

【Sample translations up to Chapter 3】



## The Yellow Dragon by Yasunari Murakami

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### Afterword

## 1. Shining Water

Kurio was walking along the path through the rice fields.

Plop!

A frog jumped out from under his feet.

“Wow!”

A few steps later, another plop. The ten-year-old Kurio thought: Maybe it’s a dark-spotted frog? Or a daruma pond frog? It has a green line on its back, so it must be a dark-spotted frog. Pondering this, he walked on, watching the frogs bobbing up to peep their faces out of the water.

They had been playing catch in some empty land by the rice fields. Kurio had missed Yusuke’s ball, and it had ended up in a rice field.

It was June. The pale blue sky and the white cotton clouds were perfectly reflected in the rice fields. The rice plants had grown to about twenty centimeters tall, and were lined up in neat rows. The white ball was floating in the middle of the field, about three meters away from Kurio’s feet.

Oh no, I can’t reach it—Kurio thought. He looked around, but couldn’t see any stick that looked long enough to reach it. Well then, he thought, and without hesitation, took off his shoes, rolled up his pants, and slipped his feet into the water.

“It’s cold!”

The shock only lasted for a moment, and then, it felt amazing.

There was a lake about a thirty-minute walk from there, up a gently sloping mountain road. The water for the rice fields was drawn from a stream that flowed out of the lake.

Kurio’s legs sank into the mud up to the tops of his ankles. Slimy mud oozed from the gaps between his toes. It felt funny.

With a slurping sound, he pulled out his muddy foot and moved it forward. Slurp. Plop. Slurp. Plop. Slurp. Plop. Slurp. He walked carefully so as not to step on the rice plants.

The ball was floating there, waiting with an air of discomfort. Kurio grabbed it, turned around, and made to walk back to the path.

“Hey, what are you doing!” said a voice.

Someone had found him. He hurriedly tried to pull his feet out of the mud, but found he couldn’t. Instead, the mud only grabbed him harder.

“Take it slow,” the voice said.

It was Roku, the owner of the rice field, poking his head out of the window of his small truck.

Yusuke stood to one side, looking over at Kurio. He was half covering his face with the baseball glove, as if to say he was sorry for making Kurio go into the rice field because of the ball he threw.

Roku was a friend of Kurio’s grandpa and had often played with Kurio since he was little. Grandpa lived in Tokyo and wasn’t there.

He threw the wet ball into his glove several times and dried it off. He climbed up to the path and threw the ball at Yusuke.

“Thank you! And sorry!” Yusuke said, catching the ball.

“I used to play baseball with Kurio’s grandfather,” said Roku, getting out of his truck.

Kurio was worried about having gone into Roku’s precious rice field, and his heart was pounding. It was a relief to see that Roku had a smile on his face.

He had heard that grandpa and his friends had been mad about baseball when they were in high school.

“Don’t go throwing it in the rice field anymore. Aim straight for the other player’s chest.”

Kurio and Yusuke nodded earnestly, and Roku patted their heads and laughed.

Then he got into his truck, put his arm out of the window and waved goodbye. His tanned hands gleamed.

An egret flew by. Kurio's feet felt warm after the rice field.

Rather than playing catch any more today, Kurio remembered how nice the water in the rice field had felt and was itching to get back in.

"Shall we play fishy swishy?" he said, with a laugh.

Yusuke made a peace sign and smiled. They left their gloves at Kurio's house, swapped them for hand-held fishing nets, and headed together toward the stream. This time, they kept their sneakers on as they stepped into the water of the stream that flowed into Roku's rice field.

"It's so cold!" Yusuke yelled happily.

The water skipped and flowed along in the glimmering sunlight. The river was about three meters wide, with countless kinds of grasses growing thickly along its banks. Little red flowers bloomed, with white and yellow butterflies dancing in the air.

They pushed their nets into the edges of the weeds growing in the water and moved them back and forth, moving one foot to push the water toward the nets with a splashing sound. They lifted the nets up straight away.

"There's something in there!" Kurio said, peering into the net.

"I caught something!" shouted Yusuke from downstream, lifting his net up.

Chubs and freshwater shrimps flapped and splashed around in the net. There were also quite a few red swamp crayfish—medium-sized ones, and cute little brown ones, not yet red.

They kept changing places, groping around for more, pushing the water into the nets with their feet, and swishing the nets back and forth with splashing noises.

"Oh! A rice fish!" said Yusuke, gently pulling it out of the net. It fluttered in the palm of his hand.

"They're rare. I didn't know they were still here." said Kurio, peering.

There was a fifteen-centimeter-long loach wriggling in Kurio's net. When he held it in his hand, it wriggled still more, with all the strength of a baby eel.

"Woah! It's strong!" he said, and with a plop, it fell back into the stream.

They had brought a clear plastic tub with them, about thirty centimeters long and covered in white scratches from use. In no time at all, the tub was filled with fish. Some water snails and caddisfly larvae that looked like black caterpillars had also ended up in the tub. It was teeming with life.

In the tub, a crayfish was eating a baby chub, its claws clamped around it.

"Get a look at this one!" said Yusuke, pointing out the crayfish to Kurio.

"Wow!"

The sun shone softly on their backs as they squatted down in their sopping pants, peering gleefully.

## 2. Yurika and the Fireflies

Going into the rainy season, the rice in Roku's fields had grown much taller. At night, an echoing chorus of frogs called from here and there in the fields.

Kurio's grandparents were visiting from Tokyo for the first time in a while.

Grandma was sitting with Kurio's little brother Naruo on her lap, absorbed in conversation with mom. Dad was still at work.

Kurio and grandpa had plans to go and see some fireflies. Kurio was thinking that fireflies were nothing new, and wasn't feeling that excited about seeing them, but grandpa seemed to be really looking forward to it.

"The frogs calling out,  
Kurio and the fireflies,  
It's time for some beer."

Grandpa said, in a strange haiku, finishing off the last of the beer in his glass.

Stepping outside, the night air felt a little damp. The green smell of the rice fields hung in the air. There was no wind.

The never-ending croaking of the dark-spotted frogs was all around them, the grunting bass notes of the bullfrog entering the chorus. They could hear the babbling of the stream in the background.

"This is louder than nighttime in Tokyo," said grandpa, breathing in the night air happily.

"Oh! The frogs' voices have got into my lungs," he said, and started calling out Kurio's name in a croaky voice like a frog.

Grandpa croaked and rubbed his throat. When Kurio was little, grandpa used to trick him into thinking he had the voice of a frog.

"Ribbit! Rrrribbit!" Kurio called in reply.

Laughing as they walked along the stream for a while, they saw a single yellowish-green light blinking in the grass.

"There's one, Kurio."

Grandpa went up to the speck of light and wrapped his hands around it. Then he gently opened his hands.

"It's a Genji firefly," he said, his joyful face glowing yellow green.

"There's some flying over there too, grandpa."

Soon, yellowish-green lights started popping up here, there, everywhere. They stood there quietly, surrounded by the light of many fireflies, listening to the stream's loud murmur.

At that moment, they heard a girl's voice coming from the darkness.

"Beautiful!"

"There are lots over here, too!" answered the familiar voice of Yusuke. Kurio strained to see in the direction of the voices.

Yusuke was with a girl that Kurio didn't know.

"Hey, Kurio!" shouted Yusuke, pointing at the girl as she gazed at the fireflies.

"That is Yurika. She started at our school yesterday," said Yusuke. He seems rather embarrassed, thought Kurio. He was in a different class from Yusuke, so he didn't know about the new girl.

The girl came up to Kurio, and Yusuke introduced them to each other. Kurio's heart beat faster as the girl's white dress floated in the darkness. He gulped and lowered his head.

"My name's Yurika Naito."

"I'm Ku-Kurio Morita."

Grandpa put out his closed hands in front of them all and gently opened them. A yellowish-green light lit up their peering faces.  
The lights rose up and then disappeared into the darkness.  
The light of the fireflies emerged here and there, as the chorus of frogs grew louder.

### 3. Cattail Cotton

The next morning, Yusuke invited Yurika to walk to school with him and Kurio. The three of them talked as they walked. It seemed like Yurika had moved into the apartment next to Yusuke's house.

"So you came from Tokyo?" asked Kurio.

"Yeah. My dad got transferred here."

"Huh. My grandpa and grandma live in Tokyo, too," said Kurio, in high spirits, but feeling like a bit of a chatterbox.

"Wanna go see the fireflies again today?" asked Yusuke.

"Yes!" agreed Yurika, clapping her hands happily.

"Morning!" said a voice from behind.

It was Mio, a girl in the same class as Kurio. She came running up from behind them. She introduced herself to Yurika, and when she heard about their plan to see the fireflies, she wanted to come too.

"I haven't seen them yet this year. I'm excited!!"

Mio was an old friend who had known Kurio and Yusuke since they were in nursery school together. When they were little, they all used to get in the bathtub together, but now she was like their big sister, and she was always outsmarting them.

For two days in a row, they went to see the fireflies. The new girl Yurika's delight at watching the fireflies made them feel good as well.

The next day, grandpa was playing with Naruo when Kurio came home from school. It was nearly Naruo's first birthday and his grandparents had come for a special celebration for his first birthday.

Grandpa was born and raised here in the countryside, just like Kurio. After finishing high school, he had left for Tokyo, with dreams of becoming a painter. He had eventually met and married grandma. After Kurio's mom was born, they'd lived in Tokyo.

But grandma and grandpa would come back here with mom during summer vacations and New Year's. Mom said that every time she came here, she thought how she wanted to live in the countryside someday.

Dad was born in Tokyo. But when he met mom, he fell in love with the nature here, and decided to take the plunge and quit his life in Tokyo to go and live a country life with mom.

Dad says that even in Tokyo nature is all around.

Dad's good at catching cicadas and grasshoppers with his hands. He's tall, so when he finds lizards, he can stretch out his long arms like a praying mantis to catch them. When Kurio sees his dad doing this, he finds it a little surprising, but also very cool.

Mom and grandma were busy with birthday preparations in the kitchen. They were getting the "issho-mochi" ready, which is about ten cups' worth of round rice cakes wrapped in a cloth. Naruo was still a toddler, but they were going to put the whole thing on Naruo's

back and let him take a few steps. This was the traditional celebration for a child's first birthday in this part of the country.

Apparently when it had been Kurio's first birthday, he couldn't handle the weight of the rice cakes, so he had ended up flipped over on his back wriggling around like a beetle. Kurio had often heard this story, and he didn't like it.

"There's a new girl at school called Yurika, and she said she wanted to see the river in the daytime, so I'm going there for a while," said Kurio.

"Okay, honey. But it's Naruo's birthday ceremony, so come back before it gets dark."

"Okay mom."

"Be safe."

They say that a river full of fireflies is a rare thing these days. The river was about three meters wide, its banks hardened with concrete here and there. It was a pretty normal river. But its banks and little sandbanks were thick with plants. There was sometimes watercress.

Plenty of rocks and stones were scattered around, providing perfect hiding places for fish.

When Kurio was little, his dad had taught him how to play "fishy swishy," and he had played around scooping up rice fish and loaches.

There were also lots of spiral-shaped shells from water snails, which the firefly larvae eat. Roku and the other farmers looked after the stream as the home of the fireflies, and they tried not to use pesticides.

Yusuke, Mio, and Yurika were already at the place where the fireflies would often appear.

"I thought the firefly river would be a really beautiful place, but in the daytime, I can see it's just a normal river," said Yurika.

"Yeah, it's normal," replied Yusuke.

"There are normally fish, and the fireflies come out," added Mio.

"Further up the river, there's a place called Moon Lake. You can catch gibel and stuff there," Kurio said in a happy voice.

Last year, Kurio had gone fishing in the lake with his dad and Yusuke for the first time, and they'd caught a gibel carp ten centimeters long.

Yusuke grinned and said: "You can't catch anything all that big, though."

"Yeah, but it was beautiful, the gibel," replied Kurio, remembering the fish flapping and glistening on his hand.

"Sounds pretty nice," Yurika said, and looked around her with a smile.

The trees rustled in a warm, damp breeze.

"Those look yummy!" Yurika said, pointing.

Ripe, dark berries were dotted around at the bottom of some mulberry trees along the river.

Yurika got there first. She stretched out her hand, pulled a branch toward her, grabbed the few mulberries that were still on the branch, and put them in her mouth.

"Yep, they're yummy!"

Not bad for a girl from Tokyo, thought Kurio and Yusuke, their eyes wide.

Yelling "Me too!" Mio stretched out her hand, and the two of them grabbed first one, then another, then another.

Mio stuck her tongue out.

“Wow! It’s so black!” Yurika said, and also gleefully showed her tongue.

“Oh yeah! Totally black! Sluuurp!” Yusuke said, popping a berry in his mouth, too, sticking his tongue out and adding:

“It’s called mulberry color.”

Their laughter mingled together with the flow of the stream.

It was the end of the rainy season, and the sun was shining brightly.

The four of them had gone to the mulberry tree again, but as expected, there were no berries left. Kurio stared up at the mulberry tree, and kicked its trunk as hard as he could.

A smattering of shriveled berries fell out of the tree.

“Found one!”

Kurio picked up a longhorn beetle that had fallen to the ground along with the mulberries.

“It’s citrus longhorn,” said Yusuke without hesitation. They both knew a lot about bugs.

“Wow, that’s so cool!” said Yurika, peering at the beetle in Kurio’s hands. It was making a creaking sound.

“It’ll really hurt if it bites you. Look at its fangs!” said Kurio, showing her its sharp, sickle-like fangs, and gently placed the beetle on the back of his hand. The beetle stood still, wiggling its long antennae.

“Wanna hold it?” Kurio asked Yurika.

“Yes.”

“Okay then, grab it behind its head.”

Yurika softly grasped it, and at that moment, the beetle sunk its fangs into the back of Kurio’s hand.

“Argh! Owwww!”

Kurio forcibly removed the beetle, which wasn’t letting go.

“You’re bleeding!” exclaimed Yurika, looking around.

“Sorry Kurio, hold on a second.”

She ran off.

There was a boggy patch beside the mulberry trees, which was full of green cattails. Yurika pushed her way through the thick mass of cattail leaves, found one of its brown sausage-like ears, and plucked it off.

There were white fluffy fibers that looked like cotton poking out of the ear. Yurika pressed the fibers onto Kurio’s wound.

“Huh? What is this, Yurika?”

Kurio, unable to understand what had been done to him, stared at the fibers that had been stuck onto his wound.

“It’s cattail cotton. It’ll stop the bleeding.”

“You’re right; it’s already stopping!”

Kurio stared in wonder.

“Yeah. If you stick this fluffy stuff onto a cut like this, the bleeding will stop right away,” said Yurika.

“No way...”

Yusuke and Mio also stared in stunned silence at the wound bandaged with cattail cotton.

“My dad told me about it. He heard about it from someone he knows who works as a cook in a restaurant,” Yurika continued.

“Cooks are always cutting their hands with knives, so they have some of these hanging up in the kitchen.”

“Wow...” the others said.

This girl from Tokyo, who was the same age as the rest of them, suddenly seemed very grown-up.

“There was a place near my house in Tokyo where cattails grew. And dad tried using cattail cotton one day when mom cut her finger with a kitchen knife.”

The others listened, rapt with attention.

“At first, mom didn’t like the idea, but then she said it couldn’t hurt to try...”

“And the bleeding stopped?” Mio asked, her eyes round as she looked at Kurio’s cut.

“Cattail cotton is amazing.”

Kurio walked along the river with the others, the cattail cotton still stuck to his hand.

Unnoticed by them was a flash of blue flying upstream. It was a kingfisher.

A car horn sounded softly.

They turned around, and saw Roku’s smiling face sticking out of the window of his truck.

“What are you all up to?”

“We’re showing Yurika around. She’s new at school,” said Mio, holding hands with Yurika.

“You know, Kurio got bitten by a longhorn beetle. He was bleeding, but Yurika put this stuff on it, and it stopped right away.”

“Aha! Cattail cotton?” said Roku with a surprised look on his face.

He looked back and forth between Yurika and Kurio’s wound.

“Well, I am surprised. Now I remember... You really know your stuff, kid.

Apparently, the pollen has something in it that stops the bleeding.”

And abruptly Roku burst into song:

As Lord Daikoku says,  
Wash the wound in clean water,  
Wrap it in cattail cotton,  
And the hare will be white again.

“You probably don’t know, but it’s a song from a myth called *The White Hare of Inaba*. The hare has lied to some sharks, and he’s crying because the sharks have taken all his skin off. Then the god Daikoku appears and tells the hare to wrap himself in cattail cotton, and the hare is healed.”

“Wow that’s really amazing.” Kurio said, gazing intently at his wound.

“It sure is,” said Roku.

Then with a beep of his horn, he drove off.

The kingfisher had come back downstream. It perched on a branch, darting its neck out straight and then back again, looking fixedly at the stream.

Without anyone noticing, the kingfisher flew into the river and caught a small river snail in its beak. Unnoticed still, the kingfisher swallowed the snail.

The waters of the stream glimmered as they flowed onward, reflecting the shadows of the four passers-by.