



研究奨励事業
研究報告

「隠花の飾り」英訳

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Hidden Flowers, by Seichô Matsumoto

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“Tabi Socks” (Story No. 1, 第一話 「足袋」)	1
“Woman’s Best Friend” (Story No. 2, 第二話 「愛犬」)	14
“Plumes of Fire in the North” (Story No. 3, 第三話 「北の火箭」) ...	27
“The Departure” (Story No. 4, 第四話 「見送って」)	40
“A Case of Misinterpretation” (Story No. 5, 第五話 「誤訳」) ...	52

“Tabi Socks”

(Story No. 1, 第一話「足袋」)

Kyoko Tsuda was a teacher of Noh, accredited and licensed by an established school. She lived in a condominium apartment in Okubo, in Tokyo. There she saw her pupils, to whom she taught both Noh chant and recital-form Noh dance. Her pupils were mostly women, but there were some men, too. Most of them had been with her ever since they were beginners; more than a few had kept at it for as long as four or five years. Kyoko set aside afternoons and evenings, three days a week, for classes. In the daytime it was mainly the women; in the evenings, male businessmen and shopkeepers. She was thirty-eight years old, a tall woman, long-faced. During the classes, of course, she wore Japanese clothes, but Western attire suited her too.

Apart from holding classes, she also went to a house in the upscale neighborhood of Den'en-Chôfu once a week to take classes herself with a Master Teacher, Kosuke Mizuno. Mizuno was the second-highest-ranking teacher in a Noh school run according to the *iemoto* or family-based licensing system. He was sixty-three years old. Kyoko Tsuda had entered this school twenty years ago. It was only seven years ago, when her Master granted permission, that she began to accept pupils herself, mainly beginners.

Hideo Murai was approaching forty-two years of age. He was currently manager of a trading company's general affairs division. Three years ago, as manager of the same company's welfare and benefits department, he had been very involved in the creation of a Noh chant club for the female employees. Kyoko had been coaxed into mentoring this club by a woman who had worked in the sales department but who was now retired and was no longer with the company. Two years ago, Murai became a pupil at Kyoko's Okubo condominium. In addition to the golf and mahjong he played to cultivate customers, he had developed an interest in pursuing something like Noh as a hobby.

Approximately one year ago, the relationship between Kyoko Tsuda and Hideo Murai became something other than that of master to pupil. What started it all was his inviting her to dinner; after three or four such dates, it turned into rendezvous at a hotel. This sort of thing happens.

Kyoko responded so readily to Murai's repeated dinner invitations because she

already had feelings for him that went beyond friendliness. A man and a woman go out to dinner, just the two of them. They have a few drinks; the man says something. She knew how it might go. It's not as though she were at an age at which she'd have no idea.

Kyoko was born in Yokohama. Her family was said to be in the lumber business. Noh chant had been her mother's hobby. From high school onward, Kyoko studied with her mother. When she was in junior college she came under the tutelage of Kosuke Mizuno. After graduation, she worked briefly at a small trading company but quit after a year, and had not worked since. As a leading disciple of Master Teacher Mizuno, she devoted herself to the chant and the dance.

Her living expenses were defrayed by her father, the lumber merchant. There had been marriage prospects, but none that moved her heart. She had turned them all down. Her parents and elder brother gave up on her: they stopped mentioning the subject of marriage. And then no luck at all—and before she realized it she was thirty-eight. Even the condominium in Okubo that she was living in at the moment had been paid for by her father. But it would never do, simply to idle about. She obtained Mizuno-sensei's permission to take beginning pupils. Such was Kyoko's story, as told to Murai.

Murai, of course, had a wife and children. His eldest, a son, was a high-school freshman; his daughter was in the second year of middle school. His wife was three years younger than himself. It had been an arranged marriage.

Once Murai had snagged Kyoko, he felt that his life had become fuller and richer. They could not meet at her apartment, in front of the pupils and the neighbors, so they used special hotels, some modern and some traditional, that rented rooms by the hour. This was about twice a week. If it was necessary to confer regarding an assignation, Murai would telephone from outside his home. But since other pupils were sometimes present at her end, he kept it to a brief communication of time and place, and Kyoko simply replied, "That's fine." If that response was all a pupil overheard, it couldn't cause any problems. Almost always, however, at each meeting they would set the next date and time and place. After that, if there were changes, it tended to be Murai who would telephone. It was usually to suit his convenience: a sudden business trip, or an unscheduled business meeting.

From the beginning, Murai's wife Yasuko had been aware of his trips to the condominium to study Noh chant, and she was aware that the teacher was a

woman. If it had been traditional love songs or popular songs, such as *nagauta* and *kouta*, perhaps it would have mattered more to her that the teacher was a woman. But Noh chant isn't that sort of thing: she thought of it as disciplined and dignified. So she was unconcerned. The day before her husband had a scheduled lesson, he would take out his book of Noh chants and practice, however briefly, listening to a cassette tape of Kyoko's voice. On Sundays he would spend half a day reciting in a loud voice in front of his wooden bookstand, or shuffling about on the tatami, holding a fan.

Given his relationship with the teacher, Murai had to be exceedingly circumspect in front of the other pupils. Both he and Kyoko took the greatest care not to give themselves away. During the lessons, Kyoko treated him the same as the other pupils—or was, if anything, somewhat cooler towards him. Murai obeyed meekly and scrupulously. Among the evening pupils there were two other men. Unlike these other middle-aged men, Murai did not try to direct any light jesting Kyoko's way. He was afraid that if he used carefree language, the tone would somehow betray him. Kyoko also took ample care. She took too much care: her attitude toward him might even have been called stiff.

Murai knew, the first night, that Kyoko was not a virgin. She was born in the Year of the Dragon, making her thirty-seven years old at that time. He hardly thought that a woman could reach that age and be completely inexperienced. Her eyes were somewhat narrow and slanted up slightly; her nose was nice and straight; her upper lip had a bit of a pout to it; her countenance in general was slender with a longish chin: it was an attractive enough face. She had undoubtedly been more of a beauty when she was younger. She must have had relations with men.

In his pillow talk with Kyoko over the course of many trysts, Murai quizzed her about her previous love life. She was reluctant to respond but finally replied that when she was twenty she had "sinned" with a college student, that this was repeated some five or six times, and that since then she had had no lovers.

However, Kyoko's physical response to Murai was intense: her whole body seemed on fire. It was hard to believe that this was the body of a woman of slight experience, seventeen or eighteen years ago at that. Since Murai believed what Kyoko said, he put it down to her thirty-seven years of age. He thought that even if her experience had been slim, and even if the intervening seventeen or eighteen years had been a blank, when the body of a woman in the prime of life received a

stimulus, the response would be a radical one. It was sufficient to pleasure the forty-one-year-old Murai. Kyoko's proficiency in bed increased rapidly, to the point of shameless wild abandon. Now that she had Murai, she frantically lost herself in lovemaking, her whole body in turmoil. This greediness escalated each time. For all that, in front of her students she sat primly and properly, while in her movements she was concerned by the least disorder in the hems of her kimono. For her Noh dance routines she encased her feet tightly in dignified white *tabi*, split-toed socks that gave a pleasing form to her ankles and toes. She quite set herself apart, with a grace reminiscent of an autumn morning. Both polar extremes fanned Murai's passion.

When Kyoko came to him wearing Japanese clothes, she had on the white *tabi*. As she removed them, raising each knee in the dimmed light of their room, her feminine figure was all the more alluring. Murai held the *tabi* once in his hands just to see what they were like. They each had five clasps. They were custom-made at a shop specializing in *tabi*. They fit a customer's foot perfectly, with not a wisp of superfluous space, imparting a form that was pleasing, even beautiful. The five clasps were designed to eliminate any slack in the fabric. Ordinary shops only sold *tabi* with four clasps. As Kyoko explained to Murai, that spelled the difference between the amateurs and those who specialized in Noh dance or traditional *buyoh* dance.

Down through the ages, men and women lying together in bed have always whispered the same sweet somethings to each other. "Don't ever leave me," Kyoko would say. "If I lose you, I can't go on living." Her hair disheveled, eyes tense, nostrils flaring, sniffing, dry throat: like a patient with a fever. But she would add, "This is how things are because you've got a wife and children; I accept that. It's fine with me, just like this. I won't be unreasonable. If we want to keep things going as long as we can, we shouldn't ask unreasonable things of each other."

This echoed Murai's consideration for his family; but Kyoko was also sensitive about her other pupils. If the relationship between the two of them became known, enrollments would plummet. Murai still objected that their assignations were too pressed for time. He suggested that they take a two- or three-day trip somewhere together. Kyoko had to dissuade him, saying that while she would like nothing better, if they tried something like that his wife was sure to suspect; besides, she herself had her pupils to take care of. They shouldn't push their luck

“unreasonably.”

A year or so into the affair, their mutual cautiousness began to slacken. This was inevitable. Routine bred negligence, and things started to come apart at the seams. One evening, after Murai returned home late from the office, he was cornered by Yasuko. She had been waiting for him, and she was livid. She even knew that the other woman was Kyoko Tsuda.

“I’ve thought your behavior strange for some time,” she said, “but until I knew the details I held my tongue. I have evidence to justify my suspicions.” And she laid out item after item in front of Murai. Matchbooks from cafés in parts of town where he had no business being. Receipts from restaurants or other eateries detailing meals for two. Most alarming, a matchbook from a hotel in the vicinity of Ikebukuro, not far from Okubo. Each time, Murai had been careful not to take such things with him, or else he had disposed of them later; but it would appear that as his conduct became routinized, his caution lapsed. His wife had been going through his clothes and collecting all this stuff that he had forgotten. She chose this moment to confront him with it.

When his wife mentioned Kyoko by name, Murai was left with no escape at all. Yasuko was in a frenzy, hitting her husband with all her might, wailing and moaning like a beast. In between her sobs, she denounced them both. “In my wildest dreams I never thought a lady teaching Noh chant would be like that!” she said. And, “I was certainly fooled: that lady teacher is nothing but a man-eater.” And, “So you got ensnared. You’re still you!” And, “This is beyond horrible!” Wives in this position generally say the same things.

Murai did think it odd that his wife knew Kyoko’s name. He did not know at that moment how she knew, but after this situation had persisted for several days, he found out that she had been tipped off by a letter, apparently from one of Kyoko’s female pupils.

At the lesson-site itself, the two lovers had been circumspect. But as time went on, they grew negligent. Meanwhile, it seems that while Kyoko’s female pupils may have feigned obliviousness, their observation of the couple had been anything but negligent. Once the suspicion of a member of the same sex has been aroused, jealousy sharpens the eyes. Murai sometimes waited at a nearby café until Kyoko could join him after class: it was entirely possible that one of the pupils had tailed her there. One or two candidates presented themselves to Murai’s imagination. There was no point trying to delve into it.

Murai had not declared to his wife whether he would break up with Kyoko immediately or indeed at all; but he did think that under the circumstances, they would be breaking up soon. Eventually, his wife intuited his feelings, and was somewhat mollified. Until that point, however, Yasuko would take a heavy dose of sleeping medicine every night when he came home. The next morning she'd stay in bed, snoring, till late. If she hadn't gone out by noon, she'd go out then and not return even when it began to get dark. But it was when Murai saw the dejection of their son, a high-schooler, and their middle-school daughter, and saw how they tried to avoid him, that he began to feel remorse. For him, too, this gloomy atmosphere at home was unbearable.

As if that weren't bad enough, it seemed to Murai that Kyoko's attitude also was different from before. When their bodies were pressed together, she was still a woman on fire. But whenever he tried to deepen the relationship, she seemed inclined to avoid that, even to flee from it. As she put it, they should suppress anything "unreasonable." It was the same as earlier, when she had refused the invitation to take a short trip together. Saturday evenings, Sundays, Murai had free time. One would have thought that Kyoko was also free then. But she said she was unavailable: on Saturdays and Sundays she had taken to returning to her parents' home in Yokohama. Since her father had been defraying her living expenses, it was understandable to Murai that she should want to visit there; but it would also have been nice if, from time to time, she had fallen in with his own wishes. At least one weekend a month, he thought, it should not be too inconvenient to forego the Yokohama excursion.

Furthermore, when it came to altering previously made arrangements over the telephone, Murai now found frequently that she could not manage to meet at the new date or time. This sort of thing, too, was unavoidable; but it would have been nice if she had tried even a little to adjust whatever these commitments were, to accommodate his wishes. This was another source of dissatisfaction.

Once Murai's wife had been told about Kyoko, Murai could not bring himself to continue attending the Noh chant lessons. He was acutely conscious that not only the female pupil who had informed on him would be present, but that the other students had been secretly apprised of what was going on between Kyoko and himself. There was no doubt that he and Kyoko would be subjected to curious stares.

When Murai telephoned Kyoko from outside and told her that his wife knew everything, he was sure she would let out a shriek of alarm and quiz him about all sorts of things. But she didn't react that way at all. She merely said, in a glum voice, "I want to meet soon." From her tone of voice, one might surmise that she already knew about his family turmoil. If that was the case, it must be because she had previously caught wind of it from her female students.

Kyoko had said she wanted to meet "soon," and Murai said, "tomorrow evening." That day there would be no lessons. But Kyoko said she had another commitment and couldn't go out: could he wait four or five days? They were up against the wall, and he thought the woman would want to meet him as soon as possible, fly to him, pepper him with questions about the whole situation. Kyoko's casual reply was peculiar. Murai could not comprehend it. One might attribute it to her personality; on the other hand, one could also imagine that she had put off their meeting in shock upon hearing that his wife knew everything.

After an interval of four or five days, just before Murai left work he received a telephone call from a man with a husky voice, giving the name Setoyama, who said he wanted to meet with him about "Miss Kyoko Tsuda," and designated the place, a certain hotel lobby. Murai agreed, and waited in a state of consternation until the visit to the hotel.

It was a big hotel lobby, full of people, but there were several quiet spots. In one of them stood a man wearing Japanese clothes. He caught sight of Murai and took some steps toward him. Saying, "I am Setoyama," he politely proffered his business card. When Murai saw on the card that the man was a senior figure in a certain school of Noh chant, his heart once again started pounding violently. Tei-ichi Setoyama was past fifty, with thin hair and a receding hairline. His small, round eyes, surrounded by creases and wrinkles, reminded one of a monkey's. The two men seated themselves in that area, removed from the crowd. After a few pleasantries, Setoyama stated that he was Kosuke Mizuno's chief disciple, and that he served as Permanent Secretary to the Association of Licensed Noh Teachers. Murai thought that for a man in such a position to want to meet him about Kyoko Tsuda, it must mean that Mizuno-sensei knew about them, and that Setoyama had come to complain about the corruption of morals in the Association. But the latter leaned forward so as to bring his mouth closer to Murai, and in a dry, husky voice of the sort one would use for the Noh chant, said, "As to that confidential matter. . . Mizuno-sensei has high hopes for Kyoko Tsuda's future. He has taken a special

interest in her, and has been looking after her. She is his favorite pupil." Murai could feel his face redden.

If all Setoyama wanted to say was that Mizuno-sensei had high hopes for Kyoko Tsuda's future, and that she was his favorite disciple, he hardly needed to preface his remarks with such a strange reference to "that confidential matter." His main point must have been that Mizuno-sensei was specially looking after her.

It was then that Murai realized that Kyoko Tsuda must have been Mizuno-sensei's lover. Now he understood why—contradicting the passion she showed when she was in his arms—she had refused to meet him at the times he specified, or told him that Saturdays and Sundays were definitely out: those were the times she was seeing Mizuno-sensei. That condominium she said had been bought for her by her father in Yokohama: it must have been given her by her Master. Murai did not even know if it was true that her father was a lumber merchant. And now Setoyama had come to tell him to break it off with Kyoko. It was just that Setoyama could not say so explicitly.

Murai asked Setoyama how it was that Mizuno-sensei knew about Kyoko and him. Setoyama smiled wanly and said that people meddle in many ways; in this case, the letter of denunciation from Kyoko's female pupil had made its way to Mizuno. Murai quizzed him further: had Mizuno-sensei been angry with Kyoko; had he expelled her from his school? Setoyama shook his head. Mizuno-sensei is a man of the world, he said. Mizuno had apparently not revealed, even by his attitude, that he knew anything at all about the affair. He had said nothing to Kyoko. He was even less likely to take such a step as expelling her. From what Setoyama suspected, Mizuno still had strong feelings for Kyoko, and did not want to stir up any trouble: he wanted to keep her all for himself, just as before. The great teacher was getting on in years.

Murai asked Setoyama what Kyoko's wishes were. Setoyama replied that Kyoko could not turn her back on a teacher to whom she owed so much. He stated flatly that she wanted to break up with Murai. "I see," said Murai. "If that's her wish, then I'll agree to break it off, too." But now Murai was waxing indignant. He also recalled how, when he had phoned her the other day, expecting her to come flying to him, she had instead shilly-shallied over the matter. That was because in her heart she had already returned to Mizuno-sensei.

Setoyama said, "My words alone may not be enough to convince you. Why

don't you let me arrange a discussion between you and Kyoko-san?"

Two months later. Kyoko telephoned him at the office, saying, "Please meet me just this once. Really, I'd appreciate it." Murai had nothing to say to her any more, so he refused. Her voice echoed endlessly in his ears, calling after him.

One month prior to that, they had had their discussion. Setoyama had acted as monitor, and Kyoko's declaration was also unpleasant: "Let's agree that what's past is past." Murai had thought the intrusion of Setoyama unnecessary: he just wanted to meet with her alone so they could confirm each other's true wishes. Setoyama refused to consent to this, on the grounds that if the two interested parties met alone he could not be sure of the outcome. And he relayed Kyoko's own preference that she and Murai not meet alone.

Since Kyoko was a kept woman, in principle Murai should have apologized to Kosuke Mizuno. Yet Murai was so selfish as to want to speak with Kyoko free of the presence of Mizuno's representative. It was only natural that Setoyama would reject that. What's more, Kyoko was willing to accept her Master's silent forgiveness, and remain a kept woman. So Murai himself was at something of a loss. In fact, the discussion supervised by Setoyama was concluded in about ten minutes, with a firm agreement to break off the relationship entirely.

For Kyoko to call a month later, in spite of that agreement, with a request to meet, lowered her in Murai's esteem. Her posture in the Noh dance imparted a sense of propriety and decorum; her form, the way she carried herself during dance recitals—back straight, knees slightly bent, feet wrapped in those five-clasp *tabi*—conveyed something profoundly elegant. How could that same body also have concealed such voraciousness?

He understood why Kyoko had been so wild in bed. She had, earlier, become accustomed to the insipidity of the aging body of her Master. Then when she had Murai, a middle-aged man, sensations fully suiting her thirty-seven-year-old body were aroused and rushed through her like a torrent.

For her to call him, asking to meet, just a month after they had said their good-byes, must mean that Kyoko was unable to go back to that insipid body. The sex she had grown used to was not what she had known during her many years with Kosuke Mizuno; it was what she knew with the body of Murai, over the course of barely a year.

When Murai thought about all this, he began to find Kyoko repugnant. He had

told his wife everything. He did not want a repeat of that dismal home scene. He told himself he would devote himself to his job and live the life of a regular family man. After passing into middle age, an ordinary existence was best, he thought; it was the least trouble. An ordinary life was in fact ideal.

After that first phone call, Kyoko rang him up at the company frequently. "Anyway, please meet me, just once. I have something I want to talk with you about." She was persistent in this request. Murai said, "Please just drop it." He didn't actually go so far as to say, "If you keep making such a pest of yourself, I'll tell Mizuno-sensei," but surely the rejection in his tone of voice came through loud and clear.

A letter arrived at the company. The sender's name was not on the envelope, but even without opening it he knew whom it was from. "It was wrong of me to hide my relationship with Mizuno-sensei from you. Forgive me. I apologize. I suppose you're angry with such a horrible woman, but I'd like a chance to explain. You are all I have. I'm going to break it off completely with my Master. Our recent affair has become an item of gossip amongst Mizuno's disciples. I'm sure Setoyama was spreading the word, all hush-hush. The number of my own pupils has decreased. Well, that's the way it goes; but anyway, please let's meet. There is much I have to discuss with you." Such was the burden of this letter.

Setoyama—he of the cunning eyes—seemed just the sort to proclaim loyalty to his Master openly, while making fun of him behind his back for the entertainment of fellow disciples and younger pupils. Murai had foreseen that Kyoko would lose some pupils; but he himself was the cause, and he did feel sorry for her.

That alone was not enough for him to work up the nerve to meet her. And it wasn't as if a man's blood does not quicken when he is pursued by a woman. But when he read that "I'm going to break it off completely with my Master...you are all I have," and so forth, he felt that meeting her again would be like walking straight into an abyss of ruin.

Now that a letter had arrived, Murai prepared himself for the phone call from Kyoko that he assumed would follow soon enough. But for about a week, none came. Then, at a time when he did not expect it at all, the call came.

"Did you read my letter?" asked Kyoko. Her voice was weak. Her self-restraint and unease were palpable. Murai overcame his own timidity by intensifying the coldness and anger in his reply: "I read it, but at this stage nothing can come of it. There's no chance my feelings will change. So no more letters, no

more phone calls.” Kyoko’s silence, it seemed to Murai, lasted more than three minutes. Finally, “Be well,” she said in a tearful voice. Then Murai found himself listening to a dial tone.

Murai thought that with this, his links to Kyoko had been severed forever. He felt sorry for her; on the other hand, he felt some sense of loss. He thought it was not a bad thing to have carved out such an experience before he entered his 50s. But then, for all his fortitude, it wasn’t as if he felt no pangs at all, still.

Another week after that, the home phone rang, and Murai or his wife picked up the receiver and said hello, but there was no reply and then the caller hung up. Then the calls came pretty much every other day or so, between seven and just past eight in the morning, and then in the evening about 9:00.

“It’s her,” said Yasuko sharply, giving Murai a look as she hung up the receiver. “No doubt about it. In the morning before you go to work, then in the evening when you’re sure to be back home: she’s timing it carefully. That’s why when I pick up the phone, she hangs up.”

“No, that couldn’t be it. When I pick up, too, the caller’s silent and then hangs up.”

“It’s her,” declared his wife flatly. “She just wants to hear your voice.” Yasuko looked displeased.

“Be well.” Kyoko’s last words to Murai came back to him. It could be that his wife was right: Kyoko was satisfied just hearing his voice, reassured by the briefest “Hello?” or “Murai residence.”

There was no question but that the relationship between her and Kosuke Mizuno was intact and continuing. Indeed, thought Murai, that might be one reason for the wordless phone calls. The fact that those calls never came on Saturdays and Sundays was suggestive. Kyoko might very well have been with her Master at those times. Murai’s wife, ignorant of such circumstances, remarked to him sarcastically that even people who pestered others with phone calls must take the weekends off, just like working people.

However, with the continuing annoyance of the ringing phone, Yasuko became somewhat neurotic. She did not go so far as not to pick up the receiver when the phone rang. The same with Murai. Yasuko said to him, in all seriousness, “What if we inform the police, and get them to install a tracing device? They could trace back those crank calls.”

After about a month, the wordless phone calls stopped. The married couple

shared a sigh of relief—at which point a new phenomenon arose. Late at night, they heard the footsteps of someone prowling around outside their house. Murai's house was in a residential district of Nakano Ward. There were few shops; at night all the residents closed their storm shutters and gates early. Murai and his wife didn't notice at first, but these footfalls were not those of shoes. The sound was, rather, that of the leather of thonged *zôri* sandals licking the ground. These quiet footsteps went back and forth a number of times in front of the entrance to Murai's corner property, entered the alley behind the house, then paced about, stealthily, outside the bamboo fence beside the couple's bedroom and kitchen. This loitering occurred two or three times a week, and each time continued for more than thirty minutes. They could deduce from the *zôri* that it was a woman, and that she was dressed in a kimono.

"This person is as spiteful as a snake," said Yasuko, her voice shaking with panic. When Murai opened the door a bit and peeked out, the dark figure he saw silhouetted in the faint light of a far-off street lamp was unquestionably Kyoko's. This silhouette was loitering, now under the leaves of a *yatsude* tree, now by the service entrance to the house across the street.

"Why don't I go out and give her a piece of my mind?" he said. But that was merely bluster, in front of his wife. If he actually did any such thing, Kyoko was so obsessed she was likely to come right back at him, shouting. On top of that, if they really had a confrontation, Kyoko would probably start wailing and moaning to such a degree it would waken the neighbors, who would peek out to see what the disturbance was about. Murai did not have the courage to go outside.

Yasuko was also opposed to her husband going out: what if this person was carrying a knife or something: then what? So she restrained him. Basically, she did not like the idea of her husband meeting with that woman. In the middle of the night, when they heard the sound of those leather *zôri* padding around outside the house, they waited with bated breath until the sound ceased, or they turned up the volume of a late-night show on the television. But whatever they did, their minds wandered to the outside: it all came to the same thing.

"What if she sets fire to the house?" Yasuko's face was pale. "That won't happen," said Murai, and it was not just hollow bravery. He had gradually come to understand Kyoko's feelings. She had unilaterally come to meet him; that was all. The succession of wordless phone calls, the walking about outside the house: all her behavior was a way of confirming her message to him that she had come.

One day, Yasuko told Murai that she had heard from someone in the neighborhood that a woman wearing a kimono was seen wandering around in the area late the previous night, and had been taken into custody by a policeman who happened to be passing by. "So for the time being we won't be hearing her footsteps," muttered Yasuko. Her face looked gaunt and haggard.

The next morning, at 7:00, Yasuko went out to fetch the newspaper from the mailbox at the gate, but she came running back to the bedroom, where Murai was still sleeping. Her countenance was changed. In her hand she held a white *tabi*, one for the left foot. "This *tabi* was tossed into our mailbox sometime last night."

The *tabi* had five clasps.

The outer surface of the *tabi* was white, but the inner surface was slightly soiled. Under the portion revealed when the clasps were unhooked, and further inside, there was a slight oily sheen.

"Ugh. This makes me queasy." Yasuko was trembling.

In the swiftly flowing waters from the Tamagawa waterworks appeared the kimono-clad body of a drowned woman. There were rocks in both sleeves. She was wearing, on her right foot only, a white *tabi*. The five-clasp *tabi* was a perfect fit, all the way to the tips of her toes. Her left foot was bare. No matter how swift the current, there was no way only one of two five-clasp *tabi* could be stripped off.

It aroused the suspicions of the police. Although the prevailing opinion was suicide, there were some who thought that further investigation might be in order.

* * * * *

“Woman’s Best Friend”

(Story No. 2, 第二話 「愛犬」)

Miyo worked as a cashier at Hatsune, a traditional Japanese restaurant specializing in exquisite *kaiseki* cuisine. Hatsune was located near Kyobashi in the old center of Tokyo. It occupied the entire seventh and eighth floors of a small commercial building. It catered to an elite clientele of individuals and top-flight corporate customers.

Miyo came to the restaurant some eight years ago. She was 27 years old, and so attractive that it was thought a pity just to keep her planted behind a register. So after two years, the proprietor asked her to go out and wait on guests. Eventually, however, she declined the silvery-gray kimono. This kimono was worn by the waitresses as a uniform. There were about thirty such waitresses at Hatsune, and unlike the staff at some traditional Japanese restaurants, they all commuted to the job.

Miyo was fair complexioned, with pleasingly plump facial features. Her eyes were large. Her lips were a little too full, but with judicious application of lipstick that defect was not so noticeable. When she smiled, it revealed some redundant tooth alignment. Still, among all the waitresses, her combination of age and comeliness had made her selection an easy call for the proprietor.

Indeed, a number of guests had clearly taken a fancy to her in her navy blue one-piece dress with maroon trim, reminiscent of a school uniform. In front of the register, however, unlike in the private dining rooms, they could not so easily engage in banter and invite her out. Looking for an opening of any kind, they wound up lingering by the glass display case next to the register, where they made a show of examining the traditional sweets, or handmade plates, or tea implements, to the point where they were practically obliged to make a purchase. The person on duty at the register was in charge of those sales.

The teacups on display there were not cheap. So the customers cast their eyes over the alternatives, expressing such sentiments as “A fine piece of Shino ware!” or “What an intriguing example of Seto ceramics!” and involving Miyo in consultations as to which one they should buy. They would follow that up with something low-key and softly spoken: “On your next day off, how about going out for a meal together?” or “...how about a cup of tea together?” Miyo would just smile

her toothy smile. Some thought it a charming look; some thought it standoffish.

There were two cashiers. They worked in overlapping shifts, the early shift running from 10:00 a.m. to six in the evening, the late shift from 3:00 p.m. to eleven. Hatsune served both lunch and dinner. The other cashier was a replacement for an older woman who had quit; this new woman was about the same age as Miyo, but stern-faced and of stout physique.

Miyo lived by herself in Asakusabashi, at the end of a narrow alley in a mazy network of such alleys. It was small, but it was home. It had been left to her by her father, a gardener. Her mother was dead now, too. She had no brothers; her elder sister was married and living in Hiroshima.

Miyo had married at age twenty-two; three years later she had divorced. It had been an arranged marriage, to a provincial civil servant in Hiratsuka. The family was not of the wealthy farming class, but they were land-rich and well off. Her husband had been of a taciturn temperament. His sixty-year-old father and his two younger sisters, who were of marriageable age, lived with them. But the woman who would have been her mother-in-law died young. So it was just the father-in-law and sisters-in-law. The father-in-law still worked in the fields.

Miyo was bullied by the elder of her two sisters-in-law. This woman was a year older than Miyo, yet had made no satisfactory match herself. Since her mother had passed away early, it was left to her to manage the household affairs. But even with the arrival of Miyo, she showed no disposition to relinquish any control. She even continued her customary management of her brother's—Miyo's husband's—salary.

The father controlled the family's principal assets, but he never interfered in the household economy; nor did he normally make up any shortfalls by drawing down on his savings account. However, once every three months or so, the elder of Miyo's two sisters-in-law would dun their father for it, and he would cough it up. But none of this money ever passed through Miyo's hands, either.

Her father-in-law made her do farm work. She wasn't used to it; that merely got her a scolding, as she was nevertheless ordered around by her father-in-law. Not a day passed but she wept inwardly. The brown fields unfurled into the distance, where she could make out the figures of young marrieds or dating couples walking along paths through deep green woods. How she must have envied them.

The family's elder daughter had never liked farmers and never took to working in the fields. The younger daughter had gone on from high school to a women's

junior college; when she came home from school she just wanted to relax. She aligned herself with her elder sister, acting spitefully toward Miyo and heaping abuse on her. The father-in-law was the silent type, a drink with dinner his sole amusement.

If Miyo appealed to her husband when he got back from the office, his brow would furrow weakly, and that was all. As his spindly physique proclaimed, he hardly had the temerity to stand up to his father and two sisters in order to protect his wife. Alas, Miyo simply did not love this irresolute husband enough to stand by him.

The immediate cause of Miyo's return to the house in which her mother still lived was, however, a dog.

Miyo had loved dogs since she was little. Now she was keeping a small mongrel Shiba hunting dog, and doing her best to mollify the objections of her father-in-law and sister-in-law. The two sisters loathed it. Everything about it, large and small, was a cause for complaint: the dog barked too much; it lolled about the house and soiled the place with droppings; they couldn't stand its smell. It was kept chained to its doghouse so it never got enough exercise; whenever Miyo did take it for a walk around the neighborhood, they made comments such as, "It's not as if it ever does any work around here, just struts around like it owns the place."

The two sisters couldn't stand the sight of this dog, and when Miyo wasn't looking they beat it with a stick or threw stones at it. The dog was terrified at the sight of the two sisters: it would curl up its tail and seek sanctuary in its doghouse. Miyo prepared food for the dog, but it was not unusual for the bowl in which she had served it to fill up with muddy water. Given all this, the dog idolized Miyo and followed her around. On which the two sisters cast a jaundiced eye: "You've got the stink of that dog about you—don't you come anywhere near us!" This loathing for the dog was, of course, a displacement of their hatred of Miyo.

One morning, the dog was nowhere to be seen. Miyo spent half a day walking about looking for it. More than a kilometer away, the dog's corpse was found in a ditch alongside the tracks of a privately run railway line. The dog had been struck by a train. This Shiba was timid; it didn't usually go far. The doghouse chain had been undone, so Miyo's guess was that the elder sister had taken the dog down to the tracks and shooed it into the path of an oncoming train. The same sister had experimented with similar actions before.

When the dog was buried, Miyo could not stop crying. Without even freshen-

ing up, she went straight back to her parents' home. When her mother, who knew nothing about the dog, saw her tears, she simply said, "If you're suffering like that, you don't need to go back to your in-laws."

The go-between who had arranged Miyo's marriage came over. He went through the motions of suggesting a return to her husband's family. After two years had elapsed, she heard a rumor that her husband had remarried.

In the years following her mother's death, and after she had started working at Hatsune, Miyo had had to bury two more pet dogs. As a single woman alone at home, and for security when she was out, she first kept an Akita. The Akita is a large dog, one that people might be afraid of. But it cannot handle hot weather, and in the middle of its second summer with her, it died. Next she raised a sturdy-looking mongrel she got from a friend. But this one, too, never made it into adulthood. One day when Miyo was out, the pup slipped out of the house and was run over by a car on the main road.

She thought she should give up trying to keep a dog. She felt that her bad luck was fated to rub off on any dog she tried to keep. In I-Ching astrological terms, Miyo's composite sign was the Triple Blue Jupiter. According to those horoscopes sold on the street, which said more or less the same thing every year, this meant her sign was located in the lucky region of the zodiac called the House of the Southeast. However, in this House two Gods of Good Fortune reside together with three Gods of Misfortune, and there is in addition the most unlucky Star of the Dark Sword Killer. The unlucky factors attenuated the influence of the Gods of Good Fortune. What saddened Miyo was the thought that it was her own Star of the Dark Sword Killer that had killed her dogs.

But she just naturally loved dogs. So, for security also, as a single woman, she spent a whole 50,000 yen on a Shiba hunting dog from a kennel, a pup with a certificate of pedigree. The Shiba is a smart dog. If a stranger wanders down the street in the distance, the dog will set to barking clamorously. It has, one imagines, a particularly well-developed sense of smell. Miyo remembered with sadness the Shiba at her in-laws' in Hiratsuka. In fact, it was to propitiate the spirit of the dog bullied by her two sisters-in-law that she had bought the same breed of dog. She didn't actually have to go and get a pure-breed. But spending so much money gave it the feel of a requiem for that beloved, unfortunate pet.

She called the dog "Sab," short for "Saburo," the traditional name for a third male child. For no particular reason, all three of her dogs had been males.

Sab was quite sensitive: when any noise such as a footfall was still some distance away, his ears would prick up, and his supple body would immediately assume an alert posture. Those intelligent eyes would focus on the direction of the sound, and he would start barking even in the house. He grew accustomed to the footsteps and voices of the neighbors, and at those sounds he would merely raise his head; but for anything else he would not stop barking until the sound had passed completely by.

However, it is not correct, actually, to say that the dog was sensitive to the sound of human footsteps. Rather, its sense of smell was so highly developed that from far away it could distinguish between different people on the basis of body odor. This is borne out by the sort of behaviors one sees in police dogs on television shows. Miyo's experience clearly conforms to that as well.

When Sab was about a year old, the footsteps of a man passing in front of the house could be heard nights, around one or two in the morning. This continued for a stretch of about five months. "Continued," but not every night: at least Miyo herself only heard it once or twice a week. The dog would wake up and dash out of its bedding and pace about just inside the vestibule, or by the verandah's storm windows, barking toward the outside of the house. The Shiba is a nervous barker. Awakened by the commotion, Miyo heard the footsteps as they receded quietly into the distance.

Since it was an alleyway, there were no cars passing in front of the house; and even in the daytime there was little pedestrian traffic. The alley's use was pretty much limited to local residents who knew it to be a shortcut between two broader streets. It was therefore unusual for a stranger to pass through it. And it was all the more rare for someone not from the vicinity to be passing through in the dead of night, when everyone was asleep. The reason Miyo knew it was an outsider was because Sab barked; if it had been a local, he would have kept silent.

At first, the dog was making such a racket that Miyo thought she would softly open the storm shutters a crack and take a peek at this midnight passerby, an apparent stranger; but then that seemed so weird she couldn't work up the courage. After about three months had elapsed, however, Sab's behavior changed. Even when he heard the footsteps he gradually barked less and less. Then he would let out a growl, but eventually even that subsided. Finally he just raised his head and pricked up his ears. He had apparently gotten used to the sound of the footsteps,

or rather to the scent of the body odor drifting in from the man who was so frequently passing by in the middle of the night. Sab seemed to have decided that this fellow was safe. The man's footsteps were quiet enough, but he favored one leg over the other, so that the second footfall was lighter than the first, giving his gait a "dum-tah, dum-tah" pattern.

It wasn't right around there, but not too far away somebody's wife got murdered. It happened one night when the husband was away at his night job. The police were quoted in the newspaper as speculating that the assailant may have been an acquaintance—that there was perhaps some love entanglement.

After that incident, the footsteps at midnight, which had been continuing for five months, apparently ceased. Miyo shuddered at the realization. She seriously thought of going to the police, but she hesitated, thinking that somehow the criminal might take revenge on her. Around there, she was the only single woman with a barking dog. So she kept mum, and the investigators never cracked the case, which was finally closed. Sab, who had been barking at those footsteps, grew quieter. But for some time, Miyo retained a strong mental impression of this man's footsteps and his peculiar gate.

By and by, the whole narrow alleyway was bought up for a condo development fronting onto one of the main streets. Discussions were held among the alley residents, but at times when Miyo was usually away at work, either for the early shift or the late shift. She left everything up to the negotiating committee. The agreement was an advantageous one, and with the settlement money she bought a small, old house with some land in the Asakusa area. She could not live in an apartment, since she was out a lot and had a pet dog, and was therefore rejected. So even though she was single, she bought a house, on account of the dog. That way, she had no worries about troubling the neighbors.

Sab turned three. He could readily sense Miyo's feelings, almost as if he were human. For example, when she was scheduled for the late shift, all she had to do was think about going out shopping for him to react, nibbling and tugging on her skirt hem. What he most hated was her going out. With those bright eyes of his, he would scrutinize Miyo's every movement, trying to penetrate to her innermost thoughts.

Miyo of course ate the same food she gave her dog; they took meals together. No matter how much she swept the house, there was dog hair everywhere. Dog hairs were even floating in the miso soup on the dining table. Miyo would care-

fully remove the hairs with her chopsticks and then drink the soup, unconcerned. It was like a mother finishing what her child leaves on its plate. And dog hair was stuck everywhere on Miyo's clothes.

But Sab understood when Miyo had to leave for work. She would utter words of farewell or greeting: "I'm off!" "I'm back!" "You missed me, didn't you!" When she was going out, the dog did not budge; it just saw her off with its lonely-looking eyes. When she returned home, he leapt up at her, his whole body filled with joy, licking her face all over. However, if she was not going out to work—if it was just to cheer herself up with an outing to a department store or a cinema, Sab would object fiercely, clamping onto her legs with his teeth. When she broke free, Sab would watch her go with a truly reproachful look. When Miyo returned, Sab would sniff her whole body thoroughly. As a dog-lover, Miyo would sometimes hug the dogs of people she knew when she was out of the house. When Sab discerned the scent of any such "Other," he would howl insanely and scratch Miyo's hands.

Whenever anyone was talking about a dog, Miyo leaned forward, all ears. If she heard that another person's dog was ill, she sympathized with an expression of concern as earnest as if it were a neighborhood child that was being discussed. And if she heard about a dog that had actually died, her eyes would glisten and tears spontaneously begin to flow. She was not as emotional when she heard of the death of someone she knew. The waitresses at Hatsune, in their silvery-grey kimono, marveled. "She wouldn't drop a tear at the death of her lover, but if she gets wind of the death of some strange dog, she takes it personally, and my how those tears will flow!" Even the death of someone else's dog reminded her of the dog that had suffered such abuse at her former in-law's in Hiratsuka and then wound up in a ditch after being run over; and it also reminded her of the Akita that died, enervated by the heat. And then overlaid on all that was the image of Sab, waiting for her alone. So she was feeling two, three, levels of sorrow at once. But this, the waitresses had no way of knowing.

Finally Miyo found a lover. His family name was Ito, and he occasionally came to Hatsune with his supervisor from work. A rugby player in his college days, Ito was broad-shouldered and chunky. He was a 32-year-old bachelor, and he was smitten with Miyo at the register. After he had taken her out to tea many times, Miyo became persuaded of the depth of his passion. And he asked for her hand in marriage.

Miyo had failed at first to mention her own history of divorce. Feeling guilty about that, she could not immediately give her consent to Ito. Their relationship proceeded without considering the subject further. Sometimes, when Miyo had the early shift, she would get out of work at 6:00 and go to some place where Ito was waiting for her. They would have a simple dinner together, and then she would follow him to a cheap hotel.

Looking at their horoscopes, it turned out that Ito's Single White Water sign and her own Triple Blue Jupiter were perfectly compatible. Even with the intrusion of the Dark Sword Killer, she grew more comfortable with the idea of accepting Ito's marriage proposal. But when, predictably, Sab got wind of their intimacy, it was both troubling and painful for Miyo.

When she returned home after one of these dates, Sab, who normally greeted her so playfully, instead sniffed around her persistently, and finally burst into howls of betrayal, snapping at her in earnest. It was impossible to escape the inference that Sab was detecting on her body the lingering body odor of the man. No matter how scrupulously she washed in the bath at the hotel, Sab would not fail to detect even the slightest remaining trace of this foreign odor.

When she went to work on a day on which she had not promised to go on a date with Ito afterward, Sab would simply see her off with his usual lonely gaze. But if she had made a date, Sab would glare at her as she was going out from the vestibule, his hair bristling all over as he assumed an attack stance. He seemed to read the mind of his mistress, as she looked forward to her date. She admonished him, saying, "I'm sorry, but don't be jealous. You should be happy for me!" However, as with a husband ablaze with jealousy, her words had no effect.

Ito had a five-day paid vacation every year, and invited Miyo to go with him to Kagoshima. Miyo had never been to the southern part of Japan before, and she yielded to the temptation of a five-day, four-night pleasure trip with her lover. Coming up with an appropriate excuse for arranging a five-day holiday from her job posed no particular problem; the difficulty was leaving Sab alone in the house for that long. Sab was house-trained: he was absolutely never incontinent indoors, and he always defecated at the same spot in the garden. The problem was feeding him. Even if Miyo prepared five days' worth of food, a dog could not be counted on to be hungry at the right times, and there was also the concern about spoilage.

So Miyo went to the housewife next door and asked her to take care of just the food. She had of course never asked her to do such a thing before. No matter how

used to this woman Sab was, she was not his mistress. And even though she was a homemaker, she was not as solicitous of dogs as Miyo was, and sometimes failed to notice certain things.

Miyo gave the housewife detailed instructions. Still feeling a tug on her heart-strings, she went off to Kagoshima with Ito. The day they landed, they stayed in town; the next day they were to stay at Kirishima Hotsprings, then Miyazaki. It was quite an itinerary, the schedule having been arranged by Ito, including reservations with the hotels or ryokan-style inns.

She spent the first night with Ito at their lodgings in Kagoshima, but for all his warm affection, Miyo was concerned about Sab, alone at home. She worried about him all through the night, and caught not a wink of sleep as she lay beside the soundly snoring Ito until morning. In her mind's eye she saw Sab's disheartened, sorrowful eyes as she left the house, and his dejected form as he was left alone in the house. She could not possibly endure another four days traveling with Ito.

"What, you want to go back *now*?" Ito scrutinized her face in astonishment. When he had understood her reason, he responded with the lover's entirely natural demand: "Which one are you in love with, me or the dog?" But when Miyo just cried and cried, even Ito's glare eventually cooled off.

After that incident, Ito stopped showing up. He never even phoned.

Less than a year elapsed before Miyo found another lover. He was a customer by the name of Takashima, a 50-year-old division chief or department head at a top trading company. She was won over by some sweet-talking at that gift display case by the register. Naturally, Takashima was married with children.

Since there was no expectation of marriage for her, the reason Miyo threw in her lot with Takashima (even though he was middle-aged) was that her experience of the burly body of young Mr. Ito had fired up the animal instincts of a woman in her prime. She had married too young, and her husband had been feeble.

Where Takashima differed from Ito—and this was perhaps a function of age—was in his liberality, even his extravagance. With Ito, for example, they would pacify their stomachs with a basic curry dish, or some simple soba noodles, and then hurry off to a cheap hotel. Takashima, however, would take her to dinner at a famous restaurant serving French cuisine, or else they would get something special at a gourmet Japanese restaurant. Then they would take a taxi to a fancy

“love hotel.” The hotel’s spacious rooms were luxuriously appointed, a far cry from the cramped and chilly rooms she went to with Ito, which had been so small you practically felt you’d bump your nose against the walls. And Ito had only the forcefulness of youth, whereas Takashima had a fully mature technique. He was solicitous afterwards as well, going out of his way as he returned home, to drop her off near her Asakusa residence.

Once out of every three rendezvous or so, in spite of Miyo’s refusals, Takashima would sneak some money into her handbag. His wife was an invalid, almost entirely bedridden.

Takashima’s astrological sign was Ninefold Purple Mars. A union with such a sign was a matter of neither “Great Good Fortune” nor “Bad Fortune,” but simply “Good Fortune.” Since Ito had been so incredibly compatible, and things had turned out so badly, she felt that mere intermediate “Good Fortune” held promise of a longer-lasting relationship than did “Great Good Fortune.” At this level of compatibility, she thought, perhaps the Dark Sword Killer in her House would remain quiescent.

Around this time, customers standing at the register commented that Miyo seemed even more beautiful or alluring than before; the waitresses said so, too. Nobody knew that the person she was seeing was Takashima, and she had to keep it that way. No matter how she was teased by those around her, Miyo just smiled silently, with a bit of snaggletooth showing between her full lips. Her skin was suffused with a most charming glow: she gleamed.

Sab had, of course, sniffed out his mistress’s affair. When Miyo left for work on a day on which she had promised meet Takashima, Sab would see her off with a scowl. On her return, he would give her body the usual once-over sniffing, and then set to growling and pawing at her.

When Miyo was bathing, Takashima spotted the scratches on her chest and thighs. Because of these locations, Miyo had to dispel any misunderstanding on Takashima’s part, so she told him about her pet dog. Takashima had burst out laughing. He said, “I like dogs, too!” Miyo was relieved: “Oh, I’m so glad.” Now she thought that things would go well, for sure. She had increased confidence that their relationship would be long-lasting. She was happy.

It was about half a year into her relationship with Takashima. One day, at about one in the afternoon, Sab was lying sprawled out on the tatami when he abruptly got up and went near the back door, growling low. You could tell from his tense

posture that that was where he was focusing his attention.

“Anybody home? I’m from Sugihara Industrial Services.” It was a man’s voice coming from beyond the hinged, glass-paned door. When Miyo bought this house, the only renovations she had done were to the kitchen and lavatory, and Sugihara was the plumbing company used at that time. The water had not been coming out of either faucet properly for a while now, and she had phoned several times. They had finally sent a repairman.

The repairman was about thirty-six or thirty-seven, a thin man with sunken cheeks and hollow eyes. When he and Miyo came face to face, he looked startled, but she didn’t notice. The repairman opened up his toolbox, took apart the main pipe, and fiddled around. Since she was on the late shift that day, in order to arrive at work at 3:00 she needed to leave the house at 2:00. Wondering if he would be finished with his repairs inside an hour, she darted glances toward the back of his squatting, uniformed figure, as she busied herself with other chores.

Sab had withdrawn into a corner and stayed there, staring at the repairman and occasionally growling. Sab barked at the person who came round each month to collect for the newspaper deliveries; but when this repairman first showed up in his work clothes at the rear entrance, and then even when the man entered and began work, Sab did not make any real fuss, confining himself to a low growl. That was unusual.

The repair work was finished in less than an hour. The repairman showed Miyo that he was done, turning the faucet so that the water gushed out. And as he was putting his wrench and screwdrivers and small hammer and pliers back into his toolbox, he volunteered that his main job was taxi driver, but that he had taken advantage of his off-duty hours to moonlight with this job. In the course of that essentially one-sided muttering, he asked how Takashima-san was doing. Miyo felt as if it were her heart that had suddenly been wrenched by the plumber. As she stood stock still, frozen in shock, he told her, “About a month ago, you and Takashima-san caught a cab outside a love hotel. That was my taxicab.”

“Of course,” he said, “at the time the two of you got into my cab, I didn’t know the man’s name was Takashima. But after he dropped you off near here, he had me take the highway as far as the Shinjuku off-ramp, then go by surface streets to the Nakano area.” He told her the precise route they took. Finally, at the house where the man had got out, there was a nameplate by the front gate: Takashima Mitsuo.

"From outside the hotel up till we got to this area, you two were so lovey-dovey, I could see that in my rear-view mirror; it made me envious. Good-looking woman, I thought. I fell for you, at first sight. Sheer chance, but today I was called to your house for plumbing repairs. Looks like the god of love has brought me together with the girl of my dreams." His gloomy eyes glistened. He spoke in a cloying whine.

"After that," he continued, "I developed an interest, see, and I looked into this guy Takashima. A big wheel at a top trading company, right? And he's got a terrific wife, I hear. So if you don't want the company or that wife to get told anything, how about you give me a little on the side?" And he looked her square in the face.

To Miyo's eyes, it grew as dark as night. The taxicab driver moonlighting as a plumbing repairman was cajoling her: "All it takes is one phone call from me to Takashima's wife, or to one of the bosses in his company, and your relationship is history. But I'm not trying to steal you away from Takashima or anything. Nobody has to know. You can meet me here, secretly. If you don't want to lose somebody important to you, this is what you gotta do."

The next day he had to drive his taxi, but the day after that he would be off-duty. "Like tonight, but tonight I have stuff to do. I'll come again in the evening, day after tomorrow. So you be expecting me, okay?" This repairman was still hammering away. Overcome by fear and a looming sense of ruin, Miyo lost all personal volition. As if bewitched, she kept silent and involuntarily nodded.

With a thin smile of satisfaction, the man grabbed Miyo's arms, draped them over his neck, and tried to draw her close enough so he could steal a kiss. Startled, Miyo resisted; and now Sab got up and barked. So the man gave up. But he reminded her, "Well, day after tomorrow, in the evening, right?" Then, on his way back out, he threw a backward glance at Sab, and muttered, as if it were just a throwaway line, "Oh, you got a Shiba here, huh. Shibas bark plenty, but you know, if a person comes by often, they'll get used to him soon enough, and stop barking."

Certainly it was the case that when this taxi-driver-cum-moonlighting-repairman had showed up at the back door, Sab just growled and did not bark. As a reaction to someone coming for the very first time, this was extraordinary behavior. It was precisely the attitude Sab would take toward someone he knew.

Miyo was reminded somehow of the incident of those footsteps four years ago,

in the alley in Asakusabashi. So she rang up the veterinarian that she went to when Sab was ill. According to the vet, a dog could distinguish a given person from quite far away, not by using its hearing, but rather by using its more highly developed sense of smell to identify body odor. And once it could recognize this person by his body odor, it would not forget it for as long as five years. So even if the owner moved, if the same person were to come around, and pass in front of the new house and so on, the dog would still remember that person.

Two days later. Evening. That was the time of day set unilaterally by the taxi driver, and at seven o'clock Miyo waited at home, with Sab by her side. At around ten minutes to 8:00, the footsteps she had been waiting for could be heard approaching the house. Sab pricked up his ears, but did not bark. The footfall was lopsided, with one shoe striking the surface of the pavement more heavily than the other, in a "dum-tah, "dum-tah" sort of pattern. It was very nearly the same as that of the footsteps she used to hear four years ago, when she was living in the alleyway in Asakusabashi, in the period just before that housewife was murdered nearby.

The taxi driver called out. Miyo unlocked the back door. The driver was dangling a piece of meat to give to the dog. He was bow-legged. When he stepped up onto the tatami flooring, he started for her right away. When Miyo saw that the dog wasn't letting out even a peep, she stopped the man herself. "Just a minute. I have to go out to the pharmacy and get something. I'll be right back. "What do you need to get?" he demanded. She turned red, and said in a small voice, "Something so I don't have a baby." The man grinned and let go of her.

At the pharmacy there was one of those ubiquitous red pay phones. She dialed 110. What if this driver is the man who murdered that housewife four years ago? She didn't know for sure. But the police would look into it for her, right? What was definite was that Takashima would be dismayed at the police investigation and would break up with her. Miyo thought, "Even that middling 'Good Fortune' wasn't so 'Fortunate' after all."

* * * * *

“Plumes of Fire in the North”

(Story No. 3, 第三話 「北の火箭」)

On March 1st, 1968, just after 3:00 p.m., an old-model four-engine Stratoliner that had departed from Phnom Penh, Cambodia, landed at Vientiane Airport in Laos. On its sooty silvery wings, in large black letters, were stenciled the initials ICC, standing for the International Control Commission, comprised of representatives of India, Poland, and Canada. When that small, 36-seater fuselage touched down, the nose tilted up at so sharp an angle it was reminiscent of a playground slide.

There were no commercial aircraft, giving the airport a spacious look. Along the far perimeter stood a row of palm trees. The roofs of two or three stilt houses poked through among the trees. In a corner of the airport, five military training planes were lined up like dragonflies. One of them was damaged. No troops were to be seen. Beyond the Annamite Mountain Range visible from here, American Air Force B-52 bombers were strewing bombs day after day. But here in Laos it was unbelievably quiet and peaceful.

On the terrace of the two-story air terminal, two Japanese men were watching the passengers as they exited the ICC plane. One was Shichiro Okaya, 49, a writer /commentator. The other was Heikichi Harada, 32, a magazine writer. If they looked like they were all geared up for a mountain-climbing expedition, it was because they were hoping to board that ICC airplane for a trip to North Vietnam, currently under bombardment.

Mixed in with the men descending the passenger stairway was a single blonde-haired woman. It was a pity the day was so overcast: that dulled the luster of her hair. Their attention focused on her, Okaya and Harada traded speculations as to her nationality. English? French, perhaps? Surely not American. She was dressed as if for a trek through the mountains and was carrying a red travel bag. Then her luxurious blonde hair disappeared into the transit lounge. Right behind her followed a scrawny man in his forties, wearing glasses and a black leather jacket, addressing words to her plump back.

A group of men in suits, and another group of women in Laotian tribal costume, had hitched space-available rides on the ICC plane and were also getting off at Vientiane. By contrast, the men outfitted in mountain climbing or hiking gear

were continuing on to Hanoi. Half were Europeans, and half were much thinner Vietnamese. They were followed by five or six Indian soldiers on duty for the International Control Commission, and a stewardess. Since the ICC planes were at risk of attack by American warplanes, the presence of a French stewardess, as if it were a commercial flight, was surprising. As to the blonde woman and the man in glasses who had caught the attention of Okaya and Harada, they were Mme. Jeanette de Sayre and Dr. James Merton, Ph.D.

The four made one another's acquaintance formally one night on the terrace of a restaurant on the banks of the Mekong River. The restaurant, managed by a Japanese woman, was located four kilometers from their hotel with its "Ten Thousand Elephants" national flag fluttering on a pole. The restaurant was surrounded by palm trees. There was no electric lighting, just bare candles on the tables, and oil lamps elsewhere.

Mme. Jeanette de Sayre was a Belgian poetess. As she had received an invitation from Hanoi, it was obvious that the poetry she wrote was neither reactionary nor decadent. She was thirty-five or thirty-six, possibly a bit younger. She had an ample figure, with a round face and large and attractive eyes. Her manner of speech was far younger than her years. She spoke a refined and fluent English, of course.

Her companion, Dr. James Merton, Ph.D., was a professor at a university in Ottawa, Canada. He gave his specialty as sociology, introducing himself, however, as not just a sociologist but also Advisor to a Peace Movement Committee created by students. His high forehead was topped with a shock of curly hair. The contemplative eyes behind his glasses always seemed somehow melancholy. He was slow of speech. This whole impression from their first, candlelight encounter remained unchanged for Okaya, right up until the end.

The first topic of conversation among the four was when the ICC plane could be expected to take off from Vientiane Airport. Okaya and Harada had already been kept waiting at Vientiane for three weeks. ICC planes were supposed to make round trips both to Saigon in South Vietnam, and to Hanoi in North Vietnam, twice a week, but the northbound planes kept stopping at Vientiane and pulling back to Saigon. According to airport personnel, they couldn't fly into Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport due to inclement weather in North Vietnam. It is a fact that every year, from February to the beginning of April, a stationary low-pressure system builds up over the Tonkin Gulf, generating water vapor that piles into the Anna-

mite Range and showers North Vietnam with rain on a daily basis, not unlike Japan's rainy season. Even if it is clear weather to the west of the mountains, it is still not feasible to fly. And indeed, it was because Mme. de Sayre and Prof. Merton could not go to Hanoi on the ICC plane that they had just been marking time in Phnom Penh for two weeks. Finding that no longer bearable, they had decided to get as close as they could to North Vietnam, and so had come here, to Vientiane.

Surprisingly, the two were not acquaintances of long standing. They had met by chance when they found themselves seated next to each other on the Air France flight from Orly to Phnom Penh. They had fallen into conversation, during which they discovered that their destination was the same. Apparently Prof. Merton had offered to serve as her escort on this dangerous journey. An escort of some sort was entirely appropriate: the journey would take place under indiscriminate bombing by B-52s. The female poet spoke of the lovely Hotel Royal, where they had stayed in Phnom Penh: the clusters of bright red flowers on the bougainvillea drooping down over the pool in the courtyard; the fragrance of the white jasmine blossoms strewn abundantly on the tables. She also related how, in order to make the most of their extra time in Phnom Penh, the two of them had undertaken a two-day trip to tour the ruins of Angkor Wat.

At the Lan Xang ("Ten Thousand Elephants") Hotel overlooking the Mekong River at Vientiane, the Belgian poetess and the Canadian professor had adjacent rooms; directly across the corridor were Okaya's and Harada's two rooms. The placement of the two newcomers in rooms that were side by side, and directly across from the two Japanese, was probably not done at their own request. It would certainly appear that the Thai check-in clerk at the Front Desk had seen their passports, learned that all four of them had a common destination, and decided to place the Belgian woman of French extraction and the Canadian scholar opposite the two earlier Japanese arrivals, so as to make one convenient cluster.

Every evening, Okaya and Harada were at their leisure, and for recreation they would go out to a horrid little cabaret three kilometers away in the Dong Palan district. The poetess and the professor, however, never set foot in the place. Harada invited them to go along, but the professor's stony countenance grew even colder. He declined with a "Thanks, but..." and an unwilling expression on his face.

However, the first floor of the hotel had a bar, and it was not long before Mme. de Sayre entered it, a smile playing about her amiable face. Following deferentially in his role as escort came Dr. Merton, Ph.D., his head tilted down and his

cheeks reddening in a most youthful manner. The bar turned out to be heavily frequented by CIA operatives stationed at the American military base at Vientiane. They were obviously military types but dressed as civilians due to the Laotian government's professed neutrality and refusal to station American troops in Laos. They were gulping down rivers of Scotch (Vientiane being a "free port") and chatting with Laotian generals and other high-ranking officers, also in civilian garb, who had also come here to drink.

The CIA group were undoubtedly tasked with radioing the American airbase at Udon Thani, in Thailand, on a daily basis, with any information they might glean about their neighboring enemy. Naturally they knew where the four travelers were headed; and for all the ripe feminine charms of the French-Belgian woman, when she appeared in the bar they gave her the cold shoulder. The two Japanese, as well as the poetess and the professor, found themselves isolated in this bar.

Okaya and Harada refrained from forcing their acquaintance on the woman and the scholar. Besides, after two weeks, they had exhausted all the obvious topics. So they took an attitude of leaving the couple across the corridor to their own devices. But also, one felt that some chemistry obtaining between the distaff poet and the professor had yielded a mysterious rapport, making it all the harder for the two men to approach them.

The professor, it seems, had a family back in Ottawa. The poetess had a husband in Anvers (Antwerp), who apparently operated a marine transport company. Neither of them was a child. They were both intellectuals, of a certain social standing; they were not about to do anything foolish.

However, Okaya thought he sensed something between the two of them. A man and a woman, not so advanced in years, staying together in a Phnom Penh hotel for over two weeks—something must have been going on. To be sure, their rooms were separate. But in the middle of the night they were free to visit each other. Mme. de Sayre had praised the red of the bougainvillea, and the scent of the jasmine strewn on the tables. Could this deep red of the tropics, and those powerful tropical aromas, have had no effect whatsoever on the senses of these two, especially on the passionate sensuality of the French-born woman from Belgium?

The two had spent a couple of days looking around Angkor Wat. The site of the ruins, Siem Reap, was a rural town roughly one-hour by air from Phnom Penh. When they were off sightseeing in the provinces like that, the two of them probably thought nothing of sharing a room.

These suspicions of Okaya's continued as the days passed. Far from diminishing, they intensified. When the two came down to the dining hall, they came down together; when they finished and left, they left together. They kept company strolling the banks of the Mekong River, or visiting Buddhist temples in town. As they passed by the brass gong decorating the lobby, and ascended the stairs, they did not go separately. Nor did they relate to each other as escort and escortee: to a stranger, they would have looked like a married couple. Perhaps because the professor was conscious of this, his face was constantly flushed, like an embarrassed youth.

Okaya refrained from mentioning his suspicions to Harada.

Late one evening, Okaya was in his own room, writing. One could say he was just killing time before the flight. In truth he was quite fed up after five weeks in boring Vientiane. He had been asked by a publisher to produce something, and he was gradually warming to his task.

Ten minutes past midnight. Okaya heard the sound of a door across the corridor being stealthily opened. He looked at the clock on his dresser to confirm the time. The north-side rooms across the corridor were occupied exclusively by Europeans; it was in the middle of that line of rooms that Mme. de Sayre and Prof. Merton had been accommodated side by side. Correspondingly, Okaya's and Harada's rooms were situated in about the middle of the line of rooms on the southern side. Harada, apparently, had already fallen asleep.

The faint sound of the lock clicking open on one of the doors opposite was followed, after a space of about five seconds, by the sound of the door of the adjacent room opening. Clearly the second room's occupant was providing an intimate welcome for a late-night visitor. Since there was no knock, it certainly appeared as though this visit had been arranged beforehand. No question but that the visitor was the professor. The professor's room was across and to the left; the woman's room was across and to the right.

At 2:20 a.m. came the faint sound of the door on the right opening. Then one could hear slippers padding along the corridor. That continued for about three seconds, then the door on the left creaked softly as the padding-sound entered. That was followed by the soft click of the lock.

The first thing that occurred to Okaya was that his suspicions had been borne out by reality. During the couple's two weeks in Phnom Penh, the flaming red of

the bougainvillea, and the pleasure-heightening aroma of the jasmine, had stimulated a sexual intimacy. The professor gallantly serving as escort, the richly receptive poetess: together they had developed feelings for each other that went beyond friendship. And if the middle-aged yet inexperienced professor had been lured into it in this way, that would not have been at all strange. Madame de Sayre, whose husband was in Anvers, and Professor Merton, whose wife was in Ottawa, were diverting themselves, on their journey, with a little *aventure*.

They may have had a sense of liberation, but this was no ordinary tourist trip. It was a visit to a country that was currently fighting America. Who could guarantee their safety? Escort and escortee, both were in the same boat, sharing a certain state of mind.

The next morning, when Okaya and Harada went down to the dining room, Mme. de Sayre and Prof. Merton were seated face-to-face, eating a breakfast of ham-and-eggs and bread. They were conversing in a familiar manner. However, that show of intimacy was nothing new; Okaya saw nothing conspicuous that tallied with the noises he had heard the previous night.

Nevertheless, that evening, and the evening after that, as he pushed pen across paper in his own room a little after midnight, Okaya heard the stealthy back-and-forth between the room on the left and the room on the right, across the corridor. Unfortunately for the professor and the poetess, the hotel's soundproofing was poor. With the two Japanese staying directly opposite them, what caution they must have exercised!

On March 19th, the Indochina Control Commission's Stratoliner shuttle at long last slipped through the nighttime clouds and landed at Hanoi's Gia Lam Airport. All the invited guests aboard this flight were accommodated at the antiquated French-style Thong Nhat Hotel, built during the colonial era. The rooms were assigned by a hotel management committee, and Okaya was placed on the third floor, while Harada was on the second floor. At first, they did not know where either the poetess or the university professor was, but it was certain that they were in the right-hand wing of the U-shaped hotel. One could not assume that this was something the professor or Madame had requested. Even if a guest had expressed a preference, the committee, unlike an ordinary hotel manager, would have simply gone by the book and rejected the request.

Okaya and Harada were assigned a Vietnamese interpreter who was an excellent

speaker of Japanese. And the poetess and the professor were also assigned one interpreter, a Vietnamese woman. That meant that Jeanette de Sayre and James Merton were officially recognized by the committee as operating as a single party.

The center of Hanoi was “sacrosanct” — safe and exempt from bombing by the American Air Force. But set foot out towards the suburbs, and straightaway you came across ruins. On your way in to the hotel you could see, in the darkness, the wreckage of a rolling stock factory by the airport. The framework of a bridge over the Red River, North Vietnam’s largest river, had collapsed into a pile of twisted iron. An engineering corps had substituted for it a pontoon bridge of floating iron boxes. Chinese-style homes had been reduced to rubble, with only some stucco walls left standing.

In the educational district in the suburbs, entire campuses had been razed, leaving nothing but lots that were vacant except for piles of black ashes. Hospitals, Christian churches, Buddhist temples: they were not exempted either. At every bridge, female soldiers with carbines slung over their shoulders stood ready to shoot at the bombers. They also concealed themselves on the tops of buildings in town, and on the roofs of homes. On distant roadways, large military trucks passed by under rows of elms or poplars, laden with surface-to-air missiles hidden under leaves and grass; other vehicles were jam-packed with soldiers camouflaged like shrubbery. In the town’s back alleys, women were clustered in groups, engaged in the manufacture of concrete bomb shelters resembling huge octopus traps. Everywhere citizens bustled about on carts and three-wheelers piled high with defense-related materials.

Night after night there were air raids. The beams of searchlights crisscrossed the sky; the B-52s caught in their glare shone silver against the white background of nearby clouds. Coming from who knows where, arcing up like fireworks, missiles exploded everywhere, together with all manner of tracer rounds; the sound of the missiles mixed with the sound of falling bombs; the earth shook.

Compared to Vientiane, this was the difference between Heaven and Earth. Or perhaps one should say the difference between Paradise and Hell. It was to inform the world of the realities of America’s inhumane bombing that a limited number of opinion-makers had been invited from all over the globe.

Given that goal, the invitees were led about by interpreter-guides as they inspected the various regions of the North. They could not exercise free will as visitors: their itinerary was pre-determined by a committee. And the committee paid

the utmost attention to securing their foreign visitors' personal safety. Their activities were predicated on that.

Before they went out into the countryside, they inspected mostly urban facilities, so Okaya and Harada were repeatedly going in and out of the Thong Nhat Hotel. They had no time for leisurely conversation with the poetess or the professor. All of them took breakfast in the dining hall at about the same time. Vietnamese cuisine and simple French fare were both represented. But the couple seated themselves facing each other at a separate table a little away from the others. If Okaya and Harada came later, they were not even invited to sit down at the next table; if Madame and the professor came later, the two of them never drew near the others. The couple seemed as lighthearted as if they were both on their second marriage and honeymoon and did not wish to be bothered by anyone else.

Okaya did not even know if the two of them were staying next to each other. One could not ask the hotel's management committee about this sort of thing. But one could conjecture. It was an air raid that provided a clue.

There were air raids every evening. Three or even four an evening. Never a letup, not even one single evening. Once the air raid siren had sounded, people in the hotel had thirty seconds before power to the lights was cut. In those thirty seconds, they had to get out of bed, get dressed, put on their shoes, and grab a metal helmet and a flashlight. Then, as quickly as possible, they had to walk down the stairs and duck into the air-raid shelter in the garden. The shelter was a long and narrow shed, half buried underground, capable of accommodating fifty people.

Thus, during a raid, one could see in this shelter almost everyone staying at the hotel. Always, the first in were a group of ten or so Chinese railway workers, in their blue suits with the stand-up collars. None of the other guests ever entered the shelter before the Chinese. Perhaps this was because the rooms of the Chinese workers were nearest the shelter. As the surrounding earth rumbled with the sound of the bombs and missiles, inside the air raid shelter it took on the atmosphere of a lounge; but this representative group of Chinese railway construction engineers, with copies of the little red *Quotations from Chairman Mao* sticking out of their pockets, always remained impassive and silent.

Into this scene, following Prof. Merton's lead, came Mme. de Sayre, wearing a negligee of gaudy color and design, and her metal helmet. Prof. Merton was fully dressed.

One would think that, had the two of them not been placed in adjacent rooms, or

at least nearby ones, they would not have been able to come dashing into the shelter together like this. Indeed, if the male professor had been in the female poet's room during those thirty seconds between the sounding of the air raid siren and lights-out, it was definitely possible for them to come into the shelter as a couple. If they had been in separate rooms, then by the time the professor had knocked on her door and hurried her out of bed, the thirty seconds would have elapsed and everything would have gone dark. But it was only the professor who was clutching a flashlight. So, in the same darkened room had stood a man and a woman. The fact that danger heightens a woman's sexual psychology is something that crops up in Western novels. And with the air raid siren sounding thrice in a night, one could hardly get any real sleep. Since this was a nightly occurrence, there were plenty of opportunities for something to develop between the poetess and the professor.

One night, when everyone was leaving the shelter, the professor had turned to Mme. de Sayre and addressed her gently as "Jeanette." Now, when a man uses a woman's first name it is an expression of intimacy; and while that does not necessarily mean that they are lovers, in this case one could conclude safely that in fact they were.

In the mornings, when Okaya and his friend were in the lobby, waiting for their interpreter-guide, they would often bump into the poetess and the professor, who were setting out a step ahead of them, with their own female Vietnamese interpreter. The poetess, her metal helmet pushed onto her back, looked for all the world as if she were merrily setting out on a picnic. Her professor-escort's irrepressible happiness was beaming from every corner of his smiling face. It seemed as though, for them, there were no bombs, no war. The hotel's other lodgers were all on edge due to the rumor going around that the American Air Force might possibly use a nuclear bomb. But these two led a unique existence.

Okaya and Harada left Hanoi for the provinces. Accommodations there were minimal. To the north, in particular, in Hoa Binh Province, *ampela* matting would be attached to bamboo poles to make walls; and the only illumination was provided by candlelight. It was no better than a *nipa* hut made of bamboo and thatched palm fronds; perhaps it was inferior. That was all very romantic, but the shared toilet was outdoors and fifty meters away. Furthermore, to get to it, one had to traverse a path that sloped down through heavy grasses. And in the darkness, depending exclusively on a flashlight, one was worried sick about the danger

of stepping on a snake lurking in the grasses. Here, it was said, there were poisonous snakes, the same color as the grasses—snakes that would strike from behind.

A plateau and highlands extend from Hoa Binh Province to Lai Chau Prefecture on the border with Laos. This marked the route that the B-52s took on their round-trip missions over Hanoi, originating from a base in Thailand. And here was where the returning bombers dumped all their surplus bombs. The highlands were pockmarked with huge craters. Civilian guards would sound air raid warnings, and people would flee their vehicles and take cover in the forests. Since the B-52s were dropping their bombs on no particular target, one could meet with bad luck at any moment.

In the early spring in the highlands, the grass was still withered and yellow. Hiding in a grove, one could smell the sweet, dead grass. There were also flowers that resembled violets. Above, the deafening roar of the American planes would come and then go. The earth-shaking bombs would fall, and trees and earth would rise up like black smoke. Here no surface-to-air missiles were set up.

When Okaya and Harada returned after their three-day journey in the provinces, Mme. de Sayre and Prof. Merton were not to be found at the hotel. It turned out that they had set forth on an identical itinerary, two days after Okaya and his friend. Again, Okaya wondered how the two of them were passing the nights, in the “*nipa* hut”-style hotels of Hoa Binh. Their Vietnamese woman interpreter-guide would probably have taken a separate room. Apart from their function as escorts, the interpreter-guides had a policy of not interfering in the guests’ private lives. Even at the hotel in Hanoi, as soon as the guests had entered their rooms, the staff retired for the night. There were no maids lolling about the corridors, no security guards patrolling in front of the guests’ rooms. Who could say that sexual passions were not excited by the primeval torrid-zone settings of Hoa Binh’s tropical hotels? Is this not precisely the theme on which Somerset Maugham wrote so exhaustively? Even to go to the outdoor toilet, Madame must have roused the professor from his slumbers and asked him to go along for protection. The flashlight making its way down the grassy path; two shadowy forms walking arm in arm; even when no stars shone in the sky, one star must have shone that only those two could see. And when, sometimes, they lay down on their stomachs in the highland woods, the sweet smell of the withered grass in their nostrils, prepared to die at any moment, they must have set their bodies very closely against each other.

Okaya and Harada went to Haiphong, where the bombing was the fiercest, and

they also went around Hon Gai harbor. The main bridge had collapsed, so they had to go on foot, over a temporary bridge. They crossed a great river on a raft made of bundled shafts of bamboo. They moved about only at night. Suddenly at the horizon, in the direction they were headed, there was a powerful, bright red flash. It was an air raid alert for vehicles passing through that area. Within five minutes, searchlights located off both sides of the car had caught the circling B-52s. The car cut its lights and ran full speed ahead. Red, yellow, blue: the smoke trails of missiles formed different colored lines as they shot up into the sky. Okaya's group abandoned the car and went into those octopus-trap bomb shelters set under rows of trees. The poetess and the professor must have come here after Okaya and Harada. They had abundant opportunities for romantic scenes.

On March 31st, America ceased the bombing of the North.

On April 5th, the members of the International Control Commission delegation—journalists, scientists, and other opinion-makers—landed back in Vientiane Airport aboard the ICC shuttle plane. A telegram was waiting for the poetess. As she informed Okaya, business related to her husband's marine transport company had helped bring him to Tokyo, where he was waiting for her, while she herself had changed her return trip to Brussels (via Paris) to a Tokyo-bound flight. Her face was flushed with pleasure. Okaya sneaked a look at Prof. Merton. The professor must have learned from her already that her husband was waiting for her in Tokyo. Behind the professor's eyeglasses, his eyes had returned to that contemplative, melancholy expression he had when Okaya first met him. However, his attitude as Jeanette de Sayre's escort had not changed in the slightest. It was as if he felt it his responsibility to hand her over safely to her husband.

Partly for business purposes, the poetess's husband, the Anvers shipping executive Marcel Langlois, had reserved rooms for a week at the T----- Hotel. On the third day after their arrival in Tokyo, Okaya and Harada were invited to lunch by Langlois, as an expression of thanks for having looked after his wife in Hanoi. Professor Merton was supposed to be returning to Ottawa, but explained that since he had come all the way to Tokyo anyway, he was visiting an academic friend and staying at a different hotel; he too accepted Langlois's invitation.

Marcel Langlois was a gentleman short in stature, nearing 60 years of age, with white hair. The age discrepancy was so great that one assumed that his marriage to Jeanette de Sayre was his second. The owner of a shipping company, Langlois

was courteous and generous, with a faint smile playing about his lips; he was a man of few words. But the way he looked at his talkative wife, the poetess, showed that he held her as dear as if she were his own daughter. He was most solicitous of his guests, as well.

The luncheon he gave to celebrate his wife's safe return was a friendly and enjoyable affair. But there was something oddly missing. His wife might raise the topic of how North Vietnam was fighting the war, or even slightly exaggerate the extent to which she had put her life on the line in her own experiences there; Okaya or Harada or Prof. Merton might chime in and try to broaden the discussion; but the conversation remained superficial. The genial Langlois did not seem to notice: from start to finish he just listened to them all, smiling all the while. He apparently thought that seeing his wife again—having her restored to him safe and sound—was the greatest happiness of his life. He seemed ecstatic.

The professor, however, was calm and cool. So was the talkative poetess. They hardly spoke to each other at all; they even avoided eye contact. But when Madame's passion as a poetess resulted unconsciously in a richly metaphorical turn of phrase, Langlois swung round to Okaya and gave him a wink, smiling all the while. Okaya was startled. Okaya thought one could interpret it as saying, "I know about everything my wife did."

They all congratulated each other once more on each other's health and safety, and then ended the luncheon. Okaya went to the offices of the magazine Harada worked for. Then, after meeting some friends in Ginza, he passed by the T-----Hotel in the evening, and found Prof. Merton standing alone, motionless, out on a side street. Okaya decided to hold off addressing the Professor until he made some movement. It turned out that the professor was peering through his spectacles at the display window of a shop that sold reproductions of ukiyo-e prints and the like. He was hunched over and evidently engrossed by what he saw. Okaya approached him from behind, but the professor still did not notice him. The ukiyo-e the professor was so absorbed in was titled, "Enjoying a Cool Evening on the Banks of the River Okawa." It showed a *yakata-bune*, a roofed pleasure boat with a tatami floor and *shoji* screen. On it, a beautiful woman was raising the rattan blinds to peek out; above stretched a deep blue night sky, across which "flower-fire" was blossoming. The fireworks showed forth in red, yellow, white, and pale blue. Okaya remained silent and passed behind the professor's back. The fireworks in the print overlapped, in memory, with the colors of the tracer rounds for

the surface-to-air missiles launched into the night sky. For the woman on the *yakata-bune*, the professor was unquestionably substituting the figure of the female poetess, and of himself, in Vietnam. The professor remained hunched over, rooted to the spot, as if he missed the vanished smoke trails over Vietnam. He was alone there in front of the display window; no one else had stopped to look. Staying in the hotel just next door were the Belgian shipping magnate and his poet-wife.

A year later, the poetess Jeanette de Sayre's *Vietnam: Through the Fires of War* was published and was available even in Japan. Okaya found and bought a copy at Maruzen Books, and read it. Her prose was beautiful, delicate, sensuous. But Prof. James Merton's name did not appear in a single line. Or rather, "a Canadian university professor" was mentioned, just once, as being among the passengers on the ICC flight from Vientiane to Hanoi. This poetess may have locked away what she most wanted to write about in a heart filled with myriad emotions. Okaya wondered: when the silver-haired Marcel Langlois contemplated the copy given to him by his wife, did he wink all alone?

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“The Departure”

(Story No. 4, 第四話 「見送って」)

The wedding celebration was held at a famous hotel in Tokyo, albeit in the smallest of the hotel's three banquet rooms. There were just over two hundred guests. The festivities began at 5:00 p.m.

The emcee was a colleague of the groom's at the bank where he worked. A Senior Managing Director and his wife served as presiding matchmakers. This Senior Managing Director was a chubby man over fifty years of age, red-faced, no doubt a liquor-lover. His wife, who was standing beside the bride during the formalities, was skinny. The Senior Managing Director began his comments with an announcement.

“First, I would like to report to everybody that one hour ago the wedding ceremony for our groom, Nobuo Hirose, and his bride, Yukiko Shimamura, was conducted auspiciously at a Shinto altar.”

In solemn tones, he then followed prescribed form to introduce the groom's family background, family members, and personal history, before moving on to introduce the bride's side. He could not take his eyes off his notes.

“Yukiko's father, Mr. Yoshimasa Shimamura, used to work for A---- Steel Corporation, but 22 years ago, when he was Assistant Director, he unfortunately died of an illness. Since then, Yukiko has grown up under the strict supervision and loving care of her mother, Motoko, and finally in the spring of last year she graduated from the English Literature Department of T---- Woman's University with an excellent record. Yukiko's grandmother—Yoshimasa's mother—has been living with Motoko and Yukiko. Since Grandma Shimamura has reached the advanced age of seventy-three, she is not, alas, able to attend today; but how happy she would be to see her beautiful granddaughter in her wedding dress, at the groom's side! She is said to be eagerly anticipating many photos of the wedding ceremony and this gathering.”

At the table in the rear-left corner of the room where the bride's family and relatives were seated, there was a woman with a long face and sloping shoulders, in her mid-forties, looking down and occasionally dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. This was Yukiko's mother, Motoko. Beside her were a tall man of around fifty and a plump woman with glasses about the same age as Motoko. This

couple was Yoshimasa's sister and her husband.

"The ancestors of the Shimamura family were retainers of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Yukiko's grandfather used to run a private school in Tokyo. The family lives in Ogikubo, near the former residence of Prince Konoe, and has substantial property. Although Grandpa Shimamura died in his mid-fifties, it is a well-established family, and the samurai spirit lives on in the household of the three women. Yukiko was brought up by her mother and grandmother according to strict but truly refined traditional standards. Therefore, she is not at all like some of those young women nowadays, the type who look like they might be boys. She is modest, intelligent, and well-mannered. "So young women like this still exist!" That was my thought, when I first met her and agreed to serve as matchmaker. I was quite surprised, and also pleased. Furthermore, my wife and I were both very impressed by her mother. We realized that Yukiko is the way she is because of her mother."

Seated at one of the front tables on the bride's side were five gentlemen in their fifties. The greeting by the matchmaker was followed by a congratulatory speech by a guest on the groom's side. The emcee then requested that Hisao Yoshioka, a former colleague of the bride's father and now Managing Director of A---- Steel Company, say a few words, and turned toward him. A functionary carried a microphone to a stout man with salt-and-pepper hair, who stood up at his seat.

"I am Hisao Yoshioka. I appreciate this opportunity to say a few words. Congratulations, Yukiko, from the bottom of my heart."

The Managing Director first turned to the bride, seated at the head table facing the guests, and bowed. Then he slowly turned his gaze to the guests. He was clearly experienced.

"Yukiko's father, Yoshimasa, used to be my colleague. Twenty-two years ago, we worked side by side. Tsutsui, Shimada, Okamura, and Sugiyama, who are seated here beside me, were his colleagues as well. And Utsumi, who couldn't come today due to unavoidable circumstances, was also one of the group. All of us cannot help thinking, "If only Yoshimasa were alive today!" He was a most reliable man, highly capable at his job. Although he was young then, his calm reticence had something in it of the old-time samurai. It made sense that he came from a family that had supported the Shogunate. All of his colleagues, without exception, were impressed by his profound character. After he died, six or seven of us got together to create an annual "Shimamura Day" on the anniversary of his

death, and for several years we used to visit the family on that day to reminisce about him. Today Yukiko is a lovely bride; but this was when she was still a small child, between the ages of about two and five, or in other words from when she was just toddling to when she could scamper about. We watched her grow.”

Yoshioka turned around towards the seats at the far end, across the room, where Motoko was seated.

“Motoko, we still remember your warm hospitality, and we are truly grateful to you. Our heartfelt congratulations to you today.”

Motoko bowed deeply to Yoshioka, and put a handkerchief to her eyes again. Yoshioka turned back.

“As the matchmaker just said, Yoshimasa’s father was an educator, so everything at his home was very strict. That atmosphere made us sit up straight when we visited. His father was already deceased, but his mother was well, as she is now. She was a wise wife who clearly supported her educator-husband from behind the scenes. I believe that Yoshimasa owed his good manners and upright behavior to his mother’s discipline at home. And Motoko has greatly benefited from her guidance and influence. Motoko was always an impeccable wife—she is modest, and has treated her mother-in-law with great respect. She has refined tastes, and composes traditional poetry. We used to envy Yoshimasa for marrying such a perfect woman. Yukiko must have inherited Motoko’s virtues, so I believe that the groom’s friends will soon be envious of him.”

Yoshioka’s slightly husky but pleasant voice carried throughout the room, over the loudspeaker . . .

Yukiko did not remember this friend of her deceased father, nor did she remember the four men in their fifties next to him. But she had a vague recollection of seven or eight men seated in a large *tatami* room, picking her up and holding her. She was perhaps four or five. Her then-young mother was entertaining them, serving food and drinks. This scene was fixed in Yukiko’s mind like a shadow picture. That was the “Shimamura Day” gathering mentioned by Yoshioka, her father’s friend who had risen to the position of Managing Director. She had no memory at all of her father, who had died within a year of her birth. She knew him only through photographs.

Yukiko had heard from Motoko that this once-a-year gathering ceased after five or six years because the group naturally fell apart, as some members moved away and some grew busy with their own lives. But a couple of people continued to

visit them for several more years. As she was only a child at that time, Yukiko could not now remember their faces. But she remembered their names because Motoko told her: Utsumi and Yamada. Some urgent business had prevented Utsumi from attending today's banquet, and Yamada had died ten years ago.

Motoko had started composing *tanka* poems when she was a young girl, and continued even after she became a wife and a mother. Yoshioka had touched on this in his speech. But it was only after Yoshimasa died that she began to study seriously. She joined a *tanka* society in Shibuya led by a female poet, and she was still a member. For Motoko, serving at her mother-in-law's beck and call, these poetry meetings were something to look forward to; they afforded her great relaxation and pleasure.

After someone from the groom's side spoke, the microphone was passed over to the bride's side again. The emcee requested some words from Masako Shimojo, Motoko's friend and fellow *tanka* devotee.

"My name is Shimojo. Congratulations, Yukiko. And also, congratulations to Motoko."

Masako Shimojo bowed slightly to Motoko, and her glasses glinted brilliantly. She was a round-faced, friendly-looking woman in her fifties.

"I have been good friends with Motoko for over ten years now. I have also been trying my hand at *tanka* poetry, and we often attend the society's meetings together. I occasionally visit her in Ogikubo, too, so I have had the opportunity to meet both her mother-in-law and Yukiko, and to get to know the family. And I must say, Motoko is that rare woman these days who has kept to the path of the filial daughter-in-law. As her husband's friend, Mr. Yoshioka, mentioned earlier, the Shimamuras are descendants of a respected educator, and also of prosperous former Shogun supporters. They seem to maintain stern samurai traditions more than the ordinary family does today. For Motoko to serve her mother-in-law faithfully even after she lost her husband is... what shall I say? Heart-warming? Beautiful? Those words do not suffice. She is a true model for modern Japanese women. Nowadays, people talk about the "nuclear family." A married couple prefer to live apart from their parents. When the man's father dies, they are reluctant to look after the widowed mother. Because daughters-in-law refuse to take in their mothers-in-law, the mothers-in-law are sadly forced to move around, staying at various times with one or another of their married children. Some say that this lack of sympathy and respect is a phenomenon of modern society, but I am an old-

fashioned woman and cannot accept that.

“Motoko, for her part, is not at all affected by such modern trends. She has the absolute purity and ineffable fragrance of a white chrysanthemum. It may seem a little rude to her mother-in-law, who is not present today, but I am amazed how well Motoko has served such a strict woman. She has been entirely submissive to her mother-in-law, making no waves at all. This has continued for so long, Motoko must have had many emotional ups and downs; yet as close as we are, I have not heard her utter a single word of complaint or dissatisfaction. I have met many different kinds of women in my life, but I have not met a single woman of as sound a character as Motoko. I have been hoping that under her influence I can correct my own faults, which are many, and become a better woman, but I’m not there yet. Motoko’s personality shows in her *tanka* poems, too. They are unassuming, gentle, cheerful, and devoid of any warped, dark sentiment. Frankly speaking, people who know her family situation are surprised. It seems that her abiding love for her departed husband extends even to his mother: it is this that accounts for Motoko’s tender, nurturing care of her. We are all deeply moved by her deeds. She has also showered affection on her only child, Yukiko, the precious memento of her husband. When I think of how Motoko must feel on this joyous day of her daughter’s wedding, it brings me tears of joy.”

Yukiko thought that the word “submissive” fit her mother well.

Yukiko’s grandmother had always been hard to please. Yukiko never heard her mother talk back to her grandmother. But while she was growing up, she often saw her mother standing in the kitchen and crying, or weeping as she lay under the quilts at night. When Yukiko cried too, not knowing the reason for her mother’s tears, Motoko hugged her tightly and put her cheeks against Yukiko’s. Her cheeks felt cold and wet as if water had splashed onto them.

After Yukiko’s father died, her mother’s own parents seem to have made repeated requests that Motoko leave the Shimamura family and return home, but Motoko rejected those requests each time. If she remarried, she would have to either leave Yukiko with the child’s grandparents, or bring her into a new family. She could not bear either thought, so she remained in the Shimamura household. When Yukiko was born, Motoko was only twenty-two.

Yukiko had heard this from her aunt, who was wearing glasses and was seated next to her mother down at the far end. She was Yukiko’s father’s younger sister, and was the same age as Motoko. Yukiko had also heard an unpleasant rumor

from others, to the effect that her mother would not leave the Shimamuras' because she was attracted to the family's fortune. Yukiko heard that it was the husband of this same aunt who had made that comment. He was the fat man seated next to her aunt. Motoko had probably heard this rumor, too.

Motoko had displayed a taste for *tanka* ever since she was a young girl, but she started going to the *tanka* society in Shibuya only about ten, fifteen years ago, when Yukiko was old enough. Once every ten days Motoko was thus exempted from her household duties for half a day. This was the only occasion on which she could enjoy herself, escaping from a daily routine that otherwise bound her to home and mother-in-law. Masako Shimojo, the woman who had just given a little speech, was one of her *tanka* friends. Another friend in the same *tanka* society was Kazue Hamashima, and in fact Motoko was closer to her than to Masako. Yukiko knew that Kazue frequently rang her mother up on the phone to talk about *tanka*. Kazue was unable to attend today, as she had a sick child at home.

Over the past four years, Motoko's poems had been well received, and the teacher's favorable comments gave her an added incentive to continue. The poetry class met three times a month, starting at 1:00 p.m. at the teacher's home in Shibuya. Motoko would come home from the class looking thoroughly refreshed.

One autumn three years ago, Motoko participated for the first time in an overnight "*Tanka* Trip" organized by the society. The destination was said to be Ina, in the mountainous Shinshu area. It was Kazue who called to inform Motoko about their itinerary. Motoko's mother-in-law did not much like the idea, but because Yukiko supported her mother's wish, she reluctantly gave her permission.

This excursion seems to have been related to some poems by Motoko that Yukiko still found mysterious. One day, while her mother was out shopping, Yukiko was looking for something and found a book titled *A Journey to Man'yo* inside Motoko's desk drawer. Idly opening the book, she discovered in it a sheet of paper folded in half. Unfolding this sheet of paper, she found four verses of *tanka* jotted down in ink:

I have always seen them as something to look up to,
But now the clouds pass endlessly below me.

Why should I fear the darkness of the Adashino plain at night?
Why – when I can rely on your guiding hand?

The two days I have accompanied you, my lord,
Are dearer to me than all my months and years.

By the roads of Yase, the colors of the maple leaves have not yet peaked.
What is truly crimson is my lord's compassion.

A two-day journey in autumn: that must refer to the "*Tanka* Trip" her mother went on three years ago. But that trip was to Ina in Shinshu. The poetic references in these couplets, however, suggested that she had flown to Osaka by passenger plane, and then toured around Kyoto. And that she had company. She called this companion, "my lord." When Yukiko studied the classical poetry anthology, *Man'yôshû*, at school, she had learned from the teacher that in poetry, "lord" refers to one's husband or lover.

Yukiko had never heard of her mother traveling to Kyoto or flying in an airplane. After Yoshimasa's death, Motoko had had no other opportunities to travel.

Were those poems derived from her mother's imagination? *Tanka* certainly has room for fiction. Yet Motoko did not seem to have any such propensity to write about fictive events. Hers was a poetry of realism: she wrote about what she saw and what she experienced. Her emotionalism drew on real experience. But these four *tanka* poems were greatly different from her usual vein. They expressed such tender feelings. That she felt the two-day journey to be "dearer" to her than many "months and years" was because she had been with some "lord" who had comforted her during a dark night in "Adashino." It implied the end of her loneliness of many years.

Yukiko remembered that her mother's face was flushed, even glowing, when she returned from her "*Tanka* Trip." In the past three or four years, even though her mother used hardly any makeup she was looking more youthful and beautiful than before, with a radiant complexion.

Ultimately, however, Yukiko had no opportunity to ask her mother about those four poems. She had come across them inadvertently, but still she had opened her mother's desk drawer without permission. And there was something else that prevented her from asking her mother straight out: Grandmother was around, too.

Who on earth was this "lord"? Yukiko still carried this unsolved riddle locked away in her breast. She thought her mother might divulge her secret after Grand-

mother died. She kept thinking about this even while she was away from the banquet room during a costume change in which she got her makeup repaired and was helped into a two-piece suit.

Led by the matchmaker's wife, Yukiko returned to the groom's side amid welcoming applause. The speeches resumed, and it was Yukiko's friend's turn to speak. She was with a group of the most gaily attired guests.

"Congratulations, Yuki!"

Naoko Hisano, standing up in her long-sleeved kimono, was Yukiko's former schoolmate.

"And Mrs. Shimamura, congratulations to you, too."

Naoko bowed quickly towards Motoko, who was seated some distance away. Motoko smiled and nodded. Yukiko's aunt, seated next to Motoko, turned. Eyeglasses flashing, she cast a curious glance at her niece's friend, who felt from the directness of the reflection that she was being glared at.

"It may sound like I'm repeating what other guests have already said in their own speeches, but first of all, I would like to express my congratulations to Yuki's mother. It may seem rude to you, Yuki, but it's in order to congratulate your mother that I'm attending this banquet.

"Seeing Yuki in her beautiful wedding dress, her mother has been dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief all this time, and I really understand how she feels. All sorts of emotions must be welling up inside her. When I get married, my mother probably won't put her handkerchief to her eyes even one tenth as many times as Yuki's mother has been doing. The reason I can say this is because the relationship between Yuki and her mother is very special. Mrs. Shimamura raised Yuki all by herself. At the same time she served her own strict mother-in-law obediently. Or, rather than "obediently," maybe it would be more accurate to say she *endured*. Someone said earlier that she was "submissive," and that is really true. I don't like the expression "submissive bride" because it sounds feudalistic, but when I visited Yuki and saw her mother serving her mother-in-law, shutting off all her own desires, I actually sensed a kind of lofty purpose in her. I can't possibly do what she does, so I intend to choose a man who has no mother-in-law, to marry. I was relieved to hear that Yuki doesn't have to live with a mother-in-law. It may be impudent to say such a thing on such an occasion.

"Mrs. Shimamura is a fantastic lady. I especially felt that this evening, when I saw her in her formal kimono. She looks even younger and more beautiful than

usual. Simply charming. I can't believe she's the same age as my own mother. She has taken such loving care of Yukiko that even though this is Yukiko's wedding, it's as if the event were somehow being held for *her*. Although from time to time today she has had to wipe away tears, she looks so vivacious. But I must say I am quite worried about how she will manage after today. Right now, she's very focused; but my concern is that after five days, ten days, that focus will dissipate. I mean, Yuki's been with her every day, and now she just won't be around any more. My guess would be that from now on, Mrs. Shimamura will try to fill the lonely void that Yuki's absence leaves in her heart by concentrating on her study of *tanka*. I have read her *tanka* poems because Yuki secretly showed me a few, and they are exactly what we would expect from her: gentle, honest, and sensitive. Just fantastic. Please keep on composing great poems, okay? . . .

"I have a request for Yuki's husband. Could you please allow your wife to go visit her mother as often as possible? Mrs. Shimamura will be so happy! Please? Oh, I see him smiling and nodding. Great! Although this is Yuki's wedding, I didn't reminisce about her at all, and instead I wound up talking a lot about her mother. But I'm sure Yuki understands my feelings. I apologize for this speech being so disorganized. I'm a bit nervous."

Yukiko listened, thinking, "Everybody—but everybody—is praising Mother!"

The honeymoon destination was Hawaii. The flight was scheduled to depart at ten that evening, so Yukiko and her husband were at the airport terminal by nine. Yukiko was clutching a large bouquet of flowers. There are "goodbye windows" at the terminal through which departing travelers and well-wishers can see each other. They have a few round holes in them making communication possible as well, so there was a crowd of well-wishers gathered there.

"Oh, Mother, you're here!"

Motoko's sister-in-law's eyeglasses flashed in astonishment at the discovery of her seventy-three-year-old mother among the people seeing Yukiko and her husband off. Her mother had not attended the wedding ceremony.

"When did you arrive?" asked the sister-in-law, surprised.

"I arranged for her to be here," responded Motoko, off to one side.

"You did?"

"She couldn't come to the banquet, but I thought she could at least see Yukiko and her husband depart on their honeymoon."

"But Motoko, don't you think it's risky to ask Mother, so elderly, to come such a long way, to a crowded airport?"

"I apologize. I asked Kenjiro to hire a car and driver and bring her."

The sister-in-law glared at her eldest son, who was standing behind them. Her portly husband said to Motoko with a slight tone of protest,

"This is a surprise. You never said anything about this beforehand."

"I am sorry. It was my last-minute idea. I wanted Mother to see Yukiko off to help make it an auspicious departure into a new life. Her grandchild has grown up from a baby to a young lady, and now she is about to take off on a honeymoon trip with a respectable husband."

The sister-in-law and her husband held their tongues, but looked upset.

The mother-in-law was still vigorous and sharp. Since she was over seventy, she had refrained from attending the banquet, but her complexion was excellent, and she was big-boned, with a strong jaw and a solid frame. Her eyes were sunken, but they showed alert movement and did not seem to suffer from any deterioration of eyesight. Her back was straight, too.

The newlyweds approached a window from inside the glass wall.

"Goodbye, Grandma, we're off!"

Yukiko, a bouquet in her arms, was smiling broadly at her grandmother through the window.

"Goodbye then!"

The old lady stared at the groom more than at her granddaughter.

Boarding was announced. Yukiko walked away, waving the bouquet at her mother. She had a small white suitcase in one hand, and the groom was carrying a large travel bag.

Motoko, too, was carrying a suitcase. Having come straight to the airport from the hotel where the banquet was held, she was still dressed in a formal kimono, so presumably she was carrying a change of clothes in which to go home.

The jumbo jet taxied slowly down the approach to the runway. Out on the observation deck, Motoko waved a handkerchief in the direction of the plane's lighted windows. She thought she saw a bouquet moving in one window, but was not sure if that was Yukiko's. The row of lights on the plane blurred into a single line, and moved upward, disappearing into the dark sky.

The group that had come to see off the newlyweds trooped down from the observation deck and headed for the exit. Midway, Motoko suddenly stopped. She

said to her mother-in-law,

"Mother, Yukiko has left as you saw. Thank you very much."

Her stiff and formal tone made her mother-in-law, her sister-in-law, and the latter's husband also stop in their tracks.

"I have fulfilled my obligations as a parent. Yukiko has found a good husband. She will lead a happy life. . . . Mother, I would now like to live my own life as I wish.

"What do you mean by 'as I wish'?" demanded the sister-in-law angrily; and she drew her bespectacled face closer.

"I have a request, Mother." Motoko ignored the sister-in-law and her husband, and looked straight into her mother-in-law's eyes.

"Since Yoshimasa's death I have served you for twenty-two years. Someone at the banquet used the word "submissive" in a speech, and while I wouldn't put it quite like that, I did deny myself and try to obey you without getting emotional. Now that Yukiko has left my care, I can speak honestly, and I finally feel liberated. I think it is time to get my own humanity back. I would like to lead a free life from now on. It's been twenty-two years, Mother."

"What do you mean by 'lead a free life'?"

"I should like to leave the Shimamura family. Please strike my name from the family register."

"Motoko, are you. . . ?"

"I apologize for this willfulness, but I decided two years ago. "When Yukiko gets married. . ." I told myself, and I have waited until now."

"What will you do after you leave the family?"

"I am going to lead a new life, but I cannot talk to you about that now. You will hear about it soon enough, I believe. So please allow me to remove my name from the register. I have finished my duties at the Shimamura household."

"You can't do that, Motoko," said her sister-in-law. "There is a seventy-three-year-old mother who would be left alone. Are you actually going to abandon that duty?" The sister-in-law poured on the pressure, mixing anger and derision.

"That duty, Nobuko, I shall leave to you to discharge. She is your own mother. She will be more at ease if you took care of her than if I did. She'll be satisfied."

"But all of a sudden like this, isn't that a selfish thing to do?" Nobuko's husband lashed out.

Motoko turned towards him and replied, "I fully realize that I am being selfish.

But I want to lead my own life, late though this is. Since I will remove myself from the Shimamura family register, after Mother dies, Nobuko, you and yours inherit everything. I have determined that the family holdings amount to about 400 million yen including real estate properties. I asked my bank for a full accounting. I will tell Yukiko to renounce her rights to even one *sen*. But I have to let you know that three months ago I did take 60 million yen. I never told you, Mother, but Yoshimasa left a piece of land in my name. I asked the bank to sell it for me, converting it into cash. I am sure Yoshimasa would forgive me because this will help me establish a new life.”

“I appreciate your help over the years.” With those words, Motoko thanked her three in-laws and headed towards the exit, carrying her suitcase. She got into a taxi, and left.

Within a fortnight, news of Motoko spread among her acquaintances. Without exception, everyone who knew her was astonished to learn that she had bought a motel—lock, stock, and barrel—in the western part of Tokyo, and taken over the business.

“This is a motel I used to come to with a lover. While I was waiting for him, I got to know the owner well, and then when he decided to move back to his home town, I bought it from him for 60 million yen.” That was what Motoko told a close friend who visited her there. She did not reveal the name of her lover, but some suspected that it was Yoshimasa’s former colleague, Jun’ichi Utsumi, who was absent from Yukiko’s wedding banquet. That seemed consistent with the recollection that Utsumi had continued to visit the Shimamura family for a while even after “Shimamura Day” had reached a natural end. Some also speculated that Kazue Hamashima of the *tanka* society had helped out by relaying phone messages.

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“A Case of Misinterpretation”

(Story No. 5, 第五話 「誤訳」)

Pulaque Mur, a poet from the nation of Petschelk, has been chosen this year's winner of the internationally recognized Skiebe Poetry Prize. The awards ceremony will be held on March 20th in Copenhagen, Denmark. The prize carries with it a cash award of \$70,000.

Even before he read this bulletin, Seiichirô Asoh, professor at a university of foreign studies in Tokyo, had heard the news from Janet Nabyer in London. Mrs. Nabyer could be called a linguistic genius. She had mastered at least ten languages. At the moment, she was studying the languages of once-thriving ethnic minorities now in decline and on the verge of extinction. She could carry on a conversation in all of these languages as well. She was, furthermore, an outstanding scholar of linguistics.

*“I think Pulaque Mur has a strong chance of winning the Skiebe Prize this year. When I went to Denmark and met with the screening committee members, I got the sense that his selection was all but certain. If this is true, it is extremely good news indeed. I think it would be the most significant award since the Nobel Prize for Literature was given to Rabindranath Tagore in 1913. Tagore had written down, in Bengali, quite a lot of ethnic-minority poetry and translated most of it into English himself. His poetry collection, *Gītāñjali*, based on that work, was what won him the Nobel Prize. In Mur's case, he can't translate from Petschelk into English himself, and his peculiar dialect has been considered too difficult to be translated by foreign literary scholars. I undertook the study of Petschelk, and labored intensively over the translation of Mur's poetic work into English. I translated his collection *Le piut tekkuig kela poale*, which appeared*

as Spirits of Lake and Forest. It was this work that was taken up for consideration by the Skiebe Prize Selection Committee. Should it be given the award (and as I suggested above the chances are 80% that it will be), then as translator I will have realized my most cherished goal. I would be so overjoyed I could die happy at any time. Already my whole body is trembling in anticipation."

The Skiebe Prize was endowed in 1930 by the Margrave von Skiebe of Denmark, who directed that his family's assets (the vast manor that had devolved from their feudal estates, and great wealth accumulated by successive generations of shipping merchants) be used to encourage the writing of poetry all over the world. The Skiebe may not be as widely known as the Nobel Prize, but in the world of poetry it is on a par in terms of prestige and tradition.

Mrs. Nabyer had just turned forty-two. Asoh had known her ever since his time as an exchange professor at Oxford University. Her father had worked for the Foreign Office, serving as Secretary, Consul General, Chargé d'Affaires, and Ambassador. Thus she had lived since childhood in various foreign capitals all over the world. As she grew up, she developed an interest in each of her host country's ethnic or tribal traditions. As a student at the Universities of Vienna and London, she specialized in cultural anthropology and ethnology; there, too, she refined and polished her natural ability in languages. She was the only person in the world who could satisfactorily translate Petschelk, a language previously almost unknown, directly into English. A few could translate it into German or French; most other translations were secondary, from her English. The rules of Petschelk grammar are completely different from those of European languages. The declension of pronouns and the conjugation of verbs, for example, are both unusually complex. In the classical language, honorifics introduce further complications.

Mrs. Nabyer had been translating Pulaque Mur's poetry for more than a decade. Mur was from Petschelk, but Petschelk had lost its independence and had become the protectorate of a superpower. Over the past five or six centuries, the country had been caught again and again between warring states, and had suffered in consequence. The history of the Petschelk people was a history of repeated invasion, sacrifice, and humiliation. Each time the dominant power changed, the winner's language was forced upon Petschelk, so that the nation's mother tongue was even-

tually reduced to the status of a regional dialect. Mur's poems were lyrical evocations of his people's sorrow, set against the backdrop of a magnificent land. They were patriotic verses, sacred lyrics for a vanishing people. As Mur wrote everything in this "dialect," his works restored the vitality of the country's ethnic history and traditions. His poetry had style and great substance. The comparison Mrs. Nabyer made to Tagore was justified. That year, Mur was seventy-one years old.

Today, the state of poetry has reached its nadir. The halcyon days of the late-19th to mid-20th century are now long gone. The decline began when some talented poets of that era rejected image-based poetry for a more music-based poetry, by which they tried to convey poetic subjectivity through abstract symbols. But the result was that without translation or critical interpretation, readers could not really identify with these poets. In their emphasis on increasingly abstract symbols, the late Symbolists coined an excessive number of neologisms. However striking these newly minted coinages may have been individually, no poet was able to coordinate them in any given work, with respect to tone and atmosphere. Poets deliberately avoided logic, stringing together the newly created vocabulary without meaningful connection. And occasionally, attempting some clever ambiguity, they descended into a deluded, solipsistic pretentiousness. Ever since this took hold in the world of abstract poetry, chaos has been the order of the day. Critics are perplexed, because verse like this hardly lends itself to analysis, no matter how carefully it is studied. The poetry of abstruseness has only become more abstruse.

In seeking to fashion complex structures of language and musical tone, abstract poetry has not succeeded in liberating itself from the rules of conventional poetry; it has merely subverted those rules arbitrarily. The "Decadence" of the *fin de siècle*, or the aestheticism of Symbolists such as Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, was revolutionary for its times, but it retained conventional poetic patterns that still yielded some lyrical pleasures. If those poets had broken completely free of "outmoded" tradition, they would have lost readers' understanding and sympathy. Accordingly, Samain wrote Symbolist poetry that was immediately accessible to the understanding of all readers, and later shifted into a descriptive poetry that incorporated classical forms. But this was not something that just any poet could do. Since Samain, no outstanding talent has emerged among modern poets; thus no compelling architecture has taken shape after the subversion of conservatism. Even as our contemporary poets scorn lyricism, they themselves

are lost, unable to reverse the current decline.

Mrs. Nabyer wrote Prof. Asoh that it was due to the sorry state of contemporary poetry that the Skiebe Prize Selection Committee was interested in Pulaque Mur. Three years ago, she had finished translating Mur's collection of long poems, *Spirits of Lake and Forest*, and it was published a year and a half later. After that, she had frequently toured Northern Europe. Her objective was to lobby for Mur to receive the Skiebe Prize. Such pre-selection campaigning was not necessarily cause for censure. It was known that a similar trend was developing in connection with the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Whenever selection committee members for a major prize cannot read texts in the original—Japanese or Chinese, for example, or other “native” languages such as Arabic, Chulk (central Asia), Beothuk (Newfoundland, in eastern Canada), Arahuac (Cuba, Dominica, and northern Venezuela), Inuit, Papuan, Tupí Guaraní (South America, on the Atlantic Coast and inland), or Dravidian (southern India)—they must rely on English, German, or French translations. On these occasions, the translator takes center stage, conducting a pre-selection campaign on behalf of the original writer. The translator reveres the original writer and wants the writer and the writer's works to be showered with honors. Translator and writer naturally have an intimate intellectual relationship. And of course, if a world-class prize is awarded, the translator also receives his or her due as a collaborator.

According to translators and scholars of linguistics who knew Petschelk, Janet Nabyer's English translations were perfect. Even readers of Pulaque Mur's work in the original often could not fully understand its compositional principles, due to Mur's tendency toward ambiguity. This tendency might be described as one of his distinctive literary traits, and was in any event intrinsic to his writing. It was not that he was being intentionally abstruse as a matter of technique: on the surface, his poetry was quite readable. Rather, Mur's contemplative nature as a poet, and his classicist spirit, found a voice through the complex grammar and periphrasis so characteristic of Petschelk. For that reason, readers could not precisely grasp his inner meanings. And yet, if one asked oneself whether there were any other Petschelk literati who wrote like this, the answer would be no. Their writing was clear and its meaning immediately accessible. So one could conclude that the originality of Mur's poetry resided in the apparent compositional disorder and seeming dissolution of sentence structure, from which arose an all-enveloping mysticism—a novel style that was in fact derived ultimately from tradition.

Conveying the flavor of the original was a challenge. Mrs. Nabyer's translations were adroit in the way they disposed of the many difficulties involved. She distilled meaning from the disorderly composition of the original poems and skillfully reorganized it; she reconstituted shattered word order; she rendered the essence of vague expressions in a clarified version of the original; and yet she transmitted poetic atmosphere without loss. Experts praised both the talent and the effort displayed in her translation work.

Mrs. Nabyer's efforts went beyond translation itself. She frequently flew from London to far-off Petschelk, a journey that involved numerous connecting flights, so that she could visit Pulaque Mur. She revered him, and ever since she undertook the English translation of his works she had cultivated a familiar relationship with him, absorbing what she could of the spirit of the poet.

"Pulaque Mur is over 70 but healthy and energetic. One gets the impression that his long white moustache and beard are the external manifestations of his pure and lofty spirit. And it's truly moving to see how directly Pulaque's poetry reflects his faltering speech."

Thus wrote Janet Nabyer, in a letter to Seiichirô Asoh.

"From the perspective of European languages, even standard Petschelk is truly complex; with honorifics, things get trickier still. In addition, when Pulaque speaks he draws freely on the classical lexicon, so one has to have done one's homework! Furthermore, in Pulaque's speech, as with his poetry, the logical connections are not always immediately apparent. Some would consider him vague or ambiguous. Worse still, people find that he has a mumbling style of speech that's hard to comprehend, a difficulty exacerbated by his extremely low tone of voice, so that one has to strain to make out what he's saying. But by now I'm so used to it that I understand Pulaque's speech better than I do, say, the Older Scottish tongue. It's not just because I've translated so many of his poems, but because I've been lucky enough to have met him and conversed with him a dozen times now."

When I visit, I stay at his house for several days.

Despite Pulaque's renown in his own country, he's not well off financially. To give you an idea: when I bring the translation copyright fee from the publisher, his wife is just delighted, even though it doesn't amount to more than 300 pounds at a time. Typically for a poet, Pulaque is oblivious to household affairs, leaving everything up to his wife. And she takes him to task as a spendthrift for going on trips, or buying expensive items—all of them traditional articles useful for his ruminative folk-poetry—whether he has the money or not. But I absolutely love that unworldly aspect of Pulaque Mur.”

It was not without reason that Janet Nabyer was Pulaque Mur's leading translator.

When it was announced that Mur had won the Skiebe Prize, Seiichirô Asoh was asked by several Japanese newspapers and literary journals to contribute critiques of his poetry. Prof. Asoh's friendship with Mur's translator, Mrs. Nabyer, was known in some journalistic quarters. He wrote several articles, getting his knowledge of Mur second-hand from Mrs. Nabyer. They were simple introductions, some five manuscript pages each for the cultural sections of newspapers and seven pages each for the literary journals. But two or three publishers expressed interest in a Japanese edition of Mur's poetry based on Mrs. Nabyer's translations, and Asoh was treated as the leading Japanese authority on Pulaque Mur.

Asoh sent a congratulatory telegram to Pulaque Mur and Janet Nabyer, timed to arrive at Copenhagen City Hall, the venue for the award ceremony, on March 20th, the day of the event. A thank-you telegram came from Mur and his wife. Clearly the two of them had both attended the ceremony. And of course there was a reply from Janet, overflowing with joy.

Three or four days later, newspapers in Japan carried a dispatch from Copenhagen, reporting that Mur had held a news conference at which he announced that he would donate the \$70,000 cash award in its entirety to welfare organizations in Petschelk. The same report conveyed the high praise and gratitude that Mur's donation had elicited in his country.

“That's just like him,” thought Asoh, moved by this news. “Indeed, a poet of the people.” As a mere protectorate of a superpower, Petschelk must have only rudimentary social welfare institutions, the reason being that the superpower was it-

self in decline, its economy performing poorly. The elderly, the children, and the sick in Petschelk would certainly rejoice to receive \$70,000. Had any previous recipient given away the entire \$70,000 award? Had a Nobel Prize recipient done anything similar? Asoh could imagine Janet's face, beaming with pride as she interpreted for Mur at the press conference. Her own long years of work as Mur's translator would receive even greater recognition, reflecting his acclaim.

But when Asoh read the latest dispatch from Copenhagen in the next day's newspaper, he could hardly believe his eyes.

Today, this year's Skiebe Prize winner, Pulaque Mur, held a second news conference, in which he announced a correction. He said that yesterday's report that he would donate his entire \$70,000 award to Petschelk's welfare institutions was the result of an error on the part of the interpreter, and that in fact he had made no such statement.

It goes without saying that the interpreter in question was Janet Nabyer. Could Janet really have made such an egregious mistake? Even if it was a simple translation error, it had serious consequences. The news of Mur's announcement the day before had reached Petschelk the same day and been greeted with great joy throughout the country.

Still, how could Janet, of all people, have made such a careless error? One could only think that on the world stage, in front of the international press corps, she must have had a bout of stage fright. According to her letters, Pulaque Mur's speech, like his poetry, was disorganized, vague, difficult to follow. He spoke in a low-pitched, ruminative mumble. All that, together with the excitement of the event, must have led to the mistaken English translation. That is the only way one could imagine her misinterpreting his words. Asoh sympathized. Initially, however, this incident did nothing to topple Mrs. Nabyer from her position as the leading English translator of Pulaque Mur's poetry. After all, an inadvertent mistake in interpreting speech should be discounted as a trivial lapse.

Approximately one month later, Asoh was formally contacted by a Japanese

publisher regarding their interest in compiling a Japanese edition of the poetry of Skiebe laureate Pulaque Mur. Asoh therefore wrote to Janet Nabyer in London, asking permission to base his Japanese translations on her English translations—all the first-hand English translations of Mur's work being Mrs. Nabyer's.

Janet had always replied to him within a fortnight. This time, after three, even four weeks had elapsed there was still no response. He wondered what had happened. In the fifth week there finally came a reply. It was a single typewritten sheet, and the content of the message was unexpected.

"For various reasons I am withdrawing my translations of Pulaque Mur's poetry from publication. So I hope you will understand that, unfortunately, I cannot accommodate your request relating to your projected Japanese translations. I will no longer provide English translations of Mur's poetry, nor will I visit him again in Petschelk. However, I still revere Pulaque Mur and his poetry. That has not changed in the least. I deeply regret that I cannot comply with your request. — Janet Nabyer, London."

Asoh could easily hazard a guess as to Janet's intentions in ceasing publication of her existing translations of Mur's work, and in refusing to undertake any new translations in the future. Her decision must have originated in her misinterpretation of Mur's comment, by which it was announced that he would donate all \$70,000 of his prize money to welfare institutions in Petschelk. That must have caused friction between Mur and herself. As the interpreter who made the translation error, Janet bore full responsibility. It was due to that error that Mur brought sudden joy to his countrymen, followed by needless disappointment. It was due to her careless mistake that a folk poet of Petschelk, a national poet glorified by receiving the Skiebe Prize, saw his reputation tarnished. It caused him a great deal of trouble. So, being the sort of person she was, Janet must have felt her responsibility keenly. Convinced of her inadequacy as a translator of Pulaque Mur's poetry, she had decided to withdraw even her existing translations from publication.

Of course this was an over-reaction. All the translators and linguistics scholars who knew Petschelk were unanimous in their praise of Mrs. Nabyer's translations. That is why she had achieved a wide reputation as the paramount translator of Mur's works into English. However, Janet was such a humble person that she

must have felt excessively ashamed of having made this blunder. The greater she respected and loved Pulaque Mur, the more ashamed she must have been. After agonizing deeply over how to make amends, she had decided that her punishment would be to withdraw her existing translations from publication, and to refuse to undertake new translations in the future. Janet Nabyer was more conscientious than other translators, and correspondingly harsher in her self-criticism.

Asoh wrote her a letter consoling her indirectly. There was no reply. He felt her sadness and distress as if they were his own. A careless misunderstanding, in the heat of the moment; but for someone as pure-hearted as Janet Nabyer it became a matter of unassuageable bitterness. One could see how devastating this might be for her. She had been so passionate about translating Mur's poetry. She had devoted her soul to it. And this whole event had been a disaster for Pulaque Mur.

Half a year elapsed. As we carry on with our daily lives, we can become separated from previous interests. Events do not necessarily correspond to the thoughts or objects one could conceivably associate with them. New events are disparate. Discrete. As with the words in a late-Symbolist poem that have no shared context—the dispersed lexicon trying to assert itself—the disordered, transient events of daily life preoccupy us with successive distractions.

One day, Asoh received a phone call from an organization of scholars of foreign literatures, soliciting a donation to a particular project. His wife was not home at that moment. Asoh responded to their appeal enthusiastically, with an immediate promise of 100,000 yen.

Then his wife returned. When he told her about his donation, she objected strenuously. "Our budget is so tight!" she protested. "We don't have that kind of money!" Faced with this attack by his spouse, Asoh capitulated. The very next day, feeling extremely awkward and embarrassed, he telephoned, giving notice that he wished to retract his promise of a donation. The accusatory tone of the person on the other end of the line conveyed deep displeasure at this overnight change of heart and breach of promise.

Asoh was left for several days with a very bad taste in his mouth. His wife's criticisms were justified: he regretted his rash decision to make a donation. He had made a promise to an organization. That constituted a half-public pledge. When he thought how people must be speaking ill of him now, he perspired all over. Whether he was at school conducting a class, or at home preparing or writ-

ing, the thought of this incident gave him chest pains so severe he felt as though he'd been poisoned.

Writing on the blackboard one day, a spark of inspiration flashed across Asoh's mind: the truth about Janet Nabyer's "misinterpretation."

Both Pulaque Mur and his wife had attended the award ceremony for the Skiebe Prize. It must have been the case that Mur had indeed declared at a press conference, in front of the entire press corps, that he would donate his \$70,000 award to welfare institutions in Petschelk. His interpreter there, Janet Nabyer, had already shown that she could read Mur's difficult poems, understand them at a deep level, and translate them from Petschelk into English. No matter how softly Mur spoke at the conference, for Janet to misinterpret such a straightforward statement was inconceivable. She had an established reputation for accuracy in translation.

If Mur had had no intention of donating his prize money, how could he have mentioned welfare institutions and donations at all? Janet had translated his words as she did because that is what he said.

The truth must have been that when the astonished Mrs. Mur learned of her husband's declaration, she objected strenuously and demanded a retraction. Janet had mentioned in a previous letter that the Mur household was not well off, and that Mrs. Mur had been delighted with the copyright fee Janet brought them, though it amounted to less than 300 pounds. And hadn't she also mentioned that Mrs. Mur had criticized her husband as a spendthrift?

His wife's objections must have put Mur into a terrible quandary. He had made a public declaration before the international press corps. Their dispatches were carried in major newspapers worldwide. He could not simply take back his promise. If he retracted it overnight, that would tarnish the luster of his glory as a Skiebe Prize-winner. At this point the poet must have turned to the person who understood him so well, Janet Nabyer, and implored her, "I would like to claim that you *misinterpreted* my statement."

Janet respected Mur. Even in her last letter she had said so. It was because she revered him that she acceded to his request. The final consequence was that Mrs. Janet Nabyer, the leading translator of the poetry of Pulaque Mur, withdrew from the literary scene entirely, without a word of explanation. Isn't that the truth behind her "misinterpretation"?

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平成二〇年一月三十一日発行

第八回松本清張研究奨励事業研究報告書

編集・発行 北九州市立松本清張記念館

北九州市小倉北区内二番三号

電話 ○九三―五八二―二七六一

印刷・製本 (株)ゼンリンプリンテックス

松本清張研究奨励事業

第10回

募 集 要 項

一、趣 旨

時代を見つめ続けた松本清張の文学を研究することは、今後の時代の進むべき方向性と私たちの生きていく指針を見出すことにもつながります。このような視点から、清張の作品や人物像についての研究活動を推進し、歴史や社会の事象の深層を追求する精神を継承していくため、松本清張夫人ナヲ様のご厚意により創設しました。

二、対 象

ジャンルを問わず、松本清張の作品や人物像を研究する活動や、松本清張の精神を継承する創造的かつ斬新な活動（調査、研究等）で、これから行おうとするもの。年齢、性別、国籍は問いません。ただし、未発表に限ります。個人または団体も可。

三、内 容

入選者（団体）に二〇〇万円を上限とする研究奨励金を支給します。金額は企画内容を検討して決定します。

四、応募規定

今後取り組みたい調査・研究テーマ等の内容が具体的にわかる企画書、予算書、参考資料など（様式は自由、ただし日本語）を、平成二〇年三月三十一日までに応募してください。

五、選 考

松本清張記念館内の選考委員会により選考します。

六、発 表

審査終了後、審査結果を直接通知します（六月末頃）。なお、入選者には開館記念日（八月四日）に、北九州市で贈呈式を行います。

七、その他

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