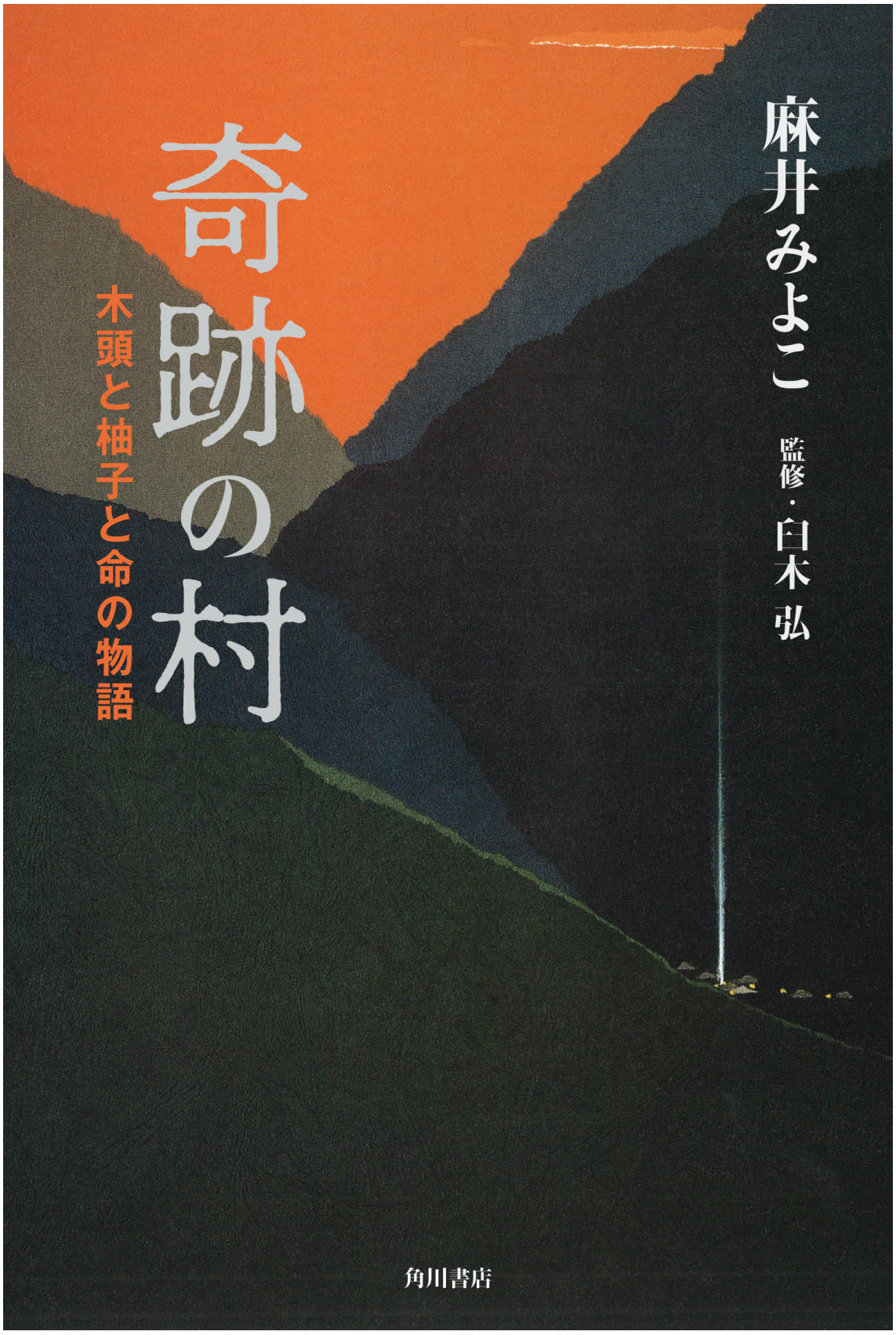
奇跡の村
木頭と柚子と命の物語
麻井みよこ
監修・臼木弘
角川書店

Going for Gold: How a Mountain Village Brought Yuzu to the World

By Miyoko Asai
With Hiroshi Usuki

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Book Design: Toshikazu Sasagawa

A wild yuzu tree in Kito

Preface: Toward an Age of Authenticity

The Nishiazabu district of Tokyo is a popular evening destination for fine dining. Among the many famous restaurants that quietly line Nishiazabu's streets is Le Severo Japon, a branch of the steakhouse of the same name located in Paris's 14th arrondissement. So firmly established is its reputation that, for Parisians, suggesting a steak dinner is virtually synonymous with suggesting a trip to Le Severo.

As I took my seat at a table in the Nishiazabu branch, I felt myself relax, as if a gracious host had welcomed me into their home. I was looking forward to a meal of dry-aged beef, its umami enhanced by traditional techniques that the restaurant's chefs have brought to new heights, served in the inimitably delicious French style.

Dry aging puts the power of natural enzymes to work, letting them slowly break down the fibers of the meat until the flavors reach their peak. This wonder of human ingenuity bears no relation to the artificial alteration of meat's texture and flavor through synthetic feed; in fact, dry aging works only on the meat of well-muscled animals that have been allowed to graze freely in meadows. Sitting at my table, I watched plates of food created through this very particular, time-and-labor-intensive process being ferried out to me, each one as striking as a masterpiece of painting.

As I lifted a forkful of greens to my mouth, it swayed softly with my own smug satisfaction.

There's nothing wrong with allowing oneself this sort of luxury now and then, I thought to myself.

Perhaps this dinner would counterbalance the hectic flurry of daily life with all those horrid five-minute meals, like a small act of resistance against the coldness of the world.

It was the kind of expectation only a city-dwellers would harbor, right down to its odd ferocity.

But, in the next moment, a gentle déjà vu enveloped me.

A fresh, refined scent floated up to my nose, delicately unassertive yet possessed of a strength that reached my core in an instant.

It was a fragrance I had encountered before.

I took another deep breath. As I let this unexpected bliss intoxicate me, I remembered.

This was the scent of yuzu.

Yuzu is different from other fruits. It's not sweet, and it won't fill an empty stomach or quench a thirst.

But it has a fragrance you never forget. Years may pass, but the moment you encounter it again, you remember at once.

And then that gently soothing aroma gives you the strength to face another day.

Like a dear memory from long ago, seared into a corner of your mind.

Chef Takeshi Saita spent eleven years cooking at Le Severo in Paris. Rumor has it he knows more about French methods of preparing meat than anyone else in Japan.

"All over the world, food is in ruins," he says. "Meats and vegetables and fruits are steadily losing their inherent flavor. I'm part of the movement to return foods from this artificiality to their natural origins. Through food, I want to foster the power of people around the world to make safer, better choices. I have to do what I can as a chef."

We have lost much to mass production and consumption. In exchange for liberation from inconvenience and hassle, we have consistently given up health, first and foremost in the realm of food.

With what are we filling the surplus time created by quick and convenient services?

Anxiety and loneliness, perhaps.

According to Chef Saita, choosing safer, better food begins with considering terroir. This French term refers to the soil, climate, water, air, and other elements of the environment in which wine grapes are grown.

Gamay grapes come from Beaujolais; Pinot Noir from Burgundy or Alsace. The distinctive climate and geography of the region where each vineyard is located give rise to the singular aroma and flavor of each wine. That aroma, in turn, calls to mind a certain landscape, sending us on an imagined journey as we picture the earth and feel the warmth of the sun. The French place the highest value on authenticity experienced with all five senses. This is precisely why their pride in French culture runs so deep.

But, Saita says, wines with no hint of terroir are increasingly common.

"Climate change is causing torrential rains that destroy the harvest, so vintners are buying grapes from other regions to make their wines. They have no choice if they want to survive."

And what about us, the Japanese?

Day by day, aren't we letting tradition and wisdom fade in the very same way? Looking back, haven't we, too, prioritized what others think over our own five senses, even when that meant rashly discarding the things that matter? Like our culture of compromise and consideration for others. Or the firm bonds between husband and wife, among family. Or nature.

Sixty-seven percent of Japan is forested, placing it among the most heavily forested countries in the world. However, with more and more of the population concentrated in cities, few people in Japan give much thought to this national characteristic. We are keenly aware of the arrival of pollen from Japanese cedar plantations and the need to combat heatstroke, but we hardly ever talk about how things came to be this way. We do not discuss the connection between our problems and the landslides, flooding, and neglected mountain forests that we see on television news programs; nor do we ask what we should do in response. We know that tropical rainforests are being lost and sea levels are rising, of course, but we cling to a vague notion that our cities will be safe, and our interest in understanding the true causes of our problems remains as low as ever.

In 2005, Paul Jozef Crutzen, who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1995 for his research on atmospheric ozone depletion, published a paper in the British science journal *Nature* that shook the world. His paper argued that rapid population growth and urbanization could cause global environmental change on the scale of the transformations set off by the asteroid that doomed dinosaurs to extinction. Dr. Crutzen is also famous for interrupting a stodgy scientific meeting by shouting "We're not in the Holocene any more. We're in the Anthropocene!" The term Anthropocene derives from *anthropos*, the ancient Greek word for "humans." What he meant was that the epoch of geological time known as the Holocene, which began approximately 11,700 years ago, had ended, and a new epoch defined by a massive increase in human population and activity was beginning.

The expansion of urban industries powered by fossil fuels triggered climate change, which is caused primarily by the rising concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The coming years will witness drastic environmental changes. Our species has already left an indelible mark on the planet, covering it with concrete, plastic, and materials released by the development of nuclear energy that will remain radioactive for hundreds of millions of years.

It is not yet clear whether the Anthropocene will gain official recognition as a geological epoch, or how exactly it will be defined if it does. But Dr. Crutzen has

explained that he proposed the term in the hope that people would realize how severely humanity's industrial activities have impacted the planet, and begin to think about how to avoid worst-case scenarios. This is, after all, how everything must begin—caught up in the daily struggle to get by, all ordinary people can do is learn, think, and talk to each other. As inhabitants of a forest nation whose lives depend on the air, water, and soil, I believe we must educate ourselves more deeply about the state of natural environments in this country and the web of life—human beings included—that those environments support.

Kito is a village in Tokushima, the most heavily forested prefecture in all of Japan, located on the island of Shikoku, which sits to the southwest of the main island of Honshu. Famous since the Edo Period (1603–1868) for its Japanese cedar trees, the village ignited the domestic boom in yuzu production that began in the latter half of the Showa period (1945–1989). (In 2005, it officially became a part of the municipality of Naka-cho.)

Today yuzu are also grown in neighboring Kochi Prefecture and many other parts of Japan, and sought after in countries around the world, France of course among them. At one time, however, the fruit was viewed as intractable to commercial agriculture. That view was disproved by the revolutionary new cultivation methods developed in the tiny village of Kito.

Sometimes called "the Tibet of Shikoku" because of its towering mountains and profound natural beauty, Kito has a long history of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. On the other hand, it, too, is clearly marked by human activity destructive to the natural environment. Kito is not the only example of *satoyama*—as Japan's richly diverse, semi-natural rural landscapes are called—being sacrificed at the altar of capitalism, but there is one dramatic difference between Kito and other satoyama communities.

Its future.

This is the true story of how two families, conscious of the value of nature and determined to both protect and utilize it, is reshaping the future of this aging, depopulated mountain village in a truly remarkable way.

People show more concern over the pension crisis than environmental destruction. Not everyone cares about climate change or supports the work of those fighting to reverse it. Many feel it is a problem for someone else, somewhere else, to solve. I may be guilty of that myself. Generally speaking, Japanese people are more concerned with their

immediate human relationships and what will become of them when they get old than they are with the global environment.

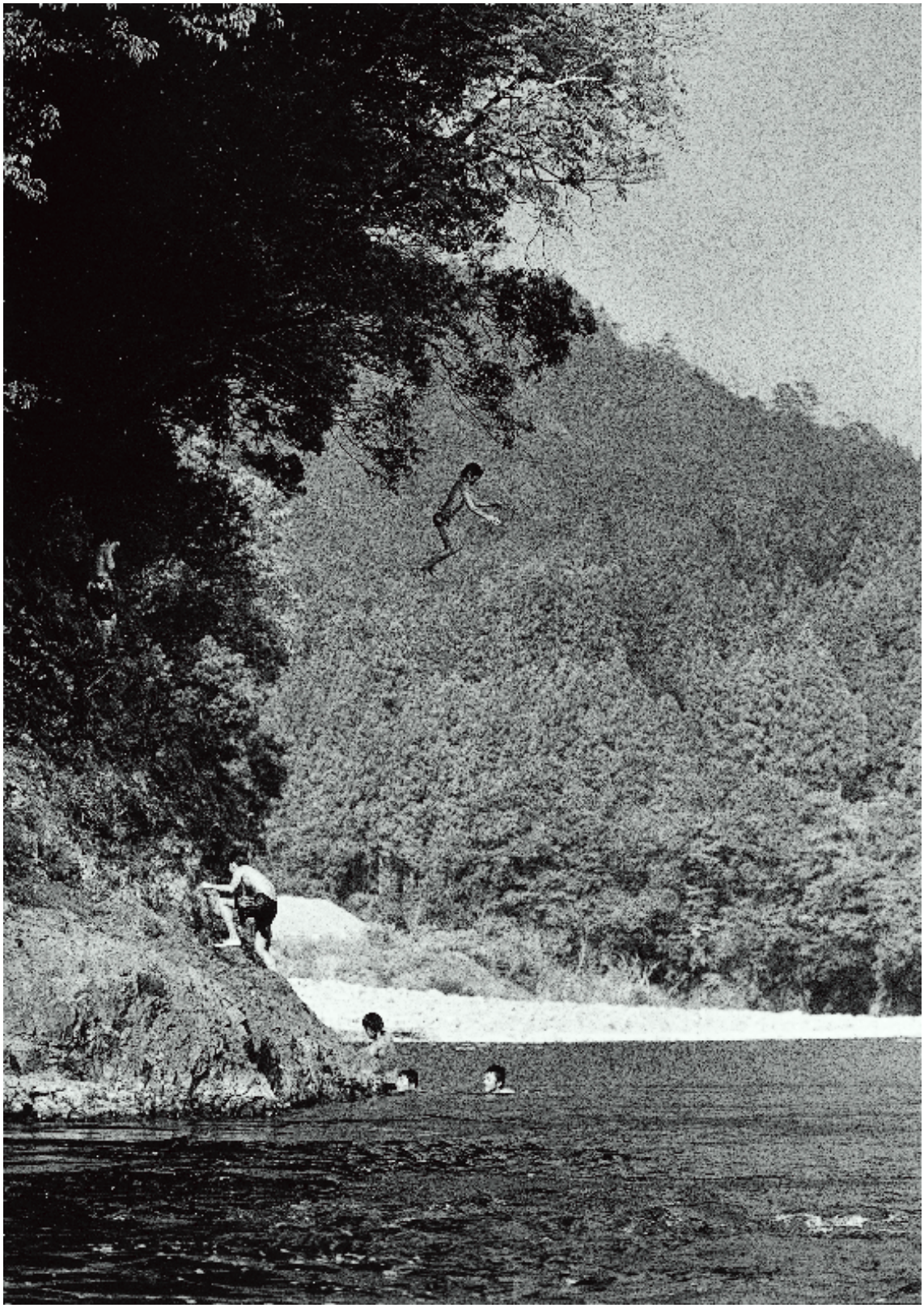
But if we were aboard a boat and realized it was taking on water, I don't believe we would seek our salvation in the lottery, or vent about our bosses, or bring innocent children aboard without fixing the hull first. Perhaps if we were able to see the carbon dioxide accumulating in the sky, we would have realized the urgency of climate change sooner. We muddle through heat waves and torrential rains by purchasing miniature fans or raincoats at the convenience store, but short-term relief won't last forever. This is no virtual story; real, devastating environmental change is taking place right now. Maybe reading about the courage of other people who took action in a time of crisis can inspire us to do the same.

Those who argue that we are in the Anthropocene generally see it as having begun in the latter half of the twentieth century, with its explosive growth in human population. In Japan, this coincides with the postwar "economic miracle." That time of upheaval also marks the beginning of this story about an incredible Japanese village that holds so many lessons for our own present and future.

It all began one balmy spring day, when a certain young man arrived in Kito. Just a year earlier, all of Japan had been abuzz with news of the Crown Prince's marriage to Crown Princess Michiko and the selection of Tokyo for the 1964 Summer Olympics. Let us return to that time, when people's hearts were overflowing with hopes and dreams never before imagined.

In the human world, shorter is better

—Ryusei, September 11, 1996



The village of Kito

Part I The Showa Era
Chasing Dreams in a Poor Mountain Village

Ch. 1 The Beautiful Mountain Village of Kito

1.

It was a fine March day in 1960. At the transit terminal in Wajiki, a town in Tokushima Prefecture on the island of Shikoku, the bus bound for the village of Kito had still not appeared three hours after its scheduled departure time.

More than twenty people were waiting. All were men and all but one were laborers. The smoke from their cigarettes mingled with the bright midday sunlight as they bantered by the side of the road.

"Bus sure is taking its time."

"It's past noon already . . . reckon it fell in the river?"

"One did fall in last month."

"Nah, last month was a truck. Damn fool piled those logs up so high he went over the cliff nose-first. Died the second he hit the ground, I hear . . ."

"Gives me the willies to think it. The bus to Kito is the bus to hell."

"Shut up! You want to jinx us? That place isn't hell, it's heaven. You can make more cash in Kito these days than anywhere else in Shikoku."

"That you can, and I'm out to make myself a pile."

"I'm itching for it. How about you, buddy?"

"Hey, buddy!"

"Is he deaf or something?"

Hiroshi Usuki looked up from the sheaf of documents in his hand, realizing the conversation he'd been ignoring had turned his way.

"You're headed for Kito, right? After some of this, I'll bet!"

The man speaking to Usuki had the brawny build of a manual laborer, and he grinned as he brought his thumb and forefinger together in a circle. It was the sign for money.

"First time sweating for your pay?" another man asked.

"It's hard work, I'll tell you that. Sure you can handle it?"

"You get cocky about this work, you'll land yourself in a heap of trouble."

"I heard about one kid took a job as a laborer in some village to pay his bar tab. Didn't take him but three days to lose a leg."

"Stop trying to scare him. Right, buddy? You've got a nice bony build, I bet you'll make all the money you want in Kito. Let me tell you a little secret." The man had a friendly twinkle in his eye. "Every day around sunset when work ends, the forestry co-op supervisor hands out the pay and goes home. What *you* do then is go cut yourself one of those skinny little cedars, swing it over your shoulder, and carry it down the mountain. There's fences waiting at the bottom who'll buy that tree for five hundred yen. A tree not more than two *ken*"—about 3.6 meters—"will get you the same as a day's work. You carry down two trees and you've tripled your pay! Don't that bring a smile to your face, son?"

Usuki looked up at the sky for a moment, then thought, *Let it go*. He grinned back at the man.

"That it does. Thank you, friend."

He'd guessed right away that the group of men were day laborers headed to Kito for work. They looked to be in their forties and fifties, and he knew he must look like a greenhorn to them. He didn't mind if they killed time by teasing him. But he wasn't in their line of work.

Usuki had just turned twenty-six in January, and he was an agricultural extension officer. The national government had set up a certification program for extension officers after the war in order to rebuild the agricultural sector. Officers were dispatched from prefectural agricultural experiment stations to serve as the equivalent of tutors for local farmers.

Usuki in particular was considered a young researcher to watch. When he was studying at the technical school affiliated with his station, one of his research papers had won the Food Agency Director's Award, and he'd gone on to pass the national certification test with the highest score in the prefecture. But there was a rebellious side to his personality that had earned him the nickname "the trickster of Wajiki" and kept him from advancing smoothly down the tracks laid out for him. Instead of becoming a researcher at the agricultural experiment station as expected, he disappointed everyone around him by abruptly transferring to the forestry cooperative. He worked there for four years before finally taking a position as an extension officer with the prefectural government.

In fact, it was the president of the Wajiki forestry co-op who had poached Usuki, sight unseen, from the experiment station, after catching wind of his talents and strong-arming him into "lending us your wisdom as a favor to the local community." For his part, Usuki doubted that fully disentangling agriculture and forestry was even possible in a heavily forested prefecture like Tokushima. He wanted to take a closer

look at the way private enterprise worked, and the flourishing forestry industry seemed like a good place to do it.

At the forestry co-op, he was put in charge of training people to grow and plant out tree seedlings for reforestation, but the industry was already booming by the time he arrived, and he was frequently asked to fill in as supervisor at short-handed logging sites. He happily obliged. The other supervisors were constantly complaining that the day laborers were such a rough crowd you couldn't look away for a second without some kind of trouble cropping up, but Usuki didn't feel that way at all. For one, he'd never in his life felt afraid or wary of another human being. On the contrary—as long as he took the proper precautions to prevent injuries and accidents, he enjoyed the liveliness at the logging sites.

"A day's pay for one young cedar! That's damn good money," Usuki said.

"Around these parts, there's not many young trees left in the mountains."

"That's why Kito's heaven! There's plenty of forest up there never been touched."

Eighty percent of Tokushima is covered in forest. Tokushima is also the most mountainous of Shikoku's four prefectures, home to the Tsurugi Mountains, the Sanuki Mountains, and many other tree-lined peaks.

Usuki had entered junior high school in 1947, two years after the nightmare of the Pacific War came to an end. He sensed the immense engine of national reconstruction beginning to roar to life as well as a young boy could, but by the time he advanced to high school, he was vividly aware that it was the Korean War, just across the Sea of Japan, that was pushing Japan's recovery into high gear.

Japanese goods, and timber in particular, were snapped up by buyers in the United States and North and South Korea to satisfy wartime demand. The people of Japan finally had enough to eat, and the next thing they wanted was new houses. Huge volumes of lumber began to change hands. Demand for pulpwood shot up as well, and the price of timber soared. One large, old tree from a natural forest was said to generate enough income to live in leisure for three months.

In mountain villages across the country, forests were clear-cut one by one. The mountains were eaten away before people's very eyes as the logging gained momentum.

Nestled deep in the mountains, Kito was so remote that it lacked proper roads and therefore escaped indiscriminate deforestation. But as the national highway system expanded, Kito was thrust into the limelight as the home of the best forests in Tokushima—the village, people said, where money grew on trees.

"Anyway, what happened to that bus? You think it really did fall off a cliff?"

The road was nominally a national highway, but it was barely more than a narrow footpath etched into the mountain over the centuries, now widened just enough for vehicular traffic. Needless to say, there weren't any safety rails.

Every day a hundred trucks loaded with timber drove up and down that dangerous gravel road with its hairpin curves, carving deep ruts into its surface. Tragic accidents involving vehicles plummeting over the edge after getting a tire caught were not unusual.

"Think we'll make it back alive with our cash?"

"Don't worry, I'll make sure your money gets to your old lady."

Just then, a man came running up the highway, shouting at them.

"Hey! It's here! The bus is here!"

Kicking up a cloud of dust, the bus finally appeared.

The route ran from Tokushima Station to Kito, a distance of about 120 kilometers, and took six hours at the best of times. The road was a string of precarious mountain passes that were so exhausting to navigate, a new driver always took over here at the Wajiki transit hub.

The driver climbed down from the bus and explained to the grumbling crowd that he'd been delayed by a landslide. Wind and rain the previous night had toppled cedar trees and dislodged soil, blocking the road.

Another landslide . . .

As Usuki pushed his way onto the crowded bus, he felt a tremor of anxiety. He'd been hearing a lot of stories about landslides lately. In the past, one stormy night wouldn't have been enough to topple large trees and send dirt and rocks spilling down the mountain.

Something strange is going on in the mountains . . .

To Usuki, who was born into a family that had farmed rice in Wajiki for generations, nothing was as terrifying as nature. A capricious turn of the weather could sweep away months or years of work at a single stroke. Usuki grew up steeped in that terror and frustration, conditioned by both personal experience and the history of his community.

Human beings you could understand through a simple conversation. Compared to nature, they weren't frightening at all.

Poling a Kito cedar downriver

2.

Agricultural extension officers moved from village to village throughout the prefecture, serving two-year contracts in each place. Their primary task was to visit the homes of village farmers and teach them new agricultural techniques to increase their yields. In Kito, arable land comprised just 0.5 percent of the total area, but that still amounted to 80 hectares of paddy, 52 hectares of regular fields, and 10 hectares of orchards. Those numbers were not even among the lowest in the prefecture.

However, the average yearly sales for any given farm among the 322 in the village was less than 10,000 yen. Considering that Usuki's monthly salary was 18,000 yen and that even a laborer in public works or forestry could earn 500 yen in a day, the return on farming was hardly worth talking about. In addition to rice, families grew wheat, soybeans, root vegetables, corn, shiitake mushrooms, onions, and other crops, but all on a subsistence scale. The men worked as day laborers in forestry to bring in the income their families needed to survive.

A year before Usuki came to Kito, an extension officer named Yoshio Konishi was posted there. Konishi had decided to focus on improving efficiency. "The only people doing farm work in this village are the *onagoshi*," he said, using a regional word for "women." Like the villagers and Usuki himself, Konishi spoke in a strong Shikoku dialect rather than the Tokyo standard. "I've got to make their job a little easier, don't I?"

The new agricultural chemicals and fertilizers Konishi introduced seemed to be having an effect, and he proudly announced that this year's rice harvest looked on track to almost double that of an average year.

Usuki was dubious.

Should this village even be growing rice and wheat at all?

His sense of uneasiness steadily grew as he made the rounds of the paddies according to Konishi's instructions. The only reason for such a remote mountain village to build paddies in the first place was so farmers could pay their taxes in rice, as was required until the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Given the extremely poor conditions that farmers in Kito faced, his guess was that, until quite recently, they weren't able to keep any of the rice they grew for themselves. They got by on wheat and millet and other grains, growing rice as a form of "money" in paddies they had wrestled from the mountainsides because they had no other choice. It was clear they went on growing it only from force of habit.

If we leave things up to the farmers and they keep on with their subsistence farming, we won't get anywhere . . .

One day, Usuki approached Konishi with a proposal.

"I think this village should start thinking about converting its paddy fields."

"Converting its rice fields? Don't be an idiot." Konishi didn't even turn away from the bookshelf he was searching through long enough to look at Usuki. "That's a huge project. How could a village like Kito afford it?"

"It won't be easy, but in this day and age, a village shouldn't be forcing itself to grow rice if it can't produce a decent crop. Other parts of the country are converting more paddies every year. Tokushima is behind the times. It's been almost ten years since the Nutrition Improvement Law was passed. Improved varieties of fruits and vegetables are coming out all the time. By the time the Olympics are over, we could be eating as well as the Americans. That's our national dream. But it's up to the farming villages to make it happen—Kito included."

Konishi smiled. "You're starry-eyed, kid. We outsiders can talk about dreams till we're blue in the face, but they won't come true unless the villagers are interested."

"Mr. Konishi, you may be my senior, but I say you're wrong. You and I know what's happening in the outside world. If we don't tell these farmers stuck in the middle of nowhere about it, how can they even know what to dream about? Seems to me it's our job as government workers to teach agriculture with an eye to the future."

"What kind of nonsense is that?" Konishi said, craning his neck around to stare at Usuki. "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. The men in this village will never stop working in forestry. Do you understand that?"

According to Konishi, the money economy had never taken hold in Kito, even in the late nineteenth century, when those changes were reaching other rural areas. Instead, everyone in the village supported one another like family, living self-sufficient lives and bartering amongst themselves. Without proper roads, they were like a land-bound island, left behind by an economy based on the distribution of goods. But sometimes harvests were poor and food became scarce, or someone would get sick, and the doctors didn't accept rice or miso as payment for medicine. The villagers' only choice was to sell off the forest bit by bit for rock-bottom prices to earn a little cash.

"The brokers must've made a killing," Konishi mused.

Yeah—by preying on the weakness of innocent people.

Usuki understood the point Konishi was trying to make. The national afforestation policy, including the plan to expand cedar plantations, was launched in 1897. Investors who saw the potential for profit in timber must have snapped up the

forests in Kito, which were filled with choice trees. Kito cedar in particular had been well known since the Edo period (1603–1868) for its quality. It was a local product with a long history.

Because the precipitous mountains resisted road-building efforts, specialized workers rode the logs down the Nakagawa river, maintaining their balance with bamboo poles. The "log-riders of Kito" were known throughout the prefecture as a symbol of the village.

Even their sole industry, a gift from the mountains, was stolen from them . . .

"This village is ninety-eight percent forested mountains, and seventy percent of that is owned by outsiders. They say anyone can get rich in Kito—except the locals. The men are so humiliated and frustrated by the whole situation, they can't stop thinking about those forests. They may be poorly paid day laborers, but they can't let go of the idea that those mountains are *theirs*. And can you blame them? They're only human."

Konishi turned back to his work at the bookshelf. He'd said all he was going to.

With nowhere else to direct his indignation, Usuki kicked a chair and walked over to the window. Outside, the limpid surface of the Nakagawa river sparkled with spring sunshine. As he shifted his gaze to the riverbank, he noticed his wife Yukiko chatting cheerfully with a group of farmwives at the edge of a rice paddy.

Yukiko had been an employee at the agricultural co-operative in Kisawa, the village where Usuki had been posted until the previous year, and that was how they'd met. Although they'd only recently moved to Kito, she'd worked hard to make friends and seemed to be fitting in famously.

She was also pregnant with their first child. Usuki knew she must feel vulnerable in an unfamiliar place without any relatives nearby, but she seemed to be pulling through.

"The people here are so lovely and kind," she'd told him. "They've only just met us and they're already giving me rice and vegetables so our baby will be healthy. It's so thoughtful of them. I adore this village."

He still remembered the happy look on her face that day.

"When I hear their stories, I can't help crying sometimes," she'd added. "They've truly suffered. I think that's why they understand other people's pain . . ."

And shouldn't they be rewarded for that hard work and suffering?

Agrochemicals, fertilizers, cultivation techniques, and farm machinery were advancing by leaps and bounds. The day when farmers would finally be freed from poverty and hardship was around the corner.

There was no harm in the current forestry boom, but letting agriculture decline as a result would be a mistake. Arable land was a farmer's most reliable source of income. Generations of backbreaking work had gone into converting every scrap of flat land into farm fields, much more effort than had been required in the plains below, and up till now those fields had carefully maintained.

The biggest agricultural revolution in history is coming, and I've got *to make sure this village is a part of it. There must be some way . . . !*

"I'm going to push for paddy conversion," Usuki said, turning away from the window. "I don't want to spend two years helping people grow rice that we all know will be thrown away."

Konishi glared at him, clicking his tongue scornfully. "You talk big, but things aren't so easy in real life."

"I'm not saying it'll be easy. I'm saying our job as human beings is to use ingenuity and effort to achieve difficult things."

"Why, you . . . Who the hell do you think you are?"

"Just give me the map of the village. You've got it memorized by now anyway. The men won't be home in the daytime, but if I go round to the farms at night, I'll be able to talk to them."

I'd better hurry, because my time here is short. I need a motorbike. Next payday, I'll buy one. That'll let me get twice as much work done.

"All those paeans to your brilliance have clearly gone to your big fat head," Konishi said, tossing a folded-up map onto Usuki's desk. "Here, knock yourself out. Don't say I didn't warn you."

Usuki unfolded the map. It showed the entire village in detail, and was marked up with the names of the owner of every house and piece of farmland along with the size of the fields, the crops grown in them, and other comments.

"But don't think I'll let you skip out on your rounds of the paddies," Konishi added. "Those old farmwives may not be able to sell their rice, but they can't wait to see how much their yields rise come fall."

"And you can't wait to prove you did something while you were here, huh?"

"Shut your mouth, Usuki!"

"If you're going to call me big-headed anyway, I might as well go ahead and do what I think is right."

"Listen to me! What can you do in two years? You're an outsider. Push for something they don't want and you'll be crushed right along with this village."

Konishi was right about one thing: Two years wasn't much time. But if his only choice was between trying and giving up, then Usuki was determined to try.

3.

After his clash with Konishi, Usuki spent his days and nights visiting farmers. He wanted to find some crop the village could become known for. Something grown in the village historically would be ideal, but he wasn't having any luck. He'd heard that some families had farmed small quantities of tea and shiitake mushrooms for many years, but that was just because farmers had to grow light crops if they hoped to transport them to the distant urban centers. Other than that, there was no particular advantage in growing those things in Kito.

On this particular day, Usuki once again found himself kicking off the gravel on the lonely highway as he swung his leg over his motorcycle. He set off toward his next destination, revving the engine joyously, as if he were racing the Nakagawa river that ran parallel to the road.

In spite of everything, *this really is a gorgeous place.*

The colors around him were so rich it was as if a film of grime had been peeled from the world. The clear air must be to thank for that. The mountains rose around him in every direction, their deep green fringing an intensely blue sky. The vivid scenery unspooled without end.

Shards of light danced across the river's translucent surface, racing into the distance. Kito sat at the headwaters of the Nakagawa river, Tokushima's longest Class A river (a designation applied to rivers of economic and environmental importance under Japan's River Law). The river cut across the prefecture from east to west for 125 kilometers, but Kito was where the pure water had its source.

If the majestic mountains in their cloak of mist were like a father, then the indescribably beautiful Nakagawa river with its undulating curves was like a mother. Usuki couldn't help slipping into spiritual sentimentalism at the sight of the landscape around him. And yet there was no denying that the human lives that had unfolded through history amidst this natural splendor had been hobbled by severe poverty.

The narrow slivers of flat land alongside the river were so crowded with houses that the paddies and fields beside them looked almost like an afterthought. Most of the houses and fields had been carved into the hillsides, with handmade stone stairs of questionable soundness leading up to Route 195, a national highway and trunk road.

From laying irrigation canals to transporting equipment, Usuki could hardly imagine a farming village where work would be more difficult.

The mountains surrounding Kito were all at least a thousand meters high. Jirogyu was 1,929 meters, Konose with its gorgeous fall leaves was 1,741 meters, and Ishidate was 1,708 meters. His eyes were always drawn upward in these parts.

Before moving to Kito, Usuki had heard it was a fairly cold place, but taking wind chill into account it felt surprisingly warm. Most likely that was because the entire village was comprised of steep valleys. The mountains that rose on either side of the road were like enormous partitions that kept the wind out, and the forests on the mountain slopes acted like additional windbreaks. They also trapped the warmth of the morning and midday sun, raising the air temperature. Still, nights were quite chilly. The sun sank behind the mountains long before sunset and too soon for the soil to have absorbed much heat, sending the air temperature plummeting.

These leaps in temperature really are unique . . . I wonder if that could be a strength, somehow . . .

Usuki caught sight of something that made him brake to a halt.

On the slope above the road towered a tree nearly ten meters high. Each of its long branches was heavily laden with dark green leaves, and reached skyward as if demanding more of something.

Now that's vitality. I wonder what kind of tree that is.

Usuki sprinted up the mountainside to the base of the tree. He knew it was some kind of citrus, but of course it couldn't be a satsuma tree. It was too big to be a sudachi, either.

Maybe a yuzu?

The tree looked well over a century old to him, but when he touched the leaves they were sturdy and thick, and the bark had a youthful suppleness. He'd seen wild yuzu trees in Wajiki, where he grew up. They grew naturally throughout the mountains of Tokushima and the rest of Shikoku. But he'd never seen such a fine, vigorous specimen.

Surveying the village as he stood on the mountainside, he realized something he'd never noticed before. In the garden of every house stood a large, tall yuzu tree, like guardian deities watching over each family home.

I climb mountains.
The world laughs.
But I climb mountains.
Again and again I go, as if drowning myself in the beauty of wild nature, prepared even to give up my life for it.
I find this is common to all mountaineers.
Perhaps it is simple human weakness.
Perhaps it is an ideal.
Just as each of us has his own struggles and sorrows and joys, we each face the mountains in our own way.
I believe it is an instinct.
An instinct—which is to say, a hope for tomorrow.

—From "A Gift to the Three Spirits," by Kentaro Fujita (age 26) *Yamakai*, vol. 12, 1961

Kito, the Tibet of Shikoku

Ch. 2 Eighteen years from sapling to fruit

1.

Kito is a long, narrow village. It is made up of seven hamlets along a seventeen-kilometer east-west stretch of the Nakagawa river valley, separated from one another by several massifs. At Kito's far eastern tip sits the hamlet of Suke.

Even on the map, Usuki could see how mountainous Suke was. There were scarcely any flat areas, and when he visited he was struck by the way the farmhouses and fields seemed to cling desperately to the near-vertical slopes. But what truly set this hamlet apart was an unusual abundance of wild yuzu trees. All of them appeared quite old, and now, in May, small, pure white flowers dotted the leafy green branches from top to bottom, making the trees look dainty and strong at the same time.

Like all the others, the yuzu tree in the garden of the Sogawa family home—which was circled in red on Usuki's map—was in glorious full bloom. Usuki was sitting on a bench in the garden, gazing at the tidy rows of young Japanese cedar trees in a field some distance away. Next to him, sitting cross-legged, was Tokuyoshi Sogawa, the head of the household. He was often mentioned by other farmers as a man who devoted unusual zeal to his farm.

"Last year I got the farmers here in Suke together and started up a cedar seedling club," he said, drinking down his tea in one gulp before urging Usuki to do the same. A few grains of rice remained at the bottom of the cup.

"We call this *shirifuricha*—'shake-bottom tea.' You know why? Because you've got to shake the bottom of the cup to get the rice out. It's the finest thing you can serve a guest in Kito. For us, rice is a luxury we don't get to eat much of—strange as that might sound to a *kitarinin* like you."

Kitarinin was village slang for an outsider.

"All we've got in Kito is mountains. All we've got is mountains, but it's the *kitarinin* who make money off those mountains. Does that sound fair to you? It doesn't to me. Our ancestors had to grit their teeth and bear it for centuries, but I want Kito to fight back. We'll make cedar seedlings our village product and claw back the money that grows on the mountains. That'll show them!"

Usuki wasn't sure what to say.

True, after the forests were cut, seedlings were planted to reforest the slopes. Growing tree seedlings was a longstanding industry in Tokushima because of the large amount of forested land in the prefecture. For that reason, there were already quite a few well-known and long-established seedling producers, and the booming timber industry of the past ten years had swelled the scale of their production. As far as Usuki could tell, these old-timers had thrived by engaging in friendly competition for business from the timber companies and forestry co-ops. The whole set-up worked like a cozy insider's club.

"I worked as a laborer in the forests, but I was always looking for a way out," Sogawa went on. "Then one day it hit me. Day after day, trucks bring in cedar seedlings from the other side of the mountains. How many hours does it take them? How many people do they need to load and drive the trucks? And that's if they don't fall off some cliff! If the farmers in Kito sold seedlings, our costs would be much lower. That would help out the buyers, too, so if we market ourselves right, we should be able to make a go of it."

"You plan to sell direct to the reforestation companies yourselves?"

"Who else will do it? Do you officials want to make the sales rounds for us? The only thing the agricultural co-op cares about is collecting our installment-savings deposits. And the village hall wants us working out in those forests like there's no tomorrow, because you won't go hungry as long as you stick to forestry. But being a day laborer isn't enough for me. What man doesn't want to do the work he was born to do in his own home village? We've still got enough spit and vinegar here to fight back if we band together."

Twelve families in Suke had agreed to join Sogawa's club, and they were all growing cedar seedlings. Since the roots of cedar seedlings are shallow, they can be planted in rice paddies, which made the switch easier. That was a big factor in the decision as well.

A seedling club, eh?

Usuki shook the bottom of his cup, stirring up the cold tea so the grains of rice slid into his mouth. A group of farmers getting together on their own initiative to try growing a new crop was good news, to be sure. Sogawa's fighting spirit and leadership should prove valuable in pushing for paddy conversion. The problem was, he didn't know about the collusion between reforestation companies.

"Mr. Sogawa, I don't like to lie, so I'm going to be honest right now. You don't have much chance of success with cedar seedlings. The established growers have

a grip on the entire seedling industry, and cedar seedlings are the most profitable thing they grow. Cutting into their business won't be easy."

"How do you know that?"

"Before I got this job with the prefectural government, I worked in the forestry co-op office. I know how the industry works. When it comes to seedlings for reforestation, the growers and the buyers are like family."

"Fine, but Kito's cedar trees are the best in the prefecture. There's no question seedlings grown here will do better, too. I think we can win."

"I like your attitude. Farmers should be farming. If you do it logically and pull the whole village together, I think the farmers of Kito can change the future. But cedar seedlings aren't the crop you need."

"Why not?"

"Because if the forestry industry goes down, you'll go down with it."

Sogawa paused. "You're saying we won't be able to put food on the table."

Usuki nodded. "If you're talking about an industry, you've got to think at the village scale. And as far as the future goes, if you're farmers, you should stop chasing after forestry and find something you can do as farmers."

Sogawa was silent, thinking.

"Mr. Sogawa, would you be interested in growing yuzu?"

"Yuzu?"

"Yuzu. This village is full of old yuzu trees. They're old, but they're still excellent trees. I traveled all over Shikoku as a trainee, and I've never seen a village with yuzu trees this good. The conditions here must be perfect for them. That could be your strength. How about making yuzu Kito's specialty product?

"Yuzu, you say? I wasn't expecting that one."

Sogawa rose lightly and stepped down from the bench.

"Come this way, Mr. Government Instructor," he said. He led Usuki around to the rear of the house. Between the building and the looming mountainside was a narrow field where about thirty yuzu trees were growing in rows.

"These trees are my youthful dreams."

Not one of them was blossoming.

Sogawa had left the village once, right after graduating from junior high.

This was twenty years ago, when he was sixteen. He'd wanted to be part of the business world where it was flourishing instead of in the poor village he'd grown up in. He'd made it all the way to Nagoya, but none of the big emporiums he'd dreamt of

working at would take a country kid with no connections seriously. From there he headed to Osaka, where he'd heard there was a greengrocer from Kito in the central wholesale market. He'd hoped the man might give him a job, and while the greengrocer did allow him a ten-day training period, it must have been out of kindness alone, because in the end he politely turned Sogawa away.

Nevertheless, Sogawa noticed something during this disappointing journey. At every produce market he went to, yuzu sold for eye-popping prices. The Osaka greengrocer kept hundreds of the fruits floating in a tank in the cellar. When he asked why, the grocer told him that since yuzu were so scarce, he preserved them in chemical-laced water, taking out just a few at a time to sell.

"Now that was a shock. In Kito the trees were groaning with yuzu. You could pick as many as you liked. Nobody thought anything of it. On top of that, the yuzu from other places were small and didn't have much flavor or scent, but ours were outstanding. I had a flash of inspiration."

If I grow yuzu, I can sell them to the market wholesale . . . !

When he got back to Kito, Sogawa took some yuzu seeds and planted them in the field behind his house, which had been left fallow in preparation for afforestation. A year later, three hundred seedlings emerged. He had himself a yuzu orchard.

His parents, who thought he'd planted cedar trees, were furious. The neighbors laughed at him, saying he must have lost his mind in the city. Kito's mountains and gardens were full of yuzu; wasting precious farmland on planting more seemed the epitome of idiocy. But Sogawa didn't care what his elders said. He was thrilled by the thought that he would soon give them all a good shock by becoming a yuzu millionaire.

The next year, however, a powerful typhoon blew through the village, causing a number of disastrous landslides. The yuzu seedlings that Sogawa had raised with such care were flattened by fallen trees, snapped in half along with his dreams. Even then, he refused to give up, and once again planted yuzu seeds behind the house. Those were the trees Usuki was now looking at.

"It's been sixteen years and they still haven't blossomed. If that typhoon hadn't taught me a lesson early on, I might have gone broke waiting around for them to bear," he said, gazing at the trees with their vigorous branches and leaves. "You're right that yuzu thrive here. Kito's yuzu are special. But the trees take twenty years or more to bear fruit. I'm not going to run my farm into the ground for some *kitarinin* talking nonsense about growing yuzu. My club and I are getting into the cedar seedling business. Come back when you've got that through your head."

2.

After talking to Sogawa, Usuki contacted the prefecture's agricultural experiment station, but they had no information or records related to growing yuzu. How long the trees took to bear, what kinds of fertilizers they needed and how those fertilizers should be applied, pruning methods, diseases and pests and how to prevent them—all of it was a mystery. Yuzu wasn't even listed as a cultivated fruit tree.

He asked a colleague to look into the yuzu for sale at the Osaka wholesale market and learned that they came from the Mizuo district of Kyoto, but the quantities were so small that his colleague thought they must be from wild trees. Nothing seemed to have changed since Sogawa trained there before the war. Apparently, no one had yet attempted to turn yuzu into a farmed crop. Was this an opportunity, or was the fruit simply impossible to grow commercially?

When Usuki was a student at the technical school affiliated with the agricultural experiment station, he had begun researching ways to efficiently raise farm profits in Tokushima's villages, which tended to lack flat land. The idea he eventually hit on was simple: *If land is limited, why not use the air?* Deciding that fruit trees were the best way to put it into practice, he published a paper on Japanese plums and chestnuts, complete with an analysis of projected demand. That was the work that won him the Director's Award and general acclaim.

Perhaps as a result, the prefecture was still recommending that farmers plant plums and chestnuts in converted paddies. The basic concept wasn't wrong, but plenty of villages had already taken up the recommendation, and Usuki was doubtful Kito could compete, especially given the growing conditions at its high elevation.

Plums and chestnuts are productive trees, but with the cold, wet climate in Kito, I just don't know . . .

On the other hand, the more he looked into yuzu, the more he thought it was the ideal crop for the village. Which left the question of whether or not he could shorten the number of years it took for them to bear fruit.

In a place like Kito with abundant rain, soils tended to become acidic, but that could be remedied by applying lime to make them more alkali and returning growth rates to normal. As for the length of time it took for new trees to bear, that could be shortened through grafting. This was done by inserting a shoot, or scion, of the tree you wanted to grow more quickly into a cut in the bark of an established tree of a different species, called the rootstock. The grafted scion sucked up nutrients from the rootstock

with remarkable speed, growing faster and better than it would otherwise. It was a method of domestication that took advantage of the genetic particularities of plant life.

Particularly among fruit trees, many species sent a taproot straight down into the hard earth, no matter how slow the process, instead of spreading their roots horizontally. Yuzu was thought to belong to this category. In any case, fruit trees weren't like vegetables that could be readily replanted. Once they were in the ground, they were there for the long haul. This made grafting critical for speeding up production. It was well studied for all the established varieties of fruit, with plenty of records and other materials to draw on. The market gains of popular fruits like apples and satsuma oranges were due in large part to the success of grafting.

Can't hurt to give it a try with yuzu . . .

Having arrived at this conclusion, Usuki asked the experiment station to run an experiment in grafting yuzu trees.

"Theoretically it should work. If you choose a good rootstock—"

"You want me to graft *yuzu* trees?" Uninhibited laughter echoed from the telephone. "Usuki, this is Okamoto. We were trainees together."

"Okamoto? It's been a while!"

"Not for me. I hear about you and your damn yuzu every day. The genius has lost his mind, they say. You're the laughingstock of the office."

"Yeah, yeah, laugh it up. Listen, I think a hardy orange would work for the rootstock. Try the flying dragon cultivar. I'd be grateful for some experimental data on the length of time until the grafts take, along with fertilizer application and resistance to insects and cold."

"Wait, wait, wait. We'll never get approval to do experiments on a tree no one cares about. Anyway, we can't start experimenting without data on consumption or any history of production!"

"Give it five or ten years, and you'll have all the consumption data you want. Just look at pepper. Pretty soon Japan will have plenty to eat, and growing seasonings will be worthwhile."

"Pepper, eh? That's an interesting point." Okamoto sounded impressed. "I'll give you one thing, Usuki—you always think beyond the immediate future."

"I don't know about that, but we've got to move fast. The future of this village depends on it."

"Paddy conversion, you mean?"

"Exactly. Unless they do something no one else has thought of, they'll never get ahead. We need to find a strength and turn it into a local specialty. That's the key for Kito."

"You're in Kito right now?"

"I am."

"Tough place to farm."

"It is. But if I can get them to grow yuzu, I'm sure it'll be the best yuzu in Japan. If they come together, they can turn it into a real industry. That'll let them work their own land as independent farmers."

"Fine, fine. I'll push for it, but we're flooded with requests for experiments on major crops. Don't expect too much."

"To hell with expectations, just tell me if you're going to do it or not. Because I'm going forward either way."

Once again, Okamoto's laughter echoed through the telephone.

"I used to think it was strange that someone as talented as you didn't stay at the experiment station, but I get it now. It's not agriculture you care about. It's people."

Okamoto's best efforts were to no avail: The request for a yuzu-grafting experiment was rejected by the station. But he looked into the topic himself, and told Usuki he thought growing grafted yuzu trees was ninety-nine percent likely to succeed.

Next, Usuki sounded out Hayashi Farm in Nyuta, part of of Tokushima city. The farm was well known within the prefecture as a large-scale producer of tree seedlings, and he'd had some dealings with it when he worked for the forestry co-op. What Usuki needed done had never been done before, and a big, experienced company would be more likely to succeed. He was also looking to the future, when he'd need to ramp up orders quickly.

He wasn't sure why, but he felt no uncertainty whatsoever about turning yuzu into a commercial crop. He couldn't even imagine the project failing.

"Well, if it isn't the trickster of Wajiki. What's this about?"

"Tell me, friend, how much would you charge me for yuzu seedlings?"

"Come again? Yuzu?"

"Yes, yuzu. I'd like you to grow me some yuzu trees grafted onto hardy orange."

Usuki explained the details. But the seedling farmer said he wouldn't take a job with no precedent and no guarantee of success.

"If I start grafting yuzu trees everyone will laugh at me. You can't eat 'em. Only thing you can use 'em for is vinegar. That's a good-for-nothing fruit tree if I ever heard of one."

"Don't be like that. I'm asking you because you're the best in the prefecture. If I promised to buy them even if the grafts don't work, how much would you charge? No harm in giving me an estimate, right? Please?"

"All right, I give in. Wait a minute."

The tree farmer calculated the time and space he'd need for the project, then told Usuki that for a thousand seedlings and no more, on a contract of just one year starting next spring, he'd charge a hundred yen each.

"But only on the condition that you buy the whole thousand, whether the grafts take or not. If you agree to that, I'll talk to my boss."

"Really? You will?"

"I owe you one for the advice you gave me when you were at the co-op."

"Much appreciated!"

A thousand trees at a hundred yen each added up to a hundred thousand yen.

Now, where will I get the money . . . ?

"Speaking of Kito, I hear there was some trouble at the co-op up there."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Word is some farmer from Kito marched in asking for a contract for cedar seedlings. The head honcho didn't like that. If you remember, he's also the head of the forestry association, and no matter how much the farmer complained he wouldn't agree to it."

That must have been Sogawa!

"And now that the co-op director's said no, every company that farmer tries selling his seedlings to will slam the door in his face. The folks up in Kito sure are strange. It may be the boonies, but they've still got a co-op of their own, and now this farmer goes recklessly trying to sell direct to the reforestation companies, out of greed or whatever it is. You've got to work through the proper organizations for things like this. There's rules to business."

Organizations. Yes, Usuki knew that well enough.

He hung up the phone, a dull ache in his chest. He felt as if the frustration Sogawa must have experienced was his own. The farmers of Kito were isolated from urban centers and wholesale markets. Their land was poor, their agricultural co-op was weak, their local government was disinterested. Facing so many disadvantages, what they needed most was to get organized and find a strong leader.

The next thing Usuki did was set about bringing Sogawa into his plan. He wanted him to reach out to the members of his Seedling Club and convince them to prune and apply lime to the yuzu trees growing in their gardens and elsewhere in the village. Then, in fall, he wanted them to pick the fruit and bring it all to Sogawa's house. As he told Sogawa, his aim was to sell the wild yuzu to Osaka's market wholesale to get an idea of the price they'd bring in. Sogawa didn't agree right away, but he took care of the trees as Usuki instructed him without complaint. Whatever he might have said, he cared more about yuzu than anyone else in the village.

After that, Usuki managed to convince the slow-moving agricultural co-op to ship the fresh yuzu to the Osaka wholesale market. They sold for three hundred yen each, far more than Usuki had predicted. The upscale inns and restaurants in Osaka and Kyoto were reportedly delighted to find such a delicacy for sale. The outstanding fragrance and quality of the Kito yuzu garnered high praise.

Usuki had selected only the largest, most unblemished, juiciest, and heaviest yuzu brought to Sogawa's house for sale. Those that didn't meet his standards could probably have been sold as well, but he wanted Kito yuzu to make the best possible impression the first time they went to market.

This was a wise strategy, it seemed. Less than 200 yuzu had brought in 6,000 yen, which even subtracting the agricultural co-op's twenty percent handling fee left a profit of 4,800 yen. The members of the Seedling Club were cheered by their hefty earnings.

Sogawa came to tell Usuki he planned to use his profits to buy Japanese plum and chestnut seedlings and put a down payment on logs for growing shiitake. And that he had changed the name of the Seedling Club to the Suke Chick Club.

"You were right about the cedar seedlings. And I'd never even thought about applying lime to yuzu trees. I have to admit, we Kito men have been working up in the mountains for so long, we don't know much about farming. My feeling is, if someone has a project they want to try, we've got to give it a go. Even if it fails, we'll gain some experience. Chicks grow up to be chickens who raise chicks of their own. I decided to name our club the Chick Club because I'm determined to get all of us ready to raise the next generation of farmers in this village."

"It's a great name. You're a strong man, Mr. Sogawa."

Sogawa shook his head.

"I'm not strong. You tell me to try growing yuzu, but I don't have the will to try again. That crop broke my heart once, and I'm afraid of it happening a second time."

"I can understand that."

Usuki thought back to what Konishi had said about how you can't force people to drink if they don't want water. But he also sensed that the desire to make a profit off yuzu was still smoldering inside Sogawa, if only it were possible. If Usuki wanted to reignite that fire, the grafting had to succeed.

3.

After that, Usuki launched several rounds of negotiations with village officials, who ultimately submitted an application for budget deliberation on his behalf. His specific request was that 100,000 yen for purchasing the yuzu seedlings be included in next year's expenditures. In his proposal, he detailed the importance of developing a local specialty product that could secure the future of Kito's farmers. He ultimately joined the hesitant staff of the village hall's Industrial Development Department at a meeting of the village assembly's budget committee in February 1961.

Although the village was dependent on allocations of tax revenue from the central government, its financial situation was rapidly improving. Total revenue for the 1960 fiscal year, which ran from April to March, was 38.44 million yen, while for 1961 it was predicted to exceed 60,000,000. Half the revenue came from local taxes, including the residential taxes and transaction taxes on timber that were apparently driving the increase in tax revenue as the forestry industry boomed.

Since the Land Tax Reform of 1873, Kito's boundaries had repeatedly shifted as hamlets were added or subtracted. It was only in 1957 that it had reached its present form with the addition of Suke. The village population had swelled to about four thousand, and naturally the local government was absorbed in building new schools and hospitals, expanding water and electric service, and otherwise catching Kito up to other villages in terms of development. The budget committee was also enthusiastic about supporting forestry, Kito's main industry, through measures such as improving the logging roads that were the cause of so many accidents, building timber processing facilities, and purchasing heavy machinery.

However, when it came to the agriculture budget, the committee's enthusiasm abruptly cooled. Farming families accounted for 2,500 of Kito's 4,000 residents, but agriculture received just four percent of the annual budget, or 1.6 million yen. Most of that went to improving agricultural roads, which was really an investment in general living conditions. Agriculture was viewed as domestic work, and farming families were expected to fend for themselves without help from the village government.

Predictably, when the time came for Usuki to present his proposal at the end of the meeting, the committee members were vocal in their protests.

"What on earth is this?"

"Yuzu? And even worse—yuzu *seedlings*?"

"Just what do you plan to do after you spend all that money?"

"Preposterous. What kind of idiot would spend a hundred thousand yen on a plant like that?"

"If you want to sell yuzu, why not go pick yourself some in the mountains?"

Usuki repeated what he had already explained in his proposal. That yuzu were highly profitable relative to the amount of land they took up. That, if the grafts took, Kito would have a completely unique local product. That farmers had to start converting their precious arable land from subsistence to commercial use. That it was crucial to lay the groundwork for organized management of the agriculture sector.

But the more he explained, the more the committee members pressed him about things that were out of his control.

"How can we even discuss this if you can't tell us how many years it'll take for the trees to bear fruit?"

"If the grafts fail, how do you plan to compensate us?"

"You're not in cahoots with this seedling grower, are you?"

Soon they lapsed into personal attacks, calling him a *kitarinin* and a greenhorn. They didn't have a drop of trust in him.

Fine, then! I'll give them a piece of my own mind!

"I'll grant that old men like you ought to know this village well," Usuki began.

"What did you say?!"

"Who are you calling old?!"

"If you weren't stuck in the past, you'd realize how bizarre it is that farmers are working in the forests for the same pay as outside day laborers. A committee of fools is what I call you!"

"Shut your mouth, *kitarinin*!"

"Our citizens earned this budget with sweat and blood! Keep your nose out of it!"

"And half that budget came from farmers working as day laborers!" Usuki snapped. "They live in the village, so they can't stay in the bunkhouses. They get no bonus for the four hours they spend walking to the worksites and back every day. They've got no stake at all in the outside companies. Shouldn't the village government be protecting its own?"

"That's why we're in discussions with the forestry co-op!"

"And what's stopping the forestry companies from just hiring people from other villages instead? You've finally got some decent revenue, so why aren't you giving a little thought to bringing farmers back to the land? The farmland in this village has just as much potential for productivity as the forests. And yuzu is the way to make the most of it!"

"You think we'll squander our precious budget on the likes of yuzu?!"

"Hey, you!" one of the assemblymen shouted at the staff from the Industrial Development Department. "Don't bring any more of these *kitarinin* to our assembly meetings! They're too ignorant to have a discussion with."

"Yes, I'm an outsider, but outside this village, other local governments are putting everything they've got into building a proper agricultural industry. Farmers here are barely scraping by! They'd be overjoyed if the village bought them some seedlings. Their drive will change this village. A hundred thousand yen is a low price to see Kito bursting with strength!"

"It's already bursting with strength in forestry!"

"And Kito has always been a forestry village. What's wrong with leaving the paddies and fields to the women?"

At that moment, the deputy mayor, Makoto Sakakino, stood up. "Just a second, everyone," he said. "Let's all calm down and talk this out rationally."

Sakakino was a young operating officer who had just been appointed to his executive position in the village government that January. He looked thirty at most, and his youthful, intellectual countenance stood out among the other committee members, most of whom were middle-aged or older.

"Mr. Usuki, your written proposal is quite logical, and I understand the points you make. I do have one question, however: Why do you have to order the yuzu seedlings from a private company? Wouldn't it be a more efficient use of funds to pay local farmers directly to grow the seedlings?"

Usuki shook his head. "The main issue with growing yuzu commercially is time," he said. "Because Kito is so cold, seedlings grown here will take longer to mature than elsewhere. By getting them started in a warmer region and then transplanting them, we can shorten the time to maturity. Plus, if we spread the seedling work among different farmers, quality will vary and we won't end up with a top-class product. Only a professional seedling company can grow thousands of young trees to a uniform quality standard. We'll have plenty of points to improve on after planting out the seedlings, so we need uniform cultural practices from the outset."

Sakakino nodded. “So it’s about the preconditions for growing them on a commercial scale. How many years do you see that taking?”

“At least ten.”

A murmur ran through the other committee members.

“It’s a pipe dream.”

“We’ll need some kind of patience for that.”

“Who has the time, in the middle of this forestry boom?”

“If you don’t do it now, then when *will* you do it?” Usuki snapped.

Sakakino remained calm. “I hear you’ve only got a little over a year left on your contract here, Mr. Usuki. Will the farmers be able to continue on their own after that?” he asked.

“Honestly, I don’t know,” Usuki said frankly. “But this proposal is about the village, not me. If this budget request fails today, then Kito’s chance to turn yuzu into a specialty product disappears, because I’m the only one crazy enough to try. I’ll handle my end of things, but I want you to tell me whether or not you’re willing to do this as a village.”

Once again, the finger-pointing began.

“Talk about irresponsibility!”

“He’s going to run off and leave us holding the bag!”

“We weren’t born yesterday!”

“Silence!” shouted the mayor, Tairoku Azuma. “Mr. Usuki has given us a reasonable response. This proposal is for us to consider. It would be wrong to hold a prefectural employee responsible for it. I’m the mayor, and if worse comes to worst, *I’ll* take responsibility. Make your decision on the merits.”

Deputy Mayor Sakakino added his thoughts as well. “At the end of last year, I was in Osaka on business. I’d read in the report from the agricultural co-op about the shipment of yuzu, and out of curiosity I went to the central market to have a look. I can’t tell you how proud I felt to see Kito yuzu selling there for top prices. Our village, shining bright in the big city. I’m voting yes on the yuzu seedling budget. We’ve been behind for years, and it’s time to catch up. I want us to do everything we can together to make this a thriving community. We’ve got an expert in agriculture backing us up right now—what better time to take a step forward?”

4.

Ultimately, the Kito village assembly's budget committee approved an allocation of 100,000 yen for the purchase of yuzu seedlings. It was a minor decision by a remote mountain village, at a time when yuzu were scarcely available on the market, let alone grown commercially. But Usuki had grand hopes for what was possible. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that hopes were all he had.

As soon as the budget request was approved, Usuki raced straight to Sogawa's house to tell him. Sogawa was surprised by both the unexpected infusion of village funds and Usuki's plan to shorten the maturation period of the trees through grafting. The embers of his desire to give the crop one more try flared up.

For the next two months, while the village was still buried in snow, Usuki and the members of Sogawa's Suke Chick Club scoured the mountains and village gardens for the finest, most vigorous yuzu trees. They labeled the best of these Kito Number One through Five and sent branches to Hayashi Farm in Nyuta to use as scions for grafting. Among them were cuttings from one of the trees Sogawa had raised himself, as well as from the huge tree in the mountains that had first inspired Usuki to try cultivating the fruit.

In April 1961, the first attempt to grow grafted yuzu trees in Japan began at Hayashi Farm. Even those involved in the experiment never guessed that those thousand young trees were the forerunners of a specialty product grown across the country and sought after throughout the world.

"So, how are my yuzu seedlings faring?"

"Morning, Usuki. Your yuzu seedlings are so healthy I can't believe it myself. The hardy-orange rootstock is a perfect match. It looks like they'll take quickly."

"Good to hear. Take care of them for me, friend."

"Oh, I will. This is a first for me, too, so I'm giving it all I've got. I'll give you your success, don't worry."

Step by step, single-mindedly, they were moving forward.

Two months after the branches were sent to Hayashi Farm, Sogawa came panting into the Tokushima Prefecture Kito Branch Office where Usuki worked.

"Mr. Usuki! The yuzu trees behind my house have finally flowered!"

"They have?! Now we're in business!"

Seventeen years had passed since Sogawa planted the seeds for the thirty yuzu trees behind his house. Who could know if it was simply the course of nature that made them flower this year, or if the soil amendments and pruning were to thank? Whichever it was, Sogawa's joy in his triumph over youthful failure was palpable.

“Put in proper care and you get results—no question about it!” he exclaimed, brimming with renewed enthusiasm for studying farming techniques.

When the harvest that November brought in top prices again, Sogawa did not hesitate to tell everyone around him that he was giving yuzu another try.

“Kito yuzu are the best in Japan! Let’s make it our specialty product!”

Rumors of Sogawa’s obsession with yuzu spread from hamlet to hamlet like wildfire. Most of the farmers sneered, but a handful were captivated. It was especially encouraging that some of the farmers with the most land in the village wanted to participate, including Suke Chick Club members Nobukazu Kogashiwa and Seiichi Matsumoto, as well as agriculture co-op board members Atsushi Hirakawa from the hamlet of Nishiu and Saburo Tanikatsu from Kitagawa.

“The best in Japan, eh? In that case, I’d like to give it a try myself. Nothing like a leap of faith to keep life interesting.”

“Right you are. Got to screw up the courage to shake things up if you want to create something new.”

“Farming’s like being a professional gambler to start with, when a single typhoon can wipe us out. I want in on Sogawa’s big bet.”

Six farmers in all decided to try growing yuzu, with Sogawa as their enthusiastic leader. Despite the group’s small size, they talked big.

When Usuki heard that the grafts looked likely to succeed, he began to think about his next steps during his regular rounds of the village. Deputy Mayor Sakakino had tried many times to talk him into staying in Kito permanently: “I want to change this village, and I want your help in turning Kito yuzu into an industry. Let’s work together to make this place flourish.”

On the day that Usuki received written notification from the prefectural government that his contract in Kito was ending and he was being reassigned to another village, he asked his wife Yukiko for her opinion. Holding their young son to her chest, she answered not in her usual cheerful tone but in a more assertive voice.

“Whether we stay or move, my place is with you and this baby. You always have a clear answer for everything, so why are you so concerned about my opinion this time? Are you sick or something? Besides, I’m in a bad mood today. When I took the baby to the clinic this afternoon, everyone in the waiting room was talking about how Mr. Konishi told them to spread fertilizer in their garden because they can get good money for their yuzu. On and on about what a genius Mr. Konishi is. Can you believe it? You’ve put more thought into yuzu production than anyone else! I was sitting there with steam coming out of my ears!”

Usuki laughed. “I’m happy Konishi’s joined the fight. I can’t do this by myself.”

“True, but you ought to make as much noise about your work as he does. Anyhow, I think you’re already planning to stay here in Kito to work on the yuzu project. Don’t expect me to give you a reason not to. What’s the worst that could happen—you fail? So what?”

“When it comes to work, I’m not competing with anyone but myself. Also . . .” Usuki took the baby from Yukiko and swung him into the air. The baby cooed happily. “I’m not going to fail. Am I, son?”

And that’s the truth. I might be reaching for the stars, but I won’t give up till I grab hold of them.

That evening, Usuki wrote a letter of resignation to Tokushima’s prefectural government. On the windowsill of the apartment, a pheasant’s eye blossom that Yukiko had picked closed its petals, as if it was nodding off for the night. It was March, and spring was just around the corner.

Hiroshi Usuki, the father of Japan’s yuzu industry, and his wife Yukiko

For the villagers of Kito, yuzu was a traditional food that had been part of their lives for generations. When the fruit ripened, every household would squeeze the tart juice to use in place of vinegar. This juice was so essential to daily life that the fruit itself was called *inosu*, meaning "yuzu vinegar." Yuzu juice is highly antibacterial, making it useful not only in preserving food but also in warding off colds and generally keeping the family in good health. Within the frugal diet of past generations of villagers, yuzu was one thing they could use in abundance. A deep affection for this small symbol of a joyful fall harvest was passed down from mother to daughter through the centuries.

Each family prided itself on its homestyle yuzu cooking. *Ayu* and *amago* fish caught in the Nakagawa river were marinated in yuzu juice, then arranged on top of sushi rice also prepared with plenty of the juice to make *ayuzushi* and *amegozushi*. Similarly, Nakagawa eels were grilled over charcoal until richly fragrant and pressed onto yuzu rice to make *unagizushi*. Wild vegetables picked in the mountains were folded into rice flavored with yuzu to make *mazezushi*, a favorite at family tables. Because the yuzu juice was itself so deeply flavored, it brought out the flavor of the other ingredients, creating fragrant, unforgettable delicacies.

The thick rinds left over after squeezing the juice were sliced thinly, boiled, and preserved in salt, or simmered with seasonings to make the salty-sweet preserves called *tsukudani*. Cooking the peels enhanced their flavor and gave them a satisfyingly chewy texture, and they were much valued in winter when fresh vegetables were scarce. Another common preparation method in the village was to split the fruits in half, stuff them with miso and shaved *katsuobushi* (dried bonito), and smoke them over charcoal to make *yuzu yakimiso*, a snack served with sake. Dried yuzu peel could be added to bathwater, or burned in summer to keep insects away . . . the list of uses went on and on.

When Usuki made the rounds of farmhouses and rice paddies during the day to offer agricultural advice, he was usually met by farmwives and older women. The moment he asked about yuzu, their eyes would light up and they would start chatting away.

"You won't find better than yuzu. One whiff of that smell and it's like your troubles and sorrows never existed. Gives a body the will to face another day."

These women were in charge of feeding their families and keeping them healthy, and their fondness for yuzu strengthened Usuki's confidence. Men ran the industries and markets, but women ran household kitchens. They were the ones who would buy the yuzu Kito was planning to sell.

One *sho* (1.8-liter bottle) of yuzu juice took about 12 kilograms of yuzu to make. According to the village farmwives, they sold the bottles of juice to traveling brokers for 500 yen each.

“Squeezing those yuzu by hand is plenty of work, but they beg and beg, so we usually end up selling off some of the vinegar we make for our families. We’re too busy to do business in yuzu vinegar,” the women told him.

Most farm families diligently planted two crops in their fields each year: rice in spring and summer, followed by wheat or soybeans in fall and winter. They had no time to spare.

Every time Usuki saw a child outside a farmhouse with a baby tied to their back, he asked how old they were. Sometimes they were past school age. When he set them in front of him on his motorcycle and took a spin around the paddy, they would squeal with delight, as if his arms were wrapped around not a human child but a water nymph that had danced over from the Nakagawa river.

Each time he watched the sun set early behind the mountains, the sight of its rays painting the forests red as the sky and mountains slowly changed color moved him. The Edo-period writer and historian Rai San’yo coined the phrase “purple mountains, clear water” to express his awe for this natural beauty, which was beyond what humans can create. The nature of Kito spread before Usuki, too, was like a simple but profound poem, its every word filled with the breath of life itself.

There is no such thing as perfection in human affairs.
The advance of time brings only inevitable oblivion.
There is a passage in *L'âme enchantée that reads "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, until thou return to the ground." This is entirely correct, for we sweat and labor all our lives simply that we may eat. There is nothing more.**
Yet despite the solitude of life, I cannot bear to endure it in silence.
I will always laugh, cry, resist, protest, and live with my heart pounding in my chest.

—From "A Tiny Soul," by Kentaro Fujita (age 24), *Yamanami*, 1934

*** A French novel in seven volumes by Romain Rolland, first published in 1922.**

Forestry workers in the bitter cold

Ch. 3 Love, Friendship, and Passion

1.

Are we satisfied with the state of industry in our village of Kito?

Kentaro Fujita, President of the Nishiu Youth Association, Kito, Tokushima Prefecture

Forestry is Kito's sole industry today, and Japanese cedar its primary product. Generations of villagers have poured immeasurable time and effort into aiding the trees in their growth. Yet as soon as Kito's lumber became famous throughout Japan, those same villagers found themselves working as mere hired labor for outsiders living downstream on the Nakagawa river, who, through what mistake at which point in history nobody knows, now have control of the forests.

The peculiar nature of the situation is this: While Kito has 21,034 forested hectares, 9,124 hectares of which are covered by plantations boasting a total of ten million cubic meters of mature timber ready for harvest, ninety percent of this is held privately by owners living outside Kito. Meanwhile, most of the men in the village piece together a living from their wages as day laborers paid by outside forestry companies.

As a result, while the current stability in timber prices has brought a degree of stability to the lives of these villagers, the moment demand shifts or prices fall for forest products, their ability to survive will be threatened. The local timber industry is overly reliant on Japanese cedar forests owned by outsiders.

Kito's residents must not continue working as forestry laborers employed by outside companies forever, as if fated to do so. They must not deny the gravity of this situation by reassuring one another that mountain villages throughout Japan face the same conditions. No, I believe that we must find some way to check this phenomenon. For that reason, I wish to reflect, as best I can, on how we in Kito will live in coming years.

First, let us consider whether any local products in this village aside from timber might, in the future, attract the sort of investment from local

government which is already seen in other villages. I have compared the temperatures and rainfall here to those of other regions, considering also their industries. My conclusion is that for a village such as ours with severe cold in the winter—and also at night, during other seasons—yuzu is the only option. I would therefore like to examine yuzu in greater detail.

Due to recent dietary improvements, yuzu has come to be highly valued as a luxury food item prized for its unique fragrance and flavor. With mass production and widespread advertising, demand would likely exceed current demand for sudachi. I believe it is the ideal choice for a future industry for this village.

Yuzu grows wild throughout western Japan, but almost nothing has been done to commercialize it. In Tokushima, the trees are particularly abundant in the mountain villages around Mount Tsurugi, but even there they remain largely untouched and are not commercially marketed.

Recently Kito's Industrial Development Department and agricultural extension officer have devoted attention to yuzu, creating a handbook and reaching out to farmers. I would like to take this opportunity to ask the village government to put its full resources into making yuzu a local specialty product. It would be a wonderful thing indeed if, when we achieve our major goals of bringing electricity and improved roads to the entire village, our residents could also enjoy a stable income from growing yuzu. In order to achieve that goal, it will be essential for both government and residents to alter their old ways of thinking and work diligently on every front.

Our first task is to rid ourselves of small-minded, conventional ways of thinking. Until 1944, Kito was entirely isolated with no road access whatsoever. As a result, ways of thinking in the village are conservative and passive on every topic.

I therefore request that, in addition to the forestry reform project currently under consideration, village authorities devote resources to an agriculture reform project moving toward mass production of yuzu through cooperative work by the villagers and at the same time overcoming unambitious thinking among them by implementing a real program of action.

I believe this intervention is absolutely essential.

The yuzu currently produced in Kito comes chiefly from trees similar to those growing in the wild, which may be many decades old. In addition, while grafting

and other rational steps toward yuzu production are being taken under the instruction of the extension officer, the grafts have not yet led to greater production, and we do not know how many years those trees will take to begin producing. The extension officer tells us that the trees should begin producing in a few years, similar to other types of citrus, but I believe this uncertainty is a great source of hesitation regarding this project.

However, without commitment, we cannot be certain of achieving mass production, no matter how much time passes. Furthermore, waiting to see the results that others achieve before we take action is hardly appropriate in an age as fast-paced as ours.

I therefore believe that, for the many reasons outlined above, it is essential for the development of this village that the authorities devote their full resources to achieving mass production of yuzu under the instruction of the agricultural extension officer.

(from *Pathways to Learning*, 1965, Tokushima Prefecture Board of Education Social Education Division)

…….

"Hmm."

Usuki closed the pamphlet that had recently been sent to his office. The essay was a strong showing from Kito's younger generation, soundly reasoned and well argued.

Kentaro Fujita always struck me as an even-keeled fellow who'll happily do whatever minor task or kindness is needed, but he's clearly got some backbone, too . . .

After quitting his job as an agricultural extension worker with Tokushima's prefectural government, Usuki took a position in Kito's village hall—specifically, in the office of the school board, having earned his certification as a social education supervisor to qualify for the post. Deputy Mayor Sakakino still wanted Usuki's support in reforming Kito's farming sector, and along with several other officials had tried to convince him to join the Industrial Development Department instead, but Usuki had two reasons for taking a job laying the foundation of social education in the village.

As Fujita wrote in his essay, Kito's villagers were generally passive and tended to value co-operation above independent decision-making. Usuki sometimes grew impatient waiting for them to come to a unified decision; on the other hand, once they

did, they moved forward enthusiastically and with real power. As a social education supervisor, Usuki was in charge of creating the village organizations that would be indispensable in coming years. In addition to schools, this included a children's club, women's club, and senior's club. The idea of helping nurture the attitudes Kito would need to thrive both materially and socially was strongly appealing to him.

The other reason he took the job was because he wanted to devote himself exclusively to advising Sogawa and his fellow yuzu growers on the technical aspects of their project. If he joined the Industrial Development Department, his position would force him to divide his attention between yuzu and other crops. Until commercial production was on track, he wanted the freedom to focus all his time outside his official duties on yuzu.

The branches cut from natural yuzu trees that he had sent as scions to Hayashi Farm three years ago in the spring of 1962 had come back as fine young trees a meter and a half tall. The unprecedented experiment in grafting yuzu had succeeded. But now the real test was beginning.

As the Japanese saying goes, "Peach trees and chestnut trees take three years to bear, persimmons take eight years, and the ridiculous yuzu tree takes eighteen." How close could he bring that number for yuzu to the three or five years it took for standard orchard crops to begin bearing?

Realistically speaking, most farm families could only hold out for five years at most, so he somehow had to get those trees to bear within that timeframe. Hardly any information was available about the types of fertilizer or application methods that would most benefit the trees, or how to prune them, and the diseases and insects they might be susceptible to were just as much of a mystery.

The twenty-two farmers who joined Sogawa's initiative had divided up the thousand grafted trees between them. They reported to each other regularly on their various trials and tests, any irregularities they noticed, the growth of the trees, and the like, keeping records as they went. The experiment, undertaken by a group of farmers bound together only by their common will, was unprecedented.

Usuki provided detailed guidance for this work, but he was still impressed by the ability of the Suke Chick Club members to get things done and the unyielding faith that lay behind their productivity. If they were starting from a neutral position, even a completely new experiment like this would have been simple. But they weren't, and tearing down what stood in their way was their first and greatest challenge. Only full commitment could make such a thing possible.

Right from the start, Suke Chick Club members Matsumoto, Hirakawa, and Kogashiwara ran headlong into virulent opposition from the farmers around them when they decided to convert rice paddies into yuzu orchards. The problem was that the irrigation canals feeding into their paddies also fed all the surrounding paddies. The decision to cut off the water in order to convert their paddies to dry fields was not theirs to make.

Hirakawa in particular was one of the largest paddy owners in the hamlet of Nishiu and held a leadership role in the management of its irrigation canals. He offered to pay out of his own pocket to have new canals built, but this failed to assuage the worries of the surrounding farmers. Some even called for him to be officially ostracized.

Kogashiwara made similar monetary and personal sacrifices when advancing his plans to grow yuzu in the hamlet of Kominono. Unfortunately, when the village approved Shikoku Electric Power Company's plan to build Kominono Dam, his yuzu orchard fell within the area designated for flooding. He opposed the dam, but in the face of a project on the scale of electric power development, his arguments had little influence, and he found no allies. Instead of giving in to despair, however, he carved out new fields in the mountains to grow his yuzu.

By this point, the other villagers were calling Sogawa's group of farmers the "yuzu loonies." For a group of people who had spent their lives cooperating with fellow community members, helping and being helped whenever the need arose by neighbors who were as close as family members, this criticism must have been bitter indeed.

As for Usuki, even Sogawa and his fellow yuzu farmers kept a certain distance, continuing to call him a *kitarinin* no matter how much time passed. He sensed that they would only truly accept him if he produced results.

The sole thing supporting this group in their struggle to grow yuzu was their mutual and almost overpowering perseverance. Sogawa was hot-blooded but never self-righteous, a hard worker who shared his genuine enthusiasm with his companions. They faced cold looks from their neighbors, anxiety about growing a new crop, and uncertain prospects for a harvest. All they had to sustain them was hope—and the fact that they had formed a team, however small, at the outset of the project. The sight of one member overcoming hardship inspired other team members to brave their own difficulties. They influenced one another, traded information, and continued experimenting and improving their methods.

Among the group was one member who served as a kind of pressure valve, skillfully detecting and smoothing over the hairline cracks of distrust that developed within the group after disagreements and arguments. This man who worked tirelessly in

the background to keep the team functioning was an employee of the Accounting Department at the village hall and president of the Nishiu Youth Association. His name was Kentaro Fujita.

"Fujita, a copy of *Pathways to Learning* came from the prefectural BOE."

Usuki had walked over to Fujita's desk in the Accounting Department, which was on the same floor of the village hall as his own office. But Fujita didn't look up from his work, even when Usuki was right beside him.

This guy sure can focus . . .

Usuki tapped Fujita on the shoulder with the pamphlet. Finally, Fujita glanced up, startled. Usuki handed him the pamphlet.

"Oh, Mr. Usuki! Thank you. I'm not sure how well that article came out, but with luck my message will get through to the readers."

"The important thing is to keep getting the word out about yuzu cultivation. I'm sorry I asked you to write it at the last minute. They told me they hadn't gotten enough submissions, so . . ."

"I didn't mind at all. I love to write."

Usuki had met Fujita after the village hall enticed the latter to leave a job with a forestry company and take one in the Accounting Department. At the time, Usuki had only recently joined the village government himself, and most of the other staff were still on the fence about the new, much-discussed *kitarinin*. Fujita was the only one who approached him eagerly right from the start.

"I heard that you're working hard to make Kito a better place, Mr. Usuki. Thank you for that," he'd said. His humble attitude had shown from their very first meeting.

Usuki had heard about Fujita as well. Back when he was still posted in Kisawa, he'd read an essay by Fujita in an anthology published by the local youth federation, borrowed by Yukiko from a friend. He vividly remembered paging through the mimeographed magazine full of hand-written articles about youthful dreams for the future and hopes of romance, and then discovering among them Fujita's essay indignantly rejecting class disparity and the societal structures that left the most vulnerable behind.

After introducing himself, the flesh-and-blood Fujita had said, in the same sincere tone and with pen and notebook at the ready, that he wanted to grow yuzu and would like Usuki to tell him how to convert a rice paddy.

One Sunday afternoon, Usuki visited Fujita's house intending to explain the entire process to him, only to find that he had already completed the job perfectly after hearing only the rough overview Usuki had offered at their first meeting. Unlike any of the other villagers Usuki had met, Fujita seemed to be the type to take the information he was given and work out the rest for himself. From that day on, the two men quickly grew close, apparently drawn together by their shared intelligence.

2.

Fujita was born in 1935, one year after Usuki, to a family that had traditionally served in the role of *sodai*, or hamlet representative, for Nishiu. A bench outside his house offered a sweeping view of the mountains that surrounded Nishiu on three sides.

As a child he loved nothing more than studying, but the village did not have a high school, and the family could not afford to send him to school somewhere else. Determined to make up for his lack of higher education with independent study and practical experience, Fujita entered the working world as soon as he graduated from junior high.

He took a job at a sawmill in Kaifu County, on the far side of the mountains. Kaifu was known for its lumber industry, and Fujita intended to learn everything he could there to bring back with him to Kito along with his earnings.

He had faith in that vision. But the working conditions the sixteen-year-old found at his new job were practically slavery. Contrary to workplace regulations, he was forced to manufacture squared timber from early morning until just before going to bed, and his employers routinely deprived him of his one day off a week. They even made him lie to the inspectors who visited regularly from the Public Employment Security Office to check for violations of the Labor Standards Act. He had always looked up to his elders, but this experience utterly destroyed his faith in adults.

To make matters worse, he suffered contempt and discrimination from his coworkers simply because he came from the most remote part of the prefecture. For the first time in his life, Fujita encountered the senseless malice that human beings are capable of inflicting on one another.

As he told Usuki, experience had shown him how terrifying people were when they didn't listen to reason. "Even now, I still think people are the most frightening thing in the world."

Given how mild-mannered and likeable he was, his words caught Usuki completely off-guard.

"I can't stand the way people call you a *kitarinin* after all you've done for this village," he went on. "Prejudice, discrimination, competitiveness—I hate it all."

"It doesn't bother me," Usuki said lightly. "Let them say what they want. They'll realize they're wrong when the yuzu are a success."

"You're a strong man, Mr. Usuki."

"You're ten times stronger for not depending on anyone but yourself," Usuki joked. "People change completely whenever it's convenient for them. They're not scary at all."

Fujita was silent for a moment. Finally, as if talking to himself, he said, "It's what's convenient for them that terrifies me."

Usuki glanced at Fujita and was struck by the expression on his face. His placid tone belied a tense aura of fierce determination.

Fujita stared at the mountains for a moment, as still as a statue, then mumbled, "I haven't seen any Japanese robins lately."

"Robins? You mean the migratory ones?"

Fujita nodded.

"In spring, they used to come in huge flocks. Cute little things that look like they're wearing russet hoods. When they circle round overhead in a big group like they're all the best of friends, that patch of sky turns red. I haven't seen that happen since I came back from the sawmill. Bulbuls, grosbeaks, ruddy kingfishers . . . I'm seeing less of all of them these days. I can't shake the feeling that something very bad is going on in these mountains."

"Something disrupting the ecosystem, you mean?"

"It's only a hunch. But there's no question that afforestation is affecting the rivers."

By afforestation, he meant the replacement of natural forests with tree plantations. Listening to Fujita elaborate on his thinking, Usuki recalled the vague foreboding he had been feeling about the recent increase in landslides. Fujita was certain that planting dense artificial forests was destroying existing mountain ecosystems, and that was causing landslides to increase year by year. In the past, natural forests full of beech, zelkova, and other broad-leaf deciduous trees had sent networks of roots deep into the earth, preventing trees from toppling in storms and holding the soil in place. But these trees had been rapaciously cleared and replaced with legions of closely spaced Japanese cedars.

There were two reasons for this choice of species: The arrow-straight cedar logs were ideal for building, and they grew fast. Compared with trees like beech, which took half a century to mature, the cedars were ready to harvest in twenty years, and as a result they were being planted in mountains throughout Japan. They were planted densely to reduce damage from inclement weather and pests when the trees were young, as well as to improve the quality of timber, but for this strategy to succeed, the plots had to be thinned over time.

The fast growth of the trees also had a downside: shallow roots. Within the unnatural environment of single-species plantations, the cedars' roots could not support their own trunks, and the trees toppled easily in rain and wind. When they fell, the soil ran down the mountain slopes, clogging riverbeds and causing floods. These were the facts behind the increasing devastation caused by landslides and floods.

"Then downstream communities start building dams up in the mountains to stop the flow of the rivers that cause the floods," Fujita said. "And that's the heart of the problem, don't you think?"

As he saw it, the flipside of the dizzying development of recent years was that people seemed to be changing nature irreversibly. He couldn't shake his horrible sense of foreboding.

Plans for new dams were proliferating around the country, forming a core pillar of the postwar national land development projects. In 1957, Nagayasuguchi Dam was the first large-scale dam to be completed on the Nakagawa river, which cut clear across Kito. After this work was finished, several more dams were proposed for the river. Following discussions between national and prefectural government officials and private companies, work was finally scheduled to begin the following year on Kominono Dam in the hamlet of Suke. The board of education where Usuki worked was busily preparing to relocate Suke Elementary School to make way for the new dam.

"In the end, dams are about human convenience, too, aren't they?" Usuki said. "I grew up on a farm, but I know that as well as a mountain man like you. Human knowledge shouldn't be put to work against nature. We ought to use it to make the most of nature's power. That's what agronomy is all about."

Fujita nodded. "There's something I'd like you to see, Mr. Usuki," he said, disappearing into the house.

When he reemerged a moment later, he was holding open a notebook full of statistics on domestic timber supply copied out by hand. "Tokushima still supplies more timber than any other prefecture," he said. "But foreign timber imports are increasing at an incredible pace."

Usuki examined the figures. Five years ago, in 1960, Japan imported 2.1 million cubic meters of timber. By last year, the figure had increased by nearly tenfold to around 20 million cubic meters.

"Incredible. What on earth is the central government doing . . . ?"

In 1961, the government announced it would abolished tariffs on imported timber. Four years later, the impact still hadn't been felt in the market due to chronic supply shortages, but Fujita predicted that cheap, lightweight foreign timber would soon overtake domestic timber. He had made notes to that effect in his notebook.

Beginning in 1950, the government had implemented a series of coercive afforestation policies, the first of their kind since the end of the Meiji period. Japan had seen itself as in a "postwar" period, but the Korean War had broken out that very year, and booming demand for wartime supplies formed the foundation of Japan's rapid economic growth. Given the country's scant national resources, timber topped the list of items it could sell.

In mountains across the country, forests were rapidly clear-cut and replanted with several times as many young trees as had been removed. Destructive as it was for mountain ecosystems, the economic incentives made dense planting of just one or two species a nearly inescapable fate for forested regions. If imported timber now flooded in and drove down prices, what would become of a place like Kito, where forestry was the only industry? What would happen to its forests, which covered ninety-eight percent of village land and were linked to water resources and ecosystems across Shikoku ? The answer could not be good.

From that day on, Usuki and Fujita began talking regularly about the destruction of nature, bringing their combined knowledge to bear. They knew that the village's economy and the livelihood of its residents would likely be threatened, but what really shocked them was a translated book that Fujita turned up.

The book was by an American biologist who vividly described the menacing chain of events brought about by the overuse of chemicals. Her argument was simple: To destroy natural ecosystems for the sake of human convenience or profit was utter folly. Titled *Silent Spring*, the book brought about a major paradigm shift in the industrial powerhouse of the United States, expanding public concern from human affairs to environmental conservation.

In Japan, too, industrial pollution disasters were unfolding in many places throughout the country as it rushed to sweep away the devastation of the war by developing its industries at a breakneck pace. A chemical factory in Kumamoto released wastewater into the sea, poisoning the local population with methylmercury and causing

what came to be known as Minamata Disease. Mines in Gifu washed wastewater into rivers, inflicting Itai-itai ("it hurts, it hurts") disease on rice farmers downstream in Toyama whose crops took up the poisons. A petrochemical complex in Mie released sulfur dioxide into the air, causing Yokkaichi asthma and other diseases linked to air pollution. Chilling reports of human recklessness were broadcast incessantly on the news.

"Here in Kito, nature still protects us," said Fujita. "We have a duty to protect the mountains and rivers in return. I think you're right: The only way to do that and still have a successful economy is through agriculture."

"It's true," said Usuki. "A forestry industry bust is inevitable. It has to be yuzu."

"Exactly. It has to be yuzu."

Usuki and Fujita could both see a fire burning deep in the eyes of the other.

3.

Three years had passed since the yuzu seedlings were distributed. Usuki wanted them to start bearing fruit within the next two years. Working as a social education supervisor by day, at night he continued to throw himself into researching yuzu and visiting farmers.

Although Kito was a single village, its various hamlets were widely separated. Suke at the eastern end was a full eighteen kilometers from Kitagawa to the west. Usuki's nightly routine was to ride his motorcycle from west to east checking in on how the yuzu trees were growing. The Suke Chick Club still met monthly, but most of its members were part-time farmers who worked as forestry day laborers as well. Usuki himself was only free at night and on Sundays, so he frequently talked with the farmers deep into the night.

For the most part, the yuzu trees were growing well. The almost prayerful care that the farmers devoted to them seemed to be helping to keep them healthy and robust. In order for the trees to become large, they needed plenty of flawless, disease-free leaves. The farmers had to protect them not only from aphids, spider mites, and leaf miners, but also from contagious disease such as scab and black spot that would degrade the fruit. These were basic matters, but no guides to yuzu production existed, so Usuki was kept busy conducting experiments and collecting detailed data.

Agricultural crops are not industrial products, and even trees grown under identical conditions do not develop uniformly. Tiny differences in soil or sunlight,

fertilizer application and pruning methods—every aspect of their environment affected how they grew up.

"Just like humans."

"Yes, like each tree has a personality."

Despite all the old yuzu trees in the village, no one had seen a young one before, and they poured their love into the seedlings like new parents blessed with their first child.

And that, perhaps, was their most remarkable achievement.

With neither personal experience nor established principles to rely on, the members of the Suke Chick Club pursued their yuzu project with the utmost care, prudence, and attention, and their detailed observations provided a valuable record for Usuki to study. Sogawa did have experience raising yuzu trees from seed, but on that occasion he had intervened very little in their development. Comparing the current experiment to his past experiences made him increasingly confident.

"With such a scientific approach, there's no way these trees will take a decade or more to bear!"

Sogawa spared no effort in spreading the word about Kito yuzu, either. He corresponded with agricultural high schools throughout the prefecture and arranged to make yearly presentations at their school festivals about the club's progress. His work won him the inaugural Governor's Prize in 1963 and in several years thereafter, motivating his companions and further raising awareness about yuzu cultivation.

Meanwhile, Kito's farmers continued to ship the fruit of wild yuzu trees to Osaka's central wholesale market. The quantities were small, but they sold well. In one year, the largest fruits went for 400 yen each. Greengrocers were clamoring for a steadier supply. The more work the club's members put in, the more confident they became.

Even so, the cultivated yuzu trees had yet to actually bear fruit, so the majority of villagers still ridiculed the project. But now, when someone sneered, "If only your ancestors could see you planting yuzu in the rice paddies they worked so hard for!" the members of the Chick Club had the gumption to shoot back, "I wish they could! We're the Yuzu Loonies, after all!" They weren't just forestry workers anymore—they were starting to gain confidence as farmers, too.

One evening when Usuki came home from work, Yukiko told him that Mrs. Tani from the hamlet of Kitagawa had dropped by at lunch with a message.

"She said her husband wants you to stop by tonight, no matter how late it is," Yukiko said.

Katsusaburo Tani had been involved in the yuzu experiment from the beginning. *I'll bet he found some new pest or disease*, Usuki thought to himself, his face tensing.

"I don't know what it's about, but those farmers depend on you. You'd better get there as fast as you can," Yukiko said, hurrying to set dinner on the table with their one-year-old second son strapped to her back.

"You're right."

But as Usuki wolfed down his meal, his younger sister Tokiko looked up from playing with their older son and scolded him. "Honestly, Hiroshi! I know you're busy with work, but at least make time to eat dinner with your family. I feel sorry for Yukiko and these kids." Usuki had convinced Tokiko to move to Kito earlier that year, and she sometimes came over to give Yukiko a hand.

The previous year, Kito's board of education had opened the first nursery school in the village as part of its slate of educational reforms. With their fathers working in the mountains from morning till night and their mothers overwhelmed by farm work, village children grew up thinking it was only natural to spend their days helping their parents. They hardly knew what it meant to play. Ever since Usuki started giving farm children rides around the fields on his motorcycle, he had dreamed of founding a nursery school to offer a broader range of enrichment activities.

The building was eventually completed, but the all-important instructors had to be brought in from outside the village, and the board of education wasn't able to secure enough of them. That was why Usuki had repeatedly begged Tokiko to move to Kito from their parents' home in Wajiki to temporarily teach at the nursery school.

Tokiko herself probably only meant to stay a short while to mollify her brother. But once she arrived, she proved hugely popular with the principal, teachers, and office staff, not to mention the children and their parents. She had worked as a dressmaker in Tokyo after graduating from high school, and she was not only strikingly beautiful but also quick-witted and cheerful. To the inhabitants of this remote village, she represented the cutting edge of the modernity they longed for.

Eventually she gave in to the pleas from all sides and earned her nursery school teacher's license by correspondence. Since spring, her position at the village nursery school had become permanent.

"Kito is a wonderful village and I love it here," she'd told her brother. "But when it comes to education, like so many other things, there's a mountain of work to do."

Tokiko had strong opinions and wasn't afraid to share them with the board of education. Usuki got the impression she was a breath of fresh air in a place where this was in short supply.

Instead of responding to her criticism, Usuki stuffed another bite of dinner into his mouth.

Yukiko laughed. "It's fine, Toki," she said. "I'm used to it. And I'm never lonely with you coming by to keep me company. Once these boys start nursery school, I'd like to get a job that contributes to the village, like yours. I think all the women in Kito are looking forward to the future in that sense."

If the men went back to farming and made enough money to support their families, the burden on the women would be lightened immensely. According to Yukiko, many of them wanted to do their part to make life in the village easier, not least for the sake of their children. Yukiko herself was attending classes for young married women that had been launched as part of the social education program. In a community where telephones, magazines, and televisions were still beyond the reach of most, simply creating a space for women to share their daily struggles as mothers and homemakers had energized them so much, Yukiko said they were like different people.

"We're going to make this village a place where parents and children alike are happy and healthy and full of hope for the future. You've got to keep giving it your all, right, darling?" she said.

Although her words were casual, Usuki could sense her affection and pride in his work. On weekends, she took their sons on the bumpy three-hour bus ride to Wajiki to help her parents with their rice paddies. She had never once complained about Usuki sacrificing time with the family for the sake of yuzu cultivation.

"You're the reason I can run around day and night working on my projects," he said. "I don't need a reminder from Tokiko to appreciate what you do!"

Tokiko laughed. "Did you hear that, Yukiko? I sure did!"

"I did hear it, and I'm satisfied, so hurry up and get over to Mr. Tani's farm, Hiroshi. And be careful on those dark roads."

Usuki had only managed to express the tiniest fraction of his gratitude, but the glint of understanding in her eyes as she returned his look rescued him, as always.

When Usuki arrived in Kitagawa, he was greeted by Tani shouting at him in excitement.

"Mr. Usuki! Come look at this! Follow me!"

The farmer headed toward his yuzu orchard. Usuki ran through the pitch-black fields, following the dim form of Tani's back. When Tani stopped in front of one of the

trees, goose bumps rose all over Usuki's body. The tree, alone among its fellows, was a mass of white blossoms.

"I can't believe it . . . It flowered!"

"When I found it this morning, I thought I was seeing things. The very tree I was most worried about goes and blossoms all by itself!"

"Now we're in business!" Usuki cried.

Because of the shape of the field, Tani had been forced to plant this particular tree in a spot that received almost no sunlight. He had been concerned about its slow pace of growth compared to the other trees, so Usuki had suggested he experiment with training the outer branches downward by tying them with rope. Now those branches had burst into blossom.

Many of the wild yuzu trees that Usuki had observed in the sunniest locations bore poorly. It seemed that the reason they grew toward the sky so vigorously was so they could bear fruit on densely packed inner branches. Going by that logic, the tree Tani was worried about had actually been growing in the same leisurely fashion as a wild yuzu tree, but Usuki had reasoned that, if there was no danger of overexposure to the sun, they might as well try pulling the branches down and securing them with rope, opening up the tree like an unfolded fan. Now the experiment had yielded unexpected results.

Interesting . . . I get it now.

It's the sap!

Pulling vertical branches down into a horizontal position improved the flow of sap!

"Mr. Tani, this is incredible. It's a first for Japan—no, for the world!"

"Is it now? I feel like I'm dreaming. Who could've imagined this would make the tree blossom? You're a genius, Mr. Usuki."

"Hardly. I only got the idea to train this tree because you paid such close attention to every single one you planted. You're the genius, and so is everyone in the club who believed in yuzu. We've figured it out. We're going to do this!"

By early summer, the flowers the two men gazed at that night had become small, green fruits. Combining the two techniques of grafting yuzu trees onto hardy-orange rootstocks and training the branches into a goblet-like shape had slashed the time between planting and bearing fruit. The entire Suke Chick Club was overjoyed.

So far it was just one tree, and they still had to prove their hypothesis, but to this small group of men a miracle seemed to be occurring before their very eyes. Hirakawa,

who had been ostracized from his hamlet, and Kogashiwara, whose first orchard had been submerged by the dam lake, were brought to tears.

"I'm so glad, so damn glad!"

"You put up with a lot. We all did."

"We've come this far. We'll make yuzu a success if we have to crawl through the mud to do it!"

The news of a single productive yuzu tree didn't cause much of a stir in the village, but word got around eventually. In November, shortly after the yearly shipment of yuzu was eagerly snapped up as usual, some members of the Agricultural Study Group in the hamlet of Oriu attended a meeting of the Suke Chick Club. The Oriu farmers were struggling to turn chestnuts and Japanese apricots into commercial crops. Their leader, a man named Okazaki, had quarreled with Sogawa several years ago over Sogawa's early yuzu evangelism, and the two men were about to fall into a new argument over whether or not Okazaki had apologized sincerely enough when Fujita stepped in to skillfully mediate a reconciliation.

"We never meant to put down yuzu," Okazaki said after he calmed down. "All we said was that poor farmers can't wait twenty or thirty years for yuzu trees to start bearing fruit. We thought Japanese apricots and chestnuts would be more efficient, and we've poured a lot of sweat into growing these crops we're not used to. But even when we follow all the instructions, they just aren't coming through for us. My farmers are ready to throw in the towel. I've got to do something."

Usuki explained that, while Japanese apricots and chestnuts were usually considered easy crops to grow, given Kito's high elevation and unique climate, the trees probably needed to be improved before they were up to commercial production.

The other farmers spoke up as well.

"Plus, lots of other mountain villages are already growing Japanese apricots and chestnuts. There was even an article in the paper about how the mayor of Oyama, down in Oita, made paddy conversion a big success by inviting everyone to grow apricots and then take a vacation in Hawaii!"

"I wish Kito's government would do the same for yuzu."

"I say we get those bureaucrats moving by growing yuzu ourselves!"

"Damn straight. And the more of us the better."

"There's nothing for you Oriu farmers to worry about—we'll show you the ropes. Chin up, everyone!"

"Come on, Mr. Sogawa, let's do it."

Urged on by his fellow farmers, Sogawa held out his hand for Okazaki to shake.

“My dream was to go from a rank beginner to a full-fledged farmer. Mr. Okazaki, you’re the first one to grant this baby chick’s wish of becoming a mother chicken.”

Okazaki bowed his head and shook the hand Sogawa offered.

“I’m truly grateful, Mr. Sogawa.”

And so, the Suke Chick Club merged with the Oriu Agricultural Study Group to form a new organization called the Kito Fruit Study Group. The twelve farmers from Oriu brought membership to thirty in all. The following year, Fujita reprised Usuki’s performance at the village budget committee meeting to request funds for the Kito Fruit Study Group. He received enough to buy another thousand young trees.

That year 1965, the population of Kito reached 4,115 residents, its highest point yet. No one aside from Usuki and Fujita suspected that the unprecedented growth in the timber industry that had begun several years earlier was reaching its peak, and the very next year would begin to come crashing down.

Suspension bridge in the mountains

4.

Kito in summer was especially beautiful. The clear river sped through the deep green mountains with schools of *ayu* and *amego* swimming in its currents. Brilliant sunlight undimmed by even a speck of dust poured from the vibrant blue sky, and innumerable trees breathed out an endless supply of pure, clean air. Night brought its own beauty. With no city lights to spoil the darkness of the sky, the moon and stars were so brilliant they seemed ready to tumble straight to Earth.

On this particular night, the village would echo with the lively sounds of drums and clappers from the summer festival. Fujita had been busy since early that morning carrying logs to a temple in the Izuhara district at the center of Kito to construct the platform for festival performances on the temple grounds. As he squatted to balance the heavy logs on his shoulder and then rose again, huge beads of sweat poured from his face, as if he were wringing every last drop of strength from his body.

Strange how clear muscle memory is, he thought.

Long-buried memories were rising to the surface unbidden—bitter recollections of his experiences at the sawmill in Kaifu where he had worked between the ages of sixteen and twenty. How many dozens or hundreds of logs had he lifted on each of those days that stretched from early morning until night? The skin had peeled from his hands and shoulders, and the creaking of his own bones had rung in his ears. Some of his coworkers had collapsed beneath the blazing sun on days like this, only to be brutally attacked later in the dormitory by the other young men who had endured the day's heavy labor. When Fujita tried to make them stop, he, too, was punched, kicked, and spit on. He refused to bow and scrape to those with power over him, and that made him an ideal target for coworkers who spent all day suppressing their anger at being forced to work under such cruel conditions. They mocked him for where he came from, urinated on his clothes, mixed maggots into his humble meals of rice and barley . . .

Fujita had grown accustomed to the hard work of forestry and farming from a young age. Physical pain he could withstand. What was hard to endure was feeling unable to take pride in himself or those around him.

Are human beings truly so shameless and foolish?

No, that can't be so.

Despair turns people into demons.

And where does despair come from?

From ignorance.

Gaining knowledge and widening one's horizons fended off all manner of despair. Fujita knew that from painful first-hand experience.

If only the workers could come together and share their suffering, they would be able to press their employers for improved working conditions, but instead the persecuted laborers vented their anger on the weakest among them. Fujita's youth was swallowed up by that wretched chain of abuse.

During those years, in exchange for his helpless frustration and crushing labor, he had received a small salary. Today, working for the hometown he loved, he received no compensation at all. Why, then, did the sweat pouring off his body fill him with so much joy? He imagined the coming summer night reverberating with song and laughter and the sounds of old and young alike dancing to the festival music.

Originally, village families observed the Bon holiday by carrying the memorial tablets of their ancestors here to Tanden Temple to worship. Then in the evening, each family danced for the dead in their garden and feasted together. For a community where even children had scant respite from farm work and other heavy labor, it was a special day that everyone looked forward to eagerly.

Well, then, can't we make it even more fun? Can't we make the people in this village even happier?

As soon as Fujita joined Kito's youth association, he set up a Bon Festival Committee. This was the group's seventh year hosting the celebration, and by now Fujita knew what he had to do to get ready.

"Hey Fujita, you're already done hauling those logs?"

"Ken's strong as a horse, and fast too!"

"Hasn't left a thing for us to do, as usual."

As the other members of the Youth Association began to gather on the temple grounds, Fujita grinned, squinting against the strong sun.

"The real work isn't carrying the logs, it's putting together the platform. Even I can't do that by myself, so I'm counting on you there."

He took the kettle someone handed to him and drank his fill. The faintly sweet water from the Nakagawa river was flavored with yuzu juice.

Ahh, that fragrance, that depth of flavor . . . The taste of this hometown I love so much. What could beat that? All my weariness, gone in an instant.

"Let's get that platform up, boys! We've got a festival to run tonight!"

"Festival! Festival!" his companions chanted, their voices echoing off the mountains.

As the sun set, lively music lured a steady stream of villagers onto the temple grounds. They welcomed the spirits of their ancestors with small bonfires, their faces illuminated

with a certain dignity, as if they had reclaimed the inner strength that was so easily forgotten in everyday life. Even in the darkness, Fujita could make out their high-spirited expressions.

Kito lay at the foot of the most beautiful, graceful mountains in Shikoku, from the famous Mount Tsurugi to Mount Jiro, Mount Ishidate, and Mount Konose. Who, he wondered, were the first people to make their way to this secluded corner of the world? Why did they settle here, carving fields and homes out of this land?

According to the village elders who had examined local relics and ancient documents, Kito was founded at approximately the same time that yuzu made its way to Japan from the Asian continent, around the tenth century. In the twelfth century, when the Taira and Minamoto clans clashed in the Genpei War, members of the defeated Taira clan fled into the mountains and settled in Kito. The place names and shrines of Kito still bore traces of ancestors that dated all the way to the battles of Yashima and Dan-no-ura, both in 1185. There was also an elegant festival song and dance in the village called Totchinchin, which the beautiful court ladies who fled to Kito with members of the Taira clan were said to have performed to ease the sorrows of the defeated warriors.

"Those Taira ladies had lived in luxury in Kyoto and now found themselves conquered and chased from their homes, but even in the depths of that sorrow they kept the precious seeds that preserved their beauty tucked into their bosoms. The seeds of the yuzu, which they believed to be the tree of everlasting youth . . ."

Fujita's mother Yoshino had sometimes told him that story at bedtime. She was still young and beautiful herself then, and even after a busy day of work on the farm her strength of mind shone through. Her graceful voice streaked through the night sky of Fujita's memories like a shooting star.

Just then, he heard someone shouting "*Sensei*!"

"It's Ms. Tokiko!"

Fujita turned at the shrill, happy voices of young children. A woman stood at the entrance to the temple grounds, smiling down at the nursery-school-aged children who surrounded her like a swarm of bees.

So . . . that must be the Tokiko Usuki I've heard so much about.

Against the red light of the lanterns, her slim form looked to him like a pure white narcissus flower.

As the taiko drummers on the platform beat out a lively five-beat rhythm, the Bon dancers reached the peak of their excitement. The men who had been drinking together

and the women who were chatting as they rested between dances began to gather around the platform as well.

"*Ara, yoi yoi, yoiyana*!"

"*Haa!*"

They were singing the *Kito Odori*, a traditional folksong that had been passed down for more than two hundred years.

North, south, east, west, wherever my eyes roam,
Kito-Kamiyama, my mountain village home.
Rain in the morning on the mountainside again,
Why do you climb the mountain in the rain?
The mountain has the grass, the fodder for the horse.
We cut a double load to balance on the course,
Tell me to come back, father, tell me not to go.
Tell me how mother fares in the village below.
I'll be back for Bon, dressed for the dance.
Tell me how I've grown, for today's my only chance
To see the one I love for a festival romance

Formed into concentric circles around the platform, the dancers intoned the familiar words. The song was said to have begun as a woodsman's improvisation. Today it was sung through the night in every hamlet during Bon.

"Ken, get over here!"

"Dance with us! Dance our village dance!"

Fujita's childhood friends, all pleasantly drunk, were calling to him from the swirling circle. He smiled and waved back, filled with total happiness as he watched from the sidelines.

We've been through poverty and suffering together, and we've overcome them together. That's why nothing brings this village to life as much as enjoying moments like this together.

I want this village to thrive. I want to make it the best it can be, with a thousand smiles . . .

As he gazed at the circling dancers, a voice came from behind.

"That does look fun."

He looked over his shoulder. The white narcissus was smiling straight at him.

"Ms. Tokiko?"

"Thank you for putting all this together, Mr. President. It's a wonderful festival. Just look how happily those children are scampering about over—oh dear, he's tripped!"

Following Tokiko's gaze, Fujita saw a boy—probably one of her students from the nursery school—crying on the ground. She started to run toward him, but he grabbed her arm.

"Leave him be and he'll stand up on his own. You watch."

". . . I suppose you're right. By the way, that boy is both my student *and* my nephew."

"That's Mr. Usuki's son?"

"Yes. He's out inspecting yuzu orchards, even on festival day. He sent his wife to our parent's home to observe the holiday with them."

"He did?"

Only one man in the world would work that hard for this place . . .

Take the village sports festival that Fujita had been wanting to start up, just like this Bon festival. Making it a reality would have been hard with only the youth association pushing for it, but when Usuki added his weight as social education supervisor, it became an official village event.

Over the past few years, the building blocks for making the village a better place had come steadily together, from the senior's club and the children's club to the classes for women and the invitations extended to doctors and teachers to work there. But Fujita still wanted to do more. He wanted to make Kito a place where children could devote themselves to their studies and learn about the big, wide world. He wanted to bring in the best coaches so Kito's students would never lose to other villages in sporting and other events. He wanted to build a campground that showcased Kito's natural environment.

He often spoke of these dreams to people around him, but most would acknowledge them politely and let conversation end there. Usuki, on the other hand, would eagerly lean forward, saying "What a great idea!" and then help Fujita make it a reality. "The question isn't whether you *can* do it, it's whether you *will*," Usuki would always say, and this gave Fujita the nudge he needed. On the other hand, when Fujita bit off more than he could chew, Usuki was the one who would tell him he'd better slow down and not get carried away.

"I'm not the docile type myself, but I'm nothing compared to him," Fujita said.

Tokiko laughed "He's always been competitive, and he's never lost an argument or a scuffle. I don't know how many times our mother had to go apologize for him at

school. And now look at me! I only moved back to Wajiki because she was sick. I was planning to return to Tokyo when the time was right, but he hounded me and hounded me until I gave in and came here instead."

Fujita looked down.

"Thank you, Ms. Tokiko. I know we're just a little mountain village . . ."

She waved his comment away.

"That's not what I meant. It's just that I planned to make my living as a seamstress. I never dreamed of becoming a teacher. You're right about one thing: Kito is even more remote than I'd imagined. It was a shock at first."

She must be incapable of telling a lie, Fujita thought with a smile. She looked up at the night sky, not noticing his amusement.

"Of all the villages in Japan, I think this one must be closest to the sky."

"What?"

"Just look at the Milky Way. All those stars! They're so close I feel I could reach up and grab one. It takes my breath away."

I never realized how exquisite a woman looks when she turns her face up to the sky, Fujita thought. It seemed to him an incredibly important realization.

"Once, when I was living in Tokyo, I went to the top of Tokyo Tower."

"That must have been some experience. I've only seen pictures in the paper, but I was moved to think how far Japan has come in its recovery."

"I only went because I wanted to be closer to the sky. But even from the tallest observation deck in Japan, the sky over Tokyo still looked so distant. To think that right here in Kito it's so close . . . as if this village were in the clouds. I think there's something important about this kind of natural beauty that you simply can't find in the city."

Just then, the little boy ran up. "Aunt Tokiko!" he called.

"Hideyuki!" she called back, opening her arms to welcome him in a hug. "You didn't even cry when you fell down!"

"Nope! Kito kids don't cry."

"What a big boy you are. A strong, smart Kito boy."

A Kito boy.

Fujita didn't know why, but those words filled him with joy from head to toe. The moment he heard them, he felt strength well up from deep in his chest.

Every night he had spent at the sawmill dormitory, covered in sweat and blood and sawdust and the debris of human cruelty, he had asked himself why he was born

and what he was living for. At the time, he had given up on finding an answer. Now he felt as if, finally, he had one.

"Do you teach the children to call themselves Kito boys and girls?"

"Yes, I do," she replied nonchalantly. "They ought to be proud of growing up in this village. That way, when they go out in the world one day and face new challenges, they won't be blown about like kites whose strings have been cut. This village will be the string that holds their hearts secure, just like a family."

It had taken Fujita years and years to arrive at this principal of life, and here Tokiko was saying it as if it was the most natural thing in the world. He stood gazing at her in wonderment.

"*Ara, yoi yoi, yoiyana*!"

"*Haa*!"

Old and young, men and women, all of Kito's children were singing and dancing. The festival night was still young.

Love.
Such an enigmatic word.

How can one simple word contain such depth and complexity? Yet "love" is the word we use to express those complex feelings within us.
What a vague and indefinite term it is.
I think humans are instinctively unsatisfied to experience that joy alone.
It is exactly twelve midnight, and I have had my share of love's joy tonight. So why do I take my pen in hand?
Because I am lonely and want to share my joy.

—Kentaro Fujita (age 25), "The Truth About Life," in *Sankyo* vol. 11, 1960

A teacher’s wedding

Ch. 4 Going for gold

1.

The Showa era was a time of true social upheaval, defined by recovery from brutal defeat in World War II, rapid economic growth, and remarkable industrial development. The waves of upheaval broke against Kito, too, rapidly transforming life in the once-isolated village. Where only footpaths had once reached, new roads snaked and branched further into the mountains each year. Tunnels were blasted through the massifs that had long impeded travel to and from the village. Bridges spanned deep ravines, opening up commerce with the city of Tokushima and other urban centers.

As far as Fujita could remember, until just a few years earlier, private automobiles had been the sole preserve of a handful of forestry magnates, landholders, doctors, and other wealthy individuals. The fact that there were no less than four cars in Kito had been a point of pride and security for its four thousand residents. But now more and more families were buying cars. A visit to Tokushima City had once meant a bumpy six-hour bus ride and an overnight stay. Now traveling long distances was much easier, and the trickle of people and goods had grown to a flood.

When Fujita was in elementary school, he had risen early to slip handmade wooden *geta* onto his bare feet and join the crowd of children who trekked over the mountains for several hours to reach the school. On snowy days, the youngest among them would cry from the pain of their frozen feet and chapped hands. Fujita soothed them and rallied them and sometimes carried them on his back the whole way.

At some point, the wheat and millet that had filled his bowl were replaced with white rice, and even that was demoted to a secondary position as more nutrient-rich dishes took center stage. Kito's traditional homes with their distinctive cedar-bark roofs were torn down, and in their place rose new buildings roofed with ceramic tiles, once considered the height of luxury. The village looked quite different than it had not so long before.

Every house was equipped with a color television, a washing machine, and other appliances that families had only dreamed of in the past. Popular songs and news programs streamed in, delivered in standard Japanese that to the villagers sounded vaguely pretentious. Before Fujita knew it, women who had always dressed in Japanese-style clothing were riding around on bicycles in light Western-style outfits.

There were still only a few schools, but now children could get to them safely on the busses that the school board had purchased as part of its educational reform program. A movie theater was built, new restaurants and bars popped up, and novel concepts like “entertainment” and “leisure time” became part of everyday life. Fujita sometimes felt as if the poverty and painful alienation he experienced in the past were figments of his imagination. The path to the future, the path he had dreamt of for so many years, finally seemed to be at his feet.

The economic boom brought about by the Tokyo Summer Olympics was followed by another, even longer one driven by the industrial sector. Standards of living shot up, and even the unselfish residents of Kito seemed to feel a new hunger for material goods, knowledge, and experiences, spurred by the flow of trade brought in by the roads.

They wanted a better life.

They wanted ordinary life to be even more enjoyable.

These desires were without a doubt innocent, and the blessings of an era that steadily satisfied them were welcome. The downside was the urban pollution disasters that filled more newspaper columns with every passing year, with no sign of abating.

Most industrial pollution involved man-made chemicals. Fujita himself benefited from chemical products such as plastic and vinyl, so he could hardly brush the problem off as unconnected to a rural village like his. The shock was still fresh from disasters such as the “dark oil incident,” in which feed contaminated by PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) killed 400,000 factory-farmed chickens, and the Kanemi Yusho incident, in which cooking oil poisoned many people, in particular pregnant women, whose babies were later born with abnormally dark skin.

Fujita felt a growing need to reconsider what human prosperity truly meant. Even in Shikoku, red tides were occurring more often and in more places in the Seto Inland Sea. The cause hadn’t yet been determined, but given that they were a sign of abnormal algal blooms, which can be exacerbated by runoff from chemical fertilizers, there was no question in his mind that they were connected in some way to the elevated standard of living that his village and others like it was now enjoying.

All living beings on land and sea, from microorganisms to plants and animals, were inseparably tied to the water, soil, and air. Humans were no exception. The recent explosion of domestic industry had clearly come at the expense of primary industries like forestry and farming, but when change was too rapid, quality suffered. Fujita was convinced that, for the sake of Kito’s future, they had to keep in mind the true meaning of prosperity—that is, the quality of human life.

“More of our members have dropped out,” Sogawa said. “The Fruit Study Group is down to half of what it was—only fifteen of us left now. You ask me, farming in this village is on its last gasp.”

It was late at night, and Sogawa was at Fujita’s house. He gulped down his sake as if seeking to forget the bad news. The Kito Fruit Study Group had started out in 1965 with thirty members, but farmers had dropped out one after another. Each had his own reasons for doing so, but the general trend was clear: They were giving up on a crop that wasn’t generating any income.

The group had been formed by commercial farmers growing yuzu, chestnuts, and Japanese apricots with the intention of playing an important role in the future of Kito’s agriculture, but yuzu wasn’t bringing in any profits yet, and farmers who had bet on Japanese apricots and chestnuts had lost their enthusiasm when they saw how poorly their harvests compared to those from other regions. In the beginning, they’d all relied on day labor in forestry to pay their bills while farming part-time, but in the past few years, more opportunities were opening up in road-building and other public works projects. As Sogawa saw it, they were turning to immediate income opportunities because they and their families wanted more consumer goods and entertainment.

“They say there’s no money in it, but the group’s only been around for three years! We’re about to turn the corner! Goddamn bunch of spineless worms, I say.”

He threw back another gulp of sake and banged the empty cup down on the low table.

“Yuzu is Kito’s only hope! Why don’t they understand? Why don’t they believe in it?!”

“Mr. Sogawa, don’t you think you’ve had enough to drink tonight? Drowning your sorrows won’t get us anywhere.”

Fujita glanced over his shoulder. On the other side of the sliding partition, his wife—who had to wake up early in the morning to finish the housework before heading to work—was in bed with their baby. He’d courted Tokiko zealously from the night of the festival and ultimately won her as his companion in life. Shortly after their marriage, members of the Fruit Study Group began visiting every night to talk about yuzu, and Tokiko had welcomed them graciously without a word of protest. But one day, after this had gone on for about a month, she collapsed from exhaustion and had to be admitted to the hospital.

This had made him realize that, in addition to holding a full-time job just like him, she cleaned the house, did the laundry, made their meals every morning and night,

and cared for his parents. Regretting that he'd taken advantage of her kindness, he begged her not to bother herself with his guests, and that had remained the arrangement since then. He had come to feel strongly that in a village like Kito, where feudal notions of male dominance were still firmly rooted, changing unquestioned bad habits like this was essential. The truth was, the women propped up the men when it came to yuzu cultivation, too.

"I'm sure you already know this, Mr. Sogawa, but even in families that have quit the Fruit Study Group, the women are still taking care of the yuzu trees. Now's not the time to worry about who's on the membership list. Our best strategy is to grow great yuzu and prepare for the future."

The reason the Fruit Study Group had formed in the first place was the miracle Usuki and the farmers had achieved through their hard work: making a yuzu tree bear fruit in just three years. Sogawa had been ready to jump into the market with those results, but Usuki had insisted on more research. The novel method of training sped up maturation remarkably, but it also caused the quality of the fruit to decline.

"Until we can grow top-quality fruit that's as good or better than the wild yuzu in this village, we can't bring it to market."

Many questions remained. Which of the five grafted varieties would produce the best fruit? What combination of fertilizers should be applied? When, and in what proportions? What degree of pruning on the branches that grew in spring versus those that grew in fall would produce the most bountiful harvest? How many of the blossoms should be plucked off to encourage the best fruit formation? How should the soil be amended? How could rind-oil spot and black spot disease be prevented, and which trees were most resistant?

For farmers encountering the meticulous nature of agricultural research for the first time, Usuki's detailed list of research questions was no doubt intimidating. Most likely this, too, dampened enthusiasm and contributed to the rising number of dropouts.

"I don't know why we formed that group in the first place," Sogawa grumbled.

"I understand how you feel, but forget the formal organization right now," Fujita said. "We've worked hard to get where we are. We're one step away from making Kito yuzu into a commercial crop."

Sogawa only scowled. "I saw this coming. With a project this uncompromising, farmers are bound to get discouraged and drop out."

"They'll come back once we figure out the growing methods. There may not be many of us left, but let's keep at it. We can't give up now."

Sogawa tilted the bottle of sake to fill his cup once more before answering.

"I've been thinking about kicking out Mr. Usuki as our technical advisor."

Fujita was shocked. "Why would you do that?"

"If we train the trees, they'll bear in three years. The quality may not be great, but we've got to sell something if we want to help our members."

"Don't be a fool! If you get impatient now, all those years of hard work will be wasted!" Building a stellar national reputation for the flavor, fragrance, and size of Kito yuzu had been one of the group's central goals from the start.

Sogawa remained silent, downing his sake. Finally he spoke again.

"In the end, Mr. Usuki's just studying what he wants to study. He doesn't care about this village or what we farmers think."

"How could that be true? Think about it—who'd benefit from that?"

"You married into his family, so I get why you'd take his side. But I never trusted that *kitarinin*. If he doesn't leave the group, I'm stepping down as president. The Fruit Study Club is over."

Fujita stood and pulled Sogawa up by the arm.

"Let's continue this conversation in the garden."

"Oho . . . still strong as an ox, eh?"

Fujita didn't know if Tokiko was asleep or not, but he didn't want to risk her overhearing an argument about her brother. Out in the garden, Sogawa stumbled drunkenly.

"Every one of those bastards is here to suck Kito dry. You cared about this place more than anyone, Ken. It's a sad day when I see you licking the boots of a *kitarinin*."

"Mr. Sogawa, get a hold of yourself. I haven't changed at all."

"Then get rid of that outsider while Kito still has some pride left! How long are you planning to keep us poor? If you don't squeeze some money out of those yuzu trees fast, I'll knock you out!"

"Fine. I can't get money from those trees this instant, so go ahead and hit me. Go on. Right here and now."

"How will that get me any cash? I'm telling you to make Usuki leave the group!"

"If you think you can make him leave, then do it. But I think you know what will happen if he does. I'm sick of you whining like a baby. Do what you want—if you can knock me out first."

"You greenhorn bastard . . ."

Glaring at Fujita with eyes bloodshot from drink, Sogawa grabbed a forked pole that was lying on the garden bench. It was a simple tool for harvesting yuzu that every

family in the village had. Some of the older trees were more than seven meters high, and the sight of villagers snagging the fruits in the forks of these poles and twisting them off had been a classic autumn scene for centuries. Fujita remembered his mother Yoshino tying a kerchief over her hair, tucking up her kimono sleeves, and joining his grandmother and aunts and uncles as they sang, laughed, chatted, and pulled down yuzu fruits with this very pole every year.

Beneath the clear blue autumn sky,
The garden's painted gold with fallen fruit.
Yuzu is the fruit of happiness, never bringing misfortune.
Not now, not in years past, nor years to come.

"Oof!"

As Sogawa brought the forked pole crashing down onto Fujita's right shoulder with a shout, the thick wood snapped in half with a loud crack. Fujita hardly felt the blow, so many times had he bled from that same spot while hauling logs. Stunned by his own actions, Sogawa tripped over his feet and collapsed into a sitting position on the ground. When Fujita offered him a hand to help him up, he began to cry.

"I'm sorry, Kentaro . . . I'm so sorry . . ."

"Don't be an idiot," Fujita said, laughing. "I told you to hit me, didn't I?"

"I *am* an idiot. I'm not fit to be president. A fool like me's no good to anyone."

"What are you saying? The Kito Fruit Club wouldn't exist if it weren't for Tokuyoshi Sogawa, the biggest yuzu loony in the history of Japan."

The sake must have caught up with Sogawa at last. He was as limp as a noodle. Fujita heaved him onto his back.

"I'm sorry, Ken. I—I . . ."

"Forget it. We're friends. Everyone has their off days."

Sogawa fell silent.

"Come on," Fujita said to no one in particular. "We've got to get back to the grindstone tomorrow." He slowly began to walk beneath the watch of the peaceful moon.

2.

In 1970, it finally happened.

"This is a disaster!"

"What? That huge company . . . ?"

One of the most prosperous timber companies on the Nakagawa river, downstream from Kito, had gone bankrupt. The village hall was in an uproar over the news.

"Timber prices have been so low these past five years, I guess even the big players are feeling it."

"What happens now? It's only a matter of time until the ripples reach us!"

Fujita had been transferred from Accounting to the Industrial Development Department four years earlier. During that time, timber companies and sawmills throughout the prefecture went bankrupt in rapid succession, vanishing from their communities. With the rise of cheap imported wood, demand for domestic timber had crumbled, and market prices were in free fall. He'd worried that this day would come, and now it finally had.

That the prefecture's major timber companies had been going under one by one since the year before was a sure sign that the postwar forestry boom was in terminal decline. Kito, still dependent on forestry, was about to be dealt an immeasurable blow.

"Fujita, the mayor wants to see you."

The mayor?

"I'll be right there."

When he walked into the mayor's office, Usuki was already there.

"I'm sorry to bother you both when you're so busy," the mayor said with his usual politeness. It was Sakakino, who had taken on the job three years earlier when the previous mayor died of an illness. He was the youngest person ever to hold the post.

Sakakino had shown enthusiasm for Usuki's yuzu cultivation plan as deputy mayor, and his father had been working steadfastly to grow yuzu on their land. Perhaps partly because he was around the same age as Fujita and Usuki, who were both in their mid-thirties, the three were on friendly terms and often exchanged ideas informally.

"The scenario we've been talking about for a long time has come to pass," Sakakino said, his face clouding over. "I don't plan to take the destruction of our forestry industry sitting down, and of course I'll do my best to negotiate with the prefecture and industry, but our immediate problem is unemployment."

Most of the forests in Kito were owned by outside entrepreneurs, but villagers did the work on the ground. Starting around 1955, an increasing number of laborers had come from outside the village, but as the boom subsided starting in 1965, they disappeared. This was partly the result of nationwide population flow to cities due to industrialization, and partly because timber companies were gradually going out of business.

However, the nosedive in timber prices did not mean less work to do in the mountains. On the contrary: Companies had to sell more timber at thinner profit margins, meaning they pushed forestry laborers even harder. Since more of those laborers were now local residents, farmers were driven even further from their farms. This cycle had now reached its sad conclusion.

"The day laborers will probably start losing work now," Usuki said. "Just as the rice farmers lose their work, too."

That year, the national government had launched a policy of reducing paddy acreage in response to domestic overproduction of rice, shaking the world of agriculture to its roots.

Fujita folded his arms across his chest and sighed softly.

"In other words, you want to encourage farmers to convert their paddies to yuzu orchards?" he asked Sakakino.

Sakakino nodded. "You catch on quick. What scares me even more than the loss of jobs is the loss of hope among the villagers. I want to avoid that. Usuki, is it true that you've figured out how to get yuzu trees producing in five years?"

"It's true," Usuki answered. "At first we had trees bearing in three years, but the fruit was small. If we give them five years, they bear fruit as good as the wild trees. We've got the cultivation practices in place to bring our yuzu to market with confidence."

"You've done it in a decade, then, just like you said you would. How about that! I can't tell you how grateful I am," Sakakino said, bowing his head.

"The members of the Fruit Study Group have worked a lot harder for this than I have. Sogawa, Matsumoto, Kogashiwara, Hirakawa, Tani . . . there's only a handful left, but they deserve the credit for putting up with ten years of unpaid research at a snail's pace."

"They really do," Fujita said, nodding. "They're the reason we know how to cultivate yuzu now. All that's left is to increase the number of growers. Now's the time to give yuzu everything we've got."

"Will you lead the effort, then?" asked Sakakino. "I want to appoint one of you head of the Industrial Development Department to turn yuzu into a real industry. What do you say?"

Fujita and Usuki exchanged a glance.

"That's not a good idea," Usuki said. "If you switch your loyalty to yuzu just as forestry goes into crisis, you could make a lot of enemies. If we start producing mass quantities of yuzu, at some point we'll need to develop value-added goods to stabilize

proceeds from the industry. That means investment in processing factories and warehouses and equipment. *That's* when Kentaro should be made head of the Industrial Development Department. It'll be a critical moment, and we'll need someone with a good head for numbers."

Sakakino mulled the suggestion.

"In that case, I hope you'll take the job then, Fujita, but what do we do right now? It's a chicken-or-egg question. If we allocate a hefty budget to yuzu, we can scale up production quickly. But we've got to prove yuzu can be profitable before the village assembly will give us that budget. You know how they are."

Fujita nodded. "Half the assembly members are anti-Usuki on principle. I'm sure they'll make a fuss. 'If there's money to waste on yuzu, it should go to forestry instead.'"

"That's a hard argument to make right now, though."

"True."

The three men fell silent. Finally, Usuki slapped his knee and shouted, "I've got it! If they're going to call me an idiotic *kitarinin* and every other insult they can think of anyway, I might as well hurl myself against the wall to begin with. Bam!"

Sakakino and Fujita stared at him.

"Hurl yourself against the wall?"

"Precisely. It always falls to the young and the foolish and the outsiders to break through impasses. Will you lend me a hand lighting the fire?"

Sakakino and Fujita leaned forward as he spoke, listening intently. Then, realizing that Usuki's seemingly clever idea might not be very wise, their expressions shifted.

"Wait a second. That sounds too risky."

"I agree! If anyone's going to take the chance, it should be someone from the village. I'll do it myself!"

"No, I insist," Usuki said with a grin. "It'll be fun. Kito yuzu, you're going to the front lines!"

Kaboom!

The sound of a terrific explosion bounced off the mountains and echoed through the hamlet. Dirt flew everywhere, and smoke billowed across the paddy. The farm wives shrieked and took cover. The older women recited prayers to Amida Buddha.

"Mr. Usuki, are you alive in there? Are you hurt?"

“I’m alive!” answered a dirt-covered Usuki from inside the gray cloud of smoke. He crouched down and peered into the massive hole that now gaped at the center of the paddy. It was at least a meter and a half deep.

Don’t need to go this far down. Next time I’ll cut the dynamite in half. Can’t waste any of the budget.

He climbed onto the power shovel he’d borrowed and used it to clear away the large rocks that had been loosened by the force of the explosion before smoothing out the scattered dirt.

After transferring from the school board to the Industrial Development Department, Usuki had obtained a special license to purchase and use dynamite. Converting fields from rice paddies to dry orchards required not only draining the surface water but also heavier jobs like breaking up the hardpan hidden underground and mixing in manure. The physical strength, time, and endurance required to perform these tasks manually were a major obstacle to paddy conversion and one of the reasons farmers were reluctant to grow yuzu. As a member of the Industrial Development Department, Usuki had begun doing the work for these farmers. Seeing him boldly blast up paddies with dynamite gave the villagers a good shock and got them talking. In no time, news of the project had spread throughout Kito.

“I’ve been hearing those explosions again today. Wonder what’s going on.”

“I heard the village hall is blasting up paddies for farmers who want to plant yuzu.”

“So even the village hall is going crazy? Who blows up a rice paddy?!”

“I hear you, but now that the forestry work’s dried up, I’ve been worried about how we’ll get by. They’re giving out yuzu seedlings for cheap, so I think we’d better get ourselves some.”

“I’ve been thinking the same thing . . .”

Usuki’s master plan was proving extremely effective in getting the word out about yuzu cultivation. He had also instructed the farmers to sell their cultivated yuzu fruit under the official name of “Kito yuzu” that year. It was the first time the name had been used, crystallizing years of hard work. At Osaka’s central wholesale market, Kito’s biggest-ever shipment of yuzu was eagerly received, and some of the largest, most outstanding fruit sold for six hundred yen apiece, the highest price ever.

“Our customers love Kito yuzu,” merchants would say. “Some placed orders in advance, and the rest of the stock sold as soon as I put it out on the shelves. We’ll gladly take as much as you can grow.”

Needless to say, the farmers were deeply moved by this response to their fruit. The Kito Fruit Study Group had almost disintegrated, but some members returned when they lost their forestry jobs, resulting in a relaunch with forty members and Sogawa once again serving as president. As part of the plan Usuki had shared with the mayor and Fujita, the Fruit Study Group was also invited to move its headquarters to the village hall. Some staff objected because they were already swamped with work related to the forestry crisis, but Fujita volunteered to take charge, smoothed over the disagreements, and set up a reception area where farmers unsure about the future could come any time to talk. The transformation of Kito's economy was proceeding at a whirlwind pace, and yuzu offered new hope for farmers reeling from the forestry crash.

More and more villagers were taking the first steps toward growing the new crop. This created an urgent need for seedlings. Fortunately, with orders for Japanese cedars and other forest trees falling dramatically, Hayashi Farm in Nyuta was at a crossroads of its own and therefore willing to accept a massive order for 8,600 yuzu seedlings, payable on delivery. Kito yuzu's conversion into a commercial crop was moving forward aggressively.

Usuki's plan was not for the village government to play nursemaid to the industry, but rather to support its growth so that Kito's residents would get involved of their own volition. He and Fujita stayed behind the scenes, conducting research and laying the groundwork for rapid action at crucial moments. They planned farmer workshops, wrote cultivation manuals, and tested out the storage methods that would soon be needed. There was still more research to do on cultivation, and new markets to develop. They also needed to invent value-added goods to use fruit that didn't meet the standards for selling fresh.

There was so much work to do that neither Usuki nor Fujita could afford to take any time off. Nor did they want to. Neither of them could imagine any work more meaningful or rewarding. Kito was facing the collapse of its primary industry, but Sakakino's administration managed to keep the village not only functioning but miraculously harmonious. The villagers had found salvation in yuzu, and their passionate enthusiasm was about to light up Kito like the rising sun.

Villagers and rice paddies

3.

Before Kito's farmers started growing yuzu, they seldom sold their crops. Even when they could grow enough high-quality food to sell, no roads existed to get it to market. Plus, everyone had to work together to maintain the agricultural infrastructure. If everyone else was growing rice, then you had to grow rice, too, even if it didn't bring in much money. Group loyalty had deep roots.

The great achievement of the Kito Fruit Study Group was to turn this communal orientation into an advantage. Nothing could be more persuasive than the fact that the first farmers to start cultivating yuzu were earning several times the profit that rice generated. Sogawa and the other core members blazed a path for the rest, making success feel like a realistic possibility. In addition, when the group took action, it wasn't on an individual level but as a collective. The conformist, cooperative tendencies of the villagers became a fundamental strength.

Sogawa bore no grudges against those who had ridiculed him early on; on the contrary, his goal as president was to make sure none of these new converts dropped out of the club. But the cultivation methods the older members taught the new ones didn't

guarantee immediate success. With nature as a workmate, farmers are accustomed to things not going as planned, and the original “yuzu loonies” knew from personal experience the anxieties and pitfalls awaiting those who had spent their lives in the forests rather than the fields.

These original members took on leadership roles in their respective hamlets, breaking down their experience and knowledge for the newcomers. When that didn’t work, they visited the newcomers’ fields and lent a helping hand, unstinting with their unpaid labor. The Fruit Study Group was a nonprofit organization to support those who wanted to farm commercially, fueled by Kito’s unique spirit of mutual aid. Money was a powerful motivating force for change among the impoverished villagers, but the bonds between them—more like family ties than bonds between colleagues or friends—were even more powerful.

In 1971, the Fruit Study Group held six cultivation workshops for a total of 160 farmers. Not only did the group retain all its members, the workshops were so popular they had to be held every month the following year to meet demand.

“Go get ’em! I did it and so can you!”

“Don’t get anxious, and don’t give up. If you’re having trouble, we’ll help you out, and between the lot of us we’ll make Kito yuzu the top in Japan!”

Like parents prodding their children forward, the older members helped, encouraged, and trained the newer ones. Sogawa’s dream for the Suke Chick Club had become a reality.

The women, too, poured an astounding quantity of love and energy into Kito yuzu. In the past, a typical village farmwife had divided her time between growing the rice and vegetables her family ate and managing the family finances using the money her husband earned as a day laborer. This pattern of daily life was so firmly established, no one imagined it would change within their lifetimes.

But when families began growing yuzu, the farm work that had always been an extension of household chores became directly linked to household income. Farmwives were energized by the novel pleasure of seeing their work yield quantifiable results. They were also delighted to witness their beloved yuzu making a splash out in the world. Throughout the village, women could be seen tending to the trees in rain and snow and blazing heat. The crop benefited immensely from their meticulous attention and creative ideas.

The fruits of the yuzu tree are surrounded by hard, sharp thorns up to five centimeters long. Thorns cover the branches as well. They doubtless serve a purpose for the trees, but for growers, they were the cause of many swollen cuts, and thorns that fell

to the ground could pierce the sole of a shoe. Unfortunately, however, cutting the thorns off caused a visible decline in the quality of the fruit.

Back when yuzu were destined only for the family table, forked poles were a good enough tool for harvesting, but that was no longer the case now that the fruits were valuable produce bound for discerning customers. The only surefire way to avoid injuring their rinds was to pick them by hand. However, most of the fruit grew on the crowded inner branches, meaning pickers had to stick their arms into the nest of thorns. This caused a great number of injuries and lengthened the time needed for harvest.

It was a team of farmwives in the hamlet of Minamiu who overcame the problem. The team, which called itself the Better Life Group, was spearheaded by Mayor Sakakino's wife. Together they devised an outfit consisting of long gloves, aprons, and breathable work pants, all made of sturdy leather, then began sewing the outfits by hand. The Fruit Study Group advertised the custom-made clothes to its members, and work efficiency soared.

The wives of Fruit Study Group members also played an active part in other parts of the industry, such as producing yuzu juice for sale and finding marketable uses for the leftover skins. Taking on roles that would have been unimaginable within the longstanding framework of men working in forestry and woman in farming, the hardworking women grew more confident and optimistic. Their husbands were happily surprised by the change.

4.

One Sunday, Fujita left his house before dawn. He was headed for a scenic overlook at the top of Konose Gorge in the hamlet of Kitagawa. Mount Konose towered 1,740 meters above sea level and was the source of the Nakagawa river. Its natural beauty was every bit as majestic as one would expect from the headwaters of a river that meandered all the way to the Kii Strait between eastern Shikoku and Honshu's Kii Peninsula.

In the past, few people outside the village even knew that Konose Gorge existed. However, since its designation as a quasi-national park in the year of the Tokyo Summer Olympics, a steady stream of sightseers had been making their way to the spot, and a rest house called the Autumn Leaves Teahouse had recently been built. The gorge was Kito's first tourist attraction, and Fujita wondered if he might be able to advertise Kito yuzu there. To that end, he had been visiting on Sundays to hand out free samples of yuzu juice. The samples proved popular with the tourists, many of whom had never heard of yuzu.

“Why, this is delicious. It’s so refreshing.”

“Where can I buy some?”

“At the agricultural co-op! Please do buy a bottle!”

The co-op had only recently begun offering the product, and Fujita wasn’t a practiced salesman, but he did his best to smile warmly and speak loudly.

The steady growth in yuzu production meant a corresponding increase in fruit that didn’t meet the standards for wholesale marketing. Finding profitable uses for the discards was an urgent challenge. However, forestry had dominated the economy for so long that Kito lacked any commercial infrastructure at all. In developing and marketing yuzu products, they had to start from scratch.

Recently, Fujita had been going back and forth between the weak agricultural co-op and the newly established chamber of commerce, trying to get them to do something about the issue. The co-op was especially problematic: In the past, it had almost completely neglected its primary task of distributing agricultural products, and a corruption scandal involving the management had put it at risk of being broken up. Fortunately, a proposal to merge with the co-op in the neighboring town had been floated, and through a desperate effort to retrain the local co-op staff, the organization was saved. Kito’s co-op was now a branch of the much larger Naka-Seibu agricultural co-op, and this time around it would have to play a stronger role in the local farm economy, primarily by serving as a broker of farm products.

At the same time, yuzu was starting to stand out as a village specialty, and residents were feeling more hopeful about its prospects. Anxious to keep the momentum going, Fujita was running between the Fruit Study Group, chamber of commerce, and agricultural co-op trying to develop distribution channels for yuzu products. A dizzying list of additional tasks waited just over the horizon. Products had to be planned, factories secured, and production lines designed. There would be negotiations with packaging factories, as well as department stores and railway stations throughout the prefecture that might sell the products.

Topping off the list of Kito’s prospective value-added products was yuzu miso. Fujita asked a number of village women to come up with trial versions, but they all turned him down, saying the responsibility was too heavy. In the end, his sister-in-law Yukiko took on the job.

“You want me to experiment with yuzu miso recipes?”

“That’s right. I’ve arranged for the agricultural co-op to sell yuzu juice, so that’s what we’ll use substandard fruit for. After the juice is squeezed out, we’ll have plenty of peel, and I’d love to find a good use for it. Plus, miso keeps well.”

Yukiko happily agreed. If he thought she was qualified, she said, she'd willingly take on the job.

"Leave it to me! I promise to give everything I've got to finding out which version is most popular and which is the tastiest, with the strongest yuzu flavor!" she said cheerfully. Then her face clouded over, and she added, "But, Kentaro, are you alright? What with what happened and all . . ."

What happened.

"I hear you've been staying up all night working. Please don't push yourself too hard. I was the one who told Tokiko that you were a good, reliable man she could marry without any worries. If you work yourself to collapse, I'll lose face."

Fujita had reassured Yukiko that he was fine and asked her to be there for Tokiko.

But how deeply had it hollowed out Tokiko's heart?

The sun was sinking behind the mountains. The crowd of sightseers at the rest house was thinning.

"Good work today, Mr. Fujita!" one of the clerks at the rest house said, patting him on the shoulder. "You must have been talking up a storm out here. We had hordes of customers come in for yuzu juice today. And you're not even a salesman! You really earn your keep at the village hall."

"If I can help out, then I might as well. This village belongs to all of us."

"You've certainly got a lot of energy," the woman said with a smile. "Given what happened and all." Then she clapped her hand over her mouth. She hadn't meant to say that.

"I'll be heading off now," said Fujita. "Take care."

He packed up his things, but instead of making for home, he set off walking toward the gorge. He'd climbed this mountain many times since he was a teen, and the fading afternoon light was enough to guide his way. In spring the gorge exploded with alpine flowers. When they shed their petals, the luminous green of early summer wreathed the stream while the treetops echoed with the calls of birds and other small animals, as sweet as a heavenly chorus. Fall brought the drama of leaves turning red and gold over a six-week span. Even in a place as blessed with natural beauty as Kito, Konose Gorge at this time of year was a highlight.

The gorge plunged down in a steep V-shape for two hundred meters, lined with a dense rainbow of deciduous trees. Kito's distinctive climate, with its warm days and cold nights, brought an almost mystical procession of colors throughout the fall. The unusual shape of the gorge combined with rich, vivid reds, yellows, and greens against a

matchless blue sky. Fujita stood alone, watching the dusk slowly dissolve the stunning vista that had doubtless left the sightseers a few hours earlier breathless.

"I wanted to show this to you . . ."

The words spilled unbidden from his mouth, unleashing an intense shaking from deep within. He could have contained it if he'd wanted to. But part of him knew this was his only chance to release everything that had built up inside of him, and so he did.

A few months earlier, his and Tokiko's firstborn had died of pneumonia at the age of two.

Tokiko had kept her job at the nursery school after they married, and of course Fujita had wanted her to. During the day, they left their son in the care of Fujita's mother Yoshino, who lived in a detached cottage next to their house. The child had caught a cold that developed into pneumonia, and by the time anyone realized what was happening, it was too late.

"I…I should have been there with him!"

Clinging to the tiny body of their son, Tokiko had sobbed as if she'd lost her mind. Fujita had never felt so overwhelmed by his own powerlessness.

He had married the woman he loved and created a family with her, welcoming new life into the world together. His days were filled with a sweetness that felt like a kind of magical power. He remembered the sight of Tokiko holding their son as he innocently nursed at her breast. The warmth of those joyful moments when he cried, laughed, or took his first steps had seemed as if it would last forever. How happy he would have been if that joy had continued unchanged until, one day, their son called him "Dad." He had wanted to take the small hand of this Kito boy and share with him the nature, the beauty, the warm afternoon sun of this place they called home.

Tokiko was thrust into a despair so deep it seemed to have no bottom, and Fujita felt that he had to seal his own sorrow inside himself to help her heal, however gradually. He had thought he was succeeding.

But was he really?

Maybe he was only trying to protect himself from losing even more than he already had through the death of their son. Perhaps that was why he was throwing himself into work like this. His suppressed guilt came out in a wail.

"I couldn't protect you . . . I couldn't do anything for you. What a wretched father I was."

Hot tears streamed down his cheeks.

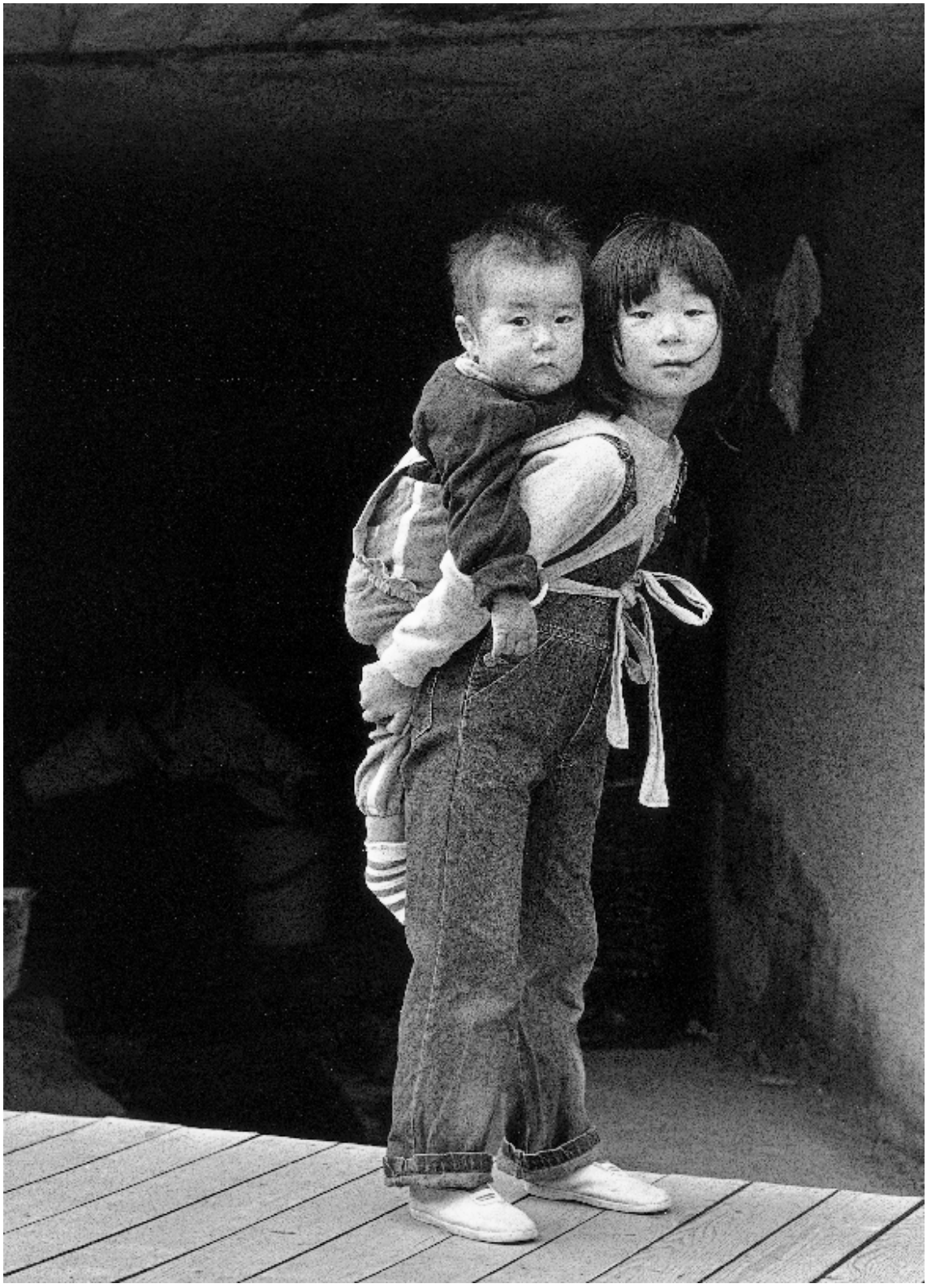
"Forgive me . . . forgive me!"

The sobs that welled up from his throat went unheard by any human. Like the cries of forest animals to their young, they were swallowed up by the dusky gorge.

Happiness.
I feel as if I, too, was happy once.
Until I was seven or eight, the things my father and mother talked about were to me no different than a fairytale.

Perhaps happiness cannot exist in the present, but only in the past. In memories.
I don't intend to seek happiness from other people.
Nor do I intend to ask other people to rescue me from unhappiness.
Only nature can do that.

—From "A Tiny Soul" by Kentaro Fujita (age 24), *Yamanami*, 1959



Young children

Ch. 5 Tears and glory

1.

Several places throughout Japan have long been known for their yuzu, including Okutama in Tokyo, Moroyama in Saitama Prefecture, Mizuo in Kyoto, and Mino in Osaka. The fact that producers in each of these areas sold only small quantities and were located near large cities is suggestive of the fruit's history as a luxury and a gift for the privileged classes. Among all the yuzu-producing areas in Japan, Kito was the only one attempting to produce this rare fruit in bulk and market it widely without sacrificing quality.

To neighboring villages, Kito must have seemed like it was blessed with extraordinary good fortune. During the forestry boom, it was envied as the "village where money grows on trees"; when that industry crashed, it promptly switched to growing yuzu, "the golden fruit." But Kito's good fortune worked on a mechanism that wasn't visible from the outside.

This mechanism had several parts. First was the Kito Fruit Study Group, whose members had stubbornly refused to give in to difficulty or self-doubt, instead pushing forward in the belief that yuzu was Kito's only option. Second were the villagers, who had come together to overcome all sorts of unfavorable conditions and keep moving ahead. Third were the hidden leaders like Usuki and Fujita who had guided the village toward the yuzu industry with a constant eye to the future. There could hardly be a village less suited to agriculture, but by uniting around a single idea, Kito had performed its miracle. It would not have been possible had any of those three elements been absent.

Within the Fruit Study Group, Sogawa and the other leading yuzu farmers were tireless in training their fellow farmers to grow yuzu and researching problems related to its cultivation. Within three years of the group's restart in 1970, their yuzu production exceeded 120 metric tons, with brisk sales of yuzu juice and yuzu miso, too. Farmers across Japan were starting to talk about Kito yuzu. Some were starting to come from neighboring Kochi Prefecture, as well as other parts of Japan, to inspect the orchards and request a spot in cultivation workshops. After all, every farm village in Japan faced the same challenges under the government's paddy reduction policy.

The trickle of requests from farmers in other villages eager to learn how to grow yuzu became a flood. At this juncture, the village made a characteristic decision.

Normally, farmers might be expected to avoid revealing their hard-earned knowledge, for fear of increasing the number of competitors in the market. But some of the farmers made long journeys from distant homes again and again, and the village leaders of Kochi who had decided to revive their farming sector with yuzu were regular visitors, too. All of them were earnest and sincere.

By nature, Kito's farmers wanted to return the enthusiasm of these visitors in kind. The immediate catalyst for making more information public, however, was the theft of some yuzu seedlings. This made the Kito farmers resolve to share what they knew rather than concealing it, so that none of their fellow farmers, suffering the same hardships they had themselves, would ever again be desperate enough to steal. And so they taught their visitors everything they knew, from how to induce trees to bear within five years to what fertilizers to apply and how to prevent disease and pest problems. They also shared seedlings grafted onto hardy-orange rootstock, just as they had shared them with one another.

"Would you be willing to spare a few Kito yuzu trees, even just one or two?"

The Kito farmers found themselves unable to turn down these humble requests from distant visitors. On Sundays, Usuki would rope his sons Hideyuki and Takashi into helping him load up his car with seedlings he had grown himself.

"Dad, I'm beat. These seedlings are heavy!"

"Yeah, Dad, what are you going to do with so many of these?"

"There are some farmers in Kochi having a hard time, and I'm going to take these trees to them."

"The people in Kochi are having a hard time?"

"I'm having a hard time myself. My palms are stinging like crazy!"

"But I understand, Dad. When you're better off than someone else, you help them out. My teacher said everyone does better that way. They said in Kito we're proud of being thoughtful."

Usuki figured that scions from Kito's vigorous yuzu trees would be quickest to produce tasty fruit. Quickest to bring those struggling farmers happier times. That was the reasoning that led him and others in Kito to throw themselves so fully into supporting yuzu cultivation in other villages.

Mayor Sakakino also delivered yuzu seedlings to impoverished farming communities far from Kito. In this way, the kindness of Kito's villagers helped spread yuzu cultivation throughout Japan. And, through the efforts of the farmers in these

distant communities, Kito's yuzu scions took root throughout Japan, multiplying with remarkable vigor.

2.

Mr. Hiroshi Usuki
Director, Industrial Development Department
Kito Village Hall, Kito, Tokushima Prefecture

Dear Mr. Usuki,

I write to you from the office of the Asahi Broadcasting Corporation program "Masaru Doi's Television Cooking Class." Mr. Doi received the letter and Kito yuzu you sent and would like to convey his sincerest gratitude for this most generous gift, which he sampled immediately. As your letter promised, the appearance and flavor of the Kito yuzu were outstanding, and Mr. Doi would like to incorporate them into the foods he cooks on his television program. Are you available to meet with him at the station to discuss the matter in person? We apologize for the inconvenience of the long journey, but we hope you will accept our invitation. Detailed directions follow.

……..

"Hiroshi, look! This is amazing!"

When Usuki got home from work that night, Yukiko skipped her usual greeting and instead pushed a letter into his hands.

"Mr. D-Doi says he wants to use our yuzu in his cooking show!"

"So it worked!" Usuki said, scanning the letter as he stood in the entryway.

Now we're in business . . . !

"Will you go?"

"Of course! Just watch what happens when they put yuzu on TV. Lots of people haven't even heard of it yet, but this will make it famous overnight!"

"Oh, my!" Yukiko said, pressing her hands to her chest. "Do you realize how incredible this is? Masaru Doi is the most popular chef in Japan right now. To think that a television celebrity likes our yuzu!"

Usuki had sent the show some Kito yuzu assuming he would get no response.

"Just about every housewife in the country watches that show! This is like a dream. You really do give anything and everything a try, Hiroshi."

"That I do, but right now I've got a different business trip to get ready for. I have to hurry—would you give me a hand?"

"Of course. I'll go fill the bath now. You're covered in mud from dynamiting."

"I can't wait that long. I'll have to wash off with cold water. Could you put the kettle on for me so I'll have some hot water to rinse with? And give the kids their dinner and wrap up mine for the road. I've got to catch the first ferry out of Tokushima in the morning."

"You're speeding around like a bullet every day. Where is it this time? Osaka? Kyoto? Nagoya?"

"Tokyo. We got a nibble from Tsukiji Market. They asked us to bring some yuzu for negotiations!"

If they cut a deal with Tsukiji, the biggest market in Tokyo, it would be easier to get the many other markets in the capital interested as well. Usuki had visited Tsukiji a number of times, but the general lack of awareness about yuzu had undermined his efforts. Now, though, one of the wholesalers had a new manager from Kochi who—naturally—knew about yuzu, and he'd sent word that he was willing to negotiate.

We've done a lot to help out Kochi's farmers. I'm sure this one's in the bag.

He slipped several effusive notes of gratitude from Kochi farmers into his suitcase.

Since Fujita became director of the Industrial Development Department in 1973, the village had built the large storage facility they needed for coordinating shipments of fresh yuzu, as well as a processing factory for making yuzu juice and yuzu miso. An efficient, profitable system for handling the growing volume of yuzu was taking shape.

Fujita handled everything from selecting construction sites and calculating operation costs to negotiating budgets with the village assembly. He even oversaw architectural planning. On top of that, he took on the work the unmotivated agricultural co-op neglected, organizing spot sales at the big department stores in downtown Tokushima, arranging contracts to sell at railroad kiosks, and even negotiating with the prefectural fruit and vegetable commercial co-op, opening up many new sales routes.

He'd also gotten the management of the yuzu mother-tree orchard on track when the leaders of the Fruit Study Group began to quarrel over the project.

By 1972, membership in the Fruit Study Group—which is to say, the number of yuzu-growing families in Kito—already exceeded one hundred, with almost four hundred farmers attending the bimonthly workshops that year. The group was growing too big to operate solely on the unpaid labor of ordinary farmers. Its leading members decided that they would allot a portion of their yuzu orchards to serve as experimental plots for the Fruit Study Group. These, along with the remaining privately owned fields, would be closed to visitors wishing to learn yuzu farming methods, so that members could focus on protecting their resource base. Instead, the group would lease a separate piece of land in the mountains and establish a village-run model yuzu farm for teaching workshop attendees and visitors from other villages.

While Usuki of course devoted much time and energy to choosing the location for the model farm, preparing the land, and planting the trees, Fujita's stubborn determination in negotiating land acquisition, budgets, and oversight ensured the project's completion. Thanks to their work, total sales of Kito yuzu in 1973 reached a record high of 15.24 million yen, ten times the previous year's figure. Around 1,500 yuzu trees were now mature enough to harvest from. Fujita had succeeded with flying colors in making the slogan he'd promoted at the Industrial Development Department reality: "Ten thousand yen from every yuzu tree."

After that, the number of yuzu trees in the village skyrocketed to ten and then twenty thousand. Usuki was sure they could never have achieved so much in so little time without Fujita's calm perseverance and unwavering ability to get things done. Yet as the two of them ran around shouting about yuzu to everyone else, they often talked to each other about quite different things.

"How should we get the kids excited about the next village sports festival?"

"Let's build a campsite in Kito where everyone can come and have fun!"

Sharing these innocent dreams with each other kept them motivated.

Tokiko eventually got back on her feet after the tragedy of losing her first son to sickness, and by this point had given birth to a daughter and then a second son. The glint in Fujita's eye spoke to how much her recovery, along with the new additions to their family, renewed his own vitality.

Around this time, plans for another large dam that the Ministry of Construction had put forth in the past resurfaced without warning, shaking Mayor Sakakino's administration. The thoughtless proposal would submerge a hundred households. It threatened the continued existence of the village and the natural ecosystem of the

Nakagawa river, while promising no benefits for Kito beyond some compensation and a few short-lived jobs. It was a prime example of the so-called "public works politics" that prioritized the construction industry above all else.

To help Sakakino battle the proposal, Fujita took on the post of Director of Dam Affairs while still serving as director of the Industrial Development Department, making his workload even heavier. For his part, Usuki—now director of the Social Education Department—was busy trying to achieve his and Fujita's old dream of building a village campsite in between responding to farmer requests for new yuzu orchards by blasting up rice paddies with dynamite. In the evenings, he discussed the latest research findings with the leading members of the Fruit Study Group.

Seventeen years had passed since he stepped off the bus in Kito as the new agricultural extension officer. The modest farmhouses with their cedar-bark roofs had been replaced with modern homes, the roads had been widened and extended, and many new tunnels connected once-isolated hamlets. The number of schools hadn't increased, but the existing ones now had gyms, pools, pianos, and all the latest educational facilities. New school buses and dormitories had made Kito's educational system unparalleled in the region.

Where rice had once grown, yuzu trees laden with fruit now dyed the entire village gold. By the previous year, 1976, the project's initial thousand trees had swelled to thirty-five thousand—or forty thousand, if you included the village's five thousand wild yuzu trees.

I bet there'll be more many more trees to come, too . . .

We can't let them destroy everything this village has achieved with that senseless dam!

That ardent conviction motivated Usuki to take over from Fujita as director of the Industrial Development Department.

Now that I'm director, Kito's headed for the top spot in Japan . . . !

3.

Usuki's connection with the celebrated culinary instructor Masaru Doi was a turning point for yuzu's role in Japanese foodways. Previously, most demand for yuzu had come from high-end restaurants, but Doi brought the fruit to the tables of Japanese families. As the founder of Japan's first culinary school for everyday cuisine, he set off

a home cooking boom so massive it gave rise to the popular phrase "housewife training."

Doi's role in establishing a set national menu for the New Year's holiday was particularly important in making yuzu more widely known. In the past, holiday dishes such as *zoni* (a soup of rice cakes, vegetables, and other ingredients) and *kohaku namasu* (a vinegared salad of carrots and daikon radish) might include yuzu or not, but under Doi's powerful influence, yuzu came to be seen as an indispensable ingredient in these dishes. Eventually, the fruit became so familiar that the mere mention of it evoked visions of joyful family celebrations at the New Year.

Usuki headed to his meeting with Doi at the Asahi Broadcasting Company in Tokyo never dreaming it would be the starting point for these developments. He found Doi so affable and unpretentious he nearly forgot he was a celebrity. Doi listened eagerly to Usuki's descriptions of traditional yuzu cuisine from Kito, then not only featured them on his television show but also invited Usuki to visit his school and work with students to invent new yuzu dishes. In Doi's hands, the beloved *ayuzushi* with yuzu juice that represented the flavor of home in Kito became an elegant dish of deboned whole ayu molded over sushi rice. After Doi prepared it on his show, it was featured in women's magazines and became a popular dish for entertaining.

Doi continued to use yuzu frequently as a flavor accent and to counteract fishy smells. Television and magazines brought his techniques into homes across Japan.

"Hiroshi, Mr. Doi has sent a box of sweets. Shall we open it?"

"By all means!"

The living room filled with the excited oohs and ahs of Yukiko and their sons. Yukiko brought a plate and a cup of tea to Usuki in his study.

"Look at this gorgeous cake he's sent, Hiroshi! I've never seen the likes of it in Kito. And we're the ones who ought to be thanking him . . ."

Usuki didn't watch Doi's cooking show, so he didn't know how he was using yuzu, but he knew from his contacts at Tsukiji Market that the ripple effects were massive. The Industrial Development Department's phones were ringing off the hook with orders from Tokyo companies who had doubtless heard about Kito from the Tsukiji wholesaler with whom Usuki negotiated their first deal. Opening up the Tokyo market had been one of Usuki's goals when he took over as director, and he'd counted on spending at least six months visiting companies to make his pitch. Now he was gaining unexpected footholds left and right.

The power of TV is incredible . . .

Needless to say, all of this had happened because home cooks placed a great deal of trust in Doi. To Usuki, this type of trust seemed the most important commodity in any industry. Grateful as he was for the new markets opened up by viewers' trust in Doi, he wanted to cultivate trust in Kito yuzu itself by obtaining some kind of objective proof of its quality. He had a plan to get that proof, and to that end he had been staying up late every night in his home study, immersed in writing.

Kito yuzu trees

In 1963, the Asahi Shimbun Company established the prestigious Asahi Agriculture Prize. The prize recognizes outstanding examples of group activity in any field of commercial agriculture, including dairy farming. It is considered the highest honor in the Japanese world of farming. In the first round of selections, prefectural nomination committees choose one agricultural cooperative or other group from each prefecture, and two from Hokkaido. In the second round, the selections are narrowed down to a dozen or so groups. The final winner is chosen following site visits and deliberations.

Usuki intended to enter the Kito Fruit Study Group in the competition. Immediately after he informed the Tokushima Prefecture's Office of Agricultural Improvement of his intentions and obtained the initial application documents, he

received a phone call from the agricultural experiment station where he used to work. It was his old friend Okamoto.

"I hear Kito yuzu is finally going for the Asahi prize."

"Well, you sure have big ears."

"I've been following your work all along. I hope you win. Even here, we're snowed under with questions about yuzu from experiment stations all over Japan. Kochi, Oita, Niigata . . . and you started it all. That's some accomplishment."

"That it is. Remember the good old days, when you called me a fool for even mentioning yuzu?"

"Let's not talk about that. The experiment station's been on your side for a long time now, right?"

It had. Usuki owed quite a lot to the hard work of Okamato. He wasn't sure if he and the farmers could have managed on their own to experiment with different temperature settings and lengths of time for storage, test out the new fertilizers and agrochemicals that were being developed one after the next, or come up with the dizzyingly complex fertilizer mixtures involved.

"Anyway, we'll be competing with farmers all over Japan for this prize," he said. "We call what we're doing commercial agriculture, but we've still only got thirty-five hectares of Kito yuzu. I'm having a hell of a time figuring out how to write the application so it'll stand out among all those big farms in the plains of Honshu."

Okamoto laughed.

"So even you feel unsure of yourself occasionally, eh? I think the trick is just to be you. The beautiful thing about people who really devote themselves to farming isn't how big their farm is or how much money they make. It's how deep their love is, right?"

Love . . .

"They fret over their crops like parents and appreciate them like children. Those are the feelings that lead to innovation and effort. I don't think anyone can beat Kito when it comes to loving yuzu. So write with confidence."

He's right. When it comes to loving yuzu, no one in all of Japan can beat us. That's Kito.

Usuki spent three months writing the application, staying up night after night. The application made it past the first round of selections at the Office of Agricultural Improvement, and then, following a site visit, was submitted to the Tokushima Prefecture Asahi Agriculture Prize Nomination Committee.

It was summer and green fruit was forming on the yuzu trees when, following further inquiries by the committee, the Kito Fruit Study Group was nominated as one of the forty-six groups from across Japan competing for the prize. In November, at the height of the yuzu harvest, word came from the central prize committee in Tokyo that the group was among the eleven finalists. A few weeks later, as December's chill seeped into the village, six judges arrived from Tokyo.

"That was certainly a long journey. The remoteness of this place strains the imagination."

"We've been to villages throughout Japan, and I can tell you, in this day and age, not one of them is a three-hour bus ride from the nearest railroad station."

The judges seemed utterly exhausted from the travel alone. And that wasn't all.

"The conditions for farming here are just horrid," one of the judges said, frowning at a yuzu orchard carved into the side of the mountain.

Sogawa and longstanding Fruit Study Group members Hirakawa and Kogashiwa spent three days showing the judges around the village, answering their questions and making sure they had all the information they needed. While chatting during breaks, they learned that one of the eleven finalists was a group of twelve dairy-farming families who had singlehandedly converted 230 hectares of wilderness to pasture in Hokkaido despite the bitterly cold winters. There was also a team growing Aomori apples, which were wildly popular, and a group of farmers from Shizuoka who had found success with melons.

After they saw the judges off on their return journey to Tokyo, the Fruit Study Group members gathered for discussion.

"I have a terrible feeling that the other finalists are operating on a much bigger scale than us."

"Yeah, that's the sense I got, too."

"The judges didn't say one way or the other what they thought of us."

"It's the Asahi Prize, after all. Maybe we shouldn't get our hopes up."

They sipped their sake in uncharacteristic silence. Finally, someone said, "We did what we could."

"We'll go on growing the best yuzu we can. That hasn't changed."

"You're right."

All they could do now was await the contest results.

The New Year came and went, and January was nearly over when the news arrived: The Kito Fruit Study Group had won the 1977 Asahi Agriculture Prize for

1977. The central prize committee, comprising an agriculture professor from the University of Tokyo, a sociologist, the director of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's National Institute of Agricultural Science, and other eminent figures, made the following comments in awarding the prize:

> 1. The group took up the cultivation of yuzu, concerning which no technical data existed at the time, and through its own research and innovation developed a sound system of production.
> 2. The group independently developed value-added yuzu products and successfully found markets for them.
> 3. All members of the group joined together to resist societal pressures and turn their community into a center of yuzu production.
> 4. The group successfully motivated the weak local agricultural cooperative to become more active.
> 5. Because the group is citizen-run, women have many opportunities to be involved, and women's groups have made impressive contributions.
> 6. The number of yuzu farmers is increasing in Kochi Prefecture and other nearby locations, and the group has taken the initiative in forming associations such as the Regional Committee for Yuzu Promotion, thus contributing to agricultural businesses in mountain villages throughout Shikoku.
>
> . . . Based on the above points, we find the Kito Fruit Study Group worthy of recognition, and hereupon award the group this year's Asahi Agriculture Prize.

The core members of the Fruit Study Group were invited to Tokyo for the awards ceremony, which was held at the Asahi Shimbun Company. Hirakawa and Kogashiwara watched in tears as Sogawa, dressed in his best suit with a large award ribbon pinned to his chest, received the certificate of award and commemorative shield onstage to the roar of applause and cheers. Memories of the eighteen years they had spent together overcoming hardship welled up in their chests in a surge of powerful emotion. In the course of chasing wildly after a dream that eluded them so nimbly for so long, they had somehow managed to arrive here—the moment of a lifetime for residents of a remote, impoverished farming village.

News of the prize was broadcast on television and in the newspapers, and the residents of Kito were congratulated and celebrated everywhere they went. Three months later, the Asahi Shimbun Company published a book on the Agriculture Prize. It included a report entitled "The Farmers Who Took on Yuzu" detailing the struggles of the indomitable Kito Fruit Study Group, which ended with the following words of praise from the prize committee judges who visited Kito:

> From a national perspective, this group's individual farm sales, farm size, and productivity of labor due to upgrades of agricultural infrastructure are all far below average.
>
> Its strengths lie in an entirely different realm.
>
> The greatest advantage of the Fruit Study Group is its bottomless energy. Its members simply refuse to give in to the many challenges nature and society hurls at them. This strength has played a role in the group's research into cultivation methods, its expansion into new markets, and every other aspect of its activities, yielding results on all fronts.
>
> The number of regions growing yuzu continues to increase, which raises the question of how the group will respond if overproduction causes prices to fall. Due to the low labor productivity rate caused by mountainous conditions, a rapid expansion in scale will be difficult, and it is possible that the group will find itself in a challenging situation.
>
> However, as long as the group retains its current energy, we cannot imagine that the farmers of Kito will abandon their village or give up farming. Fortunately, 57 of the 127 households that make up the Fruit Study Group include younger family members who are working alongside their parents to grow yuzu and engage in forestry. Many of the school-age children in these families also say they plan to remain in the village.
>
> In a world that prioritizes corporations and relegates agriculture to a lower status, we suspect it is groups of spirited farmers like the Kito Fruit Study Group that will save agriculture from ruin.
>
> *New Farming Villages '78*, Asahi Shimbun Company, 1978

After Kito yuzu won the Asahi Agriculture Prize, it remained Japan's top yuzu in both name and fact. The farmers were careful not to squander their hard-earned reputation on the pursuit of easy profit, instead prioritizing quality by continuing to research ways to

maintain and improve the caliber of their fruit. In 1977, the year Masaru Doi began using yuzu on his popular cooking show, sales of Kito yuzu leapt to 65 million yen, double the previous year's earnings. The following year, when the Fruit Study Group won the Asahi Agriculture Prize, sales rose to 85 million yen, and the year after that to 93 million. The industry was growing steadily. In 1980, sales reached 120 million yen. Both full-time and part-time farmers in the village grew yuzu, and all of them, regardless of size, were earning profits close to double the ten-thousand-yen-per-tree goal that Fujita had always talked about.

Usuki continued on as director of the Industrial Development Department, guiding the expansion of yuzu production for a decade and playing an energetic leadership role both within and outside of Kito. Yuzu cultivation was taking hold in many of Tokushima's mountain communities, becoming one of the main agricultural industries in the prefecture. In Kito, storage facilities were built in each hamlet, and processing factories run by the agricultural co-op and the village government went up as well. The heavy work of transporting the fruit out of the orchards was lightened by the installation of monorails, another sign of the industry's modernization.

As the Showa era drew to a close in the late 1980s, 218 towns and villages in 44 prefectures were growing a total of nearly ten thousand metric tons of yuzu each year. The fruit had gained recognition as a proper Japanese specialty product. In 1988, in response to enthusiastic demand from yuzu producers across the country, the Kito Fruit Study Group hosted a National Yuzu Summit. Five hundred yuzu farmers and sellers from Kanto, Hokuriku, Kinki, and Kyushu gathered under one roof for two days of successful seminars.

Among the speakers were presidents of wholesalers and trading companies at Tsukiji Market, as well as Masaru Doi, who by that time had known Usuki for ten years, in his role as president of the All Japan Culinary School Association. It was a gathering of growers, sellers, users, and thinkers. Each had a different perspective, but all wanted to see the yuzu industry adapt and thrive as times changed. The event was featured in newspapers and on television, and to outsiders Kito must have seemed to be shining more brightly than ever as the village that achieved the miracle of commercial yuzu cultivation.

Only Usuki knew the truth: Even as the village basked in the light of success, Fujita was struggling with a shadow that threatened the village's very existence. The path to expanding yuzu production had always run beneath the dark and ominous cloud that was the Hosogouchi Dam Project, and that government scheme was drawing a swarm of profiteers to the little village of Kito.

“Mr. Usuki, I’m leaving the yuzu in your hands,” Fujita had told him. “I want to devote my life to protecting nature. I might be no more than a single piece of wood in that righteous fire, but I have to play my part. That’s how I want to use this life of mine.”

Fujita had done what he could to lay the groundwork for commercial agriculture in a village with no preexisting commercial network. Now he was quietly stepping back from his official role in the yuzu industry. From that point on, he would battle the dark cloud looming over Kito.

Who could have imagined that in the end, he would give his own life to protect Kito’s natural environment from the government dam project?

There are all sorts of people in this world.
Tossed on the winds of suffering and pleasure, sometimes they laugh, sometimes they weep, and sometimes they grow drunk on joy—wildly ecstatic in the unfounded belief that this joy will last forever.
In our joy, we forget the troubles and pains of daily life, and even the limits of life itself. But, with time, joy ebbs like a receding tide.
In that moment, emptiness and regret flood our hearts.
Life is an ongoing cycle of joy and despair.

—From "To Live," by Kentaro Fujita (age 23), *Yamakai* no. 3, 1958

Catching dragonflies

Young village intellectuals (Kentaro Fujita, second from right)

Happy days of the past

Part II The Heisei Era A Thirty-Year Battle for Water and Life

Ch. 1 The demon of national policy

1.

Fujita heard the mountains moaning. The people who once tended to the forests with such care had vanished, and the animals, robbed of their food sources by the loss of the diverse deciduous woods, shivered in terror of starvation. When rain fell, it washed the topsoil mercilessly down the slopes, like tears of blood shed by the mountains whose pelt had been stripped away.

Things were better when the densely planted Japanese-cedar plantations were still making their owners rich. The stands had been thinned and some branches removed to maintain timber quality, with an eye to begin harvesting the trees in a little over two decades. However, when timber prices fell to rock-bottom, the owners of the dense plantations abandoned them, having determined that hiring laborers to maintain the forests would cost more than the trees were worth.

Once people begin reshaping the wild nature of the mountains, they must continue their work or face disaster. The mountains of Kito had once been covered by a natural “green dam” rooted in fertile topsoil, but the government’s afforestation policy ignored traditional forestry practices in favor of densely spaced cedar plantations, and those who owned land in the mountains went along with that policy. In the past, many different tree species had entwined their roots deep in the soil, holding one another up. Trees toppled only infrequently, and even in Kito, which receives the most rain of any place in western Japan, the forested mountains could absorb copious amounts of water.

However, no sooner did the price of domestic cedar collapse due to government policies that favored imported foreign timber than the densely planted stands of cedar were abandoned. In the neglected forests, untrimmed branches tangled overhead, blocking sunlight from reaching the forest floor. In a plantation forest consisting entirely of Japanese cedars, which are evergreen and do not lose their leaves, the topsoil loses the nourishment of rotting foliage. With no undergrowth due to the lack of light, animals who eat smaller plants can no longer live in the forest and do not enrich the earth with their droppings. The soil becomes dry and lifeless.

In Kito, this soil washed easily off the mountains and into the Nakagawa river. There it settled and raised the riverbed, causing frequent flooding the likes of which the village had never seen. This flooding was how the Ministry of Construction justified its

proposed dam in Kito. Dubbed the Hosogouchi Dam Project, the massive flood-prevention structure would span the hamlets of Nishiu and Oriu. Kito was informed of the plan in 1971, the year after the timber price crash and the launch of the paddy reduction policy. The announcement shook the village government to its core.

Could the central government be any more idiotic?

Fujita heard the cries of his native mountains, and it filled him with pain and resentment. The prefectural government said something had to be done to stop the flooding in cities downriver. The national government said the loss of a few neighborhoods beneath a dam lake that would cleave the village in two were hardly worth worrying about, considering the money the remote little community would receive from the huge public-works budget. However, three dams had already been constructed in the upper reaches of the Nakagawa river since the end of the war, including one in Kito. Far from stopping the flooding, the dams had exacerbated it. They provided not flood control but instead flood enhancement.

The dams accumulated several times as much sediment as projected, rapidly undermining their ability to retain water. As a result, water had to be released from them regularly, inundating industrial zones and cities downstream and damaging crops. To make matters worse, the accumulated sediment soon turned to stinking sludge that flowed downstream, clouding the crystal-clear currents of the Nakagawa river with wastewater. Trying to alleviate these negative impacts with yet another enormous dam further upstream—that is, Hosogouchi Dam—could not possibly be wise.

If they really want to stop the river flooding, then instead of building dams they should fix the forests they so recklessly destroyed! And if they're going to pour billions into public works, they should spend it on returning the neglected forests to their original state!

Fujita's reaction wasn't mere idealism. It was the wisdom of mountain dwellers cultivated over centuries, as well as a reflection of pragmatic natural science that pointed the way to the future. But it was also true that many of Fujita's fellow villagers who had been forced out of the ruined timber industry hoped to find a new source of income in construction. Support for the dam project was split straight down the middle.

In 1971, when the Ministry of Construction unexpectedly asked Kito to cooperate with an on-site survey for the dam, the village assembly approved the request, with conditions. However, residents who opposed the dam were unhappy with this decision, and feelings of mistrust toward the village government swelled. Remaining neutral in the face of competing expectations and uncertainties is the lot of village

employees, who are not permitted to express personal opinions about official matters. Fujita was no exception to this rule.

"Kentaro has always spoken out so passionately about protecting nature. Why won't he help us fight this thing?"

"Looks like he switched camps as soon as the assembly voted yea. Guess I misjudged our Director of Dam Affairs."

Some old friends were so outraged they stopped talking to him.

The dam continued to cause unrest in the village as the anti-dam faction staged rallies and marches and petitioned to recall village assembly members. Fujita was keenly aware that relationships between pro- and anti-dam villagers were fraying. To him, the Hosogouchi Dam loomed like a shadowy demon bent on hacking apart the ties of cooperation and mutual aid that had allowed this poor village community to survive through the generations.

2.

In the summer of 1976, with the village in the throes of disagreement over the dam project, a record-breaking typhoon swept right through Shikoku. Many communities were devastated. In Kito, landslides of unprecedented severity buried six villagers alive, a tragedy unheard of in its long history. The combined damages from destroyed houses, flooding, loss of agricultural land, and obstruction of roads reached 2.7 billion yen in the village. Forced to prioritize disaster recovery, the Ministry of Construction put the dam on hold.

I've got to do something while the pressure's off . . . !

Fujita's anxiety was immense. The unstable employment situation in the village was forcing everyone to rely on government money.

I have to figure out a plan fast. To do that . . .

"You're going to ask the mayor to put you in charge of Planning and Development Department?"

Usuki, who was standing on a suspension bridge gazing down at the clear water below, looked up at Fujita. On that day in 1977, the two men were working at the construction site for Minagawa Camp Village, scheduled to open that summer. Usuki, still director of the Social Education Department, had spearheaded plans for the new village-run leisure facility, which would serve as both a tourist attraction and a social education site for villagers.

"You mean you want to focus on business development?"

"That's right," Fujita said, nodding. "We've got a third of the village working on typhoon recovery. The dam will probably stall for a couple years while we rebuild, but if we don't find stable jobs for everyone in the meantime, it'll strangle Kito in the end."

"Hmm." Usuki threw Fujita a worried look. "That's true, but you're already directing three departments and you won't get any bonus for taking on another. You sure you'll be okay?"

"The village economy matters more than me."

"You're hopeless," Usuki said, frowning. "Seems to me you're taking on too much."

"It's no trouble for me," Fujita said, shaking his head. "Some farm families don't have enough land to make a living from yuzu alone, and some women want to work in the off-season to earn extra money for the family. They can't commute to the city, so however you look at it we need companies in Kito."

"How about I take over the Industrial Development Department? I can carry on the work you've been doing there."

"You don't have to do that. This is a busy time for you, with the campsite opening in July."

"Don't worry about that. You can't do everything yourself! Plus, you've got a son and daughter at home who haven't even started school yet."

Usuki wouldn't take no for an answer.

"When do you think you'll get the appointment for the Planning and Development Department?" he asked.

"Mayor Sakakino told me April."

"Then I should take over Industrial Development before then. The campground is almost finished, and I don't have to do the rest of the work here myself, but I do have to handle the yuzu stuff."

Fujita was silent.

"Fighting that dam's going to be a tough job. Go easy on yourself."

Fujita nodded in thanks.

"No one at the village hall can do the work you do, Kentaro. Everyone from the mayor to the rookies leans on you. But industrial development? That's something I can handle. You watch. I'm not kidding—I'll make Kito yuzu the top in Japan."

Usuki looked out at the scenery again. The babbling stream hinted at the coming end of the long winter. Fujita stood beside him, leaning against the railing of the suspension bridge. The landscape spread before them felt so close, yet so far away. The

green foothills cradled the winding stream like outstretched palms, and from beyond the mountains came the unceasing breath of the Earth. The rainbow of pebbles dotting the shallow riverbed looked as brightly colored as if the two men were holding them in their hands. The white spray frothing against the rocks seemed a celebration of the righteousness of the young. Minogawa Camp Village was reached via a mazelike network of forest paths; it was small, but the landscape was as perfect and intricate as a miniature garden.

"What do you think, Kentaro? I found a good spot, didn't I? We've got log cabins and a cookhouse and this bridge. Since the budget is so small, the staff and I built it all by hand. I say we've done such a good job, even Tokiko won't be able to complain. 'Hurry up and build a nature camp so the kids in Kito can be proud of their hometown,' she says. I'm no match for that woman and her obsession with education."

Fujita nodded, smiling. Making the most of Kito's abundant natural beauty by building a campsite had long been a dream of his. At some point, Tokiko had come to share that dream. They'd spent many an evening excitedly looking over plans he'd drawn up. Her eyes would sparkle as he described his childhood in the mountains, so different from her own upbringing in the town of Wajiki. He would tell her about finishing up his work cutting grass, his young hands covered in blisters, and then following a butterfly he'd never seen before to a natural spring in the woods, or sheltering from the rain beneath a huge tree with a mother deer and her doe, or the secret stream so thick with *amago* trout he could catch them with his bare hands. How delicious they had been, grilled over charcoal! The campsite had succeeded in recreating that same sense of the gentleness hidden in the depths of nature's harshness.

Kreeeerererere . . .

A black kite soared across the blue sky, heralding spring with its cry.

"It's a paradise on Earth," Usuki murmured. "That perfect harmony of trees and light and water . . . it makes me feel like this world doesn't need humans."

Usuki's words struck a chord deep in Fujita's chest.

"They talk about the oil shock on TV and how the high prices will affect Japan. It really exposes human arrogance for what it is."

"That it does."

Fujita's voice was tinged with self-reproach. Human beings, creatures so weak they likely couldn't survive a single winter without fire, had taken the power of fire for themselves. They consumed fuel greedily, fought for influence, and sought wealth and pleasure. The cost was the destruction of nature's harmony.

Today villagers had no need to go to the mountains to cut wood. They could warm their homes with kerosene stoves and boil water or cook rice in a matter of minutes on gas ranges. Above all, cars and heavy machinery had freed the village from its isolation. In less than thirty years during the Showa era, they had gained immeasurable convenience.

Even in a remote mountain village like Kito, the present seemed like a dream compared to the harsh life of the past. Fujita, too, bore the burden of the human ego, which would not let him go back to that old life. From the perspective of nature, he was without question an unwanted presence. He wished he could apologize humbly to the creatures of the forests, river, and sky who had been hounded to the verge of extinction and robbed of the balance in their web of life. He wanted to restore the ruined mountains to the way they once were. He *had* to restore them. If he couldn't do that, at the very least he had to stop the Hosogouchi Dam. To achieve that, the village needed money. No matter what, it needed money.

"I'm certain the human race will pay the price for what we've done to nature," Fujita said. "I might be able to accept that if the ones who did the harm were the ones who paid, but what keeps me up at night is the thought of the toll on generations who haven't even been born yet. That's always how it goes in this absurd human society of ours."

He paused, then continued.

"Mr. Usuki, I . . . I . . ."

"What?"

"I want to be firewood."

"Firewood?"

Fujita nodded.

"Passion is the one saving grace of human beings. The only thing we've got that other animals don't is the energy that comes from burning the firewood in our hearts."

"You wrote that a long time ago in one of your essays, didn't you?" Usuki asked. "Maybe you're right. People burn up their lives and disappear. That's it. We tell ourselves we've got control over nature, but in the end nature's logic always wins. No matter how much knowledge we have, we're only chasing after nature."

At the edge of the stream flowing swiftly with snowmelt, mountain hares darted back and forth between the woods and the water. The soft calls of a Kajika frog, unchanged from the calls Fujita had heard as a boy, floated up to them from the riverbank in dialogue with the sound of rushing water.

The balance of nature is disappearing before our eyes, and we have a responsibility to preserve it for future generations.

If there's anything inside me I can burn, that's it. That conviction.

Fujita took a deep breath, dislodging the ball of heat rising in his chest.

"Mr. Usuki, I'm leaving the Industrial Development Department and the yuzu in your hands. I want to devote my life to protecting nature, even if I'm no more than a single piece of wood in that righteous fire. That's how I want to use this life of mine."

3.

A year passed. The Fruit Study Group still basked in the glow of the Asahi Agriculture Prize. Kito yuzu was the top in Japan, both in reputation and reality. On reflection, Fujita felt that his dreams of peaceful coexistence between people and nature were coming true one by one. To achieve his final dream of freeing the village from its reliance on the proposed dam, he was now devoting himself to generating employment opportunities for Kito's residents and restoring the mountain ecosystem. He'd earned the nickname Director Boar for charging from place to place, working harder than anyone else at the village hall. He always held three or four different titles: Director of Dam Affairs, Director of Planning and Development, Director of General Affairs, Director of Forestry. . .

After years of studies, on-site tours, persistent requests, and negotiations, he eventually succeeded in bringing eight companies to the village. He even founded a business himself with three other investors. There was a sewing factory that did contract work for apparel companies, another factory that assembled electronics, and another that manufactured high-end disposable chopsticks using cedar remnants. They were all small compared to the massive factories in cities, but villagers eager to create a more stable life for their children were grateful for the work. The factories operated briskly with a willing workforce, on par with the construction companies that were steadily multiplying at the same time.

As Fujita sought a means of restoring the abandoned forests and promoting local industry at the same time, he explored livestock raising and dairy production as possible options. He sent letters to distant farmers asking for advice and studied the techniques on his own. Some villagers laughed at the idea, saying "Cattle in Kito?" or "That's crazy!" Some of the landowners he approached about leasing land refused to even talk to him, saying a village employee who wouldn't take a clear position on the dam

couldn't be trusted. But Fujita didn't let what people said or did bother him. Instead, he envisioned the revitalization of the village and the recovery and protection of its mountains and river. Those were the images that fueled him.

As he researched afforestation in his role as director of the forestry department, he discovered that most land couldn't handle more than a thousand cedar trees per hectare. If you planted at the absurd density of three thousand trees per hectare, it was only logical to expect harmful effects. In order to spread this information, he launched a "Thousand-Tree Forest" initiative for villagers and held forestry workshops to teach them the importance of thinning and other methods to increase the value of their timber.

In 1983, Sakakino fell ill and a new mayor took over. Sakakino had guided Kito's rudder through the stormy seas of the Showa era for twenty-two years, including his time as deputy mayor. When he left office, he told Fujita, "I'd never have been able to carry on this long as mayor without you here at the village hall. Thank you. I leave Kito in your hands."

The following year, Prince Takamatsu awarded Sogawa a medal of honor for his contributions to Japanese agriculture as president of the Fruit Study Club.

"This is all thanks to you, Ken!" the ever-excitable Sogawa exclaimed. "Half of this medal belongs to you!" His eyes brimmed with tears. "I'll write a book one day. I'll write a book so everyone knows that you're the unsung hero of this story!"

Fujita would have been just as happy if no one knew. All he wanted was for the village to remain a place where everyone could live a happy life. For even a few more people to find healing in its nature, its yuzu and wild mountain vegetables and river fish . . . and for people to recognize the value of all these things, so rare in the modern world.

By 1983, Kito's population had shrunk from its 1967 peak of over 4,000 to just 2,200. The average number of children per family had fallen from four to three, and since the number of households hadn't increased, that alone meant a population decline. Meanwhile, young people were leaving to continue their education or find work. Considering that their parents were still working themselves and probably didn't want to tie their children to the family business, it was clear that the problem had no simple answer. Assuming that the population would continue to decline and age, the only remaining hope lay in developing primary industries that relied more on the power of nature than of humans.

One day, as Fujita devoured information in search of a solution to this conundrum, he came across an article in an agricultural magazine that seemed just what he was looking for. The article was about gingko cultivation, potentially the next yuzu

for Kito. Like yuzu, gingko trees are extremely vigorous, and according to the article they thrived in soil suited to Japanese cedars. Techniques had already been developed to enable harvest within five years of planting, market demand was considerable and could quite likely be expanded, and, most importantly, the edible seeds were highly profitable. Planting deciduous gingko trees sounded like the perfect way to heal the forests while producing a commercial crop.

Fujita immediately contacted the magazine's editor and sent a letter to the gingko farmers profiled in the article. Just like the Kito Fruit Study Group's members had always done, the leading producers in Fukuoka Prefecture responded with detailed advice motivated not by hope of profit but by human kindness. Fujita attended several workshops in Fukuoka, turning the initial hunch that had struck him almost like a revelation into a solid understanding of the crop. Kito's farmers would be able to use the same distribution routes they'd developed for yuzu, and, crucially, they would be able to protect Kito's forests. Of course, they couldn't start at a scale sufficient to heal the damage from the cedar plantations, but they had to take the first step, however small, if they intended to get anywhere.

After all, the nationally famous Kito yuzu had begun with just a thousand seedlings. Not only had that figure swelled to a hundred thousand, yuzu was now a specialty product across Tokushima and a firmly established part of Japanese food culture. All of this had been achieved through persistent effort and unshakable, single-minded determination.

We're Kito. We can do it again . . . this time with gingko!

Fujita started up a Gingko Study Group, and together with others interested in the crop—Sakakino among them—he began working on his new initiative. They all agreed that if they were going to spend their lives in mountainous Kito, they couldn't just sit around wringing their hands about the forestry slump and the dam.

When the typhoon recovery was complete, the governor of Tokushima Prefecture visited Kito to seek cooperation on the Hosogouchi Dam. News of the impending visit suggested that the project was about to start up again, but it seemed that he was only testing the waters after Sakakino's resignation; with the village government still opposed to the dam, the future remained unclear. Nevertheless, a large-scale project under the direct control of the central government was unlikely to vanish of its own accord. Even as yuzu revitalized the community, the peaceful lives of the villagers remained under threat.

In that context, the idea of turning gingko into a new regional product brought the hope of broadened horizons—at least for the several dozen farmers in the Gingko

Study Group, who understood Fujita's holistic view of natural ecosystems. Because more than half were also yuzu farmers belonging to the Fruit Study Group, work progressed quickly. They purchased seedlings and shared their new dreams at cultivation workshops and meetings.

They didn't want to endure the terror and sorrow of landslides any more. They refused to give up the clear waters of the Nakagawa river. If nutrients returned to the lifeless soil, maybe they would once again be able to pick abundant harvests of bracken and Asian royal fern fiddleheads in the mountains. How wonderful it would be to laze beneath the lush green leaves of the gingko trees in spring and revel in their colors come fall! As winter approached, the brilliant gingko leaves and the fruit of the yuzu trees would gleam in the sunlight. The mere vision of this golden village was enough to take their breath away.

4.

At the end of the Showa era, by popular demand from those involved in the yuzu industry throughout Japan, Kito hosted a National Yuzu Summit. It was a huge event, with the village of just over two thousand people hosting five hundred guests for two days. Not long after the summit successfully wrapped up, the Heisei era began. Nearly twenty years had passed since the Ministry of Construction first informed Kito of the Hosogouchi Dam Project.

Dams had been a pillar of the central government's public works program since World War II. While some of the dams built across Japan in the early years of the "economic miracle" did benefit local economies through flood prevention, water management, and tourism, more of them caused harm, and opposition campaigns frequently arose when new sites were proposed. Laws had already been amended to require the agreement of local residents before a dam could be constructed.

In Kito, a resolution rejecting the government's request to conduct a construction survey for the dam was adopted, albeit by a single-vote margin, and this anti-construction resolution was used to justify the rejection of repeated follow-up requests. This irritated the cities, towns, and commercial and industrial organizations downstream on the Nakagawa river that hoped to reap economic benefits from the Hosogouchi Dam Project. Overwhelmed with clashing opinions and hoping to break the twenty-year deadlock, Tokushima's prefectural government appointed its vice governor to direct the Dam Promotion Headquarters in 1990, just as the bubble economy was bursting.

The historic financial crash dealt a heavy blow to many industries, and the prefectural government had little choice but to hope for an infusion of funds for the Hosogouchi Dam. As a result, it set about attempting to win Kito's approval for the project by offering money for parks, development of new agricultural land, and other infrastructure projects unrelated to the dam. But Kito would not budge, and pressure on the prefecture grew fierce as downstream municipalities and business entities ran out of patience. The prefecture began to adopt more forceful attempts to break down resistance. It held periodic explanatory meetings about the dam for Kito's residents but kept them secret from the village government, entertained those living in planned inundation zones at public expense, and built a monorail needed for construction surveys on the proposed site.

Fujita knew the prefectural employees were public servants just like him, doubtless being squeezed from both above and below. However, their pushy strategy naturally inflamed the emotions of Kito's residents, throwing the village into chaos after a long period of placidity.

"We must resist this tyrannical policy that ignores our anti-dam resolution!"

"What are you saying? This is the path our government has chosen and we need to respect that!"

A fierce antagonism developed between the pro- and anti-dam factions of the village assembly. Needless to say, community activists ramped up their campaigns as well. Some circulated petitions, or pushed to recall all assembly members who would not stick to their campaign promises about the dam. The village felt more like a war zone every day.

When the typhoon devastated the village over a decade earlier, six construction companies had been established to handle the recovery, and then other public works projects. Today these companies employed one in three village residents. Members of the pro-dam and anti-dam factions all had their own lives and families to protect and their own view of what was best for the village. As Fujita watched the strength of those convictions steadily erode people's ability to accept the views of those on the other side of the debate, he was pierced by an almost physically painful sadness. These were people who had once smiled and chatted when they saw each other, danced and sang together, and helped one another through difficult times. They had walked through life as companions.

So why do we have to fight among ourselves now?

The situation crescendoed at the beginning of 1993 when the mayor abruptly disappeared. The event was unprecedented in Kito's history. The mayor at the time had

been a mild-mannered man, well known for his many achievements in the field of education, but the increasingly complex conflict and disorder in the village assembly and intensifying citizen activism must have become unbearable to him. He had abandoned his post midterm and left town.

What on Earth will happen to this place?

If Tokushima Prefecture as a whole were taken into consideration, an overwhelming proportion of the population supported the Hosogouchi Dam Project. With Kito's village government the only opposition, the chance that the project could be defeated was slim. But one man saw the need for action, and took it. Fujita called him "the elder." He was an influential figure, and the one who had originally recognized Fujita's talent and headhunted him for a job at the village hall.

As a mountain-dweller, "the elder" knew the dangers of the dam project well. Half-confined to his sickbed, he made it his last duty in life to call his youngest brother back to Kito from the town where he was working a white-collar job and convince him to run for mayor. Barely two weeks had passed since the previous mayor had disappeared. The new anti-dam candidate ran on a platform of cancelling the project, and with the pro-dam party unable to put forth a candidate at all, he won an uncontested election on April 18, 1993. It was a fateful crossroads for Kito, and for Fujita.

"Ken, won't you have a cup of tea?"

At the sound of Tokiko's voice, Fujita strode out of the yuzu orchard in front of their house and over to the garden bench. Taking off his straw hat and wiping his sweat with a hand towel, he took the cup of iced tea that Tokiko had poured for him and wet his parched throat. It was a brilliant blue morning. The midsummer sun illuminated the green yuzu fruits hanging heavy on the branches, and on the mountainside behind the house were three hundred young gingko trees that were coming along nicely. Although the fields nearest the house were now planted with yuzu instead of rice, the deeply peaceful, reassuring feeling he got from being in them hadn't changed at all since he was a child.

"It's so beautiful," Tokiko said suddenly. "How wonderful it will be if the people of Kito can live in peace growing yuzu and gingko!"

"Yes," Fujita replied. His wife's voice had a strange power to transport him through time and space. He sensed within her something very similar to this view from his garden bench of the deeply familiar countryside.

They had been married twenty-five years, he realized. Despite the hardship and sorrow they had gone through together, her voice was as clear as ever, and her bearing

still like a narcissus, as if she had forgotten to age. He was filled with gratitude that his foolish young love, the love that had made him want her for his wife no matter what, had not, in fact, been foolish at all.

Tokiko was the fourth daughter in a family of seven siblings, and although she said she'd given her five older brothers and sisters plenty of trouble growing up—eespecially Usuki—she doted on her youngest sister Tsuyako. After she finally granted Fujita's repeated appeals to marry him, he often invited Tsuyako to festivals and events. Tokiko had no relatives in the village except Usuki, and for all that Usuki was Fujita's close friend and brother-in-law, as the oldest brother in his family, he would eventually have to return to Wajiki. Tokiko needed someone to lean on, and Fujita wanted to make sure she would be cared for if something were to happen to him. His wish was finally granted when Tsuyako married Satoshi Kabuta, a close friend of Fujita's from the Kito Youth Association. To Fujita's eye, Tokiko looked far more at ease now that her beloved sister was a resident of the same village. But instead of merely clinging to Tokiko, Tsuyako made an unexpected contribution to the village: She became the first employee of the chopstick factory Fujita helped bring to Kito.

The wedding of Kentaro and Tokiko Fujita

Satoshi worked for a forestry company maintaining the health of the mountains, and helped Fujita manage his farm on the side.

"Kito people are kindhearted. They have their opinions, but they understand the other side, too. I'm sure no one is one hundred percent for or against the dam. Anyway, no war lasts forever . . ."

A day didn't pass without Fujita wishing he could find a way to settle the issue peaceably. He was certain everyone in the village must feel the same way deep down, but . . .

"Did the new mayor really ask you to be his deputy, Ken?" Tokiko asked anxiously. "I heard about it from Hiroshi . . . and it scares me."

The rumor she'd heard was true. Hisashi Kushida, the new mayor who had taken office that spring, had been Fujita's junior in elementary and junior high school. He'd left Kito to continue his education, moved to one of the most developed towns in the area, and spent an active career in the labor union of Japan's largest telecommunications company. Given that he belonged to the same family as "the elder," Fujita suspected he was a sharp man with nerves of steel. Immediately after taking office, Kushida had set about issuing shrewd orders to lay the groundwork for stopping the dam, displaying an autocratic tendency unseen in past mayors but also a tenacious ability to lead.

This mayor just may have what it takes to stop the dam, Fujita thought. Kushida emanated an almost coercive confidence.

Right after taking office, the mayor sought a deputy to assist him in the offensive and defensive war against the central government. His first choice was Usuki, who was a legend at the village hall. But Usuki, who had reached retirement age just before the mayoral election and left to grow yuzu at his ancestral home in Wajiki, declined Kushida's invitation to return. At the time, he called up Fujita to talk about it.

"This dam has to be stopped, but I can't work for that new mayor. It's not about whether I like the guy or not—our ideas about work are just too different. Even in the heat of the moment, it doesn't sound good to tell people you didn't take the job of mayor because you wanted it," he'd said.

Many of Fujita's coworkers at the village hall felt the same uneasiness as Usuki. But "the elder" had a different opinion.

"I convinced my brother to run for mayor by telling him that Kito would be done for if its leader wasn't focused solely on stopping the dam. The central government and the prefecture plan to force their way through while the villagers are squabbling among themselves. That's obvious. Right now, we've got to fight that dam no matter what the cost. So take the deputy job and help him. No one else will."

He had a point.

Tokiko looked down, fiddling with her apron.

"You'll be able to retire in two more years. You've given your all to this village for decades—you've done more than your share. Now I feel like it might all go up in flames at the last minute," she said.

"I'm sorry." Fujita placed his hand over Tokiko's. "Kito has never been in a mess this bad before. I've got to do something."

". . . Two years," Tokiko said softly. "Promise me that two years from now, when you've reached retirement age, you'll retire. You can find someone to take your place as deputy mayor. No one in the whole world can take your place in my life, or the children's."

Fujita nodded, but to himself he added silently that, for their family, no village in the whole world could take the place of Kito.

"That's a promise, then. In two years, you'll quit your job at the village hall and we'll live a quiet life together growing yuzu and gingko."

A quiet life.

For years, he had been breathlessly chasing the dream of pulling his village out of poverty without spoiling the peace that nature offered—of creating a community where everyone could be happy. If they would only agree meekly to the dam, they would receive a vast amount of money from the central government. He had known that for twenty years. Even though neither the studies nor the construction work had advanced one bit, the government continued to allocate hundreds of millions of yen for the dam every year. He had no idea where that money went.

Slowly, over the course of many years, the simple, pure character of the villagers was being crushed beneath a silent pressure. They no longer talked eagerly about positive topics like yuzu and gingko cultivation or their children's education. Rumors about compensation and lifetime preferential treatment for those in the planned inundation zone nurtured envy and antipathy, fracturing relationships and tearing apart relatives, even siblings.

This is what happens when huge sums of money are involved.

Rumors flew about this person or that claiming to oppose the dam in public but supporting it in private. No one knew who or what to believe. Fujita feared that the community would end up too tormented by uncertainty and wounded by malice to ever wipe the slate clean, let alone create a better village together.

Privately, he agreed with the “the elder”: Now was the time to oppose the dam, no matter what the cost. Tsuyako and Satoshi would look out for Tokiko. He had no other choice.

Honest men are never rewarded for their honesty, but constantly suffer in this world of

contradictions and falsehoods.

Oh, how great was the gulf between society as I imagined it from the school bench and

as it exists in reality!

For me, the chasm was too wide.

At sixteen, I entered the working world believing what I'd learned in social studies class.

Shocked by the harsh, bitter reality of daily life, I wept in disgust and despair.

Have I achieved anything for the benefit of society, for the benefit of the world?

No, I have done nothing.

This ineffectual and powerless man has been swept along in the muddy current of society,

struggling simply to breathe.

—From "The end of my drifter's life," by Kentaro Fujita (age 22), *Yamakai* vol. 1, 1957

The world

Ch. 2　A general and his horse

1.

On September 1, 1993, Fujita stepped down as head of most of the departments he'd been leading and took on the role of deputy mayor—which is to say, chief advisor to the village. Because of the nature of his new job, he retained just one of his old positions as well: Director of Dam Affairs.

Mayor Kushida, who excelled at negotiating organizational struggles, moved with even greater energy and speed than Fujita had expected. He instructed Fujita to bring together the various anti-dam citizen's groups, with their different goals and perspectives, and to collect signatures on an anti-dam petition from at least three-fourths of the village population. In mid-September, with those two achievements in hand, Kushida sidestepped the prefectural government standing in his way and barged straight into the Ministry of Construction in Tokyo, where he lobbied the minister himself to cancel the dam project. Then, when Tokushima elected a new governor at the end of the month, Kushida immediately arranged for a top-level talk with him in mid-November.

He headed next to the Ministry of Finance and demanded that no funds be allocated to the Hosogouchi Dam the following year. He attended a local electioneering party held by leading members of the Liberal Democratic Party, which that year had lost the national election to an opposition party for the first time since its inception, and appealed to party president Yohei Kono and politician Shizuka Kamei for their support.

Resentment over dams simmered in hundreds of places throughout the country, but for the mayor of a remote mountain village of less than two thousand to challenge the central government directly was unheard of. Kushida's bold opening moves began to attract media attention just as major newspapers were starting to give front-page coverage to "the dam problem."

"As long as I'm mayor, this dam will not be built."

The mayor had lived outside Kito for many years, but he came from a bona fide mountain family. He was fiercely critical of the government's river policy and deeply knowledgeable about the destruction of nature. There was no question that he was a promising leader for a community torn apart by the dam proposal. However, working alongside him, Fujita worried that the captain was steering such a dramatic course that the rough waves would take a toll on everyone aboard.

At the beginning of the following year, 1994, Kushida instructed Fujita to write up an official document laying out the mayor's conditions for a public meeting with prefectural officials, which they had agreed to hold during top-level talks the previous fall. The village was willing to discuss the matter with the prefecture, but only if the prefecture accepted the mayor's list of conditions—an aggressive demand.

The conditions were as follows: close the Dam Construction Office that had been built in the village, remove the dam project from top of the prefecture's wish list, agree not to negotiate directly with landholders without the village government's permission, and begin repairs on national highways within the planned inundation zone. Fujita was in charge of all business related to this document, and could not help feeling uneasy about what its creation and release to the media would mean. He feared the mayor's chosen weapon was simply too blunt.

Kito's villagers had let out a collective sigh of relief when the mayor initially arranged the public meeting with the prefecture. It had felt like a step toward dialogue. The anti-dam faction wanted a detailed, rational discussion with the prefecture, covering every issue related to the dam, but the mayor's list of conditions could easily be interpreted as a declaration of war and a rejection of dialogue altogether. It carried a substantial risk of making the prefecture harden its position. However, the mayor would not listen to Fujita's warnings.

"You think we'll win this fight by chumming around with the prefecture?" he retorted, insisting on his strike-fast-and-win strategy.

At the end of January, as a lead-up to the public meeting, newspapers around the country published the mayor's list of conditions, along with an interview in which he said he wanted to collaborate with other communities suffering from dam and tidal-weir projects with the goal of expanding the anti-dam movement.

That was the moment when Fujita understood the mayor's strategy. He wanted to mobilize the media to launch a movement critical of the government. Fujita didn't know at this early stage whether that strategy would be effective, but his premonition that the prefecture would not bear its public beating in silence turned out to be correct. On top of postponing the meeting for six months, the prefecture withdrew its former agreement to freeze the dam project and announced that preparations for construction would continue.

When the first public meeting finally took place, the governor rejected all of the mayor's conditions and insisted that Hosogouchi Dam was indispensable to the wellbeing of the prefecture's citizens. In a marked change, his attitude was now severe

and uncompromising. He also announced plans to circumvent the obstructionist village government and negotiate directly with those living in the planned inundation zone.

Naturally, the mayor was indignant. He pressed the governor to reverse his statement, calling it a threat to democracy. However, the following month, the prefecture and Ministry of Construction held an explanatory meeting for residents of the inundation zone and published large ads in five newspapers promoting Hosogouchi Dam. The goal was clearly to give the mayor a taste of his own medicine. The feud was on.

Although Mayor Kushida's anti-dam movement was gaining support across Japan, Fujita could no longer envision how the conflict might come to an end. What he feared more than anything was pressure on Kito's finances. The prefectural and national governments were propped up by the copious dam budget; a drawn-out battle with Kito would not harm them one bit. On the other hand, Kito was reeling from the blow of Japan's bubble economy bursting. Sales of fresh yuzu—the core of the local industry—had plummeted, and the other factories in town, which had been operating smoothly up till that point, were shutting down one after the next as subcontracting orders evaporated.

The only companies still hanging on, if only barely, were the handful of locally run construction firms that had been contracting with the prefecture on public works projects since the disaster recovery. Fujita wasn't sure if the prefectural government knew that a third of the households in Kito depended on these firms for work, but its next move was to cancel previously accepted public-works bids in an apparent show of power.

"What the hell is this? You're trying to make an example of me?"

Furious, Kushida burst into the prefectural office and protested vehemently. Although the councilor in charge of public works promised to reopen the projects for bids, the mayor did not escape the ire of the enraged villagers.

"If this is the cost, I'd rather take the dam!"

"How are we supposed to feed our families?"

"The cowards! They're trying to starve us into submission. We can't let them get away with that!"

"You're right! Save the mountains! Save the river! No to the dam!"

When the second public meeting was held not long afterward, villagers lined the streets around the venue with flags reading "No dam!" Protestors with kerchiefs tied around their foreheads, a traditional symbol of defiance, gathered outside, shouting and chanting at the governor and other high-level prefectural staff.

The prefectural officials were angry. “How are we supposed to have a proper discussion in the middle of this uproar?” they demanded. Fujita’s only option was to try to convince the villagers to quiet down.

“Please, take off your kerchiefs. This is an important opportunity. Let’s all calm down and listen to what they have to say.”

“You’re supposed to be deputy mayor! Whose side are you on?”

“Are you trying to control us?”

No, not at all . . .

In the end, the second public meeting was even more antagonistic than the first. The two sides failed to reach an agreement, and the governor later announced that he would cancel the third meeting that had been planned. From then on, the prefecture and village advanced their respective pro- and anti-dam positions separately, and the national media looked on as the Hosogouchi Dam grew ever more mired in mud.

2.

There are two kinds of people: those who are drawn to the strong, and those who are drawn to the weak. Fujita had always belonged to the latter group. He wasn’t trying to present himself as a savior, but he was aware of this tendency in himself. And it wasn’t because he was strong, like everyone thought. Keen awareness of his own weakness was what made him sympathize so deeply with the struggles of the powerless and almost reflexively act to help them. He did everything he could think of to overcome this habit, but still inevitably felt that he hadn’t done enough. Perhaps because his family had for generations served as leaders in their hamlet, neighbors frequently came to him for advice about personal problems. He always did his utmost to be of service to them.

“Kentaro, I lost my part-time job at the factory, and the children are so young . . . Do you think you could help me find another job?”

“I’ve always counted on my old lady, but her illness has gotten worse. She can’t keep up with the yuzu anymore, and our children are living in the city. I don’t know what to do.”

These stories pained Fujita, and so he would visit companies asking if they would hire his neighbor, or call on members of the Fruit Study Group to help the elderly couple with their orchard.

The hamlet of Nishiu, where Fujita lived, was the location for the proposed dam. Fujita’s own home and fields were included in the site. Four kilometers of national

highway running by the hamlet had been disqualified for disaster recovery work. The prefecture argued it was a waste of money to fix roads in a district that would soon be at the bottom of a dam lake. In the meantime, however, the narrow one-line highway was plagued by accidents, and Fujita offered up some of his land at no cost to solve the problem. He had truly spent his life trying to improve the lives of his fellow villagers.

When it came to the battle over the dam, however, all he could do was listen silently to their opinions. Because his neighbors were eligible for large amounts of government compensation, all eyes were on them, and no one believed them when they said they opposed the dam. They were exhausted. Now the people who called him at home each night were not only seeking help; more and more, they were airing grievances. “Isn’t it your job as deputy to keep the mayor from going too far?” they would say, or “If things are going to be this tough, I’d rather take the government money and get out of here.” Fujita never stopped wanting to do everything he could for the village, but the villagers were cooling toward him day by day, and his friendships were growing strained.

Not long after the talks between the village and the prefecture broke off, Tokiko took early retirement from her longstanding job educating Kito’s young children.

“The deputy and his wife both work for the village, so even with the economy going down the tubes they’ve got plenty of cash. That’s why they can stand by and watch us suffer without batting an eyelash.”

This was the kind of criticism that had made Tokiko decide to quit her job. When Fujita heard this from Yukiko, his chest burned.

“Tokiko said she had to protect your honor,” Yukio said. “She couldn’t stop crying . . .”

Tokiko never mentioned it to him directly. When they were together every morning and evening, she acted as cheerful as ever. After retiring, she gathered her fellow teachers and members of the youth club and took on a new role leading volunteer activities. She talked about opening a “school of the mountains, river, and sky” in Kito where children from all over Japan could discover the joy of playing outside in nature. This was the antithesis of destructive government policy and, of course, her way of protesting the dam, but when she publicly joined the anti-dam movement, people said she was only doing it because she had so much time on her hands. On the other hand, if she did nothing, she was criticized for that as well.

“The anti-dam movement may be necessary, but the town is filling up with protest signs and flags. Children are so sensitive to how adults feel . . . I don’t want this to be all they remember about this place. This is exactly the sort of situation where the

beauty and fun of nature can do the most good. It's frustrating that I can't help you more directly, but I'm determined to do what I can."

I know, Tokiko.

You've always been there for me. What a wonderful thing marriage is, and family.

"Mom, how's Kito doing? Is everything okay?"

Sometimes their second son Yasushi would call from Nagoya, where he lived. Tokiko would hand Fujita the phone, and he would reply, the corners of his mouth tightening.

"Don't worry about the village right now, worry about yourself. Are you eating okay?"

Yasushi had started a company in the growing cellular phone industry while he was still a university student in Nagoya. After graduating this spring, he'd chosen the rocky path of continuing to run that company instead of getting a job with a large firm.

"I'm fine. There's a million things I don't know, but I'm working hard. I'm determined to come home to Kito a success. Save me a spot, okay?"

Yasushi kept up a positive tone on the phone, but Fujita couldn't help wondering how badly the cutthroat post-bubble economy was pummeling him.

There was another person who called now and then.

"Kentaro, are you sure you're not taking on too much again?"

It was Usuki, calling from his home in Wajiki like he did every time the mayor of Kito showed up in a newspaper article.

"That mayor may know how to pick a fight, but he hasn't done a thing aside from opposing the dam. He's an amateur when it comes to government. It's obvious he's making you do all the heavy lifting."

"Doesn't bother me. Whoever can do the work has got to do it."

Those were Fujita's genuine feelings, and he had no other response. He wasn't working for the mayor. He wasn't working for any particular person, for that matter. He was working for future generations who would know nothing of this moment in time. Few realized how terrifying things could get when humans threatened nature. But there was no question in his mind that, if the dam was built, the problem would no longer be Kito's alone.

He could not permit human beings to destroy the environment any more than they already had.

Around that time, some relatives came to Usuki's home in Wajiki for a gathering. As his brother-in-law, Fujita was among them. He found Usuki and his eldest son Hideyuki deep in conversation.

"I looked into it as well, and it seems that 9-1-1 is by far the best of the improved varieties."

"You're the expert, Dad. If you say so, then I'm convinced. That one grows easily and works for all sorts of processing. I'm sure it'll be a smash hit and surprise everyone."

"No doubt it will. It smells so different from the existing varieties, you'd think it was a different plant entirely. But what else would you expect from the best ag tech organization in Japan?"

When Fujita asked what "9-1-1" was, they told him it was the research ID number of an improved soybean variety developed at a newly opened integrated research institute for domestic agricultural technology in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture.

Hideyuki had found work in the city of Tokushima after graduating, but after a few years, he, too, had started his own company. He and Yasushi had grown up hearing their fathers arguing over things like markets and profitability rates, and Fujita and Usuki joked that this might be why their sons had gravitated toward the business world, unlike typical bureaucrat's sons.

Usuki's younger son had earned a name for himself during university both inside and outside of Tokushima as a master of kendo. He eventually reaching the seventh dan rank—almost the highest possible. After attending a college of physical education, he had returned to Kito to teach kendo at the junior high school. Fujita's daughter Kazumi, on the other hand, was frail and meek by nature, but she was also a thoughtful, kind woman who loved the familiar natural setting of the village more than anything in the world and always had a smile on her face. What the children of both men shared was a deep desire to do something for their hometown.

Hideyuki told Fujita that business at the commercial bakery he'd opened in central Tokushima was starting to take off.

"We might be able to help revive the economy in Kito, too," he said.

When Fujita asked what his idea was, he got a surprising answer.

"Cookies made from *okara*?"

Okara is the soybean pulp leftover from making tofu, and Fujita knew that tofu makers spent quite a bit of money disposing of it. According to Hideyuki, however, the pulp was so nutritious it was a pity to waste it, and he'd been experimenting with using it to make cookies and other sweets. Hideyuki was executive director of the company,

but his business partner and company president was a close friend who had previously run a tofu company. That was how they'd come up with this innovative idea.

"I've never heard of *okara* cookies before," Fujita said.

"Right? We're the first to do it. Back when I was cutting my teeth in the food industry, I saw a health-food boom coming. And now it's here," Hideyuki replied.

Of course, he added, the product's current success was the result of intensive marketing efforts. The tasty, low-calorie, high-nutrient cookies were a perfect match for the ongoing dieting fad, which was why so many stores were placing orders. The company had recently built a new factory in the prefecture and was expanding production.

"The health-food boom is just beginning. According to the big distributors, trends in Europe and the US suggest that this market still has plenty of room to expand. It's here to stay. All the big distributors—Mitsubishi, Kokubu, Yukijirushi—they all willingly signed up to sell our cookies. We've got the same vision as them."

"Wow, you're working with the top companies. That's impressive. I can tell you've put a lot of sincerity and hard work into this, Hide."

"You've got to be sincere in business."

Hideyuki's calm, dignified tone and expression put Fujita in mind of a clear, swift, strong mountain stream.

"*Okara* really is one of nature's gifts. I didn't feel right about people throwing away something that could be eaten. Japan is a wealthy country, globally speaking, but the downside is that people have become much more careless about food. This whole project started with my old-fashioned belief that we've got to reclaim the Japanese tradition of valuing what we have." Hideyuki smiled. "What I want to suggest, Uncle Ken, is that maybe this business can help Kito's economy recover, too."

The new variety of soybean, 9-1-1, that Hideyuki and his father had been discussing earlier yielded especially good value-added products. It didn't have the unpleasant vegetal smell most soybeans do, which made it a good fit for cookies and other sweets. It also looked like a promising candidate for developing new products like soymilk and soy ice cream, neither of which were common in Japan at the time.

"My idea is to grow the 9-1-1 beans in Kito, use them to make low-calorie soymilk, and then use the leftover pulp in healthy cookies."

"Great idea!" Fujita said, slapping his knee.

As diets became more diverse, Japan was facing an oversupply of rice, and more and more of Kito's paddies were lying fallow. Hideyuki was suggesting that everything from growing the soybeans to making the products could be done in the village. To

Fujita, who was struggling to improve Kito's financial situation, it seemed like the perfect solution.

He had high hopes for gingko production too, both as a way to protect the mountains and as an income source. Unfortunately, several years after planting the trees, he had discovered that the dealer who sold the village its seedlings had cheated them by sending only male trees, which don't bear seeds. As a result, they'd had to start over from zero. Soybeans were different: Farmers could plant them right away in fallow paddies, and the plants would bear in one season. The villagers were desperately worried about how they'd get through the economic downturn, and with the dam conflict dragging on, Fujita knew it was essential to take immediate action toward financial recovery.

He wasted no time in visiting Hideyuki's company in the Mima district of Tokushima Prefecture. As well as meeting company executives, he toured the newly built factory, which proudly displayed a sign reading "Japan Healthic Inc." Hideyuki's partner and company president Muneoka was extremely knowledgeable about soybeans due to his past experience running a tofu company. He told Fujita that he had the utmost confidence in the company's primary product, *okara* cake, which they had spent several years developing.

The company's managing director was a former employee of a regional credit bank, and he had arranged the financing for the new factory.

"I fell in love with their concept and their passion, so I quit the bank to join up. I'm as eager as they are to make this company a success."

The managing director gave Fujita an amiable smile, then eased into the main topic with the smoothness of a veteran moneylender.

"Of course our goal is to expand the business, and our prospects are good. But the manufacturing process is our intellectual property, so we can't share it outside the company. That means our only real choice is to build more factories that we run directly, but since we just got a loan to build this one, we can't very well do that right now. However, if the village of Kito is willing to become a partner in our business, there's another option."

He was proposing a public-private partnership. If the village government and Japan Healthic jointly invested in a new entity that then partnered with Japan Healthic, the joint venture would have access to proprietary production techniques, and could become an independent corporation operating autonomously in the future.

"Of course, we assume that Kito would aim to become independent eventually. Usuki often talks about what a wonderful village Kito is and how the community

overcame hardship by growing yuzu. I believe that if we work together, we can help each other succeed."

A public-private partnership. Interesting.

Hope bubbled up inside Fujita. Maybe one day, this new industry could be integrated with yuzu or gingko production. He couldn't have asked for better.

3.

In addition to serving as deputy mayor and director of the Office of Dam Affairs, Fujita resumed his former role directing the Planning and Development Department. He was busy from morning to night with these duties as well as preparations for launching the public-private partnership. This was a battle to end the bigger battle, even more demanding than the direct conflicts he'd been embroiled in recently.

He barely had time to pause for breath for most of 1994. One day, toward the end of the year, the mayor approached him.

"Some prefectural officials are coming to the village hall to meet with me today, but I'm not going to see them. I want you to handle the situation."

According to Kushida, the officials were going to deliver a plan to support industry in Kito.

"I can guess what's in it. Use the dam lake for tourism, rent out boats, build a shopping center. They've been ignoring our requests to fix the highway for years, and here they come with some pie-in-the-sky plan. You won't see me bowing down to them in gratitude."

The mayor and prefecture were still endlessly trading blows. Kushida continued to reject the dam project and speak out through the media against the central government's river policy. This caused quite a bit of trouble for the prefecture, which fought back with a pro-dam ad campaign. When a new Minister of Construction took office, the mayor immediately went to lobby him to cancel the dam project; a week later, the governor of Tokushima lobbied to push the project ahead. The Minister, however, refused to get involved, telling both parties to talk it out between themselves. The biggest player in the whole drama was escaping to the balcony to watch the fight.

"Listen, Fujita. No matter what those prefectural officials say to you, do not accept their report. We'll come up with our own recovery strategy, one that's based in reality. When will the plan for the public-private partnership be ready?"

Fujita had been staying up late to put together an estimate of operating costs. After many in-depth conversations with Japan Healthic, the numbers had finally started

to feel real. However, when he set about trying to find farmers willing to grow soybeans for the factory, he discovered that not many wanted to work with the village on a new project. He told the mayor he had run into trouble.

"Well, get it done as fast as you can," the mayor replied. "I plan to introduce the anti-dam ordinance before the end of the year."

With that, the mayor walked off.

For the past several months, Kushida had been working with Kito's administrative scrivener on a new ordinance. The Osaka Bar Association, a group he'd gotten to know through anti-dam activism, had advised him to write it. Local governments have the power to autonomously create ordinances, which are like laws for the residents of that village, town, or city. Because ordinances are part of the right to self-government and the constitution prohibits the central government from intervening in their establishment, local governments can legally reject dams by passing ordinances that block their construction or protect the environment. In other words, an ordinance would elevate the village government's opposition to the Hosogouchi Dam Project to the level of law, allowing Kito to counter pressure from the central and prefectural government by claiming they were violating the constitution.

With the ministry taking a wait-and-see approach, the ordinance just might put a stop to the reckless and melodramatic game of cat-and-mouse between the village and the prefecture. Such was the faint hope in Fujita's heart as he received the visiting prefectural officials that day.

"Deputy, I know you're saying you can't accept this report, but I'm begging you, just take it. I can't go back to my office unless you take it. Please."

The official was clearly disconcerted by Fujita's rejection of the report.

He's just following orders from above, and yet he has to beg me . . .

The people sent to the front lines are never the ones who want to fight. How long is the central government going to keep making them do this?

The mayor's new strategy might offer a way out. Shortly after the prefecture officials visited, the village assembly held its last meeting of the year and adopted the anti-dam ordinance. It was the first of its kind in Japan, and the news was splashed across headlines through the New Year. The mayor was flooded with interview requests.

"Kito will not be tempted by the temporary economic benefits of the dam. We will choose the slow and steady path of preserving our beautiful natural environment. In the United States, which leads the world in environmental awareness, the utter idiocy of building dams is already common knowledge."

As he continued to implement his anti-dam battle plan, the mayor received ever more media exposure. Requests for newspaper columns and speeches poured in. Some observers compared the little mountain village confronting the gargantuan central government to an ant fighting an elephant. The internet was just catching on at that time, and news of Kito's dam conflict began to spread there, as well.

At the same time, however, distrust of the mayor was growing among Kito's residents. He was launching a kind of revolution by taking the anti-dam movement national and calling for a re-evaluation of the government's entire river policy. This was all part of his strategy, but as the stern of the ship unexpectedly swerved off its usual course, some passengers grew seasick, others shrieked in shock, and still others were thrown overboard. The prefecture reduced its public works expenditures for Kito to a mere 10 million yen per year, less than a sixth of what other villages received. It was a devastating blow to Kito's construction industry, the only sector that had managed to stay its course through the crash.

"This is happening because the mayor went against the prefectural and national governments! What's his plan now?"

"The mayor is a hero in the world's eyes. Meanwhile, we're all unemployed!"

It was obvious to everyone that the mayor was concerned only with outside affairs and had no interest in building relationships within the village. Every night, Fujita's phone rang off the hook with calls from angry, dissatisfied villagers. He took their brutally honest opinions and jeers in silence, then went back to reviewing departmental data, worrying about the village's finances in the recession, thanking his subordinates for their work, staying up late at his desk finishing paperwork, and skipping sleep to work on the public-private partnership plan.

The actual responsibility of running the village government fell entirely on Fujita, but he suppressed his emotions and continued to shoulder the burden. If this was the weight he had to carry to protect his hometown and its natural environment, then carry it he would. He knew that since the mayor had taken his job solely to prevent the dam from being built, his own burden would most likely only grow heavier.

The proposal for a public-private enterprise that Fujita had felt so hopeful about was repeatedly rejected by the village assembly. No matter how many times he put it forward for consideration, it fell victim to the body's resistance to new initiatives. As for the mayor, now that he had enacted the new anti-dam ordinance, he had to prove to the prefectural and national government that Kito had another way to promote industry.

Increasingly anxious to get Fujita's proposal passed, the mayor began pressing him to make Japan Healthic accept Kito's conditions for the deal.

"The assembly won't be satisfied until you do, and nothing can get moving until the proposal passes the assembly. You've got relatives at the top of the company, right? Can't you push our demands a little harder?"

Perhaps because they knew Fujita was in a tough spot, Hideyuki and the other executives at Japan Healthic conceded as much as they could to the village demands. In the end, a new business entity was formed with Japan Healthic instead of Kito as the main actor, which was quite different from what the company had originally envisioned. The mayor assumed the title of president, while Japan Healthic president Muneoka became, in effect, its CEO, and Hideyuki and the managing director became board members, so that for the time being, Japan Healthic was forced to concentrate its energy on the partnership. The new entity was required by a binding agreement to report on business matters to the village assembly and receive its approval for all new initiatives. On top of that, Japan Healthic bore full responsibility for sharing its technical knowledge and educating employees. The business plan had morphed into one that vastly favored the village.

The village loaned money from the Village Development Fund to start up the new business, but Fujioka was pained to see Hideyuki and Muneoka paying more than they could afford out of their own pockets for the startup, as well. Muneoka expressed his hesitancy to Fujita directly, suggesting they reorganize the unbalanced partnership.

"I'm sorry this has become such a monetary and emotional burden on you," Fujita said.

"If this is what we have to do to make it work, then that's just how it is," Muneoka said. "Once the company is up and running, I'm sure we'll all settle into our roles. Let's give this everything we've got."

Muneoka sounded upbeat, as if eager to leave any bad feelings behind. Japan Healthic had been recognized as one of the most outstanding startups in Tokushima Prefecture, and he may have started to feel a sense of mission about forging the future of his home prefecture. Plus, he had known Hideyuki for many years, and his friend's intensity had finally worn him down.

"He's constantly saying 'for Kito, for Kito.' I've never met anyone who cares that much about his hometown, not even you. It must be a really special place," Muneoka said with a smile, ending on a conciliatory note.

The new public-private partnership was finally approved by the village assembly. Called Kito Healthic Corporation, it was the central pillar in the plan to

render Kito financially independent of the dam. The negotiations had taken an entire year.

Fujita was still shouldering a huge amount of work, with no end in sight. Instead of keeping his promise to Tokiko to quit when he reached retirement age, he continued his mission, unknown to anyone but himself, to confront the crisis of environmental destruction. Adding Vice President of Kito Healthic to his existing titles of Deputy Mayor, Director of Planning and Development, and Director of Dam Affairs, he remained so busy he hardly noticed the passing of day into night or spring into summer, let alone the fact that he was being smothered by his work. It was 1996, the sixty-first summer of his life. It was to be his last.

The clouds move, the clouds move, above the valley of autumn leaves
The clouds move, casting shadows over the *ayu* as they swim downriver after spawning.

He forgets everything as he listens to the river's flow, watches the frothing white foam, plays at chasing the beautiful fish. Even his dull mind begins to move smoothly.
The smallest things embarrass him twice as much as they do anyone else.
And when the smallest things drive him to unbearable rage, he rebels.
Rebellion, for him, is silence.
He closes his eyes as if rebelling against the deep blue autumn sky.
This clear stream, this beautiful gorge, even these *ayu* are under the assault of civilization.
He wonders if, some years from now, the Nakagawa river will vanish.
The thought makes him unbearably angry, and he is unable to break through his own silence.

—From, "A Strange Man," by Kentaro Fujita (age 24), in *Yamanami*, 1959

Minagawa Camp Village

Ch. 3 Choosing love and death

1.

The early morning sky was so blue it took Fujita's breath away. The yuzu leaves had gathered mist overnight and now shed glistening droplets onto the earth below, offering up their morning greeting. He rose from the garden bench as if a beloved child were calling to him and began to putter around the orchard. It was a fruiting year, and the yuzu were coming along well. "You've worked hard," he murmured as he walked from tree to tree, wiping the mist off the densely packed green orbs with a cotton towel.

Yuzu trees only bear every other year, and the previous year there had been little harvest. Up on the hillside behind the house, the gingko trees were thriving as well. He and Tokiko had tended them carefully, cutting the weeds around their trunks, and now healthy, translucent yellow-green leaves grew thick on the branches. Perhaps they would give their first crop this year.

He could hardly believe that ten years had passed since he had founded the Gingko Study Group and bought seedlings from the dealer in Kyushu, not realizing as he and his fellow members lovingly nurtured them that they'd been sent male plants that would never bear seeds. The others had been angry, accusing him of being too gullible, but later he'd heard that the dealer had skipped town, up to his ears in debt and no doubt suffering horribly from the economic downturn. Fujita remembered him as a simple man who had carefully instructed him how to care for the trees. He hoped he was living a peaceful life somewhere now that the scandal had died down.

"When you left your mother's womb, I think you must have forgotten to bring the emotion of anger with you," Tokiko had once teased him, but she was wrong. Anger constantly simmered in the depths of his chest. He simply did not unleash it on other people. From the age of sixteen, when he first experienced exploitation of the working class and truly understood the structure of capitalist society, up until the present day, he had seen the discrimination, prejudice, deception, and ruthless competition for resources in society. But when he thought about why people did these things, lashing out ceased to feel meaningful. He had become a simple man tossed between the waves of joy and sorrow.

He could endlessly ponder why he had ended up like this, but in his many interactions with other people in the village, these two emotions seemed to be the only ones they ever shared. Why was it that whenever he recalled the overflowing joy of past

years, it always seemed to transform into sorrow? Saddened, he resolved not to think about the past until fall. In three months, he would be able to share the joy of the beautiful golden yuzu and ginkgo trees with his family. He was determined that Kito Healthic would be running smoothly by then. And so the long battle of another day began, as the factory approached its planned completion date of October 23.

The Kito Healthic factory required a fairly large plot of land, which meant that, during lease negotiations, a refusal from just one of the several landowners whose property the factory would span meant a new location had to be chosen. Multiple detailed studies and discussions were also needed to ensure that contracts for the factory were fairly divided among the several construction companies in Kito.

"Mr. Fujita, you're vice president of the company, so I understand your enthusiasm. But I'm not going to lease my land. You might as well give up."

"You village officials deprived our construction company of public works contracts from the prefecture, so you'd better guarantee a decent profit from this project."

Not only did the Kito Healthic project entail mountains of paperwork, but with every step Fujita faced attacks on every front. It truly was a battlefield. With the mayor taking the public stage as an anti-dam crusader, Kito appeared to outsiders as a brave challenger standing up to the central government, but the truth was very different. In fact, the anti-dam faction of the ten-member village assembly barely outnumbered the pro-dam faction.

For the pro-dam members, who found themselves unable to break down the mayor even by joining forces with prefectural officials, Fujita was like the proverbial horse on whose back the general galloped across the battlefield. "If you want to shoot the general, first shoot his horse," the saying goes, and so they did, showering Fujita with ever more arrows as he drew closer to his goal. Having devoted his working life to village governance, Fujita was hardly one to complain about having to report to the village assembly on Kito Healthic's every move or ask permission for each new initiative. Whenever he did so, however, the assembly members' comments were closer to attacks than critiques. Every interaction felt like a criminal interrogation.

If village governance has degenerated to this point, how in the world can we get back to normal . . . ?

"I hear one of the pro-dam assembly members has been saying they'll stake their spot on the assembly on destroying Kito Healthic," the mayor warned him. "Be careful. You don't know where they'll try to trip you up."

Fujita didn't know if the rumor was true or not, but he did know that the opposition to Kito Healthic, which was the main anti-dam project, had grown more determined than he'd ever before experienced.

"I hear one of the assembly members has been bragging he'll get 300 million yen if the dam is approved."

"There's a rumor going round that the construction industry is bribing the governor, too."

I hear this, I hear that. Whether the rumors were fact or fiction, Fujita felt only sadness when he heard them. This village with its pure water and clean air and abundant nature, this village to whose governance he had devoted so much slow, steady, sincere work—when, and why, had it begun to stagnate in such an ugly way?

Those around him stood back and watched, wondering how the deputy mayor would handle this minefield. Aside from allocating some routine paperwork to a few devoted staff, Fujita handled all of the substantive work, organization, negotiations, record-keeping, brainstorming, and even the drawing up of contracts.

"Seems the deputy isn't satisfied unless he does everything himself."

Fujita heard these rumors, too. The truth was, rather than pulling more unwilling victims into the quagmire, he felt it was nobler to carry the load on his own. He knew he was going beyond the boundaries of his role as Deputy Mayor and Director of Dam Affairs. When the mayor went to lobby a politician, Fujita stayed up all night writing the petition. He drew up everything from press releases to notifications, filled in for the mayor in receiving any guests that wouldn't lead to media exposure, gathered and organized materials to counter the arguments of the assembly, and much more.

In the midst of all this, he somehow managed to lease land for the Kito Healthic factory and negotiate construction contracts. In early June, construction finally began. As he weighed in with the electrical company on where to move the utility poles and procured machinery for making soymilk, *okara* cakes, and soy ice cream, he felt briefly revitalized. The people he talked to spoke calmly of business and nothing more. The mere fact that they neither demanded anything from him nor attacked him made him feel as if he were in a different universe.

In early August, when a journalist from the Tokyo office of the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper who had been reporting on the village for the past two years visited again for another series of articles, Fujita had a similar feeling. When he arrived at the topic of Kito Healthic during his explanation of the situation in the village, the reporter looked deeply impressed.

“How interesting! What a wonderful strategy for reviving the economy! I’m so relieved to hear you’ve found such an ideal way forward.”

Even if the reporter was only being polite, Fujita realized how desperate he was for this type of reaction. In the village, however, opposition to Kito Healthic heightened as the opening day approached. His attempts to hire factory employees vividly reflected the situation. The business plan called for Muneoka and Hideyuki to spearhead operations during the early stages, with two office staff and nineteen workers on the production line to ensure a low-stress, successful startup. Fujita devoted much time and care to coming up with the job requirements and hiring-exam questions. However, when he finally began recruiting, barely anyone applied. The age limit for applicants was set at fifty-five, and the positions included social insurance and retirement benefits. It should have been clear that the project was intended to help the village. Yet Kito Healthic had been sucked into the maelstrom of village politics, leaving ordinary residents feeling unable to become involved with the company, regardless of whether they were pro- or anti-dam. Even the mayor, who had become president of Kito Healthic after making a dam-free economic recovery part of his ordinance, could not hide his anxiety.

“You’d better fill the vacancies fast or we’ll be in trouble. I’ve got to speak in front of a thousand people next week. You’ve written me a good speech holding up Kito Healthic as an example of economic recovery without dam money—I can’t very well say everything’s gone rotten. People here trust you more than they do me, so I’m sure you can do something, right? I’m counting on you.”

Fujita dug up new data on employment in the village and started calling housewives who weren’t working. He also sent letters to young people who had left the village, inviting them to return for a job at the factory. But it was no good. He was bombarded with angry phone calls at home.

“No way I’ll let my wife get mixed up in some harebrained scheme from village hall! Don’t call us again!”

“Mr. Deputy, I hear you’re spending village money to build a factory for your relatives. I’ll bet you can guess what the rest of us think about that. My wife doesn’t want anything to do with it, so leave her alone!”

Fujita’s every move drew snarls and attacks. He was hounded by a strange anxiety, as if the whole village had turned on him. He began to worry that perhaps he had made a huge mistake. Was he doing the wrong thing after all?

“Why don’t we pitch a feature on Kito Healthic to the news desk?” the Asahi journalist innocently asked Fujita one day.

"I don't think that's a good idea . . ." Fujita replied reluctantly.

"Why not?"

"Things aren't going so well right now."

"They're not? What's the matter?" the journalist asked, sounding perplexed.

"Our job posting hasn't gotten many applications, so we don't have enough staff."

"That's odd. I thought the villagers wanted this factory. Oh, well—I'm sure things will fall into place soon."

"One would think so," Fujita said with a wry smile. The sense of something deeply off lingered. To him, that mysterious "something" felt like a terrifying evil spirit. He exhaled softly, cold sweat trickling down his back.

Even if Fujita knew the planned dam was responsible for shattering Kito's peaceful harmony, he couldn't fix it unless he figured out what, precisely, had been shattered. The situation reminded him of a fruit tree whose roots were rotting in the soil. If things went on like this, the leaves, branches, and trunk would all wither before his very eyes.

2.

Over the next month, Fujita carried out a second round of recruiting for Kito Healthic. By the end of August, he managed to hire twenty employees, meeting his original goal. He had posted the job notice through the public employment security office in a nearby city to avoid any potential problems; candidates took a written employment test followed by in-person interviews by company executives.

However, no sooner had Kito Healthic reached the required staffing level than an unsettling incident occurred. The phone rang at Fujita's house early in the morning, as if the caller intended to deny him even a moment's peace.

"You've really done it now."

It was a member of the Kito village assembly. The voice clutched Fujita's heart, making his whole body seize up with foreboding.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't play innocent. You poached workers from Inoue Sewing for Kito Healthic!"

Fujita was caught completely unawares.

"You know what you did, Deputy. Kito begged Inoue Sewing to come here. We owe them gratitude for keeping our people in work all these years. Now you go and

steal their key employees, the technicians who keep that factory running? Mr. Inoue says it'll send the place under! Mark my words, you'll pay for this!"

Before the blood finished draining from Fujita's face, he received a second call along the same lines, accusing him of poaching two female workers from the sewing factory.

It couldn't be. There had to be a misunderstanding.

Fujita could sense his daughter Kazumi, who was eating breakfast before heading to work, stare anxiously at him, chopsticks stopped in midair. She worked at another of the sewing factories that Fujita had brought to Kito in the late Showa years.

I invited Inoue Sewing here ten years ago myself, and Mr. Inoue has told me how much he values my sincerity. I wouldn't betray him! I'd never poach his workers!

"Kentaro, what's the matter? Did something happen?" asked Tokiko, who was waiting for him at the table.

"Sorry," he said. "It's nothing." He unplugged the phone from the wall and moved it to his study on the second floor. Something told him the incident wasn't over.

On the desk in his office were two envelopes containing job offers that he'd written at dawn, just before going to bed. He noticed that they were addressed in his own hand to the women whose names he had just heard over the phone. He recalled the women saying they had experience working at a sewing factory. They claimed to have left their jobs amicably . . . but he hadn't properly checked their stories.

I've been too busy. I'm not myself.

No, this situation goes far beyond that.

I can struggle all I want, but I won't escape this one.

I've been shot through the heart.

The decision he made at that moment came very naturally. He felt calm, as if watching himself from outside.

He finished getting ready for work and started down the stairs. Tokiko was standing at the bottom looking up at him.

"Tokiko?"

With every step he took toward her, her eyes grew redder and welled fuller with tears.

"If the phone rings on the second floor, don't answer. Tell Mom and Kazumi, too."

"I'm used to the harassment," she said. "That's not a problem. It's you I'm worried about."

"I'm fine. I always am."

"Please just quit. If you work for the mayor any longer, something's going to happen to you."

"Don't worry about me. I've got to help this village."

He must have said the same words to her hundreds, even thousands of times, but marriage is an odd thing.

I wonder if she senses what I plan to do.

Those tearful eyes of hers must see the arrow piercing my heart.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs, she ran her shaking hands over his chest again and again.

That day, the president of Inoue Sewing came to lodge his complaint with the village hall.

"Aren't you people supposed to be looking out for my factory?!"

His story matched what the village assembly members had said on the phone that morning. Two employees had been poached, which left the factory unable to operate. He was demanding compensation. The company was headquartered in a nearby town closer to the city, so running the factory in Kito really was a gesture of goodwill. Fujita apologized profusely, but to no avail.

"If you won't offer compensation, then at least make my factory a public-private partnership like Kito Healthic."

A demand like that was clearly impossible for the village to meet. Fujita explained the situation to the mayor, who snapped back at him angrily.

"That's outrageous! So if we don't pay up, he'll close the factory and throw thirty villagers out of work unless we make it a public-private enterprise? I'll bet my bottom dollar one of those pro-dam assembly members is behind this. Go tell him it's not our fault his employees came to us. We absolutely will not pay him compensation!"

That was likely the only response the village could make if it wanted to protect itself. Still, they couldn't very well ignore the fact that two of Inoue's employees had quit, halting operations at his factory. Fujita knew it wasn't an ideal solution, but instead of mailing the job offers he'd written up, he asked the two women to withdraw their resignations from Inoue Sewing. However, they insisted they wanted to work at Kito Healthic because the benefits and pay were better. Evening after evening he went to their homes and humbly begged their cooperation, but they stood firm. The hard work Fujita had put into making Kito Healthic an appealing place to work was backfiring.

Meanwhile, a steady stream of enraged assembly members visited the village hall. The clock was ticking on the Kito Healthic project, as well, with the factory under

construction. But whenever people heard about Fujita attending a meeting related to the factory, they criticized him harshly.

"Your nepotism when it comes to Healthic is the cause of all our problems!"

"You call it village development, but we don't need some shady company that's all show and no go!"

They also called his house incessantly.

Fujita wasn't trying to shirk responsibility. He didn't believe apologizing could make up for his failure to properly check the job applicants' claims. Nor did he intend to make excuses. There was no point asking whether his accusers were behaving humanely. They were not trying to bring down Kentaro Fujita, human being; they were aiming at the horse the anti-dam mayor was riding.

"You make fine speeches about how the factory will employ young people, but show me a young person in this village! And right off the bat you're stealing employees!"

"You fooled the assembly, you fooled the people, and you made a fool of a company we're indebted to. Now it's closing. Under your leadership, Healthic hired twenty people and put another thirty out of work!"

No matter how hard he tried to answer in good faith, he knew all they heard was the braying of a horse.

But . . .

Letting them tear him down from his post as deputy would do absolutely nothing to improve or change the situation. His ultimate responsibility was not to the assembly members.

My mission is to prevent the construction of Hosogouchi Dam from destroying any more of the natural environment.

The ideal we should be striving for is a human society that exists in harmony with all of creation—a truly golden village.

That is what the eternal mountains, rivers, and sky have always told us to do.

This heartbreaking, futile civil war must end . . . !

Three days after the outbreak of the poaching scandal, the president of Sugino Industries, who ran another sewing factory in Kito, came to the village hall to lodge his own complaint.

"It is absolutely unacceptable for the village to prioritize its own enterprise to the point of poaching employees from another company. Mr. Inoue is right to be outraged. You ought to take his request to form a public-private partnership seriously."

Fujita explained that he had not, in fact, poached any employees.

"I see," Sugino responded, tilting his head in puzzlement. "Then the story I heard was quite distorted."

According to Sugino, Inoue had invited him over to tell him what happened—and village assembly members had been present to corroborate the story.

"'The deputy this,' 'The deputy that' . . . They couldn't stop attacking you. Knowing what kind of man you are, I wondered why the most earnest person in Kito had lost his mind. I feel better knowing the truth, but this can't go on. Please try to resolve it as soon as you can."

He was right—Fujita had to somehow patch up the damage. After several more days of apologizing and negotiating, Fujita managed to convince one of the women from Inoue Sewing to withdraw her resignation and return to her old job. He visited or called Inoue every day to apologize and explain that she was returning. Eventually, Inoue seemed to calm down. However, he did not reverse his decision to close the factory. If a public-private partnership was impossible, he said, he wanted Fujita to arrange a merger with one of the other sewing companies. However, most of the companies in Kito had already pulled out due to the economic downturn. Only Sugino's factory and one other were left, and neither was of a scale that would make a merger easy. Nevertheless, because Inoue had finally agreed to compromise, Fujita wanted to find a positive resolution. He pitched the idea to Sugino, who said he'd have to take a look at Inoue Sewing's finances but would do what he could to help.

No sooner had this glimmer of hope appeared on the horizon than three pro-dam assembly members submitted a request to form a special panel to investigate the Kito Healthic employment issue. This move came on September 3, and the establishment of the panel would force Kito Healthic to delay its October launch. Until the assembly settled the twin issues of Inoue Sewing's poached employees and its threatened factory closure, progress on the Healthic project would be impossible. Meanwhile, interest payments and contractor bills would continue to pile up with no income flowing in to pay them.

"I'll bet that was their goal all along," the mayor said disgustedly. "They're trying to squash our anti-dam strategy by setting up a panel to drag out the investigation forever, but hell if I'll let them. I'll push back with everything I've got. I'm not even going to open that request they sent to convene a special meeting of the assembly!"

As the mayor said, it would be unwise to allow the assembly to open an inquisition under the name of a "special panel" so close to the launch of Kito Healthic.

However, rejecting the request to convene a meeting for discussion would obviously only enflame the assembly members further.

I don't mind bearing the brunt of the attack, Fujita thought. According to Sugino, however, Inoue resented being dragged into Kito's civil war. His factory in Kito wasn't even the core of his business; like Sugino, his private residence and company headquarters were in a different town. Fujita suspected the real reason he was shutting it down was the same reason the other local factories had done so: the economic downturn. If one of the pro-dam assembly members had suggested he demand a public-private partnership or merger, the timing must have seemed perfect to him.

Still, I'm the one who invited Inoue to open a factory here, and I know how much he's helped out the village over the years. If he's determined to close the factory, then the least I can do is act in good faith to help him.

Fujita convinced the mayor to swiftly help Inoue with his merger plan as well as to convene a special meeting of the assembly a week later, with the aim of forestalling the investigative panel. Hideyuki, Muneoka, and everyone else involved in Japan Healthic had scaled a mountain over the past year for the sake of the public-private partnership, but now the poaching scandal was shaking the project to its core. Muneoka in particular shrank from the uproar, and Hideyuki seemed to be acting as go-between to coax him along. Fujita was determined not to cause anyone who was helping Kito any more trouble.

His first priority was making sure Inoue Sewing was on track for an orderly exit from the village before the special assembly meeting on September 9. The financial documents Inoue sent him showed a deficit of twenty million yen. When Sugino saw them, he sighed and shook his head.

"I want to help Mr. Inoue, but I can't take on this much debt. Please tell him the merger won't work."

Fujita accepted the bad news but asked if Sugino could help in any other way. After much discussion, Sugino offered to hire all of Inoue's employees.

"But I can't afford to expand the factory to accommodate thirty new workers. The best I can offer is for them to work at home."

Even that was an enormous help. After the negotiations began, Inoue stopped mentioning compensation and public-private partnerships and instead returned to a businesslike focus on practical details.

"What will I do with the thirty sewing machines after we close? Can you see if Sugino or the workers will buy them?"

Since Fujita couldn't very well let Inoue set the price for the machines, he convinced him to accept a depreciated value. He hurried to the chamber of commerce to find out how much the machines normally sold for, working desperately to close the deal. All the while, he was dizzyingly busy representing the mayor, meeting with Muneoka and the others to prepare Kito Healthic's launch, attending a prefectural meeting on forest management and a district meeting on yuzu production, and performing his other duties. When he got home there were angry calls from assembly members to deal with and documents to draw up for the special assembly on the ninth.

Tokiko constantly reminded him he needed to eat and sleep more, but even when he laid down, sleep would not come, and he had no appetite. He only drank his miso soup to give the appearance of eating. His body no longer needed those things. He didn't know how many days remained before he would carry out his earlier decision, but he knew he must do all he possibly could to lay the groundwork for Kito Healthic in whatever time did remain.

Sugino readily agreed to buy the thirty sewing machines and lend them to the thirty new workers to use at home, because that was "what made sense for the business." Fujita managed to advance the plan that far by the day before the special meeting of the assembly. He stayed up all night finishing a timeline of events, then headed to the meeting.

As he'd expected, the proceedings consisted entirely of bitter attacks from the three pro-dam assembly members. It was a merciless kangaroo court bent on denouncing the deputy mayor. Rejecting the very premise that an economic recovery plan was needed to free the village from dependence on the dam, they went back a year to dissect the public-private partnership, the alleged poaching of employees, and the planned closure of Inoue Sewing.

"Looks to me like you stole those employees because all you care about is your own company."

"Once you got our approval, the company was yours and the mayor's to run as you pleased. You poached the employees you wanted, and now you think you can use village money to do whatever else you like!"

"If Kito Healthic is such a great business, why don't you two run it on your own? Just you and the mayor. It'll be profitable and young people will come back to work there—isn't that what you said? What do you need Kito's name on it for?"

"Sugino Industries may be coming to the rescue, but that doesn't erase your role in this scandal. Make up for what you've done in a way that satisfies *us*. Oh, you can't? That's why we're calling for an investigatory panel!"

In the end, the pro-dam faction had no interest whatsoever in the proof Fujita tried to offer of his integrity in advancing the anti-dam initiative. The moment he opened his mouth, they pounced, and the report he'd prepared only gave them more ammunition. Yet even after two hours of abuse and ridicule, the assembly members had not determined whether an investigatory panel was necessary. Instead, they decided to hold another special meeting in ten days.

"Well, at least we managed to fend off the resolution to establish the panel," the mayor said, still looking upset. "Between now and the next meeting, I'm counting on you to talk the three pro-dam members out of it."

If a conversation could have smoothed this over, I'd have done that long ago . . .

3.

The next morning, September 10, Fujita opened the local newspaper and found a prominent article about the previous day's meeting.

> Kito Sewing Factory May Close after Key Workers Leave for Public-Private Partnership
>
> The Kito Village Assembly held a specially meeting on the 9th to discuss recent problems involving Kito Healthic, a cookie manufacturer established as a public-private partnership between the village government and other parties. Assembly members submitted a draft resolution calling for the establishment of a special panel to investigate the matter . . .

Shortly afterward, Fujita received a phone call from Muneoka, who had also read the article.

"Tell me, Mr. Fujita, why has this become such a huge problem? I thought the assembly already approved Kito Healthic. Haven't they already investigated us enough? What do they think we have left to expose? The company's receiving constant phone calls from people with complaints and criticisms. I can't take it anymore."

Fujita promised to meet with Muneoka that night to come up with a plan, but he wasn't confident they would find a solution. He hung up with a heavy heart.

He had tried to avoid causing Muneoka and his colleagues any more trouble, but instead, things had ended up like this. His only possible salvation was the fact that talks

on the closure of Inoue Sewing were one step beyond what the assembly was aware of, and the outcome was not as bad as it could have been. He called Sugino to confirm once more that he planned to hire all the workers who lost their jobs and buy the thirty sewing machines.

"Yes, just as we agreed," Sugino said. "I don't go back on my word."

Next, Fujita got in his car and sped to Inoue's office to reconfirm the plan with him and go over various details.

"Looks like my only option is to settle the deal on those conditions. I've got to close that Kito factory as fast as I can and get my company back on its feet. The rest is in your hands. Please take care of it as quickly as possible."

Fujita agreed that was the best plan, then headed out to his car. He planned to return to Kito and start implementing the deal right away. As he got in, however, he saw a man enter Inoue's office.

He looks an awful lot like that pro-dam assembly member. Could he be trying to undermine me?

The instant that thought occurred to him, a powerful shock ran between his eyes. This was no passive revelation—it was the shock from the decision he, himself, had made.

So this is the end. The time has come.

Just now, I doubted a companion in this life. A companion of a thousand years, whose body runs with the same water from the Nakagawa river and the same sweet fragrance of yuzu as mine. A fellow villager.

A heart that doubts a companion, even for an instant, is fit only to fatten the evil spirit.

I will put an end to it now.

That is the final piece of firewood I can throw onto the righteous fire.

That night, Fujita received a phone call from Inoue.

"The deal with Sugino Industries is off!" he raged. His sounded like an entirely different man from the one Fujita had met with several hours earlier.

"You've gone and told my workers that when the factory closes, they'll become home workers for Sugino Industries?" he went on. "What the hell are you doing, telling my employees company secrets before I've had a chance to tell them myself? I'll have nothing more to do with Sugino Industries. From here on out, it's all up to the special panel in your damned village!"

No matter what Fujita said or how much he apologized, Inoue would not change his mind.

I've got a feeling that, from now on, everything will backfire on me like this.

When Fujita went to inform Sugino that Inoue had backed out of the deal and offer his apologies, Sugino patted him warmly on the shoulder.

"If Mr. Inoue says he's no longer interested, there's nothing we can do. But it's not your fault. Don't worry about me. Actually, I'm more worried about you—you look awfully pale. Try to get some rest, alright?"

"Yes," Fujita said. "You're right," He expressed his deep gratitude and took his leave.

When he got home, his daughter Kazumi was making *ayuzushi* for dinner. He realized how worried she must be that he hadn't eaten for the past few days.

"I know *ayuzushi* is your favorite, Dad, so I thought maybe you'd eat some of this."

I've even brought a sad look to the face of my sweet, kind daughter who never stops smiling, he thought. Kazumi was twenty-six, the same age Tokiko had been when she and Fujita met.

He picked up a piece of the sushi, made using rice seasoned with juice squeezed so carefully from each yuzu fruit, and slowly savored it.

"It's delicious," he said, and climbed the stairs to his study.

He remembered so clearly those long nights he struggled through in his teens, shivering with the chill of oppressive solitude. What a blessing it was to have married, had children, and spent these years with his family.

He sensed that the moment he let his mind wander to anything else, a heavy groan would escape his throat. He willed himself to control his shaking hand enough to grip a pen. The haiku that he scribbled almost unconsciously on an opened envelope felt as if it were dictated by his very soul.

My daughter's sushi
This is how my last summer
Comes now to an end

- Ryusei, September 10, 1996

The next morning, Fujita rose before dawn and drove to Inoue's home to speak with him in person in the few minutes before he left for work. Inoue insisted that he had said everything he had to say on the telephone the night before, leaving Fujita without a

straw to cling to. As he left, Fujita told him he was grateful for their many years of acquaintance.

4.

Fujita drove the hour and a half from Inoue's house to his own in Nishiu. As he got out of the car, he noticed that the sky was such a pure blue it seemed about to suck him in. He walked through the yuzu orchard. The mist had just cleared and the trees glittered in the sun as if welcoming him gladly home. "Good to be back," he replied. The trees reminded him of the years he had raced through in a dream, working to make Kito yuzu a specialty product of the village. It felt as if those youthful years had only just ended.

I met my lifelong friend Usuki, I met Tokiko, we made this wonderful family together . . . The reason my life seems to have gone by so quickly must be that I've been so happy.

As he stood in a daze, time and place began to waver.

The current date was pasted onto a corner of his mind, but he thought he should begin by peeling those numbers away. He took a pen from his paper-stuffed bag, then pulled out a random document and wrote down the poem that came to mind, quietly transferring the date pasted onto his consciousness to the top of the paper.

In the human world, shorter is better

- Ryusei, September 11, 1996

It was 9:50 in the morning. When his final poem was written, he took off his wristwatch and put it in the pocket of his suit jacket. From that point on, his ears were filled with a noise like the babbling of a sublime brook, as if his whole self were being subsumed into the landscape of his village, so beautiful to him as he gazed upon it.

. . . So that's what it means.

Now I understand.

This is what they call eternity.

Now that I've peeled the numbers off the world, what remains is eternity itself.

He climbed the stairs to his office and began to write his suicide notes. He did not harbor the slightest grudge or wish to punish anyone. The pro-dam assembly members were doing their duty as representatives of those in the village who favored dam construction. The mayor shouldered the heavy responsibility of winning his quixotic battle against the central government. The villagers, the prefectural staff . . .

everyone involved with the dam was saddled with absurdities that fueled their indignation. He fervently prayed he would be able to absorb all the anger in the village, leaving not a single drop behind when he vanished into the heavens.

Kentaro Fujita's last poem

To the Mayor and Chief Assembly Member Osawa

I am sorry for the trouble this will cause you, but there is no other way.
I take responsibility for everything and pray that all is resolved.

My sincere apologies,
Deputy Mayor Kentaro Fujita

After he finished the note, he lightly closed his eyes. He didn't know how many nights he had gone without sleep, but as moisture spread across his dry eyes, he felt his consciousness slipping away.

When he came to, the weight and pain that had dragged him down of late had vanished. The constant tightness in his head was gone too, along with the creaking of his joints, the lump in his chest that had obstructed his breath, and the heat in his throat. He felt as light as a feather.

Oh, yes, of course I feel light.

I'm floating.

He was looking down on his own form, eyes closed before his final note. The body of the grey-faced, aging man beneath him was pierced by countless arrows on every side, dried blood plastering the wounds.

This body was given to me that I might live in the world, and look how mercilessly I've worn it out. I always hoped I'd be able to wring every drop of life from it like this.

For the first time, he was able to acknowledge his own achievement, if only slightly.

Then a warmth like spring sunshine flowed into the room.

Here they come.

Every last one of the beloved memories he'd so carefully avoided shaking awake, knowing that would turn them to sorrows, advanced toward him. Closer and closer they came, wrapped in brilliant light.

I've got to write the other note before they surround me.

To Tokiko, Kazumi, and Yoshino,

I'm so very sorry, but I must give my life to make amends.
Please forgive me for the trouble this will cause you.

Kentaro

By the time he'd written that much, he could hear the bright voice of a child calling to him from among the crowd of memories drawing ever closer.

"Dad! Dad!"

Oh, it's Yasushi. I haven't heard that young, mischievous voice in years.

"Look, I found frog eggs!"

How he loved to play in the rice paddies until he was covered head to toe in mud!

And there he is, staring out at me happily from that muddy face of his, eyes big as saucers.

"Dad! I won the prefectural championship again! Next month I get to go to the nationals!"

I remember those long teenage years he trained so hard for kendo . . .

Before he knew it, that boy had turned into a sturdy young man. The last time they'd had to spend together was Yasushi's birthday—August 31, a Saturday this year. Yasushi had just launched his company in Nagoya and seemed quite busy, but he'd returned for the weekend all the same, saying he wanted to spend the day with his family. The night before his birthday, Fujita suggested they all go fishing together the next day.

"That's a splendid idea, Kentaro! It's been ages since we did that!" Tokiko said, clapping her hands and smiling from ear to ear.

"Let's make *ishiyaki*!" Kazumi added happily, and set about getting the knife and cutting board ready for the outing. *Ishiyaki* is a traditional Kito dish made by slowly heating a large rock in a campfire and then cooking fish, vegetables, and miso on its surface.

Ahh, the aroma of the food as it cooked, the sounds of my family cheering and laughing and singing, soft as a gentle breeze . . . When I reach the next world, if an angel asks me what the most delicious food down below was, I think I'll tell them it was the ishiyaki I ate that day.

On the morning of Yasushi's birthday, the family left their house before dawn. They were headed for a stream in their hamlet where Fujita often went to ease his mind. They walked down the damp mountain trail, hardly wide enough to call a path, until they reached the stream. Although it was still dark, Fujita could make out the landscape opening up around him.

They stood side by side on rocks by the river and waited for the sun to come up. Little by little, dawn crept across the land, tinting everything an indescribable shade somewhere between ultramarine and purple. As nature emerged from shadow in all her intricate glory, Fujita was struck by the thought that his wife and two children, too, were part of that pure, unified whole. The image inscribed itself deep into his heart.

"Yasushi, this here is a prime *ayu* fishing hole. I've never told anyone else about it."

His son's white teeth glinted in a grin as dawn spread over the mountain behind him. He was twenty-three years old. He gazed at the surface of the water, where the backs of countless *ayu* glistened in the morning light.

I was just a typical rough-hewn dad born before the war, never the type to talk much to my son or teach him through words. Even on that day, knowing it was the last we'd ever spend together in this world, all I could think of were the most commonplace phrases.

But I didn't need to tell him that stream would be submerged beneath the dam lake.

It will be enough if that heavenly beauty is seared into his memory. Enough if he feels something in his own soul and remembers it one day.

Enough if he thinks about what it means that I took him there to show him the ayu.

At the end of the previous year, 1995, the national Board of Audit had announced that 4.3 billion yen had gone toward studies on the Hosogouchi Dam alone. From the total national budget for dam studies, a stunning 85 billion yen had gone up in smoke due to local opposition that stymied construction for nearly twenty years.

Those recommendations from the Board of Audit to the Ministry of Construction strike me as a major turning point for the dam issue. If my hunch is right, this place won't end up at the bottom of a dam lake after all.

I'm not sure when, but one day, we won't have to call this a "planned inundation zone" anymore.

No doubt the mayor's anti-dam movement had something to do with it, but I think the very notion of building dams is about to become a relic of Japan's economic boom.

He had a gut instinct, a conviction rising near to certainty, that grand forces were grinding into motion as the Showa era matured into the Heisei. It made him all the more heartbroken to see his remote mountain village still mired in conflict with itself and with the prefectural government, which ought to have been like a benevolent parent. It seemed only a matter of time before the government fundamentally reconsidered the need for the dam. Fujita had made his decision in hopes, however faint, that it would offer some sort of path toward resolution.

Soon, I'll take my last breath. Forgive me, my son.

He remembered Yasushi dipping his hand in the clear stream and talking to the young *ayu*.

A child of Kito, pure of heart.

Summer insects hopped among the blades of grass at the edge of the stream. He breathed in the scent of the grass, gathered the last of his strength, and brought his pen to the half-finished suicide note before him.

In this new era, the truth about the crises facing our planet will become ever clearer.

Those realities may be inconvenient to society at large, but they hold the answer to why you and I, father and son, were born here in this unique place called Kito.

Keep my thoughts in your heart until you arrive at that answer—for the sake of our country's future.

Yasushi, keep up the good fight.

5.

A little after eleven o'clock on the night of September 11, the phone rang at the Usuki household in Wajiki.

"Hello? Toki, is that you? What's the matter . . . ? What . . . ? No!"

Still holding the receiver, Yukiko shouted for Usuki.

"Hiroshi! Hiroshi!"

"What's all the fuss at this time of night?"

"It's Ken! Ken's killed himself…"

What?

What?! Killed himself?

Usuki grabbed the receiver from Yukiko, who had collapsed on the floor.

"Tokiko, what happened? Oh, Tokiko!"

He couldn't make out her tear-choked words.

"We're coming right away!"

Usuki and Tokiko drove to Kito as fast as they could.

Kentaro!

What have you done . . .

Tokiko cried the entire hour-and-a-half drive.

"Kentaro called me two weeks or so ago. Not to say anything particular. He told me he would always be on my side . . . He must have been calling to say goodbye, after making his decision. It's so hard to believe . . ."

Usuki had heard from his son Hideyuki that the Kito Healthic project had run into serious problems. Although he called often to ask Fujita about it, all the younger man would say is, "It's nothing, I'm fine." After a while, Usuki could only get a busy signal.

"Hiroshi . . . Do you think he drowned himself in the river? To think that patient old Ken, the one who loved Kito more than anyone, would go and do this . . . It's too horrible."

By the time they reached Fujita's house in Nishiu, it was after one in the morning. Six or seven people were gathered outside the shed next to the yuzu orchard.

"Tokiko!" Usuki cried as he ran over to the group.

She looked up at him and choked out something resembling "Hiroshi" before collapsing into a sobbing pile. The villagers quietly stepped back to make a path for him. The mayor was among them.

As Usuki walked between the onlookers, the vision of his nearly unrecognizable friend hanging from the ceiling of the dark shed leapt out at him.

Kentaro—

Kentaro, Kentaro . . . !

"All of you!" Usuki shouted, trembling with anger. "What the hell have you been doing?!"

His roar tore through the stagnant darkness like lightning. The crowd of men shrank back.

"We hurried over when Mrs. Fujita called us around eleven and called the police."

"Since we're so deep in the mountains, they still haven't gotten here."

Don't give me that! How long do you cowards plan to leave him hanging?!

And why?

Why didn't you take him down?

You were fighting alone like this all along, weren't you, Kentaro . . . ?

"Get him down!" Usuki screamed with his entire body and soul.

The villagers leapt into action as if an electric current had run through them, lowering the cold body from the ceiling and laying it on the ground.

Look, Kentaro.

It's the earth of your beloved village.

It's warm, isn't it?

"Mr. Usuki, look at this balance sheet! We've done it. We've finally broken ten thousand yen per yuzu tree!"

"Here in Kito, nature protects us humans, and that's why we've got to protect the mountains and river."

"Mr. Usuki, I'm leaving the yuzu in your hands. I want to devote my life to protecting nature, even if I'm no more than a single piece of wood in that righteous fire. That's how I want to use this life of mine."

Kentaro. You saw it through, didn't you?

I see the look on your face. You burned everything up, and you died satisfied.

I understand.
You always carried the heaviest load, sacrificing yourself.
You were too good a person.
Weren't you, Kentaro?
You were just too kind . . .

"What remains after life ends are not the things we have collected but the things we have given."

Fujita, who loved literature more than almost anything else, had once happily recited that line from a novel to Usuki. It struck a chord with him, he said.

He was an uncommon man, and he remained uncommonly sensitive his entire life, Usuki thought.

In their village of less than two thousand residents, eight hundred mourners flocked to his funeral. The following month, the village also held a lavish public service for him. It was the first time the village had ever honored a departed resident that way. Fujita had kept working past retirement age, sticking to his post of deputy mayor for the sake of the village. If only he'd rejected the second request for him to postpone his retirement, as he had been perfectly entitled to do, he would have been freed of all his duties. Those who gathered for his funeral remembered his gentle smile and mourned the warm spirit that had vanished from among them. They realized, at last, the magnitude of his achievements.

His time of death was recorded as noon on September 11. On that day, he and Tokiko had planned to meet at a relative's house after he finished work. She became worried when he did not arrive and rushed home from Wajiki only to find the note in his office.

I am sorry for the trouble this will cause you, but there is no other way.

After his death, those last words gained a dazzling power. The newspapers covered the incident for days.

"Strained by Village Governance, Kito's Deputy Mayor Commits Suicide"

"Assembly Grilled Deputy Ahead of Public-Private Partnership Launch Next Month"

"Hard Blow for Troubled Village Government"

> On September 12, Kito was reeling from the suicide of Deputy Mayor Fujita. The unexpected suicide of the veteran village employee is expected to have a significant lasting impact on village governance. Residents received the tragic news with complicated emotions . . .
>
> "I won't know what to do without the Deputy Mayor here," said the director of Kito's Industrial Development Department, visibly shocked by the news.
>
> "Deputy Mayor Fujita was our contact point for negotiations. His death will make it difficult to communicate with the village about the dam as well as other issues," the director of Tokushima Prefecture's River Management Department commented...

Among the articles was a series in the Yomiuri Shimbun titled "Repercussions of a Death: Why Did Kito's Deputy Mayor Die?" that recounted in detail the tragedy inflicted on the small village by the dam project.

In December, the central government made an announcement: It had decided to cancel plans for two dams in Fukushima Prefecture and three in Ishikawa Prefecture. Then, in February of the following year, the Minister of Construction made headlines when he suggested at a meeting of the Budget Committee that all planned dams would be reconsidered.

Six months later, in August of 1997, the Ministry of Construction announced that six dam projects would be cancelled, eleven would be suspended, and one—the Hosogouchi Dam Project—would be "temporarily suspended." The wording was only for appearances' sake, however; in reality, the project had been cancelled. Less than a year after Fujita's death, the three-decade battle over the dam was over. This served as a catalyst accelerating the government's audit of all expenditures on public works projects, and one by one the remaining hundred-some dam projects throughout Japan were canceled.

The dominos are falling, Usuki thought. *Just as Fujita predicted, I'll bet. He read the situation quietly, with no fuss whatsoever, then once his perceptive mind had assessed the state of the world, he bet his life on its conclusions.*

You were quite a man, Kentaro. They've probably already crowned you a hero in the next world. Of course, knowing you, I bet you turned it down out of modesty and kept right on worrying about our fate down here on Earth.

“Go ahead and take that crown, Kentaro. You are a hero, and I won’t let anyone say a word to the contrary,” Usuki said with a smile. He stood before Fujita’s grave, having come to tell his old friend the latest news on the dam. Without warning, his smile turned to a flood of tears. He looked down in a daze as they rolled over his cheeks, traversed his chin, and plopped onto the collar of his suit. He missed that shy smile of Fujita’s so much he couldn’t bear it.

Life is a dream.
Hopes, ideals, thoughts, ambitions—all are dreams, no different from the dreams we have while we sleep.
The fact is, there can be no reality in what we call living, for life is a chain made up of past and future.
The future ever becomes the past, vanishing before we even have the chance to call it the present.
But death is not a dream.
Which is to say, death is the true reality—and, I believe, the only absolute one.

Sometimes I think that I would like to suffer a great deal when I die.
To suffer before death.
To cease dreaming and experience the agony of facing nothing but the reality of death.
Until that inevitable final moment of reality, I am sure I will live engrossed in the dream of life.

—From "Ideal and Reality," by Kentaro Fujita (age 23), in *Yamakai* vol. 4, 1958

The sparkle of life (Tokiko Fujita, nursery school teacher, in the center)

Ch. 4 Thinking downstream

1.

After three years of temporary suspension, the Hosogouchi Dam Project was officially cancelled in 2000. In one sense, Kito's steadfast opposition had finally prevailed. The risk of large-scale environmental damage was safely averted. However, the price the village had paid, in the form of its many years of struggle, was enormous. Rather than a victory, it felt more like the huge evil spirit that for so long had occupied the village had finally slunk away. In its wake, it left a gaping emptiness, a local economy in tatters, and a torn web of human relationships. The villagers, now thirty years older, could only pick up the pieces one by one.

The population was shrinking and aging. All of its industries were in decline, not just forestry and agriculture. How could Kito be revitalized? What should the villagers do? Where should they begin?

Starting in the Showa period, Fujita had always been the one to think about those questions and take bold, practical action. His death meant the loss of a leader in the local economy who knew how to create something from nothing. The gingko project that had melded forest restoration with agriculture naturally faded away now that its unifying force was gone. Kito Healthic, the integrated soybean cultivation and cookie manufacturing project to which Fujita had devoted the final years of his life, did open as planned. At the assembly meeting a week after Fujita's suicide, the measure to establish a panel to investigate the alleged scandals linked to the company was voted down; after that, the uproar melted away.

However, even after opening its doors, Kito Healthic steadily unraveled without Fujita there to support it. Public-private partnerships are supposed to offer a win-win solution both for local governments, who often have little commercial experience, and private companies, who gain a stable community foothold. In reality, most enterprises adopting this model in Japan have failed. In most cases, the gap in perceptions and practices between professional and novice businesspeople is simply too large. This was certainly true of Kito Healthic.

For up-and-coming parent company Japan Healthic, working with Kito Healthic was like giving a piggyback ride to a headstrong old man who kept swatting their behind. The executive director of Japan Healthic, Usuki's son Hideyuki, poured his

energy into launching and running the company, both because he wanted to build the economy of his beloved hometown and because he wanted to honor his uncle's final wish. However, the excessive demands of the mayor, Kito Healthic's president, pushed him to his wit's end.

Kito Healthic employees spent two months training at the Japan Healthic factory in Mima. On top of that, Japan Healthic was required to unconditionally provide all of its knowledge about manufacturing soy ice cream and *okara* cookies, take full responsibility for product manufacturing, manage the company's finances, and submit business reports to the village assembly. However, the scandal over employee poaching had drained much of Japan Healthic president Muneoka's enthusiasm for the project.

"For the amount of work we're putting in, a lot of people would expect to be paid," he said.

He was right. But once the project had begun, Japan Healthic's only option was to plough ahead while carrying on its ordinary operations at the same time. The only thing that kept Muneoka and the others going was the belief that Kito Healthic would eventually grow more independent, freeing them from their duties.

The mayor, however, had different expectations. What flummoxed Muneoka and his colleagues most was the mayor's unbending demand that, instead of the two partners working together to market their products, Japan Healthic ought to buy everything that Kito Healthic produced.

"Nothing else will work for Kito," he insisted.

Japan Healthic sold its products through major distributors, but to sell Kito Healthic's output on top of that would mean ramping up sales efforts several-fold.

"Mayor, you can't rely on us for everything. The products are good, so let's work together to develop new markets. Let's try opening a shop in the city for direct sales. We're committed to making our best effort, so won't you work with us on this?"

But the mayor refused to give in.

"Not possible," was his only reply. "We don't have any experience in sales."

The cookies and ice cream piled up. When Japan Healthic prepared to reduce production, the mayor protested.

"If we have less to sell, we won't be able to pay our operating costs or employee salaries," he said. "The assembly will never stand for it if we go into the red. It's absolutely out of the question."

In the end, Japan Healthic was forced to buy Kito Healthic's products while Hideyuki desperately searched for new buyers. Japan Healthic also had to rent a refrigerated warehouse to store what they couldn't sell.

This prompted the mayor to ask, “Why are we overproducing like this? We’ve got to make something else that will sell better.” Without consulting Japan Healthic, he signed a contract with another company to start developing new products.

“This is a disaster,” Hideyuki moaned, frustrated beyond words.

Japan Healthic’s own marketing efforts were achieving steady results. One of its distributors introduced the company to the president of AEON, a national retail chain, who took a liking to the cookies and agreed to carry them. A fast-food restaurant popular with young people contracted with the company to add its products to the menu in an original dessert. Unfortunately, however, running Kito Healthic and buying its products sucked up every last drop of these growing sales and hopes.

In the end, Kito’s village assembly adopted a resolution submitted by the mayor to cut Hideyuki and the other Japan Healthic executives out of Kito Healthic and transition control of the company entirely to the village. Just a year after the public-private partnership was launched in October 1996, it fell apart. Yet the contract for Japan Healthic to buy all of Kito Healthic’s products remained in force, and the ballooning inventory became a burden on Japan Healthic’s finances. Exhausted by the string of problems, Muneoka abruptly vanished, leaving all his responsibilities behind. In 1999, Japan Healthic went bankrupt.

The next year was the year the Hosogouchi Dam Project was cancelled—a major victory for Mayor Kushida. Even so, when he ran for reelection four months later, he failed to gain the confidence of the voters and left the village in defeat. This ironic outcome was not the result of machinations by the anti-dam camp; the villagers had simply expressed their wishes. Similarly, the assembly members who had supported the mayor as an ally in the fight to stop the dam had washed their hands of him now that he had transitioned to endlessly promoting Kito as “the village that stopped the dam.”

The physical landscape of Kito was ravaged by the postwar afforestation policy; its emotional landscape was ravaged by the dam project. Even if Kito’s residents did not mind the harsh natural environment that was the setting of the lifestyle they treasured, the man-made political disaster dealt a heavy, lasting blow. Recovery and revitalization were urgent priorities, but no one with the necessary leadership abilities materialized. Four years later, Kito agreed to merge with four neighboring villages and towns.

On the last day of February in 2005, Kito became part of the newly formed town of Naka, ending its 137-year history as an independent village. That history had been a painful one, defined by fierce competition between the ideals of residents who wanted to free the village from its identity as Tokushima’s most remote, backwards community and the force of reality that repeatedly crushed those ideals.

2.

While the dam problem was sucking up Kito's vitality, the yuzu industry it had so carefully fostered was losing market share and name recognition to farming villages in Kochi Prefecture and elsewhere that had followed its model. Kito's village-run yuzu programs were abandoned and distribution networks fell apart. Pushed aside by fruit from other communities that succeeded in establishing a national market, Kito yuzu was on the verge of vanishing from public memory.

Long ago, a group of independent farmers driven only by their dreams had fought through ten long years of research in isolation, with neither income nor outside support. Their pioneering work on yuzu cultivation led to the formation of the Kito Fruit Study Group, which went on to train farmers who flocked to Kito from throughout Japan wanting to learn to grow yuzu. The group even gave those farmers young trees its own members had raised. These activities undeniably created competition and contributed to Kito's decline.

It simply did not occur to the farmers of Kito, known for their warmth, kindness, and genuine desire to share their love of yuzu, to slyly outplay their fellow farmers. If someone was in trouble, they came to that person's aid because they knew everyone was in the same boat. Whatever any of them had was shared, not hoarded. Over time, these unquestioned norms of behavior, became pitfalls. It was only to be expected that some farmers would eventually prioritize quantity over quality, and that villages with more flat land would achieve a scale of production far beyond Kito's.

"We sure made fools of ourselves in the end."

"And just when we were getting going, the dam problem popped up. The god of commerce must have forgotten us."

The residents of Kito looked on passively as yuzu from other regions grew increasingly popular, lacking the energy to do more than console one another. Traces of their accumulated efforts survived in the name of the most common yuzu variety planted across Japan: Kito Line. However, even that contribution was as overlooked as a grain of sand in the new information society. Kito's achievements were fading from awareness.

One reason was that, unlike the dramatic and visible social transformation of the Showa era, the changes of the Heisei era were invisible. Information technology, communications, and distribution systems were revolutionized, with new technologies developed while their predecessors were still turning global industry on its head. These

changes were so fast and all-consuming that businesses reliant on old distribution networks were left wringing their hands helplessly.

Local industries with little ability to attract customers were particularly vulnerable amid the emergence of new forms of business dominated by the Internet. Small shops across the country went out of business as they lost their local advantage. This massive transformation of industry gave rise to a value system that prioritized speed and convenience in all things.

In the blink of an eye, Japan's food culture was transformed. Processed, ready-to-eat foods such as frozen meals and convenience-store items swept the market. Yuzu's flavor and scent remained popular, but easy, convenient, processed versions began to perform better than fresh fruit. Kito's aging farmers did not have the energy or capital to keep up with the changing times. Having lost first its forestry industry and now its yuzu industry, the village was swallowed up in the wave of depopulation. All the yuzu growers could do was keep pouring the same care into their trees as they always had. Still, with no one left to take over the orchards, more land was abandoned every year. Only the sad reality of a dying industry remained.

Even then, the residents of Kito were proud of one thing: No one in the whole country produced more delicious or higher-quality yuzu than they did. Kito was naturally blessed with the perfect climate and geography for growing beautifully fragrant and flavorful yuzu, with a mellow acidity and a color closer to brilliant gold than yellow—so much so that the village was nicknamed "the hometown of yuzu."

When the fruits were processed, neither size nor color nor marred skin mattered; mass production only led to greater price stability. That was not the case for Kito's farmers, who sold the bulk of their yuzu fresh. For them, market prices were volatile and earnings never guaranteed. They had to remain watchful for tiny black spots on the rinds and make sure the fruit was juicy by pruning, thinning the young fruit, applying fertilizer, and refreshing the orchards with new trees. They invested far more labor and money in their orchards than farmers growing yuzu for processing. A typhoon just before harvest season could wipe out a year's work in half a day by knocking the fruits against the thorns surrounding them. And yet Kito's farmers continued to grow yuzu primarily for the fresh market for one simple reason: They wanted to safeguard the quality of their fruit as long as humanly possible. After all, only Kito, with its unique natural environment, could grow yuzu that good.

"We can't beat the trends of the day, so we might as well give up on profits."

"True, true. Those yuzu are like our children. We've got a responsibility to keep sending the very best ones to market until the end."

The aging farmers weren't waiting for the day when their untold efforts would pay off; they were simply continuing to do what they had to do, like meticulous, devoted artisans. Kito yuzu was a shadow of what it once had been, teetering on the brink of disappearance. This was the unfortunate truth, and the villagers could see no solution.

Honest men are never rewarded for their honesty, but constantly suffer in this world of contradictions and falsehoods.

There is no such thing as perfection in human affairs.

The passage of time brings only inevitable oblivion . . .

"Hiroshi, I brought you some tea."

Yukiko quietly set the cup on a low table, along with some sweets. Usuki slipped off his reading glasses and set the pamphlet he'd been reading down on the table, next to a stack of eight or nine others. They were issues of *Yamakai*, a literary magazine published fifty years earlier by the Kito Youth Association. Assembled by young hands in those distant Showa years, they were faded from sunlight and ragged around the edges, but the roughness of the *warabanshi* straw paper—and its scent, mingled with that of the ink and the precocious intellectual musings on its pages—made Usuki nostalgic.

"I remember liking *Yamakai*, too. I read it often," Yukiko said. "Back then, books and magazines really were our only window into people's thoughts. Kentaro was so devoted to his work and his literary activities, even at that young age. I wonder if he wrote haiku, too."

"He did indeed. See here, where it says Ryusei? That was his haiku pen name. I can tell from the handwriting."

At the time, printing technology was still undeveloped, so all the poems and stories in the anthologies were written by hand. Fujita had been only twenty-three or twenty-four at the time, but Usuki was struck as he reread his contributions by the passion and clarity with which Fujita had fixed his gaze on society's problems.

"I wonder what made us all so excited about getting things done together back then," Yukiko mused with a sigh. "I don't blame Tokiko for leaving Kito after Kentaro died—it was too hard for her to be here anymore. Now Kochi is beating us at yuzu production. And . . ."

Yukiko trailed off, dabbing the corners of her eyes with the hem of her apron.

She must be thinking about Hideyuki.

"Don't cry," Usuki said. "He's a grown man. He's not so spineless that one failure will discourage him forever."

"I know . . . but the way he keeps talking about doing things 'for Kito' reminds me of Ken."

Usuki knew that Hideyuki had fought a lonely battle to keep the public-private partnership going after Fujita's suicide. In the end, the mayor had used him up and thrown him away, prioritizing the dam's defeat above all else. When Hideyuki's own business partner had skipped town, the young company that was once a rising star in Tokushima went bankrupt, and Hideyuki was left holding two hundred million yen in debt. Usuki ended up having to forfeit his house and land, which he'd put up as collateral to finance the business. The battle over the dam had swept up Usuki and Yukiko, too, and taken everything they had.

"I hate that mayor more than anyone in the world."

"Let's not rehash the past. Kito is gone and so is the mayor. Anyway, if it weren't for him, the dam wouldn't have been canceled."

"That's all well and good, but he put the son I gave birth to and raised through hell. And besides, what's so horrible about a mother rehashing her sorrows?"

Yukiko paused to sniffle.

"Tokiko even filed a worker's comp claim because she thought Kentaro died from overwork. The mayor said he'd do the paperwork, but instead he covered it up for seven years. She had to file a lawsuit in the end, and that wasn't easy in her condition. There's not much worse than having your family's honor trampled on. Anyone who doesn't understand that is downright inhumane."

Usuki understood Tokiko's point well. He was past seventy himself now, and it pained him to think that he had devoted his life to building a future for Kito, a community he had landed in by pure chance, only for that future to end up like this. His close friend had died tragically, his sister was grieving, his son's bankruptcy had made him lose the family house and land, passed down over the generations . . . It was impossible not to feel nihilistic in the face of these unexpected twists of fate.

Funny, though. More than anger or frustration, I mostly feel resignation. I must be getting old. I hope at least the yuzu industry I worked so damned hard to start survives.

“I wonder if Hideyuki is doing alright in Tokyo . . . and if Tokiko has begun to heal at all. Don’t you wonder about her, Hiroshi? We hardly see them anymore. I hope they’re doing alright.”

“Hideyuki’s still young. I’ll bet he’s gritting his teeth and getting by. And I have no doubt Kentaro is watching over Tokiko.”

People may bump into rocks or hurtle off waterfalls, but they always end up where they’re meant to be. He had to believe they all would find comfort and sympathy in the end.

3.

One day, a young man left the city life behind. No longer able to feel alive in a world where mind and body led seemingly unconnected existences, he quit the job that kept him tied to a computer, embarked on a journey into nature, and eventually settled in Kito.

He had to admit, work had become far more convenient when the business world moved onto the internet. This let businesspeople like him interact with an exponentially larger number of clients and associates. In exchange for this new efficiency, however, the mental and emotional toll of work had increased multifold. Winning the confidence of contacts he’d never met in person was difficult, and his nerves were ground down from morning till night. Efficiency had supposedly increased, but he was responsible for a ballooning volume of work, and he couldn’t keep up with the pace of product development on top of that.

Long ago, the man had heard a story. An American millionaire found an indigenous family leading a traditional life deep in the mountains, bundled them onto his private jet, and flew them to a big city. He planned to give them a whirlwind tour of the most luxurious hotels and the restaurants. However, when the family arrived at the urban airport, they sat down in the lobby and refused to move for weeks.

“Our bodies seem to have been flown a great distance very quickly, but our souls have been left behind. They are headed here now, and we can’t move until they arrive,” they said.

The man felt as if he understood that family’s words. Ensconced in the tall mountains of Kito, a healthy vitality welled up inside him, as if his atrophied cells had found new life. He found a job in forestry, where workers were in short supply due to the aging local population, and learned the ways of nature from the old but still robust

mountain folk. The local families were kind to him, and he discovered anew the fundamental warmth of human beings.

Not so long after he settled in, a family in the village served him a dish made with yuzu juice. A local culinary tradition, they said. He fell in love with its distinctive, refreshing fragrance and flavor. Until that day, he'd thought of yuzu as simply sour, but now he realized it had a certain sweetness mingled with the sour, and a complex depth of flavor hidden within. It went down so smoothly, with no hint of astringency, seeming to diffuse throughout his weary body after a long day of work in the mountains.

"I knew yuzu from Kochi and Kyushu was famous, but I didn't realize such delicious yuzu grew in Kito, too," he blurted out. In response, his hosts told him the long tale of Kito yuzu.

They told him how Kito's farmers mastered commercial cultivation of yuzu, once deemed impossible, and how the crop then spread through Japan and beyond. They told him that the village had won the Asahi Agriculture Prize, the Nobel Prize of Japanese farming. And they told him about the deputy mayor who gave his life to defeat the dam project that had torn apart the village.

The man was stunned to learn that the peaceful, pastoral landscape held such a dramatic history. He could hardly believe that this fading village deep in the mountains was where yuzu cultivation throughout Japan originated.

"I don't think anyone knows Kito's story," he said.

"Not many producers are left. We could have the best yuzu trees in the world, but that doesn't mean anything if no one's left to tend to them and sell the fruit."

The man was deeply saddened by the story. He wondered if he could do anything to help. Soon after, he took over some land from an elderly retired farmer and began growing yuzu as a sideline to his job in forestry. He had never farmed before, but a longstanding organization specializing in yuzu cultivation called the Kito Fruit Study Group was headquartered in the Kito branch of the Naka town hall. The staff there lent him cultivation manuals and gave detailed advice.

Still, there was much he couldn't do. Understanding and mastery were two entirely different things. Working with nature brought constant surprises, and plans often went awry. He learned firsthand how much work went into the farm products that he had eaten so casually up till that point. The work demanded great mental effort, just like his old job in the city. But strangely enough, far from becoming exhausted, he felt that the more he used his mind and heart, the happier he became. The things he poured

time and effort into were imbued with love, and that love always came back to him in one form or another.

I guess the same goes for people, he thought. *That's what it means to raise someone*.

The president of the Fruit Study Group was a man named Makoto Hirakawa who owned a large yuzu farm. He said he was following in the footsteps of his father, who'd once been called a "yuzu loony."

"If Kito yuzu wasn't the best in Japan, I might have quit. But someone's got to carry on the things that have value. Giving them up would be a sin against our ancestors who worked so hard."

Kito now was part of Naka, and there were many farmers over the mountains in Naka's other districts who had been trained by the Fruit Study Group. Makoto said he felt bound to keep researching cultivation techniques for the sake of these newer farmers as well as those in Kito. He was working for his community despite no prospect of personal profit.

This meeting ignited something in the man.

In Minamiu, one of Kito's more scenic hamlets, there was a yuzu processing and marketing company called Yutoan run by a woman named Mizue Sakakino. Her father-in-law was a former mayor who had done much to develop the yuzu industry, she said.

"When farmers sell fresh yuzu through the agricultural co-op, it gets mixed with all the other yuzu from the co-op district. Since yuzu from Kito is a cut above when it comes to flavor, we're working to bring it directly to consumers."

Like other women in Kito, Mizue was surprisingly youthful. Her skin was smooth and unblemished, she never looked tired, and her eyes were always moist and sparkling.

"It's because I eat so much yuzu. Not many people know this, but yuzu is a secret superfood that's incredibly beneficial for health and beauty."

As the man talked with Kito's second generation of yuzu cultivators, who had grown up loving the fruit, his own enthusiasm rose. He devoted himself to his orchards, hoping to catch up as quickly as he could.

Yuzu originated in China and made its way to Japan via the Korean peninsula in the early Heian period, around 800 CE. People in those days wrote the name of this unfamiliar fruit using the same characters as were used in China, 柚 or 由. Later, after the trees had become naturalized in Shikoku and yuzu juice began to be used in place of vinegar, the fruit itself was called *yunosu* 柚の酢, meaning "yuzu vinegar." Over time,

this became *yuzu* 柚酢, which eventually came to be written with the characters used today: 柚子.

The plant's scientific name is *Citrus junos*; the specific epithet *junos* derives from the Japanese *yunosu*. In China, dried yuzu skin has been an important medicinal ingredient for at least two thousand years. In the mountains of Japan, however, the trees bore juicier and more fragrant fruit than in their native habitat. Yuzu juice was seen as the finest of "vinegars," gracing the tables of nobles and elites. The fruit thus passed most of its history as a rarity grown only in a few locations and consumed only by a small segment of mountain dwellers and wealthy individuals.

Yuzu is among the most nutritious of all fruits. It has 1.6 times the vitamin C of lemons, as well as high levels of many other nutrients, including citric acid, calcium, and antioxidant flavonoids. Its health benefits include relieving exhaustion, promoting blood circulation, strengthening the immune system, improving the skin, and fighting obesity, while its culinary merits include an outstanding fragrance and a flavor that can substitute for the finest of vinegars with no processing beyond squeezing.

The primary elements of yuzu's fragrance are limonene, which is common to all citrus fruits, and yuzunone, which is unique to yuzu. These two substances have the unusual property of penetrating the deeper layers of the brain when absorbed by the body. They restore balance to the nervous system, producing a comfortable feeling of release and sensorial sharpness. Yuzu has also been shown to boost secretion of the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine, both of which play an important role in mental health. In other words, its fragrance truly does appear to reduce irritation and nervous strain and bring a sense of happiness.

These are the scientific underpinnings of yuzu's power to gently soothe with its scent, which is as oddly familiar as an earthly paradise one could never have visited in the first place.

The man from the city saw in this an important message for today's stress-filled society.

Eventually, the man started his own company selling hand-squeezed Kito yuzu juice. It proved popular with consumers, and business was good. However, after several years, he ran into a wall. Production could not keep up with demand. He needed to build a factory and hire more employees, but that would require tens of millions of yen in capital. He could not secure anywhere near that much, and neither the Naka town hall, the chamber of commerce, nor the agricultural co-op could help.

What a pity to come so far, only to be stopped by this . . .

Seeing all the other yuzu products on the market and knowing Kito's yuzu was the best of all, he wanted to get more Kito yuzu products out into the world. He had complete confidence in the quality and flavor of his product. The only thing he lacked was funding.

I guess I've reached my limit.

Such was his state of mind when an unexpected rumor made its way to him. Apparently, the president of a prominent technology company wanted to grow, process, and sell Kito yuzu. This rumored IT whiz kid was well known in the business world for his role in the industrial upheaval of the Heisei era. The man asked why an elite businessman wanted to shore up agriculture in a remote mountain village. The answer came: "Because he comes from Kito, too."

The man promptly went to meet the businessman and told him he felt it would be a travesty if Kito yuzu disappeared. He said he was ready to put everything he had into getting it out into the world.

"Me too," the IT company president answered.

The man could tell at once from the light in the businessman's eyes that he had been raised on yuzu. He stared at the name printed on the business card he was handed.

Yasushi Fujita.

4.

President of Media Do to Transfer Tax Residence to Naka, Plans to Revitalize Hometown

Yasushi Fujita, president of the digital content distribution company Media Do (Tokyo), will transfer his registered home address from Tokyo to Naka in order to bring tax revenue to his hometown, he said. Mr. Fujita grew up in the hamlet of Nishiu in the Kito district of Naka and said he remains strongly attached to the region.

While staying involved in the management of his company, which is listed in the first section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange, Mr. Fujita plans to scale up a project aimed at revitalizing Kito, where the population is declining and aging. He has also announced plans to open a Media Do office in the city of Tokushima next June that will eventually employ around one hundred people.

"I want to work with local people to create a community where we all can say, 'This is what Kito has to offer,'" Mr. Fujita said.

(Tokushima Shimbun, November 29, 2016)

……

I'm back, Dad.

No matter where I was, in Tokyo or flying around the world, I never forgot Kito for a single day.

My father was deputy mayor of the former village of Kito. It's not often that a public servant in a remote mountain village commits suicide to take responsibility for problems in the workplace. It's only natural that, as his son, I have thought more broadly and deeply about what happened than anyone else.

It happened on September 11, 1996.

I'm not sure why, but I knew before I picked up the phone that my mother was calling to tell me Dad had died. The instant I saw my cell phone light up late that night, the shock of tragedy ran through me. Before my mother even said "Hello?" my body had absorbed the reality of my father's death.

I had a similar experience the last time I saw him. Just before my twenty-third birthday, I came down with a high fever. I was in no state to travel home to Kito, but for some reason I felt an overwhelming need to go back. Uncharacteristically, I put logic second and decided to follow my instincts and spend the weekend at home.

I felt no better when I arrived. Strangely, though, my fever cooled before dawn on the day of my birthday and I was able to take my father up on his invitation to go *ayu* fishing in a local stream. When we returned that evening and he left to do some work, my fever rose again. I fell into a sleep so deep it was like a coma and didn't wake up until the next morning.

"I'll see you later," I heard my father saying in the entryway as he left for work again.

I have to see him off!

I leapt from bed like a man possessed and made it to the front door in time to see him leaving for the village hall. Only later did I realize that was my final glimpse of him.

It was also somewhat later that I learned the stream he had taken me to fish in on my birthday was in the planned inundation zone. I remember how beautiful the land

looked that morning in the dawn light. That last day we enjoyed as a family passed gently, gone before I knew it yet remaining as a memory I could visit again and again.

"Yasushi, this here is a prime ayu *fishing hole. I've never told anyone else about it."*

My father's words and tone of voice were no different from any other time. And yet, in some entirely different dimension from his surface actions, he was telling me he was going to die. He was motivating me to act, trying to communicate something to me.

My father was by no stretch of the imagination a corrupt individual, and the shock of his suicide swirled in my heart with a force so strong I couldn't tell if it was sorrow or anger, despair or passion. Unable to express the swelling chaos of these emotions, I cried instead for my mother, who was left grieving and alone. I had never once seen her and my father so much as argue. They had been an ideal couple, full of mutual respect, and it broke my heart to see them torn apart so cruelly. After my father's death, the ripples of misfortune became waves that broke relentlessly upon my family, but I could only watch, dejected and wanting above all to lash out in hatred at someone or something.

What killed my father?

What crushed my cousin Hideyuki, a businessman with such a promising future ahead of him?

Why did my refined, capable Uncle Usuki and my cheerful, helpful Aunt Yukiko have to be thrown to rock-bottom after retirement, after all the appreciation they received from the villagers before?

The more I thought about it, the more my thoughts circled around Kito. But when I brought up the idea of returning to revitalize the village, my mother scolded me.

"What could you possibly do at this stage in your life?" she snapped.

I was at a loss for how to respond to her harsh reprimand.

Her expression softening to a gentle smile. "You'll be fine," she said. "The older you get, the more you'll become like your father. Don't worry if you don't have all the answers right now. Just follow your own path."

Her words were like a riddle, and the only answer I could come up with was that halfway down my own path, I still hadn't found myself.

In my third year of university, wanting to study abroad in the United States but lacking the money to do so, I started selling cell phones. Cell phone use was beginning to expand, and business was so good that lines would form outside my office. I decided

that instead of using the profits to study in the U.S., I would reinvest them in my business career. As soon as I graduated in April 1996, I launched my own company.

It was a dog-eat-dog world, and older businesspeople often laughed at me as a nobody from nowhere, but I was completely absorbed in growing my company. If I wanted to understand my father's death and carry on his legacy, I would have to first gain the ability to turn my own philosophy, methodology, and vision into reality.

"I understand," I told Mom. "I won't come back until I've achieved so much no one will be able to say a word against me." It was the only choice I could make.

I went back to the city and worked so hard I almost died. I worked when my friends were having fun. I clung to the craggy unbeaten path toward success in a new industry, and no matter how many times I fell off, I crawled back up.

I had no fear. But nor was I confident. Mountain climbers don't stop to wonder if they're qualified to climb a mountain.

People laughed at me and humiliated me, but I felt no hesitation so long as I wasn't doing the same thing to others. Several times I was offered shortcuts to success, but I did not take them. I knew that would lead to failure in the long term, because I would be sidestepping valuable experience. Even when my way forward was blocked and I lost hope, I did not reach up to grab the rope dangling above my head. I was too busy searching for the pure water in the untouched mountain stream that feeds the wide river. When I found it, I scooped it up and developed my own innovative, outstanding technology.

My company steadily expanded its market share. In 2013, when full-year sales reached 5.5 billion yen, it was listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange "Mothers" section, which is devoted to startups. That May, I built a yuzu processing factory in Kito and entered the business of yuzu production, product development, and marketing in earnest. I named the company Ogonnomura, meaning Golden Village. However, I was still living primarily in Tokyo and working around the clock. I had decided not to move back to my hometown until my technology company was elevated to the first section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange.

In 2016, full-year sales shot up threefold to 15.5 billion yen, and our stock was listed in the first section of the stock market. As the founder and president of a joint-stock company, entering this elite group was one of my longstanding goals. Some people think I'm one of those lucky people blessed with success; others think I'm a hard-working late bloomer. It's true that it took eighteen years from launching my company at age twenty-two to watching it debut on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. Many

IT companies blossom and fade in the span of just a few years. Compared to them, I'm an eccentric, stubborn "yuzu loony." That's exactly why I've been able to nurture a business that has a strong trunk, robust branches, and the ability to be transplanted around the world. Building this tenacious company is how I found myself.

Many years have passed since my father's suicide, but not a day went by that I didn't seek to understand his death.

My hometown of Kito falls further behind the rest of the world every year, while the cities suck people up like evil gods, growing ever more prosperous. All this is just as capitalism demands. Society has been steadily evolving toward its current form since my father's youth. The rapid economic growth of the Showa era was not limited to Japan but was part of a global explosion of human activity. My father lived through that period of dramatic change in a remote mountain village, but what was he trying to do? What was he struggling for in his peaceful way all those years?

I believe he was attempting to slow, even slightly, the advance of an economy that paid no heed to the laws of nature.

Can true hope exist in a winner-take-all society that robs nature and the disadvantaged of everything they have, even their future? Can any wealth and comfort won in such a society be genuine? Can such a society achieve long-term sustainability?

Today, the future my father feared has arrived. Environmental problems sweep the planet, one after the next. There is no question in my mind that this is what my father wanted to tell me in those final words he left behind before his death.

So, here we are. A new challenge stands before us. The terrible mountain of environmental destruction rises before our eyes, its peak yet invisible. No one has traveled this path, but someone must blaze the trail up the cliff. Time to start climbing.

Mom, I kept you waiting a long time. Let's live together in Kito again, like we did before. The sky here is bluer than anywhere else, and the yuzu are a dazzling gold. Even the clarity of the water and air feels more intense. Being here always invigorates me. Vivid primary colors suit this place best—like the red flame of my passion to design a golden paradise floating in the blue sky. Let's build a village of miracles, where people and nature can live in everlasting harmony.

Kentaro Fujita with his children

5.

Proclamation

Heisei 7　Tokiko Fujita, President, Committee for a Kito School of the Mountains, River, and Sky

Today's Japan is a wealthy nation, blessed with all the material goods its people need.　While we have gained much through societal development, it goes without saying that we have also lost some things. First and foremost among the things we have lost is nature.

Nature has already disappeared from many parts of the world, but here in Kito a wonderful natural environment endures, made up of endlessly green mountains, crystal clear rivers, and starry skies. This is an irreplaceable treasure, and we must continue to guard it into the future.

Working day and night in distorted environments, most people today have forgotten what it is to live a relaxed life. This has led to a shift in focus

from material wealth to spiritual wealth, as people search for true abundance. I believe that what people today long for is to coexist peacefully with nature, learn from nature, and live in a natural way.

In response, I have created the Committee for a School of the Mountains, Rivers, and Sky. My goal is to bring children from all over to Japan to Kito so they may experience the joy of learning from nature and become aware of nature's importance. In doing so, they will also deepen their interaction with our community and, I hope, ultimately realize the meaninglessness of destroying nature.

The year 2019 marked the beginning of a new chapter for Japan: the Reiwa era. Twenty-four years earlier, as the conflict over the Hosogouchi Dam intensified in the last year of my father's life, my mother took on a new role as a leader in environmental education. Her single-minded focus drew media attention, and she was featured in an NHK special and other television programs. She had a magnetism that was rare among women born at the time before the war. My father gave his life to stop the dam; my mother has expressed her views in words and deeds of piercing honesty. As their son, I share their values. Now it is my turn to find a way to express them.

I spend my days now filtering the future that hurtles toward us, refining it into our present. The ever-worsening crisis of climate change is, at root, the result of humanity's continuous destruction of the natural world for the sake of wealth and material comfort. If we want to restore nature, our only choice is to intervene in this destruction through force of will.

Why do the trees in the mountains matter?

Why does the beauty of limpid river water, flowing in its natural course, *matter*?

Those who live with nature and witness its destruction firsthand are always the first to realize the truth. We must therefore reverse the flow of values. Instead of infusing rural areas with the values of the city, we must bring the irreplaceable perspective of the countryside to urban centers. How can we do this as village populations shrink and industry contracts? This is the question everyone is scratching their heads over.

It is painfully clear from the chaos of contemporary Japanese society that if we wait until negative outcomes materialize to act, we will be too late. My father was stymied by just this kind of outdated thinking, and one reason his life ended before he achieved his dreams was that he lacked economic power. I intend to use my economic

resources and business knowhow to realize his dream of harmony between humans and nature here in our hometown of Kito.

Like the pure water that flows from the mountains to the oceans, ultimately mingling with all water on the planet, I want to send the hope for renewed life that exists within nature conservation downriver from Kito to the world.

My Uncle Usuki began his quest to cultivate yuzu in 1960. Eventually, Kito yuzu trees multiplied throughout Japan and spread around the globe; today, countries including France, Spain, and Morocco are beginning to grow the crop. I doubt that my uncle or my father, or their fellow villagers, could have imagined sixty years ago that yuzu would make it this far. It really is possible for one individual's dream to leap from person to person across time and ultimately achieve a miracle.

A solution to the crisis of abandoned Japanese-cedar forests remains as elusive as ever. Damage from landslides is worsening as abnormal weather events grow more frequent. The innumerable dams built on rivers throughout the country will remain a burdensome legacy of crumbling concrete tens of millions of years into the future, by some estimates. In some places the rotting sediment that accumulates behind dams is excavated with heavy machinery and returned to the mountains, but this robs the seashore of the sand that would normally flow downriver, leading to beach erosion. And so the dams are beginning to destroy coastal ecosystems as well as those in the mountains. This type of superficial response to the environmental crisis is typical in its failure to consider the web of connections linking all of nature together.

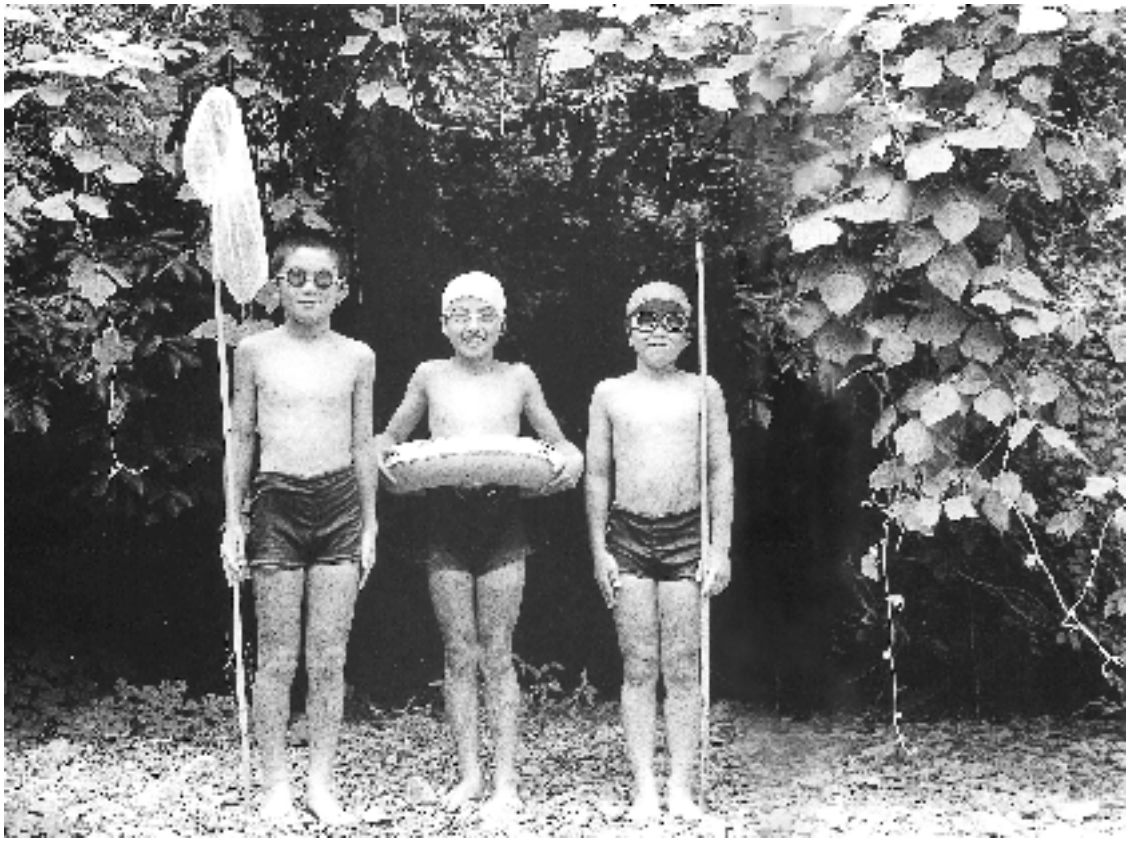
Once again, one step at a time, a dream from this village will spread: from Kito to Tokushima Prefecture, from Tokushima to this island we call Shikoku, from Shikoku to Japan, and then to all the world. From this generation to the next and the next after that, flowing downstream through time and space. I want this sky, so blue it seems to soak straight into your eyes, to cover every corner of the globe again. I want to spark an enormous miracle that will bring a smile to the face of every human being. I want future generations to carry on my dreams. I do not know if this epic wish will be granted, but well-intentioned debate on what is realistic can wait until later.

Right, Dad?

That's why I plan to keep on saying it until my life runs out: If we think downstream, we can change the world.

I admire people who never let go of their dreams.
People with passions so powerful they spend their whole life chasing a single dream,
prepared even to die in its pursuit.
Or, to put it another way, people who die before their passion cools.
I have no desire to become a feeble-minded old man.
I simply do not know how to live an aimless, easy life.

—From "A Tiny Soul," by Kentaro Fujita (age 24), *Yamanami*, 1959



Village boys (right, Yasushi Fujita)

Afterword　　Witness to a Miracle

A great green island floating in a blue sea; a majestic isle seemingly made of tall, rough mountains and big trees: This is Shikoku. Surrounded by the beautiful Seto Inland Sea on one side and the Pacific Ocean on the other, the people in its four prefectures still savor the gifts of the ocean and mountains and uphold local traditions.

On a map, you will find Tokushima Prefecture at the bottom right of this island, and the town of Naka, still famous for its yuzu, at the bottom right of Tokushima. In 2017, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries granted Naka a geographical indication (GI) for yuzu grown in the town and originating from its wild yuzu trees, in recognition of the superior quality of its intellectual property. The designation means that the history of Kito's leading role in improving yuzu, as well as the unique flavor, fragrance, and beauty of Kito yuzu itself, will be preserved.

In France, where demand for and appreciation of yuzu is steadily rising, Kito yuzu sell for the equivalent of 1,500 yen each. The town of Naka thus continues to link Japan with the world from its perch high in the mountains. Further into the mountains, however, surrounded by twenty peaks towering over a thousand meters high, lies a deep gorge. This is the source of the Nakagawa river, said to flow with the most delicious water in Shikoku. This pure, fast-flowing mountain stream nurtures many animals: monkeys, deer, boars, racoon dogs, mountain hares, moon bears, Japanese serows, masked palm civets, dormice, and Kyushu flying squirrels. Among this list of species that are now rare in other areas, one more should not be forgotten: humans.

The humans were strong and carved open the mountains, planting wheat to survive. Soon enough the Nakagawa river was lined with hamlets and rice paddies, and people lived out their short lives in harmony with the natural world. In a village called Kito, on the far edge of Naka, they planted beautiful yuzu orchards that burst with delicate white flowers in spring and fragrant, carefully nurtured green fruit in summer. In fall, a bounty of ripe yuzu dyed the valleys gold, and people labored in big local factories to process the fruit into various products.

When we city folk become weary, we go off in search of nature. We breathe in the clean air, sending negative ions to our cells, soothe our spirits with tea and coffee brewed from clear water, and refresh our bodies with delicious local foods, wondering why it is that things taste so different in the country.

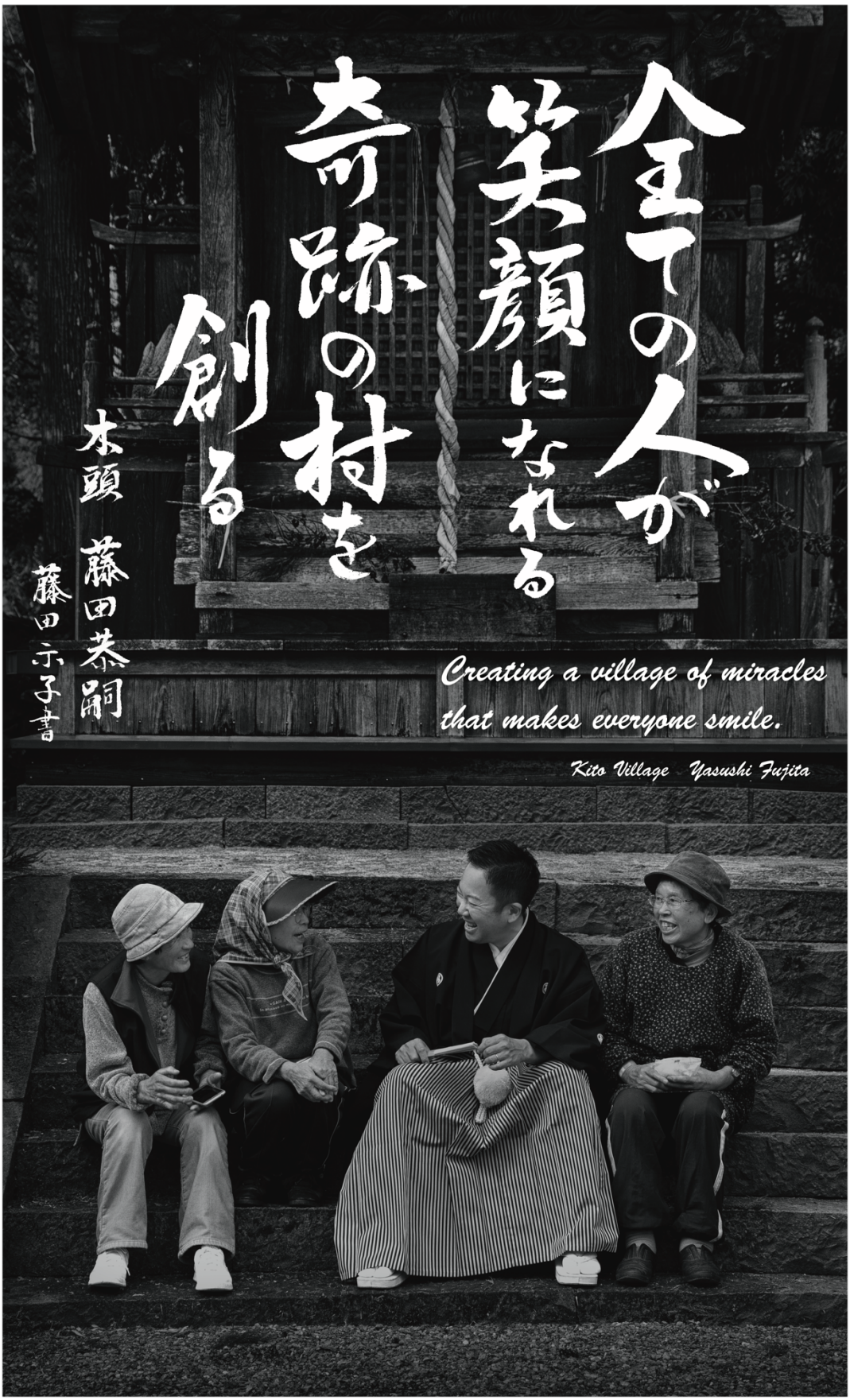
People often say that Japanese cities are the most convenient in the world. That praise is based partly on the natural beauty located just beyond their borders. Even in the megalopolis of Tokyo, you are only a short drive or train ride away from one mountain or another. The ability to traverse city and nature in under half a day is part of what makes Japan such a unique and outstanding tourist destination. If the cities were surrounded by endless deserts, no doubt they would not feel so peaceful.

The increasing concentration of the Japanese population in urban centers, where daily life is convenient and sheltered, is likely one reason that concern over climate change remains low even as people elsewhere in the world grow more aware of the impending crisis. Another reason is that living green forests cover approximately seventy percent of the archipelago. But the truth is, neither Japan's abundant forests nor the secure lives of its city dwellers can be maintained if we do not care for them.

The world's population is predicted to exceed 10 billion by 2050. Humanity is confronting multiple crises, from the water, food, and energy shortages to global climate change. What will become of Japan, and the world, in the coming decades? Will we walk a path of utter destruction, or will we somehow manage to avoid the worst-case scenario? Only those who have not yet been born will learn the answers to these questions.

And yet—

If we come together and choose a path that safeguards future generations, any one of us can bear witness to a vital truth: among all the living beings who share this planet we call Earth, only human beings can perform a miracle.


全ての人が笑顔になれる
奇跡の村を創る
木頭 藤田恭嗣
藤田恭子書
Creating a village of miracles
that makes everyone smile.
Kito Village Yasushi Fujita

■Photograph Credits

“The village of Kito,” “Poling a Kito cedar downriver,” “Forestry workers in the bitter cold,” “Suspension bridge in the mountains,” “A teacher’s wedding,” “Young children,” “Catching dragonflies,” “The world,” “The sparkle of life (Tokiko Fujita, nursery school teacher, in the center),” and “Village boys (right, Yasushi Fujita)” from *The Warmth of Home: Kenkichi Nakano’s Photographs of Kito* (2006). Photograph at end of the Afterword by Yoshinori Hayashi.

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