





# **THE DESCENDANT OF CAIN:**

A Bilingual Edition

BY

**TAKEO ARISHIMA**

TRANSLATED BY

**Yasotarō Mōri**

Revised by

**Earl Trotter**

**Peach Blossom Press**



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Frontispiece: Photograph of Takeo Arishima from about 1915.

Takeo Arishima  
The Descendant of Cain  
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1. Takeo Arishima (1878-1923). 2. Japanese Fiction.





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. . . . . Commencing at rear of book.



**THE DESCENDANT  
OF  
CAIN**



## Introduction

### Biography

Takeo Arishima (有島武郎), was born on March 4, 1878 in Tokyo. His family was wealthy and he studied at prestigious schools in Yokohama and Tokyo, learning English on the way. He then went north to Sapporo Agricultural College in Hokkaido in 1897. There he attempted a love-suicide with Kokichi Morimoto but they both survived. Still in Hokkaido he converted to Christianity in 1901. He had parted with Morimoto and she went on to get her Ph.D. and founded women's schools throughout the country and published a book in English, *The Standard of Living in Japan*, in 1919.

After graduation in 1901 Arishima spent a year in the army, then, having brushed up on his English, went to America in 1903 as a correspondent for the *Mainichi Shimbun*. He also attended Haverford (Quaker) College and later graduated from Harvard. He worked for a while in a Quaker-run insane asylum (as psychiatric hospitals were then called). During his time in America he became interested in socialism. He then went to Europe in 1906.

Arishima returned to Japan in 1907 and taught English and ethics at the Tohoku Imperial University Agricultural University (previously Sapporo Agricultural College). In 1911, he joined with his brother Ikuma, Shiga Naoya and others to form the White Birch Society whose magazine was *Shirakaba* (White Birch), of which he became a key figure. His first popular success was *The Descendant of Cain* (カインの末裔, *Kain no Matsuei*) in 1917. He retired from teaching that year. Then in 1919 appeared his most famous work, *A Certain Woman* (或る女, *Aru Onna*).

He married Yasuko Kamio in 1909. They had three children but she became ill and died of tuberculosis in 1916. In 1922, following his socialist ideals, he distributed the property that he inherited from his father in Niseko, Hokkaido, to the tenant farmers working

the land. This locale is, in fact, the setting for *The Descendant of Cain*. Also in 1922 Arishima had an affair with a married woman, Akiko Atano, the editor of a woman's magazine. After the relationship was discovered by her husband, they committed suicide by hanging on Jun. 9, 1923.

One of Arishima's children, his son, Masayuki Mori (birth name, Yukimitsu Arishima) born in Sapporo in 1913, became an outstanding movie actor. Besides starring in Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (1953), he appeared in a film version of his father's book *A Certain Woman* (*Aru Onna*, 1954).

### **The Descendant of Cain**

This is a rather bleak story of a man (and in the background, his wife), struggling to make ends meet in the frontier area of Hokkaido. Several interesting readings of the book have been done (see "Further Reading"). One can see it as three intermingled conflicts. On the elemental level there is humankind versus harsh nature. On the social level there is human conflict. Firstly, the tenant farmers are oppressed by the landowners. This fits Arishima's political views. Also, the nonconformist Nin'emon is at odds with his neighbours. Finally there is psychological level of self-conflict. Nin'emon struggles, sometimes successfully, but is undone by his weaknesses. He is a Western-influenced anti-hero, and perhaps there is a touch of Ibsen here, one of Arishima's favourite authors. Nin'emon is overall a reprehensible character but he does have some redeeming moments and in the end is a survivor.

### **Yasotarō Mōri**

The translator, who used the name "Morri" in his English writings, had a career in journalism. He was born in 1882. In 1906 he published a translation of Natsume Soseki's *I Am a Cat*. Then, in 1918, when he was on the editorial staff of *The Kokusai News Agency*, he translated Soseki's *Botchan*. *The Descendant of Cain* was published in 1925. Mōri later became chief editor of *The Japan Times and Mail* (now *The Japan Times*). He corresponded

with Ezra Pound and published numerous essays by the latter during 1939 and 1940. He died in 1959.

## **The Translation**

It should first be mentioned, that Mōri's book also contained a number of humorous short pieces written by himself. Besides being incompatible in tone with the main piece, they are of little literary interest and have therefore been excluded. As well, although Mōri could write English well enough in original material, there are some issues in his translation and his renderings are sometimes awkward and in a few cases convoluted. Therefore I have revised the text to a smoother flowing English. However, it should be noted that it is the English rendering and not the Japanese to English translation *per se* that has been revised. Certain place names are corrected or brought up-to-date and footnotes added to elucidate the text.

This work of Arishima was also translated by John W. Morrison, first in his 1948 thesis and later published in *Modern Japanese Fiction* in 1955. His translation is very thorough and includes extensive notes. I have made two minor changes based on his work which I read afterwards. He translates the title as "Descendants of Cain", which gives a more universal edge to the work. However as the book is heavily focussed on the main character, Nin'eman, and as neither Arishima nor his brother seem to have had any objections, Mōri's title is retained. However, both titles have their merits.

The Japanese text of the original edition is included. It commences at the rear of the book and proceeds, Japanese-style, in columns to be read top to bottom and right to left and the flow of pages is from right to left. There are no page numbers for the Japanese section. In Mōri's translation sections IV and V were combined. I have split them back up and renumbered the following chapters to match the Japanese text.

## **Further Reading**

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Earl Trotter

## A Word by the Translator

The following translation of *The Descendant of Cain*, originally written by the late Mr. Takeo Arishima, appeared in The Osaka Mainichi, English Edition, early in 1923. It was intended to be published in book form with the author's permission, but before steps could be taken to that end, Mr. Arishima had died at Karuizawa. The present publication has been made possible through the courtesy of Mr. Ikuma Arishima, a brother of the author.

Some years ago, while in Tokyo, I began reading stories by the late Mr. Takeo Arishima, who is regarded as one of the most representative writers of present day Japan. Of all the stories of his I read, *The Descendant of Cain* struck me most. While all of us have more or less the blood of Cain in ourselves, it is not often that we come across a man who appears to be a better replica than the original.

The hero of the story, Nin'emon, reminds me of Captain Wolf Larsen of the schooner *Ghost*, described in Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*. Both Nin'emon and Captain Larsen believed in nothing but brute force and due to surrounding conditions, both held society at large in defiance. They simply ignored all conventionalities as sham and pretence, and went right ahead to what they wanted, relying solely upon physical strength which they never hesitated to display in the most primeval manner whenever occasion demanded.

Men of this character really deserve our sympathy. Underlying the apparently cruel disposition of the man described in the story, there is something that calls forth from our innermost hearts the feeling of pity and compassion. He is a victim of a society in the making. He himself is not actually to blame for what he does; he does not know what else to do. I believe that is what Mr. Arishima

tried to show us, and succeeded, in holding up before us a man of the type of Nin'emon.

Any fault in the translation is due to the lack of ability on the part of the translator; any merit in the story as here presented in English is entirely due to the original author.

Yasotaro Morri

Kobe, July 1925

## The Descendant of Cain

### I

With a long shadow drawn on the ground, he walked on silently, leading the reins of a lean horse. His wife straggled several yards behind, limping slightly, with a baby strapped on her back, along with their goods, wrapped in a big dirty *furoshiki*<sup>1</sup>. All one could see was the baby's head, which was large like an octopus.

Winter gripped Hokkaido from earth to sky. The west wind blew from the Sea of Japan to Uchiura Bay<sup>2</sup>, and then over the great expanse of grass fields stretching to the foot of Makkarinupuri<sup>3</sup>, the Ezo<sup>4</sup> Fuji. It swept through like an oncoming swell. It was a cold wind. Above, covered with snow almost to the summit, leaned its head slightly forward and stood in silence, defying the wind. The sun was setting where a small group of clouds had gathered on the side of Konbudake<sup>5</sup>. There was not a single tree growing in the grass fields. The man and his wife move on alone, like two trees that falteringly walked over an intolerably straight path.

The two kept on walking in silence like two human beings who had forgotten how to speak. Only when the horse stopped to pee, would the man stop grudgingly. His wife, in the meantime, would catch up, and, readjusting her load, sigh audibly. When the horse started, the two again walked on in silence.

“They say “old daddies<sup>6</sup>” go about here.”

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- 1 A traditional Japanese wrapping cloth used to wrap and/or to transport goods.
  - 2 Off the south-western tip of Hokkaido.
  - 3 Now known as Mt. Yotei. “Nupuri” means “mountain” in Ainu.
  - 4 The old name for Hokkaido.
  - 5 Also known as Mt. Konbu, near Niseko in south-western Hokkaido.
  - 6 Bears.

During the trip of eight miles through the grass fields, this was the only remark made by his wife. For those who are used to the country, there were reasons, considering the hour and location, to apprehend attack from bears. Spitefully he spit on the grass.

When they reached where the path widened and joined the national highway, the day became dark. Night came on, – the night of a stiff, raw late autumn when the outline of everything was indistinct as darkness set in.

Their clothes were thin, and the two were hungry to the point of starvation. The wife occasionally looked at the baby. Dead or alive, the baby at any rate, was quiet. Without even a snore, its head hung on her right shoulder.

On the national highway, however, the shadows of one or two persons could be seen moving. They seemed to be people who had been drinking in the town, and the smell of strong liquor could be discerned as they passed by the couple. The pungent odour suddenly made the husband feel the pangs of thirst and appetite. He looked back at them, but couldn't even spit in vexation as his mouth was so dry, almost bounding his lips.

At a place where, on the main Japanese islands, one would see a stone *koshin*<sup>7</sup> or stone image of *Jizo*<sup>8</sup>, a sign post, beaten black by the weather, stood, nearly twelve feet high. Coming up to this point he thought he faintly scented the smell of broiled dried fish. For the first time, he halted. The lean horse, in a walking posture, became also lazily immovable, only its mane and tail following the direction of the wind.

“What’s the name of the farm?”

He, who was extraordinarily tall, blubbered to his wife, as if looking down upon her.

“Something like Matsukawa.”

“Something like? Fool!”

He was provoked because he had talked to his wife, and after rubbing the nose of the horse with the rein, started walking again. The dim lights in the town, lit at absurdly long distances apart on the level ground higher up on the other side of the valley, now become dark. Nature seemed even more desolate than when no

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7 A carved stone depicting the three monkeys connected with the Kōshin ritual, the well-known “see, hear, and speak no evil.”

8 Guardian deity of children and travellers.



human beings had been seen. When he saw these lights, he at once became conscious of a kind of fear. Scinting fellow creatures, he could not help becoming alert. At that moment, he was no longer at ease. The fact that he was conscious of it made him all the more grouchy. Casting toward his wife a look which seemed to say, "Your foe is in front of you. Be sharp, or you get the worst of it," he adjusted his *obi*<sup>9</sup>, and continued on. The wife, whose eyes were downcast, didn't notice the face of her husband, and followed the horse, mouth open and without regard to anything.

On the edge of K-Town<sup>10</sup>, as many as four vacant houses stood in line. The small windows, like the black eyes of a skull, opened toward the street. Somebody lived in the fifth house, but only the moving silhouettes of the people against the flickering flames from brushwood in a hearth could be seen. There was a blacksmith's shop in the sixth house. From a rickety chimney, sparks scattered out mixed with smoke being swirled by the wind. The shop was as bright as the open mouth of a furnace, and the light clearly shone across to the other side of the absurdly forty-five foot wide Hokkaido highway.

It was a one-sided street, but as it had houses standing close together, the wind which was forced to alter its course, blew up the dust in a vengeance. The dust, reflected by the light of the fire in front of the blacksmith's, was seen whirling in thick clouds. Three men were working about the bellows. When the noise of the iron hammers striking the anvil gave a piercing sound, even his lean horse, dead tired as it was, pricked up its ears. He thought of when he would bring his horse to this shop. The wife, as if stuck to the spot, gazed at the colour of the inviting fire. The two felt strangely excited.

Beyond the blacksmith shop, it became abruptly dark, and most of the houses were locked for the night. Except for a house that seemed like a bar plus grocery store, and from which came the smell of food and the drowsy, jocular voices of men and women. All of the houses, lined straight, dwindled before the cold like those in a deserted village, and the only sound was the telegraph poles emitting startled snarls. The man, his horse and his wife kept

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9 A cloth sash worn across the waist.

10 Kaributo, now Niseko.

on walking in silence as before. They would walk awhile, then halt again, as if they happened to think of halting. Halting awhile, they would resume walking, seemingly for no particular reason.

When they thought they had covered four or five blocks, they found themselves at the other end of the town. The road curved as if twisted by force, and farther on, it went down in a sharp slope to a pitch-dark low ground. They went up to the bend and stopped. Besides the rustling noise of the wind blowing through a wood of broad-leaved trees which grew in thick abundance far below, only the indistinct sound of the water of the Shiribeshi River<sup>11</sup> was heard.

“Go and ask.”

“You go and ask.”

The voice of the husband who suddenly crouched on the ground, sounded as if coming out of the earth. The wife, balancing her load and sniffing, traced her way back. She knocked at a house door and was shown the location of Matsukawa Farm. But she was far away from him and unable to distinguish his figure. She was somewhat afraid of using a loud voice; not only afraid, but she had no strength to force her voice. So she returned limping.

They were so tired, yet they had to walk three blocks more. Finally they found the square, two-storied clapboard house with a shingle roof, standing dominant over the other houses.

As the wife stopped there without a word, he knew it was the office of Matsukawa Farm. To tell the truth, he had thought from the first that this building could not be anything else, but he hated to go inside, so passed it by as if not knowing what it was. Now, he had no alternative. He tied his horse to a tree on the other side of the road, and taking a flaxen feedbag containing oats and chopped grass from the saddle, placed it over the horse's muzzle. Immediately, the crisp, clear-cutting sound of the horse's teeth was heard. He and his wife again crossed the road and came to the entrance of the office, and there, the two anxiously looked at each other.

While the wife clumsily toyed with her hair, he resolved to open the sliding door, the upper half of which had plate glass. The castors on the door rolled in the iron groove with a frantic noise:

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11 A river in southern Hokkaido.

the strength in his hand which was wont to handle unyielding doors was overpowering.

The wife was startled and then the baby on her back awoke and began crying. Two men at the office counter looked up surprised, almost jumping up. There he and his wife who neglected the crying baby, stood with vacant looks.

“What’s the matter with you people! Can’t you see the wind blowing in with the door open? Get in quick if you want to!”

One of the men who had a blue-black tunic on, tied with a serge apron, and sat beside a square oak *hibachi*<sup>12</sup>, angrily shouted these words with a knitted brow. When our traveller saw the face of a man – a face of one superior to him in some respects – he became sulky at once. Feeling like a desperate animal threatened by a sword, he moved his huge body to the floor. The wife timidly shut the door and stood outside. She was so upset as to be oblivious to the crying of the baby.

The man who had spoken had a long face, about 30 years old, with sharp eyes and a moustache which did not become him. To see a long face among farmers was like to detect the face of a horse among pigs. Intense as was the feeling of the traveller, he could not help gazing at the face with curiosity. He did not do so much as bow even once.

Outside the door the baby cried as if being strangled to death. His attention was also drawn to that.

The other man, sitting on the floor stile, was watching him closely for a while and suddenly talked in a voice which, like that of a Naniwa-bushi<sup>13</sup> singer, had a peculiar tone.

“You’re one related to Kawamori-san, eh? You look quite alike.” Next, without waiting for an answer, he looked toward the man with the long face and said:

“I think you, ‘Clerk’ (he addressed him by his position), must have heard from Kawamori – that he wished to have his relatives put in at Iwata’s.”

Again turning to him, he said:

“Isn’t that so?”

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12 A brazier holding burning charcoal as fuel.

13 Also known as Rōkyoku. It is a genre of traditional Japanese narrative singing, usually accompanied by a shamisen.

Exactly: there was no mistake. But when he looked at that man, he felt disgusted. He, too, unusual for a farmer, had a long face. From the bald forehead to the left half of the face, remained the shining scar of a burn and the lower left eyelid, turned out red. His lips seemed as thin as paper.

The man who was addressed as “Clerk”, as if to say that’s why he was there, asked him many things, occasionally staring at him with an upward glance. And from the drawer of the office table, the clerk took out documents of Mino paper<sup>14</sup> on which was printed something in fine type, wrote down Nin’emon Hirooka (the traveller’s name) and his native place, and gave him two of them, telling him to attach his seal after reading them carefully.

Nin’emon (as we will call him henceforth, instead of the traveller) was, needless to say, illiterate, but he knew that at farms, fishing districts, and mines, one must put down his seal (however ignorant he may be of what the document says) at the end of the document, in order to earn his daily food. Searching the pocket of his *haramaki*<sup>15</sup>, he grabbed out a wad of paper. He peeled off several pieces of paper, just like paring a bamboo shoot, and a cheap seal, black with dirt, rolled out. He breathed on the seal to moisten the ink stuck thereto and stamped it down on the documents so hard that it seemed as though it would go through the paper. He put one of the documents given him in the bottom of his pocket with the seal. He was grateful that with only this performance, he could have obtained the means of his living. The baby outside was still crying.

“I’m dead broke – I’d like to borrow some money.”

When he said this, becoming suddenly desirous of having small change while thinking about the baby, the clerk stared at him hard as if surprised. – Much as this fellow looks like a harmless sort, he is a wayward tough that needs to be watched, figured the clerk. He advised him that the office never handled cash that way, that he should ask his relative, Morikawa, where he had better stay tonight anyway. Nin’emon was already sullen. He was going to leave the office without saying anything when the man who was there called

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14 Made from the paper mulberry, a plant that grows in the city of Mino, Gifu Prefecture.

15 A cloth band worn across the stomach for warmth.

him back, telling him that he will go with him. Then Nin'emon realized that he did not know where his own hut was.

“Well, ‘Clerk’, please see everything is all right. Report to the big boss as you see fit. Now, Hirooka-san, we’ll go. My, the baby cries some. Well, good night.”

He dexterously bowed and took up an old bag and hat. This man, with the lower part of his clothes tucked up and wearing a pair of second-hand boots of an artilleryman, was more like that of a grain-broker than of a tenant farmer.

When they stepped outside, the clock at the office struck six. The wind was howling fiercer. Not knowing what to do with the crying baby, the wife had been standing alone by a snow shed made of corn stalks.

Warning Nin'emon to look out as the road was in bad condition, the man, leading the way, went into a side path from the national highway.

The fields, after harvest, resembled huge swells, extending desolately into the distance. The long, slender leafless trees, planted as a wind shield, were the only thing that met one’s eye. The innumerable sparkling stars made the earth even darker. The man who acted as a guide was a tenant farmer named Kasai who, as he told Nin'emon, was also the local representative of Tenrikyo<sup>16</sup>.

They walked about seven or eight blocks, but still the baby did not stop crying. Its howling, as if from a death struggle, floated afar without echo in the wind.

After a while, Kasai stopped where the path forked into two.

“You go this way and you’ll find a hut on the left, see?”

The cold wind was blowing louder so that Nin'emon, peering over the dark level of the ground, put his hand to his ear so as not to miss the words of Kasai. Kasai repeated in detail how to get there and did not forget to add that he would help him some cash, if Nin'emon needed money, with the guarantee of Morioka. But Nin'emon had stopped listening when he picked up the whereabouts of his hut. Hunger and cold began to tell on him, and shivering, he left Kasai and walked on briskly without saying so much as good night.

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16 A Japanese “new religion” founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.