

## The Field Hospital

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Translated by

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exhausted, I lay on the sickbed. With the slightest movement, the straw under me rustled. For some reason, that faint sound really got on my nerves tonight. Once again I opened my blurry eyes. The pale light of the waning moon made them ache. Tagawa's face floated in the moonlight. Evidently he was asleep and appeared to be sleeping very soundly.

"Hey, Sho, do you have this kind of superstition where you come from? That someone is sure to die when the tunnel is dug."

"Ha! I never heard that one before."

"You've had a good deal of education and you don't believe it?"

"Ha! I've never heard of it before, so it doesn't matter if I believe it or not."

"If there really is such a thing, that's pretty interesting, but I don't know whose fate it will be. Will it be me? Ha-ha-ha."

In the darkness, I could almost see Sergeant Shiono's big smile, his white teeth and red lips, amid his heavy beard. Oh, what a great guy, I wish it was you who was fated. I repeated this silently to myself.

Every mountain has its guardian spirit. If you dig a tunnel through the middle of the mountain, the spirit will be upset and demand the sacrifice of a life, a "human pillar."\* Building a bridge over rapids requires a human pillar, the same with digging a tunnel. If a strong and brave man is used as a human pillar, so much the better. Wasn't Sergeant Shiono the most appropriate choice? He would certainly ensure that the tunnel never caved in. Corporal Tsugawa would be okay, Private First Class Ishida would be too, and Captain Kato wouldn't be bad at all—no, the old guy was thin and tall and a bit hunched over. He couldn't stand up straight enough to be a human pillar. No, the best was still the sergeant with the beard. If the guy died, then it could be said that the world was half at peace; at least so many sick friends wouldn't be beaten, beaten so severely every day. If he died, they'd leap up and cheer for him. But if the commander of the invalid labor corps was changed, beatings would still be inevitable. It would be best if they all died, I wish there were such a mysterious power that would kill them all....

I came back to reality in the end. Such naïve ideas seemed strange even to me. Poor me. All I

could do was pray for divine assistance in my daydreams; even amid these unlimited daydreams, I hadn't the courage to stand up and use my own strength to punish those detestable people and blow off steam. You're just a coward, a mean daydreamer, a buffoon between heaven and earth.

Yes, you're an incurable coward—my thoughts soar again—you're even a laughable coward when it comes to women. They stare brazenly at the nurses, but not you, even though you really want to look at them. You are captivated by the curve of the waist and the protruding breast. Some of them

even act—Kato, the old guy and Sergeant Shiono. But you, yes, you're angry, you gnash your teeth, and you feel sorry for the girls. Then doesn't the flame in your heart flare up and rage? Black beauty Umeko, butterfly-like Choko, and Hanako no, I'm not dirty like them. I must be pure and clean like

Two swinging braids, two crystal-clear eyes, skin suffused with apple red that look, so serene as if sinking in a deep lake.

"Aki "

Having almost called out her name, I hurriedly looked left and right. Tagawa still slept soundly under the moonlight. I felt my face suddenly flush.

From the very first day she appeared, she impressed me as uncommon—I ought to say I was shaken, that is perhaps more accurate.

That was about ten days ago. In the morning, we patients who were not seriously ill arrived as usual at the foot of the mountain behind the field hospital. Work had been going on there for some time. For some unknown reason, the military had ordered that a tunnel be dug there. It was said that work was begun at both ends simultaneously. Those engaged in the work were all local residents. Each day, each household had to supply one person for the forced labor, which was euphemistically referred to as the “performance of official duties.”

The men and women from the village worked under the direction of the constabulary. Two thirds of the laborers were women and most of the men were fairly old. I knew that the strong young men were volunteer soldiers or had been drafted, unless they were members of the youth corps far from home to "perform their official duty." The men and women used various kinds of tools for digging. The men did the digging and the women carried away the earth in baskets. Shortly after work began, we sick soldiers of the invalid labor corps were organized to take part in the work.

That day, shortly after arriving at the site, I heard a high pitched and clear voice.

“Ah, Sergeant, good day, sir!” “Oh, Miss Akiko, good day.”

What was most surprising was the sudden change in the sergeant's voice. Normally, he seemed to shout every word and sentence, and his voice was harsh and grating like a gong. But his voice at that moment was totally different.

"Are the sick soldiers supposed to work?" "Well, they can help out a little."

“Ah, that's not right. It's our work, so how can you let them help out?”

“Oh,” for a moment the sergeant seemed unable to hold his own, “it's just for exercise, and besides those up above hope to have it done early. Furthermore, it is to finish the sacred war...”

“Really? Then it would be a good thing. Sergeant, if you have them carry less in their baskets.”

"Of course!"

At that moment, I once again experienced that stirring in my heart. It was so complicated and subtle that I could scarcely come to terms with it.

Her status was surprising. When I spoke to Shiono (I ought to say when I was asked about something, because I never spoke to him of my own accord), I had to stand up straight, feet together, at attention while beginning every sentence with “hai.” But her? She was so at ease, without a care or concern. Ah, she could adopt such an attitude with the sergeant—a sergeant, a terrible sergeant, who, in the eyes of a private, was unapproachably high, and put herself on the same footing.

Without a doubt she understood the difficult position of us sick soldiers. It was inappropriate for a soldier who was out sick to undertake such heavy labor, but we still had to spare no effort in moving heavy baskets filled with earth. But that wasn't all, for some were mercilessly subjected to severe beatings. She spoke in such a tactful way, so composed, and in a tone of perfect assurance. Perhaps no one but her—while hundreds of millions were engaged in the great mission of the decisive

battle—could achieve the lessening of the burden of some sick soldiers with such ease!

Oh, she was so beautiful—no, I couldn't yet determine if she was beautiful or not, but her manner and the purity she exuded were touching. She, with her long, curvaceous and pleasing form in her Japanese-style stovepipe pants and white blouse with short sleeves and open collar, was able to marvelously combine both weakness and power, so strangely and inconceivably!

She and the sergeant must have known each other for some time and seemed to know each other quite well. He was extremely polite to her, indicating that they shared an unusual affection ...

I'm very reluctant to use such a romantic term, but still would rather imbue it with some more implications, such as ambition, desire, and evil. The tone of his voice changed, the wrinkles that had accumulated on his face over the years grew smooth, but I still sensed the fierce covetousness in his heart.

These intuitions came to me almost all at once; they existed together jumbled in my mind right up until this moment when I lay down in bed, and I still I felt I couldn't fully grasp them, for their being clear one minute and confused the next.

Oh, I didn't want to think about it anymore. I needed to get some shut-eye soon because I had to get up and work tomorrow.

Today, on the way to work, Sergeant Shiono carried a large mirror out of the clinic and had Tagawa, who brought up the rear, carry it. The sergeant didn't keep everyone in suspense for very long; he revealed the answer to the riddle as soon as he came out the door.

“Hey, do you guys know what this mirror is for? This is our captain's masterstroke. He wants us

to use the mirror to shine the sunlight into the tunnel. He said we could save on the acetylene and have a little more light. Our captain has a good head on his shoulders. Ha-ha-ha.”

It was that “heroic” laughter again—that was the adjective the sergeant had used to describe his own laughter. The sergeant's tone of voice seemed to harbor a certain disdain for the captain. But

I felt that old Kato wasn't all that stupid.

The work began. The sergeant himself held the mirror. He could have told a comrade to hold it, but there was no way he would allow a sick soldier to switch from the heavy work at hand for such an easy job, nor would he allow himself to be idle.

"Oh, no, no, Sergeant" It was that lively clear voice. "What is it?" "I can't open my eyes." "You have to put up with it." She was back today. My heart pounded.

Actually I took advantage of the situation. When I entered the tunnel, I could rudely and brazenly look out the tunnel as much as I liked as people moved the earth. I could see her clearly. Those long lashes of hers, opened and closed, and in the strong light seemed never to stop. Her bearing was filled with intelligence, innocence, and cheerfulness. Her nose and lips were suffused with a smile and determination.

With each trip, I approached the tunnel entrance with expectation. At times, I unconsciously altered the speed of my steps until Tagawa, who was carrying a basket with me, brought it to my attention, indicating his surprise. Only then did I realize that I had unintentionally arranged it so that I would opportunely bump into her.

"Hey, are you that hot?" Tagawa asked me at the entrance to the tunnel.

“Yep.”

I rubbed my forehead and found it covered with sweat. I was hoping that when we brushed past one another, she'd see my face in the light of the mirror and remember me, retaining a deep impression of me. Perhaps it was this hope that unconsciously made me nervous, causing me to break out in a sweat. But, oh, what a vague and ridiculous idea!

Then

“Oh, why are you guys carrying so much? Really!”

It was her. In the blinding light of the mirror, I saw her hasten her steps toward us.

“Give us half.” "It's not that heavy," calmly said Tagawa. “That won't do! You”

She and her partner snatched away our basket and dumped it, nearly emptying it.

“Hey, give it back.”

“How can that be right? That's not enough. Sergeant Shiono wants

“Don't worry. We'll go together and I'll talk to him.”

After that, we went back and forth with them following us. I didn't know if I should be happy or sad. It was hard to get a clear view of her, which made me sad. However, being able to walk with her actually made me feel elated. The only thing was that I couldn't think of anything to say to her; I just listened anxiously as she conversed with Tagawa.

That afternoon I didn't feel right--my arms and legs were exhausted and my chest ached. If I said something to Sergeant Shiono, he probably would have let me rest, but that might have given the

impression that I was lazy. The imperial soldier had fortitude and endurance, which was Sergeant Shiono's pet phrase. Moreover, I felt that perhaps my condition was the result of nerves. All I had to do was endure and everything would return to normal. I really couldn't risk it. And so I continued working as usual. I should add that perhaps I was willing to suffer if I wanted to be in a place to see her.

The tunnel entrance faced west, so in the afternoon the mirror couldn't be used, which meant that I wouldn't be able to see her face fully in the bright light of the mirror. The first time we ran into each other, she flashed me a smile and nodded. At that moment, my entire body was suffused with warmth.

And it was Tagawa who first opened his mouth to address her. Although they spoke only the usual social niceties, it was sufficient to make me jealous.

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I met Tagawa only after arriving at this field hospital situated in a mountain village. He had graduated from forestry school in Chiayi. Since he was the only educated Taiwanese youth in the place and because I thought he was a nice guy, I tended to get along with him. But at that moment, my feelings for him changed and I felt that he was tricky and shallow

At first, I really did feel that I had recovered, but it was only because in a moment of excitement I forgot I was unwell. After working for about an hour, my chest began to ache. The sky and the earth started to slowly spin and spark to fly. I became unsteady on my feet and fell to the ground.

"What's the matter?" Tagawa held me up and shook me vigorously.

"I'm a little" "Oh, your face is really pale." "Ng " "Rest under that tree over there for a bit."

He held me around my back and moved as if he was going to pick me up. Everything seemed to go dark, my legs wouldn't support me, and my whole body went limp. Tagawa had to manage alone.

After I took a few steps, a clear voice seemed to waft to my ears from far, far away.

"Ah, what's the matter?" "He fainted." "Hurry, hurry, get him under the tree."

Then I felt another pair of hands pick me up by my legs. It was her! I was still aware of this. But my heart was too weak to beat.

I was put down. Someone wiped the sweat from my temples.

"Oh my, he's so pale he's really sweating " Again it was her!

Quite a few people came and stood around me. I couldn't open my eyes, but I could hear them talking about me.

Soon they left.

I opened my eyes. It was very bright. I closed my eyes almost at once.

"Are you okay?" She asked, seeing me open my eyes. "Ng... okay?" "How do you feel now?" "A little better "

"Sho!" Tagawa interposed. "Pull yourself together. It's Miss Akiko."

"Oh" I pulled in my chin.

"He's Shō and he's from up north; I'm Tagawa. Please look after us in the future."

“Actually I should ask you guys to look after me. You know my name?”

"Of course we do."

I opened my eyes a little. I saw her face. Perhaps it was on account of keeping them closed for so long, I felt her face at that moment was so bright and moving that I almost couldn't bear to look at her.

For two whole days I had lain in bed, unable to get up. Although the army doctor, Hasegawa, hadn't said anything, I knew my condition was not encouraging, probably the damned pleurisy from which I was recovering had taken a turn for the worse. It went without saying that it was the result of working the last few days.

The first time I ever had the illness was when I was about to graduate from middle school.

Fortunately it wasn't a serious case, so I was able to hang on until after exams and get through that difficult time of studying. I was very lucky and tested into an industrial arts high school.

That happened over a year before. In the year since then, I had gradually overcome it; but just after finishing my first year, I was drafted after deferrals were ordered cancelled. I had been in the service less than three months when my illness took a turn for the worse and I was sent to this field hospital. I had been in the hospital for about two months.

I was now treated like a patient and did not have to work in the labor corps. Given the current state of my health, this was a matter for rejoicing. But for some reason, I had been vexed and worried for the last two days. I wanted to get up and go outside for a look, but I couldn't stand the sound of the straw rustling under me.

A secret seemed to enter my brain and disappear again. The moment it appeared, I denied it. I decided to believe that I became restless and agitated because of homesickness, and furthermore I was depressed about my outlook for the future. Yes, I didn't know how long I was going to have to be a soldier. The day would never come save when the war ended but it was a long and large decisive battle involving tens of millions. In recent months, the newspapers had been screaming that every imperial subject, tens of millions strong, would have to fight to the last man—that's what that disturbing slogan is about: “millions of pieces of broken jade.” The fight for the Ryukyu Islands was nearing the end, then the decisive battle for Japan would come, and perhaps Taiwan would be attacked.

After playing hide and seek several times with that idea, I finally had to admit that it was the cause of my unease. Before that, the seriousness of the battle situation, the violent air raids, ten million pieces of broken jade, and the like were of no concern to me. Oh, I was missing her—Akiko. I was looking forward to seeing her figure and hearing her voice.

Every time Tagawa returned, I wanted to ask about her, but I couldn't bring myself to open my mouth. All I could do was mention the hard work and ask about the progress of the project, and if there was any news.

In that frame of mind, another day was lost. Tagawa and the others came back in the evening.

“Hey!” Tagawa walked toward me, ramrod straight, practically shouting at me: “It was really dangerous this afternoon and I nearly lost my life.”

“Oh, what happened?”

"I was nearly crushed under a boulder, about this big." Gesturing with his hands he said, "It fell just a meter in front of me. If I had been a step faster, I would have been a goner."

"Aiya! Was anyone hurt?" : "No I was really scared."

Exhausted, Tagawa collapsed on his bed and bent over to undo his leggings.

"Hey." He suddenly looked up, "She showed up again this afternoon. His voice no longer sounded tired.

"Who?" I replied without hesitation, though I knew at once to whom he was referring.

"Akiko!" He pressed close and whispered. "Oh She didn't show up yesterday?"

"No. She said her sister-in-law was here yesterday and this morning, so she was busy."

I really wanted to know something about her, but I persisted in pretending I was disinterested. I also figured that perhaps Tagawa also liked her. But who wouldn't like her? Tagawa was clearly much closer to her than I was, and if there was a competition, he was way out in front. Suddenly it seemed to grow dark around me.

"You don't look so good." "I " Weakly, I closed my eyes. "She asked after you." "Huh?" I sensed a light in front of me. "She said she'd like to come and see you. Ha-ha." It was awful. The blood rushed uncontrollably to my face. Two or three more days went by.

Thankfully, my illness didn't grow any worse and I felt I had already recovered to the point I was at before the last flare up.

The army doctor permitted me to get up and walk around the sickroom, inside and outside, but I felt as if I

Only then did it hit me that since that day, he was always the first to mention her when we get back from work, and thinking about it now, it seemed that he was always examining my face.

The guy was really clever and tricky, I grumbled to myself.

couldn't stay there any longer and just had to get outdoors for a look. Perhaps my heart was already flying to the tunnel entrance.

That night, I told Tagawa that I planned to resume work the following day.

"What? If you can rest, what's the point?" He was very surprised.

"I'm bored to death and besides " "What, what is it?"

"Nothing really, it's just they " I spoke thrusting my chin in the direction of the clinic.

I had to tell him how fast and loose they were behaving. The old guy, Captain Kato, was always coming to chase the nurses and you could hear their crazy laughter. There was already a rumor going around about him and Umeko fooling around in broad daylight. It would be a torture to stay in the hospital.

Umeko was one of the young women of the aborigines who had been conscripted from the mountains to work as nurses in the field hospital—they were pretty and shapely, but because they were rather dark skinned they were nicknamed black beauties. They were romantic by disposition and there was a lot of malicious gossip circulating around them.

What I said was not without its basis in fact. That brazen smile of hers along with the captain's

sensual eyes always made me uneasy. But it wasn't just him—the other junior medical officers all had a sort of hungry look, and none of them made any attempt to hide anything; instead, they made it seem heroic.

“Hmm ...” Hearing what I said, Tagawa muttered hesitantly to himself and said, “I know that you, and don't deny it, are in love with her, so ....”

“Nonsense.” I couldn't help being startled.

“There's no point in denying it. The day I mentioned her, your eyes glowed and you blushed. Later...ha-ha-ha...never mind. My eyes can't be wrong.”

But, he was still trying to convince me to rest a few more days, for the sake of my health. Now that he had guessed what was on my mind, I could only give up the idea of taking part in the work, although I did not openly admit that he was right.

· Totally unexpected, she came to see me the following day. A medical orderly brought her to my sickroom door and then turned and left. She entered the otherwise unoccupied room amid my surprise.

“Ah” I didn't know what to do and tried to raise myself in bed.

“Lie down, there's no need to get up,” she gently commanded me.

“Are you feeling a little better?”

“Thanks to you, a good deal better.” Suddenly I felt like I had to make a great effort to talk.

“Ah, your color is better. I brought this from home.”

She opened the bundle in her hands and removed two bunches of lichees. The fruit was bright red and the leaves dark green.

“Oh, how nice. Thank you Miss Shūgetsu. “Huh, how do you know my name?” “Tagawa told me.”

I wanted to tell her how much I liked her name—it was much better than Akiko, but I said nothing.

“Tagawa? How would he know? That's very strange. What about him? What did his name used to be?”

“His surname is Chin, but I don't know his given name for certain.”

“Why didn't you change your name?” “No reason. You didn't change yours either.”

“My dad forbade it. Besides, it doesn't make any difference, no one outside calls me Shūgetsu anymore.”

“I think I'll call you Shūgetsu, okay?” “Why?” “I don't know.”

She laughed and I couldn't help but smile. She wanted to know where I was from and I told her it was pretty much like here, a small village at the foot of a mountain, there were mountains and rivers, a very tranquil place. Then we couldn't find anything else to talk about.

Just as she was about to leave, she, too, tried to convince me not to go back to work too soon and to take care of myself. She also indicated that she would come back and see me when she had time.



I got up and saw her to the door. I watched her depart from behind, my heart so agitated that it was a long time before I could calm down again.

Two days later and I was still thinking about what had happened, going over her each and every word and recalling her smile. Sometimes I had the feeling that I was in the lead in this race and would suddenly grow excited; other times I felt just the opposite, that while I was being stupid, Tagawa was advancing and even passing me.

I was looking forward to her swift reappearance. I would be a little braver then, and a little more composed. Using what little knowledge I had gained from reading about dealing with women, I imagined how things would be when she arrived.

I waited in vain for two more days, and couldn't bear it any longer. I decided I'd go back to work the very next day. This was all on account of my longing to see her, but also because the work was nearing completion. Tagawa told me that occasionally the picks could be heard from the other side when they struck rock. Everyone was saying they would meet in a matter of two days. I felt that I wouldn't have much chance of seeing her once the work was finished, so I hoped to get to know her better before that.

In the morning, I reported to Sergeant Shiono and rejoined the work.

There had been a lightning storm at night and the road was all mud. Everyone was complaining about how hard it was to move and how much more difficult it would be to work. But I didn't care in the least; for me it was just the opposite—I was jumping with joy because I would soon be seeing her again. The air was clear after the rain and the village was filled with green, which made me feel how bright the day was. The only thing I was worried about was her. If for some reason she didn't come, I didn't know how disappointed I would be.

When we arrived we found, the civilians were already there performing their official duties. I saw her at once among the others. She also spotted me at once among our group, generously shooting that touching smile of hers at me.

Tagawa elbowed me, turned and said while making a face, "She's looking at you."

"You fool," I couldn't help muttering.

The guy read my mind, but I knew nothing about him and I simply couldn't do anything with him. What was he really thinking about her?

Work began. I passed her a few times and each time we wanted to say something to each other. She was startled by my appearance. I said I had completely recovered. This time I didn't just listen to her and Tagawa, which gave me a little more confidence and made me feel a little more at ease.

Soon, whether we had picked up the pace or she and her partner had slowed down, the four of us were walking together. We talked and laughed. She said the day after next was Sunday and we were invited to her house. Tagawa and I made profuse promises to go.

Perhaps on account of the big storm the previous night, there was more underground water in the tunnel than usual, and it frequently dripped on my head and sometimes a small stone would fall, and with just a few acetylene lamps, which didn't help us as we entered and exited the tunnel, it

was very

*the found up the laughed* dark inside. Although Sergeant Shiono was still outside holding the mirror, the tunnel curved and only the entrance could be said to have a little light.

It was hard to walk, awkward and strenuous, but I wasn't aware of the slightest pain. I felt intoxicated; I no longer felt there were dark clouds shrouding my future. Even the war, artillery fire, and bombs no longer seemed to exist on earth.

After a while, we filled another basket with earth. Just as we were about to lift it and head for the tunnel entrance, the area around us was rocked by an explosion.

"Wow!" "We're through."

Several different shouts echoed in the tunnel as if everyone were shouting in unison.

"Hey, we're through!" Tagawa dropped the basket, turned and ran down the tunnel.

"What? What happened?" Shūgetsu and her partner, who were several steps ahead, turned to ask.

"The tunnel has been joined. Let's go look."

I felt I shouldn't let her go by herself to take a look, and stopped.

That's when everything happened. Suddenly I felt as if a black shadow passed in the darkness ahead, which was followed at once by a shaking. I looked more intently and only one of the two women was standing in front of me. In a split second, a strange and inexpressible fear—a mental fixation—took hold of me. It felt as if a cold light penetrated me. In another split second, I regained my senses.

"Oh, Miss Hideko(Shūgetsu)!" "What happened?"

I still did not know what had happened, save that my intuition told me it was bad. I hurried forward a couple of steps. At that time I felt mud fall on my head and shoulders, and quite a lot of it.

"What happened?" I asked again.

"She Hideko." She pointed at the ground, her voice trembling.

Only then did I understand. My goodness, what happened?

"Tagawa! Tagawa!"

I shouted for all I was worth. I shouted crazily twice and then dropped down. Shūgetsu was crushed under a boulder.

"Shūgetsu Shūgetsu "

My voice was tearful. As I shouted I dug, but do what I might, I couldn't budge that boulder.

Tagawa hurried over. Together, the two of us with difficulty finally moved it. But

That happened eighteen years ago. After that my memory was a blank until we left that mountain village and returned home.

I know that one thing happened during that blank—the Japanese announced unconditional surrender, and the war ended. Many people went crazy and shouted with joy at the news, but all I remember is that I didn't go crazy and shout with joy.

Also, I seemed to have gone to her home—oh! that was for her funeral. It was a large red brick house in the hollow of a mountain, with two lichee trees in the front yard, with a sea of trees

behind. But all of this color is fuzzy and faded; today I can't be certain if it was even her house. When I left the mountain, I wasn't in the least happy about returning home; I just felt mournful and incredibly sad at leaving. It was with great difficulty that I left. I couldn't believe that she was no longer in the village. It was I who carried her, unbreathing and covered with mud and blood, out of the tunnel. Anyone who saw her might possibly have doubts as to whether she was dead; only I could have no doubt.

An also oh, yes it was the moment for Tagawa and me to shake hands in parting. My bus headed north and his headed south. We said goodbye to each other at the village bus stop.