

# The Dog with Vanishing Spots (1939)

Miyano Murako

Introduction and translation by Quillon Arkenstone

**Abstract:** “The Dog with Vanishing Spots” is a 1939 work of detective fiction by Miyano Murako. One of only a few women writers of detective fiction in the prewar period, Miyano presents a work in tune with the state of the genre during its Golden Age, while also displaying the interest in character psychology that figured prominently into her writings. The result is a mystery of lost dogs, stolen jewels and murder in the continental city of Dairen, all centered on a character that just might be the lone instance of a teenage female sleuth in Japan’s prewar detective fiction canon.

**Keywords:** Detective fiction; literature; prewar; women writers; *gaichi*

“The Dog with Vanishing Spots” (Buchi no kieta inu) was written by Miyano Murako (1917-1990) and published in the journal *Meisaku* in November 1939. As a prewar contribution to Japanese classic, or orthodox, detective fiction (*honkaku tantei shōsetsu*), it displays many formal elements contemporary writers understood as essential to the genre. These include the use of an anonymous third-person narrative, the deployment of reasoning

on the part of the amateur sleuth, and adherence to the idea of giving the reader enough information to compete with both the story’s author and its fictional detective. As such, the work achieves much of what writers were striving for at the prewar crest of what has been called the Golden Age of Japanese detective fiction.<sup>1</sup> What differentiates it thematically from other works of the time, however, is the location of the story, as the foregrounding of the colonial territories and portrayal of life (and criminal activity) there situates the work within the smaller category of *gaichi tantei shōsetsu* (detective fiction of the outer lands) (Fujita 2003: 295). Miyano was by no means the only writer of detective fiction to depict the experience of expatriate life in the *gaichi*, and the continent would factor prominently for a number of postwar detective novelists who spent time there before and during the war, but she is one of the few to have published before its outbreak.

The setting of “The Dog with Vanishing Spots” is the port city of Dairen, at the time an important center in the Kwantung Leased Territory and the southern terminus of the South Manchuria Railway. By the end of the 1930s, Dairen’s population included around two hundred thousand Japanese, one of whom was Miyano herself, who relocated there from her home province of Niigata. The handful of published works she has during this period are generally centered around life in the city, and parts of “The Dog with Vanishing Spots” occur

near the southern neighborhood of Tōgendai where she lived. Miyano's career as a writer began while she was on the continent with an unsolicited manuscript she sent to the prominent detective novelist Kigi Takatarō; his encouraging response led to her debut in 1938 with the publication of "The Persimmon Tree" (Kaki no ki) in Kigi's own journal *Shupio* (Spy).

Miyano's prewar output, which aside from "The Persimmon Tree" and "The Dog with Vanishing Spots" consists of a few thematically-scattered publications in small coterie outlets, might be loosely subsumed under the general designation of "mystery fiction," but at the time she was not yet a committed writer of the genre. In fact, it was not until one of her pieces was censored by the *Tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu* (Special Higher Police) as anti-militarist during the war that she decided to dedicate herself to the writing of detective fiction (Miyano 2009: 437). This conviction was strengthened further in the postwar when she contrasted the intellectually stifling atmosphere of Soviet-backed rule in Dairen with rumors of a Japan that was (now) increasingly free intellectually. After a lengthy wait, she was repatriated, and her postwar debut came in 1949 with the publication of "The Tragedy of the Koinuma Family" (Koinumake no higeki) in the journal *Hōseki* (Jewel).

Several characteristics of "The Dog with Vanishing Spots" would go on to define not only many of Miyano's works, but Japanese detective fiction as a whole as it moved into the postwar period. As mentioned, one of the more prominent aspects of the story is its use of logical reasoning, and the primary method here is abductive, wherein the detective fashions a descriptive theory of the crime based on a series of apparently scattered observations. The arrangement of these signs into a coherent narrative theory of the crime is achieved when the detective interprets them through a general, often cultural, rule that is usually (but not always) proven correct (Pyrrhonen 1999:

71). The successful deployment of this method, long considered a hallmark of the genre, is notable here in that its practitioner is not a consulting detective or member of the police force but rather a curious young woman just out of high school. She displays an adept usage of abduction by illustrating its maxim that all signs, or facts, in a bounded space (whether the scene of the crime, the city at large, or a collection of advertisements in a newspaper) are relatable when viewed through the prism of the crime under investigation.

The process of reconstructing the crime through abductive reasoning in classic detective fiction often involves an encounter with what has been called "the paradox of the obvious," in which anything that seems to be true or significant (evidence, suspects, and so on) is rejected by the detective as false, insignificant, or misleading (Roth 1995: 179). This rejection stems from the detective's refusal to entertain an easy solution to the case in favor of a more complex one, and their interaction with the paradox is two-fold as they disregard as meaningless both apparent and non-apparent clues. "The Dog with Vanishing Spots," too, presents both detective and reader with a variety of clues, much of which is discounted in favor of a deeper analysis as the ostensibly simple mystery of a lost dog expands into territory more characteristically associated with the genre.

Further available to detectives in their fight against criminal activity is the consideration of probability, a method of deduction that made its debut in the early years of the Golden Age. The use of probability in Japanese detective fiction was considered an important facet of the genre's development, despite the fact that its initial appearance actually came courtesy of the traditional literati (*bundan*), specifically in the writer Tanizaki Junichirō's 1920 short story "On the Way" (Tojō) (Hori 2014: 175). This was applauded by prominent and aspiring writers of detective fiction alike, though, as opening the

door for its further use in Japan. Arriving almost twenty years later, “The Dog with Vanishing Spots” shows the use of probability to be alive and well, here playing an important role in establishing the identity of the criminal.

The use of abductive reasoning, the paradox of the obvious, and probability are but a small sample of the formal characteristics of “The Dog with Vanishing Spots,” and while the story includes many other generic conventions of the period, there are also instances where Miyano’s use of a female sleuth leads to the creative subversion of other common tropes such as the victim-as-villainess figure, a concern with (and somewhat unique depiction of) Japanese criminal activity on the continent, and the role of the police. The latter, whose appearance is important if brief, might be either military or civil, as by the time of the story’s publication in 1939, the lines between the two had blurred following the Kwantung Leased Territory’s reversion from a strictly civil police system to one of both military and civil police (*keiken tōgōsei*) (Chen 1984: 222). Their efficacy is unquestionable, though, and the speed with which they make an arrest is one the citizens of Dairen would have been accustomed to at the time (O’Dwyer 2015: 41). Unusual given the passivity of the police in orthodox detective fiction, however, is the implicit role they play in the story’s innovative denouement, a role that might be best contextualized within the evolving relationship Japan found itself in with its regional neighbors from 1937.

A final element in the story is its human one, which stems from Miyano’s interest in depicting character psychology over the mechanics of crime. In a post-war roundtable discussion with Kigi Takarō, Ōtsubo Sunao and others in the journal *Shinseinen*, Miyano pushed back against the notion that the technique of the crime, or *torikku* (trick), in orthodox detective fiction was paramount, arguing that the more outlandish and ingenious (and most important of all unprecedented) it

was the less believable. She insisted that the crime could be achieved by any means, but its methods were less important than its motives:

Miyano: It’s said to be preferable for the murder method to be unusual, right? Can we constantly be coming up with extremely rare methods of murder? Just because that’s what readers want, I don’t think we need to cater to it unconditionally.

Kigi: That’s what readers want right now, and surely that trend will change in the future. But writers bear some of the responsibility, too.

Miyano: Not just writers, but editors as well. They say five or ten manuscript pages are plenty when writing about murder. I could spend a thousand pages writing about murder.

Ōtsubo: That’s because you’re a crime writer (*hanzai-kei*). With detective writers (*tantei-kei*) the concern is with the various investigations after someone has been murdered, so the events up to the death don’t matter (Kusaka 2009: 459).

It will of course be left to readers of the story to judge the criminal ingenuity on display, but “The Dog with Vanishing Spots” does set the stage for the portrayal of character psychology as important to Miyano’s subsequent works. In the original Japanese, much of this psychological insight is achieved through sudden shifts of the narrative into the mind of characters, shifts the below translation has tried to maintain. Ultimately, the motives in Miyano’s story are filtered through the concerns of her characters, and while such an approach might have been at variance with Ōtsubo’s “detective writers,” here she manages

to have it both ways by combining the elements of detection described above with liberal insight into her characters' minds as they grapple with the mystery of a dog with vanishing spots.

# 1

It began when Yoriko brought over a cute, plump puppy with white hair.

At the time, Michiko and Kineko had brought out a *go* board and were enjoying a game of *Chōsen gomoku*, which they had recently learned. The game looked to be going against Michiko, and she was starting to become somewhat irritated as she glared at Kineko, who was spiritedly shaking her head and whistling. Then:

"Onee-chan, Onee-chan!"

Yoriko came running up, her cute, bobbed hair bouncing as she called out in a cheery voice:

"Onee-chan!"

"Hm?"

"Um, this doggy."

"Oh?"

"This doggy, Onee-chan!"

Yoriko had gone through all the trouble to bring over the dog, but Michiko and Kineko were so absorbed in their game that they kept giving absent-minded responses and so finally she looked like she'd had enough. Pursing her little lips tightly, she dropped the white puppy with a thud right in the middle of the heated battle on the board. The pieces, so carefully arranged in white and black lines, were instantly scattered. In surprise, the puppy kicked them even further all over the place as it jumped down off the board.

"Hey, hey! Yokko-chan, what are you doing? You naughty girl, you know if you do that, we're not going to play with you anymore—"

Kineko was upset, but Michiko seemed more relieved than anything, and quickly turned to placate Yoriko:

"Cute dog. Yokko-chan, did you get it from your Mama?"

"No, my brother. He found it in a field. It was really hungry, and it was whining. He felt sorry for it and brought it back. It drank a lot of milk."

Yoriko, who was five years old this year, lived in the house next door to Michiko. Her father was said to have passed away long ago, and she lived with her young mother and older brother, a second-year elementary school student, and though modest, they lived quite well. She was a good friend of the child-loving Michiko, who had come home after graduating from girls' school, and she came over to visit almost every day. As such, she became quite close with Kineko, also a frequent visitor to the house.

"Yokko-chan, what's the dog's name?"

Resigned to the fact that the *go* board was not going to be restored no matter how long she stared at it, Kineko joined the conversation.

"Ururu. My brother named it."

"Ururu? That's a funny name."

"When it's time for bed he whines 'ururu ururu.' And then he does this."

Yoriko made a trembling motion with her body.

"And then he starts whining again."

"Aah, and so your brother named him 'Ururu,' huh?"

While walking lightly as if in a hop, Ururu went

around sniffing the room, stopping frequently to poke his nose at dolls, flowers, and the like. He looked to have an injury on his left rear leg, which was bandaged, and it seemed to be impeding his normal gait.

"When my brother brought Ururu-chan home, he was really dirty. He had black hair, too. Mama took him into the bath, got him all soapy and swished him around in the tub. When she did that, the black hair turned white. Then Mama put medicine and a bandage on him."

Yoriko looked to be ecstatic at having received the cute puppy. Through scolding and chiding she clearly wanted to show that Ururu was hers, and her eyes never left him, so that even at the most trifling thing she would try a fearful voice:

"Ururu, no!"

And when she did Ururu, who until then had been playing about innocently, would look startled and scared, putting his tail between his rear legs and shrinking back in fear. Then his ears would droop, and his eyes, on the verge of tears, would tremble timidly as he gave the appearance of wanting to know what he had done wrong. Watching intently as he did that, Michiko asked in a low voice:

"I wonder why Ururu is so scared?"

"Some rascal must have hurt him when he was a stray," said Kineko.

"You're probably right, but in some ways, he seems completely unlike a stray dog. I mean, he understands what we're saying to him, right?"

Michiko said this before turning to Yoriko to advise:

"Yokko-chan, I wouldn't scold Ururu until he is more used to you."

## 2

"You go first, Neko-chan."

"Nothing doing. It's your turn to go first today, Miikō.<sup>2</sup> Loser goes first."

Today again Michiko and Kineko had brought the *go* board out onto the veranda, and were arguing about who was to go first. This time it was Yoriko's big brother Sadao who ran up to them.

"Onee-chan, Onee-chan, look!"

While waving a newspaper in one hand the red-faced Sadao came rushing up onto the veranda and plopped down onto the *go* board.

"Look, look! There is something about Ururu."

"In the newspaper?"

"Look, right here. It's about him, right?"

Sadao rustled open the paper and pointed to a section in the classified advertisements underlined in red. He still had not learned many Chinese characters, so it looked like his mother had marked it for him so that there would be no mistake. Two places had been indicated.

"Lost dog, six months old, long hair with white and black spots, pointed ears, curly tail. Injury to back left foot, slight limp, reward offered if found. Surname 'Zaisha.'"

"Lost dog, six-month-old puppy, distinguishable by long snow-white hair, pointed ears, curly tail. Collar with gold-tone fittings, identification number Kantōchō 1182. Please notify if found. Reward offered. 64 Seiundai, Kazami."

"Mama says it's definitely about Ururu. I wonder if it is?"

"Which one?"



“Both of them.”

“Isn’t it odd that they’d both be about him? Sadao—this seems like a completely different dog. It’s different from Ururu. Although—” Michiko took another look at the advertisements. “Right. The first one is like a different dog. The appearance, injury and the limp look like him, but Ururu has pure white hair and no spots, right? The other one—but of course! If you put an injury on the back left foot and gave it a limp it would be just like Ururu. But there is nothing here about a limp.”

“Maybe the injury happened after he got lost?” Put in Kineko.

“Aah, yes. Yes, surely. You’re pretty smart sometimes, Neko-chan. Sadao-chan, the first one is different but the second one might be Ururu.”

“But Onee-chan.” Sadao gave a confused look. “I think the first one sounds like him more than the second.”

“The one with the spots? But Ururu doesn’t have any spots, right?”

“He did, but they went away.”

“The spots went away?”

Michiko and Kineko cried out in unison.

“Yeah, um, it was like this.” Sadao started to speak, but he did not think he would be able to explain it well so he said, “Wait, I’ll get Mama.”

He dashed out. Soon he came back, his mother in tow.

“Sadao is saying some strange things, what is he talking about, Mama-san?”

Michiko asked the question at once. She and Kineko followed Sadao and his sister in calling their mother—who looked young enough that one might have said they were

friends—“Mama.”

“I can’t tell which is which either, so I told him to ask you,” Mama began to explain. “When Sadao brought Ururu back, he definitely had white and black spots. They became totally white, you know. He was so dirty I thought I’d clean him up, and when I started to wash him in some hot water it turned completely black and the black hair gradually lost its color. I was shocked. It was as if he’d been dyed.”

“Hmm, when you put it that way, I get the feeling both of them could be about Ururu. But it’s strange, I wonder why they’re both looking for the same dog—why would someone want to put spots on that beautiful of a dog?”

Sunk in thought, Michiko was tapping her teeth animatedly with her fingernail. Suddenly she raised her head and asked:

“Mama-san, did Ururu have anything like a collar or dog tag?”

“No, he didn’t have anything like that. There was a torn cord hanging around his neck,” Sadao answered from the side.

Michiko again furrowed her brow and became lost in thought.

### 3

“Wait here a minute.”

Michiko went into the house, returning soon with a bundle of newspapers.

“Let’s see, Sadao-chan found Ururu the day before yesterday. I have a feeling that the advertisement for the dog without the spots appeared even before that.”

Michiko went silent, carefully turning the pages of each newspaper and examining them. Then:

“Here it is, here!” She said this happily and took a deep breath. “Neko-chan, Mama-san, look here. See? The one with the spots appeared four days ago. The day before Sadao-chan found Ururu—the one with no spots was before that, five days ago—so both of these are Ururu.”

“How can that be?”

Kineko and Mama asked together, a dubious look on their faces.

“Like this. Ururu’s real owner is the one at 64 Seiundai, the one named Kazami. And he was stolen by this person named ‘Zaisha.’ So Kazami placed an advertisement looking for their lost dog. ‘Zaisha’ saw that, and, fearing that they would be discovered, used dye to change the white dog to a spotted one, took the nameplate and collar off, and replaced it with a cord—which the dog then bit through and escaped. The flustered ‘Zaisha’ never expected that the person who found the dog would give it a bath, so took out an ad describing the dog as it looked when it escaped—that’s one explanation. As for the injury, they might have hurt him when they stole him, or maybe he tried to escape before that and was hit with a stick or something—what do you think? Do you see what I mean?”

Kineko knew Michiko often did this sort of thing, so she was not really surprised, but Mama was shocked.

“My, it’s like you’re clairvoyant. But that ‘Zaisha’ is a great dog lover, right? To steal someone’s dog, go so far as to dye its hair a different color in order to hide it, and then take out a classified advertisement for it after it escapes—”

“I don’t think so,” Michiko answered definitively.

“If ‘Zaisha’ really loved dogs, Ururu wouldn’t try to escape to the point of chewing through

the cord and limping away. I don’t think they stole Ururu to keep him as a pet, I think there was another reason behind it.”

“Well, that may be, but if we know who the owner is we have to return him—but I don’t want to go myself. Michiko, can you take Ururu to Kazami for me?”

Mama asked this and looked at Michiko.

“Sure, it’s too late to turn back now.”

Michiko turned toward Kineko and said:

“If that’s what we’re going to do the sooner the better. Neko-chan, shall we go?”

She impatiently began to get ready.

“What do we do about ‘Zaisha?’”

“There’s no point in chasing after a dog thief. Let’s forget about it.”

#### 4

They quickly found the Kazami residence at 64 Seiundai.

They could also tell before even going inside that it was Ururu’s house. As soon as they entered the gate Ururu’s behavior began to change. During the car ride and the walk up the hill his wide eyes had been sorrowfully alert and he had been balled up in Kineko’s arms, but passing through the gate, he suddenly began whining quietly and struggling to get down.

“What do you think?”

Michiko whispered to Kineko, poking her arm triumphantly. Kineko thrust out her chin and nodded as if in signal. They announced themselves, and when the young maid who came out saw Ururu struggling in Kineko’s

arms she completely forgot to greet them, shouting instead:

“Oku-sama! Oku-sama! Leo is—!”

She disappeared into the house. Before long, a refined middle-aged lady rushed out with a determined expression, as if she would be met with an irrevocable situation were she but a moment late. At a sign from Michiko, Kineko released Ururu, who made straight for the lady and all but jumped onto her.

“Oh, I can’t thank you enough! Leo is like my baby. Ever since he disappeared, I have had nothing but restless, sleepless nights. I have been seeing him even in my dreams.”

Mrs. Kazami politely invited Michiko and Kineko to the parlor and spoke to them as she pressed the recovered baby Ururu—Leo—to her teary cheek. Then:

“Please wait a moment.”

She went out, and returning before long said:

“I hope this is acceptable...”

She gently placed a rectangular envelope on the table.

“Oku-sama, we can’t accept this. We didn’t do it for the reward.”

Michiko pushed back the envelope, but the lady was insistent, so she instead asked for an air gun and a sleeping doll, thinking to give the reward to Sadao and Yoriko. The lady looked perplexed, but after hearing Michiko’s explanation she laughed brightly and withdrew the envelope with grace.

“Very well. I won’t feel satisfied unless I meet them and thank them either, but it is a little late today, tomorrow for sure. Tell the young master and the young lady it is my promise.”

“Thank you so much. Well then, Neko-chan, we

should be going.” Michiko stood up and took the paw of Leo, who was still being held by the lady. “Well, Ururu—Leo—goodbye, and don’t go outside alone anymore.”

“Oh, I’ve never let Leo out by himself, whenever he goes out, he is either with me or the maid. What happened was that there was a burglary at the house next door, and there was a great commotion during the night, so when I wondered what was happening and opened the door to have a look Leo probably noticed that something was wrong as well and ended up wandering out. I quickly realized and looked for him, but he was gone—”

“Oh my! Did the thief escape in the commotion?”

“Yes, and it seems he stole a very valuable diamond. The lady of the house was excited at having received it and that evening had invited some close friends to show it off to. After the last of the guests left late at night, she was very tired, and so she did not return the diamond to the strong box, but put it on the dressing table next to the window in the bedroom and went to sleep.”

“Oh, I think I read about that in the paper,” said Kineko. “The thief climbed up the rain gutter and cut through the window glass to steal the diamond, but was discovered when he lost his footing and made a clatter going down.”

“Yes, that’s what happened. But he managed to escape, and they still have not found either him or the diamond.”

“What’s the name of the household next door?”

“It’s a very wealthy family named Tahara. Do you know them?”

“No. But I like this kind of thing.”

Kineko knew this to be true, and she knew that



Michiko would inevitably press for details when such topics arose, so out of consideration for the lady she softly pressed Michiko's arm as a sign it was time to leave.

Being politely seen out, Michiko and Kineko passed through the gate back onto the street.

"So this is the house of the lady who has been sickened by the loss of her diamond," Michiko spoke in an undertone, looking up at a cold, towering stone wall. "Yes, it's tall alright. But I bet if a man were agile, he could scale it easily."

Michiko was saying this and walking around before she suddenly stopped.

"Neko-chan, something doesn't add up—wait a second—"

"What is it? Let's go home. I'm hungry."

"You're always hungry. Be quiet for a minute."

Thrusting her fingers into her hair, Michiko put her back against the wall and crouched down.

"What are you doing? You can't do that here—"

Kineko put a hand on Michiko's shoulder, but Michiko brushed it off roughly.

"I told you to be quiet, you just don't get it—wait, that's it!"

Michiko suddenly shouted and jumped up and began running back along the road they had come. Kineko followed her, stunned. Michiko ran through the Kazamis' gate and into the entrance foyer without even announcing herself. With no choice, Kineko followed.

"Did you forget something?"

The lady, who had come out in surprise, asked after giving a friendly laugh.

"No, Oku-sama, I know who the thief is who

stole the diamond from next door."

"Oh my!" The lady looked astonished.

"It's the same person that stole Leo and put the spots on him. I think it's likely a man. He knew about the Taharas' diamond, and he also knew that they would be tired after the party that evening and would be sound asleep, so at the right time he entered to steal it. And then, as you said before, he was able to take the diamond, but misstepped during his escape and was discovered. 'I have to be careful or I'm going to be caught, I'd better not have the diamond when I'm caught, if I don't have the diamond maybe I can talk my way out of it.' He was hiding here and there with these thoughts going through his head when a little puppy quickly trotted up to his feet. At first, he was probably afraid of being barked at, so he might have grabbed him and covered his mouth. Leo is just a puppy so it would have been easy. However, while he was doing that the glimmer of a certain idea came to his mind—"

"I've got it!" Kineko shouted. "He hid the diamond in the puppy's body. He made him swallow it, right?"

"Well, surely that's one way he could have done it. But his method was different. Using a knife or something, he cut the puppy and stuffed the diamond inside the wound. Of course, in order to stop him from crying out he tied his mouth shut with a handkerchief or something—at the time he may have intended to escape by himself and come back to steal the dog later, but soon an opportunity to escape presented itself so he probably took the dog and ran."

"I think I understand now as well." This time it was the lady who spoke. "That accounts for this wound on Leo's foot, right? And I am assuming that the diamond is still inside of it."

"I think it has to be. If it's not I don't understand why that man is looking for Leo to the point of placing an advertisement in the

classifieds. He probably thought it would be dangerous to try to just retrieve Leo as is but would have been safe to make him look like a completely different dog while the diamond was still inside. Nobody would imagine that there would be a diamond in the dog's foot. —Oku-sama, can I borrow Leo for just tonight? I promise to return him tomorrow."

"Of course, I don't mind. Please take him. But are you planning on looking into it alone?"

"No, my uncle is with the police, so I think I'll ask him to help us."

## 5

When Mama saw that Michiko and Kineko had brought Ururu home again, she said:

"It doesn't look like you were clairvoyant after all."

She was about to tease her, but upon hearing why they had returned with Leo, she was completely shocked, and stared at the injured foot as if she could see the diamond.

As for young Yoriko, she did not understand what they were talking about, and was simply excited to hear that she would be receiving a sleeping doll.

"Well, we've got work to do." Michiko was encouraged after a rest. "Neko-chan, are you brave enough to cut Leo's foot?"

"Absolutely not. Shouldn't you do it?"

"I don't want to do it. I don't want to hurt him. Maybe we should get a veterinarian to do it—okay, Neko-chan, you take Leo to the veterinarian for me. Tell him that some kids were being mean and shoved some glass in there or something. I'm going to go talk to my uncle—"

"Do I have to watch the surgery?"

"Of course, make sure you do—we'd really be in a jam if the diamond disappeared."

"There'll be blood, right?"

Mama was apparently unable to watch Kineko stall any longer, and said with a chuckle:

"I'll go. Even I'm not as skittish as Kineko."

Michiko and Mama left together before going their separate ways. Michiko finished with her uncle and returned in about two hours, but it was not until much later that Mama returned, carrying Leo with a white bandage on his foot.

"How was it, Mama-san? I thought you might get back before me, but I guess it took a while. Did you have any trouble?"

"No, I was kept waiting for quite some time, that's why it took so long," Mama replied, withdrawing a small paper envelope from her *obi*. "Well, here it is—"

"I want to see it, too." Kineko had come closer and with foreheads together Michiko slowly unwrapped the paper.

"Wow, it's beautiful."

The two of them turned the beautiful shining diamond around and around, holding it up to the light and rolling it around in their palms while looking at it.

"The veterinarian didn't say anything?"

"No, nothing—"

Mama had perhaps been spooked by the sight of the blood as her eyes looked strangely listless, and her face was somewhat sullen.

## 6

Kineko was back at Michiko's house the next day. They were both in high spirits. Michiko's uncle had just notified them by telephone that the man who had put the spots on Leo had been arrested. They learned that the man—whose name was Kurihara—was an expert jewel thief who employed a Chinese henchman. The diamond had been returned safely to Mrs. Tahara. Mrs. Kazami had kept her promise, and much to the delight of Sadao and Yoriko had delivered an air gun and sleeping doll early that morning. More than with her own meritorious deed, Michiko seemed pleased that she had been able to bring happiness to her two young friends. She had a pleasant smile on her face. Kineko looked at Michiko with an innocent mixture of respect and admiration.

"You're pretty smart, Miikō."

"Save it for when I win."

Michiko said this while bringing out the *go* board. It was then that Yoriko again came rushing up.

"Here she comes. I bet she steps on it again."

And so it was. Determined to get the full attention of the two older girls, Yoriko stepped demurely onto the *go* board.

"Onee-chan, isn't this dress pretty?"

"Yes, it's beautiful—Yokko-chan, be a good girl and get off the board, please."

"No, look closer." Yoriko spread her arms proudly and stuck out her chest, making no attempt to move.

"Alright, alright. Let's have a closer look. Oh wow! You've got so many buttons, it's very pretty—did Mama-chan buy it for you?"

"No. Mama-chan put the buttons on for me."

"That looks like the same dress you were wearing yesterday."

The remark was Kineko's. On the chest of the dress Yoriko had come to show them were two new rows of cloth-wrapped ornamental buttons that Mama had sewn.

There was then a telephone call for Michiko. She got up and left, returning before long looking troubled.

"What is it?"

"It was my uncle. Mrs. Tahara is claiming that the diamond we returned was fake—"

"Fake?"

"Yes, and he said that Kurihara denies replacing the diamond with a fake, and that he is likely telling the truth. Plus, Neko-chan," Michiko said, lowering her voice as she glanced at Yoriko, who was playing *Ohajiki* with the *go* tiles. "Uncle says that the diamond could only have been replaced with the fake either between the time Leo escaped from Kurihara and was found by Sadao or during the surgery, but it has to be one of those. And he says he can't imagine it being the first one. No one other than Kurihara knew that there was a diamond in Leo's foot, so—so it had to have been replaced during the time of the surgery, and that could only have been done by one person—Neko-chan, do you get what I'm saying?"

"Yes, I do."

Kineko's eyes widened as if she had seen a ghost, and she swallowed hard.

"But surely that—can't be—"

"I think so too. There must be some mistake."

Michiko and Kineko lapsed into a frightened silence. The person Michiko's uncle said was the only one who could have swapped out the real diamond for a counterfeit—was Sadao and Yoriko's Mama.

Mama was severely interrogated, which was necessary, if unfortunate. She insisted that she knew nothing, however, and the facts appeared to be nothing more than suspicion; moreover, the diamond was not among any of her possessions.

There was also nothing untoward about the veterinarian who operated on Leo's foot. He said he had assumed to be removing a piece of glass, and could never have imagined that it was a valuable diamond. In this way the suspicion surrounding Mama was cleared naturally, but the mystery of when the real diamond was replaced with a counterfeit remained. The lack of resolution frustrated Michiko:

"That can't be all, it can't end like that," she kept saying, but no clue that might solve the mystery was forthcoming, and in this way a week passed.

## 7

One morning, while eating breakfast, Michiko spread open the newspaper, and she must have seen something for instantly her eyes widened, and hunched over the paper she began reading and then suddenly, chopsticks still in hand, flew to the telephone to call Kineko.

"Something's happened, hurry over. Quickly."

She gave the order, then hung up without hearing the response from the other end. About thirty minutes later Kineko arrived looking surly and still drowsy with sleep.

"Neko-chan, did you read the paper this morning?"

"And how would I have had that kind of time?"

Annoyed at having been summoned so early in the morning, Kineko was not in the best of moods.

"Okay, well, read this."

Kineko sluggishly shuffled her feet and approached the paper, and after reading it for some time tossed it aside with a big yawn.

"Oh, here we go again! There's nothing more to be done about it. I know it's hard to let go, but it's just safer that way. If you get too involved, you might suddenly end up dead like this veterinarian too, you know."

In the newspaper was a lead article saying that the veterinarian who had extracted the diamond from Leo's foot had been killed at his residence the previous night. He appeared to have been bludgeoned with a gun, the fatal wound a contusion on the back of the head.

A note found next to the body, written in a disguised hand, said that when the veterinarian realized that the piece of glass he took from Leo's foot was actually a splendid diamond he was suddenly consumed by greed, and quickly replaced it with a piece of glass when Mama was not looking. Learning this, the writer of the note approached him to return the diamond, but he refused, so all that was left was to kill him and take it back. Such were the contents of the note, which was clearly the work of Kurihara's underling.

The article added that while Kurihara insisted that he knew nothing of this, he would undoubtedly confess sooner or later, and when he did the veterinarian's killer would easily be identified.

"We should just leave this alone. It's too dangerous—"

Kineko said this, seriously concerned for Michiko's safety.

"Right, but there's something strange, you know," while lost in thought gazing at the newspaper, Michiko suddenly lifted her face. "Okay, I'll try it. And if this isn't it, I'll definitely

let it go.”

“You shouldn’t do anything!”

“Don’t say that, help me, please—”

Michiko put her hands on Kineko’s shoulders and looked at her. “It’s nothing difficult. The dress Yokko-chan had on last time, the one with all the buttons, I want you to go get it and bring it here for me. Just say something like this. Say that you have a niece the same age as her, and the dress is so cute you want to make a similar one, so can you borrow it to copy the style—understand?”

Leaving reluctantly and looking baffled, Kineko soon returned with Yoriko’s dress.

“Thank you.”

Michiko took the dress, laid it down flat, and began poking and touching the buttons one by one. Then:

“Oh, I think it’s this one. Neko-chan, give me the scissors.”

Michiko carefully took the button she had cut off between her fingers, and slowly began to unwrap the cloth. Kineko’s eyes were transfixed on the fingertips. Stuffed into the cloth tightly was a ball of cotton. Michiko quietly undid it.

Kineko shouted in surprise. Michiko simply looked in silence, as if she were possessed. From the cotton a dazzling diamond appeared, shining brilliantly.

“What do you think, Neko-chan?” Michiko finally asked. “It’s beautiful. It really does sparkle differently from glass. When you look at it, don’t you get the feeling that it’s worth more than a life or two?”

“So, it was Mama-san?”

Michiko’s face darkened, and she nodded.

“She killed him, too?”

“It was probably on the spur of the moment. That’s what I’d like to think.”

“But how did you know, Miikō?”

“This newspaper article. The veterinarian took out what he thought was a piece of glass, but when he saw a diamond he suddenly got greedy and switched it with glass when Mama-san wasn’t looking—that’s what the note said, right? But Neko-chan, how do you think the diamond looked when it came out of Leo’s foot?”

“I’m sure it was covered in blood.”

“Right, and unless one is an expert in jewels, I don’t think it’s possible to see something that appears to be a bloody piece of glass, assume it to be so, and then suddenly realize it’s a diamond. And even if he had realized that, it’s absurd to think that he would have conveniently had a piece of glass of the exact same shape and size at hand. The veterinarian didn’t know anything, so how would he have been able to prepare such a thing? Leo showed up suddenly, without any notice. At that time, I don’t think even in his wildest dreams he could have imagined there’d be something like a diamond. And then this note, it’s strange in that it’s just too suggestive of who the criminal is, so if anything I got the feeling it could be read the opposite way. While I was thinking of that I suddenly remembered the buttons on this dress.” Michiko stopped talking. Kineko silently urged her on.

“When was it that Yokko-chan came to show us this? You remember too, right, Neko-chan? It was the day after. You know, this dress is fashionable even without this kind of button. Putting it over the floral pattern just made it gaudy. Mama-san definitely knew this. From what I’ve seen, her tastes are pretty refined. She is not someone who would favor such a loud decoration. When you think about it this



far, Neko-chan, I'm sure even you've reached the same conclusion as me. Mama-san's face was pale when she returned with the diamond. It took her a long time to get back—I can clearly remember that as being significant as well. The one who went dizzy with greed was not the veterinarian, but Mama-san. Once she had it, she didn't want to give it back. She fell completely under the spell of the diamond, wandered around town, and bought a fake diamond of the same size and cut to bring back, that's why it took her so long."

"And killing the veterinarian?"

"At first the veterinarian didn't know anything, but upon being questioned and reading the papers he would have realized what Mama-san had done. After that I'm sure he threatened her. It's terrible to think about, but bear with me and listen."

It appeared difficult to discuss, and Michiko frowned and blushed.

"He might've said something like 'If you don't want anybody to find out that you stole the diamond—' or maybe 'give me the diamond—' no, he surely wanted Mama-san more than the diamond, which would have been dangerous for him to have. She is still young, and you know how beautiful she is. And then finally, last night, when Mama-san was forced to decide whether to be exposed as a jewel thief or sacrifice herself, somehow he fell and hit his head on a table corner or something. And then she had to write that absurd note and flee—It's all the fault of this, Neko-chan. When I think of that, I feel like my palm is going to burn just holding it like this. It would have been better to have not said anything and left it buried forever in Leo's foot."

Michiko looked down again at the shining diamond.

"But what are we going to do?" Kineko urged.

"I don't know, what do you think we should do? More than Mama-san, I can't help feeling sorry for Sadao-chan and Yokko-chan. Well, let me think about it today."

Summoned by telephone at around noon the next day, Kineko rushed over to see Michiko's face beaming as if a great burden had been lifted. When Michiko saw Kineko's worried look, she burst out laughing. Without a word, she went into the house, brought out the *go* board, and set it down in front of Kineko.

"Everything's been taken care of. Come on, it's time for us to finish our match." Michiko quietly placed a black stone in the middle of the board. "I know I had you thinking the worst, but that diamond you know, Kurihara's henchman knew that having it brought him unwanted popularity, so he was forced to get rid of it and sent it back to the rightful owner. It'll be in the papers tomorrow for sure—Anyway, let's forget about all that, hurry up and finish this game, and go give Yokko-chan her dress back."

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**Miyano Murako** (pen name of Tsuno Kō) was born in Niigata Prefecture in 1917. Before the war she studied Japanese literature at Jissen Girls' School in Tokyo but withdrew before graduating. Relocating to Dairen, she began her career as a writer, publishing under a variety of pseudonyms such as Kureo Kyōko (the surname an approximation of Cleopatra). As a member of the Japan Detective Writers Club in the postwar period (and from 1956 as Miyano Murako) she wrote orthodox detective fiction, penning several full-length novels and contributing to the periodicals *Detective Club*, *Jewel*, and *New Youth*. She died in 1990.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Defined as the period 1920-1945. Marked at the beginning by the death of Kuroiwa Ruikō, the launch of the influential magazine *Shinseinen* and the early appearance of detective stories involving the use of probability, the "Golden Age" of Japanese detective fiction featured formative debates about the genre's makeup, the demarcation between its orthodox and heterodox variants, and its relationship to literature proper (Taniguchi 2018: 21-40).

<sup>2</sup> Michiko's nickname.