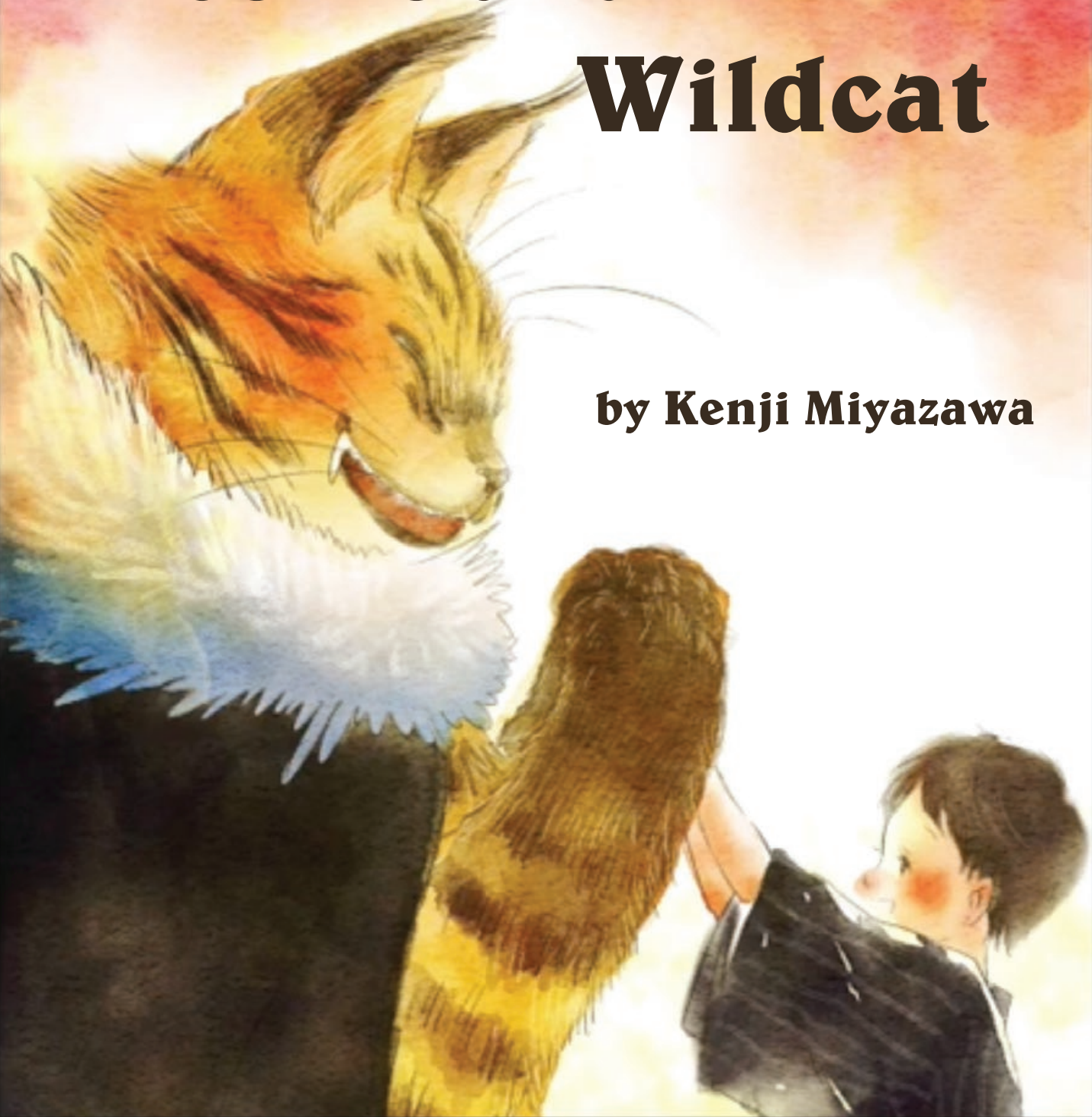


# **Acorns and Wildcat**

**by Kenji Miyazawa**





One Saturday evening, a most peculiar postcard arrived at Ichiro's house. This is what it said:

*September 19*

*Mr. Ichiro Kaneta:*

*Pleased to know as how you're well. Tomorrow I've got a difficult case to judge, so please come. Please don't bring no firearms.*

*Yours respectfully,  
Wildcat*

That was all. The writing was terrible, and the ink so blobby it almost stuck to his fingers. But Ichiro was quite delighted. He put the card in his satchel when no one was looking and took it to school, and all day long he was bouncing up and down with joy.

Even after he'd crept into bed that night, he still kept imagining Wildcat's face with its cat's grin, and the scene at



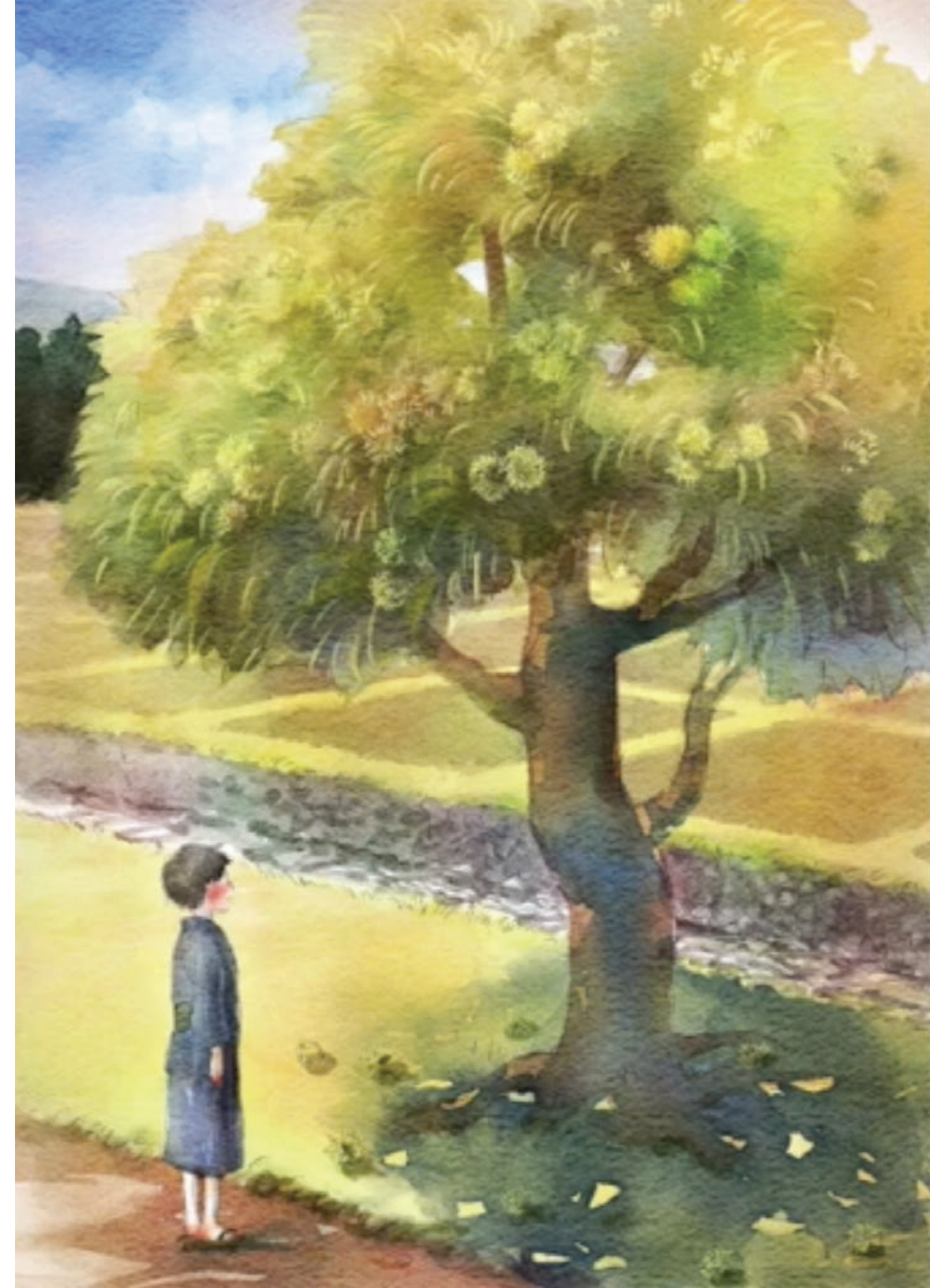
tomorrow's trial, and so many other things that he couldn't get to sleep until quite late.

When he awoke, though, it was already broad daylight. He went outside, and there were the hills lined up beneath a bright blue sky, rising as fresh and clean as though they'd just been made. He hurried through his breakfast and set off alone up the path by the stream in the valley. There was a fresh morning breeze, and at each puff the chestnut trees showered their nuts in all directions. Ichiro looked up at them.

"Hello there, Chestnut Trees," he called. "Did Wildcat pass this way?"

And the trees paused a while in their rustling and replied, "Wildcat? Yes, he rushed past in a carriage early this morning, going to the east."

"The east? That's the direction I'm heading in. How strange! At any rate, I'll keep going this way and see. Thank you, Chestnut Trees."







The chestnut trees made no answer but went on scattering their nuts around. So Ichiro went a little farther, and came to the Flute Falls. About halfway up a pure white cliff, there was a small hole through which the water spurted, whistling like a flute before dropping with a roar into the valley below. Facing the waterfall, Ichiro shouted up at it:

“Hello there, Flute Falls. Did Wildcat pass this way?”

“Wildcat?” came a high, whistly voice. “Yes, he rushed past in a carriage a while ago, going to the west.”

“The west?” said Ichiro. “That’s where my home is. How strange! Anyway, I’ll go a bit farther and see. Thank you, Waterfall.”



But the waterfall was already whistling to itself as it always did. So Ichiro went on a bit and came to a beech tree. Under the tree, a crowd of white mushrooms were playing together in a funny kind of orchestra: tiddley-tum-tum, tiddley-tum-tum. Ichiro bent down toward them.

“Hello, Mushrooms,” he said. “Did Wildcat pass this way?”

“Wildcat?” replied the mushrooms. “Yes, he rushed past in a carriage early this morning, going to the south.”

“That’s strange,” said Ichiro, in growing puzzlement. “That’s in those mountains over there. Anyway, I’ll go a bit farther and see. Thank you, Mushrooms.”

But the mushrooms were already busy again, playing their peculiar music, tiddley-tum-tum, tiddley-tum-tum. . . .







Ichiro was walking on when he noticed a squirrel hopping about in the branches of a walnut tree.

“Hey, Squirrel!” called Ichiro, waving at him to stop. “Did Wildcat pass this way?”

“Wildcat?” said the squirrel, shading his eyes with a paw as he peered down at Ichiro. “Yes, he rushed past this morning in a carriage while it was still dark, going to the south.”

“The south?” said Ichiro. “That’s strange—that’s twice I’ve been told that. Ah well, I’ll go a bit farther and see. Thank you, Squirrel.”

But the squirrel had gone. All he could see was the topmost branches of the walnut tree swaying a little, and the leaves of the neighboring beech tree flashing for a moment in the sun.



A little farther on and the path along the stream grew narrower, then disappeared altogether. There was another narrow path, however, leading up toward the dark wood to the south of the stream, so Ichiro set off up it. The branches of the trees were heavy and so close together that not the tiniest patch of blue sky was to be seen.

The path became steeper and steeper. Ichiro's face turned bright red, and sweat fell off it in great drops. But then, quite suddenly, he came out into the light. He had reached a beautiful golden meadow. The grass rustled in the breeze, and all around stood fine, olive-colored trees.







There, in the middle of the meadow, a most odd-looking little man was watching Ichiro. His back was bent, and in his hand he held a leather whip. Ichiro slowly went nearer, then stopped in astonishment. The little man was one-eyed, and his blind eye, which was white, was moving nervously all the time. His legs were very bandy, like a goat's, and—most peculiar of all—his feet were shaped like spades.

“You wouldn’t happen to know Wildcat, would you?” Ichiro asked, trying not to show his nervousness.

The little man looked at Ichiro with his one eye, and his mouth twisted in a leer.

“Mr. Wildcat will be back in just a moment,” he said. “You’ll be Ichiro, I suppose?”

Ichiro started back in astonishment.

“Yes, I’m Ichiro,” he replied. “But how did you know?”



The strange little man gave an even broader leer.

“Then you got the postcard?” he asked.

“Yes, that’s why I came,” Ichiro said.

“Badly written, wasn’t it?” asked the little man, looking gloomily down at the ground. Ichiro felt sorry for him.

“No,” he said. “It seemed very good to me.”

The man gave a little gasp of joy and blushed to the tips of his ears. He pulled his coat open at the neck to cool himself, and asked:

“Was the handwriting all right?”

Ichiro couldn’t help smiling.

“It was fine,” he said. “I doubt if even a fifth grader could write that well.”

The little man suddenly looked depressed again.

“When you say fifth grader, you mean at primary school, I suppose?” His voice was so listless and pathetic that Ichiro was alarmed.

“Oh, no,” he said hastily. “At university.”

The little man cheered up again and grinned so broadly that his face seemed to be all mouth.

“I wrote that postcard,” he shouted.

“Just who are you, then?” asked Ichiro, trying not to smile.

“I am Mr. Wildcat’s coachman!” he replied.

A sudden gust of wind rippled over the grass, and the coachman gave a deep bow. Puzzled, Ichiro turned around, and there was Wildcat, standing behind him. He wore a fine



coat of yellow brocade, and his green eyes as he stared at Ichiro were perfectly round. Ichiro barely had time to note that his ears were pointed and stuck up just like an ordinary cat's, before Wildcat gave a stiff little bow.

“Oh, good morning,” said Ichiro politely, bowing in return. “Thank you for the postcard.”

“Good morning,” said Wildcat, pulling his whiskers out stiff and sticking out his chest. “I’m pleased to see you. The fact is, a most troublesome dispute arose the day before yesterday, and I don’t quite know how to settle it, so I thought I might ask your opinion. But anyway, make yourself at home, won’t you? The acorns should be here any moment now. Really, you know, I have a lot of trouble with this trial every year.”

He took a cigarette case from inside his coat and put a cigarette in his mouth.

“Won’t you have one?” he asked, offering the case to







Ichiro.

“Oh, no thank you,” said Ichiro, startled.

“Ho-ho! Of course, you’re still too young,” said Wildcat with a lordly kind of laugh. He struck a match and, screwing up his face self-consciously, puffed out a cloud of blue smoke. His coachman, who was stiffly standing by awaiting orders, seemed to be dying for a cigarette himself, as there were big tears rolling down his face.

Just then, Ichiro heard a tiny crackling sound at his feet, like salt being tossed on a fire. He bent down in surprise to look and saw that the ground was covered with little round gold things, glinting in the grass. He looked closer and found that they were acorns—there must have been over three hundred of them—all wearing red trousers and all chattering away about something at the top of their voices.

“Here they come. Just like a lot of ants,” said Wildcat, throwing away his cigarette. Hurriedly he gave orders to the coachman.

“You there, ring the bell,” he said. “And cut the grass just here, where it’s



sunny.”

The coachman took up a big sickle at his side and swished down the grass in front of Wildcat. Immediately, the acorns came rushing out from the surrounding grass, glittering in the sun as they came, and chattering like mad.

The coachman rang his bell. Clang, clung! it went. Clang, clung! the sound echoed through the woods, and the golden acorns became a little quieter. Unnoticed by Ichiro, Wildcat had put on a long black satin gown and was now sitting there in front of them, looking important. It reminded Ichiro of pictures he had seen of crowds of tiny worshipers before a great bronze idol.

Swish, crack! swish, crack! went the coachman with his whip. The sky was blue and cloudless, and the acorns sparkled beautifully.

“Let me remind you, this is the third day this case has been going on,” Wildcat began. “Now, why don’t you call it off and

make it up with each other?”

His voice was a little nervous, but he forced himself to sound important. No sooner had he spoken, though, than the acorns set up a commotion again.

“No, that’s impossible! Whatever you say, the one with the most pointed head is best. And it’s me who’s the most pointed.”

“No, you’re wrong, the roundest one’s best. I’m the roundest!”

“It’s size, I tell you! The biggest. I’m the biggest, so I’m the best!”

“That’s nonsense! I’m much bigger. Don’t you remember the judge said so yesterday?”

“You’re all wrong! It’s the one who’s the tallest. The tallest one, I tell you!”





“No, it’s the one who’s best at pushing and shoving. That’s what settles it!”

The acorns were making such a racket that in the end you had absolutely no idea what it was all about. It was like stirring up a hornet’s nest.

“That’s enough!” Wildcat bawled. “Where do you think you are? Silence! Silence!”

Swish, crack! went the coachman’s whip, and at last the acorns were quiet.

“Let me remind you again, this is the third day this trial has been going on,” Wildcat declared, twisting his whiskers till they stood on end. “How about calling it off now and making things up?”

“No, no, it’s no good. Whatever you say, the one with the most pointed head’s best!”



“No, you’re wrong. The roundest one’s best!”

“No, he’s not, it’s the biggest!”

Chatter, chatter, chatter again, till you had no idea what was going on.

“That’s enough! Where do you think you are?” Wildcat shouted. “Silence! Silence!”

Swish, crack! went the coachman’s whip again. Wildcat twisted his whiskers till they stood straight up, then started again.

“I don’t need to remind you, this is the third day this case has been going on. Why don’t you call it off and be friends again?”

“No, no, it’s no good! The one with the most pointed head...”  
Chatter, chatter, chatter. . . .

“That’s enough!” Wildcat yelled. “Where do you think you are? Silence! Silence!”

Again the coachman’s whip went swish, crack! and again the acorns fell silent.

“You see what it’s like,” whispered Wildcat to Ichiro. “What do you think I ought to do?”

Ichiro smiled. “Well, here’s one suggestion,” he said. “Tell them that the best is the one who’s most stupid, most ridiculous, and most good-for-nothing. I heard that in a sermon, actually.”

Wildcat nodded wisely and prepared to give his verdict. Pulling open his satin gown at the neck so that the yellow brocade coat showed a little, he put on his grandest air. Then he spoke.

“Right! Be quiet now! Here is my verdict. The best of you is the one who is least important, most foolish, most ridiculous,





absolutely good-for-nothing, and completely crackbrained!”

A hush fell over the acorns, such a complete hush that you could have heard a pin drop.

Wildcat took off his black gown and, wiping the sweat from his forehead, shook Ichiro’s hand, while the coachman cracked his whip five or six times for sheer joy.

“I’m most obliged to you,” said Wildcat to Ichiro. “I must say, you’ve taken a most awkward case off my hands in not so much as a minute and a half. I do hope you’ll act as an honorary judge in my court again in the future. If ever I send you a postcard from now on, please come, won’t you? I’ll see you’re suitably rewarded every time.”

“Of course I’ll come,” said Ichiro. “But I don’t want any reward.”

“Oh, no,” objected Wildcat. “You must accept one. It’s a matter of honor for me, you see. And from now on, I’ll address the postcard to ‘Ichiro Kaneta, Esq.,’ and call this ‘The Court’ —is that all right?”

“That’s fine,” said Ichiro.

Wildcat was silent for a moment, twirling his whiskers as though there was something more he wanted to say. Then he seemed to take courage and went on:

“About the wording of the card—how would it be if I put it like this: ‘Pertaining to certain business in hand, your presence in court is formally requested?’”

Ichiro smiled. “It sounds rather funny to me, somehow. Perhaps you’d better leave that bit out.”

Wildcat gazed crestfallen at the ground, still twiddling his whiskers as though regretting that he hadn’t put it better. Finally, with a sigh, he said:

“Well, then, we’ll leave it as it stands. Oh yes—about your reward for today. Which would you prefer, a pint of gold acorns or a salted salmon head?”

“The acorns, please,” replied Ichiro.

Wildcat turned straight to his coachman, as if relieved that it hadn’t been the salmon head.

“Get a pint of gold acorns,” he said, speaking fast. “If there aren’t enough, you can put in some gold-plated ones. And be quick about it!”

The coachman began to scoop the acorns into a square wooden measure. When he had finished, he shouted: “One pint exactly.”

Wildcat’s brocade coat flapped in the breeze. He stretched, closed his eyes, and smothered a yawn. “Right!” he said. “Now hurry up and get the coach ready.”



A carriage made of a great white mushroom appeared, drawn by a horse of a most peculiar shape and gray in color— just like a rat, in fact. Wildcat turned to Ichiro.

“And now we’ll see you home,” he said.

They got into the carriage, the coachman put the measure full of acorns in beside them, and—swish, crack! —off they went. The meadow was left behind, and trees and bushes swayed by in a bluish haze. Ichiro’s eyes were fixed on his gold acorns, while Wildcat was gazing quite innocently into the distance.







But as the carriage journeyed on, the acorns lost their glitter, and when—in no time, it seemed—the carriage came to a halt, they were just the plain, ordinary, brown kind.

Wildcat's yellow brocade coat, and the coachman, and the mushroom carriage—all had vanished together, and Ichiro was left standing in front of his own home, the measure of acorns in his hand.



From that time on, there were no more postcards signed “Yours respectfully, Wildcat.”

Ichiro sometimes wonders about it. Perhaps he ought to have let Wildcat write “your presence is formally requested,” after all?

