouse was. Somehow,
he was extremely tired.

It must have been a hallucination. A human arm covered in a
wrapping cloth; it’s really quite absurd.

The spring sunshine filling the room made his mood entirely
cheerful. The weird feelings of the previous night seemed un-
real.

He gave one great stretch and, picking up the newspaper the
landlady had left by his pillow, scanned the society page first,
as was his habit. He did not find any particularly interesting
articles. Almost all the two- and three-column headlines were
bloody crime stories, but when he read the articles, all of them
seemed to describe incidents in some other country and did not
commend themselves to his attention. But turning to anoth-
er page, a certain article suddenly drew his interest. Seeing it,
somehow he could not help being startled. Under a three-line
headline that said ‘Woman’s leg found in ditch: bizarre murder case?’ was the following article:

Yesterday afternoon, the sixth, a human leg was found in the suburban district of Senjumachi, Nakagumi by a laborer, Sanjirō Kida, who was cleaning out a roadside ditch. The leg, which was wrapped in a striped cotton wrapping cloth, was discovered with a small stone weight, amid the scooped-up mud and caused a great commotion. According to the expert opinion of Dr. Toyama, M.D., the right leg of a healthy woman of about twenty, was severed at the knee about three days ago. Although a look at the severed end establishes that the cutter was no surgeon, neither a murder case answering to the above nor the disappearance of a woman has been reported in the vicinity, and the identity of the victim is unknown. The police are conducting a rigorous investigation into whether an exceedingly clever murder may have been carried out.

The paper had no reason to treat the matter as especially important and the article was phrased quite simply, but to Monzō’s eyes it seemed as if it were bursting into flame. He rose abruptly from his futon and, almost unconsciously, re-read the article five or six times.

“It’s probably a coincidence. Besides, last night may have been nothing but a hallucination.”

Although he forced himself to calm down in this way, soon afterwards, the image of that strange dwarf—standing at the edge of a ditch in a lonely district on the outskirts of the city, tossing in a bundle covered in a wrapping cloth, his expression horrible—rose vividly before Monzō’s eyes.

Aimlessly, and feeling as if he were being driven on by something, he rose from his bedding and began to dress in a great hurry.

Unsure of what he planned to do, Monzō removed a newly-tailored sack coat and a spring overcoat from his chest of Western clothes and put them on. He had left school but not
yet gained employment, so this was his only good suit for going out, and he was quite proud of it. Both the jacket and pants were a fashionable sky-blue, which harmonized well with his personal appearance.

As he passed through the living room below, the landlady called out from behind, “Oh my, you’re all dressed up. Where are you off to?”

“Nowhere in particular.” Giving this strange reply, he hurriedly tied his high-laced boots.

But even after exiting the lattice door, he had not the slightest idea where he should go. He thought of making a report to the police, but he lacked the confidence. Somehow, he still felt that he wanted to keep the secret to himself. In any case, going to the temple of the previous night and checking out the situation seemed best. Might not all of last night’s happenings have been nothing more than his own hallucinations? He thought about that incessantly. He could not relax without going once more to make certain under the light of day. Resolutely, he set out for Honjo.

Getting off the train at Kaminari Gate and crossing the Azuma Bridge, he entered a vaguely recollected side street. The whole area took on an entirely different appearance by day, so he felt a little as if he had been bewitched by a fox. He went back and forth through countless similar back alleys, and at last came out before a temple gate he recognized. Although the area was surrounded by squalid neighborhoods, there was vacant land there, and that made it seem a strangely lonely place. Outside the gate there was only a single isolated, rustic-looking, small-time candy shop with an old woman basking drowsily in the sun before the storefront.

Monzō entered the gate, making sure his footsteps would be heard. Then, standing before the entrance to the priests’ quarters he had seen the previous night, he boldly opened the sliding paper doors. They made an awful clattering sound.

“May I come in?”

“Yes, but who might you be?”

In an empty, dim room about ten mats in area sat a Buddhist priest wearing a white kimono. He looked to be in his forties.
“If I might ask, might there be, well, a physically disabled person residing in this place?”

“Eh, what’s that you say? A physically disabled person?” The priest replied, blinking with surprise.

“A short person. I think he must have returned extremely late last night.”

Aware that he had begun the discussion in an odd manner, Monzō grew still more flustered. He had completely forgotten the stratagems he had thought up on his way.

“Perhaps you are calling at the wrong house. There are no lodgers here. I know nothing of any short, disabled person.”

“I feel certain that it was this temple. There aren’t any other temples in the neighborhood, are there?” Monzō gazed doubtfully about the interior of the priests’ quarters as he spoke.

“Not nearby. But there is no person like the one you described here.” The priest glared at Monzō and answered bluntly, stopping just short of saying “What an odd fellow!”

Monzō couldn’t hold out any longer and thought of leaving it at that and going home, but he summoned his courage and continued.

“No, actually, I saw a strange thing in this place last night.” As he spoke, Monzō abruptly entered and sat down on the doorsill.

“You see, I saw a small person, such as often appears in shows, enter the priests’ quarters here carrying a certain item. Naturally, I saw him from the other side of the hedge over there. Are you sure you don’t know anything about it?”

Monzō felt that the affair was becoming stranger and stranger as he related it.

“Oh, is that so?” The priest took an extremely mocking tone.

“I know nothing at all. You’ve made a mistake. Could such a ludicrous thing as you describe have taken place?” He guffawed loudly.

A Young Lady Vanishes

“I don’t know where you’re from, but you seem to be making some exceedingly strange accusations.” After answering Monzō’s questions for some time, the priest finally lost his temper.
“I wonder if you didn’t dream all of this nonsense about a dwarf carrying a human arm. If I say I don’t know, I don’t know. As you can see this is a small temple, and there’s no place here where a person could hide. If you have doubts, feel free to search the house. Ask the people of the neighborhood as well. Ask them whether such a cripple resides in this temple.”

“I didn’t mean to doubt you at all.” Monzô became flustered again. “I saw a suspicious man sneak in here last night, so I wanted to warn you to be careful. But it’s strange. I certainly did see him.”

“If you saw him, then you saw him, but I’m a little busy just now, so . . .”

The priest frowned, stopping just short of saying that he had no time to take heed of a madman.

“I’m very sorry to have inconvenienced you.”

Monzô reluctantly stood up. He went out of the gate practically in a daze.

There must be something wrong with me. How mad my visit must have seemed. It’s only natural the priest ridiculed me. But by his tone, he doesn’t seem to have anything to hide. No matter how hard I try, I can’t make sense of it.

He loitered absentmindedly before the gate for some time. Then, suddenly struck by an idea, he went over to the storefront of the small-time candy shop where the old woman was dozing.

“I’ll take those rice crackers for fifty sen there.” He feigned an innocent inquiry after merchandise for which he had no desire. “By the way, would you happen to know if there’s a very short person around here? Like a Lilliputian, that sort of cripple.”

“I’ve lived in this area for many years, but I’ve never seen anyone like that or even heard a rumor of one,” the old woman answered suspiciously.

“Aside from the head priest, what sort of people live in the temple in front of this shop?”

“Oh, Yōgen Temple, you mean? That’s a queer temple: the head priest lives there all by himself. There was a young priest with him until just recently, but he was discharged or something, and I haven’t seen him since. The head priest is quite an
odd gentleman. My husband sometimes offers his services to the temple, so I know all about it.”

The old woman seemed to be a gossip and continued to speak loquaciously. But there was nothing of any particular benefit to Monzō. He brought the conversation to a perfunctory conclusion and walked off toward the railway encumbered by the bag of rice crackers. Along the way, he dropped into liquor shops, rickshaw stands and the like and made the same inquiry, but no one knew of the dwarf. He felt stranger and stranger.

Even after boarding the train at Kaminari Gate, he was oddly absentminded. He felt as if a thin curtain was hanging over his head.

“My goodness, if it isn’t Mr. Kobayashi!”

When the train passed Ueno Yamashita, someone standing in front of him called out a greeting. Sunk in a reverie, Monzō was so startled by the soft voice that he jumped. He felt as if he had been caught doing something bad. He turned bright red even before identifying his interlocutor.

“It looks like you were lost in thought.”

To his surprise, Mrs. Yamano stood there laughing.

“Where are you going?” She inquired, tilting her head in her habitual manner.

Monzō was completely taken aback at the sight of the wife of the businessman Yamano Daigorō clinging to a leather strap on a crowded train.

“I’m very sorry for neglecting to write for so long. Please forgive me.” He stood up and made to surrender his seat. Because he was in such a hurry to stand and because the train rounded a curve just then, he staggered, and his hand brushed against the lady’s thigh. He grew still more flustered and red in the face.

“Thank you. You’re just the person I wanted to see. There’s a little something I want to ask you about. Would you minding getting off at the next main street with me?”

“Not at all.” Monzō replied deferentially, as if he were the lady’s servant. Out of habit, he regarded Mrs. Yamano’s beauty with something resembling fear. He was even more uncomfortable when he came into contact with this lady than he was when
he encountered her husband, Yamano Daigorō, who was from his hometown.

Disembarking at Ueno Main Street, the pair set off shoulder to shoulder in the direction of the public park.

“I don’t suppose you’ve eaten lunch yet. Neither have I. But won’t you stroll with me for a little while? I’ll treat you to a meal at the Seiyōken once we’ve finished talking. You see, it would be inconvenient if what I have to say were to be overheard.”

Whatever it was, the lady appeared to take it extremely seriously. But no matter what she might say, as long as he was able to walk shoulder to shoulder with her, and more than that to join her at table, Monzō was in ecstasy. Thinking back, he realized he had not eaten all morning.

He thought himself lucky to have gone out that day wearing his only good suit of Western clothes. *Dressed like this, I shouldn’t be an embarrassment to the lady. I may even have achieved a perfect balance with her attire.* Monzō thought only of such things as he followed a step behind the lady, gazing at her beautiful figure.

As they neared the entrance to the park, where pedestrian traffic was sparse, the lady suddenly turned to Monzō and made an odd inquiry: “Say, Mr. Kobayashi, you once told me that a famous amateur detective was among your acquaintances, didn’t you? Perhaps I was mistaken.”

“Oh, you mean Akechi Kogorō? I wouldn’t call him a friend, but I certainly do know him. He was in Shanghai for a long time and only returned six months ago. We met on his return, but I haven’t even paid him a visit since. They say he hasn’t been accepting many cases since he came back. Do you have some business with him, madam?”

“Yes. I haven’t told you yet, but something dreadful has happened. To tell you the truth, Michiko has run away from home.”

“What? Michiko? I had no idea. When did it happen?”

“It’s been five days. It was almost as if she disappeared. No matter how hard I think, I have no idea why she ran away or where she could have gone. I’m beginning to feel there might really be such a thing as being spirited away after all. We’ve asked the police to investigate confidentially. They’ve divided up the
work and investigated my husband and everyone else who has been in and out of the house, but there are no clues at all. I hope you understand the situation. I’m truly at my wits’ end. My husband had some idea about Osaka, so he set out for his branch office there last night, even though he has no business there. And this morning I’m walking here on my own initiative, asking after the acquaintance of an acquaintance. I even deliberately boarded a train, of all things, almost like a detective.” Smiling strangely, she added something with no relation whatever to the story of Michiko: “By the way, do you know the head priest of Yōgen Temple?”

Monzō was more than a little confused, but at the same time a wild idea began to form in his mind.

“No, there’s no reason I should. Why do you ask?”

“I first saw you in front of Yōgen Temple,” the lady said suspiciously. “I passed you on the vacant land near the gate. I suppose you were wrapped up in your own thoughts. The head priest of that temple comes from the same village as my husband, but he is quite an eccentric. I went to see him about Michi and am on my way back now. Didn’t you know that he’s from your hometown?”

“Is that so? I hadn’t the least idea. I feel as if I’ve been bewitched by foxes since last night.7 There really must be something wrong with me if I encountered you, madam, without realizing it. My mind has been a bit queer recently.”

“Now that you mention it, you do seem preoccupied with something. Did something happen?”

“Haven’t you read, madam? There was an article in this morning’s paper saying that a young woman’s leg has been pulled from a ditch in Senju.”

“Oh, I read that. It startled me for a moment because of Michi. But it couldn’t be her.” She smiled.

“I’ve had an awful time because of that article,” Monzō began awkwardly. “I went to Asakusa Park last night. In the dark public park, I came across someone like a monster. I’ve been completely mad since then.”

It appeared that the lady’s curiosity was aroused, so Monzō summarized the events of the preceding night.
"My goodness, how creepy!" The lady knit her brows. "But it was probably just nerves. The priest at Yōgen Temple is not the sort to tell lies, and if a cripple like that were about, there's no way that the people of the neighborhood could fail to notice him."

"I think so as well. But if that's the case, things are even more hopeless. . . ."

They walked about Ueno for more than thirty minutes, Monzō ascertaining the facts of Michiko's disappearance, and Mrs. Yamano inquiring into the character of Akechi Kogorō. At last, the conversation terminated with a decision to call on Akechi at his lodgings.

Finishing their meal at the Seiyōken and calling for an automobile, the two headed for the Kikusui Inn in Akasaka, where Akechi was lodging. Monzō had a strangely pleasant feeling. Taking a meal face to face with the beautiful Mrs. Yamano, sitting beside her in the trembling automobile, and the thought of the lodgings of the famous amateur detective at their destination all delighted his childish heart.

When they alighted from the automobile and stepped into the inn's wide entrance hall, he was feeling thoroughly agreeable. He even entertained an outrageous fantasy that Mrs. Yamano was his lover and had come to meet him, going behind her husband's back.

Fortunately, Akechi was at home. He came cheerfully into the corridor to greet them.

It was a sunny ten-mat Japanese room. The three seated themselves around a rosewood table. Akechi arranged his features, which resembled those of the professional storyteller Hakuryū, into a smile and waited for his guests to broach the reason for their visit. Mrs. Yamano appeared to form a favorable first impression of the amateur detective. She even smiled as she began to tell of Michiko's disappearance. The smile made her expression innocent, like a young girl's, increasing her already considerable charm.

In the six months since his return from Shanghai, amateur detective Akechi Kogorō had been suffering from inactivity. While he said that he had already grown sick of detecting as
a hobby, the reality was that he could not stand the tedium of idling about in his room at the inn. Just when his inactivity had become intolerable, Kobayashi Monzō, an acquaintance with whom he had shared a boardinghouse during his period of poverty and for whom he felt some affinity, had come bringing what promised to be a challenging case. As he listened to Mrs. Yamano’s tale, he intuited with the experience of many years that this would be an interesting affair. Unconsciously, he thrust a hand into his unruly hair and began to stir it with his fingers.

Although Mrs. Yamano’s story was quite long, Akechi summarized it in his own style and committed only the necessary parts to memory.

Missing person: Michiko Yamano, nineteen years old, Mr. Yamano’s only daughter, graduated from a girls’ school last year.

Father: Daigorō, forty-six years old, iron merchant, director of a real estate company.

Mother: Yurie, thirty years old. Michiko’s real mother passed away several years ago, and Yurie is her stepmother.

Servants: two maids, two kitchen maids, a houseboy, a driver and an assistant.

These were the usual occupants of the Yamano house.

“Then, you say that there are no clues at all?”

Having heard Mrs. Yamano’s story once in its entirety, he now enquired into the main points.

“Yes, it truly is mysterious. As I said, Michiko’s bedroom is on the second floor of the Western-style house. There is only one door in and out of the building, and the room in which we were resting is right in front of that door, so no one could have come out without us knowing at once. Even if we hadn’t noticed, the main doors in the entrance and all the others were locked from the inside, so there shouldn’t have been any way for her to sneak out.”

“Were all the windows in the house locked?”

“Yes, they were all locked from the inside. Besides, even though it had just rained and the ground outside the windows was soft, there were no footprints that we could see.”

“I suppose the young lady wouldn’t have been able to go out
by a window, anyway.” Akechi paused. “Did anything unusual occur the previous night?”

“Nothing I would call unusual. Her piano was heard during the evening, but when I went to look in on her at around nine o’clock she was fast asleep. My husband returned from his shop just before I went to look in on her and was in the study right below Michiko’s room for a long time, going over his affairs. If Michiko had come downstairs, or if anyone had tried to sneak in, my husband could not possibly have failed to notice. By the time my husband went to bed, the servants were already asleep and all of the doors were locked, so there was no longer any way out.”

“How odd. The young lady cannot possibly have vanished. There must have been a clue somewhere.”

“But there’s no mistake about the doors being locked. The police made various investigations, but the detectives would only say that it was quite mysterious.”

“Couldn't she have gone out in the morning?”

“A maid named Komatsu brought in the morning post and found Michiko’s bed empty, but the gate had not yet been opened, and the houseboy was cleaning the entry. The tradesman’s entrance had only just been unlocked, and the kitchen maids were in the kitchen. No one could possibly have gone out unnoticed.”

“As for the reason your daughter ran away from home, I believe you said that there was none in particular?” Akechi continued his questions.

“No, I haven’t the least idea why she did it. I’m only her stepmother, and she may distrust me unjustly on that account, but that was our only trouble. Even so, I would like to assure myself of Michiko’s safety as soon as possible. I’ve come here to consult you while my husband is away because I can’t bear to wait patiently and do nothing.”

Mrs. Yamano returned to the agony of her position two or three more times, repeating her explanations.

“Was there no engagement or any sort of love affair?”

“There have been two or three proposals, but Michiko said herself that the men didn’t suit her or gave some refusal to that
effect, and nothing has been decided. Other than that there’s been nothing to speak of. . . .”
She appeared to hesitate.
“You said your husband went to Osaka?”
Akechi pressed his advantage.
“Yes, that is, well . . .” The lady became flustered. “Michiko’s favorite aunt lives over that way, so my husband wondered if Michiko might not be hiding there with her.”
But the lady’s reticence had apparently been on account of something else.
“Just being told of it, the affair is mysterious enough,” Akechi spoke thoughtfully, “but just now, you told me that your daughter vanished from inside a house with no way to get in or out. Because such a thing is, in reality, impossible, there must be a perfectly ordinary misapprehension somewhere, and we will all laugh about it later. Once that point is cleared up, your daughter’s whereabouts will become known to us with surprising ease. Would you allow me to view your daughter’s room? Perhaps I will be able to unravel the riddle without difficulty.”
“Yes, of course. Please do as you think best. I have a car waiting right now, so why don’t we set out at once?”
After waiting for Akechi to change his clothes, the three departed the Kikusui Inn. Akechi wore Chinese clothing brought back from Shanghai, of which he was proud, and a matching felt hat. Compared to several years before, he had become something of a fop. Inside the automobile, none of them said much. Each of them had something to think about.
“Something quite trivial, something the amateur would think absurd, will play an extremely important role in solving this mystery. Silly things that deviate from the ordinary are indispensable, especially when it comes to crime. The secret of the crime-solver is not to make light of such things. Such are the ideas passed down to us by the famous foreign detectives.”
Akechi spoke to himself, addressing no one in particular.
The three were squeezed onto a single cushion, with Mrs. Yamano in the center, Akechi on the right, and Monzō on the left. Mrs. Yamano’s knee pressed against Monzō’s every time the car
The Dwarf

jolted, and he gradually retreated into the corner. Yet he secretly enjoyed this novel experience.

The car soon passed over the Sumida River and made for Mukōjima along the river. When it passed over the Azuma Bridge, Monzō recalled the unpleasant article he had read that morning. Again, Michiko’s disappearance and the freshly severed arm carried by the mysterious dwarf formed an unsavory association in his mind. Mr. Yamano’s residence was in a quiet area of Kōmechō in Mukōjima. Sounding its assertive horn, the automobile entered a splendid, crossbarred gate.

Passing along a clean-swept gravel path, the automobile came up alongside an entranceway built in Japanese style. A small, concrete, two-storey Western building stood at a right angle to the right of the Japanese-style main building, and a wooden garage was visible to the left, a little way from the main hall. Although certainly not grand, it was an estate which somehow gave the impression of affluence.

Coming into the entrance hall, Mrs. Yamano appeared to make an inquiry of the houseboy who came to greet her, but she soon passed through a long corridor and guided her two guests into the parlor on the lower floor of the Western-style building. Although it was not very spacious, careful attention had been paid to the hues of the wallpaper, curtains and carpet as well as to the arrangement of the furniture, so that it was a comfortable room. The glossy surface of a piano in one corner reflected the pattern of the carpet.

Throwing himself into a white, armchair upholstered with linen, Akechi brusquely made a strange inquiry: “Have you checked the shoes?”

“What?”

Mrs. Yamano was somewhat startled by Akechi’s abrupt manner of speaking and smiled as she answered his question with one of her own. She had been about to take her leave to the Japanese-style room, but, as Akechi seemed to be speaking to her, she reconsidered and sat down.

“If your daughter has run away from home, a pair of her shoes should be gone,” Akechi explained.

“Oh, if that’s what you mean, I haven’t seen the plain pair she
kept for casual wear. A shawl and a small net purse of hers are
gone as well.”

“What sort of clothing? . . .”

“She was in her everyday clothes. Dark silk.”

“In other words,” Akechi said sarcastically, “on the one hand,
the house was so securely locked up that she shouldn’t have
been able to take a step outside. And, on the other hand, the
shawl, shoes, and so on are all present to attest that she did in-
deed run away from home.”

“That’s right,” the lady answered with embarrassment.

“Then, would you be so kind as to show me the interior of this
building?”

Akechi returned to his feet as he spoke.

The parlor and the master’s neighboring study were the only
two rooms on the lower floor. Akechi passed a brief glance over
the study then ascended the stairs at the end of the corridor out-
side. Kobayashi and Mrs. Yamano followed. There were three
rooms on the second floor, all of which were used by Michi-
ko, the only daughter. From the state of her rooms, it could be
guessed that Michiko was not a methodical person. The various
articles of her toilette stood in disarray before a full-length mir-
ror in the powder room, and the bookshelves and desktop in the
study were cluttered and disorganized.

The lady opened the cabinets and closets one by one and dis-
played their contents. Although she produced Michiko’s recent
 correspondence from a drawer of the desk and displayed it as
well, there was not a single item which attracted Akechi’s in-
terest.

“We searched the closets and so on thoroughly that morning,
but we found nothing out of the ordinary.”

The lady wished to indicate that there had been no oversight
on the part of the household.

“But, unless she was a ghost, she couldn’t have left a locked
room.”

Akechi touched the wallpaper and examined the locks on the
windows as he spoke.

“Is it possible your daughter is still in the house?”

Monzō thought that if Michiko had managed to stay hidden
within the house for five days, she must surely be a corpse. He still could not escape the nightmare feeling of the previous night.

Having looked over the room from top to bottom, the three returned to the parlor.

“It seems Michiko is fond of the piano. Do you play?” Akechi inquired as he stood before the large upright piano in the parlor and lifted the lid of the keyboard.

“No, I’m absolutely clumsy.”

“Then, other than your daughter, no one here can play?” Seeing the lady nod in assent, Akechi seemed to think of something, sat down on the piano bench and began to play.

The other two were startled by Akechi’s childish behavior. But even stranger was the sound of the piano, which made a sound like the striking of a clock with a bent mainspring as Akechi’s fingers touched the keys.

“Is it damaged?” Akechi stopped playing and looked at the lady.

“No. At least, it shouldn’t be. Michiko was always playing it.” Akechi tested the broken key once more and, sure enough, it made the same noise. The next key had come down with phthisis as well. The three suddenly fell silent and exchanged glances. They had been struck by an uncanny premonition. Mrs. Yamano went ghastly pale and fixed her gaze on Akechi’s eyes.

“May I open it?” Akechi inquired presently, his expression grave.

“Yes, by all means,” the lady replied, her voice and heart trembling.

Akechi moved the metal fittings under the keyboard, opened the lid of the piano halfway, and peered inside.

Monzō leaned forward behind Akechi. He gazed steadily at Akechi’s expression rather than at the inside of the piano. He expected the detective to find something horrible inside the piano’s resonating chamber. The bloody corpse of a woman with its arms and legs severed floated vividly before his eyes.

But at first glance nothing was amiss inside the piano, whose lid had been completely removed. Within the large cavity, only the intricate lengthwise and crosswise springs could be seen.
When he was sure of that, Monzō heaved a sigh of relief and relaxed. He thought amusedly of his foolish daydream of the moment before. He exchanged a glance with the lady, and they both smiled slightly. She was certainly of the same mind.

In spite of that, Akechi’s expression became still graver as he conducted a single-minded investigation of the piano’s interior. And when he finally stood up and turned to face the two, his voice was low.

“Madam, this is no ordinary case of a girl running away from home. It is more horrible. Do not be alarmed. This hairpin is your daughter’s, isn’t it?”

Akechi displayed a metal hairpin.

“Yes, that’s probably Michi’s.”

“This was caught in the springs inside the piano. That must be why it made such a noise. Is your daughter’s hair long and just a little red?”

In addition to the pin, a single hair was entwined about his fingers.

“Oh my, then . . .” Mrs. Yamano exclaimed in astonishment.

“Your daughter can’t have been playing hide-and-seek. It would be impossible to climb inside here and close the lid alone. That being the case, I cannot but think that someone hid your daughter here.” After a slight hesitation, Akechi continued. “This is merely conjecture, but it seems someone may have concealed your daughter here for a time, prepared for her disappearance, waited for a time when everyone’s attention was diverted, and then carried her out of the house.”

“But, there wasn’t a single visitor that day, and this room is the closest to our own. So we would have known if anyone had sneaked in.” The lady sought a way to contradict Akechi’s imaginations.

“If we assume that to have been the case, then it is inconceivable that your daughter had freedom of movement at that time.” Akechi went on without taking notice. “If she had been able to cry out or move, someone would have heard her. Most likely she could neither move nor cry out.

“It is a queer hiding place, but there was probably no other choice on the spur of the moment. Criminals are creatures who
employ absurd plans, such as we could not imagine. Conveniently, there is no one else in the house who plays the piano, so the ploy went undiscovered. It appears that the scoundrel who hid your daughter conducted himself with surprising composure. I made an examination just now to see if there might not be fingerprints on the lacquer of the lid, but there are none at all. It has been wiped clean.”

Although it felt somehow unreal at first, as they listened to Akechi’s explanation, they gradually understood the nature of the case clearly. The first thing they worried about was Michiko’s safety. Mrs. Yamano spoke a little haltingly and with a deliberate nonchalance, as if afraid to put it into words.

“Are you saying that Michiko has been abducted? Or perhaps something even more terrible?”

“I can’t say yet. Under the circumstances, I can’t be optimistic.”

“But even if Michiko’s body had been hidden here, how could it possibly have been carried outside? During the day, there were ourselves and a great crowd of eyes, and the doors were shut at night. Even if someone sneaked in and got out again, it is impossible that we should not have noticed. There has never once been a door latch out of place when morning came.”

“That’s so. I was thinking of that just now. Are even the windows here checked every morning to see if they are fastened?”

“Yes. My husband is wary by nature, so the maids have been ordered to take great care. And everyone has been more careful than ever since this happened.”

“By any chance, since your daughter vanished,” Akechi spoke as if he had suddenly realized something, “has any large article been carried out? As you can tell from this piano, whoever has made off with your daughter possesses some rather extraordinary ideas. He may have employed another ridiculous conjuring trick in carrying your daughter away. In other words, I am wondering if he may not somehow have concealed your daughter’s body in some entirely unimaginable object and then carried it out.”

The lady appeared to be a little taken aback by Akechi’s odd suggestion.
“No, no large object of that sort has been carried away.”

“But if your daughter is not within the estate, then she must have been carried out of it by some means. And judging by the state of this piano, it’s unthinkable that she could have gone out by herself.” Akechi hesitated slightly, then said, “Would it be possible for you to call the servants in here? I’d like to ask them a few questions.”

“It will be an easy matter.”

The lady called all the employees of the household to convene in the parlor. It was somehow an impressive scene. The five men and women jostled and milled about before the door, fidgeting restlessly. They gazed at Akechi’s Chinese garments with queer expressions in their eyes, unable to judge what sort of person he might be.

Only two of the employees were absent. Komatsu the maid had complained of a headache and was sleeping in the maids’ room, and Fukiya the driver had returned to his parents’ home two or three days before.

Akechi did not much like to gather a crowd of people in one room and attempt to interrogate them like that. It differed from his usual method. But how had Michiko (probably a corpse) been carried out of the Yamano estate? There was a need to investigate that point alone in a great hurry.

Mrs. Yamano introduced Akechi Kogorō to the employees, who looked at him suspiciously, and admonished them to answer all of his questions without the least reserve.

“I would like you to describe, as well as you can remember, all the people who have come in or gone out of this estate since your young mistress went missing. In other words, since the second of April,” Akechi got straight to the point. He then turned his eyes to the houseboy who minded the entrance.

Yamaki the houseboy, his pimple-covered face reddening slightly, racked his brains to list the names of visitors. He added that among these men and women, fifteen or sixteen were acquaintances of many years and that there had been nothing about them that ought to arouse the least suspicion. The lady was of the same opinion on this point.

“Wasn’t there anyone among them who carried away some-
thing large? I don’t just mean visitors but even the people of the house. I don’t care who it was. Be that as it may, wasn’t there a person who went out the gate carrying some large object?”

“You say a ‘large object,’ but the most I saw was a briefcase,” the houseboy answered, mystified. “Automobiles and rickshaws have gone in and out by the gate, but no one went away carrying anything large.”

None of the other employees knew anything more.

“Has anyone been in or out by the rear entrance?” Akechi at last seized upon the two kitchen maids.

“There were only well known tradesmen in the kitchen.” One of the kitchen maids looked to the other, as if seeking agreement.

In the end, they learned nothing. The driver hadn’t driven anyone besides the master of the house and he declared that he didn’t remember carrying any kind of large object. If nothing had been overlooked, then it seemed as if there was nothing to do but to search above the ceiling, under the floorboards and in the nooks and crannies of the house. But they had already been searched to exhaustion by the people of the Yamano household: Michiko Yamano had indeed vanished like smoke.

“But such a thing is impossible! There is something we are overlooking. You overlooked this piano. If you had been more careful, your young mistress might have been found before she was carried off. It must be something obvious. We are failing to notice something quite ordinary. Besides what has been said just now, isn’t there something which has been left unsaid? For example, the houseboy has said nothing of postmen coming and going by the gate. Although a postman couldn’t have carried off your young mistress, we shouldn’t leave out that sort of trivial detail.”

“There were cleaners and laborers and so on as well, weren’t there?” Monzō broke into the conversation as if he had suddenly come to his senses.

“That’s right. That’s the sort of thing I mean.”

“Oh my, speaking of cleaners, hey, Okimi,” one of the kitchen maids said abruptly, looking over her shoulder at her colleague. “It was the very next day, wasn’t it? When he came early in the
morning to take the garbage? That sanitation worker from the ward office, I mean.”

She addressed this last to Akechi and bent in a slight bow.

“Was there something unusual about him?”

“No, not particularly . . . But he seemed to be a little earlier than the scheduled time. Even though he always comes about once every ten days, that time he came when he had been just two or three days before.”

“I suppose the waste bins are by the tradesman’s entrance in the kitchen?”

“Yes, they are placed inside the service entrance.”

“What sort of man was he? Did you recognize him?” Akechi looked as if his curiosity had been roused.

“No, I didn’t particularly recognize him, but he was a dirty man wearing a livery coat, just as always.”

“I suppose he came in by the tradesman’s entrance. Did you see where he brought the garbage?”

“No, we just passed each other at the gate as I was leaving on an errand. What about you, Okimi?”

“I didn’t get a good look at him either, but . . . oh, yes! Now that I think back on it, there was something odd. Even though it had only been two or three days since the last man came to take it away, our waste bin was full. That morning, I went to throw away the trash before the cleaners came, and noticed it, but,” Okimi turned to Akechi, “I was busy, and I had nearly forgotten it.”

“Is the waste bin large?” Monzō asked, unable to wait for Akechi’s question. He was more fascinated than others by such bizarre happenings. He privately wished to test his own conclusions as to Michiko’s whereabouts.

“Yes, it is very large.”

“Large enough to hold a person?”

“Yes, a person could get in all right.”

After such questions and answers had been repeated, Akechi and the others went to inspect the waste bin by the tradesman’s entrance. The service entrance opened in the high concrete wall opposite the main gate. Just inside it was a large, black-lacquered waste bin. Except that its size showed those wild imaginings to
be possible, nothing much was discovered.

“Conceal a person in the waste bin and cover them from above with filthy garbage. They are then moved onto a garbage cart by a man dressed up as a sanitation worker and carried off somewhere. This is a most absurd fantasy. But its absurdity makes it all the more likely to be true. There are some extraordinary points about this case. There are points which cannot easily be considered with common sense. Criminals do occasionally concoct wild and ridiculous plans,” Akechi explained to Mrs. Yamano, who appeared dubious.

After that, a thorough search of the premises was conducted, and the servants were investigated one by one. In the case of Komatsu, the kitchen maid who had complained of a headache and gone to sleep in the maids’ room, Akechi went to that room and made various inquiries of her.

Immersed in the air of the Yamano household like that, Akechi managed to grasp a few points. From the language and expressions of Mrs. Yamano and the servants, a single, hazy conclusion seemed to have been born.

Akechi and Kobayashi received the hospitality of dinner and quit the Yamano residence with the onset of night. Although Monzō made various attempts to learn what conclusions Akechi had come to, the latter continued mostly in silence until Monzō alighted from the automobile and split off in the direction of his boardinghouse.

For two days after that, nothing happened out in the open. Akechi no doubt was moving his investigation forward, so Kobayashi Monzō called alone at the Yamano estate or prowled aimlessly about Asakusa Park and the neighborhood of Yōgen Temple in Honjo according to his own judgment. No fresh incident occurred at the Yamano residence, either.

But on the night of the third day, the tenth of April, an unprecedented strange occurrence took place in a famous department store on Ginza Avenue. It established beyond a doubt that the case of Yamano Michiko’s disappearance was no commonplace affair of a girl running away from home.
The Plum Doll

At two o’clock in the morning, the young head clerk, accompanied by an assistant clerk, was making his rounds in the dry goods section on the third floor. Every night in this shop, the head clerk, his assistant, a military policeman, a firefighter and dozens of other people on duty were made to patrol the large store from corner to corner all night long.

The spacious sales floor was deserted. Devoid of the daytime hustle and bustle, it gave them a strangely terrible feeling. Most of the lights were off. The few which remained, at the tops of stairs and at turns, dimly illuminated the aisles.

The displays on the sales floor were covered with white cloths, and the varied pale forms, large and small, tall and short, were scattered about like innumerable corpses.

The young head clerk walked along the dark aisles, keeping an eye on the shadows. His periodic halts were to withdraw the keys to the small boxes set at every important point and affix a seal to the timetable he carried.

Thick cylindrical columns stood at intervals. In the gloom they somehow gave the impression of living giants.

The assistant walked ahead of the head clerk with a lit electric torch. He acted brave, making his steps rough and trying to whistle. The sound echoed in the corners of the spacious hall, making it seem weirder than ever.

The eeriest things in the store were the life-sized “living dolls” in the center of the area where Yuzen-dyed silks were sold. Three women clad in fashionable spring costumes stood beneath a large cherry tree. Among the employees, those three dolls were called Pine, Bamboo and Plum. The staff spoke of them just as if they were living humans, talking of “Ms. Plum’s sash” or “Ms. Plum’s shawl.” Of the three, the doll called Ms. Plum was the youngest and prettiest.

There were various episodes told concerning these decorative dolls. Rumors often circulated that a young employee at the store had fallen in love with one of them and other things of that sort. There was also talk of a man sneaking quietly into the store in the dead of night to speak and flirt with the dolls.
Because this Ms. Plum was such a beauty, it was possible that someone may really have fallen in love with her.

These dolls seemed somehow so unlike inanimate things that they gave rise to such rumors. It was suspected that they merely pretended to be so during the day, assuming the look of man-made faces, and that when night fell they sprang to life. In truth, when one of the guards stood before the dolls during the night rounds and gazed steadily at their faces, he felt as if they might suddenly break into smiles.

To the head clerk and his companion, those three dolls now appeared pitch black in the hazy light of the distant electric torch.

“Hey, when did they put a child doll like that in there? I didn’t hear a thing about it.” The assistant clerk suddenly halted, pulling on the head clerk’s sleeve.

“Eh? A child doll? There’s nothing like that here.” The head clerk denied the youngster’s assertion with what seemed an angry tone. He was afraid.

“See for yourself. Look, aren’t Ms. Pine and Ms. Bamboo holding a child’s hands?”

The youngster pointed his electric torch at the dolls. Although they could not see clearly on account of the long distance, there was certainly a child standing in the shadow of the Plum doll.

No matter how they considered it, there should not have been a child doll there. Thinking it odd, they grew excessively afraid.

“Hey, turn the switch. Turn on the chandelier overhead and see.”

The head clerk wanted to cry out and run away, but he managed to hold his ground and urged the boy clerk on.

The boy clerk went to press the switch, but he was confused and so did not immediately comprehend its location. Growing impatient, the head clerk snatched the electric torch from the boy’s hand and advanced, directing it at the suspicious dolls.

There was an empty space surrounded on all sides by long display tables, and in the center of this stood the three dolls. The round light of the electric torch crept along the floor, trembling with fear. One after another, the iron railing that enclosed the dolls’ surroundings, the artificial lawn, Ms. Pine’s feet, Ms.
Plum’s feet, and Ms. Bamboo’s feet entered the circle of light.

There, the round light hesitated for a moment. It shuddered as if afraid to ascertain the truth. But suddenly making up its mind, the light flew, cutting the empty air. It came to a sudden stop on a strange figure, making it look as if it were shown in close-up.

The creature wore a hunting cap on its head, some black garment on its body and was just withdrawing its hands from those of the ladies Pine and Bamboo, as the assistant clerk had said. But they understood at a glance that it was no child. Large eyes and a large nose were set in a large face, and thick wrinkles were carved around the cheeks. It was what is commonly referred to as a dwarf. Although an adult, it had only a child’s stature. In the circle of light from the electric torch, it was shown in close-up from the chest upward, making a face which said “I am a doll” and not even blinking, as if participating in a tableau vivant.

The combination of the beautiful dolls and the deformed child was so exceedingly strange that anyone who beheld it would probably let out a great burst of laughter if they saw it in the daytime, under the light of the sun. But at night, the composed expression of the deformed child floating in the electric torch’s dim circle of light, looking all the more insane by virtue of its composure, was felt horribly.

“Hey, who’s that over there?” The young head clerk shouted boldly.

But the thing did not reply. In place of an answer the bust in the round light suddenly ceased to be visible, just as if the film of a moving picture had been cut. In other words, it had fled.

The boy clerk located the switch at last, and in a moment the area became bright. But by that time the deformed child had gone over the iron railing, passed between the display tables, and disappeared. Rows of countless display tables extended in all directions, and they had no means at all of pursuing the dwarf, who was shorter than the tables, as he fled between them.

Before long, the entire night watch gathered on the third floor due to the alarm sounded by the head clerk. Then all the electric lights were turned on, and an extremely thorough search was begun. The white cloths on the display tables were pulled off
one by one, and the space beneath the tables, the interiors of the cabinets, and every nook and cranny in the store were subjected to scrutiny. Discovering that no one was hiding on the third floor, they separated into two groups, one going to search the fourth floor and above, and one going to search the second floor and below. But, to locate a single, small human in a department store crowded with such a variety of miscellaneous articles was nearly impossible.

The extensive search continued almost until dawn, but in the end it was found that not a single article had been stolen, that, other than the windows, every place a human could enter or exit was securely locked, and that there was no evidence of any person stealing in from outside.

If nothing had been stolen, then there was no fault on the part of the night watch, and no fear of a punitive cut in wages.

“It’s all because that head clerk’s a coward. He probably mistook something he saw.” With grumblings of this sort, the search concluded unresolved.

At a predetermined time the following day, all the windows and doors of the department store were thrown open, and the usual hustle and bustle commenced.

Just to be certain, the manager called the clerks in charge of the entrances and exits and inquired whether they had seen a customer who was a dwarf, but neither on that day nor the day before had anyone remarked such a cripple. In the end, it seemed that the uproar of the previous night might have been due to nothing but a young clerk’s dream.

Nothing had been stolen, and there was no way for a thief to have snuck in. Nor was there any trace of a cripple such as the one described by the young head clerk having entered the shop before closing on the previous day, or of one leaving after opening on that day (even though no one could fail to notice such a cripple). So, what the young head clerk saw must have been either his own hallucination, or else a mischief-maker among the boy clerks, meaning to startle his cowardly superior by imitating the appearance of a doll. Such speculation eventually led the discoverer, who had earned nothing but the ridicule of his coworkers, to attempt to silence the incident.
But at about noon on that same day, a preposterous disturbance occurred in the dry goods department on the third floor. Because the dolls had just recently been redecorated, the three beauties beneath the artificial cherry blossoms drew the admiration of the whole floor, and it was mysterious that, in spite of the large crowd of people that was always gathered around them, no one noticed a thing. The idea was perhaps much too fantastic for the adults, and so it was two primary school students who made the discovery.

They wore matching school uniforms of navy serge and stood in the place closest to the railing, admiring the dolls.

“Say, this doll is awfully strange. The right hand and the left hand are completely different colors. Whoever made it sure was bad at his job,” one primary school student criticized the doll’s maker.

“Don’t be so impertinent.” The elder brother rebuked the younger, feeling consideration for the surrounding spectators.

“Look here. Although the color of that hand on the side clutching the handbag is a little bad, the craftsmanship is really detailed. The craftsman certainly wasn’t unskilled.”

“But it’s silly for there to be such a difference in feeling between the right and left. That is, although the workmanship is detailed . . . But it’s still strange—even though the right hand has little wrinkles drawn on it one by one, the left hand is just carved into five fingers, without a single wrinkle or anything like that. It’s all smooth . . . And then there’s peach fuzz growing on the right hand . . . Oh, oh, that’s a real human hand! It’s definitely a corpse’s arm!”

He shouted, excited by the unforeseen discovery. The few words “a corpse’s arm” made the eyes of the spectators, who had only come to gaze at the dolls’ clothing and appearances, move in unison to the appendage in question. The ghastly thing peeked out from the right cuff of the youngest doll, Plum.

If one looked carefully, one could tell by the hue of the skin, the fine wrinkles, and the soft, downy hair that it was without doubt the hand of a corpse. But the sensible adults still doubted their own eyes. They tormented themselves with the thought that such a ludicrous thing could not possibly occur.
“Hey, miss, that really is a human hand, isn’t it?” The primary school student at last seized a woman and tried to make her endorse his discovery.

“Goodness gracious, no. Do things like that happen?” The woman casually denied it, but, for some reason, she stared at the hand as if to eat into it.

“There’s no way, but if you want to make sure, you should go inside the railing and try touching it,” a different woman chimed in, teasingly.

“I guess you’re right. Well then, I’ll go and make sure.”

Before he had even finished speaking, the schoolboy had climbed over the railing and walked up beside Ms. Plum. His brother tried to stop him, but was too late.

“Here it is.”

The primary school student pulled out Ms. Plum’s right arm, and flourished it high over his head in the direction of the spectators. When they saw this, the crowd broke into a Babel of voices. The root of the arm, which had until now been concealed within the sleeve, had been cruelly severed at the elbow, and dark red, sticky blood clots adhered thickly to the cut end.

On the afternoon of the same day as the commotion caused by the Plum doll in the department store, Akechi Kogorō called at the entrance of the Yamano residence. Mrs. Yamano just happened to be in, and he was promptly conducted to the same parlor in the Western-style house. After a brief salutation, Akechi somewhat restlessly ignored the usual order of conversation and entered upon important matters at once.

“I would like Michiko’s fingerprints. May I see her room again?”

“Certainly.”

Mrs. Yamano went ahead as they ascended to Michiko’s room on the second floor.

Compared to when he had last viewed them, both the study and the powder room were like completely different rooms, clean and put in order. Locating Michiko’s fingerprints did not require much effort. First, there was worn out blotting paper on top of the desk in the study, and on it was a deep black right
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thumbprint. In the powder room, although the dresser, small boxes and so on had been wiped clean and not a fingerprint remained on them, there were several clear fingerprints inside the drawers of the dresser and on the various bottles of cosmetics.

“Do you have any objection to my borrowing these bottles?”

“No, please take them if they will be of use to you.”

Akechi removed a linen handkerchief from his pocket, and carefully placed several cosmetics containers of his choosing inside it.

Returning to the parlor, Akechi arranged those containers and the blotting paper on the table, along with a single scrap of paper. On this last object, the fingerprints of some person’s hand were impressed. Akechi suddenly drew out a magnifying glass.

“Madam, please look and compare the five fingerprints on this scrap of paper with those on the blotting paper and cosmetics that were in your daughter’s room. If you make them bigger with a magnifying glass, it should be obvious even to an amateur.”

“My goodness,” the lady paled and made as if to back away. “Please examine them yourself. I am somehow frightened . . . .”

“No, I already examined them just now, and know that both sets of fingerprints are the same, but it would be better if you, madam, would take just one look at them.”

“If you have looked at them, and they are the same, then isn’t that sufficient? Even if I were to look, I wouldn’t understand what I was seeing.”

“Is that so? . . . Then I will tell you. But, Madam, you must not be shocked. Your daughter has been murdered. These fingerprints were taken from one arm of her corpse.”

Mrs. Yamano staggered and looked as if she would collapse, but hung together by the skin of her teeth. She glared at Akechi with wide eyes and spoke stammeringly.

“Then, where on earth was this corpse you speak of?”

“Ginza—in the dry goods section of a department store. This is indeed a strange case; everything about it is out of the ordinary. I mean to say that, during the night, one arm of a decorative doll in the dry goods department of that store was replaced
with a genuine corpse’s arm. I have an acquaintance among the police clerks who let me know at once, and he secretly took these fingerprints for me while he was at it. After that, these prints were sent to the police along with the arm, which appears to have a large ring set with a ruby on one of its fingers. I think you probably have some knowledge of that ring as well.”

“Yes, it’s true that she was wearing a ruby ring, but to think that Michi’s arm would be found on the sales floor of a department store! It simply doesn’t feel real, just as if it were a nightmare.”

“You’re quite right, but there’s no mistaking that this is reality. This incident will be fully reported in the evening paper before long, and sooner or later even the police will think to tie it to your daughter’s case. In addition to sorrow, this matter may bring about some exceedingly troublesome problems for your family.”

“Oh dear, Mr. Akechi, what should I do?” Mrs. Yamano, eyes filling with tears, a kind of queer, strained expression on her face, spoke as if clinging to Akechi for support.

“There is nothing we can do but swiftly locate the criminal and take back your daughter’s body. Even the police should be sufficient to investigate this case, and they may be surprisingly quick to reach a solution. Aside from that, has your husband returned home?”

“Yes, he got my telegram and returned the day before yesterday, but he’s terribly fond of Michi, so when I told him about the piano and the rest of it, he got discouraged that she was probably already dead and became practically an invalid, withdrawing to his bed chamber and refusing to meet with anyone. Because of this, I’ve been at a loss whether or not to inform my husband of our discussion for some time now.”

“You mustn’t tell him, I suppose. It sounds as if your husband’s despondency is terrible. I wonder if he could see me today?”

The lady appeared hesitant to speak. “Well, he was told of your presence some time ago, but he wishes you to excuse him for today.”

“Then I will take my leave, but first I will make a brief report
of my investigations up to today.” Akechi thought for a moment and then continued. “First, the whereabouts of that sanitation worker—the one I said may have concealed your daughter’s body in the garbage and carried it off. I spent the whole next day finding out as much about him as I could. Somehow or other, I managed to track him as far as the east end of Azuma Bridge by drawing out the memories of a variety of people. But after that, whether he crossed the bridge, or whether he took the river-bank and went toward Umay Bridge, or else turned left toward Narihira Bridge, I have tried all possible means and still don’t know. Even now, one of my subordinates is conducting an investigation in that direction, but there is still no word from him.

“There is also the driver, Fukiya, of your household.” Akechi smirked at something and kept his eyes on the lady’s face. “It seems that you have been concealing something, madam. I do not think it unreasonable of you, but if pressed I would say that concealing a thing only encourages people’s inquisitiveness. I conducted an investigation into Fukiya at once, and I have probably been able to gain an even fuller knowledge of the situation than you yourself. The relationship between your daughter and Fukiya appears to have been serious on both sides, but if I had to choose between them I would say that your daughter was the more enthusiastic. I think you were most likely aware of this as well. What you may not know is that, before your daughter, Fukiya had been with the maid, Komatsu. (She was the woman who discovered your daughter’s room empty that morning, wasn’t she?) And his relationship with this Komatsu had been quite a serious one. In other words, there was something like a love triangle.

“It looks as if there is some meaning in Fukiya requesting leave to return to his hometown at just about the time of your daughter’s disappearance, just as your husband thought. So, I took the same path as your husband and tried following Fukiya. I investigated all of his movements since the second of April. As a matter of fact, he begged leave of your husband on the third, and that evening he boarded a train for his home town of Osaka. At that time he was alone, with no female traveling companion or anything of the kind, as many witnesses have gathered
their voices to testify, although many of them were people in the same business.

“Did your husband not meet with Fukiya in Osaka? It is unfortunate that I am unable to see him and inquire into the circumstances of their meeting, but Fukiya most likely has no connection at all to your daughter’s present calamity, although I suppose he may know something.” Akechi gazed steadily at Mrs. Yamano as he spoke. The lady only paled, was moved to tears, and hung her head in shame. Akechi was unable to read anything in her expression.

“If one were to go only by appearances, the maid Komatsu would now be the prime suspect.” Akechi lowered his voice still more. “As far as she was concerned, your daughter was a rival in love. In addition, as a maid she could enter and leave your daughter’s room at any time without being suspected, and she was also the first to discover that your daughter was missing. And if we cannot take it as strange that since that time she has claimed to be ill and secluded herself in her room, then there is nothing we can take as such.”

“No, if that’s all there was she would never do such a dreadful thing,” Mrs. Yamano grew flustered and interrupted Akechi. “She is an unfortunate girl. Both of her parents were gone and she had just been sold to a dreadful place by an awful uncle when my husband got wind of it and rescued her. It has been four years since then, and in that time we have reared her, treating her just as if she were our own daughter. That girl feels herself awfully indebted to our family. It was practically her favorite phrase to say that if it were for my husband’s sake she would not even regret laying down her life, and she works diligently for us. And she is a girl of quite a gentle disposition, so she would never do anything to Michiko no matter what the circumstance might be.”

“That’s so. I agree that Komatsu isn’t the sort of woman to do such a thing.” Akechi mussed his hair with his fingers. “I only said that appearances are such as to pin suspicion on that woman. I know very well that Komatsu is innocent, but she may still know something. I went to her bedroom the other day and put a number of questions to her, but whatever I asked she only
said she didn’t know. She would not even raise her head. When I asked forcefully, she finally burst into tears. I’m certain that she has some sort of secret.”

Akechi peered into Mrs. Yamano’s pale face, as if determined not to miss even a subtle shift in her expression. Keeping his manner ordinary, he proceeded to the next topic of conversation.

“A strange cripple appears to be connected to this case, one of those commonly called a dwarf. You wouldn’t happen to know such a person, would you? Although you’ve probably heard already, Kobayashi says that he saw such a person the other night, and the same dwarf seems to be somehow involved in this incident at the department store. A clerk claims to have seen him in the middle of the night, crawling like a worm beside a doll called ‘Ms. Plum.”

“My goodness.” Mrs. Yamano shivered as if with genuine discomfort. “When I heard the story from Mr. Kobayashi, I thought that he must have made some mistake, but, well, there really is such a cripple, then, in spite of everything? No, I don’t know a thing. Except for when I was small and saw one at a show, I haven’t seen anything like a dwarf in my life.”

“I suspected it would be so.” Akechi continued to look into the lady’s eyes. “There’s something odd about that story. Kobayashi certainly saw the dwarf enter Yōgen Temple, but he says that there is no such person in the temple and that the people of the neighborhood have never seen one.

“The same thing has happened again this time,” Akechi continued. “In spite of the clerk seeing the dwarf in the middle of the night, there is no indication of such a cripple entering or leaving the store on either the preceding or the following day. There’s no trace of him breaking a window to get in and out, either. He seems to disappear every time, as if vanishing into thin air. I wonder if there mightn’t be some meaning in that.”

Akechi knew something. He knew, but he affected an air of innocence, appearing as though he were merely exchanging frivolous conversation. Perhaps he had made a plan and been acting out a drama from the first.

“The most mysterious point in the current incident, although I think that you, madam, are particularly aware of this, is that
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the criminal should attempt to lay bare his own crime before the public. What Kobayashi saw, that incident of the leg in Senju (although that may be an entirely separate case), and these happenings in the department store all look as if the criminal wishes to tell the world that a horrible murder has been committed. Especially today’s case, in which he even went so far as to leave the ring in its proper place. Doesn’t that seem as if he is advertising: ‘This is Michiko Yamano’s arm? A murderer who wishes to advertise his own crime is utterly unimaginable. Unless he were a fool or a madman—no, even if he were—he would never do something so reckless. And attaching the arm of a corpse to a decorative doll in a department store without revealing himself to anyone is not a feat that a fool or a madman could perform. Taking this into account, there must be some deep scheme behind these happenings, which appear absurd at first glance.” Akechi cut his words off there with a sigh and gazed at Mrs. Yamano’s pale face. He sat staring motionlessly like that for an unnaturally long time.

Conscious of the keen glint in Akechi’s eye, Mrs. Yamano trembled, her eyes still cast downward in shame. Her consciousness was distorted by an excess of terror and she appeared unable to speak.

“So, if this affair has been carried out according to some deep plan, it can have only one meaning. In other words, the criminal is elsewhere. Whoever exposed a part of your daughter’s corpse to the public eye is not the criminal, and he is employing such startling methods in order to threaten the true criminal. He is adopting extreme measures for some purpose of his own. Surely the thing can be conceived in that way?”

At that moment, Mrs. Yamano raised her head with a gasp of surprise and stared at Akechi. The two remained silent, glaring steadily at each other. They exchanged glares, terrible glints in their eyes, as if each were penetrating the breast of the other. But in the next instant, Mrs. Yamano laid her face on the table and burst violently into tears. No matter how she tried to suppress it, a breast-piercing, shrill voice leaked out between her sleeves. Her small shoulders heaved violently. At the nape of her white neck, straggling hairs tangled and shook seductively.
At that point the door opened, and the houseboy came in. Perceiving the alarming nature of the situation, he looked as if he were about to retrace his steps but changed his mind and came closer to the table. He too appeared to be extremely agitated about something.

“Mistress,” he nervously appealed to the lady, “a terrible thing has come.”

The lady at last suppressed her tears and raised her face.

“This parcel arrived just now.” The houseboy placed the long, thin, wooden box he held on the table and glanced in Akechi’s direction.

The parcel was a plain wooden box, securely nailed shut, but the houseboy appeared to have forced it open. Half the lid was cracked, and something wrapped in oil paper protruded from within.

The long, thin, wooden box had been in with the first afternoon post. Although there was no sender’s signature, Yamaki, the houseboy, had calmly opened the lid, thinking that it must nonetheless be a gift from someplace. (In the case of things other than sealed letters, such as parcels and publications, it was the custom in this house for the houseboy to open the package and then present the contents to the master.) But when he caught a glimpse of the thing inside, Yamaki turned pale. He did not know how best to deal with this. He hesitated to startle his ill master, but he could not leave it in silence, either. Then he had suddenly remembered that the amateur detective Akechi Kogorō was visiting and was at that moment in the parlor. In any case, he brought the parcel to where the lady and Akechi were.

Akechi removed the oil paper-wrapped item from within the box as he listened to the houseboy’s explanation and carefully peeled back the wrapping. A human arm, turned the purplish brown color of paper treated with astringent persimmon juice, emerged from within the oil paper. It had been severed completely at the elbow, and black blood had solidified on the cut end. An unbearable stench assailed the nose.

“You, please take your mistress over there! It’s better that she not see this,” Akechi shouted, quickly thrusting the parcel back inside the box.
Mrs. Yamano, however, had seen everything. She stood up with an expressionless face, her eyes fixed on a single point. Her face was so white it seemed on the verge of becoming transparent.

“You, quickly!” Akechi and the houseboy supported Mrs. Yamano together. The lady no longer had the strength to stand. Still silent, she departed for the Japanese-style room supported by the houseboy’s arms.

Once the lady was gone, Akechi opened the parcel again, took out the thing inside, and gazed at it a while. The skin seemed that it would come loose and peel off if he did not take great care. It was the left forearm of a young woman, and looked as if it might form a perfect pair with the thing that had been exposed to the public eye in the department store.

Taking down an inkstone case from a shelf and making some ink, he carefully lowered the five half-rotted fingers onto a notepad and took their prints. Then, he wrapped the arm up again, shut it inside the box as before, and placed it in a corner of the room where it would not be noticed. Needless to say, he made a minute inspection of the wooden box, the wrapping paper, the inscription of the recipient’s name on the lid of the box, and so on without neglecting even a single spot.

After that, he opened the handkerchief into which he had earlier placed Michiko’s cosmetics, extracted its contents, and compared the fingerprints remaining on the containers with those reproduced on the notepad by peering through a magnifying glass.

“Just as I thought.” With a sigh, he addressed himself in a low voice. He knew that the forearm inside the box was Michiko’s without a doubt. After that, perhaps thinking of something he had overlooked, Akechi ascended the stairs to Michiko’s room once more and busied himself for a while. When he finally descended again, Yamaki, the houseboy, was waiting for him.

“The mistress has sent me to ask you to see yourself out if your investigation is concluded and to kindly take care of contacting the police.”

“Ah, is that so? Please convey to her that she need have no worry on that account. But would your master be able to see me? Even a moment would do.”
“No. I know it seems terribly rude, but because the master’s nerves have become extremely sensitive owing to this affair of the young mistress, he says that he wishes to keep news of the matter from reaching his ears as much as possible. Everything is being kept secret from him, so at the moment he wishes to avoid meeting with anyone if at all possible.”

“Is that so? In that case, I will be going. Please take great care to keep this box preserved somewhere. Someone from the police should come by for it sooner or later. So until then avoid handling it as much as possible.” Akechi carefully pocketed the handkerchief bundle containing the cosmetics and rose to leave.

Yamaki and Oyuki the maid escorted him as far as the entryway. As they passed through a dim portion of the corridor, Oyuki passed a small scrap of paper to Akechi. Yamaki, walking ahead of them, did not notice a thing.

A Clandestine Meeting

Since his return from Osaka, Yamano Daigorō had been laid up. His slight fever continued and was accompanied by ceaseless, intense headaches. Although the doctor attributed his symptoms to a cold that was going around at the time, he did not doubt that the cause of the fever was the disappearance of Yamano’s only daughter, Michiko. Not only had his trip to Osaka ended in disappointment, but during his absence from home it had been learned through the unexpected discoveries of Akechi Kogorō that Michiko’s disappearance was no ordinary case of a girl running away from home. So his anguish became more intense than ever.

Mr. Daigorō did not wish to face his household. Yamaki was severely reprimanded for thoughtlessly announcing a visitor. Even the manager of his store, who came for business meetings and to receive instructions, went away without seeing him more often than not. The only people who entered the master’s room during that time were his wife Yurie and the maid Oyuki, who waited on him three times a day.

After seeing the gift in the ghastly wooden box, Mrs. Yamano became almost an invalid and shut herself up in the living
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room. She did not even show her face in the dining room when it came time for dinner. Oyuki was worried and came frequently to check on her mistress’ condition, but Mrs. Yamano was lost in thought and would not even speak to her.

As if she had suddenly remembered something, Yurie changed her clothes and went into Mr. Yamano’s room the moment it struck seven o’clock. Mr. Yamano lay on his back in the futon, pale-faced, gazing vacantly at the ceiling. The electric light, covered in dark green silk, only made the room appear even more dismal.

The lady offered her husband medicine, set a lidless brazier at his bedside so as to prevent the air in the room from becoming dry, and poured water into a silver kettle. She then attempted to read Mr. Yamano’s countenance.

“I would like to make a short visit to Katamachi, but . . .” she began with nervous diffidence.

“Are you going for a consultation or something of the kind?” Mr. Yamano inquired, twisting his bearded face in his wife’s direction. He appeared to have thinned remarkably over the last two or three days and his eyes were big and bloodshot.

“Yes. My visits there have been frequent, but if your condition is not so bad, I would like just an hour or so of free time to go over that way.”

In her hometown of Nishi Katamachi, there lived an uncle of Mrs. Yamano’s. Both the lady’s parents were gone, and this person was her only remaining relative.

“I have no objections, but if you go, take care on the way,” Mr. Yamano said absentmindedly, as if he were thinking of something else.

“Then I will go and pay a brief visit.” Mrs. Yamano began to stand up as she said this, but suddenly noticed an evening paper lying open at her husband’s side. Because so many incidents had occurred one after another, she had become distracted and a serious matter had slipped her mind. She should not have allowed her husband to see that day’s evening paper.

There, just as she had expected, no, exaggerated beyond her expectations, the strange occurrence of the department store was reported. The passionate article filled the greater part of two
It appeared that the private affairs of one family had expanded into a major public scandal without her realizing it. Of course, there could not be a single thing about Michiko written in that article, but this exaggerated human-interest piece made her feel as if the event’s actual connection to her family was a lie.

There was no doubt that Mr. Yamano had read the article. But, in reading it, had he noticed a certain detail or not? The lady endeavored to read the answer in his expression, but his dispirited face told nothing. Probably he could not even imagine that such a sensational article hinted at his daughter’s fate.

Mrs. Yamano informed Oyuki of her destination and had her make preparations for going out. Oyuki recommended bringing Yamaki along, but Mrs. Yamano said that, because she would hire a neighborhood taxi, it would not be necessary. She went out the gate alone.

Outside the gate, long walls stretched out along the road on either side. Here and there safety lamps gave off dim light, but they seemed only to enhance the darkness. There was no pedestrian traffic at all.

Mrs. Yamano halted on the dark highway and pondered something for a while, but in the end she trudged off. The strange thing was that the road she took led away from the taxi stand, pointing in a still more lonely direction. When she came to the first street corner, she looked back over her shoulder. Once she had confirmed that there was no one to see, she quickened her pace slightly and walked on, choosing dark street after dark street.

When she had gone two or three blocks, the road came out onto a lonely bank of the Sumida River. The lights of all the houses on the opposite shore appeared just like the painted backdrop of a play. On the wide, pitch-black surface of the river, the thin red paper lanterns of barges, two or three of them, moved while appearing motionless.

Coming out onto the embankment, going a little way along it and descending the gentle slope, she arrived at the grounds of Mimeguri Shrine. After her descent from the hill, Mrs. Yamano carefully looked about again to her left and right, then entered the shrine.
But, in spite of her caution, the lady was unable to perceive the person shadowing her. The maid Oyuki, with even more caution than her mistress, had been following Mrs. Yamano since she exited the gate of her estate.

The grounds of Mimeguri Shrine were as silent as a graveyard. Aside from the light emitted by the safety lamps at the top of the bank, there was no illumination but the lamplight that leaked out through cracks in the walls. In the darkness, stone slabs engraved with haiku stood in rows, looking like bald giants.

Mrs. Yamano weaved her way between the fieldstones as if searching for something. Finally arriving before an especially large slab, she came to a halt, as if she were expecting something.

“Madam?”

Something white appeared from behind the engraved slab and called out in a whisper. The man wore Japanese clothing with a spring overcoat and a large hunting cap, which was pulled low over his eyes. His large glasses sparkled even in the dark, reflecting the distant light.

“Yes,” Mrs. Yamano answered weakly. Her voice sounded as if she were trying with all her might to keep it from trembling.

“I wasn’t lying, was I? I pulled it off perfectly, just like I said I would.” The mysterious man was leaning on a thick stick seemed to be peering into the lady’s face.

“I’m laying down my life, you know. Whatever it is, I’ll do away with it. Even something more than this. Now, let me hear your reply. How about it? Will you comply with my wishes?”

“It’s already hopeless. Having come this far, we can’t go back.” The lady sounded as if she was about to burst into tears. “I’m certain it will come out. To make matters worse, I’ve gone and called in Mr. Akechi. He’s a terrifying person. I feel as if he sees through to the very bottom of everything. And you, why didn’t you speak more quickly? At least before I had asked Mr. Akechi?”

“Akechi, you say?” the mysterious man laughed sardonically. “What can he do? There’s nothing to fear. It’s all your fault that things have come to this. You were wrong to look down on and
make light of me. Talk didn’t startle you, so I had no choice but to put it into practice. What good will it do you to complain now? But never despair. I hold all the secrets. Even if it’s known that Michiko has been murdered, no one, not even the police or the amateur detective, will ever find out who’s killed her or where her body is, no matter how they search. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Oyuki drew as near to the pair as she could, and from the shadow of a stone slab tried to hear their secret talk. More than fear, she was filled with a strange curiosity and a kind of feeling of righteousness. Moreover, it made her oddly excited that Yurie, whom she had always revered as if she were of a different race entirely, was engaged in these mysterious actions, which had the appearance of a crime. She trembled with a queer feeling that was almost indignation.

“You should relax. As long as you don’t anger me, everything will be alright. But on what pretext did you leave your home this evening?” The man continued in a voice low as if he were trying to repress it.

“I said I was going to Katamachi,” the lady answered brokenly. “Your uncle’s place, I suppose. Then two or three hours won’t matter. Come with me; I have a taxi waiting up on the embankment. I’ll have you home in about two hours. There’s nothing to be afraid of. But if you refuse my proposal, something unthinkable will happen. I’ll confess without holding anything back. Of course I’ll be implicated as well, if it comes to that, but it will ruin your position. You won’t be able to live. So you have no choice but to consent to do as I say. Why not resign yourself to the bad luck of being anticipated by a terrible fellow? Now, we haven’t much time, so make up your mind quickly. I’ve already waited as long as I can.”

“I didn’t think you were so horrible. You pretend to be a hermit who has achieved enlightenment, but it seems you’re really a terrifying villain.” The lady sighed. “But there’s nothing else to be done. In order to keep that matter a secret, I’ll make any sacrifice I have to. But can you force my compliance in such a way and still have a clear conscience? You know I could never come to love you.”
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The mysterious man stifled unpleasant laughter. “I’ve waited for ten years. You couldn’t know, but I’ve been thinking only of you for such a long time. How I suffered! What absurd plans I made! Now I confess it all.” Another burst of eerie laughter. “You’ll certainly be surprised. When you realize the true identity of the man who’s been thinking of you, you’ll be so surprised you’ll faint for certain. But how fortunate this business is! If something like this hadn’t happened, I would never have had the opportunity to confess these heartrending feelings of mine. I’ll give you a full account once we get there. In any case, you have no choice but to accompany me.”

The man exited the grounds of the shrine and walked toward the embankment, appearing full of confidence. Mrs. Yamano followed after him so obediently as to be vexing, as if she had lost her own will and was moving according to the commands of another mind.

Half a block upstream along the embankment from Mimeguri Shrine, there was an isolated, broken-down, vacant house. An automobile was parked beside it, as if hiding in its shadow. Because the headlights were off, at a brief glance it looked like nothing but a part of the vacant house. When the mysterious man finally arrived at the car, he beckoned to Mrs. Yamano. He then climbed on top of the car as if he was breaking into it, and after whispering something to the driver he too entered the dark box.

The automobile immediately let out a piercing screech and vanished from the top of the deserted embankment, practically flying in the direction of Azuma Bridge.

Oyuki stood in hiding, looking carefully after the car. There was nothing more she could do. She had no choice but to return to the estate. But at least she had fixed the only two matters she ought to report to Akechi in her mind. One was the number of the automobile in which the suspicious man had taken Mrs. Yamano away: 2936. The other was the fact that the mysterious man’s body and voice, and especially his characteristic way of walking, resembled a person she knew well.

Because his figure had recalled such an unexpected person to her mind, Oyuki felt odd. She wondered if there might be
something wrong with her head. But that slightly limping walk could belong to only one man. The attitude of the shoulders, the way of grasping the stick, and every other point besides were unmistakable. Oyuki hurried back to the estate to report the affair to Akechi by telephone.

The automobile in which the mysterious person and Mrs. Yamano rode turned and turned countless times, down wide avenues and narrow streets, before stopping at a certain lonely street corner. The window curtains had been lowered since their departure, so Mrs. Yamano had not even the slightest idea where she had been taken to. She repeatedly asked their destination, but the man only smirked broadly and made no reply.

“Come now, we’ve arrived.” Once the automobile had stopped, the man prompted the lady and alighted from the car himself. Compared to his attitude before their departure, he had become strangely sullen. It was as if he were a different person.

After the lady alighted from the car, she looked about the lonely road. She had hoped that she might recognize the neighborhood, but it was a place completely unknown to her. Although she felt that they had not traveled for a very long time, the aspect of that area gave her the impression of a country town somewhere extremely distant.

The man walked with unexpected quickness, putting his weight on his stick as if he were dragging his legs along. Although he said nothing, and did not even look back, the lady had no choice but to follow after him. Again they turned down countless narrow streets. After walking about three blocks, they passed together through a small gate and came out onto a street lined with an uninterrupted row of houses for rent, which gave the impression that they might be the residences of government clerks or something of the kind. The mysterious man passed through the gate of one of these and opened a glass-fitted lattice door situated just inside it. It appeared that Mrs. Yamano had now screwed up her courage and, although she turned pale, she followed after the man with surprising composure.

In an effort not to keep his refuge secret even from the cabman, the man had deliberately left the car three blocks before
it. Even if Oyuki the maid remembered the number of that car, it would be of no use against such a cautious opponent. Luckily, there was one other person, aside from Akechi and Oyuki, who shadowed Mrs. Yamano constantly. His actions sprang not from justice or curiosity, but from a certain more ardent motive, and he did not neglect his observation of the lady for even a moment.

Around the time the mysterious man and Mrs. Yamano got out of the automobile and vanished into the dark streets, the assistant sitting in the seat beside the driver removed his gaudy, borrowed overcoat and spoke, passing a bill to the driver at the same time.

“Well, thank you. Now, this isn’t much, but it’s a symbol of my gratitude. Please give my regards to your assistant as well.”

Disguised as the assistant and sitting in the driver’s seat was none other than Kobayashi Monzō. He stripped off the overcoat he had borrowed from the real assistant and beneath it he was wearing his only good suit, that sky-blue spring overcoat.

He got out of the car and carefully shadowed the man and woman walking just half a block ahead. He watched them until they entered the gate of a house.

Monzō then tenaciously continued to keep watch before that house. Even if he had had the courage to break in, he had not the least idea what Mrs. Yamano’s secret was or what sort of relationship the strange man had with the lady, so he could not act recklessly.

Luckily, beside the house was a narrow alley that came to an end by its rear door. If he kept watch in the entrance of that alley, he would not miss them even if they slipped out the back.

Monzō hid himself within the dark alleyway and patiently stood watch. Disguising himself as the assistant and keeping a lookout for a mysterious person in the dark like this actually made him feel a little proud.

When they opened the lattice door and entered, there was a dirt floor about four yards square, a three-mat vestibule, and immediately after that a stairway leading to the second floor. The man went up the stairs in silence. Mrs. Yamano, trying for some reason to silence her footsteps, followed after him. The
lame man crept up the stairs slowly, one step at a time, using his hands like a child. Waiting below, the lady thought that he looked just like a crab scaling a stone wall.

The second floor was divided into two rooms, one six-mat and one four-and-a-half-mat. The man entered the six-mat room and shut the sliding screen tight behind him.

“It’s no good staying on our feet. There are seating cushions over there, so feel free to lay them out. But, Yurie, you’re here at last.”

The man smiled unpleasantly as he spoke. Then he took a cushion as well and sat upon it without removing his overcoat. He took a long time, as if bending his legs was extremely difficult, and finally sat with his legs out to one side.

“You’ve gotten awfully stiff. Why not make yourself more at home?” He looked at the lady, snake-like eyes glinting from behind his spectacles.

“Is there no one here?” Yurie sat shrinking in a corner and spoke with parched lips.

“Well, it’s as good as if there isn’t. I employ a hard-of-hearing old woman here, but I thought you would probably find her disagreeable so I have ordered her not to show her face. The old woman might as well be deaf, so it makes no difference. Even if you raise your voice a bit, there’s no fear of being heard.”

The man removed the large hunting cap he had been wearing until then. Short, disheveled hair sprouted dirtily on its underside. The strange thing was that, when he removed his cap, his features appeared to alter completely.

“My goodness!” Yurie drew in her breath in astonishment at the sight.

“This?” The man laughed, running a hand over his head. “This is a wig. My face must look different without it. You can’t let something like this shock you. There are more horrible things. But it doesn’t matter; you’re already mine. You can’t get away, even if you try to escape. If you flee, it will mean the destruction of your position.”

The man grinned in a strange manner, unsightly wrinkles gathering above his nose. He had removed his mask just a little and was beginning to reveal his true, cruel nature.
The Dwarf

He abruptly bared his teeth and laughed like a madman. “Yurie. Ah, now at last I am able to call out to you. I am able to call out to you like a lover. For ten years, I have continued to call your name within my breast. I knew that it could never be, and still I couldn’t cast away the hope. Now my wish has come true. I’m as happy as I could be in a dream. Yurie, I won’t ask for something so impossible as for you to give me your love. Please have pity on this man of unfortunate birth. Don’t detest my wicked tricks. You must do that much. Please have some sympathy for my miserable feelings.”

The man reversed his overpowering manner and supplicated himself, writhing in agony. Before Yurie knew what was happening, the long, overcoat-clad body toppled sideways and the man approached her, bending his body back and forth loosely like a weird snake.

“Who in the world are you? Aren’t you the you I know? Who? Who?” Yurie cried in a shrill voice, drawing back even further into the corner.

“You want to know that, do you? Well then, I’ll tell you.”

The prone man seemed to fly into the air. His hand shot out in the direction of the electric light, then there was a snapping sound and the room suddenly went pitch black.

The shutters on the second storey were closed tight, and there was no light in the highway outside other than dim gate lamps, so when the electric light was extinguished, the interior of the room was truly dark.

Within that darkness, Yurie held her position, staring intently in the direction where the man had been. More than anything, she feared that the truth of the matter would be exposed. In order to preserve that secret, she was prepared to endure any sacrifice. She was no innocent virgin and let out no immodest screams, but she could of course do nothing to stop herself trembling timidly from an inexpressible fear in her breast.

She felt certain that he would come leaping at her any moment, but, mysteriously, the man only let out a soft cry. For a while, only his ragged breathing, mixed with a clattering noise, could be heard from the opposite corner of the room.

“You gave me a start by turning off the light so suddenly.
Switch it on at once. If you don’t, I will return home,” Yurie forced herself to speak nonchalantly, but her tone was firm.

“By all means, go if you can. It’s no good bluffing like that. Whatever you do, you can’t go home. I only turned off the light so that you wouldn’t be frightened.”

A suppressed laugh, like a shudder, sounded out of the darkness.

"You probably don’t remember, but our first meeting at the Yamano residence is already ten years in the past. At that time, you were still an innocent girl with the shoulders of your kimono tucked in. You often came to the previous Mrs. Yamano’s place to play, back when Yamano’s estate was in Nishi Katama-chi. Come on, you must remember. I’ve been in and out of Yamano’s estate frequently since then, since I first saw your face. But I showed no sign of such feelings, because mine is not a body capable of ordinary love. I’d given up on just about everything in this world. In fact, perhaps it was fate, but you, Yurie, were the only thing I couldn’t give up completely, no matter how I tried. I don’t know how many times I wanted to stab you to death and then die myself. When you married Yamano of all people, I actually slipped a dagger in my breast pocket before going to meet you. That’s how much I’ve brooded over it. Surely you can feel a little compassion for me."

It was a broken, miserable voice. It came nearer to Yurie’s position with every few words, as if it were crawling through the darkness. She could feel the wriggling presence of a black thing growing gradually closer to her, as if the owner of the voice really were sidling toward her little by little.

Yurie felt odd. It was not just fear, but a strange dread, as if she were being assaulted by some ghastly beast. The strange thing was that, as she listened to the man’s confession, she felt a certain fascination with his snake-like tenacity. It was not the feeling of compassion, but a more bodily species of longing.

Something soft suddenly crept about her knee and quickly grasped her hand, allowing her no time to flee. She felt a man’s palm, drenched in cold sweat.

"Oh,” Yurie could not repress a low cry. She tried to break free, but the hands of the imagined man stuck to her as tenaciously
as birdlime and could not be easily removed. Not only could they not be removed, the force with which they fastened onto her slender fingers grew gradually stronger.

At the same time, a queer sound began to be audible. At first, Yurie wondered if the man was coughing. His throat sounded violently. But before long, it became a sniffling, and then, abruptly, a convulsive sobbing. The man was crying. He clung and clung to Yurie’s fingers, his tears dripping onto her arm. He continued to cry as if he had gone mad.

Yurie was won over by the man’s violent emotion, and before she knew it she had abandoned one hand to the man’s mercy and was listening to his sobbing voice in silence, feeling a mysterious arousal. The sensation of tears falling onto her hand like rain softened her fear just a little.

"Yurie! Yurie!"

The man called her name countless times as he sobbed. One of his hands ran over Yurie’s entire body with its five legs, like a large insect. From her knee it rose to her sash, crawled uneasily over her breasts, slid along her gently sloping shoulders, and stroked the hollow of her spine as if to offer comfort. Yurie felt the sweat-damp palm uncannily through her thin kimono, as if it lay directly against her skin. In spite of the intense uncanniness of the thing, it appeared to possess the bewitching power of paralyzing her moral sense.

Before she knew it, she had lost the power of resistance. That was why, even when the man’s burning face brushed her cheek, his hot tears wet her lips and a sigh like flames mingled with her breathing, she made no attempt to ward him off.

But a short time later, she suddenly let out a cry of terror and hurried to escape from the man’s arms. While she was doing that, she noticed that a certain fearful change had taken place in him.

Her hands had been unconsciously groping for the man’s body from the first. When she accidentally touched his foot, she discovered that, although until now she had thought he was merely sitting, in fact he was standing, and his short, misshapen legs were fully extended. His face and her face were at the same height. And yet, while she was sitting, he was clearly standing
upright. In other words, unnoticed by her, the man had changed into an abnormally short deformed child. She grasped the whole situation in an instant. Just as he had disguised himself that night by means of a wig, glasses and an overcoat, his everyday self was also nothing more than a masquerade. This second disguise concealed his abominable true form. That dwarf who had been shadowed by Kobayashi Monzō and discovered by the head clerk of the department store was none other than this man. She had indeed been quite thoughtless not to have noticed until now that the man threatening her and the man who had pulled the sinful trick of dismembering Michiko’s corpse were one and the same person. If he were truly a frightful deformed child to look at, then his declaration that he had been unable to reveal his heartrending love for ten long years, his hiding in the shadow of a criminal incident like this, and his attempt to achieve his desire by taking advantage of her weak body were all truly quite understandable.

No matter how prepared she was, when Yurie realized that the man was a dwarf she could endure no more. A cold shudder went down her spine when she thought that she had felt a queer fascination for a monster like this even for a moment. She struggled desperately to twist and tear away from the monster’s arms.

When he saw that she understood, he held his victim with still greater strength. Deformed child or not, against the strength of desperation there was nothing Yurie, a feeble woman, could do to resist.

"You think I’ll let you loose after waiting such a long time?" His voice strained with exertion. "Shout all you want. See here, you can’t possibly have forgotten. If you do such a thing, it will mean your destruction. Listen to me! It will mean the ruin of the Yamano family."

The dwarf twined himself around the now-standing Yurie’s thighs, rattling off threats. When he saw his opponent falter, he seized his chance, entangled his short legs about one of hers, and threw her down with fearsome power.

Even if Yurie had wanted to shout, she had been robbed of the freedom to speak. Even if she wished to escape, she had lost
The Dwarf

the power to flee. She felt as if she were having a nightmare. The deformed child clung tightly to half her body like a ghastly mollusk. The strength of his arms, tightened around her waist, increased moment by moment.

Kobayashi Monzō endured the unbelievable cold, tenaciously holding his ground at the mouth of the alleyway. It wasn’t what one would call late, but that neighborhood was awfully dark and quiet. Each and every house kept just as silent as if they were all vacant.

He kept watch on the dim highway, pressing his body, bat-like, against the wooden fence of the alleyway. Once in a while a thing like a grey shadow would pass quietly by. They were certainly human beings, but he felt as if they were some sort of ghosts because they did not make even the least sound.

Sensing that Mrs. Yamano had ascended to the second floor, he looked up in that direction and strained his ears. He hoped to overhear voices in conversation, but he could not even see any trace of a light. It was as if the house within the tightly closed shutters were deserted.

Monzō suddenly thought he had heard something. When he pricked up his ears, the feeble, crying voice of a baby could be heard from far off.

In the past few days, Monzō had escaped from his long period of boredom and been able to savor a considerable feeling of tension. He felt as if he had finally discovered his raison d’être. The childlike Monzō found being caught up in the whirlpool of a weird criminal incident and affecting the air of an amateur detective to be extremely entertaining. But it was the fact that Mrs. Yamano, who until now he regarded as being somehow on a different level from himself and had hesitated even to speak to, had approached him out of the blue with an easy manner that pleased him most of all. With Michiko’s affair as a pretext, he would call on the Yamano family and shadow the lady’s person as long as he had the opportunity.

At last, he would be able to grasp the lady’s secret. The villain called Love made him incredibly sensitive: No action of the lady’s, no matter how trivial, could escape his observation. He
had perceived that night’s clandestine meeting just as Oyuki had, and he had performed a risky feat that the maid could not have imitated. He had shrewdly bribed the assistant driver of the mysterious man’s automobile, and as a result he had at last succeeded in locating this hiding place. Monzō was terribly proud to think that he may have outwitted Akechi Kogorō and grasped a clue that the specialist had not even dreamed of.

But who the mysterious man was, he had not the slightest idea. He felt vaguely that he had met him once before somewhere, but more than that he could not say. What he did know was that the man was taking advantage of the lady’s weakness to threaten her, that the lady held some terrible secret, and that she was resigned to act in accordance with the man’s will.

Whatever the lady’s secret might be, Monzō did not feel inclined to hate her for it. It was the man he hated. Against him, Monzō felt a fearsome jealousy. When he thought of what the feeble lady might at that moment be suffering because of that man, he felt that he would go mad.

Unsightly scenes flitted vividly before his eyes. A man like a beast. The lady’s enticingly disheveled figure. The thought of it caused him physical pain. He wanted to leap into the house more times than he could count, but he sympathized with the lady’s trouble and narrowly managed to hold himself back.

He waited and waited, but there was no sign of the pair coming out. He had been standing in the darkness for more than an hour. The wild ideas only grew worse. He could endure no more. And it was at precisely that time he heard something like a woman’s scream from the second storey. He thought he heard it.

In a half-crazed state, he entered the gate and violently pushed open the lattice door.

"I beg your pardon."

The interior of the house was silent as the grave.

"Is anyone there?"

He shouted two or three times in a loud voice, but there was no reply of any kind. He resolutely opened the sliding paper door in the entryway. Still no one appeared, so he opened the sliding screen at the boundary of the next room and peered inside. There was not even the shadow of a person.
Monzō did not know how he would make his escape if, by some chance, he had been at fault, but he made light of the possibility. Though he was a coward, he could be extremely reckless and daring at times.

He abruptly removed his shoes and stepped up into the entryway, but because he was flustered, he did not notice that Mrs. Yamano’s footwear was nowhere to be seen on its dirt floor. Fully opening the sliding screen, he stepped into the room beyond it, which seemed to be a living room, and tried opening the sliding screen leading to the inner rooms. Inside, a single squalid old woman was sitting with a vacant look on her face, as if she had just been startled out of a doze.

"Oh goodness gracious, who might you be? I don’t know you at all," the old woman scolded in a loud voice.

"Pardon my rudeness, but there was no answer no matter how much I called, and I thought Yamano’s wife might be found here. To tell the truth, urgent business has come up and I’ve come to fetch her."

"Who? My husband is out at the moment," the old woman replied incoherently. She seemed to be hard of hearing.

After repeating this dialogue two or three times, Monzō grew frustrated and, without taking further notice of the old woman, began opening the nearby paper doors and sliding screens as he pleased to search for Mrs. Yamano. On the lower floor, in addition to the rooms he had already visited, there was only a narrow kitchen. He could see neither hide nor hair of any person.

Ignoring the old woman’s cry to stop, Monzō went up to the second floor. He braced himself as he ascended the stairs, expecting every moment to be shouted at. But mysteriously, there was no sign of anyone upstairs either. There were only two rooms on the second floor. In the six-mat one a dim electric light was on and the furnishings were neatly arranged. It was strangely deserted, and he could see no sign of its recent occupation.

"Oh dear, what absurd things this fellow does. Didn’t I say that my husband is away from home? Aside from me there isn’t even a single kitten in the house."

The old woman arrived unconcernedly on the second floor, muttering complaints as she observed Monzō.
"But I certainly saw them enter this house. How odd. You must lying."

But the old woman hardly understood him, whatever he said. She gradually raised her voice, finally screaming so loudly that the whole neighborhood could hear.

Monzō opened and looked in the closets one by one and searched every nook and cranny of the house. As the old woman had said, the place was deserted. He had been surveying both the front and rear entrances, so if the lady and her companion had left the house, he could not have failed to notice them. It was also impossible for them to have caught the sounds of him entering the house from the front and taken that chance to escape by the rear entrance. They could not have had enough time. In other words, he could only imagine that they had vanished from the house.

Once again, Monzō felt that he had been bewitched by foxes. Now he came to think about it, this same sort of strange thing had occurred many times now. Michiko had also vanished from inside a room. That creepy dwarf had disappeared after entering the Yōgen Temple priests’ quarters. Tonight it was Mrs. Yamano’s turn. Monzō was fed up.

He left the house in low spirits, still scolded by the old woman.

"Is there something wrong with my head these days? Or else, does the villain know some miraculous, mysterious sorcery? Which can be the true explanation?"

He felt as if he were having a nightmare. Walking through the dark streets in search of the railroad, Monzō suddenly recalled the stories of foxes and raccoon dogs transforming into people that he had heard in his childhood. That preposterous fear sent a chill down his spine.

Suspicion

The next morning, Kobayashi Monzō appeared in the entrance hall of the Yamano residence with a strangely vacant look on his face. He had had nightmares all through the night. His dreams had intermingled with the previous night’s happenings, and now he could not be certain how much had been reality and how much had been dream.
The Dwarf

It may have been his imagination, but somehow the Yamano estate made a different impression than it had previously. Garbage lay on the gravel path inside the gates, dust had collected on the step in the entranceway, and the shutters on the second storey were only half open. The whole aspect of the place had become lonely and wild.

Even Yamaki, the houseboy who came out to receive guests, was strangely pale. Monzô’s only concern was whether or not Mrs. Yamano was still missing.

"Your mistress?" He inquired in a small voice, trying to peer inside.

"She’s not here."

When he heard that, Monzô was startled.

"Since when?"

"Eh?"

Yamaki gave Monzô an odd look.

"I suppose she hasn’t come home since last night?"

"No, she went out to Mr. Akechi’s place a moment ago."

"Oh, to Akechi’s," Monzô spoke rapidly to hide his embarrassment. He had turned bright red. "Didn’t she go out anywhere last night, then?"

"Last night she went to visit a relative in Katamachi." The houseboy answered coolly.

"And about when did she return?"

"It was around nine o’clock."

The houseboy gave another odd look. Speaking of nine o’clock, Monzô had still been loitering in the dark alley at that time. He understood less and less. How had Mrs. Yamano been able to slip past his strict lookout? Such a thing could not be possible. Assuming that to be the case, had the previous night been nothing more than a bad dream? In any case, he felt that he should try to meet with the lady.

"Then she must still be at Akechi’s."

"Yes, she only went out a moment ago."

"There’s been nothing especially unusual other than that?" As Monzô prepared to leave, he suddenly came to himself and inquired, "How about your boss’s illness?"

"He doesn’t seem at all well. His fever is high, and it’s reached
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the point that two nurses came this morning, and, on top of everything, the household is in disorder. To make matters worse, Komatsu the maid went out last night, saying she was going to the doctor, and hasn’t returned.”

"Komatsu is the one who said she had a headache or something and slept in her room while Akechi questioned the servants, right?"

"Yes. We tried making telephone calls to every likely place and sent out messages, but right now she’s still missing. And on top of all that, people from the police have been coming since early this morning. It’s difficult for the mistress on her own."

"The police? Have they found a clue or something, then?"

Monzō had a bad feeling. It seemed he had been outwitted on every point.

"They’re no good; they don’t know anything at all," the houseboy practically spat. "It seems Mr. Akechi told them about that arm parcel. Well, they came to look into it. The police have figured out that the arm in that noisy department store is connected to our young mistress’s case, so they’ve finally begun to kick up a fuss in earnest. The young mistress’s death has been a secret from the master until now, but he found out everything because of the police inquiry, and now his illness is worse than ever. It’s a real mess. We’ve barely even been able to sleep at night."

The houseboy made an exaggerated show of grumbling, twisting his pimple-covered face into a scowl.

Having heard that much, Monzō quit the Yamano house and made for Akechi’s lodgings in Akasaka in pursuit of the lady. It was all coiling hazily into a whirlpool in his head. The number of suspects appeared to be increasing by the day. First was that mysterious dwarf; then the driver, Fukiya, who had taken time off; and the mysterious bespectacled man of the previous night. Now there was the absconding maid Komatsu as well, and, on top of that, his respected and beloved lady Yurie was also, beyond a doubt, caught up in the whirlpool of suspicion.

The events of the previous night had been no dream and, however favorably they were interpreted, it was certain that the lady played quite an important role in this case. If they were
considered unfavorably, it was even possible to suspect that the lady had by some means done her stepdaughter to death. Since the previous night, Monzō had repeatedly collided with this terrifying doubt. Every time he did, he gave an involuntary start and forced himself to concentrate on other things.

But even if those suspicions were by some chance justified, he would not detest the lady. On the contrary, he would doubtless fear the exposure of that sin just as she did and cooperate to preserve the secret. Then, making his knowledge of the lady’s weakness into an eternal bond between them, he would privately rejoice. That was the level to which his yearning for the lady had risen over the past several days. So he could not fail to fear Akechi’s ability. If Akechi were able to succeed in discovering the criminal behind Michiko’s murder, and if that criminal were none other than Yurie . . . The thought made him uneasy. That was another reason he wanted to meet with Akechi again and sound out the situation.

"But that could never be. If the lady had a guilty conscience, she wouldn't have called in Akechi in the first place. From her perspective, even visiting him would be illogical."

That thought enabled him to gain a little peace of mind.

While Monzō was engrossed in such worries, the train had arrived at his destination. If the conductor had not called out loudly, he would have ridden thoughtlessly past. When he called at the Kikusui Inn, he was immediately conducted to Akechi’s room, but Akechi was alone. There was no sign of Monzō’s object, Mrs. Yamano.

"Haven’t you seen Yamano’s wife?" Monzō first asked as he took a seat.

"I sent her home just now. If you had been just a little earlier, you could have seen her."

Akechi welcomed Monzō with his usual smile.

"Is that so? I came in a hurry, but . . . By the way, have any more clues been found?"

Despite the difference in age and social position, the intimacy of old boardinghouse friends loosened Monzō’s tongue. Besides, he had been made somewhat conceited by his adventure the previous night. It appeared that, even though an am-
ateur like him had caught wind of that weighty secret, Akechi Kogorō, called "the great detective," still knew nothing about it. Monzō felt impatience but also more than a little pleasure.

"No, there's nothing which I could even call a discovery."

Akechi was composed.

"It seems this case will be quite difficult. Isn't this slow progress unlike you?" Monzō spoke against his better judgment. Afterwards, he read Akechi's countenance, taken aback at his own audacity.

"It's an extremely odd case, isn't it?" Akechi was smiling as usual, without any appearance of anger. "Incidentally, I hear you were quite active last night. Why don't we hear about that, rather than any evidence of mine? It looks like you aren't to be underestimated either."

Monzō turned red. How did Akechi know what had happened the night before? It was mysterious, but there was nothing to be done. His smiling face suddenly seemed an eerie thing.

"You probably think I heard something from Mrs. Yamano just now, but you've nothing to worry about there. She certainly didn't suspect your disguise," Akechi said, adroitly reading Monzō's expression. "She hasn't been telling me anything these days. She tries her hardest to conceal even trifling matters. It even looks as if she regrets calling me in as a detective. She didn't come today because she wants the criminal found quickly; she came, timidly, to ferret out just how far I've penetrated into the truth."

"Then, do you think she has some connection to the crime?"

Monzō wanted to know Akechi's true intentions.

"That there is a connection is evident. But why should the lady set out of her own free will to call in a detective like me, and why should she begin to regret that now? These points want some clearing up. That woman is an enigma. She appears extremely chaste, but somehow there seems to be something ridiculously coquettish about her as well. There's nothing about her one can easily latch onto. Perhaps she deliberately threw down this case before me, in an attempt to put on a still more daring play. She may have underrated me and believed that there was no fear of her secret leaking out. One finds that sort of wildness in female criminals."
"Supposing that were so, wouldn't it mean that something happened recently to make her lose that confidence?"

"I've been doing quite a bit of work on this case. If there's anything shady about her, it's only natural that she would begin to worry. You probably think that I've been lounging around here with my arms folded, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. I even know all about your movements last night."

"Last night?"

Akechi let out a loud guffaw.

"It's useless to feign innocence. My investigation has gone as far as the number of the automobile. Although you couldn't have known it, the car in which you, disguised as an assistant, rode with the lady and one other man last night was number 2936."

"Then, last night, were you hidden somewhere as well?"

"Look at that. You've gone and confessed at last. That was a guess. I thought it was probably you, so I tried tricking you into confirming it. I'll reveal my trick: A maid of the Yamano household called Oyuki is my confidante. When I went there the second time and questioned the employees one by one, I selected a suitable agent. Although of course I promised a reward, Oyuki is the most loyal of the servants, and she willingly agreed to my request when I told her it was for the sake of the household. She's quite a useful woman. She followed the lady last night and memorized the number of the automobile for me. Then, thanks to a telephone call from Oyuki, I went out to investigate myself. Because I knew the number of the cab, finding the stand it belonged to was simple enough. Once I knew the stand, I knew the driver, and with a single five-yen note I found out everything. It became apparent that a man like you had asked to ride in the driver's seat, and that that man had followed after the two passengers. But the man who carried off the lady did it extremely carefully, didn't he? He's one used to wickedness. He wouldn't do anything so careless as taking a hired car all the way to his destination. Therefore, I don't know what house you went to, but I can guess, because the place where the automobile stopped was T. Street, Nakanogō, in Honjo. I wonder if it might not have been a house with no
storefront behind a certain small gate on O. Street, in the same area. Am I right?"

"Just so. How did you know?" Monzō blurted out, taken aback by Akechi’s insight and forgetting that he had meant to keep that house secret for the lady’s sake.

"So it’s as I thought. Well then, we have an opportunity, so why don’t you tell me everything? But before that, I have something to show you."

Akechi took several long, thin pieces of torn paper from his stationery box. He carefully smoothed out the wrinkles, arranged them on the desk, and joined them together in order.

After patching together the strange scrap of paper, Akechi placed it on a corner of the table. He proceeded to remove other articles from the stationery box one after another: that black metal hairpin caught in the piano spring, many types of cosmetics brought from Michiko’s dresser, fingerprint-covered blotting paper that had been on Michiko’s desk, a mysterious fragment of plaster, a web-like spring shawl, a small ladies’ handbag, a photograph, three sealed letters. All those articles were arranged in rows on the table, just like a stall selling antiques at a night market. In addition to the items on the table, a pair of worn-out felt sandals remained at the bottom of the stationery box.

Kobayashi Monzō was taken aback by this startling scene. Those articles were without doubt all the pieces of evidence in the case, but when had Akechi gathered them all? Even without hearing each item explained, just the sight of that ostentatious display caused the little feeling of disdain, which he had held toward Akechi until just then, to vanish without a trace.

"How about it, Kobayashi? This is proof that I haven’t been idle. These items will pass out of my hands before long. It’s been decided that my friend, public prosecutor Tamura, will take on the case, so I mean to pass all of them on to him. With so much, I will be extremely helpful to the investigation. No, it isn’t a question of being helpful; a careful investigation of these items may enable me to grasp the truth of the case while I sit here, without any struggle at all. This is a perfect opportunity, so I’ll have you look them over once before they leave my hands."
The Dwarf

You’re the one who introduced this case to me, and you seem to be quite an enthusiastic amateur detective yourself. So although to me they are a trade secret, as it were, I’ve decided to show them especially to you. On the other hand, I won’t tell you all of my conclusions regarding these articles. It’s not that I can’t speak, just that I’ll be moderate in what I say. As you know, it is my habit not to voice half-baked ideas before I completely solve a case."

A faint, inscrutable smile played across Akechi’s lips as he twirled those objects as if caressing them. He had the appearance of an antiques dealer appraising the value of secondhand goods.

"I wonder which I should start with." He appeared really cheerful. "That’s right. We had begun to talk about the house in O. Street. You seemed surprised, but there was actually a trick behind my guess. It was this torn scrap of paper. Try reading it."

It was about half the size of a sheet of calligraphy paper, and in addition to having been torn into fine pieces, it had holes burned through it here and there. It may have been the remains of a letter, but it was not entirely legible.

... burial done according to your request ... and my humble self and that Fukiya, just the three of us ... wish to consult fully regarding the aforementioned ... gō-Omote (one or two characters missing) 63 Nakamura ... after reading once, be sure to burn. . . .

However he reexamined it, Monzō could make out no more than that.

"I was able to predict your destination last night because of the phrase '... gō-Omote' here. The '63' could only be an address, so the name of a street corresponding to '... gō-Omote' must come before it, and in Tokyo that can only be O. Street in Nakanogō. I went there at once to see for myself. I had no difficulty discovering a certain house with a small gate and a nameplate reading 'Nakamura.' I went inside and met a deaf old woman. She says that her husband is a salaried worker, but I don’t know whether or not that’s true. 'Nakamura' never showed himself, but I searched the house itself and gained light on several points as a result. If my ideas are not mistaken, a tru-
ly terrifying person is intervening in this case. Their curse has complicated the whole business immensely. But they probably aren't the murderer; the criminal lies in another direction. It is unfortunate, but, because of that, I can’t disclose that demon’s true form until the culprit is found. I’m afraid of allowing the real criminal to escape."

Monzō found Akechi’s roundabout way of speaking irritating. He had no doubt that Akechi meant the man who had taken Mrs. Yamano. The suspicious man was clearly threatening the lady. But, if he were not the criminal, then might his victim, Yurie, Michiko’s own stepmother, be a terrifying murderer? He could think of no other possibility. Doubtless Akechi was also suspicious of Mrs. Yamano, but whether or not he really thought her the criminal was impossible to say.

"But where did you find this scrap of paper?"

Monzō had a feeling that something would become clear to him if he could clear up that point.

"My confidante Oyuki picked it up for me. The recipient of the letter was Yamano’s wife. After she finished reading it, she tore it into fine pieces, rolled it up, and tossed it into the charcoal brazier in the kitchen, just as instructed. Oyuki secretly snatched it out. Luckily the fire in the brazier was low, so that while Yamano’s wife thought it burned up completely, this much was left on the inside. It’s regrettable that the envelope turned completely to ash, but what we have is still a considerable clue."

When he heard that, Monzō felt that his suspicions were at last confirmed beyond a doubt.

"Then, if the recipient of this letter was Mrs. Yamano, this 'according to your request' must mean her request, mustn’t it? I suppose 'burial' probably means burying Michiko’s corpse somewhere. And then, before this ‘... and my humble self and Fukiya, just the three of us,’ must have been her name."

His imagination rushed forward, quick as an arrow. Then, because he was really quite afraid, he examined Akechi’s expression.

"It can be taken that way, but we can’t jump to conclusions. Although the matter seems a simple enough, so if we had to
deliver a verdict now, then we would certainly say that Mrs. Yamano is the criminal."

Akechi smiled enigmatically.
"But there aren't any other ways to take it, are there?"

In his enthusiasm, Monzō was unable to prevent himself from revealing his real intentions to Akechi.
"If we want to suspect Yamano's wife, then we have other grounds for doing so as well," Akechi swept on calmly. "This shawl and handbag, as well as the sandals inside this stationery box. These three items are all Michiko was said to have been wearing when she ran away from home, but my Oyuki found them for me in a corner of a closet in Mrs. Yamano's room."

"In other words, Mrs. Yamano hid those things beforehand, in order to make it appear that Michiko had run away from home. Doesn't that make the lady even more suspicious?"

Monzō plunged ahead, growing more heated as he struggled with these new pieces of evidence.
"We can't declare her the criminal just because she's suspicious," Akechi lightly turned Monzō's thrust aside. "If you're so convinced of the lady's guilt, then why don't we examine the opposing viewpoint as a test? First of all, the lady voluntarily entrusted this case to me. Of course, this may have been a drama staged by a daring criminal, as I suggested earlier. But there is still a great deal of difference between her carelessness in taking her leave without ascertaining that the letter was completely burned up or putting precious pieces of evidence in the corner of a closet in her own room, a place where a brief search would discover them immediately, and the skill that erased the fingerprints from the piano and hid the corpse in a garbage bin. Criminals often commit stupid blunders, but isn't this a little too ridiculous to be conceivable?"

Akechi's speech was deliberately vague. He stopped and gazed at Monzō for a little while, but before long he resumed his startling narration.
"As for the lady, pieces of evidence against her are popping up one after the other. Here is another."

Careful not to leave any fingerprints, he gripped the odd fragment of plaster between his fingers and lifted it from the desk.
"This also came from inside the lady's closet. It was hidden underneath the small chest of drawers into which the shawl and the rest were packed. Naturally this is only one fragment which Oyuki carried off, but the broken remains that were once a foot-tall plaster statue were all there."

Monzō stared at Akechi with a look of confusion.

"No, you couldn’t understand from just that but, before I explain, we must first examine this hairpin." Akechi took up the hairpin, previously discovered inside the piano. "I’m not Dr. Thorndike in the detective stories, but this one required a microscopic examination. I’m totally unskilled in such things, so I asked a doctor friend of mine. The head of this pin is terribly bent, the mark of its being struck by some object with corners. I took it home, inspected it carefully under a bright light, and saw that there is white powder sticking to the bent part. Looking still more closely, something like a bloodstain seems to be on it as well, although because the material is black I cannot know for certain. If you look closely, it’s still there even now. I scraped off that powder and blood and had it examined under a microscope, and the result was that the powder seems to be plaster mixed with some dye. It’s probably the powdered remains of a bronzed plaster statue. I discovered that the blood is definitely human. I then needed to ascertain whether or not there was a bronzed plaster statue in the Yamano residence. But, of course, this was easily learned by means of Oyuki’s testimony. A blue statue of just a head rested on a shelf in Michiko’s study. Because of its thick pedestal, it could probably knock a person unconscious, or even kill them, if it were thrown at them and struck them in the wrong place. Shockingly, the fragment of plaster that came out of the closet of Mrs. Yamano’s room had bloodstains on it as well, so there is no doubt that a corner of the pedestal struck the victim’s head and she received a cerebral concussion. So the fragment of plaster that was found in the lady’s room corresponds, so to speak, with the murder weapon."

"Even in the face of that much evidence, you say that the lady is not the criminal?"

"I won’t say that she isn’t. I think any assertion would be a little hasty. This case appears simple on the surface, but it is in
reality quite complicated. It's quite a singular case, even if only by virtue of the monster I mentioned just now being connected with it. There are strangely aberrant, inhuman points about it; a dwarf walking around carrying a freshly severed arm, a corpse's arm sprouting from a decorative doll in a department store. Be that as it may, considering the fact that the murder weapon was a plaster statue, as I said just now, and that the corpse was hidden in a piano, this murder definitely was not planned in advance. It probably came as a surprise even to the criminal. They certainly intended to kill, but they never meant the affair to become such a major incident. But that makes the work of the detective all the more difficult. A planned crime will leave traces of the preparations somewhere, and it will be possible to grasp something by following up those traces. In this case there is nothing of the kind."

"But doesn't everything which can be called evidence point to Mrs. Yamano?"

"Wait, there's still a little left. Let's put off argument for the time being, and I'll finish explaining. I'm still a busy man myself. Next are these three letters. They have several things to teach us. Two envelopes, one postcard. The sender in each case is 'K,' but the real name 'Kitajima Haruo' is written on the interior of this envelope. It means that an unsettling ex-convict has been added to the case. This Kitajima left the penitentiary only ten days ago. I believe you knew Michiko well, but it seems she was an extremely loose woman. Her father was soft on his only daughter, and her mother wasn't related by blood and couldn't discipline her sufficiently, so it's nothing to wonder at. But I wonder if Michiko may not have been a born harlot.

"This is a recent photograph of Michiko, which I received from Mrs. Yamano. Just looking at it is enough to enable me to guess at her disposition."

Akechi took a large photograph from the table and gazed intently at it while he spoke. The Yamano family had taken it all in a group, with Mr. Yamano in the center and even the servants included.

"I deliberately got a photograph taken in a large group because I wanted to know not only Michiko's face, but that of the
The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

driver, Fukiya, as well. After all, according to the torn letter there, it's certain that Fukiya has some connection to this case."
Akechi added by way of explanation. "I like looking at human faces. Something comes welling up inside me when I gaze at the face of another. I feel as if the stories of that person’s past are crystallized in their face. It amuses me to unravel them one by one. Even this look of Michiko’s has things to say. The first thing that comes to me is a sense of artificiality, the sense of something false. The way she dresses her hair, her makeup, the fact that she dresses in fashionable Western clothes: the sight of these is enough to let one know what a woman of skill she is. And look at this artful expression. This is certainly not Michiko as she was naturally. It is the face of an actress on the stage. The maid Komatsu is right beside her. It’s an amusing contrast, isn’t it? She is Michiko’s polar opposite: completely artless. From her hair and kimono to her expressionless face, she is the old-fashioned Japanese girl through and through. But such a docile-looking woman is quite capable of doing surprisingly wild things when she sets her heart on something. She appears to be nearsighted and wears glasses. And her eyebrows are nowhere to be seen. Isn’t it odd that she shaves them? It seems she does it to hide naturally thin eyebrows, but somehow it gives one the impression of a married woman. Thin eyebrows. Ah, I know a woman who had thin eyebrows. It frightens me even to remember her."

Akechi became gradually more eloquent. He appeared to be extremely glad about something. But what his loquacity meant, his audience of one had not the slightest idea. While he toyed with the three letters Kitajima Haruo had sent to Michiko, Monzō suddenly recalled the mysterious disappearance of Komatsu. Then, from the drift of the conversation, he wondered if Akechi might possibly suspect the maid.

"Do you know that Komatsu has gone?"

"I heard it from Yamano’s wife. An idea about that came to me just now. That woman may be the central character of this case."

Akechi ran his fingers through his hair as he spoke. He was oddly excited. Monzō felt that he had been right to think that
Akechi suspected Komatsu. Komatsu had been Michiko’s rival in love, so she would have been the prime suspect if she were not such a mild-mannered girl. But Monzō realized later that this conjecture of his was not entirely correct.

"We were speaking of those letters." Akechi returned to the original subject as if he had only just noticed that the conversation had strayed. "I found them inside the cushion of the chair in Michiko’s study. I looked at a bundle of letters when we first examined Michiko’s desk, but they were all strangely commonplace, so much so that it drew my interest. I thought that there ought to be gayer, more flamboyant letters in a young lady’s room. So the next time I went, I made a thorough search to see whether there mightn’t be a secret hiding place somewhere. I even examined the bookshelves. From them, I learned to my surprise that this young woman was a fan of detective fiction. Her shelves were lined with detective books, domestic and foreign. It made me feel rather embarrassed. Taking into account that Michiko was a connoisseur of detection, I felt that I must alter my search plan. So this time I searched for hiding places that would recommend themselves to a lover of detectives, and the chair cushion was the first to catch my eye."

Akechi laughed amusedly.

"By the way, what surprised me was the sheer quantity of love letters concealed in the cushion. Her father’s lax management and her mother’s diffidence were past hope, but Michiko would have been incapable of such immoral conduct if she herself had not been by nature a woman of loose morals. And still both her parents are completely ignorant. The dates on the envelopes show that she has exchanged love letters with seven men in just two years. Judging by the contents of the letters, it appears that all of those relationships were considerably involved. The seventh was with the driver, Fukiya. The devotion in this instance appears to have been rather on Michiko’s side. I’ve only seen his photograph, but Fukiya seems a man women would like. He also writes quite serious letters. But he had his relationship with Komatsu at the same time, and Michiko reproaches him for that. Fukiya’s seems to have take the position of claiming that he could not be so cruel as to throw over Komatsu for Michi-
The dates of both letters were February of the year —. In other words they had been written about a month previously.

... I curse you. What sort of hardship have I been through to win your favor? In the end I even sank to becoming a burglar. In order to be with you, in order not to be disdained by you, I had no other choice. You appealed to me with deception, and now I am enthralled. Do you remember that I once asked you to raise money? If you had done something for me then, it would have never have come to this. But you’d already had a change of heart. You hurried on to another man, and wouldn’t even listen to anything I said. Can you imagine my feelings then; the bitterness of love and the fear of sin? I was already half mad. Many times I put a dagger in my pocket and prowled the perimeter of your estate. But there was never an opportunity. I’ve been avoiding my lodgings and staying at a cheap boardinghouse, wanting to escape the hands of the police until I’ve laid this grudge to rest. I’ve been thinking only of thrusting a dagger into your silky smooth cheek and churning it around. But it’s no use anymore. I was finally caught. I begged the detectives, and finally got the time to write this letter. There’s a mountain of things I want to say, but I’m out of time. There’s just one thing I’ll promise you: I don’t know how many years I’ll be locked up, but when I get out, I swear I’ll take vengeance. I’ll be looking forward to that day from now on. Just you wait. . . .

The other letter, written about ten days before the first, con-
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tained a pleading request for just one more meeting and a con-
tinuous stream of other entreaties.

The postcard was dated March the twenty-seventh. It had ar-
ried a day or two before Michiko’s violent death. Kitajima had
most likely stopped by the post office immediately upon being
discharged from the penitentiary. Simple, yet terrifying phras-
es, intelligible only to the interested parties, had been hastily
scrawled in pencil.

Please rejoice. We’ll be able to see each other at last. I mean to
fulfill our promise to meet within a few days. That promise. —K

"She received a postcard like this and kept silent. Surely that
means she wasn't afraid?"

Monzō finished reading and interposed a doubt.

"I considered that as well, but she may have opened her heart
to Mr. Yamano. I still haven’t met with him. It seems his fever
is serious. But it’s certain that she didn’t request the protection
of the police or do anything of that kind. To do that would have
been extremely embarrassing. She may also have hesitated be-
cause she found it difficult to speak frankly to Fukiya. It would
be bitter to learn that one’s lover has known an ex-convict like
Kitajima."

"If that’s the case, then Michiko's murder might be the re-
geof this vindictive unrequited lover."

Monzō was fascinated by the pieces of evidence that appeared
before him one after the other. Before coming to the Kikusui
Inn that day, he had felt that he grasped something of the truth
of the case, but he gradually lost his confidence as he listened
to Akechi. He had not the least idea what this evidence was
pointing to or what sort of judgments Akechi was making. The
mysterious thing was that the truth of the case did not become
clearer each time a new piece of evidence appeared. On the con-
trary, it seemed to grow more tangled and obscure.

"Now, we can’t say for certain just yet, but if we take this man
to be the criminal, it gives rise to a number of contradictions,
starting with the fact that there was no sign of a person coming
in from outside on the night of the crime. But it seems too much
of a coincidence to be mere chance that Michiko was killed just
at the time this man left prison. Kitajima must have thought of
nothing but revenge during his year in jail, so we can’t know what ingenious methods he thought up. On top of that, a man doubtless half-mad with unrequited love and prison would be quite capable of risking his life in some desperate attempt, so we cannot easily declare him cleared of suspicion."

Monzō wondered if Akechi was being deliberately employing a vague in order to irritate him. At the same time, the hideous figure of the dwarf came suddenly to his mind. Lately, he had come to immediately recall that deformed child whenever he came up against some inexplicable reality.

"Are this Kitajima’s whereabouts known?"

"Not at present, but if I pass this into the hands of the police, they should be able to find him without too much trouble because he is an ex-convict. Be that as it may, there is still a little evidence left." Akechi indicated the cosmetics and blotting paper on the table with his eyes. "I think you will have heard this from the lady already, but I took the fingerprints of that arm in the department store as well as those of the one which arrived yesterday for Mr. Yamano by post and examined them to see whether or not they match Michiko’s. Unhappily, my surmise was correct, and here is the proof."

Akechi untied a linen handkerchief and arranged the nickel containers and bottles of various shapes that it contained with great care. Many black speckles could be seen on their smooth surfaces. They had been sprinkled with black powder in order to make fingerprints clearly visible.

"Michiko appears to have been extremely fashion-conscious, and she had a shocking quantity of various cosmetics. She had the full array of hand cosmetics along with nail polishing powders, files, buffers and so on. But among her collection, it is only on these that fingerprints can be clearly seen. The surfaces of the rest are rough or made of paper. Even most the smooth things were no use because no fingerprints remained on them. I also examined the surface of the mirror and the metal fixtures of the drawers, but they had already been cleaned. Still, these will be more than sufficient for evidence."

Akechi picked up the containers between his fingers one by one and carefully sorted them.
"Hydrogen peroxide cucumber, fresh face-whitening cream, face powder, camellia flower perfumed oil, hydrogen peroxide cream, . . . all commonplace items, Japanese-made and not very expensive. Michiko collects cosmetics indiscriminately without any fixed principles or opinions. She doesn’t have refined tastes. But this one is an imported Pompeian. While it’s not a terribly high-class item, it is a powerful grease cream."

This last item Akechi kept happily toying with.

"That’s the only one that appears not to have any fingerprints on it," Monzō remarked suddenly.

"The exterior has been cleaned spotless. But look what complete fingerprints are impressed on the cream inside," Akechi said with a sly expression, like a mischievous child.

The last item was peach-colored blotting paper, but, aside from Michiko’s fingerprints, there were no points about it particularly worthy of notice. It bore the overlapping marks of blotting many letters, but all were indistinct and could not be read.

"Now, I’ve shown you everything that I’ve discovered. Why don’t we hear your story next? The story of last night." Akechi prompted Monzō as he cleared the items on the table back into the stationery box.

"No, there’d be no point." Monzō scratched his head in embarrassment. "I’ve nothing to tell beyond what you already know."

He briefly told how Mrs. Yamano and the strange man had vanished from the house the previous night.

Akechi, totally unsurprised, ignored that mystery with a look of disinterest. Then, as if suddenly struck by an idea, he abruptly inquired about something entirely different.

"Did Michiko have a good complexion? I can’t tell by the photograph. If you had to say one way or the other, didn’t she have a glossy, red-tinged face?"

"No, the exact opposite. I haven’t heard that she was particularly frail, but her face was pale and made a sickly, dissolute impression. She cleverly hid that with cosmetics and tricks of expression. Somehow or other, she never gave me the impression of a maiden."

Monzō gave Akechi an odd look. Akechi began to eagerly run his fingers through his hair in that habitual way of his.
When at last Akechi had said just as much as he would say, he disregarded Monzō’s further attempts at questioning, called the maidservant, and ordered tea with the air of one whose business is already concluded.

Before long, Monzō announced his departure and exited the Kikusui Inn. As he walked away, and even after he boarded the train, his head was filled with the evidence that Akechi had shown him and the suspicious persons who had appeared one after another.

Setting aside the cosmetics and blotting paper, which were just to confirm Michiko’s fingerprints, and the letters that came out of the chair cushion, which show that Kitajima Haruo can be suspected if anyone can, the hairpin, the plaster statue, the shawl, the handbag, the felt sandals, and all the other evidence is unfavorable to Mrs. Yamano. Besides which, the lady burned a suspicious letter and is having secret meetings with a mysterious man. No one would doubt that she is the prime suspect.

In spite of Akechi’s defense of the lady, Monzō was unable to rid himself of this idea. He also tried to consider all the suspicious persons who had so far appeared and every imaginable motive for the murder.

By any standard, there are six persons who ought to be suspected. Of those, the dwarf and the man who took Mrs. Yamano away last night are complete enigmas. That Fukiya the driver returned home to his parents just after the incident and that his name was in the burned remains of that letter are sufficient reasons to suspect him. But the three mentioned in that letter don’t seem to be the direct perpetrators. At present he has no motive whatever, so even considering the circumstances, it seems that he isn’t the criminal. Against that Mrs. Yamano, Kitajima Haruo, and Komatsu all have motives for being quite capable of murdering Michiko. The lady was Michiko’s stepmother, and it’s certain that she was not on good terms with that willful girl. Kitajima has gone mad from the resentment of unrequited love. Komatsu held a deep grudge over having her love with Fukiya snatched away. Incidentally, if, of these three, we suppose Kitajima to be the perpetrator, then it doesn’t seem to make sense that there were no traces of a person entering from outside that night, that the mur-
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der weapon was not prepared in advance and a plaster statue in Michiko’s room was used, and that after hiding Michiko’s corpse once the criminal then carried it away. Komatsu is naturally docile and doesn’t seem capable of such a terrible thing, and if we do take her to be the criminal, there is the problem of why she hesitated to escape until last night. Mustn’t Mrs. Yamano be the most suspicious one after all?

No matter what he tried, Monzō fell into that line of thinking. He still could not forget his fresh, weird experience of the previous night.

The Deformed Devil

It was already past one o’clock at night. As one would expect, pedestrian traffic had ceased by that time in Asakusa Park, and one felt the loneliness all the more keenly because the place had been so congested in the early evening. The area to the right as one enters Niōmon Gate, behind which the five-storied pagoda, sutra library, outdoor statue of the Buddha, and Benten-yama sit, was particularly deserted. It was strangely desolate, as if out of the whole spacious park only this place had been left behind.

Behind the five-storied pagoda, in the most desolate place of all, a huge tree, such as might even be revered as sacred, spread its branches. The light of the distant safety lamps barely reached even the front side of the five-storied pagoda, and there was not even a shadow in the darkness beneath the tree at its rear. Of the whole park, it was the place in which one would most expect demons to make their home. It was mysterious that, in this area, even the rattling of patrol sabers could be heard only two or three times a night.

That night, there was not even the light of stars in the sky, and it looked even darker and more dreadful than usual beneath the huge tree. At times, one could hear the ominous cry of a bird.

"Hey, boss, are you asleep?"

A low, gargling voiced welled up from the root of the huge tree. Then, a rotten straw mat, which lay discarded on the ground there, moved and rose up. At first glance it appeared to be only an abandoned rice mat, but actually a vagabond had flattened his body as much as he could and been sleeping beneath it.
"I'm awake," another voice answered from somewhere. It was the same sort of stifled whisper.
"Aren't they late? Those brats, I mean. They can't have bungled it, can they?"
"It's fine. You'll get used to it. You'd better get some sleep."
On that note, the voices ceased. The straw mat went back to being a discarded straw mat.
For a while, the silence continued. Rain clouds hung low, and the wind had died. It was an uncanny silence.
At last, the sound of something creaking began to be faintly audible. It stopped and started, stopped and started for more than ten minutes. The big doors of the five-storied pagoda slowly opened, and two young men snuck out of the pitch-black opening. They both wore kimono printed in large splash patterns and had on school caps.
"Who is it? Oh, it's you. I guess you've pulled another clever job."
The straw mat moved, and the first voice whispered.
"It wasn't clever at all. We only got a little today."
The young men stepped down onto the narrow, open-air veranda and walked to meet the straw mat.
"I don't mind, but you can't forget the share for Teikō here."
Another voice spoke. If one looked closely, the mouth of a still blacker hollow yawned under the base of the huge tree's black trunk. Inside that hollow, someone was eating alone.
"I know. Here, I've got these three bills. I'm worn out, so I went to take a short rest. This is it for me tonight."
The young men had been making a living detaching valuable metal fixtures from the tower's interior and selling them. A group of burglars had snuck into the five-storied pagoda, within the lively temple grounds of the Asakusa Kannon, and even the policemen in the police box not one hundred yards distant had failed to notice a thing.
"Hoo, hoo, hoo." The slightly shrill voice of a bird suddenly sounded.
"Hey, the signal! Look out," the straw mat muttered and became motionless. The young men hid themselves back behind the door they had come from in a great hurry. By the time the
rattling of a saber began to be audible from the other side of the tower, no trace of the robbers remained.

Although by so doing they were able to escape the eyes of the policemen, there was one more pair of eyes that went unnoticed. From beneath the veranda of the pagoda, a man wearing a navy blue business suit had been covertly examining their affairs from the first.

"Hey, boss, is it true you haven't shown your face around here for a while because you've been breaking in somewhere else?" the straw mat said after waiting for the policeman's footsteps to recede.

"That's a lie. I've just been a bit busy. I'm holding back from mischief these days. Today, I wanted to see the red stuff again after so long," the voice inside the hollow answered.

"It's a fateful illness. By the way, has that matter of the arm been settled?"

"I don't like to think about it, but because it's you I'll tell anything and everything. Society is talking about it. Thanks to the seeds I've sown, the local news section in today's paper was buried in it. This time for sure, I want a trophy I can be proud of. I shouldn't have to tell you, but never say a word about this to anyone. Myself now, I put one foot into the drainage ditch in Senju, one foot into Hyōtan Pond here in the park, one hand into a display in a dry-goods store, and one hand into a small parcel I sent to some house." The voice trailed off in a chuckle. "It's the talk of the town. Never felt better."

The demon in the hollow casually confessed these shocking facts. He let out a weird laugh, as if to say that he couldn't bear to be so very, very happy. The ghastly sound of grinding teeth was mixed in with the laughter. He was grinding his teeth in ecstasy.

The straw mat seemed to be too overwhelmed even to reply, and for a while no voice at all could be heard.

"Keep your mouth shut! If you try to tell, you'll suffer the consequences, understand?"

From inside the hollow, the weird laughter came again.

"What a thing to say. Aren't you and me friends? I won't talk, even if my mouth rots. Besides, aren't you always stirring up trouble?"
"I suppose. I have to do it. Myself now, Teikō, even I understand. I was born with a fateful body, and I’m going mad from the prejudice. I can’t help hating the contented, healthy people of society. It’s natural for them to be my enemies too. I’m only saying this because it’s you. It’s not for just anyone to hear. After this, I mean to commit still more evil deeds. I’ll do as much harm as is in my power to do until my luck runs out and I get trampled down."

The stifled voice, which rose along with the sound of grinding teeth, resounded frightfully within the hollow.

Again, silence continued for a while.
"Hey, boss, it’s the fire bell! Sounds like they pulled it off."
If one cleared one’s ears, the voice of the bell was distantly audible.
"Teikō, is there anyone here?"
"Don’t worry about it."
Hearing that, the demon sluggishly emerged from his hollow for the first time. It was the ugly dwarf. After looking cautiously around the area, he clambered up the trunk of the huge tree, passing from branch to branch with a speed unbefitting a cripple, and vanished among the overgrown leaves. To compensate for the deficiency of his short legs, he moved with the complete mastery of an acrobat. It was just like a monkey climbing a tree.
"Burning! It’s burning! There’s no wind, but as things stand ten houses will burn for certain."
The demon’s cursing voice resounded in the treetop, but he was afraid that the neighborhood would hear and spoke so low that he could barely be heard.

The fire lay to the west of the park and appeared to extend over nearly ten blocks. The sound of the fire bell and the echoes of the steam pump’s siren came to them across the theater district. At times, the ecstatic howls of the deformed child in the treetop could be heard mingled with the sounds of the fire.

At last, with the faint flapping of cloth and the sound of stealthy but hurried footsteps, two dirty boys came dashing into the rear of the tower.
"Is that your work?"
"Yes," One boy answered the straw mat’s question, a note of
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challenge in his voice. "It went splendidly. There’s no wind, but we got ten houses for sure."

The leaves of the huge tree chattered, and the monkey-like deformed child, perhaps catching the sound of those voices, flew down to earth.

"Sounds like it went well. Teikō, I’ll be going out again for a little while to watch, so let those damn brats know that for me, will you?" Hurriedly pulling a bill from his pocket, he whispered rapidly while a hand emerged from the straw mat and took hold of the money.

Then, his small body jumping up and down, he vanished into the darkness. Without giving the remaining vagrants another look, the man in the business suit, who was hiding beneath the veranda of the pagoda, crawled out on the opposite side and followed after the dwarf.

When they left district six and came out onto a wide avenue, here and there they could see high-spirited rubbernecker breaking into a run, despite the lateness of the hour. There were also people who loitered near buildings and gazed at the red sky. The dwarf and his shadow ran in among the rubbernecker. No one would take any notice of the deformed child at a time like that. The shadow, too, was able to run without worry of being noticed by his quarry, and he drew considerably closer.

The fire had passed the Kappa Bridge Station, gone two or three blocks, and was now in the back streets of Kyoshima. The police were still short-handed, so the rubbernecker were able to freely approach the scene of the fire. The burning buildings were mostly houses that had been divided into tenements. Five or six houses were already surrounded by flames.

Apart from the sound of the steam pump sucking water and the desperate shouts of the firefighters, the scene was strangely silent. A great number of the spectators kept quiet and huddled together in isolated groups. The fire burned mutely. Because there was no wind, most of the flames rose vertically, and the sparks came falling on the heads of the onlookers. The water from the pumps climbed like stripes within a bright red whirlpool.

Due to the water escaping the hoses, the road was as muddy
as after a long rain. The ecstatic dwarf ran and darted about, mixing with the firemen going every which way. His weird face was painted deep red on account of the flames and his large mouth was twisted into a ghastly sneer across it. It was enough to make one wonder if he were not, after all, a small demon come bearing fiery disaster to this world.

The man in the business suit mingled with the crowd, and his gaze never left his quarry. His face, too, was painted in the color of flames, and it showed an abnormal mental strain.

But at last the influence of the steam pump gradually subdued the raging fire. The onlookers, perhaps feeling equally relieved, departed by ones and twos, and the number of people slowly dwindled.

The dwarf had been completely exhausted by his frenzy, but also appeared to be thoroughly satisfied. He mingled with the line of the crowd and retraced his steps down the street from which he had originally come. Needless to say, the man in the business suit continued to shadow him.

The dwarf wove his way down dark streets, darting from shadow to shadow under the overhanging roofs and running as quickly as a weasel. It was a shocking pace for one with such extremely short legs. On top of that, he was as short as a child and blackish hue of his kimono acted camouflage, so that he seemed to appear and disappear at will, like a flickering specter, and one was apt to lose sight of him. The man in the business suit continued his pursuit at the cost of great exertion.

The deformed child cut straight across the park, sticking to dark places, and passed over Azuma Bridge. After turning down a great number of the complicated streets of Honjo district, he vanished inside the lattice door of an oddly styled house.

On the somewhat narrow street, among a row of old-fashioned stores and houses, which seemed to have been forgotten by the world, the house he entered was deliberately eccentric. A portion of the lattice windows which merged into the overhang of an ordinary, non-commercial household had been modified into a small show window, and behind its glass was a row of three or four large doll heads. The head of a red ogre with eyes painted gold, the face of the god of wealth looking toward one
and smiling as if alive, and the pale head of a terrific beauty were lined up behind the dust-covered glass like antique curios and dimly illuminated by a five-candela electric lamp. The fact that the other shops and houses had their doors thoroughly shut, and aside from their door lamps no light leaked out of them, caused this shabby show window, without even a door, throwing dream-like stripes of light onto the street to give a still more terrible impression.

The man in the business suit surveyed that mysterious house, his face pale. He appeared to find it surprising that the dwarf had entered such a place. Looking at the nameplate, he was barely able to make out the words "Yasukawa Kunimatsu, doll maker."

After entering the lattice door and shutting it behind him, the dwarf let out a sigh of relief. But he was completely unaware of his shadow. He appeared to have almost forgotten himself in an excitement that had the appearance of madness.

The entranceway continued to a dirt-floored passage, longer than it was wide, and to one side of that there was a wide, doorless shop room, which reminded one of an old-style mercantile house. In one corner, a box and other tools used for crafting dolls were piled up in confusion. Beneath an upright octagonal clock, a surprisingly large earthenware Kewpie doll was illuminated by the electric light, its eyes directed toward the entrance in the manner of a sentry. A person who caught an accidental glimpse of it might think for a moment that a living human was glaring in their direction. Among the tatami mats and other old-fashioned furnishings, which had already become discolored, this doll alone was conspicuously new, and its peach-colored skin shone brightly.

The deformed child opened a hinged door at the end of the hallway and entered a narrow garden, which extended to the rear of the property.

"Who is it?" a half-asleep voice inquired from behind the sliding paper door beside him.

"It's me," the dwarf answered simply and speedily walked off. The person behind the paper door made no attempt to challenge him. Like that, the monster vanished completely into the darkness within the garden.
Left behind in the street outside, the man in the business suit peeped into the house through a crack in the door and circled around the block to investigate the its rear. He peered at name-plates here and there, made sure of the street names and house numbers and recorded them in a notebook. He prowled tena-ciously around that area for almost two hours. Finally, around the time the east grew light, he seemed to give up hope and dragged his tired feet back down the streets along which he had originally come.

Passing over Azuma Bridge, he entered a public telephone booth there as if struck by a sudden realization, glanced briefly at his notebook and called the number of the Kikusui Inn in Akasaka. Approximately ten minutes passed before someone came to answer the phone on the other end.

"Mrs. Kikusui?" he said enthusiastically, "I'm sorry to wake you so early. I think Mr. Akechi is in. There's something I would like to let him know as soon as possible. He's probably still sleeping, but could you wake him? Me? I'm Saitō."

He stamped his foot as he waited for Akechi to come to the phone.

It was already the third day since Kobayashi Monzō had called on Akechi and been surprised by his various pieces of evidence, Komatsu the maid was found to have absconded, and Michiko's murder finally became a police matter.

Within that time several significant events had taken place. In the shadows, the man called Saitō had witnessed the extremes of brutality of which the dwarf was capable. On the surface, the ever-practical police, acting on Akechi's evidence, had first tracked down Kitajima Haruo, who had sworn vengeance against Michiko, as the prime suspect, and then arrested him without difficulty in a certain cheap lodging house where he was in hiding. Although Kitajima was still being investigated and his guilt had not yet been decided, he could not establish an alibi for the night of Michiko's violent death. He had been staying at a cheap lodging house under an assumed name, and, aside from that, there were many vague points in his statement, so that, unless another likely suspect should appear, the ex-con-
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vict was without a doubt the most suspicious person in the case. At the same time they were arresting Kitajima, the police were searching for Komatsu the maid as the number two suspect. They expected that Komatsu, who had no relations at all, had gone to depend on her lover, Fukiya, who had returned to his parents’ home in Osaka, so a request to investigate was made to the Osaka police and, in addition, a detective was sent there by express from Tokyo. The result was only to confirm that Fukiya had not been at his parents’ home for several days and that there was no sign that Komatsu had visited. More than that was not yet known.

It need not be said that, owing to the items discovered in her closet, Mrs. Yamano was also subjected to an investigation. But she had no memory of the things and insisted that someone must have planted them in order to frame her. First of all, if she were the criminal, then her reasons for having voluntarily requested the aid of the police and called in an amateur detective were incomprehensible. In addition to that, to everyone’s surprise, a truly potent witness appeared to defend her. That is to say that the still-ill Mr. Yamano Daigorō declared that, on the night of the murder, she had not left their bedroom even once. With that, Mrs. Yamano appeared to have been cleared of suspicion for the present.

But Kobayashi Monzō, at least, was unable to believe in Mrs. Yamano’s innocence. It was natural enough that Monzō had not revealed anything regarding the suspicious house in Nakano’s O. Street, but for some reason Akechi seemed to be maintaining his silence as well; the police appeared to know nothing whatever of Mrs. Yamano’s clandestine meeting with the mysterious lame man. Monzō privately rejoiced at that for the lady’s sake, but the more goodwill he felt for her, the deeper his terrible doubts concerning the lady grew.

That the daily newspapers wrote about the strange happenings of the Yamano family goes without saying. What with the unprecedented, strange incident of the arm in the department store, the fact that the victim was a young lady, the unclear identity of the perpetrator, and the ghost story of the dwarf, it was really only natural that the affair would create a sensation.
Of course those connected with the Yamano family worried as the incident gained publicity, but Mr. Yamano took it especially hard. This shock, added to the sorrow of losing his only daughter, caused his condition to suddenly worsen, and that became another source of worry to his household.

Shockingly, in the midst of all this Mrs. Yamano again acquiesced to the invitation of that bizarre man, and this time was actually daring enough to take leave of her home in broad daylight for the purpose of attending a second clandestine meeting. As usual, she claimed that she was going to Katamachi when she went out, but when Monzō heard that, he realized the possibility, and the secretly made telephone call to her uncle’s home in Katamachi confirmed his suspicions. Apart from Monzō, there was no one who knew the truth.

But then, just as if it had been awaiting that opportunity, something truly dangerous to the lady occurred. It seemed the time had finally come for her secret to be revealed.

Although Monzō had confirmed by telephone that the lady was not going to Katamachi, he did not have the courage to immediately pursue her as he had before. On the one hand he was anxious for the lady’s safety, but on the other, when he remembered how he had been outwitted on that other night, it seemed ridiculous to even worry. A queer feeling, somewhat like envy, made him terribly melancholy.

Monzō had no doubt that the lady’s destination was that house in O. Street, Nakanogō, but he felt that, if he were to go there and witness something unpleasant, he might not be able to bear it. But waiting for the lady’s return in the houseboy’s room and exchanging glares with him would be still more painful. In any case, he left the Yamano residence and set off toward the train tracks.

For now, I’d probably better take my mind off this by visiting Akechi. It’s been three days since we’ve seen each other, so I’m sure the detective has been making a great deal of progress. Besides, he’s been trying to hide it, but somehow or other he seems to have grasped the secret of the house in O. Street, so I’ll try to get a full account out of him.

Monzō suddenly thought along those lines. That is to say, he
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wanted to hear the role the lady had played in the case from Akechi’s lips at once.
Akechi was in his lodgings again that day. He was the type of man who never let others know when he did his work.
"Oh good, you’ve come at just the right time."
Following the maid into the room, Monzō found Akechi smiling as usual.
"As a matter of fact, Michiko’s case is just about settled. It’s at a point where I’d like to inform you as well."
"Then you know who the criminal is?" Monzō asked in surprise.
"I figured that out a long time ago, but there was a reason I couldn’t present what I know until today. Speaking of which, I’m actually going out after this for the arrest. Even, now a group from the Metropolitan Police Department is coming to pick me up. I’m to be the commander. And today the chief detective himself will be going with us in person. He’s a good friend of mine, so I dragged him out. That’s how much this arrest is worth. You see, our opponent is a villain without precedent. There actually exist in the world people more terrifying than anything one could imagine."
"You don’t mean that dwarf?"
"That’s right. But he’s no mere cripple. Most of those born deformed like him are idiots or feeble-minded children, but he alone, rather than a feeble-minded child, is a truly terrifying genius. He’s a rare villain. Have you ever read Stevenson’s novel Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? It’s just like that. During the day he disguises himself and pretends to be a good man, and when night falls he prowls about from street to street in the form of a demon, committing every evil deed you can name. It’s the curse of a vengeful cripple. In his world of darkness, he has been scattering murder, robbery, arson, and other mischief besides. That has been his one and only pastime."
"Then that cripple is Michiko’s killer after all?"
"No, he isn’t the murderer. As I said the other day, the criminal lies in a different direction. But he is a villain many times worse than the real criminal. No matter what else happens, we
must destroy him. I have waited until now to do so in order not to let the criminal directly responsible escape, but the worry of that is now gone."

"Just who is it, then?" Monzō asked, holding his breath. Mrs. Yamano’s beautiful, smiling face flitted before his eyes.

Just then, the maid came in and handed Akechi a business card.

"Ah, the chief detective’s group has turned up. I must set out at once. Would you like to go with us as well? We can finish our conversation in the car."

Akechi was already standing and had begun to dress.

A large automobile from the Metropolitan Police Department was parked before the gate of the inn. Aside from the chief detective, the party consisted of two detectives in plain clothes. Akechi and Monzō joined them in the car.

"Because of your warning, I’ve requested arrangements from Haraniwa Station as well. But I suppose there couldn’t really be anything dangerous."

In spite of his advanced position, the chief had not yet grown fat. He was a thin man with the air of a fox. He seemed thoughtless at first glance, but on closer inspection a queer wildness showed through. As one would expect of a person who did not normally come out for a situation of this sort, he gave an impression of being somewhat unsuited to the task.

"I can’t really say. He’s a cripple, but he’s also a villain like a demon come crawling out of Hell. He’s truly inhuman. Despite being a little person, he is terribly fast, and he’s as skilled as a monkey when it comes to climbing trees. If he were alone that would be one thing, but he has comrades," Akechi said as he seated himself in the motorcar.

"But he won’t suspect something and make a break for it, will he? I suppose the lookout is all right?"

"It’s fine; three of my subordinates are securing the place from three directions. They’re all men who can be trusted."

Once the automobile sped off, it became difficult for conversation to pass between the front and rear seats. Akechi naturally conversed with Kobayashi Monzō, who sat beside him.

"That house in O. Street, now. You tried to investigate the
place afterwards, didn’t you? For a long time that house was a kind of prostitute’s den. It was an extremely secret place that looked after amateur girls and married ladies. They were quite famous among the well-informed, but no one in the neighborhood ever knew a thing about it. Later on, that monster rented it. Because of the house’s history, there is a secret escape route from the second storey, as there often is in places of that sort. A means of retreat in the unlikely event of a police raid. It begins inside a closet, passes between the side of the neighboring house and the wall and comes in quite an unexpected place. It’s only natural that they slipped past your watch."

"I had no idea. How absurd. Where on earth does it come out, then?" Strangely, Monzō did not feel taken aback.

"It comes out at the back of Yōgen Temple. You might not have noticed it, but Yōgen Temple is on A. Street in Nakanogō, and Isn’t A. Street back to back with O. Street? In other words one can enter Yōgen Temple on A. Street and come out in O. Street. And from that house in O. Street it is also possible to go through Yōgen Temple and come out in A. Street. They are separated by two or three blocks if one goes around on the main road, but by the escape route they are next door to each other. By the way, speaking of Yōgen Temple, that’s the temple you once saw the dwarf enter. So, I think you have a rough idea of the situation. This is the secret of his conjuring trick."

"I see. They touch each other back to back, don’t they? I didn’t notice at all."

"But he has one more escape route. It’s in the rear of Yōgen Temple’s cemetery, which is also on A. Street. This one runs back to back as well, but with a queer doll maker’s shop. I have learned that the cripple also gets in and out through the house there. In other words, this means that his dwelling possesses three entrances and exits on different streets. It could be said to be entirely on account of these elusive entrances and exits that he has been able to commit such evil deeds and yet preserve his secret until today."

"Then, the head priest of Yōgen Temple and that doll maker must be his accomplices."

"Of course. They are probably more than that." Akechi was
speaking in that irritatingly vague way of his. "So today we will mount a siege from all three entrances."

"So, who is the man who went into the house in O. Street with Yamano's wife?" Monzō inquired. "I suppose he must be another member of the gang?"

"That man was lame, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was."

"Well then, he was that dwarf. Didn't you recognize him by his face?"

"It was hidden by a hunting cap and large glasses. Besides, it was dark, so I couldn't see clearly. But how could a dwarf become such a large man?"

"There it is. That is another reason his evil deeds were never exposed. He is a dwarf only in the world of darkness, and during the day he is an ordinary human. It is a fearsome conjuring trick."

"But how was he able to do such a thing?"

"He lets out that he was injured when he was a child and had a major operation on both legs. In other words, he puts on artificial legs. 'Little people' like him have heads and torsos no different from those of normal humans. Try to think of him as someone who just has unnaturally short legs."

"Artificial legs? Could such an absurd thing really pass unnoticed?"

"The absurdity of it only made it safer. I just said 'artificial legs,' and I suppose it really doesn't seem likely, but I saw them myself. I know everything about it now. Besides, you're the only one who has seen the dwarf. As for the people of the Yamano household, the idea of a unique person such as a dwarf would never enter their heads. He has been passing as a cripple with artificial legs on from the start."

"Then, just who is this man who wears artificial legs?"

"The head priest of Yōgen Temple."

It was difficult to converse inside the automobile, and it was only with great effort that they were able to say this much. Monzō had not yet fully taken in what Akechi had said. Because the story was so strange, so seemingly ridiculous, he even wondered if Akechi might be playing a trick on him. But he
could not confirm that suspicion, and before he knew it the car was stopped in front of the Haraniwa Police Station in Honjo.

Inside, the station chief and his men were awaiting their arrival. All present alighted from the car and, after making a few preparations, they added the Haraniwa detectives to the party and set out for the nearby O. Street on foot. The chief detective remained behind in the chief’s office to await good news.

In the presence of the chief detective, the police detectives had to obey the directions of the amateur. They split into three parties—one to Yōgen Temple, one to the house in O. Street, one to the doll maker’s dwelling—and placed a lookout at each entrance. Akechi’s subordinates had been waiting for them there for some time.

"Until I give the signal, please don’t let anyone whatsoever escape. No matter if it’s a woman or a child, for the time being stop everyone who comes out of the house," Akechi requested repeatedly. He himself, accompanied by Monzō and one police detective, entered the gates of Yōgen Temple.

Opening the sliding doors of the priest’s quarters, they found a dirty, old man doing something or other before the hearth.

"You’re the old man from the sweet shop across the street, aren’t you?" Akechi called out in greeting. "I suppose the chief priest is away from home?"

"Oh, he’s in. But who might you gentlemen be?"

"Have you forgotten? I shopped at your store two or three days ago. Actually, I’ve come on police business today. Just call the head priest here for a minute."

The old man obeyed respectfully, and went into the interior of the building to search for the head priest, but after a while he came back with an odd look on his face.

"I don’t see him anywhere. I didn’t notice a thing, but perhaps he went out while I wasn’t looking."

"Is that so? I’ll have you let us in for a bit in any case. Because it’s police business, you understand."

As he spoke, Akechi speedily removed his shoes and climbed up into the room. The old man was taken aback and did not even try to stop him. Monzō and the police detective followed Akechi’s example and removed their shoes as well. Then, with
a gasp of surprise, Monzō remembered something which he
had not meant to forget, but had forgotten. The reason the head
priest was nowhere to be seen must be that he had gone out the
back to that house in O. Street, the house to which Mrs. Yama-
no was coming. He knew that if the head priest was found, the
lady would be exposed to shame along with him, to say nothing
of the inescapable evidence that would be seized.

At the same time, Monzō became aware of a startling fact.
Until now he had not even known who the man threatening the
lady was, so he had merely felt a species of envy for him. But ac-
cording to Akechi’s declaration, the man was none other than
that ghastly dwarf. Whatever the lady's weakness was, when he
thought of her continuing to have clandestine meetings with
such a disgusting, abominable person, even she came to seem
an unearthly creature in his eyes.

While Monzō was considering such things, Akechi was step-
ning rapidly in the direction of the main temple building. Dusk
was imminent, and it had advanced so far that they could not
even see the discolored tatami in the deserted hall. Strange,
thick pillars covered with carving, an enshrined wooden statue
in one corner with its lacquer wearing off, a line of large mor-
tuary tablets, a weird painting on a hanging scroll, the smell of
incense—these props engendered an immeasurable ghastliness.
Of course, there was no sign of any person.

Akechi carefully peered into every corner and shadow in the
hall, then passed through two or three more large rooms. Fi-
nally, he descended into the garden, and, after investigating ev-
ery nook and cranny of the stone lanterns and potted plants, he
opened a hinged door in the wooden fence and went out toward
the cemetery. Monzō and the detective put on garden sandals,
which they found under the veranda, and continued after him.

The cemetery had already become almost completely dark.
Akechi’s subordinate, still keeping watch, was intermittently
visible through rents in the hedge on the side facing the street.
Monzō could not help remembering a night not long ago, when
he had snuck into the cemetery through those gaps.

"Look there. Doesn't that black board fence over there look
thin and worn out? Just on the other side of that is the work-
place of Yasukawa the doll maker. Excuse me, but would you please keep watch over it for a while?"

Akechi turned toward the police detective and spoke politely. The police detective could not possibly refuse, so he followed the instruction and walked off in the direction of the board fence. The side of that house in O. Street merged into a straggling bamboo fence, and it appeared that, with a little effort, one could get in and out through any part of it.

"Hey, look here for a moment."

Akechi suddenly halted and pointed to the root of a ginkgo tree in one corner of the cemetery. There, in the shadow of the tree’s trunk, was a large hole, inside which garbage was piled high in a heap.

"This seems like it has become the temple’s garbage dumping ground, but two or three days ago I snuck in here and searched around in this garbage, tried opening the new graves and so on. I thought that Michiko’s corpse might be hidden in this area." Akechi spoke as if this were a thing of no concern. "I’m sure you also know that there is evidence that someone disguised themselves as a garbage collector and made use of a garbage cart in order to carry Michiko away from Yamano’s estate. We lost track of that garbage cart in the vicinity of Azuma Bridge, but because of what I had heard from you of the dwarf, I wondered if that garbage might not possibly have been carried here. I quickly made inquiries in the vicinity of this temple, and I learned that a garbage cart had driven through the temple gate early that very morning. There’s no safer place than a cemetery for concealing a corpse. I thought I had hit upon something clever. But, when I searched, the body had already been moved somewhere else."

"Then, the man disguised as a garbage collector must have been the dwarf as well."

"No, that cripple couldn’t haul a heavy cart or do anything of that kind. That wasn’t him."

Akechi spoke in a low voice as he walked away in the direction of the bamboo fence. Immediately past the bamboo fence there was a stone wall, which continued for a long way, and after that the ground rose much higher. Akechi scaled the stone wall
and emerged into the darkness of a narrow alley between the overhangs of a board fence and a storehouse with thick earthen walls. After eleven or twelve yards that came to an end in another wall, which stood blocking the path. Akechi pulled out a thin wire from his pocket, thrust it into a point in the wall in front of him and wiggled it around. Before long, it made a sound like a pivot hinge being dislodged, and a portion of the wall creaked open. It was a hidden door.

Inside the hidden door was a space between the walls of two houses that had been made into a corridor so narrow that a person could barely pass through it. They fumbled their way inside. Monzō suddenly remembered childhood games of hide and seek. For that reason, rather than being terrified, he felt it somehow charming.

After going a little way, Akechi, who was in front, warned Monzō that he had come to a ladder. They climbed the precarious ladder, taking care not to make a sound. At the top was a long, narrow room with a wooden floor, and there the path came to a dead end. There were only boards to either side, and it was so narrow that they were forced to turn their bodies sideways.

"This place comes up exactly against the back of the closet," Akechi whispered. "Be quiet."

For a while, they listened to each others’ breathing in that narrow, pitch-black space. Imagining Mrs. Yamano on the other side of that closet, Monzō grew so anxious that his body went numb. He prayed that somehow she had already returned home, but at the same time he also had a desire, like an ache, to see the lady’s flustered condition alongside that hideous dwarf.

For a while, no noise of any kind could be heard from the direction of the room, but at last there came the sound of a sliding paper door closing with a smack.

"Yurie, no one could ever suspect you," a man’s deep, coarse voice could be heard. "But even still, when I peeked out the window just now, there were some strange fellows loitering about in the street. They’ll be trouble. I’ve also heard that a queer youngster came up into the house the other day. Dangerous, dangerous. It’s high time I abandoned this house. But they couldn’t possibly know about the escape routes."
Because there was nothing but thin boarding and a sliding screen between them and the room, they could hear the voices from the other side of the partition so clearly it seemed as if they could reach out and touch the speakers.

"Please get away quickly. If you are found, the damage will be truly irrevocable." Although the tone was terribly abrupt, unlike her usual speech, the voice was certainly Mrs. Yamano’s.

"It’s the same for me. But there’s nothing to worry about just yet. You know what I’m capable of."

It felt strange to think that the deep voice, which seemed to press down upon them, could be that deformed child’s. That his voice alone was extraordinarily imposing was both comical and horrible.

"Well then, shall we withdraw? Take care not to leave anything behind."

The voice gradually grew closer, along with the sound of footsteps on tatami and of a sliding screen quietly opening.

Akechi signaled to Monzō by grasping his arm in the darkness, then laid his hand on a part of the boards and pulled it away without making a sound. A square hole opened wide and a faint light came shining through it. Suddenly realizing that he was about to come face to face with the dwarf, Monzō gave a start and shifted his stance in preparation for the meeting. But a number of wicker trunks were piled up on the other side of the hole and their adversary was not yet visible.

At last, the topmost wicker trunk was quietly pulled away, a single arm emerged from the opening created, and, grasping the cords of the second trunk, dragged it away into the room. Akechi’s hand gripping Monzō’s arm twitched.

The wicker trunks were removed. From the other side of the opening, the close-shaven head of the high priest peeped out. Eight eyes collided at a distance of two or three feet. There was a short exclamation of surprise. Four people had called out in unison.

The high priest suddenly turned and fled toward the inner four-and-a-half-mat room. Akechi kicked the wicker trunks aside and followed. Just outside the window of the four-and-a-half-mat room there was an area for drying laundry. Due
to the presence of the lookouts on the ground floor, the roof was the only remaining escape. Quickly exiting the window, the deformed child made a stool of the drying area’s handrail and clambered up onto the roof of the second storey. Akechi, one step too late, grabbed the foot of his opponent, who was dangling from the roof. But, after a moment of struggling, that foot came away cleanly and remained in Akechi’s hand. It was something like a doll’s leg encased in a white sock.

The top of a roof was the perfect refuge for the deformed child, who was as skilled in tree-climbing as a monkey. He rolled up the hem of his white priest’s robe and clung to the steep-sloped roof.

"Kobayashi, go to that window and call the detectives for me."

Having left these instructions, Akechi also crawled up onto the roof. The deformed child’s white robe and Akechi’s black Chinese clothes tangled together as they ran along the ridge of the roof, with the twilight sky as background.

When the roof ran out, the deformed child used telegraph poles and walls as footholds to moved on to the next one. Once, he even crossed over a gap of six feet, gripping a power line with both hands. The dwarf was an acrobat.

When it came to such things, Akechi was no match. Because he was unable to imitate the dwarf, he was forced to make wide detours around tiny gaps. In a twinkling, the distance between the two had grown farther apart.

The deformed child was desperate now that his true form had been exposed. He had no hope of successfully escaping, but neither did he have time to consider such things. He was in a hurry, struggling to make it at least as far as the house of Yasukawa the doll maker.

At last, the large roof of a public bathhouse stood in the deformed child’s path. When he looked behind him, he saw that his pursuers had become two. While he was hesitating, their numbers would probably continue to increase. Boldly jumping down to the small roof over the veranda of the bathhouse, he shrunk against the wall and ran off along the eaves. But, when he finally made it to the corner, he caught the sound of a disturbance. A detective who had anticipated his movements came
The Dwarf

into view, leaping toward him from the other side of the roof. Upon spotting him, the dwarf suddenly let out a loud cry. He had been driven into a corner.

The dwarf wrung out the last of his strength and climbed up along the gutter to the main roof of the bathhouse. But he did not even have time to breathe a sigh of relief on that conspicuously high ridge before his pursuers took possession of both ends of the roof. There was no longer any place for him to flee. He could jump off and bash his head in or obediently accept the rope.

The pursuers approached him tile by tile, readying themselves. In the deformed child’s mad eyes, they looked like three huge lizards. He rolled his eyes restlessly as he looked around in all directions. Then the bathhouse’s chimney caught his eye. The thick, black-painted iron cylinder grew skyward from the roof tiles right beside him. He suddenly clung to the chimney, swiftly scaling it thanks to his exceptional skill in climbing trees.

The pursuers were not foolish enough to try climbing the chimney in the same way. They gathered beneath it and threw fragments of tile at the monkey up in his tree. They intended to wait patiently for their adversary to tire.

But the deformed child had a different idea. The chimney, like the mast of a ship, had thick wires emerging in all directions from its pinnacle. One of those passed over a narrow strip of vacant land and arrived at the roof of a squalid row house on its opposite side. He meant to glide along that wire like a cable car and cross over to the other roof. If that went well, because the streets of that place were like a complicated maze, and because it was dusk, a successful escape would not be altogether impossible.

The desperate acrobatics began. The white-robed monster floated in the sky. Grasping the wire and separating his feet, he smoothly slid ten or twelve yards in the time it took to think a gasp of surprise. The wire groaned, and the chimney bent like a bow.

The wire bit into his palms and rasped the bone like a file. Before the deformed child had slid even halfway across, he be-
came unable to endure the pain and no longer had the strength to grasp the wire. Accidentally looking down, he saw that five or six people were in the vacant lot, looking up at the sky and making a din. Even if he slid all the way to other side, he had no more chance of escape. Realizing that his situation was hopeless, his fingers uncurled. For an instant, the world spun like a top before the deformed child’s eyes.

The fallen dwarf lost consciousness where he lay. The people in the vacant land raised their voices and approached the spot at a run.

**Misunderstanding**

Following Akechi’s directions, Kobayashi Monzō opened the front window and shouted in a loud voice. Then, after waiting to see the detectives who had been keeping watch outside run off, he stood for a moment in a daze. He was wavering between climbing up onto the roof after Akechi and staying where he was to look after Mrs. Yamano. The lady lay with her face on the ground at his feet, as motionless as if she were dead. When he looked closer, he could see that she was sobbing, her shoulders trembling minutely. Her collar was in disarray, baring the milky white nape of her neck all the way to her back, and innumerable straggling hairs were crawling over the exposed flesh.

The commotion on the roof gradually receded. The old lady downstairs was not showing herself for some reason, and in the midst of it all a queer stillness came. It felt as if they had been cut loose from the world.

"Madam."

Monzō placed his hand on the lady’s shoulder and called to her in a low voice. At that, the lady suddenly stood up and called out: "It was me! I am the one who killed Michiko! Please say so to the policemen. Mr. Kobayashi, please take me to where the policemen are."

Her pale face was wet with tears and her lips convulsed unattractively.

"No, before that, please take me to my home. I must return home. Now, hurry, hurry Mr. Kobayashi," she cried, clinging to
Monzō’s arm. Her bloodshot eyes looked restlessly about, fearing the coming of any other person.

Monzō too was pale with excitement. A mysterious shudder crawled up his spine. Lick as he would, his lips remained parched.

"Madam, run away."

His voice was hoarse and trembling.

"Quickly, take me to my home."

"I’ll go too. Run away with me."

Due to her violent emotion, Yurie did not even have the strength to stand. She collapsed, depending on Monzō’s shoulder for support. He put his arm around the lady’s narrow chest, and at last managed to get her down the stairs. At the bottom, the deaf old woman stood absentmindedly. She somehow sensed that strife had occurred and had finally managed to make her way as far as the stairs.

Monzō thrust the old woman aside and ran to the entrance. He shoved his feet into the wooden clogs that were kept on hand there and went out of the gate. The police detectives on watch had gone after the dwarf, and the place was deserted. Monzō and the lady ran, stumbling, along streets that had already begun to grow dark, keeping to routes on which pedestrian traffic was scarce. Fortunately, no one appeared to challenge them.

They crossed over the street along which the trains ran without difficulty, and in time they came out onto the embankment of the Sumida River. That was the only way of escape open to them. The lady was short of breath and frequently seemed on the verge of collapse. Her hands, which had been clinging to Monzō’s shoulders, fastened tightly on his neck. Cold, disheveled hair teased his ears. After much struggle, they finally arrived at the curving road to the Yamano estate.

"We won’t go that way. If you go home now you’ll only be arrested. Come on, let’s keep running."

"No. I must return home once no matter what. Let go. Let go of me!"

The lady mustered her feeble strength and tried to turn toward the estate, but Monzō held her firmly in his arms and would not let her.
"You don’t have to worry. I’ll go with you anywhere. Come now, this isn’t the time to be hesitating. Let’s go. Let’s run as far away as we can."

Monzō spoke in a shrill, nervous voice, dragging the lady along. Even so, she continued to struggle in Monzō’s arms for a while, but at last her strength was used up. Monzō felt the lady’s body suddenly, quietly grow limp and heavy. She was exhausted in mind and body, and had lost even the strength of will to resist.

Monzō practically carried the lady in his arms as he ran ever north along the embankment. As they went, human habitation grew sparse, and the oncoming dusk became still more pronounced. They must have run several hundred yards when Monzō suddenly looked up and found that there was a deep, thickly grown forest striking up against the embankment on his right.

Due to the weight of two people, Monzō’s feet had ceased to obey him. He was short of breath and his breast felt as if it had burst open. It was just then that he discovered the forest, which made for a likely resting place. He practically collapsed into it. After laying the barely conscious lady’s body on the grass in the shadow of a large tree, he retraced his steps to the embankment, advanced to the river, scooped up the dirty water and drank. Once he had eased his parched throat a little, he soaked a handkerchief in the water and carried it back with him into the forest.

Yurie was lying on her back as he had left her. Only her face was clearly visible. Her obscenely disordered appearance melted into the darkness, and engendered a dream-like beauty.

Monzō stared dazedly at her beautiful form, clutching the wet handkerchief in one hand. When he thought that he was now eloping with this person, who until the day before he would certainly have loved, and whom he had even regarded with a species of terror, he felt a pain in his chest. It was an inexpressible feeling, both tragic and sweet.

He went down on his knees and, lifting up Yurie’s head, suddenly brought his lips to hers, in place of the wet handkerchief. Then he stole a kiss from her, just as he had once done to a girl cousin sleeping beside him when he was still a small child.

"My goodness, I wonder what was the matter with me."
At last, Yurie’s lips spoke from beneath the rain of kisses. Monzō could not help but wonder if his passion’s excess had awakened her from sleep, or if she had been aware of everything and was pretending to have only regained her senses just then. Yurie’s manner of waking was so unnatural, and it was strange that, even after waking, she made no attempt to refuse Monzō’s arm, which was coiled around her head. A heat grew behind Monzō’s eyes at the thought that this was not entirely due to his imagination.

"How do you feel? Can you walk?" He belatedly applied the wet handkerchief to Yurie’s mouth. "Hold on just a little longer. If we turn right here, we should be at Hikifune Station. We’ll take a train from there. Then we’ll go someplace far away."

"No, there’s no point now. There’s no point in running away. I have no doubt that he has already confessed everything."

"What are you saying? Isn’t that why we’re running away? Or is it just that you think we can’t succeed?" His eyes shone with self-sacrificing devotion, and he spoke as if reciting lines from a play. "I don’t feel the least bit of regret for this life of mine. If I can die with you, I won’t regret my life at all. Won’t you please die with me?"

"Oh dear, you are . . . Why do you speak of dying?"

"But then, don’t you fear the gallows? Of course, if it were me, I would run away as long as I could, but when at last I could run no longer, what could I do but die?"

"Be that as it may . . ."

So saying, Yurie fell silent and remained sitting in the darkness for a long while. Monzō, too, continued to clutch her hand without saying a word.

"You’ll be my ally through thick and thin, won’t you?"

"Why even ask such a thing? Don’t you know that I will?"

"I know. But will you, even though I am, as I have always been, Yamano’s faithful wife?"

"Yes."

"No matter what happens?"

"I swear it."

"Well then, I will tell you. It was not me who killed Michiko. The criminal is someone else."
"Who is it, then?" Monzō asked with an exclamation of surprise.

"It is Yamano. Yamano, my husband. That’s why I must return home as quickly as possible: so that he may escape."

"But Mr. Yamano is Michiko’s own father, isn’t he? Could such an absurd thing happen? Alright, even if it were so, what do you suppose an invalid like him will do if he is allowed to escape? Besides, I have no doubt that the estate is already in the hands of the police by this time."

Mrs. Yamano let out a sigh.

“So it is pointless, after all. But perhaps that cripple managed a clever escape, and, in that case, the case may come to an end without the secret being exposed."

"Him? He holds the key to the secret? So that’s why you were following the orders of a fellow like that. You only wanted to cover up your husband’s crime."

"It was the only thing I could do." Yurie’s voice became tearful. "Once I found out, I resolved that I would do my best to protect the Yamano family name and my husband’s safety, even if it meant laying down my life. That was my late mother’s teaching."

Monzō stared at the lady’s passion in a daze.

"I don’t think that you understand the relationship between my husband and me very well. The Yamanos are my family’s valuable benefactors. It is entirely in accordance with the will of my late parents that I married a husband much older and that I resolved to sacrifice myself for his sake. My disposition would not have allowed me to do otherwise."

"But even so, there’s something I don’t understand." Monzō pulled himself together at last. "You probably think that you burned and disposed of it, but the strange letter you received came into Mr. Akechi’s hands. The letter that cripple wrote to call you to the house in O. Street. I’m certain it said, ‘We buried Michiko’s body as requested, only the three of us, somebody, myself, and Fukiya, know of this.’ Only one name was burned and couldn’t be read, but you were the recipient of the letter, so if it wasn’t yours, whose could it be? There are several other pieces of evidence. For example, weren’t the shawl and handbag and the rest of the things that Michiko was said to have taken..."
with her that day hidden in your closet? And that’s not all. Even
the plaster statue, which seems to have split Michiko’s head, was
in your room. Surely it is only natural that I suspected you."

Monzō listed the evidence to conceal his embarrassment.
"My goodness, I had no idea that those things were in my
room. Did Mr. Akechi find them?"
"No, it was Oyuki the maid. She’s been bribed by Mr. Akechi."
Monzō’s beautiful dreams had come to nothing, and he was
growing desperate.
"Oh my, is that so? I had no idea. I remember the letter you
spoke of, but has even it fallen into Mr. Akechi’s hands? That
letter. It was the first time I learned who the real criminal was.
The cripple confessed that he had disposed of the corpse at Ya-
mano’s request, and he threatened me. He knows my disposi-
tion and the relationship between me and my husband well,
so he took advantage of that weakness and schemed to do as
he pleased with me. I received that letter just after Mr. Ake-
chi came for the first time. Until then, I only half-believed that
Michiko was even dead. If I had not been uncertain, if I had
done something to Michiko, why would I ever have wished for
Mr. Akechi’s services?"

Monzō had not the slightest idea how to handle this excess of
surprises and the embarrassment of having leapt to a misappre-
hension and gone so far as to propose to die with the lady.

Yurie, having made a clean breast of her secret, was hang-
ing her head in dejection and saying that everything was fin-
ished, and Monzō, who had been pushed down from the beau-
tiful country of dreams into world of reality, sat in a daze, left
speechless by absurdity and embarrassment. The awkward si-
ence continued for a long time.

"Well then, the unknown third person in the letter was Mr.
Yamano? In other words, that cripple undertook to bury the
corpse at Mr. Yamano’s request," Monzō asked at last, his tone
become businesslike.
"That’s right," the lady answered, but her tone was careless, as
if it to say that it no longer mattered.
"The fact that my husband took out a considerable amount
of money from the store just after Michiko disappeared proves

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that it’s no lie. The manager was worried and spoke to me about it, but it didn’t seem likely that my husband would need such a large amount of money. When I saw that letter, I realized at once why he had done it. Perhaps half of that money went to the driver. My husband said that he followed that man to Osaka in order to find Michiko’s abductor and bring her back, but afterwards I realized that he went to give the driver money so that he would not reveal the secret. But I did not allow my manner to show that I suspected my husband. When I saw that he was making himself ill like that, it was a pity, but there was nothing to be done."

"So Fukiya learned the secret somehow?"

"Yes. I can’t say for certain, but I wonder if it mightn’t have been Fukiya who hauled that garbage cart. After all, Yamano couldn’t possibly have played that part himself. The priest of Yōgen Temple is a cripple, and aside from them there’s no one else who could have transported Michiko’s corpse. But it’s no use trying to pry into things like that now. Mr. Kobayashi, I wonder what I should do."

"Why don’t we try returning to the estate, in any case? I couldn’t possibly ask you to elope with me again, after all." Monzō grew red and made a clumsy attempt at a joke. "If that fellow managed a clever escape, or, better yet, if he fell from the roof and died, we can still do something to salvage the situation, but at this point we have to be prepared for things to go either way. From now on I’ll be your ally and try to help however I can. I hope you’ll allow me to do that for you."

"It is I who should be asking you."

Foolish Monzō’s spirits recovered a little when he saw that the lady accepted his assistance without ill will.

At last, the two left the forest and began walking along the embankment in the direction of the Yamano house.

"But what I still don’t understand is Mr. Yamano’s motive. I wonder what could ever have made him want to kill his daughter."

"Yamano is a strict man, not cut out to be a merchant, and it is his nature to do extremely drastic things when he flies into a rage. So I wonder if he might not have gotten an inkling of
Michiko’s immoral behavior and meant to chastise her but flew into such a rage that it came to that by mistake. Besides, there are several other reasons to consider. It was hidden even from the servants, but that maid called Komatsu, who ran away, was really my husband’s illegitimate child. He is a firm person, but of course there were mistakes in his youth. Under normal circumstances she could have entered the household as a daughter, but, as I just said, my husband is a stubborn man, so he said that it would be inconvenient for the discipline of his daughter and in front of relatives and so on. It was covered up and, although he kept an eye on her, in front of others she was forced to be a maid."

"Then, Michiko and Komatsu are sisters." Monzō was taken aback.

"That’s right. They are sisters, and their temperaments could not be more different. Michiko is a great tomboy. Komatsu, on the other hand, is an extremely considerate, well-behaved girl. One would never think that she came from merchant stock."

The two of them were trudging along the top of the now fully darkened embankment. One was exhausted in mind and body. The other was afraid of returning to confront reality and his natural walk had become sluggish. Somehow, it was unbearably lonesome not to speak.

"Because Yamano was like that," the lady continued, "if he learned that both of his daughters were competing for the same man, for a driver of all partners, I think he could not help but fly into a rage. His feelings can easily be guessed. I’m sure it felt like Hell. He could not bear to think that the one loose daughter must be a child of sin, born of his own looseness. When you come to think about it, Yamano is truly unfortunate."

"I wonder why he doesn’t give himself up and have done with it. If it was an accident like that, I don’t think it would have been a major crime."

"But one cannot face society having killed a person, even if the crime is minor. My husband minds the opinion of society more than others, so trying to hide the matter entirely was perfectly natural for him. Yamano was worried for his family name more than for his own safety. If you ask why, perhaps it is because, if"
the matter got out, everything from Yamano’s looseness to his daughters’ unsightly competition would become well-known."

"I wonder why he only punished Michiko."

"She was his official daughter. It’s his nature to methodically account even for details like that. Besides, you must consider the fact that my husband’s love, if I had to say one way or the other, tended toward the unfortunate Komatsu. A tomboy daughter did not suit his disposition."

"Please try to be quiet a moment."

Sure enough, when they ceased their conversation and strained their ears, they sensed the presence of another. That it was a pursuer was proved beyond a doubt by the fact that, when the pair’s feet stopped, the other suddenly halted as well. Looking through the darkness, they saw that someone was concealing themselves in the shadow of a grove of trees right beside them.

"Who are you? Do you have some business with us?"

"It’s me, Mr. Kobayashi."

The man emerged nonchalantly from the shadows, speaking in a tone of familiarity.

"So I’ve been found out at last. I’ve been tailing you all the way from O. Street, but you were thoroughly excited and didn’t notice a thing. Me? I’m Hirata, one of the people who assist Mr. Akechi. You wouldn’t know me, but I happened to see you once or twice at the Kikusui Inn."

When he heard that, Monzō flew into a rage at such disgraceful behavior. When he thought that even the affair in the forest would be communicated to Akechi through this man, Monzō had a sudden urge to grab at him out of an inexpressible feeling of shame.

"What? You followed us?"

"Please forgive me. Those were Mr. Akechi’s instructions. It was my role to wait in front of that house in O. Street for you to come out."

"Then, he was perfectly aware that we would flee?"

"It appears so. He told me to tail you and that if you entered
the estate it was alright, but that if you did not do so, I was to follow the two of you wherever you went and to catch every detail of your conversation. And if something dangerous to the two of you were to occur, I was to call for help and . . ."

"So what? This means that Mr. Akechi knew that Mrs. Yamano was in that house and brought me along deliberately. It was his plan was for the two of us to run away, allowing him to eavesdrop on our discussion."

"It was just a precaution, orders to do this in the unlikely event that such a thing were to happen. He said that he knows Mrs. Yamano is under a terrible misapprehension, so we mustn't let anything happen."

**Shifting Blame**

That night a strange meeting was held in the house of the doll maker, Yasukawa Kunimatsu. Every available seat was lined up on the wooden floor of the wide work area, and on them public prosecutor Tamura, the chief detective and members of the police were seated. Mixed in between them were the figures of the dejected Kobayashi Monzō and Yasukawa the doll maker, who was excited and looking around restlessly. Mrs. Yamano had become a semi-invalid due to strain and remained on the estate, and the gravely wounded dwarf had been carried into a neighborhood hospital and was hovering between life and death, so they were not participating in this meeting.

Completed dolls formed a strange group of sculptures on one side of the work area. Beside them, unfinished heads, arms, legs and so on were lying scattered about, almost like the den of a man-eating ogre. Akechi stood before them, indistinguishable from the dolls in his Chinese robes, and eagerly explaining something. At his side there was a small table. The articles of evidence which he had shown to Monzō were arranged on top of it.

He said that he would at last deliver the true criminal, and so he had called together public prosecutor Tamura, with whom he was on friendly terms, the chief detective and the rest. Because the meeting took place immediately after the capture of the deformed child, and for other important reasons as well, the
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doll maker’s work area was chosen as the place for it. For Akechi, this was the most important programme of the day.

When he had made a brief explanation of his progress thus far, he at last entered into the real issue at hand.

“In other words, there were five people who ought to be suspected of being the criminal responsible for Michiko’s murder. The first is the head priest of Yōgen Temple, namely that cripple. But although he is a most brutal and cold-blooded madman, considering that he exposed Michiko’s arms and legs before the public and threatened Mrs. Yamano, it is clear that he is not the immediate criminal. The second is Mrs. Yamano. In addition to this person being Michiko’s stepmother, the shawl here, along with these other personal effects of Michiko’s, was concealed in the closet of her room, and she complied with the cripple’s threats. The deepest suspicion rests on her, but in order to suspect the other persons I will tell of presently, one must not have leapt to conclusions impatiently like Kobayashi. And because the lady has now made a clean breast of certain matters, her innocence has become clear. The third is the maid Komatsu, who was Michiko’s rival in love. This woman purported to be ill and secluded herself in her room from the day on which the incident occurred and ran away from home several days later. As her whereabouts have been unknown until now, even the police have come to deeply suspect her, but for certain reasons her whereabouts are known to me, as is the fact that she is certainly not the criminal. The fourth is the pitiful Kitajima Haruo, who has now been thrown into a detention centre. But I knew from the start that this man was not the criminal. That is because, quite apart from the complete absence of any signs of ingress on the day in question, if he were the criminal, he would never have employed a plaster statue as the murder weapon, and because he would also have no reason for going to the trouble of concealing the body by such methods as the piano and the garbage bin. The fifth is Fukiya the driver. He has been partially suspected because he returned to his hometown the day after the incident, but as he was Michiko’s lover, and as there is no sign of him having hated her, there is not much of a motive for murder on his part. Besides, I have located this man as well,
and been able to confirm that he is not the criminal. In other words, it has become clear that none of the five suspects is the real murderer."

Akechi spoke in an insinuating manner, as was his habit. In his life as a detective, this was, so to speak, his one and only pleasure. But that manner did much to stimulate the curiosity of his audience. They even forgot to smoke tobacco and stared only at Akechi’s smoothly moving lips like schoolchildren.

“But at this point a sixth suspect appeared. Just now, my subordinate followed Kobayashi and Mrs. Yamano, heard the lady’s confession and was able to confirm that.” Akechi summed up the scene on the embankment of the Sumida from start to finish. “Mrs. Yamano’s mysterious movements had led me to suspect the same thing earlier. It is truly unfortunate for the virtuous lady, but her many hidden cares were completely useless. Mr. Yamano is certainly not guilty of filicide.”

Astonishingly, Akechi had systematically rejected each and every suspect.

“But it was certainly natural for the lady to believe that Mr. Yamano had killed his own child in error. That Mr. Yamano’s character was more than usually strict, that his relationship with his wife was a rather special one, almost like that between an old-fashioned lord and retainer, and that Mr. Yamano’s mysterious position in relation the present case produced a queer alienation between the two all doubtless contributed to this misunderstanding. All of the circumstances coincidentally appeared to point to Mr. Yamano. On the very night of the first incident, Mr. Yamano sat up late in the Western-style house. He went chasing after Fukiya the driver and presented him with a large sum of money. Upon returning home, he was struck by a nervous fever, and as the case progressed his illness continued to grow more severe. Day after day he kept his family at a distance and refused even to speak to them. And then, Mr. Yamano’s name was written in the threatening letter that the dwarf sent to the lady.”

He took the fire-scarred letter from the table and explained its contents, as well as the route by which it had come into his hands.
The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

The listeners all wore expressions of surprise. Only one, Yasukawa Kunimatsu not listening to Akechi’s story, and he was trembling.

At first, Monzō was surprised as well. If even Mr. Yamano, of whose guilt he had at last felt certain, was not the criminal, then there were no longer any suspects remaining. What on earth was Akechi thinking? He had declared that he would deliver the true criminal that night. Then, could that villain be in this house of Yasukawa’s? The doll maker couldn’t possibly be the criminal, could he? But while he was mulling things over like that, a certain astonishing thought suddenly flitted through his mind. His face became bright red for surprise and joy.

“It was that photograph. Akechi made pointless chitchat, looking at that photograph. That’s it. I should have paid more attention to it.”

It was the photograph of the whole Yamano household, which had been on Akechi’s desk before and was now lying on the table. He now understood why Akechi had treated that photograph so meaningfully. Even so, how astonishing a truth it was!

“So there isn’t a single suspect left. But since there was a murder, there has to be a criminal,” Akechi continued. “There was certainly a criminal. Only, because the criminal is so exceedingly unexpected, nobody, not even Mrs. Yamano, realized who it was. As I promised, I will deliver that criminal to you tonight. But before that, I would like to give a summary of the process by which I arrived at the discovery of the true criminal. I think it may be a useful reference for the gentlemen of the police.”

Akechi’s insinuating manner again. Public prosecutor Tamura noisily re-crossed his legs in frustration.

“Akechi, aren’t you raising our expectations terribly high? Start by revealing the criminal.”

“Well now,” Akechi smiled delightedly, “it seems even you are still completely in the dark. But please, let me tell it in the proper order.”

“Honestly, you go on like a novel. Tell it as simply as possible.”

The open-hearted Mr. Tamura laughed, repaying his friend’s teasing in kind.

“It was from this bottle of cosmetic cream that I first detect-
ed an incongruity in the case.” Akechi took up the white jar of Pompeian Cream on the table. “Just as a musician must be sensitive to a discordant note, it is probably necessary for a detective to be sensitive to an incongruous fact. Often the discovery of even a slight incongruity becomes the basis for a chain of reasoning. This was taken from Michiko’s dressing table. As you can see there are fingerprints on all the other bottles, but on this bottle alone no traces can be seen, as if they have been wiped off. No fingerprints on the bottle of the cream which most easily becomes greasy. The outside has been carefully wiped, but even a careful person makes the occasional slip. A clear fingerprint actually remains on the surface of the cream inside. And that fingerprint is completely different from those on the other bottles and those of the severed arm.

“This is the print of a right index finger. When one compares it to the print of the same finger on this bottle of liquid face-whitener here, although they are strangely similar, so similar that they cannot be differentiated with the naked eye, upon examining them with a lens it becomes apparent that they belong to entirely separate people. Michiko is extremely fashion-conscious, so there are many more cosmetics other than these on her dressing table, but oddly enough there is no trace of a fingerprint upon any of them. It is a little difficult to conceive of there being no fingerprints on a bottle of cosmetics which has been used even once, and she can hardly have wiped the bottles every time she used them. This was done for some purpose, and I wondered if it may not have been specifically to wipe away the fingerprints. Then, I wondered why only this group here had not been wiped clean. It was because it was necessary that they not be wiped. In other words, only these are not Michiko’s. They are cleverly prepared false evidence.”

Monzō felt somewhat gratified. It was gradually becoming clear that his guess had been correct.

“As proof of that, these cosmetics on which fingerprints remain are rather plain to belong to Michiko, who lived an extravagant lifestyle. Things such as these hydrogen peroxide cucumbers, hydrogen peroxide cream, and so on are, if I had to say one way or the other, best suited to an oily person, but
Michiko’s skin was, on the contrary, pale and wasted. So although I cannot assert positively that she never used them, they do feel a bit out of place. And then there is this white face powder. Even though it would be normal for a pale person to use a rose-colored one, this liquid face-whitener here has a green tint, more suitable for a red face. Again, a thing such as this camellia flower perfumed oil is not much used for Western hairdressing. In other words, whichever way we look at them, these cosmetics are not things that Michiko would have habitually used. There can be no doubt that they were brought in from somewhere else and planted in Michiko’s room.”

Akechi’s explanation was gradually entering upon smaller and smaller points.

“That the cosmetics were prepared as false evidence can also be understood from this blotting paper. This, of course, is a piece of false evidence as well.” He indicated the peach-colored blotting paper. An ink thumbprint was clearly visible on its surface. “This was set in the exact center of Michiko’s writing desk. I realized at a glance that it had been placed in a conspicuous spot deliberately. And then, the faint marks of blotted letters still remain on it. At first glance, they are broken up in places and cannot be read, but when one follows the lines with a pencil, clearly legible characters appear. But there is nothing in the phrases which is worthy of notice. It is nothing more than a sample of ordinary feminine writing. By the way, here is a separate sample of Michiko’s handwriting. When we try comparing this to the specimen of handwriting on the blotting paper, both are quite similar and in a young lady’s hand, but we won’t learn the truth just by looking at them like this. You see, the writing on the blotting paper is left-handed.”

After taking out a pocket mirror, which he had prepared for the purpose, Akechi held it out above the blotting paper so as to make it visible to the listeners. Tamura and the rest brought their faces up right beside the mirror and compared the two specimens of writing visually, as if admiring them.

“When we correct the left-handed writing to be right-handed like this, the two specimens are completely different. In other words, this blotting paper did not belong to Michiko.”
“And what does that mean?” Tamura was surprised. “Let me see. If we take it that those fingerprints are false, it means that the arm that the dwarf was carrying about and the other body parts are not Michiko’s.”

“That’s right. They were not Michiko’s at all.”

“But what you say overturns the very foundation of this case.”

“It does. The case has been mistaken in its point of departure,” Akechi answered with composure. Mr. Tamura’s countenance finally took on a hint of seriousness. The chief detective leaned forward on one knee.

“Then, are you saying that Michiko isn’t dead, Akechi?”

“That’s right. Michiko isn’t dead.”

“Well then, you . . .”

Tamura’s face paled, owing to a mixture of emotions, and he scowled at Akechi.

“That’s right.” Akechi tried to read the public prosecutor’s expression. “Precisely. Your idea is correct. Michiko isn’t the victim.”

“If she isn’t the victim . . .”

“She is the perpetrator. Michiko is the criminal.”

“Then, where is the victim? Just who did Michiko kill?”

“Wait. You have a rough idea of most of it,” Akechi forestalled the public prosecutor, while beckoning to the doll maker, who was shrinking into a corner. “Mr. Yasukawa, it might seem an abrupt question, but these dolls arranged here are all made to order, aren’t they?”

“Yes, that’s right,” the doll maker answered, licking his lips. “They are all ‘living dolls’ for Hanayashiki.”

“This Kewpie doll at the back is surprisingly large, but I suppose it is going to decorate Hanayashiki as well?”

“Yes, that’s right.” The doll maker was already trembling visibly.

“But it seems that this Kewpie doll adorned the shop room until yesterday, so why has it been mixed in with the other dolls?”

The doll maker said nothing. His behavior was telling all. Akechi immediately pulled down the living dolls, which had become obstacles, and approached the Kewpie doll at the back.
Then, grasping a hammer which had fallen nearby, he aimed at the doll’s clownish face and struck it a violent blow. The doll’s face crumbled, and wood shavings and soil scattered.

“Here is a truly unfortunate victim.”

Akechi continued to push through the soil with his fingers, and the indigo blue face of a dead person, their black hair in disarray, appeared from within the dirt as an intensely offensive smell assaulted the noses of the listeners.

“Needless to say, this is Komatsu the maid. Both her hands and both her feet have been half cut off, and she looks just . . . yes, just like a dwarf. She has been blotted out within the smiling body of this god of good fortune. It is the curse of a terrifying cripple. But . . .”

Akechi suddenly held his tongue. It was just then that the dead person’s throat appeared, and on its skin a strange black bruise was visible. It was clearly the mark of being gripped by fingers.

“This must mean that she did not die entirely from the wound to her head, so she was strangled to death.”

A bizarre silence fell. Even the experienced people of the police could not bear to look directly at this unprecedented brutality. They had all had their breath taken away and the whole room was a tableau vivant of sadness and gloom. The reddish-brown light of the discolored electric lamp half-illuminated the people’s faces and cast spectral shadows on the walls and floor. The living humans were still as death, and in contrast the lifeless dolls appeared to be looking around at each other and giggling.

“Then, this means that Michiko did this to Komatsu, her rival in love.” With a sigh, Tamura spoke at last.

“That’s right.” Even Akechi had paled somewhat, as was to be expected. “Behind crime, there is love. Michiko and Komatsu’s love for Fukiya, the dwarf’s love for Mrs. Yamano—this case sprang entirely out of love.”

“But who sealed her up inside this doll?”

“That wasn’t Michiko. Of course, it was the dwarf. And this man Yasukawa is also an accomplice. I saw the dwarf enter this place last night with my own eyes. But another reason I watched the doll maker with suspicion is that when the dwarf appeared
in disguise as an ordinary human, his stilts weren’t normal artificial legs, they were wooden dolls’ legs. Expertise has gone into this special invention, and the parts that bend back and forth are truly well-made. It was on account of those legs that the dwarf never removed his shoes. The maker of a thing like that could hardly be other than a doll maker. In other words, this Yasukawa and the dwarf have doubtless been in an undesirable but inseparable relationship for some decades.”

“But, Akechi, it’s quite odd.” Tamura came to a sudden realization and interrupted Akechi’s explanation. “I suppose there must be something wrong with my head, but what you say seems impossible. If we take Komatsu to be the victim, then whose was the arm that the dwarf carried about with him? It was only three days ago that Komatsu ran away from home, and wasn’t she still in the Yamano house at the time of the department store incident? It strikes me that there is a temporal inconsistency there.”

“But Komatsu fell ill the day after the incident occurred. And she seemed to have a fear of her face being seen. Even when I went to visit her sickbed, she buried her face in a pillow and would not look directly at me. That’s not all. Her fingers, which she had carelessly left out in the open, were manicured. Just like the fingers of a wealthy young lady.”

“Then perhaps, ah, could such an absurd thing really happen?” Tamura’s voice trailed off in silence.

“I also thought it impossible at first. But look at this. My opinion was settled from the time I noticed this photograph.”

So saying, Akechi took the group photograph of the Yamano household from the table and held it out to Tamura, the chief detective and the rest. In that photograph, a queer mischief had been done to Michiko’s face. Her eyebrows had been completely painted out with white artist’s chalk, and the frames of glasses had been drawn in beneath them.

When they saw that, Mr. Tamura and the chief detective looked at each other in wonder and murmured, “They look alike.”

“I thought you’d say so. Take away Michiko’s eyebrows, put glasses on her, quiet the artful expression on her face, and she
cannot be distinguished from Komatsu. That’s no wonder. The girl called Komatsu is actually Mr. Yamano’s illegitimate child, so she and Michiko are sisters. Only, because one was demure and expressionless, while the other was an artful tomboy and on account of differences in hair style, glasses and eyebrows, their similarities are not much noticed. Do you understand? In short, that evening, Michiko, after quarrelling with her love-rival half-sister, unintentionally committed the crime in an excess of violent emotion. She threw a plaster statue and ended up killing her rival. Then, in an instant, she hit upon the ingenious idea of disguising herself as Komatsu.”

“And what do you mean by that? It’s not as if disguising herself as Komatsu would make the crime disappear.”

“There was that daredevil, Kitajima Haruo, whom I spoke of just now. He had got out of prison just the day before and was sending Michiko ominous postcard warnings. He’s a madman lost in unrequited love. She might have been killed. That day, Michiko’s head was also filled with the matter of this daredevil. Because the accident occurred just then, her convenient disguise was a bright idea no matter which way one considers it. It allowed her to escape Kitajima’s revenge for one thing, to avoid suspicion of Komatsu’s murder for another, and even to pin the suspicion on Mrs. Yamano. When we also take into account that Michiko was an avid reader of detective stories, her feelings and methods are quite understandable. After all, as I’ve already told you, Michiko’s bookshelves were almost buried in detective novels both domestic and foreign. Hiding the dead body in the piano, the trick of the garbage bin, and planting the false evidence in the lady’s room were all products of her intelligence. The sanitation worker who hauled that garbage cart was her lover, Fukiya, in disguise.”

“Isn’t it peculiar that the whole household didn’t know about it?”

“No, there was one person who knew. That was Michiko’s father, Mr. Yamano. You see, he was in the Western-style house when the incident occurred. Precisely because Mr. Yamano is a severe man who prizes his family name, he consented all the more readily to Michiko’s plan. He joined with Michiko and
tried to bury the whole affair away in secrecy. It was also Mr. Yamano who gave Michiko, disguised as Komatsu, the money she needed to run away from home, and who bribed Fukiya and the head priest of Yōgen Temple. Mr. Yamano’s way of doing things invited his wife’s suspicion, and ended up making the case more troublesome.”

“Then, that means the cripple undertook to bury Komatsu’s corpse and used his position to squeeze money from Mr. Hira - ta, while threatening the lady at the same time.”

“That’s right. Mr. Yamano could not possibly have known that the monk was such a villain. For some reason they were on extremely friendly terms. It seems that damned cripple had skillfully taken him in. Besides, until this it had always been Mr. Yamano who gave aid to the priest, so he never imagined that he there would be anything like betrayal when he revealed the circumstances and made his request.”

“It truly is a complicated case. But, after your explanation, I understand the gist of it. Well then, I suppose you’ll hand the criminal over to us as you promised. Where on earth is Michiko hiding?”

The chief detective’s tone was severe, as if he had become aware of his important role for the first time.

“Oh, I’ll hand her over,” Akechi replied, sounding depressed. “Michiko is also unfortunate. She is certainly at fault for her looseness, but considering that she is also an only daughter raised in a complicated home, she is not solely responsible for it having come to this. Besides, she is now deeply regrets her past folly. Although she killed a person, it was no more than an accident. Tamura, I hope that you will bear these circumstances in mind for me.”

“I understand. I will try to meet your hopes as much as possible. Be that as it may, hurry up and let us know where the criminal is hiding.”

“What? Michiko is right here in the house.”

At Akechi’s signal, the sliding paper doors on one side of the room opened, and from them one of Akechi’s underlings emerged. Standing with him were Michiko, in the guise of a maid, and, unexpectedly, Fukiya, the driver. Michiko’s face was
pitifully tearstained, and she did not even have the strength to raise her eyes.

“Fukiya, too, has been in this house from the first,” Akechi explained, seeing the others’ suspicious looks. “Of course, this is another result of Mr. Yamano placing too much trust in the head priest of Yōgen Temple. Fukiya, who transported the dead body, was undoubtedly complicit, so Mr. Yamano entrusted the head priest with his concealment, just as the head priest advised him to. Knowing the dwarf, he must have had some fresh wickedness in mind. He made the shed at the rear of this house into an improvised hiding place, and even had three meals a day carried out to it. Then, Fukiya waited there for Michiko-Komatsu to come running away from home. You see, once it was clearly known that it was Michiko who had been killed, Michiko’s Komatsu disguise had served its purpose. Mr. Yamano chose an opportunity at his own discretion, and let Michiko-Komatsu run away from home to make her rendezvous with Fukiya here. If Michiko were not Mr. Yamano’s daughter, but had become a maid, then there would be no impropriety in her getting together with the driver. Mr. Yamano had probably considered the business from one end to the other, even taking things like that into account.”

When Akechi’s explanation reached its conclusion, Michiko, Fukiya, and Yasukawa Kunimatsu, came in any case to be conducted to the neighboring Haraniwa Station. Between the gently sobbing Michiko, the pale Fukiya, and the trembling Yasukawa, the atmosphere of the room seemed to dampen momentarily. Three police detectives made to walk the suspects to the station, following behind them. Just as they were about to go out the entrance of the work area, Akechi, who was gazing fixedly at the Kewpie doll, called Michiko to a halt in the tone of one who has had a sudden realization.

“Michiko, one moment. Do you recall the finger marks on this dead body’s neck? Did you strangle Komatsu?”

Michiko hesitated for a moment, but at last she replied with an air of suspicion.

“No. I did no such thing.”

“Really?”

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“Yes.”

Hearing that, Akechi became suddenly cheerful. Smiling, he enthusiastically stirred his fingers through his long hair in that way of his.

“Tamura, wait a minute. There’s a chance that the true culprit may not be Michiko.”

“What’s that?” The public prosecutor stared at Akechi in astonishment. “Didn’t you just declare Michiko to be the criminal?”

“No, I may have been somewhat mistaken.”

“‘Mistaken,’ you say?”

“These finger marks on the victim’s neck. I have a feeling that these black bruises are too large for Michiko’s fingers. I arrived at that realization just now. Moreover, Michiko says that she has no memory of strangling Komatsu.”

“In that case? . . .”

“It might be that . . .”

At precisely that moment, Akechi’s subordinate Saitō came running in from the front in a great hurry.

“Mr. Akechi, one moment.”

Akechi took him into a corner, and the two exchanged whispers.

“My guess has not been mistaken.” Akechi joyously turned to face the room. “As I thought, the true criminal was elsewhere. Michiko never killed Komatsu at all.”

“Then who on earth did?” Tamura and the chief detective shouted almost simultaneously.

“The dwarf. I will now report the new facts that Saitō here has brought me. The dwarf has regained consciousness in a hospital bed. It seems that now, on the verge of death, he will confess all of his sins. I’m sure that one day we will have an opportunity to determine just how brutal those numerous sins were, but for now I will relate only the portion that is relevant to this case. He received Komatsu’s dead body, mixed in with garbage, from Fukiya on the morning of the crime. That day’s night fell and he prepared to conceal the corpse in a place where human eyes would never reach it, but when he lifted her up from within the garbage, Komatsu unexpectedly regained consciousness. It
seems that she wasn’t quite dead. The cripple was shocked for a moment, but in the next instant the brutality of his nature reared its head. He cursed all contented, healthy people. And if Komatsu were to revive, he would have nothing with which to threaten the lady and wouldn’t even be able to extort money from Mr. Yamano. He strangled to a second death the girl who had gone to such great pains to return to life. Then he made her arms and feet into objects of public humiliation and frightened Mr. and Mrs. Yamano for his own reasons. For one thing, it satisfied the deformed child’s horrifying desire for exposure of his crimes. But the head alone could not be made a demonstration. If he were to do that, the lady would learn the truth of the situation. So he searched for a place to hide the head and torso, and hit upon the clever idea of a Kewpie doll. This is a confession made on the brink of death, so it cannot possibly be a lie.”

Monzō could not forget that strange scene for a long while. Akechi paced to and fro, grasping his own hair and stamping his feet on the wooden floor of the work area. Michiko and Fukiya, who had been crying until now, showed embarrassed smiles. People ran to the Yamano estate. Hearing good news and the excess of joy, the gravely ill Mr. Yamano accompanied his wife and came running.

“What? It’s not murder, after all. Besides, she’s a young lady, so she might still be declared innocent.”

Tamura smilingly consoled Mr. Yamano, as if a heavy weight had been lifted from his mind.

After that, Michiko, Fukiya and Yasukawa Kunimatsu, were taken to Haraniwa Station for the time being. But because of what Tamura had said, no one felt anxious for their welfare. Only Yasukawa the doll maker was in low spirits, taking no notice of the rejoicing around him and looking pitiful.

Kobayashi Monzō left the doll maker’s house with Akechi. Due to the satisfaction of the case being perfectly settled, they had naturally become talkative. While they walked to the taxi stand, they discussed various details of the case with each other.

“It’s wonderful, don’t you think? Even among the cases you have been involved with until now, I believe there are very few that worked themselves out so conveniently.”
Monzō was plying Akechi with flattery. “Conveniently?” Akechi’s tone was pregnant with meaning. “Because a remorseful person was not accused of the crime, I suppose. The dead are poor, because they experience nothing. Besides, that dwarf was an uncommon villain.”

Monzō gave Akechi an odd look and said, “I wonder what you mean by that.”

“Let me give an example: Even without breaking the Kewpie doll, I may have known beforehand that Komatsu had been strangled to death. And, in order to save the remorseful Michiko, I may have persuaded the dying dwarf to make a false confession... a cleverly constructed one-scene drama. I wonder if something like that is entirely unimaginable. Understand? Shifting blame. Depending on the circumstances, it’s not such a bad thing. Especially if it’s done to avoid removing a beautiful creature like Michiko from this world. She is, you see, entirely remorseful.”

Amateur detective Akechi Kogorō sounded refreshed as he took long strides through the spring twilight.
The Early Cases of Akechi Kogorō

Notes on the stories, based on the author’s afterwords

The Case of the Murder on D. Hill

The neighborhood of “D. Hill” is a fictionalized representation of Dan-goza (“Dumpling Hill”), located in Bunkyō Ward in modern day Tokyo. Two or three years prior to beginning his career as a novelist, Rampo operated a small secondhand bookstore in Dangozaka called the “Trio Bookshop,” and his memories of that shop became the basis for the scene of the crime in “The Case of the Murder on D. Hill.”

The gaps in a board fence running beside the railway tracks in the small town of Moriguchi, where Rampo lived at the time, suggested the “trick” of the striped yukata and the lattice to him, and it was from this idea that he began composing the story. A later comment that such a coincidence would be ‘unnatural’ led him to give the story its present form.

Rampo’s explicit reference to Hakuryū as a model led many of his contemporaries to assume an acquaintance between the two, but in fact they never met or corresponded, despite Rampo’s growing notoriety and stated fondness for Hakuryū’s performances.

The Dwarf

In 1927, the same year its publication was completed, The Dwarf became the first of Rampo’s works to be made into a movie, and the only such adaptation prior to the Second World War. Two more adaptations were produced during Rampo’s lifetime—in 1948 (making The Dwarf both the first and the second of Rampo’s works to be filmed) and again in 1955. A fourth adaptation, this time merging the story with The Blind Beast, another well-known Rampo work, was released in 2004 by the prolific director of cult cinema Teruo Ishii.

Rampo appears to have taken a special interest in the various actors who played the titular dwarf, invariably devoting some portion of each of the four afterwords he produced for different editions of the novel to them and even going so far as to provide a brief biography of each. The first of the little people cast in the role was a Kyushu man named Chame Kuriyama, who worked as a katsuben, a professional narrator of silent films. The second was a performer of naniwa-bushi, a type of traditional Japanese narrative singing, called Fukusuke Sakai. The third was Tsutomu Wakui, who had been working as a sandwich man for a Chinese restaurant in Tokyo’s Ginza district. All three men were roughly the same height, just over three feet, and of similar build, although Rampo remarks that Wakui was easily the handsomest of the three. Rampo wrote in his afterword to a 1961 edition of The Dwarf that he had met all three actors personally and even gone drinking with them.
Introduction

3. Ibid. Vol. 1, pg. 43
4. Ō Nanboku is another name for Tsuruya Nanboku IV (1755–1826), an Edo-period (1603–1868) playwright. Kuroiwa Ruikō (1862–1920) was an author, translator and journalist of the Meiji period (1868–1912).
5. Ramo, Edogawa Rampo Zenshū Vol. 1, pg. 220–21
7. Ibid.
15. Ibid. Vol. 5, pg. 329
16. Silver, Purloined Letters pg. 146
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18. Ibid. pg. 401–02
19. Ibid. Vol. 2, pg. 678

The Case of the Murder on D. Hill

1. Street markets which flourished in the business districts of pre-war Japan. Night markets included small booths as well as large stalls attached to ordinary shops. The night market in Ginza was particularly well known.

2. Real name Totsuka Iwatarō (1889–1949). He became the fifth Kanda Hakuryū in Meiji 45 (1912). As a storyteller, he specialized in domestic dramas.

3. In the Taishō Period, when this story was written, the electric lights in small houses not installed with meters were switched off during the day by an employee of the power company, using a switch at the transformer substation.

4. Due to the way the tungsten wires in the light bulbs of the time were attached, it was common for them to become disconnected and then reconnect by accident.

5. *On the Witness Stand* was actually first published in 1908. The Japanese translation quoted by Rampo contains a number of errors of detail when compared with the English original.

6. Ōoka Tadasuke (1677–1752) was famed as a clever and incorruptible judge.

The Black Hand Gang

1. This is George R. Sims’s ‘Originality in Murder,’ from the October 1915 issue of Strand Magazine.

2. A form of gambling in which participants submitted thirty-six idiomatic compounds written on pieces of paper and tried to guess which the bookmaker would turn over. It was popular in Japan during the Meiji period.

The Dwarf

1. Some editions have specified this to be a ticket to enter the park, but the price and circumstances suggest an erotic or pornographic print (shunga) of some kind.


3. Iki-ningyō: Life-size, realistic dolls made for display during the late Edo Period. Replaced by mannequins.

4. A theater in Asakusa at which musical performances accompanied a carousel.

5. Kaminarimon (‘Thunder Gate’) is the outer of two gates leading to Sensōji Temple in Tokyo’s Asakusa district. Originally constructed in
Notes

Komagata in 941 and rebuilt in its current location in 1635, the current structure was built in 1960 and is a popular tourist attraction.

6. A Tokyo restaurant from the Meiji period which served Western-style cuisine. It was frequented by the author Natsume Sōseki. This text refers to the Ueno branch, which opened in 1876.

7. In Japanese folklore, foxes are tricksters possessed of potent magic. They often deceive humans or lead them astray.

8. The name of a district in Honjo ward from 1891 until 1931, when it became Sumida Public Park. The area was incorporated into Sumida ward in 1947.

9. The kimono worn by small children are traditionally folded in at the shoulders and waist in order to fit more comfortably.

10. Pompeian Massage Cream was imported and sold by the Sasaki Shop in Tokyo’s Ginza district beginning in the 1910s. In addition, a face powder from the Pompeian company called Pompeian Beauty Powder went on sale in 1919.

11. A small shrine to the goddess Benten, located on a small, high hill to the right of Asakusa Temple’s gate.

12. At this time Asakusa was divided into seven numbered districts.

13. This contradicts Akechi’s statement in chapter 6, “The Deformed Devil,” that Mrs. Yamano claims the objects were planted in order to frame her.

14. Hanayashiki is an amusement park located in Asakusa. Opened as a botanical garden in 1853, it began exhibiting “living dolls” and dolls made from woven chrysanthemum flowers the following year.

15. Rampo, Edogawa Rampo Zenshū Vol. 1, Pg. 220
16. Ibid. Pg. 216
17. Ibid. Pg. 218
19. Ishii, Blind Beast vs Killer Dwarf
Edogawa Rampo (pseudonym of Hirai Taro, 1894–1965) is the acknowledged grand master of Japan’s golden age of crime and mystery fiction. In the early part of his career, he created the Japanese gothic mystery, developing the work of Edgar Allan Poe and related nineteenth century writers in a distinctly Japanese form.

This part of his career coincided with a great flowering in Japanese literature and culture, a relatively free and uninhibited popular press being a defining feature of the times. In this context, Rampo’s dark vision and extravagant grotesquery found an avid readership, and had a profound influence on other writers. Public morals tightened in the years leading up to Japan’s Asian and Pacific wars, and censorship was tight in the war years. Rampo’s early work fell out of favour, and he turned to adventure stories with detective characters in leading roles. After the war, he concentrated on stories for young readers, and on developing the Japan Association of Mystery Writers.

The Edogawa Rampo Prize, originally endowed by Rampo himself, is awarded annually to the finest work of the year in the mystery genre. It is the most important prize of its type in Japan. Edogawa Rampo – whose name is meant to be read as a punning reference to ‘Edgar Allan Poe’ – remains popular and influential in Japan. His work remains in print, in various different editions, and his stories provide the background for a steady stream of film, television, and theatrical adaptations.
William Varteresian is a translator currently living just outside of Boston, Massachusetts. He is a lover of weird tales and detective fiction, especially of the early twentieth century, and hopes to make more of Japan’s distinguished history of imaginative and bizarre tales accessible to Western readers.
**Mike Dubisch** can see into other dimensions, they say.

His art and subject matter are pulled from pulp science-fiction, EC comics, *Heavy Metal*, fantasy art and horror fiction, and he cites his greatest influences fantasy and comics illustrators Frank Frazetta, Richard Corben, Bernie Wrightson, Moebius, Barry Windsor Smith, Wally Wood, Greg Irons, Alex Niño and Jack Kirby.

In recent years Dubisch has become a figure in the world of Cthulhu Mythos fandom, publishing his Cthulhu Mythos space fantasy *Weirdling*, a graphic novel collecting his independent comic books, and releasing the limited edition collectible artbook *The Black Velvet Necronomicon: Black Velvet Cthulhu*.

Dubisch paintings are usually created in mixed media, utilizing pencil, colored ink, gouache, and colored pencil.

In his work, he strives to put human into the inhuman—to render the unreal as real—to make a static image appear full of movement, and to render shadow as full of light.

Mike can be reached at dubisch.com and facebook.com/MikeDubischArt.
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