

Crow Boy

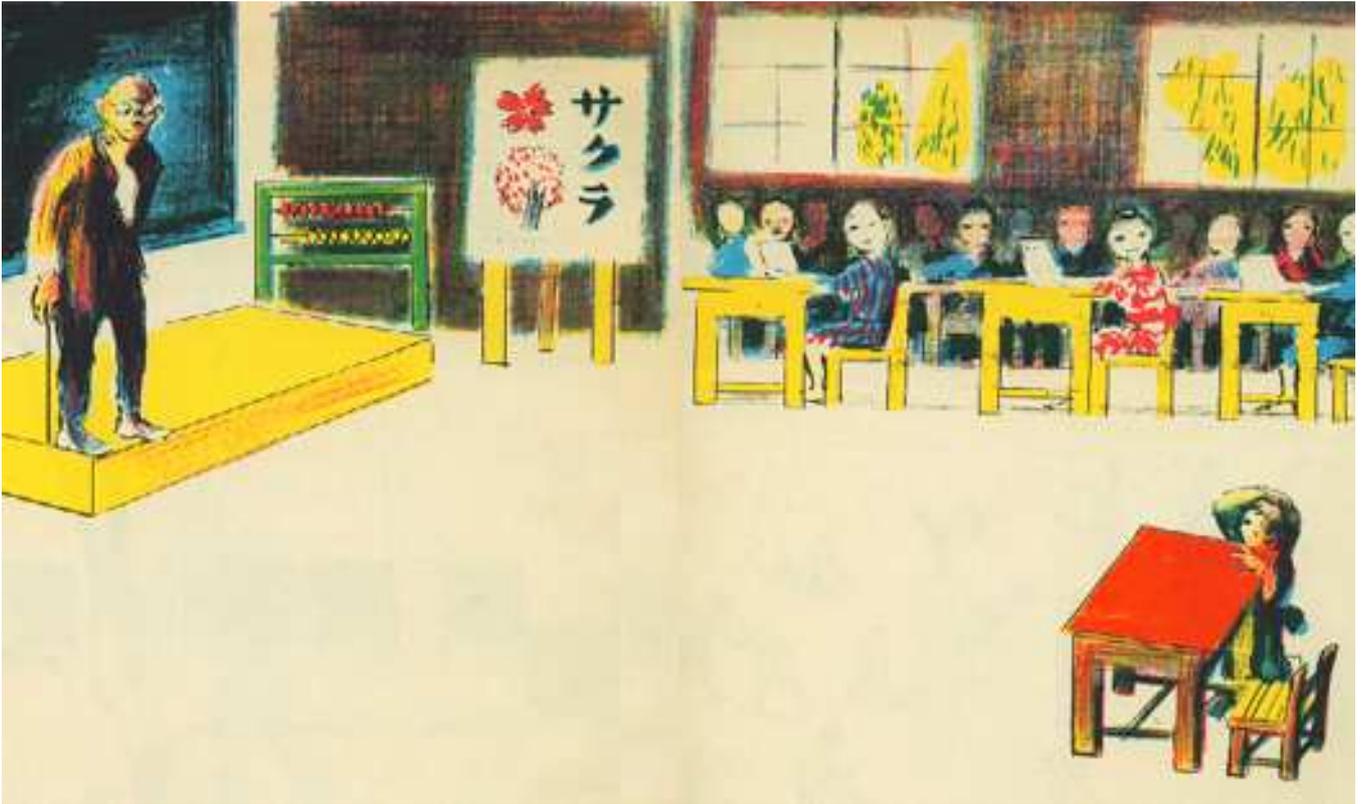


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TJ 1661

by Taro Yashima



On the first day of our village school in Japan, there was a boy missing.
He was found hidden away in the dark space underneath the schoolhouse floor.
None of us knew him. He was nicknamed Chibi because he was very small.
Chibi means “tiny boy.”



This strange boy was afraid of our teacher and could not learn a thing.

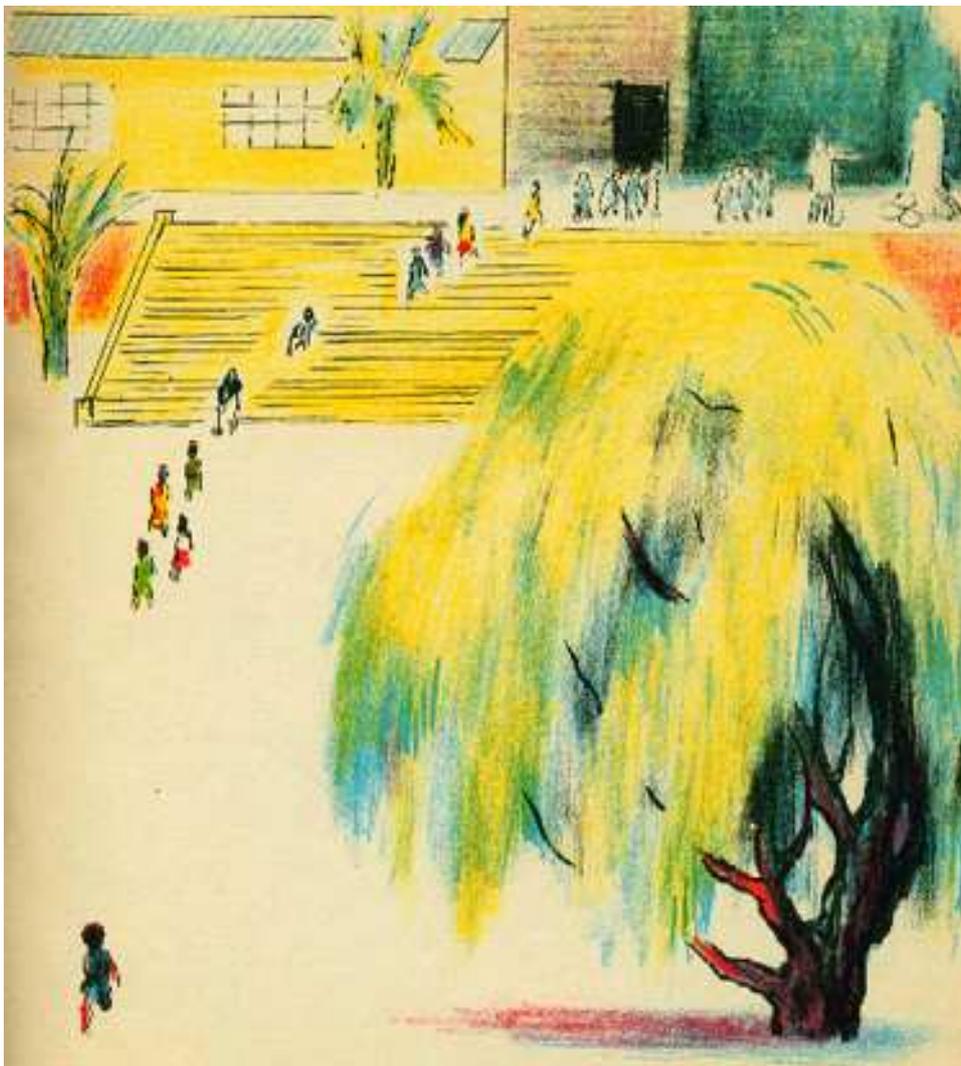
He was afraid of the children and could not make friends with them at all.



He was left alone in the study time.



**He was left
alone in the
play time.**



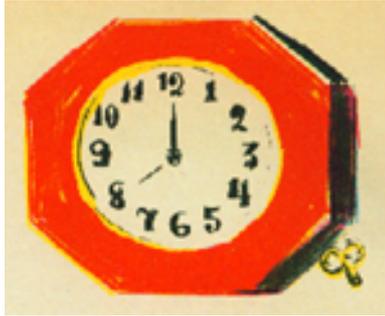
**He was always
at the end of
the line,
always at the
foot of the
class, a forlorn
little tag-along.**



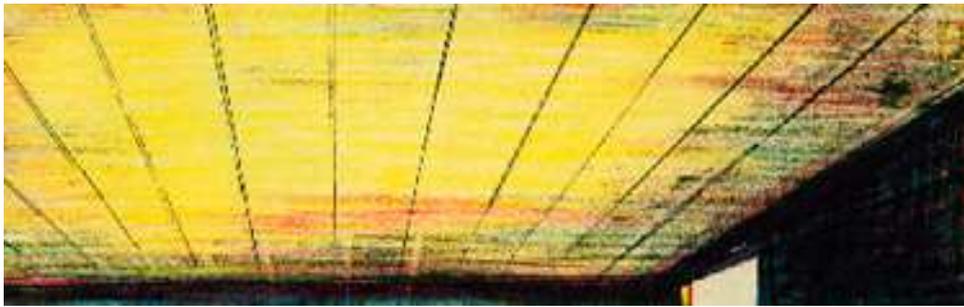
Soon Chibi began to make his eyes cross eyed



so that he was able not to see whatever he did not want to see.



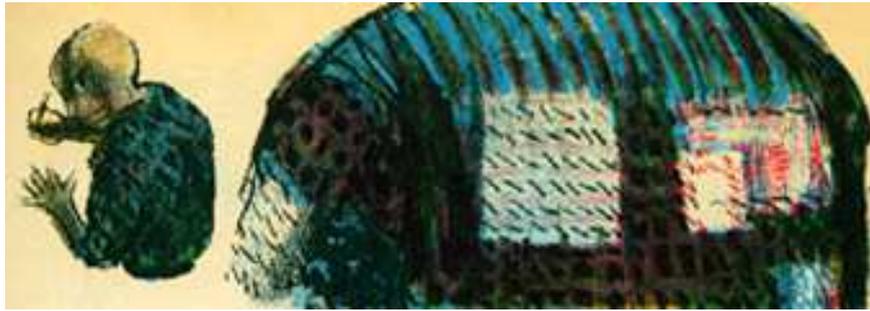
And Chibi found many ways, one after another, to kill time and amuse himself.



Just the ceiling was interesting enough for him to watch for hours.



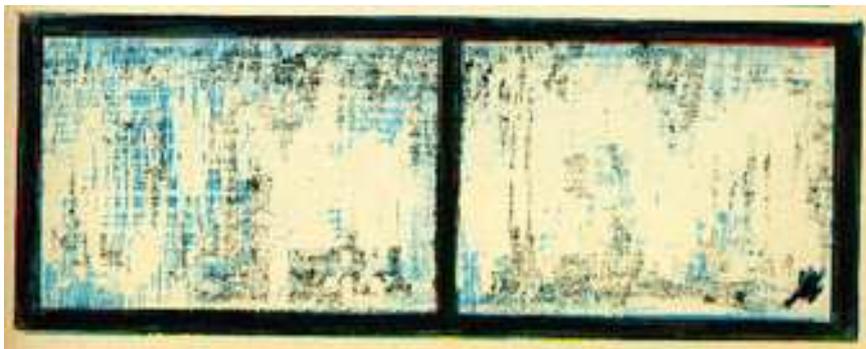
The wooden top of his desk was another thing interesting to watch.



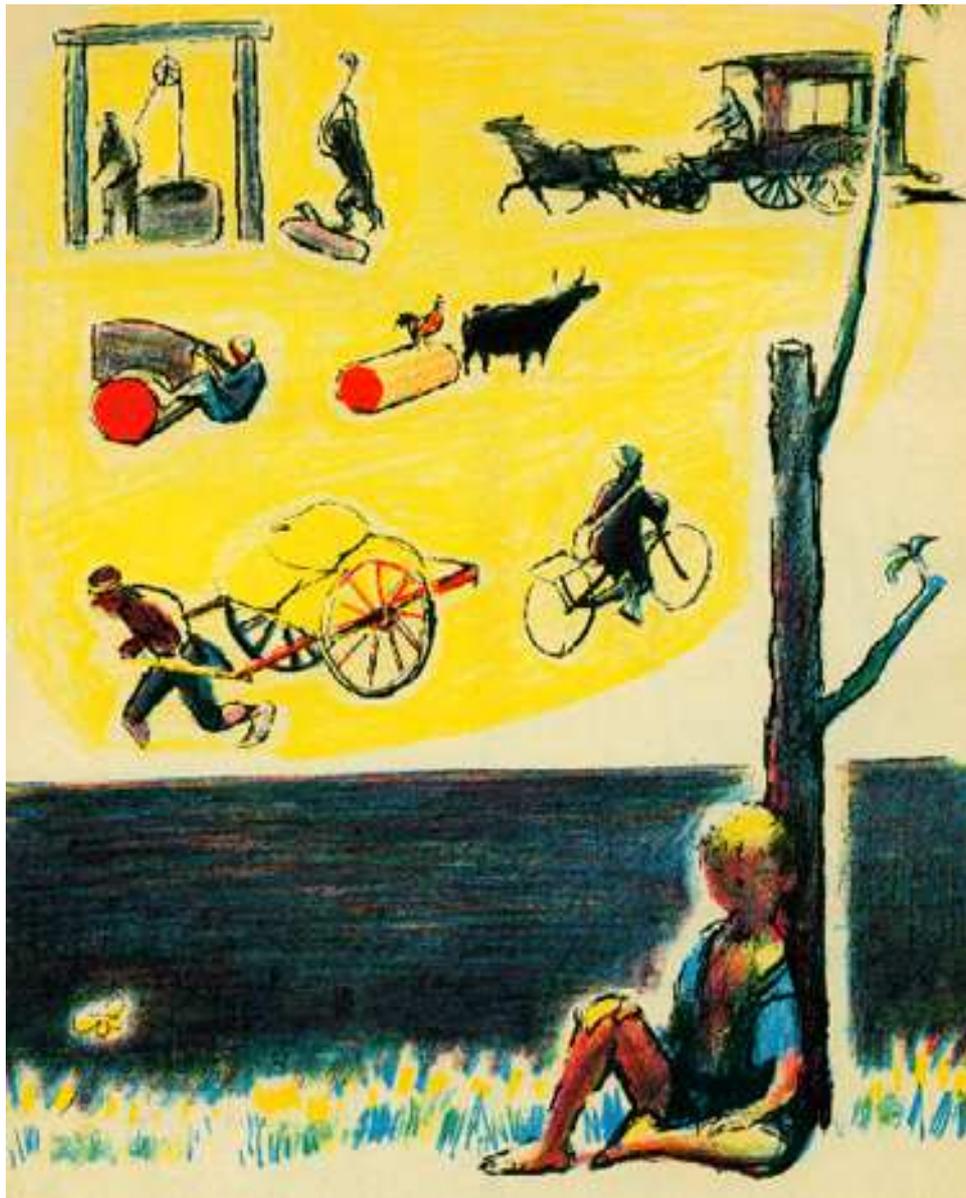
A patch of cloth on a boy's shoulder was something to study.



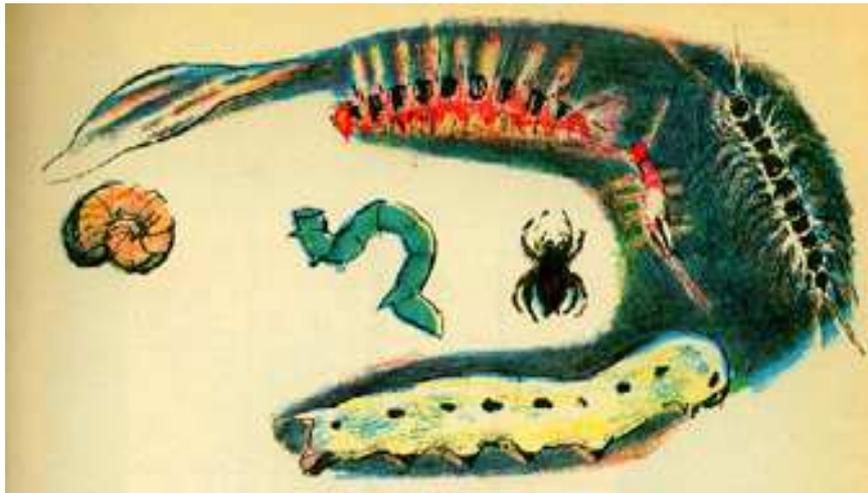
Of course the window showed him many things all year round.



Even when it was raining the window had surprising things to show him.



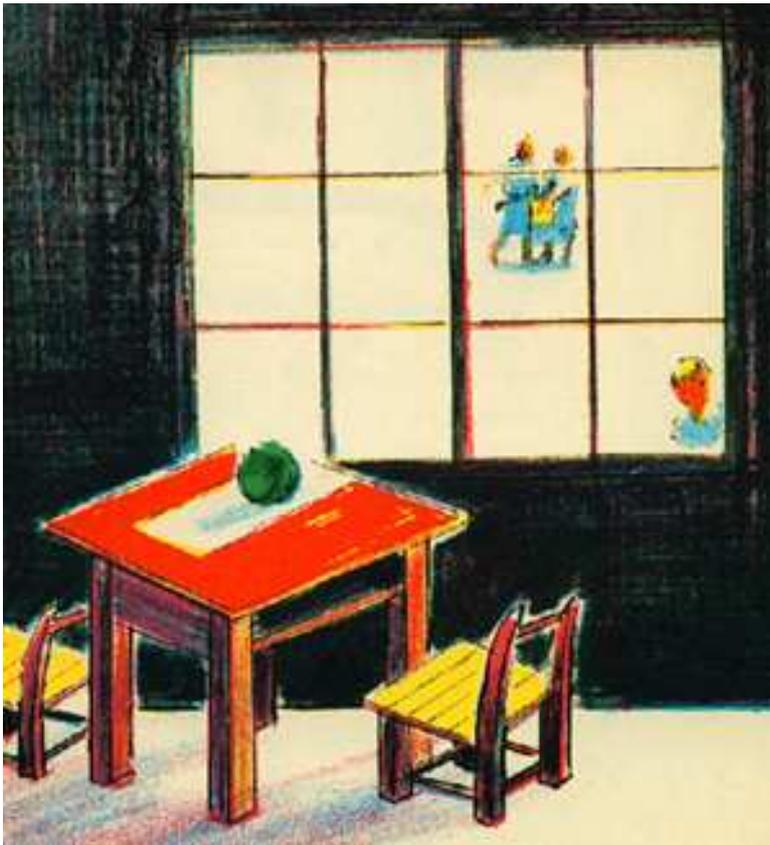
**On the playground if he closed his eyes and listened,
Chibi could hear many different sounds, near and far.**



And Chibi could hold and watch insects and grubs that most of us wouldn't touch or even look at.



So that not only the children in our class but the older ones and even the younger ones called him stupid and slowpoke.

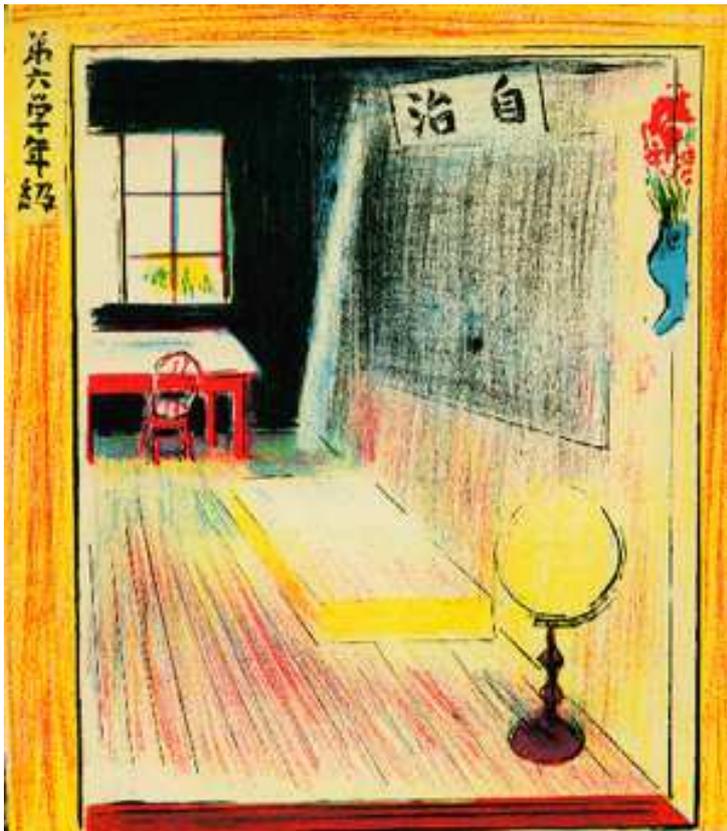


But, slowpokes or not, day after day Chibi came trudging to school.

He always carried the same lunch, a rice ball wrapped in a radish leaf.



Even when it rained or stormed he still came trudging along, wrapped in a raincoat made from dried zebra grass.



**And so, day by day,
five years went by,
and we were in the
sixth grade, the last
class in school.**



**Our new teacher
was Mr. Isobe. He
was a friendly man
with a kind smile.**



Mr. Isobe often took his class to the hilltop behind the school.



He was pleased to learn that Chibi knew all the places where the wild grapes and wild potatoes grew.



He was amazed to find how much Chibi knew about all the flowers in our class garden.



He liked Chibi's black-and-white drawings and tacked them up on the wall to be admired.



He liked Chibi's own handwriting, which no one but Chibi could read, and he tacked it up on the wall.



And he often spent time talking with Chibi when no one was around.



But, when Chibi appeared on the stage at the talent show of that year, no one could believe his eyes. “Who’s that?” “What can that stupid do up there?”

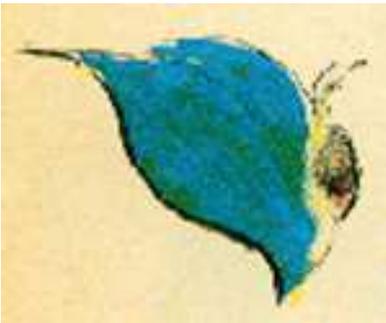
Until Mr. Isobe announced that Chibi was going to imitate the voices of crows. “Voices?” “Voices of crows?” “Voices of *crows*?”



“VOICES OF CROW.”



**First he imitated the voices
of newly hatched crows.**



And he made the mother crow's voice.



Then he imitated the father crow's voice.



He showed how crows cry early in the morning.



He showed how crows cry when the village people have some unhappy accident.



He showed how crows call when they are happy and gay.



Everybody's mind was taken to the far mountainside from which Chibi probably came to the school.



At the end, to imitate a crow on an old tree, Chibi made very special sounds deep down in his throat. “KAUUVVATT! KAUUWWATT!”

Now everybody could imagine exactly the far and lonely place where Chibi lived with his family.



Then Mr. Isobe explained how Chibi had learned those calls – leaving his home for school at dawn,



And arriving at sunset,



Everyday for six long years.



Every one of us cried, thinking how much we had been wrong to Chibi all those long years.



**Even grownups
wiped their eyes,
saying, “Yes, yes he
is wonderful.”**



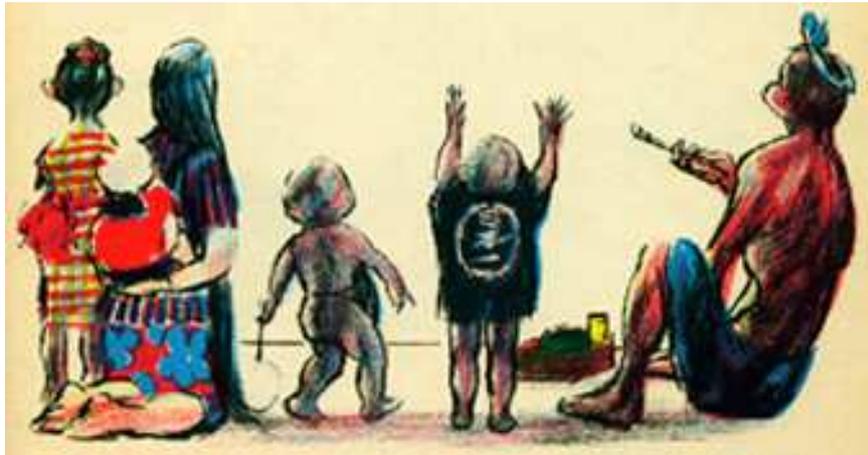
**Chibi was the only
one in our class
honored for perfect
attendance through
all the six years.**



After school was over, the big boys would often have work to do in the village for their families.



Sometimes Chibi came to the village to sell the charcoal he and his family made.



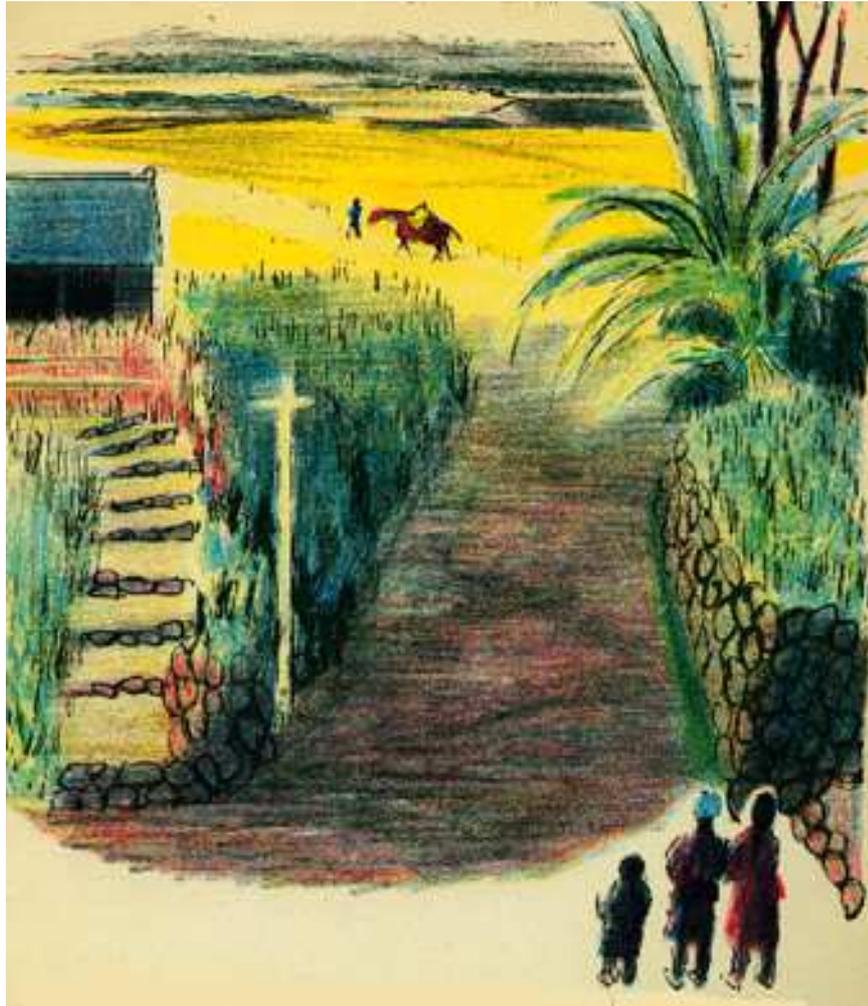
**But nobody called him Chibi anymore.
We all called him Crow Boy. “Hi, Crow Boy!”**



**Crow Boy would
nod and smile as if
he liked the name.**



**And when his
work was done
he would buy a
few things for
his family.**



Then he would set off for his home on the far side of the mountains, stretching his growing shoulders proudly like a grown-up man. And from around the turn of the mountain road would come a crow call – the happy one.

End