



Be a Woman

HAYASHI FUMIKO AND
MODERN JAPANESE
WOMEN'S LITERATURE

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Diary of
a Vagabond

Hōrōki

Translator's Introduction

Diary of a Vagabond (*Hōrōki*) was first serialized from October 1928 through October 1930 in the journal *Nyonin geijutsu* (Women's arts). What became the prologue to the book was published in the journal *Kaizō* (Reconstruction) in October 1929. The whole appeared as a separate volume in July 1930 issued by Kaizōsha and became an immediate best-seller. Hayashi made a number of small revisions in the text for *Hōrōki*'s publication as a book by Shinchōsha in 1939. This translation follows the Shinchōsha edition, 1979.

Hōrōki purports to be excerpts from a diary kept in the mid-1920s. Biographers and literary historians, Tanaka (1987) among many others, have treated these as "clearly autobiographical." An unsigned entry in Kōdansha's *Nihon kindai bungaku dai jiten* (Encyclopedia of Japanese literature) takes a more qualified stance in observing that the work was "half-autobiographical"; unfortunately, we don't know, and the entry doesn't tell us, which half. *Diary of a Vagabond* should be read as fiction, though many of the details, in the persons and places represented make this "confessional fiction" seem like a roman à clef.

My choice for the title, *Diary of a Vagabond*, is in part inspired by the structure of the work. But I also mean to underscore the work's fragmentary, discontinuous narrative. Hayashi wrote that, until its publication as a separate volume, she had referred to it as her *uta nikki* (poetic diary), and that the title *Hōrōki* had been suggested by Mikami Otokichi, the husband of her editor, Hasegawa Shigure, at *Nyonin geijutsu*. The tanka poet Takuboku also clearly inspired Hayashi, and a half dozen of his poems appear in *Hōrōki*. In 1910 Takuboku advised, "A poem should be a strict report of events taking place in one's emotional life (for the want of a better term)—a straightforward diary. This means it has to be fragmentary, it can't have unity or coherence" (Sesar 1966, 16). For Hayashi, a diary could aspire to be like such a poem.

Hayashi published two sequels (*zoku*), *Zoku Hōrōki* (November 1930), and *Hōrōki dai sanbu* (*Hōrōki*, part three; serialized in the journal *Nihon shosetsu* [Japanese literature, 1947–1948] and published as a separate volume in 1949). Elisabeth Hanson (1987) misidentified her fine translation of excerpts, *Vagabond's Song*, as coming from *Hōrōki* (1927 [sic]), when it is taken from the sequel published twenty years later. Although translations in Chinese and Korean have long been available, aside from a short four-page English translation (1951) of the prologue and an eight-page translation in Esperanto of one diary entry (1965), *Hōrōki* has not been translated into European languages.

In an earlier generation, translators often rendered items that might have been presumed exotic or unknown in terms more familiar to the English reader. But in order to retain the feel of the original, and in keeping with changing assumptions about readership, I have kept many terms that may already be common knowledge for the contemporary reader in romanized Japanese, such as “futon,” “miso,” “samisen,” “tatami.” But I have also left other terms, such as the ingredients to *oden*, like *chikuwa* and *kon'nyaku*, in Japanese, and have provided a glossary to all terms in appendix A. Brief notes on the people and titles mentioned in the text appear in appendix B, and other explanatory material is given in footnotes.

Prologue

I learned this verse at a grammar school in Kyushu.

In the deepening autumn night,
A traveler distressed by desolate thoughts
Yearns for home, longs for family.

I was destined to be a wanderer. I have no home.

My father was an itinerant peddler of cotton and linen cloth. He came from Iyo on the island of Shikoku. My mother was the daughter of the owner of a hot springs inn on the island of Sakurajima in Kyushu. People say that since she took up with an outsider, they were run out of Sakurajima. They settled for a time in Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi prefecture, and that is where I was born.

Because my parents were cast out by their own families, travel is my only real home. Since I felt fated to wander, I memorized these lines about yearning for home with a sense of inescapable sorrow.

When I was still young, my life took a turn for the worse. After reaping a windfall at his kimono auctions in Wakamatsu, my father brought home a geisha. Her name was Hama. She had run away from Amakusa Island off Nagasaki. Mother left my father's house on a snowy New Year's Day, taking me with her. I was eight. I recall that you could get to Wakamatsu only by boat.

My present father, my stepfather, is from Okayama. Far too honest in nature and abnormally willing to take risks, he's spent his life in poverty, buried in debts. I hardly ever stayed anywhere you could call a home as I tagged along with my mother behind this man. We just made do with cheap rooming houses wherever we went.

“Papa, he doesn't like homes, doesn't like all the stuff it takes to set them up,” my mother always explained to me. My mother and my step-

father dragged me along with them as they roamed Kyushu peddling their wares. As a result, I experienced only a life of low-rent rooms and remember nothing of the natural beauty of mountains or rivers. I first entered school in Nagasaki. Dressed in a discarded muslin frock altered to fit me, I would walk from our rooming house, the Zakkoku Inn, to the school near the Nankin precinct. From there, we moved on to Sasebo, Kurume, Shimonoseki, Moji, Tobata, and Orio, in that order. I did not have a single close friend, since I changed schools seven times in four years.

"Papa, I don't want to go to school no more." Discouraged, I quit. I hated it. That would have been when I was about twelve, when we were living in a coal-mining area in Nogata.

"How about having little Fu try her hand at hawking?" Since I was at an age when I was too useful to be allowed simply to play, I took up door-to-door peddling.

The sky in Nogata was dark and smoky day and night. It was the kind of town where the water curled your tongue, even though sand filters were supposed to remove the heavy iron. In July we settled into our lodgings, the Umayu in the Taisho neighborhood. My parents would just leave me behind, as usual, at the rooming house and rent a cart. Filling their large straw containers with knitted goods, socks, muslin, belly warmers, and whatnot, they would head off for the coal mines and the pottery works, my mother pushing the cart from behind.

To me, this was a new, unfamiliar place. I would wind up my three sen of spending money in my waistband and set off everyday for town. The streets were not alive as they had been in Moji, nor were they beautiful like those of Nagasaki. There were no pretty women as in Sasebo, either. In this neighborhood, sooty eaves yawned darkly, sandwiching alleys encrusted with coke. A cheap sweet shop, a noodle shop, a junk shop, a bedding rental—the random succession of shops made the town look almost like a freight train. Women with ferocious eyes strode past the shop entrances. Their unhealthy appearance was completely different from the women you would find strolling around a big city. The women passing by under the hot July sun wore only dirty belly bands and sleeveless under-kimonos. Come evening, small gangs of chattering women would return to the tenements, shovels on their shoulders and straw baskets dangling from their waists.

The folksong "Osayo, the Miller's Daughter" was popular.

My three sen disappeared on frozen sweets or miniature books like *The Beautiful Twins*. Instead of going to school, I soon started working at the millet-cake factory in the Susaki district for a daily wage of twenty-three sen. About that time my family paid eighteen sen for the day's rice we bought in our bamboo basket. At night I would rent books from the

local lending library. I read a succession of romantic titles: *Skillful Kisaburo*, *Against-the-Grain Masanori of Fukushima*, *Nightingale*, *No Blood Relation*, and *Whirlpool*. Happily-ever-after selfish daydreams and sentimental heroics soaked into my head as into a sponge. I was surrounded from morning to night by talk of money. My highest ambition was to become rich. When it rained for days on end and drenched the cart my stepfather rented, we ate only squash and rice gruel for every meal. It was depressing even to pick up my bowl.

A lunatic lived in our cheap rooming house. He was a former miner who suffered from what was commonly called "nerves." The innkeeper said he had gone crazy after being shell-shocked by dynamite. He was mild-mannered for a madman. Early every morning he set off with the women of the neighborhood to push the coal cars. I often had Mr. Nerves pick out my lice. He later went on to make a career out of setting up tunnel beams in the mines. Besides him, there was a drifter from Shimane with a glass eye who sang ballads, two mining couples, a racketeer selling rotgut, and a prostitute missing a thumb. This group was more diverting than a circus.

"She says that the coal car took her thumb right off, but don't you go believing it for one minute. Somebody probably just cut it off . . .," the wife of the Umayu innkeeper explained to my mother with a wink.

One day the thumbless prostitute and I went to the public bathhouse. The room was all dark and slimy with moss. A snake tattooed in a circle all around her belly was sticking a red tongue out at the navel. This was the first time that I had ever seen such an impressive sight. I viewed the light-blue snake tattoo with childlike solemnity. The prostitute usually did her own cooking. Even her friends who did not cook for themselves would buy rice and have her prepare it for them.

The billboards for the movie *Kachusha* appeared about the time that the street corners of Nogata blistered under the heat. The posters showed a young foreign woman pounding against a train window in a station, a blanket draped over her head in the falling snow. Before long, it became all the rage to have a Kachusha hairstyle with a part down the middle.

My darling Kachusha, parting is such sweet sorrow.

Let's offer our prayer up to God

Before the melting of this powdery snow.

In no time at all the coal miners made this song popular. It still brings back such wonderful memories. I did not really understand the power of this Russian woman's love but, after seeing the movie, I turned into a very dreamy girl. I had been taken to a theater only once before, to listen to the old folk ballads sung to the music of the samisen. Yet now I slipped away every day to watch the *Kachusha* movie by myself. For quite a while

I was in a trance under her spell. As I passed the open square where the white oleanders blossomed, on my way to go buy oil, I would reenact *Kachusha*, or even "coal mining," with the neighborhood children. When we played "coal mining," the girls would pretend to push the coal cars, and the boys would pretend to dig while singing a miner's song.

At the time, I was a very healthy child.

I said good-bye to the twenty-three-sen salary from the millet-cake factory. I had worked there barely one month. Then I began a routine of crossing the Onga River and going through the tunnel to the mining quarters and huts. There I tried to sell the goods I had tied up in a gray cloth bundle on my back, things like fans and cosmetics my father stocked. Many peddlers went right into the mines.

"It's so hot. How're you holding up?" I would call out a cheery greeting to two of my friends. "Matsu-chan" was a cute fifteen-year-old sweet-shop girl who would walk all the way from Katsuki. But before long she was sold off to Tsingtao as a geisha. "Hiro-chan" was a popular salesboy at a dried fish shop and, though only thirteen, he put on the airs of a full-fledged miner. He could already drink sake and surprised people by the way he brandished his pickaxe high in the air. Besides, he got in to see plays and movies in town for free. I used to walk home along the edge of the Onga River after the moon had risen, listening to his stories.

"All for one price" was a popular sales gimmick. My fans all went for ten sen. They were decorated with drawings of carp, the seven Gods of Fortune, or Mount Fuji. There were exactly seven sturdy bamboo ribs on each fan. On an average day, I got rid of about twenty of them. The fans sold much better when I went round to the miners' hovels, rather than to the wives in company housing. And then there was the "harmonica tenement" where ten Korean families lived under one long roof. Naked as peeled onions, their children used to pile playfully on top of each other on the rough straw mats.

Under the blazing sky, you could hear the rumbling of coal cars, sounding like thunder far in the distance, coming from the gaping mouth of the torn earth. At lunchtime, I waited for the miners to spill out like foam from the dark tunnel entrance, with its scaffolding as intricate as an ant hill. Young as I was, I would walk among them, selling my fans. The miners' sweat was black and syrupy. They would flop down on the newly dug coal and sleep soundly, all the while gulping air like goldfish. They looked almost like a pack of motionless apes.

The only movement was the spinning of old-fashioned straw baskets dangling under the ridge poles. After lunch, the *Kachusha* song might float in from here and there. Then, as the piercing siren sounded, the lanterns—faint moonflower lights—would file back into the earth. "White

skin when I left the country" It was not a particularly remarkable singing voice, but amid the smoky mountain of coal slag it conveyed something poignant even to a child.

When I could not sell any more fans, I began to peddle sweet bean-filled buns for one sen apiece. It was two and a half miles to the mine, and I used to make it with lots of rest stops, nibbling on the buns. My stepfather had gotten into a fight over business with a miner and was holed up in the rooming house with a towel around his head. Mother worked a banana stall near the Taga shrine. Countless gangs of miners would descend from the station. A pile of bananas sold for so little they went relatively fast. After selling the buns and leaving the basket next to my mother, I often went to play in the shrine. Mixing with the large crowds, I would pray at the bronze horse statue for my wishes to come true. "May I be blessed." It always rained on the shrine festival. With an eye on the drenching sky, stall operators would shuttle back and forth between the eaves of the station and the shrine grounds.

In October there was a miners' strike. The streets were deserted, as if everything, even noses, had been pinched shut. Only the strikebreaking miners brought any life or excitement. "A strike is a bitter thing, God knows." I learned this song, too. They said that because of the strike, the miners would just have to move on to other mines. The tradespeople would rarely credit any miner's account, since transactions between the two might abruptly come to an end. But even with the risks involved, those who traded with the miners said it was an easy and enjoyable business.

"You're past forty, so you've just got to try harder, there's no way round it."

I was immersed in a French detective novel, reading by the light of a tiny lamp. Lying at the opposite end of my futon, my mother kept grumbling about my stepfather. Outside the interminable rains continued.

"You know, we've got to have a place to settle down so we don't have these problems."

"Stop complaining, will you!"

After his rebuke, the sound of the rain returned. Only the thumbless prostitute was in good spirits, always drinking sake.

"I hope there's a war."

This prostitute's pet theory was on the benefits of war. She said it would be good if this world turned upside down. It would be great. Tons of money would flow into the mines. "You must have been born under a lucky star," my mother would tell her. "How can you even imagine that?"

the thumbless prostitute would reply, smiling sadly and tossing something out of the window. She claimed to be twenty-five, but had the freshness of a new recruit.

Signs of November were in the air.

My parents and I felt free to talk loudly on the return home from Kurozaki as we pulled a light cart along the bank of the dark Onga.

"You two get into the cart. We've got a ways to go yet and the walking's hard . . ."

My mother and I got in, and my stepfather pulled us along, singing heartily.

Every autumn there are countless shooting stars. "Hey, mister!" a voice called out behind us as we were almost to the shopping street entrance. It seemed to be coming from a couple of miners who had been dogging us. My stepfather stopped. "What?" When they said they hadn't eaten in two days, he asked whether they had run away. They were both Koreans. They were going to Orio and wanted to borrow money. They begged incessantly. Silently, he pulled out two fifty sen coins and let them each grab one. A cold wind blew on top of the embankment, and stars twinkled in the vast sky above the Koreans. Mother and I shivered. Once they had the money, the two silently pushed our cart into town from behind.

Some time later, when his father died, my stepfather returned to Okayama to sell the rice fields. His principal objective was to get his hands on some capital and try his luck at auctioning Karatsu pottery. But everybody knows that in a mining marketplace, the fastest-selling items are food. With my mother's bananas and my sweet bean buns, as long as it didn't rain we could sell enough to feed two people. We paid the Umayia inn two yen twenty sen each month. My mother claimed it was easier than renting our own house. But no matter what we tried, we were extremely unlucky. That fall, my mother suffered from arthritis and stayed away from her stall for several days. My stepfather returned with just forty yen from selling the land. He laid in a stock of pottery and took off alone to try his luck in Sasebo.

"I'll send for both of you soon."

With these words, my stepfather boarded the train, wearing his one sun-bleached set of thick cotton work clothes. I was left to sell the sweet buns day in and day out. Even when it rained, I did my rounds, not skipping a single house along the Nogata streets.

I will never forget this period. Sales were not all that difficult for me. As I plodded along from house to house, the cash in my homemade wallet grew a few sen at a time. I loved it when my mother praised my abilities. I lived with her and sold sweet buns for two months. I returned one day to find my mother stitching a beautiful skin-colored waistband.

"Where'd that come from?"

I looked on in wonder. My mother said that my real father over on Shikoku had sent it. I became wondrously elated. Before long we cleared out of Nōgata, accompanied by my stepfather, who had come to fetch us, and boarded a train bound for Orio. As the train crossed the steel bridge over the Onga River, I saw the street I used to walk down every day. The road along the embankment was awash in the pale sunset. Its sadness reflected in my eyes. The memory of a single white sail heading upriver even now overwhelms me with a longing for home. Peddlers hawking gold chains, rings, balloons, and picturebooks chattered nonstop in the train. My stepfather bought me a ring with a red glass stone.

December

Alighting at a station at the end of nowhere,
In bright snow
I enter a lonely town.

The snow was falling. This poem by Takuboku left me rather homesick. I opened the window in the toilet, and could make out dimly lit evening lights. They burned like the red rhododendrons I had seen long ago in the mountains of Shinshu. The lights were extraordinarily beautiful.

"Maid, come and take the little miss!"

It was the wife's voice.

Oh, but the baby Yuriko was such a bother. Like the professor, she was high-strung and cried a lot. It was just like trying to hold a fireball on your back. At least when I escaped to the toilet like this, it felt like I had a life of my own.

(Bananas and eel, pork cutlet and oranges—these are things I would really like to eat.)

For some strange reason, when I feel miserable, I get the urge to scribble graffiti. I traced "pork cutlet and bananas" on the wall with my finger.

I paced up and down the hall with the baby on my back until dinner was ready. Though it was only a week since I had come to Chikamatsu Shūkō's house, it did not look as if there was any future in this. The professor here scurried up and down the steps many times a day, almost like a mouse. I would never be able to survive his neurotic condition.

"Peek-a-boo! Sleeping well?"

Reassured by peering at his infant daughter over my shoulder, the professor tucked up his kimono and climbed up to the second floor.

Today I pulled Chekhov out of the bookcase in the hall. My soul was at home with Chekhov. His emotions and characters all came alive, whis-

pering things to my heart in the darkness. The book was soft to the touch. After scanning the professor's collection, I couldn't help but think that it wouldn't hurt him to read his Chekhov again. Stories about Kyoto geisha were about a world too far removed.

Night.

I became delighted when I saw Kiku, the housekeeper, in the kitchen preparing delicious-looking sushi.

By the time I had given the baby a bath and she had calmed down, it was already eleven o'clock. I detested babies, but strangely enough, whenever they were put on my back, they fell right asleep, much to the amazement of the household.

Thanks to this, I was able to read lots of books. When you got older and had kids, you might be so worried about them that you wouldn't be able to do any work. Whenever I saw the professor fretting over the baby, however, I began to feel real animosity toward him. I wasn't going to be a maid all my life.

I wondered if the professor even knew about the lovely white flowers blooming amid the burr clover. Of all the members of this house, I liked his wife best, although she was so quiet she was almost asleep. You'd expect her to have had a bit more life in her, having been raised in the countryside.

December

They fired me.

I had nowhere in particular to go. Standing on the overpass above the train tracks and lugging a large cloth bundle, I opened the white paper envelope I had received. It contained only two yen. For more than two weeks, exactly two yen. Cold blood curdled up from the tips of my toes.

As I walked along with the large bundle dangling from my hand, I wanted to just chuck everything away and pick a fight with the first person to come along. I decided to take a look at the modern house for rent along the way, with its blue tiled roof. The garden was large, and the glass windows glistened in the cold as if polished by the December wind.

Tired and sleepy, I thought about taking a rest. When I opened the back door, I saw empty rusted tin cans scattered about, and mud-caked straw matting in the sitting room. A deserted house at midday was indescribably bleak. The faint shadows of former residents seemed to have remained behind in certain places. The cold penetrated deeply. I had nowhere to go. I couldn't do much with two yen. When I came out of the toilet, a doe-eyed dog stared at me from the side of the dilapidated porch.

"It's okay—nothing to worry about."

I only intended to reassure the dog while I asserted my claim on the porch.

(What should I do . . . there's nothing I can do.)

Night.

I stayed overnight at a rooming house in the Asahi area of Shinjuku. It cost thirty sen to stay in that inn—it faced out onto the mire of pasty slush covering the wall-lined road. I was able to rest my mud-caked body there. I had no guarantee of seeing the next light of dawn in the three-mat room with a tiny oil lamp that must have antedated the Meiji era. Although uncertain of any response, I wrote a long letter to the man on the island who had abandoned me.

The world, nothing but lies.

The last train bound for Kōshū runs across my head

As I stretch my veins across the futon of the cheap rooming house.

I abandon my existence, lonely as the rooftop entertainment of a department store.

I try embracing my own corpse shattered by the train

Pretending it was another man.

At midnight, opening the shoji dark with soot,

Even here I find a playful moon and sky.

Good-bye everyone!

I return to being a warped die

Here in the attic of the cheap rooming house.

Blown about by the wind

I grasp the layered loneliness of the journey.

People were coming and going, making quite a racket even in the middle of the night.

"Excuse me . . ."

With this warning, a woman with big sweeping hair suddenly slid the shoji open and shut with a terrible clatter. She flung herself under my quilt. Heavy steps followed right behind her, and a weaselly-looking man, without even a hat on his head, cracked open the door.

"Hey! You! Get up!" he yelled.

Mumbling under her breath, the woman went out into the hallway. Then I could hear the sound of a cheek being slapped repeatedly. Soon it became eerily still, like the slow oozing of sewage. Disturbed by the woman's abrupt departure, the air of the room did not settle.

"What do you do? Address? Where you headed? Age? Parents? . . ."

The weaselly man had returned to my room and stood by my pillow, all the while wetting the tip of the pencil with his tongue.

"Are you a friend of that woman?"

"No, she just came barging in."

Even Knut Hamsun could not have been in such a predicament. After the detective left, I stretched out my arms and legs and checked on the wallet hidden under the pillow. *There was only one yen sixty sen left.* The moon was buffeted about in the wind. Through the distorted transom panes I saw the colors of the rainbow.

Pierrot the clown was skilled at leaping from precipitous heights, but it was no easy feat to leap back up. Yet somehow it should work out. I should be able to find some way to eat.

December

In the morning I went to the eatery at the entrance to Ome Road. As I was drinking hot tea, a muddy laborer rushed in.

"Miss! Can you give me something to eat for ten sen? I've only got ten sen," he asked in a booming unpretentious voice.

"Would the house tofu and rice special be all right?" replied a young girl of fifteen or sixteen.

The laborer broke out in a broad grin and seated himself on a bench.

A huge bowl. Onions and meat and tofu all finely chopped up. Murky miso soup. All of this nourishing food cost just ten sen. Preoccupied with his meal, the laborer opened his large mouth and shoveled it in. The whole scene brought tears to my eyes. A sign on the wall close to the ceiling clearly stated "Meals from ten sen and up." But with only a thin ten sen coin to his name, this middle-aged laborer was unabashedly making sure. He had gotten more rice than I would, but I wondered if it would be enough for him. He was an incredibly cheerful man. The waitress brought out rice, mixed stew, and pickles and placed them in front of me. It was certainly a poor rendition of "delicacies from the mountain and sea." I paid the total of twelve sen, and the waitress called out a thank you as I went out through the noren curtain in the doorway. Twelve sen for my fill and a morning greeting. This dead-end world is certainly a cheery place, but with not much distance between hope and despair. For that laborer back there, could it be that a single ten-sen coin was the only thing that came between him and deepest sorrow?

If only my mother would come to Tokyo, we could figure out some way of making a go of it. Like a ship fast taking on water, I was really a wreck that was sinking as far as it could. I was way past the point of just getting a bit wet. My thinking did not differ greatly from that of the prostitute I had encountered last night. She might have been well past thirty. Had I been a man, I might have indulged myself straight away, and in the morning we'd already be talking of a double suicide.

At noon I left my luggage at the inn and went to check out the job agencies in Kanda.

No matter where I went, I felt alone, deserted. My heart was in turmoil.

(I wouldn't even think of working for you.)

Moron!

Bitch!

Fool!

What a cold, stuck-up female. . . .

I handed over the pink card of blotting paper.

"You want about thirty yen a month?" muttered the female receptionist, laughing at my audacity. "Won't you settle for being a maid? There are oodles of female high school graduates who want to work in offices, and you won't be able to get that kind of job. But there are lots of openings for maids."

Younger and more beautiful women threatened to bury me like an avalanche. What you said was certainly true. There might be no work for me at all.

There were three possible openings—at an india-ink company, as a gas-pump attendant, and as a maid for the Italian Embassy. I had only about ninety sen to my name. On my return to my room in the evening, I encountered geisha lined up before mirrors, smearing on thick grayish makeup and looking a bit like clay flowerpots.

"I only sold two minutes last night."

"No one wants a squint-eye!"

"Is that so? I'll have you know that some men like this look."

"That's big of them."

The young women who were bantering with each other were fourteen or fifteen years old.

December

Waves of self-pity swelled up within me. Haunting hallucinations drove me crazy. I struck a match and lit an eyebrow pencil.

Ten A.M. I went to the Italian Embassy in Kōjimachi, sannen chō.

Laugh and live. A motto belied by my crooked smile.

A foreign child riding a horse came out the front gate. Next to the gate was what looked like a ramshackle gatekeeper's hut, and stretching far beyond it up to the front door was a beautiful pebble walkway. This was not the place for a woman like me. I was shown into a large red-carpeted room with a map on the wall. I thought that the foreigner's wife in her black-and-white dress was very beautiful, even more so when viewed from afar. The horse-riding boy returned home whinnying. Then a for-

eign man appeared. It turned out that he was not an ambassador after all, only a secretary. Both husband and wife were tall and overpowering. The woman dressed in black and white showed me the cook's room. Onions lay scattered in a concrete bin; two charcoal braziers served as the helpers' own cooking stoves. The room had the feel of a deserted house, with closed black Venetian blinds. It smelled foreign, like soap.

In the end, I left through the gate without reaching any conclusion. I escaped the opulent residences and descended the slope. The red shop flags flapping in the December wind reflected my turbulent thoughts. Different nations cannot understand each other. Shall I look elsewhere for work? Deciding not to board the streetcar, I walked along the edge of the moat. I wanted to go home. I knew that nothing would come of hanging on in Tokyo without a specific purpose. *When I looked at an electric streetcar I thought of dying.*

I went to the house in Hongō where I had previously stayed. *The landlady seemed distant.* A letter from Professor Chikamatsu was waiting for me. When I left, the professor had said he might just help me out since they needed a maid over at the Yoshii in Jyūnisō. But this was a rejection of my request, written in pale ink. Maybe writers were coldhearted.

As I made my way home down the evening streets of Shinjuku, my inexplicable reaction to my dilemma was to yearn for male company. (Wasn't there anyone to rescue me now?) As I stared at a purplish signal light flashing and swaying on a pedestrian overpass in front of Shinjuku station, my eyelids swelled with tears, and I began to hiccup like a child.

I'd take a chance on anything. I went and had a frank talk with my landlady. She agreed to let me live downstairs with her until I found work.

"Say, why don't you become a conductor on the Blue Line Bus? If you can cut it, they say you can bring in about seventy yen."

Someone must have been grilling a sandfish somewhere. Its terrible odor came wafting in. How wonderful if you could bring in as much as seventy yen. But I had to find a place to stay. Sitting at the landlady's office kotatsu under a ten-watt ceiling bulb, I wrote a letter to my mother.

"Am sick, in trouble, please raise three yen and send it to me."

The prostitute from the other day came in, shoving some sushi into her mouth.

"Two days ago you really put us through a horrible experience. You're pretty inconsiderate, you know," grumbled the landlady.

"Was the old man angry?" asked the prostitute.

Under the light I could see that she was already past forty, with a dried out, sagging body.

"I call that owl, the way you bring all kinds of men back in the middle of the night. You're not the most welcome tenant. The police really gave my husband a dressing-down just now, and he's fighting

mad." The usually good-natured, prematurely aged landlady complained as she poured tea.

That night she treated me to a bowl of noodles. Tomorrow I would go on the recommendation of the landlord to the Blue Line Bus depot to take an exam. With the end of the year almost at hand, it was sad not to have someplace to settle down, but this world was not the kind of place where it did you any good to fret. I would rely completely on my healthy body. Outside the wind moaned dreadfully between the power lines. I threw myself onto a dirty futon in a corner of the cheap room. Gazing at the face of the good-luck god Daikoku plastered to the wall, I day-dreamed that I was lord above the clouds, though I was really quite small.

(Should I go home and get married?)

April

Today, with the introduction from Yasu at the knitted-goods shop, I took one large bottle of sake to the boss who was to give me a stall.

After I passed under the sign for a building contractor at the entrance to the alley, next to the pickle shop in Dōgenzaka, I opened the sliding glass doors. They had only been halfheartedly cleaned. The old man who gave out the daytime spaces was seated by the side of the charcoal brazier sipping tea.

"If you're going to start tonight to tend a night stall on top of your daytime one, you'll be able to build a bank pretty soon," he laughed amiably and in good spirits took the bottle of sake I had brought.

I didn't know anyone in Tokyo, so it didn't matter if I was embarrassed. You could find whatever you needed here in this city. Since I was stripped down to the bare essentials as it was, I would have to work as hard as I could. I told myself that this was nothing; my job at the sweets factory was much worse. I felt somewhat relieved.

Night.

I was given the spot between a woman selling fountain pens and the name-plate stall. The man there was churning out name plates without waiting for specific orders. I lined up men's knitted underwear on a shutter, which I had borrowed from the noodle shop, and hung a "20 sen sale" sign. Then I read *Lande's Death* by the bulb of the fountain-pen display. When I took a deep breath, it already felt like spring. It was as if the wind carried faraway memories. The pavement, a river of light, was thick with people.

"Ladies and gentlemen! How much is 89,503 plus 275,460? No one knows? There sure are a lot of fools here." In front of the china shop, a shabby university student was selling calculators. His high-handed way of doing business, disparaging the crowds, was most entertaining.

A refined, married woman fiddled with the underwear for twenty minutes but left after buying only one pair. Mother brought me my dinner. As it got warmer, it was strange how kimono stains stood out more and more. Mother's kimono had also lost its shape. I decided to buy her a bolt of cotton material for a new one.

"I'll take over for you for a bit, so you go ahead and eat."

The ceramic tiered lunchbox contained pickles and stewed chikuwa. I turned my back on the paved street and ate without tea or hot water.

"You can't get them just anywhere. Try them and see for yourself," yelled the young woman with the fountain pens.

Salty tears fell from my eyes. Mother was softly singing an old song, content with her somewhat less hectic routine. If only my stepfather, gone off somewhere in Kyushu, were more successful, then life would be as carefree as my mother's song: dum da da dum dum, dum dum.

April

The young women walked down the streets in thin flowing shawls. I wanted one of those. *I was blinded by the April window decorations of the Western-goods store, by the gold, the silver, and the cherry blossoms.*

As the limbs of the cherry spread out across the sky
Turn faintly to the color of blood,
Colored blossoming threads dangle off the tip of the flowering
branches.
Pull to win the passion lottery.

To make ends meet
A nude dancer plunges into a cabaret,
But that is not the cherry blossom's fault.

There is one chance of love
For every two of duty.
Cherry blossoms blooming
Luxuriantly under an azure dome,

The enticing threads smoothly reel in
Every single woman's
Bare lips.

They say that, at night,
Impoverished maidens
Throw their lips like fruit
To the wide sky.

The light-pink cherry blossoms tinge the heavens.
But these "lovely" women's
Kisses of obligation
Leave traces without emotion.

I considered saving up money to buy a shawl, but decided not to bother. Instead, I went to see a cut-rate movie. White Rose of the Railroad *was not the least bit interesting.*

It had begun to rain during the movie, so I scurried out of the small theater back to the stall. Mother had already gathered up the straw mats. When we went to the station, carrying our things on our backs as usual, we found it teeming with young women returning from flower-viewing parties, as gaudy as goldfish. Gentlemen floated about here and there like algae. It was teeming with life.

We pushed our way onto the train. It was pouring rain. I was feeling fine. Rain harder, and harder, and make the cherry blossoms all drop off. I rested my cheek against the dark window and looked outside. I could see my mother's reflection in the window, as she stood unsteadily, like a crestfallen child.

Even inside the train there is a feeling of unease.
We received no news from Kyushu.

April

Mother came down with a cold because of the rain, so I went alone to set up the stall. I passed the front of a bookstore lined with many volumes fresh off the press, and wished I could buy them. The muddy roads were bad. Dōgenzaka Street looked as if it had been flooded with sweet bean paste. We would run into problems if I took a day off now, and there were sure to be several rainy days later, so I decided to bear with it and set up shop. It was just me and the man selling rubber shoes set up along the road thick in blurred colors. Women passing by tittered when they saw my face. Did I have on too much rouge? Was my hair funny? I glared back at them. Women offer the least sympathy.

Though the weather turned fine, the street was bad for business. At noon, the hairpiece seller who set up next to me grumbled about the rent going up two sen. I ate two bowls of noodles for lunch. (*Sixteen sen.*) A student bought five pairs of underwear. I thought about closing early today and going to Shiba to get more goods. On the way home I bought ten sen worth of sweet bean cakes in the shape of fish.

"Yasu was run over by a tram. It doesn't look good," my mother informed me. She was lying down when I returned home. I stared at her

blankly, without removing the pack from my back. Just after noon, someone from Yasu's family had come with this news. Mother searched for the paper on which she had written the name of the hospital.

That night I went to Yasu's house in Shiba. His young wife, her eyes swollen from weeping, had just come back from the hospital. I took what few articles of underwear were ready and left some money. I pondered how the universe could dare be so full of cracks like this. *I imagined Yasu and his wife, just yesterday in full health, pressing down on the pedal of their sewing machine.* It was supposed to be spring, and the cherry trees had blossomed, but the season seemed out of place. I leaned against the window of the streetcar and studied the lights of the moat in Asakusa all the way home.

April

A long letter arrived from my stepfather. He wrote that he lived on the border of starvation because of the long rains. Mother asked that I send all of the fourteen yen we had saved in the flower vase, so I bought a money order and quickly posted it. A new wind would probably blow tomorrow. After Yasu died, they couldn't even continue to make simple underwear. Completely exhausted, even the most ordinary things became too much of a bother for them.

We sent fourteen yen to my stepfather in Kyushu.

"We can make do with a three-mat room, so how about renting the adjoining six-mat room out?" Mother asked me.

"Room for rent. Room for rent. Room for rent." I became quite optimistic, and childishly covered sheets of paper with these words. Then I went out to the road in Narukozaka to post them. Our conversation inevitably turned to death. Damn it! I laughed thinking about how nice it would be to afford a large sackful of rice once in a while. Mother talked about working in the neighborhood washing and blocking kimono. These days "help wanted" signs for waitresses and geisha caught my attention. A mayfly rises lazily from the black earth, while we sit on the veranda basking in the sun. Soon it will be May, the month of my birth.

"Next year should be a lucky one for you. This year there's no lucky direction for you or your dad," Mother blurted out.¹ She was slapping pieces of cloth she had just washed onto the uneven glass door to smooth them out.

1. Directional taboos were one of the many superstitious beliefs operating since the Heian period. During prescribed periods, it was considered unlucky to travel in certain directions.

How will I face tomorrow? I won't give in. It was just a string of back luck, wasn't it, Mama?

I wanted to buy an underskirt for my kimono.

May

Our room was so dirty that no one had come to rent it yet. Mother brought home a huge cabbage, claiming that the vegetable storekeeper had given it to her on credit. Seeing that cabbage made me want to bite into a plump steamy pork cutlet. As I lay gazing up at the ceiling of the bare room, I think how much fun it would be to become as small as a mouse, and to run around tearing into all kinds of things to eat. That night Mother discussed my becoming a temporary housekeeper, an idea she claimed to have overheard at the public bathhouse. That might be worth a try, but I naturally hated authority. It was more oppressive to kowtow to the traditions of a wealthy family than to commit hara-kiri. I wept at the sight of Mother's forlorn face.

You could not deny your hunger when your belly was empty. We would be starving tomorrow. We were starving today. I wondered if that fourteen yen had arrived in Kyushu. I was sick of Tokyo. It would be great if my stepfather could get rich quickly. Kyushu was nice, Shikoku too. I watched Mother persistently licking the lead pencil with her tongue as she wrote a letter to Father late at night. I wondered if anyone would buy a body like mine.

May

When I awoke in the morning, mother had already washed our wooden geta.

Dear Mother! I set out for the Temporary Housekeeper Association in Hyakunin chō in Ōkubo. Two middle-aged women were sewing inside the shop. Perhaps because there were not enough people to fill all the requests, the boss gave me a letter of introduction and a map. The job was as a helper to a pharmacology student.

I was the happiest when I ambled along the boulevards. Covered with the dust of May, I crossed the pedestrian overpass in Shinjuku. Boarding the streetcar, I saw scenes that might as well have included banners declaring, "All the world is at peace." The sight of these gracious thoroughfares wiped away my painful experiences. All the things I wanted to buy hung in the shop windows. Tilting my head, I fixed my hair in the glass window of the streetcar. I alighted at Honmura chō and discovered the house on a quiet lane of an exclusive residential section.

It was really a large house. Could I work in such a place? I stood by the front door dazed, wondering whether to go home.

"Hello!"

"Housekeeper! We had a telephone call a while ago from the agency that you had set out. The master's quite upset that you're so late."

I was shown into a small western-style living room. A faded magazine frontispiece of Millet's *Angelus* hung on the wall. It was an uninteresting room. I couldn't tell what kind of stuffing was in the chair, but it was unexpectedly bulgy and soft.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting."

It was a little unclear, but it seemed that this man's father ran a pharmacy in Nihonbashi and that I had the simple task of putting the medicine samples in order.

"But soon, when my work gets busy, I'll have you write out clean drafts for me. And in a week I'll be going to Cape Miura for research. Will you come with me?"

He was tall, and looked to be about twenty-five, but I couldn't tell the age of young men. I just gazed up at his face.

"Why not give up being a temporary and come here every day?"

I agreed, for thirty-five yen a month. It was a much better option than working for an employment agency that made you feel like a piece of merchandise. The black tea and Western sweets they served brought back youthful memories of church on Sunday.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"I'm twenty-one."

"Then you should let down the folds in your kimono. You're not a child anymore, you know."

I blushed.

I couldn't believe my luck. I hoped I could keep getting thirty-five yen a month.

When I returned home, I found Mother holding a telegram with news of my Okayama grandmother's serious condition. She was not a blood relation—she was my stepfather's mother. This grandmother had still been commuting to work to a factory in the country where they made thickly woven Sanada obi. It was depressing to think that she was already on the verge of death. Someone had to go. We had just sent money to my father in Kyushu several days earlier, and it would have been too audacious to ask to borrow money at the place where I had been today. So Mother and I went to talk to the landlord, though we still owed four months back rent. We borrowed ten yen. I promised we would repay it with lots of interest. I put together a box lunch of leftovers and wrapped it up in a cloth.

Traveling on a night train by oneself was a lonely prospect. But since

Mother looked old and pitiful, it was even more so. I didn't want to send her back by herself to my stepfather's home, but we were in desperate economic straits. Both of us knew that there was nothing for her to do but silently board the train. I bought her a ticket for Okayama. Under the pale light, the Shimonoseki express swallowed up many well-wishers as well as passengers.

"In the next few days, I'll get an advance and send it to you. Don't fall apart. It doesn't make any sense to break down like this."

Mother was sobbing like a child.

"You're so silly. I'll send you the train money no matter what. Don't worry and go take care of Grandmother."

After the train left, I began to feel dizzy. What had seemed like nothing—Grandmother's illness and scrambling for money—suddenly seized and distressed me. I left the National Railway platform and walked out to the open plaza in front of Tokyo station. I hadn't applied cream to my cheeks for some time, and my face smarted. I cried.

I could hear a faraway Salvation Army brass band playing, "Come to me, all ye who believe, to your Savior." What was this "ye who believe" stuff? If you couldn't believe in yourself, you couldn't believe in Jesus or Buddha. Poor people didn't have time to believe. What was this religion that they even advertised with a brass band? They didn't have to worry about making ends meet. So it was "Come to me, all ye who believe," huh? I'd had enough of such dour music. *I wanted a spring song.* I'd rather be retching my guts out, crushed by a nobleman's car on the beautiful streets of the Ginza, than listening to this.

Dear Mother, where were you now? Had the train reached Totsuka or Fujisawa? What were you thinking about in that corner of the third-class carriage? I imagined the scenery from the speeding train.

It would be great if my thirty-five-yen job continued. The moat reflected the lights of the Imperial Theater. Stillness surrounded me. All the world was at peace.

November

"Leaving the world behind, I live in the deep mountains." This vulgar ballad from Tateyama resounded around me as I commuted daily to paint at the celluloid doll factory. It had now been four months since I had become a factory girl earning the daily wage of seventy-five sen. The butterfly barrettes I painted seemed like such sentimental souvenirs. I wondered where they had scattered to by now. Ochiyo, from Kanasugi in Nippori, claimed she had a father who worked as a samisen player in a cheap theater. Her family, with its six children, lived in the back alley.

"Dad and me, if we don't work no one eats" She tilted her pale face wistfully as she slapped red paint on the butterflies.

Twenty women and fifteen men worked in this small factory. Kewpie dolls poured out on the world from our lethargic, leaden hands. Celluloid butterflies and kewpies that would begin the color of boiled squid filled our world from seven in the morning until five in the evening. Buried in stinking plastic scraps, we rarely had time to lift our heads up to look out the window.

"If you slack off there'll be real trouble to pay." The factory owner's wife, in charge of the office accounts, would notice our fatigue, and comment sarcastically.

This was the last thing we needed. She used to be a factory girl just like the rest of us.

"We ain't machines, you know!" The men in the shipping department used to laugh and stick out their tongues at her.

At five o'clock, we threw in an extra twenty minutes of our labor. When the bamboo basket containing envelopes of our day's wages came around, we rummaged frantically to find our own.

In the evening, Ochiyo followed behind me as I left through the factory gate with my kimono sleeves still tied back with a sash to keep them out of the way.

"Hey, aren't you going past the market this evening? I have to go buy food for dinner tonight."

Ochiyo and I clutched the saury fish in both hands. The fish, floating in its blue glistening oil, had cost only eight sen per plate. Its aroma regaled our stomachs.

"Doesn't it make you feel happy to walk down this road?"

"Sure, I feel so relieved."

"But I envy you your independence."

Beautiful Ochiyo's braided hair was dusted white from the factory. I began to feel an exhilaration, as if I could set all the showy goods along the street ablaze.

November

Why was it? Why?

Did we have to put up with the stinking celluloid forever? Was ours a celluloid life? Morning to night we daubed on primary colors, wriggling like earthworms in a warped factory hidden away from the sun. Slowly but surely, without respite, they squeezed from us long hours, youth, and health. Pity overwhelmed me whenever I looked at the faces of all the young women.

But wait. Just think of how the kewpie dolls and butterfly barrettes

we made festively decorated the heads of poor children. It was probably all right to smile a little bit beneath that window.

In my two-mat room the earthen pot, the rice bowls, the cardboard rice bin, and the wicker clothesbasket, together with the small desk all stood firm, as if my lifetime debt. The morning sun sparkled through the transom and streamed above my futon laid out diagonally, dividing the room. The dust danced in stripes over my head. Where exactly blew the wind of revolution? You Japanese radicals certainly knew many clever words. I wondered exactly what kind of fairy tales the socialists were inventing. Exactly how much longer did we have to separate newborn babies by class, babies puffier than brown rice buns, by choosing for them a silk or a cotton diaper?

"Do you have the day off from the factory?" called out the woman as she rapped on the shoji to my room. I clicked my tongue and slipped both hands under my head. It had become strangely leaden. At such times I usually mulled over important matters, but all I could do was whimper.

A letter from my mother.

Send me anything, even fifty sen. I'm having problems with arthritis. I'm really looking forward to seeing you and your father soon. I've heard from your father that things aren't going like he wanted. It makes me sad to hear that you're having problems too.

The letter was written in katakana in a halting hand. At the end she had written "To the Honorable Lady, from your humble servant, Mother." She was so precious, yet so exasperating. I wished she were near so I could nudge her with playful affection.

"Aren't you feeling well?"

Matsuda, a printer who was also renting a room from the tailor, opened the shoji door to my room without hesitation and entered. He was short, like a young teenager, with hair down to his shoulders. He epitomized all that I despised: a man generous to a fault. I had been gazing at the ceiling while thinking, but I turned my back on him and covered myself with the futon cover. He was so kind I couldn't help but feel grateful. But the more time I spent with him, the more obsequious he seemed. He made me disenchanted.

"Are you okay!"

"I ache all over."

I could hear the sewing machine grinding away down in the shop below. The tailor was probably sewing overalls.

"If we just had sixty yen I think we could live together quite comfortably. You've turned cold, keeping all to yourself."

Matsuda sat by my pillow like a rock and bent his dark face toward

me. Hearing his heavy sighs, I muffled a cry. Up until now, there hadn't been even a single man who tried to comfort me with such solicitous attention. Hadn't they all made me their slave and then thrown me to the wind? I was almost ready to marry him and set up housekeeping in some small tenement. But it was too bleak a proposition. I knew I'd get sick of Matsuda if I were with him for ten minutes.

"I'm sorry, but I don't feel well. It takes a lot out of me just to talk. So please go away."

"Won't you take some time off from the factory? I'll take care of things in the meantime. I'd be content, even if you didn't marry me."

It was certainly an odd world.

Night.

I went out to buy a paltry measure of rice. As long as I was out, I decided to walk by the evening stalls of Aizome Bridge, my bundle dangling from my arm. The shops sold cut flowers, Russian bread, sweet bean-filled cakes, dried fish, vegetables, used books—I hadn't been in the area for some time.

December

The roads were all very Christmassy. The shop windows displayed turkeys and even Salvation Army alms pots. Newspapers and magazines inundated the streets, along with frantic flyers and advertising banners.

The express train passed by at dusk. We were still at work. The wind was buffeting the nearby window. In an efficiency campaign, the owner had begun to post the number of pieces we completed. Names of the twenty factory women appeared on the blackboard by the dirty wall, like the daily weather report. It began to intimidate us. When any of us fell below the prescribed quota of three hundred fifty, a flapping chit with the notation "five sen deducted" or "ten sen deducted," would be attached to our wage envelope.

"I really hate this. Don't you?"

Factory girls were like whisks—with a minimal shake they could whip up a great deal. We were all artists, but our collective portrait was like a Daumier caricature.

"It's like they think people are trash."

Even when the clock sounds five, there was no relief from the work. It didn't look as if the wage envelopes would be coming around. Work halted abruptly when little Ohikari announced that she had watched from the toilet window as the owner's wife had taken her children with her by car at about four-thirty. The place erupted. Some of us speculated that they must have gone off to the theater. Some held that they had probably gone to buy a New Year's kimono.

Seven-thirty.

After putting in a full day at work, I returned with sixty sen. I placed the earthen pot on the brazier and lined up my rice bowl and chopsticks on my desk. I wondered whether this was all life was about. I felt like slapping the first one to gripe and complain. While waiting for the rice to boil, I slipped five pink fifty-sen bills into a letter to my mother and sealed it. They had taken me so long to save. I fantasized about how happy I would be if, at this very moment, everything I had disappeared. Then the absurdity of my five-yen rent dawned on me—five yen for a two-mat room. A day's work averaged sixty sen, just enough to buy two measly measures of rice. I considered going back to working in the cafe. My faded silk kimono, dull from so many washings, hung on the wall. I felt as washed out as my kimono. I lost any taste for living. Nothing existed for me anymore.

Watch Out! I'm Danger! Because I was dangerously slack. If you had slipped me a bomb, I would gladly have thrown it. I preferred to burst apart and die in an instant rather than live like a mouse. I laid last night's leftover saury fish in an attack position atop some hot rice and took a huge mouthful. I was not wholly tired of living after all. In the old newspaper in which the pickle was wrapped, an article said that in Hokkaido there were still thousands of acres of pristine wilderness. *What luck! We could create a utopia in such a primitive land.* Maybe we could sing about cooing doves. "Come gentle people, let's all be friends" might become a hit song.

As I was coming home from the bathhouse, I passed Matsuda at the alley entrance. I slipped by in silence.

December

"Don't think you'll be forced into an awkward situation. Matsuda says he'll lend it to you, so why don't you go ahead and borrow it? My family's really counting on your rent, you know."

Facing the old, thin-haired landlady, I began to get so furious that I felt like just packing up and leaving. After fighting this battle, I hurried out to Nezu Road. Matsuda was waiting for me next to the postbox by the liquor store. He mailed a postcard. Even though he was a really good-natured guy and smiling patiently, I don't know why, but I was sick to my stomach.

"Just borrow it. You don't have to say anything. I could just pay it for you, but I know you wouldn't accept that." Matsuda started to put the small tissue-wrapped packet of money between the folds of my sash. I became acutely self-conscious about my kimono jacket, with the tuck still intact at the shoulder to accommodate a growing child. I broke loose from Matsuda and jumped on the streetcar.

I didn't have a destination in mind. I then hopped on the streetcar going in the opposite direction, and regretted stepping on my own shadow when I alighted in the cold at Ueno.

The towering frantic neon advertisement of the service employment agency swayed in the wind like the signal lights of a buoy.

"And how may I help you?" The clerk looked like a pimp. I looked up breathless at the help-wanted ads as if they were baubles for sale.

"Miss, you'd better think twice about it. Whatever you decide will have its consequences." He started to scrutinize my appearance—the scruffy woman before him who didn't even have a shawl. I asked for an introduction for a maid's position at a sushi shop in Shitaya, and got him to knock down the commission from one yen to fifty sen. Then I went to the park. The vagrants snored serenely, fast asleep on the benches, even though it looked as if it would snow at any minute. The statue of Saigo commemorated the hero of the Rōnin War. You and me, we were from the same place in Kyushu. Did you ever become homesick for Kagoshima or visiting Mount Kirishima, Sakurajima Island, and Mount Shiro? It was the season there for delicious yam sweets cut with hot tea, wasn't it?

We both looked cold.

We were both poor.

I went to work at the factory at noon. *Life was a bitch.*

December

Last night I found the money, which Matsuda had slipped in my desk drawer. Should I go ahead and keep it? I would be sure to pay him back. Oh frailty, woman's name was poverty.

Quitting time

Is all I wait for.

I work again today.

Takuboku wrote this poem about the delight of going home. But when I got home from the factory, all I did was stretch out my legs like sticks across the two mats of my room and yawn widely. That was my only pleasure. I sneaked out a two-inch kewpie doll from work. Setting it on the shelf with the rice bowls, I scrutinized it. I had painted the eyes and the wings. I had given birth to this kewpie. I poured miso soup over cold day-old rice, and shoveled down a lonely evening meal.

I thought Matsuda had given an unusually loud cough as he had passed below the window. "Eating your dinner already?" he called up from the kitchen. "Wait a bit. I just bought some meat."

Matsuda cooked for himself, as I did. He seemed to be a rather thrifty sort. The aroma of meat simmering on the kerosene stove made my watering mouth ache.

"Excuse me, but could you cut these onions for me?"

Just last night he had pried open my desk drawer to slip in a packet of money. Now he presumed that ten yen clinched a friendship, and wanted me to chop his onions. I couldn't stand it when even his sort was so forward with me. In the distance I could hear the high-spirited pounding of rice cakes. I quietly nibbled on salted radish pickles. Off in the kitchen he was chopping the onion all alone. "Well, I'll chop them for you." The disgusting silence overcame me, and I opened the shoji. I took the knife from Matsuda.

"Thanks for last night. I paid the landlady five yen. There's five yen left over, so I'll return that to you, okay?"

Matsuda was silently taking the pieces of dripping red meat from the bamboo leaf wrapping and putting them into the pot. A single small tear glistened on his grimacing face when he suddenly looked up. The landlady's regular histrionics penetrated the room. They had probably started playing their flower card game. Without uttering a word, Matsuda began to wash the rice.

"What? Haven't you cooked the rice yet?"

"No. You were already eating, so I thought I'd quick give you some meat."

Could you imagine my thoughts as I swallowed the cooked meat he had sliced? I visualized many other men and rejected them all as less than worthy. Maybe it might be okay to marry this Matsuda. After dinner I went for the first time to visit him in his room.

Matsuda was shuffling pieces of New Year's rice cakes around on an outspread newspaper, and then arranging them in a bamboo basket. Such a superbly serene moment self-destructed in excruciating awkwardness. I turned around and went back to my own room.

"The sushi shop is pretty boring, too . . ." I mumbled to myself.

A storm was blowing outside. Kewpie doll, I hope our utopia of cooing doves comes soon. Rage and roar, oh storm and driving snow.

April

Let the earth split open exactly in two, I screamed. But I was just a small bird. Looking askance, the world told me to be quiet, shush. As usual, I faced another lonely morning rising. The more I stared at the black parasol hung on the narrow wall, the more it appeared to take on many shapes. Again today he would probably take the young actress's

hand down the cheerful cherry-blossomed path, and exchange with her the scripted vows, "We're in this together, comrade." Facing his back, I quietly inspected his hair while he slept. What if the futon were fastened shut just as it was, and he couldn't get out? If I pulled a pistol on him, would he squirm around squeaking like a mouse? Why, at best, you were once an actor. You've become the jester for the intelligentsia. It was ridiculous to say "We're in this together, comrade." I'd already fallen out of love with you. Your bank book with two thousand yen, and those love letters from another woman, were just dying to slip out of that black bag of yours.

"I'm so broke, soon I won't be able to even eat. I wish I could join a commercial theatrical group and make some money, but I have my own reputation to think about."

I would believe anything a man told me.

When I heard words like that, I would dissolve in tears and offer to go to town and try to scrounge up some work. So these past four or five days I had been out looking for work, coming home exhausted, a sticky, slippery mess, like fish guts, while this lying fool of a man . . . ! Last night I took a peek into the bag you always kept so carefully locked. Those two thousand yen belied your "we proletariat" talk. I felt humiliated to have shed such beautiful tears for you. If I had two thousand yen and a young actress, I'd be able to live a long life, too.

(Ah, this floating world was a bitter place.)

Sleeping like this you'd think we were the perfect, harmonious couple. But I'd had it with your cold kisses. Your body gave off the scent of your wife of seven years, and now this young actress. You'd had your arms around my neck taking care of business, yet your passionate embrace was meant for those others.

I wondered how much better it might have been, how much less of a mental strain it would have been, just to have become a prostitute. I jumped up and gave his pillow a kick. Liar! In my mind he crumbled apart like a briquette. Oh bright April night, when cherry blossoms appeared in all their wild glory. A rustling hot wind seethed outside our realm. "Hey, spread your wings!" an unseen voice burst out into the April sky. "Let's work somewhere no one knows us." I saw God's hands in the vast mist. I saw God's pitch-black arms.

April

Once is solace, twice a lie,

Thrice touched by the delusion . . .

Oh spiteful carnal desire, I am a woman. I can't help but drown in painful tears.

From the liver of a living chicken
Fireworks scatter, bringing the night.²
Attention! Attention!
The finale with him gradually came to pass.
In his entrails, cut in two with a single stroke of the sword,
Swim darting minnows.

On a smelly, stinking night,
If no one's home, I'll break in!
I was so poor that even my man ran away.

Now, it's a pitch-black good-for-robbers night.

Loneliness overcame me as I walked along peering down at the ground. I began to shake like a sick dog. Shit! This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. Today I again roamed the pavement like a stray. I would sell myself. Didn't anyone want to buy me?

Even if I didn't want to break off with him, it seems that he did, so I thought I might just as well beat him to it. Small white butterflies clustered on the enormous tree, bowed down with blossoming white flowers, outside the window. I'd forgotten its name, but its wonderful scent spilled through the window. On the moonlit verandah, I listened to him practicing his lines for the play. Suddenly memories of my youth mingled like the scent of the flowers. "Isn't there a good man somewhere?" I howled at the moon. He was famous for his role in *Razor*, in which he had starred with Sumako. When I was a young girl I saw him perform it in a small theater in Kyushu. Sumako's Kachusha was great, too. Ages had passed since then. He was already nearing forty. "An actor really needs an actress for a wife," I thought. Watching the shadows he cast in the light as he practiced solo, I couldn't help but feel pity. When he read the script beneath the purple lampshade, his profile shrank and he disappeared from sight.

"On our tour with the traveling theater, we stayed at the same inn and I even took care of her baggage. But, after making sure I wasn't looking, she sneaked off in just her nightclothes to some other man's inn.

"I got my kicks out of making her cry. When I hit her, she bounced back like rubber. It was great to watch how she put everything she had into crying."

The two of us stretched out our legs on the veranda. He turned out

2. Hayashi is girding herself by invoking ritual sacrifice before her confrontation with her lover.

the light and kept on talking about his former wife. I was forgotten, outside the conversation. It was a one-man show. Gazing at the sky in a daze, I could hear a voice tell me that things would not work out with this man, either. A devil was laughing somewhere. The bottoms of my feet itched the more upset I became. Seated next to a man absorbed in his soliloquy, I quietly tilted my mirror to the moon. My face, with its thickly drawn eyebrows, spiraled like a whirlpool. My sole wish was that all over the world it could be as bright as a moonlit evening.

"It's just that I want to be alone . . . I don't care what happens, I just want to live alone." As if he had returned to me, he heaved a big sigh and brushed aside a tear. Crying as if distraught by the idea of separation, he tried to embrace me. Was he doing this for my sake? Things might get out of control. I just wanted to shake hands. Leaving him behind on the second floor, I took off towards Dōzaka.

I poked my head into a stall selling wonton soup. Concentrating on some Chinese wine, I cleansed myself of any reminder of his wayward travels.

April

Our separation that morning at the intersection was colder than if we had been strangers. He had formed a small amateur troupe called The People's Theater, and he commuted daily to the Takinokawa rehearsal studio.

From that day, I commuted to work. To be supported by a man is worse than eating mud. Rather than look for a good job, I took the first one to come along as a waitress in a sukiyaki restaurant. "An order of roast, please." Scrambling up and down the stairs, lugging the heavily laden platters, I could scarcely contain my elation. In the large hall, the clusters of fascinating faces seemed like characters from a film. The space inside the front of my obi gradually swelled with tips. What could go wrong here? The room was full of the sweet aroma of bubbling beef. But all at once the constant trips up and down the stairs exhausted me. "You'll get used to it in a couple of days," sympathized Osugi, the head waitress, as she came upon me massaging my back out of sight of the customers. Her hair was done up in a maid's style.

Even at midnight the shop was bustling, and I became anxious about going home. Everyone lived on the premises except for Oman and myself. Unconcerned about the hour, they stayed behind to flutter over the clamoring customers.

"I'll have the fruit, Ta."

"What? Mine's the noodle soup with duck."

They were like a gathering of wild animals, laughing and chewing nonstop, oblivious of the time. I couldn't help but be impatient. When I finally left, it was almost one. Maybe the restaurant clock was slow; the streetcars had long since stopped running. Given the distance between Kanda and Tabata, I was so disheartened that I just felt like collapsing. Lights disappeared one by one like will-o'-the-wisps. Those remaining reflected cheerlessly in my eyes. Faced with no other alternative, I started to walk. I reached the bottom of Ueno Park but couldn't for the life of me move any farther. The dark slope was intimidating, and I stood still, straight as a rod. The wind carried hints of rain, and both sides of my traditional hairdo flapped like the wings of a bird. I studied the flickering neon signs advertising Jintan, the mouth freshener. Wasn't there someone I could walk with? It didn't matter who. I found myself looking for a large street.

Embittered, I wondered if I would have to devote myself entirely to him. A man in a happi coat on a bicycle unexpectedly whirled past me like smoke.

"Are you going toward Yaegakichō?" Throwing all caution to the wind, I raced after him, pleading.

"Yes, I am."

"I'm on my way home to Tabata. Could I go with you as far as you're going?" I entreated him as I ran along like a dog wagging its tail. I was all in earnest.

"I got delayed at work, too. If you'd like, hop on the bicycle."

I was up for anything. Clutching my wooden geta in one hand, I tucked up the hem of my kimono and hopped on the back. I firmly planted my hand on the shoulder of his happi coat. Suddenly, I found it so pathetic—the comical sight of a woman balancing precipitously on the back of a bicycle in the middle of the night—that I began to sob. I couldn't help praying that I'd get home safely.

I regained my composure as I stared at the glowing white characters for "dyed goods." I almost burst out laughing in relief. We parted in Nezu. I hurried along the road buoyantly, with a song on my lips, heading to that man as cold as merchandise.

April

They sent my futon from home. You could catch the scent of salt spray from the ocean. I was moved to sing out an ode to my parents as I hung the bedding out over the sunny veranda.

Tonight was The People's Theater performance. He left early with the makeup box and kimono. I watched his blithe figure from the second-floor window. Like a potted plant left unwatered, my ardor had com-

pletely dried up. In the evening I went to have a look at the Mitsuwa Hall in Yotsuya. It was already full of people. As usual, the play was *Razor*. His sharp-eyed younger brother sought me out and, winking, asked me why I didn't go to the dressing room. A carpenter by trade, this brother was such a good guy. It was almost as if he came from a different planet from my man.

On stage the couple had a rowdy fight. Hey, that's the woman. His leading lady spoke with the self-assurance of a favorite. For the first time I was overwhelmed by jealousy of another woman. He was wearing the kimono he usually wore when we slept together. This morning I had noticed that about two inches along the seam had come undone, but I purposely didn't mend it. I'd had enough of the smug man.

Sneezing more than once, I decided to head home. I went outside into the warm air with a few poet friends. *It would be great fun to strip naked and run wild on such a wonderful night.*

April

"When I send a telegram, come back right away," he told me. He was still telling lies. I was humiliated, but after he gave me fifteen yen, I hurried out to the regular streetcar stop.

I was going back to my parents' home, the one soaked with ocean salt. We sat down at a white table in the Seiyōken restaurant, he and I, for a modest parting banquet.

"I'm going to have a really good time back there."

"We both know we're not exactly parting on the best of terms. But I'm sure I'll really miss you. Even right now I can't stop feeling utterly lost."

I needed a smoke once I got on the train. At the kiosk in the station I bought six blue packs of Bat cigarettes. We shook hands mechanically through the window of the train.

"Good-bye. Take care, okay?"

"Thanks. . . . Bye. . . ."

I opened my tightly closed eyes, releasing the flood I had held back. I stretched out my legs as far as they would go and let the tears fall, sitting in a corner of the third-class car bound for Akashi without even a shred of luggage. I considered getting off before I reached my destination if there was someplace interesting. Staring up at the railway map hanging above my head, I went through the names of stations one by one. *Maybe I'd get off at a new place.* Should I make it Shizuoka? Nagoya? But I couldn't decide. Leaning against the dark window, I looked at the lights of the houses rushing by. I could see my face clearly, mirrored in the dark window.

It's over with that man!

In my heart, the children wave the red flag.

Are you rejoicing so much for me?

I won't go anywhere anymore,

I'll live here and wave the flag with everyone.

And then won't you all jump out of my heart,

And then pile the stones up for me,

And throw me up in the air,

And place me on top of the stone castle.

It's over with that man, no tears here!

Wave the flag securely, firmly.

It's the return of the impoverished queen.

It was pitch-black outside. As jumbled scenery rushed by the glass window, I pressed my eyes, nose, and mouth against it and cried, sticking to it like an too-salty pickle.

Where exactly did I think I was going? Each time I heard the vendors calling at one station after another, I opened my eyes in panic. If this life was so impossibly difficult, I preferred to be a beggar and wander about from place to place. That would be more interesting. I laughed, cried, and joked as I indulged in this childish daydream. I caught my strangely shifting countenance—my hundred comic faces—in the window. This was one way to keep amused. I shifted myself on the hard seat cushion. Without missing a beat, I returned to a pitiful encore of the hundred faces.

May

I fell in love with the Buddha

When I kissed his faintly cold lips.

Oh, I am unworthy of your attention.

My heart begins to tingle.

I am unworthy of your attention,

But my gently coursing blood

Flows backwards.

His aloofness and refinement,

Irresistibly composed,

Enticed my soul completely.

Buddha!
How indifferent you are
 To my heart
 That is like a broken beehive.
 Just giving me lessons on the transiency of
 "Namu Amidabutsu"
 Is not enough.
 With your refined manner,
 Please jump
 Into my enflamed breast.
 With the dust of the world still on me,
 Embrace me tightly
 Though I might die,
 "Namu Amidabutsu."

It was a strangely dark day. I might go crazy on account of the weather. The rain persisted from the morning, and wind came with the night, drenching both body and soul. I wrote this poem and pasted it up on the wall, but it did not ease my heart.

"Come immediately do you need money?"

It was strange how the pale blue flimsy telegram paper had fluttered in the air and floated around me.

I wanted to shout "you fool, fool, fool, fool" a thousand or ten thousand times. When I received his telegram at an inn in Takamatsu, I had actually been so happy that I had cried. Then, cradling a bag bursting with presents, I had come home to Tabata. But why had he moved out to another new place in the less than two weeks I had been away? He had paid two months' rent for me, but kept the room in his name. He had moved effortlessly to a boardinghouse in Hongō, like a goldfish with a flick of its tail. The day before, carrying a pile of his freshly washed clothes, I had climbed the wide stairs of his rooming house with heightened anticipation, as if arriving for an affair. At that moment I had wished I could fly up to his joyful room. But when the lights went on I found them entwined, he and that actress. And to think how he had cried on my breast and clung like a child to get me to stay. I retreated to a dark corridor, eyes brimming with tears. My whole face, no, my whole body stiffened like a wire doll's. It was too much for me.

"Ha . . .," I blurted out simply but forcibly, like an obnoxious child. I kept my swollen face facing the floor. My galloping around a crazy mixed up world began in earnest.

"A kiss for fifteen sen!" My petulant offers at all those bars haunted my memory.

It was obvious that all men were worthless! Consumed with anger, I

wanted to torture him. I was a pitiful sight, blindly drinking whiskey, sake, and whatever I could get my hands on. Now motionless in bed, I listened quietly to the sound of the rain. He was probably cradling the actress's head, inside the mosquito netting billowing in the breeze. The more I dwelled on it, the more I wished I could fly over and bomb them.

I had a hangover and an empty stomach. I stood unsteadily, put the remaining uncooked rice in the cooking pot, and went out to wash it at the well. Everybody from downstairs was off to the public bath, so I made a lot of noise washing the rice. I was drenched from the rain, but enjoyed draining the white rinse water off the rice in solitude.

June

Morning.

It was clear, good weather. When I opened the rain shutters, I saw white butterflies swarming like snow. I was taken aback by the masculine scent of the season, the way the brilliant white clouds floated in a blue sky. I really needed to do some good writing. I threw out all of the cigarette butts stuffed into the brazier and thought about how nice it was for a woman to live all alone in an attic room. Boundless energy replaced my gloom as I inhaled the fresh air of the bright morning. But despite my best expectations, I was quite disgusted by the mail. The notice from the pawn shop just made me want to throw up my hands—interest due on the four yen forty sen. I put on a striped kimono and a yellow obi and set off for town, twirling my parasol, looking for all the world like a happy, carefree young woman. It was my daily visit to the used-book store.

"Buy it for a bit more than usual today, okay? I have to go somewhere far away . . ." As always, the owner of this store in Dōzaka hid his friendly smile in his wrinkles, took the book I offered, and quietly examined it in both hands.

"This is the current best-seller. It's sold out elsewhere."

"Hmm . . . Steiner's *On the Self*. I'll take it off your hands for one yen."

He placed two fifty sen coins on my palm. I put one in each sleeve of my kimono and went out into the blinding sun. Then I went as usual to eat.

I wondered when I would be able to sit at a cozy dinner table like everyone else and blithely consume my meals. I could not fill my stomach enough by writing a few children's stories, and working at the cafe made me feel seedy and callous. It was distressing to be supported by a man. Selling books from time to time was all I had left. That night Yoshida, the art student, came alone to visit. I was cutting my nails after returning home from the public bath. He'd taken to painting scenes from nature,

and brought along several small landscapes. The scent of the oils wafted from the canvas. I had met him through the poet Aikawa. I didn't particularly like or dislike him, but his frequent visits were beginning to irritate me. Claiming to be tired, Yoshida had thrown himself down by the purple lampshade. He sat up abruptly.

One eyelid, then another, he pierces the thin closed lids,
And suddenly wrenches out both eyes.
The Nagasaki,
The Nagasaki Doll making is a frightening thing!

"Do you know this? It's a poem by Hakushū. You remind me of it."

The wind chime was quietly playing with my heart. I positioned myself next to the lamp, my feet out on the cool veranda and my head resting against his chest. The throbbing seemed mournful. I was spell-bound by the melancholy, mournful, pitifully throbbing heartbeat. It was distressing to think that a woman's presence could bring this about. My own pulse surged like the spray of a fountain. Yoshida had fallen silent and was trembling. I considered for the first time how sad oil paints smelled. For quite some time, we made love. Then the tall Yoshida disappeared through the gate, and I burst into tears, still clutching the mosquito netting to my chest. My more vivid thoughts were of the other man from whom I was separated. I called out his name, and wailed like an uncontrollably selfish child.

June

Today, Isori, a friend of the man from whom I had separated, was going to move into the eight-mat room next door to mine. For some reason I was uncomfortable with the idea. It might be a plot my ex had concocted.

I bought a stick of incense for the Jizo statue along the road to the eatery. When I returned home, I washed my hair. Feeling refreshed, I set out for Shizue's boardinghouse in Dangōzaka. I dashed up the slope full of energy, since our poetry journal, *Two People*, was about to come out. Pushing aside the blue curtain, I talked with Shizue through the window, leaning against it as usual. She always looked young. She tilted her bushy bobbed hair, and her moist eyes sparkled. In the evening I went with Shizue to the printers to pick up the issues. It was only eight pages long, but it was as welcome as fresh fruit. On the way home we stopped by Nantendō and gave everyone a copy. I was determined to keep this journal going for a long time. Tsuji tapped me on the shoulder as I was drinking my cold coffee.

"You've put out something really great. I hope you keep it going." He

loosened his headband and sang our praises. Shizue and I left feeling elated, buoyed by his enthusiasm.

June

This time the people who put together *The Sower* were going to put out a magazine called *Literary Front*.³ I wrote up my experiences from working at the small celluloid toy factory as a poem called "Song of a Factory Girl" and submitted it. Today's *Capital* newspaper⁴ printed the poem I had written to my ex-lover. I knew I should stop writing such poetry. It was preposterous. I resolved to try harder to write something exquisite. In the evening I went to the Pine Moon cafe on the Ginza, where they were holding an exhibit of John Donne's poetry. My pathetic scrawl adorned the top of the exhibition guest book. I met Hashizume.

June

A thin patter of rain fell.

With a sunny early spring,
Blossoms bloom together on the weeping willow.

One night a spring wind sweeps into the women's quarters,
Willow flowers fly down on the southern house.

Consumed with love I step outside, but my feet have no strength.
I pick up the willow blossoms, tears touch my heart.

Autumn passed and spring came again, the swallow
Wants to take the willow flowers into its nest.

Slouched under the lamp, reading of Empress Rei's poetic love for White Flower, I could not help but feel a wanderlust. *Since Isori's arrival, he had rolled in past one o'clock every night.* Working people lived downstairs, so they went to bed about nine. All one could hear was the rumble of the electric and steam trains that passed through Tabata station from time to time. Otherwise, the residential neighborhood was shrouded in a wilderness peace. All by myself, I became quite lonely. I yearned for some-

3. *Tane maku hito* (The sower, 1921) and *Bungei sensen* (Literary front, 1924) were short-lived literary journals that contributed to Japanese socialism and the Proletarian literary movement.

4. *Miyako Shimbun*.

one beautiful like White Flower. Laying the book open on its spine, I grew impatient and went downstairs.

"Where're you going at this time of night?" the woman from below asked. She rested her hands from her sewing and stared at me.

"Late-night discounts at the movie house."

"Well, you're certainly full of energy . . ."

Opening the paper umbrella, I went to see what was playing at Dōzaka. The billboard touted something called *Young Maharaja*. I felt aroused by this cut-rate pubescent prince. Both the Oriental orchestra on the flat-bottomed barge and the rain pleased me. *Yet, no matter where I wandered, I was sad and lonely.* I slunk out of the closing movie house like a sewer rat, and returned to my room.

"I think you have a guest . . ." the downstairs woman murmured drowsily. I climbed up, tired. Yoshida was rolling a piece of paper up into a ball and stuffing it into his pocket. He was so tall that he couldn't stand in the door frame.

"Sorry to come up so late."

"It's okay. I went off to see a movie."

"It was getting so late that I was writing a note to leave for you."

Here was a practical stranger who never had anything to talk about, trying to seduce me. I was flabbergasted.

"Rains a lot, doesn't it?"

I had to pretend I didn't know his intent. Leaning his back against the wall, he began to stare at my face. I was in a quandary. I couldn't bear the thought of falling madly for this man. But I really had had enough. Quietly, resting both hands on the desktop, I ran my eyes above the light of the lamp. The tips of my fingers were trembling. It felt as if two people were pushing as hard as they could against each other.

"You're not teasing me, are you?"

"What do you mean?"

What a dim-witted reply. Hadn't I just come to terms with my romantic desires? Yet they still caused those murmurings in the back of my throat. I hesitated to make him stop coming here again. Yes, I wanted a friend. I wanted someone with this kind of gentleness, yet. . . . Without my realizing it, my eyes brimmed with tears.

I thought of doing away with myself once and for all. This man might stare me to death. My mouth went sour. I couldn't help but feel sorry for myself. Countless memories still flooded this room, where for several months I had lived with my former lover. It was suffocating to stay here. As I bent over my desk, I imagined the fresh summer scenery of the outskirts of the city. The intensity of the rain increased. The anguish was unbearable.

"Please love me. Don't say anything. Just love me," he pleaded.

"Well, I'm not saying anything, am I? Aren't I loving you?" If all it took to soothe this young man's heart was to take his hand in mine. . . . Yet I was afraid of falling victim again. Even though I was no innocent when it came to men, still I could not dismiss the notion that somewhere, someplace, someone might appear to whom I would be able to entrust my whole life. Yoshida had a freshness, with a broad chest, fair brows, and eyes like the sun. I cried with the passion of a raging torrent.

June

I was lonely. Worthless. I wanted money.

I wished to walk all alone along one of the fragrant acacia-lined avenues of Hokkaido.

"Are you already up?"

It was unusual for Isori to be calling to me from the other side of the shoji.

"Yes, I am."

It was Sunday. Isori, Shizue, and I had planned a rare visit to Miyazaki Mitsuo's "American Chocolate House" in Kichijōji. Uenoyama, a western-style painter, stopped by while we were playing on the porch with the dog that evening. I had met him once before when I was younger and working as a maid for the Chikamatsu household. He had shown up all scruffy and unkempt, trying to sell a painting of a cow. I remembered that the children had been down with diphtheria, and Uenoyama had looked terribly disheveled. While I had arranged his shoes in the entryway, I had noticed that in one shoe the sole was separating from the upper section, yawning like the mouth of a hippopotamus. Without telling anyone I had plugged the gap with a small nail. Perhaps he had never realized this. Uenoyama drank copiously and talked a lot. That night, he went home alone.

Seating myself on the revolving stool of the earth,

I take a dramatic go-round.

One of the red slippers I scuff along

Flies away.

I'm lonely. . .

"Hey," I cry out, but

No one gets my slipper for me.

Plucking up my courage,

Shall I leap down off the revolving stool and

Go get the far-flung slipper?

My timid hands tightly
 Clutch the stool.
 "Hey, somebody,
 Whack the side of my face
 With all your might, won't you,
 And send the other slipper I'm wearing flying."
 I want to sleep peacefully.

I composed this poem in my head as I lay restless in bed. Downstairs, the cuckoo clock struck three.

June

The world consists of stars and people. I discovered this while reading Emile Verhaeren. But mine was only a boring world. I decided to disdain this deceiving poet.

O man, though that tall mountain be difficult to scale,
 Do not diminish your desire to soar,
 Fear not the impossible,
 Attack the swift golden stallion.

This poem might be insignificant, but it certainly commanded impressive imagery. Attack the swift golden stallion?

A red balloon sailed by my window. Astonishing, amazing, bewildering. Living was truly unmasterable in this fleeting world.
 A letter arrived from home.

I wish you'd be more realistic about money. At least don't count on me to keep food on your table. You mustn't get too conceited about your own capabilities. I don't like your aimless wanderings. Mother is getting weaker, too. Come back soon.

My stepfather had enclosed a five-yen money order. I placed it on my lap. I bowed. Thank you ever so much. Shamelessly, I stuck out my tongue in the direction of their distant home.

June

A blue light shone tonight in the mortuary across from the rooming house. Another soldier had probably died. Shadows of two soldiers at the wake were dimly cast across the window.

"Hey, a firefly!"
 By the wellside, Kuroshima's wife gazed vacantly up into the sky.
 "No kidding?"

I got up from my sprawled position to go out onto the veranda, but I couldn't see even a single one.

Night. The Tsuboi couple next door and the Kuroshimas came for a visit.

"It was really quite a stroke of luck today. When Denji and I went to the market to buy a wash basin, before I even paid for it, they gave me about three yen's worth of change. Boy, was I surprised." Tsuboi blathered on.

"I wish that would happen to me. I think Knut Hamsun had the hero of *Hunger* go buy candles, and he too got change for a five Kroner and the candles for free."

Both my husband and I were a bit envious of Tsuboi's luck. We lived in such a miserable dark tenement in Taishidō, a veritable raft floating in a morass. I was sick and tired of our surroundings—a barrack mortuary, a cemetery, a hospital, and cheap cafes.

"By the way, how about having bamboo shoots with rice tomorrow?"

"Shall we go steal some shoots?"

The three men, Kuroshima, Tsuboi, and my husband approached Iida, who lived above the barbershop across the road. The barbershop had a back door leading onto the bamboo grove, and they set off for the hill behind to steal some bamboo shoots. We women really wanted to see the city lights, but we gave up and went walking around the neighborhood festival instead. The cheap metal lamps on the stalls set up along the paths of the park filled the air like a fountain.

June

We hadn't been on a walk for quite a while, so, poor as we were, we decided to go see the greenery on the hill under the exquisitely transparent sky.

I locked up and set out after my husband, though I didn't know which way he had gone. I couldn't even catch a trace of him. I traipsed up and down the paths on the dry, scorching hill, but as luck would have it, he returned while I was still out looking for him. Fuming at having been kept waiting, he pushed me down from behind when I returned and then went inside. He was furious yet again. I tried to sneak in through the back door like a thief, but he started throwing scrub-brushes and bowls at me. Why did you rage at me so? I was just careless. I stood by the well, watching the pale clouds. Just because I mistook the path to the right for the one to the left, wouldn't it have been enough just to say "You're stupid"? Watching my lonely shadow, I recalled a trick from elementary school. I'd stare at my shadow and then glance at the sky, and see that shadow mir-

roared in the clouds. Tirelessly, I peered from the shadows to the sky. Sobbing like a child, I crouched on the ground, longing to belt out old songs like a water-seller in Cairo.

The whole world was full of loving parents. Too preoccupied with my own problems, I had forgotten their importance and their love. Still wearing my white apron, I passed by a bamboo grove, a stream, and a western-style house, and then descended the hill at a leisurely pace. The steamboat whistle of a factory nearby reminded me of the sea at Onomichi. Carried back in time, I raced down the hill like a child, to find only a deserted open field, with the hum of a factory motor coming from next to a police box. Dizzy and hungry, I stood for a while at the Mishuku train station pretending to wait for a train.

"You've been standing here for some time now. Is something wrong?"

Two old women had been staring at me. They approached in a friendly way, then looked me up and down. When they took me in tow, you couldn't tell if I was laughing or crying. Starting out together at a leisurely pace, these kind ladies talked about the Tenrikyō religion, about how a cripple learned to walk because of his faith, and how the afflicted could live cheerfully as children of God.

Within the religious compound along the river, the cool garden had been sprinkled with water. New green leaves of a maple branch spilled refreshingly over the fence. The two women first bowed low before the altar and then spread their arms to begin a peculiar dance.

"Where are you from?" asked the middle-aged priest clothed all in white. Appraising my sorry state, he offered me green tea and a roll filled with sweet beans.

"I'm not really from anywhere. Officially, I'm registered in East Sakurajima in Kagoshima."

"That's pretty far away."

Unable to hold back any longer, I picked up the roll. It was rather hard, and crumbs dropped onto my lap.

Nothing. I didn't have to think about anything. I stood up abruptly, bowed to the altar, put on my geta and just kept on going. I didn't care if my cavities throbbed from the sweet, as long as the flavor lingered in my mouth.

When I passed by our place, I saw that it was shut as tightly as his pinched mouth. I made myself at home at the Tsubois', slowly stretching out my legs and then lying down.

"Do you have any rice to spare?"

Sakae kindly brought a bowl containing a handful of rice and sat down beside me. She began to talk despondently about how tired she was of living.

"I hear that Taiko's relatives have sent her some rice from Shinshū. Let's go see her," she suddenly remembered.

"Sounds great to me."

Kuroshima's wife, seated next to me, clapped her hands like a gleeful child. What a simple soul.

June

I hadn't been into the center of Tokyo for a while, so I decided to set off today. I met Katō Takeo at the Shinchōsha publishing company. He paid me six yen for my poem, which had appeared in the magazine *Literary Club*. I usually passed the streets along Kagurazaka with my eyes closed, but today they were a spectacle of delight. I poked my head into each store with great relish.

Neighbors and
Relatives and
Lovers.

What are they?

If not satisfied with life's fare,

The image of a charming flower would wither away.

I want to work cheerfully.

Among all the malicious gossip

I crouch down ever so tightly, ever so pathetically.

I try holding both hands up high for all to see,

But are there people who would betray my trust?

Am I not the one to keep silent forever, cradling such innocence?

My belly may be empty,

There may be no work,

But I must not wail,

For those living in comfort will object.

Though I die in agony, mopping up the blood,

The earth will not be moved an inch.

In the showcase

Lie buns hot from the steamer.

The world unknown to me must seem,

Ah, how light and airy like a piano minuet.

Then, for the first time,

I feel like screaming, "Motherfucking fate!"

Having been jolted along on the train for what seemed like hours, I faced the daunting prospect of returning to my comfortless room. *Com-*

posing poetry was my only solace. That night, Iida and Taiko came to visit me, singing this silly ditty.

That lovely feathered one
Singing "Kekko, kekko"
In my yard.
You probably want her, don't you?

I got rice cooked with green peas from Tsuboi.

June

It was the big evening of the Taishidō festival. Since I had something of a view of the sumo-wrestling grounds from my front veranda, everyone gathered there. "And in the Western Division! We have Maedagawaa!" the referee bellowed, sending us into gales of laughter. It was quite a sight with all of us on tiptoe on the narrow balcony, craning our necks. We just couldn't contain ourselves when we heard the familiar name Maedagawa being announced. When you're poor, you tend to open yourself up to everyone with more than just polite social graces. You become filled with bonhomie and one with the group.

Everyone carried on. When the conversation turned to ghost stories, even Taiko told a yarn of having seen a ghost on the beach at Chiba. Taiko had extremely beautiful skin, perhaps because she was born in a mountain village. *Men certainly have brought her untold grief.* We played the hanafuda flower card game until after one in the morning.

June

Hagiwara came for a visit.

I wanted a drink, but was broke, so I sold a futon to the junk man for one yen fifty sen and bought some cheap shōchū. As there wasn't enough rice to go round, I bought noodles for all of us to share.

With outstretched palm
My friend wiped my face drenched with the driving snow.
He made Communism his personal philosophy.

Drink sake and become blue as a storybook demon.
My immense face,
Filled with sadness.

Wasn't it great! Here we were, young poetic illiterates belting out verses by Takuboku, nibbling at the noodles, and swizzling cheap sake. That night, we all saw Hagiwara off at the station. On returning home, my

man insisted that we close all the doors and windows of our place, since we did not have a mosquito net. We lit repellent coils and went to bed.

"Get up, get up!" Just then a flurry of footsteps rattled our slumber. We felt like barley shoots coaxed deeper into the soil by farmers stamping the surrounding earth.

"Hey, don't pretend to be asleep. . . ."

"You're awake, aren't you?"

"If you don't get up, we'll set fire to your place!"

"Hey! We've pulled up a radish. It's good. Aren't you going to get up?"

We could hear both Iida and Hagiwara spouting away. Smiling to myself, I kept still.

July

In the morning I read a wonderful story in the newspaper as I lounged on my futon. The Viscountess Motono was going to rescue delinquent boys and girls. A feature photo of her, trimmed to a circle, accompanied the article. If I could but some way, somehow, catch a piece of that charity, then surely a bright future would be guaranteed. I was, after all, a bit delinquent, and still twenty-three. So I screwed up my courage and jumped out of bed. I clipped the Motonos' address from the newspaper and set off for their residence in Azabu.

A yukata may have a proper crease in the shoulders and back, but it is still just casual and common. So attired, I ambled along with my heart filled with dreams.

"Are you the Miss Hayashi who bakes bread?" the maid quizzed me. On the contrary, I'm the Hayashi who's come to collect my bread and butter, I muttered to myself.

"I've come to see Madam Motono about something," I tried aloud.

"Is that so? She has gone out to the Women's Patriotic Association, but should be home shortly."

The maid ushered me in. I sat down on the divan next to the bay window and gazed out onto a beautifully cultivated garden. The cool breeze swelled the blue curtains as it entered the room.

"And what is the purpose. . . ."

Before long, a pudgy woman entered the sitting room. She wore a black, gossamer-thin short jacket over her kimono.

"Wouldn't you like to have a bath first?" the maid was asking her mistress.

I got tired of being a delinquent. I tried explaining that as my husband was suffering from consumption, I would like anything left over from the aid to delinquent boys and girls.

"It seems that there was something like that written up in the newspaper, but we've just helped out a bit in that project. If you have a problem, why don't you go to the women's group in Kudan and work there?"

Given this tepid reception, I was then brushed outside like dust. The brows of the Viscountess would no doubt have furrowed as she scolded the maid for letting someone like me into the house. I felt like spitting on her. "Philanthropy"? "Public works"?

My man and I wrote aimlessly, sitting morosely in a darkened room. By evening we were famished, having eaten nothing since morning.

"How about some western take-out?"

"What!?"

"Curried rice, or a cutlet, or a steak?"

"Got any money?"

"'Need knows no law.' If we order western food tonight, no one will collect until tomorrow morning, right?"

So we ordered. I was overjoyed with the aroma, and savored the beef's slippery juices. It wouldn't have been strange if we had left a little on the plate, as if to ask for seconds. With stomach content, nay, reborn, we looked to a brighter future. What else could we do? We were so poor, there weren't even any mice around.

Leaning on my orange-crate desk, I began to write a children's story. *Outside the sound of rain*. There was a ceaseless succession of gunfire off toward the Tama River. Even in the middle of the night it crackled. But how much longer would our insect-like existence endure? My head began to fill with tears.

What a team—a man with warped sensibilities and a woman with poor judgment—it didn't look as if we would eat white rice again as long as we lived.

July

"I was off to buy me a prostitute, but I've taken a liking to you, so how about it?" a balding man propositioned me this evening. Rolling my apron into a ball, I choked back tears of heartwrenching loneliness.

I cried out "Mama!" sick of it all. I threw myself down in a corner of the maid's room on the second floor. The mice were roving about in packs. As my eyes became accustomed to the light, I could make out magazines and cloth bundles scattered about like pebbles. Nightclothes and sashes hung in disarray on the wall like seaweed. The clamorous cacophony downstairs had come to a brisk boil. Upstairs, the maid's room was so deserted it would not have been surprising to see a ghost.

A steady stream of tears had released a flood of swirling sorrow. All I wanted was a normal life. Calming myself, I picked a book to read.

No matter how much I try,
Only hardship at home
With an alcoholic lover who's sleeping around and gambling,
That's the sum of my labors.
Ah . . .

Cut them up,
Jump out of the way, send them flying.
How many times have I screamed from the pain?
Let's dance like a dervish and purge ourselves of talent along with
our bloody vomit.

So Kaita continued to howl. Such a pathetic muse. I wanted to plumb the depths of my soul with Chekhov, Artzybashev, or Schnitzler. I had never before thought of working as an ordeal, but today I really would have appreciated some relief. It all seemed make-believe.

In the dimly lit room I recalled Shiga Naoya's *Reconciliation*. Surrounded by the din of this cafe, it was trying even to write a line in a diary.

First of all, a place where sparrows chirp, where bright morning sun shines with tranquil rays, and where the green foliage basks in the sun, its sound and color giving out the scent of rain. I longed crazily for such a place to live all by myself, just like Kaita did.

It was a monumental self-deception. Because it was dark, I just kept my eyes shut.

"Hey! Where'd Yumi go?"⁵ the owner's wife was calling out downstairs.

"Yumi, are you around? The boss's wife's looking for you."

"Can you tell her I'm taking a rest because my tooth hurts?"

Yae descended the stairs with a great commotion. "I wish I could die," I moaned fearfully. By and by, Mephistopheles came out dancing.

"What's life? What's this organism called life?" asked Lunacharskii, once someone of importance. I wanted to repeat these questions. A fallen Mary Magdalene, my instinct for self-preservation was destroyed. Putting both hands under my head, I fantasized suicide. I fantasized I was drinking poison. "Instead of going out to buy a prostitute, I've gotten to like you." Life was certainly absurdly cheery. I was without a home, but still found it distressing to think about my mother. Should I become a thief? A mounted female bandit? The face of my former lover seared my eyelids.

The owner's wife sharpened the edge in her voice and climbed up the ladder. "Hey! Yumi, you know good and well that we don't have enough

5. Hayashi's bar name.

help. How about putting up with the pain for a little bit and coming downstairs and working?"

Every single thing was smoke, sand, mud. Retying my apron strings, I descended to the churning, surging sea, with a merry song on my lips.

July

It had rained since morning.

The woman who borrowed my new coat ended up never coming back. Begging a spot to stay for the night and the use of my coat, the woman had flitted off like a mosquito to another job.

"You're so kindhearted. Isn't there an old adage about needing to watch out for the thief in everyone?" Yae ridiculed me as she scratched her ashen ankle.

"Really!? Is there a saying like that? Well then, how would it be if I stole your umbrella and made a run for it?"

"If the world were only full of thieves, how thrilling it would be!" chimed in Yoshi, who had been lying down. She was nineteen and claimed to have been born in Sakhalin. Her pride was her pale complexion. The shadows of the raindrops, filtered through the green window-glass, showed clearly against Yae's chestnut skin. She had dropped her kimono off her shoulders, and it hung at her waist while she readied her toilet.

"People are such bores."

"But trees are much more boring."

"Even if there was a fire or a flood, a tree couldn't run away..."

"Don't be so preposterous!!"

"Everybody's preposterous, isn't that right..."

Women's chatter was as sunny as a blue sky in summer. How fine if I had only been born a bird. Someone turned on the light. We all drew lots to see who would pay what for the snacks. Mine was four sen. The women looked like blanched asparagus, still in their pasty-white pancake makeup. They lay around slovenly, nibbling mitsumame. The rain cleared, and a cool breeze blew in through the window.

"Yumi, do you have a sweetheart? I've suspected as much."

"I had one, but he left me and went far away."

"How marvelous!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Even though I want out, my guy won't let me be."

Licking the now-empty spoon, Yae claimed she wanted to split up with her present boyfriend. I suggested she'd probably feel the same no matter who she was with.

"That's not the way it should be," she retorted. "Why take even soap.

There's a world of difference between the ten sen kind and the fifty sen kind, you know."

Evening. I gave myself up completely to drinking sake. I had earned two yen and forty sen. Thank you, thank you most graciously.

July

A preoccupied heart brought with it its share of setbacks. The car glided along the streets of Hachioji in the pouring rain.

Faster!

Faster!

It was great to ride in a car once in a while. Headlights pierced the night and colored the drizzly town.

"Where to?"

"Anywhere. Just drive until we run out of gas."

The driver, Matsu, was balding a bit—a little prematurely, I suspected.

I had nothing to do on the afternoon of my day off, and Matsu, who owned his own cab, offered me a ride. We got as far as Tanashi, where the car got stuck in the red clay. We came to a sudden stop by a stand of oaks, just as it started to rain. The only light was at the foot of the distant mountain. Not only did it pour, but thunder rumbled like the earth was growling, and lightning began to strike. The thunder refreshed me. When the rain hit the windshield, it would spray into this old Chevy. Only one car passed us on that narrow back road in the shadow of the oak grove. We were alone with the howl of the rain, the thunder, and the lightning.

"With it like this, there's no way we can get out to the main road, is there?"

Matsu smoked his cigarette in silence. Beneath his virtuous facade, I very much suspected he was up to something. The cold rain felt good. The thunder and lightning railed as if they would tear everything apart. The car was stranded in the oak-grove twilight, bombarded by rain.

I felt cornered. His stinking oil-stained overalls prompted a mirthless laugh. No longer an innocent young girl, I was well aware of the avenues of escape.

I put up a solid front. "You haven't even said you loved me yet. I hate men who think they can use brute force. If you're attracted, you have to be better behaved, or I won't stand for it!"

I left tooth marks on his predator arm. My throat choked with tears. Who said I'd submit? When the dawn began to break the dark night's drizzle, he was asleep, his face still dirty, but relaxed.

A distant rooster announced the blue skies of day. *It was a serene summer morning.* The breeze flowed like rustling silk, washing out the

night's sordid struggle. If only he had been that other one. . . . Leaving the fool in the car, I eased myself onto the muddy road and walked away. The wind on my swollen eyelids swept away the fatigue from last night's endless vigilance. I found myself strolling lighthearted into the outskirts of town. I am worthy of contempt! I knew I was completely wild. As I ran out of the oak grove, I decided that Matsu was pitifully unfortunate. Thinking of him back in the car, just a tired guy in the sleep of innocence, I even entertained the notion of running back to wake him. But he might be embarrassed. *The memory of him at the wheel nonchalantly smoking made me decide he was despicable after all. I felt immensely relieved.* Someone, anyone, wasn't there anybody who would love me. . . . I recalled the man who left me. . . . Wandering clouds drifted far away in the July sky. That's what I looked like. How about singing a song from Provence while picking wildflowers.

August

I wrote letters for the maids.

Omiki, fresh from Akita, was lying down on the tatami, licking the tip of a pencil. The owner's wife was turning a profit in the bar by diluting the bottles of King of Kings whiskey sevenfold. Such dust, such stifling humidity. They said that if you sucked on a lot of ice, your hair would fall out. But even Yoshi, who rarely took any ice, stole a lump from the freezer and crunched away all by herself.

"What's a good way to start a love letter. . . ?"

Yae mouthed these words with her red lips and flashed her jet-black eyes. Country girls from Akita, Sakhalin, Kagoshima, and Chiba sat around a table in the shop writing letters to distant destinations.

Today I went to town and bought a muslin obi sash. I asked for eight feet—one yen two-sen. I always glanced at the classifieds to see if there wasn't a steady job that I could settle into, but there were no good leads. The usual medical student crowd came in. The scent of animated males flowed into the room like the tide. Yae, who liked students, put away her unfinished love letter and pressed both hands to her chest, playing the coquette.

Yoshi blamed everything on the karma from her days in Sakhalin. She was embarrassed when I caught her applying some pungent medicine, so she put it away and sprawled out on the second floor.

"It's pretty boring, isn't it."

"Yeah. . . ."

When I gazed at Yoshi's luminous skin, I found myself strangely attracted to her.

"You may not believe it, but I've had two children."

Yoshi had lived all over after her own birth in the basement of a hotel in Harbin. Entrusting the children to her mother in Korea, she had drifted into Tokyo with another man, not the father of her children, and lived the bar life in order to support him. It was the usual story.

"After I buy a few kimono, I'm thinking of working in a cafe in the Ginza."

"This line of work isn't something you can do forever. It really wears you down."

"As if it were all a dream" was one gentle affectionate phrase that caught my eye, reading Sato Haruo's story "Eastern moon in the morning sky." "*As if it were all a dream . . .*," I'd like to try settling down.

"Yumi! No matter where you go, be sure to write, okay. . . ." Yoshi tearfully implored me while wiping her lavender collar with benzene cleaner.

You knew it was all a dream.

"Is that book interesting?"

"Not at all."

"But it's supposed to be a good book. . . . I read a novel about Taka-hashi Oden."

"This kind of book just makes me depressed."

August

There were days when I thought about going out and finding a job in another cafe. I was depressed about being irresistibly addicted to this work, as if I were smoking opium. Every day it rained.

Here we discover two paths of art, two kinds of understanding. Along which path will people progress? Dream on! Of course, whether it will be the path in pursuit of a small oasis of beauty, or the path in pursuit of active creation, depends partly on how high your ideals are. The lower the ideals, the more concrete people are. The lower the ideals, the less desperate the abyss between ideal and real appears. Chiefly, however, the path is determined by the degree of human resilience, the reserves of energy, and the tensile force of the nourishment that one consumes. A life of tension naturally consists of creation, the strain of struggle, and hope.

I found this passage in Lunacharskii's *Foundations of Positive Aesthetics* when I was reading in the waitress room one day after the girls had left for the public bath. *Alas, my current bogged-down existence and my unsettled emotions troubled me.* I became somber. No sooner did I think I wanted to study than an uncontrollable depraved wildness coursed through my body. I had no idea what my life would be, no idea which of

these two roads I would follow—to live or to die. When night fell, I found myself singing a nonsensical song with the feeling of desperation of slaves on the white man's block. My muslin kimono easily ripped when it clung to my perspiring legs. There was nothing I could do in this relentless heat but wait until it cooled down and keep on going.

I figured that I could fulfill my dreams if there were someone who would give me thirty yen a month with no strings attached.

October

Gazing through the foot-square skylight, it was the first time I had ever seen the sky so clear. A lavender sky. Autumn had come. Eating in the cook's quarters, I yearned, pined, for autumn at home far away. The season was magical. A new woman had arrived. *She looks a rather curious, marshmallow white.* I tired for no reason and missed familiar faces. Every customer's face looked like merchandise. Every face seemed exhausted. I pretended to read a magazine, quietly meditating, oblivious to it all. I couldn't go on. Not doing anything would be just the same as letting myself rot.

October

I cleaned up the large hall, and felt for the first time that I could be my own woman. Every day and night, as I returned to my room, I carried the notion that I really must do something to change my situation. But I was on my feet all day long. I was so tired I would end up collapsing, asleep without even dreaming. I was lonely and bored. It was hard to live on the premises. I kept thinking that any day now I would go look for a room somewhere else, but I couldn't afford to leave this place. The night was too precious to spend on sleep, so I lay still with open eyes. The insects were buzzing off in the gutter.

Even though I tried to hold them back, cold tears flowed pathetically. There was nothing I could do to stop them. I felt left out at the sight of the three pillows in a row under the old mosquito net. The pillows belonging to the women from Sakhalin and Kanazawa looked like eggplants left out in the sun in front of a small shop.

"The insects are buzzing," I murmured softly to Aki beside me.

"On a night like this I could really go for some sake before bed," came her reply.

"Are you thinking about him?" asked Toshi from her futon at the foot of the stairs.

We were all as lonely as sad mountain cuckoos. A chilly autumn wind blew at the hem of the mosquito net. It was midnight.

October

I had saved a little spending money, so I had my hair put up in the traditional style. I hadn't had it done for awhile. It was great. When I had the paper cords tied squeaky tight, my eyebrows bristled. When the hairdresser combed my bangs with a long dripping comb, they fell lushly across my forehead. I was remade into a beautiful new me. If I were to make eyes at the mirror, it would simply swoon. With such beautiful hair, I felt I should be going somewhere. I wanted to board a train and go far, far away.

At the neighboring bookstore, I exchanged coins for a one-yen note and enclosed it in a letter home. I thought they would appreciate it. I knew I was pleased when someone sent me money.

I bought some sweet bean cakes and ate them with the other girls.

Today there was a horrible storm. Such rainy days were depressing. My feet froze as hard as ice.

October

A quiet night.

"Where're you from?"

The owner, who slept in front of the safe, was quizzing the newcomer, Toshi. It was kind of fun to eavesdrop on other people's conversation while you were lying in bed.

"You mean me? From Sakhalin. And from Toyohara. Do you know the place?"

"From Sakhalin? Did you come all alone?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Boy, you're a plucky one, aren't you?"

"I was in the Aoyagi district of Hakodate for a long time, too."

"That's a nice neighborhood, isn't it. I'm from Hokkaido, too."

"I thought as much. You've got a bit of the accent."

I recalled a fine, sad poem by Takuboku about the Aoyagi district and a weak, long-stemmed cornflower, and knew I would take a liking to Toshi.⁶

Wasn't living something to rejoice? I'd come to believe that life was somehow truly joyful. I was surrounded by good people.

It was the beginning of fall. A rather cool wind was blowing. *Though lonely, I still felt a passion for life ablaze within me.*

6. This poem is from Takuboku's *Ichiku no suna* (Handful of sand, 1910).

October

Word came from my mother that her rheumatism was bad. I wasn't getting any tips.

I wrote fairy tales during lulls in business. Eleven pages under the title "A Tale of a Child Who Became a Fish." I would send what I got for it back home. It must be wretched to be old, penniless, and cast out on your own. Poor mother. I was all the more worried since she hadn't tapped me for money for a while.

"One of these days, why don't you come visit my home? The country is real fine," Okei invited me in her gruff male way of talking. She had been a waitress here for three years.

"Sure . . . I'll go. Can you put me up?"

I decided to save a bit of money for the trip. The women who worked at places like this were much kinder and more compassionate than others.

"Never leave me, okay?' or 'I've fallen for you.' You know, I've had enough of foolish things like love and endearments. These promises don't mean a thing. The man who did this to me is even a member of the Diet. As soon as he got me pregnant, he was out the door. If you bear an illegitimate child, everybody says that you're a modern girl, but it's still shameless. . . . It's an asinine, fleeting world. The world today wouldn't swallow sincerity even if you could bottle it. I've been working like this for the past three years because my child is so precious. . . ."

My irritation vanished as I listened to Okei go on. She was an extraordinary woman.

October

Staring out the window, I saw the rain pass like a streetcar. I pulled in a bit today. Toshi was griping about how difficult the times are. She was sitting on the electric fan stand, telling us her life story in such a dejected manner. I could feel her honesty. She had worked in a large cafe in Asakusa, but left after being abused by her fellow workers. A fortune-teller in Asakusa told her she would be all right in the Koishikawa neighborhood of Kanda, so she came here.

"But this is Nishikimachi," Okei said.

"That can't be right!" Toshi was startled. She was the most beautiful and honest woman in the shop, and by far the one with the most interesting stories.

October

A bath after work revived me. While we were cleaning up the big dining room, the cook and the dishwasher bathed and then fell asleep

in the large communal tatami room upstairs. This left us the opportunity to soak in the hot bath at our leisure. Not having been able to sit down once since morning, we were all so tired we could have fallen into a trance.

"I gave up everything for just you, I'm a withered flower of first love," Aki started to sing. I sprawled out on the mat in the dressing area and listened until everyone got out of the bath. I really wanted someone to take care of me. But there were certainly a lot of dishonest men. I would save up my money and take a devil-may-care holiday.

There was an interesting story about Aki.

She spoke so beautifully that the thirty-sen set-lunch noon crowd of university students greeted her like a Paris daisy. Aki was nineteen and liked the students. From my vantage point I watched Aki's observant eyes, but could also see dark circles under them and creases around her neck that were certainly not those of a youth. These were sure signs of a jaded life.

That night, when everyone was in the bath, Aki waited self-consciously for some time in a corner of the hallway.

"Hey! Aki, your body'll rot to pieces if you don't get in the bath and wash off your sweat," Okei called out while brushing her teeth.

Eventually Aki slipped into the communal tub, covering her breasts with a hand towel.

"You've had a baby, haven't you?"

The whole orchard is pure white! You haven't forgotten, have you my love? Lyuba? You remember that long tree-lined avenue endlessly stretching on, straight as an arrow, glistening in the moonlit, don't you, dear? You couldn't have forgotten, could you?

That's right. Even this cherry orchard is being sold off to the moneylenders, unlikely as it may sound, but it can't be helped. . . .

My ex-lover often used to repeat Gayev's soliloquy in the cherry orchard.⁷ Lost in salty reminiscences, I eyed the big moon through the warped window panes.

Okei was quizzing her in a high-pitched voice.

"Yes, I have a boy who will soon be two."

She uncovered her nipples and sat down in the thickly steaming bath.

"And you claimed you were a virgin. Ha! I suspected as much ever since you got here. There's probably a tragic tale of how you ended up here, too. What happened to your man?"

"He's got tuberculosis and is home with the baby."

There was no shortage of suffering women.

7. From Anton Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*, written in 1903-1904.

"I was pregnant once," Toshi shrieked. We could see her hands and legs were as shapely and supple as a model's.

"I aborted mine at three months. Everyone in the city of Toyohara knew about my splendid life. I had married into a landowning family that was actually very modern. They even let me take piano lessons. The teacher was someone who had drifted in from Tokyo. I was completely fooled by that character and got pregnant. I knew it was his child all right, so I told him.

"Just make it your husband's child," was the line he gave me. I was furious. I figured having that guy's child would be horrid, so I dissolved a teacup full of hot mustard and drank it. Ha, ha, ha . . . I mean to follow him no matter where he runs, and spit on him in front of everybody."

"Incredible. . . ."

"You're really remarkable. . . ."

Compliments and encouragement continued for awhile. Okei jumped up and poured bathwater down Toshi's back again and again. Choked and at a loss for words, I was deeply impressed. I was weak. . . . I was thinking about the face of the man who had betrayed me, the one I should spit on. I was the biggest fool, beneath contempt. It didn't put my mind at ease to hear everyone's reassurances.

October

When I opened my eyes, Toshi was already getting ready.

"You overslept, we have to get out of here right now."

I felt relieved as we carried our luggage to the bath. I tied my stiff Hakata obi sash so that it wouldn't make any noise, tidied my hair, and then got two pairs of wooden geta from the dirt shop floor. It was already seven in the morning, but mice were still scurrying around in the quiet kitchen. The kind owner's snores were undisturbed. Okei was gone, returned home to Chiba the previous night on account of her child's illness. Toshi and I had secretly discussed how we really wanted to quit, that we didn't know what to do with just the student and set-lunch customers frequenting the place. Given the already small number of overworked waitresses, both of us had initially caved in after all and decided to bear with it. Yet, with no tips coming in, we couldn't keep it up just for fun. We had no other choice but to run away. The spacious deserted dining hall was fearfully hushed in the morning. Red goldfish swam in the cement pool. A dirty gray air had already blanketed the room. Opening the window facing onto the alley, Toshi jumped down effortlessly like a man, and went to get the cloth bags we had thrown out of the high window of the bath. I had only a small bundle of books and cosmetics.

"Oh, you've got a lot. . . ."

Toshi brought a bamboo umbrella and a sky-blue parasol. She also carried a cylindrical rucksack, making her a near caricature of the country bumpkin just arrived in the big city. As we waited near the Ogawa area stop, four or five streetcars went by completely filled with students. It was almost time for school. People laughed. No doubt we looked like vagabonds, with our unwashed faces basking in the invigorating morning sun. Unable to bear it any longer, we dove into a noodle shop and stretched out our stiff legs. The noodle shop's delivery boy did us a favor by getting us a one-yen taxi, but riding in the taxi, I had absolutely no confidence. I was completely exhausted and in desperate need of a drink of water. We moved into the second floor of a grocery store in Shinjuku where we had already made arrangements.

"It's all right. It's better to get out of that kind of shop. If my plan works out, things will be just great."

"I'll get myself together and work, okay. You can put yourself into studying."

With my eyes downcast, I couldn't do anything about the tears. Even if Toshi was only mouthing a girlish sentimental dream, in my hopeless situation, her words made me inexplicably happy. I would go back to my mother's home . . . I would run home to my mother's breast. . . . Through the window of the car, I looked up at buildings in the bright morning sky. I watched the roofs race by and the sparrows in the dark rust-reddish tree-tops fly along the road.

Even if I become a ragged beggar in a distant place

From far away I recall my home.⁸

This poem touched me in a special way.

October

The Autumn winds had begun to blow. Toshi was taken away by her ex-husband to Sakhalin.

"Because it'll get cold . . ." she said when she gave me a quilted twill jacket as a keepsake, and then left Tokyo. I hadn't eaten since morning. Selling several children's stories and poems didn't mean I'd be eating high off the hog. Hunger made my head fuzzy, and even my ideas ended up growing mold. My head made no distinction of Proletarian or Bourgeois. I only wanted to cook and eat one handful of rice.

"Please feed me."

8. One verse of the poem "Shokei ijo" (A beautiful scene of wonderful passion) in Murō Saisei's (1889–1962) anthology *Jojo shōkyoku shū* (Lyrical short musical pieces, 1918).

Should I throw myself into the middle of a stormy sea, awash in the troubles of others? When evening arrived, from downstairs I could hear the clatter of bowls from all the people assembled. A grumbling stomach set me pouting like a child. Suddenly I became envious of the women in the distant red-light district. I was starving. All my many books have now dwindled to a few. Kasai Zenzo's *With Children on My Hands*, Artzybashev's *The Worker Seryou*, and Shiga Naoya's *Reconciliation* are rattling around in the beer crate.

"Maybe I should try to earn some money at a restaurant again."

Painfully resigned and strangely unsteady like a tumbling toy Daruma, I roused myself. Putting my toothbrush, soap, and hand towels into my kimono sleeve, I went out into the windy evening streets. Like a stray dog, I inquired at cafes, one after the next, that were likely prospects for "help wanted." Above all else, my stomach craved solid food. No matter what, I had to eat. Wasn't the street enveloped in delicious aromas! It looked as though it might rain tomorrow. In the blustery winds, fragrances of fresh autumn fruits stimulated my senses.

October

The chestnut roaster's familiar bellow came with the season. At the sound of his sluggish voice, which drifted into the licensed quarters, I became unexpectedly disheartened. I stared out the window of the dark room, motionless and alone. Ever since I was little, my teeth had hurt at the onset of winter. Spoiled by my mother, I would roll around howling on the tatami mat floor. I would get my entire mouth daubed with the all-purpose pickled plum, a home remedy that would leave me hiccuping and crying. Here I was on the second story of a lonely bar, nursing a toothache. My life nearly half spent, I could recall so much—the fields, mountains, and ocean of Onomichi, and the faces of those from whom I had parted.

I turned my watery eyes and spoke to God, but saw only the wandering moon beyond the distorting window panes.

"Does it still hurt?"

Okimi had come upstairs quietly. In the moonlight, the shadow of her wide sweeping pompadour loomed over me. She placed a plate of sushi near my pillow, and the scent of seaweed wafted toward me. I had eaten nothing since morning. Silently, with a tender concern, she watched me. I cried for no apparent reason.

"Don't be so foolish!" Okimi scolded me when I pulled my coin purse from beneath the thin futon. She slapped my hand with a rolled-up newspaper. Then, after smoothing down and tucking under the edges of the

futon, she quietly descended the back stairs. Ah, what a wonderful world it was after all.

October

The wind was blowing.

Near dawn, I dreamt about a light-blue snake slithering into the ground. It was tied to a yellowish pink waist cord. From the time I awakened I couldn't shake a strange sense of anticipation that something delightfully splendid would happen. After finishing the morning's cleaning, I quietly stared into the mirror at my pale, swollen face, weathered and worn. I heaved a long sigh. I wanted to crawl into a hole in the wall. Breakfast was likely to be murky miso soup and leftover rice. I would have preferred Chinese noodles. Gazing at my own listless, unadorned face, I suddenly became irritated, and tried smearing on some bright red lips. I wondered what he was doing. I tried to grab hold of that broken cord, but he remained motionless like a row of trees in the landscape. . . . Maybe I was having a nervous breakdown? I was afraid to carry several plates at once.

I watched a crowd of female students kick the mound of purifying salt that was by the entrance, just under the short noren curtain. The mountain suddenly crumbled and the salt scattered. It was exactly two weeks since I had come to this shop. I had earned quite a bit. I had two co-workers. Ohatsu was unsophisticated, just as her name, "new," implied. She was truly a cute girl who looked good with her hair swept up in the "butterfly."

"I was born in Yotsuya. But when I was twelve, an older man kidnapped me and took me away to Manchuria. Pretty soon after that I was sold to a geisha house, so I quickly forgot what that man looked like. . . . I used to slide back and forth on a wide slippery hallway with a girl named Momochiyo. It was shiny like a mirror. When theater troupes would come from back home, I used to throw a blanket over my head, put on galoshes, and go see them. When the ground froze, you could walk just wearing geta. When you came out of the bath, it was real funny to see the hairs on your head freeze straight up. I was there about six years, but got a newspaper man in Manchuria to bring me back home."

After the customers had drunk, eaten, and left, winsome petite Ohatsu talked candidly as she traced letters on the table with spilled sake. The other girl, Okimi, who had started work there one day before me, was tall, motherly, and good-natured. Despite its location at the exit of the red-light district, this shop was surprisingly quiet. I was able to become friends with the other waitresses right away. No matter how ill-

natured or hard-boiled they might be at first, no matter how guarded and without the least inclination to be friendly or altruistic, at some point women working in a place like this open up to reveal their true selves. They suddenly lower this guard, and, as if they'd been fast friends for years, they're closer than sisters. When the customers had gone, we would often curl up like snails in a circle and talk.

November

The sky was overcast. I smelled the fragrance of a flower from my youth as I sat quietly across from Kimi. In the evening, I returned from the bathhouse along the streetcar line. Mizuno, a perpetually inebriated university student, was having his usual libations. This time Ohatsu was pouring the sake for him.

"He says he finally saw you naked!" Ohatsu announced with a laugh. She peered over the mirror to see my face as I inserted combs into both sides of my traditional coiffure.

"Mizuno came and asked about you just after you went off to the bath. So I told him where you had gone."

The drunk university student waved his hand in feeble protest, and then tapped his head.

"That's a lie!"

"What! But that's what you just said! Mizuno, I wondered why you hurried off to the boulevard. When you came back, you said you'd opened the door to the women's side. Then the bathhouse attendant told him it was the women's side, but he said he thought it was the hospital and didn't move. You had just gotten naked, he said. Mizuno's really ecstatic about it. . . ."

"Really! How shameless!" I savagely applied some rouge.

"Are you mad at me? Please forgive me!" The university student put his suppliant hands together, pleading. What's he talking about? If he really wants to see me naked, I'll get stark naked out in the sunlight and show him! I wanted to scold him roundly. All evening it weighed on me. I cracked open more than a half dozen eggs, each time with a good whack against the table.

November

The aroma of grilling saury hailed the autumn season. Again today, when evening fell, the smell of saury fish escaped the licensed quarters. The prostitutes probably had scales floating around their insides from their daily diet of saury fish. The evening mist was white. Thin shadows

of the light poles stretched out like needles. I ducked under the noren curtains in the open doorway, and once outside gazed at the moving streetcars. I became suddenly envious of the passengers, and felt as if I would cry. I was truly tired of this living. Working at a place like this had hardened me so much that I wanted to steal something. I wanted to become a female warrior.

Young woman, why do you weep?

I yearn for a cold-hearted man. . .

Everybody and anybody was laughing at me.

"Try drinking ten glasses of King of Kings, I'll bet you ten yen you can't!"

An easy-going man from who knows where laid an iridescent ten yen note on the table. His pomaded hair glistened horribly.

"That's nothing." I downed ten glasses of that whiskey with feigned indifference under the white light of the bar. The man with the glistening head stared at me in amazement. Then laughing, unwilling to admit defeat, he disappeared outside. Only the bar owner was happy. "You know, that young woman drank ten King of Kings at one yen a glass. . . ."

I felt like heaving it all up. My eyes were aflame. *I despised everyone.* Ah, I was an unchaste woman. Should I show you a naked dance, you refined people? You would knit your brows, preferring the stars, the moon, and the flowers! I shuddered merely at the thought of roughing it in the wilds on my own. But having a man support me would be ten times harder. Even my friends laughed at me derisively.

If you listen to singing, oh it's Umekawa.

You can throw troubles away for a time,

Here and there love abounds,

That's Chūbei's dream tale.⁹

Reciting this poem put me in a good mood as I opened the window and inhaled the evening mist. To think that I'd get drunk on ten glasses of such cheap watered-down whiskey. . . Ah, please raise your eyes to the brilliant rainbow under the mantle of the evening sky.

"Are you okay? It doesn't hurt, does it, your chest, or your heart?" Okimi questioned me wide-eyed, then got her best grip on me and led me upstairs.

9. One verse of the poem "Kasa no uchi" (Under the umbrella) from the poetic anthology *Wakana shū* (Young herbs, 1897) by Shimazaki Tōson (1872–1943). It refers to the story of Umekawa and Chūbei, from the play *Meido no hikyaku* (Courier of Hades) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724).

How sweet are the young
In the innocence of first love.
You two who go hand in hand,
Why are you hiding?¹⁰

This was one of my favorite poems. Bewitched, drowning in tears, my body and soul began fleeing to the ends of the earth. Then around the time the clock unwound, those cheeky *kowairo* children, trained to spout poetic passages like "White fish in the misty moonlight" came begging.¹¹ "Hey, mister! Anything you please . . . hey, mister, anything you can spare. . . ."

Go ahead and throw out your washed-out and disabled actors. The children's pitiful faces, pasted with thick white dried-up makeup, made me want to seek comfort in someone's arms.

November

The boss got bent out of shape if I ate all my meals in the kitchen, but I hated having the customers buy me food. Even though the shop closed at two, when those on their way home from the pleasure quarter crowded the place, the boss pretended not to notice the time up until dawn. He didn't even try to take down the noren curtain in the open doorway to signal closing time. The jarring clip-clop from wooden geta on the concrete floor gave me chills and made my blood run cold. The smell of sour sake was disgustingly rank.

"I've had it. . . ."

Ohatsu stood blankly, wringing her beer-soaked kimono sleeve.

"Give me a beer!"

It was already past four, and I heard a rooster's familiar crow from far off. Toward the end of the night, as the train whistle blew from Shinjuku station, it was my turn to wait on a flashy latecomer.

"Beer!"

Since there was nothing else I could do, I opened a bottle and filled a glass. The man sulked, just staring up at the ceiling, and then tossed off the beer, feigning indignation. "What! Ebisu beer? I can't stand the stuff." With that parting shot, he left for the misty pavement, just like that, without paying. Stunned at first, I suddenly grew angry and rushed

10. One verse of "Kusa makua" (Grass pillow) from Shimazaki Tōson's *Young Herbs* (1897).

11. *Kowairo* were itinerant bards who recited dialogue from popular plays. This line is from the play *Sannin kichiza kuruiwa no hatsugai* by Kawatake Mokuami (1816–1893).

off after him, taking the half-empty beer bottle with me. Just as he was about to turn at the bank, I hurled the bottle with a vengeance at his black shadow.

"If you want beer, I'll give you some."

The bottle smashed to smithereens, shooting up a spray.

"Hey!"

"You fool!"

"Watch it. I'm an Anarchist!"

"What, such people really exist? I don't believe it! What a puny terrorist."

Okimi was worried and ran after me. As several taxis pulled up, the pathetic anarchist quickly ducked into the alley. I felt like quitting this line of work . . . but then, the letter from my stepfather had arrived from Hokkaido. He said he didn't have the fare for a trip home now. The gist of the long letter was that he wanted me to send whatever little I could spare. I was determined to send something, maybe even forty or fifty yen. He couldn't bear the cold. When I had saved a little, I would go up to Hokkaido too. I wondered if, together with my parents, I couldn't try my hand again at peddling rather than continue as I was. I spied Ohatsu when I poked my head into an oden stall. She had turned off the light in the stall, skewered dumplings onto chopsticks, and was gulping rice and tea with all her might. To calm my nerves after all the excitement, I had Okimi undo my apron and heat up a bottle of sake to go with the oden.

December

Asakusa was a great place.

It was always a great place no matter the occasion. I was a wandering Kachusha twirling around in this quickly flashing light. Having gone without face cream for ages, my skin had become hard and brittle as crockery. Nobody frightened me, drunk as I was on cheap sake. Behold, one inebriated woman. Once drunk, I turned maudlin. The absurdity of this feeling, as if my numb hands and feet would fall off. . . . If I didn't drink sake, the world would be too crazy for me to pass through without cracking up. He said he had another woman. What in the world was that supposed to mean? I wanted to grieve, but the sake said it would have nothing more to do with worldly matters. The street lights suddenly went out. I stared at ripped, distorted faces plastered on the wall of the movie house. The band in the movie house sounded ethereal, as if it were emanating from a dream. Maybe I was too immature. I despised myself. In my anger, I resolved to start writing again tomorrow.

Growing old quickly . . . was not so bad after all. Dead drunk on

sake, I had a momentary sober reflection. I would just tie on a kerchief like a monkey in a street show and go for a stroll.

Asakusa was a good place to drink. It was a good place even when you were sober. Sweet sake for five sen a cup, sweet bean soup for five sen, a skewer of grilled chicken for two sen, what a feast! And you didn't have to mind your manners. I gazed at the banners blowing in the wind over the theater. I saw the name of the man who once loved me. I could hear him still ridiculing me, in that same old voice of his. So long, everybody! It was the coldest winter sky I'd seen in many years. Wouldn't you know it, my shawl was only a cheap synthetic blend. The wind stealthily penetrated through to my skin as if someone were laying an icy hand on my shoulder.

December

There was no greater consolation for a girl who didn't like to be awake alone than to smoke a cigarette in bed first thing in the morning. Blowing wavering rings, I found the wafting purple smoke pleasurable. As I reclined, basking in the sun . . . I prayed for something good to happen today. Worn-out kimonos of various shades lay where they had been dropped, cluttering the tiny three-mat room. Half awake, like a sunning baby turtle, a lone woman alone in a comfy spot. Rather than find a troublesome job at a cafe or sukiyaki restaurant, I wondered whether I should set up my own food stall and make oden. Let them laugh, let them mock me, with my kimono tucked up out of the way, exposing my red slip like a monkey's ass! I'd like to try setting up a stall and become my own boss this year. My spirits soared at the thought of each ingredient: kon'nyaku, ganmodoki, chikuwa, and dumplings. You dipped them in burning hot mustard and ate them with bright green spinach in soy sauce and sake. I savored each morsel. When I reached a certain point, I fell back to reality. Though they might be silly, these daydreams brought me childish delight.

I couldn't mooch off my poverty-stricken parents. After working so many odd jobs, what could I buy but a couple of books a month? Before I knew it, all my earnings would go to food and drink. Even though I was living a bare-bones existence in a three-mat tatami room, what savings I once had had been eaten away. When I was in a fix and the future became dark, I seriously entertained the idea of burglary. But I knew I'd be caught on my first try since I was so nearsighted. My absurd new career choice suddenly seemed hilarious. A self-mocking laugh echoed off the cold walls of the room. I wanted money. Then dark fantasies invaded my dreams, and I slept soundly until evening.

December

Okimi came to get me. With renewed hopes of finding good jobs, and armed with a small newspaper clipping, we boarded the National Railway for Yokohama. The bar where she had been working had gone downhill, and Okimi had quit at the same time as I had quit my job. She had returned home to her husband in Itabashi in the northern part of Tokyo. He was more than thirty years her senior. When I had first gone to visit her house, I had mistaken him for Okimi's father. The chaos of the household with Okimi's children and stepmother around was a little hard to take. I didn't like to be bothered with such things. Okimi was quiet about her personal life and didn't especially like to talk about her family. It made my heart ache to listen to her stories when she did open up. We quietly alighted from the train, and went out to the bluff, gazing at the blue sea all the while.

"It's been a long time since I've seen the ocean. . . ."

"It's cold, but the sea's so nice. . . ."

"Yes, like a lover. I feel like stripping and jumping right in. It's like the color blue is melting right there in front of us."

"You're right! It's scary. . . ."

Two Westerners with neckties flapping in the wind were sitting on the steps of the pier, staring at the rough waves.

"The hotel's over there!"

What Okimi's quick eyes had discovered was a small drinking establishment—whose ad had billed itself as a hotel—that looked like a blind for hunting ducks. Stained blankets aired in the sun, draped from the crooked windows of the second floor.

"So this is it. . . ."

"Let's go home!"

A winsome girl in a vermilion kimono was petting a black dog on the porch of the hotel, all the while laughing shrilly to herself.

"How disappointing. . . ."

We stared silently at the vast cold ocean before us. I wanted to become a bird. I thought about how nice it would be to travel, unencumbered, with nothing but the smallest of bags. Kimi's traditionally styled hair was blown askew by the wind, as poignant a sight as a willow tree on a snowy day.

December X

A white sky, the sound of the wind,
Such a wonderfully cold winter sea!
The ocean so blue arouses you from sleep.

A crazy man may whirl like a dervish,
But it's straight ahead to Shikoku.

Blankets are twenty sen, sweets ten.
The third-class passenger room is like a pan of loaches
Brought to a deadly boil.

With sprays of water sprinkling like rain,
Gazing upon the overarching white sky,
I clutched a purse containing eleven sen.

Ah, I'd like to smoke a good cigarette.
"Hey!" I shout,
But you see the wind swept it away.

In the vast tumbling sky,
The face of the man who gave me a hard time
Appeared, large, gigantic.
Ah, ours is a solitary journey after all.

Far off, the sound of the steamship whistle pierced me to the core. Here and there, small lead-gray ocean eddies disappeared one by one. The cold moaning December wind blew, trying to plaster my tangled butterfly tresses onto my cheeks. Inserting both hands into the underarm openings at the sides of my kimono, I gently pressed against my soft breasts. My cold nipples elicited unintended bittersweet emotions. I had lost at everything. Removing myself far away from Tokyo, racing above the sea, I saw hazy faces of lovers peeping through the gaps in the clouds.

Yesterday's blue sky had made me nostalgic, so I had forced myself to set off for my mother's home. This morning I was already on a ship in the open sea off Naruto.

"Passengers! How about breakfast!"

On the empty deck at daybreak, it was not surprising when my scattered daydreams turned their back on those small towns of my youth and scurried off to the capital. Since travel was my home, there was no special need to amass anecdotes of success for the home crowd. Yet I was full of remorse. I sat upon my blanket in the dark cellar-like third-class cabin. Unappetizing stewed seaweed, miso soup, and the like were lined up on the peeling lacquer of a small, low vermilion table. I mingled with the groups of touring actors, temple pilgrims off to Shikoku, and fishermen's wives with children in tow. Under the dim lantern light, I felt the poignancy of travel.

"Where're you from?" asked some of the old women, since I had my hair up in the more urban butterfly style. "Where're you off to?" inquired the young men. A young mother lying next to her two-year-old softly sang a lullaby I had heard before in my travels.

Hush-a-bye little one,
Go to sleep and
Wake up early in the morning.
The beach wind tonight will give you such a chill,
So sleep early in the evening.

Freely breathing the exhilarating air of such a refreshing sea made it great to be alive, after all. It was far better than exhaustion in a corner of that impure city.

December

I opened the sooty canary-yellow paper windows and stared mesmerized at the swirling snow, soon to melt as it hit the ground.

"Mama! The snow's really early this year, isn't it."

"Uh huh."

"Papa must be having it rough because of the cold."

"I've come too far north, and the business isn't going like I planned, so I'll be back in Shikoku in the spring," he had written in a recent letter. It had been more than four months since he had gone off to Hokkaido. It had gotten really cold here, too. The aroma of boiling noodle soup stock pervaded the town of Tokushima in winter. The cascading river that ran through the town's rows of low buildings spewed a light vaporous mist. As the number of hotel guests diminished, my mother was reluctant to light the lanterns in front of her shop.

"When it's cold, nobody travels, you know. . . ."

Lacking real roots, my parents had recently settled in Tokushima. I had helped them open a weather-beaten inn amid the lovely women and beautiful water of the city. I was excited by my first seasons in Tokushima when I was younger, but now this run-down inn earned nothing but a little extra pocket change for my mother. I turned over shy love letters and large photographs of big, sweeping hair I had found in the depths of a worn chest of drawers. Sweet, ancient memories gradually flooded back. Living in Tokyo can wear out even someone like me. I had left my parents behind, but now yearned to return to their home. I found memories in the yellow noodles of Nagasaki, the Senkoji cherry blossoms of Onomichi, and the song of Joga Island I had learned at Niyu River. Several of my early, awkward sketches had faded brown. When they had appeared out of the storage room, it was as if I was viewing myself from a completely different

planet. I heard a duet of a four-stringed "pipa" and a plaintively sung lonesome lament while I warmed myself at the kotatsu at night. The music resonated beyond their room at the inn. Outside, the sleet fell softly.

December

Beach-combing weather had finally arrived. The ballad-singing couple who had been staying at the inn for a few days set out early in the morning, each with a black muffler flung around the neck. My mother and I stayed behind, grilling sardines in the large sooty kitchen. I was already bored with the country.

"You know, enough is enough. How about giving up, leaving Tokyo, and settling down here? There's somebody who says he'd like to marry you. . . ."

"Really? What kind of person is he?"

"His family runs a sembei cracker store near Shogoin Temple in Kyoto, and he's in line to take over the family business. But now he's here working for the city hall. . . . He's a good man."

"..."

"What do you think?"

"I wonder if I shouldn't meet him. It sounds like fun. . . ."

It was all so childishly delightful. So I was to become a country maiden, my innocent face ablush as I offered up tea. My heart began to leap like a virgin's as I raised and lowered the bucket in the well. I felt like a voracious caterpillar gobbling passion. Or like a leech sucking all the blood out of a man. With the cold weather, a man's skin would be as welcome as a coverlet.

I would return to Tokyo. During my evening walk my feet took me unconsciously in the direction of the station road. As I read the station timetable I couldn't stop the tears from streaming down my cheeks.

December

He stepped up into the parlor after untying his red shoes. I felt ill. I frowned as I looked him directly in the face.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Who, me? Twenty-two."

"Hmm . . . then I'm older."

His thick eyebrows and thick lips were somehow familiar, but I couldn't place him. Suddenly, I brightened and felt like whistling.

There was a good moon that night. The stars twinkled at the top of the sky.

"Shall I see you off part way. . . ?"

Strangely enough, he seemed the picture of composure. We passed under a banner that someone had forgotten to take in. When we came out onto the brightly moonlit street I was able momentarily to breathe a loud sigh of relief. We covered one block, then two, but we both kept silent. I don't know why the river saddened me the way it did. I wanted to start a fire and burn up all men. Maybe I would fall in love with Buddha. Buddha to whom we pray—"Namu amidabutsu"—had unusually erotic eyes, and had been stealing into my dreams lately.

"Well then, good-bye. You get yourself a good wife now."

"What?"

Darling man, you country people were simple and good. Whether he understood my words or not, he went back to the next town dragging the long shadow of the moon behind him. Tomorrow for certain I resolved to pack my bags and set out on a trip. . . . It had been a long time since I had looked at the paper oil lantern in front of the inn. The fact that my mother was so dear to me suddenly struck home. I stared at the lantern, which listed like an owl's eye.

"Boy, it's cold. Do you feel like drinking some sake?"

Sitting face to face with my mother in the living room, I felt pretty good after one large glass of sake. I realized how wonderful it was to have family, to be able to gaze on my mother's face with uninterrupted tranquillity. To leave my mother behind again under this sooty ceiling where the mice run rampant filled me with remorse.

"I really don't like his type."

"But he seemed so good-natured. . . ."

It was a lonesome comedy. I decided to write a bunch of letters that would make all my Tokyo friends miss me.

January

The pure white sea
That day I was Tokyo bound,
Filling a basket full of the first green tangerines,
I boarded the vessel *Tenjin* from the shores of Shikoku.

Though the seas were fretfully rough,
The skies sparkled mirrorlike.
The light from the carrot-shaped lighthouse was so red it pierced my eyes.
To throw away with no regrets
Sorrow on the island,
I bear the cold briny wind.

Watching the sailing boats in the distance,
The white sea of January and
The fragrance of the first tangerines
Made me on that day as disconsolate as a woman about to be sold.

January

A dark snowy sky. Lined up on the morning tray were white miso soup, *kōya dōfu*, and black beans. Everything seemed somewhat watered down. *I had nothing but sorrowful memories of Tokyo.* I suddenly considered the possibility of living in Kyoto or Osaka. . . . From the second floor of the cheap inn Tenbōzan, I sprawled out absent-mindedly, listening to the incessant caterwauling of the cats outside. Why was it so difficult to be alive? My body and soul alike were already worn out. The bedding reeked of the sea, dank and dirty, like the entrails of a fish. The wind beat against the sea, and the sea replied with the deafening crash of the waves.

I was a shell of a woman. Without the means to go on living, there was no beauty in life. All I had left was my drive. When bored, I would bend one knee up and twirl in a circle like a crane. My eyes, grown unaccustomed to reading, just kept skipping over the sign on the wall listing the rates, which started at one yen a night.

Snow began to fall from evening. *I traveled alone, no matter what direction I chose.* I even wondered if I should retrace my steps back to my mother on Shikoku. I was in a terribly lonely inn. *This was the kind of night that made me want to stay put and enjoy myself.*

To soothe my old wounds,
We steal a cup of sake, just you and me,
Under the mantle of love.

I scribbled off this haiku that I learned long ago. I gazed at the postcard in my hand and recalled my many friends in Tokyo. Each was self-preoccupied.

The train whistle blew. I slid open the window and looked out over the quiet bay. Several boats lay asleep, blue lights blazing. You and me, we're vagabonds. Snow falls. Suddenly I yearned for my faraway first love. I have not thought of him for a long time. It has been this kind of evening. He was singing "Rain at Joga Island" as well as "Silent Bell." The sea off Onomichi did not have waves as rough. Under the cape covering us both, we gazed into each other's eyes by the light of a match. Our parting came all too quickly. "Oh woman, how far you have fallen!" was the last I heard from you, now already seven years ago. You used to dis-

cuss Picasso's paintings and admire Kaita's poems.¹² I hit my head brusquely with my hands until it hurt. I sat down in a daze. I continued whistling steadily. The strains of a samisen sounded from somewhere around me.

January

Well! Empty-handed, I had to start all over again. Exiting through the gate of the city employment agency, I boarded the train bound for Tenma in Osaka. I had been directed to a blanket wholesaler and, as a graduate of a girl's high school, I was to be an office worker. The train raced by overcast streets. I considered Osaka an interesting place, too. It would probably be good to work somewhere where no one knew me. The withered willow trees along the river banks swayed gracefully at the waist in the strong wind.

The blanket wholesaler's store was relatively large. With a wide frontage and a deep interior, it was as dark as a seashell. The seven or eight sickly, pale-faced shop assistants scurried about. There was an extremely long hallway. I sat facing the elderly female head of the house in the neat sitting room arranged to suit Osaka tastes. Everything shone from being so well kept.

"Why did you come here from Tokyo?"

Having fabricated my permanent address as Tokyo, I was slightly at a loss as to what I should say.

"Because my older sister is here. . . ."

Now that I had gone and said this, I felt my usual resignation. It was just a matter of time until I would be turned away. The maid brought in a beautiful plate of sweets and tea. It had been a long time since I had drunk good tea, and longer since I had eaten such sweets. *So there are still hospitable households in the world.*

"Ichirō," the female head of the house called out gently. From the next room entered a quiet and composed man in his mid-twenties, probably her son, his back as straight as a rod.

"She's here. . . ."

The young master, his features as delicate as an actor's, looked at me with sparkling eyes.

I felt sure I had made the trip out here only to humiliate myself. I was convinced my hands and feet were going numb. This world was too far removed from mine. I wanted to flee. When I returned to Tenbōzan, the harbor inn, the sun had already set. Many ships were in.

"Why are you dawdling? Come quickly. I have an interesting job,"

12. Murayama Kaita. See appendix B.

Okimi had written on her postcard from Tokyo. No matter how desperate her straits, she's always in good spirits. Reading her card revived me.

January

I had thought it wasn't going to happen, but I finally went to work in the blanket wholesaler's shop.

I moved out of the cheap Tenbōzan inn where I had stayed for five days. I still didn't feel any stability, with my fate blown by the wind. I went to live in the blanket shop, like a puppy who has just found a new home.

Even at noon, the gaslights in the back rooms were lit and hissing. As I sat in the large office, I addressed many envelopes and often had inexplicable daydreams. I would hit my face each time I made a mess of things. When I put both hands under the blue gaslight, each fingernail turned yellow, and my ten fingers looked as transparent as silkworms. I seemed to have become a specter. At three, someone would bring tea and a pile of cinnamon crackers out to the shop. All told, there were nine assistants, six of them shop boys. Since they usually went out on errands, I didn't yet know who was who. There were only two maids, Okuni, the kitchen help, and Oito, the parlor maid. Oito, like a lady-in-waiting with an impenetrable expression, appeared to be asleep. Kansai women had a gentle mien, and I couldn't at all tell what they were thinking.

"Coming from such a distance, you probably think this place is boring, don't you?"

Tilting her tightened hairstyle, one characteristic of unmarried young women, Oito pulled the weft tightly as she wove an exquisite cloth pattern, the likes of which I had never seen. Oito had told me that the young master, Ichirō, had a wife who was almost nineteen. She was at the other house in Ichioka for the birth of a child, and the house was silent as the grave.

At eight o'clock at night the main door was already closed, and the nine assistants had all disappeared one by one for the night. I stretched both legs out gingerly under the stiffly starched futon and gazed up at the ceiling, becoming all too aware of how hopeless my situation was. Oito and Okuni's box-shaped black pillows were lined up at the head of their futon, just like high geta. Oito had thrown her long red kimono slip over her quilt. I kept eyeing that slip as if I were a man. The two young women were splashing around silently in the remaining bathwater. I wanted to touch Oito's beautiful white downy hands. Aroused, overwhelmed, I was in love with Oito in her red kimono slip. The silent woman gave off a gentle fragrance like a flower. I closed my tear-blurred eyes and turned away from the brightly lit lantern.

January

I had become accustomed by now to the daily breakfast of rice porridge with sweet potatoes, but still longed for the red miso soup of Tokyo. It was so fine, cooked with thinly sliced mountain potatoes and cabbage. I liked to peel off and savor salted salmon flake by flake. I wanted to eat a salty delicacy together with delicious tea over rice. The Osaka sun, like the round cut end of a long radish, was all I could see. My daydreams all seemed a little childish to me while I worked.

In winter I ran into trouble with persistent frostbite on my toes. Every evening I would hide from the rest in the shadows of the high stacks of boxes and scratch my itching feet with all my might. My toes were flushed and puffed up, and I couldn't help wishing I could puncture them with a needle.

"Wow, you've really got a case of frostbite there," Kenkichi, the head clerk, peered over with amazement. "If it's frostbite, you should massage it with a lit pipe."

He enthusiastically popped open a tobacco can and filled the pipe. After giving it a number of puffs, he massaged my red blistering toes with the head of the long metal pipe. You can find kindness even among people who speak of nothing but accounts.

February

"You were born under the sign of gold, but it's the gold of the gold-leaf screen, so you've got to go for delicate work," my mother used to tell me.

I've gotten tired of this type of refined work. Easily bored, quickly exhausted, and timid, I despised my inability to make friends. *I wanted to cry and vent my impatience somewhere alone.*

I enjoyed reading my copy of Oscar Wilde's De Profundis.

I was caught up by the mob jeering in the gray November rain. Tears are a part of daily experience for people in jail. The day that people in jail don't cry is when their heart has hardened, not when they're happy.

It pained my heart to see such words. What friends? What family? What neighbors? I even yearned for someone who would be concerned enough to jeer at me. There may also be a blessing in Oito's love. I could see many stars scattered across the sky at night as I soaked in the bath and stared out the ceiling window. I gazed up at the stars unmoving, oblivious, as if dredging up a distant memory.

My heart was worn out in inverse proportion to my youthful body. I extended my reddened arms and stretched out in the bath. I suddenly felt feminine and decided then and there to get married.

I could smell the wedding makeup. I trimmed my eyebrows and painted my lips thickly, trying to attach an innocent face to the body reflected in the mirror attached to the pillar. I next wanted to tie up my hair with a mother-of-pearl comb and a peach-colored chignon band.

"*Frailty, thy name is woman.*" After all, who was the one sullied by the world? Was there no handsome groom. . . ? Should I sing a sweet old song from Provence? With a smoldering heart, I turned and rolled through the water like a minnow in a bucket.

February

The streets were filled with the flapping red flags signifying spring sales.

After I had received a letter from Onatsu, a high school friend, I wanted to throw everything over and head off to Kyoto.

"You've probably had a hard time of it. . . ." Not at all, I responded while reading her letter. You don't have to be a man to appreciate a letter from a nice girl. There was a vaguely pleasant childlike scent to it. I had graduated with her. During the last eight years, there had to have been hundreds of miles separating the two of us, but here was a splendid letter, a real tearjerker. She had opted not to marry and instead was the dutiful daughter helping her father with his traditional Japanese-style painting. I felt like going to see her, if even for a short time, to talk things over with this dear woman.

I went to Kyoto on my one day off from work in a cold blowing wind. I arrived at the station in the early evening. Onatsu had come to meet my train. Her pale face was buried in a black fluffy shawl.

"You remembered me?"

"Of course."

We silently gripped each other's cold hands.

Onatsu presented a strange sight. She was dressed completely in black, like a widow. Only her lips signaled to me.

They were wonderful lips, like the petals of a camellia flower. Securely holding hands, we walked childlike down the misty streets of Kyoto, confiding in each other whatever came to mind. The Kyōgoku area had not changed. Beautiful paper envelopes, which had previously enthralled us, were displayed in the window of a familiar shop. We discovered a noodle shop called Kikusui in a side alley during our leisurely stroll of the area. We hadn't looked at each other by such bright lantern light for some time. I was poor and on my own, and, of course, Onatsu didn't get much spending money from her father. After comparing the

meager resources in our purses, we ate simply, fried tofu on noodles in broth. But carefree, like students again, we loosened our obi sashes and ordered seconds.

"There's no one who moves as much as you, you know. You're the only one who messes up my address book."

Onatsu gazed at me with her big black unblinking eyes. *I want someone to take care of me.*

We walked together just like lovers by the fountain at Maruyama park.

"Mount Toribe in autumn was great, wasn't it? With the fallen leaves . . . remember when the two of us visited the graves of Oshun and Denbei?"

"Shall we go there again?"

"That's the kind of thing that gets you in trouble." Onatsu gave me a startled, guarded look.

Kyoto is a fine town. A nightbird cried out from the trees across the way. The streets were filled with evening mist.

There was a small police station with a red light lit across from Onatsu's house in Shimogamo. Ducking under the hanging stone lantern at the front gate, we quietly went upstairs. The slowly tolling bell of a far-away temple echoed in the room.

"Instead of spinning stories, let's be quiet. . . ." Onatsu went downstairs to get some charcoal, and I leaned out the window, yawning widely.

July

A lone hilltop pine

At its base

I silently gaze skyward.

In the pure pale blue sky, the aged bough

Sparkles like pins.

Oh, how difficult it is to live,

To survive.

Then,

Drawing my ragged sleeves across my chest,

I tap the trunk of the pine

With that unguarded innocence beloved

From days of my childhood.

A sadness fell over me. I wandered aimlessly in the dark green stand of trees.

It had been a long time since I had worked as a waitress. I wore only light touches of makeup. I thought of my home as I twirled my parasol. That old pine on the hill haunted my memories.

When I returned to the room my lover was renting, I saw he had acquired several large bookcases. Here he was, making me, his beloved, work as a cafe waitress, while he bought such extravagances for himself. As always, I placed twenty yen under his writing paper. Completely at home and indulging in the luxury of the solitary moment, I looked in his closet for dirty clothes.

"Excuse me, a letter's just come," said the maid as she handed it to me. The envelope was fairly thick, with a six-sen stamp. It was from a woman. I bit my nails uneasily, and my heart pounded anxiously. Chiding myself for my stupidity, I found a substantial pile of this woman's letters hidden in the corner of the closet.

"I prefer the hot springs."

"From your Sawako."

"Ever since staying that night, I have. . ."

I stood up unsteadily, chilled by the cloyingly sweet letters.

The letter about the hot springs said, "I will get some money ready, but please get some yourself." I wanted to fling it across the room. I left after pocketing the twenty yen that I had placed under the writing paper.

Wasn't he the one to berate me for my insensitivity whenever he saw me? Didn't he write all those poems and short stories for magazines just to slander me? And wasn't I reduced to singing to all the bar patrons, "For you alone I threw away myself and the world. . ." just to support that morose, half-crazed, tubercular man? Walking down the streets of Wakamatsu with the cool evening wind on me, I did not feel like returning to the cafe in Shinjuku. *Now I knew why there was only a fraction of the money left.*

"Won't you go with me to the hot springs?"

That night I got so completely drunk Toki-chan pitied my sorry state.

July

"Every dark cloud has a silver lining," read his letter of apology. Night.

Toki-chan's mother came to the back door of the cafe. *I lent Toki-chan five yen.* Everything in this flavorless world is as insubstantial as chewing gum, and tastes like cigarette butts. Maybe I should save my money and go see my mother. On my way to the kitchen I swiped some whiskey and drank it.

July

I woke feeling displaced, like a fish out of water. Four soundly sleeping women were a mass of thick white goo. I smoked a cigarette and looked at Toki-chan's arm flung out above the bed. She was still seventeen and had light, pink-colored skin.

Her mother ran a shaved-ice shop in Zoshiki. Since her dad had gotten sick, every few days she came to visit Toki-chan at the back door to get money. Gazing through uncurtained windows, I felt almost as if I were advertising myself like the red flag of the Chinese restaurant, flapping in the wind. When I worked in a cafe, the illusions I held about men disappeared into smoke. It seemed as though the value of things dropped, as if I were buying in bulk at a discount. Since I didn't need to earn money for that man any more, I contemplated going off to feel the salty wind of my youth. He was really such a sorry creature.

It was a muddy road.

Like a broken-down car, I stood still.

This time for sure I'll sell myself and make money.

I wanted to please everyone.

Hadn't I returned to Tokyo this morning after such a long journey?

No matter where I look there is no one to buy me.

"If I could watch a film and eat a hearty dinner of grilled eel over rice, then I wouldn't mind dying."

Recalling the words he spoke this morning,

I wept bitterly.

My man stays in a rooming house.

If I lived with him, the rent would go up.

Like a pig I smell my way

Walking from cafe to cafe.

Love or family or society or a husband,

With my brain beginning to rot

All appear so far away.

Not having enough courage to call out,

I don't even have the strength to die.

Whatever happened to the frisky kitten *Otekusan* toying at my hem?

I considered casing the clock shop show window like a female burglar.

There are only impostors loitering about.

They say that drinking horse piss will cure tuberculosis.
 What would it be like,
 To have my sick man drink it?
 To go through with a lover's double suicide?
 Money, money, money is indispensable!
 They say that the wheel of fortune may come your way, but
 I work and work and it doesn't come round.

How about a miracle round about now?
 Isn't it somehow, some way possible?
 Where does the money I work for run off to?

And in the end I become a coldhearted person,
 The pale shadow of a woman.
 Until the day I die I will only remain a bar hostess or a maid, amid
 the dregs of society.
 Do I have to work myself to death?
 A man prejudiced by disease
 Calls me a red pig.

Just try to attack me with arrows and guns.
 In front of those disgusting men and women,
 I'll show you Miss Fumiko's guts.

You were so hard on me that I wrote this poem for a magazine to get even with you. I was a big fool. I had the good faith to think that you would be irritated at how easily I could make money in this trade, and object to our way of life. I had enough to go back to my mother's, so I took the train. The spray of the fast ship would have been quite nice, too. The blue sea would whiz along by the cinnabar color of the carrot-shaped lighthouse. But I took the night train. With no one to see me off, and with a funereal air, I boarded the Tōkaidō line as I had done countless times before whenever things had gone wrong.

July

"Maybe I'll get down at Kobe. I bet there's some interesting work there. . .," I thought to myself.

The third-class train car bound for Akashi was full of people getting off at Kobe. I also took down my wicker basket, carefully put away the leftovers from my box lunch, and alighted at Kobe station with some trepidation.

"If I can't get work again and eat, it'll be just as Hinkelmann said, it's the dirty world's fault."

The sun beat down. But I couldn't buy any ice cream or shaved ice. I felt refreshed after washing my face at the sink on the station platform. I drank a bellyful of lukewarm water. The dirty yellowed mirror reflected my sorry state. So, give it your best shot, I told my reflection. I tucked my layover ticket in a safe place, and, without any particular destination, ambled toward Kusunoki Park.¹³

One ratty basket.

A broken parasol.

A woman paler than cigarette ash.

This is all combat preparation for my desperate fight.

In the dusty precincts of the shrine to General Kusunoki there were the usual pigeons and picture-postcard stand. I seated myself on the stone edge of the dry hexagonal fountain and invited the wind with my parasol. I gazed up at the clear blue sky. The bright sun exposed everything limply.

How many years would it be now—maybe it was when I was about fifteen. I was a maid at a music shop run by a Turk. I looked after his two-year-old girl, Nina. After putting her in the baby carriage with the black rubber wheels and high wainscoting, I would walk in the direction of the American pier. The pigeons would come close to my feet. *Men should be born pigeons*. I cried when I thought of my disappointments in Tokyo.

Even with the passing of a lifetime, exactly when would I be able to send several thousand yen, several hundred yen, or several dozen yen to my mother? When would I be able to console my poor stepfather? He was still supporting my mother through peddling, and had tried his best to take good care of me. Yet I couldn't do anything successfully. My head hurt when I thought about it.

"Hey, you there! Aren't you getting hot? Why don't you come in here?" yelled an old woman. She sold beans for pigeon feed from her hovel of a shop next to the fountain. Her friendly smile and kindness merited a reward. Fearful of hitting my head, I entered the shop encased in rush mats. Just as I imagined, it was like a pigsty. I placed my basket on my lap. The hut reeked of beans, but still it was cool. Swollen soybeans were soaking in an oil can. Amulets and hard pieces of seaweed lay under the glass covers of two boxes. All the goods were covered with dust.

"Ma'am, please give me a plate of those beans."

As I put down my five-sen coin, the shop woman's wrinkled hand brushed mine aside.

"Forget the coin."

In response to my asking, she told me she was seventy-six. She was just like a once-elegant doll, moth-eaten and forgotten.

"Is Tokyo all recovered from the earthquake?" she asked.

13. Named for Kusunoki Masashige (1294–1336), a military commander of the Namboku Period.

The toothless woman's mouth looked like the tightened drawstring of a money pouch. She eyed me kindly.

"You have some too, ma'am."

When I removed the box lunch from my basket, she beamed. Her cheeks soon bulged with my omelet.

"It's pretty hot, isn't it, Granny." A frightening-looking old woman who appeared to be a friend of the shopkeeper crouched in front of the stall, her back still straight.

"You know of any work, anything at all? If I just hang around too much the neighborhood rep will get after me, so I was wondering. . . ."

"Well, you might try the inn over in Sakae. They were saying they had some bedding to be washed. It would probably pay up to twenty sen."

"That's great! If I wash two of them I could get something to eat. . . ."

These two women were willing to take on any job for the money. It saddened me to think that even at their age they had to worry about where the next meal came from.

Finally night fell. By the time the harbor lights began to go on, I still had no place to go. I had worn my sweat-drenched kimono since morning. Feeling totally powerless, I was at the point of bursting out in tears. I wouldn't let this get me down! Not even this! It felt as if something were pressing against my head. Damned if I was going to let this get to me, I whispered. Walking aimlessly from house to house, I was more of a sight than a traveling snake-oil salesman with his accordion.

I soon found the Tradesman's Inn the old woman had told me about, guided by its paper lanterns. It wouldn't make any difference wherever I went. I entered, and, embarrassed, asked the rates. The innkeeper glanced in her register and told me that it was sixty sen for the night. "Please come in." Her kind words reassured me. The blue-tinged walls of the three-mat room created a peculiar and lonely atmosphere.

When I inquired, the innkeeper said they were indeed looking for a kitchen maid if that kind of work interested me. On the road along the beach, I ran across groups of boatmen who clucked their tongues in an attempt to catch my attention. Boatmen were certainly unrestrained and transparent.

After changing into a light cotton kimono—I had been wearing my regular kimono since morning—I got directions from the innkeeper and set off for the local public bath. Travel may seem frighteningly unpredictable, but it really doesn't have to wear you down. Women bathers encircled the small bathtub like lotus flowers in a pond. They spoke strangely, in dialect. As I soaked my travels and cares away in the tub, my face revived. But when I anticipated the dreams I would have, surrounded by those blue walls, I became apprehensive.

July

The mosquito netting billowed up like a wave in the refreshing morning breeze, creating a truly pleasurable start to the day.

"The priest said he'd buy a hair ornament for his love. . . ." Below the window laborers passed by singing this Tosa ballad. Listening to the sentimental lyrics, I began to yearn for that harbor in Takamatsu, Shikoku, and the pristine places of my memories. I'd like to go back after all. . . . Nothing would come of my becoming a kitchen maid. With all my might I bounced the abusive language of the man I just left off the ceiling. Then I took a deep breath.

"Heigh-ho," the boatmen yelled at each other below the window. As a favor, the innkeeper arranged to sell my layover ticket for Okayama to a mothball broker for one yen. From Hyogo I decided to take the boat to Takamatsu.

I must gird myself and not let down my defenses no matter what the circumstances. After buying a box of the local crackers made in the shape of roof tiles, I bought a ticket for the Takamatsu boat at the run-down riverside inn. I would go back after all.

"Come home right away." My mother's enthusiasm telegraphed across the transparent blue sky. I was a selfish daughter. I would probably go through life irresponsibly, like a perpetual child. Wrapping bits of chipped ice in a dirty handkerchief, I pressed it against my throbbing cheek.

October

I stared blankly at the dirty map over the stairs. Above the map, a dreary autumn picture was lit up by the rays of the evening sun. My eyes blurred with inexplicable tears while I smoked a cigarette lying down. I was despondent. My poor mother probably thought about me day and night. She lived simply along on the beachfront in Shikoku. It covered only two or three inches at the top of the map. I could hear the downstairs clamor of women perhaps just returned from the public bath. My head hurt most peculiarly. I had time on my hands.

If you're lonely, let's go resplendently into the sea.

If we plunge in, the sea will constrict us.

If we swim, we will be carried along.

Stand firm with all your might, man on the rock.

The blueness of the autumn air brought to mind this poem by Hakushū. Is this all the joy that exists in this world? One, two. . . . I counted with my fingers and pondered the insignificance of my years.

"Oyumi! Please turn on the light," the innkeeper called out shrilly. So I was Oyumi. *Oyumi was a good name.* Then my mother was the jōruri puppet character Tokushima Jūrōbei from the island of Awaji.

The evening meal consisted of the usual stewed cuttlefish and kon'nyaku. Some other special catered trays pretentiously featured a deep-fried golden pork cutlet. My appetite was already on automatic. Without my chewing the cuttlefish, it would slide down my throat with a gulp of water. That evening, a fancy gramophone, the twenty-five-yen kind, played the popular children's ditty "Zuizui zukkoro bashi."¹⁴ Tōko returned to the cafe after having been out and about since morning on her day off.

"It was so much fun. Four men were waiting for me in the Shinjuku station waiting room and I stiffed them all. . . ."

It was a common practice among waitresses to promise to spend their day off with a number of different male customers, have them all wait in the same place, and then snub them.

"I took my younger sister to see a movie. It came out of my pocket, so I'm flat broke. I can't even pay for a bath until I save up some more money."

After she put on her dirty apron, Toko treated everyone to sugar-coated beans.

Today I had my monthly cramps. I could barely keep standing with the pain.

October

The women were lying this way and that like broken pencils. I made a stab at writing letters in the margins of a notebook.

I have tried to live to the fullest. It's been a long time since I've seen you, hasn't it? Not since we parted at Kanda. . . . I'm desperately lonely. When I realize that I don't have anyone in this whole world to care for me, I want to cry. Though I'm always alone, I want to hear kind words. And if someone is even a little bit considerate toward me, I cry for joy. I go so far as to sing in a loud voice, waltzing down the road in the dead of night. With the coming of autumn, I wanted to work but wasn't able to due to my usual poor health. Of course, putting food on the table became a major problem. I want money. If I could eat white rice with radish pickles crisp to the bite, I couldn't

14. "Zuizui zukkoro bashi," a children's song from Tokyo that became popular from the middle of the Meiji period. It accompanied a hand game for choosing the person who would be "It" similar to "eenie, meenie, minie, moe." Although there is one theory that this song is about the transport of tea containers from Kyoto to Edo in the Tokugawa period, the words are, for the most part, nonsensical.

ask for anything more. When you're poor you get down to basics. Tomorrow I'll be very happy. Some payment for a manuscript did come in, only a little, but I'm thinking about traveling as far as I can on it. All I do is look at maps. There is no joy to be found in the waitresses' common room on the second floor of this bar. It is only the soiled map above the stairs that makes me a daydreamer. Maybe I'll just go to a place called Ichiburi on the Japan Sea. Either to live or not to live. . . . Anyway, I just want to set out on a trip.

I can accept the words "Frailty, thy name is woman." They fit me exactly. But I am also untamed, and that's fine. There's nothing I can do but throw myself back into the wild. As things stand now, the fact is that I can't send any money back home. I've done unforgivable things to him. I've put up with a lot, smiling. If I set out on a journey, I plan to work a while until the country sky and earth gradually bring me back to health. Nothing worries me more than my weakened condition. Besides that, he is sick too. I don't like it. I want money. I negotiated to go to Ikaho hot springs to become a maid, but they claimed that an advance of one hundred yen was too much. You may wonder why I want to travel, but in my present situation I'll just explode. I've lived this long with all kinds of thoughtless, malicious gossip, and I don't care what people say. I'm completely exhausted. When winter comes, I'll meet you with the strength of ten people. I'll go where I can. Carrying only my bright yellow poetry manuscripts, which are my sun and moon, I will go to the Japan Sea.

Please take good care of yourself.

Goodbye. . . .

I am sorry that I have not written to you in such a long time. Are you keeping well? To send such a letter to someone as scornful as you will no doubt make you laugh at me. I actually shed tears over you. Even though we've separated, when I think of your illness I wish I were with you. I recall both hard and joyful times. But your cruel treatment made me miserable, embittered.

I have enclosed two one-yen bills. Please do not get angry, but use them for something. They say you are not with that woman any more. Was I making too much out of nothing? Autumn has come. My lips are freezing in the cold. Since we parted. . . .

Tai is working back in the kitchen too.

Dear Mother,

I'm sorry I'm late with the money. But I've had many expenses since the beginning of fall.

I hope you are well. I am okay. Could you please send me at your

convenience a little more of the herb medicine you sent recently? My dizziness stopped when I made tea with it. I like its fragrance, too.

As usual, since I have already stamped the money order with your name, all you have to do is take it as is to the post office.

Have you heard from Father? Just take it easy until your luck changes. I'm lying low since this is a bad year for me.

I pray for your health. I'll enclose a return envelope, so please answer.

My whole face was drenched with tears. I sobbed convulsively. No matter how I tried, I couldn't stop crying. Alone, writing letters on the second floor of such a rowdy place, my heart filled with thoughts of my elderly mother. I hoped she wouldn't die before I could do something. It would be too pathetic if she passed away alone in the oceanfront inn. I'll go to the post office and send it off first thing tomorrow morning. I had stashed six or seven one-yen bills in the padding of my obi sash. The money had been in and out of my bank account and didn't amount to much. Resting my head on the wooden pillow, I heard the two A.M. clacking of wooden clappers by the night watchman from the licensed quarters.

October

A gloomy autumn landscape loomed outside the window. Entrusting all of my possessions to my one basket, I boarded the train bound for Okitsu. Beyond Toke there was a small tunnel.

Long ago pilgrims to Rome

Exited out of Simplon, an unknown hole, and went south.

I really liked this poem by Banri. I had heard that Simplon, in the Alps, was the longest tunnel in the world. A tunnel on a solitary journey without a destination evoked depressing emotions, and I feared going to the sea. Memories of my former lover's face and thoughts of my mother sustained me.

I alighted at Mikado. Lights had started to turn on, illuminating the mulberry fields in front of the station. Here and there, thatched roofs caught my eye. I stood absent-mindedly in the station holding onto my basket.

"Is there an inn here?"

"There's one if you go on ahead to Chōja."

I cut through Hiari Beach. Here in Chiba, the awesome fury of the swelling tides of October aroused me. There was nothing but sea and sky and beach. Dusk fell. *This wide expanse of nature underscored the insig-*

nificance of human efforts. A dog howled from afar. A girl in a short quilted ikat jacket was walking a black dog as she hurried toward me singing. With each surging wave the dog stiffened its neck in fear and howled at the ocean. The howling and rumbling created an ominous combination.

"Is there an inn around here?" I called out to the pretty maiden. She was the only other person on the beach.

"Our house isn't an inn, but you can stay there if you like."

Without a sign of fear, she took me home. She lit the way back to her house, all the while skillfully blowing on a purple Chinese lantern plant.

Looking like a shipwreck at the edge of Hiari Beach, the small teahouse was adjacent to the town of Chōja. The elderly couple who ran it kindly heated the bath and took care of me. How amazing to discover a world so carefree and natural. Recollections of the fearsome atmosphere of the rough city bar were enough to frighten me. I couldn't identify the dried tails of fish pasted on the ceiling.

The electric light in my room was dim, as was my wandering soul. Although I wasn't able to tour the Japan Sea coast as I had really yearned to do, I found the scenery in Chiba to be even more stirring. The roofs of the houses from Ichifuri to the neighboring Oyashirazu were covered with what looked like heavy pickling stones. The salt spray blanketed everything as far as the train tracks. Stinging thistle bloomed atop a crumbled bluff. I remembered all this from many years before. Snuggling into the futon that reeked of the sea, I took out a bottle of chloroform from my basket and applied a few drops to my handkerchief. It was more than I could bear. Quietly smothered by memories and moved by a present urge to vanish, I pressed the horrible chloroform flat against my nose, like a pressed flower.

November

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when I awoke dreamily to the sound of the rumbling of distant thunder, followed by the heavy rain beating against the window. I quietly opened a window, since the vinegary chloroform odor still pervaded the room. Pale, rainy fog painted the beach in the inlet. It was a subdued morning. I could smell sardines grilling in the main house.

My head hurt so much at noon that I went with the girl to take the black dog for a walk. We set off in the direction of Hiari Beach. Women and children were gathered in small groups in a fisherman's house near the beach, spearing fresh sardines on bamboo skewers. The skewered sardines lining the straw mats were speckled with silver from the faint sunlight that seeped through the rain. After getting a bucket-

ful of fresh sardines, the girl pulled up weeds from around the area and covered the fish.

"This is ten sen worth," she said on the way home, thrusting the heavy bucket out in front of me.

That night we feasted on sardines in soy sauce, sake, and vinegar, along with stewed seaweed and raw eggs. The girl, Onobu, said she would walk from Chiba to Kisarazu in good weather selling dried fish. While I sipped tea and chatted with the old couple and Onobu, a pale blue crab scurried across the threshold. I became quite envious from my glimpse of these people's lives that were as unchanging as a rock. I was worn out by my vagabond existence. The shutters creaked like a ship at sea, as if the wind had caught its sails. *The old-fashioned seashore inn could have leapt from the pages of Chekhov.* Around here, with the coming of November, the soles of my feet were already frozen.

November

I saw Fuji.

I saw Mount Fuji.

As long as red snow doesn't fall,

Fuji doesn't deserve to be praised as much of a mountain.

I'm not going to let that mountain defeat me,
I thought countless times from a train window.
Threatening my disconnected life,
The heart of that peaked mountain
Looks coldly down at my eyes.

I saw Fuji.

I saw Mount Fuji.

O raven

Fly over that mountain from the ridge to the summit,
Sneer with your scarlet beak, if you please.

O wind!

Fuji is a palace of sorrow for snow.

Blow to your heart's content.

Fujiyama is the image of Japan,

The Sphinx,

Nostalgia steeped in dream,

A palace of sorrow where lives the demon.

See Fuji.

See Mount Fuji.

In your image sketched long ago by Hokusai,

I saw your youthful spark, but

Now you're an old decayed mud pie,

Always rolling your eyes skyward.

Why do you hide yourself in snow?

O raven, o wind,

Hit that exceedingly clear white

Shoulder of Mount Fuji.

That is not a silver citadel,

But a snowy palace of sorrow that unhappiness haunts.

O Mount Fuji!

Here stands one woman unwilling to bow,

One woman sneering at you.

O Mount Fuji, O Fuji

Until your plain but fiery passion

Whirls and groans,

And strikes this stubborn woman's head,

I'll wait gaily whistling.

I was no better off than before. Wearing an apron, I went to open a window on the second floor, and could just faintly make out Mount Fuji far in the distance. I have passed by the foot of that mountain numerous unhappy times in my travels by train. But even though my recent trip was short, the lonely scenery of those two days in Chiba cleansed and beautified my body and soul. Like a solitary cedar standing alone in the field, I require this kind of respite and joy.

We were to celebrate autumn leaf day tomorrow, and we would have to dress up like lunatics in matching scarlet kimonos. How could city people think up such comic ideas without a hint of embarrassment? Another new woman had arrived. So again this evening I would apply my mask of makeup and fool them with a duplicitous smile. They called it the floating world, which was right on the mark. My mother had sent me two white cotton camisoles while I was away.

January

A ring I unexpectedly received from a drunk customer at the cafe came in handy. I hocked it for thirteen yen and went shopping with Toki-

chan along the streets of Sendagi. At a used-furniture store I bought a box brazier and a small, low dining table. After getting together an assortment of pickle and tea bowls, and even a tea set, the rest could barely cover half a month's rent. The absurdity of thirteen yen.

It was close to ten o'clock when we arrived home. Each of us grasping one side of our heavy loot, we dragged it upstairs. We could see our breath in the cold air.

"Hey! There's a ballad teacher in the place across from ours . . . Look, isn't that great!"

Umbrella outfurled.

Hold aloft the flower storm of the licensed quarters!

About the time that this samurai's sickness passes,

It's spring in Edo, purple with haze.

From the second floor of the building a stone's throw across the way, I could hear this melancholy samisen melody. Through our slightly open window shutters, I could see the delicate frame of their latticed shoji by the light that shone brightly next door.

"Let's just go to sleep now and take a bath tomorrow. Did you borrow the top futon?"

Toki-chan slammed our shoji shut. The bottom futon was left over from when Taiko and I had shared a room. She had left it behind when she went to marry Kobori, along with pots and knives. I recalled the most wonderful and, at the same time, most oppressive memories from the second floor of the bar in Hongō where we had lived. Our neighbors on the second floor were a nice couple—the man was just out of the army, and his wife washed diapers. When I've taken care of business, I'll take out my diary from that period and read it.

"I wonder what's happened to Taiko?"

"She's probably finally found happiness. Kobori seems like such a strong man that nobody could beat him up. . . ."

"Please take me along with you on your next visit, okay?"

Covering ourselves with the quilt we borrowed from the lady downstairs, we went to bed. I made an entry in my diary.

First of all, out of thirteen yen:

Low dining table	1 yen	
Box brazier	1 yen	
One flower in a pot	35 sen	
Rice bowls	20 sen	Two
Soup bowls	10 sen	Two
Horseradish pickle	5 sen	

Radish pickle	11 sen	
Chopsticks	5 sen	Five sets
Tea set with tray	1 yen 10 sen	
Momotarō container	15 sen	
Plates	20 sen	Two
Rent (3-mat room)	6 yen	(2/3rds of a month)
Metal brazier chopsticks	10 sen	
Mochi grill	14 sen	
Aluminum soup ladle	10 sen	
Rice paddle	3 sen	
One packet of tissue paper	20 sen	
Astringent	28 sen	
Ritual sake for the altar	25 sen	One measure
Moving-in noodles	30 sen	For the people downstairs
Remainder, 1 yen 16 sen		

"I can't believe that's all that's left. . . ."

As I prodded my cheek with the tip of my pencil and wrote in my diary, I caused Toki-chan, high nose and all, to glance my way.

"Do we have any charcoal?"

"The lady downstairs said she'd get the charcoal from the usual shop and arrange it so that we would pay at the end of the month."

Looking relieved, Toki-chan lifted up the sidelocks of her butterfly tresses with her slender fingers as she leaned against my back.

"I'm telling you everything's okay. From tomorrow I'll work really hard, so lift up your spirits and study, okay? I'll quit my job in Asakusa. I think it would be good to work at one of the cafes around Hibiya and commute, they say that there are lots of drinkers in that area. . . ."

"If I commute, that'll be fun for both of us. Food doesn't taste good if you eat alone, you know."

I contemplated what had been a complicated day. I had received two measures of uncooked rice from Setsu-chan at the Hagiwaras. The painter Mizoguchi had wrapped up some of the mochi for me, which he said someone had sent from Hokkaido. He had taken my ring to the pawn shop.

"Let's both of us work really hard for a while, okay?"

"It'll be fine if I can send thirty yen a month to my mother back in Zōshiki," Toki-chan responded.

"I'll be getting a little bit from my manuscripts, so we'll get by if we just stop worrying and work."

I wondered if it was snow. There was a muffled sound of something hitting the window.

"Cyclamen flowers smell horrible." Gently pushing away the flower-pot from the head of the bed, Toki-chan removed her hair ornaments and combs. "Now let's really go to sleep," she said. In the dark room, the scent of the red cyclamens was the only unpleasantness.

February

Though you see the swirling light snowfall drift,
It disappears, without a trace, an evanescence.
Willows may sway gently
In the spring, the dawn of the heart.

Hearing Toki-chan singing this song, I woke up to find bare white ankles astride my pillow.

"Hey, are you up already?"

"It's snowing."

When I got up I saw that the water was boiling. Atop the plank outside the window where we had rigged up a stove, the simmering rice was bubbling over, frothy white.

"Have they already brought the charcoal?"

"I borrowed some from the lady downstairs."

Toki-chan had never before done kitchen work. She was wiping rice bowls with wonder. *I drank my tea at the minuscule low table with contentment.*

"For now, let's not tell the people at the Yamato Inn where we are, okay?"

Toki-chan nodded and warmed her hands on the small brazier.

"Are you going out even in this snow?"

"Sure."

"Well, then, I'll go meet Shiroki at the Jiji Newspaper. I've sent them a children's story."

"If you get any money, please cook something hot. I'll be looking around here and there, so I'll be late."

I made my introductory greeting to the couple in the six-mat room next door. They ran a used-clothing store. I also met the husband of the landlady who supposedly was head of a scaffolding team. Everyone was boisterous, like shitamachi types.

"This house used to face the road. But there was a fire and now it stands back from the road like this. . . . In the front is someone's mistress, at the end of the alley is a male ballad singer. It can be really noisy, you'll see. . . ."

I stared in fascination at the landlady, whose teeth were blackened like in the old days.

"Is she somebody's mistress? I got a glimpse of her on the street, and she seemed to have a fine, upstanding appearance."

"The woman downstairs was saying that you're quite a nice girl, not the usual type we get around here."

The two of us set out for the snowy town, both with our hair done up in tresses. Like lifeless foam, the snow fell haphazardly, yet it seemed as if it were trying to search out my nose and eyes.

"It's tough to make any money, isn't it?" Snow, fall as much as you like, until you bury me. I obstinately twirled the umbrella while walking. All the windows along the wide street in Yaesu were lit. Women in purple or red coats were returning home from work, walking against the snow. Since I was not wearing a coat, my sleeves were soaking, as wet as a wretched toad.

Shiraki had already gone home. Served me right! This kind of run-around made me want to go back to working at a cafe. But Toki-chan told me to keep to my writing. I left my standard message at the large receptionist's desk of the newspaper company, about my having trouble making ends meet. I wrote it by hand in linking blurred letters.

The door of the Jiji Company was interesting. It revolved just like a water wheel. When I pushed on it twice, it went back to right where it started. The mailman was laughing at me. What petty people. It was as if the towering building was telling me that it didn't matter if an insignificant nobody like myself lived or died. If I could own that building and sell it, I could buy a lifetime's supply of all my necessities, besides sending a long telegram back home. If I told all my hard-hearted relatives and cold friends that I was going to strike it rich, they would dismiss me out of hand. "Shameless Fumiko, just get out of here."

Toki-chan was probably shuffling numbly in the snow like a stray dog.

February

Tonight again I waited in vain. Heating the tea at the brazier, I ate dinner alone, later than usual. It was already past one o'clock. . . . Last night was two o'clock, the night before one-thirty. She had always returned home exactly at twelve-thirty. I couldn't imagine what was happening to Toki-chan. A couple of half-finished manuscripts were scattered on the low table. There was only eleven sen left in the house.

Last night I missed the chance to ask about the ten yen that Toki-chan had had me put aside. She had taken it without telling me. I wondered what she had done with it.

The rice in the steamer had gotten soggy from being repeatedly

reheated. The clam miso stew had gotten too thick. I couldn't write any more. I thrust my desk next to the vanity and, with resignation, sadly spread out the futon. I wished I could afford to go to the hairdresser. It had been more than ten days since I had last had my hair done up. My scalp itched like crazy. It would be too lonely for her to come home to total darkness, so I turned on the light and dimmed it with a purple cloth covering the shade.

Three o'clock.

I awoke at the sound of the landlady downstairs making a fuss. Then came the heavy footsteps that indicated that Toki-chan was drunk. And it appeared that she was.

"I'm sorry!"

Her hair was disheveled, her face pale. Wearing a purple coat, Toki-chan crumpled at the foot of the futon. Just like a spoiled child, she burst out in tears. Even though I had readied a speech, I was silent, unable to utter a single word.

"Good-bye, Toki-chan!" A man's voice disappeared from beneath the window, and at the entrance of the alley sounded the silly honking of a car horn.

February

We ate the meal without looking at each other.

"These days we've been slacking off, so you wipe the stairs, okay, and I'll wash clothes . . .," I suggested to Toki-chan.

"No, I'll do it, so just leave everything as it is, okay?"

Her eyelids were swollen from lack of sleep. She was such a touching sight that I could hardly stand it.

"Toki-chan, where'd you get the ring?"

On her slender ring finger sparkled a white stone in a platinum setting.

"And that purple coat?"

"..."

"Toki-chan, have you gotten tired of being poor?"

It pained me to come face to face with the landlady downstairs.

"Hey, Sister! Something's gotten into Toki."

He spoke while the water ran from the faucet, and his words pained my heart.

"Right over there, you know, with a car horn going off like that in the middle of the night . . . I'm the area representative. Even a little indiscretion really causes problems. . . ."

He was right. The words pressed on my heart as I washed.

February

It has been five days since Toki-chan last came home. I awaited news desperately. She was lost to that ring and coat. What has she gotten herself into? I kept telling her that poverty wasn't disgraceful . . . but an eighteen-year-old probably wants both red lipstick and purple coats. I bought five cheap sweets with the few pennies I had, and ate them in bed reading old magazines. Despite past declarations about the honor in poverty, those last five cheap sweets failed to convince my stomach. *Nibbling on leftover cabbage, I fantasized about the texture of white rice.*

I swung open the closet with my outstretched hand. I had nothing. Tears began to blur my sight. I could turn on the light. . . . As though cheated by cheap sweets, my stomach growled. The penetrating aroma of grilled saury fish emanated from the used-clothes dealer next door.

Hunger and sex! Could I get a bowl of rice by doing what Toki-chan did?

Hunger and sex! Wanting to cry, I chewed on these words.

February

Please read this and don't be angry with me. I've been forced to work at a house of assignation in Asakusa by the man who gave me the ring. He has a wife, but he says he'll divorce her. Please don't laugh, will you? He's a contractor, and he's forty-two. He had lots of kimono made up for me, and when I told him about you, he said he'd send you about forty yen each month. So I'm happy.

Tears burned like fire as I struggled through her letter, unable to read straight. This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. My teeth grated like metal. When had I ever asked her for anything like this! Fool, what a fool to be so, so . . . was she so fragile? With eyes completely swollen, blubbery until I was blinded, I turned toward my memory of her and cried out my soul.

You didn't tell me where you are. What did you mean by a house of assignation?

And not such an old man . . . forty-two!

Kimono, kimono.

What was it with the ring and the kimono? Were you so lacking in willpower?

Ah, with that lovely figure, like a wild lily, soft, light-pink skin, and jet-black hair, still she had been a virgin. That worm from the floating

world probably stole her first kiss. . . . She used to tilt her lovely neck and sing to me about spring. Damn you, you middle-aged lech!

“Miss Hayashi, there’s a registered letter for you!”

The woman from downstairs sounded unusually good-natured. I picked up the envelope she had placed on the stairs. It was a registered letter from Shiraki at the Jiji Newspaper. Twenty-three yen! It was payment for the manuscripts of the children’s stories. I wouldn’t have to starve, not for a while. My spirits rose until I was almost ecstatic. But then, God, maybe it was this bit of luck, but now I felt so terribly alone. God, the friend who should share my joy was in the arms of a forty-two-year-old man . . . how could this have happened?

“As usual, I’m praying for your hard work and diligence.” Shiraki had enclosed one of his kind, solicitous letters.

I opened the window wide and heard the temple bells of Ueno. I would eat some fine sushi that night.

Appendix A

Terms

chikuwa. Fish paste formed into a tube along a stick, steamed, and then grilled.

Daruma. Rounded, papier-mâché doll representing a legless, armless Buddha.

futon. Japanese bedding, much like thickly padded quilts, spread on the floor at night, and put away in closets during the day. The term refers to both the mattress and the coverlet.

ganmodoki. deep-fried tofu patty.

geta. Wooden zori, or sandals, with thongs and two ridges on the soles that significantly raise the foot from the floor.

jōruri. A ballad drama acted out by very large puppets manipulated by several people.

katakana. one of two syllabic scripts used in Japanese. In this era, katakana was the first script taught to students, and women’s names were most often officially registered in it.

kon’nyaku. A jelly-like food made from the root of the arum plant.

kotatsu. A low table with a heating unit under it. One sits at the table covered by a quilt to keep the heat in.

kōya dofu. Dried tofu softened by simmering in a sweet broth.

miso. Soybean paste. Used most often as the basis for the soup that commonly accompanies meals.

mitsumame. A sweet mixture of gelatin, fruit, and small black beans.

mochi. Pounded, steamed rice formed into a thick pancake shape.

Momotarō. “Peach Boy” (from the legend of the little boy born out of a peach). The reference could indicate either the shape of the container or a design painted on the container.

Namu Amidabutsu. Literally, “Buddha, I implore you.” The opening line to the Lotus Sutra, commonly recited as a mantra or prayer.

noren. Short curtain that hangs in the entry of shops.

obi. The wide stiff sash worn with a kimono.

ochazuke. A simple meal of green tea over cooked rice.

oden. A stew made of vegetables, fish products, tofu, and kon'nyaku and eaten with hot mustard.

onnagata. A kabuki actor who specializes in playing female roles.

samisen. A three-stringed musical instrument that accompanies folk ballads. The samisen is also used in performances of kabuki and bunraku theater.

sembei. A cracker made of pounded rice. Sembei are formed into various shapes and are grilled over coals.

sen. One-hundredth of a yen.

shitamachi. The geographically low-lying parts of Tokyo, known as an artisans' and entertainment district. People from this area are often stereotyped as friendly, jovial, and straightforward.

shō. A measure containing about two quarts.

shōchū. Inexpensive distilled spirits made from sweet potatoes.

shōji. A translucent paper sliding door separating a room from a corridor or an exterior veranda.

tanka. A thirty-one syllable poem written in 5-7-5-7-7 meter.

tatami. Thick, woven-rush matting that is recessed into the whole floor of a room. It comes in 3' × 6' sections.

yukata. An unlined cotton kimono worn in summer, usually in the evening.

Appendix B

Names

Artzybashev. Russian Modernist Mikhail Petrovich Artzybashev (1879–1927), who wrote about the aspirations and self-indulgence of the intelligentsia during the last years of the Russian Empire. His work had achieved prominence in Japan through a series of translations in the 1910s. Hayashi's protagonist refers to his novel *Lande's Death*, translated in 1919.

Banri. Hirano Banri (1855–1947), tanka poet.

Chikamatsu. Chikamatsu Shūkō (1876–1944), novelist generally categorized with the Naturalist movement. Chikamatsu's wide-ranging personal confessions, for example, in "Kurokami" (Black hair, 1922), helped foster the I-novel tradition.

Daikoku. One of the seven gods of good fortune, Daikoku brings food and drink.

Hagiwara. Hagiwara Kyōjirō (1899–1938), the cofounder (with Tsuboi Shigei) of *Aka to kuro* (Red and black, 1923–1924) and *Bungei Kaihō* (Literary liberation, 1927). His major work is the poetic anthology *Shikei senkoku* (Death sentence, 1925).

Hakushū. Kitahara Hakushū (1885–1942), Symbolist poet.

Hamsun. Knut Hamsun (1859–1952), Norwegian writer and recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920, who influenced modern literature through his emphasis on psychological states, fragmented writing, use of flashbacks, and lyricism. Hayashi wrote that after she had read his novel *Hunger*, she was convinced that she too could become a writer.

Hashizume. Hashizume Ken (1900–1964), poet, critic, and fiction writer. He was an Anarchist and Dadaist.

Hinkelmann. Protagonist of a 1923 play of the same name by Ernst Toller (1893–1939), German playwright and poet.

- Iida.** Iida Tokutarō (1903–1933), Anarchist critic and writer. He was Hirabayashi Taiko's husband.
- Kachusha.** A character in the play *Fukkatsu*, a translation of Henri Bataille's dramatization of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, which was first performed in March 1914 by Matsui Sumako. Her Kachusha song became an instant hit. In October 1914, a silent movie of this name was released. The role of Kachusha was played by the *onnagata* Tachibana Shinjiro.
- Kaita.** Murayama Kaita (1896–1919), a poet and painter, and author of a poetic anthology *Kaita no utaeru* (Kaita's song; published posthumously).
- Katō.** Katō Takeo (1888–1956), an employee of the Shinchōsha publishing company and a fiction writer.
- Kasai.** Kasai Zenzō (1887–1928), writer best known for *Ko o tsurete* (With children on my hands, 1918) in which, having been evicted from his rooms, the narrator wanders the streets with his children, homeless and penniless.
- Kuroshima.** Kuroshima Denji (1898–1943), a Proletarian writer who wrote antiwar novels based on his experience as a soldier in Siberia.
- Lunacharskii.** Anatolii Vasilievich Lunacharskii (1875–1933), Russian literary critic and playwright.
- Maedagawa.** Maedagawa Hiroichirō (1888–1957), a Proletarian writer affiliated with the journals *Tane maku hito* (The sower, 1921), and *Bungei sensen* (Literary front, 1924).
- Murō.** Murō Saisei (1889–1962), poet heralded as a major literary figure from the late 1910s. Murō later turned successfully to short stories and novels.
- Oshun and Denbei.** The courtesan Oshun is the central character in a kabuki play about double suicide, *Chikagoro kawara no tatehiki* (Recent riverbed rivalry) by Tamekawa Shūsuke, most active as a kabuki and kyōgen playwright between 1751 and 1763.
- Saigo.** Saigo Takamori (1827–1877), a Satsuma leader of the Meiji Restoration who opposed the foreign policy of the new Meiji government. In 1877 he led a major rebellion.
- Sakae.** Tsuboi Sakae (1900–1967), a well-known writer of "women's literature" and children's stories. Perhaps her best known novel, *Nijūshi no hitomi* (Twenty-four eyes, 1952), chronicled the lives and bittersweet reunion of students of a young female teacher in a remote village. She was the wife of Tsuboi Shigei (1898–1975).
- Satō.** Satō Haruo (1892–1964), Japanese Modernist writer and poet best remembered for the novel *Yameru sōbi* (The sick rose, 1917), a work also known by the title *Rural Melancholy*.

- Schnitzler.** Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931), Austrian playwright and novelist.
- Shiga.** Shiga Naoya (1883–1971), author. His novella *Wakai* (Reconciliation, 1917), told of his own reconciliation with his father. His only full-length novel, *An'ya kōro* (A dark night's passing, 1921–1923, 1938) has often been heralded as the quintessential I-novel.
- Shimazaki.** Shimazaki Tōson, (1872–1943), poet who made an enormously influential contribution to modern poetry in his early years. He later became one of the preeminent Naturalist novelists.
- Shizue.** Tomotani Shizue, a poet with whom Hayashi published four issues of a small poetry journal *Futari* (Two people) from 1924.
- Steiner.** Max Steiner (1806–1856), German philosopher. Tsuji Jun translated *On the Self* into Japanese.
- Sumako.** Matsui Sumako (stage name of Kobayashi Masako [1886–1919]), actress best known for her leading roles in the Bungei kyōkai (Literary Association) productions of modern western dramas in the early 1910s, and then for those with the Geijutsuza (Arts theater) that she formed with her lover Shimamura Hōgetsu. She played the role of Kachusha.
- Taiko.** Hirabayashi Taiko (1905–1972) began as a Proletarian writer but achieved her greatest prominence through her postwar autobiographical accounts of her hardships and frustrations as a "woman writer," as well as by her portraits of gangsters in *Chitei no uta* (Song from the bowels of the earth, 1948). She and Hayashi were close compatriots in the mid-1920s, and Hirabayashi wrote several biographical sketches of Hayashi after her death.
- Takahashi.** Takahashi Oden, the wicked female protagonist of a series of historical novels. Kanagaki Robun's (1829–1894) version is the most famous account of her life.
- Takuboku.** Ishikawa Takuboku (1885–1912), tanka poet and essayist, whose critical perspectives on social conditions served as a precursor to the Proletarian literature of the 1920s.
- Tsuboi.** Tsuboi Shigei (1898–1975), poet and co-founder (with Hagiwara Kyōjirō) of the Dadaist-Anarchist poetry journal *Aka to kuro* (Red and black, 1923–1924) and *Bungei kaihō* (Literary liberation, 1927). Tsuboi later played a prominent role in Proletarian literature. Tsuboi Sakae (1900–1967), a well-known writer of "women's literature," was his wife.
- Tsuji.** Tsuji Jun (1884–1944), critic who spurred the New-Dadaist movement in Japan.
- Verhaeren.** Emile Verhaeren (1855–1916), Belgian playwright and poet.