

Edogawa Ranpo, *The Ticket* (一枚の切符)

Part 1

“No, I have a rough idea what happened too. After all, it was a recent incident. No one in town is talking about anything else, but there’s no one who knows nearly as much as you do.”

The young gentleman lifted a slice of meat to his mouth dripping with red blood.

“Won’t you tell me about it?”

“Well, maybe I’ll say a word or two. Hey, waiter, give me another beer.”

The young man who replied was well-dressed, but a bird’s-nest of long hair not suited to his handsome clothes ran down his back. Here is the story he told.

“The time is 4 am October tenth of the year 192x, the place is the city limits of the town of —, and the railroad track behind the estate of Professor Tomita, that is the stage. Imagine an early morning in late autumn, the light still dim, the silence of dawn broken by the number x inbound train as it rushes toward town. And as it does, for some reason, a sudden shrill whistle begins to ring, and the emergency brakes bring the train to a screeching halt. But it is just barely too late, and before the cars can stop, a woman is hit and killed. And I saw the scene of the accident myself.

“The woman was the wife of the professor in question. An emergency call from the conductor brought others from the railroad down. Curious onlookers began to gather. Sooner or later somebody went and let the professor know. The shocked husband and servants came running out of the house. As the uproar was reaching its height — as I believe you know also, I was in the town at the time for a little vacation, and I am in the habit of taking an early morning walk, and I met the crowd on the way. And then the autopsy started. A fellow who appeared to be a police doctor examined the wounds. Once he was done, they carried off the corpse into the Tomita estate. To a bystander’s eyes, the matter seemed to have been dealt with, very easily.

“That is all that I saw myself. The rest is put together from newspaper articles and my own guesses added in, so please take it in that spirit. Now, then, the doctor found that the cause of death was naturally the impact, and had been due to the amputation of the right leg at the hip. How had things come to that? They found a

very persuasive clue in the pocket of the deceased. It was a letter from the wife to her professor husband, a will, to the effect that she had been suffering for tuberculosis for many years now, she had been in pain herself, she had caused trouble to those around her, she had resolved to commit suicide, and now succeeded in doing so. Really a very typical incident. And, if a certain great detective had not appeared on the scene, the story would probably have ended there, and 'suicide of professor's wife from despair' or something like that probably would not have been more than a little article on the corner of page three, but thanks to that great detective we were given something really interesting to talk about.

"The man was Kiyotarō Kuroda, police detective, famous even in the newspapers. A commendable man, although the sort of fellow who seemed to read a lot of detective novels. Or, well, in an amateur's imagination, anyway. The man got down on all fours like a dog and went over the scene of the crime sniffing the ground, the sort of thing that would happen in a foreign detective story. After that he went over to the professor's estate and asked the master and his servants all sorts of questions, went over every corner of every room with a magnifying glass, and, well, just imagine he made use of every modern technique of detection. And he went to his chief and said 'I believe we need to look into this one more carefully.' So then they all suddenly got excited and decided to take apart the corpse. With the help of Doctor such-and-such at the university hospital, they carried out an autopsy, and it turned out that Detective Kuroda's deductions had not been in error. They found evidence that the corpse had taken poison before she was hit by the train. In other words, someone had killed her with poison first, carried her remains to the railroad tracks, and made it look like suicide, though in fact a dreadful murder. The newspapers ran headlines like 'Who Was The Criminal?' and set our curiosity aflame. So, the examining judge summoned Detective Kuroda before him, and the search for evidence was taken a step further.

"Now, then, the detective brings out his evidence with an air of importance, and the evidence is, first, a pair of shoes; second, a plaster cast he has taken of a footprint; third, several sheets of crumpled wastepaper. With these three pieces of evidence in hand, he asserts that the professor's wife did not commit suicide, she was murdered. And the killer was, of all things, her husband, Professor Tomita. How do you like that, quite an interesting story, eh?"

The young man who was speaking gave a slightly crooked smile and looked at the face of his listener. Then he took out a silvered cigarette case from his inside pocket, pulled out one of the Oxfords with extraordinary dexterity, and flicked the lid closed

with a snap.

“That’s right¹,” his listener said, as he struck a match for the speaker, “That much I knew, more or less. What I’m asking is, how did that Kuroda fellow figure out who the killer was?”

“It’s an excellent detective story, isn’t it. According to Mr. Kuroda, the thing that led him to suspect murder was the puzzled remark of the doctor that there had been so little blood. Everything began from that very small detail. The killing of the old mother last x in the town of — was another example of that. Doubt everything that you can doubt, and then carefully explore those doubts one by one. They say that’s the motto of detective work, and this detective seems to have had a firm grasp on the idea, and began by putting together a hypothesis. Someone, a man or a woman, had poisoned the wife. And then they’d carried her corpse to the railroad, and waited for everything to be crushed by the wheels of the train. He inferred that the movement of the corpse should have left some sort of traces near the track. And by very good luck, well, for the detective, rain had been falling continuously on the night before the death, and all sorts of footprints were clear in the earth. On top of that, the rain had lifted around midnight, so the only perfect prints were those that had crossed the area before the death at 4 am. So, as I said earlier, the detective began to imitate a dog, and I’ll try and draw a rough sketch of the scene here.”

Sōda pulled — that was the name of the young man telling the story² — pulled out a small notebook from his pocket as he spoke and drew a rough map with a pencil.

“The railroad line was a little higher than the surrounding land, and the slope on either side of it was covered with grass. Between the line and the back entrance of the professor’s estate, there was a fairly large, right. A piece of vacant land about large enough to fit a tennis court, with fine gravel mixed into the soil and neither grass nor anything else growing on it. The footprints were on that side. On the other side of the line, in other words the side opposite the professor’s mansion, there was a flooded rice paddy field, and far in the distance you saw the chimney of some factory. A typical scene on the edge of town. The western end of town stops with the professor’s estate along with several other houses in a Cultural Village style. Picture the railroad line running roughly parallel to the professor’s estate, and houses along it the whole way. And the place where Detective Kuroda had gone down on all fours was the empty land between the professor’s house and the line, and if you ask what he was sniffing for, there were over a dozen footprints mixed together there concentrated around the place

of the collision, and although at first glance I'm sure he couldn't tell which was which, when he went over them carefully and broke them into types, well, he realized there were several kinds of outdoor boot marks, several kinds of clog marks, and several kinds of shoe marks. And when he compared the number of people at the scene to the number of the prints, he realized there was just one extra. In other words, he had discovered a set of footprints whose source was unknown. And they were shoe marks. No one was wearing shoes that morning but the railroad workers, and not a single one of them had left. A bit strange. And when he investigated very, very carefully, he realized the suspicious set of prints had come out of the professor's estate."

"That's a crazy amount of detail."

Here the young man listening, that is, Matsumura, broke in.

"No, most of this is right out of the *Variety Morning Report*³. When there's an incident like this, it runs long articles on the points of interest. Sometimes they're very helpful. Well, so this time he investigated the footprints that had gone back and forth between the professor's estate and the collision, and he found four sets. The first was the unknown set I mentioned. The second were the boot-prints of the professor, who had come to the scene. The third and fourth were the footprints of the professor's servants, and that was all, there was no sign that the dead woman had walked to the railroad. She should have left small sock prints, but he found nothing like that. So had she walked there in men's shoes? If not, someone who matched those footprints had picked her up and carried her there: one of the two. Of course the first was out of the question. So there could be no obstacle to the second. And on that point, there was one strange thing about those footprints. The heel of the shoe had bitten unusually deeply into the ground. Every print you looked at was the same. That was evidence that whoever made them had been carrying something heavy. The detective concluded that the heels had sunk more than usual because of the heavy burden. On this point Mr. Kuroda boasted a great deal to the paper, and that's where this comes from. People's footprints can tell us various things about them. These footprints were made by a cripple, these by someone blind, these by a pregnant woman, the methods of footprint detection have been explained in great detail. If you're interested take a look at yesterday's *Variety*.

"The story is getting a bit long, so abbreviating some of the finer details, the painstaking investigative work of Detective Kuroda discovered a pair of shoes that matched the footprints in question, hidden down out of sight outside an inner par-

lour in the professor's estate. That famous academic had worn them all the time — which the servants unhappily confirmed. There were a variety of other small pieces of evidence. That the servants' room and the room of the professor and his wife were far apart. That the servants, two maids, had been sleeping soundly, and didn't know anything about what had happened that night when they were woken by the uproar in the morning. The fact that the professor in question had very unusually spent the night at home. And to back up the evidence of the shoe prints, there were the circumstances of the professor's household. Professor Tomita was, as you know, the adopted son-in-law of the late Professor Tomita senior. In other words, his wife was the wilful owner of the house, she had chronic pulmonary tuberculosis, she was hardly a beauty, and on top of that she had intense attacks of hysteria. I think one can easily imagine what kind of relations there were between husband and wife. In fact, the professor had secretly set up a separate house for his mistress, Ms. something, an ex-geisha, whom he doted on. But I don't think that should change our opinion of the professor at all. Well, so, hysteria is something that would drive the average husband crazy, and it was so in the professor's case as well, the dreary relationship between them got worse and worse, and eventually there was tragedy — that was the reasoning.

“But one difficult point still remained. That was the will in the pocket of the deceased. Careful investigation proved that it was in fact written in the handwriting of the professor's wife. How could she have written a will that she didn't mean? It was a serious difficulty for Detective Kuroda. The detective said he himself had a great deal of trouble over it. And then, after many pains, he discovered those sheets of wrinkled waste paper. What were they? They were practice sheets, and, you see, the professor had been practicing his wife's handwriting on some scrap paper. One of the sheets was a letter the wife had sent to her husband while she was on a trip, and the criminal had been practicing her handwriting with that. He had been planning it carefully. The detective found those in the wastebasket in the professor's study.

“So this was the conclusion. A thorn in his side, an obstacle to his love, and an ungovernable madwoman — and he decided to do away with her. And he thought long and hard so that it would not hurt his prestige as a professor in the slightest. He made his wife drink poison, calling it medicine, and once she had obligingly died, he picked her up on his shoulder, slipped on the shoes I have mentioned, and carried her out the back door to the railroad line that ran so fortunately close to his house. And then he put the plausible will he had prepared into the victim's pocket. And when at length the train hit the dead woman and she was discovered, the daring criminal ran down to the scene of the crime, wearing an expression of extreme surprise. Why did

the professor not divorce his wife? Why did he make his way down such a dangerous path? Well, I think this was the opinion of the reporter rather than the detective, but here's how a certain newspaper had it. The first reason for it was that he had been good friends with the late professor and he feared the reproach of society should he divorce his daughter, and the second, which may have been the more important reason for the sort of man that dared commit this brutal act, was that the wife had been given a small inheritance from her parents. They gave those two reasons.

“And the arrest of the professor followed, and the star of Mr. Kiyotarō Kuroda rose higher, and the newspaper reporters reaped an unexpected harvest, and it was a tremendous scandal for the academic world, and as you said yourself, the story has the whole country talking.”

With that Sōda finished his story, and drained the rest of his glass with a gulp.

“I imagine seeing the scene yourself got you interested, but still, you did well finding out all that stuff. But he's a really smart guy, that detective Kuroda.”

“Well, he's a kind of writer, isn't he.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, I see. He's a writer. Although I think you could say he writes something more interesting than fiction.”

“I don't think he's anything more than a writer, though.”

Sōda put a hand into a pocket of his vest and began to fish around for something, a cynical smile appearing on his face.

“What do you mean?” Matsumura blinked in the middle of the cloud of smoke.

“I'm saying Mr. Kuroda might be a novelist, but he's not a detective.”

“Why not?” Matsumura stood shocked, looking into the eyes of his friend as if he expected something amazing to happen, some utter impossibility.

Sōda pulled out a bit of paper from his pocket and laid it on the table. And then, “I wonder if you know what this is?” he said.

Matsumura's expression was strange. “What does that have to do with anything? That's a cash-receipt ticket from the PL Company.”

“That’s right. It’s a cash-receipt ticket for forty sen for a rental pillow in a third-class express train. I saw it at the scene of the collision and happened to pick it up, and I claim that this ticket proves that the professor is innocent.”

“Nonsense. You’re joking.” Matsumura’s tone was not completely certain.

“Listen, whether or not the evidence is there, the professor ought to be innocent! For the world to lose an academic like Professor Tomita, over the life of one hysterical woman, the world — that’s right, the professor belongs to the world. There are only a few others in the world like him — they have to be crazy to imagine burying such a man. Matsumura, I am going to catch the train at one-thirty and call at the professor’s house. I have a few questions I want to ask the caretakers.”

Sōda glanced down at his wristwatch, picked up a napkin, and stood up.

“The professor will probably speak on his own account. And I think that the lawyers who sympathize with him will defend him too. But none of them know about the evidence that I’m holding here. Do you want me to explain? Well, wait a little, please. I need to investigate a little more or it won’t be complete. There are still holes in my reasoning. And — excuse me — I’m going to leave now to fill them in. Hey, waiter. Tell that to the car, please. Let’s meet again tomorrow morning.”

Part 2

The evening edition of the — *News* ran a large contributed article as follows, stretching across five columns of print. The most copies ever sold in the city of —, they said. The headline was ‘Proof of the Innocence of Professor Tomita,’ and it was signed Gorō Sōda.

I have put the material of this article into the form of a letter and presented it to the judge who is responsible for the trial of Professor Tomita, Judge —. I think that that will probably be sufficient on its own, but there is the remote possibility that he might misunderstand me, or that, for some other reason, my statement will be consigned to the darkness. And besides, my testimony runs contrary to the truth proven by one of their leading detectives, so that, even if the court accepts it, the authorities might afterward spread false charges against the professor I respect. For that reason I have gathered these few words together and made an appeal to public opinion.

I have no personal feelings whatever toward the professor, good or bad; I am only someone who has come to respect the professor's intellect through his books. However, in this case, when before my eyes my elder in academia has been charged with a crime through mistaken deduction, and when I happen to be present at the scene of the crime by coincidence, and I discover a small piece of evidence, and I believe there is no one other than myself to save him, then it is my natural duty to put in my hand. I wish there to be no misunderstanding on this point.

So, then, why do I believe the professor is innocent? It is, in a word, that the reasoning of the court that the professor is guilty, on the basis of the investigation of Mr. Detective Kuroda, is extremely immature. It is filled with extremely childish theatrics. When we take the incomparable intelligence of that great savant, whose absolute clarity cannot be overlooked even in the slightest degree, and compare it with what we call the facts of this crime, what will we see, I wonder? Rather, I think we cannot suppress a bitter laugh at the tremendous separation between the two thoughts. That a man of the professor's intelligence should so crudely leave his shoes, that he should leave sheets of wastepaper with forged handwriting, that he should even leave a poisoned cup⁴ behind, that he should be so senile as to lose to some Mr. Kuroda! Come now, one could not expect such an erudite suspect even to allow traces of his poison to remain on the corpse. I believe the professor is obviously innocent, before any evidence whatsoever is presented. But I am not so reckless as to make this statement based only on that conjecture.

The detective, Mr. Kiyomichi Kuroda, is now glittering with a brilliant case record. The world calls the man a Japanese Sherlock Holmes. I regret that as his triumph is reaching its climax, I must plunge him into the abyss. In fact, I believe Mr. Kuroda is the best and most skillful policeman of our country. This catastrophe came about precisely because he was brighter than the others. There was no fault in his reasoning. It was just that the materials he used were flawed — his observations. That is, it is to be greatly regretted that, as far as detailed and careful examination goes, he lost to myself, a mere boarding student. Leaving that for the moment, the pieces of material evidence that I would like to present are the following two perfectly ordinary articles.

First, a cash-receipt ticket from the PL Company that came into my hands at the scene of the crime. [Note: A receipt for the fee for a rental pillow, part of the third-class railway furnishings. A private corporation called the 'PL Company' did in fact accept these in the Taishō period.]

Second, the shoelaces of the pair of the professor's shoes that are being held as evidence by this court.

That is all, nothing else. I fear my reader will see these as worthless. But those of us on this path know that even a single strand of hair can prove a grave crime.

To be honest, my first discovery was coincidental. I happened to arrive at the scene of the incident. As I was watching the coroners work, I noticed the white corner of a slip of paper sticking out from under the stone I was resting on. If I had not seen the date that was stamped on that ticket, I would probably never have had any doubts, but fortunately for the professor, the date of that ticket seared itself into my eyes like a revelation. October 9, 192x, in other words, the day before the death.

I moved the stone out of the way, easily forty or fifty pounds⁵, and picked up the slip of paper, which was half about to tear from the rain. It turned out to be a cash-receipt ticket from the PL Company. And that stimulated my curiosity.

Now, then, there are three things Mr. Kuroda overlooked at the scene.

The first of those is the ticket, and coincidence blessed me with that, so we might make an exception for it, which still leaves at least two certain points of negligence. But if Mr. Kuroda had been the possessor of an extraordinary power of awareness, he might have been able to find the above-mentioned ticket, and not by coincidence. That is to say, you could see at a glance that the stone that the slip of paper was pinned under was one of the many tumbled rocks lying to the side of a half-finished drainage trench behind the professor's estate, and the fact that that one stone had been left far away next to the railroad line might have had meaning for someone with more power of attention than Mr. Kuroda. That is not all: I showed the ticket that day to one of the policemen on the scene, and I can pick out even now the man who, taking no notice of my kindness, reproached me, "In the way, move it!"

The second point is that the alleged footprints of the criminal do leave the back entrance of the estate and come to the railroad line, but there are no footprints going back to the estate. I wonder how Mr. Kuroda chose to interpret this — the newspaper reporters were cruelly negligent on this important point and said nothing, so — I am not aware, but perhaps he decided that the criminal found it convenient for some reason to return along the railroad tracks once had placed the body of his victim on the line. In fact, it is not impossible to get back to the estate without leaving any footprints by going a little out of the way. And the shoes matching the footprints

were actually discovered in the estate, so perhaps he believed he had sufficient proof that the criminal had returned even without a returning set of footprints. A plausible thought so far as it goes, and perhaps there is nothing unnatural about it after all.

The third point would escape the attention of most, and in fact even the people on the scene did not pay the slightest attention to it, but the prints of a dog could be seen over the whole area, and particularly together with what we are calling the footprints of the criminal. What called my attention to that was this: in the case of a collision and a woman dead, it is strange that a dog in the area, and moreover I saw that the prints disappeared at the back entrance of the professor's estate, so that the dog was probably the victim's pet dog, would not have come out to the crowd.

I have listed all of what I call my evidence above. I think the keen reader will have already guessed most of what I am going to say. For them, it may be superfluous, but in any event I must bring my testimony to its conclusion.

I had no opinion when I reached home that day. I hadn't thought particularly deeply about the case, even the three points mentioned above. I have made things clearer than they really were to excite the attention of the reader. There on that day, I did not think through it all this far. But when the next day, and the day after that, and every day in the morning newspaper they told me the professor I admire had been arrested, and even made me read the detective's account of his hardships catching the man, then by the simple application of common sense at the start of my statement, I trusted that there must have been some mistake in the detective work of Mr. Kuroda, I connected together the various observations I made at the scene, and for the places where doubt still remained, I called today at the professor's estate and made a number of inquiries of its caretakers. And as a result I believe I have at last grasped the truth of this case.

Now I will try to outline my reasoning, following the order of facts above.

As I said earlier, my starting point was the PL Company cash-receipt ticket. We can assume that the ticket was dropped out the window of an express train on the day before the death, probably late the previous night. Why was it pinned under a rock with a weight of forty or fifty pounds? That was my first question. I had to conclude that it had been carried there by somebody after the train that dropped the ticket passed last night. Or it might have fallen from the railroad line, perhaps from an open freight car, but its position ruled that out. Well, then, where had the stone been carried from? It could hardly have been far with that weight. And, to make a

long story short, it was one out of a pile of rocks that had been left in the back of the estate for the construction of a drainage ditch, which was clear from its wedge shape.

In other words, sometime before the corpse was discovered that morning, but after the train had gone by late the previous night, somebody had carried that stone from the back of the professor's house to the scene of the collision. In that case, they should have left footprints. The rain had not been heavy the previous evening, and it had stopped during the night, so the prints should not have been washed away. But, as the wise Mr. Kuroda discovered in his investigation, the scene had just one set of prints that did not belong to anyone present, the *footprints of the criminal*. And we must conclude that the person who carried the stone could only have been *the criminal*. When I reached this bizarre conclusion, I worried long and hard: how can we make it possible for *the criminal* to carry the stone? And then, I noticed what an ingenious trick had been played, and it made me reel at the shock.

Whether you have a person in your arms or a stone your footprints will be the same, similar enough to fool the eyes of a skilled detective. The trick astonished me when I understood it. Someone who wanted the professor to be a murder suspect had slipped on the professor's shoes, picked up a stone in place of the body of the wife, and left a set of footprints going out to the railroad, and no other analysis was possible. And if we suppose the author of this hateful trick left the prints, then how did the collision victim, in other words the professor's wife, arrive at the railroad? There was only one set of footprints, one too few. The reasoning above can have only one conclusion, and I regretted it, but I could not help but realize that the professor's wife was a dreadful monster who detested her husband. I imagined a woman with a frightening talent for crime, a woman twisted by jealousy, and pulmonary tuberculosis — an incurable disease that had instead pushed her mind to brilliant clarity, pathological clarity. All was dark. All was spite. And I saw, at the centre of the darkness and the spite, a vision of a pale woman, the only light, the terrible brightness of her eyes. A vision of long weeks, long years, and at the reality of that vision I could not help but shiver.

Let us put that aside and move to the second point of doubt. The footprints did not return to the professor's estate. Why not? A simple answer is that the one wearing the shoes was the victim of the collision, so on the contrary it would be strange if they had come back. But we need to think more deeply. How did a woman with such a natural talent for crime forget to leave a set of footprints back from the railroad to the estate? If the ticket had not fallen from the train, it would have been her only mistake.

The key to that problem was given to me by the third point: the prints of the dog. When I connected the mistake of the wife with the dog, I was unable to suppress a small laugh. I am sure she planned to make a round trip in the shoes, and then walk back to the railroad by a path that would not leave prints. But there was an obstacle in her path, a funny one. That was her pet dog John (I heard this name John from one of the servants at the house, Ms. —) who woke up from a light sleep, noticed her strange behaviour, and ran over to her and started barking enthusiastically. She feared that the dog's barking would wake up others and she would be discovered. There was no time to waste. Even if the barking did not wake up the others in the house, it could bring other dogs in the neighbourhood down on her, and that would be very bad. And then, all of a sudden, she thought of a way to turn the crisis to her advantage, and get rid of the dog and put the final touches on her plan at the same time.

According to my research, the dog John had been trained to run errands while carrying small items in his mouth. Mostly he would take things from his master in the middle of a walk and bring them back to the house. When he did, he always left the item on the verandah of the inner parlour. On another visit to the estate, I learned that there is no way to go from the back door of the estate to the verandah except through a single wicket gate in the wooden fence around the inner garden, and that the gate has a spring gadget like a Western-style door and can only open inward.

The professor's wife used both these facts cleverly. Those who know dogs know that in cases such as these, you cannot drive them away just by shouting at them, but if you give them an order — for example, if you throw a piece of wood far away and ask them to pick it up and bring it back — they will never refuse you. She used this piece of animal psychology. She gave the shoes to John and got him to leave. And the shoes were left, at least, next to the verandah, and — probably John did not leave them in the place he usually did because the verandah's storm shutters were closed — the gate could not be opened from the inside however he pushed it, and it would hold him back, and he would not return to the scene, she hoped.

I have connected together the footprints that did not return, the pawprints and presence of the dog, and the wife's talent for crime, but it is only a possible scenario, and I fear the criticism that it is all too far-fetched, trying a little too hard to match the facts. We could instead think of the missing return footprints as an oversight, and then the dog's prints are telling us how she planned to deal with the shoes from the start. That may be right. But whichever it may have been, the claim that I am making, the claim of the *crime of the wife*, does not change in the slightest.

Well, a problem arises with this. Namely, how could a single dog have carried a pair of shoes, in other words two shoes, in only one trip? The answer is the second piece of material evidence I gave, the one I have not explained yet, the “shoelaces of the professor’s shoes that you are holding as evidence.” After much effort, I managed to extract from the memory of the same servant, Ms. —, that when the shoes were recovered they were tied together by the laces as if they were being kept by the doorman at the theatre. I don’t know whether Detective Kuroda noticed that or not. Perhaps he was so happy to find them that it escaped his attention. If it did not escape him, I suppose he must have made some guess at why the criminal tied his shoes together and hid them next to the verandah and been satisfied by that. Otherwise Mr. Kuroda could not have come to the conclusion that he did.

Thus the woman with her dreadful hatred drank the poison she had prepared, lay down on the railroad tracks, and imagined her husband thrown from the summit of his fame into the black depths of ostracism, and crying out in prison before long, and waited for the wheels of the train with a terrible smile on her face. I do not know what happened to the container that the poison was in. But if my reader goes to that stretch of railroad track and takes a diligent look around the area, perhaps he will discover something strange buried in the mud of the rice paddy field.

I have still not said a single word about the will that was discovered in her pocket, but it is hardly necessary to add that this was another piece of her false evidence, like the footprints and so on. I haven’t seen it myself, of course, so this is nothing but conjecture, but if the opinion of an expert handwriting analyst were called for, it would surely prove that she had been imitating her own handwriting, but, on the other hand, that the words she had written were the honest truth. I would like to avoid the trouble of giving counterarguments or explanations one by one for the fine details that remain: they should be self-evident from what I have said above.

Finally, what was the reason she committed suicide? It was extremely simple, and my reader has surely already guessed it. According to the professor’s servant, the wife was in fact suffering from severe lung disease, just as it says in the will. Does this not tell us her motive? I mean that, with one death, the greedy wife was trying to accomplish two goals: to end her weary life, and to have her revenge in love.

My statement ends here. All I can do now is pray that the order from the court summoning me to the witness stand will come an hour sooner.

On the next day, at the same table at the same restaurant, Sōda and Matsumura met again.

“After just one night you’re a popular man,” Matsumura said, praise in his voice.

“I’m just glad I managed to contribute a little to the world of academia. And if in the future the professor brings out a book that shocks the world, perhaps he will not object if I ask him to put in the gilt letters ‘Written together with Gorō Sōda’ after his signature.” With that Sōda spread his fingers out and stuck them into his long, disheveled hair like a comb.

“But I had no idea you were such an amazing detective.”

“Correct that word ‘detective’ to ‘daydreamer,’ please. I really don’t know how far my imagination ran. Say the suspect hadn’t been a great scholar and a man I admire. I think I might have imagined that he did murder his wife. And they might have rejected all the pieces of evidence that I gave them myself, the ones that were most important. Listen, do you realize, all the evidence that sounded plausible there when I was listing it off, if you think about it carefully, all of it could have been different, there were other possibilities, everything was ambiguous. The only thing that was definite was the PL Company ticket, but even that. For example, suppose I hadn’t picked up the ticket from under the stone in question, but beside it?”

Sōda gazed into the still not quite comprehending face of his friend and broke out in a very odd grin.

Notes

¹Here the listener says *sōda* そうだ “That’s right/Sōda”. On first reading, the reader thinks he’s saying “That’s right,” but then...

²...Sōda 左右田 is introduced two paragraphs later. At first the sudden introduction of Sōda’s name a third of the way through the story seems bizarre, but the reader (eventually) realizes that Sōda is being introduced here because the listener said his name two paragraphs earlier. The result is a mild joke on the reader. I was hesitant to change characters’ names to make this joke work, but if you are not so cowardly, please imagine Sōda’s name is “Roger,” and in that case you might as well change others, reading Tomita as “Richfield” and Kuroda as “Blackfield.” On the other hand, you could decide the occurrence of 田 “field” in the three names is intentional, and to preserve it, call Sōda “Pickfield.”

³Sōda uses the nickname *aka shimbun* 赤新聞 “red paper,” of the *Yorozu Chōhō* 万朝報 “Variety Morning Report,” a tabloid-like gossip and scandal newspaper published daily from 1892 to 1940. “Red paper” was also a generic term for tabloid papers, but he seems to be thinking of a specific paper when he says “yesterday’s *Variety*,” so my guess is that he means the *Yorozu Chōhō* specifically.

⁴I don’t think that a poisoned cup was mentioned earlier.

⁵The weight is described as “five or six *kanme* 貫目”.