

TRANSLATION

Mangan

FULFILMENT OF A VOW

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THIS is an incident that happened four years ago. I was spending the summer at a friend's house in Mishima, a harbor town on the Izu Peninsula, while writing a story called 'Romanesque'. One evening, I got on a bicycle after a few drinks under my belt and, while tearing up and down the streets, hurt myself. I ripped the skin of my right foot just above the ankle bone. The wound wasn't deep but, as I'd been drinking, it bled profusely and I ran in a panic to the doctor's. The town doctor was a 32-year-old man who looked like Saigō Takamori. He also was quite drunk; when he appeared in his examining room in just about as shaky a state of tipsiness as I was in, it struck me funny. While being treated, I broke out into a giggle. Then the doctor started to giggle too. Finally, unable to contain ourselves, the both of us were laughing heartily together.

From that evening on, we became close friends. The doctor liked philosophy more than literature. I enjoyed talking about that too, so our talk was lively. The doctor's view of the world could probably be described as a primitive dualism: he saw the world totally in terms of a battle between good and evil, and he expressed his view well. In my heart I very much wanted to believe in just the one god Love, but still, as I listened to the doctor's theory about good and evil forces, I felt something cool and refreshing stir in my gloomy breast. For example, he would say by way of illustration that *he*, because he immediately told his wife to serve up beer when I came on my evening visits, was a *zendama*,¹ while his wife, who smilingly proposed that *this* evening we should play bridge and skip the beer, was an *akudama*.² And I compliantly agreed. His wife was small

¹ 善玉, a good person.

² 悪玉, a bad person.

and plain-looking, but her skin was fair, and she was a genteel woman. They had no children, but the wife's younger brother, a quiet boy who was going to the commercial school in Numazu, boarded upstairs.

The doctor's house was getting five different newspapers, and so almost every morning I would drop in while out for my walk to read them, and would stay for a half-hour or an hour. I used to go around from the back entrance, seat myself on the veranda, and, while drinking the iced barley tea brought by the doctor's wife, read the paper by holding it fast with one hand as it flapped in the wind. Less than twelve feet away a brook in full stream flowed lazily between patches of vegetation; every day the milk delivery boy, who passed on bike over the narrow path that ran alongside the brook, never failed to greet me—an out-of-town stranger—with a 'Good morning!'

A young woman used to come at that hour to get some medicine. In a light summer dress, with *geta* on her feet, she conveyed an impression of unsophistication. Often her laughter could be heard from the consultation room together with the doctor's, and once in a while the doctor would accompany her to the vestibule to see her off with the loud injunction: 'Be patient a little while longer, Mrs.!'

One day the doctor's wife explained the matter to me. She was the wife of a primary school teacher who three years before came down with a lung ailment, but was of late improving. The doctor, using all his powers of persuasion, steadfastly restrained the young wife, telling her that now was the critical stage. The woman obeyed his instructions. Still, every now and then, she would make another piteous plea. And each time the doctor would steel his heart and command her firmly, in words latent with meaning, 'Be patient a little while longer, Mrs.!'

At the end of August, I saw something beautiful. As I was reading a newspaper one morning on the veranda of the doctor's house, the doctor's wife, who had been seated beside me, whispered softly: 'Oh, what a look of happiness!' Quickly raising my head, I saw before us a neat figure in light summer dress skipping by over the path. She was twirling her white parasol gaily.

'This morning she got permission', the doctor's wife once more whispered.

'Three years.' Easily said, but. . . I felt choked up with emotion.

With each passing month, each passing year since then, the picture of that woman grows more beautiful.

Maybe the doctor's wife had put in a good word for her.