

Bisei's Faithfulness

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Translated by Scott Baird & Chitose Kishi, 1974

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Come, let me tell you what I see so far...

For a long time Bisei squatted under the bridge, waiting for his woman to arrive.

He looked up and saw the high, stone, railing - half of which was covered with ivy. Through the ivy he could occasionally see the white clothes of the passers-by, fluttering in the breeze and reflecting the brilliant setting sun. But the woman had not arrived yet.

Bisei whistled silently. Looking around light-heartedly, he spotted a sandbank under the bridge.

This yellow sandbank was scarcely twelve feet square and water was lapping at its edges. There were a lot of holes where crabs dwelled, among rushes at the water's edge. They popped ever so faintly every time the ripples hit. But the woman had not arrived, yet.

Green rushes grew thickly along the river banks and clumps of willows could be seen here and there. Their thickness made the stream seem narrower than it really was. A clear belt of water was silently flowing through the rushes, reflecting a piece of mica-like cloud. But the woman had not arrived, yet.

Then Bisei turned his face away from the water's edge and began to stroll on the not very wide sandbank. While walking, he noticed that the day was growing dark and he could feel the atmosphere begin to press around him.

Possibly because no one had passed over the bridge for a while, neither the sound of footsteps nor horse hooves could be heard on the bridge any longer. There was just the breeze, the whispering rushes, and the splash of water; then somewhere the noisy crackle of a heron was heard. Bisei stopped and saw that the glittering water, washing the yellow sandbank, was coming closer to him than before. But the woman had not arrived, yet.

Frowning, Bisei impatiently paced around on the sandbank under the bridge in the dark. The tide was gradually rising -first an inch and then a foot. At the same time he scented the odor of duckweed and the water that came from the river. It gave him a chilly feeling. He looked up and noticed that the setting sun had faded. The dark stone railings of the bridge stood out against the background of the dark blue sky. But the woman had not arrived, yet.

Bisei was paralyzed with fear.

The water was close enough to soak his shoes and would be filling the river under the bridge up to the banks in no time. Then in a little while his knees, belly, and chest might possibly become hidden under the mercilessly rising tide. But the woman had not arrived, yet.

Bisei, now standing in the water, often looked up at the bridge with a gleam of hope. The leaves of the rushes and willows that grew here and there waved in the windy haze. Dusk was grimly falling over the river water, which was, indeed now, soaking his belly. Suddenly right in front of him a fish, perhaps a sea-perch, jumped out of the water and showing its white belly made its acrobatic return into the water. In the sky directly above, stars were twinkling. The ivy covered bridge was scarcely visible in the dark. The woman, though, had still not arrived.

At midnight, when the moonlight was shining upon the rushes and willows, the river water aided by the breeze silently carried the lifeless body of Bisei down toward the sea. But his soul, as if it were yearning for the moonlight in the midnight sky, quietly departed from his body and ascended high in the air just like the water and duckweed sent up odors from the river.

After the passing of several thousand years, his soul, having wandered through many spheres, was destined to dwell in a human body. The soul that dwells in my body is really Bisei's. That is the reason that, even though I was born in this modern age, I have not done anything meaningful. Living a dreamy life with no definite object in view, I am waiting for something wonderful to arrive - just as Bisei, under the bridge in the dark, was patiently waiting for something wonderful to arrive, waiting for his lover who never arrived.