



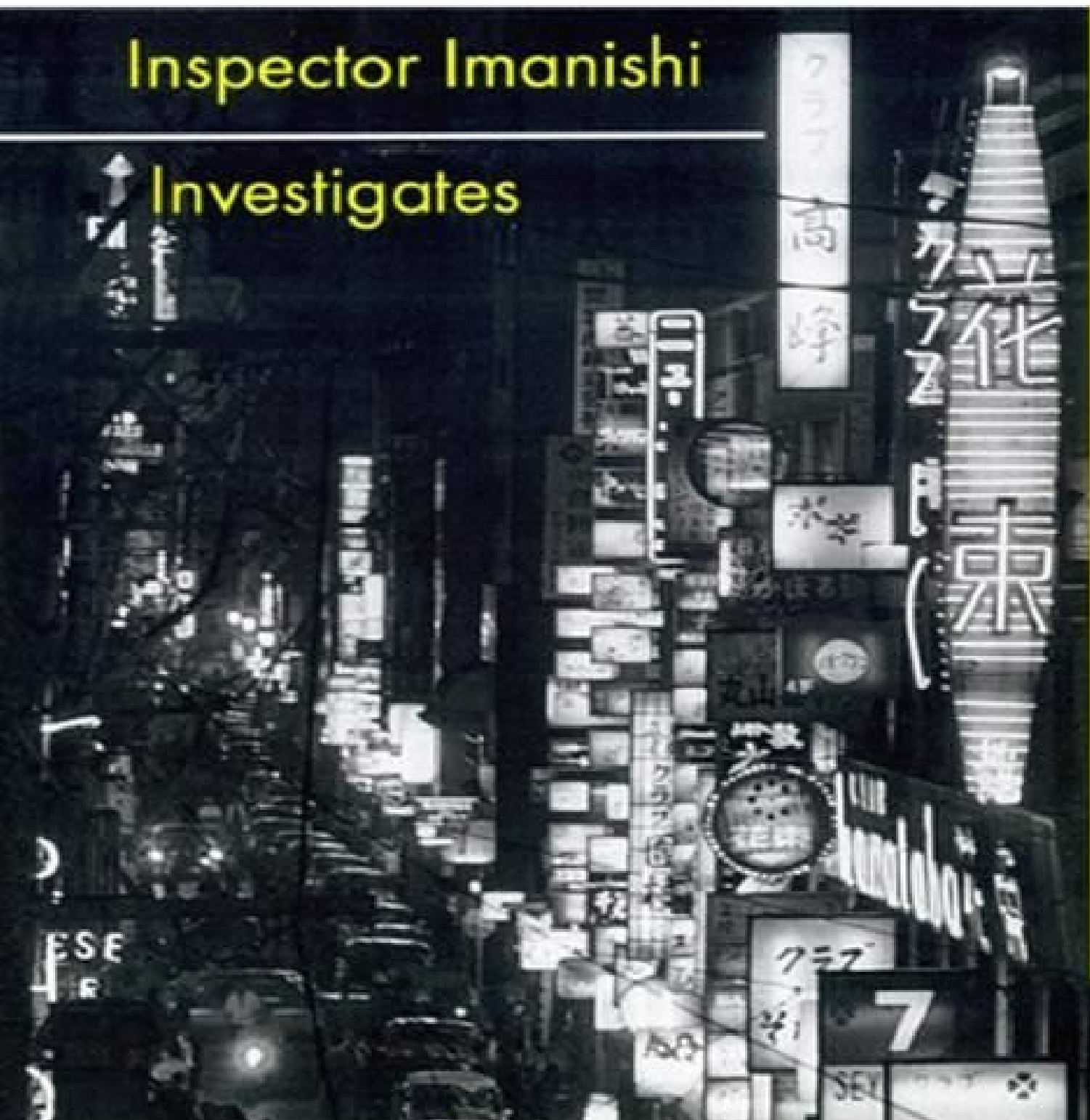
**“Tantalizing . . .
A superb thriller.”**

—LOS ANGELES TIMES

Seichō Matsumoto

Inspector Imanishi

Investigates



INSPECTOR
IMANISHI
INVESTIGATES

INSPECTOR
IMANISHI
INVESTIGATES

SEICHŌ
MATSUMOTO

TRANSLATED BY BETH CARY

SOHO

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INSPECTOR
IMANISHI
INVESTIGATES

ONE

KAMATA

RAILROAD

YARD

The first train on the Keihin-Tohoku Line was scheduled to leave Kamata Station at 4:08 A.M. The **engineer**, the brakeman, and the conductor left the night duty room **shortly** after 3:00 A.M. to go to the rail yard. It was dark and cold.

When the young brakeman shone his flashlight under the seventh **car**, he stiffened, stood still, swallowing for a moment, and then began to run, his arms flailing. He flung himself into the engineer's cab, shouting, "Hey, there's a *tuna*."

"A dead body?" the engineer laughed. "We haven't even moved the train yet. How could there be a tuna? Rub your eyes and wake up."

"No, I'm not mistaken." The brakeman looked pale. "I really saw a tuna under the train."

The engineer and the conductor decided to go see for themselves. When the brakeman shone his flashlight under the seventh car, they saw a human form lying on the rails just in front of the wheels. It glistened in the beam of light. The engineer bent over to look closer. "Ugh, it's horrible!" he screamed.

The three men stood for a while staring at the body. Then the conductor said, "Call the police immediately. We don't have much time." It was only twenty minutes before the 4:08 departure time. The engineer ran back to the office.

"This is an unpleasant business, first thing in the morning," the conductor said to the brakeman. "I wonder what happened. The wheels haven't moved at all, but his face is covered with blood."

The corpse's face looked like a red devil's mask. The head lay pillowed on one rail, the thigh across the other. If the train had started, the face would have been crushed and the hip joint severed by the wheels.

The sky became lighter. By the time the police investigators arrived, the lamps in the railroad yard had been turned off. Chief Inspector Kurozaki Hajime of the Homicide Division was accompanied by eight members of the Homicide and Criminal Investigation divisions.

The rail car involved was left on the tracks, while the others were detached and towed out of the yard. Criminal investigators scurried around this car. They took photographs, sketched diagrams, and drew in red lines on a borrowed map of the railroad yard. When the scene had been recorded, the body was dragged out from under the car. It was that of a man whose face had been battered to an unrecognizable pulp. The eyeballs had nearly popped out, the nose was smashed, and the mouth was split open. The gray hair was matted with blood.

The autopsy revealed the following:

Age: About 54 or 55; slim build.

Cause of death: Strangulation.

Numerous bruises and fractures on almost the entire face; on the arms and legs injuries and fractures accompanied by abrasions and welts.

Contents of the stomach: Light yellowish brown, slightly thick liquid (including alcohol content) mixed with partially digested peanuts. Chemical analysis indicates the presence of sleeping powder.

Conclusion: From the above evidence, it is presumed that the victim drank some sleeping medicine dissolved in whiskey, and then was strangled; afterward, he was beaten with great force by a blunt-edged instrument (such as a rock or a hammer). Time elapsed since death: Three to four hours.

The victim had been wearing a cheap suit, shirt, and underwear, none of which had laundry markings. He seemed to have been a poor laborer, but the police found nothing to indicate his identity. It was assumed that he had been murdered between midnight and one o'clock in the morning.

The murderer had viciously battered the victim's face after death, indicating that the criminal was someone who hated the victim a great deal, or that the murderer had intended to destroy the face totally in order to prevent identification of the body. The investigation team concluded the crime had not been motivated by robbery but was a murder committed by an acquaintance of the victim acting out of hatred, perhaps a crime of passion.

The first step was to identify the victim. Investigators started their questioning in the area around Kamata Station.

The previous night, two people, who might have been the victim and his companion, had been seen at a Torys bar (one of a chain of cheap bars) located near the station. The employees of the bar and the customers who had been there were called in for questioning. According to the bartender and hostesses, the two men had never been in before. They had entered the bar at about 11:30 P.M. The time was fixed by a woman customer, an office clerk, who had been concerned about missing the late Mekama Line train. Memories were vague about the faces of the two customers. Everyone agreed that one definitely had hair that was quite gray. As to the other, some of the witnesses said he was thirty, others that he was about forty years old, and still others that he seemed much younger.

After statements had been taken from the bar staff, bar customers, and a pair of guitar players who passed by the two men outside the bar, the only fact they all had agreed on was that the victim's accent was of the Tohoku region in northeastern Japan, a dialect with thick *zu-zu* sounds. The younger man seemed to be speaking in standard Japanese.

None of the witnesses questioned knew what the subject of the men's conversation had been. They had sat in a booth near the door leading to the rest room. The staff and customers, going back and forth, had overheard only fragments, a few words, a phrase. But Sumiko, a bar hostess, recalled that the younger man had said to the victim, "Kameda must be the same even now." A second bar hostess had also overheard the word "Kameda."

What had been meant by "Kameda"? The investigation team concluded that the victim and his assailant were old acquaintances who hadn't seen each other for a long time, that they had accidentally run into each other, and then stopped off at a nearby bar. In their conversation, the topic of their mutual friend, Kameda, had come up. It could be inferred that the gray-haired man had either recently seen or had kept up his friendship with Kameda, while the younger man had not seen Kameda for some time.

Other bits of the conversation included phrases such as "nostalgic," "since that time things haven't gone as I had hoped," and "I've finally gotten used to this kind of life." These were spoken mainly by the victim, the man with the heavy accent. Hardly any of the younger man's words had been

heard because he spoke in a low, muffled voice and, whenever someone walked by to go to the room, averted his face. The only words attributed to this man were “Kameda must be the same even now.”

The young man who had appeared in the Torys bar with the victim was considered to be the prime suspect. It was decided that inquiries would be made for him and the victim at cheap apartments and inns in the Ota-ku area of Tokyo, where the Torys bar and Kamata Station were situated.

The evening papers carried large articles on the crime. If the victim had a family, relatives would surely contact the police. But two days later no missing persons report had been filed, and the investigation team that had searched Ota-ku had found no leads.

A meeting of the investigation team was called. Someone suggested, “Just because he was drinking in a bar near Kamata Station doesn’t necessarily mean that he lived in the area. Kamata Station is the junction of the National Railway Line, the Mekama Line, and the Ikegami Line. The victim could have lived near the Mekama or Ikegami lines.” That would expand the area of investigation but general opinion favored this hypothesis.

“The statements of the witnesses confirm that the victim spoke in a Tohoku dialect, but what about the accent of the assailant?” the chief asked. “The man with the victim, the one we are assuming is the murderer, is the person who asked the victim about Kameda. Though he spoke in standard Japanese, the bar hostess said there might have been a slight northeastern tone to his words. From the content of their conversation, it would seem likely that they knew each other from their hometown in the northeast, rather than having met in Tokyo.”

The investigation team reached a consensus on these two points and agreed to proceed on the above assumptions.

One week passed and the identity of the victim was still unknown.

The name Kameda was no doubt quite common in the northeast. Finding every person with that name would be tedious, but it was decided to undertake the search. Headquarters asked the Northeastern District of the National Police Agency to locate every person named Kameda within the jurisdictions of the prefectures of Aomori, Akita, Iwate, Yamagata, Miyagi, and Fukushima.

Residents along the Mekama and Ikegami lines were questioned. Since the victim appeared to be a day laborer, investigators reviewed all records of the daily job placement officers in the vicinity. The inexpensive apartments and inns that might have housed the victim were also checked thoroughly. No one fitting the victim’s description turned up. From the violent nature of the murder, headquarters had suspected that the murderer would have been splattered with quite a lot of blood. Every taxi company in Tokyo was notified to see if someone fitting such a description had been picked up as a passenger, without result. The murderer might have hidden somewhere, washed his clothes, and then escaped on an early-morning train. Inquiries made of the train conductors were fruitless. The area surrounding the scene of the crime was combed. There were many vacant lots full of weeds, in which it was thought, the murderer might have hidden. But no objects related to the murder were found.

Responses to headquarters’ request to the Northeast District bureau of the National Police Agency for lists of persons named Kameda started trickling in:

“Kameda Shuichi, Kameda Umekichi, Kameda Katsuzo, Kameda Kameo ...” Kamedas living in villages all over the six prefectures were listed. There were thirty-two men named Kameda living in northeastern Japan. Headquarters requested that local police forces check out each of these men. Five days later the last responses were received. All thirty-two Kamedas said that none of their family members, relatives, friends, or acquaintances was the victim.

“I don’t have any idea what to do now,” said the perplexed chief of investigations. “The problem

may be that we have limited the search to the northeast Tohoku region. The mutual friend named Kameda may not be from that region. He could live in Tokyo or in western Japan.”

The team decided to ask the newspapers to stress the name Kameda in articles and to refer replies to the police. But there were none.

The movements of the victim and the murderer before their arrival at the Torys bar were still under investigation. Day after day weary detectives trudged from place to place making inquiries, and came back to headquarters tired out. When detectives were close to capturing a criminal, their expressions were bright no matter how fatigued they were. But when there was no clue, they just looked exhausted.

Imanishi Eitaro was one of these worn-out policeman. The forty-five-year-old detective was hesitant even to return to headquarters for a cup of tea. He was in charge of making inquiries at the cheap apartments and inns along the Ikegami Line. For the last ten days he had walked that area. Again, today, he returned to headquarters without any leads.

At the daily meeting the investigation team reviewed information brought back by the detectives but there were no developments. The mood in the meeting room was one of intense frustration, and futility.

It was nearly midnight before Imanishi reached his home that night. Through the slats of the front door he could see that the lights had been turned off. The door was locked from the inside because he hadn't been expected. He rang the buzzer. The light went on inside, and his wife's shadow was cast across the glass door.

“Who is it?” his wife asked.

“It's me.”

The door slid open and Yoshiko appeared in the shadows.

“Welcome home,” she said.

Imanishi entered and slipped off his shoes. Over the past few days, his heels had become worn and scuffed, so his shoes tilted awkwardly on the stone stand. From the two-tatami-mat entry, he entered directly into the four-and-a-half-tatami-mat room. There were three futon mattresses laid out on the tatami. The face of his sleeping son peeked out of one. Imanishi knelt down and tapped his son's cheek.

“Don't wake him up,” his wife scolded gently, standing behind him.

“I haven't seen my son awake for ten days.”

“Will you be late again tomorrow, too?” Yoshiko asked.

“I don't know yet.”

Imanishi walked into the next room and sat down.

“I guess you'd like something to eat?” Yoshiko asked.

“Just some tea over rice would be fine,” Imanishi answered.

“I'll warm up some sake.” Yoshiko smiled and stepped down into the kitchen.

Imanishi rolled over on his stomach and unfolded the newspaper. He closed his eyes. He could hear sounds in the kitchen, then he dozed off for a while.

“It's ready.” Yoshiko shook him to wake him.

When he looked up, the table was set with a warmed carafe of sake. His wife had covered him with a blanket while he was asleep. He threw it off and sat up.

“You must be very tired,” Yoshiko said as she lifted the sake to pour it.

“I'm exhausted.” Imanishi rubbed his eyes.

He drained the cup and picked at the salted fish set out for him. “It tastes good. Why don't you have some, too?” He handed his sake cup to his wife.

She drank just enough to make him feel comfortable and returned the cup to him.

“It still isn’t solved?” she asked.

“Not yet.” Imanishi shook his head as he drank another cup of sake.

Since he had been assigned to the Kamata case, he had come home late every night. Yoshiko was more concerned about her husband’s accumulated fatigue than about the solution to the case. She looked up at him and said, “The newspapers say that you’re searching for a person named Kameda. You still haven’t come up with anyone?”

Yoshiko almost never asked him about the cases he worked on. He made it a point to try not to talk about work at home.

“Mmm,” Imanishi responded noncommittally.

“I wonder why nothing comes up when there is so much written about the case in the newspapers?”

Imanishi did not respond to this either. He had no desire to talk over his work with his family. Yoshiko had once pressed him about a case he was working on. Imanishi had scolded her, saying she shouldn’t pry into cases under investigation. Since then, she had been more reserved. But her curiosity about this case made her forget. Yoshiko asked, “Are there many people named Kameda?”

“I guess it’s not that common a name.” Imanishi felt that he couldn’t scold his wife tonight, but he continued to give vague answers.

“I went to the fish store to run an errand today and checked their telephone book. There were a hundred and two Kamedas listed in the Tokyo telephone book,” she said. “A hundred and two isn’t that large a number, but it’s not that small either.”

“I wonder,” Imanishi mumbled, as he reached for the second carafe of sake.

He was tired of hearing the name Kameda. No one could appreciate the effort headquarters was making to find this man. Tonight, he wanted to forget about the case and go to sleep.

“I wonder if I’ve gotten a bit drunk.” His body felt warm.

“You’re so tired that the alcohol has hit you very quickly.”

“Maybe I should eat after this one.”

“There isn’t much to eat. I didn’t know whether you’d even be home tonight.”

“That’s all right.”

Yoshiko went to the kitchen again.

Imanishi felt a little light-headed. “Kameda, eh?” he said, without realizing that he was saying the name aloud. It was on his mind after all. He didn’t think he was really drunk, yet he repeated the name several times.

The next morning Imanishi slept late. It was almost nine o’clock when he got up. His son had already left for school.

Imanishi washed his face and sat at the dining table. He had slept soundly for a change and felt rested.

“What time do you have to be at work today?” Yoshiko asked as she scooped some rice into her bowl.

“I have to show up by eleven.”

“So you can take your time.”

The morning sun shone on their small garden. The sunshine had become quite strong. Droplets of water glistened on the leaves of the miniature bonsai plants. Yoshiko must have watered them.

“Will you be early tonight?”

“I’m not sure when I’ll be home.”

“I hope you’ll be able to come home early. Too many late nights in a row can’t be good for you.”

health.”

“~~But that can't be helped in my line of work. Until the case is solved I can't tell whether I'll be~~ early or late.”

“And when this case is solved, there'll be the next one. There's never an end to them.” Yoshiko seemed mildly displeased. But this was just her way of showing that she cared for her husband.

Imanishi pretended not to hear and ate his breakfast of rice and miso soup, pouring the soup over the rice. Having been raised in the countryside, he had never abandoned this custom. His wife criticized his bad manners, but to Imanishi this was the way it tasted best.

His stomach full, Imanishi lay back on the tatami. Perhaps his sleepiness still lingered, for when he lay down, he felt drowsy.

“Why don't you rest a bit before you leave?” Yoshiko brought him a pillow and covered him with a light blanket.

He couldn't fall asleep right away. A women's magazine happened to be lying near the pillow. To take his mind off the case, he opened up the thick glossy magazine. He intended to skim it randomly, but another smaller volume fell out of it. It was a supplement, a folded color map entitled “Guide to Japan's Famous Hot Spring Areas.” Imanishi lay down and held the map above his head, his attention drawn to the northeastern region of Japan. He was still mulling over the name Kameda. The map highlighted such famous resort areas as Matsushima, Hanamaki Hot Springs, Lake Tazawa, and Lake Towada. The names of the stations were crowded in along the train lines. Reading the unfamiliar station names seemed to conjure up images of the scenery of that area. On the left there was Hachirogata, beyond that, the Oga Peninsula. Noshiro, Koigawa, Oiwake, Akita, Shimohatma—the place names drifted before his eyes. Then he saw the name Ugo Kameda.

He jumped up and started getting ready for work.

“What happened?” Yoshiko hurried into the room from the kitchen and contemplated her husband hastily changing into his work clothes. “Can't you sleep?”

“This is no time to be sleeping,” Imanishi said. “Hurry up and shine my shoes, will you?”

“But you don't have to be there until eleven. It's still early,” said Yoshiko, looking at the wall clock.

“Never mind, just hurry. I have to leave right away,” he said loudly. He could feel his own excitement mounting.

Imanishi walked quickly along the street. He waited for the bus impatiently.

Investigation headquarters had been set up in a room in the Shinagawa precinct office. It was shortly after ten when Imanishi reached it.

“Hey, you're here early,” a colleague said, patting him on the back.

“Is the chief in?”

“Yeah, he just came in.”

Imanishi entered the room with the sign “Kamata Railroad Yard Murder Case Investigation Headquarters” on the door. Behind a desk in the center of the room sat Police Inspector Kurozaki. Imanishi went directly to him.

“Good morning, sir,” Imanishi said.

“Morning,” Kurozaki nodded.

“Chief, it's about the Kameda matter,” Imanishi started off.

Kurozaki's hair was slightly frizzy, his eyes were narrow, and he had a double chin. He was a big man with a thick neck that was tucked into his shoulders. He looked up quickly and asked, “Have you found out anything?”

“I don't know if this is right, but about the name Kameda,” Imanishi began. “Could it be that it isn't a person's name but a place name?”

“Is there such a place in the Tohoku region?”

~~“Yes, there is. Actually, I found it on a map this morning.”~~

“I didn’t think of that. That’s ... of course ... so that’s it,” Kurozaki answered, thinking it over.

“Where is this Kameda?” he asked.

“It’s in Akita Prefecture.”

The chief yelled, “Hey, someone bring me a prefectural map.”

A young detective rushed out of the room to borrow a map.

“Boy, am I glad you noticed this,” the chief said.

The detective returned with a folded map flapping in his hand. The chief opened it up at once.

“Imanishi, where is it?”

Imanishi went around the desk to stand beside the chief and peer at the small print. The map that Imanishi had seen that morning had been an inexact drawing. After a moment Imanishi found Aki City. Then, pointing with his little finger, he traced the Uetsu Line.

“Let’s see.” The chief peered at the spot, “I see, Ugo Kameda. It’s there.” Just next to Ugo Kameda was a town called Iwaki.

Chief Kurozaki gathered all the detectives together and announced Imanishi’s discovery. The majority opinion was now in favor of Kameda as a place name rather than a person’s name. All eyes in the room drifted toward Imanishi.

“We’ll send the victim’s photo to the area and have the local police inquire as to whether anyone in that area knows the victim,” the chief said.

The response came four days later. Chief Kurozaki took the call.

“This is the investigation chief at the Iwaki station in Akita Prefecture,” the caller began.

“This is Chief Inspector Kurozaki. Thank you very much for all the trouble you went to.”

“About your inquiry...”

“Yes?” Kurozaki, grasping the telephone receiver, became tense. “Were you able to find anything?”

“We made inquiries in the Kameda area, but unfortunately were unable to come up with anyone fitting your description.”

“Is that right?” Kurozaki said in disappointment.

“We took the photograph you sent us and asked various people, but the residents of the Kameda area say they don’t know him.”

“What is Kameda like?” Kurozaki asked.

“The population of the Kameda area is at most three to four thousand. It is now part of Iwaki town. There is very little farmland, and most of the industry in this area centers on the production of dried noodles and weaving. The population seems to be declining year by year. If the man in the picture was from Kameda, people would have known immediately, but they all said they had never seen him.”

“Is that so.” But the next words gave hope to the discouraged Kurozaki.

“Though no one fits the description, something strange did happen here.”

“Yes, what do you mean when you say ‘something strange’?”

“Two days before we received your inquiry, that is, just a week ago, a stranger was seen wandering around the Kameda area. This man also stayed in the one inn in Kameda. Since it’s an area where it is unusual to see strangers, he attracted some attention, and one of our men heard about it.”

“What kind of man was he?” the chief asked.

“He was thirty-two or -three years old. At first impression he seemed to be a factory worker. W

couldn't figure out why he had come to Kameda. I wanted to inform you in case it might be interest."

"Did anything happen while this man was there?"

"No, nothing happened. He didn't cause any trouble. But, as I told you, since he was a total stranger who appeared in the area, I thought it might have some bearing on your inquiry, so I just wanted to mention it."

"Thank you very much. Was there anything that the man did to attract the attention of the villagers?"

"It's a very small matter, but we can't deny that something like that did occur," the chief inspector of the Iwaki station continued. "This may be perfectly normal, but in a country area without any excitement, this man's behavior did attract the attention of the villagers. It's hard to explain in detail over the telephone...."

It seemed that the chief inspector was suggesting that someone be sent to that area to continue the investigation.

"Thank you so much. We may be sending someone from here to investigate. If we do, please cooperate with him."

"Yes, certainly."

That was the end of the telephone conversation. Chief Kurozaki lit a cigarette and stared at the ceiling as he exhaled. Then he put his elbows on his desk and thought for a while.

An investigation meeting was called.

"Is everyone here?" the chief asked the men assembled in the room. "Contrary to our initial expectation, this case is causing us enormous trouble. At this point, we have no knowledge of the movements of the victim. The man he was talking to at the Torys bar is the prime suspect, but we have nothing on him either. The only hope we have is the name Kameda." The chief wearily drank some tea. Taking a breath, he continued, "According to the phone report I just received from Iwaki station there was a man wandering around the Kameda area about two days before our inquiry reached there, meaning a week ago. We couldn't get details over the telephone, but I think this Kameda is a very important lead at this point. The telephone call indicated that it would be beneficial if we sent one of our men to that area. What do you think?"

All of those in attendance agreed. The investigation was currently at a standstill. They were willing to grasp at straws. It was decided that someone should be sent to Kameda.

"Imanishi," the chief said, "you were the one who found the place name. It'll mean more work but will you go?"

The meeting room tables were arranged in a U shape. From about the center of one side, Imanishi nodded his head.

"Good. And I'd like someone else to go along. Yoshimura?" the chief said, looking in the other direction.

At the back, a young man stood up.

"I'll do as you ask," replied the young detective, Yoshimura Hiroshi.

I manishi Eitaro returned home at about six o'clock

that evening.

"You're home awfully early," his wife greeted him with surprise.

"I'm not early. I have to go on a business trip. I'm leaving tonight, right away."

Imanishi flipped off his shoes and walked into the sitting room.

"Where are you going?"

"To the northeast, near Akita," was all he said. Yoshiko was close-mouthed, but there was no guarantee that she might not let something slip out about her husband's whereabouts. Imanishi was very cautious.

"What time is your train?"

"It leaves Ueno Station at nine P.M."

"Does this mean that you've discovered who the murderer is?" she asked.

"Nothing like that. We haven't even found a suspect."

"Then is it a stakeout?"

"No, it's not." Imanishi became slightly irritated.

"I'm glad, then," Yoshiko said.

"What are you glad about?"

"I'd be worried if you were going on a stakeout or if you were picking up a suspect. If it's just an investigation, it's not dangerous, so I feel relieved," she answered.

Actually, Imanishi himself felt at ease about this trip. All he had to do was to go to the Kameda area and make some inquiries. But if he didn't come up with results, he would lose face at the investigation headquarters.

"Who will be going with you?"

Detectives never traveled alone. They were always paired up with a partner.

"I'll be going with Yoshimura," Imanishi answered.

"Oh, Yoshimura-*san*, the young man who came by last year at New Year's. Will he be coming here?"

"No. We're getting on the train separately."

Imanishi reached Ueno Station at 8:40 P.M. The limited express train bound for Akita was already at the platform. Imanishi took a stealthy glance around. He didn't see anyone who looked like a newspaper reporter. He continued to be cautious, going to the kiosk on the platform to buy a pack of cigarettes rather than entering the train right away. Yoshimura was nowhere to be seen. He smoked one of the cigarettes from the pack he had bought.

He felt a tap on his shoulder. "Hey, Imanishi-san."

Imanishi turned around in surprise. Yamashita, a reporter, was smiling at him.

"Where are you going so late at night?"

"I have a bit of business in Niigata," Imanishi answered.

"Niigata?"

It might have been his imagination, but to Imanishi it looked as though Yamashita's eyes glittered.

"Did something happen in Niigata?"

"No, nothing."

"That's strange. You're busy with that railroad yard murder, aren't you? For you to be going off to Niigata sounds fishy to me."

"There's nothing fishy about it," Imanishi retorted, acting annoyed. "My wife's family lives in Niigata. Her father died, so I'm on my way there. I just got the telegram."

"Oh, really? My sympathies," Yamashita said. "But I don't see your wife anywhere."

Imanishi recovered his composure. "The telegram came about noon. So my wife went on ahead. I'm on my way now because I had some things to do first."

"What are you doing wandering around a place like this?" Imanishi asked Yamashita in return.

"I'm here to meet someone arriving from Niigata."

"Well, that's nice of you," Imanishi said. He waved good-bye and started walking slowly down the platform.

When Imanishi finally turned around, he could no longer see the newspaper reporter. He breathed a sigh of relief. Still taking precautions, he hid in the crowd and then jumped on the last car of the train. It was nearly full. Imanishi entered the second car. It was also packed. He moved to the next car and spied Yoshimura who was saving a seat for him with his suitcase.

"Did you get caught by a reporter?" Imanishi asked.

"No, I was all right."

When the train's departure bell rang Imanishi breathed another sigh of relief.

"Have you ever been to the Tohoku region?" he asked.

"No, never."

"It's the first time for me, too. Say, Yoshimura, wouldn't you like to take a relaxing trip with your family? We always take these trips for work, with no pleasure involved."

"Unlike you, I don't have a wife." Yoshimura laughed. "I think it's more fun to travel alone. Any kind of trip is fine with me."

"I suppose so."

"You discovered Kameda, Imanishi-san. If we find out something, it'll be a gold star for you."

"I don't know if my theory is correct. I might get criticized by the chief for spouting off and making them waste money on this trip."

The two of them chatted for a while. It was hard to sleep. **The lights** from the scattered houses flowed past the dark window. They couldn't see the scenery, but it seemed that they could already smell the Tohoku region.

Daylight came. It was 6:30 when they reached Sakata. Imanishi woke early. Beside him Yoshimura was still asleep, leaning against the seat back with his arms crossed. After changing trains

at Honjo they arrived at Kameda. It was close to ten o'clock.

~~The station was empty. The houses in front of the station were all old but built in a sturdy manner. A mountain rose up behind the town. The eaves of the houses were very deep in this area of heavy snowfalls. For Imanishi and Yoshimura this sight was unusual.~~

They went to a restaurant in front of the station. Only two or three customers were inside, and half of the space was taken by a souvenir shop. The second floor was an inn.

Imanishi ordered some noodles. They ate sitting side by side.

"Imanishi-san, this may sound strange, but I wonder how you feel about it," Yoshimura said while wolfing down his tempura over rice. "We go on various business trips like this. And afterward, rather than the scenery or problems I might have encountered, what I remember is the food. Our expense allowance is so small we can only afford rice with curry, or some meat on top of a bowl of rice, food you can get anywhere. Yet the flavoring is always different. It's the taste of each location that I remember first."

"Is that so?" Imanishi said, sipping his noodles. "After all, **you're** young. I prefer to remember the scenery."

Yoshimura said, his chopsticks stilled for a moment, "I hear **that** you write poetry. That's why you focus on scenery. Will you **add** to your haiku collection on this trip?"

"My poems aren't any good." Imanishi laughed in self-deprecation.

"By the way, what shall we do? Should we go to the police station right after we eat?"

"Yes, let's do that."

"Isn't it strange? We're here because you happened to look at supplement in your wife's magazine. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't have seen this place. One's life can be changed by chance happening," Yoshimura said, pouring himself some tea. He'd polished off his bowl of rice, leaving not a single grain behind.

The Iwaki police station was housed in an old building.

They entered and Imanishi presented his name card at the reception desk. A policeman looked at the card and led them into the station chief's room immediately.

The chief was seated, looking over some documents, but he stood up as soon as he saw the two visitors. He seemed to know who they were even before he had seen their cards.

"Please. Please, sit down."

The heavy-set chief smiled at the visitors and had two chairs brought for them.

"I'm Imanishi Eitaro of the Homicide Division of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Agency."

"Yoshimura Hiroshi from the same division."

"I appreciate your coming here," the station chief said, urging them to be seated.

Imanishi offered their thanks for the cooperation they had already received.

"Not at all. I didn't know if it would be of any help, but I thought I should report the matter, just in case."

A young staff member of the police station brought in some tea.

"You must have had a tiring trip," the chief said, offering them the cigarettes on the table. "Do you come to this station directly?"

"No, we got off at Ugo Kameda to see what the area was like. Then we took a bus here."

"You're the first visitors we've had at this station who have come from the Tokyo police," the station chief said. "We've heard the outline of the case you are concerned with. But would you mind giving me more details?"

Imanishi gave an account of the investigation into the Kamata railroad yard murder case.

The chief listened intently. Then he started to explain. "Kameda was a castle town in the old days. It was a small domain of about twenty thousand *koku*. You must have seen that three sides of the town are surrounded by mountains. There is very little land that can be cultivated, so the main products of this area are dried noodles and cloth. This cloth is called Kameda weave, and it was valued up until before the war. Now there isn't that much production. Every year more and more young people leave town."

The station chief was using the words of standard Japanese, but his accent was thick.

"That's why practically everyone would know a person who was a native of Kameda. I had men go around with the photograph of the victim sent by your headquarters; it doesn't seem that the person is from this area. But...", he paused, and then continued, "about a week ago, a strange man appeared in the town of Kameda."

"When you say strange, in what way?" Imanishi asked.

"At first glance he seemed to be a laborer, wearing an old, worn-out suit, a man of about thirty or forty. He wasn't considered strange from the beginning, but when your inquiry came and we checked out the Kameda area, people recalled that a stranger had been around."

"I see."

"This man stayed at Asahiya, an inn in Kameda. This inn is an old house, and well regarded in this area. It's not strange that he stayed in that inn, but it seems odd that a laborer would stay in such an inn."

"Yes, I see."

"The inn at first refused to accept him. They didn't want him spending the night because of the way he looked. But the man said that he had enough money and would pay in advance. The innkeeper agreed to let him stay because they didn't have any other guests at the time. Of course, they didn't give him one of their good rooms."

"What kinds of things happened?"

"Well, that's about all. Nothing happened in particular. He paid the inn for his lodging in advance as promised. He even gave a five-hundred-yen tip to the chambermaid. There aren't many people around here who would give such a tip to a maid. The innkeeper regretted having given him a bad room."

"What did he do at the inn?"

"He arrived in the evening. After supper, he said he was tired and went to sleep without even taking a bath. That made the people think that he was quite odd."

"Did anything else happen?"

"Something strange? Well, this is what happened. The man slept until after ten o'clock, and then called a maid to ask how late the inn kept its doors open. When the maid answered that they were open until one o'clock, he said he had something to do and went out, wearing the inn's wooden clogs."

"He went out after ten o'clock at night?"

"That's right," the station chief answered. "He returned to the inn just after one A.M."

He continued, "I forgot to mention this, but this man arrived with a shoulder bag. He left that bag at the inn when he went out. In this area all the houses close up early in the evening. So we can't figure out what this man was doing when he went out from after ten until one o'clock. It wouldn't be strange at all if he had gone out like that in a big city, but in our area, this is considered to be strange."

"I suppose so. And when he came back, was there anything changed about this man's behavior?"

"There wasn't anything. It didn't seem that he had gone drinking, and he seemed to behave the same as before he left. When the maid asked where he had gone, he told her that he had gone to run an errand. But no one runs errands after ten at night."

"I see. I suppose there is a record of his registration?"

“Yes, there is. We could have seized it, but since we knew you were coming, we’ve left it at the inn.”

“Thank you very much. Was there anything else that was strange?”

“That was all at the inn. The man left just after eight in the morning. When she served him breakfast, the maid asked him where he was going. He said he was getting on the train for Aomori.”

“What was the address he listed on the inn registration?”

“It’s listed as Mito City in Ibaragi Prefecture.”

“So he’s from Mito.”

“So it says on the inn registration. When the maid said Mito must be a nice place, he spoke about its famous sights. So it seems that he wasn’t completely unfamiliar with Mito.”

“What about his occupation?”

“According to the inn registration, he put down company employee. But they didn’t learn which firm he worked for.”

“So, it seems that what was strange was his leaving the inn for three hours late at night?”

“Yes. But if that were the only thing, I wouldn’t have asked you to come all this way. There were a few other things that seemed unusual.”

“Yes, and what were those?”

“One was that this man was seen loitering in front of a dried noodle shop.”

“What is a dried noodle shop?”

“As I just explained, Kameda is famous for the dried noodles it produces. Rows of noodles are hung to dry next to the noodle-makers’ houses. It was at such a house that this man appeared.”

“What did he do when he appeared in front of this dried noodle shop?”

“Well, it wasn’t as if he *did* anything. He just stood there, in front of the place where they dry their noodles,” the station chief answered, with a strained smile.

“He just stood there?”

“Yes. He did nothing but stand there for twenty minutes or so, gazing at the noodles hung to dry.”

“Hm.”

“The shop owners were a bit concerned about this unkempt fellow standing in front of the drying area. But he went away after a while. That’s about all there is to tell. But I thought it might be of some interest to you.”

“It certainly is interesting,” Imanishi nodded deeply. “I assume that the man who stayed in the inn and the man watching the noodles were the same person?”

“I think so. There’s also something else.” The station chief gave a little laugh.

“What is that?”

“There is a river that runs through the town of Kameda. It’s called Koromogawa. A man thought to be this same person was seen lying on the bank of this river at noontime.”

“Just a minute,” Imanishi interrupted. “Was that the day after he had stayed at the inn?”

“No, not the day after. It was the day he went to the inn. As I told you, he got to the inn in the evening, so this was noon of that day.”

“I understand. Please go on.”

“Well, there isn’t much except that this man was lying at the edge of the river. But there aren’t any men around here who can take things easy like that. There’s a road at the top of the levee. A local person who was walking on that road thought it was a strange place for a man to be taking a nap. I thought the man was a drifter.”

“I see.”

“No one said anything about this. It’s just that my men heard about it when they made their inquiries. When they asked if there were any unusual goings-on, they were told about this incident.”

“That means that this man was lying about in the grass around noon. That night he left the inn after ten and returned at about one o’clock.... This does seem to be strange behavior.”

“You think so, too?” The station chief seemed relieved.

“Napping on the bank of the river during the day and leaving the inn in the middle of the night that doesn’t sound like a normal person, does it?”

“If you think he may have been a burglar, I thought of that, too. But there weren’t any thefts reported around that date.” The station chief continued, “If there had been any actual loss reported but there was nothing, so it’s hard to figure him out.”

“Was that the only day that the man was seen wandering about?” Imanishi asked.

“Yes, that’s the only day. Imanishi-*san*, don’t you think there’s some connection to the case you were asking about?”

“Let me see,” Imanishi said and smiled. “Let us look around the town a bit.”

“I’ll have one of my men show you around.”

“Please don’t bother. If you could just direct us, we’ll go ourselves.”

Imanishi and Yoshimura got on the bus for Kameda. The passengers were all from that locality. Their accents were so strong that it was hard for the outsiders to make out their meaning.

Soon the row of houses ended, and the bus drove along a road through the fields. The war season came to this area much later than to Tokyo. The color of the new green leaves of the hillsides was beautiful.

They got off at the bus stop as instructed and went to the Asahiya inn. The station chief had said it was an old established house, and it looked it. The gabled entry seemed forbidding.

Imanishi presented his police identification to the maid who came to the doorway. The innkeeper, a man in his forties, appeared.

“I’ve come from the Tokyo Metropolitan Police,” Imanishi said. The innkeeper invited them to enter, but Imanishi preferred not to go inside. The maid brought seat cushions and some tea to the entryway.

Imanishi described what he had heard from the Iwaki police chief.

“Yes, we certainly had such a guest,” the innkeeper nodded.

“Can you tell me about him in more detail?” Imanishi asked.

The innkeeper agreed and recounted his version, which was no different from what they had heard from the station chief.

“I understand you have the guest register?” Imanishi asked.

“We do,” the innkeeper nodded.

“Could you show it to me?”

“Yes, certainly.”

The innkeeper asked the maid to bring the guest register. It was in the form of separate sheets of paper, each like a bill.

The entry the innkeeper showed them read:

“Hashimoto Chusuke, Number xx, xx town, Mito City, Ibaragi Prefecture.”

It was inscribed in a very poor hand, as if a grade schooler had written it. But this was not unnatural, since the man had seemed to be a laborer. Imanishi stared at the characters.

Imanishi asked what the man had looked like. About thirty years old, tall with a medium build, his face on the long side, and his hair short and unparted. His skin had been rather dark, but his nose was straight and his features even. The innkeeper said he had kept his face averted, and had not met anyone’s eyes even when he spoke. That was why the maids’ memories were vague.

Asked about the way he spoke, the innkeeper responded that the man did not have a Tohoku accent. His speech was close to standard Japanese and his voice was low. The general impression was

that he had seemed to be a gloomy sort, and terribly tired. Everyone agreed on this point. He'd had neither a travel bag nor a suitcase, only the kind of shoulder bag people had used during the war with all his belongings in it.

The two detectives visited the dried noodle shop. Next to it, bamboo poles were set with noodles draped from them. This made the noodles appear like white waterfalls when the sun shone on them.

The woman of the house came out and showed them a narrow pathway about two hundred yards from the drying area, between the grass lots, that led to the main road. In this section of town the spaces between the houses were wide and overgrown with grass. The man in question had hung around this lot, squatting and standing, for about thirty minutes.

Imanishi and Yoshimura walked until they reached a wide river that flowed from the surrounding mountains. The grass grew tall on its banks. A farm woman walked along carrying a hoe on the opposite bank of the river.

"Imanishi-san," Yoshimura asked, "what do you think? Is it your feeling that this man is the one who was with the victim at the bar in Kamata?"

"I can't say either way. But there *is* something strange about this fellow."

"There's nothing definite, though, is there?" Yoshimura looked disappointed. "The name he used in the inn register is an alias, of course?" Yoshimura asked.

"Of course."

Imanishi stated this so definitely that Yoshimura took the bait. "How can you tell?"

"You saw the penmanship on that register, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. It was very poor writing."

"Of course it was poor, since he wrote it with his left hand on purpose." Imanishi fished his notebook out of his pocket and took out the carefully folded sheet from the inn register. "Look at this closely. See, there's no flow in the writing at all. No one writes such awkward characters. Remember what the maid said at the inn? He didn't fill in the register in front of the maid. She brought the register and left it in the room. When she came back later, it was filled in. The guest filled it in using his left hand to hide his handwriting while the maid was out of the room. So we can assume that the name and address are false."

"But where did this fellow go from ten at night to one o'clock in the morning?" Yoshimura asked. "From his behavior during the day, he didn't seem to have any pressing business."

"That's it. I was just thinking about that myself." Imanishi stood in the grass with both his hands stuck into the pockets of his slacks. Ripples spread in the river in front of his eyes. The sun shone on the mountains and cast deep shadows.

"This is a strange trip. The results are kind of disappointing, aren't they? Imanishi-san what shall we do now?" Yoshimura asked.

"Since we don't have any more leads, shall we go home?"

"Don't we have to find out where else the man went?"

"I don't think we'll be able to. He was probably here in Kameda for only that one day."

"Then what did he come here for?"

"I can't tell. Though he seemed like a drifting laborer, there's no evidence that he came to ask for work. But maybe we should make inquiries in the nearby towns just to be sure. After all, we've come all this way. Come on, cheer up," Imanishi said, looking at Yoshimura's dejected face.

...

The following afternoon, Imanishi and Yoshimura visited the office of the Iwaki police chief once again.

"Thank you for everything you've done for us," Imanishi said.

"You're very welcome. Were you able to discover anything?"

“Thanks to you we were able to get a concrete picture of what went on. It seems that the man didn’t make an appearance in any other villages. Just Kameda. He must have gotten on a train at Kameda Station and gone to another area.”

“I see. That’s too bad. But it seems strange that he got off the train only at Kameda.”

“That’s true. So maybe this incident holds some promise.”

The two detectives chatted for a while with the station chief. After an appropriate length of time they took their leave.

They walked toward the train station by the deep eaved houses of the snow country.

They entered the small station and found the tram schedule displayed above the wicket. The two men looked up to read the schedule.

At that moment they heard a commotion behind them. When Imanishi turned around, he saw four young men with suitcases surrounded by several men who looked like newspaper reporters. Some had cameras and were taking photographs.

Imanishi gazed at the four, wondering why the local newsmen were making a fuss over them. He could tell at first glance that the four were not from this region, that they had come from Tokyo. Although they were dressed casually, a closer look revealed that each item of their clothing had been carefully chosen. They were “casually fashionable.” They wore their hair rather long, and seemed to be around thirty years of age. The youngest of the four men had a pale face and thin eyebrows, and was wearing a gray suit with the collar of his black sports shirt out. He was saying, “I think it will be some time before Japan will be able to launch a rocket.”

“What are *they*?” Yoshimura asked Imanishi.

Imanishi had no idea who they might be. They seemed to him to be awfully young to have attained such importance.

The local people waiting for the train in the waiting room of this lonely country station were all watching this group. Some young girls went up to the four men and stuck out a notebook. One of the men took out a pen and wrote in it. The girl bowed and went to the next young man. He also scribbled something with a pen. It was clear that the girl was asking for their autographs.

“Could they be movie stars?” Yoshimura asked.

“I have no idea.”

“But I don’t recognize their faces, and what they’re saying doesn’t fit.” Yoshimura pondered.

“I can’t recognize the faces of the new movie actors,” Imanishi stated. “They keep creating more and more new stars. Young girls know a lot more about that kind of thing.”

After a while, the group of young men went through the gate, toward the train bound for Aomori in the opposite direction from the way Imanishi and Yoshimura were headed. The newspaper reporters bowed their farewell and left the station.

“Shall I ask them?” Yoshimura said, his curiosity aroused.

“No, don’t bother,” Imanishi stopped him.

“But I’d like to know who they are.” Yoshimura approached the young girl with the autograph book.

He bent over and asked her something. The girl answered, blushing slightly. Yoshimura nodded and returned to where Imanishi was seated.

“I’ve got it,” he said, smiling self-consciously.

“Who were they?”

“They are intellectuals from Tokyo. They are members of the Nouveau group. They often appear in newspapers and magazines.”

“What is this Nouveau group?”

“You might say it’s made up of members of the younger generation who have progressive

opinions: composers, academics, novelists, playwrights, musicians, filmmakers, journalists, poets—all types.”

“You’re really up on all this, aren’t you.”

“Well, I do read the papers and the magazines,” Yoshimura said, somewhat embarrassed.

“So those four are members of this group?”

“Yes. I just asked that girl. The one in the black shirt was Waga Eiryō, the composer. Next to him was the playwright Takebe Toyochiro; then Sekigawa Shigeo, the critic; and the painter Katazawa Mutsuo.”

When he heard these names, Imanishi realized that they were vaguely familiar.

“Why did they come all the way out here?”

“She said that a university rocket research center is located here in Iwaki. They’re on their way back from taking a tour of the center.”

“A rocket research center in this backwater?”

“When she told me, I remembered that I’d read about it somewhere.”

“A strange location for such a modern facility.”

“It sure is. They’ve finished their tour and are going on to see Lake Towada before they go home. The local press was all over them because they’re mass media stars—opinion leaders. The spotlight the new generation is on them.”

Imanishi was indifferent to them. The generation gap distanced him from this group. He yawned and said, “Have you found us a train?”

“Yes. There’s a limited express at seven forty-four P.M.”

“What time does it reach Ueno?”

“At six-forty tomorrow morning.”

“That early? Well, I guess it’s all right. We can go home and sleep a bit before reporting to headquarters,” Imanishi said, and then added, “There’s no need to hurry; we’re not going back with a breakthrough.”

“True. Imanishi-san, since we’ve come all this way, how about taking a look at the Japan Sea? We still have plenty of time.”

“You’re right. Let’s do it.”

Imanishi and Yoshimura walked toward the coast. The town gradually dwindled into a fishing village. Suddenly the air smelled of the sea. The beach stretched far along the shore. Not one island could be seen on the vast horizon. The setting sun created a sash of light across the sea.

“It’s really boundless, isn’t it?” Yoshimura gazed at the sea as he walked along the sand. “The color of the Japan Sea is so dark,” Yoshimura exclaimed. “The Pacific Ocean is much lighter. To me it looks like the color of this sea is more intense.”

“You’re right. This color matches the scenery of the Tohoku region.”

The two men gazed out at the sea for some time.

“Imanishi-san, have you come up with anything?”

“You mean a poem?”

“You’ve probably come up with about thirty already.”

“It’s not that easy.” Imanishi smiled ruefully.

A boy from the fishing village walked past them, carrying a large fish basket.

“Coming to a place like this makes you realize how hectic Tokyo is,” Yoshimura said.

“This *is* relaxing.”

“I suppose you’d feel washed clean if you spent several days in a place like this. I feel like our hearts are full of grime.”

“You’re quite poetic yourself,” Imanishi said, looking at Yoshimura.

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