

## I am a Cat – Chapter 4b

Natsume Sōseki – 1905

"As always, taking things in stride. How old is your first one? Must be getting big by now."

"Yep. I couldn't tell you for sure, but must be six or seven by now."

"Ha ha ha. A teacher's life is free from cares. I should have gone into teaching myself."

"Give it a try. Three days in and you'll regret it."

"Is that so? It strikes me as cultivated and comfortable. You've time to pursue your own interests. The business world's not bad, but life in the trenches is tough. If you're going into business, you have to aim for the top. In the lower ranks, it's all about kissing up and putting on airs. Utter foolishness."

"I've never cared for businessmen, even from my school days. Prostitutes to fortune. What they used to call plebeians." The master speaks his mind to the businessman before him.

"Really now -- It's not as bad as all that. Granted there is some coarseness. One does have to cast one's lot with wealth -- And wealth is a cruel mistress -- I just called on a certain businessman, and here's what he told me. If you want to make money, you need to 'know' three things. No duty or obligation, no feelings of compassion, and no sense of shame. Those, he says, are the three 'knows.' Amusing, don't you think? Ah ha ha ha ha."

"What kind of idiot told you that?"

"He's no idiot. Actually quite shrewd. Lives in the lane up the way."

"Kaneda? That man's an ass."

"No need to take offense. It's only a joke. All he's saying is it takes dedication to make money. You're not supposed to take it at face value."

"Fine then, the three 'knows' are in jest. But what of that woman's nose. You must have seen it, that nose, when you called."

"You mean the wife? Seemed to me a sensible woman."

"But her nose. I'm talking the size of her nose. The other day, I penned some new-style verses in homage to that nose."

"What are new-style verses?"

"You're not familiar with new-style poetry? You've fallen behind the times, haven't you?"

"I'm afraid I'm far too busy for literary pursuits. And it never was my cup of tea to begin with."

"Tell me, do you know the shape of Charlemagne's nose?"

"Ah ha ha ha ha. You're at it again. Can't say that I do."

"The Duke of Wellington was nicknamed Nosey by his subordinates. Did you know that?"

"What's this fixation with noses? Does it really matter whether one's nose is round or pointed?"

"It matters indeed. Are you familiar with Pascal?"

"Yet another question? It's as though I've stumbled into an exam hall. What of Pascal?"

"There's something Pascal once said."

"Which is?"

"Had Cleopatra's nose been a bit flatter, the world we know today would be markedly different."

"I see."

"Take note then. A nose is nothing to make light of."

"Point taken. I'll pay it due respect. That aside, I've come here today on a minor errand -- that former student of yours, Mizushima -- um, Mizushima, um, I can't recall his given name -- he's over here often, is he not?"

"Kangetsu?"

"Yes, yes. Kangetsu, Kangetsu."

"Might this concern his betrothal?"

"Something, more or less, of that sort. At the Kaneda's today ..."

"The nose herself already came calling."

"Yes. Yes. So she said. She called here to talk with you, but Meitei was present and gummed up the whole endeavor. In the end, she garnered very little."

"She's only herself to blame, poking her nose in like that."

"She bears you no ill will. She's merely disappointed that Meitei was here, and his presence precluded any intimate exchange. That being the case, she asked me to call anew on her behalf. This isn't a role I'm accustomed to, but if there's no objection from the concerned parties, then I'm ready and willing to intercede on their behalf. -- At any rate, that's why I'm here."

"I appreciate your efforts." The master stated this rather dryly, but deep down he was not unmoved. The expression "concerned parties" had in some sense touched him, like the hint of a cool breeze that grazes one's sleeve on a sultry summer's evening. The master was brusque, obstinate, and opaque to his core. That being said, though, he was not cast from the cold and heartless mold that's modern civilization. He might fly off the handle on occasion, and he might fume and fret, but he wasn't ignorant of deeper forces at play. He'd quarreled with the nose because the nose had offended him, but the nose's daughter was in no way culpable. His disdain for industrialists extended of course to Mr. Kaneda, the quintessential industrialist, but this too bore no connection to the daughter. The Kaneda daughter had presented neither cause for favor nor justification for malice. And the master cherished his disciple Kangetsu as dearly as we would a younger brother. If Suzuki, as he suggests, was the preferred intermediary of the concerned parties, then obstruction, even if indirect, could only be regarded as ungentlemanlike. -- Master Kushami does, indeed, deem himself a gentleman. -- If the concerned parties wished it -- but here lay the key question. Before he could bring himself to reassess the situation, he needed to know where things stood.

"So tell me, does the young lady wish to be Kangetsu's bride? Mr. Kaneda and the nose aside, what does the young lady herself think?"

"That's, well -- what have you -- anyhow -- why yes, I would suppose so." Suzuki's reply is hardly convincing. His mission had been to enquire on Kangetsu and report back. It hadn't occurred to him to interview the young lady. Consequently, his tactful demeanor now gives way to flustered consternation.

"'would suppose,' hardly inspires confidence." The master wants nothing short of direct, on-point, and hitting the mark.

"Allow me to try again. I didn't choose my words well. I believe the young lady is so inclined. In fact, I'm sure of it. -- Huh? -- The wife assured me. Though she does, on occasion, take to cursing him."

"The young lady?"

"Yes."

"Despicable wretch, cursing Kangetsu! She has no mind at all, then, to marry him."

"That's just it. The world's a curious place. Fondness dons the guise of harsh critique."

"What asinine world is that?" Any appeal to the subtleties of human nature is lost on the master.

"Say what you will, in the passionate world, foibles abound. That's Madam Kaneda's honest view of the matter. The fact that the young lady curses Kangetsu on occasion, referring to him as 'clueless sponge gourd' and such, can only mean that, in her heart of hearts, she cares for him deeply."

The master finds this all too peculiar. He sits there in dumbstruck silence, gazing at Suzuki's face as if he were some sort of sideshow. Suzuki, seeming to sense that his mission is in peril, steers the conversation back to a realm the master can grasp.

"Look at it this way. Given their wealth, and given the young lady's charms, it's hard to imagine they're wanting for qualified suitors. This Kangetsu may be a talented man, but in terms of social status -- no, perhaps social status is not the best term -- when it comes to family wealth, it goes without saying they come from different worlds. Now, do you suppose the parents would have called on my services and sent me over here if the young lady were disinterested in Kangetsu?" Suzuki lays out a solid argument. The master seems satisfied, and Suzuki breathes a sigh of relief, but he's wary of lingering for long, lest some new objection arise. His best bet, he reckons, is to push the conversation forward and seal the deal without delay.

"So you see, in light of all that, the other party is soliciting neither money nor assets. In place of these, however, they desire some certain level of qualification -- and by qualification here, I mean title -- it's not that they're so presumptuous as to insist on a doctorate -- don't take it wrong. The other day, when the wife called, Meitei was here and feeding her all manner of falsehoods -- It was, of course, no fault of yours. The wife, in fact, spoke most highly of you. Praised you as straight-shooting and candid. It's Meitei she took issue with. -- Anyway, the Kanedas have their reputation to uphold, and if Kangetsu were to earn his doctorate then they could embrace him with pride. What do you think? Do you see him, in the near future, submitting his doctoral thesis and earning his degree? To the Kanedas, of course, these degrees, whether doctoral or bachelor, are of little import. It's just that the world they move in is not so forgiving."

When presented thus, the other party's appeal for a doctoral degree seems hardly unreasonable. And as it's hardly unreasonable, one feels inclined to honor Suzuki's request. Suzuki is now free to employ the master or hold him in check at will. The master, at the end of the day, is a simple and guileless soul.

"In that case, next time Kangetsu comes I'll encourage him to start on his thesis. However, before doing so, I'll need to confirm his marriage interest with regard to the Kaneda daughter."

"Head-on interrogation won't do when it comes to marriage interests. The quickest way to confirm his intent is to subtly sound him out in the course of conversation."

"Sound him out?"

"Yes. But perhaps that's not the right way to express it. -- Don't worry about sounding him out. Just talk with him. You'll know where he stands."

"That may work for you, but not me. I won't know till I ask point-blank."

"Is it really so vital to know? What's more important, I think, is that one not bring things to ruin, like Meitei is wont to do, by sowing seeds of apprehension. Even without your counsel, this is something Kangetsu should pursue anyway for his own sake. When you see him, just be so kind as to not interfere. -- What I really mean, of course, is not you, but Meitei. That man can't open his mouth without courting disaster." Suzuki is berating Meitei, as a proxy for the master, when speak of the devil, wouldn't you know that Meitei himself, as though carried on the spring breeze, comes floating in unannounced through the side door.

"Well, well! An honored guest! I'm a familiar face here, and Kushami, it pains me to say, treats me as such. Once per decade, it would seem, is the proper cadence for calling. Those sweets are a cut above the usual fare, are they not?" Meitei unceremoniously stuffs his cheeks with Fujimura yōkan. Suzuki fidgets in his seat. The master floats a grin. Meitei works his jaw. I take in this scene from the veranda. A silent drama unfolding, it strikes me, in splendid form. In a zen temple, the wordless exchange of questions and answers is how one soul communes with another. This silent drama is clearly in the same vein. Its brevity renders it all the more vivid.

"The career vagabond, with little fanfare, suddenly finds his way home. Never thought I'd live to see it. It's worth soldiering on in this world just to behold such wonders." In his approach to Suzuki, as in his approach to the master, Meitei knows no restraint. Even a former kitchen mate, after ten years' absence, is shown due deference. Except with Meitei. Whether this marks Meitei a sage or a fool is hard to say.

"Sadly enough, disdain doesn't run so deep." Suzuki provides an equivocal response, but his discomfort is apparent. He fiddles nervously with his gold chain.

"Have you tried the electric trains?" Out of nowhere, the master hits Suzuki with a curious question.

"You gentlemen, it seems, have it in for me today. I may be fresh from the country -- even at that, though, I'll have you know I hold sixty shares in Tōkyō Rail."

"One can't make light of that. I myself held eight hundred eighty eight and a half shares, but unfortunately, owing to insect damage, I'm down to only a half share left. Had you come to Tōkyō sooner, before the insects set in, I'd have gifted you ten of those shares. Such a shame."

"Your tongue hasn't lost its edge. But joking aside, you can't go wrong with those shares. They only appreciate with time."

"Right you are. Even a half share, if held for a thousand years, will yield three roomfuls of riches. This point's not lost on talented modern men like you and me, but Kushami, sadly, is not yet there. Mention 'kabu,' and he only conjures up daikon and such." Meitei reaches for another yōkan and turns to the master. Meitei's appetite proves infectious, and the master's own hand reflexively extends toward the sweets dish. In this world of men, all decisive actions are endowed with the power to induce like response.

"You can have your stocks, but I wish I could have, even just once, taken Sorosaki to ride the electric trains." The master gazes, with a melancholy air, at the teeth marks in his half-eaten yōkan.

"Sorosaki would never have known to disembark short of Shinagawa. The safer play, as I see it, is to have 'Natural Man' inscribed in a takuwan stone."

"I heard he had passed away. Terrible shame. A brilliant fellow. Most unfortunate," Suzuki adds.

Meitei follows without hesitation. "Brilliant guy, but couldn't cook worth a damn. Whenever it was his turn in the kitchen, I'd slip out and make do with soba."

"He'd cook up rice with charred crust and gooey core. It was hard to stomach. To make matters worse, raw tōfu was his signature side dish, cold and unappealing." Suzuki digs into his memory and calls up a grievance from ten years prior.

"Kushami and Sorosaki were close then. Every night they'd head out for sweet bean soup. It's caught up with Kushami. He suffers now from chronic dyspepsia. Of the two, Kushami indulged the more. He should have, by all rights, been first in the grave."

"What kind of false logic is that? Worse by far than me and my soup, Meitei used to head out back to 'exercise' with his fencing stick. He beat it against the stone pillars in the cemetery, and the priest, who caught him in the act, chewed him out good." The master, with a tone of defiance, reminds Meitei of his own former transgressions.

"Ah ha ha ha. I remember that now. The priest accused me of striking the heads of departed souls and disturbing their slumber. I may have caused some ruckus with my fencing stick, but General Suzuki here went one better. He manhandled those stones, wrestling three of them, of varying sizes, onto their sides."

"That priest came at me, quite irate. He insisted I restore them to their proper positions. I told him to wait till I hired some help, but he wouldn't hear of it. Anything short of righting them myself, he said, as a display of penitence, was an affront to the Buddha."

"If you could've seen yourself. In muslin shirt and string loincloth, stomping through fresh puddles, moaning and groaning ..."

"And you had the gall to stand there calmly and sketch. I'm not one to lose his temper, but never had I felt so utterly disrespected. I remember still what you said. Do you recall what you told me?"

"Who can recall what was said ten years prior? On the other hand, the engravings on those pillars stand clear in my mind. One said, 'The honorable and respected Kisen Kōkaku, gone to glory in the 5th year of An'ei, in the first month, on the day of the dragon.' Paragons of classical elegance, that's what those stones were. When we moved, I was tempted to snatch one and take it along. In terms of aesthetics, they were truly a marvel, rendered, as they were, in the gothic style." Meitei spouts off again on aesthetics.

"That's all well and good, but here's what you said. It went like this -- 'My studies are in aesthetics, so it's imperative that I sketch. All that happens 'tween heaven and earth, anything of intrigue, I duly preserve for posterity's sake. Personal feelings, this being regrettable or that being a pity, are subjugated to scholarship's mission and dispelled from my mind.' So you stated, point blank. Appalled at such callousness, I seized your sketchbook with my muddy hands and rended it to shreds."

"And my artistic talent, until that moment so promising, was thus nipped in the bud. You quashed my ambition, and for that I resent you still."

"Utter nonsense. Any resentment is rightly mine."

"Meitei, even then, was already a charlatan." The master has finished his yōkan and inserts himself back into the conversation.

"He's never in his life kept a promise. What's more, when cornered and pressed, he offers up excuses in place of apologies. There was a crape myrtle within the grounds of that temple, and its flowers were in bloom. 'I'm going to write a work titled Theory of Aesthetics, and I intend to complete it before those blossoms fall,' he told me. I countered that such was not possible, adding that I'd believe it when I saw it. So Meitei answered back that, despite appearances, he possesses an iron will. If I doubt him, then let's place a wager. I took him up on it, in earnest, and we settled on a dinner of Western cuisine, at some place in Kanda, as the payout. Though I wagered with every confidence he wouldn't produce his work, in the back of my mind I was some slight trepidation. For one thing, I couldn't afford the restaurant tab. However, the good doctor did no work on his draft. Seven days passed, then twenty, and not a page. Finally, the last blossom fell, and still no action. Looking forward to an outing of Western cuisine, I went to Meitei, at last, to collect on our wager, and he unashamedly refused to deliver."

"I suppose he produced some sort of rationalization." Suzuki lends his support.

"Indeed. The man is truly unscrupulous. 'If nothing else, when it comes to matters of will, I'm no man's inferior,' he insisted."

"Despite not producing a single page?" This time it's Meitei himself who poses the question.

"Of course. Here's what you told me. 'On the point of force of will, I concede to no man. However, in the realm of memory, I'm regrettably not so blessed. When I told you I would produce my Theory of Aesthetics, I had every intent of doing so. By the next day, though, it had completely slipped my mind. So the fact that I didn't produce it before the blossoms fell was a fault of memory, not a fault of will. If there's no fault of the will, then why should I spring for Western cuisine?' Such was his argument."

"That, indeed, is Meitei being Meitei. Ya gotta love it." Suzuki somehow now finds Meitei endearing. Meitei's presence has fully altered his view. This, perhaps, is a shrewd man being a shrewd man.

"What's to love?" The master seems still, to this day, indignant.

"I've very clearly wronged you. That's why, to make amends, I've been searching high and low for peacock tongue. Don't be cross. Just give me a little more time. However, speaking of written works, I bear today the grandest of rare tidings."

"You're never one to want for rare tidings. I'm not buying it."

"Ah, but today's tidings are truly the newest of news. At face value, and not a penny less. Did you know that Kangetsu's drafted his doctoral thesis? Being such an oddly opinionated fellow, I never thought he'd apply himself to something so mundane. Must be love-struck, don't you think? You should go and tell the Nose. Let her, if she fancies, dream dreams of her Doctor Acorn."

Suzuki, on mention of Kangetsu, implores the master with eye and chin movements to avoid the topic. His frantic signals are all for naught. Under Suzuki's persuasion, the master had waxed sympathetic toward the Kaneda daughter. Now, however, with Meitei bringing up "the Nose," he remembers butting heads with the mother. In some sense, he could dismiss the whole incident as comical, but at the same time, there lingers yet a tinge of aggravation. That being said, nothing could have pleased him more than news of Kangetsu's thesis. This time Meitei, true to his word, has indeed delivered rare tidings. And the tidings he's born are not just rare, but joyous and refreshing. Kangetsu could take the Kaneda daughter or not for all the master cared. In any case, Kangetsu's pursuit of his doctorate was momentous. One like himself, a flawed piece of work, could dwell in obscurity, like unfinished woodwork stuffed into the corner in a purveyor's shop, chewed on at length by insects. But a deftly crafted work, on the other hand, must without delay be brushed and gilded.

"Has he really drafted his thesis?" Ignoring Suzuki's signals, the master questions in earnest.

"The man's an eternal skeptic. -- While I can't tell you whether he's written on acorns or written on the mechanics of hanging, at any rate, knowing Kangetsu, whatever he's done will put the Nose in her place."

Meitei speaks without reserve, and each time he mentions "the Nose," Suzuki winces a bit. Meitei takes no notice and continues undeterred.

"Since that day, I've delved further into the topic of noses, and I discovered, just recently, a relevant discourse in Tristram Shandy. It's a pity Sterne never saw the Kaneda nose. It would have, I expect, been excellent subject matter. A nose of legends, it is, worthy of multi-generational adoration. A terrible shame should it crumble unknown into dust. Next time she calls here, I'll sketch it. My tribute to aesthetics." True to form, Meitei's mouth rattles on.

"It would seem, however, that the young lady does have thoughts for Kangetsu." The master repeats what Suzuki has intimated. Suzuki's eyes grow desperate, and his look does all it can to avert further damage. The master, though, is a nonconducting body, and Suzuki's signals don't carry.

"Seems odd to think that that thing's offspring could harbor affections. No doubt they're superficial. Probably nasal at best."

"Nasal or otherwise, Kangetsu'd do well to take her."

"Do well to take her? Just the other day, were you not adamantly opposed? Now today you're suddenly mollified."

"I'm not mollified. I'm by no means mollified. It just that ..."

"It's just that something's amiss. Say Suzuki, you count yourself, albeit humbly, a member of the business community, so give a listen to this. It concerns a certain Kaneda. As friends of Mizushima Kangetsu, one of the land's most talented men, we're not about to stand passively by and kowtow to the daughter of this certain Kaneda as she takes her place as his wife. It's a bit like oil and water, the two things just don't mesh. Even a businessman should recognize so much."

"Spirited as ever, I see. Good for you. Ten years hasn't changed you a bit. That's something." Suzuki bends with the breeze, attempting to sidestep Meitei.

"If you think that's something, allow me to expound with a little scholarship. The ancient Greeks placed paramount importance on athletics, and to encourage physical conditioning they sponsored competitions with highly coveted prizes. What's puzzling, however, is that there's no record of any such rewards for academic achievement. I've always wondered at this."

"Yes, that does seem odd." Suzuki voices agreement.

"Just a few days prior though, as I was pursuing my studies in aesthetics, I stumbled across the reason, and this age-old enigma resolved itself in a moment. Imagine my sheer delight as the scales fell from my eyes, and what once was hidden was now known."

Meitei's rhetoric is so overblown that even Suzuki, master of flattery though he is, can only sit there bewildered. The master, who can imagine what's coming, begins tapping his ivory chopsticks against the edge of the sweets dish and diverts his gaze. Meitei, in his own element and beaming with exultation, continues on.

"So whose writings do you suppose it was that explained this inconsistency, settling the matter for all time and extricating us from the dark chasms of doubt and confusion? It was none other than that Greek philosopher Aristotle himself, founder of the Peripatetic school, and widely regarded as the greatest of scholars. As Aristotle explains it -- now stop your tap tap tapping and listen up for a moment -- the prizes the Greeks could earn through competition were always valued in excess of athletic prowess itself. To this end, they were something to strive for, and they served as instruments of encouragement. Now consider the case of academic achievement. If some reward were to be offered for academic achievement, then it would have to be something whose worth is valued in excess of learning. Is there any treasure in this world, though, more valuable than learning? Of course there is not. And anything menial, in its giving, would merely serve to debase the majesty of learning. They imagined piling lock boxes to the height of Mount Olympus and filling them with the wealth of Croesus. They thought that, maybe, this would prove adequate, but they realized on further reflection that even this would never do. Ever since, they've settle on giving out nothing at all. From this, it should be clear enough that coins, be they gold, silver, or bronze, are no match for knowledge. Now, let's try applying this same principle to the situation at hand. What is this certain Kaneda but a banknote with eyes and a nose? A clever way to describe him, perhaps, is as nothing more than a living and breathing banknote. The daughter of a living and breathing banknote, in turn, is a living and breathing voucher. On the other hand, what of Kangetsu? Did he not unapologetically graduate first in his class from the highest institution in our land? Does he not toil day and night, without the least complaint, in a haori with worn strings handed down from the Chōshū expedition, to fathom the stability of acorns? And then, as if that weren't enough, is he not soon to publish a seminal thesis, against which the achievements of Lord Kelvin will pale in comparison? He may have tried and failed once to fling himself off of Azumabashi, but such are the passions of youth. Worry not, this one fitful act is nothing that, in any way, compromises his great store of knowledge. If I apply my gift for analogy to Kangetsu, I'd have to say he's a living and breathing library. He's a twenty-eight centimeter cannon shot, forged of erudition. This cannon shot, once its time comes, when it explodes over the scholarly world -- watch when it explodes -- we know it will explode -- " Meitei, at this point, appears to have exhausted his superlatives and seems to be faltering toward, as they say, starting with a bang and ending with a whimper, but he soon regains his footing. "Living and breathing vouchers, even millions of them, can only amount to so much confetti. Such a woman doesn't suit Kangetsu, and he has no future with her. I'm wholly

opposed. It's as if, in the animal kingdom, the grandest and wisest of elephants should be wed to the meanest and runtiest of pigs. Wouldn't you agree, Kushami?" Meitei concludes his diatribe. The master says nothing but resumes his tapping on the sweets dish.

Suzuki seems a bit subdued.

"It can't be as bad as all that," is all he can muster in response. Having earlier unleashed his own tirade against Meitei, he has to tread lightly now, lest the master, loose cannon that he is, blurt out something inopportune. His best course of action is a measured deflection of Meitei's attack, followed by a timely exit. Suzuki's a shrewd man. In his mind, unproductive rows are a relic of the feudal past, while modern man, as best he can, avoids confrontation. Actions, not words, define a man's life. When affairs advance, in step with one's will, then life's aims are brought to fruition. When affairs advance in absence of toil, stress, or strife, then life's aims are brought to blissful fruition. Since graduating, this "principle of blissful existence" had served Suzuki well. Applying this principle, he now sports a gold watch and is endearing himself to the Kanedas. Likewise, he'd successfully talked Kushami into submission and largely handled the affair at hand. That's when this strange bird Meitei, the wandering waif who seems to sport a few loose screws, had come bursting onto the scene, suddenly standing all on its head. The principle of blissful existence was contrived by Meiji gentlemen, but it's practiced to perfection by one Suzuki Tōjūrō. And it's Suzuki Tōjūrō, living this principle, who now finds himself in a fix.

"You have no idea. You sit there and tell us calmly, elegantly, direct to the point for a change, that it can't be as bad as all that, but if you'd seen what transpired the other day, when that nose and its proprietress were here, then I'm sure even you, partial as you are to the business community, would have been utterly appalled. Isn't that so Kushami? The two of you went toe to toe, did you not?"

"Nevertheless, I'm told that it's you, not me, she disdains."

"Ah ha ha ha. Awfully sure of yourself, aren't you. Then again, how could you not be and show your face at school, what with taunts of 'savage tea' from the students and teachers? When it comes to force of will, I bow to no man, but when it comes to sheer brashness, I bow before you in humble admiration."

"Let the students and teachers grumble a bit if they like. What's it to me? Sainte-Beuve is the greatest critic of all time, but he was hugely unpopular when he lectured at the Sorbonne. He always went out with a dagger up his sleeve for protection should the students accost him. After Brunetière spoke ill of Zola's writings at the same Sorbonne ..."

"Hold on. You're not a university professor or anything of the sort. You're at best a teacher of English Readers. For you to equate yourself with such leading figures is like a small fry equating itself to a whale. You're only inviting further ridicule."

"Enough out of you. Whether it's Sainte-Beuve or whether it's me, a scholar is a scholar."

"You've set your sights awfully high. However, walking about with a dagger is risky. I don't suggest you follow suit. If it's daggers for university professors, then perhaps a pen knife will do for an instructor in English Readers. Then again, any blade is a hazard. How about going over to the arcade and securing a popgun from the toy store? You'll cut an endearing figure. Don't you think so, Suzuki?" The conversation has finally shifted from the Kaneda affair, and Suzuki breathes a sigh of relief.

"Candid conversation is always so refreshing. Spending time with you two again after ten years' absence, I feel like I've emerged from a narrow path into a wide open meadow. In my world, conversations are nuanced and guarded. Every word has to be measured, and over time it grows to be truly nerve-wracking. Conversation should flow freely. And there's nothing freer than chewing the fat with former classmates. It was an unexpected delight, too, to see Meitei here today. I've several errands to run, so I'll have to excuse myself." Suzuki starts to get up. "I'm going too. I have to go to the New Theater Society in Nihonbashi, so I'll accompany you," Meitei adds. "Wonderful. We'll walk together. It's been such a long time." With that, the two of them are off.