

DHARMA BROTHERS

KODO AND TOKUJOO



**A HISTORICAL NOVEL BASED ON THE
LIVES OF TWO JAPANESE ZEN MASTERS**

ARTHUR BRAVERMAN

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Dharma Brothers

Kodo and Tokujoo

Also by Arthur Braverman

Translations

Mud and Water

Warrior of Zen

A Quiet Room

Memoir

Living and Dying in Zazen

Dharma Brothers

Kodo and Tokujoo

A Historical Novel Based On The Lives
Of Two Japanese Zen Masters

Arthur Braverman

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In memory of
Irving Braverman and Judy Sweetbaum

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Dharma Brothers

Kodo and Tokujoo

Book I

Kodo

Zazen practice is the practice in which we resume our pure way of life, beyond any gaining idea, beyond fame and profit. By practice we just keep our original nature as it is. There is no need to intellectualize about what our pure original nature is, because it is beyond our intellectual understanding. And there is no need to appreciate it, because it is beyond our appreciation. So just to sit without any idea of gain, and with the purest intention, to remain as quiet as our original nature—this is our practice.

Shunryu

Suzuki Roshi

Chapter 1

I might have been a gangster, a *yakuza* boss, or even a murderer had I not come across the teachings of the Buddha. I was a little devil from the time I could walk. At least that's what my older sister Sai told me. "You were blessed with a strong body and cursed with a hot temper."

I was a poor student, too, and only made it to the fourth grade in elementary school. And here I am professor of Buddhist studies at the only Soto Zen Buddhist university in Japan. It is strange the turns life takes.

But I'm getting ahead of my story.

My mother died in 1883 when I was three years old. I have no memory of her. All I know is what my older sister Sai told me. She took care of me after Mother's death. She said Mother was a strong willed, industrious person for whom raising four children was not enough to keep her busy. She even managed her own rice store while caring for us.

"When she was on her deathbed, she worried about who would rein you in once she was gone." Sai described me as the neighborhood terror, but claimed Mother felt that Father refused to see it. "It's interesting, though," she said, "you were always calm in Father's presence. Maybe that's why he had trouble believing the stories of your tantrums."

I couldn't remember how Mother looked, and we had no photographs back then to refresh my memory. But I conjured up my own picture of her, combining Sai's description and my imagination: prominent cheekbones, penetrating eyes, a tall, husky woman with perfect posture, both loving and ominous.

I can picture Father as though he were standing in front of me now. He was a wiry but muscular man with a wide smiling mouth, a strong square jaw, a large forehead and sleepy eyes. My earliest memory is of being wrapped in Father's arms as he carried me up a hill near our neighborhood to watch the sunrise. It was a hot humid day, a year before Mother died, and Father perspired profusely as he carried me. I felt safe in his arms. To this day, I associate that smell

of perspiration from his body with a feeling of security. When we reached the top, Father sat on a rock and placed me on his lap. A large pheasant perched itself on a nearby branch and stood there silently.

I pointed to the pheasant and said, "Closer."

"If we go any closer, it will fly away," Father said.

I slid down from his lap and ran toward the tree. As I got close, the pheasant took flight.

Father's workshop was built as an addition to our house. I used to go there and watch him repair rickshaws. He would be absorbed in his work and I would ask a question about what he was doing and he would stop his work and answer me. He was a very quiet man, and his answers were short. But he always responded.

One day when I was watching him work, he turned to me and said, "You want to go for a ride on this one?" He was pointing to one of the rickshaws that he must have finished working on.

"Sure," I said. Father had never taken me for a ride before. I was thrilled.

I helped him put his tools in their proper places.

"That's not the way the wrench goes," he said. "Turn it around." He was always careful about his tools. He had taught me where each one went and tested me regularly. When we finished putting the tools away, he lifted me, placed me in the seat of the rickshaw and pulled me up and down the street. I shrieked with joy. He was laughing and seemed to be having just as much fun as I was.

But then he died. I was only eight. That was when everything changed.

It was a day after Father's funeral. My aunt Hiino was carrying a bundle of my clothes that sister Sai had packed for me. I let go of my aunt's hand and stopped walking. "Where are you taking me?" I asked.

Aunt Hiino said. "We are going to my house. You will be living with Uncle Toraji, cousin Matsu and me from now on."

We were standing in front of the playground of my school. Aunt Hiino took my hand again and started to lead me on. I pulled it free.

"I don't want to go to your house," I protested. "I want to live with my sister Sai."

"Saikichi, we went all over this before. Your sister has been hired as a live-in maid. She can't take her little brother with her. We were lucky to get that position for her." Aunt Hiino stared at me for a long time. She put out her hand. "Well, are you coming or not?"

I took her hand and walked with her. We went through the shopping street where my sister Sai used to take me when she went to buy groceries. The street was crowded with people, carts, and shops. It had been my favorite place to go. But I didn't care about it now, only about where my aunt was leading me.

We turned off the shopping street onto a narrow road, which was lined on both sides with tiny residential homes. We continued a few blocks until we came to my aunt's street. I recognized her house as soon as we got near. It was next to a small shrine to the Bodhisattva Jizo, the protector of children. This little stone Bodhisattva had a red bib around his neck and an apple and a rice ball in front of him. I used to go with Aunt Hiino to place an offering of fruit or rice at the shrine. We would take away the rotten food that Jizo hadn't eaten. He didn't seem to have much of an appetite. In front of the house, which was squeezed between two equally small houses, was a smelly open drainage ditch.

We were standing out in front when Aunt Hiino took me aside and said, "You stay right by me when I talk with Uncle, and don't say a word."

I wondered why she was telling me not to speak. I looked down, avoiding her eyes. When I finally looked up, she said, "Not a word, you understand?"

I nodded.

We stepped across the drainage ditch, she opened the *shoji* screen and we entered the earthen floor kitchen.

"I'm home," Aunt Hiino called out.

When Uncle Toraji appeared, he stared down at us. The kitchen was at ground level and the rest of the house was a couple of steps higher.

"Where is Matsu?" Hiino asked.

"He's playing next door," Uncle Toraji said. He stared at me for what felt like a long time, then pointing at me, he said, "What's he doing here?"

"Saikichi is going to stay with us," Aunt said.

"For how long?" Uncle said, without taking his eyes off me.

"From now on," she responded. "I have agreed to adopt him."

"Adopt him." Uncle Toraji's eyes widened and his jaw dropped. He looked up at the ceiling and took a deep breath.

The kitchen was long and narrow. I could feel the cold from the earthen floor through my thin straw sandals. Aunt Hiino was holding my hand, squeezing it tighter when Uncle Toraji raised his voice. He was a husky man with broad shoulders. He looked as if he were blocking our entrance into the upper part of the house. My aunt, a tiny frail woman, stared at him defiantly without saying another word.

"We can barely feed our own family," Uncle Toraji said. His eyes narrowed and his brow furrowed with so many creases he looked like one of those masks of the devil.

Aunt Hiino put her hand on my shoulder and brought me close to her. She stared straight at him, seeming not to be afraid, which made me feel better. Uncle looked down and muttered something under his breath.

"What else could I do?" Aunt Hiino said, removing her sandals. I took off my sandals, too, and walked behind her. She led me up the stairs, pushing Uncle aside.

I followed her through the family room to the small bedroom at the far end of the house. Uncle Toraji trailed behind, screaming. His words were coming out so jumbled I was having trouble understanding him. Then, he became surprisingly quiet.

In a calm voice he said, "The boy has two uncles. Why couldn't one of them take him?" I looked up at my aunt to see how she'd respond.

"Kentaro's family is taking his younger sister Saku, and Kenjiro's family is taking his brother Toshi," Hiino said. Her response must have angered Uncle Toraji because he was yelling again.

"Very clever of them. They snatch up the angels and leave us with the savage!"

I didn't know what savage meant, but I knew it wasn't good. I thought about my sister Sai telling me I had a wild streak. Maybe it was true. But I'd always thought Uncle Toraji liked me. Now he was calling me a savage.

"You're going to make the boy feel terrible on his first day here," Hiino protested.

She asked me to wait in the bedroom, and she walked to the other end of the house to the front room with Uncle. As soon as they left, I tiptoed into the family room where I could hear their conversation.

"I know what that little bully has been doing. The whole neighborhood knows. He beats up other children—even bloodied his older brother, used a saw from his father's workshop to do it."

I remembered hitting my brother Toshi with the saw, but I didn't remember why. Though I couldn't recall why I had hit him, it was the first time Father ever lost his temper with me. From that day on he had forbidden me to enter his workshop.

Hearing Aunt Hiino raise her voice, apparently cutting Uncle Toraji off, brought my attention back to them. I listened carefully.

"Now you're sounding like the rest of the family," Aunt Hiino said. "They wanted to send him to a monastery."

A monastery? Is that where they sent young boys who nobody wanted; boys they called savages? Did they lock them up there, like they do to grownups in prisons?

Uncle became quiet, as though he were mulling over an idea. "A monastery," he said, "Why not? Maybe a priest can tame him. Maybe we should ..."

I felt a tightening in my chest and couldn't breathe; then I heard Hiino's voice. "He's family. He's not a bad boy."

My breath came back and my body relaxed. As my aunt's voice grew bolder Toraji's sounded meeker. I knew she had gotten her way. But I didn't want to be near Uncle, ever.

I moved in with my aunt and uncle and my cousin Matsu. Matsu and I shared a room. I had often played with my little cousin when my sister took me to his house after Mother died. If sister Sai had work to do or was going to meet a friend, she would leave me with Aunt Hiino for the day. I watched him as an infant and played with

him as he grew older. I didn't mind playing with him then because we were only together for a little while. But now he wanted to play with me all the time. He'd ask me to get down on all fours and he would ride me around like a horse. He never had enough. It got pretty boring.

One night when I told him I didn't want to play horse anymore, he got angry and started to cry. I ignored him and he kicked me and hit me. He had never acted like that when I used to visit him, but now that I was living there, he seemed to feel he could boss me around.

"Stop," I said, but he continued hitting and kicking me.

Then I smacked him on the side of his face and his crying turned into screams. He ran out of the room bawling. A few minutes later Uncle Toraji came into the room with Matsu trailing behind him, still crying. I knew I was in trouble.

"What the hell did you do to my little boy?" he said, grabbing me by my shoulders and shaking me. I tried to get loose but his grip was so tight I couldn't. Just then Aunt Hiino came in and squeezed her tiny body between my uncle and me.

"Stop it," she shouted. "Leave him alone!"

"Did you see what that rascal did to Matsu? Look at the side of Matsu's face. It's all red." He took one hand from my shoulder in order to point to the red spot on Matsu's face and his forearm accidentally smacked my aunt across the face, knocking her to the floor. It had to be accidental because Uncle wouldn't dare hit her intentionally. When he saw Aunt Hiino lying there, his expression changed. He really looked worried. He let go of me and bent down to help her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But look at Matsu ... look at what Saikichi did."

"You and your precious Matsu," Aunt Hiino said. Uncle was helping her up, but she pushed him away. "He is my son too, you know. And he can be pretty ornery when he doesn't get his way."

Uncle was still staring at me and breathing heavily and his body was shaking, but he didn't look as mean. I couldn't tell whether he was angry or scared. Was he afraid of Aunt Hiino? She was so tiny, but she seemed to have some kind of power over him.

Aunt Hiino turned to Matsu and me and said, "Now you two try to get along," and she shoved Uncle Toraji toward the entrance of the room. He didn't try to resist her. He was like a little child.

As they were about to pass through the entrance, Uncle Toraji turned to face me and said, "Don't you ever lay a hand ..." He never finished the sentence because Aunt Hiino pushed him out of the room.

From that day on, if Matsu didn't get his way, he would run crying to his father saying I hit him. Matsu was a pretty clever brat. Denying it did me no good. Uncle believed whatever his little Matsu told him. If Aunt Hiino wasn't around, and Matsu said I hit him, Uncle would beat me. Because of my fear of being beaten by Uncle, I did everything I could to keep my cousin happy.

After school and on Sundays I often took Matsu to a large Zen temple called Shitennoji, in walking distance from the house. The yard in front of the temple served as a playground for neighborhood children. I didn't have to entertain my bratty cousin then, because he found children his own age to play with.

On our first Sunday at the Shitennoji playground, when Matsu became absorbed in play with other children, and I walked away to be by myself, I met a boy named Akihiro. Akihiro was a year older than me and about a head taller. He walked over to me, followed by a small group of lads who appeared to be his band of followers, and asked me a bunch of questions. He did all the talking for the group.

I was standing near a large bronze statue of the Buddha. The calm smile on the Buddha's face had made me feel quiet inside. It was comforting. As soon as the boys had approached, however, the quietness desolved and I was my old restless self.

Akihiro wanted to know where I'd come from and why I moved to this neighborhood.

"My mother and father died so I came here to live with my aunt," I said.

Akihiro was quiet for a moment and then he asked, "How come your mom and dad died?"

"I don't know," I said. I didn't want to talk about my parents' deaths. I stared at the face of the Buddha, ignoring the group after

that last question.

I could see Akihiro shrugging to the others while I pretended to be looking directly at the Buddha. He nodded in the direction of another part of the playground and walked away with his crew following at his heels.

Though I didn't want to talk about my parents' deaths, the quiet calm of the Buddha's smile brought my thoughts back to Father. It was as though Father had melted into this bronze form and returned to watch over me.

At the other end of the playground more boys kept showing up until Akihiro's group was quite large. I watched as he divided them into two teams. He counted heads for both sides and then walked back to where I was standing.

"Saikichi, you want to play war with us?"

I looked over to where my cousin was. He was still absorbed in play with some little boys.

"Sure," I said. Whatever quiet returned to me as I thought about being with Father in the presence of the Buddha quickly drained from me. I walked with Akihiro, feeling myself becoming transformed into a tough in the presence of the two groups.

There were ten boys counting Akihiro in one group and nine in the other.

"Saikichi, you join that group," Akihiro said, pointing to the band of nine. Then he sat astride two boys who became his horse, and with great eagerness he ordered his group to attack.

I didn't wait for my group to choose a general. I immediately took charge. I chose two boys to be my horse and led my troops, charging into enemy lines, causing Akihiro's soldiers to scatter in all directions.

One of the boys in Akihiro's band said, "It's not fair. They have most of the big boys."

I pointed to two of our biggest boys and said, "You two join Akihiro's side. We will defeat them with an army of eight."

I led my troops once more, shouting orders, attacking from a different direction. Again Akihiro's boys broke ranks and we easily defeated them. I knew we would defeat them. I can't say why but I

just felt it. I pointed to two more boys and said, "This time we'll rout them with six," sending those two to the other side.

"Who made him the general?" one of the boys on my side said to another.

I could feel my body heating up. I had to show this group that I was boss. I imagined the Buddha scolding me, but I couldn't control myself.

"You want to fight me for the position?" I threatened.

The boy said nothing. Nobody challenged me after that.

The following week I took Matsu to the playground after school. It was late and we only had a little time before we had to return home. Some of the boys he'd played with the week before were there and he went off to join them. I didn't see Akihiro or any of the boys from his band that I recognized so I went over to the bronze Buddha. I looked more carefully at his whole form. He was seated with his legs folded, the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. He held a jar in his left hand and his right hand was positioned in front of him at shoulder level with the thumb and index finger forming a circle. I stood there trying to imitate the way the Buddha held his fingers when a stranger came up to me.

"Do you know what that position stands for?" he asked.

The man stood tall and straight and looked important. He wore a brown silk kimono. His graying hair hung down to his shoulders and a small pointy beard covered the center of his chin. I hadn't seen anyone who looked and dressed as he did around that neighborhood before. I shook my head.

"The Buddha teaches us in many ways. He uses hand positions, or *mudras*, as signs indicating an aspect of his message. That position is called the *vitarka mudra* and it tells us that he is going to give one of his sermons."

"What's in the jar?" I asked.

"Medicine," he said. "This is the Medicine Buddha. He heals the sick. Many people come to this temple and pray to the Buddha to heal them."

He pointed to the well beside the Buddha. There was a wooden roof above the well supported by posts and a ledge of stone around

it. Many ladles lay on the ledge.

“When people drink spring water from that well, it heals them. It can restore sight to the blind,” he said, with a smile that made me uncomfortable. “Do you want to try some of that water?”

“No,” I said. I was getting scared.

He laughed and walked away. When he was out of sight, I walked over to the well and scooped up some water with one of the ladles and tasted it. It didn’t taste different from the water I drank at home, and I didn’t feel anything special. But the yard at the temple was special to me.

The Shitennoji monks returned from their rounds of collecting alms. They walked in single file wearing their straw umbrella hats, black robes and straw sandals. I watched, fascinated. The wonder of this unusual sight—all those monks in their uniform dress, and the order they maintained as they walked through the yard, made me wish I could get in line with them and follow them into their world. They gathered outside of the main hall. The leader of the monks struck a gong and they all chanted a Sutra. The sounds of the chanting to the beat of the *mokugyo*, the wooden fish-shaped drum, and the occasional gong struck by the leader, had a mysterious and soothing effect. It was a feeling I’d never before experienced, and I didn’t want it to end.

I heard the temple bell. It made a deep thundering sound that vibrated through my body, telling me the sun was setting. It was time to take my cousin home.

I looked forward to our trips to Shitennoji. It was a time when I could play with boys my own age, or when I felt like it, just sit by the Medicine Buddha and dream about a different life. As Matsu and I were about to leave for the temple playground one Sunday morning, I called out to my uncle, who was in the lavatory. “I’m taking Matsu to the Shitennoji playground.” He didn’t answer. I repeated myself, but still no answer. Matsu was growing restless, so I took his hand and was about to leave the house when I heard an eerie groan behind me. I turned around and saw the lavatory door swing open and my uncle stumble out. I first saw the top of his hairy leg sticking out from his open kimono. I lifted my head, and as my gaze climbed up his

body, I saw his loincloth, his bare chest and finally his face. His mouth was wide open and his eyes were staring in my direction but not at me. I thought he was looking through me. He had a look of horror on his face. Then his eyes rolled back into his head and he gave out a sigh and collapsed.

“Uncle! Uncle! What’s the matter? Uncle!” I yelled, but there was no answer. I grabbed Matsu and ran to call my aunt. It was too late; the stroke had killed him. Only six months had passed since I’d moved in with my new guardians, and now the man who had, however reluctantly, provided me with support was gone.

Chapter 2

I'd never heard the name Ishinden before Aunt Hiino said she was sending me there to live. It was only a few kilometers from Tsu City where I was born, but it could have been on the other side of the world for all my nine-year-old mind could fathom.

"I have something important to tell you," Hiino said.

I tensed and looked at the floor, avoiding her gaze. I'd been frightened ever since Uncle's death; frightened I might be thrown onto the street. I had sensed a change in my aunt's attitude toward me after his death. She was still kind, but I could feel her anxiety, and it made me anxious too. Then one morning Uncle Kentaro, the patriarch of our family, came to speak with Hiino in private. He was tall and heavysset and looked very serious, and I knew something awful was about to occur.

"You are going to live with a couple named Bunkichi and Hisa Sawaki," Hiino said. "They are associates of Uncle Kentaro's father-in-law. Bunkichi has a lantern business in Ishinden."

I continued staring down and said nothing. But I kept tapping my foot on the floor and I couldn't stop. I'm certain that the panic I was feeling didn't go unnoticed by my aunt.

"I'm sure you'll be happy with your new guardians," she said, patting me on the head.

There was something in Hiino's voice that wasn't very convincing. Did she really believe I would be happy with these new people? I didn't look at her and I still said nothing.

"Now that I have no husband to help me, I can't take care of you and Matsu together." She was trying to explain but it didn't make me feel any better.

The next day, Uncle Kentaro took me to my new guardians' home. A huge lantern hung from the top of the entrance with some characters brushed on it that I couldn't read. My uncle slid open one of the four *shoji* doors and we entered an earthen floor vestibule. The ceiling was high and the house looked much larger than my aunt Hiino's.

"Hello. Is anybody home?" Kentaro called out. Nobody responded. He took me by the hand and led me onto a *tatami* room

a few feet above the vestibule. Many lanterns, cans of glue, paper and candles were strewn along the room in no particular order. The contrast to my father's orderly workshop was striking. The *tatami* mats were creaking below my feet and I feared they might give way. We walked around the mess to one side of the room where a half-open sliding door led to another room.

A man and a woman sat by a low table in one corner. Leftovers from their last meal lay on dishes in the corner of the table, along with an almost empty bottle of *sake*.

The woman wore a bright orange kimono with a yellow and blue flower design around the hem. She was emptying her long thin pipe into an already overflowing ashtray when she noticed us standing there. She nudged the man, who tried to focus his glassy eyes on us.

"Come in and sit down," he said, slurring his words.

My uncle introduced them to me as Bunkichi and Hisa. He appeared embarrassed. I don't think he expected to find them in such a messy room or to see Bunkichi so obviously drunk. "These are your new parents," he said.

I nervously stared at my feet, but as soon as I heard the two men talking over arrangements, I looked up and studied my new guardians. The bright red face on Bunkichi seemed too large for his torso. His oversized belly, protruding from an otherwise thin frame, stuck out over the sash of his cotton kimono, which he wore rather sloppily. When he spoke, he got excited and his face grew even redder.

I looked at Hisa. Her hair was thinning and had tints of gray. She smiled at me, displaying two missing front teeth. Still, I thought that she was pretty. Her colorful kimono and made-up face gave her a more feminine look than the casually dressed women I was used to seeing. The warmth of her smile relaxed me. She appeared mild mannered and kind. My fear of being abandoned dissolved and I felt relieved.

"You be a good boy now and do whatever your new parents ask," Kentaro said. He smiled at me—clearly an uncomfortable smile—and said goodbye. I could sense that he wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible.

I stood there not knowing what to do.

Finally Hisa got up and said, "Follow me." She took me back through the room adjacent to the vestibule with all the lanterns strewn around to a small room on the other side of the house. She slid open the sliding door and said, "This will be your room."

Hisa opened the closet on the far side of the room and told me to put my belongings alongside the sole *futon* mattress on the shelf inside. The smell of mildew was strong, and I hesitated putting my bag of belongings in the closet. Hisa waited. Not wanting to make a bad impression, I did as she asked.

"You must be tired," she said. "Get some rest." Then, without another word, she left the room.

It was a small room—an empty room, other than four walls, a *tatami* mat floor and the closet. When I closed the closet, the smell of mildew became faint and tolerable. But I couldn't rest. I was too nervous. Even when my father was alive, and I lived with my family, I never took afternoon naps. I always had to be doing something.

This was the first time I ever had my own room. I had dreamed of having my own room when I'd lived with my bratty cousin Matsu, a room where he wouldn't be constantly bothering me. But now, sitting with my back to the wall, looking around at nothing but four walls, thinking of my sisters and brother, I felt lonely. I even missed my brother Toshi, though we were constantly fighting.

I sat there through most of the afternoon. I think it was the longest time I had ever stayed alone in one place in my life. I would get up occasionally and peek through the doorway to see if Bunkichi was working in the front room, but he never appeared. Late that afternoon I heard footsteps in the front room, so I ran to the doorway to check. Bunkichi was leaving the house by himself.

I was hungry. As long as I thought Bunkichi and Hisa were together in the main room, I didn't want to go there. I don't know why. Now that I knew only Hisa would be there, I walked across the front room and slid open the screen to the main room. Hisa was sitting on the same spot she had been hours before when my uncle and I first entered the house. The table was still piled with dishes.

"When is dinner?" I asked.

She was startled. Then she realized it was me. "Saikichi, come in," she said.

I walked over to the cluttered table and stood there. She didn't ask me to sit down.

"When is dinner?" I repeated.

"Dinner?" she said. "Oh, yes, dinner."

But she didn't say anymore. It was as if I had woken her from a dream. Then, seeming to clear her mind, she said. "Saikichi, can you please take these dishes and bring them to the kitchen sink."

That wouldn't alleviate my hunger, but it was something to do. It took my mind off food. I picked up the dishes and utensils, piled them up, brought them to the kitchen and placed them in the sink. I heard Hisa yelling from the main room. "Saikichi, wash the dishes and then bring a kitchen rag with you when you return."

After washing the dishes, I returned to Hisa with the rag in my hand. She looked at it and said, "That is for wiping dishes, bring the light blue one."

I returned the dishrag and brought the light blue one.

"Could you wipe the table," she said.

I did as I was told and she pointed to a spot I had missed. I wondered how she could be so concerned about a spot on the table I was wiping and yet sit by the mess all afternoon. "When is dinner?" I said for the third time.

"Dinner?" she repeated for the third time. "Oh, yes." She took a coin from her pocket and said, "Go to the noodle vendor on the corner and bring back two bowls of *udon* noodles."

I took the money and said, "What about Bunkichi-san?"

"Bunkichi? You mean Father," she corrected me. "He probably won't be back until early morning, if he is going where I think he is."

I bought two bowls of noodles, Hisa and I ate and I cleared the table and washed the dishes. I returned to my room and Hisa seemed to return to a world of her own.

The following day, when Bunkichi appeared in the afternoon, having slept all morning, he tried to teach me how to repair lanterns. He would work on one lantern, stop in the middle, and go to another. He didn't seem to know how to concentrate on one job for very long.

He started to explain to me how to apply the glue to a patch on a lantern, when someone walked in the door.

"Bun, good morning." It was about two in the afternoon. The man looked at me and said nothing.

"Masa. Come in." Bunkichi pushed the lantern material to one side and shouted, "Hisa, bring us some *sake*."

"We are all out of *sake*," Hisa shouted from the adjoining room.

Bunkichi turned to me and said, "Saikichi, go to the corner liquor store and pick up a fifth of *sake*." He gave me some money, and the lantern repairing lesson was over for the day.

The world I'd just been delivered to was nothing like I'd first thought it would be. Bunkichi and Hisa lived in their own universe, and I was only a part of it when they found some use for me. And they found quite a bit of that: watching the store, cleaning and cooking, delivering lanterns and doing whatever else they could pass off to me. They paid little attention to me otherwise.

School was out of the question. Bunkichi had no intention of allowing me to go to school. He had work for me to do all day, and I guess he wasn't going to let school interfere with those regular duties. At first, being kept out of school didn't bother me.

I'd only gone to school for half of a semester when my father died and I had to be taken out. When I'd moved in with Aunt Hiino and Uncle Toraji, I was sent to a new school only to have to leave once again before completing a full year. I was in trouble most of the time I did go to school, fighting with other children and speaking out of turn and disrupting the lesson. Even when I was responding to something the student next to me had said, my loud voice always caused me to get caught.

Hisa, my new mother, was subject to fits of hysteria. I spoke to her the way I'd always talked to grownups and never thought I was impolite. But she would stop me in mid-sentence and scream, "That's not the way you address your parents!" and would hit me over the head with her pipe and the hot ashes would singe my hair.

Bunkichi, who I soon realized had a violent temper, would come home from a gambling stint drunk and yell at Hisa for something trivial. She, in return, would then find some reason to yell at me. I became confused and frightened—fearful of getting scolded or

beaten whenever I did anything. My fear of making a mistake only led to me making more mistakes.

After a few months of living with my adoptive parents, never knowing when one or the other would lose their temper, I became accepting of my life. I didn't like it, but realizing there was nothing I could do to change it, I developed ways of making the best of the bad situation. I performed my duties at home and made deliveries for Bunkichi while drifting into my own world of thought. I fantasized about a future life in which I would learn the secret of peace from the Medicine Buddha. Though I did the work expected of me, I did it out of habit, paying little attention to the task.

I was on my way home from a delivery one day; the sky had cleared after three days of solid rain, but the roads were still quite muddy. The main street of Ishinden took me past a *miso* factory, a barbershop, a noodle house and street vendors selling fruits and vegetables. I was having an internal conversation with the Medicine Buddha, telling him of my troubles at home. He was very real to me, while the stores appeared as though they had come out of a dream. I paid little attention to where I was going. I walked by a ceramic store which sold little earthen Buddhist statues. On another day I might have stopped to stare through the store window, fascinated by the little figures, but this time I glanced at them and continued on my way. I had just turned onto the narrow side street leading to my house when the teeth of one of my *geta* sandals got caught in the mud. The Medicine Buddha disappeared. I pulled and pulled and the weight from pushing down on my other sandal caused it to get stuck. Finally, one of the ropes that held the sandal on my foot broke, and I fell back into a ditch and was drenched in mud. My clothes were soaking wet. I started to shiver. Tears streamed down my cheeks. I truly despised my life.

I turned around and saw Bunkichi walking toward me. He looked angry, the way he usually looked after losing in a card game. He didn't realize who I was at first, and almost tripped over me. When he recognized me, his anger at his poor luck turned to rage against me.

"What the hell are you crying about you little coward?" he growled, and then added, "If there's one thing I hate it's a weakling."

His admonition only made me cry more.

"Maybe the back of my hand will help you regain some courage!" he said, as he smacked me across the side of my head. I looked up trying unsuccessfully to hold back tears. He got angrier and smacked me on the mouth and then on my nose. Blood began to drip from my nose onto the mud. I wiped my face with my sleeve. What had started as shame toward myself turned into hatred of Bunkichi.

"I hate you," I yelled.

He smacked me again. But I was out of control.

"I hate your guts," I screamed over and over. "I wish you were dead."

Each time I cursed him he hit me, but nothing he did could shut me up. Finally he stopped beating me. His hands must have started to hurt. He just stared at me with disgust.

"Now get yourself home, there's work to be done."

Bunkichi walked away, and I continued to sit there in the mud. I promised myself that I would never cry again, but the tears continued to flow. I fantasized about punching Bunkichi in the nose and knocking him down. I was beating him and he was begging me to leave him alone, saying he would never lay a hand on me again. But the cold penetrated my whole body and took me away from my fantasy.

I didn't want to return home, knowing that I would have to face Bunkichi again, and that Hisa was sure to scold me for ruining my clothes. So I picked myself up, wiped some of the mud from my clothes and the blood from my face, and walked to the house where my older sister Sai was working as a live-in maid. Her master's house was about a kilometer from mine. Barefoot, carrying my broken *geta* in my hands, I stood in front of the gate where Sai worked.

Feeling my new life to be meaningless, I'd gotten into the habit of visiting Sai. I knew that she was fearful of losing her job when she took time out from her duties to talk with me, but I couldn't help myself. I'd promise myself never to visit her again during working hours, but here I was, this time feeling more miserable than ever. I waited outside her employer's house for some time. It was a grand house constructed of plastered mud mixed with straw and capped

with a tile roof. A thick wall about my height surrounded it. There was a large wooden gate at the entrance, but the help and delivery people entered through a smaller gate at the side of the house, which is where I waited for Sai. Workers walked in and out of the side gate ignoring me. I was determined to stay there until my sister came out.

Finally, Sai walked out looking nervously around her. She stood by the entrance, keeping a distance from me. She wore a stern look, but I was used to it and knew that she was acting.

"I've told you before that if I'm seen out here when I'm supposed to be working, I could get fired," she said. "Now go back to Bunkichi's this very minute!"

I could barely hear her because she kept her voice down and stayed a few meters away. She wanted to make it appear that we were two unrelated people on the street in case anyone from the house was looking in our direction. Her cross expression and harsh words weren't very convincing. I stood there all muddled, teary-eyed and bloody. Sai hesitated. Then she must have noticed the blood on my clothes because her expression changed. She had a look of real concern.

"Are you all right?"

Sniffing, I nodded.

She walked over to me and looked at my face and bloodstained clothing more carefully. Shaking her head, she took out a handkerchief and wiped my face.

"You were fighting again, weren't you?"

I didn't say anything. I don't know why I didn't tell her that Bunkichi beat me, but something inside of me prevented my doing so. She put two coins in my hand and closed my fingers over them. Her actions only made me choke up more, and I continued to sob. I looked up at her, and she looked around once more; then she took me in her arms and held me until I calmed down.

"Now go back home quickly," she said, wiping the mud from her clothing.

I was no longer crying, and I started to walk away. Turning my head in her direction as I was walking, I saw her quickly turn so as not to meet my gaze. She went back inside her employer's house,

and I slowly dragged myself home. “I swear I’ll never go to her crying again,” I repeated to myself over and over on my way home.

Though I did stay away from Sai’s place and didn’t see her until many years later, I thought of her often. She’d been like a mother to me from the time of my mother’s death until the death of my father. I felt a desire to see her many times while I was living with Bunkichi and Hisa, especially during periods of despondency, but I was a very stubborn child and managed to force myself to keep from visiting her again.

Chapter 3

Our town was divided into two zones, an inner and an outer. The inner zone was enclosed by a moat surrounding Senjuji—the Pure Land Buddhist temple that ruled over the town—and by a small settlement that served its community. I lived in the zone outside the moat. The outer area, like the inner, was a world unto itself. It, too, was a busy village; its main difference was that it was comprised to a great extent of shady businesses such as gambling joints and whorehouses. The people living within the moat didn't usually mix with the rest of us unless they needed some work done and there was nobody in inner Ishinden who could do it.

Bunkichi's lantern business was typical of a number of businesses in outer Ishinden. It was turned into a gambling parlor in the evenings. One of my jobs was to stand outside the store and watch for the authorities. I would make rice dumplings and sell them. If I saw any police, I would run inside and warn Bunkichi. Then together we would send the crowd away while we quickly moved things around, changing the room back into the lantern store. I spent part of my day working in the store and the other part cooking the rice dumplings. In Bunkichi's eyes I was indispensable to running his business.

The public baths were my only means of escape from the oppressive atmosphere at home. I went there as often as I could get Bunkichi to give me the money. I'd become the cleanest boy in Ishinden. Returning from the bath one day I heard Bunkichi in front of our house screaming at a policeman.

Bunkichi had worked himself into such a frenzy, I don't think he even noticed me as I walked by him and the policeman and into the house. Once inside, I stayed close enough to the entrance to be able to see the two men and hear what the argument was about.

"What do you mean he's got to go to school? How the hell am I going to run my business without him?" Bunkichi said, waving his arms.

I wondered if the policeman had any idea which business Bunkichi was referring to.

“That’s not my problem,” the policeman retorted. “The law is the law.”

“Which law says I’ve got to send my boy to school?”

“The law of our land,” the policeman said, in a loud voice, putting his face close to Bunkichi’s. “The Meiji constitution requires all children of elementary school age to attend school. If you don’t want to go to jail, you’d better see to it that your boy goes.”

I was elated. I hadn’t enjoyed school that much before, but the thought of escaping Bunkichi’s clutches by being in the classroom filled me with excitement. Now I had another place of refuge besides the public baths. The school, like our house, was in outer Ishinden.

I started school a month into the semester. Because I had had to leave school twice, having moved both times in the middle of semesters, I was once again in the first grade. It didn’t bother me that I was older than the other children. I was happy to be in school from the moment I entered my new classroom.

I looked around at the thirty students—children dressed in kimonos—mostly cotton. The boys, at least a large number of them, wore an apron to keep their kimonos from getting soiled. There were a few boys with splash patterns, but most of them, like me, wore dark blue kimonos. I didn’t have an apron, and my kimono was clearly one of the shabbiest, but that didn’t bother me. I was happy not to have to wear that silly looking apron, and I was certain that none of the other children were aware that it was because I couldn’t afford one. I felt properly dressed. There was only one boy who stood out and that was because he looked so wealthy. He wore a striped silk kimono, a formal silver gray *haori* coat, and, *hakama*, the divided skirt, with white *tabi* socks.

That first day, Mr. Hashimoto, the class teacher, took me gently by the arm and led me to the front of the room. All eyes were on me. I felt a little nervous but also enjoyed being the center of attention.

“This is a new student,” Hashimoto-sensei announced. “He will be with us for the remainder of the semester. I want you all to welcome him.”

I bowed to the other students and introduced myself. I told them my name and where I lived. Perhaps, in my nervousness, I spoke too loud because I heard a few students chuckle. I didn’t like it.

Hashimoto-sensei must have given them a look because they immediately quieted down.

"You certainly have a powerful voice," Hashimoto said with a laugh, as he led me to my desk.

He wasn't upset with me for speaking loudly, as teachers in my previous schools had been; he was just commenting. I liked him immediately. Though he wasn't at all threatening, the students obeyed him. I wasn't used to teachers who displayed such warmth. I hadn't ever seen anyone dressed like him either. He wore a Western-style suit, white shirt and a stiffly starched collar under a vest. His suspenders held up his slacks, his white shirt filled the gap between the bottom of his skimpy vest and his trousers, and he wore sandals instead of shoes.

I wasn't in the class long before I saw the well-dressed boy crying and some boys around him laughing. I didn't pay much attention to the incident. Hashimoto-sensei went over to the group, said something, and the boys stopped laughing. I didn't understand what it was all about. The next day, the rich boy was crying again.

As I got to know everyone, I became friendly with a group of boys who were the wildest in the class. When we were playing in the schoolyard during recess, I asked Tsutomu Morikawa, my closest friend in the group, why the rich boy was crying.

"That's Juntaro Tani," Tsutomu said. "He's always crying. His grandmother brings him to school, and he won't let her go home. Since she's not allowed in the classroom, she stays out in the hall all day by the corridor window so that Juntaro can turn around and see her whenever he feels anxious. If she goes to the lavatory and one of the other boys notices it before Juntaro, he'll say, 'Your grandmother went home.' It never fails to make Juntaro cry."

I felt sorry for Juntaro. However, I learned during our calligraphy class that he had a talent that may have caused some of the students to feel jealous. I wondered if it was one of the reasons they picked on him.

"Calligraphy time," Hashimoto sensei called out. "Who wants to pass out the brushes, ink stones and *sumi*-ink sticks?"

My hand went up first. Hashimoto-sensei pointed to me and I jumped up, excited to have been picked, and went to the closet to

get the equipment.

“Remember,” he said, walking up and down the isles, checking that all of our desks were cleared of books and that we were sitting up straight, “your posture and attitude are most important when you write. If you are not attentive to your body, the characters will be poorly executed. Tsutomu-kun! Get those books off your desk!”

He waited until everyone was quiet and the desks were cleared of everything other than our calligraphy paper, and then he turned to me. “Okay, Saikichi, give out the brushes, stones and *sumi*-ink sticks.”

I passed out the equipment to each student and returned to my desk. I felt important for the first time since moving in with Bunkichi and Hisa.

“Now, before you pick up your brush,” Hashimoto-sensei said, “make sure your ink is sufficiently thick. Sit up straight, take a deep breath and relax your shoulders. Your writing will reflect the way you’ve made the ink in your ink-stone. When I give the word, you will wet the stone and grind your ink. Remember,” he reiterated, “keep your posture upright.” He looked around the classroom.

I picked up my ink-stick, anxious to get started.

“Saikichi,” he shouted, looking at me and shaking his head with a sigh, “I didn’t say begin!” I put my ink-stick down and sat up straight again. He looked around once more to make sure everyone was paying attention. “Now, begin.”

While most of the students were still grinding their *sumi*-ink sticks on the stones, making ink, I was brushing characters.

“Saikichi!” Hashimoto-sensei shouted again. “Put your brush down. You have to make the ink thick before you start to write.”

We wrote a page full of characters for the word ‘tree.’ When we finished, we were to line up in front of the teacher’s desk. I raced to the front of the room to be first in line. Hashimoto-sensei checked my paper.

“Saikichi-kun,” he said, shaking his head. “You have to keep the characters within the lines. You’re in such a rush to finish first that you forget the purpose of the exercise.” He shut his eyes, shook his head and bit his lower lip. I knew what it meant. He did this whenever he was frustrated with me, which was often.

Sensei made corrections on my paper. It seemed as though there were more corrections than characters. I took my paper back to my seat feeling disappointed. On my way back to my seat, I glanced over at Juntaro Tani's paper. His characters were perfectly executed. They reminded me of some of the signs in stores that were brushed by professionals. I couldn't believe that someone younger than me could brush something so beautiful.

"How do you do that?" I asked, pointing to his paper. His body tightened as though he thought I was going to taunt him. But then he realized I was seriously referring to his beautiful calligraphy, because he looked up and smiled.

"I can help you if you want," he said.

I smiled and said "Thanks."

Juntaro worked with me on my calligraphy for the rest of the semester, though I never really got it. And, with me as his friend, nobody dared tease him anymore. At the end of the year Juntaro's parents sent him to a private school, and I never saw him again.

School continued to be a place of refuge for me through the next four years. I was never much of a student, but I loved the atmosphere, especially recess when I could play with other students. Though my friend Tsutomu helped me with my academic subjects, my grades were barely passable. I volunteered for whatever chores had to be done in class, and my abundance of energy made me popular with the teachers and the other students. I only told Tsutomu about Bunkichi's gambling parlor since we had become good friends. He promised to keep it a secret from the others.

Sometimes, on the way home from school, I would leave the other boys and stand by the entrance to inner Ishinden. I liked to look beyond a large gate, which opened to a bridge that led you over the moat to the inner zone. The great temple bell of Senjuji echoed from inner Ishinden, ringing at dawn and dusk, reminding me of the bell at Shitennoji where I'd taken my cousin Matsu to play. Though there were no signs posted and no guards at the cross bridges, people on the outside didn't cross unless they had specific business with one of the temple parishioners or with one of the businesses on

the Senjuji side. I didn't cross to the other side because everyone I knew obeyed this unwritten law.

When I returned from school one day, I saw Hisa powdering her face in front of a mirror. Her hair was set in a married woman's coiffure and she wore a black kimono. I asked her where she was going.

"To Senjuji," she said. "I'm going to the funeral of the wife of my former boss at the teahouse."

"Can I go with you?" I asked. This was my chance, I thought.

"No. You can't go there without a special invitation," Hisa said, putting on the final touches of her make-up. "Even I am only allowed to go because my former employer is accompanying me. He's waiting outside with the other girls. Now don't bother me, I have to go."

The following day at school I asked Tsutomu about inner Ishinden. His father was a doctor and sometimes had to make calls to some of the families at the sub-temples of Senjuji.

"The *osho* of Senjuji is the most important person in Ishinden," Tsutomu said. "Even the Shogun's government, before the Meiji revolution, didn't interfere with the *osho*. My father says that is why crooks, gamblers, and whores came here when the Shoguns controlled the country. These 'lowlifes' preferred the rule of a Buddhist priest to the severe rule of the military. They weren't allowed to live in inner Ishinden so they set up their operations outside the moat. That's the origin of our part of town."

When Tsutomu said 'lowlifes,' I glared at him. He looked away, and I knew that he regretted his choice of words. But he was right. I could think of no better word to describe Bunkichi.

Thanks to the distraction of school my first four years with Hisa and Bunkichi had gone by quickly. For six days each week I'd been in school most of the day and spent many afternoons delivering lanterns. Unfortunately the government only required us to go to school for four years. There was no way Bunkichi would allow me to go beyond the mandatory period. The thought of spending everyday with my adoptive parents was unbearable.

There was one incident that had made me think about more than the dread of life with my adoptive parents. It brought home to me the realization of how fragile life was—teaching me one of the basic principles of Buddhism.

During that final school year, my classmates and I used to pass the red-light district on our way home from school. We would chat and tease each other, competing for the attention of our group. On one occasion, I heard a commotion at one of the brothels. A group of prostitutes mingling outside a house next to the road where we were walking were engaged in a lively conversation about something that seemed to shock and excite them.

“Quiet down,” I said to my friends. I wanted to hear what the women were talking about.

One of the boys said, “I wonder what happened?”

“I can check it out, if you want.” I bragged.

“You can’t just walk in there.”

“I sure can. I used to play hide and seek there when I was younger.”

One of the boys whispered to Tsutomu, “That’s because his mother ...”

I couldn’t hear any more, but I was pretty sure I knew what he said. I grabbed him by the shirt.

“I didn’t say anything! I swear,” he said.

I let him go.

“Come on, Saikichi. Let’s see you go in,” another boy said.

I hesitated and someone chuckled.

I got really angry, but I couldn’t make out who’d said it. I stared at the group, but everyone shut up.

“All right,” I said, and walked toward the brothel.

I made my way through the group of women who had gathered, catching bits of their conversation.

“What a shame!” one of the prostitutes said.

“Well, it serves the old bugger right. He should know his limits,” said another laughing.

While I was maneuvering my way through the circle of women, one of them, an old friend of Hisa’s, called out to me. “Hey, Saikichi, where do you think you’re going?”

She was one of the women who went to the funeral at inner Ishinden with Hisa. I recalled Hisa saying she was going with her former employer and some of the girls. So this was the 'Tea House.' I suspected Hisa was a former prostitute, and this confirmed it. I ignored the woman and continued walking into the building.

"That little guy thinks he owns the place," she said.

I climbed the stairs to the second floor where the bedrooms were. The smell of tobacco, liquor and makeup was overwhelming. I heard a woman's wailing voice. It felt so eerie I wanted to turn and go back down, but I was too curious to turn back. I reached the top of the stairs and saw that one of the bedroom doors was open.

I stood in the hallway where I could see into the room while remaining hidden. A man was lying on a futon, lifeless, his mouth open and his eyes bulging. Standing over him was the wailing woman. A young man, I assumed was her son, had his arm around her shoulders. He looked very uncomfortable. The woman muttered in a choked voice, as if addressing the dead man.

"How could you do this to us? Here of all places!"

Once more I felt a strong desire to run. But I didn't. I knew the other boys were waiting for a full report, and I had bragged myself into a situation I had to see through to the end. I stood there watching. On the other side of the mattress sat a girl of about seventeen in a red kimono puffing smoke from her long narrow tobacco pipe, looking quite disinterested. I remembered the people crying at my father's funeral and me not being able to cry. My sisters and brother were crying, but for some reason I couldn't cry. Was I like this girl sitting there unmoved by the whole scene? I felt sick.

Once outside again, I no longer thought of the brothel as the place where I had played as a young boy before I had started school. It became a disturbing place, and I didn't want to go near it again. But I hid those feelings when I met my friends in the street.

"I saw a dead man," I told them. "He died while doing it."

They all laughed and I laughed with them. But I wasn't laughing inside.

Though I had been to the funerals of my mother and father, and watched my uncle die of a stroke, I hadn't thought much about death itself. I was experiencing a new feeling, an awareness of life's

transience that I'd never felt before. It made me think of my father carrying me to the hilltop on clear days to watch the sunset—the assurance of his embrace; the belief that he would always be there for me; the feeling of permanence.

I learned later that Zen master Dogen, the founder of the Soto School of Zen Buddhism, had lost his father when he was three and his mother when he was eight. As he watched the incense smoke at his mother's funeral float up in the air and disappear, he became profoundly aware of the impermanence of life. You'd think that having experienced three deaths before the incident at the brothel, I too might have felt life's fragility. But I wasn't a very sensitive child. I remember gobbling up the sweets they served at the funerals of my parents and enjoying the pageantry. I didn't think about mortality. It wasn't until this last year of school, when I was twelve years old and saw the dead man in the brothel that I felt an inkling of the impermanence of life.

Chapter 4

No longer having school as an escape, I was once again spending most of my day in that oppressive home atmosphere with Bunkichi and Hisa. But just when my loneliness and desperation seemed about to engulf me, something happened that raised my spirits. I was at the paper store waiting for the clerk to get through with the previous customer so I could give him my order. I was so caught up in my own woes that I didn't recognize the customer waiting. The stores back then didn't display anything in the front room. The clerk stood behind a counter and took your order. You had to know what you wanted and ask for it. Then the clerk would go into the back of the store where all the different kinds of paper were kept.

There was a large earthen floor vestibule at ground level when you entered the store, which led up about a meter to the *tatami* room where you placed your order. I was sitting on the ledge of the *tatami* at the front of the room facing the entrance with my feet dangling above the earthen floor. I heard a voice from behind me.

"Saikichi, how are you?"

It was Chiaki Morita. He woke me from my self-absorbed trance.

"Hi, Chiaki," I said. "Buying paper for your father's business?" He worked with his father in a family frame and paper mounting company, and I used to run into him working outside his father's workshop when I went on errands. His house was on the same street as mine.

Chiaki came over and sat by me. "No, as a matter of fact, I'm buying paper for my painting."

"Really? I didn't know you painted." I knew nothing about painting, but I was curious. I'd never met an artist before. Chiaki was six years older than I was, but only slightly taller. He had thick steel-rimmed glasses which slid down his nose when he got excited. As he talked to me about art, he became animated and constantly had to push his glasses back up the ridge of his tiny nose. He told me that he studied poetry and calligraphy as well as painting, but it was painting that he truly loved.

The clerk returned with Chiaki's order and that ended our conversation. I was disappointed, and I think he was too. As he was

leaving the store, he turned and said, "If you are interested in seeing some of my father's art books, come by and visit us when you have some free time."

There was something about Chiaki, a gentleness I'd rarely seen in our neighborhood, which drew me to him. I took him up on the invitation. The following week I was at the entrance to Chiaki's house calling out to him. His mother opened the door. Chiaki was standing behind her.

"So this is the boy you've been telling me about," Mrs. Morita said, giving me a warm friendly smile. She was a tiny woman and very spirited. If it weren't for her graying hair I would have thought she was Chiaki's younger sister. I liked her immediately.

Chiaki led me toward the living room where Mr. Morita was sitting in one corner with another man. They both had cups in their hands, and there was a half-filled liter bottle of *sake* by Mr. Morita's side. As I entered, they were absorbed in a discussion of the paintings in an art book lying on the floor between the two men.

Chiaki's father looked at me and smiled. I returned his smile with a bow, and I followed Chiaki to the opposite end of the room, studying the two men as unobtrusively as I could. I had often seen Chiaki's father working in his shop at the front of the house. The shop doors were always wide open to release the fumes of the glues and paints, I suppose. He was a short stocky man with a tired but friendly expression. Though they were sitting crosslegged on the floor, it was clear that the guest was at least a head taller than Mr. Morita. His hair was thinning and gray and I would guess he was quite a bit older than his host. They were both dressed simply but neatly and, though their dress was not that much different from that of the men who frequented my adoptive parents' home, their demeanor was very different. Something in their interaction felt new and refreshing. They obviously cared about each other. When Mr. Morita spoke, his friend looked as though he was truly listening—wanting to know what Morita had to say. At home, the few times when Bunkichi's friends visited, each person seemed interested only in his own ideas and looked bored when anyone else spoke.

The guest was showing Mr. Morita a book of paintings from the Southern Sung Dynasty in China. I gathered he'd brought the book

with him to show his friend. When Mr. Morita saw me looking in his direction, he gestured.

"Come here," he said. "Are you interested in art?"

I went to where they were sitting. They were looking at a painting by the 12th century Chinese painter Bayen of a solitary fisherman in a small canoe-like boat.

"I don't know," I said.

"Surely your teachers showed you paintings?"

I shook my head. "We did practice calligraphy," I said. "But I could never brush the characters so they would stay between the lines."

Mr. Morita laughed, a warm friendly laugh.

"Look at this one," the guest said, "nothing but a tiny boat and a fisherman in the vast sea."

"That's the beauty of it," Mr. Morita said. "The economy of brush strokes, the charm of its deficiencies. The perfection is felt despite its imperfection, or perhaps because of it. You can feel its *sabi*—its rustic unpretentiousness. That's because the painters of Southern Sung were *bunjinka*, men of letters, or priests, or both. They were not professional artists."

Morita picked up the bottle of *sake*, gesturing to his guest, who raised his glass to be filled. Then, as is the custom, the guest took the bottle and filled Morita's glass. I had nothing to say and they seemed to forget that I was there, so I quietly left the two of them and rejoined Chiaki. He was standing at the far end of the room by a delicately decorated alcove with a beautiful painting on a scroll hanging there. Beneath the scroll was a white porcelain bowl decorated with paintings of horses. We didn't have so much as an alcove or *tokonoma* in our house let alone any paintings to hang in it. What's more, in none of the houses I'd ever been, those of my friends or my aunts or uncles, had I seen any paintings or books.

I took it all in, the shelves full of books on literature, history and art, books titled in classical Japanese characters I couldn't read. Everything I saw fascinated me. Chiaki noticed me looking at the bowl.

"That's an *imari* porcelain," he said.

He said it as though I would know the name—probably known by most educated art enthusiasts. I nodded, trying to appear impressed.

“It’s a very precious piece. My grandfather had many rare works of art and antiques. When the government took away our samurai stipend in its attempt to democratize the country, Grandfather had to sell most of our valuable works of art. He loved that bowl so much it was the only one he refused to part with.”

I nodded again. “It is beautiful.”

Then I looked more closely at the painting on the scroll hanging in the *tokonoma*. I was mesmerized by it.

“Did you do this?” I asked Chiaki.

“I wish I had,” he said, with a laugh. “That’s *The God of Thunder and Lightning*, painted by Ikkei Ukita, a 19th century Japanese brush painter.” He walked to the bookshelf, pulled a large art book from the shelf and brought it to me.

“Would you like to see more paintings by Ukita-sensei?”

“Yes.”

Chiaki opened the book, and the two of us looked through it—for Chiaki, probably the hundredth time, but for me it was the excitement of a new world opening. As I looked at the art of Ukita-sensei, I could hear Chiaki’s father’s voice in the background critiquing the 12th and 13th century Chinese paintings.

“You see how Bayen evokes a sense of the great expanse of the sea with the simple brush strokes for the lone fisherman in his small boat? How the boat floats helplessly on the vast world of sea? And look at this one by Mokkei; see how the wagtail on the withered lotus leaf suggests a rustic poverty, the essence of simple beauty—the *wabi* and *sabi* that the men of true artistic sensibility in our country cherish so ...”

‘*A lone fisherman in a small boat, a wagtail on a withered lotus, the essence of simple beauty...*’ His words provoked a new awareness in me that served as a guide to this new world of art. I’d never heard such beautiful expressions for poverty and loneliness. It gave me a new way to look at my own inner turmoil—to give some meaning to it. From that day on, I went as often as possible to the Moritas. When Bunkichi found out about my visits, he warned me to stay away.

“They’ll fill your head with strange ideas that will only twist your mind,” he said.

Hisa added her admonitions, though they only made me more determined. As she began to watch my moves more closely, questioning me whenever I left the house, I'd put a towel around my neck and announce, "I'm going to the public bath." The one thing I learned from living with Bunkichi and Hisa was how to come up with a quick lie. Nothing was going to stand in the way of my visits to the Moritas. I would make sure to wet the towel at the neighborhood well before returning from my regular visits to Chiaki.

On my next visit to Chiaki's he showed me paintings by his teacher, Yuinen Hoyama, a disciple of Ukita. Then upon my insistence, he took out some of his own paintings. A few of them were simple brush paintings of bamboo and maple trees with no color and few strokes.

"These look like the Chinese paintings in your father's books," I said.

Chiaki laughed. "As you develop an eye for painting, you'll see the absurdity of comparing my work to that of the old masters."

He showed me some sketches he'd made of our neighborhood and one of inner Ishinden as seen from outside the moat. He'd used color for the picture of inner Ishinden, and I thought it was beautiful. When I told him so, he quickly put his drawings and paintings away and brought us back to the pictures in his book of Ukita's paintings.

"Why don't you sell your paintings?" I asked, knowing that his family's paper mounting business was not successful. "You spend so much time papering *shoji* and *fusuma* screens and mounting paper on scrolls for such little reward."

He smiled. "Even Ukita-sensei sold his paintings for little more than the price of the materials. His inspiration didn't come from any desire to make money. The freedom one feels in his paintings, like those of the Chinese painters of the Southern Sung, comes from his having a free spirit. The comforts most of us desire meant very little to him."

I was puzzled and fascinated. I'd never heard anyone talk like this before. Chiaki must have read the confused look on my face.

"Let me tell you a story my teacher told me of his first encounter with Ukita-sensei.

“When my teacher was a young man and very passionate about art, he saw the paintings of Ikkei Ukita. He was so taken by the beauty of the renowned artist’s paintings that he made up his mind to find the master and ask for permission to study with him. His parents tried to discourage him from what they felt was a fruitless endeavor. They told him that he was wasting his time, that a famous painter like Ukita would never accept him as a disciple.

“My teacher was determined to find Ukita and no amount of pleading from his parents would discourage him. He knew the district in Kyoto where Ukita lived and felt certain that he would have no trouble locating the home of such a famous artist.”

Chiaki had barely gotten into his story when I found myself stirred with thoughts of this new world. The strong resolve of the young Hoyama did something to fill me with hope.

Chiaki continued, “After searching the area, my teacher finally found the master’s house at the back of a group of tenements all under one long roof. He was surprised to find a painter as revered as Ukita-sensei living in this tiny hovel in a back alley near the communal latrines and the water pump.

“My teacher stood at the entranceway and called out. Ukitasensei welcomed him to his home.

“‘Please wait here,’ Ukita told him. ‘I’ll be with you in a short while.’

“My teacher noticed that the house leaned to one side and there were stains on the *tatami* from an apparent leaky roof. Then he saw the master’s wife sweeping pieces of broken pottery into a dustbin and mumbling to nobody in particular.

“‘I told him the string would never hold, but he wouldn’t listen to me.’

“Ukita-sensei had apparently hung a pot with flowers from a rafter in order to sketch it and water from the leaky roof must have dripped onto the fragile string used to hang the pot. The string broke and the pot went crashing to the ground into many pieces. My teacher realized how difficult it must have been for the wife of an artist so absorbed in his work that he didn’t concern himself with practical matters. He looked around at the sketches and paintings amidst the

chaos and was once more dazzled by the power of expression in Ukita's art.

"Ukita sat on the veranda talking with a sandal repairman who was fixing the teeth on Ukita's *geta* sandals. At the corner of the room sat another man dressed in fine clothes, apparently a Kyoto Nobleman, who was waiting for the master to attend to him. He was drinking tea and looking very impatient as the master gave his attention to the sandal repairman. The master looked over at the Nobleman and said, 'I'll be with you in a minute,' and then resumed his conversation with the man repairing his sandals.

"Don't forget that this was a time when social status was strictly observed in Japan," Chiaki told me. "Ukita-sensei loved painting and the freedom of expression it brought to his life. When he dealt with people, whether they were noblemen or repairmen, he maintained the same freedom; he made no distinctions. He followed his own beliefs and neither money nor social status meant anything to him."

Listening to the story of a man who wasn't controlled by the conventions to which others felt bound, filled me with hope. If Ukita sensei could live that way, why couldn't I? First I had to become an artist. I would take painting lessons from Chiaki and create the lifestyle of an artist for myself. I had the idea that if I learned to paint, I would also free myself from the oppressiveness of living with Bunkichi and Hisa. But it would be difficult. I would have to prevent my family from learning about my new endeavor.

I decided to keep my brushes and sketchpad at Mitsu's fruit stand, which was just down the street from my home, and then get them on my way to my art lessons with Chiaki. Mitsu was Bunkichi's sister. She was a short chubby woman of jolly disposition and it was rare to catch her when she wasn't chewing on a piece of fruit. She had taken a special liking to me from the time I first moved in with her brother and sister-in-law. She was the only relative in my adopted family that I liked and trusted. She gave me seasonal fruit—apples, pears, oranges, tangerines and persimmons—whenever I passed her stand.

I arrived at Chiaki's home for my first lesson with a bag of fruit that Mitsui had given me.

"This wasn't necessary," Chiaki's mother said when I handed her the fruit.

I could tell from her expression, however, that she was grateful for the present. She led me to Chiaki's workspace. He had his own little room with a low desk and cans of brushes and sketchpads on it. Paintings at various stages of development were strewn all around. I was surprised at how messy his room was considering the neatness of the rest of the house. Chiaki cleared some space on the desk and invited me to sit by him. We made ink with our charcoal sticks and ink-blocks and he asked me to brush strokes as he did. I tried to copy his strokes.

"Take more time thinking about where you are going before you start your stroke," Chiaki said. "It's like you're trying to arrive at Tokyo without considering how you will get out of Ishinden."

I remembered Hashimoto-sensei's criticism of my calligraphy during class. How many times had he tried to slow me down with little success!

Chiaki told me to hold the brush and he put his hand around mine and moved my hand as we painted bamboo leaves. He had me try it by myself. Then he took my hand and repeated the practice until he was satisfied that my stroke was passable. He told me to make some sketches on my own and bring them back to him the following week.

The first chance I got, I picked up my brushes, pad and paints from Mitsui's and ran to the bridge that led across the moat to Senjuji temple. Chiaki's painting of inner Ishinden had inspired me. I painted the temple from the outer Ishinden side of the moat. I worked hard trying to get a likeness of the temple, but my hand seemed to have a mind of its own. I wasn't satisfied with my attempt, but I brought it to Chiaki for his critique anyway. He looked at it, smiled, and made a few brush strokes over my sketch.

"Now that's a little better," he said.

"A *little* better! You so easily made my jumble of strokes look like a temple resembling Senjuji." I was already feeling discouraged.

"Don't worry. You'll get it, eventually."

This was how he taught me. No matter how frustrated I was with my own progress, Chiaki worked with me in his calm manner, always

encouraging. I didn't want to give up, as much because I wanted to please Chiaki as from a desire to do something I could take pride in. The memory of my four years of struggle trying to make my calligraphy strokes respond to my wishes and the frustration at never really getting it only added to the realization that I was no artist. I couldn't paint.

As Chiaki's first disciple, I became aware of the difference in his and my motivation when it came to painting. It wasn't from any real desire to paint that I was drawn to the art, but rather from the idea that painting would make me free. Chiaki seemed to paint because of some inner drive to do so. He didn't ask for anything from his practice other than to paint. And he had a talent for it that I felt I lacked. I realized that painting wasn't for me. My apprenticeship with Chiaki, however, was not a waste of time. I learned from him that you have to find what you want to do and pursue it. You have to believe in yourself. It was the beginning of my search for something that would change my life.

Chapter 5

Bunkichi and I were walking with our lantern boxes, making the rounds of the village of Mukumoto about ten kilometers from Ishinden. We were delivering lanterns to customers in the area as we did each month. A thick fog enveloped the village and we could hardly see more than a few meters in front of us. Though I had been feeling more depressed than usual lately, having come to the realization I would never be an artist, something about this unique village helped pick up my spirits. It was quite an extraordinary place—a center for spiritualists, clairvoyants, and fortunetellers known as *inarioroshi*, who sell their spiritual wares to pilgrims on their way to the Ise Shrine. As we passed through the center of town we could hear a commotion up ahead, which was not uncommon in the area. This time, however, the uproar sounded particularly violent.

We hurried through fog in the direction of the noise until I was able to make out some of the people responsible for the racket. There were two groups lined up on opposite sides of the street. As I inched closer I knew by their dress that they were some of the unsavory characters I'd seen in the slums of Ishinden—many, I thought, frequented Bunkichi's gambling parlor. I could see the glitter of swords that some of the men wielded. There must have been about twenty men on each side, and they were screaming threats at each other. Those who didn't have long swords were swinging knives or short swords or sticks. I could feel my heart pumping, as the excitement of such a large-scale fight held me spellbound. I'd seen many fights in Ishinden, but they were usually one on one or a few men beating on a storeowner for not making a payment they referred to as protection money.

"It's a gang war," Bunkichi said, stopping in his tracks.

I remembered Bunkichi talking to Hisa a few days before about a group of outside gangsters trying to encroach upon the territory of the regular Ishinden mobsters. Bunkichi paid the Ishinden mob for protection, though he was considered a member of the gang. He had told Hisa that he was worried he might have to pay both groups if the outside gangsters weren't dealt with.

I glanced at Bunkichi and then looked back toward the gangs, not wanting to miss any of the action. I'd become disgusted with the whole low-life scene at home ever since frequenting Chiaki's house and seeing another side of the world—a side that valued peace and beauty. So when my adrenaline rose and I became fascinated by the explosion of energy around me, I felt a strange mixture of excitement and shame. How quickly I could forget about the new world Chiaki's family had opened up for me!

A loud scream brought my attention back to the fight. It looked as if it were a fierce encounter at first. I focused my attention on who was going to strike and who was going to fall. But as I waited for something to happen, I was surprised at how little contact there actually was at the beginning, just a lot of gruff shouts. When someone from one side would lunge forward swinging a stick or sword, the group on the other side would jump back. Then someone from the other side would counter with a lunge, sending his opponents back. It was comical. This kind of back and forth motion, accompanied by shouts of obscenities, continued for at least ten minutes while the two gang leaders stood at a safe distance, yelling at their men to attack.

While I was watching this circus of angry screams and physical posturing, I tried to inch up to get a better look. Bunkichi grabbed my arm and stopped me.

"That hurts. Stop it!" I said. He was squeezing my arm. Then I realized he didn't even know he was doing it.

"It's Hana's husband's gang," he whispered. His voice was shaking.

Hana was one of Bunkichi's sisters. Bunkichi was a member of his brother-in-law's gang, but I could see he wanted no part of the confrontation; he was paralyzed with fear.

Then one of the attackers actually made contact. He jumped forward and slashed with his sword, cutting a gash into a man from Bunkichi's brother-in-law's gang, who went down with blood spurting from his shoulder. From that point on everything changed. Some gang-members started slashing at each other with their knives and swords, smashing with their sticks, while their war cries grew louder and louder.

And there was Bunkichi's brother-in-law yelling, "Kill those sons of bitches!" while he remained safely protected behind the members of his gang. Drops of water from the fog formed on my face and in my eyes blurring my vision. I wiped my face with the sleeve of my kimono.

The leader of the other gang was also screaming at his men, egging them on from a safe distance. I could see that gang members were trying to muster some courage by bellowing obscenities and barking growls from their lower abdomens, though it didn't seem to make a difference to most of them. Only a few were willing to actually jump into the fray. I, however, found myself wanting to pick up a stick and join Bunkichi's brother-in-law's gang. I was rooting for those fellows, who, up until a few minutes before, were players in a world I had come to despise.

I watched as two or three members from each side actually struck opponents and caused some injuries—there were a number of wounded, and at least two were lying on the ground. Most of the warriors, however, like their leaders, were screaming while making sure to stay clear of the actual fight.

The fog started to lift, giving me a clearer picture of what was happening. I brought my attention to the sword-carrying members; I was surprised to see that most of them were swinging their weapons with their eyes closed. Didn't they realize they could easily have sliced one of their own group? It was obvious they were afraid.

Then, turning around to Bunkichi, I received another surprise. That spineless father of mine, who felt no compunction when it came to smacking me around, was just like the cowardly ones in the gangs, the ones who were pretending to fight. He had positioned himself behind me so he wouldn't be seen. His legs were shaking and he looked like a frightened child. I could tell that he was afraid to be seen running away, but he was also too frightened to pick up a stick and join the others in the fight.

I stared at him in disbelief, but said nothing. What could I say? He was the frightened child—fearful not only of the gangs, but of the son he'd bullied for so long. I hated him for one moment and felt sorry for him the next. He wouldn't look at me and no words left his

lips. I had seen him for the coward he was and he knew it; he looked both frightened and ashamed. He was a pitiful sight.

The police showed up on the scene, but did nothing to stop the fighting. They simply walked around telling onlookers to step back so they wouldn't get hurt. I wondered if they, too, were afraid.

Then one fellow from Bunkichi's brother-in-law's gang slashed one of the opponents with a mighty blow that knocked him to the ground and his body shook like a vibrating windup doll. The action slowed down while many of the members of both gangs stared at the fallen man. In a few moments he stopped moving and lay there as though in a peaceful sleep, except for the fact that the pool of blood forming around him kept growing. One of the fellows from the unconscious man's gang bent down, felt his heart and put his ear by the man's mouth. "He's dead. Abe's dead," he screamed.

Two of the policemen finally entered the scene. They walked cautiously to where the dead man lay, carefully checking around them to make sure they wouldn't be attacked. The members of Bunkichi's brother-in-law's gang backed up, slowly at first, then turned around and took off into the mountains.

"Let's go home," Bunkichi said. Those were his first words since announcing it was his brother-in-law's gang. His voice was still shaking. I followed him home, traveling through out-of-the-way backroads. He was avoiding the territory of the opposing gang. What would have normally taken an hour or so took us over three.

That experience caused me to lose what little respect I had for my adoptive father, and I found living with him even more unbearable. I remained at home for a while working for him, but I had my sights set on a different world. Though I was certain I didn't have the talent to be an artist, I knew I had to find a different way to live. I started to attend lectures at Pure Land Buddhist temples and began to think seriously about becoming a monk.

I was fifteen years old then, and didn't have the understanding of how much Bunkichi and Hisa suffered in life. I only knew that my life was miserable, and I blamed it on them. Later I realized that they really didn't know any other way to live. They didn't have enough freedom in their own lives to understand how to treat others civilly.

The Buddha works in strange ways, I thought. Had I not felt as though I were suffocating while living under the same roof as my adoptive parents, I might never have made the initial contact with Buddhism. I should be grateful to them.

Chapter 6

I can look back now and see the progression of events that compelled me to seek a new life, as far away from the world of my adoptive parents as possible—my contact with Chiaki and his family being the most obvious. At the time I was too young to see those influences as anything but individual incidents in my life. But now I see that the last straw was my shock over Bunkichi's spinelessness at the gang war.

From that time I started looking for an escape. I attended Buddhist sermons at temples around Ishinden whenever I could. But it was the *osho* of Busshoji, the country priest of the small rural Pure Land temple, whose lectures truly captured my imagination. He spoke simply, and I felt the sincerity of his devotion to the Dharma. He was a large man whose speech naturally carried across the Buddha Hall, though he never seemed to raise his voice. He was gentle and his eyes smiled at you when he talked.

As I listened to his sermons, I was assaulted with the lament, 'Why couldn't I have been adopted by someone like the *osho* instead of Bunkichi?' Compared to my restless guardian this country priest was so calm and at ease with himself. He told stories, fables, from the ancient Jataka Tales—tales of the Buddha in his previous lives. It was those tales that appealed to my young mind. The first lecture I attended, however, was about Amida Buddha's vow to save all sentient beings. I still remember a part of that lecture because it made such a strong impression on me. I can hear *Osho's* voice:

"We may see all kinds of differences in the people we meet and place our own values on each of the differences," he said, "but from the point of view of an enlightened one, distinctions are only on the surface. All are equal in the Buddha's eyes."

Unlike my fidgeting in elementary school, where Hashimotosensei had to tell me to sit quietly, here I listened to *Osho's* every word, wanting to understand them more than anything I'd ever longed for.

"The monk Dharmakara, Amida Buddha in a previous existence, was a king who came in contact with the Buddhist teachings. He renounced his throne and shaved his head and resolved to become

a buddha and live in a buddha-land. In that buddha-land, all inhabitants would be assured a life of bliss until their final entry into nirvana. This life of bliss would come to them through Amida Buddha's merit."

I thought about all the old people in Ishinden, who intoned "Praise to Amida Buddha," even when they were performing deeds that seemed unclean. I wondered what kind of buddha would permit his name to be mentioned while someone was breaking the law.

"Nirvana means 'extinction' another name for enlightenment. Dharmakara took forty-eight vows obliging him to sustain ordinary people on the path to enlightenment. Dharmakara's eighteenth vow is most important to us. In it he promised that he would continue to practice and would refrain from entering the Western Pure Land (another name for supreme perfect enlightenment) until all ordinary people entered. We ordinary people need only recite his name with a sincere heart and then we too will enter nirvana."

When the talk was over, tea was served and everyone soon left. I stayed behind, kneeling on the floor in a corner of the Buddha Hall, waiting for the priest to notice me. The hall seemed to have grown larger after the people had emptied out. On the altar was a wooden statue of Amida Buddha covered in gold leaf, flanked by paintings of Shinran, founder of the Pure Land sect on the left, and Renyo, the fourth patriarch and great propagator of the faith on the right. Without the body heat of the parishioners the room had become cold.

The *osho* stood up and was about to extinguish the candles that lit up the altar when he noticed me. He sat down and asked me to sit by his side.

"Is there something you want to ask me?" he said.

I felt shy, but I nodded.

"Yes, what is it?"

"When you talked about Amida Buddha's vow to save all people before he entered nirvana, I was filled with joy. I thought, I, too, can be saved."

The priest smiled.

"Whenever I heard the people in Ishinden where I live call out to Amida Buddha, I too called his name. I called out his name here too while you were telling us of this wonderful vow, and still my life is

unbearable. How can Amida Buddha live in the supreme perfect enlightenment while I suffer like this?”

The priest was quiet for a moment, and then he spoke.

“You’re a very bright boy. It is good to express your doubts when something doesn’t ring true to you. I will try to explain, though I fear this may be a little difficult for you to understand.

“Dharmakara’s vow to work for all ordinary people so that they are assured a life of bliss makes it possible for all to enter nirvana regardless of their position on Earth. When we recite his name, it is an expression of gratitude for Amida Buddha’s universal compassion, which is always within us and surrounding us, regardless of whether we recognize or accept it. That is why he is now called Amida Buddha—the Enlightened Buddha of Infinite Wisdom. The fact that many do not know that they are saved does not negate Dharmakara’s original vow. The circumstances we find ourselves in now as a result of past karma only camouflage our true nature and make us think we are stuck in a world of delusion. If we open our hearts to Amida Buddha this very moment, we are saved. The reason that it is possible is a result of the power of his vow.”

The priest’s fear that it would be difficult for me to comprehend was correct; it was more than difficult for me, it felt impossible. Though I didn’t understand what he meant, I liked him and trusted him. As the days went by, I thought more about the stories of the hermit sages of India and China I’d heard about in other talks at other temples or read about in some of the books I’d borrowed from Chiaki’s family. Some of the the books had pictures to make the stories easier for me to comprehend. Those hermits performed miracles, and their stories were easier for me to imagine than Amida Buddha with his vow to save ordinary people. The hermit-sages flew through the air, lived without having to eat, had life spans of thousands of years and appeared and disappeared at will. I imagined myself having magical powers. How, I wondered, could I become a hermit-sage? I believed that if I learned the correct practices, a hermit sage would come on a white cloud and take me to a magical land just like Amida Buddha took those who recited his name to his Western Pure Land.

For a few days following the Dharma discourse at Busshoji temple I found myself restless and wanting to do something that would help me escape my present situation. I was still living at home with Bunkichi and Hisa and being constantly reminded that I was in a world I'd come to detest. Thus began my search for someone who would be able to teach me about the hermit sages. There was an old man seated high at the entrance to the public bath who collected money and sold soap, razors and towels. His face reminded me of some of the sages I saw in Chiaki's books. He had a beard and bushy white eyebrows. His ears were large, reminding me of the long ears of the Buddha as portrayed in paintings and statues.

I went to him and asked, "What do I have to do to learn the ways of the old hermit sages of China?"

Looking down at me from his high seat, he scratched his head, and said, "How the hell should I know!"

His response was so sharp it startled me. I walked away not daring to look up at him again. But I didn't give up. Someone, I thought, will be able to give me an answer to the secrets of these ancient sages. The possibility that the stories about hermits and sages of old might be mere fantasy did pop into my head every once in a while, but I managed to bury it as soon as it appeared. I had already given up on the idea of becoming an artist and wasn't ready to abandon my next hope.

The following day when I was out delivering lanterns, I approached an aged man with a long white beard, who walked the streets of Ishinden carrying his warped walking stick and selling calligraphy on old cheap paper, "How can I become a hermit sage?" I asked.

He just grumbled something unintelligible and kept on walking.

The more I thought about my quest to find out the secret to the powers of the ancients with their magical abilities, the more skeptical I became. The Busshoji *Osho* seemed far more animated when he talked about faith in Amida Buddha's vow than when he talked about the magic and mystery of the hermit-sages. I wondered whether he told those stories of secret powers of the ancients in order to draw people to his temple so that he could preach to them about faith in the Pure Land, which he deemed more important. As I pondered this

question, my desire to learn about those hermits faded. The need to escape my present situation, however, stuck with me like a permanent itch.

I saw less and less of Bunkichi at our workplace. I got to be more skilled at patching lanterns and knew the business as well as he did, giving him more time to engage in his illicit activities—whoring, gambling and drinking. I didn't like having him near me, so I had no complaints about being left to do the work. Though he no longer could push me around physically, he still had a certain power over me that I couldn't explain. I could feel it when in his presence, and I could sense that he knew it. He and Hisa did take me in when I had no one else and fed and clothed me for the last seven years. He knew how to play on my sense of obligation to him regardless of the fact that he had taken me in for his own benefit. When he did come to join me at the workplace, all he talked about was how I needed to repay him for taking care of me. It's strange but I think he really believed he was working hard to keep our household together.

He came into the shop one day when I was patching lanterns and said, "When you turn nineteen, I'm going to send you off to work in another town so Hisa and I can retire."

Retire from what? I thought. I pictured myself spending another four years in that household, and after that the rest of my life working for Bunkichi and Hisa. I felt sick. I had gotten used to cooking and cleaning for my adoptive parents and didn't mind patching and delivering lanterns. The thought of being around them and their low life existence for the next few years, however, was more than I could endure.

Once I had gotten to know Chiaki and his family, and then learned about the lives of the ancient patriarchs of Buddhism, I realized that there were other possibilities in life. I told myself that I had to get out as soon as possible.

I often went alone to Mukumoto to deliver lanterns to customers. It was an opportunity to be away from Bunkichi and Hisa, but there was also something compelling about the place. Bunkichi apparently had no desire to go there after the gang fight incident, so I didn't

have any problem suggesting I take that route as part of my regular rounds.

Mukumoto was an ancient village in a narrow valley. The valley cut through mountains dotted with buddha statues carved from the mountain rocks during the medieval period. A big fifteen hundred year old *muku* tree stood in the center of town. The residents regarded the statues and the tree as their protectors. As I walked through the town, past shops selling religious objects and by the *inarioroshi* with their small shrines, which reminded me of booths at a carnival, I'd feel a mixture of discomfort and awe. These sellers of messages from the spirit-world are women who were said to have the power to see into the future. I didn't really believe in their power, but neither could I totally dismiss them as fakes. It may have been the unique atmosphere of Mukumoto that made me think of these unusual women differently than I did the fortunetellers of Ishinden. I knew the fortunetellers were nothing more than swindlers like so many others in my town.

Many of the *inarioroshi*, like the prostitutes of Ishinden, tried to drag potential customers off the street to have their fortunes read. Still there was something, maybe a result of the sheer numbers of these women, which made the atmosphere very imposing. I never walked through Mukumoto without feeling some mysterious force surrounding me.

I was returning from delivering lanterns one day, walking through the center of town, passing all the *inarioroshi* who lined the main street selling their prophecies. The mystifying atmosphere of the place filled me with contradictory emotions this time. On the one hand, I was uncomfortable with what felt like the unknown—I wanted to be able to anticipate what was going to happen in my life and prepare myself for it. On the other hand, my future felt so bleak that the mysteriousness around me suggested things could change, possibly for the better, in ways I could never predict. As I walked, thoughts of getting out of Ishinden so occupied my mind that I forgot where I was.

"The little lantern maker's mind is in disarray today," a voice called out, waking me from my self-absorbed state.

It was the voice of one of the *inariorishi*, a woman who had caught my attention on other trips because of a special quality about her that separated her, at least in my mind, from the others. She was a blind woman. Her striking features captivated me. Her long black hair with its streaks of silver gray also intrigued me. It hung down over her kimono past her waist. She hardly ever had to solicit business because customers came naturally to her. There was generally a long line outside her shrine room. This was one of the rare times that she sat by herself. It wasn't the first time she'd called out to me. She always had something to say when I'd walk by her shrine. At first I wondered how she knew it was me, but then I realized she must have recognized the rhythm of my gait.

I stopped and turned toward her.

"You want to know what to do with your life," she said. "I can help you."

Had it been any of the other *inarioroshi*, I would have continued on my way. But she was clearly different. I didn't sense in her a need to sell anything. She was relaxed. Though she expressed a desire to help me, I felt no pressure from her to accept the offer. I paused, wondering how to respond. Finally, I said, "I'm sorry, but I don't have any money."

"That's okay," she said. "You pay what you can."

I was of two minds. I wanted to get away and I wanted to hear more. Something seemed to draw me to her in spite of myself. I ducked inside the shrine room and sat on the cushion across from her. The mysterious force I'd often felt when walking through Mukumoto seemed greatly magnified in that tiny room. It was like a vibrating sound that filled my brain, blocking out all other sounds. Incense smoke permeated the room and made my eyes water.

She didn't waste any time. She immediately thumbed her beads and mumbled some incantations I couldn't make out. Then she sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity, appearing to drift into a trance. I felt very uncomfortable, and again I wanted to run away, but I couldn't move. It was as though I were stuck to the cushion. When she started to speak, her voice changed, as if another person were speaking.

"You have important work to do," the voice said. "It will be difficult work and will take a lot of time before you understand what you must do. You will encounter many obstacles on your journey, but you will overcome them. You must never lose sight of the power from the other world that will guide you through these tribulations on your journey. Never give up, for the road you take will eventually help others and bring to you a great peace."

The woman seemed unaware of my presence as she spoke. When she had finished, she became quiet and looked exhausted. Beads of sweat dripped down her forehead. She was breathing deeply. After some time, she lifted her head and appeared to wake up. Once again she became aware of me sitting in front of her. She did not refer to her previous words; indeed, she acted as if she had no connection to them.

"Give me your hand," she said.

I was reluctant.

"Don't be afraid," she said, reaching out to me with her hand.

I put out my hand and she took it in hers. She held my arm by the wrist and felt my palm with her other hand. After running her fingers over my palm and along my fingers, she put her hand on my face—feeling my forehead, my eyes, my nose and my lips. Then she smiled and said, "You can go now."

I was grateful to be released—realizing only as I left her presence just how tense the situation had made me. It was more than the release from tension, however, that gave me such a feeling of relief. She said that the road I take *will bring me peace*. I immediately felt a sense of hope at a time when I'd been overwhelmed with attacks of despondency. Even if I only half believed that there was any truth to her prophecy, I wanted more than anything in the world to believe.

I returned to my home, my mind occupied with thoughts of running away. The *inarioroshii's* prophecy made me feel I could follow my heart and that I would not be making a mistake. However, I still had no real plan. I'd thought about becoming a monk, but I knew nothing of how to do so or whether it was even a possibility. I thought I might get some help from the *osho* of Busshoji.

Chapter 7

The next time I attended a Dharma talk at Busshoji temple, it felt as though some mysterious force was setting the stage for my journey. The talk that day was so clearly the guidance I sought that it practically sent me on my way.

I was more aware of my surroundings on this visit. The fragrance of incense was mixed with the strong odor of pickled *daikon* radish and *miso* soup. The kitchen must have been adjacent to the Buddha Hall. I looked around at the group attending and realized I was by far the youngest person there. For a moment I felt extremely self-conscious. Then, turning my gaze toward the *osho*, my nervousness dissolved. He stood in front of the altar, the statue of Amida Buddha behind him. He had no notes and spoke in the quiet manner I remembered from my last visit. He was already speaking by the time I'd arrived.

"... In ancient times, the young ascetic Sessen Doji was practicing religious austerities in the great Himalayan Mountains. He sat for hours in meditation in this beautiful environment near a flowing river, purifying his mind. There was an abundance of trees and grasses and fruit. He sustained himself with the ripened fruit that fell at his feet. Though the young ascetic sat in deep meditation for months on end, losing track of the passing years, he still couldn't penetrate the Way to its depth."

This time it was the story of the Buddha in a previous life. The Buddha as a young boy—a *boy like me*, I thought.

"Then, one day, Sessen Doji heard a mystifying voice that seemed to come out of nowhere. It was the beautiful melodious chanting of a poem. The chanting stopped after the first two lines of the traditional four-line form. *All things are impermanent / They appear and disappear...* Upon hearing these first two lines, the young ascetic became elated. These are truly the words of wisdom, he thought. When he looked around to see where the words had come from, he was face to face with the frightening demon Rakshasa.

"Please recite the final two lines of that verse," the boy pleaded.

‘I’m famished,’ replied the demon, ‘I have no strength to continue.’

‘Please recite the final two lines. I’ll become your disciple and serve you for life.’”

I trembled with excitement, as the priest continued the story. Sessen’s yearning became my yearning.

“‘I would like to complete the poem,’ said the demon, ‘but I told you I’m starving and can’t continue until I get something to eat.’

‘What do you eat?’ Sessen asked.

‘I eat the flesh of humans, and I drink their blood.’

“Sessen Doji was so captured by the first half of the verse that he was sure the final lines would enlighten him to the Way. ‘If you recite the rest of the poem, I will give you my flesh and blood as an offering.’ And the young ascetic took off his deerskin robe and laid it down on the earth in front of Rakshasa. The demon immediately sat down on the robe and began to recite, *Put an end to appearance and disappearance/Nirvana is realized*.

“The young ascetic was joyful. He proceeded to carve these lines on trees, paths and rocks in the area so that they would liberate others after his demise. Then he climbed a tall tree and was about to throw himself to his death to fulfill his promise to the demon when the god Shakra, who had disguised himself as Rakshasa, changed back to his real form and saved the boy.”

The priest ended with a short discourse on the meaning of the mind that seeks the Buddha Way. But I was hardly listening. I was too absorbed in rapture; I felt such a strong identification with the young Sessen. This was the story of a boy who wanted so badly to attain the Way that he was willing to throw away his life. I felt his desire so greatly I was still trembling when the priest finished his story. That settles it, I told myself: I will become a monk.

I stood in the Buddha Hall watching as the members of the congregation left. It was the same small group of mostly elderly men and women that had attended the last lecture. The priest was saying a final word to the last couple as they were leaving when he noticed me standing at the entrance to the hall quietly waiting. He walked back to the altar and knelt on a cushion.

"Come here," he said, motioning me to sit near him. "You have a question?"

"I want to become a monk," I blurted out, still standing.

He looked at me, a thoughtful half smile on his face. "Sit down," he said.

I could feel my whole body shaking, which I'm certain didn't go unnoticed by the priest, as he considered my words. I sat by his side. After a few moments, he asked, "Have you thought about it carefully?"

"I've been thinking about nothing other than that for at least a few months. I'm quite sure of it. Today's story of Sessen Doji inspired me even more. I don't want to put it off any longer."

When I mentioned Sessen Doji, I noticed a look of surprise on the priest's face. He waited a moment, and then, recovering his calm demeanor, said, "I'm very happy when someone wants to enter the house of the Buddha. Have you given consideration to what kind of a monk you want to be?"

What kind of monk? I hadn't realized there were different kinds of monks.

"I only know that I can't continue living the way I have. I want to live a better life. I want to be enlightened like Sessen Doji."

The priest looked at me and then up at the ceiling as though he were trying to find the right words. "Monastic life may not prove to be the enlightened life you are seeking." He looked as if he were about to add something and then apparently changed his mind.

I wasn't sure what to make of his remark. Was he trying to dissuade me? "I want to be a monk," was all I could say. I was struggling for something more to add. Then I said, "I want to find out for myself what it means to be a monk."

He smiled, but it was a sad smile, or perhaps a worried smile. It bothered me. I wanted him to be excited about my plan. I wanted encouragement from him. But all he said was, "It seems as though you've made up your mind."

After another brief pause, he turned and stared at the altar in back of him. Amida Buddha was peering down at us, his right hand pointing upward, the left downward, the thumb and index fingers of

each hand forming a circle. The gentle smile on this standing Buddha calmed me.

The priest turned back to face me. "This temple is a Pure Land Buddhist temple. Pure Land Buddhist priests marry and have families. They are not monks in the sense of true ascetics. Saint Shinran, our founder, said he is not fully a monk and he is not fully a layman. His meaning is quite subtle. However, I would suggest that you become a Zen monk and not a Pure Land priest."

"Why?" I was getting more confused the longer I listened to him. The story of Sessen Doji was simple and clear. Why was the priest making it so complicated?

"Zen monks aren't expected to marry. We Pure Land priests are. We are pressured because of our tradition to marry and are criticized if we don't. I have five children and my wife is dead. I can barely feed my family, so most of my energy is directed to clothing and feeding my children. I can't devote my life solely to the Dharma."

He had a look of real concern on his face when he talked. He truly cares about me, I thought.

"In order to practice the life of true Dharma as you envision it," he said, "you had better become a Zen monk."

"What is Zen?"

"Zen is a school of Buddhism that emphasizes *zazen* or sitting meditation. *Za* is the character for sitting and *Zen* can be loosely translated as meditation."

"Meditation?" I said, half to myself. I'd heard the word before, but never connected it to Buddhism.

"Yes, sitting meditation," he repeated. "I'm not an expert on Zen Buddhism," he added, "but I will explain what I know of it. The word Zen comes from the Sanskrit word *samadhi*—it means a state of deep meditation. In our country Zen monks sit with their legs folded and torsos erect like this," the priest demonstrated the posture for me, "and try to experience *samadhi*—a state of oneness..."

He must have noticed the confused look on my face because he stopped. Words like 'deep meditation' and '*samadhi*' meant nothing to me. All I knew was I wanted to get away from Bunkichi and Hisa; life with them had become unbearable. I wanted to understand the lives of people that I'd read about in the books I'd borrowed from my

friend Chiaki. I wanted something that I could feel good about. I wanted to live a life I could take pride in.

“Let me try to explain from a historical perspective,” Osho said. “In ancient times some brave monks with a strong desire to understand Buddhism traveled to China to learn from the country where Buddhism developed before it came to Japan. Two of those monks brought back with them a practice of Buddhism that was called ‘Chan’ in China. They were impressed with the devotion to sitting meditation that the Chan monks demonstrated. Chan is the Chinese translation of the word *samadhi* and Zen is the Japanese translation of Chan.”

There was that word *samadhi* again. My mind started to drift as soon as I heard it.

“One of those monks, Eisai, studied what is called Rinzai Zen. In that practice the monks meditate on *koans*, which are paradoxical statements, sayings of the old masters that one can’t understand with the thinking mind. When a student meditates on these *koans*, he has to go beyond thinking or reason in order to understand the nature of ultimate reality.”

“*Koans*? Paradoxical statements? Beyond the thinking mind?” He could have said pink dragons flying through the sky. “I don’t understand this *koan*.” I said.

“*Koans* are like riddles. When you try to solve them by thinking, it doesn’t work. So your thinking mind gives up and, with a very quiet mind, the solution may come.”

“We have two minds?” With each new idea I became more confused. I could feel the priest struggle to help me understand, and I really wanted to be able to say that I did—to see him look satisfied with his explanation—but I couldn’t.

The priest put his hand on his forehead and let it slide down to his chin. No matter how much I wanted to please him, I couldn’t lie, not when this subject was so important to both of us. Then he seemed to think of something.

“You know how you think about getting away from your home in Ishinden, and how your mind is constantly occupied with that idea?” he said.

I nodded, as I wondered how he knew that.

“Most of the time we think about what we want, what we don’t like about our present life, our hopes, our dreams and our fears, how other people see us and how we view other people and on and on. Many of these thoughts are necessary to live in the world, but not all of them. From these thoughts we develop an image of who we are. With that image we distinguish ourselves from other people and believe ourselves to be separate from others.

“Wise men over the years have pointed to a different way of looking at the world and ourselves. They say that we are not separate from others, and that it is only the illusion created by the small-thinking mind, the one that creates the image of who we are as a result of our fears, hopes, likes, dislikes, and so forth. We can think of this other way of looking at the world as a big mind or a quiet mind. It’s not really another mind but rather a sense we have when the ordinary mind stops churning out all those thoughts. The wise men say that if you can see the small mind or the mind that churns out thoughts for what it is, and you are no longer controlled by all the emotions it creates, you will cease to feel like a separate person and you will be at peace.”

“And *koans* can make you feel at peace?” I asked, perking up at the thought of finding peace in my life.

“*Koans* are one method of going beyond the ordinary thinking mind, but it is one of many methods.”

Though the priest seemed uncertain whether he was making sense to me, he continued. “The other monk, whose name was Dogen, came back from China with a different interpretation of Zen meditation. His school was called the Soto Zen sect. He taught a practice called *shikantaza*, or ‘just sitting.’ In Dogen’s approach you meditate with the belief that sitting itself is enlightenment. In some respects this is closer to the view in the Pure Land School of entrusting your life to a higher power.

“Dogen was very uncompromising in his approach to Zen and wouldn’t allow practices from other schools to be a part of his teaching. The established Buddhist schools at the time feared the loss of their power, and Dogen was pressured to leave Kyoto where the Buddhist authorities were located and to go into the countryside

in Echizen. He believed in the purity of Zen and refused to let it be stained with what he perceived to be mistaken practices.”

That last part about Dogen really caught my attention. I didn’t fully understand the priest’s explanation of Zen meditation, but I was impressed with Dogen’s refusal to compromise his principles. I was brought back to Sessen Doji, the boy who would sacrifice his life for his belief.

“If you want to practice Rinzai Zen, you should go to Kyoto, and if you want to practice Soto Zen, though the journey would be longer, you should go to Echizen.”

That did it. I made up my mind. Kyoto was not far enough away. I would be taking a chance of being found and dragged back to my adoptive parents’ house.

Osho then became quiet. He wiped a piece of dust from his robe. I thought he was finished and that I should get up and excuse myself. At that moment, he straightened himself up and, as though he’d just remembered something, began to talk again.

“On my travels to Echizen once, I stopped at Eiheiji Monastery for a short period. During my stay there, it felt like a place where the true Dharma flourished. You should consider training there if you are serious about practicing the Buddha Way.”

Yes, Echizen was where I would go. I didn’t need much encouragement to leave Ishinden and get on the road, but I had needed some advice about where to go. I had gotten more than enough from the priest. I thanked him and went home full of excitement for my new plan. I wasn’t concerned with the differences in the two approaches to Zen. All I knew was that shaving my head and putting on robes, regardless of the kind of Buddhism, meant leaving a foul world behind. I started making plans for my escape.

Chapter 8

Bunkichi must have suspected I was planning to leave because he watched me more closely from the time I returned from Busshoji—when he was sober enough to do so that is. I had to be careful and wait for the right moment. He and Hisa were sitting in the living room finishing a jug of *sake* one day. It was a week since I'd last visited the Pure Land temple, and this was the opportunity I'd been waiting for. They were both pretty drunk. It was early evening. I walked into the living room holding a lantern.

"I have to deliver this to Ikeda-san," I said, holding the lantern up so they could see it. Hiroshi Ikeda was a regular customer of ours.

I didn't know whether they even heard what I'd said. Bunkichi just grunted something I couldn't make out, and Hisa didn't even look at me. I walked down the hall toward the front door as casually as I could, though I was, in fact, extremely tense. I was dreading that Bunkichi just might have needed time for my words to register. I quietly slid the door open.

"Saikichi!" Bunkichi bellowed from behind me.

My body tightened. Though since the gang-fight at Mukumoto I'd stopped fearing a beating from him, he still held some unexplainable sway over me. I slowly turned around. The hall was dark and all I could see was the outline of Bunkichi with some object swinging from a rope or a chain he was holding. Bunkichi too was swaying back and forth, barely keeping himself from falling. My eyes got better accustomed to the dark, and I could see the object hanging from a rope in Bunkichi's hand. It was a jug with the rope tied to its lip. In his other hand he held a coin. Slurring his words, he shouted, "Didn't you hear me? I said take this jug and have it filled with *sake* on your way back from Ikeda's."

I felt some relief, though I wasn't out of there yet. He handed me the jug and the coin and staggered back to the living room. I watched him go, my body still reeling from the shock. I calmed down, walked out the door and placed the jug and the coin on the ground outside by the entrance. The cool evening air blew against my face. It was the most soothing breeze I'd ever felt.

I walked quickly to Busshoji Temple, passing the familiar houses and stores of the town I'd lived in for the last eight years, hoping never to see any of them again. I reached the temple a half hour later, grateful not to have met anyone I knew on the way. I stood by the gate with the lantern in my hand and called out to the priest. He came to the hallway by the entrance.

It took him a moment to recognize me. "Come in," he beckoned, appearing surprised to see me but not upset.

I walked across the garden to the temple entrance. Two young boys and a young girl were peeking through a small opening in the *shoji* screen that ran along that side of the temple and faced an open corridor. The priest summoned another girl who appeared to be about my age and asked her to take care of the other children. I remembered the priest's words on my last visit about having to care for five children since his wife died. I felt like an intruder, but I had no one else to turn to.

I took off my sandals and stepped up to the open corridor. The priest led me down the corridor into his study. He collected some papers that were spread over a small table in the middle of the room, placed them neatly in the corner and asked me to sit down.

"You're back," he said. "Another question?"

"Not really," I told him. "I'm on my way to Eiheiiji, and I was wondering if I could spend the night here and leave early in the morning?"

He had been sitting up straight looking directly at me. My declaration must have thrown him off balance. He started to put the papers in order again as if he hadn't done so before. He seemed to be gathering his thoughts. I waited.

"You haven't talked to your parents about this, have you?" he said.

I didn't answer. The fear that the priest might try to thwart my plans suddenly rose up in me. I had to fight with myself to contain it—to keep from standing up and leaving.

He looked around me as though searching for something. "Where are your travel bags?"

"This is all I have," I said, pointing to the lantern. "I didn't want to take anything from my adoptive parents."

"Are you certain they wouldn't approve of your becoming a monk?"

"They would do everything they could to keep me from leaving. They expect me to take care of them as soon as I'm old enough. I'm the only one who does any real work in their house. All they do is drink and gamble."

"I see." The priest must have decided it was better not to ask any more about my family. "How much money do you have?" he asked.

I pointed to the lantern again, and repeated, "This is all I have."

"And you're going like that to Eiheiiji?"

I nodded.

"How do you expect to eat on the way?"

"If Sessen Doji worried about things like that, he would never have become enlightened."

He folded his arms and stared at me. I wondered whether my response had been inappropriate. Was I disrespectful? Then he looked toward the ceiling and closed his eyes. I could feel a lecture coming on.

"The story of Sessen Doji is from the Jataka tales," he said. "Those stories are romantic tales that teach some point in the Dharma, but they are not to be taken literally."

That was all he said. He must have realized that I wasn't in the mood for a lecture, certainly not one that would try to dispel my dream of a better life. Then he smiled. I think that his decision not to try to change my mind was a relief to him.

"You'd better get some sleep. You have a long day ahead of you tomorrow." He led me to a room and helped me take a *futon* from the closet. Then, bidding me goodnight, he left.

I lay there telling myself I'd escaped. I was free. The excitement of the journey ahead kept me from falling asleep right away though I was dead tired.

The following morning, I got dressed, folded my *futon* and put it away. The sun hadn't risen yet. I heard the clanging of pots and pans in the kitchen and the smell of rice gruel boiling. When I walked into the kitchen, the priest was cutting pickled white radish. His children must still have been asleep.

“You’re up?” he said, smiling. “Let’s go to the Buddha Hall and say our prayers.”

We recited the *shoshin ge*, the *gatha* of True Faith in the Pure Land, and then went into the dining room to have breakfast. After the meal, I washed the dishes, helped him clean up, and thanked him for everything. There were no more lectures, and I was thankful for that. In silence he walked me to the entrance way and put on my sandals for me. I felt in this gesture how much he cared about me. I was sure he’d held back from lecturing me because he didn’t want to scare me away before he had a chance to add his own gift to aid me on my journey.

He handed me a sack of rice and a tiny package. The rice was wrapped in a cotton scarf; the package was made of rice paper and tied at the top by string customarily attached to envelopes with temple contributions in them. I could hear some coins rattling in it as he handed it to me. He bowed to me and said, “That’s a little something for your trip. Now practice hard and become an exemplary monk.”

I looked down at the tiny parcel—a contribution from a man who depended on contributions to feed his family—and remembered the priest’s words when we’d last spoken: *Most of my energy is directed to clothing and feeding my children ...* I hesitated a moment, but the look in his eyes said ‘take it please.’ I accepted the gift and was on my way. The morning air was fresh, and I breathed it with exhilaration. The clouds of the previous day had disappeared, and the sun rose in a clear blue sky. It was a good omen.

Munching periodically on the uncooked rice from the half-liter the priest had given me, I walked all that day and night, barely sleeping. When I did lie down to catch a short nap, it was in a field or on a patch of earth by the side of the road. I checked the contents of the envelope: 27 *sen*. I was reminded once more of the *osho*’s situation—a poor country priest with five children and no wife. And he didn’t hesitate to share the little he had with me! His words, *Now practice and become an exemplary monk*, echoed in my mind as I continued on my way. I promised myself that I wouldn’t disappoint him.

I arrived at Kuwana City on the morning of the second day and took a small boat along the Ibi River to Ogaki. It cost 15 *sen*, leaving me with 12 *sen*. Sitting on the boat, looking out on the countryside and down at the river, I finally had a chance to rest. But my mind was racing. I was so full of the excitement of the journey, of moving closer to Eihei-ji Monastery, that sleep wouldn't come. I also thought about my parents, my sister Sai and brother Toshi and a strange feeling welled up inside me. I couldn't totally immerse myself in the new life until I made a proper break with my past.

When I disembarked at Ogaki in the late morning, I went to the post office and bought postcards and stamps. With the four *sen* that remained, I bought a bag of roasted soybeans. I sent postcards to Sai, Toshi and my adoptive parents, informing them of my decision to become a monk, but telling them nothing of my destination. When I mailed the postcards, it felt as if I'd finally made the break. I was free.

I walked on. My excitement about my future put a bounce in my steps. I refused to allow the guilt of having abandoned my duty to my adoptive parents to occupy my mind. I had no choice, I told myself. When doubts as to whether I would succeed on this journey did occasionally arise, I would invoke images of the young Sessen Doji, awakened by words of the god Shakra, carving verses of enlightenment on trees and rocks in the mountains. The encouraging words of the blind fortuneteller, the *inaritoroshi*, also gave me strength to battle the demons of uncertainty.

The straw from my sandals, already quite worn when I'd left Ishinden, was shredding to pieces and the straps ripped. I discarded them and continued walking barefoot, nibbling on the roasted soybeans. My thin striped kimono too had been old and torn in places before I'd left on the journey. Having slept for short periods the night before when I was exhausted, the kimono became stained. I looked more like a vagabond than a pilgrim on his way to Eihei-ji. Arriving at Kinomoto City late that evening, exhausted, I was dearly in need of a place to rest. I had been on the road two days, but with so little to eat and hardly any sleep it felt more like a week. Passing a

fellow in the center of town, I asked, “Do you know where I can find a place to spend the night?”

He looked at my bare feet and dirty kimono, and said, “There’s a shrine to the Bodhisattva Jizo on the other side of town. It has a large statue of the Bodhisattva and a small wooden shelter for pilgrims. You can sleep there.”

I followed his directions and walked across the town in the dead of night. The candle in my lantern had melted away the night before. I was hardly able to keep from falling asleep on my feet. With the help of the dim light from the crescent moon, I could make out the head of the Bodhisattva Jizo above a mass of darkness. The moon’s glow reflected off the bronze face of this protector of travelers—a statue over six meters tall. Exhausted though I was, the glow from the bodhisattva filled me with joy. I walked in the direction of the statue only to find myself in a dense forest. It was pitch black, and my joy soon turned to apprehension. I was lost. Unable to see my hand in front of my face, I was about to plop myself down on the spot when I noticed a cluster of fireflies around a small structure. “There it is,” I said, and thanked the little creatures for their guidance. Like a blind man, I felt for the entrance, stepped over a concrete protrusion and collapsed on the ground. I was instantly asleep.

I wasn’t asleep very long when I was woken by the sensation of liquid splashing on my face. I opened my eyes and saw a man standing over me.

“What the hell are you doing?” I screamed, when I realized that he was peeing on me.

Equally shocked, he jumped back, “Oh, I’m terribly sorry, but I thought this was a latrine. What are you doing lying down here?” He was a pilgrim who had come to pray at the shrine. When I explained to him that I thought I was at a shrine, he pointed and said, “The shrine room is over there to your left.”

I got up and walked dazedly to the shrine room wiping my face. Annoyed and humiliated but too tired to say any more, I dropped to the ground and drifted off.

I was woken again, this time by the sun shining through the translucent paper of the shrine room doors. For the first time I could see this sanctuary that gave me shelter and appreciate the need for

places like these that temporarily house pilgrims. The walls were made of wooden slats and the roof was thatched.

Morning already! I felt as though I'd just gone to sleep. There was a fragrance of morning dew on maples and a slight odor coming from the latrine. Reminded of having been peed on the night before, I feared my luck was changing. No, it was just an understandable mistake! Don't allow anything to defeat you!

Forcing myself to get up, I sluggishly made my way to a nearby well and washed my face. Then I returned to the shrine room and said a personal prayer to the Bodhisattva Jizo, "Bodhisattva Jizo, protector of travelers, thank you for letting me spend the night in your shrine room. Please help me become a monk. I want it so badly. I left my home prepared to die if necessary. Please allow me the chance to be an honorable monk."

I walked through the next day until my feet could no longer carry me and spent the late hours of the night at another roadside shrine in the town of Imajo. It was my third day on the road. The following morning, before sunrise, I continued my journey. Munching the last of the raw rice and a final handful of roasted soybeans, I arrived that evening at the road leading to Eihei-ji. The road narrowed to a dirt path from which I could see a huge gate ahead of me. Great cedars lined the path, partially hiding what I guessed to be small temple buildings on both sides. Worn out and half starved, yet elated, I staggered up stone stairs leading to the monastery gate. I must have looked like a half crazed vagabond because a monk not much older than I was walked out of a monastery building, stopped at the gate, turned to me, sneering, and asked, "What do you want?"

"I want to become a monk."

He looked into my eyes, and then at my soiled clothing, my dirt stained hands and feet and his sneer turned to disgust.

"Get out of here!" he yelled.

My feeling of joy was gone.

"Please," I pleaded, "let me become a monk."

"I said get out of here!"

The weariness of the trip coupled with the shock of the reception deflated me, and I sunk slowly to the ground and sat there. "I'm famished and can't move. Let me die here," I said.

Chapter 9

The young Eiheiji monk seemed baffled by my behavior. He stood there staring at me. I was so tired and hungry from the trip that I drifted in and out of consciousness. My mind would be blank, and then I would notice the monk and the world would come back to me, but never in complete focus.

In a conscious moment I looked up at the monk, beseechingly, without saying a word. He must have been a novice because he seemed confused about how to proceed.

“We’ll give you some leftover rice gruel, but then I want to see you on your way.”

“In that case, don’t bother,” I said. “I’m not going anywhere.”

His look of confusion disappeared, and once again he became the tough monk he thought he should be. He glared at me for a moment, then turned around, walked into the monastery and didn’t look back. I sat there feeling numb. I stayed where I was, having no intention of moving. With my hopes shattered and my strength exhausted, I couldn’t have left if I wanted to.

I sat on a patch of gravel in front of the gate, looking from its beautiful wooden pillars to the massive cedars that had accompanied me on the last leg of my journey. I wanted to remain resolute and looked to those trees to give me strength. They’d been there for hundreds of years. I will follow your example, I said to the trees, and sat up as straight as possible. I tried to keep aware of my resolution when the next thing I knew the sun was shining in my eyes and I was lying on the gravel. I’d fallen asleep and slept through the night.

Managing to lift myself back into a seated position, I reviewed the previous night’s events. My body was aching and my stomach was growling, but I forced myself to stay put. I wasn’t going to let that young monk defeat me. He never returned, but an older monk in work clothes came through the main gate in the afternoon, looked at me and then returned to the monastery. Early that evening the same fellow appeared again. He walked over to me and asked, “How long do you intend to stay out here like this?”

I looked up at him, wondering whether he'd been summoned to send me away. "Until I am taken in or until I die," I said.

He too seemed perplexed. He shook his head and said, "Come with me." He had to help me stand and steady me until I was able to maintain my balance. I followed him to a small building with an earthen floor. Various tools were neatly arranged on one side and a series of straw mats lined the other.

"These are the workers' quarters," he said. "You can stay here for the time being."

He turned to a young monk, also in work clothes, who must have been one of his crew, and asked the fellow to bring me something to eat. The young monk left the room and came back carrying a tray with *miso* soup, rice, and some pickles. The two of them stood over me watching.

"Take it easy," the older monk said. "Nobody is going to take the tray away until you've finished."

I realized I was gobbling the food like a hungry animal.

The following morning the young helper who'd brought me dinner the previous night took me around the monastery explaining what each of the buildings was used for. He pointed out the Dharma Hall, the *hatto* he called it. "That's where the teacher gives Dharma talks." Then he took me to a building he called the *butsuden*. "That's the Buddha Hall where statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are enshrined." I wanted to go in and look around but didn't dare suggest anything that might make me appear too outspoken on my second day. Just walking around Eihei-ji was enough of a thrill to satisfy me. Then he showed me where the monks live and train; he called it the *sodo*. "Half of the monks at the monastery live here," he said, and then added, "You will hardly ever see them."

Monks who didn't train in the *sodo* were working everywhere. I was ecstatic having made it this far. I was inside the monastery. Every monk we passed I imagined to be an enlightened Bodhisattva.

Our tour ended after he pointed out the bathhouse and the toilets and showed me the *kuin*, the building that housed the administrative offices and the kitchen.

I shed tears of joy the following day when a priest in charge of a sub-temple of Eihei-ji, located outside the monastery's main gate, made me a monk's robe, patched together from pieces of tattered robes discarded by others.

"Put it on," he said. We were standing by the gate to his temple in front of a small garden. "Originally monks' robes were made from discarded rags and dyed uniformly," he added. "So you will be the only practitioner here with a robe similar to those of the ancient worthies."

He helped me into my new outfit and watched as I walked around the garden flapping my sleeves like a proud peacock. Though it felt heavy to my body, I loved the feeling. It was as if the robe were protecting me, hugging me and soothing me like my older sister had once done. I was elated, and no amount of will power could make me hide my feelings. But the priest kept shaking his head. I thought he must be angry at me for my showy display, so I stopped.

"This won't do," he said. "Come with me."

He led me through the garden to the entrance of his temple and told me to wait. I stood there looking around at the temple and the garden. There were two thatched roof buildings—the larger one, probably the Buddha Hall, and the other, into which the priest had disappeared, must have been the living quarters. Though I was curious about his temple, noticing the poor condition of the screens and the roof, I kept turning my attention back to my patched robe. I was so pleased I couldn't stop looking at it for more than a few seconds. Nothing I'd ever worn felt as magnificent as my robe.

The priest returned with a basin half full with water, a towel, a pair of scissors and a shaving knife. He told me to take off my robe, which I did reluctantly, and to sit on the ground. He handed me the basin and put the towel around my neck. After cutting my hair as close to the scalp as he could with the scissors, he picked up the knife.

"This may hurt a bit," he said.

What an understatement! He started to scrape away at my scalp as though it were a piece of wood that needed smoothing. I stiffened each time he cut me until I was continuously rigid with anticipation of the next cut. When he finished, he wiped my head with the wet

towel; it became red with blood. The scratches and bloodied spots made me cringe from stinging pain. Nevertheless, I was overjoyed at this major step to having at least the appearance of a monk. I put my robe back on, and the priest looked at me with satisfaction.

“Now that’s better,” he said.

With tears in my eyes I thanked him.

“You must now behave like a monk worthy of the robe,” he said, reminding me of the words of the *osho* of Busshoji Temple in Ishinden: *be an exemplary monk*.

Taking my leave, I walked through the garden. With the breeze cooling my wounded head, and the sleeves of my robe fluttering in the wind, I felt like a king.

I began to work under the guidance of the head of workers, the monk who I considered my savior. He showed me what needed to be done around the monastery while telling me about the workings of Eihei-ji. I watched in awe at how he managed all the laborers, checking on them as they worked in the gardens, repaired buildings, harvested vegetables, cleaned toilets and performed many other chores. When I had a break from my work, I walked around examining every corner of the property. Though it was the main Soto Zen monastery in the country, it consisted of nothing more than simply constructed thatched roof buildings that housed approximately one hundred monks.

When I helped the head of workers in the garden near the monks’ quarters, my mind drifted to thoughts of the monks living in that building. He must have seen how distracted I was, because he stopped his work and turned toward me. “Concentrate on your work and forget about the monks in the *sodo*. The fifty monks that live there are in special training and we have little to do with them. Your practice for now will be to work around the monastery with one pointed concentration.”

There was a watermill at the foot of a hill beside the workers’ quarters. I watched the monk in charge of milling the rice. He stood by the waterwheel that provided the power, washing the bran off his clothing. Even this simple act of cleaning his clothing seemed special

to me. I was mesmerized—believing everything that went on at Eihei-ji was motivated by enlightened action.

During my second week at the monastery, I met a young monk who was temporarily staying at Eihei-ji. He told me that if I were planning to be ordained in Zen, I would have to learn to practice Zen meditation. “Zazen is the most important practice in our sect,” he said. “Let me show you how to begin.”

He took me to the *butsudō*. There weren’t any monks in the Buddha Hall so we wiped our feet on a cloth at the entrance and went inside. The floorboards were polished and felt cold. The smell of incense permeated the room. My companion lit two candles and placed them on the altar. I looked around the large hall with a feeling of reverence. A large statue of the Buddha Shakamuni shone through the flickering light from the candles. It was painted in gold leaf and sat in meditation, at the center of the altar, on a lotus flower. Two Bodhisattvas, also painted in gold leaf, Monju and Fugen, were on Shakamuni’s left and right. Monju, the Bodhisattva of wisdom, sat on a lion, and held a sword meant to cut all entanglements and reveal the light of wisdom. Fugen, the Bodhisattva of love, sat on an elephant. He held a scroll in his hand.

I stood there absorbed in this scene, the Buddha and his Bodhisattva attendants coming alive and penetrating my being. The half smile on Shakamuni’s lips radiated a peace I longed for. The monk had to wake me from my reverie to show me the basic sitting position. We sat in meditation for the length of a burning incense stick. When I first got into the lotus position, my legs crossed, right foot on left thigh and left foot on right thigh, I was still in a dreamlike state brought on by the Buddha’s expression of great tranquility. But by the time the incense had burned halfway, I was feeling nothing but pain in my legs and back. Nevertheless, I was excited to be practicing like the Buddha—meditating in the seated posture of great repose. It was a posture I had seen in art books at Chiaki’s house, a position taken by the Medicine Buddha as portrayed in the statue at Shitenno-ji where I’d taken my little cousin. All the pictures and statues of the seated Buddha depicted him with a peaceful expression of enlightenment. I told myself I too will some day have that expression.

A few days later when I was working in the kitchen, I was sent by the monk in charge of the temple menu to get some sugar from the supply room. On my way, I saw the silhouette of a group of monks reflected on the paper sliding doors. They were sitting erect in the zazen posture. The image caused an electric shock to pass through my body, causing me to cower in fright. I tiptoed past the monks and proceeded to get the sugar. I couldn't stop thinking about what I'd felt. How could the shadow of monks in the sitting meditation posture have such a powerful effect on me?

I began to practice zazen whenever I had free time, experiencing nothing but pain in my legs and a constant barrage of thoughts. I reviewed my life and dreamed of my future over and over. Though I never experienced the peace I'd longed for, I believed that, in time, I would. That belief made the physical pain and uncontrollable thoughts bearable.

The excitement of my new life at Eihei-ji, the beauty of the monastery grounds, its great cedars and pines, the waterfall in the back of the main buildings, and the quiet contemplative atmosphere of its gardens kept me in a state of euphoria. But as I was assigned to work with the other monks, I soon learned that many of those who appeared like enlightened ones were nothing more than young novices feigning the behavior of awakened beings.

"*Koji*, take this package to the monks' hall right away."

I was sweeping in the garden. The monk who ordered me was no more than a year or two older than I. *Koji* is a name for a lay disciple. He used it to remind me that I was inferior, not having been ordained. It bothered me, but I didn't want to get in trouble, so I quickly finished sweeping and put the broom away.

"Move your ass," he said. "We don't have all day!"

I picked up the package and brought it to the monks' hall. With the exception of the head of the workers and a few senior monks, his behavior seemed to be the standard way monks dealt with newcomers. I was trying to get used to being treated like a servant and an inferior to anyone who had seniority over me, but it wasn't easy. I thought about Ishinden and the people I'd run from and wondered how different this new world really was. I told myself that

even if monks on the true spiritual path at Eiheiiji were rare as an *udonge* flower, said to bloom once in three thousand years, I would practice until I became one as rare as that flower.

In my second month at Eiheiiji I met Shoie, a monk who was caretaking at a temple while his teacher was away. He'd come to Eiheiiji to help out with a ceremony at the request of his teacher. Shoie wanted to know why I wasn't wearing an *okesa*. Monks didn't wear their Buddhist vestments while doing manual labor, so I was surprised at the question. I gathered he was just trying to make conversation.

"I'm not ordained yet," I told him.

"You are not going to get ordained at Eiheiiji," he said. "You realize that, don't you?"

"Why not?"

"It's not the way the system works," he said. "Eiheiiji is the main Soto Zen monastery. The monks that were sent here are already ordained. They come from Zen temples around the country. Here they learn how to perform ceremonies and receive higher ranks as Soto Zen priests. They eventually go back to the temple they came from."

Another shock. My ideals were being erased one at a time.

"I'm returning to my teacher's temple next week," he said. "Why don't you come with me, and I'll see to it that you are ordained when my teacher returns. He is on the road now, but he should return to our temple in a month or so." Then, as though out of the blue, he said, "You have to be careful when you choose a place to train. There are a lot of charlatans out there masquerading as monks." In a kind of big brother attitude he added, "Believe me, Saikichi, I know. I've been around."

I met Shoie a few more times that week. Whenever he saw me, he came over and talked with me. He was very friendly, perhaps too friendly. Why, I wondered, was he taking such an interest in me?

The day before Shoie was to leave for his teacher's temple, he came to the workers' quarters and asked me if I'd thought about going with him. "If you're willing to work hard, there won't be any problems." He looked directly at me with a sympathetic expression and said, "I give you my word you will be ordained as soon as my

teacher returns.” His words were enticing, but I was suspicious. Why was I nervous when Shoie acted friendly? Did I meet so many swindlers in Ishinden that I was no longer able to accept kindness? At any rate, I wanted so badly to be ordained, and this fellow was offering me the opportunity.

“Hard work never bothered me,” I told Shoie, and I agreed to go with him.

Chapter 10

It was late November and snow was falling in the mountains when Shoie and I set out for his teacher's temple. The name of the temple was Chojuan. It was near Maruoka, a mountain village a day's walk from Eiheiji. We hiked up hills of cedars and pines, climbing the mountain paths, as snow piled up. My bare feet hurt from the cold.

We took a break on one of the peaks. Shoie turned to me and said, "Some of the people in our town believe Chojuan is haunted." He was smiling.

Apparently seeing no particular surprise from my expression, he asked, "Don't you believe in ghosts?"

"Not really," I said.

Shoie continued, watching me closely as he spoke. "A one-eyed snake has been spotted around the temple grounds, and people say that it is the revengeful ghost of an old half-blind peasant woman who was buried under the temple."

I was becoming curious, but kept quiet and tried to hide any outward display of interest. I could feel that he was hoping to get a reaction from me, and it only made me hide any demonstration of interest. I didn't like feeling manipulated.

"They also say that the large amount of rain we get each spring is a result of the woman's tears," he added.

The story sounded quite bizarre. I couldn't keep quiet any longer. "Why was she buried under the temple?" I asked.

"She was a *hitobashira*," Shoie said.

I'd heard about the gruesome ancient superstition that burying someone alive under a building would give the structure the strength needed to fight off the evil forces that try to destroy it, but I'd thought it was only a part of eerie folk tales. I asked Shoie how this woman became the victim of such a hideous custom, and this is what he told me.

"Chojuan was originally a castle built by the head of a samurai clan. He received the land from Nobunaga Oda, who awarded it to him for his military support in Nobunaga's effort to unify our country at the end of the 16th century."

Shoie described in detail how this samurai broke the power of the Pure Land Buddhists, the populist sect with its strong standing army in that area, by burning their temples—in many instances with the believers inside.

“Nobunaga was greatly pleased with this general’s method,” Shoie said.

The gory details, as Shoie delineated them, turned my stomach. He, however, smiled the whole time. My mind was picturing people, like the parishioners at the Pure Land temple in Ishinden, older people, devout believers, thumbing their beads and praying to be saved, while those samurai, led by this bloodthirsty general were shooting fire arrows into the building and killing anyone who tried to escape. The images of this bloody inferno filled me with horror.

“How does all that relate to the half-blind peasant woman, the *hitobashira*?” I asked, hoping that another part of the tale would have some moral redemption.

“She and her husband lived on a small parcel of land in the area, which they farmed. Her husband was conscripted into Nobunaga’s army—equivalent to a death sentence. You see, the peasants were placed in Nobunaga’s front lines during attacks and were usually killed during the extended campaign. She never saw her husband again.”

I could tell that to my disappointment the story was going to get even more grisly, but, at this point, I wanted to know about the woman. Shoie told me that after her husband was taken away, she farmed the land alone until marauding bandits came down from the mountains and stole her crops and whatever else of value they could carry from her home. She managed to escape into the woods with her two boys. When she came back, she found her house burned to the ground. From then on, her life was devoted solely to making certain her sons survived. She did whatever was necessary to feed the boys, including stealing when she was desperate. Her right hand was cut off when she was caught stealing a loaf of bread. As he described the woman’s appearance, Shoie hobbled around in a grotesque fashion, back bent, one eye shut, and his hand up the sleeve of his robe.

It disturbed me to see him hobble around imitating the poor peasant woman. Was he just trying to give me a better idea of the tragedy, or was he getting pleasure from the telling? Whatever his reason for the mime, it felt a little abnormal; it gave me the creeps.

The early snow continued to fall, carpeting the green mountains with a beautiful white blanket. My feet were starting to feel numb and my robe was soaked. I was taking in the beauty around me, shivering from the cold and listening to a horror story.

“The general made two attempts at building a castle on the highest hill of his domain,” Shoie continued, “but the stone walls collapsed on both attempts, as landslides toppled them before the work could be completed. Following the advice of his closest retainer, the general sent out word that they were looking for someone to agree to be a *hitobashira*. The half-blind peasant woman, living in poverty and desperate to see that her sons improve their lot, said she would sacrifice her life if the general promised to elevate her sons to the rank of samurai. The deal was made, and the woman was buried alive.”

The story was over—at least that’s what I’d assumed. Shoie and I walked in silence for a while—I enjoyed the release from the tension of the drama. However, Shoie wasn’t finished; he was just waiting for the right moment to maximize the impact of the tragic conclusion.

“The stone walls held, and the castle was completed,” Shoie said. Then, after another short silence, he added, as though he’d just remembered—and he said it, mind you, with a roar of laughter. “At the whim of the Shogun’s government, the general’s clan was relocated to another part of the country before he had a chance to bestow the rank of samurai on the woman’s sons.”

I felt sick inside. Shoie, however, seemed to be having a good laugh from his own telling of this tragic tale.

Shoie and I arrived at Chojuan that evening. I’d expected to find other monks training there, but none appeared. There was no activity at all. The temple seemed to be deserted.

“How many monks train here?” I asked.

“Two,” Shoie said, with his characteristic smile that was starting to get on my nerves. “You and me.”

“Just you and me!” I wondered at my own lack of curiosity about the temple before leaving Eiheiji. Why the devil didn’t I ask him how many monks there were before agreeing to come? I didn’t ask Shoie anything about Chojuan. All I could think about then was being ordained.

As soon as we settled in, Shoie explained the daily routine of the temple.

“Since I’m in charge in the *osho*’s absence,’ he said, “I will have to stay around in case someone needs to see me.” There was that sinister smile again.

Of course, since many of the menial tasks—begging in town, fetching water at the bottom of the hill, purchasing supplies at nearby stores and so on—required leaving the temple, I had to do them. I also had to do most of the work around the temple, being the only other monk in residence.

The temple was located on the summit of the mountain and its source of water was a well at the foot. The most arduous chore was carrying the buckets of water up to Chojuan. We needed water to cook breakfast and wash, so it had to be fetched first thing upon rising in the morning. I got up at three, jumped out of my *futon*, washed my face, and quickly wrapped myself in my old cotton kimono—the only one I owned. I put my patched robe over my thin kimono, picked up two buckets and a bamboo pole and trotted barefoot down the mountainside. As winter set in, snow fell often. The cold morning air kept me moving fast until my blood circulation increased and my body warmed up a bit. I filled the buckets at the well at the foot of the mountain and carried them back up to the temple.

When that chore was done, I went to the Buddha Hall and, joined by Shoie, read sutras. Then I went to the kitchen and prepared rice gruel for breakfast. After breakfast, I went to town and made the rounds to collect alms.

One night, around my second week at Chojuan, Shoie came into my room. “I have some work to do tomorrow morning, so don’t wait for me. Just do the sutra reading by yourself.”

He gave me the same excuse the next day and the next. By the third week, I got used to performing the morning recitations alone.

Shoie stopped showing up for breakfast, too. That good-for-nothing! I thought. I'll bet he's still in bed. Sleeping-in while the master's away. I felt like going to his room and waking him, but I didn't want to endanger my chance at being ordained, so I stayed on and kept my mouth shut. I prepared the morning gruel, as I'd done before, and got ready to go alone for my daily alms rounds at the nearby town of Maruoka.

The snow froze on the road to town as I walked barefoot with my begging bowl. I went to every house, standing under the eaves chanting *hoooo* ... When someone put some rice in my bowl, I recited a prayer for the donor without lifting my head and then moved on to the next house. I tried not to think of Shoie and the fact that he was hardly involved in any of the duties at the temple, but I no longer had any doubt that I was dealing with a trickster. The memory of him, wearing that phony expression of deep concern, telling me, "There are a lot of charlatans out there masquerading as monks," incensed me, and I couldn't let it go.

Once, standing by one of the houses, begging, with my head down and my face hidden under my straw umbrella hat, I heard two people talking.

"Shoie has got himself another sucker," one fellow said.

"Yeah, he sure knows how to run that temple," said the other, laughing.

I became furious when I realized they were laughing at me.

I arrived back at Chojuan and heard snoring coming from Shoie's room. Here I was having finished morning chores, sutra reading, breakfast and the morning alms rounds and that lazy wretch was still sound asleep, as though he was living in some luxury inn.

The realization that I'd been duped made it difficult to perform the daily chores with any degree of calm. But I couldn't let go of my desire to be ordained by the *osho* of Chojuan when he returned. I felt like a hypocrite. I became acutely aware of what little work Shoie actually did. He went to town often, sometimes not returning until the following day. Many times he'd return drunk. My aversion to being around him made me look forward to his leaving the temple while, at the same time, I was angry at having to do all the work as though I was his servant.

"When is *Osho* coming back?" I asked him one day.

"He just sent me a letter saying he would be gone a few more weeks. Some work came up and he had to delay his return."

His response was too fast, too automatic. I don't think he had any memory of having ever told me when his teacher had planned to return. I could picture him putting me off with stories of new letters from his teacher postponing his return. I thought of myself waiting for the next few months, maybe for the whole year.

He was also beginning to show no qualms about revealing his indiscretions. I had been at Chojuan about one month when I returned from an errand in town and heard a woman's voice in Shoie's room.

"Ha ha ha, Shoie-kun, stop that."

"Shut up and pour me another drink."

"You're such a bad boy, ha ha ha ..."

The mood was so reminiscent of the prostitute quarters where I played hide and seek as a child that I felt an uncanny discomfort—like I was being thrown back into the world from which I'd thought I'd escaped. How the hell did I get myself into this situation? I thought. Am I a fool? Did I leave Ishinden and the low life there for the same situation here? Not knowing what else to do, I stayed there a while longer, hoping that Shoie's teacher would return and ordain me. But the thought that I was an active participant in this sorry plight of mine began to trouble me. Shoie was not the only trickster. I too was an imposter—false to myself. Despite my growing feeling of being part of the problem, my resentment towards this scoundrel was like a festering wound.

Then, one day, when I was washing the floor in the hallway, I heard Shoie cursing abuses at his woman. He walked out of the room with an empty jug, showed it to me and shouted, slurring his words.

"Take this to town and have it filled with *sake*."

The image of Bunkichi handing me the jug, as I was about to run away from home a few months before, flashed through my mind. It was almost as though my adoptive father had come back to haunt me in the form of Shoie. I wrung the rag into the bucket and continued wiping the floor; I didn't even look up. I wasn't about to

jump to attention when being addressed that way. Since I'd never before ignored Shoie, I guess he took me for a pushover.

"Idiot, I said move it!" Shoie stammered, and then let out a tirade of abuses.

I was used to foul language, having grown up with pimps, whores and gangsters, but hearing it at a temple was surprising to me. At Eiheiiji, many of the monks spoke gruffly when they were talking among themselves, but Shoie took the vulgarity to another level. "What are you deaf and dumb? Move your ass, you dumb piece of shit, you ..."

He was so involved in his own emotional diatribe he probably never noticed the fury in my eyes. When I grabbed him by the collar and dragged him out into the snow, he was shocked. He couldn't believe this was happening. I lost all self-control. I too screamed obscenities as I gave him a good thrashing.

While I was beating him, his girlfriend came out and tried to stop me by grabbing my arm. With a sweeping motion of my elbow, I sent her sprawling.

"Help! Somebody help us," she sobbed. But no one was around to hear.

I stared at Shoie's bloodied face, feeling my rage drain from me, and a weary calm take over. I had let out two months of suppressed anger, but what did that tell me about myself? In what way were my actions any different from those of the thugs I wanted to escape from in Ishinden? I walked away from the two of them, went into my room and got my few belongings. I wrapped them in a scarf and walked out of the temple. When I looked back before descending the mountain, Shoie was still sitting in the snow, his girlfriend wiping the blood off his face with a handkerchief.

I felt empty inside as I walked down the mountain trail for the last time—my dream of a better life fading with each new encounter. Many of the monks I'd worked with at Eiheiiji appeared like imposters in black robes; Shoie, however, was the lowest. Had I come this far just to learn that my future couldn't really be altered? My mind was racing as I tried to understand the events that had occurred since my arrival at Eiheiiji. How excited I'd felt when I arrived at the monastery. I thought I was going to learn a new way to live my life. Was I

completely bound by my karma? And was mine the karma of the doomed? Then I recalled my last trip to Mukumoto and the prophecy of the *inariroshi*. Her words, *the road you take will help others and bring great peace to you*, had brought me hope at a time when I didn't know what to do with myself. It didn't matter that I thought fortune telling was nothing but a crooked business. That blind woman was different, and I was dearly in need of direction. Her words were what I had needed and all that really mattered.

As I continued on the road away from Chojuan and back to Eiheiji, another part of the *inariroshi*'s prophecy helped me regain some hope for my future: It will be difficult work and will take a lot of time before you understand what you must do. *You will encounter many obstacles on your journey, but you will overcome them.*

Chapter 11

Shortly after returning to Eiheiji and resuming my work with the laborers, I helped a monk named Seiryu Yamamoto take supplies to the kitchen. Seiryu was different from most of the monks I'd worked with at the monastery. He treated me as an equal; I felt none of the posturing I was becoming accustomed to when I was with other Eiheiji monks. I enjoyed working with him, and over time we developed a friendship.

One day Seiryu and I were sweeping leaves in the garden when he turned to me and said, "Saikichi, you can't remain a laborer at Eiheiji all your life. You have to get ordained or you will eventually be asked to leave."

"I know, but it's not that easy." I told him of my experience at Chojuan.

"Listen to me. My teacher has a temple in Amakusa in Kyushu. His name is Koho Sawada. He's the real thing. You'll know it as soon as you meet him. I promise you nobody will take advantage of you there. I realize that Kyushu is the western-most island, and the city of Amakusa is located half way down the island; it's a long journey to Amakusa. But I can assure you that you won't regret it. I'm certain Sawada Roshi will ordain you. Think it over."

Not having fully recovered from my experience with Shoie, I was extremely cautious. I liked Seiryu and wanted to believe him, but I hadn't known him very long. I couldn't get the thought from my mind that he too might try to take advantage of me. I watched him carefully for the next couple of weeks. He was a small handsome monk five years older than I. He had an easygoing way about him and appeared to get along with everyone. After suggesting I go to Amakusa, he never talked to me about it again. It occurred to me that unlike Shoie, Seiryu had nothing to gain from my going to his teacher's monastery. He was suggesting I go to Amakusa while he would be training at Eiheiji. So he couldn't be thinking of using me as Shoie did, since he wouldn't even be there. There was another reason I believed Seiryu was sincere in his desire to help me. I was feeling desperate—I needed to believe him. I decided to take a chance and set out for Amakusa.

It was the third week in January and the snow was piled high in the mountains around Eiheiiji when I left for Amakusa in Kyushu. I was seventeen years old, had no money, just the patched robe I was wearing. I walked barefoot.

I traveled west from Eiheiiji about twenty-five kilometers until I arrived at the ferry crossing of Kuzuryu River. I didn't have the boat fee, and wondered what to do. I told myself that there was no turning back and decided to join the crowd boarding the boat and leave things to fate. There were about fifteen passengers, an oarsman and a boatman in charge. Nobody paid me any particular attention; they chatted with each other as the boat left the dock.

Once the ferry boat was underway, I heard one voice above the others. "That'll be fifteen *sen* please. Thank you. Fifteen *sen*, sir. Thank you. Fifteen *sen*, madam. Thank you..." The ferry boatman was making the rounds collecting the fee from each passenger. As he got closer to me, I became panicky. I had to do something quickly. I put my head down, closed my eyes, and in a loud voice started reciting the Heart Sutra, "*kan ji zai boo satta gyoo jin hanya hara mitta ...* " I had learned something of value at Chojuan. As the boatman got closer, I got louder "*ji shoo ken goo on kai ku doo issai kuu yaku ...* " He tried to ask me for the fee, but when I continued reciting with eyes closed at an ear-piercing pitch, as though I couldn't hear him, he moved on to other passengers. He came back to me periodically only to be bombarded with more of "*sha ri shi shiki fuu ii ku ku fuu ii shiki shiki...*" I stretched each syllable to lengthen the recitation until the boat was about to land on the other shore.

As the passengers got off the boat, I recited, "I pray for the merit of this sutra to reach all sentient beings and all the buddhas in the three worlds..." and then I approached the ferry boatman. Bowing my head, I said, "Sir, the fact is I don't have even a one *sen* coin. Could you please accept this sutra reading in lieu of money?"

He stared at me for a moment, and then he turned his head and looked over his shoulder at the oarsman who was watching us with a blank expression. When the boatman shook his head, I was certain he was going to take me to task. I froze, preparing to be admonished, or worse, to be sent to the authorities. Then a big smile spread across his face and he said, "That was the longest recitation

of the Heart Sutra I've ever heard, ha, ha, ha... it's alright, it's alright, sure, have a good trip little monk, ha, ha, ha. "

My mood changed, I felt uplifted. I continued down the road to Kyushu, begging for food and hoping to be put up at temples on the way. It was winter and I was traveling through high country. On the second night of my journey I stayed at a Pure Land Buddhist temple in Tsuruga. Early the next morning I set out to cross the Yanagase Mountains, reaching the top of the highest peak in the middle of the night. Snow was already piled high and new snow was falling. The winds were fierce. To keep the circulation of my body heat warming me, I had to keep moving. My bare feet sank deep in the snow as I walked, slowing my pace considerably.

I started to lose feeling in my toes and had to stop and rub them to get the circulation back. My feet had been damaged from begging barefoot in the snow and ice in Maruoka, when I was at Chojuan, and they had never completely recovered. As I traversed the Yanagase peak the numbness turned into pain, a stinging pain, and then my feet started to burn. Realizing I was suffering from frostbite, I began to panic. It was another five hundred kilometers to Kyushu and two hundred more to Amakusa. I knew that I could never make it in this condition.

I had posted a letter to my sister Sai during my stay with the workers at Eihei-ji, and learned from her reply that she had married and now lived in Iga Ueno. Iga Ueno was a town in Mie prefecture, about a hundred twenty kilometers from the Yanagase peak. Surely I could make it to her house. I decided to go there and convalesce. When my frostbite healed I would get back on the road.

I struggled in pain up and down mountain roads in snow country. Shiga, the adjoining prefecture, brought milder weather. The warm breeze off Lake Biwa, the largest body of water in our country, relieved me and I felt less afraid.

Through the green reeds and shrubs I could see hundreds of water birds dotting the blue lake. Two fishing boats appeared as slightly larger dots. In the middle of the lake the granite cliffs of Chikubu Island rose high. Legend says that the sun goddess sent the god Benzaiten to visit the earth on Chikubu Island (called the

Island of the Gods) to bring a message to the emperor. If the emperor built a temple there, the message stated, peace, prosperity and good harvest would come to his people. Though comforted by this angelic scene, the comfort also took some of the fight from me. I relaxed, and with the feeling of relaxation came an awareness of just how fatigued I was.

My movement south along Lake Biwa was made easier by milder temperatures. I spent the next few nights in family temples of the Pure Land sect. Though the pain in my feet never subsided, I felt refreshed from nights of sound sleep. The flat countryside roads were a relief. My pace picked up, and I arrived at Iga Ueno on the fifth day.

I reached the door of Sai's house, tired and feet in pain. It was a two-story house—a fish store with its large display counter full of fish in front was on the first floor. The smell of fish was strong, and I was reminded that I hadn't eaten all day. I was tired and hungry and excited at the thought of seeing my sister again. I hadn't seen Sai since the time I'd cried in front of her master's home when I was nine years old and feeling helpless. Eight years had gone by since that incident. She had married a fishmonger, who set up shop in Iga Ueno.

I saw Sai behind the counter placing trays of fish on the display table. My sister—my mother—my sister; I was nine-years old again, wanting to run to her, to hold onto her apron and cry. But I didn't. I stood there and watched her work. Even in her soiled work clothes she was beautiful.

Sai looked up and saw me at the entrance. I guess she thought I was a customer. She seemed about to ask me what I wanted, then she looked more carefully at my tattered robe and dirty face and upon reexamination probably figured I'd come to beg food. Suddenly, as though awakened from a dream, a look of recognition came over her face—she realized I was her wayward brother.

"Nishide," she shrieked, turning to the man behind the counter, "it's Saikichi! It's my brother!"

The man watched us with a big grin on his face.

"Saikichi!" She shouted joyfully. She put her arms around me and hugged me. Then she jumped back, "Oh, gracious me! You're

covered in lice!”

She led me to the back of the house and stripped me down and put my clothes in a pile. Then she poured water in a large iron pot and stoked a fire under it until the water boiled.

“Here, put this kimono on,” she said and took my clothes and placed them in the pot of boiling water.

I stood there in my brother-in-law’s kimono, which was a few sizes too big for me, watching my sister take control just like the old days.

Chapter 12

The fish store remained open for a few hours after I'd arrived. Sai worked in the front dealing with customers while I stood by her side telling of my life from the last time we'd met up to my arrival at Eihei-ji. Her hair was hidden in a white scarf and she wore a not so white apron covering her kimono. Her husband worked in the back, cutting, gutting and preparing the fish to be displayed on the front counter.

"I don't think you've ever talked to me so much in all the years we'd lived together," Sai said.

So many thoughts had been churning in my mind ever since I left Eihei-ji. It was as though the floodgates that were holding back those waves of thoughts had opened and everything came pouring out. I told Sai of my experience with that horrible trickster Shoie at Chojuan.

"What kind of a Buddhist monk is that!" she said. "Horrible!"

I was already regretting having told her about Shoie. I didn't want her to get the impression that the world I had chosen to become a part of, the monastic world, was one of charlatans and tricksters. I wanted my sister to support me in my choice to become a monk.

"Nishide," Sai called out. "Can you watch the front for a while? I'm going to prepare the bath."

I followed her into the house and into the bathroom; I was still jabbering away as we went. "I'll fill the tub and light a fire under it," I said. "You go back and take care of the store."

She showed me where the wood was and left me to prepare the bath.

In the evening after dinner, Sai and I sat by a low table in the dining room that adjoined the store. Her husband returned to the store to prepare for the following morning and to clean up. Sai had taken off her white apron, uncovering her subdued wine and black splashed kimono. Her hair was tied in a simple bun, exposing her long neck. It took me some time to adjust to this new person, who had played such an important role in my life as a child in Tsui City.

Her moderate style of dress and her calm demeanor reminded me that my sister was now a mature married woman.

Sai poured tea while I recounted to her the details of my journey from Eihei-ji to Iga Ueno. When I told her about the last leg of my travel—this past week on the road when I spent nights at Pure Land temples—I was reminded of the lice. People had taken me in and fed me and treated me like family. They trusted me because of my robe and shaved head. What if I had spread the lice to them?

“The Pure Land priests and their wives treated me like one of their family,” I said. “And how did I repay their kindness? I probably left them all swarms of little creatures jumping all over their temples and getting inside everyone’s clothes and in their hair. Were they becoming aware of it at this very moment?” I felt so ashamed.

“You didn’t realize it, so how could you do anything?” Sai said, trying to comfort me. But I could see that she was also trying to keep from bursting out laughing.

At that moment Sai’s husband, Nishide, walked in. He was a tall robust man with a round face, large penetrating eyes, and thick eyebrows. He wore an oil-stained apron on which he was wiping his hands. He smelled of fish.

“You’re looking good in my kimono,” he said, laughing. “A little too big, but it suits you better than that tattered robe.”

“Thanks for lending it to me. No offense but I prefer my robe once it is disinfected.”

After Sai poured her husband some tea, she took the kettle into the kitchen to fill it and boil some more water.

“Have you thought about giving up this idea of becoming a monk?” Nishide said. “Look at those feet. You can’t go to Kyushu like that.”

“He’s not going anywhere until his frostbite is gone,” Sai yelled from the kitchen.

“From what Sai tells me, you haven’t exactly been treated well by the clerics you’ve met so far. Why don’t you give up this crazy idea of being ordained and consider working for us at the fish store?”

“Thanks for the offer,” I said, “but I plan to be on my way as soon as I can travel.”

"I told you he wouldn't listen," Sai said, carrying in a fresh pot of tea. "He's always been a very obstinate boy." She filled our cups.

"What made you want to become a monk in the first place?" Nishide asked.

I reviewed the reasons in my mind before I spoke, recalling life with Bunkichi and Hisa. It seemed like years since I'd left my adoptive parents' home. So much had happened since then. I recalled the joy I'd experienced whenever I'd managed to get away and spend time with Chiaki's family—the books on art and history and the peaceful atmosphere. But those were interludes, moments of reprieve, from what was normally a life of vulgarity and squalor. I snapped back to the present, realizing that Nishide was waiting for my response.

"I was tired of living among people who think nothing of taking advantage of anyone weaker than themselves. I wanted to live in a world that values beauty and truth over cleverness and exploitation."

"And have you found such a world?" Nishide asked.

I was a bit perturbed by the question. He knew the answer. "I haven't even been able to be ordained yet. I've just moved around the fringes of the monastic world. It hasn't been all that beautiful, I agree, but I have to give it more time.

"In Ishinden, with the exception of one family, I encountered nothing but slime. As long as I stayed there, I saw no way out. I've been in the monastic world for less than a half year now. It's true, I've met some seedy characters, but I've also had some experiences that inspired me."

"And they were?"

"For example, when I wore my robe, tattered though it was, people seemed to trust me, like the families from the temples that took me in for the nights when I had no place to sleep. These are people who believe in the teaching of the Buddha, and they trusted me because my robe showed me to be someone who took refuge in Buddhism."

"They were good people," Nishide said. "Good people are good people. They help others whether they wear robes or not. You will meet good people in this town, too—even if you wear the clothes of a fishmonger."

We sat quietly for a while. Then I spoke, more to myself than to him. "And then there is zazen."

"Zazen?"

How could I explain it? I remembered my first encounter with the practice of Zen meditation. With the exception of the explanation from the Pure Land priest in Ishinden, who had recommended Eihei-ji to me, I had known nothing of zazen. My confused mind at that time couldn't understand much of what the priest said. All I had in my thoughts then was to get away from Bunkichi and Hisa. When that young Eihei-ji monk showed me how to meditate, though I still hadn't been accepted as a monk, I felt I had received a secret initiation into Buddhism.

Nishide sat there patiently while I drifted into thought once again. Finally, I said, "Yes, zazen, sitting meditation. It's the most important practice in Zen temples. I have to learn more about it." From the look of my brother-in-law's face, I gathered he hadn't the slightest idea what I was talking about.

I tried despite my frostbite to take the lotus posture and sit up straight. "You see, when I sit with my legs crossed and my hands in this position and concentrate on my lower abdomen, I experience something special. My mind starts to slow down, and I feel a sense of calm. Of course I've only just started practicing, so I also have to deal with pain in my legs and in my back; and the periods of calm are few and far between. But I truly believe that as I meditate more, I will find a peace that surpasses anything I've ever known. I may be wrong about that, but I have to find out for myself."

"I see," he said, looking at my legs locked in the lotus position. His expression was one of concern. "Now release those legs. If you don't let the blood circulate, it will take months before your feet begin to heal. You do want to get to Amakusa, don't you?"

I realized, however, that he didn't see. I hadn't clarified anything for him. No, I take that back. He did realize one thing; I wouldn't be happy if I remained in Iga Ueno.

"Your sister told me that you wouldn't be satisfied working in a fish store, and I'm beginning to see her point. In any case, you'll have to stay here until the sores on your feet heal."

After a week of staying off my feet, they began to heal. From the second week on, I helped my brother-in-law around the store during the day and reminisced with Sai in the evenings. My distressing past seemed less painful when I looked back on it with my sister. Hoping that with time I would grow attracted to life in Iga Ueno, Sai gave me the town's story in small daily doses. Iga Ueno had a history for which its citizens were proud. It was built around a castle and was surrounded by mountains. It was the birthplace of the famed haiku poet, Basho, and a training place for Ninja warriors during medieval Japan. Sai took me to visit the town's scenic spots. But it was becoming clearer to her the more we were together that my mind was set on continuing my journey toward monkhood. I constantly checked the condition of my feet and was impatient for them to heal.

"I guess all you can think about is getting back on the road," Sai said.

We were looking at the great walls of the Ueno Castle from outside the castle moat. Most of the castle was in ruins, but the great stone walls, thirty meters high, stood reminding one of a time when it was perhaps the grandest castle in the country. I was looking down at the water, avoiding Sai's gaze.

"I will miss you and Nishide. I think of that too. But I must get on with my life, and that means being ordained." I loved my sister and felt comfortable around her. I couldn't believe that nine years had passed since the last time we were together. We were family in the true sense of the word. I was even growing fond of Nishide—he too had become family. Even so, I couldn't forget my dream. I made plans to depart.

The evening before my departure, I returned from working with Nishide at the fish store. We washed up and walked into the dining room. The table was elaborately set considering the family's modest circumstances.

"What's the feast for?" I asked.

"We are celebrating your return to health and lamenting your decision to leave at the same time," Sai said with a playful smile. "Where is the little boy who stood outside my master's house with tears in his eyes, refusing to leave me?"

“Back then I was going home to a den of sloth. Now I am on my way to the house of Buddha.”

“I never could win with you, Saikichi. Sit down and let’s eat.”

“You know I don’t eat meat.” I said, taking the plate of red snapper in front of me and placing it to the side.

“I thought just this once, since you are leaving tomorrow. You need strength for your trip.”

“Thank you, but I’d rather not. The Buddha will give me strength.”

“Stubborn right to the end.”

When I think of the pride I felt refusing the fish, I turn red with shame. I’d given no thought to the effort my sister put into preparing it. I hadn’t yet read the story of the Buddha eating rotten meat that would kill him so as not to offend his host.

Sai and I sat on the veranda the following morning looking out at the mountains. Nishide had already gone to work. Sai was seeing me off, trying to hold back her tears.

“Here,” she said, handing me a package.

I took it and placed it beside me on the veranda.

“You’d better open it. It won’t do you any good to carry it all the way to Amakusa.”

I opened the package and found a new pair of straw sandals. I looked at my sister; I was overcome with emotion. I wanted her to hold me as she once did in front of her employer’s house, but I forced myself to hide those feelings. I needed to keep my thoughts focused on Amakusa and the experience of true monastic life.

“We don’t want you ruining your feet again,” she said. Then she kneeled in front of me. “Let me tie them for you.” As she tied my sandals I felt a tear drop on one of my feet. Sai quickly wiped it off with the edge of her sleeve. “Now walk around and see how they feel,” she said.

I walked back and forth in front of the veranda. “They feel very comfortable,” I said. “Thank you.”

Chapter 13

As I left my sister's house with a bundle of supplies for the road, I wondered whether my experience at Soshinji, the monastery I was going to in Amakusa, would really be different from Chojuan. I hoped that Koho Sawada Roshi was at least half as worthy as Seiryu's claim, and I prayed that I was not being sent on another fruitless mission.

By the time I left Iga Ueno, the weather had become milder. Much of the snow had melted and, with my new sandals and the month of rest, the bounce had returned to my step. It didn't take long for my fear of another unsuccessful venture to fade from my mind. I felt, once more, the exhilaration of a new journey and the hope that accompanied it.

That night I stayed at a Pure Land temple. The priest and his wife were very kind to me. They asked me where I was going and were interested in my story. The priest kept shaking his head saying, "I could never do anything like that. I admire your courage." I was reminded of the *osho* at Ishinden, who took care of me and sent me on my journey with some coins and a bag of rice.

I felt more comfortable searching out Pure Land temples than those of my own Zen sect to seek shelter in the evenings. Ishinden, was a town built up around Senjuji, a large Pure Land temple, and for all intents and purposes its head priest governed the town. Most of the temples outside the moat in Ishinden were Pure Land temples, subordinate to Senjuji. They were in neighborhoods standing alongside ordinary homes, and they served a lay community. There were no *sodos* to train monks and their main building was the Buddha Hall where people from the community came for special religious ceremonies. Because Pure Land priests married and had families, I'd grown up thinking that marriage was normal for a Buddhist priest. Perhaps the family atmosphere gave me a sense of belonging I'd always craved.

The following morning after eating a hearty breakfast, I said goodbye to the wife of the priest. She was sitting with her legs folded in the traditional *seiza* posture on the veranda, as she saw me off.

“Take care on your journey, Reverend Sir,” she said. “And don’t forget to take your lunch.”

Reverend Sir? Being aware of my true standing, the words embarrassed me. I was wearing a priest’s robe, but I’d never been ordained. I was neither monk nor layman; I didn’t know what I was. I remembered the Pure Land *osho* at Ishinden quoting Shinran, the founder of their sect, saying he was neither monk nor layman.

On the road to Otsu in Shiga Prefecture farmers were bent over the fields harvesting *daikon* radish and *hakusai* cabbage. Plum trees lined the roadside. The fragrance of pink and white plum blossoms filled the air. As I walked on, taking in the sights and smells, I overtook a monk, hardly noticing him.

“Where are you going in such a rush?” he called out from behind.

I turned my head to face him. “I’m sorry. The scenery absorbed me, and I didn’t see you. This is the pace I usually walk. I’m on my way to Amakusa.”

“Quite a coincidence,” he said. “I, too, am on my way to Amakusa.”

Coincidence? I thought about my life up to then—all the pleasant and painful occurrences. The deaths of my parents and uncle, life with Bunkichi and Hisa, meeting Chiaki and his family, the *inariroshi* at Mukumoto, Shoie and Chojuan, Seiryu and now this monk, were these coincidences? They felt more like part of some grand scheme, some mysterious force at work, that brought me to where I was today.

We walked together, quietly at first, then, as I became more comfortable in his company, I told him about my journey and asked him many questions. His name was Sekitei. He was the priest of a family temple in a village near Soshinji, and he knew all about Soshinji and Sawada Roshi. Another coincidence? Whatever it was, the chance to learn about the monastery and about its teacher excited me greatly.

“What kind of man is Koho Sawada?” I asked.

“Sawada Roshi?” he said, grinning. “He’s one of those rare birds. He trained with some of the best teachers of his day and some of the wildest. He is well educated in the scriptures, a good poet and

calligrapher, as well as being gifted in sutra recitation. His voice is both sonorous and powerful, and like some of his renegade Dharma brothers, he is very much his own person—he doesn't follow the herd."

Everything he told me about the teacher excited me. But he hadn't mentioned the one aspect of this 'rare bird' that interested me most.

"What is his feeling about zazen?" I asked, as my anticipation of meeting this unusual teacher grew.

"Zazen?" he said, reflecting for a moment. "Roshi believes zazen is the essence of Zen Buddhism. He practices intensely, never worries about where his next meal will come from. He can meditate for days on end—sits like an immovable rock. I'll tell you one story, and you judge for yourself. It was told to me by one of the senior monks at the Soshinji Monastery, who'd trained with Sawada Roshi at Chotokuji, a monastery in Yamaguchi Prefecture.

"Sawada Roshi had been Zen master of Chotokuji before he came to Amakusa. The monks at Chotokuji lived from day to day, practicing hard and begging in the town for their food. A day before the most important retreat of the year, *Rohatsu sesshin*, the *tenzo* came into Roshi's room all flustered. Being in charge of the kitchen, the *tenzo* had to ensure there would be no shortage of supplies for the week of retreat. 'Tomorrow is *sesshin* and we don't have any provisions,' he said. 'With all the business at the temple this week, we haven't been able to do *takuhatsu* these last few days. Not having collected alms, we don't have enough supplies to take care of the monks during *sesshin*. What can we do?'

"With no change in expression, Roshi calmly said, 'It doesn't matter. Whether we have food or not, December first is the beginning of *Rohatsu sesshin* and, like every other year, we will start *sesshin* tomorrow.'

"So *sesshin* went on as usual. The monks meditated for days without food. By the third day the monks were famished. The only noises you could hear in the meditation hall were their growling stomachs and the loud smacks of the *kyosaku* stick striking the sleepy monks. Roshi sat quietly seeming unmoved by the whole affair. The *tenzo* felt particularly responsible for not being more

attentive to the problem of kitchen supplies before *sesshin* and wondered whether he should appeal to Sawada Roshi once more. He was feeling desperate and wasn't sure how to proceed.

"Just then, he heard someone at the entrance to the meditation hall quietly beckon him. He stood up and walked outside the zendo. It was one of the older ladies who lived nearby and who usually had her nose in all the temple affairs. She asked, 'Have you been meditating for three days without eating?' The *tenzo* nodded. 'That's what I thought,' she said, shaking her head. 'You'll all shrivel up like dried plums.' She bowed to him and left.

"About thirty minutes later, the *tenzo* heard the pitter-patter of feet in the kitchen, and what sounded like the whispering of ladies' voices. There followed the sounds of chopping and the crackling of a fire, the smell of rice boiling, and of pickled radish and *miso* soup. His senses were so sharpened by three days of meditation that he could hear the chopping and smell food as if it was being prepared right there in the zendo. He wasn't the only one; the relief all the monks felt, as they too knew food was being prepared, was apparent to the *tenzo* though not a word had been said.

"When the preparation for lunch was completed, the old lady was back at the entrance to the zendo. 'Lunch is ready,' she whispered to the *tenzo*. As the bell ringer rang the bell to end that sitting period, the *tenzo* clacked the clackers. The monks went into the dining hall and read the meal sutra, '*busho ka bi ra joo doo ma ke da...*' They all ate, trying to look stoic while hiding their joy.

"When *sesshin* was over, the old woman told the *tenzo* the whole story: how she had come to the temple because she hadn't seen the monks begging that week; how she snooped around, saw the monks meditating, and checked the kitchen, finding the rice bins empty and the cupboards bare; how she left the monastery and called together all the other women, sending them out to get various supplies—one to get tofu, another to get rice, another to get pickles and another to get vegetables; and how she took over the temple kitchen, ordered the women around as if she were chief chef for the Shogun, and oversaw the preparation of a feast the monks would never forget. The *tenzo* relayed her story to Sawada Roshi.

“Roshi smiled, and said, ‘Really?’ Nothing more was mentioned about the whole affair.”

After hearing Sekitei’s story, I was even more eager to meet Sawada Roshi. I had learned not to expect the monastic world to be one of complete truth and beauty, as I had believed when I left Ishinden. However, my faith in the practice of Zen meditation, and a belief that it would give me the understanding to live an enlightened life, had become my new creed.

We walked on toward Amakusa, the priest in his clean new robe, his white gaiters and *tabi* socks, his *geta* sandals and clean shaven head, telling stories of Sawada Roshi, and me, the imposter monk, in my patched robe, straw sandals and stubble-haired scalp, listening attentively and relishing all that I heard. We were an odd looking twosome, a prince and a beggar.

At Otsu Harbor we boarded a ferry bound for Kobe. I was grateful when Sekitei paid both fares. I joined the crowd boarding the boat, elated at the thought of being able to sit down and relax and still move closer to Sawada Roshi’s temple. It was a small boat and the twenty or so passengers had to squeeze together on the gauze-carpeted deck. I took out the lunch prepared for me by the wife of the Pure Land Buddhist priest, offered some to Sekitei (which he refused politely) and ate it.

In front of me sat a very proper looking young woman in her early twenties. She sat up straight looking around her, an expression of disdain on her face, perhaps not pleased at being so close to people she didn’t know. I wondered whether it was me in my soiled robe that upset her so. I quickly forgot my concern about my appearance and returned to the joyful thoughts of my adventure.

Suddenly there was a commotion centered on this young lady. She appeared to have lost something and had become quite hysterical. Some of the other passengers were attempting to calm her. One of them pointed in my direction and said something to the others. I didn’t know what the fellow pointing at me was saying, but I feared I was being accused of something. I quickly became conscious of my shabby appearance. The Buddhist attire that helped me earn the trust of country folk on my journey from Eiheiiji no longer felt like garments that would gain me respect—not from these

people. When the boat arrived at the Kobe Harbor, four policemen boarded and started to question the woman.

"Where were you sitting when you noticed your purse was missing?" One of the officers asked.

"I was right here in front of this young fellow." She was pointing at me. When she said that, her group of supporters looked at me suspiciously.

Then there was an announcement from the captain. "I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but nobody is to leave the boat. Everyone please stay where you are until we can straighten this out."

I remained seated. I could feel an unvoiced hostility toward me among the people with the young woman. Then someone walked behind me and shouted, "Here it is!" He reached right in back of where I sat and picked up the lady's purse. Suddenly all the passengers' eyes were focused on me. Three of the policemen walked over and glared down at me.

"What are you all looking at? I didn't take it," I pleaded.

One of them took my arm and said, "Come with us."

"Wait a minute. I'm a monk, on my way to Soshinji Monastery in Amakusa. I would never steal anything. You've got to believe me. You can ask ..." and I turned around looking for Sekitei, but he was nowhere in sight.

"Let's go," said one of the policemen, as two others took my arms and led me off the boat.

"But I didn't do anything! Where are you taking me? Please, I'm not a crook. I wouldn't steal if my life depended on it. I'm a monk, please believe me."

They dragged me off the boat.

Chapter 14

The policemen took me to the Kobe Harbor police station. They brought me into a gloomy, bare room where an officer sat at his desk doing paper work. The only light in the room came from a small desk lamp and a tiny window high up on the far wall. The officer looked up from his work. He appeared to be annoyed at being disturbed. I started to panic. I knew I wouldn't get any sympathy from him. One of the policemen that brought me in addressed the seated man as captain and explained the situation.

The captain looked me up and down, staring at my patched robe, my torn sandals (the new sandals Sai had given me were already falling apart) and the stubble of new hair on my head, and asked, "How do we know that you are really a monk? Where is this Sekitei fellow you said you were traveling with who can vouch for you?"

"He was with me until the boat reached Kobe. Then he disappeared. I don't know where he went." Sekitei must have left when the commotion started, not wanting to be involved in an investigation. How could he leave me like this! What kind of priest leaves a fellow monk to be taken to jail without coming to his aid? Where is his compassion? It did no good to be angry with him, but that didn't stop me from feeling outraged by his action.

The officers who brought me in chuckled. They seemed to get some sadistic joy from my predicament. The captain looked at the officers and said, "A little while in jail won't hurt him."

"In jail? For what? I told you I didn't steal anything. I would never ..."

The captain looked at me while I pleaded but didn't seem to hear anything I said. He returned to his paperwork, and without looking up again said, "Take him away."

There was no proof that I took anything, and, in fact, nothing was stolen. The woman got her purse back, and the money was in it. Still their minds were made up that I was a thief and nothing I said could change that. They must have considered me a menace to society and saw this as an opportunity to get me off the streets.

The policemen dragged me out of the station and took me to a nearby red brick building. Two guards met us outside the entrance,

and led me through a large iron gate and walked me down a narrow hallway to a room that had a steel door with a small iron-barred window. I started to tell the guards of my innocence, but no one listened to me. Unlike the policemen who at least got a few laughs out of my plight, they didn't even find my story funny. With stoic expressionless faces they opened the door, pushed me into the cell and locked the door behind me.

Just a week before, I'd been telling my brother-in-law how people respected the robe and how kind they were to me when I wore it. I wondered what he would say if he could see me now. I kept asking myself why this was happening to me. Why was I so unlucky? I took some deep breaths to try to calm myself.

I looked around the large room. Men were standing in groups of threes and fours, frightful looking fellows, all peering in my direction. I stood near the door terrified. Straw mats covered an earthen floor, and there was a small latrine in the corner. The foul odor from the latrine permeated the cell, but nobody appeared to be bothered by it. I thought I would vomit from the stink, but I soon found myself concerned with other matters. A group of men were walking toward me. I stared at the floor as they approached. I could see a tattooed leg sticking out of a kimono worn by the man in front. The Meiji government outlawed tattoos, so you didn't see them on anyone other than the truly defiant criminals.

I shrank into a corner. All the confidence and swagger I had adopted during my life in the slums of Ishinden had vanished. I looked up and saw this hardened criminal backed by an entourage of seedy looking characters standing a few feet away scrutinizing me. I took a deep breath to hold back the impending rush of tears and looked at the gangsters in front of me.

"Hey, little monk, what're you in for?" A man with a throaty voice addressed me. He was the one with the tattoos—a large man with a straggly beard, missing front teeth and the nose of a prizefighter. He seemed to be the spokesman. He had the air of a *yakuza* boss.

"Well, you see, this woman who sat in front of me on the ferry from Otsu to Kobe had her purse stolen, and everyone suspected me. I was arrested and thrown into this place." I was trying to sound tough, but I was too intimidated to make it believable.

“Hmm... So how much did you take?” asked the inquisitor.

I decided I'd better be straight with him. “I didn't steal anything. I was mistaken for the thief and arrested. And now I am thrown into this ...”

Before I'd finished my explanation, a roar of laughter throughout the cell drowned me out. Amidst the laughter, I could hear men shouting:

“I didn't start the fire.”

“I never killed anybody.”

“I was framed. I never robbed that bank; it was an inside job.”

Each time someone claimed his innocence there was another thunder of laughter. Then the inquisitor spoke again.

“Hey, stupid, look around. These guys here are rapists, arsonists and burglars, and who knows how many others are running loose out there, and you want us to believe that you're here for nothing.” Then pointing to my head, he said, “Have you lost your wits along with your hair?”

I was angry and embarrassed, but too frightened to say anything. He then started introducing his fellow prisoners, following each introduction with a list of his crimes. Each prisoner smiled upon hearing his name and the crimes he committed—the more severe the crime the broader the smile. I realized what a topsy-turvy world I was in. The most respected of the prisoners was the one who committed the greatest atrocity. And here I was claiming to be innocent of a petty crime.

When the boss was through and the other inmates had squeezed as many laughs as they could from the situation, he said to his followers, “Let's leave the little Buddha alone.” They all walked away, leaving me to mope over my victimization. I stayed by myself for the rest of the day and nobody bothered me. That night I could hardly sleep. The day's events kept churning in my mind.

I spent the first week in a daze, emerging from it when I was ordered to be on a work party or when meals were served. By the second week I began to accept my situation, and my attention turned from feeling sorry for myself to observing my new environment. I saw a group in the corner playing with strange looking handmade dice.

They had to be quiet so they had developed a code by raising a certain number of fingers to indicate a particular bet. During this one time of the day when the jail was quiet, I could hear the beating of a drum and the chanting of monks from a nearby temple.

One fellow threw the dice while everyone watched in silence; the chanting and the drumbeat affecting nobody but me. He threw a six and looked around. Another put up two fingers. A third made another sign with his hand and so on until everyone had silently placed his bet. Then the first fellow threw the dice again. I assumed from having watched dice games on the streets of Ishinden that he was trying to make a certain number, but I wasn't able to figure out the rules. I watched the same game during the next two weeks. Nobody asked me to join in, but I followed it more closely each day. If it weren't for the temple drums and chanting in the background reminding me of a dream that seemed to be fading, I might have asked to take part.

The dice didn't last long. After a few days they were no longer functional because the corners chipped so easily and the dots became unreadable. I watched one of the players make new dice, amazed at the fellow's ingenuity and dexterity. He shaped stale rice into cubes. Then, with the edges of straw from ripped mats, he impressed eyes on each of the six sides of the cube.

The game continued to be the major event of each day. One fellow stood at the gate watching out for the guard. I learned over the weeks I was there that they were betting the only commodity they had, their meals. Some bet their lunches. Others, big gamblers, bet lunch and dinner, while cautious gamblers bet as little as a pickle. Big winners would have two, three or four lunches, and, in some cases, a week's worth of lunches and dinners. The losers would go hungry; some big losers would have to fast for a few days or even a week. They were making a life for themselves in prison.

I found myself looking forward to the daily dice game, though I remained a spectator. The sound of the drum and the chanting was a constant reminder of the contrast between my hopes and my present hopeless situation.

One time, when the drumming got loud, someone turned to me and said, "They're playing your song," and the other spectators laughed. One of the gamblers hushed the crowd, fearing a guard

would come to see what was causing the laughter. Fretting about my fading chances of becoming a monk, I started to lose interest in the game. I had to wonder if my time spent in prison would make me an unacceptable candidate for ordination. That thought depressed me.

Things did settle down, and I became resigned to my fate, but I never let go of the dream of ordination.

Once a week, a priest who served as the prison chaplain would come to give a Dharma talk to the prisoners. Though it was supposed to be voluntary, I believe the guards had ways of seeing that everyone attended. I say that because most of the men sat there uninterested in the talk, as though all they could think about was getting back to their games in the cells, but none of them dared to leave. I attended, sitting in the back, trying to pay attention to the lecture, often brooding over my situation.

The chaplain gave his talk from the *tanisho*, a record of discourses by the great master Shinran, recorded by his disciple. He explained the meaning behind Shinran's statement: "Even a 'good' person is reborn in the Pure Land, how much more so is a 'bad' person!"

"'Bad,' refers to people who break the laws of Buddhism and the laws of society," he said. "Shinran's understanding is in contrast to how ordinary people think. Shinran understood the relative nature of words like good and bad. It is bad only when one continues to commit unlawful acts. Amida Buddha's vow allows for the fact that we can all change by simply behaving differently."

Though I was too depressed to pay much attention to the priest's explanation, just watching him brought back the memory of the Dharma talks I'd attended in Ishinden. I remembered how they had filled me with hope. Only now, the memory filled me with despair, reminding me of how far I'd fallen.

At the end of the third talk, as I sat there remembering the joy I'd felt when I first heard the priest from Ishinden talk about Sessen Doji—the young ascetic who was willing to die for enlightenment—a deep feeling of emptiness overwhelmed me, and I began to cry. The chaplain noticed me and walked over.

"You are a monk, aren't you?"

I couldn't lie to him. I wiped the tears from my face, took a deep breath, and said, "I haven't actually been ordained yet, but I was hoping to be ordained at a monastery in Amakusa."

"What did you do to get yourself into this place?"

What did I do? That question set me off and I started to cry again. "I did nothing wrong." I said teary-eyed. "I did nothing wrong," I repeated. "Why am I here?" All I could do was repeat my innocence and cry like a baby.

"Let's go into the back room where we can talk in private."

At the chaplain's request, one of the guards let us into a passageway that led to a back room off the hall where he'd spoken. It was a tiny straw mat room with no furniture and one high window with bars on it. The priest sat on the floor and invited me to sit next to him.

"Tell me what happened from the beginning," he said.

I practically spilled my whole life to the chaplain, from running away from Ishinden to my journey to Eiheiiji up to my incarceration. "I wanted to become a monk in order to escape this mean world, but everywhere I turn it seems to catch up with me."

"Your aspiration to become a monk is admirable," the chaplain said. "But if you think of it as an escape from another world, you're bound to be disappointed. Our mission is to understand ourselves and to know our weaknesses. We are not trying to create an ideal world. After the Buddha's enlightenment, he chose to come back and live in the world with all its ugliness as well as its beauty. After his realization, he no longer tried to escape. He taught us to see things as they are, not as we want them to be."

He looked at me and must have realized that I was not in any condition to be receptive to a Buddhist sermon. I was so obsessed with my own victimization I could think of nothing else.

"I believe your story," he told me.

My heart jumped when I heard those words. He believes me. It was like a ray of light in a dark, dark tunnel. I felt hopeful.

"Let me talk to the warden and see what I can do."

The following day I was released from prison without any explanation. I had spent a month in jail. I wanted to ask how I could be so easily incarcerated and then just as easily freed, but I wasn't

about to take the chance that my inquiry would cause someone a change of heart. So I said nothing and was soon on my way.

The time I spent in jail did turn out to be an experience I'd come to appreciate. Years later when I was asked to give talks at the Kosuge prison in Tokyo, I knew how to talk to the prisoners. I understood how they looked upon someone coming into a prison to teach them. I knew that they felt they had to be there, listening to me, just as they had to be behind bars in the first place. To them any lecture was an interruption to their daily routine, an annoyance, a bother to their real life. They had no choice but to accept it; however, they wasted no energy paying attention.

When I gave a Dharma discourse at Kosuge prison, I opened with a short description of my own time in jail. That, of itself, was enough to endear me to the inmates. By that time, I had studied the words of Shinran that the prison chaplain in Kobe had quoted, and I too believed that these prisoners were as cherished in the eyes of the Buddha as any of the people in the outside world.

Chapter 15

I started a lonely walk with my head full of wonderings about my plight—my incarceration for a crime I hadn't committed. Was I being tested? I remembered how the god Shakra changed his form into that of the demon Rakshasa to test the determination of Sessen Doji. I told myself that the Buddha was testing me and that I had to be as determined as Sessen was. That thought gave me strength as I continued on my way.

I traveled the *sanyodo*, a road constructed in ancient times for the purpose of sending exiles from the Kyoto capital to Kyushu. I was without a *sen* as usual so I slept in wayside shrines, graveyards and fields. The coming of milder weather worked its magic on me. Though I walked the road that sent exiles to a land of torment, I was going to a place I hoped would bring me salvation. As I walked on, I thought little about my unjust treatment in the hands of the Kobe officials; I simply walked, and the activity healed me. There was a rhythm to my step, which cleared my mind.

I arrived at the port in Shimonoseki, the easternmost town on Honshu, the main island, where once more I had to take a ferry. I sat on a stump by the water wondering how I would get across. I didn't have any money, and I no longer felt confident that my Buddhist robe would be my passport when it came to ferry crossings. The ferry had become a frightful instrument of conveyance on which I would board at my own peril.

"Where are you going little monk?"

I turned around and saw a tall thin man wearing a brown silk kimono, matching *hakuma*, a bowler hat and scarf. Though he wasn't dressed like a police official, I was afraid. Was he looking to lock me up?

"I'm on my way to Amakusa to a temple called Soshinji," I responded timidly.

"Where are you coming from?" he asked; his soft, friendly countenance desolved my fears.

"I came from Eiheiiji in Echizen."

He looked down at my torn sandals and asked, "You came all the way from Echizen in those sandals?"

"Part of the way," I said. "And part of the way barefoot."

Staring at my tattered robe, he shook his head. "I'll bet you don't have any money either?"

"No, I don't."

"My younger brother is a monk," he said. "He lives in a temple in Kumamoto Prefecture. I don't think he could ever do what you're doing. Here comes the ferry, let's go." He took me gently by the arm and led me onto the boat.

"Two passengers please," he told the boatman, and paid for both of us. "Wait till I tell my brother about you," he said, shaking his head, a big smile on his face. What did you say the name of the temple was?"

"Soshinji."

"Wait till I tell my brother," he repeated.

As the ferry rolled into Moji, the port on the Kyushu side of the Kanmon Channel, I became choked with emotion.

"First time outside of the main island, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes sir. I was wondering if I'd ever make it."

"Well you haven't made it yet. It probably feels like the other side of the world to you, but you still have quite a way to travel down Kyushu before you reach Amakusa."

I felt intoxicated. I could hardly contain my delight. "I made it this far," I said. "Nothing can stop me now."

"Good luck to you son. Wait till I tell my brother," he said for a third time, shaking his head as we parted.

I made my way south through towns and villages, begging food on the way and sleeping when I could no longer see where I was going. When I arrived at the Mizuno Port, I had to take another ferry. I looked around me, hoping, or rather expecting to find another Bodhisattva to pay my way. My attitude had changed, and with it came more luck. A fellow dressed in fishermen's clothing was staring at me. I looked at him and smiled, no longer suspicious of people I didn't know.

"Are you waiting for the ferry, young monk?"

"Yes, I am."

“Here’s fifteen *sen*,” he said, gave me the ferry fare and walked away.

Strange as it was, I accepted it without surprise. I felt, once more, that the Buddha was watching over me. It all felt like a part of a design—even the period in jail. I repeated the *inariiroshi*’s words: “You will encounter many obstacles on your journey, but you will overcome them.”

The ferry crossed Shimabara Bay with its countless islands, large and small, beyond which I could see mountains stretching from Kumamoto to Satsuma Prefectures. One moment the mountains came into view and the next they were hidden in fog. Fishing boats, with their sails hoisted, floated across the tranquil sea and thousands of turtles appeared, heads bobbing in and out of the water. The beauty of this idyllic scene added to the excitement I was feeling of a new life. On the other side of this tranquil sea was Soshinji, the object of my long journey.

I arrived at Soshinji after the week of the *higane* ceremonies, seven days of services of which the fourth day was the equinox. I stood in front of the main gate, which led to a row of steps up to the temple compound. I’m here! I thought, and though I was hungry and tired, I was ecstatic. Then suddenly, almost unconsciously, my ecstasy disappeared, and I became apprehensive. I remembered my elation when I had arrived at Eiheiji and how it soon turned into a nightmare. I was so deeply absorbed in my thoughts and fears that I hadn’t noticed a young monk descending the stairs. He’d come to the gate to inquire of my business. I nervously asked if I could see the master. He looked me up and down, but with none of the frightful posturing of the Eiheiji monk. He asked me to follow him and we climbed the steps.

“Wait here,” he said when we reached a platform at the top of the steps. He disappeared into a small temple building, which was connected by an open passageway to a larger thatched roof structure I assumed was the Buddha Hall. A few minutes later another monk came out and told me to follow him. He led me into the small building and down a corridor to Sawada Roshi’s room and announced our arrival. We waited in front of the entrance, legs folded under us in traditional *seiza* posture.

The master asked us to come in. The monk bowed to the master and walked to the corner of the room. I prostrated myself at the entrance and followed the master's gesture to sit across from him. Sawada Roshi, an elderly man, sat at a desk. Much to my surprise and relief, he was relaxed and informal. I guessed that he was in his late sixties or early seventies. He was a thin man with bushy white eyebrows and sad eyes. When he looked directly at me, I felt a kindness radiate through the melancholy. It put me at ease.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Saikichi Sawaki," I said.

"Aha! You're the fellow Seiryu-san wrote about. So you want to be ordained a Soto Zen monk?"

"Yes, Roshi."

"You've come a long way. How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"Why did you travel all this distance? There are many temples around Eiheiiji. Couldn't you get ordained there?"

"I did go to one. But the monk who invited me wasn't serious about practice. He looked upon me as a convenient lackey to do his work for him. I was sent on errands and made to do all the work while he did as he pleased."

Sawada Roshi's countenance changed. I wondered whether I'd been too outspoken for a first meeting with the master.

"You must have some pretty strong opinions about Buddhism," he said. "You will find it helpful to suspend your opinions for a while." He then changed the subject. "How did you travel all this way?"

"I have no money so I traveled on foot. I stayed at temples, shrines and sometimes in fields. People took me in and fed me. I begged when I needed to."

"You're a strong-willed boy. That's good. Not many monks are tenacious, nowadays. However, I think it would be better if you forget about ordination for a while. Let's see how you practice at Soshinji."

Forget about ordination for a while. Those words felt like a stab in the gut. Roshi must have noticed my disappointment because he added, "Don't worry. I'm sure you will do fine here. Welcome to our monastery."

“Thank you,” I said, and bowed and turned to leave. I could hear Sawada talking to his assistant, “See if you can get him another monk’s robe. The one he is wearing looks as if it’s about to crawl away.”

I liked Sawada Roshi. And I think he took a special liking to me, too. Sometimes when I talked with him, he would tell me that he was only a meter away, and I didn’t have to shout. I hadn’t realized I was shouting. Though Roshi told me not to speak so loudly, he also said that he saw potential in my strong voice. He loved to chant sutras. He told me that if I learned to control my powerful lungs, I could develop a great chanting voice.

Over the next few months I followed the schedule at Soshinji and was available for whatever job had to be done. My abundant energy didn’t go unnoticed. The monks at Soshinji nicknamed me Tetsubin, or iron teapot, because they said I was always bubbling with energy. The villagers, too, began to call me Tetsubin. Many of the local people who were involved in temple affairs on a regular basis marveled at my speedy nature. I never walked on my way to parishioner’s houses, they said—I bounced. Some of the farmers would watch me bouncing along the winding country paths on the edges of streams and wet rice paddies while reading Buddhist texts, and expressed amazement that I never fell into the water.

Restless as I was at Soshinji, I was respectful and relatively calm when in the presence of Roshi. He taught me with great care, and I learned fast. He gave me lessons in his specialty, sutra recitation. During my second month at Soshinji, Roshi called me to his room to work on my chanting voice.

“Let’s see if we can channel that powerful voice of yours and make you an exemplary chanter,” he said.

I remembered how my loud voice usually got me in trouble at school and I had to laugh.

Roshi started to chant: “*Kan ji zai bo satta gyoo jin ...* Now you try it” he said.

“*Kan ji zai bo ...*”

The master put his hands over his ears, “No. No. You’re screaming! Stop and try it again. This time let the power come from

down in your *hara*. It should be robust and not simply loud. Once more.”

“*Kan ji zai bo satta ...*”

“That’s a little better. But you have to feel the voice deep down inside of you. Try again...”

For the next few months, Roshi spent a great deal of time showing me how to control my voice for sutra chanting. He was very patient with me. We chanted all the prescribed Soto Zen sutras together, repeating them as many times as necessary until he was satisfied. He had such a beautiful chanting voice, I wanted so badly to emulate his style.

One day, during my sixth month at Soshinji, Sawada Roshi sent for me. I went to his room and kneeled in front of his door. He hadn’t called me for a chanting lesson in over a month. I wondered whether he had been too busy or I had done something wrong. I hadn’t done anything to anger him that I was aware of, but neither was I aware half the time when I’d angered my adoptive parents or my teachers for that matter. The thought that I may have upset people in authority without knowing it became a part of my nature.

“*Onegaishimasu*, Roshi” I said, announcing my arrival.

“Saikichi, please come in.”

I knew right away from the sound of his voice that I wasn’t in trouble. I entered his room, kneeled again as I closed the sliding door, turned around and bowed to him.

“Come here,” he said, beckoning me to sit by his side.

“You know why I haven’t called you in for chanting lessons lately?” he asked.

“No I don’t, Roshi.” I thought for a moment that I was mistaken. Maybe I had done something wrong.

“Because you no longer need lessons,” he said. “You’ve mastered the voice delivery. All you need to do now is practice the sutras by reciting them with the other monks.”

I was thrilled to receive the compliment, though I did my best not to show it. That was the Zen way. A combination of humility and stoicism was highly valued at Zen monasteries. Roshi’s expression

changed. He had a serious look on his face, and I thought I might not have done a good enough job hiding my satisfaction.

“Some parishioners have been making special requests to have you perform the chanting at their altars on the family memorial days. I had told them that you were not ready. I think you are ready now, so I will allow you to go. But remember Saikichi, it is a privilege, an honor, and you have to show the utmost respect to the parishioner and the family when you visit.”

“Yes, Roshi.” I was sure Sawada Roshi had heard about my nickname and the fact that I had a reputation for being unusually exuberant. I think he was telling me indirectly to slow down and develop the demeanor of a mature mindful monk.

“I have high aspirations for you,” he said, and dismissed me.

For the next few months I followed the Soshinji schedule and was often called to parishioners houses to chant sutras. I tried as best I could not to show the joy I was feeling at this new popularity, though I had never been very good at hiding my feelings.

The 8th of December was the final day of the *Rohatsu Sesshin*—an eight day meditation retreat commemorating the Buddha’s enlightenment. As is the custom in most Zen temples, on the last day of *sesshin* initiates are ordained. It was the day of *my* ordination. I was to be ordained together with four other candidates. I had been at Soshinji for eight months, and not a day went by when I didn’t think about my future ordination. I touched the tuft of hair left on my otherwise bald head for probably the thousandth time. For the last couple of months I, along with the other initiates, let that little bit of hair grow so that Roshi could cut it off as part of the ordination ceremony.

I had been meditating for a week—meditating in form that is. I tried to keep my mind free of all distractions, but the thought of my forthcoming ordination kept returning. No amount of will power could stop me from imagining myself as a full-fledged monk. I also thought about my past, about the turning points in my life that led to my desire to become a monk. A picture of Bunkichi and Hisa, drunk and sitting by the low table in their room as I left them and ran away from home flashed in my mind. I could smell the stale odor particular to

our house—feeling a strange nostalgia for the smell I'd once detested. I remembered my painting lessons with Chiaki and my frustration at not being able to make my brush move the way I wanted. I saw the *inarioroshi*, my sister Sai and even Hashimoto-sensei. I'm going to be a monk, I told them, before I woke to the fact that I was sitting in the zendo. I thought about those esoteric Buddhist practitioners of mantras, who repeat their incantations throughout the day. The recurrent images from my past and the anticipation of the long awaited ordination ceremony that flooded my brain during zazen throughout *sesshin* were like uninvited and unwanted mantras.

"Why such a serious expression, Iron Teapot? I've never seen you looking so grave." A senior monk was shaving my head and trying to relax me at the same time. It was the morning of the 8th of December and *sesshin* had just ended. The other four initiates and myself were in the bath with our assigned guardians. "You look so on edge, I'm afraid to let you in the tub by yourself for fear you might drown," he said amidst laughter from the other seniors.

"Oh shit, I cut off the tuft!" he blurted out.

I put both hands on my head in a panic. The tuft was still there. I sighed with relief, while everyone else roared with laughter. I was too relieved to feel any anger toward him for teasing me.

After the bath the monks set up the hall for the ceremony. Many of the lay supporters of Soshinji would be coming to watch, so extra effort was made to clean and make the temple presentable. I'd gotten to know some of the people in the surrounding towns, and they were coming to *my* ordination ceremony. While the monks were cleaning one of the seniors led the five initiates into the zendo to instruct us on how to behave during the ceremony.

We lined up in a row, the four other initiates in their new white kimonos that were customarily worn under monks' robes. I had my striped kimono that I'd worn from Eiheiji all the way to Amakusa. I'd washed it and scrubbed it clean the night before after evening zazen. Our instructor scanned the group, stopping when his eyes came upon me. He stared for what felt like a long time, shaking his head. I wondered whether I was doing something wrong.

I'd learned from living at Zen monasteries that you don't ask your senior why he is upset with you. Your job is to figure it out on your own and correct it. We all waited in silence, and I became more and more apprehensive. I had a feeling I'd experienced something quite similar to this before but I couldn't remember when. Finally, the monk told us to wait there, and he left the room. A few minutes later he returned carrying a white kimono.

"Try this on," he said.

He was about my size, and the kimono fit perfectly.

He lined me up with the others and looked at us. "That's better," he said.

That was it! His look of dissatisfaction and then, when I changed into his white kimono, his expression of contentment, as if he'd solved a difficult problem. I recalled the same look of dissatisfaction on the priest of the sub-temple at Eihei-ji, who had made me my first kimono out of strips of discarded robes. He had looked at me with my Buddhist robe and unshaven head and felt that something wasn't right. When he'd shaved my head, he too looked as though he'd solved a difficult problem. I realized neither of them was angry. My own fear of having done something wrong made me project anger onto their expressions. They weren't angry; but rather they were like artists looking at their potential masterpieces and trying to figure out what was wrong with the painting. One solved it by shaving my head, the other by lending me his kimono.

Only then did I become aware of how strange I'd looked, the only initiate in an old striped kimono. The others had families to buy them new kimonos, but I had to make do with what I had. The most dramatic part of the ordination ceremony would occur when the roshi handed each initiate a robe, begging bowl and *okesa*. That meant we were to sit in our kimonos up to that point. I realized that I would have been sitting there for most of the ceremony in a striped kimono looking the odd man out. I was very grateful to the senior monk for his thoughtfulness.

The crowd had already been seated in the Buddha Hall when the senior monk led us in and told us to sit in front, facing the altar. Incense rose to the ceiling from a sensor in front of the statue of

Shakamuni Buddha sitting in deep repose; the half smile of a settled mind on the image of this enlightened being did little to calm me. I was so choked with emotion that I was practically unaware of where I was. I was shaking, though not from the cold.

The large drum sounded announcing the opening of the ceremony and the crowd quieted down. The only things I was aware of were the pounding of the drum and the thumping of my heart. Roshi entered the hall, went to the altar, lit an incense stick and prostrated himself three times before the statue of the Buddha. From that point on it was like a dream in which one scene came into focus then another and another without any continuity. I heard sutras being chanted, but they faded as my mind drifted to memories of the first Buddhist discourses at the small country temple in Ishinden. I recalled the thrill I'd felt when I heard the story of Sessen Doji, the Buddha-to-be, willing to sacrifice his life for one verse of the Dharma.

Roshi's voice came into earshot, explaining ... *Ordination is a recognition and a beginning, not a completion; it is becoming a shamior novice and entering a life of practice. The meaning of the original Sanskrit word is to 'refrain from evil and act with compassion'. In ancient times in China, there was a great distinction between a shami and a soo or priest, but that distinction was no longer made when Buddhism came to Japan...*

I remembered sitting in the corner of my prison cell amidst the stink of the open latrine, fearful of my cellmates, whom I felt might beat me as easily as they would scratch an itch. I'd wondered then if my karma was such that monkhood was out of the question, that I was unworthy of ordination. My mind returned to Roshi's voice:

Homage to the Buddhas in the ten directions

Homage to the Dharma in the ten directions

Homage to the Sangha in the ten directions ...

We paid homage to the great patriarchs with three full prostrations—bowing to Dogen our founder and Keizan the fourth patriarch, the great propagator of Soto Zen. My mind drifted again, but was brought back by the loud crack of the clackers, accompanying the chanting of Homage to *Dainichi*, The Sun Buddha, *Yakushi*, The Medicine Buddha, *Miroku*, The Buddha of The

Next World Age, *Amida*, The Buddha of Infinite Light, *Shakamuni*, The Buddha Manifest or The Historical Buddha, *Kannon*, The Bodhisattva of Great Compassion and *Monju*, The Bodhisattva of Great Wisdom.

Roshi explained the meaning of being ordained into the house of the Buddha:

This ritual, performed with all Buddhas simultaneously, is how one enters the way as an ordained disciple. This is how the body and mind merge with the Buddha way. To cut off one's hair is the vow and act of cutting the root of attachment. To cut off, even slightly, the root of attachment is to reveal the original nature of the self. To change one's usual clothes for the Buddha's garments is the vow and the act of becoming free from delusion. It is to be freely present in reality as it is.

The Buddha robe is a banner of absolute liberation. The shaved head, robes and teaching are revered by all. It is not that the person is honored; rather, the person tries to continuously honor the robe, the teaching, and the community. The robe is not one's own, it is the Buddha's robe. The teaching is not one's own, it is everyone's.

Roshi called us up one at a time. When it was my turn, I felt as though my legs wouldn't hold me. A strange power, which grew from my fear of falling, allowed me to stand, walk to Roshi and prostrate myself in front of him. I sat up in *seiza* and Roshi approached me with his razor.

This last lock of hair is called shura. Only a Buddha can cut it off. Do you allow me to cut it?

"Yes, I do." I felt the razor cut my tuft. I found myself holding back tears. I remembered sitting in the mud after a beating from Bunkichi, promising myself I would never cry again. How many times had I broken *that* vow!

The head monk passed Roshi my robe, *okesa* and begging bowl. Roshi gave them to me, explaining the significance of each one. I saw Roshi's mouth moving, heard the sounds coming out, but I couldn't make out any meaning. I was in a state of blissful numbness. I believe I bowed at the right times and went back to my place when I was expected to. I no longer heard Roshi. I was drowning in a sea of ecstasy. My new name, Kodo, echoed in my

brain like a chorus from Noh play, rendering all other sounds—the roshi's voice, the chanting by the monks, the whispers in the crowd—as faint musical accompaniments to the drama.

Chapter 16

My two years at Soshinji, especially the year following my ordination, were particularly memorable to me. My dream of becoming a certified monk had come true. With the help of Sawada Roshi, I'd developed confidence in myself as a Buddhist monk, though at nineteen my mind was not mature enough to see how an essential element of the Buddhist teachings applied to my life. I was still chasing enlightenment, unaware that I had my own treasure-house right where I was.

I didn't walk to the villagers' homes when I was asked to read sutras, I trotted. Sometimes I would be practicing my recitation while I was trotting, not looking where I was going. Once, going up a mountain path, I banged up against an ox carrying two baskets of a new crop of sweet potatoes. A young girl was leading the beast to market. The ox was startled, it reared its legs and the baskets of sweet potatoes fell into the valley. The girl was livid, cursing me and stamping her feet. I felt terrible, but something inside me made me hide those feelings. I bowed my head and continued on my way, the echo of her curses and the ricochet of the stamping of her feet fading in the background.

Because I'd never learned to slow down, the villagers continued to call me Iron Tea Pot long after I was given the name Kodo. The need to slow down is a lesson I still have to master. The lessons I did learn, which had the greatest impact on me during this period, were those I'd absorbed from the local villagers. They taught me the difference between the poverty of need and the poverty of want. They had few material goods, but that didn't stand in the way of their enjoying the little they had. No doubt, they too fancied having more. However, their poverty was not nearly as debilitating as the poverty of want or the poverty of the soul that I was to later observe in many of my more affluent disciples.

A man the villagers called Fuji, one of the poorest in Amakusa, taught me more about being with one's present situation, 'just sitting,' the essence of Zen master Dogen's teaching, than did any of my teachers. Fuji's father had just died and I was called on to read sutras at his altar. Fuji was a simple fellow, a kind of village idiot who

had until then lived with his father. His brothers had all left home to work wherever work was available. Fuji stayed with his father, doing simple chores for the neighbors and helping at home. They were the poorest in a village of the poor. Their house was a dilapidated shack—four posts holding up a grass roof over an earthen floor covered with chaff.

Nobody came out to greet me when I arrived. I panicked for a moment, fearing that Fuji had become confused and run away, that his father's death might have agitated him to such a degree that he would try to flee from it. But then I looked inside and saw Fuji sitting in the corner naked. Alongside him lay his deceased father on two straw mats placed on top of the chaff. I turned to him and said, "Fuji, what are you doing there? Your father just died, and here I am. What kind of way is this to greet me?"

When Fuji, who had been sitting gazing at the floor in front of him, looked up and saw me standing there, a big grin came across his face. He didn't seem at all self-conscious sitting there in the nude. The only thing I could detect was that he was struggling to find the words to explain why things were as they were. He stood up, and after a few false starts, finally said, "Father is dead. We only have one kimono. I ... He ... We only have one ..."

I looked over at Fuji's father, and sure enough he was dressed in a kimono. Fujii wanted his dead father to wear the one kimono they had between them. It was an old ragged cotton kimono. I put both my hands on Fuji's bare shoulders and looked at him. His simple act of dressing his father in their only kimono, whether done out of love or simply the desire to do the right thing, choked me so I couldn't speak. All I had was a threadbare kimono myself, the one that I had worn since I arrived at Soshinji. I took off my robe and my kimono and stood next to Fuji, both of us stark naked, staring down at his dead father.

"Here, put this on," I said, when my voice returned, handing him my kimono. Then I put my robes over my naked body and returned to Soshinji. I wanted to get back to Fuji's house as soon as possible and didn't feel like talking to anyone at the monastery. My own feelings, as a result of the scene I'd just witnessed, were so overwhelming I didn't think I could share them with anyone. I took

the little savings I had and without deliberation went into the kitchen and swiped some rice. Then I returned to Fuji's house.

Fuji was sitting on the floor once more beside his father and had returned to staring at a spot in front of the dead man. I tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention.

"Fuji, take this money and buy some tofu," I told him. "Then boil rice and tell your neighbors to join you for a meal and to take part in the wake tonight. Tomorrow I'll come and we'll have a funeral." I returned the following day and performed a simple funeral.

It was people like Fuji, with their desires for nothing more than to do what's right for their families, who were to leave a lasting impression on me. Their simple acts of piety and compassion helped me understand the true meaning of Dharma. I never tired of visiting the villagers and performing rituals at their family altars.

I asked Roshi if I could continue chanting classes with him, and he assented. They had become less frequent, once every other month, still they were frequent enough to help me improve my voice delivery, and in the process to help me to know my teacher better. I was feeling settled at Soshinji. Then Seiryu returned and an unexpected series of events changed things for me at the monastery.

I was eager to see Seiryu—the person responsible for my new life, and most importantly my ordination. I wanted to go straight to his room and thank him, but I thought it would be better to give him some time to settle in. I would see him from a distance during chanting and zazen practice and hoped that he would approach me, but he didn't seem to notice me.

On the fourth day after his arrival, unable to wait any longer, I walked to his room, stood outside the entrance and called to him.

"Yes, what do *you* want?" he said. He sounded irritated. It was something I hadn't expected. I became anxious.

"I just wanted to welcome you back, and tell you that Sawada Roshi is everything you said he was. I am ordained now. My new name is Kodo," I said, showing him my *okesa*. I immediately felt embarrassed, realizing I was strutting around like an actor on stage.

"Listen, I'm busy now. Leave me alone. I have work to do."

"Sure," I said. I stood there for a minute in a state of shock. I didn't know how to respond.

"Didn't you hear me?" he said. "I'm busy."

"Oh ... well, See you later." I left his room not knowing what to make of what had just happened. I couldn't understand why he was so cold to me. I wondered what I'd done wrong. Was he angry at my ostentatious behavior? Then I figured he must be having a bad day, so I would visit him some other time.

But it wasn't a bad day. I had to work with Seiryu often in the daily running of the monastery. Clearly, he was unfriendly to me. At times he was downright mean—harassing me every chance he got.

"That's not the way you sweep in a garden," he said one day, looking at me with an expression of disgust. "Give me that broom. This is the way you sweep. How long have you been here that you can't even sweep correctly?"

I didn't see any difference in the way he was sweeping, but I thought it best to keep my mouth shut. I was still trying to figure out why he was treating me like this.

"This rice isn't cooked enough, Kodo" he scolded me another time. "Don't you even know how to cook rice?"

I was substituting for the *tenzo*, who was sick. None of the other monks complained about the rice, but no one said anything in my defense either. I was embarrassed, being scolded like that in front of all the other monks. He was my senior and I was expected to accept it when a senior corrected me. You don't talk back to a senior monk in a monastery.

When Seiryu was carrying one of the statues into the *butsuden*, I happened to be cleaning the hallway adjacent to it. He was walking one way and I was racing down the hall the other way, washing the wooden floor with a wet rag, head down, buttocks in the air in typical Zen fashion. I didn't see him coming. As I passed him, he stuck out his leg and tripped me.

"Are you blind?" he said, as I tumbled over. "This statue is worth more than you and ten more like you. Pay attention!"

"That's no reason to trip me." I said, but he had already walked through the zendo entrance. I thought about following him and talking to him about why he was acting that way toward me but

decided against it. I had flashes of Shoie pushing me around and making me feel like a fool, but this was different. Seiryu worked hard and seemed to fit in well with the other monks. It was only me that he treated badly, and I couldn't figure out why.

There was another monk with whom I'd often worked, and who had become my friend. He'd been at Soshinji for more than five years so I assumed he knew Seiryu well. One day when we were working together cleaning the zendo, I asked him, "Is Seiryu always like this?"

"He seems to have it in for you, Kodo. He's one of the senior monks here, so there's not much you can do about it."

"But why me? He's the one who recommended I come here in the first place."

"Yeah, but I guess he didn't count on you being so popular."

"Popular? What do you mean?"

"Roshi seems to give you special attention. You're also quite well liked by the parishioners. Jealousies run high at monasteries. I know it sounds strange, but it's a fact. Just be patient, and he'll probably calm down after a while."

"I hope so," I said, amazed that monks could be so petty. Just as with my stay at Eihei-ji, my greatest lesson from having trained in monasteries was to learn that small mindedness doesn't go away just by changing one's environment. My own easily ignited temper after three years of Zen training was proof that old habits are extremely difficult to break.

I wasn't used to being so docile, even though it was expected of me in the realm of the monastic pecking order. The parishioners who witnessed Seiryu's bullying, expressed their dismay to me privately, but they knew it was not their place to interfere with the insular world of monastic training.

A month went by and I became accustomed to Seiryu's harassment. Accustomed, but not accepting—it was like a wound festering inside. I knew when the *segaki* ceremony came around that we would have to work together in the presence of many people from the community, and I was more worried about my ability to control myself than about Seiryu's outbursts. The *segaki*, a ceremony of making oblation to the 'hungry spirits' was a very

important ritual in rural temples like Soshinji, and many villagers came to volunteer their help. It was held for the repose of the souls of the dead. On the appointed day, volunteers were in the kitchen helping out when Seiryu seemed to be in particularly bad spirits. I was with him in the kitchen. I could feel his resentment and tried to be careful not to do anything to anger him. When I heard Seiryu calling me, I became anxious.

“Kodo, put a bigger fire under here,” he bellowed.

“Yes,” I said, and took some coals from under the rice vat.

“Not from there, idiot. The rice won’t boil.”

“All right.” I said, controlling myself.

I could see some of the parishioners in the kitchen glancing at each other in disapproval. They probably realized I was boiling quicker than the rice. As I carried some hot coals from the hearth in another room, I was feeling quite agitated. My preoccupation with controlling my temper distracted me from what I was doing and I accidentally dropped one of the hot coals near Seiryu.

“Sorry,” I said, and bent down to pick it up.

“Damn you!” Seiryu said, and to the shock of everyone present, I’m sure, he took the fire shovel used to place the coals in the stove and hit me on the head with it. Boy, it hurt like the devil! He must have felt pretty confident that I would accept such treatment, since he was my senior. He was wrong.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” I screamed. It wasn’t only the pain, but the humiliation. I’d been treated like an animal in front of a kitchen full of people. I was livid. I was no longer in a monastery dealing with a senior monk. I didn’t know or care where I was. I grabbed Seiryu by the legs, tackled him to the ground, and punched him three or four good shots. Then I grabbed him by the scruff of his collar, took him through a small side door and deposited him in a puddle outside the kitchen. I heard someone say, “Iron Teapot boiled over,” and another say, “He finally did it! I wondered how long he would endure.” Nobody tried to stop me though they knew I was breaking a foremost monastic rule by hitting a senior monk. They simply watched.

Seiryu hadn’t fought back. Just as with Shoie at Chojuan when I blew up at him, Seiryu wore a look of astonishment. All he did was

cover up to keep my blows from hitting him.

At that point my mind cleared enough to realize what I'd done, but there was no way to undo it. I walked back into the kitchen feeling a strange mixture of embarrassment and calm.

Someone said, "Seiryu just pushed him too far," his voice tapering off. I looked toward the entrance to the kitchen and saw Roshi. I wondered how long he had been standing there. He stepped from the entrance into the kitchen. His entrance brought about a hush in the crowd. I didn't know what to expect, and I didn't say anything.

Roshi was cognizant of everything that went on in the monastery. He involved himself whenever possible in the daily matters at Soshinji. Though he didn't interfere with personal animosities between disciples, I'm sure he knew all about the situation with Seiryu and me. He probably believed that it was better to leave those petty battles between monks alone because they usually worked themselves out without his interference.

After the hushed silence, as everyone waited for the master's response, Roshi looked at me, shaking his head. He walked to the other side of the kitchen, looked through the small door and saw Seiryu lying there. Then he walked back into the kitchen. I was sure he was going to admonish me. But all he said was, "Kodo held himself in check as long as he could. He finally settled accounts."

From that day on, life at Soshinji began to sour for me. I still enjoyed my contact with the people in the community and with many of the monks. Roshi continued to work with me on chanting when he had time and treated me with the same care that may have been the cause of Seiryu's jealousy. But I had once more experienced the narrow-mindedness of life in a monastery and was disappointed in my own behavior in response to it. Soshinji no longer felt like the ideal place I'd spent most of my life yearning for.

Seiryu soon packed his bags and went to another temple. The embarrassment of having been beaten up by a junior monk and not receiving any sympathy from Roshi or the community must have been too much for him. I later learned that he had hoped to eventually take charge of Soshinji when Roshi retired. Though he had bullied me until I could no longer control myself, I felt regrets for

the pain I had caused him. After almost two years of monastic life, I was still a wild boy from the slums of Ishinden. I realized how little I understood of the true meaning of monkhood. I had yet to find that calm place within myself that was the mark of a true follower of the Buddha. It had been easy to accept the fact that many of the monks I'd met up until then were not Buddhists in the true sense of the word, but when I had to confront my own weaknesses, I felt pained to the point of depression. I had to do something about it.

A couple of months after Seiryu left the monastery Roshi sent for me.

"Kodo-san, come in," he said after I announced myself at the entrance to his room. "What do you think of this?" He was hanging a scroll in the alcove of his room.

The scroll read "Illusion is inseparable from Buddhahood." At first glance I felt the power and the sense of freedom in the piece. The brush strokes were pure and fresh. Though I had little experience personally with calligraphy, I was certain of that much. I was taken back to the time I had viewed the paintings of Ukita sensei, my neighbor Chiaki's art teacher.

"It's beautiful," I said.

"And the meaning? What do you make of the meaning?"

I hadn't thought about the meaning. The question threw me off balance. I needed time to think. I wasn't certain that even with time I would have a satisfactory answer. "Who was the calligrapher?" I asked, stalling.

"It was brushed by Suzuki Shosan over 300 years ago," Roshi said. "He was a warrior who asked to be relieved of his post in order to be ordained as a Zen monk. Shosan was prepared to perform ritual suicide if his request wasn't granted. The Shogun gave him permission to leave the military, and he became one of our country's greatest Zen masters."

I remembered the Ishinden Pure Land priest's story about Sessen Doji, the boy who also was willing to give up his life to understand the Buddha Way.

"What do you make of the meaning?" Roshi repeated, interrupting my musings.

"I'm not sure, Roshi."

“Zen master Shosan believed that one should practice zazen in the midst of strife and confusion. He was fond of saying, ‘What use can there be for a zazen requiring a quiet place?’”

Roshi waited, hoping perhaps that I would have a response to what he’d just said. But why was he talking to me about Shosan? Why did he choose to give me this informal lecture about practicing amidst strife?

“Kodo-san, you are not practicing with the same enthusiasm you had in the past. I’ve heard that you have been openly critical of the practice at Soshinji and even talk about leaving the monastery.”

So that’s why he sent for me. That’s what I get for speaking my mind indiscriminately.

“When you came to Soshinji last year, you talked about being taken advantage of by monks while they played around. I suggested then that it would be a good thing to suspend your opinions and concentrate on your Buddhist practice for a while. You have now spent over a year at Soshinji and your practice had been maturing nicely before that difficulty you had with Seiryu san. Before you let that experience color your feelings about Soshinji, I would ask you again to suspend your opinion for a while and just practice with us. You are still quite young, and I don’t think it would be a good thing for you to leave us so soon.”

I thanked him for his advice and was truly moved that he would show such concern for me. But something had changed for me after my fight with Seiryu, and I could feel a change in the way I was treated by many of my seniors. As unfair as Seiryu’s treatment of me may have been, and no matter how justified my actions may have seemed to many of the lay community, I still broke a cardinal rule in monastic training. One should never attack a monk who is senior to you. I could not tell Roshi the message I thought I was getting from the other monks because it was just a feeling. There was nothing concrete in their treatment that I could point to. After the incident with Seiryu, however, Soshinji no longer felt like home.

Chapter 17

In our tradition, after learning the basics of Zen monastic life at the temple where you received ordination, monks used to set out on pilgrimages in straw sandals, straw umbrella hat and monk's traveling clothes, begging their meals and sleeping wherever they found shelter, searching for a teacher to train with. Though few monks followed those old ways when I was at Soshinji, I was bent on practicing as the ancients had. I'd become convinced that the petty jealousies, the degrading behavior seniors showed junior monks and the general lack of compassion I'd encountered in monasteries was a result of the disregard of the ways of the ancients. I believed that if I adhered to the practices of the patriarchs, at least I would be able to become a genuine monk.

Roshi wanted me to stay at Soshinji a little longer, feeling I was too young and immature to set out on my own. I, however, wanted to change so badly that I listened to his words but didn't hear the import of his message. I believed the only way to truly change would be to emulate the ancients; so, despite the objection of my teacher, I left Soshinji a few months after Seiryu did.

I wandered around the country, begging meals and requesting lodging at various temples. After spending nights at a number of temples, joining in on morning services and meeting with the masters, I found a teacher with whom I wanted to train. The monastery was Entsuji in Tamba and the abbot's name was Senmyo Hara Roshi.

"So you want to train at Entsuji," Hara Roshi said when I came to his room to greet him.

He was a soft-spoken man with a warm smile, perhaps in his early fifties. He was up early in the morning to practice meditation with the monks, which was not the case with most of the monasteries I'd visited since leaving Soshinji. I had asked permission to stay at Entsuji when I arrived a few days earlier. I was tired of being on the road—that and the fact that the Roshi joined us for morning zazen encouraged me to give Entsuji a try. I needed the

roshi's permission if I were to train with him at Entsuji for an extended period of time.

"I would like to, with your permission, Roshi."

"This is a poor country monastery," he said. "If you are serious about practice and willing to accept the hardships that living in poverty entails, you are welcome to try it."

"I am, Roshi," I said, and I believed I was telling the truth. I had thought Soshinji was poor because its parish was primarily made up of poor farmers, but I'd never gone around hungry there. The farmers always made sure the monastery had enough rice and vegetables to feed its monks generously.

At breakfast here at Entsuji I was last in line, being the newest to have arrived there. Rice gruel and pickles were all that we had. I ate fast and went to the server for a second helping.

"We are all out of rice gruel, get back to your place," the server said, glaring at me.

I was young and energetic and I never felt that I got my fill. I studied in the evenings after the other monks went to sleep and I sat zazen during rest periods. The other monks seemed to take life easy, perhaps partly because they had to survive on a very poor diet. On nights when I studied until the early hours of the morning, I used to go to the kitchen and eat the remaining rice gruel. The cook scolded me and took money from my small savings when he didn't have enough rice for the next morning.

Once I accompanied Hara Roshi and a few monks to another temple to perform some rituals. When the rituals were over, we were invited to take part in a meal. We sat down and chanted the prescribed prayer before the taking of food. I was feeling starved as a result of the poor fare I got daily at Entsuji. While most of the others still had their hands in the prayer position, I was already kneeling by the server with my bowl ready. The server scowled at me. I ignored him. I guess he didn't want to make a scene because he filled my bowl with rice. I returned to my seat and devoured the contents in a minute. That one bowl felt so good, it only made me aware of how hungry I was. As soon as I'd finished, I jumped up and brought my empty bowl back to the server before anyone was halfway finished with his first serving. Shaking his head in disbelief

the server filled it up again. I gobbled it down and jumped up for another serving. I was stuffing it in; I made an art of it. I wanted to make sure that I left the table with a full belly. I must have eaten twice as much as the next biggest eater.

On the way back to Entsuji, Hara Roshi turned to me and said, "There was plenty of time to eat. Did you have to devour the food so quickly?"

It was a very mellow reprimand, so I didn't take it too seriously. I said, "I can't eat any slower than that."

This delicate teacher didn't know how to handle me. He received complaints from the other monks, not only about me taking food from the kitchen when everyone was asleep, but also for openly expressing my dismay at the lackadaisical attitude of the other monks.

One night I'd planned to spend a few hours reading Dogen's short essay, *Genjokoan* or "The Koan of Life." One of the few monks at Entsuji who took a liking to me had recommended I read it. The old Japanese characters were difficult, and I was getting frustrated because I couldn't grasp the opening passage. I got angry with myself because of my poor background in the classical Japanese language. Frustration led to hunger.

I went into the kitchen and saw a group of four or five monks in a heated philosophical discussion. Go back to your room, I told myself. I knew that when I'd become frustrated and angry with myself, I had a tendency to take it out on others. But I wanted to know what they were arguing about. Standing at the opposite end of the room, I listened to the debate. The argument was around Dogen's statement, "At the very time we are doing zazen, we must study whether the whole world is vertical or horizontal."

Reisho, one of the monks, turned to me. "Kodo-san," he said, "What do you make of the passage?"

I knew that wise guy was asking me because he was certain I wouldn't know what they were talking about. What angered me most, however, was the fact that he was right. I hadn't any idea what Dogen meant. I stood there with all eyes on me. I can't really say whether they were mocking me or not, but I was looking at four monks who were laughing sarcastically. So I just turned my back to

the group, lifted my robe, let out a huge fart and walked out of the kitchen.

Hara Roshi called me to his room the next morning. Damn! I thought, I should have gone back to my room as soon as I saw the other monks in their heated debate. No matter, Roshi will just reprimand me and it'll be over. I'd been through this before.

"Kodo-san, is something bothering you about Entsuji?" he said.

"Nothing particular," I lied.

"Then why do you take every opportunity to degrade the other monks? You must show your seniors respect."

"Yes sir."

I knew that Hara Roshi was right. I was acting disrespectful. Since my fight with Seiryu something had snapped in me. I remembered my treatment by Shoie and then by Seiryu and my disappointment with monks grew. My short experience at Entsuji didn't do anything to renew my faith in monks or monastic ways. Monks were dozing during morning zazen and seemed to take life easy. Not having very much Zen training, I dealt with my frustrations by reverting to a crude behavior that I had learned over a good deal of my childhood.

I waited for Roshi to dismiss me, but he didn't.

"There is a teacher named Ryouin Fueoka, who is abbot of Ryuunji Monastery in Tajima about a half a day's walk from here. Fueoka Roshi asked if I could provide him with a couple of monks to help with a precept ceremony. I would like you to be one of them. I think you need a break from Entsuji."

He really meant that he and the monks at Entsuji needed a break from me. I had become disillusioned with the place and was as happy to get away from Entsuji as Hara Roshi was to see me go.

I thanked him, bowed and left the room. I hadn't any idea what to expect from this temporary transfer. Not knowing anything about Fueoka or this temple Ryuunji, I could only cling to the hope that it would be more suitable to me than Entsuji.

That afternoon I was cleaning the zendo with Ippei, the monk who'd befriended me and recommended I read Dogen's *Genjokoan*. I asked him what he knew of Fueoka.

“Hara Roshi often talked to us about Fueoka,” Ippei said. “He’d even asked Fueoka to give us a Dharma talk in his stead once, which is unusual for teachers in this area. You’ll meet him tomorrow morning and see for yourself. He is an unassuming teacher with a deep understanding of the scriptures and a quiet self-confidence.

“He was senior to Hara Roshi under Zen master Bokuzan Nishiari the great Dogen scholar. While Fueoka is soft spoken and composed, his teacher Nishiari is a dynamic teacher who, despite all his expertise in the teachings, has difficulty controlling his own temper.”

Like me, I thought.

“When Nishiari Roshi was in charge of Denshinji Monastery, Fueoka was the only disciple of the master who could calm his teacher down. Nishiari seemed to need someone with Fueoka’s temperament near him to bring balance to his explosive side.”

Just what I need.

Ippei continued. “Hara Roshi told us of a time Nishiari got angry when the monk in charge of beating the wooden drum to morning sutra reading missed a beat, took a deep breath, and started again. Everyone was thrown off and it was difficult to get back to the sutra rhythm. Nishiari got up and started to scold the group. He continued for hours calling them country bumpkins and every name he could think of. Hara Roshi, who was one of the monks practicing at the monastery at the time, sneaked out and went to the administration building next door where Fueoka was doing the accounting.

“‘Things are dire,’ he told Fueoka, ‘the master is screaming at us and he doesn’t appear to know how to stop. Please do something about it.’

“Fueoka put his work aside and went next door to the Dharma Hall where the monks were standing in a row, looking down as Nishiari was chastising them. Fueoka took the mallet from the monk in charge of beating the drum and said, ‘Let’s start again.’ He then looked directly at his teacher, his posture upright and the mallet in his hand in position to bang the drum. He waited. The master looked back at his disciple, the rhythm of his tirade thrown off, and he became quiet. Fueoka signaled for the monks to return to their places. When they had returned to their cushions, he hit the drum

and led the monks in a smooth recitation while Nishiari calmed down.”

I stood there transfixed. Ippie’s account of Fueoka could not have made me happier if he had told me that the master was Buddha himself.

“Snap out of it Kodo,” Ippei said. “We have to get this zendo clean before lunch.”

Chapter 18

Fueoka Roshi and a few other priests came that night to Entsuji to greet Hara Roshi and to discuss some temple affairs. They spent the night at the monastery and planned to walk to Fueoka's temple Ryuunji with me and another Entsuji monk.

When we were all ready to leave the following morning, Hara Roshi saw us off at the Entsuji gate. He turned to me and said, "Kodo-san, I'm putting you in charge of the lunches for the group."

I felt honored to have been chosen. I was already regretting my past behavior at Entsuji. Not that I wanted to stay, but simply regretting the trouble I'd caused this gentle teacher. After my conversation with Ippei, I was convinced that Hara wasn't sending me to Ryuunji to get me away from Entsuji, but rather because he felt Fueoka was a more suitable teacher for me.

All the priests were to assist Fueoka at the precept ceremony at Ryuunji the following day. For Fueoka and the other priests the walk appeared to be an outing during which they could relax and picnic in the mountains. I, however, had no special interest in picnicking anywhere. For me it was a trip that I hoped would bring me to a monastery where Buddhist practice was alive.

Chatting and admiring the scenery, the priests walked on, taking their sweet time. I too enjoyed the beautiful pine forest and sloping mountains as I walked through this exquisite countryside, but unlike the priests, I was also anxious to get to Ryuunji and begin my new life. The walk, a good half-day journey, was for them a chance to be away for a brief time from the rigors of formal temple affairs. So I scurried on ahead, at my normal speedy pace, unaware that I had left the others miles behind.

At lunchtime I looked around and no one was in sight. The others were far behind, and I didn't know what to do. I waited and I waited and I waited. Finally the others arrived. At least two hours had gone by from the time I'd stopped at that spot. I could see from their expressions that they were peeved, and I imagined they were quite hungry too.

“Kodo-san, where the devil were you running to?” Fueoka asked, standing in front of a group of very cross monks.

I bowed my head and said nothing.

“A monk is supposed to be aware of his surroundings and work for the benefit of others. How can you do that if you go off into your own world and forget your mission?”

“I’m sorry, Roshi,” I said, handing Fueoka the lunches. I couldn’t help but feel that he was trying to act stern for their sakes, and that he wasn’t really as upset as the others. He’d admonished me more out of duty, I believe, than out of anger. Still, he must have realized then that he wasn’t dealing with any ordinary monk.

Fueoka took the lunches and handed them out to the group.

I spent less than a year with Fueoka Roshi. In that short time I learned lessons that were to shape the direction of my Buddhist practice for the rest of my life. He lectured on the works of Dogen and Dogen’s disciple, Keizan. But the most important lessons were those that the master gave me when we were alone.

After dinner one evening, the *ino*, the supervisor of monks, came to my room and told me that the roshi wanted to see me. I went directly to his room, sat outside in *seiza*, while the *ino* told him I was waiting.

“Ah, Kodo-san, please come in.”

I feared, as usual, that he was going to scold me for something, though I hadn’t been aware of breaking any rules lately.

“Remember that massage you gave me last week?” he said. “Where did you learn to do it?”

We had been sitting around the Ryuunji garden the previous week and I could tell by the way Fueoka was favoring one side of his body that his back was bothering him. I had stood up, gone over to him and massaged his back.

“I didn’t really learn it from anyone,” I said. “I used to give my father massages when he had a hangover, which was quite often. I just learned by doing.”

“Hmmm...like zazen,” he said with a smile. “Could you give me another one tonight?”

“Certainly, I’ll be back after evening sutra reading,” I said, relieved that I hadn’t broken a monastery rule and excited to have the chance to spend time with Roshi alone.

That was the beginning of an exchange to which I began to look forward. I know that Roshi enjoyed it too. I would massage his frail body before he went to bed, while at the same time, absorbing lessons about Buddhism and Zen. On one occasion, Fueoka talked about the saying attributed to the first Zen patriarch.

“Kodo-san, I’m sure you’ve heard about one of the basic tenets of Zen Buddhism attributed to our first patriarch Bodhidharma: ‘Zen is transmitted outside the scriptures and not through words.’

I nodded.

“Many monks look at this statement carelessly and interpret it to mean that they need not study basic Buddhist texts,” he said.

I have no doubt that he recognized in me a propensity for such an interpretation.

“The fact is,” he continued, “you can’t truly grasp the real meaning of the highest teachings of Zen without understanding the foundations from which those teachings are derived—that is, the general writings on Buddhism.

“You’ve heard many of those Zen anecdotes about teachers screaming at their disciples, grabbing them and throwing them out of the Buddha hall, tweaking their noses, hitting them on the head, cutting off their fingers, and many other outrageous acts. Students who haven’t studied the general teachings deeply enough try to imitate those ancient masters. Some are placed in positions of authority before they are ready. They may hit other monks or act rudely toward them. Imitating the ancient masters does not mean that you have their wisdom. I’ve even heard of one student who lifted his robe and farted in front of his fellow disciples to make a point.”

I froze. I tried to hide my surprise, but I suspect I didn’t do a very good job of it. The twinkle in Fueoka’s eye told me that he felt I got the point and it pleased him. I wondered what else Hara had told him about me.

“When those ancient teachers acted in unconventional ways with their students,” he continued, “they weren’t simply acting impulsively. They had a deep understanding of the Buddhist teachings and were

acting out of their understanding for the sake of their disciples. They understood the teaching from the sutras as well as the sayings of the patriarchs. That is why they could act out of compassion. Most of the impulsive ones who dismiss scholarship are wild foxes, fooling themselves as well as others.

“Kodo-san, be sure you have a good knowledge of the general Buddhist teachings before you study Dogen and others from our school.”

During another massage session I told him about my early contact with the practice of zazen. “The first time I saw monks in zazen posture, it felt like an electric shock had gone through my body. How can this posture have so much power?”

“Indeed zazen is a powerful practice,” he said. “But it is also easily misunderstood. I notice that you are sitting zazen whenever you have the time. It is good that you place such value on this practice. But what is your reason for pursuing zazen so vigorously?”

“I want very badly to attain enlightenment.” I said. “Then I’m certain to understand this strange power of zazen.”

“Hmmm ...” Fueoka sighed, and sat quietly, absorbed in thought. Then he spoke. “Kodo-san, there is no need to chase after enlightenment in this overzealous manner. You are like a fellow walking around with a piece of shit on his nose frantically looking for the place where the fart came from.”

I wished he would stop referring to farting. “I see,” I responded politely. But my thoughts, far from polite, were: What does he want me to do? Sit like those lazy monks at Entsuji—dozing half the time?

Though I initially resisted Fueoka’s warnings, the words stayed with me. They penetrated my consciousness the longer I practiced. The more I watched my own unthinking behavior, the greater sense his words made. I was learning the real meaning of a good teacher and a good friend.

“Never practice zazen for yourself,” Fueoka was to tell me at another massage session. I was massaging his low back while he lay face down on his *futon*.

“A little bit lower and to the right,” he said. “That’s it, right there.”

I could feel his muscles loosen as I worked that section. I was gentle with him because his body felt so frail. Fueoka spoke in a

subdued manner in general and with his head on the futon it was even more of a strain to hear him.

“To practice with personal reward in mind is zazen in form only. It has nothing to do with the true practice of Zen.”

Hearing my teacher's words while massaging his frail body gave the lessons even more meaning. Still, I didn't stop charging ahead. It was as though I wasn't driving the engine. Somewhere deep down inside, however, I knew that Fueoka understood me far better than I understood myself.

When Fueoka sent for me one day, and it wasn't the usual massage time, I was a bit apprehensive. He drove himself beyond a reasonable limit in order to be an example to his monks, and knowing how delicate his body was I worried about it breaking down.

“Come in Kodo-san,” he said, after I announced myself at the entrance to his room. He was sitting by his desk and I could see to my relief that he wasn't in any kind of physical difficulty. “I want you to take a package for me to Hara Roshi. Roshi said he wanted to see you, so I figured you can deliver this package to Entsuji while you are at it.”

The fear that I was being sent back to Entsuji must have been evident on my face because Fueoka hurriedly said, “Don't worry Kodo-san, you'll be coming back to Ryuunji in a few days.”

His words didn't entirely convince me. I'd found a teacher I believed was perfect for me and I didn't want to lose him. When Fueoka wouldn't tell me what Hara wanted of me, it made me feel that it was something serious and that spoiled my journey to Entsuji. I arrived that evening and went straight to Hara Roshi's room.

“Kodo-san, it's good to see you.” While I was surprised at my own feelings of gladness to see Hara again, I wondered whether he was really happy to see me.

“I have some papers for you,” he said, as he searched through a pile on his desk. My anxiety returned. While he was looking through the pile he asked me how my life was at Ryuunji with Fueoka.

“It has been going well,” I said, certain that Fueoka had already given him a report. I didn't want to sound too enthusiastic about Fueoka for fear he would take it as a criticism of his own handling of me.

“Here they are,” he said, and handed me the papers.

I read them carefully. The top paper was my orders to report to my draft board for a physical. The others were forms to fill out to bring with me. My heart dropped. Not now! Just when I’ve found a good place to train and a true teacher! Though I was only reporting for a physical, my fear that the military would take me from Fueoka put me in a panic. I had nothing—no money, no rank. Some people in my situation would have welcomed the draft in order to extricate them from poverty. But I had a dream, and I was chasing that dream with a passion.

“You’re not drafted yet,” Hara said, in an effort to calm me. My fear of a shattered dream must have been evident.

“How did the army find me?” I asked, embarrassed at the implication of the question as I heard myself ask it. I didn’t want him to think I wanted to hide from the military.

Hara explained that they have registries of every temple in the country. I was registered at Entsuji, though Hara Roshi had lent me out at Fueoka’s request.

“I hope that your stay with Fueoka Roshi isn’t cut short by the draft, but you have to answer your country’s call if they need you.” He handed me a package wrapped in a brown silk *furoshiki*. “Here’s something for your journey, wear it proudly,” he said with a chuckle.

I stood there staring at the package.

“Open it,” he said.

I untied the package. It was a *fundoshi*. Word had gotten around that I was the only monk that didn’t even have a loincloth. Remove my robe and cotton kimono and you would find me stark naked. Hara Roshi must have known how ashamed I’d feel to go to the physical without underwear. I would have been derided and probably beaten by the inspectors. Though I was surprised and a little embarrassed that Hara had known I didn’t own a loincloth, I was elated. With my new *fundoshi* I felt like a rich man. I’d been nothing but a bother to the old man, a thorn in his side, but he had a big heart and never held my troublesome behavior against me. After being away from Entsuji for a while, I was able to see Hara Roshi with some objectivity. I was like a spoiled child for whom separation helped bring awareness of the value of his parent.

The draft notice came months later to Fueoka Roshi's temple by way of Entsuji. I had easily passed the physical. My number was chosen from a lottery of those who'd passed the physical, and I had no choice but to go. I would have to put my Buddhist aspirations aside for three years. I felt crushed. Finally, I had found a true teacher and now *this*. It was as though I was being sent back to prison.

You will encounter many obstacles on your journey, but you will overcome them. You must never lose sight of the power from the other world that will guide you through these tribulations on your journey. The words of the *inariroshi* came to me again—words I needed desperately to believe.

Chapter 19

I left Fueoka's temple with 20 *sen* and just the clothes on my back. I was on my way to report for duty at Tsu City, a good two and a half days walk from Entsuji. I left Ryuunji and my teacher Fueoka and spent the night at Entsuji. Hara Roshi gave me the name of a temple I could stay in on the way and sent me off with a large lunch full of enough rice and vegetables for at least two meals.

"I didn't forget your impressive appetite," he said with a laugh.

Did he remember anything about me for which I wouldn't be sorry? For my part I was sure I would always remember him as the man who directed me to Fueoka, the teacher who taught me true Zen. I bowed to Hara and left him standing at the gate to Entsuji with his attendant monk.

I felt free on the open road with the mountain air blowing on my face. As long as I could keep the thought of where I was headed and the fact that I had to leave Fueoka Roshi out of my mind all was good. But the face of Fueoka, and the realization that I would soon be in the military returned to me constantly, bringing me down from an intoxicating high to a feeling of despair. Why now of all times? Why did the Buddha test me like this?

I spent that night in a temple run by Hara Roshi's disciple. The afternoon of the following day, feeling tired and hungry and more intimately aware of the fact that I was soon to become a soldier, I stopped at a home that appeared to be owned by an affluent family. I walked through the main gate of the home and chanted *hooo* in front of the door. The owner opened the door and stood there waiting. I kept my head down, hiding my face under my umbrella hat.

"Please allow me to borrow your tray," I said.

This was a code that would tell the owner that I was going to bless his house with some talisman. I knew that I had nothing to give him, but I was not fazed by the deception of my actions. I was hungry and thought only of getting a meal.

"Just a moment," the owner said, seeing my robe. He went into his house and returned with a tray, thinking I was going to put the talisman on the tray in exchange for a contribution. As soon as the

tray was presented, I took out my eating bowls (five of descending sizes) and placed them on it.

“Please fill this one with rice, this with *miso* soup and these with whatever else you can offer ...” and without concerning myself with how disconcerted my host might be, I started to read the sutra for *takuhatsu* in a loud voice. With my head down, I chanted, “*busshou ka-hi-ra-jou-dou-ma-ka-da-setsu-bou-ha-rana...*” I heard the man’s footsteps as he returned with the food in my bowls on the tray. I smelled the rice the *miso* soup and the pickles. He placed the tray on the veranda and I recited the prayer before eating, bowed, and devoured all the food. I then received hot water, washed my bowls, put them away and recited the prayer of gratitude and left.

I made my way to Tsu City on foot with nothing but my monk’s clothes under which I felt the comfort of my new loincloth. Though I was headed for the army, traveling in this manner allowed me to feel that my life as a monk was still alive. It was only when I arrived at Tsu City that the reality of my new situation truly sunk in. *Never give up, for the road you take will eventually help others and bring to you a great peace.* Please, Buddha, make the *inarioroshi*’s words come true.

At the Tsu City draft board, I got together with the other inductees. While we were being given our instructions, I looked at those around me. They were all wearing formal attire, displaying their family crests. I felt a strange mixture of pride at being a monk and intimidation at standing out as a poor beggar. I was careful to hide the intimidation and to display my own sense of pride. We were invited to an official send off that evening sponsored by the Tsu City Committee to Support the Draft. I went to a bath before the party, cleaned myself and arrived wearing my tattered robe.

We were led into a large meeting room down the hallway from the offices of the draft board where everyone had a chance to relax and get acquainted. Small low tables were positioned around the room and trays of food were placed on each table. It was a grand feast with a big platter of fish. I hadn’t eaten any kind of meat since leaving Ishinden years ago. I was hungry and the fish looked delicious. I knew that I wouldn’t be able to remain a vegetarian during my stay in the army, but I was still wearing my robe. I was a

monk, I was different, I was special. I needed to believe those things in order to fend off the despair that was slowly engulfing me.

“Here, you take the fish,” I told the inductee on my left and proceeded to eat the rice, *miso* soup and pickles. I stood out from the beginning, appearing in a monk’s robe. Now refusing the best part of the feast, I was even more conspicuous.

When we all reported for duty, we were given our army outfits. We were smartly dressed in regulation uniforms made of dark blue cloth. The single-breasted tunic had a standing collar piped in yellow and five brass buttons along the front. Our trousers were dark blue with a yellow stripe about an inch wide down the outer seam. We wore them tucked into white cloth gaiters, which buttoned on the outside and reached to just below the knee. The gaiters had a buckled leather strap fastening at the top and another passing under the brown hobnailed shoes. Our hats were dark blue ‘pillbox’ style with a black leather peak and chin strap and a yellow colored band and crown seam piping.

The tunic and trousers and boots tightly wrapped around my body made me feel like a parcel securely packed to be sent to another part of the world. There was a sense of security and splendor in this new look, as long as I was able to keep from my thoughts the fact that I was torn away from my Buddhist practice, my special teacher and my dream of realizing through meditation a state of supreme repose. When those thoughts arose, the tightly fit uniform felt like an enclosure shutting me in and shutting out everything beautiful and free.

I looked around me at those men who had arrived for induction in their various decorated kimonos, *hakama*, white *tabi* socks and their individual family crests, now all dressed in matching military outfits. I looked down at myself, the one monk who had shown up in a tattered robe, dressed exactly as the rest. We were all instantly transformed into a group of uniformed soldiers.

We were led back to the meeting room where low tables were once more placed around the room near the walls.

“Here you are, sir, enjoy your meal.” A middle age waitress brought out a tray of food, placed it in front of me, bowed to me and

went away. Other waitresses were bringing trays to the other men; it was a feast again, and again a luscious fish was included.

I could feel all eyes on me, probably wondering to whom I was going to give the most desirable part of the meal this time. As they watched, I ate my rice, my soup and pickles and finally, looking around and returning all the stares, I gobbled up every bit of the fish.

Strange as it was, I felt a little freer to do what I pleased without my monk's attire. But I know it was more than just the change of clothing. I'd always done things to keep people off balance; so, when I saw those other fellows thinking they had me figured out, I took great pleasure in eating the fish. The surprise I saw on their faces was for me as delicious as the fish I had just devoured.

Of course that was just a small pleasure, and it only lasted for the length of a meal. I had to return to the reality of my situation. I had to say goodbye, for the time being, to a dream that had fed me hope since my escape from the oppression of life in Ishinden.

Chapter 20

Because a day hadn't gone by during my peacetime stay in the army when I wasn't aware that I was taken from my Buddhist practice, time seemed to crawl. In retrospect, however, since so little had actually happened of any real significance then, it felt like a moment in my life. I have few memories of that period. The few memories of training that do stand out in my mind only show the stupidity of a method designed to prepare men for war; a training that would prove useless when one was actually facing an enemy in battle.

The non-commissioned officers enjoyed catching us breaking one of the thousands of rules of conduct. If you saluted with your hand at a 40-degree angle from the horizontal instead of 45, you were reprimanded by your drill leader, who would send you to the division head, who would smack you across the face and send you to the troop commander, who would write out a citation, which would be kept on file. It all seemed so meaningless then; more so because I was reminded of the fact that I had to give up my dream of enlightenment for this.

My Zen training did, however, help me avoid receiving citations and keep me from getting smacked across the face. With the exception of a few outbursts and occasional wiseacring during my monastic days, I'd learned as a novice monk to take orders from my seniors without question or hesitation. I was also quite athletic and nimble and performed the drills with our bulky out of date rifles quickly and with good coordination. These were the qualities for a model soldier.

During basic training, my commanding officer came to my bunk and called me outside.

"Private Sawaki."

"Yes, sir?"

"You've learned to maneuver your fire arm quite skillfully in a short time."

"Thank you, sir."

"I want you to take charge of drilling the new recruits."

"Yes sir." I felt proud at having been chosen but fearful of the responsibility. I also feared I might lose the friendship of many of my

fellow soldiers. Together we'd made fun of our superiors, behind their backs of course, and now I was given a position of authority. Was this going to create a distance between me and the men I'd trained with?

I tried to be fair to the men I'd trained, but I knew I couldn't be too easy on them. I was walking a tightrope between being an authority (a position I'd always been uncomfortable with) and being a 'good guy.' Like everything else in peacetime training, it felt pointless. When I thought I was through with the army and could return to my Buddhist training, war broke out between Japan and Russia.

As a result of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, we were all called up for another three-year stint. My dream of returning to the monastery was shattered. I wanted to cry, but I wasn't a child. The need to express my feeling of despair took the form of the first and only poem of my life.

My one dream
To dedicate my life to Buddha,
But fate has me
A country-defending devil.

On February 8, 1904, our army attacked the Russians without warning at their naval base at Port Arthur. The Russo-Japanese War had begun. In May of 1904 I was sent to China's Liaotung Peninsula with the 33rd infantry of the 3rd Division of the 2nd Army. After cutting the railway lines in Pulantien, the 3rd Division moved on to Nanshan where we waited for the advance of the Russian army.

The Russian army! We were going to face an enemy whose image loomed large in my mind. Like Russia, a country that dwarfed our tiny island, I imagined Russian soldiers to be giants. Would I be able to stand up to these goliaths? Would I have the courage? All the fights I had in the past were with Japanese, enemies whom I felt I knew. But Russians were unknown to me. I had never seen a Russian. I tried to summon up the courage, but it only made me more frightened, as my mind churned out thoughts of this fierce foe.

On May 26 the 3rd division, including the 33rd infantry, my group, attacked. When we actually faced the enemy, I wasn't nearly as

frightened as I had been waiting and thinking about the attack. I was able to work myself into a fury that smothered any feelings of doubt. The Russians launched a counter attack causing us severe losses. We held our position near Nanshan waiting for the order to move forward. We heard gunfire all around us. I looked around and saw all the men flat on their stomachs. Not one soldier even lifted his head to see what was happening. Nobody was inclined to respond to the shower of bullets from enemy machineguns.

I was lying there when I had a flash of the gang fight in my youth—the gang members swinging their swords at each other with their eyes closed. Now, facing the Russians, I wondered how our men could move forward when you couldn't see the enemy. We were no more effective than the cowardly gang members who blindly swung their swords. I mustered up courage, stood up and looked around, glaring in the direction of the enemy. There, amidst the shower of gunfire, I realized that though bullets were flying there wasn't much chance of getting hit—certainly not enough to warrant our men burying themselves in the dirt.

I looked around me again and noticed the platoon commander, the squadron commander, and the captain all prone, shouting things that nobody could possibly understand. One group began firing their weapons, though I thought they hadn't been given an order. I figured they couldn't hear anything so I ran to the squadron commander.

"Sir, did you give the command to fire?"

"No, don't fire your guns yet!" he said, with a shaky voice, his head still buried in the ground.

I looked at my master sergeant. I couldn't believe what I saw. That blusterer, who had always been so haughty pushing his weight around acting as though he was the toughest guy in the platoon, was lying there flat on his fat belly, quiet and pale as a ghost.

Then something snapped in me. It was as though I were possessed. I started to scream, "How long are you going to crawl around like a baby?" I nudged the master sergeant with the butt of my gun. Then I yelled to the captain and squadron commanders to move, and finally, regardless of their rank, I began to scream at everyone until they started to advance. I was shouting orders to my superiors who were all paralyzed.

I saw a soldier turn to the guy next to him, "Who the fuck is that guy?" he asked.

"He's a Zen monk," the other said.

"That must be the reason. Nothing scares that son-of-a-bitch!"

Zen Buddhism being considered the religion of the samurai must have carried with it a reputation for teaching monks to be fearless. I thought of Shoie and Seiryu and had to laugh. I can't even say that I wasn't scared. All I know is that I had the ability to work myself into a frenzy that helped push whatever fear I may have had to the deep recesses of my unconscious. I thought about my childhood and the fights I had with boys bigger than me. I wondered whether it wasn't the fact that I was a very frightened boy that pushed me into devising a way to cover up my fear with an apparent courage that made me look fierce in the eyes of others. I realized that must have been how I could act so tough back then. And even now I caught myself enjoying the feeling as I had in my childhood. I was now deriving satisfaction from being considered brave in the eyes of my fellow soldiers.

We defeated the Russians at Nanshin, as much a result of them running out of ammunition as from any superiority on our part. Still, it gave us the confidence that we could defeat this fearsome foe. Insane as it might seem, I found the experience of being in actual combat less of a strain on the mind and body than life during peacetime in the army. I no longer had to worry about the way I carried my weapon or whether my shirt was tucked in properly or whether I saluted my superiors with my hand at the proper angle. I walked, carrying my rifle however I pleased, my tobacco pouch hanging from my belt and my shirt hanging out over my pants. Ignoring the thousands of rules that our superiors vigorously insisted upon during peacetime, we were still more alert than ever. The fact that an enemy sniper could appear at any moment was all that was needed to keep us vigilant.

During our march from Port Arthur to Liaoyang I ran into difficulty, but not from the enemy. Some of the men I had under my supervision were a part of a small group that I had worked with during peacetime. I'd been promoted to corporal when we were

called up at the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war, and those men begrudged me my quick promotion. They were not very excited about taking orders from someone who'd entered the forces as a private the same time as they had. Now that we were fighting a war and their obedience was ever more essential, they found ways to disregard my orders. I knew how important it was to work together with my men at this crucial time, but I had little recourse in the midst of battle to force them to obey. One fellow, private Sasaki, was the most defiant. If I hadn't won him over, I would have been totally ineffective as a group commander.

Sasaki was a short, solidly built fellow who would stare at me with his deep-set eyes below thick eyebrows in apparent anger. I wondered, however, if it weren't fear that was actually driving him. Whatever it was it manifested in the form of a tough little scoundrel with a chip on his shoulder who led a mini rebellion against me. He challenged me every chance he got. Though I acted tough in his presence, I feared him worse than the enemy.

Our division was chasing the Russians up and down the hills north of Port Arthur. The stench of decay from wounded and dead Russian and Japanese soldiers scattered along the path filled my nostrils. I could hardly breathe. We walked north through the mud and mosquitoes and the scorching heat of the Manchurian summer, never knowing when we would be attacked or picked off by snipers. I was walking with the very real possibility of imminent death. But my fear of dying was strangely overshadowed by a feeling of importance—a meaning to my life that I had never before experienced. I was intoxicated with self-importance.

I was bringing up the rear when I saw Sasaki lying in the mud. At first I thought he'd been shot, but I looked closer and realized he had no wounds and was still, though barely, breathing. He must have collapsed from heat exhaustion under the sweltering temperatures. He would surely have died if I hadn't noticed him. I picked him up by the scruff of his collar and shook him.

"Come on, move your ass," I said. "You'll be a dead soldier if you don't get yourself together."

I don't think he had any idea what was happening at first, but his head gradually started to clear. "Let's go," I said, but all he did was

look up and stare at me.

I wiped his forehead and kept shaking him until he could stand on his own. Then I picked up his rifle and pack and held him by the shirt, pulling him along. We were meandering off the regular path so the enemy wouldn't spot us. It was so humid that Sasaki could hardly walk, but whenever he looked like he would collapse, I'd nudge him along. "If we don't keep moving," I said, "we'll both be shot dead."

Despite carrying both our gear and two rifles, I didn't feel fatigued—something was giving me the necessary strength. The thought of how that son-of-a-bitch hated me and caused me so much trouble came into my mind, but was buried by the immediate need to get us to safety as quickly as possible.

We finally arrived at the campsite of the supply unit. I made some rice gruel.

"Here drink this," I said. "Rest here and you can catch up with us later."

I asked the sergeant in charge to let him stay with them until he recovered. Only then, as I took off to catch up with our platoon, did I reflect over just how much of a thorn in my side he'd been ever since my promotion. But from that time on Sasaki was my most loyal man. When any of the others tried to give me trouble or ignore my orders he was right there. I didn't have to do anything. He was ready to fight anyone who thought to disobey me. It was quite a relief to have him on my side.

When we attacked the main Russian defense lines south of Liaoyang, the 34th infantry was supposed to join the 33rd and attack the Cairn Hill Fortress. It was necessary to attack Cairn Hill before we would be able to occupy Liaoyang. The 34th must have gotten lost in the millet fields that surrounded the fortress, because we never saw them pass us. The 34th attacked alone. Division after division had stormed the hill and were picked off by the entrenched 1st Siberian army. When we of the 33rd approached the fortress, we walked by corpses from the 34th, separated body parts scattered all around. Other men, still alive, were moaning in pain. I smelled a sweetish stench of the dead and saw my fellow soldiers lying in their own blood, many with severed limbs. Though, like my comrades, I

was sick to my stomach, unlike some of them who had to turn their faces and vomit, I was overtaken with a desire to viciously attack and kill the enemy.

The sergeant turned to me. "Kodo, take 30 men and hit the enemy at the Cairn Hill Fortress with hand grenades."

"Yes sir."

We got within range and I yelled, "Follow me," and threw the first grenade. The grenades were tin cans stuffed with gunpowder with fuses attached. I placed the grenade between my thighs, lit the fuse, waited a few seconds then ran out into the open and hurled it. You had to be careful not to release the grenade too early, as the enemy would pick it up and throw it back. If you waited too long it could go off in your hand. The action helped me unleash some of the tension that felt like a knot in my stomach from the time I'd passed my fellow soldiers slaughtered after storming Cairn Hill. As soon as I released it, I ran back to cover. Sasaki followed. When each had thrown his first grenade, I jumped out from my cover to throw another one. Suddenly everything went blank.

"Oh shit, they got Sawaki."

I recognized the voice. It was a soldier from my platoon, a Tsu City man, a transport soldier in charge of military supplies. He was talking about me as if I were in the past. But I'm still alive! Maybe I don't look alive, lying here in a pool of blood and mud, but I am alive. I tried to talk, but I had no voice. I tried to move, but I couldn't. I'm still alive, damn it! I felt a sharp pain in the back of my neck and on my cheek and tongue. But I am alive. The pain became unbearable and everything went dark.

I woke up in a field dressing station. Rows of wounded were all around me—some with white tags and others with red ones. I could hear the sound of soldiers giving orders.

"Take the ones with red tags first. The white tagged probably won't make it anyway." Others were picking up wounded on stretchers and moving them out. "When we have a free hand, we will attend to those with white tags—those who are still alive."

I was given nothing to eat and no one attended to my wounds. The pain became severe and I blacked out again. Every once in a

while, as I drifted back to consciousness, I would see men taking the wounded away on stretchers and bringing in new ones. No one paid any attention to me. Did they think I was dead? Was I dead? I breathed and felt a sharp pain from something lodged in my neck. No, I'm still alive! I felt happy, mortified, and in pain.

Daily, I saw other white tagged wounded being moved out around me while new ones were brought to replace them. My pain was agonizing. I wanted to scream, "What about me?" but I still couldn't speak or move my body. The pain would become unbearable, and I would black out only to regain consciousness and experience more pain. Some days later, I woke to the sound of two soldiers talking as they walked through the field dressing station. One of them seemed to be in charge and the other was listening as though he were making a mental list of what had to be done. The underling looked down at me.

"This fellow was shot through the neck. The bullet split his tongue and knocked out some teeth." He became quiet for a moment. "He's still breathing, Sergeant!"

"He may make it after all. Call the medic and see that he is treated."

"Yes sir."

I was then given very watered down rice gruel.

"This is going to hurt a little corporal," the orderly said, as he washed my wounds.

A little! My body twitched and jerked as though propelled by some internal force. I couldn't speak or I would have screamed. The orderly must have felt the rumble as he washed my cheek and the back of my neck.

"Sorry, sir."

I lost consciousness again. When I awoke, two soldiers were placing me on a mat-rush sack. Along with a group of other wounded, I was put in an open freight car. There were about fifty cars with 20 wounded per car, each car pulled by a couple of coolies.

"Let's go! Let's go!" shouted a soldier atop one of the cars. "Let's go! Let's go!" repeated other transport soldiers stationed on each car. Simultaneously, the coolies pulled the cars yelling something in Chinese. When we got going down a hill, the coolies jumped on the

cars and rode alongside the soldiers as gravity propelled the train on.

I heard groans from the other men, occasionally mixed with a sigh of a last breath. I'm alive, I thought, and then came the pain, and I wondered whether being alive was a good thing.

We were pushed in this way through the afternoon and evening. Those who couldn't hold on died, while others, if conscious, groaned and winced until the cars finally reached their destination, army headquarters in the occupied territory.

"Supplies are inadequate and there aren't enough doctors or medical orderlies to treat these men, sir," a sergeant reported to his commanding officer.

"Ships will be here in a few days bound for Japan. We'll just have to make do with what we have until then," the commander said.

When the ships arrived, we were carried on board and taken to Ujina, a port near Hiroshima. As we were transported from the ship to the army hospital on stretchers, I saw people lined up along the roadside, mostly older women and children, with their hands in prayer position, palms together, bowing to each stretcher.

"Praise to Amida Buddha, Praise to Amida Buddha" they chanted.

I looked up at these pious faces, wrinkled and worn, and the little children holding on to the sashes of their grandmothers or imitating them with their little hands in prayer, and I remembered the stories of Amida Buddha coming down to earth to lead the people to his Western Paradise. I wondered once more whether I'd passed into the next world.

Chapter 21

I was moved to an army hospital in Nagoya after my wounds were cleaned and dressed in Hiroshima. I stayed at the Nagoya hospital for three weeks and was discharged and given leave from the army to recuperate before having to return to report for duty. I still had a couple of months left to serve. The year was 1904.

Before I returned to active duty, I went back to see my adoptive parents. Strange how I wanted nothing more than to get away from them when I lived in Ishinden, but after my war experience, I went straight back to their home.

I walked the streets of Tsu City and Ishinden with a strange sense of nostalgia. I was even looking forward to seeing Bunkichi and Hisa. I recalled the joy I felt when I managed to get away from my home and Ishinden, eight years before, the feeling of having broken loose from something oppressive. But my memory of the actual reasons for that oppressiveness had faded, and all I felt now was how familiar Ishinden was. Time had healed the emotional wounds that had become faded memories just as surely as time would heal my physical wound from a Russian bullet. I approached my house with an excitement that confirmed my belief in the power of time to heal.

At the house, little had changed from the outside—the boards covering the open sewer out front were still there and the tile roof was still in need of repair. When I stepped up to the entrance and walked down the hallway, I could hear the floorboards creaking and feel them sag, a result of generations of termites devouring the beams. The rotting house, forever rotting but always managing to remain standing, only added to the nostalgia. It felt familiar, and that felt good. But when I slid open the door to the main room, I was greeted by a sound that made me tremble. I stood aghast.

“Ayyy, ayyy! It’s you? Ayyy, ayyy ...” The sound was almost inhuman. But the woman who made it was unmistakably my adoptive mother. Though she said, “It’s you?” the look on her face made me wonder whether she had any idea who she was talking to, at first. Would she have said, “It’s you” to whoever entered the room? As she stared at my face, I could see her beginning to recognize her

wayward son. “Ayyy, ayyy, Saikichi,” she said as she crawled in my direction. Something was restraining her. I suddenly realized that she was chained to the chair like a dog on a leash. I felt a sudden nausea rising from the pit of my stomach.

It seemed that Hisa had gone mad! Her kimono hung from her with the front untied, exposing her shriveled naked body. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes wide open expressed both fear and confusion. She had the crazed look of a wild animal. I almost gagged from the smell of her feces, which stunk up the whole room. Nobody was there to take care of her.

Not knowing what I could do, I turned around and walked outside feeling miserable. I stood outside the door fighting with myself, my desire to get away battling against a feeling that I was doing something wrong, abandoning my adoptive mother. I remembered her fits of hysteria exploding for no apparent reason, and how at those times all I could think of was getting away from her; and I recalled the times she would hit me on the head for not showing her the proper respect. I was too young then to think of her actions as being done out of anything other than meanness, but over the years I started to think that she really may have, in her own distorted way, believed she was teaching me to be a respectable son. She may have acted from a sense of love, at least from the closest she was able in her world of pain and frustration to express love.

The pain in my cheek and jaw began to act up reminding me that I was still healing from my wound. I felt weak and helpless. I had been dismissed from the hospital with the doctor’s injunction not to strain myself. I couldn’t go back into that house no matter how irresponsible abandoning my adoptive mother may have been.

I started to walk the streets of Ishinden. I drifted aimlessly, telling myself that I was searching for my adoptive father, though not really certain I wanted to find him. My aimless wandering made me feel a sense of freedom that the appearance of Bunkichi would have immediately quelled. I passed my elementary school and recalled my four years in the classroom and the recess time playing with friends in the schoolyard. Those were the only really joyful times I’d had as a child, primarily because I was away from the home I’d just come back to Ishinden excited to visit. I walked by the whorehouse where

I'd seen the dead man and his weeping wife and her son standing by her side and the disinterested prostitute sitting on the bed smoking her tobacco pipe and the feeling of the impermanence of life that the whole scene had brought up to me.

Walking on, reliving my past with both pain and joy, I looked up and realized that I was in front of the corner pharmacy. It was a hangout for Bunkichi when he wasn't gambling or whoring, and I'd often gone there in search of him. The pharmacist was always kind to me, making me feel like it was a home away from home. I walked in almost unconscious of my movements.

The pharmacist stared at me for a moment, then with a big smile, said, "Saikichi! When did you get back?" I immediately felt better, knowing that the pharmacist didn't have much difficulty recognizing me. He looked at my scarred face and sighed. "Boy that's quite a wound. Did you get it in combat?"

"Yes, a Russian bullet caught me on the side of my neck and came out through my cheek." From the look on his face I knew that he was struggling to make out what I'd said, my speech was still garbled as a result of the damage to my tongue.

"Well we can be grateful that you didn't come back in a wheelchair or a coffin. You served your country well." He went into the back of the store and brought his wife out to see me. "Saikichi is home from the army. This calls for a celebration. Bring out some lunch for him." After my shocking encounter with the crazed Hisa which rattled my nerves, being in this familiar place and the friendly treatment from the pharmacist made me feel a sense of calm. It wasn't unlike the calm I'd felt when I'd escaped to my neighbor Chiaki's home, free for a time from the oppressive atmosphere of my own home. I knew, however, that I had to do something about my adoptive mother's situation. I couldn't indulge myself in a feeling of quiet contentment.

"Do you know where my father is?" I asked, half hoping he didn't. If anyone knew where my father was it would be the pharmacist. Here was a place where one went to learn all the gossip of life in Ishinden.

"He's been out gambling for the last three days. Not knowing how to deal with your mother in her present state, he went off and left her

to fend for herself. He can hardly take care of himself,” the pharmacist said, wiping the counter in front of me.

At that exact moment my father came charging into the pharmacy swinging his hands and screaming something incomprehensible, though there was nothing wrong with *his* tongue. He sat down next to me, took a few deep breaths and then continued talking. Someone must have informed him that I was in the pharmacy, because he recognized me instantly.

I watched him as he talked, noticing something about his behavior, a peculiar trait that had always made me uncomfortable in his presence. Before this moment though I hadn't been able to say exactly what it was. Bunkichi never looked directly at me when he spoke. His eyes darted all over the room. His pupils bounced around his eyeballs like mice caught in a trap. Though his hair had begun to gray and he had fewer teeth than when I'd last seen him, there was still something youthful about him. I wondered what it was that kept him from aging. Was he too restless to grow old? Could it be because he never thought deeply about anything? His mind was like a child's. Maybe that was what gave him that youthful aura despite what felt to me like premature senility. Whatever the reason, it made it difficult for me to feel any kind of animosity toward him. Pity, yes; concern, yes that too; but not anger.

“So you're back,” Bunkichi said. “Have you seen mom? She's gone crazy.”

I explained that I'd just come from the house, but he wasn't listening. He was busily absorbed in his own words. “She's *kichigai*! Gaga! Do you hear me?”

“I know, I just came from the house,” I repeated, but Bunkichi went on.

“So what are you going to do about it? You're back from the army now. You became a monk and disregarded your duties to your family. Well that's all over. You're back and you've got to help us. Mom's *kichigai*,” he repeated, “and the business has collapsed and you've got to help. Do you hear me? You *have* to help. We are in bad trouble.”

“Take it easy Bunkichi,” the pharmacist interrupted. “Your son just got home and he has a pretty severe wound. He came close to being

killed, fighting for his country. Let him rest and enjoy some time in his hometown, and you can discuss all that later.” He tried to calm my father, but Bunkichi was obsessed with his own difficulties. As I listened to him ramble on, I wondered why I’d ever considered coming home, even for a visit.

Bunkichi quieted down for a moment but then resumed. “Don’t think about leaving again, you hear me? You have to take care of us—it’s your duty... your duty.” He continued repeating the same things over and over and then stormed out of the pharmacy.

“I guess he must have left the game in the middle of a hand,” the pharmacist said with a smile.

I wasn’t smiling.

“Here, eat,” he said. “You’ll feel better.”

He placed a tray in front of me with a steaming bowl of rice, another with miso soup, some pickled white radish and pickled Chinese cabbage and a plate with a large piece of sea bream on it. I hesitated when I saw the fish, but then devoured everything including another bowl of soup and two more bowls of rice.

“I’m glad to see that you can still eat like the Saikichi I remember,” he said with a smile.”

Then, looking somewhat hesitant, he broached a subject he must have known would be delicate. “Bunkichi was quite upset,” he said.

“He sure was. What did I do to get him so riled up?”

“You didn’t die.”

I turned toward him, my head slightly cocked to one side. I didn’t believe what I’d heard. “I didn’t die?”

“That’s right. You see, if you’d died he’d have collected a sizable allowance, being the main survivor of Saikichi, the war casualty. Bunkichi was depending on it. In fact, when the business went bad, he continued spending money on gambling and women. When his money ran out, he borrowed more, using the anticipated bereavement allowance as collateral. Some of the fellows that come in here regularly tried to warn him that he was taking a big chance borrowing so much from thugs. But he wouldn’t listen. Then you showed up, and now he doesn’t know how he will pay his debt.”

“What made him so sure I’d be killed?” I wasn’t angry, just confused.

“Our tiny country at war with the colossal Russia! We all figured we’d be lucky if one in ten survived. I guess your father figured it was a good gamble.”

“He never had much luck at gambling,” I said.

“What do you plan to do?”

“There’s a temple on the other side of town called Teiganji. The priest in charge was in the same infantry division as me. He was wounded too, and we were together in the Nagoya Army Hospital. When I was sent home to recuperate, he asked me if I could stay at his temple while he was in the hospital. I plan to take him up on it. But first I have to do something for my parents. I can’t leave them this way.”

I thanked the pharmacist for the meal and excused myself and set out to find my brother Toshi’s house.

I inquired about my brother Toshi Tada and learned that he lived somewhere near a small temple in Tsu City that was famous for its large statue of Emma-o, King of the Underworld. It wasn’t far from the house where I was born. It took me a couple of hours, inquiring as I went, to find my brother’s house. I called out from the entrance.

“Saikichi,” Toshi greeted me at the door. “I don’t believe it’s you! Thank god, you’re back, and alive! Come in. Have something to eat and some tea.”

“Thanks, but I just ate.”

My brother looked as excited to see me as I was to see him. I hadn’t seen him since I’d run away from home. He had moved since then from my uncle’s house where he’d lived after our father’s death. He was thin and as frail looking as ever. The only change I noticed besides some lines on his face was a thin mustache.

“The mustache looks good on you,” I said.

He smiled. Then, noticing my scared cheek, he said, “What happened to you?”

“Punishment for all the damage I caused as a child.”

He put his hands on his head, parted his hair and bent slightly toward me, showing me a scar. “Remember this one?” he said.

“I was hoping you would have forgotten about that.”

“You were a little child then, Saikichi. No hard feelings. I really am glad to see you.”

I was suddenly stricken with a feeling of melancholy. I wanted to spend some time with Toshi, relating as I imagined brothers should. After Father died we were sent to different homes and we went our separate ways. We’d never had time to relate as brothers. Now that we could, I was there to ask for money. I wished my visit hadn’t been for that purpose. It made the whole meeting feel tainted.

Toshi’s house was across the street from the temple that housed the statue of Emma-o. The temple was called the Emmado. We walked through the Emma-do gardens, talking. I told him of my life since leaving Ishinden and of how I got my wound. The temple grounds were small and Emma-o seemed to be bursting from the structure that housed it.

“Emma-o is quite big for this pavilion,” I said.

“The feudal lord of Ise brought it back from Korea after the war and didn’t seem to care that it was too big for this small temple building,” Toshi said.

Staring at this judge of the dead and hungry ghosts, his eyes bulging, carrying his punishment stick, I was brought back to the present and to the specific purpose of my visit. I felt like a hungry ghost.

“Toshi, I need some money,” I blurted out.

Toshi didn’t ask any questions. He went into his house and brought out what he could afford and gave it to me. I didn’t tell him what I needed it for, and he didn’t press me. Even as a small boy I’d never liked talking to my siblings about my adoptive parents. Though I had no say in the matter of being separated from Toshi, Saku and Sai, something inside made me feel responsible, or ashamed. It was as though having been sent to the home of a gambler and prostitute were some kind of divine retribution for my actions as a wild child. I left my brother with a feeling of discomfort in my gut. I hadn’t seen Toshi in over eight years, and now I’d come begging.

After leaving Toshi, I went looking for Bunkichi. I found him at Keiko’s bar down the street from our house. He walked out of the latrine as I sat down by the counter. He started to talk to me as

though I'd been sitting by the bar with him before he went to relieve himself.

"We're in bad shape, your mom and I. We're broke, and if you don't help us we'll starve to death. We need money. Do you hear me?"

My father must have accumulated quite a sizable debt. He probably owed it to a loan shark who wouldn't think twice about breaking one of his arms in order to get his money. If the debt was substantial, Bunkichi may have even feared for his life. He had always paid the local mob leaders for protection in running his shady businesses, and I knew that the threat of these mobsters loomed large in his mind. Still, hearing him cry, "I need money, money, money"—begging me again and again—made me feel ill. I found it difficult seeing him in such a desperate situation, behaving like a needy wretch. I even preferred the old Bunkichi, the hustler and bully, to the broken man who now sat beside me. I took out all the money I'd received from Toshi and gave it to him.

"Here, take this and use it for you and mom and *make sure she is taken care of.*"

Bunkichi took the money, looked down at it and then looked up at me. He seemed to be thrown off balance. He started to say something and then changed his mind. I'm sure he wanted to know where I got the cash, to know if more might eventually come from the same place. He was probably afraid, however, that if he pushed me any more I might take it back, so he made no further pleas.

I left without saying another word and went straight to the other side of town searching for Teiganji. In the pit of my stomach I had a sick feeling that was to accompany all my visits to Bunkichi. I wanted to help him, but the last two times we met I was overwhelmed with a desire to run.

Following Zen protocol, I banged on the wooden block at the entrance to the training hall at Teiganji Monastery and yelled 'hoooo...' in a deep sutra chanting voice. Unlike my first time at the entrance to Eiheiji and Soshinji, I was entering Teiganji at the request of its abbot. Nevertheless, not knowing what kind of reception I would get, I was hesitant. My feelings were complex: a mixture of

nervousness that always accompanied a new unknown situation and the excitement of returning to a house of the Buddha.

A young monk came out and looked me over. "What do you want?" he said in a tough manner that reminded me of the posturing I'd encountered when I tried to enter Eiheiji. I smiled inwardly.

"I'm looking for the priest in charge of Teiganji," I said.

"Just a minute," he said and went back into the temple.

Another monk, a little older looking, came out.

"You wouldn't be Kodo Sawaki-san would you?" he asked.

"That's me."

"Please come inside. Sorry to have let you stand out here so long."

We entered the temple. He led me down a hallway to the guest room, and I followed him inside. He asked the younger monk to put the kettle on for tea, and I didn't see that fellow again until he returned with the tea. He served us tea and once more left the room. The older monk had many questions for me about the war and about the condition of his teacher Irie, the abbot. I realized how much the monk respected his teacher, and how important I was in his eyes for having served in the army alongside Irie.

"Irie *Osho* sent us a letter about you. He said you would be acting head priest in his absence for the length of your own recuperation. Shall I have one of the monks get your belongings?"

"This is all I have." I pointed to a few articles of clothing wrapped in a *furoshiki*. I could tell he was surprised at how little I'd come with. He looked at the *furoshiki* for a moment, and, perhaps realizing he didn't have to be too formal with a monk who traveled so lightly, turned to me and smiled.

"Please wait here while we prepare your bath and your room."

My wound was healing and my speech, though still unclear, had improved. I had a place to live and a temple to resume my Buddhist practice. Though I was still officially in the army, I immersed myself in temple life. My years in the army, even the last one fighting in the trenches of Manchuria, seemed like a dream from some other world.

I dove into my work, substituting for Irie, going out begging with the other monks a few times a month, lecturing to the novice monks

on Buddhist texts, performing the Soto Buddhist services and overseeing the general functioning of the temple. If returning to my adoptive parents' home had felt like a disaster, returning to a monastery conversely felt like truly coming home. I only realized how much I'd loved my monastic life when I threw myself back into it.

During my stay at Teiganji I heard some monks talking about a Pure Land Buddhist priest named Joushin Murase, a well-known scholar whose lectures were popular among monks of many denominations.

"What do you know about this teacher Joushin Murase?" I asked my assistant at Teiganji.

"I hear that Murase-sensei is lecturing on the ancient teaching based on the Indian Buddhist school called Yogachara," he said. "I don't know much about the subject, but I did hear Murase-sensei lecture once. I've never heard anyone speak with such clarity."

I knew nothing about the Yogachara or "Consciousness Only" Buddhist teachings, but I had a flash of my teacher Fueoka looking at me, his usually sleepy eyes opening wide and cautioning: *Kodo-san, before studying Zen master Dogen's teachings, you should learn about the fundamentals of Buddhism.* Though I paid little attention to his words then, they stayed with me, echoing faintly in a corner of my mind. The Yogachara school was just one school of fundamental Buddhism, but it would be the beginning of my learning about Buddhist philosophy outside of the Zen schools. I decided to go to Murase sensei and see if I could receive permission to attend his lecture.

My assistant gave me directions to the lecture hall where Murase was speaking. I arrived at the end of Sensei's first lecture and waited for him to finish speaking with some of the attendees. He was a tall thin man with large protruding ears, droopy eyes and a nervous twitch. He didn't appear at all as I'd imagined from the little description my assistant had given me. I had been prepared for someone more dynamic. He seemed quite shy when I approached him and asked if I could attend his lectures.

"Of course," he said. "My talks are open to whoever is interested."

He wanted to know why I was interested in Yogachara philosophy. I told him of my relationship with Fueoka Roshi and how he had urged me to study the fundamentals of Buddhism before concentrating on the teachings of the Zen patriarchs.

"I think Fueoka Roshi recognized a recklessness in me and feared that if I concentrated on the wild ways of some of the Zen patriarchs without a proper background in Buddhist studies, it might exacerbate that tendency," I added.

Murase laughed. "I think you were fortunate to have met a teacher as wise as Fueoka Roshi." He then explained as simply as he could what Yogachara or "Consciousness Only" stood for. He said it was a teaching about the nature of the phenomenal world expressed in the enlightenment experience—an experience beyond description. "Since it is beyond description," he said, "I try to explain it through the actions of some of the ancients, as you will see when you attend my next lecture."

I left Murase excited about attending his lectures. Now, after years of military madness I was starving for both calm and intellectual stimulation. When I trained under Fueoka, I had the strong mindset of a defiant youth. When he said something that ran counter to my idea of training, I easily dismissed it. But now, many years later, everything I recalled of Fueoka's teaching felt like guidance from the Buddha—I treasured his words like sacred jewels.

I went to the lecture hall the following week as excited as I'd been when I'd attended my first Buddhist talk as a boy in Ishinden. When I arrived, Murase was already up at the podium with his notes, waiting for everyone to settle down. People crowded into this small hall to hear him—monks of all ages and denominations, lay students and older devotees perhaps from Murase's home temple. As when I'd first met him, he gave the impression of being a very shy man. But when he started to talk about Dosho, a seventh century Japanese monk and one of the founders of Japanese Buddhism who had traveled to China, he appeared to wake from a quiet place within himself and truly come alive.

"When Dosho returned to Japan, he lived in the Gangou-ji monastery in Nara, where he opened the first Zen meditation hall in Japan's history," Murase said. "He studied Yogachara philosophy

from an Indian master whom he had met in China. Dosho was a brilliant scholar and a teacher who introduced the Hosso school of Buddhism to Japan. He was also a man of action. Dosho traveled across Japan digging wells, building bridges and setting up ferry crossings, deeply involving himself in practical matters of social importance.”

I listened to the master’s lecture, once more consumed with the excitement I’d felt years ago when I’d heard my first Pure Land talk. Murase brought life to this ancient patriarch, just as the Pure Land priest at Ishinden had brought life to Sessen Doji. Sessen, the young boy, the Buddha in a previous incarnation, had been willing to give up his life to hear a verse of the Dharma. So much had happened in my life since then, practicing at Eiheiji, Soshinji and Ryuunji and then fighting in the war. In what felt like an instant, hearing Murase talk about this monk Dosho, a scholar, who was able to translate what he’d learned from books to actually working to help bring real social change to the people of Japan, transported me to the day eight years ago when I’d resolved to sacrifice my life if necessary to understand what the Buddha taught.

I never missed a day of Murase’s lectures. I was attentive and asked many questions. Murase seemed to enjoy the challenge of simplifying difficult concepts for me. One day at the conclusion of a lecture, I asked him a question about the Yogachara interpretation of the illusive concept of mind.

“What does the term ‘mind only’ in the Yogachara school actually mean?” I had missed the first lecture where I imagine he’d explained this essential term.

He became quiet, appearing to struggle for the right words. “According to the Yogachara school everything is experienced in the mind,” he said. “Things exist only as processes of knowing and not as individual objects. The so-called external world is purely mind. Just as there are no actual objects experienced in the external world there is no subject who experiences. Perception is a process of creative imagination that produces these apparent external objects ...” As he was explaining this term to me I could feel that he was preoccupied with something else. Finally he stopped himself, changing the subject.

“Am I to understand that you’ve just been discharged from the army?” he asked. The question didn’t appear related to anything under discussion at the time.

“I am on medical leave because of my wound, but I still have a few months to serve.”

“Well, you are in a unique position,” he said. “You are a monk, presently in charge of a temple, who has seen action in the war. I am a priest at a Pure Land Buddhist temple, and I think it would be wonderful if you could speak to my parish about your experience in the war. Would you be agreeable to do it?”

The request startled me. At first, I didn’t know how to respond. “My speech, as a result of this wound, is still unclear,” I finally said. “I’m not sure that people would be able to understand me very well.”

“That will only add to the validity of your message. Please agree to try.”

“I will do what I can.” I sounded hesitant, but I was excited to have the chance to talk at this teacher’s temple.

“I will make the arrangements,” Murase said, as he walked with me down the hallway outside of the lecture hall. “You just bring yourself and your experiences.”

I bowed and walked back to Teiganji with conflicted feelings of excitement and dread.

Three days later, I was at Murase’s temple with a few notes I’d jotted down the night before. I didn’t know what to expect, but I imagined I’d be talking to a small group of parishioners, who might have friends or relatives in the military. Murase greeted me at the entrance gate and led me into the Buddha Hall. He could see I was nervous. He put his hand on my shoulder and told me to relax. To my surprise, and to add to my apprehension, a large crowd was waiting for me in the Buddha Hall. Older women in subdued kimonos, younger women in more colorful wear, men wearing dark kimonos and *haori* and a few in western suits filled the room. People were still arriving as we sat. I watched as the crowd pressed together; latecomers sat in the hallway and others stood in the garden. With all the faces turning toward us as we walked to the altar, I could feel my body trembling.

The altar had a statue of Amida Buddha painted in gold leaf in the middle, one of Shinran, the 13th century founder of the sect on the right and one of Rennyo, the 15th century monk responsible for spreading the faith throughout the country, on the left—both painted in shiny black lacquer. The smell of incense pervaded the room. Murase and I sat in front of the altar waiting for the rest of the people to file in and for the crowd to quiet down. He then got up and addressed the audience.

“As you all know, we are engaged in a severe and bloody war at this time. Many of us have loved-ones whose lives are at risk defending our country. I thought it would be important for us to learn about the war from someone who has fought in it. I am honored to introduce to you the priest temporarily in charge of Teiganji while his friend and fellow soldier, the high priest Reverend Irie, is recovering from a wound he incurred during his time fighting in this same bloody war. Welcome Reverend Kodo Sawaki.”

I stood up and looked around. Talking in front of a group of boys during my childhood was never a problem for me. I had spent nights with small groups of monks and later soldiers, where I would prattle on quite easily. I’d always prided myself on my ability to keep my audience entertained for hours. But now my knees were knocking against each other. I looked around and tried to talk. At first nothing came out. I thought that my throat wound might have flared up, damaging my vocal chords and I started to panic. I cleared my throat and tried again. My voice came back.

“War is brutal,” I began. I looked around me and wasn’t certain anybody understood what I’d just said. The crowd was quiet and I could see some people looking at their neighbors. Were they wondering what kind of animal was making that strange sound?

I tried again. “I suffered a wound from a bullet that entered my neck and exited through my cheek, splitting my tongue,” I continued, not knowing whether I was talking to the audience or to myself. “If you can understand what I am saying that is good. If you can’t understand me, then my message should be that much clearer. War is brutal.”

Some of the crowd laughed a nervous laugh, while others nodded, and I knew I was being understood. I began to relax.

“I am a lucky one because I can stand in front of you and tell you of my experience. Many of those I served with never came back. Their lectures will have to take place in another world.”

I gave the audience a vivid picture of the war as I saw it. I told them of things like electrically charged wire, machine guns and land mines that the Russians used, and that I had neither seen nor heard of before I confronted them on the battlefield. I talked about mountains of corpses, the disembodied parts, and the rivers of blood that I saw during the battles of Nanshan and Shuzan. I also talked about zazen, but few seemed interested in that part and many probably never even listened to it. But my description of the war, though spoken in unclear, scrambled speech, held their attention like no talk I'd ever given.

I thought about my part in the war. How strange it was that I could take a break from a Buddhist practice and during that time become a professional killer. How little I'd reflected on that fact up to this day! The Buddha, the prophet of peace, and me, a killer. I didn't talk about that to my audience because I really didn't know what to make of it myself. I knew it would take me a long time to make any sense of this contradiction in my life.

After this first talk, reports of my lecture swept the neighborhood. Soon I was getting invitations to speak at schools and playhouses and everywhere that people of Tsu City gathered. The lecture halls were packed. Men and women, young and old, gathered to hear this young soldier-monk teach them about the war from his actual experience.

One day I returned with the monks of Teiganji from begging in town. We all stood inside the temple grounds reciting the Heart Sutra to conclude our session of *takuhatsu*. After completing the chant, I was untying my straw sandals when Bunkichi came barging in hysterically. I hadn't seen him since I'd given him the money I borrowed from Toshi. I figured he must have spent it all.

As though unaware that I was with anybody or that I had any work that might need doing, he started in with what was on his mind.

“So I hear that you're making a lot of money now.”

What in the devil is he talking about! His hysterical behavior I'd become used to, but I wasn't prepared for some of his bizarre fantasies.

"Wait a minute," I said. And then I spoke to the monks. "Alright, you're probably tired so take a break and we'll meet for zazen in an hour."

After they were gone, I returned to Bunkichi. "Now what were you saying?"

"Don't try to keep me in the dark. Everybody's talking about it. I went to the pharmacy yesterday and that was all I heard. 'The father of the famous lecturer.' That's what they called me. 'Saikichi's lecturing all over town to record crowds,' they said. So now you've become famous and rich and you forget all about the family that took care of you. I expect you to send some of that money my way."

It had been over two weeks since I'd given my last talk on the war. I realized that Bunkichi, who probably spent all his time traveling from whorehouses to gambling joints, had been unaware of my activities until he'd joined the group of the regulars at the local pharmacy.

It seemed that whenever Bunkichi saw my face, all he could think about was money. Money, money, money. It was like some kind of disease with him.

"Listen to me," I said. "I have been lecturing here and there and the attendance has been sizable. However, I haven't received one *sen* for any of it."

Bunkichi looked suspicious.

"I don't receive any money from these talks." I repeated.

Bunkichi's face dropped, and he turned around and started to leave. On his way out, he turned toward me and said, "I see. But I will be back, and you'd better have some money for me then!"

I didn't even look up. He was like a lost child, and I was the 'parent' he depended on. I wasn't angry. I was sad and was holding back tears.

This ends Book I

Book II

Tokujoo

Living In The Mountains

*Neither seeking fame
nor grieving poverty
I hide deep in the mountain
far from worldly dust
Year ending
cold sky
who will befriend me?
Plum blossom on a new branch
wrapped in moonlight*

Zen master Jakushitsu Genko (1290 – 1367)

Chapter 22

I was born in a mountain village north of Nagoya city in 1876, the fourth of ten children. When I was six years old, Father, who was an entrepreneur, moved us to Nagoya to start a *sake*-making business. He was a stern man, whose decisions we children were not allowed to question. When the business failed, he became more severe and distant. So, when he came to me one day and said, “Sanjiro, I’m going to take you to a festival to celebrate the construction of the new bridge,” I was thrilled—Father had picked his third son, me, not Ichiro or Jiro, my two older brothers, but *me*. I wanted to ask him why my older brothers weren’t going with us, but I was afraid to. I kept quiet because I feared he might change his mind and take one of them instead of me. I was nine years old.

I should have suspected something when he shaved my head before we left to the festivities, but even if I had surmised something odd, one didn’t question Father’s actions. I had done that before, many times, only to be silenced. I eventually learned not to question him.

We rode to the festival in a rickshaw. It was my first ride ever. I laughed every time we went over a bump. Father smiled, seeing me so excited I guess. He rarely smiled.

“You want some cotton candy?” Father asked when we arrived at the festival. I could smell the sweet potatoes and fried octopus. I wanted everything. But I settled for the cotton candy.

“Sure,” I said.

Father seemed jovial, very different from the man I knew at home. I remembered his scowl as he told my two older brothers to stop making faces from the doorway to our yard as he shaved my head. He stared at them with the expression that I had seen so often on his face, and they quickly moved out of sight and into the house. As he shaved my head, his razor slipped and he cut me. I yelled in pain, but he ignored my screams and continued shaving me without saying a word.

After Father bought me cotton candy, we followed a crowd across the new bridge. The breeze from the water felt cool on my newly shaved head. On the other side of the bridge there were more food

stands. When I glanced over at the booth where they sold syrupy ice and *dango* dumplings, I saw a *kamishibai* showman with his stack of cardboard sheets each with a different picture depicting a scene from a famous tale. I ran over to him and joined the other children who were listening to the story.

The showman was holding up a big card with a painting of *momotaro*, the peach boy, and his companions, the dog, the pheasant and the monkey, on one side, and the evil *oni* on the other. How often I'd heard the story of the boy born from a peach who was discovered by an old lady doing wash by the river! She was about to eat the delicious peach when she dropped it and a baby boy emerged. She brought the peach boy home and, together with the old man, raised him. When an evil *oni* came to the village and threatened the people, *momotaru* decided to go out and conquer him. Grandma and grandpa reluctantly let him go, giving him a bag of *dango* dumplings for the road.

On his way to conquer the evil *oni*, *momotaro* befriended fellow warriors—the dog, the pheasant and the monkey—by giving them *dango* dumplings. The showman was telling the story while drumming on his hand drum: “*Momotarooooo* took out his sworrrrrd and slashhhhhhed at the evil *oniiiiiii* ...” I loved his special screechy voice and the way he stretched out certain words. I turned toward Father. He was constantly looking at his watch.

“We have to go, Sanjiro. “

“Just a little longer,” I pleaded.

As the evil *oni* was surrendering and the showman imitated the *oni* with a voice that made all the children shudder and then cheer: “*momotaroooooo* take all these jewels but leave me beeeeeeeee ... ,” Father said in a serious voice, “We have to go now.”

“Why?” I asked. I knew he didn't like it when I asked why, but I was feeling some of *momotaro's* courage.

“We have to meet the *osho* in charge of Daeiji temple.”

Osho was the name they had called the priest who came to our house two days ago. He had another name, but Father and Mother called him *Osho*. It must be a title for an important person.

I started to get nervous. I remembered the priest with his beautiful long black robe and his clean white socks with separate

pockets for each toe. They were like gloves for his feet. I'd never seen socks like that before. His head was bald and shiny. I'd thought it was because he was old, but now I wondered. I felt my shaved head. Did someone shave his head?

Osho had patted me on the head and smiled at me, and then went into the guest room with Mother and Father. My brothers and sisters didn't seem to care about him, and he likewise paid no attention to them. I thought he liked me better than my brothers and sisters.

"Why are we going to see *Osho*?" I asked.

Father looked at me with that 'not another why' expression I'd often seen on his face, but he didn't say anything. He just motioned for me to follow him.

We walked and walked. My feet started to hurt. I wondered what happened to the rickshaw.

"Why can't we ride, Father? My feet hurt."

"Stop complaining." With those two words he'd become the old strict father I knew. It wasn't fun anymore. He looked at me with that same look he'd given me when I walked into the guest room while he and Mother were talking with *Osho*. Mother was kneeling by the hearth, scooping hot water from an iron pot. She was preparing tea. Father and *Osho* were sitting opposite each other talking about something. When I walked into the room they stopped talking. That was when Father gave me that look.

"We are having a private talk," he said. "Go into the other room, Sanjiro."

I looked at Mother. She looked at me. Her expression scared me. I thought she had been crying.

"You heard your father," she said.

I left the room.

I followed Father until I could no longer hear the sound of the crowd or the music from the festival. I couldn't stop thinking about why he was taking me to the *osho's* temple. I remembered the *osho's* bald head and kept putting my hands on top of my own. Why did Father shave my head? Many young boys in my neighborhood had their hair cut very short. My older brothers had very short

haircuts; very short, but not shiny bald like the *osho's*. *Or like mine*. Was mine as shiny as the *osho's*?

We soon arrived at the temple. *Osho* was standing by the gate. It was small for a temple, I thought; smaller than the few temples I'd seen in my neighborhood; much smaller than the temple next to the *osho's* temple. Father called him Doya *Osho*. Doya must have been his real name. He greeted me and then turned to Father. They talked for a while quietly. I tried to listen, but Father kept giving me that look, so I pretended not to listen. I kept busy looking at a temple next door. It had a big gate in front and a large yard beyond the gate. There was a huge bronze statue of a monk in the yard. It was bigger than Father with me standing on his shoulders. The monk had an umbrella hat that covered most of his face, a begging bowl in one hand and a string of beads in the other hand. I stared at the large statue and forgot about Father and the *osho*. Then Father turned to me.

"You're going to live here with *Osho*," he said.

My body became stiff like the statue and my face felt hot. Tears came to my eyes.

I looked at Doya *Osho*. He had many more lines on his face than Father. He smiled at me, something Father rarely did. He seemed friendly. I turned away from him. I didn't want to live at the temple and I didn't want to live with him. I didn't care how friendly he was.

"No, I want to go home with you, Father."

I cried and cried. Doya *Osho* walked over to me and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Don't cry!" Father said with a frown. "Big boys don't cry." He gave me that stern look that said, *you heard me, now obey*. I stopped crying. Then he said something to Doya *Osho* that I couldn't hear and turned and walked away. He didn't say goodbye. He didn't look back. He just left me there.

I took a deep breath and held back tears until Father was out of sight. Then I started to cry again. I took the *osho's* hand from my shoulder and stepped back from him. Father had tricked me. The temple was far from my house, and I had no idea how to find my way back. Why did Father bring *me* here? I hated him. My two older brothers were already going to middle school, and maybe he didn't

want to take them out of school. No, that wasn't the reason he chose me. I remembered times when Father got angry with me for asking too many questions. Did he hate me for that?

Why did Mother let him send me away? When Father was shaving my head, I had seen Mother peek through the doorway to the kitchen. She was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. Father turned to her, shook his head, and she left. I hated her too. But I still wanted to go home.

Chapter 23

Doya stood patiently by me, but when I couldn't stop crying, he pointed to the characters above the entrance to the temple. "Can you read them?" I shook my head—still teary-eyed. Doya pointed to each character, "dai ei ji" he said. "That's the name of your new home." My new home! Those words made me cry even more.

He put his arm on my shoulders again, but I shook it off. He led me into the temple. No matter what he did, no matter how much friendlier he was than Father, he wasn't Father, and I wanted to go home.

We entered the vestibule, took off our shoes and stepped up to a large room at the front of the temple. There was a bookshelf filled with books on one side of the room and a calligraphy hanging from a low beam over the sliding screen leading to another room on the far side. A boy stood at attention near the wall opposite the bookshelf.

Doya *Osho* said, "Sanjiro, this is Eto. He is a novice like you, but he has been here for a while. He will be your big brother."

Eto looked a few years older than me. I didn't want him to think I was a weakling so I forced myself to stop crying.

"Eto, show Sanjiro to his room."

My room, my new home, words like that only angered me more. I wanted my old home and my old room. I followed Eto through the sliding screen doors down a hallway to a room at the far end of the temple. We entered. The only thing in the room besides the ceiling, four walls, a *tatami* floor and a closet was a small bundle wrapped in *furoshiki* scarf. I walked over to the package and looked more closely at it. It was my scarf and my clothing.

"How did these get here?"

"*Osho* brought them two days ago, when he returned from your home."

At that moment, I hated *Osho* too. He was part of the plot to trick me into coming to the temple. I was so mad I didn't try to hide my anger from Eto.

Eto seemed to want to become my friend. "You will like it here, Sanjiro," he said.

I didn't say anything. I didn't want to talk to anyone, not even Eto.

"My room is next to yours. Come in any time," he said and then left.

I sunk to the floor, put my hands on my face and started to cry again. I thought about my brothers and sisters. Though I didn't play with my sisters, and my two older brothers teased me most of the time, I wanted so badly to be with them. Why me? What had I done wrong to make them send me away? I repeated that question over and over. It wasn't fair.

Early that evening Eto came into my room. "It is time for dinner," he said.

I was sitting on the floor near where he'd left me hours before. I'd sat there crying until I had no more tears. Then I just stared at the walls until I dropped off to sleep. I had just woken up before Eto walked into the room.

"I'm not hungry," I said, though I really was.

He shook his head and left the room.

After dinner, Doya *Osho* came into my room. He sat down beside me and was quiet for a while. I said nothing. I wanted to tell him that I hated him and that I wanted to go home, but I knew it wouldn't do me any good. So I just sat there looking away from him.

"You are a lucky boy," he finally said. He waited a moment and then continued. "You were chosen to come here so that you could learn the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha left his home many years ago because he wanted to learn the way to be truly at peace. You too will learn the way to peace if you follow the teaching of the Buddha. You may not believe it now, but you will see that your mother and father made this decision for your sake."

Then why did they send me here and not my brothers, I thought, but I didn't want to talk to Doya *Osho*. I didn't want him to even think I'd heard what he said. I said nothing and continued looking everywhere but at him.

He went to the closet, opened it and took out a *futon*. "We have services at six in the morning, so you had better go to bed." He waited for me to say something, and when I didn't he left the room.

The following morning Eto woke me up.

"It's time for morning services," he said.

"I don't care," I said, and rolled over on my *futon* to face away from him. I didn't know what morning services were, but I wasn't going anyway.

"Osho isn't going to like this," he said and left the room.

I lay on my *futon* listening to Doya Osho, Eto and another voice reciting some words I couldn't understand in singsong voices to the rhythm of a drum and ringing of a bell. The temple was small, so I could hear all their voices. The third voice sounded like that of an old woman. My stomach was making sounds. I was hungry.

After the service, Doya Osho came storming into my room. He was a different man from the one who told me about the Buddha the night before. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"No," I lied.

"Good, because you aren't getting anything to eat until you are ready to do the services," he said and left.

When I showed up that afternoon for lunch, Osho said, "What are you doing here?"

I looked down at the floor and said, in a barely audible voice, "I'm hungry."

"I can't hear you," he said, and I knew that he had lost patience with me.

Eto was sitting at the dining table with his head down. I felt totally defeated. An old lady was carrying in a pot with what smelled like *miso* soup. *Miso* soup had never smelled so good. She must have been the lady I heard reciting the morning services with Osho and Eto.

"I'm hungry," I said, louder.

"Are you ready to do the Buddhist services?"

I nodded.

"Eto, take him to the Buddha Hall and show him how to recite the sutras. Just do the shorter Heart Sutra this time. We'll wait for you." He glared at me when he said they would wait.

After Eto and I recited the Heart Sutra, actually he recited it and I tried my best to go along with him, we went back to the dining room. Doya Osho didn't even look at me, but I didn't care. I ate the most delicious meal of my life.

Tessei Doya *Osho* (Tessei was his first name) taught Eto and me Buddhist and Confucian classics. Doya was a different person when he taught us, stern like Father. If we read the text incorrectly, he would bop us on the head with either his fist or his stick. So with no particular interest in the meaning of the books, we memorized them and never got any explanation of their import. We simply learned them as a kind of self-defense.

Throughout our lessons, the *obaa-san*, that's what we called her though I didn't know whether she had any grandchildren, sat near by, spinning thread from balls of cotton. She didn't talk much, but she smiled at me whenever we looked at each other. I liked her.

As strict as Doya was when we had our lessons, he wasn't as frightening as Father. I think it was his eyes; a concern for your well being emanated from them, even when he was scolding you. Father had no such look. Unlike the *osho*, when Father told you to do something you knew that you had no choice but to obey.

During one of our lessons, I asked Doya *Osho* why we had to learn such difficult books. I would never have questioned Father in that way. I could see Eto smiling while Doya was looking down at the book.

"These are important teachings of the Dharma. If you are going to be a monk, you must know them," Doya said, looking up from the book. Eto immediately wiped the smile off his face.

"But you don't teach us their meaning," I said. Not that I had any interest in becoming a monk in the first place.

"You are still too young to understand."

"Then why can't you wait until we are old enough before having us read them?"

I could hear Eto chuckle. Doya glared at him and he stopped. Then he closed the book and walked out of the room. As soon as he left, Eto and I had a good laugh. I was proud of myself for standing up to Doya in front of Eto. I wanted to look brave in his eyes. On the other hand, I secretly felt bad about making my teacher so upset with me. I wanted him to like me, too. I hadn't expected him to get so angry that he would leave the room.

As hard as it was for me, having been thrown into a Buddhist world against my will, I think it may have been more difficult for my

teacher to deal with a boy as troublesome as I was. We were constantly arguing. Of course Doya was the master, and I eventually would do what he asked, but not before annoying him terribly.

Life went on at Daiei-ji and I became used to my lot. I looked up to Eto as a big brother and followed him around imitating whatever he did. He seemed to enjoy the adoration and my companionship when we were inside the temple, but not when we played outside.

"I'm going to the Hongan-ji yard," Eto said, after our study session with Doya one day. The Hongan-ji was the name of the temple next door to ours—the one with the large bronze statue of the monk.

"Can I come with you?" I asked.

"Sure," Eto said, but I could sense that he wasn't happy about it.

I followed Eto to the Hongan-ji yard where some boys were playing *sumo* wrestling. There were two teams of three or four boys each. When they saw us, one of the boys shouted, "Eto is on our team. We are one short."

"No you aren't," a boy from the other team shouted. You have four, too."

"She doesn't count," the first boy said, pointing to one of the members. "Get out of here Shizue. Go play jump-rope with the other girls."

"You're mean, brother!" she protested, lowering her head and walking to where I was standing.

That was when I realized she was a girl. She looked younger than me. I could tell by the way she walked that she wanted to be one of the boys and had no desire to jump rope. Her brother appeared to be about Eto's age as were most of the boys in the game. No one asked me if I wanted to join in, so I stood by watching. I was fascinated once more by the large bronze statue of the monk in the middle of the yard. I'd learned from Eto that it was a statue of Shinran, the Pure Land priest who founded Pure Land Buddhism. I didn't know what Pure Land Buddhism was about, only that it was a different school of Buddhism than ours.

"Why is your head shaved?" Shizue asked.

"Because I'm going to be a monk," I said.

"What's a monk?"

"I don't know," I said. I didn't want to talk with her, and I wasn't sure how to explain what a monk was anyway.

"What's your name?"

"Sanjiro."

"Brother," Shizue shouted. "Can't I play on one side and Sanjiro on the other?"

"Why don't you teach Sanjiro how to jump rope," one of the boys said, and they all laughed.

The more Shizue paid attention to me, the more self-conscious I felt. Finally, I returned to Daiei-ji by myself.

Eventually I was allowed to join the other boys in their games and even became friendly with Shizue. But when the older boys were around, I ignored Shizue the same way Eto ignored me when he was playing with his friends.

When I was twelve years old, I was to be ordained as a Zen monk. Up to that time my sole understanding of Buddhism was from reading the ancient texts of which I understood very little and reading sutras in the Buddha Hall in old Chinese characters of which I understood none. The rest of the time was spent cleaning the temple and playing with other boys in the yard next door.

Eto was four years older than me and had been ordained before I had arrived at Daiei-ji temple. He came into my room one morning when I was putting my *futon* in the closet.

"Need some help?" he said.

"I've been putting this *futon* away every morning for the last three years. Now, for the first time, you ask me if I need help," I said and we both laughed.

"Actually I wanted to talk to you about your ordination. *Osho* asked me to."

"Oh."

"Ordination at Daiei-ji is a pretty informal affair," he said. "It is not like the ceremony at larger training temples. A few parishioners who know you may show up, but it is basically little different than morning service, with the exception of you receiving a new name, an *okesa*, and you taking the ten Buddhist vows."

I was excited at the thought of becoming an official monk with a monk's name. The memory of my first impression when I was tricked into coming to Daieiji flashed through my mind. I remembered hating my father for bringing me here, hating my mother for not stopping him and hating the *osho* for being a part of the plan. However, my feelings had changed. I was still a thorn in Doya Osho's side, wanting to know the rationale for everything we did at the temple, much of which even Doya wasn't certain about, and refusing to do anything that didn't make sense to me. But I grew to love the old priest, and despite my contrariness I think he liked me.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"No, that's it. Oh, one more thing. I think *Osho* is afraid you are going to ask him why you have to obey each of the vows when he presents them to you at the ceremony," he said, laughing.

"You made your point," I said, pushing him out the door. He was still laughing.

The following Sunday was the day I would be ordained. Eto shaved my head and seemed particularly careful doing so. When he was finished he stared at the top of my head for a moment.

"Checking that you didn't miss a spot?" I asked.

"I'm looking for my reflection," he said. "It looks fine." Then, as he was leaving my room, he added, "Wait here. I have something for you."

He left and soon came back carrying a small *furoshiki* package. He handed it to me. "This is from *Osho*."

I unwrapped the package and found a new monk's robe in it. I put it on and went with Eto to the second floor of the temple for my ordination ceremony. It was unusual for a temple to have its Buddha Hall on the second floor, to even have a second floor at all for that matter. But Daieiji was squeezed between the Pure Land temple with the large yard on one side and a fruit and vegetable store on the other. Not having much space to accommodate even a moderate parish in that small area, the Buddha Hall had been constructed on the second floor.

Doya Osho was standing in front of the altar and three parishioners I'd gotten to know over the years were kneeling on the

tatami floor in the back of the hall together with the temple *obaa-san*. Behind the *osho* on the altar was a gold plated wooden statue of Sakyamuni Buddha seated with his hands in the meditation *mudra*. I had always acted so nonchalant when it came to any Buddhist service at Daieiiji. I considered it old fashioned and wanted to appear like a modern boy. But at this point I felt choked up as Doya Osho gestured for me to kneel in front of him.

Eto took the mallet for the *mokugyo*, the wooden fish shaped drum, and waited for the *osho's* signal. The reason the drum was shaped like a fish we were told was to encourage us to work hard. Because the fish never closed its eyes it had become a symbol of hard work. Eto received the go-ahead from the *osho*, and banged the drum, reciting; *makahara hanya shingyoooo* ... the last part of the Heart Sutra to start us off. Then we all recited the sutra from the beginning: *kan ji zai bosatta gyo jin hanya hara* ...

Doya Osho passed the *okesa* to Eto who helped me put it on. Then I kneeled again and Doya Osho said, "I give you the name Tokujoo." He read me the ten Buddhist commandments: not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie, not to deal in intoxicating liquor, not to slander, not to insult, not to covet, not to give way to anger and not to speak falsely of the three treasures. With each commandment he asked, "Do you, Tokujoo agree to obey?" and I said I agreed. The ceremony ended with chanting the four Bodhisattva vows: to save innumerable beings, to extinguish inexhaustible passions, to learn the immeasurable Dharmas and to attain the unattainable Buddha-truth. It was here that I would have normally asked the *osho* how one could extinguish something that is inexhaustible or attain something that is unattainable. I wondered if Doya feared I might stand up and question these vows. I wouldn't dare, but the thought made me smile.

When the ceremony was over the parishioners walked up to the altar and congratulated me. Eto and Doya Osho looked on. "You did good," Eto said when Doya had left the room. The *obaasan* had gone downstairs to prepare tea and snacks. I walked out with Eto. I felt proud strutting around in my new robe and *okesa* and enjoyed being the center of attention.

When Eto was eighteen, Doya sent him to Eiheiiji Monastery to get his credentials to become a temple priest. Doya had a relative, a priest in his seventies, who was in charge of a small temple and was planning to retire. He wanted to place Eto in that temple. I never saw Eto after he left for Eiheiiji.

Though I have little memory of the content of most of my arguments with Doya during those early years at Daieiiji, I can't recall a period when we weren't arguing at least some of the time. But I have a clear memory of one of our clashes after around my fifth year at the temple. The thought of it is so embarrassing it makes me want to cringe.

For a while after my ordination I wore my robe with pride. But when the novelty of it wore off, I started to dress in what I imagined to be the fashion of the day. I walked around Daieiiji in a student style brown and white splashed pattern *kimono* and *hakama* and a bowler hat. Though there was nothing wrong with my eyes, I wore gold horn-rimmed glasses, thinking they made me look stylish. At 14 years old, I thought of myself as quite a dandy. It never occurred to me that I might look like a fool walking around in a temple dressed like that. One day, as I was leaving Daieiiji to perform my duty at a parishioner's house, Doya Osho noticed me in the hall.

"Tokujoo-kun, where do you think you are going in that outfit?"

I looked down at my clothes, wondering why he was so upset. "I have to read sutras at the Kobayashi family altar, Osho."

"You can't make the rounds at parishioner's houses in that getup!"

"Why not? In today's world we have to keep up with the times," I was very proud of my up-to-date ideas. I took it upon myself to teach Doya the ways of modern society.

"Tokujoo-kun!" Doya bellowed. "From the time you arrived at Daieiiji you argued with me over every little thing. I figured it was good to have you consider different ways of viewing the world, so I didn't get too upset. I thought that your extreme contrariness was just a stage in your development, and that you would soon grow out of it."

"But a couple years later I had to listen to you lecturing me that I shouldn't be telling stories about the *arahats* and bodhisattvas because modern people just wouldn't accept those tales of the ancient enlightened ones anymore. You said that I should be using reason and scientific explanations when I give my sermons. Do you remember that?"

"I certainly do."

"And do you remember how those discussions usually ended?"

"You would tell me to get the hell out of your room or something to that effect."

"I did?" He seemed surprised at hearing how he had behaved.

"Yes, you did, *Osho*."

"Well, it seems that it didn't do much good. Look at you. You look like you're going to a circus, not to read Buddhist sutras at somebody's altar."

"Don't worry, the Kobayashis are modern people. They will be impressed," I said.

Doya *Osho* put his palms to his forehead and said, "I give up!" and returned to his room.

No matter how unpleasant it was to study the scriptures at Daieiiji as a youngster, and no matter how much arguing we did as I grew older, my life at the temple was quite stable. I'd become used to Doya *Osho*'s temper and truly thought of him as a mentor. Though he threw me out of his room on a regular basis, he never gave up on me. I grew to love him like a substitute parent as well as a teacher.

During my eighteenth year Doya had grown old and looked frail. He never said anything was wrong but he started asking me to go to many of the parishioners' houses that were a part of his regular schedule. Some days he wouldn't come to dinner and the *obaa-san* or I would take his meal to his room. When I asked him if he was okay, he would say he was fine he was just getting old.

One day, he didn't show up for morning services. After the service, I went to his room to check on him.

"Are you feeling all right, *Osho*," I asked.

"Yes," he said in a barely audible voice.

"Shall I call the doctor?"

"No, that won't be necessary. I'm just feeling a little weak today."

His face was quite pale and I was worried. "I'll bring you your breakfast," I said.

"I don't feel like having breakfast," he said. "Tokujoo, could you go to the Satos' for me today. I'm supposed to read sutras at their altar. I think I will stay home and rest."

"Of course."

When I returned home that afternoon, I went to Doya's room to check on him. I thought he was sleeping peacefully. But when I looked closely I realized he wasn't breathing. I hadn't realized his condition was that serious and never thought much about life without him. I was eighteen years old, but a very young eighteen.

Upon *Osho's* death I almost fell apart. I couldn't sleep at night and I became a nervous wreck.

Chapter 24

I left Daieiiji and returned to my parents' home in Nagoya; there was nowhere else for me to turn. Over the years I'd come to accept my situation at Daieiiji and no longer carried any anger toward my father for tricking me into becoming a monk. But once I was living with my parents, I walked around the house wondering what I was doing there. I suffered from insomnia and had severe stomachaches. My mother nurtured me as much as she could, lavishing me with attention, which seemed to displease my father. I didn't feel I received any sympathy from him. I had no idea what to do with my future. I lived at home for a couple of years doing very little with my life. I helped my mother around the house and read a lot, but when it came to considering what to do with my future, I felt paralyzed. When Father realized just how confused I was, his attitude changed. He became concerned. He came up with what seemed to me to be a rather drastic solution. He tried to fix things by purchasing a temple for me.

I know that sounds strange. However, in that neighborhood people bought temples—that was the custom. Father found a temple—a Soto Zen temple called Jounji—that did not have a priest in charge. The previous priest had died and left nobody to take over the temple. Father paid 600 yen for the temple. It was in Moriyama, a suburb of Nagoya. I wasn't excited about having my father buy me a temple, but I was quite confused at that time and in no condition to object. He did it to help me—to give me a profession, I guess. I don't think he ever thought that purchasing a temple might contradict the teaching of the Buddha. He simply wanted me to be a respectable man in society. So on top of feeling unsettled in my own life, I had to take on the duties of head priest of a temple at twenty years old.

Though I was in charge of Jounji, I found as many reasons as I could to get away. There was another monk at the temple. His name was Shuzo. Shuzo had been hired by the parish to watch over the temple after the previous priest had died. When I took over at Jounji, Shuzo became my assistant. Because he was there to perform the priest's duties, I was able to go away for periods of time without worrying about leaving the temple unattended. In my twenty-first

year I told myself I wanted to learn more about Buddhism and entered the Tokyo School of Philosophy. I studied there for three years, returning to Jounji during school breaks. But nothing I did would settle me down. Learning about the Buddha only made me more aware of the contradictions in my own life. How could I be the head of a temple when I didn't know my own mind?

My head was full of ideas about what I should and shouldn't be doing. The Buddha didn't let his father buy him a temple. He didn't perform funerals. He didn't do this and he didn't do that and on and on ... I was making myself more distraught with a head full of conflicted thoughts.

At that time, a monk friend of mine, who was also studying at the Tokyo School, suggested I practice Zen meditation. It's strange how I could be a priest in charge of a Soto Zen temple and know nothing about zazen. But all we did was perform ceremonies, read sutras and conduct funerals. Though I knew very little about Zen meditation, I believed it was a practice that would lead me to a better understanding of Buddhism than any of the activities I'd been doing at the temple.

"My brother is studying Zen and Zen meditation at Engakuji," my monk friend told me. "It's a famous Zen temple in Kamakura about a half hour train ride from here. Soen Shaku, a renowned Zen master has just come back from America and is the residing priest in charge of Engakuji. Why don't you go there and study Zen?"

"Is he a good teacher?" I asked.

"I don't know him personally, but since coming back from America he has become a big sensation in the Zen world."

I didn't feel ready to return to Nagoya—to my temple or to see my parents, so I entered Engakuji as a lay student and did zazen under the master. As a lay student, I could come and go as I pleased. I wasn't ready to commit myself to study as a disciple under a new teacher. I was still too confused to dive into a practice as a monk.

My first meeting with Soen Shaku Roshi was memorable.

I sat in the traditional *seiza* position—legs folded under me, buttocks resting on my calves—and announced myself outside Roshi's room.

“Come in,” he said.

I slid the door open from the kneeling position, stood up, stepped across the threshold, turned around and knelt again and slid the door closed. I turned toward Roshi and prostrated myself three times, as I was taught by one of the resident monks at Engakuji, and returned to the *seiza* position. I had to control my surprise as I saw the master sitting on a comfortable chair behind a big table. He'd adopted a modern way that felt to me rather unusual for the formal Zen meeting with the roshi known as *dokusan*. He was a handsome man with a severe look that was intimidating. He seemed to be observing me in a way that made me feel completely exposed. I wondered if he could read my thoughts, and that made me uncomfortable. Particularly so because I couldn't rid my mind of the thought of the incongruity of this casual setup he'd adopted for *dokusan*. Something felt weird about having a formal meeting to check the understanding of my *koan* when the teacher was sitting on a chair with a table in front of him.

By now I had gotten over the idea that Buddhism had to adjust itself to the modern world. I thought of the Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree in deep meditation, oblivious to the external elements of nature and the internal demons of the mind. But here I was kneeling on one side of a table with the master sitting on the other side in a comfortable chair. It was more like an atmosphere for a tea party than a traditional Zen meeting.

“What's your name?” Roshi asked in a high-pitched voice that again seemed incongruent with those severe penetrating eyes and stern demeanor.

“Tokujoo Kato,” I said, slowly recovering from my initial shock of this unexpected layout.

“Tokujoo? A monk's name! Why aren't you wearing robes?”

“For the last three years I have been a student at the Tokyo School of Philosophy.”

I didn't tell him anything about my temple in Moriyama. My general absence from Jounji, leaving my assistant to run the temple, was not something I wanted to share with Roshi. I thought that if I tried to explain my situation in any more detail, I would appear like an incompetent priest. Though my explanation to Soen for wearing

laymens clothes did not really explain anything, Soen dropped the questions and gave me my first *koan*.

"A monk asked Master Joshu: 'Has the dog Buddha-nature or not?'"

"Joshu responded: *Mu!* (no)'"

Soen told me to meditate on the response *mu* and not to think about any other part of the *koan*.

"Just meditate on *mu* until it penetrates to your body and mind."

I left his room, went to the meditation hall and started meditating on *mu*. From that day on, I would meet Soen every morning for *dokusan* and express my understanding of the *koan*. When I mentioned anything about the nature of a dog or the meaning of Buddha-nature, Roshi would say, "Forget about everything except *mu!*" and ring his little bell, dismissing me.

As I sat, my knees and back would ache and I'd recite *mu* more vigorously to take my mind off the pain. My body would vibrate and the pain would diminish.

Many lay students practiced at Engakuji under Soen Roshi. A woman, who appeared to be in her fifties, sat on the cushion next to mine. One morning when she was dozing off, not being able to keep awake, the monk in charge of the meditation hall came by with the *keisaku* and smacked her three times on the shoulder. The *keisaku* is often referred to as the encouragement stick, designed to help people concentrate on their meditation practice. Encouragement stick! I thought. Used to beat old ladies? My reaction to her being beaten may have been exaggerated, but tears came to my eyes. I felt her pain as though it was my own.

I entered the *dokusan* room that morning, my body reeling and my head dizzy from repeating *mu* constantly, and still very much affected by my reaction to the *keisaku* striking the back of the old lady. I looked up at Roshi and smiled. I don't know what made me smile, perhaps the relief of getting away from my meditation cushion and leaving my confusion there. I said nothing and had no idea how Roshi would react.

"Good," he said. "Now name ten things that are *mu*."

It seemed obvious what he wanted, so I started naming different things around the room—the table, the chair the light, Roshi ...

Soen, nodded his approval and gave me my next *koan*. It wasn't until then that I realized he had given me credit for passing my *koan*. After only one week! I didn't know what to make of it. I was more confused than ever. Here I was thinking of the Buddha practicing in the forest for six years and the first Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma, facing a wall for nine years, and now Soen Shaku tells me that I have had an enlightenment experience in one week.

I had learned something about Buddhism, having spent so much of my life up to then in temples and having studied at the Tokyo School of Philosophy. With that knowledge and a little intuition, I was able to solve the next few *koans*. I'd thought that *koans* were problems that one couldn't understand with the rational mind, but here I was solving them through a process of logical deduction.

At first, I'd imagined I was actually making progress on the Buddhist path, but I didn't feel any different. The disorder I had been experiencing in my life was still there. Though I was still very mixed up, I wasn't confused enough to fool myself into thinking I was enlightened.

"What is it with *koan* practice?" I asked the monk who had coached me on protocol for *dokusan* with Roshi. "I thought it would take years before I would have a glimpse of enlightenment. What does it mean to pass your *koan*?"

"Each training place has its own style. At Engakuji, they lead you by the hand through *koan* training for a few years and then all you do is study Zen Buddhist philosophy," he said.

I didn't stay at Engakuji long enough to be led through all the *koan* training. The contradiction of a quick certification of my 'enlightenment' experience and the feeling that I was no different than before that experience, made me feel that Engakuji was not the right training place for me. No matter how enticing it was to think that I had experienced some degree of enlightenment, I knew deep down in my heart that I hadn't. I began to doubt the value of *koan* practice as a way of understanding the Buddha's teaching. That doubt was coupled, however, with a fear that the problem might be with me rather than with the practice.

After leaving Engakuji, I spent a week walking around Tokyo unsettled and disheartened—not knowing what to do or where to go. I still had my temple in Moriyama to return to, but I couldn't get myself to go back. Not right away. I couldn't return to a position of head of a Zen temple less certain of my way than when I'd left. I needed time to sort things out. I didn't want to go to my parent's house in Nagoya, knowing that I would be asked all kinds of questions for which I had no answers. They had bought me a temple, and I was neglecting my duties there.

In my studies at the Tokyo school and in my short stay at Engakuji temple I had hoped to understand Zen—to know better what I should be doing as the head priest of a temple—only to become more confused than ever. Zen Buddhism, I told myself, was the study of enlightenment. Conducting funerals and ceremonies was certainly not going to bring me closer to that goal. That, I had known for a long time. But now I discovered that studying *koans*, as I did at Engakuji under a certified Zen master, didn't make me feel I was any closer to enlightenment either. I felt no more at ease with myself than before I'd started to meditate. Only now I had to deal with the growing fear that there may be something deep down inside me that was the real problem.

By the end of the week, not knowing what else to do, I returned to my temple in Moriyama.

"Welcome back," Shozo said, when I showed up at the Jounji. "I hope you're back for good."

I had made short trips to Jounji during school break during the last three years, but never stayed very long. "I have no plans at this time," I said. "Have you been able to manage the duties by yourself?"

"All except trying to explain your absence at least once to each member of the parish." Shozo said, laughing. "I told them that you wanted to better understand the depth of the Buddha's teaching. By the time I told the tenth parishioner, I had gotten pretty good at it. I even started to believe it myself."

I wasn't sure that I enjoyed his sarcasm, but I laughed with him.

"I hope you've returned a wiser man," he added.

That really hit me where it hurt. I didn't say anything.

Together with Shuzo I made the rounds to parishioner's houses, reading sutras and conducting funerals and holding functions at the temple upon request of the parishioners. Despite my belief that these rituals had little to do with the Buddha's teaching, for a while, the routine of it all was relaxing, and it had a calming effect on my nerves. I even taught some of the parishioners about the life of the Buddha, having had a course on it at the Tokyo school. But after a year or so, the nagging question, "What is the meaning of all this?" returned to haunt me. Buddhism was supposed to help people understand themselves and the world and I was supposed to be a conduit for that. But I didn't even understand my own feelings so how could I ever help others?

Having resolved to perform the duties of a temple priest at Jounji for the time being, I decided to visit my parents. I thought that they would be happy because for all intents and purposes I appeared to have settled down, but in truth I was becoming more restless day by day. I was taken aback when my father said to me, "Sanjiro, what are you doing with your life?"

"What do you mean Father?"

"I hear stories of you going to parishioner's houses with a slide projector and showing slides to the families."

Damn! Someone had complained to him. I'd thought they were all pretty happy with my shows. "I show them slides about the life of the Buddha. I am a messenger of the Buddha, am I not?"

My father lost his temper. "A priest has proscribed duties to perform," he said, his voice growing louder. "They consist of reading sutras at the altars and performing certain ceremonies. *That* is what you are expected to do."

We'd probably have been done with any further discussion if I'd kept my mouth shut. But I was fuming and feeling very defensive. "What meaning is there in reading sutras nobody understands and performing strange ceremonies? How does *that* teach people the meaning of what the Buddha taught?"

"You are still as argumentative as ever," my father retorted, echoing the words of my late teacher Doya. "I'm not debating the meaning of the Buddha's teaching with you. I just don't want to hear people talking about the eccentric priest of Jounji. We spent a lot of

money to get you settled in a temple. I would like to see you take your responsibilities seriously and not make a fool of yourself.”

I am a Buddhist priest not a businessman like you, I thought to myself. If the Buddha had been as concerned about conforming as my father thought I should be, we wouldn't have Buddhism today. The Buddha left his home and its comforts and denounced his worldly life in order to discover the truth. If I were to be true to those teachings, I too would have to be willing to give up everything.

It all made perfect sense to me, but I realized that I could never make my father understand. It hurt, because no matter how much I felt that the little understanding of Buddhism I had was deeper than my father's, I still wanted his approval.

I left my parents' house and walked the streets of Nagoya lost in thought. I felt defeated. I'd hoped to derive some comfort from returning home after a period of settling back in at Jounji, but I only angered my father. My desire to be a real Buddhist, true to its ideals, conflicted with my desire to be a good son. My father wanted me to be the kind of person I could never respect.

Looking for a new direction for my life, I would wander into used bookstores searching the stacks for books on all kinds of mystical subjects. While I was reading, my mind was occupied, and I didn't have to think about my predicament. I read books on the occult, on hypnotism, on the lives of the saints and the patriarchs. I would stand for hours by the shelves of books reading until my legs could no longer hold me up.

Kawakami Shoten, a philosophical bookstore, was my favorite. It had many fascinating books on the occult. It became a regular haunt of mine. I went there often to read from their selection of writings on all the modern spiritual fads of the times.

One day I became absorbed in a book on hypnotism by Takeuchi Nanzo when I sensed someone's eyes on me. The fellow came closer and started reading over my shoulder.

“Is that Sanjiro Kato?” the man asked, calling me by my given name, the name I'd used when I attended classes at the Tokyo School of Philosophy.

I turned around. It was Kenjiro Ibe, one of my classmates at the Tokyo school.

“A Practical Study of Hypnotism? Pretty esoteric subject,” he said.

I hadn't known Ibe very well and was surprised that he even recognized me. I was one of a group of students who gathered around Ibe in the school cafeteria listening to him pontificate about the 'New Japan.' He was a tall, thin man who wore western clothes and let his hair grow long in a school where the old ways were extolled. He seemed to enjoy being the gadfly in that conservative institution.

I put the book back on the stacks, a little embarrassed, having been caught reading such a book. The thought that it might actually impress Ibe had never occurred to me.

“I hadn't realized there were any progressive students at that stuffy school in Tokyo,” Ibe said with a laugh. He took out a pen and paper and started to scribble something.

Ibe's family worked for the Japanese diplomatic corps, and he had lived for a while in America when he was in his middle teens. He returned to Japan with many new ideas about socialism, universal suffrage as well as a very critical view of the Japanese monarchical system. He was the rare nonconformist in our conservative college whose ideas excited many of us. We felt locked into a feudal religious system and enjoyed hearing radical ideas our teachers never talked about except to oppose them if we dared voice them ourselves. Ibe apparently derived pleasure from shocking us with his brazen assertions about how stuffy Japanese society had become. I had a clear memory of him holding court in the school cafeteria.

“Ibe-san! I didn't know that you were from Nagoya,” I said.

He stopped writing and looked up. “My aunt and uncle live here. My parents hadn't wanted me to fall behind in my education when they were living abroad, so during the school year they would leave me with my aunt and uncle. They are far more understanding of my political views than my parents are. I've grown very close to them.”

I thought about my father and his disappointment with my behavior and felt a sudden kinship with Ibe.

“Listen, Sanjiro, a group of people I spend time with are having a gathering at the home of some old friends of mine this Saturday night. There will be many interesting people, socialists, artists and

free thinkers like yourself. Some of them have been studying hypnosis too. Why don't you join us?"

I wondered where Ibe had gotten the strange notion that I was a 'free thinker.' I felt intimidated at the thought of meeting people of the new Japanese *avant-garde*, but I also felt a desire to learn more about this group of independent thinkers; men and women who certainly were not as complacent or as predictable as the families in my parish. My life was in such turmoil that meeting a new breed of citizen might be just what I needed.

"Thank you for the invitation. What time shall I come?" I asked.

"People will be arriving after six. Come whenever you can make it. Here's the address. It's a farmhouse about two kilometers north of the bookstore. Here's a rough map," he said, handing me the paper he'd been writing on. We said goodbye, and he left.

Chapter 25

On the day of the gathering I put on my old *samue* rather than my Buddhist robe. I thought that wearing monk's work clothes would give me a more informal look so I wouldn't stand out as the traditional monk at this meeting of what Ibe had referred to as free thinkers. I hadn't shaved my beard or my head for a couple of weeks before I'd met Ibe at the bookstore and decided to leave the unruly growth. When I arrived at the farmhouse at seven, the front wooden sliding door was half open and I could hear the hum of many voices. The gathering, or more accurately, the party was already in progress. I was hungry for the excitement of a new adventure and nervous at the thought of meeting a group of 'free thinkers.'

I stood outside studying the building and its surrounding area before I could muster enough courage to go inside. The house, an old farmhouse with a straw thatched roof, was larger than I'd expected. It was situated in a narrow valley that ran east to west and probably got very little sun during the cold months. The outside was covered with cedar bark, peeling in places, exposing the mud and straw walls. The more I imagined what I might find on the other side of those walls the more reticent I felt to enter. I don't know what I was afraid of—perhaps just a fear of entering a world unknown to me up to this point. Finally, I composed myself and walked in.

I stood just inside the doorway, as self-conscious as if I were standing naked in a crowd. I was hoping to spot Ibe, when he, apparently noticing me first, walked over to where I was standing. He immediately took me around to introduce me to some of his friends. We walked by a large earthen floor kitchen to the entrance to an even larger main room with a Buddhist altar against the far wall. The altar appeared to have been neglected for some time; probably since Ibe's friends took the house over. Ibe seemed to have a natural rapport with everyone in the house, making me feel that my own shyness was that much more evident.

"This is quite a large house," I said, and quite dilapidated, I thought.

"Large, yes, that much you can say about it." His sarcastic expression made me feel he'd read my mind.

“The family that owned it had moved closer to the city into a new house,” he said. “One that enjoyed abundant sunlight because of its southern exposure and its lack of obstructing mountains. The owners were descendents of poor peasant farmers, *burakumin*, I suspect, as evidenced by the farmland’s total enclosure in the shade of the valley. Those outcasts were always allotted the poorest land with the least sunlight.”

The *burakumin* was a taboo subject in the society where I lived. I’d never heard anybody speak of these Japanese outcasts so openly before. They were traditionally people who did the jobs that the Buddhists considered unclean, like leatherwork and butchering animals.

“Their luck changed, however, when the city limits expanded to accommodate its growing population,” Ibe continued. “The land value increased greatly, and when they sold half of the property to a munitions factory they were instantly freed from the struggles of a life into which they’d been born. They still farmed the half of the land that they kept, but with more modern equipment and a lightened workload.”

We entered the large main room where a group sat in a circle engaged in a heated discussion. They were arguing about Kotoku Shusui’s recently published critique of the nationalism and militarism of the time, titled, “Imperialism: The Monster of the Twentieth Century.” Having grown up in a Buddhist world, sheltered, as were most Buddhist monks, from the rest of society, I knew nothing about the topic.

My eyes were immediately drawn to the lone woman in the group. She was as animated as the rest—expressing her opinion without reservations. I hadn’t experienced a woman like this before, and she fascinated me. Her outfit as well as her deportment was a testimony to her individualism. She wore a western style dress with a ruffled collar. Her hair was straight, cut to shoulder length and she wore bangs. Her lips were painted maroon-red, covering more than the natural lines of her mouth. The few women I had had contact with in Nagoya prior to this day wore the standard kimonos and kept their hair pulled straight back into a bun. They dressed uniformly including the color of the ribbons they wore to keep their buns

secure. There was nothing about this woman's attire that resembled anything I'd seen before.

I recalled how I dressed as a young monk at Daieiji—driving my teacher crazy. Though I'd donned myself in outfits I thought of as the new modern look back then, I was not prepared for this woman of such fashion and outspokenness.

"Naomi-chan," Ibe called out, breaking into the group's conversation, "this is an old college classmate of mine from my Tokyo days."

Naomi gave Ibe a half-hearted smile of recognition. Her eyes, however, were focused on me.

"Come, Sanjiro," Ibe said. "I want you to meet some people interested in hypnotism."

Ibe must have seen how uncomfortable I looked at that moment for he had taken it upon himself to rescue me. I say he rescued me though I don't know if that's the right term for saving someone who didn't really want to be saved. All I could think about, as Ibe dragged me away, was that alluring woman and the way she looked at me. Despite Naomi's intimidating behavior, or perhaps because of it, I was intrigued and even felt bewitched by her.

After we excused ourselves, Ibe took me by the arm and led me into the adjoining room, where a fellow was demonstrating hypnosis on two subjects. I watched the demonstration, my mind still occupied with Naomi. I felt relieved that this exhibition of hypnosis required complete silence from the onlookers. I could watch and not worry about being drawn into a discussion of something I knew little about. I watched half-heartedly, though, as the couple followed the hypnotist's commands. I couldn't tell whether they were truly hypnotized or just acting, so as not to hurt the fellow's feelings.

When the subjects were awakened with a snap of the hypnotist's fingers, a lively discussion followed throughout the room.

Ibe turned to a man who was watching the demonstration. "Ozeki, I want you to meet a friend of mine. This is Tokujoo Kato. He's an old classmate of mine."

I bowed my head. "Glad to meet you."

"I ran into him at the Kawakami bookstore," Ibe continued. "He was reading Takeuchi's 'A Practical Study of Hypnotism.' It was quite

a surprise to find an old classmate from that conservative Tokyo school reading something so current.”

“Have you read Fukurai’s ‘Psychology of Hypnotism?’” Ozeki asked.

“No, I haven’t,” I said, trying to sound as though it was the one book on the subject I just hadn’t gotten around to.

I was ready to move on. I couldn’t get that short encounter with Naomi out of my mind, and it was difficult to fake an interest in what seemed to be Ozeki’s passion.

“You really should read it. It’s the hypnotist’s bible,” he said.

Once more Ibe must have sensed my reticence to get involved in the discussion because he diplomatically excused us. We wandered through the house and he introduced me to some of his other friends, each with his own story. They all seemed excited to find someone who hadn’t yet heard their tale, a tale they must have told often. One fellow talked about his encounter with the spirit world, another wanted to tell my future by some Chinese system of astrology. My preoccupation with thoughts of Naomi made me a poor audience, but nobody seemed to care. As long as I couldn’t say ‘you told me that last week,’ they appeared to be content.

When I was leaving the party, I passed through the main room where the discussion had moved on to the philosophy of the people’s rights movement, of which I knew nothing. My mind had been focused on returning to this room from the time Ibe thought he was rescuing me. I’d wanted to return here but couldn’t think of a reason to do so without hinting at my desire to be near Naomi, who attracted me and frightened me at the same time. I smiled at Naomi, as I passed her political discussion group. Each person appeared to be passionately involved in the subject. Naomi was busy at that moment praising a recently published criticism of the Meiji government’s disregard for the people’s rights. She nodded to me and continued making her point. I could see it would not be possible to speak with her alone, so I bade goodbye to Ibe, thanked him for the invitation, and left.

Though I’d felt intimidated that night, I found myself drawn to the place; just as I’d been attracted to Ibe and his stories when he held court in the cafeteria at school in Tokyo. He seemed to me then to

have a unique view of society. I found the gatherings at the farmhouse new and exciting, and I returned several more times. Since I was a monk, I told myself that Naomi had nothing to do with my decision to return to the farmhouse. But when she didn't show up on my next two visits, I was sorely disappointed.

On my third visit, Ibe introduced me to Nan, a Japanese man, dressed in a saffron robe, the type worn by monks from Thailand. Here I was trying my best not to look like an old-fashioned monk, and this fellow strutted around wearing the proud expression of a prince, with his shiny clean-shaven head, his bright saffron robe and *okesa*.

"Nan too was a Soto Zen priest once," Ibe told me, after our formal introduction.

This handsome saffron robed monk followed me around that night occasionally asking me about my life as a monk, though he was obviously more interested in talking about his own. He said he had become disillusioned with the Japanese monastic system and traveled to Thailand to practice what he believed to be the true teaching of the Buddha. It made me think of my own frustration with my temple and the difficulty I had trying to make my father see that I also wanted to follow the true teaching of the Buddha.

"When I heard about a temple in Nagoya called Nittaiji devoted to the practice of non-denominational Buddhism, I returned to Japan," Nan said. "The ideogram for *Ni* stands for Japan and *Tai* is for Thailand," he added.

When he said, "Nittaiji, was built to house the bones of the Buddha, given to Japan by the King of Thailand," I wondered if he really believed it.

"I feel that the Buddha Shakyamuni was a true revolutionary," Nan told me. "We Japanese have lost the spirit of rebellion. We are too complacent."

When I left the party that night, I realized how uninformed I was about the world outside of my small environment in a Soto Zen temple. Afterwards, I made regular trips to the Kawakami Bookstore, always searching for titles that I hoped would provide me some direction in my present confused state. I also wanted to be more

knowledgeable, so I wouldn't feel out of place when talking with the people at the farmhouse.

Once I found a copy of Fukurai's "Psychology of Hypnotism" on the shelf and remembered the recommendation by Ozeki at the first gathering I'd attended. I pulled the copy from the stacks and started to thumb through it when I noticed Naomi standing down the aisle reading. I felt a tremor of excitement run through my body that I did my best to conceal. I hadn't noticed her immediately because of her outfit. She looked like a different person in her alluring chartreuse silk kimono splashed with delicately patterned purple irises. Her sash had finely stitched leaves in gold thread on a background of purple, matching the irises. Her hair hung straight on her shoulders. Though it was not combed back in a bun, as was the custom for traditional women, she still looked very elegantly Japanese. Her lipstick was a subtle red and meticulously followed the contours of her lips. Had she worn her hair back in a bun as was the custom for traditionally dressed women, I might not have recognized her. But her straight short hair gave her away. She walked over to where I was standing and looked over my shoulder.

"What are you reading?" she asked.

I looked up, pretending I didn't recognize her right away. I realized for the first time that she was a couple inches taller than I was. I paused.

"I look like a different person in Japanese dress, don't I?" she said.

"Naomi-san," I finally said, feigning surprise. I smiled and showed her the book.

She shook her head as she read the title. I wasn't sure what she meant by that gesture, and I was uncomfortable at the way she then gazed at me.

"What are *you* reading?" I asked, trying to hide my discomfort.

She showed me the title: 'Tangled Hair: Tanka by Akiko Yosano.'

"There is nothing to compare with Yosano's poetry," she said.

"She has brought life back to the *tanka* form—such passion!"

Naomi was so close to me I could feel her sweet breath on my face.

“My friend Haru-chan lent this collection to me when it first came out,” she said. “We were studying together at the Japanese Women’s College in Tokyo. I never expected to find a copy at a bookstore in a city as devoid of culture as Nagoya.”

She turned the pages of her little book, looking for a particular part. “Here it is,” she said, “Listen to this one: *Preacher of the Way/Are you not lonely/Never having known such fiery blood/Beneath this tender flesh?*”

She paused between each line and looked into my eyes. The reading was very dramatic. I tried to listen but found it difficult to concentrate on the poem. Her new look made me even more aware of her beauty. And she was showing an interest in *me*, a short, unattractive monk!

“Haru-chan opened my eyes to our plight,” she said. “Here women are slaves. We’re expected to be good little girls, to stay out of politics, to clean and cook and produce babies for one man, while he runs around screwing whomever he feels like.”

It wasn’t easy to hide my astonishment as she talked so brazenly, but from her next comment I assumed I had been at least relatively successful.

“You understand, don’t you? Monks leave their homes for the same reason—to be liberated from this oppressive society.”

“It’s true,” I lied. I recalled my own introduction to monkhood. How my father had brought me to a temple and left me there against my will. I knew nothing at that time of an oppressive society or of liberation.

Naomi told me how her friend Haru, who had studied Zen Buddhism while she was at the Women’s College, had sex with a monk because she didn’t want to stay a ‘virgin-slave’ any longer. “The monk understood Haru’s situation and was very accommodating,” she said.

Was she hinting at something? Was she really interested in me? I tried as hard as I could to stop myself from analyzing everything Naomi said, as though it related to me and me alone. I wanted to relax and have a simple conversation with her as one would with a new friend. But it wasn’t easy to erase the tremors of excitement simply being in her presence caused.

After chatting for a while, Naomi said, "There's a tea parlor a short distance from here. Why don't we go there where we can talk in a more relaxed atmosphere?"

"Sure, that sounds like a good idea." She could have asked me to jump with her into the crater of a live volcano at that point and I would have. As we walked, I tried to lift my head to the sky and straighten my body in order to add an extra inch to my height. I don't know whether she crouched a bit for my sake, but as we journeyed to the tea parlor we appeared, at least to my eyes, to be the same height.

The tea parlor was a small shop with a placard over the door with its name, Juttokuya, and a lantern hanging outside the entrance. We walked into a dimly lit room with three long benches on an earthen floor and a raised *tatami* mat platform in the back. The walls were bare. In a lighted corner of the room sat two young men deeply absorbed in a game of *go*. I'd often played that board game with my fellow students at school in Tokyo. At the other end of the room on the raised *tatami* platform a woman and man were kneeling by a low table. She was wearing an elegant pink silk kimono with a red sash decorated with dragons of silver thread. The man was dressed in a formal *hakama* and *haori*. The waitress was serving them ceremonial *macha* tea. What a collection, I thought: an aristocratic couple, two young *go* enthusiasts and a monk chatting with a modern Japanese lady.

A man, apparently the owner, greeted us at the door and made a few friendly comments to Naomi. From his familiarity, I assumed that she'd often frequented the place. He showed us to one of the benches. When the waitress finished serving the young couple, she came over to take our order. I waited for Naomi to make her choice.

"I'll have a sweet bean cake and *sencha*," she said.

The waitress looked at me.

"I'll just have the tea."

Naomi continued the conversation where we'd left off, telling me more about her old schoolmate. Haru was clearly a strong influence on her. "She woke me from a life of sleep walking," Naomi said. "I've never known anyone else with such courage."

“She certainly sounds like an unusual woman,” I said. Naomi looked surprised, and I regretted my choice of words. “A very special woman, I mean.”

She laughed at my self-correction, and I laughed with her. As we talked, my feelings of trepidation at Naomi’s forwardness disappeared; I grew used to her style and comfortable with her face close to mine and with her eyes focused directly on me. I found myself looking into her eyes. It was a suggestion of intimacy that I had always avoided with other acquaintances, but it felt quite natural now with her.

The world beyond that room disappeared, as I listened to her talk about her life. When she talked, I felt that she spoke from her heart. And when she listened, she listened with her whole being—I had the impression that she really cared about everything I said.

“Tell me why you became a monk.”

“I didn’t really choose,” I said. “I was sent to a temple before I’d ever thought about what I wanted to do with my life. I was only nine years old.”

I told her of my desire to truly understand what the Buddha taught, of my frustration with my present situation and of my yearning for enlightenment. Though I no longer felt nervous when she looked directly at me with her big beautiful, black eyes, when she put her hand on my knee as she was making a point in the conversation, I was aroused and became flustered. She may have realized it because she quickly withdrew her hand. I was angry with myself for that nervous response, but there was no way I could take it back. If I tried, I would only call greater attention to the inexperience my action had demonstrated.

The conversation shifted from our personal stories to the group at the farmhouse.

“Even the men at the farmhouse expect me to mind my place,” she said, her expression changing. The joy she exuded up to then disappeared and she became solemn. “They talk about freedom, but when they are confronted with a liberated woman, they show their true colors. Once, I told them about Haru, and all I got was looks of shock and disapproval. ”

“Is that why you haven’t been coming to the gatherings?” I asked. As soon as the question came out of my mouth I felt conflicted. On the one hand I didn’t want to make it obvious how aware I was of her absence at those meetings, while on the other hand I wanted her to know that I had missed her.

She nodded.

Before we parted, she said that she would come to the next gathering if I would be there. My heart stopped. I’d become quite skillful by this point at sounding casual when I was, in fact, tingling with excitement. “I’ll see you there,” I said.

For the following two weeks, all I could think about was the next farmhouse meeting and Naomi. I had no idea where all this would lead. I was a monk and was responsible for a parish, and here I was intoxicated by a chance meeting with a beautiful independent woman. I tried to tell myself to cool down, that nothing would ever come of such an unlikely match, but it did no good. When I went to the parishioners’ homes to read sutras, I did so mechanically while my mind constantly drifted to thoughts of Naomi. I was captivated by this woman who I feared might not have even given me another thought after we’d parted company.

Two days before the next group gathering, I returned to Jounji after a visit to the bookstore and found Shuzo waiting for me.

“Tokujoo san, Takeda’s daughter came by this afternoon to tell us that Mr. Takeda died this morning. The wake will be tonight and the funeral is planned for the day after tomorrow.”

That was the day of the next gathering. Would the funeral interfere with my getting to the farmhouse? I felt like a hypocrite when I caught myself thinking such thoughts. You tell your father that you are a servant of the Buddha, and here you are worrying about your duties as a monk interfering with your attendance at a social gathering!

“We’d better get ready to attend the wake tonight,” I said, and then added, “We are scheduled to read sutras at the homes of the Yamamotos and the Suzukis the day of the funeral. I have an

appointment that evening, so I'd like you to read the sutras on your own, if that's okay?"

On the day of the farmhouse gathering everything went wrong. Shuzo had fallen sick with a high fever. I had to conduct the funeral alone and then make the rounds to the parishioners' houses. I felt a hollowness in the pit of my stomach and my energy depleted. My annoyance at this unexpected complication made me even more aware of how I was being pulled around by my passions.

At seven that evening, I went to the home of the last family on my schedule for the day. Mrs. Suzuki welcomed me into her home and asked if I wanted tea before we began the sutra reading. We'd customarily had tea and made small talk before my recitation.

"Thank you," I said, "but I have an appointment tonight."

"I see," she said, clearing her throat. I could tell that she was surprised at my response and tried to hide it with a strained smile.

She led me into the living room and we sat with our legs folded under us in formal *seiza* posture by the altar. Mr. Suzuki walked in and I turned toward him. We greeted each other. Then I lit an incense stick, placed it in the censer before the statue of the Buddha, and we bowed. Facing the altar, I started to recite the Heart Sutra.

Kan ji zai bosatta gyo jin hanya hara ... In the middle of the reading, I lost my place. I didn't have the sutra in front of me because I knew it by heart—at least I did when I wasn't so preoccupied. I would have to go back to the beginning to get my bearings. I noticed Mr. and Mrs. Suzuki looking at each other. She turned to me and smiled that same strained smile. Mr. Suzuki looked exasperated.

"Let me start again," I said.

It was getting late. Distracted and displeased with the turn of events, I rushed through the sutra recitation like an auctioneer with an overload of items to dispense, and left the Suzukis in a hurry. I was certain that they were not happy with my hasty second recitation, but I was too determined to leave to try to make amends. It was after eight when I finally arrived at the farmhouse.

The activities were well underway—political discussions, a séance, and another demonstration of hypnotism. I saw me

eyeing the group that was talking politics. I wasn't interested in the political discussions, having had my fill of it during the last few gatherings. I'd been an observer noticing how each participant was more interested in his own opinion than in agreeing on any plan of action that could make a better society. I was reminded of some of my teachers at the Tokyo school, who lived affluent lives while lecturing on how wonderful the Buddha's commitment to a life of poverty was.

Ibe walked over to me, rather staggered over, apparently quite drunk. I was still preoccupied with finding Naomi, though I tried not to be too obvious about it. She'd promised she would be here when we last met, and it was already quite late. Had she lied to me? Perhaps something came up and she had no way of contacting me.

"Forget about those idiots," Ibe said, referring to the group I was observing. I'm sure he had no idea that I was searching for Naomi among them.

"They don't know what the hell they're talking about," he continued. "To them, anything that didn't happen within the last five years is passé. They want to deny our whole, beautiful history."

A strange tirade, I thought, coming from a man who tried to bring modern ideas to the Tokyo School of Philosophy. Though I wasn't in disagreement with his criticism of those fellows, this new attitude of his surprised me. I wondered what made him sour to the progressive ideas he'd championed. Perhaps he too grew tired of the abstract theorizing of a group of sheltered intellectuals.

I'd admired Ibe's courage to say what he believed during our Tokyo school days even when he knew it would not be popular. But of course, that was what he was doing now; taking an unpopular view with this crowd, still playing the part of the gadfly. Then again, maybe it was just the *sake*. Could he be one of those fellows who, under the influence of alcohol, becomes belligerent and speaks contrary to anything being put forth?

While I stood there trying to make sense of this new Ibe, he began to ramble about a carpenter, whose nickname was 'Dullard.' A man who, he said, had a genius for building.

"Dullard couldn't read or write, and when he spoke he stuttered and could hardly be understood. But he was a master with a chisel.

A master with a chisel!" Ibe began to repeat himself. He must really be drunk, I thought.

While I was hunting for Naomi, I was also drawn in by Ibe's story. He was describing a character from a novel he'd just read called "Pagoda." Ibe said that the author, Rohan Koda, truly understood the beauty of our Japanese tradition. I'd heard the name Rohan Koda before but knew nothing else about him.

"Dullard, the impoverished simple minded carpenter, knows the true spirit of our people better than any of those intellectuals," Ibe said, pointing with disdain to the group. He said it loud enough for them to hear him, but they were either too absorbed in their political discussion to notice, or just didn't care. They may have seen him like this at other times, so they just accepted it now.

"Dullard puts his body and soul into his work—he lives for his carpentry, humble in every other way." Ibe began garbling his words so badly his story became difficult to follow. Despite his frequent incoherence and my divided attention (I was still unobtrusively searching for Naomi), the story of Dullard the carpenter fascinated me. Even in his drunken stupor, Ibe managed to stay with his story.

"Dullard, the simple, humble carpenter, builds a pagoda, and everyone, with the exception of the wise priest, who recognized his genius, is aghast at his audacity to even think he is worthy of attempting such a feat.

"A wise priest, mind you," Ibe stammered out, pointing his finger at me. He started to lose his balance and I caught him. He straightened himself up, smiled at me and continued. "A wise priest and a commoner, a monk and a humble craftsman, that's what our country is about."

Ibe told of the magnificent five story 'Cloud-Bearing Pagoda' that Dullard built and how it towered into the heavens and was admired by all. The other carpenters who had doubted a man so inarticulate, so sluggish, could handle such a difficult job, were shocked when the scaffolding was removed revealing a superb piece of craftsmanship.

"Then a mighty storm erupted. The winds unprecedented in Edo's history threw its residents into a panic." Ibe was becoming more excited as he continued, as if he were hearing the story for the first time and even he didn't know the ending. "They latched their storm

doors and windows. Fences tumbled, walls fell down, trees were torn from the earth by their roots, while roof tiles rained down from above, shattering on the ground.

“Monks watched in horror as the stately pagoda, just completed, was attacked by the fierce winds—swaying under the onslaught, the nine-ringed spire swinging like an upside down pendulum clock. They sent for Dullard, who, confident in his construction, saw no need to do anything. The resident monks and the other local carpenters did not share Dullard’s confidence. In order to get him to understand what they perceived to be a dire situation, they devised a plan. They told Dullard that the head priest was worried (a lie, for the head priest had great faith in the work of this man). Dullard marched to the temple grounds and climbed to the top of the pagoda.” Ibe stopped for a moment. He must have lost track of his story. His eyes closed and his brow furrowed. Then apparently becoming aware of the place where he’d lost track, he continued.

“Dullard said that if the pagoda didn’t hold up, he didn’t deserve to live. The pagoda rocked back and forth and Dullard was pelted with stinging rain as he swung about with his creation.”

Ibe too was swaying back and forth and I couldn’t tell whether he was imitating Dullard for effect or just having trouble standing still. He hiccupped and then smiled at me.

“Dullard refused to come down from the tower despite the shouts and pleas of the monks watching. If he died, they would be the ones to blame.”

My attention drifted, as I perused the room, wondering where Naomi could be. Ibe seemed unconcerned with my distraction. He continued to tell the story of the pagoda, while using every opportunity to criticize the group of intellectuals around us.

“Dullard was no abstract intellectual blabbermouth, like some people” he said, looking at the group. They ignored him.

Ibe truly had a gift for story telling. I pictured Dullard swinging back and forth on the top of this five-story pagoda and forgot about my search for Naomi. But when Ibe made another disparaging remark towards the group across from us, my mind drifted and I searched the room once again. At that time I noticed a woman sitting in the adjoining room—the occult room. It was Naomi! I edged over

to the entrance to get a better look. She was back to her Western style—her dress perfectly matched the ribbon that tied her hair in a ponytail, a different dress and a very different hairstyle from that of our first meeting, but stunning in its affect. Ibe trailed me, continuing on with his story. I wondered whether he was even aware that we were both moving.

“Dullard stands atop this mighty structure while the storm grows fiercer.” Ibe again became excited. “It looks as though the pagoda will crack and the carpenter will be thrown to his death. ‘If any section of this pagoda cracks, I don’t deserve to be called a carpenter,’ Dullard screams as if to the heavens. He is thrown around like drunken sailor on a ship in a storm...”

When I saw Naomi talking with a monk in saffron robes, my heart sank. It was Nan. She was sitting quite close to him and their conversation appeared very private. I didn’t have the nerve to walk over. She looked up once and smiled, but turned her attention back to Nan. I don’t know whether Nan saw me, but, if he did, he gave no indication. Naomi put her hand on his knee as she was talking. While he didn’t seem at all uncomfortable with that degree of intimacy, seeing it sent an electric shock through my limbs.

I tried to focus on Ibe’s story again, occasionally looking toward Naomi and Nan. It felt so foolish to be listening to a story of courage and concentration while being pulled around like a dog on a leash by my childish infatuation.

While Ibe was dramatically describing Dullard’s final triumph, I saw Naomi and Nan, this time by the entrance to the main room. They must have walked right by us and I hadn’t noticed. They were leaving together—he talking in his usual animated fashion, and she looking up at him totally absorbed in his words. They didn’t look back or say goodbye to anyone in the room.

I left soon after Naomi and Nan and never returned to the farmhouse. There was a strange feeling of both disappointment and relief at the end of my vicarious romantic adventure. The disappointment was most powerful for the first few days; then the feeling of relief took over. I think I always knew in the back of my mind that nothing would ever come of a relationship with Naomi, but for a while it took my mind off the confusion I felt about my life. I also

learned from my short period of infatuation with Naomi how easily one could be led astray by the lure of the senses.

Having become disillusioned with the group of armchair radicals and avant-garde mystics, there wasn't anything to draw me back to the gatherings. I still made regular trips to Kawakami bookstore, perhaps hoping that I would see Naomi again, but I never did.

Chapter 26

Though my regular trips to the Kawakami Bookstore didn't result in another encounter with Naomi, one of them did change my life. I was browsing the bookstore shelves as I usually did on rest days at my temple, when I came across a little book on Buddhism. It was Zen master Dogen's *Zuimonki*, a collection of talks transcribed by his disciple Ejo. I knew something about Dogen, the founder of our sect, but not nearly as much as a head priest of a Soto Zen temple should. My assistant Shuzo had shown me some of Dogen's writing, and there was a small group at the Tokyo School of Philosophy that read some of the master's work, so I wasn't totally unfamiliar with it. The few works of Dogen's that I had tried to read, however, didn't arouse my interest. I could feel the beauty of the language, but the philosophy was too difficult for me to comprehend. I was looking for practical guidance on how to live my life as a monk.

As I read the *Zuimonki*, I found that unlike other writings by Dogen and many of the ancient Buddhist texts I had read, it was easy to understand. The *Zuimonki* was not very philosophical, but rather a transcription of the master's informal talks on how monks should behave and, most importantly, on the great value of sitting meditation.

I read the opening talk, and Dogen's words went straight to my heart. It felt as though he were talking directly to me. I read as much as I could while standing in the bookstore. I felt euphoric. Solving *koans* at Soen Shaku's place didn't give me any sense of attainment I'd imagined monks of old experienced. However, merely reading Dogen's words did.

The book wasn't too expensive so I bought it. For the next few days all I did was read the *Zuimonki*. I read it from cover to cover many times, each time marking passages that stood out to me. I read those passages repeatedly. Dogen talked about freeing oneself of desire for fame and personal gain, the importance of living a life of poverty, the need to throw away narrow self-centered views and the primacy of following one's teacher. Everything recommended in this little book excited me, particularly the passages on the necessity of *zazen*.

“Sitting meditation is suitable for all people—for those of superior, mediocre or inferior capabilities,” Dogen said. “When I was in China in the assembly of my late teacher, after hearing the master emphasize this point, I sat zazen day and night.”

“I, too, must practice zazen day and night,” I told myself. Images of Buddhist statues in the seated meditation posture in peaceful repose sprung up in my mind, almost possessed me. I felt a peace engulf me from merely picturing those images.

I had been a Zen Buddhist priest in charge of Jounji for eight years, and what had I learned about Buddhism? What had I learned about myself? Nothing. I performed ceremonies, funerals, and even attempted, to my father’s chagrin, to teach the life of the Buddha as if I understood it. What a hypocrite I’ve been!

I studied Buddhist philosophy at the Tokyo school and practiced *koan* Zen with Master Soen, all to no avail. I read another passage from the *Zuimonki*: “Reading the sayings and *koans* and understanding the actions of the ancient masters to preach them to ordinary people is ultimately useless... If you realize the Way through Zen meditation, you will have unlimited resources to teach others, though you may not know a single word (of the masters).” Up to this point in my life I had been piling confusion on top of confusion, feeling no way out of my dilemma.

My embarrassment at having been rejected by Naomi (an affair that existed only in my mind), my discontent with the “new Japanese” intellectuals, my disappointment in my weakness and lack of real commitment to Buddhism were all dissolved as I read this little book of wisdom.

It became very clear to me what I had to do. I would find a place where I could learn the proper practice of sitting meditation. Jounji can never provide me with an atmosphere conducive to the practice of zazen, I realized. There was no other way for me. Zazen, I believed, with Dogen, was the only true practice. I was twentyseven years old.

Jounji? What was I going to do about my temple? My father? How could I tell my father of this new revelation? He would never understand.

I opened Dogen's little book again and read: "Do not spend your time wastefully," the master wrote. "Seekers of the Way, you should covet every moment. This dew-like life fades away... In this short life, don't study superfluous things; just study the Way. People say 'It is difficult to disregard your obligations to your parents'... or 'People will despise me if I forsake my home...' If you don't sever these ties, you will have wasted your whole life and have only regrets when you face the end... Parents cannot give you enlightenment... Ordinary people cannot help you... Practice the Way without giving thought to the myriad things. Don't put it off until later (when it may be too late)."

The following day, I called Shuzo into my room.

"I'd like you to contact as many of the parishioners as you can and inform them that I want to meet with them tomorrow."

Shuzo looked at me suspiciously. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

"Everything is fine," I responded. My response didn't give Shuzo a clue to what my plan was. Having a flair for the dramatic, I kept my intention as vague as possible.

Shuzo was quietly waiting. He expected me to say more. He looked down at the floor, then up at the ceiling, appearing to grow more frustrated by the minute.

"Have you ever read Dogen's *Zuimonki*?" I asked.

"Of course. Every Soto Zen monk should study Dogen thoroughly. The *Zuimonki* is a practical guide, essential to any student of Dogen."

"I found a copy in the bookstore the other day and read it. You've talked to me about the writings of Dogen, but you never mentioned this text," I said.

"The philosophical writings of the master are more thought provoking," he said. "The *Zuimonki* is so clear; I guess it doesn't need much interpretation. Nothing really to debate about," he added with an authoritative grin.

"Is that why you never practice zazen?" I was on the attack; feeling frustrated with the way Shuzo had made light of this book I found so inspiring.

“You’re not going to preach zazen to the group tomorrow, are you?”

“And if I do?” At this point, Shuzo’s flippant attitude toward sitting meditation was also getting to me. “The Buddha spent six years in sitting meditation under the Bodhi tree. It was through that practice that he came to understand the human condition and attained the wisdom he taught others for the next forty years.”

“I don’t need a lecture on the life of the Buddha,” Shuzo said, heatedly. He was obviously unhappy being told by someone many years his junior that he was ignoring the basic practice of Buddhism. “Look, Tokujoo, the essence of Zen practice may be sitting meditation, but that is not what our parishioners want to hear. They are not members of the temple because of any desire to be enlightened.”

I could sense Shuzo softening. We had always gotten along up until now, and I’m certain he saw some truth in what I’d said. I believe he also felt that he was remiss in a practice that he knew was, according to Dogen, the most important training if one wanted to understand Zen Buddhism. “What do you want me to do?” he said, in a much calmer voice.

“Just help me contact the parishioners.”

I said no more. I knew Shuzo was upset with my secretiveness, but he left without pursuing me any further about my intention. I’m certain he wanted to know more, but he may also have wanted to leave me with the impression that he didn’t really care. In addition, Shuzo, having trained at a Zen monastery before being hired by the Jounji parish, had learned not to question his superior’s actions. Young and inexperienced as I was, I was still the priest in charge of Jounji.

The following day at around the appointed time, the parishioners started to arrive one by one. I served tea in the Buddha Hall and made small talk with each of them as they arrived. No one knew why I’d summoned him. When all were gathered, I called the meeting to order. The parishioners had become used to my unconventional approach to the duties as priest of Jounji and were probably curious as to what fanciful scheme I would propose to them this time. There

was no slide projector, so they knew I wasn't going to give them another lecture on the life of the Buddha. But I don't think they were prepared for what followed.

"Thank you all for taking the time to come here on such short notice," I said. "I know you must be wondering why I called this meeting. I don't want to take any more of your time than is necessary, so I will get right to the point. I have decided to leave Jounji."

There was a buzz of whispers. I waited. I hadn't really given much thought to how I would present this decision to the parishioners, and now I found myself fumbling, wondering what more I could say. I was surprised at my own discomfort. Finally, I continued. "I must understand the true meaning of the Buddha's teaching, and I have to do it in the way I see fit. So I am handing this temple over to Reverend Shuzo. I know that he will serve you and the Buddha well. Goodbye."

With that I went into my room, put my summer kimono in a *furoshiki* bundle, and changed into my traveling clothes. As I returned to the Buddha Hall the whispering quieted and all eyes focused on me. They must have expected me to talk more about my decision to leave Jounji, but I didn't have anything else to say. All I could think of was that I wanted to be on my way, though I wasn't sure where I was going. I needed to practice under a reputable Zen master and with a group of devoted Zen students.

I put my umbrella hat and *furoshiki* bundle down and kneeled as the group sat there waiting. I bowed to everyone, apologized again for leaving abruptly, picked up my hat and bundle and left the room. Shuzo quietly followed me to the entrance. As I bent down to tie my straw sandals, Shuzo stepped up to me and took the straps from my hands and tied them for me. It was a warm gesture that said more to me than any words could have expressed. I felt, as I left a bewildered group of parishioners, that at least Shuzo understood something of what I was doing.

As I walked away from Jounji with the little bundle of my belongings under my arm, I had only a vague idea of where I would go from there. I knew that I should return home and tell my parents what I had done, but I didn't. I couldn't face my father and have his

angry tirade bring me down from the lofty feeling of euphoria that had been with me since making the decision to follow my heart. My steps felt lighter than they had felt in many years. I walked down the road feeling that a huge burden had been lifted from my shoulders, and that for the first time in my life I had a true sense of purpose. I no longer felt out of place in the world. Zen master Dogen had spoken directly to me across a time span of nearly five hundred years.

Chapter 27

From Jounji I followed a small gravel path out of town. It was a winter afternoon in 1902. I was no longer the head priest of a Soto Zen Temple, but rather a simple monk on the road. I was heading north from Moriyama in Aichi Prefecture, dressed in the traditional garb of a Zen pilgrim—worn straw sandals, tattered robe, straw umbrella hat and a *furoshiki* bundle over my shoulder with my summer kimono in it. As I walked, the number of houses and stores dwindled, and on my right and left I saw rice paddies surrounded by fields of soybeans. It was two in the afternoon and the winter sun would still be up for a couple of hours.

I walked briskly, taking long strides, my head held high feeling the electricity of excitement tingle through my body. I was a monk on a quest. The hope that my life would have new meaning temporarily picked me out of a state of despair and propelled me happily on my way. My final destination was to be Shogenji Monastery in Ibuka. Ibuka was an area in Gifu, the prefecture north of Aichi. I would ask to be accepted as a trainee at Shogenji, but I would first stop at a small Rinzai Zen temple named Daianji on the way to Ibuka. Not being aware of any Soto Zen temple that had a reputation for the serious practice of zazen in either Aichi prefecture where I'd lived or Gifu the adjoining one, I decided to make the switch to Rinzai Zen. At Daianji I would request shelter for the night, hoping to learn a little about the customs of Rinzai Zen temples from the head priest. My plan was to arrive at the Shogenji Monastery with some understanding of Rinzai Zen protocol.

There were only a few people working in the fields at that time of the year. Passing a farmhouse alongside a narrow road, I spotted a middle-aged farmer chopping wood. He was absorbed in his work and didn't seem to notice me. A large neatly stacked pile of firewood stood by the wall of the house. The thatched roof extended over that side of the house sheltering the wood in case of rain.

"Good afternoon," I said, removing my straw hat so that I could look directly at him. He took one last chop with his axe, wiped the sweat from his brow and turned in my direction, looking at me for a

moment. He was a lanky man with thinning hair, gray at the temples. His skin was weather beaten.

"Well, well, an unusual sight around here. How do you do young monk?" He smiled, showing the few teeth left in the front of his mouth. Seeing my bundle, he glanced again at my monk's traveling clothes and asked, "Are you lost?"

"I hope not." I said. "I'm on my way to Daianji, a Zen temple."

"I don't know if it's Zen," he said, scratching his brow, "but there is a temple of some kind about two hours north of here in Unuma. If that's what you're looking for, you're on the right road."

Then looking down at my sandals, he said, "You could use a new pair of sandals. Those look pretty worn. Don't think you'll make it to Unuma in those."

"I think I can. If the sandals tear, I will repair them."

He shook his head, still smiling. Then he said, "Wait a minute," and ran into his house. He came out with a pair of new straw sandals. "Take these, I have plenty. I make them during the winter months when there's little work to do in the fields."

"I'm sorry, but I don't really have money to spend on new sandals."

"Well I don't have money to give a needy pilgrim. So take these as a donation."

"In that case, thank you," I said, putting the new sandals on my feet and walking around to try them out. "They're very comfortable." The warmth of the gesture meant as much to me as the gift.

"I don't see people like yourself much in these parts. We don't have any priests coming around here. But I have an altar in the house. My wife died last year and I make sure to see that she is cared for on the other side. I haven't been to the temple since she died though, cause I can't afford to contribute anything. But I give offerings to the wife so her soul will rest peacefully."

The farmer was quiet for a moment. Then he looked up as though something occurred to him. "Reverend, do you think you could read a prayer for my wife? I don't have much relationship with Buddhism or anything, but it sure would be a nice surprise to the wife if you read something for her at the altar."

“I’d be happy to,” I said, and followed him into his house and over to the altar. The house was dark and had a musty smell to it. The altar, however, was clean and shiny. There were rice balls placed in front of a wooden tablet on which some ideograms were written. A small bell stood alongside the tablet. I looked at the ideograms and could make out only a few of the characters. They were in the classical Chinese language. If I’d only paid more attention when my teacher Doya was trying to beat the Chinese classics into me!

“That’s in memory of my wife,” the farmer said, pointing to the tablet. “The priest who performed the funeral ceremony said he gave her a new name to enter the other world with.” The farmer then rang the bell and bowed to the altar. He stood there looking at the tablet for a while. His mind seemed to drift to thoughts I would never know. Then, as if snapping out of a trance, he realized I was standing there. He moved a bit to the side.

I rang the bell three times and chanted the heart sutra; the farmer stood by my side, hands in the prayer position, palms together, trying to mouth the words along with me. I rang the bell at the completion of the reading and bowed to the altar. His hands were still in the prayer position, and his eyes were fixated on the tablet. He was back in that private world of his, a smile on his lips. I waited. When he came back to our shared reality, the look of satisfaction on his face made this a very special moment for me.

“My son went up north to do some work,” the farmer said. “There’s nothing to do around here in the winter so he works as a lumberjack in the mountains for a few months. He’ll be back to help me during spring planting season.”

We talked a bit longer as we left the house. He didn’t seem to want me to leave. I had already spent about an hour with the farmer almost forgetting that I wanted to get to Daianji before sundown.

“I’d better be on my way,” I said. “It’ll be getting dark soon.”

“Thank you for the prayer. I’ll bet the wife was surprised. I can’t wait to tell my daughter when she visits. She’s married and lives in Nagoya.”

We bowed to each other and I left and continued walking down the road, surprised at my own joy at reading the sutra at his altar. How natural it felt; how different from the times I’d chanted sutras at

the houses of the Jounji parishioners. The parishioners had taken my visits for granted, and my recitations were almost mechanical. I'd usually complete a recitation and feel something lacking. Before leaving their altars I'd talk with them about the meaning of Buddhism in an attempt to erase that feeling. But I always had a sense that they listened to my talk with a polite tolerance rather than any real interest in its meaning.

I had no desire to talk to the farmer about the true meaning of the Buddha's teaching or about meditation. The simplicity of this encounter seemed to me to be a true manifestation of the Dharma. I'd left his home feeling content.

Continuing on my way, I passed farmhouses where women were bailing hay in the middle of dried up rice fields. They were dressed in *mompe* pants and padded workman's coats. Their heads were wrapped in kerchiefs and covered by straw hats that hid their faces. Even dressed as they were, with their inelegant baggy pants gathered at the ankles, they had a beauty of their own. I smelled the smoke from burning leaves, old wood and garbage. The young children were collecting the wood and garbage to burn while their older siblings supervised the work.

Some of the children noticed me walking by and ran over to talk with me. They wanted to know where I was going, why I was wearing a strange hat and black robe. I wanted to spend time with them, but I could feel a chill in the air and was reminded that evening was not far off. I responded quickly to their questions and moved on.

Two hours after leaving the farmer's house, I arrived at the village of Unuma. This is the beginning of a new life, I told myself, a life devoted to zazen. But my mind had been so occupied with thoughts of the farmer and his simple life, which centered around family, and of my own need to be free of the pressure I'd felt from my father that I'd forgotten about Daianji. What was I going to say when I arrived at the temple? I started to rehearse.

"Please allow me to take refuge at your temple for the night." No, that didn't sound right. "I'm on my way to Shogenji to practice Zen. Allow me to stay at your temple..." and so on. I practiced the lines of an introduction that appealed to me most, until I practically banged into an old priest who was sweeping leaves around a temple gate.

"What do you want?" the priest asked in a very gruff voice.

Startled, I jumped back. "I, um, well ..." I forgot everything I'd rehearsed and stood there stuttering like a fool.

Through the gate I could see stairs leading up a hill and a few buildings visible at the top. The ideograms for Daianji carved on a wooden slab were attached above the gate.

The priest, a tall man with a large face, thick eyebrows and deep-set eyes, was staring down at me, impatiently. I tried to speak several times but nothing came out. With him glaring at me, I finally managed a sentence.

"I'm on my way to Ibuka and I was wondering if I could stay here for the night."

He looked carefully at my attire, and without changing his expression said, "Come with me."

I followed him through the gate and up the steps to a compound of temple buildings. The excitement of the journey and the chance encounter with the simple farmer and the joy on the farmer's face when I read the sutra at his altar had had a wonderful effect on me. But that exhilaration had faded. I felt intimidated after being confronted with the unexpected curt manner of the Rinzai Zen priest.

"Wait here," he said, and I watched as he walked over to a well and washed his hands and feet. I wanted to do the same but was afraid to make any move without his suggestion.

He came back and asked me, "Have you had dinner?"

"No sir," I said, walking behind him into one of the buildings. I took off my sandals at the entranceway and stepped up to a long hallway. The priest looked down at my sandals. He stared at them and then looked directly at me. I looked down and noticed that unlike his sandals mine were not perfectly lined up. I straightened them.

"We are about to eat. Join us for dinner." He led me down a corridor open to the sky. There were doors leading to rooms on one side and a thatched roof building a few meters away on the other side. We passed three rooms and the priest opened the sliding *shoji* to a fourth. His countenance unchanged, he said, "You can leave your bundle here." Then he turned to a young monk who had followed us from a distance, and said, "Sou-san, show this fellow to the dining hall."

I joined them for dinner. Three monks besides Sou-san and the head priest were lined up sitting in *seiza* posture by a long narrow table. They all had stern looks on their faces and hardly acknowledged me when I entered the dining room. I took my position at the far end of the table next to Sou-san. The priest was at the head. A set of bowls wrapped in a handkerchief were set on the table in front of me.

The monks put their hands in the prayer position and began to chant a sutra. I mouthed the words along with them as best I could because it was a different sutra than we chanted at Jounji. We were still chanting when the monks began to unwrap their sets of bowls and lay them out in descending order, large rice bowl, smaller soup bowl and so on. They placed their chopsticks next to the last bowl. I followed suit, at least I thought I did. The priest was staring at me just as he did when my sandals were not straight. Sou-san nudged me and gestured to my chopsticks. I looked at his chopsticks, then at mine and then at all the other monks' chopsticks. We were all still chanting. Everyone's chopsticks were perfectly perpendicular to the edge of the table except mine. Mine were slightly at an angle, about 85 degrees, from the table's edge. I straightened them.

From that point on nothing went right. My mind was so occupied with the fear of making a mistake that I couldn't concentrate on what I was doing. The *tenzo* and his helper came out of the kitchen carrying large pots. They placed them in front of two of the monks. One pot had rice and the other *miso* soup. We passed our bowls to the servers, still chanting, and were supposed to make a hand signal to say when there was enough rice and soup in them. The server of rice kept looking at me waiting for my signal to say there was enough rice in my bowl, but I hadn't realized what he wanted me to do because I was busy trying to mouth the chant.

The chanting finished and I noticed the priest looking frustrated once more. Finally he screamed to the server, "Enough!"

My bowl had a mountain of rice in it. When the soup server was filling my bowl I was careful to make certain I signaled when my bowl was almost full. My first lesson in Rinzaï Zen was that they didn't teach you how to behave. They waited for you to blunder and then they scolded you. Side dishes of vegetables and pickles were

passed to us. I hadn't expected such a sumptuous meal at a Zen temple. Unfortunately I wasn't able to enjoy it; I kept making mistakes in Zen etiquette. I had so much rice that I had to rush through the meal so the others wouldn't have to wait for me. In the rush, I dropped my bowl spilling all the miso soup on the floor. The priest passed a cloth to Sou-san who walked over and threw it at me. As I wiped it up, the priest shook his head in apparent disbelief.

When I was trying unsuccessfully to stack my bowls and wrap them in the handkerchief in the correct way, the priest said, "Is that how they taught you to tie up your bowls in the temple where you trained?"

The other monks just sat there expressionless with their heads slightly bent looking down at their bowls. I became so tense. I was acutely nervous. When the meal was over and we'd put our utensils away, the priest came over to me and said, "Haven't you ever trained in a Zen monastery?"

I felt utterly dejected. I didn't know how to respond. In desperation, I called on what was my last line of defense. I spoke candidly. "I was in charge of a Soto Zen temple in Moriyama that my father purchased for me. I have spent a good part of my life in Soto Zen temples, but never in a training monastery. In fact, I am now on my way to Shogenji Monastery in Ibuka to practice Zen. Since I've never trained in the Rinzai way, I hoped that I could learn some of the protocol in my short stay here at Daianji."

"Shogenji?" the priest said, his eyes opening wide. He looked as though he didn't believe what he had heard. Then his expression changed. The hard lines on his face seemed to soften as the muscles in his jaw relaxed. "If you're serious about training at Shogenji, you need to know a few basic things." He was like a different person—carefully working with me to prepare me to enter the "devil's monastery."

When dinner was over, the priest led me to his room and talked to me more about Shogenji. He taught me the proper way to enter a monastery, how to hold my bowl when eating, how to enter the zendo, how to sit in zazen according to Rinzai teaching and many other details about monastic life. I listened attentively. As he

softened, I relaxed. Next he prepared me for the kind of reception I could expect to get at the monastery.

“When you arrive at Shogenji,” he said, “they will be preparing for the ‘Founder’s Ceremony,’ so they won’t have time to accept you as a new student. To be accepted in the monastery, they would have to put you through the *niwa zume*, a three-day ritual designed to test your willingness to endure the hardships of spiritual practice. So you had better ask for permission to help out at the ceremony, and when it is over, request to be accepted as a student.”

That night Sou-san showed me to the room where I would sleep. It was a common-room where guests stayed. “Osho-san certainly changed his attitude toward me when he realized I was going to Shogenji,” I said.

Sou-san smiled. “Osho trained there for five years before he took over as head of Daianji. He’s very proud of having survived the devil’s monastery and never tires of talking about his time there.”

Sou-san showed me where the *futons* were and bid me goodnight. “Good luck,” he said as he left, and I could see a kind of impish smile on his face. I gathered he did not share his teacher’s feelings about how special Shogenji was.

The following morning I thanked the priest for all his help and left Daianji having learned as much as one could in an evening crash course about Rinzai Zen. I walked throughout the day, passing more farmhouses, children in the fields playing games, a few older people chopping wood and more women bailing hay. I saw very few young men—most of the young able-bodied men must have gone to other areas where temporary work was available. Like the son of the farmer who gave me the sandals, these young men would most likely return home when planting season came around.

I was slowly returning to the joy of being on the road, a joy that had been briefly interrupted by the shocking introduction to Rinzai style correctives the night before. I had gotten an early start and was sure I would make it to Shogenji before evening, so I rambled along talking with whomever I met on the way. I didn’t feel the pressure of racing against sundown as I had the previous day.

Chapter 28

I arrived at Shogenji just as the sun was setting and the evening chill was beginning to penetrate my bones. There was a big rectangular wooden signboard with the characters for Shogenji painted on it at the bottom of a steep hill. Large stone steps led up the hill to the monastery buildings. I climbed the steps, walked through the mountain-gate, across to the main building. The large wooden doors to that building were open so I entered. I stood on the stone floor vestibule enclosed by high walls. I was in awe of the imposing structure. Everything about the monastery looked monumental. I felt as though I'd entered the fortress of an ancient warring clan, and it made me feel very small again.

Daieiiji, where I'd lived for most of my childhood, and Jounji, the temple my father purchased for me, stood among houses in the middle of towns and could almost be mistaken for private homes of affluent people. Shogenji, however, consisted of a group of imposing structures on a hilltop, hidden from the surrounding village by trees and adjacent hills. It was what I imagined the mountain monasteries of ancient China were like. Intimidated by the massive buildings, I recalled being humbled by the priest of Daianji the night before. Would the monks in charge of Shogenji show me the consideration the Daianji priest had shown once he sensed my desire to truly study the Way? Or would they be as fearsome as the priest had been before I'd announced my desire to practice at the "devil's monastery"? After all, the temple must have been given the name "devil's monastery" because of how severely monks in training were treated. I stood in the vestibule with this internal dialog paralyzing me. Finally, I mustered up courage and banged on the wooden board with a mallet announcing my arrival in the manner the priest of Daianji had instructed.

A monk slid open the *shoji*, stepped out on the top stone step leading to the front room and looked down at me. He stared for a moment, waiting perhaps for me to state my business. He was dressed in monk's work clothes and appeared a few years older than me.

I took a deep breath and said, "My name is Tokujoo Kato. I've come from Nagoya and was hoping to help out at the Founder's Ceremony."

The monk had a stern look on his face as he continued to stare at me. I wondered whether he was suspicious of some hidden motive he'd imagined I had, which I was covering up with a pretense at wanting to volunteer my services. The Daianji priest said that they always needed help at these ceremonies. I hoped the priest hadn't been mistaken in assuming I would be welcomed.

"Follow me," the monk said.

He led me to a common-room and introduced me to a younger monk who was in charge of volunteers.

"We can use help in the kitchen," he told the younger monk, who maintained an icy expression, not unlike his superior, until we were out of sight of the latter. I was getting used to this game of maintaining a tough exterior when in the presence of one's superior, remembering Sou-san and how his countenance had changed once he was away from the head priest of Daianji.

I was led to a large earthen floor kitchen with a clay oven on one side of the room with openings for four pots—two extremely wide and two not so wide. A monk was feeding the oven with logs and sticks under two big vats of rice and two pots of soup. On the other side of the room was a big cutting board with a pile of vegetables in one corner. Two lay volunteers stood by the cutting board slicing *daikon* radish, and a monk in another corner of the room was placing some whole *daikon* in a pickling vat and burying them in rice bran and salt. The young monk introduced me to monks and lay people who seemed to all be talking at once while they were working. They quieted down for my introduction and then continued their many conversations.

The young monk said something to another monk who appeared to be in charge of the kitchen and then turned to me.

"This is the *tenzo*," he said, introducing me to the monk in charge by the title of his position, without using either of our names, and then left the room.

The *tenzo* gave me a knife and told me to join the two lay volunteers cutting vegetables. I bowed to the two men I'd be working

with and proceeded to join them in cutting vegetables. I concentrated on my task. It was a festive time and the strict Rinzai Zen style was apparently suspended for the duration of the celebration. I worked vigorously, wanting to impress everyone, especially those in charge of administration of the ceremony.

One conversation caught my attention. The monk who had been feeding the fire was talking about Doshu Roshi, the abbot of Shogenji, to a layman who had just brought a stack of firewood into the kitchen. Nothing could interest me more than learning about the man I would be studying with if I were accepted as a novice in this monastery. I listened as carefully as I could while continuing to work.

“... Doshu had studied at Shogenji under Daigi Roshi together with five or six students who later became renowned Zen masters. Either of Daigi’s two most advanced students, Gazan or Seishuken, was the obvious choice to take over Shogenji when Daigi died. Both were scholars as well as notable Zen students. Doshu, one of the master’s devoted students, because of his insufficient scholarship and his slow country manner, was known by the other monks as ‘Doshu the Fool,’” the monk said.

At this point I noticed all the other conversations in the kitchen stopped. With that nickname for the master, the monk had immediately gotten everyone’s attention.

“They called Roshi, ‘Doshu the Fool?’” the layman said, shaking his head. One fellow laughed, but became quiet under the wrathful gaze of the *tenzo*.

The monk continued. “When it was Doshu’s turn to read the sutras at ceremonies, he’d misread many of the characters while the other monks looked at each other and rolled their eyes. In spite of that Roshi moved up in rank as the custom of seniority dictated, but never earned the respect of his brother disciples.

“When on Daigi’s deathbed the master said, ‘Doshu is my heir,’ the other monks were quite surprised. There was much discussion among the long-standing disciples of Daigi as to what to do about the situation. ‘Can someone like Doshu, a monk lacking in scholarship, run this large monastery?’ was the constant question. Finally, after Daigi’s death, Gazan went to Doshu and broached the topic.

“Doshu, you realize that Shogenji is a great historical training monastery,” Gazan said. ‘One needs a certain background in the ancient texts as well as a particular understanding of the intricacies of running such a large institution in order to take charge. I think it would be better if you agreed not to succeed our late teacher.’

“Whether it was stubbornness, a belief in himself, a love for his teacher and need to follow the master’s wishes, or a combination of all of them, Doshu Roshi looked directly at his Dharma brother and said, ‘Our late master requested that I take over Shogenji and that is what I must do. If I prove to be lacking, I will step down.’

“And the matter was settled. Nobody in the congregation had expected Doshu Roshi to respond with such certainty and they questioned the wisdom of his resolve. However, time has shown that his master Daigi knew what he was doing. He saw through the superficial erudition of his many disciples and chose the one whose devotion to the Dharma was truly deep. With his clear-eyed vision Daigi picked Doshu, and through time his choice proved to be the right one.”

The story seemed to please everyone including some who may have heard it before. There were comments praising Doshu for his courage and Master Daigi for his perceptive Dharma-eye. I remained quiet continuing my work. I didn’t want to be thought of as a slacker. The story made me that much more excited about the chance to study with Doshu Roshi.

The ceremony began in the Buddha Hall, but I didn’t see any of it. I spent most of the time working in the kitchen, delivering firewood when we ran low, and finally, helping clean up. I stayed the night and the next day asked for permission to be accepted as a student of Shogenji. I was given the chance. Now I would really be tested.

Lying prostrate on the flat stone floor at the entrance to Shogenji with my head on my *okesa*, I could sense the passing of time with the changing weather, from the cool of early morning to the warmth of the afternoon to the return of chill as the sun sank in the evening sky. I wasn’t permitted to lift my head, and I was expected to remain in that prone position throughout the day. This was part of the formal Zen ritual called *niwazume*, which was performed at all Rinzai Zen

training monasteries by students requesting acceptance as practitioners.

It was a re-enactment of the classical scene in which the second patriarch of Zen, Master Eka, waited in the snow to be accepted as Bodhidharma's student. According to the story, when the first patriarch left Eka standing outside in the garden with snow piling up to his waist, the second patriarch chopped off his arm and presented it to the master to show his willingness to sacrifice in order to study the Buddha Way. Only then did Bodhidharma accept him as a disciple. Nobody expected me to cut off my arm; I simply had to follow a procedure that had once been a way to test the student's commitment to serious practice, but had been reduced to a ritual in most Rinzai Zen monasteries.

"Get out of here!" screamed the monk in charge of the *niwazume*, "There are plenty of monasteries that are better than this one. Go to one of them," and he proceeded to beat me with the *keisaku*, the wake up stick, until I finally left the garden. I'd expected this, but I didn't anticipate how seriously this monk would take his job. I thought it was all ritual but had to wonder whether this fellow realized it. He was beating the daylights out of me.

Of course I came back immediately, as was expected of me—everyone had to play his part. Though this was primarily ceremonial, it was still painful to be beaten like this and torturous to remain prostrate all day. So I made good use of my one channel of escape. I was allowed to go to the toilet to relieve myself. I slowly took off my robe, carefully laid it down, folded my *okesa* and placed it on top of my robe and walked to the toilet, cherishing every moment in the process. I'd never before realized how beautiful this simple call to nature was. However, I forced myself to remain in the prostrate position unless I really had a strong urge to pee. I knew I was being observed. If I went to relieve myself and only a trickle could be heard, or if I made the trip to the latrine too often, I was afraid they would perceive me as cunning. After spending three days prostrate in the garden, this part of the ceremony was over. A monk walked over to where I was lying.

"Follow me," he said.

He led me into a small room with a single window. “You know how to sit in zazen posture, don’t you?” he asked.

I nodded.

“Sit here and don’t move,” he said and left the room.

I sat with legs folded in the full lotus posture. The window was higher than my head and the door was shut, so I couldn’t see outside. Still part of the ritual, this activity also had some remnants of the original meaning—to test a monk’s true desire to study the Buddha Way. One of the monks, according to the priest at Daianji, would observe my activity though I couldn’t see anyone watching. I was in a room by myself and was expected to stay there for three days. A monk watched to see whether I sat in zazen resolutely. I had practiced meditation, legs in full lotus, at Engakuji in Kamakura so my legs were pretty flexible. It was still painful to sit like this for most of the day and night and I wondered how novices who’d never meditated before could stand it.

If I acted in a manner that was considered out of the ordinary, if I ran to the toilet too often or changed my leg position constantly, I would not be accepted to practice at the temple. Secretly watching me in my solitary confinement, this monk could see how I responded under stress. My reason for coming to Shogenji in the first place was to follow the way of zazen, so this part of the ceremony was purposeful and even exciting to me.

I sat resolutely. I passed the test and was allowed to enter the temple as a practicing novice.

Once I had been formally accepted as a novice at Shogenji, a young monk named Gen was assigned to take me around and show me where I would live.

“You know where the kitchen and the latrines are, so let’s go to the *zendo* and you can put your luggage away.”

I looked at my little package of a summer kimono and shaving knife wrapped together in a *furoshiki* scarf and, pointing to it, looked at Gen. “My luggage,” I said.

He smiled and led me to a tile roof building whose walls were a mixture of mud and plaster. I followed him inside. We bowed to a small statue of the Bodhisattva Manjushri on an altar at the entrance.

The Bodhisattva was dressed in a monk's robe and carried a sword of perception. I looked around with feelings of excitement and trepidation. Though this was the beginning of my training, and I had no idea how I would fare, part of me had the feeling that I had made it.

"This is the hall where many of the great monks of the monastery's past had experienced enlightenment," Gen said.

I didn't know whether I was simply conjuring up these sensations, but Gen's words made me feel charged with energy I imagined came from the concentrated might of the enlightened monks of Shogenji's past.

The stone slab floor was cold to my feet. There were knee high platforms on either side of the floor deep enough to allow monks to stretch out and sleep. Against the far walls were cupboards with *futons* folded, one set for each of the twelve *tatami* mats lined up on the platform. Eating bowls were kept on ledges above the cupboards. There was a meditation cushion on each of the mats.

"You can think of this as your living space," Gen said, opening his hands to indicate the whole room. "Of course you will be sharing it with about twenty other monks," he added with an impish smile. I liked him.

Pointing to one of the *tatami* mats, Gen said, "This will be where you'll spend a good part of your days and nights, so you might as well think of it as your room. Your *futon* is folded on the shelf above your mat. You can put your bag there."

I jumped up to my room and stood there staring down at Gen.

"Not on the *joen*!" he shouted, shaking his head. I'd done something wrong. "Look where you are standing for goodness sake! If one of the seniors saw you standing there he'd have your head on a platter."

I looked down at my feet and realized I was standing on a halffoot strip of immaculately polished untreated timber that ran along the edge of the *tatami* mats. The memory of the priest of Daianji staring at my slightly unaligned sandals followed by all my other mistakes of protocol at the temple flashed through my mind. I was grateful it was Gen and not a temple official who had caught me.

“That lip,” Gen said, pointing to the strip I’d been standing on, “was traditionally where monks ate while in training. Though we no longer eat in the *zendo*, we must be careful never to step on it when mounting the platform. It should be treated with the greatest respect.”

I put my belongings next to my *futon* and jumped down, making certain not to touch the lip. We left the *zendo* and Gen showed me around the other parts of the monastery grounds.

After I settled in at Shogenji, I was working in the garden when Gen approached me and told me that the master wanted to see me. I hadn’t met Master Doshu Roshi before and knew nothing about him other than what I’d heard while working in the kitchen during the Founder’s Ceremony. I knew he presided over one of the severest training monasteries in the country, which was enough to make me feel awestruck at the thought of being near him. I kneeled outside the master’s room in the formal *seiza* position and announced my presence. “With your permission, Roshi.”

“Come in,” Doshu said in a deep but quiet voice.

I stood up, opened the sliding door to his room, entered and kneeled again, closing the door. I turned to face him and made a full prostration as I’d been instructed by Gen. I returned to the *seiza* position, facing Doshu. Though he too was seated in *seiza*, I could tell that he was a short man with a solid frame. I guessed him to be in his late fifties or early sixties. He didn’t look nearly as ferocious as I’d imagined he would. His eyes, slightly crossed, were kind, and I soon felt at ease in his presence.

“What brought you to Shogenji?” he asked.

I surprised myself at how freely I could talk with Doshu. I told him of the death of Doya of Daieiji, who was my teacher for most of my childhood, and about my feelings of grief and confusion. “When I returned to my parents’ home, I didn’t know what I would do with my life,” I said, watching Doshu, who appeared to be listening with great interest. “My father’s solution to my dilemma was to purchase a temple for me. I was nineteen years old and became a priest in charge of a Zen temple.”

“Your father bought you a temple,” he said, with a chuckle. “Hmmm ...”

It soon became clear to me that Doshu was not one who liked to talk. He made a few grunts through the telling of my story but said little. I could feel, however, that he wanted to hear more. I told him how I came upon Dogen’s *Zuimonki* in the Kawakami bookstore and how I resolved to follow the path of zazen.

When he heard zazen, his eyes widened. “Zazen,” he said, nodding. “Good.”

We talked a little more, or I should say I talked and he nodded or grunted, and then I bowed to him and left the room. Though Doshu hardly opened his mouth during this first meeting, I felt that I was sitting in front of a very special man. He was calm and self-composed and I instantly trusted him. I believed I had made the right decision in choosing to come to Shogenji.

I watched the master as he performed his duties around the monastery, chanting prayers before the break of dawn to the different Buddhist statues placed around the temple grounds, giving *dokusan* to any monk who requested it during meditation periods, walking around the temple checking what needed to be done and then discussing it with the head monk. Everything he did, he did with a quiet dignity.

The only time he looked uncomfortable was when he gave his daily lectures. He lectured on the Blue Cliff Record, the most important *koan* collection in Rinzai Zen. He had difficulty reading the ancient Chinese text, confusing some of the characters, and seemed to stumble through his commentary as though he wished he were somewhere else. Though he may not have been a learned monk, watching him whenever I had the chance convinced me that he was truly wise.

Eihaku was a young monk at Shogenji who had arrived a few weeks before I did. He had seen me go into the meditation hall during our free time. The zazen schedule at Shogenji was strenuous, longer meditation sittings and more sittings per day, I was told, than most monasteries in Japan. Eihaku was a type of monk that probably made up the majority of training novices, those who came to a

monastery to get credentials in accord with their family's wishes and had little interest in meditation.

"What brought you here?" he asked, when we were cleaning in and around the *zendo* one morning.

"Zazen," I said, as I folded my damp cleaning rag and pushed it down the corridor in a crouching position, wiping the wooden floor in front of the meditation hall. As I propelled myself down the corridor, I could hear Eihaku mumble something that sounded disgruntled. He returned to wiping the wooden strip along the edge of zazen platform, probably feeling my response too terse and uninviting. Eihaku, a slightly pudgy monk with a very round face and small eyes that almost disappeared when he smiled, was nineteen years old, a common age for entering a training monastery. I, at twenty-seven, was a latecomer.

I hadn't intended to snub him; I simply didn't know when one was allowed to make small talk in this new environment. As time went on I became more confident that I wouldn't be thrown out of the monastery for having chitchat with another monk. The next time the two of us were working together, in an attempt to erase the cold first impression I'd given him, I initiated the conversation. "What brought *you* here?"

Clearly happy with my change in attitude, Eihaku smiled and said, "Not zazen, that's for sure. I was born in a temple. My dad's a Zen priest. He wanted me to study under Doshu Roshi because Roshi was his teacher many years ago."

My desire to know more about Doshu motivated me to learn what I could from Eihaku. "Did your father ever talk to you about Roshi?" I asked.

"Did he ever! He never stopped. It got so bad that at the mere mention of Roshi's name I would remember some work I had to do. Dad got angry once it became clear to him that whenever he told Doshu Roshi stories I didn't stay around very long; sometimes I'd just remember something that all of a sudden seemed to need my immediate attention."

I hadn't had much contact with monks like Eihaku—born in temples, thinking of Buddhism as a family profession they felt obliged to follow. I thought about how my father would have been

thrilled if I had had a similar attitude to Eihaku's. He'd come to Shogenji to get credentials in accord with his family's wishes. I don't think he would ever have chosen Shogenji to train at with its long hours of zazen if his family temple hadn't been a branch of Shogenji. With time I realized, however, that monks like Eihaku were the rule rather than the exception. Still there was information I was seeking and Eihaku seemed to have some of it.

I said, "When you couldn't wiggle your way out of his clutches, what did your father tell you about Roshi?"

Eihaku thought for a moment. "Where should I start? One thing that always surprised me was how my dad talked about Roshi being uneducated, as though that were an advantage. He said that Doshu came from rural Japan and had a slow country drawl that made him appear lethargic as well. Then he said I shouldn't let that fool me. Doshu was anything but lethargic."

That made me recall Ibe's story about the carpenter, Dullard, a man of little formal learning who constructed a magnificent pagoda.

"I remember arguing with my father about how he could praise this man on the one hand, emphasizing his lack of education as if it were a virtue, and at the same time, encourage me to get a good education. I can't forget his response. 'You can't imitate what Roshi has. And if you ever do understand it, education will never get in its way. But an education will stand you in good stead *if you never grasp what Roshi has to offer you.*'"

After being given a week to settle in at Shogenji, I had my first formal *dokusan* meeting with Doshu Roshi. I entered the meeting room, nervous and guarded. I made three complete prostrations, peeking up at Roshi each time I lifted my forehead from the floor. Doshu sat upright in formal *seiza*. He appeared like a different man from the master I'd met a week before in our more informal meeting. This time I felt as though he was looking through me, or perhaps into me, and yet that look soothed me and once more allayed my fears. That solid pillar of a man sitting across the room was certainly not the frightening Zen master I'd dreamed up. However, he possessed a strength that held me in awe—I felt a wave of energy emanating

from him that engulfed me, as though Doshu was physically embracing me.

“Are you settling in well?” he asked. It was a very sociable and unorthodox way of beginning our formal meeting and Doshu seemed uncomfortable with this kind of casual talk. It made me uncomfortable too.

“Yes Roshi,” I said, feeling my voice crack as though I were squeaking like a mouse. I was embarrassed and looked down.

Doshu quickly changed his manner, presenting me with my first *koan*. “A monk asked Master Tairyu: ‘The physical body will ultimately rot away. What is the true indestructible body?’ Tairyu said, ‘Flowers cover the mountain side like brocade, the valley stream is in shade, overflowing, blue as indigo.’ What did Tairyu mean?”

I thought about it for a few seconds. Doshu rang his little hand bell, dismissing me before any coherent response could come to mind. I bowed and left the room and returned to my meditation cushion to work with this *koan*. Though I wanted to approach the new practice afresh, the memory of my experience with Soen Shaku popped into my head. Soen Shaku Roshi had given me the classic *mu koan*. *Mu* or no was the answer Master Joshu gave to his student who’d asked, Does a dog have Buddha nature? “Devote all your energy to this one word *mu*,” Soen had said. “If you do not retreat from *mu*, you will pass through the Dharma gate and walk with all the Zen masters of the past,” he’d added, quoting the ancient Zen master Mumon’s comment on the *koan*.

This I’d done. I’d felt as though I’d become *mu* and with that experience, Soen had said that I’d broken through to the essence of my *koan*. Though I’d been told that I had had a glimpse of enlightenment, I remained a confused person who didn’t know what to do with his life. My so-called breakthrough had been too quick and I doubted its validity. I became discouraged with the practice of understanding enlightenment by solving *koans*.

Though it was Dogen’s stress on “just sitting” that had caused my epiphany and sent me on my way to Shogenji, here I was practicing *koan* Zen once more. I hadn’t given any thought to the practice done at the “devil’s monastery” when I’d made my decision. I only knew that as the name implied they practiced hard.

I threw myself into meditation on “Flowers cover the mountain side like brocade, the valley stream is in shade, overflowing, blue as indigo,” putting my discouragement with *koan* practice with Soen Roshi behind me.

Doshu would announce the beginning of *dokusan* during certain meditation periods with a clanging of his hand bell. Those of us who felt we had a response to our *koans* that we wanted to demonstrate to Roshi would get up off our meditation cushions and line up in front of the *dokusan* room. After a week of grasping for answers that I knew deep down inside me were wrong, I went to *dokusan* thinking I might have the proper response. I moved up to the front of the line and waited for Roshi’s hand bell to ring, indicating the monk in the room with him was finished. When Roshi’s hand bell rang, I struck the bell in front of me twice with a padded wooden mallet as was proscribed, stood up, entered the *dokusan* room and bowed to Roshi.

Doshu sat in full lotus posture, waiting. He appeared to be in a deep state of meditation.

Feeling confident, I said, “The mountain flowers and the valley stream are themselves the true indestructible body...”

Ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling went Roshi’s hand bell, and I was back in the zendo meditating on the mountain flowers and indigo valley stream. I realized that once more my thinking mind had tricked me into believing I knew something.

A few weeks went by as I tried every possible answer I could think of. Finally, Soen Shaku’s words, “Don’t try to understand the question, just breathe *mu*,” came to me again. No matter how disappointed I’d been with Soen, his advice gave me some direction. I pictured the flowers and the water. I could smell the flowers and feel myself bathing in the cold valley stream. They became as indestructible as any idea. I became the flowers, I became the stream, I was indestructible.

I walked into the *dokusan* room, bowed to Doshu Roshi and expressed my understanding.

He sat there looking at me. For a moment he remained quiet and I couldn’t read his expression. Then he smiled. “That’s fine,” he said. He paused for another moment and gave me a new *koan*. “We know

the sound of two hands clapping. What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

Just as with my experience with Soen Shaku, I didn't know I'd passed the first *koan* until Doshu had given me my next one. No, I thought. Not again! Shouldn't I have known that I'd solved it immediately? It was too quick, and I didn't feel any great sense of realization. It was nothing compared to what I felt when I'd read Dogen's words. I seemed to have a knack for catching a certain essence of these sayings of the masters, at least Soen Shaku and now Doshu felt I had. But I was disappointed. The feeling I had as I left the *dokusan* room after my breakthrough of the *koan* was not much different than what I'd experienced with Soen Roshi.

Damn it! I said, almost audibly. What in the name of Buddha is the value of these *koans* if they don't make you feel a sense of liberation? Had Doshu known my history—my quick and unsatisfying breakthrough with Soen—he might have been a little more cautious with me in *dokusan*; he might not have passed me so quickly. But he did pass me, and I became discouraged again. I went back to reading the *zuimonki*. I came to the passage where Dogen says, “Zazen is the practice of the Buddha; it is the ultimate practice; it is the true self. The Buddhist teaching is not to be found outside of this.” I put the book down and made a resolution right then and there. I will sit until I've penetrated to the core of my own body-mind, and I will not go to *dokusan* before that.

So I sat and I sat and I became a sort of oddity at Shogenji. Not because of my long hours of sitting as much as for the fact that I refused to go to *dokusan*. Having arrived at the monastery when I was already in my late twenties, I was older than most of the other training monks there. Many of them were like the young Eihaku, more concerned with getting rank so they could take over their teachers' rural temples than in practicing the Buddha Way. They would never have refused to go to *dokusan* for fear of not being certified as priests qualified to be in charge of their own temples. Nevertheless, they appeared to be impressed with the unconventional way I threw myself into the practice of zazen.

I heard later from the head monk that he had gone to the master and asked what he should do about me with my unusual approach to

practice. Doshu asked whether I'd been practicing zazen regularly and had been performing all the other temple duties. When the head monk told him that I had done all that was expected of me, and more, Doshu said, "Then you need do nothing." And I was allowed to follow my instincts.

From that point on I became known as the Gargoyle of Shogenji Monastery. I was friendly with the other monks at work and play. I also gave advice to those who asked me, though I was not a preacher type. But when I sat in the zendo, never attending *dokusan*, hardly anyone questioned the wisdom of my approach.

Once when I was practicing zazen during break time, I heard a young monk who had recently arrived at Shogenji talking to one of the other monks.

"What's with that fellow Tokujoo? He seems to be in the zendo meditating all the time."

"That's the way it is with him," was the response. "You'll get used to it."

The longer I practiced like that, meditating when I wasn't required to be elsewhere, the more respect I seemed to gain in the eyes of the other monks. I guess nobody thought that I might be struggling with feelings of despondency and self-doubt. They probably imagined I was sitting in constant bliss.

Doshu wasn't young when I entered Shogenji, and he had begun to show signs of physical decline. I watched him with feelings of sadness as his body began to break down. The way the master kept up his spirit and never let infirmities interfere with his duties as abbot, inspired me to meditate through periods when I felt myself at a low-ebb in my zazen practice. As my teacher plodded on despite the growing difficulty of dragging along his aged body, I realized why Eihaku's father had such respect for this man. I understood the wisdom of Doshu's teacher Daigi in choosing 'Doshu the Fool' as his successor.

For some time Doshu had been suffering from a severe stomach disorder. He couldn't eat and he was rapidly losing weight. His doctor tried many forms of herbal medicine to no avail. The physician then called in a specialist from the Gifu University Medical Hospital. When

I saw Yuho, the head monk, meet the specialist together with Doshu's regular doctor at the Shogenji gate and take them to Roshi's room, I realized that the situation was serious. That evening during zazen, the assistant head monk came into the meditation hall, tapped me on the shoulder and signaled me to follow him. Outside of the hall he spoke to me in a hushed voice.

"The Buddhist Law service is the day after tomorrow," he said.

"Yes," I said, wondering how he could think I might not know.

"You understand how taxing that ceremony is on Roshi?"

I nodded. The annual service of the Buddhist Law ends with hundreds of parishioners receiving the precepts, a ceremony initiating them into the house of the Buddha. Doshu would have to lead in the opening ceremony and then initiate each group—monks, laymen and laywomen—separately. It was quite a strenuous service.

"We are going to need you to take on a great deal of responsibility this time given Roshi's present physical condition."

"Of course," I said, but wondered why he would choose me. Was it because of my age? With the exception of the head monk and the other officers, I was the oldest monk in training. But given my attitude toward *dokusan*, I assumed they would never consider me for special responsibilities. "What did the doctors say about Roshi's condition?" I asked.

"He has stomach cancer."

My heart stopped. Is Roshi going to die before I'm ready to have *dokusan* with him! Instantly, I became angry with myself for having such a self-centered thought. "He can't perform the ceremonies if his condition is that serious," I said.

"Yuho pleaded with Roshi to follow the doctor's recommendation and let someone else perform the ceremony. But you know Roshi. He said it is an important opportunity for the people in our community to be initiated into the house of the Buddha, and that they have waited all year for their chance. When Yuho suggested that he instead of Roshi perform the ceremony, Roshi shook his head and said, 'If the abbot isn't present it wouldn't be the same for the parishioners.'"

I knew about Doshu's reputation for stubbornness, especially when it concerned Buddhism. He'd always refused to put his

personal needs before his commitment to the teachings. Now I understood why Yuho had appeared so preoccupied these last few days.

“Nothing of this is to be mentioned to any of the other monks,” the assistant said. “Those are Roshi’s orders.” He left without giving me any special assignment, and I returned to my meditation cushion.

On the morning of the ceremony I watched as hundreds of people poured in from near and far to take part in the Buddhist Law Ceremony. I wondered how many of them came because they felt it was their social obligation to attend this yearly ceremony. I remembered my father and how disappointed he was because I’d neglected my duties to the Jounji temple parish. I had rebelled, believing I was trying to understand the true teaching of the Buddha. It was so crystal clear to me then. When I thought about Doshu, and how his deep belief in the practice of Zen meditation as the direct way to enlightenment did not interfere with his feeling of social obligation, I realized how narrow my own view of Buddhism was. I had so much to learn.

We had worked together with neighborhood lay volunteers all through the previous day and early that morning setting up the Buddha Hall and preparing food for the numerous guests. Like the Founder’s Ceremony, which had taken place when I’d first arrived at Shogenji, the mood was lighthearted, very different from the Spartan atmosphere that governed temple behavior during the rest of the year. We were a big happy family—monks and lay people from our parish.

There was, of course, a damper to the atmosphere—the roshi’s physical condition. Despite Doshu’s injunction to keep his illness hushed-up, it had become an open secret among those of us close to him. Though we didn’t talk about it, I’m sure it loomed forebodingly in the minds of many, as it did in mine.

While we were attending to final details of the preparation, crowds poured in, climbing the stairs to the *sanmon*. Passing through this temple gate they could see on their left the bell tower, which had been built in 1673. Behind the bell tower was a majestic

Cherry Tree, a *shidare zakura* or Weeping Cherry, said to be over two hundred years old. The old tree added to the dignity of the place and to the majesty of the ceremony.

Beyond the ancient tree stood the *hondo*, the Main Hall, where the ceremony would take place. I was in the hall with the other monks, sitting upright with our legs crossed and our prayer books on the mats in front of us. We'd lined up in rows on both sides of the large but unadorned altar. I remembered my surprise when I'd first entered the hall after my *niwazume* initiation. The altar was void of gilded Buddha statues common in most *hondos* of temples; only a dark wooden carving of the founder, Zen Master Kanzan and a large censer with burning incense sat on it. The starkness of the altar and the huge painting of the dragon on six screens along side it lent an ominous tone to the place—a reminder that Rinzai Zen was the religion of the samurai warriors.

Though most of the monks hadn't been told explicitly that Doshu's physical condition was rapidly deteriorating, those who were observant must have gathered from his movement over the last month that his illness was critical. As we waited for the ceremony to begin, I could feel the tension in the room.

The assistant head monk gestured for me to follow him out of the Main Hall. I followed him and just outside the entrance, he said, "Tokujoo-san, I'm putting you in charge of beating the big drum in my stead."

"Yes, sir." I wanted to ask him if there was a particular problem, but I knew this was no time to start a conversation.

"You know the routine," he added. "Just keep your eyes focused on the *ino* and take your cue from him." The *ino*, the supervisor of the monks' hall, was in charge of chanting the invocations.

Over the last four years I had had to take my turn drumming during chanting, as did all monks after their initial practice as novices. I returned to the Buddha Hall and sat by the drum, legs folded under me in formal *seiza*, my buttocks resting on my upturned heels. With my eyes on the *ino*, I waited, drum mallet in hand, for the signal to start drumming. When I saw the assistant head monk in the place where Yuho, the head monk, customarily was, I realized what had happened. Yuho must have insisted on staying by Doshu's side

to make certain his teacher didn't do anything that would strain his already emaciated body.

I watched as the remaining open spaces in the Buddha Hall filled and people bunched together to make room for those arriving after them. When the hall reached capacity, many latecomers stood outside, searching for spots where they could watch the activities without too much obstruction. The crowd was unusually large, and I wondered whether word had gotten out to some in the community that this would be the last chance for them to receive the precepts from Doshu.

You could hear whispering among the crowd as people were settling in. Then the *ino* gave me the signal to hit the drum, and the first loud thump silenced the crowd. It was a huge drum and the banging shook the room like an earthquake. I followed the first booming drumbeat with another slightly softer one and another still softer in rapid succession, increasing the speed of each beat as I softened the individual beats. Then I stopped, holding the drum mallet in front of my face. After a moment, I began again with a loud beat and a softer one speeding up in the same manner until another moment of silence and then a repeat of the pattern. I imagined Doshu was walking down the hall from his room with his deliberate yet graceful steps, and I imagined the head monk following close behind.

Roshi appeared, wearing an intricately woven brown silk robe with faint patterns of circular dragons whirling around large clouds, and a silver green silk *okesa* engraved with more prominent patterns of the mythical phoenix birds surrounded by small scattered clouds. These mythical creatures of ancient Chinese stories symbolized eternal life. The delicate beauty of the costume couldn't hide the fact that Doshu had lost a great deal of weight and could barely support the robe; his shrunken face stared out of an outfit that maintained its shape. He appeared like a turtle peaking out of an oversized shell.

Doshu stood in front of the altar, the head monk standing to the side while I completed the last series of beats. I put down the mallet and sat, watching my teacher's every move. The assistant head monk stood up, bowed to the altar and lit an incense stick. He went to Doshu, handed him the incense and returned to his place. I could

see a slight tremble in Roshi's hand as he placed the burning incense in the censer in front of the statue of the founder, Kanzan. He then stood back and took his silk scarf from under his *okesa*, which was draped over his left shoulder, and unfolded it in the prescribed fashion, placing it on the floor in front of him. I held my breath as Doshu made three full prostrations, kneeling on the scarf, stood up, picked up the scarf, folded it and placed it back under his *okesa*.

As I searched the crowd to see if anyone noticed the difficulty Roshi had standing up from the last prostration, the *ino* began the sutra reading. He recited the first sentence, after which we all joined in—reciting along to the rhythm of the *mokugyo*, a fish shaped wooden drum.

Many sutras were read in rapid succession, Zen fashion, as though we were racing through the Buddhist canon in order to finish in time for dinner. At given times during the recitation, Doshu would place another incense stick on the altar, repeating the three prostrations, making a final bow and continue the recitation. Following each series of prostrations he had to work harder to stand up, his legs wobbling more and more. I wondered where his strength to keep going came from.

When the sutra reading was completed, the assistant head monk came over to me and took the drum mallet from my hand. "Go with Roshi and Yuho," he said, quietly.

I stood up and followed Yuho as he whisked Doshu away from the Main Hall. I felt relieved knowing the old master had made it through this part of the ceremony, though I knew the worst was yet to come. The ordination ceremony that followed would require Doshu to mount the platform countless times as he ordained hundreds of disciples, laymen and women and monks. There were special ordinations for laypeople.

When we reached Doshu's room, Yuho turned to me and said, "Go to my room and bring me a small pouch with Chinese herbs. It's on my desk."

I left immediately, hurrying to Yuho's room. When I returned to Doshu's room, I could hear Yuho pleading with his teacher to let him perform the afternoon ordinations in Roshi's stead. "The main

service is over,” he said, “please follow the doctors orders. Think of your health.”

“My health?” Roshi retorted. “What will another week or two added to my life mean? My true mission is in the service of the Buddha. That is my real life. If I can’t continue my work to that end, those extra weeks will mean nothing. The doctor has to tell me what he deems best for my health. That’s his duty. But I too have a duty. Mine is to work for Buddhism. I will perform the final part of the ceremony as scheduled.”

Doshu’s voice was faint but unequivocal. I saw the concern on Yuho’s face and my heart went out to him. I didn’t know whether the ceremony was more painful for teacher or disciple. He prepared the medicinal drink for Doshu and made certain that the master drank it all. Doshu stood up, slightly energized by the brief rest and medicinal tea and left the room. Yuho and I were right behind him.

As we followed Roshi down the hallway and into the Buddha Hall, though his steps were still graceful and light, as if he were floating slightly above the ground, I wondered how long it would last. Did he have the strength required to mount the ordination platform time and again? I stayed close to one side and Yuho to his other side, as he struggled up and down from the platform four times, managing to hold on. Then, on the fifth, he slipped and would have fallen off had Yuho not grabbed him just in time. It amazed me to see how quickly Yuho had moved to catch his teacher, while I had only started to go in Doshu’s direction. Doshu regained his composure, gracefully bowed to his chief disciple and went on with the ceremony. I could feel Yuho’s agony, as he watched Doshu persevere. How difficult it must have been for him to look on as his teacher got weaker each time he mounted the platform. Nonetheless the ceremony continued, while most of the audience appeared to be unaware of the abbot’s infirmity and the toll this activity took on his body.

After the ordinations of more than a hundred candidates, lay and monastic of different ranks—each type requiring Doshu to mount the platform once again and perform the proper rites—the master was pale and worn. Only the drive to perform his duty to the community and to Buddha had provided him the strength to keep from collapsing during the ceremony. Yuho reminded his teacher of a

promise he'd made to his disciple before Yuho would agree to let Doshu follow his heart while neglecting the rest of his body.

"We must now go to the clinic and let the physician examine you. There is a rickshaw waiting to take you."

I went out to the main gate to make certain the rickshaw had arrived, while Yuho helped Doshu change into his regular robe and make his way to the rickshaw. Together with Yuho I followed the rickshaw to the clinic. Before examining his patient, the doctor must have known from the color of Doshu's skin and his watery eyes that the master was very sick. He looked at me and then at Yuho critically.

"He wouldn't listen," Yuho told the doctor. "There was no way he could be persuaded to allow someone else to perform the ceremony," he added, looking directly into the doctor's eyes, his own eyes pleading for understanding.

The doctor didn't respond. He was focused on his patient. He checked the abbot's pulse, listened to his heartbeat and took his temperature. He took a deep breath and shook his head. I could feel the doctor's frustration at having all his instructions ignored and saw in his expression a deep concern for his patient's life. The doctor turned to the head monk, and said, "Let's get him to the hospital right away."

Doshu spent the following week at the Ibuka General Hospital, where only close friends and disciples were allowed to visit, and then only for brief periods. Though I hadn't studied formal *koan* practice with Roshi for most of my time at Shogenji, I grew to love him. Silly as it was, I dreamed of him recovering and of me attending *dokusan* with him some day. Of course that wasn't to be. On the seventh day the master, lying in bed propped up by some pillows, gave final instructions to his closest disciples. When he became quiet, the head monk asked us to leave and let the master rest, removing all but one pillow and helping him lie back down. Doshu closed his eyes and slept. He never woke up.

Chapter 29

Six months had gone by since Doshu's death. I noticed that Yuho, the head monk, and I had often been in the same work party of late. When a particular job required two people and I was one of them, Yuho would usually be the other. It felt like more than mere coincidence.

We were raking pebbles in the rock garden one day when Yuho turned to me. "What brought you to Shogenji, Tokujoo-san? You were initially a Soto Zen monk, weren't you?"

"A very mixed up Soto Zen monk," I said.

Yuho smiled.

I told him how upset I had been when Doya, my first teacher, died, and how lost I'd felt. I saw a sadness in his expression that told me I'd touched a personal chord in him. I was certain it wasn't my loss alone that had triggered that look.

"You felt quite close to Doshu Roshi, didn't you?" I said, taking a guess.

His eyes narrowed, lowering his eyebrows, and I thought he was about to cry. Yuho was a square-faced muscular man in his late thirties who, like Doshu, never appeared very intellectual to me. Both master and disciple were doers rather than thinkers. It was a strange moment for both of us, he so used to putting on a tough exterior and I used to seeing him that way. "We were all Roshi's children," he said, carefully raking pebbles around a boulder. "He saw us as physical manifestations of the Buddha's teaching. I will never forget him."

We were both quiet for a while as we continued raking.

"So many monks have left Shogenji because of the long hours of zazen," Yuho said, looking at me, "but there doesn't seem to be enough zazen for you." His eyes opened wide and there was a smile on his lips. He appeared to have lightened up.

I looked away, feeling a little embarrassed. "I spent years in charge of a Soto Zen temple hardly knowing that zazen existed. When I finally came across Dogen's *Zuimonki*, everything changed. I couldn't stay at my temple, reciting sutras and performing

ceremonies, after that. I had to find a place where I could practice zazen with a community of people who believed in it.”

I didn’t tell Yuho of my surprise to find monks like Eihaku, who considered zazen to be little more than a painful activity that they had to endure in order to get their credentials. And I didn’t tell him everything I had been going through while I’d sat in meditation the last four years. There had been times when I felt joyful and other times when a peaceful calm enveloped me. But there had also been times when that perennial question of what I was doing with my life would return. I’d get this dull feeling in my gut, and it wouldn’t go away.

“I saw the new abbot a few weeks ago, and he asked me about you,” Yuho said, startling me from my train of thought.

“About me?”

“Yes, he wanted to know why you never came to see him in formal *dokusan* to check the progress on your *koan*.”

I was surprised that the new abbot even knew I existed. I guess I shouldn’t have been, considering I was the only monk who hadn’t ever gone to *dokusan* since the new abbot took charge six months ago. I’d often seen him during sutra reading and meal times. He was tall and thin with a long narrow face and sleepy eyes. I was told that he was a scholarly man and, as with many intellectual monks, he appeared to be nervous in public. His head, always perfectly shaved, was unusually pointy; a feature that immediately drew my attention. I had to make a conscious effort to lower my gaze so as not to rudely stare at the top of his head.

Yuho, I’m sure, had felt more comfortable with Doshu than with the new abbot. Doshu’s quiet simplicity and unquestioning, almost childlike devotion to the Buddha Way very likely had made Yuho feel protective of his old teacher.

“What did you tell him,” I asked.

“I didn’t know what to say at first. Your behavior is not that easy to explain,” he said with a slightly sarcastic grin.

I didn’t respond. I couldn’t explain why I’d decided not to go to *dokusan* because I was no longer certain of my own motivation. Had he asked me four years before, I would have answered with certainty. But after four years on my meditation cushion, I learned

that the reasons I gave myself for the things I did were not always the real reasons.

“I told the new abbot that you simply stopped going to *dokusan* over four years ago, and that when I’d talked to Doshu Roshi about it, he didn’t seem concerned,” Yuho said. “I explained that Doshu Roshi said that as long as you were practicing zazen and participating in all other temple functions, we should let you follow your instincts.”

Yuho closed his eyes and furrowed his brow as though he was trying to recall something. With his eyes still closed, he said, “I can remember Doshu Roshi’s exact words: ‘Tokujoo is struggling with something. He will get through it, and when he does, I will be waiting for him.’” Yuho opened his eyes, looked at me, and said, “I’m sure he never expected to leave this world before you got through it.”

I felt pangs of regret. Doshu’s patience with me confirmed my feelings of what a special teacher he was. What was it that had kept me from going to talk to him when I felt myself sinking into a pit of despair! Why had I been so damned stubborn! I returned to sweeping the pebbles. But Yuho wasn’t through with me.

“The new abbot wants to make you an officer of the monastery,” he said.

There were six heads of different monastic departments at Shogenji. These officers had the major responsibility for running the monastery so the abbot could concentrate on teaching his disciples. The positions were usually given to monks who had been at the monastery for many years and were considered the most responsible practitioners.

I continued raking the pebbles in silence. Though I tried to act as though I wasn’t very concerned by the request, in fact, I was shaken. My regular world at Shogenji, even its periods of confusion when my spirits were low, was a life I’d learned to live with. I found its regularity comforting.

The noon bell chimed.

“Let’s put our brooms away and wash up for lunch,” Yuho said.

We walked to the supply shed and I could feel Yuho’s eyes on me. I don’t think my attempt at appearing nonchalant worked. I had

the sense that Yuho could see through my mask. He must have realized how disturbed I felt learning of the new abbot's request.

After putting our brooms away we stopped at the well on our way to the dining hall. I cranked the lever, and Yuho put his hands under the spout. While washing his hands he looked up at me and said, "The new abbot suggested that you be made *choshu*."

Choshu! I tried clumsily to keep pumping, feigning detachment once more. I knew that this position meant that one of my duties would be to assist the abbot in training the community in meditation. I also knew that one doesn't refuse such a request by the abbot. In fact, I was supposed to feel honored that he would consider me for this important position. I can't say that I didn't feel a little puffed up at the thought that I had been chosen. However, I wasn't enthused about this new complication in my life. The last four years of concentrated zazen had not made me feel that I had penetrated to the core of Zen, but they had taught me quite a bit about the ego and its unique capacity to inflate itself through all kinds of self-deception. My immediate feelings of importance upon hearing of the new abbot's request only added to my concern. The other monks thought that I was special because I'd spent so much time on my meditation cushion; but my long periods of meditation, accompanied at times by extreme mood swings, had only taught me that I was neither important nor ready for a position of authority. I was scared.

"It's your turn," Yuho said. He was standing by me and I hadn't realized he'd gotten up and was finished washing his hands.

"Oh, right," I said, and circled the well and put my hands under the spout. My actions were almost unconscious. I was so preoccupied with the news. Yuho didn't expect an answer from me, knowing an abbot's "request" wasn't really a request. It was more like a command. He just let the idea sink in for a while, and I made no response. After I had washed my hands, we continued on to the dining hall for lunch.

I never told Yuho of my occasional spells of gloom during my meditations. I can't say for certain why I held back when I talked with him. I guess I wasn't ready to reveal my weakness to someone who was in charge of training at Shogenji. I felt I needed to appear strong in his eyes. I wondered if he would have tried to dissuade the new

abbot of his plan if he knew of the pain I often felt during zazen. He must have believed, along with the other monks, that most of the time I was sitting in a state of one-pointed concentration.

I had been sitting in a Rinzai Zen temple for the last four years meditating according to my own self-prescribed program. I didn't use *koans*, but rather sat in a manner Zen master Dogen described as "just sitting." Now I was swept back to the Rinzai roots. I had a *koan* whether I liked it or not. It haunted me for the next few days. How to deal with this new dilemma was my *koan*. I couldn't deceive myself into thinking I was qualified for the position. Nothing felt more contradictory to the spirit of Zen than to fool myself into believing I was advanced beyond what I knew to be the reality.

The breakthrough to this *koan* came more quickly than I had expected. Early on the morning of the fourth day after my conversation with Yuho, without saying a word to anyone, I packed my belongings—the same summer kimono I'd come to Shogenji with and a monk's bag with a few yen in it—and readied myself to leave the monastery.

I hadn't gone to see the new abbot to tell him I was leaving. I knew it was wrong to leave this way, not to even tell the few monks I'd gotten to know over the years, but I didn't know what to say. I only knew that I had to leave.

Leaving Shogenji may not seem like accomplishing anything, for it was, after all, running away. But, when you are carrying a burden that you don't recognize as a burden until you drop it, you feel as though you have had a breakthrough. My resolution to meditate until I had a clear realization of Zen was a heavy weight on me. I hadn't realized it until that moment. When I made the decision to leave Shogenji, I felt truly liberated.

I left my room before the wakeup bell and went to the Main Hall. I stared at the huge dragon image painted on six folding screens along the wall adjacent to the altar—a ferocious dragon two meters high and six meters long, its eyes staring back at me—a symbol of this "devil's monastery" that had greatly intimidated me when I'd first arrived. It no longer seemed intimidating; I wanted to pet it, embrace it. I walked out of the Main Hall, down the massive stone steps, and

past the big rectangular wooden signboard with the ideograms for Shogenji painted on it. I turned around to see one last time those formidable structures that had been my home for five years. I bowed my final goodbye and hurried away.

An early morning chill penetrated my robe as I walked down the dirt path away from the monastery. Tears came to my eyes. Despite the periods of despondency during my years of zazen at Shogenji, meditation had become an important part of my life. I had Shogenji to thank for that. The belief that meditation would bring me to the understanding that I longed for only grew with time. It felt wrong, however, to live at Shogenji while refusing to take part in *dokusan*, an integral part of the practice at that monastery. It had taken years of zazen, of looking within, and the additional prod of being promoted to a position for which I felt in no way qualified, for me to wake to the fact that I really didn't belong there.

With each step I felt free of the burden that had reached its apex when I'd been promoted to *choshu*. Though having made the decision to leave Shogenji felt liberating, the fact that I hadn't a plan was now weighing heavily upon me. Then I remembered having once hiked with other monks to Hazama Mountain about ten kilometers southwest of Shogenji where we'd stopped at a *gyojado*. I decided to go to that small pavilion constructed as a place where mountain ascetics practiced their austerities. I would stay under the partial shelter of the pavilion and consider what to do next.

Chapter 30

As I walked from Shogenji to Hazama Mountain, I felt once more the exhilaration of being on the road. I was free to go wherever I chose and to do whatever I pleased. Only the fear of unknown consequences could stand in the way of my dream of selfrealization. The excitement of the moment swept away my fear, and I walked through hilly roads feeling as though I were floating, my feet gently touching the ground, making loving contact with the earth. As the sun rose over the eastern hills, it warmed me and my nostrils filled with the pleasant fragrance of early spring blossoming plum trees. As the land leveled, I went through rice paddies and walked past farmhouses and greeted the few people that were out working in the fields.

I reached the foot of the mountain and sat down on a rock. The thought of the head monk, Yuho, and what he would think when he found out I was gone, weighed on my mind. I'd grown to like him during the month that we'd worked together before he sprang the news of my promotion on me. What would he tell the new abbot? Would Yuho be angry with me? Would he blame himself for not presenting the new abbot's request in a way that I might have accepted? My fear of disappointing Yuho was not unlike my feeling toward my father when I'd left Jounji in search of zazen.

"Good day to you, Reverend." A voice startled me from my ruminations.

I looked around and saw an old woman whose back was so bent her torso was parallel to the ground. She wore work clothes and had a scarf around her head. Her face, which I could only see as she turned her head to the side to see me, had as many wrinkles as a baby hippopotamus, and her hair sticking out from her scarf was white and thin. Her eyes smiled, and she had a glow about her of one who no longer worried about life but rather took a childlike fascination in everything.

"Good day to you, Grandmother," I said.

She looked at me quizzically and asked, "Did someone die?"

I gathered from her remark that her main association with monks was funerals. She must have doubted news of such importance

would have ever escaped her notice.

"Not that I'm aware of," I said, instantly liking her. "I'm on my way to the pavilion in the mountain."

"Oh, you mean the *gyojado*, Fudo-sama's place."

I'd visited the *gyojado* or pavilion once with some other Shogenji monks when we'd collected alms in the area. It was devoted to the wrathful deity Fudo Myo-o, the Buddha who expounded esoteric Buddhism. There was a faded scroll with a picture of Fudo on the altar in the pavilion, and the villagers referred to it as Fudo-sama's place. Some of them would climb the mountain when a family member was sick or when a crop failed and ask the deity for help.

"Yes, I guess that's the place."

"You're going under the waterfall, are you?"

I looked at her, not quite getting her meaning.

"Lots of those monks, the ones in white robes, go under the waterfall," she added.

I realized that she was referring to the mountain ascetics. One of their practices, *misogi*, was to stand under freezing waterfalls for hours reciting prayers.

"I might try it," I said, nodding.

She strained her bent head to better see me. She looked me up and down and said, "You're all skin and bones. You'd better eat a little more, or you'll catch cold."

I laughed. "I'll keep that in mind."

"I'd better be getting home," she said. "Glad nobody died."

"Goodbye Grandmother. Take care of yourself."

She walked away, and I sat on the rock for a while longer. I realized that Buddhism for this old woman was a holy institution that provided monks to perform ceremonies and recite incantations to assist departed loved ones in reaching the other world. Hers was a simple expression of faith in a world where departed souls had an important role. To someone like her, a big part of our duty on Earth was to see that the departed ones were provided for, a belief I had scorned when I lived in Daiei-ji because to me it was not scientific.

I sat there remembering when I was fifteen or sixteen lecturing my teacher Doya on how important it was to keep up with the modern world. The thought of it embarrassed me. How haughty I

was back then! I knew all the answers. I had to learn from the simple faith of this woman that the real meaning of religion was far more complex than my arrogant, small-minded notions. Though this bent-over, old lady had probably arrived at her home already, I put my palms together in prayer and thanked her most sincerely.

When I felt rested, I started up the winding mountain path. I hadn't gotten very far when I heard the clacking noise of wooden *getta* sandals against the pebbles on the path.

"Reverend monk," the voice of a child called out.

I turned around and saw a young girl running to catch up with me. She wore workpants, a plain dark blue cotton jacket, her shiny black hair in braids. Her smiling eyes gave her away. I was pretty certain who had sent her. She was carrying a package wrapped in a purple *furoshiki* scarf.

When she caught up, she thrust a small bundle into my hands.

"Grandmother told me to bring this to you. She said you looked very thin and she was worried about you going all the way up the mountain on an empty stomach."

I thanked her and looked down at the package. I untied the scarf and found six rice balls wrapped in seaweed. My mind drifted to thoughts of the old woman, her concern for a monk she didn't know; a woman who believed in doing what was right; an uncomplicated soul. When I looked up the child was gone. She had disappeared around the bend. She must have gone quite a distance because I could no longer hear her sandals against the pebbles. I tied the scarf again and continued up the winding mountain path, my pace enlivened as a result of this unexpected blessing. On both sides of the path shrubbery gave way to tall evergreens intermittently blocking the bright orange rays of the sun.

Finally arriving at the *gyojado*, I sat down to rest and suddenly felt famished. I took out the rice balls and gobbled up three of them. I could have devoured all six, but I forced myself to practice some control not knowing when or from where my next meal would come.

After lunch I decided to explore my new environment. I looked around the pavilion, first checking the roof for its shelter value and then going inside. There weren't any obvious leaks. The piles of straw along the walls were dry though it had rained a few days

before. They wouldn't have dried that quickly in the shade in this humid climate if the roof had serious leaks. Then I looked at the faded scroll of the wrathful deity on the far wall opposite the entrance. Fudo-Myo-o, even on this weather-beaten scroll, looked fierce with angry bulging eyes and a frown on his lips. Holding a sword in his right hand and a lasso in his left and massive red flames rising behind him, he appeared ready to strike out and destroy all delusions with his vital energy.

"I will need some of your energy, Fudo-Myo-o, to fight the demons that are sure to attack me as I try to understand the true meaning of the Way." I bowed to the deity and then walked outside. I will stay on this mountain for a while, I told myself. The fresh smell of the mountain air, the sounds of the birds, the nearby waterfall and the natural beauty of my surroundings had won me over, and there was nothing pulling me in any other direction.

As I wandered the grounds surrounding the pavilion, the sound of the waterfall was like a beckoning call. I followed a path towards the sound. There was a platform carved out of the mountain directly under the falling water. I assumed it was where religious pilgrims stood under the falls reciting their sacred incantations of the ritual *misogi*. This was another sign, an auspicious marker that made this mountain feel like a temple under the sky. I hurried past the falls, feeling myself being pulled along a narrow trail leading toward the mountaintop. Through the dark path shaded by large pines and cedars I could see a beam of sunlight up ahead; pine needles in the distance sparkled with the sun's reflection. I continued in the direction of the light and came out on top of the peak. The view was breathtaking! Across a wide valley, I saw two high lush green peaks opposite me and a few smaller ones to my right and left. The orange sun appeared and disappeared behind fluffy white clouds in a strikingly blue sky.

I stood there looking around at the other peaks in the distance, feeling the thrill of the panorama and the excitement of being on top of my own little world. Finding a flat spot, I sat down, folded my legs and started to meditate. I hadn't planned to do zazen when I left the pavilion but, arriving at that spot on the peak, it just seemed like a natural way to get to know the mountain. The clouds were fading; the

sun was still shining above the mountains. There was a chill of early spring in the air, but the warmth of the sun on my back made for a most pleasant feeling. Having practiced zazen in a meditation hall for the last five years, I had forgotten how much the natural elements could affect the feeling in meditation.

Adjusting my posture so that my body was upright and my spine erect, I deepened my breathing and pushed down slightly on my lower abdomen. As was usual at the beginning of meditation, many thoughts persisted fighting each other to dominate me. Did I do the right thing leaving Shogenji? What if I had stayed? Would I have grown into the position the new abbot had chosen for me? Was I running away again? Focusing on my breath, I watched the thoughts slowly begin to wane. My breath became more gentle and deep until I was no longer doing the breathing. I had no more control of my breathing than I did of the cool breeze that blew against my body. Like the symphony of the many birds that filled the air, the universe was playing through me. Then suddenly, I knew why I had come to this mountain—I had arrived at my true home.

I sat until the sun turned a bright red and began to sink in the sky. I stood up and started to walk back to the pavilion. I turned around to look back at my new outdoor zendo, pleased to have found such a beautiful spot. It would serve as my meditation room when the weather allowed. I returned to the pavilion, which was to be my shelter and my indoor zazen room on rainy and snowy days. Sitting down for a moment to catch my breath and to gather my thoughts, I felt myself being overtaken by sleep. The pull to this semi-consciousness of sleep was more than physical tiredness. Something beyond the body was tugging at me...

You are sitting in your outdoor zendo and once more you hear the voice of the mountain and feel the gentle massage of the wind on your back. You check your posture, deepen your breathing and listen to the sounds that echo inside you during the outer silences. Once more the sense of contentment of “just being” pervades your body and mind. You feel something yanking at your robe.

“Reverend sir,” a child’s voice pleads. The sound comes from above.

You look around and see the little girl who brought you the rice balls.

“Reverend sir,” the voice repeats. “Please come quickly, help mother.”

You turn to look directly at her. You are not sure that you’ve heard right.

“Please sir, come quickly. Help mother, she is drowning.”

You stand; the girl grabs your hand and leads you down the path. While you hurry together, you hear her voice say over and over, like an echo from above,

“Come quickly.”

Together you quicken the pace. She leads you to the waterfall, but you don’t see anyone. “Over here,” she shouts, as she takes you along the platform and pulls you with her under the pouring water.

There you see a deep ditch in the alcove carved in the mountainside. It is full of water but, at first glance you don’t see anyone. You hear a voice. This time it is not high-pitched like the little girl; it is the voice of a grown woman crying for help. Then you spot a woman in the water up to her neck with her hands outstretched. As with the cry of the child, the voice doesn’t come from her direction but rather echoes from above.

You stretch out your hands but you can’t reach her. As though from the same source above, you hear a deep voice repeat its cry for help and the higher child’s voice frantically saying, “Do something, please do something.”

You lie down and extend your body as far as it can go while keeping yourself from falling into the water. Stretching out your hands once more, you feel her hands touch yours. Her fingers feel limp so you grab hold of her wrists and pull her toward you. Then you raise your body and lift her out of the water, her arms around your neck and you holding her around the waist. She is wearing the white robe of a pilgrim. It’s Naomi. How light she feels! She is much smaller than you. The robe is soaked and transparent. Her beautiful naked body visible through the transparent robe entices and arouses you.

She clings to you and you do not take your hands from her waist. You don’t want to end the pleasurable feeling of her body clinging to

yours, and you remain in that position for what seems like an eternity. Then you hear the child call out “mother” and you take your hands from her waist and unclasp her hands from around your neck. Your discomfort makes your face flush and you wonder how apparent it is to mother and child. You are embarrassed at your arousal.

The scene changes.

You are all walking down the mountain path with the little girl between you and her mother. The girl is in the middle, holding hands with both of you. The little fingers grasp yours as though she is holding on for dear life. You feel elated with your large hand wrapped protectively around that little hand. You feel important, needed.

Two old people are walking toward you from a distance. As they approach, you realize that they are your mother and father. You are bewildered. You don’t expect them to both be alive and now you are excited to see them. You are eager to tell them of all your experiences since you last met. Your father is wearing his regular kimono, but your mother is dressed in the white robe of a pilgrim. As they get close, you see the disapproving expression you’ve so often seen on your father’s face. Your mother’s face has a look of delight. Though you recognize their voices, the sound doesn’t come from their direction. All the voices seem to echo from above.

Your father’s echo says, “Look at you! Tattered robe like a beggar and soaking wet. You couldn’t stay at Jounji, could you? You had to run off on your own. You would have had a prosperous temple and been a distinguished head priest. See yourself now! What have you done with your life?”

It’s an old song. You’ve heard it countless times. You want to respond but you can’t say anything.

“Sanjiro is a good boy.” Your mother comes to your defense. “He’s following the true path of the Buddha. He is practicing the Dharma in poverty. That’s why I didn’t want his sister to call him down from the mountain for my funeral.”

You realize that your mother is dead.

I woke up drenched in sweat and shaking. The rays of the sun shone through the pavilion entrance blinding me. I had slept through

the night and late into the morning, longer than I'd slept at a stretch in many years. Yet I felt more tired than before I'd gone to sleep. The dream had consumed all my energy. I sat up to get out of the sun and tried to clear myself of the fog that engulfed my brain. It was as though the dream, which was sparkling clear, was the reality, and now I was sitting up in a dreamlike existence. I stood with some difficulty and dragged myself outside and went to the waterfall to wash my face. In the ice-cold water, I slowly began to return to the conscious world. I checked for the deep ditch under the falls, and when I saw none I felt relieved. Of course it was only a dream I reassured myself. But what a dream! Why did I have such a dream?

My mother had always respected what I did. She had faith in me. I remembered one day confronting her for giving special treatment to my older brother. I was five or six years old at the time. She'd given my brother sugar candy when she thought nobody was looking, and she always seemed to watch over him.

"Why do you favor older brother?" I had asked her.

She looked surprised. I guess she never thought that I was aware of the way she treated my brother. She probably hadn't realized how much I scrutinized her every move.

She stared at me and then smiled a rather embarrassed smile.

"I know that wherever you go and whatever you do, Sanjiro, you will be all right. But your brother is weak. So I can't help myself. I worry about him all the time."

As young as I was then, I felt good about being considered strong in my mother's eyes. I was no longer jealous of my older brother. My mother's belief in my ability to take care of myself gave me the confidence I needed when, years later, my life seemed to be falling apart. She always had faith in me. And now, in my dream, she had come back from the dead to reaffirm her faith in me. She must have realized that I was going through another important change in my life.

Feeling physically refreshed from the icy water on my face and spiritually invigorated recalling my mother's words, I walked along the path heading for my meditation spot on the peak of the mountain. I considered the part of the dream with Naomi's embrace. No, don't get into that, I told myself. Not now.

The hike up to my private zendo, with its symphony of birds, insects and the sound of the wind moving through the trees was a meditation. When I sat down to do zazen, I needed little time to adjust to the transition. I only had to change from a standing to a sitting posture to fully enter the state of zazen.

I sat through the rest of the morning and into the early afternoon. When my knees started to hurt, I got up and did *kinhin*, walking meditation, for a few minutes and then resumed my sitting posture. My mind started to wander. I made an effort to clear it of thoughts, the seemingly useless effort that wasn't *really* useless. Something was always working, perhaps at a deeper internal level, while on the surface I was trying to close out the intrusive thoughts.

I wondered what I was doing there on the mountain, what the meaning of my life up to then had been, and the perennial question for practitioners of zazen—would I ever experience an enlightenment about which I had no doubt. Those thoughts vied for time with practical ones about how I would get my next meal and how I would take care of my personal needs in this new environment. The thoughts, however frustrating at first, diminished as I watched them and dissolved after a while. They crept back into my mind again and again, but each time with less intensity, until they no longer felt like intrusions.

At some point in my meditation, I found myself doing nothing of my own volition. Once again the universe was practicing zazen and I was just there being with it. I was the witness. The universe was breathing, the universe was sitting upright, and, as thoughts gently popped up, it was the universe that was thinking. This universe was the hand of the Buddha guiding me through my life. The thought, “just leave everything to the Buddha,” comforted me as I observed the world outside.

This feeling of freedom occurred when I wasn't expecting anything, when I wasn't conscious of any effort to change anything, and it would disappear when I became aware of the feeling and reflected on it. Then I would wonder once more about my life and where I was going. These wonderings were not new to me. They had often occupied my mind when I was at Shogenji. But at Shogenji I didn't think much about practical matters. There, I cooked and

shopped when it was my turn and performed my duties as the temple schedule required, but it was all arranged for me. I only had to follow the schedule. Now I had to figure it all out for myself.

Chapter 31

Having decided I wanted to stay on the mountaintop for a while and having settled upon my indoor and outdoor meditation spots, I had to consider how I would get food. I would go to the village of Hazama at the foot of the mountain and beg for rice. I had gone on alms rounds a few times a year at this village with the other Shogenji monks, so my presence would not be a surprise to many of the villagers.

“Are you leaving the mountain so quickly, Reverend?” The voice came from behind me as I walked down the path on my way to the village. I turned around and saw a woodcutter sitting on a fallen tree. I must have walked right by without noticing him. He was whittling a point on a stick, his eyes fixed on his handy-work as he spoke. “You’ve only been here two nights.”

“How did you know?” I asked, never having seen the man before.

He put his knife in its holder and looked up. His face was weather-beaten, toasted brown. “I saw your bundle in the Fudosama Shrine Room. Then I saw you meditating on the mountaintop. I thought you’d be staying for a while.”

“I’m on my way to the village to beg for some rice. I’m not planning to leave the mountain just yet.”

“Good. It can get pretty lonely up here. The white robed mountain ascetics come and go, but they don’t talk much or stay very long. They seem to live in their own world—not very stimulating company. I’m glad you’ll be returning. Even if we don’t see each other too often, it’s nice to know that someone lives nearby.” He returned to his whittling, and with his eyes focused on his handiwork, added, “If you follow the path from the shrine past your meditation rock, my cabin is a little ways down the other side of the mountain. Come by anytime you feel like.”

I thanked him for the invitation and continued down the mountain. I too was glad to know that I wasn’t living on the mountain alone. I made a mental note to visit him when I returned from Hazama village.

“You are from Shogenji, aren’t you?” a villager said, after filling my begging bowl with rice.

I looked up, pushing my umbrella hat back so I could see his face. The proscribed way of *takuhatsu* was to keep one’s head bowed, read a sutra in front of the home of a villager and move on to the next house. But I no longer felt bound by those rules. I wanted to know the people who would be making it possible for me to live in the mountains.

“No, I’m living on Hazama Mountain now,” I said, hoping he wouldn’t question me any further. I was still trying to clarify my own motives and didn’t think I could explain why I’d left the monastery.

I was surprised to hear the sound of coins hitting the side of my bowl before they settled on the rice offering.

“You can’t live on rice alone,” he said.

I poured the rice and the coins from my bowl into my begging bag, bowed to him, read the sutra for *takuhatsu*, and thanked him. He smiled a yellow-toothed smile and bowed his head. There were no more questions so I walked to the next house.

The fifteen houses that made up the village were spread out with rice paddies between them. They were modest size clapboard houses with thatched roofs. I begged alms in front of each one. The people in Hazama Village were friendly and welcoming. After covering all the houses in the village and using the coins to purchase *miso* for soup, I made my way up the mountain with my supplies.

I rested for a while in the shrine room before gathering twigs to make a fire on my homemade stove. Figuring out how to survive on the mountain kept me busy for the first week and kept my mind off the bigger question—what I was doing there in the first place.

At the end of the week the woodcutter came to visit me. There must have been something about me that made him realize I was out of my element, because the first words out of his mouth were, “If you’re going to stay here for any extended period, you’ll have to know how to survive in the mountains.”

“I’d appreciate whatever you can show me,” I said.

We walked together on the mountain and he pointed out where to find the many varieties of mountain vegetables and which ones to look for during the different seasons. It was the beginning of spring,

and there were parsley, flowering ferns, dandelions, bracken, thistle, bog-rhubarb and mug-wart. We picked them together so that I would know what the actual plants looked like, and then the woodcutter showed me how to prepare them. He taught me the medicinal value of some of the wild plants like mug-wart and thistle. He also showed me where the summer plants like strawberry geranium, spider-wart and ginger could be found, where the autumn yams, chestnuts and various wild edible vines were, and where the chick-weed, wood sorrel, star-wart and skunk cabbage that would be available during the cold winter months grew.

“You are an encyclopedia of wild plants,” I said.

I could sense the pride he felt at hearing that. He loved to show what he knew, and I wanted to learn all I could. We made a perfect team. After searching for wild mushrooms together, he tested me.

“If you eat that one,” he said, checking the mushroom I’d picked, “I will lose the only friend I have up here.”

I followed him around as he picked a number of different types of mushrooms, and I learned the subtle differences between the edible ones and the poisonous ones. He had me pick a few more, and when he was satisfied that I could tell the good ones from the bad, he said, “We can stop now. I don’t think you’re going to kill yourself. But if you ever have a question about its identity, leave it alone. That’s the safest policy.”

With my new knowledge, I began to entrust myself to life around me. Because of my contact with the woodcutter, I became intimate with the vegetation, and because of the nature of my zendo under the sky, I met many of my animal neighbors. As I sat meditating on the mountaintop, small critters came to visit me. They must have found my quiet zazen posture non-threatening, because they let their curiosity take precedence over their caution.

The longer I sat on the mountain the greater became my confidence that I was protected while in that posture. Larger animals came by to visit too, and I let them explore. I met wild boar, bears, monkeys and deer. Pheasants and hawks perched on nearby trees and appeared to join me in zazen. You’re never really alone in the mountains, I realized.

With the help of the woodcutter, I learned how to survive in my new mountain dwelling, and my life became more and more regular. As with life in a monastery, I was practicing within a routine. I learned how to prepare the various wild fruits and vegetables to make tasty side dishes to go with my *miso* soup and rice. The waterfall became my personal shower. And when I wasn't taking care of the practical, I was in my zendo meditating or walking on the mountain.

I learned to adjust to the changing seasons—new mountain vegetables grew in different areas at different times of the year and required different methods of preparation. When the rains were heavy, my shrine-home needed fortification to keep it dry. With the onset of winter, I had to create changes to the configuration of my shelter in order to shield me from the chilling winds. Winter also produced very little vegetation, so I learned to make do with less variety. All of these practical adjustments I enjoyed as welcome changes in my otherwise habitual life in the wild. But the twists and turns that my meditation took were not as easy to deal with.

Some time early on in my practice on the mountain, I began to feel that unpleasant sensation again originating in my gut during afternoon zazen. It felt both physical and emotional as it permeated my body and mind. I remembered having had similar feelings when I'd been wandering around Tokyo and Nagoya not knowing what I wanted to do with my life. My despondent feelings when practicing zazen at Shogenji also resembled these, though they hadn't been as severe. The sensation seemed to well up in me in the afternoon following a morning of zazen and to disappear by the early evening.

Months of trial and error followed until I found that a practice of staying with this unpleasant sensation, despite my natural desire to run from it, resulted in its dissolution little by little. The resolution of this problem allowed me to return to the joy of zazen only to eventually be confronted with other challenges.

During zazen, when my thinking mind quieted down and thoughts passed through me like the scenery of a landscape, the memory of the dream I had on my first night in the shrine appeared. I re-dreamed, this time with my conscious mind, the little girl frantically leading me to the waterfall, and then the scene jumping to the embrace of the mother—who was Naomi, though a shorter version

of her. I tried not to analyze it. I let myself feel the sensation of the embrace of Naomi under the waterfall. The feeling returned often.

What I sensed strongly through the dream was the importance of women in my world—a world normally dominated by men. At Zen temples the only part women played was when some of the monks would sneak out at night to go to a whorehouse or when the wives of some patrons would come to help clean and cook for ceremonies. My need for women seemed to be more encompassing than sexual attraction. It may have stemmed from the support I'd always received from my mother even when my father had completely lost faith in me. I needed a kind of moral support from women that I felt I could never get from men. My mother believed in me and in my search for the true Dharma, which gave me strength when I was on the verge of giving up. From my father I felt only pressure and judgment.

I remembered the real Naomi, from the farmhouse gatherings, and my attraction to her. I recalled our talk at the tea parlor, how important she made me feel, and how easily I revealed my life to her. I had felt no concern that I would be laughed at, and none of the need to hold back as I had when speaking to men. Her openness had made it easy for me to open up.

Of course, I couldn't forget my physical attraction to her either. I sat there on the mountaintop feeling a flush to my face as I remembered the secret hope I had entertained that she was also attracted to me, that she might have wanted me as I wanted her. How quickly I had forgotten my desire to understand the Buddha Way under the spell of an alluring woman! I often revisited the feeling of dejection as I'd watched her leave the farmhouse with Nan.

When I noticed my mind wandering in this way, I smiled and returned to just sitting. I was here again, breathing deeply, feeling the life in each cell of my body—the warbler singing its song, the melody of the pine needles blowing in the wind, the smells and sensations of this little mountain world of mine intermingled with the universe of which it was a part.

I spent my time meditating, gathering food, cooking, begging in the village, and keeping the pavilion dry and warm. I was never at a loss for something to do. Months went by, seasons changed, and I,

like the animals, trees and plants, became a regular part of Hazama Mountain.

One day in early spring, I went to take a shower at the waterfall as I'd done most mornings. Still a distance from the falls, I could make out a white blur of a figure under the downpour of water. As I got closer I realized it was a mountain ascetic standing under the fall in his white robe chanting a sutra. My first reaction was, Who is this fellow in *my* shower? I had to laugh at my possessiveness, an instinctive reaction that made me feel that Hazama Mountain was *my* mountain. I stood there waiting for him to finish so I could take my shower. I was certain he noticed me standing there, but he didn't seem to be in a rush. After about a half hour, I realized he wasn't there solely to clean his body. He was cleansing his spirit as well. This was the practice of *misogi* that the old lady I'd met when I first came to the mountain had asked me about. She wanted to know if I planned to go under the falls like the white robed ones. I realized it was going to take a lot longer for him to complete his practice. The mountain ascetics stayed under the freezing fall for hours chanting their special incantations and sutras. I was either going to have to join him or to wait a day to take my shower.

"Mind if I join you?" I shouted over the noise of the falls and his loud chanting.

He looked in my direction, and without taking a break from his chanting, stepped slightly to one side. I stripped down to my loincloth and entered the space along side him, wondering whether he realized I had come to take a bath or thought I was joining him in this ascetic cleansing practice. Standing next to him under the freezing falls, which I'd usually stayed under for only a few minutes, I didn't feel I could abruptly leave. It would be like walking out of the zendo in the middle of zazen practice. He might even think I was just plain rude. We were both religious practitioners, and he was sharing one of *his* practices with me. Though I was freezing in this icy water, I decided to stay. The water bounced off me like chunks of ice burning my shoulders and back as it made contact. I started to chant the Heart Sutra, as much as an attempt to fight off the discomfort of the freezing water as from any religious feeling. My body vibrated as I

chanted from the depth of my abdomen, and this brought me relief from the cold water.

Our recitations didn't exactly complement each other, but with the roar of the falls, they didn't sound as if they were clashing either. I completed my chant of the Heart Sutra and could hear that he was nowhere near finished with his. While chanting as loudly as I could, I felt relief from the chill, but as soon as I stopped I began to shiver. Rather than step out, which still felt somehow irreverent, I chanted on, this time reciting one of the longer Wisdom sutras I'd learned at Shogenji. He steadily kept up his chanting and I wondered if he even knew I was still there. I was certainly aware that he was there, and for some reason I was intent on keeping pace with him.

We stayed under the falls for most of the morning. At some point during the chanting, I became accustomed to being there and my body actually began to warm up. The sun was shining high in the sky, sunrays were hitting us through the water and the outside temperature had turned mild. When we finished (I took my cue from him) I felt as though I was floating on a cloud. We stepped out of the falls and I put my robe back on. I watched him as he stood there in his drenched white robe thumbing his beads, his lips still moving, reciting more incantations, but almost inaudibly.

"You practice *misogi* in the middle of winter too, don't you?" I asked.

He nodded. I could sense from his demeanor that, discounting the incantations regularly rolling off his tongue, he was a man of few words. I remembered the woodsman telling me that the white robed ones were not very stimulating company. However, I pressed on.

"How do you keep from feeling the pain of the extreme cold when practicing in winter?"

"I don't," he said.

"Then what *is* your secret?" I asked.

He smiled. "The secret," he said, "is not to mind that it is painful."

I thought of the story of the Buddha—his discovery that the path to enlightenment was the middle way between severe, ascetic practices on the one hand and indulgence in the pleasure of the senses on the other. I admired the mountain ascetic for his strong determination to practice, and yet it didn't feel like the middle way. I'd

heard from the woodsman that the mountain ascetics also practiced walking on hot coals and that the power of their incantations allowed them to walk on fire without being burned.

I remembered a story of the 14th century Zen monk, Ikkyu. Ikkyu was friendly with a mountain ascetic. The two monks constantly tried to outdo one another in what Zen masters refer to as Dharma combat. Dharma combat was part of Zen practice, a way monks kept each other alert. One day Ikkyu and the mountain ascetic were taking a ferry across a river. The mountain ascetic was thumbing his prayer beads and chanting something almost inaudible. Ikkyu looked at his friend and started to laugh. The ascetic stopped thumbing his beads and asked, "What's so funny?"

"What's the value of thumbing beads and reciting all that gibberish?" Ikkyu said.

The ascetic, looking irate, said, "I get power from the Buddha through this practice."

Ikkyu laughed louder, turned to the side of the ferry, sat crossing his legs and started to meditate.

"I suppose you get your power from sitting on your bottom and staring at the ground in front of you," the ascetic said, snickering.

Ikkyu ignored his comment and continued to meditate. As the boat got close to the other shore the two monks heard a dog barking—the nearer the ferry came to the shore the louder was the dog's bark. Ikkyu stood up and turned to the mountain ascetic and said, "Let's see which one of us has the power to stop the dog from barking."

Looking first at the dog and then at Ikkyu, the mountain ascetic said, with a big grin on his face, "I'll go first."

He stared at the dog for a while and then began to recite a magical incantation while thumbing his beads. The dog continued barking. The boat moved closer and closer to the shore and the dog's bark got louder and louder, becoming ferocious as the boat started to dock. The ascetic frantically thumbing his beads tried another incantation and another, sweat pouring from his face, but to no avail. Finally he gave up.

Frustrated at his failed attempt, he turned to Ikkyu. "Your turn," he said. "Let's see you quiet the beast by sitting on your bottom."

Ikkyu remained standing, looked at the dog for a moment, then he put his hand in the sleeve of his robe and took out a riceball that he had left over from his previous meal. "Come, come," he shouted to the dog, as he held out the rice-ball. The dog instantly stopped barking and, wagging its tail, ran over to the boat.

I woke from my musings and realized that the fellow was still standing there thumbing his beads, his lips moving silently. I wondered whether he too felt it was wrong to just walk away, as I had felt under the waterfall. I wanted to return to my meditation spot and practice zazen, and I could sense that he, though willing to answer my questions, also wanted to get on with his practice.

"I should be getting back," I said. Back to where? I thought, amused at myself. It wasn't like someone was waiting for me or that I had a rigid schedule that I must comply with.

He smiled, and I wondered whether he had read my thoughts or was just happy to be released. Then he bowed and left. I never saw him again.

To the people in the village below I was the hermit on the hill. They met me each month when I came down from my mountain dwelling to beg for my monthly supply of rice and to buy some *miso* for soup. They saw me during the celebration of the New Year when one or another of the families invited me to take part in their year-ending feast. And some met me on the mountaintop, after they'd climbed to the shrine in order to pray for an ailing friend or family member, or when they walked the mountainside picking wild vegetables that were in season.

The villagers seemed to look forward to my monthly visits when I came to beg for rice. I would follow the prescribed formula for a Zen monk when begging up to a point—chanting *hooo*, keeping my head down, and, after receiving a donation, reading from the sutra for *takuhatsu*. But then I would feel free to make conversation with my donors; a practice I developed as part of my way of thanking them for their kindness.

"You are very generous to share some of your crop with me," I said to one of the farmers when I passed him working in the field on my way back to the mountain path.

“I’m a rice farmer, as are most of the people in this village,” he said. “The modest amount that we give you is a small price to pay for the blessings of the Buddha.” He was leaning on his hoe and had a big smile on his face. He added, “We village farmers don’t get much of a chance to have a friendly conversation with someone like yourself.”

I guess I brought novelty to the routine of their daily lives. They competed to have me join them for dinner during the New Year celebration. I would sometimes have a few New Year meals so as not to offend anyone. But the feasts I had in the village, delicious as they were, did not excite me. Having spent so much time in the natural surroundings of the mountain, I soon longed to return to my shrine on the hill. All I could think of was how to excuse myself as soon as possible without offending any of my hosts.

I lived on the mountain for five years. During the winters I was totally alone. The woodcutter spent the cold months in his home village. None of the mountain ascetics or any of the devout pilgrims ventured up the mountain in winter. Those were the times of my intensive retreats. Even my animal friends deserted me.

Much of my life on Hazama Mountain was idyllic—full of peace and tranquility. But it wasn’t always like that. I was young and haunted by demons that had plagued me all through my life as a monk. I was restless at times and never completely rid myself of the doubt as to what I was doing with my life. The doubt would come and go, but when it was there it felt like an enormous weight in the pit of my stomach.

One day, at the end of my fifth year on Hazama Mountain, a messenger came with a letter for me from my older brother. It was a mystery to me how anyone knew where I was. He told me that the wife of my second oldest brother was on the verge of death and that he wanted me to help nurse her. I read the letter and the next day I was gone from Hazama Mountain. I heard later that there were rumors around the village that the hermit on the mountain was seen flying through the air, never to return.

I realize in retrospect that my training up to this point had been shallow. I’d learned to meditate and even to reach some profound

understanding of the power of this practice, but I was like a seasoned samurai who still wore his protective armor when he went into battle. I wasn't aware that I wore protective armor—a shell to protect my ego from injury. Though meditating by myself at Shogenji and Hazama Mountain as I had been doing for the last nine years helped me deepen my understanding of Zen meditation, it did not waken me to some of the more subtle ways I was deceiving myself. I was an ordinary person who was trying to prove that he was special. It wasn't until I met Kodo Sawaki, a true Dharma friend, who gently but firmly poked his fingers through the cracks in my armor, that I began to open to my ordinariness. It took the further practice at Bairinji monastery, where a monk disguised as a devil (or was it the other way around?) smashed my armor to bits, for me to truly stand naked in my ordinariness and understand the true meaning of Zen.

This ends Book II

Book III

Zeze-an

Pienho, a man from the province of Chu, found an uncut jade in the mountains. He brought the jewel home and presented it to Emperor Wu. The Emperor asked his chief jeweler to assess it. "It is a mere stone," said the jeweler. The Emperor was angry with Pienho for lying and had his left foot cut off as a consequence. When the Emperor died and the new Emperor Wen ascended the throne, Pienho, went to him and once more presented the jewel. The new Emperor asked his jeweler to assess it. "It is only a valueless stone," said the jeweler. The Emperor was angry with Pienho and had his right foot cut off as a consequence. Emperor Wen died and Chang became Emperor.

Pienho crawled to the top of Mount So and wept for three days and nights. When his tears were gone he was said to have wept blood. Emperor Chang heard about it and sent an officer to the mountain to find out why Pienho was so distraught. "There are many people in this world in similar conditions to yours; why are you so sad?" the officer inquired on behalf of Chang.

"I am not grieving at the loss of my feet," Pienho said. "I grieve because a jade was called a stone and an honest man a liar."

When Emperor Chang heard this he sent for the stone and asked his jeweler to polish it. The stone turned out to be a beautiful jewel and was hence called the Jade of Pienho.

From the writings of

Hanfeitzu

Chapter 32

April 1939

Fumie, daughter of Tokujoo Kato priest of Zeze-an Temple, was sitting at a small table in her living room, pen in hand, her journal in front of her. She dipped the pen into a bottle of ink, shook the extra ink from it and started to write. 'We moved to Zeze-an on December 8, 1934.' She stopped, placed the pen down and looked around the room. She needed more time to think about what she would write. She wished she had more mechanical work to do while gathering her thoughts, but everything was tidy in the sparsely furnished room—after all she'd cleaned it twice in the last twelve hours, once last night and again this morning. There was little to do in her new home other than clean and prepare breakfast and dinner for herself and her husband Morio. They'd been living in this house a little over a month, and she was already feeling pangs of nostalgia for Zeze-an. Because she had so much free time, she decided to fill it with this project of introducing the temple and her parents to her future children.

Fumie picked up a small photo album that was lying next to her journal and opened it. It was a handmade album that Morio had put together to keep the photos he'd taken while living at Zeze-an. He had brought a new camera with him from Tokyo when he took up lodging at the temple and spent most of his free time taking pictures of all the goings on at his new home. Fumie opened it to a picture on the first page of Tokujoo in his monk's traveling clothes, standing in front of Shutokuji, the temple where she was born. His monk's bag with his begging bowls in it hung from his neck, and he held his large straw umbrella hat in his right hand by his side. He had a shy but knowing smile, an expression that said so much to Fumie; much more than she could ever express in words. Yet wanting to explain this man to her yet-to-be-born children was the real inspiration for this journal project. That and Zeze-an of course. She wanted them to know the temple as she knew it, and she feared that with time the freshness of that memory would fade. That's why she couldn't wait until they were born.

Fumie had been excited to move with Morio to their very own place. But unlike Zeze-an, where someone might drop in at anytime, here there was hardly a chance of seeing anyone until Morio came home from work. He wouldn't be home until late tonight, she remembered—another staff meeting. How many meetings must they have to run that tiny school? And on Saturday night! It seemed to her like they were always having meetings. Didn't they think he should have some time to himself? She meant some time with his wife.

Fumie put the photo album down, placed her hands under her chin with her elbows on the table. She thought about the first time she'd met Morio Kimura. He'd come to board with them at Zezean. Tokujoo had explained to her that Morio would be living with them, and she should consider him part of the family. He hadn't realized just how much a part of the family he would become, she mused, smiling to herself. Her uncle in Tokyo, a friend of Morio's family, had asked his brother if Morio could rent a room at the temple, and Tokujoo agreed.

"Why on earth would anybody come to this tiny country village to teach?" she'd asked her father.

"Teaching positions are extremely difficult to find in Tokyo," Tokujoo had explained. "So when Morio heard of a vacancy at the elementary school in Komiya, he applied. He hopes the job will be temporary until he finds a better one at a more prestigious school."

He hadn't anticipated falling in love with the daughter of the priest of Zeze-an, Fumie reflected. She blushed although there was nobody to see her or read her thoughts. She picked up the photo album again as if the action would draw attention away from her blushing. Whose attention? she thought, feeling silly.

She looked at another picture. Tokujoo, her mother Yayo, her brother Yoshihisa in his school uniform, and Uncle Kodo Sawaki, were all standing in front of the Buddha Hall of Zeze-an. Though she'd seen them together countless times, she was surprised at how much taller Uncle Kodo was than her father. No photo could show how big Father really is, she thought. She wanted her future children to know about Uncle Kodo too. She picked up the pen again, dipped it once more in the bottle of ink, took it out, shook it and continued writing.

‘I was fifteen when we moved from Kurume to Komiya—the other end of the world,’ she wrote. ‘My whole life up until then was centered on my school and Shutokuji Temple. Father was the priest in charge of this small temple, a sub-temple of Bairinji. Bairinji was a large monastery, famous throughout Kurume, where Father had trained for years. He traveled to Bairinji daily to meet his teacher, Komushitsu Roshi. From the time I was old enough to talk, if I woke up early I would beg Father to take me with him to Bairinji. I was the only child then and took advantage of my ‘princess’ status.

‘I remember him giving in once when I was about four years old. It must have been strange to see a monk in his begging clothes walking in that provincial part of the country with a four-year old girl, hands around his neck, riding piggyback. When we arrived back at Shutokuji, a policeman was talking to Mother. I was frightened to see this stranger in uniform questioning Mother. Evidently, some people had reported a suspicious looking monk who may have been abducting a child. Father laughed when Mother told him what the policeman was there for. The policeman laughed too. I joined in laughing, but I wasn’t sure why.

‘When I was fifteen years old, Father told me we were moving to Komiya, a small village outside of Tokyo. I was devastated.

“I’m not going!” I said. “I’m not going to leave my friends and go to a school where I don’t know anyone.”

“You’ll make new friends,” he said, with that smile that told me, I’m on your side but *we are going*.

‘I knew we were moving and there was nothing I could do about it but protesting felt good. I’d seen how new students from other parts of Japan who came to our school in Kurume were treated, and I didn’t want to be treated that way. Now I wish I’d protested when friends at my old school looked down on those new “foreigners” who spoke Japanese with a different regional accent. Though I didn’t approve of my classmates’ behavior, I remained silent because I didn’t want to be criticized by the popular girls in our group.

‘I don’t remember what I imagined Zeze-an Temple to be like before we arrived, but I know it was nothing like what we found. Mother and Father must have been as shocked as I was, though they did their best to hide it from Yoshihisa and me. Yoshihisa, five

years old at the time, saw it as an adventure and Teruyuki, who was still an infant, probably didn't see any difference from what went before. His whole world consisted of Mother's breasts and the warmth of her back, where he was usually snuggled inside her loose coat wrapped tightly by her sash.

'December 8th, the day of our arrival, was the anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment. It rained most of that first week. At night, we all huddled together, sleeping on straw in the only corner of the single room that was relatively free of leaks. Here, too, Yoshihisa seemed to be the only one enjoying himself. Now that I think about it, Yoshihisa enjoyed everything until he started school.

'As soon as Mother (your grandmother) received fabric from our uncle in Tokyo, we busied ourselves making *futons*. I say we because I did try to help. But mother was so fast, I'd hardly get started by the time she had completed most of the work.

'Everything was in disrepair: leaky roof, torn *tatami* mats, ripped *shoji* and *fusuma*. Father (your grandfather) immediately set out to repair all the partitions and the roof and to plant plum trees. He seemed ready to make the best of the terrible situation. Mother was not of the same mind. It was the first and only time I ever heard them argue.

'I remember Mother's expression when she returned from the kitchen for the first time. Yoshihisa said he was hungry (he was always hungry) so she went into the kitchen to see if she could find something to satisfy him. Not only was there nothing to eat, there weren't any cooking utensils, no pots, pans, bowls, nothing except big vats that fit into the clay stove in the earthen floor kitchen. Mother walked out of the kitchen shaking her head in apparent disbelief.

'A few days passed and I heard her complaining to Father. "How can we possibly live in this place—we don't even have pots to cook soup in. And we are supposed to raise our children in this excuse for a temple? This is worse than camping out in the mountains." She wasn't aware that I was listening from the next room.

"At least in Kurume I had family who would help us out in times like these," she continued. Father got really angry. I'd never heard him lose his temper before.

“Do you think I can simply give up and go back to Kurume?” he said. “That’s not the way a Zen monk responds to adversity. Go back if you want. Take the children with you or leave them with me, I don’t care. Leave me here naked. I’ll make do...”

‘I didn’t know at the time that he had just come back from a meeting with the committee from the Zeze-an parish. Apparently, some committee members had thought that Father was too old to take over a temple and had mentioned it at a previous meeting. One of them had even said he was about ready for his own funeral. Somehow, Father got word of it and decided to confront the committee at their next meeting. The remark about him being ready for his own funeral really infuriated him. He barged in at the next committee meeting to plead his case. He told them that when the priest he knew from Bairinji who is in charge of the temple near Zeze-an had invited him to live there, he had given Father the impression that he had arranged it with the committee. He laughed about this when he told me years later, but he certainly hadn’t been laughing at the time.

“I may be sixty years old,” he’d told the committee, “but I’m not ready for my own funeral. I have three children and a wife to take care of. I can’t afford to be old.”

‘The members had been shocked that the comment about him being ready for his own funeral had made its way from the supposedly confidential meeting to Father’s ears. They were embarrassed and tried to calm him down. Before he left they had agreed to talk over his situation and possibly rethink their original criticism. He left the meeting slightly appeased and returned home. But by the time he reached the house he’d worked himself into a fury again. Mother obviously picked the wrong time to suggest we go back to Kurume. I think she picked the wrong time to suggest anything to Father. She didn’t go back and things did improve at Zeze-an. I soon made new friends at school and we managed to survive, but not without a struggle.

‘Father planted a garden, worked daily repairing the temple and little by little earned the respect of the parishioners. Mrs. Tanaka, the wife of one of the committee members, came to visit and was horrified at the sight of the dilapidated temple. She couldn’t believe

that a family with an infant baby could live in such a place. She brought Mother kitchen utensils, towels and milk for the baby and helped out wherever she could. She was Mother's first friend in our new home.

'I can't believe how quickly my own feelings about Zeze-an changed. That started when Uncle Kodo came and introduced Father to patrons who helped support the temple.

"I knew your father wouldn't let me give him money," Uncle Kodo told me. "Tokujoo is a proud man—a proud, stubborn Zen man," he said with a laugh. "So I had to think of something more creative to help him. I introduced him to families I knew in Tokyo who agreed to give him one yen each month if he would perform the monthly sutra recitation at their family shrines. Fifteen families, fifteen yen; that was what he needed to run Zeze-an."

'I asked Uncle Kodo why Father moved here in the first place. The temple in Kurume was our home, and we were secure there.

'Kodo laughed when I asked him. He looked at me for a moment and seemed to be contemplating whether to say anything. "I'll tell you what I think," he finally said. "Tokujoo is a true Zen man. They don't make them like him anymore. I don't fully understand why he came here, but I know that the security of life in Kurume would not make him stay there. You see, a true Zen man doesn't hold on to security outside of his own knowledge of himself (because there is no other true security)." He must have seen how confused I was because he became quiet for a moment. He smiled at me and patted me on the shoulder. "Your father is a true Zen-man, he repeated. You will realize it some day."

'Then Uncle Imamura, a monk who had studied with Father at Bairinji, came to Komiya from Bairinji to study with Father, and Zeze-an started to feel like home. But more important to making me feel at home in this world so far from Kurume was my new life at school. I had just turned sixteen and my biggest fear was being considered an outsider and being treated poorly or simply ignored by the other students. That didn't happen. To my surprise, the other girls in my class all wanted to know me. Having come from Kurume, a city much larger and more cosmopolitan than this village, I was looked up to,

and everyone wanted to be my friend. I was popular and I loved the feeling.

‘Another thing that made Zeze-an feel like home was watching Father get back into his old routine. I know it sounds strange but when I heard Father’s screaming voice at three-thirty in the morning chanting the Wisdom Sutra, I felt that my world hadn’t been turned on its head.

‘I slept through most of Father’s morning practice. I even learned to sleep through his screeching chanting of the Wisdom Sutra, eventually. But just knowing that he was practicing as he had daily at our old home, Shutokuji, that our new life was not that different from our old one, was comforting. I can still remember the first time I’d watched Father do his morning routine when I was a small child at Shutokuji. Father used to keep a wet towel by his bedside and give himself a cold massage before getting out of bed to do his morning chanting and meditation. I must have been about five or six years old. Something, a bad dream perhaps, woke me at three in the morning. I heard weird noises sounding as if muffled by covers. Instead of getting in bed with Mother as I usually did when I was frightened, I just sat up and watched what felt very strange to my child’s mind. Though it was dark, it wasn’t pitch black and I could make out what appeared like an animal crawling around Father’s body under the covers. Mother was sound asleep next to him—I could hear her heavy breathing.

‘The animal seemed to be crawling around his neck than his chest and stomach, and then Father sat up. I was startled.

“What are you doing Father?” I asked.

“Oh, you’re up,” he said, sounding surprised. “I’m giving myself a massage.”

“What’s a massage?” I asked.

“I’ll show you,” he said, and he took the cold towel (it was the middle of winter) proceeded to rub the back of his neck, his upper back and lower back, moving down his body to his toes. “It feels good,” he said. “Why don’t you try it? And he handed me the wet towel.

‘I rubbed the back of my neck with it, but it was so cold that I screamed and gave it back to him. I didn’t like the feeling. Father

laughed. Through all this noise and activity Mother remained asleep. I don't remember exactly what happened after that, but I think I crawled under the covers with Mother and Father got dressed and went into the Buddha Hall to do zazen.

'That was the beginning of your grandfather's day as long as I can remember. When he finished the massage, he'd practice zazen and then read one of the Wisdom Sutras. He didn't just read, as I said before, he bellowed it from the depth of his belly so that it vibrated throughout the temple. He said that when he recited it that way all thoughts disappeared and he became the recitation. I'm still not sure what he meant by 'becoming the recitation.'

'When we first moved to Zeze-an, Father had to suspend his morning routine until things settled and the temple started to look like a temple and not the ruins of a temple. So when he started it again, it felt like one of the final touches to things returning to normal.

'Your uncle, Yoshihisa (my younger brother), worshipped your grandfather. He followed Father around imitating everything he did. He even tried to practice zazen with Father and Uncle Imamura, though he would get restless after five minutes and quietly sneak out of the Buddha Hall. I remember watching your grandfather teach Yoshihisa how to harvest *daikon* radish. Yoshihisa had just pulled out the top part of a broken *daikon* and showed to Father.

"You have to dig deeper," Father told him. "Dig a wider circle around the plant and get your shovel down under it." When Yoshihisa pulled a whole *daikon*, they would both beam. Though I knew that Father loved us all, I would become jealous when I felt he was paying more attention to my brother than to me.

'When we finally got the room adjoining the family sleeping room cleaned and patched up so that one could live in it, I asked Father if I could sleep there. I wanted some privacy. Soon after, it became *my* bedroom. But it wasn't long before Yoshihisa asked if he too could sleep there. I said I didn't mind, which was a lie; I'd been given my own room and it made me feel like a grown up. Now I would have to share it with my young brother. When I went to bed late one night after doing my homework, I walked into the room and saw Father watching Yoshihisa sleep. He just stood there watching his son—

unaware that I had entered the room. When he did notice me, he turned and smiled.

"I wonder what he's dreaming about," he said. Then he left the room.

'I once remarked to Mother that Yoshihisa was Father's favorite.

'She chuckled, shaking her head, and told me it wasn't true. She became quietly thoughtful. "When your oldest brother was born we had barely enough food for the three of us," she said. "We didn't know if we could afford to support a family of four. Tokujoo's older brother offered to adopt the baby and he consented. I don't think he ever stopped feeling guilty about that decision. When our son Yoshihisa was born, your father looked at the tiny wrinkled baby, and told me he would never give this son up."

'After hearing Mother's explanation, I ceased feeling jealous.'

Fumie put her pen down again. She picked up the photo album and looked for photographs of Yoshihisa and her youngest brother, Teruyuki. The family didn't have their own camera, so all the pictures, with the exception of Tokujoo in front of Shutokuji Temple, were taken by Morio within the last year. There was one of Teruyuki riding his older brother like a horse. Both boys were laughing. In the next shot, Yoshihisa lifted his torso like a bucking stallion and Teruyuki fell backwards. In the third of the series, Teruyuki is lying on his back, apparently after the fall and still laughing as Yoshihisa looked on. Fumie thought about how caring Yoshihisa was with his little brother most of the time. Teruyuki idolized his older brother just as Yoshihisa idolized Tokujoo. She thought about her feelings of jealousy toward both her brothers. There was another reason for those childish feelings she'd had, one that she conspicuously left out of her journal. I don't want to tell my future children in this journal, she thought. If I do tell them, it will be in person. *If I ever do tell them.* Mother and Father know. If they haven't told anyone, I may take that secret to my grave.

She picked up the pen and resumed her story.

'Father was never very stern with any of us. He left the disciplining to Mother. But I do remember one time when he was unyielding with Yoshihisa. My brother didn't want to go to school one

morning. He stayed in bed under the covers until Mother came in to find out what was wrong. No matter what she said to him, he refused to get out of bed. He said he didn't feel well. Mother felt his head and told him that he had no fever so he had to go to school.

"I'm not going," he cried, very determined to have his way.

'I'd never seen him so determined. Finally, out of frustration, Mother went into the Buddha Hall where Father was doing zazen and asked him to talk with Yoshihisa. I was folding my *futon* with great care before putting it in the closet—taking my time so that I could stay there and see the outcome. Father walked in smiling as usual. He didn't ask me to leave the room, so I continued finding things to do. I folded my clothing, put my schoolbooks in order and did whatever I could to keep busy.

"What's the matter son?" Father said.

'Yoshihisa didn't answer.

"Do you feel sick?" Father asked.

'Still, no answer.

"Get up Yoshihisa, you have to go to school." Father didn't raise his voice, but there was something in the way he spoke, a quiet sense of command, that my brother must have felt (as I did), because Yoshihisa slowly got out of bed and started to collect his school clothes. Father stayed there watching him.

'Then, to my surprise, and I'm certain to Father's, Yoshihisa asked as he was dressing, "What does 'holy war' mean, Father?"

'Father's countenance changed. As he helped Yoshihisa put on his jacket, he asked, "Where did you hear the term 'holy war'?"

"Our social studies teacher said our country is fighting a holy war. Now all the other students are talking about the holy war. When I asked what it meant, they just laughed at me."

'Father looked relieved and concerned at the same time. The mystery of my brother's reluctance to go to school was solved. The problem of why the teacher would burden the students with that idiotic concept (that's how Father referred to it later when he explained the situation to Mother) still permeated the air.

"Son, the word 'holy' means something sacred, something that is considered special because of its purity, its cleanliness. War involves

killing. I don't think we can ever call something that involves killing, holy."

"Then my teacher is wrong."

'Father became thoughtful. He knew that Yoshihisa had a difficult time when he first entered elementary school. He was small for his age and quite frail looking. He had a very inquisitive mind and never tired of asking questions. It was a trait of Yoshihisa's that Father held dear. He was always ready to answer his son's questions, and Yoshihisa usually had a follow-up question and another and another... "That's what a Zen mind should be like," Father would say. Of course, Yoshihisa, getting such encouragement from Father, began to ask questions about everything that interested him to whomever happened to be present. He made the mistake of assuming that everyone would be like Father, rewarding him for his inquisitive mind.

'Father must have remembered Yoshihisa's complaints those first years at school. The students laughed when he asked questions in his Kyushu accent. He was very bright, and that too must have aroused the jealousy of the less bright and less inquisitive students. I knew from what Father had said on many occasions that he wasn't sure that his encouragement of Yoshihisa's inquiring mind was always a good thing for his son's sake. He told me that his own first teacher, the priest Doya, threw him out of the master's room countless times for asking so many questions.

'But Yoshihisa was in the fourth grade now, and he hadn't complained about school in over a year. Nevertheless Father was probably worried that Yoshihisa, who was the smallest boy in his class, may have been experiencing some bullying by some of the class troublemakers. Still he had to go to school.

'He continued to help Yoshihisa dress, but his mind seemed occupied. "I'm not an authority on this kind of thing," he finally said. "I simply have a different opinion than your teacher. It doesn't necessarily mean that he is wrong. But even if he is wrong, it is not a good idea for you to correct him. You should respect your teacher."

'Yoshihisa accepted Father's advice, though reluctantly, and said no more on the subject. He put his schoolbooks in his

daypack and walked into the dining room where Mother was placing a pot of rice on the table.'

Chapter 33

‘You may think it strange that I’m writing this for you before you are born, but it feels quite natural to me. It’s as though I am preparing myself for your entrance into this world and preparing you by teaching you about Zeze-an while the details of our move from Kurume in Kyushu to Komiya are still fresh in my mind. You may not be born in Zeze-an, but I want you to consider the temple your home.

‘It is not surprising your grandfather eventually won over the hearts of those who still considered themselves parishioners of Zeze-an. He worked hard—planting his garden and plum trees, slowly fixing the leaks and patching the doors and walls—whatever could be done on an extremely miniscule budget. He performed all the Buddhist rituals expected of a local priest, and most importantly, visited the personal shrines of the entire parish during *obon*, the festival for the departed souls. Because Zeze-an had not had a priest for twenty years before we arrived, most of those whose families had been connected with the temple had moved over the years to other temples for important rituals, especially for *obon*. As Father became popular with those who remained, word spread to other families—those whose grandparents or great grandparents had been parishioners of Zeze-an—and many of them returned to the temple of their ancestors.

‘More than Father’s hard work and devotion to the Way, it was his personality that was responsible for his growing popularity—his infectious laugh and the way he listened to people with his whole heart, people who desperately needed someone to listen to their troubles, who needed someone to listen without judging them.

‘People also returned to Zeze-an for reasons other than the personality of its priest. On the second of every January the temple held a celebration for the New Year. Mother’s cooking was one of the highlights of the evening, but the appearance of Uncle Kodo was the main attraction. Kodo Sawaki’s name was becoming known throughout Zen Buddhist communities in the country. That a famous priest would come each year to spend the New Year celebration with Father, elevated Father’s image in the eyes of the parishioners.

‘Uncle Kodo was a phenomenon. He told stories about his travels, about his childhood and about his first love—zazen. Once he got started talking, he mesmerized his audience with entertaining tales. Father called it a gift from the Buddha. He told me that in ancient times the temple was not only a place for the propagation of Buddhism, but was also where the community went for its entertainment. If the priest wanted to spread the faith to his followers and he simply droned on about the teachings, all his parishioners would show up for the theatrical events and stay home during the sermons. So he had to learn to be as entertaining as his professional competition. Father believed that somewhere in Uncle’s previous lives there must have been one truly talented preacher who could make the Dharma as exciting as a sensational Kabuki drama. He said that Uncle Kodo was that priest’s true heir.

‘I spent most of those New Year celebrations in the kitchen helping Mother prepare the food, but always with part of my attention focused on the Buddha Hall across from the dining room where Uncle Kodo talked to his captive audience. It wasn’t difficult to hear Uncle because he has the loudest voice I’ve ever heard. He said his strong vocal chords always got him in trouble when he was in elementary school. He was constantly being scolded for disrupting the class with his wisecracks. “And all the time I’d thought I’d been whispering,” he said.

‘Uncle talked about his years studying at the Nara School of Buddhist Studies after returning from serving in the Russo-Japanese war. He said that he kept receiving new nicknames. “To the neighborhood children I was Uncle *Okara*, because I was always going to the local Tofu store to purchase *okara* for practically nothing.” This refuse from soybeans after the juice was squeezed from them was the cheapest food you could buy. He said he walked around wearing robes with more holes in them than a fisherman’s net, which immediately attracted the attention of the children. When they saw him leave the tofu store regularly with a bag of *okara*, they would run after him, pointing to the bag and yelling, ‘Uncle Okara, Uncle Okara.’ I could hear Kodo in the adjoining room affecting a falsetto voice, dramatizing the children’s behavior to roars of

laughter. Of course Father, who'd probably heard the story a thousand times, laughed the loudest.

'Uncle told of a time he and some other students from the Nara school were walking home from class when they noticed a commotion around a well. One of the workers was trying to fish something out from the bottom of the well. Another was chastising his companion. "Idiot," he said, "I told you what would happen if you kept flipping the knife in the air like that! The boss is going to have your head on a platter if he learns that you've lost his valuable knife."

'While a crowd gathered around, many giving advice on how to retrieve the knife, Uncle quickly took off his robe and his loincloth (the only clothing he had under his robe), swished some water on his private parts so he wouldn't sully the well-water, grabbed onto the rope and descended into the well. He shimmied up the rope a few minutes later with the knife in his mouth and handed it to the worker. "You should have seen the looks on their faces when I stood there naked as the day I was born and handed him the knife," Uncle said, while the Zeze-an crowd was hysterical laughing. Uncle quickly dressed and walked on while the crowd was still trying to figure out what had happened.

"After that, some of my fellow students called me '*ninja* man,' others called me 'monkey man'," Uncle added.

"I might have been one of Japan's most feared gangsters if it weren't for people like Fueoka Roshi and this fellow over here (pointing to Father)," he told the Zeze-an parishioners on another occasion. Uncle had a special feeling for Father. He said to Mother once when she remarked that the Zeze-an parishioners come each New Year to be with him, "That is because they don't know what a gem they have here all year around. If they were able to see the true Dharma in the way Tokujoo lives, works and practices here, my visits would wear thin in comparison."

'Uncle didn't seem to like the adoration he experienced from many of the Zeze-an parishioners. Maybe that's why he enjoyed being with Yoshihisa and Teruyuki so much more. They loved him, not as one adores an adult, but rather, as though he were just another child—a particularly playful child. He was forever showing them magic tricks or clowning with them, and they never got enough

of it. I think Uncle may have had to grow up too fast when he was young and was now trying to capture some of the joy of youth that he'd missed.

'When I watched Uncle Kodo clowning with Yoshihisa and Teruyuki, I felt some of my old jealousy arise. He used to play with me when he visited us at Shutokuji when I was Yoshihisa's age, and I had fond memories of those times. I wanted to join my brothers and laugh like I used to, but I'd become too selfconscious. I was a grown girl and wasn't supposed to play silly childish games. I had to act like a young lady.'

Fumie put her pen down and sat by her desk staring out at no place in particular. She wondered what it was about Zeze-an that had such power over her. She couldn't even talk to her husband about the mysterious attraction the temple had for her, afraid it would make him feel he'd wronged her by dragging her away from her cherished abode. Though the move after their marriage took them only a few kilometers from Zeze-an, it did take her away from the daily activity of the temple. She knew how badly Morio had wanted them to have their own place, and a part of her had felt the same way. She didn't think she could even explain why Zeze-an meant so much to her. Was it a sense of pride she felt in that small country temple? She was certainly proud of how her father had taken the dilapidated neglected buildings and brought them back to life. Whatever the reason for the power she felt from this small country temple, she was sure that it was more than the fact that it had been her home for the last four years.

She hadn't always felt that way about living in a temple. She remembered times during her elementary school years living at Shutokuji Temple and feeling embarrassed about being the only student in her class having grown up in a house of worship. She'd wanted to be like everyone else, to blend in with her schoolmates when she entered elementary school. But being the daughter of a Zen priest made her unique, a curiosity, a cursed curiosity, and that was the last thing she desired.

As she grew, however, her feelings changed. Something about being next to a room where a statue of Buddha, The Illustrious One, sat in deep repose, a place where her father chanted Buddhist

prayers and her mother sometimes read along with him had slowly penetrated her being. She had become a part of something much grander than herself, and it felt good. She was no longer unique in a lonely sense of the word, but rather a member of a remarkable Buddhist family. She felt that her father had an important role in a great world ruled by an all-powerful Buddha. She had a place in that world and a father who was the humble servant of the Buddha. She would never feel alone again.

Fumie looked at the clock on her desk. I'd better get dinner started, she thought. It was difficult to think about dinner when she knew Morio wouldn't be there. Eating alone was no fun, and waiting for him to return before eating, when he'd probably already have eaten with the other staff members, made no sense. She stood up and walked into the kitchen. She started a fire under the stove, put two cups of rice into a pot of water and let it soak while she filled another pot with water. She added seaweed to one pot and rinsed rice in the other and placed them both on the fire. Then she returned to her desk, opened her journal and continued where she'd left off.

'Why did Father leave Shutokuji to come to this little village? I've often pondered that question. You might say, why don't you ask him? Well, you see, I have and he has answered me. But I have to say that your grandfather's answers are not always as straightforward as I would like them to be. He was a highly respected monk at Bairinji. So deciding to move to Komiya with a family of five to an abandoned temple may have been a decision for which he had some regrets. He said that he had been invited to take over Zeze-an by the priest of a temple nearby called Ryujin. He and that priest had trained together at Bairinji. However, I don't believe such an invitation alone would have been enough to get Father to pack his bags and take Mother, Yoshihisa, little Teruyuki and me to the other side of Japan, knowing little of the town and nothing of the temple to which he was going.

'I have my own theory about the move. When you come into this world and meet your grandfather, I think you will agree with me. He loves people, especially children. Despite his age and his position of responsibility, he has never lost his childlike nature. Your grandfather is the oldest, wisest child in the world. He also loves two families

simultaneously—the monastic family of the Buddha and the family he produced with your grandmother. Saint Shinran, founder of the True Pure Land school of Buddhism, described himself as half monk and half layman. I think that characterizes Father perfectly. He has one foot in each world, or better yet, two feet in both worlds.

‘When the priest of Ryujuin approached him about coming to Komiya, I believe Father thought about being close to Nobuyuki, his first son, whom he’d given to his brother in Tokyo to raise, and I’m certain he trusted his brother to take good care of the boy. But I think he wanted to be near enough to Nobuyuki to watch him grow up. Of course this is all speculation on my part, so maybe when you are with your grandfather some years from now you can ask him.’

Fumie went into the kitchen to check on the rice and to cut vegetables for the soup. She mixed some *miso* in a bowl with hot water and took out some pickled radish from the storage cabinet. The teachers meeting could be cut short, she thought; that had happened on occasion. She needed something, some reason, to encourage her to put an effort into preparing a meal; believing that her husband might possibly return for dinner would do. She loved to cook for others, especially Morio; and he seemed to take such pleasure in food, always praising her cooking. He was very considerate of her, unlike the average old-fashioned man in this antiquated village. Komiya is so close to Tokyo, the most modern city in Japan, and yet, compared even to Kurume it is a backward village. If the people here knew that Morio offered to borrow money from his parents to pay for our wedding, she thought, they would laugh him back to Tokyo.

She remembered how surprised he had been when she told him that her mother and she had saved money through their sidebusiness, working at home, sewing and cooking and teaching the parish girls those important skills. Though she appreciated his offer, she felt it important that her family pay its share of the wedding expenses.

Fumie’s mind drifted to thoughts about her mother, Yayo. She realized she hadn’t told her future children anything about their grandmother. She took the rice off the stove to simmer, put the

dissolved *miso* in the other pot, added the cut vegetables and returned to her desk.

‘I haven’t told you anything about your grandmother. She is truly the silent power behind the throne. Your grandfather is a wonderful priest and a very wise man, but when it comes to practical matters, well, he leaves a lot to be desired. I think that if he were left to his own devices, we would all be living in tents under his beautiful plum trees. Not that he didn’t work hard to put the temple in order—he certainly did—but it was Mother who had to constantly remind him what needed to be done. He never forgot to practice zazen or to read sutras, and he didn’t need anyone to remind him to take care of his plum trees, but the rest of the affairs—making sure the temple had enough money to function and seeing that we had enough food on the table—he seemed to feel he could leave all that to the Buddha. He was fond of saying “Things will be as they will be.”

‘I don’t want to give you the impression that Mother’s belief in the Buddha Way was any less devout than Father’s. It certainly wasn’t. However, she was not as great a believer in letting “things be as they will be.” How grateful I am for that! While Father had to bring life to the Buddhist teachings, Mother had to make sure all the pegs were solidly in place so that the house where the Buddha Dharma was taught didn’t fall down.

‘I was helping mother in the kitchen a few months before Morio and I got married when the postman delivered a letter. We rarely got mail at Zeze-an, so it was an exciting event when the postman showed up. It was a letter addressed to Father from Bairinji. Mother took the letter and stared at it for a moment, then a big smile spread across her face.

“It’s from Komushitsu Roshi,” she said. “I recognize his handwriting.”

‘Komushitsu was Father’s teacher at Bairinji. Mother knew Roshi well.

“Open it,” I said, seeing how curious she was.

“I can’t. It’s addressed to your father.”

‘I was surprised at how formal she was in dealing with Father’s mail. I followed her as she went into the garden where Father was

preparing one of the radish beds. I was becoming excited myself, seeing Mother so animated. She is from the old Kyushu stock. Women in that part of Japan rarely showed much emotion. I think it dates back to the attitude of the old samurai families where stoicism was an important trait for women as well as men. So the big smile on Mother's face made me aware of the importance of the occasion. She showed Father the letter and told him it was from Komushitsu Roshi. He didn't take it from her right away. He put his hoe down and went to wash his hands first. Then he came back, took the letter and walked to the veranda. We followed excitedly. He sat there staring at the letter while we waited patiently for him to open it. But he didn't. He just kept staring at the writing on the envelope. I think he was savoring the feeling of getting the letter and didn't want to spoil it by finding out its contents.

'Finally, he said, "It's from Roshi for sure."

'Mother stood there waiting. I could sense her frustration. She couldn't restrain herself any longer. "Well, aren't you going to open it?"

'Father looked at her, then at me, then back down at the letter and said, "I suppose I should." He proceeded to open it carefully, not wanting to tear any of the paper with Roshi's handwriting on it. He read it quietly, nodding every once in a while but saying nothing.

"Well?" Mother said. She was losing her patience with Father.

'He looked at her and smiled. Then he went back to the letter, reading it through again and looking up at Mother every once in a while. He must have realized how frustrated she was, but he kept on reading the letter. I could tell that he was thrilled to receive a letter from his teacher even though he too had learned from his years living in Kyushu the "art of restraint." But I also sensed that he was deriving some mischievous pleasure from Mother's frustration. Even I was finding it difficult to watch this scene.

"Father!" I finally said.

"Oh, yes," he said. "It seems that Roshi is sending a monk here to train with me. He says the fellow has completed his *koan* training at Bairinji and he wants me to fine-tune his practice. I think Roshi is preparing this monk to be the next abbot of Bairinji."

'Mother's face was beaming, but Father suddenly looked worried.

"I don't know if I have the skills to train a monk at that level," Father said.

"If Roshi feels you do, why don't you trust his judgment?" Mother said.

"I suppose you're right," Father said, and walked back to continue working on the radish bed.

'Mother and I returned to the kitchen.

'See, my children, your grandmother's job is a very complicated one. Working behind the scenes for a Zen Buddhist priest requires many talents one wouldn't usually think about.

'In addition to the practical things, another major part of her work was to instill confidence in her husband when he started to have doubts. Regardless of all his training, or maybe because of it, Father knew that he still had a great deal to learn. "I'm in the middle of my practice," was another one of his constant refrains. Mother had to encourage him so that he wouldn't paralyze himself by waiting for perfection.'

Fumie remembered she was returning to Zeze-an the following day and had to make preparations. It was the Ochiai Shrine festival, a big day of merry making in Komiya. She had promised to come and help her mother take care of her two brothers at the festival. Since Morio would be visiting his parents in Tokyo, and Tokujoo would also be in Tokyo visiting patrons, she was happy to have a reason to return to Zeze-an—she was needed. She closed her journal, put it away and went into the kitchen to eat her dinner, after which she would have fun choosing what to wear at the festival.

Chapter 34

Fumie was grateful that this Sunday morning, though hot, was less humid than the previous day. She had chosen a brown *yukata* and a solid matching sash, elegant, she thought, yet subdued so as to keep within the unwritten guidelines of a nation at war. Fumie knew, as did all of Japan's citizens, that one was expected to demonstrate even in one's dress the gravity of the nation's situation. She did her hair up in the manner of a married woman—a modest pompadour fastened with hairpin, exposing her neck and allowing the cool morning breeze to blow on it. She felt comfortable in her light cotton *yukata* though she knew it would be a hot afternoon. The heat I can tolerate, she thought, as long as the humidity stays this low.

It's going to be a beautiful day. If only Father hadn't had to go to Tokyo. She loved returning to Zeze-an for any occasion, but Tokujoo being away made it less joyful. The New Year celebrations were the most fun, with Uncle Kodo and Father together. She had similar feelings to those parishioners who said that they spent most of the year thinking about the New Year celebration and wondering what new stories Kodo would be telling.

When Fumie arrived, she saw her mother sitting in the front room sewing the last of the cotton kimonos for the festival at the Ochiai Shrine.

"You haven't finished sewing them yet, Mother?" Her mother had been asked by the committee in charge of setting up the festival to sew *yukata* for the community and had been working on them all week. Had she still been living at Zeze-an she too would have been sewing those informal kimonos and enjoying the labor.

"I would have finished if your brothers hadn't been bothering me all morning. I'm so glad you've come early." Yayo looked up from her work while her hands were still sewing. "I have to finish this last one. Yoshihisa is in a particularly bad mood, and his brother is not helping matters."

"What's bothering him?" Fumie placed a *furoshiki* bundle on the veranda and started to unwrap it.

"I'm not sure. Yoshihisa says his stomach hurts. But I can't tell whether it's the source of the problem. He jumped out of bed and ran

into our room certain he would catch your father before he left for Tokyo. He was disappointed. He then ran to the meditation hall hoping to catch him there, but it was empty. I wondered whether the stomachache was a result of his disappointment at missing his father or the overexcitement of the festival or a combination of the two.

"He asked me if Father had already gone, and when I said yes he seemed to get upset with me. I think he wanted my attention and didn't like the fact that I was absorbed in sewing the *yukatas*."

"Where is he now?"

"He's in his room getting dressed for the festival. When I asked him to help his brother, he said his brother was old enough to dress himself. Fumi-chan, could you go in there and see how they are doing?"

"All right Mother." Fumie took a jar from the *furoshiki* bundle. "I brought some fermented *natto*. Our neighbor makes it whenever she has a new crop of soybeans. I trade her my pickled *umeboshi* plums for her *natto*. It's a pretty good deal. I'll put them in the kitchen first."

She went into the kitchen, put the *natto* on the counter and then went to her brothers' room. As she approached the boys' room, she heard Yoshihisa yelling something at Teruyuki, but she couldn't make out what it was. She walked into the room.

"What's the matter *nii-chan*? She called him big brother, hoping it would calm him down. Yoshihisa was usually kind to his little brother. His attitude toward Teruyuki made Fumie fear that something was really wrong with his stomach.

"Teruyuki wants mother to dress him. He can't even dress himself."

"I can too. I just don't want to."

"Let me help you," Fumie said.

"Teruyuki's a baby."

"I am not."

"That's enough, Yoshihisa," Fumie said, getting Teruyuki's trousers from the closet. She was surprised at Yoshihisa's crankiness. She had never seen him this bad before. "Mother helped you dress when you were his age," she added.

Yoshihisa began searching through his drawer for his own clothes.

Fumie felt she'd been a bit too severe with him. "Mother said that you have a stomachache." She was putting the neck of Teruyuki's shirt over his head.

Yoshihisa gave his sister a quizzical look.

Could the excitement of the day have distracted Yoshihisa for the moment? Fumie wondered. He couldn't be in that much pain.

"I can never get up early enough to catch Father before he leaves," he said.

"You know your father. If you want to get up before him, you'd better not go to sleep in the first place. He probably was up by three, doing his massage, reading sutras and doing zazen, all before sunrise." Fumie thought about how many times she'd tried to get up early enough to read sutras with her father. She could feel her brother's frustration.

As Yoshihisa watched his sister help Teruyuki get dressed, he winced. Fumie noticed it.

"Is your stomachache back?"

Yoshihisa nodded.

"Maybe you should stay home and rest." Fumie felt a little deceitful, knowing Yoshihisa would never agree to stay home no matter how badly he felt. She suggested it to keep him from complaining.

Yoshihisa must have considered the possibility of missing the festival, because he quickly responded. "It doesn't hurt now."

After dressing Teruyuki, Fumie went to see how her mother was doing with the last *yukata*. She watched Yayo concentrating yet at ease, her hands moving quickly, propelled like a machine in high gear, totally absorbed in her sewing. The only time Mother appears relaxed is when she is working. Now that Fumie was out of Zeze-an taking care of her own house, she watched with new appreciation as her mother performed her duties.

"Is there anything I can do, Mother?"

"Can you give Yoshihisa and Teruyuki breakfast?" Yayo said, still sewing. "This will only take a little while longer. The rice gruel is cooking and the pickles are already cut."

"Certainly."

“Thanks, and don’t wait for me before eating. Otherwise we will never get out of here.”

Fumie went into the kitchen and checked the rice gruel. She took the pickled radish and cabbage out and placed them in a small dish and put them on the table. She then took the *natto* out of its container and put it in a bowl. She cut up some scallions, and after stirring the fermented soybeans until they were gooey, added the sliced scallions, mustard and soy sauce to it. When everything was ready, she called her brothers.

“Breakfast is ready.”

Teruyuki came running into the kitchen. When he saw the *natto*, he furrowed his face and pointed. “What’s that?”

“This is not the first time you’ve seen *natto*, so stop making that ugly face. You don’t have to eat it, you know. Your brother likes it. I’m sure he will be happy.”

“*Onii-chan* says that he’s skipping breakfast this morning.”

“Skipping breakfast? That’s not like Yoshihisa.”

Fumie became concerned again. Her brother hadn’t ever skipped a meal in as long as she could remember. She went into the other room looking for Yoshihisa. He was sitting in the corner packing his little daypack for the festival. “Is your stomach hurting that much, Yoshi?”

“I just don’t feel like having breakfast this morning.”

Fumie put her hand on his forehead. “You don’t have fever. Are you sure you are all right?”

“My stomach hurts sometimes. The pain comes and goes.”

“Rice gruel may help settle it for you. I brought some fresh *natto* too.”

When Yoshihisa heard *natto*, his expression changed. “It doesn’t hurt right now. Maybe I will have some *natto* and rice gruel.” Fumie smiled to herself, as her brother followed her into the kitchen.

While the children were eating, Yayo came into the room. “I’ve finished,” she said, and sat down and joined the family for breakfast. Yoshihisa appeared to have forgotten about his stomachache but was still complaining. “How come I’m the only male from this house going to the festival?”

If only Father were here, Fumie thought for what felt to her like the hundredth time. Father knows how to handle Yoshihisa in his gentle but commanding way.

"I'm a male," Teruyuki said, shoveling the rice gruel and pickles down.

"You're not a male, you're a baby."

"O.K. Stop arguing over something so silly," Fumie said.

"But I am a male," Teruyuki insisted.

"Yes you are," she agreed. "Now finish your breakfast so that we can get started."

"Sister, why isn't Uncle Morio coming?" Yoshihisa asked.

"He went to Tokyo to his parents' house."

"Everyone's gone to Tokyo."

Fumie felt relieved that breakfast was over. Once they get to the shrine she was certain everything would be okay. She helped Yayo clean the dishes, put away the food and wipe the table. They got their belongings together and walked to the Ochiai Shrine in what was turning out to be a beautiful summer morning. Fumie and her mother were carrying the remaining *yukatas* that Yayo had finished sewing the previous night and that morning. They also brought some rice-balls wrapped in a *furoshiki* for lunch. Yoshihisa packed his backpack with various knickknacks and his brother carried his favorite sword.

When they arrived at the shrine, people were still setting up for the festival. The vendors were erecting their stalls. There were sweet corn, dumplings, sugar ice, rock candy, cotton candy and little trinkets for sale, but far fewer than there were the year before. With each year the varieties of food and novelty toys decreased. As the government escalated the war with China and drained the treasury, officials talked to the people about sacrificing for the sake of the nation. Whether or not they believed in being frugal, everyone had to appear, at least, to be making an effort.

Yayo went directly to the festival committee leader and gave him the last of the *yukatas*. Fumie took Teruyuki's hand and went to see some of her old girlfriends from the neighborhood. They hadn't seen each other since Fumie's wedding. She knew she would be a celebrity, having been the first of her close friends to be married, and

though she would pretend that it was nothing special, she was very proud of her new status.

Her wedding had been the talk of Komiya—the first formal Buddhist wedding any of her friends had ever experienced.

“I never saw a Buddhist wedding before,” one of her girlfriends told her.

“Everything about it was fascinating,” another said. “The exchange of prayer beads before the altar, the reading of sutras, the bride and groom burning incense and bowing in front of the statue of the Buddha.”

Fumie realized that everything about her wedding compared with the simple ceremonies customarily held in homes in this tiny village must have appeared elaborate, even romantic to her friends, and she hoped that they didn’t feel jealous of her. On the other hand, she did want them to be a little envious.

When one of them said it was straight out of an ancient storybook, she became embarrassed and wanted to change the subject. Her friends asked her questions about her new life as Mrs. Kimura, and she tried to answer them without sounding too proud. While she was answering her friend’s questions, she had to contend with Teruyuki who was yanking on her arm wanting to move on to the exhibition booths.

“Where’s Yoshihisa? Yayo asked Fumie when she caught up with her.

“He ran off to find his friends.”

Yayo, Fumie and Teruyuki walked around the shrine grounds checking out all the sights. The air was full of smells of soy sauce, deep fried tofu, boiled rice dumplings and baked corn. Voices of the crowds and sounds of drumming and flute playing could be heard everywhere. A group was rehearsing its dance steps for the evening festivities.

“Can I have that?” Teruyuki asked, pointing to the hard candy.

“So far you’ve wanted something from every stand we’ve passed,” Fumie said, faking a look of annoyance. “I’ll get you some candy, but this better keep you until lunchtime.” She turned around and was surprised to see Yoshihisa behind them.

“What are you doing here? Haven’t your friends arrived yet?”

"My stomach hurts."

Yoshihisa stood there appearing to be in pain. His face was pale. Fumie put her hand on his forehead to feel for temperature. He didn't seem to have any but the loss of color concerned her greatly. She couldn't stop herself from wishing Tokujoo were around. She felt like the little child she'd been when she looked up to her father as a god. She almost longed for that time in her life.

"He doesn't have fever, but he looks pale."

"Where does it hurt?" Yayo asked.

Yoshihisa pointed to his stomach and then below it. "Here and here," he said.

"What does the pain feel like?"

Yoshihisa didn't seem to know how to answer.

"Is it a sharp pain? Does it sting?" Yayo asked.

"No."

"Is it a dull pain, like a muddy feeling?"

Yoshihisa nodded.

"Maybe we should take him to the doctor," Fumie said to her mother. "It doesn't seem like anything serious, but you can never tell." She was feeling uneasy while trying to hide it. She didn't want her own fears to unnecessarily upset her mother. After all it may turn out to be nothing to worry about.

"It's better not to take chances, Yayo said. "His stomach's been aching all morning. For Yoshihisa not to play with his friends he would have to be feeling pretty bad." Then turning to Teruyuki,

"Come on, we have to go home."

"I don't want to. We just got here."

"Your brother has a stomachache and we have to take him to the doctor," Fumie said, pulling a protesting Teruyuki along.

When Yoshihisa didn't object to their leaving the festival, Fumie grew more worried. She feared that her brother might be suffering from something far more serious than at first appeared. They walked slowly back to Zeze-an not wanting to aggravate Yoshihisa's condition. Fumie's glance moved from her brother to her mother and back. Yoshihisa was quiet and his face was pale. Yayo's expression was one of growing anxiety, which added to her own.

When they arrived at Zeze-an, Fumie suggested that she go and see if the doctor was in since it was Sunday. She wanted to do something right away, as much to calm her mother as to deal with her brother's condition. She told Yoshihisa to lie down and rest while she hurried to Dr. Kumagai's home.

She arrived at the doctor's out of breath. She was very athletic but wasn't used to moving so quickly in *geta* sandals.

"Excuse me?" she said at the entrance way, "Is anybody home?" What if he's out? she thought. He's the only doctor in Komiya. Her mind was creating one desperate scenario after another when the doctor's wife appeared at the door.

"Kimura-san, please come in. What brings you here today?"

Fumie gave a sigh of relief. "I wanted to inquire if the doctor was home. I know it's Sunday, but my brother, Yoshihisa, has had a stomachache all morning, and I wanted the doctor to look at him. It's probably nothing, but just in case..."

"My husband is out of town today, but his father is home. Let me check with him."

Akihira Kumagai had taken over his father's medical practice ten years ago. His father, in semi-retirement, still saw a few of his old patients. Fumie had run into the old doctor on the street the other week and he seemed so fragile. It had even taken him a few moments to recognize her though she'd been his patient for the last four years. She did her best to hide her disappointment from the old doctor's daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Kumagai returned with her father-in-law.

"Fumie-chan," he said, "what's the problem?"

"Hello, doctor. It's my brother, Yoshihisa. He has a stomachache and he looks quite pale. I don't think it's anything major, but I thought it might be good to have you look at him."

"Of course, bring him here and I'll take a look."

"Thank you, doctor. I'll bring him right away."

Fumie ran home and told her mother the doctor would see Yoshihisa. She didn't tell her that the son was out of town or her concerns about the old doctor's present state. At least someone would see Yoshihisa. Yayo went to fetch Yoshihisa, and together with Teruyuki, they walked to the doctor's home. Yoshihisa seemed to be

having trouble walking and Fumie could feel her mother's growing concern. Yayo carried a sun-umbrella and kept it over Yoshihisa so that the noonday sun wouldn't beat down on him.

They arrived at the doctor's a little after twelve. The day was heating up and they were all sweating from the walk. Mrs. Kumagai was waiting for them at the entrance and led them into the doctor's office. The old man looked at Yoshihisa and asked him to lie down on the mat. He went and got his stethoscope.

"Your sister tells me that you have a stomachache. Show me where it hurts."

Yoshihisa put his hand on his stomach and then a little below it. "All around here," he said.

The doctor felt Yoshihisa's stomach and pushed in a little bit. "Does it hurt here?"

Yoshihisa winced.

The doctor put his hand on different areas of Yoshihisa's stomach pushing down lightly and asking, "Does it hurt here? What about here? and here...?"

He put his stethoscope on the boy's heart and listened to his heartbeat. He asked Yoshihisa to turn on his side and to take deep breaths as he put the stethoscope on different spots on his back. He then told the boy to relax and he put the instrument away.

"His heart sounds fine and his breathing is good. I think you should let him rest and keep the area around the stomach warm. I'm sure he will be fine. Call me tomorrow and let me know if there is any change in his condition."

They thanked the doctor, took Yoshihisa home and put him to bed. Yayo took some ice from the refrigerator and wrapped a towel around it and placed the whole thing in plastic. Fumie watched her mother in wonder.

"The doctor said keep it warm, Mother. Why are you making a cold compress for him?"

"I don't know if it is appendicitis or not, but that is my biggest fear. I've seen many children with appendicitis and I know that you don't keep the area warm; you keep it cold. Dr. Kumagai didn't seem to know what to do or say. I'm not comfortable with his advice. Until we

are absolutely certain that it isn't appendicitis, I want to make sure we don't aggravate the appendix."

Fumie, too, felt that the doctor hadn't had any clear idea what the problem was. He hadn't given any reason for advising them to keep the area warm. She was surprised at how assertive her mother became at this point and trusted Yayo's judgment. How many times had her mother nursed her to health without her even seeing the doctor! She remained at her parents' house all afternoon, helping her mother, checking in on Yoshihisa and keeping her little brother, Teruyuki, entertained.

By late afternoon the area on the right side of Yoshihisa's lower abdomen started to redden. Fumie became increasingly worried. Seeing her mother's concern coupled with what appeared to her as Yayo's growing inability to do anything after having been so confident about using the cold compress, Fumie turned to her and said, "Mother, I'm going home to call a hired car to take Yoshihisa to the hospital at Hachioji. They have an internal medicine specialist there. I think we should have him look at Yoshi." She remembered Morio insisting that they get a telephone when they moved into their own home. He'd wondered out loud how they could live in this modern world without a phone at Zeze-an.

"Go quickly." Yayo said. "It's a long ride to the Hachioji Hospital. I think we've already waited too long."

Fumie left immediately and hurried home. When she was finally able to contact the hired-car company and find a driver available on a Sunday, it was close to nine in the evening. Her husband had returned by then from visiting his parents in Tokyo. When the car arrived at their house, Fumie and Morio were waiting outside. They jumped in the car.

"Please take us to Zeze-an temple quickly. We have to pick up my brother and take him to the Hachioji Hospital."

"I'm sorry I was so late madam. You see it's Sunday and I'm the only one working today and I had a call..."

"Just get us to Zeze-an as quickly as you can!" Fumie cut him off.

"Yes madam."

Morio put his hand on hers. "Calm down," he said. "Everything will be all right."

When they arrived in front of the temple, they got out and Fumie told the driver to wait there. Imamura had dropped by and was waiting with Yayo. He let Fumie get into the car first and then, together with Morio, carried Yoshihisa in, placing the boy's head on Fumie's lap. Then he held the door for Yayo and placed Yoshihisa's feet on her lap. Imamura and Morio followed. As soon as they were all in the car the driver stepped on the gas and drove off.

"Where is Teruyuki?" Fumie asked.

"I left him with a neighbor for the night." Yayo was looking as pale as Yoshihisa at this point.

Fumie reached over and put her hand on her mother's shoulder, trying to reassure Yayo and herself at the same time. She was jerked away from her mother as the driver sped around a curve. She wanted to tell the driver to slow down, but remembered her earlier instructions for him to go as quickly as possible.

"We have to get word to Father," Yayo said, her face becoming whiter and whiter.

"While we were waiting for the taxi, I sent a telegram to the home in Setagaya where he would be staying tonight," said Morio. "He should have gotten it by now."

Yayo turned to Fumie, "I think I'm going to vomit."

The words had barely gotten out of her mouth when she was vomiting in the car. Fumie knew that her mother had been prone to carsickness, and together with the fear for her son it was almost predictable that she would throw up. But in the excitement of the moment she hadn't thought to prepare for it. She quickly gave her mother a handkerchief. Fumie looked over at her brother. His nails were turning a bluish purple and he seemed to be in great pain. Is he going to die? she thought in a panic. But, when a few minutes later he appeared as though he felt some relief, her panic subsided.

It was early morning when they arrived at the hospital.

Yoshihisa grimaced, letting out a groan, as Imamura handed him to Morio. Hearing her son in pain, Yayo looked as if she were losing consciousness. Fumie ran to her mother's side and held her, as the two men carried the boy to the emergency room. The nurse on duty took one look at Yoshihisa and quickly called for the doctor. Imamura wiped Yoshihisa's forehead with a wet handkerchief, while Fumie

paced up and down the room, shuffling between the door to the hospital hall and the spot where her mother was standing. She walked to the door and looked down the hall many times as though it would quicken the doctor's arrival.

At last, to her relief, the doctor walked in. He didn't bother introducing himself. He walked over to Yoshihisa, looked at him, felt the area around the stomach and checked the boy's pulse. He turned to the family.

"Who's the father?" he said.

"His father is not here. I'm the boy's older sister."

The doctor looked at Fumie and signaled her to follow him into the hall.

"I'm afraid it's too late," he said. "We can't operate now. We're not set up for it, and besides it wouldn't save the boy—he's too far gone..." The declaration was like a bolt of lightning that went through every cell in Fumie's body. She felt her face aflame accompanied by nausea in her stomach. She became dizzy and had to lean against a wall. The doctor didn't explain why he'd come to that conclusion, and Fumie didn't know what to say.

Finally she mumbled almost inaudibly, "His father is on the way."

"Then all we can do is comfort the boy until his father gets here." The doctor walked back into the room with Fumie following. She felt such confusion she was unaware of her body. She wasn't even aware of the other people near her. The room seemed to swirl, but when she saw the stunned look on her mother's face, she immediately got hold of herself. She walked to her mother's side.

Outside the window she could hear the loud sound of early exercise music common in most communities. The people would gather around a radio and do their morning exercises to the music. It was part of the government's effort to get the people involved in the war machine. The noise was unbearable and only enraged her.

Yayo was mumbling. Fumie could make out something like "If only Father was here." Yayo kept repeating herself as though she were drugged. Imamura stayed by her side trying to comfort her, as Fumie went over to her brother. But Yayo seemed to be in a distant place.

The doctor gave Yoshihisa an injection of camphor to help stabilize him until his father arrived. Morio was talking with the doctor, asking why nothing could be done just as Tokujoo arrived. The doctor was explaining that the appendix had burst and that it was too late to operate. He repeated what he'd told Fumie about the hospital not having the proper equipment to perform the operation anyway.

Fumie wondered if the doctor was afraid that if he operated he would be blamed for the boy's death.

Tokujoo walked into the room and looked around. Nobody had to tell him what was happening. He knew that his son was dying. Fumie had never seen him look so vulnerable. He seemed to want to be with Yayo and Yoshihisa at the same time. He looked into his wife's eyes, straightened his body and took a deep breath. He walked over to Yoshihisa, his legs seeming unsteady, and took the boy's hand. Fumie was holding the other hand, looking directly at her brother.

Tokujoo held Yoshihisa's hand for a moment apparently making sure his son was aware of his presence. Then holding back his own tears, he said, "Son, you're going to a place where even I can't accompany you. You have to make the trip by yourself." He took another deep breath. "Recite the Heart Sutra with me." Yoshihisa nodded. They started to recite, *kanji zai bosatta gyo jin hanya hara mita ...* When they got to the end of the sutra, *gyate gyate hara gyate hara so gyate bo ji so waka hanya shin gyo* (gone, gone, gone to the other shore, landed at the other shore), the doctor took Tokujoo's hand and stopped him. "That's enough," he said. "Let the boy go. Let him relax." He didn't give Yoshihisa any more injections.

Yoshihisa died to the blare of the exercise music on the radio. Nothing was said. The sound of Yayo weeping in the background was deafening. Tokujoo stayed by Yayo's side while Fumie picked up her dead brother and carried him to the car. While she was holding him pus dripped out of his nose. All of a sudden, her strength gave way and she broke down.

"Why couldn't they have operated!" she said weeping. "Even if they used a razorblade, anything ... They didn't even try!" Her husband took the limp body of Yoshihisa from his wife as they all walked to the car.

Chapter 35

Tokujoo was in the Buddha Hall at Zeze-an practicing zazen. Months had gone by since Yoshihisa's death—not long enough, he thought, to remove the dark veil that wrapped itself over the temple. He sat aware of his body and the present moment, the center, which was where the mind returned after its wandering; returning and returning and returning. Yoshihisa's face with its pleading eyes appeared, those eyes that looked at him when he held the boy's hand just before life had left it. He saw Yayo, his wife, standing by a wall in the hospital room when he'd entered, looking at him, pleading, he'd supposed, for him to make things right. Tokujoo didn't want to return to present awareness, to the line of 'just sitting.' He thought of it as a line from which you strayed when thoughts and feelings pulled you here and there. No, he didn't want to let go of the feeling, the joy, or was it the familiarity, that the pain brought him. He wanted to think about his son. He didn't only miss the boy's cheerfulness, but also his complaining. He missed Yoshihisa's complaining dearly, so very dearly.

Tokujoo wished he had cancelled his trip to Tokyo that day and spent it with his son at the festival. He knew that Yayo too had her own misgivings. He'd heard her talk, half to herself, not realizing her words were audible, about being remiss for not rushing Yoshihisa to the hospital sooner. He didn't interrupt her when she got into those moods of remorse but tried to stay by her side and be with her in a quiet presence. Regrets were useless, he thought, but he could do nothing to stop himself from having them.

Why? Of all days, why did he have to be away on *that* day? Tokujoo wiped the tears from his eyes. At least his friend Soetsu Imamura had been there to help get his son to the hospital. But now Imamura was gone too. Said he wanted to deepen his practice by wandering the country in the manner of the ancients. Tokujoo remembered when he too went out in the world to practice like the ancients. He would miss Imamura.

Fumie too was no longer living at Zeze-an. He'd been happy for her having found a good husband to begin a new life with. But with Yoshihisa gone, he felt Yayo needed someone like Fumie to talk with

—to open her heart to. Why, he wondered can't I talk with her about our lost child?

Yoshihisa! Tokujoo's thoughts had taken him far, far from the pleading eyes of Yoshihisa, which had set him off in the first place. He returned to being in the moment, to just sitting. The incense stick had burned down. He felt like he'd just begun the last period of zazen and it was over. That's what happens when you sit in delusion, he thought, and couldn't help a little internal laughter, a painful laughter at himself for obsessing over his loss. Defeated once more by love, he said, and smiled.

"You have a guest," Yayo said, as Tokujoo walked out of the Buddha Hall. She was hanging the wash to dry on a clothesline not far from the hall.

Why wasn't Yayo with the guest or at least preparing tea to serve? "Who is it?" he asked.

"See for yourself," she said. "He's standing in the yard outside of the front room.

A surprising reaction for her to treat a guest that way, he thought. Who could it be? Tokujoo walked toward the front room and saw him, a rather unusual looking fellow dressed in a worn livery-coat, tight *momohiki* trousers and straw sandals. As Tokujoo got closer he saw a small frail looking man with somewhat bulging eyes and an other-worldly expression, as though he'd dropped out of the sky and found himself in the middle of an unknown land. Tokujoo wondered whether Yayo was afraid of him or just didn't want to deal with another beggar coming to the temple asking for a handout.

He approached the fellow cautiously. "Hello. What can I do for you?"

"I have a few questions I would like to ask you."

He speaks clearly and he doesn't have the smell of liquor on his breath, Tokujoo concluded, and decided to ask him in. "Come into the front reception room please." He looked the man over once more. A strange looking fellow for sure, looks like a ragged raccoon, wonder what he wants.

"My name is Koun Tsukada. I came here from Shinshu."

"Shinshu, that's the Japan Alps. You came hundreds of miles south to visit Zaze-an?" Tokujoo couldn't believe it. "What do you

want to ask?”

“I hear that you trained at Bairinji in Kurume?”

“Correct.”

“A pretty severe training monastery.”

“So they say.”

“Are you teaching monks here?”

“I practiced with another monk. He’s gone now. I wouldn’t say that I teach.” Tokujoo remained on his guard, as though he were responding to a tax collector. He listened to the man’s questions and answered them as carefully as he could. Koun Tsukada was respectful and appeared to listen to his responses with great interest. No surprises yet, Tokujoo thought, still waiting for the jolt—expecting the unexpected.

“May I study with you here, Roshi?”

There it is! “With me? Here?” Tokujoo looked him up and down again, and took a moment to reflect on the situation. He recognized something unique in the fellow and was intrigued by how he’d decided on a place to practice. This was the way teachers were chosen in ancient times. No letter of introduction, no recommendation from a recognized priest. Tokujoo liked that.

It may be a mistake to accept him without any more deliberation, he told himself; especially with the death of Yoshihisa still fresh in his mind. How would Yayo feel about a stranger joining them so soon? Maybe, on the other hand, the presence of someone new here would be just what she needed. He was intrigued by this new fellow, and by the unconventional way he chose to search for a teacher—unconventional in this modern world of temple protocol. He saw in this man and his nonconformity something of himself. Tokujoo wondered whether he’d appeared that strange when he showed up at Bairinji, a fortyyear old monk looking to start his practice there. He judged Tsukada to be about forty. He asked himself why he was being so cautious.

“Seeing that you came all this way from Shinshu and how it’s a long way to go back with nothing to show for it ...” Tokujoo hesitated and then continued, “but you see what kind of place this is ... there’s a temple down the road called Myokoin that’s empty. I’ll see if you can stay there and come here so that we can practice together.”

Koun Tsukada put his hands together in the prayer position and bowed his head. “I was beginning to despair of finding the right teacher, I graciously thank you.” He then opened up his bundle of belongings and took out his monk’s robe, his *okesa* and his kimono.

Well I’ll be damned! Tokujoo thought. This man is a monk. He must have wanted to test me—to see how I would treat a shoddy looking character. He created this scenario to find out if *I* was worth studying under—if this place lived up to *his* standards. He’s an interesting fellow indeed.

As they practiced together over the next few months Tokujoo got Tsukada (everyone called him Tsukada, he’d said) to reveal more and more of his training life before coming to Zeze-an. Tokujoo didn’t push him, as he realized that his new student was not very talkative, but little by little Tsukada let pieces of his life slip out.

Tokujoo knew about the kind of practice Tsukada had been involved in before coming to Zeze-an—nominally a Soto Zen practice, however, unlike most Soto Zen practices they used *koans* in their teaching. Tsukada had completed a large part of his training in accord with the traditional prescription of *koan* practice and had come to Tokujoo in order to further his study of the Way.

“My friend in Osaka told me to go to Zeze-an and check out this ‘hermit in the woods’,” Tsukada told Tokujoo when they were working together in the garden.

Tokujoo laughed out loud. “Hermit in the woods, is that what I am?”

“He’d heard about you from another monk who came from Bairinji,” Tsukada continued. “Your reputation followed you all the way to Tokyo. You can’t run away from it any more than the ancient Zen master, Daito, could hide from the Emperor Hanazono by living among beggars under the Gojo Bridge in Kyoto.”

Tokujoo knew of the famous legend of how the emperor searched for the founder of Daitokuji monastery. Emperor Hanazono learned that the eccentric monk loved *makuwa* melons and couldn’t resist them. So when it was rumored that the master was living under the Gojo Bridge disguised as a simple beggar, the emperor journeyed there by himself with a basket of melons. He showed the melons to the group of beggars and said, “I will give these melons to anyone

who can walk up to me and take them without using his feet.” One of the beggars stepped forward and said, “Give them to me without using your hands.” This must be my man, thought the emperor, and led the master to the imperial palace.

Tokujoo looked at his new student, shaking his head, thinking the comparison absurd, but secretly enjoying it.

Tsukada had been living in the temple down the road for six months, coming to Zeze-an for daily formal meetings, for zazen and to work around the temple when he made his request of Tokujoo. They were planting new plum saplings together in the garden.

“Do you think I could move to that shack over there?” he said, pointing to a dilapidated shack on the far side of the garden. I’d like to be closer to you.”

The shack was built of logs placed upright and tied together with rope for walls. The roof was a combination of rotting wood and bark. Thin straw matting had been placed over a wooden floor. It was so full of crevices and cracks that it became an abode for every kind of insect that existed in that area.

“Do you know what kind of place it is?” Tokujoo asked. He’d seen Tsukada looking inside the shack often and wondered when he would make his request.

“I’ve checked it out,” Tsukada said.

“Suit yourself. Don’t be surprised if you have to share it with a lot of unexpected guests—four and six legged creatures.” Tokujoo remembered his years on Hazama Mountain, the animals that came around to meditate with him and the bugs that sucked his blood. He caught himself feeling a little envious of Koun Tsukada, absurd as it was.

Shortly after Tsukada moved to the shack, Gensho Tokai arrived at Zeze-an. He’d been sent from Bairinji by Tokujoo’s teacher, Komushitsu.

“I don’t know why Komushitsu sent you to study with a farmer monk,” Tokujoo said in his self-effacing manner, “but you are welcome to practice here. There’s a temple down the road where Tsukada lived before moving into the shack over there. You can sleep there and come here for zazen and work.

Gensho shook his head. "Komushitsu Roshi said I should stay as close to you as possible. He said I have to watch the way you live your daily life as well as practicing meditation at Zeze-an. Can't I live with Tsukada-san in that shack?"

Tokujoo was surprised. That tricky teacher of mine! he thought. Komushitsu had told Tokujoo that he had big plans for Gensho and that he should watch him closely, but now he wondered if he'd really sent Gensho to keep *him* virtuous? "You're welcome to stay in the shack if you like. Tsukada has many fourlegged and six-legged friends there but no human companion."

When Tokujoo came to join Tsukada and Gensho in the shack for their first afternoon zazen together, he heard slapping sounds inside. They must be swatting mosquitoes, he thought, with a little smile. He went in and the slapping stopped. They sat for a period of zazen after which Tokujoo left to go to the Buddha Hall where his disciples would have formal *dokusan* with him. He paused outside the shack and heard the swatting resume. Tsukada and Gensho continued sitting a second period, waiting for their call to *dokusan*. Tokujoo rang his little bell twice for Tsukada to come to *dokusan* and three times for Gensho. He planned to alter the calls so that they would not know who would be called first. He felt that the surprise would make it easier for him to assess how well they had penetrated their *koan*.

"Are the mosquitoes getting to you?" Tokujoo asked Gensho at their first *dokusan* before giving him his *koan*.

"How come they never bite you?" Gensho asked, surprising Tokujoo with his candidness. Tokujoo laughed. This fellow is going to be fun to work with, he thought.

"When you get to sixty, your blood turns sour," Tokujoo said, still laughing. "Hasn't your training at Bairinji prepared you for the small hardship of a few mosquitoes," he added, wanting to hear his new student's response.

"The devils at Bairinji are the monks that train you. Once you've proved you can take it, they don't really push you anymore.

But these bugs don't ever let up."

Tokujoo was truly enjoying his new student. He remembered his training days at Bairinji. There was always one monk who would entertain the group when practice got tough. He was glad Tsukada had Gensho to lighten up his own training woes. He gave Gensho a *nanto koan* as his teacher Komushitsu had suggested in his letter. *Nanto koans* were considered the most difficult to solve.

“A water buffalo passes through a latticed window. His head, horns, and four legs all pass through, why can’t his tail pass through?”

As Gensho contemplated the *koan*, Tokujoo rang his bell indicating the end of *dokusan*. How many times had he, Tokujoo, heard that bell ring before he’d had a chance to sink his teeth into his newly assigned *koan*.

‘Why can’t his tail pass through?’ No other *koan* had as much meaning to Tokujoo as this one. There was always a feeling of incompleteness—something doesn’t ‘pass through.’ As Zen Master Dogen said in his ‘Koan of Life,’ (*genjo koan*), “When the Truth doesn’t fill your body and mind, you feel all is complete. When the Truth fills your body and mind, you know something is missing.” Nothing taught him the correctness of that statement like the experience of the death of his son. I am still in the middle of my practice—this limitless, beautiful practice—and here I am trying to teach others, he thought. He felt both blessed and frightened at the prospect of guiding these two advanced students.

Tokujoo worked with Koun Tsukada on the philosophical writings of Zen Master Dogen. Tsukada had completed his training in which he’d worked through all the *koans* from a Soto Zen collection of those paradoxical sayings of the patriarchs. Since Tsukada’s lineage was a branch of Dogen’s Soto Zen school, Tokujoo decided to help him understand the difficult passages from Dogen’s philosophical writings.

Tokujoo enjoyed training Tsukada and Gensho. He was glad to see that they got on well with each other and brought life back to Zeze-an. They cooked their meals on a self-constructed wood burning stove and practiced zazen in the shack. Most importantly from Tokujoo’s point of view was the fact that both of his new

students had warmed up to Yayo. He felt that because of their friendship her despondent periods were not as long or as severe.

One day while Tokujoo was practicing his calligraphy (it had become his custom to brush a page of characters from a sutra every morning after breakfast), Yayo rushed into his room.

"Come quickly," she shouted, hysterically.

He knew that Yayo didn't get that flustered over unimportant things, so he jumped up to follow her.

"I think the shack is on fire. Come, come," she kept shouting as she ran. Tokujoo was right behind her. He could see smoke pouring out of the windows, but there were no flames.

Yayo stood by the entrance while Tokujoo cautiously went inside. Through the heavy smoke he saw the two monks frantically fanning and coughing. Tsukada was roaring with laughter. Gensho picked up an earthen pot where the major part of the smoke was coming from. He was about to take it outside when he saw Tokujoo standing by the entrance. "It's Roshi," he called in a loud whisper.

Tsukada looked over and stopped laughing at once, and they both followed Tokujoo outside. Gensho was still carrying the earthen pot. Once Tokujoo knew there wasn't any real danger and he saw that Yayo no longer looked worried, he said, "Okay, what's this all about?" He had to make an effort to keep from laughing out loud.

"It was like this," Tsukada said. "We were practicing zazen and the bugs were really giving us a hard time. They weren't as bad when I lived here alone, but when Gensho came I think they thought we were going to fill the place with people and they would have to find a new home. So they really started assaulting us."

"There were so many, they were biting each other," Gensho said.

"Well, Gensho had this great idea," Tsukada said, paying no attention to Gensho's remark. "He said he'd learned it when he camped out with the monks at Bairinji. He went out and picked some special grasses and mixed them with twigs and placed them all in that earthen pot and brought it into our cabin."

Tokujoo noted with interest that Tsukada was calling it a cabin now rather than a shack.

"You thought it was a good idea, when I told you about it," Gensho said, defensively.

Tsukada ignored him. "So he brought the pot into the cabin and put a match to the mixture of grasses and twigs and for a while we weren't bothered by bugs. It worked well for the first five minutes. Then the room started to fill with smoke, and it got into our nose and throat and that's when you came in."

While Tokujoo was fighting with himself to remain serious and wondering whether he should reprimand them as if they were little children, Yayo burst out laughing. He hadn't heard her laugh like that in he couldn't remember how long, and it made him want to laugh and cry for joy.

Gensho, who had been red with embarrassment until then, started to laugh and in a moment all four of them were hysterical laughing. When the laughing died down, Tokujoo walked back to the main house with Yayo behind him.

The following day, when Tokujoo was weeding around his plum trees, Koun Tsukada came up to him and started to weed with him. It wasn't unusual for his monks to join him when he was working in the garden or weeding around the plum trees, but he knew this time that Tsukada had something on his mind. After working with Tsukada for a few months, it became easy for him to tell when his disciple had some special concern he wanted to talk about. He smiled at Tsukada and continued weeding, acting nonchalant, imitating his student's behavior. Then without looking up, he said, "What is it you wanted to ask?"

Though he thought he could sense Tsukada's disappointment that he had been found out, the disciple continued weeding. Feeling even more certain from Tsukada's behavior that he was trying to give the impression that he'd come simply to help weed, he wasn't about to let it go at that.

"What is it?" Tokujoo repeated. Now he could clearly see the chagrin on Tsukada's face.

"Gensho and I were thinking, uh..."

"Well thinking is not always bad. What is it that you were thinking?"

"We were thinking that it might be a good idea if we build a zendo. The cabin wasn't so bad in winter ... a little cold, but not bad ... but now that spring has come and the bugs are out, it really is uncomfortable to sit ..."

"You want to be comfortable?" Tokujoo interrupted.

"No, I don't mean that we're looking for comfort. Actually, it's more than uncomfortable; it's closer to unbearable. And the cabin is not going to stay up that much longer anyway. The roof is rotten. One good rain and we will have to put a new roof on it. And others are going to be coming here. Maybe not right away, but certainly some time in the future. We might as well start thinking about that now."

"You mean we should be planning for the future?" Tokujoo was springing a trap on his disciple and having fun doing it—a little sadistic fun, he reflected guiltily. Zen monks were supposed to live from day to day and Tsukada certainly realized that.

"Well no, not exactly," Tsukada said, seeming somewhat disoriented. "But if something needs to be done and it will also have some value in the future, it's just an added reason to do it, isn't it?"

Tokujoo looked at his disciple and thought he'd put him through enough of an ordeal. "OK," he said, "if you want to build a zendo, go ahead. But I won't be able to put one yen toward the expense."

"Of course, we understand that."

"Well, if you are certain you want to do it, you can build it over there on the other side of the garden. There's a patch of land that's not being used."

"Thank you." Tsukada said, and continued to help Tokujoo pull weeds around the baby plum trees.

Tokujoo smiled to himself again, realizing that Tsukada still wanted him to believe that the main purpose for his visit was to help with the weeding.

The prospect of a new zendo in the place of that dilapidated shack was exciting to Tokujoo, though he didn't show it outwardly. The stoic Zen attitude, especially in severe training monasteries like Shogenji and Bairinji, had become a part of him, despite his growing realization that it was a silly attitude for a monk who was supposed

to be free of pretenses. Since the building of the zendo was just an idea in Tsukada's mind, it might not come to fruition anyway, he told himself. That was his conclusion until the two monks approached him the next morning with their plan.

"We figured out what we need to build the new zendo and how much it will cost," Tsukada told him. "Gensho made friends with the contractor of the construction sight at the top of the hill, and he said he would hire us to do construction with his crew until the job was completed. Can we take him up on his offer?"

"You can," Tokujoo said, still sounding disinterested, while thinking to himself, they're actually going to do it!

The next day, after morning zazen and sutra reading, Tsukada and Gensho put on their work clothes and walked up the hill to begin their new job.

Weeks went by and Tokujoo noticed that his two students were looking thinner. They were also nodding off during morning zazen and losing their place when reading sutras. He didn't want to interfere with their plan, but he was worried about their health.

"Are you getting enough to eat?" he asked them after a very poorly performed morning service.

"We agreed to eat one bowl of rice a day while saving our money," Tsukada said. "It doesn't seem to be enough to sustain us."

"Well then eat one and a half or two bowls," he said, feeling irritated with them. "The Buddha tried to starve himself when he first left his home to practice with the religious ascetics, and learned from his experience that it didn't help him understand the true Way." Tokujoo realized he was scolding them and hadn't meant to. He just wanted them to use some common sense.

They increased their rations and Tokujoo noticed the difference within a few days. He felt like he was talking to two young Tokujoos and was glad that they weren't as stubborn as he'd been when he was their age. He talked with Yayo about Tsukada and Gensho's situation, and she started preparing side dishes for them to give them more energy. Tokujoo noticed that Yayo was happier when she prepared food for the two monks. Attending to their needs, must have helped take her mind off the death of Yoshihisa and the absence of Fumie since her marriage.

When the roadwork was finished, the monks still didn't have enough money to do the construction. Tsukada told Tokujoo that Gensho found work cutting trees in the mountains and he, Tsukada, was planning to do *takuhatsu* until they had enough to start building. Tokujoo suggested places where Tsukada could go to collect alms. He knew from his own trips doing *takuhatsu* that there were some neighborhoods where the people weren't used to that custom.

"They will think you're a homeless beggar," he told his disciple. "When I first moved here, the parish leader told me that if I did *takuhatsu* in the neighborhood around Zeze-an, the people wouldn't understand, and my children would be branded as children of vagabonds."

Tokujoo remained outwardly aloof from the fundraising project, while inwardly wondering when the building would begin. Without Tsukada or Gensho to help around the temple, he had so much to do to keep the weeds down, plant new crops and do the general maintenance at Zeze-an that he didn't have much time to be excited about the project anyway.

One day, approximately six months from the time Tokujoo had agreed to the construction of a new zendo, Tsukada and Gensho walked into the temple with a man dressed in tight leggings, *jikatabi* (workman's split-toed heavy-cloth shoes) and a workman's livery coat. Gensho introduced him to Tokujoo and Yayo, who had been working together in the garden.

"Okawa-san is the carpenter who built the house on the hill," Tsukada said. "He is between jobs and has agreed to oversee the construction of the zendo for free." Tsukada had a big smile on his face.

Tokujoo had never seen his disciple show such enthusiasm before. While remaining outwardly reserved himself, he was happy to see the monks so excited about the building project.

"Thank you for offering to help," he said to the carpenter. He bowed and returned to his work with Yayo following. Gensho and Tsukada took Okawa to the place where the zendo was to be built, and the three of them talked about how to proceed.

For the next few months Zeze-an was alive with activity. Tokujoo, watching unobtrusively from the sidelines, could feel an excitement

that helped lighten the mood of melancholy that had engulfed the temple since Yoshihisa's death. He knew the feeling would not last, but what *does* last? He was happy for the temporary reprieve, especially when he could see happiness in Yayo's eyes as she watched the construction.

Tsukada and Gensho took turns cooking for the crew which had grown to four as the carpenter brought along a helper who the monks agreed to pay as long as their funds lasted. Yayo provided them with drinks and made small talk. Tokujoo particularly appreciated Tsukada for the care he showed Yayo. He seemed to sense when Yayo was withdrawing into a melancholic state, perhaps at times of the day when she had in the past attended to Yoshihisa's needs. He would go over to talk with her to take her mind off her loss. Tokujoo remembered when Tsukada first showed up in his ragged clothing, and how Yayo had avoided him. He turned out, however, to be a truly sensitive person, who had apparently made it one of his missions to cheer up Yayo in what was the darkest period in her life.

Teruyuki, now seven years old, was a ball of total uninhibited excitement. As soon as he came home from school, he would run over to the construction site and ask the monks and the carpenter a slew of questions. He'd never been nearly as inquisitive as was his brother, so this new side of Teruyuki made Tokujoo feel that Yoshihisa's spirit had inhabited his younger brother's body. Though not a great believer in the spirit world, Tokujoo welcomed any intimation of the continuing presence of Yoshihisa.

Five weeks went by and the finishing touches were put on the new zendo. The monks hadn't had a formal roof-raising ceremony, and Tokujoo wondered whether they didn't want to attract his attention before the project was finished. Certainly they must have known that he was aware of their progress on the building.

"Tokujoo," Yayo called out one day when he was patching up a hole in the *shoji* screen door of the room facing the garden. "Come and see the new zendo."

"One minute," Tokujoo said, and put the last bit of paste on the paper and pressed it against the wooden frame. He closed the jar of

paste, put the stick-brush he'd used in another jar of water and went to the well to wash his hands, knowing that everyone was waiting for him. Finally, he walked over to his wife and followed her to the new zendo.

The two monks were standing by the entrance, Gensho smiling from ear to ear and Tsukada looking nervous.

"It's done," said Gensho, "and I think it looks pretty good, if I can boast for the both of us."

Tokujoo enjoyed Gensho's self-confidence and even his immodest behavior. He wondered, however, whether Komushitsu would agree. Maybe his teacher had wanted him to train Gensho so that when he returned to become abbot of Bairinji, in addition to having a deeper understanding of *koan* practice, he would be more humble.

Tokujoo and Yayo walked around the building. Tokujoo noticed that his wife was smiling her approval at the nervous looking Tsukada, hoping, he supposed, that she could help his disciple relax. He checked the roof, the foundation and the posts and how they connected to the walls—all the while maintaining what he hoped was a stoic, expressionless facade. It was not only a result of the habit he'd picked up from the martial type training at two severe Rinzai Zen temples that made him hide his emotions; he was acting that way as much to hint to the beaming Gensho that a little humiliation might be in order. He wondered if he'd been that cocky at Gensho's age.

When they came around to the entrance again, Tsukada invited them to inspect the inside.

Gensho gave an exaggerated bow. "Welcome to our humble home."

Tokujoo stood still for a moment while everyone waited. Yayo was beaming. That alone made this project worthwhile. All four of them took off their shoes and entered. The smell of fresh wood and new straw matting permeated the room.

Tokujoo examined every corner. Each time he noticed something new—the toilet, the kitchen, the *dokusan* room for formal meetings—he nodded his head slightly without any noticeable change of expression, and he moved on. He was, however, extremely

impressed that they could construct a zendo with a kitchen and toilet on the small amount of money they had earned at the construction sight and from the extra time given to *takuhatsu*. He checked the windowsill. Noticed some sawdust, which hadn't been wiped away, and he ran his fingers across it. Gensho's overconfident grin disappeared and Tokujoo smiled inwardly. He must have been sanding the windowsill, Tokujoo concluded, seeing Tsukada staring at Gensho and shaking his head. When Tokujoo had inspected every post and beam, he stepped down from the entrance. Everyone followed in silence.

He turned to his two disciples and said, "The ancients did zazen on rocks and under trees." He smiled and together with Yayo walked back to the garden to continue his work. They'll be trying to figure that one out for a while, he thought.

Chapter 36

Tokujoo and Yayo returned to the garden and worked in separate areas—Tokujoo planting sweet potatoes and Yayo thinning the young Chinese cabbage plants. Tokujoo noticed Yayo stop what she was doing and stare vacantly in the direction of the new zendo. He put his hand shovel down, took out a handkerchief and wiped his brow, his eyes focused on her. She turned her glance toward him, and as he looked into her eyes a pain gripped him so fiercely he could hardly breathe. He was certain that she too felt the heaviness in the air created by the pain they shared in that moment. He was aware of the extreme mood swings that still plagued Yayo, something she had been going through since Yoshihisa's death. He also knew that his own withdrawal into his work, keeping his feelings inside, wasn't helping matters. What could he do? He had never been expressive when it came to discussing feelings, but if there was ever a time when a change in that aspect of his personality was needed ... They worked through the rest of the afternoon in silence.

"I'm home," Teruyuki announced in a loud voice.

Tokujoo turned, first toward his son, who was standing by the entranceway with his backpack and schoolbooks, and then he looked toward Yayo. She immediately stopped her work and went to meet her son. Teruyuki took off his sandals, jumped up to the front room and Yayo followed. The *shoji* between the front room and the garden were wide open. Tokujoo put down his handshovel and watched as Teruyuki dropped his belongings one by one on his way to his room—his backpack, his jacket, his lunchbox, his hat and some papers, probably notices for parents from the school. Yayo followed him, picking up the things he'd dropped. As soon as he shed all of his baggage, he put his hand in his pocket and took out a shiny stone, stared at it for a moment, and then disappeared behind the sliding screen doors that separated the front room from his room. A few minutes later he came out and joined Tokujoo as he was using his hoe to cover the row of sweet potatoes he'd planted.

"What are you planting, Father?"

"Your favorite food."

"Cotton-candy?"

Tokujoo laughed. "When I learn how to grow a crop of cottoncandy, our financial worries will be over. Guess again."

"I give up."

"I'll give you a hint. It's sweet, and it's a potato."

"Sweet-potato."

"How'd you guess?"

Tokujoo continued covering the holes with cuts of potatoes in them.

"How was school today?" he asked.

"Boring."

He remembered Yoshihisa's response almost a year ago—*the same response to the same question*. He fought hard to control the wave of grief that swept over him. "What did you do at school?" he asked, trying a different approach.

"The baseball game was cancelled because three of our players were out with the flu."

"I see. Well what did you do?"

"And Jiro's father, who was supposed to give us a talk on being a firefighter, couldn't make it."

"That's too bad, so what *did* you do?"

"And the picnic was called off because our homeroom teacher had a cold."

"I didn't ask you what you didn't do because I thought that would be too broad a topic, but apparently that is all you want to tell me."

"We did the same stuff we do every day—boring."

Tokujoo gave up on the topic of school. He finished covering the last hole in that row and leaned on his hoe, looking at his son.

"The new zendo was finished today." he said.

Teruyuki perked up. "Can I go and see it now, Father?"

"After you change out of your school clothes and wash up."

Teruyuki went to change and came out in record time wearing his play clothes. Tokujoo could see Yayo in the front room still cleaning up after their son, picking up his school bag, folding his sweater and taking them into his room.

Teruyuki quickly washed up and went to see the zendo. Yayo returned to the garden to put her gloves and boots away and then went into the kitchen to start preparations for dinner. Tokujoo decided

not to plant another row of sweet potatoes. He put away his tools, cleaned up and went to the kitchen. He watched Yayo as she soaked the rice and washed the small Chinese cabbage plants she had just thinned from the garden. Then she opened a jar of pickled green vegetables, took some out and once more mixed the rice bran and salt in the jar with the remaining greens and closed it. Tokujoo stood there by the doorway as though in a trance. He wanted to say something—to open up a conversation about his feelings, about the pain and the loss that he knew was eating away at both of them. Yayo turned and looked at him.

“What do you want?” she asked.

Tokujoo was startled back into the present. “Can I help?” he said.

She looked at him quizzically. “Are you feeling all right?”

He was about to respond when Teruyuki walked in.

“That was quick,” Tokujoo said.

“Uncle Gensho wasn’t there and Uncle Tsukada was doing some work on the roof. There was nobody to talk to. Anyway, I’m hungry.”

“When aren’t you?” Yayo said. She poured him some barley tea and gave him a rice-ball wrapped in seaweed with a pickled plum inside.

Tokujoo stood there watching his son munch on the rice ball. Yayo went back to dinner preparations.

“Father, where did Yoshihisa go when he died?”

Yayo was cutting the pickles. Tokujoo caught her momentary pause before she resumed cutting. He didn’t know quite what to say to Teruyuki. The boy was only seven years old. Tokujoo thought for a moment.

“You know how you feel after a good night’s sleep, rested and raring to go?” He finally said.

Teruyuki nodded, though he looked perplexed.

“Yoshihisa is resting peacefully in that place you go after falling asleep and before waking.”

He could see that his explanation didn’t help. That’s what happens when I don’t give enough thought to my response, he chastised himself. Before he could try a different approach, Teruyuki looked up at him and said, “Am I going to die like Yoshihisa, Father?”

So that's what's troubling him, Tokujoo realized. He paused, wanting to respond this time with an answer that wouldn't confuse his son.

"Teruyuki, we can never be sure when we are going to die. But we did learn something from what happened to your brother. I can promise you that we will not let the same thing happen to you."

Teruyuki looked relieved after that explanation, which relieved Tokujoo too. But then Teruyuki said, "I miss my brother so much."

Yayo turned away from her son and started cutting more pickled vegetables. Tokujoo knew that she was hiding tears.

That evening after dinner Tokujoo went to the new zendo to meditate with the monks. During the second sitting, he rose from his cushion and moved to the adjoining *dokusan* room to hold the first formal meeting there with his two disciples. Tokujoo had gone through the motions of zazen with his monks but his mind constantly drifted. As he held this formal meeting in the *dokusan* room, he struggled to stay in the present in order to focus on his students. He hoped that they wouldn't realize that his heart was elsewhere.

After evening zazen, he went back to the main house where Teruyuki was practicing writing Japanese characters in his notebook. When his son completed a page of characters, he checked them and corrected some of the strokes. Here too Tokujoo's mind was somewhere else. He was thinking about his wife cleaning in the kitchen.

When Teruyuki finished his homework, he said goodnight to his father and went to bed. Tokujoo sat in the dining room and poured tea for Yayo and himself. Yayo came in and sat across from him. They quietly sipped their tea. When Yayo was looking down at her cup, Tokujoo looked at her intently.

"Something's on your mind," Tokujoo said. In fact, there was something on *his* mind. Why, he wondered, is it taking me so long!

Yayo looked up. "After visiting the new zendo, I walked away thinking about Yoshihisa," she said.

Tokujoo was silent.

"I've thought about him so often since his death it shouldn't be very surprising, but this time it felt more intense."

Tokujoo wondered if she had read his mind. He had resolved to open up, to talk with her about Yoshihisa in a way that would help them look more deeply into their own feelings. She beat me to it, he thought.

"I don't understand the connection, but it felt as though it had something to do with the completion of the new zendo." Yayo said. "When Teruyuki talked about his brother's death, he too had just come from seeing the zendo. I know it sounds crazy, but I feel the connection. Maybe the completion of the zendo is a message that life has to go on, and I am not willing to accept it."

Tokujoo listened, sipping his tea. "It doesn't sound crazy to me," he said.

They both became quiet.

"Yayo, I haven't been very helpful, keeping my feelings to myself these last few months. I've felt a deep sorrow that came and went and came again—waves of heavyheartedness that practically smothered me before another calm would come. I could see you going through something similar, but I didn't know how to help. The sadness I was feeling, the mind couldn't touch. The knowledge that others suffer too, many from greater losses, the awareness that the wheel of Dharma turns with its cycles of life and death, nothing could relieve me of the pain I felt. I just knew that I had to live with those waves, and I guess I believed that you did too."

Tokujoo became quiet again; relieved that he'd at least said something. But he knew that he couldn't end the conversation like that. He was too quiet too long and he could sense his wife's disappointment. He forced himself to continue.

"I felt a loss when my mother died. I meditated on it and learned to stay in the present and live with the fact of her death. Zazen helped me then, and I assumed I could depend on it to help me accept my son's death too. I treated meditation like some sort of fix-it-all, a mechanical practice. I assumed that what I'd experienced in meditation before was something I could call on whenever I needed it. Kodo-san always warned against attaching to experience, even the experience of enlightenment, and I thought I understood him at the time. But my understanding was an intellectual one. It hadn't penetrated to the depth of my being.

“It took the loss of our son, a loss that I couldn’t stay with no matter how much I’d learned to stay with other sorrows. When Yoshihisa died, the pain was intense. I meditated, attempting to sit with my pain, to sit with our son’s death—believing that if I didn’t try to escape the sorrow, I would learn through zazen how to deal with it. There were moments of relief, a feeling at times of some understanding, but I didn’t stop remembering, grieving or hurting for long. I simply could not stay with the sorrow completely.

“It was as though zazen was telling me, ‘How dare you assume that you know me! You must never stop trying to understand more deeply, though you will never *fully know*. You must dig and dig, for that is true zazen.’

“I would give my life to have our boy back, but that is not to be. My meditation practice will not bring him back, and it won’t stop me from missing him. But I still practice, knowing that the Dharma is deeper than I can fathom. It’s strange, but Yoshihisa’s death has taught me to practice no matter how desperate I feel. Our son has left me with a prize.”

Yayo was quiet. The two of them sat there in silence for a while. They looked at each other, and Tokujoo saw in her face, beyond her sad teary eyes, a look of calm release.

“Tokujoo, it’s getting late,” she said. “Time to go to bed.”

This ends Book III

Book IV

The Friendship

*Wind stirs cold woods
frosty moon shines*

*Guest arrives
conversation uplifting
we talk through the night*

*A skewer by the hearth
cooked potatoes go unnoticed*

*We listen quietly
falling leaves tapping on the window
sound of rain*

Zen master Jakushitsu Genko (1290 – 1367)

Chapter 37

January 2, 1941

The cold breeze through the open zendo window felt exhilarating on Tokujoo's face as he watched Teruyuki build a Bodhidharma snowman. The boy was constructing his work of art near the garden in front of the main house. It was the afternoon before the celebration welcoming in the New Year at Zeze-an. Tokujoo's mind drifted to thoughts of the boy's older brother Yoshihisa who had usually obsessed over a drawing or some other of his many hobbies. He wondered what project Yoshihisa would have been fixated on if only he hadn't ... catching himself drifting there again, he returned to cleaning the zendo in preparation for the evening celebration.

Along side Tokujoo was Gazan, the new monk in residence at Zeze-an. Gazan showed up at just the right time, he thought, because there was so much work that needed to be done around the temple. Tsukada and Gensho always returned to their respective home temples for the holidays. Fumie was in the kitchen helping her mother and Kodo would soon be arriving. Tokujoo looked forward to this day, to his friend's visit in particular, with the excitement of a schoolboy waiting for recess. I'm a sixty-four year old monk feeling like a boy of four, he thought, a little embarrassed.

Snow had been falling for the past two days, subsiding, but leaving a biting chill in the air. Tokujoo put down his cloth and returned to watching his son pack the head of the sculpture, step back and look at his work, return to the snowman, make a slight alteration and step back again.

The boy looked up the hill at the road leading to the temple as though he were searching for someone. Tokujoo knew who that someone was. Like father like son, he thought, smiling to himself. Teruyuki stopped his work and walked into the zendo.

"Is Uncle Kodo really coming Father?"

"Uncle has been here every year since he started teaching in Tokyo. If he doesn't show up, a lot of people besides you are going to be disappointed."

The boy returned to his work in progress.

Gazan laughed. "Your son has been in here every fifteen minutes asking if Kodo Roshi has arrived. I think he needs help with his snowman," he said, wiping the *tatami* mats with a cloth. Tokujoo was dusting the altar.

By late afternoon the sun, low in the sky, came out from behind the clouds. Tokujoo took a break from his cleaning and walked outside to see how his son's work was coming along.

"That's a very impressive looking snowman," he said. "Maybe you should consider becoming a carver of Buddhas." It had a strange resemblance to a Buddhist statue he'd seen but he couldn't place it.

Teruyuki continued working. Every few seconds he would check the path leading down from the hill. As Tokujoo was about to return to the zendo, he spotted the figure of a monk bouncing down the path. It was a gait he knew well. Teruyuki must have noticed him at the same time.

"Uncle Kodo!" the boy shouted and ran up the hill to meet Kodo Sawaki half way. He grabbed Kodo's hand and led him to the snowman.

Tokujoo, standing on the side, watched them.

Kodo was grinning from ear to ear.

"Look at my Bodhidharma snowman, Uncle."

"A fine snowman it is!" Kodo said. In cupped hands he was holding three packages wrapped in *furoshiki* scarves. Tokujoo waited for his son to notice the packages. He knew that Teruyuki's curiosity would soon divert his attention from his snowman project.

"What're in the packages, Uncle?"

Kodo looked down at the packages as if he was surprised to be carrying them. He put them under his left arm and scratched his chin.

"Let's see. Some dried persimmons in this one," pointing to the one on top, "some tangerines in this one," pointing to the one in the middle, "and ..."

Teruyuki waited patiently for Kodo to announce what was in the third package. Kodo kept looking at it as if he were trying to remember.

"Now what's in this one?" he said, scratching his clean-shaven head. "Why don't you take it inside and open it and see."

Teruyuki took the package, ran for the house, tearing the paper off as he went.

"You made it. We were getting worried," Tokujoo said. "I thought we would have to send out a search party."

"Happy New Year," Kodo said. Noticing the new zendo, he walked toward it.

Tokujoo followed him. He was glad Kodo noticed the building and he didn't have to call his friends attention to it. "What do you think?" Tokujoo asked. "Tsukada-kun and Gensho-kun worked pretty diligently building it. They were tired of being eaten up by mosquitoes when they had practiced in the old shed. Now the poor little critters have to find a new home. I think my students missed the point of zazen. They must have thought it was something you're supposed to enjoy." He was, in fact, very proud of the work his disciples had done.

Kodo circled the building, looking it up and down. "Not bad, not bad," he said. "They must have gotten tired of your quoting your favorite section in Dogen's *zuimonki*."

Tokujoo feigned a confused look.

"You know the one about finding a spot to practice zazen where the roof doesn't leak," Kodo said. When Tokujoo didn't respond, though he knew the exact passage his friend was referring to, Kodo continued, "*When Master Fang-hui first became abbot of the monastery on Mt. Yang-chi the temple buildings were dilapidated...*"

"Come inside and look at their workmanship," Tokujoo said, cutting him off in mid-sentence. He took off his sandals and stepped up to the zendo. Kodo followed. They walked around, Kodo inspecting every corner, as Tokujoo had done upon its completion when Tsukada and Gensho nervously stood by watching. This time it was Tokujoo who was nervous. He wanted Kodo to appreciate the workmanship and hoped he wouldn't find anything to criticize.

When Kodo appeared to be counting the *tatami* mats that comprised the meditation room, Tokujoo said, "It's small but sufficient. It can accommodate about a dozen monks."

Kodo's face wore an expression of nonchalance as he checked everywhere—the small kitchen, the *dokusan* room and the toilet—

not displaying any outward feelings. When he'd finished his inspection, he repeated, "Not bad," and walked outside.

Tokujoo relaxed. Kodo's two words were all he could expect in terms of praise from another Zen man. He felt that his friend was pleased and that pleased him. A cold early evening breeze blew on Tokujoo's face and he gestured to the main house. He walked to the entrance, took off his shoes and stepped up to the hallway. Kodo was right behind him.

"Yayo, Fumie, Sawaki-san is here."

The two women came out to greet Kodo, and he gave Yayo the remaining two packages. Teruyuki came running in the house with his new toy airplane that flew through the air with a flick of the wrist. "Thank you Uncle," he said as he set the plane to flight. It whizzed by Tokujoo, who had to duck to keep from getting hit.

"Teruyuki, take that outside. It's not made to be flown in the house!" Yayo scolded.

Teruyuki went running outside with his new toy and Kodo apologized. "I was debating between the airplane and a spinning top. I guess I made the wrong decision."

"I assure you he would not have been as happy with a top," Tokujoo said. "We'll just have to be mindful of flying objects when we walk around from now on."

Yayo thanked Kodo for the tangerines and dried persimmons and then returned to the kitchen with Fumie to continue preparation for the evening celebration. With Kodo following, Tokujoo walked toward the zendo to finish cleaning when he noticed two figures coming down the path. As they got closer Tokujoo recognized them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Tanaka, Happy New Year." Tokujoo greeted the couple as they approached the temple. Mr. Tanaka had recently been voted president of the Zeze-an parish committee and was a regular visitor at the temple. "You're early," Tokujoo said.

"Mrs. Tanaka came to help with the food preparation, and I thought I might help you set up the Buddha Hall," Mr. Tanaka said. His wife was carrying two packages.

"I had better bring these to the kitchen," Mrs. Tanaka said. "Yayo san may want to use them for tonight's meal."

Tokujoo walked to the entrance to the kitchen followed by the Tanakas and shouted, "Mrs. Tanaka is here." Fumie came out to meet them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Tanaka, welcome." She turned to Mrs. Tanaka, "Mother said you would be coming to help with the food preparation. Come this way."

Mrs. Tanaka walked into the kitchen followed by the three men. She greeted Yayo, and after putting two bags on the table, got right to work.

Tokujoo, Kodo and Mr. Tanaka excused themselves and walked toward the zendo. Gazan was coming toward them.

"The zendo is taken care of," he said, "I was going to start cleaning in the Buddha Hall."

With Gazan leading, the four men entered the Buddha Hall. Gazan went to the far end of the hall and began to wipe the lacquered altar while Tokujoo surveyed the place debating where to start cleaning. A small wooden statue of the Buddha behind an unglazed vase with a few pine branches in it sat on the altar.

Mr. Tanaka walked up to the altar and placed an envelope by the Buddha statue and bowed. Tokujoo was grateful for the contribution but felt a little anxious when he realized that the president was staring a bit too long at the statue. It was an ancient statue, missing part of its nose, one of its thumbs and its right ear. Tokujoo stared at the statue along with Tanaka. "Teruyuki's snowman," he said to himself, "that's what it looks like."

He thought he had said it to himself until he heard Tanaka say, "What?"

"Oh nothing," Tokujoo said, recalling a conversation he had had with Tanaka a few months before.

'Why don't you let us take up a collection and get a fine new Buddha statue for the altar,' the president had said.

Tokujoo had found the statue in a corner of the Buddha Hall among some rubble when he had moved to Zeze-an. He'd immediately felt something special about it. "I would rather keep this one," he had told Tanaka. "I kind of identify with it," he added. The president had looked dumbfounded but said no more. Tokujoo hoped

that would be the end of the discussion, but now he feared Tanaka might bring it up again.

“Let’s set up the room,” Kodo said, placing *zabaton* mats near one of the walls adjacent to the altar. Tanaka joined him and Tokujoo felt relieved. They placed mats all around the hall. The Buddha Hall, the only room at Zeze-an large enough to accommodate all the guests, was nevertheless small for a Buddha Hall.

By six o’clock people started arriving.

Tokujoo greeted the people as they arrived; Kodo was at his side. Most of them hadn’t seen the new zendo and Tokujoo proudly gave the tour to those interested. Next the guests went to the Buddhist altar and placed envelopes by it. From there they proceeded to a mat, sat down, and joined in one of the many conversations that took place simultaneously. Rice and various vegetable dishes were placed in front of each mat.

Tokujoo sat on one side of the room and Kodo on the other. People were eating, drinking *sake* and talking, and then most of the conversations stopped and Tokujoo heard the unmistakable voice of Kodo. His powerful voice would have drowned out any other conversation if there had been one, Tokujoo reflected, smiling to himself. He listened to Kodo with the others.

“... so I was asked to leave Daijiji monastery after being in charge of training for almost six years ...”

This is great Tokujoo thought. When that fellow tells one of his stories, everybody becomes engrossed in it and all I have to do is stoke the fire, so to speak. He truly enjoyed the fact that Kodo Sawaki was such a popular figure—the shining star of the party. It was a relaxing time for Tokujoo, and that was just fine with him. He would catch up on the year’s happenings with Kodo in the morning, as his friend always stayed the night. He picked up his glass of sake and took a sip. As Kodo talked, Tokujoo drifted into thought, returning once in a while to his friend’s voice.

“Having spent so much time at the monastery,” Kodo was saying, “I had many students who didn’t want to see me leave the area.” Kodo was telling about his life after leaving Daijiji Monastery, where he was head of training. “They took up a collection, each putting five-

yen in a pot. There were a hundred people, so they had collected five hundred yen. They gave it to me, and I rented a small house that I named Daitetsudo, The Great Iron Pavillion.

“A monk named Gido, who had been my attendant for the last two years, came with me. He was a wonderful gourmet cook. Together we ran short retreats for my students. I paid thirty yen to cover the first month’s rent and gave the rest to Gido to take care of the finances in general. What a mistake that was! Gido knew next to nothing about how to manage finances—knew little about how to manage life outside of a monastery. He was a great cook, however. He cooked wonderful meals for the retreats. Attendance grew as people heard about these retreats where you were served the best food in town. As the number of retreat participants grew, they couldn’t all fit in the pavilion, so we had people meditating in the garden and on the porch ...”

Tokujoo was eating and drinking, his mind often drifting. He’d heard the story before, so he just listened to the rhythm of Kodo’s voice, and it soothed him until he dozed. He woke up to people’s laughter and to Kodo saying, “... so we were broke within a few months, and if I hadn’t been hired by the university I would have had to come begging to Tokujoo-san. And he is the only monk I’ve ever known who took the monk’s vow of poverty to a higher level (or should I say lower level) than even I could imagine.”

Hearing his name, Tokujoo tried to clear the fog from his brain. He heard Mr. Tanaka’s voice and realized that the president was addressing him.

“If I may ask, Reverend Tokujoo, how did you and Reverend Kodo become acquainted?”

Tokujoo was certain that Kodo would be happy to tell the story of their first meeting. “Go ahead,” he said, looking at his friend.

But Kodo shook his head and gestured to Tokujoo. “Tanakasan asked you. I’d also like to hear *you* tell it.”

A small group of parishioners scooted nearer to Tokujoo in order to hear his story. Kodo also moved closer. Tokujoo didn’t like being the center of attention. He hadn’t expected Kodo to turn down the chance to tell a story. But he knew his friend well enough to recognize when he wasn’t going to budge. For some unknown

reason Kodo must have decided not to let him get out of this one. Tokujoo took a minute, feeling uncomfortable, with all eyes turned to him. He gathered his thoughts and began.

Chapter 38

November 1912

I had gone to Eihei-ji for the annual meeting to study the writing of Zen master Dogen shortly after my solo retreat on Hazama Mountain. I became friendly with a monk named Kanryo who, like myself, had started as a Soto Zen monk and changed to Rinzai. We were asked by one of the lecturers of the meeting, the abbot of Yosen-ji, a monastery in Ise, if we would help with the training of monks at his temple. Mizuno, that was the master's name, thought that the presence of monks like us, who had experienced the severe Rinzai Zen training, might inspire his own monks to train harder. Neither Kanryo nor I had any plans so we agreed to go.

As soon as we arrived we were greeted by Kodo who was the assistant head of training, the *tanto*. He welcomed us warmly. There was none of the tough posturing I'd become accustomed to from Zen monks during my five year stay at the 'devil's monastery' in Ibuka, where I'd trained before my solo retreat in the mountains. I felt an immediate connection with Kodo.

I remember my first visit to Kodo's room and how nervous I felt. We had often talked before in the common-room, but this was the first time I'd taken him up on his invitation to visit him in his room. I didn't want to impose upon the *tanto*, but I wanted to get to know him better. I walked down an open corridor with rooms on my left and a garden on the right. The garden consisted mostly of fine white gravel raked in simple patterns. The rooms had *shoji* sliding doors facing the garden. The translucent doors allowed light to enter even when they were closed. Kodo's room was the last one along the corridor. His door was open. He was sitting on the floor by a low table taking notes with three books open in front of him. A charcoal brazier and a small shelf with tea utensils lay alongside the table. Kodo didn't notice me standing in the corridor.

I watched him quietly from the entrance. He was so absorbed in his work that he didn't notice me standing there. I let out a very timid,

“Excuse me.” I’m sure it wasn’t the kind of announcement he expected from a Zen monk who’d trained at the “devil’s monastery.”

When he finally looked up and saw me standing there, he threw a mat to the other side of his small table and beckoned me to sit down. But I didn’t. I just stood there, looking around the room, surveying all his books. I couldn’t believe how many books he’d packed into that small room. I read some of the titles. Dogen’s “The Eye and Treasury of the True Law”; a translation of the Indian scholar Avagoshā’s “The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana”; The Complete Works of Shinran; Sōsan’s “Believing in the Mind;” works on every aspect of Buddhist teaching from India, China and Japan.

“Not much room to move around here,” I said. “You really like to read, don’t you?” A big grin appeared on Kodo’s face and that relaxed me. I’d felt that way each time we had met in the commonroom. Kodo had a way of relaxing me, though I don’t think it was anything he consciously did. I’m a shy fellow, but something about Kodo’s manner has always drawn me out. More than relaxed, I felt devilish. I took pleasure in throwing him off balance.

I remained standing and he gave up waiting for me to sit down. “Tell me about your five year retreat. What made you give it up and come to Yosenji Monastery?” he asked.

Strange as it may sound, insinuating that a Zen monk is scholarly is insulting. Most Zen monks spend their time deriding scholars for sitting behind a desk when they should be sitting on a cushion and meditating. I was sure that Kodo was attempting to change the subject because I was suggesting that he was a scholar. But that only fortified my resolve not to let him have his way.

“You certainly do have a lot of books,” I continued, ignoring his question. “Have you read them all?”

“I try to learn all I can about Buddhism. Now tell me about your retreat and what made you leave the tranquility of the mountains.”

Having pushed the book-jibe as far as I could for the moment, I walked over to the table and sat where he’d placed the mat. Enjoying the cool early evening breeze that came through the open *shoji* screens, I looked out at the bell-tower beyond the garden, taking some time to collect my thoughts.

"I'm really interested in why you decided to leave your mountain retreat," he said. "My parents are no longer alive so I need not worry about sending them money anymore. I'm free to have a solo retreat myself, something I've often longed to do. So I wonder what made you quit. Didn't it work for you?"

In the middle of the finely raked pebbles in the garden were a few low, carefully trimmed bushes around a stone lantern. I gazed at the garden while Kodo waited patiently, or perhaps not so patiently. "It was a very valuable experience," I finally said. "But it's a complicated story. I just came by to see your room and say hello. I realize that you have to plan your lecture for tomorrow morning, and I don't want to interfere with your work."

"Don't go just yet," he said. "First, tell me what made you leave your mountain retreat."

"Strange isn't it?" I said, thinking about the natural beauty that surrounded my mountain dwelling, and how it contrasted with the man-made garden I was staring at in front of the bell-tower.

"That's certainly an illuminating answer," Kodo said. I could feel his frustration mounting and was enjoying a little mischievous pleasure from it.

"I would sometimes be invited to a villager's home where I'd be treated to quite a feast. I'd eat until I was full and then sit around with the family and talk. We didn't talk about anything very profound; just some small talk about the crops that year or the changing weather pattern or about some animal that came down from the mountain that they had to kill to protect their fields. At some point in the evening I would feel weary—full of food that made my body bloated, and full of talk that made my head just as bloated. All I wanted to do was return to my mountain home and enjoy the peace and quiet of my little sanctuary."

"That's understandable." Kodo said.

"Maybe. But I started to wonder whether I wasn't becoming a bit strange, you know, kind of eccentric. I mean being by myself most of the time, talking once in a while to a squirrel or a warbler and being content knowing that they had no idea what I was talking about—enjoying the conversation for that very reason. You have to start wondering ..."

“So, you left the mountain because you thought you were becoming a bit strange?”

“Well, not exactly.”

“Because you were feeling confused about what you were doing with your life?”

“Not really.”

“It certainly isn’t easy to get a straight answer from you,” he said, shaking his head.

“There are no straight answers when it comes to human actions,” I said. “There are all kinds of forces that are at play when we make decisions. We just pick one that we like and say that’s the reason. But it’s never really that simple.”

“Then why don’t you just pick one that you like and tell me about it.”

Kodo looked exasperated, and I took some time to savor it before answering. I told him of the letter I’d received from my oldest brother telling me of what he’d described as my second oldest brother’s wife’s grave illness. She was living in Manchuria with her husband and needed someone to help nurse her.

“My oldest brother couldn’t leave his business, so he asked me to go in his place. Since what I was doing on the mountain had no value in his mind, in fact it made no sense to him at all, I was the perfect choice to go and help take care of my sister-in-law. My oldest brother, like my father, thought I should have stayed in the temple that had been purchased for me and become a respectable temple master. Though I’d disregarded my family’s wishes and abandoned that temple nine years ago, this time I felt it my duty to do what my brother asked, however beautiful and tranquil my life was most of the time on the mountain. So I went to Manchuria with the boat passage my brother had sent me. My sister-in-law recovered quickly, and I was back in Japan a few months later. Not having a particular place to go when I got back to Japan and still uncertain of how to proceed, I went to the *Genzo* meeting at Eihei-ji. A meeting to elucidate the teaching of Zen master Dogen seemed a good place to turn to help me get a better focus on my future. That was where I befriended Kanryo and met the abbot of this place. Mizuno Roshi asked Kanryo and me to come to Yosen-ji, and here I am.”

"You didn't think about returning to Hazama Mountain?" Kodo asked.

"No, I didn't. In fact, I had thought about leaving the mountain even before the letter came. I had experienced a degree of peace of mind there, but only as long as my circumstances didn't change. Change the circumstances and I was back to my old anxious self."

Kodo had what I took to be a confused look again. I needed to say more.

"Life on Hazama Mountain was ideal when I didn't have to meet people and make small talk. It was ideal when I could control my circumstances. But put me in a house in the village with a family—a family I liked, mind you—and I wanted to run away. This was not the behavior of one who was truly at peace with himself."

Kodo stood up, walked to the far corner of the room and took some pieces of charcoal from a box. He returned to his place by the table, put the charcoal on some paper in the brazier and lit the paper. He then blew on the flames with a bamboo tube. "Would you like some tea?"

"Sure."

He took a jug of water and a kettle from the shelf and brought them to the table. He poured water into the kettle and placed it on the brazier. "I'm no stranger to restlessness," he said. "However, I've always believed that the power of meditation would cure me. You're making me question that belief."

I remembered the story of the ancient master Niu-t'ou. He would sit in the mountains where birds flocked to him with flowers in their beaks, but when he met the fourth patriarch and learned the true Dharma, the birds stopped coming. "You know the story of the fourth patriarch and his disciple Niu-t'ou, don't you?" I asked.

Kodo nodded. "So, you're saying that like Niu-t'ou, you were becoming attached to quiet sitting?"

I shrugged.

"What do you plan to do now?" he asked.

"I know that this place isn't for me. Mizuno Roshi felt that since Kanryo and I had trained at Rinzai monasteries known for their severe training styles, we would be better equipped to bring an atmosphere of strict practice to Yosenji. It sounded like an interesting

project. Though I didn't realize it at the time, Roshi must have been frustrated with the lackadaisical attitude of the monks here. I guess you were asked to come here for the same reason."

"I was."

"Well, I think we are in agreement that you can't squeeze water from a stone. Most of the monks here may play along with us, but they are only biding their time. Anyway, I'm not much of a taskmaster. I find it a lot easier to push myself than to train others."

When the water boiled Kodo took two cups, a teapot and a container of green tea from the shelf and brought them to the table. He poured water in the cups and tea in the pot, letting the water cool a bit. "I don't think I could stay around here much longer myself," he said, "but I haven't figured out where to go next."

I knew that feeling only too well. This time, however, I had a plan. My friend Kanryo had a similar background to mine. Kanryo started as a Soto Zen monk and then switched to Rinzai because he couldn't find a good Soto temple at which to train. He went through the complete *koan* training under his teacher. He kept telling me that I couldn't judge *koan* Zen unless I'd followed it through to completion. He said that passing a few *koans* and then saying they're meaningless is like the blind man feeling the elephant's leg and saying it is the trunk of a tree.

I was aware of Kodo's criticism of koans. I even shared some of his distrust of the *koan* method. But I was beginning to distrust my distrust. I told Kodo what Kanryo had said.

He replied, "So Kanryo-san is suggesting that you spend years solving *koans* and then confirming that they're meaningless? I guess that's one way of killing time."

"It's funny that you should put it that way. It's not that far from the truth. Kanryo and I argued about the value of *koans* quite a bit. Then he said to me, 'Just go through the practice as though you were piling trash in a garbage dump,' and for some reason that appealed to me. I can't say exactly why, but it was easier for me to look at it that way than to think that I was doing something with great import."

When the water had cooled some, Kodo poured it from the cups to the teapot and watched for the leaves to open. He nodded at times in apparent agreement with me as I spoke, but I couldn't be

certain of his feelings. In fact, I suspected he didn't agree with me at all.

The decision to return to *koan* practice was very important to me. I wanted Kodo to understand and to support me in my resolve. In our few encounters up to now I'd felt that he had a natural insight into Buddhist practice. As I sensed his disagreement with my determination to go deeper into *koan* practice, I started to lose confidence.

He poured the tea back into the cups and passed one to me. We sipped our tea. Then he changed the subject. "Do you have any idea of where you will go from here?"

"Kanryo said there's this teacher named Sanshoken, who he has heard is an extraordinary master. He said he's met a few monks who studied under Master Sanshoken, and they had nothing but praise for him. Sanshoken is abbot of Bairinji Monastery in Kyushu. He suggested I practice *koan* Zen with him." I studied Kodo's reaction to Kanryo's suggestion, but he seemed to have moved on to the new subject of leaving Yosenji.

"I have a desire to do a solo retreat as you did, but I would also like to train with a group of serious practitioners. How's that for a contradiction?" Kodo said.

"Zen is full of contradictions. Our affinity for each other is one prime example," I said, laughing.

For the next few weeks I visited Kodo whenever both of us were free of our duties. I enjoyed our talks about Buddhism and learned more about his difficulty at attempting to train the monks at Yosenji Monastery. I welcomed his view of Buddhist practice no matter how much it differed from my own. Each of our Dharma battles felt refreshing and ended with a good laugh. I admired Kodo's rugged individualism. I felt akin to it. At some point in one of our conversations, we talked about leaving Yosenji.

"I'd like to travel with you," I told him. "But then we will need a cart for all those books."

"Don't start that again please."

"You're not planning to have me carry them for you now, are you?"

Kodo smiled and said nothing for a while. He seemed tongue-tied, an unusual state for him. Then, recovering, he said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give up my books if you give up this stepladder Zen?" Damn you, I thought. I knew he would eventually get back to questioning my decision to practice *koan* Zen. I didn't mind his being on the attack again, as it was one way we related to each other. It had its history in what we call Dharma combat. Zen monks have to try to dig deep into the meaning of their practice, and Dharma combat was one way of doing it. But Kodo was questioning a decision I'd already made and one that I felt would bring some real stability to my practice. I didn't want to hear anything to the contrary. I guess I wasn't ready to dig deep. I needed time to think of a good response.

"What is stepladder Zen?" I said, stalling.

"You know, you solve a *koan* and then you get another one and slowly work your way up the ladder of *satoris*," he said.

"You think I should practice *shikantaza* and just sit around and do nothing. I figure I am doing enough of that at other times when I'm not practicing anything." I was starting to lose my composure.

"I guess there's doing nothing and doing *nothing*. You know what I mean?"

"Yes I do. I practiced what I understood to be *shikantaza* during a good part of my stay at Shogenji and most of my time on Mount Hazama. I have no problem with it. I do think, however, that working through *koans* might help me see a different aspect of Zen. Since I haven't really had very positive experiences with *koans*, I'm just speculating. I may turn out to be mistaken. But until I follow through in the way my friend Kanryo suggested, I will never know."

I found myself becoming surprisingly defensive. "What on earth is it that bothers you so much about *koan* practice?" I said.

Picking up on my agitated response to his cynical description of *koans*, Kodo became uncharacteristically serious. He took his time, perhaps to gather his thoughts before he spoke.

"I'm not sure why, but I am suspicious of *koan* Zen," he finally said. "There's one thing I do remember that may have colored my feeling toward the practice. I did a few retreats with Oka Roshi, the famed Dogen scholar. A few months ago during a three-month

practice period, Oka Roshi asked me to take charge of the monks' hall. A visiting monk came to me one day, a very healthy looking young man with a lot of energy, and asked me if he could have a meeting with Oka Roshi. He wanted Roshi to confirm his understanding of the 'Shuzan and the Bride' *koan*."

Most of the *koans* I had studied came from the two big collections used at Rinzai temples—the 'Blue Cliff Record' and the 'Gateless Gate Collection.' I hadn't heard of the 'Shuzan and the Bride' *koan*.

"'Shuzan and the Bride'?" I said.

"It's from the Soto Zen collection, the *Shoyoroku*. A monk asked the master Shuzan, 'What is the Buddha?' Shuzan responded, 'The bride rides the donkey and her mother-in-law pulls it,' Kodo explained. "So, I arranged for this monk to have *dokusan* with Oka Roshi. I told Roshi that the fellow wanted to see him and have his understanding of the 'Shuzan's Bride' *koan* checked. Oka Roshi agreed to meet him.

"You have to know a little about Roshi's appearance to have an idea of what it means to face him in *dokusan*. His skin is dark and his face is full of pockmarks. His eyes are set deep in their sockets. They seem to shine from their depths. His nose is twice as big as mine and his lips too are large. His face is gigantic and quite frightening. He reminds you of the devils depicted in those temple roof tiles. And he has a voice to match—it comes from deep down in his abdomen. Just seeing him across from you in the meeting room and hearing his voice is enough to make you want to turn around and run.

"I was sitting in the adjoining room so I could hear everything that went on. Because the door to the room was slightly open, I was also able to see what occurred. Well, this fellow entered the *dokusan* room and performed the ritual bow. Then he proceeded to lift up his robe so that his behind was staring Roshi in the face. He mimed taking hold of the reins and trotted around the room braying like a donkey."

"How did he make out?" I was laughing so hard I had difficulty getting the words out.

"Need I say? First, Oka Roshi said with a wry smile, 'What the heck is that supposed to mean?' The fellow just continued circling

the room looking very serious braying his head off. Finally Roshi couldn't take it anymore and shouted in a thunderous voice, 'Stop this foolishness now!'

"The poor guy was shocked. He stood there with a blank look on his face. He was like a pigeon who'd just been shot with a slingshot. I guess that was all he had in his theatrical repertoire, because he just stood there for a moment, and then he bowed and left the room."

After recovering from my belly laugh, it occurred to me what Kodo was suggesting. It irritated me. "So you're going to judge the whole practice of *koan* Zen by the antics of one naïve monk, who just didn't get it?"

"I'm not saying *koans* are bad, Kodo said. "They were derived out of stories that were real in the lives of many of the ancients. Of course they have certain points to make. And they have a special appeal as well. They are anecdotes that reflect the spirit of Zen. But, when you get seduced by their charm though the story has no particular relationship to your actual life—that is to say, you feel some vague affinity to the message and you tell yourself, 'I'm going to become like that,' and you start to imitate the subject of the story ..."

I knew what Kodo meant, but the fact that it made sense to me only irritated me more. I didn't want my plans thwarted, and I wasn't about to give in so easily. I cut him off, saying, "Shall I then judge *shikantaza* by the monks who practice it at Yosenji?"

"You're right," Kodo said, in a rare moment of concession. "I only know about the practice I've involved myself in. I look forward to hearing about your experience when you complete your *koan* practice."

Kodo had this tentative look on his face as if he were contemplating whether to say something more on the subject. "My reaction to *koan* practice," he finally said, "is probably related more to my personal dilemma than to anything about *koans* per se. You see, I've always been plagued with a deeply competitive nature. It's not an obstacle in regular society which rewards people for that kind of spirit. That nature of mine had even served me well in the field of religious scholarship. It was this competitive nature that urged me on to study day and night to catch up with the other students at the

Horyuji School of Buddhist Studies when I had fallen behind all the other monks as a result of my years in the military. I was helped in many situations because of this nature of mine, in the worldly sense that is. In the deep religious sense, however, it can prove to be a real obstacle.

"I think I could really get into *koan* practice if I let myself. But I fear I would approach it in the same way I approached my Buddhist studies at Horyuji. I would run with it, as I've done with so many things in my past, in order to be number one, to beat out all the competition. I can see *koan* practice, in my case at least, leading me down a road that would be my destruction. I have to learn what it really means to just sit without any desire for anything ... without any toys, so to speak." He seemed to be debating whether to continue with that train of thought, but he didn't.

For my part, it wasn't anything I was ready to debate. I had made up my mind to practice *koan* Zen at Bairinji Monastery under the master Sanshoken and was in no mood to have anyone discourage me. I sat quietly listening but not hearing.

"Now, are we going to get away from this place or not?" Kodo said, bringing us back to our present plight, to my relief.

"I'm ready whenever you are," I said.

Kodo pushed the monks at Yosenji to the breaking point. I was in charge of the kitchen and had to listen to many of the complainers grumbling about him driving them like slaves.

"We've got to do something about the *tanto*," one of the senior monks said to me as I was chopping vegetables. He had just carried supplies into the kitchen and was stacking the cupboard. "He doesn't give a damn whether we collapse from exhaustion as long as we obey his sadistic rules."

If one of the senior monks is complaining that the religious practice is too severe, Yosenji Monastery is doomed, I thought. There were always novice monks who weren't fit to endure an arduous practice, but they usually either got used to it with time or left the monastery. But when the long-term practitioners are lazy, the place has no hope.

Smoke from the flames under the large vats of rice gruel and soup was rising to the high ceiling in the dark earthen floor kitchen. I couldn't see the senior's face, but I recognized him from his voice. I looked up for a second and continued cutting, angry with myself for saying nothing in Kodo's defense. I supported the *tanto* in his work, not minding the rigorous practice at all. But since Kodo was the one who set the schedule, he was blamed for being too severe. The other monks assumed that I agreed with them that the *tanto* was unfair.

We had to be up before dawn and practice zazen in the dark. Kodo gave lectures four times a day and joined us for meditation regularly. The hours of zazen were long and the sitting posture during lectures—upright, legs folded under you with your bottom on the back of your ankles—was painful.

"He's putting us through hell, "I heard one monk whisper to another during the moment of break between meditation periods.

"I've never seen the *tanto* sleep," responded the other monk. "It's just a matter of time before he collapses from exhaustion. All we have to do is wait and things will surely get easier."

But things didn't get easier. Kodo displayed his indefatigable energy, and the monks began to show their frustration.

"They make me feel like a villain," he told me, "but I don't know any other way to be."

Kodo didn't know how to ease up on them anymore than he knew how to be easy on himself.

"When I returned from a three-month retreat with Sotan Oka Roshi before you arrived at Yosenji," Kodo said on one of my visits to his room, "I could tell that the monks saw me as the ogre returning. I felt terrible returning to Yosenji to that kind of a reception. I actually considered softening my approach to practice, but then I read Dogen again, and I knew that I couldn't in right conscience do that. The teaching of our patriarch has become an obsession with me. Though I know now that it will never work at Yosenji, I can't do it any other way."

"I told you I'm ready to go whenever you are," I said. "But every time I bring up the problem of your boxes of books, you change the subject."

Kodo rolled his eyes. "I can take care of them. I'll have them sent to my brother's house in Tsu City."

"It sounds good to me. I'll pack my kimono and be ready to leave anytime."

"First I must talk to Kiyohara san," Kodo said.

Reverend Kiyohara, a chubby middle age monk with thick glasses and smile that seemed pasted on his face, was the *ino* at Yosenji. He had recommended Kodo for the position of *tanto*. Kiyohara had trained in Kyushu and heard good things about Kodo's earnestness and diligence as a practitioner. Kiyohara chuckled at everything. The one time I'd met him when Kodo and I were together he said something to Kodo about how Yosenji was the wrong place for him—laughing his jolly laugh as he made that observation.

"Well, don't take too long. I want to get to Bairinji Monastery while Sanshoken Roshi is still alive," I said.

Kodo said he would talk with Kiyohara and begin to make arrangements for someone to take over the training of the monks. A week went by and I became restless. I asked myself if he was ever going to be ready to leave. I know I should have waited for him or at least talked to him once more, but I didn't. I was still a very impatient person and feared that if I did talk with Kodo, he might convince me to stay a little longer. All I could think of was that I wanted to get to Bairinji Monastery and study with Sanshoken. So one morning, after giving instructions to my assistant in the kitchen, I packed my little bundle and left Yosenji before the sun came up.

Ten years had gone by before I learned about the circumstance around Kodo's departure from Yosenj Monastery. We'd met by chance in Kurume City near Bairinji Monastery, and he told me of his conversation with Reverend Kiyohara before he finally left the monastery.

"I'd wondered how long you would stay here training these monks," Kiyohara had said to Kodo chuckling in his characteristic way. "I hope you don't hold it against me for recommending that you come here. I'd foolishly entertained the idea that the monks here would be responsive to the vigor that you brought to the place. I'm afraid I was wrong."

"I may have been too hard on them. I just don't know any other way to be," Kodo said.

"It's not your fault that the monks nowadays haven't the stomach for rigorous practice. It's a sign of the times. Japan has become too affluent, and the result is a bunch of pampered children who say they want to be monks. What are your plans now?"

"I haven't finalized anything as of now. I will send my books to my brother in Tsu City and will visit him if I can. From there I will search for a place where I can find a situation that better suits me."

"It won't be easy, you know," Kiyohara said. "Since the Meiji government lifted the restriction on monks marrying, things have slowly deteriorated. Most monks look at religious training as something they have to go through before they can qualify as 'professional' priests. Few see religious practice as a means of waking up to the Buddha Way. I'm afraid you are going to find that wherever you go."

"I'll find something. Until my father died this year I had to be careful not to act impulsively. He wasn't capable of taking care of himself, so I had to make sure I could send him money to live. But now I have no dependents, and that gives me a little more freedom to search for a suitable place to practice."

"Kodo-san, if you don't mind living in an abandoned temple in the Nara hills, I know of a temple where you might be allowed to stay. The parishioners are looking for a caretaker. If it suits you, I can make the arrangements. It's a pretty isolated temple in the middle of a dense jungle-like woods, but if you're interested ..."

"It sounds like the kind of place that might suit me. However, I was planning to travel with Tokujoo-san for a while and see where it takes us. Since he plans to return to a Rinzai practice, we will probably part company at some time. But I think it might be good for both of us to practice together a little longer."

"Tokujoo-san? Is that the monk who has been running the kitchen these last six months?"

"Yes, that's the fellow. He's been coming to my room regularly when he's finished with his work, and we've had a lot of nice talks. I feel a real affinity with him."

"Well you're going to have to move pretty fast to catch him."

“What do you mean?”

“He’s gone. He left Yosenji early this morning. He told the assistant cook to take over for him. He explained all the procedures to the assistant, and then he packed his bags—I should say, he packed his little scarf-bag—and left.”

Chapter 39

It was getting late and people were starting to say their goodbyes at the Zeze-an New Year celebration. Tokujoo could see Yayo and Fumie at the door thanking the departing guests for having come and receiving compliments for the feast that the women had prepared. He knew he should get up and join them but was afraid he would stagger and maybe even fall on the way, so he decided to stay put.

He looked at the broken nosed, one eared Buddha on the altar, wondering if any of the other Zeze-an parishioners shared Tanaka's concerns about its unsuitability as the main image for the temple. He was sitting at the far end of the Buddha Hall with Kodo and a small group of people who had joined them and apparently couldn't get enough of the stories about his and Kodo's adventures. His face felt flushed and he became concerned about how much it showed. Having been thrown on stage to his chagrin, he'd been sipping a lot of sake in order to calm his nerves. Before he knew it he was quite tipsy. He had told the group of his first meeting with Kodo at Yosenji Monastery and was proud of his coherency considering how much sake he had consumed. Though Kodo drank very little, he laughed with drunken abandon at Tokujoo's depiction of their early days at Yosenji Monastery. It's like he is hearing stories about two eccentric monks he'd never met for the first time, Tokujoo mused.

"So Reverend Kato left you at Yosenji without any warning?" Tanaka asked.

They haven't had enough yet! Tokujoo said to himself of the small remaining group that didn't appear to have any intention of leaving. He'd felt relieved to have managed to tell of his and Kodo's meetings without too many faux pas, and he wasn't sure he wanted to continue, but he didn't seem to have a choice.

"I just pictured myself carrying half of those boxes of books and I knew I would never make it to Bairinji with that kind of load." Tokujoo said, feeling himself slurring his words. He looked around to see if he was making sense.

Kodo was staring at him, shaking his head. "And I thought I was impatient. When this fellow over here (pointing to Tokujoo) left

Yosenji, and I hadn't even figured out when I would leave. I was shocked. I knew I'd met my match."

"Knowing how fast you were, I thought I'd better get a head start since you'd soon catch up to me. I kept looking back wondering when you would overtake me." Tokujoo said, laughing.

"What did you do next?" Tanaka asked Kodo.

Tokujoo relaxed, knowing that once Kodo took the stage he was free to just sit back and listen for a while.

"First I visited my brother in Tsu City. I remember riding the train to his house and learning for the first time of the outbreak of the Great War. It was already the beginning of August, but I had been so busy I hadn't heard anything about the outside world during my last few months at Yosenji. Though I was out of contact with the world at large, I wanted to isolate myself even more. While Tokujoo-san was coming down from the mountain, I was dreaming of hiding away—taking over where he left off.

"I decided to take Reverend Kiyohara up on his offer to introduce me to the leader of this temple in Takami, a tiny mountain village in the Nara hills. It had a small parish and the village head was its spokesman. The temple was in a pretty remote area and very inaccessible. Since I wanted to devote a considerable amount of time to concentrated zazen, it seemed like the ideal place. I was very excited about my plan. It was going to be the launching of a new life—a life truly devoted to meditation."

Turning to Tokujoo he said, "You were partly responsible for this resolution, Hotei."

Tokujoo laughed along with the group at the reference to him as the Laughing Buddha.

"I made my way through the forest," Kodo continued, "and found this temple. From the looks of the only structure left standing—its thatched roof, the three large moss covered stone stairs leading to a veranda in front of four *shoji* sliding doors and wood paneled walls—I could imagine it once was an impressive compound. One thing that impressed me most was the thick posts that held up the roof. They were shorter than one would expect of a Buddha Hall of that size, usually a sign that they were cut at the bottom because of rotting,

possibly from termites. The remains of whatever structures had stood together with this Buddha Hall were hidden in the overgrowth.

"It was perfect. I couldn't imagine anyone plowing his way through the wilderness to get to this unusual temple. I was sure I would be left alone here to follow my plan. Unfortunately, the few parishioners left to care for the temple, who lived in a partly deserted nearby village, were not looking for a monk who wanted to use their temple for a retreat. They wanted a country priest who would perform ceremonies and be available to serve the needs of the villagers. So it didn't work out.

"What did you do next?" Tanaka asked.

"I felt discouraged, but I wasn't ready to give up. I remembered my old teacher from my days at the Nara School of Buddhist Studies, the high priest Join Saeki. When I left Nara, he told me to see him if I ever needed a place to practice.

"I'd heard that Jofukuji, a temple of which Join Sensei was nominally in charge, was uninhabited, and I hoped that he would offer it as a place where I could practice. I called on Sensei and I told him of my situation. He was happy to see me.

"If you don't mind a truly neglected temple that has no parish," he said, "you can stay at Jofukuji."

"It sounds perfect to me," I said.

The temple was falling apart, but it had a roof that didn't have any major leaks. Since it no longer had a parish, I didn't have to worry about people coming to visit. I couldn't have hoped for a better situation. I thought that finally I could put *shikantaza* to the test."

"What about you Reverend?" another parishioner said, turning to Tokujoo.

Tokujoo was thrown on stage again, and he wasn't excited about it. Could Kodo have finished his explanation so quickly? he wondered. What on earth was happening to his friend? He never told such an abbreviated story in the past. Tokujoo had felt himself getting confused at the end of his last story and had been relieved when it was over. Now, he would have to sober up quickly or he'd never be able to speak intelligently.

"Me? I, uh, I went, uh, directly to Bairinji." Tokujoo's Bairinji days were not easy, but his discovery of that monastery had been a

turning point in his practice, one that changed his life. He didn't talk about it much, but he'd often reflected on those very special years of his life. He felt, in retrospect, that his five years at Shogenji, the devils monastery, and the next five on Hazama Mountain were mere preparation for his real training at Bairinji Monastery. He didn't regret any of his training, not even roaming the streets of Tokyo and Nagoya, lost and confused. It was all necessary preparation, he thought. I'm just a late bloomer.

He looked around him at the small group of attentive parishioners, who seemed to be wondering when he would get on with his story. Well, here we go.

Chapter 40

September 1914

I remember getting off the train in Kurume and asking a rickshaw driver the way to Bairinji, The Plum Tree Grove Monastery.

"It's right around the corner," he said. Pointing in the direction behind me, he added, "You can see one of its walls from here."

I turned around and saw a huge mud and plaster wall like the one that surrounded Shogenji, the devil's monastery. I couldn't believe it. I'd expected the compound to be hidden away in the mountains, in a quiet area conducive to meditation. I walked around the corner, and sure enough the massive front gate leading to Bairinji stood there shielding the temple buildings from the city. But it couldn't shield them from the noise and hustle and bustle of an urban center that ran right up to the monastery walls. In front of the large gate were many small houses. There were a few shops, vegetable stands, noodle venders and some people going by in rickshaws, others on foot, all within a few steps of this large complex of temple buildings. I asked myself how anyone could practice meditation in such an environment.

I walked around to the back of the monastery and sat by a river that flowed behind Bairinji. The river offered me some solace. At least one side of this great monastery wasn't facing a busy street. The enormous wall facing the riverside was like a grand barrier protecting a fortress, and the river was its moat. I let my mind run with the river.

I had come all the way from Nagoya to Kurume and now I wasn't sure that I wanted to be here. But I was becoming aware of a pattern in my life. I'd run away from my own temple in Moriyama because I wasn't practicing the true way of the Buddha. That seemed quite clear at the time. Then I left Shogenji in Ibuka because they wanted to make me an officer of the monastery. That too made sense. I seemed to be the only one there who realized that I wasn't ready to teach. I needed to learn first. My years in Hazama Mountain were beautiful. I had the best opportunity to put zazen to the test. Sitting on the mountain was difficult at times, but I sat through the difficulties

and learned the power of meditation. I learned about living in a natural environment from the animals, from the plants, from the wind and the rain. I left the mountain because duty called, but I didn't return. The need to train with like-minded people seemed reason enough to not return to the mountain. However, there were always understandable reasons why I left the places I left. The Yosenji monks weren't serious about training. That too was a fact. But the other fact that I couldn't deny was that my way of dealing with all these adverse situations was to run away.

I threw a stone in the river and watched the ripples until the slow moving current engulfed them. Why did I always have difficulty staying in one place? A boat went past with a few fishermen untangling a net with their catch. I imagined they hadn't left the vicinity of that river in their whole lives. What was it that made me so damn restless? Why was there always some place somewhere else in the future better than where I was?

Now, here I was at Bairinji, and even before entering the monastery I was finding fault with it. I told myself that I should spend some time there before making any new moves. I was forty years old. At an age when most monks had completed their practice, I was entering a training monastery. I might have been breaking a record for being the oldest novice monk in Japan. I turned around and walked toward the entrance.

I had little difficulty adjusting to life at Bairinji Monastery. The meditation schedule—the long hours of sitting—was similar to that of Shogenji. The work schedule—mostly cleaning the temple complex—was not as strenuous as at Shogenji where along with cleaning the temple buildings we had to take care of the forest that was a part of the monastery property. Cutting down old trees and clearing away brush was an integral part of the Shogenji work schedule.

One thing that did make my stay at Bairinji trying was the humiliation of being bossed around by monks half my age. One day when I was sweeping leaves in the garden a young monk approached me.

“Hey old man, you're needed in the kitchen.”

As I gathered the stray leaves near the pile I'd just made to complete my job, he said, "Get a move on. We don't have all day!"

I could feel my blood boiling. That little shit-head; he must be about 18 years old. He acts like he runs the place.

"Did you hear me?"

I held myself in check. "Yes, I'm on my way."

It didn't matter how old you were or what your background was, if you arrived at the monastery one year or even one day later than another monk, you were his junior. I, at age forty, had to follow the orders of wise-ass monks in their teens who happened to arrive at the monastery before me; some of them seemed to take sadistic pride in making the "old monk" work for them. That was just one of the obstacles I had to overcome when I entered the monastery.

By the time I arrived at Bairinji, Sanshoken had retired. He was living in a retreat house called Boun-ro (Evening Cloud Hermitage), a beautiful one-room cottage within the temple walls.

It was across from the main Bairinji garden with the river on its far side. I was told that he only saw some of his long time disciples. This was the teacher I'd traveled from Yosenji to study with. I'd known hardly anything about the master other than what little my friend Kanryo had told me—but Kanryo had nothing but praise for him. Though I heard other monks at Bairinji speak fondly of Sanshoken, for me there was still a kind of mystery that surrounded him.

I saw Sanshoken's calligraphy and paintings in the commonrooms at the monastery. Many of them had beautiful renditions of plum blossoms, making me wonder whether he was responsible for all the plum trees planted around the monastery. The power demonstrated in his brush stroke and the strong individualistic style of his painting reinforced what I'd been told about the man—that he was a very dynamic teacher. Kanryo said that Sanshoken had devoted his life to reviving Buddhism during its decline in the late 1800s.

Along with my concern about practicing Zen amidst the noise of a monastery in an urban area, I had to consider that the teacher I'd come all that way to study with was not accessible to new students. I had always welcomed challenges, but this one was unique. I had to force myself to follow through with a practice in a place that had lost

its one major attraction. I'd learned to meditate under difficult circumstances—fear, confusion and sorrow—because it was the only way to overcome them. But now I had to deal with a new set of obstacles outside of my formal meditation practice—harassment from impudent young monks who had seniority over me, and inaccessibility to Sanshoken. I had to test whether I could apply what I'd learned from zazen in the other aspects of my life. That was not as simple as I'd imagined.

The teacher who was to be my regular master, Komushitsu, had a personality antithetical to that of Sanshoken. The only thing the new abbot had in common with his teacher was a complete devotion to the practice. My first meeting with Komushitsu Roshi came after dinner one evening when he summoned me to his room. The other monks expressed surprise that Roshi should make time to see me, a newly arrived monk, outside of formal *dokusan* meetings. I didn't know whether I should be honored or worried.

I entered Roshi's room after making the formal announcement of my arrival and sat across from him in the *seiza* posture on the other side of a low table. This was the first time I was able to see him close up. Komushitsu was a small frail looking man with sad, sleepy eyes and a small mouth that turned downward on the sides and protruded over a nearly non-existent chin. He appeared to be a shy man and reminded me more of a kindly grandmother than a roshi; there was none of the dynamism Sanshoken was reputed to have.

"Come a little closer," he said in a quiet voice that matched his quiet demeanor. He was folding and unfolding a handkerchief in such a nervous manner it made me nervous.

I moved closer to the table with my head bowed. I thought about the previous teachers I'd studied with: Soen Shaku with his bright alert penetrating eyes and fine features; Reicho Doshu with his peaceful, solid-as-a-rock deportment, and I couldn't help but feel I was in the presence of the most delicate roshi in Japan. It was comforting not to feel intimidated in his presence. On the other hand, I was hoping to study with a teacher that was at least *a little* intimidating.

He looked at me with what appeared to be careful deliberation before he spoke.

“You are quite a bit older than most of the monks that reside at Bairinji. Were you involved in some profession or business before you decided to become a monk?” he asked.

His language was polite and his thoughtful delivery was such a contrast from that of the other Bairinji monks that I wanted to respond in like manner. I didn’t only have difficulty speaking at what I perceived to be the proper level of sophistication, but I had to respond to a question about my past, the last of all possible questions in the world to which I would have chosen to respond.

“I’d trained at other monasteries and lived in the mountains practicing alone for some years before deciding on settling here at Bairinji,” I said, hoping my vague response would be enough and that he wouldn’t pursue this subject anymore.

“What made you settle on Bairinji?”

I was relieved to move away from my past and on to my reason for coming to Bairinji. “A friend of mine, a monk I spent some time with at Eiheiiji, told me about Sanshoken Roshi and encouraged me to study under him. My friend said that Roshi was an extraordinary teacher.” As soon as the word Sanshoken came out of my mouth, I wondered whether I’d been indiscrete. After all, Komushitsu was going to be my teacher and I was telling him that I’d come to the monastery to study with someone else. But I could see from his expression that I hadn’t blundered. His face lit up when he heard his teacher’s name. He was like a child proud of his father’s fame.

“Sanshoken Roshi. Yes indeed. Extraordinary, that’s what he is.”

I could sense that he was as happy to talk about his teacher as I was to get away from talking about myself.

“Sanshoken Roshi, extraordinary,” he repeated, this time as if to himself. For a moment he became lost in thought. Then, waking to the fact that I was still there, he talked about his teacher. “Roshi single-handedly brought life back to this monastery after the buildings had fallen into disrepair because of lack of funds, a result of the Meiji government’s decision to cease supporting Buddhist temples. Roshi told me about the time he’d lived in the *hondo*, the Main Hall, when there was no tile roofing. He said he had to carry an umbrella around in the middle of the *hondo* when it rained. The local farmers respected the way he worked so diligently to rebuild Bairinji,

so they donated wheat, vegetables, grain and other provisions to help support the temple.”

I wondered why he was going on at such lengths about his teacher. He was, however, leading to something, if in a rather round-a-bout way.

“Sanshoken Roshi not only rebuilt the physical structure of Bairinji,” he continued, “Roshi also created a training program that was more strenuous than any other Zen monastery in the country.” He talked in detail about the roughness of the training style, and then looked directly at me as if trying to read my reaction to what he’d said. Finally he got to his point. “It’s very severe as I’ve said, both physically and mentally. Do you think you can handle it?”

So that’s it, I realized. He was worried about someone my age having to endure a training program designed for much younger monks.

“I can train as hard as anyone,” I said, a little embarrassed at how confident I must have sounded.

Komushitsu seemed satisfied with my answer. He was quite talkative, I thought, for a Zen master. He made tea for me without the help of an assistant, brewing the tea with extreme care in which he truly seemed to take joy. Nothing he did, however, impressed me. I left Komushitsu’s room feeling dejected. I’d hoped to study with the dynamic Sanshoken, and I was being asked to settle for someone I perceived to be nowhere near his equal.

So along with having to live with young rascals who enjoyed taking their own frustrations out on the “old monk”, I had to study with a teacher to whom I felt no attraction whatsoever. I was about to face the biggest challenge of my career as a Buddhist practitioner. I told myself that I would see this through regardless of the challenges.

I expressed my disappointment at not having the opportunity to study with Sanshoken to a monk named Shojo with whom I’d become friendly. Shojo had shown me respect though he was my senior at Bairinji. He was younger than me by at least ten years, but that still made him old for a training monk. I think he respected me for my determination to study at Bairinji at my age.

“You will get a chance to have *dokusan* with Sanshoken if it’s that important to you,” Shojo said. “Sanshoken has *dokusan* with monks during the major *sesshin* of the year—*rohatsu sesshin*. Just make sure you queue up for *dokusan* on the line for Sanshoken during *rohatsu*.”

I was excited and couldn’t contain the joy this news brought.

Shojo shook his head and smiled. “I can’t imagine being so fired up by something like having *dokusan* with Sanshoken,” he said.

Rohatsu sesshin was the longest and most severe meditation retreat of the year beginning on the first of December and ending on the 8th. I will get my chance to see the real master then, I thought. I kept my spirits up by constantly reminding myself that my day was soon to come; the major retreat, *rohatsu sesshin*, was almost here. This next anniversary of the Buddha’s enlightenment will be my big opportunity. Until then I can take whatever manure these little scoundrels dish out.

I was pushed around and tested by many of the new monks—new to the temple, but senior to me. Even those fellows were impressed with how I accepted all their orders without complaint. But unlike my friend Shojo, they had to prove something to themselves. Some of the old timers seemed to watch with displeasure the way the young monks pushed me around, but they didn’t interfere with what had been an accepted mode of behavior at the monastery. Most of them had grown up in remote country areas in Kyushu. It was an area where the samurai code of ethics didn’t disappear even after a government regulation dissolved the special privileges granted to that martial class. They were tough and they respected the qualities of patience, perseverance and stoicism. They didn’t see any contradiction between the Buddha’s peaceful repose and the severity in the way new monks were tested before becoming full-fledged Buddhist practitioners. For the most part they didn’t see the contradiction because the only paradoxes in their lives were in the *koans* they worked on by themselves and in the *dokusan* room.

As the time for *rohatsu sesshin* approached the tension in the air was thick. The monks busied themselves with the many preparations for the eight-day retreat while mindful of the ominous training period

about to begin. I was probably the only one of the newcomers who was actually looking forward to it. For me, it was my chance to have *dokusan* with the real master. I'd experienced *rohatsu sesshin* at Shogenji a number of times and I didn't expect the Bairinji *sesshin* to be that much more challenging than the one at the devil's monastery. I turned out to be mistaken.

At two-thirty in the morning the sound of the big drum echoed throughout the monastery—loud deep thuds, slowly at first, then increasing in speed while softening in intensity and ending with a final loud thud and then repeating the pattern. No matter how many times I'd experienced this ritual at Shogenji and Yosenji, it still sent chills through my body. Meanwhile a monk ran through the building ringing a bell as the rest of us jumped out of our warm *futons* into the icy air, folded them and put them on the shelves above our meditation platform. We put on our undergarments, ran to the latrines, urinated, washed our hands and faces, and returned quickly to our places in the meditation hall. We took our robes from their hooks on the back wall, put them on over our undergarments and then took our *okesas*, which were folded in our cupboards, unfolded them and put them on. We stood in front of our meditation cushions, bowed to the monks at the cushions across from ours, puffed up our cushions and sat legs folded in zazen posture. I swayed back and forth, finding my center of gravity and began to meditate.

I sat upright anxiously anticipating the excitement of the hour. This was my one chance to show the big man, Sanshoken, who I am. The period went by quickly because I wasn't really there, not mentally that is. I was stuck in a world of thoughts, my mind totally undisciplined as a result of the excitement—like a monk practicing zazen for the first time. The only difference between a real beginner and me was that I didn't feel the severe pain in my legs or back. My years of zazen had made my legs flexible and my back strong. But the absence of pain only made it easier for thoughts to assault me. I'd been given the *koan*, *The oak tree in the garden*, months ago by the new, "grandmotherly" teacher Komushitsu. This was the ancient Joshu's response to a monk's question: "What is the meaning of the First Patriarch Bodhidharma's coming to China?" I hadn't given a

satisfactory response, though I had worked on it for months. This difficulty was new to me. But now I will meet Sanshoken I thought, the dynamic Zen master I'd traveled all this way to see. I will show him who I am. I was overwhelmed with energy—the challenge stimulated me but made settling down very difficult.

The oak tree in the garden. I repeated the phrase over and over, beginning to get into it. *The oak tree in the garden.* I became the oak tree. I swayed with the wind. I stood in the garden. I would soon meet Sanshoken in *dokusan*. *The oak tree in the garden.* I felt the bark, the leaves, the roots in the ground. *The oak tree in the garden.* I straightened my posture, pulled in my chin, relaxed my shoulders, and pushed out my lower abdomen. *The oak tree in the garden.* My breathing became steady—the oak tree's breathing became steady...

Woops! The appearance of the monk in charge of the zendo, the *jikijitsu*, walking in front of me brandishing his wake up stick brought me back to the consciousness of being there on my meditation cushion. The monk next to me was nodding. Bam, bam, bam the *keisaku* or “wake up” stick smacked against his shoulders. He bowed, the *jikijitsu* bowed and the monk resumed his zazen. Bam, bam, bam, another monk was being hit. I checked my posture and returned to my *koan*. Before long, I ceased to feel the separation between the oak tree, the garden and the zendo. I was the oak tree, I was the garden, I was Tokujoo sitting in the zendo. The bell rang—the sitting was over.

The monks stood in two rows in front of their meditation platform facing each other. Another bell and we bowed and turned to line up one behind the other. The head monk took off at a fast pace. I hadn't experienced this fast walking meditation since Shogenji. In Soto Zen monasteries the *kinhin* was slow, a mild meditative walking. In Rinzai Zen monasteries *kinhin* was intense like all Rinzai activities. You were at a jogging pace set by the head monk. The head monk moved faster and faster while you had to keep up with him, careful to keep a small gap between the monk in front of you and yourself.

The bell rang and the pace slowed down. We continued walking until we had all returned to our places in front of our cushions, and then we stopped. When the two lines of monks were standing in front

of their respective cushions facing each other, everyone bowed and returned to the seated posture. I returned to *The oak tree in the garden*. Then I heard the head monk yell, “*dokusan!*” I jumped up, put my cushion in order and joined the herd running to the *dokusan* room. Now is my chance, I thought.

Sandals were flying as each of us ran to be first in line queuing up to see the master. I was quick; I was right in front of the herd when I saw four ominous men in robes standing by the *dokusan* room glaring at us as we approached.

“Get back to your cushions!” one of them shouted. The herd stopped, each monk banging into the one before him. “I said get back to your cushions, now!” another shouted. I stopped and wondered what to do. I turned around and saw some monks returning to their cushions. I felt the wake up stick strike my shoulder. “Did you hear me?” Bam, bam ... “I said get back to your cushion.” I walked back to my place, puffed up my cushion and sat down. I settled once more on my cushion, not knowing what to make of the strange occurrence when one of the officer monks walked in front of me and stopped.

“Didn’t you hear me say *dokusan*? Get up and go to *dokusan*, immediately!”

I got up and went back toward the *dokusan* line. I was not alone. Others who had returned to their cushions when I did were also told to go back to *dokusan*. Again I saw the black robed devils glaring at me. “Are you deaf? What do you think you’re doing loitering around here in front of Roshi’s room?” one of them shouted. “We said to get back to your cushions and sit!” This time they didn’t wait for us to turn. They just started swinging their sticks driving everyone back to the zendo. And again in the zendo we were told to go to *dokusan*. Those who didn’t move were driven from their cushions with the stick.

Some of those black-robed monsters were black belts in Judo. Nobody wanted to challenge them. I felt like a yo-yo—going back and forth and then:

Aha! This is part of the process, I realized. That’s why some of the veterans were let through. They were testing us new monks. In Shogenji the so-called “devil’s monastery” the *jikijitsu*, would

sometimes have to grab someone from his cushion and push him to *dokusan*. I remembered one fellow holding on to his cushion for dear life refusing to go, while the *jikijitsu* dragged him out of the room. But that was just one way. Here they sandwiched you in, one pushing you in this direction and another pulling you in the opposite direction. It was brutal!

Well here goes, I told myself and got up again and went to the *dokusan* line. I walked right through the pack of sentries; I was determined to queue up to see the old master. I ignored their shouts of abuse and smacks with the *keisaku* and got in line. Once I resolved to go to *dokusan* no matter what, something changed inside me. There no longer were any obstacles. The monsters guarding the gate must have been able to sense when someone broke through his own mental barrier, because they let me through. I sat in back of the queue, in *seiza*, feeling a sense of accomplishment. I'd made it! I was proud of my accomplishment. In the hustle I'd practically forgotten why I was there. "*The oak tree in the garden*," I reminded myself.

I moved up to the front of the line, telling myself, This is it!

One of the black robed devils walked up and down the line glaring at everybody like a sadistic prison guard. He stopped in front of me. He grabbed me by the collar and glared at me.

"You think you're going to have *dokusan* with Roshi, do you? Sanshoken is too good for you."

He practically lifted me off the ground by my collar, pulling me out of line and, in front of everyone, shouted in my face. "I said Sanshoken Roshi is too good for you. Get in line for the new teacher!"

That meant back to Komushitsu, the unimpressive master I'd been studying with since I'd arrived at Bairinji. I was in a state of shock. I thought I'd learned to control my temper over the last few months. I'd even taken some pride in having obeyed the young rascals as they ordered me around. But this was too much. Here I was with the big opportunity I'd been waiting for. Now this son-of-a-bitch wanted to sabotage my chance to meet with Sanshoken. I couldn't let this happen. Did this idiot think it was my first *sesshin*? I got back in line. Then the bastard smacked me a few times with the

keisaku, grabbed me again by the collar and dragged me over to the line for Komushitsu,

I finally relented and waited in line for Komushitsu. What else could I do? I'll have to wait until next year, I told myself. Though I gave in to the inevitable, I was devastated. I had so much pent up in me I wanted to scream. I'd let go of my resistance to what couldn't be reversed, but I couldn't drop my feelings of resentment. I was still fuming inside.

One of the *keisaku* carrying devils, a tall man with a slender but athletic build, was watching me intently. His name was Kyosu. He had been studying at Bairinji for many years under Sanshoken. I had had some contact with him during the last few months at Bairinji, but only as part of a work party. Kyosu had a big round face, too round for his body, thick eyebrows and penetrating eyes. He laughed easily and seemed a pleasant enough fellow, even gentle for a Bairinji monk. But *rohatsu sesshin* changed him. His normally smiling eyes were now glaring like the fierce paintings of the first Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma. He walked up and down the line of the new monks waiting for *dokusan* with Komushitsu—I could feel him focusing most of the time on me, could even sense his glare though I wasn't looking at him. The air felt charged with electricity whenever he got near me.

I was still trying to cool down and ready myself for *dokusan*. I brought myself back to *The oak tree in the garden* countless times. I concentrated on my lower abdomen and slowed down my breathing. The sounds around me became clearer though they no longer captured my attention. I felt more settled as I moved up in line. When Kyosu walked behind me, however, I could feel the energy from his menacing stare—this monk who had been transformed into my tormentor.

The bell rang, dismissing the previous monk from the *dokusan* room. I was next in line. I entered the room, prostrated myself three times, moved closer to the new teacher and stated my *koan* in the ritual manner. But my inner agitation was an open book to Komushitsu. I'd hardly gotten out my answer when the master rang his bell calling the meeting to an end. I bowed again as prescribed in the *dokusan* protocol and left the room, returning to the zendo where

most of the students were lined up on their cushions. I got to my cushion, bowed to the monk on the cushion across the aisle from me and sat down in the lotus posture and began to meditate.

Once more I made a concentrated effort to return to a feeling of quiet repose. I repeated my *koan* while bringing my attention back to my lower abdomen. Not having been able to work through my agitation which resulted in my quick dismissal from the *dokusan* room only added to my frustration. *The oak tree in the garden*, breathe deeply, chin in, relax shoulders, what is that son-of-a-bitch staring at? ... Caught again, damn it! *The oak tree in the garden*...

The day went by quickly. I had four *dokusans* with Komushitsu, each one resulting in a quick dismissal by the roshi. I thought I was getting a hold on myself, but each time that devil Kyosu walked past me, I'd be reminded of my thwarted plans to meet with Sanshoken, and I would become inattentive to my meditation. I'd go to *dokusan* agitated. I couldn't focus enough to even make Komushitsu hesitate about my grasp of the *koan*. He dismissed me almost on sight. My disappointment would grow into anger.

I woke the morning of the second day feeling better. I'd had a deep sleep and felt refreshed. But my feeling of agitation started to creep back into my consciousness. By the afternoon I was back to where I'd started—my emotional discomfort fighting with my attempts to return to my *koan*. Then he was there again. Kyosu was in front of me and my blood felt like it had instantly boiled. Kyosu took his *keisaku* and poked me in the chest to straighten my posture. Who the hell does he think he is, correcting me? I thought. I was meditating when he was still in diapers, that wiseass!

Then I heard words that really set me off.

"What's the use of wearing that expression of enlightenment on that forty year old puss of yours?" Kyosu was standing over me.

Goddamn young shit-head. Who the hell does he think he is? The words went through my mind though I didn't voice them. I didn't have to. I'm sure they were visible in my carriage, no matter how I tried to conceal them.

"I'll give you a taste of this stick," he said. "Let's see how thirty blows from a disciple of Sanshoken suit you."

It didn't help to think what drivel the bastard spit out, because before I knew it I felt the blows from Kyosu's *keisaku* on my shoulder. Bam, bam, bam, bam ... And they kept coming, bam, bam, bam ... By around the twentieth blow a numbness starting at my shoulder penetrated my whole body. I no longer felt any pain—I didn't know where I was or what was happening. Then, at what must have been the twenty-fifth or perhaps the thirtieth blow, the stick broke and went flying across the zendo. It was a wonder how I remained conscious. The adrenalin rush must have kept me from fainting.

But something else happened that I could never have predicted. I was not only still conscious but I felt as though a five hundred pound load had been lifted from my shoulders. My anger with Kyosu, my frustration with being denied access to Sanshoken, and most importantly, the pride I was carrying around without even knowing it disappeared and I felt as though I were floating high above my meditation cushion.

The rest of *sesshin* went smoothly. I continued *dokusan* with Komushitsu feeling light as a man on the moon. From the fifth day everyone was into the rhythm—the monks moved as though of one body. There were still small kinks in the fabric of *sesshin*, and the *keisaku* was still singing on the shoulders of sleepers and stragglers, but there was an overall sense that the participants were one organ that was self-regulating throughout. Before I knew it *sesshin* was over.

"Allow me to scrub your back." We were taking our after *sesshin* baths. The voice was Kyosu's, soft and gentle, a devil transformed into an angel.

I turned around not knowing what to make of this change. I looked about me and noticed that all the seniors were scrubbing the newcomers' backs and praising their juniors for their perseverance and hard work. I wondered if the world had turned upside down. Or had it just been turned right side up? Whatever had happened, I had been euphoric ever since the brutal beating by this newly transformed teddy bear.

I felt no need to make sense of it all. What I did understand was that the burden I had been carrying around deep inside me for all

those years had finally been brought to the surface. When it dissolved on the twenty-fifth or was it the thirtieth blow, its absence was startling. I asked myself if one needed to experience such extreme drama and to be treated so violently in order to drop this extra emotional burden. The behavior of the monks in charge of Bairinji seemed to demonstrate that they believed it was necessary. The *sesshin* was wild; violence was a natural occurrence there, and it was miraculously turned off when *sesshin* was over.

The senior monks who oversaw the practice became the servants as soon as the battle was over. They cooked rice gruel for the rest of the participants and they heated up the bath. They made sure everyone else was taken care of before they attended to their own needs. The transformation was mind-boggling. These supervisors also disappeared when the final event to celebrate the end of *rohatsu sesshin* took place.

“What’s your specialty, Tokujoo-san? Shojo asked me.

“Specialty? Don’t have one.”

“You’ve got to do something for the ‘Day of No Rules.’ Everyone has to show off his immature mind. Can’t you sing?”

I laughed. “Only if you want to exorcise the place.” I thought for a moment. “I can cook a mighty dish of *udon* noodles,” I said.

The regular practice schedule resumed at Bairinji, but after *zazen* there was a lot of activity throughout the week in preparation for the ‘Day of No Rules.’ Exactly one week after *rohatsu sesshin* all the senior monks disappeared and the festivities began. Whatever theatrical talent existed in this group was made public. Some monks dressed like geisha and did a fan dance. Those who sang well sang on stage. Shojo together with a group of young monks did a *sesshin* scene. One of them mimicked Sanshoken, and another following him around like his lackey, bowing constantly, did a great imitation of Komushitsu. There were shrieks of laughter in the crowd. Clandestinely (a secret that everyone was aware of) liquor was brought into the party.

I’d always been extremely self-conscious about performing in public. Shojo asked me to create a noodle stand and be the noodle vendor. I did perform and was praised by everyone. The new

Tokujoo that emerged from battle a week before with a muchlightened ego was far less self-conscious than ever before when put in the limelight. I wore a band around my head, pushed my selfconstructed cart around with hot noodles for sale, yelling at the top of my lungs, *Come get your fresh noodles! Delicious noodles for sale!*

Chapter 41

Tokujoo staggered into the kitchen at Zeze-an as his wife and daughter were saying their goodbyes to Mrs. Tanaka. He gazed at the walls of burnt clay that seemed to pulse and sway rhythmically. When he realized that it was he who was actually swaying, he grabbed hold of the doorframe to keep from falling. He wasn't used to drinking so much. While telling his story about the *rohatsu sesshin* at Bairinji, he'd guzzled the *sake* as if it were water. His nervousness in the course of telling his story kept him sober, and only now did the full effect of the liquor hit him.

"Thank you for everything Yayo-san," Mrs. Tanaka said. Then, turning to Fumie, "It was good to see you again. Please send my regards to your husband."

Tokujoo noticed Mrs. Tanaka looking in his direction and he lowered his head, feeling self-conscious because of his condition.

"Goodbye, Roshi. I'm not going to wait for Mr. Tanaka. He appears to be glued to his seat. I apologize for his lack of consideration, but I haven't the strength to drag him home. He is the president of the parish committee and should know better than to keep you all up like this."

Tokujoo could feel his wife's gaze focused on him. He knew he should say something but his tongue felt glued to his palate. After an uncomfortable silence Yayo spoke.

"Please don't concern yourself," she reassured Mrs. Tanaka. "They are all having a good time. We knew when Kodo Sawaki Roshi came here no one would want to go home. We have prepared ourselves for a long night."

Tokujoo wanted to tell his wife that it was he and not Kodo who had been doing the storytelling for the last half hour, but the words wouldn't come out. Mother, father and daughter accompanied Mrs. Tanaka to the gate, Tokujoo trying his best to walk a straight line. They bowed to their guest and watched as she walked along the road from Zeze-an. Tokujoo followed his wife and daughter back to the kitchen and handed Yayo an empty porcelain decanter for *sake* and said, "Can you give us some more *sa saaa ke*?"

“Haven’t you had enough?” Yayo said. “You can hardly walk, and you’re starting to slur your words. It’s bad enough trying to understand you when your head is clear.”

Tokujoo stood there, leaning against the wall for support, the decanter in hand, waiting patiently.

Yayo took the decanter, shook her head, filled it and handed it to her husband. “This is for the guests, not for you,” she said, glaring at Tokujoo.

Tokujoo smiled, and feeling chastised, took the decanter and returned to his guests. For a moment he couldn’t remember why he had left the room in the first place. Then he noticed the decanter of *sake* in his hand and it came back to him. He took his place next to the parish president and, wanting to be a good host, gestured to fill his guest’s cup. Then he remembered that protocol would require that his guest pour the host a cup of *sake*. Tanaka lifted his cup and Tokujoo filled it, proud of the fact that he hadn’t spilled a drop. Tanaka then took the decanter and waited for Tokujoo to pick up his cup. Tokujoo looked over at the entrance to the kitchen and when he saw Yayo busy washing dishes held his cup while Tanaka filled it.

“Bairinji sounds like a pretty rough place,” Tanaka said. “How did someone as mild mannered as you survive there?”

“I’ve mellowed with age,” Tokujoo said, pleased with his response. “It was uh, uh, harsh treatment.” He was struggling for the right words. “It, uh, it worked for me ... cause, uh, I was a forty-year old child and, uh, I needed a good spanking.”

“The next time I met Kato Roshi, he was a different man,” Kodo chimed in. “Whatever they did to him at Bairinji, it certainly worked.”

“When did you both meet again?” Someone asked, directing the question to Tokujoo.

Tokujoo had just gulped down the cup of sake and the room was spinning. The question startled him. He sat up straight but the fog in his mind didn’t completely clear.

Kodo must have realized Tokujoo was in no condition to speak with any coherency. “Let’s see?” he said, “I believe it was about ten years later.”

Tokujoo felt relieved. Kodo had taken charge.

“I started holding monthly Zen retreats at Seneiji, a Soto Zen temple in Kurume. The head priest of Seneiji came to a talk I’d given at an old folks’ home in Saga Prefecture. He asked if I could come to his temple for regular retreats. He said that he couldn’t pay me because he needed the money received from funerals and memorial ceremonies to feed his family, but that he would treat me well. It was an offer I couldn’t refuse,” Kodo chuckled. “The treatment consisted of picking me up from Kurume Station and taking me back to the station in a rickshaw.

“I disliked riding in a rickshaw when I could walk, but the priest of Seneiji felt he had to do something to show his gratitude for my lectures, and I didn’t want to offend him. The rickshaw driver was in his parish so it didn’t cost him anything. I would ride back and forth from my lectures hoping I wouldn’t meet any monks I’d known over the years. Then, on the way back from one of the retreats in a fog and constant drizzle, I saw a monk with his begging bowl, a weather beaten travel robe, and an old torn monk’s umbrella hat. I have been near sighted all my life so it took a while for me to focus and recognize Tokujoo-san. He must have needed time to recognize me too since I was traveling in a high seat like the emperors of old. We recognized each other simultaneously.”

Chapter 42

March 1923

“If it isn’t Kodo-san,” Tokujoo said, looking up at me with a big smile on his face. Then, looking at the rickshaw, “Traveling in style, are you?”

I knew that fellow wouldn’t let a chance go by to rib me. I tried to hide my embarrassment as I stepped down to properly greet him. All my life I’d lectured on the way of a true monk—no worldly possessions and no permanent home—and I tried to live a life in accordance with those beliefs. But here I was caught riding in style and I couldn’t deny the contradiction.

There was something about Tokujoo that had obviously changed. I’d always sensed in him a kind of restlessness that now seemed to have disappeared. I hadn’t thought of him as an older Dharma brother before, though he was four years my senior. However, for the first time since our initial meeting at the Yosenji monastery, I felt as though I were in the presence of an elder.

“Shall we go someplace where we can sit down and talk?” I asked.

“We can sit by Chikugo River at the back of Bairinji. It’s about a fifteen minute walk from here,” he said.

Since Bairinji was in back of the Kurume train station and the rickshaw driver was supposed to take me to the station, I told him to leave me where we were and Tokujoo and I walked down the street toward the station together. I was glad to be able to dismiss the fellow and walk with Tokujoo. We moved along in silence for a while. I was happy to be in his company once more.

When we arrived at the riverbed we sat on the ground. I looked at him and contemplated the change. I was looking at a new man. But I shouldn’t have been surprised considering it had been ten years since our last meeting. I was certain that I too had changed considerably since we’d been together at Yosenji. Before I had a chance to probe him about his life since the Yosenji days, he turned to me and asked, “Where did you go after you left the monastery?”

Tokujoo had a way of getting me to talk about myself and deflecting any attempt to focus the conversation on him. I was drawn back to my time at Jofukuji. My old professor from the days at Horyuji School of Buddhist Studies in Nara was in charge of a temple whose history went back to the 9th century. Some say that it was older still; that it was the place where Prince-regent Shotoku, the first major figure in Japanese Buddhism, retired and eventually died. It looked as though it hadn't been improved on since Shotoku's death in the 7th century. The temple had been abandoned for many years and was no more than a dilapidated hovel in the woods. The remnants of a stone wall and three stone steps leading nowhere in an overgrown field were all that remained besides the one small temple building that was barely standing. There were no monks training at Jofukuji and it didn't have a parish. Since I was looking for a place where I could devote myself exclusively to zazen, this temple was perfect.

Given the influence the famed Regent Shotoku had in spreading Buddhism throughout Japan as well as his reputation for being one of Japan's most enlightened leaders, it was surprising that there hadn't been any movement to renovate the temple. Wild boar, raccoons and foxes came sniffing around. Finding nothing, they returned to their mountain dwellings. In the few years I was there I had exactly four visitors and none of them stayed any longer than the wild animals.

I had imagined an isolated *sesshin* like that would open up a new world for me, erasing all my doubts. I did learn a great deal from it but not in any expected way. Time seemed to stand still when I sat alone all day. Each day felt like a week. I was sure that once I devoted myself to zazen exclusively I would get to a point where my thoughts would clear away and my mind would become empty or at least what I imagined an empty mind to be. You would think that if you sat by yourself from two in the morning until ten at night at some point thinking would stop. But nothing of the sort occurred. My mind didn't follow the dictates of my imaginings. The further I moved into this life in isolation, meditating all day with breaks only for eating and for eliminating what I ate, the more I would be plagued by a never ending stream of thoughts.

I didn't know what to make of all this, but I had made an agreement with myself. I'd told myself that I would sit like that no matter what happened. I was prepared to die if necessary rather than quit. I had remembered a lecture by Zen master Dogen recorded in his *Zuimonki*. Dogen said: "When I studied in China under my master Ju-ching, many monks stopped sitting when it was either too cold or too hot, fearing they would get sick. I sat every day and night no matter how bad the physical conditions were. I told myself, 'Even if I get sick and die, I must just practice zazen. What good is this healthy body of mine if I don't use it to practice the Way? If I get sick that will be my destiny ... Long life without practice is pointless ...' So I practiced day and night and remained free from disease."

Whenever I got discouraged, I reminded myself of Dogen's words. If Dogen was willing to die rather than give up practice, I too had to be prepared to die.

At some point during this *sesshin* I started to question the meaning of all this practice if it had no effect on others. It was the Tempter *Mara* working on me. She put the fear of obscurity into my consciousness. I was bending but I refused to give in. I realized that the obscurity I feared was just another kind of death. What I came to understand was: Truth was dependent on nothing. Practice needed no confirmation. It was only the "self realizing itself." So whether or not thoughts continued to flow like a neverending stream they should have no effect on practice. Whether or not people understood what I was doing should have no effect on the truth. Zazen was big enough to contain everything. I was learning to put my faith in meditation regardless of all the dualistic feelings that occupied my small mind. Zazen was defeating *Mara*.

So my mind never really cleared up. Delusions never disappeared. But I was not bothered by my delusions because I was no longer expecting them to disappear. I was simply growing more grateful for the fact that zazen was big enough to accept everything as it is, even if I wasn't.

After telling Tokujoo of my early experiences at Jofukuji, we sat quietly watching the river. It was so peaceful sitting there with my old

friend that I didn't want the time to end. A few men were fishing off the shore and a small boat was sailing down river. I turned and looked at the impressive wall of Bairinji Monastery behind us, hiding the temple buildings where Tokujoo had trained since we parted ten years ago. The large monastery appeared like a fortress. It may very well have once served to fortify the clan that built it to stave off enemy attacks in addition to protecting the clansmen's souls from spiritual demons. I wanted to know about Tokujoo's life during our long separation and I was about to ask him. But before I could say a word, he asked, "You left your little haven of zazen at Jofukuji two years later, didn't you?"

I recalled how he'd often deflected my enquiries when I tried to focus them on his personal life during our conversations at Yosenji Monastery.

"I was afraid you might want to hear about that," I said. Then speaking half to myself, I added, "The ego is always waiting around the corner ready to pop up whenever the opportunity arises."

He looked at me with a bewildered expression, and I knew that I couldn't leave it at that. I had to tell the whole story—a story I'd been trying to forget.

While I'd been practicing alone at Jofukuji, I received a letter from my latest teacher, Sotan Oka. Oka Roshi asked me to come to Eiheiji Monastery to be one of the lecturers. He was in charge of the yearly retreat where Dogen's major work was studied, and he wanted me to assist him. I was still a monk in training, but Oka Roshi liked to ask some of his students to lecture the other monks when the student had a specialty they all could benefit from. During my studies at the Nara School of Buddhism, I had specialized in an ancient Buddhist philosophy called the 'Consciousness Only' school. Oka Roshi felt that because of my studies I would be able to give the group a different perspective on Zen Master Dogen's writing. While on the one hand I had promised myself that I would continue practicing Zen meditation at Jofukuji even if I died in the process, I felt honored to have been chosen by Oka Roshi to assist him. He was the most respected Soto Zen teacher in Japan and had requested *me*, a nobody, a relatively young monk still in the middle

of his practice, to work with him. I told myself that I wasn't really going back on the promise I'd made to myself but was simply developing another side of practice for a short time. I knew I would be back at Jofukuji when the retreat was over.

After a year of my solo *sesshin*, with four hours of sleep a night and rice, pickled plums and grated radish each meal, I was starting to look like the dried pickled plums that were my staple. When I arrived at Eihei-ji, I could see concern on the faces of Oka Roshi and some of the other monks who had known me. I must have looked prematurely aged.

On the second day of the retreat I gave one lecture on Dogen's interpretation of mind from his writing, titled "Mind Cannot Be Grasped" and was scheduled to give another lecture two days later. At the end of the third day, marking the completion of the first half of the retreat, there was a special meal for all the monks who had been living on a very plain diet and eating in moderation. Large amounts of rice mixed with baby bamboo shoots and tofu *miso* soup were prepared and everyone was invited to eat all they could. A popular activity among monks still in training was an eating contest. The monks in charge of the retreat would leave the trainees, allowing them to carry on with their antics.

Though I was scheduled to give two lectures, I was still considered a trainee. But given my emaciated condition no one thought I would take part in the eating competition. They didn't realize the depth of the competitive seed planted in me long ago and neither did I. I had just come from a year of sitting alone on meager rations. I had realized while sitting in my little temple shack that "I was who I was" and shouldn't compare myself with others. When the competition started, however, all my apparent realization floated away like the smoke of an incense stick. I was right in the midst of it.

"All contenders line up at your assigned places," the monk in charge shouted.

I went to my assigned place and looked around me. There were about ten monks in the competition. Though none of them were particularly heavy set, they all looked imposingly hefty to me. I was without a doubt the thinnest one—the only emaciated one I guess you could say.

Sickly thin as I was, it didn't stop me from being swept up in the excitement of it all. I readied myself for this new task.

The monk in charge watched that we were all in our assigned places and then signaled to the *tenzo* and his helpers in the kitchen to hand out the bowls—one with the baby bamboo shoot rice and the other with the tofu *miso* soup. My first instinct was to grab for my bowl. I stopped myself. We hadn't been given the signal to begin. A flash of Hashimoto sensei, my elementary school teacher, appeared to me. It had been calligraphy time and I could hear him scold, "Saikichi, put that brush down! I haven't signaled you to start yet!" I smiled inwardly.

"Is everyone ready?" the monk in charge said, looking around at the contestants. "Okay, begin."

I grabbed my rice bowl and started to gobble up the food. When I finished that bowl, they brought more. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven bowls of rice and seven bowls of soup. Most of the monks had had their fill and were starting to drop out one by one; but I was just getting into it. Eight, nine, ten ... by the eleventh bowl of rice, there were only three monks left. I was among them, still unfazed. The bowls were small, but eleven of them amounted to a lot of rice. At rice bowl number fifteen and soup bowl thirteen, we were still going strong to the delight of an audience of mesmerized onlookers. I heard cries of encouragement from my supporters. Then one of the monks started to puke, which disqualified him, and the other monk simply gave up. I was no longer competing with anyone, but I didn't seem to know how to stop. I was back to competing with myself. By the twenty-third bowl of rice and the eighteenth bowl of soup, I stopped. From the concerned expressions on the faces of some of my supporters, I realized I must have looked quite sick. But I had broken an all-time record and the crowd gave me a rousing round of applause. When I finally woke up to what I had been doing, I felt ashamed and nauseous.

I told this to Tokujoo and I could see that he was trying to keep from exploding in laughter.

"Laugh all you want," I said. "I deserve it. And it's not healthy to hold in a laugh that's bent on being released."

And he did. He laughed and laughed, and I waited until he was through. The embarrassment I'd felt when I realized what I had done at the eating contest came back to me as if I were right there again.

On the morning following the eating contest I was scheduled to give a lecture. I woke up with severe stomach cramps. I checked my face in the mirror. It was a whitish blue. I managed to make my way to the Dharma Hall though I felt as if I would collapse at any moment. When I walked into the hall, Sotan Oka looked over toward me. He looked troubled, and his expression became serious. Turning to the priest next to him, a certain Hozen Hosotani, he whispered something in Hozen's ear. Hozen left the room and returned a little later and said something to Oka. Then Hozen came over to me, took me by the arm and led me out of the Dharma Hall. As we were leaving I turned around to see Oka Roshi stepping up to the platform. He must have given an impromptu lecture in my place.

Hozen walked me to the monastery gate where a rickshaw was waiting.

"You go home now and get plenty of rest," he said. "The retreat is over for you."

It was the most embarrassing moment of my life. Just thinking about it years later would make me turn a bright red.

"You're right about one thing. The ego is a tricky little devil. Always waiting to pop up when you least expect it," Tokujoo said.

"Thanks for your sympathy. The experience wasn't all for nothing, though. I had been practicing meditation for a year alone and thought that I had learned quite a bit about myself. But I hadn't had the opportunity to see myself amidst others to know how I would respond in a group. One thing I learned from that humiliating experience was that practicing by one's self has its drawbacks."

"So that's why you left Jofukuji hermitage?"

"Do you remember your response when I asked ten years ago at Yosenji Monastery why you left your sanctuary on Hazama Mountain?"

"I'm having enough trouble remembering what I did yesterday," Tokujoo said with his characteristic laugh.

“You said something about there being no straight answers when it comes to human actions. Then you said that all kinds of forces are at play when we act, and we pick one. And you added that it wasn’t that simple,” I reminded him.

“Well why did you leave Jofukuji?” he persisted.

“It’s not that simple,” I said.

“Kodo-san, have you been waiting all those years just to get back at me?”

We both began to laugh. My thoughts drifted back to the second year of my solo retreat at Jofukuji.

It was 1915 when Oka Roshi wanted me to be the unofficial priest in charge of Daijiji Monastery in Kumamoto. Unofficial because Oka would be the abbot on record. He had other monasteries to oversee and didn’t have the time to train monks at Daijiji. That was the simple reason I could give for ending my solo retreat. But I had been questioning the value of practicing alone. I hadn’t forgotten what Tokujoo said about feeling uncomfortable in the presence of the villagers after spending most of his time on Hazama Mountain. I could see how training without other serious students was not the best thing for my practice. When I was in the presence of others, like at the Eiheiiji eating contest, I didn’t know how to behave. I told Tokujoo about Oka Roshi’s invitation.

“It’s surprising that Oka would want you to train monks at one of his monasteries after your performance at the eating contest,” he said.

“I won the contest, didn’t I?” I had hoped we could put that story behind us. “Actually Oka Roshi didn’t want me,” I told Tokujoo. “He wanted his prize disciple Hozen Hosotani to be in charge of the training program at Daijiji Monastery. Hozen didn’t want the responsibility, so he recommended me for the position. Hozen and I had become good friends when we were together at one of Oka Roshi’s three month training periods during my Yosenji days. He insisted Oka accept me as head of training and said that he would be *tenzo* and work closely with me.

“Hozen later told me that when he’d first suggested that arrangement to Oka, the master said, ‘You want that fellow who

thought he would become enlightened by eating twenty-three bowls of rice to be in charge of Daijiji?”

At this point Tokujoo broke into another belly laugh, and I had to wait for him to finish.

“When Hozen told his teacher that he would only agree to take part in the training program at Daijiji if I were put in charge, and that he would promise to keep an eye on me, Oka reluctantly agreed.

“We were a great team. I don’t think I could have implemented the rigorous program without Hozen’s support.”

I told Tokujoo about the Daijiji schedule. Though it was pretty much the same as the schedule I tried to set up at Yosenji, I didn’t run into any of the resistance like the monks at Yosenji had given me. Even the elderly from Kumamoto who seemed to spend a lot of their time watching the monks work were always encouraging us in our practice.

“‘When you first came to Daijiji,’ one of the elderly said to me, ‘the place was so full of weeds surrounding the monastery we could hardly see much of the temple buildings. We often talked about it among ourselves and even tried to weed a bit. But we are old and our attempts to help didn’t make much of a difference. By the third year since you took charge, however, there were so few weeds that finding one became a new source of entertainment for us.’”

The lay people in the community around Daijiji took pride in the monastery. They felt that the benefit from devoted religious practice went far beyond the monastery gate, and they took every opportunity to thank the monks for their hard work.

“I’ve often wondered why the monks I trained at Daijiji practiced so much harder than those we worked with at Yosenji,” I said. “I’m sure it was partly a result of the community support. The encouragement the monks received from Hozen, however, was truly a key element. Though he was a real task master, his love for the practice was infectious.”

The sound of the river was soothing background as we talked. Or should I say as I talked. Just like our meetings in my room at Yosenji the time flew by. Tokujoo listened to me so totally I didn’t want to stop talking. His silent attention was a source of inspiration to me. I could

feel his joy of life—it was an aura that surrounded him. He didn't have to talk to communicate his enthusiasm. He just had to smile.

Much had happened in the last ten years that changed both of our lives. I was curious about the turns in his life during our period of separation, but Tokujoo kept asking me questions, and I would get lost in my own tales. I knew he was interested in what I'd been doing since we'd last been together. Although I didn't realize it at the time, there was another reason he kept pursuing his line of questioning. Something had happened in his life that he was reticent to talk about.

"The monks at Bairinji also seem to thrive on hard practice," he finally said. "The grueling routine seems to confirm their notion of what it means to be a true student of the Buddha Way. I wonder whether there is something about the history of this area that would give us a clue to why the monks here are so much more diligent than those at Yosenji." He said this last part to himself as much as to me.

I waited for him to say more, but he sat back and became quiet.

I recalled how the monks at Yosenji seemed to look forward to the times when I'd leave the monastery for practice periods with my teacher Oka Roshi; and how disappointed they appeared upon my return. It had felt horrible. I must have appeared to them like an ogre. The monks at Daijiji, on the other hand, seemed to feel that when Hozen and I pushed them to practice harder it meant that we were worthy to be their teachers. We must have given them a sense of pride in themselves.

Another reason for the diligence of the Daijiji monks occurred to me. "Daijiji is unusual for a training monastery." I said. "It has patrons who contribute to the running of the temple, but most of the support comes from alms giving. Daijiji has no official parish. The monks that come to practice there are not simply looking for credentials to take over a country temple. Though there are some monks like that, most of them sincerely believe in the value of understanding the Buddha Way." I thought about it some more and added, "They are not as affluent as the monks at Yosenji. They haven't been spoiled."

"Yes, that makes sense," Tokujoo said.

He became quiet again. He picked up a leaf, put it between two of his fingers and started to blow on it, making what I guess he

believed to be a tune. "Do you recognize this melody?" he asked.

It sounded like a community of mice having a shouting match. I thought of a period in my childhood when all the children were trying to play tunes by blowing on a leaf. We quit when we got a little older, feeling it to be a childish activity.

"Shall we walk a bit?" I said.

We stood up and quietly watched the flowing river for a moment. Then we started to walk.

"When I first came to Bairinji Monastery and realized that it was so close to the city, I wanted to run away," Tokujoo said. He stopped to watch a group of boys on the other shore throwing rocks into the river. They were having a contest to see who could throw his rock the farthest. "I came to this place and sat right here feeling very confused. The river had a calming effect on me. I decided to give Bairinji a try.

"There are many legends about Chikugo River," he said, as we started to walk. "One tells of a peasant who was rambling along its bank and noticed some children abusing a snake. He begged them to leave the creature alone, but the children ignored him and continued throwing rocks and hitting it with sticks. Then the peasant took a few coins from his sleeve pocket. Though he'd brought the money along as an offering to the god of the Koura Shrine, he said that he would give it to the children if they left the snake alone. They agreed, and the peasant continued on his way to pray at the shrine. When he prayed he promised the god that he would bring double the amount he had sacrificed in his bargain with the children upon returning to the shrine the following year.

"Walking home along the river, the peasant became aware that a woman was following him. He turned around and faced her. She was beautiful. She told him that she was Ryuo queen of the river and that the god of Koura Shrine had charged her with guarding the river. She said that the snake he had saved from the beating was her son. She thanked him for protecting her son and gave him a box in order to show her gratitude. She said that if he put the box on his altar and prayed to it morning and evening, it would protect his crops from droughts and inclement weather; and that he would have the richest

yields in the country. Then she warned him that he must not, under any circumstances, open the box.

“The peasant did as the queen had commanded and became richer and richer. With his new wealth he bought more land and soon became a great landowner with the richest fields in the country. But as his wealth grew so did his greed. Years passed and he forgot his promise to the queen of the river. He wanted to see how much luck he had left so he opened the box. When he did, clouds of smoke came out and then flames. A great fire burned down his house and his fields. Once more he became a poor peasant.”

Tokujoo became quiet. He bent down and picked up a blade of grass and this time placing it between his thumbs he started to blow on it, making a high-pitched sound, like the rasp of a fledgling. I was glad he didn't want to know if I recognized this new tune. But he said no more about the story. I wondered whether he was making a point by telling it to me, but he seemed to be finished.

“Are we to understand from that story that human nature never really changes?” I asked.

Tokujoo smiled and said, “I don't know.”

Perhaps the river had become Tokujoo's friend, and he simply enjoyed stories about it. I remembered him telling me that he liked talking to the animals that visited him when he lived on Hazama Mountain, knowing they weren't going to respond to him. The river too was the type of friend that only listened. Was I a threatening friend because I could ask him questions he wasn't ready to answer? I tried to curb my curiosity. My thoughts drifted to our departure from Yosenji.

Tokujoo and I had both left Yosenji Monastery with the hope that our lives would change for the better. I have Hozen to thank for much of what did change in my life. If it weren't for him, I don't believe I would ever have been able to create the serious atmosphere at Daijiji. Hozen understood my mind better than I did. And he knew how to make the monks feel good about what they were doing. He was a magician, instilling confidence in me while at the same time encouraging the young monks. He did it without compromising the strict schedule. He had high expectations for everyone, and we all wanted to live up to them. When he had an appendicitis attack and

had to return to his home, I had doubts about my ability to properly run the monastery without him.

“When my Dharma brother Hozen left me alone at Daijiji, I felt that things had started to become a bit slack,” I said to Tokujoo. “For a short period, I panicked, not knowing how to proceed. Then, as if the Buddha sent them in Hozen’s place, a group of students came to Daijiji who were a true match for me. Even in my fondest dreams I would never have imagined a group of practitioners like those of the Fifth High School of Kumamoto.”

Chapter 43

The students of the prestigious Fifth High School of Kumamoto were an interesting example of a new order that emerged during the reign of the weak Taisho emperor. For me their behavior was both exciting and perplexing. The year 1911 was the beginning of a liberal movement known as the Taisho Democracy. The movement was eventually crushed when the military regained their stronghold on the government. I was trying to understand the meaning of the new democratic movement, though it was not nearly as challenging a task as it was to get a grip on this unique group of students.

These students roamed the streets of Kumamoto City wearing school hats dyed with shoe polish or oil or soup from *udon* noodles. They ripped holes through the backs of the hats so their long unruly hair could stick out. They put dirty towels (consciously dirtied and stained if they were new) in their back pockets, letting them hang down over their behinds. In winter, they walked around town with long black capes draped across their shoulders. Their high, wooden-toothed *geta* sandals made loud clacking sounds as the students drew attention to themselves wherever they went.

I'd heard stories from a monk at Daijiji Monastery of how these young devils behaved and confirmed it later when I got to know some of them. The monk, one of the senior practitioners at Daijiji, strongly disapproved of the students' behavior and seemed surprised that I didn't share his condemnation. A couple of the stories he told me stand out in my mind.

Led by a boy named Takashi Hayashi, a group of the high school students were walking down a narrow street in the city where cars, a very recent addition to the landscape, would honk their way through cramped streets, creating clouds of fog and dust and forcing people to scatter. Getting tired of jumping out of the way, Takashi turned to the others and said, "Who in the hell do these drivers think they are taking over the streets like that?" Then seeing another car coming down the road, he got an idea. "Let's make that 'big fish' stop. Everybody lie down here. Even if he runs us over, if we concentrate all our energy in our lower abdomens, we'll be okay."

“Let’s go,” another boy said, inspired by Takashi’s fervor, and he lay down in the middle of the street. In an instant there were five bodies supine in the street with their hands and feet spread out.

“Remember, push down on your *hara*,” Takashi said, and everyone pushed their lower abdomens out, held their breath, faces bright red, making wincing noises.

The driver honked his horn. Nobody moved. He honked again and again.

“Don’t move!” Takashi spurred them on. “Push down on your *hara*!” he reminded them with a rallying cry.

The driver steered the car closer, honking his horn. Nobody moved. He came closer still, honking away and shaking his fist out the window. He was within meters of the boys, his horn blasting, screaming something which couldn’t be heard over the blare of his horn. Nobody budged. All that could be heard were the sounds of a horn, an incomprehensible something from the voice of the driver and occasional grunts from the students. Angry and frustrated the driver backed up, turned around and drove back down the road. The students stood up and wiped the dust off their clothes. In one voice they shouted, “Banzai!”

Another evening, they were singing near a police box in piercing voices. Finally the officer on duty could stand no more. He walked outside and screamed,

“That’s enough! Quiet down! You’re disturbing the peace. There’s a law against that.”

“It’s against the law to sing? What’s the number of the ordinance?” Takashi asked.

“That’s uh ...” While the officer was trying to think of a response, the group marched away laughing, savoring their victory.

They returned the following day with a new song. When they finished, one of the students peed in front of the police box. That was too much for the officer. He came out of the box warning them that they’d better watch their step. When they started to argue that the student was only responding to nature’s call, the officer was fuming.

“Okay, all of you. Let’s go!”

“Where are you taking us?” Takashi asked.

“You’re coming with me to headquarters.”

“Even if you say come, how can I come to Sado Island... ?” Takashi started to sing the old “Sado Island” folk song, and everyone joined in. Seeing that they were pushing the officer to his limits, Takashi dropped out of the choir and said, “You have business with us? Okay then let’s go.” And they all accompanied the officer to the central police station. As they were being booked, Takashi asked if he could use the phone. He got permission and called the school dormitory.

“Hello, Sensei? We got into trouble. We were singing downtown by that local police box and Hiroshi-kun couldn’t hold it in, so he peed on the wall. Now they are going to lock us all up for disturbing the peace. Please get us out of here.”

The teacher in charge of the dorm called the chief of police.

“One of our students peed on the side of the police box and now your officers are going to lock a group of them up. You can forgive something as trivial as that, can’t you?”

The chief of police called the front desk and asked them to release the students. The group walked out of the police station as cocky as ever and returned to school. The chief of police didn’t want to anger the principal of the Fifth High School or the dorm teacher—the former whose position carried more weight than his, and the latter whose family descended from high ranking court officials.

Incidents like these gave the students the feeling that they could do as they pleased. They had been accepted into one of the top high schools in the country, which allowed them an automatic promotion to Japan’s most celebrated institute of higher education, The Imperial University. They were being groomed for positions such as members of the Japanese Parliament and advisors to the emperor. They didn’t have sinister intentions when they got into trouble, they were just acting like the spoiled brats that they were.

Despite the pompous attitude of these students, a Japanese citizenry whose own lives had been greatly controlled by an authoritarian government not only tolerated the young rascals but also secretly envied them.

When Takashi was in his last year at the Fifth High School in 1920, he became secretary of the school’s Buddhist youth group. That year the principal arranged for me to give a monthly talk to the

group. I was impressed with the lively spirit of the monks at Daijiji and was eager to see if high school students demonstrated the same zest when introduced to Buddhism. The first talk I gave was titled “There is no secondary character—only the one right here.” Takashi later told me it wasn’t only the subject matter that impressed them but the way I presented it.

“You didn’t use any difficult Buddhist jargon,” he said, “You talked with conviction about something you clearly felt in your gut. It was like no other lecture we’d ever attended.”

In that first lecture I explained what I meant by the “secondary character.” It was the voice in us that says, “I want to do this, I want to do that ...” the part of us that is never satisfied with what is happening at that moment. It’s a little demon usually grumbling and complaining and persecuting us. The secondary self is forever comparing itself to the true self, wanting to change it, and rendering it far more complicated than in fact it is. This is the activity of the deluded self. As long as this “secondary” self functions humans are lost. We become attached to this and that and are pulled around constantly and never find a place to settle down.

Your true self, the one right here, I explained, is as it is, immediately, and because it involves no unnecessary thoughts, it doesn’t zigzag through rationality, reason or objectivity—it is the self becoming the self and nothing else. When this is seen, the illusion of a secondary self disappears.

Many of the students didn’t understand what I was saying, but they were intrigued and wanted to know more. It was their persistence to know what was not at first obvious, their natural curiosity, and their honest reaction to what they didn’t understand that intrigued me most about those boys. One of them came up to me after the lecture and said, “*Osho*, I don’t know what the heck you are talking about, but it certainly is interesting.”

They compared my talk with that of the Christian father who preached a sermon the previous year. I wasn’t talking about god or morality and they were grateful for that.

“You talked about things that have meaning in our lives,” Takashi said.

At the end of one of my talks, Takashi and a few of his group stayed around waiting to catch me alone. As I was packing my books in a *furoshiki* bundle I noticed the students.

"Did you want to speak with me?" I asked.

The students looked at each other searching for a spokesman. Finally Takashi stepped forward.

"Osho, we've been thinking about zazen. In all of your talks you recommend zazen. If we practice zazen, how will it help us?" Takashi looked around for some support. Another student spoke up. "Yeah, what will we get out of it?" he said, and everyone nodded. He was speaking for all of them.

"You will get absolutely nothing out of it." I said.

The boys looked at each other somewhat perplexed. My answer only confused them. They must have thought I was playing with them. Finally, a third boy spoke out. "If zazen will give us nothing, why on earth should we practice it?" Everyone nodded.

I was comfortable with this kind of confrontation. I waited a moment and then said, "You should do it precisely because it will give you nothing."

The boys nodded again though this time they seemed unsure of what it was they were agreeing with. They said "Thank you," and left.

I watched them go. I was pleased. I knew that their discomfort was something they would not accept. I had planted a seed. Let them stay with their confusion for a while I figured, because my previous experience with them told me that they would ponder it. I believed this was the way *koans* should be administered.

I was leaving the Buddha Hall of Daijiji a week later when I saw a group of boys in their school uniforms approaching from the main gate across the temple yard. As they got closer, I recognized Takashi in front and the other boys from the group that had questioned me about zazen the week before. They walked up the steps to the Buddha Hall and stood facing me on the top landing. Takashi, in front, looked around at his entourage as if he were receiving authority from them.

The temple was a good ten-mile walk from the school, so I knew that they had come with a purpose. I welcomed them and led them into the hall. Giving them each an incense stick, I took one myself, lit

it and placed it in a censer in front of the statue of the Buddha. They followed suit and we all bowed. The enormous, ancient statue of the Shakamuni Buddha looking down on us flanked by his two attendants, Ananda and Mahakashapa, was a major treasure of the monastery.

Takashi appeared to be collecting his thoughts before speaking, and I took the opportunity to study him more carefully than I had before. There was nothing striking about his appearance that would make one think he commanded leadership over this group with the exception of what I can only think of as a sense of knowing who he was. Unlike his schoolmates he seemed relaxed and uninhibited.

I noticed two new boys standing in back who were extremely shy and seemed to remain outside of the group. "Who are you?" I asked, addressing the new boys.

"This fellow is Buddha and this one is God," one of the other boys said to chuckles in the group. The new boys remained quiet.

I looked at Takashi for help.

"Nicknames," he said.

Buddha and God bowed to me, looking extremely nervous. I smiled, hoping to relax them. Turning back to Takashi, I asked, "What brings you here today?"

"We've come to practice a zazen that will give us nothing," Takashi said.

I knew then that I had found some enthusiastic students and was very excited. It's true that they were impertinent peacocks, having passed the test for the most prestigious high school in Kyushu, but they didn't rest on their laurels. They never shrank from challenges. When something didn't come easily to them, it stirred their competitive spirits and they didn't give up.

From the day Takashi declared the group's desire to practice zazen, they started taking part in retreats at Daijiji on a regular basis. There were some who couldn't take the rigors of zazen from morning till night, and who quit and returned to school, but others to my surprise and delight stayed with it. Some of their teachers also came to practice meditation at Daijiji.

The students who continued practicing with me weren't satisfied with simply following the zazen program. They had many questions,

and they expected my answers to make sense to them. Responding to their questions was both a challenge and great learning experience for me.

“Osho-san, I have a question,” said Hiroshi, another boy in the group.

“Yes?”

“What is the ‘twelve-linked chain of dependent origination?’”

I had mentioned this teaching at an open lecture at Daijiji that a group of the high school students attended. Now I gave them the standard definitions: “Ignorance, which is the cause of illusion, leads to actions produced by consciousness ... and so on leading to birth and finally old age and death.” I then went on to explain each of the terms. When I finished, I turned to the students. “Well now, does it make any sense to you?”

They were all quiet for a while looking around at each other. They were not going to simply say they understood to appease me; that wasn’t the way they operated.

Finally, Hiroshi broke the silence. “We don’t have any idea what you are talking about.” His words were accompanied by a bunch of heads nodding.

My initial feeling was as though I had been stabbed in the gut. I recovered quickly, realizing that this was, in fact, an exciting challenge. I couldn’t leave it at that. The Buddhist teachings had to be explained in a way that would make sense to these boys. I refused to quit until I could make them understand. Like those students I embraced new challenges, telling myself that if I couldn’t make the teachings understandable to these fellows I didn’t really know the subject thoroughly myself. I took a few minutes to consider what was essential in the teaching of the twelve-linked chain of dependent origination and how to make it real to these students.

“It is simply a detailed way of explaining the Buddhist law of cause and effect,” I said. “Buddhists believe that all your past actions have an effect on who you are. And what you do now will determine who you become in the future. We call the effect of your actions your karma.” I gave them some time to consider what they’d just heard and then continued. “Zen Buddhists are not interested in a philosophy which is of no help to you in the present. So we can

forget about the fact that you are who you are now because of your past karma since we can't alter that. However, what you do now, your present action, will affect your future. And that is very important. Good actions produce good results and bad actions produce bad results. So of course it is better to engage in good actions."

From the looks on their faces I gathered that they were satisfied with that explanation so I decided to push my luck. "That teaching is important to help society function properly, but it is not the ideal of Zen Buddhism. For us the creation of karma—even good karma—is something to view with suspicion. If we do good with the hope that it will make us better people, we take ourselves out of the present moment and into a sort of dream world. To stay in the present we believe that it is best not to produce karma of any kind. Of course that is an ideal, and we don't want to be bound by an ideal either." I could see I was losing them so I summed up by saying, "Zazen is sitting, aiming at not creating karma. That's why I told you it will give you nothing."

Having earlier contemplated the "zazen that gives one nothing" the familiarity of it seemed to please them. Their heads began to nod again in a way that translated as, We are not sure we understand but it will pass for now.

Most of the students I worked with were both playful and serious about learning. But the two they nicknamed God and Buddha were gravely serious—frightfully serious I'd say. I feared that they might break under too much self-imposed pressure. I think I sensed something of myself in them. How many times had I gotten angry when the behavior of others didn't live up to my standards about how things should be? One of the most difficult lessons for me to learn was to relax in the face of adversity.

At one of our monthly meetings, before the students walked into the room, I brushed on a large piece of paper and hung in front of the class the statement, "A DAY WITHOUT WORK IS A DAY WITHOUT FOOD." When the students entered, they looked at the saying and some started whispering to each other. I waited for them to sit and quiet down.

Once the room had quieted I said, "When I was a novice at Eihei-ji, the older monks used to point to this phrase to get all of us newcomers to work harder. 'If a farmer doesn't work, he won't be able to eat, will he?' the monks would say as they watched us work like slaves. They were referring to the words of the great patriarch of Sung China, Zen Master Hyakujo, the monk credited with setting up the rules for Zen monasteries. You see, most monastic societies at this time had considered manual labor as not appropriate for monks. Monks were thought to be the teachers of the people and manual labor did not suit their position. The Zen monks were the first to believe in the necessity of manual labor for those living in monasteries.

"We novice monks heard Hyakusho's injunction about the importance of manual work referred to so many times that it no longer took on the spirit for which this great Zen master intended. The harder we worked the more these senior monks looked like the privileged class. Few of them appeared to sweat like the novices did.

"The story of Hyakujo's attitude in regard to work is informative. This old master was in his nineties and he still worked in the field every day. The other monks worried about the old man working himself to death. The head monk pleaded with him to put down his hoe and take a day off, but the master refused. Others approached the master imploring him to quit work but all their pleas were to no avail.

"A few of the senior monks discussed their concerns for the master's health, hoping that if they put their heads together they could come up with a solution. Finally, one monk said that reasoning with the old master wasn't working so maybe they should hide his tools. They all agreed, and that night when Hyakujo went to bed the head monk took his hoe and hid it.

"The following day when it was time for work the master searched all over for his hoe. He was sure he remembered putting it in the work shed, but he couldn't find it there. He looked around the monastery and even went out to the field, but it was nowhere to be found. Finally, he went into his room and started to do zazen. When it was time for the evening meal, the master didn't show up. The monks waited for a while, then the head monk went to fetch him.

When he found Hyakujo sitting in his room, he reminded the master that it was time for dinner. The master looked at the head monk and said 'a day without work is a day without food,' and refused to go to dinner."

I went on to describe the spirit behind this story. I told them that a true master sees no difference between himself and his disciples. If people must work to keep society functioning, no one should be exempt. When we don't work to sustain our lives, we don't understand the meaning of true enlightened living.

The boys nicknamed God and Buddha were so gravely serious their solemnity set them apart from the group. My lecture about Hyakujo had a profound effect on both of them. God changed his major the following year, vowing to devote himself to teach people the meaning of true labor. He did volunteer work to help the needy, which consumed his time so that he had to add a year on to his schooling. Buddha went to work in the coalmines after graduating from university. When offered an executive position in the company, he refused, saying he preferred working in the mines.

I felt protective of God and Buddha. Even now I become full of emotion when I think about those two boys. They were so vulnerable I was always concerned for their well-being. With the others I had to watch out for my own well-being. Not that the other students weren't also sincere; they were. But they also had a kind of built-in protection system. I approached them at my own risk.

I guess it sounds strange that I should be so excited about working with the students of the Fifth High School. I mean some of them were so full of themselves that a good spanking might seem more appropriate than a dose of zazen. There were times when they would frustrate me with their antics and their lack of consideration for others, driving me to consider giving them just that much needed spanking. Then I'd recall my time with Fueoka Roshi and the patience he had when teaching me and I would approach them with renewed energy and determination.

I knew very little about the world outside of our island country. I'd studied Buddhism, Confucianism and the national polity. But these boys were interested in new ideas from the West that were

becoming popular in the academic world of Japan—democracy, socialism, communism, anarchism and every other ism imaginable. I knew nothing of those things. The students would come to me with questions about ideas like the need for universal suffrage and the dismantling of the old political party network. They thought about these problems and loved to argue, using all the logic they could muster to make their point. They would talk with me through the night about social problems that I hadn't ever considered. While I was teaching them the world of zazen, they were opening me up to a new world of ideas. I'd never realized how sheltered I'd been having lived in monasteries for so many years.

They didn't only see me at the temple and the high school lecture hall. We went on picnics and hikes together. I started to believe they had spies out checking when I left the temple. No sooner would I leave the monastery than five or six of them would appear.

"Going somewhere, *Osho*? Mind if we go along with you?"

I enjoyed their company and looked forward to any chance to teach them a little more about Buddhism. But even for me, a fellow whose behavior has appeared quite eccentric to many, their self-indulgence was sometimes a bit too much. Not only was I embarrassed by their manner; hanging around with them kept me constantly broke. If we rode the trains together, I was the one who had to pay. They seemed to know when my purse had a few coins in it.

They'd accompany me to other temples when I had a lecture scheduled. When the priest would arrange for me to have lunch, they were right by my side. "You don't need these sweets, *Osho*, we'll eat them for you." And if the temple happened to serve meat, they were there to relieve me of it. "You don't eat meat, do you, *Osho*?"

I wasn't bothered about being broke all the time. I didn't become a monk with financial gain in mind. But I liked to use the little money I had to print up pamphlets for the people I lectured—pamphlets containing the texts I used in my talks. Far more problematic when traveling with them than the drain of the little money I had was the embarrassment about the way they acted in public. People looked at me as though I were responsible for their behavior. If I reprimanded them, they would say that I was becoming a conventional priest.

They felt it was their duty to keep me from selling my soul to the ruling powers. They would remind me of something I'd once said about the essence of Buddhism having to do with following your heart. They were quite clever when they wanted to have things their way.

The students from the Fifth High School changed my life. I'd just about given up finding students with such inquiring minds, people who wouldn't shy away from making a true effort to understand themselves and the world around them even if it meant breaking the conventional rules. I loved all the monks at Daijiji for their devotion to practice and their faith in me. But these students had a quality that added another dimension, an essential dimension to Zen practice. They looked at things afresh with what we refer to in Zen as beginner's mind. They were vibrant and challenging. They helped me recapture that original spirit. In Zen the epithet "good friend" refers to a true teacher. These students were good friends.

Tokujoo and I walked a little further as the sun began to sink.

"Shouldn't we be getting to the train station?" he asked.

I'd forgotten all about the train. "You're right," I said, and we turned around and started back to the station.

As we got closer to the train station Tokujoo became quiet. I looked at him in his patched robe and ripped sandals and I started to feel envious. I'd always thought of myself as a monk who'd given up the world of name and fame. In a climate where marriage was starting to be a normal part of the lives of Soto Zen monks and prosperity was no longer thought of as a sign that a monk had disregarded his vow of poverty, I'd taken pride in the fact that I followed the old ways of the patriarchs, living a life of poverty and celibacy. I'd struggled all my life to make certain I didn't get caught by anything that contradicted my monastic vows, unyielding in my determination to control myself. I'd considered monks who got married weaklings and those who amassed possessions above what they needed for daily sustenance monks in form only.

I thought about Tokujoo as he stood there with me waiting for my train, and I remembered how he'd traveled with only one little *furoshiki* bundle with his summer kimono in it. He'd taken the vow of

poverty to a new level that even I couldn't reach, and he didn't have to struggle to do it as I did. It seemed to be a natural part of who he was. I wondered whether Tokujoo consider my extensive studies as a form of greed. He really needed very little. In the words of Zen master Rinzai, he was "A true man of no rank."

"I'll be coming to Kurume to give a talk at Seneiji again in two months," I said.

Tokujoo smiled. "I'll be there."

When we arrived at the station, a train was just getting in. I told Tokujoo what I'd been thinking about him.

"You know I have this strange feeling of envy seeing you standing there in your worn robe, torn sandals and old umbrella hat. I've always prided myself in managing to follow the path of the Buddha while living in poverty and not marrying. As I look at you, however, I realize that poverty is a relative thing. You must think of me as a rich man."

Tokujoo laughed his uninhibited laugh, as he watched me board the train. He had a mischievous gleam in his eyes—one I'd often noticed in him when he had something to say that he knew would startle me.

"Poverty may be a relative thing but marriage isn't." And with a slightly embarrassed smile on his face he added, "Remind me to tell you about my wife and daughter the next time we meet."

The doors to the train closed but we could still see each other through the window. I tried to hide my feeling of astonishment at this new revelation of Tokujoo's. I watched him standing on the platform as the train moved out of the station, his figure shrinking until I could no longer see him.

I tried to practice zazen as was my custom when riding trains but I couldn't. Thoughts of Tokujoo's disclosure and my own feelings about matrimony bombarded my brain and I couldn't let go. I remembered the Pure Land Buddhist priest's advice when I was a teenager on my way to Eihei-ji, "Become a Zen monk. Then you won't feel the social pressure to marry as we Pure Land priests do." He had felt that most of his energy was devoted to feeding his family, and he didn't have much left to study the Dharma.

It wasn't that I subscribed to the narrow view of some Buddhists that women were inferior to men and could only hope to be reborn as males before the path to enlightenment would open to them. Indeed, I'd taught many women who showed me through their devotion and understanding how absurd that notion was.

My mind drifted to the memory of Akiko Takada, a disciple of mine, who'd died a few years before.

After graduating from high school, Akiko was stricken with spinal caries, a tubercular decaying of the bones. When she was being treated at Tezukayama Hospital in 1912, her sister came to visit. Her sister was soon to be married and was all dressed up when she visited Akiko. Excited about her engagement and the prospects for her new life, she wasn't aware of the effect her optimism was having on Akiko whose future was dark and uncertain. Akiko was not the type who would give in to despair. She resolved then to follow a religious path.

First she tried to embrace Christianity. She attended the sermons of a Catholic missionary, read the Bible from cover to cover and questioned the priest about confusing points in her readings. His responses didn't help settle her personal issues, so she abandoned Christianity in disappointment.

She heard about Nantembo Nakahara, a well-known Zen master who resided at Kaiseiji in Nishinomiya. Akiko attended lectures by the master and practiced zazen. Here, too, Akiko felt something lacking. The master seemed sincere and the practice of zazen was new and exciting, but there was something about the Zen world, the worshipful atmosphere surrounding the master that didn't feel right to her. It didn't concur with the Zen she had read about in the records of the masters of old. It felt, as she told me later, like having an itch on the bottom of your foot and only being able to scratch your shoe. She continued reading every religious text she could find while enduring physical pain that required periods of convalescence.

Akiko's family lived near an Obaku Zen temple. She heard about a series of lectures I was giving at the temple and decided to take part. I was lecturing on the "*Record of Points to Watch in Zazen*," a book written by the fourth Patriarch of Soto Zen, Jokin Keizan. Akiko practiced zazen with the group and attended the lectures. I read the

difficult ancient Japanese text and explained its meaning in a language the audience could understand. I attempted to show them that the fourth Patriarch emphasized an attitude of sitting meditation with a mind that didn't seek anything, not even enlightenment. Though enlightenment is contained within the sitting practice, it should not be sought after. Proper sitting meditation is being in the moment with no expectations. That act is enlightenment so there is no need to seek it.

I made copies of the text for all participants as was my practice. I spoke of my own life and how these ancient Buddhist writings related to my personal experiences. I told them how my first teacher Fueoka Roshi tried to get me to stop chasing after enlightenment as though it were something outside of me, but I was too young and too ambitious to understand. It took years of fumbling within my meditation practice to finally understand what my old wise teacher was trying to elucidate. Once I saw that zazen contained everything—pain and sorrow as well as joy and happiness—and that they are all mind-waves that we watch as the scenery of our lives, I understood the true peace of the practice.

Akiko took in everything I said. She stood out because her concentration was so complete that she looked as though she were in a trance. After each lecture she'd come to me to ask questions. It seemed clear to me that she did not ask from mere intellectual curiosity but rather from a need to resolve issues that concerned her deeply as a result of being stricken with her debilitating disease. She told me she felt my explanation of sorrow, pain and impermanence were directly addressed to her. She said that listening to my talks made her forget her troubles and gave her hope. I needed to hear that my talks were helpful. A teacher has his doubts: about his ability to reach people, about the truth of his message and about the importance of his teaching. I needed students like Akiko as much as they needed me.

Akiko came to my lectures the following year. After my talks she approached me and asked if she could be my disciple. I was in charge of Daijiji Monastery at the time, and Akiko wanted to study with me there. Because of her health, I was doubtful that she could keep up with the schedule at Daijiji and told her of my concern.

“I will follow the schedule steadfastly,” she said with a selfconfidence that threw me off balance.

Her family and friends tried to dissuade her, but she was determined. With my permission, she moved to Daijiji and practiced with the other students. The year was 1920. At first the other monks thought of her as a curiosity and didn’t take her seriously. That didn’t last long, however, for she showed them that she could keep up with the most conscientious monks. I never imagined having a student so devoted to the Buddhist Way. I realized as a result of observing her dedication to the Way that zazen was not the purview of men only. My own prejudices regarding women and Buddhism stared me in the face.

Two years later I left Daijiji, and Akiko returned to her home. I traveled around the country and Osaka was a part of my circuit. Whenever I came through Osaka to give lectures and lead retreats, Akiko was sure to attend. I met her in Osaka on my first trip there after I’d left Daijiji.

I was excited to see her. “How are you getting along?” I asked. “Do you miss getting up at two in the morning for zazen?”

“I practice every morning, but I don’t start that early,” she said, with a serious expression that reminded me of my two earnest and solemn students from the Fifth High School, “God” and “Buddha.”

“I hope your family isn’t still angry at me for taking you away from your home,” I said only half serious.

“When I returned from Daijiji, everyone was surprised at how healthy I was. I don’t know what they expected to see when I returned, but I think they were grateful for what you did for me.”

“I didn’t do anything,” I said. “It was the power of the Buddha that watched over you.”

“Shakamuni Buddha and Kodo Sawaki Buddha,” she said.

I felt both humbled and elated. A teacher’s greatest pleasure is when he feels his student progressing beyond him in the Buddhist Way. I took her hand in mine and smiled. I could say nothing.

On one occasion when I traveled to Osaka, I gave a series of five lectures and Akiko attended them all. There was a flu epidemic at the time that spread through the crowd who attended the lecture.

Akiko caught it. Because of her past medical history, her body was frail, and the flu developed into pneumonia. The infection spread to her bones and in two days she'd become seriously ill.

When I heard about the severity of her illness, I returned to Osaka to visit her. I hadn't been to her home before and had to search around the Tezukayama section of Osaka trying to find it. I was a conspicuous sight in this wealthy part of town in my umbrella hat, straw sandals, knicker-like leggings and patched robe. Finally, after wandering around town for some time, I arrived at the home of Akiko's family and announced myself. Akiko was confined to her bed and not supposed to see visitors. When she heard that I had come, she got out of bed and came to greet me. I insisted she return to bed and I joined her at her bedside. We sat quietly together.

The room was dark and had an odor of medicine and disinfectants. Akiko's mother walked in and opened the window shades to light up the room and left. Akiko looked pale and weak, but her eyes had a sparkle that reassured me I'd made the right decision to come.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

"With you here, perfect," she said.

A faint smile appeared on her emaciated face. "I'm preparing to die," she added. Her hands were in the prayer position. "I have a request. This is the last time we will meet in this world, and I would like to receive 'The Refuge in the Three Jewels' from you."

I was quiet for few moments. The Three Jewels, the three essential components of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, or the awakened one, the truth expounded by him and the followers living in accordance with this truth are given to students who have truly entered the Buddha Way.

I put Akiko's frail, cold hands in mine and said, "Of course."

I could feel her weak grip tighten in my hands as she tried to straighten up. "Try to relax," I said looking into her eyes.

She leaned back against three pillows that were piled up on her *futon*.

"Repeat after me," I said. "I take refuge in the three jewels—refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma, refuge in the Sangha."

“I take refuge in the three jewels—refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma, refuge in the Sangha,” she repeated. Her voice so weak I could barely hear her. But the sparkle in her eyes intensified.

When she completed her recitation, she sat up straight and smiled. It was a radiant smile that erased any remaining doubt that my visit, though it may have weakened her body some, was the proper action. As I watched her, hypnotized by her smile, she started to fall over. I caught her. I held her but she was no longer breathing. She had fought off taking her last breath until she received the three jewels. My body was reeling. I was in shock from the sudden loss of a disciple and friend, but grateful to have made it to Akiko’s home in time to transmit the three jewels to her before she passed on. I believe the Buddha sent me there for that purpose. Akiko had been the kind of disciple a teacher dreams of having. I grieved my loss and felt blessed to have known her.

Akiko had taught me about my narrow-mindedness with regard to women and Dharma. But I’d still questioned marriage as an institution—whether it could live within another institution, the monastery, without causing the downfall of the monastic system. But I had just spent some time with Tokujoo, a married monk, and sensed his calmness. It contrasted with the restless energy I’d remembered from him in our last meeting when he was single. I believed that Tokujoo had found that peaceful place within himself signifying an important turning point in his religious practice. He’d already made me reconsider my attitude toward *koan* practice. Now with the news of his marriage, I was wondering whether it wasn’t time for me to reevaluate my ideas about marriage within monasticism. Was the Buddha sending Tokujoo to me every time I felt certain about something, to show me that it just might not be that way?

In what felt like only a moment since I’d left Kurume, I heard the train start to slow, pulling into Kumamoto station. Time certainly passes quickly when thoughts swamp your mind.

Chapter 44

Kodo noticed that his audience at the Zeze-an New Year party had been whittled to four, Tokujoo, Tanaka and two more parishioners. He watched Tokujoo stand up and stagger into the kitchen once more with an empty decanter of sake. He could hear Yayo and Fumie doing little chores—the sounds of utensils being cleaned and pots being scrubbed. He heard Tokujoo mumbling something that he couldn't make out. However, Yayo's response was quite audible. "Don't you think you've all had enough?"

Tokujoo returned to join the others, looking like a scolded child. He'd evidently left the empty decanter in the kitchen. As the drinks stopped coming and Tokujoo began nodding between laughs, Tanaka must have finally woken up to the fact that he and the other guests were keeping the Kato family from retiring, and he gestured to the others that they should leave.

"It's quite late. Forgive us Reverend for keeping you up till this hour."

"Stay a little longer," Tokujoo said.

Kodo, realizing how small the group had become, and knowing that Tokujoo's invitation to stay a while longer was more out of a sense of politeness than any desire to keep the party going, said, "Tanaka-san is right, it's time to call it a night."

He and Tokujoo stood and saw the guests to the door. Kodo noticed, as they passed by the kitchen, that Yayo and Fumie were nodding off into dream worlds as they sat by the stove. They must have finished cleaning in the kitchen and, not used to staying up that late, couldn't keep their eyes open. He felt guilty that he'd been so absorbed in his own stories he hadn't noticed how late it was.

"The guests are leaving," Tokujoo shouted.

The two women came out of the kitchen to say goodbye to the three men. The women smiled politely, but Kodo noted that they were not very successful in concealing their joy at seeing the guests depart.

Tanaka spoke for the threesome. "The food was delicious Yayosan and Fumie-san. It's been a special evening."

"We really didn't do anything. Without the help of Mrs. Tanaka we couldn't have prepared the little we did. With rations as they are we didn't have enough of a variety to serve you properly. Please forgive us," Yayo said, responding with the right amount of humility.

"I guess we will have to wait until next year to find out how Reverend and the Mrs. met," Tanaka said.

"It's not a very interesting story," Yayo said, looking a little embarrassed.

"In reality that's true," Tokujoo added. "But the way I embellished it when I told it to Kodo-san is another matter."

Everyone laughed. The three men put on their coats and left the temple. The Kato family and Kodo bowed at the entrance gate and watched the three until they were out of sight. Kodo would be staying the night and leaving the following morning for Tokyo. Fumie too would spend the night at Zeze-an.

Tokujoo and Kodo returned to the main room and helped Fumie clear up the remaining dishes and glasses. They collected the sitting cushions and piled them up in the corner.

"It's been a long evening for you Fumie-chan. Thank you for your patience with this old man. Your father is used to me, and besides patience is part of his religious practice. But you shouldn't be required to sit through the musings of an old stuffed shirt," Kodo said laughing.

"We all enjoy your visits. The parishioners look forward to this day for weeks. I don't know what we would do if you couldn't make it. You are the main reason Father has been accepted as the priest of Zeze-an."

"The only reason," Tokujoo chimed in.

"Your bath is ready Sawaki-san." Yayo called out from the hallway.

Fumie quietly left the room.

"You didn't have to go to the trouble at this time of night," Kodo said.

"No trouble at all," Yayo responded.

Tokujoo walked Kodo to the bathroom where Fumie was stoking the fire.

“It should be just right now. Shout if it’s too hot.” Fumie said, as she handed Kodo a basin with a towel in it.

Kodo went into the bathroom and sat for a moment quieting his mind. He filled a bucket and put his hand in it to check the temperature; then he poured water on his head. After washing his body thoroughly he rinsed off. He then entered the tub to soak and feel the warmth and the comfort of this most beautiful of customs. The Goimon Bathtub, the large iron tub Kodo was soaking in, was named after a famous robber, Goimon Ishikawa. It was shaped like half of an egg and heated by a wooden fire. Kodo thought about the irony of a tub just like this one that was bringing him such comfort being used to boil the famed robber as punishment for his crimes. Kodo sat in the tub reviewing the day and wondering if he’d talked too much.

Though he only returned to Zeze-an once a year, it felt as though he were coming home. He loved the children and loved watching them grow. He enjoyed watching Yayo manage a fine balance in her role as a humble temple wife while carefully directing much of her husband’s behavior without him being aware that she was doing so. It was a special pleasure to watch Fumie, a grown woman now, work with her mother to make sure the fundamental operation of the temple proceeded as it should while Tokujoo performed his duties as the head priest. And he cherished the time he spent with Tokujoo, a true brother in the Dharma.

Kodo got out of the tub, dried himself off and put on his loincloth and *yukata* and left the bathroom. Yayo was waiting for him near his bed to ask if there was anything else he needed.

“No thank you, *Okusan*. Please get some sleep. Thank you again for everything.”

Kodo got under the cover and was asleep in a minute. He slept soundly through the night and rose early. He walked to the toilet, urinated and then washed his face and hands. On his way back to his room he saw Fumie going into the kitchen.

“Did you sleep well, Sawaki-san?” she greeted him.

“Yes, thank you. Is your father still asleep?” he asked.

“Father is in the *zendo* doing his morning zazen.”

Kodo stood there shaking his head. “He’s the only fellow that gets the best of me every time,” he said, and Fumie laughed.

Kodo quickly put on his robe and *okesa* and joined his friend in the meditation hall.

This ends Book IV

Book V

Letting Go

The Zen master Shido Munan¹ lived in a small hermitage in the Asabu district in Edo. He was reputed to have lived an impeccably austere religious life. His hermitage was near a rice store where a beautiful girl, the daughter of the owners, lived.

One day the girl's parents discovered that she was pregnant. They were furious and admonished her daily, demanding that she tell them who the father was. She refused to reveal the name. Finally after weeks of harassment, she confessed that the father was Munan.

The parents stormed into Munan's hermitage and chastised him for what he'd done. All he said was, "Is that so?"

When the child was born, the parents brought it to the monk. By this time word had gotten out to the people in the neighborhood and Munan's reputation was ruined. That did not concern him at all. He took good care of the baby for the first year, obtaining milk from one of the neighbors, caring for the child's every need.

The mother of the baby finally felt she couldn't live with her lie and told her parents that Munan wasn't the real father. She said that a young man who worked in the fish market was responsible for fathering the baby.

The mother and father immediately went to Munan's hermitage to ask his forgiveness and to get the baby back.

Munan willingly gave up the baby. As he handed them the child, he said, "Is that so?"

¹ This anecdote has also been attributed to Hakuin, a disciple of Munan's student.

Chapter 45

January 2, 1942

“You came to fix the plumbing?” Tokujoo said when Kodo arrived for the Zeze-an temple celebration to welcome in the New Year.

Kodo knew that his outfit would elicit a unique comment from his friend. Though he wore his *samue*, altered to his own taste and for his own convenience—his pantaloons style monk’s black workpants bunched around the ankles and the wide sleeves of his jacket cut lengthwise and tightened so that they looked like tubes around his forearms—the surprise affect it had on Tokujoo brought him added pleasure. He looked at Tokujoo, a proper looking monk in his black robe and *okesa*, and realized that he looked more like a fishmonger or a carpenter in comparison.

“Any way I can be of help around the temple,” he said.

Tokujoo chuckled, the chuckle tapering to his classic grin.

The recent events in Japan that had troubled Kodo dearly started to fade. All it took was the sight of that toothless smiling face. Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, and America, in response, had¹ declared war on Japan. The ominous fact of their country being at war with America loomed in the thoughts of many Japanese citizens. Many others of course saw it as a sign of strength, of their country rising to its proper place in the world. Kodo hoped this visit to Zeze-an would give him a temporary reprieve from it all—the jubilant vocal supporters and the foreboding but muzzled critics. He didn’t know why he thought the Zeze-an parishioners would be any different from the citizens of Tokyo; he just hoped they would.

“I had wondered whether you would be able to come given the new state of affairs in our country,” Tokujoo said.

Though Japan had been involved in military exploits in China since Kodo had moved to Tokyo, Tokujoo had never before broached the subject with him—indeed he seemed completely detached from politics. Even Tokujoo couldn’t ignore something so ominous as a declaration of war by America, Kodo thought.

“Many of the guests have already arrived so let’s go straight into the dining room.”

Kodo insisted on going to the Buddha Hall first to leave a donation. He wondered what had prompted Tokujoo to move the gathering from the only space large enough to accommodate all the parishioners. His question was answered as soon as he and Tokujoo entered the dining room. There were about ten people seated around the low table—half the number he was used to seeing at these gatherings. They could all fit nicely into this room, which was about a third the size of the Buddha Hall. Kodo felt the warmth created by the body heat from the guests cuddled around the low table and from the charcoal burner. He sat down at the place Tokujoo gestured and rubbed his hands near the warm burner.

As the guests noticed Kodo, they stopped their conversations. Tanaka, apparently speaking for the group, expressed his delight that Kodo could make it. Kodo was the star of the show, and though he enjoyed the feeling, it also embarrassed him.

“We kept the party modest this year to respect the constant plea for frugality by government bureaucrats,” Tokujoo said, with a playful smile.

As if any gathering that Tokujoo had his hands in could ever be anything but frugal, thought Kodo.

After the usual greetings and toasts, Mr. Korematsu, one of the parishioners, turned to Kodo.

“Reverend Sawaki, have you seen the new movie *Sun of the Eighty-eighth Year*?” Korematsu, an old parish member in his sixties, had a small cutlery business, which was suddenly booming with government contracts. He had just come back from Tokyo where his son was running the company.

Kodo knew that Korematsu was referring to one of the new propaganda films that were ubiquitous in theaters in every city in Japan. His hope of a reprieve from the craze for war talk was shattered faster than he could have imagined. He had no desire to see any of the government sponsored movies and was even less interested in getting into a subject that was so volatile.

“I’m sorry, I don’t often get to see movies nowadays.” After he responded, he looked over at Tokujoo hoping to be rescued.

“I don’t go either, but there was a time when I walked around Nagoya with my own slide show,” Tokujoo said, laughing.

"I didn't know that you were in show business," Kodo said, eagerly responding to the change in topic. He'd heard this story from Tokujoo more than once. "Tell us about it."

"There's not much to tell. Before I was aware of any true Buddhist practices, I was quite confused. Though I was in charge of a temple, I was really in no condition to direct anything at the time. I couldn't even manage my own affairs. The only thing truly alive in me was a rather rebellious spirit. Anyway, I didn't want to be a priest that ignored the Buddhist teachings, so I used to go around to parishioners' houses showing slides of the life of the Buddha." Responding to the surprised expressions on the faces of his audience, he added, "You can all rest assured I am over that now."

"Thank goodness," Tanaka said, hands in prayer position.

"What was the *Son of the Eighty-eighth Year* about?" someone asked.

Kodo looked over to Tokujoo and shrugged. The reprieve is over, he thought.

"It is a very moving film about a ship builder named Teppei (Iron Peace)," Korematsu began. "He works for a company that is commissioned to build a destroyer within a certain time frame—far less time than it should normally take. There is this young engineer named Tajiro, who is quick to claim that it can't be done that soon. Now this young engineer, an intellectual of course, is correct in his calculations—correct up to a point, that is. Where he goes wrong is his ignorance of the miraculous power of the Japanese spirit. He fails to take that into consideration when he makes his calculations. Unlike Teppei, who had been a sailor on the Mikasa, Admiral Togo's flag ship, during the victory at Tsushima in 1905, Tajiro has never been to war and only knows what he was taught at the university. He knows nothing of the spirit of a man of action like Teppei. And being a pragmatist, he has no understanding of Teppei's love for his country ..."

As Korematsu continued his story, Kodo could feel the anxiety of many of the parishioners.

Korematsu told how Teppei convinced the workers to work long hours; how they built the ship in what appeared to be an unreasonable timespan; and how Tajiro realized how wrong he was.

A man named Tsui, who had been sitting quietly listening to the story, joined in. "I visited America almost twenty years ago on business. I went from San Francisco to Los Angeles and back. It's amazing the size of that country. Why California alone is as big as Japan! And there are forty-seven other states. I don't see how our small group of islands can defeat such a large country."

Korematsu snapped, "You don't understand the spirit of our people. Look at what we did at Pearl Harbor. We are fighting for our survival. We can perform miracles when we maintain the true Japanese spirit." Korematsu looked at Tsui and added, "Your attitude is not unlike that of Tajiro's."

"Yes, but this isn't a propaganda movie. We're talking about reality," Tsui retorted.

Kodo saw the quiet ones in the group shaking their heads. However they felt about the war, it was clear to him that they thought it inappropriate as a topic at the temple.

"When one of the parishioners came to my father's house and told him that his son was running around with a slide projector putting on shows, my father was livid," Tokujoo said.

Nice try, Tokujoo, Kodo thought. But this fellow is not going to be stopped that easily.

"America cut off our oil. That was as much as a declaration of war. They were trying to strangle us!" Korematsu's voice cracked and the veins in his neck looked as if they were about to pop. His wife whispered something to him, trying to calm him down. Whatever she said didn't work.

"If we look at America as a country too large and too strong to oppose, we will act like little mice and will defeat ourselves. But if we remember that we have an indefatigable spirit and a willingness to sacrifice whatever is necessary in order to win, *we will win*."

Korematsu looked around for support. One fellow nodded his agreement, but the rest of the group were silent—clearly a disapproving silence. Korematsu, knowing of Kodo's military record, turned to him for confirmation.

"Reverend Sawaki," he said, "you understand what I am talking about, don't you? You fought against Russia when the same cowardly fears were being expressed. Those who doubted our

national spirit then said that Japan could never defeat a nation as great as Russia. But they were proven wrong. Great as Russia was, it was no match for the Japanese spirit.”

Yayo, Fumie and Mrs Tanaka walked in with trays of food. They placed them around the table. Kodo was grateful for the interruption. He felt as if he were cornered. He had been conditioned during his military stint of the uniqueness of the Japanese spirit. He recalled the feeling when he was in the midst of battle of having meaning in his life, having, for the first time, a purpose for living. He couldn't even remember any regrets at the time for the fact that he was taking other lives. Since then, he had trained many martial artists and worked with military men and had heard over and over the importance of the martial spirit and of one's willingness to die “a good death” for one's country. He had been a sort of warrior all his life and knew how easily he could get swept up in the furor of war hysteria.

Fueoka Roshi, Kodo's first teacher, saw the tendency in him to get caught up in excitement and did all he could in their short time together to wake Kodo to the dangers of that tendency. He hadn't heeded Fueoka's warning at the time but never forgot his wise teacher's words. When Kodo studied the writings of Dogen and the master's injunction that putting one's mind in order was the real challenge, he felt he had learned a new perspective on the Japanese spirit. Fueoka's teaching was finally making sense to him. He had begun to wonder whether the “one spirit” that the Japanese propagandists preached wasn't simply an example of a kind of “group foolishness.” These thoughts were considered treasonous by the authorities, and he wasn't excited about expressing them in the present climate of war hysteria, but he did want to be true to himself. He felt unsure of how to proceed, and that was unusual for him.

“I have to look at it from a Buddhist point of view,” he finally said. “In the Lotus Sutra it is said that ‘All things are the truth by themselves.’ If we are true to the Dharma, we must treat everyone we come in contact with as Buddha. I am not a politician, and I don't understand all the details behind the decision to go to war, but I think that we have to have compassion for all living creatures.”

Kodo's response didn't appear to please Korematsu. "We made a big mistake showing our weakness when Perry landed on our shores with his 'Black Ships' almost one hundred years ago," Korematsu said. "The local people became hysterical. That's why to this day America has shown such little regard for us. If we'd been willing to give our lives for our country then, America would have treated us with more respect and the attack on Pearl Harbor wouldn't have been necessary. Only the Germans understand the need for true self sacrifice."

"You've made your point." Tanaka said, looking irritated. "Last year we learned of Kato Roshi and Sawaki Roshi's first meeting in Kurume. I've been waiting all year to learn about their second meeting, and how Kato Roshi met Mrs. Kato."

That didn't work either. It only served to enrage Korematsu. "I felt elated when I heard that we attacked Pearl Harbor. Finally, I thought, we have stood up to those foreign devils. We must sacrifice everything until we have destroyed that country. It is our holy duty to the emperor and to our nation."

"There is nothing holy about killing another human being no matter where he is from," Tokujoo said. He spoke in a tone not of anger but of calm command. "When Shakamuni Buddha was enlightened he said that he saw that all were enlightened. He didn't say that only the Japanese were enlightened. Until we can see the Buddha-nature in others, we remain deluded."

Everyone became quiet.

He doesn't say much, Kodo thought. But when he does talk ...

Korematsu sat back and kept quiet. After some calm returned to the room, Tanaka spoke.

"As I remember, the conversation ended last year with Sawaki Roshi returning from a sermon and Kato Roshi mentioning that he had a wife and daughter."

Turning to Tanaka, Tokujoo said, "Did you write all that down so you wouldn't forget it?"

Tanaka laughed. "That, I couldn't forget."

"Nor could I," Kodo said. He turned and gestured toward Tokujoo.

"All right," Tokujoo said. "But don't any of you fall asleep while I'm telling it."

Chapter 46

May 1923

Two months after Kodo and I parted at the Kurume train station next to Bairinji monastery, I showed up at his lecture at the Seneiji temple. I'd begged with my fellow Bairinji monks throughout the city and had become familiar with every district. Nevertheless, the temple grounds at Seneiji were smaller than I'd remembered. There were other temples on two sides of the property and temples all along the road leading to Seneiji. I learned from a monk who'd grown up in Kurume the reason there were so many temples located in this one spot. The area around Seneiji temple was near the border of the domain controlled by the Arima clan. The clan supported the building of temples during the period of the Warring States in the 16th century so they could be used as barracks and fortresses to guard the clan's domain in case of attack.

"The temples were built to ward off evil spirits on the one hand and protect against enemy attacks on the other," the monk had told me. "Killing two birds with one stone," he'd added with a sarcastic grin.

The Buddha Hall where Kodo was lecturing was long and narrow. They must have built it that way in order to get the maximum area for the hall without infringing on the property of the temples squeezing in from both sides.

I sat in the back of the long hall hoping not to be noticed. Kodo had been talking about the importance of expecting nothing from the practice of zazen. As usual he was making this very important point clear to people not particularly versed in Buddhist philosophy.

"When you expect nothing from your practice," he said, "you will be practicing without the interference of the ego. Without the ego in your way, you will start to feel that whatever happens is a blessing."

Then, he seemed to stray from his topic. He started to talk about the Chikugo River—the very river we'd gazed on as we sat in back of Bairinji when we last met—and to my surprise, he told his audience

about me. He must have seen me come in. I was curious to hear what he would say.

"I know a monk who traveled from Yosenji Monastery on the other side of our country all the way to Bairinji Monastery here in Kurume," he said. "When he got to Bairinji, he thought about turning around because the monastery was in the middle of this bustling city. He stood in back of the temple on the bank of Chikugo River, and there he decided not to turn back but rather to enter the monastery and practice. I believe that it was the river that persuaded him to stay."

The river persuaded me? This fellow has quite an imagination, I thought.

"The river teaches us many things," he continued. "Throughout its history Chikugo River has been important to this area for fishermen and farmers alike. The god of Koura Shrine is said to protect this river because of its importance to the sustenance of the people in this area."

I was relieved when he said no more about me. Kodo was leading us into an old folk legend about the river.

"One of many legends about Chikugo River tells of a fisherman and a monk. According to the story, Yota, that was the fisherman's name, was standing by Chikugo River looking extremely dejected when a monk in a dusty robe appeared behind him.

"'Why are you standing here?' he asked. And when the fisherman turned around and the monk saw his face, he added, 'And why so sullen?'

"Yota told him that the river was overflowing its banks and that as a result he couldn't fish it.

'Where are you going?' Yota asked the monk.

'I'm returning to my temple on the mountain near Koura Shrine.'

'You can't cross the river now,' Yota said. 'If you try, you will surely drown.'

"Yota urged the monk to stay at a nearby inn until the weather cleared up and it was safe to continue. Together they went to the inn. The inn was crowded with people all waiting for the winds to calm down so that the river would be crossable.

“The monk told the innkeeper that he was a mendicant on his way back to his temple on the mountain, and that he had to go quickly. The innkeeper begged the monk to stay because he feared a great storm coming. That night the storm did come, and all the houses along the banks of the river including the inn began to wash away.

“While everyone else at the inn was panicking, the monk sat quietly reciting a sutra.

“Yota turned to the monk and said, ‘What good will it do to read a sutra at a time like this?’

“The monk was displeased with Yota and told him to be quiet as he continued his recitation. Many of the other people were wailing and lamenting their fate, certain the end was near. The monk stopped his recitation to address them.

‘Stop fretting about your own lives. Confess your misdeeds to the Bodhisattva Kannon, and vow from now on to save all others before thinking of yourselves.’

“He then continued to recite his sutra.

“Feeling desperate and not knowing what else to do, the people followed the monk’s advice, reciting vows to save all beings. No sooner had they turned their focus on saving others then they felt their agitation subside. As the inn floated down the river they all looked up and saw a great ball of light circling them in the sky. The ball started to descend, and as it got closer to the river it turned into a boat. There were ten children in the boat who tied a rope to the inn and towed it to shore, saving everyone. Then the children and the boat disappeared.

“Yota turned to the monk and said, ‘Surely you are no ordinary monk. Tell us your name for we must know who saved us.’

‘My name is Ryukei,’ the monk said, ‘but I didn’t save you. The Bodhisattva of Compassion, Kannon, saved you. When you promised to save all others before thinking of yourselves, you rid yourselves of the ego, which hinders communication with the Great Teacher.’

“The inn was converted to a temple called Midoen, and Ryukei built a sub temple on Mount Koura called Kannondo, temple to the Bodhisattva Kannon, to show his gratitude for the lives saved.

“There are many legends like this about the Chikugo River,” Kodo concluded. “Many people depend on the river for their life’s sustenance. These stories teach them to be grateful for the gift but not to expect to gain personally. That is the attitude with which we must approach zazen. When we practice Zen meditation without expecting good results from it, our lives change. The outward events don’t necessarily change, but we no longer let a fear of negative results churn in our mind and we appreciate life as it is. The anticipation of suffering is often more painful than the actual suffering.”

I’d always marveled at how Kodo could take stories, folk tales as well as incidents from his own life, and turn them into lessons about meditation.

When the lecture was over the head priest led the congregation in a recitation of the Four Vows. We all placed our hands in the prayer position and recited:

*However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them;
However inexhaustible passions are, I vow to extinguish them;
However immeasurable the teachings are, I vow to learn them;
However unattainable the Buddha truth is, I vow to realize it.*

When the short prayer was completed, people walked up to the altar where Kodo and the head priest were talking, waiting, I assumed, to ask Kodo questions or to thank him for the lecture. I slipped out through the side door and waited for Kodo in the garden. He would have to pass through the garden to leave from the front gate.

I walked around the garden admiring the perfectly trimmed mounds of azaleas and other shrubs when I heard the unmistakably powerful voice of Kodo. I looked up and saw him talking with the head priest and one of the parishioners. They too had left through the side door of the Buddha Hall. Kodo spotted me, turned to his companions and said something in the way of excusing himself. He bowed to the two men and walked over to me.

“You were able to make it,” he said. “I’m glad.”

We walked around the garden while he gave me the temple’s history as was told to him by the head priest. Approaching two

boulders facing a small pond, Kodo gestured to me to sit on one. He sat on the other. We were quiet for a while.

“That was a pretty brief service after your lecture,” I said, breaking the silence.

“You can’t find a shorter prayer than the Four Vows,” Kodo said. “I guess the head priest had an appointment that he didn’t want to miss.”

Another period of silence. Not really silence. Birds were chirping and a mild wind was blowing a tune through a pine tree. I’m sure Kodo was winding down. He needed that silent time. He seemed so at home when he gave a talk, as if it took nothing out of him. But I knew better. Kodo worked hard to bring the Dharma home to ordinary people. He worked hard to make it look easy—to relax his audience in order to allow them to take in something new.

I would have been happy to sit there in silence for the remainder of the day. This time it was Kodo who broke the silence.

“Tell me about your life at Bairinji. Did you ever get a chance to study with Sanshoken after traveling all that way to see him?”

Kodo probably didn’t want to start off with the question I imagined was foremost on his mind. I wasn’t anxious to talk about my wife and child because I knew Kodo had been critical of monks who married. I was pretty certain he was curious about my family and that I would eventually have to tell my story. I took advantage of the reprieve he gave me and talked about my teachers, the old master, Sanshoken, and his chief disciple, Komushitsu.

“I did indeed,” I said, “though not for very long. When I arrived at Bairinji, I was told that the old master was not seeing new students. I was devastated. I did have *dokusan* with him at the second *rohatsu sesshin* and continued for a few months after that. But his health started to fail after my second year at Bairinji and he died a year after that.”

Once the silence was broken, I talked as though I really didn’t appreciate quiet times. I don’t know whether it was for fear of Kodo asking me about my family, or simply because I’d always been uncharacteristically talkative around him. I told him about how different my two teachers were physically—Sanshoken being tall, husky and jolly, loving to joke. His disciple, Komushitsu, on the other

hand, was small, shy and serious to a fault. Sanshoken used humor as an indirect way of getting his students to see the errors of their ways. You had to love him, even after you were stung by one of his remarks. He didn't care whether he was talking to a politician, a statesman, a treasured donor, or whomever—he could be relentless in pointing out inconsistencies in their behavior. But then he would be done with it.

I spoke mostly of Komushitsu, however, because I knew him far better than Sanshoken.

"In outward appearance and behavior," I said, "Komushitsu was the antithesis of his teacher. In devotion to the Dharma, they were equals. It was in their mutual love of the Way that they had great respect for each other.

"I had been devastated when I heard that I would not be able to study with Sanshoken. I wanted to run away. But I had done that once too often and felt that I had to stop running. Upon reflection I feel that had Sanshoken been my regular teacher, I may well have run again. I had few expectations of Komushitsu and never stopped being amazed at what the little fellow taught.

"I served as Komushitsu's attendant for a long time and, though the master could be as annoying as a gadfly, he had a real depth of understanding. I was constantly learning from observing him. Komushitsu paid so much attention to detail that he could make one feel grossly unmindful in comparison. He didn't scold you for the way you did things. He would just watch you, and say, 'Watch the way I do it.' He had his own way for every action. He folded *futons* in a special way, drew water in a special way, swept in a special way—always with an emphasis on conservation.

"After working with Komushitsu for a while, I learned that there were reasons for his seemingly irrational fastidiousness. He conserved as though everything were alive—from materials like cloth and paper to ideas like respect and consideration. You folded *futons* for guests so that you never put your body on the upper half of the bedding. Letting a drop of water go to waste was, to him, an act of sacrilege. You treated paper and cloth in a manner so that you would prolong its use, as though you were prolonging a life.

“When he was going to serve tea to guests, and I tried to change the cloth he regularly used to wipe the tea bowl, Komushitsu stopped me. ‘It still has plenty of use,’ he said, and used it until it was all ripped up. Even when it was torn in many places, he wouldn’t let me throw it out. He would find another situation where it could be of use. And when it was ripped to shreds he would oil it and use it to wipe the grooves for the sliding doors on the small shelves and doorways.”

I watched Kodo’s face as I rambled on about my teacher. He appeared to be listening with interest, but I was sure he was biding his time. I enjoyed talking about Komushitsu Roshi as much as I dreaded explaining how I’d met Yayo.

I continued, “When you looked on the shelves when Komushitsu was in charge of Bairinji you would see everything in order. All the cloths from *furoshiki* to rags were folded in his own special way and placed in different locations to indicate their use: new *furoshiki* in one place, moderately used ones next to them, heavily used ones next and towels and rags each in various states of wear in their separate places. Try to get rid of any of them and he’d be right there. ‘What did you do with that green rag?’ He knew where everything was and never allowed anything to be thrown out while it had some use left in it. He saw Buddha everywhere and he treated everything like the precious Dharma. He seemed to feel that if he got another year out of a rag, he was adding to the longevity of a living thing.

“Cooking for him was interesting too. He ate the same foods day in and day out. One day I bought some tofu and fried it in order to give him a change. Sure enough, ‘Tokujoo, where’d you get this tofu?’ If I told him that I’d bought it, he would have been furious, so I said that a parishioner brought it for him. Then came the lecture. ‘When you eat special foods regularly, it ruins the fun of eating out. For monks, eating out is a great pleasure. Don’t take that away from me. Anyway there are plenty of delicious vegetables to enjoy from our garden.’

“Watching his behavior with Sanshoken when the master was weak and in retirement was a real lesson in devotion. During the summer Komushitsu would work with the monks, teaching zazen and doing *dokusan* until nine in the evening. Then he would head

straight for his master's retirement hut. Sanshoken would be maneuvering his large torso around the little space in his mosquito net, and Komushitsu would be massaging him and fanning him until he finally fell asleep. Once the master fell asleep, Komushitsu would feel relieved and free to return to his room.

"What really struck me more than anything was how Komushitsu appeared to take care of his teacher as though Sanshoken was an extension of himself. He never seemed to be making a special effort. He worked diligently behind the scenes as a wife might do for her husband."

As soon as the words 'wife and husband' came out of my mouth, I knew I'd made a mistake. It was a bad choice, and I regretted it, but the damage was done.

"Speaking about wives," Kodo said, "you were going to tell me about your own family situation. I would be a liar if I said that I wasn't shocked when you told me you had a wife and daughter."

He must have caught the look of consternation on my face because he added, "I would have figured some way of leading up to it no matter what you said. It was just a matter of time."

"Where shall I begin?" I said. "First let me say that the one great value of *koan* study is the relationship one develops with his teacher."

Kodo started to shake his head.

"I'm not evading the question," I said. "This is all important to the story."

Kodo looked suspicious but kept quiet.

"Komushitsu's fastidiousness was just what I needed for my own practice. He knew my past history and he never sanctioned my understanding until he was convinced that I grasped every aspect of the *koan*. We became very close in the process, though I found it extremely trying at times. I believe that Komushitsu grew to trust me completely, and that is why he didn't abandon me when he found out about my relationship with Yayo. He may have anticipated it even before I met her."

With that last statement, I had Kodo's undivided attention. Once I'd overcome my resistance to talking about certain very private

affairs, I began to enjoy my own retelling of that most significant time in my religious practice.

Chapter 47

I believe it was April 1918. I was meditating in the zendo in the early morning with fifteen other monks. I heard the familiar sounds of the *keisaku* stick striking the shoulder of a dozing monk and birds chirping from the many plum trees surrounding the zendo. The monk in charge of the zendo walked by me with his stick resting on his shoulder. His sandals stepped so lightly on the stone slab floor that they barely made a sound.

After four years living at Bairinji, I had come to consider the monastery my home. The zendo, like that at Shogenji, had two knee high platforms on either side of the floor and shelves along the walls for our *futons* and eating bowls. I remembered how excited I'd been when I first entered the Shogenji zendo 15 years before, feeling the energy I believed came from the many enlightenment experiences of the Shogenji monks of the past. How my emotional fervor had tempered since then! I no longer felt that excitement, and I didn't regret its loss. The relative calm that replaced it was a blessing.

"*Dokusan*," shouted the monk in charge.

I got up, straightened my meditation cushion, turned around and bowed to the monk across from me, and followed the monk in front of me out of the zendo. We walked along a hallway to the waiting room, where we queued up for *dokusan*.

I had successfully completed my last *koan* and would now receive a new one. I had developed a degree of faith in *koan* practice that erased most of my previous doubts. We were given very few *koans* at Bairinji, and responses were scrutinized so thoroughly that I truly felt their power when, after months of struggle, my response was accepted. Nevertheless, it was the periods when I couldn't see the light at the other end of the tunnel, when no solution came to me no matter how diligently I struggled, that I considered the most important learning experience in the process. It was those times when I had to truly look, to deal with my frustrations, and to watch my ego-ridden mind wanting so badly to successfully solve the *koan*. Those were the times when I'd become aware of the great Pure Land saint Shinran's statements on how delusions never

disappear; when I'd realized as did the ancient Zen master Dogen that practice, itself, is enlightenment.

Komushitsu Roshi rang the bell, dismissing the monk who had been on the *dokusan* queue just before me. I struck the gong announcing my turn and walked through a small rock garden, over a wooden bridge to the *roshi's* room. I requested permission to enter and when it was granted I slid the door open, kneeled to close it from the inside, turned around and prostrated myself three times before my teacher. I'd grown to love this little man despite all his maxims and his fastidiousness. Things about the way he managed the temple that had driven me crazy, began to make sense the more I lived with him and followed his rules. Most importantly, I trusted him unconditionally with my training. I had learned that he was concerned with my well being first and foremost.

Komushitsu looked at me with his sleepy eyes for a moment and then began to tell a story. I was puzzled to hear him recite what seemed to be a parable that I thought was outside of the *koan* collections regularly used at Bairinji.

"An old woman in China had been supporting a monk for twenty years," he said. "She had built him a hut, fed him and taken care of all his needs, while he meditated and recited Buddhist sutras. She started to wonder what progress the monk had made during the twenty years she'd supported him.

"To find out, she obtained the help of a local courtesan. 'Go and embrace this monk,' she told the girl, 'and then suddenly ask him, what's next? Then report back to me on his response.'"

I thought I saw my teacher smile and then quickly wipe the expression from his face. The subject and Komushitsu's attitude were not what I was used to in the *dokusan* room.

The master continued, "The courtesan returned, and the old woman asked her how the monk had reacted. She told the woman that the monk had said, 'An old tree grows on a cold rock in winter. Nowhere is there any warmth.'"

Komushitsu gave me a chance to consider the scene and then continued.

"When the old woman heard the monk's reaction, she said, 'To think I fed that fellow for twenty years!' and she went to the monk's

hut and burned it down.”

Komushitsu waited another moment and then asked, “Why did the old woman chastise the monk in this way?”

While I was contemplating an answer, Komushitsu rang his little bell. *Dokusan* was over.

I was used to being cut off by the *dokusan* bell when first presented with a *koan*. You can’t help but be inhibited by your contemplative mind when the problem is first introduced. I would usually return to the zendo and let the *koan* work on me. I’d repeat the problem over and over to myself, while in zazen, while cutting vegetables in the kitchen, while working in the fields. At some point, a solution, or what I imagined to be the solution would come to me. I would find out in the next *dokusan* whether or not I was on target.

If it were a true breakthrough, my teacher would usually know when I walked into the room, before I even opened my mouth. I, too, was quite certain when I felt a breakthrough occur. But even when I didn’t have that feeling, I would still be required to present something during that formal meeting.

Working on the “old lady burning down the hut,” proved quite difficult. When studying the *koan* “the sound of one hand clapping,” I could forget about using logic from the outset. I’d let the answer come from a deeper place. But this one, its answer seeming so rational, was difficult to approach while ignoring common sense. The answer appeared so clearly reasonable. But my past experience told me that Zen didn’t work that way.

During the next *dokusan*, I had no choice but to respond with the obvious.

“The old lady realized that the monk was living within his intellect and disregarding his heart. He was half a ...”

Ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling ... *dokusan* was over.

I went back to the zendo feeling a strange sense of relief. My answer seemed so reasonable that I had wondered whether it might have been, by some remote chance, the right one. I thought there was a possibility it was that simple, but I felt pretty certain it wasn’t. Now at least I had gotten that possibility out of the way and could work anew in a manner I had learned to use with past *koans*. But no possible solution came to me. For a while I returned to *shikantaza*, or

just sitting—feeling the openness of being there, sitting in the present moment. I enjoyed the expansiveness of this practice, but I knew I had to face my teacher again in *dokusan*, and that Komushitsu wouldn't be sympathetic with my explanation that I'd decided to take a break from my *koan*.

My mind began to wander. I remembered my dream when I lived on Mount Hazama—the embrace of the mother whom I'd rescued from the falls. How good that embrace felt. I wondered why I had never returned to that dream; why I had blocked it out of my mind for over ten years. The embrace certainly didn't feel like ice to me in that dream. Then I wondered about Komushitsu's smile; it was as though he knew of my dream. No, I stopped believing in such phenomena after my involvement with the occult when I'd roamed the streets of Nagoya, confused and forlorn, over fifteen years ago.

Why did the old lady burn down the hut? What was the significance of the encounter between the monk and the courtesan? My mind drifted to my first year at Bairinji when Kakuho, a monk I'd been working with in the garden, approached me.

"Hey old monk, you want to join us tonight? A few of us are going over the wall," he said.

I knew what that meant. They were going to a whorehouse. They would sneak out after evening zazen and be back at Bairinji before morning sutra reading. Kakuho may have called me by the pet name given me at the temple as a friendly tease, but it only infuriated me. I accepted it because I had no choice. Kokuho had arrived at Bairinji before me, and though no more than twenty, himself, he was my senior. I had to take it, but I didn't have to like it.

"No thank you," I told him.

I overheard two other monks who had been listening.

"The old man may be having trouble getting it up," one of them said.

"Too much zazen," said the other.

That made me even angrier. I tried not to show it. Those good-for-nothing imps! I thought.

I wasn't going to fall for that sort of thing again. I'd gone over the wall at Shogenji with a group of monks. I didn't really want to go then, but neither did I want them to think I was too proud to join their

adventure. Since the decision to sit without going to *dokusan* back then had already made me the odd man out, I didn't want to add to my ever-growing anti-social reputation. So I went along. They took me to a small red light district in Seki the largest town in the vicinity of Shogenji.

We walked along a small side road off the main street. The monk, who was apparently the most experienced in these excursions, and who seemed to know this area well, walked into a house and came out with a young woman in a bright yellow kimono with beige sash. She didn't look older than twenty. He pointed in my direction and whispered something to her.

She walked over to me, took my arm and said, "Tokujoo-san, come with me."

She led me into the house she'd just emerged from and brought me to one of the rooms. I was nervous and wondered how much it showed. I was probably ten years older than her, but her gentleness and seeming confidence made me feel like a little boy.

She took off her kimono, put it on her clothes rack and helped me off with my robe. Then she lay down on the *futon*. She didn't take off her undergarment. She just opened it, exposing her naked body, and reached her hand out to me.

"Come here," she said.

She was so relaxed and nonchalant in playing her part that it made me feel that much more nervous. My mind was riddled with conflicting thoughts: Was I doing something monks shouldn't do? Was I performing correctly in bed? How did this poor girl become a prostitute? How did I get myself into this situation? I hardly found any pleasure in this my first experience with sex and only wanted to get it over with. I would never forgive myself for giving in to the pressure from the group.

I couldn't get the idea out of my mind that this young woman had been forced into this profession—forced to be a home-leaver as I was when I was a child. We were both home-leavers. I eventually found true meaning in my life as a monk. She, I imagined, would find nothing but pain and suffering in her world.

I woke from this reverie, reminding myself that I had to get back to my *koan*.

What was Komushitsu thinking? Maybe nothing. Maybe the story was one he used with all of the monks at some point in their training. But that smile. Was it just my imagination? I couldn't get that smile out of my mind.

I returned to my meditation, trying to let the question about the old woman's action sink in without any intellectual interference. I repeated it to myself and let it sit within me. I tried to feel the meaning, to be the monk and feel this fellow's reaction. It was a difficult process—more difficult than any *koan* probing I'd ever worked on. The obvious, sensible answer, which continued to leap into my consciousness, had already been rejected. My teacher's smile, along with the question of whether it actually was an uncharacteristic smile, kept popping into my head too. I couldn't stop these intrusions, and I knew from experience that trying to stop them was counterproductive. So I just continued as best I could, going to *dokusan* at the appointed times and responding with answers that my meditations dictated. The first couple of times after my teacher's initial rejection, I walked into *dokusan* with no answer, hoping that something would come to me the moment I faced Komushitsu. But nothing did.

Then answers did start to enter my consciousness, and I brought them to *dokusan*. But they never jumped up at me or made me confident of my conclusion as had many responses to other *koans* in past times. I tried them anyway and was sent out of the room immediately. Months went by, but I couldn't break through to the essence of this *koan*. I was learning from the process though. Watching my own reaction to being stuck for so long was a new experience for me. I observed myself trying to create an answer to fill a void. I realized how this void, a result of having no answer and no hope of one, disturbed me so. My frustration sometimes led to anger, and I would find myself cursing the *koan* and spewing obscenities at my master, in my own mind of course, as I was cleaning the floors in the monastery, cutting vegetables in the kitchen or weeding in the garden.

Once, when I was raking leaves, angry at everyone, I remembered Kyogen, the ninth century Chinese Zen master, and the story of his enlightenment.

Kyogen was a brilliant scholar and was used to depending on his keen intellect to understand problems that he confronted. This of course made Zen training a real challenge to him at the beginning. After his first teacher, Hyakujo, died Kyogen studied under the master's chief disciple, Isan. Recognizing his student's unusual genius, Isan hoped to open Kyogen to the Way beyond the intellect. One day he called Kyogen to his room and said, "I've heard that you have a remarkable intellect. Your intellect won't allow you to understand the Way of Zen. Let me see what you know of Zen. Tell me who you were before your parents were born."

Kyogen could not respond to the master. He returned to his room and went through his notes of the late master Hyakujo's sermons. He searched his own mind and all he'd studied of Zen, but nothing helped. Going back to Isan's room he pleaded with the teacher for an explanation.

Isan said, "I have nothing to explain to you. If I tried to, you would reproach me in the future. What I say will be an expression of my mind and have nothing to do with you."

Kyogen was devastated. He took his leave of the master and burned all his books and notes. He traveled as a mendicant from place to place. Wandering the country, he came upon the ruins of a temple. He stayed there for a while. One day, while sweeping up fallen leaves, his broom caught a piece of broken tile that flew in the air and hit a bamboo stalk making a sharp noise. Startled by the unexpected sound, he became instantly aware of who he was before the birth of his parents. He ran back to his hut and lit a stick of incense, bowing in the direction of Isan's monastery. Then in a loud voice he said, *You have shown me kindness that surpasses that of my parents. Had you explained it to me, I never would have known this joy I now feel.*

I relaxed. I no longer felt vexed when my teacher sat there while I strained to give an answer that would penetrate the *koan*. "Someday," I told myself, "I will light an incense stick in gratitude for his silences."

Another month went by, and I got so accustomed to the sound of the bell sending me out of the room that I felt like ringing it myself to save Komushitsu the effort. Then one day my teacher sent for me. I

announced myself outside of his room, wondering why he had summoned me.

"Come in, please," he said.

He was relaxed and informal when he addressed me. He even served me tea. I sat there wondering what precipitated this change in attitude. We sipped tea and listened to the birds chirping, the sound of traffic and the voices of people passing near the temple.

Finally the master said, "Tokujoo-san, there is a small hermitage a few kilometers from here. Until recently a nun was in charge. She died leaving the hermitage without anybody qualified to care for it. I'd like you to take charge for a while. Just try it, and if it doesn't suit you, we will look for someone to take your place. It is close enough to Bairinji so you can come here daily to continue *dokusan* with me."

If it doesn't suit you? I wondered why he'd put it that way?

"Will you give it a try?" Komushitsu was unusually solicitous.

"When would you like me to go, Roshi?"

"Tomorrow."

The following day Komushitsu walked me to the gate to see me off. He looked at my one *furoshiki* bundle and smiled.

"You do travel light, don't you?"

"It's my personal stamp—something I have always been known for," I said. "You never know when your teacher is going to send you to some other temple on a moment's notice."

Komushitsu laughed. "That's the way the monks of old used to travel. You were born a couple hundred years too late. But that's what we try to do at monasteries—go back in time."

We reached the gate and stopped. I looked back at Bairinji.

"I remember when I first arrived here," I said. "The clamor of the city so close made me want to run away. Now it looks beautiful to me. Not surprising I guess—it's been my home for the last four years."

"You'll be back for *dokusan* tomorrow morning. It's not like you're going abroad. You are walking distance from Bairinji." Komushitsu was starting to sound defensive.

"Change is a strange thing. You welcome it and resist it at the same time," I said.

“That’s true. However, a monk must always be prepared for change.”

I could feel a lecture coming.

“When you are a novice monk, you need to control your environment,” Komushitsu said. “You come to a temple with so much conditioning that you no longer know what is natural and what is simply a habit. It’s the object of practice to break those habitual reactions even if we are applying new conditioning to do so. At some point, however, you have to learn the meaning of letting go.”

I listened, but wondered why I was getting this particular lecture at this time. I didn’t ask him, knowing it wasn’t my place to question my teacher’s reason for choosing a particular opportunity to teach me. My experience had taught me that Komushitsu had his reasons, and they eventually made sense to me, though it wasn’t always obvious at the time.

“It doesn’t mean that you rid yourself of all habitual activity,” Komushitsu continued. “You still should brush your teeth every morning. But you must become aware of what is habit and what isn’t. And if it’s healthier to let go of a habit, hopefully it will be easier to do so.

“Remember, Tokujoo-san, a novice controls his environment, and a mature monk leaves things to nature’s control.”

I was getting anxious to move on, and Komushitsu must have felt my restlessness.

“One more thing,” he said. “When Sanshoken Roshi was dying he made one request of me. He asked me to make sure that the Shutokuji hermitage did not fall into disrepair. A nun by the name of Myotei owned a fair amount of property including a parcel in the district of Hakkenya. She sold all of her other parcels of land and with that money she built the Shutokuji hermitage on her property in Hakkenya. Myotei was a devoted follower of Sanshoken and requested he be the founder. So Shutokuji was made a branch temple of Bairinji. My master devoted a great deal of energy to repairing Bairinji and building branch temples. He lectured to lay groups and clerics alike and had many women devotees.

“A year after Sanshoken died the nun Myotei passed on. While she’d lived at Shutokuji, she had adopted a young girl from a family

she had known all her life. That little girl must be in her twenties by now. Myotei had a little money which she left to that girl, as the temple has no parish to support it."

"And that little girl, who is now in her twenties, where did she go when Myotei died?" I asked the question partly out of curiosity, but more out of fear of what turned out to be my teacher's answer.

"Nowhere," he said.

"You mean that this young woman is still at Shutokuji?"

Komushitsu smiled that smile he'd first shown me when he gave me the *koan* of the old woman burning the monk's hut. I was getting used to it. He didn't answer my question.

"Remember, Tokujoo-san, a mature monk learns to let nature take its course. Be flexible."

Saying that, he left me standing at the gate trying to digest the new information and its implications.

Chapter 48

I stood at the Bairinji gate for a few moments contemplating my teacher's words. Not those about the mature monk opening up to natural laws, but the few facts about Shutokuji—originally run by a nun, who left her adopted daughter, also a nun, *in her early twenties*, at the temple. I agreed to follow his wishes—wishes revealed to me in increments. Komushitsu was making sure I wouldn't be able to object. A sneaky fellow for sure, that teacher of mine! Why did Komushitsu pick me? Was I being tested? It was obvious now that he had been planning this for some time. The *koan* about the old lady burning down the monk's hut was part of the preparation. *But why me?*

I could go on for hours, I thought, trying to figure out Komushitsu's mind and get nowhere. So I started on my way. Spring was coming to a close; the day was clear and warm. I could smell the fresh new grasses as I moved farther into the country. In a few weeks summer would begin and it would no longer be fun walking that road in the heat in my black robe. This was only the first of many trips to come. I would be walking to Bairinji to meet my teacher every morning.

As I went along with my little bundle over my shoulder, I recalled other trips many years before: for one, my walk to Shogenji Monastery over fifteen years ago. I remembered my feelings of joy—the joy that came with the belief that I was following the true Buddhist path. I knew that my father would be disappointed in his son once more, but that knowledge didn't deter me. Back then I was young and full of the enthusiasm one feels when he is going to transform both himself and the world. I'd told myself that I would return home some day a realized monk and would know how to explain to my father why I did what I did.

My high expectations had been tempered by doses of reality, but they never turned into despair. The Shogenji experience didn't, however, produce the dynamic change I'd hoped it would. Though I left Shogenji, it was with a belief in the power of zazen and with the hope that living in the mountains would allow me to delve deeper into meditation's power. My walk to Hazama Mountain, though not as

brim full of expectations, nevertheless brought with it the anticipation of positive change.

Now, though this trip was tempered by age and experience, I still felt excited as I wondered about the new world I was about to enter. I believed in Komushitsu—I believed in his concern for my development and in his strong commitment to the Way. I'd also learned to expect less and enjoy more. Still, I couldn't dismiss the fear that I might be going to a temple that had been neglected for some time and was now occupied by a girl who'd been used to being pampered.

My mind slowed down as I walked on. Walking, like zazen, had become a meditation over the years. My concerns about the temple I was going to and the unusual circumstances of a young nun living there disappeared. All I was aware of was the cold breeze against my body and the earth under my feet.

I arrived at Shutokuji early that afternoon and stopped in front of the temple. I put my little bundle down and sat on a rock in front of the entrance to look it over. It was a small hermitage in a quieter section of Kurume than was Bairinji, and it had a good feel. The grounds were well taken care of; the trees were trimmed and the small garden was cared for. I felt relieved. This nun is not lazy, that's for sure, I told myself.

On the far side of the garden toward the back of the compound, I saw a clothesline with linen and clothing hanging from it. Among the bedspreads and pillowcases were articles of clothing—*hakue* (the white robes worn under nun's outer garments), underwear, and, to my surprise, tiny outfits and diapers. I figured she must take in laundry from the neighbors in order to make some extra money, confirming my assessment of her diligence.

I enjoyed looking around and imagining what the young woman's life must be, living alone in a small temple. I decided to sit a bit longer before entering the grounds. While I was sitting there the young nun came out of the building and went to the clothesline to collect the dry clothing. She didn't notice me. Though small in stature, her very straight posture made her look taller than she was. She was thin but not frail and collected the wash with the speed and grace of one accustomed to mechanical tasks. She turned in my

direction, but still didn't see me. Her dark eyes were strikingly sensual. They also gave her a look of sternness that felt a bit intimidating.

I stood up and walked toward her. She was startled at first, but then registered something that seemed to calm her. She must have known I was coming.

"I'm Tokujoo Kato," I said, and I bowed to her. "Komushitsu Roshi sent me here. I assume you knew I was coming?"

She nodded. While we greeted each other and exchanged information, her eyes were focused downward. She told me her name was Sotei. She wore nun's work clothes and her head was perfectly shaved. Had I not expected a young woman I would have mistaken her for a novice monk. Though Sotei never looked directly at me, she didn't appear shy. I guess she was simply giving me the respect she felt my position deserved.

"Let me show you to your room," she said.

I followed her into the temple, down a narrow corridor and into one of the rooms off the corridor. After four years of living in the massive buildings of Bairinji, Shutokuji appeared like a miniature temple. The corridor was narrow, the ceiling was low and the room that was to be mine was tiny. It had a low desk and a cushion in one corner and scarcely enough remaining space to accommodate a single *futon*.

"You must be tired," she said. "Rest here. I will be making noodles for lunch," and she closed the sliding door and was gone.

For fear of being seen as a tired old man by the younger monks who usually surrounded me, I had been careful to refrain from lying down in the middle of the day. Now, I sat on the *tatami* mats in the small *futon* sized space across from the desk and relaxed, allowing my mind to drift. Having been at Bairinji for over four years, I no longer worried about senior monks harassing me; still it felt good to be almost completely on my own. I didn't have to think of myself as the old man, because I was the only man at Shutokuji. That thought felt good and had such a calming effect on me that practically unaware of my own movements I must have dozed off. I was lying down with my head on a cushion when Sotei called from outside the room.

“Noodles are ready.”

I jumped up—reacting to my old fear of being caught napping in the afternoon. I followed the nun to the dining room where a large bowl of steaming *udon* noodles and some pickled radishes were on the table. I took my bowls and chopsticks from my monk’s shoulder bag and placed them in front of me. Sotei went to the shelves and took her bowl and chopsticks and placed them across from me. We sat down, bowed to the bowls, and I recited the five Buddhist vows before eating.

“First, we reflect on the effort that brought us this food and consider how it comes to us.

“Second, we reflect on our virtue and practice, and whether we are worthy of this offering.

“Third, we regard it as essential to keep the mind free from excess such as greed.

“Fourth, we understand that this food is good medicine to heal our fragile bodies.

“Fifth, we receive this food for the sake of attaining the Buddha Way.”

Sotei sat with her hands folded but hadn’t recited along with me. Together we gave thanks with the traditional “*itadakimasu*” and began to eat.

I wasn’t used to talking while eating, but I felt obliged to pay her a compliment.

“This *udon* is delicious.”

“The family down the road makes the noodles themselves,” she responded.

There was what sounded like a faint cry of a baby, and Sotei excused herself. She came back ten minutes later saying nothing about the interruption. I didn’t inquire, not wanting to appear prying, but I couldn’t stop myself from dwelling on the sound I’d just heard. When we finished eating, I thanked her, washed my bowl and chopsticks and returned to my room. I sat in my room planning the rest of my day when I heard a baby crying again. There was no question about it this time. There was a baby at the other end of the temple. I wondered whether Sotei was babysitting for one of the neighbors.

I put my few belongings away and went into the Buddha Hall. The room was small as far as Buddha Halls go, and the altar was uncluttered. None of the ancestral tablets that customarily crowd altars; only three small statues—the Buddha and his two attendant Bodhisattvas, Manjushri and Fugen—sat there. The altar was sparkingly clean and the fragrance of incense permeated the room. The cleanliness and simplicity of the space was refreshing. I bowed to the Buddha and Bodhisattvas and lit an incense stick. There was a cushion in front of the altar. I went over to the cushion, sat down and meditated almost automatically. This is how I consecrated my spot on Hazama Mountain, I recalled. I quickly felt the calming effect of sitting, and became a part of my new environment and, once more, at home with myself.

I could hear Sotei moving around and talking to someone.

“We have to clean the tub Fumi-chan ... Up we go ... Good girl ... Oops, let me wipe your mouth ... There that’s better ...”

It was obvious she was speaking to a child. Was it the child I had heard crying earlier? I heard her steps as she walked into the Buddha Hall where I was meditating.

“The monk is practicing zazen,” she whispered. “We have to be quiet, honey,” she said, as she walked away.

I sat for the length of two incense sticks—the early calm disturbed by Sotei and the baby’s entrance. Was I going to have to deal with a neighbor’s child on a regular basis? It will be her responsibility, not mine, I concluded, and returned to a relative state of calm. When the second incense had burned down, I lit another, bowed to the Buddhist statues and left the hall.

But as soon as I’d left the hall, I returned to the feeling of being an intruder—not really knowing what to do. I didn’t want to come into what had been Sotei’s home and act as though I were taking over, even if my teacher decreed it. I strolled around the grounds exploring as inconspicuously as possible. In a small room off the kitchen I saw Sotei and the baby. The little one was tied to Sotei’s back by a large sash. Sotei was dusting shelves with a cloth while reading a sutra.

“kanjizai bosata gyo jin hannya hara mita...”

The child started to cry and Sotei shook her body up and down as she continued wiping the shelves. When the crying stopped and

the baby had been rocked to sleep, she carried her to another room and returned to finish cleaning the shelves. I guess she did most of the chores with the little one tied to her back until it was the baby's naptime.

I didn't talk to her about living arrangements. I didn't know how we would work out a situation where there was one kitchen, one bath, an old monk, a young nun, and a baby, who I assumed would be returned to its home in the evening. I figured there would be plenty of time to discuss it.

Later on in the day, I saw Sotei in the garden picking *daikon* and *hakusai* cabbage. She carried them into the kitchen where a fire was already going under the rice. I could hear the crackle of the burning wood and the smell of rice cooking. I poked my head in the kitchen while she was cutting pickled radish and asked, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Sotei looked at me in disbelief. I guess she'd never heard of a man helping out in the kitchen when a woman was there to do that work. I'd been in a monastery for so long I'd forgotten how other households, especially in this feudal part of Japan, divided the chores between men and women.

"Dinner will be ready in about thirty minutes," she said.

At six o'clock I was startled to hear the clackers announcing dinner. I wondered whether Sotei had performed this Zen ritual call to dinner with the old nun when they had lived together there, or she was doing it just for me. I walked into the dining hall and the delicious aroma of fried mushrooms filled my nostrils. I sat at the place to which Sotei beckoned me. The meal was one Komushitsu would have considered far too extravagant for a monk, but I wasn't complaining. There were deep fried shitake mushrooms, wild angelica stems, sesame tofu, baby bamboo shoots and rice and miso soup.

"You don't eat like this every night, do you?"

Sotei smiled. It was a smile that said volumes. She understood that I was being facetious, and she knew that my question didn't require a verbal answer. It was a confident smile that told me that this woman was neither shy nor easily thrown off balance.

I put my hands together in prayer position and started to recite the five vows: “*shitotsu ni wa koo no tashou o hakaru ...*” I heard from across the table:

“*ka no raisho o ...*”

Sotei was reciting with me this time. It surprised me and I lost my place, but following her chanting brought me quickly back.

When the meal was over, I thanked her and helped her clean up.

“You don’t have to,” she said. “It’s my chore”

I continued to help anyway, and she didn’t stop me. When we finished cleaning up, I turned to her.

“I usually get up at three-thirty and chant sutras. Then I meditate for a couple of periods and recite some more. I will be going to Bairinji for *dokusan* with Komushitsu Roshi after that and will go on *takuhatsu* on the way back.” Then, not considering any other possible scenario, I asked, “Did you return the baby to her home?”

Sotei stared at the floor, and, for the first time since I’d arrived, she looked embarrassed. She remained silent.

I didn’t pursue the subject. But when I heard the baby crying in the middle of the night, I realized that the situation at Shutokuji was going to be even more complicated than I had envisioned. The following morning I got up at my usual 3:30 and altered my schedule to accommodate this new situation. So as not to wake the baby, I meditated for the length of two incense sticks before reciting the Wisdom Sutra. When I did recite it, in contrast to my usual recitation, which was loud and piercing, I chanted it quietly. I then recited two shorter sutras. After I’d completed my morning services, I heard the banging of the clackers informing me that breakfast was ready. We had rice gruel, miso soup and pickled radish.

Sotei looked at me with an impish smile and said, “We eat like this every morning.”

After breakfast, I put on my *takuhatsu* clothing, and, bowing to Sotei, who saw me off at the gate, began what was to be my regular six kilometer walk to Bairinji. I passed large farmhouses and rice paddies and, as I got close to the monastery, smaller homes of merchants and other town’s people. I arrived at the monastery in time for the scheduled *dokusan*.

Before I could give my response to the *koan* of the old lady burning down the monk's hut, Komushitsu asked me how my first day was. He was relaxed and addressed me in an informal manner. I responded with what was foremost on my mind.

"There is an infant living there."

"Is that so?" Komushitsu said. He seemed surprised, but not *that* surprised.

I couldn't read his reaction. Had he known that there was a baby at Shutokuji? Whether he did or not he didn't seem to consider it much of a problem.

I gazed around Komushitsu's small *dokusan* room. I had been in this room once daily for the last four years, and an additional three times a day during retreats, but felt like I was seeing it for the first time. There was a scroll on the far wall, a portrait of the first Zen patriarch brushed by Komushitsu's teacher. Above the portrait Sanshoken had brushed *Plum blossom opens, five-petaled spring*.

"Sanshoken Roshi's painting of the first patriarch made him look like a trickster," I said.

Komushitsu turned around to look at the portrait, as though he hadn't known it was there. Staring up at it he said, "It does, doesn't it. Sanshoken brushed many portraits of the first patriarch; each with a different expression. He must have been feeling playful when he brushed this one."

I wanted to see Komushitsu's face, but all I could see was the back of his head. I wanted to compare the trickster on the scroll with the one in front of me.

"Do you know what 'five-petaled spring' means?" Komushitsu was still looking up at the portrait.

"No."

He turned to face me. "It symbolizes the first patriarch's enlightenment. The blossom naturally opens and a new world appears. As you know, spring according to our traditional calendar was the beginning of our New Year."

"There is an infant living at Shutokuji," I said.

"You already told me that."

I was so flustered I'd forgotten that I had mentioned it before. While I was trying to contain my embarrassment, Komushitsu had

moved into his *dokusan* pose—legs in traditional *seiza*, torso straight, chin tucked and eyes glaring at me.

“What is your response to the *koan*?” he asked, throwing me even more out of sorts.

I had prepared an answer though it hadn’t satisfied me. But at that moment, I couldn’t for the life of me remember it. My mind was a complete blank. The more I strained to remember, the worse it got. I wasn’t even sure of where I was until I heard the bell dismissing me.

I left the *dokusan* room once again feeling frustrated. I walked out of the monastery through the Bairinji gate and began what would be a daily routine of *takuhatsu*.

“Hooooooo ...” I chanted in front of a farmhouse with my head down, hidden under my umbrella hat and my begging bowl in hand. It felt good to get back into a familiar routine and to let the humiliating memory of the last *dokusan* fade.

A farmer called to his wife, “Hey, dear, it’s a Bairinji monk, bring out some rice.” He filled my begging bowl. “Only one monk, that’s unusual,” he said half to himself.

I wanted to explain that I was no longer living in Bairinji, but the required way to collect alms was to keep your head down, recite the prescribed *takuhatsu* chant and move on to the next house.

I begged at some of the houses where I’d customarily begged when traveling with the other Bairinji monks and then concentrated on homes nearer Shutokuji.

I quickly moved into a regular schedule: zazen in the morning, sutra recitation, daily trips to Bairinji for meetings with my teacher, *takuhatsu* and afternoon and evening zazen. There were times I had to help out at Bairinji and would return to Shutokuji in the early evening. When I did return to Shutokuji early, I’d work with Sotei cultivating the garden or cleaning the temple. We became comfortable in each other’s presence, chatting more and more as time went on.

Our conversations for the first couple of months were about practical temple matters and small talk. I never asked anymore about the baby, Fumie, though it became clear to me that it was Sotei’s child. After an initial shyness on both our parts, the child and I

became accustomed to having each other around. I started to play with her, and she wanted more and more of my attention. Fumie was a new girl each week, growing in leaps, as young babies do. I shared Sotei's excitement every time her daughter surprised us with a new acquired skill.

We were drinking tea in the dining room after lunch one afternoon, when Sotei nudged me. "*Goin-san*, look," she said, pointing to Fumie trying to pull herself up to a standing position holding on to the table. Sotei used the honorific name for the head of the temple when she addressed me. Fumie kept falling and trying again as the two of us laughed at her failed attempts. She saw us laughing as she sat there after a failed attempt, and she laughed too, making us laugh even harder.

Dokusans remained a constant frustration for me. I would present my response to the "old lady burning the monk's hut" *koan* and get the usual ding, ding, sending me out of the room; never a hint from the master, never a suggestion that I was getting close. That was the style at Bairinji—a contrast to the other monasteries where I'd worked on *koans*. Komushitsu would listen as though he were expecting a particular response and, not getting it, ring his bell with a straight, expressionless look. I felt fine with that style during the time I stayed at Bairinji, knowing I would eventually get it, but my feelings were changing. I spent more time on this *koan* than on any previous one and didn't feel any closer to breaking through. The connection of the *koan* to my move to Shutokuji and its relation to Sotei and the baby made the whole problem that much more complicated. I could feel myself getting angry at Roshi when he gave me that blank look.

Sometimes his face would lighten up when he asked me how things were at Shutokuji. The expression was one of the warmth that I'd remembered him displaying in the past when I was his attendant for six months before moving to Shutokuji. Then we would talk for a while about my new life, and once again I would feel close to him. But when we met for *koan* testing, it was back to the old, detached expression.

Whenever I returned to Shutokuji, Sotei seemed aware of my frustration from the expression on my face. She was gentle and caring, while also keeping a little distance. She knew I was

struggling, but she also knew it was not her place to ask about difficulties with practice.

One day I returned from *takuhatsu* with a liter bottle of *sake*.

"I'm back," I whispered, as I quickly walked to my room, trying to stay out of sight.

"Hi" Sotai said, surprising me. She had been cleaning the floor outside my room.

So much for keeping it a secret, I thought.

"One of the parishioners gave this to me," I lied, pointing to the bottle, and had a flash of my encounter with Komushitsu the time I'd bought tofu for his meal. I'd told him that a parishioner gave us the tofu, so he wouldn't be angry at me for being extravagant. I seemed to have one standard excuse when I lie.

From that day, when I returned from Bairinji upset, I would go into my room and come out for lunch, my face flushed—the warm red glow that I'd always had when I drank. On those occasions I was particularly talkative at meals.

I came out of my room feeling renewed from a couple of shots of *sake* one afternoon and walked into the dining room. Sotai was wiping the table with Fumie by her side. "I brought some *somen* noodles from one of the Bairinji patrons," I said, giving her the package. (That was the truth).

"I'll cook them for dinner. Cool *somen* will be nice in this heat," she said, picking Fumie up. She was going to carry the child with her into the kitchen.

"I'll take Fumie," I said, snatching the little one from her mother. I shook the child to get her attention and started to lift her up and down. When Sotai left the room with the *somen* in her hands, I threw Fumie a little ways in the air, caught her, and threw her a little higher. She was giggling. More than the few shots of *sake* Fumie's smiling face helped pick up my spirits when I felt defeated from another *dokusan*. Unaware of my struggles, she could draw me out and make me forget everything outside of the moment. When Sotai returned to the dining room, Fumie was laughing as she flew through the air and back down into my arms.

"Be careful, you'll drop her!" Sotai said,

It must have been apparent to Sotei that I was slightly tipsy. I could tell, however, that she was happy to see her daughter laugh, and to see me relax when I played with the child. Sotei brought lunch in and took Fumie from me and placed her in the corner of the room. Before she'd put the utensils in their right places, the child was by her side wanting to play or eat—wanting attention. Sotei carried her into the next room to nurse her until she fell asleep and returned to the dining room. I waited until Sotei was ready, and then we recited the five vows before eating.

"Fumi-chan has your eyes," I said. As the words came out of my mouth, I felt a little embarrassed. I was getting personal and hoped I wasn't too personal.

"And your laugh," Sotei said. And we both laughed at the absurdity of her spontaneous response.

We ate quietly, washed our bowls and sat on the veranda drinking cool barley tea.

"What happened to the baby's father?" I asked. The *sake* had loosened my tongue. I even surprised myself with my directness.

Sotei looked down, and I assumed that, as had happened other times when I'd mention something about the child that made her uncomfortable, this would be the end of our conversation. Then she surprised me. "He's off somewhere, in medical school perhaps." She was quiet for a while and then added, "He doesn't know he has a daughter."

That wasn't the response I had even thought of as a possibility. I felt as though I had intruded enough for one day and was about to change the subject. To my surprise Sotei wanted to talk about it.

"My teacher and adoptive mother, Myotei-*obachan*, sent me to elementary school when I was eight years old," she began. "Most of the students had been there the previous year so I was already an outsider in the eyes of the other kids. Along with that, my head was shaved. My classmates had a lot of fun with this baldheaded latecomer. It wasn't much fun for me. Rural school students can be quite cruel. For the first year, I did my best to be accepted by the others, but nothing I did worked. I studied hard and they called me a goody-goody. I brought snacks for everyone and they only laughed

at me while gobbling them up. Finally, I just gave up and stayed by myself. The first year at school was horrible.”

I wondered what this had to do with Fumie and the child’s father. I was certain, however, that there was a connection, and I was anxious to hear more. I didn’t have to feign interest because I was burning with curiosity.

“When school started again the following year, I begged *obachan* not to send me. ‘You have to go to school,’ she said. ‘I won’t be around to take care of you forever. You must get an education.’

“I cried for a week straight, but when opening day came I was there with the rest of the children. Not wanting to deal with the harassment, I stayed by myself as much as possible. I lived in my own fantasy world and played with my imaginary friend. My apparent self-contentment only made the other children more contentious. They teased me every opportunity they had, calling me little nun, baldy, and, worst of all, foreigner. I pretended not to care, though I was feeling miserable. I told my imaginary friend that I didn’t need anybody but her and made up my own names, as insulting as possible, for each of the students. That’s how I spent the first few months of my second year at school.

“Then something happened that turned everything around. In the middle of the semester, Akira, a new student whose parents moved to Kurume from Osaka, joined our class. The only thing worse than coming to school a year later than the other students and with a shaven head to boot is to transfer from another school, particularly one in another part of the country. Akira was a handsome boy. He was bright and a good athlete—all the qualities to allow one to be a class leader in a different situation. But at Kurume Elementary School Akira wasn’t accepted. He had a strong Osaka accent, which drew laughs every time he opened his mouth, and he was extremely stubborn. Not only did he refuse to ignore the initial rebukes by the other students, he turned on them in response, calling them all kinds of names. He went home from school with a bloody nose and a black eye almost every day during his first few weeks at school.

“But he was tough, and he could hand out whatever he received. Eventually the other students got tired of being bloodied up in return and stopped teasing him. They simply ignored him and he ignored

them as well. I watched all this with mixed feelings—relieved that I wasn't the only one being isolated from the group and angrier than ever with the classmates for being so vicious.

“At some time during the year Akira must have heard some of the other students mocking me when I answered the teacher's question. That was all he needed to make him take an interest in me. He saw me as an ally because the other students persecuted me too. I think he also felt protective of me, realizing I didn't have the kind of strength he had to fight back. So from that time on he talked to me every chance he got. I was a little nervous being considered a friend of another outcast, but Akira's boldness gave me strength.

“‘You don't need to pay any mind to those idiots,’ he said.

“From that day on I no longer needed my imaginary friend. Akira and I met in the schoolyard before school started, and we ate lunch together every school day. We became a self-contained duo. Though the other students weren't happy with our relationship—we must have looked very content in each other's presence—they'd learned not to anger Akira anymore. They simply looked on silently, begrudging our happiness. The joy of this new relationship changed my feeling about school. I looked forward to each day and couldn't get to school fast enough. Myotei-*obachan* noticed the change in my mood and asked me about this new attitude.

“‘I just like it, that's all,’ I said, not wanting to reveal the true reason.”

I was engrossed in Sotei's story and with the exception of some encouraging nods I listened quietly. Then Fumie started crying and Sotei went into the other room to check on her. She came back holding the baby and sat down next to me. I wanted her to continue the story, so I took the child from her and started shaking her on my knee.

“Please continue,” I said.

“Now where was I? Oh yes. I told Akira that I lived in a temple, and he asked a million questions. He wanted to know everything about my life, and he never tired of detail. He had an insatiable appetite to learn all there was to know about everything. He asked me questions about Buddhism, and I wanted so much to teach him, but I knew very little about the subject myself. Every day, after

school, I would pump Myotei-*obachan* with questions about the Buddha. My new interest in the subject aroused *obachan's* curiosity.

“Why, all of a sudden the great interest in Buddhism?” she asked.

“The question threw me off balance. I knew that showing an interest in Buddhism would make her happy, but I hadn’t considered that it might make her suspicious as well. I wasn’t ready to mention anything about Akira for fear that she might not approve. I tried to act nonchalant, responding as vaguely as I could. ‘Some of the students are asking me questions, and I don’t really know much.’

“By the end of the school year, I knew all about Akira’s life, and he knew all about mine. The other students had become used to us as a couple, and our relationship felt natural and good. I don’t know how Akira felt about the coming school break, but I was dreading it. I couldn’t imagine being away from him for such a long time. Before the break, he asked if he could visit me at the temple sometime, and I assented. I knew then that I would have to tell *obachan* about him. *Obachan* was agreeable to Akira visiting.

“That was the beginning of our relationship outside of school. *Obachan* liked him because he was so curious about Buddhism in general and Shutokuji in particular. He asked her more questions about the temple on his first visit than I’d asked in all my life. He visited me a few times that summer and continued to visit during the next school year. He talked about his family. His father was a doctor of western medicine, and his mother was a doctor of Chinese medicine. He was an only child and planned to study western medicine like his father. He talked about his parents with great fondness, but he never asked me to visit him at his home. Whenever I hinted at visiting him, he would make some kind of excuse why that particular time wouldn’t work.

“I’d met his parents a couple of times when they came to school to conference with our homeroom teacher, but I never saw them outside of those conferences. During our years together in elementary school I never visited his home. I wondered whether his parents didn’t like me, and if so why? Could it be the fact that my head was shaved? I decided then that I would let my hair grow. *Obachan* wasn’t happy with my decision, but she reluctantly agreed to stop shaving my head.

“Nothing I did seemed to change Akira’s attitude. He never invited me to his home, and I stopped asking. I pretended it was not a big thing with me, though it was. Still we had become so close we were like brother and sister. We did argue at times, and there were periods when we weren’t speaking to each other, but those times were few. We loved each other, and as we grew older our relationship was complicated with concerns that plagued adolescents. Myotei-*obachan* began to worry about where the relationship was going to end up.

“When we were alone together, we held hands and became very comfortable having physical contact, though we didn’t think of it in sexual terms. We were both twelve years old. By then Akira was in junior high school and I no longer went to school. I spent most of my time helping *obachan* around the temple. Akira and I would meet a few times a month, and I lived for those times. We played games and sang songs that we’d learned in elementary school. We were like little kids when we were together.”

At that point, Sotei appeared to be uncomfortable, and she became quiet. I sensed her discomfort and started to play with Fumie, allowing the subject to be dropped for the time being. While I played with the baby, Sotei went into the kitchen to boil some more water for another pot of tea. She returned with the tea, as Fumie was getting cranky.

“I think it’s time for your nap, Fumi-chan,” she said. She carried the child into her room. The child cried, not wanting to nap, but her mother must have nursed her to sleep because Sotei came back alone.

“She is asleep now,” Sotei said, and picked up her cup and sipped her tea.

I assumed that the conversation concerning her relationship with Akira was finished for the day, but I was wrong. She seemed to want to get it all out.

She picked up the teapot and filled up my cup. Then she poured some more tea in her cup. “When Akira was a senior in high school, our meetings were usually secretive. *Obachan*’s concerns grew, and she didn’t hide them. Though Akira didn’t talk about his parents’ feelings regarding our relationship, I could sense that they were

strained. I would ask him if anything was wrong at home, but he would change the subject and then become terse with me. So I stopped pursuing the point.

“I told Akira that *obachan* was trying to pressure me to stop seeing him, and, though we never talked about it, he knew that I was aware of his problems with his parents. We realized that unless we were willing to run away together, it was just a matter of time before we would be forcefully separated. I didn’t want to hurt *obachan*, and he had no desire to disobey his parents’ wishes.

“Along with the realization that each meeting could be our last, came the desire to cherish each moment. I no longer felt the restraint that propriety demands. The inevitability of our separation made me cling to Akira, and I felt no shame in giving myself to him.”

This revelation should have been no surprise to me, but it made me a little uncomfortable. I wondered if I were feeling jealous, though it seemed a bit ridiculous to feel that way. Whatever it was, I believe that I was having a harder time hearing it than Sotei was telling it.

After a brief pause, Sotei continued. “At this point our relationship took another strange turn. As we became closer physically, Akira stopped expressing his feelings verbally. I don’t know what was happening at home for him, but our new relationship seemed to make him quite uncomfortable. His discomfort made me feel ill at ease, too, and we agreed to stop seeing each other for a while. I went along with Akira when he suggested we take a break from each other, and even expressed the opinion that it was the best thing for both of us given our family situations. However, I was really hiding a deep hurt. I secretly coveted the hope that we would get together again. So when he showed up at Shutokuji a month later, I was ecstatic. I told *obachan* that I would be back soon and we took a walk.”

I saw tears forming in Sotei’s eyes, and I handed her a handkerchief. With that gesture, she started to sob without restraint. I sat there until she recovered her composure and was able to continue.

“Akira told me that his parents were returning to Osaka, and that he would be applying to medical school. He said that his parents did not want him to see me anymore, and that he had agreed. I didn’t

say anything. I had thought I would be prepared for what seemed inevitable, but I wasn't. This was not a temporary separation. He was telling me that he'd agreed to never see me again. I cried and cried, and he held me, but he couldn't say anything. That was the last time I ever saw him. When I realized three weeks later that I was pregnant, I decided not to let him know."

Sotei and I sat on the veranda sipping tea and taking turns looking at each other and then out at the garden. A cool breeze passed over us and chilled the sweat on my brow. I feared that my quiet, almost unresponsive demeanor might have made Sotei wonder whether she'd been out of place discussing her private life in such detail with this monk. I forced myself to ask her a question to demonstrate such was not the case.

"Was it stressful to have a child in this traditional society, at a temple and with no father?"

Sotei looked at me. "Stressful? What an understatement!"

Now I feared that my question was inappropriate.

"I tried to hide the fact that I was pregnant to all except *obachan*, and it worked for a couple of months. During my sixth month *obachan* came home from shopping, and I could see that she was livid.

"What's the matter?' I asked.

'There is a rumor going around town that you will be giving birth to Sanshoken Roshi's child!'

I was sipping my tea and I almost spit it out

Sotei laughed. "Maybe you need another shot of *sake* rather than tea."

"Roshi died before Fumie was born," I said.

"But not before she was conceived. *Obachan* and I often went to Roshi's hermitage to bring him food and help relieve Komushitsu Roshi of caretaking his teacher. Some of the older women in this community believed Sanshoken had extraordinary powers," Sotei said, laughing.

I was happy to see her mood lighten up.

"That was when *obachan* made up a story that the child's father was a high ranking naval officer who had to return to his ship before Fumie was born. She told all the nosy women who enquired that we

had gotten married in a quiet ceremony in Tokyo with only *obachan* and his family present. Some of the town gossips, those who naively believed the story, must be wondering now when on earth the father was going to return. The others probably still think Fumie is Sanshoken's daughter."

At that point Fumie started crying again and Sotei stood up to go to fetch the child. As she was about to leave the room, she turned to me and said, "When Fumie was born, I asked *obachan* to shave my head again."

I wondered about her reason for suddenly deciding to have her head shaved, especially because she had a roguish smile on her face when she said it. But she was gone by then, and I had work to do in the garden.

By the time they came back onto the veranda, I was already gathering my tools. With Fumie on her back making her baby noises, I could hear pots and pans banging as Sotei cleaned the kitchen. We were back to our afternoon routine: she wiping down the dining table and shelves in the dining room and cleaning the rest of the temple all the while talking to Fumie, and me working in the garden.

After Sotei unburdened herself with her story, I grew even more comfortable with mother and child, and, with the exception of my continued frustration with *dokusan*, was generally happy.

One morning I was practicing zazen, working on my *koan* of the lady burning down the hut. Once again I felt as though I was going crazy. As I'd done more and more when the frustration around the *koan* mounted, I turned to *shikantaza* for a while to get some relief. Just being there in the moment, feeling my breathing, hearing the birds as they started their symphonies in the garden, and being aware of the sound of silence—the sound of my own brain when thoughts slowed to a minimum—took me to a special place, a place of joy. Without making a conscious effort to return to my *koan*, the image of the young woman embracing the monk, the monk's cold response and the old lady burning the monk's hut popped into my brain simultaneously. Holding those images did not feel frustrating in the least. Then came the dream on Hazama Mountain and the

embrace from the drowning lady, and then an internal voice of reprimand:

You filed it away somewhere, didn't you? You didn't want to understand; couldn't handle the joy of the embrace; it didn't fit with your dream, with your image of a monk who wanted nothing other than enlightenment. You needed the woman in your dream—you realize it now, don't you? When you buried her deep down inside of you, you buried a slice of the truth. Your image of strength is, in reality, mere weakness. You hide what you can't face because it's too painful—at least, you think it is.

At that point a voice deep down inside me said: You love Sotei, don't you? You're so good at self-deception you don't even know it when you love somebody.

I could feel myself trying to dismiss this revelation. But I knew it was true. I did love Sotei and I did hide it from myself. I only needed to hear it as though it came from someone else, some other part of me, to know how true it was.

My first response was a feeling of happiness, a lifting of a great burden, but then I was seized by an equally great pang of sadness. I didn't try to escape; something told me to stay with it, and I did. It was as though sorrow filled every cell in my body and mind. As I sat holding on to this sorrow, embracing it, the quality of the feeling changed. First I was the courtesan feeling disbelief at being rejected, the rejection translated as self-doubt. Then I was the monk holding desperately to his ideal, and then I was the old lady. She needed the monk to be a certain way, and he wasn't. Then Sotei appeared with her daughter and a lingering love for the father who was taken away from her.

People suffered from apparent circumstances they couldn't control. They suffered from loss of loved ones, poverty, betrayal and, strangely, from lack of all these things. People with blessed circumstances seemed to suffer too. They suffered from ambition and from lack of it. Nobody seemed to escape the pain of being human. *Life is suffering*, the Buddha's first noble truth pointed to this. I had read it and heard it countless times, but never before had I *felt* it as I did then. Faces appeared before me: my father, disappointed in his son; my mother, wanting my father to understand me; Doshu,

Kanryo, Sotei ... each with his or her own suffering; and I with my personal battle with *what is*—fighting a most natural and beautiful feeling, the love for another person, because it didn't fit in with my vision of who I *should be*. Tears came to my eyes, uncontrollable tears. I was sitting and weeping—the only time I could remember tears during zazen.

Then the pain, the suffering and the disappointments started to blend together. There was no longer the suffering of the monk, the old lady, Sotei, my father, myself; there was simply *suffering*. Though the feeling kept growing inside me, it ceased to be painful. As soon as the personal—their suffering and my suffering—disappeared and I simply sat with the suffering, the fact of it as part of being human, I didn't feel it as pain. But I *did* feel it. Never before did I feel so human. Never before did I feel so joyful. When the joy possessed me, I understood sorrow and when sorrow possessed me, I understood joy. But most important was the feeling of being human; the feeling of being created, born, limited, because it brought with it a feeling of the Uncreated, the Unborn, the Unconditioned.

Tears of sorrow became tears of joy and then sorrow again. The tears did not stop flowing. Sotei walked past the Buddha Hall and heard the sobbing. She must have wondered what could make me cry like that. I had been a pillar of strength to her, and now I was sobbing like a baby.

She told me some time later how uncomfortable she had felt, how uneasy my crying had made her. She said that when she finished preparing breakfast, she realized she hadn't heard me reciting the morning sutras. She peeked into the main hall but I wasn't there. She walked by my room but heard nothing. Then she went to the entrance way and saw that my sandals weren't there. I had gone to Bairinji to see my teacher.

I arrived at the *dokusan* room early that day but Komushitsu wasn't there. I hastened to his private room; my need to see him couldn't wait. I announced myself outside his room, and he asked me to enter. As soon as he saw me, he knew that I had broken through.

"I've waited a long time for this moment," he said.

Tears streamed down my face once more.

"Thank you for being patient with me," I heard myself saying; remembering the story of Kyogen and his teacher Isan: *You have shown me a kindness that surpasses that of my parents. Had you explained it to me, I never would have known this joy I now feel.*

Komushitsu asked me to explain in detail what I had experienced. I tried as best I could. The more I spoke the less it felt like the words were coming from me. Just as I'd watched the transformation during morning zazen from all the individual sorrows to a non-personal sorrow—the sorrow of being human the explanation I now gave was also becoming impersonal. The less I identified with the experience the more easily words flowed from my mouth. I wondered at this new gift. Komushitsu asked a few questions to clarify certain points and then smiled.

"The joy of the teacher surpasses that of the student," Komushitsu said, as he walked me to the gate. "Remember though, beautiful as it is, it is nothing special. You must live each day, each ordinary day, with the care one would give to his infant baby."

An interesting choice of words, I thought. I turned and bowed to him and walked out of the monastery.

I went on my normal begging rounds before returning to Shutokuji. When I arrived at the temple, Sotei was in the garden weeding, and Fumie was playing near her. Sotei looked nervous when she saw me from a distance, no doubt remembering the strange morning and my disappearance before breakfast. But as soon as I approached and she saw my face, her expression changed. She knew all was fine. She told me that she hadn't seen me return from *dokusan* looking as calm since she'd known me.

When Fumie looked up from playing in the dirt and saw me, her face lit up. She stood and walked three steps toward me before falling. Those were her first steps and Sotei and I watched, both beaming. The baby stood up again and stretched her hands toward me. I picked her up, lifted her into the air and she laughed. "You and I both learned to walk today, little one," I said.

To someone from the outside, life at Shutokuji would not have appeared any different after my breakthrough of the “old lady burning down the hut” *koan*. I arose at 3:30 each morning, practiced two periods of zazen, recited sutras, ate breakfast and went on to Bairinji for *dokusan* with my teacher. I then went on *takuhatsu*, choosing a different neighborhood each day, and returned to Shutokuji for lunch. The afternoons consisted of work around the temple and zazen in the evenings.

Sotei cleaned, cooked and worked in the garden and took care of her daughter. She also joined me in reciting sutras when she could, sometimes with Fumie strapped to her back. She told me that I was more relaxed and no longer appeared preoccupied.

“I feel like I have to get used to a new person,” she said. “Not that I’m complaining. It’s more fun being around someone who is totally involved in what he is doing and looks as though he loves his work.”

It was true. When I worked, I simply worked. I was no longer preoccupied with thoughts of why I was sent to Shutokuji. I hadn’t found such joy in working since before I started pondering that last *koan*. I also became more attentive to Fumie’s needs, and that, more than anything else, seemed to bring joy to Sotei.

When I was free, the three of us went up the mountains for picnics. I made the rice balls and Sotei made side dishes from the vegetables in the garden. The monk, the lady and the baby became a family. As our intimacy grew I remembered my teacher’s words: *a novice controls his environment and a mature monk leaves things to nature’s control*.

“What did you think when an old monk showed up at the Shutokuji gate?”

Sotei and I were in bed and Fumie was asleep in a small futon along side us. Two months had passed since my breakthrough with the *koan*.

“I don’t remember how I felt then,” she said. “But watching you move around the temple these last few months, I don’t think I’m young enough to keep up with you.”

Fumie cried out in her sleep and we were quiet until she settled down. Then Sotei whispered.

“What did *you* think when you first heard a baby crying?”

“It certainly was a surprise—a shock would be more accurate.” After a quiet moment I added, facetiously, “Then, I just assumed you needed someone to take care of Fumie for you.”

“You’re interested in her more than in me anyway,” she retorted.

“You know what I think, Yayo?” I started using Sotei’s birth name when we became a couple. “I think Fumie planned this all along.”

“She’s only a year old!”

“That doesn’t mean she can’t scheme.”

“You know what I think Goin-san?”

“What’s that?”

“You’re usually a quiet man, but sometimes you talk too much. I know how to shut you up though,” she said, wrapping her arms around me.

Chapter 49

On January 2, 1963, Kodo and his disciple Tokugen Sakai walked down the path to Zeze-an. Kodo had made this walk every New Year since 1936. He looked at the plum trees that lined the path, the first reminder that he had returned to his old friend's temple. His disciple, walking in front of him, bounced on ahead. "I've done fine by myself all these years. Why does Sakai have to accompany me now?" he muttered to himself. He knew that his eighty-three year old body was no longer holding up on long journeys—his legs had collapsed twice while he was traveling to northern Japan to lecture and hold retreats this past year. Nevertheless, the trip from Tokyo to Zeze-an consisted of nothing more than an hour train ride and a short bus ride to the temple. Surely he didn't need an attendant by his side for this short trip.

Kodo realized that his life on the road was coming to an end, and he was greatly dispirited, but he kept those feelings to himself as though not sharing them made them only half true. His short temper was further proof that events were overtaking him. He recalled his response when Sakai insisted on going with him to Tokujoo's temple.

"So I'm too old to be allowed out on my own now!" he bellowed.

"Please, Roshi, we've already gone over this. I sent a telegram telling the Katos that I would be accompanying you, so the matter is settled."

Now, as they approached the main temple building, and Kodo saw Tokujoo and his disciple, Yuzen Yanase, waiting for them, his spirits soared. At the sight of his friend, Kodo's frustration with his own disciple dropped away. He even found himself feeling grateful that Sakai had demonstrated such concern for his teacher. What is it about Tokujoo, he wondered, that can transform a grumpy old man, into a happy monk? He and Tokujoo walked behind their disciples, engaged at once in conversation.

Kodo saw Sakai whisper something in Yanase's ear.

"He seems to be fine now," Yanase responded.

"Tokujoo Roshi can make an ogre smile," Sakai said. "I hope it lasts."

Sakai must be warning him that I am cranky today, Kodo thought.

When they arrived at the kitchen, Yayo, Fumie and Taigan were waiting for them. Kodo saw Taigan, the youngest of Tokujoo's four children, in his Buddhist robe and said, "I'd heard that you were training at the Kenchoji Monastery. I hope they're treating you well. Those Rinzai training monasteries can be pretty rough." Pointing to Tokujoo, he added, "It's not like practicing under this old fellow, is it?"

Taigan smiled. "Father never taught me anything," he said. "When I got to Kenchoji and didn't even know how to recite sutras, everyone had a good laugh. I had to take a lot of teasing for a while. That was worse than the actual training."

Tokujoo laughed. "If I had pushed my children to practice, they would have all run away. Taigan decided to become a monk on his own. If he doesn't like it, he has only himself to blame."

Kodo turned to Fumie. "How do you keep so young?" It was hard to believe the little girl he'd loved to play his magic tricks on was now in her forties.

"By climbing trees," Yayo said.

"Mother!"

"It's true," Tokujoo chimed in. "She's the only one who can get up to the top of the plum trees to get the ripe fruit."

"You mean they don't let you climb trees at Kenchoji?" Kodo said to Taigan. "What is this Rinzai training worth anyway?"

"You look for any chance to rail at Rinzai Zen," Tokujoo said. "If tree climbing becomes his passion I'll send him to Eihei-ji."

"Are you two going at it again? Let's have some tea," Yayo said.

"The perennial peace maker. Can't a couple of grizzled old timers have some fun?" Tokujoo said. He turned to Kodo, "Let me show you the new plum trees first, then we'll have tea."

"While you two 'grizzled old timers' have fun looking at trees, Sakai-san and Yanase-san will join us for tea, won't you?" Fumie said.

Mother, son, and daughter, and the two disciples walked inside, and Kodo followed his friend to the river in back of the temple where Tokujoo had planted seedlings the previous spring. They passed a pen housing two goats. It must be the goat milk that keeps Tokujoo so spry at eighty-seven, Kodo thought, as he followed his friend in

silence. There was no need to talk. They sat by the river's edge and watched the water.

After a long silence, Tokujoo asked, "How was the trip to Kyushu and northern Japan last year?"

"Long trips are getting more difficult. I don't know that I'll be able to keep it up for many more years," he said. "I feel the cold more biting than ever before. And my legs are not what they used to be." To lighten things up he smiled and said, "But it's not nearly as painful as when my teeth fell out one by one ten years ago."

Tokujoo laughed his own toothless laugh and said, "I remember when you tried to get me to wear false teeth. You had just gotten yours, and you seemed to be on a new mission. You even offered to pay for mine if I agreed to get a pair."

"And you said you would take the money, but not the teeth."

They both had a good laugh. Tokujoo appeared to be mulling something over in his mind. Finally, he turned from the river to face Kodo. "I can't imagine you settling down, but if you ever decide to, you can live in the little hut in the back. We'll take good care of you."

"Will I have to start practicing *koan* Zen?" Kodo asked, grinning.

"These days I've been doing *shikantaza*, so you don't have to worry."

Kodo was appreciative of his friend's offer, but he didn't want to talk any more about retirement. "Where are those young plum trees you were going to show me?" he asked.

They stood up and walked along the riverbed until they came to an area with rows of saplings and full-grown trees. Kodo remembered visiting Tokujoo at Bairinji and taking a walk around the monastery grounds. The monastery had all those beautiful plum trees surrounding it. "You really brought Bairinji here, didn't you?"

"The older ones still have plums, but some of them have no juice inside."

"Like me," Kodo said.

"Like us," Tokujoo added. "That's why we train disciples." Then pointing to the younger trees, he said, "They are like these little guys. The future is in their hands."

"That's right," Kodo said.

“You shouldn’t have any complaints. You’ve scattered little saplings all over the country. You’ve done your job and now it’s time to sit back and watch the work grow.”

“You’ve had more practice staying in one place. I guess I’m going to have to learn.”

They walked in silence for a little while longer. Tokujoo turned around. “We’d better get back,” he said, and then added with a playful smile, “Yayo doesn’t like me to have too much fun with my friends. She thinks it’s a bad habit for a practicing monk.”

When the two old monks returned to the main house, Yayo, her daughter and son and the two disciples were laughing and having a good time. Yayo brought out a *seiza* bench and asked Kodo if he wanted to use it. The bench would allow him to sit in the traditional *seiza* position without putting too much pressure on his knees. Another reminder of his declining age! Kodo gave Sakai a sharp look and said, “You’ve been talking about me.”

There was an uncomfortable silence. Kodo broke it, turning to Yayo. “No, thank you, Yayo.”

“My children bought it for me,” Tokujoo said. “I’d gone to Bairinji once when my teacher was seventy-three. He used one of those benches, and I made the mistake of telling everyone. So they went out and bought me one. I tried it, but it just doesn’t feel right.”

Tokujoo understands what I’m going through, Kodo thought. However, he seems to take getting old a lot more gracefully than I do.

After tea, Yayo and Fumie excused themselves, saying that they had to start preparing for the evening celebration. Sakai and Yanase walked off in one direction and the two friends walked in another. It was a cold clear day with a mild breeze. It hadn’t snowed or rained that week so walking was easy. As they strolled around the temple grounds, quietly listening to the birds and the sound of flowing water from the river, Kodo was reminded of a European painting he had seen in the Tokyo National Museum. It was an oil painting of two Trappist monks walking in a medieval garden.

As the sun started to sink in the western sky, guests arrived one by one, dressed in their holiday best. Tokujoo and Kodo greeted

them at the gate, engaging them in small talk. Kodo's day with his friend had picked up his spirits. He noticed Sakai was looking more relaxed, and that he wasn't watching him every moment to make sure he didn't over exert himself.

The Buddha Hall had been converted into a large dining room. Fumie started bringing out the warm sake, and a festive feeling permeated the place. Kodo looked around the room. Many of the fifteen or so faces had already begun to turn red from the sake, and there was much laughter. He knew most of them—parishioners of Zeze-an who had attended each year. The younger ones, he supposed were waiting in anticipation for the feast while the older ones, he feared, were hoping to be entertained. At that point, Tokujoo made the usual suggestion.

"Kodo-san, how about brushing a calligraphy for the occasion."

"Not me," he said, surprising himself. The words seemed to come out of his mouth of their own accord.

Kodo could see the surprised looks on the faces of the old timers. He knew that this was a ritual that had continued without interruption for twenty-seven years. Many had brought their little squares of fancy writing paper with the hope that he would brush a phrase of Zen teaching for them, and now he was refusing to accommodate.

He turned to Tokujoo. "You brush something, and I will follow." Knowing that Tokujoo had started practicing calligraphy at around sixty, pretty advanced in age to begin, he wanted Tokujoo to become a part of this ritual.

Kodo's own hand was beginning to shake, reminding him in yet another way that he had become an old man. His shaking hand would be less noticeable, he thought, if he weren't the center of attention. He also knew that Tokujoo had never been asked to brush anything when Kodo was around, unless, of course, Kodo insisted. He noticed a quiet look of satisfaction on Tokujoo's face.

"They want your calligraphy, not mine. I'm an amateur," Tokujoo said.

Though it was true that Tokujoo had started practicing calligraphy late in life, Kodo knew that he had done so with gusto. Every morning for the last twenty years, Tokujoo had practiced on old newspapers, brushing the characters for sutras and pictures of

Bodhidharma. He showed his work to Kodo on the morning of January third each year, when none of the guests were around. Though Kodo felt that his friend's brush strokes did not have great power, they had a simple charm and freedom that Kodo felt was a quality he could never duplicate.

"I'm at Zeze-an 365 days a year," Tokujoo continued, with the proper amount of humility, "so they can obtain my poorly executed work anytime. But the calligraphy of a famous monk like you, who comes around only one day a year, is much more precious than that of a farmer monk ..."

"You brush something first, and I will follow," Kodo repeated, cutting his friend off.

Tokujoo was quiet for a moment. "If you insist."

Kodo couldn't help but notice Tokujoo's joy at the opportunity to demonstrate his own talents. He smiled to himself, as Tokujoo got up and walked out of the room to get his writing implements.

Through all this wrangling between the two friends, a young man in his early twenties, who Kodo presumed was new to Zezean, kept staring at him. He usually engaged in conversations with people he saw for the first time at these parties, but this fellow's constant staring was making Kodo feel uncomfortable.

While the group was waiting, Tanaka, the retired parish president addressed Kodo.

"How do you keep traveling like you do Roshi? I'm seventythree, ten years your junior, and I can barely get myself to Zeze-an for these parties. Where do you get all that energy from?"

Kodo laughed. It sure is interesting to see how others perceive you, he thought. "I was just thinking how difficult it has been for me to travel lately," he said. "But I'll tell you one thing that keeps me going."

People started to gather around and Kodo knew that they wanted more than a quick answer. "Every year I make at least one trip to a temple in Kuji, in the far north, to lecture and hold a retreat. One lady, who has been attending my lectures for the last forty years, is now ninety-seven. She has never missed a lecture for as long as I can remember." Kodo noticed the young man watching him. He was tapping his hand on the *tatami* mat and looking around the room,

appearing impatient. Kodo ignored it and kept on talking. "That woman is partially blind and almost completely deaf. She walks with two canes and the aid of her granddaughter who has been accompanying her these last few years. Though I'm known for having an extremely loud voice, I'm sure she can't hear what I'm saying. She sits in the front row and I can see her lips moving; I imagine she is chanting *praise the Buddha* or some such invocation. When my talk is over, she comes up to the altar, takes my hand and says *arigato, arigato, arigato...* thanking me three or four times. She leaves with the help of her granddaughter, and I can hear her saying *arigatai* sermon, *arigatai* sermon, *arigatai* sermon, repeating how grateful she is for the lecture all the way out the door until I can no longer hear her."

Kodo saw the young man inch his way to a place directly across from him, a few feet between them. He was carrying a rolled up scroll in his hand. He still looked impatient. Kodo continued. "When I feel tired and my body doesn't respond like it used to, and I become discouraged, I think of that old woman, almost completely deaf and partially blind, sitting in front of me, her lips repeating 'praise the Buddha,' and I become energized and continue on my way ..."

Kodo paused for a moment, about to add something when the young man across from him unrolled the scroll in front of him.

"I know that it must sound strange that I should be most encouraged to continue my travels to far off places to lecture by the behavior of someone who can't even hear what I am saying," Kodo said, attempting to ignore the scroll that lay spread out in front of him. However, it was gnawing at his patience, and he wondered whether the others were aware of the contrast between the impudent boy and the humble old woman he had been discussing.

Kodo continued, "Her belief in the Buddha was so strong that my words were unnecessary. For her, it was just my presence that made all the difference. How could I stop going to Kuji to lecture as long as my body, however tired, would allow it?"

Kodo stopped talking and looked down at the blank scroll and then across at the young man, who was still waiting. Before he could say anything, the fellow started to speak.

“My younger sister built a new house, and I want to give her a gift in celebration.”

The young man told a long story of how she'd gotten married the year before, and he added some details about her life. Kodo could see some of those present shaking their heads, others making wry faces, convincing him that he wasn't the only one tired of this young man's behavior. When the fellow finished talking, he moved the scroll closer to Kodo, who looked down at the scroll again and then at the young man in disbelief.

“What is *this*?” Kodo said, pointing to the scroll. The fellow started repeating his request apparently oblivious to the master's feelings. Kodo couldn't contain his feelings any more. In a powerful voice, said, “Who the hell do you think you are, placing this in front of me? I'm not a street performer, damn it!” Hearing his own voice roar through the room, he felt awful.

He thought he'd conquered his volatile temper long ago as a mature monk. When he reached his boiling point this time, he felt like he was watching another part of himself acting without his permission. His past had come back to haunt him.

No matter how badly his conscience was chastising him for his behavior, his body was still following the dictates of an inertia caused by his initial anger. Kodo took the scroll, rolled it up and pitched it at the fellow. There was silence in the room. He could feel the beating of his heart. He'd always been proud of his ability to mesmerize an audience with the power of his delivery when he interpreted the Dharma, but the sound of his own wrathful voice causing such shock in those around him didn't feel good at all. He watched the boy pick up the scroll, walk to the corner of the room and slump down. What is the matter with you, old man, he thought, but he could do nothing to undo what he'd done.

An old parishioner who came yearly to the celebration, a local bank manager named Kurihara, attempted to make peace. “Please forgive the rudeness Roshi. Let's have a drink and forget this unfortunate intrusion.” He picked up a tumbler of sake and gestured to fill Kodo's glass.

Kodo was still steaming and feeling embarrassed on top of it. The mixed feelings paralyzed him, and he didn't respond to Kurihara's

attempt to mediate the situation. He looked around the room. Kurihara put the tumbler down and said nothing. Kodo's disciple Sakai and Tokujoo's disciple Yanase were looking at the floor in front of them. Nobody seemed to want to make eye contact with Kodo, and though it made him feel terrible, it was also a relief not to have to see their expressions.

At that moment Tokujoo came ambling into the room with his brushes and ink stick. He looked as though he wasn't aware that sparks were flying, but Kodo couldn't imagine that he hadn't heard him shouting. Kodo was beginning to feel a degree of calm, though he knew that the damage had been done. He had demonstrated to everyone present that he couldn't control his temper.

"What's this all about?" Tokujoo asked, speaking mostly to himself. Then he added, "Something doesn't feel right."

Kodo was certain his friend had heard him shouting. Tokujoo doesn't miss much that goes on at Zeze-an; even if he had been at the other side of the temple. So what was he up to?

Tokujoo then turned and looked at Kodo. "I never could show my feelings when I'm bothered. I wish I could just let it all out like you do."

Kodo looked up at Tokujoo, his friend of fifty years. Though Tokujoo had treated him as a mentor throughout their relationship, he knew that this gentle monk had often been teaching him. He felt those words delivered with all the warmth of a true Dharma brother, and it broke through his armor and brightened the atmosphere in the room.

Kodo picked up his glass of sake and gulped it down. "This is wonderful," he said, and, turning to Kurihara with the tumbler in his hand, he filled up the banker's glass. There was laughter in the room and conversations broke out here and there. Yayo, Fumie and two other women came in with trays of food and the party mood returned. Tokujoo looked at his box of brushes and ink stick and put them down.

"This will have to wait," he said. "I'm hungry."

The evening passed with no further incidents. They ate and drank and Kodo told some more stories. He then turned to Tokujoo

and said, "How about brushing one of your paintings of Bodhidharma?"

"Bodhidharma? You want a Bodhidharma, do you?" Tokujoo looked around at the group to a bunch of nodding heads. Kodo knew him well enough to catch the slight sign of joy in his expression, however hard he may have tried to look nonchalant. Tokujoo took out his brushes and his ink stick and brushed his famous rendition of the first patriarch, Bodhidharma. The wild first patriarch who traveled from India to China preaching an uncompromising Zen, who sat for nine years facing a wall and cut his eye lids off so he wouldn't fall asleep, was usually portrayed as a fierce looking monk. Tokujoo's interpretation was unique in its gentleness.

"Kato Roshi's Bodhidharma could never let it all out when he is angry," Kodo said, and he and Tokujoo laughed. With that comment Kodo hoped that all bad feelings he'd considered himself responsible for were erased.

The following morning Tokujoo and Kodo were on their way to the bus stop. Sakai was walking behind talking to Yanase and Yayo. Kodo turned around to make sure the two of them were out of earshot of the others and said, "I won't be coming here next year. I'll be back for your ninetieth birthday, though." He didn't really believe he would be able to return for Tokujoo's ninetieth, but he couldn't depart without suggesting some hope of his return.

It was a sad moment for Kodo. He had been coming to Zeze-an for New Year celebrations since 1936, never missing one. Even during the year of the Tokyo bombing, when nobody expected him to show up, he came wearing a protective helmet.

There was a period of silence, as Tokujoo seemed to drift off into thought. "It won't be the same," Tokujoo finally said as the two waited for the others.

The bus came and Tokujoo, Yanase and Yayo bowed as Kodo and Sakai boarded the bus. Kodo watched through the bus window at the threesome waving until he could no longer see them.

* * *

Tokujoo was working in the fields at Zeze-an. His youngest son Taigan had come home on break from his training at Kenchoji. He was helping his father plant. It was nice having his son around to talk with about Zen practice. Not the same, however, as talking with Kodo. Only someone who'd practiced at the turn of the century truly understands the Zen world I lived through, he thought. More than two years had gone by since the 1963 New Year celebration, when he last saw Kodo.

Tokujoo looked up at the sky. It was mid-spring and the weather was mild but cloudy. Rain threatened and he worked quickly to get some cuts of sweet potatoes in the ground before the downpour. Out of the corner of his eye, Tokujoo could see Taigan leaning on his hoe watching him.

Tokujoo sensed something was bothering him. "Farmer's work too tough for you, son?"

"As a matter of fact, I was wondering whether it might be time for *you* to retire. You are eighty-nine. I'm afraid you might be taxing your body a little too much for a man of your age."

"Have you been talking to your mother about the feeble old man in the garden?" Tokujoo knew that Yayo was concerned about him overworking, but he also knew that she didn't want to bring the subject up herself. It made sense that she'd send Taigan to do that. "What am I going to do, watch TV all day?"

"People come here all the time to ask for your advice. It's not like you will cease being a Zen priest."

"It's true, I do give advice to people who come around. But they come around when they see me working in the field. They don't like to come to the temple to ask the priest directly for help. We usually talk about the crops or the trees and then we have tea. Once they have relaxed, they bring out what is really on their mind."

"I'm just worried about your health, Father."

"I am also advising the earth and the plants and the trees," Tokujoo said. "And they are teaching me, too. I still have plenty to learn. I'm in the middle of my practice." With that, the conversation ended.

Tokujoo understood how his son felt. Taigan's concern was natural. Still he was glad Taigan didn't press his point any further.

It started to rain. Tokujoo quickly completed planting the row of sweet potatoes and took refuge on the veranda.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Taigan said. “This came for you.” He took a letter out of his pocket and handed it to his father. Then he took the tools and ran to the shed to put them away.

Tokujoo looked at the return address on the letter. It was from Kodo at Antaiji Temple. He watched the rain and once more his mind drifted to thoughts of Kodo. He wished Kodo was there. He wouldn’t be talking about retirement. If Kodo hadn’t been forced to settle at Antaiji because of his legs there is no way anyone would have convinced him to give up his life preaching on the road.

Up to now Tokujoo had gotten all his information about Kodo from the system of Zen-bush telegraph—a monk stopping by Antaiji would tell the news of Kodo to a monk on his way to Tokyo who would tell it to someone in a temple in Tokyo and before you knew it the news would make its way to Zeze-an. Tokujoo had heard nothing directly from his friend. In fact this is the first letter he had ever received from Kodo. Well, why don’t you open it? he said to himself. It was the first time in their fifty year friendship that Kodo had ever written him. He had seen enough of Kodo’s calligraphy to recognize his handwriting on the envelope, so he knew his Dharma Brother was not in some kind of critical condition, still he felt a strange anxiety that kept him from opening the letter. This is silly, he thought and carefully opened the letter so as not to tear it:

April 1965

Dear Tokujoo,

The weather has been mild these last few weeks, the cherry trees are in bloom and the bush warblers sing their beautiful ho-ho-ke-kyo all day long. I believe the birds are telling me to just lie there and listen to the Dharma (ho means Dharma) since my legs will no longer allow me to practice zazen.

It is hard to believe that over two years have gone by since we last had any contact. I promised I would return to Zezean for your 90th birthday, but I’m afraid I will have to break that promise. After the way I behaved at the New Year celebration two years ago, I’m sure your parishioners will be glad to be rid of

this grumpy old man for good. I never did apologize for my behavior at the party. Once my legs started to weaken and my aged body no longer could deal with extreme temperatures, something seemed to snap inside me. The old Saikichi from the Ishinden slums started to take over, and I would easily lose my temper.

Just when you think you've conquered the "foolish self" after years of Buddhist practice, you start acting like a little kid or a gang member. When I think of what I might have done if I'd never come into contact with the practice of zazen, it frightens the hell out of me. I've often told my students that we are deluded people when we are not practicing zazen, and that the practice is the only real form of the Buddha; well my actions as I got old and infirmed really brought that home to me. How many times have I warned some of my cocky students about being tricked by the thought they might be enlightened. I guess I was falling into that trap myself. I am grateful for my deluded outburst—it was the Buddha telling me to wake up. But I am sorry that the fellow who asked me to brush him a calligraphy, whether his request was appropriate or not, had to pay the consequence for my lesson.

Tokujoo put the letter aside for a moment. He thought about the last two New Year celebrations with the very conspicuous absence of Kodo. He missed his friend dearly. It wasn't as though they met regularly. They would have been together a total of two days had Kodo been healthy enough to visit. Few as those meetings were, they did occur each year. He had always known that his friend would be there on the 2nd of January, and he'd looked forward to those encounters like a child looks forward to a birthday or a special holiday. During the rest of the year he would go on with his life at Zeze-an. When something happened that was notable, he would tell Kodo. First he would tell him in a kind of internal dialog; it was like a rehearsal for the next New Year celebration when he would actually meet his friend and they would talk about the particular happening. In this way the year would go by quickly, and before Tokujoo realized it, Kodo would be at the temple again.

He picked up the letter and continued reading:

Since the Zen world is a small one, and news travels quicker through the Buddhist grapevine than through any other channel, you probably know that I've been living at Antaiji since June 1963. After my last visit to Zeze-an during the 1963 New Year celebration, I returned to Tokyo for a short rest before getting back on the road. I probably should have cancelled my regular schedule and taken a good long rest or even considered retirement then. I just didn't want to believe in the inevitability of what I knew deep down inside me to be true; I couldn't maintain my regular schedule for long.

The following February I went to Nagoya with my disciple, Sakai, to conduct a weeklong retreat. He had to return to the university, and I went on to Hiroshima. I was determined to follow my regular schedule so I continued on to Kyushu conducting retreats and giving lectures. In March I went to Antaiji for a lecture and a short rest. Kosho Uchiyama, my longtime disciple and caretaker of Antaiji, tried to get me to cancel the rest of my schedule, but this stubborn old man didn't know how to stop. I went up north to give a lecture and then on to Eiheiji for a five-day *genzo* retreat. My legs felt weak and the cold penetrated my body as it never had before. From there I went to Kuji in the far north. The trip was strenuous, but the people I met were wonderful; they were so devoted to the Buddha Way and so kind to me that I felt the desire to continue on my regular journeys until I dropped.

I returned to Tokyo that June. When I got off the train and onto the platform, I collapsed. My legs would no longer hold me up. My disciple Sakai was waiting for me there. He called a cab, and together with the cab driver carried me to the cab and took me to his room at the university. I asked him to telegraph Uchiyama to come and get me and take me to Antaiji. And that is where I've been ever since.

I had imagined that spending most of my time in bed would be worse than hell. Well I was wrong. I'm starting to believe that all my years of Zen meditation were really preparing me to know

how to enjoy life now that I am bedridden. Uchiyama and the nun Joshin take care of me full time, and other disciples come and go. They have tried everything to bring life back to my legs—changing my diet, applying acupuncture, acupressure, moxa cautery, Chinese medicine, enzyme therapy, mug wart baths, chiropractic treatments, electrostatic therapy—experimenting with every approach to rehabilitation recommended, but nothing has worked. I can see the pain in their eyes when they watch me in my present condition, and no matter how much I tell them that I am fine, they don't seem to believe me. They think I'm saying it for their sakes. The fact is that I am enjoying life: Uchiyama reads the news to me every morning (my eyes have gotten worse and I can no longer read even with a magnifying glass), the birds sing to me, and the three mountains, which I can see from my window, seem to beckon me to come to them. And when I remember reading about the beggar monk Tosui who moved to Hawk's Peak, the largest of the three mountains, I am reminded of you, Tokujoo. You, like the beggar Tosui, are truly a man free from rank. And I miss you.

Yours in the Dharma,
Kodo

Tokujoo put the letter back in its envelope and placed it in his pocket. His eyes started to tear. He remembered his father telling him big boys don't cry when he was dropped off at Daieiiji Temple at nine years old. Had he not been tricked into going to Daieiiji, he never would have come into contact with Buddhism and would never have met Kodo. His mind drifted to a quote from the Christian Bible. One of the Zeze-an parishioners who often asked him Buddhist doctrinal questions had once quoted from Jesus in the gospels. "It is as difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." That fellow Jesus is a true Buddhist, he mused. Kodo would agree with me, I'm sure. "You too, dear friend, have lived in outward poverty because of your belief in Dharma," he said. "You will surely enter that Kingdom of Heaven."

Tokujoo and Kodo shared many of the same Buddhist beliefs and values. But those ideas were not what Tokujoo was longing for when

he thought about his friend and the fact that Kodo would probably never again come to Zeze-an. What he missed most was hearing Kodo talk about his life, the mutual teasing and that intangible feeling one has when a good friend is near. He didn't feel the need to have Kodo by his side often; but to think that they might never see each other again was unbearable. Kodo's legs may not be able to carry him to Zeze-an, but my legs are still strong, he thought. I will leave my garden for a while and visit Kodo at Antaiji.

When Tokujoo told Yayo of his plan, she said, "You know how I worry about you. Your hearing is getting bad and you are slowly losing your memory. When you go to help Tsukada-san with his Zen retreats up north, I always fear that you'll be more of a burden than a help."

Just as Tokujoo was getting that 'here we go again' feeling, Yayo surprised him.

"If it is Kodo Sawaki-san that you want to visit, I will help you pack."

Two weeks had gone by since Tokujoo had told Yayo of his desire to visit Kodo at Antaiji. Though his wife surprised him with her eager consent, she had suggested that it might be a good idea if he contacted Kodo first to find out if he was up for the visit. The idea made sense and Tokujoo had agreed. He had asked a parishioner, Haruki Matsumoto, who was going to Kyoto on a business trip, to drop in at Antaiji and check with Kodo. Tokujoo was now in the garden planting a row of radishes and mulling over the plight of his old Dharma brother, confined to bed for the first time in his life. He heard Yayo calling him from the veranda facing the garden.

"Tokujoo, Matsumoto-san is here." He looked up to see Matsumoto standing by Yayo.

"Matsumoto-san, welcome," he called out. "I'll be there in a minute." He put his little planting trowel down by the half planted bed of radishes and went to the well to wash his hands and feet. He was anxious to hear the news of Kodo from Matsumoto.

"We will be waiting for you in the guest room," Yayo shouted as she and Matsumoto walked along the veranda.

Tokujoo pumped water into a bucket and washed his feet, wiped them, and then washed his hands. He stepped up onto the veranda, glanced over at his unfinished radish bed and hurried along to the guest room. He smiled at the thought of calling it a guest room, as it had so many uses over the years. He remembered when it was the only room with a ceiling that hadn't leaked during the early weeks of their arrival at Zeze-an. It was the bedroom for the whole family back then. When the other rooms were repaired, it became a bedroom for his sons, and when they were grown and out of the house it served as his study and calligraphy studio.

The "guest" room faced the veranda and the *shoji* sliding doors were open. Tokujoo smelled burning charcoal. He was surprised that Yayo would use the brazier during such mild weather. Then he saw an iron kettle on the hot coals, the bamboo teaspoon and ladle, two tea bowls, a whisk and a tin with ceremonial green tea (the *macha*) on a low table. Serving Matsumoto ceremonial tea rather than the regular *sencha* green tea meant that Yayo had elevated Matsumoto to the position of a special guest. She must be as anxious to hear the news about Kodo as I am, Tokujoo thought.

Tokujoo entered the room and sat by the table across from his guest. Matsumoto, who was sitting with his legs folded under him on the *tatami* floor, moved back from the table and bowed to Tokujoo. He returned the bow.

"I'm sorry to take you away from your garden, Roshi."

"I was about to take a tea break," Tokujoo said.

Yayo placed a small plate with *monju* bean paste sweets in front of Matsumoto. Then she took the bamboo teaspoon, scooped up some of the powdered tea from the container, placed it into one of the cups while gesturing to Matsumoto to eat a sweet. Tokujoo was certain Matsumoto was as surprised as he was to be served ceremonial tea at Zeze-an. He didn't even know Yayo had kept any of the tea at the temple.

Yayo ladled some hot water from the iron kettle and poured it into a cup, whisking the tea and water until it was the proper consistency and placing it in front of Matsumoto. While he drank his tea, she did the same for her husband. When Tokujoo finished his tea, he sat quietly listening to the water bubbling in the iron kettle. He didn't

want to rush his guest, though he was eager to hear the news of Matsumoto's visit to Antaiji.

"Kodo Roshi asked how you are doing," Matsumoto finally said. "He also sends his regards to you, *Okusan*, and to your daughter and sons."

Yayo bowed her head and Tokujoo nodded, both waiting for more.

"Roshi's legs are of no use to him. He can only leave his bed when his two caretakers, Reverend Uchiyama and the nun Joshin, assist him. He rarely gets up unless he has to relieve himself or to move to a chair while they change the sheets on his bed." He added, with a smile, "However, his spirits are high. He hasn't lost his good humor."

"What did he say about my proposed visit?" Tokujoo could wait no longer.

"Yes, your proposed visit," Matsumoto said, seeming to stall.

Tokujoo wondered whether Matsumoto didn't want to deliver the news. Was it possible that Kodo didn't want him to see him?

"I told him of your intention and he said ... let me see if I can remember his exact words ..."

As he struggled to remember, Tokujoo struggled to maintain his patience.

"Yes, I remember," Matsumoto said, but then he became quiet. He lifted his head, closing his eyes and, finally, "He said, 'I don't want the old fellow trudging all the way here from Zeze-an. Tell him not to come.'"

Tokujoo's heart dropped. He was stunned. Trying to hide his disappointment, he nodded and said, "I see." He could tell that Matsumoto found it painful delivering Kodo's response.

"That's Kodo-san for you. He doesn't want to inconvenience you," Yayo said.

Tokujoo felt she was trying to soften the blow, though he knew she too was shocked. The three of them talked a little more about Matsumoto's trip and had another cup of *macha* tea. Tokujoo savored the taste of the bittersweet tea. It brought him back to the present, and he felt a moment of calm.

Matsumoto thanked them for the tea and excused himself.

While Yayo was collecting the utensils from the table, Tokujoo said, "I'd better get back to the radish bed."

He left the room and returned to his garden. Working in the garden was always soothing for him and he needed some comfort at that time. While he finished planting the radishes his mind was focused on his work, but once the work was completed his thoughts returned to his friend. Did Kodo say what he said because he didn't want to trouble me? Or did he not want me to see him in his present condition? Should he go anyway? No, he couldn't do that. Not if Kodo didn't want Tokujoo to see him in his bedridden state. Maybe Kodo wanted to be remembered as the vibrant Dharma brother he had been through most of their years together. I might feel the same way if I were in his place, Tokujoo thought. A strong desire to go to the zendo and meditate welled up in him.

He put his tools away and once more washed his hands and feet at the well. Then he went to his room, changed into his robe and *okesa*, and went to the zendo. He lit an incense stick at the altar and sat on his cushion. He wasn't doing zazen with any intention of answering his questions about Kodo. It was more because it was a practice he and Kodo had shared and identified with throughout their fifty-year relationship.

Tokujoo crossed his legs, straightened his back, pulled in his chin and let himself breathe normally. He made no attempt to quiet his mind, *letting it be* and believing it would become quiet on its own. This time, however, he was flooded with memories of his times with Kodo—their first meeting at Yosenji Monastery, the renewal of their friendship when they met by chance on the streets of Kurume, and the many New Year celebrations at Zeze-an. Before he knew it, the incense stick had burnt down. He stood up, took another incense stick from a box, lit it and resumed sitting.

Tokujoo remembered Kodo talking about his solo retreat in the Nara Hills. Kodo had said that though his thinking mind never ceased, he stopped being concerned about it; that zazen was big enough to absorb all his thinking. Tokujoo remembered his own experience when his son died and his realization that he couldn't use zazen to heal his wound. That realization gave him a better understanding of what his meditation practice was all about. He

learned to practice without expecting anything and his meditation deepened.

Tokujoo's thoughts slowed. The second incense stick burned down. He stood up, went to the altar and lit another stick and sat again. When he heard footsteps outside the zendo, he knew Yayo was checking up on him. He hadn't sat this long since his own health had become erratic last year. He heard the footsteps retreat and assumed that after seeing him sitting straight, Yayo must have been satisfied that he was okay.

His mind quieted again. He lost the sense of his own body. A flash of Kodo sitting in the zazen posture appeared before him. He had the sensation that he and Kodo were sitting together. He knew then why he had the urge to meditate: it brought him closer to Kodo than anything else could. It didn't relieve him of the sadness at the thought of not being able to see his friend one last time, but it did make him feel that the sadness was okay.

* * *

On the morning of December 19th 1965, Kodo Sawaki's Doctor, Seiji Morizawa, hurried along Gentaku Street past rice paddies and vegetable gardens and a few scattered homes to the small entrance at Antaiji, a modest temple in Kyoto. He was on his way to see his patient, Kodo. He hastened through the entrance gate and along a dirt and cobblestone path that wound around a bamboo grove. The path opened into a small flower garden; the temple building stood on the far side of the garden. Kosho Uchiyama, Kodo's long time disciple and caretaker of Antaiji, was waiting for the doctor in the front room overlooking the garden. When he saw Morizawa approaching through the narrow garden path with his small black satchel, he jumped up and hurried toward the doctor.

"Thank you for checking on Roshi, Doctor." Uchiyama said, leading Morizawa into the temple.

Because Kodo's health was failing rapidly, Morizawa had been visiting quite regularly.

"I'd often make this trip with my father as a child," Morizawa said. "He used to take me through Gentaku Street north to Hawk's Peak Avenue to see the gardens of Koetsuji, the ancient hermitage for

poets and scholars. Then we would go a short distance up the mountain to pick mountain ferns. I still enjoy the walk. I only wish it were to see a healthier Kodo Sawaki Roshi."

Uchiyama signaled for the doctor to follow him into the front room where guests usually waited before being taken to see Kodo.

"Some tea Doctor?" Uchiyama asked.

"No thank you. I'd better check on Roshi first. When I came last night, he wasn't very coherent. I'm concerned about the fluctuation of his blood pressure. I gave him some Chinese medicine to steady the pressure, and I want to check the effects of it."

Uchiyama led the doctor to the second floor room where Kodo was lying in bed, his head propped up on two pillows. Kodo was staring out the window at Hawk's Peak. The nun Joshin was taking his bedpan out. She bowed to the doctor.

"Don't spill it," Kodo said in a barely audible voice. "It's one of the few things I can still give freely—my sermon to the vegetables." He offered a slight smile. "Had I known how much I would miss standing and peeing, I would have savored the feeling more when I was able."

The three of them laughed when they heard Kodo up to his old jokes.

Kodo drifted into a fog. He closed his eyes and lightheadedness engulfed him. It was a pleasing feeling that no longer came as a surprise. It had been happening to him for days. He opened his eyes and saw this strange man standing in front of him.

"Let me take your pulse, Roshi, the man said."

The familiar activity jolted Kodo's memory, and he looked embarrassed. How could he forget the face of the doctor who had been caring for him this last year!

"Hello doctor," he said. "Thank you for coming."

"I'll leave you two," Uchiyama said, looking at his teacher. "I have some work to do."

Kodo nodded.

"I'll be in my room when you finish, Doctor," Uchiyama said, and left.

Twenty minutes later, the doctor was sitting in Uchiyama's room talking to him about his teacher's condition. It was a small room overlooking the back garden. The two men sat facing each other

near a low table with a teapot and two cups on it. On the floor at the other side of the table was a tea cabinet with a few teacups, a caddy and a dishcloth. A kettle was boiling on the brazier.

The doctor sighed. "I think you had better contact Roshi's friends and students. His pulse is low and his blood pressure is in the danger zone."

Uchiyama looked down and said nothing. A moment later, he looked up at the doctor, straightened his body and took a deep breath. He poured the boiling water from the kettle into the teapot and then into two cups to let the water cool to a simmer. He took some tea from the caddy and poured it into the teapot. When the water had cooled a bit, he poured it from the cups onto the tealeaves in the pot and waited for the leaves to open. He poured tea into two cups and placed one in front of the doctor. The two men sat for a few moments sipping tea.

"Who is Tokujoo?" the doctor asked.

Uchiyama looked up. "He's an old friend of Roshi's. He lives near Tokyo. Their friendship goes back fifty years. Why do you ask?"

"While I was checking Roshi's vital signs, he kept looking out the window. I turned to see what he was looking at, but all I saw were the mountains. Then he said, 'Can you hear, doctor?'

'Hear what,' I asked.

'The mountain, Hawk's Peak. It's calling, Kodo! Kodo! Can't you hear it?'

"Before I could answer, he lay back on his pillow and fell asleep. He started calling out Tokujoo in his sleep. A few minutes later he opened his eyes and looked around the room as though he were searching for something. Seeming perplexed, he asked me, 'Has Tokujoo-san arrived yet?'

"Then he fell back to sleep muttering, 'Tokujoo, Tokujoo.'"

A cold breeze blew through the room. Uchiyama put another briquette in the brazier. He then poured the doctor some more tea and filled up his own cup. The two men sat in silence. A warbler cried in the garden.

The end

Glossary

<i>bunjinka</i>	a painter in a literary artistic style; cultured painters who consider themselves literary men rather than professional artists
<i>burakumin</i>	literally “village people”; a slang used to refer to a group of Japanese outcasts
<i>choshu</i>	any of six job positions of major monastery officers
<i>dango</i>	a dumpling
<i>dharma</i>	universal laws which govern human existence; the Buddhist teaching; truth
<i>daikon</i>	a white radish
<i>fundoshi</i>	a loincloth; a G string
<i>furoshiki</i>	a scarf, often used to carry packages
<i>fusuma</i>	a sliding papered door used to partition off rooms in a Japanese house
<i>futon</i>	a quilt-like mattress placed on the floor for sleeping
<i>geta</i>	a pair of wooden clogs
<i>go</i>	a Japanese board game
<i>gorotsuki</i>	a general name for a common criminal
<i>hakama</i>	pleated trousers for formal wear
<i>hakusai</i>	Chinese cabbage
<i>haori</i>	a short coat worn with a formal kimono
<i>hara</i>	the lower abdomen, believed to be the center of vital energy in the body
<i>Inarioroshi</i>	a medium; women who set up booths on the road to shrines devoted to the fox god, telling fortunes through their communication with the fox god
<i>ino</i>	supervisor of the monks’ hall and generally of monks’ conduct; one of the six temple administrators
<i>jikijitsu</i>	the monk in charge of the meditation hall (zendo)
<i>kakemono</i>	a hanging scroll

<i>kamishibai</i>	a picture card show
<i>keisaku</i>	(also called <i>kyosaku</i>) a stick used by the monk in charge of the zendo, used to wake up sleepy monks
<i>kichigai</i>	crazy; insane
<i>kinhin</i>	walking meditation
<i>koan</i>	a problem with no logical solution, given to Zen students to meditate on
<i>macha</i>	ceremonial green tea
<i>Mara</i>	a demon said to have tempted the Buddha when he meditated under the Bodhi tree before his enlightenment
<i>meinichi</i>	the day of the month which is equivalent to that on which a person died
<i>miso</i>	fermented soybean paste used to make soup
<i>Momotaro</i>	Peach Boy; the name of a hero from a Japanese folk tale; a boy born from a peach
<i>mompe</i>	baggy workpants gathered at the ankles
<i>mokugyo</i>	a wooden fish-shaped container struck with a mallet used to set a rhythm for chanting sutras.
<i>Muku</i>	an alder, a desiduous tree
<i>obon</i>	festival for the dead, celebrated during the summer months
<i>okara</i>	refuse after the juice from the soybeans used to make tofu was squeezed from the the bean
<i>okesa</i>	vestment; surplice
<i>okusan</i>	wife
<i>osho</i>	a Zen teacher who gives precepts
<i>rohatsu</i>	an eight day retreat (<i>sesshin</i>) to commemorate the occasion of Buddha's enlightenment
<i>Rinzai Zen</i>	a major school of Zen named after the Zen master Kigen Rinzai
<i>rickshaw</i>	a small two wheeled, cart like passenger vehicle, pulled by one person

<i>roshi</i>	venerable old teacher
<i>samue</i>	monk's work clothes
<i>sen</i>	the smallest denomination of Japanese money from pre-world war Japan
<i>sencha</i>	green tea
<i>seiza</i>	a sitting position with one's buttocks resting on one's heels, knees together and back straight; a formal Japanese squatting position
<i>shichirin</i>	a portable clay cooking stove with charcoal
<i>shikantaza</i>	a word coined by Zen Master Dogen for a way of practicing meditation best translated as 'just sitting;' it is the primary method of meditation for the Soto school of Zen Buddhism
<i>shissui</i>	head of workers at a Zen monastery
<i>shoji</i>	sliding door papered with translucent paper to let light in from the outside
<i>sesshin</i>	a Zen retreat in which the monks spend days in intensive meditation practice
<i>sodo</i>	monks' hall
<i>sumi</i>	charcoal, a sumi-ink stick is rubbed into a concave stone with water to make ink for calligraphy
<i>Soto Zen</i>	one of the two major school of Zen Buddhism; it is based on the teaching of Zen master Dogen
<i>sumo</i>	an ancient form of wrestling connected to Japanese Shinto ritual
<i>tabi</i>	digital socks for formal wear
<i>takuhatsu</i>	begging for alms
<i>tanka</i>	a traditional form of Japanese poetry
<i>tanto</i>	assistant head of training at a Zen monastery
<i>tatami</i>	a straw mat
<i>tenzo</i>	the Zen monk in charge of the kitchen
<i>tokonoma</i>	an alcove
<i>udon</i>	a Japanese noodle made from wheat flour

<i>udonge</i>	a legendary flower said to bloom once in 3000 years; the flower the Buddha was said to have shown to the congregation in the Wordless Sermon; Makakasho was the only disciple who understood the meaning of the sermon
<i>wabi-sabi</i>	a Japanese aesthetic of elegant poverty
<i>yakuza</i>	a member of a Japanese mob or organized crime syndicate
<i>yukata</i>	an informal cotton kimono (for summer wear)
<i>zabuton</i>	a square mat placed on the floor to sit on
<i>zazen</i>	the practice of Zen meditation
<i>zenchishiki</i>	a good friend, one who helps in conversion or religious progress; in Zen it is often applied to ones teacher
<i>zendo</i>	a Zen meditation hall

Temples and Monasteries

Antaiji	The temple in Kyoto where Kodo spent his last days
Bairinji	A monastery in Kurume City on the island of Kyushu where Tokujoo trained for twenty years.
Busshoji	A temple in Ishinden where Kodo heard his first sermon. The priest helped Kodo make the decision to become a Zen monk.
Chojuan	A temple on a hill near a town called Maruoka in Fukui Prefecture where Kodo, as young novice, was hoodwinked into thinking he would be ordained.
Daianji	A temple in a small town called Unuma in Gifu Prefecture. Tokujoo spent a night at Daianji, hoping to learn about Rinzai Zen protocol before going to train at Shogenji Monastery.
Daieiji	A temple in Nagoya. Tokujoo's father took him there against his will to become a novice monk when he was nine years old.
Daijiji	A monastery in Kumamoto City where Kodo was placed in charge of training by his teacher Sotan Oka Roshi.
Eiheiji	The major training monastery for Soto Zen monks. Kodo went there when he ran away from his adoptive parents at sixteen years old. Tokujoo went to Eiheiji for a retreat after leaving his mountain sanctuary.
Engakuji	The head temple of the Engakuji Branch of the Rinzai Zen sect, located in Kamakura. Tokujoo went there to practice as a lay student under Shaku Soen Roshi after studying at the Tokyo School of Philosophy.
Entsuji	A Soto Zen training monastery in Tamba. Kodo trained there briefly under Senyo Hara Roshi after his ordination at Soshinji.
Jofukuji	A small abandoned temple in the Nara hills. Kodo did a two year solo retreat there before being asked to

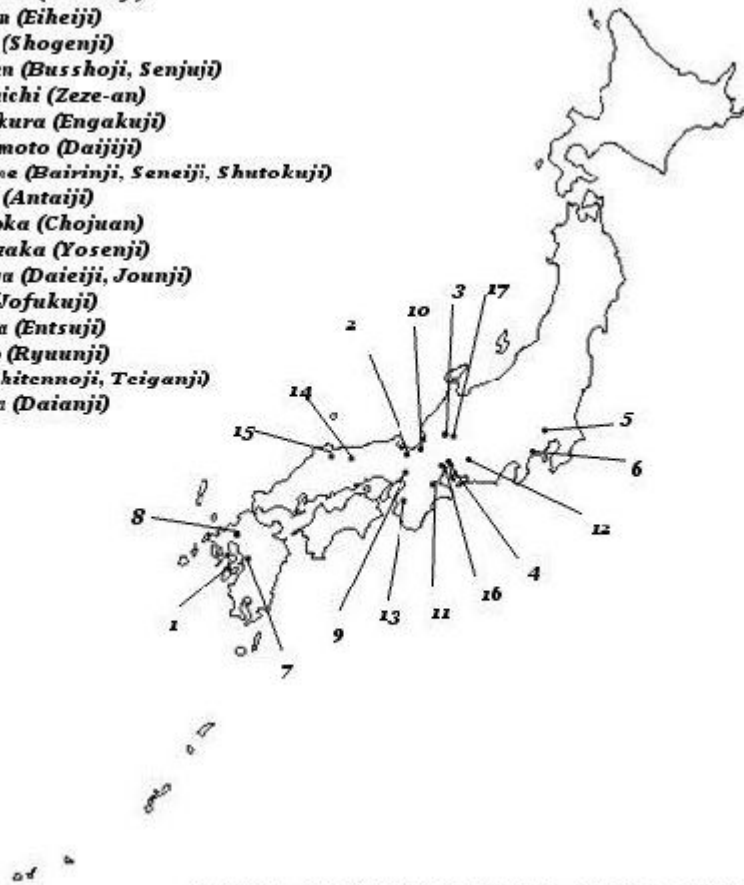
	become head of training at Daijiji.
Jounji	A Soto Zen temple in Moriyama, a village outside of Nagoya. Tokujoo's father bought it for Tokujoo when he didn't know what to do with his life.
Ryuunji	A Soto Zen temple in Tango near the Japan sea. Kodo met Fueoka Roshi at Ryuunji.
Seneiji	A Soto Zen temple in Kurume. Kodo met Tokujoo there after a ten year separation.
Senjuji	A Pure Land temple in Ishinden where Kodo grew up.
Shitennoji	A Soto Zen monastery where Kodo played with his cousin Matsu as a young boy.
Shogenji	A Rinzai Training Monastery in Ibuka in Gifu Prefecture. Tokujoo went there to live the life a true monk of zazen.
Shutokuji	A small temple in Kurume, a branch temple of Bairinji. Tokujoo was sent there by his teacher.
Soshinji	A Soto Zen monastery in Amakusa in Kumamoto Prefecture. Kodo was ordained there.
Teiganji	A Soto Zen monastery in Tsu City. Kodo was asked to be in charge in the place of the head priest an army buddy of his while his friend was recovering from a war wound.
Yosenji	A monastery in Matsuzaka a town in Mie Prefecture. Kodo and Tokujoo first met there.
Zeze-an	Tokujoo's temple in Itsukaichi, outside of Tokyo

Characters who appear more than once

<i>Doshu</i>	the abbot of Shogenji Monastery
<i>Fumie Kato</i>	Tokujoo's daughter
<i>Hashimoto Sensei</i>	Kodo's elementary school teacher
<i>Hozen</i>	Kodo's assistant at Daijiji
<i>Hosotani</i>	
<i>Kenjiro Ibe</i>	an old school acquaintance of Tokujoo's; he invited Tokujoo to an avant garde party
<i>Kodo Sawaki</i>	born Saikichi Tada, a renowned Zen master who was raised by a gambler and prostitute before he ran away to Eiheiji Monastery
<i>Komushitsu</i>	one of Tokujoo's teachers; he became abbot of Bairinji after Sanshoken Roshi's death
<i>Kosho Uchiyama</i>	Care taker of Antaiji Temple and disciple of Kodo Sawaki
<i>Morio Kimura</i>	Fumie's husband; Tokujoo's son-in-law
<i>Naomi</i>	the woman Tokujoo met at a party of Japanese <i>avant garde</i> when he was head priest of Jounji, the temple his father purchased for him
<i>Ryoun Fueoka</i>	the abbot of Ryuunji; Kodo's first Zen master
<i>Sai Tada</i>	Kodo's older sister
<i>Sanshoken</i>	the Zen master Tokujoo traveled to Bairinji to study under
<i>Semyo Hara</i>	the abbot of Entsuji in Tamba, where Kodo stayed for a short period after leaving Soshinji; Hara introduced Kodo to Zen master Fueoka
<i>Soen Shaku</i>	the abbot of Engakuji, where Tokujoo first studied koan Zen
<i>Soetsu</i>	a monk who trained with Tokujoo at Bairinji and

<i>Imamura</i>	Zeze-an
<i>Takashi</i>	the leader of a group 5 th High School students
<i>Tessei</i>	the priest in charge of Daiei-ji, where Tokujoo studied
<i>Doya</i>	as a novice monk
<i>Teruyuki</i>	Tokujoo's third son
<i>Kato</i>	
<i>Tokujoo</i>	the priest of Zeze-an; after a confused life as a
<i>Kato</i>	monk, he became a teacher of many future Zen
	masters
<i>Toshi Tada</i>	Kodo's brother
<i>Yayo Kato</i>	Tokujoo's wife
<i>Yoshihisa</i>	Tokujoo's second son
<i>Kato</i>	

1. Amakusa (Soshinji)
2. Echizen (Eiheiji)
3. Ibuka (Shogenji)
4. Ishiden (Busshoji, Senjuji)
5. Itsukaichi (Zeze-an)
6. Kamakura (Engakuji)
7. Kumamoto (Daijiji)
8. Kurume (Bairinji, Senzeji, Shutokuji)
9. Kyoto (Antaiji)
10. Maruoka (Chojuan)
11. Matsuzaka (Yosenji)
12. Nagoya (Daieiiji, Jounji)
13. Nara (Jofukuji)
14. Tamba (Entsujji)
15. Tango (Ryuunji)
16. Tsu (Shitennoji, Teiganji)
17. Unuma (Daianji)



MAP OF TEMPLES AND CITIES