

Inamura no Hi (Fire in the Haystacks)

1



This story was originally written by Lafcadio Hearn (1890-1940, westernized name of KOIZUMI Yakumo). NAKAI Tsunezou (1907-1994) later adapted the story for a short tale, which was used for a language textbook in elementary schools in Japan during 1937-1947. This picture-story show tells us about the nature of tsunami and about the importance of prompt evacuation in case one expects a large tsunami after an earthquake

2



"It has been a hard day today."
Finishing his work in the fields, Gohei, who is a village elder, came back to his farmhouse, which stands on a small hilltop overlooking the area. "There had been a very fine rice-crop.", he said to himself and had a cup of tea while taking a rest.

3



Suddenly, he heard the beams creaking and no sooner his thatched house started to sway in all directions.

"Oh my God !"

Gohei quickly ran out of the house. "Hm...." this quaking was not very strong," he thought. The long, slow, undulating motions together with the rumbling sounds were not like anything that the old Gohei had ever experienced before in his time.

4



Gohei looked anxiously down from the backyard of his house at the village below. The people on the beach were all busy preparing for celebrations on the eve of the harvest festival. Nobody seemed to notice the earthquake.

"Uh.....," looking at the sea beyond the village, he was at a loss for words. The sea was moving away from the land and against the wind. Sand and rocks normally under the water became exposed over a vast area.

"Oh ! There must be a tsunami coming !", Gohei thought instantly.

"If I cannot immediately send a warning to the people below, the tsunami will sweep away hundreds of people and destroy the village."

Gohei needed to act quickly.

5



"Yes !" Gohei hit upon an idea. He rushed into his house and got a taimatsu or a pine-torch. He lit the torch in the fireplace and hurried to the fields.

6



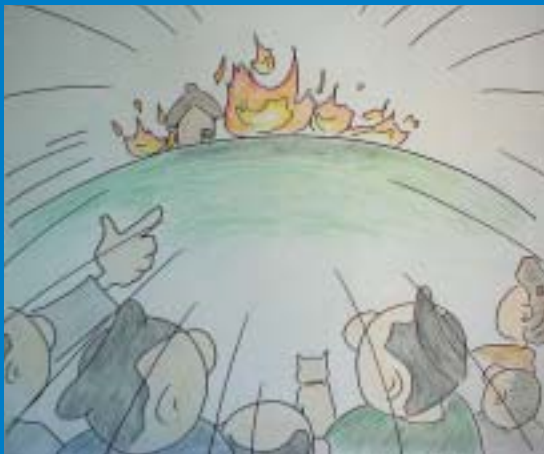
In front of him stood hundreds of haystacks from the harvest several days ago. "It is very wasteful, but I can save the lives of many people by this act." Unhesitatingly, Gohei applied the torch to a haystack.

7



The fire spread quickly in the strengthening sea-breeze. Gohei hurried from one haystack to another, setting fire to them all. Finishing the task, he threw down the torch and looked uneasily down at the sea. It was now completely dark as the sun had set, and in the darkness the fire blazed brilliantly. The priests of the Buddhist temple in the village below noticed the fire and sounded their big bell, which acted as a fire alarm to the villagers.

8



"The big bell is sounding. Where is the fire?" The people on the beach stopped working and looked around. A man directing his eyes towards the hills finally found the flames of the fire. "Look ! it is Gohei's house." "Everybody, hurry ! Let's go put out the fire in Gohei's house." A party of agile young people started to run towards the hills. They were followed by the older folk, women and children.

9



In the mean time, Gohei was looking down at the village from his house and waiting for the people to quickly come up the hill. It was not long before the party of young people arrived. They said, "We have come to put out the fire !" But Gohei stopped them, and said in a commanding loud voice, "Let it burn ! There is something dangerous happening. I want everybody in the village to come here as quick as possible !" The young people were at a loss, and looked at each other with perplexed faces.

Others arrived one after another and Gohei counted the number of people gathering at the spot. The people looked puzzlingly from the blazing fire to Gohei's face.

10



Suddenly, Gohei shouted, "Look ! It is coming !" The villagers looked to where his finger pointed. In the distance they saw a line like the shadow of a coast-line. A line that thickened as they watched. A line that approached the land with incredible speed.

"What's that?"

11



"*Tsunami ! It's a tsunami !*" yelled the people. A colossal mass of water like a cliff approached and struck the shore. The weight of the water was like a large mountain sliding down on a plain. There were sounds like hundreds of thunderbolts striking the land at one time. The villagers on the hill stepped back in panic at the sight of the terrible spectacle. Then for a moment, they could see nothing as a storm of spray rushed up the slope.

12



The people could do nothing but watch the violent sea overwhelming their homes. Twice, thrice, five times, the sea struck and ebbed. On the hill all the people were wonder-struck and could only stare at the demolished village below.

13



As the sun rose the next morning, the people regained their senses and remembered the burnt haystacks. Having realized that the fire saved their lives, they bowed to Gohei and thanked him for his wise and unselfish actions.

14



The End:

Note: In this story, the tsunami first ebbed and then flowed into the land. Please beware that this is not all the case. There is a tsunami directly flowing into the land without any water recession. There is also another type of tsunami, in which the biggest wave comes after a few cycles of ebbs and flows.