

## Read Aloud – Excerpt Summary: End of Big Wave



While they were talking the dusk had deepened, and now, coming up the mountainside, they saw a flickering light. "I wonder who comes?" Kino exclaimed.

In a few minutes they saw that their visitor was Old Gentleman coming from the castle. "Is this the house of Uchiyama, the farmer?" Old Gentleman asked.

At this Kino's father stood up, and so did Kino. "Please, Honored Sir," Kino's father said. "What can I do for you?"

Old Gentleman came forward. "Do you have a lad here by the name of Jiya?"

"He lies sleeping inside my house," Kino's father said.

"It is my habit when the big wave comes to care for those who are orphaned," said Old Gentleman. "Three times the wave has come, and three times I have searched out the orphans and widows, and I have fed them and sheltered them. I have heard of this boy Jiya and I wish to do even more for him. I will make him my own son."

"But Jiya is ours!" Kino cried.

"Hush," his father replied. "We must think of Jiya's good. We are only poor people." Then he said to Old Gentleman, "Sir it is very kind of you to propose this for Jiya. I had planned to take him for my own son, now that he has lost his parents, but I am only a poor farmer and I cannot pretend that my house is as good as yours. Tomorrow when he wakes, I will tell him of your kind offer. He shall decide."

"Very well," Old Gentleman said. "But let him come and tell me himself, so that I know how he feels."

As soon as Kino woke the next morning he remembered Jiya and the choice he had to make. After breakfast Kino went to the field to weed the cabbages, but his father stayed in the house to talk to Jiya.

For a long time Kino stayed in the field, working alone. Then, when the sun was nearing zenith, he heard his father calling. He got up at once and walked along the part between the terraces until he reached the doorway. There his father stood with Jiya.

"I have told Jiya that he must not decide until he has seen all that Old Gentleman can give him for a home," Kino's father said. "Jiya, you know how our house is—these four rooms and the kitchen, this little farm upon which we have to work so hard for our food. We have only what our hands can earn for us."

Then he turned to Kino again. "You are to go with Jiya, and when you see the castle you must persuade him to stay there, for his own sake."

So the two boys went down the mountainside to the castle. The gate was open and the garden was most beautiful. A gardener was sweeping the green moss, but he left his work to lead them to the house. There they took off their shoes and

followed the gardener through a great door. Inside this they met a manservant who dismissed the gardener and said to the boys, "Follow me."

So they followed him through a wide passageway. On both sides of this passageway panels slid back to show beautiful rooms, and in each room were a vase of flowers, an exquisite scroll, a few pieces of dark polished furniture. Neither Jiya nor Kino had ever seen such a house.

Then far in the distance they saw Old Gentleman sitting beside a small table. The table was set in front of the open sliding panel that looked into the garden, and Old Gentleman was writing.

When the two boys came near he looked at Jiya. "Well," he said. "Will you be my son?"

Jiya turned very red. He had not expected to have the question put to him so directly.

Old Gentleman saw he found it hard to speak. "Say yes or no," he told Jiya.

"No," Jiya said. "I thank you, but I have a home – on the farm," he added.

For a moment Kino was filled with pure joy. Then he remembered the small farmhouse, the four little rooms and the old kitchen. "Jiya," he said solemnly, "remember how poor we are."

Old Gentleman was smiling a half-sad little smile. "They are certainly very poor," he said to Jiya. "And here, you know, you would have everything." Jiya looked about him. Then he shook his head again.

Old Gentleman took up his brush again. "Very well," he said. "I will do without a son."

The manservant motioned to them and they followed, and soon they were out in the garden.

"How foolish you are," the manservant said to Jiya. "You would have everything here."

"Not everything," Jiya replied.

They went out of the gate and across the hillside and back to the farmhouse. Setsu came running to meet them, the sleeves of her bright kimono flying behind her, and her feet clattering in wooden sandals.

"Jiya has come back home!" she cried.

And Jiya, seeing her happy little face, opened his arms and gave her a great hug. For the first time he felt comfort creep into his heart.

Their noonday meal was ready, and Kino's father came in from the field. And when he had washed, they all sat down to eat. "How happy you have made us," he told Jiya.

"Happy indeed," Kino's mother said.

"Now I have my brother," Kino said.

Jiya only smiled. Happiness began to live in him again. The good food warmed him, and his body welcomed it. Around him the love of the people who received him glowed like a warm and welcoming fire upon the hearth.

Time passed. Jiya grew up in the farmhouse to be a tall young man, and Kino grew at his side. Setsu grew, too, from a mischievous, laughing little girl into a willful, pretty girl. But time, however long, was split in two parts by the big wave. People spoke of “the time before” and “the time after” the big wave. The big wave had changed everyone’s life.

For years no one returned to live on the empty beach. The tides rose and fell, sweeping the sands clean every day. Storms came and went, but there was never again such a wave as the big one. Then people began to think that perhaps there would never again be such a big wave. The few fishermen who had listened to the tolling bell from the castle and had been saved with their wives and children had gone to other shores to fish, and they had made new fishing boats.

But as time passed after the big wave, they began to tell themselves that there was no beach quite so good as the old one.

Now Kino and Jiya had not often gone to the beach again either. Once or twice they had walked along the place where the street had been, and Jiya had searched for some keepsake from his home that the sea might have washed back to the shore. But nothing was ever found.

But Kino saw that Jiya always looked out of the door every morning and he looked at the empty beach, searching with his eyes as though something might one day come back. Then one day he did see something. “Kino, come here!” Quickly Kino went and Jiya pointed down the hillside. “Look – is someone building a house on the beach?”

Kino looked and saw that indeed it was so. Two men were pounding posts into the sand, and a woman and child stood near, watching. “Can it be that they will build again on the beach?” he exclaimed.

They ran down the hill to the beach and went to the two men. “Are you building a house?” Jiya cried.

The men paused and the elder one nodded. “Our father used to live here and we with him. During these years we have lived in the outhouses of the castle and we have fished from other shores. Now we are tired of having no homes of our own. Besides, this is still the best of all beaches for fishing.”

“But what if the big wave comes back?” Kino asked.

The men shrugged their shoulders. “There was a big wave in our great-grandfather’s time. All the houses were swept away, but our grandfather came back. In our father’s time the big wave came again, but now we come back.”

“What of your children?” Kino asked anxiously.

“The big wave may never come back,” the men said. And they began to pound the post into the sand again.

All this time Jiya had not said another word. Now as he stood watching the new house being made on the beach, he felt a strong delight. Could it be true that people would gather once more on this beach to make a village? Was it right that it be so?

At this moment there was a commotion on the hillside. They looked up and saw it was Old Gentleman, coming slowly down the rocky path. He was very old indeed now, and he walked with difficulty.

The elder builder threw down his stone mallet. “Here comes our Old Gentleman,” he told the others. “He is very angry or he wouldn’t have left the castle.”

Anyone could see that Old Gentleman was angry. He grasped his long staff, and when he came near them he pulled his beard and moved his eyebrows. “You foolish children!” he cried in his high old voice. “You have left the safety of my walls and come back to this dangerous shore to make your home, as your fathers did before you. The big wave will come back and sweep you into the ocean again!”

“It may not come, Ancient Sir,” the elder builder said mildly.

“It will come!” Old Gentleman insisted. “I have spent my whole life in trying to save foolish people from the big wave. But you will not be saved.”

Suddenly Jiya spoke. “This is our home. Dangerous as it is, threatened by the volcano and by the sea, it is here we were born.”

Old Gentleman looked at him. “Don’t I know you?” he asked.

“Sir, I was once in your castle,” Jiya replied.

Old Gentleman nodded. “Now I remember you. I wanted you for my son. Ah, you made a great mistake, young man! You could have lived in my castle safely forever and your children would have been safe there too. The big wave never reaches me.”

Jiya shook his head. “Your castle is not safe either,” he told Old Gentleman. “If the earth shakes hard enough, your castle will crumble, too. There is no refuge for us who live on these islands. We are brave because we must be.”

Old Gentleman rolled his eyes a few times. “Don’t ask me to save you next time the big wave comes,” he told everybody.

“But you will save us,” Jiya said gently, “because you are so good.”

Old Gentleman shook his head at this and then smiled. “What a pity you would not be my son,” he said and then he went back to the castle and shut the gates.

As for Kino and Jiya, they returned to the farmhouse, but from that day on the family knew that someday Jiya would go back to the sea, and that he would build himself a house on the beach.

One after another now seven houses had risen, the frail wooden houses of fisher-folk that the big wave could lift like toys and crush and throw away. But they sheltered families, men and women and children. And again they were built with no windows toward the sea. Each family had built on the bit of land that had belonged to it before the big wave came, and at the end was left a bare piece. It belonged to Jiya now, for it had belonged once to his father.

“When I have a boat, then I shall build my own house there,” Jiya said one night to the farm family.

“I shall pay you wages from this day,” Kino’s father said. “You have become a man.”

From that day Jiya saved his wages until he had enough to buy a boat. The day he got it he and Kino sailed it far into the channel, and Jiya had not been so happy since before the big wave. “I knew all the time that I had to come back to the sea,” he told Kino.

Then to Kino’s surprise Jiya grew very red. “Do you think Setsu would be afraid to live on the beach? He asked Kino.

Kino was surprised. “Why should Setsu live on the beach?” he asked.

Jiya grew redder still, but he held his head high. “Because that is where I shall build my home,” he said firmly. “And I want Setsu to be my wife.”

It was such astonishing news that Kino did not know what to say. Setsu was his little sister, and he could not believe that she was old enough to be anybody’s wife. Nor, to tell the truth, could he imagine anybody wanting her for his wife. She was careless and teasing and mischievous and she still delighted to hide his things so that he could not find them.

“You would be very foolish to marry Setsu,” he now told Jiya.

“I don’t agree with you,” Jiya said, smiling.

“But why do you want her?” Kino urged.

“Because she makes me laugh,” Jiya said. “It is she who made me forget the big wave. For me – she is life.”

“But she is not a good cook,” Kino said. “Think how she burns the rice because she runs outside to look at something!”

“I don’t mind burned rice,” Jiya said, “and I will run out with her to see what she sees.”

When they got home he went to his father. “Do you know that Jiya wants to marry Setsu?” he asked.

“I have seen some looks pass between them,” he said smiling.

“But Jiya is too good for Setsu,” Kino said.

“Setsu is very pretty,” his father said.

Kino was surprised. “She will hide his things and tease him and make him miserable.”

“What makes you miserable will make him happy,” his father said.

“I don’t understand that,” Kino said soberly.

“Someday you will understand,” his father said, laughing. “Do you remember that I told you life is stronger than death? Jiya is ready to live.”

On the day in the early summer that Jiya and Setsu were married, Kino still did not understand. But when the wedding was over and the family took the newly married pair down the hill to the new house on the beach, Kino began to feel sad. The farmhouse would be very quiet without Setsu and he would miss her. He grew very grave indeed. What if the big wave came again?

There in the pretty little new house he turned to Jiya. “Jiya, what if the big wave comes again?”

“I have prepared for that,” Jiya said. He led them through the little house to the room that faced the sea, the one big room in the house, where at night they would rest and where in the day they would eat and work.

All the family stood there, and as they watched, Jiya pushed back a panel in the wall. Before their eyes was the ocean, swelling and stirring under the evening wind. The sun was sinking into the water, in clouds of red and gold. They gazed out across the deep waters in silence.

“I have opened my house to the ocean,” Jiya said. “If ever the big wave comes back, I shall be ready. I face it. I am not afraid.”

“You are strong and brave,” Kino’s father said.

And they went back to the farm, and left Jiya and Setsu to make a new life in the new home on the old beach.