

## I am a Cat – Chapter 6a

Natsume Sōseki – 1905

This heat is too much, even for a cat. The Englishman Sydney Smith reportedly said, complaining of the heat, that there was nothing left for it but to take off his flesh and cool his bones. I don't necessarily wish to strip to the bone, but I'd like at least to pull off this grey mottled fur, give it a thorough washing, and stretch it out to dry. Either that or pawn it off for a spell. Humans may imagine that cats and such have it easy, dressing year round in our single best outfit, never fretting over style, and never spending a dime. We cats, though, are not immune to feeling the heat or feeling the cold. I'd love, once in a while, to bathe myself, but this fur coat, once wetted, is not easily dried. To this day I've yet to frequent a bathhouse, resigned instead to sweating it out in my fur. Even a fan might bring some relief, but I've no way to grip or wave one. Human beings are, when I think on it, an indulgent lot. They delight themselves in taking things best eaten raw and, at the expense of considerable effort, stewing them, roasting them, pickling them, or steeping them in miso. The same holds true for clothing. Born deficient as they are, one can't expect them to don their birthday suits year round, as we cats do, but they dress to excess, adorning themselves with multivarious coverings. They impose upon sheep, lean on the silkworm, and tie their fates to the cotton field. They're proof living that incompetence breeds indulgence. I can understand when it comes to food and clothing, but in other aspects too, unrelated to their sustenance, they're equally indulgent. Take the hair on their heads. It grows there naturally, and the simplest and easiest course, for all involved, is simply to leave it alone. Nevertheless, they contrive to work it at great effort, and with no small degree of self-satisfaction, into myriad forms.

There are Buddhist priests and such who always shave their heads. When it's hot they carry a sunshade, and when it's cold they tie on kerchiefs. Is there any point, then, in shaving their heads in the first place? At the same time, there are others who take great satisfaction in applying a saw-like tool, which they refer to as a comb, to part their hair down the middle. If not down the middle, then on a seventy-thirty left-right split, demarking an artificial boundary across their craniums. Some even extend this split past the hair whorl, all the way back to the neck, styling their heads like banana leaves. Next is the flat-top cut with straight sides, framing the round head in a square. It calls to mind a cedar hedge in a well-worked garden. They also talk of fifteen, ten, and three millimeter cuts. Then again, why stop at the head's outer surface? Cutting through to the underside, one could conjure up novel cuts like minus three and minus ten. It just might catch on. At any rate, to what end they harbor such obsessions is entirely unclear. As another example, going about on just two legs, instead of the four they've been given, is utter extravagance. Though faster on all fours, as their maker intended, they insist on going biped, dangling their two idle legs like useless cords of dried cod. It's asinine. Taking this all into account, one can't but conclude that human beings are far more indulgent than cats. For lack of anything better to do, they amuse themselves with endless forms of foolishness. What's puzzling, though, is how these men of leisure gather together and grumble that they're run ragged. It's even written on their faces. Their hectic lives, it would seem, are

hounding them all to early graves. Some of them, on occasion, regard my carefree existence with expressions of envy. They're welcome to follow suit. No one, after all, ever asked them to fret so. They weigh themselves down, to the point of breaking, with tasks of their own choosing. It's akin to setting a fire, fanning the flames, then lamenting one can't stand the heat. The day we cats come up with twenty ways to style our fur is the day our carefree existence ends. If they want carefree, let them learn from me and wear one coat year round, even through summer. -- That being said, I'm roasting. This fur is too much.

In this state, my signature nap is out of the question. What's there to do? My human-watching efforts, of late, have fallen short, so I thought maybe I'd check in today and catch up on their latest fussings. My master, however, is regrettably more cat-like than human. His napping rivals my own, and he hasn't done a lick of work since the summer holidays started. When it comes to observing humans, there's nothing there that merits observation. At times like these, the likes of Meitei are called for to shake the master out of his dyspeptic stupor and distance him, if only for a while, from his cat-like torpor. Just as I'm wishing Meitei would show, the rushing of water sounds from the washroom. Someone, arrived unannounced, is dousing himself. Punctuating the sound of the water are unrestrained exclamations. "Ahh! Wonderful!" "Thoroughly refreshing!" "One more go!" These sounds of satisfaction echo throughout the house. When it comes to loud, and when it comes to disregard for protocol, only one caller fits the bill. It has to be Meitei.

Meitei's finally arrived, and here goes half the day. As I'm thinking thus, he makes his usual brusque entry into the parlor, wiping sweat as he straightens out his attire. "Greetings ma'am! Is the master about?" he calls out as he deposits his hat on the floor. The wife, who'd been stretched out by her sewing box in the next room and napping soundly, is startled awake by the sudden clamor assaulting her ear drums. Rubbing her tired eyes, she enters the parlor to find Meitei, decked out in Satsuma linen, camped out in his favorite spot and fanning himself.

"Ah, welcome," she greets him. "I had no idea," she adds with a bow of salutation, beads of sweat adorning the tip of her nose, as she struggles to orient herself. "No worry. I only arrived just now. I had Osan rinse me down in the washroom. I'm finally feeling revived -- how about this heat?" "These past few days have been brutal. Even staying still, one can't but break a sweat. It's oppressive, -- you're looking good though." The wife's nose is still beaded with sweat. "Kind of you to say so. I'm not one to easily wilt, but this heat is something else. It drags one down." "I've never been one to nap, but when it's this hot --" "You've been resting? Good for you. Nothing's better than resting during the day and sleeping through the night." Meitei, as always, is all for carefree. Not content, it seems, to leave it at that, he continues. "I'm not much of a sleeper. I envy Kushami. Every time I call he's asleep. This heat will do his digestion no favors. Even a hearty man, on a day like today, struggles to carry his head on his own shoulders. That being said, he can't well pluck it off and set it aside." Meitei, uncharacteristically, is at odds with his own head. "It's a wonder that you, ma'am, with that extra weight on your head, can even sit upright. Just the weight of that

bun is enough to put you sideways." The wife is suddenly conscious that her napping shows in the state of her hair. While reproving Meitei for his unrestrained candor, her hands go to work adjusting her bun.

Meitei, utterly undaunted, gives the conversation a curious turn. "Yesterday, ma'am, I took an egg up to the roof to fry it." "You did what?" "The roof tiles were blazing hot, so I thought to use them to my advantage. I melted some butter and dropped an egg over it." "Oh my." "However, the heat of the sun was not so great as I'd thought. After waiting in vain for my egg to soft boil, I finally went down to read my paper. A visitor called, and I forgot all about it. This morning, I suddenly remembered. Figuring it must have finally cooked, I went back up." "And how was it?" "Far from soft boiled, it had run down the roof." "You don't say!" The wife knits her brows in response to Meitei's unsavory depiction.

"Odd though. It was refreshingly cool all through the height of summer, and now it's turned hot." "Indeed. Until these last several days it was almost chilly in an unlined kimono, and now it's suddenly so hot." "Crabs walk sideways, but this year's weather is walking in reverse. It's nature's manifest demonstration, perhaps, that it's best sometimes to go against the grain." "I'm afraid I don't follow." "Well, never mind then. At any rate, this reversal of weather patterns calls to mind Hercules' cattle." Meitei is finally off on one of his tangents, and the wife, of course, has no idea what he's talking about. Having been burned already with, "nature's manifest demonstration of going against the grain," she responds with a simple nod and refrains from further inquiry. In absence of further inquiry, Meitei's story line has no way forward. "Are you familiar, ma'am, with Hercules' cattle?" "No, I've never heard of such cattle." "If you haven't heard, then allow me to explain." The wife, who can't bring herself to tell him not to bother, voices a tepid approval. "Long ago, Hercules was passing along with a herd of cattle." "Was this Hercules a cattleman?" "No, he was no cattleman. Nor did he manage an Iroha Steakhouse. There wasn't yet, in those days, a single steakhouse in all of Greece." "So the story takes place in Greece. Why didn't you say so?" The wife recognizes the country name Greece. "We're talking Hercules, are we not?" "Does Hercules mean Greece?" "Yes, Hercules is a Greek hero." "Then that's why I've never heard of him. At any rate, what of this Hercules --" "This fellow, just like you, grew drowsy and dozed off. --" "Please, let's leave me out of it." "As he was sleeping, Vulcan's son approached." "Who's Vulcan." "Vulcan's a smith, a worker of metal. This smith's son made off with some of Hercules' cattle. Here's the thing, though. He pulled the cattle away by their tails. Hercules woke and searched for his missing cattle, but to no avail. And of course to no avail. The cattle left hoofprints, but they hadn't been led away forward. They'd been pulled away backward. It was a major coup for the smith's son." Meitei had forgotten all about the weather.

"By the way, where's the master? Napping again, I presume? The midday nap, when appearing in Chinese poetry, carries an air of elegance, but in Kushami's case, day in and day out, it starts to seem crass. It's like a little taste of death, punctuating the listless passage of time. If I may so impose, I'd like you to go and rouse him." Meitei's call to action meets with the wife's agreement. "It really is too much. For the sake of his health, he needs to be more active. Especially right after eating." As she rises to her feet, Meitei re-

engages. "Speaking of eating, ma'am, I've not had any lunch yet," he announces unprompted and without the least hint of compunction. "Oh my, I should have guessed as much, given the time -- I don't have much to offer, but how about chazuke?" "No chazuke for me, thank you." "In that case, I'm afraid I've nothing to offer that would suite your taste." In the wife's response is a hint of sarcasm, which is not lost on Meitei. "I've no need for chazuke or the like. I ordered myself a fine lunch on the way over. It'll be here shortly." Such forward action, from any other fellow, would be outright appalling. "Well!" the wife responds with a single word. In this "Well!" are mixed together a range of emotions, from surprise, to offense, to relief at the trouble she's been spared.

At this point the master, on account of the commotion, comes tottering out of his study, still showing the effects of having been wrenched back from slumber to consciousness. "Never a quiet moment with this guy. Just as I was dozing peacefully." A yawn contorts his sour face. "Awake, are you? Terribly sorry to intrude on your blessed repose. But then again, perhaps it's for the best. Have a seat." From this exchange, it's unclear who's the visitor and who's the host. The master, uttering not a word, seats himself, takes an Asahi from his wooden in-laid cigarette case, and starts in with his first puffs of smoke. As he does so, Meitei's hat, tossed into the facing corner, catches his attention. "You bought yourself a new hat?" "What do you think?" Meitei, with an air of pride, immediately holds it out to husband and wife for review. "It's a handsome hat. Of fine weave, and soft too," the wife remarks as she runs her hand over its surface. "This hat, ma'am, is a true treasure. It does its owner's bidding." With that, he makes a fist and drives it into the hat's flank. As intended, a fist-sized hollow appears. Before the wife can express her surprise, he places his fist inside and pops it back out, restoring the hat's bowl to its tapered form. Then he grasps the brim on opposite sides and pushes it flat. The squashed hat is no thicker than soba spread thin with a roller. From there, he starts at one edge and rolls it up tight like a straw mat. "There you have it," he remarks as he tucks the tightly-rolled hat into his sleeve pocket. "Who would have thought?" the wife expresses astonishment, as though having witnessed Kitensai Shōichi's sleight of hand. Meitei, drawing encouragement from the wife's reaction, reaches in and pulls the hat, which he'd placed into his right sleeve pocket, out through his left sleeve opening. "Good as new," he confirms as he restores it to its original shape, sets it over his index finger, and spins it on its bowl. Then comes more. He drops it onto the floor behind him and scoots himself back, crushing it under his haunches. "Are you sure it's alright?" Even the master expresses concern. The wife, of course, is also looking worried. "Enough already, please. It's a splendid hat. It'd be a shame to damage it," she admonishes. "Curiously, though, it's not damaged in the least." The hat's owner triumphantly produces his crumpled hat and places it on his head, where it reverts, miraculously, to its proper form. "That's one rugged hat. How does it do that?" The wife is duly impressed. "Do what? It's only doing what it's built to do." Meitei, the hat still on his head, answers matter-of-factly.

"You should get yourself a hat like that too." After a moment, the wife starts in on the master. "But Kushami already has a nice straw hat, does he not?" "He did indeed, until the children trampled it the

other day." "That's a shame. I'm sorry to hear it." "That's why it's best, I'm thinking, he buy one like yours, handsome yet rugged." The wife continues, having no idea how much a Panama hat costs. "Go and get yourself one. Why not?"

Meitei proceeds to produce a pair of scissors, packed in a red case, from his right sleeve pocket. He takes them out to show the wife. "Forget the hat for a moment, ma'am, and take a look at these scissors. They're something special. Fourteen tools in one." But for the appearance of these scissors, the master might have been badgered into buying his own Panama. Fortunately, female curiosity got the better of the wife, sparing the master such ill fate. As I see things, such outcome was more serendipity than any clever intention on Meitei's part. "How can a pair of scissors be fourteen tools?" Meitei beams proudly in response to the wife's query. "Listen carefully now, and I'll cover them one by one. Ready? See this crescent-shaped notch here? Put a cigar in, and it snaps off the seal. Now look what they've done at the base of the blade. Snips right through wire. Lay these flat on a piece of paper, and you've got yourself a straightedge. Opposite the blade are gradations, so it serves as a ruler. On this surface is a file for smoothing your nails. Are you with me? Insert this tip into a threaded fastener and twist it tight to drive it home. In that sense it's a hammer. Wedge it under the lid and pry open any nail-fastened box with ease. There's more yet. This tip is tapered like an awl. This area's for scraping away misprinted brushwork. Separate the halves, and now it's a knife. And finally -- now prepare to be amazed by this final feature, ma'am. You see this bead here, no larger than a fly's eyeball. Take a peak inside." "I hope this isn't another of your tricks."

"It pains me, ma'am, that I've failed to earn your trust. Humor me once, and take a look. No? A bit reluctant, are we? Come now, just this once." So saying, he passes the scissors to the wife. The wife, still harboring doubt, takes them up, puts her own eye to the aforementioned fly's eye, and peers intently. "How is it?" "All I see is black." "Black won't do. Hold it more toward the shōji, and keep it angled upright -- that's it. You should see something now." "Goodness! It's a photograph. How did they get such a tiny photo in there?" "That's what's amazing." The wife and Meitei continue to converse. The master, who's been silent all the while, seems suddenly interested in seeing the photo. "Let's have a look." "She's beautiful. A nude goddess." The wife keeps the scissors pressed to her face. "My turn now. Hand them here." "In a moment. Look at that lovely hair, flowing down to her hips. She's so tall. And the way she lifts her gaze. A ravishing beauty." "Enough now! Hand them here already!" The master's patience is nearing its end, and he snaps at the wife. "Fine then, she's all yours. Enjoy!" As the wife is handing the scissors to the master, Osan comes in from the kitchen and announces that the visitor's order has arrived. In her hands are two baskets of soba.

"This, ma'am, is the fine lunch I ordered up. If you'll be so kind as to permit me, I'll now proceed to indulge myself." Meitei addresses the wife with a courteous nod. The wife, uncertain whether he's sincere or speaking in jest, can only manage a, "Please do," in response. The master finally tears his attention from

the photograph. "Soba, in this heat, will do you no favors." "Don't worry 'bout me. I trust my stomach. It's rarely steered me wrong." Meitei lifts a lid. "Nothing like fresh soba. Soggy noodles, like a dull-witted man, are fit for nothing." Meitei drops condiments into his soba sauce and stirs vigorously. "Better watch it with the wasabi. That's too much," the master advises with a concerned look. "Soba is eaten with sauce, and soba sauce means wasabi. I take it you're not a fan?" "I prefer udon." "Udon is for packhorse drivers. I pity the man who knows not the virtues of soba." Meitei, without further ado, digs in with his cedarwood chopsticks, engaging as much soba as possible and lifting it off its holder. "When it comes to partaking of soba, ma'am, there are various approaches. The inexperienced soba eater is liable to over-dip in his sauce. He's also liable to over chew. He misses out on the true flavor. Soba needs to be drawn up in a single scoop. Like so." Thus saying, he lifts his chopsticks higher, leaving the longer noodles to dangle below. Thinking he's cleared the basket, he glances down to see some ten or more strands still at rest and intertwined over its surface. "These are some long noodles. Will you look at that, ma'am?" He again solicits the wife's reaction. "They certainly are long," the wife, too, seems duly impressed. "With long noodles like these, one dips but a third in the sauce then swallows in one gulp. The trick is not to chew. Chewing destroys the flavor. The noodles have to glide down one's throat." With a resolute motion, Meitei hoists his chopsticks even higher, and the noodles finally clear the basket.

His chopsticks then descend, bit by bit, toward his left hand, which holds the bowl of sauce. The ends of the noodles are gradually submerged, and the sauce, according to Archimedes' principle, swells proportionally in volume. However, since the bowl was eight eight-tenths full to begin with, the noodles are only a quarter submerged before the sauce has risen to the brim. Meitei's chopsticks come to a sudden stop some fifteen centimeters over the bowl. It's no wonder they've stopped. Any further movement, and sauce will go pouring over the brim. Meitei, at this point, seems to hesitate. Then, with a decisive burst of motion, his head dives toward his chopsticks. A slurping sound ensues, a series of marked undulations traverse his throat, and just like that the noodles are gone from the tips of his chopsticks. From the outer corners of his eyes, tears stream forth and run down his cheeks. It's unclear whether these tears are the work of the wasabi or the consequence of an overstuffed throat. "I'm impressed. I wouldn't have thought one could swallow all that." The master voices his admiration. "Magnificent, indeed," the wife concurs. Meitei is temporarily speechless. He sets down his chopsticks and pats his chest several times before responding. "One basket, ma'am, is three or four mouthfuls. Any more than that, and the experience is diminished." He wipes his mouth with his handkerchief and pauses for a moment to catch his breath.

At this point Kangetsu appears. His lower legs are covered in dust and on his head, for whatever reason and in spite of the heat, he's sporting his winter cap. "Hey there! Our fine fellow makes his appearance! Excuse me, if you will, as I finish my lunch." Meitei, in the presence of his comrades, unabashedly gobbles down the remaining content of his baskets. His manner of indulgence is not so flamboyant as before. Nevertheless, he handily clears both baskets, this time smoothly, without reliance on his handkerchief, and with no further pauses for breath.

"Have you finished drafting your doctoral thesis?" the master asks. "You mustn't keep Miss Kaneda waiting too long now," Meitei adds. Kangetsu responds with his characteristic forced grin. "I know I mustn't string her along, but the topic being what it is, it can't be rushed. It demands due investigation, and due investigation takes time and effort." Judging by his tone, less so than his actual words, Kangetsu is wholly sincere. "Right you are. The topic is what it is, and the Nose had best accept that. It would surely enough behoove her, with that nose of hers, to sniff things out for herself." Meitei's words are in the same vein as Kangetsu's. The master, in contrast, is conversing in earnest. "What was it you chose as your topic?" "The effects of ultraviolet light on the electrical responses of frog's eyes." "Now that's novel. You never do disappoint. Brilliant topic, frog's eyes. What do you say, Kushami, shall we whet the Kanedas' interest with advance notice?" The master pays Meitei no heed. "Is that really so difficult to investigate?" "Yes. It's proving, as it turns out, to be quite involved. For one thing, the lens of the frog's eye is of no simple construction. Various experimentation is called for, and I'm trying my hand, as a prerequisite to experimentation, at fashioning spheres out of glass." "Why not just go to a glassmaker?" "It's not that easy." Kangetsu appears somewhat piqued. "Fundamentally, circles and straight lines are geometrical constructs. In the real world their ideal counterparts, adhering to precise geometric definitions, don't exist." "If they don't exist, then best to just throw in the towel," Meitei interjects. "What I'm trying to do is fashion spheres that, for experimental purposes, will serve my needs. I've already started in."

"Is it going well?" The master asks in simple terms. "How could it be?" Kangetsu replies. Then, sensing the contradiction in his statements, he elaborates. "It's no easy task. One grinds away, only to realize that the radius of one side is too large. One grinds it down a touch, and now the other side's too large. One works and works and grinds at that side too, and now the whole thing's out of balance. One grinds off offending material, only to find the diameter's off. What starts out the size of an apple, after numerous reductions, is now a strawberry. One perseveres, and in the end it's a soybean. I work at it feverishly -- since New Year's, I've ground my way through six glass spheres of various sizes." Kangetsu prattles on, and it's unclear whether he's relating things as they've actually happened or embellishing. "Where do you do all this grinding?" "At the school, in the lab space. I start grinding in the morning, break for lunch, then go at it again till night falls. It never goes quite as intended." "So that's what's kept you so busy? You're out every day, even Sundays, grinding glass at the school." "All I do lately, morning to night, is grind glass." "You could earn your doctorate in sphere fabrication -- don't you think? Even the Nose, though, when she learns what you're doing, will have to acknowledge your passion. Which reminds me, I stopped into the library on an errand the other day and happened across Rōbai on the way out. I thought it curious that he should still frequent the library after completing his studies. I expressed my regard for his diligence, and he responded with an odd look. 'I didn't come in to read,' he told me. 'I was passing out front and dropped in to take a pee.' Meitei finishes with a hearty laugh. You and Rōbai are polar opposites. If they ever republish the Mōgyū Reader, I'll submit you two for inclusion." Meitei, as usual, cannot resist a long-winded ramble. The master, with some earnestness, engages Kangetsu. "It's fine that you spend your days grinding spheres, but when do you think you'll be done?" "At the rate it's going, it could be ten years." Kangetsu

seems not so concerned as the master. "Ten years -- can it not be done sooner?" "Ten years is soon. It could be closer to twenty." "That's quite a chore then. Your doctorate's a long ways off." "It is. I'd like to settle things sooner, but until I've produced these spheres, the crucial experiments can't proceed ..."

Kangetsu continues after a brief pause. "But anyway, there's no need for concern. The Kanedas are aware of this work I'm doing with spheres. I was over there just a few days ago, in fact, and explained the situation." Kangetsu puts their worries to rest with an air of satisfaction. The wife, who's been listening attentively to their conversation, if not necessarily following all that's been said, gives Kangetsu a dubious look. "If I'm not mistaken, the entire Kaneda clan, each and every one of them, left last month for Ōiso." Kangetsu, seemingly thrown for a loop, feigns ignorance. "That's odd. How can that be?" At times like these, when conversation dangles, when an awkward moment presents itself, when the company grows weary, when any difficulty whatsoever arises, it's Meitei to the rescue. "In Ōiso since last month, yet seen in Tōkyō just the other day. How wonderfully mysterious. The proverbial melding of minds. Such phenomena often occur, they say, in the presence of fervent affection. As I've heard it described, it's like a dream, yet more real, in a sense, than any waking moment. To one such as yourself, ma'am, having been married off to Kushami in the absence of passion and never knowing romance, such skepticism is understandable ..." "Hold on now! You've no basis for such statements. Disparage me, will you?" The wife shuts Meitei down and tears into him. "And what would you know of romance?" the master backs his wife, confronting Meitei head on. "My brushes with romance, be they many or few, are faded into the past, and it may be you don't recall -- but my years of bachelorhood, I'll have you know, are the direct consequence of heartbreak." "Ho, ho, ho, ho. You're kidding!" the wife exclaims. "Don't go pulling our legs." The master diverts his gaze to the garden. "Let's hear about it. Nothing like lessons from the past." Only Kangetsu, sporting his signature grin, takes the bait.

My story, too, is somewhat mystical. It's a shame that the late great Koizumi Yakumo is no longer with us. He would have taken great interest. Without him, in fact, I'm not sure it's even worth telling, but let me take the occasion and relate it nonetheless. In exchange for doing so, I'll expect your careful attention throughout." Meitei, after admonishing his listeners, finally starts in on his story. "It was long ago now -- I have to think -- how many years ago was it -- rather than bother, let's just say it was fifteen years or so prior." "Oh, come now!" the master objects with a disdainful snort. "Seems your memory's not what it was," the wife taunts. Only Kangetsu, adhering to Meitei's admonition, holds his tongue, seemingly eager for the story to proceed. "At any rate, it was in winter of a certain year. I was traversing Takotsubo Pass, making my way from Takenokodani, in the Kanbara District of Echigo, about to enter Aizu." "Seems an odd setting," the master interrupts. "Let's let him talk. It's getting interesting." The wife checks him. "The day, however, was growing late. I was unsure of my way, and I was hungry. Having no other recourse, I stopped at a solitary dwelling, in the middle of the pass, and knocked at the door. I explained my situation, the this and that of it, and asked if they couldn't shelter me for the night. The young lady who greeted me replied that I was welcome to stay and bade me enter. She raised up a bare candle as she spoke, and a

shudder raced through me as its light touched her face. It was then and there that I was first smitten by pangs of love." "You don't say! Are there really such beauties in the middle of the mountains?" "Be it mountains or seaside, ma'am, I wish I could share with you just one glimpse of that face. And her hair was done up in the takashimada style." "Really?" The wife seems duly taken. "I entered into an eight-mat room with a sunken hearth, around which I joined the young lady, the young lady's grandfather, and her grandmother. 'You must be hungry,' they said. I told them I was, and that anything would do, but the sooner the better. The grandfather, in honor of my presence as a rare guest, proposed that they cook up snake stew. We're approaching the part where my heart breaks, so listen closely now." "I am listening closely, but how is it there are snakes about in Echigo in the winter?" "That's a valid question, but you mustn't apply strict logic to poetic narrative. Recall, if you will, how in Kyōka's novel crabs emerge from the snow." "I see." Kangetsu seems satisfied and again becomes the attentive listener.