Mr. Kurosawa who

It was three days later when Mr. Kurosawa called me to his home.

I sat at the table in his spacious drawing room, opened a notebook, and faced him.

Mr. Kurosawa was writing in pencil on pieces of *warabanshi*, straw half-sheets, that he'd cut again in half. Whenever he wrote screenplays, Mr. Kurosawa didn't use manuscript paper but these pieces of *waraban-shi* cut in half, on which he fit ten rows of twenty characters each, for a total of 200 characters per page. In my case, the lines bent and characters stuck out of their frames even when I wrote on manuscript paper, but

Mr. Kurosawa always wrote ten neat lines of twenty characters each even on blank sheets with no boxes. Perhaps when he was learning to write screenplays he couldn't afford manuscript paper and used *warabanshi*, which became a habit... No, originally, he was an artist accustomed to facing a canvas, so maybe blank paper allowed his thoughts to flow free and unlimited. After all, a screenplay is also a picture written in words.

Mr. Kurosawa finished writing the characters one by one in the middle of a page using a 3B pencil.

A man with only seventy-five days left to live.

He turned the sheet around and pushed it towards me. Just to be sure, I picked it up and read it one more time.

A man with only seventy-five days left to live.

"Got that? That's the theme."

I nodded.

"Make sure not to deviate from that theme."

I nodded, still silent.

"He can be any profession."

"Any profession?"

"Yes, he can be a minister of state, he can be a beggar, a gangster, a thief—anything is fine."

I thought for a moment. "A *yakuza* would be interesting, but no. You already have *Drunken Angel*."

Mr. Kurosawa smiled wryly. "That's true, not a *yakuza*. Anything else will do... In any case, decide his profession. Then a simple story, simple is fine. No longer than two or three of these sheets."

Mr. Kurosawa added a couple more things. The story should be a general framework. Since we didn't know how it would play out in the scenario, detailed writing was pointless. As for the theme, it often comprised the whole story or indicated the bulk of it. I didn't need to separate theme and story and instead might approach them in tandem.

"Which is to say, themes shouldn't be abstruse, you ought to be able to make out their form and see them clearly... Their characteristic is that they can be put into just a few words, and if it takes more, you're not expressing but explaining. So, in my works, I've set themes that can be stated in a single breath, and I intend to keep it that way."

It was as though he were making a proclamation. But what he was saying firmly retraced Mr. Itami's demonstration of how a theme should be established in *The Rickshaw Man*. Perhaps it was Mr. Kurosawa who most faithfully and pointedly confirmed Mr. Itami's teachings.

I took up my notebook, lifted my face, and looked at Mr. Kurosawa. "The theme is a man who has only seventy-five days left to live... First I decide his profession...and then a simple story, yes?"

I began work on the second floor of the Nishimura residence.

The profession of the man with only seventy-five days left to live was decided rather easily. To start off, I borrowed thick phonebooks from the Nishimuras and picked out and jotted down doable professions, but this was a terribly inefficient way to work akin to searching for a diamond in the sand.

Yet as I kept it up, a dim outline of the man would appear and disappear, and with each cycle, little by little, his silhouette grew more vivid. His death is his greatest drama, so his day-to-day life, his past months and years, and any future he envisions must be as undramatic as possible, with minimal emotional ups and downs and behavioral swerves; everything is cut and dried, and put in the extreme completely robotic, and the more evidently bland his life, the more jarring his impending death. This limited his profession to a fairly narrow range.

Lay that over a concise story that supported the theme...the story of a man who, having done nothing with his life, accomplishes just one mission before he dies—a civil servant, for example—and actually, his profession arises simply and clearly.

The man who has only seventy-five days left to live isn't a minister of state or an entrepreneur, not a scientist or engineer, not an artist or a company man, nor a criminal like a thief or murderer, but a civil servant—he could be nothing but a bureaucrat at a government office.

Other modest ideas occurred to me. The story of an aging itinerant *shamisen* guitar player, part of a troupe of raconteurs and performers of traditional songs. Neither very good nor very bad, come rain or shine he always bellows out the same song, "Murder at Yoshiwara." But one day, he delivers a superlative performance of "Murder at Yoshiwara" that astounds not only the audience but the rest of his troupe. Then he returns backstage and drops dead. One of his colleagues investigates and discovers that a doctor had told the man that he was dying of leukemia and had only a short time to live. The pathos of an itinerant *shamisen* player—just the kind of thing I liked... A tale about an artisan, like a maker of mannequins or an Ise woodblock artist, could be interesting as well. From a

death coming in seventy-five days you could draw a line to any profession. But these were just off-stage possibilities so I left it at that and started putting together the story of the government office worker, my best bet. As Mr. Kurosawa had directed, I kept it as simple as possible.

> A local government office worker finds out he has stomach cancer and doesn't have long to live. He tries depending on the love of his family, tries living loose with women and sake. But they do nothing for him. One day, back at work after going absent without leave for days out of despair, he sees a document sitting on his desk at the office. It's a residents' petition for work on an underground drainage system, an item he passed on to the civil engineering section half a year ago that has arrived back on his desk after making a round of more than ten sections. Out of habit he's ready to send it over to the civil engineering section—but stops himself and undertakes an examination of the site. Then he immerses himself in the task of removing the swamp created by leaking water and builds a modest little park in its place—before going on to die.
>
> He has worked at the government office for thirty years. For the most part though, his existence is like a mummy's, neither alive nor dead; he only lives in the true sense of the word during those six months, from when construction begins on the culvert to divert water from the swamp until the completion of the park.
>
> (385 characters—under two pages of half-sheet paper)

The sky was leaden, the wind strong.

But Tokyo had no mountains, and I couldn't tell which direction the wind was coming from. The radio had forecast a winter blast the night before, but from the way the trees in the garden were bending, it wasn't a true north wind but more like a northwester that oddly seeped into my body.

In my hometown, this was the season when the gaminess faded from wild boar and their meat turned fatty, but that day I was grateful for beef sukiyaki. I'd be having some with Mr. Kurosawa and Mr. Oguni. This was the meeting before we brought in the producer, and since it was troublesome and annoying to have to go to Shibuya or the center of the city, we decided on the conveniently-located Nishimura residence. The sukiyaki was scheduled for six p.m., but we were getting together at three…the first meeting for the coming film.

"Today we carve out the characters," Mr. Oguni cut to the chase when we saw one another in the Nishimuras' drawing room. He had already been informed of the planned theme and story by Mr. Kurosawa, so today was character design—carving out the characters.

"Oguni… First, read this, would you?"

Mr. Kurosawa took *warabanshi* half-sheets out of an envelope and handed them to Mr. Oguni, who started reading and chuckling. "This is good, this is good… A government office is just like this," he said and passed the manuscript on to me.

Taking it, I saw that Mr. Kurosawa had penned a script-like memo on the bit about the petition making the rounds, which he seemed to like in my story.

> City Hall, the Public Affairs Section window.
>
> Housewives have arrived to petition about the clogged drain.
>
> "Thanks to the water I got this weird rash." "On top of that, it stinks and there are lots of mosquitos." "Isn't there anything you can do about it?"
>
> The person at the window explains the gist of the petition to the section manager.
>
> The protagonist of the story, the section manager, states without feeling: "Civil Engineering Section…"
>
> Civil Engineering Section: "This issue is the responsibility of the local Public Health Center."
>
> Local Public Health Center: "Ah, that goes to the Sanitation Section."
>
> Sanitation Section: "The Disease Control Section… That's number 12."
>
> Disease Control Section: "Please see the Epidemic Subsection."
>
> Epidemic Subsection: "Um, a lot of mosquitos? That's a job for the Pest Control Subsection."
>
> Pest Control Subsection: "All we can do is spray DDT. Anything to do with waste water is the jurisdiction of Sewage Section, City Hall…"
>
> From there, they're passed on to the Sewage Section, the Road Maintenance Section, the City Planning Department, the Town Planning Section, the local fire department, the Education Section, the house of a city councilman, and finally the office of the Deputy Mayor.

Deputy Mayor: "Please, please, come in… We're grateful for your frank complaints and ideas, and that's why we've established a Public Affairs Section to serve as a window… You, show these ladies to the Public Affairs Section right away…"

At the initial Public Affairs Section, the person at the window and the housewives.

"For this kind of problem, please go to the Civil Engineering Section. Window number 8."

One of the housewives starts yelling, "What are you talking about, stop treating us like idiots!"

In simple summer clothes the first time they were here, the housewives are now dressed in thick midwinter attire.

"Enough. We won't be asking you people anymore. Wherever we go, you treat us like fools—and you speak of democracy!"

The subsection chief comes rushing from the back to whisper in the ear of the clerk at the window.

"Oh, uh… I'm afraid the section manager is off today, but if you could submit your petition in the shape of a form…"

The housewives look at the clerk dubiously, crane their necks, and espy an empty desk set apart from the others in the section.

On the desk from which the protagonist is missing is a triangular sign: "Public Affairs Section Manager."

The hero has taken today off for a doctor's exam—and is told he has stomach cancer.

When I finished reading, I began giggling. It was paced well and could be used as-is.

"May I keep this to use in the first draft?"

"Sure. I have it down in my notebook. Well then, shall we begin?"

Character design started with naming. None of the dozen I'd prepared and listed out seemed to serve, but after batting it around for an hour, considering all the pros and cons, we settled on Kanji Watanabe… The hero of our film was Kanji Watanabe.

"Hashimoto, where was this man born?" asked Mr. Oguni.

"In downtown Tokyo. His family owns a metalworks in the vicinity of Edagawa in Koto Ward…a small enterprise that passes down to his older brother. After graduating from the old system's middle school, our man becomes a civil servant, at age nineteen."

"From his parents' point of view," Mr. Kurosawa confirmed, "the older brother is set since he'll continue the family business, but the younger brother needs security…and so they support him through middle school though it's a strain on their budget."

"Yes, that's it."

"Common sense would have him working at the Koto Ward Office," Mr. Oguni pointed out.

"No, to avoid model issues, we won't identify his workplace. If it's a ward office, we're narrowed down to Tokyo, Osaka, and such, but if it's a city hall, it could be Chiba or Urawa if we're talking Kanto, Amagasaki or Nishinomiya if we're talking Kansai… But we wouldn't clarify which city. A city hall in a city of a certain size you'd find somewhere…anywhere in Japan."

The hero, Kanji Watanabe, public affairs section manager at some Japanese city's city hall, is 52 or 53 years old and the recipient of a local governance commendation for three decades of service.

"At work," Mr. Oguni wanted to know, "is he the hungry sort who tries to climb the ladder to get ahead, a wishy-washy layabout, or a typical bureaucrat who handles his responsibilities well enough but doesn't concern himself with anything else?"

"He's the third, a typical bureaucrat."

"He would have married at age 25 or 26, but was it for love? Or was it an arranged marriage?"

"Arranged. His wife is a diminutive, taciturn woman with a scrofulous feel, and I haven't decided yet how many children he has."

Mr. Kurosawa spoke. "The fewer the… One is fine. His wife died early, he has one son…and raised him as a single father. Now his son is grown and married, and they all live together under the same roof, but they're a self-involved young couple and treat him as coldly as they would a stranger…no, worse than a stranger."

"So then, does the son's wife cook the meals and do housework?"

"No, not the wife. But there's no way Kanji Watanabe can cook. A maid or a housekeeper prepares the meals, does the laundry, and so on, and they keep separate households."

The vague contours of Kanji Watanabe's character were coming into view.

I made note of these bits of conversation, then looked over the memos I had made beforehand.

"This is backtracking, but Kanji Watanabe has a medium build and doesn't wear glasses."

"No glasses?"

"No. He only wears reading glasses when he looks over documents." I added more to this. He wasn't one to go drinking with his subordinates at stalls after work or to frequent a pub. He could drink when the occasion called for it but didn't spend his own money on alcohol. Naturally, he didn't smoke.

"So then, this public affairs section..." followed up Mr. Oguni. "Aside from Kanji Watanabe, the subsection chief, and the clerk at the counter, we need two or three other roles there."

"Yeah, and we want one who stands out."

I repeated after Mr. Kurosawa, "Stands out?"

"For example, a young woman...who says what she wants to say, does as she pleases, and wants to quit this job because she's tired of it. One such person, and various things will be easier to deal with."

The three of us fell into silence as our conversation tapered off. Then Mr. Kurosawa muttered, "The main character has started to solidify...but I'd like one or two more things that would be decisive."

Mr. Oguni clicked his dentures, then mumbled, "When Kanji Watanabe goes to sleep at night...he carefully lays his suit trousers under the futon to press them while he sleeps, as he's been doing every night for thirty years."

Both Mr. Kurosawa and I held our breath.

"And...he always has an *udon* noodle soup for lunch. First taking the time to slurp the noodles, when he's done he takes the bowl like this (he held an imaginary one in both hands and rotated it slowly), lifts it up, and drinks the soup. Then he turns the bowl again and drinks the soup, repeating this two or three times...but doesn't drink it all down and looks closely at the remaining soup and puts down the bowl... That's Kanji Watanabe lunching, how he eats *udon*."

Mr. Kurosawa and I could not but exchange a glance. Kanji Watanabe had become quite three-dimensional. He was also showing signs of squirming around, and the work itself quickened like a baby in the womb. Such was Hideo Oguni, the possessor of a vast, nearly limitless array of drawers (dramatic essences).

Sengokuhara in Hakone was desolate in midwinter.

The stock of frosted and withered silver grass covered the foothills of Mount Kintoki to the north and Nagao Pass to the west, and the chill creeping under my collar intensified, filling every nook of my body with a penetrating cold that made me shiver.

Senkyoro in Sengokuhara was a large *onsen* hot springs inn, but as it was right after New Year's the place had few guests and felt quiet. Mr. Kurosawa and I arrived there at the beginning of January in 1952.

We had decided the theme, story, and characters, so I had begun writing the first draft at the Nishimuras' home in Soshigaya. When I was stuck or had too many ideas, I went to my old office in Okachimachi and continued writing there. My concentration was deep in the deafening silence of the Nishimura residence, but when I felt down the stagnation was like a bottomless bog. In my case, clamorous surroundings tended to quell any nervousness and to speed up my writing, and I completed the first draft shuttling back and forth between the Nishimuras' in Soshigaya and my old company branch office—and in order to turn it into the final draft, I checked into Senkyoro at Hakone's Sengokuhara with Mr. Kurosawa. Due to other commitments, Mr. Oguni would arrive a little later.

The two of us began working, and Mr. Oguni arrived on the evening of the fourth day.

"This place is really cold. I mean, look—it's become a plank." Mr. Oguni had immediately tried the *onsen* upon arriving at the inn, but while he was walking down the long, unheated corridor back to the room, his towel had frozen stiff as a board.

As Mr. Oguni smoked a cigarette, Mr. Kurosawa wordlessly passed him what we had finished. Mr. Oguni stubbed out his cigarette, took a breath, and began reading, but when he was finished he tilted his head slightly.

"Kurosawa... This is a little off."

Mr. Kurosawa raised his face, and I also looked directly over at Mr. Oguni.

"This won't do."

"What won't do?!"

I looked at Mr. Kurosawa in shock. His face was stiff and livid with anger.

"Oguni! What won't do?!" His voice brimmed with a terrible ire bordering on the murderous.

Mr. Oguni began mumbling some words. Wanting very much not to get caught up in trouble, I began to concentrate on the manuscript I was working on. Since there was no room for me to intervene, and perhaps because I had shut my ears instinctively, I couldn't hear Mr. Oguni's voice well. Mr. Kurosawa was silent now, but I could picture his frightening expression.

Suddenly he yelled, "If you're right, Kanji Watanabe will die halfway through!"

"Can't he just die?"

"What?!"

"It's not like we couldn't write the rest if Kanji Watanabe died."

Mr. Kurosawa fell silent, and Mr. Oguni started mumbling some more. He droned on, with Mr. Kurosawa not saying a word.

In the end, Mr. Kurosawa spat out, "Fine, Oguni!"

I looked up reflexively, startled.

Mr. Kurosawa's face was going from livid to angry red. Reaching out to grab the manuscript that Mr. Oguni was returning to him, he tore it up and said, "It's all because you didn't come as promised!"

In my mind, I gasped. It wasn't yet fifty pages. Still, it was a good thirty or forty, pages we'd eked out considering this and that, and now they were clean gone, and we would be beginning from scratch the next day.

I stole another glance at Mr. Kurosawa and Mr. Oguni. Mr. Kurosawa's face was utterly crimson with rage, his expression that of a richly painted red demon. Mr. Oguni, however, didn't flinch, nor did he look appalled. Regally calm, unwilling to yield an inch over his assertions, he lit another cigarette.

My gaze dropped to the manuscript I was writing. I felt gloomy about the work ahead of us. There was no telling, anything could happen.

The next morning, our work as a trio began.

It was just the same as when it had been the two of us. We got up at around half past seven, warmed up in the onsen, and had breakfast, then turned to our work by ten. At noon, we straightened up the pieces of paper, put them off to the side, and had *udon* or *soba* noodles; Mr. Oguni would then smoke a cigarette while Mr. Kurosawa and I went straight back to work. We finished shortly before five and, having wrapped up seven hours of hard work, we'd bathe and have dinner. Mr. Kurosawa and Mr. Oguni, both heavy drinkers, chatted over whiskey cut with water about everything but work. Our bedtime was pretty much fixed at ten… In such a manner we passed the days as if punching a time clock.

We worked around a large table in the center of the tatami room. Mr. Kurosawa didn't sit with his back to the *tokonoma* alcove but rather on the right side of the table, facing south, toward the garden. I sat at the same table to the left of Mr. Kurosawa, facing the alcove. Mr. Oguni, who'd arrived later, dragged out a small low desk from the corner of the room. Facing south from in front of the alcove, with his back to Mr. Kurosawa, he perused a thick English book.

I filled manuscript paper without uttering a word. Mr. Kurosawa, also mute, wrote away on his *warabanshi* half-sheets. Meanwhile, not putting down a single character, Mr. Oguni continued to read his English book. The manuscript circulated counterclockwise, me using my right hand to pass my work to Mr. Kurosawa. He would look it over and simply pass it back, or fix something, or redo it himself…and when a scene or two were done, he pushed it over to Mr. Oguni with his right hand.

Mr. Oguni would pick it up without a word and read. If he said, "Nice," it traveled back clockwise with him pushing it back over the table with his left hand. Mr. Kurosawa would take it silently and clip together the thickening manuscript, the final draft growing without incident. There were some days when we only progressed five or six pages, but also days when twenty or thirty pages flew by, and as long as nothing disrupted our pace of working seven hours a day, we could count on adding to the manuscript by a dozen, perhaps fifteen pages per day. Thus were Kanji Watanabe's fateful days spelled out, his death drawing closer by the minute.

Told by his doctor that he has cancer, Kanji Watanabe loses his bearings and tries to lean on his only son. But the only thing he and his son share now are memories of the past… His married son is like a complete stranger now.

With no one to turn to, Kanji Watanabe withdraws all his money from the bank. Trying to flee fear and loneliness, and with a shady man he meets at a rundown bar as his guide, he grasps at pleasure like straw, in a world of karaoke, beer halls, cafés, cabarets, strip clubs, and blue and red lights… But such joys neither intoxicate nor uplift him, and eventually the pain of vomiting up the contents of his stomach turns his hayride into a transmigration through infinite hell—yet something like salvation visits Kanji Watanabe unexpectedly.

One of the office workers in the Public Affairs Section, Toyo Odagiri, goes to see Kanji Watanabe, who's been absent from work, at his home, in order to get his stamp on her letter of resignation. When creating the characters we had planned for an oddball, and a young woman who says what she wants and does as she wishes brings unusual color and cheer to the darkening screen.

The two of them leave the house and converse at a coffeeshop, a sweet bean soup shop, a park, a movie theater, an eatery… and Kanji Watanabe comes to life. It's not a December romance,

it's just fun being with Toyo Odagiri.

One day, Kanji Watanabe visits a small toy factory in town where Toyo Odagiri has gone to work after leaving city hall. But she tells him to stop following her around and refuses to go out with him, making a present of a mechanical toy rabbit she's made herself at the factory.

Holding the toy rabbit in his hand, Kanji Watanabe futilely pleads, "You live your life to the fullest, the way you like. I want to be like you, even if just for one day... Tell me what I should do."

"I just work, eat, and sleep, that's all... You should just up and quit that place too, manager, and go work someplace more worthwhile."

"No, no, it's too late for that."

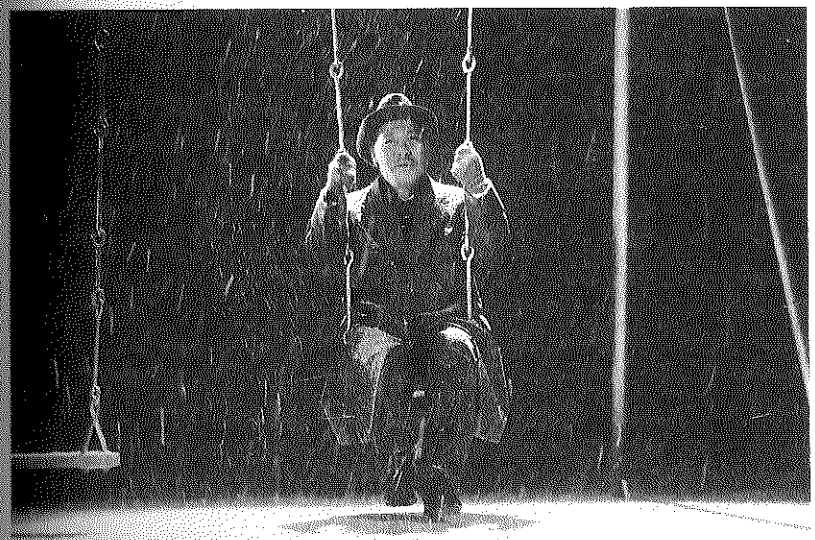
Embracing the mechanical toy rabbit hard enough to break it, Kanji Watanabe says, "There's only that place, that place for me... No, even there...if, if I had the will...if only I had the will..."

Kanji Watanabe returns to work for the first time in days and sits in the section manager's chair amidst surreptitious, curious gazes. On his desk is a hefty pile of unprocessed documents. On the very top is the petition from the housewives that got shunted around, with a note saying that it should be handled by the civil engineering section. The window clerk, the chief, and the subsection chief have all affixed their seals to it. As is his habit, Kanji Watanabe starts to put his seal on it as well. But he stops. Then, as everyone watches with bated breath, he reads over the petition one more time, removes the note, and tears it up, and tells the subsection chief, "We're going to survey...survey the site regarding this case. Please prepare a car!"

Everyone is frozen in place, with some even gaping.

Five months later—Kanji Watanabe has died, and there's a black-beribboned photograph of him smiling gently at the wake.

The attendees huddle together in small circles, all telling various stories about Kanji Watanabe, who responded to a citizen petition and conducted a city project to reclaim swampland created by water runoff and had a small park built in its place. Kanji Watanabe had coughed up blood and died at the small park they'd just completed.



Kanji Watanabe (Takashi Shimura) in *Ikiru*'s last scene

If the story proceeded in the present tense with him still alive, it ran the risk of being a stinky series of inspirational vignettes, but since it's all posthumous, his passion, his extraordinary acts, and the drama of overcoming obstacles and difficulties are all effectively brought to life. Yet, no one knows the true impetus behind Kanji Watanabe's transformation.

Just before the wake ends, a young police officer appears and says he'd like to offer some incense. He is the officer who witnessed Kanji Watanabe just before his death.

Having overcome various obstacles and difficulties, Kanji Watanabe sits gently swaying on a swing, late at night as light snow falls, in the small park you could say he built. He is singing.

Life is short, love away young maid

After burning incense, the officer tells the hushed crowd, "I saw him during last night's patrol. At first I thought he was drunk, and I approached him to take him into custody... But he seemed to be singing so happily, no, all too poignantly, as if the lyrics were seeping into his heart, that I let him be... If only I had

just gone ahead and taken him into custody."

Mr. Kurosawa and I had written a scene cutting back from the police officer's lines to the park at night where Kanji Watanabe sat on the swing, singing.

Life is short, love away young maid...

For this I was merely transcribing what Mr. Kurosawa had muttered, as if to himself, so I had no idea how the lyrics went after that.

"Hashimoto, how does the rest of the song go?"

"How would I know? It must be a love song from before I was born."

Mr. Kurosawa asked Mr. Oguni, who was reading his English book, "Hey, Oguni. What comes after 'Life is short, love away young maid'?"

"Um, what was it, uhm... Uhm, it's right on the tip of my tongue."

I immediately called reception on the phone and asked for the oldest maid working at the inn to be sent up, assuring them that, yes, we wanted the oldest.

After a few minutes, a voice at the sliding door excused herself, and in came a maid. She was small and older, but she didn't seem that old.

"I'm the oldest, what can I do for you?"

I cut to the chase. "Do you know the song that goes, 'Life is short'?"

"Oh, the Gondola Song."

"Gondola, that's what it's called? Do you happen to remember the lyrics?"

"Hmm, I wonder. Maybe the first verse, if I may sing it..."

"Then sing it please."

The inn maid sat on her knees on the tatami by the entrance. Tightening her fists and placing them on her lap, she took a breath. Mr. Kurosawa and Mr. Oguni leaned forward. I swallowed and held my breath. She began singing, low, not too loud. Her voice was fine and clear, the sentiment somehow heartfelt.

Life is short, love away young maid
Before the red of your lips fades
Before your hot blood cools
As though there's no tomorrow...

We called it in early that day, at three.

Ever since secluding ourselves at the beginning of January, we had

faced the table whether it was Sunday or a holiday, and now it was already the third of February, the end of winter according to the old calendar... The work already had fleshed-out features, we had crossed the mountain and were feeling a little relieved, and so we quit work early. According to the inn maid who had sung "The Gondola Song" (lyrics: Isamu Yoshii, music: Shimpei Nakayama), the staff would be coming by every room before dinner to throw uncooked red beans as was the custom for the old calendar day.

I bathed and returned to our room, but it was still early so I ventured out into the garden.

This was the first time I'd been in the garden since our arrival, and the view from there was expansive. The ridge from Nagao Pass in the west to Mount Kintoki to the north was black against the light, while Myojingatake and Myojogatake in the east connected bumpily in the bright setting sun. Before them the stretch of withered silver grass undulated in the light like white waves, yet the deep cold that permeated my skin had a hint of spring beneath it.

Spring, already... It gave me a kind of relief. When Mr. Oguni had come and clashed with Mr. Kurosawa, I had felt boundless unease about the future of this particular job, but after that nothing happened, the going was smooth, and we'd be finished in a day or two.

But this was thanks to having laid out the basic theme, story, and characterization beforehand in a precise manner. If we'd been vague on those points, the work could have come apart; it was a lesson in how crucial indeed the basics were.

The most important thing in film production is the screenplay, and for the screenplay the most important things in turn are first, theme, second, story, and third, characterization (and composition). While that has been the standard view from the earliest days of cinema, just as neither the film industry nor the one surrounding it has handled and treated the screenplay as being of paramount importance to a film, not many screenplays are written with the three basic tenets so precisely laid out.

If the majority of screenplays satisfied these basic tenets, then both films and TV dramas would be much more interesting and of a higher quality than they are now.

For the screenplay writer, the scenarist, these three basic tenets are a hard slog, almost physiologically so.

When Mr. Itami was reading my screenplays, if I was slapdash about those three elements he would flare up and relentlessly bellow that I tighten the theme, shorten and shape up the story, and carve out the characters

to the best of my abilities. I understood how important it was, but when the time came to write I would cut corners again and have a hard time getting the basics in order. This was the first time I had done it all properly, but only because Mr. Kurosawa had forced me to on every point.

Mr. Kurosawa's script-craft involved meticulously, almost mulishly compiling all of the three basics one by one and, just to be certain, wielding a hammer "to tap a stone bridge before crossing it" as the Japanese saying goes—as upright as it gets, some teetotaler clad in the armor of God. If such straight-laced meticulousness is to be called rational, then when it came to making that most important thing for a film called the screenplay, Akira Kurosawa was utterly rational.

Not just that. Something prior to… Yes…yes, that's it!

He was arrogant, selfish, and unilateral, a man who arbitrarily decided where I would live.

But his attitude towards me as a screenplay writer he worked with was completely different. I was a writer he had discovered, and if he had wanted Hideo Oguni to participate, he could just have informed me at our meeting. Instead, he had gone out of his way to visit my lodging and secure my consent in advance.

Likewise, when he introduced Mr. Hideo Oguni and me, he could have summoned us both to his home or made me visit Mr. Oguni's home together with him, but he instead brought Mr. Oguni to me to introduce us.

I was the lead runner and vanguard for this work, and the quality of the first draft would greatly influence the final draft. He treated his main writer with all possible etiquette and allowance… If, prior to my starting on the screenplay, there was anything he should do as the person in charge, then he saw to all the particulars without even the least omission.

Akira Kurosawa's script-craft—as with *Rashomon*, in order to seize a flash of inspiration he could jettison everything and make a dizzying leap for it, but the underlying essence, as with this time around, was straight-laced and meticulous advance preparation, an almost mulishly thoroughgoing rationalism—or rather, something surpassing rationalism that might better be termed perfectionism.

When I stepped up from the garden and entered the room, I found Mr. Kurosawa not in his usual spot but with his back to the alcove, facing the table, writing on manuscript paper. Not on a *warabanshi* half-sheet but on the framed manuscript sheet I'd been using. Since there was an edict in effect against jotting down a single character after bath time, I

eyed him wondering what he was up to. Mr. Kurosawa took the clip off the final draft bundle and replaced the title sheet with the manuscript paper he'd just written on.

"Hashimoto… I did this for the title, but what do you think?"

I took it and read:

Ikiru [To Live]

Not a bad feel—but it seemed a bit stylish. It put on airs. This story was a little crude. I had also become quite accustomed, and attached, to the title since the first draft, *The Life of Kanji Watanabe*. I couldn't come to a quick decision.

"Mr. Oguni…"

Having taken his bath, Mr. Oguni had his English book open as always, but when I scooted over he looked up from his book and turned his gaze to me.

"Mr. Kurosawa says he'd like to do this for the title, but what do you think?"

Mr. Hideo Oguni, who had not written a single word for the script but was the work's command tower and navigator, took the final draft and beheld the title sheet. After just a glance he said, "Ah, Hashimoto… This one, this is good, better than *The Life of Kanji Watanabe*. The title of this script is *Ikiru*, okay, *Ikiru*."

The screenplay *Ikiru* was finished two days later on February 5, 1952.

The film *Ikiru* was completed in October 1952, and it took the Special Prize at the Berlin Film Festival (1953), the International Film Education Culture Association gold medal, and the Golden Laurel Award (America, 1961).

When I speak with various overseas film directors and producers at international film festivals and the like, they often show more interest in *Ikiru* than *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai* and ask me insistently about the motivation and process behind the screenplay. Perhaps this work has an unusual number of fans amongst film professionals.