



Dear friend,

When I heard you were going to the Colonies I unearthed this out of my old pillow books; it is the one I kept during my trip to the Second City. Much of it is my usual silliness, but I hope you will find some useful information in it.

Highest Regards,

Ide Arahime

射出
荒女臣

28th day of the month of the Boar

I bow to the four corners of the world and implore Fukurokujin to guide my hand.

Finally, I begin. It is more than a bit embarrassing that I have carried all of this paper with me on the journey and have done nothing with it until now. The journey was the problem. Not the travel itself; the day I can't spend twelve hours in the saddle and then write half the night is the day I shave my head and become a nun. No, the problem was the landscape. Endless wastes of rock, followed by endless stands of encroaching forests, and not a city, town, or village to break up the monotony. I have never experienced such tedium before, though the winter court where that one artisan tried to bring the Sparrow storytelling style into fashion is a close second.

To make things worse, the caravan master, his riders, and all the guards spent the entire time looking tense and uneasy. After weeks of this I finally learned they were unhappy because we had not been attacked by bandits. Nor had a hungry wild animal so much as looked at our horses, supplies, or cargo. My suggestions for how to correct this were not received in the spirit they were offered. The Fortunes smiled upon me when they granted me a good voice, because if I hadn't later been able to entertain the camp with the story of the Hida samurai, the tanuki, and the fourteen ink sticks I don't think they would have spoken to me for the rest of the journey. I love my horse as much as the next Unicorn (so long as the next Unicorn is not a Battle Maiden), but Botan is a wretched conversationalist.

We finally arrived at Journey's End Keep this afternoon. It is hardly more than an overgrown guard post with a village attached, but it is the start of the Colonies proper and I was happy to see it. Our clan speaks boldly of turning it into a major trade center, but such things lie well into the future if they ever happen at all. I remarked to Korechika it was well we managed to arrive before the winter cold set in, and he smiled and told me this was winter cold. I was astonished. The weather has been more in keeping with early fall! But he was born here, and I have no wish to suspect another samurai of lying, even if he is a Spider. I had heard the seasons were different in the Colonies, but it is altogether peculiar to experience it oneself.

Day 3, Month of the Rat

The Second City! At last!

We approached it from the north and then swung west around the walls to enter from the south, which gave me ample time to study it from the outside. The outer edge of the city is walled, though on the south that wall becomes something of a formality at best. Korechika told me the inner part of the city marks the area of the original settlement and has a much grander wall, and he did not exaggerate... but I am getting ahead of myself.

The caravan entered the city on a street that ran straight as a bowshot south to north, while almost all the streets that intersected it ran directly east to west. It made for a smooth flow of traffic, with no tight turns, odd curves, or bottlenecks, but it is quite unnatural. If one has to have cities at all they should grow like trees, not be planned out like a piece of furniture. Regardless, the street took us to the Shinjo Stables, an impressive sprawl built up against the wall that marks the boundary of the Military District. (I think someone could have used a bit more originality when naming the parts of this city. Given the epic scale of the undertaking, a bit of poetry wouldn't have been out of place. Of course, given that the original walls were all built by Kaiu Engineers, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised.) The wall itself is quite impressive; very tall and very solid. I will never like a walled city, but I must admit I can sympathize with the decision to build this one.

The caravan officially dissolved once we reached the Stables, leaving me to fend for myself. I must have let a bit more of my bewilderment show than I should have, because Korechika approached and offered to guide me to the Unicorn embassy. I put him off at first, saying I didn't want to interfere with his own business, but he assured me he also was going into the Imperial District and it was no trouble at all. So I arranged for the boarding and care of Botan and we set off.

The guards at the gate didn't even examine our papers; they just glanced to see that we were holding documents in our hands and waved us through. Korechika didn't seem surprised at this. As we walked through (more straight streets and right angles) he pointed out various barracks and named off the legions who occupied them. The names ranged from utilitarian to outright lurid, which I confess cheered me greatly. The bright banners hanging outside each building added verve to the scene. The streets were packed with bushi of all clans going about their business, but we had no trouble making our way. Many of those who passed us noted Korechika's mon and gave us a wide berth, but he showed no sign he noticed.

The guards at the boundary between the Military District and the Imperial District (the Empress really needs to send some poets here to name her city better) were a bit more diligent in checking our papers, but in very little time we were admitted. The buildings here seem to be very tall, all of them at least three stories, and also very close together, giving the place a cramped feel. How could anyone with a claim to good breeding tolerate this? I was tempted to ask Korechika but refrained; one never knows how such questions will be received.

On the way we passed a lovely little tea house that he identified as the finest in the Imperial District. I tried to make note of its location, because if I spend much time in this city-dungeon I will need some soothing.

Korechika excused himself as we approached the Unicorn Embassy. He said he greatly enjoyed his conversations with me during the journey, and if I ever desired a guide around the city I need only leave word for him at the Dragon Embassy. I wonder at this: wouldn't it be easier to reach him at the Spider Embassy? But the Dragon are the guardians of the Spider, so perhaps they like to keep track of who the Daigotsu are paying calls on.

I entered the Embassy to discover my lord's message about my trip had not been received, no one had any idea who I was or what I was doing here, and no rooms had been prepared for me. It was all terribly awkward. Shinjo Izanagi, one of the samurai stationed there, assured me this happened all the time and there was no problem. They would be able to put me up there for the night and find me more suitable accommodations the next day. He was such a help; I must find a way to repay his kindness.

Day 4, Month of the Rat

When this journal is pulled out of the wreckage of this building, along with my crushed and broken body, let my family and lord know I died a hero to courtesy. When I was led to the place I was to stay for the remainder of my visit I discovered I was to be housed in a heaven-defying deathtrap known as the Fuan-ti Tower. Izanagi was positively cheerful as he bounded up the stairs (and stairs and stairs) that led to my suite, and he seemed so proud about having secured it for me I was completely unable to protest. "I found you rooms on the east side, Ide-san, so you will look out over the Temple District!" he said. They do indeed overlook the Temple District, and I can only hope that helps focus my mind on prayer when this thing comes collapsing down. Could I really have been so sinful in my previous life as to merit this? I must

start donating more money to the temples I visit, in order to expunge whatever it was I did from my karma.

After Izanagi left I started to supervise the unpacking of my luggage and suddenly the building started to sway! I stifled my scream and tried to sit down gracefully. “Does the building sway this way often?” I asked of the servant woman helping me.

She looked confused. “No, Ide-sama, it doesn’t sway. Well, a little bit, during the monsoons.”

“Monsoons?” I asked.

“They are a kind of storm, Ide-sama. Very big, much rain. They last for days.”

Ancestors have mercy on me.

Day 6, Month of the Rat

As I am not dead yet, I’ve been busy putting my lord’s orders into motion. Specifically, I’ve been making acquaintances and figuring out who I need to cultivate into a friend. Getting wood and curios for his newest tea house is quite an undertaking, and it will go much easier if I can find people who know the answers.

Utaku Kimiono at the embassy has proven an absolute jewel; I am so grateful for her. She has already secured me invitations for tea with several useful people, and has seconded Korechika’s taste in tea houses. She also took me to the Great Bath, which is as fine as any public bath I’ve used in Rokugan. It is so reassuring to find civilized facilities in this strange place!

Day 8, Month of the Rat

Still not dead. I finally made time to visit the tea house and found myself trapped there for several hours. I will probably go back, but need time for the memory to fade. The problem was in paying. At every other fine teahouse I have visited, the staff knew when you were ready to leave and discreetly slipped a bit of paper on your table or murmured something in your ear. But not at the Flawless Blossom. I waited and waited and no one came. I could have just left without paying, but that is so gauche. It is the kind of thing ronin characters do in stories to make sure you understand they are dishonorable scum. I was finally saved by an ornately decorated Otomo woman who approached one of the servers and loudly made a point of ‘gifting’ the teahouse with a large sum of koku. It was then I realized I had seen patrons giving the staff money all afternoon without understanding what I was seeing. My sensei would be so ashamed of me; I really need to be more observant.

After the Otomo left I estimated the cost of my tea (a really excellent leaf from the Phoenix lands), added a bit more so as to not look cheap after the Otomo, and 'gifted' the server with it. She was every bit as gracious towards me as she was to the Otomo, so I think I must have figured appropriately.

Day 9, Month of the Rat

Not dead. In the spirit of being a better observer, I accepted Korichika's invitation to visit what he claimed was the best noodle shop in the Second City. I was not surprised when he led us out of the Military District and into the Peasant District, thinking he must be taking some odd route to the Merchant District (names! - need better names!), but no, we ended up at a small shop some blocks away from the Stables. I was dubious, but refusing would have shamed Korichika and probably created an enemy, so I kept a good face on and went in.

It turned out to be a shop full of amazements. The first was the noodles, which were delicious, absolutely delicious. The cook had found some way of combining the normal flavors of a noodle broth with the local spices such that each was enhanced, and the noodles themselves were of very high quality. I slurped my bowl down rapidly and decided I would have to come back the next day for more. Korichika must have divined my thoughts, because he grinned and ordered us both another bowl.

While I was waiting for it I started to observe the other customers in the shop. This was the second amazement, because I realized they were an even mix of peasants and samurai, mostly low-ranking bushi. The casualness of the atmosphere and the ease with which they shared tables was quite shocking; at one point I even saw one of the serving women teasing a Mantis bushi about a new kimono. In Rokugan I had heard stories about the lack of propriety in the Colonies, but dwelling in the Imperial District I had seen little sign of it. What other strangeness will I find as I go out in the city's outer districts?

Day 10, Month of the Rat

I visited a geisha house today, seeking ideas for furnishing the tea house. I regret it was not the finest in the district, but I have yet to secure an invitation to the House of the Sparrow's Song. Still, the Black Lily is very fine, even compared to the geisha houses I have visited in Rokugan. It has the charming custom of requiring a flower from any would-be patrons; fortunately for me there is a small shop dealing in flowers located not too far away. I presented something the locals call a turban flower and asked for someone who was a good conversationalist.

It was a pleasant and informative afternoon. Hanako was cheerful company and when she learned I was interested in decorative items unique to the Colonies she was quite helpful. She right away pointed out the screens in her parlor, which I had noticed myself when entering. Instead of the normal paper and wood construction, they were a wooden lattice carved in an ornamental swirl of flowers and leaves. Hanako didn't know where the screens came from, but she was certain I could find someone in the Artisan District to make them for me. This reminded me once again of my complaint against the names of this city, and I shared it with Hanako. She found it very funny, and we spent the rest of the evening alternately discussing housewares and coming up with progressively more ludicrous names for places in the city. Really, it was well worth the visit.

Day 11, Month of the Rat

While hunting for a screen-maker I came across the most amazing shop. Nothing in it was exactly for sale: it simply served as a place for many different sculptors to display their works in hopes of attracting patrons. The person responsible for it, Shiba Donoka, has a real love of the art and graciously spent some time showing me around and discussing the pieces currently there. Some of them were of a very high quality, but they were all too traditional for my needs. Looking back, it strikes me as somewhat peculiar: If I were attempting to furnish a traditional tea house, I would have said the sculptures were too wild, that they contained too much of the gaijin look of the Ivory Kingdom. I think there is an important point there, but I will have to meditate on it to tease it out.

Also, I am still not dead.

Day 15, Month of the Rat

Had a productive meeting with Shinjo Shimikoto, who appears to be the best-connected of the Unicorn merchant patrons in the city. He understood precisely what I needed for the tea house and listed out the merchants he sponsored who would be able to supply me. He also pointed out the things I would be better off going directly to the artisans in the Artisan District for, as I would be able get exactly what I wanted if I communicated directly with the craftsmen themselves. I'm glad I took the time to study the aesthetics of the Second City and decide what I needed before I started to talk with merchants and their patrons. Indecision can be so costly.

Day 18, Month of the Rat

Finally found the screen-maker I was looking for, and received a horrible shock. He is a gaijin! I suppose I should have expected something from the fact his shop is in the Peasant District, but still. I was so startled when he began talking to me I had to hide behind my fan and study the screens he had on display until I recovered my composure. Never in my life have I had to speak with someone not a part of the Celestial Order. Nothing my sensei ever said prepared me for this. Well, I was taught a few basic rules for dealing with the desert Moto, but they are distant kin of the Moto who Lady Shinjo took into her heart and so they don't really count. Also, the desert Moto tend to carry very large swords with a clear intent to use them, and that sort of situation just cries out for polite behavior. Gaijin wood carvers are clearly a separate case.

For lack of a better idea I decided to treat him as a peasant, as I wanted him to make something for me. I was gratified to discover he spoke very passable Rokugani and we were soon haggling over the details. I suppose I could have gotten a cheaper deal, but in the end I just wanted to have it done and be out of his presence. He has promised to have everything completed in time for the travel season, and that is the most important thing.

Day 20, Month of the Rat

Still not dead.

I passed a Noh theater today and decided on a whim to go take in a play. With all of the merchants and money I've had to deal with this month I felt the need to cleanse myself with a little art. Jizo's Mercy Theater is run by a Crane and it is of the same nature as every other Crane-sponsored noh theater I've ever been. With all the strangeness of the city I found that very appealing.

The decor ran to the minimalist, with a heavy use of white. I appreciate what the designer was aiming for, but I think it could have been a little less heavy-handed. It is a noh theater, for Shinjo's sake, we know the plays are going to involve death! The play was well-done, however, and better still was a new one written just for this troupe. Once I am back home I will be able to score points with several Moto courtiers by relating it to them.

Day 28, Month of the Rat

Strange to think that last month on this day I was just entering Journey's End, and looking forward to arriving at the Second City. I've seen so much since then! I am still not dead yet, which is also cheering.

Also today I arranged to have teapots made for the teahouse. I had not originally planned to have teapots made, given the difficulty of shipping them, but I found a potter who was making them in the shape of a native gourd and they were too amusing to pass up. I contracted for twice what I need, to allow for breakage.

I had been planning on taking the land route back home, but with the screens and the teapots I'm seriously beginning to consider the sea route. Botan would hate that, however. Could I send them by sea and go overland myself? Without my presence I'm worried that something could go wrong. I have some months to decide, but I should not put this off.

Day 5, Month of the Tiger

Second City! O City of Marvels! After today nothing I will find in you will amaze me, for today I met a Matsu fashion plate. I am recording this here because in my aging years I am sure I will begin to doubt this memory and will need to have a permanent record of it.

I was at a flower-viewing party at the Crane Embassy examining a grotesque yet strangely compelling orchid when I realized there was a determined-looking Matsu woman heading my way. I quickly settled my spirit and fixed my best courtier's smile on in preparation. I had not heard of any recent spats between our clans, but one never knows when some bushi will take it into their head to prove their valor or some such thing. As if the normal workings of the world do not provide enough challenges!

The woman introduced herself as Matsu Sakiko and, having confirmed I had come from Rokugan this season, launched into a series of questions regarding what was fashionable in the courts when I left and what I thought the trends for the coming year would be. My sensei would be proud: I did not stand there and gape in open-mouthed astonishment. Instead I started a rambling description of the obi worn by some of the ladies in the Crane delegation at the Ide courts. This pleased her and thus began a lengthy conversation. Most of it is not worth recording in detail (fashion being a transient art) but towards the end Sakiko asked me where I was having my summer kimono

made. This confused me because, as I explained to her, I was wearing my summer kimono. She looked concerned and told me the summer season was soon to arrive, it was a very, very hot season, and I would need much lighter kimono than the one I was wearing. This sounds very ominous, I thought, but I thanked her for the information and said I would start looking for a seamstress the next day. Sakiko smiled and brightly told me this would be no problem, she would give me the name of her own seamstress who would surely be able to set me up in style.

Day 6, Month of the Tiger

Visited Sakiko's seamstress today and was treated to more of this city's sometimes amusing, but always surprising, lack of propriety.

The artisan, whose name is Midori, does her business out of a small shack located in the Merchant District. This was my first visit to that part of the city, and I found that not only were the streets a tangled mess, there were people living in tents everywhere. At last, someplace I can approve of.

I found Midori's after a great deal of searching (Sakiko's directions to 'find Tsukiko's Blessings and then travel north until you find a noodle shop; then turn around' were not as helpful as she probably intended them to be) and then I had to bang on the door repeatedly before it was opened. Midori proved to be a middle-aged peasant woman who, when I explained what I wanted, politely told me she could not help me; she had all the orders she could fill for the coming month. A peasant telling a samurai no! It is unimaginable!

When I got my wits back I told her Matsu Sakiko had recommended her to me, and Midori's whole attitude changed. "Oh, you are a friend of Sakiko-sama!" she said. "Well, I can try to do something for you, then, but I am afraid I will be a little late in delivering them. Come in and I will show you what I have."

I spent the rest of the afternoon with her looking at the sketches of her designs and examining fabric samples. Some of the designs were simply scandalous in the amount of skin they showed -- one outfit wrapped fabric around the hips and upper torso, leaving the midriff completely exposed! Midori assured me that those were not court wear, but casual things to wear around one's home in the heat. I am extremely dubious, but I ordered one anyway: no one back home will believe me about this unless I have one on hand to show them. For the rest I ordered normal kimono in the local style, with sleeves and hems cut to let air flow in and keep one cooler. The fabrics were lighter than I am accustomed to, which I find slightly distressing, but Midori clearly considered them the proper weight for summer and I am not in a position to argue with a Matsu's favorite seamstress.

In the course of my searching for Midori's shop I passed a number of other shops, shacks, and tents offering jewelry, statues, and other items from the ruined Kingdom. I am going back tomorrow to hunt for things for the tea house.

Day 7, Month of the Tiger

A productive day. My first find was a jewelry-seller with a large stock of bracelets and necklaces. The necklaces look highly uncomfortable to wear, as they consist of a large number of ornate metal plaques strung together with brightly colored beads. Worn as is they would look simply barbaric, but I had an idea: if one broke the necklace apart one could remount the plaques and beads as ornamental dangles on hairpins, thus making the tea house serving-women exotic, yet not too strange to be off-putting to the customers. My lord will be so pleased! I bought several, and then bought a bracelet for myself. It is a light, almost lacy thing: silver worked into a graceful floral motif. I considered getting an earring for Botan, but decided he would be offended by it. Horses can be such traditionalists.

After looking all day I came away with a deep admiration for the street food in the merchant district (I found a noodle place almost as good as Korechika's favorite), as well as with the necklaces, seven small statues, and four ornately carved stone bowls. I do not know what the bowls' original intended use was -- the carving goes right through the wall of the bowl in places, making it useless for holding liquids -- but they should do well as incense burners.

Day 18, Month of the Tiger

It was warm today, notably more than yesterday. Could this be the start of summer? It doesn't seem too unpleasant. My summer kimono have not yet arrived, but perhaps I will not need them.

Day 25, Month of the Tiger

I think every day has been warmer than the day before. Dreadful! I had to go to the Great Baths three times today just to be presentable in polite company. When will my kimono arrive?

Day 26, Month of the Tiger

My kimono showed up today. Not a moment too soon, as I had a meeting with Shimikoto in the evening. Now that summer has arrived everyone avoids setting appointments in the middle of the day. I support anything that will keep me out of the sun.

Day 1, Month of the Hare

Still alive, but starting to regret it.

Day 9, Month of the Hare

Summer Court is in full swing and Kimiono and Izanagi have been very busy attending to the needs of the Unicorn. I have been avoiding Court as much as possible; the heat is destroying my ability to be cool and witty, and since I am here only for a short time there is little for me to gain in the wider political game. A few courtiers have sought me out, seeking this or that bit of recent information about Rokugan. I've been helpful where I could, hoping to accumulate a few favors to make shipping everything home a little bit easier. Staying home also allows me to wear that absurd midriff-baring kimono, which is presently the coolest and most comfortable thing I own. Have sent word to Midori ordering four more.

Day 11, Month of the Hare

This morning I was watching the sun rise over the Temple District and I recalled that I need to clear the blot from my karma before I die. As it seems I am likely to die from building collapse or heat collapse any day now I really should not put this off. I have stopped at the sole temple in the Imperial District several times, but visiting the other temples in the city seemed like a sound strategy.

There is a large temple dedicated to the Seven Fortunes in the middle of the Temple District: it makes for a very dramatic view at sunrise. Lacking other ideas I decided to go there first. The walk there was very relaxing after I got out of the Military District, for the Temple District was clearly laid out to soothe the spirit of all who go there. The architecture is delightfully traditional, and the buildings have been placed so there is room for gardens between them.

Once I was in the temple I felt the distance between the Second City and home vanish. The arrangement of the interior, the dimness, the scent of the incense: I could have been in Ryoko Owari, or Toshi Ranbo, or any other great city in the Empire. Filled with a sudden peace of heart I went before the altar to make my devotions. I spent some time praying to all the Fortunes, giving extra attention to Daikoku and Ebisu. My lord has entrusted a great responsibility to me, and if I can gain Heaven's favor on my efforts so much the better.

After my prayers I sought out one of the monks and made a donation to the Temple. He smiled and bowed deeply, promising to offer prayers in thanks for my generosity. Filled with serenity at having begun to

repair my karma I decided to wander the district for a bit before going home. There are many temples and shrines here, and I may as well spread my donations around.

While I was exploring I came upon an area that looked mostly like a garden, but it had an area of hard-packed dirt in the center of it. I didn't have to wonder long what it was for, as there were two men, both stripped to the waist, using it to train. One, judging from his shaven head, rippling muscles, and glorious tattoos, was a Togashi monk of one of the more militant bents. The other was more non-descript, but from his shaven head he was also a monk, and the robe that had been tossed on to a nearby bush was of the kind I have seen the Asako family wearing.

"One offers no insult when identifying the nature of a thing," the Asako said, and launched a hard punch to the Togashi. There was a flurry of blows, and then the two backed apart. "But change is in the nature of things," the Togashi said. "Acorns become trees; children become samurai become monks." He aimed a kick at the Asako's head, igniting another round of battle. It ended with the Togashi grabbing the Asako by his leg, spinning him around, and flinging him across the area. The Asako somehow cart-wheeled into a standing position -- he moved so fast I could hardly follow his actions -- and threw himself back into combat. "Acorns do not produce mulberry trees," he said as he charged.

At that point I moved on. Their physiques were amazing, but philosophical debate has always bored me.

Day 18, Month of the Hare

It was a horrible day, and I can hardly hold back my tears as I write. First, the potter I had commissioned sent word that a vase had exploded in the kiln, ruining all of the teapots I ordered. They would begin again immediately, of course, but there is no getting around the delay. This was bad, but not crushing: I hadn't expected to get everything I needed without mishap. And then the true blow fell: a messenger from the Shinjo Stables arrived to tell me Botan was ill.

I rushed to the Stables to see him, and it was heart-wrenching. Botan did not greet me when I called his name: he just stood there in his stall, head down. He had the exhausted air of a horse being worked to death, and I angrily demanded to know what abuse they had inflicted on him. The stable-master did not take offense, but patiently explained it was the heat: it has been especially hot the last two weeks, and some horses had trouble enduring such temperatures. He promised they would do everything they could to help Botan, but unless the heat broke soon it might not be enough.

I sent one of the grooms to the Temple District with a donation to the Shines of Jizo and Jurojin to burn incense on Botan's behalf. I have cleared my schedule for tomorrow and will go myself to pray.

Day 22, Month of the Hare

Still no change in Botan's condition. The stable-master has brought in a Kuni shugenja who has shown some skill in treating horses, but he is not optimistic. Botan is not suffering from a disease or an injury, but from the heat.

As word has spread through the Unicorn Embassy I have received many messages of sympathy. Izanagi came for a visit this evening. We mostly sat in silence, but it was such a balm. I would love to talk to Kimiono, but I have not heard a word from her. I hope her duties are not overwhelming her.

Day 28, Month of the Hare

Botan is now unable to stand, and simply lies in a corner of his stall. He shows no interest in the candy I bring him. The stable-master has assigned two heimin to sprinkle water on him and keep him fanned. The grooms will not meet my eyes when they speak to me.

Day 7, Month of the Dragon

Farewell, Botan.

I pray to the Lords of Death you will be found worthy of being reborn as a samurai.

Day 20, Month of the Serpent

The Monsoon rains started today.

I will admit it was an amazing sight watching the rain clouds move across the sky, covering all the world with their shade. It is odd to think these were the first clouds I had seen since my arrival in the Colonies. With the sun hidden the heat is less intense, though it remains quite warm. Will it stay this warm, I wonder, or will we finally be blessed with cooler temperatures? And where can I find an umbrella that could possibly offer protection against this downpour?

Day 23, Month of the Serpent

Spent the day speaking with various Mantis functionaries, investigating the possibility of shipping my treasures home by sea. Entirely too much of that time was spent talking with an unpleasant man named Moshi Jiro -- he has an excellent reputation as a ship captain, but I am not sure I could tolerate being trapped on a ship with him. That his crew manages to do it speaks well for their commitment to duty! I must find someone in the Crane delegation to discuss ships with, in hopes finding a ship as reliable as Jiro's.

Day 24, Month of the Serpent

There is tea grown in the Colonies! Real tea!

I made this amazing discovery while visiting with two members of the Phoenix delegation; Isawa Yuzuki and her student, Isawa Teiko. Well, student is not exactly correct, Teiko is past her gempukku, but she clearly looks up to Yuzuki and the older woman treats her just like my sensei treated his favored students. We were at the Flawless Blossom escaping from the rainy weather and Yuzuki called for a leaf I had never heard of before. In response to my curiosity she explained it was a local tea, grown not far from the city itself. Moreover, it is one of many such teas! I had no idea -- all of this time I had simply requested this or that tea from the Empire and had never even thought to inquire if there were any other kinds of tea available.

My sensei must never, ever learn of this.

I ordered some myself and found it to be quite tasty. This was something of a relief, because I know quite well that even if it tasted like a saddle blanket had been steeped in luke-warm water my lord would insist on serving it at his tea house. I must secure a supply of it to take home, along with a means of getting new shipments in the future.

Day 29, Month of the Serpent

I have finally solved the tea problem, after days of sloshing through the Merchant Quarter trying to find someone who could sell me enough tea for my needs. Yesterday I stopped at the Tavern of the North Wind to cool my thirst with a bit of fine sake and happened to run into someone I knew slightly: Yasuki Himiko, a courtier attached to the Crab Embassy. Suddenly inspired, I explained my quest to her and inquired if she knew of a merchant who could help me. She did, naturally.

Today she arrived at my suite with two very large chests of tea -- from the two finest tea gardens in the Colonies, she claims -- and a contract for additional supplies in the coming year. I looked it over and it seemed to be quite reasonable, so I signed it. Now that the tea is taken care of I can go back to worrying about transportation.

Day 30, Month of the Serpent

It seems I was not imagining things so many months ago -- the building does indeed sway. I find this very disturbing! The rain outside has the roar of a waterfall, and the servants tell me the streets are ankle-deep in water. The things I do for duty!

Day 5, Month of the Horse

The rains moderated to a slow drizzle today, so I made my way to court for another inconclusive conversation with Moshi Jiro. The man cannot seem to understand why I want matters settled now when it will be weeks before we could sail. So infuriating!

However. As I was leaving court I was approached by a Crane, Daidoji Senshi. He introduced himself politely enough and said he had observed I was trying to arrange to ship some items home. He knew of a ship captain who was quite reliable, and would be happy to recommend him to me. There was an odd intenseness about Senshi, but I agreed to meet with the captain: I don't seem to be having much luck with the Mantis.

Later I spoke with Kimiono about Senshi, and she says he's considered a bit abrasive by the Crane delegation but honorable enough. A ship captain he recommends is likely to be reputable.

Day 8, Month of the Horse

Concluded arrangements with the Crane for shipping my teahouse treasures home. We will float them down the Shinano River on a barge and then transport them to the merchant ship for the ocean voyage, arriving at Mura Sabashii Toshi. Such a relief!

Day 10, Month of the Horse

Rain is back to falling in a dense curtain. It is less horrible than the heat of summer, but it is horrible nonetheless. I plan on going out as little as possible -- even the air is damp right now, but at least while inside I can avoid getting soaked.

Day 15, Month of the Horse

I must have been mad. I let Korechika talk me into visiting a storyteller of his clan, a woman named Daigotsu Meikuko.

Never again. Never again!

I haven't slept in three days: every time I close my eyes I'm tortured by the notion there are insects waiting to try to crawl inside my skin. I am strongly considering never speaking to Korechika again.

Day 28, Month of the Horse

I was so tired of being in my rooms I accepted an invitation from Kimiono to attend a flower-viewing party. It was a pleasant time, until I made the mistake of remarking I had seen a noh play at Jizo's Mercy and had enjoyed it. It was a mistake because a man named Bayushi Kuraku was present, and I had not realized previously how besotted with kabuki that man is. Never mind that I have seen several kabuki plays since arriving in the city; I had liked a noh play and that meant I was clearly ill-informed. Artistic fanatics are such tedious people! I had to promise to see a kabuki play at his favorite theater in order to quiet him.

Day 7, Month of the Goat

I have been inviting Korechika over for tea and go. I'm probably causing several kinds of scandal by it, but I am so bored in these rooms and his stories of exploration are quite entertaining. So long as he does not try to drag me to that horrible storyteller again!

Sadly, he's the most inept go player I have ever encountered.

Day 15, Month of the Goat

Finally became bored enough to brave the rains and visit Bayushi's Smile. It is a beautifully done building, and large enough I could forget the downpour surrounding us. Korechika went with me. We saw several plays, all well done. I still do not see why I cannot like both noh and kabuki.

Day 20, Month of the Goat

The teapots arrived and are now safely stored in the warehouse, awaiting the end of the rains.

Day 1, Month of the Monkey

Good part of the day: the wooden screens were delivered and they are just as lovely as I had hoped they would be.

Bad part of the day: Korechika professed his undying love for me and attempted to convince me to stay in the Second City with him. I was so shocked I was dumbstruck for several minutes while he rattled on about how wonderful our life would be together. Even if I didn't hate the weather for six months of the year, how could I possibly break faith with my lord?

There was no way our conversation could have ended well, and it did not.

Day 13, Month of the Monkey

I have begun wrapping up all my affairs in the city. The diviners say the rains will end a few weeks early this year, and as soon as they do I will be sailing down the river to the port, to await the journey home. I cannot bear to stay in the Second City one day more than I must.

Day 21, Month of the Monkey

Tomorrow I leave.

I am packing this journal away with my bracelet and my indecent but so comfortable kimono, not to be looked at again until I reach my home. It is painful to think of now, but perhaps a day will come in the future when I read the entries here and simply smile over the me that was then.

