



THE OLD CAPITAL

YASUNARI KAWABATA

A NEW TRANSLATION BY J. MARTIN HOLMAN



*The
Old
Capital*



T H E
O L D
C A P I T A L

by
Yasunari Kawabata

Translated by
J. Martin Holman

COUNTERPOINT
BERKELEY

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TRANSLATOR'S

NOTE

2005

In the years since my translation of *The Old Capital* was first published in 1987, friends, colleagues, students, and strangers have offered suggestions—general and specific, welcome and resented—for improving the work. These voices, along with my deepened understanding of Kawabata as an author, encouraged me to undertake a complete revision of my translation of *The Old Capital* when Jack Shoemaker suggested the possibility of bringing the novel back into print.

I wish to acknowledge the debt I owe to the many who have taught and advised me over the years. Thanks to them, my revisions to *The Old Capital* reflect what I hope is my increased capacity to coax the English language into conveying with greater fidelity the original meaning and tone of one of Kawabata's most affecting and beautiful novels.

In particular, I want to express my gratitude for the detailed comments I received from the late Mr. Hideki Masaki, who served as the personal English translator and interpreter for Emperor

Hirohito from the late 1950s until the Emperor's death in 1989. Mr. Masaki wrote me just a few months after the book's publication to extend his congratulations and offer his thoughts on my translation of a novel that he considered one of his favorites. I incorporated many of his thoughtful suggestions into my revision.

I am grateful to Jack Shoemaker for the generous encouragement he offered a young literary translator when he first read my manuscript nearly twenty years ago and for the support that he and Trish Hoard have extended to me on this and other projects since.

And despite many other revisions, my dedication of this translation to my wife, Susan James Holman, remains unchanged.

J. Martin Holman
Columbia, Missouri
September 2005



TRANSLATOR'S

NOTE

1987

When Kawabata Yasunari won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1968, *The Old Capital* was cited and lauded by the Nobel committee, alongside *Snow Country* and *A Thousand Cranes*, as one of the three works that qualified the author for the award. *The Old Capital* was originally serialized in both the Tokyo and Osaka editions of the *Asahi* newspaper in one hundred installments from October 1961 through January of the following year. As soon as he completed the novel, Kawabata checked himself into the hospital to be treated for an addiction to sleeping medications that he had developed while he was writing the book. Although Kawabata called *The Old Capital* his “abnormal product,” the novel takes up familiar themes: recognition of the gulf between the sexes and the anxiety it brings, yearning for the virginal ideal, and the linking of nature and man, setting and character.

The novel is set in Kyoto, a city of high art and the cultural soul of Japan since it became the capital almost eleven hundred years ago. Each obi weaver, kimono designer, tea master, and

calligrapher in the ancient city is the recipient of traditions that have been passed down through the ages. Their work embodies not only the peculiar aesthetic sensitivity of the artist himself, but also the spiritual blood of his predecessors as it flows down from the past.

Many Japanese regard Kawabata as the modern writer who most fully embodies ancient traditions—perhaps the most “Japanese” of modern Japanese authors. At the same time, many of his techniques and images were considered avant-garde and even shocking to Japanese readers of his time. After Japan’s defeat in the war, Kawabata said that he would write nothing but elegies for the remaining years of his life, and in *The Old Capital* he laments the decline of old Kyoto in the melancholy tone of elegy. But the crisis he depicts in the traditional artist of postwar Japan involves ambivalence; his characters confront disorienting yet alluring changes that they both welcome and deplore. The novel acknowledges and explores the necessarily ironic, and often seductive, relationship between innovation and tradition—the interplay of passivity and vitality in human existence and human endeavor.

Many friends helped me along the way to completing this translation. I would like to express my appreciation to Steven D. Carter now of Stanford University, who first introduced me to Japanese literature and the works of Kawabata; to Van C. Gessel of Brigham Young University, whose encouragement and suggestions helped me immensely; and to Hiroko Sugiura and many others who assisted me in deciphering difficult phrases, particularly those in the Kyoto dialect. I am grateful to Tom Ginsberg for bringing North Point Press and me together. I also would like to express my gratitude to Virginia Burnham for typing the manuscript, and to her

husband, James Coughlin, for providing a computer for the task. Most of all I want to thank my wife, Susan James Holman, whose patience and endurance in serving as editor, thesaurus, and friend saw me through to the final draft. I dedicate this translation to her.

J. Martin Holman
Berkeley, California
January 1987



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THE
FLOWERS
OF
SPRING

Chieko discovered the violets flowering on the trunk of the old maple tree. “Ah. They’ve bloomed again this year,” she said as she encountered the gentleness of spring.

The maple was rather large for such a small garden in the city; the trunk was larger around than Chieko’s waist. But this ancient tree with its coarse moss-covered bark was not the sort of thing one should compare with a girl’s innocent body.

The trunk of the tree twisted slightly to the right at about the height of Chieko’s waist, and just over her head it bent even farther. Above the bend the limbs extended outward, dominating the garden, the ends of the longer branches drooping with their own weight.

Just below the large bend were two hollow places with violets growing in each. Every spring they would put forth flowers. The two violets had been there on the tree ever since Chieko could remember.

The upper violet and the lower violet were separated by about

a foot. “Do the upper and lower violets ever meet? Do they know each other?” Chieko mused. What could it mean to say that the violets “meet” or “know” one another?

Every spring there were at least three but no more than five flowers on the violets in the tiny hollows. Chieko stared at them from the inner corridor that opened onto the garden, lifting her gaze from the base of the trunk of the maple tree. Sometimes she was moved by the “life” of the violets on the tree. Other times their “loneliness” touched her heart.

“To be born in such a place and go on living there . . .”

Though customers who came to the shop admired the splendid maple, few noticed the violets blooming on it. The tree had grown strong with age, the moss on the old trunk lending it dignity and elegance. The tiny violets lodging there attracted no attention.

But the butterflies knew them. The moment Chieko noticed the violets, several small white butterflies fluttered through the garden from the trunk near the flowers. The whiteness of their dance shone against the maple, which was just beginning to open its own small red leaf buds.

The flowers and leaves of the two violets cast a faint shadow on the new green of the moss on the maple trunk.

It was a cloudy, soft spring day.

Chieko sat in the corridor looking at the violets on the trunk until the butterflies had passed.

“You’ve bloomed there again for me this year,” Chieko wanted to whisper.

At the base of the maple, just below the violets, stood an old stone lantern. Chieko’s father had once told her that the standing image carved on the pedestal was that of Christ.

“Are you sure it isn’t Mary?” Chieko had asked. “The large statue of Mary at Kitano Tenjin Shrine looks just like this one.”

“They say it’s Christ,” her father said simply. “It’s not holding a baby.”

“Ah. Of course,” Chieko had to agree. Then she asked, “Were there any Christians among our ancestors?”

“No. A gardener or stonecutter probably placed it here. It’s not an uncommon sort of lantern.”

This Christian lantern had probably been made during the period when the religion had been proscribed. The rough stone was brittle, so the relief carving had been worn down and broken through hundreds of years of wind and rain, distinguishable now only as a head, body, and legs. Even when new it was probably but a simple carving. The sleeves were long, almost touching the ground. The hands seemed to be folded in prayer, but one could not tell merely from the small bulge at the forearm. Still, the impression was different from that of the statues of Buddha or the guardian deities.

Whether this Christian lantern had once been a symbol of faith or was nothing more than an ancient exotic ornament, it now stood at the foot of the old maple in the garden of Chieko’s family’s shop simply for the sake of its antique elegance. If it happened to catch a customer’s eye, Chieko’s father would tell him that it was a statue of Christ. But few of the salesmen who came noticed the somber lantern in the shade of the great maple tree. Even someone who happened to see it never looked at it closely; a lantern or two in a garden is to be expected.

Chieko lowered her gaze from the violets on the tree to regard the Christ. Although she had not attended a mission school, she had gone to church and read the Old and New Testaments in order to become familiar with English. But she felt the weathered lantern

was unworthy of an offering of flowers or votive candles. There was no cross carved anywhere on it.

She sometimes imagined the violets above the carving of Christ to be the heart of Mary. Once again Chieko lifted her eyes from the lantern to the flowers. In a moment she recalled the bell crickets she had been raising in a jar.

Chieko had begun raising bell crickets four or five years earlier, long after she had first found the violets on the old maple tree. She had heard them chirping in the parlor of the home of one of her school friends, and had received several as a gift.

“The poor things, living in a jar . . .,” Chieko had said. But her friend had answered that it was better than keeping them in a cage and letting them die there. She said that there were even temples that raised them in large quantities and sold the eggs. It seemed there were many who had similar tastes.

This year Chieko’s bell crickets had increased in number. She had two jars. Every year about the first of July the eggs would hatch, and about the middle of August the crickets began to chirp. But they were born, chirped, laid eggs, and died all inside of a dark, cramped jar. Still, since it preserved the species it was perhaps better than raising one short generation in a cage. The crickets spent their entire lives in a jar; it was the whole world to them. Chieko had heard the ancient Chinese legend of a “universe in a jar” in which there was a palace in a vessel filled with fine wine and delicacies from both land and sea. Isolated from the vulgar world, it was a separate realm, an enchanted land. The story was one of many such legends of wizards and magic.

Of course the bell crickets had not entered the jar in order to renounce the world. Perhaps they did not realize where they were, so they went on living.

What surprised Chieko most about the bell crickets was that if she happened not to put in males from elsewhere, the insects that hatched were stunted and feeble, the result of inbreeding. To prevent that, cricket fanciers would often trade male crickets. Now it was spring, and the bell crickets would not begin to chirp until late summer. Still, there was some connection between the crickets and the violets blooming in the hollows of the maple tree.

Chieko herself had placed the bell crickets in the jar, but why had the violets come to live in such a cramped spot? The violets bloomed, and this year too the crickets would hatch and begin their chirping.

“A natural life . . .”

A gentle breeze teased at Chieko’s hair, so she tucked the strands behind her ear. She thought of herself in comparison to the violets and the bell crickets.

“And me . . .”

Chieko was the solitary observer of the tiny violets on this spring day, a day that swelled with the vitality of nature.

The sounds from the shop indicated that someone was leaving for lunch. It was almost time for Chieko to get ready to go out to view the cherry blossoms.

Mizuki Shin’ichi had called Chieko the day before to invite her to see the cherry blossoms at Heian Shrine. A school friend of Shin’ichi’s had been working as a ticket taker at the entrance to the shrine garden for about two weeks. Shin’ichi heard from this friend that the flowers were now at their peak.

“It seems he’s been on the lookout. I don’t suppose you can be more certain,” Shin’ichi laughed softly. His laugh was charming.

“Is he going to be watching us too?” Chieko asked.

“He’s the gatekeeper, isn’t he? He lets anyone in.” Shin’ichi

laughed again briskly. "But if you don't like the idea, we could go in separately and meet somewhere inside the garden under the trees. You can look at the blossoms all you want by yourself. They aren't the sort of flowers you can tire of."

"If that's true, why don't you go see them alone?"

"I would, but don't blame me if there's a big rainstorm tonight and the blossoms all get blown off the trees . . ."

"Then we could see how elegant the flowers can look on the ground," Chieko said.

"You think the elegance of fallen flowers has something to do with their lying rain-soaked and muddy on the ground? My impression of fallen flowers is . . ."

"Don't be perverse."

"Who, me?"

Chieko left the house wearing an inconspicuous kimono.

The Heian Shrine was well known for the Festival of Ages. The shrine was built in 1895, the twenty-eighth year of the reign of Emperor Meiji, in honor of Emperor Kammu, who had established the Heian capital in Kyoto over a thousand years earlier, so the shrine hall was not very old. The gate and outer worship hall were said to be modeled after the Otemmon and Great Hall of State of the original Heian capital. A traditional Orange Tree of the Right and a Cherry Tree of the Left were also planted there. Komei, who had been emperor before the capital was moved to Tokyo, was enshrined there in 1938. Many weddings were held at the altar of the shrine.

The groves of red weeping cherry trees that dressed the garden were one of the splendid sights of Kyoto. "Surely there is nothing that represents spring in the old capital better than these flowers."

As Chieko entered the shrine garden the color of the weeping cherries blossomed deep in her heart. "Again this year I've greeted the spring in the capital." She stopped and gazed all about.

Was Shin'ichi waiting somewhere, or had he not yet come? Chieko looked for him, then decided to take in the flowers. She walked down between the blossoming trees to the lawn below. Shin'ichi lay there with his hands folded behind his head. His eyes were closed.

Chieko had not expected to find Shin'ichi lying there. She thought it disgusting that he would be napping when he was supposed to be waiting for a young woman. Chieko felt more revulsion at the sight of Shin'ichi sleeping than embarrassment at his bad manners. In her world Chieko was not accustomed to seeing a man asleep.

At his university Shin'ichi had probably had many lively discussions with his friends while relaxing on the lawn, looking up at the sky or leaning on his elbows. He had merely adopted the same posture today.

Four or five old women were having a casual conversation beside Shin'ichi, their lunch spread on the lawn. Perhaps feeling an affinity for the women, he had sat down beside them and fallen on his back. Thinking that might have been what happened, Chieko almost smiled, but instead she blushed, just standing there without calling to wake him. Then Chieko started to walk away from Shin'ichi; she had never looked into the face of a sleeping man.

Shin'ichi was dressed in his school uniform, and his hair was all in place. His long eyelashes reminded her of a little boy. Still, she could not look at him directly.

"Chieko." Shin'ichi stood up, calling to her.

Chieko felt offended. "Sleeping in a place like this. It's unseemly. Everyone can see you as they walk by."

"I wasn't sleeping. I knew when you came."

“You’re mean,” Chieko said.

“What would you have done if I hadn’t called to you?”

“Did you pretend to be asleep when you saw me?”

“I thought, what a happy girl has entered the garden, and I felt sad. And my head has been hurting . . .”

“Me? I’m happy?”

Shin’ichi did not answer.

“You have a headache?”

“No, it feels better.”

“Your color is bad.”

“No, I’m all right,” Shin’ichi protested.

“Your face is like a fine sword.”

Shin’ichi had occasionally been told that by others, but this was the first time he had heard it from Chieko.

When something violent within him was about to ignite, people spoke of Shin’ichi’s face in such terms.

“Fine swords don’t kill people. Besides, we’re beneath the flowers here.” Shin’ichi laughed.

Chieko returned from the lawn to the corridor entrance at the top of a small hill. Shin’ichi stood up and followed her.

“I want to see all the flowers before we go,” Chieko said.

At the entrance to the west corridor the blossoms of the red weeping cherry trees suddenly made one feel spring had indeed arrived. The scarlet double flowers were blooming all the way to the tips of the slenderest weeping branches. It would be more fitting to say that the flowers were borne upon the twigs than to say they were simply blossoming there.

“These are my favorite flowers in the garden,” Chieko said, leading Shin’ichi to a place where the corridor turned outward.

The branches of a single cherry tree spread particularly wide. Shin'ichi stood beside Chieko, gazing at the tree.

"If you look closely, it seems feminine," he said. "The slender drooping branches and the flowers are gentle, lush."

The faintest touch of lavender seemed to reflect on the scarlet of the flowers.

"Until now I hadn't ever thought of them as so feminine," Shin'ichi said. "The color of the blossoms, their elegance, their captivating charm . . ."

Leaving the cherry tree, the two of them walked toward the pond. At a narrow spot in the path, where folding stools had been set out and a red carpet spread on the ground, visitors sat drinking tea.

A girl called Chieko's name. Dressed in a formal, long-sleeved kimono, Masako came out of the tearoom, Choshintei, which stood in the shadow of the trees.

"Chieko, would you lend a hand for a moment? I'm so tired. I'm helping with my teacher's guests."

"Dressed like this, the most I could do is work in the kitchen out of sight."

"That would be fine. We're making the tea in the back today."

"I'm with someone."

Noticing Shin'ichi, Masako whispered in Chieko's ear, "Your fiancé?"

Chieko shook her head slightly.

"Boyfriend?"

She shook her head again.

Shin'ichi turned and was walking away.

"Why don't you come inside and sit down . . . together," Masako suggested. "The place is empty now." But Chieko refused and followed after Shin'ichi.

“She’s pretty, isn’t she?” Chieko asked when she caught up with Shin’ichi.

“A common sort of pretty,” he responded.

“Oh, she might hear you.”

Chieko nodded to Masako, who waved good-bye.

The path below the tearoom came out at a pond. Near the bank the leaves of the water irises stood vying with one another in their youthful green. Water-lily pads floated on the surface of the pond.

There were no cherry trees here.

Circling the bank, Chieko and Shin’ichi entered a path in the shadow of some trees. It smelled of new leaves and damp earth. The narrow shaded path was short; where it ended, a bright pond garden opened up that was even larger than the one they had left. The flowers of the red weeping cherry trees were reflected in the water, illuminating the eyes of the visitors. Some foreign tourists were photographing the blossoms.

In a grove of trees on the opposite bank an andromeda tree modestly put forth its white blossoms. Chieko thought of the old city of Nara. There were also pine trees that were well shaped but not tall. Had there been no cherry blossoms the green of the pines would still have remained to catch the eye. No, even now the undefiled green of the pines and the water in the pond set off the masses of red weeping cherry blossoms even more splendidly.

Shin’ichi walked ahead, crossing the stepping-stones in the pond, which were known as “marsh-crossing” stones. Round, they looked as if the columns of a Shinto gate had been sliced and lined up across the pond. In spots Chieko had to lift her kimono a bit to cross.

Shin’ichi glanced back at her. “I wish I could carry you across.”

“I’d be impressed . . . if you could.”

Even an old woman could cross these stepping-stones.

Water-lily pads floated around the stones. As Chieko and Shin’ichi approached the bank the small pines were reflected in the pond.

“I wonder if the way these stepping-stones are placed is meant to be some sort of abstraction,” Shin’ichi said.

“Aren’t all Japanese gardens abstract? Like the moss among the cedars in the garden at Daigoji Temple. But the more everyone goes on about how ‘abstract’ it is, the less I like it.”

“That’s true. The moss there is surely abstract. They’ve finished repairs on the pagoda at Daigoji. Would you like to see it? . . . the unveiling?”

“Will it end up like the new Gold Pavilion?”

“It’s probably been newly painted in bright colors. The pagoda didn’t burn down like the Gold Pavilion. They took it apart, then reassembled it as it was originally. The unveiling will be when the flowers are at their best. There should be crowds of people there.”

“I don’t care to see any flowers besides these weeping cherry blossoms here.”

The two crossed the last of the stepping-stones to the inner side of the garden.

From the bank where some pine trees stood Chieko and Shin’ichi crossed to the Bridge Hall. Correctly, it was called Taiheikaku, but it was actually a bridge that looked like a hall. Both sides of the bridge were fitted with low benches with back rests. Visitors sat there to relax and admire the layout of the garden beyond the pond. But, no, this was a garden whose focus was indeed the pond.

Some of the people seated there were taking refreshments, while children ran about the center of the bridge.

“Shin’ichi! Shin’ichi! Over here . . .” Chieko took a seat, putting down her right hand to save a place for him.

“I can just stand,” Shin’ichi said. “Or maybe I’ll just squat here at your feet.”

“No, you won’t.” Chieko stood up quickly and forced Shin’ichi to sit down. “I’ll go buy some food for the carp.”

Chieko returned and tossed food into the pond. Scrambling for it, the carp piled on top of each other, some even rising up out of the water. The rings of waves spread outward, causing the reflections of the cherries and pines to tremble on the surface of the pond.

“Would you like to throw in the rest of the fish food?” she asked Shin’ichi, but he said nothing.

“Does your head still hurt?”

“No.”

They sat for a long while. Shin’ichi stared fixedly at the surface of the water, his face clear.

“What are you thinking about?” Chieko asked.

“Hmm . . . I wonder myself. Aren’t there times when you’re happy just thinking of nothing?”

“On days like this, with the flowers . . .”

“No. I mean in the company of such a happy girl. Your happiness drifts on the breeze like a fragrance, like the warmth of youth.”

“I’m happy?” Chieko asked. A shadow of melancholy flickered across her face. But she was looking down, so it may have been just the pond water reflecting in her eyes.

Chieko stood up. “There’s a cherry tree I like on the other side of the bridge.”

“I can see it from here. It’s that one, isn’t it?”

The red weeping cherry was a splendid sight, famous for its branches, which drooped like a willow yet spread out wide. As Chieko stood beneath the tree, petals fell about her feet and shoulders in the delicate breeze.

The flowers lay scattered on the ground. A few petals floated on the pond as well, but no more than seven or eight.

Although the tree was supported by a bamboo scaffolding, it seemed as if the delicate tips of its branches would touch the water.

Beyond the pond, above the groves of trees on the east bank, the mountains with their new young leaves could be seen through the blossoms of the double cherry.

“Is that part of Higashiyama?” asked Shin’ichi.

“It’s Daimonji Mountain,” Chieko answered.

“Really? Daimonji? Doesn’t it look awfully tall?”

“That’s because you’re looking at it from beneath the flowers.”

Chieko was standing with Shin’ichi under the blossoming tree.

They were reluctant to leave.

Coarse white sand was spread around the cherry tree. A group of beautiful pines, rather tall for this garden, stood to the right. Beside them was the exit to the shrine garden.

As they passed through the gate Chieko said, “I want to go to Kiyomizu now.”

“Kiyomizu Temple?” Shin’ichi’s face betrayed his lack of interest.

“I want to see the sunset over the capital from Kiyomizu, to watch the sun go down in the sky over the mountains to the west,” Chieko said.

Shin’ichi nodded. “Let’s go.”

“On foot, right?”

The road was rather long. They avoided the avenues where the streetcars ran, taking the more secluded route around to Nanzenji Temple Road, passing behind Chion'in Temple. Then they crossed the back side of Maruyama Park, walking the old narrow path that emerged at Kiyomizu Temple. The spring evening mist had just filled the air.

The only sightseers left on the veranda of the temple were three or four girl students, but their faces were not clearly visible.

This was the hour when Chieko preferred to visit. Votive candles burned in the dark recesses of the Great Hall, but Chieko passed by without stopping, continuing on from the Amida Hall to the rear sanctuary.

The veranda of the rear sanctuary was built overhanging a cliff. Like the light, buoyant cypress bark roof, the veranda too appeared to be delicately suspended. The veranda faced west, looking out toward Nishiyama on the far side of the capital.

The lights were burning in town, leaving a faint glow.

Chieko leaned against the railing and gazed toward the west. She seemed to have forgotten about Shin'ichi. He drew near her.

“Shin'ichi. I was an abandoned child, a foundling,” Chieko spoke abruptly.

“An abandoned child?”

“Yes.”

Shin'ichi puzzled over whether the words “abandoned child” had some emotional meaning.

“Abandoned,” Shin'ichi whispered. “Even you sometimes feel as though you were an abandoned child, Chieko? If you are abandoned, then so am I . . . spiritually. Maybe all people are abandoned

children. Perhaps being born is like being abandoned on this earth by God.”

Shin’ichi stared at Chieko’s profile. The glow of dusk colored her cheeks ever so faintly. Perhaps it was the poignancy of the spring evening.

“They do say we are God’s children. He abandons us here, then tries to save us . . .”

But Chieko looked down on the lights of the old capital city as if she heard nothing. She did not even turn to Shin’ichi.

Moved by Chieko’s sadness, which he could not comprehend, Shin’ichi started to put his hand on her shoulder. She pulled away.

“You shouldn’t touch an abandoned child.”

“I told you God’s children, all people, are abandoned here,” Shin’ichi raised his voice.

“It’s nothing so complicated as that. I wasn’t abandoned by God. My human parents abandoned me.”

Shin’ichi did not speak.

“I was a foundling, left in front of the red lattice door of the shop.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s true. Though it’s no use telling you the story. When I stand here on the veranda of Kiyomizu, looking out on the sunset over this huge city, I wonder if I was born here in Kyoto.”

“What are you talking about? You’re crazy.”

“Why would I lie about something like this?”

“You’re the pampered only child of a wholesaler. An only daughter is a slave to her delusions.”

“It’s true. My parents do pamper me. It doesn’t matter now that I was a foundling.”

“Do you have proof that you were a foundling?”

“Proof? The lattice door. I know that old door well.” Chieko’s

voice became more lovely. "I was in middle school, I think, when my mother called me to her and told me I was not her own daughter, not one who caused her the pain of childbirth. She said they stole a lovely baby and escaped in a car. But Mother and Father slip up and tell me different stories about where they got me. Sometimes they say it was in the evening beneath the cherry blossoms at Gion. Other times it's the riverbed of the Kamo. They think it would be too painful for me to know I was abandoned in front of the shop."

"And you don't know who your real parents are?"

"The mother and father I have now love me very much. I don't have any desire to look for my real parents. Perhaps they are even among the graves of the unknown pilgrims in Adashino. Of course all the stones there are quite old."

The soft evening color of spring had spread, like a faint red mist, from Nishiyama across half the sky.

Shin'ichi could not believe that Chieko was a foundling, much less a kidnapped child. Chieko's home was in an old wholesalers' neighborhood, so one could know by asking around if what she said was true. Naturally, Shin'ichi did not wish to investigate. He was puzzled. What he wanted to know was, why Chieko had made such a confession to him here.

Perhaps Chieko had led Shin'ichi to Kiyomizu to reveal this to him, in her pure voice with a beautiful note of strength that rang in its depths. She had not seemed to be making an appeal to Shin'ichi.

Surely Chieko vaguely realized that he loved her. Was her confession meant to offer personal knowledge of herself to the one she loved? It did not sound that way to Shin'ichi. Rather, it echoed of a rejection of his love, even if she had simply made up the story about being a foundling.

At Heian Shrine Shin'ichi had said three times that Chieko was "happy." Thinking it would be fair if she were protesting that, he asked her, "After you realized that you were a foundling, were you sad? Did you feel sad or lonely?"

"No, I didn't feel in the least sad or lonely."

Shin'ichi did not speak.

"Only when I told my father I wanted to go to college and he said that it would just get in the way, since I am to succeed him in the family business, that instead I should start learning the trade—that was the only time."

"Was that the year before last?"

"Yes."

"Are you completely obedient to your parents?"

"Yes, completely."

"Even when it comes to something like marriage?"

"Yes. For now I intend to be obedient," Chieko answered without hesitation.

"What about yourself? Don't you have your own feelings?" Shin'ichi asked.

"Having too many seems to cause trouble."

"So you suppress them . . . you stifle your feelings?"

"No, not that."

"You're speaking nothing but riddles." Shin'ichi attempted a gentle laugh, but his voice faltered. Leaning onto the railing, he tried to look into Chieko's face.

"I want to see the face of a puzzling abandoned child."

"It's dark now." Chieko turned toward Shin'ichi for the first time. Her eyes flashed.

"How frightening," she cried out as she glanced up at the eaves of the Great Hall. The ponderous dark mass of the cypress roof loomed over her.



THE
CONVENT
TEMPLE
AND THE
LATTICE DOOR

Three or four days earlier Chieko's father, Sada Takichiro, had secluded himself in a temple hidden deep in a remote part of Saga.

It was a convent temple, but its lone occupant was the head abbess of the hermitage, who was more than sixty-five years old. The small convent was historic because of its association with the old capital, but the entrance was hidden by a grove of bamboo, so tourists seldom visited. It was a quiet temple. The detached room was used occasionally for a tea ceremony, but it was in no way a teahouse of name. From time to time the abbess left the convent to give lessons in flower arranging.

Could one say that Sada Takichiro had come to resemble this convent temple where he rented a room?

Sada's business was a wholesale dry goods shop in the Nakagyo Ward of Kyoto. He had incorporated his shop, as had most others around him. Takichiro was of course the president, but he left the transactions to his head clerk. Still, he retained many business practices reminiscent of a traditional shop.

Since his youth Takichiro had had the disposition of a master. He was something of a misanthrope. He utterly lacked the ambition to hold a one-man show of his weaving and dyeing work, but his pieces would not have sold even if he had displayed them, for they were too novel for their time.

His father, Takichibei, quietly observed his son's actions. The shop did not lack for stylish designs, as it handled patterns drawn by its own designer and other artists. But when Takichibei realized that his son, who was no genius, had hit a slump and started producing queer designs under the influence of narcotics, he had sent him straight to the hospital.

After Takichiro took over the shop his designs became more normal, and this he lamented. His reason for shutting himself up alone in the convent was to achieve a heavenly design.

Kimono styles had changed markedly since the war. Takichiro recalled the strange, narcotic-inspired designs of his early years and wondered if now they might not be considered refreshingly abstract, but he was already in his late fifties.

"Shall I go with a bold classic pattern?" Takichiro sometimes whispered to himself, but his mind was flooded with scores of superb patterns from earlier days. All the patterns and colors of ancient cloth filled his head. Naturally, he also walked through the famous parks, mountains, and fields of Kyoto making sketches for kimonos.

Chieko arrived about noon.

"Father, would you like some Morika boiled tofu? I bought some for you."

"Oh, thank you. I'm happy about the tofu, but I'm even more pleased that you've come. Won't you stay until evening and help unravel the thoughts in this old head . . . so I can think up a good design?"

A cloth wholesaler did not need to draw patterns. Such a pursuit could in fact get in the way of business. But Takichiro sometimes sat for as long as half a day at his desk by a parlor window in the back, facing the inner garden and its Christian lantern. Behind the desk in two old paulownia-wood wardrobes were samples of ancient Chinese and Japanese cloth. The bookcases to the sides of them were filled with patterns of fabrics from around the world.

On the second floor of a storehouse, separated from the shop, were a number of Noh theater costumes and wedding kimonos preserved in their original state. There was also a great deal of chintz from Central and Southeast Asia.

Takichiro had inherited some of these items from his father and grandfather, but when exhibitions of ancient cloth were held and a display was requested of him, he would flatly decline. "According to the wishes of my forebears, the cloth does not leave this house." He was stubborn in his refusal.

The Sada house was an old-style Kyoto home, so one had to pass through the narrow hall beside Takichiro's desk to reach the toilet. He would frown silently at these comings and goings, and when the shop became noisy he would call out sharply to demand quiet.

The clerk would bow low to the floor. "We have a customer from Osaka."

"It's fine with me if he doesn't buy anything here. There are plenty of other wholesalers."

"But he's an old steady customer."

"One buys fabrics with the eye. If he has to use his mouth, surely he must have no sense for them. A real businessman would know at a glance. But then . . . we do have a lot of cheap stuff here too."

"Yes, sir."

Takichiro had an antique foreign carpet spread on the floor from his desk to the cushion where he was seated. And draperies made from fine southern chintz surrounded him. This had been Chieko's idea. The draperies served to soften the noise from the store. From time to time Chieko changed them for a new pattern, and each time she did so Takichiro understood the gentleness of her heart. He spoke to her of Java or Persia, of some period of history, of the design of the cloth of the draperies. Chieko did not always understand his detailed explanations.

"This is too good to use for bags and too big to cut up for tea ceremony cloths. If you made it into obi sashes, how many could you cut from it?" Chieko asked once as she looked around at the chintz fabric enclosing her father's workplace.

"Bring me the scissors," her father said.

Takichiro cut the chintz drapes with the expertise one would expect of him.

"This will make a good obi for you, won't it, Chieko?"

Chieko was startled. Tears welled in her eyes. "Oh, no, Father. What are you doing?"

"It's all right. It's all right. If you would wear an obi made from this chintz maybe some new ideas for designs would come to me again."

That was the obi Chieko wore to the convent temple in Saga.

Of course Takichiro noticed the chintz obi immediately, but he did not give it a second look. The pattern was large and showy for a chintz design, with both dark and pale areas. He had wondered if it was the right obi for a girl to wear during cherry blossom season.

Chieko placed a lunch box at her father's side.

"Will you have something to eat? Wait just a moment, I'll prepare the tofu for you."

Her father was silent.

Chieko stood up and turned toward the bamboo grove by the gate.

“It’s already ‘bamboo autumn,’” her father said. “The earthen walls here have started to crumble and lean. They’ve all but collapsed . . . just like me.”

Chieko was accustomed to hearing her father speak in such a manner. She did not even try to console him. She merely repeated his words, “bamboo autumn.”

“How do the cherry trees look along the way here?” her father asked casually.

“The fallen petals are floating on the pond. And there are a couple of trees still in bloom on the mountain among the new green leaves of the other trees. They’re all the more lovely from a distance as you walk by.”

Chieko went into the kitchen. Takichiro could hear the sound of her chopping onions and grating dried fish. She returned with the special set of utensils for boiled tofu. Takichiro had brought a wide range of dishes from home for his stay.

Chieko waited on her father piously. “Why don’t you have a bite with me?” her father asked.

“Thank you,” Chieko answered.

Takichiro looked his daughter over from her shoulder to her waist. “It’s so plain. You always wear my designs. You’re probably the only person who does. You always end up wearing what won’t sell.”

“It’s all right. I wear them because I like them.”

“But they’re so plain.”

“They *are* plain, but . . .”

“There’s nothing wrong with a young girl wearing plain clothes,” Chieko’s father spoke with unexpected severity.

“People who look closely always compliment me.”

Her father fell silent.

Takichiro now drew designs merely as a hobby or diversion. The shop had become a wholesale business aimed at popular tastes; the head clerk would have two or three of each of his designs dyed into cloth in order to save face for the master. Chieko always took one for herself and wore them willingly. The fabric for her clothing was carefully selected.

“It’s not necessary that you wear only my designs,” Takichiro said. “And you don’t have to wear kimonos just from our shop either. You needn’t feel such an obligation.”

“Obligation?” Chieko was taken aback. “I don’t wear them out of obligation.”

“If you start wearing showy kimonos, should I assume you’ve found yourself a man?” Her father laughed loudly, but he did not smile.

As she was serving the boiled tofu, Chieko noticed her father’s great desk. There was nothing there to indicate that he had been designing a dye pattern; only an Edo-period lacquer inkstone box and two rolls of hand copies of Ki no Tsurayuki’s introduction to the imperial poetry anthology, the *Kokinshu*, rested on one corner.

Chieko wondered if her father had come to the temple to forget about the business at the shop.

“It’s never too late to learn, so I’m studying calligraphy.” Takichiro spoke with some embarrassment. “But the flowing line of these Fujiwara characters will probably be of some use to me in my designs.”

Chieko was silent.

“It’s miserable. My hand trembles so.”

“What if you drew them larger?”

“I am already drawing large characters.”

“What’s that rosary on top of the inkstone box?”

“Oh, that? I asked the abbess for it. She gave it to me.”

“Do you use it to worship?” Chieko asked.

“It’s what young people nowadays might call my ‘mascot.’ But sometimes I feel like cracking the beads with my teeth.”

“What a nasty idea. I imagine it’s dirty with years of grime.”

“What do you mean ‘nasty’? They’re the fingerprints of the faith of generations of nuns.”

Chieko silently lowered her eyes, feeling as though she had touched a sorrow in her father. She carried the dishes of leftover food back to the kitchen.

“Where is the abbess?” Chieko asked when she returned.

“She’ll probably be back soon. What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to take a walk around Saga, then go home. There are probably crowds of people at Arashiyama now, but I also like Nonomiya, Adashino, and the path to Nison’in Temple, so I’ll go there.”

“If you like places like that at your age, I worry about your future. Don’t take after me!” Takichiro said.

“Is it possible for a woman to take after a man?”

Chieko’s father stood on the veranda, watching her as she walked away.

The old abbess soon returned and began cleaning the garden.

Takichiro sat at his desk. He called to mind the paintings of ferns and wildflowers by Sotatsu and Korin. He thought of Chieko, who had just left.

The convent temple where her father had secluded himself was hidden from the village road by a grove of bamboo.

To visit Nembutsu Temple in Adashino, Chieko climbed the ancient steps as far as the two stone Buddhas on the cliff to the left, but hearing the chatter of voices coming from farther ahead, she stopped.

The countless hundreds of dilapidated small pillar tombstones there were called Buddhas of the potter's field. Nowadays photography sessions were occasionally held there; women clad in strange, scanty dress would be posed among the stones of the small toppled pillars. Today the voices were probably from such a gathering.

Chieko descended the stone steps from the Buddhist statues. She recalled her father's words.

Even if her reason for going to Adashino was merely to avoid the spring tourists at Arashiyama, such places as Adashino and Nonomiya were certainly not right for a young girl, and even less suitable than wearing her father's drab kimono designs.

"Father doesn't appear to be doing anything at that old temple." Chieko felt a faint sadness permeate her chest. "I wonder what he could be thinking about as he sits there biting on those old grimy rosary beads."

Chieko knew how, in the shop, her father would often try to suppress his feelings, which were so intense that he might have wished to crush the beads of the rosary with his teeth.

"It would be better if he bit my finger," Chieko whispered, shaking her head. Then she turned her thoughts to the time when she and her mother struck the bell at Nembutsu Temple together.

The bell tower had been newly built. Her mother was a small woman, so try as she might, the bell had made little sound. Chieko had put her hand over her mother's. "There's a knack to it," she said as they struck the bell together. It resounded loudly.

"There is! I wonder how far it will echo." Her mother was elated.

“Not as far as when the priest strikes it. He’s experienced,” Chieko laughed.

Chieko recalled that incident as she walked the lane toward Nonomiya. It had not been so long ago that this lane was described as leading to the depths of a bamboo grove, but what once might have been a dark footpath was now bright and open. There were even vendors in front of the gate who called to passersby.

The small shrine, however, had not changed. It was described even in *The Tale of Genji*. The imperial princesses who were to serve at Ise Shrine would spend three years there in purification from the unclean world before going on to Ise. The shrine was known for its small brushwood fence and its Shinto gate made of logs with the bark still on them.

The road through the fields ran from the front of Nonomiya Shrine, opening out on the expanse of Arashiyama.

Chieko boarded a bus by a row of pines on the near side of Togetsu Bridge.

“I wonder what I should tell Mother about Father, though she knows what’s the matter.”

Many of the houses in Nakagyo were lost in the Teppo Fire and the Dondon Fire, before the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Takichiro’s shop had not escaped damage.

Although there were old Kyoto-style houses left with lattice doors and lattice windows in the second story, none was more than a hundred years old. The storehouse behind the shop, however, was said to have survived the fires.

The shop had not been refurbished in a modern style. That was partly due to the temperament of the master, but it may also have been the fault of the spiritless wholesale business.

Returning home, Chieko opened the lattice door and looked through to the rear of the house. Her mother, Shige, was sitting at Takichiro's desk smoking. She propped her cheek on her left hand, and her back was bent as if she were reading or writing, but there was nothing on the desk.

"I'm home." Chieko approached her mother.

"Oh, thank you for your help." Shige seemed to come to herself. "How's your father?"

"Well . . .," Chieko groped for an answer. "I bought some tofu for him."

"The Morika kind? That probably made him happy. Did you make boiled tofu?"

Chieko nodded.

"How was Arashiyama?" her mother asked.

"Crowds of people were out today."

"Did your father go with you to Arashiyama?"

"No, the abess was out, so he had to stay to look after the place." Then Chieko thought of an answer. "Father seems to be studying calligraphy."

"Calligraphy?" Her mother spoke as if it were nothing extraordinary. "I hope it will calm his heart. I also studied calligraphy once."

Chieko looked at her mother's noble face and fair complexion. Chieko could read no movement in her countenance.

"Chieko," her mother called softly. "Chieko, when the time comes, you don't have to take over the shop." Chieko did not respond, so Shige continued. "If you want, you may marry into another family and leave home."

Still Chieko was silent.

"Are you listening to me?"

"Why are you talking about such things?"

“I can’t tell you in a word, but I’m fifty years old now. I’ve thought about what to say for some time.”

“What if you and Father just gave up the business and retired, Mother?” Chieko’s beautiful eyes moistened.

“We don’t have to make that big a jump, but . . .” Chieko’s mother smiled slightly.

“Chieko, you said we should quit the business. Is that what you really think?”

Her mother’s voice was not loud, but she seemed to turn on her daughter. Or had Chieko imagined the smile on her mother’s face?

“That’s how I feel,” Chieko answered. A thread of pain passed through her chest.

“I’m not angry. Please don’t make such a face. You know who would be the sadder, the young girl who can say her parents should quit their work or the old woman who hears her say it.”

“Mother, please forgive me.”

“It’s not a question of whether I forgive you or not.”

Then her mother really smiled. “That doesn’t sound like what I said a bit ago, does it?”

“I don’t understand what I would say myself,” Chieko said.

“People, including women, should not change what they say, to the bitter end.”

“Mother.”

“Did you tell your father the same thing at Saga?”

“No. I haven’t said anything to Father.”

“Tell him and see what he says . . . please. He’s a man, and he’ll probably be angry, but I’m certain that he’ll be pleased in his heart.” Her mother rested her forehead on her hand. “I was sitting here at the desk thinking about your father.”

“Mother, you know what’s happening, don’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

Mother and daughter were silent for a while. Then Chieko spoke, as if she could not keep still. “Shall I go to Nishiki market to get something for dinner?”

“Yes, please.”

Chieko stood up and went toward the shop, stepping down into the entry. Originally, the entry room had been narrow, extending far to the back of the house. On the wall opposite the shop black stoves stood in a row. This had been the kitchen.

Now of course the stoves were no longer used. They had installed a gas range in the back of the entry room and put down a wood floor. The lower walls were the original plaster. The draftiness made the severe winters of Kyoto particularly bitter.

The hearth, however, was still intact, as it was in many houses, probably because faith in Kojin, the fire god, was still prevalent. A Shinto talisman was hung behind the hearth as a precaution against fire. Potbellied statues of Hotei, the god of fortune, also stood in a row. There could be as many as seven. The number had increased each year when the Sadas bought one at the Inari Shrine in Fushimi on the Hatsuuma in February. If there was a death in the family, they would remove the figures and begin again with one.

Seven figures of gods stood on the hearth in the shop; with only father, mother, and daughter in the house now, there had been no deaths for seven, even ten years.

A white porcelain vase was placed to the side of the row of gods on the hearth. Every two or three days Chieko’s mother would change the water and carefully wipe the shelf.

Just as Chieko started down the street she saw a young man about to enter the lattice door.

“It’s the man from the bank.”

He had not noticed Chieko.

There was nothing to worry about; it was the same young bank employee who always came. But Chieko’s feet grew heavy. She walked along the front of the shop, lightly touching her fingers to each strip of latticework.

At the end of the lattice Chieko glanced back at the shop, then looked up.

The old signboard in front of the lattice window on the second floor caught her eye. The small roof attached to the sign was the mark of a shop of old standing, but it also seemed to be a sort of decoration.

The inclining sun of the peaceful spring shone on the dull, weatherworn gold lettering of the sign, making it look all the more forlorn. The thick cotton shop-door curtain was faded white, with heavy threads dangling from it.

“Even the red weeping cherries at Heian Shrine have times when they are lonely, subdued by this kind of feeling.” Chieko hurried away.

Shoppers thronged the market street at Nishiki, as always.

On her way back to the shop near home Chieko saw one of the Shirakawa women, vendors who came to the city to sell the products of the fields on the outskirts of Kyoto. Chieko called to her, “Please stop by our house too.”

“Thank you. I will. You got back just in time,” said the young woman. “Where have you been?”

“To Nishiki.”

“I see.”

“I’d like to buy some flowers from you for the family altar.”

“Oh. Thank you. See if there’s anything you’d like.”

The “flowers” were actually branches of *sakaki* used in Shinto rituals, but the leaves were still young.

The Shirakawa women came around on the first and fifteenth of each month.

“I’m so glad you were home today,” the Shirakawa woman said.

Choosing a small branch of young leaves made Chieko’s heart beat faster. Grasping the *sakaki* branch in one hand, she entered the house. “Mother, I’m home.” Her voice was bright.

Chieko opened the lattice door again halfway and looked out at the street. The flower vendor was still there.

“Please come in and rest a while before you go. I’ll make some tea,” Chieko called to her.

“Thank you. You’re always so kind.” The young woman nodded. Then carrying her flowers over her head, she stepped into the entry room. “All I have is some plain wildflowers.”

“I like wildflowers. Thank you for remembering.” Chieko gazed at the flowers gathered from meadows and mountains.

Just inside the gate before the hearth was an old well with a woven bamboo cover. Chieko placed the *sakaki* and flowers on it.

“I’ll get some scissors. Oh, and I’ll have to wash the *sakaki* leaves.”

“Here are some scissors.” The Shirakawa woman held them out. “Your hearth is always so tidy. We flower vendors are certainly grateful for people like you.”

“My mother is quite particular about cleanliness.”

“And you too, Miss.”

Chieko was silent.

“In so many homes now the hearths and the vases collect dust and the well covers are dirty. These days even flower vendors feel

sad about it. It's too bad. But coming here to your house makes me feel relieved and pleased."

Still Chieko did not speak. She could not bring herself to talk of how her family's business seemed to be declining as the days passed.

Shige was still sitting at Takichiro's desk.

Chieko called her mother to the kitchen to show her what she had bought at the market. As Chieko removed items from the basket her mother marveled at how frugal her daughter had become. Maybe it was because her father was away at the convent temple in Saga.

"I'll help," her mother said as she came into the kitchen. "Was that the flower woman who always comes by?"

"Yes."

"Did your father have the books of paintings you gave him there with him at Saga?" her mother asked.

"I didn't notice them."

"He only took the ones he got from you, didn't he?"

The books contained paintings by Paul Klee, Matisse, Chagall, and also more modern abstract artists. Chieko had bought them for her father, thinking they might awaken in him a new sensitivity.

"It wouldn't matter if your father didn't draw any designs at all. It's enough just to handle goods that were dyed elsewhere. But your father . . .," Shige said.

"And you, Chieko, you're kind enough to wear only your father's kimonos. I should thank you," her mother continued.

"Thank me? I only wear them because I like them."

"Don't you think your father is sad when he sees the kimonos and obis his daughter wears?"

“Mother, they may seem plain, but if you look closely, they have a particular flavor. People compliment me on them.”

Chieko recalled that she had had the same talk with her father earlier that day.

“Sometimes a pretty girl looks even prettier in a plain kimono, but . . .” Her mother lifted the lid from the pot and tested the boiling food with chopsticks. “I wonder why your father can’t draw anything showy or fashionable anymore.”

Chieko did not speak.

“Years ago he used to create quite striking and original designs.”

Chieko nodded but then spoke. “You wear Father’s designs, don’t you, Mother?”

“I’m old, so it’s all right.”

“Old? Old? How old are you?”

“On an old person . . .” Her mother stopped midsentence.

“What about the Intangible Cultural Treasures—Living Treasures, aren’t they called? Komiya’s Edo stencil-resist patterns. When young girls wear those they look even more striking. They stand out. People turn their heads when they pass.”

“You couldn’t compare your father to a great man like Master Komiya.”

“Father’s designs come from the depth of a spiritual wave.”

“You say such difficult things.” Her mother’s expression changed. Her skin was pure white, typical of a Kyoto woman. “But, Chieko, your father has always said he would make a dazzling kimono for your wedding. I’ve been looking forward to that for a long time.”

“My wedding?” Chieko frowned and fell silent for a while.

“Mother, what’s ever happened in your life that overturned your heart completely?”

“Maybe I’ve talked about this before, but the first time was when I got married, and the other was when your father and I stole you away when you were a tiny baby. We picked you up and escaped by car. That was twenty years ago, but even now I feel a fluttering in my breast when I think of it. Here, Chieko, feel your mother’s heart, how it’s pounding.”

“Mother, I was a foundling, an abandoned child, wasn’t I?”

“No. No.” Her mother shook her head rather sharply.

“Once or twice in their lives people do something frightfully evil,” her mother continued. “Kidnapping a baby is a deeper sin than stealing money or anything else. Maybe it’s more evil than murder.”

Chieko did not speak.

“Your real parents were probably crazed with grief. When I think about it, even now I feel I should return you, but it’s too late. If you wanted to leave us to seek out your real parents I couldn’t stop you, but I would probably die.”

“Mother, don’t say such things. You are the only mother I have. I always felt that way as I was growing up.”

“I understand. And that makes my sin all the worse. I realize that your father and I will go to hell . . . What is hell? Perhaps it would be to have our dear daughter leave us.”

Her mother’s tone was severe, but Chieko saw tears running down her cheeks even as she tried to hold back her own.

“Mother, please tell me the truth. I was a foundling, wasn’t I?”

“No! I’ve told you that you weren’t.” Her mother shook her head again. “Why do you want to think you were a foundling?”

“I can’t imagine that you and father would steal a child.”

“Didn’t I just tell you that once or twice in their lives people do something fearfully evil that overturns their hearts?”

“If it’s true, where did you find me?”

“Under the cherry blossoms at night at Gion Shrine,” her mother responded without hesitation. “I may have told you before, but there beneath the blossoms a lovely baby had been laid on a bench to sleep. She looked up at us and smiled like a flower. I couldn’t help but pick her up. When I did my heart was pierced. I couldn’t bear it. I pressed my cheek against hers. When I looked at your father’s face he said, ‘Shige, let’s take this baby.’ ‘What?’ ‘Hurry, let’s go.’ The rest is like a frantic dream. I think we jumped into the car in front of the restaurant Hiranoya.”

Chieko said nothing.

“The baby’s mother had just stepped away for a moment. We stole her baby during that instant.”

Her mother’s story contained no implausible details.

“Fate . . . then you became our daughter. Twenty years have passed now. Whether it has been good for you or bad, I don’t know. Even if it *has* been good for you, I’ll always fold my hands and beg forgiveness in my heart. I think your father feels the same.”

“It’s been good, Mother. I believe it has been good.” Chieko put both her palms to her eyes.

Whether she was a foundling or whether she had been stolen, Chieko was registered as the legitimate daughter of the Sada family in the government records.

When she was first told by her parents that she was not really their daughter, Chieko could not believe it was true. Having just entered middle school, she doubted her parents’ words, thinking they had told her the story because they were displeased with something about her.

Fearing she would hear something from the neighbors, her parents had decided to disclose the truth to her first, since they were convinced that she loved them and that she had reached an age when she would understand.

Chieko was startled, but she was not so sad. It did not trouble her even when she reached adolescence. Her affection and love for Shige and Takichiro did not change. There was not so much as a hint of a problem that might trouble her. Such was Chieko's nature.

But if she was not really their daughter, then her true parents must be somewhere. And possibly she had brothers and sisters as well.

"I don't really want to see them, but . . .," Chieko thought. "Certainly their life is a harder one."

Chieko had no way of knowing. The poignancy of life with her father and mother, here in the old shop with its lattice doors and deep recesses, had permeated her heart.

That is what moved her to press her palms to her eyes in the kitchen.

"Chieko." Shige shook her daughter's shoulders. "Please don't ask about what happened long ago. Sometimes, in some places, there are gems that fall to this earth."

"A gem, a splendid gem. I wish it had been one you could have set in a ring." Chieko turned and began to work industriously.

After dinner Chieko and her mother cleaned up, then went upstairs to the back of the house.

The front portion of the second floor was the simple, low-ceilinged room with lattice windows where the young shop boys slept. The hallway alongside the inner garden connected to the back part of the second floor. It could be reached by stairs from the shop as well. The Sadas had often entertained their favorite customers and put them up for the night in a second-story room. Now they

handled most business discussions in the parlor that faced the inner garden. It was called a parlor, but it stretched from the shop to the back of the building. The dry goods and fabrics lay in stacks on either side, overflowing from the shelves. The room was long and wide, so it was a convenient place to unroll goods to display for customers. A rattan mat was spread out on the floor all year long.

The ceiling was high in the rear of the second floor. There were two rooms that served as private rooms for Chieko and her parents. Chieko sat at the mirror, undoing her long hair, which was always neatly arranged.

“Mother,” Chieko called to the next room. Restless thoughts clouded her voice.



THE
KIMONO
TOWN

For such a large city, the color of the leaves in Kyoto was beautiful.

The groves of pines in Gosho and the imperial villa of Shugakuin and the trees in the expansive gardens of the old temples all caught the eye of the traveler, as did the rows of willows in the center of the city, along the banks of the Takase River. Along Kiya, Gojo, and Horikawa the willows truly wept, their branches drooping as if they would touch the ground. How gentle they were, these weeping willows, and the red pines of Kitayama, whose branches sketched soft circles as they seemed to join one to the next.

Now it was spring in the old capital. The masses of young leaves formed patterns of color on the mountainsides of Higashiyama and Hieizan.

The trees in Kyoto owed their striking appearance to the beauty and cleanliness of the town. In places like Gion, where the small, somber, aging houses stood side by side, the narrow streets were never dirty.

The streets were also clean in the area around Nishijin, where the small, dispirited kimono shops huddled together. Dust never collected even on the fine latticework of the doors. In the Botanical Garden too, not so much as a scrap of paper was to be found scattered about.

The American military had built houses in the Botanical Garden, prohibiting of course any Japanese from entering, but now, with the occupation army gone, the gardens had been returned to their original state.

Otomo Sosuke, who lived in Nishijin, enjoyed a certain avenue in the Botanical Garden, one lined with camphor trees. The trees were not very tall, and the street was not long, but before the occupation he had often gone for a walk there when the leaves were unfolding. Sosuke sometimes wondered, as he sat amid the clattering sound of the weaving looms, what had become of the trees. Surely the occupation army had not cut them down.

Sosuke had long awaited the reopening of the Botanical Garden.

His customary walking path, from which he could see the mountains north of the city, was just outside the garden, on the bank of the Kamo River.

Sosuke's walks through the Botanical Garden and along the Kamo River usually took him only an hour or so. He had just been thinking of his walk when his wife called to him. "Mr. Sada is on the telephone. It seems he's in Saga."

"Sada? Calling from Saga?" Sosuke stepped to the counter.

Sosuke, the weaver, was four or five years younger than Sada, the wholesaler, but even outside their business dealings they got along well. In their youthful days there had been times when they

might have been called “partners in crime,” but lately they had more or less drifted apart.

Sosuke answered the phone. “This is Otomo speaking. It’s been a long time, hasn’t it?”

“Ah, Otomo,” Takichiro’s voice reverberated.

“And you’re in Saga?” Sosuke asked.

“I’ve hidden myself in a quiet, secluded convent temple.”

“Please forgive me, but may I be so bold as to suggest that yours is a rather dubious situation.” Otomo spoke with mock politeness. “I’ve heard about those convents.”

“No, this is a real convent temple. There’s one old abbess and . . .”

“That’s fine. Just one old abbess. And you, Sada, can be alone and have a young girl.”

“You fool,” Takichiro laughed. “I have a favor to ask you today.”

“Yes?”

“Would it be all right if I dropped by shortly?”

“Certainly. Please do.” Sosuke was suspicious. “I won’t go anywhere. You can hear the looms over the phone, can’t you?”

“Actually, that’s what I want to talk to you about. It’s good to hear that sound.”

“What did you expect? What would I do if they stopped? This isn’t some secluded convent.”

It took less than half an hour for Sada Takichiro to reach Sosuke’s shop by car. Sada’s eyes seemed to shine as he quickly spread open his bundle.

“I wanted to ask you to weave this.” He unrolled his design.

“Oh?” Sosuke stared into Takichiro’s face. “This obi is rather up to date for you . . . showy. Hmm . . . is this for some woman you’re keeping in that convent temple?”

“There you go again.” Takichiro laughed. “It’s for my daughter.”

“Really? It might knock her for a loop when she sees it. But do you think she’d wear something like this?”

“The truth is, Chieko herself gave me two or three thick books of Klee’s paintings to inspire me.”

“Klee? Who’s Klee?”

“He is a painter who was in the forefront of the abstract movement. His paintings are gentle, exceptional. You might say they have the quality of a dream that speaks even to the heart of an old Japanese like me. I studied them over and over until I came up with this pattern. It’s unlike any traditional Japanese design.”

“Yes, it is.”

“I was wondering how it would look as an obi, so I thought I’d have you weave it for me.” Takichiro’s zeal would not be quelled.

Sosuke examined the design for a moment.

“Hmm, it’s excellent. The color harmony . . . fine. You’ve never drawn anything so novel before. Still, it’s restrained. Weaving it will be difficult. But we’ll put our hearts into it and give it a try. The design shows your daughter’s respect for her parents and her parents’ affection for their daughter.”

“Thank you. Nowadays people would be quick to use an English word like ‘idea’ or ‘sense’ to describe it. Even colors are now referred to in faddish Western terms.”

“Those aren’t high-quality goods.”

“I hate it that Western words have come into such use. Haven’t there been splendid elegant colors in Japan since ancient times?”

“Even black has various subtle shades,” Sosuke nodded. “Yes, I was just thinking about that today. There are some obi makers like Izukura. They have a modern factory in a four-story

Western-style building. Nishijin will probably go the same way. They make five hundred obis a day, and soon the employees will be participating in the company's management. The average employee is in his twenties or thirties. Small home businesses like mine with hand looms will probably disappear within the next twenty or thirty years."

"That's ridiculous."

"If one survived, wouldn't it have to be under government sponsorship as an 'Intangible Cultural Treasure'?"

Takichiro did not respond.

"Why, even a person like you, Sada, with your Klee or whatever . . ."

"I *did* mention Paul Klee, but that's not all. I secluded myself in that convent for ten days—no, two weeks—racking my brain day and night. Aren't the colors and pattern sophisticated?" Takichiro asked.

"Very sophisticated and refined. Elegant in a Japanese manner." Sosuke hurriedly continued. "I recognize that it is indeed your work. We'll weave it into a fine obi for you. I'll send the design to a good shop to have the weaving pattern for the loom cards drafted accurately. Yes, and I think I'll have Hideo weave it instead of me. He's my eldest son. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes."

"His weaving is much more precise than my own," Sosuke said.

"Well, I leave it to your judgment. I call myself a kimono wholesaler, but all I ever do is ship goods out to the little country places."

"Don't say such things."

"Anyway, I know this isn't a summer obi. It *is* for autumn, but I'd like to see it as soon as possible."

“I see. What about a kimono to go with it?”

“I’ve only thought about the obi so far.”

“Since you’re a wholesaler, I suppose you can pick out anything you like from your stock, so you don’t need to worry about that now. Are you doing this in preparation for your daughter’s marriage?”

“No. No.” Takichiro began to blush as if the question were about himself.

The craft of hand weaving was said to be a difficult skill to pass down for three generations. Even if the father was a superior weaver—even if he had, so to speak, an artist’s hand—his ability would not necessarily be inherited by his children. It was not that a son would purposely neglect his work, resting on his father’s accomplishments, but that the son might turn out to be untalented, however earnestly he might strive.

Often a child was first taught to reel thread when he was four or five. Then, at ten or twelve, he received training as an apprentice weaver. Finally, he was able to weave for wages. For that reason, having a large number of children often helped a family to prosper. Even an old woman of sixty or seventy could reel silk inside the house, so in many homes a grandmother and her little granddaughter sat working together.

In Otomo Sosuke’s house his old wife wound the obi thread. Sitting day in and day out working with eyes downcast had aged her beyond her years and made her silent.

Otomo had three sons, each of whom wove obis at his own loom. Owning three looms was of course better than average; many shops had only one, while others had to rent their looms. Hideo’s skill had surpassed his father’s and was known even among the wholesale dealers and other weavers.

“Hideo, Hideo,” Sosuke called, but his son seemed not to hear. Unlike the countless machine looms of the large factories, the three wooden looms in Sosuke’s shop did not make much noise. Sosuke thought he had called quite loudly enough, but his voice did not seem to reach Hideo, who was sitting at the loom farthest away, near the garden, absorbed in weaving a difficult lined obi.

“Mother, would you tell Hideo to come here,” Sosuke said to his wife.

“Yes.” She brushed her lap and stepped down into the entry room. As she walked toward Hideo’s loom she beat the small of her back with her fists to relax the strain of sitting so long.

Stopping the reed batten of the loom, Hideo glanced toward his father, but he did not stand up immediately. Possibly he was tired, but, knowing that a customer was watching, he could not flex his arms or stretch his back. Finally, he mopped his face and approached his father and Takichiro.

“Thank you for coming. I’m sorry the place is such a mess,” he greeted Takichiro sullenly. His work seemed to linger in his face and body.

“Mr. Sada has designed an obi, and we’re going to weave it for him,” his father said.

“I see.” Hideo’s voice displayed no enthusiasm.

“This is an important obi, so rather than putting my hand to it, I think it would be better to have you weave it.”

“Is it for your daughter, Chieko?” Hideo turned his ashen face toward Sada for the first time.

Hideo’s expression was rather inhospitable for a man of Kyoto. His father Sosuke tried to make excuses for him.

“Hideo’s tired from working all morning.”

Hideo said nothing.

“It’s wonderful that he can be so absorbed in his work,” Takichiro tried to console him.

“It’s just a lined obi, but I was completely engrossed in it. Forgive me.” Hideo bowed his head.

“That’s all right. A weaver must be that way.” Takichiro nodded twice.

“Even some trivial item will be recognized as the work of our shop, so it is distressing always having to be so cautious.” Hideo looked down.

“Hideo.” Sosuke put new resolve in his voice. “Mr. Sada’s design is different. He secluded himself in a convent temple in Saga to draw it. It won’t be for sale.”

“Really. Hmm . . . a convent in Saga . . .”

“Have him show it to you.”

Takichiro had come to Otomo’s shop in high spirits, but they were dampened considerably by Hideo’s attitude.

He unrolled the drawing in front of the silent young weaver.

Hideo said nothing.

“What do you think?” Takichiro asked timidly.

Hideo stared without speaking.

“Isn’t it any good?”

Still Hideo did not answer.

Sosuke lost patience with his son’s stubborn silence. “Hideo, don’t you think it’s rude not to respond?”

“Yes.” He still did not look up. “I’m a weaver, so I’m examining Mr. Sada’s design. This isn’t some insignificant piece. This obi is for Chieko, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” his father nodded. He was suspicious of Hideo’s abnormal manner.

“It isn’t any good, is it?” Takichiro repeated, his tone becoming more severe.

“It’s fine.” Hideo was calm. “I never said it wasn’t good.”

“You didn’t say it, but in your heart . . . those eyes said so.”

“Really?”

“What do you mean . . .” Takichiro stood and struck Hideo in the face. Hideo did not try to dodge the blow.

“Hit me as much as you’d like. I would never dream of telling you your design was poor.”

Possibly because of the blow, Hideo’s face became animated.

Hideo bowed low and apologized, without bothering to nurse his reddening cheek. “Mr. Sada, forgive me.”

Takichiro did not speak, so Hideo went on. “You may be offended, but I want to weave this obi.”

“That’s what I came for . . . to ask you.” Takichiro tried to calm his chest. “Please forgive me. I’m older and should know better My hand hurts from hitting you.”

“I should have lent you my own. The skin of a weaver’s hand is tough.”

The two of them laughed, but the distress deep within Takichiro’s heart would not fade.

“How many years has it been since I hit someone? So many I can’t recall. Well, I’ve already asked you to forgive me for that. What I want to ask you is this, Hideo. When you looked at my design, why did you make such a queer face? Would you tell me truthfully?”

“Yes.” Hideo frowned again. “I’m young and just a laborer, so I don’t understand such things well. But you said you secluded yourself in a convent in Saga to draw the design, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I was at the temple today. Let’s see. It’s been about two weeks since . . .”

“Give it up!” Hideo spoke forcefully. “Go back home.”

“I can’t relax at home.”

“This obi design is bright, showy, innovative, but something about it is alarming. I wondered how you could have drawn a design like this. That’s why I was staring at it.”

Takichiro remained silent.

“It’s intriguing at first glance, but it has none of the harmony of a warm heart. It’s raging and morbid.”

Takichiro turned pale, his lips trembling. Words would not come.

“There are probably foxes and badgers around that desolate temple. I don’t mean to say that you’ve been bewitched by them, but . . .”

Takichiro pulled the design toward his knees and stared at it intently. “Well, thank you for what you’ve said. You’re an impressive fellow for a young man. Thank you. I’ll think about this once more and draw it over again.” Takichiro hurriedly rolled up the design and stuffed it into his pocket.

“Don’t! It’s fine as it is. When it’s woven it will have a different feeling about it. The fabric and dyed threads will make the color . . .”

“Thank you, Hideo. Would you weave it, warming the color with affection for my daughter?” Takichiro excused himself, leaving through the gate.

Just outside there was a small stream, the kind that seemed befitting of the capital. Old grass grew along the bank, leaning toward the water. The white wall by the bank was probably part of Otomo’s house.

Takichiro crumpled the obi design in his pocket. Then taking it out, he tossed it into the stream.

Shige was puzzled by Takichiro’s unexpected telephone call from Saga asking if she would come to Omuro with Chieko to see the flowers. Shige never went out flower viewing with her husband.

“Chieko, Chieko,” Shige called to her daughter as if requesting help. “It’s your father. Will you take it?”

Chieko took the phone, listening with her hand on her mother's shoulder.

"Yes, I'll bring Mother too. Wait for us at the tearoom in front of Ninnaji Temple. Yes . . . as soon as we can."

Chieko hung up the telephone. Smiling, she spoke to her mother. "It's an invitation to go flower viewing. I'm surprised he's invited you too."

"Why would he ask me?"

"He says the cherry blossoms at Omuro are at their best now."

Chieko hurried her hesitant mother along as they left the shop. Shige still looked suspicious.

The dawn cherries and the double cherries at Omuro were blooming later than most in the town, possibly the last traces of cherry blossoms still left in the capital.

The grove of cherries to the left inside the main gate of Ninnaji was overflowing with blossoms.

"I can't stand this," Takichiro said.

Large benches were lined up along a path in the cherry grove, and there was a great commotion of people drinking and singing in a boisterous crowd. Some old country women were dancing gaily, while some of the drunken men rolled off the benches snoring.

"This is terrible." Takichiro stood up, lamenting the scene. The three of them did not walk beneath the trees. Takichiro had long known the cherries of Omuro.

Smoke rose in the grove at the rear of the garden from fires where trash left by the sightseers was being burned.

"Let's go someplace quiet. Shall we, Shige?" Takichiro asked.

As they turned to go they saw near some benches six or seven Korean girls in Korean dress beating Korean drums and dancing a

Korean dance under the tall pines across from the cherry grove. This would certainly be a far more elegant sight. They noticed mountain cherries among the pines.

Chieko paused to watch the Korean dance.

“Father, a quiet place would be better. How about the Botanical Garden?”

“That might be good. All you need to do is take just one look at the cherries at Omuro, and you’ve done your duty to spring.” Takichiro went out the main gate and got into the car.

The Botanical Garden had just reopened in April. The streetcar from Kyoto station to the garden had begun to run more frequently.

“If there are crowds at the Botanical Garden, we’ll take a walk by the Kamo River instead,” Takichiro said to Shige.

The automobile passed through the green of the town. The new leaves stood out more vividly against the backdrop of old homes imbued with antique colors than they did against the newer houses.

The Botanical Garden spread wide and bright beyond the tree-lined avenue in front of the gate. The bank of the Kamo River was to the left.

Shige slipped the entrance passes into her obi. Her heart opened as she gazed at the expansive scenery. Only a fragment of the mountains was visible from the wholesalers’ district, and Shige seldom even went out to the street in front of the shop.

They found tulips blooming around the fountain in front when they entered the Botanical Garden.

“This isn’t something you would normally see in Kyoto,” Shige said. “It’s no wonder the Americans made their homes here.”

“I think the houses were built farther toward the back,” Takichiro responded.

As they approached the fountain a fine spray was scattered in the air, though there was not much of a breeze. A large, round, steel-frame greenhouse stood on the far left side of the fountain. The three of them glanced at the tropical plants inside but did not enter, since they had only a short time to walk.

A huge Himalayan cedar to the right of the path was putting forth new shoots. The lower branches of the tree spread out just above the ground. Although it is called a “needle tree,” the soft green of the new buds did not suggest needles; instead, they had a dreamlike air.

“Otomo’s son certainly got the best of me,” Takichiro said out of the blue.

“His work is much finer than his father’s. He’s perceptive. He also has a sharp eye. He can see right to the heart.” Shige and Chieko naturally did not quite understand Takichiro’s monologue.

“You saw Hideo?” Chieko asked.

“I hear he’s a good weaver,” Shige said. Takichiro usually did not like to be pressed for details.

They circled around the right side of the fountain. At the end of the walkway was a children’s playground to the left where they could here many voices, and the children’s satchels were arranged together on the lawn.

As the Sadas turned to the right in the shadow of the trees, the path unexpectedly descended toward a tulip field. The flowers in full bloom were so exquisite that Chieko almost shouted. Red, yellow, white, and purple as dark as a black camellia, each blooming in its own bed.

“Seeing these makes me think I should use tulips in a kimono pattern. I would have thought it would be ridiculous,” Takichiro sighed.

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As he continued to look at the field Takichiro wondered to himself, "If the low branches of the budding Himalayan cedar are said to resemble a peacock spreading its tail feathers, to what can one compare the multicolored tulips blooming so profusely here?" Their colors seemed to tint the sky and reflect within the viewer's own body. Shige stayed slightly away from her husband, drawing up next to her daughter. Chieko thought it strange, but she did not reveal in her face what she was thinking.

"Mother, that group of people in front of the white tulip bed looks like a *miai*," Chieko whispered as she glanced at a young couple whose first formal arranged meeting was taking place in front of the flowers.

"Yes, it does."

"Don't stare at them, Mother." Chieko pulled her sleeve.

A fountain with carp in it lay in front of the tulip fields.

Takichiro stood up from the bench and walked over to examine the tulips up close, stooping to peer into the mass of flowers. Then he returned to Chieko and his wife.

"Western flowers are bright, but I tire of them. Of course I like a bamboo grove best."

Shige and Chieko stood up.

The tulip beds were in a hollow surrounded by trees.

"Chieko, the Botanical Garden is designed after Western-style gardens, isn't it?" Takichiro asked his daughter.

"I'm not certain, but I think it is, partly," Chieko answered. "Could we stay a bit longer . . . for Mother?"

Takichiro walked off among the flowers, knowing he would have to stay.

"Mr. Sada?" A voice called. "It is! Mr. Sada!"

"Ah, Mr. Otomo, and Hideo too," Takichiro said. "What a surprise to see you here."

"I'm the one who's surprised." Sosuke bowed deeply. "I like

the camphor tree avenue, so I've been waiting for the garden to re-open. The trees are fifty or sixty years old, and I just took a leisurely walk among them." Sosuke bowed his head again. "I'm sorry my son was so rude to you the other day."

"He's young."

"Did you come here from Saga?"

"Yes, I did, but Chieko and Shige came from home and met me here."

Sosuke stepped over to greet Chieko and Shige.

"Hideo, what do you think of these tulips?" Takichiro asked rather sternly.

"Flowers are alive." Hideo's manner was still brusque.

"Alive, you say? They certainly are alive. But I've grown tired of them . . . such an awful lot of flowers." Takichiro turned away.

Flowers are alive. Their life is short, but clearly they do live. In the coming year they will bud and bloom . . . just as nature lives.

Takichiro felt once again that Hideo had delivered a disagreeable put-down.

"My eye just isn't accustomed to them. I wouldn't like an obi or kimono cloth in a tulip pattern, but if a great painter were to attempt it, perhaps even tulips could become a work of art with an eternal life," Takichiro said, looking aside. "Some of the ancient designs were like that. Some of them are older than this capital city itself. No one creates anything like that anymore. They can do no more than copy them."

Hideo was silent.

"You can even take living trees, for example. Aren't there trees here that are older than the capital itself?"

"I didn't mean anything as difficult as that. A weaver who listens to the clatter of wooden looms every day doesn't think such lofty thoughts." Hideo lowered his head. "But if I could offer an example, were your daughter Chieko to stand before the celebrated

statues of Miroku at Koryuji Temple and Chuguji Temple, how much more beautiful would she be in comparison.”

“Would you tell that to Chieko? That would make her happy. But she doesn’t deserve such a comparison. Hideo, she’ll be an old woman before you know it,” Takichiro said.

“That’s why I said the tulips were alive.” Strength entered Hideo’s voice. “They flower for only a short season, but don’t they bloom with all their strength? Now is their time.”

“That’s true.” Takichiro turned back toward Hideo.

“I don’t think of myself as weaving obis that will be passed down to grandchildren. Just for now . . . I’m weaving obis that a girl can be happy wearing for even a year.”

“That’s a good attitude.”

“I have to be that way. I’m not like Tatsumura.”

Takichiro did not speak.

“That’s the feeling that prompted me to say that the tulips were alive. Now is their prime, but there are already a few petals that have fallen.”

“Yes, there are.”

“Even fallen petals . . . a blizzard of cherry blossoms has an elegance about it, but what about tulips?”

“Do you mean the sight of tulip petals scattered about?” Takichiro asked. “I get tired of such masses of flowers. The colors are too gaudy, and they seem to have no ‘savor.’ Of course, I’m older.”

“Let’s go,” Hideo urged Takichiro. “I’ve seen tulip patterns for obis before, but the ones that come to our shop were not of living flowers. My eyes have been opened.”

The five of them climbed the stone steps from the tulip bed in the hollow. To the side of the steps the masses of Kirishima azalea

bushes swelled upward, more like a living embankment than a hedge. They were not in flower now, but the abundance of delicate, young, green leaves set off the colors of the blooming tulips to their best advantage.

At the top of the steps were two new, unfamiliar gardens—one peony and one rhododendron—not yet in flower. Perhaps because they were newly built they offered little appeal.

But they could see Mount Hieizan to the east.

One could see the mountains Hieizan, Kitayama, and Higashiyama from almost anywhere in the Botanical Garden, but Hieizan looked as if it marked the front of the peony garden.

“Perhaps it’s because of the deep haze, but doesn’t Hieizan appear low?” Sosuke asked Takichiro.

“It’s a spring mist . . . gentle . . .” Takichiro gazed at it for a moment. “Yes, it is, but doesn’t the mist make you think of the fleeting spring?”

“Yes, it does.”

“Such a deep haze makes me realize that spring will soon come to an end.”

“Yes,” Sosuke said again. “It passes so quickly. I seldom go flower viewing anymore.”

“There’s nothing new to see.”

The two of them walked quietly for a moment.

“Otomo, before we go, let’s walk along the camphor tree avenue you said you liked,” Takichiro said.

“Thank you. Let’s do. That’s all I need . . . just to walk among those trees. I passed by them on the way in too.” Sosuke turned back to Chieko. “Chieko, come walk with us.”

The tips of the branches of the camphor trees on either side mingled in the center above the avenue. The new leaves on the twigs were still supple and a faint red. There was no wind, but here and

there the branches rustled slightly. The five of them spoke little, but within each of their minds thoughts churned in the shade of the trees.

Takichiro could not get Hideo's words out of his head. Hideo's comparison of Chieko to the most graceful Buddhist images of Nara and Kyoto, his assertion that Chieko was more beautiful. Could the young weaver be so drawn to Chieko?

"But . . ."

If Chieko were to marry Hideo, they would need her in So-suke's weaving shop. Would she reel silk thread from morning until night, just like Hideo's mother?

Looking back, Takichiro saw that Chieko was absorbed in a conversation with Hideo, nodding occasionally.

Marriage would not necessarily mean that Chieko would have to go to Otomo's house. Takichiro thought it might be possible to bring Hideo into his own home as an adopted son-in-law.

Chieko was an only child. Were she to leave home, how sad her mother Shige would be.

But Hideo was the eldest son, and Otomo had said that he was a more accomplished weaver than his father. Even so, there were also two younger boys.

Besides, Takichiro's business had declined so much that he could not even afford to remodel the inside of the old-style shop. But he was, after all, a wholesaler of dry goods in the old neighborhood of Nakagyo, not a weaver with three looms. Otomo's shop was known as a family handicraft business without a single outside employee. That was obvious from the appearance of Hideo's mother, Asako, and their humble kitchen. Though Hideo was the eldest boy, Otomo might be talked into offering his son to be adopted into the Sada home as Chieko's husband.

"Hideo is a fine, dependable fellow," Takichiro said, testing

Sosuke's response. "He's young, but he's certainly reliable."

"Thank you," Sosuke said casually. "Only as far as his trade goes. He works hard, but he's rude to people. He's quite likely to cause trouble."

"There's nothing wrong with that. I got quite a scolding from him the other day." Takichiro's manner was surprisingly pleasant.

"I hope you'll forgive him." Sosuke lowered his head slightly. "It takes a lot of convincing to get him to listen to his parents."

"That's all right." Takichiro nodded. "Why did you bring only Hideo with you today?"

"If I were to bring his brothers too, the looms would have to stop. Besides, he's so intense, I thought a walk among the camphor trees might help make him a kinder person."

"This is a lovely avenue. Actually, Otomo, I brought Shige and Chieko here to the Botanical Garden because of Hideo's . . . well, because of his kind advice."

"What?" Sosuke glared dubiously at Takichiro's face. "You wanted to see your daughter's face, didn't you?"

"No. No." Takichiro hurriedly denied it.

Sosuke looked around. Chieko and Hideo were walking several paces back. Shige was walking alone even farther behind.

As they left the gate of the Botanical Garden Takichiro spoke to Sosuke. "Please take our car. Nishijin isn't far. Meanwhile, we'll walk along the banks of the river."

Sosuke hesitated, but Hideo urged his father into the car first. "Let's go ahead and accept Mr. Sada's hospitality."

As the Sadas stood seeing them off, Sosuke sat up on the seat to bow, but Hideo's movement was so slight that one could not distinguish whether he had even nodded his head.

"He's an interesting boy." Takichiro suppressed a smile as he

recalled the time he hit Hideo in the face. "You and Hideo certainly had a long talk. I guess he has a weakness for girls."

Chieko's eyes looked sheepish. "On the camphor tree avenue? All I did was listen. I wondered why he would talk to me so much. Why should he open up to someone like me?"

"It's because he likes you, isn't it? You understand that much, don't you? He said you were more beautiful than the Miroku at Chuguji or Koryuji Temple. It surprised me too. That obstinate fellow says some amazing things."

Startled, Chieko did not speak. She blushed lightly to the base of her neck.

"What did you talk about?" her father asked.

"About the fate of the hand weavers at Nishijin."

"Fate? Really?" Her father seemed to become absorbed in thought.

"'Fate' makes it sound like some difficult discussion, but, yes, we talked about their fate," Chieko answered.

Outside the Botanical Garden pine trees grew in a row on the embankment of the Kamo River. Takichiro stepped down through the trees to the river bottom. The dry bed of the Kamo was like a long narrow field of young grass. He could hear the sound of water falling over a dam.

Groups of old people sat in the grass with their picnic lunches spread out around them. Young couples were walking together.

On the far bank was a promenade just below the road. Beyond the cherry trees with their scattering of new leaves were the mountains, Atagoyama in the center and Nishiyama stretching to either side behind. Upstream, Kitayama appeared to be very near. It was a particularly scenic area.

"Shall we sit down here?" Shige asked.

Beyond Kitaoji Bridge they could glimpse *yuzen* silk spread out to dry on the grassy river plain.

“It’s a lovely spring,” Shige said, gazing about.

“Shige, what do you think of that boy Hideo?” Takichiro asked.

“What do you mean, ‘what do I think?’”

“What if we brought him into our home to marry Chieko?”

“What? Why should you bring up something like that all of a sudden?”

“He’s a fine boy, isn’t he?”

“Yes, but you’ll have to ask Chieko about such things.”

“Chieko has always said she’d be completely obedient.”

Takichiro looked at his daughter. “Haven’t you, Chieko?”

“You can’t force your opinion on someone in a question like marriage.” Shige also turned toward Chieko.

Chieko cast her eyes down. A vision of Mizuki Shin’ichi came to mind. It was Shin’ichi as a child, a festival boy with finely drawn eyebrows, lip rouge, and makeup, wearing ancient imperial clothing and riding on a float at the Gion Festival. Of course at that time Chieko too had been but a child.



KITAYAMA

CEDARS

Since the days of the Heian Court, the most noted mountain of Kyoto has been Hieizan, and the most noted festival, the Kamo Festival.

The Hollyhock Festival of May fifteenth had already passed.

Since 1956 the Procession of Imperial Messengers of the Hollyhock Festival had been combined with the Procession of Shrine Maidens. The old ritual had been revived in which participants cleansed themselves in the Kamo River before being cloistered in the purification hall. Restoring ancient practices, court women dressed in elegant robes led the procession in a palanquin, followed by ladies-in-waiting and maidens of the court, with minstrels who offered music. The shrine maidens wore twelve-layered robes and rode in traditional ox carts. The festive elegance perhaps owed more to the shrine maidens being college-aged young women than to the costumes they wore.

One of Chieko's schoolmates had once been chosen to be a shrine maiden. Chieko and her friends had gone to the banks of the

Kamo to see their companion in the procession. With so many shrines and temples in Kyoto, it seemed almost accurate to say that there was a large or small festival every day somewhere in the old capital. A glance at a festival calendar would make one think there was always something going on in May.

There were so many offerings of tea, so many ceremonies in tearooms and outdoor tea ceremonies held here and there, that it would be impossible to attend them all.

This May Chieko had missed even the Hollyhock Festival, partly because of the heavy rains and partly because she had always had someone to take her to all the festivals since she was a little girl.

Besides flowers, Chieko also enjoyed going to view the green of the young leaves. She was naturally fond of the newly budding maples at Takao. She also enjoyed the area around Nyakuoji Temple.

As she began to brew some new tea she had received from Uji, Chieko said, "Mother, I forgot to go see the gathering of the new tea this year."

"If you are looking for tea, I think they would still be picking now, wouldn't they?" her mother asked.

"Possibly."

They had also been a bit late to see the flowerlike beauty of the opening buds of the rows of camphor trees through which they had walked at the Botanical Gardens.

Chieko received a telephone call from her friend Masako.

"Chieko, would you like to go to Takao to see the new maple leaves?" she asked. "There aren't as many people as when the leaves turn in the autumn."

"Isn't it late for them?"

"It's cooler there than in town. I think they're still all right."

“Hmm.” Chieko cut her off shortly. “Say, after the cherries at Heian Shrine, I wish I had gone north to see the ones in the mountains at Shuzan, but it slipped my mind. I wonder about that one old tree The cherry blossoms are gone, but I would like to see the cedars at Kitayama. That’s near Takao, isn’t it? Whenever I see the lovely straight cedars at Kitayama, it makes my spirit feel refreshed. Could we go as far as Kitayama? I’d rather see the cedars than the maples.”

Having come some distance, Chieko and Masako decided to see the young maple leaves at Jingoji Temple in Takao, Saimyoji Temple at Makinoo, and Kozanji Temple at Toganoo before they went on.

Both Jingoji and Kozanji were at the top of a steep slope. Masako could climb easily, dressed in low heels and light Western clothes suitable for early summer; she looked back, wondering how Chieko was doing dressed in a kimono. Chieko spoke, seemingly unbothered by her attire. “Why are you looking at me that way?”

“How beautiful.”

“Yes, it is beautiful.” Chieko stood still, looking down on the Kiyotaki River. “I thought the green would be more vivid, but it is cool and refreshing, isn’t it?”

“I . . .” Masako tried to stifle a smile. “Chieko, I was talking about you.”

Chieko did not speak.

“Why was such a beautiful girl born?”

“Oh, stop it.”

“Your plain kimono makes you look all the more lovely here amid the green of the trees. A bright kimono would be quite showy, but . . .”

Chieko was wearing a rather somber violet kimono, and her obi

was made from the chintz her father had cut so ungrudgingly. She climbed the stone steps. At the moment Masako spoke, Chieko had been thinking of the faint reddish traces on the cheek of the portrait of Shigemori, or was it elsewhere? The portraits of Taira no Shigemori and Minamoto no Yoritomo in Jingoji Temple had been made world-famous by André Malraux. Chieko had heard Masako say the same thing many times before. At Kozanji Temple Chieko enjoyed viewing the mountains from the veranda of Sekisuiin. She was also fond of the portrait that hung there of the founder of the sect of the temple, the priest Myoe, sitting in a tree meditating. A reproduction of an illustrated scroll, *Frolicking Birds and Animals*, lay unrolled to the side of the alcove. The two girls were served tea on the veranda.

Masako had never gone farther than Kozanji Temple. Most sightseers stopped there.

Chieko recalled the time when her father had taken her around the mountains to see the cherry blossoms and gather horsetail grasses to take home. The horsetail grasses were long and thick. Since she had come as far as Takao, Chieko decided to see the Kitayama cedar village even if she had to go alone. Actually, the village had been annexed by the city and was properly called Nakagawa Kitayama District of Kita Ward, but there were no more than 130 houses, so "village" seemed a more appropriate term.

"I'm accustomed to walking, so I'll go on foot," Chieko said. "Besides, this is such a good road."

The steep mountains pressed against the banks of the Kiyotaki River where they walked. Finally, the beautiful cedar groves came into view. The straight, orderly cedar trees revealed the thoughtful attention they had been given. This village was the only place that produced the renowned Kitayama logs.

Some women who had been cutting grass came down the hill through the cedars, perhaps for a three o'clock break.

Masako stood frozen, staring at one of the girls. "Chieko, that girl looks a lot like you. Just like you, don't you think?"

The girl had rolled up the tube sleeves of her navy blue outfit. She was wearing loose trousers and an apron, with old-style gloves on her hands and a hand towel draped over her head in the manner typical of working women. Her apron was wrapped all the way around to the back and had slits on the sides. A glimpse of her narrow red obi showed between her sleeves and her trousers. The other girls were dressed in a similar fashion.

They resembled the Ohara women or the Shirakawa women; unlike those peddler women, however, their clothing was not a costume to wear when going to the city to sell, but real mountain work clothes. This was the look of women who labored in the fields and mountains of Japan.

"She really does look like you. Don't you think it's strange? Take a look." Masako repeated.

"Really?" Chieko gave the girl scarcely a glance. "You're always so rash."

"It doesn't matter how rash I am. You don't see someone as beautiful as she is."

"She is beautiful, but . . ."

"It's as if she were your own lost child."

"See how excited you get?"

Masako started to laugh at her own outburst, but hearing Chieko's words she kept silent for a moment.

"I know it's possible for one person to resemble another that much by chance, but this is frightening," Masako said.

The girl and the others with her passed by, paying little attention to Chieko and Masako.

The towel on the girl's head revealed a glimpse of her hair in front but half hid her face. She was not looking toward Chieko and Masako, so they could not distinguish her features well.

Chieko had visited the mountain village several times and seen the men strip the rough bark from the cedar logs, after which the women would remove the remaining traces, polishing the logs with sand mixed with warm water. She thought she vaguely recognized all the girls' faces, since they did their work outside the houses or along the roadside. There probably were not that many young girls in such a small mountain village, but Chieko had not of course made a careful inspection of each girl's face.

Masako calmed down as she watched the women walking away. "How strange," she said again. Then she tilted her head, gazing at Chieko as if looking at her anew.

"She *does* look like you."

"In what way?" Chieko asked.

"Well, it's her overall appearance. It's hard to say just how she resembles you. Her nose . . . or eyes . . . of course you would expect a girl from the city and a girl from the mountains to be quite different. Please forgive me."

"That's all right."

"Chieko, couldn't we follow that girl home and have another look?" Masako asked, reluctant to drop the subject.

Even someone as venturesome as Masako was probably not serious when she suggested they follow the girl.

Chieko slowed her pace almost to a halt, looking up at the beautiful polished cedar logs of uniform diameter that stood leaning in rows against the houses.

“They look like handicraft items,” Chieko said. “I hear they use them in the construction of rooms for the tea ceremony as far away as Tokyo and Kyushu.”

The logs stood in a line against the eaves of a house and along the second floor as well. Underwear was hanging out to dry in front of the rows on the second story. Masako looked at the house, amazed. “These people live inside a parade of cedars,” she said.

“You get in such a hurry, Masako,” Chieko laughed. “Look, there. Isn’t that a splendid house next to the shed with the logs?”

“Oh, I saw the laundry hanging there to dry outside the second floor, so I thought that was the house.”

“The same rash thinking made you say that girl looked like me.”

“That was different.” Masako became serious. “Were you really so upset when I said she resembled you?”

“No, not in the least.” Just as Chieko spoke, the girl’s eyes flashed into her mind. A rich, deep poignancy lay submerged in the eyes of that healthy, hardworking girl.

“The women in this village do work awfully hard,” Chieko spoke as if to change the subject.

“It is nothing unusual for women to labor right alongside men. Farmers are like that, aren’t they? Greengrocers and fishmongers too,” Masako said casually. “A genteel girl like you *would* be impressed by such things.”

“I consider myself a laborer too. You must be talking about yourself.”

“That’s right. I don’t work,” Masako said frankly.

“It’s easy to talk about it, but I wanted to show you how these village women really work.” Chieko again looked up at the cedar mountains. “They’ve already started the branch cutting.”

“What do you mean, ‘branch cutting’?”

“They cut off unnecessary branches with a hatchet to produce

good trees for logs. Sometimes they use ladders, but often they have to jump from the top of one tree to the next like monkeys.”

“How dangerous!”

“I hear some men climb up in the morning and don’t come down until lunchtime.”

Masako too looked up at the cedar mountains. The straight, orderly trunks were beautiful. The clusters of leaves left on the branch tips resembled a fine crafted work.

The mountains were neither high nor deep, so the trunk of each individual tree was visible even on the tops of the mountains. The cedars were used in the construction of tearooms, so the groves themselves had the elegant air of the tea ceremony.

The steep mountains on either side of the Kiyotaki River dropped into the narrow valley. One reason the famous cedar logs were raised here was that the area received ample rain and little sunshine. It was also protected from the wind. Strong winds would cause the new growth to become bent or twisted.

The houses of the village stood in a single row along the riverbank at the foot of the mountain.

Chieko and Masako walked out beyond the village, then returned.

They saw a house where logs were being polished. The women lifted the logs from the water where they had been soaking and polished them carefully with Bodai sand. The sand, which resembled reddish-yellow clay, was brought from the base of Bodai Falls.

“What will happen when the sand runs out?” Masako asked.

“The water brings sand with it when it rains, and it collects below the falls,” an elderly woman answered.

Masako thought this was a carefree business.

As Chieko had said, the women were working diligently with their hands. The logs they were polishing were about five or six inches in diameter—about the size that would be used for pillars.

The women washed the polished logs in water and set them aside to dry. Then they wrapped them in paper or straw to be shipped out.

In some places cedars were planted in the stony bed of the Kiyotaki River. The rows of cedars standing on the mountains and those leaning in rows against the eaves of the houses reminded Masako of the lattice doors in the houses of old Kyoto, where no dust was allowed to settle.

The Bodai Road stop of the Japan National Railway Bus Line was located at the entrance to the village, a distance below the falls.

The two girls boarded the bus there for home. After a while Masako broke the silence. “I wonder if it’s best for a girl to grow up straight like those cedars.”

Chieko did not speak.

“But we don’t receive as affectionate care as the trees,” Masako said.

Chieko almost burst out laughing. “Masako, are you seeing someone?”

“Yes, I am. We often sit together in the grass on the bank of the Kamo River.”

Chieko did not speak.

“Recently, there have been more visitors coming to the river plain at Kiyamachi, so now they turn the lights on at night. But we always sit with our backs to them so the people on the veranda won’t recognize us.”

“What about tonight?”

“Tonight we have a date at seven-thirty, though it is still a little bit light then.”

Chieko envied Masako’s freedom.

Chieko and her parents sat at dinner in the back parlor, which looked out on the inner garden.

“Today Shimamura sent us a lot of Hyomasa bamboo leaf sushi, so you’ll have to forgive me. All I made for dinner was some soup to go with it,” Shige said to Takichiro.

Bamboo leaf sushi made with sea bream was Takichiro’s favorite dish.

“Our dear cook was a bit late coming home,” Shige said, speaking of Chieko. “She went to see the Kitayama cedars again with Masako.”

“I see.”

The sushi was piled on an Imari porcelain dish. Inside each of the triangularly folded bamboo leaves a thin slice of sea bream rested on top of the rice. The soup contained mostly dried tofu and some mushrooms.

Takichiro’s business still retained the air of an old Kyoto wholesale shop, exemplified by the red lattice door, but now that his business was incorporated, most of the clerks and shop boys had started commuting to work as regular company employees. With only two or three live-in shop boys from Omi in the lattice-window room in the front of the second floor, the rear of the house was quiet at dinnertime.

“You like going to the Kitayama cedar village, don’t you?” her mother said to Chieko. “Why is that?”

“The cedars all stand there so straight and beautiful. I wish human hearts grew like that.”

“Then aren’t you just like them?” her mother asked.

“No, I’m bent and twisted”

“That’s true,” her father spoke up. “No matter how gentle a person may be, deep inside he still has much to ponder.”

Chieko was silent.

“But that’s all right, isn’t it? A child like the Kitayama cedars would be sweet, but no such child exists. And were there such a child, someday he would meet with suffering. I think, as long as a tree grows tall, it doesn’t matter if it’s bent or twisted. Take a look at the old maple in our little garden.”

“What do you mean saying such things to a good child like Chieko?” Her mother grew angry.

“I know. I know. Chieko is a straight and upright girl” Chieko turned her face toward the inner garden and was silent for a moment.

“I don’t have the kind of strength that maple has.” Chieko’s voice was touched with sadness. “I’m more like the violets growing in the hollows of the tree Oh, I hadn’t noticed until now. The violet flowers are gone.”

“They are, but they’ll surely bloom again next spring,” her mother said.

Chieko’s downturned gaze rested on the Christian lantern at the base of the maple. She could not see the weatherworn carving well in the dim light from the house, but somehow she wanted to pray.

“Mother, where was I really born?”

Shige looked at Takichiro.

“Under the evening cherry blossoms of Gion,” her father said flatly.

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Hearing her father say she was born under the cherry trees at Gion reminded her of the old story "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter," in which the tiny princess Kaguyahime was found between the joints of a stalk of bamboo.

That was why he had spoken very matter-of-factly.

If it were true that she had been born under the flowers, perhaps someone would come from the moon to fetch her, as they had in the story of Kaguyahime. Chieko realized the humor of her father's explanation, but she could not bring herself to mention it out loud.

Whether she had been a foundling or a stolen child, her mother and father would not know where she had been born, nor would they know who her real parents were.

Chieko regretted that she had asked amiss, but it seemed best not to apologize. What had prompted her to inquire so unexpectedly? She did not quite understand, but perhaps she vaguely recalled Masako telling her that she looked just like the girl at the Kitayama cedar village.

At a loss where to turn her eyes, Chieko gazed at the top of the large maple tree. The night sky glowed faintly white, perhaps from the lights downtown or the rising moon.

"The sky has turned such a summer color," her mother said as she too looked up. "Chieko, you were born in this house. I didn't give birth to you, but you were born here."

"Yes." Chieko nodded. Just as she had told Shin'ichi at Kiyomizu Temple, Shige and Takichiro had not stolen her as an infant from beneath the cherry blossoms of Maruyama at night. She had been abandoned as a baby at the entrance gate of the shop. Takichiro had been the one who carried her into the house.

That had been twenty years ago. Takichiro, who was then still in his thirties, was the kind of man who enjoyed himself on the town. At first Shige did not believe her husband's story.

“You think you’re so clever. That’s some geisha’s baby of yours you’ve brought home.”

“Don’t say such stupid things.” Takichiro turned red. “Look at the clothes on her. A geisha’s baby? Could this be a geisha’s baby?” He held the infant out to his wife.

Taking the baby in her arms, Shige pressed her face against its cold cheek. “What shall we do with it?”

“Let’s discuss it in the back. Don’t stand there like a fool.”

“It’s a newborn.”

Takichiro and Shige could not adopt the baby, since the real parents were unknown, but they were able to register her as their own legitimate child. They named her Chieko.

Folk wisdom has it that adopting a baby often induces a mother to bear her own, but Shige could not, so Chieko was raised as a beloved only child. So many years had passed that Takichiro and his wife no longer worried themselves about what sort of parents abandoned Chieko. They did not know whether Chieko’s real father and mother were alive or dead.

Cleaning up after dinner was simple, a mere disposal of the bamboo leaves and taking care of the bowls. Chieko did it alone.

Then Chieko hid herself in her bedroom in the rear of the second floor, contemplating the books of paintings by Klee and Chagall that her father had taken to the convent temple at Saga. She fell asleep, but soon awakened from a nightmare screaming.

“Chieko, Chieko,” her mother called from the next room. Before Chieko could answer, the sliding door had opened.

“Were you having a nightmare?” Her mother entered the room. “It was a bad dream, wasn’t it?”

Sitting down by Chieko, she turned on the lamp near her daughter's pillow.

Chieko sat up on her bedding.

"How terrible. Look at all that sweat." Her mother took a gauze towel from the mirror stand. Chieko let her mother wipe her forehead and neck. Shige considered the beauty of Chieko's white chest.

"Here, now, under your arms." Shige handed the towel to her daughter.

"Thank you, Mother."

"Was it a frightening dream?"

"Yes. It was scary. I dreamed I was falling from a high place through the green all around me. There was no bottom."

"That's a dream everyone has," her mother said, "... endlessly falling."

Chieko did not speak.

"You mustn't catch a chill. Do you want to change your nightgown?"

Chieko nodded, but still had not regained her composure. She tottered as she tried to stand.

"That's all right. I'll get it for you."

Sitting down, Chieko modestly changed her gown, then began to fold the one she had taken off. "You needn't do that. I'll have to wash it anyway," her mother said, taking the gown and tossing it onto the clothes rack in the corner. Then she sat down again by Chieko's pillow.

"A nightmare like that makes me wonder if you have a fever." She put her palm to her daughter's forehead. Contrary to her expectation, it was cold. "Maybe you're tired after going to Kitayama."

Chieko did not respond.

“What a pathetic-looking face . . . Shall I sleep in here tonight?” Her mother started up to get her bedding.

“Thank you. Please don’t worry. Go back to sleep. I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?” Shige crawled under the edge of her daughter’s covers. Chieko moved over to make room.

“It seems strange, Chieko. You’re so big now, you can’t sleep with your mother holding you.”

Shige soon fell into a peaceful sleep. Chieko felt about to make sure that her mother’s shoulders were covered so they would not get cold. Then she turned off the light, but she could not sleep.

Chieko’s dream had been long. She had told her mother only the end.

The first part was more a state between wakefulness and sleep than a dream. She recalled the pleasant day she had just spent at Kitayama with Masako. Chieko thought more intently now of the girl Masako had said resembled her. The green that she fell through at the end of the dream was probably the remnant of the green of Kitayama.

The Bamboo Cutting Ceremony at Kurama Temple was one of Takichiro’s favorite events. He enjoyed its masculine air.

Takichiro had attended many times since his youth, so the ceremony was nothing unusual for him. But this time he was thinking of taking Chieko along. He also thought it might be his only opportunity to go to Kurama, since a shortage of funds would probably prevent the Kurama Fire Festival from being held this year.

Takichiro was concerned about rain. The ceremony was to be held on June twentieth, in the middle of the rainy season.

On the nineteenth it was raining rather heavily. "If it rains like this today, it will clear up tomorrow," Takichiro said as he glanced at the sky.

"Father, I wouldn't mind if it's raining."

"Yes, but . . .," her father said. "But of course if the weather is bad, well . . ."

It was rainy and wet on June twentieth.

"Close the windows . . . and the doors of the wardrobes. The cloth will get damp with the humidity," Takichiro told a clerk.

"Are you giving up on going to Kurama Temple?" Chieko asked her father.

"They'll have it again next year. Let's call it off. With all the fog around Kurama Temple . . ."

Those who served at the bamboo cutting were mostly local villagers, not priests; nevertheless, they were referred to as monks. On the eighteenth, in preparation for the ceremony, they had lashed four stalks each of the male bamboo and the female bamboo to the logs standing to the left and right of the main hall. The female bamboo had the root attached, while the male bamboo had the root cut off, but the leaves remaining.

Since ancient times the left side of the hall had been called the Tamba Seat and the right side had been called the Omi Seat, after the two old provinces to the west and east of Kyoto. Each year the turn to participate in the ceremony fell upon a different house, whose family members would wear traditional dress: a coarse silk kimono that had been handed down for generations, a warrior's straw sandals, two swords, a priest's stole and robe, nandina leaves around the waist, and a bamboo-cutting knife in a brocade sheath. Led by ritual forerunners, they faced the temple gate.

It was held at one o'clock in the afternoon.

The Bamboo Cutting Ceremony began with the sound of a priest in traditional clothing blowing a conch shell horn.

Two festival children faced the chief priest and spoke in unison, "The Bamboo Cutting Ceremony. Felicitous greetings."

Then the festival boys advanced to the seats on the right and left.

"Omi Bamboo. How beautiful."

"Tamba Bamboo. How beautiful."

They praised each.

According to custom, the thick male bamboo that had been bound to the logs was first cut down, then arranged on the ground. The more delicate female bamboo was left as it was.

The festival boys then announced to the chief priest, "The Bamboo Rites are completed."

The priests entered the inner sanctuary and chanted the sutras. In place of lotus flowers, summer chrysanthemums were scattered about.

The chief priest came down from the altar and opened a cypress fan, raising and lowering it three times. He then called out, and two people from each side cut the bamboo into three pieces.

Takichiro wanted his daughter to see the ceremony, but just as he was considering the situation, hesitating because of the rain, Hideo entered the lattice door with a bundle wrapped in a cloth under his arm.

"I finally finished your daughter's obi," he said.

"Obi?" Takichiro seemed puzzled. "My daughter's obi?"

Hideo knelt, one knee on the floor.

"A tulip pattern?" Takichiro asked casually.

"No, the pattern you drew at the convent at Saga." Hideo was serious. "I am sorry I was so rude to you. I'm young and rash."

Takichiro was secretly surprised. "What? I was just trying to amuse myself with my designs when I drew that. You upbraided me. I should thank you for opening my eyes."

"I wove your obi. I brought it with me."

“What?” Takichiro was flabbergasted. “I crumpled that design into a ball and threw it into the stream by your home.”

“You threw it away? I see.” Hideo was daringly calm. “I saw enough of the design to memorize it when you showed it to me. “

“I suppose that’s your job.” Takichiro knitted his brow as he spoke. “But, Hideo, why did you weave the design I threw away? Why? Why would you weave it?” A feeling that was neither sadness nor anger fomented in his chest. “Wasn’t it you, Hideo, who said it showed a discordant heart . . . that it was raging and morbid?”

Hideo was silent.

“You did. And that’s why I threw it in the stream when I left your shop.”

“Mr. Sada, forgive me.” Hideo bowed again in apology. “When you came to our shop I was in the middle of some worthless piece I had to weave, so I was tired and irritated.”

“That’s how I felt too. The convent was quiet of course, but with only one old nun there except for the women who came by to work, it was lonely . . . very lonely. And besides, my business is in trouble, so I thought over and over about what you said. A wholesaler like me doesn’t need to draw designs. Those designs are the work of someone who was chasing after novelty.”

“I thought about things a great deal too. And since I met your daughter at the Botanical Garden, I’ve pondered even more,” Hideo said.

Takichiro did not speak.

“Would you like to see the obi? If you don’t like it, I want you to cut it to pieces right here.”

“Please show it to me,” Takichiro said. “Chieko! Chieko!” he called to his daughter, who was sitting next to the clerk at the counter. She walked over to them.

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Hideo's heavy eyebrows and tightly set mouth gave his face a confident look, but his fingers trembled as he untied the bundle.

Hideo turned to sit facing Chieko, as if he found it difficult to speak to her father. Then he took a formal posture.

"Chieko, please take a look at this obi. It's your father's design." He handed her the rolled obi.

Chieko unrolled the end of the obi. "Oh, Father, you were thinking of the painting in the Klee book. Did you do it at Saga?" She pulled it across her lap. "Oh, it's wonderful."

Takichiro grimaced and he did not speak, but secretly he was amazed that Hideo had remembered the design so well.

"Father," Chieko exclaimed with childlike joy, "it's such a beautiful obi!"

Takichiro did not speak.

Chieko stroked the fabric. "You wove it so splendidly," she said to Hideo.

"Thank you." Hideo looked down.

"May I unroll it here and take a look at it?"

"Certainly," Hideo answered.

Chieko stood, spreading the obi out in front of Hideo and her father. She stood admiring the obi, her hands on her father's shoulders.

"What do you think, Father?"

Takichiro did not respond, so Chieko encouraged him. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"You really like it?" her father asked.

"Yes. Thank you, Father."

"Look at it more closely," Takichiro said.

"It's an innovative pattern, so it will depend on the kimono, but it's a lovely obi," Chieko said.

"Really? Well, if you like it, you should thank Hideo."

“Hideo, thank you.” Chieko knelt behind her father and bowed her head toward Hideo.

“Chieko, does this obi have harmony? . . . of the heart?” her father asked.

“What? Harmony?” Her father’s question took her by surprise. She looked at the obi again. “If you are worried about harmony, it would depend on the kimono and the person wearing it. But nowadays clothing that purposely defies harmony is coming into style.”

Her father nodded. “Actually, Chieko, when I showed this design to Hideo, he told me that it had no harmony. So I threw the design in the stream by his shop.”

Chieko was silent.

“Even so, the design I threw away looked just like this obi Hideo has woven. Though the thread color is a bit different from my drawing.”

“Mr. Sada, please forgive me.” Hideo bowed to the floor. “Chieko, this is a selfish request, but would you try the obi on?”

“With this kimono?” Chieko stood up and wrapped the obi around her waist. She looked resplendent. Takichiro’s face relaxed.

“Chieko, this is your father’s creation.” Hideo’s eyes flashed.



THE
GION
FESTIVAL

Chieko left the shop carrying a large market basket. She was to cross Oike Street to the north and go on to the shop Yubahan in Fuyamachi, but she stood for a moment on Oike Street gazing at the sky, which blazed from Hieizan across to Kitayama.

It was too early in the long summer day for a sunset glow. The sky was not so melancholy a hue. It was as if vast flames spread across the heaven.

“I didn’t realize there were such sights as this. This is the first time I have seen anything like it.”

Chieko took out a small mirror and looked at her own face reflected amid the colors of the clouds.

“I won’t forget this. For all my life, I’ll never forget this Man is certainly an emotional creature.”

Touched by the color, Hieizan and Kitayama appeared a deep blue.

At Yubahan they sold dried tofu, peony tofu, and stuffed tofu.

“Miss, please come in. We’ve been so busy with the Gion Festival

that we can serve only our old regular customers. We have to excuse ourselves from serving others.”

Normally the shop prepared items only on order. Kyoto had a number of such businesses among the confectioners and other shops.

“Is this for the Gion Festival? I certainly should thank you for coming here regularly for so many years.” The lady filled Chieko’s basket almost to overflowing.

Stuffed tofu, just like stuffed eel, contained burdock. Peony tofu resembled a fried mixture of tofu and vegetables, but there were also ginkgo nuts wrapped inside.

This shop was over two hundred years old, having survived the Dondon Fire. The owner had made only a few changes: Glass had been fitted in the small skylight, and the Korean-style hearth where the tofu was prepared was now made of brick.

“We used to burn charcoal, but when we would stir up the fire, the ashes made black spots on the tofu, so we decided to use sawdust instead.”

Chieko did not respond.

As the surface of the tofu began to harden, the woman maneuvered bamboo chopsticks to lift the layer of congealed tofu out of the square partitioned copper pot, placing it on a slender rod. There were many rods above and below that were raised as the tofu dried.

Chieko went to the rear of the workplace and put her hand on the old pillar. Her mother would always stroke the ancient black pillar when she came to the shop with Chieko.

“What kind of wood is this?” Chieko asked.

“It’s cypress. Very tall . . . and perfectly straight.”

Touching the pillar again, Chieko could sense its antiquity. Then she left the shop.

As Chieko returned home the sounds of a Gion Festival band rehearsing grew louder.

Tourists who came from afar were apt to think that the Gion Festival consisted of only the procession of floats on the seventeenth of July. Many also came to the Yoiyama festivities on the night of the sixteenth.

But the real ceremonies of the Gion Festival continued all through July. In the various districts in the parish of Yasaka Shrine, each of which had its own Gion float, the festival bands began to perform and the amulet rituals commenced on the first of July.

The float with the festival boy led the procession each year. On July second or third the mayor drew lots to determine the order of the floats. The festival carts were assembled the previous day, but the ceremony of the washing of the shrine palanquins was the true preparatory rite of the festival. The palanquins were purified at the Great Bridge at Shijo over the Kamo River. Although it was called a washing, the Shinto priest simply dipped a *sakaki* branch into the water and sprinkled it on the palanquins.

Then on the eleventh the festival boy visited Gion Shrine. He was the child who would ride the festival float. Astride a horse and wearing the high headdress of a nobleman, the boy was accompanied by attendants to the shrine, where he would be granted the fifth court rank. Those above the fifth rank were referred to as imperial court nobles.

In ancient times the Shinto and Buddhist deities became intermingled, so the attendants to the left and right of the festival boy were likened to Kannon and Seishi, two bodhisattvas of Buddhism, even though the festival was a Shinto event. The granting of court

rank to the festival boy had been compared to the rites of marriage with the deity.

“That’s stupid,” Shin’ichi had said when he was chosen to be a festival boy. “I’m a man.”

The festival boy was required to keep the rite of the “separate fire.” In other words, he was to be given food prepared over a special fire apart from that of his family. The purpose was purification, but by now the ritual had been abbreviated to the point where the festival boy’s food was merely touched by a Shinto purification flame. Rumor was that the festival boy would often remind his family, crying “purification fire” when someone absentmindedly forgot to keep the ritual.

The role of the festival boy was not easy, since it did not end simply with the one day of the procession. He also had to go around to the many districts making official greetings. Both the festival itself and the festival boy’s term lasted almost a full month.

The people of Kyoto savored the elegant mood of the Yoiyama gaieties on the night of July sixteenth even more than the procession of floats on the seventeenth.

The day of gathering at Gion had arrived. At Sada’s shop they were busy with preparations for the festival and had removed the lattice door.

The Gion Festival was held annually at the shrine, so it was nothing unusual for Chieko; not only was she a Kyoto girl, but, living near Shijo, she was a parishioner of Yasaka Shrine. It was another festival of the sultry Kyoto summer.

Chieko’s fondest memory was seeing Shin’ichi riding on a float as a festival boy. Whenever she heard the Gion bands and saw the floats surrounded by lanterns, the memory of Shin’ichi would

come back to life. Both Shin'ichi and Chieko had been about seven or eight years old at the time.

"I've never seen a girl as beautiful as that child." Chieko followed Shin'ichi when he went to Gion Shrine to be appointed Major General of the Fifth Court Rank and again when he rode on the float in the procession. Shin'ichi came in his festival costume accompanied by two attendants to greet Chieko at her family's shop. She stared at him, blushing when he called her name. Shin'ichi wore lip rouge and makeup, but Chieko's face was merely suntanned. The bench at the lattice door was overturned, and Chieko, wearing a red dappled obi with her summer kimono, had been setting off small fireworks with some neighborhood children.

Even now, the image of Shin'ichi as a festival boy lingered in the sound of the Gion bands and the lights of the floats.

"Chieko, would you enjoy going to the Yoiyama festivities?" her mother asked after dinner.

"What about you, Mother?" Chieko asked.

"We have guests, so I can't leave."

Chieko quickened her steps as she left the house. It was difficult to pass through the crowds of people at Shijo.

But Chieko knew where along Shijo Avenue and in which alleys to find the various floats, so she was able to take in all the gay sights in one round. She could hear the music of the many festival bands on the floats.

Chieko walked to the front of Otabisho and bought a candle, lighting it to offer to the deity of the shrine. For the duration of the festival the god of Yasaka was temporarily enshrined in Otabisho, which was located on the south side of Shijo Avenue at Shinkyogoku.

Chieko noticed a girl at Otabisho who seemed to be performing the "seven-turn worship." She had seen her only from the back

but realized immediately what the girl was doing. The seven-turn worship involved walking a distance away from the altar before the deity, then returning and bowing, repeating the sequence seven times. During the course of the ritual the worshiper was not to speak even if an acquaintance happened by.

Chieko thought she had seen the girl somewhere before. Feeling somehow impelled, Chieko too began to perform the seven-turn worship.

The girl went to the west and returned to Otabisho. Chieko, however, walked to the east. But the girl's prayers were longer and more sincere than Chieko's.

Chieko did not walk as far as the girl, so they completed the ritual at about the same time.

The girl finally noticed Chieko and stared as if she would swallow her.

"What did you pray for?" Chieko asked.

"Were you watching me?" The girl's voice trembled. "I wanted to know what became of my sister. It's you. You're my sister. God has brought us together." The girl's eyes overflowed with tears.

It was the girl from the Kitayama cedar village.

The altar glowed in the light of the votive lanterns strung about Otabisho and the candles offered by the worshipers, but the girl's tears took no notice of the brightness. The flickering light rested on the girl. Chieko stood firm, her resolve welling up within her. "I'm an only child. I have no sister," she said, but her face turned ashen.

The Kitayama girl sobbed, "I understand. Miss, please forgive me. Forgive me. Ever since I was small . . . my sister . . . I've wondered what's become of my sister. I've made a terrible mistake."

Chieko did not speak.

“I was a twin, but I don’t know if I’m older or younger.”

“It’s just a chance resemblance, don’t you think?”

The girl nodded, but tears ran down her cheeks. Taking out a handkerchief and wiping her face, she asked, “Miss, where were you born?”

“In the wholesalers’ neighborhood near here.”

“Oh! What did you pray for?”

“For the health and happiness of my father and mother.”

The girl did not speak.

“And your father?” Chieko asked.

“A long time ago he slipped and fell when he tried to jump from one tree to another while cutting branches in the Kitayama cedars. He hit in a bad place. That’s what the people in the village say. I don’t know for myself. I had just been born at the time.”

Chieko felt her heart had been pierced.

The desire to go to the village and look upon the beautiful cedar mountains—was it the call of her father’s spirit?

The mountain girl had also said she was a twin. Had her real father abandoned the one twin, Chieko, and then, lost in thought in the tops of the cedars, slipped and fallen? Certainly it must have happened that way.

Cold sweat oozed from Chieko’s forehead. The music from the Gion bands and the sound of footsteps overflowing from Shijo Avenue faded in the distance. Chieko’s eyes began to turn dark.

The mountain girl put her hand on Chieko’s shoulder and wiped Chieko’s forehead with a handkerchief.

“Thank you.” Chieko wiped her own face with the handkerchief and put it in her own pocket. She did not realize what she had done.

“And what about your mother?” Chieko whispered.

“She’s dead too.” The girl’s voice faltered. “I was born in my mother’s village deeper in the mountains than the cedar village. But now my mother is gone too.”

Chieko asked no more.

The tears of the girl from Kitayama were of course tears of joy, and when they stopped her face beamed.

In contrast, Chieko’s heart was so confused that her legs trembled when she tried to stand. This was nothing she could grasp on the spot. The mountain girl’s robust beauty seemed to be the only thing that supported Chieko. It was impossible for Chieko to be as meekly joyous as the Kitayama girl. A tinge of sorrow deepened in Chieko’s eyes.

As Chieko puzzled over what to do, the mountain girl put out her hand.

“Miss,” she said. Chieko took it. The skin was rough and chapped, unlike Chieko’s soft hand, but the mountain girl clasped Chieko’s hand, seemingly unconcerned about the difference.

“Good-bye, Miss.”

“What?”

“Oh, I’m so happy.”

“What’s your name?”

“Naeko.”

“Naeko? My name is Chieko.”

“I’m an apprentice now. It’s a small village, so if you ask for Naeko, anyone would know me right away.”

Chieko nodded.

“Miss, you look happy?”

“I am.”

“I won’t tell anyone we met tonight. I swear. Only the god of Gion Shrine will know.”

Naeko understood. Although they were twins, their stations in life were different. Chieko did not know what to say, realizing that Naeko had perceived the disparity. But Chieko was the one who had been abandoned as a baby.

“Good-bye, Miss,” Naeko said. “Hurry, before someone notices us.”

Chieko was choked for a response. “Naeko, my family’s shop is nearby. At least pass by that way with me.”

Naeko shook her head. “What about the people there?”

“My family? It’s just my father and mother.”

“I don’t know why, but somehow I thought that is how it was. I’m sure you grew up with their love.”

Chieko pulled at Naeko’s sleeve. “We had better not stand here together for too long.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

Naeko then turned back to Otabisho and bowed respectfully. Chieko hurriedly followed.

“Good-bye,” Naeko said for the third time.

“Good-bye,” said Chieko.

“I have so much to talk to you about. Please come to my village someday. No one would see us in the cedar grove.”

“Thank you.”

The two of them found themselves threading their way toward Shijo Grand Bridge through the crowds. There were many parishioners of Yasaka Shrine.

Although the procession of the seventeenth had ended, the later festivals continued. The stores were open with painted screens set out for decoration. There were early *ukiyo-e*, Kano School and Yamato paintings, and Sotatsu folding screens. Among the original *ukiyo-e* were some that depicted foreigners in the elegant Kyoto style. Those

displays expressed the height of vitality of the Kyoto merchant class.

That vigor now remained in the procession floats, which were decorated with imported Chinese brocade and homespun Gobelin tapestries, gold-brocaded satin, damask, and embroidered cloth, examples of the splendor of the Momoyama Period, when beautiful articles reached Japan through foreign trade. The insides of the floats were also decorated with famous paintings. Tradition held that the pillarlike structures at the head of the floats had originally been masts on trading ships authorized by the shogun.

A Gion band passed by, playing a simple melody that it was famous for, but there were actually twenty-six musical numbers that resembled the music for Mibu Kyogen, or court music ensemble.

Jostled in the crowd as she approached the bridge, Chieko fell behind Naeko.

Naeko had said good-bye three times, but Chieko was not certain whether they had already parted or whether Naeko would walk with her past the shop so that she could show her where she lived. She felt a warm closeness to Naeko that filled her heart.

"Chieko!" Hideo called to Naeko, mistaking her for Chieko, just as she was about to cross the bridge. "Did you go to the festivities? . . . all alone?" he asked.

Naeko hesitated, but she did not look back at Chieko.

Chieko slipped behind some people to hide.

"The weather's nice, isn't it?" Hideo said to Naeko. "Tomorrow will be nice too. The stars are so bright."

Naeko looked up at the sky, at a loss for a reply. Naeko, of course, could not have known Hideo.

"I'm sorry I was so rude to your father the other day. Was the obi all right?"

"Yes."

"Didn't your father feel offended later?"

“Uh . . . yes.” Not knowing what he was talking about, Naeko had no way to answer.

Even so, she never glanced back at Chieko.

Naeko was puzzled. If it would have been all right for Chieko to speak to the young man, then Chieko should approach them.

The young man had a rather large head, broad shoulders, and deep-set eyes. To Naeko he did not look like a bad fellow. His talk of obis led her to think he was a weaver from Nishijin. After years of sitting at a loom, one’s body comes to have a particular look about it.

“I’m young. I spoke out of turn about your father’s design. But I stayed up all night long to think it over and decided to weave it,” Hideo said.

Naeko did not respond.

“Have you worn it?”

“Well . . . yes,” Naeko replied.

“How was it?”

The light was not as bright on the bridge as in the street, and the bustling crowds threatened to separate the two of them. Still Naeko found it strange that Hideo should mistake her for Chieko.

Twins who have grown up in the same family are sometimes difficult to distinguish, but Chieko and Naeko had led completely different lives, having been raised in different places. Naeko wondered if the young man might be nearsighted.

“Chieko, I have a plan. I want to put all my energy into weaving an obi that would be the representative work of my twenties.”

“Oh . . . thank you.” Naeko’s voice faltered.

“Having met you here at the Gion festivities, perhaps I’ll have divine help in weaving your obi.”

Naeko did not speak. The only thing that Naeko could imagine was that Chieko did not want the young man to know they were twins and that was why she would not come to their side.

“Good-bye,” Naeko said. Hideo was taken aback.

“Oh . . . good-bye,” he answered. “Please let me weave the obi for you. Is it all right? I’ll finish it in time for the maple season.” Hideo insisted on his plan.

Naeko looked around for Chieko but could not find her.

The young man and his talk of obis did not bother Naeko; she was happy simply thinking that meeting Chieko in front of Otabisho was a divine blessing. She held onto the bridge railing, gazing for a moment at the reflections of the lanterns in the water.

Then Naeko walked slowly along the side of the bridge. She intended to make her way to Yasaka Shrine at the end of Shijo.

As she approached the middle of the bridge she noticed Chieko talking with two young men.

“Oh,” she cried out in a small voice, in spite of herself. Although she did not approach, she found herself vacantly looking in their direction.

Chieko had wondered what Naeko and Hideo could have been talking about. Hideo had obviously mistaken Naeko for Chieko, and surely Naeko had been flustered, not knowing how to respond to the young man.

It might have been better to approach them, but Chieko had not. And not only that, but when Hideo had called out Chieko’s name to Naeko, Chieko had promptly concealed herself in the crowd.

Why had she done so?

The shock of their meeting in front of Otabisho was far more severe for Chieko than for Naeko. Naeko had said that she already knew she was a twin and had been looking for her sister. But Chieko had never even dreamed of such a thing. This was all too sudden. She was not prepared to feel the joy that Naeko felt.

This was the first time she heard that her real father had fallen from a cedar and that her real mother had also died young. It pierced her heart.

Chieko had caught wind of the neighbors' whispers and realized that she was a foundling, but she had forced herself not to wonder about what sort of parents had abandoned her. No amount of wondering could have helped her understand. Besides, Takichiro and Shige's love for her had been so warm that she saw no need to pursue her origins.

Hearing what Naeko had to say this evening at the festivities was not necessarily a fortunate experience for Chieko. But it seemed that Chieko was developing a tender love for her sister.

"Your heart is purer than mine. You work hard, and your body is strong," Chieko whispered. "Someday will I need your help?"

Chieko had been crossing Shijo Bridge in a daze when Shin'ichi called to her, "Chieko, what are you doing walking around alone looking so absentminded? Your color isn't very good."

"Oh, Shin'ichi." Chieko seemed to come to her senses. "You were so cute when you rode on the float as a festival boy."

"It was a miserable experience at the time, but when I look back on it now I have good memories."

Shin'ichi had someone with him. "This is my older brother. He's in graduate school."

The brother resembled Shin'ichi. He bowed his head brusquely.

"When Shin'ichi was little he was a crybaby and cute like a girl.

That's why they made him a festival boy. What an idiot." Shin'ichi's brother laughed loudly.

They had come halfway across the bridge. Chieko looked at the older brother's manly face.

"Chieko, you're pale tonight. And you look awfully sad," Shin'ichi said.

"It's probably just the light out here in the middle of the bridge," Chieko said as she stepped firmly. "Besides, everyone here at the Yoiyama festivities is having a good time, so naturally a girl alone would look sad."

"That just won't do." Shin'ichi led Chieko to the bridge railing. "Lean here a moment."

"Thank you."

"But there isn't much of a breeze on the river."

Chieko put her hand to her forehead and seemed about to close her eyes. "Shin'ichi, how old were you when you rode on the float as a festival boy?"

"Let's see . . . it seems I was seven by the traditional count. I think it was the year before I went to elementary school."

Chieko nodded but did not speak. She wanted to wipe the cold sweat that began to appear on her forehead and neck. Putting her hand in her pocket, she found Naeko's handkerchief there.

Chieko caught her breath.

The handkerchief was wet with Naeko's tears. Chieko did not know what to do. Should she take it out or not? She wadded it in her palm and wiped her forehead. She felt tears welling in her eyes.

Shin'ichi was suspicious. He knew it was not Chieko's nature to leave an old handkerchief wadded in her pocket.

"Chieko, is it hot? Do you have a chill? A summer cold can be hard to shake . . . if that's what it is. You'd better get home right away. We'll take you . . . won't we, Ryusuke?"

His brother nodded. He had been looking at Chieko the whole time.

"It's nearby. You don't have to."

"Yes, it is close, but that's all the more reason for us to go with you," Shin'ichi's brother declared.

The three of them walked back from the middle of the bridge.

"Shin'ichi, did you really know that I was following the float that you were riding on in the procession as a festival boy?" Chieko asked.

"Yes, I knew. I remember it well," Shin'ichi answered.

"We were so little then."

"Yes, we were. It's unsightly for a festival child to be glancing off to the side while he's riding in a procession. Even so, I was impressed when I saw a little girl following me. You must have got tired, being jostled by the crowd."

"We can't become that little again."

"What do you mean?" Shin'ichi parried lightly. He wondered what had happened to Chieko tonight.

When they arrived at Chieko's shop, Shin'ichi's brother greeted Chieko's parents politely. Shin'ichi hid behind his brother's back.

Takichiro was drinking festival sake with a guest in the back room. He was not so much drinking as keeping him company. Shige was up and down waiting on them.

"I'm home," Chieko said.

"You're early." Shige looked at her daughter. Chieko greeted her father's guest.

"Mother, I'm sorry I was too late to help out here."

"That's all right." Shige signaled to her daughter with her eye,

and the two of them went into the kitchen, ostensibly to get a bottle of sake. "Chieko, those boys brought you home because you looked so helpless, didn't they?"

"Yes, Shin'ichi and his older brother . . ."

"Well, I thought so. Your color looks bad, and you seem unsteady on your feet." Shige put her palm to Chieko's forehead. "You don't seem to have a fever, but you look so sad. Tonight we have a guest, so you can sleep with me." She hugged Chieko's shoulders.

Chieko held back a tear that threatened to fall.

"You go on upstairs in the back to sleep."

"I will, thank you." Chieko's heart softened at her mother's kindness.

"Your father's a bit lonely, since he doesn't have many guests . . . though we did have five or six here for dinner."

Chieko carried the sake bottle to the parlor.

"I've had plenty, thank you. Just this one more will be enough."

The container shook as she poured the sake, so she used her left hand as well. Still, her hands trembled.

Tonight a light had been put in the Christian lantern. She could faintly see the violets growing in the two hollows of the great maple.

There were no flowers on them now, but the two small violets in the upper and lower hollows—were they Chieko and Naeko? It looked as though the violets could never meet, but had they met tonight? Looking at the violets in the dim light, Chieko was again moved to tears.

Takichiro too noticed something about Chieko. He kept glancing at her.

Chieko stood quietly and went upstairs. The guest bedding had

been laid out in Chieko's usual room. Taking a pillow from a closet, Chieko crawled into bed.

She buried her face in the pillow and held the edges so no one would hear her sobbing.

Shige came upstairs and noticed that Chieko's pillow was wet. "You can tell me about it later," she said as she took out a new pillow for Chieko and immediately started back down. Pausing at the head of the stairs, she looked back but said nothing.

It was not that three futons would not fit in the room, but only two had been taken out. One was Chieko's; it seemed that her mother had already been planning to sleep with her. Two linen summer top sheets, Chieko's and her mother's, lay folded at the foot. Shige had prepared her daughter's bed for her. It was a small act, but Chieko was moved once again by her mother's kindness.

With that, her tears stopped and her heart was calmed.

"This is my home."

It was only natural that Chieko should not be able to control the confusion in her heart on meeting Naeko so suddenly.

Chieko stood in front of the mirror stand, looking at her own face. She considered putting on some makeup, but decided against it. She simply took a bottle of perfume and sprinkled the tiniest bit on the bedding. Then she adjusted her under sash.

Of course, sleep did not come easily.

"I wonder if I was cold to Naeko."

When she closed her eyes she could see the beautiful cedar mountains of Nakagawa Village.

Chieko had learned the facts about her real parents from what Naeko had told her.

"I wonder if I should tell my father and mother."

Most likely, Chieko's parents here at the shop knew nothing of the place where Chieko was born or of her real father and mother.

Even the thought that they were no longer in this world did not bring tears to Chieko's eyes.

The sound of a Gion band drifted in from the town.

The guest downstairs seemed to be a crepe dealer from somewhere near Nagahama in Omi. The sake had made several rounds, so their voices were rather loud. Snatches of the conversation reached Chieko where she lay in the rear of the second floor.

The guest stubbornly insisted that it was for the sake of tourism that the float procession now began at Shijo, went down the broad, very modern Kawaramachi, turned down Oike, which was a wide street designed for emergency evacuation purposes, and passed in front of City Hall, where viewing stands had been constructed.

Previously the parade had followed the narrow streets typical of Kyoto—these streets were so narrow in fact that occasionally houses were damaged by the passing floats. Back then the procession had a grace to it. One could even receive a rice cake by reaching out from a second-story window as a float passed the house. Now they scattered rice cakes from the floats.

When the floats turned off Shijo onto the narrow streets, one could not see the lower part of the floats, which was good.

Takichiro calmly defended the new way, explaining that he thought it was splendid now to be able to see the whole float easily on the wider streets.

Lying in the bedroom, even now Chieko could almost hear the creak of the floats' great wooden wheels turning at a crossroad.

*

It seemed the guest would be staying in the next room tonight. Tomorrow Chieko planned to tell her mother and father everything she had heard from Naeko.

All the businesses in the Kitayama cedar village were private enterprises, but not all the families owned land in the mountains. In fact, few did. Chieko imagined her parents had probably been employed by one of the landowning houses.

Naeko had said that she herself was apprenticed.

Twenty years ago it was not only that her parents would have been embarrassed at having twins, but that it would also have been a hardship to raise them both. Perhaps they had abandoned Chieko wondering how they could get along otherwise.

Chieko had failed to ask Naeko three things. Chieko had been abandoned as an infant, but why had they abandoned Chieko and not Naeko? When had her father fallen from the tree? Naeko had said it was right after they were born. She had also mentioned that they were born in their mother's village deeper in the mountains. What was the name of the place?

Naeko seemed to think that Chieko's social status had changed when she was abandoned and that now she could never come to call on Chieko. If Chieko wanted to talk to her, she would have to go to Naeko's cedar mountains.

But it seemed that Chieko could no longer go without letting her parents know.

Chieko had read over and over the beautiful passage from *The Temptation of Kyoto* by Osaragi Jiro: "The planted groves of cedars destined to be made into Kitayama logs stand with their branches layered one atop another like stratus clouds, while the mountains themselves are delicately linked together by the trunks of the red pines. And they send out, like music, the singing voices of the trees." These words came to mind.

The music of the round mountains, each enjoined to the next, and the singing voices of the trees communicated with her heart, even more than the bands and the other festivities. It was as if she heard the music and the singing through the rainbows that often appeared over Kitayama.

Chieko's sadness faded. Perhaps it had not been sadness. Maybe it was the surprise, the puzzlement, the distress of meeting Naeko so suddenly. Perhaps it is a girl's fate to shed tears.

As she turned over and closed her eyes Chieko listened to the song of the mountains.

"Naeko was overjoyed, but what did I do?"

Shortly, her father and mother came upstairs with the guest. "Sleep well," Takichiro told him.

Chieko's mother folded the clothes the guest took off, then came to the room Chieko was in and began to fold Takichiro's. "I'll do it, Mother," Chieko said.

"Are you still awake?" She left them to Chieko and lay down. "It smells good here. You're a young girl," she said.

Soon the guest from Omi was snoring on the other side of the sliding panel door, probably thanks to the sake.

"Shige," Takichiro called to his wife in the next room. "Don't you think that Mr. Arita wants to send his son to our shop?"

"As a clerk . . . or some kind of employee?"

"As a husband for Chieko."

"Such talk! Chieko isn't asleep yet." Shige tried to silence her husband.

"I know. It's all right if she hears."

Chieko did not speak.

"It's his second son. He's come here several times on errands."

"I don't like Mr. Arita very much." Shige spoke in a hushed voice, but firmly.

Chieko's mountain music vanished.

"Isn't that right, Chieko?" Her mother rolled over toward her. Chieko opened her eyes but did not answer. For a while it was quiet. Chieko lay still, her ankles crossed.

"Arita wants this shop . . . I think he does anyway," Takichiro said. "He knows that Chieko is a good and beautiful girl. And we do business with him, so he understands our finances quite well. We have some employees here who blab everything." No one spoke.

"Well, it doesn't matter how beautiful Chieko is," he added. "I've never even considered marrying her off for business, have I, Shige? God wouldn't forgive me."

"That's right," Shige said.

"My disposition just isn't right for this shop."

"Father, forgive me for having you take those books of Paul Klee's paintings to the convent at Saga." Chieko got up and apologized to her father.

"What? They're my pleasure . . . my comfort. Now they give me something to live for." Her father bowed his head slightly. "Though I don't have the talent for such designs."

"Father."

"Chieko, if I sold this shop, how would it be if we moved to a small, quiet house near Nanzenji or Okazaki—Nishijin would be all right too—and the two of us thought up designs for kimono cloth and obis? Could you stand being poor?"

"Poor? I wouldn't mind at all."

With that her father finally seemed to doze off, but Chieko could not sleep.

The next morning Chieko got up early, swept the street in front of the shop, and wiped the benches at the lattice door.

The Gion Festival continued.

After the eighteenth there was the later float preparations, then the Festival of Screens on the twenty-third, the procession of floats on the twenty-fourth, the dedicatory *kyogen* performance, and the shrine palanquin washing on the twenty-eighth; then back at Yasaka Shrine there was a festival to announce the end of the Shinto ceremonies.

Several of the floats passed through Teramachi.

With all the activity of the month of festivals, Chieko's heart would not be calmed.



THE
COLOR
OF
AUTUMN

One of the last reminders still left in Kyoto of the era of “civilization and enlightenment” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was finally to be dismantled—the streetcar that ran along the Horikawa Kitano line, the oldest electric train in Japan.

The old capital was known as the place in Japan where many of the innovations from the West were first adopted. This trait was evident among many of the people of Kyoto as well.

But perhaps there is still something of the old capital in a city that would keep the streetcar running so long. Naturally, the streetcar itself was small; one’s knees almost touched those of the passenger sitting opposite.

Now that the streetcar was to be dismantled, however, it seemed that everyone hated to part with it. People decorated it with artificial flowers, calling it the “flower train.” The streetcar was advertised with passengers dressed in the fashion of the Meiji Period. Would this be another Kyoto festival?

The streetcar continued to run for many days with full loads of

passengers who had no particular reason for riding. It was July, and some even carried parasols.

The summer sun in Kyoto was much more intense than in Tokyo, where nowadays one seldom saw anyone using a parasol.

As Takichiro was preparing to board the "flower train" in front of Kyoto Station, a middle-aged woman stood behind him trying to stifle a smile. Takichiro did have something of a Meiji air that would qualify him to ride the old streetcar.

Takichiro noticed the woman as he got onto the streetcar. He spoke with some embarrassment. "What do you mean by laughing? You don't have any Meiji credentials."

"I'm not too far removed from that era," the woman answered. "Besides, I live along the Kitano line."

"Really? Oh, yes, that was the place," Takichiro said.

"That was the place! What a cold way to put it! Still, you *were* kind enough to remember."

"That's a pretty girl you have with you. Where have you been hiding her?"

"You old fool. She's not my child. You should know that."

"Well, I didn't. You know how women are."

"What do you mean? . . . It's a man's business too."

The girl, about fourteen or fifteen, was lovely and shy, with fair skin. She wore a narrow red obi with her light summer kimono. Pursing her lips, she sat close to the woman in order to avoid Takichiro.

Takichiro tugged lightly on the woman's sleeve.

"Sit here between us," the woman told the girl.

For a moment the three of them said nothing. Then the woman leaned over the girl's head and whispered into Takichiro's ear.

"I'm thinking about sending her to be an apprentice geisha, a *maiko*, at Gion."

“Whose child is she?”

“She’s the daughter of a tearoom owner nearby.”

“I see.”

“Some people say she must belong to you and me,” the woman spoke in a voice Takichiro could barely hear.

“What are you saying?”

The woman was the proprietress of a tearoom at Kamishi-chiken.

“This girl has lured you into coming with us to Kitano Tenjin shrine, hasn’t she?”

Takichiro realized that the woman was joking.

“How old are you?” he asked the girl.

“I’m in the first year of middle school.”

“Hmm.” Takichiro looked at the girl. “Well, I’ll call on you in the other world, or when I’ve been reborn in this one.”

Being a child of the gay quarters, she seemed to understand vaguely Takichiro’s strange words.

“Why should I go to the Kitano Shrine because of her? Is she an incarnation of the deity Tenjin?” Takichiro teased the proprietress.

“She is. She is.”

“But Tenjin was male.”

“Reincarnated as a girl,” the woman said, setting him straight. “It’s because he’d suffer the same bitterness of exile again that he did in mortality if he were reincarnated as a man.”

Takichiro almost burst out laughing. “And as a woman?”

“As a woman, well . . . as a woman, one is cherished by a lover.”

“I see.”

The girl was indisputably beautiful. Her short bobbed hair glistened black. She was a lovely girl whose eyes had almost a Western appearance.

“Is she an only child?” Takichiro asked.

“No, she has two elder sisters. The older one will finish middle school next spring, so she might make her debut then.”

“Is she beautiful like this girl?”

“She resembles her, but she’s not as beautiful as this one.”

Takichiro did not speak.

There was not a single *maiko* in Kamishichiken now. Even if a girl were to become a *maiko*, it was not permitted until after she finished middle school.

Kamishichiken, or the “Upper Seven Houses,” was so named because originally there had been only seven teahouses there. Takichiro had heard that the number had increased to twenty.

In the past, not so long ago, Takichiro often used to go to Kamishichiken for pleasure, accompanied by weavers from Nishijin or his favorite customers from outlying areas. His shop had been prospering then.

“You must be quite inquisitive yourself . . . riding this streetcar and all,” Takichiro said.

“It’s essential that people should cling to the past,” the proprietress said. “Our business doesn’t forget old patrons.”

Takichiro was silent.

“Besides, today I just saw a guest off to Kyoto Station. This line is on our way home. Isn’t it you, Mr. Sada, who’s a bit odd . . . riding all alone?”

“Maybe so. I wonder why I’m here. It should have been enough just to see the flower train.” Takichiro inclined his head. “Is it that the past is so full of memories? Or is it because it’s so lonely now?”

“Lonely? You’re not old enough to talk like that. Why don’t you come with us? If only to see the young girls?”

Takichiro felt as though he was about to be escorted to Kamishichiken.

Takichiro followed the proprietress as she walked directly to the altar of Kitano Shrine. Her meticulous prayer was long. The girl too bowed her head. The woman returned to Takichiro’s side. “Please excuse her.”

“Certainly.”

“You go on home now,” the woman spoke to the girl.

“Thank you.” The girl said good-bye to the two of them. As she walked away her gait gradually took on the look of a middle school student.

“You seem to have taken quite a liking to the girl,” the woman said. “She’ll make her debut in about two or three years. You can look forward to it. She’s precocious. It’s because she’s so beautiful.”

Takichiro did not respond. Having come this far, he had wanted to walk around the extensive grounds of the shrine, but it was hot.

“Could I take a rest at your place? I’ve become quite tired.”

“Of course. I was planning on it from the start. It’s been a long time,” the woman said.

As they approached the old teahouse, the proprietress spoke again. “Come inside. What have you been doing lately? We’ve often talked of you fondly. Please lie down, and I’ll bring a pillow. You mentioned being lonely. I’ll bring a gentle girl you can talk with.”

“I don’t want to see any of the geisha I’ve met before.”

*

A young geisha came in just as Takichiro was beginning to doze. She sat quietly for a moment, probably wondering about this difficult guest whom she was meeting for the first time. Takichiro sat languidly, making no attempt to enliven the conversation. The geisha spoke, trying to cheer him. She said that since she made her debut she had met some forty-seven men who struck her fancy.

“Just like in the famous old play about the forty-seven loyal retainers. It’s funny to think about it now—falling for so many men. Some were in their forties or fifties. Everyone laughed at me.”

Takichiro was now completely awake. “And now?”

“Now, just one.”

The proprietress had entered the parlor.

The geisha was about twenty years old. Still, Takichiro wondered if she really remembered all forty-seven men even though she had had no deep relationship with them.

Once, only three days after her debut, a guest suddenly kissed her as she was showing him to the restroom. She bit the man’s tongue.

“Did he bleed?”

“Yes, he did. He made me pay his doctor’s fee. The man was terribly angry. I cried, and there was a little disturbance. But it was his fault . . . Don’t you think so? I’ve already forgotten his name.”

“Hmm.” Takichiro gazed at the geisha’s face, imagining this seemingly gentle, slope-shouldered Kyoto beauty, who would have been eighteen or nineteen at the time, suddenly biting hard on someone’s tongue.

“Show me your teeth,” Takichiro told the geisha.

“Teeth? My teeth? Didn’t you see them while I was talking?”

“I want to get a better look. Smile big.”

“No. I’m embarrassed.” The geisha pursed her lips. “You’re so mean. I wouldn’t be able to talk.”

The geisha’s teeth were like white beads in her beautiful mouth. Takichiro teased her. “I know. Your teeth broke then, and these are false, aren’t they?”

“A tongue is soft, so . . . ,” she spoke absentmindedly. “Oh, stop it.” She hid her head behind the proprietress’s back.

After a while Takichiro spoke up. “I’ve come this far, so I think I’ll drop by Nakasato.”

“What? They’d be happy to see you there. May I go with you?” The proprietress stood up. Then she sat for a moment before the mirror.

Nakasato had the original front on the building, but the guest-rooms inside were all new.

Another geisha joined them. Takichiro stayed at Nakasato until after dinner.

Hideo came to the shop while Takichiro was away. He asked for Chieko, so she went out to the shop to see him.

“I finished the design for the obi I promised at the Gion Festival. I came to have you take a look at it,” Hideo said.

“Chieko,” her mother called, “why don’t you two go sit in the back?”

“All right.”

Hideo showed the design to Chieko as they sat in the room that faced the inner garden. There were two designs. One was of chrysanthemums arranged among leaves. It was rendered in such a novel way that one did not recognize them as chrysanthemum leaves. The other design was of maples.

“They’re lovely.” Chieko admired them.

“I’m happy you like them,” Hideo said. “Which one shall I weave for you?”

“Well, I could wear the chrysanthemums all year.”

“So shall I use the chrysanthemum pattern?”

Chieko did not speak. She looked down. Her face took on a concerned look.

“Both of them are fine, but . . .” Chieko’s voice faltered. “Could you make a design of mountains with cedars and red pines?”

“Mountains with red pines and cedars? It sounds as if it would be difficult, but I could think about it.” Hideo gave Chieko a puzzled look.

“Hideo, I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? There’s nothing to be sorry about.”

“But it . . .” Chieko searched for words. “It wasn’t me you promised the obi to on the bridge at Shijo at the festival. You mistook someone else for me.”

Hideo’s voice would not come out; he could not believe her. His face lost its strength. It was for Chieko that he had put his whole heart into the design. Was it Chieko’s intention to reject Hideo completely?

But if that were the case, Hideo could comprehend neither Chieko’s remarks nor her manner. His harsh mood returned. “Did I meet your ghost? Was it your ghost I talked to? Do ghosts appear at the Gion Festival?”

Chieko’s face tightened. “Hideo, the girl you talked to was my sister.”

Hideo did not speak, so Chieko went on. “She’s my sister. I had just met her myself for the first time that night. She’s my sister.”

He still did not respond.

“I haven’t even told my mother and father about her yet.”

“What do you mean?” Hideo was taken aback. He did not understand.

“You know the Kitayama log village? She works there.”

“What?”

Chieko’s confession was so abrupt that Hideo could find no words.

“You know Nakagawa District, don’t you?” Chieko asked.

“Yes, but I’ve only been through there on the bus.”

“Please give one of your obis to that girl.”

“What?”

“Please give one to her.”

Hideo nodded with a suspicious look, but then asked, “So is that why you said you wanted me to make an obi with a red pine and cedar mountain design?”

Chieko nodded.

“All right. But won’t it be too close to her daily life?”

“It’s your responsibility to take that into account.”

Hideo did not speak.

“She’ll treasure it all her life. Her name is Naeko. She’s not a landowner’s daughter, so she works hard. More . . . much more than someone like me.”

Hideo was still doubtful. “I’ll make the obi, since you’ve asked me.”

“Make sure you remember. Her name is Naeko.”

“I see. But why does she look so much like you?”

“We’re sisters.”

“But even sisters would not . . .”

She did not reveal to Hideo that they were twins.

Naeko and Chieko had both been wearing light summer festival dress, as was everyone else, so perhaps it was not just Hideo’s eyes playing tricks in the evening light that caused him to mistake them.

Hideo wondered how they could be sisters. This girl he saw now before him—the daughter of a fine Kyoto kimono wholesaler whose old-fashioned, somewhat out-of-date shop stood deep in the recesses behind layers of beautiful lattice doors—and an apprenticed girl in the log village in Kitayama. But it was not something he felt he could delve into.

“When I finish the obi, shall I bring it to you?” Hideo asked.

“Well,” Chieko thought for a moment. “Could you deliver it directly to Naeko?”

“Yes, I could.”

“Then please do.” Chieko’s heart was in her request. “It *is* a bit far away.”

“I know. But it’s easy to find.”

“Naeko will be so happy.”

“Will she accept it?” Hideo’s doubt was reasonable. He wondered if Naeko might be startled.

“I’ll tell her about it.”

“You will? If you’d do that, I’d be happy to deliver it. What’s the name of the house?”

Chieko did not know. “The house where she lives?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll let you know by telephone or in a letter.”

“All right,” Hideo said. “I’ll take it to her. I’ll weave it well, as though it were your obi rather than your double’s.”

“Thank you.” Chieko lowered her head. “Do you think this is all bizarre?”

Hideo did not respond.

“Hideo, please don’t weave it for me. Weave it for Naeko.”

“All right. I understand.”

As Hideo left the shop he naturally felt as though he were wrapped in a puzzle; nevertheless, he had already set his head to work on a pattern. He feared the design would be too plain for

Chieko unless he made it quite bold. Hideo still seemed to regard it as Chieko's obi. No, if it were Naeko's obi, then he would have to design it in such a manner that it would not clash with her way of life as a laborer. It was as he had said to Chieko.

Hideo turned his steps toward the bridge at Shijo where he had first met "Chieko's Naeko" or "Naeko's Chieko," but it was hot under the noonday sun. Leaning against the rail at the end of the bridge, he closed his eyes. He listened, not for the echoes of the crowds or the trains, but for the almost imperceptible sound of the flow of the river.

This year Chieko did not see the Daimonji, the fires lighted on the mountainside on August sixteenth to mark the end of the Bon Festival. Chieko stayed home while her mother went with her father on a rare outing together.

Her parents reserved a whole room at a teahouse in Kiya Nijo along with several nearby business friends.

It was said that the custom of lighting a fire on the mountain came from the tradition of throwing burning torches to guide the spirits through the night sky back to the realm of the dead.

The Daimonji on Niyogatake Peak on Higashiyama was the best known, but there were actually five mountains where bonfires were lighted: the Left Daimonji on Okitayama near Kinkakuji, the Myoho on Mount Matsugasaki, the Funagata on Mount Myoken in Nishigamo, and the Toriigata on a mountain in Kamisaga. These five "sending fires" were lighted to direct the spirits of the dead back to the netherworld. For the forty minutes of the events all the neon lighting and advertising in the city was turned off.

Chieko could sense the color of early autumn in the sending fires and the glow of the night sky.

About two weeks earlier than the Daimonji, on the evening

before the beginning of autumn, the ceremonies of the “summer passing” were held at the Shimogamo Shrine.

Chieko and her friends used to climb the dikes on the Kamo River to view the Left Daimonji. She had been accustomed to seeing the Daimonji since she was a child.

It’s already time for the Daimonji again. The thought came deeper into her heart every year as she grew into a young woman.

Chieko went out to the front of the shop and played with the neighborhood children around the benches. The children seemed to pay no attention to such things as the Daimonji, preferring the more interesting fireworks.

This year the Bon Festival brought a new sadness to Chieko: At Gion she had met Naeko, who had told her that her real father and mother died long ago.

“Yes, I’ll go see Naeko tomorrow,” Chieko thought. “I’ll have to tell her about Hideo’s obi.”

The next afternoon Chieko went out in inconspicuous clothes. She had never seen Naeko in the daylight.

Chieko got off the bus at Bodai Falls.

It seemed to be the busy season at Kitayama. The men were trimming the rough bark from the cedar logs. It fell all around in piles.

Chieko then walked a bit, hesitantly. Suddenly Naeko came rushing toward her at top speed.

“Miss, thank you for coming. Thank you.”

Chieko looked at Naeko’s work clothes. “Are you sure it’s all right?”

“Yes, I asked for the rest of the day off . . . when I saw you.” Naeko spoke between breaths. “Shall we talk in the cedar mountains? No one will see us there.” She pulled Chieko’s sleeve.

*

Naeko lightheartedly took off her apron and spread it on the ground. The Tamba cotton apron went all the way around the back, so it was wide enough for both girls to sit on together. "Please, sit down," Naeko said.

"Thank you."

Naeko took off the towel that covered her head and fluffed her hair with her fingers. "Thank you so much for coming. I'm so happy, so happy." Her eyes sparkled as she gazed at Chieko.

The scent of the earth and the trees was strong—the fragrances of the cedar mountain.

"If we sit here, no one can see us from below," Naeko said.

"I like the cedar groves, so I've come often before, but this is the first time I've ever been up in the mountains." Chieko looked about. The two girls were surrounded by the straight cedar trunks of uniform size.

"These are man-made trees," Naeko said.

"What?"

"They are about forty years old. They'll be cut and used for pillars or the like. Left alone, they would probably grow for a thousand years . . . wide and tall. I think about that occasionally. I like virgin forests the best, but in this village it's as though we're growing flowers for cutting."

Chieko did not speak.

"Were there no such thing as man, there would be nothing like Kyoto either. It would all be natural woods and fields of grasses. This land would belong to the deer and wild boar, wouldn't it? Why did man come into this world? It's frightening . . . mankind."

"Naeko, do you think about such things?" Chieko was surprised.

"Yes, sometimes."

"Do you dislike people?"

“I love people,” Naeko answered. “I like nothing as much as people, but how would it be if there were no people on earth? Things like that come to mind after napping in the mountains.”

“Isn’t that a kind of pessimism hidden in your heart?”

“I hate pessimism. I enjoy working here every day . . . but I wonder about people.”

The cedar grove suddenly turned dark.

Chieko did not speak.

“It’s a shower,” Naeko said. The rain, falling in great drops, began to collect on the leaves of the cedars.

The violent thunder rumbled.

“I’m frightened.” Chieko turned pale. Naeko took her hand.

“Miss, please bend your knees and crouch into a ball,” Naeko said, leaning over Chieko and completely covering her sister with her body.

The thunder grew more intense until soon there was no interval between the lightning and the crash. The mountains seemed as though they would be rent with the sound.

The storm passed directly over the girls.

The branches of the trees on the cedar mountain were astir in the rain. Each lightning flash illuminated the earth and glared off the trees around the girls. In that moment the beautiful straight trunks of the trees in the grove appeared uncanny and ominous. Then the thunder crashed.

“Naeko, we’re going to be struck!” Chieko huddled smaller.

“It might strike the ground, but it won’t hit us,” Naeko said firmly. “Why would you think lightning would strike you?”

Then she clung to Chieko even more completely.

“Miss, your hair got wet.” Naeko wiped the back of Chieko’s head with her towel. Then, folding the towel, she put it on top of Chieko’s head.

“A few raindrops may fall, but lightning would never strike anywhere near you.”

Chieko calmed at hearing Naeko’s kind voice. “Thank you. Thank you so much,” Chieko said. “But didn’t you get wet protecting me?”

“These are my work clothes. I don’t mind in the least,” Naeko said. “I’m very happy.”

“What’s that shiny thing on your belt?” Chieko asked.

“Oh, I had forgotten. It’s a scythe. I’d been using it to cut bark from the cedar logs on the roadside when I ran over to meet you,” she said when she realized what she was carrying. “It’s dangerous.” She tossed the scythe far away. It was small, without a wooden handle.

“I’ll pick it up on the way back . . . but I don’t really want to go.”

The thunder seemed to be passing.

Chieko could clearly feel Naeko’s embrace as the mountain girl covered her with her body.

Though it was summer, the shower in the mountains chilled Chieko’s hands, but as Naeko covered Chieko from head to foot the warmth in Naeko’s form spread deep into Chieko’s body.

The inexpressible warmth was intimate. Chieko held still for a moment, her eyes closed with joyful thoughts.

“Naeko, thank you,” she said again. “I wonder if you did this for me in our mother’s womb.”

“Don’t you imagine we pushed and kicked each other around in there?”

“Maybe so,” Chieko laughed, her voiced imbued with sisterly affection.

The shower passed with the thunder.

“Naeko, thank you. I think it’s all right now.” Chieko moved as if she would get up.

“Yes, but let’s stay like this a while longer. The raindrops that collected on the leaves are still falling.” Naeko continued to cover Chieko.

Chieko put her hand on Naeko’s back. “You’re all wet. Aren’t you cold?”

“I’m used to it. It’s nothing,” Naeko said. “I’m so happy you came that I feel warm inside. You got a bit wet too.”

“Naeko, was this the place where our father fell from the tree?” Chieko asked.

“I don’t know. I was only a baby then myself.”

“Where is our mother’s home village? Do we have a grandfather or grandmother still alive?”

“I don’t know that either,” Naeko answered.

“Weren’t you raised in the village?”

“Miss, why do you ask such questions?”

Hearing Naeko speak so sharply, Chieko swallowed her words.

“You don’t have such people?” Naeko asked.

Chieko did not answer.

“I would be grateful if you’d just think of me as your sister. I’m sorry I said too much at the Gion Festival.”

“No, I was happy that I’d met you.”

“I was happy too. But I couldn’t visit your family’s shop.”

“But if you would, I’d arrange everything . . . I’ll talk to my father and mother.”

“No, don’t,” Naeko said firmly. “If you were ever in trouble, as you were just now, I’d go to protect you, even if it would kill me. You understand that, don’t you?”

Moved to tears, for a moment Chieko was unable to speak.

“Naeko, you were confused that evening when you were mistaken for me, weren’t you?”

“You mean when the man talked to me about the obi?”

“That young man is a good person. He’s a weaver at an obi shop in Nishijin. He said he’d make an obi for you, didn’t he?”

“Because he mistook me for you.”

“The other day he came to show me the design. I told him it wasn’t me. I told him it was my sister he had met.”

“What?”

“I asked him to make an obi for my sister Naeko.”

“For me?”

“Didn’t he promise you he would?”

“But he had mistaken me for you.”

“He’s weaving one for me, and I want you to accept the one he’s weaving for you . . . as a token that we are sisters.”

“Me?” Naeko was taken aback.

“It was a promise made at Gion, wasn’t it?” Chieko asked softly.

Even as she continued to cover Chieko, Naeko’s body grew stiff, but she didn’t move.

“Miss, if you were ever in danger, I would gladly take your place, but I would never want to accept a gift in your stead. It would be shameful.”

“You wouldn’t be accepting it in my stead.”

“Yes, that *is* what it would be.”

How could Chieko persuade her?

“And you wouldn’t accept even if I were to give it to you?”

Naeko did not answer.

“I’m having him weave it so I can give it to you.”

“That’s not the way it was. On the night of the festival, he mistook me for you and said he wanted to give you an obi.” Naeko spoke pointedly. “That obi maker, that weaver, is really longing for you. I’m something of a woman. I understand that much.”

Chieko suppressed her embarrassment.

“Wouldn’t you accept it?”

Naeko was silent.

“I told him you were my sister. I’m having him weave it for you.”

“I’ll accept it, Miss.” Naeko bowed her head obediently. “I’m sorry I said what I did.”

“He’ll deliver it to you. What’s the name of the family where you live?”

“Murase,” Naeko answered. “It will be a magnificent obi, I’m sure, but someone like me would never have a place to wear it.”

“Naeko, no one knows where life’s path will lead.”

“That’s true. One doesn’t.” Naeko nodded. “But I don’t want success in the world. Even if I can’t wear it, though, I’ll keep it as a treasure.”

“Our shop doesn’t handle many obis, but I’ll find a kimono to go with the one Hideo is making.”

Naeko said nothing.

“My father’s quite a strange fellow, so recently he’s had bad feelings about our business. It wouldn’t do for a variety wholesale shop like ours to handle only the best items. Lately, we’ve had more and more synthetics and woolens . . .”

Glancing up at the branches of the cedars, Naeko stood.

“A few drops are still falling. But you were feeling cramped, weren’t you, Miss?”

“No . . . I feel grateful to you.”

“What if you were to help out at the shop, Miss?”

“Me?” Chieko stood up as if she had been struck.
Naeko’s clothes clung to her skin, soaking wet.

Naeko did not see Chieko all the way to the bus stop—not because she was wet, but because she was afraid of being noticed.

When Chieko returned to the shop, her mother was in the back of the house beyond the entryway preparing snacks for the clerks. “Welcome home,” she called to her daughter.

“Mother, I’m sorry I’m so late. Is Father home?”

“He’s in behind the curtains you made, brooding about something.” Chieko’s mother looked at her. “Where have you been? Your clothes are all wet and wrinkled. You should change.”

Upstairs Chieko slowly put on dry clothes. She sat for a while, then went downstairs again. Her mother had finished serving the clerks their three o’clock refreshments.

“Mother.” Chieko spoke in a wavering voice. “I have something I want to talk about with you, alone.”

Shige nodded. “Let’s go upstairs in the back.”

Chieko’s manner became a bit formal. “Was there a thunder-shower here too?”

“A thundershower? No. But I don’t think it’s a thundershower that you want to talk about, is it?”

“Mother, I went to the Kitayama cedar village. I have a sister there. We’re twins. I met her for the first time at the Gion Festival this year. She says our real father and mother died long ago.”

This naturally took Shige by surprise. She simply looked into Chieko’s face. “The Kitayama cedar village? Really?”

“I couldn’t keep it from you. I’ve only met her twice . . . at the Gion Festival and today.”

“And, this girl . . . what is she doing now?”

“She’s apprenticed to a house in the cedar village. She works there. She’s a good girl, but she won’t come here to our home.”

“Hmm.” Shige was silent for a moment. “I suppose it’s good that you should know. What are you going to do?”

“Mother, this is my home. I want you to keep me your daughter, just as you always have.” Chieko’s face became intent.

“Of course. Chieko, you’ve been my daughter for twenty years.”

“Mother.” Chieko buried her face in her mother’s lap.

“Actually, since the Gion Festival, sometimes—just a little, but sometimes—you’ve seemed distracted. I thought about asking you if you’d found someone you liked!”

Chieko was silent.

“Why don’t you bring the girl here sometime . . . after the clerks have gone home. Maybe in the evening.”

Chieko shook her head slightly on Shige’s lap. “She won’t come. When she talks to me she even calls me ‘Miss.’”

“Really?” Shige stroked Chieko’s hair. “I’m glad you told me about this. Does she look a lot like you?”

The bell crickets in the Tamba jar had begun to chirp.



THE
GREEN
OF
PINES

Having heard of a house for sale at a reasonable price near Nanzenji Temple, Takichiro invited his wife and daughter to go with him to see it—in part just for the chance to walk in the fine autumn weather.

“Do you plan to buy it?” Shige asked.

“I’ll decide that after I’ve seen it.” He suddenly appeared cross. “I hear it’s a small house and not very expensive.”

Shige did not respond.

“Let’s go even if it’s just for the walk. Wouldn’t that be all right?”

“Well . . . yes.”

Shige felt uneasy. Was he thinking to buy the house and commute to their shop? As in Tokyo’s Ginza and Nihonbashi, many of the wholesalers in Nakagyo had begun to buy separate homes and commute to their shops. It might not hurt to follow suit. The Sadas’ shop, Tamaru, was having troubles, but there was probably enough money to spare to buy a small second home.

But perhaps Takichiro was planning to sell the shop and retire to the small house. It might be better if he closed out the business while he still had money to spare. But if that were the case, how would Takichiro make a living in a small house near Nanzenji Temple? He was in his late fifties, so Shige wanted him to live as he pleased. The shop would bring a reasonable price, but living off the bank interest would be a rather discouraging life. If they could get someone to invest the money well, they could live comfortably, but Shige could not think of anyone who could handle it.

Although Shige did not mention it, Chieko seemed to sense her mother's uneasiness. Chieko was young. Solace filled her eyes as she regarded her mother.

Takichiro, however, was enjoying himself.

"Father, as long as we'll be walking near there, could we go over toward Shoren'in Temple?" Chieko asked in the car. "Just in front of the entrance."

"The camphor trees. It's the camphor trees that you want to see, isn't it?"

"That's right." Chieko was surprised at her father's perception. "The camphor trees."

"All right. Let's go," Takichiro said. "When I was young I used to sit in the shade of the big camphor trees there and talk with my friends . . . None of them are in Kyoto anymore."

Chieko was silent.

"That whole area brings back memories."

After leaving her father to his youthful recollections for a moment, Chieko spoke. "I haven't seen those trees in the daylight since I finished school. Father, you know the evening tour bus route? Shoren'in is one of the temples on it. When the bus arrives several of the priests come out carrying lighted lanterns to meet the guests."

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The path along which the guests were led to the vestibule was rather long by the light of the priests' lanterns. But that was about the extent of the artistic effect.

According to the tour bus brochure, the temple nuns were to serve tea to the visitors, but the tourists were actually conducted to a large hall.

"Naturally, the tea is all prepared in advance. A bunch of people bring in a lot of cheap-looking cups on a big tray, leave them there, and scurry back," Chieko said, laughing. "The nuns may have something to do with it, but it must involve some amazing sleight of hand. I never caught sight of them! It was quite disillusioning . . . and the tea was just lukewarm."

"That can't be helped. It would take a lot of time to do it carefully, wouldn't it?" her father said.

"Yes, it would, but it was all right. The garden is illuminated from all sides. A priest came out in the center and gave a fine talk—just an explanation of Shoren'in—but he was so eloquent."

Takichiro was silent.

"Once you were inside the temple you could hear the sound of a *koto* being played somewhere the whole time. My friend and I were talking about whether it was the real thing or a recording."

"Hmm."

"Then we went to see the *maiko* at Gion," Chieko continued. "They danced two or three numbers at the Kaburenjo, but I wonder what sort of *maiko* they were."

"Why is that?"

"They wore the long, dangling obis, but their clothes looked so shabby."

"Really?"

"From Gion we went to Sumiya at Shimabara to see the grand courtesans. Their clothes were all authentic . . . and the young girl

attendants' too. In the light of one hundred candles—isn't it called the 'exchanging of cups'? Anyway, they were dressed like that. Then they appeared in the ceremonial procession of courtesans."

"Well, that's quite a show they put on," Takichiro said.

"Yes, the lantern greeting at Shoren'in and Shimabara were the best," Chieko said. "But it seems as though I've talked about this before."

"Take me with you sometime. I've never seen Sumiya or the grand courtesans," Shige said.

They reached Shoren'in just as her mother spoke.

Why did it occur to Chieko to see the camphor trees? Was it because she had walked among the rows of camphor trees at the Botanical Garden? Was it because she said that she preferred natural trees to the Kitayama cedars, which were grown as a crop?

Four camphor trees stood in a row above the stone wall at the entrance to Shoren'in. The nearer ones seemed to be very old.

Chieko and her parents stood silently looking at the camphor trees. They could sense the weird power of the giant trees in the uncanny way that the extended branches intertwined.

"Well, shall we go?" Takichiro started walking toward Nanzenji Temple.

Takichiro spoke as he examined the directions to the house, which were written on a paper he had taken from his wallet. "Chieko, I don't know much about them, but don't camphor trees grow in warm climates? Aren't they southern trees? They flourish in places like Atami or Kyushu. These are surely ancient trees, but they look like oversized bonsai, don't you think?"

"Isn't that the way it is with Kyoto? It's the same with the mountains and rivers . . . and the people too?" Chieko said.

"Maybe so," her father nodded. "But not all people. That's not always true with people."

Chieko did not speak.

“Whether it’s people today or people from ancient history.”

“I suppose so.”

“If what you say is true, Chieko, wouldn’t it go for all of Japan?”

Chieko did not respond, marveling at how far her father had taken her comment.

“Father, if you look closely at the trunks of those trees and the strange way the limbs spread, don’t they seem frightening, as though they possess some great power?”

“They do, but does a young girl like you think about things like that?” Her father looked back at the trees. Then he stared at his daughter. “Certainly, it’s as you say . . . and even in the way your lustrous hair has grown But your old father has become rather dull. Maybe I’ve grown quite decrepit. I’m glad that I’ve learned a good lesson from you.”

“Father,” Chieko called out, her voice filled with intense compassion.

Although the precincts of the temple were quite spacious and quiet, there were, as always, few signs of people inside the main gate of Nanzenji Temple.

Takichiro turned left as he studied the map to the house. The house was quite small, and it was situated far back from the street behind a high earthen wall. White bush clover bloomed in long stretches on both sides of the walk from the narrow gate to the door.

“Look, how lovely.” Takichiro stood motionless in front of the gate, fascinated by the beauty of the white bush clover. But he had already lost the desire to examine the house to buy it; he noticed that a large home two doors away had been converted into an inn.

Still, something about the rows of clover made it difficult to leave.

Takichiro was surprised to find that many of the houses on the street nearby had been converted into inns since he had last visited Nanzenji. Some had been rebuilt inside to accommodate large groups, such as students from the country visiting Kyoto on school excursions, who caused a great commotion going in and out.

“The house itself is all right, but this just won’t do,” Takichiro whispered as he stood at the gate. “I wonder if time will turn all of Kyoto into nothing but inns . . . just like the area around Kodaiji Temple. The strip between Kyoto and Osaka has become an industrial zone. There is still some open land around Nishinokyo, but even if you could put up with the inconvenience of living that far away, who knows what sort of fancy modern houses they might build in that neighborhood.” Takichiro’s discouragement showed in his face.

Takichiro still seemed to feel an attachment to the rows of white bush clover. He walked seven or eight steps away, then, alone, he turned and looked at them again. Shige and Chieko stood waiting for him in the street.

“The man who owns this house got them to bloom so well.” He returned to where Chieko and her mother were standing together. “I wonder what his secret is. He probably should have used some bamboo supports for the clover. If it rained, you wouldn’t be able to walk on the flagstones without getting all wet from the leaves,” Takichiro said. “He probably didn’t have a mind to sell the house when he was tending the clover this year, but once he had to sell, he didn’t care whether it got bent or tangled.”

Chieko and her mother said nothing.

“I guess that’s just the way with people.” Takichiro frowned a bit.

“Father, do you like clover that much?” Chieko said, trying to brighten the moment. “It’s too late this year, but I’ll design a bush clover print for you for next year.”

“Clover would be a woman’s pattern. It would have to be for a woman’s summer kimono.”

“I’d try to make something that wouldn’t look as though it were for a woman or for a summer kimono.”

“Well, what would you use a clover print for? . . . underwear?” Takichiro looked at his daughter, his thoughts diverted with laughter. “And for you I’ll make a kimono or a jacket in a camphor tree pattern. It would look like a design for a ghost.”

Chieko was silent.

“It would be as though women and men were turned around backwards.”

“No, it wouldn’t.”

“Would you go out wearing some ghostly camphor tree pattern?”

“Yes, I would. Anywhere.”

“Hmm.” Her father cast his eyes down as if deep in thought. “Chieko, it’s not that I like only white bush clover. Any flower can touch me depending on the time and place I see it.”

“I suppose so . . .,” Chieko answered. “Father, since we’ve come this far and Tatsumura’s is close by, I’d like to drop in.”

“That’s a store for foreigners. What do you think, Shige?”

“If Chieko wants to go it’s fine,” she answered casually.

“Well, Tatsumura’s obis don’t appear in the stores.”

The shop was in a neighborhood of fine old homes in lower Kawaramachi.

Entering the store, Chieko began to inspect the silk fabric for women, which was stacked in rows along the right side. They were not Tatsumura’s own designs, but weaves from the Kanebo company.

Shige approached her daughter. "Are you planning to wear Western-style clothes?"

"No, Mother. I was just wondering what kind of silk foreigners prefer."

Her mother nodded. She stood behind her daughter, occasionally putting out her fingers to touch the silk.

In the middle room and in the hall hung prints of Shosoin cloth and ancient fabrics.

This was Tatsumura's work. Takichiro had seen Tatsumura's displays many times, and he had often seen the original classic fabrics and illustrated catalogs. He knew them all by name and by sight, but he could not help but examine these closely.

"These are here to show the foreigners that we can make things like this in Japan," a clerk said. Takichiro recognized the clerk's face. He had heard the same thing when he visited the shop previously, but he nodded again this time. "Ancient times were amazing . . . over a thousand years ago . . .," he said in regard to the reproductions of old Chinese fabrics.

They did not seem to sell large pieces of cloth in the old prints. Takichiro liked such fabric and had bought several obis made from it for Shige and Chieko, but this shop was geared toward foreigners and did not appear to carry obis. The biggest thing they sold seemed to be table runners.

Small articles, such as bags, wallets, cigarette cases, and crepe wrappers, were displayed in showcases.

Takichiro bought two or three Tatsumura neckties that looked atypical of Tatsumura's work, and also a Kikumomi wallet. Kikumomi was a reproduction in cloth of a craft called Okikumomi, which had been made in Takagamine by Koetsu over three hundred years ago.

“Where was it in Tohoku? There’s a place where they still make something that looks like this out of strong Japanese paper,” Takichiro said.

“Yes, yes,” the clerk replied. “But I don’t know much about the connection with Koetsu.”

Takichiro and his wife and daughter were naturally surprised to find portable Sony radios lined up on top of the display cases in the back, even if they were merely consignment goods for the purpose of acquiring foreign currency.

The three of them were led to a receiving room in the rear, where they were served tea. The clerk told them that many so-called VIPs from foreign countries had once sat in the chairs where they were now seated.

Outside the window was a small, but unusual, grove of cedar trees.

“What kind of cedar is that?” Takichiro asked.

“I’m not sure, but I think it’s called a *koyo* cedar or something like that,” the clerk said.

“Which Chinese character do you use to write *koyo*?”

“The gardener doesn’t always know how to write the names. I’m not sure myself, but wouldn’t it be the characters for ‘broad leaf’? Whatever it is, I hear they grow from Honshu on toward the south.”

“What makes the trunk that color?”

“That’s moss.”

They turned around at the sound of a portable radio starting to play and saw a young man explaining something to three or four Western women.

“That’s Shin’ichi’s older brother.” Chieko stood up.

Shin’ichi’s brother Ryusuke stepped toward Chieko. He bowed his head to her parents in the receiving room.

“Are you acting as a guide for those ladies?” Chieko asked. As Chieko and Ryusuke approached each other, she found it difficult to speak to this young man, so different from the easygoing Shin’ichi. She felt ill at ease, as if she were being threatened.

“Not as a guide. A friend of mine was going around with them as an interpreter, but his younger sister died, so I’m taking his place for three or four days.”

“What? His younger sister?”

“Yes, she was about two years younger than Shin’ichi. She was a cute girl.”

Chieko did not speak.

“Shin’ichi’s English isn’t very good. He’s shy. And, well, I . . . we don’t need anything like an interpreter here at the shop. These are the kind of customers who buy portable radios. They’re American women staying at the Miyako Hotel.”

“I see.”

“The hotel is close by, so we dropped in here. I wish they would look at our fabrics, but no . . . it’s radios,” Ryusuke laughed in a whisper. “I suppose it’s all right either way.”

“This is the first time I’ve seen radios for sale at a place like this.”

“Portable radios or silks—a dollar is a dollar. It’s all the same.”

“I see.”

“Just a moment ago we went out into the garden. There are a number of different colors of carp in the pond. I was wondering how I could explain the carp if they ask me details about them. All they said was, ‘Beautiful, beautiful.’ That got me off the hook. I was certainly glad to find you here and get away from them. I don’t know anything about carp. I wouldn’t know what to say in English about the colors or about the spots.”

Chieko did not speak.

“Chieko, shall we go out and look at the carp?”

“What about the ladies?”

“It would be better to leave them to the clerk here. It’s almost time for them to go back to the hotel for tea. They’re supposed to meet their husbands there to go to Nara.”

“I’ll tell my father and mother.”

“I have to go talk to the ladies too and excuse myself.” Ryusuke went to the women and said something. The ladies all looked toward Chieko at the same time. Chieko blushed.

Ryusuke returned immediately and led Chieko into the garden.

The two of them sat down by the pond and watched the splendidly colored carp swimming about. Chieko and Ryusuke were silent for a moment.

“Chieko, the head clerk at your shop—since your business is incorporated now I don’t know if you call him the manager or director—I think you need to press him rather hard with some questions. You could do it, couldn’t you? I’d go with you if you’d like.”

Chieko had not expected to hear anything like this. Her heart shrank.

That night, after she returned from Tatsumura’s shop, Chieko had a dream. Schools of all colors of carp gathered as she knelt at the edge of the pond. The carp piled one on top of another, dancing as they stuck their heads out above the surface of the water.

That was all there was to the dream. It was midday. The fish drew closer when Chieko put her hand in the water and made ripples on the surface of the pond. She was startled but felt an inexpressible affection for the carp.

Ryusuke, who was standing at Chieko’s side, seemed even more surprised.

"I wonder what kind of fragrance, what kind of spirit, emanates from your hand?" Ryusuke said.

"The carp are probably accustomed to people." Chieko stood, embarrassed at his words.

Ryusuke stared at Chieko's profile.

"Higashiyama is right over there," Chieko said, avoiding Ryusuke's eyes.

"Don't the colors look a bit different? . . . more like autumn?" Ryusuke responded.

After awakening, Chieko could not quite recall whether Ryusuke had been at her side in the carp dream. For a while she could not sleep.

The next day Chieko hesitated to mention that Ryusuke had encouraged her to confront the clerk.

As closing time approached Chieko sat down in front of the account register. It was in an old-fashioned booth surrounded by low latticework. Uemura, the head clerk, noticed Chieko's uncommonly serious air. "Miss Chieko, what do you need?"

"Would you please show me some of our kimono fabric?"

"Ours?" Uemura seemed relieved. "You're going to wear a kimono from our shop? If you want one now, then is it for New Year's? A visiting kimono or a long-sleeved one? So you're not going to buy it at a dye shop like Okazaki or a place like Eriman?"

"I want you to show me our Yuzen. It's not for a New Year's kimono."

"I'd be happy to show you all we have, but I wonder if there's anything that would suit the tastes of a girl with a practiced eye like yours." Uemura stood up, called two clerks, and whispered to them. Together the three of them took out ten bolts of cloth and unrolled them in the middle of the floor, arranging them with experienced hands.

“This one will be fine.” Chieko quickly made her selection. “Could you have it done in five days or a week? I’ll leave the details up to you . . . the lining color and such.”

Uemura was taken aback. “This is quite sudden. Since we’re a wholesale shop, we seldom send things out to be made, but it will be fine.”

The two clerks deftly rolled up the fabric.

“Here are the measurements.” Chieko placed a paper on Uemura’s desk but did not turn to leave.

“Mr. Uemura, I’d like to learn about the business here a little at a time. I hope you’ll be kind enough to help me,” Chieko spoke in a gentle voice, bowing her head slightly.

“Certainly.” Uemura’s face stiffened.

Chieko spoke quietly. “Tomorrow would be all right, but I’d like for you to show me the account ledger too.”

“The account ledger?” Uemura seemed to wince. “Are you going to study the accounts?”

“Nothing so ambitious as that. I thought I would just take a glance at it. I don’t know anything about the business, you know.”

“Yes, the account ledger involves quite a lot. I couldn’t explain it all in one sitting. There are also things like taxes and such.”

“Does our shop use a double ledger?”

“What are you talking about? I’d certainly be asking for your help if you could do a trick like that. Ours is all on the up-and-up.”

“Please show it to me tomorrow, Mr. Uemura,” Chieko said bluntly and stepped away.

“I’ve been taking care of this shop since before you were born, Miss Chieko,” Uemura said, but she would not turn back. “What’s she up to . . . ?” Uemura said under his breath. Then he clicked his tongue. “Oh, my back hurts.”

When Chieko returned to where her mother was preparing

supper, Shige appeared to be astonished. "Chieko, you said some rather forceful things."

"It wasn't easy, Mother."

"Young people can be alarming, even when they seem gentle. I was almost trembling just to listen to you."

"I got the idea from someone else."

"Really? Who?"

"Shin'ichi's older brother, at Tatsumura's. Their father is still doing well in business. He said they have two good clerks, so if Mr. Uemura were to quit, he would send one of them here or he'd come himself."

"You mean Ryusuke?"

"Yes, he's going into business anyway, so he can quit graduate school anytime."

"Really?" Shige looked at her daughter's lovely beaming face. "But Mr. Uemura doesn't show any signs of planning to quit."

"And Ryusuke even said if a good house turned up near the white clover house, he'd have his father buy it."

"I see." Shige could say nothing else for the moment. "Your father *has* grown weary of the world."

"He asked if that would be good for my father."

"Ryusuke said that too?"

"Yes."

Shige was silent.

"Mother, you probably heard me ask the clerk, but I'm going to send a kimono to the girl in the cedar village. I want her to have it."

"That's fine. And how about a jacket to go with it?"

Chieko looked away, her eyes filling with tears.

*

Why were they called “high looms”? The hand looms themselves were tall, so the earth was hollowed out slightly beneath them and they rested low in the ground. Some held to the theory that this was because the dampness of the earth was good for the thread. Originally, a second person sometimes also sat on top of the loom, but now they put heavy stones in baskets and suspended them from the sides.

Some weaving houses used both hand looms and machine looms.

At Hideo’s shop they had three hand looms at which the three brothers wove. Since their father Sosuke also worked at the loom occasionally, their shop fared moderately well among the few small hand-weaving businesses in Nishijin.

Hideo’s joy increased as the obi that Chieko had requested neared completion. Perhaps it was because he was finishing a work into which he had put his whole heart or because he could perceive Chieko in the movement of the shuttle of the loom and the sounds of the weaving.

No, it was not Chieko. It was Naeko. The obi was not Chieko’s obi, but Naeko’s. Nevertheless, as Hideo wove Chieko and Naeko became one.

Hideo’s father stood beside him for a moment, watching. “My, that’s a beautiful obi. And what an unusual pattern.” Sosuke inclined his head. “Whose is it?”

“It’s for Sada’s daughter, Chieko.”

“And the pattern?”

“Chieko designed it.”

“Really. Chieko can do that? Hmm.” Sosuke seemed almost to hold his breath as he gazed at the obi still on the loom, touching it with his fingers. “Hideo, your weaving is precise. That’s good.”

Hideo did not respond.

“Hideo, I think I talked about this before, but I feel I’m indebted to Mr. Sada.”

“I’ve heard this, Father.”

“I suppose I’ve already told you,” he said, but he continued all the same. “It was half on borrowed money that I was able to get my first loom and start in the weaving business on my own. Every time I wove an obi I used to take it to Mr. Sada. It was so embarrassing to take him a single obi that I always went quietly at night.”

Hideo was silent.

“Mr. Sada never looked displeased. Now we have three looms, and somehow or another . . . well, we manage.”

Still Hideo did not speak.

“Even so, our social position is still different . . .”

“I know, but why are you talking about such things?”

“You seem to be quite fond of Sada’s daughter.”

“Is that what it is?” Hideo had been resting, but he put his hands and feet back to the loom and continued weaving.

The moment the obi was finished Hideo left for Naeko’s cedar village to deliver it.

That afternoon a rainbow had appeared several times in the direction of Kitayama.

Hideo noticed the rainbow as he stepped into the road carrying Naeko’s obi under his arm. The rainbow was wide, but the colors were pale, and the upper portion of the arc was missing. As Hideo stopped to look, it seemed the colors would fade and vanish.

Before the bus entered the mountains, Hideo saw the same kind of rainbow two more times. None of the rainbows was perfectly shaped to the top; all three had thin spots. It was not an uncommon

sort of rainbow, but today Hideo was somewhat concerned. Were these rainbows a sign of good luck or bad?

The sky was not cloudy, but after he entered the forest he could not tell if yet another faint rainbow appeared because of the mountains that pressed in on the banks of the Kiyotaki River.

Hideo got off the bus at the Kitayama village. Naeko, wearing her work clothes and wiping her wet hands on her apron, walked up to him immediately.

She had been carefully washing cedar logs by hand with Bodai sand, which was more like clay.

It was still only October, but the mountain water was probably cold. The log was floating in a man-made trough. Hot water seemed to be running from a simple kettle on one side where steam was rising.

“Oh, thank you for coming such a long way back here in the mountains.” Naeko bowed deeply.

“This is the obi you were promised. I came to deliver it.”

“It’s the obi I’m to receive in Chieko’s place. I don’t like being her substitute. I was happy enough just to meet her,” Naeko said.

“This obi was promised to you, wasn’t it? Besides, it’s Chieko’s own design.”

Naeko cast her eyes down. “The day before yesterday, Hideo, I received everything to go with the obi, from kimono to sandals . . . all from Chieko’s shop. Where could I ever wear things like that?”

“What about at the Festival of Ages on the twenty-second? Couldn’t you get away then?”

“Yes, I could,” Naeko answered without hesitation. People will see us here, she seemed to be thinking. “Let’s go to the riverbed, where all those small stones are.”

It would not be appropriate for them to hide among the cedars, as she had done with Chieko the previous time.

“This obi you made will be the treasure of my life.”

“Oh, no. I’ll make one for you again.”

Naeko could not speak.

The family who looked after Naeko knew of course that Chieko had sent the kimono, so it would have been no problem for Naeko to have taken Hideo to the house. But since Naeko generally understood Chieko’s circumstances now and knew about the shop, that alone was enough to satisfy the desire she had cherished since childhood. Besides, she did not want to cause trouble for Chieko over something minor.

Indeed, since the Murase family, who had raised Naeko and for whom she now worked so ungrudgingly, were landholders in the cedar mountains, it could not cause any problems for Chieko’s family if the truth were to be revealed. It might have been that a landholder in the cedar mountains was in a more stable position than a middle-class dry goods wholesaler.

So Naeko intended to avoid seeing Chieko further and deepening their acquaintance, although Chieko’s affection had naturally touched Naeko’s heart.

Naeko led Hideo to some flat stones in the plain of the Kiyotaki River. Even in the river bottom as many cedars as could be planted there were being raised among the small stones.

“I’m sorry I was so rude,” Naeko said. She was a young girl and wanted to see the obi as soon as possible.

“The cedar mountains are beautiful,” Hideo said, looking up as he untied the cotton cloth around the bundle and loosened the string around the wrapping paper. “This is where the bow would be and this is supposed to be the front.”

“Oh.” Naeko stroked the obi. “It’s too good for me.” Her eyes brightened.

“What could be too good about an obi woven by some young fellow like me? When I heard it was to be cedars and red pines, I thought, since it’s close to New Year’s, the bow should be pines, but Chieko said it should be cedars. Now that I’ve come here, I realize why. When you think of cedars, you think of stands of old trees, but drawn gently they have their merit. There are also some trunks of red pines, for color harmony.”

Of course the color of the cedar trunks was not reproduced exactly in the obi. There was a style in the color and design.

“It’s a splendid obi. Thank you so much. But a person like me couldn’t wear a bright-colored, fancy obi.”

“Does it go well with the kimono Chieko sent?”

“I think they’ll go together very well.”

“Chieko has been well acquainted with the kimono styles in Kyoto since she was little. I haven’t shown her this obi. Somehow I feel embarrassed to.”

“But it’s her own design. I want her to see it.”

“You’ll wear it to the Festival of Ages, won’t you?” Hideo said as he folded the obi and placed it inside the wrapping paper.

When he finished tying the string Hideo spoke to Naeko. “I hope you won’t have any difficulty accepting this. I was the one who promised the obi, but Chieko asked me to make it. Please think of me only as the weaver But I *did* put my heart into weaving it for you.”

Naeko sat silently as Hideo placed the obi in her lap.

“Chieko has seen kimonos all her life. She is familiar with styles, so I’m certain it will go with the kimono she sent you . . . as I mentioned before.”

Naeko did not speak.

The flow in the shallows of the Kiyotaki River in front of the

two of them made a tiny, delicate sound. Hideo looked around at the cedars on both sides of the banks. "I realized that the trunks of the trees would probably stand uniformly side by side like crafted pieces, but even the leaves on the upper branches look like rather somber flowers."

Naeko's face wore a touch of sorrow. When her father was working as a branch cutter, surely he had fallen as he jumped from branch to branch, distracted by the pain in his heart for the child he had abandoned. At that time Naeko too had been a baby; she could not have known anything. The people of the village had told her after she was older.

Naeko had not known her sister's name, whether she was alive or dead, or who was the older of the two. All Naeko had wanted was to see her sister, even if it was only a single, casual glimpse.

Naeko's original home still stood in the cedar village, weathered and abandoned since a girl could not live there alone. For a long time a middle-aged couple who worked in the cedar mountains had lived in the house with their daughter, who attended primary school. Naturally they paid no rent; the house was not worth charging them.

The primary school girl was strangely fond of flowers. There was a single, fragrant, golden olive tree at the house. The girl would occasionally come to ask "Big Sister Naeko" to help prune the tree.

"Just leave it alone and it will be fine," Naeko had answered. As she passed the house Naeko was able to perceive the fragrance of the blossoms from a greater distance than most people. That was to Naeko rather a sad discovery.

With the obi on her lap, Naeko's legs felt heavy . . . with the thoughts that filled her mind.

"Now that I know where Chieko is, I don't want to continue to

see her. I'll wear the kimono and obi just this once. You understand, don't you?" Naeko spoke from her heart.

"Yes," Hideo said. "Please come to the Festival of Ages. I'd like to have Chieko see you wearing the kimono and obi, but I won't invite her. The festival parade begins at Gosho, so I'll wait for you at Hamaguri Gate on the west side. Is that all right?"

Naeko's cheeks blushed lightly for a moment, then she nodded deeply.

A small tree stood at the water's edge on the far side; the reflection of its crimson leaves shivered in the flow of the river. Hideo looked up. "What kind of tree is that turning such a bright red?"

"That's a lacquer tree," Naeko said, lifting her eyes. As she answered she tried to smooth her hair with her shaking hand, but somehow it came undone, cascading down her back.

"Oh."

Naeko blushed again. She tried to pull her hair back up and twist it, holding the hairpins in her mouth. She stuck in the pins she had, but since some of them had scattered to the ground, there were not enough to hold her hair.

Hideo admired the beauty of Naeko's hair and movements.

"You let your hair grow long," he said.

"Yes. Chieko doesn't cut hers either. She does it up so well that a man wouldn't know." Naeko hurriedly put a towel on her head. "Excuse me."

Hideo did not respond.

"Here it's as if my work is to do makeup for the cedar trees, but I don't use any myself."

Even so, it appeared as if she wore the faintest trace of lipstick. Hideo wished she would take off the towel once more and let him

see her hair fall down her back again, but he could not bring himself to ask.

The mountain on the west side of the narrow valley began to turn slightly dark.

“Naeko, I suppose you have to be going.” Hideo stood up.

“The days are getting shorter. Work is almost finished for today.”

Hideo glimpsed the golden colors of the evening sky between the straight rows of the trunks of the trees on the summit of the mountain on the east side of the valley.

“Hideo, thank you. Thank you very much.” Naeko stood up, accepting the obi with a delicate movement.

“If you thank anyone, you should thank Chieko,” Hideo said, but the joy of having woven an obi for this daughter of the cedar mountains swelled warm within him. “I may sound persistent, but be sure to be at the west gate at Gosho, the Hamaguri Gate.”

“I will.” Naeko nodded deeply. “I’ll feel awkward in an obi and kimono I’ve never worn before, but . . .”

The “three great festivals” of the old capital were the Festival of Ages on October twenty-second, along with the Hollyhock Festival of the Kamigamo and Shimogamo Shrines and the Gion Festival. The Festival of Ages was a celebration of the Heian Shrine, but the procession began at Kyoto’s Gosho.

From early morning Naeko had been unable to calm herself. Now she had been waiting for Hideo in the shadow of Hamaguri Gate since half an hour before the appointed time. This was the first time she had waited for a man.

Fortunately, the sky was clear and blue.

*

Heian Shrine was built in 1895, the twenty-eighth year of the Meiji Period, eleven hundred years after the removal of the capital to Kyoto, so naturally the Festival of Ages was the newest of the “three great festivals.” Since the procession commemorated the inauguration of Kyoto as the capital, one thousand years of changes in customs were displayed in the parade, each era being represented in costumes worn by someone portraying a famous personality associated with the time.

For example, there was the Princess Kazunomiya, the poetess Rengetsu, and the grand courtesan Yoshino. There were also Izumo no Okuni, the legendary originator of *kabuki*, and Hideyoshi’s concubine Yodogimi. Lady Tokiwa, Yokobue, and Lady Tomoe also appeared, as well as Lady Shizuka, Ono no Komachi, Murasaki Shikibu, and Sei Shonagon.

Then there were the Ohara women and the Katsura women. These women and others—courtesans, female performers, and women venders—were scattered throughout the processions. Naturally, there were men like Kusunoki Masashige, Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, imperial court noblemen, and warriors.

This procession was like a long scroll of Kyoto customs unrolling before the viewers.

Women had been added to the procession in 1950, making it ever so much more showy and beautiful.

Leading the procession were Loyalists of the time of the Meiji Restoration and the mountain troops of Kitakuwada in Tamba. In the rear were the civil officials of the Enryaku Period proceeding to the imperial court. When the procession made its way back to Heian Shrine, Shinto prayers were recited before the imperial carriage.

The procession left from Gosho and could be seen well from the plaza there. That was why Hideo invited Naeko to this spot.

Although crowds of people were going in and out, no one

seemed to notice Naeko waiting for Hideo in the shade of the gate. Finally one lady, who seemed to be the wife of a shop owner, came straight toward Naeko. "Miss, what a beautiful obi! Where did you buy it? It looks so good with your outfit." She started to touch it. "Would you show me the bow in the back?"

Naeko turned around. Surprisingly, being watched by the woman made her feel at ease.

Hideo arrived. "Thank you for waiting."

All the seats next to Goshō, from which the parade would leave, were taken by travel clubs and shrine societies, so Hideo and Naeko stood behind the tourists' seats.

This was the first time Naeko had seen the parade from such a good spot. She watched the procession, quite forgetful of her new clothes and of Hideo.

Naeko asked, "Hideo, what are you looking at?"

"The green of the pines . . . and the parade. The pines in the background make the parade look all the better. The expansive gardens here in Goshō are mostly black pines. They're my favorite."

Naeko did not speak.

"And I've also been looking at you out of the corner of my eye. You didn't notice, did you?"

"Stop it."

Naeko cast her gaze down.



DEEP
AUTUMN
SISTERS

Of all the many festivals of Kyoto, Chieko enjoyed the Kurama Fire Festival even more than the Daimonji. Naeko had also gone to it; the festival was not very far from her home. But if they had once passed each other there, neither of them had ever noticed.

Partitions of tree branches were constructed at the houses along the path from Kurama Road to the shrine, and water was poured on the roofs. In the middle of the night people carried all kinds of torches, large and small.

Chanting “*Saireya, saryo,*” participants climbed the hill toward the shrine. The flames burned fiercely. When the palanquin appeared the village women all came out to pull it with ropes. Toward the end of the festival an offering was made of great torches. The celebration continued almost until daylight.

But this year the Fire Festival had been canceled. Some said it was for financial reasons. The Bamboo Cutting Festival, however, was held as usual.

The Taro Festival of Kitano Tenjin Shrine was also canceled

this year. Some said it was because the poor taro harvest prevented the making of taro palanquin.

In Kyoto there were many events like the Pumpkin Service at Anrakuyoji Temple at Shishigatani and the Imperial Offering of Cucumbers at Rengeji Temple. Might this reveal an aspect of both the old capital and its people?

Among the recently revived traditions were the dragon-headed Karyobinga boats on the river at Arashiyama and the feast held on the banks of the meandering stream in the garden of Kamigamo Shrine. Both were originally the elegant diversions of the nobility.

At the stream feast participants sat on the bank, dressed in ancient costumes, composing poetry or drawing pictures while the wine cup came floating down the stream before them. They took it up, drank from it, and sent it on downstream to the next person. Young boys attended them.

The event had started the previous year. Chieko had gone to see it. The leader of the noble families had been the Japanese traditional poet Yoshii Isamu, who has since passed away.

The traditional event, having been newly revived after years of neglect, was somehow not very inviting.

Chieko had not seen the Karyobinga at Arashiyama this year, either. She was inclined to think that it was unlikely that the event would have any of the rustic elegance of old. In Kyoto there were more ancient festivals than one could possibly see.

Was it because she was raised by her hardworking mother, or was Chieko naturally of such a character that she rose early to polish the latticework?

“Chieko, you two appeared to be having a good time at the Festival of Ages.” After she finished cleaning up for breakfast, Chieko received a telephone call from Shin’ichi. It seemed he too had mistaken Naeko for Chieko.

“You were there? You should have said something.” Chieko shrugged her shoulders.

“I started to, but my brother stopped me,” Shin’ichi said effortlessly.

Chieko hesitated to tell him it was a case of mistaken identity. She learned from Shin’ichi that Naeko had been wearing Hideo’s obi at the Festival of Ages as well as the kimono she had sent.

The person accompanying Naeko had surely been Hideo. That news took Chieko by surprise, but soon she felt a faint warmth in her heart as a smile came to her lips.

“Chieko! Chieko!” Shin’ichi called her name over the telephone. “Why aren’t you saying anything?”

“Aren’t you the one who called me?”

“That’s right,” Shin’ichi laughed. “Are the clerks there now?”

“No. Not yet.”

“Chieko, do you have a cold?”

“Do I sound as though I do? I was just out front cleaning the lattice door.”

“I see.” It sounded as though Shin’ichi were shaking the receiver.

This time Chieko laughed.

Shin’ichi spoke in low tones. “Actually, I’m calling for my brother. Here he is.”

Chieko could not speak to Ryusuke in so carefree a manner as to Shin’ichi.

“Chieko, did you talk to the clerk?” Ryusuke was abrupt.

“Yes.”

“Great.” Ryusuke spoke in a powerful voice. “Great,” he said again.

“My mother overheard me, so she’s been a little uneasy.”

“I would imagine.”

“I told him I want him to show me the account ledger because I’d like to learn the family business.”

“That’s good. Just talking to him changed his attitude, didn’t it?”

“Then I had him get the bank books, stocks, bonds, and such out of the safe.”

“That’s excellent, Chieko. You did well . . .,” but Ryusuke could not resist his emotions, “. . . for such a gentle girl.”

“It was your idea.”

“It wasn’t my idea. There’s been a rumor among the wholesalers in the neighborhood. If you hadn’t said anything to him, we had decided that either my father or I should go, but it was better for you to do it. The clerk’s attitude changed, didn’t it?”

“Yes, somewhat.”

“I thought so.” Ryusuke was silent for a long while. “That’s good.”

Chieko sensed that Ryusuke was hesitating.

“Chieko, would I be in the way if I dropped by your shop this afternoon?” he asked. “With Shin’ichi?”

“In the way? Of course not,” Chieko answered.

“Well, you *are* a young girl.”

“Oh, stop it.”

“How about it?” Ryusuke laughed. “Would it be all right if I came by while the head clerk is still there? I’ll take a look for myself. You don’t have anything to worry about. I just want to see his face.”

“Oh?” The rest of her words would not come out.

Owning a large wholesale business in Muromachi, Ryusuke’s father had many influential friends. Ryusuke was yet in graduate school, but the status of the shop was still reflected in his bearing.

“Then later on we can go have some turtle soup. I’m reserving

seats at Daiichi in Kitano. Would you come with me? It wouldn't be polite for me to ask your father and mother to go too, so I'm inviting just you. I'll bring along the festival boy."

Chieko was overawed. "Yes" was all she could say.

It had been more than ten years since Shin'ichi had ridden on the shrine palanquin in the Gion Festival, but his older brother Ryusuke still called him "the festival boy," half in ridicule, but also because Shin'ichi still retained the gentleness and charm of a festival child.

"Ryusuke and Shin'ichi called to say they'll be coming this afternoon," Chieko told her mother.

"What?" Shige too seemed surprised.

In the afternoon Chieko went to the rear of the second floor and carefully put on her makeup, but nothing that would stand out. Try though she would, Chieko could not do up her long hair to suit herself. She attempted this and that, still wondering what to wear.

When she finally came down, her father was not home. He had gone out.

Chieko prepared the charcoal fire in the parlor in the back of the house, then looked about at the small garden. The moss on the maple tree was still green, but the leaves of the violets had turned slightly yellow. The small sasanqua bush at the base of the Christian lantern had put forth its scarlet flowers, and its vivid color touched Chieko's heart more than that of a red rose.

Ryusuke and Shin'ichi greeted Chieko's mother politely when they arrived. Then Ryusuke seated himself alone squarely in front of the head clerk at the register.

The head clerk Uemura hurriedly came out of the accountant's booth and took quite a long time offering a stiff, formal greeting. But Ryusuke's sullen face never flickered as he responded to the clerk. Uemura of course perceived his coldness.

Uemura wondered what this impudent student was up to. Although he felt oppressed by Ryusuke, there was nothing he could do about it.

Ryusuke waited for a break in Uemura's words. "It's wonderful that the shop is doing well," he said calmly.

"Thank you."

"My father and his associates say it's because Mr. Sada has you here. Your many years of experience are indispensable."

"What do you mean? This isn't a big shop like yours, Mr. Mizuki. We're hardly worth mentioning."

"Oh, no, no. All we've done is expand into different areas. A Kyoto dry goods shop, or whatever we're called—we're really just a big general store. I don't like it. Why . . . if shops run by solid, reliable people like you were to disappear . . ."

Ryusuke stood up before Uemura could respond. The clerk frowned as he watched the retreating figure of Ryusuke going to the parlor in the rear where Chieko and Shin'ichi were sitting. It was obvious to Uemura that there was some sort of secret connection between Chieko, who had wanted to see the account books, and this boy Ryusuke.

Chieko looked up at Ryusuke's face as if to question him.

"I drove the nail in him. I *am* responsible for advising you as I did."

Chieko did not speak. She looked down as she made some tea for Ryusuke.

"Ryusuke, look at the violets on the maple trunk." Shin'ichi pointed to them. "See, there are two plants. Some years ago Chieko said that the two violets were like two sweet lovers. Though they are close to one another, they can never meet."

"I see."

"Girls think of such cute things."

“Stop it. Aren’t you ashamed, Shin’ichi?” Chieko’s hand shook slightly as she placed the teacup in front of the older brother.

The three of them went to Daiichi, a turtle soup shop at Kitano Rokuban, in Ryusuke’s shop car. Daiichi was a venerable establishment, well known among tourists. The rooms were old-fashioned with low ceilings.

They had turtle that had been boiled in a so-called round pot and made into a stew.

Chieko felt a warmth swell within her as though she were drunk.

A faint peach blush appeared at her neck. It was a beautiful sight to see the color rise in her youthful, white skin, so smooth and delicately grained. A fascinating charm showed in her eyes. Occasionally, she stroked her cheek.

Chieko had never before put so much as a drop of liquor to her lips, but the broth of the stew was almost half sake.

The car was waiting out front, but Chieko was afraid her legs would not hold her; nevertheless, she was cheerful. She felt as though she might speak more freely than usual.

“Shin’ichi.” Chieko spoke to the more approachable brother. “The person you saw at the Festival of Ages at the garden of Goshō wasn’t me. You were mistaken. She was some distance away, wasn’t she?”

“You don’t have to hide anything,” Shin’ichi laughed.

“I’m not hiding anything.” Chieko did not know what to say. “Actually, that was my sister.”

“What?” Shin’ichi was dubious.

When the cherries were in bloom at Kiyomizu Temple, Chieko had told Shin’ichi that she was an abandoned child, and surely her

confession had made its way to his brother Ryusuke. Even if Shin'ichi had not mentioned it to him, he might well have heard the rumor, since their shops were close together.

"The girl you saw at the garden at Gosho was . . .," Chieko hesitated slightly. "We're twins . . . She's my sister."

This was the first Shin'ichi had heard of such. He did not respond.

The three were silent for a moment.

"I was the one who was abandoned."

Shin'ichi still said nothing. Then Ryusuke spoke. "If that's true, I wish Chieko had been abandoned in front of our shop. Yes, I wish she had been abandoned at our shop," he repeated wholeheartedly.

"Ryusuke," Shin'ichi laughed, "it wasn't the Chieko you see now. She was a newborn baby."

"What would be wrong with a baby?" Ryusuke said.

"You're saying that as you look at Chieko now."

"No, I'm not."

"The Chieko you see now is the Chieko that the Sadas have nurtured and loved and raised," Shin'ichi said. "You were still a child then yourself. Could a little child have raised a baby?"

"Yes," Ryusuke answered firmly.

"Hmm. That's your same stubborn confidence. You can't stand to lose."

"Maybe so, but I would have liked to have taken care of Chieko as a baby. Mother surely would have helped."

Chieko's head cleared. Her forehead turned white.

The autumn festival of the Kitano Dance lasted for two weeks. The day before it ended Sada Takichiro went there alone. Naturally,

he had received more than one admission ticket from the teahouse, but he did not feel like inviting anyone along. He felt it would be tiresome to go to the teahouse with friends after seeing the dance.

Before the dance festivities Takichiro gloomily went up to the teahouse. He was unfamiliar with the geisha whose turn it was to perform the tea ceremony.

Seven or even eight young girls stood in a line to the side, helping with utensils. Except for one girl in the center in light blue, they all wore matching long-sleeved kimonos in pale pink.

Takichiro almost called out loud. She was now in makeup, but wasn't this the same girl who had ridden on the streetcar with the mistress from the gay quarters? Perhaps the blue kimono meant it was her turn at something.

The girl in the blue kimono brought some tea and placed it before Takichiro. Of course she was very prim and did not smile, all according to correct manners.

But Takichiro felt his heart lighten.

The dance was "Portrait of Lady Yu Poppies," a dance drama in eight scenes from the well-known tragic Chinese story of Lady Yu and Hsiang Yu.

Lady Yu stabs herself in the chest and dies in the arms of Hsiang Yu while listening to one of the nostalgic "Songs of Ch'u." Later, after Hsiang Yu dies in battle, the scene shifts to Japan and the story of Kumagai no Naozane, Taira no Atsumori, and Princess Tamaori. Realizing the evanescence of life, Kumagai, who had killed Atsumori, takes Buddhist orders. When he goes to the old battleground to visit Atsumori's grave he sees the fields blooming with masses of Yu poppies, so named after the Lady Yu of the Chinese story. He hears a flute. Atsumori's ghost appears to tell Kumagai that he wishes his favorite flute, "Greenleaf," to be placed

as an offering in the temple at Kurodani. The ghost of Princess Tamaori then appears, saying that she wants some of the red poppies blooming around the grave to be offered to the Buddha.

After this dance came a lively new one called "Kitano Elegance."

The dance of Kamishichiken was of the Hanayagi School, unlike Gion, which was of the Inoue.

After Takichiro left the Kitano Hall, he dropped in at the old-fashioned teahouse and plopped himself down in a seat. His manner prompted the proprietress to ask whom she might call for him.

"Hmm. How about the girl who bit the man's tongue? And also the girl in the blue kimono," Takichiro said.

"The girl on the streetcar? Well, it would be all right if it's just to say hello."

Takichiro had been drinking before the geisha arrived, so he purposely stepped outside. When the geisha came to accompany him he asked, "Do you still bite?"

"You remember well. I won't bite. Stick out your tongue."

"I'm scared to."

"Really, I won't bite."

Takichiro stuck out his tongue. It was sucked into a soft warmth.

He patted the girl's back lightly. "You've become quite corrupted."

"Is this corruption?"

Takichiro wanted to gargle and rinse out his mouth, but he could not since the geisha was standing at his side.

He had made up his mind to do this bit of mischief with the geisha. Even to her it was a spur-of-the-moment act and had no real meaning. Takichiro did not dislike the geisha, nor did he consider her dirty.

The geisha stopped him as he began to return to the parlor.

"Please wait," she said as she took out a handkerchief and wiped Takichiro's mouth. There was lipstick on the handkerchief. The geisha brought her face in front of Takichiro's, gazing directly at him. "Now, that's all right, isn't it?"

"Thank you." Takichiro placed both hands lightly on the geisha's shoulders.

The geisha stayed behind at the washstand mirror to touch up her lipstick.

When Takichiro returned to the parlor no one was there. He drank two or three cups of cold sake as if to rinse his mouth.

Even so, the fragrance of the geisha, or of her perfume, remained. Takichiro felt vaguely young again.

Although the geisha's flirtation had caught him off guard, he wondered if he had been cold toward her. Perhaps it was because he had not enjoyed himself with a young woman for a long time.

This geisha of about twenty might turn out to be a particularly interesting woman.

The proprietress came in with the young girl. She was still wearing the long-sleeved blue kimono. "Since you requested, I asked her to come in to greet you. As you can see, she is quite young," the proprietress said.

Takichiro looked at the girl. "You served me tea a while ago."

"Yes." Being a girl of the teahouse, she was not shy. "I thought you were the man from the streetcar, so I brought you tea."

"Oh! Why . . . thank you. You remembered me?"

"Yes, I did."

When the geisha returned the proprietress spoke to her. "Mr. Sada has taken quite a liking to this little girl."

"What?" The geisha looked at Takichiro's face. "You have a

practiced eye, but you'll have to wait about three years. Besides, she's going to Pontocho next spring."

"Pontocho? Why?"

"She wants to be a *maiko*. She says she dreams of becoming a *maiko*."

"Really? If she wants to be a *maiko*, wouldn't Gion be better?"

"Her aunt lives in Pontocho. That's why she's going there."

Takichiro gazed at the girl. She would become a first-rate *maiko* wherever she went.

The Nishijin Fabric Weavers Trade Association took an unprecedented measure by stopping all loom work for eight days from November twelfth until the nineteenth. Since the twelfth and the nineteenth were Sundays, it was actually only a six-day work stoppage.

There were a number of reasons, but in short, the purpose was economic. Overproduction had resulted in more than 300,000 excess bolts of fabric on hand. The purpose was to dispose of some of the stock and improve business. There had also been increasing problems in financing.

From the autumn of the previous year through the spring, some of the trading companies in Nishijin had folded.

It was said that by stopping work for eight days, stocks were reduced by some 80,000 or 90,000 bolts. The results were favorable, so the strategy seemed to be a success.

As one could see from a glance at the streets in Nishijin, the weaving houses were mostly small family businesses. It was surprising that they would obey the regulations so well.

The small houses, deep under the eaves of old weathered tile roofs, stood low, side by side, as if lying prostrate. Even those with two stories were rather squat.

The side streets, or rather alleys, were more like labyrinths.

One could hear the sounds of the looms within the dusky darkness. Not all of the looms were privately owned; some were rented.

Only about thirty shops were said to have applied for exemption from the work stoppage.

Hideo's family did not make fabric; they wove obis. Naturally, they used electric lights as they worked at their three looms, even in the daytime, but their shop was much brighter than the average because there was open land in back. Still, the kitchen and furnishings were coarse, and the house was so small that one might wonder where everyone slept.

Hideo was persistent, blessed with a talent for his work and the diligence to go with it. He probably had long bruises on his bottom from sitting continuously on the narrow slats of the loom.

When Hideo invited Naeko to see the Festival of Ages, the reason he was more taken by the green of the pines in spacious Gosho than by the parades of various period costumes was because it gave him an opportunity to escape from his everyday life. The scenery was not something that Naeko, who worked in the mountains and the narrow valleys, would have particularly noticed.

Hideo felt more encouraged in his work after having seen Naeko at the Festival of Ages wearing the obi he had woven.

After Chieko went to Daiichi with Ryusuke and Shin'ichi, she had moments when she felt as though she had lost her heart somewhere, though her feelings were not so severe as to be called suffering. Chieko realized that it must be the result of anxiety.

On December thirteenth the Kotohajime passed, and the quickly changing winter weather typical of Kyoto began. The winter rain might sparkle in the sun even when the sky was cloudless. Occasionally sleet would fall, mixed with the rain. The sky would clear quickly, and quickly it would turn cloudy again.

New Year's preparations in Kyoto—namely, the giving and receiving of year-end gifts—traditionally began after the Kotohajime.

Naturally, the places where this custom was observed most faithfully were the gay quarters like Gion.

About that time the geisha and the *maiko* went about distributing rice cakes shaped like mirrors to the teahouses, the homes of music and dance teachers, and the houses of the senior geisha—all who had been of assistance to the *maiko* and the geisha.

Then the *maiko* went around making New Year's greetings. The purpose was to express thanks to those who had helped them in some way during the past year and to request their goodwill in the coming year.

On this day, this "early new year," the striking dress of the *maiko* and the geisha as they came and went enlivened the atmosphere around Gion more than on any other day.

Chieko's shop was not nearly so festive.

After finishing breakfast, Chieko went upstairs alone to do her makeup, but her hands remained still.

The intense words Chieko had heard from Ryusuke at the soup shop in Kitano passed through her heart. It was a rather forceful way to put it, to say that he wished that Chieko had been abandoned in front of his shop when she was a baby.

Ryusuke's brother Shin'ichi was Chieko's childhood playmate and friend through high school. He had a gentle disposition, and although she knew that he liked her, Shin'ichi would never have said something that took away her breath the way Ryusuke had. She and Shin'ichi could enjoy one another's company without such worries.

Chieko combed her long hair, letting it hang down her back, then she went downstairs.

Just before breakfast was over Chieko received a telephone call from the Kitayama village.

“Is this Miss Chieko?” Naeko made certain who was on the telephone. “I want to see you. Actually, something has come up that I want to talk with you about.”

“Naeko, it’s good to hear your voice. How would tomorrow be?” Chieko asked.

“Tomorrow is fine. Anytime.”

“Then please come to the shop,” Chieko said.

“I’m sorry, but I’d rather not.”

“It’s all right. I’ve spoken to my mother, and my father knows about you too.”

“But the clerks are there.”

Chieko thought for a moment. “Well, if that’s the way you feel, I can meet you at your village.”

“It’s terribly cold here, but I’d be so glad if you’d come.”

“I’d like to see the cedars anyway.”

“Really? It’s cold, and it may be drizzling, so be sure to dress for the weather. I can build a fire.” Naeko’s voice brightened with her response. “I’ll be working by the roadside so I’ll know when you get here.”



WINTER
FLOWERS

Chieko rarely wore slacks and a sweater, but today she did, along with heavy, brightly colored socks.

Since her father was at home, Chieko sat down to greet him. Takichiro looked wide-eyed at his daughter's unusual appearance. "Are you going to the mountains?"

"Yes . . . the girl from Kitayama said she wanted to see me today because she had something to talk about."

"I see." Takichiro showed no trace of hesitation. "Chieko."

"Yes?"

"If she has some problem or difficulty, please bring her home with you. We'll look after her."

Chieko cast her eyes down.

"It would be wonderful to have two daughters. Your mother and I would both be very happy."

"Thank you, Father. Thank you." Chieko bowed to him. Warm tears stained her lap.

"Chieko, we've raised you since you were a nursing baby. You

were the sweetest child anyone could hope for. But we would treat that girl as fairly as we could. If she looks like you, she's surely a good girl. Bring her here. Twenty years ago twins weren't accepted, but now it's nothing," her father said. "Shige! Shige!" he called to his wife.

"Father, I understand. I think it would be wonderful, but the girl . . . Naeko will never come here to our house," Chieko said.

"Why is that?"

"It's probably because she doesn't want to be an obstacle to my happiness."

"Why would she think she'd be an obstacle?"

Chieko did not respond.

"Why would she think she'd be an obstacle?" he asked again, inclining his head.

"Even today I asked her to come here to the shop, since you and Mother already know about her." Chieko's voice was choked with tears. "She was afraid of trouble with the clerks or the neighbors."

"What do the clerks have to do with it?" Takichiro's voice was unintentionally loud.

"I understand what you're thinking, but at least today I'm going to go to Kitayama to see her."

"I understand," her father nodded. "Take care. And it might be good if you'd tell that girl Naeko what I've just said."

"Yes, I will."

Chieko attached the hood to her raincoat. She also wore rubber boots.

Though the sky over Nakagyo was clear, it might cloud over at any time. It could be drizzling at Kitayama; from town it looked as if it were. If these were not the small, gentle mountains of Kyoto, it might have looked like signs of snow in the air.

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Chieko took the National Railway bus.

Two bus lines passed through Nakagawa Kitayama. The city bus turned around just before the mountain pass on the northern outskirts of the newly annexed portion of the city of Kyoto, but the National Railway bus ran all the way to Obama in Fukui Prefecture.

Obama was on the edge of Obama Bay, which opened into Wakasa Bay, which in turn opened out on the Sea of Japan.

There were few passengers on the bus, perhaps because it was winter.

A young man glared at Chieko. He was accompanied by another man. Feeling a vague apprehension, Chieko put up her hood.

“Miss, may I ask a favor? Please don’t hide yourself like that.” The man’s voice was hoarse, not befitting his age.

“Hey, you shut up,” the man next to him said.

The man who spoke to Chieko was wearing handcuffs. What kind of criminal was he? Was the man beside him a policeman? Where was he escorting this man, far beyond the deep mountains?

Chieko could not bring herself to take down her hood and show her face.

The bus had reached Takao.

“Where has Takao gone?” one passenger asked.

It did indeed look as though Takao had vanished; the maple leaves had all fallen, and a touch of winter rested on the tips of the branches.

The parking lot below Toganoo was empty.

Naeko had come out to the bus stop at Bodai Falls to wait for Chieko. She was in her work clothes.

For a moment Naeko did not recognize Chieko in the outfit she was wearing.

“Miss, thank you for coming. Thank you. It’s so far out here in the mountains.”

“It’s not that far.” Chieko grasped Naeko’s hands without removing her gloves. “I’m so happy. I haven’t seen you since summer. Thank you for taking care of me last summer when I was here with you in the mountains.”

“That was nothing. But I wondered what would have happened if we had been struck by lightning. Even so, I was so happy you came.”

“Naeko,” Chieko said as they walked down the road, “what you called about was urgent, wasn’t it? I want you to tell me about it first. Otherwise, we can’t have a good leisurely visit.”

Naeko did not speak. She was wearing her work clothes and a towel on her head.

“What is it?” Chieko asked.

“Actually . . . Hideo says he wants me to marry him. And . . .” Naeko stumbled and caught hold of Chieko.

Chieko held the reeling girl.

Working hard every day as she did, Naeko’s body was strong and muscled. Frightened as she was during the thunderstorm, Chieko had not noticed in the summer.

Naeko regained her composure, but happy that Chieko still held her, she did not ask her to stop. Instead, she continued to lean on Chieko as she walked.

At the same time Chieko began to lean on Naeko, but neither girl noticed.

Chieko had her hood up. “Naeko, what did you say to Hideo?”

“My answer? I couldn’t answer him on the spur of the moment.”

Chieko did not speak.

“He mistook me for you. He knows the difference now, but in his heart, deep down, you’re the one there, Miss.”

“No, that’s not true.”

“Yes, it is. I know quite well. Even if it’s not a case of mistaken identity, it would be a vicarious marriage to you. In me, Hideo sees an illusion of you, Miss. That’s the first thing,” Naeko said.

Chieko recalled her mother reproving her father for asking what she would think of Hideo as a son-in-law when they were returning from the Botanical Garden along the bank of the Kamo River. The tulips had been in full bloom.

“And second, Hideo’s shop weaves obis, right?” Naeko said forcefully. “It would make trouble for you if I were somehow connected with your shop. People around you would look at you strangely. I couldn’t make up for all the trouble I would cause you, even if I were to die. I wish I could hide myself even further back in the mountains.”

“Is that what you think?” Chieko shook Naeko’s shoulders. “Even as I left the house today I told my father quite clearly I was coming to visit you, Naeko . . . and my mother knows too.”

Naeko did not speak.

“What do you think my father said?” Chieko shook Naeko all the harder. “He said, ‘If that girl Naeko needs help, bring her here. You are registered as my daughter, but as best I can, I’ll be impartial and treat her well. She’s probably sad there all alone.’”

Naeko did not speak but took the towel off her head. “Thank you.” She held her face in her hands. “I’m touched by your kindness. Thank you.” For a moment Naeko could not speak. “I’ve no one to turn to. I’m lonely, but I forget about it and work.”

Chieko tried to lighten the mood. “The important thing is the situation with Hideo.”

“I can’t answer him so quickly,” Naeko said in a tearful voice as she looked at Chieko.

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“Give me that.” Chieko took Naeko’s towel. “You can’t go to the village with this weepy face.” She dried Naeko’s eyes.

“I don’t mind. I’m strong-willed and I work my share, but I’m a crybaby.”

When Chieko finished with the towel Naeko pressed her face against Chieko’s chest, sobbing convulsively.

“It’s nothing to be troubled about, Naeko. Don’t be sad.” Chieko patted Naeko’s back lightly. “If you’re going to cry like that, I’ll have to go home.”

“No. No, don’t!” Naeko was startled. Then she took her towel, which Chieko had been holding, and rubbed her own face.

Since it was winter, one could not tell she had been crying except that her eyes were slightly red. Naeko put the towel on her head, concealing her face slightly.

The two did not speak for a moment.

After the limbs were cut, round bunches of leaves were left behind on the top branches of the Kitayama cedars. To Chieko these looked like plain green flowers of winter.

Sensing the moment was right, Chieko spoke to Naeko. “Hideo draws obi designs that are good, and he’s a skilled weaver. He works hard.”

“Yes, I know,” Naeko answered. “When he invited me to the Festival of Ages, he was watching the changing colors on Higashiyama and the green pines at Goshō more than he was watching the parades of period costumes.”

“The Festival of Ages is nothing unusual to him.”

“No, that didn’t seem to be it.” Naeko put strength into her words. Chieko was silent, so she went on. “After the parade was finished he invited me over.”

“To his house?”

“Yes.”

Chieko was slightly surprised.

“He has two younger brothers. He showed me the land behind the shop and said if we got married he’d build a little place there and he’d weave what he likes.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“What’s wrong? I think Hideo wants to marry me as an illusion of you, Miss. I’m a girl. I can understand that.”

Chieko walked along, wondering what she might say.

In a small hollow off the narrow valley, some elderly women who had been washing cedar logs were resting in a circle warming their hands and feet at a smoking fire.

Naeko and Chieko passed in front of the old family house, which was actually more of a shed. The straw thatch roof needed attention; it leaned with a noticeable sag. Being a mountain house, it had a small garden where red berries hung from seven or eight tall nandina trees that grew in unattended disorder.

Perhaps this wretched hut had also been Chieko’s.

Naeko’s thin tears had dried before they passed by the house. Should she tell Chieko this was the house? Since the twins had been born in their mother’s village, Chieko had probably never even been in this house. Even Naeko had no firm recollection of whether she had ever been here when she was an infant after losing her father and mother.

Fortunately, Chieko did not notice the house as they passed by; she was gazing up at the uniformly aligned cedars. Naeko did not mention it.

Indeed, the round bunches of leaves left on the twigs of these straight trees were the “winter flowers” that Chieko fancied them to be.

Most of the houses were surrounded by cedar logs that had been washed, polished, and left standing side by side between the eaves and the second floor to dry. The white logs stood with their bases placed methodically in rows. That alone made them beautiful—perhaps more beautiful than any wall could be.

The uniform trees on the cedar mountains were also beautiful, with dry grass at their bases. One could glimpse the sky through the spaces between the trunks.

“Isn’t winter the most beautiful season?” Chieko asked.

“I wonder. I’m so used to seeing the trees all year long, I don’t know. Of course, in the winter the leaves take on the color of straw.”

“That makes them look like flowers,” Chieko said.

“Flowers? . . . flowers?” Chieko’s description was unexpected. Naeko looked up at the cedars.

As they walked they saw a large, elegant house. Did this belong to the landowners? The bottom half of the rather low wall that surrounded the house was made from red painted boards, while the upper half was white plaster. It was topped with a small tile roof.

Chieko stopped. “This is a lovely house, isn’t it?”

“Miss, this is the house where I’m staying. Please come in and look around.”

Chieko did not respond.

“They won’t mind. They’ve taken care of me here almost ten years,” Naeko said.

Chieko had heard Naeko say two or three times that Hideo wanted to marry her more because she was an illusion of Chieko than as a substitute for Chieko.

Chieko could of course understand what Naeko would mean by substitute. But what in the world did she mean by an “illusion,” especially in reference to a marriage partner?

“Naeko . . . illusion. You said, ‘illusion.’ What do you mean?”
Chieko said firmly.

Naeko did not answer.

“Isn’t an illusion something without form that you can’t touch with your hand?” Chieko continued, unexpectedly blushing. Naeko would belong to a man—this Naeko, who looked just like Chieko, not just in the face but probably all over.

“Yes, that’s right. But a formless illusion does exist, doesn’t it?” Naeko replied. “It may exist in a man’s heart or mind or somewhere else—who can tell?”

Chieko did not speak.

“Even when I’m an old woman of sixty, won’t the Chieko of his illusion still be as young as you are now?”

Chieko did not expect such talk. “You’ve thought about it that much?”

“The time never comes when a beautiful illusion turns ugly.”

“That’s not necessarily true,” Chieko finally said.

“You can’t kick or tread on an illusion that you harbor. All you can do is overturn yourself.”

“I see.” Chieko could recognize envy even in Naeko. “Are there really such things as illusions?”

“In here.” Naeko touched Chieko’s chest.

“I’m no illusion. I’m your twin.”

Naeko did not speak.

“Then will you be a sister to my ghost?”

“No, I want to be the sister of the Chieko before me. But, then . . . at least for Hideo’s sake . . .”

“You think too much.” Chieko looked down and walked for a moment. “Sometime, what if we talked together, the three of us, until we’ve settled things?”

“Talk? . . . Sometimes I want to . . . other times I don’t.”

“Naeko, are you so doubtful?”

“It’s not that, but I have the heart of a girl too.”

Chieko said nothing.

“The winter rain is coming down from Shuzan. See the cedars on the tops of the mountain.”

Chieko lifted her eyes.

“Hurry home. It looks as though there will be sleet.”

“I thought the weather might turn bad, so I brought some rain gear.” Taking off one glove, Chieko showed her hand to Naeko. “This isn’t the hand of a young ‘Miss.’”

Naeko was startled. She wrapped her two hands around Chieko’s.

It had started drizzling before Chieko realized it. Although she was from the mountains, Naeko too was caught off guard. It was neither a shower nor a mist.

Chieko glanced around at the mountains. They appeared cold, shrouded in haze, but the trunks of the cedars at the foot of the slope looked all the clearer.

In a moment the small mountains became indistinct, as if wrapped in mist. Of course, this mist was quite different from the spring mist that descended from the sky. But this mist was perhaps more befitting of Kyoto.

Looking at the ground, Chieko realized it was damp. The mist surrounded them as the mountains were enveloped in a faint gray. It grew denser and seemed to flow down the mountainside mixed with something white. It began to sleet.

“You’d better hurry home,” Naeko said when she noticed the bits of white particles. You could not call it snow. Sleet perhaps—but the white particles vanished and reappeared.

The valley, dark for the time of day, suddenly turned chill.

The rain at Kitayama was nothing unusual to a Kyoto girl like Chieko.

“You’d better hurry before you turn into one cold illusion,” Naeko said.

“Illusion? There you go again,” Chieko laughed. “I came with rain gear. In Kyoto the weather is always changing in the winter. It will probably let up.”

Naeko glanced up at the sky. “You’d better call it a day and go home.” She grasped Chieko’s ungloved hand.

“Naeko, have you really been thinking about marriage?” Chieko asked.

“Just a little bit,” Naeko answered. Then she put the glove back on Chieko’s hand in a gesture ever so filled with love.

“Please come to my house once,” Chieko said, but Naeko did not respond.

“Please come.”

Naeko was still silent.

“After the clerks have all gone home.”

“At night?” Naeko was surprised.

“You can stay over. My father and mother know all about you.”

Naeko’s eyes filled with joy, but she hesitated.

“For at least one night I want to sleep in the same room with you.”

Naeko turned her eyes to the far side of the road so that Chieko would not see her tears, but there was no way Chieko could fail to notice.

When Chieko returned home to Muromachi, the weather was only cloudy there.

“You got home just in time, before it starts raining,” her mother said. “Your father’s waiting for you in the back.”

Before Chieko could say hello her father asked eagerly, “How did it go, Chieko, when you talked to her?”

“Well . . .” Chieko puzzled over what she should say. It would be difficult to explain clearly in a few words.

“How was it?” he asked again.

“Well . . .”

Chieko had understood what Naeko had said, but there were also some things that she could not comprehend. Hideo really wanted to marry Chieko. But he had given that up as impossible, saying instead he wanted to marry Naeko, who looked just like Chieko. Naeko’s young heart discerned his feelings, so she had told Chieko about her strange “illusion” theory. Did Hideo intend to resist his desire for Chieko by taking Naeko? Chieko did not think it was merely conceit that made her feel it was true.

But perhaps that was not all.

Chieko could not look at her father’s face directly. She felt even the sinews in her neck might betray her awkwardness.

“So this girl Naeko was just eager to see you?” her father asked.

“Yes.” Chieko resolutely raised her head. “She said that Mr. Otomo’s son Hideo wants to marry her.” Chieko’s voice quavered.

“Really?” Chieko’s father watched her for a moment in silence. He seemed to perceive something, but he did not mention it.

“So . . . Hideo. It would be good if she married a boy like Otomo’s Hideo. The workings of fate are certainly strange, but then maybe it’s all thanks to you.”

“But, Father, I don’t think she’ll marry Hideo.”

“What? Why not?”

Chieko did not answer.

“Why not? It seems all right to me.”

“You’re right. It wouldn’t be bad, but, Father, do you remember at the Botanical Garden when you asked how Hideo would be as a match for me? Naeko senses it all, the way a girl would.”

“Really? How?”

“She imagines that Hideo’s shop and ours have at least some business dealings.”

This echoed in Takichiro’s chest. He fell silent.

“Father, once would be enough, but please would you let Naeko come here to stay just one night. Please.”

“Of course . . . but why are you asking? I told you we would even take her in permanently, didn’t I?”

“But she would never come here to live. Only for a night.”

Her father looked at her with compassion.

They heard the sound of Shige closing the rain shutters. “I’ll go help.” Chieko stood up.

The almost inaudible touch of winter rain sounded on the tile roof. Chieko’s father sat motionless.

Takichiro was invited to dinner by the father of the brothers Ryusuke and Shin’ichi at Saami in Maruyama Park. The winter days were short, so the city lights were already visible from the high vantage point of the dining room. The sky was gray, with no evening glow. Except for the lights, the town itself was also gray—the color of the Kyoto winter.

Mizuki Ryusuke’s father was a strong, dependable personality, being the owner of a large Muromachi wholesale house that had prospered considerably under him, but today he seemed to have difficulty expressing himself. He hesitated, spending time on trivial gossip.

“Actually . . .” He finally spoke up, after acquiring some pluck from the sake. Takichiro was a passive man who tended toward pessimism. This word was enough for him to guess the purpose of Mizuki’s talk.

“Actually . . .” Mizuki seemed about to stumble on his words again. “Has your daughter said anything about my son Ryusuke?”

“Yes Our family could hardly be worthy of such consideration, but I understand Ryusuke’s good intentions.”

“I see.” Mizuki seemed to be more at ease. “He’s much like I was when I was young. Once he states his intention, it doesn’t matter who tries to stop him, he won’t listen. I don’t know what to do with him.”

“No, I’m very grateful to him.”

“I’m relieved to hear you say so,” Mizuki said, appearing genuinely to feel relief. “I hope you will forgive him.” He bowed politely.

Though Takichiro’s shop was having financial difficulties, it would have been a disgrace to have a mere boy come in to help out, particularly one from a similar business. Still, he could not pretend his purpose was to learn, since the two shops were of opposite styles.

“I’m thankful,” Takichiro said, “but you could scarcely do without Ryusuke at your shop.”

“What? Ryusuke just observes the business. I hesitate to say this, since I’m his father, but he *is* a diligent boy.”

“Yes, I was quite surprised when he came to my shop. He sat down in front of my head clerk and gave him some quite harsh looks.”

“That’s the kind of boy he is,” Mizuki said. He drank more sake in silence.

“Mr. Sada.”

“Yes.”

“If Ryusuke could go to your shop to assist you—not necessarily every day—I think it would help his brother Shin’ichi become more responsible, and that would take a load off my mind too. Shin’ichi is a gentle boy. Even now Ryusuke often teases him by calling him ‘the little festival boy.’ He hates that more than anything. It’s from when he rode on the float in the Gion Festival.”

“It’s because he’s so pretty. He’s been friends with Chieko since they were children.”

“About Chieko . . .” Again Mizuki was at a loss for words.

“About Chieko,” he repeated. He sounded as if he were angry. “How did such a good and beautiful girl come to be?”

“It wasn’t through her parents’ efforts. She just turned out that way,” Takichiro answered directly.

“I suppose you understand, Mr. Sada. Your business is similar to mine, and the reason Ryusuke says he wants to help at your shop is so that he can be near Chieko for even thirty minutes or an hour a day.”

Takichiro nodded. Mizuki wiped his forehead, which resembled his son Ryusuke’s.

“He’s not much of a son, but he works hard. I don’t want to ask the impossible, but if by some chance Chieko should decide someday that a fellow like Ryusuke would be suitable, well . . . it’s rather brazen of me to ask, but if that were the case, could I ask you to take him in as an adopted son-in-law? I would formally disinherit him so that he could marry into your family.” He lowered his head.

“Disinherit him? The successor to a great wholesale business like yours?”

“That’s not what makes people happy. That’s what I think when I look at Ryusuke nowadays.”

“Your intentions are kind, but let’s leave all that up to the two of them. They’re young.” Takichiro sought to evade Mizuki’s intense line of inquiry. “And you know Chieko was a foundling.”

“Why should it matter that she’s a foundling?” Mizuki asked. “Well . . . please keep in mind what I’ve said. May I send Ryusuke to your shop as an assistant?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you. Thank you.” Mizuki’s whole body seemed to relax. Even his manner of drinking changed.

The next morning when Ryusuke came to Sada’s shop, he quickly gathered the clerks together to take inventory. He just watched, saying nothing. Since Ryusuke’s last visit, the head clerk had been shy of him; he did not even lift his eyes.

The Sadas tried to get Ryusuke to stay longer, but he left before supper.

That evening the hesitant knock at the lattice door was Naeko’s. Only Chieko heard.

“Oh, Naeko, you came . . . and it’s been so cold this evening.”

Naeko did not speak.

“But the stars are out.”

“Chieko, would it be all right if I met your parents?”

“I’ve told them all about you, so all you’ll have to say is, ‘I’m Naeko.’” Chieko held Naeko’s shoulders as she walked to the back of the house with her. “Have you had supper?”

“Yes, I’m fine. I had some sushi just before I came.”

Naeko’s manner was formal. Chieko’s parents were so astounded by the two girls’ resemblance that they could not speak.

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“Chieko, you can go on upstairs in the back. The two of you make yourselves at home and talk.” Shige was the one who finally came to her senses.

Chieko took Naeko’s hand as they crossed the narrow veranda, climbed the stairs, and lit the heater.

“Naeko, come here a moment,” Chieko called her to the dressing mirror. Chieko stared at their two faces.

“We certainly do look alike.” Chieko felt something hot pass through her body. They changed sides. “We’re really the very image of each other.”

“That’s what twins are,” Naeko said. “What would happen if everyone had a twin?”

“People would always be mistaking one another. It would certainly be a problem.” When Naeko stepped back her eyes were moist. “One can never know a person’s fate.”

Chieko stepped back alongside Naeko and shook her shoulders. “Naeko, couldn’t you stay here always? Father and Mother have said they want you to. I’m very lonely here by myself. Maybe the cedar mountains are a pleasant place, but . . .”

Naeko seemed unable to remain standing. Kneeling down as if otherwise she might stagger, she shook her head. Teardrops fell on her lap.

“Miss, our lives have been different. And our upbringing has been different. I couldn’t live in a place like Muromachi. Once, just this once, I’ve come to your home. I wanted to show you the kimono you gave me And you were kind enough to come visit me twice in the cedar mountains.”

Chieko was silent, so Naeko continued. “Miss, you are the one that my parents abandoned. I don’t know why.”

“But I’ve forgotten that,” Chieko said without pausing. “I don’t even think of it. It’s as though I never had any such parents.”

"I think . . . perhaps both of them have received their punishment. I was just a baby, but please forgive me."

"What kind of sin or responsibility could you have?"

"It's not that. I told you before, Miss. I don't want to be even the slightest obstacle to your happiness." Naeko lowered her voice. "I'd rather disappear completely."

"No, don't say that." Chieko's voice was firm. "It seems so unfair. Naeko, are you unhappy?"

"No, I'm lonely."

"'Good fortune is short, while loneliness is long.' Isn't that true?" Chieko asked. "Let's lie down. I want to talk some more." Chieko took the bedding from the closet. Naeko helped her.

"Happiness. This is happiness." Naeko was listening to a sound coming from the roof.

Seeing Naeko straining to hear, Chieko stood motionless. "Is it drizzle or rain? Or sleet? Or a mixture of both?"

"Maybe. Or is it snow?"

"Snow?"

"It's quiet. Hardly enough to call snow . . . just a fine powder."

"Is it?"

"In the mountain village sometimes a snow like this falls while we're working and before we know it the surfaces of the leaves turn white like flowers . . . and even the tips of the fine twigs of the dead winter trees turn white," Naeko said.

Chieko did not speak.

"Sometimes it stops, or turns to sleet or a drizzle."

"Shall we open the shutter and see? Then we'd know." Chieko got up, but Naeko held her back.

"Don't! It's cold, and besides, it would destroy the illusion."

“Illusion? Naeko, you talk about illusions an awful lot.”

“Illusion?” Naeko smiled. There was a faint sorrow about her beautiful face.

Naeko hurriedly spoke as Chieko was about to take out the bedding. “Chieko, just this once let me prepare your bed for you.”

But it was Chieko who silently crawled under Naeko’s covers, which had been spread beside her own.

“Oh, Naeko, it’s so warm.”

“We do different kinds of work . . . just as the places where we live are different.”

Naeko embraced Chieko. “It will be cold on a night like this,” Naeko said, as if she were not the least bit chilled. “Tonight the powder snow will drift down . . . stop . . . then sift down again.”

Chieko was silent.

Takichiro and Shige came upstairs to the next room. Being older, they used an electric blanket to warm the bed.

Naeko whispered in Chieko’s ear, “Your bed is warm now, so I’ll move over to the other one.”

It was later when Chieko’s mother opened the sliding door a crack to peep into the girls’ room.

The next morning Naeko got up very early. She shook Chieko to awaken her. “Miss, this has been the happiest time of my life. I’m going to leave now before anyone sees me.”

Just as Naeko had said, a light powder snow had been falling off and on during the night. Now the cold morning glistened.

Chieko got up. “You don’t have a raincoat do you? Here, take this.” She got out her best velvet coat, a collapsible umbrella, and high clogs for Naeko.

“These are for you. Come again . . . please.”

Naeko shook her head. Chieko stood for a long while against the red lattice door, watching as Naeko walked away. Naeko did not look back. A few delicate snowflakes fell on Chieko’s hair, then vanished. The town was as it should be, still silent in sleep.