



## Flying Horse

(Original Title: Soratobu Uma)

by Kaoru Kitamura

First Published: April 1994

Price (before tax): JPY720

Size/Type of Book: Paperback

Number of Pages: 368

ISBN: 978-4-488-41301-3

Genre: Mystery



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**Logically solving trivial mysteries hidden in everyday life!**

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*Introduction and selling points:*

“Mystery in Everyday Life” has firmly established itself as one of the mystery genres of today; although no brutal murders occur there, puzzling mysteries are hidden here and there in ordinary life. The real thrill of the genre lies in solving the mysteries with logical deduction, the technique used in authentic mysteries.

Kaoru Kitamura, the author, is the founder of this genre and has influenced the style of many mystery writers who have followed his footsteps. He continues to convey to us the appeal of authentic mysteries that do not rely on bloodshedding scenes that are so common in mystery novels. Flying Horse is without a doubt a representative of the “Mystery in Everyday Life.”

*Synopsis:*

A collection of five short stories: Shun'outei Enshi, a rakugoka (traditional Japanese comic storyteller) who is a mentor to a college girl (I) on trivia, brilliantly solves puzzling mysteries that I encounter, with his wealth of miscellaneous knowledge.

“Oribe no rei” (The Ghost of Oribe [Oribe is the name of the founder of Oribe-yaki, the famous pottery])

The story of the university professor of mine: Mystery was that when he was a child, he had a dream of a man in a samurai costume committing seppuku (suicide by disembowelment) whenever he stayed at his uncle's house.

“Satou gassen” (The Sugar Battle)

I was a witness to a puzzling scene at a tea shop I went to with Enshi-san. Three young women were repeatedly pouring spoonfuls of sugar into their teacups. Why on earth would they do that?

“Kurumi no naka no tori” (The Bird in the Walnut)

While I was traveling with friends, the seat cover in our car was stolen. Why?

“Aka zukiin” (Red Riding Hood)

Rumor has it that a girl in red (sometimes in red skirt, red hooded coat, or red blouse - hence she is named Little Red Riding Hood) is standing in front of the giraffe statue in the park on Sunday nights at 9:00 pm sharp. Who is this Little Red Riding Hood?

“Sora tobu uma” (The Flying Horse)

An old coin-operated-ride horse was placed in front of the local grocery store. Although it no longer worked, its body was still solid, so it was given to a kindergarten and set up in the yard.

However, in the middle of the night, it disappeared without a trace. And yet, the next morning it was back where it had been! What on earth happened to the toy horse?

*Author:*

Kaoru Kitamura

Born in 1949. Graduate of the First Department of Literature, Waseda University. Made his debut in 1989 with Soratobu uma (The Flying Horse). Kitamura won the 44th Mystery Writers of Japan Award in 1991 for Yoru no semi (Night Cicada), one of the series that follows Soratobu uma, the 6th Honkaku Mystery Award in 2006 for Nippon kouka no nazo (The Mystery of Japanese Coins), and the 141st Naoki Prize in 2009 for Sagi to yuki (Fraud and Snow). In 2016, he won the 19th Japan Mystery Literature Award.

*Visual Adaption, etc.:*

Adapted as comic and published by torch comic (LEED PUBLISHING)

*Translations:* Chinese Complex, Korean

*Excerpt from "Satou gassen" (The Sugar Battle)*

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"Coincidences sometimes indicate things we never expect, don't they? By the way... .."

Enshi-san went on without turning around.

"What makes you so curious about those three girls?"

I froze for a while with the page of my notebook facing Enshi-san, then slowly lowered my hand as if a still image started moving again.

I blinked once or twice and asked him reluctantly.

"How do you know that?"

Enshi-san grinned mischievously.

"Did I hit the mark?"

"Yes, you did."

"It is easy for me to tell they are a group of three girls. The door opened twice. The man who came in later is reading a newspaper over there. He has nothing to do with us. Before him, I heard multiple footsteps that entered the shop. They sat behind me and soon started talking. Their voices are low, but I can tell if they are men or women."

"But you can't tell the exact number of them as you can't see them from your seat... .."

I was about to say so but I realized that Enshi-san was facing the counter.

"Water."

"Right. The waitress went to their table with three glasses of water on the tray."

"Then what made you think I was curious about them?"

"You were incessantly looking at the scene behind me. And after a while of gazing in that direction, you suddenly started talking about 'Macbeth.'"

I gasped.

“Of course, there’s no wonder you brought the topic up because you went to the opera yesterday. But it seems to me that the girls were the trigger .”

A slice of lemon, which was dipped in the tea several times to transfer its flavor to the tea, is placed on a small white plate in front of Enshi-san. Its color of lemon yellow is vivid.

“As I listened to you, it became clear to me. About the opera Macbeth, I assume the newspaper review said ‘many witches were milling about ’ on the stage. It is understandable that the nature of the opera performance may require a large chorus on stage. Now listen . There were many witches on stage. And yet, despite having seen the opera, you said ‘the three witches’ more than once, just as in Shakespeare's original story.”

Now that he mentioned it, he was right. I had subconsciously said the number of witches was three, different from what I had seen in the opera.

“I can only imagine that the girls reminded you of Shakespeare's three witches. And it seems to me that you were very offensive to them. I wonder if they did something that made you annoyed .”

I looked Enshi-san in the eye.

“Did you ever figure out what it was?”

Enshi-san smiled wryly.

“If I knew that much, I would be a god.”

He was absolutely right. I was ashamed of myself for thinking that he might be clairvoyant. I continued my story, sorting out what I saw one by one.

“That’s certainly true that there are three girls sitting at a table in the corner. They’re around twenty, about my age. They gave me an odd impression because, for a group of girls, they looked gloomy.”

I explained to Enshi-san in detail what they were doing. Of course, my voice naturally lowered because we were gossiping about other people.

“When their tea was served, they put the teacups in front of them. Then they reached for the sugar pot and placed it in the middle of the table. They opened the lid of the pot. First, one of the girls reaches for the sugar spoon... .. so far so natural.”

Enshi-san nodded and said,

“Okay, you mean that the inexplicable events were about to begin, right?”

“Yes, but before that... .. don’t you think it’s natural that the situation reminded me of the witches in Macbeth? Three mysterious girls around the sugar pot.”

“The three witches surround the cauldron.”

“Yes, they are chanting ‘Fire burn, and cauldron bubble’ while reaching out their hands one after another and throwing something suspicious into the cauldron.”

In a dark cave, what is bubbling up in the cauldron is a brass-colored liquid. An offensive odor. Poisonous smoke billows like a thousand snakes.

Enshi-san tightened his lips as if he felt real interest for the first time.

“Go on.”

“The other two also reached for the sugar pot, one after another.”

I paused, and Enshi-san took it over.

“But you don’t mean to say that they started putting any dubious stuff in the pot. If they did that, you wouldn’t ignore it.”

“No, I wouldn’t.”

“So, what do you have in your mind?”

I remembered having a pen and notebook in my hand.

Enshi-san has solved problems in front of me twice so far since we entered this tea shop. What happens twice happens thrice, they say, but can he ever solve such a strange puzzle like this?

I moved my pen slowly.

I heard the man sitting by the counter folding a newspaper.

“Here it is.”

I turned the page of my notebook to Enshi-san and showed him the line I had just written.

— — Why did the “Sugar Battle” begin?

“You mentioned the parable that eating super spicy curry with red pepper and Tabasco.”

“Yes.”

“But in my opinion, if I had to choose which one required extra endurance, it would be the sweet one. There is a ramen shop near the girls' high I went to. I don't remember the exact number, but they hold an eating competition where if you ate one or two hundred gyoza, you got 10,000 yen. Of course, if you didn't eat them up, you had to pay for all the gyoza prepared.”

I continued my story, recalling the well-stocked ramen with leeks and corn I had with my friends on winter days while blowing on the noodles to cool it down.

“I have a rather small stomach and I can't even finish a bowl of regular ramen. To me, it's unbelievable that there are people who can eat such big meals. On the wall of the shop are pieces of paper with the names of people who have succeeded in the challenge, like ‘Mr. So-and-so from so-and-so city.’ I chatted with my friends about how amazing it was that some guys had really made it through. Then one day, at the school festival in my senior year, one of my friends brought her boyfriend and he said he had done it before.”

Her large-built boyfriend had double eyelids that were adorable for a man.

“According to him, it's no longer a simple act like eating, but swallowing the food with his eyes shut. When he reached about halfway through, his original ambition faded away. The only thought swirled in his mind was that if he gave up now, all the pain he had suffered would be in vain, and he went through with it. At this point, it may no longer matter whether it tastes sweet or spicy. He might not have even put soy sauce on his gyoza. But I feel that he made it because it was gyoza somehow. Even if the shape is similar, you can't eat 200 Otabe (a soft sweet dumpling filled with chunky sweet azuki bean paste). You may eat wanko-soba (a style of Japanese soba noodles from Iwate Prefecture where small servings of soba noodles are served in small bowls. You must quickly eat your soba noodles and then get your bowl immediately refilled. Your bowl will be refilled with soba noodles one after another unless you turn your bowl upside down.) but wanko-shiruko (narrator's coined word. Shiruko is a sweet red-bean soup with mochi) would be out of the question.”

“I agree with you that humans are much more likely to reject sugar.”

“You put one spoonful of sugar in your cup, and I put two. Three spoonfuls would be the maximum in general.”

“Exactly.”

I thought Enshi-san understood most of the direction of my story, but he just kept on nodding his head.

“Starting with the girl with a ponytail, they took turns pouring a spoonful of sugar in their cups, having a sip or two of tea, mumbling, and then, as if competing with each other, they went on to the second round. Until then, I had been watching their behavior without paying much attention, but at a certain moment, I thought, ‘Oh? Something's wrong.’ Each girl put a spoonful or two of sugar in her cup and sipped the tea again, just a little bit. And just when I thought they were talking in a low voice for a while ... ..”

“The third round started.”

“Absolutely. While I was being taken aback, the fourth round started. No matter how much of a sweet tooth you have, if you put that much sugar in your drink, it won't taste good anymore. It is nothing but a strange endurance game.”

“I wonder if there is a health approach or something that consuming a lot of sugar is good for beauty.”

Enshi-san said lightly, as if stalling for time until he could come up with something.

“No, there's none.”

I assured him, however, since I only read women's weekly magazines at beauty salons, it occurred to me that there was a possibility that unimaginable theories were spreading. In fact, last year, I read an article in a magazine saying, “I made my waist this slim with plastic kitchen wrap around my belly” which was quite convincing. But intaking a lot of sugar is definitely strange.

“So, it's the sugar battle.”

“Yes, where on earth is the need to compete with sweetened tea?”

Enshi-san made a motion of picking up a spoon with his fingers and stirring it around. He asked,

“Were they stirring their tea?”

“It seems they didn't do that much. But there must have been seven or eight spoonfuls in the cups, so they must be very sweet. The girl with the ponytail even put the sugar back in the pot several times when she was about to put it in her cup.”

“Are you sure you always put two?”

“Yes,”

“How about your friends? How many do they put in the most?”

“I’m not sure, but three is the max, I suppose.”

“Why do they put seven or eight spoonfuls of sugar?”

Enshi-san looked at me and said in a serious tone,

“What is your opinion?”

I shook my head slightly and said,

“I have no idea.”

I had been trying my best to find a reason that makes sense while talking about Macbeth. I could come up with a ridiculous example of a group of like-minded people; they had suppressed their sweet consumption out of fear of gaining weight, but finally, they ran out of patience and gathered together one day to commit an act of desperation. But no reasonable answer came to mind that I could confidently disclose to Enshi-san.

“How about you, Enshi-san?”

I asked, as if testing him. There was a slight expectation that I would see the troubled look on his face. But his calm voice began to reply,

“Well, in my theoretical thinking... ..”

He could have seen the look on my face as if to say, “Wait a sec.” I was really surprised.

“Do you mean there is only one deduction?”

Enshi-san nodded and said softly.

“Those girls... .. might as well be the witches of Macbeth as you say.”