

**Akira**  
**KUROSAWA**

*Something Like an  
Autobiography*

Translated by Audie E. Bock

## Translator's Preface

I AWAITED my first meeting with Kurosawa Akira with a great deal of curiosity and a fair amount of dread. I had heard stories about his "imperial" manner, his severe demands and difficult temper. I had heard about drinking problems, a suicide attempt, rumors of emotional disturbance in the late sixties, isolation from all but a few trusted associates and a contempt for the ways of the world. I was afraid a face-to-face encounter could do nothing but spoil the marvelous impression I had gained of him through his films. Nevertheless I had a job to do: I was writing a book on those I considered to be Japan's best film directors, past and present. I had promised my publisher interviews with all the living artists; I could hardly omit the best-known Japanese director in the world. I requested an interview through his then producer, Matsue Yoichi. I waited. Six months went by, and my Fulbright year in Tokyo was drawing to a close. I was packing my bags and distributing my household goods among my friends in preparation for departure the next morning when the telephone rang. Matsue was calling to say Kurosawa and he would have coffee with me that very afternoon. In the interim I had of course interviewed all the other subjects for the book, and all had spoken very highly of Kurosawa. In fact, the whole chapter on Kurosawa was already roughed out with the help of previous publications and these directors' contributions, so it seemed possible that my meeting with the man himself would be nothing more than a formality. Not only Kurosawa's fellow directors, but film-company executives, independent producers and most of the older generation of Japanese critics regarded him as a special case, someone whose eccentricities were readily excused by his stature as an artist. Even the younger generation of filmmakers credited Kurosawa, whose style they opposed as representative of "the establishment," with bringing Japanese cinema to the attention of the world, and thus opening an international pathway for them. In short, although Kurosawa was indeed regarded as a difficult person to deal with, a large part of this difficulty seemed to lie in the fact that he was in a class by himself, the most important member of the Japanese film community, yet one whose standards were anything but typical. The unique and in some respects uncomfortable position Kurosawa held grew out of his unprecedented and as yet unmatched inter-national success. His 1950 film *Rashomon* not only opened the eyes of the world to the existence of a cinema in this remote, war-shaken country that could be universally appreciated, but launched his personal career into a course of consistent triumphs a decade and a half long. *Rashomon's* Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival was succeeded by countless awards for virtually every film he wrote and directed, period and contemporary dramas alike. The twelve films that Kurosawa made between 1950 and 1965 were all box-office successes in Japan, and eventually made an impact on international commercial cinema. The Italian Sergio Leone did him the ambiguous honor of remaking *Yojimbo* as a spaghetti Western called *A Fistful of Dollars*, while Hollywood itself remade two of his period films as Westerns: *Rashomon* as *The Outrage* and *Seven Samurai* as *The Magnificent Seven*. No other Japanese director has ever, received such homage from the West. But after the success of *Red Beard*, released in 1965,

Kurosawa's steady rise came to an abrupt halt, and his career seemed to suddenly collapse. Hollywood's discovery of his talent had led to a contract with 20th Century-Fox to direct the Japanese half of an ambitious bilateral vision of the Pacific war called *Tora! Tora! Tora!* It was not long before terrible communication problems developed over the budget, the schedule and, most important for Kurosawa, "final cut," or the right to approve the editing of his own work. Amid accusations that he was carrying perfectionism to the point of insanity, he left the project. To anyone who reads *Something Like an Autobiography*, Kurosawa's insistence on artistic control will come as no surprise; through-out his career his position on this point has been almost absolute. But in this case it seriously jeopardized his future as a filmmaker. He was unable to obtain financing for further projects until three fellow directors joined with him to produce *Dodes'kaden*, released in 1970, which he made, he says, "partly to prove I wasn't insane." It cost less than one million dollars and was shot in twenty-eight days, but it still lost money at the box office, the first time a Kurosawa film had ever done so. This discouragement and ill health—an undiagnosed gallstone condition—were the apparent causes of a suicide attempt in 1971. Recovery came only with successful medical treatment and surgery and—in 1973—an offer from the Soviet Union to direct a project of his own choosing, financed by Mosfilm. *Dersu Uzala*, a Russian story he had been attracted to since the time he was an assistant director, was the result. It required two years of filming in Siberia and gained the 1976 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Despite the acclaim, Kurosawa's projects continued to meet opposition. It was difficult for outsiders to understand why Japan's fore-most director was not working. The basic reason was that the Japanese film industry had entered a decline in the late 1960's and the budget for a Kurosawa film was no longer affordable. I did not know it at the time, but I would be meeting Kurosawa at a moment when two of his scripts in succession had been turned down because of their high production cost, and when he was about to start work on yet a third. For that third script to become a finished film would require the intervention of Kurosawa's American admirers Francis Ford Coppola, of *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now* fame, and George Lucas, the writer-director of *Star Wars* and *American Graffiti*, who persuaded 20th Century-Fox to negotiate for the purchase of the international distribution rights. An understandably wary Kurosawa finally agreed, and *Kagemusha*, the 1980 Cannes International Film Festival Golden Palm winner, became the first Japanese film ever to be released world-wide by an American company. There have been no regrets. The retelling of these incidents from a third-party latecomer's viewpoint may help to suggest some of the stubbornness and perfectionism of the man who will talk in the following pages about his life up to the point where *Rashomon* emerged to startle the world. By adhering strictly to the principle of authorship of his films and refusing to compromise on either artistry or energy, Kurosawa has managed to survive both the venom and the equally destructive glamour of the movie business. Kurosawa Akira has written, by his own admission, only a partial autobiography. If he were to tell the whole story about many people who have been associated with him, some who still are and some who have passed on, a certain amount of embarrassment and resentment would be the inevitable result. Kurosawa, as these pages and all of his films will show, has the capacity for—or perhaps the

fault of—telling more truth than most of us. In the film industry especially, it is both refreshing and unnerving to come across such a person.

However, I believe Kurosawa's reluctance to continue his auto-biography beyond 1950 stems not only from the maxim "If you can't say anything nice . . ." These events and people truly are too close in the past. Kurosawa has not yet retired from filmmaking, and to complete one's autobiography must be to complete all statements about one's life. My suspicion is that he will never catch up with himself and the urgency he feels to express himself in his primary medium, that of the film. He has, in fact, admitted that he hopes to end his life in the midst of his work, by collapsing on the set. Kurosawa in his own preface to this book expresses the fear that anything he has to say about himself will end up being about movies. Of course there are many anecdotes about the making of particular films here, and much more about his movie-making methods and attitudes in general. Yet the autobiography of Kurosawa Akira is not exclusively about movies. In large part, this work affords a first-person glimpse of an era and place very little known to us in the West. Kurosawa was a boy in Taisho Japan (1912-1926), when country life was still robust but peaceful with a nineteenth-century kind of slowness. City culture was beginning to absorb the ideas of the whole outside world—Symbolism, avant-gardism, the Russian revolution, new democracy, Dada, new technology. Kurosawa experienced both city and country life, and grew up in a household that combined the most modern with the most traditional philosophies. His autobiography, much of which is devoted to this growing-up period, thus provides a sweeping yet personal portrait of pre-war Japan. The personal experience of an artist in wartime, with all the frustrations of thought control and censorship, also emerges as a strong theme. The fact that his directing career could begin only after Japan had entered the Pacific War lends special poignancy to his struggles with the censors. The self-chastisement of the artist in his seventies looking back on the burning desire of youth to create has moved me more than once in the course of this translation. And some descriptive passages, notably those on the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, were so disturbing I had to stop and come back to them another day. It has been a great privilege to engage in this endeavor; to work with Mr. Kurosawa himself and his producer/script girl/archivist Miss Teruyo Nogami; with the support of the Japan Society of New York and its Education and Communications Director, Peter Grill; and with the understanding, precision and guidance of Charles Elliott as editor at Alfred A. Knopf. But it all came about from that first meeting over coffee in 1977, which set the tone for my relationship with Mr. Kurosawa. I expected an aloof ogre. I was far too intimidated to bring a tape recorder, and only hoped my ignorance would not offend him. My journalist's duties—to ask about those troublesome times of the last decade or so—were forgotten along with my composure. Too agitated to ask about anything so personal, I stumbled through the formalities and then finally hit upon the idea of asking Kurosawa about his impressions of Naruse Mikio, a director he assisted on one picture in 1938, and who is as little known in Japan today as he is in the United States. From anecdotes about Naruse we progressed to talk about Enomoto Ken'ichi, who starred in Kurosawa's 1945 *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* and who was one of the most popular comedians of the immediate prewar and wartime era. Most of the films in which he appeared, including many by

Kurosawa's mentor Yamamoto Kajiro, have been lost, so few people know about him today. The shy gentleman wearing sunglasses who answered my questions soon became enthusiastically involved in reminiscing. These were people and experiences obviously dear to him, but nearly for-gotten. He seemed pleased to recall them, even at the behest of an American film student/journalist whose Japanese—to this day—is far from perfect. The next thing I knew, I was being asked to take part in conversations when he was preparing to begin his autobiography. Later I was summoned on numerous occasions around the world to translate for him, to act as what he jokingly calls his "Foreign Minister," and have been flattered to do so. I hope that in translating Kurosawa Akira's account of his own life that I have conveyed the spirit and sensibilities of this unique personality in a fashion that is comprehensible to the Western reading public. I have only my experience as his interpreter to guide me (and I have no professional training as an interpreter), but the content of this volume is far more delicate and necessarily far more personal than interviews and press conferences. I have over the last four or five years seen Mr. Kurosawa in situations where he appears meek, vulnerable and, on occasion, testy—but only when provoked. These are usually meetings with the press. I have also seen him in situations where he is totally in command and clearly in love with what he is doing—making movies. The image I retain of him in my mind's eye directing the night battle scenes in *Kagemusha* is one of a man brimming with confidence, authority and potential. If some of the excitement I have experienced in the presence of this contradictory and inspiring personality emerges in the translation of this remarkable life, my hopes will have been fulfilled.

AUDIE BOCK

Berkeley, October 1981

## Preface

IN THE PRE-WAR era when itinerant home-remedy salesmen still wandered the country, they had a traditional patter for selling a potion that was supposed to be particularly effective in treating burns and cuts. A toad with four legs in front and six behind would be placed in a box with mirrors lining the four walls. The toad, amazed at its own appearance from every angle, would break into an oily sweat. This sweat would be collected and simmered for 3,721 days while being stirred with a willow branch. The result was the marvelous potion. Writing about myself, I feel something like that toad in the box. I have to look at myself from many angles, over many years, whether I like what I see or not. I may not be a ten-legged toad, but what confronts me in the mirror does bring on something like the toad's oily sweat. Circumstances have conspired, without my noticing it, to make me reach seventy-one years of age this year. Looking back over all this time, what is there for me to say, except that a lot has happened? Many people have suggested that I write an autobiography, but I have never before felt favorably disposed toward the idea. This is partly because I believe that what pertains only to myself is not interesting enough to record and leave behind me. More important is my conviction that if I were to write anything at all, it would turn out to be nothing but talk about movies. In other words, take "myself," sub-tract "movies" and the result is "zero." Not long ago I gave up trying to refuse, however. I think my capitulation derives from the fact that recently I read the autobiography of the French film director Jean Renoir. I once had the occasion to meet him, and even to be invited to dinner with him, over which we talked of many things. The impression I had of him from this en-counter was that he was not at all the type of person to sit down and write his autobiography. So for me to hear that he had ventured to do so was like having an explosion go off under me. In the foreword to that book Jean Renoir writes the following:

*Many of my friends have urged me to write my autobiography. . . . It is no longer enough for them to know that an artist has freely expressed himself with the help of a camera and a microphone. They want to know who the artist is.*

and further,

*The truth is that this individual of whom we are so proud is com-posed of such diverse elements as the boy he made friends with at nursery school, the hero of the first tale he ever read, even the dog belonging to his cousin Eugene. We do not exist through ourselves alone but through the environment that shaped us. . . . I have sought to recall those persons and events which I believe have played a part in making me what I am.\**

\* Jean Renoir, *My Life and My Films* (Jean Renoir Autobiography), Misuzu Shobii, Tokyo. Translated from the French by Norman Denny, p. /2. New York: Atheneum, 1974.

My own decision to write the present chapters, which in a slightly different form were first published in the Japanese magazine *Shukan Yomiuri*, was prompted by these words, and by the terrific impression Jean Renoir left on me when I met him—the feeling that I would like to grow old in the same way he did. There is one more person I feel I would like to resemble as I grow old: the late American film director John Ford. I am also moved by my regret that Ford did not leave us his autobiography. Of course, compared to these two illustrious masters, Renoir and Ford, I am no more than a little chick. But if many people are saying they want to know what sort of person I am, it is probably my duty to write something for them. I have no confidence that what I write will be read with interest, and I must explain that I have chosen (for reasons I will discuss later) to bring my account to a close in 1950, the year in which I made *Rashomon*. But I have undertaken this series with the feeling that I must not be afraid of shaming myself, and that I should try telling myself the things I am always telling my juniors. In the course of writing this thing resembling an autobiography, I have on several occasions sat "knees to knees" with a number of people and talked frankly to refresh my memory. They are: Uekusa Keinosuke (novelist, scriptwriter, playwright, friend from grammar-school days); Honda Inoshira (film director, friend from our assistant-director days); Muraki Yoshiro (art director, frequent member of my crew); Yanoguchi Fumio (sound recordist, a cherry tree of the same bloom as I at P.C.L., the pre-war predecessor of the PACO Film Company); Sato Masaru (music director, pupil of the late composer Hayasaka Fumio, a frequent collaborator of mine); Fujita Susumu (actor, star of my maiden work, *Sugata Sanshiro*); Kayama Yuzo (actor, one of many I put through severe training); Kawakita Kashiko (vice president of Toho-Towa Films, a lady who has aided me greatly abroad and who knows much about me and the reputation of my work in foreign countries); Audie Bock (American scholar of Japanese cinema, a person who when it comes to my films knows more about me than I do about myself); Hashimoto Shinobu (film producer, script-writer, collaborator with me on the scripts of *Rashomon*, *Ikiru* and *Seven Samurai*); Ide Masato (scriptwriter upon whom I have relied as collaborator for my recent films, my adversary in golf and shogi chess); Matsue Yoichi (producer, Tokyo University graduate, graduate of the Italian Cinecitta film school, a man whose activities are completely mysterious, very strange to me; my life abroad has on many occasions been shared with this handsome Frankenstein); Nogami Teruyo (my right hand, frequent member of my crew beginning as script girl on *Rashomon*, and in this endeavor as well, from start to finish, the person I make suffer). I would like to express my warmest thanks to all of these people.

AKIRA KUROSAWA

Tokyo, June 1981

## Babyhood

I WAS IN the washtub naked. The place was dimly lit, and I was soaking in hot water and rocking myself by holding on to the rims of the tub. At the lowest point the tub teetered between two sloping boards, the water making little splashing noises as it rocked. This must have been very interesting for me. I rocked the tub with all my strength. Suddenly it overturned. I have a very vivid memory of the strange feeling of shock and uncertainty at that moment, of the sensation of that wet and slippery space between the boards against my bare skin, and of looking up at something painfully bright overhead. After reaching an age of awareness, I would occasionally recall this incident. But it seemed a trivial thing, so I said nothing about it until I became an adult. It must have been after I had passed twenty years of age that for some reason I mentioned to my mother that I remembered these sensations. For a moment she just stared at me in surprise; then she informed me that this could only have been some-thing that occurred when we went to my father's birthplace up north in Akita Prefecture to attend a memorial service for my grandfather. I had been one year old at the time. The dimly lit place where I sat in a tub lodged between two boards was the room that served as both kitchen and bath in the house where my father was born. My mother had been about to give me a bath, but first she put me in the tub of hot water and went into the next room to take off her kimono. Suddenly she heard me start wailing at the top of my lungs. She rushed back and found me spilled out of the tub on the floor crying. The painfully bright, shiny thing over head, my mother explained, was probably a hanging oil lamp of the type still used when I was a baby. This incident with the washtub is my very first memory of myself. Naturally, I do not recall being born. However, my oldest sister, now deceased, used to say, "You were a strange baby." Apparently I emerged from my mother's womb without uttering a sound, but with my hands firmly clasped together. When at last they were able to pry my hands apart, I had bruises on both palms.

I think this story may be a lie, It was probably made up to tease me because I was the youngest child. After all, if I really had been born such a grasping person, by now I would be a millionaire and surely would be riding around in nothing less than a Rolls-Royce. After the washtub incident of my first year, I can now recall only a few other events from my babyhood, in a form resembling out-of-focus bits of film footage. All of them are things seen from my infant's vantage point on my nurse's shoulders. One of them is something seen through a wire net. People dressed in white flail at a ball with a stick, run after it as it dances and flies through the air, and pick it up and throw it around. Later I understood that this was the view from behind the net of the baseball field at the gymnastics school where my father was a teacher. So I must say that my liking for baseball today is deep-rooted; apparently I've been watching it since babyhood. Another memory from babyhood, also a sight viewed from my nurse's back, comes to mind: a fire seen from a great distance. Between us and the fire stretches an expanse of dark water. My home was in the Omori district of Tokyo, so this was probably the Omori shore of Tokyo Bay, and since the fire appeared very far away, it must have taken place somewhere near Haneda



(now the site of one of Tokyo's international airports). I was frightened by this distant fire and cried. Even now I have a strong dislike of fires, and especially when I see the night sky reddened with flames I am overcome by fear. One last memory of babyhood remains. In this case, too, I am on my nurse's back, and from time to time we enter a small, dark room. Years later I would occasionally recall this frequent occurrence and wonder what it was. Then one day all at once, like Sherlock Holmes solving a mystery, I understood: my nurse, with me still on her back, was going to the toilet. What an insult! Many years later my nurse came to see me. She looked up at this person who had reached nearly six feet and more than 150 pounds and just said, "My dear, how you've grown," as she clasped me around the knees and broke into tears. I had been ready to reproach her for the indignities she had caused me to suffer in the past, but suddenly I was moved by this figure of an old woman I no longer recognized, and all I could do was stare vacantly down at her.

For some reason, my recollections of the years between the time I learned to walk and my entrance into nursery school are less distinct than those of my babyhood. There is only one scene I recall, but I remember it in vivid colors.

The location is a streetcar crossing. On the other side of the tracks and closed railway crossing gate are my father, mother and siblings. I stand alone on this side. Between my side and my family's a white dog scampers back and forth across the tracks, wagging his tail. Then, after he has repeated this action several times and is just heading back in my direction, the train suddenly hurtles past. Right before my eyes the white dog tumbles down, split neatly in half. The body of the instantly killed beast was round and bright red, like a tuna sliced crossways for sashimi. I have no recollection at all of anything subsequent to this awful spectacle. It probably threw me into such a shock that I lost consciousness. But later I have a vague memory of a great number of white dogs in succession being brought before me, carried in baskets, held in people's arms, led on leashes. It seems that my father and mother were searching for a dog like the one that had been killed to give to me. According to my older sisters, I showed no gratitude for their efforts. On the contrary, whenever I was shown a white dog I would fly into a mad rage, crying and screaming, "No! No!" Wouldn't it have been better to bring me a black dog, perhaps, instead of a white one? Didn't the white ones simply remind me of what had happened? In any event, for more than thirty years after this incident I was unable to eat sashimi or sushi made of fish with red flesh. The clarity of my memory seems to improve in direct proportion to the intensity of shock I underwent. My next recollection is also a bloody one—a scene in which my brother is carried home with his head wrapped in blood-soaked bandages. He was four years older than I and, since I was not yet in school, he must have been in first or second grade. He had fallen from a high balance beam at the gymnastics school when he walked out on it and was blown off by the wind. He had come within a hairbreadth of losing his life. When the youngest of my older sisters saw him in his bloodied condition, I clearly recall her suddenly bursting out, "Let me die in his place!" It seems I come from a line that is overly emotional and deficient in reason. People have often praised us as sensitive and generous, but we appear to me to have a measure of

sentimentality and absurdity in our blood. It is a fact that I was enrolled in the nursery school attached to the Morimura Gakuen school, but I barely remember anything of what I did there. Just one thing I recall: we had to make a vegetable garden, and I planted peanuts. I think I did this because, having a weak digestive system at that age, I was never allowed to eat more than a few peanuts at a time. My plan was to grow a lot of my own. But I don't remember reaping much of a peanut harvest.

I think it was around this time that I saw my first movie or "motion picture." From our house in Omori we'd walk to Tachiaigawa Station, take the train that went toward Shinagawa and get off at a station called Aomono Yokocho, where there was a movie theater. On the balcony in the very center was one section that was carpeted, and here the whole family sat on the floor Japanese style to watch the show. I don't remember exactly what it was that I saw when I was in nursery school and what I saw in primary school. I just remember that there was a kind of slapstick comedy I found very interesting. And I remember a scene in which a man who has escaped from prison scales a tall building. He comes out onto the roof and jumps off into a dark canal below. This may have been the French crime-adventure film *Zigomar*, directed by Victorin Jasset and first released in Japan in November. Another scene I recall shows a boy and girl who have become friends on a ship. The ship is on the verge of sinking, and the boy is about to step into an already overfull lifeboat when he sees the girl still on the ship. He gives her his place in the lifeboat and stays behind on the ship, waving goodbye. This was apparently a film adaptation of the Italian novel *Il Cuore* (The Heart). But I much preferred comedy. One day when we went to the theater, they weren't showing a comedy, and I cried and fretted about it. I remember my older sisters telling me I was being so stupid and disobedient that a policeman was coming to take me away. I was terrified. However, my contact with the movies at this age has, I feel, no relation to my later becoming a film director. I simply enjoyed the varied and pleasant stimulation added to ordinary everyday life by watching the motion-picture screen. I relished laughing, getting scared, feeling sad and being moved to tears. Looking back and reflecting on it, I think my father's attitude toward films reinforced my own inclinations and encouraged me to become what I am today. He was a strict man of military background, but at a time when the idea of watching movies was hardly well received in educators' circles, he took his whole family to the movies regularly. Later in more reactionary times he steadfastly maintained his conviction that going to the movies has an educational value; he never changed. Another aspect of my father's thinking that had an important effect on me was his attitude toward sports. After he left the army academy, he took a position at a gymnastics school, where he set up facilities not only for traditional Japanese martial arts such as judo and kendo sword-fighting, but for all kinds of athletics. He built Japan's first swimming pool, and he worked to make baseball popular. He persevered in the promotion of all sports, and his ideas have stayed with me. When I was small, it seems that I was very weak and sickly. My father used to complain about this state of affairs in spite of the fact that "we had the yokozuna [champion sumo wrestler] Umegatani hold you in his arms when you were a baby so that you would grow strong." Nevertheless, I am my father's son.

I, too, like both watching and participating in sports, and I approach sports in terms of single-minded devotion to a discipline. This is clearly my father's influence.

### Morimura Gakuen

SOMETHING STRANGE happened one day after I had already become a film director. The Nichigeki Theater in Tokyo was showing a film by my contemporary Inagaki Hiroshi, *Wasurerareta kora* (Forgotten Children, 1949), which is about retarded children. In one scene a classroom full of children listens to the teacher while off to one side a solitary child sits at his desk amusing himself, oblivious of the others. As I watched this scene, I gradually came to feel deeply moved and depressed. Soon I was very uneasy. I had seen that child some-where. Who could it be? Suddenly I rose from my seat in the theater and went out into the lobby, where I sat down heavily on a sofa. Feeling somehow faint, I stretched out and put my head down. A woman theater employee came up to me and asked if I was all right. I replied, "Oh, yes, it's nothing," and tried to stand up, but it made me dangerously queasy. Finally I had to ask her to call a taxi to take me home. But what was it that made me so ill on that occasion? The answer is my own memory. Seeing *Wasurerareta kora*, I recalled a bad feeling—a feeling I did not really want to remember. When I was in my first year at the primary school of Morimura Gakuen, for me school might as well have been called jail. As I sat quietly in my chair in the classroom with my head full of bitterly painful thoughts, my only activity was to stare through the glass doors at the household servant who accompanied me to school. His worry evident, he would pace up and down the corridor outside. I don't like to think I was a retarded child, but it is a fact that I was slow. Because I understood nothing of what the teacher was saying, I just did whatever I wished to amuse myself. Finally my desk and chair were moved away from those of the other children, and I ended up getting special treatment. As the teacher gave his lessons, he would look over at me from time to time and say, "Akira probably won't understand this, but . . ." or "This will be impossible for Akira to solve, but . . ." The other children would turn to look at me and snicker when he did this, but no matter how bitter I felt, he was right. Whatever the subject, it was completely incomprehensible to me. I was pained and saddened. During morning exercises, when told to stand at attention, I would inevitably fall down in a faint. For some reason, when I heard the command "Attention!" I would not only assume a stiff posture, but also hold my breath. Later I would find myself lying on a bed in the school medical office being peered at by the nurse. I recall an athletic incident. It was a rainy day, so we were in the gymnasium playing dodge-ball. When the ball was thrown to me, I was unable to catch it. This must have been amusing to the others. The ball kept flying in my direction and hitting me. Sometimes it hurt, and since it was not amusing to me, I picked up the ball that hit me and threw it outside into the rain. "What are you doing?" the teacher shouted angrily at me. Now, of course, I understand perfectly well why he should have been annoyed, but at the time I could see nothing wrong about getting

rid of this ball that tormented me. So, for my first two years of primary school, life was a hellish punishment. It's a terrible thing to make retarded children go to school simply because some rule says they should. Children come in many varieties. Some five-year-olds have the intelligence of a child of seven, and, conversely, there are seven-year-olds who have not surpassed the average child of five. Intelligence develops at differing rates. It's a mistake to decree that a year's progress must take place within exactly one year, no more and no less. It seems I'm getting carried away. But when I was about seven, I was so isolated and school life was so miserable for me that it left a mark, and I have unconsciously slipped into writing from the view-point of such a child. As I remember it, the fog-like substance that clouded my brain finally vanished as if blown away by the wind. But my eyes did not open with clear intelligence until after my family moved to Koishi-kawa, another district of Tokyo. It happened when I was in the third grade at Kuroda Primary School.

### Crybaby

IT WAS IN the second or third term of my second year in school that I transferred to this school. Here everything was so entirely different from Morimura Gakuen that I was astounded. The schoolhouse itself was not painted white, but was an unadorned, humble wooden building rather in the style of a Meiji-era military barracks. At Morimura all the students had worn smart European-style uniforms with lapels; here they wore Japanese clothing with the wide trousers called hakama. At Morimura they had all worn "Landsel," German-style leather knapsacks for their books; here they carried canvas bookbags. At Morimura they had worn leather shoes; here they wore wooden clogs. Above all, their faces were different. They should have been, because while at Morimura students had all let their hair grow long, here they had their hair shaved close. And yet I think that the Kuroda students may have been even more surprised by me than I was by them. Imagine someone like me suddenly appearing among a group that lives by purely Japanese customs: a haircut like a sheltered little sissy's, a belted, double-breasted coat over short pants, red socks and low, buckled shoes. What's more, I was still in a wide-eyed daze and had a face as white as a girl's. I immediately became a laughingstock. They pulled my long hair, poked at my knapsack, rubbed snot on my clothes and made me cry a lot. I had always been a crybaby, but at this new school I immediately got a new nickname on account of it. They called me Konbeto-san ("Mr. Gumdrop") after a popular song that had a verse something like this:

*Konbeto-san at our house,  
He's so much trouble, so much trouble.  
He's always in tears, in tears.  
Blubber blubber, blubber blubber.*

The idea was that the crybaby's tears were as big as gumdrops. Even today I can't recall that name, "Konbeto-san," without a feeling of severe humiliation. But at the same time I entered the Kuroda Primary School, my older brother also arrived. He conquered them all straightaway with his genius, and there is no doubt in my mind that this "Konbeto-san" cried all the more because his brother did not lend his dignity to back him up. It took a full year for me to find a place for myself. At the end of that year I no longer cried in front of people, and no one called me "Konbeto-san" any more. I was now very respectably known as "Kuro-chan." The changes that occurred during that year were in part natural. My intelligence began to bud and blossom, growing with such speed that I caught up with my peers. Spurring my remarkable progress there were three hidden forces. One of these hidden forces was my older brother. We lived near Omagari, which was the center of the Koishikawa district, and every morning I would walk along the banks of the Edogawa River with my brother on the way to school. Since I was in a lower grade, school ended earlier for me and I would have to make my way back home alone in the afternoon. But every morning I went side by side with him. Every morning my brother would deride me thoroughly. The vast number of different expressions he found to abuse me with was in itself amazing. He did this not in a loud or conspicuous way, but in a very soft voice that was barely audible even to me. None of the passers-by could hear him. If he had been loud, I could have shouted back, or cried and run away, or covered my ears with my hands. But he spoke in a subdued patter so that I could never retaliate while he was continually showering me with scathing insults. I thought of complaining to my mother and older sister about the way my brother was treating me, but I couldn't do it. As soon as we got close to the school, my brother would say, "I know you're a dirty little rotten sissy coward, so I know you'll go straight to Mother and our sisters and tell them about me. Well, just you try it. I'll despise you even more." I found myself unable to lift a finger to stop his needling me like this. Nevertheless, this very same mean and nasty brother of mine always turned up at recess time when I needed him. Whenever I was being teased by the other children, he would appear from somewhere—I don't know how he happened to be watching. He was the center of attention for the entire school, and those pestering me were younger than he, so without exception they would shrink back when he arrived on the scene. Not even bothering to look at them, he would command,

"Akira, come here a minute." Relieved, I would happily run up to him and say, "What is it?" but he'd only reply, "Nothing" and walk briskly away. As this same sequence of events occurred over and over again, my fogged brain began to think a little: My brother's behavior on the way to school was different from his behavior in the schoolyard. Gradually his abuse on the way to school every morning became less hateful to me, and I began to listen in silent appreciation. Looking back on it now, I feel that this was the time when I began to grow from a baby-level intelligence toward the thinking capacity of a normal school-age child. There is one more incident I would like to relate about my brother. When I was still in my "Konbeto-san" period, my father suddenly decided to start taking us all to the Suifuryu practice pool, which was built out into the Arakawa River. At this time my brother was already wearing a white bathing cap with a black triangle pattern on it and swimming around the practice pool with a first-rate over-

arm crawl stroke. I was put in the charge of the Suifuryu teacher, who was apparently a friend of my father. Because I was the youngest child, my father spoiled me. But how irritated he must have been to see me carrying on like a girl, playing patty-cake and cat's cradle with my older sisters. He said if I learned to swim and got tanned by the sun—even if I just got a suntan without learning to swim—he would give me a reward. But I was afraid of the water, and I never entered the practice pool. It took many days of scolding by the swimming teacher for me even to get wet up to my navel. My older brother also accompanied me whenever we went to the pool, but as soon as we arrived, he would abandon me. He would swim straightaway to the diving raft out in the deepest part of the river, and he never came back till it was time to go home. I spent many a lonely and frightened day. Then one day, when I was finally learning how to kick my feet along with the other beginners, holding on to a log floating in the river, my brother appeared. He came rowing up to me in a boat and offered me a ride. Rejoicing, I reached out my hand and let him pull me up into the boat. As soon as I was on board, he began rowing vigorously out toward the middle of the river. Just when the flag and the reed blinds of the poolside hut began to look very small, he suddenly pushed me into the river. I flailed with all my strength to keep afloat and reach the boat with my brother in it. But as soon as I came close, he rowed away from me.

After he repeated this action several times, my strength drained from me. When I could no longer see the boat or my brother and had already sunk below the surface, he grabbed me by my loincloth and pulled me up into the boat. Shaken and surprised, I found there was nothing wrong with me except that I had swallowed a little water. As I sat gasping and wide-eyed, my brother said, "So you can swim after all, Akira." And sure enough, after that I wasn't afraid of the water any more. I learned to swim, and I learned to love swimming. On the way home that day my brother bought me some shaved ice with sweet red-bean sauce. As we ate, he said, "Akira, it's true that drowning people die smiling—you were." It made me angry, but it had seemed that way to me, too. I remembered having felt a strangely peaceful sensation just before I went under. A second hidden force that aided my growth was that of the teacher in charge of Kuroda Primary School, Tachikawa Seiji. Some two years after I transferred to Kuroda, Mr. Tachikawa's progressive educational principles came into direct conflict with the conservatism of the school principal, and my teacher resigned. He was subsequently invited to teach at Gyosei Primary School, where he was responsible for developing a great number of talented men. I will have more to say about Mr. Tachikawa, but I'd like to start with an incident that took place when I was still behind the others of my age in my intellectual development and very timid about it. Mr. Tachikawa came to my aid and for the first time in my life enabled me to feel what is called confidence. It happened during art class. In the old days—in my day, that is—art education was terribly haphazard. Some tasteless picture would be the model, and it was simply a matter of copying it. The student drawings that most closely resembled the original would always get the highest marks. But Mr. Tachikawa did nothing so foolish. He just said, "Draw whatever you like." Everyone took out drawing paper and colored pencils and began. I too started to draw—I don't remember what it was I attempted to draw, but I drew with all my might. I pressed so hard

the pencils broke, and then I put saliva on my fingertips and smeared the colors around, eventually ending up with my hands a variety of hues. When we finished, Mr. Tachikawa took each student's picture and put it up on the blackboard. He asked the class to express opinions freely on each in turn, and when it came to mine, the only response was raucous laughter. But Mr. Tachikawa turned a stern gaze on the laughing multitude and proceeded to praise my picture to the skies. I don't remember exactly what he said. But I do seem to recall that he called special attention to the places where I had rubbed my spit-covered fingers on the colors. Then he took my picture and put three big concentric circles on it in bright red ink: the highest mark. That I remember perfectly. From that time on, even though I still hated school, I somehow found myself hurrying to school in anticipation on the days when we had art classes. That grade of three circles had led me to enjoy drawing pictures. I drew everything. And I became really good at drawing. At the same time my marks in other subjects suddenly began to improve. By the time Mr. Tachikawa left Kuroda, I was the president of my class, wearing a little gold badge with a purple ribbon on my chest. I have another unforgettable memory of Mr. Tachikawa during my time at Kuroda Primary School. One day—I think it was during handicrafts class—he came into the classroom carrying a huge roll of thick paper. When he opened it up and showed it to us, laid out flat, it was a map, with streets drawn on it. He then instructed us to build our own houses on these streets and make our own town. Everyone started in with great enthusiasm. Many ideas came forth, and we ended with not only each student's own dream house, but with landscaping for tree-lined streets, ancient trees that had always been on the site and living fences of flowering vines. It was a lovely city, and it had been created by cleverly drawing out the individual personality of each child in the class. Upon completion of our project, our eyes shone, our eyes glowed and we gazed proudly at our handiwork. I remember the feeling of that moment as if it were yesterday. In the early Taisho era (1912-1926), when I started school, the word "teacher" was synonymous with "scary person." The fact that at such a time I encountered such free and innovative education with such creative impulse behind it—that I encountered a teacher like Mr. Tachikawa at such a time—I cherish among the rarest of blessings. There was a third hidden force that helped me grow. In my class, Kuroda there was another crybaby, a child who was worse than I. The very existence of this child was like having a mirror thrust in front of my face. I was forced to see myself objectively. I recognized that he was like me, and watching him and realizing how unacceptable his behavior was made me feel uneasy about myself. The child who resembled me and who afforded me the opportunity of seeing my own reflection, this perfect specimen of a crybaby, was named Uekusa Keinosuke, much later co-scriptwriter with me on several films. (Now, don't get angry, Kei-chan. We're both crybabies, aren't we? Only now you've become a romantic crybaby and I'm a humanist crybaby.)

Through some kind of strange fate, Uekusa and I were joined together from childhood to adolescence. We grew like two wisteria vines, clinging and twining around each other. The details of our life in this era can be found in a novel Uekusa wrote. But Uekusa has his viewpoint and I have mine. And because people want themselves to have been a certain way, they have a disturbing tendency to convince themselves they really were that way. Perhaps if I wrote an

account of my childhood with Uekusa to be compared with the account in his novel, we would come very close to the truth. Be that as it may, Uekusa was unable to describe his own childhood without writing about me, just as I can't write about myself without talking about him. When I try to write about Uekusa and me when we were students at Kuroda Primary School, all I can remember is the two of us like tiny dots of human figures in an Oriental landscape painting. I see us standing beneath the wisteria arbor on the school grounds, the clusters of flowers waving in the wind. I see us walking up the slope of Hattorizaka, or up Kagurazaka hill. I see us under a huge Zelkova tree busily nailing up straw dolls to exorcise evil spirits during a shrine visit at the Hour of the Ox, between two and four a.m. In every instance the landscape comes to mind with glistening clarity, but the two boys remain nothing more than silhouettes. Whether this lack of distinctness is due to the passage of so much time, or whether it has something to do with my personality, I can't tell. Whatever the cause, it requires a special effort for me to recall the detailed characteristics of these two boys. I have to do something equivalent to removing the wide-angle lens from the camera and re-placing it with a telephoto lens, then looking once again through the viewfinder. And even this isn't enough. I need to concentrate all my lights on these two boys and stop down the lens so as to record them clearly. Well, then, looking at Uekusa Keinosuke through my telephoto lens, I now see that, like me, he was someone who differed from the rest of the students at Kuroda Primary School. Even his clothes were different: he wore some kind of silk-like flowing material, and his hakama trousers weren't the usual duck cloth, but a soft fabric. The overall impression was that of a stage actor's child. He was like a miniature player of lover-boy roles, the kind you can knock over with one punch. Speaking of knocking him over with one punch, Uekusa the primary-school student was always falling down and crying. I remember him falling once on a stretch of bad road and ruining his fancy clothes.

I accompanied him as he cried all the way home. Another time, at a track meet, he fell in a mud puddle and turned his sparkling white athletic outfit pitch black; I had to try to comfort him while he blubbered. The saying goes that birds of a feather flock together. Crybaby Uekusa and I felt something in common; we were drawn to each other, and soon we were playing together continually. Gradually I came to treat Uekusa the way my older brother had treated me. Our relations are very frankly described in the passage about the track meet in Uekusa's novel. Once Uekusa, who always came in last in any race, for some inexplicable reason was running in second place. I rushed up behind and shouted, "Good! Good! Come on, come on Together we ran the last stretch and leaped across the finish line into the open arms of the beaming Mr. Tachikawa. When the meet was over, we took our prizes—colored pencils or paints or whatever—and went to see Uekusa's mother on her sickbed. She cried tears of joy and kept thanking me on her son's behalf. But, looking back on it all now, I am the one who should have been saying "Thank you," because while this weakling Uekusa made me feel protective toward him, I somehow at the same time became someone the school bully could no longer push around. Mr. Tachikawa seems to have looked favorably on our friendship. He once called me in for consultation as the class president and asked me what I thought of appointing a vice president. Thinking this meant I had been doing a poor job as president, I fell into a dark silence. Mr.



Tachikawa studied my expression and asked whom I would recommend. I named one of the best students in the class. Mr. Tachikawa said that he would prefer to try putting a less impressive student in that position. I stared at him in surprise. He went on to say with a big smile that if we put someone who was not very good in the job now, that person would be sure to shape up and prove worthy. Then, addressing me as my classmates did, he said, "So, Kuro-chan, what do you say to making Uekusa vice president?" At this point I became painfully aware of the warmth of Mr. Tachikawa's feeling toward us. Deeply moved, I stood staring at him. "Fine," he announced, "it's all settled, then." He slapped me on the shoulder and with a grin told me to go and tell Uekusa's mother straightaway; he knew she'd be happy. As he walked away, there seemed to be a kind of halo around his head. From this time on, Uekusa wore a silver badge with a red ribbon on his chest, and in both the classroom and the schoolyard he was always at my side. Recognition of him as vice president of the class was instantaneous. It was as if he had been planted in the flower pot of the class vice presidency and placed in full sun. He began to bloom. Mr. Tachikawa had referred to him as "not very good" in a way that may sound disparaging, but in reality I think he had observed the talent that lay dormant within Uekusa.

### Whirlwind

IN TERMS OF intelligence, my brother and I were about ten years apart, but in reality our ages differed by only four years. So when I suddenly began to become less of a baby and more of a little boy, as I started the third grade in primary school, my brother was just entering middle school. At this point, an event no one could have imagined took place. As I have already mentioned, my brother was a brilliant student. When he was in the fifth grade, he placed third on the academic-ability examination given to all primary-school students in the city of Tokyo. When he was in the sixth grade, he placed first. However, when he took the entrance examination for the top-ranking state middle school, which would have sent him on to the First High School and eventually to Tokyo Imperial University, he failed. This incident was like a nightmare for the entire household, from my father on down. I remember the strange atmosphere that took hold at home. It was as if a sudden whirlwind had passed through, tearing things apart. My father sat staring vacantly into space, my mother wandered aimlessly around the house and my older sisters spoke softly among themselves and averted their gaze from my brother. Even I experienced a feeling of irrational rage and mortification over this event. (I still can't understand why he failed that entrance examination. He had never had any difficulty with exam questions before, and after this test he seemed to be full of his usual confidence. There are only two explanations I can think of: One is that, in the final selection process, preference was given to the children of alumni; the other is that in the oral-interview part of the examination my conceited and individualistic brother responded in a way that could not be measured by their testing standards.) Oddly enough, I have no recollection of my brother's mood or behavior at this time.

Probably he assumed his usual detached air, but I'm sure this incident was a terrible shock for him too, underneath it all. The evidence for my suspicions lies in the fact that immediately afterward, his personality changed suddenly and dramatically. At my father's suggestion, he entered the Seijo Middle School in Wakamatsu-cho, Tokyo. This school was very much like a military academy, and I believe my brother reacted against the regimentation. In any case, he now seemed to be willing to throw his academic career to the winds, for he developed a passionate addiction to literature. Confrontations between my brother and my father became frequent. My father had been in the first graduating class of the Imperial Army's Toyama Academy and had subsequently become a teacher. He was so remarkable a teacher that some of his students had advanced to the rank of general; and his educational principles were terribly spar-tan. It was inevitable that he would come into direct conflict with my brother, who was becoming infatuated with ideas gleaned from foreign literature. Unable to understand such a rift between father and son, all I could do was look on sadly. But just as this desolating wind overtook my home, yet another cold gust of change began to blow. My oldest sister's child is the same age as I am, which means that when I was born, this sister had already left home to be married. My oldest brother is also much older than I, so by the time I was becoming a mentally and physically aware human being, he had long since left home and I saw him only very rarely. My second oldest brother died of illness as a child before I was born. So the siblings I actually grew up with consisted of the older brother I have been writing about and three of my older sisters. I was the youngest member of the family. All of my sisters have the character meaning "generation" or "representative," pronounced "yo," at the end of their names. Beginning with the oldest who had already left home, they are Shigeyo, Haruyo, Taneyo and Momoyo. But I always addressed my sisters at home according to their ages, so for me these three were "Big Sister," "Middle Big Sister" and "Little Big Sister." As I mentioned earlier, my brother would have nothing to do with me, so I always played with my sisters. (I'm still good at playing patty-cake and cat's cradle. When I demonstrate these skills to my current acquaintances or motion-picture crew, I invariably draw a surprised reaction. I'm sure they will be much more surprised to read about my "Konbeto-san" period. ) The sister I spent the most time with was "Little Big Sister." I remember very clearly one time when we were playing at the school where my father taught in the Omori district. We were in a funnel-shaped corner and suddenly a twirling gust of wind lifted the two of us, clutching at each other, into space. We floated in the air a moment and the next second crashed to the ground. I cried all the way home, grasping her hand tightly in mine as we ran. When I was in the fourth grade, this dear sister of mine became ill. Quite suddenly, as if touched by a swift, evil wind, she died. I can never forget the forlorn smile on her face when we went to visit her in the Juntendo Hospital. Nor can I forget playing with her at the time of the Doll Festival on March 3. In my family we had an heirloom set of festival dolls representing the Emperor and Empress. We also had the three court ladies, five court musicians, an Urashima Taro (a kind of underwater Rip Van Winkle who took a ride on a tortoise and came home an old man) and a court lady with a Pekinese dog on a leash. There were two pairs of gold folding screens, two lanterns and five little gold lacquer trays complete with the tiny dishes and utensils

for ceremonial meals. There was even a silver brazier small enough to fit in the palm of my hand. With the lights turned out, soft gleams from the lantern candles in the darkened room fell on the dolls arranged on their five-tier stand of scarlet wool felt. In the eerie glow they seemed so lifelike as to start speaking at any moment, and this exquisite beauty was just a little bit frightening to me. Little Big Sister would call me over to sit before the doll display, put one of the trays in front of me and proffer the brazier. She would treat me to a fraction of a thimbleful of sweet white sake in one of the tiny doll-sized cups. Little Big Sister was the prettiest of my three sisters who lived at home, and she was almost too gentle and kind. Her beauty was something of a glass-like transparency, delicate and fragile, offering no resistance. When my brother fell off the balance beams and injured his head at school, it was this sister who sobbed and said she wanted to die in his place. Even as I write about her now, my eyes burn with tears and I keep having to blow my nose. The day her funeral was held, the whole family and all our relatives gathered at the main hall of the Buddhist temple to listen to the priests recite sutras. When the recitation became quite noisy, as they all chimed in with the wooden drum and the gong sounding, I suddenly broke into peals of laughter. Much as my father, mother and sisters glared at me, I couldn't stop laughing. My brother led me outside, still laughing. I was prepared for a terrific scolding. But my brother did not seem in the least angry. Nor did he leave me out in front and return to the ceremony in the main hall as I expected him to do. Instead, he turned and looked back toward the loud proceedings and said, "Akira, let's get farther away." He set out briskly across the paving stones toward the temple gate. As he forged ahead, he spat out the word "Idiotic!" and I was happy. The reason I had started laughing was that I felt the same way. To me, the whole thing was absurdly funny. When I heard my brother's opinion, I felt relieved. I wondered if my sister would be at all consoled by that ceremony in the main hall. She died at the age of sixteen. For some strange reason, I remember the Buddhist name she received after death in its entirety: To Rin Tei Ko Shin Nyo. ("Peach Forest Righteous Sunbeam Sincerity Woman").

## Kendo

IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS of the Taisho era, kendo swordsmanship was added to the regular curriculum beginning in the fifth grade. It was a two-hour-a-week class, beginning with instruction in wielding bamboo swords. Then we learned how to parry and thrust, and finally we put on the old, sweaty fencing outfits that had been in the school for generations and embarked on real contests—best two out of three. Usually the fencing instruction was given by one of the regular teachers who was especially well versed in kendo. But sometimes a fencing master who ran his own school would appear with an assistant to polish and correct what had been taught. They would pick out the most promising students to be given lessons, and occasionally the master and his assistant would use real swords and demonstrate the basic techniques of their school's style. The fencing master who came to Kuroda Primary School was named Ochiai

Magosaburo. (Or it may have been Matasaburo. In any case, it was a typically swordsman-like name that I can't remember correctly now.) He was an imposing and exceptionally strong man, and when he demonstrated his swordplay style with his assistant, his power was awesome. The students gathered to watch all held their breath. I was one of those singled out as meriting closer attention by the master. He offered me a personal lesson, and I suddenly became enthusiastic. I squared off with him, raised my bamboo sword over my head and shouted "O-men!" ("To the face!" or "En garde!"). But as I charged toward him, I felt a sensation of lifting off the ground, my feet kicking in the air, with a deft movement of Ochiai Magosaburo's muscular arm grasped me at his shoulder height. I had been taken completely by surprise. My respect for this swordsman naturally rose beyond measure. I went straight to my father and begged him to enter me in Ochiai's fencing school. He was overjoyed. I don't know if my interest had occasioned a resurgence of the samurai blood in my father's veins or the reawakening of his military-academy teacher's spirit, but, whichever it was, the effect was remarkable. This happened at about the time that my brother, for whom my father had cherished great expectations, began to go astray. My father had spoiled me up until that time, but now he seemed to transfer his hopes from my brother to me and began to treat me with great attention and strictness. My father was more than agreeable to my devoting myself to kendo, and insisted that I take calligraphy lessons as well. Moreover, I was instructed to be sure to pay my respects at the Hachiman shrine on my way back from my morning kendo lesson at the Ochiai school, in order to develop the propel spirit. The Ochiai school was far away. From my house to Kuroda Primary School was far enough to fatigue a child's legs, but to the Ochiai school was more than five times as far. Fortunately, the particular Hachiman shrine my father ordered me to visit every morning was right next to Kuroda Primary School and more or less on the route from the fencing school. But, following my father's orders, I had to go to the Ochiai school in the morning, visit the Hachiman shrine on my way back from the fencing lesson, return home to eat breakfast and then go off to Kuroda Primary School. After school, I had to go to the calligraphy teacher's house, which luckily happened to be on the way from school to my house. And then I was to go to Mr. Tachikawa's home. The latter trip was my own choice. Mr. Tachikawa had left Kuroda Primary School, but Uekusa and I continued to visit him at his home. We passed many a fulfilling day in the atmosphere of free education and respect for individuality he created, and the warm hospitality his wife provided. No matter what my other duties, I was unable to forgo these precious hours. In order to carry out this daily program, I had to leave home before dawn in the morning, returning after sunset at night. It occurred to me to try to evade the shrine visits, but my father prevented that. Telling me it would provide a record of my piety, he gave me a little diary in which I was to receive the imprint of the shrine seal every morning. There was no way out. My innocent request for kendo lessons had brought me a load of unexpected tasks. But I had asked for it, so there was nothing I could do. My father accompanied me to the Ochiai fencing school when I applied for admission, and, beginning the very next morning, I followed this rigorous daily schedule for several years, until I graduated from Kuroda Primary School. The only surcease came on Sundays and during summer vacation. My father did not permit me to wear tabi socks with my wooden clogs, even in winter.

So in the cold season my feet were pitifully chapped and frostbitten. It was my mother who attempted to rescue me with hot foot baths and medication. My mother was a typical woman of the Meiji era, Japan's age of swift modernization, during which women were still expected to make extreme sacrifices so that their fathers, husbands, brothers or sons could advance. Beyond that, she was the wife of a military man. (Years later when I read the historical novelist Yamamoto Shugoro's *Nihon fudoki* [An Account of the Duties of Japanese Women], I recognized my mother in these impossibly heroic creatures, and I was deeply moved.) In such a way as to escape my father's notice, she would listen to all my complaints. Writing about her like this makes it sound as if I am trying to set her up as a model for some moral tale. But that is not the case. She simply had such a gentle soul that she did these things naturally. In the first place, I believe that things were the opposite of what they appeared on the surface. My father was actually the sentimentalist, and my mother the realist. During the war years, when I visited my parents in Akita Prefecture, to which they had been evacuated, I had to part with them under conditions that meant we might never meet again. I was on a lonely road that stretched off into the distance from the front gate of the house. I kept looking back over my shoulder at my parents standing there to see me off. It was my mother who immediately turned and hurried back into the house. My father kept standing there perfectly still, looking in my direction, until he appeared as small as a bean. During the war there was a popular song called "Father, You Were Strong" ("Chichi yo, anata wa tsuyokatta"), but I want to say "Mother, You Were Strong." My mother's strength lay particularly in her en-durance. I remember an amazing example. It happened when she was deep-frying tempura in the kitchen one day. The oil in the pot caught fire. Before it could ignite anything else, she proceeded to pick up the pot with both hands—while her eyebrows and eyelashes were singed to crinkled wisps—walk calmly across the tatami-mat room, properly put on her clogs at the garden door and carry the flaming pot out to the center of the garden to set it down. Afterward the doctor arrived, used pincers to peel away the blackened skin and applied medication to her charred hands. I could hardly bear to watch. But my mother's facial expression never betrayed the slightest tremor. Nearly a month passed before she was able to grasp something in her bandaged hands. Holding them in front of her chest, she never uttered a word about pain; she just sat quietly. No matter how I might try, I could never do the same. I seem to have strayed off the subject; let me return briefly to the Ochiai fencing school, kendo) and myself. From the time I began my daily attendance at the Ochiai school, I assumed all the affectations of a boy fencer. I was a child, so this was predictable behavior. After all, I had read about all the great swordsmen from Tsukahara Bokuden (1489-1570) to Araki Mataemon (1599-1637) in books from Mr. Tachikawa's library. My apparel at the time was the Kuroda Primary School outfit, rather than that of the Morimura Gakuen, as suited a prospective samurai swordsman: a splash-pattern kimono over duck-cloth hakama trousers, heavy wooden clogs. To get a better picture, try imagining Fujita Susumu in the role of Sugata Sanshiro in my first film. Then shrink him to one third as tall and half as wide and have him carrying a bamboo sword in the sash tied around his kendo outfit. That will give you the idea. Every morning while the eastern sky was still dark, I set out by the light of the streetlamps on the street that followed the

Edogawa River, my wooden clogs scraping along the road. I passed Kozakurabashi bridge, Ishikiribashi bridge, and after crossing Ishikiribashi to the street with the trolley tracks, just about the time I reached Hattoribashi bridge I would pass the first trolley of the day going in the opposite direction. I crossed the Edogawabashi bridge. My journey to this point took about thirty minutes. From there I walked another fifteen minutes or so in the direction of Otowa, turned left and slowly climbed the hill toward Mejiro. In about another twenty minutes I could hear the drum announcing the start of morning lessons at the Ochiai fencing school. Forcing myself to hurry, in another fifteen minutes I arrived at the school. From the time I left home, walking without taking so much as a glance aside, it took an hour and twenty minutes. Lessons at the Ochiai school began with meditation. All of the disciples of Ochiai Magoemon (what was his name?) gathered together and sat down on the floor in formal position, facing the shelf for the Shinto deities, which was lit by votive candles. We began by concentrating our strength in the pits of our stomachs and banishing all worldly thoughts. The room in which we sat had a hard, cold board floor. In order to withstand the winter temperatures, especially when dressed in nothing more than a single layer of fencing costume, you had to concentrate all your strength in your stomach. It was cold enough to make your teeth chatter, so there was hardly any leftover space for an idle worldly thought to pop into your head. In winter all we thought about was getting warm as quickly as possible, but in good weather it took a tremendous concentration of energy to banish those mental obstructions. At the end of the sitting, the parrying-and-thrusting practice began. We separated according to the rank of our skills and spent thirty minutes in prearranged combat. Then we took formal sitting position again to give thanks to the fencing master, and the morning lesson was over. On cold winter days, by this time our bodies would be giving off steam. But after leaving the fencing school and setting off toward the shrine, my footsteps became heavy. With my stomach empty and breakfast the only thing on my mind, I would push on to the shrine so as to get home faster. On clear days it was about this time that the first rays of sunshine would strike the top of the gingko tree in the shrine compound. Standing in front of the worship hall, I would ring the "alligator mouth" gong (a hollow metal bell of a wide, flattish shape rung by shaking the clapper-studded braided cloth rope with which it is hung high above the collection box on the exterior of the main shrine building). After clapping my hands in prayer, I would go to the priest's house in one corner of the com-pound and stand in the entryway, shouting out, "Good morning!" The priest, his kimono, his hakama and his face all white, would come out. Without saying a word, he would take the little diary I held out in front of him and next to the date he would stamp it with the shrine seal. Whenever I saw him, his cheeks were puffed up and his jaws were working, so I guess I always caught him eating his breakfast. Then I descended the shrine's stone steps and, passing in front of the Kuroda Primary School, to which I had to return immediately, I headed for home and my own breakfast. From the foot of Ishikiribashi bridge, as I approached my house along the Edogawa River, the morning sun at last came up and shone full in my face. Every time the sun shone on me in the morning, I couldn't help thinking that from that moment on my day would begin to be like that of an ordinary child. But it wasn't out of discontent that this feeling came to me; it was a sense of self-

sufficiency and satisfaction. And indeed from then on my ordinary child's day began. It followed the usual schedule of breakfast, going to school all day and returning home in the afternoon. But, compared to the teaching of Mr. Tachikawa, the instruction I now received at school seemed deficient. The hours in the classroom struck me as dry and tasteless, a painful exercise to be endured. I did not get along well with the new teacher who took over our class. Until my graduation, it was as if we were continuously engaged in a contest of wills. He seemed to be completely opposed to every aspect of Mr. Tachikawa's educational philosophy, and he was forever making sarcastic comments about his predecessor's teaching methods. He'd say, "Mr. Tachikawa probably would have said this," or "Mr. Tachikawa probably would have done that," and his face always bore a contemptuous smile as he spoke. Every time he did this, I would give the foot of my friend Uekusa, sitting next to me, a good kick. Uekusa would respond with a quick grin. Something like this even occurred: It was during art class. We were to paint a still-life of a white vase full of cosmos flowers that decorated the classroom. I wanted to capture the volume of the vase, so I emphasized its shaded areas with a thick purple. I showed the light leaves of the cosmos as masses of green smoke, and the pink and white blossoms as scattered splashes. The new teacher took my picture and put it up on the side of the board we called the pin-up board. Here the best examples of students' calligraphy or compositions or pictures were put up as a model for the rest of us to follow. The teacher called out, "Kurosawa, stand up." I was very pleased, thinking I was about to be praised again, and I stood up proudly. But the new teacher, pointing at my picture, gave me a thorough dressing down.

"What's the matter with the shading on this vase—where do you see any dark purple? What is this green here that looks like a cloud? If you think that looks like the leaves of cosmos flowers, you're crazy." There were too many barbs and too much venom in his words. His accusations were full of ill will. I stood like a stick, feeling the color draining from my face. What was this all about? After school was over that day, Uekusa came running up behind me as I nursed my wounds in silence on the way down the Hattorizaka slope. "Kuro-chan, that was mean, wasn't it? It was too mean! It was awful! It was unforgivable!" He kept repeating these things all the way home. I think this was the first time I ever experienced the savagery that lies in the human heart. I could never find pleasure studying under this teacher. But I acquired a determination to work so hard that this teacher would never be able to criticize me again.

## Calligraphy

I USED TO return home exhausted in the afternoon, tired out from all the walking and from having to prove myself to the teacher whom I hated. The way seemed three times as long as it had in the morning, and still longer because I had to look forward to a calligraphy lesson. My father loved calligraphy, and frequently put hanging scrolls of calligraphy on display in the

tokonoma alcove of our house. Only very rarely did he put up paintings. The scrolls he usually hung were either ink rubbings of inscribed stone monuments from China or characters written by his Chinese acquaintances. I still recall a particular antique rubbing of a gravestone from Hanshan Temple. Here and there the characters had been broken or chiseled off the stone, and there were blank spaces in the middle of some sentences. My father would fill in the missing words, and in this way he taught me the poem "A Night Spent by the Maple Bridge" by the Chinese poet Chang Chi of the T'ang Dynasty. Even now I can recite this poem off the top of my head, and I can write it with a brush just as easily. Some years ago I attended a gathering at a Japanese-style restaurant where this same poem by Chang Chi, written in an overly graceful hand, was hanging as a scroll in the art alcove. Without really thinking about it, I quickly read it aloud. The actor Kayama Watt overheard me, and staring in wonder said, "Master, your accomplishments amaze me." It's no wonder that Kayama should have been impressed. Reading the script for *San jurt5* aloud, he had a line that was to be "Wait behind the stable." Mistaking "stable" for another character with the same radical, he read it, "Wait behind the outhouse." Nevertheless I gave him a major role in this 1962 film and used him again later in *Red Beard* (1965). But now I must tell the truth, and the fact is that I could read that poem only because it was from Hanshan Temple. Presented with any other Chinese poem, I would have simply stammered. Of another Chinese poem in a hanging scroll my father liked, for ex-ample, I remember only the lines

*For your sword, use the Full Moon Blue Dragon Blade  
For your study, read the Tso Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals.*

This is of limited interest. I have strayed from the subject again. The point is that I cannot understand how my father, who loved calligraphy so much, could have sent me to study with the kind of teacher he did. Perhaps it was because the teacher's school was in our neighborhood, and because my brother had also gone there. When my father went to enroll me as a student, the teacher inquired after my brother and urged my father to send him back for more lessons. Apparently my brother had done extremely well there. But I was unable to find anything interesting about the teacher's calligraphy. He was indeed strict and forthright, but I found his writing without flavor or fragrance—just like printed characters in a book. I had my father's orders, however, so I went to the school every day and, using the teacher's calligraphy as a model, I practiced writing. Both my father and the calligraphy teacher let their facial hair grow, as was fashionable in the Meiji era. But while my father had both a full beard and mustache in the manner of a Meiji elder statesman, the calligraphy teacher wore only a mustache, in the manner of a Meiji petty bureaucrat. He invariably sat behind a desk wearing a stern expression, as if challenging the students lined up behind their desks across from him. Beyond him we could see the garden. Dominating the garden was a huge construction of shelves crowned by a row of bonsai miniature trees displaying the antique bends of their branches. As I looked at them, I couldn't help thinking how like them were these students at their desks. When a student felt he



had done a good piece of writing, he would carry it up to the teacher with great trepidation. The teacher would look at it and take a brush with red ink to correct the strokes he did not like. This procedure would be repeated over and over again. Finally, when the teacher approved the student's writing sample, he would take out a seal I couldn't read because it was carved in ancient seal script and stamp it in blue on the side of the student's work. Everyone called this the Blue Seal, and when you got the Blue Seal, you could go home for the day. Since I wanted nothing except permission to leave quickly and go to Mr. Tachikawa's house, I applied myself with fervor to copying the teacher's calligraphy. But you can't love what you don't like. About half a year later I asked my father if I could quit the calligraphy lessons. With my brother's assistance, I succeeded in getting permission to stop. I don't remember my brother's exact words, but he had a very logical understanding of the vague dissatisfaction I felt with the teacher's writing. He came to the conclusion that it was perfectly natural I should feel as I did. I remember I sat in amazement and listened to him as if he were talking about someone else. When I left the calligraphy school, I was still at the stage of writing four-character poems on large sheets of paper in block-style script. To this day I'm very good at that kind of calligraphy. But if I have to write anything smaller than that or write characters in cursive script, it's no good at all. In later years I was told by an older colleague in the movie world that "Kuro-san's writing isn't writing, it's pictures."

### Murasaki and Shonagon

WHEN I DECIDED to write this thing resembling an autobiography, I got together with Uekusa Keinosuke to talk about the past. On that occasion he told me about how, on the hilly street where Kuroda Primary School was situated, called Hattorizaka, I once told him: "You are Murasaki Shikibu and I am Sei Shonagon." I have no recollection whatever of having said this.

In the first place, it's not possible that we—in primary school—could have been reading Murasaki's *Tale of Genji* or Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book*, both written around the middle of the Heian period (794-1185). But now that I think about it carefully, Mr. Tachikawa had told us a great deal about these classics of early Japanese literature during our visits, which took place after my calligraphy lessons. Uekusa was generally there, waiting for me, and we spent many pleasant hours with our former teacher. So I think this exchange between Uekusa and me could have occurred as we walked home together down the hill between Denzu-in and the Edogawa River. Even so, the idea of comparing ourselves to Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shonagon was outrageously conceited. Yet I have some inkling of why this childish utterance might have taken place: At that time Uekusa's compositions were long narratives, while mine were always very short descriptions of impressions. In any event, when it comes to friends from that time of my life, Uekusa and I were together so much that he is the only one I remember anything about. But

our home lives were entirely different: His was a townsman's household, while mine had a samurai atmosphere. So when we sit back and talk over old times, the things he remembers well have a completely different character from those I recall. For example, Uekusa retains a very vivid impression of the time he caught a glimpse of his mother's white calves above the hem of her kimono. He also remembers that the prettiest girl in school was the girls' group leader of our class, that she lived in the Otaki area on the Edogawa River; he remembers her name and tells me, "You seemed to be interested in her, Kuro-chan." I have no recollection at all of these kinds of things. What I remember has to do with getting better at kendo and becoming a sub-captain in my third term of the fifth grade at primary school. And how as a reward my father brought me a suit of black kendo armor. And I remember that in a fencing match I beat five opponents in succession with a reverse body twist. I remember that the captain of the opposing team was the son of a fabric dyer and when we were in close combat he gave off a terrific odor of dark-blue dye. For some reason, all of my recollections betray this martial spirit. Among them there is one incident that remains the most memorable. It was when I was ambushed by students from another primary school. As I was on my way home from the Ochiai fencing school, I came to a fish shop near Edogawabashi bridge. In front of it was a gathering of seven or eight slightly older children whose faces I did not recognize. They carried bamboo swords, bamboo poles and sticks. Children have their territories staked out, too. Since this was not Kuroda Primary School territory and these children were looking at me in a strange way, I stopped. But since I had taken on the airs of a boy swordsman, I could not allow myself to show any fear in a situation like this. I put on a blasé expression and walked on past the fish shop, and since nothing happened even when I had my back to them, I breathed a sigh of relief. Immediately afterward I felt something whizzing dangerously near my head. Just as I moved my hand to touch my head, I was hit. Swinging around, I saw a hail of rocks coming at me. The group of children remained silent, but all of them were heaving stones in my direction. It was their silence that terrified me. My first impulse was to run, but I felt that if I did, my poor bamboo sword would shed tears of humiliation. With this in mind, I took the bamboo sword I was carrying and brought it round to aim at their eyes. But since my kendo outfit was dangling from the end of my sword, the move didn't achieve quite the effect it was supposed to. The children, however, interpreted my move as a threat, and, shouting something to one another, they all came at me flailing their weapons. I, too, flailed my sword with all my might. My kendo outfit went flying off the end of it, and my sword became light. And once they raised their voices, my adversaries ceased to be so frightening as they had been when silent. Grasping my lightened sword and yelling "O-men!" ("To the face) or "Kote!" ("Gauntlets!") or "Do" ("To the torso!") and such things as I had learned in my kendo lessons, I went at them with the bamboo blade. For some reason, they didn't surround me, but all seven or eight bunched up together and faced me. They came forward wildly brandishing their weapons, so there was no backing down. These myriad flying arms were imposing, but by merely jumping to one side or the other it was easy for me to gain the advantage. I remembered that in such a situation it was dangerous to close in too soon, so I avoided that, and the result was that I had plenty of leeway. Finally they fled into the fish shop.

The proprietor, wielding one of the long shoulder poles used to support loads at each end, came running out from the interior. At that point I picked up the high wooden clogs I had kicked off when it had become a great swordfight, and fled. I clearly remember escaping into a narrow alleyway that had sewage running down the middle of it. I ran zigzag, jumping from side to side to avoid the foul-smelling water. It wasn't until I came out of the other end of this alley that I stopped to put on my clogs. I have no idea what happened to my kendo outfit. It probably became the war spoils of my adversaries. My mother was the only person I told about this incident. I really didn't want to tell anyone at all, but since I had lost my kendo) outfit, I had to talk to her. When my mother heard my story, she said nothing, but went to the closet and brought out the ken& outfit my brother was no longer using. Then she washed the gash on my head where the rock had hit me and put soft ointment on the wound. I had no other injuries. But to this day a scar remains from the stone. (As I have been writing about my bundled up kendo outfit and my high wooden clogs, I have had a sudden realization. Without knowing it at the time, it was these objects from my past that I employed in my first film, *Sugata Sanshiro* [1943] as visual devices showing Sanshiro's new dedication to a life of judo. Perhaps it is the power of memory that gives rise to the power of imagination.) As a consequence of this incident, my route to and from the Ochiai fencing school underwent a slight alteration. I did not pass by that fish shop a second time. But this was not because I was afraid of those urchins. I simply didn't feel like running into that fish-shop proprietor's carrying pole again. I am sure I must have told Uekusa about this incident at some point, but he now remembers nothing of it. When I accused him of being an old lecher who could only remember things having to do with women, he vehemently denied it. The fact is that this pretty boy you could knock over with one punch was a real problem when it came to knowing his own limits. When we were in the sixth grade, there was a battle with some students from another primary school on Kuseyama mountain. The enemy had their encampment on top of a hill, and they came at us with a shower of stones and dirt clods. Our allies were skirting this by keeping to the hollow created by the bluff as they climbed. Just as I was contemplating sending some men around behind the enemy, Uekusa suddenly shouted out something and ran up the hill, the picture of recklessness. What can you do when your weakest man takes it upon himself to charge the enemy alone? On top of that, this was a cliff that took more than the usual fortitude for anyone to climb. Covered with wet red clay, it was so steep and slimy that you slipped back two steps for every one you gained. Undaunted, Uekusa rushed forward into the enemy's range of dirt-clod and rock fire. He was immediately hit in the head by a large stone and fell back down the bluff. When I rushed over to help, he lay stretched out on the ground, his mouth agape and his eyes fixed on some remote corner of the sky. I would have liked to call him a fearless hero, but in all honesty I can only say he was a lot of trouble. When I turned and looked up, I saw all of the enemy lined up on top of the cliff looking down with terror-stricken faces. I was left standing there staring at Uekusa's prostrate form and wondering how in the world I would get him home. I must tell one more story about Uekusa and Kuseyama mountain. One evening Uekusa was standing alone atop Kuseyama. He was six-teen, he had written a love letter to a certain girl student and he was waiting for her. He had climbed

up Kuseyama and looked out over the Emma-do, the temple dedicated to the king of hell, watching the steep street for some sign of her. But the girl did not appear at the appointed hour. He decided to wait another ten minutes. Having done so, he was just thinking about wait-ing yet another ten minutes when he turned and saw a figure in the darkness. "Ah, she has come," he thought, and his heart leaped. He started toward the figure and then noticed that it had a beard. At that point, according to Uekusa, "I did not lose my courage. I did not run away, but approached the man." The man asked him, "Did you write this?" He was holding Uekusa's love letter up in front of him. Without waiting for an answer, he continued, "I am this girl's father," and handed Uekusa his name card. The first thing Uekusa saw on it was "Police Headquarters, Building and Repair Section." Uekusa says that then, because he was courageous, he resolutely laced the man and undertook to describe his feelings for the daughter and how pure they were, drawing—amazingly—a comparison to the poet Dante's love for Beatrice to illustrate his point, patiently and elaborately explaining to the girl's father. "And then what?" I asked. "Her father at last understood my feeling," claims Uekusa. "And what happened with the girl after that?" I queried. "Never saw her again, but we were just kids anyway." I think I understand and yet I don't.

### The Fragrance of Meiji, the Sounds of Taisho

AT THE BEGINNING Of the Taisho era, 1912 and the years following, a fragrance of the preceding Meiji era lingered on. It was evident even in the songs we sang in primary school, all of which were invigorating tunes. The two I still like best today are "The Battle of the Japan Sea" and "The Naval Barracks." Their lyrics are open-hearted, their melodies simple, and they describe their events with surprising directness and precise fidelity—no unnecessary sentiments are tacked on. In later years I told my assistant directors that this was exactly what movie continuity (the shooting script) should be like. I encouraged them to use these songs as models and learn from their descriptions. I am still convinced this is a good method. I believe that the people of the Meiji era were like those described by contemporary novelist Shiba Ryotaro in his *Saka no ue no kumo* (Clouds over the Hill). They lived their lives as if their sights were set on the clouds beyond the hill they were climbing. One day when I was in primary school my father took me and my sisters to the Toyama Army Academy. We sat in a bowl-shaped amphitheater that had grass-covered step benches. In the round clearing at the bottom a military band gave a concert. As I look back on it now, it seems a very Meiji-era scene. The band members wore red trousers; the brass instruments glittered in the sun-light; the azaleas were in brilliant bloom around the garden; the ladies sported bright-colored parasols; and your feet couldn't help tapping along with the melody the woodwinds played. Perhaps because I was just a child, I didn't perceive the slightest specter of our dark militarism. By the end of the Taisho era, in 1926, popular songs had become gloomy, full of glorification of despair. Some of them were "I Am

But a Withered Pampas Grass in the Riverbed," "Floating Downstream" and "When Evening Darkness Closes In." The sounds I used to listen to as a boy are completely different from those of today. First of all, there was no such thing as electric sound in those days. Even phonographs were not electric phonographs. Everything was natural sounds. Among these natural sounds were many that are lost forever. I will try to recall some of them. The resounding "boom" of midday. This was the sound of the canon at the Kudan Ushi-ga-fuchi army barracks, which fired a blank each day precisely at noon. The fire-alarm bell. The sound of the fire-watchman's wooden (tappers. The sound of his voice and the drumbeats when he informed the neighborhood of the location of a fire. The tofu seller's bugle. The whistle of the tobacco-pipe repairman. The sound of the lock on the hard-candy vendor's chest of drawers. File tinkle of the wind-chime seller's wares. The drumbeats of the man who repaired the thongs of wooden clogs. The bells of itinerant monks chanting sutras. The candy seller's drum. The fire-truck bell. The big drum for the lion dance. The monkey trainer's drum. The drum for temple services. The freshwater-clam vendor. The natto fermented-bean seller. The hot-red-pepper vendor. The goldfish vendor. The man who sold bamboo clothesline poles. The seedling vendor. The night-time noodle vendor. The oden (dumplings-and-broth) vendor. The baked-sweet-potato vendor. The scissors grinder. The tinker. The morning-glory seller. The fishmonger. The sardine vendor. The boiled-bean seller. The insect vendor: "Magotaro bugs!" The humming of kite strings. The click of battledore and shuttlecock. Songs you sing while bouncing a ball. Children's songs. These lost sounds are all impossible to separate from my boyhood memories. And all are related to the seasons. They are cold, warm, hot or cool sounds. And they are allied with many different kinds of feelings. Happy sounds, lonely sounds, sad sounds and fearful sounds. I hate fires, so the sound of the fire alarm and the fire-watchman's voice and drum shouting out the location of the fire were sounds that struck me with terror. "Bong, bong! Fire in Kanda district, Jinbochii'." At noises I burrowed down under the covers and tried to make myself small. During my "Konbeto-san" period I was awakened once in the middle of the night by my sister. "Akira, there is a fire. Hurry and get dressed." Scurrying to pull on my kimono, I ran out to the entry, where I saw the house directly across from our gate in a mass of bright red flames. After that, I remember nothing. When I became aware of my surroundings again, I found myself walking alone on Kagurazaka hill. I rushed home and found the fire had been put out, but the policeman guarding the emergency demarcation lines for the fire area wouldn't let me through. When I pointed to the other side and said, "My house is over there," he looked at me in surprise and let me pass. As soon as I came into the house, my father's wrath descended on me like thunder. Since I did not understand what had happened, we asked my sister. Apparently I had run away as soon as I saw the fire. In spite of her cries of "Akira! Akira!" I opened the front gate and escaped into the night. Apropos of fires I remember something else: the horse-drawn fire wagons of those days. They were pulled by beautiful horses, and they were very elegant affairs with things that looked like pure brass sake-warming bottles on top. I hate fires, but I had long wished to see these fire wagons just once more. My chance came years later on an open set at the 20th Century-Fox studios. It was a scene representing old New York City, and the fire wagon was pulled up in front of a church where

masses of purple lilacs were in bloom. But let me return to the sounds of Taisho. All of them carry memories for me. When I saw the child of the freshwater-clam vendor, who raised a pitiful wail to sell his goods, I felt fortunate in my own lot in life. Noon on a stifling summer's day when the hot-red-pepper vendor passed by, I remember holding a bamboo rod for catching cicadas and studying the insects' movement in the oak tree overhead. At the sound of a humming kite string I see myself standing on Nakanohashi bridge clutching the string under a windy winter sky almost strong enough to take it away from me. If I were to continue enumerating the somewhat sad childhood recollections that arise from sound stimuli, there would be no end to it. But as I sit here and write about these childhood sounds, the noises that assail my ears are the television, the heater and the sound truck offering toilet paper in exchange for old newspapers; all are electrical sounds. Children of today probably won't be able to fashion very rich memories from these sounds. Perhaps they are more to be pitied than even that freshwater-clam seller's child.

### Storytellers

AS I HAVE mentioned previously, my father's attitude was one of extreme severity. My mother, who came from an Osaka merchant family and was thus less sensitive to finer points of samurai etiquette, received frequent scoldings about the fish set out on the individual meal trays. "Idiot! Are you trying to make me commit suicide?" Apparently there was a special procedure for serving the meal that pre-cedes a ritual suicide. It seems it extended to the position of the fish on the plate. My father had worn his hair in a samurai topknot as a child, and even at the time these scoldings occurred he would frequently take a formal sitting position with his back to the art alcove and hold his sword straight up to polish the blade with abrasive powder. So it's probably quite natural that he should have been angry, but I couldn't help feeling sorry for my mother and thinking it could hardly matter that much which way the fishhead pointed. Yet my mother continued to make the same mistake over and over again. And every time the fish on his tray was pointed the wrong way, my father scolded her. As I think about it now, it could have been that my father's fault-finding was so frequent an occurrence that she became deaf to it, as the saying goes, "like a horse's ears in an east wind." I'm still not sure how a meal tray is supposed to be presented to someone about to commit suicide; I have yet to put a scene of ritual suicide in one of my films. But when you are served a fish on a meal tray, usually its head points to the left and its belly is toward you to make it easy to reach. If you are going to commit suicide, I gather that it is served with its head pointing to the right and its belly away from you, because it would be insensitive to place a cut fish belly directly facing someone who is about to cut open his own abdomen. This is my assumption, but it is no more than an assumption. And yet I can't imagine that my mother would do something no Japanese would ever think of, like serving a fish in such a way as to make it difficult to reach, with its belly away from the person about to eat it. So she

must have mistaken only the part about pointing the head to the left or right. And this alone made my father angry with her.

I, too, received my share of scoldings on the subject of mealtime etiquette. If I held my chopsticks the wrong way, my father would take his chopsticks by the points and rap me on the knuckles with the heavy ends. My father was very strict about these things, and yet, as I mentioned earlier, he frequently took us to the movies. They were mostly American and European movies. There was a theater on Kagurazaka hill called the Ushigomekan that showed nothing but foreign films. Here I saw a lot of action serials and William S. Hart movies. Among the serials I remember especially *The Tiger's Footprints*, *Hurricane Hutch*, *The Iron Claw* and *The Midnight Man*. The William S. Hart movies had a masculine touch like that of later films directed by John Ford, and more of them seemed to be set in Alaska than in the Wild West. An image remains emblazoned in my mind of William S. Hart's face. He holds up a pistol in each hand, his leather armbands decorated with gold, and he wears a broad-brimmed hat as he sits astride his horse. Or he rides through the snowy Alaskan woods wearing a fur hat and fur clothing. What remains of these films in my heart is that reliable manly spirit and the smell of male sweat. It's possible that I had already seen some Chaplin films, but since I don't remember doing Chaplin imitations at this age, it may not have been until later. Something else that may have taken place around this time or a little later remains an indelible movie memory. It happened when my oldest sister took me to the Asakusa district of Tokyo to see a movie about an expedition to the South Pole. The leader of the sled dogs falls ill, and the exploration party has to leave him behind and drive on with the rest of the team. But the lead dog follows them, staggering, on the verge of death, and resumes his place at the head of the team. Seeing the faltering legs of this lead dog, I felt as if my heart would break. His eyelids were stuck together with pus; his tongue hung lolling from his mouth as he panted in pain for breath. It was a pathetic, gruesome and noble face. My eyes over-flowed so with tears that I could hardly see. On the blurry screen, one of the expedition members led the dog away across a slope. Finally he must have killed the beast, because a rifle report sounded loudly enough to frighten the other dogs and make them jump out of line. I burst out crying. My sister tried to comfort me, but it was no use. She gave up and took me out of the movie theater. But I kept on crying. I cried in the streetcar all the way home; I cried after I got inside the house. Even when my sister said she'd never take me to the movies again, I kept on crying. To this day I can't forget that dog's face, and whenever I think of it, I am overcome with reverence.

At this time of my life I did not have a great deal of enthusiasm for Japanese movies, in comparison with foreign pictures. But my interests were still those of a child. My father didn't just take us to the movies. He quite often took us to ten to storytellers in the music halls around Kagurazaka. The ones I remember are Kosan, Kokatsu and Enyu. Enyu was probably too subtle for my childish mind to find entertaining. I enjoyed Kokatsu's Introductions, but Kosan, who was called a master of the storytelling art, was one I really liked. I can't forget two of his routines, *Yonaki udon* (Nighttime Noodles) and *Uma no dengaku* (The Horse in Miso Sauce). Kosan

would pantomime the noodle vendor pulling his cart and lifting his voice in a whining refrain, and I remember how quickly I was swept into the mood of a frosty winter evening. I never heard anyone but Kosan tell the Horse in Miso Sauce story. A pack-horse driver stops at a roadside teahouse to have some sake. He leaves his horse, which is carrying a load of miso salted-bean paste, tethered outside. But while he drinks, the horse gets loose and wanders off, and he sets out to look for it. As he asks everyone he comes across, his speech becomes sloppier and more hurried. Finally he asks a drunk by the road if he has "seen my horse with miso on it." The drunk replies, "What? I've never even heard of horse cooked that way, much less seen it." Then the pack-horse driver goes off down the tree-lined road, a dry wind blowing as he continues his search. I practically shuddered at the feeling of dusk on my skin, and I thought it was wonderful. I liked the stories I heard the masters tell in the storytelling halls, but I liked the tempura on buckwheat noodles we had on the way home even better. The flavor of this tempura-soba on a cold night remains especially memorable. Even in recent years when I am coming home from abroad, as the plane nears the Tokyo airport I always think, "Ah, now for some tempura-soba." But lately tempura-soba doesn't taste like it used to. And I miss something else. The old noodle shops used to pour out the day's broth in front of the entrance in order to dry the bonito flakes used to make it, they could be reused. When you walked past, the flakes gave off a fragrance. I remember this with great nostalgia. This is not to say that noodle shops never pour out the broth in front any more, but if they do, the smell is completely different.

### The Goblin's Nose

IT WAS NEARING graduation time. I was going down the steep street called Hattorizaka in front of our school on a "Taisho skate." It was like a giant skateboard or a scooter, with one wheel in front and two in the back. You put your right foot on it, grabbed the handle and pushed with your left foot. I was careening down the hill, holding my breath, when the front wheel hit the metal cover of a gas main. I felt myself somersaulting through the air. When I woke up, I was stretched out in the police box at the bottom of Hattorizaka hill. My right knee was badly hurt, and for some time I was virtually crippled and had to stay home from school. (My right knee is still bad this day. Trying to protect it, I seem to do the opposite—I am constantly bumping it on things and hurting it. This knee is the reason I'm good at putting in golf. It's painful for me to bend over, so I can't anticipate the undulations of the putting green very well. Otherwise I would no doubt be an expert putter.) Around the time my knee healed, I went with my father to a public bathhouse. There was an elderly gentleman with white hair and a white beard. My father seemed to know him, and exchanged greetings with him. The old man looked at me in my nakedness and asked, "Your son?" My father nodded. "He seems to be pretty weak. I've opened a fencing loci near here—send him over." When I asked my father later who that man had been, he explained he was the grandson of Chiba Shusaku.



Chiba Shusaku was a famous fencer of the late feudal age who had had a school at Otama-ga-ike and left behind many a tale of his prowess. Hearing that this tan's grandson's school was in our immediate area, I was greedy for fencing lessons and began going there right away. But the white-haired, white-bearded person who was called the grandson of Chiba Shusaku did nothing but occupy the highest-ranking position at the school. Never once did he deign to give me a lesson. The man who did give the lessons was the assistant to the master, and he had a shout that went "Cho cho, yatta! Cho, yatta!" like a folk-dance refrain. Somehow this shout prevented me from respecting him very much. On top of that, the students were all neighborhood children who approached fencing as if it were a game of tag, and it was all very silly. Just as I was feeling all these frustrations, the head of the fencing school was hit by an automobile, still a rarity at the time. For me, this was like hearing that the famous feudal swordsman Miyamoto Musashi had been kicked by his own horse. All the respect I had for the grandson of Chiba Shusaku disappeared completely. Perhaps as a reaction to my experience with the Chiba school, I made up my mind to take lessons at the fencing school run by Takano Sazaburo, who had taken a whole generation by storm with his art. But my resolve proved to be no more than that of a "three-day monk." I knew his reputation, but the reality of the violence of Takano's lessons surpassed even my imagination. In the thrust-and-parry practice I called out "O-men!" and struck. The same instant I was thrown flying against the wainscot, and darkness descended before my eyes, interspersed with scatters of stars resembling a fireworks display. Like these stars, my confidence in my kendo ability—or rather my pride in it—went plummeting through an empty sky. A hundred proverbs and tag phrases come to mind. "The world is not an indulgent place." "There is always something higher." "The frog in his well." "Looking at the ceiling through a hollow reed." Once thrown against the wall, I gained a bitter understanding of how pre-sumptuous I had been to ridicule my previous fencing master for being hit by an automobile. My long, smug "goblin's nose" was summarily broken off, never to grow back again. But prior to my graduation from primary school it was not only kendo that shattered the pride of my goblin's nose, I had hoped to attend Fourth Middle School. I failed the entrance examination. But my case was different from my brother's when he failed the exam to enter First Middle School. It was an event that aroused no surprise. Even my record at Kuroda Primary School was something you would have to call representative of a frog in his well. I applied myself only in the subjects I liked, such as grammar, history, composition, art and penmanship. In these areas no one could surpass me. But I couldn't make myself like science and arithmetic, and only very reluctantly put enough energy into these subjects to stay a shade above disgrace. The result was obvious. Attempting to deal with the questions on science and arithmetic in the Fourth Middle School examination, I was at a complete loss. I still have the same strengths and weaknesses. It seems I am of a literary rather than a scientific turn. An example is the fact that I can't write numbers properly. They end up looking like the decorative ancient cursive syllabary. Learning to drive a car is out of the question; I am incapable of operating an ordinary still camera or even putting fluid in a cigarette lighter. My son tells me that when I use the telephone it's as if a chimpanzee were trying to place a call. When someone is told over and over again that he's no good at

something, he loses more and more confidence and eventually does become poor at it. Conversely, if he's told he's good at something, his confidence builds and he actually becomes better at it. While a person is born with strengths and weaknesses as part of his heredity, they can be greatly altered by later influences. However, this kind of defense now serves no purpose, and my only reason for bringing it up is to say that it was then that the path I would take in life became clear to me. It was the path of literature and art. And the point at which these two would diverge was still a long way off.

### The Gleam of Fireflies

GRADUATION DAY was at hand. Primary-school graduation ceremonies in those days followed a prescribed order—conventional, well mannered and sentimental. First the school principal made a hackneyed address of encouragement and blessing for the future of the graduates, then one of the guests delivered a perfunctory message of greeting, to which a representative of the graduating class made a formal response. Then the graduates sang with organ accompaniment:

*"We sing thanks for our teacher's kindness, We have honored and revered. . ."*

The fifth-year students followed this with:

*"After the years, met daily as brothers and sisters, You go on . . ."*

And at the end all together sang:

*"In the gleam of fireflies."*

At this point all the girls would start sobbing. And in the midst of that, as valedictorian representing the graduating boys, I had to give my formal response. Our teacher had written my speech himself, handed it to me and told me to make a clean copy and "give a fine delivery" of it. This speech met all the requirements as to content, but it read like strung-together excerpts from an ethics text book. I knew that I would never be able to put any feeling into it. The rhetoric praising the teacher's unselfish devotion to his students was particularly flowery, and I couldn't help glancing up at his face as I read through it for the first time, standing in front of him. As I mentioned earlier, this teacher and I lost no love between us. How could he make me say these nauseating things about his great kindness and our sadness at parting with him? And what kind of per-son was this who could write all these laudatory phrases about him-self? My flesh crawled with revulsion, but I took his draft and carried it home with me. Assuming that this was the custom and there was nothing I could do about it, I sat down and set about copying the speech onto good paper. My brother looked over my shoulder as I worked. His eyes raced over the page

I was completing. "Show me that," he demanded. I took the teacher's draft and read it standing next to me. As soon as he finished, he crumpled it into a little ball and threw it across the room. "Akira, don't read that thing," he commanded. I was dumfounded. He went on, "You need a speech; I'll write you one. You read mine." I thought that was a wonderful idea, but I knew the teacher would demand to see my clean copy of the speech he had written. I'd never get away with it, I explained to my brother. He replied, "Well, then, finish copying his speech and show it to him. Then for the ceremony you just slip mine inside it and go up there and read it." My brother wrote an extremely acrimonious speech. He attacked the conservatism and inflexibility of primary-school education. He lashed out with sarcasm at the teachers who honored and upheld this system. We graduates had been living in a nightmare until now, he said; throwing off the chains would let us have happy dreams for the first time. For that day and age, it was a revolutionary address. It refreshed my spirit. Unfortunately, I couldn't muster the courage to read it. If I had, it occurs to me now, I'm sure it would have caused a scene like the one just before the curtain falls at the end of Gogol's *The Public Prosecutor*. Out there in the audience was my father, looking properly majestic in his frock coat. And the teacher had made me read my clean copy of his speech aloud to him for his final approval before I went up to the podium. Yet I did have my brother's speech hidden in the breast of my kimono. It wouldn't have been impossible for me to slip it out and read it. When we arrived home after the graduation ceremony, my father said, "Akira, that was a fine speech you gave today." My brother probably understood what had happened when he heard this. He looked at me with a quick, sarcastic grin. I was ashamed. I am a coward. It was in this fashion that I graduated from Kuroda Primary School.

### Keika Middle School

WHEN I ENTERED Keika Middle School, its campus was situated, along with Keika Commerce School (which Uekusa attended), in the Ochanomizu district of Tokyo. It remains there today, sandwiched between the Juntenda Hospital and a broad street. In my time the landscape of Ochanomizu, which means "water for tea"—as witness the Keika school song, "Behold the valley of tea . . ." and so forth—was considered comparable in beauty to some of China's famous scenic places, although that was a slight exaggeration. A passage in the class report of my 1927 graduating class describes both the Ochanomizu topography and me at the time I was in my first and second years of middle school. Since it was written by a friend from that time, I'd like to quote from it.

The Ochanomizu embankment was overgrown with lush wild grasses that gave off a fragrance I can't forget. That canal side has something ineffably nostalgic about it. When classes finally ended, I would find liberation through the Keika Middle School gates ( actually a small gate resembling a rear entrance), cross the wide avenue where the city trolley stopped at Hongo Motomachi, wait for a chance and slip past the "No Trespassing" sign into the thick vegetation of the embankment and disappear. From that point on

I was safely out of sight, so I'd pick my way very carefully down the steep slope. Reaching a place that was level enough so there was no danger of slipping and falling, I'd throw down my schoolbag as a pillow and stretch out on the grass. Going on down to the water's edge, there was a flat area just wide enough for a single person to walk on. I would travel along this until I got close to the Suidobashi area and then scramble back up the bank and onto the street. . . . The only reason I did all this was that I didn't want to go straight home from school. A friend of the same mind was Kurosawa Akira. He and I climbed down the bank two or three times together. Once we stumbled on a pair of snakes mating in a clump of grass. Coiled together, they seemed to be standing up, and scared us badly. Kurosawa Akira was poor at all subjects but composition and painting. His work was often published in the school magazine. One of these published paintings, a still-life of some fruit, as I recall, left an impression on me that still lingers. The actual painting it-self was no doubt even more inspiring. I hear that because he was so talented our dashing young teacher (Iwamatsu Goro) showed him special attention. Kurosawa's ability in physical education was zero. When he went to the chinning bar, he'd hang there with both feet planted on the sand from start to finish. It made me very anxious. Kurosawa's voice was also very girlish. I remember a strangely bittersweet feeling as I climbed down the bank and lay down shoulder to shoulder staring up at the sky next to this tall, pale youth.

Reading this, I get the distinct impression that I still had certain effeminate qualities at this age. The only comfort I can find in it is that while my Konbeto-san period was just sweet and indulgent, at least by this time I'd become "bittersweet," so I guess I had grown up a little. In any event, the self I see when I think about my past and the Kurosawa Akira that others remember are so different that I am un-comfortably surprised. From the time I adopted the affectations of a boy swordsman I imagined myself to be robustly masculine. What could have happened to cause the writer of the above excerpt to refer to my physical capacities as "zero"? I feel moved to voice an objection. That I had no strength whatsoever in my arms and simply hung there on the bar is the truth. That I couldn't pull myself up is the truth. But it is not true that I had zero physical capacities. I did very well in all the sports that don't require very much strength in the arms. In kendo swordsmanship, which I have discussed above, I reached the top rank. In baseball I pitched, and the catchers were afraid of the balls I threw; when I wasn't pitching, I played shortstop, and I was renowned for my ability to snap up the infield grounders. In swimming I learned two Japanese-style strokes and later mastered the newly imported Australian crawl. I have never been a fast swimmer, but even at my present age I have no trouble swimming. In golf, as I have mentioned, I'm very bad at putting, but I haven't given up the game. However, it shouldn't surprise me that to my classmates I appeared to have no physical capacities. Our physical-education class at Keika Middle School was led by a former army officer, and he put great emphasis on athletics that required strength in the arms. He had a ruddy face, so we called him Beefsteak behind his back. Once Beefsteak played a trick on me. I was hanging from the bar as usual, and he tried to push me up over it. I was not pleased to feel myself being forced, so I let go of the bar and fell with all my weight on top of Beefsteak, making him collapse on the sand. Covered with a layer of sand from head to foot, Mr. Beefsteak looked like a breaded cutlet. At the end of that term I set a new school record by getting a zero in physical education. It was the first time in the history of Keika Middle School. But something else happened to me in Mr.

Beefsteak's class. We were doing running high jumps, and those who missed the bar were out—it was a competition to see who'd be left as the bar was moved higher. When my turn came, I started running and all my classmates burst out laughing. It was a laugh that expected me as a matter of course to knock down the bar that was directly ahead of me. But I sailed right over it. Everyone looked puzzled. The bar rose with each round; the number of contenders dropped and those on the sidelines increased. But among those challenging that bar, I remained a participant after numerous jumps. The onlookers became strangely silent. And the impossible happened: I alone was left to face the bar. Beefsteak and my classmates all stared in disbelief. How could this have happened? What did I look like as I ran for that bar? When I first started, every time I went over the bar I heard snickering, so I must have shown a very bizarre form. As I think about this incident now, I still can't understand it. Was it a dream? Did the wishes of the boy who was repeatedly laughed at in physical-education class finally invent success for himself in a dream? No, it wasn't a dream. I really did keep jumping over that bar. And I alone was left and continued to do it many more times. Some angel may have felt sorry for the boy with the zero in gym and lent him her wings for a moment.

### A Long Red Brick Wall

IN WRITING ABOUT my memories of middle school I can't leave out the brick wall surrounding the armory. Every day I walked to and from school along this wall. At first I didn't walk, though. I took a streetcar from the stop at Omagari, near my house in Koishikawa Gokencho. At Iidabashi station I transferred to the tram for Honga Motomachi and walked from there. But I did this only a few times. Something very strange happened to me on that streetcar, and after-ward I didn't like riding it any more. Even though it was my own fault, it was frightening. The morning tram was always full. Clumps of people always over-flowed from the entrance where the conductor's stand was and hung precariously from the side of the car. One day I too was hanging there on the way from Omagari to Iidabashi, when suddenly I decided that everything in life was stupid, boring and futile. I let go of the hand rail. I was pinned between two university students who were also hanging on the outside of the car. If this had not been the case, I would have plunged to the ground. Even so, I had only one foot on the running board, so I did start to fall backward. One of the university students let out a yell and freed one hand to grab me by the strap of the schoolbag on my shoulder. I rode the rest of the way to Iidabashi suspended from the hand of this student like a fish on a line. Holding very still, for this entire interval I stared into the eyes of the pale, horror-stricken young man. When we arrived at Iidabashi and descended from the tram, the two students caught their breath. "What happened to you?" they asked. Since I myself didn't understand what had happened, I just bowed my head quickly and headed for the stop where I had to catch my next streetcar. "Are you all right?" they persisted, and it looked as if they were going to follow me. I ran, caught up with the tram for

Ochanomizu and jumped on just as it began to move. Turning and looking back over my shoulder, I saw the two students staring after me in amazement. No wonder; I can't help being amazed at myself. After that, I avoided taking the streetcar. And I was used to walking from my primary-school days with the long trek to the Ochiai fencing school. Moreover, if I saved my streetcar fare, I could satisfy the new craving I developed around that time I could buy books. I left my house in the morning and walked along the Edogawa River to the foot of the Iidabashi bridge. From there I took the street the tram followed and turned right. Proceeding a little farther, on the left side I came to the long red brick wall of the armory. The wall seemed to go on endlessly. At the point where it was interrupted stood Korakuen, the garden of Count Mito's Tokyo mansion. Following that on the right after a while came the Suidobashi intersection. On the far left corner stood a huge hinoki cypress gate like that of a nobleman's residence. From that corner a gentle slope led up toward Ochanomizu, and this was the route I followed every day. And as I walked to and from school, I was reading the entire time. Along this path I read Japanese novelists Higuchi Ichiyo (1872— 1896), Kunikida Doppo (1871-1908); Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) and the Russian Ivan Turgenev. I read books borrowed from my brother and sisters as well as books I bought myself. Whether I understood it or not, I read everything I could get my hands on. At that stage of my life I didn't understand very much about people, but I did understand descriptions of nature. One passage of Turgenev I read over and over again, from the beginning of *The Rendezvous* where the scenery is described: "The seasons could be determined from nothing more than the sound of the leaves on the trees in the forest." Because I understood and enjoyed reading descriptions of natural settings so much at this time, I was influenced by them. Later I wrote a composition that my grammar teacher Ohara Yoichi praised as the best since the founding of Keika Middle School. But when I read it over now, it's precious and pretentious enough to make me blush. As I think back, I wonder why I didn't write about that long red wall I walked along as if being carried on a stream, on my left in the morning and my right in the afternoon. That wall protected me from the wind in the wintertime, but in summer it made me suffer with the heat it reflected from the blazing sun. It's too bad. When I try to write about that wall today, I cannot do it. And when the Great Kanto Earthquake came, the wall fell down; not a single brick of it remains.

September 1, 1923

IT HAD BEEN a dark day for me, because it was the day after summer vacation ended. For most students it was a day full of enthusiasm for the resumption of school. Not for me. It was also the day of the ceremony opening the second term, an event I always found disgusting. When the convocation ended, I set out for Maruzen, Japan's largest foreign bookstore, in the downtown Kyobashi district. My oldest sister had asked me to pick up a Western-language book for her. But when I got there, the store hadn't opened yet. More disgusted than ever, I headed for home

again, intending to try once more in the afternoon. Two hours later the Maruzen Building would be destroyed and the horrifying photograph of its ruins sent around the world to show the kind of devastation wrought by the Great Kanto Earthquake. I can't help wondering what would have become of me if the bookstore had been open that morning. I probably wouldn't have spent two hours looking for my sister's book, so it's unlikely I would have been crushed by the toppling Maruzen Building. But how could I have escaped the terrible fire that engulfed and destroyed central Tokyo in the wake of the earthquake? The day of the Great Earthquake had dawned cloudless. The sweltering heat of summer still lingered on to make everyone uncomfortable, but the clarity of that blue sky unmistakably foretold autumn. And then about eleven o'clock, without a stir of warning, a violent wind sprang up. It blew my little handmade bird-shaped weathervane tight off the roof. I don't know what relationship this wind may have had to the earthquake, but I remember climbing up onto the roof to put the weathervane back, looking up at the sky and thinking, "How strange!" Just before the historic tremor, I was back home from Kyobashi, in the street in front of my house with a friend from the neighborhood. Across the way was a pawnshop. We were crouching in the shadow of its storehouse and throwing pebbles at a red Korean cow that was tethered by the gate of my house. This cow belonged to our nextdoor neighbor, who used it to pull the cart in which he carried feed for his pig farm in Higashi Nakano, then a rural suburb of Tokyo. The night before, he had for some reason left it tied up in the narrow alleyway between our houses, and it had lowed noisily throughout the entire night. As a result, I had not been able to sleep well and was hurling stones at the cursed beast with all my might. At that point I heard a rumbling sound from beneath the ground. I was wearing my high wooden clogs, and in order to hit the cow I was moving my body, so I didn't feel the earth move. What I noticed was that my friend who had been squatting next to me suddenly stood bolt upright. As I looked up at him, I saw that behind him the wall of the storehouse was crumbling and falling—toward us. I stood up in a hurry, too. Because I was wearing high clogs I couldn't keep my balance on the rippling ground, so I took them off and carried one in each hand. Like someone on a boat in heavy seas, I lurched and ran to where my friend stood with his arms wrapped around a telephone pole for dear life. I did likewise. The pole was waving around crazily, too. In fact, it was snapping its wires into thousands of little pieces. Then, before our eyes, the two storehouses belonging to the pawn-shop started shedding their skins. They shuddered and shook off their roof tiles and then let go of their thick walls. In an instant they were skeletons of wooden frame. It wasn't just the storehouses that were doing this either. The roof tiles of all the houses, as if they were being put through a sieve, suddenly danced and shook and slipped off. In the thick dust the roof beams lay revealed. Isn't it remarkable how well Japanese houses are built? In this situation the roof becomes light and the house doesn't collapse. I remember thinking these thoughts as I stood clinging to the violently shuddering telephone pole. But this doesn't mean that I was calm and collected. Human beings are funny creatures—if they are too severely startled, one part of the brain is often left out entirely and remains strangely composed, thinking about something completely unrelated. But my poor brain, which in this moment contemplated Japanese domestic architecture and its capacity to withstand earthquakes,

in the next moment became feverish with concern over my family. I set out at a breakneck run for my house. The front gate had lost half of its roof, but it stood solidly without even a list to one side. But the stone walk from the gate to the front entrance of my house was blocked by a mountain of roof tiles that had fallen from the buildings on either side. I could hardly see the front door. My family must all be dead. Strangely enough, the feeling that came over me at that moment was not one of grief, but rather a deep resignation. The next thing that occurred to me was that I was all alone in the world. Looking around me and wondering what to do, I saw the friend I had left holding on to the telephone pole come bursting out of his house with all the members of his family. They stood in a group in the middle of the street. Thinking there was not much else I could do under the circumstances, I decided to stay with my friend, and I started walking toward them. As I approached, my friend's father started to say something to me, but then stopped suddenly. He walked past me and stared at the front of my house. Following his gaze, I turned around and looked back. There were all the members of my family coming out of the front gate. I ran like one possessed. Those I had thought dead were not only safe, but appeared to have been worried about me. As I ran to them, they welcomed me with relief visible on their faces. You would think I would have burst into tears as I ran to them. But I didn't cry. In fact, I couldn't cry. It was impossible for me to cry because my brother began to scold me with a vengeance. "Akira! What's the meaning of this spectacle? Walking around barefoot—what slovenliness!" Looking at them, I saw that my father, mother, sister and brother all had their clogs on. I hastened to put my high logs back on, and I felt terribly ashamed. Of all the members of my family, I was the only one who had conducted himself in a disorderly fashion. To my eyes it looked as if my father, mother and sister were not in the least perturbed. As for my brother, he was not only calm in the face of the Great Kanto Earthquake, but appeared to be having a wonderful time.

### Darkness and Humanity

THE GREAT KANTO EARTHQUAKE was a terrifying experience for me, and also an extremely important one. Through it I learned not only of the extraordinary powers of nature, but extraordinary things that lie in human hearts. To begin with, the earthquake overwhelmed me by suddenly transforming my surroundings. The street where the streetcar ran on the other side of the Edogawa River was badly damaged, heaving with fissures. The river itself had raised its bottom and showed new islands of mud. I didn't see any fallen houses in the immediate area, but there were leaning ones here and there. The whole Edogawa River district was veiled in a dancing, swirling dust whose grayness gave the sun a pallor like that during an eclipse. The people who stood to the left and right of me in this scene looked for all the world like fugitives from hell, and the whole landscape took on a bizarre and eerie aspect. I stood holding on to one of the young cherry trees planted along the banks of the river, and I was still shaking as I gazed



out over the scene, thinking, "This must be the end of the world." From that point on, I don't remember very much about that day. But I do recall that the ground kept on shaking and shaking without respite. And I remember that eventually a billowing mushroom cloud appeared in the eastern sky, gradually towering and spreading to fill half the heavens with the smoke from the fire engulfing central Tokyo. That night the Yama-no-te hill area, where we were and which escaped the fires, was of course without electricity like the rest of Tokyo. No lamps were lit, but the light from the fire raging in the low-lying downtown section cast an unexpected glow on the hills. That night every household still had candles, so no one was threatened by the darkness. What terrified everyone was the sound of the armory. The armory grounds, as I have already mentioned, were bounded by a long red brick wall within which the factories stood in rows of huge red brick buildings. This plant served as an unforeseen barrier to the fires advancing from downtown and saved the entire Yama-no-te district. However, the arsenal itself, because it was a storage area for explosives, seems to have been touched off by the heat of the flames licking their way from Kanda to Suidobashi. From time to time, perhaps ignited by some kind of shell, a column of fire spewed forth from the armory accompanied by a terrifying roar. It was that sound that unnerved people. In my neighborhood there was actually a man who explained, as if really believed it, that this sound was volcanoes erupting on the Izu peninsula a hundred miles south of Tokyo. They were setting off a number of eruptions, he said, which was heading north toward us. "So if comes to the worst," this man continued, "I'm going to pack up what need and get out of here with this thing." And he proudly displayed it milk wagon he had found abandoned somewhere. This little story has its charm and doesn't really hurt anyone. What is frightening is the ability of fear to drive people off the course of human behavior. By the time the fires downtown had subsided, every-one, had used up all the household candles and the world was plunged to the real darkness of night. People who felt threatened by this darkness became the prey of the most horrifying demagogues and engaged in the most incredibly reckless, lawless acts. It's impossible even to imagine the magnitude of the terror brought by total darkness to people who have never experienced it before—it is a terror that destroys all reason. When a person can't see anything to the left or the he becomes thoroughly demoralized and confused. And, as the old saying goes, "Fear peoples the darkness with monsters." The massacre of Korean residents of Tokyo that took place on the heels of the Great Kanto Earthquake was brought on by demagogues who deftly exploited people's fear of the darkness. With my own eyes I saw a mob of adults with contorted faces rushing like an avalanche in infusions, yelling, "This way." "No, that way!" They were chasing a bearded man, thinking someone with so much facial hair could not be Japanese. We ourselves went to look for relatives who had been burned out in the fires around the Ueno district. Simply because my father had a full beard, he was surrounded by a mob carrying clubs. My heart pounded as I looked at my brother, who was with him. My brother was smiling sarcastically. At that moment my father thundered angrily, "Idiots!" They meekly dispersed. In our neighborhood each household had to have one person stand guard at night. My brother, however, thumbed his nose at the whole idea and made no attempt to take his turn. Seeing no other solution, I took up my wooden sword and was led to a drainage pipe that was

barely wide enough for a cat to crawl through. They posted me here and said, "Koreans might be able to sneak in through here."

But there was an even more ridiculous incident. They told us not to drink the water from one of our neighborhood wells. The reason was that the wall surrounding the well had some kind of strange notation written on it in white chalk. This was supposedly a Korean code indication that the well water had been poisoned. I was flabbergasted. The truth was that the strange notation was a scribble I myself had written. Seeing adults behaving like this, I couldn't help shaking my head and wondering what human beings are all about.

### A Horrifying Excursion

WHEN THE HOLOCAUST had died down, my brother said to me in a tone betraying his impatience to do so, "Akira, let's go look at the ruins." I set out to accompany my brother with the kind of cheerfulness you feel on a school excursion. By the time I realized how horrifying this excursion would be and tried to shrink back from it, it was already too late. My brother ignored my hesitation and dragged me along. For an entire day he led me around the vast area the fire had destroyed, and while I shivered in fear he showed me a countless array of corpses. At first we saw only an occasional burned body, but as we drew closer to the downtown area, the numbers increased. But my brother took me by the hand and walked on with determination. The burned landscape for as far as the eye could see had a brownish red color. In the conflagration everything made of wood had been turned to ashes, which now occasionally drifted upward in the breeze. It looked like a red desert. Amid this expanse of nauseating redness lay every kind of corpse imaginable. I saw corpses charred black, half-burned corpses, corpses in gutters, corpses floating in rivers, corpses piled up on bridges, corpses blocking off a whole street at an intersection, and every manner of death possible to human beings displayed by corpses. When I involuntarily looked away, my brother scolded me, "Akira, look carefully now." I failed to understand my brother's intentions and could only resent his forcing me to look at these awful sights. The worst was when we stood on the bank of the red-dyed Sumidagawa River and gazed at the throngs of corpses pressed against its shores. I felt my knees give way as I started to faint, but my brother grabbed me by the collar and propped me up again. He repeated, "Look carefully, Akira." I resigned myself to gritting my teeth and looking. Even if I tried to close my eyes, that scene had imprinted itself permanently on the backs of my eyelids. In this way, convincing myself it was inescapable, I felt a little bit calmer. But there is no way for me to describe adequately the horror I saw. I remember thinking that the lake of blood they say exists in Buddhist hell couldn't possibly be as bad as this. I wrote that the Sumidagawa was dyed red, but it wasn't a blood red. It was the same kind of light brownish red as the rest of the landscape, a red muddied with white like the eye of a rotten fish. The corpses floating in the river were all swollen to the

bursting point, and all had their anuses open like big fish mouths. Even babies still tied on their mothers' backs looked like this. And all of them moved softly in unison on the waves of the river. As far as the eye could see there was not a living soul. The only living things in this landscape were my brother and I. To me we seemed as small as two beans in all this vastness. Or else we too were dead and were standing at the gates of hell. My brother then led me to the broad market grounds of the garment district. This was where the most people lost their lives in the Great Kanto Earthquake. No corner of the landscape was free of corpses. In some places the piles of corpses formed little mountains. On top of one of these mountains sat a blackened body in the lotus Position of Zen meditation. This corpse looked exactly like a Buddhist statue. My brother and I stared at it for a long time, standing stock still. Then my brother, as if talking to himself, softly said, "Magnificent, isn't it?" I felt the same way. By that time I had seen so many corpses that I could no longer distinguish between them and the burned bits of roof tiles and stones on the ground. It was a bizarre kind of apathy. My brother looked at me and said, "I guess we'd better go home." We crossed over the Sumidagawa again and headed for the Ueno Hirokoji district. As we approached Hirokoji Street, we came upon a large burned-out area where a great number of people had gathered. They were assiduously sifting through the ruins, looking for something. My brother smiled bitterly as he said, "It's the remains of the bullion treasury. Akira, shall we look for a gold ring as a souvenir?" But at that particular moment my eyes were fixed on the greenery - atop the Ueno hills, and I couldn't budge. How many years had it been since I'd seen a green tree? That's how I felt, as if I had after a long time at last come to a place where there was air. I took a deep breath. There had not been a single trace of green in all the ruins of the fire. Until that instant it had never occurred to me how precious vegetation is. The night we returned from the horrifying excursion I was fully prepared to be unable to sleep, or to have terrible nightmares if I did. But no sooner had I laid my head on the pillow than it was morning. I had slept like a log, and I couldn't remember anything frightening from my dreams. This seemed so strange to me that I asked my brother how it could have come about. "If you shut your eyes to a frightening sight, you end up being frightened. If you look at every-thing straight on, there is nothing to be afraid of." Looking back on that excursion now, I realize that it must have been horrifying for my brother too. It had been an expedition to conquer fear.

### Honor and Revere

THE KEIKA MIDDLE SCHOOL in Ochanomizu burned down in the fire. When I saw the rubble of my school, my first thought was, "Ah, summer vacation will be extended," and I was delighted. I realize as I write this that I must appear insensitive, but to describe the feelings of a not very brilliant middle-school student honestly, this is what you get, so it can't be helped. I have always been honest to a fault. If I did something bad at school and the teacher asked who was responsible, I would always honestly raise my hand. And then the teacher would take out his

grade book and give me a zero for conduct. When we got a new teacher I continued my honesty. I raised my hand when he asked who did it. But this new teacher then said that everything was all right because I had not tried to dodge responsibility. He took out his grade book and gave me a hundred for conduct. I don't know which of these teachers was right, but I have to admit I liked the teacher who gave me the hundred better. He was the same teacher who had praised a composition of mine as "the best since the founding of Keika Middle School," Mr. Ohara Yoichi.

In those days Keika Middle School graduates had an excellent rate of entrance into Tokyo Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo), and this was a great matter of school pride. Mr. Ohara always used to say, "Even a ghost could get into a private university." These days it isn't that easy, but a ghost with money can still get in. I liked my grammar teacher, Mr. Ohara, very much, but I was also fond of my history teacher, Mr. Iwamatsu Goro. According to my class report, I was a great favorite of this teacher as well. He was a wonderful teacher. A really good teacher doesn't seem like a teacher at all; that's exactly how this man was. If someone looked out the window or started whispering to his neighbor during class, Mr. Iwamatsu would throw a piece of chalk at him. He would fly into a rage and throw one piece after another, so he was always running out of chalk. Then he would say he couldn't give his lessons without chalk, so he'd smile and settle into an unstructured chat. His rambling talks were always far more instructive than any textbook. But the heavenly perfection of Mr. Iwamatsu's personality displayed itself in the most vivid fashion when the term-end examinations came. Each classroom where the exams were held was visited by a succession of teachers who administered the tests. Care was taken that supervising teacher had nothing to do with the subject of the exam being given. But if it was Mr. Iwamatsu who walked in the door, a roaring cheer would fill the room. The reason was that Mr. Iwamatsu was unable to do something so formal as proctor an examination. If a student showed distress over one of the exam questions, Mr. Iwamatsu would come and peer over his shoulder at the problem. Then the following events invariably transpired: Mr. Iwamatsu would say, "What's the matter, can't you do that? Listen, it goes like this," becoming completely involved. Then he would say, "You still don't understand? Blockhead!" At this he would go to the blackboard and write out the whole solution, saying, "Well, now you understand, don't you?" Sure enough, after his careful explanation, even the worst idiot would have the answer. I am very poor at mathematics, but when Iwamatsu proctored the examination, I got a hundred percent. At the end of one term I took a history examination with ten questions. There wasn't much I could do to answer any of them. The Proctor was of course not Mr. Iwamatsu, since he taught the subject, so I was ready to give up. But in the utmost desperation I decided to take a stab at one of them: "Give your impressions of the three sacred treasures of the Imperial Court." I scribbled about three pages of nonsense, something along these lines: I've heard a great deal of talk about the Three Treasures, but I've never seen them with my own my own eyes, so it isn't really possible for me to write my impressions of them. Take for example the legendary yata-no-kagami sacred mirror---it is so holy that no one has ever been allowed to see it, so it may in reality be not round but square or triangular. I am only capable of

talking about things I have looked at closely with my own eyes, and I believe only things for which there is proof. The day came when Mr. Iwamatsu had finished grading the exam papers and returned them to the students. He announced in a loud voice, "There's one paper here that's very curious. It answers only one of the ten test questions, but this answer is most interesting. This is the first time I've ever come across such an original answer. The fellow who wrote this shows real promise. One hundred percent! Kurosawa!" He thrust the paper at me. All eyes turned on me at once. I turned bright red and shrank down in my chair, unable to move for a long moment. In my day there were many such teachers who harbored a libertarian spirit and a wealth of individual qualities. By comparison with them, among today's schoolteachers there are too many plain "salary-man" drudges. Or perhaps even more than salary men, there are too many bureaucrat types among those who become teachers. The kind of education these people dispense isn't worth a damn. There's absolutely nothing of interest in it. So it's no wonder that students today prefer to spend their time reading comic books. In primary school I had a wonderful teacher in Mr. Tachikawa. In middle school I had Mr. Ohara and Mr. Iwamatsu, who were also wonderful teachers. These teachers understood my individual qualities and encouraged me to develop them. I have been truly blessed with my teachers. Later, when I entered the film world, I was fortunate enough to get an excellent teacher in "Yama-san" (director Yamamoto Kajiro, 1902-1973). I also received warm encouragement from director Itami Mansaku (1900-1946) and excellent training from the superb producer Morita Nobuyoshi. Besides these people there are many directors I revere as teachers: Shimazu Yasujira (1897-1945), Yamanaka Sadao (1909-1938), Mizoguchi Kenji, Ozu Yasujiro and Naruse Mikio. When I think about these people, I want to raise my voice in that old song: ". . . thanks for our teacher's kindness, we have honored and revered. . . ." But none of them can hear me now.

### My Rebellious Phase

BEGINNING WITH my second year of middle school, following the Great Kanto Earthquake, I became an incorrigible prankster. Since the Keika Middle School building had burned down, we moved into the borrowed facilities of a technology school near Ushigome-Kagurazaka. It was at that time a night school, so the buildings were not normally in use during the day. Nevertheless, all four classes of second-year students were crammed into the auditorium instead of individual classrooms. For those assigned seats in the back of the auditorium, the teacher at the rostrum not only looked like a dwarf, but his voice was barely audible. Since my seat was among those in the rear, I was far more diligent in mischief than in studies. A year later, even after the school was rebuilt on a site near Shirayama and my mischievous tendencies should have been subsiding, I got worse. While we were at the technology school, the pranks I rolled were fairly rudimentary and harmless. But at the new school I did some things that were downright alarming. Once I even put together all the ingredients in the formula for dynamite we had learned in chemistry

class. In the laboratory I carefully filled a beer bottle with this mixture and put it on the teacher's lectern. When he heard what it was, he turned white as a sheet, very gingerly removed the bottle from the lectern, took it outside and sank it in the pond in the school garden. For all I know, that bottle still lies sleeping peacefully on the bottom of the Keika Middle School pond. Another time I concluded that a boy in my class who was the son of a math teacher but who himself did very poorly at math would probably get the final-exam questions ahead of time. I enlisted some of my friends and we led the boy out behind the school building. At first he insisted he knew nothing, but in the end we got every last exam question out of him. We gave them to everyone else in the class, and on the examination the whole class miraculously scored one hundred percent. However, these marks naturally aroused the teacher's suspicions, so now it was his turn to interrogate his son. It seems he, too, got a confession, because the whole class was subjected to another exam.

The result on the second exam was that the teacher's son failed the course, and so did I. Once a prank I knew nothing about was attributed to me. In righteous indignation, I ran over the tops of all the desks in the lecture hall wearing my spiked baseball shoes. But this was such extreme behavior that I didn't confess to it, and I was subsequently surprised to see that my marks in conduct improved. Toward the end of my third year in middle school, military training became part of the regular curriculum. A real Army captain was posted to our school, and things did not go well between him and me. One day a mischief-loving friend of mine showed me a tin can he was carrying. It was packed full of gunpowder from the bullets we used in marksmanship practice, he said. He was sure it would make a wonderful noise if someone would smash it, but he couldn't find any-one with enough courage to try it. When I suggested he go ahead and do it himself, he countered that he, too, lacked the courage and proposed, "What about you, Kurochan?" Thus challenged, I could hardly refuse. "All right," I said, and set the can at the foot of the stairwell in the school building. I then selected a big rock, carried it up to the second floor and dropped it. The sound was positively deafening, much louder than we had expected it to be. Even before the echoes had died off the concrete walls, the Army captain, livid with rage, was upon me. I wasn't a soldier, so he couldn't hit me, but he dragged me off to the principal's office. There he lambasted me with a fiery stream of reproaches. The next day my father was also summoned. I suspect that his distinguished military career had some influence at this point. I was fully prepared to be expelled from school, but I wasn't, and no further disciplinary measures ensued. I don't recall that my father even scolded me very much. And although the principal was present while the Army captain reprimanded me in his office, I don't remember the principal himself being angry with me. As I reflect on it now, it seems to me that both my father and the principal may have been opposed to compulsory military education. Among teachers and military men there are of course exceptions to the rule, but there is a vast difference in viewpoint between the Meiji era—dominated by its elite military and business class—and the Taisho and Showa periods that followed, which were so marked by fanaticism. My father was a military man of Meiji who hated socialism. But he also reacted with horror to the murder of the internationally famous anarchist Osugi Sakae and others by an Army extremist in 1923, and

when the assassin received no more than a ten-year sentence, my father burst out, "Madmen! What can they be thinking?" My relations with the Army captain at Keika were very similar to my relations with the teacher who succeeded Mr. Tachikawa at Kuroda Primary School. He seemed to take great pleasure in calling on me to demonstrate everything he was trying to teach. I was never fit to be a model, and he enjoyed it when I botched something and made a fool of myself. I thought over this situation very carefully and wrote a letter in old-fashioned Chinese-style prose in the book kept for correspondence between teachers and parents. It said something to the effect that "this child has a chest ailment, so please excuse him from carrying heavy implements like rifles." I affixed my father's seal to it and handed it to the Army captain. He made a dour face, but accepted its terms. From that time on, he could no longer abuse me with commands like "Target straight ahead, shoot from your knees!" or "Enemy target to your ear right, lie down and shoot!" But if a rifle was too heavy for me, a saber ought to be just right. The captain dragged me forward to be trained as a platoon leader. At tiny command, my whole class was supposed to spring into action. But my orders would contradict each other, or suddenly fail to emerge from my mouth, and the results were very strange. My classmates found this quite amusing, so they would march off in the wrong direction even when my commands were right, and when I did give wrong commands, they took great delight in carrying them out spectacularly. For example, when I said, "Forward, march!" they should have shouldered their rifles and moved ahead, but instead they would start walking with their rifles dragging along the ground behind them. They were especially delighted when the whole column was marching straight for a wall. If I panicked and didn't come out with a command to change direction immediately, they would happily plow into the wall, noisily scuffing at it with their boots. I would get out of the way and give up. No matter what the Army captain said, I would feign ignorance and say nothing. Seeing this, my classmates would all the more faithfully attempt to carry out my order and some would even try scaling the wall. The Army captain would stand there aghast until I came out with another command. My classmates claimed that their intention was not to embarrass me, but to tease the Army captain for being such a mean-tempered fellow. They showed their consistency most clearly when the military-education inspector came and we were to carry out a practice attack for him. While we were waiting for our turn to perform, I spoke to my classmates: "All right, let's show this captain what's what. There's a big mud puddle right in front of where the inspector is standing. When we get there, I'm going to give the command to lie down, so everybody do it right." They all nodded. At my command "Charge!" they all burst into a breakneck run, and when I yelled "Down!" just before the mud puddle, all gustily threw themselves into the mire. A great spray flew into the air, and we were all turned into mud dolls. The inspector bellowed, "That will do!" I quickly glanced at the face of the captain, standing at attention next to the inspector. He looked as if he had bitten into something that he had thought was a steamed rice cake but turned out to be horse manure. The strained relations between us continued until I graduated from middle school. It seems to me now that this relationship constituted my second rebellious phase. I feel I concentrated all my youthful resistance on this one man, I say this because during this period I showed no antagonism toward

my family or anyone else—only this Army captain received the full brunt of my hostility. When I graduated from Keika Middle School, I was the only one in my class who failed military education. I did not receive a certificate of commissioned officer's competence. Moreover, fearing what the captain might say to me at the graduation ceremony, I stayed home. But later when I went to pick up my diploma and passed through the school gate on my way back home, there he was lying in wait. He came after me, planting himself in my path and glaring menacingly. "Traitor!" he roared. Passers-by stopped in amazement and stared at us. But I had been prepared for a scolding from him, and I didn't waste a moment with my response: "I have graduated from Keika Middle School. You as the military officer attached to the school no longer have the right or the responsibility to say anything to me. Finished His face changed several colors with the facility of a chameleon. I waved my rolled-up diploma at that face and turned my back on him. After I had gone a short distance, I turned around and looked back to see him still standing there.

### A Distant Village

MY FATHER'S PEOPLE are from Akita in the northern part of Honshu. For this reason, apparently, my name is listed with the Tokyo Association of Akita Prefecture Natives. But my mother was born in Osaka, and I myself was born in the Omori district of Tokyo, so I really don't have the feeling that I am a native of Akita Prefecture or that it is in any way my home. As if Japan weren't small enough to begin with, I fail to understand why it is necessary to think of it in even smaller units. No matter where I go in the world, although I can't speak any foreign language, I don't feel out of place. I think of the earth as my home. If everyone thought this way, people might notice just how foolish international friction is, and they would put an end to it. We are, after all, at a point where it is almost narrow-minded to think merely in geocentric terms. Human beings have launched satellites into outer space, and yet they still grovel on earth looking at their own feet like wild dogs. What is to become of our planet? My father's home in the back country of Akita has been altered cruelly. In the brook that flows through the center of the village where my father was born, where once lovely grasses and flowers bloomed, there is now refuse: teacups, beer bottles, tin cans, laborers' rubber shoes and even knee boots. Nature takes good care of her appearance. What makes nature ugly is the behavior of human beings. When I visited the Akita countryside in my middle-school days, the people were truly simple. And it is not as if the scenery there were the most picturesque imaginable. It was ordinary enough. But at the same time it was replete with a simple beauty. To be accurate about it, the village in which my father was born was called Toyokawa Village and lies in the Senboku-gun district of Akita Prefecture. You used to be able to get within about eight kilometers of it by train and then walk the rest of the way. I remember that there were two oddly named stations along the line, one called Gosannen ("Three Years Later") and one called Zenkunen ("Nine Years Earlier"). The latter



station no longer exists. Apparently these two localities were named for famous battles of the Hachiman Taro clan, relatives of the medieval Genji warriors. Looking out of the lefthand side of the train, you could see a range of mountains where, according to legend, Hachiman Taro Yoshiie himself had his battle encampment. I later learned that these remote events actually had a connection to me. In my entire lifetime I have been to my father's native village only six times. Two of those excursions took place during my middle-school years. Once was when I was a third-year student, and I can't for the life of me remember when the other time was. Nor can I remember what happened on the second trip—it has all become inextricably tangled in my mind with the first one. As I ponder it, it occurs to me that the reason for this is that the village had not changed at all in the interval between my two trips. The houses, streets, brooks and trees, even the stones, grasses and flowers were so much the same from one trip to the next that I have no means of distinguishing between what should be two separate memories. It was as if time stood still even for the people in that village, for they, too, remained completely unchanged, left behind by the world. Many people there had never eaten "foreign" foods like breaded pork cutlets or rice curry. No caramels or cookies were sold in Toyokawa either, because there were no houses that doubled as shops. Even the primary-school teacher had never seen Tokyo. He asked me what people there say as a greeting when they go visiting—as if Tokyoites surely spoke some odd, incomprehensible dialect. Carrying a letter from my father, I went to visit one of the homes in the village. The old man who came to the entry to ask what my business was listened to me a moment and then rushed back into the interior of the house. In his place an old woman came out and with the utmost courtesy conducted me to the formal room with a tatami-mat floor, where she seated me in the honored guest's position with my back to the art alcove. Then she disappeared. Finally the old man re-emerged, in his formal black cloak with the family crest on the shoulders, and formal black hakama trousers. He made a forehead-to-floor kneeling bow to me, raised my father's letter reverently to his head and began reading. That same evening I was again seated with my back to the pillar of the art alcove. With me as the guest of honor in the highest position, and all of the elders and adults of the village seated around the room, a drinking party began. Each of the villagers held out his sake cup before him to the village daughters, all decked out in their finery to serve at this occasion. "To Tokyo," said the first, proffering his cup. "Tokyo," said the second. "Tokyo," the third. As I was trying to understand what this was all about, the girls all started toward me one by one with the sake cups. Arriving at my place, the first girl held out the cup to me. When I took it in my hands, she poured it full of sake. Never having drunk sake before, I stared at the cup in discomfort. As I did so, the second girl urged her cup on me Mild poured. And then a third. I gave up and drank. After a while my eyes glazed over and the voices saying, "Tokyo," "Tokyo," became softer and softer like an echo. My heart began to pound furiously. I could no longer sit still, so I stood up and wobbled outside, where I fell into a rice paddy. Later I understood that "Tokyo" meant "for the guest from Tokyo," Mud I was being honored. They certainly hadn't meant to do wrong lo making a mere child drink sake; here they gave sake to babies. (Of course, they must get used to it.) Near the main thoroughfare of the village stood a huge rock, and there were always cut flowers on top of it. All the children

who passed by it picked wild flowers and laid them atop the stone. When I wondered why they did this and asked, the children said they didn't know. I found out later by asking one of the old men in the village. In the Rattle of Boshin, a hundred years ago, someone died at that spot. Feeling sorry for him, the villagers buried him, put the stone over the grave and laid flowers on it. The flowers became a custom of the village, which the children maintained without ever knowing why. Also in this village there lived an old man who hated thunder. When a thunderstorm began, he would crawl under a huge shelf he had suspended from the ceiling to block the thunder. He huddled there until the storm ended. Once when I visited a farmer's house, he served me a vegetable dish with miso bean-paste sauce cooked in clamshells—a style called *kaiyaki* in this part of the country—and fish. While he drank sake over his meal, he said to me in thick dialect, "You might wonder what I mild be interesting about living in a hovel like this and eating slop like this. Well, I tell you, it's interesting just to be alive." In any case, what I heard and saw of the way people lived in Toyokawa Village fifty years ago was surprisingly simple and almost sadly peaceful. As I recall it now, the memories of this place fade into the distance like a village seen from a train window, growing smaller and hazier.

### The Family Tree

DURING THE SUMMER holidays of my third year in middle school I was sent to stay with my relatives in Toyokawa Village. The household was that of my father's older brother, but since he had already passed away, his oldest son was the master of the house. The house itself was what had formerly been the rice storehouse. The original house had been sold in grandfather's time to the area's wealthiest man. By my time not even the foundation cornerstone was left. But some shadow of the past could still be found in the garden. There was a lovely meandering stream there. Its course carried it through the center of the kitchen, and from there it continued on to rejoin the brook by the town's main thoroughfare. They say that in the old days you could catch frogs in the stream, and that they even came into the basin that blocked the flow of the stream in the kitchen. The building that had once been the rice storehouse had ceiling rafters as big around as the pillars holding up a normal house. The central pillar of this house as well as the beams supporting the ridge-pole were thick and sturdy, and the braces all gleamed with a dark glow. It had been my father's idea to send me here. He decided that this was the place to cure my physical weakness with discipline. The daily schedule for my training was outlined in a letter from my father to the head of the house. My father's instructions were to be carried out with extreme rigidity. For a city boy like me it was a cruel regime. I got up very early in the morning, and as soon as I had finished breakfast I was turned out of the house. I was given a layered lunchbox with two meals for each of two people in it. These meals consisted only of rice, miso bean paste and pickles. I was also given a cast-iron pot to carry. Outside I was met by a primary-school sixth-grader from another family of local relatives. This boy always carried a huge net for

catching fish and a massive stick. The idea was that if we wanted to eat anything besides pickles and rice for our lunch and dinner, we had better catch ourselves some fish. The stick the sixth-grader carried was actually more of a log with a square board nailed to one end of it. You were supposed to stem the flow of the stream with it and chase the fish into the net. The boy who accompanied me was a big fellow who carried the stick like a piece of straw, but when I tried lifting it, I found it awfully heavy. Trying to block off a stream and a fish with it was hard work. But we wanted more than pickles and rice to eat, so we applied ourselves to using it, with modest success. The sixth-grader willingly manipulated the fishnet, but he absolutely refused to wield the stick. "No. Orders," he said. The fact that my father's instructions had penetrated even this boy's brain caused me to marvel and shut my mouth. It was summer, so we usually ate our outdoor meals in a cool forest. First we'd find two Y-shaped branches and stick them into the ground. Then we'd lay a crosspiece on them, hang the pot on it and build a fire underneath. The pot was cast iron, but inside it were big clamshells with miso sauce for cooking the fish in *kaiyaki* style. The fish were mostly varieties of carp. We would add local herbs and vegetables that grew wild. We ate with chopsticks made from whittled branches, and our meals were indescribably delicious. I was about to write that these were the best meals I've ever tasted, but that would be a slight exaggeration. Nevertheless, I would be hard put to decide which meals were better, these or the cold rice balls I ate atop the peaks when I much later became a devotee of mountain climbing. We usually ate dinner on the riverbank. This meal, eaten amid the sunset colors of the sky and the glowing reflection from the river, had a different flavor although the ingredients were the same. When it was over, we made our way back home, reaching it in total darkness. As soon as I returned and had a bath, I was sleepy. I'd have a cup of tea by the sunken hearth and find myself unable to keep my eyes open, so I'd go straight to bed. With the exception of rainy days, my entire summer was spent in this kind of mountain samurai's existence. Gradually I got better at catching fish, and the stick with the board on it lost its heaviness for me. Gradually also we came to penetrate deeper and deeper into the mountains, and our number increased to three, then four and five as other children tagged along with us. One day we came upon a waterfall. It emerged from what seemed to be a rock tunnel cut through the mountain wall, and it plunged some thirty feet into a pool. The pool was not a very big one, and the overflow continued on down the mountain. I asked the other children what it was like at the other end of the tunnel the waterfall came through. They all replied that no one knew because no one had ever been there. "Well, then I'll go take a look," I said. They all looked horrified and urged me to give up the idea—after all, no adult had ever been there, so it must be really dangerous, they insisted. At this resistance my stubbornness grew and I felt I absolutely had to go. I shrugged off all the frantic attempts to deter me and clambered up the cliff. I entered the hole from which the waterfall emerged, putting both hands firmly against the top and my feet astride either side of the stream below me. Shifting my weight from left to right with each step, I headed for the light at the end of the tunnel where the stream came in. Each time I moved one of my hands or feet, the smooth, wet moss on the rock walls threatened to make me slip. The sound of the water inside the tunnel made a deafening, echoing roar, but I wasn't particularly frightened.

But the moment I arrived at the other end I inadvertently relaxed my grip. In an instant I had fallen into the stream. I don't know how I came back through the tunnel, but before I could gather my wits I was astride the top of the waterfall and plunging headlong over it into the pool below. I seem to have come through unharmed, because I surfaced and swam to the edge of the pool, where the terrified children all stared at me with their eyes as wide as saucers. It's a good thing they didn't ask me what it was like at the other end of the tunnel. I did make it that far, but I didn't have time to look around. After that I did one more stupid thing that amazed the boys of Toyokawa Village. Not far away there is a good-sized river called the Tamagawa. At one point the current of the Tamagawa forms a big whirlpool. Whenever the village children went swimming, their good sense made them carefully avoid this spot. I once more displayed my bravado by insisting I would dive into the river precisely there. Naturally everyone turned pale and tried to stop me. So naturally I became all the more determined to show them. Finally the boys set a condition on allowing me to dive into the whirlpool. They would all tie their kimono sashes together and tie this sash rope around my waist. That way, if anything happened, they would have a hold on me and could pull me out of the water. But this rope of sashes nearly proved to be the death of me. I had taken lessons in the Kankairyu swimming style from the time I entered middle school. I had been made to swim under a huge cargo junk as part of these lessons. At that time exactly what the teacher had told me would happen occurred. When I reached the midpoint under the belly of the ship, I was suddenly sucked against its bottom boards. But exactly as the teacher had told me, I did not panic. Instead, I turned over. My back had been pinned to the junk but now I pushed off with all four limbs and swam on. Since I had had this experience with the junk, a mere whirlpool seemed like nothing to me. But no sooner did I dive into the whirlpool than I was pinned to the bottom of the river. Recalling the junk, I repeated over and over to myself, "Don't panic," and I tried to crawl along the river bottom, away from the whirlpool. But the boys on the bank were pulling on the sash rope tied around my waist with all their might, so I couldn't move at all. I did panic. But I still couldn't move. I had no choice but to try crawling in the direction from which I was being pulled by the waist, against the current. After what seemed like hours of extreme pain and abject terror, I began to float toward the surface. I kicked my feet and shot out of the water. Once again the village boys were all standing there with pale faces and staring at me with eyes as round as saucers.

There was a reason I gave them such adventures. As I have explained already, it was only on rainy days in Toyokawa Village that I was not turned out of the house after breakfast with a two-meal lunchbox. My life-style was the exact expression of the phrase "working in fair weather and reading in wet." When it rained, I'd read books or occasionally look at my homework but not really do much of it. On these days I had the use of the small room where the shelf for the Shinto gods was. One day while I was reading, the head of the house-hold came and took from a drawer or bookshelf under the god shelf what he said was the Kurosawa genealogy chart. Looking at the family tree, I saw the name Abe Sadato (1015 – 1062), who died in that Battle of Zenkunen that no longer has a train station named after it. From his name there extended a number of lines, but the third one was Kurosawa Jirisaburo. From his name extends one Kurosawa after another.

Apparently Abe Sadato's third son—Kurosawa "Tail End Number Three Son," to treat his name literally—was the progenitor of my family. It was the first time I had ever heard the name Kurosawa Jirisaburo, but Abe Sadato was a very familiar name. In the history books he is mentioned as a famous warrior of northern Japan. His father was the Genji warrior Yoritoki, and his younger brother, Abe Muneto. He defied the orders of the imperial court and went to war with Minamoto Yoriyoshi, where he met his end. The fact that he was a traitor and died in a losing battle was a little disappointing, but he was Kurosawa Jirisaburo's father, and if I had to pick an ancestor to admire, it was Sadato who cut the best figure. And somehow I became courageous. The result of my newfound courage was climbing the waterfall tunnel, slipping and going over the falls and later diving into a whirl-pool. Not very smart. But even though I pursued such foolishness, in the course of this one summer vacation this particular descendant of Abe Sadato became considerably more robust.

### My Aunt Togashi

AS I FINISH my stories about Akita Prefecture, there is one person I must write about. This person is my father's older sister, who married into the Togashi family in the town of Omagari in Akita. This Togashi household were descendants of the border captain Togashi, who has Benkei read the subscription list in the famous Kabuki play Kanjincho -, upon which I based my 1945 film The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail. The Togashi estate did not occupy a very big piece of land, but the house was an exceptionally large one and surrounded by a moat. Carved wooden sumo wrestlers supported the ridgepole, supposedly the work of the legendary early modern architect-sculptor Hidari Jingoro. Of course, any wood sculpture that looks like anything at all is attributed to Hidari Jingoro, so I can't tell if these wrestlers were really his work or not. There is also supposed to be a short sword in the Togashi household that is the work of the master swordmaker of the thirteenth century, Okazaki Masamune, but I have not yet seen it. In any event, you could judge the social standing of the household by looking at the construction of the house. For me it was much more a case of sensing the social standing of the household by observing my aunt's behavior. My Aunt Togashi had a truly awe-inspiring presence, a majesty powerful enough to wither those around her. But she was affectionate toward me, and I in turn had a special liking for her. When she came to visit my father in Tokyo, he behaved with extreme courtesy. And we would often have eel for dinner. This dish was terribly expensive at time, so we hardly ever ate it. But my aunt always left half of her in t ion neatly untouched. Then, calling "Akira," she gave it to me. Whenever she went visiting, I accompanied her. She was at that time already very advanced in age, and she wore her white hair cut short around a face that still showed teeth blackened in the traditional way for married women of the feudal era. She looked something like one of the magical little old men of the Noh drama. When we went out, she wore a kimono overcoat and put her hands inside her sleeves as she walked. I don't mean

she had her arms folded together inside her sleeves in some lazy or sneaky fashion, but rather that she grasped the ends of the sleeves with her hands from the inside, and she pulled the sleeves out straight to the side as she walked. So she looked something like a chicken or a heron spreading its wings to take off in flight. Passers-by would always stare at her in surprise. I felt a little embarrassed as I accompanied her, but it was a special kind of feeling. My aunt never talked while we walked along. But when we arrived at the house where she was going visiting, she would turn to me and hand me a fifty-sen piece wrapped in paper and say, "Saraba," a northern dialect word for "goodbye." At that time fifty sen was a huge amount of money for a child. But it wasn't for the money that I enjoyed escorting my aunt. It was because that word "saraba" had a charm that sent shivers down my spine. In my aunt's way of saying it there was a great store of implicit warmth and kindness. Aunt Togashi should have lived, judging by her general physical condition, to be about a hundred and ten years old. But a stupid doctor had a theory about extending her life span even longer by making her eat strange things like pine wood and tree roots. Because of this she died without even reaching the age of ninety. When she was on her deathbed, I went a little in advance of my father to be his representative in case she died before he got there. My aunt lay quietly as I sat near her pillow, and then she said to me, "Akira? Pain. Your father?" I explained that my father had been slightly detained and had sent me ahead, but that he was on his way. I left the room. But she called me back again and again to say, "Akira, has he come yet?" Finally my father arrived from Tokyo, and I was already on my way back. A few days later my aunt died. For my part, I cannot forgive that doctor who made her eat those strange things. I'd like to stuff his mouth with pine needles.

### The Sapling

ORDINARILY, children are supposed to spend their childhood like saplings sheltered in a greenhouse. Even if on occasion some wind or rain of the real world slips in through the cracks, a child is not supposed to be weatherbeaten in earnest by the sleet and snow. I, too, spent such a sheltered childhood, and the only time I really experienced the wind of life was in the Great Kanto Earthquake. Events like the First World War and the Russian revolution and the transitions and upheavals in Japanese society during those years were things I only heard about, like the wind and rain outside my greenhouse. When I graduated from middle school, it was as if I had been planted outdoors for the first time. I began to feel the wind and rain of world events on my own skin. In 1925, when I was in my fourth year at middle school, the first radio broadcasts in Japan began. Even if I didn't want to hear about what was going on in society, I could not avoid it. As I mentioned earlier, this was about the time that military education was instituted in the schools, and the world became somehow hurried and cold. As I look back on my early years now, it seems the summer I spent in Akita was the last carefree time of my childhood. But such observations may be pure sentimentality on my part. In my fourth and fifth years of

middle school, when I was about sixteen, I was still fumbling around with a crystal radio set. On Sundays I would borrow my father's pass (why he had this I don't really know) and go to the Meguro racetrack, where I would spend the whole day looking at the horses I had loved from childhood. And my parents bought me a set of oil paints so I could go to the outskirts of Tokyo and paint the scenes of rural life I saw there. I had a pretty good time. During these years my family moved from Koishikawa to Meguro, and from there to Ebisu, near Shibuya. Still in Tokyo, of course. Each time we moved, it was to a smaller, less well-built house. I did not understand that this meant my family's economic situation was getting worse and worse. I still insisted that upon my graduation from middle school I intended to become a painter. At that point I was forced to think about how I would actually make a living in my chosen profession. My father, who had always loved calligraphy, was not without sympathy for my goals—he did not oppose me. But, as any parent in those days would have done, he said I would have to go to art school. As a lover of Cezanne and Van Gogh, I felt that such an academic approach would be a waste of time. Nor was I eager to take another entrance examination. Even though I felt that I had the ability to pass the practical painting test, I was rightly not confident of my command of academic course material. I took the entrance exam and failed. Although it was a bitter thing to have to disappoint my father, I was thus enabled to pursue my studies freely, and I was sure there would be some other way to console him. The year after I finished middle school, at the age of eighteen, I had a painting accepted for the prestigious national Nitten exhibition. My father was happy. But after that I set out on a winding path beset by wind and snow.

### The Labyrinth

THE YEAR I turned eighteen, 1928, saw the mass arrest of Communist Party members in the "3-15 Incident" and the assassination of the Manchurian warlord Chang Tso-lin by Japanese Army officers. The following year brought the worldwide economic panic. As the winds of the Great Depression blew across a Japan shaken to the very foundations of her economy, proletarian movements sprang up everywhere, including the field of fine art. At the other extreme was an art movement that advocated escape from the painful realities of the hard times, something that was called, in a sort of pidgin, "eroguro nan-sensu" ("erotic-grotesque nonsense"). In the midst of all this social upheaval it was impossible for me to sit quietly in front of my canvas. On top of that, the cost of canvas and painting supplies was so high that, considering the financial situation of my family, I could hardly ask them to buy me a full supply. Unable to throw myself completely into painting, I explored literature, theater, music and film. Around that time there was a boom in the printing of "yen books," so-called because each cost one yen, and the market was flooded with collections of both Japanese literature and translations of foreign works. If you went to secondhand bookstores, you could find these books remaindered for fifty sen, sometimes even thirty sen, so even I could buy as many as I wanted. For someone like me who had no need to

spend time in academic pursuits, there was more than enough time to spend in random reading. I read classics and contemporary, foreign and Japanese literature without discrimination. I read under the covers in bed at night, I read as I walked along the street. I went to the theater to see Shinkokugeki, the "New National Drama" developed to take the place of Meiji-era Kabuki. It was with the greatest wonder in my eyes that I watched the performances at the playwright-director Osanai Kaoru's Tsukiji Little Theater, the center of revolution in the theater. A friend of mine who liked music had a phonograph and a record collection. At his house I listened mainly to classical recordings. I also went often to listen to composer-conductor Konoe Hidemaro's New Symphony Orchestra rehearsals. Naturally, as an aspiring painter, I went to see every kind of painting I could, both Japanese and Western. At that time art books and printed monographs on painters were not very common, but I bought what I could afford of what was available. What I couldn't afford, I imprinted on my brain by looking at it over and over again in a book-store. Most of the art books I bought at this time were lost along with all my other books in the air raids on Tokyo in the Pacific War. But a few of them are still in my possession. Their spines are broken and frayed, their covers and pages mixed up, and they are covered with fingerprints—some of them obviously made by paint-smearred fingers. And when I look at these books now, the same emotions I felt when I first studied them come rushing back. I became fascinated by motion pictures, too. My older brother, who had left home and was moving from boardinghouse to boarding-house, was addicted to Russian literature. But at the same time he wrote under various pen names for film programs. He wrote in particular about the art of the foreign cinema, which was much promoted following the First World War. In matters of both film and literature I owe much to my brother's discernment. I took special care to see every film my brother recommended. As far back as elementary school I walked all the way to Asakusa to see a movie he had said was good. I don't remember what it was that I saw in Asakusa, but I do remember that it was at the Opera Theater. I remember waiting in line for discount tickets for the late show, and I remember my brother getting a terrific scolding from my father when we got home. I have tried making a list of the films that impressed me at that time, and the list runs to nearly a hundred titles.\*

- It was a long time ago, so it's very difficult to remember the exact dates. For the foreign films I have had to refer to their production and release dates in their Countries of origin, and in some cases there was a gap of two or three years before they were shown in Japan.

1919 (Taisho 8). AK aged 9. The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, directed by Robert Wiene; Passion, dir. Ernst Lubitsch; Shoulder Arms, dir. Charles Chaplin; Male und Female, dir. Cecil B. DeMille; Broken Blossoms, dir. D. W. Griffith.

1920 (Taisho 9). AK aged 10. Von Morgens his Mitternacht, dir. Carl Martin; Die Bergkatze, dir. Ernst Lubitsch; The Phantom Carriage, dir. Victor Ibstrom; The Last of the Mohicans, dir. Maurice Tourneur; Humoresque, dir. frank Borzage; Sunnyside, dir. Charles Chaplin.



1921 (Taisho 10: Prime Minister Hara assassinated). AK aged 11. Way Duten East, dir. D. W. Griffith; The Kid, dir. Charles Chaplin; The Three Musketeers, dir. Fred Niblo; Over the Hill to the Poor House, dir. Harry Millarde; The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, dir. Rex Ingram; Fool's Paradise, dir. Cecil B. DeMille.

1922 (Taisho 11: Founding of Japan Communist Party). AK aged 12, first Year at Keika Middle School. Dr. Mabuse, dir. Fritz Lang; The Loves of Pharaoh, dir. Ernst Lubitsch; The Little Prince, dir. Alfred Green; Blood and Sand, dir. Fred Niblo; The Prisoner of Zenda, dir. Rex Ingram; Pay Day, dir. Charles Chaplin; Foolish Wives, dir. Erich von Stroheim; Orphans of the Storm, dir. D. W. Griffith; The Distant Smile, dir. Sidney Franklin.

1923 (Taisho 12: Great Kanto Earthquake). AK aged 13, second year at KMS. The Pilgrim, dir. Charles Chaplin; The Thief of Bagdad, dir. Raoul Walsh; I a Roue, dir. Abel Gance; Kick In, dir. George Fitzmaurice; The Covered Wagon, flu James Cruze; Kean, dir. Alexandre Vilkoff; A Woman of Paris, dir. Charles Chaplin; Cyrano de Bergerac, dir. Augusto Genina.

1924 (Taisho 13). AK aged 14, third year at KMS. The Iron Horse, dir. John Ford; He Who Gets Slapped, dir. Victor Sjostrom; Die Niebelungen, dir. Fritz Lang; The Marriage Circle, dir. Ernst Lubitsch.

1925 (Taisho 14: Peace Preservation Law passed; first radio broadcasts). AK aged 15, fourth year at KMS. The Gold Rush, dir. Charles Chaplin; Master of the House, dir. Carl Dreyer; Feu Mathias Pascal, dir. Marcel L'Herbier; Beau dir. Herbert Brenon; Greed, dir. Erich von Stroheim; Lady Windermere's Fan, dir. Ernst Lubitsch; The Big Parade, dir. King Vidor; The Salvation Hunters, dir. Josef von Sternberg; The Last Laugh, dir. F. W. Murnau; The Joyless Street, dir. C. W. Pabst; Nana, dir. Jean Renoir; Variety, dir. E. A. Dupont.

1926 (Taisho 15: Farm Labor Party founded; death of Emperor Taisho). AK aged 16, fifth year at KMS. Three Bad Men, dir. John Ford; So This Is Paris, dir. Ernst Lubitsch; The Armored Vault, dir. Lupu Pick; Tartuffe, dir. F. W. Murnau; Faust, dir. F. W. Murnau; Metropolis, dir. Fritz Lang; Potemkin, dir. brrgei Eisenstein; Mother, dir. V. I. Pudovkin.

1927 (Showa 2: Financial panic; author Akutagawa Ryonosuke commits suicide; Disarmament Conference established). AK aged 17, graduates from KMS. Seventh Heaven, dir. Frank Borzage; Wings, dir. William Wellman; Barbed Wire, dir. Rowland V. Lee; Underworld, dir. Josef von Sternberg; Sunrise, dir. F. W. Murnau; Comedies with Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, Harry Langdon, Wallace Beery, Raymond Hatton, Chester Conklin, Roscoe Arbuckle, Sidney Chaplin; Chuji tabi nikki, dir. Ito Daisuke.

1928 (Showa 3: Assassination of Chang Tso-lin in Manchuria; "3-15 Incident" suppression of Communism). AK aged 18. Docks of New York, dir. Josef von Sternberg; The Dragnet, dir. Josef von Sternberg; Therese Raquin, dir. Jacques Feyder; Storm over Asia, dir. V. I. Pudovkin; The Wedding March, dir. Erich von Stroheim; The Little Match Girl, dir. Jean Renoir; Verdun,

Visions d'histoire, dir. Leon Poirier; The Fall of the House of Usher, dir. Jean Epstein; La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc, dir. Carl Dreyer; The Seashell and the Clergyman, dir. Germaine Dulac; Shinpan Ooka Seidan, dir. Ito Daisuke; Roningai, dir. Makino Masahiro.

1929 (Showa 4: "4-16 Incident" suppression of Communism; zeppelin comes to Japan; gold embargo; Tokyo streetcar wars; worldwide Depression begins). AK aged 19. The Blue Angel, dir. Josef von Sternberg; Asphalt, dir. Joe May; Un Chien andalou, dir. Luis Bufluel; Les Mysteres du Château du De, dir. Man Ray; Rien que les heures. dir. Alberto Cavalcanti; Kubi no za, dir. Makino Masahiro; Kaijin, dir. Murata Minoru.

Even I am surprised at the number of films I saw during this time that have survived in the annals of cinema history. And I owe this to my brother. At the age of nineteen, in 1929, I became dissatisfied with my life of painting landscapes and still-lives when so much was going on in the world around me. I decided to join the Proletarian Artists' League. When I informed my brother of my intentions, he said, "That's fine. But the proletarian movement is like influenza now. The fever is going to die down very quickly." I felt slightly irked by his comment. At the time my brother had taken a great step. He was no longer simply writing program notes for films as a great fan of the movies, he had become a professional silent-film narrator. The narrators not only recounted the plot of the films, they enhanced the emotional content by performing the voices and sound effects and providing evocative descriptions of the events and images on the screen—much like the narrators of the Bunraku puppet theater. The most popular narrators were stars in their own right, solely responsible for the patronage of a particular theater. Under the leadership of the famous narrator Tokugawa Musei, a completely new movement was under way. He and a group of like-minded narrators stressed high-quality narration of well-directed foreign films. My brother joined them and, although it was a third-run theater, took a job as the chief narrator at a movie house in the suburb of Nakano. I thought that my brother, having succeeded in life, had become snobbish about politics and was speaking lightly about something I took very seriously. But, as it turned out, my proletarian feelings sub-sided exactly as my brother had predicted. I was reluctant to admit that he was right, however, and stuck with the movement for several years. With my head crammed full of art, literature, theater, music mod film knowledge, I continued to wander, vainly looking for a place to make use of it.

### Military Service

IN 1930 I turned twenty years old and I received a notice to appear for my Army physical prior to conscription. The physical was to be administered at the primary school in Ushigome. I stood at attention before the officer, who said to me, "Are you the son of Kurosawa Yutaka, who graduated from the Toyama Academy and taught school as an Army officer?" "Yes, sir," I replied. "Is your father well?" he asked. "Yes, sir." "I was a student of your father's. Please give

him my regards." "Yes, sir." "What do you want to do?" the officer asked me. "I'm a painter, sir," I replied. (I did not say "proletarian artist.") "I see," said the officer. "There are other ways to serve country besides military service. Go to it." "Yes, sir," I replied. But you seem to be very weak," the officer continued. "And your posture is bad. You should do body-building exercises, too. This kind of exercise will stretch your back and correct that poor posture." He stood up and proceeded to demonstrate a whole series of exercises for me. Apparently I still looked like a weakling at that age. Well, maybe the officer had been sitting at his desk too long and needed to stretch. At the end of my conscription physical I was called before a warrant officer who sat at a desk piled high with forms. This man studied me with a fierce glower and said, "You have nothing to do with military service." So it was in fact. I was not even called up until the eve of Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. This occurred after the city of Tokyo had already been turned into a burned-out wasteland by the American air raids, and after I had become a film director. Since it represents my only immediate contact with military service, I might as well describe it here. At that point most of the people who were being drafted were either physically disabled or had suffered nervous breakdowns. We were all supposed to have our "service bags" (containing the essentials for going into military service) with us for the roll call. There was an inspection of these service bags, and as the inspecting officer looked at mine, he said, "This man's got everything." This was to be expected, because my bag had been assembled by my assistant director, who had already done his military service. I stood there at attention pondering this truth, and the inspecting officer whispered to me, "Salute! Salute!" I hastily pulled myself together and saluted him. He returned the salute and passed on to the next man in line. I was distressed that he would praise the good order of my service bag and then scold me in the next breath. But as I was thinking this, I heard him bellowing, "What's happened to your service bag?" Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the inspector glaring at the man standing next to me. The man was carrying a pair of torn undershorts that he had knotted up, with a knot forming a kind of rabbit tail right at the seat of the pants. He stared blankly at the inspector and said, "What's a service bag?" The military-police officer who was right behind the inspector rushed forward and hit the rabbit-tail man. Just at that moment the air-raid sirens began to shriek. It was the beginning of the saturation bombing of Yokohama. It was also the end of my association with military service. But I often wonder what would have happened if I had actually been drafted. I had failed military training in middle school, and I had no certificate of officer's competence. There would have been no way for me to stay afloat in the Army. On top of that, if I had ever run into that Army officer who had been attached to Keika Middle School, it would surely have been the end for me. Even thinking about it now makes me shudder. I have that officer who administered the Army physical to thank for sparing me. Or maybe I should say I have my father to thank.

## A Coward and a Weakling

I FIRST BEGAN commuting to the Proletarian Art Research Institute in Shiina-cho, Toshima Ward in 1928. I showed my paintings and posters in their exhibitions. But the Proletarian Artists' League, which I joined in 1929, had a brand of realism that was much closer, in my view, to naturalism, and pretty far from the intensity of realism in the work of Courbet. There were some excellent painters in this group, but in general, rather than an artistic movement with its roots in the essentials of painting, it was a practice of putting unfulfilled political ideals directly onto the canvas—a "leftist tendency" movement, as not only paintings but films of this type came to be called. I gradually came to have deeper and deeper doubts about this movement, and in the end I lost the passion for painting. Around this time I had become so disillusioned with the Proletarian Artists' League that I was entering into more direct, illegal political action. The proletarian newspapers had gone underground; their slogans were written in the Western alphabet, and they were further disguised by patterns and designs surrounding them. I became a member of the lower ranks of one of these organizations. Carrying out such activities made me likely to be arrested. I had already experienced the "pigpen" (jail) as a member of the Proletarian Artists' League, but if I got caught this time, I would not get out so easily as I had on those occasions. Just imagining the look on my father's face if he heard I had been arrested gave me immeasurable pain. I told my parents I was going to live with my brother for a while, and I left home. I moved from rented room to rented room and occasionally found shelter in the homes of Communist sympathizers. At first my job consisted mostly of making contact with members on the outside. But the oppression was so severe that often the person with whom I was to communicate did not appear at the appointed place. Arrested en route, he would never be heard from again. One snowy day I was on my way to an appointment near Komagome Station. As I opened the door of the coffee shop, I suddenly froze. There were five or six men inside who all stood up simultaneously as they saw me. At one glance I knew they were special police detectives; they all had the same strange reptilian look about them. The instant they rose to their feet, I was already running. I had the habit of laying out a getaway route whenever I went to an appointment, just in case. This time it paid off. I'm not very fast on my feet, but I was still young, and by taking the route I had picked out ahead of time I lost them completely. I also had a run-in with the Kempeitai military police once. I was caught, but the M.P. turned out to be very nice. I told him I had to use the restroom, and without even frisking me first he led me off to the facilities. He even held the door shut for me, while inside I hastily swallowed the crucial papers from my superiors that I was carrying. I was set free immediately afterward. I guess I got a thrill out of this dangerous lifestyle, and I had a pretty good time. I enjoyed changing my appearance all the time, wearing glasses, thinking up new disguises. But the arrests increased from day to day, and the proletarian newspaper became short-handed. It wasn't long before, newcomer though I was, I was made an editorial assistant. The man in charge said to me, "You're not a Communist, are you?" He was right, I wasn't. I had tried reading Das Kapital and theories of

dialectic materialism, but there had been much that I couldn't understand. For me to try to analyze and explain Japanese society from that point of view was therefore impossible. I simply felt the vague dissatisfactions and dislikes that Japanese society encouraged, and in order to contend with these feelings, I had joined the most radical movement I could find. Looking back on it now, my behavior seems terribly frivolous and reckless. Yet I stayed with the proletarian movement until the spring of 1932. The preceding winter had been especially cold. The money that came to me from time to time as compensation for my movement activities was small indeed and always seemed on the verge of ceasing altogether. Many days I had only one meal, and some days I didn't eat at all. There was of course no heat in the room I rented, and the only way to get warm was to go to the public bathhouse before going to bed. A fellow messenger of working-class background explained his economics to me. When he received his movement compensation, he would count the days until his next payment was due. He would then divide it all up and budget his daily food allowance. But I could never do it that way. In order to fill my empty stomach, I'd spend my share with complete abandon. When my money was gone and I had no less to carry out, I would spend the day under the covers trying to endure my hunger and the cold. As it became more and more difficult to publish the newspaper, the number of such days increased. I had one escape route left—to go to my brother for help. But my pride prevented me from appealing to him. I lived in a tiny four-mat room untouched by any sunlight, upstairs over a mah-jong parlor near Suidabashi. One day I had a terrible cold and my fever was so high I literally couldn't move. As I pressed my head to the pillow, the rattle of the mah-jong pieces being shuffled together downstairs fluctuated oddly, at times very near and loud, at times soft and distant. I spent about two days listening to this noise come in and out, and then the landlord became suspicious. He looked on me and was greatly alarmed by the smell of sweat in the room and the beads of perspiration standing on my hot face. He said he would call a doctor immediately, but I resisted with all my might. "It's nothing, really," I insisted. I didn't know whether my cold was nothing or not, but I knew it would be something if a doctor came, because I had no money to pay a doctor. The landlord listened to me and left without saying anything else. A little while later the landlord's daughter appeared with a bowl of cold gruel for me. Until I got well again, she came three times a day very day with a bowl of rice gruel. I no longer have any recollection of what she looked like. But I shall never forget her kindness. During the course of my illness, my ties with the members of the proletarian newspaper staff were completely severed. We had been very wary of grapevine-style arrests, so we made sure none of us knew another's addresses. When we met outside, we decided the time and place of our next meeting on the spot. There was no way for me to find them after missing a meeting. I suppose that if I had really wanted to find them again, I could have done so. But, still weak and dazed from my illness, I simply couldn't muster the spirit. To put it more precisely, I used the fact that I could not contact them as an excuse to extricate myself from this painful illegal political movement. It was not a case of the leftist movement's fever dying down; it was a case of my own leftist fever not having been a very serious one. Freshly recovered from my illness, I walked on legs that were still wobbly along a path I had worn well as a lower classman in middle school, from Suidobashi to Ochanomizu. I

crossed Ochanomizu and I went toward Hijiribashi bridge. Across Hijiribashi I went down the hill to the left and, turning the corner at Sudacho, I came to the Cinema Palace movie theater. I had seen my brother's name in the Cinema Palace newspaper advertisements. If I climbed back up the winding path on the hill I had just come down, I would be at his home. As I have been writing this, a poem by Nakamura Kusadato suddenly comes to mind:

*Coming down the winding trail,  
The springtime voice of the crying calf.*

### An Alleyway in the Floating World

AT A CORNER on the way from Ushigome-Kagurazaka to the stockade, there is a little alleyway that remains just as it was in the feudal era. In that alley, although the doors had been replaced with glass, there were three divided tenements that in every other respect re-mained as they had been centuries ago. My brother lived in one of these with a woman and her mother. When I recovered from my illness and was able to leave my room, it was to this tenement that I moved. My appearance backstage at the Cinema Palace Theater that first day had startled my brother. He stared at me with frank amazement on his face and asked, "Akira, what's wrong? Are you ill?" I shook my head and replied, "No, I'm just a little tired." My brother looked again and shrugged. "I wouldn't call it a little. Come on to my place." And so it was that I came to impose on my brother's hospitality. About a month later I moved to a room nearby, but even after that I spent every waking moment at my brother's. My father had been told that I was staying with my brother from the time I first left home; now that lie became the truth. The tenement and the alley where my brother lived were like the places the rakugo storytellers have set their tales in for generations. There was no running water, but only a well where people drew their water. The residents were all the most traditional of born-and-bred "Edokko," the original Tokyoites. My brother's role in this setting was that of a masterless samurai, like the late-seventeenth-century battle-scarred warrior Horibe Yasuhei of the war romances. He was looked upon with awe and respect.

The way these tenements were divided up, each had a two-mat entry (about four by four feet) and a six-mat room in the rear with the kitchen and toilet along the back of it. The space was tiny. At first I couldn't understand why my brother, with his income, would live in a place like this. But as the days went by, I began to appreciate the qualities of this life-style. Some of the people who lived in this neighborhood were construction workers, carpenters, plasterers and the like. But the majority of the residents had no visible means of support and no definable profession. Yet somehow they shared and depended on each other to such a degree that what should have been a terribly difficult life became surprisingly optimistic and, at every opportunity, downright

humorous. Even the small children made wisecracks. Adults' conversation went something like this: "So this morning I'm lying out on the stoop in the sun. Right before my eyes, a rolled-up mattress comes flying out of my next-door neighbor's. And my neighbor himself comes rolling out of the middle of the mattress. You know, his wife is really ruthless with the housecleaning." The reply to this man was, "No, I'd say she's especially considerate. She wraps him up so he won't get hurt." In houses as cramped as these there were still those who made tiny rooms in the attics and rented them. In one such rented attic room was a young man who made his living selling fish. Every morning he would get up before the crack of dawn and carry his tin box to the riverbank, where he bought his goods. He worked furiously for an entire month, and then at the end of the month he put on his finest clothes and went out to buy a prostitute—as if that made it all worth-while. For me this existence was as interesting as living among the characters of late-eighteenth-century fiction in stories of Sanba and Kyaden. I learned a lot. The old men who lived in the neighborhood had jobs like taking care of the footwear at the storytellers' halls on Kagurazaka or doing menial work around the movie theaters. As part of their privileges they had passes to their establishments and rented these out at very low rates to their neighbors. I availed myself of these heap passes and spent every day and every evening I lived in the area ng to the movies or listening to the storytellers.

At that time Kagurazaka boasted two movie theaters, the Ushi-gomekan for foreign pictures and the Bunmeikan for Japanese films. There were three storytellers' halls, the Kagurazaka Enbuja and two others whose names I have forgotten. I didn't see films only at the two Kagurazaka theaters, though. My brother introduced me to friends at other theaters, so I saw movies to my heart's content. But the reason I was able to savor the art of the storytellers so fully is that I had the experience of living in the tenement near Kagurazaka. I had no idea what role these popular arts of storytelling and singing would play in my future; I just enjoyed them without thinking about it. Besides the acts of well-known artists, I also had a chance to watch the performances of clowns and comedians who rented the story-tellers' halls to put on their own shows. I still remember one of these acts called "The Fool's Sunset." It was a pantomime of a fool standing and staring at the sunset sky and the birds flying home to roost. It seemed very simple, but the artistry of the man evoking the winsomeness and pathos of the scene filled me with admiration. Around this time the talkies first appeared in the movie theaters, and some of them remained imprinted on my memory: *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Lewis Milestone, *The Last Company* by Curtis Bernhardt, *West front 1918* by G. W. Pabst, *Hell's Heroes* by William Wyler, *Sous les toits de Paris* by Rene Clair, *The Blue Angel* by Josef von Sternberg, *The Front Page* by Milestone, *Street Scene* by King Vidor, *Morocco and Shanghai Express* by von Sternberg, *City Lights* by Charles Chaplin, *The Threepenny Opera* by Pabst and *Der Kon-gress tanz* by Erik Charell. As the talkies came in they spelled the end of the silent-film era. As the silent films went out, so did the need for the narrators, and my brother's livelihood was struck a terrible blow. At first all seemed well because by this time my brother was chief narrator at a first-run movie house, the Taikatsukan in Asakusa, where he had his own following. The change was very gradual, and coincided with my discovery that the bright, cheerful humor of tenement

life I enjoyed so much harbored in its shadows a dark reality. This is probably true of human life everywhere—a light exterior hides a dark underside. But I was seeing it for the first time, and I was forced to think about it. Ugly things happened here, as they did everywhere else. An old man raped his little granddaughter. A woman caused a great disturbance throughout the tenements with her suicide threats every night. One night, after trying to hang herself and being laughed at by everyone in the neighborhood, she quietly jumped into the well and drowned. And there were the stories of battered stepchildren, just as in fairy tales, stories that would make you very sad. I will relate only one of them here. Why would a stepmother be cruel to her stepchild? That her behavior toward a child would be motivated by her hatred for her husband's previous wife doesn't make sense. The only explanation for this kind of crime is ignorance. But ignorance is a kind of insanity in the human animal. People who delight in torturing defenseless children or tiny creatures are in reality insane. The terrible thing is that people who are madmen in private may wear a totally bland and innocent expression in public. There is an old story told in senryu verse about the stepchild who is sent to buy moxa for the cruel stepmother to burn on the innocent old's skin. The description of the face of the little child who is sent by the instrument of its own torture was made yet more poignant for me by this incident. One day while I was at my brother's place, the woman who lived next door came in sobbing piteously. She was crying a way that was unbearable for me to watch, both hands clutched to breast and shuddering convulsively. When I asked the reason, she said her next-door neighbor was torturing her stepchild again. She had heard a little girl's terrible cries and finally couldn't stand it anymore. She looked in through her neighbor's kitchen window and saw the child tied to a post, with her stepmother burning a large amount of moxa on her bared abdomen. She was about to describe the scene further to me when she glanced outside and suddenly closed her mouth. A woman wearing light makeup was passing by. She bowed to us with a pleasant smile and walked on toward the main street. The woman from next door who had been sobbing her heart out now looked at the retreating figure and swore. "Until two minutes ago she looked like a raging demoness, and now she's sweet as a lamb. "Witch!" So the woman who had just passed by was the stepmother who had been torturing the little girl. I couldn't believe it to look at her, but the next-door neighbor immediately turned to me and began pleading. "Akira, please. Please go help that child while she's out." At a loss for words, half believing and half doubting, I found myself following

Looking in through the window of the rooms next to hers, sure enough I saw the child tied to a post with a man's kimono sash. The window was open, so, like a thief, I climbed into a stranger's house. I rushed to untie the sash that bound the girl to the post. But she glared at me with furious eyes. "What do you think you're doing? No one asked for your help!" I stared at her in surprise. "If I'm not tied up when she comes back, she'll torture me again." I felt as if I had been slapped in the face. Even if she was untied, she couldn't escape from the environment that bound her to that post. For her, other people's sympathy was of no value at all. Pity was only a source of more trouble. "Hurry and tie me up again," she said with so much ferocity I thought she might bite me. I did as she told me. It served me right.



## A Story I Don't Want to Tell

AFTER TELLING a story that makes me feel bad, I may as well go on and write about something I had not wanted to face again. It concerns my brother's death. It is very painful to write about, but if I don't discuss it, I can't go on. After I had caught a glimpse of the dark side of life in the tenements, I suddenly had the urge to return to my parents' home. It had now become clear that all foreign movies would henceforth be talkies, and theaters that showed them decided as a universal policy that they no longer needed narrators. The narrators were to be fired en masse, and, hearing this, they went on strike. My brother, as leader of the strikers, had a very difficult time. It would not have been right for me to continue to impose on him. I went home. My parents, who knew nothing at all of the life I had led for the past several years, welcomed me as if I had been away on a long sketching excursion. My father seemed to want to know all about what kind of painting I had been studying, so I had no choice but to keep quiet about the truth and tell a lot of appropriate lies. Seeing how much hope my father still cherished for my prospects as an artist, I felt like starting over in painting. I began sketching again. I wanted to paint in oils. But the entire household was being supported by my older sister, who had married a teacher from Morimura Gakuen. I couldn't bring myself to ask for paint and canvases. I sketched.

In the midst of this, one day we heard of my brother's attempted suicide. I believe the cause was his painful position as leader of the narrators' strike, which had failed. My brother seemed to be resigned to the fact that narrators would no longer be needed when film technology progressed to the point of including sound. Since he knew it was a losing battle, the fact that he had to accept the leadership of the strike must have been indescribably painful for him. My brother's attempt to end the suffering of his life cast gloom over the household once again. I desperately wanted to find some happy event to distract everyone. I hit upon the idea of having my brother marry the woman he had been living with. I had sponged off her for nearly a year, had found nothing objectionable in her character and had come to behave with her as if she really were my sister-in-law. I felt that bringing about the formalization of their relationship was a natural role for me to play. My mother, father and older sister expressed no objections to my idea. But the odd thing was that I couldn't get a straight answer out of my brother. I attributed his reticence to the simple fact that he was out of work. Then one day my mother said to me, "I wonder if Heigo is all tight." "What do you mean?" I asked. She explained her misgivings: "Hasn't Heigo always said he would die before he reached the age of thirty?" What she said was true. My brother had always said that. He claimed that when human beings lived past thirty, all they did was come uglier and meaner, so he had no intention of doing so. He was great devotee of Russian literature,

hailing Mikhail Artsybashev's *The Last Line* as the best book in the world, and he had always kept a copy of it close at hand. But I had always found my brother's espousal the hero Naumov's creed of a "weird death" to be nothing more than an excess of emotion—certainly not the presage of his own death. It turned out to be. So when my mother expressed her concern to me, I laughed it away, saying, "People who talk about dying don't die." I had made light of my brother's words, but a few months after I had assuaged my mother's fears in this way, my brother was dead. Just as he had promised, he died without reaching the age of thirty. At twenty-seven he committed suicide. He had treated me to dinner three days before his suicide. But, strangely enough, much as I try, I can't remember where it was. It may be that his death was such a shock to me that, although I remember with extreme clarity everything about our last words to each other, I remember nothing of what came before or after. We said our goodbyes at Shin Okubo Station. We were in a taxi. As my brother got out to go up the steps to the train station, he told me to take the cab all the way home. But when the car started up again, he came back down the steps and motioned the driver to stop. I got out of the cab and walked over to him, saying, "What is it?" He looked at me very hard for a moment and then said, "Nothing. You can go now." He turned and went back up the stairs. The next time I saw him he was covered with a bloody sheet. He had taken his life in a detached cottage of an inn at a hot spring on the Izu Peninsula. At the entrance to the room I found myself unable to move. A relative who had come with my father and me to recover the body said to me in an angry voice, "Akira, what are you doing?" What was I doing? I was looking at my dead brother. I was looking at the body of my brother, who had had the same blood as I flowing in his veins, who had made that blood flow out of his body, and whom I esteemed and who for me was irreplaceable. He was dead. What was I doing? Damnation! "Akira, give me a hand," my father said very softly. Then, with great effort, he began to wrap my brother's body in the sheet. The sight of my father puffing and straining touched me deeply, and at last I was able to step into the room. When we put my brother's corpse into the car we had come in from Tokyo, the body let out a deep groan. His legs, folded against his chest, must have pushed the air out through his mouth. The driver of the car began to shudder, but he managed to put the body through the crematorium and turn him to ashes. He drove like a madman all the way back to Tokyo and took a lot of strange side roads. My stoical mother endured the incident of my brother's suicide in complete silence without shedding a single tear. Although I knew she did not bear the slightest grudge against me, I couldn't help feeling accused by her silence. I had to apologize to her for treating my brother's words so lightly when she had come to me for consultation. But all she said was, "What do you mean, Akira?" The relative who had said "What are you doing?" when I was paralyzed at the sight of my brother's corpse had not been able to intimidate me, but I could not forgive myself for what I had said to my mother. And how terrible the results had been for my brother. What a fool I am!

## Negative and Positive

WHAT IF . . . ? I still wonder sometimes. If my brother had not committed suicide, would he have entered the film world as I have done? He had a great knowledge of films and more than enough talent to understand filmmaking, and he had many appreciative friends in the film world. He was still young, so I'm sure he could have made a name for himself if he had wanted to. But probably no one could have changed my brother's mind once it was made up. He was overwhelmed by that first defeat when as a superior student he failed the entrance examination for the First Middle School. At that point he developed a wise but pessimistic philosophy of life that saw all human effort as vanity, a dance upon the grave. When he encountered the hero expounding this philosophy in *The Last Line*, he probably clung all the more steadfastly to it. Moreover, my brother, so fastidious in all things, was not the sort of person to be wishy-washy about any statement he had once made. He must have seen himself as already sullied by worldly affairs and on his way to becoming the kind of ugly person he despised. In later years when I was chief assistant director on Yamamoto Kajiro's film *Tsuzurihata kyOshitsu* (Compostion Class, 1938), the kid was being played by Tokugawa Musei, the famous silent-film narrator. One day he looked at me with a long, curious stare and said, "You're just like your brother. But he was negative and you're positive." I thought it was a matter of my brother having preceded me in life, and that is how I understood Musei's comment. But he went on to say that our appearance was exactly the same, but that my brother had had a kind of dark shadow in his facial expression and that his personality, too, had seemed clouded. Musei felt that my personality and face were, by contrast, sunny and cheerful. Uekusa Keinosuke has also said my personality is like that of a sunflower, so there must be some truth to the allegation that I am more sanguine than my brother was. But I prefer to think of my tit tither as a negative strip of film that led to my own development as a positive image.

I was twenty-three years old when my brother died. I was twenty-six when I entered the film world. During the three-year interval nothing very noteworthy occurred in my life. The only major event had taken place before my brother's suicide. This was the news that my oldest brother, who had not been heard from for a long time, had died of an illness. The deaths of my two older brothers left me the only son, and I began to feel a sense of responsibility toward my parents. I became impatient with my own aimlessness. But in those days it was much harder than it is now to succeed as an artist. And I had begun to have doubts about my own talent as a painter. After looking at a monograph on Cezanne, I would step outside and the houses, streets and trees—everything—looked like a Cezanne painting. The same thing would happen when I looked at a book of Van Gogh's paintings or Utrillo's paintings—they changed the way the real world looked to me. It seemed completely different from the world I usually saw with my own eyes. In other words, I did not—and still don't—have a completely personal, distinctive, way of looking at things. This discovery did not surprise me unduly. To develop a personal vision isn't easy. But when I was a young man, this insufficiency caused me not only dissatisfaction but

uneasiness. I felt I had to fashion my own way of seeing, and I became more impatient. Every exhibition I went to seemed to prove to me that every painter in Japan had his own personal style and his own personal vision. I became more and more irritated with myself. As I look back on the art scene, it's clear to me that very few of the painters whose work I saw really had a personal style and vision. Most of them were just showing off with a lot of forced techniques, and the result was mere eccentricity. I don't recall who wrote it, but there was a song about someone who is unable to state outright that what is red is red; the years go by, and it is not until his old age that he finally becomes certain. And that's just how it is. During youth the desire for self-expression is so overpowering that most people end up by losing all grasp on their real selves. I was no exception. I strained to perform technical tours de force as I painted, and the resulting pictures revealed my distaste for myself. Gradually I lost confidence in my abilities, and the act of painting itself became painful for me. What is worse, I had to do boring outside work in order to earn the money to buy my canvases and paints. It consisted of things like illustrations for magazines, visual teaching aids for cooking schools on the correct way to cut giant radishes, and cartoons for baseball magazines. The result of spending my time on a kind of painting for which I felt no enthusiasm at all was a further, more irrevocable loss of my real desire to paint. I began to think about going into some other profession. Deep down inside I really felt that anything at all would do; all I was concerned about was putting my mother's and father's minds at ease. This feeling of casting about was intensified by my brother's sudden death. Since I had been doing nothing but follow my brother's lead, his suicide sent me spinning like a top. I believe this was a very dangerous turning point in my life. "Through all of this my father did not let me loose to spin on my own. He just kept telling me, as I became more and more panicky, "Don't panic. There's nothing to get excited about." He told me if I would just wait calmly, my road in life would open up to me of its own accord. I don't know exactly what kind of viewpoint led him to tell me such things; perhaps he was speaking from his own experience life. As it turned out, his words proved amazingly accurate.

One day in 1935, as I was reading the newspaper, a classified advertisement caught my eye. The P.C.L. (always called that, though the full name was Photo Chemical Laboratory) film studios were hiring assistant directors. Up until that moment it had never occurred to me to enter the film industry, but when I saw that advertisement, my interest was suddenly aroused. The ad said that the first test for prospective employees would be a written composition. The theme of this essay was to be on the fundamental deficiencies of Japanese films. One was to give examples and suggest ways to correct the problems. This struck me as very interesting. From this test question I got a use of the youthful vigor of the newly established P.C.L. company. The theme of fundamental deficiencies and the ways to overcome them gave me something I could sink my teeth into, and at the same time it appealed to my perverseness and sense of mischief. If the deficiencies were fundamental, there was no way to correct them. So I began writing in a half-mocking spirit. I don't remember the precise contents of my essay, but I had thoroughly savored and consumed foreign films under my brother's tutelage, and as a movie fan I found many things in Japanese cinema that did not satisfy me. I undoubtedly gave vent to all my accumulated

criticisms and had a fine time doing so. Along with the test essay an applicant for the assistant director's job was to submit a curriculum vitae and a copy of the family register setting forth his antecedents. Since I was prepared to take any job that came along, I already had copies of my curriculum vitae and family register waiting in my desk drawer. I dispatched them with my essay to P.C.L.

A few months later I received notification of the second round of testing. I was told to appear at the P.C.L. studios on a certain day at a certain time. Feeling as if I had been bewitched by a fox to have written that kind of essay and have it accepted, I proceeded as ordered to the P.C.L. studio. I had once seen a photograph of the P.C.L. studios in a film magazine. It showed a white building with palm trees in front of it, so I had thought it must be located along the beach in Chiba Prefecture, many miles from Tokyo. It turned out to be in a southwestern suburb of the city, a very prosaic place. How little I knew of the realities of the Japanese film industry, and how little I dreamed of ever working in it! But I found my way to the P.C.L. studios, and there I met the best teacher of my entire life, "Yama-san"---the film director Yamamoto Kajiro.

### A Mountain Pass

AS I WRITE this, I can't help thinking how very strange it all was. It was chance that led me to walk along the road to P.C.L. and, in so doing, the road to becoming a film director, yet somehow everything that I had done prior to that seemed to point to it as an inevitability. I had dabbled eagerly in painting, literature, theater, music and other arts and stuffed my head full of all the things that come together in the art of the film. Yet I had never noticed that cinema was the one field where I would be required to make use of all I had learned. I can't help wondering what fate had prepared me so well for this road I was to take in life. All I can say is that the preparation was totally unconscious on my part. The inner courtyard of P.C.L. was overflowing with people. Later I heard that more than five hundred people had responded to the newspaper announcement for the job of assistant director. Apparently the company had rejected about two thirds of the applicants on the basis of their essays, but more than 30 people assembled in the courtyard for the second round. I knew that out of all these only five people would actually be hired. I no longer felt like taking the second test. But by this time I had developed a real curiosity about seeing a studio. I busied myself with looking around. Apparently no films were being made at the moment, and no one who looked like an actor was anywhere in sight. But one fellow among the assistant-director applicants was wearing a morning coat. It's odd that I should recall this, for every so often I remember this fellow in his tails for a job examination, and I shake my head in wonder. The first part of our examination consisted of scenario writing. We were to be divided into groups and given a theme to write on. Each group was given a subject, but each applicant had to write alone. Afterward we would have an oral examination. My group was as-

signed a page-three newspaper item about the crime of an industrial borer from Kotochi Ward who fell in love with a dancer from Asakusa. I had no idea how to write a scenario and I was sitting there nonplused when I stole a glance to one side. The fellow next to me was scribbling away at a furious rate as if totally accustomed to it. I really had no intention of cheating, but I couldn't help watching him. It seemed that first you decide where the story is to take place and then go about writing it. I took note of this and proceeded to write. As an aspiring painter, I decided to draw a contrast between the bleak Industrial area and the gaudy dressing room of a revue backstage, showing the laborer's lifestyle in black and the dancer's in pink. That's how I started my story, but I don't remember the rest of it. After submitting my finished scenario I had to wait a long time for my oral examination. Noon had passed while I was writing, and since I had eaten only my usual breakfast before coming to the exam, I was ravenous. There was a cafeteria in the studio, but I didn't know if we were allowed to eat there, so I asked the fellow next to me. He turned not to be quite an operator and said he knew someone who worked there, so we'd have his friend treat us to lunch. This person he dragged along treated me to a plate of rice curry. But I still had to wait a long time after that, and it wasn't until almost dusk that I was summoned for my interview. Naturally, I didn't know my examiners. But our conversation was most enjoyable, covering everything from painting to music. Since it was a film-company examination, we of course talked about movies, too. I've forgotten exactly what we said, but some years later Yama-san wrote a magazine article about me in which he said I liked the Japanese painters Tessai and Sotatsu as well as Van Gogh and the music of Haydn. When I saw this article, I remembered talking about these four artists during that oral examination. Anyway, we talked a lot,

Suddenly I noticed that it was getting dark outside, so I excused myself, reminding them that a great number of applicants were still waiting for their oral examinations. Yama-san said, "Oh, that's right," and bowed to me with a friendly smile. He even advised me that if I was going home in the direction of Shibuya, there was a bus that stopped right in front of the studio. I got on this bus and stared out the window all the way to Shibuya, but I never saw anything that looked like the ocean. About a month later I received notification of a third examination from P.C.L. This was to be the last test, so it involved meeting the studio head and the managing director. At this interview the executive secretary began asking me a lot of questions about my family, and something in his manner and tone irritated me. Suddenly I couldn't contain myself any longer and burst out with "Is this an interrogation?" The studio head (at that time it was Mori Iwao) stepped in and tried to mollify me, so I was sure this meant I would not be accepted for the job. Nevertheless, a week later I received the job offer. But that executive secretary at the final examination had really put me off, and seeing all the actresses with their thick pancake makeup that same day had made me feel sick. I showed the offer of employment to my father and explained to him that although I had been accepted I was not actually eager to take the job. My father responded that if I found I didn't like the work, I could always quit. He said anything I tried would be worth the experience, so I should give it a month or even a week just to see what it was like. That seemed to me to be a valid idea, so I joined P.C.L. Although I had understood

that only five people were to be hired, the day I joined the company I found myself among some twenty new employees. I thought this was very strange until it was explained that tests had been given on other days for the hiring of five camera assistants, five recording assistants and five administrative assistants, along with the five assistant directors. The monthly salary for all but the administrative assistants was to be 28 yen (in today's money, very roughly \$560). The administrative assistants were to receive 30 yen (about \$600) a month, because their opportunities for advancement were fewer. That same executive secretary I had taken a dislike to at my last interview explained this. (The executive secretary in later years became managing director. While he held the position, one of the assistant directors who had entered with me was crushed by a falling light. Six of his ribs were broken, and the shock caused a torsion of his intestines which later resulted in the further complication of appendicitis. When the appendicitis complication was revealed, our executive secretary came forth with the extraordinary statement that the broken ribs from the falling light were the company's responsibility, but the appendicitis wasn't. After the Pacific War, when the company labor union was formed, he was voted the most hated executive in the studio.) With the first duties I was assigned as a new assistant director, I made up my mind to quit. My father had said that anything I tried would be worth the experience, but everything I was ordered to do turned out to be something I under no circumstances wanted to do twice. The assistant directors who were my seniors did their utmost to persuade me to stay. They assured me that not all movies were like the one I had been working on, and not all directors were like the one I had been working for. I listened to them, took a second assignment and ended up working for Yama-san. They had been right. I learned there are many kinds of films and many kinds of directors. The work in the Yamamoto group" was fun. I didn't want to work for anyone else after that. It wits like the wind in a mountain pass blowing across my face. By this I mean that wonderfully refreshing wind you feel after a painfully hard climb. The breath of that wind tells you you are reaching the pass. Then you stand in the pass and look down over the panorama it opens up. When I stood behind Yama-san in his director's chair next to the camera, I felt my heart swell with that same feeling—"I've made it at last." The work he was doing was the kind that I really wanted to do, I was standing in the mountain pass, and the view that opened up but before me on the other side revealed a single straight road.

P.C.L.

"YOU WORK FOR a company that makes blimps?" I was asked by a bar girl who was not very bright. She was looking at the little pin on my chest, which showed a side view of a lens with the letters P.C.L. inscribed in it. Depending on how you looked at it, the lens might appear to be a dirigible. P.C.L. stands for Photo Chemical Laboratory, and indeed the company was founded as a kind of research institute for sound films. It was only later that the studio was built and the actual production of feature films begun. For this reason the atmosphere differed from the

established studios; it was fresh and youthful. There were few directors, but most of them were progressive and energetic. Yamamoto Kajiro, Naruse Mikio, Kimura Sotoji, Fushimizu Shu – of these men were young and did not have that odor of flicker-maker hack about them. Their films, too, differed from the Jap-anese movies I had seen. They had a flavor such as you might find in the springtime category of haiku poetry under headings like "Young Leaves," "Bright Wind" or "Fragrant Breeze." The directors' freshness and vigor was most apparent in works like Naruse's *Tsuma yo bara no yo ni* (Wife! Be Like a Rose!), Yamamoto's *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (I Am a Cat), Kimura's *Ani imato* (Older Brother, Younger Sister) and Fushimizu's *Fūryu enkatai* (The Fashionable Band of Troubadours). But half of this phenomenon was a tendency to obscure or do away with a national identity. While Japan was rushing headlong into dark events, withdrawing from the League of Nations, undergoing the "2-26 Incident" (the assassination of cabinet ministers by young Army-officer fanatics who found their policies too moderate) and establishing the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, we were making movies as carefree as a song about strolling through the fragrant blossoms of Hibiya Park. In fact, it was immediately after the "2-26 Incident" on February 26, 1936, that I joined P.C.L. The heavy snows of that terrible day still remained in drifts in the shade of the studio building. Considering all that was going on in the world, it's amazing that P.C.L. managed to flourish and mature as it did. The intellectual lead-ers of the company were as young and vigorous in spirit as adolescent movie buffs, and they set about establishing new policies and push-ing forward with enthusiasm. Studio personnel were still at the level of a collection of amateurs. But the faltering, stupidly straightforward quality of the work produced was, in my opinion, far superior for its naiveté, honesty and purity to the incoherent films of today. In any event, P.C.L. was really the kind of place it would be correct to call a dream factory. In accordance with company policy, the newly hired assistant direc-tors were an impressive lot. With the exception of one, they were graduates of the best universities: Tokyo Imperial, Kyoto Imperial, Keio and Waseda. The exception with the very odd curriculum vitae was Kurosawa Akira. We were all like minnows who had been let loose in the stream, and we were energetically beginning to swim.

Management theory at P.C.L. regarded the assistant directors as cadets who would later become managers and directors. They were therefore required to gain a thorough mastery of every field necessary to the production of a film. We had to help in the developing laboratory, carry a bag of nails, a hammer and a level from our belts and help with scriptwriting and editing as well. We even had to appear as extras in place of actors and do the accounts for location shooting. The president of the company went to America to observe how movies were made in Hollywood, and he came back very deeply impressed by the importance of the chief assistant director on a given film and the vigor with which he did his job. In consequence of this, he had a huge sign put up in the middle of the studio saying "Chief assistant directors' orders are to be obeyed as the President's orders." This of course elicited a great deal of resistance and resentment from livery division of the company. In order to keep the situation under control, we really had to push. A chief assistant director often found himself having to say, "If you have a complaint, meet me behind the developing laboratory." This led to hand-to-hand combat with camera people, lighting



technicians, prop crew and set designers. But even if some of this was a little extreme, I don't think the basic idea of the assistant director as a management cadet was a bad one, nor was the method of training these cadets in error. Today's assistant directors are in trouble when they get to direct for the first time. Unless you know every aspect and phase of the film-production process you can't be a movie director. A movie director is like a front-line commanding officer. He needs a thorough knowledge of every branch of the service, and if he doesn't command each division, he cannot command the whole.

### A Long Story: Part I

IN AUGUST of 1974 I received word that Yama-san--my teacher, Yamamoto Kajiro—was confined to his bed and that his prospects for recovery were not good. I was just about to leave for the Soviet Union to begin making my film *Dersu Uzala*. I knew the shooting would take more than a year. If something happened to Yama-san during that time, I would not be able to come back to Japan. It was with this anxious knowledge that I went to visit his home. The house was on a hill in the northern part of the Tokyo suburb of Seijo. A sloping concrete path led from the front gate up to the entrance. In a strip along the middle of this pathway Yama-san's wife had diligently planted a long, narrow flower bed. For me, in the somber mood I found myself, the blossoms' colors were too intense. Yama-san on his sickbed had lost so much weight that his unusually large nose looked even larger. I expressed my regrets over his illness and spoke the usual phrases wishing him a speedy recovery, and he replied in a thin little polite voice, "Thank you for coming when I know you are so busy." But he followed right along with "How is the Russian assistant director?" When I answered, "He's a good man. He writes down everything I say," he let out a cheerful laugh. "An A.D. who does nothing but write is no good," he said. I had been thinking just that myself, but I was worried about having said such a thing now and given Yama-san cause for concern. I lied a little: "It's all right. He's a little bit too nice a person, but he does his work well." "If that's true, it'll be all right, then," said Yama-san, and changed the subject to sukiyaki. He told me about a restaurant where you could get sukiyaki that tasted just as good as in the old days. He urged me to try it and gave me careful directions for getting there. Then he talked about the restaurant we used to go to together in the old days and the flavor of the food there. He said he now had no appetite at all, so I couldn't help marveling at the characteristic enthusiasm he showed in talking about it so cheerfully. He probably wanted to send me off to Russia with light-hearted memories. In Moscow I received word of Yama-san's death. It may seem strange that I should start writing about Yama-san from the point of his deathbed, but there is a reason. I wanted to show that even when he knew he was at the end of his life, his first concern was with assistant directors. I don't believe there has been any other director who paid so much attention to his assistant directors. In beginning work on a film, the first thing the director does is select his crew. The very first thing Yama-san always did was to

worry over whom to choose as assistant directors. This man who sought flexibility in all things, who was easy-going and open-minded, showed a surprising thoroughness when it came to selecting them. If a new man had just been promoted to A.D. "cadet," Yama-san would investigate until he had established to his satisfaction what the man's character and temperament were. But once he had made up his mind, he would treat his assistant directors without regard for seniority, asking the opinions of all. These free and outspoken relationships were the hallmark of the Yamamoto group. The major films I worked on as assistant director with the Yama-san group were those starring the comedian Enomoto Ken'ichi, *Chakkiri Kinta* (Chakkiri Kinta, 1937), *Senman choja* (The Millionaire, 1936), *Bikkuri jinsei* (Life Is a Surprise, 1938), *Otto no teiso* (A Husband's Chastity, 1937), *Tojuro no koi* (Tojuro's Love, 1938), *Tsuzurikata kyoshitsu* (Composition Class, 1938) and *Uma* (Horses, 1941). During that interval I advanced from third assistant director to chief assistant director, and I had to do second-unit directing, editing and dubbing. It actually took about four years to reach that level, but it felt to me as if I were clambering up a steep mountain by leaps and bounds in a single breath. In the Yamamoto group every day was full enjoyment. I was able to speak my mind freely on everything, I had plenty to do and I was enthusiastic in my work. However, this was the era when P.C.L. was fortifying itself with directors and stars hired away from other companies and growing into the Toho company. In order to compete with the other studios in the market, it threw prodigious energy into every single picture. The conditions were extremely rigorous, and, no matter what the work, it turned out to be no ordinary job. I'm not saying that because of this it was necessarily the best possible training, but one thing is certain: I never had time to get a good night's sleep. In those days the greatest desire of any film crew was sleep. But while other members of the crew could get a little rest at night, we assistant directors had to prepare for the next day's scenes. For us there was no respite, and I often had the same recurrent thought. I imagined a huge room that had mattresses spread over the entire floor. My fondest desire was to dive into the middle of that floor and sleep. But even in this condition we'd put saliva in our eyes to help us see a little more clearly and carry on. We put our last ounce of strength into the hope of making the movie a little bit better. One example of this energy was Honda "Mokume no kami" (Honda "Keeper of the Grain")—actually Honda Inoshiro, the director who created Godzilla, and who worked with me on my 1980 film *Kagemusha*. He was then second assistant director, but when the set designers were overwhelmed with work, he lent a hand. He would always take care to paint following the grain of the wood on the false pillars and wainscoting, and to put in a grain texture where it was lacking, hence his nickname "Keeper of the Grain." His motive in drawing in the grain was to make Yama-san's work look just that much better. Probably he felt that in order to continue to merit Yama-san's confidence, he had to make this extra effort. The confidence Yama-san had in us created this attitude. And of course this attitude carried over into our own work. I was one of those whose attitude toward work was shaped by Yama-san's confidence. When I advanced to chief assistant director this combined with my natural stubbornness to form an extraordinary tenacity. I remember an occasion during the filming of *Chushingura* (1939). This feudal revenge story was being filmed in two parts, with director Takizawa Eisuke responsible for the first half

and Yama-san for Part II. We had only one day of shooting left or we wouldn't make the release date, but the whole climax raid still had to be filmed. Yama-san and the company executives had already given up, but I still had hope, so I went to see the open set. The front gate, the back gate and the gardens, were completed, but none of the snow essential to the scene was anywhere in sight. I got a bucket of salt and climbed up on the rear gate to begin making a snow-covered roof. The chief set designer, a difficult man named Inagaki who always took the side of the underdog, came by and gazed up at me. "What are you doing?" he asked. "What am I doing? The day the forty-seven loyal retainers carried out their vendetta, there was a huge snowfall. If we don't have snow, we can't work," I replied, continuing to pile salt on the roof. Inagaki kept looking up at me for a long time, and then he went back to the prop room mumbling to himself. He returned leading a whole mob of set workers. "Snow! Give me some snow here!" he bellowed angrily. I came down off the roof and went to the Yamamoto group's waiting room, where I found Yama-san asleep in a lounge chair and woke him up. "The rear gate is almost covered with snow now. Please start shooting from there. While you do that, I'll finish getting the snow on the front gate and start shooting the scene on that side. Then you can take over in front when you finish in the back, and I'll get the garden snowed in and start shooting there, and then you can . . ." Yama-san rubbed his eyes and nodded sleepily. He got up slowly with all his exhaustion showing. It was a brilliantly sunny, blue-sky day. We used a red filter to shoot the attack on Lord Kira's mansion day-for-night, and the pitch black sky came out in magnificent contrast to the white snow. But as we got to the garden scenes, real night closed in on us, and we finished shooting in the middle of the night. As we cranked up at the end of it all, the studio head arrived on the scene while we were having our picture taken to commemorate the event. He said he hadn't been able to put together anything much, but would we all please come to the dining hall for a toast. Arriving at the dining hall, we found the tables all decked out with sake and fish. We got to our seats facing the line-up of company executives in the seats of honor, but in our extreme fatigue none of the crew felt like making a toast. We couldn't swallow anything. All we wanted to do was get to sleep. While the executives made speeches of thanks for meeting the production schedule, everyone listened with moping heads as if they were at a wake. The moment the speeches were over, the lighting technicians all stood up, bowed and walked out without saying a word. Then the camera crew, the sound recordists and every other section of the crew followed suit, without a word. In a few minutes only the executives, Yama-san and the assistant directors were left. This must have made some impression on the executives; it certainly did on me.

Yama-san never got angry. Even if he was furious, he never showed it. Because he didn't, I took over and made people understand that he was angry. Many of the stars who had been hired away from other studios were very self-centered and pampered, and they bowed up late on the set. If this went on for a number of days, Yama-san wouldn't get angry, but the crew got mad enough to spit. When this happened, the work itself would go bad, so something had to be done. On these occasions Yama-san called the whole crew together and explained what was going to happen. When the star arrived on the set a second time, Yama-san would thunder out, "That's it! Wrap up for today!" And everyone would leave. The star and his attendant would be left alone on the set. We

knew the actor or his attendant would come to the Yamamoto group's waiting room later, so I asked Yama-san to put on as terrifying an expression as he could. As expected, one of the two would appear and timidly ask, "Was the shooting canceled today because I (or Mr. So-and-So) arrived late?" I would answer, "Probably," and look at Yama-san. He usually looked nonplused and hesitant, but I would proceed with my dressing down: "We don't make up the shooting schedule so that you can come late." From the next day on, the star would show up on time.

I never saw Yama-san get angry at an assistant director. Once for a location scene we forgot to call out one of the two lead actors. I hastily consulted then chief assistant director Taniguchi Senkichi (later a director who filmed my scripts *Ginrei no hate* (To the End of the Silver Mountains, 1947), *Jakoman to Tetsu* (Jakoman and Tetsu, 1949) and *Akatsuki no dasso* (Escape at Dawn, 1950). "Sen-chan" didn't hesitate for a moment, but went straight to Yama-san and explained the situation: "Yama-san, X won't be coming today." Yama-san stared at him in surprise and asked why. "Because we forgot to call him," said Sen-chan in a high-handed tone as if it were Yama-san's fault. This was a specialty of Sen-chan's that no one else at P.C.L. could imitate. Yama-san took no offense at all at this attitude, and just said, "All right, I understand." He went ahead and managed to do something that day with the actor who had come. He told him to turn his back and -yell over his shoulder as he walked away, "Hey, what are you doing? Hurry up!" When the picture was finished, Yama-san took Sen-chan and me drinking in Shibuya. We passed a movie theater where our film was playing and Yama-san suddenly stopped. "What do you say, shall we have a look?" he asked. We all went in and sat through the whole thing. When it came to the part we shot without one of the two leads, we watched the solitary actor look back over his shoulder and say, "Hey, what are you doing? Hurry up!" Yama-san turned to us and said, "What do you suppose the other fellow's doing there—gone off to take a crap?" Sen-chan and I both stood up in the dark movie theater, bowed our heads and said, "Our deepest apologies." The other people in the audience turned around in surprise to stare at these two large men suddenly standing up and bowing. That's the kind of person Yama-san was. Even if he didn't like the footage we brought him from second-unit shooting, he always included it. Then when the film was finished and released in the theaters, he'd take us to see it. He would point out what we had done and say, "Wouldn't it have been better to do that this way?" and patiently explain why. His attitude was that in order to train his assistant directors it was worth sacrificing his own pictures. At least, that seems to me the only possible interpretation. Yet the same Yama-san who educated us in this exceptional manner made the following claim in a magazine once: "All I ever taught Kurosawa was how to drink." How is it possible to express one's gratitude to someone so selfless? I learned so much about movies and the work of being a movie director from Yama-san that I couldn't begin to describe it all here. He was without question the best of teachers. The best proof of this lies in the fact that none of the work of his "disciples" (Yama-san hated this term) resembles his. He made sure to do nothing to restrict his assistant directors, but rather encouraged their individual qualities to grow. He managed to do this without any of the stiffness associated with the image of "teacher." But even this marvelous Yama-san had his scary moments. I remember once we were on an open set for an Edo-period film. I've forgotten what

they were, but some characters were written on a signboard outside a merchant household. One of the actors asked me was on the signboard. I couldn't read what it said either, and didn't know what kind of goods it meant they were selling, so I just guessed and told him it was probably medicine. Suddenly I heard something very rare: Yama-san's angry voice yelling, "Kurosawa!" I stared at him in amazement; I had never seen him look so angry before. With that same furious expression he said, "That's a sign for clothing sachets. You mustn't say irresponsible things. If you don't know, say you don't know." I had no ready reply. These words have stayed with me; even now I can't forget them. Yama-san was a good talker, too, and I learned a tremendous amount from him over alcohol. He was a man of varied interests, and he was especially knowledgeable about food, enough to be called a teal gourmet. I learned much from him about international cuisine. "People who can't make the simple distinction between what tastes good or bad have disqualified themselves from the human race," was one of his pet theories. Since he liked eating so much, I accumulated quite a bit of study in this area. He was also very well acquainted with antiques, especially antique utensils. He loved folk art as well, and it was from him that I gained the beginnings of an appreciation for these things. Then, due to my background as a painter, I went on to pursue them even more deeply than Yama-san. Yama-san had a game he played with us assistant directors on the train when we had time to kill on the way to location shooting. We would decide on a very straightforward theme and each of us had to write a short story on it. This served as study for screenwriting and directing, but it was in itself an interesting game. For example, Yama-san wrote one like this on the theme "heat": The setting is the second floor of a sukiyaki restaurant. The blistering afternoon sun of summer beats in through the closed windows and shoji screens. In the tiny room a solitary man concentrates all his energy on seducing one of the waitresses, without even bothering to wipe the perspiration that streams off his body. About that time the sukiyaki boils up, starts to make searing and bubbling noises and fills the whole room with the smell of beef. This short story, I feel, leaves out nothing in a full elaboration of the theme, and the image of the sweating man is so vivid you can see it before your eyes. All the assistant directors took their hats off to Yama-san at once.

## A Long Story: Part II

WHEN YAMA-SAN AND I were working together, we drank together when the day was over, and he often asked me to his house for dinner. After completing a film he was always already under pressure to start the next one, and he would include me in the consultations on it. I remember one time, when we had finished *Tojuro's Love*, how after all our terribly hard work the reviews weren't favorable. Disappointed, Yama-san and I started drinking in the morning. I'll never forget the bitter feeling of sitting there silently with him in the morning sun in a Yokohama bar overlooking the port, just watching the ships in the harbor as we lifted our glasses. After I had worked as Yama-san's chief assistant director on a number of films, he started me writing

scripts. Yama-san himself had originally been a scriptwriter, and his talent in this area was unsurpassed. On one occasion the irrepressible Taniguchi Senkichi said to Yama-san's face, "You're a first-rate screenwriter, but as a director you're not really so hot." Of course this is an excellent example of Sen-chan cheek, but there is no doubt about Yama-san being a first-rate screenwriter. I can testify to his writing abilities because of his precise criticisms and revisions on the scripts I later wrote. Anyone can criticize. But no ordinary talent can justify his criticism with concrete suggestions that really improve something. The first script I wrote under Yama-san's supervision was based on Fujimori Nariyoshi's story *Mizuno Jurozaemon*. In the original there is a scene where the eponymous hero tells his comrades of the Shiratsuka band about an edict he has seen put up on a signboard in front of Edo Castle. I followed the original closely and had Mizuno go back and report to his friends what he had seen. Yama-san read this and said if this were a novel it would be fine, but for a script it was too weak. He quickly dashed off something and showed it to me. Instead of having Mizuno do something dull like talk about the edict after having read it on the signboard, Yama-san had him uproot the signboard and arrive carrying it over his shoulder. He plants it in front of his comrades and says, "Look at this!" I was awed.

From this point on, my approach to literature changed. I made a liberate effort to change it. I began to read carefully, asking myself what the author was trying to say and how he was trying to express it. I thought while I read, and at the same time I kept notes on the usages that struck some emotional chord in me or that I considered some reason important. When I reread in this new way things I had read in the past, I realized how superficial my initial reading had been. Not just literature but all the arts, as one matures, become gradually more comprehensible in their depth and subtlety. This is of course very commonplace notion, but for me at that time it was a revelation, and it was Yama-san who led me toward it. Before my very eyes he had taken his pen to my script in the midst of reading it and revised as he went along. I was not only surprised at his ability, and inspired to re-educate myself, but at the same time came to understand, something of the secrets of creation. Yama-san said: "If you want to become a film director, first write scripts," I felt he was right, so I applied myself wholeheartedly to scriptwriting. Those who say an assistant director's job doesn't allow in any free time for writing are just cowards. Perhaps you can write only one page a day, but if you do it every day, at the end of the year you'll have 365 pages of script. I began in this spirit, with a target of one page a day. There was nothing I could do about the nights I had to work till dawn, but when I had time to sleep, even after crawling into bed I would turn out two or three pages. Oddly enough, when I put my mind to writing, it came more easily than I had thought it would, and I wrote quite a few scripts. One of the scenarios I completed during this period was *Daruma-dera no doitsujin* (A German at Daruma Temple), a story based on the life of the architect Bruno Taut. On Yama-san's recommendation, it was later accepted for publication in the film magazine *Eiga hyoron*. This, incidentally, led to a troublesome occurrence. Yama-san entrusted the sole copy of this script to a critic from the magazine, on the understanding that it would be printed in the next issue. This critic proceeded to go out drinking and leave the manuscript on a train.

In righteous indignation Yama-san protested such behavior and demanded that the man advertise in the newspapers for its return. But no advertisement ever appeared. I naturally did not want to let this opportunity for making a reputation go by, so I set about rewriting the script. I stayed up three nights in a row racking my brain to remember what the original had been like, and when I finished, I took it myself to the plant where they printed *Eiga hyoron*. There I met the very man who had lost my original, but, far from attempting to apologize, he wore an expression that said, "You should be grateful that we are going to put you in print." To explain it in as kind a way as possible, there was probably no other attitude that fellow knew how to take. At least, this is what I tried to tell myself, but, to tell you the truth, my blood was boiling. To this day, when I think of that critic, I feel nauseated with rage. When I reached a certain level of achievement in scriptwriting, Yama-san told me to start editing. I already knew that you can't be a film director if you can't edit. Film editing involves putting on the finishing touches. More than this, it is a process of breathing life into the work. I had already grasped this, so before Yama-san gave me the command, I had already been spending time in the editing room. Or, rather, I had been wreaking havoc in the editing room. I had been taking Yama-san's unedited footage and cutting and splicing away. When the editor caught me, he was furious. Yama-san was a first-rate film editor, and he always cut his own films with amazing speed, so all the editor really had to do was watch him and then splice where he indicated. But I suppose he couldn't condone the interference of an assistant director in his work. Moreover, this editor was of a terribly fastidious temperament, and he would carefully take all the scrap frames, clean them up and put them away neatly in a drawer. So naturally he couldn't stand by and watch me merrily Chopping and tossing his film around. Anyway, I don't know how many times he nearly bit my head off. I may sound insensitive to admit it, but the fact is I did my best to ignore him and went right on cutting and splicing. Finally the editor gave up. I don't know if he ran out of strength or if he was reassured by my putting everything back together the way I had found it. But at last he came to lend his tacit approval to my fumbleings with film in his editing room. Later, up until his death, this man worked as chief editor on all my films. I learned a mountain of things about editing from Yama-san, but I think the most vital among them is the fact that when you are editing you must have the intelligence to look at your own work objectively.

The film that Yama-san had labored painfully to shoot he would cut to pieces as if he were a total masochist. He'd always come into the editing room with a joyful look on his face and say things like, "Kurosawa, I thought it over last night, and we can cut that so-and-so scene," or "Kurosawa, I thought it over last night and I want you to cut the first half of such-and-such a scene." "We can cut!" "I want you to cut!" "Cut!" Yama-san in the editing room was a bona-fide mass murderer. I even thought on occasion if we were going to cut so much, why did we have to shoot it all in the first place? I, too, had labored painfully to shoot the film, so it was hard for me to scrap my own work. But, no matter how much work the director, the assistant director, the cameraman or the lighting technicians put into a film, the audience never knows. What is necessary is to show them something that is complete and has no excess. When you are shooting, of course, you film only what you believe is necessary. But very often you realize only after

having shot it that you didn't need it after all. You don't need what you don't need. Yet human nature wants to place value on things in direct proportion to the amount of labor that went into making them. In film editing, this natural inclination is the most dangerous of all attitudes. The art of the cinema has been called an art of time, but time used to no purpose cannot be called anything but wasted time. Among all the teachings of Yama-san on film editing, this was the greatest lesson. I didn't intend to write a handbook of filmmaking technique here, so I'll put an end to this discussion. But there is one more incident involving editing and Yama-san that I would like to relate. It took place during the editing of the film *Uma* (Horses), which I had co-scripted and which Yama-san had put entirely in my hands for cutting. There is one place in the story where a foal has been sold and the mare frantically searches for her baby. Completely crazed, she kicks down her stable door and tries to crawl under the paddock fence. I edited the sequence most diligently to show her expressions and actions in a dramatic way. But when the edited scene was run through a projector, the feeling didn't come through at all. The mother horse's sorrow and panic somehow stayed flat behind the screen. Yama-san had sat with me and watched the film as I was editing it any number of times, but he never said a word. If he didn't say, "That's good," I knew it meant it was no good. I was at an impasse, and in my despair I finally begged his advice. He said, "Kurosawa, this sequence isn't drama. It's mono-no-aware." Mono-no-aware, "sadness at the fleeting nature of things," like the sweet, nostalgic sorrow of watching the cherry blossoms fall when I heard this ancient poetic term, I was suddenly struck by enlightenment as if waking from a dream. "I understand!" I exclaimed and set about completely re-editing the scene. I put together only the long shots. It became a series of glimpses of a tiny silhouette of the galloping mare, her mane and tail flying in the wind on a moonlit night. And that alone proved sufficient. Even without putting in any sound, it seemed to make you hear the pathetic whinnying of the mother horse and a mournful melody of woodwinds. It goes without saying that in order to be a film director you must be able to direct actors on the set. A film director's job is to take a script, make it into something concrete and fix that on film. To that end, he must give the appropriate instructions to the people handling the cameras, the lights, the tape recorders, the sets, the costumes, the props and the makeup. And he must also coach the actors in their delivery. In order to give us experience with directing actors, Yama-san often had assistant directors take charge of second-unit shooting. Sometimes he would even shoot a scene up to a certain point and then go home, leaving the rest in our hands. If you don't have a tremendous amount of faith in your assistant directors, you can't do a thing like that. On the other hand, from our point of view as assistant director it was a heavy responsibility. If we didn't rise to the occasion, we would lose not only Yama-san's trust, but the confidence of the cast and crew as well. We had to do our utmost. I'm sure Yama-san was well aware of our position and was off somewhere having a drink with a grand smirk on his face. But these experiences, which were like unannounced examinations in school, provided the best possible opportunity for us to develop our directing ability. During the filming of *Horses* Yama-san did indeed come to the location set-ups. But usually after spending one night there he would say, "Take care of it," and



go back to Tokyo. It was in this way that I was trained, before becoming a director, to handle the crew and to coach the actors.

Yama-san was good with actors. He didn't have the dignified severity of directors like Ozu Yasujiro and Mizoguchi Kenji, but instead a kind of quiet cleverness. He often said, "If you as director try to drag an actor by force to where you want him, he can only get halfway there. Push him in the direction he wants to go, and make him do twice as much as he was thinking of doing." The result is that in Yama-san's films the actors seem to be relaxed and playing at what they are doing. A good example of this easy-going spirit was the comedian Enoken (Enomoto Ken'ichi). In Yama-san's pictures he really runs wild and his special qualities come out in full bloom. Yama-san also treated actors with extreme politeness. I would sometimes forget the names of the extras—the people who had walk-on parts or played in crowd scenes—and I called them by the color of their costumes, "Say, you in the red . . ." or "Excuse me, the man in the blue suit. . . ." Yama-san would scold me: "Kurosawa, you mustn't do that. People all have names." Well, I knew that, but I was too busy to look up each name. Yama-san, on the other hand, would call me to up the name of any extra he wanted to give special instructions to. I would find out the person's name and report it to him, and only then would he make his request: "Mr. So-and-So, would you please move two or three steps to the left?" The extra, of course a complete Unknown, would be overwhelmed by the personal address. This technique reveals that Yama-san was a little bit cagey, but there's no denying it worked—he really knew how to make people give him their best. Aside from this, there are three very important things I learned from Yama-san about actors. The first is that people do not know themselves. They can't look objectively at their own speech and movement habits. The second is that when a movement is made consciously, it will be the consciousness rather than the movement that draws attention on the screen. The third is that when you explain to an actor what he should do, you must also make him understand why he should do it that way—that is, what the internal motivations in the role and the action are. No matter how much paper I had, I could never finish writing down everything I learned from Yama-san. I will have to wrap it up with one last item: what he taught me about motion-picture sound. He himself approached sound with an attitude of discretion, employing a delicate sensibility in the use of both natural sound and music. Therefore, he was most to be feared during the process of dubbing—recording the sound track on the edited film, the last step in completion of a film. My pet theory—that cinematic strength derives from the multiplier effect of sound and visual image being brought together—was born from the experience of Yama-san's dubbing work. For us assistant directors, the dubbing process was particularly painful. Shooting was over and we were all exhausted, but usually we had the release date hanging over our heads. Since we generally had no leeway at all, our sleepless nights continued, and because the work of putting in the sound demanded such delicacy and refinement, our nerves were worn to a frazzle by the time we finished.

Yet on the other hand there were rewards. Frequently we had the natural sound recorded as the film was shot, and sometimes adding another kind of sound on top of this would create

unexpected new effects. So the dubbing process came to have its own special attractions and pleasures. Depending on how the sound is put in, the visual image may strike the viewer in many different ways. Such effects the director calculates, but assistant directors rarely have the opportunity to set foot in this territory. In most instances, the results took us assistant directors by surprise. Yama-san seemed to enjoy surprising us, so he took care not to let us know what he was doing. Then he would gleefully surprise us with an extraordinary combination of sound effects and music. The sound powerfully altered the visual image to create a whole new impression, and at these moments we forgot all our pain and exhaustion in the excitement of it. It was still the very beginning of the sound-film era in Japan. I don't believe many other directors had thought about the relationship between sound and image so deeply as to realize that they were mutual multipliers. I think Yama-san wanted to teach me what he knew, because he had me do the dubbing on *Tojuro's Love*.

When he looked at my handiwork in the private screening room, he instructed me to do it all over again. This was a shock for me. It was as if I were disgraced in public. To redo it would take enormous time and effort, and I could hardly face the people who assisted on dubbing. On top of all this, I still didn't understand exactly what was wrong with what I had done. I went through it reel by reel, over and over again, searching for what I thought might be the bad places. Finally I found them, redubbed them and presented the film to Yama-san again. When the screening was over, all he said was "O.K." At that moment I hated him. "Makes me do everything and then says whatever he wants," I thought. But the feeling lasted only a brief instant. At the party celebrating completion of *Tojuro's Love*, Mrs. Yamamoto came and spoke to me. "My husband was very happy. He said Kurosawa can write scripts, handle the directing, do the editing and now the dubbing—he'll be all right." My eyes suddenly got very hot. Yama-san was the best kind of teacher. Yama-san, I promise you I'll try a little harder, a little longer. This is the memorial speech I offer, up to Yama-san.

### Congenital Defects

I AM SHORT-TEMPERED and obstinate. These defects are still pronounced, and when I was an assistant director they gave rise to some very serious problems. I recall one occasion when we were particularly pressed for time on the shooting of a film. For more than a week we had not had a full half-hour for lunch, and what made it worse was that we had to make do with the box lunches the company provided. These box lunches consisted of riceballs and giant radish pickles. More than a week of riceballs and radish pickles is unbearable. The crew began to complain, so I went to the company administrative Ices and requested a little consideration. "At least wrap the riceballs dried seaweed," I begged. The production office agreed to my request, so I returned to the set and announced to the crew that the next day the box lunches would contain something

different. The grumbling ceased. However, the box lunches the next day consisted of riceballs and radish pickles. One of the enraged crew picked up his lunch and threw at me. I very nearly flew into a rage myself at that, but I controlled myself, picked up the lunch I had been hit with and set out for the reduction office. We were shooting on an open set a good ten-minute walk from the studio buildings. As I walked, I kept saying to myself, "Don't fly off the handle, you mustn't fly off the handle. . . ." But the longer I walked, the shorter my fuse got, and by the time I reached the door of the production office I was just a few seconds from exploding. When I stood before the chief of the production office, it happened. In a flash the production chief got the box lunch right in the face and was covered with sticky grains of rice. There was another incident when I was assistant director for Fushimizu Shu, who had been an assistant director for Yama-san before me. We had to shoot a starry night scene, and I had clambered up to the top of the set to string together the spangles representing the stars. But the threads kept getting tangled and twisted, and finally my patience was at an end. Fushimizu himself, watching from below in his position next to the camera, was also getting irritated. "Can't you hurry it up a little?" he shouted. That was it. As if I wasn't annoyed enough already! I grabbed a silver-colored glass ball that was in the box of spangles and threw it at Fushimizu. "O.K., here's a shooting star for you!" I yelled. Later he said to me, "You're still a child. Just a short-tempered child." Fushimizu may have been right. Even though I have passed the age of seventy, I haven't been able to cure my quick temper. Now I sometimes put on a fireworks display, but that's all it is. I'm like a space satellite that flies around but doesn't leave behind any radio-activity, so I consider that my short temper is of a rather good quality. Another time we had to record the sound of someone being hit in the head. We tried socking all kinds of things, but the mixer didn't find that anything was suitable. Finally I exploded and hit the micro-phone with my fist. The blue light signaling "O.K." flashed on. I have a distaste for argumentation, and I can't stand people who spout all kinds of strung-together logic. One argumentative screen-writer used some syllogistic reasoning to prove to me that his script was right. I became annoyed and countered that, no matter how logically he defended it, what was dull was still dull, so forget it. We fought. Once when I was in charge of the second-unit shooting we were terribly pressured. We had finished a particular take and I was dead on my feet, so I sat down to rest. The cameraman came to ask me where to set up for the next shot, and I pointed to a spot near where I was sitting. This cameraman, an argumentative fellow, demanded an explanation of the theoretical basis for my decision to select that spot. I became annoyed (this seems to happen a lot, and it always gets me in trouble) and told him the theoretical basis for my selection of that particular camera position was that I was exhausted and didn't want to move. This cameraman loved to fight, so imagine my surprise when he had no reply to this reasoning. Anyway, I used to get annoyed very easily. According to my assistant directors, when I get angry my face turns red, but the end of my nose is drained of pigmentation—an anger that would lend itself well to color film, they say. Since I have never gotten angry in front of a mirror, I don't know if what they say is true or not. But for my assistants this is a danger signal, so it's not likely their observations would be wrong. Near the end of Yama-san's *Horses* is a scene where the foal is sold at a horse auction. The young heroine,

Ine (Takamine Hideko), has to buy a big bottle of sake at one of the shops set up for the auction. She carries the bottle through the rowdy throng gathered for the auction, returning to where her family is gathered to commemorate the parting with their horse. The sound of the northern folk songs sung by the farmers standing around their horses while they drink, like the members of her own family, comes to Ine's ears. Because it symbolizes her separation from the horse she has raised herself, it makes her unbearably sad. The original idea for *Horses* had come from Yama-san. Listening to the radio, he happened to tune in to the live broadcast of a horse auction. Amid all the sounds of the sales he could hear the sobs of a young girl. This girl became his heroine, me. So this scene at the auction is the real core of the film. To our dismay, an order came from the Army's Equestrian Affairs Administration to cut the entire scene. It was wartime (*Horses* was released in 1941), and what we were showing was in contravention of the ban on daytime alcohol consumption. Yet this scene had been in the approved original script. A colonel assigned by the Equestrian Affairs Administration had even been present at the shooting (Colonel Mabuchi, a stubborn, implacable character with a brusque manner). The filming had been extremely difficult—we had had to dolly on a diagonal through the square where an actual auction was being held. It was no easy matter to win the cooperation of the crowd gathered for the auction, and here and there throughout the square we had to contend with mud and puddles of water. It was a matter of precision balancing to move the camera along dolly tracks laid over boards through this mess. But everything went miraculously well and we got a superb take. So what did they mean by telling us to cut it now? I made up my mind not to give in. The Army bureaucracy at that time was so strict they wouldn't let babies cry, and on top of that I was pitted directly against Colonel Mabuchi. The prospects looked very dim. Yama-san and the producer, Morita Nobuyoshi, were both leaning toward the inevitability of cutting the scene, but I had been given full responsibility for the editing, and I refused to budge. To begin with, the idea of banning daytime alcohol consumption struck me as the stupidest kind of hard-line officiousness. Secondly, they might have apologized for letting us film it all and asked us politely to cut it. Instead, they just issued an order: "Cut it." I couldn't let them get away with that. One evening very late, as the release date drew dangerously near, Morita came to find me in the editing room. As soon as I saw his face, I said, "I won't cut it." "I know," he replied in a casual tone, "I know when you have that expression on your face nothing anyone says will make any difference. But we can't leave things like this. I want you to come with me to Colonel Mabuchi's house." "What will we do there?" "I just want it made clear whether we cut or don't cut." I responded "But you know the Colonel will say 'cut' and I'll say 'I won't cut,' so all we'll do is sit and glare at each other." "Well, if that's what happens there's nothing we can do about it. I still want you to come." Just as I predicted, all Colonel Mabuchi and I did was sit and glancing menacingly at each other. On our arrival Morita had said, "Kurosawa here says he won't cut that scene under any circumstances. He's the kind of fellow who won't do something that doesn't make sense. I leave him to you." Then he looked down and proceeded to drink the sake that the Colonel's wife had served us. He said nothing more. I, too, once I had said my piece to the Colonel, fell silent and stared at my cup as I drank. The Colonel's wife came back from time to time served more sake

and looked at the three of us worriedly. I don't know how long this silence went on, but all the bottles for serving sake in the household of this hard-drinking colonel were used up. Mrs. Mabuchi had to come and collect the bottles that we had lined up in front of us in order to heat more, so it must have been quite a while. At the end of this long while Colonel Mabuchi suddenly moved aside the tray that was in front of him and put both hands to the floor to bow in front of me. "I'm sorry. Please cut it," he said. At that I said, "All right, I will." It was all over, and from that point our liquor became most enjoyable. By the time Morita and I left, the sun was high in the sky.

### Good People

YAMA-SAN WORRIED about this hot temper and obstinacy of mine. So whenever I went to work for other directors he would call me to him and make me swear a solemn oath that I would in no circumstances lose my temper or behave stubbornly. In fact my experiences assisting other directors are extremely few: twice I worked for Takizawa Eisuke and once each for Fushimizu Shu and Naruse Mikio. Among these experiences outside the Yamamoto group the thing that impressed me the most was Naruse's work method. He possessed something that can only be called expertise. I assisted him on a lost film, called *Nadare* (Avalanche, 1938), based on a story by Osaragi Jiro believe the material was not fully satisfactory to the director, but there was much that I was able to glean from this job. Naruse's method consists of building one very brief shot on top of other, but when you look at them all spliced together in the final film they give the impression of a single long take. The flow is so magnificent that the splices are invisible. This flow of short shots that looks calm and ordinary at first glance then reveals itself to be like a dip river with a quiet surface disguising a fast-raging current underneath. The sureness of his hand in this was without comparison. During the shooting Naruse was also sure. There was absolutely no waste in anything he did, and even the time for meals was duly allocated. My only complaint was that he did everything himself, leaving s assistant directors to sit around idle. One day on the set I had nothing to do, as usual. So I went behind backdrop that had clouds painted on it and found a huge velvet curtain that was used for backgrounds in night scenes. It was conveniently folded, so I lay down on it and promptly went to sleep. The next thing I knew, one of the assistant lighting technicians was prod-rig me awake. "Run!" he said. "Naruse's mad." In a panic I fled through a ventilation hole in the back of the stage. As I scrambled, I heard the lighting assistant yell, "He's behind the clouds!" When I came nonchalantly through the front entrance to the stage, Naruse was coming out. "What's wrong?" I asked, and he replied, "Some-body's snoring on the stage. My day's ruined, so I'm going home." To my great shame, I was unable to admit that I had been the culprit. In fact, I didn't bring myself to tell Naruse the truth until ten years had passed. He thought it was very funny. As for Takizawa, I can't forget the location in the Hakone Mountains where we shot *Sengoku gunto den* (The Saga of the Vagabonds, 1937). I

was third assistant director on this picture, and I hadn't learned to drink liquor yet. So when we got back to the inn at night, the maid would give me tea and my two sweet bean cakes, plus Takizawa's and the chief assistant director's rations of cakes as well. Every day I was eating six sweet bean cakes, so I guess I must have been pretty cute. Seven years later, when I was location scouting in the same area for my first film, *Sugata Sanshiro*, I met the maid who had brought me those cakes every day. She failed to recognize me. Apparently in the course of seven years I had changed completely, at least to her eyes.

How could the Kurosawa who wolfed down six bean cakes a day and the Kurosawa who now sat there drinking sake like a fish be the same person? I later noticed her staring at me through a slightly opened door, as if she were observing the movements of some kind of monster. The original idea for *The Saga of the Vagabonds* came from the film director Yamanaka Sadao. The screenplay was written by Miyoshi Jiro, a playwright, but here and there Yamanaka's brilliance shone through it. (I later wrote my own script based on Yamanaka's original, and this was filmed by Sugie Toshio in 1960.) We were on location in the Hakone Mountains at the coldest time of the year, in February. A bitter wind blew across these plains at the foot of a pure-white Mount Fuji all day long, and our hands and faces became cracked and wrinkled like silk crepe. We left for the location while it was still dark outside, and when we arrived there the sun was just beginning to strike the summit of the mountain, turning it a rosy pink. I'll never forget the landscape I gazed at every day on the way to the location before starting the shooting, again during break periods and yet again on the way back to the inn. It's disrespectful of me to say this about Takizawa, but the landscape impressed me far more deeply than what we were filming. In the morning as we rode along in our car in the wan light of pre-dawn, we could see the old farmhouses on both sides of the road. Farmers dressed as extras, wearing their hair in topknots, clad in armor and carrying swords, would emerge from these houses, throw open the huge doors and lead out their horses. It was as if we had really been transported back into the sixteenth century. They would mount and ride along behind our car. Rolling along past massive cryptomeria and pine trees, I felt that these, too, were part of that ancient era. When we arrived at the location, the extras led their horses off into the forest and tethered them to trees while they built a huge bonfire. The farmers gathered around the fire, and in the dim forest their armor caught gleams of light from the roaring red fire. It made me feel that I had stumbled on a band of mountain samurai in the woods. While they waited for shooting to begin, the people and horses all stood still with their backs to the north wind. The standing warriors would shudder in a wave, their topknots rising on end along with their horses' manes and tails. And clouds skittered across the sky. The scene portrayed exactly the feeling conveyed in the mountain-samurai title song from the movie.

*Thinking of home so far away,*

*Ah, lay down your lance in the forest.*

Ever since *The Saga of the Vagabonds* I have felt an affinity for the town of Gotenba, the plains at the base of Mount Fuji and the people and the horses of the area, and I have made several period films here. My experience of the spirited charge of horses in *Saga* so impressed me that I revived it in *Seven Samurai*, *Throne of Blood* and most recently *Kagemusha*. The last good person I want to write about is Fushimizu Shu. It bough he and I were born the same year, he a few months after me, he died at the very early age of thirty-one, in 1942. He had seemed to be the one who would inherit Yama-san's talent with musical films, so it's all the more tragic that his life was cut short. We all called him "Mizu-san," and Mizu-san's appearance was exactly what you would imagine the ideal image of a film director to be. He had fine features and was always dashingly well dressed. Yama-san, too, was handsome and dressed well, so Mizu-san seemed to be his most suitable heir. Somehow, perhaps because he had already been promoted to director, none of us—Taniguchi Senkichi or Honda Inoshiro or I—no matter how big we acted elsewhere, could ever look like anything but little others next to Mizu-san. Two or three days after we heard from Yama-san that our "older other" Mizu-san was seriously ill, I was waiting for the bus to the Toho studios at Shibuya Station in Tokyo. Suddenly Mizu-san stepped out of the crowd in the station. I knew he was supposed to be confined his bed at his family home in the Kyoto-Osaka region, so I was shocked. But even if I hadn't known that, I would have caught my cath at the way he looked. Weakened from his illness, he appeared truly ghostly.

I ran over to him and asked, "Are you all right? What are you doing here?" He drew up his pale face into a kind of smile at last and replied, "I want to make films. I've got to make movies." I couldn't say anything else. He must have been thinking all along, "I've only just begun, just begun," and couldn't stay still in his bed. That same day Yamaa-san took him to a hotel in Gora in the Hakone Mountains and had him given full nursing care, but it was too late. There was also a marvelously talented assistant director to Mizu-san named Inoue Shin. He died before he became a director. On location in the Philippines he contracted a fatal illness, but before he went off to the Philippines he came to me for advice on whether or not to go. I had some kind of premonition about it and told him I thought it would be better to stay home. If only I had been more persuasive! With Inoue's death the line of succession to Yama-san's musicals was cut off. The proverb says that beautiful people do not live long, but it also seems that good people have short lives. Naruse, Takizaw Mizu-san, Inoue Shin—they all died much too soon. I must say teh same for directors Mizoguchi Kenji, Ozu Yasujiro, Shimazu Yasujiro, Yamanaka Sadao and Toyoda Shiro. For them, too, I have to say "Good person, short life." But I am probably just being sentimental about those I have lost.

## A Bitter War

WHEN THE MAKING OF *Horses* came to an end, I was relieved my duties as an assistant director. From that point on, I did only occasional second-unit shooting for Yama-san, and spent the major part of my time in scriptwriting. I submitted two of my scripts to contest sponsored by the Information Ministry; Shizuka nari (*All Is Quiet*) won a second prize of 300 yen (roughly \$6,000) and Yuki (*Snow*) won a first place, with a prize of 2,000 yen (\$40,000). My salary at the time was only 48 yen (about \$960) a month, and this was the highest any assistant director received, so the Information Ministry prize money was to me a fabulous sum. I used it to take my friends drinking day after day. The schedule went like this: First we'd drink beer near Shibuya Station, then proceed to Sukiyabashi near Ginza and drink sake with an array of Japanese dishes, and finally we'd end up in the Ginza bars to drink whiskey. We talked about nothing but movies the whole time, so I can't really say it was pure dissipation, but it is a fact that we burdened our digestive systems thoughtlessly. When I had drunk up all my money, I sat down at my desk again and began to write. What I wrote was in the main for money, and my client at the time was Daiei Motion Picture Company. For them I wrote such scripts as *Dohyosai* (Wrestling Ring Festival) and *Jajauma monogatari* (The Story of a Bad Horse), and they sent me my payment in care of my employers, Toho. But Toho took fifty percent. When I asked why, the answer was: "You're under contract to Toho and we pay you a regular salary, so of course we get a percentage of what you do on the outside." But to me it looked a little different. Daiei paid me 200 yen for each script. My salary at Toho was 48 yen a month, or 576 yen a year. If I wrote three scripts a year for Daiei, Toho would be making an average of 25 yen a month from me—over half my salary. So it appeared to me that Toho was not employing me for 48 yen a month, but rather that I was employing Toho for 25 yen a month. This seemed pretty strange, but I didn't say anything about it. When an executive from Daiei later asked me if I had received my money all right, I told him very straightforwardly what had happened. He looked astounded a moment, said, "That's terrible!" and disappeared into the accounting office. He reemerged with 100 yen, which he handed to me directly.

From that time on, whenever I wrote a script for Daiei, we went through this rigmarole. Perhaps Toho was worried that if I received much money I would drink too much. As a matter of fact, I did develop a case of incipient gastric ulcers from drinking too much. So I went on a mountain-climbing expedition Taniguchi Senkichi. After spending the whole day clambering found the peaks, I was so sleepy in the evening I could drink hardly fly sake at all, so I got well right away. Once cured, I started writing another script in order to drink again. (All this drinking had begun with *Horses*. We assistant directors were so busy we couldn't drink sake with our evening meals at the inn o location because we had to rush through our dinner and start preparing for the next day's shooting. And when we came back, every-one else was already asleep. The people who ran the inn felt so sorry for us that they always set out a serving bottle full of sake for each of s by our pillows, and they left a kettle on the hibachi coals for us to at it up with. Every night we



drank our sake in bed, with just our heads sticking out of the covers. We looked like tortoises poking our heads out of our shells, and eventually we became stewed tortoises.) My life of writing and drinking went on like this for about a year. Then at last it was proposed that I direct my own script *Daruma-dera no doitsuujin* (A German at Daruma Temple). But as soon as we went into pre-production, the project was abandoned because of the restrictions on film distribution. The Pacific War had begun. And at this inauspicious time my desperate battle to become a director also started in earnest. During the Pacific War, freedom of speech became more restricted fluty by day in Japan. Even though my script had been selected by the Production company for filming, the Ministry of the Interior's censorship bureau rejected it. The verdict of the censors was final; there was no recourse.

Nor were the censors lax. At that time it was determined an offense to make use of the chrysanthemum crest of the imperial household, and any pattern even resembling it was proscribed. Because of this we took great care that among the costumes we used in our films there were no designs that looked like chrysanthemums. Nevertheless, one day I was summoned by the censorship bureau for using the chrysanthemum crest, and was ordered to cut an entire scene. Thoroughly baffled, as I knew we couldn't possibly be using any-thing with a chrysanthemum pattern on it, I went back to check. I found that the objectionable item was a sash with an oxcart design. I took the sash and returned to the censor's office to show him. But he held fast. "Even if it is an oxcart in reality, since it looks like a chrysanthemum it is a chrysanthemum. Cut the scene." The censorship bureau was unrelenting in its perverseness, so such occurrences were by no means rare. The censors echoed the official wartime xenophobia, and if they were able to find something that was "British-American-looking," they excitedly condemned it to destruction. My next two scripts, *Mori no sen'ichiya* (A Thousand and One Nights in the Forest) and *San Paguita no hana* (The San Paguita Flower), were buried forever by the Interior Ministry censorship bureau. In *The San Paguita Flower* there was a scene where the Japanese employees of a factory join in the celebration of a Filipino girl's birthday. The censorship bureau found this "British-American-looking" and put me through a cross-examination, I tried asking if it was wrong to celebrate a birthday. The censor replied that it was obviously a British-American custom to celebrate birthdays, and the idea of writing a scene like that at a time like this was an outrage. But this censor, pursuing his censor's logic, fell right into the trap of my question. At the beginning he had called into question only the use of a birthday cake, but now his argument had escalated to the point of rejecting the entire birthday celebration. Without a moment's hesitation, I countered, "Well, then, is it wrong to celebrate the Emperor's birth-day? In Japan the celebration of the Emperor's birthday is a national holiday, but if this is a British-American custom, then surely it must be a terrible outrage." The censor turned ashy pale and rejected my script summarily. At that time the censors in the Ministry of the Interior seemed to be mentally deranged. They all behaved as if they suffered from persecution complexes, sadistic tendencies and various sexual manias. They cut every single kiss scene out of foreign movies. If a woman's knees ever appeared, they cut that scene, too. They said that such things would stimulate carnal desires. The censors were so far gone as to find the following sentence

scene: "The factory gate waited for the student workers, thrown n in longing." What can I say? This obscenity verdict was handed down by a censor in response to my script for my 1944 film about a group volunteer corps, *Ichiban utsukushiku* (The Most Beautiful). I could not fathom what it was he found to be obscene about this sentence. Probably none of you can either. But for the mentally disturbed censor this sentence was unquestionably obscene. He explained that word "gate" very vividly suggested to him the vagina! For these people suffering from sexual manias, anything and everything made them feel carnal desire. Because they were obscene themselves, everything seen through their obscene eyes naturally became obscene. Nothing more or less than a case of sexual pathology. Nevertheless, I must say the sniffing Dobermans of the censorship bureau certainly underwent a full-scale domestication at the hand of the reigning powers of the day. There is nothing more dangerous than a worthless bureaucrat who has fallen prey to the trends of the times. In the Nazi era, of course, Hitler was a madman, but if you consider people like Himmler and Eichmann behind him, you understand that it is in the subordinate positions that the geniuses of horror and insanity appear. When it comes down to the level of the jailers and operators of the concentration camps, you find beasts that exceed the power of the imagination to conceive. I believe the wartime censors in the Ministry of the Interior constitute one example of this phenomenon. They were the people who really should have been put behind bars. I am doing my best right now to suppress the anger that makes my writing about them become violent, Ito t just thinking about them and remembering it all makes me shudder with rage. That is how deep my hatred for them remains. Toward t he end of the war I even made a pact with some of my friends: If it came to the point of the Honorable Death of the Hundred Million and c% cry Japanese would have to commit suicide, we vowed to meet in front of the Ministry of the Interior and assassinate the censors before We took our own lives. I must end my discussion of the censors here. I have become too excited over it, and that is not good for me. I learned from having an X-ray taken of the vascular system of my brain that my main artery has a peculiar bend in it. Apparently a normal artery is straight, and my condition was diagnosed as congenital epilepsy. As a matter of fact, I used to have frequent seizures as a child, and Yamasan often say to me, "you have a habit of falling into a state of distraction." I never noticed it myself, but it seems I would sometimes have brief lapses 1, during my work when I completely forgot what I was doing and went '11 into a kind of trance. The brain needs a lot of oxygen, and apparently a lack of oxygen in the brain is extremely dangerous. When I a overworked or overly excited, it seems this bent main artery in m brain cuts off the blood supply and causes me to have small epileptic seizures. Anyway, the censors put me through some horrible experiences Because I resisted them, they all looked like enemies to me. But even though I had had two scripts in succession shelved by them, I went o and wrote another one. It was called *Tekichu odan sanbyakuri* (Three Hundred Miles through Enemy Lines). This was a big action-adventure story based on the novel by Yamanaka Hotaro and it dealt with the Tatekawa reconnoitering party during the Russo-Japanese war just after the turn of this century. Tatekawa himself, who had been a second lieutenant at the time of his famous exploits nearly forty years before, had advanced to lieutenant general in the Pacific War, and was also ambassador to the Soviet Union.

He was most enthusiastic about the idea of filming the story of his reconnoitering party, and I had calculated that with this kind of subject and support the censors the Ministry of the Interior were not likely to complain. Moreover, at that time around the city of Harbin in Manchuria there were a great many White Russians. Among these were a number of Cossacks, and they had preserved their military uniforms and flags from before the revolution very carefully. Everything needed for the filming was thus available, and I proposed the project to the company. Morita Nobuyoshi was then head of the Toho planning division, and he was among the best film people I have ever met. But he looked over my script and groaned. "It's good. It's very good, but . . ." He trailed off. What he was trying to say was that the script was good and they certainly would want to film it, but that the scale of the picture was much too large to be given to a first-time director like me. It was true that although there were no actual battle scenes in the script, the action is set in the battle camps of both sides as they pull back to a stand-off after the Battle of Mukden. And in the end I had to wave goodbye to this script as well. (It would be filmed much later, in 1957, by the director Kazuo Mori.) Years afterward Morita recalled this incident as the greatest mistake of his life. "If only I had let you make that movie—but I felt bad about it even at the time. I really had no choice." I saw his point—under wartime conditions, when the film industry as a whole was so full of hardships, no one could consider giving a large-scale picture to a complete novice. My feelings were assuaged somewhat when, after the project had been shelved, Yama-san and Morita succeeded in getting it published in *Eiga hyoron* magazine. One day around this time I saw an advertisement in a magazine tailed *Nihon eiga* (Japanese Cinema) in which the name Uekusa Keinosuke appeared. I learned from it that this magazine had published my old schoolmate's script *Haha no chizu* (A Mother's Map). I went to a bookstore on the Ginza and bought the magazine. As I walked out the door, I ran straight into Uekusa, who was carrying in pocket a copy of the *Eiga hyoron* with my script printed in it. I don't remember what we did or what we talked about that day on the Ginza, but Uekusa came to join the screenwriters' section of Toho and finally we had the opportunity to work together.

### My Mountain

AFTER MY Three Hundred Miles project was shelved, I gave up fighting to become a director. All I did was go on writing scripts in order to earn the money to drink, and I drank as if it were going out of style. The scripts I wrote were things like *Seishun no kiryu* (Currents of Youth, directed by Fushimizu Shu in 1942) and *Tsubasa no gaika* (A Triumph of Wings, directed by Yamamoto Satsuo in 1942). They were stories that the times required, about the aircraft industry and boy aviators. Their aim was to fan the flame of the national war spirit, and I did not undertake them out of any personal inclination. I just dashed them off in the suitable formulas. In the midst of this I was reading the newspaper one day when an advertisement for a new book caught my eye. It was for a novel called *Sugata Sanshiro*, and for some reason my interest was

terrifically aroused. The advertisement described the content only as the story of rowdy young judo expert, but I just had a gut feeling that "This is it." There was no logical explanation for my reaction, but I believed wholeheartedly in my instinct and did not doubt for an instant. I rushed to see Morita and showed him the ad. "Please buy the rights to this book. It will be a great movie," I begged, Morita replied happily, "All right, let me read it, too." But then I said, "It hasn't corn out yet. I haven't even read it myself," and Morita gave me a funny look. I hastily tried to reassure him, "It'll be all right. I'm positive this book will make a good movie." He laughed, "O.K. If you're that sure about it, you're probably right. But just because you tell me a book you haven't read is sure to be good I can't go rushing out and buy the rights. When it comes out, you read it right away and if it's good corn back. Then I'll buy it for you." After that I haunted the bookstores in Shibuya. I checked morning, noon and night, three times a day every day, to see when the book would arrive. When it finally appeared, I leaped to buy it. This happened in the evening, and by the time I had returned home and read it, it was 10:30 p.m. But I had been right. It was good, and it was exactly the kind of material I was looking for to film. I couldn't wait until morning. In the dead of night I set out for Morita's house in Seijo. A very sleepy Morita came out when I banged on the door of the darkened house. I thrust the book at him and said, "It's a sure thing. Please buy the rights." "All right," he promised, "I'll see to it first thing in the morning," and he had a look on his face that very clearly said, "There' no stopping this fellow." The next day producer Tanaka Tomoyuki (now president of the Toho Eiga film production arm of Toho Ltd., and co-producer of m latest film, *Kagemusha*) was dispatched to visit the author of Sugata Sanshiro, Tomita Tsuneo. He requested the film rights for Toho, but came away without an answer. Later I heard that the next day two of the other majors, Daiei and Shochiku, had also requested the rights. Both of them had promised to cast a big star in the role of the judo expert, Sugata Sanshiro. But, very fortunately for me, Mrs. Tomita had read about me in the film magazines, and told her husband she thought I showed promise. So at least in a way I owe the start of my career as a director to the wife of the author of the novel Sugata Sanshiro. But in the course of my work as a film director, whenever my fate has hung in the balance, some kind of guardian angel has always appeared out of nowhere. I myself can't help being surprised by this strange destiny. This fate nudged me into my first experience as a fledgling movie director. I wrote the script for Sugata Sanshiro at one sitting. Then I took it to the naval air station on the coast of Chiba Prefecture, where Yama-san was shooting *Hawai-Marei oki kaisen* (The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya). My purpose was, of course, to have him look at my script and give me his advice. When I arrived at the base, I saw a massive aircraft carrier moored with its deck facing the ocean. Zero fighters were landing, taxing and taking off from it in rapid succession, circling into the sky. The shooting of the film, in other words, betrayed all the tension of a real-life battle. All I could do was greet Yama-san, tell him the purpose of my visit in a word or two and get out of the way. At the barracks where the camera crew were housed I waited for Yama-san to return. But a message came that he would be delayed because he had to have dinner with the admiral and the commissioned officers. My instructions were not to wait up. I waited until about 1:00 p.m. and then gave up and crawled into bed. I fell asleep immediately.

In the middle of the night I woke up. When I turned over, I saw gut coming through the cracks around the door of Yama-san's room. I got up and very softly walked over and peeked in. I saw Yama-san seated on top of his bed with his back to the door. He was reading.

He was poring over the manuscript of my Sugata Sanshiro screen-play. He was going through it very carefully page by page, sometimes turning back the pages and rereading. In that concentrated silhouette there should have been some sign of the exhaustion of the day's shooting and the evening's drinking. Not a trace. The barracks occupants had all gone to sleep; there wasn't a sound anywhere, except for the pages turning. I wanted to say, "You have to get up early in the morning—it's all right, you don't have to do this for me, please go to sleep." But for some reason I couldn't bring myself to speak. His seriousness was intimidating. I sat down and waited with my back erect for him to finish reading. I will never forget that view of Yama-san's back and the sound of those pages turning. I was thirty-two years old. At last I had climbed to the base of the peak I had to scale, and I stood gazing up at my mountain.

### Ready, Start!

THE SHOOTING of Sugata Sanshiro began on location in Yokohama in 1942. My first step as a director, the first shot we set up, was Sanshiro and his teacher, Yano Shogoro, coming up a long flight of stone steps leading to a Shinto shrine. After the tests were done and we were ready to shoot, with the cameras rolling I gave the call for action, "Yoi, staato!" ("Ready, start!") The whole crew turned to stare at me. Apparently my voice sounded a little peculiar. I had done plenty of second-unit directing for Yama-san, but, no matter how much experience you have, when you finally reach the point of directing your own first film you are in a state of extreme tension. But from the second shot my tension disappeared; everything just felt exciting, and all I wanted to do was hurry on. The second shot showed what the judo expert and his teacher saw at the top of the steps: the back of a young girl praying in front of the worship hall of the shrine. She is the daughter of Murai Hanshiro, who will be Sanshiro's adversary in the match sponsored by the police headquarters, and she is praying for her father's victory. But Sanshiro and his teacher don't know who she is, and they are so impressed by this girl's fervent prayers that they try to avoid disturbing her and go around the back way to pray and leave. Preparing for this second shot, the actress playing the daughter (Todoroki Yukiko) asked me, "Mr. Kurosawa, do I just pray for my father's victory?" I replied, "Yes, that's right, but while you're at it, you might as well pray for the success of this picture, too." While on the Yokohama location, one morning I got up and went to the washroom. On my way I happened to glance at the entryway, and among the men's shoes lined up there I saw a pair of high heels. They were quite flashy-looking, so I couldn't believe they belonged to the script girl. Miss Todoroki was commuting to the set from home, so they couldn't be hers. Yet, aside from the script girl, there were only men in the crew

and cast staying at this inn. I found this strange. I asked the innkeeper whose shoes they were. He looked at me with a pained expression, but I guess he decided he had been caught. "Mr. Fujita [Susumu, who was playing the Sanshiro role] went out drinking last night in Yokohama and brought back a girl from a bar," he said. "But I put her in a separate room." I had to admire the innkeeper's way of putting it—it sounded more like a lawyer's defense than a witness's account. But I asked him to end Fujita to my room anyway. I went back and waited. Finally I heard the sound of the door sliding open, and I glanced around. Through the ever so slightly opened door, one of Fujita's eyes was peering in at me to see what kind of mood I was in. Later in the film there is a scene where Sanshiro goes out on the town and gets in trouble drinking and fighting. Afterward he is called in by his teacher, Yano Shogoro, for a scolding. I had Fujita do exactly what he had done with me. He complained that I was cruel to put him through two chastisements, but he had no one to blame but himself. And he was very good in that scene. There is a point I would like to clarify here. After Sanshiro gets his scolding, he says he will show how he can die for his teacher, and he jumps into the pond in the garden. He spends the whole night in the pond clutching a post, until finally his willfulness is broken and he becomes humble. When I met with Fujita recently, he told me about a certain film director's criticism of this scene: Lotus flowers don't bloom at night, and when the blossoms open, they don't make any noise. Now, I had put a great deal of effort into showing that Sanshiro jumps into the pond in the daytime, spends the entire night in the water and doesn't come out until it's light again. I changed the direction of the sun's rays, I moved the moon and I made morning mists. If utter all of that it appeared to be nighttime when the flowers bloomed, too bad. I tried. The sound of lotus blossoms opening is another matter, however. I had heard that when lotus flowers bloom they make a wonderful, clear bursting sound. So one morning I got up very early and trekked to Shinobazu Pond in Ueno to listen to the lotuses open. And in the dim mists of morning I heard that noise. But the issue of whether or not lotus flowers make noise when they open really has nothing to do with that night that Sanshiro spends in the pond. It's a matter of esthetics, not physics. There is a famous haiku by Basho:

An old pond  
A frog jumps in—  
the sound of the water.

People who read it and say "Well, of course if a frog jumps into the water, there's going to be a noise" simply have no feeling for haiku. Likewise, people who say that it's strange for Sanshiro to hear a beautiful sound when the lotus flowers open simply have no feeling for movies. There are sometimes such human beings among film critics—the things they say they see are so far off the beam that you would think they were possessed by some kind of demon. I suppose nothing can be done about critics, but we can't have such people among film directors.

## Sugata Sanshiro

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK me how I felt directing my maiden work, but, as I have said, I simply enjoyed it. I went to sleep each night looking forward eagerly to the next day's shooting, and there was absolutely nothing painful in the experience. My crew to a man gave me their utmost. My set designers and wardrobe people ignored the small size of our budget and responded with, "O.K. Leave it to us!" I was deeply touched by their insistence on making everything exactly what I wanted it to be. And all the doubts I had had about my ability to direct before I was given the opportunity vanished after the first shot was completed, like clouds and mist after a rain. The whole task was carried out with a feeling of ease. This feeling may be a little hard to understand, so let me try to explain. When I was an assistant director, I watched very carefully how Yama-san directed, and I couldn't help being amazed at the way his attention reached every nook and cranny of the production. Feeling that my own eyes could not see that far, I necessarily harbored doubts about my directing talent. Once I looked at the production from the director's viewpoint, however, I saw everything I had been unable to see as an assistant director, or even as a second-unit director. I understood the subtle difference between the positions. When you are creating your own work, it is entirely different from when you are helping with someone else's. Moreover, when you are directing your own script, you understand the script better than anyone else possibly can. When I finally became a director, I at last understood all the implications of Yama-san's order to write scripts first if I wanted to direct. It was because of this that, although Sugata Sanshiro was my very first film, it went exactly the way I wanted it to. Making this film seemed not like ascending a steep precipice, but more like clambering around the gentle slopes at the base of the mountain. My overall impression of it was that of a very pleasant excursion, like a picnic. But there is a song in Sugata Sanshiro with lyrics that go like this.

*Cheerful on the way there,*

*Fearful on the way home.*

And so it was for me. I climbed the trail into the mountains, and it wasn't until much later that I encountered the steep rock cliff I would have to scale. This came with the climax scene toward the end, where Sanshiro and Higaki Gennosuke battle it out on the plains of Ukyaga-ara. We required a field through which the wind was blowing, and I felt that without a blustering, gale-force wind this final and most crucial confrontation was unlikely to distinguish itself from the other six fight sequences in the film. First we fashioned tall grasses to blow in the wind on the set. (The idea was to use wind machines for the effect.) But when I looked at the finished set, I felt that what we could shoot here would not only fail to be more impressive than the other fight scenes, it would look tawdry enough to ruin the whole picture. In a great flurry I rushed to consult with the production company, and managed to get permission to shoot this last scene on location. But the stipulation was that the shooting had to be completed in no more than three days.

The location selected was the Sengokuhara plain in the Hakone mountains, a place famous for its winds. But we encountered an unusual period of calm with a thick cloud cover. For two days we sat with nothing to do, staring out of the inn windows at the murky sky. I he third day, too, dawned without a whisper of the famous wind, and below the Hakone Mountains enshrouded in mists we prepared to scum home. I told my cast and crew that we would persevere at least till the end of this third day. Half feeling like giving up, and half in desperation, we began drinking beer from early morning on. About the time everyone was getting a little tipsy and starting to launch into song with complete abandon, someone looked out the window and suddenly began pointing and trying to quiet us down.

Looking outside, we saw that the cloud which had covered the outer crater of Hakone was starting to lift, and over Lake Ashinoko There seemed to be a misty dragon ascending to heaven with a swirling motion. A violent gust of wind blew in the open window and made the hanging scroll in the art alcove rattle and dance. We all looked at each other speechless, and then burst into action. From that moment it became in every sense of the word a b action drama. Everyone grabbed a piece of the equipment we needed, shouldered or dragged it and hurried out of the inn. The location was close by—only the equivalent of two blocks' walk—but we made our way into that violent headwind as if we were gulping it down. On the hill where we had planned to shoot, the pampas grass should have gone to seed already, but a field of the fluffy stalks still waved like a typhoon-ripped sea. Above our heads, tatters of clouds fairly raced across the sky. I couldn't have asked for a more perfect se design. The cast and crew worked like men possessed in the teeth of the providential wind. Whenever we finished a take that had required clouds drifting in the background, the sky cleared itself completely as if the clouds had been swept away by magic. We kept on working in the driving gale until three o'clock in the afternoon without stopping for a minute to rest. As we finished shooting the scene exactly the way it was written in the script, in the distance we saw some people wearing headbands toiling up the grass-covered hill carrying something across their shoulders. As they drew closer, we saw that it was the maids from the inn, their hair wrapped in headbands against the ferocity of the wind. They were carrying a huge kettle of hot miso soup for us. This was the most delicious soup I have ever tasted; I drank at least ten bowls of it.

Since my assistant-director days I seem to have developed a peculiar relationship with the wind. Yama-san once told me to go shoot the waves at Choshi, where I had to wait through three days of a placid sea. Then suddenly a furious gale blew up the waves to astounding swells, and I got exactly what I came for. Another time, during a location on Horses, I ran into a typhoon and had my raincoat tipped apart at the seams. During the filming of *Nora inu* (Stray Dog, 1949) our open set was blown to smithereens by Typhoon "Kitty," and during the Mount Fuji location shooting of *Kakushi toride no san-akunin* (The Hidden Fortress, 1958) we were hit by three typhoons in succession. The forests in which we had planned to film were leveled one by one, and what was to have been a ten-day location shoot ended up taking a hundred days. But, compared to these winds, the gale that blew across the Sengokuhara plains for Sugata Sanshiro



was truly a kamikaze, a "divine wind," as far as I was concerned. There is only one thing that I now regret: Due to my lack of experience, I was unable to take full advantage of the opportunity provided by that divine wind. In the midst of the gale I thought I had shot as much as I needed, but when I got that 1,000 feet into the editing room I found it far from adequate; there were many places I should have reshot or shot much more. When you are working under difficult conditions, you experience an hour's labor as two or three. But hard work just makes you feel you've put in more time than you have. Reality remains reality: An hour is only an hour. Since this experience, whenever I am working under adverse conditions and feel, through exhaustion, that what I have must be enough, I force myself to go on and produce three times as much. If I do that, I finally get what I really need. It was the bitter experience in the wind of Sugata Sanshiro that taught me this. There are still many things I would like to say about Sugata Sanshiro. But if I wrote them all down, we'd end up with a whole book on that one film. For a director, each work he completes is like a whole lifetime. I have lived many whole lifetimes with the films I have made, and I have experienced a different life-style with each one as well. Within each film I have become one with many different kinds of people, and I have lived their lives. For this reason, in order to prepare for the making of a new film, it requires a tremendous effort to forget the people in the film that went before. But now, as I recall my past works in order to write about them, the people from the past whom I had at last forgotten come to life again in my head, clamoring for attention, each one asserting his own individuality. I am at a loss. Each one is to me like a child of my own that I gave birth to and raised. I have special affection for them all, and I would like to write about each one, but that is not possible. I have made twenty-seven films, and unless I take only two or three characters as the representatives of each film and limit my reminiscences, I'll never get to the end. Among the characters in Sugata Sanshiro, the one who most strongly draws my interest and affection is of course Sanshiro himself. But, looking back now, I realize that my feelings for the villain, Higaki Gennosuke, are no less strong. I like unformed characters. This may be because, no matter how old I get, I am still unformed myself; in any case, it is in watching someone unformed enter the path to perfection that my fascination knows no bounds. For this reason, beginners often appear as main characters in my films, and Sugata Sanshiro is just such a one. He is unformed, but he is made of superior material. Now, when I say I like unformed people; I don't mean I'm interested in someone who even if polished will not become a jewel. Sanshiro, is material that gleams brighter and brighter the more he is polished, so in the course of the film I wanted to polish him as vigorously as I possibly could. Higaki Gennosuke, though, is also the type of material that would become a shiny jewel if polished correctly, but people are subject to what is called destiny. This destiny lies not so much in their environment or their position in life as within their individual personality as it adapts to that environment and that position. For all the straight-forward and flexible people there are who do not let their environment and position get the better of them, there are just as many proud and uncompromising people who end up being destroyed by their surroundings and status. Sugata Sanshiro represents the first group, while Higaki Gennosuke is a member of the second. Personally, I feel that my own temperament is like Sanshiro, but am strangely attracted by

Higaki's character. For this reason I portrayed Higaki's demise with a great deal of affection. Then in *Zoku Sugata Sanshiro* (Sugata Sanshiro, Part II, 1945) I followed Higaki's two brothers with close scrutiny in the same way. The critical response to my maiden work, *Sugata Sanshiro*, was, on the whole, positive. In particular the general public, perhaps because they were starved for entertainment during the war, reacted to my film with feverish warmth. The Army's strongest opinion seemed to be that my film had no more value than ice cream or a sweet cake, but the Navy's Information Section announced that this was all right for a movie, that a movie's entertainment value was important. Next, although it will make me angry and be bad for my health again, I will tell you what the censors in the Ministry of the Interior said about my film. At that time the Ministry took a director's first film as the subject of a directing test. As soon as *Sugata Sanshiro* was finished, it was submitted to the Interior Ministry and I had to go in for my examination. The examiners were, of course, the censors. Along with them were several already established film directors who made up the board of examiners. For my test these were to include Yama-san, Ozu Yasujiro and Tasaka Tomotaka, but Yama-san had other business and couldn't appear. He called me to him to assure me that everything would be all right because Ozu would be there, however, I went off like a stubborn dog to my battle with the stubborn monkey censors. That day I walked the corridors of the Ministry of the Interior in a deep melancholy. Then I noticed two young office boys tussling in the hallway. One of them yelled, "Yama arashi!" ("Mountain storm!") and, using *Sanshiro* special technique, threw the other to the floor. So I knew the screening of *Sugata Sanshiro* was over. But I was still made to wait for three hours. During that time the boy who had imitated *Sanshiro* brought me a cup of tea wearing a compassionate expression on his face, but that was all. When the test finally began, it was horrible. In a room with a long table, the censors were all lined up on one side. Down at the very end were Ozu and Tasaka, and next to them an office boy. All of them, including the office boy, were drinking coffee. I was instructed to sit the single chair on the other side that faced them all. It was really like being on trial. Naturally, no coffee appeared for me. It seems I had committed the heinous crime called *Sugata Sanshiro*. The point of the censors' argument was that almost everything in the film was "British-American." They seemed to find the little incident of the "love scene" between *Sanshiro* and his rival's daughter on the shrine stairs—the censors called this a "love scene," but all the two did was meet each other for the first time there—to be particularly British-American," and they harped as if they had discovered some eat oracular truth. If I listened attentively, I would fly into a rage, so I did my best to look out the window and think of other things. But I reached the limits of my endurance with their spitefulness. I felt the color of my face changing, and there was nothing I could do about it. "Bastards! Go to hell! Eat this chair!" Thinking such thoughts, I rose involuntarily to my feet, but as I did so, Ozu stood up simultaneously and began to speak: "If a hundred points is a perfect *Sugata Sanshiro* gets one hundred twenty! Congratulations, Kurosawa!" Ignoring the unhappy censors, Ozu strode over to me, whispered the name of a Ginza restaurant in my ear and said, "Let's go there and celebrate." Later Ozu and Yama-san arrived at the restaurant, where I was all ready waiting. As if to calm me down, Ozu praised *Sugata Sanshiro* with all his might. But I was not so easy to console, and I

sat there thinking how much better I would have felt if I had taken that defendant's chair and hit the censors over the head with it. Even today the thing I am most grateful to Ozu for is that he prevented me from doing just that.

### The Most Beautiful

I THINK THE easiest way to talk about myself from the time I came a film director is by following my filmography and going through my life film by film. Sugata Sanshiro was released in 1943; I was thirty-three years old. The Most Beautiful was released in 1944; was thirty-four. But a picture is usually released the year after the actual filming, so, for example, The Most Beautiful was a film I start shooting in 1943. Before I began work on The Most Beautiful, I had a request from the Information Section of the Navy. They called me to see if wouldn't make a big action picture using Zero fighter planes. I understand that American pilots called Zero fighters "Black Monsters" and seemed to be terrified by them, so probably what the Navy had in mind was a propaganda film to fan the Japanese war spirit. I said I would think about it. But it was already evident that Japan was going to lose the war, and the Navy's ability to carry on was reaching the bottom. They really couldn't have spared any Zero fighters to make a movie with, and I never heard anything more about the project. The Most Beautiful was the project that replaced the Zero film. It deals with a volunteer corps of teenage girl workers. The setting is military-lens factory belonging to the Nippon Kogaku company in the town of Hiratsuka, and the girls are engaged in the manufacture a precision lenses. When I received this project to direct, I decided I wanted to try doing it in semi-documentary style. I began with the task of ridding the young actresses of everything they had physically and emotionally acquired that smacked of theatricality. The odor of makeup, the snobbery, the affectations of the stage, that special self-consciousness that only actors have—all of this had to go. I wanted to return them their original status of ordinary young girls. So I began with running practice, and went from there to volleyball. Then I had them form a fife-and-drum corps, practice marching and playing and finally parade through the streets. The actresses didn't seem to object to the running and the volleyball, but the very thought of doing something so attention-getting as marching through the streets in a fife-and-drum corps affronted them. I had to deal with a strong resistance to this request.

But with repetition they became accustomed even to parading. Their makeup lost its artificiality, and at first glance, and even at a harder second look, they appeared to be in all respects a healthy, active group of ordinary young girls. I then took this group and put them in the Nippon Kogaku company dormitory. I sent several of them to each section of the factory, and they began leading the same life as the actual workers, on the same daily schedule. Reflecting upon my actions now, I must conclude that I was a terribly rough director to work for. It is really quite amazing how

they all did without question what I told them to do. But then, in the mood that prevailed during wartime, everyone took orders as a matter of course. I was not consciously asking these girls to behave in a selfless, patriotic fashion. The fact is that the theme of the film is self-sacrificing service to one's country, and if we had not gone about preparing for it in this way, the characters would have been like cardboard cut-and lacked all reality. I had the actress Irie Takako playing the dormitory mother for the girls at the factory, and her natural ability to show maternal affection made her very popular among the young actresses; her presence was a great help to me. At the same time the cast entered the factory women's dormitory, the crew and I moved into a men's dormitory. Our mornings began everyday with the distant strains of the fifes and drums. When we heard this music, we leaped out of our beds, pulled on our clothes and rushed off to the Hiratsuka railroad crossing. Along the white frost-covered road came the fife-and-drum corps, all wearing headbands and playing a simple but inspiring march tune. While playing their instruments, they glared at us out of the corners of their eyes as they passed by us, crossed the railroad tracks and marched into the front gate of the Nippon Kogaku factory. We would watch them disappear and then return to our dormitory for breakfast. After our meal we gathered our equipment and proceeded to the factory for filming. The spirit with which we shot was exactly the same as if we had been making a pure documentary film. The girls in each section of the factory of course spoke the lines of the drama that were set down in script, but rather than paying attention to the camera they were fully absorbed in carrying out the factory job they were learning and monitoring the workings of the machinery. In their concentrated expressions and movements there was almost no trace of the self-consciousness actors have, only the vitality and beauty of people at work.

The full impact of this quality comes through best in the sequence I edited together of many, many close-ups of each girl at her place the factory. As background music for these close-ups I used the inspiring sound of the battle drum from the John Philip Sousa march "Semper Fidelis," which lent them the courage and heroism of soldier in the front lines fighting the war. (Oddly enough, even though I use march music by an American composer, the censors from the Ministry of the Interior sat through this sequence without labeling it "British American.") The food at the factory was awful. It usually consisted of broken rice mixed with corn or millet, or broken rice mixed with some other weedy grain. The main dish was always some kind of seaweed or kelp that had been culled from the nearby shore. We on the crew felt sorry for the actresses, who had to eat this miserable fare and then work more than an eight-hour day. We each contributed from our own pockets every day and had someone go out and buy sweet potatoes. We steamed them in the kettle-style dormitory bathtub, which was heated with a wood fire, and gave them to the girls. Later it came to pass that I married the girl who played the lead of the girls' volunteer corps, Yaguchi Yoko. At that time she represented the actresses and frequently came to argue with me on the behalf. She was a terribly stubborn and uncompromising person, and since I am very much the same, we often clashed head on. These battles could only be brought to a peaceful resolution through the intervention of Irie Takako, who had no easy task of it. In any event, *The Most Beautiful* was a film that occasioned a very

special kind of hardship. Much more than for me or for my crew, it affected the young actresses, who would never see the likes of it again. I don't know if it was due to the stress of acting in this film, but for some reason almost all of them gave up their careers and got married when *The Most Beautiful* was over. Since among these women there were many who had great acting talent and of whom I had hopes for the future, I didn't know whether I should rejoice or lament. And certainly didn't want to believe that they all gave up acting because had been so mean to them. In later years when I asked the ones who quit what their reasons were, they all denied that my demands on them had had anything to do with it. In fact, they said that working on my film had been the first opportunity to return to being ordinary women, following the same path ordinary women do, casting off the various dead layers skin that had clung to them as actresses. But in their protestations I heard much that was meant to keep my feelings from being hurt. The truth of the matter is, I am sure, that the severity of the work I put them through was one of the primary causes of their decision to give up acting. But they really did their best for me, this group of actresses. *The Most Beautiful* is not a major picture, but it is the one dearest to me.

## Sugata Sanshiro, Part II

*Sugata Sanshiro* had been a hit, so the studio asked me to make a sequel. This is one of the bad points about commercialism: It seems the entertainment sections of Japan's film-production companies haven't heard the proverb about the fish under the willow tree that hangs over the stream—the fact that you hooked one there once mean you always will. These people continually remake films that were successful in the past. They don't attempt to dream new dreams; they only want to repeat the old ones. Even though it has been proved that a remake never outdoes the original, they persist in their foolishness. I would call it foolishness of the first order. A director filming a remake does so with great deference toward the original work, so it's like cooking up something strange out of leftovers, and the audience who have to eat this concoction are in an unenviable position, too.

*Sugata Sanshiro, Part II* was not a remake, so the situation could have been worse, but it was still a question of refrying to a certain extent. I had to force myself to arouse the desire to go back to it and continue it. But one aspect of the story of Higaki Gennosuke's younger brothers seeking a revenge battle with Sanshiro interested me. This was the fact that Gennosuke is forced to see himself as he was in his younger days through the similarly impetuous actions of his younger brother Tesshin, and the recollection causes him to suffer. The climax of the *Sanshiro* sequel is a duel between Tesshin and Sanshiro on a snow-covered mountain. The location was a place called Hoppo, a hot-spring and ski resort, and two funny things occurred during our shooting. On the day I was helping the set builders construct the hut the brothers are living in, my gloves got covered with sticky snow and I had to melt it off over a bonfire. Then when

evening came, the temperature fell suddenly and I lost all sensation in my wt and stiffened hands. I went back with the rest to the hot-spring inn. My intention was to go straight to the bath pool, jump in and g warmed up. But the water was so hot I couldn't stand it, so I scurried to add cold water to it. I picked up a tub of cold water, but as I did I slipped on the icy floor of the bathroom, and the bucket flew up the air and emptied the cold water over my head. I have never been cold in my life. In fact, compared to Yama-san's short story about heat, this experience of mine rivals it for cold. As I struggled along, stark naked, shaking like a leaf, trying desperately to mix cold water into the bath, my crew started to come in the bath. I yelled at them with violently chattering teeth to give me hand. When they saw how cold I was, they dipped up buckets of hot water from the bath, added a little cold water to these and poured them over my head. With this I came back to life and wondered why hadn't thought of doing that myself. When the human animal get panicky, he becomes stupid. The second funny thing that happened at the Hoppo location involved Higaki Gennosuke's youngest brother, Genzaburo. He is mean to be half crazy, so I spent a great deal of effort on his costume and makeup. We put him in a tousled long black wig like those used in th Noh drama. He wore white makeup all over his face, and bright red lipstick. We put him in a white costume and had him carry the "bamboo grass of madness" that crazed characters in Noh plays hold. The role of Genzaburo was played by Kono Akitake. One day his scenes were finished early, so we sent him on back alone. The location for these scenes was on a cliff covered with deep snow. I looked down from the top and saw about seven skiers coming up the road to the cliff. Suddenly they all stood stock still, staring up the road ahead of them, and then in a flash they turned back and skied at breakneck speed down the hill. Small wonder. In the heart of the mountains, where you rarely see a trace of other human beings, if you suddenly saw someone dressed like Genzaburo coming toward you you would run, too. Though I have no evil intentions, for some reason in my business I end up giving a lot of people a terrible fright. I met these skiers later at the inn, explained what we were doing and apologized. On this location the climactic duel between Sanshiro and Tesshin took place in deep snow. They both had to be barefoot, so it was a real test of endurance. Even now, whenever Fujita Susumu (who played Sanshiro) sees my face, he begins to talk about his feet on that 194 location. He goes on and on about how cold they were and how much he holds it against me. Fujita had also had to jump into the lotus pond in the month of February for the first Sugata Sanshiro, so his resentments were really piled up. But I did not make him do these things because I dislike him. Considering that these films made him a star, I think he might go a little easier on me. Sugata Sanshiro, Part II was not a very good film. Among the reviews was one that said "Kurosawa seems to be somewhat full of himself." On the contrary, I feel I was unable to put my full strength into it.

## Marriage

THE SAME MONTH *Sugata Sanshiro, Part II* came out in the movie theaters, I was married. To state it accurately, in 1945 at the age of thirty-five I married the actress Yaguchi Yoko (real name Kato Kiyo ) in a ceremony at the wedding hall of the Meiji shrine in Tokyo. The official matchmakers for the ceremony were Yamamoto Kajiro and his wife. My parents, who had been evacuated to Akita Prefecture, could not attend my wedding. The day after the ceremony took place, U.S. carrier-based planes launched a massive attack on Tokyo, and in the B-bomb raid the Meiji shrine became a raging conflagration. The result is that we don't even have a photograph of our wedding. It was thoroughly panicked event, our marriage, with the air-raid sirens bowling throughout. At that time if you made an official report of your intention to marry, the government gave you a ration of sake for the exchange of nuptial cups. I received this delivery and decided to taste it before the ceremony. It proved to be some kind of awful synthetic sake. But during the actual ceremony when I took a drink from my cup it wasn't the synthetic sake; it was in fact delicious, and I wouldn't have minded having a little more. Then at the reception held at my wife's parents' house, the only alcohol was a single bottle of medium-grade Suntory whiskey. I'm afraid my wife will be very annoyed at me for writing about nothing but the liquor at our wedding. But I feel that, in order to convey a true sense of what it was like to get married at that time, these things should be part of the description. In any event, you can imagine that if the wedding ceremony was like this, the events leading up to it were hardly romantic. It all began with my parents' evacuation to the country. Mori Nobuyoshi, who was then head of the Toho production division, saw that I was having a difficult time taking care of myself in my day-to-day life. He suggested that I give some thought to getting married "But who?" I asked, and Morita immediately replied, "What about Miss Yaguchi?" "Well, that does make sense," I thought to myself, but since she and I had done nothing but fight all the way through *The Most Beautiful*, I told Morita I thought she was a little too strong willed. But he countered with a big grin, "But don't you see that' exactly what you need?" I had to admit he had a point, and I made up my mind to ask her hand in marriage. My proposal went something like this: "It looks as if we are going to lose the war, and if it comes to the point of the Honorable Death of the Hundred Million, we all have to die anyway. It's probably not bad idea to find out what married life is like before that happens." The answer was that she would think about it. To ensure that things would go smoothly, I asked a very close friend to intercede with her on my behalf. I waited and waited and no reply came. I got fed up with trying to keep cool. Finally I went to her and demanded "Yes or no?" like General Yamashita Tomoyuki demanding surrender as he occupied Singapore in 1942. She promised that she would reply very shortly, but the next time we met she handed me a thick stack of letters. She told me to read them and said, "I can't marry a person like this." They were all letters from the man I had asked to plead my case with her. I read them and couldn't believe my eyes. I was horrified. All these letters contained were slanderous statements about me. The variety and caliber of the phrasing of these terrible things were positively

ingenious. The fullness of the hatred for me expressed these letters sickened me. This fellow, who had accepted the job aiding me in my suit, had been doing his utmost to ruin my chances. And on top of that, he had frequently accompanied me to the Yaguchi home and sat at my side wearing an expression of sincerest concern and cooperation in my efforts to persuade Miss Yaguchi to marry me.

Apparently Miss Yaguchi's mother had observed all this and said to her, "Which are you going to put your faith in, the man who slanders his friend or the man who trusts the person who slanders him?" The result was that she and I were married. Even after we were married, this man felt no compunctions about coming to visit us. But my mother-in-law absolutely refused to let him in the house. To this day I can't understand it. I can't think of any reason this woman should have hated me so much. What dwells at the bottom of the human heart remains a mystery to me. Since that time I have observed many different kinds of people—swindlers, people who have killed or died for money, plagiarists—and they all look like normal people, so I am confused. In fact, more than "normal," these people have very nice faces and say very nice things, so I am all the more confused. My wife and I began our married life, and for her it must have been a devastating experience. She had given up her career as actress in order to marry, but what she didn't know was that my salary was less than one third of what hers had been. She had never dreamed that a director's pay was so low, and our life became like traveling in a burning horse cart." My fee for the *Sugata Sanshiro* script had been 100 yen (roughly \$2,000), and the fee for directing the picture had also been 100 yen. After that, my fees for *The Most Beautiful* and *Sugata Sanshiro, Part II* had risen by 50 yen each. But I had drunk up the greater part of my pay on location, so we were in real trouble. With *Sugata Sanshiro, Part II* I signed an official director's contract with the company. I was to receive severance pay in compensation for my previous work as a regular company employee. But when I asked for this money, I was told that it was being put away for my future, and they refused to give it to me. I still have not received it. Maybe they are still keeping it for my future, or maybe they are planning to draw from it to help me repay the enormous debts I now owe to Toho. At any rate, with no severance pay, I faced insurmountable financial difficulties at the outset of my married life. I had no choice but to go back to scriptwriting. I even forced myself to write three scripts at once. Probably the only reason I was able to do this was because I was still young, but I really reached the outer limits of exhaustion. The night I finished writing all three scripts I found tears streaming down my face as I drank my sake. There was nothing I could do to stop them.

### The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail

IN THE EARLY days of my marriage I suddenly realized that the wartime air raids were a real threat. We moved from the Ebisu area of Shibuya Ward out to Soshigaya in Setagaya Ward. The



following day an air raid sent our Ebisu house up in flames. The war was hurtling Japan along the road to defeat at breakneck speed, and yet the Toho studios, employing the hands of people with empty stomachs, continued to show remarkable vitality in the production of motion pictures. But those who were not running around frantically trying to complete a picture were sitting on their heels in the central courtyard talking. They were so hungry it was painful for them to stand up. Around this time I had written a script called *Dokkoi kono yari* (The Lifted Spear) for Okochi Denjiro and Enomoto Ken'ichi to star in. We were already in pre-production, but the last scene was going to require special attention. It was to show the Battle of Okehazama, where the feudal leader Oda Nobunaga defeated a northern Japanese clan in 1560. We needed to show Nobunaga and his generals spurring their horses forward into the final battle, so we set out for Yamagata Prefecture to select an appropriate location and horses. But even Yamagata Prefecture, which had always been a breeding ground for horses and had provided us with great numbers of them now had only old nags and sickly beasts. There wasn't a single horse in the entire prefecture that could run. This discovery led to the shelving of the whole Lifted Spear project, and it was as if we had gone location-scouting only to ruin our film. In my disappointment, I decided at least to take the opportunity to visit my parents, who had been evacuated to Akita Prefecture. This would be the only thing gained from the entire trip. I arrived in the middle of the night at the house where my parents were. When I banged on the big front door, my older sister Taneyo who had gone with my parents to help them, peeped through a crack in it and shouted, "It's Akira!" Then she left me standing outside in the dark and ran to the kitchen to start cooking rice. I was baffled.

It turned out that her behavior was not at all laughable. The first thing she wanted to do for the younger brother who she knew was not getting enough to eat was to cook him a meal with real rice. I was almost moved to tears. These few days spent with my father were to be our last together. He had been evacuated from Tokyo after the release of *Sugata Sanshiro*, and had never seen my new bride. He wanted to hear all about her. Immediately after the war I myself became a father, but my own father was never to see his grandchild. When I was ready to return to Tokyo, my father loaded me up with a huge backpack full of rice. Because I understood painfully well my father's feeling of wanting to be sure that my pregnant wife at least had rice to eat, I allowed myself to be treated like a pack mule. The thing was so heavy that if I relaxed my muscles I fell over backward. In my top heavy condition I squeezed onto the train for Tokyo, which was already jammed with people like a sardine can.

At station partway down the line an Army officer and his wife forced their way onto the overflowing train. A woman complained about their pushiness, and the man snapped at her, "How dare you address the Imperial Army in such a way?" The woman came back with "And as a soldier of the Imperial Army, just what do you think you're doing?" The officer had no reply, and remained meekly silent all the way to Tokyo. This incident gave me a strong feeling that Japan had already lost the war. The next morning, completely exhausted by the rice-filled

back-pack, I made my way to the entry of my house in Soshigaya. I sat down on the step with the weight still on my back, and when I tried to stand up again, I could not.

*The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* came about as a result of the cancellation of the *Lifted Spear* project, and it was thrown together in great haste. The idea was to base it on the Kabuki play *Kanjincho* (The Subscription List), about the escape of the early feudal lord Yoshitsune across a heavily guarded barrier with his generals disguised as priests collecting temple subscriptions. The overall structure would be the same as that of the play, with Okochi as the lord's strongest retainer, Benkei. It was only a matter of writing in a role as a porter for Enomoto, so I told the executives that I could come up with a script in two or three days. For the company, which didn't have enough product to put on its screens, my words were a godsend. On top of the speed I promised with the script, I assured them I would need only one set. For the location shots I would make do with the imperial forest that at that time stretched right to the back gate the studio. The company was pleased. But it all proved to be a case of calculating the price the hide will bring before you have caught the badger. Just as things were progressing smoothly on *Tiger's Tail*, Japan lost the war and the U.S. Army came to occupy the country. It came to pass that from time to time American soldiers visited the set where I was shooting. One day a whole landing party of them converged on my set. Maybe the customs being shown in my production struck them as quaint, I don't know. At any rate, they click away with their still cameras or buzzed away with 8-mm. camera and some even wanted to be photographed while being slashed with a Japanese sword. Things got so out of hand I had to call a halt to the day's shooting. On another such occasion I was up on top of the soundstage setting up an overhead shot when a group of admirals and high-ranking commissioned officers came onto the set. They were remarkably quiet as they observed the shooting and departed, and later I found out that the movie director John Ford had been among them. It was he himself who told me this years later when I met him in London, and I was amazed. Apparently he had asked my name at the time and left message of greeting for me. "Didn't you receive it?" he asked. But I had of course not received it, nor did I have any idea that John Ford had ever visited a movie set of mine until that day I met him in England.

So what finally happened to *Tiger's Tail*? For the answer to that question, the censors come onstage once again. When the U.S. Arm moved in to occupy Japan, it immediately began crusading against Japanese militarism. Part of this crusade consisted of dismissing the censors and the judicial police. And yet I was called in by these very same old censors. They said they had an objection to *Tiger's Tail*. Even Mori Iwao, who was the Toho's executive in charge of production, was so surprised that he summoned me to his office and said, "These people have no right to say anything at all now, so you just go there and tell them exactly what you think of them." Mori had always been the one to handle my hot temper by saying, "Gently, now, gently," so for him to encourage me to tell them "exactly what you think of them" must have meant he, too, had reached the limits of his patience with the censors. With my spirits thus boosted, I set out to meet them. Indeed the censors had been driven out of their offices in the Ministry of the

Interior and were regrouped in a different place. Here they were burning their official papers in big tin cans and sawing off the logs of their chairs to feed the fire. The sight of all this power reduced to such poverty almost moved me to sympathy. Nevertheless, these diehards could not give up their pride and presumptuousness, and they lit into me with an interrogating vengeance. "Do you know what this *Tiger's Tail* of yours is? It's a distortion of one of the great Japanese classic Kabuki plays, *Kanjincho*. It is a mockery of that classic." I am not exaggerating what they said. This was their word-for-word statement. Even if I wanted to forget what they said, I can't. My response was this: "*Tiger's Tail* is being called a distortion of the Kabuki play *Kanjincho*, but I believe that the Kabuki play itself is really a distortion of the Noh play *Ataka*. [The Kabuki is in fact based on this original Noh play.] Moreover, although my film is being titled a mockery of the Kabuki classic, I most certainly had no such intention, nor do I understand what aspects of my film can be said to ridicule the play. I would like you to explain to me in concrete detail exactly where such mockery occurs."

All of the censors fell silent for a long moment. Finally one of them replied, "The mere fact that you have put the comedian Enoken into *Kanjincho* is an act of mockery." My answer was, "Well, that is very strange. Enoken is a great comedian. If you say that merely having him act in this film is an affront to the Kabuki, you are casting aspersions on his talent as an actor. Are you saying that comedy is a lesser form than tragedy? Are you saying that comedians are lesser actors than tragedians? Don Quixote has a comic companion named Sancho Panza; what's wrong with the master Yoshitsune and his retainers having Enoken as a porter who is a comic figure?" My argument was a little confused because I was so angry, and I started to rattle on. But then a young stripling censor who reeked of an elite background came at me with bared teeth: "In any event, this film is meaningless. Just what do you intend by making such a boring movie?" All my pent-up anger broke loose against this fellow: "If a meaningless person says something is meaningless, that's probably proof that it isn't meaningless; and if a boring person says something is boring, that's probably proof that it's interesting." The young censor's face went through changes from blue to red to yellow, covering all three primary colors. I watched this display for a while and then stood up and went home.

But, thanks to this incident, the U.S. Army's General Headquarters banned the release of *Tiger's Tail*. This was because out of all the reports on films in production in the Japanese industry, the censor pulled only the one on *Tiger's Tail* and failed to submit it to the G.H.Q. As a result, it became an "illegal" unreported film, and G.H.Q. shelved it. Three years later, however, the head of the film division for the G.H.Q. saw *Tiger's Tail*, found it very interesting and lifted the ban. Something interesting is interesting, no matter who sees it—with the exception, of course, of boring people. The American censors are worth a comment. Japan lost the war and the Allied Occupation of the country was carried out by the U.S. military. Democracy was glorified; freedom of speech was recovered (within the limitations permitted by General MacArthur's military policies). As these things occurred, the film industry came to life again and flourished. For us, of course, the rout of the censors in the Ministry of the Interior was a delight beyond

measure. We who had been able to express nothing of what we were thinking up to that time all began talking at once. Right after the end of the war I wrote a one-act play called *Shaberu* (Talking). Setting it in fish shop on an urban street, I wrote a comic treatment of such Japanese who all begin talking at once. My play aroused the interest of the head of the G.H.Q.'s drama division. He called me in and we spent almost a whole day talking. I don't know what this American's name was, but he seemed to be a drama specialist. He had made notes on the blocking for every single line of my play and asked me very minute and elaborate questions of every detail of the directing. He sometimes smiled and sometime sputtered with mirth over my answers. The reason I am writing about this now is that this was an experience of a strange kind of pleasure I had never felt during the war. Rather, it wasn't strange at all, but a kind of pleasure that we should always be able to feel. This man did not insist on any one-sided view point, but set the desire for mutual understanding as a pre-condition for our talk. My meeting with this American censor is a heart-warming memory. Having lived through an age that had no respect for creation, I recognized for the first time that freedom of creation can exist, I am only sorry that I never learned this man's name. Of course I am not saying that all the American censors were like him. But they all behaved toward us in a gentlemanly fashion. Not single one among them treated us as criminals, the way the Japanese censors had.

### The Japanese

AFTER THE WAR my work went smoothly again, but before I begin to write about that, I would like to look back once more at myself during the war. I offered no resistance to Japan's militarism. Unfortunately, I have to admit that I did not have the courage to resist in any positive way, and I only got by, ingratiating myself when necessary and otherwise evading censure. I am ashamed of this, but I must be honest about it. Because of my own conduct, I can't very well put on self-righteous airs and criticize what happened during the war. The freedom and democracy of the post-war era were not things I had fought for and won, they were granted to me by powers beyond my own. As a result, felt it was all the more essential for me to approach them with an earnest and humble desire to learn, and to make them my own. But most Japanese in those post-war years simply swallowed the concepts of freedom and democracy whole, waving slogans around without really knowing what they meant. On August 15, 1945, I was summoned to the studio along with everyone else to listen to the momentous proclamation on the radio: the Emperor himself was to speak over the air waves. I will never forget the scenes I saw as I walked the streets that day. On the way from Soshigaya to the studios in Kinuta the shopping street looked fully prepared for the Honorable Death of the Hundred Million. The atmosphere was tense, panicked. There were even shop-owners who had taken their Japanese swords from their sheaths and sat staring at the bare blades. However, when I walked the same route back to my home after listening to the imperial proclamation, the scene was entirely different. The people on

the shopping street were bustling about with cheerful faces as if preparing for a festival the next day. I don't know this represents Japanese adaptability or Japanese imbecility. In either case, I have to recognize that both these facets exist in the Japanese personality. Both facets exist within my own personality as well. If the Emperor had not delivered his address urging the Japanese people to lay down their swords—if that speech had been a call instead for the Honorable Death of the Hundred Million—those people on that street in Soshigaya probably would have done as they were told and died. And probably I would have done likewise. The Japanese see self-assertion as immoral and self-sacrifice as the sensible course to take in life. We were accustomed to this teaching and had never thought to question it. I felt that without the establishment of the self as a positive value there could be no freedom and no democracy. My first film in the post-war era, *Waga seishun ni kui nashi* (No Regrets for Our Youth), take the problem of the self as its theme. But before I go on to talk about it, I would like to say a little more about myself during the war. In wartime we were all like deaf-mutes. We could say nothing, or if we did, all we could do was to repeat in parrot fashion the tenets taught by the militarist government. In order to express ourselves, we had to find a way of doing so without touching on any social problems. This was the reason that haiku poetry enjoyed a new vogue during the war. The doctrine of "Flowers, Birds and Suggestion in Poetry" put forth by the modern haiku poet Takahama Kyoshi was, in short, one way to avoid the censors' teeth. We even organized a haiku club at the Toho studios. From time to time we would meet to compose poems a Buddhist temple outside of Tokyo. The motive, however, was not simply the enjoyment of writing haiku; it was because outside of Tokyo the food situation was a little better and we could be assured of finding something to eat. However, people with empty stomachs can't gather together with a vacant feeling and produce good haiku even if they knock their heads together. You can't do anything well unless you have your full strength and will to pour into it. During this time I, too, wrote many haiku, but not one of them is worth setting down here. They are all superficial and affected. Around this time in a book of Takahama Kyoshi's poetry theories came across a haiku I must recommend. It was entitled "A Waterfall."

*On the mountaintop  
water appears  
and tumbles down.*

When I first read it, I was struck with amazement. It was apparently a poem by an amateur, but I felt as if its pure, clear vision and simple, straightforward expression had hit me over the head. My affection for my own poems, which were no more than words lined up and twisted around in different ways, dried up completely. Simultaneously I recognized my lack of education and talent, and I felt deeply ashamed. There must be many such things I thought I understood and yet really knew nothing about. My reaction was to resume a study of traditional Japanese culture. Up until that time I had known nothing at all about pottery and porcelain, and my familiarity with the other industrial arts of Japan was superficial at best. In fact, as far as my esthetic judgment goes, the only art I knew how to appraise at all was painting. And in the performing

arts I had never even seen that peculiarly Japanese dramatic form, the Noh. I began by going to visit a friend who was well versed in ancient Japanese implements and asking him to teach me about pottery.

I had always been rather contemptuous of this friend's interest in curios without knowing exactly why. But as I listened to his instruction, I gradually came to understand that not everything can be lumped together or dismissed as "an interest in curios." In antiques there are deep and shallow as in other fields. There is everything from the retired dilettante to the serious scholar and esthete in the connoisseurship of Japanese art and culture. The spirit of the age, the life-style of the people of the age, can emerge from a single old food bowl. As I listened to my friend teach me about ceramics, I realized that there were still limitless things for me to study and absorb. During the war I had been starved for beauty, so I rushed head-long into the world of traditional Japanese arts as to a feast. I may have been motivated by a desire to escape from the reality around me, but what I managed to learn despite the motive was nevertheless of great value to me. I went to see the Noh for the first time. I read the art theories the great fourteenth-century Noh playwright Zeami left behind him. I read all there was to read about Zeami himself, and I devoured books on the Noh. I was attracted by the Noh because of the admiration I felt for its uniqueness, part of which may be that its form of expression is so far removed from that of the film. At any rate, I took this opportunity to become familiar with the Noh, and I had the pleasure of viewing the performances of the great actors of each school—Kita Roppeita, Umewaka Manzaburo and Sakurama Kintaro. Among their plays there are many performances I will never forget, but the most memorable of all was Manzaburo's *Hanjo* (The Lady Han). It was thundering and raining outside, but while I watched him on the stage I heard nothing of the weather. Then when he came out on stage again and began the dance of the jo introduction act, the evening sun was suddenly reflected off his form, "Ah, the moonflower has bloomed," I thought, entranced. It was a moment that allowed me to savor to the fullest the play's melancholy poetic reference to the moonflower chapter of *The Tale of Genji*. The Japanese have rare talents. In the midst of the war it was the encouragement of the militarist national policies that led us to a fuller appreciation of traditions and arts, but this political sponsorship is not necessary. I think Japan can be proud at any time of having a very special esthetic world of its own. This recognition led me also to a better understanding of myself—and greater self-confidence.

### No Regrets for Our Youth

THE TITLE OF my first post-war film became a popular phrase. After the release, one frequently came across the usage "no regrets for our —" in the newspapers and other media. But for me personally the feeling is the opposite; I have many regrets about this movie. The reason is that the script was rewritten against my will. This film was born amid the two great union

strikes at the Toho studios. The first Toho dispute took place in February of 1946, and the second in October of the same year. *No Regrets for Our Youth* was produced during the seven months between the two outbreaks. As a result of the victory of the first strike, the Toho employees' union became very powerful, and the number of Communist Party members among the employees increased. Their voice in matters of film production became more important than before, and a Scenario Review Committee was formed. This committee decided that the script for *No Regrets* required changes, and the film was shot from a rewrite. The reason was not because of any offense found in the content of my script, but because another script based on similar material had also been submitted to the committee. I felt, however, that although the two scripts were based on similar material, they treated it in entirely different ways. The result, I was sure, would be two entirely different films. Anyway, this is what I said before the Review Committee, but my opinion was rejected. When the two films were completed, members of the Review Committee said to me, "You were right. If we had known they would turn out like this, we would have let you shoot from your first script." This was the height of irresponsibility. Playwright Hisaita Eijiro's first script for my film was such a beautiful piece of work that it still pains me to remember that it was shelved at the hands of such thoughtless people.

The second draft of the script for *No Regrets* was a forced rewrite of the story, so it became somewhat distorted. This shows in the last twenty minutes of the film. But my intention was to gamble everything on that last twenty minutes. I poured a feverish energy into those two thousand feet and close to two hundred shots of film. All of the rage I felt toward the Scenario Review Committee went into those final images. When I had completed the film, I was so agitated and exhausted I couldn't evaluate it with a cool head. But I was convinced that I must have made something very strange. The company arranged a screening for the American censors. They sat talking among themselves while it was being shown, so I was all the more certain that I had failed. But then as the film went into its last twenty minutes a hush over the group, and they began to gaze at the screen with deep concentration. They looked as if they were holding their breath right up until the end title appeared on the screen. When the lights came on, they all stood up at once and reached out to shake hands with me. They praised the film to the skies and congratulated me warmly, but I just stood there amazed. It wasn't until after I left them that I really began to feel that the film had succeeded. One of these American censors, a Mr. Garky, later gave a party in honor of the film. During the second dispute at Toho the stars who had played the leading roles in *No Regrets* had banded together with other actors to form the Flag Group of Ten. They had opposed the strike and gone off to join the company Shin [New] Toho. But Mr. Garky disagreed with our thinking on the matter and insisted our inviting them to the party. His hope was that we would all see that because we had cooperated to make *No Regrets* he was able to give a party to celebrate it. This was a chance, he thought, for everyone to shake hands again. (As it turned out, they did not come to the party, nor did they come back, not for about ten years. It was not only these stars who refused to return, but the movie technicians who went with them to form Shin Toho. Toho seems to have thrown away in a single move not only

the harmony that had taken ten years to establish among its employees, and the very people it had trained, but on top of that another ten years to train new people went out the window.)

*No Regrets for Our Youth* was born in the midst of these great upheavals. I felt peculiarly deep emotions about this film, the first to be made in the post-war atmosphere of freedom. The locations we used in the old capital of Kyoto—the grassy hills, the flower-lined side streets, the brooks reflecting the sun's rays—are all employed in the most trivial films today, but at that time they had special meaning for us. For me it was as if my heart could dance, as if I had grown wings and could fly among the clouds. During the war we had had to be very careful about shooting such scenery. Under wartime conditions we had not been able to portray the fullness of youth in the movies. As the censors viewed things, love was indecent and the fresh, keen sensibilities of youth were a psychological state of "British-American" weakness. Being young in those times consisted of suppressing the sound of one's breathing in the jail cell that was called the "home front." But in order for Japan's post-war youth to regain its life breath, it would have to endure yet more hard times. These would be the subject of my next film.

### One Wonderful Sunday

WHEN THE GROUP of ten stars left to form Shin Toho, we who remained behind at Toho were left without a single name actor or actress to put in our films. The two studios accidentally distinguished themselves clearly through their differing approaches—the director system for the older organization and the star system for the new one—and these emerged as rallying points. The result was in fact a civil war with brother turning against brother. Shin Toho began by announcing a schedule of productions featuring a dazzling roster of stars. At Toho all of the contract directors, screenwriters and producers responded by gathering for a conference at a hot-spring inn on the Izu Peninsula south of Tokyo. The atmosphere of this conference had all the fervor of generals planning their strategy the night before a big battle. It was a most pompous affair, the result of which was a schedule of new releases to be publicized with the directors' names. Kinugasa Teinosuke, Yamamoto Kajiro, Naruse Mikio and Toyoda Shiro were each to direct a segment of a film called *Yotsu no koi no monogatari* (Four Love Stories). Gosho Heinosuke was to make *Ima hitotabi no* (One Time Now) and Yamamoto Satsuo was to co-direct *Senso to heiwa* (War and Peace) with Kamei Fumio, while I was to make *Subarashiki nichiyobi* (One Wonderful Sunday) and Taniguchi Senkichi was to direct his first film, *Ginrei no hate* (To the End of the Silver Mountains). My responsibilities included not only writing the script for my own film, *One Wonderful Sunday*, but also writing one segment of *Four Love Stories* as well the screenplay for Sen-chan's *Silver Mountains*, I began by meeting with Uekusa Keinosuke to discuss the overall structure of *One Wonderful Sunday*, and then left the details in his hands. Taniguchi Senkichi and I stayed on at the hot-spring inn after everyone else went back



to Tokyo, to work on the scenario for *Silver Mountains*, which we intended to finish there. I decided I could dash off the script for one of the *Four Love Stories* in a few days after *Silver Mountains* was done and before I went back to work with Uekusa on the final draft of *One Wonderful Sunday*. As it turned out, I actually accomplished all that I set out to do on this insane schedule, and the three scripts got written on time. But if I hadn't had as an impetus the pressure of the competition with Shin Toho's star system and my desire to react against it, I never could have done it. First of all, the only ideas we had to go on for the *Silver Mountains* script were that it should be a manly sort of action film and, since Sen-chan was a mountain man, we should use an alpine location. Sen-chan and I sat for three days glaring at each other across a writing table, but came up with nothing very inspiring. Finally, deciding there was no way out of it but a frontal attack, I wrote out some-thing like a newspaper headline: "Three Bank Robbers Escape to Mountains of Nagano Prefecture; Investigation Headquarters Moves to Base of Japan Alps." Then I had the three robbers hide out in the snows of the Japan Alps, sent a police inspector after them, and, adding in Sen-chan's mountaineering experiences and general knowledge, we wrote a little every day. At the end of three weeks we had a complete script for *To the End of the Silver Mountains*, with a story that was not bad at all. Immediately afterward I threw myself into work on *Four Love Stories*. This was to be just one of four episodes, and I already had the story worked out in my head, so I scribbled it down in four days. At last I was free to sit down across a table from Uekusa and begin writing *One Wonderful Sunday*.

It had been twenty-five years since "Murasaki" Uekusa and Kurosawa "Shonagon" had matched writing styles at the same work table. We were both now thirty-seven years old. But as we worked together I came to realize that although we both had changed in outward appearance, inside we remained virtually the same as we had been as children. Sitting face to face day after day, we found that the years vanished like a dream and these early middle-aged men became "Kei-chan" and "Kuro-chan" again. There are few people in this world who change as little as Keinosuke had. I don't know if it's the purity of his heart or just plain obstinacy. As weak as he is, he puts on a show of strength; as romantic as he is, he puts on a show of being a realist. He's always doing things that make one feel uneasy. In sum, ever since primary school he's been causing me problems.

Ten years before *One Wonderful Sunday* I had been sitting on top of the crane on the open set for *Tojuro's Love*. As I was giving directions to the crowd of extras we were filming, suddenly from the middle of the group a hand waved at the camera. One of the basic principles of filmmaking is that the actors must not look at the camera, so I leaped from my perch in a rage to give the fellow what for. When I got close, an odd character with an ill-fitting topknot on his head smiled at me. "Say, Kuro-chan!" I realized then it was Uekusa. Shocked, I asked him what he was doing, and he proudly replied that lately he'd been making lots of money as an extra. I was so busy on this film I didn't have time for his pranks, so I gave him five yen and told him to go home. He took the money, but didn't leave, as it turned out. Later he confessed to me that he had put on a masterless samurai's costume with a deep straw hat to evade my gaze, and he had pocketed not

only what I gave him but his full extra's wages as well. When he told me this, I remembered there had been a strange samurai who persisted in wandering around the set in the wrong places and making trouble for me. Keinosuke remains worrisome. This fellow Uekusa, perhaps because of the karma from some previous existence, one day suddenly vanishes from before my eyes and another day reappears just as suddenly. And during the periods he is absent from my field of vision he is doing the most amazing things. He took a job as foreman of a crew of gravel-pit laborers. He worked as an extra in the movies. He joined the parade of courtesans in the Yoshiwara legal-prostitution quarter in Tokyo. And in between these exploits he found time to write superb plays and film scripts. It may have been that the elusive Uekusa simply got tired of his perennial wanderings, but once he sat down to work on the script for *One Wonderful Sunday* he applied himself with extreme calm and single-mindedness. His devotion may also have come from the fact that the subject matter of the film—impoverished lovers struggling along in defeated Japan—was perfect material for this man who was always attracted by underdogs and the shadowy side of life. In any event, the material was so well suited to him that our opinions on the script conflicted in very few instances. But on the climax scene at the end we did have a minor difference. The poor couples are in an empty concert amphitheater and in their minds they hear Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony." Naturally, the movie's sound track should have no music on it for this scene. The girl breaks the rules of filmmaking and turns to the screen audience to address them. "Please, everyone, if you feel sorry for us, please clap your hands. If you clap for us, I'm sure we'll be able to hear the music." The audience applauds, and the boy in the film picks up a conductor's baton. As soon as he starts to wave it, the "Unfinished" comes in on the sound track. My intention here was to elicit audience participation in the film by addressing them directly. When an audience goes to see a film, they are more or less participating in it anyway, insofar as they become emotionally involved in the film and forget themselves. But this phenomenon takes place within people's hearts, and it translates into action only to the extent of, for instance, spontaneous applause. What I wanted to do with this scene in *One Wonderful Sunday* was transform the audience into actual participants in the plot, to make them seem to affect the outcome of the film. In response to my idea, Uekusa offered something else. He wanted to show the concert hall, which is empty at the beginning of the scene, giving forth the sound of applause after the girl makes her appeal. Then the camera would pick out, here and there in the darkness, couples who resemble our protagonists sitting in the amphitheater, and they would be revealed as the source of the applause. This seemed like the sort of device Uekusa would fabricate, and it was not without interest, but I refused to give in on my own plan. My reason was nothing so serious as the claim Uekusa makes that he and I are fundamentally different types of human beings. It was simply that I wanted to use my own idea to conduct a directorial experiment. The experiment proved to be a failure in Japan. The Japanese audience sat stock still, and because they couldn't bring themselves to applaud, the whole thing was a failure. But in Paris it succeeded. Because the French audience responded with wild applause, the sound of the orchestra tuning up at the tail end of the clapping gave rise to the powerful and unusual emotion I had hoped for.)

There is one more thing about this scene in *One Wonderful Sunday* that I can't forget. The hero of the story who waves the conductor's baton for the "Unfinished Symphony" was played by Numasaki Isao, an actor who was remarkably unmusical. There are many varieties of insensitivity to music, but what Numasaki had was an imperviousness to strength or delicacy and softness, to the sharp, heavy or light qualities of sound. Even the film's musical director, Hattori Tadashi, gave up on Numasaki. But of course we couldn't leave it at that. Hattori and I took Numasaki, who stood completely stiff and waved his hands up and down like a toy soldier, and worked with him day after day to teach him how to conduct that symphony. Now, I am so lacking in dexterity that people say I look like a chimpanzee when I'm dialing the telephone, yet in the course of teaching Numasaki, Hattori gave me a grade of being "ready to conduct the first movement of Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony," so you can imagine how much effort I had to put into this. The leads in *One Wonderful Sunday* were Numasaki and Nakakita Chieko, both of whom were still unknowns at the time. In order to do city location shooting, all we had to do was disguise the camera; no one recognized the actors' faces. For these hidden-camera location sequences we put the camera in a box, which was in turn wrapped in a carrying cloth that had only a hole for the lens to poke through. This could then be hand-carried. One day we planned a location shot in Tokyo's Shinjuku Station. I set the camera bundle down on the platform and waited for the train to arrive. We were going to film Nakakita stepping off of it. But as I stood there an old man appeared from somewhere and planted himself right in front of the camera. I attempted to nudge him out of the way. But after I bumped him in the side, he frantically thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. He thought I was a pickpocket. Another time we were filming with the hidden camera on the side-walks of Shinjuku. But while we aimed at Numasaki and Nakakita walking toward the camera, a streetwalker appeared in front of them and began scratching her behind. The camera, of course, seemed focused on nothing else. There was no way that Numasaki and Nakakita would draw attention away from it. Numasaki wore a baggy suit and a military overcoat, and Nakakita an oversized raincoat and the kind of scarf you might see anywhere, so you certainly couldn't say they stood out in a crowd. In fact, they blended in so well with the throngs of other couples in the same kind of drab attire that both the cameraman and I lost track of them any number of times. The story called for them to be the kind of young couple you might see anywhere in Japan at that time, so in that sense they were perfect for the parts. And for that reason they seem to me, as I think about them today, to be like a couple I met by chance right after the war in Shinjuku, talked with and became friends with, rather than protagonists of a movie. Several days after *One Wonderful Sunday* opened I received a postcard with the following message: "When the film *One Wonderful Sunday* ended, the lights came up in the movie theater. The audience all stood up to leave. But there was one old man who remained in his seat sobbing. . . ." I read on and found myself almost on the verge of shouting with joy. The old man who was crying turned out to have been Mr. Tachikawa, the primary-school teacher who had favored and educated me and Uekusa. Tachikawa Seiji's postcard went on: "When I saw the credit titles at the end that said 'screenplay: Uekusa Keinosuke; director: Kurosawa Akira, the screen became blurry and I couldn't read the rest very well." I called Uekusa right away and we

decided to invite Mr. Tachikawa to the Toho studio dormitory for dinner. In times when food supplies were scarce, there we could at least be assured of getting something as nourishing as sukiyaki. It had been twenty-five years since we had shared a meal with Mr. Tachikawa. We were saddened to see that he had become very small, and his teeth were so weak he couldn't chew the sukiyaki beef very well. But when I started to get up to order something softer for him, he stopped me. It was enough of a feast for him, he said, just to be able to see our faces. We obeyed, moved by his emotion, and sat down again. As he gazed into our faces, he made little mumbling sounds of approval and nodded his head. And as I gazed back at him, my old teacher's facial features became indistinct, and soon my blurred eyes couldn't see him very well.

### A Neighborhood with an Open Sump

I WROTE MY next script with Uekusa also. We stayed at an inn in the seaside hot-spring resort of Atami. From our room we could look out over the bay, and there I saw a strange-looking freighter sunk offshore. It was a ship made of concrete, the product of Japanese war industries approaching defeat with no iron left for building warships. In the lingering heat of late summer, children used the concrete prow that jutted out of the water as a diving board from which they plunged into the glittering sea. Watching their play, it seemed to me this bay with the sunken concrete ship was a kind of parody of defeated Japan. This depressing image that we gazed at every day while writing the script developed into the sump in *Yoidore tenshi* (Drunken Angel, 1948). The idea for *Drunken Angel* actually originated in a pre-existing film set. Right after the war Yama-san had made a film called *Shin baka jidai* (The New Age of Fools), portraying the conditions we lived in during those chaotic times. The company had built a huge open set of a shopping street with a black market for this film, and later they came to me asking if I couldn't use it to film something, too. Yama-san's film had been about the black markets that sprang up everywhere like bamboo shoots after a rain in post-war Japan. Included in this phenomenon—and in his film—were the yakuza gangsters who put down roots in the black-market environment. I wanted to pursue these figures even more intensely than Yama-san had—I wanted to take a scalpel and dissect the yakuza. Exactly what sort of people are they? What is the code of obligation that supports their organization? What is the individual psycho-logical make-up of the gang members, and what is the violence of which they are so proud? To investigate these questions, I decided to set my film in a black-market district and make the hero a gangster who has charge of that particular territory. In order to bring his personality into high relief, I decided to pit another character against him. At first I thought I would make this antagonist a young humanist doctor who was just setting up his practice in the area. But no matter how hard Uekusa and I worked at it, we couldn't bring this idealized doctor to life—he was so perfect that he had no vitality. The gangster figure, on the other hand, had become almost real enough to breathe; his every move reeked of flesh and blood. This immediacy arose from the fact that he

was based on a real-life model, whom Uekusa was meeting with regularly. Uekusa was, in fact, becoming so immersed in the gangsters' way of life, so absorbed in and sympathetic toward the underworld, that he and I later quarreled over it. As background to the characterizations, we decided to create an unsightly drainage pond where people threw their garbage. It became the symbol of the disease that was eating away at the whole neighborhood, and it grew clearer day by day in our minds. We despaired all the more that our second protagonist, the young physician setting up his practice, remained a lifeless marionette and refused to move of his own accord. Every day Uekusa and I sat glaring at each other, surrounded by piles of crumpled and torn paper with scribbles on it. I was beginning to think we would never find a way out; I was even thinking of scrapping the whole project. But at some point in the writing of every script I feel like giving the whole thing up. From my many experiences of writing screen-plays, however, I have learned something: If I hold fast in the face of this blankness and despair, adopting the tactic of Bodhidharma, the founder of the Zen sect, who glared at the wall that stood in his way until his legs became useless, a path will open up. On this occasion, too, I made up my mind to endure it. Day after day I sat glaring in my mind's eye at the puppet-like image of the doctor who refused to grow into a real character. After about five days Uekusa and I had a sudden revelation at just about the same moment. We both remembered a certain doctor. Before we had begun writing we had "script-scouted" as many black-market areas as we could find. In a slum in the port city of Yokohama we had come across an alcoholic doctor. This man fascinated us with his arrogant manner, and we took him with us to three or four bars to listen to his stories while we drank. It seems he operated without a physician's license, and his patients were the streetwalkers of the slums. His talk about his illegal gynecology practice was so vulgar it nearly made us sick, but every so often he said something bitterly sarcastic about human nature that gleamed with aptness. He also interspersed his talk with peals of loud laughter, and in that raucous wide-open mouth there was a strange feeling of raw humanity. He was probably a rebellious young man ending his days in cynicism, but Uekusa and I remembered, looked at each other and simultaneously felt, "This is it!" Once we had re-called this alcoholic doctor, it seemed altogether strange to us that we hadn't thought of him sooner. The marionette-like young doctor who was the picture of humanitarianism was blown to bits. At last the "*Drunken Angel*" came on stage. The character immediately took on life and breath and began to move. He was a man past his mid-fifties, an alcoholic doctor with his own clinic. Turning his back on fame and fortune, he settled among the common people. As a physician, he went after tangible results with extreme obstinacy, and this stubborn character of his won him popularity. He always had a straggly three-day beard, his hair was always a mess and he would always retort in a dangerously blunt fashion to those who spoke to him arrogantly, but behind this careless exterior he harbored an honest and superior heart. Taking this newly formed doctor character, we put him in a clinic on the opposite bank of the garbage sump from the black market, with him living in his clinic and the yakuza controlling the territory across the pond, a superb balance came into play. To make the drama unfold, all we had to do was wait for the two men to come in contact with each other. Uekusa and I made the gangster and the doctor collide head on in the very first scene of the film. The

gangster is injured in a gang war and goes to see the alcoholic doctor to have the bullet removed. As he takes care of the bullet hole, the doctor finds that the gangster also has a hole in his lung, resulting from tuberculosis. It is the tuberculosis germ that proves a binding tie for the two men. From that point on, all that was necessary to set the drama in motion was for the two of them to disagree and oppose each other on what should be done about it, and tuberculosis would act as pivot. Once things got rolling on the script with this structure, we finished it in virtually one sitting. Our speed at writing does not necessarily mean everything went perfectly smoothly between Uekusa and me, however. I'm not sure what the cause was. Perhaps it was that Uekusa, in the course of associating with our gangster role-model in order to study him, be-came too deeply involved with him. Perhaps he was simply overcome by his natural feeling of sympathy for the weak, the wounded and those who live in the shadows of life. In any event, he began to object to my attitude of opposition to the yakuza system. Uekusa's dissatisfactions hinged on the argument that the failures and perversions in the yakuza personality were not the sole responsibility of the individual. This may well be true. But even if the society that gave birth to them must assume a part, or even the greater share, of the responsibility for the existence of yakuza, I still can't approve of their behavior. In the very same human society that gave birth to such evil, there are also good people who are living honest, decent lives. I can't excuse those who make their living by threatening and destroying the lives of these good people. Nor do I accept the criticism that opposition to people like yakuza is merely the egoism of someone speaking from a position of strength. Granting that there is some truth to the theory that defects in society give rise to the emergence of criminals, I still maintain that those who use this theory as a defense of criminality are overlooking the fact that there are many people in this defective society who survive without resorting to crime. The argument to the contrary is pure sophistry.

Uekusa claims that he and I are fundamentally different in character, but I think we are fundamentally the same. It is only on the surface that we differ. He says I have never known regret, desperation or defeat; that I was born strong. He describes himself as someone who was born weak, who has always lived in the vale of tears with pain, moaning and bitterness in his heart. But this viewpoint I find shallow. In order to combat the pain that life brings, I wear the mask of a strong person, while Uekusa, in order to indulge in the pain that life brings, wears the mask of a weak person. He is only wearing a mask. But this is what happens on the surface; superficially we differ, but underneath we are essentially the same type of weak person. The reason I have brought up these personal differences between Uekusa and me here is not because I am trying to attack him. Nor is it because I am trying to defend myself. It is simply that I felt this was an opportunity to make myself understood. I am not a special person. I am not especially strong; I am not especially gifted. I simply do not like to show my weakness, and I hate to lose, so I am a person who tries hard. That's all there is to me. After we finished writing *Drunken Angel*, Uekusa disappeared again. But our separation at this point was not caused by that terrible gap, that unbridgeable gulf that Uekusa claims he found between our fundamental natures. Nothing so serious as that. That's only his excuse. What in fact occurred was that he became restless and took up his strange old habit of wandering once again. Proof that our fundamental

differences are not differences at all lies in the fact that when I was gathering reference material to write this thing resembling an autobiography, Uekusa came and spent an evening talking to me with visible enjoyment. He enjoyed it so much, In fact, that he came back to talk again, forgot the time and ended up spending the night. In other words, Uekusa and I are just very good friends from our days of battling on stilts; we are fighting friends.

## Drunken Angel

IT'S NOT POSSIBLE for me to talk about *Drunken Angel*, which was released in 1948, without devoting some attention to the actor Mifune Toshiro. In June of 1946, in order to get into the spirit of post-war activity, Toho conducted open auditions to recruit new contract actors. Using the headline "Wanted: New Faces," they got a tremendous number of applicants. On the day of the interviews and screen tests I was in the middle of the shooting of *No Regrets for Our Youth*, so I couldn't participate in the judging. But during lunch break I stepped off the set and was immediately accosted by actress Takamine Hideko, who had been the star of Yamamoto Kajiro's *Horses* when I was chief assistant director, "There's one who's really fantastic. But he's something of a roughneck, so he just barely passed. Won't you come have a look?" I bolted my lunch and went to the studio where the tests were being given. I opened the door and stopped dead in amazement.

A young man was reeling around the room in a violent frenzy. It was as frightening as watching a wounded or trapped savage beast trying to break loose. I stood transfixed. But it turned out that this young man was not really in a rage, but had drawn "anger" as the emotion he had to express in his screen test. He was acting. When he finished his performance, he regained his chair with an exhausted demeanor, flopped down and began to glare menacingly at the judges. Now, I knew very well that this kind of behavior was a cover for shyness, but the jury seemed to be interpreting it as disrespect. I found this young man strangely attractive, and concern over the judges' decision began to distract me from my work. I returned to my set and wrapped up the shooting early. Then I proceeded to look in on the room where the jury were deliberating. Despite Yama-san's strong recommendation of the young man, the voting was against him. Suddenly I heard myself shouting, "Please wait a minute." The jury was made up of two groups: movie-industry specialists (directors, cinematographers, producers and actors) and representatives of the labor union. The two groups were equally represented. At that time the union was gaining in strength daily, and union representatives appeared wherever something was happening. Because of them, all decisions had to be made by voting, but I felt that for them to voice their opinions on the selection of actors was really going too far. Even the expression "going too far" doesn't do justice to the suppressed anger boiling in me. I called for a time out. I said that in order to judge the quality of an actor and predict his future capacities you need the

talents and experience of an expert. In the selection of an actor it isn't right to equate the vote of an expert and the vote of a complete outsider. It's like appraising a gemstone—you wouldn't give a greengrocer's appraisal the same weight you would a jeweler's. In evaluating an actor, an expert's vote should have at least three if not five times the weight of an amateur's. I emphasized that I wanted a recount of the votes with more appropriate weight assigned to the experts' opinions. The jury was thrown into an uproar. "It's anti-democratic, it's monopoly by directors!" someone shouted. But all of the production people on the jury raised their hands in approval of my suggestion, and even some labor-union representatives nodded their assent. Finally Yama-san, who was head of the jury, said that as a movie director he would take responsibility for his opinion of the quality and potential of the young actor in question. With Yama-san's pronouncement the young man squeaked through. He was, of course, Mifune Toshiro.

After joining the company, Mifune appeared in Sen-chan's *To the End of the Silver Mountains* as the roughest and most violent of the three bank robbers who were the villains of the story. He played with amazing energy. Right after that he had the role of a gangster boss in Yama-san's *New Age of Fools*, and here he played with an opposite kind of cruel refinement. I became deeply fascinated by the acting abilities Mifune showed in these two films, and decided I wanted him to play the lead in *Drunken Angel*. I realize that many people think I discovered Mifune and taught him how to act. That is not the case. As can be seen from the sequence of events I have just described, it was Yama-san who discovered the raw material that was Mifune Toshiro. From that raw material it was Sen-chan and Yama-san who fashioned the actor Mifune Toshiro. All I did was see what they had done, take Mifune's acting talent and show it off to its fullest in *Drunken Angel*. Mifune had a kind of talent I had never encountered before in the Japanese film world. It was, above all, the speed with which he expressed himself that was astounding. The ordinary Japanese actor might need ten feet of film to get across an impression; Mifune needed only three feet. The speed of his movements was such that he said in a single action what took ordinary actors three separate movements to express. He put forth everything directly and boldly, and his sense of timing was the keenest I had ever seen in a Japanese actor. And yet with all his quickness he also had surprisingly fine sensibilities. I know it sounds as if I am over-praising Mifune, but everything I am saying is true. If pressed to find a defect in him as an actor, I could say his voice is a little rough, and when it's recorded through a micro-phone it has a tendency to become difficult to understand. Anyway, I'm a person who is rarely impressed by actors, but in the case of Mifune I was completely overwhelmed. And yet a film director can rejoice over a marvelous asset only to have it turn into a terrible burden. If I let Mifune in his role of the gangster become too attractive, the balance with his adversary, the doctor, played by Shimura Takashi, would be destroyed. If this should occur, the result would be a distortion of the film's overall structure. Yet to suppress Mifune's attractiveness at the blossoming point of his career because of the need for balance in the structure of my film would be a waste. And in fact Mifune's attraction was something innate and powerful personal qualities pushed unwittingly to the fore there was no way to prevent him from emerging as too attractive on the screen other than keeping him off the screen. I was caught in a real dilemma. Mifune's attractiveness gave me joy



and pain at the same time. *Drunken Angel* came to life in the midst of these contradictions. My dilemma did indeed warp the structure of the drama, and the theme of the film became somewhat indistinct. But as a result of my battle with the wonderful qualities called Mifune, the whole job became for me a liberation from something resembling a spiritual prison. Suddenly I found myself on the outside. The drunken-doctor performance Shimura gave was a superb 90 percent, but because his adversary, Mifune, turned in 120 percent, I had to feel a little sorry for him. I also feel bad about slighting Yamamoto Reizaburo, who has since passed away. He was playing the gang boss who gets out of jail and comes back to recover his woman and his territory from Mifune. I had never seen eyes as frightening as his, and when I first met him I was afraid to get close enough to carry on a conversation. When I finally did talk to him, though, I was surprised at what a fine human being he was. On *Drunken Angel* I worked for the first time with composer Hayasaka Fumio. Following this collaboration, Hayasaka would do all of the music for my films up until the time of his death. He would also become one of my closest friends. While I was working on this film, my father died. I received a telegram informing me he was failing quickly, but I was so pressured to get the picture done for the fixed release date that I couldn't go to be at his side in Akita Prefecture. The day I received the news of my father's death I went out to Shinjuku alone. I tried drinking, but it only made me feel more de-pressed. Frustrated, I wandered out into the crowds of people in the streets of Shinjuku. I had no objective in mind. As I walked, I suddenly heard the strains of "The Cuckoo Waltz" blaring over a loudspeaker system somewhere. The cheerful brightness of the song threw my black mood into high relief, intensifying my sorrow to an intolerable degree. I hurried my steps to escape from this awful music. In *Drunken Angel* there is a scene where Mifune, the yakuza, walks the length of the black-market street in a very grim mood because he has just learned that Yamamoto Reizaburo has come back to take over this territory he has been running. Shopkeepers' insults confirm Mifune's sudden loss of power, coupled with his knowledge that he has tuberculosis, and his feelings grow blacker and more desperate the farther he walks. When I met with Hayasaka to discuss the dubbing of the sound for this sequence, I told him to try having "The Cuckoo Waltz" assail Mifune from a loudspeaker along the street. Hayasaka looked at me with some surprise, but then he immediately broke into a smile. "Ah, counterpoint," he said. "Right," I confirmed, "the Sharpshooter." This expression "The Sharpshooter" was part of a private language Hayasaka and I developed. It referred to a Soviet film released in Japan under that title in which the counterpoint between sound and image was the most magnificent I have encountered. So "Sharpshooter" became an abbreviation for everything involved in the techniques used to achieve such cinematic effects. Hayasaka and I had already discussed the application of these techniques somewhere in *Drunken Angel* as a kind of experiment. The day of the actual dubbing we performed our experiment. From a loudspeaker the sound of "The Cuckoo Waltz" flooded over the sorry figure of the gangster Mifune as he walked. Backed by this light music, the gangster's dark thoughts leaped to the screen with amazing force. Hayasaka looked at me and smiled happily. As Mifune entered his usual little bar and closed the door behind him, the music simultaneously came to an end. Hayasaka turned to me in surprise. "Did you time your editing to

the length of the tune?" he asked. I replied that I had not, and in fact I was more than a little surprised myself. I had calculated a counterpoint effect from contrasting the images of this sequence with "The Cuckoo Waltz," but I had not measured the actual length of either. I could not understand what had made their timing coincide. I wonder if it could have been that when I heard this music blaring at me after my father's death in the course of experiencing feelings very similar to those of the gangster in my film, I unconsciously registered its exact length in my brain. Subsequent to this "Cuckoo Waltz" incident, the same kind of thing happened to me many times. It seems that, no matter what is happening to me in my personal life, I am always thinking about my work without even knowing it. This phenomenon resembles some kind of karma. In fact, my having become a film director, and having persevered in this profession thus far, really must be either a reward or a punishment for something I did in a former life.

### On the Banks of the River Sai

AT THE SAME TIME *Drunken Angel* was released in the movie theaters, April 1948, the Third Toho Dispute broke out. After completing my film I was at last able to go up to Akita and carry out the Buddhist memorial services for my father, but I was called back right away because of the Dispute. I returned only to be caught up in it. When I look back on it now, this third strike has all the appearances of a children's quarrel. It was like two siblings fighting over doll, snatching it away from each other head by arm by leg until it's in pieces. The two children in this struggle were the company and the union, and the doll was the studio. The strike began with a company offensive in which a number of people lost their jobs. Management's aim was to rid the employees' union of its strong leftist element. In December of the preceding year those dealing with personnel matters at the top executive level had seen fit to make a notorious "Red-hater" president of the company. They had also put a strike-breaking specialist in charge of labor affairs, and no bones were made about the fact that union members with leftist tendencies were in danger of losing their jobs. It was true, however, that the leftist voice was the strongest one in the employees' union at the studio, and in many areas the union was going too far, even demanding control of production by the workers. But at the point when the management launched its punitive at-tack, the union and the film directors had already heard the criticisms on the sets where the films were being made, and they were well aware that the situation had gotten out of hand. They themselves were already imposing a better discipline, and the production of films was beginning to proceed smoothly again. Just at this sensitive junction the management came in with force. This was a tremendous blow to us. We were finally building a firm foundation for production again out of the desolation left in the wake of the Second Toho Dispute. We were infuriated. Nor can I believe that this course of action did the management any good. One incident was so foolish I still can't forget t. We directors were trying to explain the

situation to the new president of the company. He was listening, and it began to appear that we were arousing his sympathies. Just at that moment our attention was diverted to the huge plate-glass window of the room where we were meeting. Outside was a union demonstration, led by a big red flag. You might as well have waved a red-lined toreador's cape in front of a raging bull. There wasn't one more word we could say to our new Red-hating president. The third strike began, to last 195 days. My personal experiences in this strike, from its unfortunate inception through to the end, were only bitter ones. Once again the studio employees' union split. The defectors from the union proceeded to take up with those who had left as a result of the previous dispute and were now based at the rival company Shin [New] Toho. Through them Shin Toho increased its power yet further and began to plot the recapture of Toho's studios. The Toho studio atmosphere became a repeat of the Battle of Guadalcanal. In order to guard the studio against daily assaults from Shin Toho the employees set up camp in the studio itself, and the place took on the air of a fort. With the objectivity of hindsight, all of this now looks like childish squabbles or a silly joke, but at the time it was a strategy planned with dead seriousness. First they strung up barbed-wire entanglements wherever you could get into the studio lot from outside. Then the lighting technicians set up their spots to prevent anyone sneaking in during the night. But the greatest work of genius was the fans: They set up two big wind machines just inside the front and back gates of the lot, facing outward like heavy artillery. In the event of a storming of the gates, they were ready with a huge amount of cayenne pepper to toss in front of the fan blasts and blind the oncoming enemy. However, these battle preparations were made not just to repel attacks from Shin Toho. The strikers could see that behind the scenes the management itself was pulling all the strings, and it was not inconceivable that Toho itself might employ other means to end the strike. The strikers realized that the police might be called in to force them to go back to work, and the defenses were also rigged to guard against this. As laughable as it all seems today, the employees' daily lives were dependent on the outcome of the strike. For us directors, too, who had received our education there, our studio stages and equipment were virtually part of us, and our attachment would not be broken easily. We, too, were ready to guard them with all our might. The Shin Toho people were probably driven by the same kind of motivation to plot the recapture of the studio. But the opposition we felt toward them was a deep and powerful emotion. In the year and half since they had left, our antagonism toward them had become the stronger for the hardships we went through to rebuild the studio. When still others split off from us to join them, the gulf became all the more difficult to bridge. On top of all this, when it became clear that behind Shin Toho's actions there were ringleaders whose plan was aid our immediate enemy, the company management, the stand-off took on the characteristics of an irreparable breach, a chasm created by an earthquake.

For me the most painful moments of this strike was when I was caught between the employees of the Toho studio and the employee of Shin Toho. I became the target in the crossfire of "Let us in!" and "Keep them out." But among the Shin Toho, employees pushing to get into the studio were a few who tried to help me. Pushing and pulling their comrades back were former members of my crew. All of these grown men were crying. At this sight I felt an irrepressible rage welling

up inside me. Far from learning from experience with their blunders in the second strike, the management were heaping more errors on top of what they had done. They were tearing to shreds the cooperating work force of precious talent we had nurtured for so long. We are still crying with the pain of these old wounds. But for the management there was nothing painful or even irritating about these experiences. They never recognized that movies are made by a cooperative work force that is created by a union of individual human talents. They never recognized how much effort was required to bring about that union. So they were able to destroy with total equanimity everything we had worked to build. We became like the children in Buddhist limbo who have preceded their parents in death: On the banks of the River Sai they pile up stones to form little towers. But every time a tower is completed, a mean devil comes and knocks it down. It was like Sisyphus trying to push his boulder up the mountain. The company president and the director of labor relations at this time were both men from outside who had neither understanding of nor affection for movies. The executive in charge of labor, moreover, was willing to engage in the lowest imaginable tactics to win the strike battle. At one point he fed the newspapers a story to the effect that I had been forced by the union to put certain lines of dialogue into the script I was filming. Since this statement had no basis in truth, and if it had, I could never have lifted up my head in the world as a film director again, I demanded an explanation. The response was, "Well, if you say it isn't so, then you must be right," and he apologized on the spot. But even though he apologized, the article had been headline news, and everyone had read it. A printed correction would be in small type and consist of no more than two or three lines. All of this had been calculated in advance, so the apology was ready and nonchalant. In his outrage over the underhandedness of this attitude, the film director Sekigawa Hideo pounded his fist on the labor-relations director's office table to underscore his point. The glass tabletop cracked. The next day the newspapers carried stories about a company executive being subjected to violence at the hands of a film director during the course of the strike negotiations. Again we demanded an explanation of this false news release, and again the labor-relations director apologized without a moment's hesitation. Faced with this combination of a labor executive who was a genius of foul play and a president who lost all of his powers of reasoning at the sight of anything red, we felt badly burned. We raised a chorus of refusal ever to work with these two men in the future. Their response was the threatening statement, "The only thing that hasn't come [to break the strike] is a battleship." Indeed, there were armored police cars at the studio front gate, American tanks at the back and patrol planes flying overhead. Against these and the skirmish line surrounding the studio, our giant fans and cayenne pepper at the front and back gates were totally ineffectual. We had no alternative but to hand over the studio to the company management. Several hours after our removal from the studio grounds, we received permission to re-enter. The only indication of change was a single signboard with a court order posted on it. Nothing appeared to be missing or altered, and yet we sensed that something was no longer there. What had vanished was the feeling of devotion we had once had toward the studio. October 19, 1948, the Third Toho Strike came to an end. As autumn deepened, the dispute that had begun in the springtime was dissipated by the cold wind blowing

through the studio. The emptiness we felt was neither sadness nor loneliness; it was like a shrug of the shoulders and a "See if I care." I was determined to do as I had said, and not work with those two men again. I had come to understand that the studio I had thought was my home actually belonged to strangers. I went out of the gate with the intention never to return. I had had enough of piling up stones on the banks of the River Sai.

### The Quiet Duel

THIS SAME YEAR Of 1948, before the strike began, a new organization was formed with the name Film Art Association (Eiga Geijutsu Kyokai). The colleagues who established it were four film directors: Yamamoto Kajiro, Naruse Mikio, Taniguchi Senkichi and I. We were joined by producer Motoki Sojiro. The strike had started immediately after the formation of the organization, so it went into a dormant state at birth, but when the strike was over I found that this new group would be my work base following my departure from Toho. My first job turned out to be the making of *Shizuka naru ketto* (The Quiet Duel) for the Daiei Company. Not only had the 195-day strike put my family's kitchen accounts into terrible straits, but I was desperate to get back to filmmaking. Because of the screenwriting relationship I had established with Daiei back in my assistant-director days, this company was the first outside of Toho to offer me the chance to direct a film. On the screenplay I had Taniguchi Senkichi's collaboration, and for the lead I had Mifune Toshiro. Since his debut Mifune had been playing almost nothing but gangster roles, and I wanted to give him a chance to broaden his artistic horizons. Turning his type-cast image around, I conceived a role for him as an intellectual with sharp reasoning powers. Daiei expressed surprise over this role, and there were many in that company who were frankly worried about it. But Mifune turned in a magnificent performance as the young physician who re-fuses to marry the woman he loves for fear of infecting her with the virtually incurable syphilis he contracted from treating a diseased patient during the Pacific War. Even his posture and movements under-went a complete change, and he succeeded so well in conveying the anguish of this pathetic hero that I, too, was surprised. A sad truth in the film business is that when an actor succeeds in a particular role there is a tendency to keep casting him in similar roles. This stems, of course, from the convenience and advantage of those who use him, but for the actor himself there is no greater misfortune. Repeating the same role over and over, like a machine-stamped image, is unbearable. An actor who is not constantly given new roles and new subjects to tackle dries out and withers like a tree you plant in the garden and then fail to water. The most memorable part of filming *The Quiet Duel* was the shooting of the climax scene. The pain and bitterness the hero has kept hidden in his heart overwhelm him, and he reveals the secret of his rejection of his fiancée to the reformed streetwalker who works for him as a nurse. For that scene I was planning an uncut take unusually long for that period of the cinema—over five minutes. The night before the shooting neither Mifune nor the actress playing the nurse,

Sengoku Noriko, was able to sleep. With something of the feeling of the night before a decisive battle, I, too, was sleepless. The next day, as we prepared to roll the camera for the scene, a tense atmosphere enveloped the sound stage. To direct the action, I positioned myself between two lights, planting a foot on each base. Mifune's and Sengoku's performances revealed a do-or-die battle spirit. As the seconds ticked by, their acting reached a fever pitch of tension, and sparks seemed to fly as from a fireworks display. I could feel the perspiration forming in my clenched fists. Finally, when Mifune broke down in tears with the misery he was confessing, I heard the lights next to me begin to rattle. I immediately realized it was I who was shaking. The shudders of emotion passing through my body were rattling the lights I stood on. "Damn," I thought, "I should have sat on a chair," but it was too late. Wrapping my arms around myself to try to control the shaking, I glanced toward the camera and nearly gasped. The cameraman, who was looking through the viewfinder and operating the camera, was crying like a baby. Every few seconds it seemed he couldn't see through the viewfinder for the tears, and he would quickly wipe his eyes. My heart began to pound. The photographer's tears were clear evidence of the moving quality of Mifune's and Sengoku's acting, but if the camera work should become distorted because the actors succeeded in making the photographer cry, all would be for naught. My attention focused much more closely on the cameraman than on the actors' performance. I have never before or since felt that any single take was as excruciatingly long as this one. When the tear-stained, contorted face of the photographer finally voiced an "O.K.; cut" at the end of the scene, I was overcome with a tremendous sense relief. While everyone on the set remained caught in the extreme tension of the scene, I felt like a man inebriated. Then I realized that I, the director, had forgotten to say, "O.K., cut." I guess I was still young then.

Today, no matter how moving a scene is, no matter how stunning the actors' performances are, I can watch with total calm collectedness. But there is something a little bit sad about this ability. The reason we could do a scene like the climax of *The Quiet Duel* and go so excited and involved in what we were doing is because Mifune, Sengoku, and I were all young. If we were told to do that scene over again today, we couldn't. It is the recognition of this fact that makes *The Quiet Duel* a picture for which I feel a great nostalgia. Also, because this was my first picture filmed outside of Toho, felt like a second maiden work. This, too, adds to the nostalgia I have for it. After my defeat in the Toho strike and my tumbling arrival at Daiei, the crew for this film treated me very warmly. The Daiei studios in Tokyo are located on the Koshu Kaido Road in Chofu City, on the outskirts of the metropolis. The Tamagawa River flows nearby, and along its banks were inns and eating establishments with a seasoned, countrified atmosphere. The studio itself retained the old flavor of people who made the "flickers," and its inhabitants were stubborn but generous. Everywhere at that time, at every shoot for every studio, no matter how much the atmosphere of one studio differed from the next, the people working on the set were all inveterate movie lovers. So for me, working with a Daiei crew for the first time presented no discomfort whatsoever, and the filming proceeded smoothly throughout. But, looking at my Daiei crew, I couldn't help worrying about my Toho crew who had lost their jobs in the strike.

## A Salmon's Old Stories

LIKE A SALMON, I can't forget the place where I was born. I left Toho at the age of thirty-nine and spent the next three years moving from Daiei to Shin Toho to Shochiku. But at forty-two I returned to Toho and ever since have been going in and out of that studio where I began. No matter where I am, the place where I received my training remains in a corner of my heart, and in everything I do I can't help thinking about the currents of the river called Toho studios. What I think about the most, to this very day, are the assistant directors who lost their jobs in the strike. They were men with great potential, but because the strike so closely resembled warfare, their names were put down on the list of personnel cuts and they were scattered to the winds. The Japanese film world undoubtedly lost several great directors. In later years when I returned to Toho and prepared to start filming there again, one of the executives came to see me. He lamented the fact that "Today's assistant directors don't have the ambition that A.D.'s in the old days did." I replied, "You were the ones who threw the old A.D.'s out," and he looked at me with a doleful expression and said, "I wonder if they would have mended their ways." My voice rose uncontrollably. "You must be joking. You're the ones who should mend your ways." It was actually at that point, with the firing of those young assistant directors, that the Japanese film industry began its decline. If young people are not trained and fed in to replenish the reservoir of high spirits, the natural aging process inevitably leads to a loss of strength. This is true in any enterprise. I don't know if the older people stayed on in the movie industry because young people weren't trained, or if young people weren't trained because the older ones were staying on. In any event, no one took the responsibility for training young people. Not only has this training been neglected, but the movie industry in Japan shows no inclination to introduce new filmmaking technology. Today everyone talks about the twilight of motion pictures as if it were a worldwide phenomenon. Why, then, are American movies entering a new age of prosperity? The backbone of American film is the organization called the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which is built on the fundamental recognition of the fact that the art of motion pictures is intimately bound up with science. In order to do battle with the new entertainment power of television, motion pictures must employ arms that will ensure a victory. I don't believe that the movie industry can hope to maintain its special appeal in the face of television technology unless it modernizes its old equipment. Television and motion pictures may look very much alike, but they are basically different. Those who see television as the enemy of the motion-picture industry are merely suffering from a superficial understanding of movies. The film industry has been the hare, caught napping, while the television tortoise walked on by. Worse yet, in Japan the industry has begun imitating television, producing films that are like television movies. Few people are eccentric enough to enjoy paying a high ticket price to go to see a television movie in a movie theater. I have digressed again, but it is difficult for a film director who is like a salmon. When the river he was born and raised in becomes polluted, he can't climb back upstream to lay his eggs—he has trouble making his films. He ends up by complaining. One such salmon, seeing

no other way, made a long journey to climb a Soviet river and give birth to some caviar. This is how my 1975 film *Dersu Uzala* came about. Nor do I think this is such a bad thing. But the most natural thing for a Japanese salmon to do is to lay its eggs in a Japanese river.

### Stray Dog

I DON'T REALLY like talking about my films. Everything I want to say is in the film itself; for me to say anything more is, as the proverb goes, like "drawing legs on a picture of a snake." But from time to time an idea I thought I had conveyed in the film does not seem to have been generally understood. On these occasions I do feel an urge to talk about my work. Nevertheless, I try not to. If what I have said in my film is true, someone will understand. That is the way it was with *The Quiet Duel*. Apparently most people did not grasp what I most fervently wished them to, but a small number did understand very well. In order to make my point more clearly, I decided to make *Nora inu* (Stray Dog, 1949). I think the problem with *The Quiet Duel* was that I myself had not thoroughly digested my ideas, nor did I express them in the best possible way. Maupassant instructed aspiring writers to extend their vision into realms where no one else could see, and to keep it up until the hitherto invisible became visible to everyone. Acting on this principle, I decided to take up the problem of *The Quiet Duel* one more time in *Stray Dog*, pressing my vision to the point where everyone would see what I saw. I first wrote the screenplay in the form of a novel. I am fond of the work of Georges Simenon, so I adopted his style of writing novels about social crime. This process took me a little less than six weeks, so I figured that I'd be able to rewrite it as a screenplay in ten days or so. Far from it. It proved to be a far more difficult task than writing a scenario from scratch, and it took me close to two months. But, as I reflect on it, it's perfectly understandable that this should have happened. A novel and a screenplay are, after all, entirely different things. The freedom for psychological description one has in writing a novel is particularly difficult to adapt to a screenplay without using narration. But, thanks to the unexpected travail of adapting the descriptions of the novel form to a screenplay, I attained a new awareness of what screenplays and films consist of. At the same time, I was able to incorporate many peculiarly novelistic modes of expression into the script. For example, I understood that in novel-writing certain structural techniques can be employed to strengthen the impression of an event and narrow the focus upon it. What I learned was that in the editing process a film can gain similar strength through the use of comparable structural techniques. The story of *Stray Dog* begins with a young police detective on his way home from marksmanship practice at the headquarters' range. He gets on a crowded bus, and in the unusually intense summer heat and crush of bodies his pistol is stolen. When I filmed this sequence and edited it according to the passage of chronological time, the effect was terrible. As an introduction to a drama it was slow, the focus was vague and it failed to grip the viewer. Troubled, I went back to look at the way I had begun the novel. I had written as follows: "It was



the hottest day of that entire summer." Immediately I thought, "That's it." I used a shot of a dog with its tongue hanging out, panting. Then the narration begins, "It was un-bearably hot that day." After a sign on a door indicating "Police Head-quarters, First Division," I proceeded to the interior. The chief of the First Detective Division glares up from his desk. "What? Your pistol was stolen?" Before him stands the contrite young detective who is the hero of the story. This new way of editing the opening sequence gave me a very short piece of film, but it was extremely effective in drawing the viewer suddenly into the heart of the drama. However, that first shot of the panting dog with its tongue hanging out caused me immense woes. The dog's face appears under the title of the film to create the impression of heat. But I received an unprovoked complaint—or, rather, accusation—from an American woman who had watched the filming. She represented the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and claimed that I had had a healthy dog injected with rabies. This was a patently false charge. The dog was a stray that we had obtained from the pound, where it was about to be put away. The people in charge of props had given it affectionate care. It was a mutt, but it had a very gentle face, so we used makeup to give it a more ferocious appearance, and a man on a bicycle exercised it to make it pant. When its tongue started to hang out, we filmed it. But, no matter how carefully we explained all this, the American S.P.C.A. lady refused to believe it. Because the Japanese were barbarians, injecting a dog with rabies was just the sort of thing we would do, and she had no time for the truth. Even Yama-san came by to confirm that I was a dog-lover and would never do such a thing, but the American lady insisted that she was going to take me to court. At this point I lost all patience. I was ready to tell her that the cruelty to animals came from her side. People are animals, too, and if we are subjected to things like this, we need a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Humans. My colleagues did their best to calm me down. In the end, I was forced to write a deposition, and I never at any other moment experienced a stronger sense of regret over Japan's losing the war. With the exception of this one unfortunate incident, the making of *Stray Dog* was most enjoyable. It was underwritten by the Film Art Association and Shin Toho, so I was able to work once again with crew members who had been separated from me by the Toho strike. From our days together back at P.C.L., I got back my sound recordist Yanoguchi Fumio and my lighting technician Ishii Choshichira, and for cameraman I got back Nakai Asakazu, who has worked with me more often than anyone else. For the music I had Hayasaka as com-poser again, and as chief assistant director a close friend since P.C.L. days, Honda Inoshiro. The art director was Matsuyama Shu, but his assistant was the man who has since been art director on all of my films, Muraki. On top of this, we used the Oizumi studio. The furor of the strike had not yet totally died down, and it might have been difficult for me to use the Shin Toho studios, so we ended up at the old place. At that time it was virtually deserted. On the grounds there was a small apartment-house kind of building, so we all moved in there and used it as a dormitory. We worked without respite or distractions. It was midsummer when we filmed *Stray Dog*. When the day's work ended around five o'clock, the sun was still beating down. Even after we finished supper it was still light outside. Right after the war, even if you went into the center of town (from Oizumi that meant going to the Ikebukuro district), there was not much to do. We ended

up killing time waiting for dark and the hour to return to the dormitory. More often than not someone would say, "Why don't we do a little more work?" We ended up spending a great many evenings on the set. *Stray Dog* is made up of many short scenes in many different settings, so the little sound stage we used was cleared and redecorated with lightning speed. On fast days we shot five or six different scenes on it. As soon as the set was ready, we'd shoot and be done again, so the art department had no choice but to build and decorate sets while we slept. The art director, Matsuyama Shit, had three other films to supervise besides mine, so he just drew plans of what he wanted and hardly ever came to the set. The ones who really slaved to put it all together were his assistant Muraki and a female assistant. One evening I went to see how construction was going on the open set at one of our locations. Against the sunset sky I saw two silhouettes on top of the wooded hill. Muraki and the girl assistant were sitting exhausted, totally silent. I was about to yell my thanks to them for their effort, but suddenly I noticed something profoundly serious about their demeanor, and I withdrew. The camera and lighting technicians who had come with me to the open set gave me a strange look and started to speak. I stopped them with a wave of my hand, looked up at the two silhouettes on the wooded hill and said softly, "Looks like they're going to get married, doesn't it?" My prediction came true, and when the picture was finished Muraki and the girl got married. Mrs. Muraki, whose first name is Shinobu, also became a first-rate art director. I had never been an official go-between for a wedding before, but apparently these two were brought together by the terribly hard work I gave them on *Stray Dog*, so I suppose that without knowing it I had been their match-maker. From this little anecdote I think you can guess what the overall mood was during the filming of *Stray Dog*. The harmonious picnic-like air was most unusual. I had Honda do mainly second-unit shooting. Every day I told him what I wanted and he would go out into the ruins of post-war Tokyo to film it. There are few men as honest and reliable as Honda. He faithfully brought back exactly the footage I requested, so almost everything he shot was used in the final cut of the film. I'm often told that I captured the atmosphere of post-war Japan very well in *Stray Dog*, and, if so, I owe a great deal of that success to Honda. The leads in this film were once again Mifune and Shimura Takashi, and most of the rest of the cast, too, were old friends, so the work proceeded in an almost familial atmosphere. The only problem was Awaji Keiko, a dancer I dragged in from the Shochiku revue stage. This ingenue was spoiled enough to be a full measure of trouble. She was only sixteen years old, had never acted before, and all she really wanted to do was dance. She would fret and fuss no matter what she was asked to do, and in places where she was supposed to cry she would burst out laughing out of pure contrariness. As time went by and the crew befriended her, it seems Awaji began to find the work more and more interesting. Unfortunately, by that time her job was finished. We all gathered at the studio gate to see her off. Already sitting in the car, she burst into tears. Then she said, "I couldn't cry when I was supposed to, and now look at me." No shooting ever went as smoothly for me as *Stray Dog*. Even the weather seemed to cooperate. There was a scene when we needed an evening shower. We got out the fire truck and prepared for the rolling of the camera. I had them start the hoses and called for action and camera, and just at that instant a terrific real rainstorm began. We got a great scene.

Another time we were working on an interior set, but we needed a rainstorm outside the windows. Again the heavens obliged, and we were even able to record just the thunder we needed simultaneously. However, when we had a great deal left to shoot on an open set, a typhoon approached. I was forced to revise many of my plans. We rushed the shooting through with one ear glued to the radio for the storm reports. Second by second the typhoon bore down on us, and the set took on a battleground atmosphere. We wound up the shooting the very evening the storm was scheduled to hit full force. Sure enough, when we went out to look at our open set that night, we found the whole street smashed to bits by the high winds. Gazing out over the rubble of what we had been filming a few hours before gave me a peculiarly clean, rewarding feeling. At any rate, the filming of *Stray Dog* went remarkably well, and we finished ahead of schedule. The excellent pace of the shooting and the good feeling of the crew working together can be sensed in the completed film. I remember how it was on Saturday nights when we boarded a bus to go home for a day off after a full week's hard work. Everyone was happy. At the time I was living in Komae, far out of the city near the Tamagawa River, so toward the end of the ride I was always left alone. The solitary last rider on the cavernous empty bus, I always felt more loneliness at being separated from my crew than I did joy at being reunited with my family. Now the pleasure in the work we experienced on *Stray Dog* seems like a distant dream. The films an audience really enjoys are the ones that were enjoyable in the making. Yet pleasure in the work can't be achieved unless you know you have put all of your strength into it and have done your best to make it come alive. A film made in this spirit reveals the hearts of the crew.

## Scandal

AFTER THE PACIFIC WAR a great deal of noise began to be made about freedom of speech, and almost immediately abuses and loss of self-control ensued. A certain kind of magazine took up flattering the readers' curiosity and provoking scandals with shamelessly vulgar articles. One day when I was on the train to work I saw an advertisement for one of these magazines, and I was shocked. "Who Stole X's Virginity?" was in big headlines. The piece was written in a style that looked favorable to X, but in reality it was aimed at turning her into a plaything. Behind the boldness of this kind of writing style I could see something else: The cold calculation that X, whose livelihood as an entertainer depended upon her popularity, would not be able to take any strong action to refute the article. I did not know X personally. I knew only her name and profession, but when I saw the sensationalistic way this headline article was presented, I couldn't help thinking about how helpless she must feel. Outraged, I reacted as if the thing had been written about me, and I couldn't remain silent. Such slander cannot be permitted. This was not freedom of expression, I felt, it was violence against a person on the part of those who possess the weapon of publicity. I felt that this new tendency had to be stamped out before it could spread. Someone had to come out and fight back against this violence, I thought; there was no

time for crying oneself to sleep. This was the impetus for *Skyandaru* (Scandal, 1950). Of course, today all my fears have come true, and no one thinks anything of scandal sheets. In other words, Scandal proved to be as ineffectual a weapon against slander as a praying mantis against a hatchet. But I have not given up. I am still waiting for the day when someone emerges who is willing to take on this verbal gangsterism for a fight to the finish. In fact, I think I'd like to make another movie dealing with the subject. Scandal did not prove strong enough; I'd like to make a more powerful film. The more I think about it, the milder a statement Scandal seems to have been. On top of that, while I was writing the script an entirely unexpected character began to take on more life than the main characters, and I ended up being led around by the nose by him. This fellow was the corrupt lawyer Hiruta ("Leech Field"). He comes to the defendants to sell out his client, the plaintiff, who is sincerely attempting to battle the verbal gangsters in court. From this point on, the film went in a direction I had not intended and turned into some-thing quite different. Characters in a film have their own existence. The filmmaker has no freedom. If he insists on his authority and is allowed to manipulate his characters like puppets, the film loses its vitality. From the moment this Hiruta appeared, the pen I was using to write the screen-play seemed almost bewitched. It wrote on, detailing Hiruta's actions and words as if of its own accord. I had written many scripts, but this was the first time such a thing happened to me. I didn't think about the circumstances in which Hiruta lived; the pen just glided on and described his poverty and shame. As this happened, the character of Hiruta quite naturally took over the film and nudged the hero aside. Even as I observed what was happening and knew it was wrong, I could do nothing to stop it. About half a year after the release of Scandal I was on my way home from a movie theater in Shibuya, riding the Inokashira Line. Suddenly I had to keep myself from shouting out loud. As the train passed the first station outside of Shibuya, I had a flash of recollection: I had met this man Hiruta in real life. I had sat next to him while drinking in a little bar called the Komagata-ya right there at that railroad crossing in Kami-Izumi. It was an astounding thing to recall, and I couldn't understand why it hadn't come to me while I was working on Scandal. The human mind does strange things. This real-life Hiruta must have been hiding somewhere in a crease in my brain. Why had he chosen this moment to emerge? I had gone to the Komagata-ya regularly when I was an assistant director. There was a pretty barmaid there named O-Shigechan, and she understood us very well, won our affection and let us drink on credit. I used to go there with all the other assistant directors. For some reason I had gone to the Komagata-ya alone one evening. We usually went upstairs to a dirty but comfortable room on the second floor, but to drink alone I sat down at the bar on the ground floor. It was on this occasion that Hiruta was sitting next to me. He was already quite drunk, and he persisted in talking to me. The bar-tender, O-Shigechan's father, tried to keep the man from bothering me, but I nodded my head to let him know I didn't mind. I drank on while listening to the stream of babble. Behind the man's appearance—he was approaching fifty—as well as in his manner of speaking there seemed to be something very bitter, something that tugged at the heart as he talked. He didn't just ramble senselessly like an ordinary drunk. I wondered how many times he had repeated his story before he told it to me. He talked as if he had memorized his speech, and

recited it fluently and casually. But in that casual air the sad content of his talk was all the more striking. The subject of his refrain was his daughter. She was suffering from tuberculosis and was completely bedridden, and he repeated over and over again what a wonderful girl she was. She was "like an angel," "like a shining star," descriptions that under ordinary circumstances would sound sickeningly sweet. But I was strangely moved, and listened to him with an open heart. He went on to say that, compared to his daughter, he himself was a totally worthless human being. He started to list the ways, giving examples, in which he had proved inferior to his daughter, but at this point O-Shigechan's father seemed to have had all he could take. He put a covered glass dish in front of the man and said, "All right, that's enough now. You'd better go home; your daughter's waiting for you." The man suddenly fell silent and sat staring at the glass dish. He didn't move. Inside the covered dish was something that looked like the sort of food that would be given to someone with a high fever. Suddenly he stood up, grabbed the dish, tucked it carefully under his arm and rushed out the door. O-Shigechan's father apologized to me as I gazed at the door through which the man had disappeared. "He's a problem. He comes in here every day and repeats those same things while he drinks the evening away." I wondered what the man who had just rushed out said to his daughter when he came home every night. As I thought about what must be in his heart, I felt pain well up in my own. That evening I drank and drank, but was unable to feel any release. I was sure I would never forget this man and his story. I did, completely. But when I was writing the Scandal screenplay, his memory emerged unconsciously from my brain and made my pen dance on with peculiar strength. The character of Hiruta was written by that man I met in the Komagata-ya bar. He was not written by me.

## Rashomon

DURING THAT TIME the gate was growing larger and larger in my mind's eye. I was location-scouting in the ancient capital of Kyoto for *Rashomon*, my eleventh-century period film. The Daiei management was not very happy with the project. They said the content was difficult and the title had no appeal. They were reluctant to let the shooting begin. Day by day, as I waited, I walked around Kyoto and the still more ancient capital of Nara a few miles away, studying the classical architecture. The more I saw, the larger the image of the *Rashomon* gate became in my mind. At first I thought my gate should be about the size of the entrance gate to Toji Temple in Kyoto. Then it became as large as the Tengaimon gate in Nara, and finally as big as the main two-story gates of the Ninnaji and Todaiji temples in Nara. This image enlargement occurred not just because I had the opportunity to see real gates dating from that period, but because of what I was learning, from documents and relics, about the long-since-destroyed Rashemon gate itself. "Rashomon" actually refers to the Rajomon gate; the name was changed in a Noh play written by Kanze Nobumitsu. "Rajo" indicates the outer precincts of the castle, so "Rajomon" means the main gate to the castle's outer grounds. The gate for my film *Rashomon* was the main gate to the

outer precincts of the ancient capital—Kyoto was at that time called "Heian-Kyo." If one entered the capital through the Rajomon gate and continued due north along the main thoroughfare of the metropolis, one came to the Shujakumon gate at the end of it, and the Toji and Saiji temples to the east and west, respectively. Considering this city plan, it would have been strange had the outer main gate not been the biggest gate of all. There is tangible evidence that it in fact was: The blue roof tiles that survive from the original Rajomon gate show that it was large. But, no matter how much research we did, we couldn't discover the actual dimensions of the vanished structure. As a result, we had to construct the Rashomon gate to the city based on what we could learn from looking at extant temple gates, knowing that the original was probably different. What we built as a set was gigantic. It was so immense that a complete roof would have buckled the support pillars. Using the artistic device of dilapidation as an excuse, we constructed only half a roof and were able to get away with our measurements. To be historically accurate, the imperial palace and the Shujakumon gate should have been visible looking north through our gate. But on the Daiei back lot such distances were out of the question, and even if we had been able to find the space, the budget would have made it impossible. We made do with a cut-out mountain to be seen through the gate. Even so, what we built was extraordinarily large for an open set. When I took this project to Daiei, I told them the only sets I would need were the gate and the tribunal courtyard wall where all the survivors, participants and witnesses of the rape and murder that form the story of the film are questioned. Everything else, I promised them, would be shot on location. Based on this low-budget set estimate, Daiei happily took on the project. Later Kawaguchi Matsutaro, at that time a Daiei executive, complained that they had really been fed a line. To be sure, only the gate set had to be built, but for the price of that one mammoth set they could have had over a hundred ordinary sets. But, to tell the truth, I hadn't intended so big a set to begin with. It was while I was kept waiting all that time that my research deepened and my image of the gate swelled to its startling proportions. When I had finished *Scandal* for the Shochiku studios, Daiei asked if I wouldn't direct one more film for them. As I cast about for what to film, I suddenly remembered a script based on the short story "Yabu no naka" ("In a Grove") by Akutagawa Ryunosuke. It had been written by Hashimoto Shinobu, who had been studying under director Itami Mansaku. It was a very well-written piece, but not long enough to make into a feature film. This Hashimoto had visited my home, and I talked with him for hours. He seemed to have substance, and I took a liking to him. He later wrote the screenplays for *Ikiru* (1952) and *Shichinin no samurai* (Seven Samurai, 1954) with me. The script I remembered was his Akutagawa adaptation called "Male-Female."

Probably my subconscious told me it was not right to have put that script aside; probably I was—without being aware of it—wondering all the while if I couldn't do something with it. At that moment the memory of it jumped out of one of those creases in my brain and told me to give it a chance. At the same time I recalled that "In a Grove" is made up of three stories, and realized that if I added one more, the whole would be just the right length for a feature film. Then I remembered the Akutagawa story "Rashomon." Like "In a Grove," it was set in the Heian period (794-1184). The film *Rashomon* took shape in my mind. Since the advent of the talkies in the

1930's, I felt, we had misplaced and forgotten what was so wonderful about the old silent movies. I was aware of the esthetic loss as a constant irritation. I sensed a need to go back to the origins of the motion picture to find this peculiar beauty again; I had to go back into the past. In particular, I believed that there was something to be learned from the spirit of the French avant-garde films of the 1920'S. Yet in Japan at this time we had no film library. I had to forage for old films, and try to remember the structure of those I had seen as a boy, ruminating over the aesthetics that had made them special. Rashomon would be my testing ground, the place where I could apply the ideas and wishes growing out of my silent-film research. To provide the symbolic background atmosphere, I decided to use the Akutagawa "In a Grove" story, which goes into the depths of the human heart as if with a surgeon's scalpel, laying bare its dark complexities and bizarre twists. These strange impulses of the human heart would be expressed through the use of an elaborately fashioned play of light and shadow. In the film, people going astray in the thicket of their hearts would wander into a wider wilderness, so I moved the setting to a large forest. I selected the virgin forest of the mountains surrounding Nara, and the forest belonging to the Komyoji temple outside Kyoto. There were only eight characters, but the story was both complex and deep. The script was done as straightforwardly and briefly as possible, so I felt I should be able to create a rich and expansive visual image in turning it into a film. Fortunately, I had as cinematographer a man I had long wanted to work with, Miyagawa Kazuo; I had Hayasaka to compose the music and Matsuyama as art director. The cast was Mifune Toshiro, Mori Masayuki, Kyo Machiko, Shimura Takashi, Chiaki Minoru, Ueda Kichijira, Kato Daisuke and Honma Fumiko; all were actors whose temperaments I knew, and I could not have wished for a better line-up. Moreover, the story was supposed to take place in summer, and we had, ready to hand, the scintillating midsummer heat of Kyoto and Nara. With all these conditions so neatly met, I could ask nothing more. All that was left was to begin the film. However, one day just before the shooting was to start, the three assistant directors Daiei had assigned me came to see me at the inn where I was staying. I wondered what the problem could be. It turned out that they found the script baffling and wanted me to explain it to them. "Please read it again more carefully," I told them. "If you read it diligently, you should be able to understand it because it was written with the intention of being comprehensible." But they wouldn't leave. "We believe we have read it carefully, and we still don't understand it at all; that's why we want you to explain it to us." For their persistence I gave them this simple explanation: Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script portrays such human beings—the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are. It even shows this sinful need for flattering falsehood going be-yond the grave—even the character who dies cannot give up his lies when he speaks to the living through a medium. Egoism is a sin the human being carries with him from birth; it is the most difficult to redeem. This film is like a strange picture scroll that is unrolled and displayed by the ego. You say that you can't understand this script at all, but that is because the human heart itself is impossible to understand. If you focus on the impossibility of truly understanding human psychology and read the script one more

time, I think you will grasp the point of it. After I finished, two of the three assistant directors nodded and said they would try reading the script again. They got up to leave, but the third, who was the chief, remained unconvinced. He left with an angry look on his face. (As it turned out, this chief assistant director and I never did get along. I still regret that in the end I had to ask for his resignation. But, aside from this, the work went well.) During the rehearsals before the shooting I was left virtually speechless by Kyo Machiko's dedication. She came in to where I was still sleeping in the morning and sat down with the script in her hand. "Please teach me what to do," she requested, and I lay there amazed. The other actors, too, were all in their prime. Their spirit and enthusiasm was obvious in their work, and equally manifest in their eating and drinking habits. They invented a dish called Sanzoku-yaki, or "Mountain Bandit Broil," and ate it frequently. It consisted of beef strips sautéed in oil and then dipped in a sauce made of curry powder in melted butter.

But while they held their chopsticks in one hand, in the other they'd hold a raw onion. From time to time they'd put a strip of meat on the onion and take a bite out of it. Thoroughly barbaric. The shooting began at the Nara virgin forest. This forest was infested with mountain leeches. They dropped out of the trees onto us, they crawled up our legs from the ground to suck our blood. Even when they had had their fill, it was no easy task to pull them off, and once you managed to rip a gluttoned leech out of your flesh, the open sore seemed never to stop bleeding. Our solution was to put a tub of salt in the entry of the inn. Before we left for the location in the morning we would cover our necks, arms and socks with salt. Leeches are like slugs—they avoid salt. In those days the virgin forest around Nara harbored great numbers of massive cryptomerias and Japanese cypresses, and vines of lush ivy twined from tree to tree like pythons. It had the air of the deepest mountains and hidden glens. Every day I walked in this forest, partly to scout for shooting locations and partly for pleasure. Once a black shadow suddenly darted in front of me: a deer from the Nara park that had returned to the wild. Looking up, I saw a pack of monkeys in the big trees above my head. The inn we were housed in lay at the foot of Mount Wakakusa. Once a big monkey who seemed to be the leader of the pack came and sat on the roof of the inn to stare at us studiously throughout our boisterous evening meal. Another time the moon rose from behind Mount Wakakusa, and for an instant we saw the silhouette of a deer framed distinctly against its full brightness. Often after supper we climbed up Mount Wakakusa and formed a circle to dance in the moonlight. I was still young and the cast members were even younger and bursting with energy. We carried out our work with enthusiasm. When the location moved from the Nara Mountains to the Komyoji temple forest in Kyoto, it was Gion Festival time. The sultry summer sun hit with full force, but even though some members of my crew succumbed to heat stroke, our work pace never flagged. Every afternoon we pushed through without even stopping for a single swallow of water. When work was over, on the way back to the inn we stopped at a beer hall in Kyoto's downtown Shijo-Kawara-machi district. There each of us downed about four of the biggest mugs of draft beer they had. But we ate dinner without any alcohol and, upon finishing, split up to go about our private affairs. Then at ten o'clock we'd



gather again and pour whiskey down our throats with a vengeance. Every morning we were up bright and clear-headed to do our sweat-drenched work.

Where the Komyoji temple forest was too thick to give us the light we needed for shooting, we cut down trees without a moment's hesitation or explanation. The abbot of Komyoji glared fearfully as he watched us. But as the days went on, he began to take the initiative, showing us where he thought trees should be felled. When our shoot was finished at the Komyoji location, I went to pay my respects to the abbot. He looked at me with grave seriousness and spoke with deep feeling. "To be honest with you, at the outset we were very disturbed when you went about cutting down the temple trees as if they belonged to you. But in the end we were won over by your wholehearted enthusiasm. 'Show the audience something good.' This was the focus of all your energies, and you forgot your-selves. Until I had the chance to watch you, I had no idea that the making of a movie was a crystallization of such effort. I was very deeply impressed."

The abbot finished and set a folding fan before me. In commemoration of our filming, he had written on the fan three characters forming a Chinese poem: "Benefit All Mankind." I was left speechless.

We set up a parallel schedule for the use of the Komyoji location and open set of the Rashomon gate. On sunny days we filmed at Komyoji; on cloudy days we filmed the rain scenes at the gate set. Because the gate set was so huge, the job of creating rainfall on it was a major operation. We borrowed fire engines and turned on the studio's fire hoses to full capacity. But when the camera was aimed up-ward at the cloudy sky over the gate, the sprinkle of the rain couldn't be seen against it, so we made rainfall with black ink in it. Every day we worked in temperatures of more than 85° Fahrenheit, but when the wind blew through the wide-open gate with the terrific rainfall pouring down over it, it was enough to chill the skin.

I had to be sure that this huge gate looked huge to the camera. And I had to figure out how to use the sun itself. This was a major concern because of the decision to use the light and shadows of the forest as the keynote of the whole film. I determined to solve the problem by actually filming the sun. These days it is not uncommon to point the camera directly at the sun, but at the time *Rashomon* was being made it was still one of the taboos of cinematography. It was even thought that the sun's rays shining directly into your lens would burn the film in your camera. But my cameraman, Miyagawa Kazuo, boldly defied this convention and created superb images. The introductory section in particular, which leads the viewer through the light and shadow of the forest into a world where the human heart loses its way, was truly magnificent camera work. I feel that this scene, later praised at the Venice International Film Festival as the first instance of a camera entering the heart of a forest, was not only one of Miyagawa's masterpieces but a world-class masterpiece of black-and-white cinematography. And yet, I don't know what happened to me. Delighted as I was with Miyagawa's work, it seems I forgot to tell him. When I said to myself, "Wonderful," I guess I thought I had said "Wonderful" to him at the same time. I didn't realize I hadn't until one day Miyagawa's old friend Shimura Takashi (who was playing the

woodcutter in *Rashomon*) came to me and said, "Miyagawa's very concerned about whether his camera work is satisfactory to you." Recognizing my over-sight for the first time, I hurriedly shouted "One hundred percent! One hundred for camera work! One hundred plus!" There is no end to my recollections of *Rashomon*. If I tried to write about all of them, I'd never finish, so I'd like to end with one incident that left an indelible impression on me. It has to do with the music. As I was writing the script, I heard the rhythms of a bolero in my head over the episode of the woman's side of the story. I asked Hayasaka to write a bolero kind of music for the scene. When we came to the dubbing of that scene, Hayasaka sat down next to me and said, "I'll try it with the music." In his face I saw uneasiness and anticipation. My own nervousness and expectancy gave me a painful sensation in my chest. The screen lit up with the beginning of the scene, and the strains of the bolero music softly counted out the rhythm. As the scene progressed, the music rose, but the image and the sound failed to coincide and seemed to be at odds with each other. "Damn it," I thought. The multiplication of sound and image that I had calculated in my head had failed, it seemed. It was enough to make me break out in a cold sweat. We kept going. The bolero music rose yet again, and suddenly picture and sound fell into perfect unison. The mood created was positively eerie. I felt an icy chill run down my spine, and unwittingly I turned to Hayasaka. He was looking at me. His face was pale, and I saw that he was shuddering with the same eerie emotion I felt. From that point on, sound and image proceeded with incredible speed to surpass even the calculations I had made in my head. The effect was strange and overwhelming. And that is how *Rashomon* was made. During the shooting there were two fires at the Daiei studios. But because we had mobilized the fire engines for our filming, they were already primed and drilled, so the studios escaped with very minor damage. After *Rashomon* I made a film of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (*Hakuchi*, 1951) for the Shochiku studios. This *Idiot* was ruinous. I clashed directly with the studio heads, and then when the reviews on the completed film came out, it was as if they were a mirror reflection of the studio's attitude toward me. Without exception, they were scathing. On the heels of this disaster, Daiei rescinded its offer for me to do another film with them. I listened to this cold announcement at the Chofu studios of Daiei in the Tokyo suburbs. I walked out through the gate in a gloomy daze, and, not having the will even to get on the train, I ruminated over my bleak situation as I walked all the way home to Komae. I concluded that for some time I would have to "eat cold rice" and resigned myself to this fact. Deciding that it would serve no purpose to get excited about it, I set out to go fishing at the Tamagawa River. I cast my line into the river. It immediately caught on something and snapped in two. Having no replacement with me, I hurriedly put my equipment away. Thinking this was what it was like when bad luck catches up with you, I headed back home. I arrived home depressed, with barely enough strength to slide open the door to the entry. Suddenly my wife came bounding out. "Congratulations!" I was unwittingly indignant: "For what?" "*Rashomon* has the Grand Prix." *Rashomon* had won the Grand Prix at the Venice International Film Festival, and I was spared from having to eat cold rice. Once again an angel had appeared out of nowhere. I did not even know that *Rashomon* had been submitted to the Venice Film Festival. The Japan representative of Italiafilm, Giuliana Stramigioli, had seen it and

recommended it to Venice. It was like pouring water into the sleeping ears of the Japanese film industry.

Later *Rashomon* won the American Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Japanese critics insisted that these two prizes were simply reflections of Westerners' curiosity and taste for Oriental exoticism, which struck me then, and now, as terrible. Why is it that Japanese people have no confidence in the worth of Japan? Why do they elevate everything foreign and denigrate everything Japanese? Even the woodblock prints of Utamaro, Hokusai and Sharaku were not appreciated by Japanese until they were first discovered by the West. I don't know how to explain this lack of discernment. I can only despair of the character of my own people.

## Epilogue

THROUGH *Rashomon* I was compelled to discover yet another unfortunate aspect of the human personality. This occurred when *Rashomon* was shown on television for the first time a few years ago. The broadcast was accompanied by an interview with the president of Daiei. I couldn't believe my ears.

This man, after showing so much distaste for the project at the outset of production, after complaining that the finished film was "incomprehensible," and after demoting the company executive and the producer who had facilitated its making, was now proudly taking full and exclusive credit for its success! He boasted about how for the first time in cinema history the camera had been boldly pointed directly at the sun. Never in his entire discourse did he mention my name or the name of the cinematographer whose achievement this was, Miyagawa Kazuo.

Watching the television interview, I had the feeling I was back in *Rashomon* all over again. It was as if the pathetic self-delusions of the ego, those failings I had attempted to portray in the film, were being shown in real life. People indeed have immense difficulty in talking about themselves as they really are. I was reminded once again that the human animal suffers from the trait of instinctive self-aggrandizement. And yet I am in no position to criticize that company president. I have come this far in writing something resembling an autobiography, but I doubt that I have managed to achieve real honesty about myself in its pages. I suspect that I have left out my uglier traits and more or less beautified the rest. In any case, I find myself incapable of continuing to put pen to paper in good faith. *Rashomon* became the gateway for my entry into the international film world, and yet as an autobiographer it is impossible for me to pass through the *Rashomon* gate and on to the rest of my life. Perhaps someday I will be able to do so.

But it may be just as well to stop. I am a maker of films; films are my true medium. I think that to learn what became of me after *Rashomon* the most reasonable procedure would be to look for me in the characters in the films I made after *Rashomon*. Although human beings are incapable of talking about themselves with total honesty, it is much harder to avoid the truth while pretending to be other people. They often reveal much about themselves in a very straightforward way. I am certain that I did. There is nothing that says more about its creator than the work itself.

## APPENDIX

# Some Random Notes on Filmmaking

*The following comments were originally made by Akira Kurosawa and published by Toho Company, Ltd., in 1975 as advice to young people considering a career in filmmaking. They have been adapted by Audie E. Bock.*

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WHAT IS CINEMA? The answer to this question is no easy matter. Long ago the Japanese novelist Shiga Naoya presented an essay written by his grandchild as one of the most remarkable prose pieces of his time. He had it published in a literary magazine. It was entitled "My Dog," and ran as follows: "My dog resembles a bear; he also resembles a badger; he also resembles a fox. . . ." It proceeded to enumerate the dog's special characteristics, comparing each one to yet another animal, developing into a full list of the animal kingdom. However, the essay closed with, "But since he's a dog, he most resembles a dog." I remember bursting out laughing when I read this essay, but it makes a serious point. Cinema resembles so many other arts. If cinema has very literary characteristics, it also has theatrical qualities, a philosophical side, attributes of painting and sculpture and musical elements. But cinema is, in the final analysis, cinema.

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THERE IS SOMETHING that might be called cinematic beauty. It can only be expressed in a film, and it must be present in a film for that film to be a moving work. When it is very well expressed, one experiences a particularly deep emotion while watching that film. I believe it is this quality that draws people to come and see a film, and that it is the hope of attaining this quality that inspires the filmmaker to make his film in the first place. In other words, I believe that the essence of the cinema lies in cinematic beauty.

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WHEN I BEGIN to consider a film project, I always have in mind a number of ideas that feel as if they would be the sort of thing I'd like to film. From among these one will suddenly germinate and begin to sprout; this will be the one I grasp and develop. I have never taken on a project offered to me by a producer or a production company. My films emerge from my own desire to say a particular thing at a particular time. The root of any film project for me is this inner need

to express something. What nurtures this root and makes it grow into a tree is the script. What makes the tree bear flowers and fruit is the directing.

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THE ROLE OF director encompasses the coaching of the actors, the cinematography, the sound recording, the art direction, the music, the editing and the dubbing and sound-mixing. Although these can be thought of as separate occupations, I do not regard them as independent. I see them all melting together under the heading of direction.

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A FILM DIRECTOR has to convince a great number of people to follow him and work with him. I often say, although I am certainly not a militarist, that if you compare the production unit to an army, the script is the battle flag and the director is the commander of the front line. From the moment production begins to the moment it ends, there is no telling what will happen. The director must be able to respond to any situation, and he must have the leadership ability to make the whole unit go along with his responses.

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ALTHOUGH THE continuity for a film is all worked out in advance, that sequence may not necessarily be the most interesting way to shoot the picture. Things can happen without warning that produce a startling effect. When these can be incorporated in the film without upsetting the balance, the whole becomes much more interesting. This process is similar to that of a pot being fired in a kiln. Ashes and other particles can fall onto the melted glaze during the firing and cause unpredictable but beautiful results. Similarly unplanned but interesting effects arise in the course of directing a movie, so I call them "kiln changes."

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WITH A Good SCRIPT a good director can produce a masterpiece; with the same script a mediocre director can make a passable film. But with a bad script even a good director can't possibly make a good film. For truly cinematic expression, the camera and the microphone must be able to cross both fire and water. That is what makes a real movie. The script must be something that has the power to do this.

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A GOOD STRUCTURE for a screenplay is that of the symphony, with its three or four movements and differing tempos. Or one can use the Noh play with its three-part structure: jo (introduction), ha (destruction) and kya (haste). If you devote yourself fully to Noh and gain something good from this, it will emerge naturally in your films. The Noh is a truly unique art form that exists nowhere else in the world. I think the Kabuki, which imitates it, is a sterile

flower. But in a screenplay, I think the symphonic structure is the easiest for people of today to understand.

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IN ORDER TO write scripts, you must first study the great novels and dramas of the world. You must consider why they are great. Where does the emotion come from that you feel as you read them? What degree of passion did the author have to have, what level of meticulousness did he have to command, in order to portray the characters and events as he did? You must read thoroughly, to the point where you can grasp all these things. You must also see the great films. You must read the great screenplays and study the film theories of the great directors. If your goal is to become a film director, you must master screenwriting.

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I'VE FORGOTTEN who it was that said creation is memory. My own experiences and the various things I have read remain in my memory and become the basis upon which I create something new. I couldn't do it out of nothing. For this reason, since the time I was a young man I have always kept a notebook handy when I read a book. I write down my reactions and what particularly moves me. I have stacks and stacks of these college notebooks, and when I go off to write a script, these are what I read. Somewhere they always provide me with a point of breakthrough. Even for single lines of dialogue I have taken hints from these notebooks. So what I want to say is, don't read books while lying down in bed.

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I BEGAN WRITING scripts with two other people around 1940. Up until then I wrote alone, and found that I had no difficulties. But in writing alone there is a danger that your interpretation of another human being will suffer from one-sidedness. If you write with two other people about that human being, you get at least three different viewpoints on him, and you can discuss the points on which you disagree. Also, the director has a natural tendency to nudge the hero and the plot along into a pattern that is the easiest one for him to direct. By writing with about two other people, you can avoid this danger also.

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SOMETHING THAT you should take particular notice of is the fact that the best scripts have very few explanatory passages. Adding explanation to the descriptive passages of a screenplay is the most dangerous trap you can fall into. It's easy to explain the psychological state of a character at a particular moment, but it's very difficult to describe it through the delicate nuances of action and dialogue. Yet it is not impossible. A great deal about this can be learned from the study of the great plays, and I believe the "hard-boiled" detective novels can also be very instructive.

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I BEGIN REHEARSALS in the actors' dressing room. First I have them repeat their lines, and gradually proceed to the movements. But this is done with costumes and makeup on from the beginning; then we repeat everything on the set. The thoroughness of these rehearsals makes the actual shooting time very short. We don't rehearse just the actors, but every part of every scene—the camera movements, the lighting, everything.

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THE WORST THING an actor can do is show his awareness of the camera. Often when an actor hears the call "Roll 'em" he will tense up, alter his sight lines and present himself very unnaturally. This self-consciousness shows very clearly to the camera's eye. I always say, "Just talk to the actor playing opposite. This isn't like the stage, where you have to speak your lines to the audience. There's no need to look at the camera." But when he knows where the camera is, the actor invariably, without knowing it, turns one-third to halfway in its direction. With multiple moving cameras, however, the actor has no time to figure out which one is shooting him.

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DURING THE SHOOTING of a scene the director's eye has to catch even the minutest detail. But this does not mean glaring concentratedly at the set. While the cameras are rolling, I rarely look directly at the actors, but focus my gaze somewhere else. By doing this I sense instantly when something isn't right. Watching something does not mean fixing your gaze on it, but being aware of it in a natural way. I believe this is what the medieval Noh playwright and theorist Zeami meant by "watching with a detached gaze."

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MANY PEOPLE choose to follow the actors' movements with a zoom lens. Although the most natural way to approach the actor with the camera is to move it at the same speed he moves, many people wait until he stops moving and then zoom in on him. I think this is very wrong. The camera should follow the actor as he moves; it should stop when he stops. If this rule is not followed, the audience will become conscious of the camera.

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MUCH IS OFTEN made of the fact that I use more than one camera to shoot a scene. This began when I was making *Seven Samurai*, because it was impossible to predict exactly what would happen in the scene where the bandits attack the peasants' village in a heavy rain-storm. If I had filmed it in the traditional shot-by-shot method, there was no guarantee that any action could be repeated in exactly the same way twice. So I used three cameras rolling simultaneously. The result was extremely effective, so I decided to exploit this technique fully in less action-filled



drama as well, and I next used it for *Ikimono no kiroku* (Record of a Living Being). By the time I made *The Lower Depths* I was using largely a one-shot-per-scene method.

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WORKING WITH three cameras simultaneously is not so easy as it may sound. It is extremely difficult to determine how to move them. For example, if a scene has three actors in it, all three are talking and moving about freely and naturally. In order to show how the A, B and C cameras move to cover this action, even complete picture continuity is insufficient. Nor can the average camera operator understand a diagram of the camera movements. I think in Japan the only cinematographers who can are Nakai Asakazu and Saito Takao. The three camera positions are completely different for the beginning and end of each shot, and they go through several transformations in between. As a general system, I put the A camera in the most orthodox positions, use the B camera for quick, decisive shots and the C camera as a kind of guerilla unit.

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THE TASK of the lighting technicians is an extremely creative one. A really good lighting man has his own plan, though he of course still needs to discuss it with the cameraman and the director. But if he does not put forth his own concept, his job becomes nothing more than lighting up the whole frame. I think, for example, that the current method of lighting for color film is wrong. In order to bring out the colors, the entire frame is flooded with light. I always say the lighting should be treated as it is for black-and-white film, whether the colors are strong or not, so that the shadows come out right.

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I AM OFTEN ACCUSED of being too exacting with sets and properties, of having things made, just for the sake of authenticity, that will never appear on camera. Even if I don't request this, my crew does it for me anyway. The first Japanese director to demand authentic sets and props was Mizoguchi Kenji, and the sets in his films are truly superb. I learned a great deal about filmmaking from him, and the making of sets is among the most important. The quality of the set influences the quality of the actors' performances. If the plan of a house and the design of the rooms are done properly, the actors can move about in them naturally. If I have to tell an actor, "Don't think about where this room is in relation to the rest of the house," that natural ease cannot be achieved. For this reason, I have the sets made exactly like the real thing. It restricts the shooting, but encourages that feeling of authenticity.

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FROM THE MOMENT I begin directing a film, I am thinking about not only the music but the sound effects as well. Even before the camera rolls, along with all the other things I consider, I

decide what kind of sound I want. In some of my films, such as *Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo*, I use different theme music for each main character or for different groups of characters.

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I CHANGED my thinking about musical accompaniment from the time Hayasaka Fumio began working with me as composer of my film scores. Up until that time film music was nothing more than accompaniment—for a sad scene there was always sad music. This is the way most people use music, and it is ineffective. But from *Drunken Angel* onward, I have used light music for some key sad scenes, and my way of using music has differed from the norm—I don't put it in where most people do. Working with Hayasaka, I began to think in terms of the counterpoint of sound and image as opposed to the union of sound and image.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT requirement for editing is objectivity. No matter how much difficulty you had in obtaining a particular shot, the audience will never know. If it is not interesting, it simply isn't interesting. You may have been full of enthusiasm during the filming of a particular shot, but if that enthusiasm doesn't show on the screen, you must be objective enough to cut it.

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EDITING IS truly interesting work. When the rushes come up, I rarely show them to my crew exactly as they are. Instead I go to the editing room when shooting is over that day and with the editor spend about three hours editing the rushes together. Only then do I show them to the crew. It is necessary to show them this edited footage for the sake of arousing their interest. Sometimes they don't understand what it is they are filming, or why they had to spend ten days to get a particular shot. When they see the edited footage with the results of their labor, they become enthusiastic again. And by editing as I go along, I have only the fine cut to complete when the shooting is finished.

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I AM OFTEN ASKED why I don't pass on to young people what I have accomplished over the years. Actually, I would like very much to do so. Ninety-nine percent of those who worked as my assistant directors have now become directors in their own right. But I don't think any of them took the trouble to learn the most important things.

## A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Akira Kurosawa was born in 1910, to an old samurai family. He received many awards for his work, most recently the 1980 Grand Prize at Cannes for *Kagemusha*. Kurosawa died in 1998.

### A NOTE ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Audie Bock was born in New York, grew up in Berkeley, California, and graduated from Wellesley College in 1967. She earned her master's degree in East Asian studies from Harvard University and is enrolled in a Ph.D. program in fine arts there. She has taught Japanese cinema at Yale, Harvard, and Berkeley. She has lived in Japan at different periods for a total of five years, including the time spent researching her book, *Japanese Film Directors*, when she first met Akira Kurosawa. She was an assistant producer of the inter-national version of *Kagemusha*.