



THAT day, Kimie did not have to report for work at the cafe on the Ginza until three o'clock. From her rented room in Honmura-cho in Ichigaya, she strolled out along the Moat [around the Imperial Palace compound]. Boarding a bus at the approach to the palace gates, she got off in Hibiya. This side of the steel railway bridge, she turned off into an alley lined with the banners of eating and drinking shops, like some neighborhood in the suburbs. She was looking for the window of a rented office with a sign in gilt characters that read "The Golden Tortoise, Divination and Fortune-telling."

Since the close of the previous year, Kimie had had several strange, disturbing experiences. Once, on the way back from the kabuki with two or three fellow waitresses, the cuffs of all her sleeves, from her sealskin coat to her matching haori\* of Oshima pongee and her padded silk jacket clear through to her undergarment, had been slashed off by a mysterious passer-by. Then, an ornamental comb of genuine tortoiseshell inlaid with pearls had been pulled out of her hair while she was unaware. If it was done by a thief, that was that. What made her feel that it was the handiwork of someone with a grudge against her, however, was the fact that subsequently a dead kitten had been tossed into her clothes closet. Even though Kimie had been leading a really wild, abandoned

\*A light, short coat worn over the kimono (tr. note).

life these past months and years, think as she might, she had no memory of having done anything to incur such enmity. At first, she had merely thought it odd and not paid it much mind. Recently, however, in a small trade tabloid called *Street Scenes*, which mainly retailed gossip about the women who worked at the cafes and restaurants on and around the Ginza, something about her had appeared that until then Kimie had thought no one could have known. Suddenly uneasy, she had decided to follow her friends' advice and consult a fortune-teller.

The article in *Street Scenes* had been neither slander nor defamation. On the contrary, it was a harmless and inoffensive article, brimful of praise for Kimie's beauty. It told how as a young girl Kimie had had a mole on her inner thigh, said to be a sign that when she grew up she would enter one of the entertainment professions. After she had become a waitress, at some time or other the mole had split up into three moles. No doubt, the article continued, Kimie must be secretly overjoyed and in a state of suspenseful anticipation over this sign that she would find three patrons. When Kimie read this, it had given her a truly unpleasant, ominous feeling. It was certainly the case that on her left inner thigh a mole which had at first been by itself had been joined by two other moles without her exactly noticing when. It was the absolute truth. Kimie had first noticed the moles at about the time she had gone to work on the Ginza, having started out at a cafe on Ueno Pond the previous spring. There were only two men who could have known about them. One was Matsuzaki, a lusty old gentleman with whom she'd been having an affair since her pre-waitress days. The other was a writer called Kiyooka Susumu, who had surged into popularity since she had met him at the cafe

in Ueno. The location of the mole was such that not even her family could have been expected to know about it. Even the attendant at her bathhouse could not have been that observant. Kimie didn't particularly care one way or another about the moles, but how had a newspaper reporter known about something that even a bathhouse attendant would fail to observe? Joining these doubts to her suspicions from the previous year, Kimie was suddenly possessed by a vague fear. There was no telling what might happen after this, she thought. Although up to now she had never so much as drawn a lot at a temple, let alone performed devotions to the gods, she abruptly felt she ought to see a fortune-teller.

This latter-day wizard, who had set up shop in a single room in an apartment house, was a man of about forty. Dressed in a Western business suit, with celluloid tortoiseshell glasses, he had a clipped mustache. His demeanor, as he leaned against his desk, at first glance was no different from that of a doctor or lawyer greeting his client. Over the window, which afforded frequent views of passing national railway trains, a framed inscription read: "Divine Aid. The Writings of Heihachiro." On the walls, there were maps of Japan and the world. Alongside the desk, a bookcase with staggered shelves held foreign tomes and Japanese books in traditional bindings.

Taking off her light shawl but keeping it in her hand, Kimie seated herself in the indicated chair. The fortune-teller, closing a half-read volume on the desk, swiveled his chair so that he faced Kimie.

"Does it concern marriage? Or shall I tell you your overall fortune in life?" the fortune-teller inquired, a professional smile on his face. Kimie, lowering her eyes, answered: "It doesn't particularly concern marriage."

"Well then, we'll look into more general matters." Deliberately informal, evidently at pains to put Kimie at her ease, like a gynecologist inquiring into a patient's condition, the fortune-teller continued: "Having one's fortune told is very interesting, it seems. All sorts of clients come here. Some people even stop by every morning on their way to the office to get their fortune told for that day. However, from the days of old there has been no telling whether a prediction will actually come true or not. Even if you draw a bad reading, there's nothing to be alarmed about. How old are you?"

"My sign came up this year."

"In that case, your sign would be the sign of the Rat. What day were you born?"

"The third of May."

"The third of May, in the sign of the Rat. Let's see . . ." Taking up the yarrow sticks and muttering something under his breath, the fortune-teller set out the divining blocks on the desk. "The divination sign for your age is *richūdan*. However, if one read out the commentary from the book, it would probably be long-winded and not to the point. Therefore I will simply tell you my thoughts as they occur to me. Generally speaking, people who belong to this *richūdan* sign, both men and women, tend to be estranged from their relatives and to have very few friends. They pass through the world alone. Furthermore, judging from the month and day of your birth, you belong to the *yukon-senpu* sign. This sign means that even if there has been an upheaval in your life, things will gradually revert to normal. As I consider this sign, it seems to me that you are in transition. There has been a great change in your life, but now things are slowly returning to the way they were. If we compare it to weather, there has been

a storm, and it hasn't yet altogether gone away. But it would probably be correct to say that things are quieting down and well on the way back to their original calm."

Kimie, fingering the shawl in her lap, stared vaguely at the fortune-teller. It was not as if this divination had nothing to do with her. Something about it was right on the mark. Feeling somehow embarrassed, Kimie lowered her eyes again. The diviner's saying that there had been a change in her life no doubt referred to her having ignored her parents' advice and run away to Tokyo, where she had ended up as a waitress.

Kimie had left home to escape from a marriage proposal her parents and all her relatives had urged upon her. Kimie's natal house was in the village of Maruen in Saitama Prefecture, about two hours away by train from Ueno Station. The family business was the manufacture of a kind of sweet that had become a noted local specialty. Among Kimie's friends from grade school was a girl called Kyoko, who'd gone on to become a geisha in Ushigome and within a year had been redeemed by her patron and established as his mistress. The two girls constantly visited each other. When Kimie, not caring to become a country wife, had run away from home, she'd gone straight to Kyoko's house. Even though her people had come and taken her back to the country several times, she'd always run away again. At their wits' end, her parents let her go her own way, giving her permission to become an office worker or a bank clerk.

Although Kimie, through the good offices of Kyoko's patron (a man named Kawashima), had presently found work at an insurance company, this was no more than a temporary sop to her parents. Within half a year, she was out of work and spending her days in idleness at Kyoko's

place. Suddenly, it was discovered that Kyoko's patron had embezzled company funds. The case was sent to the prosecutor's office. Kyoko began inviting men whom she had known from her geisha days back to her house. When that failed to make ends meet, she went around to assignation houses and marriage agencies for customers. Kimie, observing her friend's easy circumstances, thought it a good way to make a living. At some point, she'd entered the profession herself. But it would be dreadful to be arrested, Kyoko said; she was going back to being a geisha. Although thinking it might be nice to be a geisha, Kimie knew that when one applied for a license, the police were required by law to make inquiries of the girl's family. She'd had no choice but to become a waitress.

Although Kyoko had to send money to her people in the country, Kimie was under no such necessity. A country girl herself, she felt no great need to deck herself out in the latest clothes and accessories and, unless invited, never went to movies and plays. The desultory perusal of a novel or a book of short stories on the trolley was the extent of her amusements. Other than that, she would say, she didn't even know herself what she liked to do. As long as she had enough to pay the rent and her hairdresser, she had no wish to squeeze money out of men. Often, for no extra charge, she had done exactly what the man wanted, so that no matter how lascivious a life she had led, Kimie thought, it was not likely that she had incurred any great degree of dislike from anyone.

"So there is nothing I have to particularly worry about at present?"

"How is your health? If there is nothing particularly the matter at present, then it does not seem to me that you will have any serious health problems in the near future.

As I previously indicated, there has been a disturbance in your life, but now things are quiet, indeed somewhat stagnant. Perhaps you haven't noticed it yourself, but you may have some feeling of uneasiness, of disquiet. However, as I mentioned earlier, according to your divination sign the temporary change in your life is gradually abating, and so I do not think there will be any untoward events from now on. However, if there is something that troubles you, and you are wondering what to do, let us, in regard to that particular matter, take another reading. By that means, I believe, we will obtain a general idea of what it is." So saying, the fortune-teller took up the yarrow sticks again.

"Actually, there is something I'm slightly anxious about," Kimie started to say. But it was impossibly difficult to come right out and tell him about the moles. "I don't remember having done anything in particular, but somehow I feel as if somebody has misunderstood me."

"Yes, yes." Closing his eyes in a significant kind of way, the diviner once more counted out the yarrow sticks and placed the divining blocks. "Indeed. This sign signifies that the shadow accompanies the object. It's possible that you are worrying *too much* about various things. In this way, something that is not comes to seem as if it were. To use the language I employed just now, there is illusion and there is actuality. When a thing exists, it naturally casts a shadow. According to time and circumstances, however, the opposite sometimes happens, and the thing is created by the shadow. Therefore, if you eliminate the shadow, matters will be peacefully settled of their own accord. If you will put yourself in such a frame of mind, I believe that you will have nothing to worry about."

Thinking that what the diviner said was extremely

plausible, and that she'd been fretting over trivialities, Kimie immediately felt reassured. Although there were other things she wanted to ask about, she was afraid that if she went into detail not only her present occupation but her having made the rounds of the assignation houses and marriage agencies with Kyoko two or three years ago would come to light. It occurred to her that she might ask about the dead kitten and the vanished comb, but she did not want to be late for work. She would leave things as they were today.

"Excuse me, but what is your fee?" Kimie slipped her hand into her obi for her purse.

"My regular fee is one yen, but please give what you feel is right."

The door opened, and two men in Western clothes entered. Not only did they unceremoniously plunk themselves down in the chairs right alongside Kimie's, but one of them stared round-eyed at her as if he were a detective. Averting her face, Kimie got up. Without saying good-bye to the diviner, she opened the door and stepped into the corridor.

When she emerged from the building, in the clear, serene sunlight of early May, the young foliage shone a vivid green all along the Moat from Hibiya Park. In the groups of people waiting for the trolley, the flutter of fashionable clothing caught the eye. Glancing at her wristwatch, passing under the steel railway bridge, Kimie approached Sukiyabashi Bridge. Past the Asahi Newspaper Building, advertisement balloons were moored to the roofs of several of the tall buildings. Unconsciously pausing, Kimie gazed up at the spectacle. Then, behind her, a voice called out "Kimie-san," and the sound of sandals hurried toward her. Wondering who it could be,

Kimie turned around. It was Matsuko, a girl of twenty-one or -two with whom she had worked last year at the cafe on Ueno Pond. Since that time, Matsuko's clothes and general appearance had greatly improved. Guessing from her own experience, Kimie said: "Matsuko-san. You're on the Ginza too."

"Yes. And no." After this ambivalent answer, Matsuko went on: "Toward the end of last year, I spent some time in the Japan Alps. After that, I played around for a while. But now I want to work again. I'm on my way to a bar called the Lenin in the Fifth Chome. You probably know it, Kimie-san. Atsuko, that girl who was with us at the Salon Lac, is there now. So I thought I'd go take a look."

"Oh, you were in the Alps? I hadn't heard. I've been at the Don Juan ever since then."

"Recently, I heard from one of my customers in the Alps. It might be nice to see him again, but I just don't have the time. How is that sensei\* of yours? Still the same?"

Kimie, while thinking that the respectful appellation must refer to the writer Kiyooka Susumu, thought it best to subtly sound out Matsuko. Among her many customers, there were also lawyers and doctors, all of them sensei.

"Yes. He's frightfully busy these days, what with the newspapers and films and all that."

Matsuko, however she interpreted this, seemed to be deeply impressed. "Oh, is that so-o-o . . . ?" Taking a deep breath, she went on: "When you come right down to it, men are a coldhearted lot. I've got plenty of experi-

\*A respectful term of address applied to teachers, writers, and artists (tr. note).

ence under my belt. That's why I'm thinking of going into business in a big way from now on."

Kimie, thinking in her heart of hearts that there was no need to give the grandiose term "experience" to what at the outside was five or ten men, was amused. Half-teasingly, in a deliberately downcast manner, she said: "The sensei has a respectable wife, and he also has that famous actress Suzuko. A waitress like myself is nothing but a temporary plaything for him."

When they'd crossed the bridge, as they drew near Owari-cho the pedestrian traffic gradually grew lively. However, Matsuko, oblivious of the passers-by, simple girl that she was, immediately blurted out: "But the reason Suzuko got married was because the sensei was in love with you. Everybody says so. Isn't it true?"

Somewhat disconcerted by Matsuko's earnestness, Kimie quickly replied: "Matsuko-san. We'll meet again soon and have a good long talk. If you like, come and see me. They're hiring now at the Don Juan too. I'll give you an introduction."

"How many people do they have there now?"

"Sixty. Two shifts of thirty each. The cleaning-up, tables and everything, is done by the men, so that alone makes it easier than elsewhere."

"How many turns do you have to take?"

"Let's see, now. Lately, it's been best to take three."

"I can't afford fancy kimonos. And once you take a taxi, you end up doing it every night . . ."

When it came to detailed accounts of life's hardships, even though she felt for the other person, Kimie soon grew intolerably bored. Anyway, if it was a matter of money, even without saying anything you were bound to get something from the man. Separated from Matsuko in

the crowd, not once looking back, her eyes dazzled by the Mitsukoshi Building bathed in the full sunlight, Kimie briskly cut across the intersection toward the far side of the street. Then, feeling a little ashamed of herself, she turned and looked back. Matsuko, standing just where she had left her, was bowing slightly as a sign of farewell. Then, as if her mind were relieved by that, she turned away and immediately vanished into the crowd.



## TWO

TWO or three doors down from the Matsuya Dry Goods Store, toward Kyobashi Bridge, a pair of nude plaster women, one on each side of a wide archway in a twenty-five-foot facade, supported a sign in roman letters that read DON JUAN. At night, the letters were lit up with red electric light bulbs. This was the cafe at which Kimie worked. As far as the eye could reach, almost side by side, the same sort of cafes lined the alley. If you were inattentive, you might pass by without observing which was which. Kimie, although she'd been working here for about a year, still felt as if she might enter the wrong cafe. Even now, she used the optician's shop this side of the cafe and the hardware store beyond to locate the alley in between. Although the alley was just barely wide enough to let one person through, it was lined with enormous garbage cans. Even in the dead of winter bluebottles buzzed about, and at high noon ancient rats the size of weasels went about their business at will. When someone approached, they would splash up water from the puddles with their long tails. Holding back her sleeves, Kimie advanced stealthily ten steps or so. By and by the faces of the people passing her became familiar. Once she was inside, the odor of cheap cooking oil assailed her nostrils like a wave from the kitchen, where numberless "oven bugs" scurried all about. The kitchen had evidently been built on behind the restaurant. Unlike the respectable front entrance on the Ginza, its walls and roof were a single

## *During the Rains*

thickness of corrugated sheet iron, like the shacks that had sprung up immediately after the Tokyo Earthquake.\* Not taking her shoes off, Kimie went up the steep ladder-stairs from the dirt-floored entryway. At the top, there was a ten-mat room with fourteen or fifteen mirrored dressing-stands lined up along the four walls. It was five or six minutes to three. The second shift was arriving to replace the women who'd been working since eleven. In the crowded room, there was no place to sit down. In front of each mirror, two or three girls were competing for space, sticking their faces out, applying the final layer of makeup, altering the style of their hairdos, standing up and changing their clothes, or sitting cross-legged as they put on fresh white socks.

Taking off her vertically slubbed unlined haori, Kimie wrapped it up with her shawl in a carrying cloth. Tucking it away in the pigeonhole marked with her name in the clothes shelf that stood by the doorway, she patted the tip of her nose with the powder puff from her compact. Going along the corridor through the pantry, she encountered a waitress named Haruyo coming from the second-floor dining room. Since their homeward journeys both lay in the direction of Yotsuya, Kimie, among her sixty co-workers, had grown the most friendly with this girl.

"Haru-san. We missed each other last night. I'll treat you to something after work."

"It was your fault. I waited for you the longest time. Let's go home together tonight, though. That way we'll save money."

As Kimie started along the corridor toward the second

\*September 1, 1923 (tr. note).

floor front, the man "boy" in charge of footgear called up repeatedly from the bottom of the stairs.

"Kimie-san. Telephone."

"Ye-e-s." Answering in a loud voice, Kimie muttered to herself: "Who can it be? What a nuisance." Trotting with little steps between the tables and the potted plants, she descended the ladder-stairs.

Downstairs was a single large room, all of it visible at a glance, entered from the Ginza through a big stained-glass door. Although large, its space was cluttered with tables and chairs, set up in booths on both sides of single-leaved screens lining the walls to the right and left. From the ceiling, artificial flowers twined around paper lanterns. Below there were not only potted plants among the tables and chairs, but a dense stand of shrubbery, like a stage bamboo thicket, had been installed. Somehow cramped, at first the room gave only an impression of disorder. Set up across one wide corner was the bar, its shelves lined with bottles of foreign liquors. Underneath a large pendulum clock on the wall was the cashier's counter. Next to it, behind a glass door, was the telephone. Kimie, putting on a smile for each person she passed, trotted toward the booth. "Yes? Who is it?" It turned out that the call was not for Kimie but for another waitress called Kiyoko.

Pushing open the glass door with the tips of her toes, Kimie called out: "Kiyoko. Phonecall." Turning inside the booth, arching her head back, she looked around the room. At this early hour, there were but two groups of customers, each with seven or eight waitresses clustered around them. Even when she peered through the leaves of the shrubbery, Kimie saw no sign of Kiyoko. Somebody said: "She must have been on the early shift." Repeating this answer into the phone, Kimie hung up and stepped

out of the booth. A thin, middle-aged man in Western clothes called to her from where he was standing at the counter: "Kimie-san. How did it go? The divination."

"I've just gotten back from there."

"And how did it go? Thoughts of a man, after all?"

"If it were that, I wouldn't have to go to a fortune-teller, would I? It's not that kind of thing anymore, Komatsu-san. I'm very pessimistic."

"What? Kimie-san . . ." His narrow eyes crinkling at the corners, the man she'd addressed as Komatsu smiled at Kimie. Forty or thereabouts, he was employed as an accountant at some dance hall in Kanda. Every day, until he went to work at six in the evening, he made the rounds of the cafes where he was known. His greatest pleasure was to do all sorts of favors for the women, finding them rooms, redeeming their things at the pawnshop, buying theater tickets—there was nothing he would not do for them. Made much of by them, he would be greeted with cries of "Komatsu-san, Komatsu-san." If he never said anything unpleasant, on the other hand he never ate or drank anything. In his youth, it was said, he'd been a geisha's attendant, carrying her samisen for her when she went out on engagements. He was also said to have been an actor's valet. It was he who had told Kimie about the fortune-teller in Hibiya.

"Kimie-san, what did he tell you? Did you get any clues?"

"Well, somehow—he told me all sorts of things, but it isn't clear what the matter is. I didn't try asking him anything in particular, myself . . ."

"That's no good. You're too easygoing, aren't you, Kimie."

"I wasted one yen." Only now that she had been asked,



Kimie realized that the diviner's prognostications had been completely beside the point and her questions extremely half-hearted. She should have questioned the diviner minutely and at length, even if it meant making him slightly uncomfortable.

"Even so, Komatsu-san. He said for the time being there's no danger. That's all I found out. He said this and that, but what it came down to was 'the matter is not clear.' He said a mouthful there. Anyway, that's the first time I've had my fortune told. Unless you have it done regularly, it's no good. Maybe fortune-telling, too, depends on what you ask."

"Even if there's a method of divination, there's no method of asking."

"Yes, but when you go to the doctor for the first time, doesn't he tell you that unless you tell him what the matter is, he can't help you? That's why I think it must be the same with a fortune-teller."

From the direction of the front stairs, a plump, beautifully mature waitress in her thirties called Choko approached with a ten-yen note in her hand. "Cash, please." Pausing at the counter, giving herself a good look in the wall mirror, she adjusted the collar of her under-kimono.

"Kimie-san, Ya-san is upstairs. Please go up. He's being a nuisance."

"I saw him before, but it wasn't my shift, so I came downstairs. Is it true that he used to be Totsuko's patron?"

"Yes. She was taken away from him by Yo-san of the Japan Film Company."

As Choko started in chatting, the cashier handed her the receipt and change. Just then, in the mirror over the bar, two figures were reflected from the doorway by the counter that led back to the kitchen. It was the owner of

the cafe, a man called Ikeda, and an employee by the name of Takeshita. Rather than bother with greeting them, Choko and Kimie put on know-nothing faces and headed upstairs. Ikeda, a thin-faced, bucktoothed man of fifty or so, had returned from a Japanese settlement in South America at the time of the Earthquake. With his savings, he had opened up cafes in Tokyo, Osaka, and Kobe. He was said to be making quite a lot of money.

When the two women arrived upstairs, Choko took the change to a party of two sitting in a booth against the wall. Kimie went toward a table overlooking the Ginza. There sat the man they called Ya-san.

"Welcome back. I'd completely given up on you of late."

"You took the words out of my mouth. The way you were making out the other day. I've never been so humiliated in my life."

"Ya-san. Sometimes it can't be helped." Sweet-talking him, Kimie drew her chair up so close to his that their knees touched. Just as if they were on intimate terms, she extracted a cigarette from his pack of Shikishimas on the table and stuck it between her lips.

Ya-san gave himself out as the manager of an imported car dealership in Akasaka-Tamariike. For a while, he had not only come day after day in the afternoon, when the waitresses were at leisure, but had often taken four or five of them out for supper after work. Occasionally, to show her off, he brought a geisha with him. A man of about forty, he would remove his two diamond rings to display them to the ladies, and hold forth at length on methods of appraisal and estimation of price. Vulgarly self-assured in everything, he was a man to set one's teeth on edge. Since he spent freely, however, the waitresses would swarm

around him and treat him with every courtesy. Kimie had already received theater tickets from him on two or three occasions, and once, on a holiday, he'd taken her to the Matsuya and bought her a kimono jacket and a fancy dress collar. She had come to feel an obligation toward him. If he were to invite her out for supper and afterward proposition her, it would not be so easy to refuse him. For that reason, when she was teased by Ya-san, rather than put him off with some flimsy evasion, she thought it better to be open with him. It made for less trouble. Masking his inward chagrin with a smile, Ya-san replied: "Well, anyway, I was jealous. You did me wrong." Deliberately passing it off as a joke to the three or four other waitresses clustered around the table, he continued: "I was sitting right behind you. I heard everything you said. Although there were people around, you were holding hands."

"You're impossible. If you're going to complain like that, I'm not going to the theater with you. I'll go someplace else."

"She's awful, this one." Raising his arm as if to strike her, Ya-san knocked over a bottle of cider at the edge of the table. Screaming all together, the waitresses jumped up from their seats. Some of them not only drew back their long sleeves, but hoisted up the skirts of their kimonos to avoid being splattered by the cider, which was dripping from the table to the floor. Kimie, as the cause of this commotion, felt constrained to bring a dishrag. Holding the edge of her sleeve between her teeth, she swabbed the tabletop. Just then a new party of two or three customers came upstairs. "Welcome." The ripely beautiful Choko advanced to meet them. Before taking their order, she called out in a metal-cutting voice: "Who's on duty here?" "Kimie-san, most likely." At this answer from someone, Kimie, tossing the rag onto the dirt of a flower-pot and

linging out "Ye-e-s," trotted with short steps toward the newly arrived guests.

The customers, two gentlemen of fifty or so who both had mustaches, were evidently on their way back from the Matsuya or Mitsukoshi's. Paper-wrapped purchases in hand, after they had ordered black tea, they did not even look at the waitresses but began having a serious business talk. Taking advantage of that, Kimie went and sat down in the booth against the wall where the off-duty waitresses had congregated. On the table, scattered about among newspapers and magazines, were such tidbits as chunks of sweet bean paste, salty rice crackers, and peanuts still in the bag. Whatever their fingers touched, the waitresses would pick up and toss into their mouths . . . They were already bored with such mundane matters as chitchat about movies and gossip about colleagues. Even if they'd been sleepy, it was evidently out of the question to take a nap. With nothing to do, they were simply waiting for the time to pass. Just then, a waitress sitting in one corner of the booth, who'd been flipping through the pictures of a magazine, exclaimed: "My, what a beauty! It's Kiyooka-sensei's wife."

At this, all the waitresses in the booth stuck their faces out over the table. Even Kimie, her cheeks bulging with chunks of sweet bean paste, leaned forward slightly.

"Which one is she? Show me. I still don't know what she looks like."

"All right. Take a good look at her." The waitress held out the magazine right under Kimie's nose. The photograph was of a respectable-looking married woman, seated on a veranda. The caption read: "The Home Life of a Celebrity. The Writer Kiyooka Susumu's Wife, Tsunoko."

"Kimie-san. That's nothing, that sort of thing. If I were

you, I'd want to tear it in half." The waitress who spoke flicked a peanut at the photograph. Originally the wife of a dentist, she'd been forced by hard times to become a waitress. Her name was Tetsuko.

"You're quite jealous, aren't you?" As if surprised, Kimie stared back at Tetsuko. "It's just as it should be. A wife is a wife. I don't have to worry about her."

"You're so practical, Kimie-san," chimed in Yuriko. At one time a dancer, she had changed professions and come to work at the cafe. Then Ruriko, who'd started out as an assistant in a hair-dressing salon, added: "Anyway, the lucky one is Kiyooka-san. His wife is a beauty, and his number two is a famous waitress on the Ginza."

"What do you mean, famous? Cut that out."

Purposely pretending to be angry, Kimie got up and went over to the table of the automobile entrepreneur Yata, whom she'd left in the lurch a while ago. Although aware that she wasn't in earnest, her fellow waitresses looked after her with some show of concern. Ruriko had known Kimie since the days when, moonlighting as a prostitute, she'd encountered the latter two or three times at a brothel. Even after they'd come across each other at this cafe, there seemed to be a tacit agreement between them to guard the other's secret. Aware that neither was likely to take or cause offense, no matter what was said to or by her, Ruriko had a placid expression. Just then, she heard what sounded like somebody pounding on a table. Thinking it might be one of her customers, she looked in the direction of the noise. At that same instant, the business-suited figure of a customer who'd just come up the stairs was reflected in the mirror on the far wall. Immediately recognizing it, Ruriko alerted the others in a low voice. "Oops, it's Kiyooka-sensei."

"Sensei, we were just talking about you." Haruyo, one of Kimie's boon companions, came running up. "There's a good booth over there." Clinging to his sleeve, she led him to the booth in the corner away from the others' eyes. This was Haruyo's solicitude, to ward off any trouble. The automobile dealer Yata, who had come to press his attentions on Kimie, still hadn't left yet.

"I already feel hot just from walking here. I'll have a dark beer or something." Shoving an armful of new magazines and newspapers beneath the table, Kiyooka Susumu took off his brand-new gray felt hat and hung it on a spray of artificial flowers. Clad in a blue serge double-breasted suit and wearing a bow tie, he was thirty-five or -six. Noticeably sharp-featured around the nose and chin, he looked all the more high-strung thanks to his hollow cheeks and large eyes whose whites showed clear around the irises. He wore his hair combed back from the forehead with deliberate carelessness. To anyone's eye, he was the up-and-coming writer. As a matter of fact, he looked just like one of the movie stars that one sees in publicity photos. Although his father was said to be a scholar of Chinese literature, Kiyooka, in his student days at some regional university around Sendai, had had extremely poor marks. After graduation, he had gone around a lot with writers, but it was not until three or four years ago that he'd done anything to attract the attention of critics. Then, however—where had he got the idea?—employing as a source book Kyokutei Bakin's\* *The Adventures of Dreaming Musobei*, converting the kite of the original into an airplane and tacking on the title *He Flies Everywhere*, he'd lifted the book's entire plot and placed it in a contemporary setting. The result was a work

\*Late Edo writer (tr. note).

of popular fiction that was serialized in a newspaper. By some happenstance, it was an immense success. It had been dramatized by actors of the New School method and even made into a movie. Since then, with each new book Kiyooka's literary star had risen higher and brighter. Nowadays, his work was to be found in nearly all the newspapers and magazines.

"Is this one of your books too, sensei?" Making bold to pick up a book lying on the table, Haruyo gazed at the frontispiece. "They haven't made this into a movie yet, I suppose."

Kiyooka put on a bored look. "Haru-san. Make a phonecall for me, will you? There's a person called Muraoka in the editorial department of the *Maruen News*. Here's the phone number. Call him to the phone and tell him to get over here on the double."

"Muraoka-san? The one we know?"

Haruyo went off to make the call. Sadako, who was on duty, brought a dark beer and a small bowl of peanuts. While pouring the beer, she said: "There are some things in your stories that really bring back the memories, sensei. Back then, not that I had any chance, but I went to Kamata for the first time."

"So you've been to Kamata, have you, Sada-san?" Glass in hand, Kiyooka glanced up obliquely at Sadako. "Why did you give up?"

"Why, you say. Because there weren't any prospects."

"I'm not flattering you, Sada-san. With a face like yours, you're a natural for the movies. Probably it's because you wouldn't listen to the director. Women are just no good for anything unless they have a man behind them. Even lady writers, until their work starts to sell a little, have to have a man backing them."

Kimie, a cigarette between her lips, came over and silently sat down by Kiyooka. Back from the telephone, Haruyo reported the other party's reply. Seating herself, she added: "Sensei, it's treat time for everybody. Kimi-chan, what would you like?"

"This is fine for me." Kimie picked up Kiyooka's half-empty glass of dark beer.

"That's certainly nice and friendly. Well then, Haru-chan—you and I will have some chicken rice." Taking a chit pad from her obi, Sadako jotted down the order as she stood up and left.

The shadows of the evening sun that had shone in through the skylight had faded away. From downstairs, abruptly, a phonograph started playing. This was a sign that it was five-thirty. Those waitresses who'd been resting since three now freshened their makeup and went on duty. Upstairs and downstairs, the lights came on. Even though it was still light outside in the long summer evening, inside the cafe, from early on, there was a nighttime liveliness.



### THREE

SINCE their way home lay in the direction of Yotsuya, Kimie and Haruyo usually left the cafe together after work, taking a cab from the vicinity of Sukiya Bridge. Not only would they have been conspicuous on the Ginza, but drunken customers from the cafes thereabouts were still wandering around at that hour. To avoid them, Kimie and her friend would walk on a little beyond the Ginza, hail a passing one-yen taxi,\* and board it only after they'd argued down the driver from his original bargain price to thirty sen. That evening, crossing the Sukiya Bridge and passing under the bridge of the Metropolitan Railway, the two neared the Hibiya intersection without having found a cab that would take them.

"What is this? They're making fools of us. Even that one we thought had stopped drove away." Haruyo sounded angry.

"It doesn't matter. Let's just stroll along. I was feeling a little drunk, so it's just the thing."

"It's already high summer, isn't it? Over there by the Moat, it looks just like a stage set."

At the Hibiya intersection, despite the late hour, people were waiting for the trolley.

"Let's economize tonight and take the trolley."

As they headed for the trolley tracks across the wide

\*Taxis that provided a ride anywhere in Tokyo for a fixed price of one yen. A yen was worth about \$0.50 in 1930's dollars (tr. note).

### *During the Rains*

intersection, a man in a Western suit suddenly stepped in front of them. Surprised, they looked at him. It was Yata, he of the diamond rings, who had been at the cafe that afternoon.

"You're certainly enjoying yourself tonight. Where did you go for a drink?"

"I'll see you home." Yata raised his hand to hail a taxi.

"A trolley is fine for me. The cafe doesn't like it when we get in a car with a customer." Haruyo's polite attempt at a getaway was parried by Yata, who apparently had been brushed off many times in this manner.

"That's for the Ginza, isn't it? If you've come all this way, they won't mind. I'll take responsibility."

"Why not ride on the trolley with us and save some money, Ya-san?" Kimie began walking briskly toward a trolley that had just now arrived, its red lantern signifying that it was the last of the evening. There was no time for Yata to protest. Willy-nilly, he followed the pair and boarded the trolley, which was bound for Shinjuku.

On the trolley, unexpectedly empty, there were three waitresses from some other cafe, unknown to Kimie and Haruyo, and five or six men. All of them were dozing. Until the trolley had passed Hanzomon and was approaching Yotsuya-mitsuke, Yata was meek and submissive, behaving as though he weren't even with the pair. He did not even venture to speak until Kimie, leaving Haruyo behind, was about to get off the trolley. Hurriedly following her off, he said: "Kimie-san, it's too late for a transfer. I'll hail a cab."

"It's all right. I don't have far to go." Kimie began walking along the Moat, deserted of passers-by, in the direction of Honmura-cho. Spotting them, the driver of a one-yen cab put his hand out the window, signaling a

discount with his fingers. Another stuck out his grimy visage and jeered at them. Yata stepped up close to Kimie.

"Kimie-san, do you absolutely have to go back? Can't you make arrangements for one night? Eh, Kimie-san? If you must go back, one hour, even half an hour, will do. We'll have a little talk, and then separate right afterward. Please come with me. I won't ask anything unreasonable, and you'll be home before the night is out."

"It's already too late. We've been wasting time. Now I can't go back. Besides, I'm on the early shift tomorrow."

"The early shift? That's eleven o'clock at your cafe, isn't it? While we're talking like this, time is going by. Is around here no good for you? How about Araki-cho or Ushigome?" Gripping Kimie's hand, Yata would not take a single step farther.

As the path along the top of the embankment gradually sloped lower, at each step the night sky seemed to spread out wider overhead. Visible in a single sweep of the eye from Ichigaya to Ushigome, the scenery along the Moat—the embankment and the trees and shrubberies—was an overall misty green. In the softly flowing night wind, there was the scent of field grass and the grassy-smelling blooms of the pasania trees. From the sky above the towering pine trees across the Moat, there came the sudden call of what sounded like a night heron.

"Ahh—somehow it's as if we were in the country." Kimie looked up at the sky. Promptly, Yata suggested: "Why don't we go someplace quiet? Sacrifice one night. For my sake."

"Ya-san, what if we're seen, and there's trouble? Please be my patron, instead of that other person. I'm thinking I'd like to quit the cafe." Meaning to pull at Yata's heart, Kimie purposely rubbed against him as she quietly started

walking. Actually, all she had in mind was how to charm Yata into outdoing himself with a really generous tip at whatever place he took her to.

"That person, you say. Who is he? The man you went to the samisen performance with not long ago?"

"No-o-o . . ." Kimie began, then hastily corrected herself. "Yes, yes, that's the one." The man she'd gone to the musical performance with was neither a patron nor a lover. In short, he had been a pick-up customer, the same as Yata.

"Is that so? Is that man your patron?" Taking Kimie completely at her word, Yata continued: "But if he's helped you up to now, it's not a relationship you can give up very easily. It's no good if he nurses a grudge against you."

Kimie stifled an impulse to burst out laughing. "That's so. That's why I said there'd be trouble if anything got out. Tonight will have to be a deep dark secret."

"Don't worry about that kind of thing. Everything's all right. If anything happens, I'll take care of it." Yata felt exultant. Tonight, at least, everything was falling into his lap. Taking advantage of the deserted edge of the Moat, he abruptly held Kimie close and kissed her on the cheek.

Without knowing just when, they'd passed the Honmura-cho trolley stop. They were nearing the foot of Korikimatsu Slope, where the pines stretched out their overarching branches. In the distance, the lights of the Ichigaya station and the police box in front of Hachiman Shrine were visible.

"That police box over there is a nuisance. If it's just a little late, they ask you all sorts of questions. Let's get a cab."

Yata, thinking this was not an opportunity to be

missed, looked about him for a cab. Unfortunately, there was not a single one in sight. The pair stood where they had stopped.

"My place is up that alley right over there. You see the drugstore on the corner? At nightfall, an advertisement for Jintan Pills lights up on the roof. That's how you can tell. I'll just drop off my things and come back. Wait for me."

"Hey, Kimie-san. You're sure everything's all right? It'd be a mistake to give me the slip."

"I wouldn't do anything mean like that. If you're worried, come with me as far as over there. Unless I go back, the old woman downstairs leaves the door off the latch all night."

Five or six houses along from the foot of Korikimatsu Slope, the two turned into the alley. In the abrupt change from the spacious view along the Moat to these cramped back streets, not only did one feel as if one's nose was stuffed, but the shabby little houses that irregularly lined the streets on both sides, although interspersed with wicket gates, shrubberies, and the hedge of Kenninji Temple, breathed out a broken-down, decayed atmosphere of utter poverty. When they'd come as far as a house with a fish-shop sign mounted on its eaves, Kimie, saying: "Please wait here," turned into an alley from under the fish-shop's eaves. Yata, close behind her, started to follow, then held back. It might hurt Kimie's feelings to have him see where she lived. Craning his neck, he peered into the pitch-dark alley. At the sound of a very creaky wicket gate opening and closing, he felt somewhat reassured. But his irresistible desire to see for himself led him step by step along the alley. Suddenly, to his surprise, he stepped right in the middle of what

seemed to be a puddle of rainwater. Retracing his steps, he scraped the muck off his shoes on some gravel and a ditch-board by the light of the fish-shop's eaves lantern. Presently, Kimie came back out.

"Oh dear—what happened to you?"

"Nothing. These alleys are muddy as hell. What a stink. It's probably cat or dog shit."

"That's why I told you to wait outside. My, you reek." Kimie backed off from Yata as he edged closer. "I'm wearing clogs. I can't let any of that stuff get on my socks."

As they walked, Yata kept scraping his soles against the gravel. When they'd emerged alongside the Moat, underneath the eaves of the corner house there were stacks of firewood and sacks of charcoal. By the time Yata had completed the task of cleaning off his shoes, a one-yen cab drew up without their having hailed it.

"Kagura Slope. I'll give you fifty sen." Taking Kimie by the hand, Yata got into the cab. "We'll get out at the foot of the Slope. We'll walk a little ways from there."

"All right."

"Somehow I feel like walking all night tonight." Passing his arm around her, Yata lightly drew Kimie to him. Kimie, although complaisantly leaning up against him, nevertheless asked: "Ya-san, where are we going?"

Yata, while thinking what a terrible pretender Kimie was, knew nothing of her previous history. He had the feeling that even if she appeared to know the ropes, she might not be that kind of girl. The best tack would be to treat her as an extremely permissive waitress and let her take things into her own hands. Putting his lips to her ear, he whispered: "To an assignation house. That's all right with you, isn't it? It's late. I know a good place. Or if you know of some place, let's go there."

At this unexpected comeback, even Kimie was at a loss. "No, any place is all right with me."

"We'll get out at the foot of the Slope, then. I know a quiet place behind the Ozawa Cafe."

Simply nodding agreement, Kimie turned her eyes outside the window, thus ending the conversation. Soon after, the cab stopped at the foot of Kagura Slope. All the shops were closed. Even the nighttime stalls, which earlier in the evening had had a lively trade, were gone, leaving behind a roadside litter of paper scraps and garbage. At this late hour, only a few eating and drinking shops were still open here and there on the Slope. Aside from infrequent cars steering their way among scattered, erratically weaving customers in their cups, only geishas, cutting across the avenue, appearing and disappearing between one alley and another, were to be seen. Halting in front of the Bishamon Shrine, Yata stared at the mouth of an alley across the way.

"I think it's back along there, Kimie-san. There are puddles. Mind your sandals."

The stone-paved alley was so narrow that two people could not walk abreast in it. Apparently fearful that if he went on ahead he would be given the slip by Kimie, Yata stuck close by her, heedless of his elbow and shoulder brushing against the wooden walls. Leaning on each other to save space, they made their way along the alley. At its end, there was a little fox-god shrine. This side of a low stone wall, the alley ran into another alley. In one direction, it immediately became steps leading downward. Just then, with a quiet clatter of wooden sandals, a geisha appeared, holding her skirts up to keep them from getting dirty. Yata and Kimie leaned aside to let

her pass. The geisha seemed unaware of some chaotic-looking curls in the chignon of her disheveled Shimada coiffure, and even her gait was languid. In Yata's eyes of course, and in Kimie's too, it seemed, she lent an added charm to the quiet back alley scene. A typical late night encounter in the entertainment district, they both seemed to be thinking. As if they'd agreed on it, they followed her with their eyes. The geisha, all unaware, slid open the kitchen door of a house at the corner of the alley where it turned left in front of the fox-god shrine. As soon as she was inside, with a lively voice that belied her exhausted demeanor of a moment ago, she called out: "Auntie. It's already too late."

Kimie, who'd listened intently, said: "Ya-san. I've thought of becoming a geisha myself. I really have, you know."

"You have, Kimie-san?" Sounding genuinely surprised, Yata seemed about to inquire further. In a moment, though, they'd come to the front gate of the assignation house they'd been looking for. There were still sounds of activity inside. Calling out "Oi, oi," Yata pounded on the closed gate. Almost at once, there was the sound of a glass door being slid open, and somebody slipping into a pair of wooden clogs.

"Who is it, please?" A woman's voice called out.

"Me. Yata."

"Well, you've certainly taken your time, haven't you?"

The maid, coming out to open the gate, changed to a somewhat more formal manner when she saw Kimie.

"Please come in."

From the end of the corridor, leading the way past the cedar door of what seemed to be the privy, sliding open



the door of an arched entryway, the maid showed them into the four-and-a-half-mat downstairs sitting room at the back of the house. Evidently guests had been here until a moment ago. There was a smell of sake, and cigarette smoke hung heavily in the air of the room. One or two parched beans were wedged into the decorative groove of a red sandalwood table. Bringing out a couple of sitting cushions from a pile in the corner, the maid said: "I'll straighten it up for you right away. We've only just now had a chance to tidy the place."

"Business is really good, then?"

"Oh no. The usual hopeless mess." The maid went off to fetch the obligatory tea and sweets.

"Can't we air the room out a little?"

"It certainly is stuffy." Crawling on her hands and knees, Kimie reached out and slid back the paper door. Beyond the eaves, in the small garden there was an illuminated stone lantern.

"Oh, how pretty. It's like a stage set."

"It's different from the cafe, isn't it. A touch of old Edo, one might say." Stretching out his legs on the stepping stone, Yata lit up a cigarette.

On the other side of the shrubbery, the second-floor window of the house next door was alight. Although its reed blind was lowered, the figure of a woman in a Shimada coiffure, standing as she took off her kimono, was clearly projected against the window's paper door. Kimie quietly pulled at Yata's sleeve to draw his attention. Just then, though, the voluptuous-looking shadow, growing larger and less distinct like a cloud, vanished. There was only a low murmur of voices. Yata, who seemed to have noticed nothing, his legs still flung out on the stepping stone, shed his jacket and loosened his necktie. But Kimie,

until the maid brought tea and then a couple of yukatas,\* gazed vaguely at the flickering shadows across the garden. For no particular reason, she was suddenly reminded of the first time she had been taken to an assignation house. Although it had been in Omori, not Ushigome, her sitting with the man on the veranda and gazing at the shadows projected against the paper door of the second-floor window of the house next door on the other side of the shrubbery across the garden, as they waited for the maid to complete the preparations, had been in no way different from tonight. All that had changed were her feelings. Then, she had been afraid of and fascinated by the novelty of the experience; now, completely habituated, she thought nothing of it.

"Kimi-san, what are you going to have? They say all they have is Chinese noodles."

At Yata's voice, Kimie turned around. Having changed into his yukata, he was standing up tying the waistband.

"I'm not hungry." Kimie began to loosen the string of her unlined haori.

Depositing the kimono box in which she'd put Yata's Western suit in a corner, the maid said: "Every room is taken tonight. It's cramped, but how would this one be?" Taking some bedding from the clothes closet by the ornamental alcove, she began to lay it out. Once again sitting down on the open veranda, Yata and Kimie looked out at the garden. More and more, the memories of that first night floated up behind Kimie's eyes.

"You can take your bath any time you like. The water's always hot." The maid left the room.

\*A light kimono worn in hot weather or used as a bathrobe or sleeping garment (tr. note).

"Kimi-san. What are you thinking about? Change into your yukata." Peering into Kimie's face from the side as if worried about her, Yata took her hand. Still in her haori, Kimie removed the sash that kept her obi in place and the sash band. Taking out the contents of her pockets and laying them one by one on the mats, she looked at Yata and smiled. Three years earlier, when she'd left home and was staying with her girlfriend Kyoko, the latter's patron had gotten her a job as a clerk at an insurance company. Within two months, she had been seduced by the department head and taken to the assignation house in Omori. Although that was the first time she'd actually slept with a man, not only had she observed Kyoko bring men into the house on the sly, but on occasion had slept in the same room as Kyoko and her patron. Like a young girl apprentice in a geisha house, she was thoroughly conversant with everything of that nature. At times, she was stirred up by a violent curiosity. She'd even consented to the department head's proposition as a means of satisfying it. The latter, however, unlike the typical aging philanderer, had been quite put off by Kimie's uninhibited behavior. He'd left the assignation house shortly after their arrival. As she remembered all this, Kimie unconsciously let a smile show at the corners of her mouth. Knowing nothing of her thoughts, but pleased to see her smiling, Yata took her in his arms and held her close.

"Kimi-san, you've decided to be good to me. I was thinking it was no good and had given up hope."

"It's nothing like that. I'm a woman, after all. But a man always tells other men. That's why I tried to get away." Encircled by Yata's arms, leaning back against his chest, Kimie passed her hand inside her haori and unfastening the end of her obi drew it out. The thin,

fine-quality garment, twisting slightly, slipped free of her shoulders. Her naked bosom was revealed in all its allure at the opening of her long undergarment of varicolored striped silk. Yata, his voice increasingly urgent, said: "I may not look it, but you can trust me. I won't tell anyone."

"The gossip at the cafe is a real nuisance. No matter what I do, it's none of their business." So saying, Kimie unfastened and discarded her under-girdle. Cradled by Yata's arms, lying in his lap, she arched her body upward. "Take everything off. Even the socks." At a moment like this, Kimie felt twice the interest in the man if it was her first time with him. Unless she captivated the man to her heart's content, she felt she hadn't done her job. Wondering just when she'd fallen into this habit, Kimie would catch herself at it even as she was being coaxed and cajoled. Trying to stop herself, she found she could not. More even than when the man was handsome, the trait arrogantly asserted itself with an ugly old man or a man she'd at first thought repulsive. Afterward, ashamed despite herself, Kimie would shudder at the memory of the things she'd done.

Tonight, her sudden succumbing to the importunities of Yata, whom ordinarily she thought of as a conceited lout, was thanks to that old bad habit surfacing unaware.



## FOUR

THE next morning, Kimie, getting out of the cab she'd taken with Yata at the base of the embankment of the Military Academy, returned alone to her rented room in the alley. When she sat down at her dressing-stand, however, she suddenly felt drowsy. Without the strength even to redo her makeup, she barely managed to slip off her haori. Still in her kimono, she keeled over onto her side. It was only nine-thirty by her wristwatch. Intending to sleep the thirty minutes until ten, she closed her eyes. No sooner had she done so than the bell attached to the latticework door began ringing, and she heard a man's voice. She opened her eyes. It was the unexpected voice of Kiyooka. Startled, Kimie sat up.

Kiyooka only came here in the evenings, when Kimie was on the late shift the next day. Even then, he generally let her know ahead of time, while she was still at the cafe. He almost never came calling unexpectedly like this, on the morning of a day when she was on the early shift. Did he know about last night? He couldn't have found out so quickly, Kimie told herself. Although thoroughly flustered, she put on an innocent expression and called out in a lively voice:

"My, how early you are! Everything's still a mess in here."

When she reached the bottom of the ladder-stairs, Kiyooka had just taken off his shoes and come inside.

## *During the Rains*

The old woman, who was sweeping out the doorway, evidently knew what to say.

"Kimie-san. Even if you don't like it, please take auntie's medicine once more before you go out. I was really surprised last night."

Taking heart at this, Kimie rejoined: "I'm all right now. It must have been those dishes I mixed."

"What happened? Did you get an upset stomach?" Saying this, Kiyooka mounted the stairs to the second floor. In Kimie's room, he sat down by the window.

The second floor was two contiguous rooms, one of six mats, one of three. But aside from a cheap utility chest faced with paulownia wood, a dressing table and some tea utensils on a tray, there was almost no furniture. Even on top of the utility chest, there were none of the usual little knickknacks. In this virtually empty space, the soiled, shabby old mats and the rat-gray walls stood out all the more sharply. Except for a faded, dirty muslin sitting cushion in front of the mirror-stand, there were only a couple of extremely worn cotton and flax kimonos tossed against the base of the wall. Kimie, as was her custom, turned the cushion over before offering it to her visitor. Kiyooka, placing it on the windowsill, mindful of the crease in his trousers, seated himself again.

Beneath the window, on the flat zinc roof whose asphalt covering had begun to peel, stains from mouthwash and traces of face powder thrown out the window mingled with waste thread, paper scraps, and the dust and rubbish swept out every day. Across from this filthy roof were the backs of two-story houses that fronted on the avenue that ran past the gates of the Military Academy. Among the dirty laundry, old blankets, and

diapers hung out to dry, there was an incessant noise of sewing machines and the clunking vibrations of a printing press. Combined in cacophony, from the grounds of the Military Academy, came the shouts of commands as the students performed drills, the blaring of bugles and the sound of marching songs. Not only that, but during the day, according to how the wind blew, fine dust from the cinder track of the riding grounds came drifting in through the window onto the mats like ashes, and even left a gritty deposit inside the closed wardrobe. Ever since he'd first been brought back to this room (about a year ago), Kiyooka had been trying to persuade Kimie to move to a cleaner, more pleasant neighborhood. Kimie, however, although politely agreeing with him, had shown no signs of making preparations to move. The furniture was unchanged from a year ago, and it would seem she hadn't bought so much as a single teacup since then. Although Kimie certainly had enough money, there was neither a supper table nor a clothes rack. The electric lamp's shade was still cracked, the same as a year ago. No matter how much time went by, the place looked as if she had just moved in. Unlike others in her trade, Kimie had no taste for displaying pots of flowering plants on the windowsill, setting up dolls or toys on top of the chest of drawers, or pasting picture postcards on the wall. From early on, Kiyooka had realized that she was a strange, eccentric girl.

"It's not necessary to give me any tea. You're probably about to leave for work, aren't you?" So saying, Kiyooka slid himself down, cushion and all, from the windowsill until he was sitting tailor-style on the mat. "I've got some business that will take me as far as Shinjuku Station. That's why I dropped by for a moment."

"Oh. Still, you will have a little tea, won't you? . . .

Auntie, if the water's ready, please bring us some." Calling out, Kimie went downstairs. She soon came back up with an enameled brass teapot.

"I hear you went to see a fortune-teller. That article about the mole that appeared in *Street Scenes*—did he tell you who was behind it?"

"No. He didn't tell me anything." Pouring some tea from the little pot into a cup, Kimie went on: "At first, I thought I'd ask him about various matters. But somehow I felt awkward, so I held back. When you think about it, though, it's really strange. It's not likely anyone would have known such a thing."

"If you can't find out from the fortune-teller, you should go to a medium or a fox-diviner."

"A medium? What's that?"

"You don't know? Don't geishas often consult mediums?"

"Yesterday was the first time I ever went to see a fortune-teller. Somehow it seems foolish. That kind of thing doesn't work for me."

"That's why you shouldn't worry. Isn't that what I've been saying?"

"But it's just so peculiar. Because something that was so unlikely to be known was known by someone. It's positively weird."

"Even if you think nobody knows about it but you, there are surprising things in the world. Secrets have a way of leaking out." Kiyooka cut himself short, realizing that he'd said too much. Hastily putting a cigarette in his mouth, he covertly observed Kimie's expression. Kimie, about to say something, remained silent. Holding the half-empty teacup alongside her mouth, she stared round-eyed at Kiyooka. Their eyes met and locked. Kiyooka,

pretending to be choking on the cigarette smoke, turned his face aside.

"The best thing is not to worry about it."

"That's true." To make it sound as if she were speaking from the heart, Kimie threw a note of conviction into her voice. Unable to say anything else, though, she slowly drained her cup and quietly set it down. Even if Kiyooka didn't know that she'd spent last night in Kagurazaka with Yata, theirs was a relationship of a good two years. Kiyooka knew just about everything there was to know about her. But she couldn't tell exactly how much he knew of this matter. At times, Kimie even felt that at some opportune moment she would like to break off with Kiyooka and make a fresh start with a new lover who knew nothing of her past. Kimie did not like having half her life known about by other people. Even if there was no need to keep something secret, when she was asked by others about it she would simply put them off with a smile, or tell the first lie that came to her lips. Even with her own family, with whom she might have been expected to be the most intimate, Kimie had in fact been the most distant, never divulging her innermost feelings. With a man whom she liked, she was even more secretive. When the man attempted to question her deeply, she sealed her lips more and more firmly and told him nothing. Among her fellow waitresses at the cafe, it was said that no one had a more graceful, genteel appearance than Kimie but that it was impossible to tell what she was thinking most of the time.

Kiyooka had known Kimie ever since the night of her first day as a waitress at the cafe called the Salon Lac on the pond in Shitaya. Kiyooka's first impression of Kimie was that if she hadn't been working as a waitress she most

likely would have been a geisha. Her features were rather average; nothing about them stood out. Her forehead was round, her eyebrows thin, her eyes narrow. In profile, her face was extremely concave, as if it had been scooped out. But the hairline of her "Mount Fuji" brow was as sharply defined as if she were wearing a wig, and there was an indescribable charm about her mouth, with its protruding lower lip. As she spoke, the tip of her tongue as it moved about between the regular rows of her teeth like pearls was particularly winsome. Apart from these, the whiteness of her skin and the gently sloping shoulders of her figure seen from behind were probably foremost among her points of beauty. That first evening, Kiyooka had been especially taken with her quiet manner of speech and the absence of any vulgarity in her demeanor. Tipping her a munificent ten yen, he lay in wait for her outside the cafe. Unaware that he was following her, Kimie walked as far as the intersection, where she boarded the trolley for Waseda, changing at Edogawa. By the time she reached Iidabashi, where she had to change again, the last trolley of the night had already left. Kiyooka, who'd been trailing her in a taxi, at this point stealthily alighted from it. Pretending that this was a chance encounter, he engaged Kimie in conversation. Even when asked, however, Kimie would not tell him exactly where she lived. Merely answering that it was in Ichigaya, she strolled with Kiyooka along the Outer Moat to the foot of the Osaka Slope. She gave all the signs of a woman who was prepared to do whatever the man said.

Shortly before this, with many tears of farewell, Kimie had parted from Kyoko, with whom she'd been living for so long and plying the same trade of unlicensed prostitution. Kyoko, finally giving up the house in Suwamachi

of Koishigawa, had moved to a geisha house in Fujimi. Kimie was living by herself on the second floor of a house in Honmura-cho. Since she no longer frequented the prostitution agency, she hadn't slept with a man for more than a month now. It was rare for her even to be out this late at night nowadays. Just the sight, after so long, of the quiet late night scenery along the Moat gladdened her heart in some indefinable way. It was early in May just then, and there was the pleasant sensation of the night wind caressing her skin at the openings of the sleeves and under the skirts of her lined kimono. Thinking that Kiyooka was a young university professor or the like, Kimie had from the start been well disposed toward him. Deliberately repressing her leaping happiness and assuming a constrained air even while going along with him, she let him take her that night to an assignation house in Yotsuya-Arakicho. Innately fickle, Kimie, when she'd found a man, would instantly be passionate for him and as instantly lose interest in him. Her lovemaking with Kiyooka continued almost into the evening of the next day. In her reluctance to let him go, she took that day off from the cafe. Going with him that night to an inn in Inogashira Park, she spent the third night in Maruko Gardens. The fourth day, she returned with him to her rooms in Ichigaya, where they finally parted from each other.

At about this time, Kiyooka had been thrown over by a movie actress called Suzuko something or other, who for a while had served as his concubine. Since her theft by another man, he'd been searching for a replacement. Completely overwhelmed by Kimie's ardent attitude, as if she'd given herself up body and soul to his pleasure, he told her he would indulge her in any luxury she wished and that she was to give up being a waitress. But Kimie

said that she meant to open up a cafe herself in the future and would like a little more experience. In that case, said Kiyooka, she should work on the Ginza. Making her quit her job at the Salon Lac after a month or so, he took her around Kyoto and Osaka for a couple of weeks. Upon their return, he got her a job at the Don Juan, one of the prominent cafes on the Ginza. Soon thereafter, the rainy season came to an end and it was summer. From midsummer to the days when the first autumn breezes began to blow, Kiyooka had no doubt but what he was loved by Kimie from her heart. One evening, however, on his way back from the theater with two or three fellow writers, he stopped in at the cafe. Told by the other waitresses that Kimie, complaining of suddenly feeling unwell, had gone home early, he decided after parting from his friends to go by himself to her rented room in Honmura-cho and see how she was. As he set out, he saw a woman's figure suddenly emerge from the street along the Moat that he always turned into. Although it was not yet midnight, the houses along the one side of the alleyway had already shut their doors. Along the thoroughfare, where both pedestrians and trolleys had become sparse, only a solitary taxi raced by. From a distance of about thirty feet, Kiyooka soon ascertained that the woman was wearing a whitish gauze silk-crepe kimono and a summer obi with a pattern of green bamboo. His suspicions aroused, he cut across the roadway. Keeping to the sidewalk along the foot of the embankment, he shadowed the woman. The woman, briskly and blithely passing in front of the police box, seemed to stop and be waiting for a trolley at the Ichigaya stand. Then, unexpectedly, she entered the gate of the Hachiman Shrine. Without looking behind her, she made her way up the Woman's Slope on the left.

Although more suspicious than ever, Kiyooka was determined to stay out of sight. Well acquainted with this neighborhood and trusting to his man's fleetness of foot, he ran around the shrine compound and climbed the Sanai Slope. Entering the shrine grounds from the back gate, he looked about. A man and woman were sitting close together on a bench at the bottom of the stone stairs of the main shrine, where a cliff overlooked the Moat and the Ichigaya Approach. Of course, theirs was only one of three or four benches, on each of which a couple was sitting rubbing shoulders in an illicit rendezvous. Kiyooka, thinking this an excellent opportunity and with a grove of cherry trees as his cover, gradually crept nearer. He wanted to eavesdrop on Kimie and also find out what sort of person her companion was.

Telling himself that no detective in any detective story had ever succeeded in his investigations as he had that night, Kiyooka, at that moment, in the excess of his surprise, had no time to spare for an outburst of jealous anger. The man, wearing what looked like a panama, had on a dark blue yukata without even a summer haori over it and held a walking stick. Although he did not appear to be particularly old, even by the dim light of the park lamp the whiteness of his mustache stood out to the eye. Claspings Kimie around the waist under her obi, the man said: "It certainly is nice and cool up here. Thanks to you, I'm having some new experiences. I never thought that at sixty years of age I'd be meeting a woman on a park bench. Even now, I believe, there's a big archery range on the other side of this shrine. When I was young, I used to come and practice my archery there. Since then, it's been decades since I climbed these stone stairs. Well now, where shall we go from here? Just staying here with you

on this bench is fine with me. Ha-ha." Laughing, the man kissed Kimie on the cheek.

For a while, Kimie silently allowed the old gentleman to do as he pleased. Presently, though, she quietly got up from the bench. Bringing the front skirts of her kimono together, and smoothing her sidelocks, she said: "Let's walk a little." Accompanied by the man, she went down the stone stairs. Kiyooka, circling around to the Woman's Slope up which Kimie had come, followed them at a distance. Unaware of him, the pair strolled along chatting by the edge of the Moat.

"How has Kyoko been doing since she moved to Fujimi-cho? A girl like her must surely be very busy."

"She says she's booked up every day from afternoon on. I paid her a little visit recently. But there was no time to have a really good talk. You should go over sometime. It doesn't particularly matter if she's not in."

"Hm. It'd be interesting for the three of us to stay up through the night together. It's been a long time since we had such fun on that second floor in Suwamachi, hasn't it? You and Kyoko were really good playmates. During the day, even when I'm doing some serious work, something odd occurs to me and right away I think of you. Then I think of Kyoko. I feel as if I'm having a dream."

"Still, compared to Kyoko, I'm better for your health."

"I'm not so sure. Just because you look like a decent girl, yours is the greater sin. Aren't things different since you started working at the cafe? What about that foreigner?"

"There's too much gossip on the Ginza. One can't do as one wishes. On the other hand, geishas operate in the open and have no problems. It really was better when I was in Suwamachi."

"What about her patron? Has he gotten out of jail yet?"

"I don't believe so. There haven't been any talks since then, so their relationship is probably over. Anyway, it was just obligation—she owed him for having paid off a debt. She wasn't particularly fond of him or anything."

"What does she call herself these days? Is it still Kyoko?"

"No. She calls herself Kyoyo."

Enjoying the cool late night breezes and the pleasantly deserted bank of the Moat, the two flirted with each other as they strolled along. Rounding the New Approach, from the trolley avenue at the base of Hitoguchi Slope, they turned into an alley in Sanban-cho, stopping outside a geisha house that had the name "Paulownia Blossom House" written on the lanterns hanging from its eaves. Since it was a summer night, all the geisha houses in the neighborhood were still open. Geishas sat outside on benches enjoying the evening cool and gossiping among themselves. In a familiar tone, the man inquired: "Is Kyoyo in?" Immediately, a diminutive woman stuck her round face out the door. Clad only in a loincloth, her hair done in a low Shimada coiffure tied with paper cords, the woman emerged from the house in all her nakedness, coming as far out as the dirt-floored entryway.

"Ah, you're together. I'm delighted to see you. You've come at the right time. I've only just gotten back."

"Do you know some good place where we can go and have a nice talk?"

"I see . . . well, in that case . . ." The naked woman whispered an address to the man. The two walked on and turned the corner.

Kiyooka, who up to now had been trailing the pair while keeping himself concealed in the shadows of the alley, could not bring himself to turn back now that things

were progressing so satisfactorily. Timing his visit, he proceeded to the assignation house where Kimie had been taken. Posing as an ordinary customer, he paid in advance, asking for a submissive young geisha and took her off to bed quite as if that were all he had in mind. . . . After a night spent with his eye glued to the peephole watching the frolics of that unknown old man with Kimie and Kyoyo, he quietly took his leave before the sun was up. Since it was still somewhat early to return to his house in Akasaka, he had no choice but to loiter a while in the embankment park in Yonban-cho. Strolling or sitting down on a bench, he vaguely gazed at the high ground on the far side of the Moat.

Never, in all his thirty-six years, had Kiyooka seen even in dreams what he had witnessed with his own eyes the night before. He realized that the view of women which he had held up to now was completely mistaken. Without the energy for an explosion of jealous rage, he merely felt unaccountably depressed. Until now, he'd simply assumed that all young women, not just Kimie, calmly surrendered themselves to old lechers in their fifties and sixties, forgoing love and sexual satisfaction solely for the sake of economic security. How wrong he had been! The truth was something quite other. Somebody like Kimie, who he had thought loved him and him alone, had to go and debauch herself with an ugly old man and a lewd, cheap geisha. Along with the realization of how superficial his experience and observation had been, Kiyooka felt a hatred for Kimie that was beyond words. He would never see her again after this. However, after he'd gone home and gotten a little sleep, his roiled-up feelings calmed down considerably. It would be too contemptible for words if he pretended to know



nothing. He could not rest easy until he'd confronted her with what she had done and exacted a confession and an apology from her own lips. After further thought, however, he realized that Kimie was not the ordinary girl she appeared to be. Interrogated, she might confess to everything with surprising nonchalance. She might even, in her heart of hearts, be smiling scornfully at his jealousy and sexual frustration. This, for a man, would be a humiliation more difficult to endure than the woman's unfaithfulness. He could not ignore the insult. And it would be even more mortifying to have her ostensibly apologize and then stick out her tongue at him behind his back. After much thought, he decided that he would after all pretend not to know. On the surface, things would be as before. While endlessly being made a fool of, he would bide his time and exact some signal revenge. This was the best plan.

For the past several years, to manage his literary affairs, Kiyooka had made use of two trusted assistants. One was a young writer named Muraoka, who'd recently graduated from Waseda University or some such institution. For a monthly compensation of about one hundred yen, he took down the stories that Kiyooka dictated to him and worked them up into a presentable manuscript. Then Komada, a man of about fifty, went around selling the stories to newspapers and magazines. As a former employee of the accounts department of a newspaper, Komada was conversant with the current prices for manuscripts and also had many friends among the reporters. He worked for a commission of 20 percent. It was the devoted Muraoka who, on Kiyooka's orders, had waylaid Kimie on her way back from the kabuki and slashed off her sleeves with a safety razor. Of course, the garments had been bought for Kimie by Kiyooka. Some

time afterward, when they were riding together in a taxi, Kiyooka had stealthily abstracted from Kimie's hair the pearl-inlaid comb he'd bought her at Mitsukoshi's as they were getting out. Contrary to his expectation that she would cry and carry on, Kimie didn't seem to particularly mind the loss. She didn't mention it to Kiyooka or, apparently, to the old woman at her place.

Although Kiyooka had known for some time that Kimie was a slovenly, uneconomical person who didn't look after her affairs properly, he had not imagined that her indifference even to the clothes she wore ran to this degree of nonchalance. Whereupon, when she was out, he'd tossed a dead kitten into her clothes closet and later carefully observed her reaction. Even this, however, had not seemed to sow the seeds of fear in Kimie to any great extent. Finally, although worried that if worse came to worst he would be found out, he had instructed Muraoka to plant an item in *Street Scenes* about the mole on Kimie's inner thigh. This did seem to have caused Kimie considerable uneasiness. Saying to himself "look at that," Kiyooka found a measure of relief from his angry feelings. Now that the scales had dropped from his eyes, however, the more he investigated Kimie's life the more he found to be angry about. His desire for revenge was not to be satisfied by simple occasional pranks. In order to spy out an opportunity to inflict harsher punishment on Kimie's body and mind, he pretended to be more deeply infatuated with her than ever. This was to put her off her guard and to prevent his intentions from being discovered. But the enmity that lay coiled at the bottom of Kiyooka's heart had a way of inadvertently showing itself at the edges of his words. Kiyooka had to exert extraordinary efforts to keep it hidden.

A moment ago, when Kiyooka had despite himself said

too much about the fortune-teller, his frantic attempt to pass it off as nothing was inspired by this concern. It was not good to go on facing each other like this, he thought. Glancing at his wristwatch, he said as if quite surprised: "It's already ten-thirty. I'll go with you."

Kimie, for her part, found it somehow unbearable to be seen by a man in her unwashed state after having spent the night out. She, too, wanted to get out of the house.

"Yes. Let's walk a little. When the weather's so beautiful, I hate to go to work. Because I don't see the sun from one end of the day to the other." Throwing over her shoulders a vertically striped unlined haori that she had carelessly tossed aside, Kimie slid shut the paper window.

"If you go today at eleven, that means you go tomorrow at five."

"Yes. So come to the cafe tonight. I'd like to go somewhere and enjoy myself. Is that all right with you?"

"That's so." Giving this ambiguous reply, Kiyooka took up his hat.

"We'll go somewhere and have a good time, won't we? Anyway, I'm free tonight." Pressing herself against Kiyooka, who already stood at the head of the ladder-stairs, putting up her cheek as if to say "kiss me," Kimie half-lowered her long eyelashes.

Although thinking she was a sly puss, as he looked at this charming, sensuous woman for whom he had no fundamental dislike, Kiyooka reflected that perhaps it was overly severe to find moral fault with a woman born to the trade of pleasure. At that moment, even his long-cherished anger with her evaporated. If one thought of her as a kind of machine for exciting men's sexual desires, what she did when he wasn't around was nothing to punish her for. He even felt as if he should simply extract all the pleasure from her he could and then throw her

away. But then, instantly, his wish for her to be a little more considerate of his feelings, to behave herself, and to belong to him and him alone began to surface again. Looking aside, Kiyooka remarked casually: "At any rate, we'll meet on the Ginza tonight. We'll decide then."

"Yes. Please." Her face suddenly brightening, Kimie clattered down the stairs a step ahead of him. Snatching a cleaning rag from the old woman, she wiped off Kiyooka's shoes with her own hands.

In order to avoid the public gaze on the sidestreet that led out to the Ichigaya side of the Moat, the two slipped from alley to alley, coming out in front of the Military Academy. Ascending Bikuni Slope, they walked along the Moat through Honmura-cho in the direction of the Yotsuya Approach. As it was getting toward noon, they kept somewhat apart, although walking side by side, and did not even speak to each other. Kimie, her face hidden by a parasol, abruptly recalled that it was along here that she had strolled hand in hand with Yata the night before, when they'd gotten off the trolley. The contrast of night and day made her wonder, despite herself, what had inclined her to do the will of a man as unsatisfactory as Yata. She could not but feel disgust at her feckless acquiescence. If Kiyooka-san found out about it, how angry he would be. From the shade of her parasol, she furtively observed the man's profile. She felt a slight pang of conscience, and an unbearable sense of pity for him. From now on, Kimie thought, she would behave herself as much as possible on her way home from the cafe and not give in to any impromptu solicitations. It wasn't that she meant it as an apology, but somehow Kiyooka suddenly became dear to her. Snuggling up to him, she took his hand regardless of the passers-by.

Kiyooka, evidently thinking that Kimie had grabbed

his hand because she'd stumbled on something, fearful of the eyes of the public, dodged away from her slightly toward the Moat. "What's the matter?"

"I want so much to take today off. I'll call them up and say I can't come. It'll be all right."

"What will you do the rest of the day?"

"I'll wait for you somewhere until you've finished your business."

"We'll be able to see each other tonight. You don't have to take the day off, do you?"

"I suddenly feel like doing nothing all day. Don't let me stand in the way of your business, though."

Kiyooka had in fact no business to attend to. He had come out on a surprise spying mission to observe Kimie's behavior. If he shook her off at this point and went on his way, he could not be certain of what she might get up to in the interval until he met her that night. The trivial matter began to get strangely on his nerves.

Kimie, for her part, knew from her months and years of experience in manipulating men that in a situation of this kind it was best to give the man a bit of a hard time with her selfish whims. Somehow, Kimie felt intolerably bothered by what Kiyooka had said before about the fortune-teller. Without waiting for tonight, she would have to adopt some method forthwith of making the man say what was in his heart. From long experience, she knew that no matter how angry the man was, when it came right down to it she could easily captivate him. Kimie felt endlessly at ease in this belief in her own glamor. It was something she had been born with, a kind of flesh temperature and body scent that, without her particularly exercising any skill, left the man who had come into contact with it an indelible, lifelong memory

of pleasure. Not by one man, not by two men, but by many various men Kimie had been told that she truly was an enchantress. Did her body give men such a powerful thrill? she'd wondered. As she'd become more self-aware, Kimie had gradually perfected her charms until now, despite herself, she believed profoundly in her power of seduction.

They'd come almost as far as the exit of Yotsuya Station. Abruptly putting on a sad, forlorn expression, Kimie said: "I've spoken selfishly, and that's bad. I'll take a one-yen taxi from here."

"Hm." Despite his curt reply, Kiyooka, noticing Kimie's wistful demeanor, felt a curious reluctance to part from her, as if she were a mistress he'd acquired just today or yesterday. Kimie, deliberately fastening a vague gaze on Kiyooka, poking the gravel with the tip of her parasol, stood as if rooted to the ground.

Forgetting everything he had against her, pressing her to him, Kiyooka said: "It's all right. Take the day off. Any place is fine. We'll go together."

"Do you really mean it?" Expertly bringing the tears into her long-lashed eyes, Kimie quietly looked at the ground.



## FIVE

IN front of the gate of Matsukage Shrine in the metropolitan suburban district of Setagaya, there is a T-shaped intersection. As you go along the branch road two hundred and fifty yards or so, you come to a red lacquer gate with a framed tablet that reads "Katsuenji Temple." Across from it, there is a tea field. From here, the road goes downhill. There is a view, far in the distance across dry fields and paddies, of the bamboo grove and cedar forest at the back of Gotokuji Temple. Even in Setagaya, this neighborhood is probably the most secluded and reminiscent of the outskirts of the city in the old days. On the other side of the tea field, there is a row of Western-style houses with cement gateposts and fences. At the foot of the slope, however, there are four or five reed-thatched farmhouses, each enclosed by the same kind of hedge fence. Among them was an enclosure which, from the nature of the locality, one might have guessed was the residence and place of business of a gardener. Double sliding doors were set between "inverted mixing-bowl" gateposts of chestnut wood. Not even the roof of the house, standing far back among the trees, could be seen from the street through the luxuriant mass of freshly green foliage. On one gatepost, a nameplate read "Kiyooka Residence." The words were rain-stained and difficult to make out. This was the retirement retreat of the writer Kiyooka Susumu's old father, Akira. Directly overhead, the early summer sun shone down on the chestnut and chinaberry

## *During the Rains*

trees just inside the gate. The young leaves' shadows, cast on the ground outside the gate, were drawn up directly underneath the leaves. Only the lusty cluckings of chickens were heard here and there. It was midday.

Closing a sober, burnt-tea-color parasol, a young woman of about thirty, refined-looking and evidently a married lady, opened the gate and passed inside. Her hair done in a loose bun, so that it tumbled casually down onto her nape, she wore a black summer haori with her family crest at the back of the collar over a fine-quality lined kimono with a splash pattern. Her slender, willowy figure, a white shawl over her shoulders, combined with her long neck, well-defined features, and pale, narrow face to give her a tranquilly lonely air. Shifting to the other hand a bundle wrapped in a carrying cloth, she closed the gate. In contrast to the sun pounding down on the road, here a gentle current of air came flowing from the quiet summer shadows of the trees. Stroking back into place a stray curl disheveled by the breeze, for a while the young woman looked about her. The little path inside the gate was bordered with dragon's beard. To one side, chestnut, persimmon, plum, jujube, and similar trees flourished densely. To the other side, there was a grove of speckled bamboo. Its young, vigorously lengthening sprouts were starting to grow up into pale young bamboo trees. From among the branches of the older trees, slender leaves were constantly fluttering to the ground. The heavy-scented flowers of the chestnuts were in full bloom. The young leaves of the persimmon, excelling even those of the Japanese maple, were displaying just at this time their tenderest hues of fresh new green. Filtered by the treetops, the sunlight shifted sparkingly over the thick moss. Beneath the quiet whispering of the

breeze, there was a sound of water flowing nearby. Some unknown little bird was warbling, livelier than the shrike singing at the dawn of a clear autumn day.

Unconsciously softening her tread at the sound of the bird's voice, the young woman followed the curve of the gravel path around the bamboo grove until she came to an old bungalow hitherto obscured by the foliage. The entryway had a frosted glass latticework door, but this had evidently been put in as an afterthought. The bungalow itself had a look of timeless stability that brought to mind the priests' living quarters of an old temple. But there were signs that its foundation posts and sturdy housebeams had been spliced to replace rotten wood, and its roof tiles were stained green with moss. Although a tall window alongside the entryway had been left open, not the least sound came from inside the house. Beneath the window, a mixed hedge of box and azalea blocked any view of the garden. But in the sunlight that shone through here, the peony flowers, a mingling of white and red in full bloom, were all the more conspicuous. Here also, however, it was quiet and deserted. There was the sound neither of flower shears nor of a garden broom. Only, on the grape trellis that hung along the eaves to the kitchen door, among the flowers whose time to bloom had evidently come, the buzzing of horseflies gathered in clusters there noised abroad the news that the summer day was long.

"Is anyone home?" Taking off her shawl, the young woman quietly slid open the lattice door. From within the hushed interior, a voice answered: "Who is it?" The opaque paper door was immediately slid back by an old man with his spectacles pushed up on his forehead above his snow-white eyebrows. It was the householder, Akira.

"Tsuruko, is it? Please come in. Today the old woman is off on a grave-visit. And I've sent Densuke into the city on an errand. I'm all alone."

"I came at just the right time, then. Perhaps there's something I can do for you instead." Still carrying her bundle, the young woman followed the old man inside and seated herself at the threshold of the veranda.

"You're already airing things out, I see."

"I don't do it at any particular time. I have no help, so whenever the spirit moves me, I do it at odd times throughout the year. It's the best sort of exercise for an old man."

From halfway along the veranda to the eight-mat room at the back of the house, folding cases of manuscripts, scrolls, and pictures had been set out. Both the translucent and the opaque paper doors were wide open. A swallow-tail butterfly came fluttering into the parlor. Presently, it flew out into the garden again. Undoing her kerchief bundle on her lap, Tsuruko said: "I've had that article of clothing made over for you. I'll leave it over there. And while I'm at it, shall I make some tea?"

"Yes. I'd like a cup. I think there's some sweet bean paste or some such thing I got as a gift in the breakfast room. Just have a look, will you?" As Tsuruko got to her feet, the old man began to straighten, one by one, the old manuscripts lying on the veranda. His closely cropped hair, with his thick eyebrows and mustache, had turned as white as snow, accentuating the healthy flush of his face. His lean, slightly built body seemed to have grown more and more vigorous with age. When Tsuruko came back with green tea and sweets, the old man sat down at the edge of the veranda.

"I haven't seen you for some time. I thought you might

have caught a cold. They say the flu is still making the rounds in the city."

"You haven't caught a single cold since last year, have you, Father?"

"I had a somewhat different upbringing from today's young people. Ha-ha. The drawback is that healthy people go off all at once. You can't depend on good health."

"Well—there's no need to say that kind of thing."

"There's a saying from the old days about things you can't trust. 'It is a hard thing to trust in the favor of a lord; it is a hard thing to trust in the health of old age.' Ha-ha. How's Susumu? Flourishing like the green bay tree?"

"Yes. Thank you for asking."

"There's something I've been wanting to talk with him about. Actually, not long ago, I met your elder brother on the trolley . . ." the old man began, then coughed and looked at Tsuruko over his spectacles. Tsuruko, for her part, answered with studied casualness.

"Is it something about me?"

"Yes. It was nothing bad. We were talking about what to do with your family register. There's no use fretting about what has already happened. Let bygones be bygones. I said I had no objections to whatever was decided. If your family and I agree on it, Susumu isn't likely to say anything. What about it, then? If we set about it early on, we can ask the clerk at the ward office to write it up. It's just a matter of my putting my seal to it."

"Yes. I'll tell my husband that as soon as I get back."

"It doesn't really matter about the family register, but it's best to be upright in all one's dealings. If you've lived together the same as man and wife for all these years, it should be a matter of course to enter your name in our

family register. I don't really know what went on at first, but according to your brother it's already been five years."

"Yes. If I remember correctly." Deliberately ambiguous, Tsuruko lowered her eyes. She knew, without needing to count the years on her fingers, that it had been five years. In the autumn of her twenty-third year, when her former husband had graduated from military college and was studying abroad, Tsuruko had fallen into a liaison with Kiyooka Susumu at a hotel in Karuizawa. Her husband's family, although not particularly wealthy, were descended from the old aristocracy and as such were fearful what people would hear and say. Without waiting for the husband's return, they'd dissolved the marriage on the pretext of Tsuruko's frail health. Her parents had already died by this time. Tsuruko's elder brother had made something of a name for himself in the world of industry. Bestowing just enough capital on Tsuruko so that she would not go hungry or lack clothing, he forbade her to set foot in the family's house or those of relatives for the rest of her life. At that time, Susumu was still living at home with his father in Komagome-Sendagimachi and putting out a coterie magazine in conjunction with a few other literary-minded youths. When Tsuruko's marriage was annulled, he immediately left his father's house and set up a new household in Kamakura. About half a year later, Akira suddenly lost his wife to influenza. At the same time, by the terms of the Civil Service Retirement Law, he was dismissed from his professorship at the Imperial University. Taking advantage of this, he rented out the house in Sendagimachi and settled down to a leisurely life in the dilapidated cottage in Setagaya, which up to now had been kept as a sort of country house.

Until about ten years before, Akira's father, Genzai,

had lived in retirement in the Setagaya cottage until his death at eighty. Genzai, a scholar of medicinal herbs who had been employed in the herb gardens of the Tokugawa Shogunate at Komaba, had also written books and was well known among his fellow specialists. Often urged after the Meiji Restoration to serve the new government, he had held true to his principles and passed the remainder of his life here at this country retreat. All the trees and plants that flourished today in the garden were the mementos of Genzai.

At first entering the academy of Nakamura Keiu, Akira had completed his studies under Sato Makiyama and Shinobu Joken. Immediately upon graduation from the Imperial University, he'd been engaged as an assistant instructor there. For approximately thirty years, until his retirement, he'd taught a course in Chinese composition. Evidently there was something in him deeply sensitive to the times, however, for he usually advised his students that in today's world the study of a dead way of writing was the apex of foolishness. Deprecating his specialty as something fit only for the dilettante, even when asked for his opinion he would smilingly refuse. Not associating much with his colleagues, he followed his own bent, mainly doing research in Taoism. Although he had written numerous articles, he hadn't published any of them. When he'd learned that his son Susumu was having an affair with a married woman and had set up house with her in defiance of the world, Akira had been profoundly indignant. Thinking, however, that it wasn't likely that the young men and women of this modern age would listen to the admonitions of an old man, he'd completely resigned himself. Pretending to know nothing, he had in fact virtually severed relations with Susumu. In the three

years since moving to this retirement cottage in Setagaya, he hadn't communicated with him even once. Susumu, for his part, surmising his father's indignation from his ordinary disposition, as a sign of defiance had deliberately let the weeks and months go by without getting in touch with him.

However, when Akira had gone to Kichijoji Temple in Komagome on his wife's death anniversary, he'd come upon a young woman offering flowers at the grave. Completely taken aback by her presence in the narrow, hedged enclosure, he'd responded to the woman's awkward bow by bluntly asking her name. Only then did he realize that she was his son's wife, Tsuruko. Why would a woman who of her own free will had taken up with the likes of the unruly Susumu know the death anniversary of her mother-in-law, so to speak, and pay a grave-visit? The old man did not understand. He even thought that his aged ears had misheard the name. As they walked along the cemetery path, he asked her again, to make sure. That provided the start of a conversation, and after coming out the temple gates they boarded a trolley together. Almost without their knowing it, their conversation went on and on until it was time to separate. Up to now, Akira had habitually thought that the young men and women of today were totally devoid of any moral sense. In his view, the young men were for the most part a gang of unfilial wastrels, and the young women were not much different from animals. More and more mystified by Tsuruko's ladylike speech and demeanor, he thought it even stranger that someone so conscious of the rules of correct behavior should have committed the sin of adultery. Even after he'd gotten home, he continued to exercise his mind mightily on the matter. Suddenly, it occurred to Akira

that Tsuruko had broken her vows of constancy only to be deceived by his debauched scoundrel of a son. If that were so, she was truly to be pitied. Somehow feeling that as a parent he had no excuses to offer, when Akira afterward met Tsuruko by chance at the Shinjuku railway station, he'd gone up to her of his own accord. And so, at some point or another Tsuruko had been given the entree of the house in Setagaya. But, from a sort of mutual reserve, the two did not touch on her relationship with Susumu. The matter remained as it was, without questions asked or statements made. As for financial matters, Susumu had gone on to make enormous sums of money, and the old man's frugal way of life was such that even his pension was too much for him. So that there was no occasion for either him or Tsuruko to discuss household expenses.

Although there was a man who came in to look after the garden and an old woman who did the household chores, Tsuruko had seen that Akira seemed to lack for proper meals, clean clothing, and attentions to his person. Unobtrusively, she did for him whatever she noticed needed doing. If she had said openly that she was going to take care of him, Akira would certainly have answered that it wasn't necessary. Also, there was an elder daughter in the Kiyooka family, who had married a doctor. Fearful of what this lady might think, Tsuruko did everything in a discreet manner so as not to attract her observation. As the days and months went by, Tsuruko's state of mind and feelings naturally became clear to the old man. Pitying her more and more, he could not help but secretly admire her as a person too good for the likes of his son Susumu.

Holding his empty teacup on his knee, the old man said: "I was thinking of visiting your family soon and having a talk with them. But when you get old, putting

on formal clothes becomes a nuisance. But it would be impolite not to dress up for a first visit. I'm waiting for a good opportunity. But you will come to see me, won't you, even afterward?"

"Yes. Things will be the same. If it were just my brother, I wouldn't hesitate, but there's also your daughter to consider."

"That may be so."

"At any rate, it's surely I who have been in the wrong. That's why I don't hold anything against anyone."

"It's splendid of you to feel that way." As the old man spoke, a big horsefly alighted on a copybook of stone rubbings of ancient handwriting specimens that had been set out to air. Getting to his feet and chasing the fly away, Akira went on: "One should never be afraid to correct a mistake. The errors of youth cannot be helped. The good or evil of a person comes out in old age."

Tsuruko started to say something but, fearful that despite herself her voice might tremble, remained silent with her head bowed. Her heart suddenly was full, and she felt her eyes grow moist. Luckily, just then, she heard a voice in the kitchen. Making that her opportunity to escape, she hastily got to her feet. The old man, looking in the direction the fly had gone, said: "It's probably either the sake dealer or the postman. Please don't bother yourself." He began to leisurely fold up the pages of the copybook.

Tsuruko, determined not to show her tears, had gone around to the kitchen; sure enough it was the man from the sake dealer's come to deliver a keg of soy. In the kitchen entryway, shaded by a grape arbor, the sunlight fell softly. The breeze that came blowing from the bamboo grove was so bracing it was chilly. The old woman



had evidently tidied up the maid's room before leaving. Even the ashes in the brazier had been neatly smoothed out. After the man from the sake dealer's had left, and there seemed to be nobody around, the tears that Tsuruko had held back all at once overflowed. Hastily, she wiped them away with a handkerchief. The old man knew nothing about it, but she and Susumu were a married couple in name only these days. It was no time to be considering whether or not to enter her name in the family register. Susumu had left the house the day before yesterday and probably would not be back by tonight, even. These past two or three years, on the pretext of preparing a manuscript, it had become customary for him to stay away from home as long as he pleased. He would probably be back in two or three days. With things as they were, however, although he would surely not refuse to enter her name in the family register as his legal wife, it was clear without his saying so that it would give him no great pleasure. He might even act as if he were being put upon. Tsuruko, while thinking how grateful she was for Akira's kindness, could not but feel tearful at her inability to accept it.

The love life of Tsuruko and Susumu had lasted barely a year, while they were renting a house in Kamakura. Then Susumu, at a single bound, became the darling of the literary world and started making money hand over fist from his pulp fiction. Not only did he immediately buy a house for a movie actress called Sugihara Suzuko, but he took to going on endless geisha spaces. After Suzuko had discarded him in favor of legal marriage to a fellow actor, Susumu promptly consoled himself by making some café waitress his concubine. Although thoroughly disgusted with him, rather than a passion of jealousy

Tsuruko had come to feel a bottomless sadness of despair over her husband's character. Since her girls' school days, Tsuruko had been tutored in language and etiquette by an old French lady and had studied classic literature and calligraphy under a certain Japanese scholar. The discipline and charm of such pursuits had proved her undoing when she married into the prosaic household of a professional soldier. Not only had life in such a household proved unendurable, but even toward the writer Kiyooka Susumu, the man she had chosen for herself, she'd been unable for long to have feelings of affection and respect. When she compared the Susumu of the past when they'd been introduced to each other at a church in Karuizawa and the present Susumu, who was regarded as a great master of popular fiction, she could only think they were completely different people. Susumu five years ago had been an honest, unknown writer true to his serious literary aspirations. As for Susumu today, who could say what he was? Without the least appearance of intellectual anguish, he seemed on the contrary to be endlessly, nervously keeping his eye fixed on fashions and fads. In his diligent money-grubbing, he might well be described as a combination impresario and speculator. When one examined his serialized newspaper fiction, it was simply a rehash in current colloquial language of the banal stories and romances of yesteryear. Surely even the mildly literate housewives it was aimed at must find such trash virtually unreadable. When she had read the story that Susumu had begun to publish in a ladies' magazine from the end of the previous year, Tsuruko had suddenly been reminded of Rokuju-en's *Tales of Hida no Takumi*. She also recalled, as if in a dream, how a professor whose lectures on *The Tale of Genji* she'd attended as a student had been wont to

observe that the literary men of the Edo period were infinitely superior to today's writers. Susumu's cronies, who had the run of the house, in their manner of speech and demeanor were all as alike as brothers. When two or three of them were gathered together, they immediately began swilling Western liquor, sitting tailor-style or sprawled out on their sides, and speaking in raucous voices as if they were having a quarrel. When one listened to find out what they were talking about, it was nothing but horse-racing bets, mah-jongg wagers, vicious slander of friends, the vicissitudes of the publishing world, manuscript fees, and absolutely obscene anecdotes about women.

Tsuruko had decided any number of times to leave Susumu's house at the first good opportunity. Since she was no longer welcome at her elder brother's house, she was relying on the money that he'd given her at the time of their estrangement. About half of it was still in the bank. Even prepared if necessary to take a room and find work in an office, Tsuruko had completed her plans and was waiting for the final break to occur. But although she certainly had no fears of a request for alimony from Susumu, she continued to say nothing, coldly honoring her husband in all respects as a proper wife should. As time went by, it became impossible for her to abruptly bring up the matter. And so she had failed to speak to this day. Overwhelmed by these and other sad thoughts, Tsuruko, her handkerchief held between her lips, leaned against the kitchen housepost and listened absentmindedly to the buzz of horseflies in the grape arbor.

Suddenly, there was a sound of footsteps. Caught by surprise, Tsuruko hastily tried to put herself to rights. But the vestiges of tears in the corners of her eyes and the sad pallor of her face were not so easily effaced.

The old man, thinking when Tsuruko had gone to the kitchen and not come back that perhaps it was a troublesome peddler, had casually stepped around to see how things were.

"Tsuruko, you're not feeling well, are you? Would you like to lie down for a while?"

"No. I'm all right." Despite her words, Tsuruko felt at a loss where to put herself. She sat as if glued to the wooden floor.

"Your color's not good." The old man seemed to have guessed what the matter was. "Whatever I hear from other people I never repeat. In the old days, there was a sage called Hosoi Heishu. Whenever he found a letter belonging to somebody else, he would burn it on the spot. You needn't worry."

Tsuruko, wanting now to confide everything in her heart to this good old man, drew herself close to his feet as if to cling to him. "There's something I want to tell you. Except for you, Father, even though I want to, there's no one I can talk to."

"Hm. I'm listening. I've been thinking that you didn't look yourself at all." Noticing that the glass door of the kitchen had been left wide open by the man from the sake shop, Akira reached out and slid it shut.

"Father, that talk you said you were going to have. It's very kind of you, but I don't think it would come to anything." Tsuruko sniffed back her tears.

"Is that so? Your home life is not going well, is it? What a nuisance. What are your thoughts? Is there no hope for the future?"

"There's nothing in particular going on right now, but even if I were entered in your family register, I would be a wife in name only. There's no telling what may happen.

I've even thought it might be better just to leave things as they are. I'm sorry to be talking about myself this way."

"No, I understand now. It's too bad to speak ill of Susumu to you, but this sort of thing isn't limited to Susumu. Even if you explained what proper conduct was to the young people who play around with literature these days, it's not likely they would understand. I've been a teacher for many years, and I know what I'm talking about. If there were any hope for Susumu, I would call him in and try reasoning with him, but he's just no good. I've resigned myself to it."

"Even when I've said something, it's been awkward . . ."

"That's why even now, as I say, I'm not speaking to him. But if we leave things as they are, your future will be difficult. I'm sorry about that."

"There's no need to be. Whatever happens, I'm no longer young, and so I don't worry that much about the future. And it's not impossible that Susumu may come to have better feelings in the end."

"Hm. Hm." Still standing, arms folded, the old man let out a sigh. Then, hearing a sound from the direction of the back door, he said: "That seems to be Densuke. Let's talk over there."

All but taking her by the hand, the old man hurried Tsuruko out of the kitchen.



ALTHOUGH it was raining, it was only a drizzle and there was no wind. In the early rainy season sky, the clouds were beginning to break up. At seven o'clock, it was still fairly light. A car pulled up to the gates of the Noda geisha house in Fujimi-cho, and three men got out. One was a big-mouthed, balding man of fifty or so called Komada Hirokichi, who was Kiyooka's literary agent. His companions, one past forty, the other about thirty, clad in business suits and wearing glasses, were recognizable at a glance as newspapermen. Komada, leading the way, slid open the lattice door. Jostling with the maids as they took off their shoes, the three charged upstairs into a large sitting room at the front of the house. Evidently arrangements had been made earlier by telephone, since a smoking set and sitting cushion were in readiness for each guest. The scent of incense hung in the air of the room.

"The bathwater is ready." Shortly after this greeting by the maid, the ripely mature senior geisha, a woman of thirty or so who in this neighborhood would be called "big sister boss," and a geisha of about twenty made their appearance. They began setting out on the table the dishes of food the maid had brought upstairs.

Since the current story by Kiyooka in the *Mannen* newspaper was due to conclude in two weeks, Komada had prudently entered into negotiations with another newspaper for the sale of the next manuscript. Having secretly paid off the managing editor, he was now regaling two of the latter's subordinates at the geisha house.

"The sensei will be here presently. He won't mind, so let's start in." Handing a sake cup to the older reporter, Komada removed the lid from a bowl of soup.

"Drinking is just not one of my strong points." Having the geisha pour for him, the older reporter added: "I'm like a geisha who can't play the samisen."

"I'm surprised at you. Popular people have to learn how to drink."

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before? I can't quite remember where. Surely not at a cafe?"

"No, you may have. These days, what with geishas becoming waitresses and waitresses turning into geishas, there's no difference anymore."

"It's not unusual for a geisha to become a waitress, but surely not many waitresses become geishas."

"Not so. It happens all the time. Doesn't it, sis?"

"You don't say. There are a lot of them? I'm astonished."

"That's right. There are five or six of us. . . . If you looked, you might find more."

"Isn't there someone here who used to be on the Ginza or thereabouts?"

"That girl who recently came to us from the Tatsumi-ya . . . what was her name . . . ?" Pausing with her half-drunk cup of sake in her hand, the senior geisha knit her brows. "She was on the Ginza, if I'm not mistaken."

"The Shinbashi Meeting Hall," the younger geisha interjected.

"The Shinbashi Meeting Hall? Is that where she was? About when, was it?"

The younger reporter, who had said nothing up to now, abruptly pushed back the table. Komada looked over his shoulder at the maid.

"Call that geisha. What did you say her name was?"

"Tatsuchiyo of the Tatsumi-ya." The younger geisha having given the name, the maid started to get to her feet. Just then, a voice called up from downstairs: "O-Hanasan. The guest has come."

"It's probably the sensei." Glancing toward the paper door, Komada had no sooner moved aside slightly than there was a sound of footsteps on the ladder-stairs. A panama in one hand and still wearing his gray serge Inverness cape, Kiyooka Susumu was among them.

"Sorry to be late." Handing his hat and cape to the older geisha, and tying the sash of his single-layer iron-blue haori, which he wore over an unlined kimono of striped crepe, Kiyooka seated himself in an empty place at the table, where small dishes of food and chopsticks had been set out. Apparently already acquainted with the older reporter, he was introduced to the younger one. An exchange of cards across the table began immediately. The maid, bringing the geisha's answer along with additional bottles of sake, announced: "Tatsuchiyo will come up in a little while."

"Everybody. Won't you have some more?" Receiving the tray of bottles, the senior geisha continued: "You. Won't you have one?"

"Seems like a very dull party." Having himself served, Kiyooka looked around at Komada. "Are there any others coming?"

"At present, we're still in the process of selection. You don't know of anyone else? There are waitress-geishas, so there are probably ex-dancers and ex-actresses also. Anyway, if we're going to call, someone different would be good."

"He has strange tastes, this one."

"We had an unusual girl here until recently. Who would be good, now?"

"Sis. That girl at the Paulownia Blossom House. Isn't there a lot of talk about her?"

"You mean Kyoyo-san." The senior geisha slapped her knee. "She's better than a dancer. She can stand on her head."

"She's probably a fright to look at, though."

"No, she's beautiful, and sexy. She's the busiest person in this neighborhood."

"You're giving her a terrific buildup. I'll have a little more. Anyway, call her, call her." Komada, who seemed to be getting slightly drunk, was lively. But Kiyooka, hearing the name of Kyoyo of the Paulownia Blossom House, was unpleasantly reminded of that incident late the previous summer. Since he could not veto the suggestion, however, he assumed a noncommittal expression.

The senior geisha, seeking to add interest to the conversation, said: "If I were three or four years younger, I'd give up being a geisha and launch out on the Ginza myself. Because waitresses are at least respectable types on the surface. No matter what they do, they can gloss it over. That's what I think. The house right next door to mine is an assignation house. Waitresses bring all sorts of customers there. The houses are close together, so if you put your head out the window there's just a paper door between you and the people next door. You can hear everything they say. There's a tall, slender girl, better dressed than a geisha. She must be from a fashionable cafe on the Ginza. She always comes early in the morning. Sometimes, she even comes before nine o'clock. Then, she leaves at around noon. I'm just barely awake by nine

or ten. Right now, they're not keeping any girls there. It's dead quiet. It makes me strain my ears to hear something."

Kiyooka silently had himself served more sake by the young geisha. The two reporters, apparently fascinated by this account, egged on the senior geisha. "Yes, and then? And then?" Getting into the spirit of the thing, the geisha went on: "Sometimes the clients are different. But they're always saying 'Kimi-san, Kimi-san,' so there must be a girl who goes there called Kimiko or Kimiyo. She's really extraordinary. There was something that happened—when was it?—that truly astonished me."

Kiyooka glanced up sharply at the reporters' faces. Komada, as an older, more experienced man, soon noticed the danger. Worried that it was Kimie of the Don Juan who was the subject of the geisha's discourse, he covertly observed the reporters. But both of them seemed to be remarkably unobservant with the world of the Ginza cafes. Without any particular sign of awareness, one of them asked: "What was it that astonished you? Was she more passionate than a geisha?"

"Of course. Just listen. You'll hardly believe this, but . . ."

Komada, to stop the conversation from going any further, adroitly cut in. "Hey, what's happened to that geisha you called before? Go downstairs and tell her to come up."

"Yes." The younger geisha got to her feet. Komada then added: "I'll have some rice soon."

"I'll join you." The younger reporter, who hadn't had anything to drink, chimed in. What with the serving of the rice and the brewing of fresh green tea, the geisha's story was broken off. Just then, the woman called Tatsuchiyo knelt formally outside the opened paper door.

Her age was about twenty. The ribbons of raw silk in her low Shimada coiffure were cut long, and the skirts of her light purple kimono with a "flying pattern" trailed on the floor. Her large, firm-bodied figure suggested the prostitute rather than the geisha.

"Are you the one who was on the Ginza?"

"Yes. I am." With a rather complacent air, Tatsuchiyo went on: "Perhaps I've seen you there. Anyway, I'm awfully shortsighted. I'm always not recognizing people. They think I'm being rude."

Seemingly much annoyed at the way Tatsuchiyo prattled on without so much as a glance in her direction, the senior geisha glared at her out of the corner of her eye. Apparently noticing nothing, Tatsuchiyo drank off one after the other two cups of sake poured for her by the younger reporter and returned the cup to him. "Since coming here, I haven't been back to the Ginza even once. It must have changed. What are the liveliest cafes nowadays?"

"Where were you before? The Columbia?"

"Oh, excuse me. I was at the Shinbashi Meeting Hall."

"Why did you become a geisha? Because you were living too fast and came under surveillance?"

"You say that, but actually cafes are rather respectable. Because we're in the cafe from noon until midnight."

"What do you do after midnight?"

"After midnight? Doesn't everybody go to bed? One can't stay up all night, can one? Eh, you."

Just then, a petite geisha of twenty-two or -three, her hair also done in a low Shimada coiffure, and a tall geisha of eighteen or nineteen, wearing the latest hairdo, made their entrance, seating themselves at the bottom of the table. Kiyooka needed no reminder that the small woman

was Kyoyo. He wasn't likely to forget for the rest of his life that night when he shadowed Kimie from the precincts of the Hachiman Shrine in Ichigaya. Thinking it better not to be recognized by Kyoyo, on his two or three visits to this neighborhood since then he had taken care not to encounter her. Feigning casualness, he turned away and blew out smoke from his cigarette. Komada, finishing his rice, got up and went out into the corridor.

"Komada-san. Just a moment." The maid drew him toward the back stairs. "O-Kita-san. Sis. It already will cost a lot, so send the other one back."

"What about the two that came last? Are they all right?" Komada glanced at his watch.

"Kikuyo is a bit expensive, but . . ."

"If that's so, send her back too. I won't be needing one, so it's all right if there are just three."

"Well then, Kyoyo-san, Tatsuchiyo-san, and Matsuyosan." The maid said the names over for emphasis. "How shall we do this, now?"

Since the maid seemed to be at a loss how to assign the girls, Komada decided to slip behind the front desk on his way back from the privy and call Kiyooka downstairs, leaving the two reporters to choose the girls they wanted.

"I'll do that, then."

When the maid went back inside to send the senior geisha away, the younger reporter, the ex-waitress Tatsuchiyo on his knee, was sitting at the window and looking out as he sang some popular song. Leaving him so, the maid whispered to the older reporter. Kiyooka, surmising what was up, on the pretext of going to the privy and also to look for Komada, unobtrusively left the room and went down the backstairs. By the time he'd come back up, neither reporter was to be seen. The maid, picking

up their briefcases and discarded jackets, as the latter was about to leave was saying to Kyoyo: "It's on the third floor—right at the end of the hall." Pretending not to listen, Kiyooka sat down on the windowsill. The tall, stylish geisha, apparently thinking from the look of things that Kiyooka was her customer, saying: "It's cleared up already," seated herself beside him.

At some time or other, the rain had stopped. Along the straight, narrow street lined on both sides with geisha houses, the sound of clogs going back and forth grew slightly more frequent. From a distant corner, there came the refrain of a popular song, accompanied on a violin, by a street singer.

"That O-Kita who went back just now. Where is her house? In Fujimi-cho?" Kiyooka asked, as of some unimportant matter. Actually, he was bothered by the matter of that next-door assignation house the woman had talked about.

"No. She's way out past Sanban-cho, even . . ."

"Isn't there a girls' school or something out there?"

"Yes. My own house is right next to O-Kita-san's."

"Is that so? But didn't she say that her house was next door to an assignation house?"

"Yes. That would be the Chiyoda house. Next door but one is O-Kita-san's house, and the one on this side is my house."

"Is that so? That must be the house, then. That makes side-by-side assignation houses, doesn't it?"

"It's strange, somehow."

"I owe them a visit, so I've been thinking I'd go there soon. But I don't know how things are there."

"Out there the Chiyoda house is the only place where you can sleep with the girls. It's the farthest out of the licensed quarters."

The maid, coming down from the third floor, welcomed Kiyooka. Kiyooka, however, not particularly attracted by the geisha, merely said: "What happened to Komada? I've got a little business with him. He can't have gone back yet."

"He was at the desk talking with the proprietor a little while ago. I'll go and see."

As the maid was leaving, Komada, stuffing a big billfold into a pocket of his jacket, came up the front stairs. If it was on business, Komada was willing to go to an assignation house, a cafe, or whatever, but he only rarely ordered a woman. Since he'd been working in the business department of his newspaper, he had dabbled in real estate and the stock market. He was rumored to be a rather wealthy man by now. Despite that, he still lived in a little house in Yotsuya-Teramachi, up an alley so narrow that not even a rickshaw could enter it. He'd been there since the days before streetcars. In Kiyooka's opinion, Komada was a miser of the old school who would have set fire to his own fingernails if he could save money thereby.

"Komada. If you're going back, I'll leave with you. It's still early, so probably we can catch a trolley."

"Are you going on to the Ginza from here?"

"No. I've already given that up. You know how it is—it she's someone who sees everybody, it damages your reputation. There's something I want to talk to you about. We'll leave when you're ready."

"Well. You really are leaving, then?" The geisha seemed genuinely surprised. Kiyooka, however, without looking at her, drew toward him the bellrope that hung on the post by the window and pressed the button.

Komada, as he was going down the stairs with Kiyooka, as if he'd suddenly remembered something, turned around toward the maid, who was seeing them

off. "Hey, you. If they stay overnight, send the geishas back in the morning."

"That's already taken care of."

"I don't think there was anything else. Give me some matches, and we'll be off." Even while putting on his shoes, Komada made sure to get his money's worth.

"Thank you very much. Please come again soon." Sliding open the lattice door, the two men stepped outside. The moon had come out. It was a typical summer evening in the licensed quarters. In the alleys, the yukatas of the women going back and forth caught the eye.

"Komada, you'll go with me to Akasaka, won't you?"

"So that's where you're going these days?"

"Because I'm already tired of the cafes. Geishas are the best after all. I've been thinking of finding some nice lively geisha and setting her up."

"Setting her up? You mean buying out her contract? You'll have to think about it carefully."

"I knew you'd say that, if I talked it over with you."

"You'd probably do better not laying out a round sum of money. That goes for buying out the contract, too. If she thinks there's a chance of your marrying her, she'll play fair and square with you. But if not, something unpleasant is bound to happen, and you'll have to let her go anyway."

"But even I don't know what the future may hold. I might even become single again . . ."

"Is that so? Stormy weather ahead for you, in that case."

"No, it's not as bad as all that. It's just that—I don't know why, but whenever I go home I get intolerably depressed."

Thinking he would like to tell Komada the full story of his domestic arrangements, to answer all questions,

Kiyooka walked along, mulling over how and where to begin. All of a sudden, they were at the Fujimi-cho trolley stop. In the first place, Kiyooka had never really meant to make Tsuruko his legal wife. It had been his intention merely to enjoy occasional secret trysts with her. But the woman had been extraordinarily in earnest. The affair had turned unexpectedly serious, and he hadn't known what to do. Luckily for him, he learned that she had received a sum of money from her elder brother. With it, he had rented a house in Kamakura and lived together with her. Of course, he was quite aware that Tsuruko's beauty and character would place her above reproach as his wife. As time passed, however, thanks to his own immoral life Kiyooka had begun to feel somehow ashamed of himself. Knowing that he had to be careful about telling even a single off-color joke, he felt unbearably cramped. Unless he went at least once a day to a cafe or an assignation house and drank and had silly conversations with the waitresses or geishas, he felt unendurably lonely. If the waitress Kimie had been just a little more forthcoming, Kiyooka would have liked to set her up immediately with her own bar or cafe. But, knowing how unreliable Kimie was, he'd changed his mind and was now thinking of setting up a geisha as soon as he found the right one. He'd been hoping to elicit Komada's opinion on the matter. But Komada, seeing the trolley coming, shifting his grip on his briefcase, all but leaped aboard with an agility remarkable for his years. Immediately losing interest, Kiyooka said: "I'll say good-bye, then. There's someplace I have to go."

"Tomorrow. I'll be at the office in the afternoon. If there's something you want to talk about, give me a ring." Komada answered from the trolley as it moved off.



Kiyooka looked at his pocket watch. It was ten o'clock. Since it was not that late, now would be a good time to go home. Late-night reveler that he was, though, Kiyooka felt somehow dissatisfied. He could not force his steps in a homeward direction until he'd visited one other place somewhere. But at this hour, he could not just stroll into someplace like the Don Juan on the Ginza, which would be jammed with customers and where one of the waitresses was his mistress. Fearful also of being harassed by the rascals and delinquent literary types who frequented the eating and drinking shops around the Ginza, he had no wish to see Kimie laughing and carrying on with some drunken customer. The place to go to was that assignation house in Akasaka he'd visited occasionally of late. But the geisha there that he had his eye on, although he'd already engaged her five or six times, did not seem overly amenable to his proposition. When he thought that even tonight the matter would not be settled, Kiyooka felt irritated even before he'd made his visit. His anger, however, when he had thought it over, did not spring from the geisha's refusal to do his will. The cause, as always, arose from his feelings of indignation toward Kimie. If Kimie had only done what he wanted her to, he would not have had to make a fool of himself getting rejected by the geisha. The desire for revenge, which for a while he had put aside, once again welled up hotly in him. What aroused Kiyooka's wrath more than anything else was how Kimie spent her days in apparent pleasure without a care in the world. Next was the fact that she didn't appear particularly overjoyed to have a famous writer as her lover. Even if he broke off the relationship, it seemed as if she would feel no especial regret or anything much at all. If the relationship ended, Kimie would no doubt take

advantage of that to find a new lover and go on living in the same empty-headed, frivolous manner as before. There was no one more difficult to manage than a woman without either ambition or desire for money, who simply wanted to live out her lewd, indolent existence. To make such a woman suffer, the only way might be to inflict physical pain upon her. And yet, since one could not do such things as cut off all her hair or slash her face, one could only wait for her to contract some serious illness that would confine her to bed for two or three months. Mulling over such matters, following his feet wherever they led him, Kiyooka abruptly looked around him. This brilliantly illuminated place—it was the entrance of the Ichigaya railway station. Diagonally opposite, the low houses of the neighborhoods on the far side of the Moat were visible. Under the early rainy season sky that was beginning to cloud over in impenetrable darkness, an advertisement for Jintan Pills flashing on and off caught Kiyooka's eye.

Kimie's house was up the alley where that sign was flashing on and off. Not only had he not seen her for nearly three days, from the day before yesterday until tonight, but mindful of that story he'd heard earlier from the geisha in Fujimi-cho, Kiyooka decided the best thing was to secretly reconnoiter the place. Going along by the Moat, he turned in at the usual alley.

The lights in the windows of the sake shop and the drugstore on the corner illuminated every nook and cranny of the narrow alley so clearly that one could make out the faces of passers-by. For about a year now, Kiyooka had been coming here every four or five days. Thinking he was certain to be recognized by the shopclerks, he pulled down his hat brim deeply over his eyes and hurried

past. Ahead of him, the sweets shop and the tobacconist's were still open. Along there, though, the lights were very dim, and nobody was standing around in front of the shops. The fish shop at the corner of Kimie's alley had already closed. Looking around him, Kiyooka was just about ready to enter the dark alley when he abruptly encountered the old woman who was Kimie's landlady. Pretending not to recognize her, he tried to slip past her in the darkness. But the sharp-eyed old woman called out: "Why, it's the *sensai*. We almost walked right by each other. What a lucky encounter. There have been burglaries, so I'd locked up and was on my way to the bathhouse. Is O-Kimi-san coming back early tonight?"

"No. I had a little business in Ichigaya, so I thought I'd drop by. I can't wait until she gets back. Please don't tell her I was here tonight. I've been slightly worried about her."

"Well then, just come in for a cup of tea."

"But weren't you on your way to the bathhouse, Auntie?"

"Oh come now, you. There's no great hurry about that."

Since he could not simply shake her off and go on his way, Kiyooka, as invited, entered the downstairs sitting room where the old woman slept and lived, and sat down at the long brazier. It was the same sort of six-mat room as the one upstairs. Although the walls and ceiling were sooty, and there were even floorboards missing, it was kept clean and neat down to the last nook and corner. All the tears in the paper doors had been patched. Had there been a tenant available, even this room could have been rented out. In the ornamental alcove, looking as if it had hung there forever, there was a picture scroll of Mari-

shiten\* or some such deity. Atop an old utility chest that had faded to the hue of persimmon paper, a small household shrine had been set up. Over the long brazier, an iron teakettle hung in a Yoshiwara holder that had been polished until it shone. From such utensils and furniture, one probably could have guessed the old woman's approximate age. According to the old woman herself, after her husband, a first lieutenant in the army at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, had died in battle, she had supported herself by working as a housemaid or temporary housekeeper and had also done piecework at home. By these means, she had raised her daughter. The daughter had had the good fortune to marry a wealthy importer, and the couple now lived in America. So that the old woman should want for nothing, they sent her an allowance. According to others, however, although the allowance from the daughter was real enough, the latter had been the concubine of a foreigner. When she gave birth to a child, she had been taken away by her lord and master to his own country. Kiyooka was not only unable to decide which of these versions was true, but could not make out why Kimie had rented the second floor of this house in the first place, and why she didn't move to a nicer house in a better neighborhood. Despite her claim to have been the wife of an officer, to judge from her present appearance and manner of speaking the old woman belonged to a type frequently to be met with in the back alleys of the Honjo-Asakusa area. That both her birth and upbringing had been lowly appeared in the fact that she could barely read the bill from the sake shop. Her mindless deference toward anyone with a mustache and wearing Western

\*God of War (tr. note).

clothes told one just about all there was to know about her. It would do no good to ask her what Kimie had been up to in the intervals between his visits. Not letting his long-cherished grudge show in his face, with as good-humored a manner as he could manage, Kiyooka said: "If I go to the cafe, I run into all sorts of people. It's a nuisance. That's why even when I pass by at night I try not to go inside."

"That's wise. When they see a famous person like yourself, people want to start up all sorts of rumors. Oh dear—it's already eleven o'clock." Listening to the clock in the house next door chime the hour, the old woman looked up at the octagonal clock on top of the utility chest.

"Sensei, if you can wait another hour, she'll be back. Please do wait. I'll put some more coals on the brazier."

"Auntie. It doesn't have to be tonight. I'll come by in the morning." So saying, Kiyooka slipped his pack of Shikishimas into his kimono sleeve. But the old woman had put two and two together. From Kiyooka's hanging around this neighborhood at such an odd hour, and Kimie's slatternly behavior, which she'd kept an eye on night and day, she surmised the general situation. Pretending to know nothing, though, she said: "But, sensei, unless I keep you here, I'll be scolded for it afterward by Kimie-san."

"If you don't tell her, she won't know anything."

"But somehow I don't feel easy about it. I'll use the telephone at the sake shop and call her up." Groping about in the drawer of the brazier, the old woman took out a scrap of paper on which was written a telephone number.

"Well then, I'll lie down upstairs until you get back. But she's sure to be back herself by twelve, so there's no need for you to call." Getting to his feet, Kiyooka added:

"I'll watch over the house, Auntie, so go and have your bath if you like."

When he'd sent the old woman off to the bathhouse, Kiyooka went upstairs. If any secret love letters were lying about, he meant to lay hands on them. The old woman, having often been urgently requested by Kimie to telephone her if anything unexpected came up, decided to make the call at the sake shop or the drugstore on her way to the baths. Tucking away the scrap of paper with its scribbled phone number in her obi, she set out.



## SEVEN

WHEN the phonecall came from the old woman, Kimie luckily was drinking with a customer at a table near the phone booth. She went to the phone as soon as she was summoned. But in addition to being rather drunk (it was thirty or forty minutes to closing time), she was prevented by the noise around her from hearing well. She understood that Kiyooka had come to her place, but could not make out a word of the old woman's lengthy explanation. Tonight was not one of the nights Kiyooka was supposed to come, and there had been no advance word from him. Kimie had felt free to make an engagement earlier in the evening to spend the night somewhere with a dancer called Kimura Yoshio, who had recently returned from the West. Then Yata-san, the foreign-car dealer with whom she had been intimate two or three times, had shown up. Also inviting Haruyo and Yuriko, he'd insisted that on their way home Kimie stop off at the newly opened noodle shop on the street in back of the Matsuya Dry Goods Store. If she had another engagement, an hour or half an hour would be fine, Yata had said. Going out for a while, he'd just this minute come back and was treating four or five waitresses to various snacks. At about the same time, the old gentleman called Matsuzaki, who almost never went to cafes and the like, had suddenly appeared. Of course, he explained, he was on his way back from seeing somebody off at Tokyo Station.

At all the cafes on the Ginza, not just the Don Juan,

## *During the Rains*

after ten o'clock, toward closing time, it usually got very crowded all of a sudden. The noise of the constantly playing phonograph, intermittently drowned out by the clamor of voices, mingled with the clatter of plates amid drifting motes of dust and cigarette smoke. To make matters worse, Kimie had a headache. Just when even she had begun to think that maybe she'd had a little too much to drink this evening, three men had descended upon her here at the cafe, and back at her place another one was waiting for her. She was practically at her wit's end. What to do? Why tonight of all nights were circumstances so unfavorable? It was enough to make her envy people in more respectable professions. If she could drink herself into a stupor, the others would take care of her one way or another. With this in mind, Kimie approached old man Matsuzaki's table. "I want to get dead drunk tonight. Buy me an 'auto-car,' please."

"Are you in some kind of trouble? Did you quarrel with one of your customers?" By virtue of his years, Matsuzaki seemed to know at once how things were with Kimie.

"No. That's not it. But . . ."

"'But'—so it is something of that sort."

At a loss for an answer, Kimie was silent. Then, it occurred to her that since this old man had known her from the days before she'd become a waitress and knew everything there was to know about her, it might be well to tell him her problem and ask his advice. Luckily, there was not a single other waitress at the table. Snuggling up to Matsuzaki, Kimie said: "I'm really in a fix tonight. This is the first time circumstances have been so unfavorable."

Matsuzaki, who seemed to have guessed everything instantly from Kimie's manner and way of speaking, replied: "I'm leaving in a few minutes. I just thought I'd

drop by and see how things were at the cafe tonight. Let's meet again soon, during the day, when you'll have more time."

"I'm sorry. Please don't be angry with me."

"Of course not. I understand. You've probably got more than one customer on your hands."

"When all is said and done, you're the only one, though. How did you know, Uncle?" Kimie, putting her mouth to Matsuzaki's ear, gave him the lowdown about tonight, not holding back a single detail.

"Can't you suggest some good plan?"

"There are any number of things you can do. It's no problem." Matsuzaki promptly imparted to Kimie his scheme of action. First, on her way back from the cafe, she was to rush one of her customers to an assignation house. Since there would be no question of her staying overnight, after a while, before the man got ready to leave, Kimie could apologize for leaving first, pretend to be hurrying home, and hide in another room. Previously, she would have sent a waitress whom she could trust to the house in Ichigaya to tell the old woman that they had unsuspectingly accepted a ride from a customer only to be taken off by force to an assignation house. While the customer was calling for a geisha and plying them with food and drink, the waitress alone, seeing her opportunity, had escaped. The old woman must come at once to fetch Kimie-san. Undoubtedly, it would be Kiyooka who came to the assignation house. As it would take him more than an hour to get there, Kimie would easily be able to take care of one customer. As for the other customer, with the excuse that she was afraid of being seen, Kimie would send him on ahead to another assignation house. It was too bad, but he would have to sleep by himself

tonight. Of course, he would be very angry, but his longing for Kimie was sure to grow stronger in proportion to his chagrin. The next day, he would certainly come to reproach her. If, on that occasion, she gave him his heart's desire, the result would be more felicitous than if nothing had happened. Stroking his clipped gray mustache, Matsuzaki smilingly added: "However, to carry off a job like this, it has to be a place where the people are intelligent and resourceful. Is there some house you're friendly with that would be suitable?"

"Yes. There is. That place out in Ushigome. I went there with you two or three times when I was living in Suwamachi. And these days, there's a place in Sanban-cho I go to occasionally."

Just then, a waitress came to take Matsuzaki's order. Kimie, making some irrelevant joke, got up and left the table. Since there was only half an hour to closing time, Matsuzaki thought he might find out who Kimie's customers were in the interval. He also felt curious to see what kind of action Kimie would in fact take. But, thinking that it would be difficult to sit still that long, he soon paid the bill and left the cafe. On both sides of the street, the shops had turned off their lights and closed their doors. What with the rain that had fallen earlier and the late hour, only a few stand-up eating and drinking stalls were still open. Along the main thoroughfare of the Ginza, the wide streets that led off to the right and left were all deserted as far as the eye could see. Above was the dark night sky, which loomed with a promise of more rain, and below the colored lights of the bars and cafes reflected in the wet surface of the pavement. The theaters and variety halls had already closed an hour ago. All the couples strolling about idly at this hour seemed to

be coming or going to or from the cafes. The trolleys that passed by were comparatively empty. Only taxis, with no apparent destination, cruised the intersections.

Matsuzaki, who nowadays came to the Ginza only now and then on business, felt something of the curiosity of the sightseer. Without actually stopping, he loitered at the Owari-cho intersection. As always, when he observed the scene around him, it seemed to him that only now, at this late hour, did the transformation of this district and the trend of the times come home to him. They brought in their wake the memories of half a lifetime.

Matsuzaki, who held a law degree, had at one time been a high official in a government ministry in Kobiki-cho. Implicated in a graft scandal that had shocked the nation, however, he had been tried and sentenced to prison. After his release from prison, however, all was clear sailing. Thanks to his deals, he'd accumulated a private income sufficient to let him enjoy himself for the rest of his life. His children were already grown and on the road to success. When he compared the Ginza that he'd seen every day on his way to the ministry in his own rickshaw from his mansion in Kojimachi for several years, and the present-day scene, changing day by day since the Earthquake, Matsuzaki could not but feel that he was dreaming. The dream did not hold the deep emotion with which a modern Roman thinks of the ancient city of Rome. It implied only the shallow admiration that the spectator at a variety show feels for the dexterity of a juggler. When a city aped the West to the degree that Tokyo did, the spectacle provoked in the observer an astonishment, along with a certain sense of pathos. More than merely from the appearance of the streets, this pathos was felt especially keenly when one thought of the cir-

cumstances of the waitresses who had to make their living in this district. Women like Kimie, by nature lacking any sense of feminine decorum and chastity, were doubtless not few among the waitresses. Even though she was a prostitute like them, Kimie was of a totally different kind from the geisha-prostitutes of the past. She was the same type of unlicensed prostitute that flourishes in the cities of the West. The fact that such women had appeared in the streets of Tokyo, if one attributed it to the atmosphere of the period, prompted the reflection that nothing was so surprising as the changes of time. Looking back on his own life, Matsuzaki felt no particular shame as he recalled being hauled into court and being convicted of malversation. Perhaps this also was one of the effects of the atmosphere of the period. More than twenty years had passed since then. Even though this old man who at one time had been so noisily discussed was today having a quiet drink in a Ginza cafe, no one, if they had known of it, would have thought it strange or criticized him. Time had buried the uproar, along with his merits and demerits, in oblivion. That, indeed, one would have to say, was truly like a dream. Toward the world and toward his own career, Matsuzaki felt the same melancholy mixture of resentment and cold contempt. In life, there was neither past nor future, only the pleasures and pains of day-to-day existence. Matsuzaki had come to feel that there was no need to take either praise or censure too much to heart. If that were so, he was bound to consider himself as the most fortunate of human beings. At age sixty, he was in good health. Occasionally, without any fear of what people would think, he put his arm around twenty-year-old waitresses and flirted with them like a young man. Moreover, he felt no shame in doing so. In this alone,

his happiness exceeded by far that of royalty. Matsuzaki could not help laughing out loud.

Kimie, as previously arranged, after leaving the café met the dancer Kimura Yoshio on the dark river promenade that runs toward Yuraku Bridge. From there, they went by car to the friendly Chiyoda assignation house in Sanban-cho. As instructed to by old man Matsuzaki, Kimie meant to pretend to leave ahead of the customer and hide out in another room, where she would await Kiyooka with an innocent expression on her face. On the way, however, Kimura's conversation revealed that he was a surprisingly sophisticated person. Apparently he thought it a matter of course that a waitress should have two or three lovers. When they'd gone upstairs to the second floor rear of the Chiyoda, Kimie immediately told him about tonight's situation. As she'd expected, Kimura went along with everything.

"If you had told me right away, I wouldn't have had to cause you all this trouble. Please forgive me. I've done the wrong thing. We'll meet some other time, when you're not quite so busy."

As if deliberately urging her on, Kimura helped Kimie with her preparations, even tying her obi for her.

Ever since she had seen Kimura perform in the intermission between movies at the Horaku Theater, Kimie had been stirred up by her usual curiosity. Parting in this manner left her with an unbearably dissatisfied feeling. Kimura's art, to go by articles he had published in newspapers and magazines, was an amalgam of the Russian dance since Nijinsky and Chinese theatrical dance, in short a mixture of East and West. The linear beauty of the movements of the male and female body, Kimura

claimed, was far superior to the stationary effect of sculpture and the plastic arts. Furthermore, it was more profound than the intuitive, suggestive power of music. To the waitress Kimie, however, this sort of aesthetic discussion was all one. When she'd seen naked young men and women cavorting about the stage, striking various poses and occasionally embracing each other in front of a large audience, she'd wondered what it would be like to meet the man who made his living from that sort of show. There was no difference between her feeling and that of the shameless geisha who patronizes a sumo wrestler or the girl student who develops a crush on a baseball player.

"Sensei, it's already late, so you won't go home, will you? You'll go to some other place. I'm jealous."

"But your patron is coming. You don't have any choice, do you? I'm going straight home. If you don't believe me, try calling me up." Handing her his card, Kimura added: "Kimie-san, please let's meet again."

"Yes, let's. Please. Somehow I have the feeling I've done something really unforgivable. I don't want to send you away." As usual, Kimie was unable to repress her interest in a new man. Leaning against the knee of Kimura, who had already begun his preparations for departure, she took hold of his hand.

After a while, saying that she would engage a car for his return, Kimie stepped out into the corridor to call the maid. Asking the time, she was told that it had just now struck two. The customer called Kiyooka had not yet appeared, nor had there been a phonecall. The car arrived, and the dancer Kimura took his leave. The writer Kiyooka, however, still hadn't shown up. It was now past two-thirty. When the café closed, Kimie had sent a fellow waitress called Ruriko to Ichigaya with her story. From

her days as an assistant in a Western-style hairdressing salon, Ruriko had the entree of many assignation houses. She was not likely to make a mistake in an affair of this kind. Perhaps Kiyooka, without getting Ruriko's message, had gone home early in a rage. Kimie felt more and more regretful, unbearably so, at having sent Kimura away. When she looked at his card, which she had slipped inside her obi, it had the phone number of his residence, the Showa Apartments. With the sudden reckless idea of calling him, Kimie started down the backstairs. Just then, from the front, there was the sound of somebody's arrival. Thinking it must be Kiyooka, Kimie strained her ears. But as she listened to the voice of the visitor as he came upstairs to the second floor front, Kimie realized that it was not Kiyooka. It seemed to be the untimely Yata. At the cafe, although urgently invited, she had told him that she had a prior engagement and could not go to the back-street noodle shop with him. Instead, she'd said, if it were a little later she would go anywhere he liked. Giving him the name of an assignation house, she'd sent him on ahead with the lie that she would meet him there later.

Yata, for his part, had taken Kimie at her word. Going to the assignation house, the one behind the Kagura Slope where he'd taken Kimie the first night, he waited patiently until after two o'clock. There had not even been a phone-call. Guessing what was up, Yata remembered the Chiyoda house in Sanban-cho, where Kimie had taken him ten days ago on her way to work. If she was there, he would cause a commotion and make a nuisance of himself by way of revenge. It was with this in mind that Yata had suddenly arrived at the Chiyoda. When he knocked at the gate, the maid came out to slide open the rain shutters. "Is

Kimie-san here?" To this crafty inquiry, the maid, taking it for granted that Yata was the customer Kimie had been waiting for, replied: "The lady has been waiting for ever so long. You men are really inconsiderate." Suffocated by his own cigarette smoke, Yata could say nothing. Obediently going upstairs, he sat down tailor-style in front of the ornamental alcove. Not even taking his hat off, he looked around the room dubiously.

Informed of the situation by the maid at the foot of the backstairs, Kimie decided that she would have to make the best of things. Immediately going back upstairs, she slid open the opaque paper door. "Ya-san, this is too much." Her voice sharp, Kimie upbraided him.

Yata, still not over his surprise at the maid's reply, and speechless at Kimie's extraordinary attitude, merely blinked at her.

"I was thinking of going back." Primly seating herself, Kimie looked down at the mat.

"What on earth is going on?" Seeming to notice it for the first time, Yata took off his hat. "Somehow I'm all up in the air."

Kimie, her eyes lowered, silently toyed with a handkerchief in her lap. Bringing some freshly brewed tea, the maid entered the room. "You've truly had a long wait, miss. Shall I bring some sake?"

"It's already too late," Kimie said, her voice curiously low and melancholy. "I'm terribly sorry to have made you stay up so long."

"I'm used to late hours. If that will be all . . ." Taking Yata's hat and light summer overcoat, the maid got to her feet. There was no chance for Yata to say anything. The maid leading the way, he wordlessly entered the four-and-a-half-mat room at the rear of the second floor, all



unaware that it was the same room in which the dancer had been entertained.

Although hearing in her sleep the sound of the brief downpour that came at daybreak of the short summer night, Kimie dozed for a while longer. Suddenly, at the shrill voice of a woman in the alley, exclaiming right under her window how hot it had gotten, and the staccato clip-clop of clogs as someone ran by, she opened her eyes. In the eaves, sparrows were singing. From not far away, there was the sound of someone practicing on the samisen. From the front of the house, along with the sounds of housecleaning and wooden and paper doors being slid open and shut, there were footsteps from the neighbor's as someone went up to the roof to hang out the laundry. The rain had gone away, and the sun was glittering in a clear sky. Inside the room, its windows and doors all closed and the light bulb still on from last evening, the stuffy heat was even more oppressive. Her head aching from the musty odor of sleep, despite her experience of such evenings, Kimie crawled off the bedding and began opening the rain shutters.

"Leave it. I'll do it. It really has gotten hot." Yata's humor had taken a turn for the better during the night.

"Oh, my. Just try touching this." Taking off her long underwear of bleached cotton with a delicate red collar, Kimie, on all fours, reached out her arm toward the window to let the garment dry in the breeze. Observing her pose, Yata commented: "You're a lot more charming than the likes of the Kimura Dancers."

"How do you mean, charming?"

"I'm referring to your physical charms."

Thinking what a good saying that was about ignorance

and bliss, Kimie stifled a desire to laugh. "Ya-san, I'll bet you know somebody in that troupe. They all have good figures. Even a woman thinks that, looking at them. For a man, it must be seventh heaven."

"It's not like that at all. They're fine as long as they're on the stage. Face to face, they're not worth talking about. Dancers and models don't know how to do anything except take their clothes off. Conversationally, they're duds. You've spoiled me for other women, Kimie-san."

"Ya-san, you mustn't make fun of others like that."

His face suddenly serious, Yata was about to say something. Just then, from outside the room, the maid inquired: "Are you already up? The bathwater is ready."

"It's already ten o'clock." Drawing his wristwatch to him from beside the pillow, Yata said: "I've got to drop over to the office on a little business. But, Kimie-san, are you on the late shift today?"

"Today, I'm on from three o'clock. It's too hot to go back to my place, so I'll rest up here until then. Why don't you do the same?"

"Hm. I'd like to, but . . ." Yata thought it over for a moment. "Well, anyway, let's have our bath."

Calling his showroom, Yata was informed that something had arisen which absolutely required his presence. Not even having any breakfast, he took his leave of Kimie and hurried off. By now, it was getting toward noon. Still puzzled as to what had become of Kiyooka, Kimie phoned the fish dealer's in front of her place, on whom she usually relied in such matters, and had them call the old woman to the phone. She was told that last night her friend the waitress had come, and the sensei had gone out together with her. That was all. Perhaps Kiyooka and Ruriko had struck up an amorous acquaintance, Kimie surmised. If

so, that would explain his not having shown up here. However, that was just a thought of hers, and Kimie felt no inclination to exercise herself about it. Since leaving home in the fall of her seventeenth year and coming to Tokyo four years ago, Kimie had slept with so many men that she'd lost count. And yet, Kimie had never sought the kind of love that is described in novels. That was why she had never experienced the emotion called jealousy. Rather than have one man deeply fall for her, and because of that enduring his angers and grudges, getting into troublesome entanglements and being bound to him because she had taken his money, Kimie thought it best to frolic on the spot, as the spirit moved her and to her heart's content with anyone who presented himself, be he young or old, handsome or ugly. That way there was no bad aftertaste. From the end of her seventeenth year down to this very day in her twentieth year, Kimie had been pursued by the insatiable demands of such frivolity. She had not had the leisure to consider deeply what manner of thing the true emotion of serious love might be. It was not that (every once in a very long while) Kimie did not sleep by herself in her second-floor rented room, but her principal desire on such nights was to catch up on her chronic lack of sleep. Also, she would begin to imagine the new pleasures that would naturally follow once she'd recovered from her fatigue. Any other subject, no matter how serious, as she dropped off to sleep, became dim and insubstantial, as if she were dreaming. To Kimie, nothing was so enjoyable as that mixture of feelings and sensations at the moment of waking, as she tried to make out which was reality and which a dream.

Today also, indulging herself in this pleasure, when she'd awakened from her doze, Kimie was loath to raise

her head from the pillow, although aware that it was nearly three o'clock. Looking around her, she saw the clothes that she'd stripped off herself the night before and her sash lying in a disorderly pile. After the dancer Kimura had left, the automobile importer Yata had come to this four-and-a-half-mat room at the back of the second floor. This morning he had gone, leaving a rain shutter open for her. Dangling from the ceiling, the light bulb still cast the shadow of the flower arrangement against the wall of the ornamental alcove. Carrying the cries of vendors and the languid sounds of song practice, a breeze that flowed along the narrow openings between houses came in at the window, caressing her face where she had flung herself cheek down on the mat. At a moment like this, Kimie wished that Yata or indeed any man were here. She would throw all the desires in her body at him. Forlorn in her fantasies that surged up more and more powerfully, lightly closing her eyes, Kimie embraced herself with all the strength in her arms. Heaving a sigh, she wrestled amorously with her own body. Just then, there was the sound of the opaque paper door softly sliding open. A man stepped into the room and stood in front of the folding screen. It was none other than Kimura Yoshio, whom Kimie had been thinking of so regretfully since last night.

"Well." Just barely raising her face, Kimie did not attempt to get up. Gazing at him from where she lay, she held out her arms, waiting for Kimura to bend down to her. Pulling him close, she murmured: "I was dreaming about you."

A while later, Kimura told Kimie that he had lost a silver filigree pencil the evening before and come back on the off chance that it might be here.

When the two had gotten up and were putting their

chopsticks to a fish in the front parlor, a phonecall came from the waitress Ruriko. Last night, as requested by Kimie, she had gone to Honmura-cho and assuming an agitated demeanor had informed Kiyooka that Kimie had been taken against her will to the Chiyoda assignation house in Sanban-cho. Abruptly displeased and not listening to her explanations, Kiyooka had shaken her off along the way and gone somewhere by himself. Anxious to let Kimie know, Ruriko had waited for her to come to the restaurant. But when she'd failed to appear even for the three o'clock shift, Ruriko had gotten in touch with Kimie's landlady through the fish dealer's. Surmising the situation from the old woman's answer, she had then called here.

It was dark by the time Kimie and Kimura completed their repast. Announcing that he had an opening day tomorrow at the Maruen Theater and must go for rehearsal, Kimura made hasty preparations to leave. Handing Kimie five or six special-price tickets and asking her to sell them to the waitresses at the cafe, he departed, without paying either for the meal or the taxicab fare.

Kimie, just as if she'd been amusing herself with a storyteller or a kind of male geisha, felt a sudden letdown. The carefully nurtured illusion that all day she had been living in a dream had already faded away. With the last of the light, the fact that for the time being at least she had nothing to do tonight came home to her with an abrupt loneliness. She could not stay by herself at the assignation house. Paying Kimura's bill for food and drink, she went outside. It was the hour when the coming and going of geishas to their engagements was at its height. It was too late to go to the cafe, yet too early to go home. Thinking on the spur of the moment that she would go see

Kyoyo at the Paulownia Blossom House, Kimie had no sooner turned the corner than, coming toward her, holding up the skirts of her banquet kimono, the edges of her red undergarments flutter in the evening breeze, in full geisha regalia, was none other than Kyoyo.

"Kimi-san. Are you on your way to the Ginza?"

"It's already too late. I thought I'd take the night off."

"You've been at the Chiyoda house, haven't you?"

"How did you know?"

"How did I know, nothing. Kimi-chan. You mustn't go there. Last night I saw Mr. Kiyooka."

"You did?" Kimie's eyes widened in surprise, as well they might.

"Yes. I saw Mr. Kiyooka during the evening at the Noda house. He was with three or four people. I was on my way to an after-engagement, so I just caught a glimpse of him. At the time, I didn't notice who it was. But I saw his friends later, and I heard all about their conversation. All the geishas know that you occasionally go to the Chiyoda. The houses are right next to each other, and you can see everything from the window. In the banquet room, they were talking away about you without knowing that it was Mr. Kiyooka. Well, anyway, we can't talk here. I have business with the old woman, so tomorrow or the day after I'll come by for a good long chat. But you really ought to stay away from that place."

"So. It was that sort of thing, was it? Well, I'll wait for your visit."

Dogs of the neighborhood, samisen carriers, shopboys delivering cooked food, geishas, and the like were passing by in an endless stream. Quickly ending their chance encounter, the pair parted and went their separate ways.



## EIGHT

SINCE her husband generally got up toward noon, each morning Tsuruko would have her solitary breakfast of milk and toast instead of the usual rice, clean out the cage of the parrot she'd kept the past several years, water the bonsai, do up her hair, get dressed, and wait for her lord and master to arise. This morning, among the mail that the maid brought her with the milk, there was a letter with both the address and name written in Western characters. Casually picking it up, Tsuruko discovered it was for her. The handwriting was familiar. It was from Madame Joule, the French lady from whom she had taken lessons for more than two years before and after her graduation from girls' school.

Madame Joule, wife of the noted Orientalist Alphonse Joule, had accompanied her husband to the East, living in China for upward of ten years and afterward for several years in Japan. At one time she had returned to her own country, but after her husband's death, to console herself for her widowhood she had traveled by herself in America and later returned to Japan, where she'd lived in Tokyo for a couple of years. It was during this period that Tsuruko and two or three of her schoolfriends had studied French and etiquette with her. After Madame Joule's return to Paris, an urgent matter had arisen in connection with the posthumous publication of her husband's work. And so four or five days ago she had once again returned to Japan. She was staying at the Imperial Hotel and wished Tsuruko to come and visit her.

## During the Rains

Tsuruko, after waiting until the noon siren for Susumu to bestir himself, telephoned the hotel and set out.

Madame Joule was a plump, genial, round-faced lady with narrow eyes and flaccid cheeks, such as one often sees among foreign women of a certain age. Her modern Japanese was quite passable, and she could even read a little of the old Chinese-style compositions. In her ability to look up words in *An Etymology of the Chinese Language*, she may well have excelled present-day Japanese students.

It being the luncheon hour, Madame Joule led Tsuruko to a table in the hotel dining room. In connection with the compilation of her late husband's work, she told Tsuruko, her first task was to make up for a lack of photographs of shrines, temples, and old utensils by buying up a number of these. Her second task was to locate a suitable Japanese to accompany her back to France, a person to whom she could entrust the organization of the numerous volumes of Oriental paintings and writings that were stored away at her principal residence. When Tsuruko inquired what degree of scholarship was necessary, Madame Joule replied that she wasn't particularly looking for a specialist. If, for instance, the person could distinguish between a *tanka* and a *ha-uta*,\* that would suffice. Rather than scholarship, she was looking for a person possessed of the taste and discrimination peculiar to the Japanese and also of a modicum of French. Such a person would leave nothing to be desired. Madame Joule continued: "The work will be completed in about half a year. If you were single and at liberty, I would certainly ask you. But since that is no longer the case, I must ask you to recommend somebody you know."

\*A *tanka* is a poem of thirty-one syllables; a *ha-uta* is a short popular song (tr. note).

Hearing these words, Tsuruko nearly pushed the table back in her excitement. Almost forgetting herself, she leaned across the table and said: "If it's for half a year or a year, I . . . if someone like myself would be of use, no matter what arrangements were necessary, I'd like to go with you."

"Would you be able to?" Madame Joule's eyes widened in surprise and pleasure.

"I've always thought I would like to go to the West just once." Trying not to show the emotion that had instantly welled up in her, Tsuruko lowered her voice.

Until she had received Madame Joule's letter this morning, come to the hotel, and sat down at the lunch table, Tsuruko had never so much as dreamed that a great change like this could occur in her life. There was nothing so difficult to calculate as fate. As she had listened to Madame Joule's conversation, Tsuruko, as if suddenly laid under a spell, found herself longing to go to some distant place. Tsuruko had known for some time that whether what awaited her at her destination was good or bad, it was necessary first to leave her husband's house to find a new life. But until today, she had not had the chance to act on that knowledge. At one point, in deep despair, she had decided that everything was her punishment for the error she'd committed. There was nothing for it but to grow old quickly, to wait for the day when the regret and sadness of half a lifetime would be no more than a tea-time story. Now, however, an extraordinary opportunity had come her way. There was no time to waste thinking about this and that. If, in the past, obstacles had arisen because of her habitual hesitation, Tsuruko felt that now the energy to expel the latter with all her strength, to do what was in her mind, had come to her.

After lunch, as she and the old lady sat on a sofa in the corridor and sipped coffee, their friendly conversation went on for another hour or so. Leaving the hotel, blithely unconcerned about the steamy noonday heat that had suddenly followed a clearing in the rainy-season cloud cover, Tsuruko caught a cab at the Hibiya intersection and went out to Setagaya to pay her husband's old father a visit. When she told him about the proposed trip to the West, Akira replied that during his teaching days at the university he had met Professor Joule two or three times. "When you get there, if there's anything in the books you don't understand, feel free to write me and ask." More and more overjoyed at the prospect of leaving home, Tsuruko hurried back while the long summer evening was still bright with sunlight to get her husband's permission. But Kiyooka had already gone out. Toward midnight the usual message came that since it was late she was not to wait up for him. Tsuruko had no choice but to go to bed. The next morning, since her husband was not there for her to wait for him to get up, she left a note saying that she'd been requested to do something by Madame Joule, and once more set out for the hotel. Madame Joule intended the following day to go to Kyoto, and also to visit Nara. Sojourning two or three days in Nagasaki, she planned to return to Kobe and wait for the first available steamer. Asking Tsuruko to make ready for that day, and to come to the hotel in Kobe, she wrote out a detailed schedule of her movements. To expedite the matter of Tsuruko's passport, Madame Joule would have the French embassy deal directly with the authorities concerned.

It wasn't until late the following evening, when all the world was asleep, that Tsuruko met with her husband for the first time and told him her plans for a trip abroad.

Susumu, although so surprised that he instantly sobered up from the sake he'd been drinking somewhere, spoke with deliberate nonchalance. "Is that so? It's all right with me. You may go."

"The agreement is for half a year, but if all goes well, I'm thinking I'd like to return earlier."

"There's no particular need to hurry back. It'd be too much trouble to go again, so take your time, study and sightsce and things like that."

The conversation of the two went no further than this. Susumu, although surmising the thoughts that lay behind this trip of Tsuruko's, decided that it was already too late at this point to detain her. If he were to put on a regretful air, it would be mortifying to have her think: "Well, in that case he might have been a little kinder to me in the past." If, on the other hand, he assumed an indifferent attitude that would make her think that he'd been waiting for her to go away, he would feel as if his deepest desire had been seen through. The best thing was to adopt an ambiguous attitude that was not quite either of the two. This way of approaching the matter was the same, as far as that went, for Tsuruko herself. If she were to put on an air of sorrowful parting, it would be a nuisance to be forcibly detained. On the other hand, if she were to act overly cool, it would of course be undesirable to be thought a shallow, unfeeling woman. Husband and wife, covertly observing each other, doing their best not to touch on the real state of affairs, aimed at concluding this scene peaceably and in good form.

About a week later, Tsuruko boarded the evening express train for Kobe. Although there had been talk among Susumu's friends of a farewell banquet, Tsuruko, saying that she wanted to avoid having her name appear in the newspapers and seen by her family, resolutely rejected

the idea. The party that saw her off at Tokyo Station numbered only her husband, Susumu, and his disciple Muraoka, the student-houseboy Noguchi, and two or three of her schoolfriends, each of whom was now respectably married. Her elder brother, although sanctioning the trip to the extent of secretly providing travel expenses, did not come to see her off for fear of what people would say. The old man in Setagaya, also, pleading his advanced years, did not come to the station.

When the train had pulled out, two of the men, Susumu in the fore, and the ladies naturally fell out into separate groups as they made their way out of the station. Only Muraoka, hat in hand, stood gazing after the train even when it had disappeared. Looking around, Susumu barked: "Hey, Muraoka, what are you standing there staring at?"

"It was such a lonely departure." Looking around him at the already deserted platform, only now did Muraoka begin walking.

"Thus ends Book One of *The Life Story of Tsuruko*." With this comment, Kiyooka tossed his half-smoked cigarette onto the tracks.

"Even so, she's coming back in six months."

"Oh, she'll come back all right. But it probably won't be to my house."

"Sensei, I had that feeling myself. Today was a sort of sign."

"Hey, Muraoka, why didn't you become her youthful paramour? I could see it all. She was looking for a sentimental, comparatively pure young man like yourself."

Muraoka, a youth still shy of his thirtieth birthday, blushed crimson. "Sensei, don't make that kind of joke. It's not true. That kind of thing."

"Ha ha ha. It won't be too late even after she gets back."

For the first time, Kiyooka smiled as if he were genuinely amused.

When they got to the ticket gate, the three were suddenly engulfed in a crowd of people coming and going. Breaking off their conversation, they emerged from the station. The evening wind, after rain, was blowing lonely and desolate, chill against the skin.

"Hey, Noguchi, it's still early, so you can go and see a movie. Here's a complimentary ticket." Sending the houseboy on his way, Susumu aimlessly strolled along with Muraoka among the crowds of pedestrians beneath the Maru Building. As if he'd suddenly remembered, Muraoka said: "Sensei, what about the Don Juan? Is it all over?"

"Hm. I've been doing a little thinking about that."

"What sort of thinking?"

"Well, I still don't have anything particular in mind. I don't intend to bother you about it, though, so rest easy. Your trouble is, you're too good a person."

"Is that so? I wonder."

"Sometimes you say things that sound just like some old man in the country."

"Even so, I don't think you should hold a grudge against Kimie-san the way you do."

"That's because you're only an onlooker. It's not that I dislike her that much. She just annoys me. It's nothing as serious as revenge or retaliation. I just want to make things a little hard for her. If I told you what I had in mind, you'd be sure to say that it was cruel or departed from the path of virtue or something."

"What exactly do you have in mind?"

"It's not that I don't trust you, but I can't talk about it right now."

"Are you going to report her to the police?"

"Don't be a fool. If I did something like that, Kimie would think nothing of it. They'd hold her for two or three days, and she'd come out free as a bird. Even if she isn't a waitress, there are plenty of things she can do. . . . I want to do something to her so she won't be able to do anything. I want to set up some situation in which I won't have to lay a hand on her—others will do it for me. Ha ha ha. It's a fantasy of mine. No, as a matter of fact, I've been thinking a lot lately about writing a short story about this kind of psychological state in a man. I believe it's the theme of one of Balzac's stories. A husband seals up the closet in which his wife's lover is hiding into a wall. Then he sits and drinks wine in front of it with the unfaithful wife. In my fantasy . . . in the story I'm thinking of writing, I'd like to strip the woman stark naked and throw her out of a taxicab on some thoroughfare like the Ginza. It would be amusing also to tie her up to a tree in Hibiya Park. In the old days, they used to expose adulterous couples to public view at the approach to Nihonbashi Bridge. That sort of thing. What do you think? Perhaps the contemporary reader wouldn't accept such a story."

Muraoka could not tell whether Susumu was actually talking about the plot for a story, teasing him for the fun of it, or, pretending it was for a story, speaking obliquely of his plans for revenge on Kimie. But he was vaguely aware of something ominous, as if all his hairs were about to rise and stand on end. Forcing himself, he said: "It sounds interesting. Readers are getting tired of sugary love scenes."

"It might be amusing also to set fire to the place where she was staying with her lover. Then, when she ran outside in her rumpled nightgown, grab her under cover of

the confusion, take her off somewhere, and do whatever one felt like doing to her."

"Indeed."

"There's something else I have in mind . . ."

"Sensei, please stop. Somehow it gives me a bad feeling. Please stop."

"It looks as if we're going to have a storm tonight."

The sky had clouded over blackly and looked as if it would send the rain down any minute. In the interstices of the clouds, tattered by the violent wind, stars were appearing and disappearing. From the sidewalk trees, thrashing in the wind, the delicate new leaves, so freshly green, went flying helter-skelter to the pavement. Amid the wind and the gathering darkness, the streets of this Marunouchi district, which at night tended to empty of passers-by, seemed all the lonelier. One had the feeling that muggers might spring out from the narrow streets between the towering buildings.

"There's a story about an actress from the Imperial Theater who was hit and dragged by a car on her way home. She lost a leg. The person who did it was never caught."

"Is that so? That kind of thing has happened, has it?"

"Then there was the geisha who had her eyes rubbed with germs while she was asleep and went blind. A woman like Kimie is sure to meet a similar fate. . . ."

Suddenly there was a gasp from Susumu. Startled, Muraoka stepped closer to him. A gust of wind from the side had snatched Susumu's expensive panama off his head.

Without noticing it, they'd come almost as far as the *Nichi-Nichi* newspaper building. Somewhat fatigued, they stopped to rest at a small cafe in the neighborhood. After

Susumu had had a whiskey and Muraoka a beer, they followed their feet toward the Ginza. When Muraoka tried to separate and go his own way, he was prevented by Kiyooka. Tonight, the latter said, he meant to study conditions in back-street cafes where his face wasn't known. In rapid succession, they visited five or six cafes. Having four or five whiskies in each cafe, even the heavy drinker Kiyooka was rather unsteady on his legs tonight. He was about to enter another cafe along the way when Muraoka plucked at his sleeve.

"Sensei, let's stop this. Let's go to some place that's not a cafe. I'm tired out."

"What the hell time is it?"

"It's already twelve o'clock."

"It's already that late?"

"That's why I've had enough of these cafes."

Thinking that at any rate it was risky for Kiyooka to wander around this area in a drunken state, and that at least they would be safe in an assignation house, Muraoka went on: "Sensei, let's have a quiet drink someplace where we can relax."

"Hm. You're quite talkative tonight, aren't you? All right, take me to some place you like."

"Let's catch a taxi then, sensei."

Immediately tugging at the sleeve of Kiyooka's haori, Muraoka began to head for the recently opened thoroughfare of West Ginza, which ran toward Chichibashi Bridge.

"Wait. Wait."

Kiyooka had begun to piss against the wall of a pitch-dark building. Muraoka, standing a short ways off at the corner, idly watched as three women, evidently waitresses, happened to pass by. Abruptly, he realized that one of them was Kimie of the Don Juan. Kimie, also, see-



ing Muraoka, seemed to utter a cry—*ara* or *oya*—but the violent wind, which even now hadn't left off, bore her voice away unheard. Muraoka, instantly recalling what Kiyooka had said as they'd strolled through Marunouchi a while back, feeling some unidentifiable fear, desperately signaled her with his head and hands to quickly go away. If Kiyooka, who unusually for him was dead drunk tonight, were suddenly to catch sight of Kimie on this deserted back street, there was no telling what he might do. If he caused a ruckus that got into the newspapers, it would be a disaster.

Kimie, whether she had guessed Muraoka's meaning or not it was impossible to tell, passed by without further ado. As, with her companions, she was about to enter a noodle shop across the way, Kiyooka, who'd just then completed a very long piss, swaying slightly, gazed after them.

"Who are those waitresses over there? I'm going to treat them."

In consternation, Muraoka clung to his sleeve. "Please don't. There seems to be a strange man following them."

"What the hell do I care? I'm going to treat them."

"Sensei, please don't." Holding him back with all the strength in his arms, Muraoka hailed a passing one-yen taxi. Although in the confusion he hadn't been aware of it, a misty rain had begun to mingle with the wind. After getting in the cab, he noticed that the outsides of the windowpanes were wet.

The three women, who after leaving the noodle shop caught a cab, were Ruriko, Haruyo, and Kimie. Ruriko got off first, in Akasaka-Hitotsugi. Next, Haruyo got off in Yotsuya-Samon. The driver, who'd been given the

destination beforehand, turning off the trolley avenue in Shiomachi, started down the Tsu no Kami Slope. At dead of night, with a drizzling rain, the streets were completely deserted. Kimie, intoxicated, began to grow sleepy as soon as she was by herself. Do what she would, she could not keep her eyes open. All of a sudden, she heard a man's voice say: "Kimiko." Surprised, Kimie realized that the voice calling out what he thought was her name was that of the driver, whom she'd never seen before. While thinking him a terrible oaf, Kimie decided that he must have been listening to their conversation and was trying to be funny. Paying him no mind, she said: "Ah, here we are in Honmura-cho."

Slowing the taxi to a crawl, the driver went on: "Right from the start, I thought it was you, Kimiko. You haven't forgotten me, have you? I met you two or three times at the Kato house in Suwamachi." Taking off his cap, he turned around and showed her his face.

The Kato house in Suwamachi had been where Kyoyo had worked before moving on to Fujimi-cho. Now that the driver had said so, Kimie thought that he must indeed have been a customer of hers on several occasions. Having long since forgotten his face, though, she could not remember him at all. It was not that Kimie hadn't given some thought to the appropriate attitude to adopt if she should encounter a client from that time among the customers at the cafe. But, Tokyo being the huge city it was, although Kimie had been employed at one cafe or another for nearly half a year now, from her first day on the Ginza down to today she hadn't met a single client from that other time. As the days and months had gone by, she'd naturally relaxed her vigilance, only to be abruptly accosted tonight by a taxicab driver. Although

flabbergasted, as she well might be, Kimie decided the best thing was to brazen it out with a know-nothing face.

"You must have the wrong person. I don't know what you're talking about."

"It's not strange you've forgotten me, Kimiko. Because I've fallen so low in the world I'm driving a one-yen taxi. But you haven't risen so high yourself. After all, you're just a waitress. Even a waitress is no different from a high-class lady of the night, eh?"

"Let me out, please. Right here's fine."

"But it's raining. Let me drive you back to your place."

"It's all right. I don't want to inconvenience you."

"Kimiko-san, back then, you charged ten yen."

"I said, let me out. Why aren't you stopping? Do you think I'd be out late at night if I were afraid of men? You fool."

At Kimie's show of fearlessness, the driver, perhaps because he thought that even if he tried force it wouldn't work, obediently brought the car to a stop. Just then, a gust of wind blew the rain against the window. As if to say "serves you right for not having brought an umbrella," the driver reached back and opened the door from inside.

"If here's all right for you. Get out, please."

"I'm leaving one yen here." Tossing a couple of silver fifty-sen coins onto the seat, Kimie started to get out. Timing the exact moment her foot touched the ground, the driver suddenly stepped on the gas. The car shot forward. Kimie, screaming, went flying head over heels out into the rain.

"Look at you now, you whore." The driver's jeering voice was drowned out by the sound of the rain. The car immediately sped off into the night.

Coming to herself, Kimie sat up in the mud and looked around her. Although she'd thought that this place was the pitch-dark road that ran from the base of the 'Tsu no Kami Slope to the police substation in Sakamachi, she now saw that it was a neighborhood of walled residential compounds. She had no idea where she was. There were no cars passing by, and of course no passers-by. Dragging herself along, she came to a pair of stone gateway posts surmounted by lamps. Under the provisional shelter of the foliage of an oak that reached its branches over the wall, Kimie began to do up her hair, disheveled from the rain and clogged with mud. Stroking her forehead, she looked at her palm. It was sticky with blood. The instant she knew there was blood on her face, Kimie's pulse began to pound. The heart to care about her hair and clothes went out of her. Just barely controlling an impulse to cry out for help, she set out at a run through the rain in search of a doctor's office or a pharmacy.



## NINE

THE doctor, whose office was on Yakuoji-maemachi Avenue at the top of Ichigaya-Kappa Slope, not only gave Kimie emergency aid but called a cab for her. The rainy night was beginning to lighten toward dawn by the time she returned to her rented room in Honmura-cho. The cuts and scratches on her face, hands, and legs were not that serious. However, thanks to her not having taken off her soaking-wet clothes all night, from daybreak on her temperature gradually rose, climbing past forty degrees centigrade. Even by the following evening, it showed no signs of going down. Saying that there was a risk of typhus or pneumonia, the doctor gave instructions to the old woman. Luckily, however, things did not develop that far. By the third day, talk of hospitalization was dropped, and by the end of the week Kimie was allowed to sit up in bed.

Thinking not only that it would be a nuisance to have a stream of bedside callers if people found out about her mishap, but that rumors of rape might even arise, Kimie decided to merely inform the café that she was laid up with a cold. On the afternoon of the eighth day, Haruyo came around to see her for the first time. By then, the bandage on her forehead had been removed, and Kimie could explain away the scars with a story about having tripped and fallen in the alley that night. The next day, Ruriko came by, but she also went away thinking only that Kimie had caught a heavy cold. Kimie's temperature

## *During the Rains*

slowly sank to normal, and her appetite came back. As yet, though, the bruises around her hips and on her arms and legs hadn't healed. When she went down or came up the ladder-stairs, she sometimes felt pain. The old woman having told her about a bathhouse with medicated waters in Ichigaya-mitsuke, Kimie went that evening. The next day, by forcing herself a little, she would do her coiffure, she decided.

When Kimie got back from the bathhouse, a letter had arrived for her. Although there was no return address, as she read it became clear that the letter was from Kiyooka's disciple, Muraoka.

"I have written this letter after debating with myself whether in fact I should write such a letter. That is because if my mentor Kiyooka-san were to find out about it, it would likely mean the end of our relationship. However, believing that you feel sufficient friendship toward me to keep the matter a secret, I have written this letter. I don't know whether you are aware of this, but late last month Kiyooka-san's wife abruptly left Japan in the company of a certain foreign lady. Kiyooka-san pretends that this parting has occasioned no great emotion in him, but his behavior gives the pretense away. In the ten days or so since his wife's departure, what with drinking and dissipation the sensei's life has suddenly gone to seed. It is my belief that it is only your love, Kimie-san, that has the power to console the sensei in his present and future life. Of course, nowadays, the sensei avoids the very mention of your name in front of us. . . . But from that very avoidance, from that alone, I deduce that the sensei is still unable to efface the thought of you from his inmost heart. It occurs to me that the sensei is attempting to fix the blame on you alone for his having lost his wife. I shall

have to tell you everything that has happened since last year. My making bold to inform you of the plots of revenge that have been continually hatching at the bottom of the sensei's heart ever since last year is not to estrange you and the sensei from each other. Rather, it is a spirit of duty, a sincere desire that you should know just how much the sensei loves you, even to the point of imagining bloodthirsty things against you. In two or three days, the sensei will be traveling from Sendai to the Aomori district, in order to deliver a lecture at a literary conference sponsored by the Maruen Publishing Company. The sensei has expressed his intention of escaping the heat this summer at some hot-springs inn in the Northeast. I myself have not set foot in my own part of the country in a long time, so after seeing the sensei off I intend to take advantage of his absence to leave Tokyo for a while. Wanting to see you once before then, I went to the Don Juan yesterday. I was informed that you were sick in bed. I am forced to feel grateful that your illness has prevented you from going out these past several days. I will say no more than that. If I say that I hesitate to state the reason, I believe you will instantly guess all. So then, I will be in the country until that time of year when the autumn wind shakes the stems of the tall-grown dahlias. I look forward to meeting you on the Ginza in the cool of the evening when the crowds are lively once more.

July 4th."

Observing the letter's date, Kimie felt as if she'd realized only now that it was July. She also felt as if the incident of barely ten days ago had taken place a month or two months in the past. That was how long she felt she had been in bed. Simply not having gone to the cafe, where she'd been working every day for more than a year

now, made her feel as if her life had completely changed. The rains were suddenly over. The sky was absolutely clear. During the day, a cool breeze blew continuously, but ceased at nightfall. The night turned hot and steamy. Even when she sat still, greasy sweat poured off Kimie. In contrast to the rainy season quietude of until just yesterday, the narrow back alley jammed with little houses suddenly came alive with people's voices and the sound of sewing machines doing piecework. On the streets outside the alley, radios had started up amid a variety of other, unidentifiable noises. Called downstairs by the old woman, Kimie ate supper. Afterward, her freshly washed hair not yet done up into a coiffure, with only a perfunctory dusting of face powder, she sallied out into the world beyond the alley. Not only was it bothersome to be talked at every night by the old woman, but with the sudden advent of midsummer she wanted to be out of the house, out walking somewhere, it didn't matter where. When, just before leaving, she'd taken out her purse from a drawer of the mirror-stand, Muraoka's letter had caught her eye. Just so, she'd slipped it together with the purse between her obi and kimono. What with the gathering dusk and being called downstairs to supper, she had only skimmed the second half of the letter by the dim light from the window. Kimie meant to stroll along the Moat and find a quiet place at the edge of the embankment where she could read the letter again under a bright park lamp. But traffic was heavy along the Moat, and she still hadn't found a suitable place by the time she had come as far as the New Approach. Ahead, the lights of the boat rental pier at the Ushigome Approach were visible. Two or three girls, apparently students, were sitting on a fence that lined the Approach, enjoying the evening cool. Taking advantage

of the fact that her yukata with its pattern of interwoven ivy leaves was not overly conspicuous, Kimie loitered at a slight distance. Letting the wind blow against her loosely bound hair, she opened the letter by the light of a park lamp. The letter's style seemed to Kimie as affected as that of a schoolboy's love letter, as circumlocutory as something one might read in a translated novel, and even gave her a weird feeling somehow. But she found it difficult to make out which were the facts and which rhetorical flourishes. If one were to briefly summarize the letter's contents, it seemed that since Kiyooka had in effect made Kimie his second wife, his first wife had run out on him and so she, Kimie, would have to do something. If she went on pretending to know nothing, there was no telling what desperate revenge Kiyooka might attempt to wreak on her. Muraoka seemed to be cautioning Kimie to forestall such an event as best she could. As she thought it over, Kimie grew more and more angry at a man who could write such senseless, unreasonable things.

After a while, it occurred to Kimie that this letter was no spontaneous outpouring of Muraoka's heart but something that he'd been put up to by Kiyooka. Recalling Muraoka's behavior that night when she had unexpectedly encountered them on the West Ginza as she'd been about to enter a noodle shop with her friends, Kimie thought it quite possible that her having been thrown out of the cab later on that night was Kiyooka's handiwork. Along with a sense of fear like a sudden cold gust against the nape of her neck, Kimie felt defiance surge up in her. Kiyooka might be Kiyooka, but Kimie was Kimie. She was not about to knuckle under to him. He could do anything he liked, she didn't care.

Since she could not stand forever in the same place,

Kimie moved on, thinking and thinking as she passed the Approach. By the edge of the embankment in Yonbancho where there is a public garden, she found a bench under a park lamp and sat down. Probably because it was a Sunday, there were none of the usual students about, teasing young women on their way home from night school. At the foot of the embankment, directly beneath her, and along the avenue across the waters of the Moat, there was a continual coming and going of trolleys. In the intervals of their passing, from the surface of the dark water the voices of young women floated up, mingling with the quiet sound of oars. Every summer, when the Moat became lively with rented boats, Kimie always thought back to the time when she lived together with Kyoko in the house in Koishikawa bought by the latter's patron. Any number of times, rowing out to the middle of the Moat where the lights from shore did not reach, they had deliberately bumped into boats with only men in them, using that as their cue for seduction. Since that time, down to this day, a period of three or four years, various riotous scenes of Kimie's lewd and self-indulgent life, about which she could tell no one, had unfolded against the backdrop of this moatside view from Iidabashi to the Ichigaya Approach. At the thought, the feeling came to Kimie that somehow or other the curtain raiser of this latest incident was naturally drawing to an end. . . .

Aroused from her reverie by a tiger moth that grazed her cheek like a flung pebble, Kimie gazed once more at the view that stretched from Ushigome to Koishikawa. Suddenly, somehow, it all became dear to her. Feeling that she would like to fix the scene in her heart, so that even if she never saw it again she would have no regrets, so that it would not fade out of her memory for a long, long

time, Kimie stood up from the bench and went toward the wire fence. Just then, like a quivering shadow, a man approached out of the darkness under the trees. Kimie very nearly bumped into him. As they each veered out of the other's way, their eyes met.

"Ya-a. Kimiko-san."

"Uncle, what are you doing around here?" In their surprise, the two stood where they were. "Uncle" was the patron who had bought out the contract of Kyoko, the geisha from Ushigome, and installed her in a house in Gytenshin. When Kimie had run away from home and was staying at Kyoko's house, the geishas who continually came there for visits always referred to him as "uncle." Imitating them, Kimie had also called him that. His name was Kawashima Kinnosuke. Formerly he had been in charge of the stock department of a certain company. When it was discovered that he'd misappropriated funds, however, he'd been sent to prison. In the old days, he had been wont to dress as stylishly as a professional entertainer, going about in Yuki pongee silk and the like. Now, however, not even wearing a hat, he was garbed in a laundry-faded towel-cloth yukata, cinched at the waist with an undress obi, his feet shod in cheap wooden clogs. Something about him suggested that he'd only recently emerged from prison.

Drawing together his towel-cloth kimono at the neck as if he were cold, Kawashima said: "I'm not the person I was. The past is the past, the present is the present." Although forcing a smile to his lips, the man seemed unaccountably agitated, constantly on the lookout from the corners of his eyes. Back then, Kawashima had already been forty-five or -six years old, but his white hairs hadn't been particularly noticeable. Seen from behind, accom-

panied by his young concubine, his medium-build figure had seemed that of an exceptionally well-turned-out man in the prime of life. Now, however, his strangely yellowed face was gouged with deep wrinkles, and his bushy hair, which looked as if he'd been showered with dust and ashes, was all white and unkempt. His eyes, which before had been lively and sparkling, now glittered eerily in their deep-sunken sockets as if staring out at something.

"Back then, you did a lot of things for me." At a loss for a greeting, Kimie thanked Kawashima as if only now remembering to.

"Still hanging around this area, are you?"

"I'm in Honmura-cho. In Ichigaya."

"So. Well then, we'll probably meet again somewhere."

With this, the two had started to move past each other when it occurred to Kimie that she would like to at least know where he lived. Walking along two or three steps with him, she inquired subtly: "Uncle, have you seen Kyoko? Since then, I haven't seen her again."

"Oh? I heard something about her being in Fujimi-cho. But if I went the way I am now, she wouldn't let me get near her. So it's better not to go."

"No, it's not like that at all. Do go and see her."

"What have you been doing since that time, Kimiko-san? I suppose you've found some man you like and are living together."

"No, Uncle. It's the same as before. I ended up becoming a waitress. Although I've been sick in bed this last week or so."

"Is that so? A waitress, eh?"

The two walked along talking. As well as young couples sitting together on the benches under the trees,

there were a few passers-by, who also seemed to be student types. Apparently somewhat reassured, Kawashima sat down of his own accord on a nearby bench.

"There are a lot of things I'd like to ask you about. Seeing your face brings back the past. Even though I thought I'd forgotten about the past . . ."

"Uncle, when I think of it, that time when I was staying at your place in Suwamachi was the most fun. Even before, by myself, I was thinking of it and got lost in memories. Tonight has really been a strange night. Just as I was thinking about the old days and staring off in a daze toward Koishikawa, then I met you, Uncle. It really is strange."

"That's so. You can see Koishikawa quite clearly from here." His attention caught by the view beyond the Moat, Kawashima also gazed across the water. "That brightly lit place over there is the Kagura Slope. That means the Ando Slope is over there. And that place with all the trees is Gytenshin. Yes, I carried on just as I pleased in those days. If there is just one time in one's life when one has enjoyed oneself, it's worth having been born. And when the time comes to give it up, you've got to resign yourself."

"That's true. That's why I've been thinking of going back to the country. Even as a waitress, although I don't particularly care one way or another, because of some trivial incident I've been badly thought of and had grudges held against me. It's unpleasant, and when I think of what might happen to me, I somehow feel frightened. . . . Uncle, about ten days ago, I was thrown out of a taxicab and was injured. I still have the scars. See? And there's one on my arm." Kimie rolled up the sleeve of her yukata and showed Kawashima.

"You poor girl. You've had a rough time of it. Was it a lover's grudge?"

"Uncle, men are far more unforgiving than women. Recently, I've thought that for the first time."

"When you think about it, men are no different from women."

"So you've thought the same thing, Uncle. From those days when you were having a good time . . ."

Suddenly, from the foot of the embankment, the sound of a train going by arose with a cloud of coal smoke, drowning out Kawashima's reply and obscuring the farther view. Covering her face with her sleeve, Kimie stood up. Kawashima also got to his feet.

"Well, let's move on. If it's not too much trouble, I'd like to have your address at least."

"Ichigaya, Honmura-cho, number 90. It's near Kame-saki. I'm always in till noon or one o'clock. Where are you living now, Uncle?"

"Me? Well, I . . . If I find a place, I'll let you know."

There was only one path through the park. Before they knew it, Kimie and Kawashima had come out at the New Approach and onto the trolley avenue alongside the Moat. Since it was only a one-stop ride to Ichigaya, Kimie thought she would walk back after seeing Kawashima off on the trolley. As she stood waiting with him, however, Kawashima—in which direction was he going?—let two or three trolleys pass with no attempt to board them. Not resuming their conversation just yet, again walking side by side without really seeming to, step by step, the two neared the Ichigaya Approach.

"Uncle, it's right over there, so come in for a moment." If she went back to the country, there was no telling when she would see him again. Kimie somehow had a lonely feeling. She also felt that as a return for all his past favors, she would like if she could to cheer him up with stories about the old days.

"It's no trouble for you?"

"Of course it isn't. Come along."

"You have a rented room, I suppose."

"Yes. I have the whole second floor to myself. There's nobody but the old woman downstairs. You don't have to be afraid of anybody."

"In that case, I'll impose on your hospitality a moment."

"Yes, come up. Whenever it's a man, even if it's just a social call, the old woman is terribly tactful and leaves the house. She's a little *too* alert. It makes me feel bad."

When they turned off the avenue along the Moat into the alley, as luck would have it the young man from the sake shop was cooling himself on the sidewalk outside. Kimie ordered three beers and some tinned crab from him. Sliding open the door of the entryway, she called out: "Auntie, I'm back," and ushered Kawashima upstairs. During her absence, the old woman had evidently done some cleaning up. A scrap of Yuzen silk had been hung over the mirror of the dressing-stand, and in the six-mat room bedding had already been laid out. Kawashima, standing in the doorway, looked around the room as if surprised. Only his glittering eyes showed anything, however, so that Kimie guessed nothing. "The old woman thinks I'm still sick. I'll just put this away." Sliding open the door of the wardrobe, Kimie started to put the pillow away.

As if he'd just then returned to himself, Kawashima hurriedly said: "Kimiko-san. Please don't trouble yourself. If I'm treated like a guest, I won't know how to act."

"Well then, I'll leave the bedding as it is. When I was living at O-Kyo-san's place, I was always being told that I never so much as folded up a single kimono. My messi-

ness dates from that time, so you know all about it." Turning over a muslin-covered cushion from in front of the mirror-stand, Kimie offered it to Kawashima.

The old woman, bringing the beer and the tinned crab along with some pickles, silently placed them on the board floor at the head of the ladder-stairs and withdrew. Hearing her, Kimie got to her feet. Bringing everything back into the room, she said: "Uncle, if it's fish you want, I'll treat you to anything you like. The house in front is a fish store. If I call out the window, they'll deliver anything."

Kawashima, draining at a single draft the glass of beer that Kimie had poured out for him, not saying a word, seemed to be keeping an eye on that part of the neighborhood that could be seen from the window. Kimie, wondering if this was how fearful of the world a person became once he'd been in prison, felt more and more sorry for Kawashima as she observed him.

"Perhaps it's because I just got out of bed today, but despite this heat the breeze feels chilly." Although in fact she felt unbearably hot, Kimie slid the paper window halfway shut.

His eyes instantly reddening around the edges with his second glass of beer, Kawashima said: "Whatever anyone says, the world is women and drink. I've thought of making another effort and getting back on my feet, but my health isn't up to it. There's nothing I can do. But you still have your life before you, Kimiko. You will experience the true savor of life. You were saying that you might go back to the country, but could you stand it for half a month? Even I, broken-down as I am, when I see a red quilt and drink a glass of sake, it all comes back to me."



"Uncle, you've become quite respectable."

Kimie, although wanting to ask what sort of life Kawashima had led since leaving prison, could not ask him straight out and so adopted a roundabout manner of speech. Kawashima seemed to be in a considerably better mood. His voice taking on a tinge of animation, he said: "You can't dance in a sleeveless robe, as they say. So it's for the best. Since I've returned to this vile world, I've lived like a beggar. I've gone without food, let alone drink. If my son were alive, he would have helped me out. But he died of pneumonia while I was in prison. His wife and daughter have been sent back to the country. I can't even sell the girl to be a geisha for another four or five years. It's not that if I asked, people whom I've helped in the past wouldn't do something for me, but sooner than walk around exposing my disgrace I'd rather kill myself, Kimiko-san. Even if I leave this world, this old man has not forgotten the past. He thanks you."

"Oh, Uncle. Talking that way . . . It's you who have helped me, in more ways than I can count. When one comes right down to it, isn't it thanks to you that I've been able to make my own way? You got me that office job at first . . . and then I slowly learned my way around . . . and the things I learned about assignation houses all over Tokyo, and the other things . . . it's all thanks to you, Uncle."

"Ha-ha. Is tonight's beer a thank-you for all the bad things I've taught you? If so, this old man is pleased to accept your hospitality. Even a professional like Kyoko was surprised by you back then. By now, you must really be something."

"Oh, not all that much. I used to go around a great deal with men from the office. I wonder what's become

of them all. I've never seen any of them again, not even at the cafe."

"Is that so? That's because they've all gotten older. And that company has gone under. Probably I'm not the only one who's been in straits."

"You, Uncle? You're not all that old yet. I know men of sixty who are all too energetic." About to mention the old gentleman Matsuzaki as an example of what she meant, Kimie checked herself.

"Pleasure, too, when it becomes a habit, is difficult to give up."

"Even for you, Uncle—the past is the past, and so the habit comes right back."

Kimie hadn't had anything to drink for the past ten days or so. As they were talking, the three bottles of beer were quickly emptied.

"Your business has made a very naughty girl of you. Isn't that some whiskey over there?"

"Oh, what with being sick and everything, I'd forgotten all about it." Taking the square bottle of whiskey down from the shelf, Kimie poured some into a teacup. "I don't have any glasses, so please put up with this."

"I've already had too much."

"Well, you'll have some more beer then, or sake?"

"No, nothing more. Drinking again after so long, I'm getting tipsy. It'd be awful if I couldn't go back."

"If you can't go back, you can rest over there. I don't mind." Saying this, Kimie drained at a single gulp the half teacupful of whiskey.

"You waitresses really are splendid drinkers."

"It's better than sake. You don't have a headache afterward." To moisten her burning throat, Kimie drank off a glass of the remaining beer. Giving a deep sigh, she irri-

tatedly combed back with her fingers her freshly washed hair that had begun to tumble across her face. Thinking how much she had developed in just two years, Kawashima could not take his eyes off Kimie. Back then, although there had been what one might call a certain loose quality, something of the innocent maiden had lingered about her shoulders and hips. Now, however, from her cheeks to her chin the profile of her long, narrow face was supremely elegant. The line of her neck and shoulders suggested a more lissome slenderness than before. In her opened yukata, from her bosom to her thighs as she knelt, her flesh was of an inexhaustible fullness. Everything about her, not just particular parts of her body, breathed out a lovely, alluring charm not to be seen in a respectable woman. Such charm, no doubt, was the same in kind as the difference in the everyday demeanor of a tea-ceremony master from that of an ordinary person, or the physical alertness of a swordsman even at his most relaxed. Even though the woman was not being particularly seductive, Kawashima's feelings were aroused despite himself, drawn in by her.

"Uncle, I've gotten a little drunk myself." Breaking her formal seated posture, Kimie eased her legs out to one side and leaned on her elbow against the windowsill. Propping her cheek on her palm, she turned her face in toward the room to let the breeze blow against her hair. Already quite drunk, Kawashima as he watched her from where he sat was fleetingly reminded of Kimie lying in bed, her hair tumbling disheveled from the pillow onto the mat.

Half-closing her eyes, Kimie hummed a line from a popular song. "Samurai Japan . . ." Listening intently, Kawashima seemed to suddenly make up his mind.

Serving himself, he drank off a glass of whiskey at a single draft.

Somehow with a vague sense that she was dreaming, Kimie awoke to find herself—was it because of the heat?—lying on top of the bedding in nothing but her singlet. The whiskey bottle and the beer bottles stood scattered about just as they had been. But the second floor was empty. From the neighbor's in back, a clock was chiming, either eleven or twelve o'clock. Suddenly, Kimie noticed by her pillow a sheet of letter paper folded double. It seemed to be her own stationery, taken from a drawer of the mirror-stand. Opening it as she lay on her side, Kimie saw that it was from Kawashima.

"There's no time to say anything. Last night, when I happened to meet you, I was walking around looking for a place to kill myself. Thanks to you, I was able once more to experience the pleasure of the past, which I had completely despaired of. Now there is nothing in this world that I will regret leaving. By the time you meet with Kyoko and are talking about this, I will most likely no longer be in this world. I am profoundly grateful to you for your kindness. To tell you the truth, in that moment I wanted to take you with me, all unknowing as you were, to that other world. I was shocked at myself. What a terrible thing a man's will is, I thought. So then, farewell. As thanks for your kindness in this world, I will watch over you from that other world. I pray for your future happiness.

Kawashima Kinnosuke"

"Auntie! Auntie!" Leaping up from the bedding, Kimie went on desperately calling out for the old woman.