I was so unexpectedly rendered alone that I suddenly felt utterly desolate. Shichi and Nakahata had disappeared, I thought, in accordance with a premeditated plan, having waited for my turn to go in search of food in the jungle. ‘I shall never give up’; I determined in my mind to survive on my own and to wait for Japanese reinforcements.

Day after day, I quietly survived on my own, searching for food while taking care not to be spotted by the enemy.

A week after their disappearance, on new year’s day 1949, Shichi and Nakahata kept their promise and visited me with special food. They brought me a substitute for a traditional Japanese recipe to celebrate the new year: mochi (rice cake) soup. They had made a square mochi cake from jungle potatoes and cycad powder. They made a fire in the nearby foxtail grasses to warm the soup and placed two red river shrimps and some green leaves of water potatoes on the mochi cake to serve me. They brought with them for themselves some jungle potatoes and bananas boiled in stock made from toads.

I had harboured resentment against them since they had deserted and left me alone. However, they visited me to treat me to special food in order to celebrate the new year together. My arms trembled as I received the cup of mochi soup from them. ‘After all, they are fellow compatriots!’ I was so delighted that I was almost crying. At
the same time, I was ashamed of myself for having resented them.

Shichi and Nakahata were reluctant to tell me their whereabouts. In the end, however, when they were about to leave, they agreed to me following them to their new dwelling. We proceeded in the dark using a cord wick as a substitute for a torch. Their dwelling was about a mile north from my hut across a hill. It was a mere thatched tent on a river bank. When I laid my legs out straight to sleep, my feet extended out, over the river.

They had easy access to a banana farm, jungle potatoes and palm trees. I warned them of the risk that the enemy was likely to be particularly vigilant around such a locality. However, Shichi and Nakahata had chosen this place having taken this risk into account. We chatted and I stayed with them that night.

I had a dried cycad nut with me, from which I had already washed away the poison. I borrowed Shichi and Nakahata’s milling instruments next morning to make cycad powder. They treated me to dried shrimps as snacks. The shrimps were tasty but perhaps because they were very calorific or because I had not been used to eating them, they sat rather heavily on my stomach.

Nakahata told me, ‘I will cook shrimp balls for you next time.’ I replied, ‘Then, I will cook toad balls for you.’ We laughed with each other. In the evening, we went out to take some papayas and I was going to return alone to my own hut.

On our way, we heard strange noises from the river side. As we approached in order to ascertain the source of the noises, ‘Tekida!’ there was a shout in Japanese meaning ‘enemy (teki)’ with an exclamation (da), followed by gun shots, ‘Bang . . . Bang . . .’ A man ran towards the upper reaches of the river while shooting his rifle. He left behind a device which was set to catch fish, some other similar devices which were not yet set, and six baskets.

We discussed who he was. ‘He was definitely Japanese! He spoke Japanese, you see, when he said “tekida (enemy!)”.’ I decided not to go home and continued to stay with my two colleagues.

‘Was he truly Japanese?’ We wondered, ‘Was he living alone?’ His devices to catch fish suggested that he was not a native. If he returned the next day, we speculated, in order to collect his