

KENJU'S FOREST

Junko Morimoto



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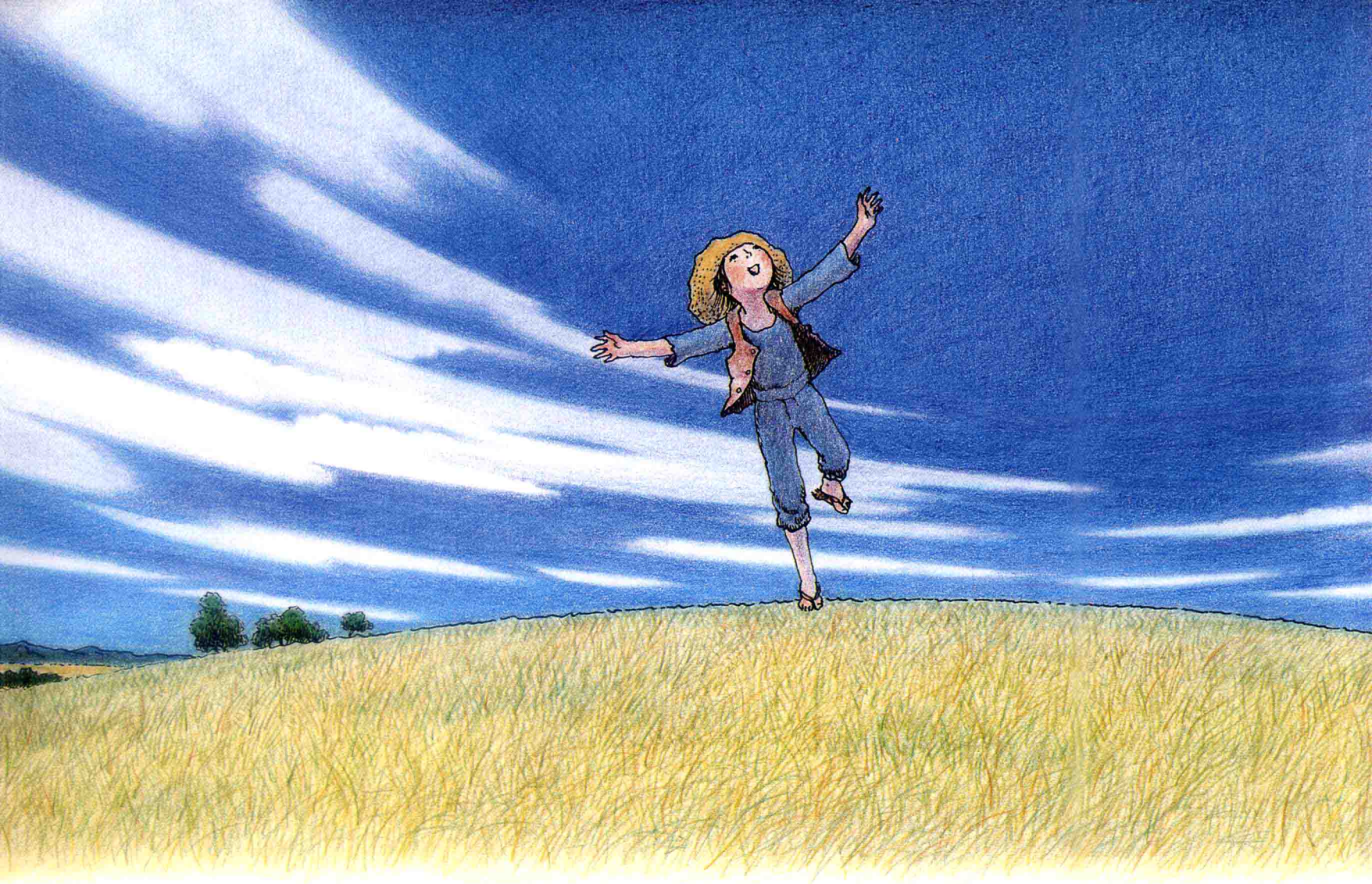
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Kenju loved to wander along the paths that lay between the rice fields. He would reach up to the sky and laugh aloud.



The birds sang and the trees danced in the wind — how wonderful it all was.

Everyone in the village laughed at Kenju, but this did not spoil his happiness.



One day Kenju came running across the field to his family. The last frost had passed and they were busy preparing for spring.

“Mother! Mother!” he called, even more excited than usual. “Would you buy me lots of cedar trees to plant in our empty field behind the house?”

His family stopped work and looked up at Kenju, who waited, a small smile trembling on his lips.

At last his Father spoke, “Kenju is a good boy. He has never asked for anything and that field has been empty for so long. Go and buy him the seedlings,” he said, turning to Kenju’s brother.





The next morning Kenju was up with the sun. It was a shining winter's day.

Kenju listened carefully to his brother's instructions; he wanted to do everything just right. He had dreamt about his trees, standing like soldiers in long straight rows.

They had been working steadily when suddenly Heiji appeared. He owned the farm next door but spent most of his time in the village.

"If your stupid trees do grow, they will block out my sun!" Heiji barked.

Kenju froze, for Heiji had always frightened him. Luckily, his brother was nearby. He straightened up and, glaring at Heiji, said, "Good morning to you, Heiji! Aren't you working today?"

Heiji just grunted and went back to town.

It seemed to take forever for the seedlings to grow. The whole village laughed at Kenju. They had all told him so.

Nevertheless, Kenju was proud of his trees. He would stand for hours on the edge of the field admiring them.

One day the villagers decided to play a joke on Kenju.

“It’s about time you pruned your trees, young Kenju. All those lower branches should be lopped off,” advised one of the farmers, looking very serious.

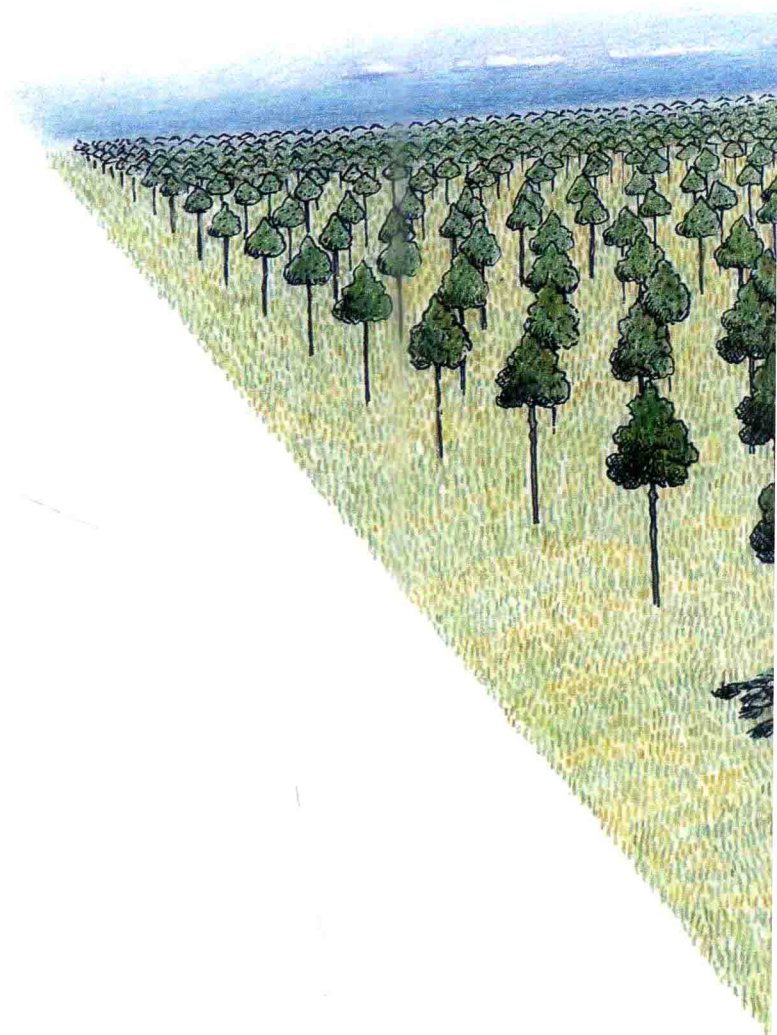
He thanked the farmer for this advice, then set off to find his axe.

Kenju pruned his treasured cedars, branch after branch.





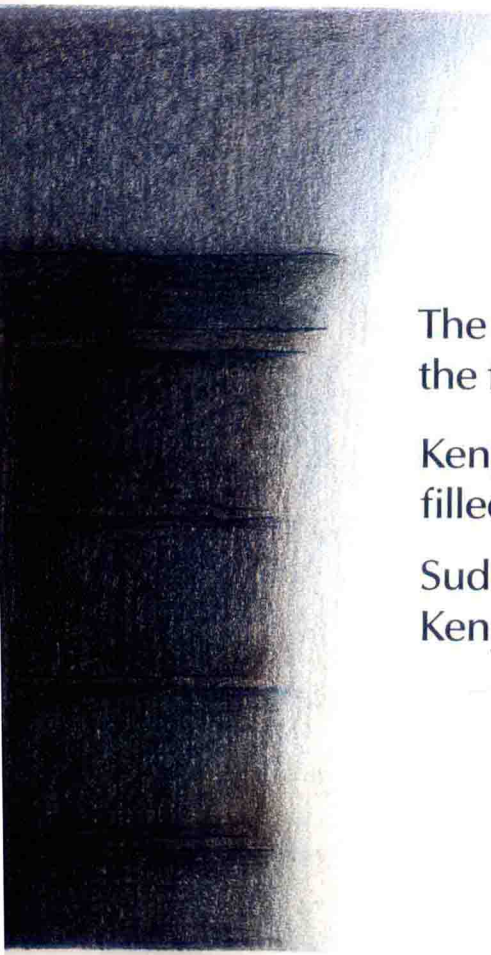
It was nearly dusk when he stopped and looked up.
He had done exactly as the farmer had told him, but
it saddened him to see all the branches lying on the
ground.



Just then his brother arrived. He patted Kenju warmly on the shoulder, "Don't worry young brother. Come on, let's collect all these branches and we'll build a big bonfire."







The next day a new sound filled the air. It floated across the field and into the hut.

Kenju stopped and listened. It was a happy sound which filled the air and brought a smile to his face.

Suddenly, realising where the sound had come from, Kenju leapt to his feet and ran out of the hut.



Kenju followed the sound. He stopped at the edge of the field, and stared.

Children, lots and lots of children, great lines of children, were marching, weaving their way through the rows of trees.