

AYA KA

— あ や か —

SIDE STORIES



10

亀井戸アキの
パラドックス

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AYAKI S STOPS 亀井戸アキの パラドックス

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"AYAKA – SIDE STORIES 10": THE PARADOX OF KAMEIDO AKI

Her name is Aki Kameido. She has never particularly liked the surname "Kameido".

When she was in elementary school, the kids in her class would charge her with the funny "turtle" sound.

If you behave carelessly and slowly in the classroom, they will criticize you and say: "Turtles are slow! Because they are turtles!" It makes no sense to say: "I am slow because my name is turtle." They just mean "turtle". Even if you try to say that: "A turtle is a turtle". That's how it is. The surname "Kameido" stuck to her body like a heavy shell and could not be removed.

Names and nicknames are the simplest curses. The mere two-letter word "Japanese you want to read aloud" has become a dishonorable curse trying to crush Aki's existence.

It was her father who lifted the turtle's curse.

The father told her daughter that she came home crying after being bullied for being a turtle.

"Dad didn't like being called a turtle or a slow man either. That's why I got the name Aki-chan from a mythical figure."

Demigod from Greek mythology, hero of the Trojan War and speedy Achilles. It's that Achilles that the boys love, making the difference in the corners.

Her father was a bit fancy. Possessed of solid knowledge and rich sensitivity, he looked up at the stars in the night sky and thought about the world of mythology. He was that kind of person. In other words, his feet weren't on the ground. However, Aki felt very comforted by the origin of the name that he told her.

From a slow turtle to a mythical hero. Proof of this transformation was Achilles' nickname, "Fastfoot".

Once the ideal to aspire to was decided, Aki did not hesitate. She read the autobiography of track and field athletes, reviewed training method videos on the Internet, and ran every morning and night. A diligent effort unlike an elementary school student. In terms of ants and grasshoppers, they were ants, and in terms of rabbits and turtles, they were turtles.

In the upper grades of primary school, the physical strength of girls exceeds that of boys. However, for those girls, it was the time when fashion and sociability began to be valued more than exercise. Aki earned a unique position in the classroom as a peculiar existence of "a girl who runs like crazy".

And finally, when she beat the fastest boy in her grade from the outside in the fifth grade track meet relay, her presence reached her peak.

"Hurry up! Turtle speed!"

The boys in the class were monkeys, so the one who ran fast was right. Aki's nickname changed from "Turtle" to "Jet Turtle". The turtle call was still the same, but this was an honest compliment.

After overcoming the turtle curse, Aki entered the track club in high school.

However, this time she was slow there.

She didn't think she had much talent to begin with. Temporary superiority due to the subtle transition between elementary school and high school, which she dedicated to "what others don't do". Before long, she was no match for the children who began to grow up, and her classmates who started the weight loss club activities began to break records.

But aside from other things, she couldn't afford to lose the race. Because she was not a turtle, but the swift-footed demigod Achilles.

Aki didn't realize that the name "Achilles" was also a curse.

What she lacked in talent she made up for in practice. She left her hobbies, her love life, and her studies, and just ran into it. The options for the future had been reduced, and going to the institute had become a sports recommendation.

When the escape route was thus completely cut off, she learned the anecdote of "Achilles and the Tortoise".

The so-called "Zenon's paradox". No matter how fast Achilles chases after it, the tortoise always stays a little ahead.

Yes, Achilles was "slower than a tortoise".

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Spring for new college graduates.

Aki was standing on a high school podium in Ninoshima, Ayaka Islands.

It was an unknown land. She remembers hearing the news when she was in middle or high school that one of the Ayaka archipelagos had erupted and caused considerable damage, but she never thought that she would go there.

Seven years after the disaster, Ichinoshima has made great strides as a tourist destination along with its reconstruction, while Ninoshima is a quiet land where traditional residents live. The small island high school still retains the atmosphere of a "remote island school". Due to the deterioration of the school building, the following year it will be merged with Ichinoshima High School and the school will be closed.

Due to the small number of teachers, she was appointed as a new teacher. It's a sophomore class.

Around the new teacher who finished greeting in the classroom, the simple students of the island gathered.

"City people are really sophisticated."

"That suit, it suits you very well."

"Brilliant!"

Looking at them with admiration and curiosity, Aki smiled guiltily.

"Thank you. I will do my best to live up to everyone's expectations. Nice to meet you."

Their eyes weren't directed at Aki herself, but at the image of "an elegant teacher from the city". She knew that. She's never been told that she's really "polished" and she's just worn suits more times than she can count. She felt that she was deceiving people by disguising herself.

But that's fine for now. She came to this island to change.

From now on, she will be a person who is not ashamed to look at herself.

"Sensei, are you nervous?"

"You must be tired because you still haven't gotten used to life on the island."

"Cute~"

Kaze Hayashi-kun, Mizutani-kun, Kanesaki-san... she was also accepted by the students who are in charge of her. First of all, it's a great start.

When Aki thought that...

"Sensei, sensei."

"Come on sensei, why did you come here? To an island where nothing exists."

(Ah, is this kid "Jingi-chan"?), she thought.

The word "Sagawa Jingi" written in the attendance book was still not quite connected in her head, but she had heard of a boy named "Jingi".

On the first day of moving into the boarding house, when the landlord's aunt invited her to chat over tea, the landlord, who laughed at Aki's worries about her life as a teacher, said, "Ahaha, okay, everyone seems be good boys". She remembered the moment when he suddenly became serious.

"Ah, since you're in charge of the middle school, you're in charge of Jingi-chan."

"Jingi-chan?"

Even when asked by Aki, the owner didn't answer. He was silent for about three seconds with a straight face, and then he laughed again.

"Ahahaha, it's a bit suspicious, but it seems like he's a good guy too."

(What was that?), she thought.

"What kind of kid is he? What is "Ayakai"?"

"Hahaha, alright, alright."

She has heard that the residents of this island are generally tolerant, but isn't that more irresponsible than tolerant?

Also, "Ayakai" seems to be a local dialect, but she's not sure what kind of nuance it represents.

In any case, that "Jingi-chan" is now laughing in front of her. If this kind of atmosphere is called "Ayakai", it probably doesn't mean very well.

"Hey Jingi, it's rude to say that to a sensei who came here."

"First of all, it's not that there's nothing. If you go to Ichinoshima by train, you'll find anything. A huge shopping mall has also been built."

"Sensei, you don't have to worry about what Jingi says!"

"No, it's okay... why did I come to this island?"

After appeasing the students attacking Sagawa, Aki began to speak. She knew they would talk about it anyway.

"I did track through college. At first I was trying to get a job there, but..."

"Eh, a business group? Isn't that amazing?"

"Idiot, Sensei is participating in national politics. She's a serious athlete."

"Oh, I also won a medal in the short distance."

"Ah... you know that, don't you?"

"My mother heard from the owner about the sensei."

A terrifying network of rural information. Human relationships are too close.

"Uh, yes. You're right. That's right, but..."

Aki chose her words carefully, thinking that what she was about to say would quickly spread throughout the island.

"I got injured last spring. No, as is often the case in the sports world, there will come a time when you retire anyway, and think about the future..."

She is not lying. It's not a lie, but it's a little convenient. The injury was not fatal and she could have returned to competition, but she kicked it on her own terms. After that, she relied on the teacher training course she had taken at the university, took a local teacher employment exam, and hoped to find the most remote place to work. The further she was from her previous life, the better.

She was slightly anticipating the development of a local drama, "A young woman who is lost in life is assigned to a remote island as a teacher, healed by beautiful nature and simple students, and is reborn". In other words, it's some kind of self-discovery, but she actually decided to get a job for a very fluffy reason, it's too stupid for words.

She wanted to blur it a bit.

Sagawa spoke as if he wanted to find a hole in her slightly stray thoughts.

"Hey, what kind of injury is it?"

(What do you mean "Hey"? That vocabulary.), she thought.

Aki replied, trying not to show any irritation on her face.

"Yes, I hurt my Achilles tendon."

"Huh, Achilles tendon."

Also "Huh". He must have laughed a bit now.

That's how it is. "Aki-chan's Achilles" is a ruptured Achilles tendon. Like it's funny?

(No, no, no, no, no.), she thought.

Other than the Achilles tendon, she hasn't talked about the "origin of her name" since high school.

The reason why the student in front of her seems to be smiling is because that's how his face was originally.

The face of the earth is joking.

"Okay, then it's "Kame-chan"."

"Eh, what?"

"Well, "Aki-chan" or "Kame-chan", I wasn't sure if I should call you "Kame-chan", but "Aki-chan" doesn't look very good, so I'll call you "Kame-chan"."

Sagawa said that.

"You are too familiar with the sensei!"

"It is a mistake in the sense of distance."

Other students criticized him. However, Sagawa himself didn't seem to care at all.

"Hehehe, I think it's better for sensei to get used to school as soon as possible. Nice to meet you, Kame-chan!"

He said that forcefully and laughed.

That face. A while ago she thought him was terribly unpleasant, but she finally understood the cause.

That playful face resembles a boy from her class who once called her "turtle".

"Oh, thank you... Nice to meet you, Sagawa-kun."

Aki smiled as softly as she could with a fake smile.

The boy who used to call her "Turtle" was Saruyama's boss, meaning he was the fastest boy in the classroom.

As she progressed through the school year and changed classes, she was still involved, so she beat him to the relay. She felt good.

However, after that, she was withdrawn from high school. There were no differences in physical ability between genders.

He was the one who said: "Achilles is slower than a tortoise, right?" She still can't forgive him.

The fact that he looks like someone she hates is reason enough to hate the person. It is for the same reason that she continues to hate someone she once hated.

A bad boy has a bad face. It's because she doesn't like it.

Anyway, she can't forgive anyone or that guy.

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Three months later, summer.

"Hello, everyone."

When Aki wearing a T-shirt entered the classroom, the students greeted her.

"Kame-chan, good morning."

"Kame-chan sensei, good morning!"

Before she finished the first semester, the nickname "Kame-chan" had established itself. At first, everyone criticized Sagawa for being too familiar, but eventually it turned into an atmosphere of "it's about time you stopped acting like a stranger", and in the end, "Kame-chan" was already used to hearing that nickname. The reason why she didn't become "Aki-chan" may be because she talked about the Achilles tendon.

"Good morning, Kameido-sensei."

There are students who appropriately call her, including Junnosuke Mizutani, who is serious. It's a last name she doesn't like, but it's better than "Kame-chan".

On the other hand, Jingi Sagawa, the one to blame for this situation, raised his right hand as soon as he met Aki's eyes.

"Kame."

(Don't mean it as a greeting in a foreign language. I mean, stop calling me that.), she thought.

Furthermore, the initial plan for a new life, "as a teacher in the city, being healed by life on the island", was quickly thwarted.

For the first month, she tried to make time on the weekends to visit tourist spots in Ichinoshima, but there weren't enough places to visit each week, so she ended up doing the bare minimum at the mall. Before she was assigned to her new position, she hoped that the "island" would bring some kind of wonder.

By the way, once a week the high school teachers had night shifts. The system does not serve to prevent crime, but for an extremely idyllic reason: "If there are no signs of people, raccoon dogs will come and do mischief.". She stayed in the night watch room on the first floor of the school building once a week to keep the raccoon dogs away.

In any case, there would be nothing to do when she got back to the boardinghouse. In the neighborhood there was only one small private store that called itself a convenience store, there were only two TV channels, and cell phone signal reception was poor.

On the other hand, on days she was on duty and stayed at school, she could save herself the hassle of commuting and her work moved forward. At that time, she took advantage of her free time to go running. It turned out to be a good course to run, past the big jetty that skirts the coast to the end and then back. It feels good to see the sunrise on the horizon early in the morning. For Aki, who doesn't have any hobbies, it was one of the few hobbies.

Therefore, while taking the initiative to take on the tasks of other teachers at home, she began to sleep and wake up in the night watch room every day. It became troublesome to change her clothes and make up each time, so she started wearing a T-shirt to the classroom.

"Kameido-sensei" should be someone in a neat suit, but "Kame-chan" is comfortable in a T-shirt.

So this is all because of Sagawa Jingi. As for the original, it was because she started talking to him. She thinks so.

Between classes in the afternoon, when Aki went to the night duty room to collect his personal belongings, Sagawa opened and ate the sweets she had bought. He didn't hesitate to try the chocolates in a pretty box or the individually wrapped candies. Even the tea was carefully brewed in a teapot.

"...Sagawa-kun, what are you doing?"

When Aki screamed...

"Hmmm... snack time?"

"It's not like that. Don't go into someone's room without permission."

"Eh~?"

Sagawa said as he laughed.

"This is a public place, isn't it? Kame-chan is occupying the school premises."

"Oh."

It was ok. Originally, there was only a simple kitchen and a set of futons for naps in the night shift room, which was supposed to be used by the shift teachers, but now it was filled with a large number of personal belongings that Aki brought. Change of clothes, late-night snacks, magazines, basic necessities, etc. So, it was like the house of a neglected student.

"Well, yesterday, the old man at the shop said, "Kame-chan bought a lot of sweets", so I thought this was a target."

(A target...?!), she thought.

"Also, this is it."

Sagawa lifted two heavy-looking plastic bags from the side of the refrigerator. Each bag is packed with long-sized beverage cans. The handle, stretched by the weight, looks like it's going to break at any moment.

"Oh, that's..."

"You can't do it~, don't drink like that."

Canned Chuhai "Z Force" with low price and advanced number. A dangerous tipe who looks like juice and feels brutally drunk. It can be said that it is already an addiction to

buy something like this and drink it regularly. Of course, drinking and sleeping at school will be a problem. Even if it's outside of work... No, night work is still work. She went out normally.

"T-that! Give it back to me!"

Sagawa stepped out into the hallway, dodging Aki's outstretched hand.

"I'll get rid of this~♪"

"Wait, wait!"

Aki also ran into the hallway after Sagawa. If she were to let him out, the scandal about the "new professor drinking on campus" would spread across the island in an instant. She had to see him at school and collect even the chuhai from the evidence.

However, Sagawa's feet were surprisingly fast.

"Hahaha."

Although he was running like an idiot with a shopping bag that weighed several kilograms in both hands, he was running at a strange speed as if he were flying. He passed through the entrance, from the schoolyard to the school gate, and to the path that leads to the coast. No impulse at all. She couldn't close the distance.

(What is this? What does it mean?), she thought.

High school boys are faster than women over twenty. This is certainly true in general terms.

However, she is a person who was a runner at the national level a year ago. Although she has a void as an athlete, she has not stopped exercising completely.

She should still have more physical strength than the average person.

Even if she ran and ran, she couldn't catch him.

(What is this boy?), she thought.

"Wait a minute, Sagawa-kun!"

"Hahaha."

Before long, Sagawa and Aki reached the shoreline while maintaining their speed and started running on the breakwater. It's a jogging circuit she's familiar with.

Here and there, local residents prepare tricks and fish on the embankment. She ran after him and headed towards the point that juts out at the mouth of the river that flows into the sea.

Immediately after arriving on the island, she was warned not to fall because the water currents around the estuary are complicated and dangerous. It is said that a fisherman who fell through carelessness died in this way.

Of course, Sagawa should know those stories. So she would lead him there. Even if she can't reach him, she should be able to corner him.

But...

Even when he got closer to the river mouth, Sagawa didn't slow down.

(Oh, no...!), she thought.

In the past three months, she has come to understand Sagawa's personality. The kind of people who get drunk and jump into a camping lake or jump into a rain-swollen river while saying "Yahoo!"

As for whether or not to do it, he would 100% "do it".

"Wait! It's dangerous!"

Sagawa jumped over the edge of the breakwater and leaped into the air, ignoring Aki's hold.

"Yahoo!"

He really he said that too.

And then he fell. There was a loud bang and a loud sound.

"Sagawa-kun!"

Aki leaned over the edge of the breakwater and looked out over the water. It's no longer a level story that can't be heard, it's a life-threatening water accident.

As she warned in advance, the flow of water near the mouth of the river caused numerous complicated eddies. Caught in one of them, Sagawa's body flowed in an arc. He still had a chuhai bag in both hands.

"Sagawa-kun, put that down!"

Looking at the face of Aki, who was desperately calling out to him, Sagawa smiled slightly and was spinning in a whirlpool.

"Hahaha, wiii..."

No, that was not right. After that there was no sense of crisis. He was probably joking up until the moment of his death. He would die joking.

The surface of the water is about five meters away. If she jumped in a hurry, she wouldn't be able to drag him either. Should she call the police or the fire department? No, she left

her cell phone at school. Aki looked around her. Is there something like a rope, or rather, that helps the fisherman that he can see in the distance?

At that moment, the inside of Aki's head was spinning.

Sagawa's body slipped out of the vortex on the surface of the water and was caught in another vortex. Further, after one and a half rotations as a leaf, to another whirlpool. Round and round, and beyond...

Sagawa's body went from eddy to eddy as if the flow of the river in the area had a clear will.

"Eh...?"

The swift current in the middle of the river, which should normally run straight out to sea. Sagawa also crossed that, going round and round. And when he landed in the shallows on the opposite shore, he looked at Aki and smiled.

"Hahaha~"

He ran away with a shopping bag in both hands.

Aki just dismissed him in amazement.

(What's with that? What is he?), she thought.

As Aki feared, this incident became known throughout the island the next day.

"Jingi stole the sake that Kameido-sensei had hidden, was chased and fell into the river."

That's how it went. Rumors often have tail fins, but in this case, it was a given without tail fins.

However, surprisingly, Aki was not blamed for this matter and instead...

"It seems that Jingi has caused you trouble..."

Some neighbors came to the school to apologize.

When she asked them if they were related to Sagawa or something, it seemed like they were just friends in the same town. Or rather, the parents of another student are often mixed. If she were to force them, the young lady who claimed to be the owner of the boarding house would probably be closer to direct guardian, but the age difference was at most siblings, so she wasn't sure what their relationship was.

They didn't seem to have arranged anything in particular, and each brought a 1.8-liter bottle of shochu, or Japanese sake, so there were plenty of sake bottles gathered in the classroom. For some reason, the woman in question brought four bottles of sweet potato shochu. Of course, Aki politely tried to refuse, but they said they couldn't take the apology home, and the principal and other teachers said...

"Just take it."

"Hahaha, Ayakai, Ayakai."

After saying something like that, five minutes later, for some reason, the class had started drinking heavily.

She still didn't understand what it meant and thought it was something irresponsible, but it seemed like he's an easygoing local character.

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Three months later, autumn.

"Come on, Sagawa!"

Aki chased after the fleeing Sagawa across the school grounds and jumped from the school gate onto the path leading to the shoreline.

"Hahaha, I'm doing it."

"None of us get tired~"

The figure was fully visible from the classroom window and was recognized as a familiar sight among the students.

"Wait, Sagawa! Leave it behind!"

"What's that?"

As Sagawa ran, he turned around. In front of his chest, he held a 1.8-liter bottle diagonally.

Ever since the canned chuhai incident in the summer, Aki has been receiving alcohol from the neighbors. It's fine to have a culture where they respect the "teacher", but she was just an amateur in her first year of teaching. Even if she tried to say no...

"So humble again."

"Hahaha, Ayakai, Ayakai."

That said, the 1.8-liter bottle was left behind.

In addition, some local inhabitants practice sea fishing.

"I caught a good fish..."

And there were many cases where it was accompanied by fresh fish.

After being placed in the night shift room fridge, they became a side to Aki's late night drink. In the last three months she has gotten quite used to handling fish.

As she already exposed herself, Aki had a habit of drinking. When she injured her Achilles tendon, she couldn't exercise during the day, so she couldn't sleep, so she tried to have a drink before bed. When the wound was fully healed, she was drinking a reasonable amount. When she first came to this island, she used to drink a long can of chuhai before bed, but recently she switched to sake and shochu, and there are plenty of side dishes to go with it, so she's starting to become a full-fledged drinker. Recently, she has made it her rule that "you can start drinking when the sun goes down."

Early today in the morning, the father of a student in her class left a horse mackerel with a junmai daiginjo. She decided to leave it between work and school, and when she returned to the night watch room...

By the way, can you imagine a scene where a Japanese macaque is carrying a 1.8-liter bottle and jumping and jumping?

Thus, Sagawa was stealing alcohol.

When their gazes met, the movement stopped perfectly.

"...Sagawa, what are you doing?"

Sagawa chuckled lightly like always.

"Well, it looks like you have some good sake."

"He likes it," or, rather, he was there this morning. In the classroom, he heard Kazebayashi's father say things like, "Sensei, this is delicious.". But that's not what Sagawa was told.

By the way, can you imagine seeing a Japanese macaque running away from the window with a 1.8-liter bottle?

"Wait, Sagawa! Sagawa!"

Aki ran out of the school building in search of Sagawa, and a fierce chase drama began.

It should be noted that this kind of persecution was a common thing in recent years, just like parental donations, but there was still something that she couldn't understand.

Why does Sagawa steal alcohol in the first place?

There are several theories as to why.

Hypothesis number one. He just drinks it. The conventional wisdom that "you have to wait until you are 20 to drink alcohol" does not apply to Sagawa or this island. However, since he steals a 1.8 liter bottle every few days, he drinks several times more than Aki in terms of pace. What about that? Isn't it bad for his liver?

Hypothesis number two. Sagawa once had a "sensei" who cared for him like a true father, and stolen sake is offered in front of his grave. Something so auspicious... she was about to be fooled for a moment, but is it okay if it's a stolen item? Will the deceased agree?

Hypothesis number three. Sagawa sells the stolen liquor to the convenience store. More specifically, most of the alcohol that they take to Aki's house is bought at that store, so Sagawa collects the alcohol that is sold at convenience stores and the same alcohol circulates. In other words, it seems that a kind of ecosystem has been created that monetizes the "respect for the teacher" of the local population through 1.8-liter bottles.

Hypothesis number four. He only does it to make fun of Aki.

He can do it if he wants to read too much about it.

(Four? Four as expected.), she thought.

First of all, a guy who runs backwards when someone is chasing him is taunting his opponent.

At this moment, Sagawa's body is completely facing backwards and she runs towards his back. That kind of running is faster than Aki's. In other words, it is approximately the speed of the national level.

What is this? A revolutionary new way, like the occasional Olympics, or something. Will runners all over the world start running backwards in a few years? Or will the rules change due to complaints from leading countries and become a forbidden technique? No, she doesn't think so. As you can see, this guy is a jerk and is pulling some kind of charade.

More than anything, that face that smiles.

"Hahaha."

After all, it is similar to that boss monkey.

A new fire entered the depths of Aki's belly.

She knows it. Guys like him seem friendly, but they don't really show their hearts to anyone. That kind smile that laughs at everything and deceives is a mask thicker and harder than the shell of a turtle. If you ask him "why" or "for what purpose", he will just dodge. That's why...

(I'll open that face and give you a guess in correct form!), she thought.

"Wait, Sagawa!"

Aki quickened her pace. She was clearly faster than when she was on duty. Whether the air and food of this island suit her body, or whether it is a problem of mentality and motivation, Aki Kameido's running ability was peaking on this island to no avail.

At the top of the breakwater, which is the final phase of the usual game of chasing, she literally runs the straight 100 meters like a sprinter and finally puts her hand on Sagawa's neck.

But...

Sagawa was also in the process of growing up.

"Hahaha~"

After slipping into Aki's hands with a smile, he increased his speed even more, adjusting his stride as a long jumper as he ran back, took off the spike of the breakwater and jumped into the air. Of course he's on his back.

And even more.

After falling five meters and landing on the surface of the estuary, Sakawa got up, turned around (in other words, he turned back to the right direction) and ran towards the opposite shore of the water's surface.

"Oh, this..."

Aki simply dismissed Sakawa, who leaves for the opposite shore, with a feeling of disappointment.

I've heard for some time that Sagawa Jingi is training in a profession that is passed down from generation to generation in this land, like in a shrine, and that he can use various mysterious techniques. What's that?

It's false. Shouldn't it be banned according to international standards?

After many hours.

She went back to school and finished her usual chores, and when she returned to the night watch room well after closing time, Sagawa was cooking in the kitchen. The rice cooked well and also made miso soup. And when he turned around...

"Kame-chan, the horse mackerel was supposed to be fresh, right?"

With a quick click of her tongue, Aki sat down at the dining table with sake and a glass.

On a day like today, when there was a chase fight, after Sagawa managed to escape from Aki, he would return to school and appear preparing dinner. In any case, like today, prepare dinner and alcoholic beverages by himself, and even rice.

"The goal of the race is the mouth of the river" and "If the game is won, it will not be revived" was a promise between Aki and Sagawa. It is said that there is an ancient custom on the island that "those who cross the river will not be questioned". It seems that the story involves something like a folkloric vision of life and death, like the Sanzu River.

She doesn't know if it's a custom or a legend, but Aki personally has no objection. Even if you hold down a spot coming from the other side, it's just that the opponent is stupid and you won't win. It makes sense to catch the fleeing opponent.

The evening drink started with handmade sake. Across the table is Sagawa, who is eating rice and miso soup for dinner. Then, the two skewered the horse mackerel as a snack and garnish.

"So what happened today?"

Aki asked about the whereabouts of the daiginjo.

"Hahaha."

As expected, Sagawa smiled and dodged. Therefore...

"You offered it to 'Master'?"

When she delved a little deeper than usual, Sagawa's expression changed slightly.

"Yes, well... he shouldn't have drunk it, my master."

Hypothesis number two. Was he really with the "master"?

"After putting it in front of the grave for a while, I took it home and sold it to Obaba at the convenience store."

Three of them. Both?

"Do you always do that? You don't drink, right?"

As a teacher, she checked it out.

"Hahaha."

Then, Sagawa turned his gaze diagonally and shrugged.

This guy is probably doing it. Also, he makes people stupid.

One and four. It is everything after all. Is complete.

"Hmm."

When Aki sipped a glass of sake...

"Kame-chan, after running, you're a bit relaxed, aren't you?"

That's what Sagawa said.

"Maybe if I don't run, I'll stress out and die."

"As expected, it's not that far. It's an exaggeration."

"But when I start drinking without running, I'm more afraid and my eyes fix. The amount goes on and on."

"Don't call people that like they don't have self-control."

"Hey, do you have self-control?"

"No... but no."

She is irritable, she tends to be an alcoholic and she is aware of it.

Sagawa said with a slight smile.

"I don't mean to preach, but my teacher used to say, "Pleasant sake is the best of all medicines. If you drink it with a smile, you will prolong your life"."

"Hey... so how long did he live?"

"30 years."

"Life expectancy has not been extended."

"Hahaha."

After finishing the meal, Sagawa got up and began to wash the dishes.

"Oh, Kame-chan, can you give me a bottle of shochu?"

"Okay, but what are you going to do? Are you going to visit the grave again?"

"A souvenir for my landlord. That person should also drink."

Sagawa's landlord is the person who brought four bottles of shochu during the canned chuhai incident. Well, she seemed like a nice person.

"Then take as much as you want. There are plenty."

"Hehe, thanks."

Sagawa skillfully tied two 1.8-liter bottles together with packing rope and walked out into the hall, holding them with both hands.

"Good night, Kame-chan. Don't drink too much."

With that face, looking back and saying unnecessary things when it's time to go.

(You really look like him.), Aki thought.

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Three months later, winter.

"Wait, Sagawa!"

As always, Sagawa and Aki walked across the schoolyard.

Recently, the students have completely lost interest.

"Well, it's always the same. Let's just leave it at that."

"That looks familiar, right?"

That's how it was.

Rather, they were more interested in what the scooter brought back from the post office after the two of them walked out the school gate.

Thirty minutes later, when Aki returned with Sagawa, Ranko Kanezaki came running over.

"Kame-chan! Looks like a stalker sent you a postcard!"

"Eh...?"

Since she doesn't come back to the boarding house very often, her mail was sent to the school recently. The postcard they gave her had something like this written on it in crude characters.

[I sent you a postcard, thinking that it might not read in a sealed letter.

I'll pick you up soon.

Masaru.]

Kanezaki called out to Aki, who was frozen with a postcard in her hand.

"Kame-chan...?"

"Ah, no, this is... not a stalker..."

The next day.

"Kame-chan seems to have escaped from her fiancée and come to this island."

"It seems that her fiancée is coming to take Kame-chan away."

As usual, the rumor spread throughout the island in an instant.

"No, no. He is not my fiancé.

Aki corrected.

"It's true that he said something about marriage, but I didn't respond. That's why he's not a fiancé."

"He proposed to you?"

"We usually get along fine."

"If you don't like him, why don't you say no?"

"Someone you have to run quietly from? No way... isn't he a stalker after all?"

"No, it's not like that. He's an excellent person... maybe."

"Then, why?"

"It's a compatibility thing... Well, we've known each other for a long time, but it's like a rotten relationship..."

The students listened to Aki's unsatisfying story one by one, mixing inferences and confirmations.

In short, the story is more or less like this.

Aki Kameido had an old friend, or rather a comrade.

They informed each other of the content of the training almost every day. They often went out to eat and drink.

If she had a complaint, she would call him in the middle of the night.

The man's name is Masaru Hiratome.

"Hey, Hiratome is a track athlete?"

"It is said that he became a strengthened athlete for the next Olympic Games..."

"He is great."

In the spring of her fourth year at the university, Aki didn't know which way to go. An Achilles tendon rupture is an injury that can be completely cured with proper treatment without rushing, but leaves you blank for almost half a year in competition. As a result, there are many people who have returned to active duty but eventually retire without being able to reach their original peak, and conversely, there are many people who rush back and relapse. Since she was in her early twenties, that would determine her competitive career, and it was a delicate period before she started looking for a job, there was some risk in every decision she made.

It was there that Hiratome made a proposal.

If Aki wants to go pro, of course he'll support her, but if she's not sure, she should have the option to withdraw. It makes a lot of sense for her to continue running as a regular runner for a long time, rather than risk a recurrence and aim for a momentary good result.

If you are concerned about your livelihood, you can take care of yourself for years, even the rest of your life. She thought about her course with that in mind. He wanted her to think about the path that Aki thinks is the best.

"...A proposal. That's a proposal."

"The conditions are really good!"

"He is a good person."

"I don't know why you're running away."

Aki waved her hand at the students who said that.

"No, that's why I didn't run away. I just kept my distance and hid the conclusion."

"You're running from your decision, aren't you?"

"Something called Blue Marriage."

Besides...

"This time the other party was waiting for me, so it's fine, but normally he would be surprised and cut ties with me."

"Don't test people's feelings with an ambiguous attitude."

Aki still made excuses to the students admonishing her.

"No, I don't. I just decided to rearrange things and try to think for myself."

"I do not think."

"You drink alcohol every day and play with Jingi."

"Haha, yes."

"Jingi, shut up for a moment."

"That is..."

Aki lowered her eyes,

"...That's Sagawa's fault."

"What's that?"

The students groaned.

"It's natural for him to be bad. This guy is always the worst."

"But just because Jingi is bad doesn't mean you don't have to do it right!"

"Don't blame others for your problems, even if they are loyal."

"Haha, yes."

"Shut up a second."

If it crosses the vermilion, it turns red. Aki, who runs with Sagawa, has already become a "same guy" among the students. If you think about it normally, no matter how people's commitments are or how life is, there is no reason why a good adult should poke into a high school student in that area, but after all, it is "similar", so this is unconditionally a sermon. It became a target.

As the curiosity trivia session began to show signs of ending...

A student came in from the hallway.

"Kame-chan, you have a guest in the principal's office."

A tall man was sitting on the couch in the director's office, in the seat reserved for visitors.

The muscular figure is clearly visible even from the top of the suit. He looks like an athlete.

"Masaru Hiratome."

"Wow, it's real."

"It's great, isn't it?"

Students looking from behind the door. The man on the couch...

Masaru Hiratome looked in that direction.

The students suddenly descended into the hallway, leaving Aki alone.

"Aki!"

Masaru Hiratome got up, walked towards the door and grabbed Aki by the shoulders with both hands.

"Aki, what are you doing in a place like this?"

"Masaru..."

"If you want to be a teacher, that's fine. I said that I would support you no matter what. Why did you decide without consulting me? I was worried because you disappeared without telling me where you were going..."

(Oh, this is...)

(That's really romantic.)

The students, who had been half listening to Aki's story, leaned forward to see the development that took place more than they had imagined.

Aki, on the other hand, stiffened with both shoulders grabbed, but before long...

"That's... you're wrong."

(What are you talking about, Kame-chan?)

The students were stunned for a moment, but Masaru winced as if he had been struck by the void.

"If you say, 'I'm rooting for you' or 'I'm worried', that means you're putting me down. That's not good for me."

(Wow, this is one messy pattern!)

The students joked in their hearts.

"I see... that's correct."

Masaru smiled sheepishly.

"Well, then it's a match."

He also said something strange.

Aki had an angry face, but she nodded naturally. It seemed that there was something decided between the two of them.

They didn't know the details, but...

(In short, both are weirdos.)

The students thought.

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They all moved to the schoolyard.

Lead-colored clouds hung in the sky and a little wind began to blow.

Aki Kameido, Masaru Hiratome, the principal, Aki's students, and other staff members and students also heard the commotion and gathered together.

As the crowd watched, Masaru removed his jacket and tie and traded in leather shoes for sneakers. He thought that if they met that could happen, so he brought it as luggage.

It was decided that the tour would begin in the school yard, follow the road towards the coast, and end at the tip of the breakwater. The distance is about 1000 meters. It is said that the students will be placed at important points and guide Masaru to run across this land for the first time.

Masaru was somewhat relieved to know that there were children around Aki who found this kind of thing amusing. He at least believes that she felt less alone than she did when she was in high school and college.

One of the students drew a line in the dirt with his toes and Masaru took a starting position standing next to Aki.

He and Aki Kameido have known each other since they were in elementary school, and for more than half their lives, they have been more deeply involved than each other's families.

According to Aki, Masaru was the first to call her a turtle. It was then that her life began to go crazy.

He doesn't remember it clearly, but it may be true. It is natural to call a person named "Kameido" a "turtle". Aki used to call him Saru, a play on Masaru's name (he remembers it). He believes that dependent on the other in that sense, but when he thinks that he might have been the one to set the direction of Aki's life in the first place, he feels a certain responsibility.

When she beat him in the fifth grade relay, he was embarrassed to be beaten on the big stage, but he didn't regret it. He knew that Aki was working harder than anyone, more than him. Her triumphant smile was radiant.

In high school, they both joined the track club. The activities were divided between men and women, and he was a little relieved that there was no direct competition. However, because this was an individual competition, there were many situations where simple numerical values could be competed for, such as records and amount of practice. Aki seemed to see him as her imaginary enemy like always, but there was simply a difference in physical strength between men and women.

Furthermore, he was blessed with a good body and during the three years of high school, his skeleton and muscles grew significantly.

At first, he felt guilty, as if he was playing an unfair game, but before he knew it, he began to think that he might be the pacemaker to guide Aki.

Five years from now, ten years from now, someday when he stops running, Aki will triumphantly catch up with him like that day. She always wins in the end. She is the tortoise of the rabbit and the tortoise. He already figured it out.

It was the biggest mistake of his life when he told Aki about "Achilles and the Tortoise" when he was in high school. The demigod Achilles, origin of her name, was her pride and support. He made a joke and contaminated that feeling. Furious, Aki ran to her father at her house and after that, she didn't speak to him for a week. He still regrets that matter.

After entering high school, Aki's attitude towards competition changed even more. What had always been a rather stoic way of dealing with him had become an afterthought,

almost austere way. It was as if she carried an invisible load on her back and kept training to the limit.

So when Aki injured the Achilles tendon in her right leg, he told her, "There is also the option of dropping the load". Aki was not convinced and got angry. That anger may be directed at him, but that's okay. If it started because of him, it's okay if she blamed him for messing it up.

However, contrary to expectations, Aki disappeared without saying anything. She didn't tell anyone where she was going and even canceled her cell phone.

He recently found out that she became a teacher on a remote island. It's been almost a year since she went missing.

"Okay, go ahead!"

With that order, the two began.

Masaru had the disadvantage of running on an undeveloped road that he had never seen before. As he waited and watched, he slowed down and let Aki take the lead.

But, Aki jumped in much earlier than expected. It's like running a sprint.

Is it a strategy to gain distance first and escape? Although it is fast. He can't believe there's been a blank for over a year.

However, if he had to say that, she was always on active duty without a break. Masaru quickened his pace and closed the distance to Aki's back.

Of course, he wouldn't take shortcuts. He knows that would hurt Aki's pride more. He would simply show a careless look touching the scales. As a result, Masaru has always put his all into his races with Aki and has won most of them. Each time, Aki became angry and frustrated, and worked even harder to move forward.

No thanks to that, in fact, she probably even hates him.

However, now Masaru's self-imposed mission is to continue playing the role of "Achilles' tortoise", the unpleasant guide who runs ahead of Aki.

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Masaru caught up with her.

Aki felt the pressure on her back as if a thick wall was approaching her.

Normally, that wall ran in front of her, no matter how much she ran, she couldn't catch up with it and couldn't even touch it.

But today, in this place, Masaru will only apply pressure from behind and will not surpass Aki. The actual attack will occur once the breakwater is reached and the goal is fully visible.

High school students stand at regular intervals on both sides of the road.

"Good luck to both of you!"

"Hiratome-san, go straight for a while!"

"Hey, hurry up you two!"

Each supports the other. And when the two passed by, they ran after them making a lot of noise.

Aki kept pace with her as she walked through the school gates onto a gentle slope towards the coast. She ran across the asphalt pavement near the school and eventually entered an unpaved gravel road.

Both gravel and slope are road conditions that Masaru, a competitor, would normally avoid. If you get used to it, you will be able to run without problems, but inevitably the load on your ankles and knees and the possibility of falling will cross your mind.

Failure to get used to it creates disorder in form and muscle stiffness. Unlike Aki, who has run this course hundreds of times, Masaru's body will become more fatigued the more he runs.

May his legs get tired before he reaches the breakwater. That was Aki's strategy.

She assumed that he was trying to stay back to see how things were going, but when he wanted to pass, he couldn't pass.

No matter how hard he tried, no matter how much he struggled, he couldn't reach the back in front of him. He tasted that feeling. Today it is the other way around. She is the tortoise and he is Achilles.

From the sandy beach she climbed a short flight of stairs to the breakwater. Last straight course.

Aki ran towards it.

But...

Contrary to Aki's expectations, Masaru was unable to turn around.

Fatigue clung to him like a burden and still all of Aki's power remained.

The physical strength of a top-level active player was something like that.

And his mental strength.

Masaru never lost sight of his purpose. Risk of injury and even loss of a future career for taking this irregular route. He ignored them and did the best he could.

Masaru pulled Aki. There was a complete difference in strength.

There were now less than 50 meters to the tip of the breakwater.

The battle is already completely decided. It was a situation where everyone thought so.

But Aki still didn't give up.

(Why can't Achilles catch up with the tortoise in the first place?)

That's because Achilles "exactly wants to win". Aki thinks that's it.

Achilles always points to the "current position" of the turtle. So when you get there the turtle will take the next step.

It's like a stone curling, thinking to stop as it continues, trying to stop safely in a chicken race. It's essentially a chicken.

It was different.

If the turtle in front of her, the walls of life, slowed her down and said, "Go ahead" or "That's enough", would she be satisfied with that? Would she agree?

She wouldn't do it. She wouldn't be convinced. She couldn't forgive herself if she felt relieved when someone said, "That's enough", and rushed to help.

She is a very stubborn person and that won't change until she dies.

She will not stop doing it until the moment of her death.

Aki accelerated quickly and passed Masaru.

(This impulse...!)

Masaru realized that in an instant. He had misjudged Aki's determination.

Generally speaking, sprinting requires at least a few meters to go from sprint to stop. Considering that the current surface is flat concrete, he should estimate that it will be at least 10 meters.

However, Aki's strength clearly exceeds that.

He intended to speed up until the last moment.

"Aki!"

He reached out, but it was too late.

Aki slipped out of Masaru's grasp and ran further forward.

Masaru was starting to slow her down, but he couldn't catch up anymore.

"Hear that!"

"You're going to fall, Kame-chan!"

The students following her were starting to make a fuss.

And...

"Hahaha, let's do it, Kame-chan."

There was laughter from Masaru's side.

"What?!"

Before she knew it, one of her students was running next to her.

He was facing Masaru in a backward running position. It was clearly abnormal posture and speed.

"You... from Aki's class...?"

"Hiratome-san, it's okay here, go to the other side!"

Aki's student Sagawa made a "detour" gesture with his outstretched hand and then accelerated even further, pushing Masaru away with tremendous force.

"Hey, you... Aki?"

"Leave it to me~!"

And at that moment, in the direction they were heading...

"Oraaaa!"

Aki stepped off the tip of the breakwater and jumped into the air.

The weather was starting to get worse and the waves were high.

Aki's body fell several meters and was enveloped by the icy water of the river. Her consciousness and body temperature disappeared in an instant and her vision turned black.

(Ah... this is dangerous...)

Even that consciousness disappeared in an instant.

Before she knew it, Aki was in a soft beam of light.

There was no gravity, no sense of up and down, she simply floated in a fixed direction along with particles of light.

(Is this the afterlife... the Sanzu River?)

She had imagined something more like a river bed or a flower garden, but when she thought about it, she realized that it was an image of the old "other world" and that something as simple as that would be more authentic in these days.

As her consciousness became clearer, she remembered the race process with Masaru just now.

Jump from the breakwater into the winter river

(I see... I think I'm dead.)

She wouldn't go so far as to say that she was prepared to die, but when her blood rushes to her head, she does something reckless without thinking about the consequences, so she expected to some extent to end up dying like that.

(Well, in that case, it's okay.)

She ended up causing problems for Masaru, but if she could come out on top with the victory, that would be the most important thing.

Regardless of what happens along the way, in the final moments of her life she must emerge victorious. That's what she had in mind.

When she was in her third year of high school, her father died.

Apparently, he died instantly in a traffic accident while traveling. It was too sudden, but more than that, she always regretted the fight she had with her father just before.

About a week before the accident, Aki, who had lost a match with Masaru as usual, complained, "I'm supposed to be Achilles.", to which Masaru was amused and said, "That guy is slower than a turtle."

"What?!" Aki said, and Masaru also seemed surprised. She thought he knew the story of "Achilles and the Tortoise". After saying that, he apologized.

It was frustrating. She had feelings like "I was humiliated" by Masaru, "I was made fun of", and "On top of that, he cared about me". Although she had those feelings, her strongest feeling was that her father had "betrayed her".

Her father was not an idiot, unlike her. He probably knew the story of "Achilles and the Tortoise" and was probably very careful when naming his daughter. In other words, the "demigod Achilles" appeared after the fact.

They thought she was a stupid girl and took advantage of it.

Meanwhile, she raced for five years and even decided her career path.

She felt like her feet were being destroyed and she was angry.

So after getting home...

"Don't say anything randomly, you liar!"

She hated her father like that and hadn't spoken to him since that day.

Aki's tantrums have been common for a long time. It was common for her to be stubborn for days on end.

However, after a week, her head began to get cold. There was no doubt that her father had said the "Achilles" thing for Aki's sake. Everything her father did was always for Aki. She knew it very well. So, she was trying to find the right time to make peace.

At that moment an accident occurred. Her father died while Aki called him a liar.

She has always regretted that. So when he died, she wanted to tell him that.

In fact, she tried to say it out loud now.

"What dad said was true."

"I'm fast. I won't lose to anyone."

She finally she could say it.

She was glad she could say that.

She thought that when she died, her father would come pick her up from the afterlife and apologize to him directly, but that didn't seem to be the case for her.

However, the flow of light surrounded her body. She was sure her father would be at the end of that trend.

In time, she too will merge with that flow and be a part of it.

"Kame-chan, wake up, wake up!"

Someone was shouting in her ear.

"Because I'm not dead yet! I'm not dead yet!"

"Uh... Sagawa...?"

A howling wind. The cold water splashed on her body. There was no ground under her feet and Sagawa was supporting her body.

"Aki!"

"Kame-chan!"

She heard voices of people coming from below. Masaru and the students. They looked small like a pea.

(What kind of situation is this...? In the air?!)

It is said that Sakawa Jingi is training in a shaman-like profession that has been passed down in this area and that she is capable of using a variety of mysterious techniques.

It seems that just now, with that power, Aki, who had fallen into the river, was swept away like a tornado, along with the river water.

The height where Aki is is probably about 10 meters, much higher than the breakwater.

"Hiratome-san! I'll send you Kame-chan, so please take her!"

Saying that, Sagawa let go of her hand.

"What?! Sagawa!"

It seems that the power of the "tornado" is still at work, and Aki is carried away by the wind as she loses altitude and falls into the arms of Masaru, who runs towards her.

On the other hand, Sagawa fell almost vertically, probably because he focused more on Aki, and a large column of water stood on the surface of the water.

"Wah, Jingi is down!"

"Help, help!"

Behind the commotion of the students...

"Are you okay, Aki?"

Masaru said, looking at her face.

Aki looked at that face again without understanding.

(If you look closely, they don't look much alike.)

Masaru has more of a monkey face, but he is much more decent than Sagawa.

Well, he could be among the pretty boys. A monkey is a monkey, but a cool monkey.

She was vaguely thinking about those things.

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The next year, spring.

Aki became the official teacher of the third year class. Since this is an improvement over the previous year, the student lineup will remain the same.

She thought there would be some excitement like, "Sensei, are you by any chance going back to the mainland?", but that wasn't the case at all.

When Aki disclosed it...

"Isn't that the kind of thing that happens in old movies? Around the Showa era."

Kazehayashi said.

"Kame-chan dreams about the island too much."

And Ranko Kanazaki.

"We will most likely graduate and this dilapidated school will be gone next year."

"Kame-chan is moving to Ichinoshima school, right?"

"Oh, yes."

Aki said.

"You are also students of that school, so if something happens, you should go there."

"However, I have no attachment to my alma mater. It's not like I went there."

And...

"I also wanted to go to a high school in the city...!"

Junnosuke Mizutani. He seemed really sorry.

"Junnosuke, you dream about the city too much."

"Is Ichinoshima really that big a city?"

"Because... there is also a Starbucks in Ichinoshima..."

"No, it doesn't make any difference either way."

Aki said.

"It's like it's connected by a single train, so I think it's quite convenient no matter where you live... You guys will stay in your hometown even after you graduate, right?"

"Oh, my love for my hometown is burning."

"Instead of worrying about us, what will happen to Kame-chan in the future? Are you going to be a teacher in Ichinoshima forever?"

"Oh, that's right! I would like to know what you are going to do with Hiratome-san."

"Ah..."

The incident that winter where "Kame-chan ran away from her fiancé and jumped into the winter river" became a rumor throughout the island as a serious incident, but the opinions of the students who saw the scene were generally unanimous.

They said...

"A troublesome woman like Kame-chan, if there is a man who is okay with that, then she should do whatever she wants, including marriage. No, she should do it. It would be a once in a lifetime opportunity."

"If you don't like him, say no clearly. In any case, it's not good to put pressure on others."

In short, Kame-chan is bad at facing her own problems properly.

That's why Aki faced her problems in a relaxed way.

"Yes, well... Masaru is still very active, so I don't think he's getting married."

"There are the Olympic Games."

"I thought it would be a good idea to have someone to support me once I was done with all that and retired."

"Hey, what are you talking about, Kame-chan?"

"Why are you trying to get on board at that time?"

"Isn't this the time to support you?"

And...

"So, let's go, Kame-chan."

Sagawa peeked out from behind the wall at the entrance to the classroom.

"You can ask Hiratome-san to come here and stay in Ayaka forever. You can live in Ichinoshima or Ninoshima, whatever you want."

"Eh?"

The idea wasn't bad. Aki looked up at the sky and thought:

"No, it's not that I want to live there forever, and I'll probably get bored soon."

"As expected, that is the truth."

"Well, although I'm not wrong..."

"That's rude, Kame-chan!"

As the students criticized Aki, Sagawa laughed out loud.

"There is nothing to offer. Rich nature, simple life, obedient students. Besides..."

He lifted the square bottle he had hidden so that it was level with his face.

"Delicious salmon~♪"

"Yes, there it is! Mizutani's father brought it yesterday."

"Oh, yes. Good whiskey."

"Hey, if it's a souvenir for the owner, you said you'd make sure to prepare it properly. Why did you bring the "nice guy" without permission?"

"Why...?"

Sagawa with a serious face.

"...Because it's interesting."

"Ah... Sakawa!"

"Hahaha."

The usual chase began.

Sagawa runs back holding a sake bottle to his chest, while Aki runs after him.

The students said as they saw the two cross the schoolyard, raising a cloud of dust.

"Both Jingi and Kame-chan are very cute."

"I never get tired of cosplaying Tendon or Showa sketches. It's the same story."

"It looks like we'll be doing the same thing in five or ten years."

Under a clear sky, a cloud of dust passed through the school gate and headed down the road towards the coast.