



CHRYS ROMEO

ANOTHER WORLD

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by Chrys Romeo

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The Japanese Restaurant



The Japanese restaurant was guarded by a red maple tree.

Beyond the gate there was a small lake and a wooden bridge. Leading the path to the bridge, there were a few stones. A kiosk made of wood waited in a peaceful meadow. Whoever went closer to the kiosk would not know if they were coming or going, because the wooden bridge that reflected its image in the water gave the impression of a round endless path that would reach the gate in many ways. Besides, the kiosk seemed to appear and disappear in a shredded mist. There was a deep quiet and chill in the air.

The monk and the guest advanced silently underneath the branches of the red maple tree.

Neither of them spoke, as if trying not to alter in any way the sacred silence of the carefully adorned garden.

“Please don’t step on the leaves”, the monk uttered eventually, in a soft reverent tone. “They are considered letters of tomorrow and we gather them for our prayers, to show us the way”.

The guest, obviously European and not accustomed to the many Asian ways of regarding life and its meanings, was very attentive and walking carefully behind the monk who seemed to slide above the earth in his brown robe. The guest felt a little awkward wearing a plain white shirt and ironed trousers. He had thought it would be an official meeting. Yet the place seemed somehow unconventional and mysteriously relaxed, in its mystic ways.

“I should have been wearing one of your *yukata* kimonos” he said to the monk who kept walking ahead of him, crossing the little wooden bridge. The kiosk had disappeared from sight– it seemed to have vanished in the air.

The monk turned around and smiled. His small perceptive eyes glanced at the guest with patience, meditating.

“It doesn’t matter what you are wearing, young man. Let me tell you something.”

They had both stopped on the bridge, right in the middle of it.

“Look into the water”, the monk told him. “What do you see?”

The guest glanced at the smooth surface. A few maple leaves were floating slowly in lazy ripples, following the current of the lake – or of a river that came from somewhere nearby.

“I see those leaves...”

“Of course. And do you think they are moving?”

He watched the leaves spiraling in slow motion on the surface of the water, carrying their reflection away, taking distance.

“Yes, I believe they are moving”, he replied.

“And that is where you might be wrong.”

The monk smiled again. The guest blinked, confused.

“I don’t understand.”

“Let me explain. In our view, the truth is often altered by our own perception of it. If you are in a boat, on a river and you see the trees on the shore, what do you actually see?”

“The trees moving along.”

“Exactly. But the truth is that it is you who are moving. In our perception of life, we must learn to distinguish what is illusion and what is true, from everything that happens. Our own impressions alter things a lot. If you want to know yourself, and know the truth of life, you must be still and learn to distinguish appearance from essence. Impressions are deceiving. Approach them carefully. Cultivate deep thoughts and detachment.”

“I agree about the tree and the boat. But what about these leaves? Aren’t they moving?”

“No, they are not moving.”

The monk smiled patiently and undisturbed. The guest seemed confused again by the answer.

“But I see them moving...”

“And yet, they are not moving. It is you who are moving.”

The guest frowned a bit, trying to figure out the meaning of what the monk had said.

“I must ask...” he spoke, still watching the leaves on the lake, “how am I moving if we are on the bridge? The bridge is still. It’s motionless. I don’t feel as if I’m moving. “

“You are moving because the image of the leaves creates an impression inside your soul and your spirit changes, moving closer to the essence of the universe. The leaves are not changing their nature, even if you see them floating on the lake. But your nature is changing right now – and that is how you are moving. Inside your mind – inside your spirit.”

“That’s very interesting...”

The guest had nothing more to say. He just stared at the calm waters and the lazy leaves, going round and round in slow circles, on the surface.

“You seem to know a lot about the truth of the universe”, he said after a while, watching the water.

The monk seemed to have an answer to everything.

“The most important thing that you can learn about the truth of the universe is that you never really know anything. The truth itself is in permanent motion. “

The kiosk could be seen again beyond the bridge.

“Come, let’s go. They are waiting for us”.

They crossed the bridge and approached the kiosk. Walking closer to it, the guest noticed that the kiosk was actually a building made of wood, with a bamboo roof and a board hanging by the door. There was an inscription on it, something written in *kanji* that the guest didn’t understand.

“It says ‘The Pathway’. It is the name of the restaurant.”

The monk bowed his head.

“Please, let’s go in.”

The guest took off his shoes. The monk left his sandals on the doorstep too. They walked inside.

Once inside, they were greeted by a Japanese girl, wearing a kimono with red and pink flowers and orange flamingo birds, fluttering large sleeves while bowing to the floor, with folded arms:

“*Konnichiwa*. Welcome to our restaurant.”

The guest bowed to her politely. She raised her eyes to him for a second and a slight smile shifted the corners of her mouth upwards, while her glance glimmered sharply, intensely, so fast, like an impression. “Appearances”, he thought. “Don’t mind appearances, he said to himself. Yet he couldn’t take his eyes off the Asian beauty that moved fast, arranging a small round table and cups of tea, walking softly and yet so smoothly, her black

shiny hair and oblique eyes contrasting with the pale skin, white as petals of lotus flowers. She seemed so delicately refined, so fragile and yet so strong, agile and quick.

“She is Haruka. That means *spring flower*...”

The monk smiled again as she bowed and came with a pot of green tea to pour for them in porcelain cups with pink flowers and brown branches painted on the side.

“Makoto-San”, the guest spoke, while sitting down on the bamboo mattress on the floor. “I am here for the parchment. I was told the manuscript would be given to me at this restaurant.”

“I know what you are here for... may I call you Kenshin-San? It is a good name. It means *modest truth*. It is what you are looking for, isn't it?”

“Yes, thank you for the honor. I was wondering – the parchment... was it really written nine hundred years ago?”

The monk took a cup of hot green tea and sipped slowly, closing his eyes, lost in thoughts, just like the leaves on the lake that were flowing without persistent direction.

“Let's drink some tea first. Then I'll tell you a legend. It might be true – or an illusion. You decide. Think about appearances when you do that.”

The guest unbuttoned his collar, and then took a sip from the cup of green tea. It was hot and strongly flavored in a bittersweet refreshing aroma. In the meantime, another girl came in, very similar to Haruka and her pink kimono. The guest thought it was the same girl, yet this time, her hair was slightly brownish and stringed in a stripe of sparkling flowery clips. She was wearing a green kimono with red maple leaves and golden little fireflies shining on her sleeves. Her deep eyes glanced stealthily at him, sideways, pouring more green tea in his cup. Her movements seemed a bit more thoughtful than the way the girl before had stormed around the room in high speed. She was the opposite of that: she looked as if she had a plan for everything she did.

“*Arigato gozaimas*“, he said to her. “Thank you very much.”

She bowed and went out, with the pot of tea.

“She is Asuka - *fragrance of tomorrow*. They're twins. And the legend I'm about to tell you has a lot to do with them.”

The monk paused, closed his eyes and inhaled the steam from the green tea; then, he leaned his head back, still holding the cup in his hands.

“Once, a long time ago, a warrior who lost his village came up to this meadow. His story was simple. He wanted a family, but he couldn't find anyone from his village, because the houses had been destroyed by a tribe of savages and the people fled away. The only thing he

had saved from his village was a root of a red maple tree. He planted the root in this meadow. He saw there was no water, so he changed the course of a river nearby to bring it closer to his tree. Then he slept next to it every night. And every night, he prayed to the moonlight and to the water to take care of his tree. In a few weeks, the tree started to grow. It grew – and grew... And it began to rise higher to the sky, with its branches getting stronger and the roots getting wider. But one night, when the moon was full, the warrior, who still slept by the tree, heard the cry of a little baby. He climbed the tree and found a little girl. It was a new born baby and he didn't know how it had appeared. During the day, he went to the nearest village to look for food for the baby. When he returned, he heard another baby crying. He climbed the tree again and found another little girl. He started to take care of them. After a few years, when the girls were toddlers, he found another child in the tree: a baby boy. He realized the tree was giving him a family. He decided to protect the tree, so he made a fence around it and he built a little bamboo house near the lake.”

The monk stopped, looking down at the floor. His eyes, almost closed, made him appear to have fallen asleep. Suddenly, a little boy rushed in the room, running and laughing, chasing a fluffy cat.

“*Banzaaaaaai!!!*” he yelled at the cat, and the cat jumped beyond the doorstep.

The boy laughed.

“Ah! And that is Kaede!” the monk exclaimed, as if just waking up.

Haruka entered the room and took the little boy Kaede outside, very fast - she didn't even leave them time to say anything. She just rushed by, like a flashlight of silky colors.

The next second, Asuka entered the room and brought a plate of food. She placed it on the table, bowed briefly - and left.

“I hope you like rice fortune cookies”, the monk said and took one of them from the plate with the chopsticks. “There's great wisdom in these. Try it. You might find your parchment, you never know...”

The guest picked a fortune cookie and tore it in two, uncovering the paper rolled inside.

“What does it say?” the monk inquired, not really curious, but rather with a childish playful attitude.

The guest looked at the writing and couldn't decide.

“I don't know. It's in Japanese. It looks like *katakana* alphabet. *Ashita wa kyou yori mo...* What does it mean?”

“I'll bring Asuka to translate it for you.”

The monk got up and disappeared from the room.

The guest waited for a while. The evening was approaching. The lake outside was silent and the sunset was reflecting its colors in the water. The restaurant was silent too. No footsteps or voices could be heard anywhere. He waited for as long as politeness could allow, yet soon he became restless and impatient. He got up and started to look around the rooms. There was another chamber that seemed to be a kitchen, with lots of pots and plates gathered in the corners. However, the objects were dusty and grey and it seemed nobody had been there for a long time. He found another room that seemed like a living room or a bedroom, because there were many bamboo mattresses rolled up and leaning on the wooden walls. However, the room had the same deserted air about it: everything was dusty and silent. He returned to the front door. Still nobody. Only deep silence.

He went outside. The maple tree, with its huge branches hanging over the lake, seemed to whisper softly, ruffling its foliage in the wind. The evening was getting closer and the light was already fading. Looking at the bridge, he thought he heard running footsteps and child laughter. Yet he didn't see the little boy Kaede anywhere.

He went closer to the bridge – and just as he was stepping on it, he saw a kimono sleeve disappearing behind the trunk of the maple tree. It was pink with orange flamingos. “Haruka.”, he thought and he ran along the bridge, only to find that she had disappeared completely. The tree was silent, swishing its branches through the sunset light. He looked back across the pond: the kiosk – the bamboo restaurant – had disappeared too. The meadow was empty and a thin mist was spreading above it, with the evening shadows.

“Are you looking for something, Kenshin-San?” he heard a voice.

It was coming from the tree. He glanced up and saw Haruka sitting casually with the kimono folded around her, on a branch, up in the tree. She laughed and her intensely quick eyes glimmered with amusement. She was glancing at him sideways, as if analyzing him in her mind in a thousand ways, in just a second.

“You don't seem to know where you are”, she said.

“I thought I came to a restaurant. I see it's gone – and where are the others?”

“You came to find a parchment for your museum. You didn't come to a restaurant”, she replied, as if willing to bring light into his mind.

“That's true, but the monk - Makoto – he told me I would find it here. Is it here?”

She chuckled.

“Are you in a hurry? It might be here, but you'll find lots of other things with it too... Maybe you came here to find something about yourself. Who knows?... ”

He thought for a few moments. Appearances. Don't be deceived.

“You said this is not a restaurant. It’s called ‘The Pathway’, right? What is it?” he asked her directly.

She answered immediately, fearlessly, somehow enjoying the story, as if she was telling him a fairy tale or revealing an unspoken secret:

“It’s the pathway to the truth. And your parchment is lost in time. So is everything else.”

She smiled and jumped down from the branch.

While falling gracefully in the grass, her kimono sleeves spreading in the air like wings, she seemed to have become, for a while, a delicate refined flamingo, colorfully reflected in the water. Then she leaned on the tree, playing with one of the leaves that she picked from the grass.

“In spring, we have the *Sakura* festival”, she spoke simply. “When the cherry trees are full of flowers and their petals cover the earth and fill the gardens, people go out to sit underneath the trees and celebrate the renewal of life.”

“What does that have to do with the parchment I’m looking for?”

“You know”, she continued without answering him, “Kaede’s name means *maple*. Isn’t it interesting?... In spring, this maple tree celebrates the renewal of life too...”

“You still haven’t told me...”

“I told you a lot. Time is endlessly renewing life. Don’t you see? This is the essence of things. You might be in the twelfth century now... or you might be in the twenty first... it doesn’t make any difference to the maple tree. It will still be renewing life each spring.”

He looked at her. He wanted to ask her why she was speaking about the twelfth century, when he noticed he wasn’t wearing his white shirt and ironed trousers anymore. He was wearing a brownish-grey cotton robe, tied at the waist with a thick rough rope.

She kept smiling. And she handed him the leaf.

“Here. Here is your parchment.”

And then she went around the tree.

“Wait a minute! Haruka!”

But from the other side of the tree Asuka appeared, smiling observantly at him. Her green and golden kimono seemed unchanged and it contrasted with his rough clothes like silk next to a potato sack. She walked around the tree, pausing in front of him, leaning on the trunk with one shoulder. And then she spoke, still watching him from behind the long delicate eyelashes, as if she had a powerful Rubik cube solving strategy rolling in her mind.

“*Ashita wa kyou yori mo*. That’s what your fortune cookie said. It means *tomorrow will be even better than today*”, she added, offering to help him understand.

“I feel something is uncanny here”, he said to her. “Where is Haruka? She just told me we are in the twelfth century. And my clothes have changed -...”

“Your clothes are fine. They don’t matter. Forget appearances”, she said looking down, as if to herself.

“Where’s Haruka?”

“She’s here.”

“Where?”

She glanced up at him and she smiled.

“Haven’t you understood yet?”

“No, I don’t understand. Where is the monk? Where is the boy? Where is your sister?”

She pondered on whether to tell him or not. She still kept smiling, undisturbed. Then she said slowly:

“Haruka... and myself... and the maple tree... are the same person.”

He glanced at her, in disbelief.

“And Kaede? And Makoto the monk?”

“Makoto means *truth*... Kaede means *maple*... They, too, are part of the maple tree...”

“So it means... the legend is true? Who is the warrior, then?” he asked.

She paused, looking at him. Then she bowed her head in reverence and answered softly but firmly:

“You are, Kenshin-San”.

The light was becoming dim. He saw her silhouette step into the trunk of the maple tree and her image seemed to just melt instantly, with her kimono, replaced by the brown surface of wooden stripes.

She had become transparent and disappeared – just dissipated, vanished – she seemed to have hidden within the tree. He remained alone in the dark.

“*Daijobu*, Asuka?” he asked in the night, a bit confused and scared to have seen her disappear. “Are you okay?”

Somehow, he felt she wasn’t completely gone.

He heard laughter inside the tree and he stuck his ear on the rough surface. He thought for a while, and then looked at the maple leaf in his hand. The moonlight was shining on it. He could see something written there, in silver signs. They were *kanji* signs. He tried to concentrate: somehow; he could understand what they said, even if he didn’t know the *kanji* - he could miraculously grasp the meaning beyond appearances. “*Time is what you find when you search for the bridge. Truth is what you find when you search for the light. Follow the*

pathway.” He sat down next to the tree, leaning on it and looking at the night sky. He could hear crickets and other insects humming distantly by the pond. The moon was reflected in the water like a golden plate, shiny and full, as if smiling at him in surface ripples...

When he woke up it was already morning.

He got up. The maple tree was still there, with its branches and leaves. The pond was still there too. Yet beyond the bridge, the kiosk was gone. He looked at himself: he was wearing his white shirt and ironed trousers again. In the grass, he noticed a roll of paper. “It must be the parchment”, he thought. He picked it up, but he already knew what it had written inside. He had seen it the night before, in the moonlight.

“*Ohayo gozaimas!*” he heard from the other side of the pond.

He saw a Japanese girl by the gate. She was wearing modern clothes and was holding the hand of a little boy. She looked a lot like Haruka, with her quick inquiring eyes, but she had the gracefully hidden planning thoughts of Asuka too. He crossed the bridge, approaching the gate.

“Good morning”, he told her when he got closer. “Are you Haruka or Asuka?”

“I’m Aiko”, she replied.

“*Love child*”, he translated in his mind, unknowingly guessing the meaning of her name.

“And this is Arata”, she added.

“*The new one*”, he translated again in his mind, understanding it right away. He looked at the little boy - so much like the little Kaede at the restaurant.

He was beginning to understand the meaning of every word. He had inherently acquired that power from the moment he had realized that everything had a better significance beyond appearances. The parchment had given him a gift he had never had before: the power of understanding the meaning beyond appearances.

“Why are you walking around the garden so early in the morning?” she asked him, observantly.

“I spent the night at the restaurant...”

“What restaurant?”

She seemed to look at him very carefully. He smiled.

“I thought there was a restaurant over the lake...”

“There used to be an abandoned kiosk”, she told him. “But now it’s just a meadow...”

They looked at the silent lake in the distance, with maple leaves floating on the water, relentlessly yet without a precise purpose...

The modern girl and the little boy that had appeared out of nowhere were waiting in the chilly air of the morning light. They seemed to be just passing by, yet appearances were not that opaque. "The truth of the universe is in permanent motion", he thought.

He looked at the girl attentively. She glanced at him sideways, somehow smiling. He kept thinking. Appearances. Don't be deceived.

"*Anata wa dare desu?*" the little boy asked him suddenly.

"*Who are you?*" he translated the meaning in his mind - instantly, without even trying.

"Kenshin", he answered immediately, without much thought.

And then he realized that the parchment didn't belong in a museum: it had to be passed on. It belonged with the new ones. It was a power to be kept and given - advancing through time, in its timeless eternal way. It was meant to be known from one century to the next. He realized it would be better to send it ahead. *Ashita wa kyou yori mo...* of course... a better tomorrow. He suddenly decided to give the boy the rolled paper.

"Would you like to have this? It's a parchment. It's very precious. You can keep it for as long as you need it."

"*Arigato*".

The little boy took the parchment.

"He doesn't read yet", Aiko told him.

The boy was thinking. Then, he handed him a plastic toy car he had in his pocket:

"*Konoshite kudasai taru!*"

"*Take this please*", he translated in his mind instantly.

Aiko smiled.

"He wants to give you something too. He's very generous. That's how he is."

He could almost hear the boy's thoughts and he knew that the little boy could read his mind too. It was like a power that he shared with the young one.

They walked past the gate.

"Are you coming with us?" Aiko asked him.

The little boy took his hand and his innocent eyes glanced at him directly, waiting. Kenshin looked back at the gardens. The maple tree was still there, in the mist, with its leaves whispering mysteriously. *Itsumademo... forever...*

The Sword of the Samurai



The samurai came running along the bridge. Behind him, in the mist, people were shouting, iron clashing on iron, screams and threatening noise were rising like a tide.

He crossed the bridge and threw himself on the ground, breathing heavily. He was so exhausted, that he felt he could never get up again. And yet, he realized he had lost his sword somewhere, along the way, behind him. He crawled up, starting to go back on the bridge, into the fog, looking desperately for his sword. He could not lose it. The sword represented his honor. His heritage. His legacy. His everything. It was a sword made in a land of sunrise. It had been forged in fire and cooled off in the pure water of a wild river. It had been intended for the most important heroes of the world... for the noblest kings of a kingdom beyond clouds... for the most loyal and for the bravest fighters. It had been intended for a strong hand. The samurai had received it from his ancestors. He didn't know if he was noble enough, brave enough, important enough. Yet he knew he was strong enough. And he knew the sword was his. Only his. He had to find it again.

He kept looking down to the ground. He walked past it and missed it, because of the intense exhaustion and the threatening battle beyond the bridge. He saw a few of his enemies advancing on the bridge. He still had a knife, but he needed his sword. He thought for a second. He would return later for it. He climbed on the ledge of the bridge, and then he jumped into the water below. His enemies looked at the water lilies floating on the pond, but could not see any trace of the samurai. They gave up and left the bridge.

The sword was still there, on the bridge. It was an exquisite sword: sharp, with perfectly luminous reflexes. Its handle was made of metal, but it had many silver plated drawings inlaid on the surface. It kept glowing brilliantly. In its brightness, it gathered so much light, so much power, that it started expanding its rays into another realm.

A few centuries ahead, in Russia, three peasants got into a fight with each other. It was winter and the freezing temperature had turned the men's beards into white frozen ice. They were lost in the blizzard and despite their thick coats and the many glasses of vodka they had tasted before going into the night with their troika, they felt an unknown danger hovering above them.

"We're doomed, Volodya. Admit it, brother. We won't find the way back to the village until sunrise. We're lost. We'll freeze our beards out here. They'll find us after a week, when the blizzard is through."

"Shut up, Misha. You're scaring the horses. We'll be home in half an hour. You'll see."

"Misha is right."

"Nobody asked you anything, Boris."

"Brothers, let's not fight. We have to find the way, or they won't find our troika until spring. We'll be buried in the storm. "

"I told you to shut it! Why didn't you bring the lamp with you? How are we to find the way now?"

"Volodya, I swear I brought the lamp, - but Boris forgot to fill it with oil."

"What? I'll show you..."

They had stopped the horses. The bigger one reached out to punch his brother who seemed to have been responsible with the oil. But because their coats were thick and heavy, they fell off the troika and rolled clumsily in the snow.

"Brothers! Brothers, please don't fight!"

The other two didn't seem to hear anything, because of the blizzard and the freezing cold that numbed their senses. In a moment, they remained down on the ground, looking helplessly ahead. Suddenly, there was something in front of them, on the path, just above the snow.

"Volodya... do you see what I see?"

"I see it. Brother Boris, you're drunk, but so am I. Let's ask Misha."

"Misha, do you see that?"

"What? What is it, brothers?"

"Do you see it?"

It was a sword, shining in the night, above the snow. Glowing brightly and swinging slightly against the blizzard, it seemed to beacon them.

"It's a sword, brothers!"

"We know it's a sword! But what is it doing up there in the air?..."

“It wants us to follow it.”

“What do you mean, it wants us to follow? It’s not a person!”

“I’m telling you, brothers! I think it wants to show us the way...”

“I say let’s not follow it. It might be wrong! We’ll end up in hell.”

“And if you stay here, what do you think will happen?...”

They stared at each other. They stared at the sword. It was there, stubbornly waiting for them to get the troika going. Eventually, they gathered their courage and decided to follow it. The sword floated ahead of them, glowing above the path and showing them the way through the storm, until they reached the village. When they arrived home, the sword had disappeared from sight, vanishing in the dark.

“Why do you think it helped us?” they asked each other the next day, when they still could not believe what had happened.

They did not understand why such a fine glowing sword, so powerful, would help some simple peasants lost in the blizzard, in the Siberian woods where everything was frozen.

In the meantime, in Poland, two children were hidden near the barbed wire fence of an extermination camp, during the second World War. They were both Polish, and they had been separated from their families. They didn’t know why the world had arrived at such a terrible moment; they just wanted to get away from it. They didn’t even understand why people needed to manifest so much hatred towards each other. They were only trying to find a way out of that dark place. They were hungry and scared, but determined to escape.

The boys ran between the brick buildings, beyond the walls of which they knew horrible things were happening each day. They had witnessed so many executions, they didn’t even stop to listen to the sound of the machine guns and the iron gates of the oven halls. They just crawled to the electrified fence, wondering how to get out. They knew the alarm would sound for them soon, when their absence would be noticed – and then someone from the watching towers would find them. It was evening and they took advantage of it, hiding next to the fence.

“Now what?” one boy whispered.

“We’ll wait for the guards to change.”

“And then what? You should’ve brought tools. Pliers. A knife. Anything.”

“What tools? Nobody has anything around here.”

“You’re the older one; you should’ve figured it out. Now they’ll find us and they won’t even ask questions.”

“Don’t be so frightened! We’ll escape. And please let’s not fight now. They’ll hear us.”

At that moment, something started glowing in the dirt, in front of them. As they were lying down, on the ground, they could see the bright light rising from something shiny. A silver object.

“What is that? A flashlight or something?”

“It’s too long to be a flashlight. It must be something electrified from the fence. A signal or a trap”.

“It’s not from the fence. Can you reach it?”

“I think so. But what if it starts the alarm or something?”

“We have to risk it. What choice do we have anyway?”

“Let’s move closer to it.”

They crawled in silence, getting closer to the object.

They examined it, with curious eyes, not attempting to reach it yet.

“Is it a sword? It looks like a sword.”

“What would a sword be doing here? And why is it glowing anyway?”

“Don’t ask me. I think we could use it to get out.”

“How?”

“We could dig under the fence. Make a small tunnel or something. And get to the other side, just roll beneath the wires.”

The boys glanced at the sword for a few moments, thinking about their chances. And then, they both grabbed the sword in a hurry and started to dig. When they made enough room under the wire, they crawled outside and waited a few more minutes, until it was completely dark outside. Then, they ran off into the night, leaving their worst nightmare behind.

The sword vanished again, after they escaped.

And it appeared in China.

There were some people on a river, trying to keep the raft steady on troubled waters. The river ran through the mountains and there were many big rocks in the water. The raft kept smashing against them, ready to break into pieces at any moment. The group of shepherds on the raft was on the way to the fields, going down the mountains. They had remained without their sheep. They were determined to buy some land, start planting rice and make a new village – and eventually, maybe, get some sheep and go up the mountains again, someday. Some of them hoped to see the Great Wall on their way too. They had heard about it but had never seen it.

“This raft would float easier if we didn’t carry those wheels with us”, one of the shepherds said after a few hours of bouncing left and right against the rocks.

Splashing cold water had made them soaking wet. It wasn't an easy ride. They had attached a few sacks and tied them on some logs, behind the raft. The luggage contained wheels from their carriages. They hoped they could re-build them once they arrived in their new location in the fields.

"If we give up the wheels, we won't have any money to buy new carriages. And we need carriages if we want to become farmers."

"We should've remained shepherds. That's what we are. We will never be true farmers."

"We must cut loose the loads behind us. They're dragging us down and the raft will break into pieces sooner or later. I say we cut them now!"

"You can't cut them! You don't have any knives sharp enough to cut the ropes! Our tools are in there too."

They started to argue about it, not noticing that they had approached a steep waterfall. The loads of tools went over the edge. The raft got stuck on a rock, yet it was slowly being dragged down by the weight of heavy tools hanging over in the falling water. The shepherds on the raft panicked.

"We'll fall down in that abyss with the tools and the wheels!"

"Cut the ropes now!"

"I don't have anything to cut them with! It's your fault! Why didn't you think of this before?"

"Whose idea was it to go rafting anyway? Weren't you the one who came up with the idea?"

"Brothers, please don't argue now! Let's just swim to the shore and abandon the raft! We can't do anything about it anymore and you don't want to fall down there, do you?"

At that moment, they noticed something shiny on the wooden raft.

"What is that?"

"It's a sword!"

They stared at it, forgetting the panic and the danger they were close to, forgetting they were just about to go over the edge.

"Whose sword is it? I never saw it before."

"It's not mine, I didn't bring it. Don't look at me."

"It's not mine either..."

"Brothers, let's just use it to cut the ropes. It doesn't matter whose sword it is. It has arrived just in time to save us from the waterfall."

"Who's gonna cut the ropes with it?"

“I’m not touching it. It glows too brightly. It glows too much. Something’s wrong about it.”

“Don’t look at me, I won’t touch it either.”

One of the shepherds took a step forward.

“I’m not afraid of it.”

He picked up the sword. The others kept staring at him, amazed at the glowing sword in his hand. He cut off the ropes in a brief movement, unleashing the loads of tools that went splashing down the waterfall. Then, the shepherds rushed to steer the raft towards the shore. When they arrived safely on land, the sword had already disappeared.

The sword was traveling through time, appearing in different centuries and shining its light for a purpose... it kept wandering, eternally roaming from one place to another, from one moment to the next...

The next place where the sword appeared was in an antique exhibition in the year 2700, in a colony on the moon. It went there to prove that wisdom had existed on earth long ago and that it was eternal. The sword had no trouble getting from the past to the future, adjusting its light through the centuries and spreading its influence upon humanity. It appeared at the North Pole, helping some explorers build an igloo; it went through the African desert, leading the way to a refreshing oasis for a caravan that needed water; it traveled to Mexico to show itself in front of some reckless young men who wanted to buy guns, scaring them away and changing their minds about it; later, it showed up in a museum, reminding the children who were visiting it that a sword did not always mean war – it could stand for honor, peace and justice too. With its shiny presence and its dignified influence, appearing and disappearing everywhere at any time, the sword became a legendary symbol of eternal mystery: it proved that the universe had the power to guard its values and elevate the human spirit beyond primitive struggles for domination, beyond temporary earthly ambitions and manifestations of hostility. It reminded humanity that there was something that mattered more: spiritual values and true evolution...

When the samurai emerged out of the pond, wet and exhausted, he saw his sword on the bridge. He climbed on the wooden platform. His enemies were gone. The lake and its surroundings were silently cold. He lay down for a while. He was so tired, he could have fallen asleep right there, and yet something more important was keeping him awake. He reached to the sword, trying to pick it up. The sword was there, with its glow, right in front of him. However, his fingers went through it, as if it had become transparent, like a ghostly

vision. The samurai frowned. He didn't understand why he couldn't grab the sword. It was there – and yet it wasn't there.

“You will have the sword after you understand how to use it”, he heard a voice echo over the lake and he recognized it as his grandfather who had been long gone for many years.

“But I know how to use it”, he protested.

“No. This is not a usual, common sword. It's a very special sword. It is the sword of justice. You can't use it to attack. You can't even use it to defend yourself: the sword will decide how to defend you in any situation. You can't try to punish anyone with it either, because you are not wise enough to judge. You can't use it to do harm. You can only use it for a good purpose. Do you understand?”

“Yes grandfather, I understand”.

The samurai knew his ancestor was speaking from a realm that was unknown to the world of the living. He had access to wisdom beyond what could have been seen by the eye.

“This sword is legendary. It is free. It gets to any place and any century as soon as someone stands for justice, freedom or truth. It gets there and it helps them. You must guard this sword well.”

“Yes, grandfather.”

The samurai was calm. He knew his grandfather would give him the sword again. He had given it to him once - he would give it to him again.

“You must also learn to be brave, noble and strong without the sword. Do not rely on it to do what you must do yourself. Don't expect the sword to replace your duty of being a man. You must become a samurai inside your spirit. The sword doesn't matter. Having it does not make you a samurai. Being a samurai means much more than having a sword.”

“I know, grandfather. You are right. I will try to be a good samurai”, he promised.

“You can have the sword now. But be careful with it, or you might lose it. Remember what I told you”.

Then, there was deep silence again above the lake.

The samurai stood up and picked the sword from the ground. He raised it to his eyes. Looking into the blade, he could see stories he didn't understand, people and places he didn't know, in times that had not happened yet...

He stared at it for a while, somehow hypnotized. And then, he placed the sword in its sheath.

And he walked across the bridge, into the mist.

The Invisible Bridge



The bridge was a simple wooden deck above a fast flowing river that rolled over the rocks, smoothing their surface impatiently. However, it hadn't always been just a plain bridge over a tumultuous river. And it hadn't always been invisible.

In ancient times, it used to be a passage to another world, a pathway to an alternative reality where the future could be created more easily and where the mind had more power to influence the material world.

The first one who discovered it was a boy from a rice field. He walked to the river to fill two jugs with water. He saw the bridge emerging from one shore to the other, in a green grove of whispering trees - and decided to walk across to the other side.

He stepped on it carefully, as the wooden boards creaked and the ropes extended more, swinging slightly under his feet. It looked like a plain bridge made of logs and ropes, unpretentious and apparently fragile, covered in light.

The boy arrived on the other shore. When he looked back, he discovered that he could see things in a very different way: there was a rainbow light flowing over everything and the trees had doubled their image. There was an ethereal energy like an aura shining through everything: the leaves, the branches, the earth, the rocks, each piece of matter was doubled by a thin vision of colorful transparent layer. It was as if the entire world was inhabited by a flow of energy that remained invisible to the eye – and yet, beyond the bridge, it could be seen in its full presence, inspiring and animating the forms and surfaces, deeper than they appeared to be. Sparkles of light were flowing everywhere around, in the air, going in different directions, like tiny flakes glistening, astray, adrift with sunlight... The boy watched with mesmerized

eyes the new earth, the new world that was unfolding its truth, revealing its miraculous sight before his eyes. He had almost forgotten about the jugs of water. He hesitated before filling them: the river seemed to undulate in that ethereal flow too. Water was carrying a blazing glow within, like thousands of rays of light, sparkling in pure wonder. He approached the shore stepping carefully on the bright layer of pebbles. He filled the jugs with glimmering ethereal water and returned to the bridge, walking back across it, to where he had come from. However, nothing was the same anymore.

Stepping off the bridge, he noticed that he could still see the double vision of the energy flow within every shape and form he encountered. He arrived in his village feeling a bit dizzy from such overwhelming brightness that surrounded him in a permanent motion.

“What happened to you? Are you feeling ill?”

People noticed his eyes wondering above them and through them, as if he was lost in thoughts, in another world – it was as if he could not hear them speaking anymore. Nevertheless, he could hear them very well. He could even hear their thoughts, things that they didn’t say. He could instantly guess what was going on in their minds, what they felt – and without the slightest effort - while their auras kept changing colors with their shifting emotions. Even their thoughts had energy: darker or brighter, fluctuating, weaker or stronger, like grey clouds or rays of light. Even the words had their own energy, carrying light or darkening the air. The boy could see them floating around, in slow motion and dissipating softly to integrate in the atmosphere. It was fascinating for him to see so much, so unexpectedly: a deeper layer of life that the others seemed opaquely unaware of; they were obviously totally oblivious to that view. They didn’t even know it existed around them, within them... it was a part of life. It was a truth that had always been there... invisible, yet so real. The boy felt as if he had just entered another space that was revealing itself within the world he had known before – making it much brighter, much more appealing.

“Let’s give him some fish oil and cinnamon powder”, he heard someone say and he couldn’t tell if it was their thoughts or their voice he had heard.

He saw the oldest man of the village approaching him with a spoon. He reacted quickly, without even moving: while looking at the metal spoon, he thought he didn’t want it – and the spoon instantly bended, spilling its content on the ground.

“Whoaaa!” the people exclaimed and stepped back, stunned by what they had witnessed.

The oldest man in the village understood that the boy had the power of the mind over matter – and he knew more about it than the other villagers who were afraid to even look at the newly changed boy.

“You have been given an unusual gift”, he told the boy. “Your mind is more powerful than the material world right now because you can see through things. You can see beyond everything and you can work with the essence of life itself. Tell us what happened and how you acquired such magical power.”

“I just found a bridge over the river... and I crossed it.”

“What bridge? Let’s go there, right now!”

The people of the village were eager to see for themselves the magical bridge and whatever had given the boy such an amazing power. They hoped they could acquire that kind of power too. They gathered in a crowd and followed the boy to the river. They arrived at the same place where he had been. Yet the bridge was nowhere to be seen. The river ran smoothly through the grove, but no bridge could be found anywhere. There were a few stones that people used to walk across, to get to the other side. Nothing more.

“Are you sure the bridge was here?” they asked the boy, suspiciously looking around.

“It was here. I’m sure of it”.

The people had expected a miracle: they were unwilling to give it up yet. They wanted to get something out of it anyway.

“I’ll cross the river to see what happens”, one of the men said and hopped from one stone to the other, getting closer to the distant shore.

The villagers watched – and waited. He was already on the other side, waving at them.

“I’m here! But I don’t see anything unusual!”

The people showed him the bended spoon.

“Can you make this bend back again?”

The man stared at the metal spoon, focused his eyes on it, concentrated – and yet, nothing moved. Nothing changed.

“I don’t understand”, he said eventually. “Where is that bridge? It must have been what gave the boy his power. It’s not the river or this place. It surely was the bridge.”

The oldest man in the village spoke again:

“I think I know what happened. The boy wasn’t looking to find any power – except the power to do good around him. He is innocent and his intentions were pure. That is why the bridge showed itself to him. He had no hidden purpose when he came to the river, other than to get water for the plants. His motives were positive and his heart was dedicated to his actions. He had a natural wish to understand. That is why the bridge chose him. It knew that the boy would not use his powers to harm anything in this world. “

The people understood then that the bridge could not be found at will, by anyone. It was something to attain in a different way. It was something to understand. It was something to become. It wasn't a prize, but a pathway...

The invisible bridge did not appear again for the people of that time.

It appeared later, through centuries, to people who were ready to see it, randomly choosing to show its passage to another world that would inhabit the material reality - without any apparent criterion other than positive intentions, unlimited minds and good hearts...

If you see the bridge, don't hesitate to cross it: you'll understand the world in a brand new different way. You'll understand there's so much more than meets the eye. And you'll like it, because if the bridge shows itself to you, that means you've earned it and you are ready to discover the brightness of an endless world beyond appearances. So don't be afraid to look for the invisible bridge, whenever you wish to surpass your own limits and your expectations of life's possibilities. You might find it closer than you think. It might be nearby... it might even be right in front of your eyes.