

The Spider Thief

(Kumo Nusubito)

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Poet (Shite)

Master (Ado)

Taro Kaja (Koado)

Guests (Tachishu)

Translated by Don Kenny

MASTER I am a resident of this neighborhood. I have organized a beginner's linked-verse club, and have been appointed to be host for this evening's meeting. There is a sound of bustling outside my front door. I have informed them that we will meet in my innermost wing, and promised to greet them there, so I posted my servant Taro Kaja outside the front door to watch for their arrival. The night has fallen, so I expect them to arrive soon, and when Taro Kaja shows them in, I will greet them at the entrance to my inner wing.

TARO KAJA Well, well, I hear that the members have arrived out front already. So I will hurry and announce them. I have a matter to announce to you.

MASTER What might that be?

TARO KAJA Your guests have arrived already.

MASTER That I am sincerely pleased to hear. I will go meet them at the entrance. Have you made all the preparations that I ordered you to do?

TARO KAJA Indeed I have completed all preparations.

MASTER Make certain that your lead them in with the greatest of care.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

POET I am a resident of this neighborhood. I am inordinately fond of linked-verse poems, and I always go about reciting them to myself. But I am so destitute and poverty-stricken, that I always refuse invitations to my beloved linked-verse club meetings, neglecting all chances to attend. I have heard that there is to be a linked-verse meeting at the home of Someone (use name of actor playing the Master). In the past, when I was more affluent, I accepted his invitations and participated in the meetings, but in recent years, I have become so poverty-stricken that I have not attended the meetings and have even given up my membership in the club. But tonight I have decided to somehow sneak in unannounced and hide outside to listen in on the meeting. I must hurry on my way. Truly, when one is destitute, one has few close friends, and being stricken with poverty has always been said to be depressing and heartbreaking. When one is in unfortunate circumstances, one is intensely reluctant to pay anyone a visit. Well, here I am already. I had heard that he had recently refurbished his home, and, I must say what a fine restoration it is. The gate is made of fine oak like that of a grand mansion. And the entranceway must be of the utmost beauty. They say that people who build their homes in this manner live long and prosperous lives. And this is obvious even at first sight. Well, I must say, what a lovely sight. First, I will go around to the back. I wonder whether the backside has been remade in such a sturdy and solid manner. Oh, good, the backside fence is still the same bamboo hedge that it has always been. First I will cut through this hedge. Thinking it might be useful in a case such as this, I have brought along a saw. Now I must cut through this hedge. Zuka, zuka, zuka. Meri, meri, gussari. Well, I must say, I have torn open a huge hole. I wonder if anybody heard me.

TARO KAJA I heard the sound of something breaking down in the back. And I also heard the sound of footsteps. I am worried about what has happened.

POET By the three treasures, it seems that someone has heard me.

TARO KAJA Oh, the backside hedge has been torn down. So a thief must have come in. I say, I say, a thief has entered the back garden. Everyone just come here and see.

MASTER What's that, you say a thief has broken in? It is a great number of thieves?

TARO KAJA I have no idea of their numbers, so do come here quickly.

MASTER All of you come along with me.

GUESTS What's that? A thief? We will go guard the front. Someone guard the back garden of the mansion.

MASTER Bring torches. Come one and all, come with me.

POEM What a vexing thing this has become. First I will hide myself in the thickness of the grove of trees.

TARO KAJA I see the shadow of a man in the thickness of this grove.

MASTER Search throughout the grove quickly.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. So, just as I thought, here he is.

MASTER Bring my bow and arrows.

GUESTS There is no need for that. Let's all come together and pull him out and capture him.

POET First wait just a moment. I am not a thief. Please do not treat me

roughly.

MASTER What do you mean you are not a thief, after tearing down my hedge in the middle of the night and sneaking in unannounced?

POET I deeply apologize, but I got caught in a huge spider web, and there is no way that I can move. Please wait just a moment.

TARO KAJA It is thus only natural that you were discovered. And now you speak of being confused and discombobulated. How amusing for a man to get caught in a spider web and unable to move.

(Everybody laughs)

POET There is an ancient story about tying a bucking horse up to a spider web. And even when a housewife came along with a hatchet, she was not able to cut it loose. So since even a horse can get caught in a spider web, there is no reason that a human being would be able to escape the same fate and end up firmly entrapped.

MASTER Did you all hear what he just said? Reciting an ancient poem of the sort he just did, makes it appear that he is a person of good taste.

GUESTS He must indeed not be a trickster who became a thief. Let's hear more of what he has to say for himself.

MASTER I say, I say, the stance he has just taken proves him to be a man of great good taste. So what reason have you snuck in here in the middle of the night like a thief?

POET That is what I want to relate to you. I am an inordinately enthusiastic lover of linked-verse poems, but as I am in a state of total destitution, I am quite unable to attend linked-verse meetings, where on my own accord or in

response to invitations from others. But as I got word that there is to be a linked-verse club meeting at your place tonight, I made up my mind to sneak in unannounced to listen in from the shadows, and it is for this reason that I tore down the hedge and made such a racket that you all heard me, causing all the huge number of you to gather here before me, so in order to somehow escape without being seen, I dashed about and ended up getting caught in this huge spider web making it impossible to budge either forward or backward. I had no intention of robbing you of even so much as a single toothpick. So I most humbly beg you to forgive me for my indiscretion.

MASTER Did you all hear what he just said? Even though there is great logic and sincerity of intent in his explanation of his action, his tearing down the hedge and entering unannounced in the middle of the night is an act of deep suspicion.

GUESTS Indeed it is an act of truly deep suspicion.

MASTER What I am thinking now is that if we give him an opening verse and he succeeding in composing a satisfactory responding link to it, we should forgive him and let him go.

GUESTS That is a fine idea.

MASTER Here, here, since it appears that you love linked-verse poems so very much, still there is no proof of what you say. I will give you an opening verse, so I order you to give a brief responding verse to it. And depending upon the state of your response, we will forgive your indiscretion and let you go.

POET I will do my best to compose a good response. Please let me hear your opening verse.

MASTER How about this?

POET How about what?

MASTER A gentle-hearted sneaking in got you caught in a spider web.

POEM In its threads that are impossible to cut through no matter how I struggle against their hold on me.

MASTER All the deities of the heaven stand as witnesses to your skill. And I must truly say that it is most fascinating. Did you all hear his response?

GUESTS Indeed we all did hear his response. We are embarrassed to hear a linked-verse here outside and so late in the night.

MASTER Taro Kaja, sweep away the spider web and bring him here to me.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir. I will go and fetch a broom. (He exits and reappears with a broom) Here, here, I will sweep away the spider web.

POET I am indeed most grateful. Now allow me to return through the place where I entered to go back home.

MASTER Here, here, wait just a moment. I must say, I was deeply impressed by the linke-verse that you just composed. Fortunately, all of my friends are present here. Please join us and make our acquaintance, and then allow us to install you as a member, and after that to make you feel welcome to be among us.

POET As you speak to me with such kindness of heart, I am overwhelmingly bereft of words to express my gratitude.

MASTER All of you come all the way inside.

HEAD GUEST With all our hearts. Come along one and all.

GUESTS With all our hearts.

MASTER Taro Kaja, bring in wine.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

MASTER It is a very cold night, so all of you drink up.

GUESTS We will indeed drink our fill.

MASTER Here, here, you also drink up.

POET If I were to thank you further, it would negate your kind intent. So I will accept one cup.

MASTER That is a fine idea.

POET Well, I must say, what fine wine this is.

MASTER Then go ahead and add a second cup.

POET That I will indeed.

MASTER All of the rest of you also drink more wine.

GUESTS Indeed we will add a second cup.

MASTER Pour for them, pour for them all.

TARO KAJA With all my heart.

POET The butterflies in my stomach have finally stopped flitting about.

MASTER Let us all sing a bit together.

GUESTS With all our hearts.

(Everybody sings together)

MASTER This has developed into a true drinking party. Won't you please dance some dance or other for us?

POET Though I am quiet inept at dancing, as it will add enjoyment to the party, I will attempt to dance. While I realize what a great effort it will be, I beg all of you to sing to accompany me.

GUESTS With all our hearts.

(The Poet dances.)

MASTER Now I will serve you some food. Taro Kaja, bring the things that have been prepared.

TARO KAJA As you say, Sir.

MASTER This is a piece of used clothing, but I present it to you, so please wear it to fend off the chill of the night.

POET I thank you again for your additional beneficence.

MASTER That is most thoughtful of you. Now, as I said before, from this time forward, do not hesitate to come and visit me frequently. And there is no need for your to come in through the backside in the dead of the night. Just come and announce yourself at the front door.

POET Oh, but I am certain that it will only be me who comes to visit you, so

please leave both the front and back open.

MASTER Well now, won't you have another cup?

POET I do not intend to stay longer as it would be a great imposition, so I will hurry on my way.

MASTER What's that? You say you are going?

POET (Singing.)

How truly gracious of you
Even though you now know
That I became a thief with great reluctance,
In spite of which your kindness
That is linked with your linked-verses
Not only inspired you to invite me in
To drink wine together with you all,
And on top of that to present me
With this fine kimono.
As they say, travel is best
with a companion,
And life is best with benevolence.
When I stop to think of it,
It was a blessing from the spider web
That elicited such rewards for me.
While praying for great good fortune
For one and all,
I now take my leave and set out on my way,
I now take my leave and set out on my way.

MASTER It is good that you have come.

POET Haaaa.

