

TEXT

The Shores of the Sorachi River

KUNIKIDA DOPPO

CONTEXT

Hokkaido

CRITIQUE

Writing Ainu Out/Writing Japanese In:
The “Nature” of Japanese Colonialism
in Hokkaido

MICHELE M. MASON

KUNIKIDA DOPPO (1871–1908) is widely regarded as having played a formative role in the creation of modern Japanese literature. A child born out of wedlock to a former samurai and a servant, Doppo grew up in rural southwestern Japan, which is said to have imbued him with a love of nature. He converted to Christianity in 1891 after he gave up his dream to be a politician. He studied English literature at university and was later active in various literary and poetic circles in Tokyo. He was a war correspondent for the journal *The Nation's Companion* (*Kokumin no tomo*) during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Doppo died at the age of 36 from tuberculosis.

Not unlike many of his contemporaries, Doppo, for a time, envisioned Hokkaido as a utopian space. He convinced his lover, Sasaki Nobuko, to elope and “escape” to Hokkaido where, it was imagined, the restrictions of Japanese traditions did not reach. The marriage and his stay in Hokkaido were short-lived. Doppo’s “Unforgettable People” (*Wasure'enu hitobito*, 1898) and “Musashino” (*Musashino*, 1901) have attracted much scholarly attention, although later works, for instance those in his collection entitled *Fate* (*Unmei*, 1906), earned him critical acclaim during his life.

In "The Shores of the Sorachi River" (*Sorachigawa no kishibe*, 1902), the male protagonist travels to Hokkaido to buy some land. His endeavors to find local officials, who can advise him about property along the Sorachi River, force him to travel about the "newly opened" island. From his train and lodging windows, from atop a horse-drawn wagon, and during his walks in the mountains and through a rugged mining outpost, "I" observes the unfamiliar landscape of the northern island and muses on the relationship between humans and nature. The narrator's inner dialogue chronicles his mercurial moods, ranging from ecstatic to despondent according to the ever-changing weather, and reveals his sense of alienation from both society and nature.

The Shores of the Sorachi River

KUNIKIDA DOPPO

TRANSLATION BY MICHELE M. MASON

Part One

I stayed in Sapporo for five days. It was only five days, but in that time my fond feelings for Hokkaido multiplied many times over.

Even the wilderness of the northeast inspired devotion in me, a person who grew up in the densely populated central region of our country's mainland and was accustomed to scenery of mountains and fields that had been conquered by human power. Upon seeing Hokkaido, the northernmost part of the country, how could my heart not be moved?! Sapporo is said to be the Tokyo of Hokkaido, but I was all but bewitched by the many sights there.

I set out alone from Sapporo for the shores of the Sorachi River on the morning of September 25. Had it been Tokyo, it still would have been warm, but here I was wearing my Western winter clothing. Autumn was waning and the bare trees told me that winter was chasing close behind.

My goal was to meet a prefectural official who had surveyed the shores of the Sorachi River and to consult with him about choosing some land. However, I was completely in the dark about the geography. Also, since I didn't know where the prefectural official was stationed, and neither did any of my acquaintances in Sapporo, I boarded the train headed for Sorachibuto feeling disheartened.

The fields of Ishikari were lost in the low-lying clouds, and as I stared out from the train window onto the fields and mountains, I was overwhelmed by the frightening power of nature. Here there was no love, no compassion. To look out on this savage, lonely, heartless, and yet magnificent sight, it appeared to me all the more that nature scorns the powerlessness and fragility of humans.

I wondered what several people in the same train car were thinking about me, a young man silently sitting in the corner next to a window with his white face buried in the collar of his overcoat. The passengers' conversations included crops, forestry, the soil, and how to extract gold from the unlimited natural resources of the area. Some were talking loudly while they sipped alcohol, and others joked around as they smoked their pipes. Most of them had met for the first time on the train. I was the only one who

didn't join in, and I kept myself apart from the rest, sinking into my own thoughts. I had never put any thought to the question of how you are supposed to get along in society. I simply went from moment to moment concentrating on how to make my own way. Therefore, my fellow passengers seemed to be of another world, and I could not help but feel that between them and me stretched an impassable, deep valley. I thought to myself that even today, with me isolated in a corner of this train car full of people passing through the Ishikari plain, was like any other day of my life. Ah, the loneliness! Even though I willingly walk outside of society, in the depths of my heart I cannot bear the loneliness.

If it had been a fine, fall day and clear on the high peaks, I could have escaped my gloomy mood and relaxed. But the clouds hung increasingly lower, and the forest was enveloped in the mist so that no matter where I looked there was not even a flicker of light. I fell into a nearly unbearable state of melancholy.

The train arrived at a certain stop that splits off to the coal mine at Uta-shinai, and most of the passengers disembarked to transfer to other trains, leaving behind just two others besides myself. The train ran on a straight line, piercing the huge forests in which not one person has tread since the beginning of time—thousands of years. Layer upon layer of ash-colored mist, appearing and then disappearing as if a living being, was silently wafting and floating.

All of a sudden a man asked me, "Where are you headed?" He was around forty years old, with a masculine build, long hair, a square face, sharp eyes, and a big nose—a man who seemed a rogue at a glance. His manners suggested he wasn't an official or a craftsman. He wasn't a farmer or a merchant either. In fact, he was the kind of man whom you would only see in a place like Hokkaido. He was the adventurer type that always first dominates any unopened land.

"I plan to go to Sorachibuto."

"On the business of the prefecture?" He took me for a minor official for the Hokkaido prefectural office.

"Oh no, I'm here to buy some land."

"Oh I see. I don't know where you plan to look in Sorachibuto, but it seems there isn't anything valuable there anymore."

"I wonder, can I get to the shores of the Sorachi River from Sorachibuto?"

"I think you should be able to, but I can't be sure without knowing where on the Sorachi River you are headed. . . ."

"In the area where the group of settlers from Wakayama prefecture are, there are supposed to be two prefectural officers. That's where I'm aiming for. At any rate, I'm planning on going out as far as Sorachibuto and asking there."

"Is that so? Well then, when you come to Sorachibuto you should go to the lodging house called Miura Inn. The owner knows a lot about those things, so asking him would be a good idea. Since the roads aren't open yet, you have to take roundabout ways to get to places that are even fairly close. So, for someone who doesn't know the area getting around will be very difficult."

Then, he talked about various things: the difficulties of clearing land; the very different challenges depending on the quality of the land; the fact that you can't easily get to the markets with a valuable harvest because of the inconvenient transportation; and the way to use tenant farmers. I had heard some of these things from my friends in Sapporo, but taking in all that this man spoke of, I could only thank him for his kindness.

Finally, the train arrived at a desolate station. I noticed that altogether there were no more than twenty travelers who got off the train with me. The train returned from whence it came.

I saw that this small station, surrounded by forest, was nothing more than a lonely island. Besides two or three small buildings in the vicinity of the train stop, there was nothing that had any connection to humans. The long-reverberating whistle of the train echoed in the forest, and when the sound diminished and finally died out, suddenly the silent, desolate island was left behind.

Three horse-drawn wagons were waiting. Silently people boarded them. I also got on board along with the man who had been in the train with me earlier.

Two stocky, Hokkaido-bred horses, one sturdy young man, and six passengers set off without knowing the particular destination. I had the sense that I was "in the middle of nowhere." Really, it was the case that had I asked myself where I was going, I couldn't have answered.

The three horse-drawn wagons were separated by about one hundred yards, and because mine was at the rail end of the line, I could see clearly how the others bumped along as they traveled the road filled with potholes. The mist swept over the forest, cut across the road, and then entered the forest again. The tree leaves, dyed a deep red, fell from the branches, two or three dancing behind one of the wagons. The driver gave a strong lash to the horse, and shouted out, "We'll arrive soon!"

The man from earlier called out "Please stop in front of the Miura Inn" and looked back at me. I nodded and thanked him for his kindness. No one in the wagon spoke a word, and with anxious faces they all fell deeply into thought. Because the driver once again applied a forceful snap of the whip and sounded a bugle, the small-bodied yet robust and hardy horse of the north galloped off.

Slowly the forest opened up, and just as I noted that two or three of the colonists' houses had appeared, all of a sudden we came out onto a plain. On both sides of the wide road, what looked like merchant houses flew by and the area had the characteristic look of a town in newly cleared land. The wagon ran through this stretch with its bugle valiantly announcing its approach.

Part Two

I arrived at Miura Inn and immediately called for the owner. I asked him the way to the shores of the Sorachi River and told him the details of my plan. However, the proprietor suggested that it would be much more convenient for me to go back to Utashinai and approach and cross the mountains from there.

"The next train would get you into Utashinai before sundown, so if you stay tonight in Utashinai, tomorrow you can ask around and head out. Utashinai is different from here in that some people from the prefectural office are there. They might know where the man named Ida is."

Hearing this, I agreed. However, I had come to Sorachibuto believing that it was best to advance along the Sorachi River in order to know the whereabouts of the prefectural agent, Mr. Ida, whom I hoped to meet. However, to get to the shores of the Sorachi River from Sorachibuto without a guide would be impossible, and from the owner of Miura Inn I heard for the first time about the lack of proper roads. So, I heeded the caution of the owner and decided to go around to Utashinai. Lonely and alone on the second floor of the Miura Inn, I waited for the train, which was due more than two hours later.

Looking about, I saw a field in front of the inn. Sticking up here and there were a few trees that had been left when the others had been cut down. Perhaps because of the strong wind the trunks were naked with only a few yellow leaves sticking to the branches. Even those, in the time that I watched, fell randomly to the ground. On top of the wind came the rain. The rain clouds closed off the distant view, but close-by there stood an oak

tree about thirty feet tall. The thick leaves made strange sounds as they were hit by the rain and quivered in the wind. Not one person passed on the road.

It was certainly not enjoyable there, knowing not a soul and without anyone with whom to talk, to be resting against the window of the inn and staring out on the falling autumn rain. I unexpectedly remembered my mother, father, younger brother, and good friends in Tokyo and presently felt what great warmth of human love I had been surrounded by until then. As I yearned to muster up my manly spirit and follow my ideals—there in the forest to search for a land of freedom—I roused my heart so that I definitely would not become womanly. However, in short, ideals became cold and human feelings became warm. Nature is brutal and intimacy with it is difficult; society is dear and is the appropriate place to make a nest.

I passed the two hours forlornly. Just when I thought the rain was letting up, the sound of a bugle-horn rang from afar. When I stuck my head out to look, there came a horse-drawn wagon nearing at a gallop that was being struck by a thread-like rain that fell at a slant. I boarded the wagon and once again set off for the train station, leaving Miura Inn behind.

There were just a few people on the train. I was the only one in the cabin I entered, but being alone wasn't pleasant and I was thinking I should change my cabin. Leaving that thought aside, I leaned my body against the corner of the train car that had become dark from the rain and fog. I was gazing out on the movement of the clouds in the darkening sky, and I absent-mindedly stared at the forest as trees passed by one after another. In times like these, you can attain a perfect serenity of mind—if you have no thoughts of self-interest and no thoughts of final destinations—if you are without feelings of love and without malicious feelings of hatred—without disappointment and without hope—only absently looking and listening. When traveling to a place where there are no familiar bonds, your body and soul tires, and finding yourself swaying with the movement of the train, occasionally you can fall into such a mental state. At times like these, by chance the scenery that comes before your eyes is etched deeply into the depths of your brain, and you are unable to forget it over many years. Now, next to the train-car window, I was just like that, watching the movement of the clouds and the birch forests.

When the train arrived in the valley of Utashinai, the rain had stopped completely and the weather had cleared. I was without a destination for lodging, and when I left the train station, two or three representatives of

local inns were waiting to greet potential guests, which is understandable for such a place with a few thousand miners and several hundred crowded houses in a narrow ravine. Led by one of these men from a local inn, I walked through the stone-strewn, darkly lit town and entered a two-story building. When the wife spoke in dialect with grace and charm and welcomed me sincerely, I couldn't help smiling.

Because the proprietor came to my room without being called after the evening meal had finished, I straight away spoke of my plans and asked whether he could be of any help to me. He listened all the while smiling.

"Wait one moment. I have an idea," he said over his shoulder as he left the room. After some time, he returned.

"Luck is a strange thing. No need to worry. I've figured it out." Pleased with himself, he sat down.

"You figured it out?"

"Yes I did. I've got it all sorted. As of four days ago there has been a guest staying here. This person is someone who deals with imperial estates, and for some time he had been surveying the forest area. He did a lot of sleeping outdoors, so eventually his health broke down, and now we are taking care of him. His name is Shinohara. Since I heard that he'd been in the area of the Sorachi River the day before he showed up here at our place, I thought maybe he'd know something. So I asked him and he did. He said that there is a small cabin straight below where you cross the mountain, and a prefectural office representative is there. You can relax. This place is about two and a half miles from here, so it will be easy to get there. If you go in the morning you can come back before the afternoon."

"Thank you for everything. That's a relief. But I wonder if it's any good to go to the cabin now. They change locations so often, even at the prefectural office they didn't know where the representatives were."

"Don't worry, he'll be there. And if he's moved on, just ask whoever happens to be there. He won't have gone far."

"Well then, since I'll set out early tomorrow morning, could you ask someone to be my guide?"

"Oh, that's right. That mountain road has many forks, so you should take a guide. I'll have my son take you. He's a young boy of fourteen, but he knows his way to Sorachibuto. He should be able to guide you." The innkeeper said all these kind things, and I didn't know how to thank him. Luck is strange indeed! If I had stayed at another inn, things would not have been taken care of so expediently and kindly, for sure.

The owner was an extremely jovial man and seemed fearless and to care little for what others thought of him. The kindness he generously showed me, whom he had never seen or known before, was in keeping with what appeared to be his natural character. It was as though he made the world his home and discovered a homeland every place he traveled. He seemed to consider the people he met his friends wherever he went. I imagined that, because of this, when he saw a person in trouble, no matter who it was, as long as there was no history of malice, it was normal for him to show the sympathy of a longtime friend. After I had heard a brief story of his life from him, I found that his personality was close to what I had guessed.

In his hometown, he had had a proper estate, but when his two younger brothers grew to strongly covet his sole right to the inheritance, a contentious battle erupted among the siblings. His seventy-year-old, aging father, who loved his younger two sons, tended to agree with them about dividing the estate among the three. But if the estate were divided among them, none of the brothers would be able to maintain a family. "So I thought about it. What pettiness to be fighting with my brothers over such a trifling amount of money. All right, I'll give it to you two. I would like just one-fifth, and I'll use that to take off to Hokkaido. At that time my boy was nine. The three of us came here just like that. Well, human beings can live anywhere. Ha, ha, ha," he said laughing. "It's ironic, but both of my brothers have wasted most of the portions I gave them. I have written letters countless times encouraging them to emigrate to Hokkaido, but they don't come thinking that their tiny village on the mainland is better than anywhere else."

I learned a great deal watching what this man did and listening to what he said. Even if this owner of a small inn is not the man I think he is, and even if the figure I conjure up by adding my own imaginings is better than this owner, the following can be said: He is supremely free and independent. While living in society, he is not oppressed by it. He faces alone the limitless, natural world, yet he is happy. He strides in a lordly manner, as though master of the oceans, mountains, plains, and towns, and is not troubled in the least. No matter where he goes he enjoys the fragrance of the flowers and lives with a warm heart. Isn't he the kind of man a true man is supposed to be?!

As I felt this, my heart opened wide. From the time I left Sapporo until arriving in Utashinai my heart had been bound up with the clouds and wilted with the rain. But now there came to me a feeling of boundlessness like the limitless, deep blue sky.

At around ten that night when I went out to walk, I could see the stars between the streaks of clouds. I passed through the dark town, and when I got away from the buildings, a distance from the valley, there stretched out horizontally in front of me a black timbered forest, like a folding screen, over which the moon appeared. The floating clouds grazed the mountains and slowly erased this picture. The air was heavy and wet and in the sky was a wind, but on the ground there was a solemn silence. I could hear only the faint sound of a mountain stream. On one side of me were the mountains and on the other side an uphill path along a cliff. When I came out onto a slightly elevated open space, all of sudden raucous singing reached my ears.

Following the base of the mountains was a strip of long buildings and facing these was another strip. The songs were coming from these buildings. On one strip a few of the doors were divided, and because they were all papered doors, the light shone through brilliantly. Amid the cacophony of the *shamisen* and the harsh voices belting out melodies without care, promiscuous laughter would burst out. Who would imagine that these buildings, just like cattle sheds, made up the entertainment frontier sought out by miners in this little nook of rugged country?!

There were those who after a life of wandering became miners and prostitutes. There were people who were there to buy and others to sell. This was a dream world with crazy songs and disorderly dances. I kept going and entered an alley along one of the long buildings.

The road was muddy from the rain, and the puddles reflected the lights. The buildings turned out to be even more pathetically constructed upon a closer look. Since it was newly opened land, the papered doors on the fronts of the houses had unvarnished wood, which even in the dark could be seen clearly. The floors and roofs were low. I wondered if the papered doors extended directly from the ground to the eaves, and then from a distorted gap I saw the shade of a hanging lamp. A rough, naked man was reflected like a phantom devil. A barmaid with disheveled hair and a head like a female demon was caught in the light. I heard a sound that made me think the floor had collapsed, but only sudden laughter came from the house. The shouts of "Drink!" "Sing!" "I'm gonna kill you!" "I'm gonna punch you!" and the loud laughter, harsh language, cursing, shouts of joy, scolding, and short verses of songs of romance were enough to break your heart. The tearful tunes of the *shamisen* were in one instant like a violent storm and in the next a spring rain. Amid the merriment was bloodthirstiness and amid the bloodthirstiness were bitter tears. Was it crying or laughing? Was it laughing

or crying? Was it anger or singing? Was it singing or anger? Ah, life is fleeting! These people fell into this valley where until a few years ago bears slept and wolves lived. Here they stagnated. Here they became enraged. Here they sank to the bottom. The shadow of the moon chillingly illuminated it all.

I walked on past and was standing there a bit when all of a sudden the papered door of a house close by opened up and a man appeared. "Hey, the moon is out!" he cried. Looking at his upturned face, I thought he seemed to be a robust young man of twenty-six or twenty-seven, tall and with wide shoulders. He was looking all around him, but then blowing out a breath reeking of alcohol he clicked his tongue and staggered back in again.

Part Three

With the innkeeper's son faithfully guiding me, I finally set off for the shores of the Sorachi River at nine in the morning on September 26.

The weather couldn't make up its mind whether to be fine or cloudy. Just as I thought a few thin sunrays would shine through, the fog would roll in and envelop the mountaintop, the forest, and the roads. The mountain road was easier than I thought it would be, and talking with the innkeeper's son about various things as I walked along made my body and heart light.

The forest was all fall leaves, and the turning ivy leaves were dyed a deep scarlet. When the fog rolled in, the mist formed a screen, which made it seem you were seeing flowers. When the sunlight shone directly, all the leaves tinged with dew radiated like millions of strands of pearls and jasper, and I felt the entire mountain was on fire. The innkeeper's son told me about bears along the shores of the Sorachi River. Then he enthusiastically narrated several bear tales he had heard and committed to memory with his child-like heart. Descending a slope, we came to an area thick with bear grass and he stopped for a moment.

He said, "Can you hear it? The sound of the river?" He cocked his ear and continued, "You can hear it, right? That's the Sorachi River. It's just over there."

"Seems like we should be able to see it from here."

"It's not something you can see from here. It runs in the middle of the forest."

The two of us traveled a bit on a very narrow path with our heads hidden by bear grass when an old farmer-type came by. I asked for directions to the prefectural official's cabin.

"If you go just about one hundred yards, then you'll come out onto a wide, newly opened road. He's in the first cabin on the right-hand side," he said over his shoulder as he walked away.

Coming thus far from Utashinai, that old man was the only person we met. Along the way, we hadn't seen anything that looked like a cabin. Meeting this old man, I realized that there were already some pioneers who had come and settled on the shores of the Sorachi River. When we came out from the path of bear grass, there was a wide road that you would not expect to find penetrating the forest in one straight line. It was probably wider than thirty feet. Moreover, on both sides a dense thicket grew wherein there were many trees whose diameter ranged from over six to nine feet, and due to the ditches passing through, this expansive road seemed like a railroad track. However, seeing this road, I understood how great the difficulties were for the prefectural office's earnest plans for colonization.

Looking again, I saw on the right side of this road a strange makeshift cabin, which you would never see on the mainland. All around this cabin the forest had been cut and a small flat area opened up. I had successfully made it to this cabin to meet the prefectural agent, Mr. Ida, and another man.

Thanks to the polite introduction by the colonial office head, the men were friendly and accommodated my requests for consultation. Moreover, what surprised me was that they had heard of my name and had already known of me—even my jumbled writings. It turned out that, completely unbeknownst to me, I had readers in this unexpected place of Hokkaido.

After the two men listened to my plans, they opened up a map of the Sorachi River, and with their great experience appraising land, they suggested around six plots, here and there, from the twelve-acre plots of land that had been parceled out for emigrants.

Business having been completed, we moved on to small talk.

The cabins are never more than eighteen feet by twenty-four feet, and the roofs and surrounding walls are a weaving of wide shakes of bark from whole logs. The only place wood planks are used is on the floor, and you lay straw matting on that. As for the entrance, a single door, also fashioned out of the woven bark, is hung on one side. This becomes the settler's nest, the settler's house, or, you could say, his castle. In a corner a large rectangular chimney is cut, and a brazier, oven, tobacco tray, and in the winter a stove, are used there.

"When the winter comes, I wonder if I can bear it to be in such a cabin."

"Well, all of the pioneers live in these kinds of cabins. What do you think, can you tough it out?" Ida asked as he smiled.

"I'm resolved to see it through, but when the time comes, it'll probably be fairly difficult."

"It's not what you think it is. If winter comes and it seems like you're just not going to be able to hack it, well, sir, because of your situation, it would be better for you to escape to Sapporo. For that matter, hibernating in the winter is the same no matter where you are."

"Ha ha ha ha ha. If that's the case, it would be best if you left things up to the tenant farmers from the beginning and lived in Sapporo," said the other agent.

"Yes, yes, you're right. If I'm going to take off to Sapporo in the middle of the winter, I might as well stay in Tokyo and open land there." Then, showing my resolve, I said, "Whatever comes, I can bear it."

Ida said, "That's right. First the snow will come, and you'll be filling up this stove. Firewood, well, you get that by hand. Then, a person like you will study the numerous books you've brought up, right?"

"Is the idea that I transform into a great scholar by the time the snow melts?" I laughed unexpectedly.

As we were talking, all of a sudden there was a sprinkling sound, and I went outside. The sun was shining dimly as the clouds were passing silently over the quiet deep forest, and a rain shower passed over.

Leaving behind the innkeeper's son, I left the cabin to walk around the area alone.

Returning to the wide road, I realized just how strange it was. They had chosen to make it in this extreme no-man's-land, destroying the thick forest that had been here for thousands of years and using human power to defeat nature. As far as anyone could see on both sides, only forest enveloped the road. Without even one shadow of a human, without even one thread of smoke, and without even one person to speak to or to listen to, it stretches out desolate and lonely.

I am aware of the loneliness of the sound of rain, but still I have never felt such loneliness as when the rain shower stealthily passed over that vast primeval forest. This is, in fact, the quiet murmuring of nature. Anyone who should hear this sound from the forest floor could not help but feel the power of limitless nature that disdains living creatures. Tumultuous waves, windstorms, sharp claps of thunder, and flashes of lightening are nature's threats. Yet, it oppresses people most when it is most quiet. When the faraway blue sky looks down upon the earth, silently, not saying a word, and when in a place deep in the forest that has never permitted a human

footprint, a leaf from a tree in one corner dies and falls without any wind, nature yawns and says, "Ah, another day has come to an end." And in this instant a thousand human years fly by.

When I looked at both sides of the forest, I discovered that there was a place where the forest thinned on the left side. Parting the grasses, I proceeded through, and suddenly turned back to see I was standing on the deep forest's floor. I sat down on a large, fallen rotting tree.

When I realized that the forest had become dark, the rain shower started again, making pattering sounds on the high branches. Just when I thought, "Ah it's come again," in the next moment it stopped and all was silent in the forest.

I sat still for some time, watched the depth of the forest become darker, and sank into my thoughts.

Where is society? Where is "history" that humans are so proud to pass on? Here people are only creatures of "survival" and feel only that they are at the mercy of one breath of nature. A Russian poet once said that having sat down in a forest, he felt the shadow of death press upon him, and this is very true. He also said, "When the last person from the human race disappears from this earth, not even one tree leaf will tremble."

The death-like silence, the frigidness, the gloominess—sitting in the deep forest, there isn't a soul who would not feel this oppressive feeling. Forgetting myself, I was sinking into frightful visions when . . .

"Mister! Mister!" Someone called from outside the forest. I hurried out and saw the innkeeper's son standing there.

"Everything's taken care of, so shall we head back?"

First, the two of us returned to the cabin, and Ida said, "Would you like to spend the night to test it out and see how it feels?"

In the end, I've come to this day having never stepped foot on the land of Hokkaido again. And, although a family matter forced me to cancel all my plans to open land there, even now when I think of the shores of the Sorachi River, I feel as though I am being pulled in by that brutal nature. I wonder why.