APPENDICES
KYUSHUJIN

(THE FORMER MASTER)

Those days I had been very slim and pint-sized woman, although I have become very fat like this now. Therefore, when I went to Komoro to work as a servant at the recommendation of our neighbour, a carpenter, people who saw me thought that I was only seventeen. I was born in Kashiwagi village, a place said to be about 4 kilometers away from Komoro. The women of Kashiwagi and Saku area have to work outside in the harsh conditions of the region, and work long and hard to help the men in whatever way they can. It may be partly because they have to work hard that my aunt and mother were robust, smart and so resourceful. I began working out in the fields with my mother when I was only thirteen. When other girls of my age with running noses were still enjoying their life by playing rope skipping etc. I already started to taste the pleasures and agonies of this world. As the number of children in my family increased, and our small business continued to be at loss, my father became an unreliable idler. However strong-minded my mother was, it was just not possible to survive only by her hands alone. Therefore, I was compelled to work as a domestic servant. Those days the maximum yearly wages of a maid servant was about eighteen yens provided that she brings her own cloth. But in my case, my
mistress agreed to give me her old dresses. Besides, she also promised to give me allowance for new and good dresses as per requirement. If we receive everything in cash, my father might swallow it. This was a major worry my mother persistently held.

"It may be regretable to say so, but I must tell you that Danna-Sama (master) will do anything if mistress wishes so", and therefore "your success will depend upon your ability to please Oku-sama", anxious about my future, mother talked to me in bed on the night before the day I was to depart. It was the second day of the third month, a day traditionally fixed for joining new jobs in the mountains, I still remember, on which I left my home accompanied by mother. The air was full of dust as it was a windy day and we proceeded towards Komoro, walking through the dry, sandy brown coloured soil. My mother was covering her head with a new face cloth and bearing a pair of hemp-soled straw sandals. I was carrying a bundle wrapped in light green cotton cloth. For the first time in my life, I felt shame and sad on that day for unknown reasons, when I was going along with my mother. When we were passing through by the side of the light green budding barley fields, soil coloured farmers resting their bodies on hoes looked at us with surprise. Hokkoku highway is a wide and straight road to Komoro. Once a person reach this road, the journey from here is easy and comfortable. On my way, I saw groups of peddlers
resting in ancient post-town type tea houses. We on our way also saw large number of people engaged in cutting down popular Japanese larch trees. Sound of giant trees falling on the ground, the echo of splitting sound of their branches, the rushing sound of people's foot steps etc. heard from here and there gave an impression of a battle field. We passed through that path smelling the fragrance of pine leaves, some time behind, some time in front of a group of pilgrims consisted of parents and children.

When we descend, Akasaka from Aramachi in Komoro, there is a large dark grey colour building at the right side. That is the primary school. Extension work of one wing of this school building was being carried out at that time, and its tower could be seen in the midst of scaffolding. Outside this structure there is a stone wall and the other side of this wall is Fukuro-machi town. This town is situated on a downward slope and a shallow tributary of a river flowing from the side of Asama mountain is passing through the middle of this town. At the bank of this tributary there was a house surrounded by an earthen wall from where branches of a persimmon tree were overhanging. It was the house of Arai family, the house to where we were going. Although this house had Komoro style gate, it was a quiet and two-storied house with new latticed work. When we reached there, the master was not at home, therefore, mother could meet only the mistress.
Mistress was an young lady with a large round chignon hairdo with a pink hair ornament on it. She had a gentle, sweet look with straight body, black eyes, and a pretty face which seems to become more and more pretty if more make-up is done. The beautiful and elegant language she spoke suggested that she was not a native of that place. Compared to my mistress's fair tender hands, my mother's large bones, sun burnt hands looked like the hands of a man.

"Mistress, please accept it, although worthless. Just to show our gratitude only", mother placed the present on the fireside (robata).

"Oh no! Why do you take such troubles. Being so poor....."

"No, please don't mind. Only a little home made miso pickles though unfit for eating".

"That is the best thing one can get.... All right. Have a cup of tea".

"Please don't take so much trouble for us."

"Any way, you came early. Well, what is your name, I am forgetting."

"Yes, I am Osada. Totally inexperienced and ignorant. Please accommodate me somehow."

I was bearing a very short padded kimono and a dark blue tabi. It was really embarrassing for me to be seen by the mistress. For me, whatever I heard or saw was new to me, even
the pleasant fragrance of perfume that coming from the body of my mistress. After completing the formalities for service agreement, mother returned to Kashiwagi leaving me alone in the midst of luxurious lifestyle and elegant language of mistress.

The main family house, occupied by elder brother of my master, was a wholesale dealer of salt and it had a curtain in its entrance with the inscription "Marumo" on it. The house where I came to work was called the new branch. Besides many family members, the main house employed over ten clerks and servants, while the new branch had only four members, master, mistress, an old servant and myself. New house was built in Tokyo style. This can be also understood from the difference in the structure of two houses. My master, a broad minded person, lived like as if he had transplanted Tokyo into Komoro, his appearance, his speech a repudiation of the old - a source of constant annoyance to the main family.

Listen. In this world there are some people with very peculiar appearance. Even when they are crying they look as if they are laughing. My Master was one of them. Shrinked muscles around his eyes and deep wrinkles between the mouth and cheek gave his face a glittering appearance always as if a smile is engraved on it permanently. Yes he had such a face. It was really strange that Master, who used to be always cautious and serious had such a face. In fact, that
was a proof to his being a good natured man, that made him different from ordinary people. Usually, masters of cold region are said to be tardy and lazy, but my master had no such problems. He loved to work diligently and never wasted any time in idle. Whenever somebody in Komoro wanted to start a new business or work, it was Arai whom he consulted with first. In other words, my master was the most important personality in Komoro.

When I came to work my master and mistress had a very affectionate, intimate and harmonious husband-wife relationship to the extent that even outsiders would have felt envy of them. Master either would go for a stroll early in the morning, or would go through some documents sitting on the first floor and would drink a glass of cow milk. At nine O’Clock he would go to the bank, bearing a cap and maetaregake. On holidays, he used to entertain guests and chat with them in the visitor’s room in the ground floor. His friends were all respectable members of the society including town councillors, rich land lords, business men and newspaper tycoons. After dinner he would chat with his wife sitting face to face, and it seemed to be the happiest moment in his daily routine. Sound of their laughing could be heard even from the robata. I served them coffee or tea at that time.

In a way, their’s was a life of unmixed blessings. Every night when I was knitting ‘floor cloth’ under the Lamp,
memories of my native place, Kashiwagi, would come afloat in my mind. It became a habit for me every night. When our despicable life in the countryside becomes busy with work, we have to get up early in the morning when still it is dark and finish our breakfast under the lamp light. The body of a woman, who starts working in the field right from the dawn is extremely tired like cotton. One day, I and my mother were lying on grass as we were tired after finishing a day's work. Suddenly a heavy rain started. We did not have the energy to get up, so we continued to lay down there letting our sweat smelting bodies to get wet in the shower. I had a severe attack of flue after that, and suffered for a long time. I know how hard and painful is the life of women in peasant houses - wheat harvesting, weeding of paddy fields - compared to that my work at Arais was extremely easy and simple to such an extent that I was almost spending everyday in idleness. I who used to roam around the valley with muddy legs like a beast could even doze while sitting on beautiful and expensive 'tatami' mat.

The life of my master and mistress was comfortably off as they did not lack anything, except for difference in their age. One day, some guests assembled in the guest room in the ground floor. All of them were very close to my master, frank and outspoken. My master was looking through a paper of small
type printing. "This is strange. I cannot read anything", master threw that paper down on the floor.

"You see, these are the things youngsters read. Not really meant for us. Just see this portion, it looks like as if some thin lines only". Saying this, one of the visitors took out a big silver framed spectacles from his Kimono pocket. After cleaning the lenses with wristband of junpan, and placing it on his nose pointed like a fishhook, he said, "With this I can manage to read, although not very clear".

"What? Could I borrow that spectacles for a moment", another guest, while laughing, took it from him. "I see, yes, with this I can also see everything clear", he said. Master also turned back while laughing. He winked and rubbed his eyes few times but did not show any intention to borrow the spectacles.

"Well, my plan is not to wear spectacles for two three years more, although using spectacles is said to be good for eyes".

"That is the reason why I wear it only when I read something", the visitor who brought the spectacles said meaningfully.

"I am surprised", the person next to him took the spectacles and put on his nose, "Is it possible to see so clearly. Ah, ah... I must get one, I think."
Finally, my master was also unable to suppress his curiosity.

"Could I see it", he stretched out his hand. While laughing one guest handed the spectacles over to him. Master put that on his nose with great interest, and read the printed paper, sometimes keeping it near to his eyes and sometimes keeping it away from his eyes.

"How do you feel after putting the spectacles on", the person who gave the spectacles to my master enquired while looking on at his face.

"Ya, I can see very well. If I wear this, I can read everything perfectly."

"Ha, ha..., that is a terrible thing, don't you think so?"

"Ha, ha, ha...", Master clapping his hands laughed loudly.

One of the guests held his sides with laughter meanwhile tears streamed out from his eyes. Finally, the sound of their laughter sounded as if they were yelling and wailing, and at this point, the guest with pointed nose ran out from the guest room holding his head between his hands.

I never thought that my master was so old. There is nothing like human beings who cannot be judged only by appearance. As a result of my careful observation thereafter, I discovered that he used to dye his hair secretly, watch his
appearance in the mirror every morning and evening, wear very colourful dress and always disliked hearing words considered to be ill-omened and unlucky. Especially his face looked pale when he wakes up in the mornings, a clear indication of his old age. Some times, his intelligent eyes were found lacklustre, deep in fatigue, as if they have even lost the power to see things. I also saw him removing his white, beautifully lined dentures which I thought original until that day. My master was an old actor dressed in young and colourful costume. Once I got accustomed with this living environment, I did not consider even this as something strange. Their difference in age, in my opinion, made them matching all the more, and gradually it became a painful for me to hear others criticize them or make rumours on them.

My mistress had extremely beautiful features, probably the major reason for master to marry her from Tokyo. I cannot narrate how pretty she looked after bathe etc. Despite being a woman, even I was fascinated by her beauty. It seemed that my master used to forget everything else when he gaze intently at her face from the sides, just like a theatergoer look admiringly at his favourite actor. Master's previous wife lived with him for a long time but he divorced her after he met his present wife. This in fact caused the alienation of the main family from the new branch. Metaphorically speaking, the main family and its relatives are like a honey comb.
Master threw a stone on to that honey comb and, therefore, even I, despite being a servant, was pricked by painful rumours.

The old fashioned, awesome nature of people in the country-side would not spare any outsider who is different from their society. Poor mistress was absolutely unaware of this truth because she was born and brought up in the city. All women in her family or relatives were simple, modest and sober looking. My mistress was the only person who attracted so much attention from others. My mistress used to make-up in the mornings, and polish in the evenings. Her transparent face was seen pale sometimes due to her extremely fair complexion. She used to hide it by slightly applying lipstick to her cheeks. Her hair was black and longer than her body. She got her hair dressed by Osen of Aioi-cho, and trimmed by Okagen's mother. Her dresses were selected by the clerk of Dairi and tailored by Ryosuke of Baba Ura - she resorted to every measures to make her life flamboyant. There are none as curious as women in the countryside. Whenever my mistress passed through the street in her colourful, stylish dress and appearance, women folk in the village would look at her through the earthen wall, windows, and holes of sliding doors of their houses and exchange unpleasant smiles among them expressing their dislike for her. Unaware of these happenings, my mistress would pass through the streets feeling
pity on them. She wanted to show them her beauty. Even when she happened to meet any of the woman from her relations, she would greet in loud voice. According to my mistress, women in this area are like the water-mill in Matsui-gawa valley - rotating to the same direction every day. She quietly laughed at the circumstances at the countryside where women must resort to hard work even when their male folk enjoyed the long winter days in idle. In fact, my mistress was totally ignorant of Komoro women. According to the opinions of ladies in her relations, including the women in the main family, mistress, an outsider who came to this countryside, where even young ladies are forced to wear hand woven striped clothes, was trying to live a luxurious civilized life as she used to do in Tokyo. Therefore, mistress, the outsider, would be hated more than master, the insider. Attention of every women in the streets turned towards my mistress, some praising her and some abusing her.

On mid-spring days, master and mistress used to walk slowly and quietly on the street past, holding their hands, viewing the snow on far away mountains in Hida while standing under late bloomed cherry blossoms. Well, the old fashioned ladies in their relations had not even gone out for flower viewing with their husbands. Therefore they all got surprised when they saw first this couple walking on the street in Tokyo style, affectionately holding their hands, as they had never
seen such a scene even in their dreams. These jealous fellows, seizing the opportunity, would spread false rumours all around. I could do nothing but feel sorry every time I heard rumours about my mistress.

I was drawing water from a well, after a spring drizzle on a warm day when Otsugi - a native of Kashiwagi who had come to Komoro for working - passed through that way.

"Otsugi, where to?", I enquired.

"For this", Otsugi showed me a sake-bottle kept hidden under her sleeves, shaking her pint-sized body for a moment, meanwhile blowing a ground cherry.

"Domestic servant?"

"Yes"

"That is too much for you".

"Hey, Osada, is it true that your mistress.... Even that blind man talk about her...."

"Oh, what are you saying, Otsugi".

"Ha, ha, ha..., she is very popular. Few days back on an evening, you see, when old lady Tomi was standing in front of 'San no Mon' it seems, she saw your master and mistress coming from the direction of Kaiko-en Park, holding their hands. Oh, it is disgusting. Will anybody walk on the street holding hands unless he or she is a blind?"

"You are talking nonsense", I pretend to draw water.
"You are lucky to get a nice master", Otsugi while beating on her hips said this smiling and ran away, but she got stuck in the mud. It was really difficult for her to get away from it with her wooden clogs.

"See what happened", pointing out my fingers I laughed loudly.

"I really feel pity on you", I said purposely.

Four ducks which were resting in idle at the side of the well came to my side in a raw quacking "guaa, guaa". It was really annoying. I throw water on them from my ladle. Ducks ran away, tottering on the mud, like an old woman fond of spreading rumours.

2

The fragrance of white plum at the kitchen door side lasts only for a short period. The spring of the mountainous countryside is usually short. While people are still engaged in preparing sushi, dengaku (bean curd backed and coated with miso) and miso soup, groups of female street vendors of Wakame (a kind of seaweed) would soon start coming. Wakame...Wakame, how about Wakame" they would call out in Echigo dialect. And by this time, people would have already become busy in silkworm breeding in the spring.

As you know, Komoro is popular for sericulture. Even the temple priests are engaged in breeding silkworm besides their main profession of offering prayers in the temple. Well,
there is no house which is not engaged in this job. However, my mistress was new to this job and she disliked it. She told me she would feel sick only by getting the smell of silkworms. When other ladies of the main family were busy in plucking the sprouts of mulberry, hanging hemp sacks around their necks, my mistress would lean against a long hibachi (charcoal brazier) and talk about the interesting points of new Kyogen performed in Tokyo.

Master was always infatuated with mistress. Apart from his wish to live a happy life with his wife he had no other desires. Seeing her happy face and cheerful voice was his only source of happiness, so he always made efforts to make her happy and keep her in good mood. This is also understood from the way he would call his wife. He never called her out only by her name, but always called 'Aya-San' (Mrs. Aya) putting 'San' for showing his respect to her. Such being the nature of my master, mistress lived in the house luxuriously everyday doing whatever she wanted to do, as if one lives in a hot spring resort where one does not have to stick to any prescribed job either during the day or in the night.

"Osada, what is the date today", sometimes, she was not even aware of the date and day. Sometimes looking on the calender on the wall, she would express her surprise on fast passing of time. While in a short time, the iris under the caves withered and rain continued to pour throughout the
period between Hassen and Kinoene making the river water muddy, and the miso mouldy. The rain at the kitchen side also gave a lonely feeling. During Gion festival, people put reed screens on their windows and during the Obon festival, they pay the charge of eel they ate on the day of ushiin doyo (the hottest period of summer dog days). To get rid of their sins during Obon they prepare butsudan (alter) but once the festival is over they throw away the flowers and other things used there. Moreover, when there is an epidemic of dysentery, there will not be any taiko-drum procession to publicise the staging of plays. My mistress wanted to enjoy outdoor pleasures but Komoro was a poor and sober place. The master of tea ceremony had shifted to Ueda and music teacher used to meet his livelihood by selling ame candies going around the villages. There are very few things in Komoro worth to be seen or hear, so my mistress was to be contented with the limited pleasures available within the house. Naturally, one ought to get bored. Ultimately, she expressed her dissatisfaction through her actions, like, throwing away silk handkerchief after cleaning nose, sprinkling perfume in bedroom ungrudgingly, and getting the hair dressed two or three times if displeased with the previous style. She also started enjoying late-night snacks. After eating vegetables pickled in rice-bran paste and dressed with sliced bonito and Chazuke (boiled rice with tea poured on it), she would ask; "isn't
there something more delicious?" Even her favourite dishes, she would take only two or three bites and rest would be given to dogs. There is nothing as short as the pleasures of woman. My mistress even got tired of such limited pleasures.

"Same thing is repeated everyday", she muttered to herself, leaning on the pillar. All those fickle pleasures she tried to enjoy finally forced her to make this conclusion.

Gradually, my mistress turned into a short-tempered person. Master was a well disciplined person and was always cautious in his actions so that his wife would not lose her temperament. But on the contrary, mistress always showed an annoyed look. "It is my sickness. I cannot stop it", she was aware of her short coming. Especially, when she would lose her temper, she would, some time, go away from her husband, shouting in anger, "oh, there is nobody as gluey as you". Whenever she lost her temper one could easily understand it from her appearance. On such days, she would look like a sick person, with swollen, reddish nose and brownish colour around eyebrows. Nope of her neck would be seen pale. She would get the rooms cleaned and swept unnecessarily and her voice would not come out clearly as if it has dried up in the throat. On such days, she would not talk to her husband even when they take their meals from the same torizen tray.

"Master has 'Kane of goo' which will bring good fortune for the year, whereas mistress's fortune is closed from all
the sides and, therefore, there is nothing to do but to wait until the lucky star come out of darkness", Godo-Sensei next to the sweet shop predicted. In other words, that was an unfortunate year for my mistress, and she used to see only bad dreams, as a bad omen for something. There is none as lonely and forlorn as woman. It will even make them sick. My mistress became weak and tired both physically and mentally, catching cold easily and yawning continuously throughout the morning. "Woman's life is cheerless and boring", she would say while making a deep sigh. She sniffed at a flower and threw that away. Even if she threw away the petty cash book, or failed to come out to receive him when he returned from outside, or even if she got up from the bed very late in the morning, Master would not scold her, because he always wanted to please her. She stayed in the house throughout day and night like a bush warbler in a cage. Some time even I feel pity on her, but she never showed any anger or discontent. Master, on some days after returning from the bank would view the summer scenery in the garden in a pensive mood with his hands crossed. And some days, he would go up to the second floor soon and would not come down except for meals. On days when mistress seemed to be not in pleasant mood, master would go to her room. Sitting near her nervously, he would ask: "Aya-San, are you not feeling well. It is not good to lie
down on the tatami always. You might catch cold. Instead of sitting like this why don’t you go to a doctor".

"No. Please leave me alone", she would reply.

Some time, mistress would go to the veranda alone and gaze at the sky over Tokyo like a bird in a cage and some other times, she would sob while writing letters. Her mood kept on changing. Yet in some other occasions, she in her night dress would walk around the garden till late in the cold nights.

Mistress started suffering from severe tooth ache from the beginning of autumn. When the pain becomes extremely unbearable, she would not allow me to go away from her. She, with painful eyes, would press her head on my back and rest. Her face, from ear to the cheek would get swollen and become pale. Even the forehead would become slightly yellowish. An completely exhausted master would nurse her, while rubbing his forehead with his hands in despair.

A dentist with a black bag often visited the house to treat her. This dentist, Dr. Sakurai, was still young but was skilled and competent. Whenever, I washed pans and pots, squating down on a stone in the river bank near the wooden door side of the kitchen, this man would be often seen coming through the uphill slope. As he was very familiar and free with me, he would come to me and peep into the water in the pots or watch the overhanging branches of persimmon trees on
the earthen wall, or view the autumn rays coming through the leaves of persimmon tree, and then, he would walk around my master, Arai's house with lot of interest. He was a native of Tokyo, and therefore, whenever he saw a house in new latticed architecture, the memories of Tokyo would come to his mind. This is what he told me. Generally, doctors coming from Tokyo are not good looking though they usually dress up in colourful cloths like heros. But only this dentist looked very handsome. Even I felt so.

He brought me presents every time he came. He gave a nickel coin each to the old caretaker also every time he returned.

One day, master had gone to Ueda on some bank business, staying overnight there. That night, we closed the doors of house early. With the intention of finishing the works in the kitchen fast, I hurriedly washed the pots and kept them upside down, washed and arranged the plates and small bowls, removed charcoal from lumber room, cleaned the foot-prints of the cat, removed the slippers from my feet and then went to mistress room. It was early in the evening. My mistress's was lying down on the bed and reading a novel, in a carefree mood, without fear or shy of others. Her white breasts were partially visible from her open chest, her left hand was dangling on the tatami mat, right leg was folded from the knee and her left leg was stretched out exposing her long backward
bending thumb. Her slovenly figure, under the bright lamp light in the night reflected much more beautiful than in daylight.

"Mistress, shall I massage your legs", I drew close to her.

"Oh, have you finished", she sat up in the bed, while adjusting her bosom, "I feel better when you massage me. This morning I had pain around my shoulders. So, you please massage me for some time".

"Well, how can I massage your shoulders if you lie down".

"What! I will get up indeed."

I had the experience of massaging my mother's shoulders. Therefore, when I started massaging mistress's tender shoulders, standing behind her, I suddenly remembered my mother. Compared to my mother's hard working body, massaging mistress did not require any effort.

"Frankly speaking, your finger tips have good power, Osada. I am really pleased by the way you massage me. Master is also praising you always". Mistress praised my talent. Praising me by her was sound to me as a riddle - because she was a person boastful of her on ability and talent. When I praise her for her talent, she would become very pleased and show a proud face with full of joy.

"Hey, Osada, tell me who is, according to your opinion, most handsome among the guests who visit our house".
"I see.... But, mistress you please say it first".

"No, you say it first".

"But I don't know who is handsome".

"Look Osada, if you go on laughing only, it is a mere wastage of time".

"Alright then, let me say seriously. Well, Mr. Yoshido of the Bank?"

"Ah, no, such an old looking person? - Don't joke. Tell me who is really handsome".

Thereafter, I said the names of many other persons - the young master of Shima-ya, the eldest son of Echigo-ya, the second son of Ura-ya, Mr. Kameso of Aramachi, Mr. Fujikan of Honmachi - all were equally good looking masters of the time. However, according to mistress's opinion, even if a man is handsome and owns lot of property etc., and possesses the nature of praising other's talent and ability, he cannot be trusted if he is a grumbler always with a perplexed mind. On the other hand, an intelligent and very attentive man is more awful because he will be able to make fool of a woman and will see through even her short comings. Some are generous but excessively lavish in spending money, some are finicky but excessively enlightened, some are kind but highly reserved. If a man seems to be good, he will be feeble-looking. So it is difficult to find out a man without any fault."

"In that case, mistress what about Mr. Sakurai".

209
"You are making me to say everything..., and you don't open your mouth. Really cunning. What is your opinion about him?"

"You mean Mr. Sakurai? It is regrettable that he remains as a dentist. People say so".

"Ha, ha... then what job should he have done, in their opinion".

"May be, a government officer...".

"Ha, ha...."

"Well, there is no woman who does not praise him. Mistress, you too are in favour of him, aren't you?"

Mistress looked at me fondly. She did not speak anything. As I was watching her face, I saw her beautiful lips getting twisted and finally sweet smile appeared on it.

Suddenly, the cat who was dozing off by the side of the lamp shaken its ears and went out of the room as if frightened by a noise. Myself and mistress also stopped our gossip about master and pricked up our ears for listening properly. But soon the cat came back to the room, stretched its body forward by stretching its forelegs, and got into the lap of mistress coquettishly. She hugged the cat with great affection as she didn't have any child, and rubbed its soft hairs with her white cheeks. Expression in her eyes at that time looked as if she was dreaming a beautiful dream. There was a needle
work box just at the side of my mistress. She drew that near to her and took out a strikingly beautiful scarf from it.

"I have been thinking to give it you since few days", she placed that into my hands. That violet silk crepe looked reddish brown in the night. I was astonished and was really in confusion whether to accept it or not. I declined it strongly.

"Look! If you say so what can I do. It is not a precious thing as you think. You work so hard and it is a symbol of my goodwill towards you.... It is alright. You keep it safely", she wanted to say something else but did not say. She made a deep sigh only. With an expression in her eyes which was resembling to that of a person who look the bottom of a ravine from a dangerous cliff, she looked around and trembled.

"I want to say something to you", she was dumb founded after saying this.

"You please promise me that you won’t tell anybody what I am going to tell you tonight. Well, I need not ask you an assurance as you are neither careless nor imprudent. So I shouldn’t worry about you", she repeatedly reminded me to keep the secret intact. Still it was difficult for her to reveal it. Finally, when she was about to speak it out her entire face till the base of the ears turned red. She, at last, lowered her voice and revealed her secret to me. That was the
first time I came to know about her relationship with the dentist until that day. She squeezed my hand. My face got flushed. For me, anything I can withstand, but I become helpless when somebody discloses his or her secrets to me. Tormented with the thought of the dentist, mistress was begging for my help. Finally, I too felt pity and compassion on her and made remarks which would comfort her. Hearing my remarks she started weeping like a child.

As there was no other way out, I promised her that I would bring the dentist to her. Suddenly, I felt that her hand, burning like fire, is getting detached from me. I agreed to arrange their meeting, on an impulse of that moment — a prudent act by an youngster. However, when I realised that she was not joking but whatever she told me was terrible truth, even I shivered in fear. After this questionable terrible alliance with the mistress, I behaved like a dog which detect rumours and barked at even the good natured Master. Sometimes, I consoled myself my own confused and guilty conscious mind. Because even though mistress's love affair was illicit, behind it had pathos beyond one's imagination. Nobody knows how much she wept in the night. And she did not have any trustworthy friend with whom she could talk about such things. Therefore, after thinking seriously about my role here, I consoled myself.
Any way, my mistress was like a flower planted in a warm country and bloomed in gentle breeze. She was not a weed which would grow thickly even if shifted to a rough land. She was completely new to the life in the country side. She must have found great difference in the village life supposed to be quite, as told to her by others while she was still in the capital, and the lonely bitter life as she actually experienced herself after started living in the countryside. Master used to see mistress as a bird in a cage, and never understood her unquenched desires. When will the keeper, who put the bird in the cage and get pleasure from it, would understand the feeling of the bird whose wings were cut off? How far mistress would be understood by master who married her? - this is the fate of a woman. Mistress, after got into the wed-lock, lead a lonely life like a traveller who left his home far behind, without a single person around considerate to her feeling. This is enough for woman to die. Unfortunate mistress. She was no more interested in tasting the real happiness of life. Mistress, being tired because of crying, withered like a dried grass. But in a way, she could have recovered easily, as there came a cool shower of love.

Just at that time of the year, the autumn grass was in full growth. The road through which the dentist was commuting was also turned beautiful.
There was a big ceremony on the 20th of October to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the bank. This was an unforgettable day in the life of my master, and his reputation spread out throughout the locality like the sound of bell in the Kogaku-ji temple. People everywhere were praising his effort and long hard work.

That day morning I got up early and prepared breakfast. Autumn rays coming through the open door of the kitchen illuminated the pail and bucket in the sink. Blue smoke leaked out of the wall through the sooty window. While slurping my nose I loaded the bonfire on a juno (tool used for carrying bonfire) and carried to the hearth. My mistress was still sleeping. She did not get up even after I completed cleaning the second floor with a floor cloth damped in boiled water. The pot on hearth started boiling and its steam started coming out through the gap of the lid. The robata was filled with the sweet, delicious smell of the soup.

Mistress was sleeping even at 8 O’Clock. Master smelling the delicious aroma of the soup, came to the hearth looking little dejected and lost in thinking. Soon, he started eating his breakfast alone. By the time, a messenger from the bank came. Hurriedly, he got ready and left the house. That day, he wore a "Kuronanako Haori" with a quintuple crest of "Kenbishi", and a hakama made of 'Cho'. I was busy in the
kitchen cooking various dishes. Soon it was past nine O’Clock, and mistress came to the kitchen with a tooth brush in her mouth - her face looked as if she saw a frightening dream. By that time the miso soup was already boiled down.

As a sign of celebration on that day, cleaned rice and money were given as charity to all beggars who came to the gate, as per master’s wish.

Generally, master disliked beggars. "Better to die instead of begging", he used to reprimand them. Therefore, giving alms to them on that day was a very strange happening. Wretched voices of poor beggars were heard from the gate right from morning of that day. Upon hearing this news, many people gathered there, some with their children acting as blind shamisen players, some as crippled or handicapped, as it was a good opportunity to make easy money. Even the people living in slum came there without any shame or fear of loss of name, because of their greed for money. Even a crippled, old woman of around seventy put her share of cleaned rice into her front flap, and disappeared in crowd outside the gate. I was amazed at this scene.

Master returned in the afternoon for a while holding a packet in a violet silk wrapping cloth under his arms. After feeding the hens, when I went to the side of mistress’s room where master and mistress were talking something. Unintentionally, I listened to their discussion while peeping.
into their room through the side of the sliding door. Master took off his "haori" and wiped of the sweat from his forehead.

"See Aya, you should not show such a face at such a good occasion. You should be little more cheerful and pleasant, otherwise I will lose interest and enthusiasm. Moreover, today is a day of celebrations. So, even the servants should be given some free time today."

"That is why, I told them to enjoy any long they want".

"Look, if you say so nobody will be able to get any free time - eh, is it not so? Aya-san, these days you tend to blame the servants always. You must not do so. Whether it is Osada, or the old man, they are our servants".

"Nobody is blaming them".

"If you don't blame, why do you speak so?"

"I don't know, when I have spoken ill of them or blamed them".

"Your tone of speaking indicates that".

"Tone, that is my nature".

"The tone when you talk to your father sounds different from the tone you talk now".

"What do you mean?" Does anybody consider his parents and servants as equals? It is better not to drag my parents into it."

"You speak very strange thing, aren't you?"
"Yes, when you talk about the servants, why do you drag my parents into it?"

"You don't understand what I say. I mentioned your father here not with any such intention - what I meant was that, one should consider his servants in the same way he consider his parents. Otherwise it is difficult to keep them as servants. Anyway, forget about such things. Today I want you to be happy. Regaining his temper, master untied the violet silk wrapping cloth and opened the lid of a small box made of paulownia wood. After removing the white silk wrapping carefully, he took out a wonderful golden sake cup and placed it on the tatami mat. Thereafter, he opened the "Letter of Appreciation" and said:

"This was presented by the bank to me in today's celebrations. Well, to me, it is an honourable memento. See, my name is engraved in this sake cup and many greetings praising me are written on this letter of appreciation.

"I have seen it".

"You see it properly". Why are you giving me such cold-hearted and indifferent reply. This is a valuable honour bestowed upon me. I came to show you that. Please say something, otherwise...."

"That is why I told you that I have seen it". Master kept his lips tight. Both of them did not speak, as there existed a cold, unpleasant feeling between them. Slightly
shivering, when master stared at the face of mistress, she with a faint disdainful smile sat there as if she is thinking something else. Suddenly, lifting up the sake cup and gazing intently on it he sighed and said: "Yes, women are cold-hearted and uninterested in the business of men. Till now I have been thinking that you are some more thoughtful and sympathetic.

"Any how, people like me do not understand what you guys are doing."

"Of course. I am not saying that you must understand my business. What I mean is that you are not sympathetic and thoughtful. A person who understands the business of a man probably won't make such answers. Well, you listen to me carefully. I am not boasting, but it is true that the business of Komoro today moves under my control. Although the businessmen in Komoro always complain about depression in business, they do not face any financial problem because of the efforts I am making to run the bank. Even the business and planning of Town Assembly are carried out on the basis of my opinion. The prosperity or decline of Komoro is entirely depending on the measures I execute. I just want you to appreciate the honour bestowed upon me, but...", a hot tear dropped from my master's eyes and fell into the golden 'sake' cup.
Suddenly, my master got out of there and went to the guest room, carrying the sake cup and "haori". His appearance was, however, not normal, and I followed him to observe his actions. Unable to contain his sorrow and anger, he abruptly grabbed the award and tore it to shreds. Hot tears flowed through his manly face. This man who could sustain the economy of Komoro himself was powerless to control his wife's feelings. My master who was competent enough to make the small Komoro bank into the biggest bank in Shiushu, threw away the life time honour bestowed on him like dumping a rubbish as he failed to get his wife's appreciation. He was no more interested in hearing people praising him or envy him for his success. If it were any other person he would have seized and twisted her hair, tore her black silk crepe haori, and even beaten her in anger. But as my master was a good person, different from ordinary folk, he could never show his anger directly to anybody even when he was furiously angry. He grabbed and pulled at his hair and kicked the tatami floor in anguish before leaving the room. I too got frightened hearing the sudden banging sound of the door.

Returning to her room I tried to comfort my mistress, who threw herself down in tears, saying various things. But she would not make any response. Hesitantly, I came to the kitchen, but I was anxious and worried about any master and mistress.
In the evening, I went to fetch water. When I came to the gate carrying a pail of water, I saw a women in her forties standing in front of the lattice. Her appearance looked like that of a pilgrim. She carried an infant covered in a real hood on her back, and bore a dark grey puttees and straw sandals. Torn and worn out in travel, it had a wretched, pitiable look. My mistress, still her eyes swollen with crying, came out and gave that woman cleaned rice, money etc., left overs from the celebration today. She looked at the pilgrim with an eye full of grief and sorrow, which was indescribable.

"Sing that song once again for me", she requested the pilgrim very gently.

"Song? You mean that song", with a sad smile, the pilgrim woman reaffirmed it in a strange local dialect. Soon, she started singing the following verse while ringing a handball.

Chichihaha no megumimo fukaki Kokawa dera
Hotoke no chikaki tanomoshi no mi.

Her face was sun-burned and ugly but her voice was melodious. The verses she was singing were not only just beautiful and touching, but were really heart-rending and she sang it in a sad, nonchalant voice. Usually, beautiful voice comes from an ugly mouth. That is common in this world. At the same time, there are very few people who can be compared
with this woman I was about to cry after hearing her singing
the first verse. My heart was choked with sorrow. Soon, she
raised her pale and tired face and continued to sing:

Furu sato ya haru-baru kokni kinii dera
Hana no miyako mo Chikaku naru naran.

She stressed the "Ya" of "Furusato ya". Her lips
shivered in sorrow when she sang "harubaru kokoni" in a long
pitch, taking a deep breath, and her nonchalant voice matching
to the sound of a hand bell. By the time she finished singing
"hana no miyako", hot tears suddenly started flowing through
her cheeks and fell on her stale, old fashioned sleeves.
Deeply moved by the song, my mistress stood there placing her
hands on her face. What would have been the feeling of my
mistress at that time, I didn’t know it well, though I could
guess it vaguely.

"What is the title of the song you have sung now", mistress asked the women in a friendly tone after she has
finished singing.

"Ah, title of this song? It is "Goeika". It is sung
often at the time of staging a play etc. When Otsuru went for
pilgrimage to Saikoku...."

"Where are you form?"

"From Ise".

"Oh, it is far from here".
"All of us wander around like this, singing "Goeika" in thirty three holy temples in Saikoku often visited by many pilgrims".

"Where are you coming from now".

"I came to Nagano from Echigo and from there I wandered around various places before reaching here. From here I am going to warmer places as it will soon become winter.

"What will you gain from listening to song by such a beggar?" the old servant laughed deliberately, although he looked innocent.

"Oh, thank you very much. It is a great help to me madame". The pilgrim women, swaying the crying child, walked away from there while gazing at the autumn sky in the dusk.

Though old servant laughed at my mistress scornfully, I did not feel like to do that. Instead, the way my mistress was moved by the beautiful voice of that pilgrim woman and her eagerness in knowing details about her wretched life, rather indicated how enviously she was interested in her. For her, living here with her husband under the same roof was as painful and wretched as the life of that wandering woman. In the eyes of that pilgrim woman, my mistress must have been appeared as a competent and intelligent woman of high status which she cannot even dreamed of. In the eyes of my mistress wretched life of that pilgrim woman must have been appeared as free and happy compared to her own life which is restricted by
social stigmas and bonds and dragged against one's own will -
a life which is spent always in dreams only.

Master returned home that day late as there was a
drinking party as a part of the celebrations. Even on such
days when he had a happy and enjoyable life, getting respect
and reverence from all around him outside the house, my master
had very lonely and sorrowful life inside the house. Master
after blowing a liquor smelling breathe on to the face of
mistress, fell on to the tatami in the second floor and slept
at once. That night onward they slept separately.

Few days the path to the well was found covered with
fallen leaves of persimmon trees. Somedays, the path was wet
due to thawing, and the straps of my geta used to get broken.
And on the day of Ebisuko, I went to fetch water walking on
the first snow of the season. Toe of my old tabi, which was
given to me by my mistress, became ice-cold, and my breathe
was white due to coldness. Cold was so severe that the snow
in the shade in northern direction even got frozen.

On 20th December, a rickshaw, with an unusual guest,
stopped in front of the gate. The guest was my mistress's
father from Tokyo. His was an unexpected visit. Therefore,
my mistress was so excited that she even stumbled against the
threshold. Master also returned from the bank early that day.
Both master and mistress were completely engaged in treating
the guest and discussing with him various things about Tokyo. Loud laughter could be heard from the inner room after a long time. How happy was my mistress on that day, I cannot explain it now. There was a special feast on that night. The guest seemed to have come there mainly to discuss about financial matters. Four days after he reached, the guest had gone to Nagano along with my master. My mistress decided to stay at home. On the day of their departure, after keeping ready their umbrellas and shoes, I went to the room, where the guest was dressing. He was an impatient, restless person. He waited in the room impatiently, looking at his pocket watch kept under his stiff sash of the kimono and walking here and there inside the room. I looked at him and mistress carefully comparing the expressions in their faces.

"Grandma is also eager to see the face of a grand child. She always talks about that only. What happened? Don't you have any such plan yet?" Passing his hands across his round chin, he asked.

My mistress, blushed by such a question, remained there looking down, without answering the question. Soon very affectionately she looked at her father and said;

"Father, please change your 'haori' before going".

"What? This is alright. This is of superior quality, you know".

"Still, it is very bad".
"This 'haori' is 15 years old, if I am right. Quality goods are strong and durable", he pressed the edge of his kimono sleeves with his fingers and unfolded it like a wing and showed her.

"Well, shall I then change my dress, although troublesome", suddenly he changed his mind. He opened his bundle and took out a 'haori' made of knotted silk. He quickly worn it and checked.

"Look. Why don't you wear this".

"This one? You know this 'haori' is meant for this kimono. Look here - this 'haori' is alright".

"But some how that looks very funny. In that case, it is better to wear the one which you were wearing before."

Our guest after tying the brown tape of the haori, sat in front of the hibachi (charcoal brazier) and inspected it. Suddenly he stood up and removed that 'haori'.

"Then, this is the one I am going to wear, the original one. Ha, ha, ha...."

My mistress folded those haori and put them into the bundle mentioned earlier. Our guest with a pipe in his mouth, stood there silently, watching what my mistress was doing.

"Ha, ha, ha... grandma has even kept a blazoned kimono in that", he said it so, as if he had remembered it suddenly.

While they were having such innocent and affectionate conversation, my master after finishing his work, came down
from the first floor. In a moment, my master’s lower lips burned in jealously.

"Well, let us start. Train will leave in another 30 minutes".

Our guest said so in hurry. Soon they left the house, both of them wearing thick over-coats. Carrying their luggage, the old servant followed them till the station. After they left I started arranging the scattered items in the rooms. Rooms were filled with suffocating smell of cigarette smoke. Opening the sliding door, I dried the quilt, sleeved coverlet, night-wear, which had male’s scent, by putting them on the verandah.

When she was alone at home, my mistress would take out her dresses from the all-paulownia chest and fold them properly and place them again into the drawers. Sometimes, she would take out her cloths and gaze at them intently for long time, as one is fascinated by seeing his or her own image reflected in a mirror. Because she really considered her clothes as a part of her own body I too stood near her and saw her dresses. All her clothes were extremely attractive. Especially, I liked her, long under garment most. Made of Hama silk crepe, this long undergarment had scattered plum pattern on its bottom. Its hem and sleeve edges were made by attaching a piece of scarlet crepe at the back side of red silk. She placed that on her laps and told me in a casual
tone that she wore it on the night of her wedding. But suddenly she became careful about her language and stopped speaking as all those things were of the past. Fixing her eyes on that, she sat there motionless. One dead silver coloured moth fell down from her sleeves. As she smelled the scent of mothball, her heart suddenly seemed to have filled with happy, pleasant memories of the past to such a level that she even forgotten my presence there completely.

"Ah, ah, I don't need kimono or anything else", she felt extremely anxious about her life and started crying while holding that long undergarment in her hands. Tears flowed through her beautiful face endlessly.

Strangely, that day was warm although the winter solstice was already nearing. This kind of phenomenon use to occur in the mountainous country side occasionally and such good weather is a warning for heavy snow. By the afternoon, low altitude grey clouds spread throughout the sky. All of a sudden it became dim inside the house. Meanwhile, it started snowing. Day was short and already it was dark inside the house so I lighted the lamp. The old servant got into his room and fell asleep as he seemed to have over drunk that day. After finishing my works in the kitchen, I went to my mistress and stayed there as I was worried about her loneliness. Except for the lonely sound of carts, passing through in the midst of snow, the surrounding was extremely calm and quite
and I was almost anxious about the accumulation of snow outside the door. We sat together in front of the foot warmer, my mistress reading the same novel I mentioned earlier and I repairing my old tabi. We gossiped about various items one after another, starting from the latest rumours in Nagano, the dentist and then even about thieves. Suddenly, my mistress became lonely.

"What happened to the old servant", she asked me.

"He fell asleep long time back".

"Ah, really, it is too early, isn't it? Osada, confirm whether the doors are closed properly. People say, these days there are lot of thieves". We sat there in fear. Suddenly, somebody knocked at the door.

"Who is it, at this time of night let me see", I went and opened the door. It was dark every where. With only the dimly white snow in the night, I could not see anybody around. I stood still there for sometime. "Sky is clear", murmuring myself, I stepped out of the house two three steps and looked around. Suddenly, cold snow started pattering on my nape of the neck.

"Heavens, is it snowing?", I stepped backward to under the eaves and combed down my hair with hand unknowingly. Although dark, very thin snow was falling and it actually looked grey like low fog. The light from the small paper
lantern held by pedestrians on the other side of the road reflected on the snow. Its light was flamboyantly bright.

After closing the door when I waited in the garden for a while somebody again knocked the door from outside. The sound of removing snow from geta also was heard. I opened the door which I closed once and in loud voice I asked, "Who is that." I surprised to see the visitor. It was none but that handsome rogue.

"Mistress, Mr.Arai has come", I rushed to her room to inform her about the visitor. Surprised by the news, her face starting from the bottom of ears till the nape of the neck turned red. She hid herself somewhere and did not appear immediately. Dentist's overcoat was covered with snow which could not be brushed off easily. When took out his over-coat, bottom of his kimono was also found wet. As usual, after hiding his footwear, I took him to my mistress's room. He was shivering with cold.

My mistress made him to take off his wet clothes first, and then, gave him a long-hem kimono of her own to wear. That was a female kimono, made of silk cloth having alternative stripes with red-silk waist back. It had eight plackets and when he wore it properly, it was very much matching to the fair complexioned dentist. Mistress looked at him from his left and right in rapt admiration.
"Osada, look at him well. How matching is that kimono? Mr. Sakurai is perfectly looking like a woman in this dress," saying this she grasped my hand.

That day I got a beautiful bustle for my obi from the dentist. Following directions from my mistress, I brought wine and placed it at the side of foot-warmer. Instead of wine cups, I gave them 'kyoyaki-style' tea cups. The room was quiet and warm, a cheerful, deceiving atmosphere as if in a dream. Outside, the plum blossom was about to bloom and the bush warbler was about to start singing although it was still winter. Even the cat had gone out of the room as if it had gone into rut. I went to the next room. Enraptured by the story of love - love like a dream in a spring night - I peeped into their room through the gaps in the sliding door. Mistress's face reflected in the bright lamp light in the night was extremely beautiful. I have never seen her so beautiful before or after that. I could see her drinking wine while narrowing her glossy eyes.

Also, I could see the dentist laughing very happily, waving his slender, fair hands. As their romance progressed, my mistress completely forgot her worries of the past and anxieties for the future. Both of them continuously engaged in talking, one subject to another, as if they applied some perfumed oil on their lips.
"Oku-san" - rubbing his cherry coloured cheek on the foot warmer he called her.

"Oh, again. For God's sake please stop calling me 'Oku-san'". These words of my mistress - a symbol of her familiarity and close friendship with the dentist - seemed to have given the dentist indescribable amount of happiness. Dentist licked his lips, and started speaking;

"I am drunk. I am drunk. I don't know why I got so drunk".

"Naturally you must. Because you have drunk alcohol", mistress laughed.

"I had only little, but even my hands turned red. I don't know why", he showed his hands to her.

"But, you please see my face", she pressed her cheeks with hands.

"You haven't turned red at all. Instead of red, your face has become pale. That means you are strong at alcohol. - You are really strong at alcohol."

"Alright, speak anything you like", she spoke in a wheedling voice, "but, you know, Mr.Sakurai, even if I want to get drunk, I never become drunk whatever quantity of alcohol I take". Moved by her words, dentist sat there in silence gazing at her beautiful eyes. My mistress sat there for a while looking at the shadow of the dentist-reflected on the paper sliding door. Suddenly, she turned back and as if
searching something she seized some air and looked at it. Her face was filled with fear. Soon, she drew closer to the man while trembling with fear.

"Can't we two live like this for ever? Ah, how nice it would be if we could live together", she became gloomy. The man just gave a sigh only. A depressed mistress continued her talk.

"Perhaps, I may not meet you again. The unpleasant dream I saw last night - I don't know why I have been so unfortunate. Possibly, I may die in the near future.... We may not be able to meet again...."

"Again, you are talking silly things. You cannot rely on dreams."

"You may say so, but you please see it from the viewpoint of a woman. It is different. Any way, I am fed up with it. Let us avoid talking such things", mistress changed her mind.

"By the way, do you remember the day on which we met for the first time. It was in May last year, you know, at the hot spring of Isobe - I wasn't married yet and came to this place...."

"Yes, yes, I remember. It was the day on which a group of people of 'Gessanko' stayed there. When we walked under the plum trees we heard a nice sound from Usuigawa river, you remember. "Is that a 'Kajika' frog? Oh yes, it is. Its
voice sounds like the chirping of 'higurashi' cicada", upon hearing the sound you said like this".

"I remember it. After that we climbed on to the hill. The whole area was covered with azalea blossom. As a result of climbing the hill, I lost my breath and was in a confused situation. I did not know what to do. Then you snapped an azalea branch with red flowers, and gave that to me saying, "you please suck in this dew. You remember that?"

"We walked a lot that time you remember. Both of us were tired and when we were viewing the surroundings, we saw the evening sun setting and the colour of sky changing followed by that. There was lot of water vapour in the air that evening. I haven’t seen again such a beautiful sight of sun-set ever since - I don’t forget it even now".

"Oh, even I also...."

They looked each other. Their sweet, old dreams of the past seemed to have come alive once again. That was what their facial appearance indicated.

"Well, don’t you have one more drink", my mistress lifted up the cup.

"I had enough".

"Is it so, then I will have one more".

"What, you drink again? - please stop now".

"Why shouldn’t I get drunk?"

"Because, the way you drink is unnatural and excessive".
"That means, you haven’t really understood my feeling yet. How nice if I could die after getting drunk. You know, that is my heart’s desire."

She forced him to hold the wine bottle and keeping her hand on his hand, she tried to pour wine into the tea cup. Their hands were shivering and some wine spilt on the Kotatsu stand. Mistress closed her eyes and emptied the cup in one gulp. Then she placed her face on the foot-warmer and started weeping silently. I could hear her strained, sorrowful weeping sound. Standing near the sliding door, when I heard her weeping, even I felt sorry for her. The man suddenly embraced her, and tried to soothe her placing his face on her ears. Seeing his sympathy and compassion, mistress’s weeping became louder, and seemed to have no plan to stop. My heart was wrung with grief. Gradually, her weeping voice became faint. Only sobs could be heard occasionally. The clock struck 10 O’Clock. I served them hot tea of good flavour. My mistress felt refreshed after wetting her dried throat with the tea.

"Excuse me please", suddenly, voice of a drunken man was heard from the front. As it was a quiet, snowing night, his thick, loud voice had echoed all around. All the three of us looked at each other in surprise.

"Who might be that", my mistress was frightened.

"Excuse me please, are you sleeping?"
The dentist soon turned pale and sobered up from the intoxication of alcohol. Trembling in fear he looked around restlessly as if he got dazzled by the voice. He wanted to hide somewhere, but his legs got wrapped in the long bottom of the kimono. Therefore, he stumbled over other articles and slipped. The bottle fell down and the remaining wine in that flowed through the tatami. I listen to the voice half in doubt, and when the men outside the gate called out a third time, to my surprise, I recognised the voice as it was my father.

"Mistress, it is my father", I went and opened the door.

"Father, why have you come..., at this time of the night" while opening the door I asked him.

"Well, I lost my way and reached here", he spoke in indistinctive words.

"It is really unbearable. Why are you coming to other's house late in the night, without permission?"

Although he was my father, I talked to him in an angry scolding tone as he had done a shameless act without any regard for the mistress. My mistress was already standing there, turning her face away from the lamp light.

"Is that Osada's father".

"No, I am not. I am from Tokyo", he hesitatingly said so with an innocent look. He was about to fall down when he
tried with tottering steps to keep the 'konjak', which he was carrying with him, at one corner of the garden.

"Oh look, don't sleep there, please go back fast".

"Well, let him sleep there for some time. It is alright."

"When you are very drunk, like this you always fall asleep. So, please go back."

"You rest for sometime there".

"Yes", father sat on the doorframe and said.

"I came here because I fell in love with Miss Osada".

"Please go back fast. Coming to somebody's house so late in the night, that too fully drunk...."

"Oh, don't say so. I haven't seen you for more than ten months. I was yearning to see you, you know."

My mistress opened the cupboard at hearth side and while looking for a glass she asked him;

"Do you want water?"

"See, mistress is so kind.... By the way, Osada, what is time now?"

"Twelve O'Clock", I said a lie.

"What? twelve...", he hacked back in stern voice.

"Eleven thirty (half past eleven)".

"Come on, have some water", mistress gave him a glass of water.
"Thank you. Well.... I hired a geisha tonight and gave her four five yens. From here I am going there again to.... Yes, yes. She wants me to drink again".

"You are already very drunk".

"I say, you return fast. See you are completely wet - you are without even an umbrella."

"I brought an umbrella, but I gave that to Miyosuke. Well... mistress, won't you give me a cigarette".

"You don't have to smoke now. You better return".

"Well, I will give you the cigarette tray", my mistress gave him cigarette. Father happily took a cigarette from that while looking at her face.

"Hello mistress, you are still young. Where is master.... I would like to see master's face before going."

"Master is not at home", I broke into the conversation.

"What is time now", he again enquired.

"Half past eleven. Here everybody sleeps at 10 O'Clock. Well now you go back quickly".

"Shall I give you one more glass of water".

"No, I had enough".

"Once you regain your composure, you may go back as early as possible tonight itself, as Osada is also worried so much. You understand? Please do so".

"Yes, yes. I will go to the geisha from here. Shall I go to Rokku".

237
"Well, that is right, you do so."

"Please excuse me for my unmannerly behaviour. When I am drunk I behave like this, but mistress, when I am not drunk I am a good chap. ah, ah...", he got up with tottering steps.

"Good night, good night", he said in a funny tone.

"What is this? Better you come to your senses", I told him in scolding manner and handed over the konjak to him.

"Oh it is snowing heavily. Take care while you go", I again told him in low voice when I went outside to see him off.

"Good Night", saying this in the tone of a song he went away, walking drunkenly. For a while, I stood silently at the gate and gazed after him. Suddenly, he returned to his real half-drunk condition and had gone away, walking on the snow very quickly. His posture and feet were not seemed like a full fledged drunkard. My father soon disappeared in the darkness.

After giving a sigh of relief, when I returned to my mistress room, the dentist, who was hiding in the closet, was sitting there with a wry smile, while scratching his head repeatedly. I felt pity on him, and at the same time, I felt shy also.

"My father finds it difficult to come here in normal conditions. That is why he played innocent as if like a totally drunk person", I said moving close to my mistress.
"Because he wanted to see you."

"He wanted to accompany me when I was coming to this place. But who wants such a person to accompany. So, I strictly warned him not to come to master's house any time."

"But, it seems that he was yearning to see you."

"I haven't seen you for more than ten months. I was yearning to see you, you know, he said so, but that is nonsense. Who wants to see such a drunkard."

"Your mother might also be worried about you", hearing these words of my mistress, I suddenly started thinking about my pathetic mother who was more dear to me than my father who came to meet me. The dentist sat there lost in thought.

"Mr. Sakurai, what are you so deeply thinking about", mistress asked him looking at his face.

"Indeed - that is what a parent is".

"It seems, you admire him greatly".

"Human feelings are something great.... Is it not so?"

"What?"

"To be greatful".

"Ah, ah...."

"Yes, it is really so".

"Look! again".

"That is true. I haven't even sent a letter during last six months".

"To whom".
"I have been busy always, so I didn't get time to write letter".

"What are you talking about".

"Eh? Did I say something?"

"Yes, you did. - I haven't sent any letter during last six months, I haven't forgotten the benefit and favour received, I don't have time to write letter - certainly you are recollecting something". Mistress turned to my side and continued; "You know Osada, Mr. Sakurai seems to be lost in some sweet memories, that is why he talks like this...."

"Please stop. You are very suspicious. I don't like it." The man had become serious and continued.

"Please hear me. I explain it you. I have a teacher to whom I have got some obligations. He has opened his hospital in Shitaya recently. I don't know how much I am indebted to him for many helps and benefits I received from him. He considers me as his own son and always worry about me. Without his help and assistance, I would not have become what I am today. He used to scold me always in an encouraging tone. "Look at your friends. They all have achieved great success in their life. Are you not envious of them? Don't waste your time in fruitless effort", he would always advice me. Whatever my teacher said is true - but I am no more bothered about great success or achievement in life. Now, my mind is occupied by you - only you. Ah, compared to my old
days when I used to compete with my friends and colleagues, I have changed a lot now, you know." After saying this much, he looked at my mistress for a while, and suddenly stood up as if he thought of something. He soon took off the long bottomed kimono, which was given to him by mistress, and began to put on his own dress. Surprised by his sudden actions my mistress enquired: "Why can't you stay in that kimono (dress)."

"I don't know why, but suddenly I am not feeling well, so I will go back tonight".

"You are going back! In this snow? Your kimono hasn't dried yet, you know".

"What?"... Ah, doesn't matter. I will fold it."

"Well, are you really going back? If so, it is too much...."

A restless dentist was standing there for some time twisting his hat. Soon, he sat down there dejected and depressed.

"I don't stop you by force. But, please stay here some more time."

"But, if I get delayed further...."

"Isn't it alright even if you get delayed. Just, some more time please."

I don't know how it spread or by whom it was spread, the love affairs of my mistress had become the talk of the town.
The hairdresser, a reporter of all news around, had returned laughing after scattering everywhere the butts of cigarettes he smoked and hinting about the rumours. The whole area was filled with cigarette's smell. My mistress who had seen sitting there forgetting all about her, started thinking something and appeared to have become weird. Messengers from the bank came to the house everyday to find out whether master has returned from his trip. There was letter from Nagano also. The guest, mistress father, had gone to some other place with another companion and would be returning one or two days later than master. That was a small letter in a dark grey cover. In order to get rid of her loneliness, my mistress had read that letter repeatedly. "Even from this letter one can understand how tasteless and inelegant my husband is", she told me. The day before my master's return, mistress spent lot of time in searching and hiding something. She was worried on that day.

My mistress always carried a photograph with her. That was a card-size photograph without gloss, of a man. The man in the photograph had slightly serious look, but he possessed the features of an attractive, loving person. Moreover, he had a photogenic beautiful face, and therefore, I don't think any female would have disliked him, though I don't know what would be the reaction of male folks. He had a fleshy cheek and idle but charming eyes. His lips were such that they
could probably only whisper, and had a well shaped and beautiful upper-half body. Anyway it can't be a trick by a countryside photographer. Mistress had difficulty in finding out a place to hide that. She tried to keep it in various places such as drawer of the table, beneath the waste thread in the needle box, under the kimono kept in the chest. But she was not satisfied with any of these places, as she was very worried about it. Thereafter, she hid the photograph behind the frame of a fine calligraphy by a woman hanging on the wall. But still she was not satisfied. She walked under that frame several times to confirm its safety and finally removed it from there. In short, there was no suitable place to keep such a small photograph. At last, she put that photograph into her pocket and while confirming its position by passing her hands over the obi, she had walked around inside the room.

Mistress also took out love letters from the letter box. She rubbed her soft cheek with those letters fondly and started reading them one by one. Some letters had inside them pressed flower petals and leaves with their original colour. Mistress smelled the remaining fragrance of the flower and her whole body burned in passion. She wanted to destroy those love letters by tearing them into pieces, so that master would not see them. However, she couldn't do that because of her attachment to them. She again opened the letters, which were
once jostled and torn into pieces, and began reading them by
joining together the torn pieces - she, in fact, rolled up and
swallowed the portions which were dear to her.

"Here is the ragman. Don’t you have wastepaper to be
disposed off", fortunately a ragman came to the house.
Mistress, raked up the torn pieces of the letters, stuffed
them into the wastepaper already in the basket and sold them
to the ragman. The ragman took out a big purse and while
making the sound of coins he said, "thank you very much for
selling waste papers to me every time. Well, I will buy it
for three sens." He placed there three copper coins and left.

That day mistress was found in a depressed mood, feeling
anxious about her future. She was slightly dizzy and as a
result, blood came out from her nose. Although she slept
early that day, saying that she was not feeling well, that was
a horrible night for her as he couldn’t sleep at all. She saw
bad dreams in which she encountered dreadful faces which she
had never seen before. She told me this in the next morning.
From her pale look also one could have easily understood that
she couldn’t sleep well in the night. She told me the content
of dream she had seen on that night. When master was walking
quietly through a place which looked like an apple orchard,
somebody came to him secretly like a shadow and whispered
something to him. Suddenly master got very angry and chased
mistress about vigorously to catch her. Mistress was about to
be caught two or three times. Finally, she took off her dress and ran desperately in naked to escape from his clutches. At last she was driven into a corner of the apple orchard. Her body got sandwiched between trees and there was absolutely no way to escape. Suddenly, she woke up from sleep - her body was full of sweat, pillow cover and her night dress were completely wet. My mistress's nights were not like ours. She would see dreams even during a doze, that was her nature. Especially, on long winter nights she would see lot of dreams throughout her sleep, and on the next day morning she often would narrate everything to me, without forgetting any of them.

"My life is dogged by dreams", she often used to say. She got worried whenever she saw a dream and always used to give unusual importance to that, whether that was a good one or a bad one. Whatever happened so far was alright. As she had this weakness, she became all the more worried after that night's dream. Two three times during the talk, she spoke in such a way that she was even suspicious of me. A mere dream of a short night had made my mistress to be suspicious of her long-time friend. Present mental condition of my mistress could be compared to the fear of a small bird - its dishelved breast down its trembling legs - which waits for the coming rainstorm.
Master returned home by the No.3 up train. While drinking tea, he talked about snow in Nagano. Unusually, that day mistress sat aside him, as if she was ready to have a friendly chat. On my way to the market - I was ordered to go for shopping - when I passed through the verandah, I could hear their conversation, coming out from the other side of the sliding door. Some how, they seemed to be talking about me.

I stood silently there with bated breath, listening to their conversation. Mistress was telling my master something like as following. She was complaining to the master, that many articles have been missing from the house, including even a violet silk scarf kept in the drawer of the needle box. Thinking it strange, she opened and searched my furoshiki zutsumi (bundle wrapped in cloth) and found everything in that including that scarf, bustle for the obi, ring etc. Also she told him that, I talk about my master behind his back when I go to the well to fetch water, and spread baseless rumours about him. Further, she also told him that I have become very selfish and disobedient, and one day somebody had seen the young milk man embracing me from my back holding his hands around the nape of my neck. She told him that she was shocked at seeing me more and more disobedient, and she does not want to keep an ill-natured woman like me as her servant.

I was all ears to hear it.
"What is this? Such loud voice - can't she hear it?" My master said.

"No, she has been sent to the market".

"Let us stop this talk here. I am a very busy person. I must go to the bank immediately. Any how, it is better to fire such persons from their work immediately"; saying this, master got up to leave the house.

I was amazed and also frightened at this cunning world. I never thought that such malicious words would come out from the beautiful lips of my mistress. Out of her fear for getting exposed her thoughtless, imprudent sin, she determined to drive me out branding me out as a nuisance. It was really too much. I thought about her dream she saw on the previous day. I jumped out to the front, and walked through the snow covered road quickly. I had even forgotten the items I should buy. Pressing the Furoshik zutsumi to my breast, I shivered in vexation and annoyance. For a moment the thought of condemning my mistress boiled up in my mind. I wanted to condemn everything she possessed including her proud features which I considered beautiful so far and her elegant manners which I used to envy always. My mind, full of good will towards her so far, was completely shaken off by wrath and indignation. I didn't have time to think about the favour or kindness I got from her. Myself of that time had changed to the old Osada of Kashiwagi, who used to roam around with black
muddy legs, wearing straw sandals. I had soon changed into true beast like nature of a rough Saku woman. I went up to the street in Aioi-cho, aimlessly calling my mother.

Standing at the foot of the bridge when I was watching the street, I noticed a large crowd under the flag, wet in snow, of 'Meibutsu Kisoba Undon'. People engaged in removing snow from the road stopped their shovels, a group of travellers wearing pure yellow cotton hats stopped their movement, and a horse rider on a carriage heading to Iwamurada pulled up the reins of the horse and turned back from the side and looked at something. Meanwhile, as group of servants came there running and shouting. Soon they started walking around, spreading some news. When I asked them about the matter, they told me that a dead body of an young lady who threw herself into Chikuma gawa river has been fished out from the water and now being carried to the corner of noodle shop. "This dead young woman has been serving as a servant at the Kikuya", one of the servants told me. Another one said, "she is Otsugi from Kashiwagi". Anyway, various rumours were spread among the crowd in the street.

"This year water cast several evil spell on us. Earlier two woman labourers jumped into the river and died. In spite of that, again one more person...." "Namu amida butsu, namu amida butsu". "Hey, what is there? A double suicide?" "No, it is not a double suicide. Probably the result of some foul
play"; "No, it happened because the mistress of Kikuya is a cruel person. Earlier also one of their servant committed suicide by jumping into the well", people expressed different opinions. When the people carrying the dead body came towards my direction through the uphill slope, I could confirm that it was the dead body of Otsugi. This is the same Otsugi who teased me at the well-side on the other day, after a spring rain. Do you remember that day, when I just pretended to sprinkle water on her, she slapped on her back and laughed while saying, "you are lucky to have a good master".

Large lumps of snow from the thatched roofs of houses in Oiai-machi-cho street melted and fell down due to bright sunlight coming through the gap between grey clouds. Accumulated snow on the ground was glittering so brightly that I was dazzled. Therefore, I could not open my eyes completely and watch it properly. The white carpeted street road had a line of reddish mark on it as many people and horses walked on it. The frozen body of Otsugi placed on a straw mat was carried away silently through that road of full of snow and mud, accompanied by policemen and government officers. Face of the dead body could not be seen as it was covered with straw matting. Only her wet, dishevelled black hair could be seen from outside.

That was a touching scene. She was also a servant like me, so I could not just stand there unsympathetic. I have
already come out of my annoyance and vexation. My mind filled with lonely, sad feeling. Even Otsugi who was in the bloom of her youth, met with such a tragic, ill-fated end. There is nothing as unfortunate and pathetic as the life of a woman.

Human life is a chain of continuous changes. See, how the life of Otsugi changed within a short period of one year. Not only just Otsugi changed. My master also changed. My mistress also changed. Probably my mother might also have changed. Even my younger sister and younger brother might also have changed. My case is also quite the same - even I too have changed completely.

On my way to home, I was analysing my own life and I realised a truth that, since coming to work as a servant here I had become a changed person. Imperceptibly, I had become accustomed to the flashy life of my mistress. In other words, I had become a modern woman of style and fashion. I who had accustomed only to 'hittsume-bin' (hair on the temples drawn back into a bun) hair style from my childhood, started to keep 'tabo' (the stretched out portion at the back side of Japanese style hair do) and wide fringe. I would steal glances in the mirror, secretly apply a razor blade to unwanted hair, and enjoy long baths, as my mistress never scolded me for that, carefully cleansing my body and removing the dirt from under my nails. I had been gradually becoming a cultured person this way. I used to wear an old but gaudy striped kimono with
a collar made of figured cloth, which was given to me by my
mistress. I was worried about getting dirt on my livery coat
so I would adjust the obi always. I would take a small
wrapping cloth with me even when I go to buy tofu (bean curd),
as I considered going without one would be indecent, and hide
the vinegar bottle under my sleeves and walk in a charming,
seductive way, blowing ground cherries. And by the time, I
had even come to think of my friend from Kashiwagi as a bit
rustic, and I was even inclined to give little thought to my
mother. I was appalled at how I had changed. If I
thoughtfully consider and analyse my work - the troubles and
the hard work that I had to endure all these days - all that
was left was the cold sweat of remorse only.

"What have you been doing? Taking one hour for going up
to Honmachi", absorbed in such thought when I returned home,
my mistress had snapped at me, without even having a slight
intention to hear my side of the story. That time, we
exchanged glances and an indescribable unpleasant feeling
occurred in my mind. She did not want me to take notice of
her being angry, but her voice had become dry, and phlegm was
got entangled with her throat. Deliberately she had cleared
her throat and sat there with a forced laugh, pretending
innocence.

That night I could not get a wink of sleep. Although in
the beginning of my service there I was busy in my work during
day time, in the night when I would go to the bed, I would certainly think about Kashiwagi. "Mother, mother," calling my mother I would sleep under a quilt. Gradually, I had forgotten the sky of Kashiwagi, and seen mother in dreams very rarely. However, on that day memories of Kashiwagi came to my mind again. No other night I had thought about my mother so dearly. My mattress of arabesque design on which I was lying down somehow appeared to me as the side of rice field in Kashiwagi. Dandelion around the field had yellow flowers. I imagined about the pleasant feeling I would get when I lie down there resting my head on the grassy embankment with full of Japanese quince flowers as my pillow, meanwhile watching the falcons flying over the sky of Asama mountain, and my hair getting fondled by the breeze coming from the green wheat field. I found it more and more difficult to sleep as the night advanced. I felt as if I am attacked by something. Even the sound of rat gnawing the bookshelf was frightening. My hair stood on end on hearing a sound from a far away place, may be a shouting by a man or a lonely sound of a water wheel. I couldn't distinguish it in the winter night. I lighted the midget lamp which I turned off earlier. I tossed about in bed several times. Still I couldn't sleep. Fresh memories flashed across my mind as if they all happened on the previous day. The stylish, luxurious life in this house is no more a subject I should envy. I kept on thinking only about
Kashiwagi. I remembered the incident when a peddler passed through my place praising the tune of yarn guide when I was weaving on a cotton loom while singing a popular song. I remembered about the yellow wild strawberries I had plucked together with my younger sister, on our way to the field on the hill. I remembered about our pleasant visit to the shrine of the Healing Buddha in Hishino. I remembered the chest, as red as a setting sun, of my father, a heavy drinker. I also remembered the terrible quarrel between my father and mother, when my mother shouted while crying, "well, kill me, if you want to kill me..." Finally, I even remembered faintly some of the incidents happened when I was only around seven or eight years old. By the time, hot tears started flowing from my eyes and I cried as I felt sympathy for myself. My hair had become wet. Even the pillow paper cover got wet. I got tired by thinking various things like this but I could not sleep at all till the morning. That day, I had got up early morning when only dimly white rays could be seen through the gaps, and sparrows had just woke up from their sleep. I tightened the sash on my sweat smelling body and kindled fire in the oven.

"I don't just want to be kicked out from here by the mistress. I must somehow prove my innocence first and then leave this house", I decided. What she has done to me is very cruel and I cannot excuse her for that. "Well, first of all
I would inform master about her illicit love affair, and then get rid of my troubles here after foiling her plot against me. I decided to show my true nature as a woman. That morning I had nothing else in my mind except the thought of revenge against her.

Once the milk in the pipkin boiled, I had poured it in a glass and taken to the master in the second floor. As usual, he was going through various documents, leaning on the table. An old photograph of his previous wife was kept on the table. Master, these days, used to look at it with sweet memories of the past. I, at last, told him frankly all about mistress’s illicit affair. Suddenly his colour changed and while keeping the milk which he started drinking on the table, he told me:

"Understood, I have understood. I have understood well what you are saying", with a lonely smile, he tried to hide the feeling of jealousy boiling up in his mind. Although he was smiling, he could not hide his deep sigh and shivering of his hand with milk glass. Soon, he drank one sip of milk and then muttered to himself:

"But, originally, it is my mistake. I have become weary of her even before completing one year after she had come here. That might be a reason. Moreover, her age is different, her way of thinking is different. Naturally, she would like to have children." In such condition, there is hardly any chance to come to a common consent through.
discussion. Ah, I was thoughtless for my own age. It was a great mistake for me to think that I can change any number of wives whenever I want. When it comes to second, or third, one cannot call it a real marriage. A wife who has stayed continuously for long time with her husband since his youth would know her husband’s personal history and his tastes. When you have come to my house to work as a servant I have been busy in my job and working restlessly with only one intention that is to make my wife happy. But, these days I am completely getting absorbed in my work in order to forget her.

I too had some idea about her unpardonable affair. In spite of that, I have endured it with patience.... But she never tried to understand my feeling.... Ah, ah.... I know that telling these things to you does not bring forth any change in the situation. Now that her father has come here, I have accompanied him up to Nagao because I wanted to tell him to take her along with him when he returns to Tokyo. However, her father is a nice person and I am unable to tell him this matter." He continued again reducing his voice further.

"Well, let me stop talking such things here. Hey Osada, do you have some evidence to prove what you have said just before. Without proof, nothing can be done. Don't you think so? Probably, you don't have any proof. Therefore, I have a request to you. You have told me that, Sakurai visits my house often during my absence. In order to prove that, could
you help me to witness their meeting next time. Today, we have the general meeting of Kitasaku branch of the Red Cross Society. I will leave the house in the pretext of going to participate in it, but actually will wait at our neighbour Mr. Koyama’s house. You understand me. You inform me the moment Sakurai reached. That is the only role you have to play. After that, you may go back to Kashiwagi. So far you have worked for us very sincerely. I am aware of that and I appreciate you for that. Moreover, I will write a letter to your mother to prove your innocence and to avoid any misunderstanding by her."

"Thank you very much".

Soon, the sound of somebody coming up through the staircase was heard. Master had quickly hid the photograph into the drawer of the table and drunk a sip of milk. While wiping his mouth with a white handkerchief he said the following in loud voice; "Well, I am busy today".

6

Just that day was the day of the winter solstice. It is customary to have fukimiso - butterbur sprout soup - and pumpkin on this day in houses in the countryside. Fortunately, there was some pumpkin left behind from autumn. When I was washing it in the sink, I could hear the cracking sound of fire-works. Very delighted, I had completed my work and gone out through the kitchen door and watched it. Smoke
in the colour of green willows was still remaining in the blue sky and the sounds of jeering children could also be heard from near and far.

Paper lanterns hanging from the eaves on a raw, strips of fancy papers in gold and silver colours, and artificial red and white flowers gave an impression as if the spring has come untimely. The large ground of primary school just at the eastern side of the house was the site for the general meeting of Kitasaku branch of Red Cross. That day, Komoro was said to have crowded with people in an unprecedented manner. Groups of people in blazoned haori and straw sandals started coming there from the previous day itself. Members of music band from Nagano in red uniform and red caps had gone around the town, playing an orchestra of big drums, high drums, trumpets, flutes etc. Great number of people wearing round silver badges on red cloth on their chests had passed through. Police men with swords in their hands had moved around the place. Young master of Shimaya, Mr.Kameso of Aramachi, Mr.Fjukan of Honmachi, the eldest son of Echigo ya, the second son of Miuraya all well dressed in 'kimono' and 'haori', had passed through the road. The Dentist wearing a "Warizasa mitsu-mon" crest kimono and a dark brown soft hat on his head, had come there, with a reddish-brown gloves on his lean, tender hands, as usual. As he had come walking very fast, he stood at the side of the earthen wall for a while and drawn a
deep breath. Sides of his eyes were swollen red as if he has been crying and especially, his fair-complexioned face had a pathetic look. Whether it is of anger or weeping, such feelings are easily visible on the face of a handsome person. His eyes, burning in passion, were yearning to meet mistress. He was seemed unaware of anything else and, on the contrary, that gave him a pathetic look. He is a person who can never be hated. I quickly got him in the house through the kitchen and shut the wooden door before anybody noticed him.

"Osada-san, it is very crowded today, isn't it?"

"Well, isn't it because lot of people have come for the function".

"Listen Osada, what happened to you? Your face is pale".

"It is because of the cold".

"Will woman turn pale when it is cold? Till today, I was thinking that they would turn only red when it is cold. I am not joking, you know. One cannot survive in such severe cold. Hands and other body parts go numb with cold. Some time, well.... - Your boss...?"

"You mean my master. He had left the house long back. Mistress has been waiting for you impatiently for quite a while."

Upon hearing it he blushed, and got in through the kitchen. Behind him I too had got into the kitchen, opened the lid of the pot and checked the pumpkin in it. Pumpkin,
yellowish in colour, was cooked properly and became sticky. As this was mistress's favourite dish, I had immediately put it in a small plate and taken to her room along with butter-bur miso as a replacement of snacks for tea. Mistress sat there face-to-face with the dentist in front of a silver folding screen with a painting of peony on it facing toward the south. Her slightly flushed face in faint pink colour was seen very charming and I cannot properly explain in words now the way they sat there and talked. She sat there with downcast eyes and inserting her slim, fair complexioned hands in the gap of sash. Her beautiful hair-do could be seen very well. The room was filled with an indescribable scent. Even my eyes, burning with anger and hatred, was fascinated by that. Suddenly with a determined mind, I got out of the room - Mistress's fate was already in my hands. But, standing in the kitchen, once again I thought about the act I was going to do.

What kind of rift would it bring if I inform the master about it, I thought. The anger which he has been suppressing patiently so far might break out at once with extremely great force like flood water. How dreadful would be the reaction of my master, who usually is a nice person, when he burnt out in anger after seeing his wife's illicit affair. These thoughts made my hair stand on end and my hands and legs started shivering in fear. I felt dizzy and was about to fall down.
there. I had to think twice about it. Fearing unforseen events which might occur in the future, I walked around in the wooden floor, with indoor sandals on my feet.

Rays of winter sun had come into the lonely kitchen through the skylight window and illuminated the kitchen utensils and tools. I looked at it reluctantly with a confused mind. The double cooking oven, bettsui, was shining in dark. Big water boiling pot, odoko, was kept at the corner. Hifuki-dake, a bamboo tube used for blowing fire, was lying on the ground in front of the Odoko. The fire shovel was kept vertical at its side. The hikeshitsubo (a lid like pot used for extinguishing the burning charcoal) was lying there as if to bid goodbye to me. Two pickle pales were kept in a raw at one corner of the earthen wall completely covered with dark soot. On the cupboard, pans and pots were kept, sume in straight position, and some in upside down position. I don’t know, what was kept in the box near the suribachi (earthen ware mortar). Miso pot and shoyu barrel were kept at the bottom of the cupboard. Grater was hanging down on a nail. Ice in the sink was falling into the drain after melting. chopping board used for cutting pumpkin and a pail with broken hoop were also lying there. The bamboo basket contained unwanted pieces of pickled radish and used tea leaves of the previous day. Sasara (bamboo whisk) and tawashi (pot cleaner) were also lying along with them. As I was
walking around, thinking and watching things with a confused mind, the music of the band suddenly started. Sounds of big drums and trumpets were echoed in the winter sky and "Kimigayo", the national anthem, followed them. Wearing the kitchen geta (wooden clogs) I came out and watched the site of meeting crowded with thousands and thousands of people. The meeting site was covered with a violet curtain painted with a white cross on it. Therefore, I could not see the events happening inside. There were groups of farmers peeping through the back side of the curtain and children watching the events from the top of the fence. Once the clapping sound came to an end, somebody started speaking in a resounding, manly voice. I didn't understand the content of the speech very well, but as he spoke each word very vividly, I too listened to it with rapt attention.

Suddenly, somebody gave a pat on my back. I turned back with surprise. Running out of patience, master had come to see the situation at home. We did not speak anything in words, but communicated in sign language, using our finger tips, eyes, and body gestures. Once we understood each other properly, I felt as if I have succeeded in executing partially the revenge against mistress. I too had various opportunities to witness man's jealousy in all these years, but I would probably never see man's jealousy as deep as the one my master had at that time. It cannot be described even in a painting.
His mental condition could be easily understood by anybody even if he could not speak it out. His eyes were burning with fierce jealousy, and beneath his pale look there underlied the feelings of agony, distress, anger, shame and sorrow - his peculiar smile also indicated this mental condition. Blood in his whole body seemed to have thrust out into his head. He was no more able to endure it. In contempt, he grabbed and pulled at his hair. Because of uncontrollable amount of jealousy, even a nice person like my master showed the true nature of a man - he quivered like a beast. Like a fox aiming at a hen, master advanced toward the back room quietly, with bated breath. I followed him as I was eager to see the horrible scene. As I was more careful not to make any noise, even the tatami gave unnecessary rattle sound. Unfortunately I stumbled against the threshold. Because of my utmost caution and excitement, even my heart-beats turned vigorous. From the side of the staircase in the end of the corridor, I could see mistress's room, facing toward south as the sliding door of the middle room was lying opened. Leaning against the pillar, I peeped into the room with fear.

Sunlight coming in through the sliding door at the south side brightened the room and reflected more beautifully the standing posture of the dentist and mistress who were standing close to the silver folding screen. Both had beautiful body structure. As they were standing by the side of a colour
painting of peony flower, both the mistress and the dentist were looked as if they are a part of the painting on the folding screen. For setting everything in the pleasure of transient love, they stood there, intoxicated in love and longing for each other, unconcerned about the rest of things around them. I had been really seeing a day dream. Only a portion of pale cheek of the man was visible to me - that too in the shade. But, mistress's emaciated face, inward slanting eyebrows, her forgetful eyes, and even her head resting on the left shoulder of the dentist were visible to me properly. Their burning lips were just about to come together in a kiss. her breasts were crushed against his chest as she stood on tip toe in white tabi, her toes straining up against the floor, her arms hung limply, her fingers slightly curled up, her shoulders raised, while his hands were nestled under her arms. It seemed as though their bodies had come to a complete standstill, and all the blood in their veins had rushed to their lips like the turbulent waves of the summer sea. My master was immobilized by the spectacle and speechless he just stood there gazing at the two from behind, as if he had been nailed to the spot.

"Saikeirei, Saikeirei" - profound obeisance - came the cries that floated in from atop the knoll on the ceremonial grounds.
Suddenly the opening sound of the front lattice was heard. "I'm home" came the voice of the returning guest, "I've just returned". Shocked by the calls of the returning guest, the two turned around, only to discover master silently standing behind them. Having no time to push the man away, mistress could only look away, turning white as a sheet. The dentist, half in shock, tried to open her mouth with his left hand and positioned his right hand as if extracting a tooth. As nobody had gone to receive him into the house, the guest finally opened the sliding door himself and came to the room through the corridor. A fear flashed through my whole body like a flash of lightning. At that moment, the sound of blaring trumpets and the thunderous sound of big drums flooded into the room. The masses of celebrants outside shouted out in unison, "Long live the emperor, long live the emperor". It echoed like the sound of a thunder.
"No", leaning over the railing on the first floor of Masuya, Uryu Natsuko continued. "I am not as easy going or comfortable as you think". "Look, you always take it in that way, that is the problem" her friend Sawa Sekiko sidled up to her and continued, "nobody is thinking that you are comfortable or easy going."

"That is why I say, I want to stay back here in Tozawa, you know".

Tazawa, hot spring in Shinshu, is very calm and quiet at this time of the year. Number of visitors coming for taking bath in the hot spring here has also become thing since the beginning of August. Around fourteen or fifteen girl students are lying on the first floor of the Masuya which is kept opened, and are enjoying day dreams during their idle midday nap. Natsuko and Setsuko, fresh from the hot spring bath and standing in front of the room where the girls are indulged in pleasures, seemed to have forgotten the unpleasant experiences and problems of this world for a while. Natsuko had been the head teacher of a certain girls school in Ueda - a private school - till last year and Sekiko is an assistant teacher in Ueda girls high school now. She has come to this place accompanied by girl students. Both of them are natives of Ueda, and studied in the same school in the city almost ten
years back. Now both of them have become old miss - sunk in
grief like green leaves in the sultry weather of August.

"I don't know how painful for me also to bid good-bye to
you here now. But, at the same time, it is not possible for
me to stay along with you", Natsuko looked at her friend's
face and continued. "You say, you are leaving tomorrow.
Isn't it very sudden?"

"Well, a person like me who is responsible for the well
being of these girl students cannot have any other option.
Anyway, you may forget about my case. What are you going to
do, Uryu. Are you going to stay here for long time? Ah,
ah.... I am fed up with your way of thinking."

"Fed up with my way of thinking?" Natsuko suddenly
brightened her eyes. "I don't understand what you are
talking".

"Well, how should I explain it. See Natsuko, your mother
must be waiting for you in great anxiety, but you say that you
don't go...."

"My mother waits in anxiety for my return?" Natsuko gave
a deep sigh and continued, "Well, I don't know why I cannot
get on with my mother. Miss Sawa I have taken a firm decision
that I will never return to my home".

"Why do you say so?"

"My decision to not to go home has not been taken just
now".
"Then, what will you do if you don’t return to your home?"

"I will spend my life travelling."

"Travelling?"

"My intention is to die during travelling."

"Wait a moment. You speak strange things, aren’t you?"

"Ah, ah..., what is strange? Everybody’s life is a journey, don’t you think so. Well, even your’s is so, am I not right?"

"Well, if you say so, in a way, it is like that only but...",

"Ah", Natsuko heaved a sigh. "At home I never felt happy even for a single day. Always I spent days and nights there weeping, doubting and in agony".

"Even I can guess that, you know. It is same with all those who have acquired school education and knowledge. Specially, those who had a bachelor’s life for long time".

"That is why, I cannot cry or laugh along with my mother. Things which will make my mother to cry will make me to laugh and things which will make me to cry will make mother to laugh".

"It may be so, but why do you say that you would not return to home? I am not able to understand your attitude. That too at this age...."

"Oh, why?"
"It is as I said only. One has to think twice before deserting his or her mother, you know." Said Setsuko. Hearing this, Natsuko tried to explain and defend herself but, suddenly kept her mouth shut. Girl students all woke up from their midday nap and hurried to the bathhouse scrambling for the first place. They were wearing only a Yukata tied with sash. They rushed to the bath house with alacrity to get into the bath tub as early as possible and to indulge in the pleasures of hot water bath like fish. Natsuko, while watching the activities of the girls, compared her own student life with theirs. Those happy, youthful days have already become mere memories of the past. "Ah, I should not have acquired education - had I not known the taste of new wisdom I would have accepted any male as my husband as per my mother’s choice and I would have been satisfied with that throughout my whole life. It would have been better had I not obtained any education at all. Had I not come into contact with the concept of freedom of self and soul I would not have tried to fly out of the cage like this. You see, is it not good to be independent of any help or service even from your mother or elder sister? Why is an unmarried, single woman considered crippled? Why are we despised like this?"

"Despised? No, it is your prejudice".

- "It is not my prejudice. It is the fact. It is a fact that we are despised".
"You are extremely over sensitive".

"In other words, we are sinners of the society in the eyes of merciless and cruel people".

"Sinners?", Sekiko opened her eyes in wonder.

"Just give birth to a child is not the only business of a woman", with a cold-hearted smile, Natsuko continued. "I don't mind being a crippled person, let the world around me say anything. I don't mind being a sinner. Actually, we are different from other women around us - our thought, taste, and even our morals are all different".

"Well, you don't have to be a cynic like that".

"No, no, I am not a cynic".

"Well, only a cynic would say that he would live or die travelling. I am not able to understand why you have taken a decision to not to return to your home".

"If you don't understand, it is alright," Natsuko continued in a scornful tone, "You leave it as though you haven't understood it".

"In that case you shouldn't have talked such things from the beginning itself", Setsuko replied annoyingly. "Even I feel anxious about you, when you say so".

"Ah, ah...." Natsuko laughed loudly.

"Then, let me ask you", Setsuko blaming Natsuko's attitude asked again, "What are you intending to do hereafter?"
"Of course, work. I cannot live without working. 'Work', 'work'. Only when I work I really feel that I am living."

"But, can you get fully satisfied only with work".

"You are different from me in that matter, aren't you?"

Natsuko dodged her body in displeasure. "If you can't get satisfied by 'work', what is the thing from which you get satisfaction? Marriage? Is it compulsory for a woman to get married?"

"Well, I think so".

"Oh, I am sorry. I am sorry to say such things to a person who will soon start a new life after getting married", Natsuko with a nervous look, floated a sarcastic smile on her lips like any spinster would have done.

"Miss Uryu, are you grinning at your friend also", Sekiko frowned.

"Look, I am not a bad person as you think."

"But, it always sounds to me so always".

"Ah, ah...., what I said now is a joke".

"I don't know why you behave so. I am always serious, you know. You never speak frankly your real feelings, don't you think so? Why don't you share your real feelings with me, as I doubt whether we would be able to meet again like this."

"Well, it is strange. What shall I hide from you?"
"No, you are hiding. You are hiding something. Can you remain satisfied only by 'work' - that too, being a very passionate woman."

"Dreams of love are talks of the past", Natsuko continued with an indifferent breath. "Ah, ah... because I cannot live like an ingenuous girl any more, you know".

"Please speak", Sekiko turned very enthusiastic. "You cannot hide anything, even if you want, from me as I have been your friend for ten years. I hate you, because you are such a person."

"Then, do you want to say that I have changed?"

"Certainly you have changed. That can be easily understood even from your voice, colour of your kimono, and your way of walking."

"Is it so", Natsuko pressed her cheeks with her both hands.

"Whose influence is there behind all these changes", Sekiko smiled.

"Eh, what do you mean by 'Whose influence'."

"You don't want to return to your home, but you want to spend your life in travelling - you say all these things due to the influence of that person. Is it not so?"

"I don't understand what you are saying".

"Then, let me put it in this way. You have changed like this after Mr. Mikami from Tokyo visited you".

271
"Mr. Mikami", Natsuko continued in a ridiculing tone.

"Ah, ah..., it is a pity. What shall I do with that painter. Isn't he a child still?"

Both of them kept silence for a while. They looked each other as if tapping for opinion. The sound of warm water was heard calmly. Even the echo of water flowing over the pebbles and stones was faintly heard.

"You don't understand me", Natsuko muttered to herself.

"But you who say so haven't understood me too", Sekiko laughed.

"We don't understand each other, but still we say that we are friends for last ten years. Ah, ah..., but, whatever may be the case, there is nothing as dear as an old friend. Oh suddenly I have recollected some old memories of the past - specially about our friends who graduated along with us. What must have happened to Omura? What must be Takizawa doing now?"

"There is no correspondence after they got married".

"Well, only you and I are the two who still remain unmarried", Natsuko could not control her deep emotion and pressed Sekiko's hand firmly and continued. "We have two options in front of us - to get married or to remain as a spinster".

"You may choose any of these which, you think, would make you happy".

272
"Happy?" Natsuko laughed. "Even this word 'Happy' is old. Look, isn't it the same 'happiness' which we used to speak about since the time of our graduation. If it was to come to us, it would have come to us long time back. We say the same thing even after ten years. We wait for that 'happiness' even at this age. Ah, ah..., look, aren't we both in the same boat. But, Miss Sawa, you will definitely be successful. You please lead a happy family life. I would spend my time alone on the cold bed, seeing dreams and weeping. Let us try who will be happy, you who are married or I who remain unmarried". Suddenly, the girl students returned from the bathhouse and they parted to left and right.

At last the day of their departure came. The girl students hurriedly packed their luggage, each one in her own way, singing, dancing and so on - what a different life compared to the two prudent old ladies. All looked young, with pink cheeks, glossy hair-dos, and lovely black eyes ready to enjoy the splendours of the world. Certainly, Natsuko had also passed through this age once. Suddenly, loud voice of some musical instrument was heard at the downstairs. Girls came down to the ground floor running. Eager to know what happening there, they scrambled each other clinging to other's back.
It was a group of low-class entertainers. Around four or five people consisted of both male and female, in strange dress and headgear came to the garden of Masuya. They play their instruments for entertaining guests at the bath and collect money from them. People from the spa also came out and watched their programme. The song they sung was a piece of love song in disorderly tone and dirty words, rubbish in content, which would please the minds of gropers only. These low class entertainers' zeal and enthusiasm due to their hunger, their miserable life for which they were compelled to sell their low grade performance and various other feelings were contained in their song which reverberated on the railings and heard in a flirtation way. Folk song has tremendous power to enthrall people. Natsuko, sunk in grief, was touched by the song and its resounding voice went straight into her heart. Suddenly she was seized with a desire to enjoy the pleasures of this world. Well, there are pleasures and sorrows. Unknowingly one gets old after living a melancholic and painful life of a spinster and when a woman notices the decaying of her youthfulness, she falls into an unbearable mental condition. Natsuko walked along with the girl students.

Soon, Sekiko had departed. Natsuko was soon fell into loneliness. By this time, Sekiko might have already reached Aokimura. Natsuko walked around the second floor corridor of
Masuya alone. Silk-tree flowers in full blossom gave the corridor very beautiful look. Fresh flowers with pleasant fragrance were touching on the pale face of Natsuko. She narrowed her eyes and smelled them. Suddenly, memories of that young painter came into her mind. Artists, whoever may be it is, strangely have a mesmerical fascination to get women attracted towards them. Natsuko had acquaintance with several men so far, but she never had such a feeling as in the case of this young artist. He is the person who showed her the places where sunlight directly fall on the grass, talked to her about silk tree flowers getting steamed by hot air, and explained to her with zeal and enthusiasm the works of the great painter, the creator. No other man with whom she had acquaintance possessed this kind of qualities. Natsuko had acquired the ability to understand the nature slightly under the guidance of Mikami. He told her many things. She recollected various memories of the past, and pleasant and interesting ideas have come to stay in her mind.

Plants and trees got steamed due to heat, and human beings burned for love and affection. In the letter she received from Mikami he has written that he would visit her at Tazawa on that day. Natsuko is in the prime time of her life and is chased by the unending agonies of the flesh but she lacks the power to endure it. Not to mention, how unbearable it is for her to wait for somebody in such a condition. She
suddenly remembered about her hiding place with Mikami. She ran down from the second floor and went to that place as if in a dream.

The sky of August is clear and bright sunlight is falling on the ground through the gaps of thick leaves of the trees. The grass on the ground, which was mentioned earlier - sitting on which the painter and Natsuko exchanged talks in the past - is fresh and new always. Verdant shades have great magical power to console a lonely mind. This place is blessed with such natural surroundings. This is Natsuko's hiding place. This is the place she has often come to forget the worries and agonies of this world, for the last one month after she has reached Tazawa. This is the place she used to be often lost in deep thought. This is the place she used to weep sometimes in pain of love lying on the grassy ground.

"Mikami, Mikami", she called out his name aimlessly. But it was quiet everywhere and nobody responded her.

Various pleasant and sad memories pass through Natsuko's mind now. During the last ten years after graduating from the city school, there had been hardly any day she spent without a lover. A man can live only with his job and honour. But a woman cannot survive without loving and being loved. As the proverb goes, woman is like an ivy vine which would wither unless it clings to something. Natsuko is exactly one of them. Natsuko's enthusiasm and desire to get rid of the pain
of being a spinster has all the more forced her to indulge in fervent love affairs. Is it strange? She, a downhearted woman depressed and withered in grief like a withered grass seeks comfort and consolation from men. Is it strange? All her old friends are leading a happy and harmonious life. Only she is an exception, as she has determined to have such a life from the beginning. Such a decision has given her indescribable amount of sorrow and she cries alone in her bed in the cold and lonely nights. Is it strange? Ah, ah, she doesn't want to grow old, she doesn't want to get rotten, she wants to remain active and lively for ever. That is why Natsuko now indulges in love.

However, her life as an old miss for last ten years has made Natsuko's character different from others. Notsuko now always has a distrust for man. She is pushed around by this distrust and in the process she grows wise as a result of experiencing sorrowful encounters. A woman like Natsuko, who has tasted various bitter and painful experiences, would all the more get consoled by seeking various men's scent. Natsuko has seen many handsome men without chastity. She has also seen very passionate men being transformed into very cruel husbands. Natsuko no more trusts men. She just wants to make love with them or make them to have love with her for her comfort and consolation. Throw away the flower after enjoying its fragrance. That is what her intention is.
Well, she is such a woman. Her passion is such that she cannot live even a single day without making love with males, but at the same time, she is cold-hearted toward them - constantly engaged in criticising and analysing them. She is an embodiment of this contradiction. That means this woman cannot love anybody without distress and anguish in her mind. Therefore, whenever she meets a man she would create a temptation in him and make him to be impatient, but at the same time, she would not allow him to speak out his feelings even though she would be aware of his pain and agony. She too would never speak out her secrets to anybody frankly - instead of that, she would prefer to wander around the verdant shades, pressing her breasts in agony.

Suddenly, sound of foot steps was heard. A young man in Masuya's Yukata and 'heko obi' appeared from behind the tree shade. He was least bothered about his personal appearance. He walked in irregular steps as if in a dream, viewing the scenarios around - from the first glance itself one gets the impression that he is a prisoner of love. If there can be an expression like "lively melancholy", it can be seen certainly in the observing eyes of this young man. It was Mikami. Both of them sat on the grass together and started talking about art. Whenever they talk about art, it is his habit to soon switch over the subject to painting. Today too, unknowingly their talk gradually shifted to painting and he explained
various things with his hands earnestly. Naturally, he has an artist's hand with wiry fingers and beautiful nails suitable for handling brush. Natsuko, while comparing her hands with his, sat there listening to his talk with a smile.

"Ah", Mikami heaved a sigh. "I am quite sick of painting portraits now".

"Why are you saying such things again", Natsuko sidled up to his side.

"Actually, I am doing a rubbish job - certainly for a livelihood. You know, I have started painting a portrait of a great landlord now. His mansion is in the midst of a thick woods and when watched from away, it looks like a painting like this. On my way to his mansion, I have imagined various things about the man and his quiet life in that mansion".

"How was it? Your imagination and reality".

"Well, there was great difference. I have got sick of it the moment I entered its gate. Many formers, tired and looking pale, have been going in and out of the gate. Probably they are the servants. I have met the hero, the landlord - a menial person without my dignity in one word, he is a neo-rich".

"There are many like him in this vicinity".

"It is worthless to meet people like him. They consider painter as beggars. Therefore, they call painters as
"egakiya" instead of "gaka". Isn't it contemptuous to call an artist 'egakiya'?"

"Then, how should they be called?" Natsuko laughed.

"Instead of calling 'egakiya', use the word 'gaka' or something else", Kikami shook his shoulders and continued. "Any way, giving no importance to such things, when I started portraying him sincerely as he originally looks, he started making certain remarks, like "can't you portray me little more handsome, can't you make the colour more fair" etc, which I dislike". "Ah, ah..., how does he look like? Is that landlord very handsome?"

"Well, he has a face which is seldom seen. Actually it is difficult to portray a man noble looking if he has no nobility originally".

"If I were you, I would have portrayed him handsome".

"I cannot do such nonsense. My conscience will not allow me to do that".

"Ha, ha... you are excessively honest".

"Ah, ah, actually human temper is a dirty thing". You should have placed a mirror in front of that man".

"Any way, present day artists cannot survive if they don't do that. For survival, we have to stand begging in front of people like this man and get satisfied by the pittance they give us. Tell me, whether anybody is getting
today enough money to live. Actually, i feel like to cry. Well, I shouldn't have become a painter."

"Mikami, you are talking things which do not fit to your nature."

"Actually, while always seeing beautiful dreams, we human beings live a humble life".

"You are grumbling".

"Grumbling? You too are very cruel".

"Then, you look at the photographers. Suppose a photographer has honestly taken the photo of a man’s face and given that photo to him without any touch up work, saying that it is your face, what will be the reaction of that customer. Of course he will refuse to accept it saying that it is not his face. Therefore, a photographer carries out touch up works to make the face of the customer beautiful. what is "touch up work"? Isn’t it a kind of flattery? Surely foolish people in this society will never think that, that is a (self) conceited photograph."

"I see...."

"Well, now your case. You are engaged in making a portrait of a rich landlord. The landlord has made certain conditions and because of that you are angry. But, why don't you make a self-conceited portrait of that man as he wished. Ah, ah... what else can you do?"

"I have done it: But now I feel that I am a fool".

281
"That is why you have won high opinion of the people".

"Ah, Nature is the best thing. It makes us to portray beautiful or ugly things silently. I don't know how happy I am if I portray the 'nature' instead of portraying man".

"Well, you told me that you are painting for earning money for your daily bread. But, do you think that you can earn your bread very easily in this world of falsehood. You portray a monkey as a man and a man as a god. Biographers, historians and all others find their means of life in that way only. You must achieve success in life by any means including even flattering. Ah, ah,..., although I say all these things, you are still young".

The suburban panorama seen through the trees have suddenly turned dark and lonely. Asama mountain ranges have completely turned greyish. The far end of black clouds may be having summer afternoon showers. Ah, it is the day of fox's marriage - that is why it is raining when the sun is shining. A group of clouds in the clear sky quickly moved toward the Hofukuji-peak. Natsuko, looking at the clouds, continued again.

"Any way, let it be so. Mikami, how is your work progressing on? Could you finish anything after that?"

"You mean my research", Mikami heaved a sigh. Soon, as if he remembered something, he looked at her face and said, "I couldn't".

282
"But you have painted something, I hope".

"No, not even a single piece".

"Not even a single piece?", Natsuko turned very eager and continued, "haven't you painted even a single one after that"?

"Yes"

"Then, what have you been doing?"

"Well, I have been thinking".

"Thinking? ah, ah...", Natsuko looked at the man. His eyes were burning in pain of fervent love.

"We have been discussing very serious matters so far", Natsuko changed her mind. "Don't we have some other interesting topic now".

"What do you mean by interesting topic".

"Why don't you tell me something about your love affairs", upon hearing it, he turned red.

"Well, first of all, Miss Uryu you tell me your story".

"Ah, ah.... If I had any such affairs I would not have lived a life like this".

Bright sunlight falling on the grass through the trees uptill now has disappeared suddenly and the clear sky seen through the leaves have completely turned grey. Abruptly, frogs started croaking as if inviting thunder shower. As it was about to rain, both of them got close to the trunk of a tree and stood there still, watching a flock of small birds
flying low in the sky. A cool breeze cooled their burning cheeks.

"I envy men", Natsuko, while looking his face from side, said. "Men can go any place they want to go and choose any work they like to do".

"But I still envy you women folk. Mainly, because I don't agree with the concept of man working all the time".

"See, even women will work. But, woman's physiology is different from man. therefore, she cannot execute everything as per her desire. If I were a man, you know, I would have done anything. Of course even now I am ready to do anything you people do, including travelling."

"I am different from you. You like to watch scenery of the sky which is very active at the time of afternoon summer showers. Aren't you? Whereas, I like calm and quite scenery, exposed to bright sun light like this place. Not only scenery, all other things are like that only. Certainly, you are planning to work like men. It is really great".

"But you know, I always think I would start working from tomorrow. Tomorrow, tomorrow, remains always tomorrow and I spend today as if in a dream."

"Why? Are you a person sitting idle? Actually, it is I who spend my time in idle".

"That is a proof of your being a genius".

"Genius? Am I?"
"Because, only a man of genius can spend his life in idle
in this world."

"I see. Certainly it is so. there is no doubt. Actually, I have been enjoying watching the scenery here now. Well, you please think about it. Why should a painter observe the nature? Is it not disgusting and irritating to portray a scenery soon after its observation? That is why I cannot make even a single painting at present. Sit under the verdant shadow and relax like a little bird, that itself make me an outstanding painter even if I don't make any painting."

Suddenly thunder had started. Farm labourers, both males and females, who have been enjoying a mid-day nap in the outskirts in order to get rid of their fatigue and tiredness caused due to hard work on a summer day, suddenly have got up from here and there and rushed back to their homes in groups through the path in the middle of the field, raising their innocent voices. Sudden shower has cooled down the grasses. Willow leaves, peach leaves, Keyaki, and maple trees, all stood in the midst of spray. Japanese plums has been falling like stones in the rain. Fortunately, they did not get wet much. The painter, shivering with passion and love, drew closer to the woman. He felt the faint fragrance of her black hair mixed with the aroma of izutsu. Her look did not change at all - she was sitting there deep in thought, calm and quite, motionless and staring at the rain.
Soon, the sky has turned clear here and there and sound of thunder could be heard only from far away distance like the sound of waves. Dark grey clouds have got tattered and sky has become clear. Trees and grasses shined in luster due to bright sunlight falling on them. Water drops on the green leaves looked like gems.

"Well, I must also return to Tokyo in the near future", Mikami said to himself. Expression on his face indicated that he wants to disclose something to her. He tried to speak it out several times, but couldn't succeed in it. Every time, he heaved a deep sigh and sat there.

"Miss Uryu, you haven't talked to me anything about yourself".

"Ah, ah..., even after talking so many things, do you still say that I haven't talked to you anything".

"Well, why do you hide everything from me?"

"Hiding? Look, what should I hide from you?"

"No. You are seemed to be thinking something. You are actually a strange person. In short, I want to know what are you planning to do hereafter?"

"Well, if there is a chance, I would like to work as a school teacher in a village".

"A village school teacher? You have strong self-confidence, and still you want to become a school teacher only? That is why I say I don't understand you. That is why,
I say that you are hiding something from me. Miss Uryu, Miss Uryu, what are you actually thinking now, where will you go hereafter? What will you do hereafter? What type of a person are you? I don’t understand you”.

"Myself is myself, as you see me now. I possess neither a house nor a hometown. Ah, ah..., you may please consider me as a travelling woman."

Both of them kept silence for a while.

"Miss Uryu", he looked at her as if he worships her, and continued. "How long are you going to treat me as your younger brother? And how long should I consider you as my elder sister...

"Elder sister? Is it so? Or your younger sister?"

"I want to tell you something once for my whole life".

"I see", Natsuko stretched out her chest; "I too have something to tell you once for my whole life, you know".

"Alright, let me hear it", he said eagerly.

"Well, start from the male’s side. That is the order". Burning in the passion and pain of love, his face from the base of the ear till the nape of the neck had turned red. Blood in his entire body had flown to his lips, urging him to disclose the secret in his mind. Ah! his lips which can usually chatter any futile matter continuously, like the chirping of a sparrow, failed to speak out a single word of love. What a pity it is. Why can’t he speak out the truth in
his mind, a truth which is free of any fabrication or decoration, purely as per his wish. Hot tears had flown through his manly cheeks.

"Mr. Mikami, I understood well. I understood well what you want to tell me", Natsuko said. Her burning eyes had dimmed with tears. Suddenly, she turned little pale and continued; "In short, you want to tell me that you love me. Am I right?"

He was no more worried about the consequences. He stretched out his shivering hand and touched Natsuko's hand gently. Natsuko pushed his hand aside and said, "thank you for your interest in me, but I don't love you". She expressed her will in a dignified, solemn tone. It was like passing a death sentence. Mikami soon turned deadly pale.

"Ah, ah....", Natsuko floated a sad and lonely smile.

"There are some people in this world who have lot of free time. They imagine various things in their mind and think that others also do in the same way. You know, I am not as easy going as you think".

He couldn't lift up his head. Natsuko continued her talk. "Mr. Mikami, what have I told you just before? I told you that I have something to tell you once for my whole life. Now you must have understood what I really wanted to tell you, haven't you?"

He remained silent again.

288
"Well, look at my face well. Hey, are you not looking at my face?" Upon hearing her words, he while shivering like a wounded beast looked at her face. Their eyes met together like a splash of lightning.

"Ah, ah..., I am a wanton woman, you know. Well, I don't believe any more what other women say. We are all liars. If it is possible to show the face of women's mind, I would like to show mine to you. Mr. Mikami please forget me. You shouldn't stray from the right path, but please try to become a fine and respectable person. I too pray for your success from behind. This would be our final separation in our life". Mikami sat there still looking down.

As if in dreams, Natsuko walked away quickly without even turning back. Her legs and zori (sandals) got wet in the dewdrops (of afternoon shower). She soon had rushed to the first floor of Masuya. As soon as she entered her room, she fell on the bed and burst into tears.

"Mikami, please pardon me".

Tears, on the other hand, reduced her pain. That night Natsuko had written a letter to Sekiko and left Tazawa next day early morning when it was still dark.

Soon Sekiko had got married. Even after shifting to Takajomachi in Ueda, she hadn't forgotten her friend whom she met again during her tour to Tazawa. She saw Natsuko in her
dreams, thought about her every morning when she woke up, and worried about her health always and waited eagerly for her letter. For six months after their separation, Natsuko had written letters to Sekiko in the frequency of one letter per month. Her letters contained ridiculous and laughable news, sad news, various pathetic news and her bitterness for being a woman. Some time she wrote in grief and some other time she wrote in happiness. Gradually, the frequency of letters from Natsuko had decreased. Once in one month had changed to once in two months and, gradually, it changed to once in three months or four months. Even the volume and contents of her letter also got reduced. A new year's card Sekiko received in the spring of the third year was sent from an inn in Saikyo. Thereafter, letters from Natsuko had stopped coming suddenly and no new year's card had come for the fourth year.

Thereafter, nobody knew about the whereabouts of Natsuko. Somebody said to have seen her in Tokyo, somebody said to have seen her in Takasaki and somebody else had seen her in Komoro. Different people spread different rumours about her. House of the Uryu family is situated in a place called Tokida in the outskirts of Ueda town, which is little away from Takajo machi. Sekiko had also visited Tokida occasionally. Every time she visited Tokida, she heard rumours about Natsuko. Natsuko had been the subject for various disgusting and shameful criticism and she had been counted as the worst
example of an educated women. In such cases, society acts very cruelly. Sekiko found it difficult to believe the rumours about Natsuko. But after separating from that young painter, Natsuko had lived with several frivolous lovers and deserted many of them. Even Sekiko couldn't help bending her ears to this rumour.

In the autumn of the fifth year, Sekiko had visited the Uryu family when she had gone to participate in Omiya festival. Takada Shishi-lion, old customers, persimmon colour overcoats, silk thread jin-haori, akatengu on a big paper fan at the front of the procession, stirring sounds of taiko - drums, mixed sounds of songs, and the shining feathers worn by the dancers who dance in disorder, etc. were as same as last time when Sekiko watched this festival along with Natsuko. That time both of them had gone there with "Tabako-bon style" hair-do, and wearing their best dress, "Uedajimagi". Natsuko's mother, weak and worried, was helped by Sekiko and watched the festival holding on to the front lattice. Four or five people in the rear side of the procession were wearing straw hat and sky-blue 'komon-hakama' over light green ceremonial dress 'kamishimo'. Their wainscot had Sanata crest, their short swords were in silk wrapping cloth. They held red tuft in their hands and wore white 'tabi' and 'fukuzori'. They passed through the front side of Natsuko's house playing their black coated flutes. The tone
of their music was mournful and sorrowful. Upon hearing the flute, music Natsuko’s mother suddenly recollected the memories of her olden days and began to weep. That day, Sekiko heard about the whereabouts of Natsuko accidentally. She heard it from Tatsu, a farmer from Netsumura, who came to see this festival. An honest and frank man, he spoke everything about her in detail.

"Yes, yes, I live in a place just near by her. However, please keep it secret whatever I tell you now", Tatsu once again cautioned Sekiko.

According to his version, Natsuko, ailing from some illness, has been staying with her wet nurse. Sekiko’s mind filled with various gusses and conjectures, which would cause her lot of pain. Her friend who has chosen a wanderer’s life after abandoning her home town - and also being abandoned by the home-town - has been taken ill in the neighbourhood of this Kotsumura - it is really painful. In one of Natsuko’s letters, which she sent from her wondering tour, she wrote; "this morning when I was dressing my hair, two three white hairs got struck on my comb. I became very sad. Therefore I stopped using mirror now". "Well, Uryu might die"; Sekiko lost her interest in watching the festival because of her worry about her friend’s illness. Sekiko soon returned alone through the streets decorated with colourful paper lanterns, leaving behind the crowds of cheerful people gathered for the
festival and sounds of taiko drums and flutes. Next day, Sekiko left Ueda along with a man to visit her old friend. Distance from Tanaka bus stop till Kotsumura is more than four kilometers. The narrow road between these two places has lot of stones and rocks. While climbing Chiisagata slope, one can enjoy the beautiful view of Chikuma-gawa river at their back. Weeds in full bloom had decorated the stone wall at the side of the paddy field.

From the outskirts of Araya village, Hitomura of Kotsu, lying along the foot of Asama Mountain ranges, can be seen. When Sekiko has seen houses with white washed and earthen walls, shining under the autumn sun, her heart leaped up for joy.

"Miss Uryu hasn't returned to her home since last five years. Am I not right?"; the man who was accompanying Sekiko said while looking at the houses in the base of Asama mountain ranges.

"Yes, you are right", Sekiko wiped the sweat on her body and continued; "it is the fifth year".

"It is a foolish thing", he laughed in a disinterested tone and continued, "not to get married in spite of getting such a high education. Actually, her case is exceptional. Even her father had been a great defender of learning. Unfortunately, he became insane and died in the house prison pathetically".
"In short, Uryu wants to be alone always and she must have inherited this nature from her father. Look, those who would become insane would like to be alone always".

"Her father was a scholar in National learning and his daughter is a scholar of Western learning."

"Stop talking nonsense. It may be so, but Uryu's mother was also quite a capable person."

"She was a strong-minded woman".

"I don't remember well about Uryu's father, but I know that her mother had unusually high desire for fame, you know. I haven't come across any woman with so much aspiration after fame like her. When Uryu graduated from our school in first rank, her mother showed indescribable amount of pride. She wanted to get her daughter married to a man in high position, at least a person in the level of a minister or above. Therefore, most of the ordinary people who had come with proposals for marriage were treated with contempt. Such has been her nature, but now she is ready to get her daughter married to anybody as soon as possible. But, you see, now for the mother it is a difficult matter."

"Well, you are the only person who support her".

"Look, Uryu is not a bad person as people say, you know. However, I too don't know how long she could continue to live alone happily."
"Men will not allow her to live so. Ha, ha...", he laughed ridiculously. "Madamme, how old is she now?"

"Well, she was just... years old when we separated last time at Tazawa. Therefore, she must be now... five years old."

"...five years. You mean twenty five years?"

"Twenty five years? Are you joking? I meant thirty five".

"Eh, I am surprised. Is she so old?"

While talking such things, they climbed the sand and mud covered slope panting.

It was quite a long distance. Sekiko thought about the meaning of woman's life. She thought about Natsuko with pity and she thought about her on life. She remembered Natsuko's words which she said in a challenging tone before they separated at Tazawa; (Let us try who will be happy, you who are married or I who remain unmarried). Is Natsuko happy? In fact, spinister's life has given her the mental strength to live but it killed her physically. According to Tatsu's talk yesterday, Natsuko has become very weak physically. Ah, she must have suffered a lot. But, am I really happy? Marriage has given me the physical strength to live, but it killed me mentally. Well, I have put on so much weight after my marriage (after I started tying my hair in 'Marumage') and become very healthy. But, for that I sacrificed my interest in language learning and music and came down to the level of
any illiterate woman in the society - worried only about eating and drinking.

As she was walking deep in thought, Tatsu, on his way back to home from work, reached there with a hoe on his shoulder. Sekiko, with great glee, told him the purpose of her visit. Slightly upset Tatsu rubbed his big peasant-like hands and soon pointed an earthen walled house reflected in the evening autumn sun. A persimmon tree with red fruits stand there covering the thatched roof of that house. that is the house of Natsuko’s wet-nurse.

"By the way", Tatsu mumbled for a while, "I am sorry for something".

"Well, what is that?", Sekiko looked at his face, "you speak out strange things suddenly".

"I don’t tell lie usually, but...."

"It is embarrassing. Then, Miss Uryu isn’t sick?"

"Well, you will understand it once you meet her".

A woman in her fifties had been washing a pot stooping down in the stream in front of the house. She was Natsuko’s wet nurse. Sekiko asked her about Natsuko. Suddenly her face turned pale. As she was in a confused state, she could not reply Sekiko’s enquiries. Neither she said welcome to her nor asked her to come into the house. Even a black cat which has been clinging around the hem of her kimono, showed its
indignation to the unaccustomed female guest. A hen had spread its wings and gathered its chicks under it.

"Yes, yes, please wait a little", Natsuko’s wet nurse rushed into the house, leaving Sekiko outside the house. After a short while, she came out, with a serious look. "Really, you have come from far away place", the wet nurse looked around restlessly and continued; after taking lot of troubles, but Natsuko is not in a position to meet you, as she is ill."

"That is why I have come to see her", Sekiko said annoyingly.

"Yes, yes, but unfortunately, doctor has asked her not to meet anybody in this condition."

The man accompanying her had pulled Sekiko’s sleeves. He has promised to meet Sekiko later and soon gone to Tatsu’s house as it was evening already. Sekiko stood there still for a while. Soon the surrounding was covered by evening haze and people as well as horses passing through that area were visible only dimmly. Suddenly, Sekiko heard the following conversation from beyond the persimmon tree.

"What happened to the young lady?" It was a man’s voice.

"Your voice is loud", it was a scolding voice. Certainly it was the voice of the wet-nurse. "She says that she has severe pain in the stomach".

"I see. She is going to deliver soon?"
"Nobody is here at present to go and call the midwife. It is good that you have come. Please go and call the midwife quickly."

"You are asking me? You better send the child".

"Child has been sent to the market".

"I hope, we will not be deceived again this time. She made a great fuss last time in the night - it was a nonsense".

"She will definitely deliver tonight".

"In that case I will run and call the midwife". Sekiko was taken aback by the sound of his footsteps. She quickly had gone to Tatsu's house.

Tatsu and family, sitting near the robata (hearth side), were chatting about Natsuko's delivery and laughing loudly.

After dinner, Tatsu's wife told Sekiko all details about her friend Natsuko. Natsuko, without doubt, had come to her wet nurse's house near Tatsu's house, when she was pregnant for about five months. Thereafter she has been always confined in a room, and engaged in reading. Whenever Tatsu's wife has gone to the backyard to collect vegetables, she heard faint sound of reading books by Natsuko, sitting at the back room. She was scared of meeting people and has never come out of the house except in nights. On moonlit nights, she used to go out for strolling, accompanied with a girl next to her house. There was no other unusual sign. Who knows how it happened. Nobody from outside visited her and, therefore,
nobody has come to know about it. To speak in extreme, even the wet-nurse seemed to have been unaware of it for a long time.

"But, giving birth to a child is also a duty of a woman in her life." Tatsu's wife laughed without opening her mouth.

Worried about her neighbour, Tatsu's wife has gone to enquire about Natsuko. Sekiko sat there till late in the night, talking to Tatsu and the other man who accompanied her. Actually, this place is a village. Both the men were talking about man's life in comparison with the life of beasts. After talking about rumours related to Natsuko, they began to talk about the delivery of female horse etc. Only Sekiko was anxious and worried. Tatsu's family offered her, Shibucha (bitter tea), pickled scallion, fried warp larva, etc. but she couldn't eat anything. Soon it was past 10 O'clock in the night. Tatsu's wife has come back to take something from house and on her way back, she told Sekiko and others the details of happenings in the next house. It was as follows: Natsuko has been lying down in the back room but the lamp has been kept in the next room, and therefore, back room gets only faint light. The place where the woman in child bed is lying down has been partitioned off by a folding screen. Ladies from neighbourhood are engaged in various activities. Some are eating, somebody is making ready Ubugi (the clothes for the new born baby) and Shimeshi, somebody is drawing
'Jitsubosan' and somebody is lifting fire in the oven (under the pot). A "makuri" (tucked-up) breast has been made by using little tsutsumi-men (wrapping cotton) on a piece of red silk. A glass of water with a talisman of Shogamasama floating on it would be good for the woman in the childbed. So, somebody is making that hastily. Around 9 O’Clock, the woman on the child bed suddenly started crying in agony and pain. Kamisan removed the folding screen to a corner, in order to make the bed-side brighter, and she broke a raw egg and gave to the woman in the child bed. Her emaciated figure gave a pathetic look in the faint lamp light. She has been lifted up from the bed by holding her back and shoulders, but it was difficult for her to sit on the bed steady. She drank the raw egg while breathing deeply. Her skinny hands were shivering in such a way that, some of the raw egg in the chawan (cup) spilled on the bed. Her black hair got dishevelled from sleeping. Sweat was flowing down from her forehead. Her bed got wet by tears. Finally her severe pain got lulled in deep breath just before and she might give birth soon. Finishing the narration of events, Tatsu’s wife (Kamisan) walked towards her neighbour’s house. Sekiko, while seeing her off from back, whipped her eyes gently.

Sekiko has no experience of delivering a child. Her heart filled with fear and compassion. She opened slightly the amado (shutters) of the south verandah. The night sky of
autumn had scattered stars on it. Westward wind blowing on the trees in the garden was giving rise to whistling sound. Leaves of persimmon tree and Japanese plum tree rustled in the wind. Leave's falling from the trees fell on the door with a pattering noise. Terrific screaming of a woman could be intermittently heard along with the noise of the wind. It was definitely the screaming of Natsuko - voice of her pain. Ah, separation of a child from its mother's womb requires unusual power and energy. Man is born to this earth after inflicting tremendous amount of pain to his mother. Sekiko (has) witnessed the birth of a child for the first time in her life. Vigorous natural force - an open secret of human life - Sekiko from the strained voice of her friend has realised for the first time how painful and horrible to give birth. Suddenly, the first cry of the newborn baby was heard. Sekiko got still more frightened.

"Baby is born, baby is born", Tatsu danced in joy and walked around in the house.

Next morning, Sekiko casually visited the wet nurse's house with the help of kami-san. Natsuko gave birth to a girl child. Her delivery was safe and easy. Upon hearing this news, Sekiko's desire to meet Natsuko increased all the more although this is not the time for that. But at least she wants to see the lovely child, Natsuko's true image.
Realising her desire, Kami-san brought the new born baby from inside.

"Here is the infant. Please see", Kami-san took off the red cap from the baby's head and rubbed the infant's dowing hair. The infant was sleeping peacefully and occasionally she twisted her face innocently. Some time, she moved her tiny lips (on which lipstick has been put) in want of breast milk. Sekiko looked at the baby's face eagerly to find out whether she has any features resembling to her mother, Natsuko. The infant's white nose is seemed to grow long. She seemed to have many other features resembling her mother, but as she is still an infant, it was different to compare her look with her mother. She looked like a gem but, at the same time, as she was a newborn baby, she looked ugly too.

After Sekiko had returned to Ueda, Natsuko must have been moved by hearing the news that Sekiko had visited her but left without meeting her. It is difficult to get a friend like Sekiko in this world. However, Natsuko's life has been dark and evil infected to such an extend that she could not tell her story even to that friend. In fact, she did have a mind to love people even when she had abandoned her parents and native place. But now that she has given up even that love. Love has also abandoned her. Like any ordinary, beautiful woman without virginity, Natsuko also gave birth to a girl child. But even this child was not born as a result of her
real love. Fearing the outside world, Natsuko did not come out, but brought up (nursed) her illegal child inside a dimly-lit room.

Natsuko’s recovery after her confinement and delivery was not satisfactory. There was a feast on the seventh night, with brown rice and fish, and next day morning, Natsuko’s girl child passed away while in her hands.

Tatsu had gone to Ueda to tell this news to Sekiko. However he could not speak it out to Sekiko properly because of sorrow and grief. According to Tatsu, Natsuko lost her normal mental condition and became mad due to great shock and grief after the death of her child.

* * * * *

Five years after, Natsuko, a living corpse by the time, had came back to her home town on a kuruma (rickshaw). She was completely changed both physically and mentally. Certainly she must have undergone indescribable amount of agony and pain. Today’s Natsuko is not the same Natsuko of the olden days. Cursing her ruin as an unmarried old lady, she wondered around from place to place like a mad person, with a chrisanthemum hairpin (kiku no kanzashi) on her hair, painting her face white and putting lipstick on her lips. She travelled from place to place - if yesterday at the Yakushi (Healing Buddha) of Yokado, today at the Omiya shrine - making company with farmers and merchants. Stopping travellers on the way she would ask them "Won’t you make me your wife", and laugh shyly, placing her sleeves on her face.