

The Cow Thief

(Ushi Nusubito)

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Saburo Hyogo (Shite)
Cow Magistrate (Ado)
Son of Saburo (Koado)
Taro Kaja
Jiro Kaja

Translated by Don Kenny

MAGISTRATE Since times long past, I have been serving in the post of the Cow Magistrate of the Toba Detached Palace. Well now, there was a cow that drew the carriage of the emperor on his visit here. I then took custody of that cow and built a special barn for it, and appointed guards to protect it day and night. But on a rainy night a few days ago, it appears a thief snuck in and bereft me of possession of that cow. I has sent a search party to discover its whereabouts throughout not only all the neighboring villages, but also the surrounding mountains and valleys, parting the grasses with care, but the whereabouts of the cow remains entirely unknown. In accordance with orders from the Minister of Public Affairs, I intend to put the cow thief on trial, for which purpose anyone, even if they have committed a similar crime, shall be awarded anything that they might desire in reward for providing information as to who the thief of the cow of the Toba Detached Palace is and where he can be found. First, I will put up a signboard announcing this matter. (He mimes putting up a signboard on the upstage right pillar) I will call my two servants Taro Kaja and Jiro Kaja and give them a job to do. Taro Kaja, Jiro Kaja, are you there?

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA Here.

MASTER There you are.

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA At your service, Sir.

MAGISTRATE You came quite quickly. The matter I have called you here about is of no great import. Since I do not know the whereabouts of the cow thief, I have put up a signboard, so if someone should come to the entrance concerning the signboard, come and notify me immediately.

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA Haa.

MAGISTRATE Ei.

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA Haaaa.

SON I am a resident of this neighborhood. I heard that anyone, even if they have committed a similar crime, shall be awarded anything that they might desire in reward for providing information as to who the thief of the cow of the Toba Detached Palace is and where he can be found. Since I know all of this, I have decided to present myself as a witness. I must hurry on my way. Truly, while I am reluctant to stand as witness against a thief, since I have a request that is as precious to me as my very life, I have made up my mind to go and bear witness. Well, here I am already. First I will announce myself. Hello in there, is anybody about?

TARO KAJA Here I am.

SON I have come to bear witness concerning the cow thief. Please announce me to the magistrate.

TARO KAJA I will announce you to the magistrate, so wait right there for a

moment.

SON As you say, Sir

TARO KAJA I have an announcement to make to you. A young child has come to bear witness to the cow thief.

MAGISTRATE What's that you say? Are you saying that a young child has come to bear witness to the cow thief?

TARO KAJA That is indeed the case.

MAGISTRATE Bring him here quickly.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. Here, here, come on inside.

SON With all my heart.

TARO KAJA Here is the person in question.

MAGISTRATE Are you the one who has come to bear witness against the cow thief.

SON Indeed I am.

MAGISTRATE So tell me who it was who stole the cow.

SON It was a man of the neighboring village named Saburo Hyogo who stole the cow, after which he led it to the market in another village and sold it there.

MAGISTRATE And do you have some proof of what you say?

SON There is no need for any sort of proof, for if you order him to come here,

and we confront each other, he will most certainly confess to it himself.

MAGISTRATE This is quite sufficient proof. Here, here, Taro Kaja, just leave this person in my possession.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. Here now, you must stay right here.

MASGISTRATE Here, here, call Jiro Kaja to come here too.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. Jiro Kaja, you are being called.

JIRO KAJA What's that? You say I am being called?

TARO KAJA And you must come quickly.

JIRO KAJA Jiro Kaja has come as he was called.

MAGISTRATE Well now, do you two know Saburo Hyogo of the neighboring village?

TARO KAJA I know the house he lives in. But I do not know his face.

MAGISTRATE Jiro Kaja, what about you?

JIRO KAJA I do not know either the house he lives in nor his face.

MAGISTRATE In any case, I order you two to go to the neighboring village and arrest that Saburo Hyogo and bring him here

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA As you say, Sir.

MAGISTRATE Even if he is the wrong person, no matter how he may object, you must tie him up and arrest him at all costs.

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA As you say, Sir.

MAGISTRATE And do so quickly and with post haste.

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA Haaa.

TARO KAJA Have we not been burdened with a most urgent task?

JIRO KAJA It is as you say indeed.

TARO KAJA First go get a rope to arrest him with.

JARO KAJA With all my heart, I have already brought a rope to arrest him with.

TARO KAJA Then let us be on our way. Come, come along with me.

JIRO KAJA With all my heart.

TARO KAJA Well now, I have always heard that Saburo Hyogo was a man of integrity, so I wonder for what we are to say to him that he is to be arrested.

JIRO KAJA Just what would be best to say to him.

TARO KAJA There is nothing for it but to deceive him to arrest him, so take great care to assist me well.

JIRO KAJA With all my heart.

TARO KAJA Well, here we are already. I will announce myself and call him out here, so you hide over there and leap out and tie him up from behind.

JIRO KAJA With all my heart.

TARO KAJA I say, I say, I wish to announce myself. Is Saburo Hyogo at home?

SABURO There is someone at the front gate. How very strange. Suddenly the color of the clouds has darkened. And for some reason or other, my breast is tense and uneasy. Who is it who announces himself?

TARO KAJA Are you the one named Saburo Hyogo?

SABURO Indeed, my name is Saburo Hyogo. Where have you come from?

TARO KAJA I have come here to request something of you, so please come all the way out here.

SABURO With all my heart. Just what is it that you have come to request of me?

TARO KAJA It is only this.

JIRO KAJA I've got you.

SABURO What are you up to? What a hateful rascal you are.

JIRO KAJA I've got you for sure.

SABURO What is this all about?

TARO KAJA Tie him up tightly.

JIRO KAJA With all my heart, with all my heart.

SABURO Here now, for what reason have you snuck up behind me and tied

me up with a rope?

TARO KAJA You are ordered to appear before the cow magistrate of Toba detached palace. Get to your feet.

SABURO You have arrested the wrong person.

TARO KAJA It does not matter if you are the wrong person. On your way, on your way.

SABURO I do not mind going in the least, but when I think how much trouble it will cause you two later, I feel most sorry for you.

TARO KAJA That is not for you to judge. Come, come, be on your way. Well, here we are already. I will go in and announce that we are back, so you keep the rope securely in place.

JIRO KAJA With all my heart.

TARO KAJA I have something to inform you of.

MAGISTRATE What is it?

TARO KAJA I have arrested Saburo Hyogo and brought him here.

MAGISTRATE You say that you have arrested Saburo Hyogo and brought him here?

TARO KAJA That I have done indeed.

MAGISTRATE You have done well indeed. Drag him in here quickly.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. Here, here, go all the way inside. This is the man.

MAGISTRATE So are you truly Saburo Hyogo?

SABURO Indeed, I am the one named Saburo Hyogo.

MAGISTRATE What a hateful rascal you are. And you are the one who stole the cow that was in my keeping.

SABURO Ha. So I see that it was because I am accused of being the thief who stole your cow that you sent your people to arrest me.

MAGISTRATE That goes without saying.

SABURO But I have no memory of committing such a crime.

MAGISTRATE Just look at his insolent face. No matter how much you may deny it, look here, I have proof positive that you did it.

SABURO There is no way that you could have proof positive as I have no memory of committing such a crime.

MAGISTRATE What do you keep jabbering about? Here, here, bring the young boy who came here a bit ago forward.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. Here, here go all the way in there.

SON With all my heart.

SABURO Oh, is this boy, the one who you say is a witness against the cow thief?

MAGISTRATE That goes without saying.

SABURO Haaaa.

SON I say, I say, Saburo Hyogo. As I have come to witness against you, there is no way that you can escape from the truth. Just go ahead and confess.

MAGISTRATE I say, I say, you speak to him with great familiarity, so tell me what he is to you.

SON He is my father.

MAGISTRATE So you say he is your father?

SON Since it is I, your son, who has come to witness against you, there is no way that you can escape. So just go ahead and confess.

SABURO Oh, has fate decreed that I am to come to my end? I will hide nothing. I am the one who stole the cow that was in your keeping.

MAGRISTRATE We already know that to be the case. You claimed that you did not, so tighten his rope and this time more securely.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

SABURO Hey, you less than human brat! What evil celestial demon encouraged you to stand as witness against your own father's crime? When you were born, unaware of this despicable character of yours, everybody praised me as a man of great good fortune to have a baby boy such as you, and both me and your mother spent all our time both day and night holding you in our arms and raising you with the greatest care. And when you reached the age of two or three years, you began to grow a great mop of hair, and when you reach four or five year of age, you were so brave and strong that neither cows or horses were able to trod on you. And when you become seven, eight, and then ten, we planned to send you to the temple school to learn how to write, and when you

become fifteen, we intend celebrate your coming of age ceremony. And then we planned to take you to enter service under the lord of the manor. But all our prayers for you to become a fine adult and care for me and my wife in our final years of life were entirely in vain. How could you do such a an irresponsible thing as come forth as a witness against your own father? You are no longer my son. You are my enemy, my worst enemy. (He weeps)

MAGISTRATE Here, here, you hateful rascal. Well, I must say, you have done a most unforgivable thing. How can you accuse such a young boy of such a crime? You should be entirely ashamed of yourself. And for what reason did you steal the cow that was in my keeping?

SABURO The fact of the matter is that this year marks the anniversary of my parent's death, but as I am quite destitute, I was completely lacking in funds for hold the memorial service. So I stole the cow that was in your keeping, led it to the market in another village, and sold it there, thus making it possible to hold the commemorative service for my parent.

MAGISTRATE What foolish word you utter. How could steal a cow to mourn for your parent constitute any sort of devotion or fulfilling of filial duty to your deceased parent?

SABURO The Buddha warns against the stealing and killing and of animals, lasciviousness, speaking out without due consideration, and excessive drinking of wine. These are all the Buddha's admonitions. At the time of the Buddha's enlightenment, there was one of his disciples named Hlkyu, who was the most poverty-stricken of all the disciples of the Buddha. Though he requested memorial services for his parents, he was not granted his plea. So he stole a cow from a certain place, but thinking it was a waste to sell that cow, as it would constitute a speaking out without due consideration, in order to secure the funds he needed, he went deep into the mountains to speak his mind in words lacking due consideration, by means of which he declared that he intended to sell the cow to obtain the funds to donate for the memorial services. And after his return

to the city, whenever he met with a citizen, he would cover his head with a cloth and carry out the mourning as though it was for a priest. And it is for this reason that the characters of the word for donation to a temple are “cloth” and “covering.” And this is a most logical interpretation of its significance. So in the light of this act by such a holy personage, how could stealing of a cow and selling it to carry out memorial services for my parent constitute any sort of crime?

MAGISTRATE Though you are one who goes so far as to steal a cow, you speak most slyly deceptive words. So I will not allow you to speak any further in your defense. And I will put off determining the sentence for your offense until a later date. So, Taro Kaja, I order you to take him away and throw him into prison for the time being.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

SON First, wait just a moment.

MAGISTRATE Wait for what?

SON First grant me my reward.

MAGISTRATE Indeed, I had completely forgotten about promising a reward to one who stood as witness against the cow thief. So, tell me, shall I give you rice or shall in be money that you desire? Or is it dumplings that you desire?

SON Oh, no, it is not any of those things that I desire. I only want you to grant me the life of Saburo.

MAGISTRATE That is quite out of the question. As he is a most serious criminal, he must be thrown into prison. But I will grant you any other thing at all that you desire.

SON So are your declarations made up of prevarications? Did you not

announce that anyone, even if they have committed a similar crime, shall be awarded anything that they might desire in reward for providing information as to who the thief of the cow of the Toba Detached Palace is and where he can be found?

MAGISTRATE Indeed that is exactly what I announced.

SON If someone else were to have borne witness, Saburo's would have lost his life. It was from the desire to save my own father's life that I, his son, came to bear witness against him. If you refuse to grant me the life of Saburo, I beg you to execute me as well. (He weeps, and Saburo also weeps)

SABURO Here, here, my child. Are you a god or a Buddha? Unaware of your heart-felt intent, just a bit ago, I cursed and spoke evil of you. Please forgive me for those words. I would very much like to fold my hands in deepest gratitude to you, but as I am in the embarrassing situation of having my hands tied behind my back, I cannot even so much as fold my hands in gratitude and supplication for your forgiveness. (He weeps)

MAGISTRATE Oh, what a pitiful situation.

TARO KAJA It is as you say, indeed, Sir.

MAGISTRATE Now that I think the matter over with care, one must not think with a mind as hard as tree and rocks, even though a crime has been committed, the gods declare that since they are father and son, a pardon it is order. Quickly forgive and release Saburo.

TARO KAJA & JIRO KAJA As you say, Sir.

SABURO (Singing)

Brought forward from the depths
of your kind words,

CHORUS

Father and son are completely overjoyed
At the granting of reprieve
And saving of their lives,
Their hearts filled
with unexpected gratitude,
As together they set out on their way home.
Never will the bond
between father and son be severed,
And their house will enjoy
great good fortune.

How virtuous is the wondrous fidelity of children toward their parents.
How felicitous, how very felicitous.