

Harriet, Brace & Co.
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THOMAS S. HANDFORTH

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Dear Miss McElderry -

As years pass ~~by~~. I become more and more aware that, quite regardless of our will, our lives progress not in straight ~~or~~ crooked lines but in cycles or circles. My circle back toward Japanese folk tales is a slow one, but thanks to your letter of June 28, it may be approaching.

Of all the delights of my childhood, I think that Japanese folk tales were the greatest. During my first reading years they animated my imaginative world, and have lingered on in the deepest ^m ~~in the~~ ~~depths~~ ~~of~~ ~~my~~ ~~esthetic~~ roots. The Chinese influence came later and there was more of it. But the Japanese was stronger in a more impressionable period. Do you know that volume of Japanese Fairy Tales, published about 1908 with the cream cloth binding and black crows flying across it? It was my greatest treasure. I wonder if any child in the world loved it as much as I did, or was so entranced by its illustrations.

Since then, although I have visited Japan four times, I have never directly used Japanese subject matter in my work. Yet it should be, on that wheel of fate, for me to illustrate a volume of Japanese folk tales. Of course it would be more logical, and a better job, to have Miss Uchida's book illustrated by a Japanese artist working in the traditional style. Aside from such a choice, I believe that I am a natural

hair to the commission .

But I have a great big axe to grind, which may throw a monkey wrench in the machine, and nip the whole proposition in the bud; because:

For the first book I ever illustrated, some 30 odd years ago when I was in high school, I was paid \$500. For the second: \$500; for the third \$500; and so on. Come depressions, come wars come floods come inflations, - also come publishers continuing to offer \$500. Fortunately some offer a great deal more. But that \$500 clings on - an antiquated anachorism! It's just out of this world. (Which in real estate jargon [I've just bought a house with a Japanese flavor to it] I find means anything or nothing. That is the most favorable interpretation one can give to the \$500.

Another more sinister one is that publishers hold illustrators in very low regard; and ~~meanings~~ ^{meanings} they appear to be, for no doubt there are many who ^{as a rule, will be} submit easily to being ^{victim} ~~victim~~ ^{victims of production} ~~victim~~.

Now such time I receive a letter such as yours my wrath increases by leaps and bounds. Time is up for being sweet and diplomatic about it.

I ^{hope some one will be more than myself} ~~am~~ ^{am} not aggressive enough to take a public stand regarding ~~simple~~ justice to artists (strangely enough most abused in the childrens book field where some of our most creative art is being produced.) But ~~one can now~~ ^{I wish some one would} at least air ^{these} ~~over~~ sentiments thru the Artists Equity Association, with hopes that others

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will take up the torch to burn out the publishers from behind their "budget" barricades.

My only stand has been of late to consistently decline (with one exception) that automatic offer, although I would rather do books than the portraits which are my source of livelihood. — That exception, "The Secret of the Porcelain Fish", I could not resist. My liking the story so much, and my fondness for Ming blue and white porcelain, reduced me to that \$500 agreement.

But Miss Bonino and the author were so delighted with the pictures that between them they managed to scrape together \$250 more — a touching gesture of appreciation. Still for the amount of time, honest research, and ~~for the amount of~~ ^{later} public acclaim, I silently considered this payment insufficient. That was two years ago.

Since then, in California at least, the cost of living has spiraled on upward. A baby-sitter could make \$500 and spend it on rent in less time than it would take to decently illustrate your book. And a book good enough for a good publisher deserves good illustrations. Especially so with this volume at this time when it is advertent to try to reflect something of the quality of the best in Japanese art. No?

In other words, when all is said and done and I've really blown my top off, it seems to me that \$1000 is not out of order for any hack job, and that \$1500 is more nearly commensurate

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with what is required to give Mrs Uchida's book a dignified presentation.

But I've not yet seen the manuscript. If you still care to send it to me, I would be very much interested in reading it. And I'll promise not to write another long winded letter.

With kindest personal regards to yourself

Sincerely

Thomas Handforth

~~I am~~

I hope my weeks delay in replying ^{to yours} has not
And pardon me for delaying a weeks to reply ^{in spite of}
inconvenienced you. ~~I am still trying~~ ^{with} the acquisition
of a house ^{delapidated} and delapidated garden, my troubles are
just beginning. ~~But I do think~~ ^{should} I shall have time