



## Cool of the Evening

I'm writing the story this week quite late in the evening. Don't misunderstand - I don't mean that I've got such a heavy work schedule that I have to work late every night! It's just that while I was on a stroll around the neighbourhood this evening I had an idea for this week's story, so when I got home it was better to sit at the keyboard and write it down before it became forgotten. If I went straight to bed, putting the story off until the morning, then the mood would perhaps be quite different.

I don't go for a walk every evening. Just now and then, in the quiet time after dinner, I feel the impulse to head out for a stroll. Perhaps it comes on those days when I have spent most of the time sitting in front of the computer, working on the website and doing email. At the end of such a day, a bit of light exercise of course feels very pleasant.

One of the things I most enjoy about these evening walks are the sounds of the neighbourhood. In winter there is nothing much to hear, but at this season, with everybody's windows wide open, the feeling is completely different. As I stroll along, I hear from this side and that, some of the casual sounds of Japanese family life. The most distinctive of these is the sound of the splash of water falling to the floor of the bathroom as somebody in their *o-furo* dumps a bucket of rinsing water over themselves. I suppose that Japanese readers of this story would perhaps not realize it, but that sound is particularly 'Japanese', only heard here in this country. People everywhere bathe themselves of course, but the combination of a small tiled bathroom and that particular method of rinsing, with water scooped from the tub, is only found here. If I were walking along blindfolded, I would still know I was in Japan!

The other most common sound I hear is - as you would guess - the sound of the television sets. The flickering pattern of light that shines onto everybody's window curtains tells the same story, that in every home the television set is on, filling each room with its constant stream of information and entertainment.

Seeing these TVs on every side of me brings back a memory from a few years ago, just at the end of my Hyakunin Isshu printmaking project, which had taken me ten years to complete. During the final couple of years of work, a TV company visited me many times, and produced a one-hour documentary program, to be broadcast at the finish of the project.

I myself have no television in my home, so when broadcast day came along, I had to decide what to do; should I visit a friend's house to watch it? I decided not to do that, and that evening as the program time approached, I went out for an evening stroll instead.

What a strange and interesting experience that was! A full one-hour program about me, broadcast on a major network during prime time ... As I strolled along through the quiet streets of the town, I could see the light from the television sets flickering on the curtains in nearly every house. How many of them were watching that channel? I didn't know, but I did know that all across the country, millions of people were watching 'my' program. How was this going to change my life?

For the entire hour that it took to broadcast the program I strolled around the streets, thinking my own thoughts about the completion of my long project, and then quietly returned home.

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And the next day ... it was as though nothing at all had happened. Life continued along exactly as before. It had been just another evening stroll ...

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