

The Flower Thief

(Hana Nusubito)

Translation copyright 2014 by Don Kenny Kyogen-in-english.com

Thief (Shite)

Garden Owner (Ado)

Translated by Don Kenny

OWNER I am a resident of this neighborhood. While my flowers are always and every year magnificent, they are particularly glorious this year. Thus I imagine that many people will come flower viewing. And, I have been told that just last night, someone or other came and broke off branch to take back home with him. I intend to go and see how the situation stands. What is this? Well, I must say, how very vexing. Just what am I to do? Since they may well come again tonight, I myself will stay and keep guard, and capture any thief who comes here.

THIEF I am a resident of this neighborhood. While it is true of every year, this year's spring is extraordinarily peaceful. Magnificent flowers are in bloom in a nearby garden, and tonight they are at the very zenith of their full-blooming beauty. Last night, I snuck in and broke off a branch, and when I presented it to a certain person, that person was so extraordinarily pleased and commented on how magnificent the blossom were, and ask me whether they were from my own garden. I inadvertently, with no ulterior intent, responded that they were indeed from my own garden. So that person asked me for one more branch. Thus I am on my way with the intent of breaking off one more branch. Truly, though this is merely a matter of breaking off a branch, stealing a thing that likely has an owner is a matter of considerable concern, so I truly hope that I can pull it off without

getting into trouble. Well, here I am already. Oh, they are blooming, they are blooming. They are even more magnificent than they were last night. This is what is meant by blossoming in full glory but not yet beginning to fall and scatter. While I do feel reluctant to break off such heartwarmingly blooming flowers, since I have already made a promise to deliver, I will break off a branch with full determination. Well now, I wonder if there is anyone about. It appears that there is no one about as there is not so much as a whisper of sound. So which branch should I choose? Shall I take this one? Oh, there is a very fine branch over there.

OWNER I've got you. (Tying the THIEF's arms behind his back)

THIEF What are you up to?

OWNER What I am up to is preventing your from messing up my precious flowers. I will not let you go alive.

THIEF Truly, I quite fully understand your intent. But happening to pass by your place, as your flowers are so very magnificent, I found myself compulsively breaking off one branch. I humble beg you to forgive me.

OWNER What an inordinately vexing excuse you give. And I am quite convinced that it was you who broke off a branch just last night.

THIEF Oh, no, tonight is my first time to do so.

OWNER Even if it is your first time to do so, though I have put up a signboard forbidding the breaking off of branches, what do you mean by breaking one off?

THIEF Oh, I see, but I did not notice your signboard. But I will hide nothing from you. Your flowers are so very magnificent that I got the desire to break off a branch as a gift for a friend, and the friend was so pleased that I inadvertently promised to break one more branch off to present to him, so there was nothing

for it but for me to come here once more. But I am definitely not a thief, so I humbly beg you to forgive me.

OWNER You continue to jabber incomprehensible nonsense. How can you blame someone else for your thievery? I am convinced that you steal not only flowers, but that you are truly an incessant robber and thief.

THIEF I say, I say, I was greatly in the wrong and I deeply apologize. (He weeps.) Oh, I must say, I did a thing that must not be done. I did not stop to think that simply breaking off a branch would be a crime, so without considering the consequences I have incurred the embarrassment of putting a noose around my neck, and now my face is blackened for all time, and I must thus end my life. Now that I have totally bereft myself of the beneficence of all the gods, both Shinto and Buddhist, I feel overpoweringly vexed and regretful. (He weeps.) Oh, how foolish, how very foolish I have been. I have shed tears over an insignificant matter. I must sit on the veranda and regret the twilight of the flowers like the famed Sokoku who abandoned his life without waiting for the arrival of spring, that very Sokoku whose heart is known throughout all Japan and China, who emptied his very heart in admiration of the flowers, causing him to misstep and fall into an abysmally deep valley and lose his life. In the same manner, just now I also, unaware that I could be cut down, executed through admiration of the flowers. Oh how grieved I am, how very grieved and regretful!

OWNER What is this? The thief is mumbling something or other to himself. Here, here, as you are mumbling such gentle-hearted things to yourself, I admonish you to consider carefully what you commit in future. After all is said and done, flowers receive the beneficence of both rain and dew, and are tossed about by storms. But during their time of full blooming, do they not hate the storms. Rain and winds only blow through and over the flowers, seeming to take careful precaution against harming them. This is what you so poetically expressed. So how could you bring yourself to recklessly break off branches of those gentle flowers?

THIEF Indeed it is just as you say. Even so, while it is regretful, breaking off their branches is also an act of mercy, for as soon as spring comes round, not only this year, but next year and the year after next, they always bloom again. There is an old poem that says that if you feel regret for the residual memory of the flowers, there is nothing wrong in breaking off their branches.

OWNER And how does that old poem go?

THIEF I have heard that it goes, "When you view the flowers, as the cherry blossoms that do not speak aloud to us, we break off their branches with both hands and take them home to enjoy there."

OWNER You are a most fascinating person. They say that poems please both demons and deities. Compose for me a poem about these flowers, and in return, I will forgive your crime and spare for you your life.

THIEF Is what you say really true?

OWNER Poems are appreciated by all the three major deities, so how could I be equivocating?

THIEF For that I am indeed most grateful. If that is the case, I will compose one verse.

OWNER That is a fine idea.

THIEF How about this?

OWNER How about what?

THIEF This spring. . .

OWNER This spring. . .

THIEF Ropes are not attached below the blossoms, so people call them tall black lacquered hats.

OWNER Very well done. The gods in heaven observe and approve. Well, I must say, how very amusing. Here, here, I will untie your rope.

THIEF For that I am most grateful.

OWNER Your hand must be quite chaffed and painful.

THIEF No, not in the least. I will immediately be on my way.

OWNER Here, here, even for a brief time, you were most uncomfortably tied up. So to lighten up your spirits, I will serve you a cup of wine. Please sit down here.

THIEF Just sparing me my life is quite sufficient, anything further is quite unnecessary.

OWNER I beg you to sit down here.

THIEF With all my heart.

OWNER Here, here, drink a cup of wine.

THIEF I am grateful that you pour for me yourself. I accept this most unexpected cup of wine.

OWNER You are most welcome. Drink the cup dry.

THIEF Well, I must say, what delicious wine.

OWNER Are you a good drinker?

THIEF I am truly a good drinker.

OWNER Since you seem to like my wine, have another cup.

THIEF If that is the case, I accept another cup. I accept one more quite unexpected cup.

OWNER Wine in abundance is a very fine thing.

THIEF The more I drink, the better this wine tastes. While I realize how rude it may seem, I now pass this cup to you.

OWNER Oh, and I accept it.

THIEF I am sorry I have soiled it.

OWNER It does not matter. Now I pass the cup back again to you.

THIEF And I accept it.

OWNER I will sing a little bit. (He sings a very short song.)

THIEF Now I pass this back to you.

OWNER And I accept it. Now I have had another drink. Now, entertain me with a dance.

THIEF I am most inept at dancing. Please allow me not to dance.

OWNER How can you refuse?! I insist that you dance.

THIEF If that is the case, I will dance a dance that I learned when I was younger, so while I realize how rude it may seem, I beg you to sing to accompany me.

OWNER With all my heart.

THIEF (He dances.)

OWNER Well done, well done.

THIEF I was most awkward.

OWNER Well now, won't you have another drink?

THIEF I will not accept another drink.

OWNER Then shall I dance for you?

THIEF That is a fine idea.

OWNER Well, I must say, I have become acquainted with a most fascinating person. Please come and visit me frequently from now on. I will welcome you with open heart and arms.

THIEF Today I have received your unexpected kind hospitality. I will come to visit you with greatest frequency, so please do what you can for me.

OWNER I will gladly extend to you my hospitality.

THIEF Well, while I will regret leaving you no matter how long I stay here, I will now say farewell and be on my way.

OWNER Here, here, if that is the case, I will give you a souvenir.

THIEF What will you give me?

OWNER This is what I will give you.

THIEF This is a truly magnificent branch of flowers. This is what is known as chasing after a true thief.

OWNER What an impressive greeting you speak.

THIEF Now I will sing one more song and be on my way.

OWNER That is a fine idea.

THIEF (Singing)

The light of the moon,
Reflect the shadow of the flowers,
Leaving fond memories of this lovely night.

Eliciting my song:

Ah, lovely, solitary branch,
Your blossoms held gently,
Wrapped in my sleeve.

Gazing at them and the moon,
Thoughts fill my mind with hope,
That will remain within my heart,

My dream of this spring,
That will remain in my heart.

Now, I will be on my way.

OWNER I am most grateful you have come.

THIEF Haaaa. (Bows deeply and exits.)

