LISETN, my children, to the true story of the Beginning of the World.

When there was neither Heaven nor Earth, nor Sun nor Moon, nor anything that is, there existed in Infinite Space the Invisible Lord of the Middle of Heaven. With him were two other Gods.

By their miraculous power, a Thing whose shape cannot be described came into existence in the midst of Space, in appearance like a Floating Cloud. Forth from it sprang as it were a Flowering Rushsprout, rising from the water --- pure, translucent and bright -- which grew and grew and widened and widened infinitely, till it spread over all things and became the Canopy of Heaven. Then downward from the Floating Cloud grew the Under-region --- the Realm of Night -- which is the Root-region of the World and the abode of Departed Spirits.

And the centre of the Floating Cloud became the Earth,
which was still liquid and formless and without life.

After this were born in Heaven seven generations of Gods, and the last and most perfect of these were Izanagi and Izanami. Now Izanagi and Izanami were the Parents of the World and all that is in it. And it happened in this wise: the Gods of the High Plain of Heaven said to Izanagi and Izanami ---

'Descend and make of this drifting mud and ocean a firm and beautiful Land, and fill it with living things.'

And the Gods placed in their hands a mystic jewelled Spear.

Now in these days the heavens were near to the earth, and the space between was spanned by a Heavenly Floating Bridge. So they set forth bravely on their journey, and looking down into the Space beneath them, they saw in the depths the green plain of the Sea. They held counsel together and said, 'Is there not a country beneath?'

And Izanagi pushed the jewelled Spear down from the
Floating Bridge and stirred the green sea round and round, and some say that is why the earth turns round and round to this day. Then the brine went curdle-curdle, and they drew up the Spear, and the brine that fell from the end of the Spear dropped down and became an Island. This island was called Onogoro and is one of the Everlasting Islands of the Land of Sunrise, of the Land of fertile Reed-plains which is Japan.

Now the Gods stepped down on to the Earth, and it was strange and desolate, and they shivered, and felt lonely and afraid.

Suddenly sounded a whirring of wings; two tiny Sekirei --- wagtails --- swept by and fluttered to the ground. It was early spring-time, the living air thrilled warm and sweet.

With little pecks and cheeps, full of busy pride, the pair sought twigs and grasses and wove them deftly into a downy nest. Quivering with rapture the lover-bird hovered round his mate and sang of love and joy and happy days to come.

While the Great Gods watched, a warmth crept round the
heart of Izanagi, and in Izanami's eyes was a mist of tears. She whispered softly, 'Let us, too, make a house to dwell in!' Then Izanagi plunged his Spear into the ground, and round them arose a great and glorious Palace; and the Spear was the Heart-Pillar thereof. And they were hidden from the sight of Heaven and Earth.

Then, moving round this Pillar, they met and gazed on one another with charmed eyes. The Mother of Mankind cried joyfully, 'Behold! I have met with a lovely Youth! And Izanagi cried back, 'Behold! I have met with a lovely Maiden!'

So the Sekirei first taught the Gods the ways of Love, and are honoured and cherished in Japan to this day.

But Izanagi remembered how Izanami had been the first to speak, and in his displeasure said wrathfully. 'I am a Man, and should by right have spoken first!'

When the first child born to them was ugly and deformed, they put him in a boat made of Camphor-wood, and he sailed away to sea and became the God of the fisher-folk. His children are the hairy men who live in some of the islands of Japan to this day.
Then the Gods passed round the pillar a second time, and Izanagi spoke first. So his anger was appeased. And they lived greatly content.

Together they made the Eight Islands of Japan, and placed them at the summit of the globe. But the land was hidden, being covered with mists, -- so Izanagi sent forth the God of the Winds. He, blowing lustily, rent the clouds, and the earth lay as a bride unveiled, shimmering with silver dew on her green pastures.

Next came the Food-Spirit to comfort mankind, the Sea-Gods, the Mountain-Gods, the Gods of the River-mouths, the Tree-Gods, and the Earth-Goddess. Last of all was born the fierce Fire-God, Kagu-tsuchi. Now this God was of such a hot and fiery temper, that he burnt his Great Mother and she suffered change and departed to the Lower World.

Then Izanagi was wroth and cried aloud, 'O that I should have given my Beloved in return for a single Child!'

And his sorrow was so great that he crawled round her head and her feet, and from the tears that he shed, sprang
up the Goddess of Weeping. Then he took his ten-span sword and hewed Kagu-tsuchi in three pieces, and each piece sprang into life as the Spirit of Thunder, the Spirit of Mountains, and the Spirit of Rain.

Now Izanagi loved his wife so greatly that he could find no rest or peace on earth; and after wandering long in search of comfort and finding none, he determined to seek her, even in the Realm of Departed Spirits. His way lay through a long and gloomy passage where few have trod, right through the centre of the earth; till he came at length to the Gate of Everlasting Night, to the kingdom of Yomi, the Ruler of the Under World. He knocked at the Gate and cried aloud: ---

'O my beloved Sister! come back to me!' and she answered him.

'O beloved Elder Brother! gladly would I come, but alas! I have eaten of Yomi's cooking and am bewitched. Let me return and speak to him, but do not thou follow me!'

So Izanagi waited anxiously without. till growing impatient at her long delay, he broke a tooth off his comb, lighting it as a
torch; and so dared to enter those terrible Shades. Through dark and dreadful ways he wandered, and his heart quailed within him.

But Yomi was wroth with him for his daring. and smote Izanami so that when he found her she lay as one altered in death, with Eight Witches at her head and her feet. Then a great horror fell upon Izanagi, he turned and fled swiftly, and the Eight Ugly Women rose and pursued him. On he ran, through winding ways where icy blasts fly shrieking; and the Witches swept after him and would have caught him, but he seized the wreath from his head and flung it down, and it was changed into bunches of grapes. When the Witches saw these they stopped and greedily devoured them; then gathering up their robes, rose and pursued again.

Izanagi felt the chill of their coming, and drew out a many-toothed comb from the right bunch of his hair, and threw it behind him. Behold! as it touched the ground, there sprang up a hedge of young bamboo-shoots across the path. The Witches swooped down, pulled up the young shoots and ate them to the last one: then again gave chase.

Now Izanami, too, was angered against him, for she had been put to shame; and she sent five hundred warriors from Yomi to pursue him. When the rush and the tramping drew
nearer, Izanagi unsheathed his ten-span sword, and in his despair his breath failed as at the approach of Death. Then suddenly appeared before him the Gate of the Pass of Yomi; and hastily plucking some peaches which grew by the Gate, he threw them and scattered his pursuers and himself passed through into the light. And he rolled a mighty stone across the mouth of the opening, so that none hereafter could move it.

The Peaches that had saved him, he named Their Augustness the great Divine Fruit; and they are honoured in some parts of Japan to this day.

Now when he came back into the world again, Izanagi felt very weary, and searched for a clear stream to wash away the foulness of the Lower Regions which clung to him. When he had found one, he bathed therein, and of this washing many evil gods were born; among them were the Gods of Crookedness who love to plague mankind. Seeing this evil, he made the Gods of Straightening to make crooked things straight.

Now when he had rested and accomplished his purification, he created the greatest of his children in this wise:
Descending once more into the clear stream, he bathed his left eye, -- and forth sprang AMATERASU the great Sun-Goddess.

Sparkling with light She rose from the waters, as the Sun rises in the East, and her brightness was wonderful and shone through Heaven and Earth; never was seen such radiant glory.

Izanagi rejoiced greatly, and said: `There is none like this Miraculous Child!'

Taking a necklace of Jewels, he put it round her neck, and said: 'Rule Thou over the Plain of High Heaven!'

Thus Amaterasu became the source of all life and light, the glory of her shining has warmed and comforted all mankind, and she is worshipped by them unto this day.

Then he bathed his right eye, and there appeared her
brother the Moon? God. Izanagi said, 'Thy beauty and radiance are next to the Sun in splendour, rule thou over the Dominion of Night!'

When the two Beautiful Ones had departed, a third God came forth, whose name was Susa-wo. He was a god with a strange destiny, and could never be at peace, sweeping ceaselessly over hills and valleys with his long beard floating behind him. Izanagi gave him Dominion over the Sea.

But he was not content, and neglected his kingdom, restlessly roaming over the earth, so that the green mountains withered and the rivers dried up. The murmuring of spirits he woke with his moaning was as the sound of innumerable bees.

So Izanagi in his wrath banished him to the Nether Regions, and having accomplished his work, withdrew into an Island Cave, and abode there till the End.