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Haruki₁ Murakami

'Mesmerising, surreal, this really
is the work of a true original'
The Times

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle



Book One: The Thieving Magpie

June and July 1984

1

Tuesday's Wind-Up Bird

*

Six Fingers and Four Breasts

When the phone rang I was in the kitchen, boiling a potful of spaghetti and whistling along with an FM broadcast of the overture to Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie*, which has to be the perfect music for cooking pasta.

I wanted to ignore the phone, not only because the spaghetti was nearly done, but because Claudio Abbado was bringing the London Symphony to its musical climax. Finally, though, I had to give in. It could have been somebody with news of a job opening. I lowered the flame, went to the living room, and picked up the receiver.

"Ten minutes, please," said a woman on the other end.

I'm good at recognizing people's voices, but this was not one I knew.

"Excuse me? To whom did you wish to speak?"

"To *you*, of course. Ten minutes, please. That's all we need to understand each other." Her voice was low and soft but otherwise nondescript.

"Understand each other?"

"Each other's feelings."

I leaned over and peeked through the kitchen door. The spaghetti pot was steaming nicely, and Claudio Abbado was still conducting *The Thieving Magpie*.

"Sorry, but you caught me in the middle of making spaghetti. Can I ask you to call back later?"

"Spaghetti!? What are you doing cooking spaghetti at ten-thirty in the morning?"

"That's none of your business," I said. "*I* decide what I eat and when I eat it."

"True enough. I'll call back," she said, her voice now flat and expressionless. A little change in mood can do amazing things to the tone of a person's voice.

"Hold on a minute," I said before she could hang up. "If this is some new sales gimmick, you can forget it. I'm out of work. I'm not in the market for anything."

"Don't worry. I know."

"You know? You know what?"

“That you’re out of work. I know about that. So go cook your precious spaghetti.”

“Who the hell-”

She cut the connection.

With no outlet for my feelings, I stared at the phone in my hand until I remembered the spaghetti. Back in the kitchen, I turned off the gas and poured the contents of the pot into a colander. Thanks to the phone call, the spaghetti was a little softer than *al dente*, but it had not been dealt a mortal blow. I started eating-and thinking.

Understand each other? Understand each other’s feelings in ten minutes? What was she talking about? Maybe it was just a prank call. Or some new sales pitch. In any case, it had nothing to do with me.

After lunch, I went back to my library novel on the living room sofa, glancing every now and then at the telephone. What were we supposed to understand about each other in ten minutes? What *can* two people understand about each other in ten minutes? Come to think of it, she seemed awfully sure about those ten minutes: it was the first thing out of her mouth. As if nine minutes would be too short or eleven minutes too long. Like cooking spaghetti *al dente*.

I couldn’t read anymore. I decided to iron shirts instead. Which is what I always do when I’m upset. It’s an old habit. I divide the job into twelve precise stages, beginning with the collar (outer surface) and ending with the left-hand cuff. The order is always the same, and I count off each stage to myself. Otherwise, it won’t come out right.

I ironed three shirts, checking them over for wrinkles and putting them on hangers. Once I had switched off the iron and put it away with the ironing board in the hall closet, my mind felt a good deal clearer.

I was on my way to the kitchen for a glass of water when the phone rang again. I hesitated for a second but decided to answer it. If it was the same woman, I’d tell her I was ironing and hang up.

This time it was Kumiko. The wall clock said eleven-thirty. “How are you?” she asked.

“Fine,” I said, relieved to hear my wife’s voice.

“What are you doing?”

“Just finished ironing.”

“What’s wrong?” There was a note of tension in her voice. She knew what it meant for me to be ironing.

“Nothing. I was just ironing some shirts.” I sat down and shifted the receiver from my left hand to my right. “What’s up?”

“Can you write poetry?” she asked.

“Poetry!?” Poetry? Did she mean ... poetry?

“I know the publisher of a story magazine for girls. They’re looking for somebody to pick and revise poems submitted by readers. And they want the person to write a short poem every month for the frontispiece. Pay’s not bad for an easy job. Of course, it’s part-time. But they might add some editorial work if the person-”

“Easy work?” I broke in. “Hey, wait a minute. I’m looking for something in law, not poetry.”

“I thought you did some writing in high school.”

“Yeah, sure, for the school newspaper: which team won the soccer championship or how the physics teacher fell down the stairs and ended up in the hospital-that kind of stuff. Not poetry. I can’t write poetry.”

“Sure, but I’m not talking about great poetry, just something for high school girls. It doesn’t have to find a place in literary history. You could do it with your eyes closed. Don’t you see?”

“Look, I just can’t write poetry-eyes open or closed. I’ve never done it, and I’m not going to start now.”

"All right," said Kumiko, with a hint of regret. "But it's hard to find legal work."

"I know. That's why I've got so many feelers out. I should be hearing something this week. If it's no go, I'll think about doing something else."

"Well, I suppose that's that. By the way, what's today? What day of the week?"

I thought a moment and said, "Tuesday."

"Then will you go to the bank and pay the gas and telephone?"

"Sure. I was just about to go shopping for dinner anyway."

"What are you planning to make?"

"I don't know yet. I'll decide when I'm shopping."

She paused. "Come to think of it," she said, with a new seriousness, "there's no great hurry about your finding a job."

This took me off guard. "Why's that?" I asked. Had the women of the world chosen today to surprise me on the telephone? "My unemployment's going to run out sooner or later. I can't keep hanging around forever."

"True, but with my raise and occasional side jobs and our savings, we can get by OK if we're careful. There's no real emergency. Do you hate staying at home like this and doing housework? I mean, is this life so wrong for you?"

"I don't know," I answered honestly. I really didn't know.

"Well, take your time and give it some thought," she said. "Anyhow, has the cat come back?"

The cat. I hadn't thought about the cat all morning. "No," I said. "Not yet."

"Can you please have a look around the neighborhood? It's been gone over a week now."

I gave a noncommittal grunt and shifted the receiver back to my left hand. She went on:

"I'm almost certain it's hanging around the empty house at the other end of the alley. The one with the bird statue in the yard. I've seen it in there several times."

"The alley? Since when have you been going to the alley? You've never said anything."

"Oops! Got to run. Lots of work to do. Don't forget about the cat."

She hung up. I found myself staring at the receiver again. Then I set it down in its cradle.

I wondered what had brought Kumiko to the alley. To get there from our house, you had to climb over the cinder-block wall. And once you'd made the effort, there was no point in being there.

I went to the kitchen for a glass of water, then out to the veranda to look at the cat's dish. The mound of sardines was untouched from last night. No, the cat had not come back. I stood there looking at our small garden, with the early-summer sunshine streaming into it. Not that ours was the kind of garden that gives you spiritual solace to look at. The sun managed to find its way in there for the smallest fraction of each day, so the earth was always black and moist, and all we had by way of garden plants were a few drab hydrangeas in one corner-and I don't like hydrangeas. There was a small stand of trees nearby, and from it you could hear the mechanical cry of a bird that sounded as if it were winding a spring. We called it the wind-up bird. Kumiko gave it the name. We didn't know what it was really called or what it looked like, but that didn't bother the wind-up bird. Every day it would come to the stand of trees in our neighborhood and wind the spring of our quiet little world.

So now I had to go cat hunting. I had always liked cats. And I liked this particular cat. But cats have their own way of living. They're not stupid. If a cat stopped living where you happened to be, that meant it had decided to go somewhere else. If it got tired and hungry, it would come back. Finally, though, to keep Kumiko happy, I would have to go looking for our cat. I had nothing better to do.

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I had quit my job at the beginning of April- the law job I had had since graduation. Not

that I had quit for any special reason. I didn't dislike the work. It wasn't thrilling, but the pay was all right and the office atmosphere was friendly.

My role at the firm was not to put too fine a point on it—that of professional gofer. And I was good at it. I might say I have a real talent for the execution of such practical duties. I'm a quick study, efficient, I never complain, and I'm realistic. Which is why, when I said I wanted to quit, the senior partner (the father in this father-and-son law firm) went so far as to offer me a small raise.

But I quit just the same. Not that quitting would help me realize any particular hopes or prospects. The last thing I wanted to do, for example, was shut myself up in the house and study for the bar exam. I was surer than ever that I didn't want to become a lawyer. I knew, too, that I didn't want to stay where I was and continue with the job I had. If I was going to quit, now was the time to do it. If I stayed with the firm any longer, I'd be there for the rest of my life. I was thirty years old, after all.

I had told Kumiko at the dinner table that I was thinking of quitting my job. Her only response had been, "I see." I didn't know what she meant by that, but for a while she said nothing more.

I kept silent too, until she added, "If you want to quit, you should quit. It's your life, and you should live it the way you want to." Having said this much, she then became involved in picking out fish bones with her chopsticks and moving them to the edge of her plate.

Kumiko earned pretty good pay as editor of a health food magazine, and she would occasionally take on illustration assignments from editor friends at other magazines to earn substantial additional income. (She had studied design in college and had hoped to be a freelance illustrator.) In addition, if I quit I would have my own income for a while from unemployment insurance. Which meant that even if I stayed home and took care of the house, we would still have enough for extras such as eating out and paying the cleaning bill, and our lifestyle would hardly change. And so I had quit my job.

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I was loading groceries into the refrigerator when the phone rang. The ringing seemed to have an impatient edge to it this time. I had just ripped open a plastic pack of tofu, which I set down carefully on the kitchen table to keep the water from spilling out. I went to the living room and picked up the phone.

"You must have finished your spaghetti by now," said the woman.

"You're right. But now I have to go look for the cat."

"That can wait for ten minutes, I'm sure. It's not like cooking spaghetti."

For some reason, I couldn't just hang up on her. There was something about her voice that commanded my attention. "OK, but no more than ten minutes."

"Now we'll be able to understand each other," she said with quiet certainty. I sensed her settling comfortably into a chair and crossing her legs.

"I wonder," I said. "What can you understand in ten minutes?"

"Ten minutes may be longer than you think," she said.

"Are you sure you know me?"

"Of course I do. We've met hundreds of times."

"Where? When?"

"Somewhere, sometime," she said. "But if I went into that, ten minutes would never be enough. What's important is the time we have now. The present. Don't you agree?"

"Maybe. But I'd like some proof that you know me."

"What kind of proof?"

"My age, say?"

"Thirty," she answered instantaneously. "Thirty and two months. Good enough?"

That shut me up. She obviously did know me, but I had absolutely no memory of her voice.

"Now it's your turn," she said, her voice seductive. "Try picturing me. From my voice. Imagine what I'm like. My age. Where I am. How I'm dressed. Go ahead."

"I have no idea," I said.

"Oh, come on," she said. "Try."

I looked at my watch. Only a minute and five seconds had gone by. "I have no idea," I said again.

"Then let me help you," she said. "I'm in bed. I just got out of the shower, and I'm not wearing a thing."

Oh, great. Telephone sex.

"Or would you prefer me with something on? Something lacy. Or stockings. Would that work better for you?"

"I don't give a damn. Do what you like," I said. "Put something on if you want to. Stay naked if you want to. Sorry, but I'm not interested in telephone games like this. I've got a lot of things I have to--"

"Ten minutes," she said. "Ten minutes won't kill you. It won't put a hole in your life. Just answer my question. Do you want me naked or with something on? I've got all kinds of things I could put on. Black lace panties..."

"Naked is fine."

"Well, good. You want me naked?"

"Yes. Naked. Good."

Four minutes.

"My pubic hair is still wet," she said. "I didn't dry myself very well. Oh, I'm so wet! Warm and moist. And soft. Wonderfully soft and black. Touch me."

"Look, I'm sorry, but--"

"And down below too. All the way down. It's so warm down there, like butter cream. So warm. Mmm. And my legs. What position do you think my legs are in? My right knee is up, and my left leg is open just enough. Say, ten-oh-five on the clock."

I could tell from her voice that she was not faking it. She really did have her legs open to ten-oh-five, her sex warm and moist.

"Touch the lips," she said. "Sloooowly. Now open them. That's it. Slowly, slowly. Let your fingers caress them. Oh so slowly. Now, with your other hand, touch my left breast. Play with it. Caress it. Upward. And give the nipple a little squeeze. Do it again. And again. And again. Until I'm just about to come."

Without a word, I put the receiver down. Stretching out on the sofa, I stared at the clock and released a long, deep sigh. I had spoken with her for close to six minutes.

The phone rang again ten minutes later, but I left it on the hook. It rang fifteen times. And when it stopped, a deep, cold silence descended upon the room.

Just before two, I climbed over the cinder-block wall and down into the alley-or what we called the alley. It was not an "alley" in the proper sense of the word, but then, there was probably no word for what it was. It wasn't a "road" or a "path" or even a "way." Properly speaking, a "way" should be a pathway or channel with an entrance and an exit, which takes you somewhere if you follow it. But our "alley" had neither entrance nor exit. You couldn't call it a cul-de-sac, either: a cul-de-sac has at least one open end. The alley had not one dead end but two. The people of the neighborhood called it "the alley" strictly as an expedient. It was some two hundred yards in length and threaded its way between the back gardens of the houses that lined either side. Barely over three feet in width, it had several spots at which you had to edge through sideways because of fences sticking out into the path or things that people had left in the way.

About this alley, the story was-the story I heard from my uncle, who rented us our house

for next to nothing—that it used to have both an entrance and an exit and actually served the purpose of providing a shortcut between two streets. But with the rapid economic growth of the mid-fifties, rows of new houses came to fill the empty lots on either side of the road, squeezing it down until it was little more than a narrow path. People didn't like strangers passing so close to their houses and yards, so before long, one end of the path was blocked off—or, rather, screened off—with an unassertive fence. Then one local citizen decided to enlarge his yard and completely sealed off his end of the alley with a cinder-block wall. As if in response, a barbed-wire barrier went up at the other end, preventing even dogs from getting through. None of the neighbors complained, because none of them used the alley as a passageway, and they were just as happy to have this extra protection against crime. As a result, the alley remained like some kind of abandoned canal, unused, serving as little more than a buffer zone between two rows of houses. Spiders spread their sticky webs in the overgrowth.

Why had Kumiko been frequenting such a place? I myself had walked down that “alley” no more than twice, and Kumiko was afraid of spiders at the best of times. Oh, what the hell—if Kumiko said I should go to the alley and look for the cat, I'd go to the alley and look for the cat. What came later I could think about later. Walking outside like this was far better than sitting in the house waiting for the phone to ring.

The sharp sunshine of early summer dappled the surface of the alley with the hard shadows of the branches that stretched overhead. Without wind to move the branches, the shadows looked like permanent stains, destined to remain imprinted on the pavement forever. No sounds of any kind seemed to penetrate this place. I could almost hear the blades of grass breathing in the sunlight. A few small clouds floated in the sky, their shapes clear and precise, like the clouds in medieval engravings. I saw everything with such terrific clarity that my own body felt vague and boundless and flowing ... and hot!

I wore a T-shirt, thin cotton pants, and tennis shoes, but walking in the summer sun, I could feel a light film of sweat forming under my arms and in the hollow of my chest. The T-shirt and pants had been packed away in a box crammed with summer clothing until I pulled them out that morning, the sharp smell of mothballs penetrating my nostrils.

The houses that lined the alley fell into two distinct categories: older houses and those built more recently. As a group, the newer ones were smaller, with smaller yards to match. Their clothes-drying poles often protruded into the alley, making it necessary for me to thread my way through the occasional screen of towels and sheets and undershirts. Over some back walls came the clear sound of television sets and flushing toilets, and the smell of curry cooking.

The older houses, by contrast, gave hardly any sense of life. These were screened off by well-placed shrubs and hedges, between which I caught glimpses of manicured gardens.

An old, brown, withered Christmas tree stood in the corner of one garden. Another had become the dumping ground for every toy known to man, the apparent leavings of several childhoods. There were tricycles and toss rings and plastic swords and rubber balls and tortoise dolls and little baseball bats. One garden had a basketball hoop, and another had fine lawn chairs surrounding a ceramic table. The white chairs were caked in dirt, as if they had not been used for some months or even years. The table-top was coated with lavender magnolia petals, beaten down by the rain.

I had a clear view of one living room through an aluminum storm door. It had a matching leather sofa and chairs, a large TV, a sideboard (atop which sat a tropical-fish tank and two trophies of some kind), and a decorative floor lamp. The room looked like the set of a TV drama. A huge doghouse occupied a large part of another garden, but there was no sign of the dog itself, and the house's door stood open. The screen of the doghouse door bulged outward, as if someone had been leaning against it for months at a time.

The vacant house that Kumiko had told me about lay just beyond the place with the huge

doghouse. One glance was all I needed to see that it was empty-and had been for some time. It was a fairly new two-story house, yet its wooden storm shutters showed signs of severe aging, and the railings outside the second-story windows were caked with rust. The house had a cozy little garden, in which, to be sure, a stone statue of a bird stood. The statue rested on a base that came to chest height and was surrounded by a thick growth of weeds. Tall fronds of goldenrod were almost touching the bird's feet. The bird-I had no idea what kind of bird it was supposed to be-had its wings open as if it wanted to escape from this unpleasant place as soon as possible. Aside from the statue, the garden had no decorative features. A pile of aging plastic lawn chairs stood against the house, and beside them an azalea bush displayed its bright-red blossoms, their color strangely unreal. Weeds made up the rest.

I leaned against the chest-high chain-link fence for a while, contemplating the garden. It should have been a paradise for cats, but there was no sign of cats here now. Perched on the roof's TV antenna, a single pigeon lent its monotonous cries to the scene. The stone bird's shadow fell on the surrounding undergrowth, breaking apart.

I took a lemon drop from my pocket, unwrapped it, and popped it into my mouth. I had taken my resignation from the firm as an opportunity to quit smoking, but now I was never without a pack of lemon drops. Kumiko said I was addicted to them and warned me that I'd soon have a mouthful of cavities, but I had to have my lemon drops. While I stood there looking at the garden, the pigeon on the TV antenna kept up its regular cooing, like some clerk stamping numbers on a sheaf of bills. I don't know how long I stayed there, leaning against the fence, but I remember spitting my lemon drop on the ground when, half melted, it filled my mouth with its sticky sweetness. I had just shifted my gaze to the shadow of the stone bird when I sensed that someone was calling to me from behind.

I turned, to see a girl standing in the garden on the other side of the alley. She was small and had her hair in a ponytail. She wore dark sunglasses with amber frames, and a light-blue sleeveless T-shirt. The rainy season had barely ended, and yet she had already managed to give her slender arms a nice, smooth tan. She had one hand jammed into the pocket of her short pants. The other rested on a waist-high bamboo gate, which could not have been providing much support. Only three feet- maybe four-separated us.

"Hot," she said to me.

"Yeah, right," I answered.

After this brief exchange of views, she stood there looking at me.

Then she took a box of Hope regulars from her pants pocket, drew out a cigarette, and put it between her lips. She had a small mouth, the upper lip turned slightly upward. She struck a match and lit her cigarette. When she inclined her head to one side, her hair swung away to reveal a beautifully shaped ear, smooth as if freshly made, its edge aglow with a downy fringe.

She flicked her match away and exhaled smoke through pursed lips. Then she looked up at me as if she had forgotten that I was there. I couldn't see her eyes through the dark, reflective lenses of her sunglasses.

"You live around here?" she asked.

"Uh-huh." I wanted to motion toward our house, but I had turned so many odd angles to get here that I no longer knew exactly where it was. I ended up pointing at random.

"I'm looking for my cat," I explained, wiping a sweaty palm on my pants. "It's been gone for a week. Somebody saw it around here somewhere."

"What kind of cat?"

"A big torn. Brown stripes. Tip of the tail a little bent."

"Name?"

"Noboru. Noboru Wataya."

"No, *not your* name. The cat's."

"That *is* my cat's name."

“Oh! Very impressive!”

“Well, actually, it’s my brother-in-law’s name. The cat sort of reminds us of him. We gave the cat his name, just for fun.”

“How does the cat remind you of him?”

“I don’t know. Just in general. The way it walks. And it has this blank stare.”

She smiled now for the first time, which made her look a lot more childlike than she had seemed at first. She couldn’t have been more than fifteen or sixteen. With its slight curl, her upper lip pointed up at a strange angle. I seemed to hear a voice saying “Touch me”-the voice of the woman on the phone. I wiped the sweat from my forehead with the back of my hand.

“A brown-striped cat with a bent tail,” said the girl. “Hmm. Does it have a collar or something?”

“A black flea collar.”

She stood there thinking for ten or fifteen seconds, her hand still resting on the gate. Then she dropped what was left of her cigarette and crushed it under her sandal.

“Maybe I did see a cat like that,” she said. “I don’t know about the bent tail, but it was a brown tiger cat, big, and I think it had a collar.”

“When did you see it?”

“When *did* I see it? Hmm. No more than three or four days ago. Our yard is a kind of highway for the neighborhood cats. They all cut across here from the Takitanis’ to the Miyawakis’.”

She pointed toward the vacant house, where the stone bird still spread its wings, the tall goldenrod still caught the early-summer sun, and the pigeon went on with its monotonous cooing atop the TV antenna.

“I’ve got an idea,” she said. “Why don’t you wait here? All the cats eventually pass through our place on their way to the Miyawakis’. And somebody’s bound to call the cops if they see you hanging around like that. It wouldn’t be the first time.”

I hesitated.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “I’m the only one here. The two of us can sit in the sun and wait for the cat to show up. I’ll help. I’ve got twenty-twenty vision.”

I looked at my watch. Two twenty-six. All I had to do today before it got dark was take in the laundry and fix dinner.

I went in through the gate and followed the girl across the lawn. She dragged her right leg slightly. She took a few steps, stopped, and turned to face me.

“I got thrown from the back of a motorcycle,” she said, as if it hardly mattered.

A large oak tree stood at the point where the yard’s lawn gave out. Under the tree sat two canvas deck chairs, one draped with a blue beach towel. Scattered on the other were a new box of Hope regulars, an ashtray and lighter, a magazine, and an oversize boom box. The boom box was playing hard-rock music at low volume. She turned the music off and took all the stuff out of the chair for me, dropping it on the grass. From the chair, I could see into the yard of the vacant house-the stone bird, the goldenrod, the chain-link fence. The girl had probably been watching me the whole time I was there.

The yard of this house was very large. It had a broad, sloping lawn dotted with clumps of trees. To the left of the deck chairs was a rather large concrete-lined pond, its empty bottom exposed to the sun. Judging from its greenish tinge, it had been without water for some time. We sat with our backs to the house, which was visible through a screen of trees.

The house was neither large nor lavish in its construction. Only the yard gave an impression of large size, and it was well manicured.

“What a big yard,” I said, looking around. “It must be a pain to take care of.”

“Must be.”

“I used to work for a lawn-mowing company when I was a kid.”

“Oh?” She was obviously not interested in lawns.

"Are you always here alone?" I asked.

"Yeah. Always. Except a maid comes mornings and evenings. During the day it's just me. Alone. Want a cold drink? We've got beer."

"No, thanks."

"Really? Don't be shy."

I shook my head. "Don't you go to school?"

"Don't you go to work?"

"No work to go to."

"Lost your job?"

"Sort of. I quit a few weeks ago."

"What kind of job?"

"I was a lawyer's gofer. I'd go to different government offices to pick up documents, put materials in order, check on legal precedents, handle court procedures-that kind of stuff."

"But you quit."

"Yeah."

"Does your wife have a job?"

"She does."

The pigeon across the way must have stopped its cooing and gone off somewhere. I suddenly realized that a deep silence lay all around me.

"Right over there is where the cats go through," she said, pointing toward the far side of the lawn. "See the incinerator in the Takitanis' yard? They come under the fence at that point, cut across the grass, and go out under the gate to the yard across the way. They always follow exactly the same route."

She perched her sunglasses on her forehead, squinted at the yard, and lowered her glasses again, exhaling a cloud of smoke. In the interval, I saw that she had a two-inch cut next to her left eye-the kind of cut that would probably leave a scar the rest of her life. The dark sunglasses were probably meant to hide the wound. The girl's face was not a particularly beautiful one, but there was something attractive about it, probably the lively eyes or the unusual shape of the lips.

"Do you know about the Miyawakis?" she asked.

"Not a thing," I said.

"They're the ones who lived in the vacant house. A very proper family. They had two daughters, both in a private girls' school. Mr. Miyawaki owned a few family restaurants."

"Why'd they leave?"

"Maybe he was in debt. It was like they ran away-just cleared out one night. About a year ago, I think. Left the place to rot and breed cats. My mother's always complaining."

"Are there so many cats in there?" Cigarette in her lips, the girl looked up at the sky. "All kinds of cats. Some losing their fur, some with one eye ... and where the other eye used to be, a lump of raw flesh. Yuck!" I nodded.

"I've got a relative with six fingers on each hand. She's just a little older than me. Next to her pinkie she's got this extra finger, like a baby's finger. She knows how to keep it folded up so most people don't notice. She's really pretty." I nodded again.

"You think it's in the family? What do you call it... part of the bloodline?"

"I don't know much about heredity."

She stopped talking. I sucked on my lemon drop and looked hard at the cat path. Not one cat had shown itself so far.

"Sure you don't want something to drink?" she asked. "I'm going to have a Coke."

I said I didn't need a drink.

She left her deck chair and disappeared through the trees, dragging her bad leg slightly. I picked up her magazine from the grass and leafed through it. Much to my surprise, it turned out to be a men's magazine, one of the glossy monthlies. The woman in the foldout wore thin

panties that showed her slit and pubic hair. She sat on a stool with her legs spread out at weird angles. With a sigh, I put the magazine back, folded my hands on my chest, and focused on the cat path again.

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A very long time went by before the girl came back, with a Coke in her hand. The heat was getting to me. Sitting under the sun, I felt my brain fogging over. The last thing I wanted to do was think.

"Tell me," she said, picking up her earlier conversation. "If you were in love with a girl and she turned out to have six fingers, what would you do?"

"Sell her to the circus," I answered.

"Really?"

"No, of course not," I said. "I'm kidding. I don't think it would bother me."

"Even if your kids might inherit it?"

I took a moment to think about that.

"No, I really don't think it would bother me. What harm would an extra finger do?"

"What if she had four breasts?"

I thought about that too.

"I don't know."

Four breasts? This kind of thing could go on forever. I decided to change the subject.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Sixteen," she said. "Just had my birthday. First year in high school."

"Have you been out of school long?"

"My leg hurts if I walk too much. And I've got this scar near my eye. My school's very strict. They'd probably start bugging me if they found out I hurt myself falling off a motorcycle. So I'm out 'sick.' I could take a year off. I'm not in any hurry to go up a grade."

"No, I guess not," I said.

"Anyhow, what you were saying before, that you wouldn't mind marrying a girl with six fingers but not four breasts ..."

"I didn't say that. I said I didn't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"I don't know-it's hard to imagine such a thing."

"Can you imagine someone with six fingers?"

"Sure, I guess so."

"So why not four breasts? What's the difference?"

I took another moment to think it over, but I couldn't find an answer.

"Do I ask too many questions?"

"Do people tell you that?"

"Yeah, sometimes."

I turned toward the cat path again. What the hell was I doing here? Not one cat had showed itself the whole time. Hands still folded on my chest, I closed my eyes for maybe thirty seconds. I could feel the sweat forming on different parts of my body. The sun poured into me with a strange heaviness. Whenever the girl moved her glass, the ice clinked inside it like a cowbell.

"Go to sleep if you want," she whispered. "I'll wake you if a cat shows up."

Eyes closed, I nodded in silence.

The air was still. There were no sounds of any kind. The pigeon had long since disappeared. I kept thinking about the woman on the telephone. Did I really know her? There had been nothing remotely familiar about her voice or her manner of speaking. But she definitely knew me. I could have been looking at a De Chirico scene: the woman's long

shadow cutting across an empty street and stretching toward me, but she herself in a place far removed from the bounds of my consciousness. A bell went on ringing and ringing next to my ear.

“Are you asleep?” the girl asked, in a voice so tiny I could not be sure I was hearing it.

“No, I’m not sleeping,” I said.

“Can I get closer? It’ll be ... easier if I keep my voice low.” “Fine with me,” I said, eyes still closed.

She moved her chair until it struck mine with a dry, wooden clack. Strange, the girl’s voice sounded completely different, depending on whether my eyes were open or closed.

“Can I talk? I’ll keep real quiet, and you don’t have to answer. You can even fall asleep. I don’t mind.”

“OK,” I said.

“When people die, it’s so neat.”

Her mouth was next to my ear now, so the words worked their way inside me along with her warm, moist breath. “Why’s that?” I asked.

She put a finger on my lips as if to seal them. “No questions,” she said. “And don’t open your eyes. OK?” My nod was as small as her voice.

She took her finger from my lips and placed it on my wrist. “I wish I had a scalpel. I’d cut it open and look inside. Not the corpse ... the lump of death. I’m sure there must be something like that. Something round and squishy, like a softball, with a hard little core of dead nerves. I want to take it out of a dead person and cut it open and look inside. I always wonder what it’s like. Maybe it’s all hard, like toothpaste dried up inside the tube. That’s it, don’t you think? No, don’t answer. It’s squishy on the outside, and the deeper you go inside, the harder it gets. I want to cut open the skin and take out the squishy stuff, use a scalpel and some kind of spatula to get through it, and the closer you get to the center, the harder the squishy stuff gets, until you reach this tiny core. It’s sooo tiny, like a tiny ball bearing, and really hard. It must be like that, don’t you think?”

She cleared her throat a few times.

“That’s all I think about these days. Must be because I have so much time to kill every day. When you don’t have anything to do, your thoughts get really, really far out-so far out you can’t follow them all the way to the end.”

She took the finger from my wrist and drank down the rest of her cola. I knew the glass was empty from the sound of the ice.

“Don’t worry about the cat-I’m watching for it. I’ll let you know if Noboru Wataya shows up. Keep your eyes closed. I’m sure Noboru Wataya is walking around here someplace. He’ll be here any minute now. He’s coming. I know he’s coming-through the grass, under the fence, stopping to sniff the flowers along the way, little by little Noboru Wataya is coming closer. Picture him that way, get his image in mind.”

I tried to picture the image of the cat, but the best I could do was a blurry, backlit photo. The sunlight penetrating my eyelids destabilized and diffused my inner darkness, making it impossible for me to bring up a precise image of the cat. Instead, what I imagined was a failed portrait, a strange, distorted picture, certain distinguishing features bearing some resemblance to the original but the most important parts missing. I couldn’t even recall how the cat looked when it walked.

The girl put her finger on my wrist again, using the tip to draw an odd diagram of uncertain shape. As if in response, a new kind of darkness- different in quality from the darkness I had been experiencing until that moment-began to burrow into my consciousness. I was probably falling asleep. I didn’t want this to happen, but there was no way I could resist it. My body felt like a corpse-someone else’s corpse-sinking into the canvas deck chair.

In the darkness, I saw the four legs of Noboru Wataya, four silent brown legs atop four soft paws with swelling, rubberlike pads, legs that were soundlessly treading the earth

somewhere.

But where?

"Ten minutes is all it will take," said the woman on the phone. No, she had to be wrong. Sometimes ten minutes is not ten minutes. It can stretch and shrink. That was something I did know for sure.

•

When I woke up, I was alone. The girl had disappeared from the deck chair, which was still touching mine. The towel and cigarettes and magazine were there, but not the glass or the boom box.

The sun had begun to sink in the west, and the shadow of an oak branch had crept across my knees. My watch said it was four-fifteen. I sat up and looked around. Broad lawn, dry pond, fence, stone bird, golden-rod, TV antenna. Still no sign of the cat. Or of the girl.

I glanced at the cat path and waited for the girl to come back. Ten minutes went by, and neither cat nor girl showed up. Nothing moved. I felt as if I had aged tremendously while I slept.

I stood and glanced toward the house, where there was no sign of a human presence. The bay window reflected the glare of the western sun. I gave up waiting and crossed the lawn to the alley, returning home. I hadn't found the cat, but I had tried my best.

•

At home, I took in the wash and made preparations for a simple dinner. The phone rang twelve times at five-thirty, but I didn't answer it. Even after the ringing stopped, the sound of the bell lingered in the indoor evening gloom like dust floating in the air. With the tips of its hard claws, the table clock tapped at a transparent board floating in space.

Why not write a poem about the wind-up bird? The idea struck me, but the first line would not come. How could high school girls possibly enjoy a poem about a wind-up bird?

•

Kumiko came home at seven-thirty. She had been arriving later and later over the past month. It was not unusual for her to return after eight, and sometimes even after ten. Now that I was at home preparing dinner, she no longer had to hurry back. They were understaffed, in any case, and lately one of her colleagues had been out sick.

"Sorry," she said. "The work just wouldn't end, and that part-time girl is useless."

I went to the kitchen and cooked: fish sauteed in butter, salad, and miso soup. Kumiko sat at the kitchen table and vegged out.

"Where were you at five-thirty?" she asked. "I tried to call to say I'd be late."

"The butter ran out. I went to the store," I lied.

"Did you go to the bank?"

"Sure."

"And the cat?"

"Couldn't find it. I went to the vacant house, like you said, but there was no trace of it. I bet it went farther away than that."

She said nothing.

When I finished bathing after dinner, Kumiko was sitting in the living room with the lights out. Hunched down in the dark with her gray shirt on, she looked like a piece of luggage that had been left in the wrong place.

Drying my hair with a bath towel, I sat on the sofa opposite Kumiko.

In a voice I could barely catch, she said, "I'm sure the cat's dead."

"Don't be silly," I replied. "I'm sure it's having a grand old time somewhere. It'll get hungry and come home soon. The same thing happened once before, remember? When we lived in Koenji..."

"This time's different," she said. "This time you're wrong. I know it. The cat's dead. It's rotting in a clump of grass. Did you look in the grass in the vacant house?"

"No, I didn't. The house may be vacant, but it does belong to somebody. I can't just go barging in there."

"Then where *did* you look for the cat? I'll bet you didn't even try. That's why you didn't find it."

I sighed and wiped my hair again with the towel. I started to speak but gave up when I realized that Kumiko was crying. It was understandable: Kumiko loved the cat. It had been with us since shortly after our wedding. I threw my towel in the bathroom hamper and went to the kitchen for a cold beer. What a stupid day it had been: a stupid day of a stupid month of a stupid year.

Noboru Wataya, where are you? Did the wind-up bird forget to wind your spring?

The words came to me like lines of poetry.

Noboru Wataya,
Where are you?
Did the wind-up bird
Forget to wind your spring?

When I was halfway through my beer, the phone started to ring.

"Get it, will you?" I shouted into the darkness of the living room.

"Not me," she said. "You get it."

"I don't want to."

The phone kept on ringing, stirring up the dust that floated in the darkness. Neither of us said a word. I drank my beer, and Kumiko went on crying soundlessly. I counted twenty rings and gave up. There was no point in counting forever.

2

Full Moon and Eclipse of the Sun

*

On Horses Dying in the Stables

Is it possible, finally, for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another?

We can invest enormous time and energy in serious efforts to know another person, but in the end, how close are we able to come to that person's essence? We convince ourselves that we know the other person well, but do we really know anything important about anyone?

I started thinking seriously about such things a week after I quit my job at the law firm. Never until then- never in the whole course of my life-had I grappled with questions like this. And why not? Probably because my hands had been full just living. I had simply been too

busy to think about myself.

Something trivial got me started, just as most important things in the world have small beginnings. One morning after Kumiko rushed through breakfast and left for work, I threw the laundry into the washing machine, made the bed, washed the dishes, and vacuumed. Then, with the cat beside me, I sat on the veranda, checking the want ads and the sales. At noon I had lunch and went to the supermarket. There I bought food for dinner and, from a sale table, bought detergent, tissues, and toilet paper. At home again, I made preparations for dinner and lay down on the sofa with a book, waiting for Kumiko to come home.

Newly unemployed, I found this kind of life refreshing. No more commuting to work on jam-packed subways, no more meetings with people I didn't want to meet. And best of all, I could read any book I wanted, anytime I wanted. I had no idea how long this relaxed lifestyle would continue, but at that point, at least, after a week, I was enjoying it, and I tried hard not to think about the future. This was my one great vacation in life. It would have to end sometime, but until it did I was determined to enjoy it.

That particular evening, though, I was unable to lose myself in the pleasure of reading, because Kumiko was late coming home from work. She never got back later than six-thirty, and if she thought she was going to be delayed by as little as ten minutes, she always let me know. She was like that: almost too conscientious. But that day was an exception. She was still not home after seven, and there was no call. The meat and vegetables were ready and waiting, so that I could cook them the minute she came in. Not that I had any great feast in mind: I would be stir frying thin slices of beef, onions, green peppers, and bean sprouts with a little salt, pepper, soy sauce, and a splash of beer—a recipe from my single days. The rice was done, the miso soup was warm, and the vegetables were all sliced and arranged in separate piles in a large dish, ready for the wok. Only Kumiko was missing. I was hungry enough to think about cooking my own portion and eating alone, but I was not ready to make this move. It just didn't seem right.

I sat at the kitchen table, sipping a beer and munching some slightly soggy soda crackers I had found in the back of the cabinet. I watched the small hand of the clock edging toward—and slowly passing—the seven-thirty position.

It was after nine when she came in. She looked exhausted. Her eyes were bloodshot: a bad sign. Something bad had always happened when her eyes were red.

OK, I told myself, stay cool, keep it simple and low key and natural. Don't get excited.

"I'm so sorry," Kumiko said. "This one job wouldn't go right. I thought of calling you, but things just kept getting in the way."

"Never mind, it's all right, don't let it bother you," I said as casually as I could. And in fact, I wasn't feeling bad about it. I had had the same experience any number of times. Going out to work can be tough, not something sweet and peaceful like picking the prettiest rose in your garden for your sick grandmother and spending the day with her, two streets away. Sometimes you have to do unpleasant things with unpleasant people, and the chance to call home never comes up. Thirty seconds is all it would take to say, "I'll be home late tonight," and there are telephones everywhere, but you just can't do it.

I started cooking: turned on the gas, put oil in the wok. Kumiko took a beer from the refrigerator and a glass from the cupboard, did a quick inspection of the food I was about to cook, and sat at the kitchen table without a word. Judging from the look on her face, she was not enjoying the beer.

"You should have eaten without me," she said.

"Never mind. I wasn't that hungry."

While I fried the meat and vegetables, Kumiko went to wash up. I could hear her washing her face and brushing her teeth. A little later, she came out of the bathroom, holding something. It was the toilet paper and tissues I had bought at the supermarket.

"Why did you buy *this* stuff?" she asked, her voice weary.

Holding the wok, I looked at her. Then I looked at the box of tissues and the package of toilet paper. I had no idea what she was trying to say.

“What do you mean? They’re just tissues and toilet paper. We need those things. We’re not exactly out, but they won’t rot if they sit around a little while.”

“No, of course not. But why did you have to buy *blue* tissues and *flower-pattern* toilet paper?”

“I don’t get it,” I said, controlling myself. “They were on sale. Blue tissues are not going to turn your nose blue. What’s the big deal?”

“It is a big deal. I hate blue tissues and flower-pattern toilet paper. Didn’t you know that?”

“No, I didn’t,” I said. “Why do you hate them?”

“How should I know why I hate them? I just do. You hate telephone covers, and thermos bottles with flower decorations, and bell-bottom jeans with rivets, and me having my nails manicured. Not even *you* can say why. It’s just a matter of taste.”

In fact, I could have explained my reasons for all those things, but of course I did not. “All right,” I said. “It’s just a matter of taste. But can you tell me that in the six years we’ve been married you never once bought blue tissues or flower-pattern toilet paper?”

“Never. Not once.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. The tissues I buy are either white or yellow or pink. And I absolutely *never* buy toilet paper with patterns on it. I’m just shocked that you could live with me all this time and not be aware of that.”

It was shocking to me, too, to realize that in six long years I had never once used blue tissues or patterned toilet paper.

“And while I’m at it, let me say this,” she continued. “I absolutely detest beef stir fried with green peppers. Did you know that?”

“No, I didn’t,” I said.

“Well, it’s true. And don’t ask me why. I just can’t stand the smell of the two of them cooking in the same pan.”

“You mean to say that in six years you have never once cooked beef and green peppers together?”

She shook her head. “I’ll eat green peppers in a salad. I’ll fry beef with onions. But I have never once cooked beef and green peppers together.”

I heaved a sigh.

“Haven’t you ever thought it strange?” she asked.

“Thought it strange? I never even noticed,” I said, taking a moment to consider whether, since marrying, I had in fact ever eaten anything stir fried containing beef and green peppers. Of course, it was impossible for me to recall.

“You’ve been living with me all this time,” she said, “but you’ve hardly paid any attention to me. The only one you ever think about is yourself.”

“Now wait just a minute,” I said, turning off the gas and setting the wok down on the range. “Let’s not get carried away here. You may be right. Maybe I haven’t paid enough attention to things like tissues and toilet paper and beef and green peppers. But that doesn’t mean I haven’t paid any attention to *you*. I don’t give a *damn* what color my tissues are. OK, black I’d have a little trouble with, but white, blue—it just doesn’t matter. It’s the same with beef and green peppers. Together, apart—who cares? The act of stir frying beef and green peppers could disappear from the face of the earth and it wouldn’t matter to me. It has nothing to do with you, your essence, what makes Kumiko Kumiko. Am I wrong?”

Instead of answering me, she polished off her beer in two big gulps and stared at the empty bottle.

I dumped the contents of the wok into the garbage. So much for the beef and green peppers and onions and bean sprouts. Weird. Food one minute, garbage the next. I opened a

beer and drank from the bottle.

“Why’d you do that?” she asked.

“You hate it so much.”

“So *you* could have eaten *it*.”

“I suddenly didn’t want beef and green peppers anymore.”

She shrugged. “Whatever makes you happy.”

She put her arms on the table and rested her face on them. For a while, she stayed like that. I could see she wasn’t crying or sleeping. I looked at the empty wok on the range, looked at Kumiko, and drank my beer down. Crazy. Who gives a damn about toilet paper and green peppers?

But I walked over and put my hand on her shoulder. “OK,” I said. “I understand now. I’ll never buy blue tissues or flowered toilet paper again. I promise. I’ll take the stuff back to the supermarket tomorrow and exchange it. If they won’t give me an exchange, I’ll burn it in the yard. I’ll throw the ashes in the sea. And no more beef and green peppers. Never again. Pretty soon the smell will be gone, and we’ll never have to think about it anymore. OK?”

But still she said nothing. I wanted to go out for an hour’s walk and find her cheery when I got back, but I knew there was no chance of that happening. I’d have to solve this one myself.

“Look, you’re tired,” I said. “So take a little rest and we’ll go out for a pizza. When’s the last time we had a pizza? Anchovies and onions. We’ll split one. It wouldn’t kill us to eat out once in a while.”

This didn’t do it, either. She kept her face pressed against her arms. I didn’t know what else to say. I sat down and stared at her across the table. One ear showed through her short black hair. It had an earring that I had never seen before, a little gold one in the shape of a fish. Where could she have bought such a thing? I wanted a smoke. I imagined myself taking my cigarettes and lighter from my pocket, putting a filter cigarette between my lips, and lighting up. I inhaled a lungful of air. The heavy smell of- stir-fried beef and vegetables struck me hard. I was starved.

My eye caught the calendar on the wall. This calendar showed the phases of the moon. The full moon was approaching. Of course: it was about time for Kumiko’s period.

Only after I became a married man had it truly dawned on me that I was an inhabitant of earth, the third planet of the solar system. I lived on the earth, the earth revolved around the sun, and around the earth revolved the moon. Like it or not, this would continue for eternity (or what could be called eternity in comparison with my lifetime). What induced me to see things this way was the absolute precision of my wife’s twenty-nine-day menstrual cycle. It corresponded perfectly with the waxing and waning of the moon. And her periods were always difficult. She would become unstable- even depressed- for some days before they began. So her cycle became my cycle. I had to be careful not to cause any unnecessary trouble at the wrong time of the month. Before we were married, I hardly noticed the phases of the moon. I might happen to catch sight of the moon in the sky, but its shape at any given time was of no concern to me. Now the shape of the moon was something I always carried around in my head.

I had been with a number of women before Kumiko, and of course each had had her own period. Some were difficult, some were easy, some were finished in three days, others took over a week, some were regular, others could be ten days late and scare the hell out of me; some women had bad moods, others were hardly affected. Until I married Kumiko, though, I had never lived with a woman. Until then, the cycles of nature meant the changing of the seasons. In winter I’d get my coat out, in summer it was time for sandals. With marriage I took on not only a cohabitant but a new concept of cyclicity: the phases of the moon. Only once had she missed her cycle for some months, during which time she had been pregnant.

“I’m sorry,” she said, raising her face. “I didn’t mean to take it out on you. I’m tired, and

I'm in a bad mood."

"That's OK," I said. "Don't let it bother you. You should take it out on somebody when you're tired. It makes you feel better."

Kumiko took a long, slow breath, held it in awhile, and let it out.

"What about you?" she asked.

"What about me?"

"You don't take it out on anybody when *you're* tired. I do. Why is that?"

I shook my head. "I never noticed," I said. "Funny."

"Maybe you've got this deep well inside, and you shout into it, 'The king's got donkey's ears!' and then everything's OK."

I thought about that for a while. "Maybe so," I said.

Kumiko looked at the empty beer bottle again. She stared at the label, and then at the mouth, and then she turned the neck in her fingers.

"My period's coming," she said. "I think that's why I'm in such a bad mood."

"I know," I said. "Don't let it bother you. You're not the only one. Tons of horses die when the moon's full."

She took her hand from the bottle, opened her mouth, and looked at me.

"Now, where did *that* come from all of a sudden?"

"I read it in the paper the other day. I meant to tell you about it, but I forgot. It was an interview with some veterinarian. Apparently, horses are tremendously influenced by the phases of the moon—both physically and emotionally. Their brain waves go wild as the full moon approaches, and they start having all kinds of physical problems. Then, on the night itself, a lot of them get sick, and a huge number of those die. Nobody really knows why this happens, but the statistics prove that it does. Horse vets never have time to sleep on full-moon nights, they're so busy."

"Interesting," said Kumiko.

"An eclipse of the sun is even worse, though. Nothing short of a tragedy for the horses. You couldn't begin to imagine how many horses die on the day of a total eclipse. Anyhow, all I want to say is that right this second, horses are dying all over the world. Compared with that, it's no big deal if you take out your frustrations on somebody. So don't let it bother you. Think about the horses dying. Think about them lying on the straw in some barn under the full moon, foaming at the mouth, gasping in agony."

She seemed to take a moment to think about horses dying in barns.

"Well, I have to admit," she said with a note of resignation, "you could probably sell anybody anything."

"All right, then," I said. "Change your clothes and let's go out for a pizza."

•

That night, in our darkened bedroom, I lay beside Kumiko, staring at the ceiling and asking myself just how much I really knew about this woman. The clock said 2:00 a.m. She was sound asleep. In the dark, I thought about blue tissues and patterned toilet paper and beef and green peppers. I had lived with her all this time, unaware how much she hated these things. In themselves they were trivial. Stupid. Something to laugh off, not make a big issue out of. We'd had a little tiff and would have forgotten about it in a couple of days.

But this was different. It was bothering me in a strange new way, digging at me like a little fish bone caught in the throat. Maybe-just maybe- it was more crucial than it had seemed. Maybe this was it: the fatal blow. Or maybe it was just the beginning of what would be the fatal blow. I might be standing in the entrance of something big, and inside lay a world that belonged to Kumiko alone, a vast world that I had never known. I saw it as *a* big, dark room. I was standing there holding a cigarette lighter, its tiny flame showing me only the

smallest part of the room.

Would I ever see the rest? Or would I grow old and die without ever really knowing her? If that was all that lay in store for me, then what was the point of this married life I was leading? What was the point of my life at all if I was spending it in bed with an unknown companion?

This was what I thought about that night and what I went on thinking about long afterward from time to time. Only much later did it occur to me that I had found my way into the core of the problem.

3

Malta Kano's Hat

•

Sherbet Tone and Allen Ginsberg and the Crusaders

I was in the middle of preparing lunch when the phone rang again. I had cut two slices of bread, spread them with butter and mustard, filled them with tomato slices and cheese, set the whole on the cutting board, and I was just about to cut it in half when the bell started ringing.

I let the phone ring three times and cut the sandwich in half. Then I transferred it to a plate, wiped the knife, and put that in the cutlery drawer, before pouring myself a cup of the coffee I had warmed up.

Still the phone went on ringing. Maybe fifteen times. I gave up and took it. I would have preferred not to answer, but it might have been Kumiko.

"Hello," said a woman's voice, one I had never heard before. It belonged neither to Kumiko nor to the strange woman who had called me the other day when I was cooking spaghetti. "I wonder if I might possibly be speaking with Mr. Toru Okada?" said the voice, as if its owner were reading a text.

"You are," I said.

"The husband of Kumiko Okada?"

"That's right," I said. "Kumiko Okada is my wife."

"And Mrs. Okada's elder brother is Noboru Wataya?"

"Right again," I said, with admirable self-control. "Noboru Wataya is my wife's elder brother."

"Sir, my name is Malta Kano."

I waited for her to go on. The sudden mention of Kumiko's elder brother had put me on guard. With the blunt end of the pencil that lay by the phone, I scratched the back of my neck. Five seconds or more went by, in which the woman said nothing. No sound of any kind came from the receiver, as if the woman had covered the mouthpiece with her hand and was talking with someone nearby.

"Hello," I said, concerned now.

"Please forgive me, sir," blurted the woman's voice. "In that case, I must ask your permission to call you at a later time."

"Now wait a minute," I said. "This is-"

At that point, the connection was cut. I stared at the receiver, then put it to my ear again. No doubt about it: the woman had hung up.

Vaguely dissatisfied, I turned to the kitchen table, drank my coffee, and ate my sandwich. Until the moment the telephone rang, I had been thinking of something, but now I couldn't remember what it was. Knife in my right hand poised to cut the sandwich in half, I had definitely been thinking of something. Something important. Something I had been trying unsuccessfully to recall for the longest time. It had come to me at the very moment when I was about to cut the sandwich in two, but now it was gone. Chewing on my sandwich, I tried hard to bring it back. But it wouldn't come. It had returned to that dark region of my mind where it had been living until that moment.

•

I finished eating and was clearing the dishes when the phone rang again. This time I took it right away.

Again I heard a woman saying "Hello," but this time it was Kumiko.

"How are you?" she asked. "Finished lunch?"

"Yup. What'd you have?"

"Nothing," she said. "Too busy. I'll probably buy myself a sandwich later. What'd you have?"

I described my sandwich.

"I see," she said, without a hint of envy. "Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you this morning. You're going to get a call from a Miss Kano."

"She already called," I said. "A few minutes ago. All she did was mention our names-mine and yours and your brother's-and hang up. Never said what she wanted. What was that all about?"

"She hung up?"

"Said she'd call again."

"Well, when she does, I want you to do whatever she asks. This is really important. I think you'll have to go see her."

"When? Today?"

"What's wrong? Do you have something planned? Are you supposed to see someone?"

"Nope. No plans." Not yesterday, not today, not tomorrow: no plans at all. "But who is this Kano woman? And what does she want with me? I'd like to have some idea before she calls again. If it's about a job for me connected with your brother, forget it. I don't want to have anything to do with him. You know that."

"No, it has nothing to do with a job," she said, with a hint of annoyance. "It's about the cat."

"The cat?"

"Oh, sorry, I've got to run. Somebody's waiting for me. I really shouldn't have taken the time to make this call. Like I said, I haven't even had lunch. Mind if I hang up? I'll get back to you as soon as I'm free."

"Look, I know how busy you are, but give me a break. I want to know what's going on. What's with the cat? Is this Kano woman-"

"Just do what she tells you, will you, please? Understand? This is serious business. I want you to stay home and wait for her call. Gotta go."

And she went.

When the phone rang at two-thirty, I was napping on the couch. At first I thought I was hearing the alarm clock. I reached out to push the button, but the clock was not there. I wasn't in bed but was on the couch, and it wasn't morning but afternoon. I got up and went to the phone.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello," said a woman's voice. It was the woman who had called in the morning. "Mr. Toru Okada?"

"That's me. Toru Okada."

"Sir, my name is Malta Kano," she said.

"The lady who called before."

"That is correct. I am afraid I was terribly rude. But tell me, Mr. Okada, would you by any chance be free this afternoon?"

"You might say that."

"Well, in that case, I know this is terribly sudden, but do you think it might be possible for us to meet?"

"When? Today? Now?"

"Yes."

I looked at my watch. Not that I really had to—I had looked at it thirty seconds earlier—but just to make sure. And it was still two-thirty.

"Will it take long?" I asked.

"Not so very long, I think. I could be wrong, though. At this moment in time, it is difficult for me to say with complete accuracy. I am sorry."

No matter how long it might take, I had no choice. Kumiko had told me to do as the woman said: that it was serious business. If she said it was serious business, then it was serious business, and I had better do as I was told.

"I see," I said. "Where should we meet?"

"Would you by any chance be acquainted with the Pacific Hotel, across from Shinagawa Station?"

"I would."

"There is a tearoom on the first floor. I shall be waiting there for you at four o'clock if that would be all right with you, sir."

"Fine," I said.

"I am thirty-one years old, and I shall be wearing a red vinyl hat."

Terrific. There was something weird about the way this woman talked, something that confused me momentarily. But I could not have said exactly what made it so weird. Nor was there any law against a thirty-one-year-old woman's wearing a red vinyl hat.

"I see," I said. "I'm sure I'll find you."

"I wonder, Mr. Okada, if you would be so kind as to tell me of any external distinguishing characteristics in your own case."

I tried to think of any "external distinguishing characteristics" I might have. Did I in fact have any?

"I'm thirty, I'm five foot nine, a hundred and forty pounds, short hair, no glasses." It occurred to me as I listed these for her that they hardly constituted external distinguishing characteristics. There could be fifty such men in the Pacific Hotel tearoom. I had been there before, and it was a big place. She needed something more noticeable. But I couldn't think of anything. Which is not to say that I didn't have any distinguishing characteristics. I owned a signed copy of Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*. I had a slow resting pulse rate: forty-seven normally, and no higher than seventy with a high fever. I was out of work. I knew the names of all the brothers Karamazov. But none of these distinguishing characteristics was external.

“What might you be wearing?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I haven’t decided yet. This is so sudden.”

“Then please wear a polka-dot necktie,” she said decisively. “Do you think you might have a polka-dot necktie, sir?”

“I think I do,” I said. I had a navy-blue tie with tiny cream polka dots. Kumiko had given it to me for my birthday a few years earlier.

“Please be so kind as to wear it, then,” she said. “Thank you for agreeing to meet me at four o’clock.” And she hung up.

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I opened the wardrobe and looked for my polka-dot tie. There was no sign of it on the tie rack. I looked in all the drawers. I looked in all the clothes storage boxes in the closet. No polka-dot tie. There was no way that that tie could be in our house without my finding it. Kumiko was such a perfectionist when it came to the arrangement of our clothes, my necktie couldn’t possibly be in a place other than where it was normally kept. And in fact, I found everything—both her clothes and mine—in perfect order. My shirts were neatly folded in the drawer where they belonged. My sweaters were in boxes so full of mothballs my eyes hurt just from opening the lid. One box contained the clothing she had worn in high school: a navy uniform, a flowered minidress, preserved like photos in an old album. What was the point of keeping such things? Perhaps she had simply brought them with her because she had never found a suitable opportunity to get rid of them. Or maybe she was planning to send them to Bangladesh. Or donate them someday as cultural artifacts. In any case, my polka-dot necktie was nowhere to be found.

Hand on the wardrobe door, I tried to recall the last time I had worn the tie. It was a rather stylish tie, in very good taste, but a bit too much for the office. If I had worn it to the firm, somebody would have gone on and on about it at lunch, praising the color or its sharp looks. Which would have been a kind of warning. In the firm I worked for, it was not good to be complimented on your choice of tie. So I had never worn it there. Rather, I put it on for more private—if somewhat formal—occasions: a concert, or dinner at a good restaurant, when Kumiko wanted us to “dress properly” (not that there were so many such occasions). The tie went well with my navy suit, and she was very fond of it. Still, I couldn’t manage to recall when I had last worn it.

I scanned the contents of the wardrobe again and gave up. For one reason or another, the polka-dot tie had disappeared. Oh, well. I put on my navy suit with a blue shirt and a striped tie. I wasn’t too worried. She might not be able to spot me, but all I had to do was look for a thirtyish woman in a red vinyl hat.

Dressed to go out, I sat on the sofa, staring at the wall. It had been a long time since I last wore a suit. Normally, this three-season navy suit would have been a bit too heavy for this time of year, but that particular day was a rainy one, and there was a chill in the air. It was the very suit I had worn on my last day of work (in April). Suddenly it occurred to me that there might be something in one of the pockets. In the inside breast pocket I found a receipt with a date from last autumn. It was some kind of taxi receipt, one I could have been reimbursed for at the office. Now, though, it was too late. I crumpled it up and threw it into the wastebasket.

I had not worn this suit once since quitting, two months earlier. Now, after such a long interval, I felt as if I were in the grip of a foreign substance. It was heavy and stiff, and seemed not to match the contours of my body. I stood and walked around the room, stopping in front of the mirror to yank at the sleeves and the coattails in an attempt to make it fit better. I stretched out my arms, took a deep breath, and bent forward at the waist, checking to see if my physical shape might have changed in the past two months. I sat on the sofa again, but still I felt uncomfortable.

Until this spring, I had commuted to work every day in a suit without its ever feeling strange. My firm had had a rather strict dress code, requiring even low-ranking clerks such as myself to wear suits. I had thought nothing of it.

Now, however, just sitting on the couch in a suit felt like some kind of immoral act, like faking one's curriculum vitae or passing as a woman. Overcome with something very like a guilty conscience, I found it increasingly difficult to breathe.

I went to the front hall, took my brown shoes from their place on the shelf, and pried myself into them with a shoehorn. A thin film of dust clung to them.

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As it turned out, I didn't have to find the woman. She found me. When I arrived at the tearoom, I did a quick circuit, looking for the red hat. There were no women with red hats. My watch showed ten minutes left until four o'clock. I took a seat, drank the water they brought me, and ordered a cup of coffee. No sooner had the waitress left my table than I heard a woman behind me saying, "You must be Mr. Toru Okada." Surprised, I spun around. Not three minutes had gone by since my survey of the room. Under a white jacket she wore a yellow silk blouse, and on her head was a red vinyl hat. By reflex action, I stood and faced her. "Beautiful" was a word that might well have been applied to her. At least she was far more beautiful than I had imagined from her telephone voice. She had a slim, lovely build and was sparing in her use of cosmetics. She knew how to dress-except for the red hat. Her jacket and blouse were finely tailored. On the collar of the jacket shone a gold brooch in the shape of a feather. She could have been taken for a corporate sery. Why, after having lavished such care on the rest of her outfit, she would have topped it off with that totally inappropriate red vinyl hat was beyond me. Maybe she always wore it to help people spot her in situations like this. In that case, it was not a bad idea. If the point was to have her stand out in a room full of strangers, it certainly did its job.

She took the seat across the table from mine, and I sat down again. "I'm amazed you knew it was me," I said. "I couldn't find my polka-dot tie. I *know* I've got it somewhere, but it just wouldn't turn up. Which is why I wore this striped one. I figured I'd find you, but how did you know it was me?"

"Of course I knew it was you," she said, putting her white patent-leather bag on the table. She took off her red vinyl hat and placed it over the bag, covering it completely. I had the feeling she was about to perform a magic trick: when she lifted the hat, the bag would have vanished.

"But I was wearing the wrong tie," I protested. "The wrong tie?" She glanced at my tie with a puzzled expression, as if to say, What is this odd person talking about? Then she nodded. "It doesn't matter. Please don't be concerned."

There was something strange about her eyes. They were mysteriously lacking in depth. They were lovely eyes, but they did not seem to be looking at anything. They were all surface, like glass eyes. But of course they were not glass eyes. They moved, and their lids blinked.

How had she been able to pick me out of the crowd in this busy tearoom? Virtually every chair in the place was taken, and many of them were occupied by men my age. I wanted to ask her for an explanation, but I restrained myself. Better not raise irrelevant issues.

She called to a passing waiter and asked for a Perrier. They had no Perrier, he said, but he could bring her tonic water. She thought about this for a moment and accepted his suggestion. While she waited for her tonic water to arrive, she said nothing, and I did the same.

At one point, she lifted her red hat and opened the clasp of the pocket-book underneath. From the bag she removed a glossy black leather case, somewhat smaller than a cassette tape. It was a business card holder. Like the bag, it had a clasp-the first card holder I had ever seen with a clasp. She drew a card from the case and handed it to me. I reached into my breast

pocket for one of my own cards, only then realizing that I did not have any with me.

Her name card was made of thin plastic, and it seemed to carry a light fragrance of incense. When I brought it closer to my nose, the smell grew more distinct. No doubt about it: it was incense. The card bore a single line of small, intensely black letters:

Malta Kano

Malta? I turned the card over. It was blank.

While I sat there wondering about the meaning of this name card, the waiter came and placed an ice-filled glass in front of her, then filled it halfway with tonic water. The glass had a wedge of lemon in it. The waitress came with a silver-colored coffeepot on her tray. She placed a cup in front of me and poured it full of coffee. With the furtive movements of someone slipping an unlucky shrine fortune into someone else's hand, she eased the bill onto the table and left.

"It's blank," Malta Kano said to me.

I was still staring at the back of her name card.

"Just my name. There is no need for me to include my address or telephone number. No one ever calls me. I am the one who makes the calls."

"I see," I said. This meaningless response hovered in the air above the table like the floating island in *Gulliver's Travels*.

Holding her glass with both hands, she took one tiny sip through a straw. The hint of a frown crossed her face, after which she thrust the glass aside, as if she had lost all interest in it.

"Malta is not my real name," said Malta Kano. "The Kano is real, but the Malta is a professional name I took from the island of Malta. Have you ever been to Malta, Mr. Okada?"

I said I had not. I had never been to Malta, and I had no plans to go to Malta in the near future. It had never even crossed my mind to go there. All I knew about Malta was the Herb Alpert performance of "The Sands of Malta," an authentic stinker of a song.

"I once lived in Malta," she said. "For three years. The water there is terrible. Undrinkable. Like diluted seawater. And the bread they bake there is salty. Not because they put salt in it, but because the water they make it with is salty. The bread is not bad, though. I rather like Malta's bread."

I nodded and sipped my coffee.

"As bad as it tastes, the water from one particular place on Malta has a wonderful influence on the body's elements. It is very special-even mystical-water, and it is available in only the one place on the island. The spring is in the mountains, and you have to climb several hours from a village at the base to get there. The water cannot be transported from the site of the spring. If it is taken elsewhere, it loses its power. The only way you can drink it is to go there yourself. It is mentioned in documents from the time of the Crusades. They called it spirit water. Alien Ginsberg once came there to drink it. So did Keith Richards. I lived there for three years, in the little village at the foot of the mountain. I raised vegetables and learned weaving. I climbed to the spring every day and drank the special water. From 1976 to 1979. Once, for a whole week, I drank only that water and ate no food. You must not put anything but that water in your mouth for an entire week. This is a kind of discipline that is required there. I believe it can be called a religious austerity. In this way you purify your body. For me, it was a truly wonderful experience. This is how I came to choose the name Malta for professional purposes when I returned to Japan."

"May I ask what your profession is?"

She shook her head. "It is not my profession, properly speaking. I do not take money for

what I do. I am a consultant. I talk with people about the elements of the body. I am also engaged in research on water that has beneficial effects on the elements of the body. Making money is not a problem for me. I have whatever assets I need. My father is a doctor, and he has given my younger sister and myself stocks and real estate in a kind of living trust. An accountant manages them for us. They produce a decent income each year. I have also written several books that bring in a little income. My work on the elements of the body is an entirely nonprofit activity. Which is why my card bears neither address nor telephone number. I am the one who makes the calls.”

I nodded, but this was simply a physical movement of the head: I had no idea what she was talking about. I could understand each of the words she spoke, but it was impossible for me to grasp their overall meaning. Elements of the body?

Alien Ginsberg?

I became increasingly uneasy. I’m not one of those people with special intuitive gifts, but the more time I spent with this woman, the more I seemed to smell trouble.

“You’ll have to pardon me,” I said, “but I wonder if I could ask you to explain things from the beginning, step by step. I talked to my wife a little while ago, and all she said was that I should see you and talk to you about our missing cat. To be entirely honest, I don’t really get the point of what you’ve just been telling me. Does it have anything to do with the cat?”

“Yes, indeed,” she said. “But before I go into that, there is something I would like you to know, Mr. Okada.”

She opened the metal clasp of her pocketbook again and took out a white envelope. In the envelope was a photograph, which she handed to me. “My sister,” she said. It was a color snapshot of two women. One was Malta Kano, and in the photo, too, she was wearing a hat—a yellow knit hat. Again it was ominously mismatched with her outfit. Her sister—I assumed this was the younger sister whom she had mentioned—wore a pastel-colored suit and matching hat of the kind that had been popular in the early sixties. I seemed to recall that such colors had been known as “sherbet tone” back then. One thing was certain, however: these sisters were fond of hats. The hairstyle of the younger one was precisely that of Jacqueline Kennedy in her White House days, loaded with hair spray. She wore a little too much makeup, but she could be fairly described as beautiful. She was in her early to mid-twenties. I handed the photo back to Malta Kano, who returned it to its envelope and the envelope to the handbag, shutting the clasp.

“My sister is five years my junior,” she said. “She was defiled by Noboru Wataya. Violently raped.”

Terrific. I wanted to get the hell out of there. But I couldn’t just stand up and walk away. I took a handkerchief from my jacket pocket, wiped my mouth with it, and returned it to the same pocket. Then I cleared my throat.

“That’s terrible,” I said. “I don’t know anything about this, but if he did hurt your sister, you have my heartfelt condolences. I must tell you, however, that my brother-in-law and I have virtually nothing to do with each other. So if you are expecting some kind of—”

“Not at all, Mr. Okada,” she declared. “I do not hold you responsible in any way. If there is someone who should be held responsible for what happened, that person is myself. For being inattentive. For not having protected her as I should have. Unfortunately, certain events made it impossible for me to do so. These things can happen, Mr. Okada. As you know, we live in a violent and chaotic world. And within this world, there are places that are still more violent, still more chaotic. Do you understand what I mean, Mr. Okada? What has happened has happened. My sister will recover from her wounds, from her defilement. She must. Thank goodness they were not fatal. As I have said to my sister, the potential was there for something much, much worse to happen. What I am most concerned about is the elements of her body.”

“Elements of her body,” I said. This “elements of the body” business was obviously a

consistent theme of hers.

"I cannot explain to you in detail how all these circumstances are related. It would be a very long and very complicated story, and although I mean no disrespect to you when I say this, it would be virtually impossible for you at this stage, Mr. Okada, to attain an accurate understanding of the true meaning of that story, which involves a world that we deal with on a professional basis. I did not invite you here in order to voice any complaint to you in that regard. You are, of course, in no way responsible for what has happened. I simply wanted you to know that, although it may be a temporary condition, my sister's elements have been defiled by Mr. Wataya. You and she are likely to have some form of contact with each other sometime in the future. She is my assistant, as I mentioned earlier. At such time, it would probably be best for you to be aware of what occurred between her and Mr. Wataya and to realize that these things can happen."

A short silence followed. Malta Kano looked at me as if to say, Please think about what I have told you. And so I did. About Noboru Wataya's having raped Malta Kano's sister. About the relationship between that and the elements of the body. And about the relationship between those and the disappearance of our cat.

"Do I understand you to be saying," I ventured, "that neither you nor your sister intends to bring a formal complaint on this matter ... to go to the police ... ?"

"No, of course we will do no such thing," said Malta Kano, her face expressionless. "Properly speaking, we do not hold anyone responsible. We would simply like to have a more precise idea of what caused such a thing to happen. Until we solve this question, there is a real possibility that something even worse could occur."

I felt a degree of relief on hearing this. Not that it would have bothered me in the least if Noboru Wataya had been convicted of rape and sent to prison. It couldn't happen to a nicer guy. But Kumiko's brother was a rather well-known figure. His arrest and trial would be certain to make the headlines, and that would be a terrible shock for Kumiko. If only for my own mental health, I preferred the whole thing to go away.

"Rest assured," said Malta Kano, "I asked to see you today purely about the missing cat. That was the matter about which Mr. Wataya sought my advice. Mrs. Okada had consulted him on the matter, and he in turn consulted me."

That explained a lot. Malta Kano was some kind of clairvoyant or channeler or something, and they had consulted her on the whereabouts of the cat. The Wataya family was into this kind of stuff-divination and house "physiognomy" and such. That was fine with me: people were free to believe anything they liked. But why did he have to go and rape the younger sister of his spiritual counselor? Why stir up a lot of pointless trouble?

"Is that your area of expertise?" I asked. "Helping people find things?"

She stared at me with those depthless eyes of hers, eyes that looked as if they were staring into the window of a vacant house. Judging from their expression, she had failed to grasp the meaning of my question.

Without answering the question, she said, "You live in a very strange place, don't you, Mr. Okada?"

"I do?" I said. "Strange in what way?"

Instead of replying, she pushed her nearly untouched glass of tonic water another six or eight inches away from herself. "Cats are very sensitive creatures, you know."

Another silence descended on the two of us.

"So our place is strange, and cats are sensitive animals," I said. "OK. But we've lived there a long time-the two of us and the cat. Why now, all of a sudden, did it decide to leave us? Why didn't it leave before now?"

"That I cannot tell you. Perhaps the flow has changed. Perhaps something has obstructed the flow."

"The flow."

"I do not know yet whether your cat is still alive, but I can be certain of one thing: it is no longer in the vicinity of your house. You will never find the cat in that neighborhood."

I lifted my cup and took a sip of my now lukewarm coffee. Beyond the tearoom windows, a misty rain was falling. The sky was closed over with dark, low-hanging clouds. A sad procession of people and umbrellas climbed up and down the footbridge outside.

"Give me your hand," she said.

I placed my right hand on the table, palm up, assuming she was planning to read my palm. Instead, she stretched her hand out and put her palm against mine. Then she closed her eyes, remaining utterly still, as if silently rebuking a faithless lover. The waitress came and refilled my cup, pretending not to notice what Malta Kano and I were doing. People at nearby tables stole glances in our direction. I kept hoping all the while that there were no acquaintances of mine in the vicinity.

"I want you to picture to yourself one thing you saw before you came here today," said Malta Kano.

"One thing?" I asked.

"Just one thing."

I thought of the flowered minidress that I had seen in Kumiko's clothes storage box. Why that of all things happened to pop into my mind I have no idea. It just did.

We kept our hands together like that for another five minutes- five minutes that felt very long to me, not so much because I was being stared at by people as that the touch of Malta Kano's hand had something unsettling about it. It was a small hand, neither hot nor cold. It had neither the intimate touch of a lover's hand nor the functional touch of a doctor's. It had the same effect on me as her eyes had, turning me into a vacant house. I felt empty: no furniture, no curtains, no rugs. Just an empty container. Eventually, Malta Kano withdrew her hand from mine and took several deep breaths. Then she nodded several times.

"Mr. Okada," she said, "I believe that you are entering *a* phase of your life in which many different things will occur. The disappearance of your cat is only the beginning."

"Different things," I said. "Good things or bad things?"

She tilted her head in thought. "Good things *and* bad things. Bad things that seem good at first, and good things that seem bad at first."

"To me, that sounds very general," I said. "Don't you have any more concrete information?"

"Yes, I suppose what I am saying does sound very general," said Malta Kano. "But after all, Mr. Okada, when one is speaking of the essence of things, it often happens that one can only speak in generalities. Concrete things certainly do command attention, but they are often little more than trivia. Side trips. The more one tries to see into the distance, the more generalized things become."

I nodded silently-without the slightest inkling of what she was talking about.

"Do I have your permission to call you again?" she asked.

"Sure," I said, though in fact I had no wish to be called by anyone. "Sure" was about the only answer I could give.

She snatched her red vinyl hat from the table, took the handbag that had been hidden beneath it, and stood up. Uncertain as to how I should respond to this, I remained seated.

"I do have one small bit of information that I can share with you," Malta Kano said, looking down at me, after she had put on her red hat. "You will find your polka-dot tie, but not in your house."

High Towers and Deep Wells (Or, Far from Nomonhan)

*

Back home, I found Kumiko in a good mood. A *very* good mood. It was almost six o'clock by the time I arrived home after seeing Malta Kano, which meant I had no time to fix a proper dinner. Instead, I prepared a simple meal from what I found in the freezer, and we each had a beer. She talked about work, as she always did when she was in a good mood: whom she had seen at the office, what she had done, which of her colleagues had talent and which did not. That kind of thing.

I listened, making suitable responses. I heard no more than half of what she was saying. Not that I disliked listening to her talk about these things. Contents of the conversation aside, I loved watching her at the dinner table as she talked with enthusiasm about her work. This, I told myself, was "home." We were doing a proper job of carrying out the responsibilities that we had been assigned to perform at home. She was talking about her work, and I, after having prepared dinner, was listening to her talk. This was very different from the image of home that I had imagined vaguely for myself before marriage. But this was *the home I had chosen*. I had had a home, of course, when I was a child. But it was not one I had chosen for myself. I had been born into it, presented with it as an established fact. Now, however, I lived in a world that I had chosen through an act of will. It was my home. It might not be perfect, but the fundamental stance I adopted with regard to my home was to accept it, problems and all, because it was something I myself had chosen. If it had problems, these were almost certainly problems that had originated within me.

"So what about the cat?" she asked. I summarized for her my meeting with Malta Kano in the hotel in Shinagawa. I told her about my polka-dot tie: that there had been no sign of it in the wardrobe. That Malta Kano had managed to find me in the crowded tearoom nonetheless. That she had had a unique way of dressing and of speaking, which I described. Kumiko enjoyed hearing about Malta Kano's red vinyl hat, but when I was unable to provide a clear answer regarding the whereabouts of our lost cat, she was deeply disappointed.

"Then she doesn't know where the cat is, either?" Kumiko demanded. "The best she could do was tell you it isn't in our neighborhood any longer?"

"That's about it," I said. I decided not to mention anything about the "obstructed flow" of the place we lived in or that this could have some connection to the disappearance of the cat. I knew it would bother Kumiko, and for my own part, I had no desire to increase the number of things we had to worry about. We would have had a real problem if Kumiko insisted on moving because this was a "bad place." Given our present economic situation, it would have been impossible for us to move.

"That's what she tells *me*," I said. "The cat is not around here anymore."

"Which means it will never come home?"

"I don't know," I said. "She was vague about everything. All she came up with was little hints. She did say she'd get in touch with me when she found out more, though."

"Do you believe her?"

"Who knows? I don't know anything about this kind of stuff."

I poured myself some more beer and watched the head settle. Kumiko rested her elbow on the table, chin in hand.

"She must have told you she won't accept payment or gifts of any kind," she said.

"Uh-huh. That's certainly a plus," I said. "So what's the problem? She won't take our

money, she won't steal our souls, she won't snatch the princess away. We've got nothing to lose."

"I want you to understand one thing," said Kumiko. "That cat is very important to me. Or should I say to us. We found it the week after we got married. Together. You remember?"

"Of course I do."

"It was so tiny, and soaking wet in the pouring rain. I went to meet you at the station with an umbrella. Poor little baby. We saw him on the way home. Somebody had thrown him into a beer crate next to the liquor store. He's my very first cat. He's important to me, a kind of symbol. I can't lose him."

"Don't worry. I know that."

"So where is he? He's been missing for ten days now. That's why I called my brother. I thought he might know a medium or clairvoyant or something, somebody who could find a missing cat. I know you don't like to ask my brother for anything, but he's followed in my father's footsteps. He knows a lot about these things."

"Ah, yes, the Wataya family tradition," I said as coolly as an evening breeze across an inlet. "But what's the connection between Noboru Wataya and this woman?"

Kumiko shrugged. "I'm sure she's just somebody he happened to meet. He seems to have so many contacts these days."

"I'll bet."

"He says she possesses amazing powers but that she's pretty strange." Kumiko poked at her macaroni casserole. "What was her name again?"

"Malta Kano," I said. "She practiced some kind of religious austerities on Malta."

"That's it. Malta Kano. What did you think of her?"

"Hard to say." I looked at my hands, resting on the table. "At least she wasn't boring. And that's a good thing. I mean, the world's full of things we can't explain, and somebody's got to fill that vacuum. Better to have somebody who isn't boring than somebody who is. Right? Like Mr. Honda, for example."

Kumiko laughed out loud at the mention of Mr. Honda. "He was a wonderful old man, don't you think? I liked him a lot."

"Me too," I said.

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For about a year after we were married, Kumiko and I used to visit the home of old Mr. Honda once a month. A practitioner of spirit possession, he was one of the Wataya family's favorite channeler types, but he was terrifically hard of hearing. Even with his hearing aid, he could barely make out what we said to him. We had to shout so loud our voices would rattle the shoji paper. I used to wonder if he could hear what the spirits said to him if he was so hard of hearing. But maybe it worked the other way: the worse your ears, the better you could hear the words of the spirits. He had lost his hearing in the war. A noncommissioned officer with Japan's Manchurian garrison, the Kwantung Army, he had suffered burst eardrums when an artillery shell or a hand grenade or something exploded nearby during a battle with a combined Soviet-Outer Mongolian unit at Nomon-han on the border between Outer Mongolia and Manchuria.

Our visits to Mr. Honda's place were not prompted by a belief on our part in his spiritual powers. I had never been interested in these things, and Kumiko placed far less trust in such supernatural matters than either her parents or her brother. She did have a touch of superstition, and she could be upset by an ominous prognostication, but she never went out of her way to involve herself in spiritual affairs.

The only reason we went to see Mr. Honda was because her father ordered us to. It was the one condition he set for us to marry. True, it was a rather bizarre condition, but we went

along with it to avoid complications. Neither of us had expected an easy time from her family. Her father was a government official. The younger son of a not very well-to-do farm family in Niigata, he had attended prestigious Tokyo University on scholarship, graduated with honors, and become an elite member of the Ministry of Transport. This was all very admirable, as far as I was concerned. But as is so often the case with men who have made it like this, he was arrogant and self-righteous. Accustomed to giving orders, he harbored not the slightest doubt concerning the values of the world to which he belonged. For him, hierarchy was everything. He bowed to superior authority without question, and he trampled those beneath him without hesitation. Neither Kumiko nor I believed that a man like that would accept a poor, twenty-four-year-old nobody like me, without position or pedigree or even decent grades or future promise, as a marriage partner for his daughter. We figured that after her parents turned us down, we'd get married on our own and live without having anything to do with them.

Still, I did the right thing. I formally went to ask Kumiko's parents for her hand in marriage. To say that their reception of me was cool would be an understatement. The doors of all the world's refrigerators seemed to have been thrown open at once.

That they gave us their permission in the end-with reluctance, but in a near-miraculous turn of events-was thanks entirely to Mr. Honda. He asked them everything they had learned about me, and in the end he declared that if their daughter was going to get married, I was the best possible partner for her; that if she wanted to marry me, they could only invite terrible consequences by opposing the match. Kumiko's parents had absolute faith in Mr. Honda at the time, and so there was nothing they could do but accept me as their daughter's husband.

Finally, though, I was always the outsider, the uninvited guest. Kumiko and I would visit their home and have dinner with them twice a month with mechanical regularity. This was a truly loathsome experience, situated at the precise midpoint between a meaningless mortification of the flesh and brutal torture. Throughout the meal, I had the sense that their dining room table was as long as a railway station. They would be eating and talking about something way down at the other end, and I was too far away for them to see. This went on for a year, until Kumiko's father and I had a violent argument, after which we never saw each other again. The relief this gave me bordered on ecstasy. Nothing so consumes a person as meaningless exertion.

For a time after our marriage, though, I did exert myself to keep relations between us on a good footing. And without a doubt, the least painful of my exertions were those monthly meetings with Mr. Honda.

All payments to Mr. Honda were made by Kumiko's father. We merely had to visit Mr. Honda's home in Meguro once a month with a big bottle of sake, listen to what he had to tell us, and go home. Simple.

We took to Mr. Honda immediately. He was a nice old man, whose face would light up whenever he saw the sake we had brought him. We liked everything about him-except perhaps for the way he left his television on full blast because he was so hard of hearing.

We always went to his house in the morning. Winter and summer, he sat with his legs down in the sunken hearth. In winter he would have a quilt wrapped around his waist to hold in the heat of the charcoal fire. In summer he used neither quilt nor fire. He was apparently a rather famous fortune-teller, but he lived very simply-even ascetically. His house was small, with a tiny entrance hall barely big enough for one person at a time to tie or untie a pair of shoes. The tatami mats on his floors were badly worn, and cracked windowpanes were patched with tape. Across the lane stood an auto repair shop, where there was always someone yelling at the top of his lungs. Mr. Honda wore a kimono styled midway between a sleeping robe and a traditional workman's jacket. It gave no evidence of having been washed in the recent past. He lived alone and had a woman come in to do the cooking and cleaning. For some reason, though, he never let her launder his robe. Scraggly white whiskers hung on his sunken cheeks.

If there was anything in Mr. Honda's house that could be called impressive, it was the huge color television set. In such a tiny house, its gigantic presence was overwhelming. It was always tuned to the government-supported NHK network. Whether this was because he loved NHK, or he couldn't be bothered to change the channel, or this was a special set that received only NHK, I had no way of telling, but NHK was all he ever watched. Instead of a flower arrangement or a calligraphic scroll, the living room's ceremonial alcove was filled with this huge television set, and Mr. Honda always sat facing it, stirring the divining sticks on the table atop his sunken hearth while NHK continued to blast out cooking shows, bonsai care instructions, news updates, and political discussions.

"Legal work might be the wrong thing for you, sonny," said Mr. Honda one day, either to me or to someone standing twenty yards behind me.

"It might?"

"Yep, it might. The law presides over things of this world, finally. The world where shadow is shadow and light is light, yin is yin and yang is yang, I'm me and he's him. I am me and / He is him: / Autumn eve.' But *you* don't belong to that world, sonny. The world you belong to is above that or below that."

"Which is better?" I asked, out of simple curiosity. "Above or below?" "It's not that either one is better," he said. After a brief coughing fit, he spat a glob of phlegm onto a tissue and studied it closely before crumpling the tissue and throwing it into a wastebasket. "It's not a question of better or worse. The point is, not to resist the flow. You go up when you're supposed to go up and down when you're supposed to go down. When you're supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb to the top. When you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom. When there's no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up. If everything dries up, the world is darkness. 'I am he and / He is me: / Spring nightfall.' Abandon the self, and there you are."

"Is this one of those times when there's no flow?" Kumiko asked.

"How's that?"

"IS THIS ONE OF THOSE TIMES WHEN THERE'S NO FLOW?" Kumiko shouted.

"No flow now," Mr. Honda said, nodding to himself. "Now's the time to stay still. Don't do anything. Just be careful of water. Sometime in the future, this young fellow could experience real suffering in connection with water. Water that's missing from where it's supposed to be. Water that's present where it's not supposed to be. In any case, be very, very careful of water."

Kumiko, beside me, was nodding with the utmost gravity, but I could see she was struggling not to laugh. "What kind of water?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Mr. Honda. "Water."

On the TV, some university professor was saying that people's chaotic use of Japanese grammar corresponded precisely to the chaos in their lifestyles. "Properly speaking, of course, we cannot call it chaos. Grammar is like the air: someone higher up might try to set rules for using it, but people won't necessarily follow them." It sounded interesting, but Mr. Honda just went on talking about water.

"Tell you the truth, I suffered over water," he said. "There was no water in Nomonhan. The front line was a mess, and supplies were cut off. No water. No rations. No bandages. No bullets. It was awful. The big boys in the rear were interested in only one thing: occupying territory as fast as possible. Nobody was thinking about supplies. For three days, I had almost no water. If you left a washrag out, it'd be wet with dew in the morning. You could wring out a few drops to drink, but that was it. There was just no other water at all. I wanted to die, it was so bad. Being thirsty like that is the worst thing in the world. I was ready to run out and take a bullet. Men who got shot in the stomach would scream for water. Some of them went crazy with the thirst. It was a living hell. We could see a big river flowing right in front of us, with all the water anybody could ever drink. But we couldn't get to it. Between us and the

river was a line of huge Soviet tanks with flamethrowers. Machine gun emplacements bristled like pincushions. Sharpshooters lined the high ground. They sent up flares at night. All we had was Model 38 infantry rifles and twenty-five bullets each. Still, most of my buddies went to the river. They couldn't take it. Not one of them made it back. They were all killed. So you see, when you're supposed to stay still, stay still."

He pulled out a tissue, blew his nose loudly, and examined the results before crumpling the tissue and throwing it into the wastebasket.

"It can be hard to wait for the flow to start," he said, "but when you have to wait, you have to wait. In the meantime, assume you're dead."

"You mean I should stay dead for now?" I asked.

"How's that?"

"YOU MEAN I SHOULD STAY DEAD FOR NOW?"

"That's it, sonny. 'Dying is the only way / For you to float free: / Nomonhan.' "

He went on talking about Nomonhan for another hour. We just sat there and listened. We had been ordered to "receive his teaching," but in a year of monthly visits to his place, he almost never had a "teaching" for us to "receive." He rarely performed divination. The one thing he talked about was the Nomonhan Incident: how a cannon shell blew off half the skull of the lieutenant next to him, how he leaped on a Soviet tank and burned it with a Molotov cocktail, how they cornered and shot a downed Soviet pilot. All his stories were interesting, even thrilling, but as with anything else, you hear them seven or eight times and they tend to lose some of their luster. Nor did he simply "tell" his stories. He screamed them. He could have been standing on a cliff edge on a windy day, shouting to us across a chasm. It was like watching an old Kurosawa movie from the very front row of a run-down theater. Neither of us could hear much of anything for a while after we left his house.

Still, we-or at least I- enjoyed listening to Mr. Honda's stories. Most of them were bloody, but coming from the mouth of a dying old man in a dirty old robe, the details of battle lost the ring of reality. They sounded more like fairy tales. Almost half a century earlier, Mr. Honda's unit had fought a ferocious battle over a barren patch of wilderness on the Manchurian-Mongolian border. Until I heard about it from Mr. Honda, I knew almost nothing about the battle of Nomonhan. And yet it had been a magnificent battle. Almost bare-handed, they had defied the superior Soviet mechanized forces, and they had been crushed. One unit after another had been smashed, annihilated. Some officers had, on their own initiative, ordered their troops to retreat to avoid annihilation; their superiors forced them to commit suicide. Most of the troops captured by the Soviets refused to participate in the postwar exchange of prisoners, because they were afraid of being tried for desertion in the face of the enemy. These men ended up contributing their bones to the Mongolian earth. Sent home with an honorable discharge after he lost his hearing, Mr. Honda became a practitioner of divination.

"It was probably all to the good," he said. "If my hearing hadn't been ruined, I probably would have died in the South Pacific. That's what happened to most of the troops who survived Nomonhan. Nomonhan was a great embarrassment for the Imperial Army, so they sent the survivors where they were most likely to be killed. The commanding officers who made such a mess of Nomonhan went on to have distinguished careers in central command. Some of the bastards even became politicians after the war. But the guys who fought their hearts out for them were almost all snuffed out."

"Why was Nomonhan such an embarrassment for the army?" I asked. "The troops all fought bravely, and a lot of them died, right? Why did the survivors have to be treated so badly?"

But Mr. Honda seemed not to hear my question. He stirred and rattled his divining sticks. "You'd better be careful of water," he said.

And so ended the day's session.

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After my fight with Kumiko's father, we stopped going to Mr. Honda's. It was impossible for me to continue visiting him, knowing it was being paid for by my father-in-law, and we were not in any position to pay him ourselves. We could barely hold our heads above water in those days. Eventually, we forgot about Mr. Honda, just as most busy young people tend to forget about most old people.

•

In bed that night, I went on thinking about Mr. Honda. Both he and Malta Kano had spoken to me about water. Mr. Honda had warned me to be careful. Malta Kano had undergone austerities on the island of Malta in connection with her research on water. Perhaps it was a coincidence, but both of them had been deeply concerned about water. Now it was starting to worry me. I turned my thoughts to images of the battlefield at Nomonhan: the Soviet tanks and machine gun emplacements, and the river flowing beyond them. The unbearable thirst. In the darkness, I could hear the sound of the river.

"Toru," Kumiko said to me in a tiny voice, "are you awake?"

"Uh-huh."

"About the necktie. I just remembered. I took it to the cleaner's in December. It needed pressing. I guess I just forgot."

"December? Kumiko, that's over six months ago!"

"I know. And you know I never do anything like that, forgetting things. It was such a lovely necktie, too." She put her hand on my shoulder. "I took it to the cleaner's by the station. Do you think they still have it?"

"I'll go tomorrow. It's probably there."

"What makes you think so? Six months is a long time. Most cleaners will get rid of things that aren't claimed in three months. They can do that. It's the law. What makes you think it's still there?"

"Malta Kano said I'd find it. Somewhere outside the house."

I could feel her looking at me in the dark.

"You mean you believe in what she says?"

"I'm starting to."

"Pretty soon you and my brother might start seeing eye-to-eye," she said, a note of pleasure in her voice.

"We just might," I said.

I kept thinking about the Nomonhan battlefield after Kumiko fell asleep. The soldiers were all asleep there. The sky overhead was filled with stars, and millions of crickets were chirping. I could hear the river. I fell asleep listening to it flow.

5

Hooked on Lemon Drops

•

Flightless Bird and Waterless Well

After doing the breakfast dishes, I rode my bike to the cleaner's by the station. The owner—a thin man in his late forties, with deep wrinkles in his forehead—was listening to a tape of the Percy Faith orchestra on a boom box that had been set on a shelf. It was a large JVC, with some kind of extra woofers attached and a mound of cassette tapes standing by. The orchestra was performing "Tara's Theme," making the most of its lush string section. The owner himself was in the back of the shop, whistling along with the music as he ran a steam iron over a shirt, his movements sharp and energetic. I approached the counter and announced with suitable apologies that I had brought a necktie in late last year and forgotten to pick it up. To his peaceful little world at nine-thirty in the morning, this must have been tantamount to the arrival of a messenger bearing terrible news in a Greek tragedy.

"No ticket, either, I suppose," he said, in a strangely distant voice. He was talking not to me but to the calendar on the wall by the counter. The photo for June showed the Alps—a green valley, cows grazing, a hard-edged white cloud floating against Mont Blanc or the Matterhorn or something. Then he looked at me with an expression on his face that all but said, If you were going to forget the damned thing, you should have *forgotten* it! It was a direct and eloquent look.

"End of the year, huh? That's a toughie. We're talkin' more than six months ago. All right, I'll have a look, but don't expect me to find it."

He switched off his iron, set it on the ironing board, and, whistling along with the theme from *A Summer Place*, started to rummage through the shelves in the back room.

Back in high school, I had taken my girlfriend to see *A Summer Place*. It starred Troy Donahue and Sandra Dee. We saw it in a revival theater on a double bill with Connie Francis's *Follow the Boys*. It had been pretty bad, as far as I could remember, but hearing the music now in a cleaner's, thirteen years later, I could bring back only good memories from that time.

"That was a blue polka-dot necktie?" asked the owner. "Name Okada?"

"That's it," I said.

"You're in luck."

•

As soon as I got home, I phoned Kumiko at work. "They had the tie," I said.

"Incredible," she said. "Good for you!"

It sounded artificial, like praise for a son bringing home good grades. This made me feel uneasy. I should have waited until her lunch break to phone.

"I'm so relieved," she said. "But I've got someone on hold right now. Sorry. Could you call me back at noon?"

"That I will," I said.

After hanging up, I went out to the veranda with the morning paper. As always, I lay on my stomach with the want ads spread out before me, taking all the time I needed to read them from one end to the other, the columns filled with incomprehensible codes and clues. The variety of professions in this world was amazing, each assigned its place amid the paper's neat rows, as on a new graveyard map.

As happened each morning, I heard the wind-up bird winding its spring in a treetop somewhere. I closed the paper, sat up with my back against a post, and looked at the garden. Soon the bird gave its rasping cry once more, a long creaking sort of sound that came from the top of the neighbor's pine tree. I strained to see through the branches, but there was no sign of

the bird, only its cry. As always. And so the world had its spring wound for the day.

Just before ten, it started to rain. Not a heavy rain. You couldn't really be sure it was raining, the drops were so fine, but if you looked hard, you could tell. The world existed in two states, raining and nonraining, and there should be a line of demarcation between the two. I remained seated on the veranda for a while, staring at the line that was supposed to be there.

What should I do with the time until lunch? Go for a swim at the nearby ward pool or to the alley to look for the cat? Leaning against the veranda post, watching the rain fall in the garden, I went back and forth between the two. Pool. Cat.

The cat won. Malta Kano had said that the cat was no longer in the neighborhood. But that morning I had an indefinable urge to go out and look for it. Cat hunting had become a part of my daily routine. And besides, Kumiko might be cheered somewhat to learn that I had given it a try. I put on my light raincoat. I decided not to take an umbrella. I put on my tennis shoes and left the house with the key and a few lemon drops in my coat pocket. I cut across the yard, but just as I set one hand on the cinder-block wall, a phone rang. I stood still, straining my ears, but I couldn't tell whether it was our phone or a neighbor's. The minute you leave your house, all phones sound alike. I gave up and climbed over the wall.

I could feel the soft grass through the thin soles of my tennis shoes. The alley was quieter than usual. I stood still for a while, holding my breath and listening, but I couldn't hear a thing. The phone had stopped ringing. I heard no bird cries or street noises. The sky was painted over, a perfect uniform gray. On days like this the clouds probably absorbed the sounds from the surface of the earth. And not just sounds. All kinds of things. Perceptions, for example.

Hands shoved into the pockets of my raincoat, I slipped down the narrow alley. Where clothes-drying poles jutted out into the lane, I squeezed sideways between the walls. I passed directly beneath the eaves of other houses. In this way I made my silent way down this passage reminiscent of an abandoned canal. My tennis shoes on the grass made no noise at all. The only real sound I heard on my brief journey was that of a radio playing in one house. It was tuned to a talk show discussing callers' problems. A middle-aged man was complaining to the host about his mother-in-law. From the snatches I caught, the woman was sixty-eight and crazy about horse racing. Once I was past the house, the sound of the radio began to fade until there was nothing left, as if what had gradually faded into nothingness was not only the sound of the radio but the middle-aged man and his horse-obsessed mother-in-law, both of whom must exist somewhere in the world.

I finally reached the vacant house. It stood there, hushed as ever.

(Against the background of gray, low-hanging clouds, its second-story storm shutters nailed shut, the house loomed as a dark, shadowy presence. It could have been a huge freighter caught on a reef one stormy night long ago and left to rot. If it hadn't been for the increased height of the grass since my last visit, I might have believed that time had stopped in this one particular place. Thanks to the long days of rain, the blades of grass glowed with a deep-green luster, and they gave off the smell of wild-ness unique to things that sink their roots into the earth. In the exact center of this sea of grass stood the bird sculpture, in the very same pose I had seen it in before, with its wings spread, ready to take off. This was one bird that could never take off, of course. I knew that, and the bird knew that. It would go on waiting where it had been set until the day it was carted off or smashed to pieces. No other possibilities existed for it to leave this garden. The only thing moving in there was a small white butterfly, fluttering across the grass some weeks behind season. It made uncertain progress, like a searcher who has forgotten what he was searching for. After five minutes of this fruitless hunt, the butterfly went off somewhere.)

Sucking on a lemon drop, I leaned against the chain-link fence and looked at the garden. There was no sign of the cat. There was no sign of anything. The place looked like a still, stagnant pool in which some enormous force had blocked the natural flow.

I felt the presence of someone behind me and whirled around. But there was no one. There was only the fence on the other side of the alley, and the small gate in the fence, the gate in which the girl had stood. But it was closed now, and in the yard was no trace of anyone. Everything was damp and silent. And there were the smells: Grass. Rain. My raincoat. The lemon drop under my tongue, half melted. They all came together in a single deep breath. I turned to survey my surroundings once more, but there was no one. Listening hard, I caught the muffled chop of a distant helicopter. People were up there, flying above the clouds. But even that sound drew off into the distance, and silence descended once again.

The chain-link fence surrounding the vacant house had a gate, also of chain link, not surprisingly. I gave it a tentative push. It opened with almost disappointing ease, as if it were urging me to come in. "No problem," it seemed to be telling me. "Just walk right in." I didn't have to rely on the detailed knowledge of the law that I had acquired over eight long years to know that it could be a very serious problem indeed. If a neighbor spotted me in the vacant house and reported me to the police, they would show up and question me. I would say I was looking for my cat; it had disappeared, and I was looking for it all over the neighborhood. They would demand to know my address and occupation. I would have to tell them I was out of work. That would make them all the more suspicious. They were probably nervous about left-wing terrorists or something, convinced that left-wing terrorists were on the move all over Tokyo, with hidden arsenals of guns and homemade bombs. They'd call Kumiko at her office to verify my story. She'd be upset.

Oh, what the hell. I went in, pulling the gate closed behind me. If something was going to happen, let it happen. If something *wanted* to happen, let it happen.

I crossed the garden, scanning the area. My tennis shoes on the grass were as soundless as ever. There were several low fruit trees, the names of which I did not know, and a generous stretch of lawn. It was all overgrown now, hiding everything. Ugly maypop vines had crawled all over two of the fruit trees, which looked as if they had been strangled to death. The row of osmanthus along the fence had been turned a ghastly white from a coating of insects' eggs. A stubborn little fly kept buzzing by my ear for a time.

Passing the stone statue, I walked over to a nested pile of white plastic lawn chairs under the eaves. The topmost chair was filthy, but the next one down was not bad. I dusted it off with my hand and sat on it. The overgrown weeds between here and the fence made it impossible for me to be seen from the alley, and the eaves sheltered me from the rain. I sat and whistled and watched the garden receiving its bounty of fine raindrops. At first I was unaware of what tune I was whistling, but then I realized it was the overture to Rossini's *Thieving Magpie*, the same tune I had been whistling when the strange woman called as I was cooking spaghetti.

Sitting here in the garden like this, with no other people around, looking at the grass and the stone bird, whistling a tune (badly), I had the feeling that I had returned to my childhood. I was in a secret place where no one could see me. This put me in a quiet mood. I felt like throwing a stone-a small stone would be OK-at some target. The stone bird would be a good one. I'd hit it just hard enough to make a little clunk. I used to play by myself a lot like that when I was a kid. I'd set up an empty can, back way off, and throw rocks until the can filled up. I could do it for hours. Just now, though, I didn't have any rocks at my feet. Oh, well. No place has everything you need.

I pulled up my feet, bent my knees, and rested my chin on my hand. Then I closed my eyes. Still no sounds. The darkness behind my closed eyelids was like the cloud-covered sky, but the gray was somewhat deeper. Every few minutes, someone would come and paint over the gray with a different-textured gray-one with a touch of gold or green or red. I was impressed with the variety of grays that existed. Human beings were so strange. All you had to do was sit still for ten minutes, and you could see this amazing variety of grays.

Browsing through my book of gray color samples, I started whistling again, without a

thought in my head.

"Hey," said someone.

I snapped my eyes open. Leaning to the side, I stretched to see the gate above the weed tops. It was open. Wide open. Someone had followed me inside. My heart started pounding.

"Hey," the someone said again. A woman's voice. She stepped out from behind the statue and started toward me. It was the girl who had been sunbathing in the yard across the alley. She wore the same light-blue Adidas T-shirt and short pants. Again she walked with a slight limp. The one thing different from before was that she had taken off her sunglasses.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Looking for the cat," I said.

"Are you sure? It doesn't look that way to me. You're just sitting there and whistling with your eyes closed. It'd be kinda hard to find much of anything that way, don't you think?"

I felt myself blushing.

"It doesn't bother me," she went on, "but somebody who doesn't know you might think you were some kind of pervert." She paused. "You're not a pervert, are you?"

"Probably not," I said.

She approached me and undertook a careful study of the nested lawn chairs, choosing one without too much dirt on it and doing one more close inspection before setting it on the ground and lowering herself into it.

"And your whistling's terrible," she said. "I don't know the tune, but it had no melody at all. You're not gay, are you?"

"Probably not," I said. "Why?"

"Somebody told me gays are lousy whistlers. Is that true?"

"Who knows? It's probably nonsense."

"Anyway, I don't care even if you are gay or a pervert or anything. By the way, what's your name? I don't know what to call you."

"Toru Okada," I said. She repeated my name to herself several times. "Not much of a name, is it?" she said.

"Maybe not," I said. "I've always thought it sounded kind of like some prewar foreign minister: Toru Okada. See?"

"That doesn't mean anything to me. I hate history. It's my worst subject. Anyhow, never mind. Haven't you got a nickname? Something easier than Toru Okada?"

I couldn't recall ever having had a nickname. Never once in my life. Why was that? "No nickname," I said. "Nothing? 'Bear'? Or 'Frog'?" "Nothing."

"Gee," she said. "Think of something."

"Wind-up bird," I said.

"Wind-up bird?" she asked, looking at me with her mouth open. "What is *that*?"

"The bird that winds the spring," I said. "Every morning. In the tree-tops. It winds the world's spring. *Creeeak*." She went on staring at me.

I sighed. "It just popped into my head," I said. "And there's more. The bird comes over by my place every day and goes *Creeeak* in the neighbor's tree. But nobody's ever seen it."

"That's neat, I guess. So anyhow, you'll be Mr. Wind-Up Bird. That's not very easy to say, either, but it's way better than Toru Okada."

"Thank you very much."

She pulled her feet up into the chair and put her chin on her knees. "How about your name?" I asked.

"May Kasahara. May ... like the month of May."

"Were you born in May?"

"Do you have to ask? Can you imagine the confusion if somebody born in June was named May?"

"I guess you're right," I said. "I suppose you're still out of school?"

"I was watching you for a long time," she said, ignoring my question.

"From my room. With my binoculars. I saw you go in through the gate. I keep a little pair of binoculars handy, for watching what goes on in the alley. All kinds of people go through there. I'll bet you didn't know that.

And not just people. Animals too. What were you doing here by yourself all that time?"

"Spacing out," I said. "Thinking about the old days. Whistling." May Kasahara bit a thumbnail.

"You're kinda weird," she said.

"I'm not weird. People do it all the time."

"Maybe so, but they don't do it in a neighbor's vacant house. You can stay in your own yard if all you want to do is space out and think about the old days and whistle." She had a point there.

"Anyhow, I guess Noboru Wataya never came home, huh?" I shook my head.

"And I guess you never saw him, either, after that?" I asked.

"No, and I was on the lookout for him, too: a brown-striped tiger cat. Tail slightly bent at the tip. Right?"

From the pocket of her short pants she took a box of Hope regulars and lit up with a match. After a few puffs, she stared right at me and said, "Your hair's thinning a little, isn't it?"

My hand moved automatically to the back of my head.

"Not there, silly," she said. "Your front hairline. It's higher than it should be, don't you think?"

"I never really noticed."

"Well, *I* did," she said. "That's where you're going to go bald. Your hairline's going to move up and up like this." She grabbed a handful of her own hair in the front and thrust her bare forehead in my face. "You'd better be careful."

I touched my hairline. Maybe she was right. Maybe it had receded somewhat. Or was it my imagination? Something new to worry about.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "How can I be careful?"

"You can't, I guess. There's nothing you can do. There's no way to prevent baldness. Guys who are going to go bald go bald. When their time comes, that's it: they just go bald. There's nothing you can do to stop it. They tell you you can keep from going bald with proper hair care, but that's bullshit. Look at the bums who sleep in Shinjuku Station. They've all got great heads of hair. You think they're washing it every day with Clinique or Vidal Sassoon or rubbing Lotion X into it? That's what the cosmetics makers will tell you, to get your money."

"I'm sure you're right," I said, impressed. "But how do you know so much about baldness?"

"I've been working part time for a wig company. Quite a while now. You know I don't go to school, and I've got all this time to kill. I've been doing surveys and questionnaires, that kind of stuff. So I know all about men losing their hair. I'm just loaded with information."

"Gee," I said.

"But you know," she said, dropping her cigarette butt on the ground and stepping on it, "in the company I work for, they won't let you say anybody's 'bald.' You have to say 'men with a thinning problem.' 'Bald' is discriminatory language. I was joking around once and suggested 'gentlemen who are follically challenged,' and boy, did *they* get mad! 'This is no laughing matter, young lady,' they said. They're so damned seerious. Did you know that? Everybody in the whole damned world is so damned serious."

I took out my lemon drops, popped one in my mouth, and offered one to May Kasahara. She shook her head and took out a cigarette.

"Come to think of it, Mr. Wind-Up Bird," she said, "you were unemployed. Are you still?"

"Sure am."

"Are you serious about working?"

"Sure am." No sooner had the words left my mouth than I began to wonder how true they were. "Actually, I'm not so sure," I said. "I think I need time. Time to think. I'm not sure myself what I need. It's hard to explain."

Chewing on a nail, May Kasahara looked at me for a while. "Tell you what, Mr. Wind-Up Bird," she said. "Why don't you come to work with me one day? At the wig company. They don't pay much, but the work's easy, and you can set your own hours. What do you say? Don't think about it too much, just do it. For a change of pace. It might help you figure out all kinds of things."

She had a point there. "You've got a point there," I said.

"Great!" she said. "Next time I go, I'll come and get you. Now, where did you say your house is?"

"Hmm, that's a tough one. Or maybe not. You just keep going and going down the alley, taking all the turns. On the left you'll see a house with a red Honda Civic parked in back. It's got one of those bumper stickers 'Let There Be Peace for All the Peoples of the World.' Ours is the next house, but there's no gate opening on the alley. It's just a cinder-block wall, and you have to climb over it. It's about chin height on me."

"Don't worry. I can get over a wall that high, no problem."

"Your leg doesn't hurt anymore?"

She exhaled smoke with a little sighing kind of sound and said, "Don't worry. It's nothing. I limp when my parents are around because I don't want to go to school. I'm faking. It just sort of turned into a habit. I do it even when nobody's looking, when I'm in my room all by myself. I'm a perfectionist. What is it they say-'Fool yourself to fool others'? But anyhow, Mr. Wind-Up Bird, tell me, have you got guts?"

"Not really, no."

"Never had 'em?"

"No, I was never one for guts. Not likely to change, either."

"How about curiosity?"

"Curiosity's another matter. I've got some of that."

"Well, don't you think guts and curiosity are kind of similar?" said May Kasahara.

"Where there's guts there's curiosity, and where there's curiosity there's guts. No?"

"Hmm, maybe they are kind of similar," I said. "Maybe you're right. Maybe they do overlap at times."

"Times like when you sneak into somebody's backyard, say."

"Yeah, like that," I said, rolling a lemon drop on my tongue. "When you sneak into somebody's backyard, it does seem that guts and curiosity are working together. Curiosity can bring guts out of hiding at times, maybe even get them going. But curiosity usually evaporates. Guts have to go for the long haul. Curiosity's like a fun friend you can't really trust. It turns you on and then it leaves you to make it on your own-with whatever guts you can muster."

She thought this over for a time. "I guess so," she said. "I guess that's one way to look at it." She stood up and brushed off the dirt clinging to the seat of her short pants. Then she looked down at me. "Tell me, Mr. Wind-Up Bird, would you like to see the well?"

"The well?" I asked. The well?

"There's a dried-up well here. I like it. Kind of. Want to see it?"

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We cut through the yard and walked around to the side of the house. It was a round well, maybe four and a half feet in diameter. Thick planking, cut to shape and size, had been used

to cap the well, and two concrete blocks had been set on the round wooden cap to keep it in place. The well curb stood perhaps three feet high, and close by grew a single old tree, as if standing guard. It was a fruit tree, but I couldn't tell what kind.

Like most everything else connected with this house, the well looked as though it had been abandoned long before. Something about it felt as if it should be called "overwhelming numbness." Maybe when people take their eyes off them, inanimate objects become even more inanimate.

Close inspection revealed that the well was in fact far older than the objects that surrounded it. It had been made in another age, long before the house was built. Even the wooden cap was an antique. The well curb had been coated with a thick layer of concrete, almost certainly to strengthen a structure that had been built long before. The nearby tree seemed to boast of having stood there far longer than any other tree in the area.

I lowered a concrete block to the ground and removed one of the two half-moons that constituted the wooden cap. Hands on the edge of the well, I leaned over and looked down, but I could not see to the bottom. It was obviously a deep well, its lower half swallowed in darkness. I took a sniff. It had a slightly moldy smell.

"It doesn't have any water," said May Kasahara.

A well without water. A bird that can't fly. An alley with no exit. And-

May picked up a chunk of brick from the ground and threw it into the well. A moment later came a small, dry thud. Nothing more. The sound was utterly dry, desiccated, as if you could crumble it in your hands. I straightened up and looked at May Kasahara. "I wonder why it hasn't got any water. Did it dry up? Did somebody fill it in?"

She shrugged. "When people fill in a well, don't they fill it all the way to the top? There'd be no point in leaving a dry hole like this. Somebody could fall in and get hurt. Don't you think?"

"I think you're right," I said. "Something probably made the water dry up."

I suddenly recalled Mr. Honda's words from long before. "When you're supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb to the top. When you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom." So now I had a well if I needed one.

I leaned over the edge again and looked down into the darkness, anticipating nothing in particular. So, I thought, in a place like this, in the middle of the day like this, there existed a darkness as deep as this. I cleared my throat and swallowed. The sound echoed in the darkness, as if someone else had cleared his throat. My saliva still tasted like lemon drops.

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I put the cover back on the well and set the block atop it. Then I looked at my watch. Almost eleven-thirty. Time to call Kumiko during her lunch break.

"I'd better go home," I said.

May Kasahara gave a little frown. "Go right ahead, Mr. Wind-Up Bird," she said. "You fly on home."

When we crossed the yard, the stone bird was still glaring at the sky with its dry eyes. The sky itself was still filled with its unbroken covering of gray clouds, but at least the rain had stopped. May Kasahara tore off a fistful of grass and threw it toward the sky. With no wind to carry them, the blades of grass dropped to her feet.

"Think of all the hours left between now and the time the sun goes down," she said, without looking at me.

"True," I said. "Lots of hours."

On the Births of Kumiko Okada and Noboru Wataya

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Raised as an only child, I find it difficult to imagine how grown siblings must feel when they come in contact with each other in the course of leading their independent lives. In Kumiko's case, whenever the topic of Noboru Wataya came up, she would get a strange look on her face, as if she had put some odd-tasting thing in her mouth by accident, but *exactly* what that look meant I had no way of knowing. In my own feelings toward her elder brother there was not a trace of anything positive. Kumiko knew this and thought it entirely reasonable. She herself was far from fond of the man. It was hard to imagine them ever speaking to each other had the blood relationship not existed between them. But in fact, they *were* brother and sister, which made things somewhat more complicated. After I had my argument with her father and ended all contact with her family, Kumiko had virtually no occasion to see Noboru Wataya. The argument had been a violent one. I haven't had many arguments in the course of my life- I'm just not the type- but once I do get going, I go all the way. And so my break with Kumiko's father had been complete. Afterward, when I had gotten everything off my chest that I needed to get off, anger was mysteriously absent. I felt only relief. I never had to see him again: it was as if a great burden that I had been carrying for a long time had been lifted from my shoulders. None of the rage or the hatred was left. I even felt a touch of sympathy for the difficulties he had faced in his life, however stupid and repulsive the shape of that life might appear to me. I told Kumiko that I would never see her parents again but she was free to visit them without me anytime she wanted. Kumiko made no attempt to see them. "Never mind," she said. "I wasn't all that crazy about visiting them anyway."

Noboru Wataya had been living with his parents at the time, but when the argument started between his father and me, he had simply withdrawn without a word to anyone. This hadn't taken me by surprise. I was a person of no interest to him. He did his best to avoid personal contact with me unless it was absolutely necessary. And so, when I stopped seeing Kumiko's parents, there was no longer any reason for me to see Noboru Wataya. Kumiko herself had no reason to make a point of seeing him. He was busy, she was busy, and they had never been that close to begin with.

Still, Kumiko would occasionally phone him at his campus office, and he would occasionally phone her at her company office (though never at our home). She would announce these contacts to me without going into detail about the substance of their conversations. I never asked, and she never volunteered the information unless it was necessary.

I didn't care to know what Kumiko and Noboru Wataya were talking about. Which is not to say that I resented the fact that they were talking. I just didn't get it. What was there for two such different human beings to say to each other? Or was it only through the special filter of the blood relationship that this came about?

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Though brother and sister, Noboru Wataya and Kumiko were separated in age by nine years. Another factor behind the lack of any perceptible closeness between the two was Kumiko's having lived for several years with her father's family.

Kumiko and Noboru had not been the only children in the Wataya house. Between them there had been a sister, five years older than Kumiko. At the age of three, however, Kumiko had been sent from Tokyo to distant Niigata, to be raised for a time by her grandmother. Kumiko's parents later told her that this was done because she had been a sickly child and they thought she would benefit from the clean air of the countryside, but she never quite believed this. As far as she herself could remember, she had never been physically weak. She had never suffered from any major illnesses, and no one in her Niigata home seemed overly concerned about her health. "I'm sure it was just some kind of excuse," Kumiko once told me.

Her doubts had been reinforced by something she heard from a relative. Apparently, there had been a long-standing feud between Kumiko's mother and grandmother, and the decision to bring Kumiko to Niigata was the product of a truce they had concluded. By offering her up for a time, Kumiko's parents had quelled her grandmother's rage, and by having a grandchild in her possession, the grandmother had obtained concrete confirmation of her ties with her son (Kumiko's father). In other words, Kumiko had been a kind of hostage.

"Besides," Kumiko said to me, "they already had two other children. Their third one was no great loss to them. Not that they were planning to get rid of me: I think they just figured it wouldn't be too hard on such a young child to be sent away. They probably didn't give it much thought. It was just the easiest solution to the problem. Can you believe it? I don't know why, but they had absolutely no idea what something like that can do to a small child."

She was raised by her grandmother in Niigata from the age of three to six. Nor was there anything sad or twisted about the life she led in the country. Her grandmother was crazy about her, and Kumiko had more fun playing with her cousins, who were closer in age to herself, than with her own brother and sister. She was finally brought back to Tokyo the year she was to enter elementary school. Her parents had become nervous about the lengthening separation from their daughter, and they insisted on bringing her back before it was too late. In a sense, though, it was already too late. In the weeks following the decision to send her back, her grandmother became increasingly overwrought. She stopped eating and could hardly sleep. One minute she would be hugging and squeezing little Kumiko with all her might, and the next she would be slapping her arm with a ruler, hard enough to raise welts. One minute she would be saying she didn't want to let her go, that she would rather die than lose her, and the next she would tell her to go away, that she never wanted to see her again. In the foulest language imaginable, she would tell Kumiko what a terrible woman her mother was. She even tried to stab herself in the wrist with a pair of scissors. Kumiko could not understand what was happening around her. The situation was simply too much for her to comprehend.

What she did then was to shut herself off from the outer world. She closed her eyes. She closed her ears. She shut her mind down. She put an end to any form of thinking or of hoping. The next several months were a blank. She had no memory of anything that happened in that time. When she came out of it, she found herself in a new home. It was the home where she should have been all along. Her parents were there, her brother and her sister. But it was not *her home*. It was simply a *new environment*.

Kumiko became a difficult, taciturn child in these new surroundings. There was no one she could trust, no one she could depend upon unconditionally. Even in her parents' embrace, she never felt entirely at ease. She did not know their smell. It made her uneasy. She even hated it at times. In the family, it was only toward her sister that she began, with difficulty, to open up. Her parents despaired of ever breaking through to her; her brother hardly knew she existed. But her sister understood the confusion and loneliness that lay behind her stubborn moods. She stayed with Kumiko through it all, slept in the same room with her, talked with her, read to her, walked with her to school, helped her with her homework. If Kumiko spent hours huddled in the corner of her room in tears, the sister would be there, holding her. She did everything she could to find a way into Kumiko's heart. Had she not died from food poisoning the year after Kumiko returned from Niigata, the situation would have been very

different.

"If my sister had lived, things might have been better at home," Kumiko said. "She was just a little girl, a sixth grader, but she was the heart of that household. Maybe if she hadn't died, all of us would have been more normal than we are now. At least *I* wouldn't be such a hopeless case. Do you see what I mean? I felt so guilty after that. Why hadn't I died in my sister's place? I was no good for anybody. I couldn't make anybody happy. Why couldn't I have been the one? My parents and brother knew exactly how I felt, but they said nothing to comfort me. Far from it. They'd talk about my dead sister every chance they got: how pretty she was, how smart, how much everybody liked her, what a thoughtful person she was, how well she played the piano. And then they made *me* take piano lessons! *Somebody* had to use the big grand piano after she died. I didn't have the slightest interest in playing. I knew I could never play as well as she had played, and I didn't need yet another way to demonstrate how inferior I was to her as a human being. I couldn't take anyone's place, least of all hers, and I didn't want to try. But they wouldn't listen to me. They just *wouldn't listen*. So to this day, I hate the sight of a piano. I hate seeing anyone play."

I felt tremendous anger toward her family when Kumiko told me this. For what they had done to her. For what they had failed to do for her. This was before we were married. We had known each other only a little over two months. It was a quiet Sunday morning, and we were in bed. She talked for a long time about her childhood, as if unraveling a tangled thread, pausing to assess the validity of each event as she brought it forth. It was the first time she told me so much about herself. I hardly knew anything about her family or her childhood until that morning. I knew that she was quiet, that she liked to draw, that she had long, beautiful hair, that she had two moles on her right shoulder blade. And that sleeping with me was her first sexual experience.

She cried a little as she spoke. I could understand why she would need to cry. I held her and stroked her hair. "If she had lived, I'm sure you would have loved her," said Kumiko. "Everybody loved her. It was love at first sight."

"Maybe so," I said. "But you're the one I happen to be in love with. It's really very simple, you know. It's just you and me. Your sister's got nothing to do with it."

For a while, Kumiko lay there, thinking. Seven-thirty Sunday morning: a time when everything sounds soft and hollow. I listened to the pigeons shuffling across my apartment roof, to someone calling a dog in the distance. Kumiko stared at a single spot on the ceiling for the longest time.

"Tell me," she said at last, "do you like cats?"

"Crazy about 'em," I said. "Always had one when I was a kid. I played with it constantly, even slept with it."

"Lucky you. I was dying to have a cat. But they wouldn't let me. My mother hated them. Not once in my life have I managed to get something I really wanted. Not once. Can you believe it? You can't understand what it's like to live like that. When you get used to that kind of life-of never having anything you want-then you stop knowing what it is you want." I took her hand. "Maybe it's been like that for you till now. But you're not a kid anymore. You have the right to choose your own life. You can start again. If you want a cat, all you have to do is choose a life in which you can have a cat. It's simple. It's your right... right?"

Her eyes stayed locked on mine. "Mmm," she said. "Right." A few months later, Kumiko and I were talking about marriage.

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If the childhood that Kumiko spent in that house was warped and difficult, Noboru Wataya's boyhood there was strangely distorted in another sense. The parents were mad for their only son, but they didn't merely shower him with affection; they demanded certain

things of him as well. The father was convinced that the only way to live a full life in Japanese society was to earn the highest possible marks and to shove aside anyone and everyone standing in your path to the top. He believed this with absolute conviction.

It was shortly after I had married his daughter that I heard these very words from the man himself. All men are *not* created equal, he said. That was just some righteous-sounding nonsense they taught you in school. Japan might have the political structure of a democratic nation, but it was at the same time a fiercely carnivorous society of class in which the weak were devoured by the strong, and unless you became one of the elite, there was no point in living in this country. You'd just be ground to dust in the millstones. You had to fight your way up every rung of the ladder. This kind of ambition was entirely healthy. If people lost that ambition, Japan would perish. In response to my father-in-law's view, I offered no opinion. He was not looking for my opinion. He had merely been spouting his belief, a conviction that would remain unchanged for all eternity.

Kumiko's mother was the daughter of a high-ranking official. She had been raised in the finest Tokyo neighborhood, wanting for nothing, and she possessed neither the opinions nor the character to oppose her husband's opinions. As far as I could see, she had no opinion at all about anything that was not set directly in front of her (and in fact, she was extremely nearsighted). Whenever an occasion arose in which she needed an opinion on something in the wider world, she borrowed her husband's. If this had been all there was to her, she wouldn't have bothered anyone, but as is so often the case with such women, she suffered from an incurable case of pretentiousness. Lacking any internalized values of their own, such people can arrive at a standpoint only by adopting other people's standards or views. The only principle that governs their minds is the question "How do I look?" And so Mrs. Wataya became a narrow, high-strung woman whose only concerns were her husband's place in the government and her son's academic performance. Anything that failed to enter her narrow field of vision ceased to have meaning for her.

And so the parents pounded their questionable philosophy and their warped view of the world into the head of the young Noboru Wataya. They egged him on, providing him with the best tutors their money could buy. When he took top honors, they rewarded their son by buying him anything he wanted. His childhood was one of extreme material luxury, but when he entered the most sensitive and vulnerable phase of life, he had no time for girlfriends, no chance to go wild with other boys. He had to pour all his energies into maintaining his position as number one. Whether Noboru Wataya was pleased to live that way or not I do not know. Kumiko did not know. Noboru Wataya was not the sort of person to reveal his feelings: not to her, not to his parents, not to anyone. He had no choice anyway. It seems to me that certain patterns of thought are so simple and one-sided that they become irresistible. In any case, Noboru Wataya graduated from his elite private preparatory school, majored in economics at the University of Tokyo, and graduated from this top institution with top grades.

His father expected him to enter the government or a major corporation upon graduation from the university, but Noboru Wataya chose to remain in academe and become a scholar. He was no fool. He knew what he was best suited for: not the real world of group action but a world that called for the disciplined and systematic use of knowledge, that prized the individual skills of the intellect. He did two years of graduate study at Yale before returning to the graduate school at Tokyo. He followed his parents' promptings shortly thereafter and agreed to an arranged marriage, but that lasted no more than two years. After his divorce, he returned to his parents' home to live with them. By the time I first met him, Noboru Wataya was a fully developed oddity, a thoroughly disagreeable character.

About two years after I married Kumiko, Noboru Wataya published a big, thick book. It was an economics study full of technical jargon, and I couldn't understand a thing he was trying to say in it. Not one page made sense to me. I tried, but I couldn't make any headway because I found the writing indecipherable. I couldn't even tell whether this was because the

contents were so difficult or the writing itself was bad. People in the field thought it was great, though. One reviewer declared that it was “an entirely new kind of economics written from an entirely new perspective,” but that was as much as I could understand of the review itself. Soon the mass media began to introduce him as a “hero for a new age.” Whole books appeared, interpreting his book. Two expressions he had coined, “sexual economics” and “excretory economics,” became the year’s buzzwords. Newspapers and magazines carried feature sections on him as one of the intellectuals of the new age. I couldn’t believe that anyone who wrote these articles understood what Noboru Wataya was saying in his book. I had my doubts they had even opened it. But such things were of no concern to them. Noboru Wataya was young and single and smart enough to write a book that nobody could understand.

It made him famous. The magazines all came to him for critical pieces. He appeared on television to comment on political and economic questions. Soon he was a regular panel member on one of the political debate shows. Those who knew Noboru Wataya (including Kumiko and me) had never imagined him to be suited to such glamorous work. Everyone thought of him as the high-strung academic type interested in nothing but his field of specialization. Once he got a taste of the world of mass media, though, you could almost see him licking his chops. He was good. He didn’t mind having a camera pointed at him. If anything, he even seemed more relaxed in front of the cameras than in the real world. We watched his sudden transformation in amazement. The Noboru Wataya we saw on television wore expensive suits with perfectly matching ties, and eyeglass frames of fine tortoiseshell. His hair had been done in the latest style. He had obviously been worked on by a professional. I had never seen him exuding such luxury before. And even if he had been outfitted by the network, he wore the style with perfect ease, as if he had dressed that way all his life. Who was this man? I wondered, when I first saw him. Where was the real Noboru Wataya?

In front of the cameras, he played the role of Man of Few Words. When asked for an opinion, he would state it simply, clearly, and precisely. Whenever the debate heated up and everyone else was shouting, he kept his cool. When challenged, he would hold back, let his opponent have his say, and then demolish the person’s argument with a single phrase. He had mastered the art of delivering the fatal blow with a purr and a smile. On the television screen, he looked far more intelligent and reliable than the real Noboru Wataya. I’m not sure how he accomplished this. He certainly wasn’t handsome. But he was tall and slim and had an air of good breeding. In the medium of television, Noboru Wataya had found the place where he belonged. The mass media welcomed him with open arms, and he welcomed them with equal enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, I couldn’t stand the sight of him- in print or on TV. He was a man of talent and ability, to be sure. I recognized that much. He knew how to knock his opponent down quickly and effectively with the fewest possible words. He had an animal instinct for sensing the direction of the wind. But if you paid close attention to what he was saying or what he had written, you knew that his words lacked consistency. They reflected no single worldview based on profound conviction. His was a world that he had fabricated by combining several one-dimensional systems of thought. He could rearrange the combination in an instant, as needed. These were ingenious-even artistic-intellectual permutations and combinations. But to me they amounted to nothing more than a game. If there was any consistency to his opinions, it was the consistent lack of consistency, and if he had a worldview, it was a view that proclaimed his lack of a worldview. But these very absences were what constituted his intellectual assets. Consistency and an established worldview were excess baggage in the intellectual mobile warfare that flared up in the mass media’s tiny time segments, and it was his great advantage to be free of such things.

He had nothing to protect, which meant that he could concentrate all his attention on pure acts of combat. He needed only to attack, to knock his enemy down. Noboru Wataya was an

intellectual chameleon, changing his color in accordance with his opponent's, ad-libbing his logic for maximum effectiveness, mobilizing all the rhetoric at his command. I had no idea how he had acquired these techniques, but he clearly had the knack of appealing directly to the feelings of the mass audience. He knew how to use the kind of logic that moved the great majority. Nor did it even have to be logic: it had only to appear so, as long as it aroused the feelings of the masses.

Trotting out the technical jargon was another forte of his. No one knew what it meant, of course, but he was able to present it in such a way that you knew it was your fault if you didn't get it. And he was always citing statistics. They were engraved in his brain, and they carried tremendous persuasive power, but if you stopped to think about it afterward, you realized that no one had questioned his sources or their reliability.

These clever tactics of his used to drive me mad, but I was never able to explain to anyone exactly what upset me so. I was never able to construct an argument to refute him. It was like boxing with a ghost: your punches just swished through the air. There was nothing solid for them to hit. I was shocked to see even sophisticated intellectuals responding to him. It would leave me feeling strangely annoyed.

And so Noboru Wataya came to be seen as one of the most intelligent figures of the day. Nobody seemed to care about consistency anymore. All they looked for on the tube were the bouts of intellectual gladiators; the redder the blood they drew, the better. It didn't matter if the same person said one thing on Monday and the opposite on Thursday.

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I first met Noboru Wataya when Kumiko and I decided to get married. I wanted to talk to him before I saw her father. I figured that as a man closer to my own age, he might be persuaded to smooth the way for me with his father.

"I don't think you should count on his help," Kumiko said to me, with apparent difficulty. "I can't explain it, exactly, but he's just not the type."

"Well, I'll have to meet him sooner or later," I said.

"I guess," said Kumiko.

"It's worth a try," I said. "You never know."

"I guess," said Kumiko. "Maybe."

On the phone, Noboru Wataya displayed little enthusiasm for the prospect of meeting me. If I insisted, he said, he could spare me half an hour. We decided to meet at a coffeehouse near Ochanomizu Station. He was just a college instructor at the time, long before he had written his book and long before his sartorial conversion. The pockets of his sports coat bulged from having had fists thrust into them too long. His hair was at least two weeks overdue for a trim. His mustard-color polo shirt clashed with his blue and gray tweed jacket. He had the look of the typical young assistant professor for whom money was an alien object. His eyes had that sleepy expression of someone who has just slipped out of the library after a day of research in the stacks, but there was a piercing, cold gleam in them too, if you looked closely.

After introducing myself, I said that I was planning to marry Kumiko in the near future. I tried to explain things as honestly as possible. I was working in a law firm, I said, but I knew this was not the right job for me. I was still searching for myself. For such a person to risk marriage might seem to be a reckless act, but I loved his sister, I said, and I believed I could make her happy. The two of us could give each other strength and comfort.

My words appeared lost on Noboru Wataya. He sat with his arms folded, listening in silence. Even after I finished my little speech, he remained perfectly still. He seemed to be thinking about something else.

I had felt awkward in his presence from the start and assumed this was because of the

situation. Anybody would feel awkward telling a total stranger, "I want to marry your sister." But as I sat there across from him, an unpleasant feeling began to well up inside me. It was like having some kind of sour-smelling, alien gunk growing in the pit of your stomach. Not that there was anything in particular about what he said or did that rubbed me the wrong way. It was his face: the face of Noboru Wataya itself. It gave me the intuitive sense that it was covered over with a whole other layer of something. Something wrong. It was not his real face. I couldn't shake off this feeling.

I wanted to get the hell out of there. I actually considered getting up and leaving, but I had to see things through to the end. I stayed there, sipping my lukewarm coffee and waiting for him to say something.

When he spoke, it was as if he were deliberately setting the volume of his voice on low to conserve energy. "To tell you the truth," he said, "I can neither understand nor care about what you have been telling me. The things I care about are of an entirely different order, things that I suspect *you* can neither understand nor care about. To state my conclusion as concisely as possible, if you wish to marry Kumiko and she wishes to marry you, I have neither the right nor any reason to stand in your way. Therefore, I shall not stand in your way. I wouldn't even think of doing so. But don't expect anything further from me, either. And most important, don't expect me to waste any more time on this matter than I already have."

He looked at his watch and stood up. His declaration had been concise and to the point. It suffered from neither excess nor omission. I understood with perfect clarity both what he wanted to say and what he thought of me.

And so we parted that day.

After Kumiko and I were married, a number of occasions arose in which it was necessary for Noboru Wataya and me, as brothers-in-law, to exchange words- if not to engage in actual conversation. As he had suggested, there was no common ground between us, and so however much we might speak words in each other's vicinity, this could never develop into anything that could be called a conversation. It was as though we were speaking to each other in different languages. If the Dalai Lama were on his deathbed and the jazz musician Eric Dolphy were to try to explain to him the importance of choosing one's engine oil in accordance with changes in the sound of the bass clarinet, that exchange might have been a touch more worthwhile and effective than my conversations with Noboru Wataya.

I rarely suffer lengthy emotional distress from contact with other people. A person may anger or annoy me, but not for long. I can distinguish between myself and another as beings of two different realms. It's a kind of talent (by which I do not mean to boast: it's not an easy thing to do, so if you can do it, it is a kind of talent-a special power). When someone gets on my nerves, the first thing I do is transfer the object of my unpleasant feelings to another domain, one having no connection with me. Then I tell myself, Fine, I'm feeling bad, but I've put the source of these feelings into another zone, away from here, where I can examine it and deal with it later in my own good time. In other words, I put a freeze on my emotions. Later, when I thaw them out to perform the examination, I do occasionally find my emotions still in a distressed state, but that is rare. The passage of time will usually extract the venom from most things and render them harmless. Then, sooner or later, I forget about them.

In the course of my life so far, I've been able to keep my world in a relatively stable state by avoiding most useless troubles through activation of this emotional management system. That I have succeeded in maintaining such an effective system all this time is a matter of some pride to me.

When it came to Noboru Wataya, though, my system refused to function. I was unable simply to shove Noboru Wataya into a domain having no connection with me. And that fact itself annoyed the hell out of me. Kumiko's father was an arrogant, unpleasant man, to be sure, but finally he was a small-minded character who had lived by clinging to a simple set of narrow beliefs. I could forget about someone like that. But not Noboru Wataya. He knew

what kind of a man he was. And he had a pretty good idea of what made me tick as well. If he had felt like it, he could have crushed me until there was nothing left. The only reason he hadn't was that he didn't give a damn about me. I wasn't worth the time and energy it would have taken to crush me. And that's what got me about him. He was a despicable human being, an egoist with nothing inside him. But he was a far more capable individual than I was.

After that first meeting of ours, I had a bad taste in my mouth that wouldn't go away. I felt as if someone had force-fed me a clump of foul-smelling bugs. Spitting them out did no good: I could still feel them inside my mouth. Day after day, Noboru Wataya was all I could think about. I tried going to concerts and movies. I even went to a baseball game with the guys from the office. I drank, and I read the books that I had been waiting to read when I could find the time. But Noboru Wataya was always there, arms folded, looking at me with those malignant eyes of his, threatening to suck me in like a bottomless swamp. This set my nerves on edge and sent tremors through the ground on which I stood.

The next time I saw her, Kumiko asked me my impressions of her brother. I wasn't able to tell her honestly. I wanted to ask her about the mask he wore and about the twisted "something" that lay behind it. I wanted to tell her everything I had thought about this brother of hers. But I said nothing. I felt that these were things I would never be able to convey to her, that if I couldn't express myself clearly I shouldn't express myself at all—not now.

"He's ... different, that's for sure," I said. I wanted to add something to this, but I couldn't find the words. Nor did she press me for more. She simply nodded in silence.

My feelings toward Noboru Wataya never changed after that. He continued to set my nerves on edge in the same way. It was like a persistent low-grade fever. I never had a television in the house, but by some uncanny coincidence, whenever I glanced at a TV somewhere, he would be on it, making some pronouncement. If I flipped through the pages of a magazine in a doctor's waiting room, there would be a picture of Noboru Wataya, with an article he had written. I felt as if Noboru Wataya were lying in wait for me just around every corner in the known world.

OK, let's face it. I hated the guy.

7

The Happy Cleaners

*

And Kano Makes Her Entrance

I took a blouse and skirt of Kumiko's to the cleaner's by the station. Normally, I brought our laundry to the cleaner's around the corner from us, not because I preferred it but because it was closer. Kumiko sometimes used the station cleaner's in the course of her commute. She'd drop something off in the morning on her way to the office and pick it up on the way home. This place was a little more expensive, but they did a better job than the neighborhood cleaner's, according to Kumiko. And her better dresses she would always bring there. Which is why on that particular day I decided to take my bike to the station. I figured she would prefer to have her clothes done there.

I left the house carrying Kumiko's blouse and skirt and wearing a pair of thin green cotton pants, my usual tennis shoes, and the yellow Van Halen promotional T-shirt that Kumiko had received from a record company. The owner of the shop had his JVC boom box turned up loud, as he had on my last trip. This morning it was an Andy Williams tape. "Hawaiian Wedding Song" was just ending as I walked in, and "Canadian Sunset" started. Whistling happily to the tune, the owner was writing in a notebook with a ballpoint pen, his movements as energetic as before. In the pile of tapes on the shelf, I spotted such names as Sergio Mendes, Bert Kaempfert, and 101 Strings. So he was an easy-listenin' freak. It suddenly occurred to me that true believers in hard-driving jazz-Albert Ayler, Don Cherry, Cecil Taylor-could never become owners of cleaning shops in malls across from railroad stations. Or maybe they could. They just wouldn't be happy cleaners.

When I put the green floral-pattern blouse and sage-colored skirt on the counter, he spread them out for a quick inspection, then wrote on the receipt, "Blouse and Skirt." His writing was clear and carefully formed. I like cleaners who write clearly. And if they like Andy Williams, so much the better.

"Mr. Okada, right?" I said he was right. He wrote in my name, tore out the carbon copy, and gave it to me. "They'll be ready next Tuesday, so don't forget to come and get them this time. Mrs. Okada's?"

"Uh-huh."

"Very pretty," he said.

A dull layer of clouds filled the sky. The weather forecast had predicted rain. The time was after nine-thirty, but there were still plenty of men with briefcases and folded umbrellas hurrying toward the station steps. Late commuters. The morning was hot and humid, but that made no difference to these men, all of whom were properly dressed in suits and ties and black shoes. I saw lots of men my age, but not one of them wore a Van Halen T-shirt. Each wore his company's lapel pin and clutched a copy of the *Nikkei News* under his arm. The bell rang, and a number of them dashed up the stairs. I hadn't seen men like this for a long time.

Heading home on my bike, I found myself whistling "Canadian Sunset."

•

Malta Kano called at eleven o'clock. "Hello. I wonder if this might possibly be the home of Mr. Toru Okada?" she asked.

"Yes, this is Toru Okada." I knew it was Malta Kano from the first hello.

"My name is Malta Kano. You were kind enough to see me the other day. Would you happen to have any plans for this afternoon?"

None, I said. I had no more plans for the afternoon than a migrating bird has collateral assets.

"In that case, my younger sister, Kano, will come to visit you at one o'clock."

"Kano?" I asked in a flat voice.

"Yes," said Malta Kano. "I believe I showed you her photograph the other day."

"I remember her, of course. It's just that--"

"Her name is Kano. She will come to visit you as my representative. Is one o'clock a good time for you?"

"Fine," I said.

"She'll be there," said Malta Kano, and hung up.

Kano?

I vacuumed the floors and straightened the house. I tied our old newspapers in a bundle and threw them in a closet. I put scattered cassette tapes back in their cases and lined them up by the stereo. I washed the things piled in the kitchen. Then I washed myself: shower, shampoo, clean clothes. I made fresh coffee and ate lunch: ham sandwich and hard-boiled

egg. I sat on the sofa, reading the *Home Journal* and wondering what to make for dinner. I marked the recipe for Seaweed and Tofu Salad and wrote the ingredients on a shopping list. I turned on the FM radio. Michael Jackson was singing “Billy Jean.” I thought about the sisters Malta Kano and Kano. What names for a couple of sisters! They sounded like a comedy team. Malta Kano. Kano.

My life was heading in new directions, that was certain. The cat had run away. Strange calls had come from a strange woman. I had met an odd girl and started visiting a vacant house. Noboru Wataya had raped Kano. Malta Kano had predicted I’d find my necktie. Kumiko had told me I didn’t have to work.

I turned off the radio, returned the *Home Journal* to the bookshelf, and drank another cup of coffee.

•

Kano rang the doorbell at one o’clock on the dot. She looked exactly like her picture: a small woman in her early to mid-twenties, the quiet type. She did a remarkable job of preserving the look of the early sixties. She wore her hair in the bouffant style I had seen in the photograph, the ends curled upward. The hair at the forehead was pulled straight back and held in place by a large, glittering barrette. Her eyebrows were sharply outlined in pencil, mascara added mysterious shadows to her eyes, and her lipstick was a perfect re-creation of the kind of color popular back then. She looked ready to belt out “Johnny Angel” if you put a mike in her hand.

She dressed far more simply than she made herself up. Practical and businesslike, her outfit had nothing idiosyncratic about it: a white blouse, a green tight skirt, and no accessories to speak of. She had a white patent-leather bag tucked under her arm and wore sharp-pointed white pumps. The shoes were tiny. Their heels thin and sharp as a pencil lead, they looked like a doll’s shoes. I almost wanted to congratulate her on having made it this far on them.

So this was Kano. I showed her in, had her sit on the sofa, warmed the coffee, and served her a cup. Had she eaten lunch yet? I asked. She looked hungry to me. No, she said, she had not eaten.

“But don’t bother about me,” she hastened to add, “I don’t eat much of anything for lunch.”

“Are you sure?” I asked. “It’s nothing for me to fix a sandwich. Don’t stand on ceremony. I make snacks and things all the time. It’s no trouble at all.”

She responded with little shakes of the head. “It’s very kind of you to offer, but I’m fine, really. Don’t bother. A cup of coffee is more than enough.”

Still, I brought out a plate of cookies just in case. Kano ate four of them with obvious pleasure. I ate two and drank my coffee.

She seemed somewhat more relaxed after the cookies and coffee. “I am here today as the representative of my elder sister, Malta Kano,” she said. “ is not my real name, of course. My real name is Setsuko. I took the name when I began working as my sister’s assistant. For professional purposes. is the ancient name for the island of Crete, but I have no connection with Crete. I have never been there. My sister Malta chose the name to go with her own. Have you been to the island of Crete, by any chance, Mr. Okada?”

Unfortunately not, I said. I had never been to Crete and had no plans to visit it in the near future.

“I would like to go there sometime,” said Kano, nodding, with a deadly serious look on her face. “Crete is the Greek island closest to Africa. It’s a large island, and a great civilization flourished there long ago. My sister Malta has been to Crete as well. She says it’s a wonderful place. The wind is strong, and the honey is delicious. I love honey.” I nodded. I’m not that crazy about honey.

"I came today to ask you a favor," said Kano. "I'd like to take a sample of the water in your house."

"The water?" I asked. "You mean the water from the faucet?"

"That would be fine," she said. "And if there happens to be a well nearby, I would like a sample of that water also."

"I don't think so. I mean, there is a well in the neighborhood, but it's on somebody else's property, and it's dry. It doesn't produce water anymore."

Kano gave me a complicated look. "Are you sure?" she asked. "Are you sure it doesn't have any water?"

I recalled the dry thud that the chunk of brick had made when the girl threw it down the well at the vacant house. "Yes, it's dry, all right. I'm very sure."

"I see," said Kano. "That's fine. I'll just take a sample of the water from the faucet, then, if you don't mind."

I showed her to the kitchen. From her white patent-leather bag she removed two small bottles of the type that might be used for medicine. She filled one with water and tightened the cap with great care. Then she said she wanted to take a sample from the line supplying the bathtub. I showed her to the bathroom. Undistracted by all the underwear and stockings that Kumiko had left drying in there, Kano turned on the faucet and filled the other bottle. After capping it, she turned it upside down to make certain it didn't leak. The bottle caps were color coded: blue for the bath water, and green for the kitchen water.

Back on the living room sofa, she put the two vials into a small plastic freezer bag and sealed the zip lock. She placed the bag carefully in her white patent-leather bag, the metal clasp of which closed with a dry click. Her hands moved with practiced efficiency. She had obviously done this many times before.

"Thank you very much," said Kano.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes, for today," she said. She smoothed her skirt, slipped her bag under her arm, and made as if to stand up.

"Wait a minute," I said, with some confusion. I hadn't been expecting her to leave so suddenly. "Wait just a minute, will you, please? My wife wants to know what's happened with the cat. It's been gone for almost two weeks now. If you know anything at all, I'd like you to share it with me."

Still clutching the white bag under her arm, Kano looked at me for a moment, then she gave a few quick nods. When she moved her head, the curled-up ends of her hair bobbed with an early-sixties lightness. Whenever she blinked, her long fake eyelashes moved slowly up and down, like the long-handled fans operated by slaves in movies set in ancient Egypt.

"To tell you the truth, my sister says that this will be a longer story than it seemed at first."

"A longer story than it seemed?"

The phrase "a longer story" brought to mind a tall stake set in the desert, where nothing else stood as far as the eye could see. As the sun began to sink, the shadow of the stake grew longer and longer, until its tip was too far away to be seen by the naked eye.

"That's what she says," Kano continued. "This story will be about more than the disappearance of a cat."

"I'm confused," I said. "All we're asking you to do is help us find the cat. Nothing more. If the cat's dead, we want to know that for sure. Why does it have to be 'a longer story'? I don't understand."

"Neither do I," she said. She brought her hand up to the shiny barrette on her head and pushed it back a little. "But please put your faith in my sister. I'm not saying that she knows everything. But if she says there will be a longer story, you can be sure there will be a longer story."

I nodded without saying anything. There was nothing more I could say.

Looking directly into my eyes and speaking with a new formality, Creta Kano asked, “Are you busy, Mr. Okada? Do you have any plans for the rest of the afternoon?” No, I said, I had no plans.

“Would you mind, then, if I told you a few things about myself?” Creta Kano asked. She put the white patent-leather bag she was holding down on the sofa and rested her hands, one atop the other, on her tight green skirt, at the knees. Her nails had been done in a lovely pink color. She wore no rings.

“Please,” I said. “Tell me anything you’d like.” And so the flow of my life-as had been foretold from the moment Creta Kano rang my doorbell-was being led in ever stranger directions.

8

Kano’s Long Story

*

An Inquiry into the Nature of Pain

“I was born on May twenty-ninth,” Kano began her story, “and the night of my twentieth birthday, I resolved to take my own life.”

I put a fresh cup of coffee in front of her. She added cream and gave it a languid stir. No sugar. I drank my coffee black, as always. The clock on the shelf continued its dry rapping on the walls of time.

Kano looked hard at me and said, “I wonder if I should begin at the beginning-where I was born, family life, that kind of thing.”

“Whatever you like. It’s up to you. Whatever you find most comfortable,” I said.

“I was the third of three children,” she said. “Malta and I have an older brother. My father ran his own clinic in Kanagawa Prefecture. The family had nothing you could call domestic problems. I grew up in an ordinary home, the kind you can find anywhere. My parents were very serious people who believed strongly in the value of hard work. They were rather strict with us, but it seems to me they also gave us a fair amount of autonomy where little things were concerned. We were well off, but my parents did not believe in giving their children extra money for frills. I suppose I had a rather frugal upbringing.

“Malta was five years older than I. There had been something different about her from the beginning. She was able to guess things. She’d know that the patient in room so-and-so had just died, or exactly where they could find a lost wallet, or whatever. Everybody enjoyed this, at first, and often found it useful, but soon it began to bother my parents. They ordered her never to talk about ‘things that did not have a clear basis in fact’ in the presence of other people. My father had his position as head of the hospital to think about. He didn’t want people hearing that his daughter had supernatural powers. Malta put a lock on her mouth after that. Not only did she stop talking about ‘things that did not have a clear basis in fact,’ but she rarely joined in even the most ordinary conversations.

“To me, though, she opened her heart. We grew up very close. She would say, ‘Don’t ever

tell anybody I told you this,’ and then she’d say something like, ‘There’s going to be a fire down the street’ or ‘Auntie So-and-so in Setagaya is going to get worse.’ And she was always right. I was still just a little girl, so I thought it was great fun. It never occurred to me to be frightened or to find it eerie. Ever since I can remember, I would always follow my big sister around and expect to hear her ‘messages.’

“These special powers of hers grew stronger as she grew older, but she did not know how to use or nurture them, and this caused her a great deal of anguish. There was no one she could go to for advice, no one she could look up to for guidance. This made her a very lonely teenager. She had to solve everything by herself. She had to find all the answers herself. In our home, she was unhappy. There was never a time when she could find peace in her heart. She had to suppress her own powers and keep them hidden. It was like growing a large, powerful plant in a little pot. It was unnatural. It was wrong. All she knew was that she had to get out of there as soon as possible. She believed that somewhere there was a world that was right for her, a way of life that was right for her. Until she graduated from high school, though, she had to keep herself in check.

“She was determined not to go to college, but rather to go abroad after graduating from high school. My parents had lived a very ordinary life, of course, and they were not prepared to let her do this. So my sister worked hard to raise the money she would need, and then she ran away. The first place she went to was Hawaii. She lived on Kauai for two years. She had read somewhere that Kauai’s north shore had an area with springs that produced marvelous water. Already, back then, my sister had a profound interest in water. She believed that human existence was largely controlled by the elements of water. Which is why she went to live on Kauai. At the time, there was still a hippie commune in the interior of the island.

She lived as a member of the commune. The water there had a great influence on her spiritual powers. By taking that water into her body, she was able to attain a ‘greater harmony’ between her powers and her physical being. She wrote to me, telling me how wonderful this was, and her letters made me very happy. But soon the area could no longer satisfy her. True, it was a beautiful, peaceful land, and the people there sought only spiritual peace, free of material desires, but they were too dependent on sex and drugs. My sister did not need these things. After two years on Kauai, she left.

“From there she went to Canada, and after traveling around the northern United States, she continued on to Europe. She sampled the water everywhere she went and succeeded in finding marvelous water in several places, but none of it was the perfect water. So she kept traveling. Whenever she ran out of money, she would do something like fortune-telling. People would reward her for helping them find lost things or missing persons. She would have preferred not to take the money. Powers bestowed by heaven should not be exchanged for worldly goods. At the time, though, it was the only way she could keep herself alive. People heard about her divination everywhere she went. It was easy for her to make money. She even helped the police with an investigation in England. A little girl was missing, and she found where the body had been hidden. She also found the murderer’s glove nearby. The man was arrested and confessed. It was in all the papers. I’ll show you the clippings sometime. Anyhow, she went on wandering through Europe like this until she ended up in Malta. Close to five years had gone by since her departure from Japan, and this place turned out to be her destination in her search for water. I suppose she must have told you about this herself?”

I nodded.

“All the time she was wandering through the world, Malta would send me letters. Of course, there were times when she couldn’t manage to write, but almost every week I would receive a long letter from her about where she was and what she was doing. We were still very close. Even over long distances, we were able to share our feelings with each other through her letters. And what wonderful letters they were! If you could read them, you’d see what a wonderful person she is. Through her letters, I was able to encounter so many different

worlds, so many interesting people! Her letters gave me such encouragement! They helped me grow. For that, I will always be deeply grateful to my sister. I don't negate what she did for me in any way. But finally, letters are just letters. When I was in my most difficult teenage years, when I needed my sister more than ever, she was always somewhere far away. I could not stretch out my hand and find her there next to me. In our family, I was all alone. Isolated. My teen years were filled with pain- and later I will tell you more about that pain. There was no one I could go to for advice. In that sense, I was just as lonely as Malta had been. If she had been near me then, my life would have been different from what it is today. She would have given me words of advice and encouragement and salvation. But what's the point of bringing such things up now? Just as Malta had to find her own way by herself, I had to find my own way by myself. And when I turned twenty, I decided to kill myself."

Creta Kano took her cup and drank her remaining coffee. "What delicious coffee!" she said.

"Thanks," I said, as casually as possible. "Can I offer you something to eat? I boiled some eggs a little while ago."

After some hesitation, she said she would have one. I brought eggs and salt from the kitchen and poured her more coffee. With no sense of urgency, Kano and I set about peeling and eating our eggs and drinking coffee. While we were doing this, the phone rang, but I didn't answer it. After fifteen or sixteen rings, it stopped. All that time, Kano seemed unaware of the ringing.

When she finished her egg, Kano took a small handkerchief from her white patent-leather bag and wiped her mouth. Then she tugged at the hem of her skirt.

"Once I had decided to kill myself, I wanted to leave a note behind. I sat at my desk for an hour, trying to write down my reasons for dying. I wanted to make it clear that no one else was to blame, that the reasons were all inside me. I didn't want my family feeling responsible for something that was not their fault.

"But I could not finish the note. I tried over and over, but each new version seemed worse than the last. When I read what I had written, it sounded foolish, even comical. The more serious I tried to make it, the more ridiculous it came out. In the end, I decided not to write anything at all.

"It was a very simple matter, I felt. I was disappointed with my life. I could no longer endure the many kinds of pain that my life continued to cause me. I had endured the pain for twenty years. My life had been nothing but an unrelenting source of pain. But I had tried to bear it as best I could. I have absolute confidence in the validity of my efforts to bear the pain. I can declare here with genuine pride that my efforts were second to none. I was not giving up without a fight. But the day I turned twenty, I reached a simple conclusion: life was not worth it. Life was not worth continuing such a struggle."

She stopped speaking and spent some time aligning the corners of the white handkerchief on her lap. When she looked down, her long false eyelashes cast gentle shadows on her face.

I cleared my throat, I felt I ought to say something, but I didn't know what to say, and so I kept silent. In the distance, I heard the wind-up bird cry.

"The pain was what caused me to decide to die," said Kano. "And when I say 'pain,' that is exactly what I mean. Nothing mental or metaphorical, but physical pain, pure and simple. Plain, ordinary, direct, physical-and, for that reason, all the more intense-pain: headache, toothache, menstrual cramps, lower back pain, stiff shoulders, fever, muscle ache, burns, frostbite, sprains, fractures, blows to the body. All my life I have experienced physical pain with far greater frequency and intensity than others. Take my teeth, for example. They seemed to have some inborn defect. They would give me pain from one end of the year to the other. No matter how carefully I brushed, or how many times a day, or how strictly I avoided sweets, it did no good. All my efforts ended in cavities. To make matters worse, anesthetics seemed to have no effect on me. Going to the dentist was always a nightmare. The pain was

beyond describing. It scared me to death. And then my terrible periods began. They were incredibly heavy. For a week at a time, I would be in such pain, it was as if someone were twisting a drill inside me. My head would throb. You probably can't imagine what it was like, Mr. Okada, but the pain would bring tears to my eyes. For a week out of every month, I would be tortured by this unbearable pain.

"If I boarded a plane, my head would feel as if it were splitting open from the changes in air pressure. The doctor said it had something to do with the structure of my ears, that this sort of thing happens if the inner ear has a shape that is sensitive to pressure changes. The same thing often happened to me on elevators. I can't take elevators in tall buildings. The pain is so intense, it feels as if my head is going to split open in several places and the blood gush out. And then there was my stomach. At least once a week it would give me such sharp, piercing pain that I couldn't get up in the morning. The doctors could never find a cause. Some suggested it was mental. But even if it was, the pain still hurt. As much as I was suffering, though, I could not stay home from school. If I had skipped school every time something hurt me, I would never have gone at all.

"Whenever I bumped into something, it would leave a bruise on my body. Looking at myself in the bathroom mirror always made me want to cry. My body was covered with so many dark bruises I looked like a rotten apple. I hated to let anyone see me in a bathing suit. Ever since I can remember, I've hardly ever gone swimming for that reason. Another problem I had was the difference in the size of my feet. Whenever I bought new shoes, the larger foot would be in terrible pain until the shoe was broken in.

"Because of all these problems, I almost never did sports. In junior high school, my friends once dragged me to an ice-skating rink. I fell and hurt my hip so badly that afterward I would get a terrible ache there every winter. It felt as if I had been jabbed with a big, thick needle. Any number of times, I fell over trying to get up from a chair.

"I suffered from constipation as well. A bowel movement every few days would be nothing but pain for me. And my shoulders would stiffen up terribly. The muscles would tighten until they were literally as hard as a rock. It was so painful, I couldn't stand up, but lying down was no help, either. I imagined that my suffering must be much like that of a Chinese punishment I had read about. They would stuff the person in a box for several years. When my shoulders were at their worst, I could hardly breathe.

"I could go on and on listing all the various pains I have suffered in my life, but it would only bore you, Mr. Okada, so I will just leave it at this. What I want to convey to you is the fact that my body was a virtual sample book of pain. I experienced every pain imaginable. I began to think I had been cursed, that life was so unfair. I might have been able to go on bearing the pain if the other people in the world had had to live the way I did, but they didn't, and I couldn't. Pain was not something that was dealt out fairly. I tried asking people about pain, but nobody knew what real pain was. The majority of people in the world live without feeling much pain—at least on a daily basis. When this finally hit me (I had just entered junior high school at the time), it made me so sad I couldn't stop crying. Why me? Why did I have to be the one to bear such a terrible burden? I wanted to die right then and there.

"But at the same time, another thought came to me. This could not go on forever. One morning I would wake up and the pain would have disappeared—suddenly, with no explanation—and a whole new and peaceful life without pain would open up for me. It was not a thought in which I could place a great deal of faith, however.

"And so I revealed these thoughts of mine to my sister. I told her that I didn't want to go on living in such pain: what was I to do? After she thought about it for a while, she said this: There is definitely something wrong with you, I'm sure. But I don't know what it is. And I don't know what you should do about it. I don't have the power yet to make such judgments. All I know is that you should at least wait until you're twenty. Bear it until you turn twenty, and then make your decision. That would be the best thing.'

“This was how I decided to go on living until I was twenty. But no matter how much time went by, the situation did not improve. Far from it. The pain became even more intense. This taught me only one thing: As the body develops, the volume of pain increases proportionately.’ I endured the pain, however, for eight years. I went on living all that time, trying to see only the good side of life. I didn’t complain to anyone. I strove to keep on smiling, even when the pain was at its worst. I disciplined myself always to present an exterior of calm when the pain was so intense that I could hardly go on standing. Crying and complaining could not reduce the pain; it could only make me more miserable than ever. As a result of my efforts, people loved me. They saw me as a quiet, good-natured girl. I had the confidence of grown-ups and the friendship of people my own age. I might have had a perfect life, a perfect adolescence, if it hadn’t been for the pain. But it was always there. It was like my shadow. If I forgot about it for an instant, the pain would attack yet another part of my body.

“In college, I found a boyfriend, and in the summer of my freshman year I lost my virginity. Even this—as I could have predicted—gave me only pain. An experienced girlfriend of mine assured me that it would stop hurting when I got used to it, but it never did. Whenever I slept with him, the pain would bring tears to my eyes. One day I told my boyfriend that I didn’t want to have sex anymore. I told him, ‘I love you, but I never want to experience this pain again.’ He said he had never heard anything so ridiculous. ‘You’ve got an emotional problem,’ he said. ‘Just relax and it’ll stop hurting. It’ll even feel *good*. Everybody else does it, so you can too. You’re just not trying hard enough. You’re babying yourself. You’re using this “pain” thing to cover up your problems. Stop complaining; it won’t do you any good.’

“When I heard this, after all I had endured over the years, I exploded. ‘What do *you* know about pain?’ I shouted at him. The pain I feel is no ordinary pain. I know what pain is like. I’ve had them all. When *I* say something hurts, it *really hurts!*’ I tried to explain by listing every single pain I had ever experienced, but he didn’t understand a thing. It’s impossible to understand real pain unless you’ve experienced it yourself. So that was the end of our relationship.

“My twentieth birthday came soon after that. For twenty long years I had endured the pain, hoping there would be some bright turning point, but it had never happened. I felt utterly defeated. I wished I had died sooner. My long detour had only stretched out the pain.”

At this point, Creta Kano took a single deep breath. On the table in front of her sat the dish with eggshells and her empty coffee cup. On her lap lay the handkerchief that she had folded with such care. As if recalling the time, she glanced at the clock on the shelf. “I’m very sorry,” she said in a dry little voice. “I hadn’t intended to talk so long. I’ve taken far too much of your time as it is. I won’t impose on you any longer. I don’t know how to apologize for having bored you at such length.”

She grasped the strap of her white patent-leather bag and stood up from the sofa.

This took me off guard. “Just a minute, please,” I said, flustered. I didn’t want her to end her story in the middle. “If you’re worried about taking my time, then don’t worry. I’m free all afternoon. As long as you’ve told me this much, why not go to the end? There’s more to your story, I’m sure.”

“Of course there is,” she said, looking down at me, both hands in a tight grip on the strap of her bag. “What I’ve told you so far is more like an introduction.”

I asked her to wait a moment and went to the kitchen. Standing in front of the sink, I gave myself time for two deep breaths. Then I took two glasses from the cabinet, put ice in them, and filled them with orange juice from the refrigerator. Placing the glasses on a small tray, I brought them into the living room. I had gone through these motions with deliberate slowness, but I found her standing as I had left her. When I set the glasses of juice on the table, though, she seemed to have second thoughts. She settled onto the sofa again and placed her bag at her side.

“You want me to tell my story to the very end?” she asked. “Are you sure?”

“Quite sure,” I said.

She drank half her orange juice and went on with her story.

“I failed to kill myself, of course. If I had succeeded, I wouldn’t be here now, drinking orange juice with you, Mr. Okada.” She looked into my eyes, and I gave her a little smile of agreement. “If I had died according to plan, it would have been the final solution for me. Dying would have meant the end of consciousness, and I would never have had to feel pain again. Which is exactly what I wanted. Unfortunately, however, I chose the wrong method to die.

“At nine o’clock on the night of May twenty-ninth, I went to my brother’s room and asked to borrow his car. It was a shiny new Toyota MR2, and the thought of letting me take it made him look very unhappy. But I didn’t care. He couldn’t refuse, because I had lent him money to help him buy it. I took the key and drove it for half an hour. The car still had barely a thousand miles on it. A touch of the gas pedal could make it fly. It was the perfect car for my purposes. I drove as far as the Tama River on the outskirts of the city, and there I found a massive stone wall of the kind I had in mind. It was the outer wall of a big condominium building, and it stood at the far end of a dead-end street. I gave myself plenty of room to accelerate, and then I pressed the accelerator to the floor. I must have been doing close to a hundred miles an hour when I slammed into the wall and lost consciousness.

“Unfortunately for me, however, the wall turned out to be far less solid than it had appeared. To save money, they had not anchored it properly. The wall simply crumbled, and the front end of the car was crushed flat. That’s all that happened. Because it was so soft, the wall absorbed the impact. As if that weren’t bad enough, in my confusion I had forgotten to undo my seat belt.

“And so I escaped death. I was hardly even injured. And strangest of all, I felt almost no pain. It was the weirdest thing. They took me to the hospital and patched up my one broken rib. The police came to investigate, but I told them I didn’t remember a thing. I said I had probably mixed up the gas and the brake. And they believed me. I had just turned twenty, and it had been only six months since I got my license. Besides, I just didn’t look like the suicidal type. Who would try to kill herself with her seat belt fastened?

“Once I was out of the hospital, I had several difficult problems to face. First I had to pay off the outstanding loan on the MR2 that I had turned into scrap metal. Through some error with the insurance company, the car had not been covered.

“Now that it was too late, I realized that to do myself in, I should have rented a car with the proper insurance. At the time, of course, insurance was the last thing on my mind. It never occurred to me that my brother’s car wouldn’t have enough insurance on it or that I would fail to kill myself. I ran into a stone wall at a hundred miles an hour: it was amazing that I survived.

“A short time later, I received a bill from the condominium association for repair of the wall. They were demanding 1,364,294 yen from me. Immediately. In cash. All I could do was borrow it from my father. He was willing to give it to me in the form of a loan, but he insisted that I pay him back. My father was very proper when it came to matters of money. He said it was my responsibility for having caused the accident, and he expected me to pay him back in full and on schedule. In fact, at the time, he had very little money to spare. He was in the process of expanding his clinic and was having trouble raising the money for the project.

“I thought again about killing myself. This time I would do a proper job. I would jump from the fifteenth floor of the university administration building. There would be no slip-ups that way. I would die for sure. I made several trial runs. I picked the best window for the job. I was on the verge of jumping.

“But something held me back. There was something wrong, something nagging at me. At the last second, that ‘something’ almost literally pulled me back from the edge. A good deal

of time went by, though, before I realized what that ‘something’ was.

“I didn’t have any pain.

“I had felt hardly any pain since the accident. What with one thing coming up after another, I hadn’t had a moment to notice, but pain had disappeared from my body. My bowel movements were normal. My menstrual cramps were gone. No more headaches or stomachaches. Even my broken rib caused me hardly any pain. I had no idea why such a thing had happened. But suddenly I was free of pain.

“I decided to go on living for the time being. If only for a little while, I wanted to find out what it meant to live life without pain. I could die whenever I wanted to.

“But to go on living meant for me to pay back my debt. Altogether, I owed more than three million yen. In order to pay it back, I became a prostitute.”

“A prostitute?!”

“That’s right,” said Kano, as if it were nothing at all. “I needed money over the short term. I wanted to pay off my debts as quickly as possible, and that was the only way I knew of to raise the money. I didn’t have the slightest hesitation. I had seriously intended to die. And I still intended to die, sooner or later. The curiosity I felt about a life without pain was keeping me alive, but strictly on a temporary basis. And compared with death, it would be nothing at all for me to sell my body.”

“I see what you mean,” I said.

The ice in her orange juice had melted, and Kano stirred it with her straw before taking a sip.

“Do you mind if I ask you a question?” I asked.

“No, not at all. Please.”

“Didn’t you consult with your sister about this?”

“She was practicing her austerities on Malta at the time. As long as that went on, she refused to send me her address. She didn’t want me to disrupt her concentration. It was virtually impossible for me to write to her during the entire three years she lived on Malta.”

“I see,” I said. “Would you like some more coffee?”

“Yes, please,” said Kano.

I went to the kitchen and warmed the coffee. While I waited, I stared at the exhaust fan and took several deep breaths. When it was ready, I poured the coffee into fresh cups and brought it to the living room on a tray, together with a plate of chocolate cookies. We ate and drank for a while.

“How long ago did you try to kill yourself?” I asked.

“I was twenty at the time. That was six years ago, in May of 1978.”

May of 1978 was the month that Kumiko and I had married. So, then, the very month we were married, Kano had tried to kill herself and Malta Kano was practicing her austerities in Malta.

“I went to a neighborhood that had lots of bars, approached the first likely-looking man I saw, negotiated a price, went to a hotel, and slept with him,” said Kano. “Sex no longer gave me any physical pain at all. Nor any pleasure, either. It was just a physical movement. Neither did I feel guilt at doing sex for money. I was enveloped in numbness, an absence of feeling so deep the bottom was lost from view.

“I made very good money this way—close to a million yen in the first month alone. At that rate, I could easily repay what I owed in three or four months. I would come home from campus, go out in the evening, and get home from work by ten at the latest. I told my parents I was waiting on tables, and no one suspected the truth. Of course, they would have thought it strange if I returned so much money all at once, so I decided to give my father 100,000 yen a month and save the rest.

“But then one night, when I was propositioning men by the station, two men grabbed me from behind. At first I thought it was the police, but then I realized that they were gangsters.

They dragged me into a back street, showed me some kind of knife, and took me to their local headquarters. They shoved me into a back room, stripped my clothes off, strung me up by the wrists, and proceeded to rape me over and over in front of a video camera. I kept my eyes closed the entire time and tried not to think. Which was not difficult for me, because I felt neither pain nor pleasure.

“Afterward, they showed me the video and told me that if I didn’t want anyone to see it, I should join their organization and work for them. They took my student ID from my purse. If I refused to do what they wanted, they said, they would send a copy of the tape to my parents and blackmail them for all the money they were worth. I had no choice. I told them I would do as they said, that it didn’t matter to me. And it really didn’t matter. Nothing mattered to me then. They pointed out that my income would go down if I joined their organization, because they would take seventy percent, but that I would no longer have to go to the trouble of finding customers by myself or worry about the police. They would send me high-quality customers. If I went on propositioning men indiscriminately, I would end up strangled to death in some hotel room.

“After that, I didn’t have to stand on street corners anymore. All I had to do was show up at their office in the evening, and they would tell me which hotel to go to. They sent me good customers, as they had promised. I’m not sure why, but I received special treatment. Maybe it was because I looked so innocent. I had an air of breeding about me that the other girls lacked. There were probably a lot of customers who wanted this not-so-professional type. The other girls had three or more customers a day, but I could get away with seeing only one or, at most, two. The other girls carried beepers with them and had to hurry to some run-down hotel when the office called them to sleep with men of uncertain background. In my case, though, I always had a proper appointment in a proper first-class hotel-or sometimes even a condo. My customers were usually older men, rarely young ones.

“The office paid me once a week-not as much as I used to make on my own, but not a bad amount including individual tips from customers. Some customers wanted me to do some pretty weird things for them, of course, but I didn’t mind. The weirder the request, the bigger the tip. A few of the men started asking for me on a regular basis. These tended to be good tippers. I saved my money in several different accounts. But actually, by then, the money didn’t matter to me. It was just rows of figures, I was living for one thing only, and that was to confirm my own lack of feeling.

“I would wake up in the morning and lie there, checking to see that my body was not sensing anything that could be called pain. I would open my eyes, slowly collect my thoughts, and then, one part at a time, check the feeling I had in my body from head to foot. I had no pain at all. Did this mean that there was nothing hurting me or that, even though there was pain, I was not feeling it? I couldn’t tell the difference. Either way, it didn’t hurt. In fact, I had no sensations at all. After this procedure, I would get out of bed, go to the bathroom, and brush my teeth. Then I would strip off my pajamas and take a hot shower. There was a terrible lightness to my body. It was so light and airy, it didn’t feel like my body. I felt as if my spirit had taken up residence inside a body that was not my own. I looked at it in the mirror, but between myself and the body I saw there, I felt a long, terrible distance.

“A life without pain: it was the very thing I had dreamed of for years, but now that I had it, I couldn’t find a place for myself within it. A clear gap separated me from it, and this caused me great confusion. I felt as if I were not anchored to the world-this world that I had hated so passionately until then; this world that I had continued to revile for its unfairness and injustice; this world where at least I knew who I was. Now the world had ceased to be the world, and I had ceased to be me.

“I began to cry a lot. In the afternoons I would go to a park-the Shin-juku Imperial Gardens or Yoyogi Park-to sit on the grass and cry. Sometimes I would cry for an hour or two at a time, sobbing out loud. Passersby would stare at me, but I didn’t care. I wished that I had

died that time, that I had ended my life on the night of May twenty-ninth. How much better off I would be! But now I could not even die. In my numbness, I lacked the strength to kill myself. I felt nothing: no pain, no joy. All feeling was gone. And I was not even me.”

Creta Kano took a deep breath and held it. Then she picked up her coffee cup, stared into it for a while, gave her head a little shake, and put the cup back on the saucer.

“It was around that time that I met Noboru Wataya.”

“Noboru Wataya?! As a customer?!”

Creta Kano nodded in silence.

“But-” I began, then stopped to consider my words for a time. “I’m having a little trouble with this. Your sister told me the other day that Noboru Wataya raped you. Was that something separate from what you’re telling me now?”

Creta Kano took the handkerchief from her lap and dabbed at her mouth again. Then she looked directly at me. Something about her eyes stirred my heart in a way I found unsettling.

“I’m sorry to bother you,” she said, “but I wonder if I might have another cup of coffee.”

“Of course,” I said. I transferred her cup from the table to the tray and carried it into the kitchen. Waiting for the coffee to boil, I leaned against the drainboard, with my hands thrust in my pockets. When I carried the coffee back into the living room, Creta Kano had vanished from the sofa. Her bag, her handkerchief, every visible sign of her, was gone. I went to the front entrance, from which her shoes were gone as well.

Terrific.

9

Culverts and an Absolute Insufficiency of Electricity

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May Kasahara’s Inquiry into the Nature of Hairpieces

After seeing Kumiko off the next morning, I went to the ward pool for a swim. Mornings were best, to avoid the crowds. Back home again, I brewed myself some coffee and sat drinking it in the kitchen, going over Creta Kano’s weird, unfinished story, trying to recall each event of her life in chronological order. The more I recalled, the weirder the story seemed, but soon the revolutions of my brain slowed down and I began to drift into sleep. I went to the living room, lay down on the sofa, and closed my eyes. In a moment, I was asleep and dreaming.

I dreamed about Creta Kano. Before she appeared, though, I dreamed about Malta Kano. She was wearing a Tyrolean hat with a big, brightly colored feather. The place was crowded (it was some kind of large hall), but Malta Kano’s hat caught my attention immediately. She was sitting alone at the bar. She had a big tropical drink kind of thing in front of her, but I couldn’t tell whether she was actually drinking it.

I wore my suit and the polka-dot tie. As soon as I spotted Malta Kano, I tried to walk in

her direction, but the crowd kept getting in my way. By the time I reached the bar, she was gone. The tropical drink stood there on the bar, in front of her now empty stool. I took the next seat at the bar and ordered a scotch on the rocks. The bartender asked me what kind of scotch I'd like, and I answered Cutty Sark. I really didn't care which brand of scotch he served me, but Cutty Sark was the first thing that came to mind.

Before he could give me my drink, I felt a hand take my arm from behind, the touch as soft as if the person were grasping something that might fall apart at any moment. I turned. There stood a man without a face. Whether or not he actually had no face, I could not tell, but the place where his face was supposed to be was wrapped in a dark shadow, and I could not see what lay beyond it. "This way, Mr. Okada," he said. I tried to speak, but before I could open my mouth, he said to me, "Please, come with me. We have so little time. Hurry." Hand still on my arm, he guided me with rapid steps through the crowd and out into a corridor. I followed him down the corridor, unresisting. He did know my name, after all. It wasn't as if I were letting a total stranger take me anywhere he liked. There was some kind of reason and purpose to all this.

After continuing down the corridor for some time, the faceless man came to a stop in front of a door. The number on the doorplate was 208. "It isn't locked. You should be the one to open it." I did as I was told and opened the door. Beyond it lay a large room. It seemed to be part of a suite of rooms in an old-fashioned hotel. The ceiling was high, and from it hung an old-fashioned chandelier. The chandelier was not lit. A small wall lamp gave off a gloomy light, the only source of illumination in the room. The curtains were closed tight.

"If it's whiskey you want, Mr. Okada," said the faceless man, "we have plenty. Cutty Sark, wasn't it? Drink as much as you'd like." He pointed to a cabinet beside the door, then closed the door silently, leaving me alone. I stood in the middle of the room for a long time, wondering what to do.

A large oil painting hung on the wall. It was a picture of a river. I looked at it for a while, hoping to calm myself down. The moon was up over the river. Its light fell faintly on the opposite shore, but so very faintly that I could not make out the scenery there. It was all vague outlines, running together.

Soon I felt a strong craving for whiskey. I thought I would open the cabinet and take a drink, as suggested by the faceless man, but the cabinet would not open. What looked like doors were actually well-made imitations of doors. I tried pushing and pulling on the various protruding parts, but the cabinet remained firmly shut.

"It's not easy to open, Mr. Okada," said Kano. I realized she was standing there-and in her early-sixties outfit. "Some time must go by before it will open. Today is out of the question. You might as well give up."

As I watched, she shed her clothes as easily as opening a pea pod and stood before me naked, without warning or explanation. "We have so little time, Mr. Okada, let's finish this as quickly as possible. I am sorry for the rush, but I have my reasons. Just getting here was hard enough." Then she came up to me, opened my fly, and, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, took out my penis. Lowering her eyes, with their false lashes, she enclosed my penis with her mouth. Her mouth was far larger than I had imagined. Inside, I immediately came erect. When she moved her tongue, the curled ends of her hair trembled as in a gentle breeze, caressing my thighs. All I could see was her hair and her false eyelashes. I sat on the bed, and she went down on her knees, her face buried in my crotch. "Stop it," I said. "Noboru Wataya will be here any minute. I don't want to see him here."

Kano took her mouth from my penis and said, "Don't worry. We have plenty of time for this, at least."

She ran the tip of her tongue over my penis. I didn't want to come, but there was no way of stopping it. I felt as if it were being sucked out of me. Her lips and tongue held on to me like slippery life forms. I came. I opened my eyes.

Terrific. I went to the bathroom, washed my soiled underpants, and took a hot shower, washing myself with care to get rid of the sticky sensations of the dream. How many years had it been since my last wet dream? I tried to recall exactly but couldn't, it had been so long.

I stepped out of the shower and was still drying myself when the phone rang. It was Kumiko. Having just had a wet dream over another woman, I felt a little tense speaking with her.

"Your voice is strange," she said. "What's wrong?" Her sensitivity to such things was frightening.

"Nothing," I said. "I was dozing. You woke me up."

"Oh, really?" she said. I could feel her suspicions coming through the earpiece, which made me all the more tense.

"Anyway, sorry, but I'm going to be a little late today," Kumiko said. "Maybe as late as nine. So I'll eat out."

"That's OK," I said. "I'll find something for myself. Don't worry."

"I really am sorry," she said. It had the sound of an afterthought. There was a pause, and then she hung up.

I looked at the receiver for a few seconds. Then I went to the kitchen and peeled an apple.

In the six years since I had married Kumiko, I had never slept with another woman. Which is not to say that I never felt the desire for another woman or never had the chance. Just that I never pursued it when the opportunity arose. I can't explain why, exactly, but it probably has something to do with life's priorities.

I did once happen to spend the night with another woman. She was someone I liked, and I knew she would have slept with me. But finally, I didn't do it.

We had been working together at the law firm for several years. She was probably two or three years younger than I. Her job was to take calls and coordinate everyone's schedules, and she was very good at it. She was quick, and she had an outstanding memory. You could ask her anything and she would know the answer: who was working where at what, which files were in which cabinet, that kind of thing. She handled all appointments. Everybody liked her and depended on her. On an individual basis, too, she and I were fairly close. We had gone drinking together several times. She was not exactly what you would call a beauty, but I liked her looks.

When it came time for her to quit her job to get married (she would have to move to Kyushu in connection with her husband's work), several colleagues and I invited her out for a last drink together. Afterward, she and I had to take the same train home, and because it was late, I saw her to her apartment. At the front door, she invited me in for a cup of coffee. I was worried about missing the last train, but I knew we might never see each other again, and I also liked the idea of sobering up with coffee, so I decided to go in. The place was a typical single girl's apartment. It had a refrigerator that was just a little too grand for one person, and a bookshelf stereo. A friend had given her the refrigerator. She changed into something comfortable in the next room and made coffee in the kitchen. We sat on the floor, talking.

At one point when we had run out of things to say, she asked me, as if it had suddenly occurred to her, "Can you name something-some concrete thing-that you're especially afraid of?"

"Not really," I said, after a moment's thought. I was afraid of all kinds of things, but no one thing in particular. "How about you?"

"I'm scared of culverts," she said, hugging her knees. "You know what a culvert is, don't you?"

"Some kind of ditch, isn't it?" I didn't have a very precise definition of the word in mind.

"Yeah, but it's underground. An underground waterway. A drainage ditch with a lid on. A pitch-dark flow."

"I see," I said. "A culvert."

"I was born and raised in the country. In Fukushima. There was a stream right near my house-a little stream, just the runoff from the fields. It flowed underground at one point into a culvert. I guess I was playing with some of the older kids when it happened. I was just two or three. The others put me in a little boat and launched it into the stream. It was probably something they did all the time, but that day it had been raining, and the water was high. The boat got away from them and carried me straight for the opening of the culvert. I would have been sucked right in if one of the local farmers hadn't happened by. I'm sure they never would have found me."

She ran her left index finger over her mouth as if to check that she was still alive.

"I can still picture everything that happened. I'm lying on my back and being swept along by the water. The sides of the stream tower over me like high stone walls, and overhead is the blue sky. Sharp, clear blue. I'm being swept along in the flow. Swish, swish, faster and faster. But I can't understand what it means. And then all of a sudden I *do* understand- that there's darkness lying ahead. *Real* darkness. Soon it comes and tries to drink me down. I can feel a cold shadow beginning to wrap itself around me. That's my earliest memory."

She took a sip of coffee.

"I'm scared to death," she said. "I'm so scared I can hardly stand it. I feel like I did back then, like I'm being swept along toward it and I can't get away."

She took a cigarette from her handbag, put it in her mouth, and lit it with a match, exhaling in one long, slow breath. This was the first time I had ever seen her smoke.

"Are you talking about your marriage?" I asked.

"That's right," she said. "My marriage."

"Is there some particular problem?" I asked. "Something concrete?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so," she said. "Not really. Just a lot of little things."

I didn't know what to say to her, but the situation demanded that I say something.

"Everybody experiences this feeling to some extent when they're about to get married, I think. 'Oh, no, I'm making this terrible mistake!'

You'd probably be abnormal if you *didn't* feel it. It's a big decision, picking somebody to spend your life with. So it's natural to be scared, but you don't have to be *that* scared."

"That's easy to say-'Everybody feels like that. Everybody's the same,' " she said.

Eleven o'clock had come and gone. I had to find a way to bring this conversation to a successful conclusion and get out of there. But before I could say anything, she suddenly asked me to hold her. "Why?" I asked, caught off guard. "To charge my batteries," she said. "Charge your batteries?"

"My body has run out of electricity. I haven't been able to sleep for days now. The minute I get to sleep I wake up, and then I can't get back to sleep. I can't think. When I get like that, somebody has to charge my batteries. Otherwise, I can't go on living. It's true."

I peered into her eyes, wondering if she was still drunk, but they were once again her usual cool, intelligent eyes. She was far from drunk.

"But you're getting married next week. You can have him hold you all you want. Every night. That's what marriage is for. You'll never run out of electricity again."

"The problem is *now*," she said. "Not tomorrow, not next week, not next month. I'm out of electricity now."

Lips clamped shut, she stared at her feet. They were in perfect alignment. Small and white, they had ten pretty toenails. She really, truly wanted somebody to hold her, it seemed, and so I took her in my arms. It was all very weird. To me, she was just a capable, pleasant colleague. We worked in the same office, told each other jokes, and had gone out for drinks now and then. But here, away from work, in her apartment, with my arms around her, we were nothing but warm lumps of flesh. We had been playing our assigned roles on the office stage, but stepping down from the stage, abandoning the provisional images that we had been exchanging there, we were both just unstable, awkward lumps of flesh, warm pieces of meat

outfitted with digestive tracts and hearts and brains and reproductive organs. I had my arms wrapped around her back, and she had her breasts pressed hard against my chest. They were larger and softer than I had imagined them to be. I was sitting on the floor with my back against the wall, and she was slumped against me. We stayed in that position for a long time, holding each other without a word.

"Is this all right?" I asked, in a voice that did not sound like my own. It was as if someone else were speaking for me.

She said nothing, but I could feel her nod.

She was wearing a sweatshirt and a thin skirt that came down to her knees, but soon I realized that she had nothing on underneath. Almost automatically, this gave me an erection, and she seemed to be aware of it. I could feel her warm breath on my neck.

In the end, I didn't sleep with her. But I did have to go on "charging" her "batteries" until two in the morning. She pleaded with me to stay with her until she was asleep. I took her to her bed and tucked her in. But she remained awake for a long time. She changed into pajamas, and I went on holding and "recharging" her. In my arms, I felt her cheeks grow hot and her heart pound. I couldn't be sure I was doing the right thing, but I knew of no other way to deal with the situation. The simplest thing would have been to sleep with her, but I managed to sweep that possibility from my mind. My instincts told me not to do it.

"Please don't hate me for this," she said. "My electricity is just so low I can't help it."

"Don't worry," I said. "I understand."

I knew I should call home, but what could I have said to Kumiko? I didn't want to lie, but I knew it would be impossible for me to explain to her what was happening. And after a while, it didn't seem to matter anymore. Whatever happened would happen. I left her apartment at two o'clock and didn't get home until three. It was tough finding a cab.

Kumiko was furious, of course. She was sitting at the kitchen table, wide awake, waiting for me. I said I had been out drinking and playing mah-jongg with the guys from the office. Why couldn't I have made a simple phone call? she demanded. It had never crossed my mind, I said. She was not convinced, and the lie became apparent almost immediately. I hadn't played mah-jongg in years, and I just wasn't cut out for lying in any case. I ended up confessing the truth. I told her the entire story from beginning to end-without the erection part, of course-maintaining that I had done nothing with the woman.

Kumiko refused to speak to me for three days. Literally. Not a word. She slept in the other room, and she ate her meals alone. This was the greatest crisis our marriage had faced. She was genuinely angry with me, and I understood exactly how she felt.

After her three days of silence, Kumiko asked me, "What would *you* think if you were in *my* position?" These were the very first words she spoke. "What if *I* had come home at three o'clock Sunday morning without so much as a telephone call? 'I've been in bed with a man all this time, but don't worry, I didn't do anything, please believe me. I was just recharging his batteries. OK, great, let's have breakfast and go to sleep.' You mean to say you wouldn't get angry, you'd just believe me?"

I kept quiet.

"And what you did was even worse than that," Kumiko continued. "You *lied* to me! You said you were drinking and playing mah-jongg. A total lie! How do you expect me to believe you didn't sleep with her?"

"I'm sorry I lied," I said. "I should never have done that. But the only reason I lied was because the truth was so difficult to explain. I want you to believe me: I really didn't do anything wrong."

Kumiko put her head down on the table. I felt as if the air in the room were gradually thinning out.

"I don't know what to say," I said. "I can't explain it other than to ask you to believe me."

"All right. If you want me to believe you, I will," she said. "But I want *you* to remember

this: I'm probably going to do the same thing to you someday. And when that time comes, I want you to believe *me*. I have that right."

Kumiko had never exercised that right. Every once in a while, I imagined how I would feel if she did exercise it. I would probably believe her, but my reaction would no doubt be as complex and as difficult to deal with as Kumiko's. To think that she had made a point of doing such a thing-and for what? Which was exactly how she must have felt about me back then.

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"Mr. Wind-Up Bird!" came a voice from the garden. It was May Kasahara.

Still toweling my hair, I went out to the veranda. She was sitting on the edge, biting a thumbnail. She wore the same dark sunglasses as when I had first met her, plus cream-colored cotton pants and a black polo shirt. In her hand was a clipboard.

"I climbed it," she said, pointing to the cinder-block wall. Then she brushed away the dirt clinging to her pants. "I kinda figured I had the right place. I'm glad it was yours! Think if I had come over the wall into the wrong house!"

She took a pack of Hope regulars from her pocket and lit up.

"Anyhow, Mr. Wind-Up Bird, how are you?"

"OK, I guess."

"I'm going to work now," she said. "Why don't you come along? We work in teams of two, and it'd be sooo much better for me to have somebody I know. Some new guy'd ask me all kinds of questions-'How old are you? Why aren't you in school?' It's such a pain! Or maybe he'd turn out to be a pervert. It happens, you know! Do it for me, will you, Mr. Wind-Up Bird?"

"Is it that job you told me about- some kind of survey for a toupee maker?"

"That's it," she said. "All you have to do is count bald heads on the Ginza from one to four. It's easy! And it'll be good for you. You'll be bald someday too, the way you're going, so you better check it out now while you still have hair."

"Yeah, but how about you? Isn't the truant officer going to get you if they see you doing this stuff on the Ginza in the middle of the day?"

"Nah. I just tell 'em it's fieldwork for social studies. It always works."

With no plans for the afternoon, I decided to tag along. May Kasahara phoned her company to say we would be coming in. On the telephone, she turned into a very proper young woman: Yes, sir, I would like to team up with him, yes, that is correct, thank you very much, yes, I understand, yes, we can be there after noon. I left a note for Kumiko saying I would be back by six, in case she got home early, then I left the house with May Kasahara.

The toupee company was in Shimbashi. On the subway, May Kasahara explained how the survey worked. We were to stand on a street corner and count all the bald men (or those with thinning hair) who walked by. We were to classify them according to the degree of their baldness: C, those whose hair might have thinned somewhat; B, those who had lost a lot; and A, those who were really bald. May took a pamphlet from her folder and showed me examples of the three stages.

"You get the idea pretty much, right, which heads fit which categories? I won't go into detail. It'd take all day. But you get it pretty much, right, which is which?"

"Pretty much," I said, without exuding a great deal of confidence.

On May Kasahara's other side sat an overweight company type-a very definite B-who kept glancing uneasily at the pamphlet, but she seemed not to notice how nervous this was making him.

"I'll be in charge of putting them into categories, and you stand next to me with a survey sheet. You put them in A, B, or C, depending on what I tell you. That's all there is to it. Easy,

right?”

“I guess so,” I said. “But what’s the point of taking a survey like this?”

“I dunno,” she said. “They’re doing them all over Tokyo—in Shinjuku, Shibuya, Aoyama. Maybe they’re trying to find out which neighborhood has the most bald men? Or they want to know the proportions of A, B, and C types in the population? Who knows? They’ve got so much money, they don’t know what to do with it. So they can waste it on stuff like this. Profits are huge in the wig business. The employees get *much* bigger bonuses than in just any old company. Know why?” “No. Why?”

“Wigs don’t last long. Bet you didn’t know: toupees are good for two, maybe three years max. The better made they are, the faster they get used up. They’re the ultimate consumer product. It’s ‘cause they fit so tightly against the scalp: the hair underneath gets thinner than ever. Once that happens, you have to buy a new one to get that perfect fit again. And think about it: What if you were using a toupee and it was no good after two years—what would go through your mind? Would you think, OK, my wig’s worn out. Can’t wear it anymore. But it’ll cost too much to buy a new one, so tomorrow I’ll start going to work without one? Is that what you’d think?”

I shook my head. “Probably not,” I said.

“Of course not. Once a guy starts using a wig, he has to keep using one. It’s, like, his fate. That’s why the wig makers make such huge profits. I hate to say it, but they’re like drug dealers. Once they get their hooks into a guy, he’s a customer for life. Have you ever heard of a bald guy suddenly growing a head of hair? I never have. A wig’s got to cost half a million yen at least, maybe a million for a tough one. And you need a new one every two years! Wow! Even a car lasts longer than that—four or five years. And then you can trade it in!”

“I see what you mean,” I said.

“Plus, the wig makers run their own hairstyling salons. They wash the wigs and cut the customers’ real hair. I mean, think about it: you can’t just plunk yourself down in an ordinary barber’s chair, rip off your wig, and say, ‘I’d like a trim,’ can you? The income from these places alone is tremendous.”

“You know all kinds of things,” I said, with genuine admiration. The B-category company type next to May was listening to our conversation with obvious fascination.

“Sure,” she said. “The guys at the office like me. They tell me everything. The profits in this business are huge. They make the wigs in Southeast Asia and places like that, where labor is cheap. They even get the hair there—in Thailand or the Philippines. The women sell their hair to the wig companies. That’s how they earn their dowries in some places. The whole world’s so weird! The guy sitting next to you might actually be wearing the hair of some woman in Indonesia.”

By reflex, I and the B-man looked around at the others in the car.

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We stopped off at the company’s Shimbashi office to pick up an envelope containing survey sheets and pencils. This company supposedly had a number two market share, but it was utterly discreet, without even a name plaque at the entrance, so that customers could come and go with ease. Neither the envelope nor the survey sheets bore the company name. At the survey department, I filled out a part-time worker’s registration form with my name, address, educational background, and age. This office was an incredibly quiet place of business. There was no one shouting into the telephone, no one banging away at a computer keyboard with sleeves rolled up. Each individual worker was neatly dressed and pursuing his or her own task with quiet concentration. As might be expected at a toupee maker’s office, not one man here was bald. Some might even be wearing the company’s product, but it was impossible for me to tell those who were from those who weren’t. Of all the companies I had

ever visited, this had the strangest ambience.

We took the subway to the Ginza. Early and hungry, we stopped at the Dairy Queen for a hamburger.

"Tell me, Mr. Wind-Up Bird," said May Kasahara, "would you wear a toupee if you were bald?"

"I wonder," I said. "I don't like things that take time and trouble. I probably wouldn't try to fight it if I went bald."

"Good," she said, wiping the ketchup from her mouth with a paper napkin. "That's the way. Bald men never look as bad as they think. To me, it's nothing to get so upset about."

"I wonder," I said.

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For the next three hours, we sat at the subway entrance by the Wako Building, counting the bald-headed men who passed by. Looking down at the heads going up and down the subway stairs was the most accurate method of determining the degree of baldness of any one head. May Kasahara would say "A" or "B" or "C," and I would write it down. She had obviously done this many times. She never fumbled or hesitated or corrected herself, but assigned each head to its proper category with great speed and precision, uttering the letters in low, clipped tones so as not to be noticed by the passersby. This called for some rapid-fire naming whenever a large group of bald heads passed by at once: "CCBABCAAC-CBBB." At one point, an elegant-looking old gentleman (who himself possessed a full head of snow-white hair) stopped to watch us in action, "Pardon me," he said to me after a while, "but might I ask what you two are doing?"

"Survey," I said.

"What kind of survey?" he asked.

"Social studies," I said.

"C A C A B C," said May Kasahara.

The old gentleman seemed less than convinced, but he went on watching us until he gave up and wandered off somewhere.

When the Mitsukoshi clock across the street signaled four o'clock, we ended our survey and went back to the Dairy Queen for a cup of coffee. It had not been strenuous work, but I found my neck and shoulders strangely stiff. Maybe it was from the covert nature of the job, a guilty feeling I had about counting bald men in secret. All the time we were on the subway heading back to company headquarters in Shimbashi, I found myself automatically assigning each bald head I saw to category A or B or C, which almost made me queasy. I tried to stop myself, but by then a kind of momentum had set in. We handed in our survey forms and received our pay—rather good pay for the amount of time and effort involved. I signed a receipt and put the money in my pocket. May Kasahara and I rode the subway to Shinjuku and from there took the Odakyu Line home. The afternoon rush hour was starting. This was my first ride on a crowded train in some time, but it hardly filled me with nostalgia.

"Pretty good job, don't you think?" said May Kasahara, standing next to me on the train. "It's easy, pay's not bad."

"Pretty good," I said, sucking on a lemon drop.

"Go with me next time? We can do it once a week."

"Why not?" I said.

"You know, Mr. Wind-Up Bird," May Kasahara said after a short silence, as if a thought had suddenly come to her, "I bet the reason people are afraid of going bald is because it makes them think of the end of life. I mean, when your hair starts to thin, it must feel as if your life is being worn away ... as if you've taken a giant step in the direction of death, the last Big Consumption."

I thought about it for a while. "That's one way to look at it, I'm sure," I said.

"You know, Mr. Wind-Up Bird, I sometimes wonder what it must feel like to die little by little over a long period of time. What do you think?"

Unsure exactly what she was getting at, I changed my grip on the hand strap and looked into her eyes. "Can you give me a concrete example of what you mean by that-to die little by little?"

"Well... I don't know. You're trapped in the dark all alone, with nothing to eat, nothing to drink, and little by little you die...."

"It must be terrible," I said. "Painful. I wouldn't want to die like that if I could help it."

"But finally, Mr. Wind-Up Bird, isn't that just what life is? Aren't we all trapped in the dark somewhere, and they've taken away our food and water, and we're slowly dying, little by little ... ?"

I laughed. "You're too young to be so ... *pessimistic*," I said, using the English word.

"Pessi-what?"

"Pessimistic. It means looking only at the dark side of things."

"Pessimistic ... pessimistic ..." She repeated the English to herself over and over, and then she looked up at me with a fierce glare. "I'm only sixteen," she said, "and I don't know much about the world, but I *do* know one thing for sure. If I'm pessimistic, then the adults in this world who are *not* pessimistic are a bunch of idiots."

10

Magic Touch

*

Death in the Bathtub

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Messenger with Keepsakes

We had moved into our present house in the autumn of the second year we were married. The Koenji apartment we had lived in until then was slated for renovation. We looked for a cheap, convenient apartment to move into, but finding such a place was not easy with our budget. When he heard this, my uncle suggested that we move into a house he owned in Setagaya. He had bought it in his youth and lived there for ten years. He wanted to tear the old place down and put up something more functional, but architectural regulations prevented him from building the kind of house he wanted. He was waiting for a rumored relaxation of the rules to take effect, but if he left the place vacant in the meantime, he would have to pay the property taxes, and if he rented it to strangers, there could be trouble when he asked them to vacate. From us, he would take only a nominal rent to cover the taxes, but in return he wanted us to agree to give up the place with three months' notice when the time came. We had no problem with that: the part about the taxes was not entirely clear to us, but we jumped at the chance to live in a real house, if only for a little while, paying the kind of rent we had been paying to live in an apartment (and a very cheap apartment at that). The house was pretty far from the nearest station on the Odakyu Line, but it was in a quiet residential neighborhood, and it had its own small yard. Even though it didn't belong to us, it gave *us* the feeling, once we moved in, that we were now part of a real "household."

My mother's younger brother, this uncle of mine never made any demands on us. He was kind of a cool guy, I suppose, but there was something almost uncanny about him in the way he left us alone. Still, he was my favorite relative. He had graduated from a college in Tokyo and gone to work as a radio announcer, but when he got "sick of the work" after ten years, he quit the station and opened a bar on the Ginza. It was an almost austere little place, but it became widely known for the authenticity of its cocktails, and within a few years my uncle was running a string of bars and restaurants. Every one of his establishments did extremely well: apparently, he had that special spark you need for business. Once, while I was still in college, I asked him why every place he opened was such a success. In the very same location where one restaurant had failed on the Ginza, he might open up the same kind of restaurant and do just fine. Why was that? He held the palms of both hands out for me to see. "It's my magic touch," he said, without a hint of humor. And that was all he said.

Maybe he really did have a "magic touch," but he also had a talent for finding capable people to work for him. He paid them high salaries and treated them well, and they in turn worked hard for him. "When I know I've got the right guy, I put a wad of bills in his hand and let him do his thing," he once told me. "You've got to spend your money for the things that money can buy, not worry about profit or loss. Save your energy for the things that money can't buy."

He married late in life. Only after he had achieved financial success in his mid-forties did he settle down. His wife was a divorcee, three or four years his junior, and she brought her own considerable assets to the marriage. My uncle never told me how he happened to meet her, and all I could tell about her was that she was a quiet sort of woman of good background. They had no children. She had apparently had no children with her first husband, either, which may have been the reason for the divorce. In any case, though not exactly a rich man, my uncle was in a position in his mid-forties where it was no longer necessary for him to break his back for money. In addition to the profits from his restaurants and bars, he had rental income from several houses and condos that he owned, plus steady dividend income from investments. With its reputation for respectable businesses and modest lifestyles, the family tended to see my uncle as something of a black sheep, and he had never shown much inclination for consorting with relatives. As his only nephew, though, I had always been of some concern to him, especially after my mother died the year I entered college and I had a falling-out with my father, who remarried. When I was living the lonely life of a poor college student in Tokyo, my uncle often treated me to dinner in one or another of his Ginza restaurants.

He and his wife now lived in a condo on a hill in Azabu rather than be bothered with taking care of a house. He was not given to indulging in luxuries, but he did have one hobby, which was the purchase of rare automobiles. He kept a Jaguar and an Alfa Romeo in the garage, both of them nearly antiques and extremely well cared for, as shiny as newborn babes.

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On the phone with my uncle about something else, I took the opportunity to ask him what he knew about May Kasahara's family.

"Kasahara, you say?" He took a moment to think. "Never heard of them. I was a bachelor when I lived there, never had anything to do with the neighbors."

"Actually, it's the house opposite theirs I'm curious about, the vacant house on the other side of the alley from their backyard," I said. "I guess somebody named Miyawaki used to live there. Now it's all boarded up."

"Oh, Miyawaki. Sure, I knew him," said my uncle. "He used to own a few restaurants. Had one on the Ginza too. I met him professionally a few times. His places were nothing much, tell you the truth, but he had good locations. I thought he was doing all right. He was a

nice guy, but kind of a spoiled-rich-kid type. He had never had to work hard, or he just never got the hang of it or something, but he never quite grew up. Somebody got him going on the stock market, took him for everything he had- house, land, businesses, everything. And the timing couldn't have been worse. He was trying to open a new place, had his house and land up as collateral. Bang! The whole thing. Had a couple of daughters, I think, college age."

"The house has been empty ever since, I guess."

"No kidding? I'll bet the title's a mess and his assets have been frozen or something. You'd better not touch that place, no matter what kind of bargain they're offering you."

"Who? Me?" I laughed. "I could never afford a place like that. But what do you mean?"

"I looked into that house when I bought mine. There's something wrong with it."

"You mean like ghosts?"

"Maybe not ghosts, but I've never heard anything good about the place," my uncle said. "Some fairly well-known army guy lived there till the end of the war, Colonel Somebody-or-other, a real superelite officer. The troops under his command in North China won all kinds of decorations, but they did some terrible things there-executing five hundred POWs, forcing tens of thousands of farmers to work for them until half of them dropped dead, stuff like that. These are the stories that were going around, so I don't know how much is true. He was called home just before the end of the war, so he was here for the surrender, and he could see from what was going on that he was likely to be tried as a war criminal. The guys who had gone crazy in China-the generals, the field officers-were being dragged away by the MPs. Well, he had no intention of being put on trial. He was not going to be made a spectacle of and hanged in the bargain. He preferred to take his own life rather than let that happen. So one day when he saw a GI stop a jeep in front of his house, he blew his brains out on the spot. He would have preferred to slit his stomach open the old-fashioned samurai way, but there was no time for that. His wife hanged herself in the kitchen to 'accompany' her husband in death."

"Wow."

"Anyhow, it turned out the GI was just an ordinary GI, looking for his girlfriend. He was lost. He wanted to ask somebody directions. You know how tough it is to find your way around that place. Deciding it's your time to die-that can't be easy for anybody."

"No, it can't be."

"The house was vacant for a while after that, until an actress bought it- a movie actress. You wouldn't know her name. She was around long before your time, and she was never very famous. She lived there, say, ten years or so. Just she and her maid. She was single. A few years after she moved in, she contracted some eye disease. Everything looked cloudy to her, even close up. But she was an actress, after all; she couldn't work with glasses on. And contact lenses were a new thing back then. They weren't very good and almost nobody used them. So before the crew shot a scene, she would always go over the layout and memorize how many steps she had to take from A to B. She managed one way or another: they were pretty simple films, those old Shochiku domestic dramas. Everything was more relaxed in those days. Then one day, after she had checked over the set and gone back to her dressing room, a young cameraman who didn't know what was going on moved the props and things just a little bit."

"Uh-oh."

"She missed her footing, fell over, and couldn't walk after that. And her vision started getting even worse. She was practically blind. It was a shame; she was still young and pretty. Of course her movie-making days were over. All she could do was stay at home. And then the maid took all her money and ran off with some guy. This maid was the one person she knew she could trust, depended on her for everything, and the woman took her savings, her stocks, everything. Boy, talk about terrible stories! So what do you think she did?"

"Well, obviously this story can't have a bright, happy ending."

"No, obviously," said my uncle. "She filled the tub, stuck her face in, and drowned

herself. You realize, of course, that to die that way, you have to be pretty damned determined.”

“Nothing bright and happy about that.”

“No, nothing bright and happy. Miyawaki bought the property soon afterward. I mean, it’s a nice place; everybody wants it when they see it. The neighborhood is pleasant, the plot is on high ground and gets good sunlight, the lot is big. But Miyawaki had heard the dark stories about the people who had lived there, so he had the whole thing torn down, foundation and all, and put up a new house. He even had Shinto priests come in to do a purification. But that wasn’t enough, I guess. Bad things happen to anybody who lives there. It’s just one of those pieces of land. They exist, that’s all. I wouldn’t take it if they gave it to me.”

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After shopping at the supermarket, I organized my ingredients for making dinner. I then took in the laundry, folded it neatly, and put it away. Back in the kitchen, I made myself a pot of coffee. This was a nice, quiet day, without calls from anybody. I stretched out on the sofa and read a book. There was no one to disturb my reading. Every once in a while, the wind-up bird would creak in the backyard. It was virtually the only sound I heard all day.

Someone rang the front doorbell at four o’clock. It was the postman. “Registered mail,” he said, and handed me a thick envelope. I took it and put my seal on the receipt.

This was no ordinary envelope. It was made of old-fashioned heavy rice paper, and someone had gone to the trouble of writing my name and address on it with a brush, in bold black characters. The sender’s name on the back was Tokutaro Mamiya, the address somewhere in Hiroshima Prefecture. I had absolutely no knowledge of either. Judging from the brushwork, this Tokutaro Mamiya was a man of advanced age. No one knew how to write like that anymore.

I sat on the sofa and used a scissors to cut the envelope open. The letter itself, just as old-fashioned as the envelope, was written on rolled rice paper in a flowing hand by an obviously cultivated person. Lacking such cultivation myself, I could hardly read it. The sentence style matched the handwriting in its extreme formality, which only complicated the process, but with enough time, I managed to decipher the general meaning. It said that old Mr. Honda, the fortune-teller whom Kumiko and I had gone to see so long ago, had died of a heart attack two weeks earlier in his Meguro home. Living alone, he had died without company, but the doctors believed that he had gone quickly and without a great deal of suffering- perhaps the one bright spot in this sad tale. The maid had found him in the morning, slumped forward on the low table of his foot warmer. The letter writer, Tokutaro Mamiya, had been stationed in Manchuria as a first lieutenant and had chanced to share the dangers of war with Corporal Oishi Honda. Now, in compliance with the strong wishes of the deceased, and in the absence of surviving relatives, Mamiya had undertaken the task of distributing the keepsakes. The deceased had left behind extremely minute written instructions in this regard. “The detailed and meticulous will suggests that Mr. Honda had anticipated his own impending death. It states explicitly that he would be extremely pleased if you, Mr. Toru Okada, would be so kind as to receive a certain item as a remembrance of him. I can imagine how very busy you must be, Mr. Okada, but I can assure you, as an old comrade in arms of the deceased with few years to look forward to myself, that I could have no greater joy than if you were indeed to be so kind as to receive this item as a small remembrance of the late Mr. Honda.” The letter concluded with the address at which Mr. Mamiya was presently staying in Tokyo, care of someone else named Mamiya in Hongo 2-chome, Bunkyo Ward. I imagined he must be in the house of a relative.

I wrote my reply at the kitchen table. I had hoped to keep the postcard short and simple, but once I had pen in hand, those few concise phrases were not forthcoming. “I was fortunate

enough to have known the late Mr. Honda and benefited from our brief acquaintance. The news that he is no longer living brings back memories of those times. Our ages were very different, of course, and our association lasted but a single year, yet-

I always used to feel that there was something about the deceased that moved people deeply. To be quite honest, I would never have imagined that Mr. Honda would name me specifically to be the recipient of a keepsake, nor am I certain that I am even qualified to receive anything from him, but if such was his wish, then I will certainly do so with all due respect. Please contact me at your earliest convenience."

When I dropped the card into the nearest mailbox, I found myself murmuring old Mr. Honda's verse: "Dying is the only way / For you to float free: / Nomonhan."

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It was close to ten before Kumiko came home from work. She had called before six to say that she would be late again today, that I should have dinner without her and she would grab something outside. Fine, I said, and ate a simple meal. Again I stayed home alone, reading a book. When she came in, Kumiko said she wanted a few sips of beer. We shared a midsize bottle. She looked tired. Elbows on the kitchen table, she rested her chin in her hands and said little when I spoke to her. She seemed preoccupied. I told her that Mr. Honda had died. "Oh, really?" she said, with a sigh. "Oh, well, he was getting on in years, and he was almost deaf." When I said that he had left a keepsake for me, though, she was shocked, as if something had suddenly fallen out of the sky.

"For you?!" she exclaimed, her eyebrows twisting into a frown.

"Yeah. Weird, isn't it?"

"He must have liked you."

"How could that be? I never really talked to the guy," I said. "At least *I* never said much. And even if I did, he couldn't hear anything. We used to sit and listen to his stories once a month. And all we ever heard from him was the Battle of Nomonhan: how they threw Molotov cocktails, and which tank burned, and which tank didn't burn, that kind of stuff."

"Don't ask me," said Kumiko. "He must have liked something about you. I don't understand people like that, what's in their minds."

After that, she went silent again. It was a strained silence. I glanced at the calendar on the wall. Her period was not due yet. I imagined that something unpleasant might have happened at the office.

"Working too hard?" I asked.

"A little," Kumiko said, after taking a sip of beer and staring at what was left in her glass. There was an almost defiant tone in her voice. "Sorry I was so late, but you know how it is with magazine work when we get busy. And it's not as if I do this all the time. I get them to give me less overtime than most. They know I have a husband to go home to."

I nodded. "I'm not blaming you," I said. "I know you have to work late sometimes. I was just worried you're letting yourself get tired out."

She took a long shower. I drank my beer and flipped through a weekly magazine that she had brought home.

I shoved my hand in my pants pocket and found the pay there from my recent little part-time job. I hadn't even taken the cash from the envelope. Another thing I hadn't done was tell Kumiko about the job. Not that I had been hiding it from her, but I had let the opportunity to mention it slip by and there had never been another one. As time passed, I found it harder to bring up the subject, for some strange reason. All I would have had to say was, "I met this odd sixteen-year-old girl from down the street and took a job with her doing a survey for a wig maker. The pay was pretty good too."

And Kumiko could have said, "Oh, really? Isn't that nice," and that might have been the

end of it. Or not. She might have wanted to know more about May Kasahara. She might have been bothered that I was making friends with a sixteen-year-old girl. Then I would have had to tell her about May Kasahara and explain in detail where, when, and how we happened to meet. But I'm not very good at giving people orderly explanations of things.

I took the money from the envelope and put it in my wallet. The envelope itself I crumpled and threw in the wastebasket. So this was how secrets got started, I thought to myself. People constructed them little by little. I had not consciously intended to keep May Kasahara a secret from Kumiko. My relationship with her was not that big a deal, finally: whether I mentioned it or not was of no consequence. Once it had flowed down a certain delicate channel, however, it had become cloaked in the opacity of secretiveness, whatever my original "intention" may have been. The same thing had happened with Creta Kano. I had told Kumiko that Malta Kano's younger sister had come to the house, that her name was Creta, that she dressed in early-sixties style, that she took samples of our tap water. But I had remained silent on the fact that she had afterward begun to make startling revelations to me and had vanished without a word before reaching the end. Creta Kano's story had been too far-out: I could never have re-created the nuances and conveyed them to Kumiko, and so I had not tried. Or then again, Kumiko might have been less than pleased that Creta Kano had stayed here long after her business was through and made all kinds of troubling personal confessions to me. And so that became another one of my little secrets.

Maybe Kumiko had the same kind of secrets that she was keeping from me. With my own fund of secrets, I was in no position to blame her if she did, of course. Between the two of us, I was surely the more secretive. She tended to say what she was thinking. She was the type of person who thought things out while speaking. I was not like that.

Uneasy with these ruminations, I walked toward the bathroom. The door was wide open. I stood in the doorway and looked at Kumiko from behind. She had changed into solid-blue pajamas and was standing in front of the mirror, drying her hair with a towel.

"About a job for me," I said. "I *have* been thinking about it. I've asked friends to be on the lookout, and I've tried a few places myself. There *are* jobs out there, so I can work anytime I decide to work. I can start tomorrow if I make up my mind to it. It's making up my mind that's hard. I'm just not sure. I'm not sure if it's OK for me to pick a job out of a hat like that."

"That's why I keep telling you to do what you want," she said, while looking at herself in the mirror. "You don't *have to* find a job right away. If you're worried about the economics of it, you don't have to worry. If it makes you uneasy not to have a job, if it's a burden to you to have me be the only one working outside the house while you stay home and take care of the housework, then take some job-any job-for a while. I don't care."

"Of course, I'll have to find a job eventually. I know that, you know that. I can't go on hanging around like this forever. And I *will* find a job sooner or later. It's just that right now, I don't know what kind of a job I should take. For a while after I quit, I just figured I'd take some other law-related job. I do have connections in the field. But now I can't get myself into that mood. The more time that goes by, the less interest I have in law. I feel more and more that it's simply not the work for me."

Kumiko looked at me in the mirror. I went on:

"But knowing what I don't want to do doesn't help me figure out what I *do* want to do. I could do just about anything if somebody made me. But I don't have an image of the *one thing* I really want to do. That's my problem now. I can't find the image."

"So, then," she said, putting her towel down and turning to face me, "if you're tired of law, don't do it anymore. Just forget about the bar exam. Don't get all worked up about finding a job. If you can't find the image, wait until it forms by itself. What's wrong with that?"

I nodded. "I just wanted to make sure I had explained to you exactly how I felt."

"Good," she said.

I went to the kitchen and washed my glass. She came in from the bathroom and sat at the kitchen table.

"Guess who called me this afternoon," she said. "My brother."

"Oh?"

"He's thinking of running for office. In fact, he's just about decided to do it."

"Running for office?!" This came as such a shock to me, I could hardly speak for a moment. "You mean ... for the Diet?"

"That's right. They're asking him to run for my uncle's seat in Niigata."

"I thought it was all set for your uncle's son to succeed him. He was going to resign his directorship at Dentsu or something and go back to Niigata."

She started cleaning her ears with a cotton swab. "That was the plan, but my cousin doesn't want to do it. He's got his family in Tokyo, and he enjoys his work. He's not ready to give up such an important post with the world's largest advertising firm and move back to the wilds of Niigata just to become a Diet member. The main opposition is from his wife. She doesn't want him sacrificing the family to run for office."

The elder brother of Kumiko's father had spent four or five terms in the Lower House, representing that electoral district in Niigata. While not exactly a heavyweight, he had compiled a fairly impressive record, rising at one point to a minor cabinet post. Now, however, advanced age and heart disease would make it impossible for him to enter the next election, which meant that someone would have to succeed to his constituency. This uncle had two sons, but the elder had never intended to go into politics, and so the younger was the obvious choice.

"Now the people in the district are dying to have my brother run. They want somebody young and smart and energetic. Somebody who can serve for several terms, with the talent to become a major power in the central government. My brother has the name recognition, he'll attract the young vote: he's perfect. True, he can't schmooze with the locals, but the support organization is strong, and they'll take care of that. Plus, if he wants to go on living in Tokyo, that's no problem. All he has to do is show up for the election."

I had trouble picturing Noboru Wataya as a Diet member. "What do you think of all this?" I asked.

"He's got nothing to do with me. He can become a Diet member or an astronaut, for all I care."

"But why did he make a point of coming to you for advice?"

"Don't be ridiculous," she said, with a dry voice. "He wasn't asking my advice. You know he'd never do that. He was just keeping me informed. As a member of the family."

"I see," I said. "Still, if he's going to run for the Diet, won't it be a problem that he's divorced and single?"

"I wonder," said Kumiko. "I don't know anything about politics or elections or anything. They just don't interest me. But anyway, I'm pretty sure he'll never get married again. To anybody. He should never have gotten married in the first place. That's not what he wants out of life. He's after something else, something completely different from what you or I want. I know that for sure."

"Oh, really?"

Kumiko wrapped two used cotton swabs in a tissue and threw them in the wastebasket. Then she raised her face and looked straight at me. "I once saw him masturbating. I opened a door, and there he was."

"So what? Everybody masturbates," I said.

"No, you don't understand," she said. Then she sighed. "It happened maybe two years after my sister died. He was probably in college, and I was something like a third grader. My mother had wavered between getting rid of my sister's things and putting them away, and in

the end she decided to keep them, thinking I might wear them when I got older. She had put them in a carton in a closet. My brother had taken them out and was smelling them and doing it.” I kept silent.

“I was just a little girl then. I didn’t know anything about sex. I really didn’t know what he was doing, but I could tell that it was something twisted, something I wasn’t supposed to see, something much deeper than, it appeared on the surface.” Kumiko shook her head.

“Does Noboru Wataya know you saw him?”

“Of course. We looked right into each other’s eyes.” I nodded.

“And how about your sister’s clothes?” I asked. “Did you wear them when you got bigger?” “No way,” she said.

“So you think he was in love with your sister?” “I wonder,” said Kumiko. “I’m not even sure he had a sexual interest in her, but he certainly had *something*, and I suspect he’s never been able to get away from that something. That’s what I mean when I say he should never have gotten married in the first place.”

Kumiko fell silent. For a long time, neither of us said anything. Then she spoke first. “In that sense, I think he may have some serious psychological problems. Of course, we all have psychological problems to some extent, but his are a lot worse than whatever you or I might have. They’re a lot deeper and more persistent. And he has no intention of letting these scars or weaknesses or whatever they are be seen by anybody else. Ever. Do you understand what I’m saying? This election coming up: it worries me.”

“Worries you? How’s that?”

“I don’t know. It just does,” she said. “Anyhow, I’m tired. I can’t think anymore today. Let’s go to bed.”

Brushing my teeth in the bathroom, I studied my face in the mirror. For over two months now, since quitting my job, I had rarely entered the “outside world.” I had been moving back and forth between the neighborhood shops, the ward pool, and this house. Aside from the Ginza and that hotel in Shinagawa, the farthest point I had traveled from home was the cleaner’s by the station. And in all that time, I had hardly seen anyone. Aside from Kumiko, the only people I could be said to have “seen” in two months were Malta and Kano and May Kasahara. It was a narrow world, a world that was standing still. But the narrower it became, and the more it betook of stillness, the more this world that enveloped me seemed to overflow with things and people that could only be called strange. They had been there all the while, it seemed, waiting in the shadows for me to stop moving. And every time the wind-up bird came to my yard to wind its spring, the world descended more deeply into chaos.

I rinsed my mouth and went on looking at my face for a time.

I can’t find the image, I said to myself. I’m thirty, I’m standing still, and I can’t find the image.

When I went from the bathroom to the bedroom, Kumiko was asleep.

11

Enter Lieutenant M a m i y a

*

What Came from the Warm Mud

*

Eau de Cologne

Three days later, Tokutaro Mamiya called. At seven-thirty in the morning. I was eating breakfast with Kumiko at the time.

"I am very, very sorry to be calling you so early in the morning. I do hope I haven't awakened you," said Mr. Mamiya, sounding genuinely apologetic.

I assured him that it was all right: I woke up every morning shortly after six.

He thanked me for my postcard and explained that he wanted to reach me before I left for work this morning, adding that he would be most grateful if I could see him briefly today during my lunch break. He was hoping to take an evening bullet train back to Hiroshima. He had planned to have more time here, he said, but something had come up that made it necessary for him to return home as soon as possible.

I pointed out that I was presently unemployed, that I was free all day, and that I could see him at his convenience, be it morning, noon, afternoon, or whenever.

"But surely you must have something planned at some point in the day?" he inquired with the utmost politeness.

I had no plan at all, I replied.

"That being the case, might I be permitted to call upon you at your residence this morning at ten o'clock?"

"That would be fine."

Only after I hung up did it occur to me that I had forgotten to tell him how to find our house from the station. Oh, well, I figured, he knows the address; he can make his way here if he wants to.

"Who was that?" asked Kumiko.

"The guy who's distributing Mr. Honda's keepsakes. He's going to bring mine here later this morning."

"No kidding?" She took a sip of coffee and spread butter on her toast. "That's very nice of him."

"Sure is."

"By the way," she said, "shouldn't we-or at least you-go to pay our respects at Mr. Honda's: burn a stick of incense, that sort of thing?"

"Good idea. I'll ask him about that."

Preparing to leave the house, Kumiko asked me to zip her dress up. It was a tight fit, and closing the zipper took some doing. She was wearing a lovely fragrance behind her ears-something perfect for a summer morning. "New cologne?" I asked. Instead of answering, she glanced at her watch and reached up to fix her hair.

"I'm late," she said, and took her handbag from the table.

•

I had straightened up the little room that Kumiko used for work and was emptying the wastebasket when I noticed a yellow ribbon she had discarded. It was peeking out from under a crumpled sheet of writing paper and a few pieces of junk mail. Its bright, glossy yellow was what had caught my eye. It was the kind of ribbon used to wrap presents, the bow tied in the shape of a flower. I lifted it from the wastebasket and examined it. The ribbon had been discarded along with some wrapping paper from the Matsuya department store. Under the paper was a box with the Christian Dior label. The lining inside the box formed the shape of a bottle. Judging from the box, this had been a pretty expensive item. I took it with me to the bathroom and opened Kumiko's cosmetics cabinet. Inside was a virtually unused bottle of Christian Dior eau de cologne, shaped like the hollow in the box. I opened the bottle's gold-colored cap and took a sniff. It was the same fragrance I had smelled from behind Kumiko's

ears.

I sat on the sofa, drinking the rest of my morning coffee and collecting my thoughts. Someone had obviously given Kumiko a gift. An expensive gift. Bought it at the Matsuya department store and had it wrapped with a ribbon. If the person who did this was a man, he was someone close to Kumiko. Men didn't give women (especially married women) cologne unless their relationship was a close one. If a woman friend had given it to her ... But did women give eau de cologne to other women? I could not be sure. One thing I could be sure of, though, was that there was no particular reason for Kumiko to be receiving presents from other people at this time of year. Her birthday was in May. So was our anniversary. She might conceivably have bought herself a bottle of cologne and had it wrapped with a pretty ribbon. But why?

I sighed and looked at the ceiling.

Should I ask her about it directly? "Did somebody give you that cologne?" She might answer: "Oh, that. One of the girls at work had a personal problem I helped her out with. It's too long a story to go into, but she was in a jam, so I did it to be nice. This was a thank-you gift. Wonderful fragrance, don't you think? It's expensive stuff!"

OK, that makes sense. That does it. No need to ask the question. No need to be concerned.

Except I was concerned. She should have said something to me about it. If she had time to go to her room, untie the ribbon, tear off the wrapping paper, open the box, throw all three in the wastebasket, and put the bottle in her cosmetics cabinet, she should have been able to come to me and say, "Look at this present I got from one of the girls at work." Instead, she had said nothing. Maybe she had thought it wasn't worth mentioning. Now, however, it had taken on the thin veil of secrecy. That was what was bothering me.

I looked at the ceiling for a long time. I tried to think about something else, but my mind wouldn't cooperate. I kept thinking about Kumiko at the moment I zipped up her dress: her smooth white back, the fragrance behind her ears. For the first time in months, I wanted a smoke. I wanted to put a cigarette in my mouth, light the tip, and suck the smoke into my lungs. That would have calmed me down somewhat. But I didn't have any cigarettes. I found a lemon drop and sucked on that.

At ten of ten, the phone rang. I assumed it was Lieutenant Mamiya. This house was not easy to find. Even people who had been here more than once got lost sometimes. But the call was not from Lieutenant Mamiya. What I heard coming from the receiver was the voice of the enigmatic woman who had phoned me the other day.

"Hi, honey, it's been a while," she said. "How'd you like it last time? Did I get you going a little bit? Why'd you hang up on me? And just when things were getting interesting!"

For a split second, I thought she was talking about my recent wet dream of Kano. But that had been a different story. She was talking about the day she called me when I was cooking spaghetti.

"Sorry," I said, "but I'm pretty busy right now. I'm expecting a visitor in ten minutes, and I've got to get the place ready."

"You're awfully busy for somebody who's supposed to be out of work," she said, with a sarcastic edge. The same thing had happened last time: her tone of voice changed from one second to the next. "You're cooking spaghetti, you're expecting a visitor. But that's all right. All we need is ten minutes. Let's talk for ten minutes, just you and me. You can hang up when your guest arrives."

I wanted to hang up without saying a word, but I couldn't do it. I was probably still upset about Kumiko's cologne. I probably felt like talking to someone, and it didn't much matter who.

"Look," I said, "I don't have any idea who you are." I picked up the pencil lying beside the phone and twirled it in my fingers as I spoke. "Are you sure I know you?"

"Of course you do. I told you last time. I know you and you know me. I wouldn't lie about

a thing like that. I don't have time to waste calling complete strangers. You must have some kind of blind spot in your memory."

"I don't know about that. Really, though--"

"Enough," she said, cutting me off. "Stop thinking so much. You know me and I know you. The important thing is--well, look at it this way: I'm going to be very nice to you. But you don't have to do a thing. Isn't that marvelous? You don't have to do a thing, you have no responsibilities, and I do everything. *Everything*. Don't you think that's great? So stop thinking so much. Stop making everything so *complicated*. Empty yourself out. Pretend you're lying in some nice, soft mud on a warm spring afternoon."

I kept silent.

"You're asleep. You're dreaming. You're lying in nice, warm mud. Forget about your wife. Forget you're out of work. Forget about the future. Forget about everything. We all come out of the warm mud, and we all go back to it. Finally-- Oh, by the way, Mr. Okada, when was the last time you had sex with your wife? Do you remember? Quite some time ago, wasn't it? Yes, indeed, maybe two weeks now."

"Sorry, my visitor is here," I said.

"*More* than two weeks, wasn't it? I can tell from your voice. Three weeks, maybe?"

I said nothing.

"Oh, well, never mind," she said, her voice like a little broom sweeping off the dust that had piled up on the slats of a Venetian blind. "That's between you and your wife. But I will give you everything you want. And you, Mr. Okada, you need have no responsibilities in return. Just go round the corner, and there it is: a world you've never seen. I *told* you you have a blind spot, didn't I? You still don't understand."

Gripping the receiver, I maintained my silence.

"Look around," she said. "Look all around you and tell me what's there. What is it you see?"

Just then the doorbell rang. Relieved, I hung up without a word.

•

Lieutenant Mamiya was a bald old gentleman of exceptional height, who wore gold-rimmed glasses. He had the tan, healthy look of a man who has done his share of manual labor, without an ounce of excess flesh. Three deep wrinkles marked the corner of each eye with perfect symmetry, as if he were on the verge of squinting because he found the light harsh. It was difficult to tell his age, though he was certainly no less than seventy. I imagined he must have been a strapping fellow in his prime. This was obvious from his erect carriage and efficient movements. His demeanor and speech were of the utmost respectfulness, but rather than elaborate formality, this gave an impression of unadorned precision. The lieutenant appeared to be a man accustomed to making his own decisions and taking responsibility for them. He wore an unremarkable light-gray suit, a white shirt, and a gray and black striped tie. The no-nonsense suit appeared to be made of a material that was a bit too thick for a hot and humid June morning, but the lieutenant was unmarked by a drop of sweat. He had a prosthetic left hand, on which he wore a thin glove of the same light-gray color as the suit. Encased in this gray glove, the artificial hand looked especially cold and inorganic when compared with the tanned and hairy right hand, from which dangled a cloth-wrapped bundle, knotted at the top.

I showed him to the living room couch and served him a cup of green tea.

He apologized for not having a name card. "I used to teach social studies in a rural public high school in Hiroshima Prefecture, but I haven't done anything since I retired. I raise a few vegetables, more as a hobby than anything, just simple farm work. For that reason, I do not happen to carry a name card, although I realize it is terribly rude of me."

I didn't have a name card, either.

"Forgive me, but I wonder how old you might be, Mr. Okada?"

"I'm thirty," I said.

He nodded. Then he took a sip of tea. I had no idea what it meant to him that I was thirty years old.

"This is such a nice, quiet home you live in," he said, as if to change the subject.

I told him how I came to be renting it from my uncle for so little. Ordinarily, with our income, we couldn't afford to live in a house half the size, I added. Nodding, he stole a few hesitant glances around the place. I followed his lead and did the same. *Look all around you*, the woman's voice had ordered me. Taking this newly conscious look at my surroundings, I found a certain coldness in the pervading atmosphere.

"I have been in Tokyo two weeks altogether on this trip," said Lieutenant Mamiya, "and you are the very last person to whom I am distributing a keepsake. Now I feel I can go back to Hiroshima."

"I was hoping I could visit Mr. Honda's home and perhaps burn a stick of incense in his memory," I said.

"That is a most laudable intention, but Mr. Honda's home-and now his grave-are in Asahikawa, Hokkaido. The family came from Asahikawa to sort out the things he left in his house in Meguro, and now they have gone back. There is nothing left."

"I see," I said. "So Mr. Honda was living alone in Tokyo, then, far away from his family."

"That is correct. The eldest son, who lives in Asahikawa, was concerned about leaving his old father to live by himself in the big city, and he knew that it did not look very good. Apparently, he tried to persuade his father to come and live with him, but Mr. Honda simply refused."

"He had a son?" I asked, somewhat taken aback. I had always thought of Mr. Honda as utterly alone in the world. "Then I assume Mr. Honda's wife must have passed away some time ago."

"Well, that is a rather complicated story. Mrs. Honda committed a lovers' suicide with another man after the war. In 1950 or 1951, I believe. The details of that event are not something that I would know about. Mr. Honda never said too much about it, and of course I was in no position to ask."

I nodded.

"After that, Mr. Honda raised his children alone-one son and one daughter. When they became independent, he moved to Tokyo by himself and began his work as a diviner, which is how you knew him."

"What sort of work did he do in Asahikawa?"

"He was partners with his brother in a printing business." I tried to imagine Mr. Honda standing in front of a printing press in coveralls, checking proof, but to me Mr. Honda was a slightly grimy old man in a grimy old kimono with a sash more suited to a sleeping robe, who sat, winter and summer, with his legs in the sunken hearth, playing with his divining sticks atop his low table.

With deft movements, Lieutenant Mamiya used his good hand to untie the cloth bundle he had brought with him. A package emerged, shaped like a small box of candy. It was wrapped in kraft paper and tightly tied in several loops of string. The lieutenant placed it on the table and slid it toward me.

"This is the keepsake that Mr. Honda left with me to give to you," he said.

I picked it up. It weighed practically nothing. I couldn't begin to imagine what was inside.

"Shall I just go ahead and open it?" I asked.

Lieutenant Mamiya shook his head. "I am sorry, but Mr. Honda indicated that he wished you to open it when you were alone." I nodded and returned the package to the table. "In fact," said Lieutenant Mamiya, "I received the letter from Mr. Honda exactly one day before

he died. It said something like this: 'I am going to die very soon. I am not the least bit afraid of dying. This is the span of life that has been allotted to me by the will of Heaven, Where the will of Heaven is concerned, all one can do is submit to it. There is, however, something that I have left undone. In my closet there are various objects-things that I have wanted to pass on to certain people. Now it appears that I will not be able to accomplish that task. Which is why I would be most grateful if you would help me by distributing the keepsakes on the attached list. I fully realize how presumptuous this is of me, but I do hope that you will be so kind as to think of it as my dying wish and exert yourself this one last time for my sake.'

I must say, I was utterly shocked to receive such a letter from Mr. Honda. I had been out of touch with him for years-perhaps six or seven years without a word. I wrote back to him immediately, but my reply crossed in the mails with the notice from his son that Mr. Honda had died." He took a sip of his green tea.

"Mr. Honda knew exactly when he was going to die," Lieutenant Mamiya continued. "He must have attained a state of mind that someone like me could never hope to reach. As you said in your postcard, there was something about him that moved people deeply. I felt that from the time I first met him, in the summer of 1938."

"Oh, were you in the same unit with Mr. Honda at the time of the Nomonhan Incident?"

"No, I wasn't," said Lieutenant Mamiya, biting his lip. "We were in different units-different divisions, even. We worked together in a small-scale military operation that preceded the Nomonhan battle. Corporal Honda was later wounded at Nomonhan and sent back to Japan. I didn't go to Nomonhan. I lost this hand of mine"-and here Lieutenant Mamiya held up his gloved left hand-"in the Soviet advance of August 1945, the month the war ended. I caught a slug in the shoulder from a heavy machine gun during a battle against a tank unit. I was on the ground, unconscious, when a Soviet tank ran over my hand. I was taken prisoner, treated in a hospital in Chita, and sent to an internment camp in Siberia. They kept me there until 1949. I was on the continent for twelve years altogether from the time they sent me over in 1937, never set foot on Japanese soil the whole time. My family thought I had been killed fighting the Soviets. They made a grave for me in the village cemetery. I had a kind of understanding with a girl there before I left Japan, but by the time I got back she was already married to another man. Twelve years is a long time."

I nodded.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Okada," he said. "This talk about the old days must be boring to a young fellow like you. I would like to add one more thing, though. And that is that we were just ordinary young men, the same as you. I never once thought I wanted to be a soldier. I wanted to be a teacher. As soon as I left college, though, they sent me my draft notice, stuck me in officers training, and I ended up on the continent for twelve years. My life went by like a dream." Lieutenant Mamiya clamped his mouth shut.

"If you wouldn't mind," I said, after some time had passed, "I would very much like to hear the story of how you and Mr. Honda came to know each other." I genuinely wanted to know what kind of man Mr. Honda had been before I met him.

Hands placed precisely on his knees, Lieutenant Mamiya sat thinking about something. Not that he was uncertain as to what he should do. He was just thinking.

"That story might be a long one," he said.

"I don't mind," I said.

"I've never told it to anyone. And I'm quite certain that Mr. Honda never told it to anyone, either. The reason I say that is that we ... made a pact... to keep this one thing secret. But Mr. Honda is dead now. I'm the only one left. It wouldn't hurt anyone if I told."

And so Lieutenant Mamiya began to tell me his story.

Lieutenant Mamiya's Long Story: Part I

*

I was shipped to Manchuria at the beginning of 1937, Lieutenant Mamiya began. I was a brand-new second lieutenant then, and they assigned me to the Kwantung Army General Staff in Hsin-ching. Geography had been my major in college, so I ended up in the Military Survey Corps, which specialized in mapmaking. This was ideal for me because, to be quite honest, the duties I was ordered to perform were among the easiest that anyone could hope for in the army.

In addition to this, conditions in Manchuria were relatively peaceful- or at least stable. The recent outbreak of the China Incident had moved the theater of military operations from Manchuria into China proper. The China Expeditionary Forces were the ones doing the actual fighting now, while the Kwantung Army had an easy time of it. True, mopping-up operations were still going on against anti-Japanese guerrilla units, but they were confined to the interior, and in general the worst was over. All that the powerful Kwantung Army had to do was police our newly "independent" puppet state of Manchukuo while keeping an eye on the north.

As peaceful as things supposedly were, it was still war, after all, so there were constant maneuvers. I didn't have to participate in those, either, fortunately. They took place under terrible conditions. The temperature would drop to forty or fifty degrees below zero. One false step in maneuvers like that, and you could end up dead. Every single time they held such maneuvers, there would be hundreds of men in the hospital with frostbite or sent to a hot spring for treatment. Hsin-ching was no big city, but it was certainly an exotic foreign place, and if you wanted to have fun there, it provided plenty of opportunities. New single officers like me lived together in a kind of rooming house rather than in barracks. It was more like an extension of student life. I took it easy, thinking that I would have nothing to complain about if my military service ended like this, just one peaceful day after another.

It was, of course, a make-believe peace. Just beyond the edges of our little circle of sunshine, a ferocious war was going on. Most Japanese realized that the war with China would turn into a muddy swamp from which we could never extricate ourselves, I believe-or at least any Japanese with a brain in his head realized this. It didn't matter how many local battles we won: there was no way Japan could continue to occupy and rule over such a huge country. It was obvious if you thought about it. And sure enough, as the fighting continued, the number of dead and wounded began to multiply. Relations with America went from bad to worse. Even at home, the shadows of war grew darker with every passing day. Those were dark years then: 1937, 1938. But living the easy life of an officer in Hsin-ching, you almost wanted to ask, "War? What war?" We'd go out drinking and carousing every night, and we'd visit the cafes that had the White Russian girls.

Then, one day late in April 1938, a senior officer of the general staff called me in and introduced me to a fellow in mufti named Yamamoto. He wore his hair short and had a mustache. He was not a very tall man. As for his age, I'd say he was in his mid-thirties. He had a scar on the back of his neck that looked as if it might have been made by a blade of some kind. The officer said to me: "Mr. Yamamoto is a civilian. He's been hired by the army to investigate the life and customs of the Mongolians who live in Manchukuo. He will next be going to the Hulunbuir Steppe, near the Outer Mongolian border, and we are going to supply him with an armed escort. You will be a member of that detachment." I didn't believe a thing

he was telling me. This Yamamoto fellow might have been wearing civilian clothes, but anybody could tell at a glance that he was a professional soldier. The look in his eyes, the way he spoke, his posture: it was obvious. I figured he was a high-ranking officer or had something to do with intelligence and was on a mission that required him to conceal his military identity. There was something ominous about the whole thing.

Three of us were assigned to accompany Yamamoto—too few for an effective armed escort, though a larger group would have attracted the attention of the Outer Mongolian troops deployed along the border. One might have chosen to view this as a case of entrusting a sensitive mission to a few handpicked men, but the truth was far from that. I was the only officer, and I had zero battlefield experience. The only one we could count on for fighting power was a sergeant by the name of Hamano. I knew him well, as a soldier who had been assigned to assist the general staff. He was a tough fellow who had worked his way up through the ranks to become a noncommissioned officer, and he had distinguished himself in battle in China. He was big and fearless, and I was sure we could count on him in a pinch. Why they had also included Corporal Honda in our party I had no idea. Like me, he had just arrived from home, and of course he had no experience on the battlefield. He was a gentle, quiet soul who looked as if he would be no help at all in a fight. What's more, he belonged to the Seventh Division, which meant that the general staff had gone out of their way to have him sent over to us specifically for this assignment. That's how valuable a soldier he was, though not until much later did the reason for this become clear.

I was chosen to be the commanding officer of the escort because my primary responsibility was the topography of the western border of Manchukuo in the area of the Khalkha River. My job was to make sure that our maps of the district were as complete as possible. I had even been over the area several times in a plane. My presence was meant to help the mission go smoothly. My second assignment was to gather more detailed topographical information on the district and so increase the precision of our maps. Two birds with one stone, as it were. To be quite honest, the maps we had in those days of the Hulunbuir Steppe border region with Outer Mongolia were crude things—hardly an improvement over the old Manchu dynasty maps. The Kwantung Army had done several surveys following the establishment of Manchukuo. They wanted to make more accurate maps, but the area they had to cover was huge, and western Manchuria is just an endless desert. National borders don't mean very much in such a vast wilderness. The Mongolian nomads had lived there for thousands of years without the need—or even the concept—of borders.

The political situation had also delayed the making of more accurate maps. Which is to say that if we had gone ahead and unilaterally made an official map showing our idea of the border, it could have caused a full-scale international incident. Both the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia, which shared borders with Manchukuo, were extremely sensitive about border violations, and there had been several instances of bloody combat over just such matters. In our day, the army was in no mood for war with the Soviet Union. All our force was invested in the war with China, with none to spare for a large-scale clash with the Soviets. We didn't have the divisions or the tanks or the artillery or the planes. The first priority was to secure the stability of Manchukuo, which was still a relatively new political entity. Establishment of the northern and northwestern borders could wait, as far as the army was concerned. They wanted to stall for time by keeping things indefinite. Even the mighty Kwantung Army deferred to this view and adopted a wait-and-see attitude. As a result, everything had been allowed to drift in a sea of vagueness.

If, however, their best-laid plans notwithstanding, some unforeseen event should lead to war (which is exactly what did happen the following year at Nomonhan), we would need maps to fight. And not just ordinary civilian maps, but real combat maps. To fight a war you need maps that show you where to establish encampments, the most effective place to set up your artillery, how many days it will take your infantry to march there, where to secure water,

how much feed you need for your horses: a great deal of detailed information. You simply couldn't fight a modern war without such maps. Which is why much of our work overlapped with the work of the intelligence division, and we were constantly exchanging information with the Kwantung Army's intelligence section or the military secret service in Hailar. Everyone knew everyone else, but this Ya-mamoto fellow was someone I had never seen before.

After five days of preparation, we left Hsin-ching for Hailar by train. We took a truck from there, drove it through the area of the Khandur-byo Lamaist temple, and arrived at the Manchukuo Army's border observation post near the Khalkha River. I don't remember the exact distance, but it was something like two hundred miles. The region was an empty wilderness, with literally nothing as far as the eye could see. My work required me to keep checking my map against the actual landforms, but there was nothing out there for me to check against, nothing that one could call a landmark. All I could see were shaggy, grass-covered mounds stretching on and on, the unbroken horizon, and clouds floating in the sky. There was no way I could have any precise idea where on the map we were. All I could do was guess according to the amount of time we had been driving.

Sometimes, when one is moving silently through such an utterly desolate landscape, an overwhelming hallucination can make one feel that oneself, as an individual human being, is slowly coming unraveled. The surrounding space is so vast that it becomes increasingly difficult to keep a balanced grip on one's own being. I wonder if I am making myself clear. The mind swells out to fill the entire landscape, becoming so diffuse in the process that one loses the ability to keep it fastened to the physical self. That is what I experienced in the midst of the Mongolian steppe. How vast it was! It felt more like an ocean than a desert landscape. The sun would rise from the eastern horizon, cut its way across the empty sky, and sink below the western horizon. This was the only perceptible change in our surroundings. And in the movement of the sun, I felt something I hardly know how to name: some huge, cosmic love.

At the border post of the Manchukuo Army, we transferred from truck to horseback. They had everything ready for us there: four horses to ride, plus two packhorses loaded with food, water, and weapons. We were lightly armed. I and the man called Yamamoto carried only pistols. Hamano and Honda carried Model 38 regulation infantry rifles and two hand grenades each, in addition to their pistols.

The de facto commander of our group was Yamamoto. He made all the decisions and gave us instructions. Since he was supposedly a civilian, military rules required that I act as commanding officer, but no one doubted that he was the one in charge. He was simply that kind of man, for one thing, and although I held the rank of second lieutenant, I was nothing but a pencil pusher without battle experience. Military men can see who holds actual power, and that is the one they obey. Besides, my superiors had ordered me to follow Yamamoto's instructions without question. My obedience to him was to be something that transcended the usual laws and regulations.

We proceeded to the Khalkha River and followed it to the south. The river was swollen with snowmelt. We could see large fish in the water. Sometimes, in the distance, we spotted wolves. They might have been part wild dog rather than purebred wolves, but in any case they were dangerous. We had to post a sentry each night to guard the horses from them. We also saw a lot of birds, most of them migratory fowl on their way back to Siberia. Yamamoto and I discussed features of the *topogra-*, phy. Checking our route against the map, we kept detailed notes on every bit of information that came to our notice. Aside from these technical exchanges, however, Yamamoto hardly ever spoke to me. He spurred his horse on in silence, ate away from the rest of us, and went to sleep without a word. I had the impression that this was not his first trip to the area. He had amazingly precise knowledge of the landforms, directions, and so forth.

After we had proceeded southward for two days without incident, Yamamoto called me

aside and told me that we would be fording the Khalkha before dawn the next morning. This came as a tremendous shock to me. The opposite shore was Outer Mongolian territory. Even the bank on which we stood was a dangerous area of border disputes. The Outer Mongolians laid claim to it, and Manchukuo asserted its own claims to the territory, which had led to continual armed clashes. If we were ever taken prisoner by Outer Mongolian troops on this side, the differing views of the two countries gave us some excuse for being there, though in fact there was little danger of encountering them in this season, when snowmelt made fording so difficult. The far bank was a different story altogether. Mongolian patrols were over there for certain. If we were captured there, we would have no excuse whatever. It would be a clear case of border violation, which could stir up all kinds of political problems. We could be shot on the spot, and our government would be unable to protest. In addition, my superior officer had given me no indication that it would be all right for us to cross the border. I *had*, of course, been told to follow Yamamoto's orders, but I had no way of knowing if this included such a grave offense as a border violation. Secondly, as I said earlier, the Khalkha was quite swollen, and the current was far too strong to make a crossing, in addition to which the water must have been freezing cold. Not even the nomadic tribes wanted to ford the river at this time of year. They usually restricted their crossings to winter, when the river was frozen, or summer, when the flow was down and the water temperature up.

When I said all this to him, Yamamoto stared at me for a moment. Then he nodded several times. "I understand your concern about the violation of international borders," he said to me, with a somewhat patronizing air. "It is entirely natural for you, as an officer with men under your command, to consider the locus of responsibility in such a matter. You would never want to put the lives of your men in danger without good cause. But I want you to leave such questions to me. I will assume all responsibility in this instance. I am not in a position to explain a great deal to you, but this matter has been cleared with the highest levels of the army. As regards the fording of the river, we have no technical obstacles. There is a hidden point at which it is possible to cross. The Outer Mongolian Army has constructed and secured several such points. I suspect that you are fully aware of this as well. I myself have crossed the river a number of times at this point. I entered Outer Mongolia last year at this time at this same place. There is nothing for you to worry about."

He was right about one thing. The Outer Mongolian Army, which knew this area in detail, had sent combat units-though just a few of them-across to this side of the river during the season of melting snow. They had made sure they could send whole units across at will. And if *they* could cross, then this man called Yamamoto could cross, and it would not be impossible for the rest of us to cross too.

We stood now at one of those secret fords that had most likely been built by the Outer Mongolian Army. Carefully camouflaged, it would not have been obvious to the casual observer. A plank bridge, held in place by ropes against the swift current, connected the shallows on either side beneath the surface of the water. A slight drop in the water level would make for an easy crossing by troop transport vehicles, armored cars, and such. Reconnaissance planes could never spot it underwater. We made our way across the river's strong flow by clinging to the ropes. Yamamoto went first, to be certain there were no Outer Mongolian patrols in the area, and we followed. Our feet went numb in the cold water, but we and our horses struggled across to the far shore of the Khalkha River. The land rose up much higher on the far side, and standing there, we could see for miles across the desert expanse from which we had come. This was one reason the Soviet Army would always be in the more advantageous position when the battle for Nomonhan eventually broke out. The difference in elevation would also make for a huge difference in the accuracy of artillery fire. In any case, I remember being struck by how different the view was on either side of the river. I remember, too, how long it took to regain feeling in limbs that had been soaked in the icy water. I couldn't even get my voice to work for a while. But to be quite honest, the sheer tension that

came from knowing I was in enemy territory was enough to make me forget about the cold.

We followed the river southward. Like an undulating snake, the Khalkha flowed on below us to the left. Shortly after the crossing, Yamamoto advised us to remove all insignia of rank, and we did as we were told. Such things could only cause trouble if we were captured by the enemy, I assumed. For this reason, I also removed my officer's boots and changed into gaiters.

We were setting up camp that evening when a man approached us from the distance, riding alone. He was a Mongol. The Mongols use an unusually high saddle, which makes it easy to distinguish them from afar. Sergeant Hamano snapped up his rifle when he saw the figure approaching, but Yamamoto told him not to shoot. Hamano slowly lowered his rifle without a word. The four of us stood there, waiting for the man to draw closer. He had a Soviet-made rifle strapped to his back and a Mauser at his waist. Whiskers covered his face, and he wore a hat with earflaps. His filthy robes were the same kind as the nomads', but you could tell from the way he handled himself that he was a professional soldier.

Dismounting, the man spoke to Yamamoto in what I assumed was Mongolian. I had some knowledge of both Russian and Chinese, and what he spoke was neither of those, so it must have been Mongolian. Yamamoto answered in the man's own language. This made me surer than ever that Yamamoto was an intelligence officer.

Yamamoto said to me, "Lieutenant Mamiya, I will be leaving with this man. I don't know how long I will be away, but I want you to wait here- posting a sentry at all times, of course. If I am not back in thirty-six hours, you are to report that fact to headquarters. Send one man back across the river to the Manchukuo Army observation post." He mounted his horse and rode off with the Mongol, heading west.

The three of us finished setting up camp and ate a simple dinner. We couldn't cook or build a campfire. On that vast steppe, with nothing but low sand dunes to shield our presence as far as the eye could see, the least puff of smoke would have led to our immediate capture. We pitched our tents low in the shelter of the dunes, and for supper we ate dry crackers and cold canned meat. Darkness swiftly covered us when the sun sank beneath the horizon, and the sky was filled with an incredible number of stars. Mixed in with the roar of the Khalkha River, the sound of wolves howling came to us as we lay atop the sand, recovering from the day's exertions.

Sergeant Hamano said to me, "Looks like a tough spot we've got ourselves in," and I had to agree with him. By then, the three of us- Sergeant Hamano, Corporal Honda, and I- had gotten to know each other pretty well. Ordinarily, a fresh young officer like me would be kept at arm's length and laughed at by a seasoned noncommissioned officer like Sergeant Hamano, but our case was different. He respected the education I had received in a nonmilitary college, and I took care to acknowledge his combat experience and practical judgment without letting rank get in the way. We also found it easy to talk to each other because he was from Yamaguchi and I was from an area of Hiroshima close to Yamaguchi. He told me about the war in China. He was a soldier all the way, with only grammar school behind him, but he had his own reservations about this messy war on the continent, which looked as if it would never end, and he expressed these feelings honestly to me. "I don't mind fighting," he said. "I'm a soldier. And I don't mind dying in battle for my country, because that's my job. But this war we're fighting now, Lieutenant- well, it's just not right. It's not a real war, with a battle line where you face the enemy and fight to the finish. We advance, and the enemy runs away without fighting. Then the Chinese soldiers take their uniforms off and mix with the civilian population, and we don't even know who the enemy is. So then we kill a lot of innocent people in the name of flushing out 'renegades' or 'remnant troops,' and we commandeer provisions. We have to steal their food, because the line moves forward so fast our supplies can't catch up with us. And we have to kill our prisoners, because we don't have anyplace to keep them or any food to feed them. It's wrong, Lieutenant. We did some terrible things in

Nanking. My own unit did. We threw dozens of people into a well and dropped hand grenades in after them. Some of the things we did I couldn't bring myself to talk about. I'm telling you, Lieutenant, this is one war that doesn't have any Righteous Cause. It's just two sides killing each other. And the ones who get stepped on are the poor farmers, the ones without politics or ideology. For them, there's no Nationalist Party, no Young Marshal Zhang, no Eighth Route Army. If they can eat, they're happy. I know how these people feel: I'm the son of a poor fisherman myself. The little people slave away from morning to night, and the best they can do is keep themselves alive-just barely. I can't believe that killing these people for no reason at all is going to do Japan one bit of good."

In contrast to Sergeant Hamano, Corporal Honda had very little to say about himself. He was a quiet fellow, in any case. He'd mostly listen to us talk, without injecting his own comments. But while I say he was "quiet," I don't mean to imply there was anything dark or melancholy about him. It's just that he rarely took the initiative in a conversation. True, that often made me wonder what was on his mind, but there was nothing unpleasant about him. If anything, there was something in his quiet manner that softened people's hearts. He was utterly serene. He wore the same look on his face no matter what happened. I gathered he was from Asahikawa, where his father ran a small print shop. He was two years younger than I, and from the time he left middle school he had joined his brothers, working for his father. He was the youngest of three boys, the eldest of whom had been killed in China two years earlier. He loved to read, and whenever we had a spare moment, you'd see him curled up somewhere, reading a book on some kind of Buddhist topic.

As I said earlier, Honda had absolutely no combat experience, but with only one year of training behind him, he was an outstanding soldier. There are always one or two such men in any platoon, who, patient and enduring, carry out their duties to the letter without a word of complaint. Physically strong, with good intuition, they instantly grasp what you tell them and get the job done right. Honda was one of those. And because he had had cavalry training, he was the one who knew the most about horses; he took care of the six we had with us. And he did this in an extraordinary way. It sometimes seemed to us that he understood every little thing the horses were feeling. Sergeant Hamano acknowledged Corporal Honda's abilities immediately and let him take charge of many things without the slightest hesitation.

So, then, for such an oddly patched-together unit, we attained an extraordinarily high degree of mutual understanding. And precisely because we were not a regular unit, we had none of that by-the-book military formality. We were so at ease with one another, it was almost as if Karma had brought us together. Which is why Sergeant Hamano was able to say openly to me things that lay far beyond the fixed framework of officer and noncom.

"Tell me, Lieutenant," he once asked, "what do you think of this fellow Yamamoto?"

"Secret service, I'm willing to bet," I said. "Anybody who can speak Mongol like that has got to be a pro. And he knows this area like the back of his hand."

"That's what I think. At first I thought he might be one of those mounted bandits connected with top brass, but that can't be it. I know those guys. They'll talk your ear off and make up half of what they tell you. And they're quick on the trigger. But this Yamamoto guy's no lightweight. He's got guts. He is brass-and way up there. I can smell 'em a mile away. I heard something about some kind of secret tactical unit the army's trying to put together with Mongols from Soviet-trained troops, and that they brought over a few of our pros to run the operation. He could be connected with that."

Corporal Honda was standing sentry a little ways away from us, holding his rifle. I had my Browning lying close by, where I could grab it at any time. Sergeant Hamano had taken his gaiters off and was massaging his feet.

"I'm just guessing, of course," Hamano went on. "That Mongol we saw could be some anti-Soviet officer with the Outer Mongolian Army, trying to make secret contact with the Japanese Army."

“Could be,” I said. “But you’d better watch what you say. They’ll have your head.”

“Come on, Lieutenant. I’m not that stupid. This is just between us.” He flashed me a big smile, then turned serious. “But if any of this is true, it’s risky business. It could mean war.”

I nodded in agreement. Outer Mongolia was supposedly an independent country, but it was actually more of a satellite state under the thumb of the Soviet Union. In other words, it wasn’t much different from Manchukuo, where Japan held the reins of power. It did have an anti-Soviet faction, though, as everyone knew, and through secret contacts with the Japanese Army in Manchukuo, members of that faction had fomented a number of uprisings. The nucleus of the insurgent element consisted of Mongolian Army men who resented the high-handedness of the Soviet military, members of the landowning class opposed to the forced centralization of the farming industry, and priests of the Lama sect, who numbered over one hundred thousand. The only external power that the anti-Soviet faction could turn to for help was the Japanese Army stationed in Manchukuo. And they apparently felt closer to us Japanese, as fellow Asians, than they did to the Russians. Plans for a large-scale uprising had come to light in the capital city of Ulan Bator the previous year, 1937, and there had been a major purge carried out. Thousands of military men and Lamaist priests had been executed as counterrevolutionary elements in secret touch with the Japanese Army, but still anti-Soviet feeling continued to smolder in one place or another. So there would have been nothing strange about a Japanese intelligence officer crossing the Khalkha River and making secret contact with an anti-Soviet officer of the Outer Mongolian Army. To prevent such activities, the Outer Mongolian Army had guard units making constant rounds and had declared the entire band of territory ten to twenty kilometers in from the Manchukuo border to be off-limits, but this was a huge area to patrol, and they could not keep watch on every bit of it.

Even if their rebellion should succeed, it was obvious that the Soviet Army would intervene at once to crush their counterrevolutionary activity, and if that happened the insurgents would request the help of the Japanese Army, which would then give Japan’s Kwantung Army an excuse to intervene. Taking Outer Mongolia would amount to sticking a knife in the guts of the Soviets’ development of Siberia. Imperial Headquarters back in Tokyo might be trying to put the brakes on, but this was not an opportunity that the ambitious Kwantung Army General Staff was about to let slip from their fingers. The result would be no mere border dispute but a full-scale war between the Soviet Union and Japan. If such a war broke out on the Manchurian-Soviet border, Hitler might respond by invading Poland or Czechoslovakia. This was the situation that Sergeant Hamano had been referring to in his remark on the potential for war.

The sun rose the next morning, and still Yamamoto had not returned. I was the last one to stand sentry. I borrowed Sergeant Hamano’s rifle, sat atop a somewhat higher sand dune, and watched the eastern sky. Dawn in Mongolia was an amazing thing. In one instant, the horizon became a faint line suspended in the darkness, and then the line was drawn upward, higher and higher. It was as if a giant hand had stretched down from the sky and slowly lifted the curtain of night from the face of the earth. It was a magnificent sight, far greater in scale, as I said earlier, than anything that I, with my limited human faculties, could fully comprehend. As I sat and watched, the feeling overtook me that my very life was slowly dwindling into nothingness. There was no trace here of anything as insignificant as human undertakings. This same event had been occurring hundreds of millions-hundreds of billions-of times, from an age long before there had been anything resembling life on earth. Forgetting that I was there to stand guard, I watched the dawning of the day, entranced.

After the sun rose fully above the horizon, I lit a cigarette, took a sip of water from my canteen, and urinated. Then I thought about Japan. I pictured my hometown in early May-the fragrance of the flowers, the babbling of the river, the clouds in the sky. Friends from long ago. Family. The chewy sweetness of a warm rice puff wrapped in oak leaf. I’m not that fond of sweets, as a rule, but I can still remember how badly I wanted a *mochi* puff that morning. I

would have given half a year's pay for one just then. And when I thought about Japan, I began to feel as if I had been abandoned at the edge of the world. Why did we have to risk our lives to fight for this barren piece of earth devoid of military or industrial value, this vast land where nothing lived but wisps of grass and biting insects? To protect my homeland, I too would fight and die. But it made no sense to me at all to sacrifice my one and only life for the sake of this desolate patch of soil from which no shaft of grain would ever spring.

Yamamoto came back at dawn the following day. I stood final watch that morning too. With the river at my back, I was staring toward the west when I heard what sounded like a horse's whinny behind me. I spun around but saw nothing. I stared toward where I had heard the sound, gun at the ready. I swallowed, and the sound from my own throat was loud enough to frighten me. My trigger finger was trembling. I had never once shot a gun at anyone.

But then, some seconds later, staggering over the crest of a sand dune, came a horse bearing Yamamoto. I surveyed the area, finger still on the trigger, but no one else appeared—neither the Mongol who had come for him nor enemy soldiers. A large white moon hung in the eastern sky like some ill-omened megalith. Yamamoto's left arm seemed to have been wounded. The handkerchief he had wrapped around it was stained with blood. I woke Corporal Honda to see to the horse. Heavily lathered and breathing hard, it had obviously come a long way at high speed. Hamano stood sentry in my place, and I got the first-aid kit to treat Yamamoto's wound.

"The bullet passed through, and the bleeding stopped," said Yamamoto. He was right: the bullet had missed the bone and gone all the way through, tearing only the flesh in its path. I removed the handkerchief, disinfected the openings of the wound with alcohol, and tied on a new bandage. He never flinched the whole time, though his upper lip wore a thin film of sweat. He drank deeply from a canteen, lit a cigarette, and inhaled with obvious relish. Then he took out his Browning, wedged it under his arm, removed the clip, and with one hand deftly loaded three rounds into it. "We leave here right away, Lieutenant Mamiya," he said. "Cross the Khalkha and head for the Manchukuo Army observation post." We broke camp quickly, with hardly a word among us, mounted the horses, and headed for the ford. I asked Yamamoto nothing about how he had been shot or by whom. I was not in a position to do so, and even if I had been, he probably wouldn't have told me. The only thought in my mind at the time was to get out of this enemy territory as quickly as possible, cross the Khalkha River, and reach the relative safety of the opposite bank.

We rode in silence, urging our horses across the grassy plain. No one spoke, but all were thinking the same thing: could we make it across that river? If an Outer Mongolian patrol reached the bridge before we did, it would be the end for us. There was no way we could win in a fight. I remember the sweat streaming under my arms. It never once dried.

"Tell me, Lieutenant Mamiya, have you ever been shot?" Yamamoto asked me after a long silence atop his horse.

"Never," I replied.

"Have you ever shot anyone?"

"Never," I said again.

I had no idea what kind of impression my answers made on him, nor did I know what his purpose was in asking me those questions.

"This contains a document that has to be delivered to headquarters," he said, placing his hand on his saddlebag. "If it can't be delivered, it has to be destroyed—burned, buried, it doesn't matter, but it must not, under any circumstances, be allowed to fall into enemy hands. *Under any circumstances*. That is our first priority. I want to be sure you understand this. It is very, very important."

"I understand," I said.

Yamamoto looked me in the eye. "If the situation looks bad, the first thing you have to do is shoot me. Without hesitation. If I can do it myself, I will. But with my arm like this, I may

not be able to. In that case, you have to shoot me. And make sure you shoot to kill.”

I nodded in silence.

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When we reached the ford, just before dusk, the fear that I had been feeling all along turned out to be all too well founded. A small detachment of Outer Mongolian troops was deployed there. Yamamoto and I climbed one of the higher dunes and took turns looking at them through the binoculars. There were eight men-not a lot, but for a border patrol they were heavily armed. One man carried a light machine gun, and there was one heavy machine gun, mounted on a rise. It was surrounded by sandbags and aimed at the river. They had obviously stationed themselves there to prevent us from crossing to the other bank. They had pitched their tents by the river and staked their ten horses nearby. It looked as if they were planning to stay in place until they caught us. “Isn’t there another ford we could use?” I asked.

Yamamoto took his eyes from the binoculars and looked at me, shaking his head. “There is one, but it’s too far. Two days on horseback. We don’t have that much time. All we can do is cross here, whatever it takes.”

“Meaning we ford at night?”

“Correct. It’s the only way. We leave the horses here. We finish off the sentry, and the others will probably be asleep. Don’t worry, the river will blot out most sounds. I’ll take care of the sentry. There’s nothing for us to do until then, so better get some sleep, rest ourselves now while we have the chance.”

We set our fording operation for three in the morning. Corporal Honda took all the packs from the horses, drove the animals to a distant spot, and released them. We dug a deep hole and buried our extra ammunition and food. All that each of us would carry would be a canteen, a day’s rations, a gun, and a few bullets. If we were caught by the Outer Mongolians, with their overwhelmingly superior firepower, we could never outfight them, no matter how much ammunition we might carry. Now the thing for us to do was to get what sleep we could, because if we did make it across the river, there would be no chance to sleep for some time. Corporal Honda would stand sentry first, with Sergeant Hamano taking his place.

Stretching out in the tent, Yamamoto fell asleep immediately. He apparently hadn’t slept at all the whole time. By his pillow was a leather valise, into which he had transferred the important document. Hamano fell asleep soon after him. We were all exhausted, but I was too tense to sleep. I lay there for a long time, dying for sleep but kept awake by imagined scenes of us killing the sentry and being sprayed with machine gun fire as we forded the river. My palms were dripping with sweat, and my temples throbbed. I could not be sure that when the time came, I would be able to conduct myself in a manner befitting an officer. I crawled out of the tent and went to sit by Corporal Honda on sentry duty. “You know, Honda,” I said, “we’re maybe going to die here.”

“Hard to say,” he replied.

For a while, neither of us said anything. But there was something in his answer that bothered me-a particular tone that contained a hint of uncertainty. Intuition has never been my strong suit, but I knew that his vague remark was intended to conceal something. I decided to question him about it.

“If you have something to tell me, don’t hold back now,” I said. “This could be the last time we ever talk to each other, so open up.”

Biting his lower lip, Honda stroked the sand at his feet. I could see he was wrestling with conflicting feelings. “Lieutenant,” he said after some time had passed. He looked me straight in the eye. “Of the four of us here, you will live the longest- far longer than you yourself would imagine. You will die in Japan.”

Now it was my turn to look at him. He continued: “You may wonder how I know that, but

it is something that not even I can explain. I just know.”

“Are you psychic or something?”

“Maybe so, though the word doesn’t quite seem to fit what I feel. It’s a little too grandiose. Like I say, I just know, that’s all.”

“Have you always had this kind of thing?”

“Always,” he said with conviction. “Though I’ve kept it hidden ever since I was old enough to realize what was happening. But this is a matter of life and death, Lieutenant, and *you* are the one who’s asking me about it, so I’m telling you the truth.”

“And how about other people? Do you know what’s going to happen to them?”

He shook his head. “Some things I know, some things I don’t know. But you’d probably be better off not knowing, Lieutenant. It may be presumptuous of someone like me to say such big-sounding things to a college graduate like you, but a person’s destiny is something you look back at after it’s past, not something you see in advance. I have a certain amount of experience where these things are concerned. You don’t.”

“But anyhow, you say I’m not going to die here?”

He scooped up a handful of sand and let it run out between his fingers. “This much I can say, Lieutenant. You won’t be dying here on the continent.”

I wanted to go on talking about this, but Corporal Honda refused to say anything more. He seemed to be absorbed in his own contemplations or meditations. Holding his rifle, he stared out at the vast prairie. Nothing I said seemed to reach him.

I went back to the low-pitched tent in the shelter of a dune, lay down beside Sergeant Hamano, and closed my eyes. This time sleep came to take me—a deep sleep that all but pulled me by the ankles to the bottom of the sea.

13

Lieutenant Mamiya’s Long Story: Part II

*

What woke me was the metallic click of a rifle’s safety being released. No soldier in battle could ever miss that sound, even in a deep sleep. It’s a—how can I say it?—a special sound, as cold and heavy as death itself. Almost instinctively, I reached for the Browning next to my pillow, but just then a shoe slammed into my temple, the impact blinding me momentarily. After I had brought my breathing under control, I opened my eyes just enough to see the man who must have kicked me. He was kneeling down and picking up my Browning. I slowly lifted my head, to find the muzzles of two rifles pointed at my face. Beyond the rifles stood two Mongolian soldiers.

I was sure I had fallen asleep in a tent, but the tent was gone now, and a skyful of stars shone overhead. Another Mongolian soldier was pointing a light machine gun at the head of Yamamoto, who was lying beside me. He lay utterly still, as if conserving his energy because he knew it was useless to resist. All of the Mongols wore long overcoats and battle helmets. Two of them were aiming large flashlights at Yamamoto and at me. At first I couldn’t grasp what had happened: my sleep had been too deep and the shock too great. But the sight of the Mongolian soldiers and of Yamamoto’s face left no doubt in my mind: our tents had been discovered before we had had a chance to ford the river.

Then it occurred to me to wonder what had become of Honda and Hamano. I turned my head very slowly, trying to survey the area, but neither man was there. Either they had been killed already or they had managed to escape.

These had to be the men of the patrol we had seen earlier at the ford. They were few in number, and they were equipped with a light machine gun and rifles. In command was a ruggedly built noncom, the only one of the bunch to be wearing proper military boots. He was the man who had kicked me. He bent over and picked up the leather valise that Yamamoto had had by his head. Opening it, he looked inside, then he turned it upside down and shook it. All that fell to the ground was a pack of cigarettes. I could hardly believe it. With my own eyes, I had seen Yamamoto putting the document into that bag. He had taken it from a saddlebag, put it in this valise, and placed the valise by his pillow. Yamamoto struggled to maintain his cool, but I saw his expression momentarily begin to change. He obviously had no idea what had happened to the document. But whatever the explanation might be, its disappearance must have been a great relief to him. As he had said to me earlier, our number one priority was seeing to it that the document never fell into enemy hands.

The soldiers dumped all our belongings on the ground and inspected them in detail, but they found nothing important. Next they stripped us and went through our pockets. They bayoneted our clothing and packs, but they found no documents. They took our cigarettes and pens, our wallets and notebooks and watches, and pocketed them. By turns, they tried on our shoes, and anyone they fit took them. The men's arguments over who got what became pretty intense, but the noncom ignored them. I suppose it was normal among the Mongols to take booty from prisoners of war and enemy dead. The noncom took only Yamamoto's watch, leaving the other items for his men to fight over. The rest of our equipment—our pistols and ammunition and maps and compasses and binoculars—went into a cloth bag, no doubt for sending to Ulan Bator headquarters.

Next they tied us up, naked, with strong, thin rope. At close range, the Mongol soldiers smelled like a stable that had not been cleaned for a long, long time. Their uniforms were shabby, filthy with mud and dust and food stains to the point where it was all but impossible to tell what the original color had been. Their shoes were full of holes and falling off their feet—quite literally. No wonder they wanted ours. They had brutish faces for the most part, their teeth a mess, their hair long and wild. They looked more like mounted bandits or highwaymen than soldiers, but their Soviet-made weapons and their starred insignia indicated that they were regular troops of the Mongolian People's Republic. To me, of course, their discipline as a fighting unit and their military esprit seemed rather poor. Mongols make for tough, long-suffering soldiers, but they're not much suited to modern group warfare.

The night was freezing cold. Watching the white clouds of the Mongolian soldiers' breath bloom and vanish in the darkness, I felt as if a strange error had brought me into the landscape of someone else's nightmare. I couldn't grasp that this was actually happening. It was indeed a nightmare, but only later did I come to realize that it was just the beginning of a nightmare of enormous proportions.

A short time later, one of the Mongolian soldiers came out of the darkness, dragging something heavy. With a big smile, he threw the object on the ground next to us. It was Hamano's corpse. The feet were bare: someone had already taken his boots. They proceeded to strip his clothes off, examining everything they could find in his pockets. Hands reached out for his watch, his wallet, and his cigarettes. They divided up the cigarettes and smoked them while looking through the wallet. This yielded a few pieces of Manchukuo paper money and a photo of a woman who was probably Hamano's mother. The officer in charge said something and took the money. The photo was flung to the ground.

One of the Mongolian soldiers must have sneaked up behind Hamano and slit his throat while he was standing guard. They had done to us first what we had been planning to do to them. Bright-red blood was flowing from the body's gaping wound, but for such a big wound

there was not much blood; most of it had probably been lost by then. One of the soldiers pulled a knife from the scabbard on his belt, its curved blade some six inches long. He waved it in my face. I had never seen such an oddly shaped knife. It seemed to have been designed for some special purpose. The soldier made a throat-slashing motion with the knife and whistled through his teeth. Some of the others laughed. Rather than government issue, the knife seemed to be the man's personal property. Everyone had a long bayonet at his waist, but this man was the only one carrying a curved knife, and he had apparently used it to slit Hamano's throat. After a few deft swirls of the blade, he returned it to its scabbard.

Without a word, and moving only his eyes, Yamamoto sent a glance in my direction. It lasted just an instant, but I knew immediately what he was trying to say: Do you think Corporal Honda managed to get away? Through all the confusion and terror, I had been thinking the same thing:

Where is Corporal Honda? If Honda escaped this sudden attack of the Outer Mongolian troops, there might be some chance for us—a slim chance, perhaps, and the question of what Honda could do out there alone was depressing, but some chance was better than no chance at all. They kept us tied up all night, lying on the sand. Two soldiers were left to watch over us: one with the light machine gun, the other with a rifle. The rest sat some distance away, smoking, talking, and laughing, seemingly relaxed now that they had captured us. Neither Yamamoto nor I said a word. The dawn temperature dropped to freezing in that place, even in May. I thought we might freeze to death, lying there naked. But the cold itself was nothing in comparison with the terror I felt. I had no idea what we were in for. These men were a simple patrol unit: they probably did not have the authority to decide what to do with us. They had to wait for orders. Which meant that we would probably not be killed right away. After that, however, there was no way to tell what would happen. Yamamoto was more than likely a spy, and I had been caught with him, so naturally I would be seen as an accomplice. In any case, we would not get off easily.

Some time after dawn broke, a sound like the drone of an airplane engine came out of the distant sky. Eventually, the silver-colored fuselage entered my field of vision. It was a Soviet-made reconnaissance plane, bearing the insignia of Outer Mongolia. The plane circled above us several times. The soldiers all waved, and the plane dipped its wing in return. Then it landed in a nearby open area, sending up clouds of sand. The earth was hard here, and there were no obstructions, which made it relatively easy to take off and land without a runway. For all I knew, they might have used the same spot for this purpose any number of times. One of the soldiers mounted a horse and galloped off toward the plane with two saddled horses in tow.

When they returned, the two horses carried men who appeared to be high-ranking officers. One was Russian, the other Mongolian. I assumed that the patrol had radioed headquarters about our capture and that the two officers had made the trip from Ulan Bator to interrogate us. They were intelligence officers, no doubt. I had heard that the GPU was at work behind the scenes in the previous year's mass arrest and purge of antigovernment activists.

Both officers wore immaculate uniforms and were clean-shaven. The Russian wore a kind of trench coat with a belt. His boots shone with an unblemished luster. He was a thin man, but not very tall for a Russian, and perhaps in his early thirties. He had a wide forehead, a narrow nose, and skin almost pale pink in color, and he wore wire-rim glasses. Overall, though, this was a face that made no impression to speak of. Standing next to him, the short, stout, dark Mongolian officer looked like a little bear.

The Mongolian called the noncom aside, and the three men talked for a while. I guessed that the officers were asking for a detailed report. The noncom brought over a bag containing the things they had confiscated from us and showed them to the others. The Russian studied each object with great care, then put them all back into the bag. He said something to the Mongolian, who in turn spoke to the noncom. Then the Russian took a cigarette case from his

breast pocket and opened it for the other two. They went on talking and smoking together. Several times, as he spoke, the Russian slammed his right fist into his left palm. He looked somewhat annoyed. The Mongolian officer kept his arms folded and his face grim, while the noncom shook his head now and then.

Eventually, the Russian officer ambled over to where we lay on the ground. "Would you like a smoke?" he asked in Russian. As I said earlier, I had studied Russian in college and could follow a conversation pretty well, but I pretended not to understand, so as to avoid any difficulties. "Thanks, but no thanks," said Yamamoto in Russian. He was good.

"Excellent," said the Soviet Army officer. "Things will go more quickly if we can speak in Russian."

He removed his gloves and put them in his coat pocket. A small gold ring shone on his left hand. 'As you are no doubt aware, we are looking for a certain something. Looking very hard for it. And we know you have it. Don't ask how we know; we just know. But you do not have it on you now. Which means that, logically speaking, you must have hidden it before you were captured. You haven't transported it over there.' He motioned toward the Khalkha River. "None of you has crossed the river. The letter must be on this side, hidden somewhere. Do you understand what I have said to you so far?"

Yamamoto nodded. "I understand," he said, "but we know nothing about a letter."

"Fine," said the Russian, expressionless. "In that case, I have one little question to ask you. What were you men doing over here? As you know, this territory belongs to the Mongolian People's Republic. What was your purpose in entering land that belongs to others? I want to hear your reason for this."

"Mapmaking," Yamamoto explained. "I am a civilian employee of a map company, and this man and the one they killed were with me for protection. We knew that this side of the river was your territory, and we are sorry for having crossed the border, but we did not think of ourselves as having made a territorial violation. We simply wanted to observe the topography from the vantage point of the plateau on this side."

Far from amused, the Russian officer curled his lips into a smile. " 'We are sorry'?" he said slowly. "Yes, of course. You wanted to see the topography from the plateau. Yes, of course. The view is always better from high ground. It makes perfect sense."

For a time he said nothing, but stared at the clouds in the sky. Then he returned his gaze to Yamamoto, shook his head slowly, and sighed.

"If only I could believe what you are telling me! How much better it would be for all of us! If only I could pat you on the shoulder and say, 'Yes, yes, I see, now run along home across the river, and be more careful in the future.' I truly wish I could do this. But unfortunately, I cannot. Because I know who you are. And I know what you are doing here. We have friends in Hailar, just as you have friends in Ulan Bator."

He took the gloves from his pocket, refolded them, and put them back. "Quite honestly, I have no personal interest in hurting you or killing you. If you would simply give me the letter, then I would have no further business with you. You would be released from this place immediately at my discretion. You could cross the river and go home. I promise you that, on my honor. Anything else that happened would be an internal matter for us. It would have nothing to do with you."

The light of the sun from the east was finally beginning to warm my skin. There was no wind, and a few hard white clouds floated in the sky. A long, long silence followed. No one said a word. The Russian officer, the Mongolian officer, the men of the patrol, and Yamamoto: each preserved his own sphere of silence. Yamamoto had seemed resigned to death from the moment of our capture; his face never showed the slightest hint of expression.

"The two of you ... will... almost certainly ... die here," the Russian went on slowly, a phrase at a time, as if speaking to children. "And it will be a terrible death. They ..." And here the Russian glanced toward the Mongolian soldiers. The big one, holding the machine gun,

looked at me with a snaggletoothed grin. "They love to kill people in ways that involve great difficulty and imagination. They are, shall we say, aficionados. Since the days of Genghis Khan, the Mongols have enjoyed devising particularly cruel ways to kill people. We Russians are painfully aware of this. It is part of our history lessons in school. We study what the Mongols did when they invaded Russia. They killed millions. For no reason at all. They captured hundreds of Russian aristocrats in Kiev and killed them all together. Do you know that story? They cut huge, thick planks, laid the Russians beneath them, and held a banquet on top of the planks, crushing them to death beneath their weight. Ordinary human beings would never think of such a thing, don't you agree? It took time and a tremendous amount of preparation. Who else would have gone to the trouble? But they did it. And why? Because it was a form of amusement to them. And they still enjoy doing such things. I saw them in action once. I thought I had seen some terrible things in my day, but that night, as you can imagine, I lost my appetite. Do you understand what I am saying to you? Am I speaking too quickly?"

Yamamoto shook his head.

"Excellent," said the Russian. He paused, clearing his throat. "Of course, this will be the second time for me. Perhaps my appetite will have returned by dinnertime. If possible, however, I would prefer to avoid unnecessary killing."

Hands clasped together behind his back, he looked up at the sky for a time. Then he took his gloves out and glanced toward the plane. "Beautiful weather," he said. "Spring. Still a little cold, but just about right. Any hotter, and there would be mosquitoes. Terrible mosquitoes. Yes, spring is much better than summer." He took out his cigarette case again, put a cigarette between his lips, and lit it with a match. Slowly, he drew the smoke into his lungs, and slowly he let it out again. "I'm going to ask you once more: Do you insist that you really know nothing about the letter?"

Yamamoto said only one word: "*Nyet.*"

"Fine," said the Russian. "Fine." Then he said something in Mongolian to the Mongolian officer. The man nodded and barked an order to the soldiers. They carried over some rough logs and began to sharpen them with their bayonets, quickly turning them into four stakes. Pacing off the distance between the stakes, they pounded them into the ground with rocks at the four corners of a square. All these preparations took some twenty minutes to complete, I guessed, but I had absolutely no idea what they were for.

The Russian said, "To them, an excellent slaughter is like an excellent meal. The longer they take with their preparations, the more enjoyment they derive from the act. Simply killing a man is no problem: one pistol shot and it's all over. But that would not be"-and here he ran his fingertip slowly over his smooth chin-"very interesting."

They untied Yamamoto and led him to the staked-off area. There they tied his arms and legs to the four stakes. Stretched out on the ground, stark naked, Yamamoto had several raw wounds on his body.

"As you know, these people are shepherds," said the Russian officer. "And shepherds use their sheep in many ways: they eat their flesh, they shear their wool, they take their hides. To them, sheep are the perfect animal. They spend their days with sheep-their whole lives with sheep. They know how to skin them with amazing skill. The hides they use for tents and clothing. Have you ever seen them skin a sheep?"

"Just kill me and get it over with," said Yamamoto. The Russian brought his palms together and, while rubbing them slowly, nodded to Yamamoto. "Don't worry," he said. "We will be certain to kill you. I guarantee you that. It may take a little time, but you will die. There is nothing to worry about on that score. We are in no hurry. Here we are in the vast wilderness, where there is nothing as far as the eye can see. Only time. All the time we need. And I have many things I wish to tell you. Now, as to the procedure of skinning: Every band has at least one specialist-one professional, as it were, who knows everything there is to know about cutting off the skin, a man of miraculous skill. His skinning is a work of art. He does it

in the twinkling of an eye, with such speed and dexterity you would think that the creature being skinned alive never noticed what was happening. But of course"-he took the cigarette case from his breast pocket once again, shifted it to his left hand, and tapped upon it with the fingers of his right-"not to notice such a thing would be out of the question. The one being skinned alive experiences terrible pain. Unimaginable pain. And it takes an incredibly long time for death to come. Massive hemorrhaging is what does it finally, but that takes time."

He snapped his fingers. The Mongolian officer stepped forward. From his coat pocket he produced a sheathed knife. It was shaped like the one used before by the soldier who had made the throat-slitting gesture. He pulled the knife from its sheath and held it aloft. In the morning sun, the blade shone with a dull white gleam.

"This man is one of those professionals of whom I spoke," said the Russian officer. "I want you to look at his knife. Closely. It is a very special knife, designed for skinning, and it is extraordinarily well made. The blade is as thin and sharp as a razor. And the technical skill these people bring to the task is extremely high. They've been skinning animals for thousands of years, after all. They can take a man's skin off the way you'd peel a peach. Beautifully, without a single scratch. Am I speaking too quickly for you, by any chance?"

Yamamoto said nothing.

"They do a small area at a time," said the Russian officer. "They have to work slowly if they want to remove the skin cleanly, without any scratches. If, in the meantime, you feel you want to say something, please let me know. Then you won't have to die. Our man here has done this several times, and never once has he failed to make the person talk. Keep that in mind. The sooner we stop, the better for both of us."

Holding his knife, the bearlike Mongolian officer looked at Yamamoto and grinned. To this day, I remember that smile. I see it in my dreams. I have never been able to forget it. No sooner had he flashed this smile than he set to work. His men held Yamamoto down with their hands and knees while he began skinning Yamamoto with the utmost care. It truly was like skinning a peach. I couldn't bear to watch. I closed my eyes. When I did this, one of the soldiers hit me with his rifle butt. He went on hitting me until I opened my eyes. But it hardly mattered: eyes open or closed, I could still hear Yamamoto's voice. He bore the pain without a whimper-at first. But soon he began to scream. I had never heard such screams before: they did not seem part of this world. The man started by slitting open Yamamoto's shoulder and proceeded to peel off the skin of his right arm from the top down-slowly, carefully, almost lovingly. As the Russian officer had said, it was something like a work of art. One would never have imagined there was any pain involved, if it weren't for the screams. But the screams told the horrendousness of the pain that accompanied the work.

Before long, the entire skin of Yamamoto's right arm had come off in a single thin sheet. The skinner handed it to the man beside him, who held it open in his fingertips, circulating among the others to give them a good look. All the while, blood kept dripping from the skin. Then the officer turned to Yamamoto's left arm, repeating the procedure. After that he skinned both legs, cut off the penis and testicles, and removed the ears. Then he skinned the head and the face and everything else. Yamamoto lost consciousness, regained it, and lost it again. The screams would stop whenever he passed out and continue when he came to again. But his voice gradually weakened and finally gave out altogether. All this time, the Russian officer drew meaningless patterns on the ground with the heel of his boot. The Mongolian soldiers watched the procedure in silence. Their faces remained expressionless, showing neither disgust nor excitement nor shock. They watched Yamamoto's skin being removed a piece at a time with the same kind of effaces we might have if we were out for a stroll and stopped to have a look at a construction site.

Meanwhile, I did nothing but vomit. Over and over again. Long after it seemed there was nothing more for me to bring up, I continued to vomit. At last, the bearlike Mongolian officer held up the skin of Yamamoto's torso, which he had so cleanly peeled off. Even the nipples

were intact. Never to this day have I seen anything so horrible. Someone took the skin from him and spread it out to dry the way we might dry a sheet. All that remained lying on the ground was Yamamoto's corpse, a bloody red lump of meat from which every trace of skin had been removed. The most painful sight was the face. Two large white eyeballs stared out from the red mass of flesh. Teeth bared, the mouth stretched wide open as if in a shout. Two little holes were all that remained where the nose had been removed. The ground was a sea of blood.

The Russian officer spit on the ground and looked at me. Then he took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his mouth. "The fellow really didn't know anything, did he?" he said, putting the handkerchief back. His voice sounded somewhat flatter than it had before. "If he had known, he would have talked. Pity. But in any case, the man was a professional. He was bound to have an ugly death sooner or later. Ah, well, can't be helped. And if *he* knew nothing, there's no way that you could know anything."

He put a cigarette between his lips and struck a match. "Which means that you are no longer of any use to us. Not worth torturing for information. Not worth keeping alive as a prisoner. We want to dispose of this affair in the utmost secrecy. There could be complications if we brought you back to Ulan Bator. The best thing, of course, would be to put a bullet in your brain here and now, then bury you or burn you and throw your ashes into the Khalkha. That would be a simple end to the matter. Don't you agree?" He fixed his eyes on mine. I continued to pretend that I could not understand him. "You don't understand Russian, I suppose. It's a waste of time to spell this out to you. Ah, well. I might as well be talking to myself. So hear me out. In any case, I have good news for you. I have decided not to kill you. Think of this as my own small expression of penitence for having pointlessly killed your friend in spite of myself. We've all had our fill of killing this morning. Once a day is more than enough.

And so I will not kill you. Instead, I will give you a chance to survive. If all goes well, you may even come out of this alive. The chances of that happening are not good, of course. Perhaps nonexistent. But a chance is a chance. At least it is far better than being skinned alive. Don't you agree?"

He raised his hand and summoned the Mongolian officer. With great care, the man had been washing his knife with water from a canteen and had just finished sharpening it on a whetstone. The soldiers had laid out the pieces of Yamamoto's skin and were standing by them, discussing something. They seemed to be exchanging opinions on the finer points of the skinner's technique. The Mongolian officer put his knife in its scabbard and then into the pocket of his coat before approaching us. He looked me in the face for a moment, then turned to his fellow officer. The Russian spoke a few short Mongolian phrases to him, and without expression the man nodded. A soldier brought two horses for them.

"We'll be going back to Ulan Bator now," the Russian said to me. "I hate to return empty-handed, but it can't be helped. Win some, lose some. I hope my appetite comes back by dinnertime, but I rather doubt it will."

They mounted their horses and left. The plane took off, became a silver speck in the western sky, then disappeared altogether, leaving me alone with the Mongolian soldiers and their horses.

They set me on a horse and lashed me to the saddle. Then, in formation, we moved out to the north. The soldier just in front of me kept singing some monotonous melody in a voice that was barely audible. Aside from that, there was nothing to be heard but the dry sound of the horses' hooves kicking up sand. I had no idea where they were taking me or what they were going to do to me. All I knew was that to them, I was a superfluous being of no value whatever. Over and over in my head I repeated to myself the words of the Russian officer. He had said he would not kill me. He would not kill me, but my chances of surviving were almost nonexistent. What could this mean? It was too vague for me to grasp in any concrete way.

Perhaps they were going to use me in some kind of horrible game. They wouldn't simply dispatch me, because they planned to enjoy the dreadful contrivance at their leisure.

But at least they hadn't killed me. At least they hadn't skinned me alive like Yamamoto. I might not be able to avoid being killed in the end, but not like *that*. I was alive for now; I was still breathing. And if what the Russian officer had said was true, I would not be killed immediately. The more time that lay between me and death, the more chance I had to survive. It might be a minuscule chance, but all I could do was cling to it.

Then, all of a sudden, the words of Corporal Honda flared to life again in my brain: that strange prognostication of his that I would not die on the continent. Even as I sat there, tied to the saddle, the skin of my naked back burning in the desert sun, I repeatedly savored every syllable that he had spoken. I let myself dwell on his expression, his intonation, the sound of each word. And I resolved to believe him from the bottom of my heart. No, no, I was not going to lie down and die in a place like this! I would come out of this alive! I would tread my native soil once again!

We traveled north for two hours or more, coming to a stop near a Lamaist devotional mound. These stone markers, called *oboo*, serve both as the guardian deity for travelers and as valuable signposts in the desert. Here the men dismounted and untied my ropes. Supporting my weight from either side, two of them led me a short distance away. I figured that this was where I would be killed. A well had been dug into the earth here. The mouth of the well was surrounded by a three-foot-high stone curb. They made me kneel down beside it, grabbed my neck from behind, and forced me to look inside. I couldn't see a thing in the solid darkness. The noncom with the boots found a fist-sized rock and dropped it into the well. Some time later came the dry sound of stone hitting sand. So the well was a dry one, apparently. It had once served as a well in the desert, but it must have dried up long before, owing to a movement of the subterranean vein of water. Judging from the time it took the stone to hit bottom, it seemed to be fairly deep.

The noncom looked at me with a big grin. Then he took a large automatic pistol from the leather holster on his belt. He released the safety and fed a bullet into the chamber with a loud click. Then he put the muzzle of the gun against my head.

He held it there for a long time but did not pull the trigger. Then he slowly lowered the gun and raised his left hand, pointing toward the well. Licking my dry lips, I stared at the gun in his fist. What he was trying to tell me was this: I had a choice between two fates. I could have him shoot me now—just die and get it over with. Or I could jump into the well. Because it was so deep, if I landed badly I might be killed. If not, I would die slowly at the bottom of a dark hole. It finally dawned on me that this was the chance the Russian officer had spoken of. The Mongolian noncom pointed at the watch that he had taken from Yamamoto and held up five fingers. He was giving me five seconds to decide. When he got to three, I stepped onto the well curb and leaped inside. I had no choice. I had hoped to be able to cling to the wall and work my way down, but he gave me no time for that. My hands missed the wall, and I tumbled down.

It seemed to take a very long time for me to hit bottom. In reality, it could not have been more than a few seconds, but I do recall thinking about a great many things on my way down. I thought about my hometown, so far away. I thought about the girl I slept with just once before they shipped me out. I thought about my parents. I recall feeling grateful that I had a younger sister and not a brother: even if I was killed, they would still have her and not have to worry about her being taken by the army. I thought about rice cakes wrapped in oak leaves. Then I slammed into dry ground and lost consciousness for a moment. It felt as if all the air inside me had burst through the walls of my body. I thudded against the well bottom like a sandbag.

It truly was just a moment that I lost consciousness from the impact, I believe. When I came to, I felt some kind of spray hitting me. At first I thought it was rain, but I was wrong. It

was urine. The Mongolian soldiers were all peeing on me where I lay in the bottom of the well. I looked up to see them in silhouette far above me, taking turns coming to the edge of the round hole to pee. There was a terrible unreality to the sight, like a drug-induced hallucination. But it was real. I was really in the bottom of the well, and they were spraying me with real pee. Once they had finished, someone shone a flashlight on me. I heard them laughing. And then they disappeared from the edge of the hole. After that, everything sank into a deep silence.

For a while, I thought it best to lie there facedown, waiting to see if they would come back. But after twenty minutes had gone by, then thirty (as far as I could tell without a watch), they did not come back. They had gone away and left me, it seemed. I had been abandoned at the bottom of a well in the middle of the desert. Once it was clear that they would not be returning, I decided to check myself over for injuries. In the darkness, this was no easy feat. I couldn't see my own body. I couldn't tell with my own eyes what condition it was in. I could only resort to my perceptions, but I could not be sure that the perceptions I was experiencing in the darkness were accurate. I felt that I was being deceived, deluded. It was a very strange feeling.

Little by little, though, and with great attention to detail, I began to grasp my situation. The first thing I realized was that I had been extremely lucky. The bottom of the well was relatively soft and sandy. If it hadn't been, then the impact of falling such a distance would have broken every bone in my body. I took one long, deep breath and tried to move. First I tried moving my fingers. They responded, although somewhat feebly. Then I tried to raise myself to a sitting position on the earthen surface, but this I was unable to do. My body felt as if it had lost all sensation. My mind was fully conscious, but there was something wrong with the connection between my mind and my body. My mind would decide to do something, but it was unable to convert the thought into muscular activity. I gave up and, for a while, lay there quietly in the dark.

Just how long I remained still I have no idea. But little by little, my perceptions began to return. And along with the recovery of my perceptions, naturally enough, came the sensation of pain. Intense pain. Almost certainly, my leg was broken. And my shoulder might be dislocated or, perhaps, if luck was against me, even broken.

I lay still, enduring the pain. Before I knew it, tears were streaming down my cheeks-tears of pain and, even more, tears of despair. I don't think you will ever be able to understand what it is like-the utter loneliness, the feeling of desperation-to be abandoned in a deep well in the middle of the desert at the edge of the world, overcome with intense pain in total darkness. I went so far as to regret that the Mongolian noncom had not simply shot me and gotten it over with. If I had been killed that way, at least they would have been aware of my death. If I died here, however, it would be a truly lonely death, a death of no concern to anyone, a silent death.

Now and then, I heard the sound of the wind. As it moved across the surface of the earth, the wind made an uncanny sound at the mouth of the well, a sound like the moan of a woman in tears in a far-off world. That world and this were joined by a narrow shaft, through which the woman's voice reached me here, though only at long, irregular intervals. I had been left all alone in deep silence and even deeper darkness.

Enduring the pain, I reached out to touch the earthen floor around me. The well bottom was flat. It was not very wide, maybe five or five and a half feet. As I was groping the ground, my hand suddenly came upon a hard, sharp object. In reflexive fear, I drew my hand back, but then slowly and carefully I reached out toward the thing. Again my fingers came in contact with the sharp object. At first I thought it was a tree branch, but soon enough I realized I was touching bones. Not human bones, but those of a small animal, which had been scattered at random, either by the passage of time or by my fall. There was nothing else at the bottom of the well, just sand: fine and dry.

Next I ran my palm over the wall. It seemed to be made of thin, flat stones. As hot as the desert surface became in daytime, that heat did not penetrate to this world belowground. The stones had an icy chill to them. I ran my hand over the wall, examining the gaps between stones. If I could get a foothold there, I might be able to climb to the surface. But the gaps turned out to be too narrow for that, and in my battered state, climbing seemed all but impossible.

With a tremendous effort, I dragged myself closer to the wall and raised myself against it, into a sitting position. Every move made my leg and shoulder throb as if they had been stuck with hundreds of thick needles. For a while after that, each breath made me feel that my body might crack apart. I touched my shoulder and realized it was hot and swollen.

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How much time went by after that I do not know. But at one point something happened that I would never have imagined. The light of the sun shot down from the opening of the well like some kind of revelation. In that instant, I could see everything around me. The well was filled with brilliant light. A flood of light. The brightness was almost stifling: I could hardly breathe. The darkness and cold were swept away in a moment, and warm, gentle sunlight enveloped my naked body. Even the pain I was feeling seemed to be blessed by the light of the sun, which now warmly illuminated the white bones of the small animal beside me. These bones, which could have been an omen of my own impending fate, seemed in the sunlight more like a comforting companion. I could see the stone walls that encircled me. As long as I remained in the light, I was able to forget about my fear and pain and despair. I sat in the dazzling light in blank amazement. Then the light disappeared as suddenly as it had come. Deep darkness covered everything once again. The whole interval had been extremely short. In terms of the clock, it must have lasted ten or, at the most, fifteen seconds. No doubt, because of the angles involved, this was all the sun could manage to shine straight down to the bottom of the hole in any single day. The flood of sunlight was gone before I could begin to comprehend its meaning.

After the light faded, I found myself in an even deeper darkness than before. I was all but unable to move. I had no water, no food, not a scrap of clothing on my body. The long afternoon went by, and night came, when the temperature plunged. I could hardly sleep. My body craved sleep, but the cold pricked my skin like a thousand tiny thorns. I felt as if my life's core was stiffening and dying bit by bit. Above me, I could see stars frozen in the sky. Terrifying numbers of stars. I stared up at them, watching as they slowly crept along. Their movement helped me ascertain that time was continuing to flow on. I slept for a short while, awoke with the cold and pain, slept a little more, then woke again.

Eventually, morning came. From the round mouth of the well, the sharp pinpoints of starlight gradually began to fade. Still, even after dawn broke, the stars did not disappear completely. Faint almost to the point of imperceptibility, they continued to linger there, on and on. To slake my thirst, I licked the morning dew that clung to the stone wall. The amount of water was minuscule, of course, but to me it tasted like a bounty from heaven. The thought crossed my mind that I had had neither food nor water for an entire day. And yet I had no sense of hunger.

I remained there, still, in the bottom of the hole. It was all I could do. I couldn't even think, so profound were my feelings of loneliness and despair. I sat there doing nothing, thinking nothing. Unconsciously, however, I waited for that ray of light, that blinding flood of sunlight that poured straight down to the bottom of the well for one tiny fraction of the day. It must have been a phenomenon that occurred very close to noon, when the sun was at the highest point in the sky and its light struck the surface of the earth at right angles. I waited for the coming of the light and for nothing else. There was nothing else I could wait for.

A very long time went by, it seems. At some point I drifted into sleep. By the time I sensed the presence of something and woke, the light was already there. I realized that I was being enveloped once again by that overwhelming light. Almost unconsciously, I spread open both my hands and received the sun in my palms. It was far stronger than it had been the first time. And it lasted far longer than it had then. At least it felt that way to me. In the light, tears poured out of me. I felt as if all the fluids of my body might turn into tears and come streaming from my eyes, that my body itself might melt away like this. If it could have happened in the bliss of this marvelous light, even death would have been no threat. Indeed, I felt I *wanted* to die. I had a marvelous sense of oneness, an overwhelming sense of unity. Yes, that was it: the true meaning of life resided in that light that lasted for however many seconds it was, and I felt I *ought to die* right then and there.

But of course, before anything could happen, the light was gone. I was still there, in the bottom of that miserable well. Darkness and cold reasserted their grip on me, as if to declare that the light had never existed at all. For a long time, I simply remained huddled where I was, my face bathed in tears. As if beaten down by some huge power, I was unable to do-or even to think-anything at all, unable to feel even my own physical existence. I was a dried-up carcass, the cast-off shell of an insect. But then, once again, into the empty room of my mind, returned the prophecy of Corporal Honda: I would not die on the continent. Now, after the light had come and gone, I found myself able to believe his prophecy. I could believe it now because, in a place where I should have died, and at a time when I should have died, I had been unable to die. It was not that I *would not* die: I *could not* die. Do you understand what I am saying, Mr. Okada? Whatever heavenly grace I may have enjoyed until that moment was lost forever.

At this point in his story, Lieutenant Mamiya looked at his watch. "And as you can see," he added softly, "here I am." He shook his head as if trying to sweep away the invisible threads of memory. "Just as Mr. Honda had said, I did not die on the continent. And of the four of us who went there, I have lived the longest."

I nodded in response.

"Please forgive me for talking on at such length. It must have been very boring for you, listening to a useless old man chatter on about the old days." Lieutenant Mamiya shifted his position on the sofa. "My goodness, I'll be late for my train if I stay any longer."

I hastened to restrain him. "Please don't end your story there," I said. "What happened after that? I want to hear the rest."

He looked at me for a moment.

"How would this be, then?" he asked. "I really am running late, so why don't you walk with me to the bus stop? I can probably give you a quick summary along the way."

I left the house with him and walked to the bus stop.

"On the third morning, I was saved by Corporal Honda. He had sensed that the Mongols were coming for us that night, slipped out of the tent, and remained in hiding all that time. He had taken the document from Yamamoto's bag with him. He did this because our number one priority was to see to it that the document not fall into enemy hands, no matter how great the sacrifice we had to make. No doubt you are wondering why, if he realized that the Mongols were coming, Corporal Honda ran away by himself instead of waking the rest of us so that we could escape together. The simple fact of the matter is that we had no hope of winning in such a situation. They knew that we were there. It was their territory. They had us far outnumbered and outgunned. It would have been the simplest thing in the world for them to find us, kill us, and take the document. Given the situation, Corporal Honda had no choice but to escape by himself. On the battlefield, his actions would have been a clear case of deserting under fire, but on a special assignment like ours, the most important thing is resourcefulness.

"He saw everything that happened. He watched them skinning Yamamoto. He saw the Mongolian soldiers take me away. But he no longer had a horse, so he could not follow immediately. He had to come on foot. He dug up the extra supplies that we had buried in the

desert, and there he buried the document. Then he came after me. For him to find me down in the well, though, required a tremendous effort. He didn't even know which direction we had taken." "How *did* he find the well?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Lieutenant Mamiya. "He didn't say much about that. He just *knew*, I'd say. When he found me, he tore his clothing into strips and made a long rope. By then, I was practically unconscious, which made it all the more difficult for him to pull me up. Then he managed to find a horse and put me on it. He took me across the dunes, across the river, and to the Manchukuo Army outpost. There they treated my wounds and put me on a truck sent out by headquarters. I was taken to the hospital in Hailar."

"What ever happened to that document or letter or whatever it was?" "It's probably still there, sleeping in the earth near the Khalkha River. For Corporal Honda and me to go all the way back and dig it up would have been out of the question, nor could we find any reason to make such an effort. We arrived at the conclusion that such a thing should never have existed in the first place. We coordinated our stories for the army's investigation. We decided to insist that we had heard nothing about any document. Otherwise, they probably would have held us responsible for not bringing it back from the desert. They kept us in separate rooms, under strict guard, supposedly for medical treatment, and they questioned us every day. All these high-ranking officers would come and make us tell our stories over and over again. Their questions were meticulous, and very clever. But they seemed to believe us. I told them every little detail of what I had experienced, being careful to omit anything I knew about the document. Once they got it all down, they warned me that this was a top-secret matter that would not appear in the army's formal records, that I was never to mention it to anyone, and that I would be severely punished if I did. Two weeks later, I was sent back to my original post, and I believe that Corporal Honda was also returned to his home unit."

"One thing is still not clear to me," I said. "Why did they go to all the trouble of bringing Mr. Honda from his unit for this assignment?"

"He never said much to me about that. He had probably been forbidden to tell anyone, and I suspect that he thought it would be better for me not to know. Judging from my conversations with him, though, I imagine there was some kind of personal relationship between him and the man they called Yamamoto, something that had to do with his special powers. I had often heard that the army had a unit devoted to the study of the occult. They supposedly gathered people with these spiritual or psychokinetic powers from all over the country and conducted experiments on them. I suspect that Mr. Honda met Yamamoto in that connection. In any case, without those powers of his, Mr. Honda would never have been able to find me in the well and guide me to the exact location of the Manchukuo Army outpost. He had neither map nor compass, yet he was able to head us straight there without the slightest uncertainty. Common sense would have told you that such a thing was impossible. I was a professional mapmaker, and I knew the geography of that area quite well, but I could never have done what he did. These powers of Mr. Honda were probably what Yamamoto was looking to him for."

We reached the bus stop and waited.

"Certain things will always remain as riddles, of course," said Lieutenant Mamiya. "There are many things I still don't understand. I still wonder who that lone Mongolian officer was who met us in the desert. And I wonder what would have happened if we had managed to bring that document back to headquarters. Why did Yamamoto not simply leave us on the right bank of the Khalkha and cross over by himself? He would have been able to move around far more freely that way. Perhaps he had been planning to use us as a decoy for the Mongolian troops so that he could escape alone. It certainly is conceivable. Perhaps Corporal Honda realized this from the start and that was why he merely stood by while the Mongolians killed him.

"In any case, it was a very long time after that before Corporal Honda and I had an

opportunity to meet again. We were separated from the moment we arrived in Hailar and were forbidden to speak or even to see each other. I had wanted to thank him one last time, but they made that impossible. He was wounded in the battle for Nomonhan and sent home, while I remained in Manchuria until the end of the war, after which I was sent to Siberia. I was only able to find him several years later, after I was repatriated from my Siberian internment. We did manage to meet a few times after that, and we corresponded. But he seemed to avoid talking about what had happened to us at the Khalkha River, and I myself was not too eager to discuss it. For both of us, it had simply been too enormous an experience. We shared it by not *talking about it*. Does this make any sense?

“This has turned into a very long story, but what I wanted to convey to you was my feeling that real life may have ended for me deep in that well in the desert of Outer Mongolia. I feel as if, in the intense light that shone for a mere ten or fifteen seconds a day in the bottom of the well, I burned up the very core of my life, until there was nothing left. That is how mysterious that light was to me. I can’t explain it very well, but as honestly and simply as I can state it, no matter what I have encountered, no matter what I have experienced since then, I ceased to feel anything in the bottom of my heart. Even in the face of those monstrous Soviet tank units, even when I lost this left hand of mine, even in the hellish Soviet internment camps, a kind of numbness was all I felt. It may sound strange to say this, but none of that mattered. Something inside me was already dead. Perhaps, as I felt at the time, I should have died in that light, simply faded away. That was the time for me to die. But, as Mr. Honda had predicted, I did not die there. Or perhaps I should say that I *could not* die there.

“I came back to Japan, having lost my hand and twelve precious years. By the time I arrived in Hiroshima, my parents and my sister were long since dead. They had put my little sister to work in a factory, which was where she was when the bomb fell. My father was on his way to see her at the time, and he, too, lost his life. The shock sent my mother to her deathbed; she finally passed away in 1947. As I told you earlier, the girl to whom I had been secretly engaged was now married to another man, and she had given birth to two children. In the cemetery, I found my own grave. There was nothing left for me. I felt truly empty, and knew that I should not have come back there. I hardly remember what my life has been like since then. I became a social studies teacher and taught geography and history in high school, but I was not, in the true sense of the word, alive. I simply performed the mundane tasks that were handed to me, one after another. I never had one real friend, no human ties with the students in my charge. I never loved anyone. I no longer knew what it meant to love another person. I would close my eyes and see Yamamoto being skinned alive. I dreamed about it over and over. Again and again I watched them peel the skin off and turn him into a lump of flesh. I could hear his heartrending screams. I also had dreams of myself slowly rotting away, alive, in the bottom of the well. Sometimes it seemed to me that that was what had really happened and that my life here was the dream.

“When Mr. Honda told me on the bank of the Khalkha River that I would not die on the continent, I was overjoyed. It was not a matter of believing or not believing: I wanted to cling to something then- anything at all. Mr. Honda probably knew that and told me what he did in order to comfort me. But of joy there was to be none for me. After returning to Japan, I lived like an empty shell. Living like an empty shell is not really living, no matter how many years it may go on. The heart and flesh of an empty shell give birth to nothing more than the life of an empty shell. This is what I hope I have made clear to you, Mr. Okada.”

“Does this mean,” I ventured, “that you never married after returning to Japan?”

“Of course not,” answered Lieutenant Mamiya. “I have no wife, no parents or siblings. I am entirely alone.”

After hesitating a moment, I asked, “Are you sorry that you ever heard Mr. Honda’s prediction?”

Now it was Lieutenant Mamiya’s turn to hesitate. After a moment of silence, he looked

me straight in the face. "Maybe I am," he said. "Maybe he should never have spoken those words. Maybe I should never have heard them." As Mr. Honda said at the time, a person's destiny is something you look back at afterward, not something to be known in advance. I do believe this, however: now it makes no difference either way. All I am doing now is fulfilling my obligation to go on living."

The bus came, and Lieutenant Mamiya favored me with a deep bow. Then he apologized to me for having taken up my valuable time. "Well, then, I shall be on my way," he said. "Thank you for everything. I am glad in any case that I was able to hand you the package from Mr. Honda. This means that my job is done at last. I can go home with an easy mind." Using both his right hand and the artificial one, he deftly produced the necessary coins and dropped them into the fare box.

I stood there and watched as the bus disappeared around the next corner. After it was gone, I felt a strange emptiness inside, a hopeless kind of feeling like that of a small child who has been left alone in an unfamiliar neighborhood.

Then I went home, and sitting on the living room couch, I opened the package that Mr. Honda had left me as a keepsake. I worked up a sweat removing layer after layer of carefully sealed wrapping paper, until a sturdy cardboard box emerged. It was a fancy Cutty Sark gift box, but it was too light to contain a bottle of whiskey. I opened it, to find nothing inside. It was absolutely empty. All that Mr. Honda had left me was an empty box.

Book Two: Bird as Prophet

July to October 1984

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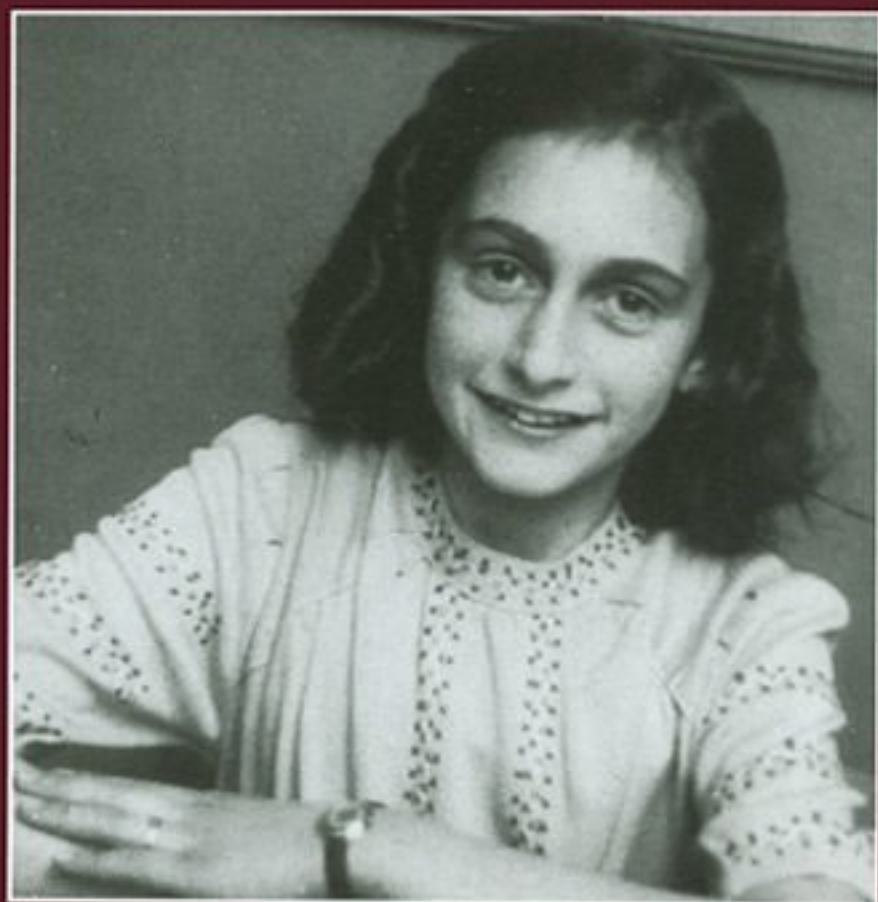
As Concrete as Possible

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Appetite in Literature

Kumiko never came back that night. I stayed up until midnight, reading, listening to music, and waiting for her, but finally I gave up and went to bed. I fell asleep with the light on. It was

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ANNE FRANK



THE DIARY
OF A
YOUNG GIRL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL : THE DEFINITIVE EDITION

Anne Frank

Edited by Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Pressler

Translated by Susan Massotty

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BOOK FLAP

Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* is among the most enduring documents of the twentieth century. Since its publication in 1947, it has been read by tens of millions of people all over the world. It remains a beloved and deeply admired testament to the indestructable nature of the human spirit.

Restored in this Definitive Edition are diary entries that had been omitted from the original edition. These passages, which constitute 30 percent more material, reinforce the fact that Anne was first and foremost a teenage girl, not a remote and flawless symbol. She fretted about, and tried to cope with, her own emerging sexuality. Like many young girls, she often found herself in disagreement with her mother. And like any teenager, she veered between the carefree nature of a child and the full-fledged sorrow of an adult. Anne emerges more human, more vulnerable, and more vital than ever.

Anne Frank and her family, fleeing the horrors of Nazi occupation, hid in the back of an Amsterdam warehouse for two years. She was thirteen when the family went into the Secret Annex, and in these pages she grows to be a young woman and a wise observer of human nature as well. With unusual insight, she reveals the relations between eight people living under extraordinary conditions, facing hunger, the ever-present threat of discovery and death, complete estrangement from the outside world, and above all, the boredom, the petty misunderstandings, and the frustrations of living under such unbearable strain, in such confined quarters.

A timely story rediscovered by each new generation, *The Diary of a Young Girl* stands without peer. For both young readers and adults it continues to bring to life this young woman, who for a time survived the worst horror of the modern world had seen -- and who remained triumphantly and heartbreakingly human throughout her ordeal. For those who know and love Anne Frank, *The Definitive Edition* is a chance to discover her anew. For readers who have not yet encountered her, this is the edition to cherish.

ANNE FRANK was born on June 12, 1929. She died while imprisoned at Bergen-Belsen, three months short of her sixteenth birthday. OTTO H. FRANK was the only member of his immediate family to survive the Holocaust. He died in 1980. MIRIAM PRESSLER is a popular writer of books for young adults. She lives in Germany.

Translated by Susan Massotty.

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FOREWORD

Anne Frank kept a diary from June 12, 1942, to August 1, 1944. Initially, she wrote it strictly for herself. Then, one day in 1944, Gerrit Bolkestein, a member of the Dutch government in exile, announced in a radio broadcast from London that after the war he hoped to collect eyewitness accounts of the suffering of the Dutch people under the German occupation, which could be made available to the public. As an example, he specifically mentioned letters and diaries.

Impressed by this speech, Anne Frank decided that when the war was over she would publish a book based on her diary. She began rewriting and editing her diary, improving on the text, omitting passages she didn't think were interesting enough and adding others from memory. At the same time, she kept up her original diary. In the scholarly work *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Critical Edition* (1989), Anne's first, unedited diary is referred to as version a, to distinguish it from her second, edited diary, which is known as version b.

The last entry in Anne's diary is dated August 1, 1944. On August 4, 1944, the eight people hiding in the Secret Annex were arrested. Miep Gies and Bep Voskuijl, the two secretaries working in the building, found Anne's diaries strewn all over the floor. Miep Gies tucked them away in a desk drawer for safekeeping. After the war, when it became clear that Anne was dead, she gave the diaries, unread, to Anne's father, Otto Frank.

After long deliberation, Otto Frank decided to fulfill his daughter's wish and publish her diary. He selected material from versions a and b, editing them into a shorter version later referred to as version c. Readers all over the world know this as *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

In making his choice, Otto Frank had to bear several points in mind. To begin with,

the book had to be kept short so that it would fit in with a series put out by the Dutch publisher. In addition, several passages dealing with Anne's sexuality were omitted; at the time of the diary's initial publication, in 1947, it was not customary to write openly about sex, and certainly not in books for young adults. Out of respect for the dead, Otto Frank also omitted a number of unflattering passages about his wife and the other residents of the Secret Annex. Anne Frank, who was thirteen when she began her diary and fifteen when she was forced to stop, wrote without reserve about her likes and dislikes.

When Otto Frank died in 1980, he willed his daughter's manuscripts to the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation in Amsterdam. Because the authenticity of the diary had been challenged ever since its publication, the Institute for War Documentation ordered a thorough investigation. Once the diary was proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, to be genuine, it was published in its entirety, along with the results of an exhaustive study. The Critical Edition contains not only versions a, b, and c, but also articles on the background of the Frank family, the circumstances surrounding their arrest and deportation, and the examination into Anne's handwriting, the document and the materials used.

The Anne Frank-Fonds (Anne Frank Foundation) in Basel (Switzerland), which as Otto Frank's sole heir had also inherited his daughter's copyrights, then decided to have a new, expanded edition of the diary published for general readers. This new edition in no way affects the integrity of the old one originally edited by Otto Frank, which brought the diary and its message to millions of people. The task of compiling the expanded edition was given to the writer and translator Mirjam Pressler. Otto Frank's original selection has now been supplemented with passages from Anne's a and b versions. Mirjam Pressler's definitive edition, approved by the Anne Frank-Fonds, contains approximately 30 percent more material and is intended to give the reader more insight into the world of Anne Frank.

In writing her second version (b), Anne invented pseudonyms for the people who would appear in her book. She initially wanted to call herself Anne Aulis, and later Anne Robin. Otto Frank opted to call his family by their own names and to follow Anne's wishes with regard to the others. Over the years, the identity of the people who helped the family in the Secret Annex has become common knowledge. In this edition, the helpers are now referred to by their real names, as they so justly deserve to be. All other persons are named in accordance with the pseudonyms in The Critical Edition. The Institute for War Documentation has arbitrarily assigned initials to those persons wishing to remain anonymous.

The real names of the other people hiding in the Secret Annex are:

THE VAN PELS FAMILY

(from Osnabriick, Germany):

Auguste van Pels (born September 9, 1890)

Hermann van Pels (born March 31, 1889)

Peter van Pels (born November 8, 1926)

Called by Anne, in her manuscript: Petronella, Hans and Alfred van Daan; and in the book: Petronella, Hermann and Peter van Daan.

FRITZ PFEFFER

(born April 30, 1889, in Giessen, Germany):

Called by Anne, in her manuscript and in the book: Alfred Dussel.

The reader may wish to bear in mind that much of this edition is based on the b version of Anne's diary, which she wrote when she was around fifteen years old. Occasionally, Anne went back and commented on a passage she had written earlier. These comments are clearly marked in this edition. Naturally, Anne's spelling and linguistic errors have been corrected. Otherwise, the text has basically been left as she wrote it, since any attempts at editing and clarification would be inappropriate in a historical document.

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I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support.

-- : --

June 12, 1942

I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support.

COMMENT ADDED BY ANNE ON SEPTEMBER 28, 1942: So far you truly have been a areat source of comfort to me, and so has Kitty, whom I now write to regularly. This way of keeping a diary is much nicer, and now I can hardly wait for those moments when I'm able to write in you. Oh, I'm so alad I brought you along!

SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 1942

I'll begin from the moment I got you, the moment I saw you lying on the table among my other birthday presents. (I went along when you were bought, but that doesn't count.)

On Friday, June 12, I was awake at six o'clock, which isn't surprising, since it was my birthday. But I'm not allowed to get up at that hour, so I had to control my curiosity until quarter to seven. When I couldn't wait any longer, I went to the dining room, where Moortje (the cat) welcomed me by rubbing against my legs.

A little after seven I went to Daddy and Mama and then to the living room to open my presents, and you were the first thing I saw, maybe one of my nicest presents. Then a bouquet of roses, some peonies and a potted plant. From Daddy and Mama I got a blue blouse, a game, a bottle of grape juice, which to my mind tastes a bit like wine (after all, wine is made from grapes), a puzzle, a jar of cold cream, 2.50 guilders and a gift certificate for two books. I got another book as well, Camera Obscura (but Margot already has it, so I exchanged mine for something else), a platter of homemade cookies (which I made myself, of course, since I've become quite an expert at baking cookies), lots of candy and a strawberry tart from Mother. And a letter from Grammy, right on time, but of course that was just a coincidence.

Then Hanneli came to pick me up, and we went to school. During recess I passed out cookies to my teachers and my class, and then it was time to get back to work. I didn't arrive home until five, since I went to gym with the rest of the class. (I'm not allowed to take part because my shoulders and hips tend to get dislocated.) As it was my birthday, I got to decide which game my classmates would play, and I chose volleyball. Afterward they all danced around me in a circle and sang "Happy Birthday." When I got home, Sanne Ledermann was already there. Ilse Wagner, Hanneli Goslar and Jacqueline van Maarsen came home with me after gym, since we're in the same class. Hanneli and Sanne used to be my two best friends. People who saw us together used to say, "There goes Anne, Hanne and Sanne." I only met Jacqueline van Maarsen when I started at the Jewish Lyceum, and now she's my best friend. Ilse is Hanneli's best friend, and Sanne goes to another school and has friends there.

They gave me a beautiful book, Dutch Sasas and Lesends, but they gave me Volume II by mistake, so I exchanged two other books for Volume I. Aunt Helene brought me a puzzle, Aunt Stephanie a darling brooch and Aunt Leny a terrific book: Daisy Goes to the Mountains.

This morning I lay in the bathtub thinking how wonderful it would be if I had a dog

like Rin Tin Tin. I'd call him Rin Tin Tin too, and I'd take him to school with me, where he could stay in the janitor's room or by the bicycle racks when the weather was good.

MONDAY, JUNE 15, 1942

I had my birthday party on Sunday afternoon. The Rin Tin Tin movie was a big hit with my classmates. I got two brooches, a bookmark and two books. I'll start by saying a few things about my school and my class, beginning with the students.

Betty Bloemendaal looks kind of poor, and I think she probably is. She lives on some obscure street in West Amsterdam, and none of us know where it is. She does very well at school, but that's because she works so hard, not because she's so smart. She's pretty quiet.

Jacqueline van Maarsen is supposedly my best friend, but I've never had a real friend. At first I thought Jacque would be one, but I was badly mistaken.

D.Q.* [* Initials have been assigned at random to those persons who prefer to remain anonymous.] is a very nervous girl who's always forgetting things, so the teachers keep assigning her extra homework as punishment. She's very kind, especially to G.Z.

E.S. talks so much it isn't funny. She's always touching your hair or fiddling with your buttons when she asks you something. They say she can't stand me, but I don't care, since I don't like her much either.

Henny Mets is a nice girl with a cheerful disposition, except that she talks in a loud voice and is really childish when we're playing outdoors. Unfortunately, Henny has a girlfriend named Beppy who's a bad influence on her because she's dirty and vulgar.

J.R. — I could write a whole book about her. J. is a detestable, sneaky, stuck-up, two-faced gossip who thinks she's so grown-up. She's really got Jacque under her spell, and that's a shame. J. is easily offended, bursts into tears at the slightest thing and, to top it all off, is a terrible show-off. Miss J. always has to be right. She's very rich, and has a closet full of the most adorable dresses that are way too old for her. She thinks she's gorgeous, but she's not. J. and I can't stand each other.

Ilse Wagner is a nice girl with a cheerful disposition, but she's extremely flinicky and can spend hours moaning and groaning about something. Ilse likes me a lot. She's very smart, but lazy.

Hanneli Goslar, or Lies as she's called at school, is a bit on the strange side. She's usually shy -- outspoken at home, but reserved around other people. She blabs whatever you tell her to her mother. But she says what she thinks, and lately I've come to appreciate her a great deal.

Nannie van Praag-Sigaar is small, funny and sensible. I think she's nice. She's pretty smart. There isn't much else you can say about Nannie. Eefje de Jong is, in my opinion, terrific. Though she's only twelve, she's quite the lady. She acts as if I were a baby. She's also very helpful, and I like her.

G.Z. is the prettiest girl in our class. She has a nice face, but is kind of dumb. I think they're going to hold her back a year, but of course I haven't told her that.

COMMENT ADDED BY ANNE AT A LATER DATE: To my great surprise, G.Z. wasn't held back a year after all.

And sitting next to G.Z. is the last of us twelve girls, me.

There's a lot to be said about the boys, or maybe not so much after all.

Maurice Coster is one of my many admirers, but pretty much of a pest. Sallie Springer has a filthy mind, and rumor has it that he's gone all the way. Still, I think he's terrific, because he's very funny.

Emiel Bonewit is G.Z.'s admirer, but she doesn't care. He's pretty boring. Rob Cohen used to be in love with me too, but I can't stand him anymore. He's an obnoxious, two-faced, lying, sniveling little goof who has an awfully high opinion of himself.

Max van de Velde is a farm boy from Medemblik, but eminently suitable, as Margot would say.

Herman Koopman also has a filthy mind, just like Jopie de Beer, who's a terrible flirt and absolutely girl-crazy.

Leo Blom is Jopie de Beer's best friend, but has been ruined by his dirty mind.

Albert de Mesquita came from the Montessori School and skipped a grade. He's really smart.

Leo Slager came from the same school, but isn't as smart.

Ru Stoppelmon is a short, goofy boy from Almelo who transferred to this school in the middle of the year.

C.N. does whatever he's not supposed to.

Jacques Kocernoot sits behind us, next to C., and we (G. and I) laugh ourselves silly.

Harry Schaap is the most decent boy in our class. He's nice.

Werner Joseph is nice too, but all the changes taking place lately have made him too quiet, so he seems boring. Sam Salomon is one of those tough guys from across the tracks. A real brat. (Admirer!)

Appie Riem is pretty Orthodox, but a brat too.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 1942

Writing in a diary is a really strange experience for someone like me. Not only because I've never written anything before, but also because it seems to me that later on neither I nor anyone else will be interested in the musings of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl. Oh well, it doesn't matter. I feel like writing, and I have an even greater need to get all kinds of things off my chest.

"Paper has more patience than people." I thought of this saying on one of those days when I was feeling a little depressed and was sitting at home with my chin in my hands, bored and listless, wondering whether to stay in or go out. I finally stayed where I was, brooding. Yes, paper does have more patience, and since I'm not planning to let anyone else read this stiff-backed notebook grandly referred to as a "diary," unless I should ever find a real friend, it probably won't make a bit of difference.

Now I'm back to the point that prompted me to keep a diary in the first place: I don't have a friend.

Let me put it more clearly, since no one will believe that a thirteen year-old girl is completely alone in the world. And I'm not. I have loving parents and a sixteen-year-old sister, and there are about thirty people I can call friends. I have a throng of admirers who can't keep their adoring eyes off me and who sometimes have to resort to using a broken pocket mirror to try and catch a glimpse of me in the classroom. I have a family, loving aunts and a good home. No, on the surface I seem to have everything, except my one true friend. All I think about when I'm with friends is having a good time. I can't bring myself to talk about anything but ordinary

everyday things. We don't seem to be able to get any closer, and that's the problem. Maybe it's my fault that we don't confide in each other. In any case, that's just how things are, and unfortunately they're not liable to change. This is why I've started the diary.

To enhance the image of this long-awaited friend in my imagination, I don't want to jot down the facts in this diary the way most people would do, but I want the diary to be my friend, and I'm going to call this friend Kitty.

Since no one would understand a word of my stories to Kitty if I were to plunge right in, I'd better provide a brief sketch of my life, much as I dislike doing so.

My father, the most adorable father I've ever seen, didn't marry my mother until he was thirty-six and she was twenty-five. My sister Margot was born in Frankfurt am Main in Germany in 1926. I was born on June 12, 1929. I lived in Frankfurt until I was four. Because we're Jewish, my father immigrated to Holland in 1933, when he became the Managing Director of the Dutch Opekta Company, which manufactures products used in making jam. My mother, Edith Hollander Frank, went with him to Holland in September, while Margot and I were sent to Aachen to stay with our grandmother. Margot went to Holland in December, and I followed in February, when I was plunked down on the table as a birthday present for Margot.

I started right away at the Montessori nursery school. I stayed there until I was six, at which time I started first grade. In sixth grade my teacher was Mrs. Kuperus, the principal. At the end of the year we were both in tears as we said a heartbreaking farewell, because I'd been accepted at the Jewish Lyceum, where Margot also went to school.

Our lives were not without anxiety, since our relatives in Germany were suffering under Hitler's anti-Jewish laws. After the pogroms in 1938 my two uncles (my mother's brothers) fled Germany, finding safe refuge in North America. My elderly grandmother came to live with us. She was seventy-three years old at the time.

After May 1940 the good times were few and far between: first there was the war, then the capitulation and then the arrival of the Germans, which is when the trouble started for the Jews. Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees: Jews were required to wear a yellow star; Jews were required to turn in their bicycles; Jews were forbidden to use street-cars; Jews were forbidden to ride in cars, even their own; Jews were required to do their shopping between 3 and 5 P.M.; Jews were required to frequent only Jewish-owned barbershops and beauty parlors; Jews were forbidden to be out on the streets between 8 P.M. and 6 A.M.; Jews were

forbidden to attend theaters, movies or any other forms of entertainment; Jews were forbidden to use swimming pools, tennis courts, hockey fields or any other athletic fields; Jews were forbidden to go rowing; Jews were forbidden to take part in any athletic activity in public; Jews were forbidden to sit in their gardens or those of their friends after 8 P.M.; Jews were forbidden to visit Christians in their homes; Jews were required to attend Jewish schools, etc. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that, but life went on. Jacque always said to me, "I don't dare do anything anymore, 'cause I'm afraid it's not allowed."

In the summer of 1941 Grandma got sick and had to have an operation, so my birthday passed with little celebration. In the summer of 1940 we didn't do much for my birthday either, since the fighting had just ended in Holland. Grandma died in January 1942. No one knows how often I think of her and still love her. This birthday celebration in 1942 was intended to make up for the others, and Grandma's candle was lit along with the rest.

The four of us are still doing well, and that brings me to the present date of June 20, 1942, and the solemn dedication of my diary.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 1942

Dearest Kitty! Let me get started right away; it's nice and quiet now. Father and Mother are out and Margot has gone to play Ping-Pong with some other young people at her friend Trees's. I've been playing a lot of Ping-Pong myself lately. So much that five of us girls have formed a club. It's called "The Little Dipper Minus Two." A really silly name, but it's based on a mistake. We wanted to give our club a special name; and because there were five of us, we came up with the idea of the Little Dipper. We thought it consisted of five stars, but we turned out to be wrong. It has seven, like the Big Dipper, which explains the "Minus Two." Ilse Wagner has a Ping-Pong set, and the Wagners let us play in their big dining room whenever we want. Since we five Ping-Pong players like ice cream, especially in the summer, and since you get hot playing Ping-Pong, our games usually end with a visit to the nearest ice-cream parlor that allows Jews: either Oasis or Delphi. We've long since stopped hunting around for our purses or money -- most of the time it's so busy in Oasis that we manage to find a few generous young men of our acquaintance or an admirer to offer us more ice cream than we could eat in a week.

You're probably a little surprised to hear me talking about admirers at such a tender age. Unfortunately, or not, as the case may be, this vice seems to be rampant at our school. As soon as a boy asks if he can bicycle home with me and we get to talking, nine times out of ten I can be sure he'll become enamored on the spot and won't let

me out of his sight for a second. His ardor eventually cools, especially since I ignore his passionate glances and pedal blithely on my way. If it gets so bad that they start rambling on about "asking Father's permission," I swerve slightly on my bike, my schoolbag falls, and the young man feels obliged to get off his bike and hand me the bag, by which time I've switched the conversation to another topic. These are the most innocent types. Of course, there are those who blow you kisses or try to take hold of your arm, but they're definitely knocking on the wrong door. I get off my bike and either refuse to make further use of their company or act as if I'm insulted and tell them in no uncertain terms to go on home without me. There you are. We've now laid the basis for our friendship. Until tomorrow.

Yours, Anne

SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Our entire class is quaking in its boots. The reason, of course, is the upcoming meeting in which the teachers decide who'll be promoted to the next grade and who'll be kept back. Half the class is making bets. G.Z. and I laugh ourselves sick at the two boys behind us, C.N. and Jacques Kocernoot, who have staked their entire vacation savings on their bet. From morning to night, it's "You're going to pass, No, I'm not," "Yes, you are," "No, I'm not." Even G.'s pleading glances and my angry outbursts can't calm them down. If you ask me, there are so many dummies that about a quarter of the class should be kept back, but teachers are the most unpredictable creatures on earth. Maybe this time they'll be unpredictable in the right direction for a change. I'm not so worried about my girlfriends and myself.

We'll make it. The only subject I'm not sure about is math. Anyway, all we can do is wait. Until then, we keep telling each other not to lose heart.

I get along pretty well with all my teachers. There are nine of them, seven men and two women. Mr. Keesing, the old fogey who teaches math, was mad at me for the longest time because I talked so much. After several warnings, he assigned me extra homework. An essay on the subject "A Chatterbox." A chatterbox, what can you write about that? I'd wbrry about that later, I decided. I jotted down the assignment in my notebook, tucked it in my bag and tried to keep quiet.

That evening, after I'd finished the rest of my homework, the note about the essay caught my eye. I began thinking about the subject while chewing the tip of my fountain pen. Anyone could ramble on and leave big spaces between the words, but the

trick was to come up with convincing arguments to prove the necessity of talking. I thought and thought, and suddenly I had an idea. I wrote the three pages Mr. Keesing had assigned me and was satisfied. I argued that talking is a female trait and that I would do my best to keep it under control, but that I would never be able to break myself of the habit, since my mother talked as much as I did, if not more, and that there's not much you can do about inherited traits.

Mr. Keesing had a good laugh at my arguments, but when I proceeded to talk my way through the next class, he assigned me a second essay. This time it was supposed to be on "An Incurable Chatterbox." I handed it in, and Mr. Keesing had nothing to complain about for two whole classes. However, during the third class he'd finally had enough. "Anne Frank, as punishment for talking in class, write an essay entitled 'Quack, Quack, Quack,' said Mistress Chatterback."

The class roared. I had to laugh too, though I'd nearly exhausted my ingenuity on the topic of chatterboxes. It was time to come up with something else, something original. My friend Sanne, who's good at poetry, offered to help me write the essay from beginning to end in verse. I jumped for joy. Keesing was trying to play a joke on me with this ridiculous subject, but I'd make sure the joke was on him. I finished my poem, and it was beautiful! It was about a mother duck and a father swan with three baby ducklings who were bitten to death by the father because they quacked too much. Luckily, Keesing took the joke the right way. He read the poem to the class, adding his own comments, and to several other classes as well. Since then I've been allowed to talk and haven't been assigned any extra homework. On the contrary, Keesing's always making jokes these days.

Yours, Anne

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

It's sweltering. Everyone is huffing and puffing, and in this heat I have to walk everywhere. Only now do I realize how pleasant a streetcar is, but we Jews are no longer allowed to make use of this luxury; our own two feet are good enough for us. Yesterday at lunchtime I had an appointment with the dentist on Jan Luykenstraat. It's a long way from our school on Stadstimmeruinen. That afternoon I nearly fell asleep at my desk. Fortunately, people automatically offer you something to drink. The dental assistant is really kind.

The only mode of transportation left to us is the ferry. The ferryman at Josef

Israelkade took us across when we asked him to. It's not the fault of the Dutch that we Jews are having such a bad time.

I wish I didn't have to go to school. My bike was stolen during Easter vacation, and Father gave Mother's bike to some Christian friends for safekeeping. Thank goodness summer vacation is almost here; one more week and our torment will be over.

Something unexpected happened yesterday morning. As I was passing the bicycle racks, I heard my name being called. I turned around and there was the nice boy I'd met the evening before at my friend Wilma's. He's Wilma's second cousin. I used to think Wilma was nice, which she is, but all she ever talks about is boys, and that gets to be a bore. He came toward me, somewhat shyly, and introduced himself as Hello Silberberg. I was a little surprised and wasn't sure what he wanted, but it didn't take me long to find out. He asked if I would allow him to accompany me to school. "As long as you're headed that way, I'll go with you," I said. And so we walked together. Hello is sixteen and good at telling all kinds of funny stories.

He was waiting for me again this morning, and I expect he will be from now on.

Anne

WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Until today I honestly couldn't find the time to write you. I was with friends all day Thursday, we had company on Friday, and that's how it went until today.

Hello and I have gotten to know each other very well this past week, and he's told me a lot about his life. He comes from Gelsenkirchen and is living with his grandparents. His parents are in Belgium, but there's no way he can get there. Hello used to have a girlfriend named Ursula. I know her too. She's perfectly sweet and perfectly boring. Ever since he met me, Hello has realized that he's been falling asleep at Ursul's side. So I'm kind of a pep tonic. You never know what you're good for!

Jacque spent Saturday night here. Sunday afternoon she was at Hanneli's, and I was bored stiff.

Hello was supposed to come over that evening, but he called around six. I answered the phone, and he said, "This is Helmuth Silberberg. May I please speak to Anne?"

"Oh, Hello. This is Anne."

"Oh, hi, Anne. How are you?" "

"Fine, thanks."

"I just wanted to say I'm sorry but I can't come tonight, though I would like to have a word with you. Is it all right if I come by and pick you up in about ten minutes

"Yes, that's fine. Bye-bye!"

"Okay, I'll be right over. Bye-bye!"

I hung up, quickly changed my clothes and fixed my hair. I was so nervous I leaned out the window to watch for him. He finally showed up. Miracle of miracles, I didn't rush down the stairs, but waited quietly until he rang the bell. I went down to open the door, and he got right to the point.

"Anne, my grandmother thinks you're too young for me to be seeing you on a regular basis. She says I should be going to the Lowenbachs', but you probably know that I'm not going out with Ursul anymore."

"No, I didn't know. What happened? Did you two have a fight?"

"No, nothing like that. I told Ursul that we weren't suited to each other and so it was better for us not to go together anymore, but that she was welcome at my house and I hoped I would be welcome at hers. Actually, I thought Ursul was hanging around with another boy, and I treated her as if she were. But that wasn't true. And then my uncle said I should apologize to her, but of course I didn't feel like it, and that's why I broke up with her. But that was just one of the reasons.

"Now my grandmother wants me to see Ursul and not you, but I don't agree and I'm not going to. Sometimes old people have really old-fashioned ideas, but that doesn't mean I have to go along with them. I need my grandparents, but in a certain sense they need me too. From now on I'll be free on Wednesday evenings. You see, my grandparents made me sign up for a wood-carving class, but actually I go to a club organized by the Zionists. My grandparents don't want me to go, because they're anti-Zionists. I'm not a fanatic Zionist, but it interests me. Anyway, it's been such a mess lately that I'm planning to quit. So next Wednesday will be my last meeting. That means I can see you Wednesday evening, Saturday afternoon, Saturday evening, Sunday afternoon and maybe even more."

"But if your grandparents don't want you to, you? shouldn't go behind their backs."

"All's fair in love and war."

Just then we passed Blankevoort's Bookstore and there was Peter Schiff with two other boys; it was the first time he'd said hello to me in ages, and it really made me feel good.

Monday evening Hello came over to meet Father and Mother. I had bought a cake and some candy, and we had tea and cookies, the works, but neither Hello nor I felt like sitting stiffly on our chairs. So we went out for a walk, and he didn't deliver me to my door until ten past eight. Father was furious. He said it was very wrong of me not to get home on time. I had to promise to be home by ten to eight in the future. I've been asked to Hello's on Saturday.

Wilma told me that one night when Hello was at her house, she asked him, "Who do you like best, Ursul or Anne?"

He said, "It's none of your business."

But as he was leaving (they hadn't talked to each other the rest of the evening), he said, "Well, I like Anne better, but don't tell anyone. Bye!" And whoosh. . . he was out the door.

In everything he says or does, I can see that Hello is in love with me, and it's kind of nice for a change. Margot would say that Hello is eminently suitable. I think so too, but he's more than that. Mother is also full of praise: "A good-looking boy. Nice and polite." I'm glad he's so popular with everyone. Except with my girlfriends. He thinks they're very childish, and he's right about that. Jacque still teases me about him, but I'm not in love with him. Not really. It's all right for me to have boys as friends. Nobody minds.

Mother is always asking me who I'm going to marry when I grow up, but I bet she'll never guess it's Peter, because I talked her out of that idea myself, without batting an eyelash. I love Peter as I've never loved anyone, and I tell myself he's only going around with all those other girls to hide his feelings for me. Maybe he thinks Hello and I are in love with each other, which we're not. He's just a friend, or as Mother puts it, a beau.

Yours, Anne

SUNDAY, JULY 5, 1942

Dear Kitty,

The graduation ceremony in the Jewish Theater on Friday went as expected. My report card wasn't too bad. I got one D, a C- in algebra and all the rest B's, except for two B+'s and two B-'s. My parents are pleased, but they're not like other parents when it comes to grades. They never worry about report cards, good or bad. As long as I'm healthy and happy and don't talk back too much, they're satisfied. If these three things are all right, everything else will take care of itself.

I'm just the opposite. I don't want to be a poor student. I was accepted to the Jewish Lyceum on a conditional basis. I was supposed to stay in the seventh grade at the Montessori School, but when Jewish children were required to go to Jewish schools, Mr. Elte finally agreed, after a great deal of persuasion, to accept Lies Goslar and me. Lies also passed this year, though she has to repeat her geometry exam.

Poor Lies. It isn't easy for her to study at home; her baby sister, a spoiled little two-year-old, plays in her room all day. If Gabi doesn't get her way, she starts screaming, and if Lies doesn't look after her, Mrs. Goslar starts screaming. So Lies has a hard time doing her homework, and as long as that's the case, the tutoring she's been getting won't help much. The Goslar household is really a sight. Mrs. Goslar's parents live next door, but eat with the family. There's a hired girl, the baby, the always absentminded and absent Mr. Goslar and the always nervous and irritated Mrs. Goslar, who's expecting another baby. Lies, who's all thumbs, gets lost in the mayhem.

My sister Margot has also gotten her report card.

Brilliant, as usual. If we had such a thing as "cum laude," she would have passed with honors, she's so smart.

Father has been home a lot lately. There's nothing for him to do at the office; it must be awful to feel you're not needed. Mr. Kleiman has taken over Opekta, and Mr. Kugler, Gies & Co., the company dealing in spices and spice substitutes that was set up in 1941.

A few days ago, as we were taking a stroll around our neighborhood square, Father began to talk about going into hiding. He said it would be very hard for us to live cut off from the rest of the world. I asked him why he was bringing this up now.

"Well, Anne," he replied, "you know that for more than a year we've been bringing clothes, food and furniture to other people. We don't want our belongings to be seized by the Germans. Nor do we want to fall into their clutches ourselves. So we'll leave of our own accord and not wait to be hauled away."

"But when, Father?" He sounded so serious that I felt scared.

"Don't you worry. We'll take care of everything. just enjoy your carefree life while you can."

That was it. Oh, may these somber words not come true for as long as possible.

The doorbell's ringing, Hello's here, time to stop.

Yours, Anne

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

It seems like years since Sunday morning. So much has happened it's as if the whole world had suddenly turned upside down. But as you can see, Kitty, I'm still alive, and that's the main thing, Father says. I'm alive all right, but don't ask where or how. You probably don't understand a word I'm saying today, so I'll begin by telling you what happened Sunday afternoon.

At three o'clock (Hello had left but was supposed to come back later), the doorbell rang. I didn't hear it, since I was out on the balcony, lazily reading in the sun. A little while later Margot appeared in the kitchen doorway looking very agitated. "Father has received a call-up notice from the SS," she whispered. "Mother has gone to see Mr. van Daan" (Mr. van Daan is Father's business partner and a good friend.)

I was stunned. A call-up: everyone knows what that means. Visions of concentration camps and lonely cells raced through my head. How could we let Father go to such a fate? "Of course he's not going," declared Margot as we waited for Mother in the living room. "Mother's gone to Mr. van Daan to ask whether we can move to our hiding place tomorrow. The van Daans are going with us. There will be seven of us altogether." Silence. We couldn't speak. The thought of Father off visiting someone in the Jewish Hospital and completely unaware of what was happening, the long wait for Mother, the heat, the suspense -- all this reduced us to silence.

Suddenly the doorbell rang again. "That's Hello," I said.

"Don't open the door!" exclaimed Margot to stop me. But it wasn't necessary, since we heard Mother and Mr. van Daan downstairs talking to Hello, and then the two of them came inside and shut the door behind them. Every time the bell rang, either Margot or I had to tiptoe downstairs to see if it was Father, and we didn't let anyone else in. Margot and I were sent from the room, as Mr. van Daan wanted to talk to Mother alone.

When she and I were sitting in our bedroom, Margot told me that the call-up was not for Father, but for her. At this second shock, I began to cry. Margot is sixteen -- apparently they want to send girls her age away on their own. But thank goodness she won't be going; Mother had said so herself, which must be what Father had meant when he talked to me about our going into hiding. Hiding. . . where would we hide? In the city? In the country? In a house? In a shack? When, where, how. . . ? These were questions I wasn't allowed to ask, but they still kept running through my mind.

Margot and I started packing our most important belongings into a schoolbag. The first thing I stuck in was this diary, and then curlers, handkerchiefs, schoolbooks, a comb and some old letters. Preoccupied by the thought of going into hiding, I stuck the craziest things in the bag, but I'm not sorry. Memories mean more to me than dresses.

Father finally came home around five o'clock, and we called Mr. Kleiman to ask if he could come by that evening. Mr. van Daan left and went to get Miep. Miep arrived and promised to return later that night, taking with her a bag full of shoes, dresses, jackets, underwear and stockings. After that it was quiet in our apartment; none of us felt like eating. It was still hot, and everything was very strange.

We had rented our big upstairs room to a Mr. Goldschmidt, a divorced man in his thirties, who apparently had nothing to do that evening, since despite all our polite hints he hung around until ten o'clock.

Miep and Jan Gies came at eleven. Miep, who's worked for Father's company since 1933, has become a close friend, and so has her husband Jan. Once again, shoes, stockings, books and underwear disappeared into Miep's bag and Jan's deep pockets. At eleven-thirty they too disappeared.

I was exhausted, and even though I knew it'd be my last night in my own bed, I fell asleep right away and didn't wake up until Mother called me at five-thirty the next morning. Fortunately, it wasn't as hot as Sunday; a warm rain fell throughout the day.

The four of us were wrapped in so many layers of clothes it looked as if we were going off to spend the night in a refrigerator, and all that just so we could take more clothes with us. No Jew in our situation would dare leave the house with a suitcase full of clothes. I was wearing two undershirts, three pairs of underpants, a dress, and over that a skirt, a jacket, a raincoat, two pairs of stockings, heavy shoes, a cap, a scarf and lots more. I was suffocating even before we left the house, but no one bothered to ask me how I felt.

Margot stuffed her schoolbag with schoolbooks, went to get her bicycle and, with Miep leading the way, rode off into the great unknown. At any rate, that's how I thought of it, since I still didn't know where our hiding place was.

At seven-thirty we too closed the door behind us; Moortje, my cat, was the only living creature I said good-bye to. According to a note we left for Mr. Goldschmidt, she was to be taken to the neighbors, who would give her a good home.

The stripped beds, the breakfast things on the table, the pound of meat for the cat in the kitchen -- all of these created the impression that we'd left in a hurry. But we weren't interested in impressions. We just wanted to get out of there, to get away and reach our destination in safety. Nothing else mattered.

More tomorrow.

Yours, Anne

THURSDAY, JULY 9, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

So there we were, Father, Mother and I, walking in the pouring rain, each of us with a schoolbag and a shopping bag filled to the brim with the most varied assortment of items. The people on their way to work at that early hour gave us sympathetic looks; you could tell by their faces that they were sorry they couldn't offer us some kind of transportation; the conspicuous yellow star spoke for itself.

Only when we were walking down the street did Father and Mother reveal, little by little, what the plan was. For months we'd been moving as much of our furniture and apparel out of the apartment as we could. It was agreed that we'd go into hiding on July 16. Because of Margot's call-up notice, the plan had to be moved up ten days, which meant we'd have to make do with less orderly rooms.

The hiding place was located in Father's office building. That's a little hard for outsiders to understand, so I'll explain. Father didn't have a lot of people working in his office, just Mr. Kugler, Mr. Kleiman, Miep and a twenty-three-year-old typist named Bep Voskuijl, all of whom were informed of our coming. Mr. Voskuijl, Bep's father, works in the warehouse, along with two assistants, none of whom were told anything.

Here's a description of the building. The large warehouse on the ground floor is used as a workroom and storeroom and is divided into several different sections, such as the stockroom and the milling room, where cinnamon, cloves and a pepper substitute are ground.

Next to the warehouse doors is another outside' door, a separate entrance to the office. Just inside the office door is a second door, and beyond that a stairway. At the top of the stairs is another door, with a frosted window on which the word "Office" is written in black letters. This is the big front office -- very large, very light and very full. Bep, Miep and Mr. Kleiman work there during the day. After passing through an alcove containing a safe, a wardrobe and a big supply cupboard, you come to the small, dark, stuffy back office. This used to be shared by Mr. Kugler and Mr. van Daan, but now Mr. Kugler is its only occupant. Mr. Kugler's office can also be reached from the hallway, but only through a glass door that can be opened from the inside but not easily from the outside. If you leave Mr. Kugler's office and proceed through the long, narrow hallway past the coal bin and go up four steps, you find yourself in the private office, the showpiece of the entire building. Elegant mahogany furniture, a linoleum floor covered with throw rugs, a radio, a fancy lamp, everything first class. Next door is a spacious kitchen with a hot-water heater and two gas burners, and beside that a bathroom. That's the second floor.

A wooden staircase leads from the downstairs hallway to the third floor. At the top of the stairs is a landing, with doors on either side. The door on the left takes you up to the spice storage area, attic and loft in the front part of the house. A typically Dutch, very steep, ankle-twisting flight of stairs also runs from the front part of the house to another door opening onto the street.

The door to the right of the landing leads to the "Secret Annex" at the back of the house. No one would ever suspect there were so many rooms behind that plain gray door. There's just one small step in front of the door, and then you're inside. Straight ahead of you is a steep flight of stairs. To the left is a narrow hallway opening onto a room that serves as the Frank family's living

[INSERT MAP HERE]

room and bedroom. Next door is a smaller room, the bedroom and study of the two young ladies of the family. To the right of the stairs is a windowless washroom, with a sink. The door in the corner leads to the toilet and another one to Margot's and my room. If you go up the stairs and open the door at the top, you're surprised to see such a large, light and spacious room in an old canalside house like this. It contains a stove (thanks to the fact that it used to be Mr. Kugler's laboratory) and a sink.

This will be the kitchen and bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. van Daan, as well as the general living room, dining room and study for us all. A tiny side room is to be Peter van Daan's bedroom. Then, just as in the front part of the building, there's an attic and a loft. So there you are. Now I've introduced you to the whole of our lovely Annex!

Yours, Anne

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 1942

Dearest Kitty, I've probably bored you with my long description of our house, but I still think you should know where I've ended up; how I ended up here is something you'll figure out from my next letters.

But first, let me continue my story, because, as you know, I wasn't finished. After we arrived at 263 Prinsengracht, Miep quickly led us through the long hallway and up the wooden staircase to the next floor and into the Annex. She shut the door behind us, leaving us alone. Margot had arrived much earlier on her bike and was waiting for us.

Our living room and all the other rooms were so full of stuff that I can't find the words to describe it. All the cardboard boxes that had been sent to the office in the last few months were piled on the floors and beds. The small room was filled from floor to ceiling with linens. If we wanted to sleep in properly made beds that night, we had to get going and straighten up the mess. Mother and Margot were unable to move a muscle. They lay down on their bare mattresses, tired, miserable and I don't know what else. But Father and I, the two cleaner-uppers in the family, started in right away.

All day long we unpacked boxes, filled cupboards, hammered nails and straightened up the mess, until we fell exhausted into our clean beds at night. We hadn't eaten a hot meal all day, but we didn't care; Mother and Margot were too tired and keyed up to eat, and Father and I were too busy.

Tuesday morning we started where we left off the night before. Bep and Miep went grocery shopping with our ration coupons, Father worked on our blackout screens, we scrubbed the kitchen floor, and were once again busy from sunup to sundown. Until Wednesday, I didn't have a chance to think about the enormous change in my life. Then for the first time since our arrival in the Secret Annex, I found a moment to tell you all about it and to realize what had happened to me and what was yet to happen.

Yours, Anne

SATURDAY, JULY 11, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Father, Mother and Margot still can't get used to the chiming of the Westertoren clock, which tells us the time every quarter of an hour. Not me, I liked it from the start; it sounds so reassuring, especially at night. You no doubt want to hear what I think of being in hiding. Well, all I can say is that I don't really know yet. I don't think I'll ever feel at home in this house, but that doesn't mean I hate it. It's more like being on vacation in some strange pension. Kind of an odd way to look at life in hiding, but that's how things are. The Annex is an ideal place to hide in. It may be damp and lopsided, but there's probably not a more comfortable hiding place in all of Amsterdam. No, in all of Holland.

Up to now our bedroom, with its blank walls, was very bare. Thanks to Father -- who brought my entire postcard and movie-star collection here beforehand -- and to a brush and a pot of glue, I was able to plaster the walls with pictures. It looks much more cheerful. When the van Daans arrive, we'll be able to build cupboards and other odds and ends out of the wood piled in the attic.

Margot and Mother have recovered somewhat. Yesterday Mother felt well enough to cook split-pea soup for the first time, but then she was downstairstalking and forgot all about it. The beans were scorched black, and no amount of scraping could get them out of the pan.

Last night the four of us went down to the private office and listened to England on the radio. I was so scared someone might hear it that I literally begged Father to take me back upstairs. Mother understood my anxiety and went with me. Whatever we do, we're very afraid the neighbors might hear or see us. We started off immediately the first day sewing curtains. Actually, you can hardly call them that, since they're nothing but scraps of fabric, varying greatly in shape, quality and pattern, which Father and I stitched crookedly together with unskilled fingers. These works of art were tacked to

the windows, where they'll stay until we come out of hiding.

The building on our right is a branch of the Keg Company, a firm from Zaandam, and on the left is a furniture workshop. Though the people who work there are not on the premises after hours, any sound we make might travel through the walls. We've forbidden Margot to cough at night, even though she has a bad cold, and are giving her large doses of codeine.

I'm looking forward to the arrival of the van Daans, which is set for Tuesday. It will be much more fun and also not as quiet. You see, it's the silence that makes me so nervous during the evenings and nights, and I'd give anything to have one of our helpers sleep here.

It's really not that bad here, since we can do our own cooking and can listen to the radio in Daddy's office.

Mr. Kleiman and Miep, and Bep Voskuijl too, have helped us so much. We've already canned loads of rhubarb, strawberries and cherries, so for the time being I doubt we'll be bored. We also have a supply of reading material, and we're going to buy lots of games. Of course, we can't ever look out the window or go outside. And we have to be quiet so the people downstairs can't hear us.

Yesterday we had our hands full. We had to pit two crates of cherries for Mr. Kugler to can. We're going to use the empty crates to make bookshelves.

Someone's calling me.

Yours, Anne

COMMENT ADDED BY ANNE ON SEPTEMBER 2g, 1942: Not being able to go outside upsets me more than I can say, and I'm terrified our hiding place will be discovered and that we'll be shot. That, of course, is a fairly dismal prospect.

SUNDAY, JULY 12, 1942

They've all been so nice to me this last month because of my birthday, and yet every day I feel myself drifting further away from Mother and Margot. I worked hard today and they praised me, only to start picking on me again five minutes later.

You can easily see the difference between the way they deal with Margot and the way they deal with me. For example, Margot broke the vacuum cleaner, and because of

that we've been without light for the rest of the day. Mother said, "Well, Margot, it's easy to see you're not used to working; otherwise, you'd have known better than to yank the plug out by the cord." Margot made some reply, and that was the end of the story.

But this afternoon, when I wanted to rewrite something on Mother's shopping list because her handwriting is so hard to read, she wouldn't let me. She bawled me out again, and the whole family wound up getting involved.

I don't fit in with them, and I've felt that clearly in the last few weeks. They're so sentimental together, but I'd rather be sentimental on my own. They're always saying how nice it is with the four of us, and that we get along so well, without giving a moment's thought to the fact that I don't feel that way.

Daddy's the only one who understands me, now and again, though he usually sides with Mother and Margot. Another thing I can't stand is having them talk about me in front of outsiders, telling them how I cried or how sensibly I'm behaving. It's horrible. And sometimes they talk about Moortje and I can't take that at all. Moortje is my weak spot. I miss her every minute of the day, and no one knows how often I think of her; whenever I do, my eyes fill with tears. Moortje is so sweet, and I love her so much that I keep dreaming she'll come back to us.

I have plenty of dreams, but the reality is that we'll have to stay here until the war is over. We can't ever go outside, and the only visitors we can have are Miep, her husband Jan, Bep Voskuijl, Mr. Voskuijl, Mr. Kugler, Mr. Kleiman and Mrs. Kleiman, though she hasn't come because she thinks it's too dangerous.

COMMENT ADDED BY ANNE IN SEPTEMBER 1942: Daddy's always so nice. He understands me perfectly, and I wish we could have a heart-to-heart talk sometime without my bursting instantly into tears. But apparently that has to do with my age. I'd like to spend all my time writing, but that would probably get boring.

Up to now I've only confided my thoughts to my diary. I still haven't gotten around to writing amusing sketches that I could read aloud at a later date. In the future I'm going to devote less time to sentimentality and more time to reality.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, 1942

Dear Kitty,

I've deserted you for an entire month, but so little has happened that I can't find a

newsworthy item to relate every single day. The van Daans arrived on July 13. We thought they were coming on the fourteenth, but from the thirteenth to sixteenth the Germans were sending out call-up notices right and left and causing a lot of unrest, so they decided it would be safer to leave a day too early than a day too late.

Peter van Daan arrived at nine-thirty in the morning (while we were still at breakfast). Peter's going on sixteen, a shy, awkward boy whose company won't amount to much. Mr. and Mrs. van Daan came half an hour later.

Much to our amusement, Mrs. van Daan was carrying a hatbox with a large chamber pot inside. "I just don't feel at home without my chamber pot," she exclaimed, and it was the first item to find a permanent place under the divan. Instead of a chamber pot, Mr. van D. was lugging a collapsible tea table under his arm.

From the first, we ate our meals together, and after three days it felt as if the seven of us had become one big family. Naturally, the van Daans had much to tell about the week we'd been away from civilization. We were especially interested in what had happened to our apartment and to Mr. Goldschmidt.

Mr. van Daan filled us in: "Monday morning at nine, Mr. Goldschmidt phoned and asked if I could come over. I went straightaway and found a very distraught Mr. Goldschmidt. He showed me a note that the Frank family had left behind. As instructed, he was planning to bring the cat to the neighbors, which I agreed was a good idea. He was afraid the house was going to be searched, so we went through all the rooms, straightening up here and there and clearing the breakfast things off the table. Suddenly I saw a notepad on Mrs. Frank's desk, with an address in Maastricht written on it. Even though I knew Mrs. Frank had left it on purpose, I pretended to be surprised and horrified and begged Mr. Goldschmidt to burn this incriminating piece of paper. I swore up and down that I knew nothing about your disappearance, but that the note had given me an idea. 'Mr. Goldschmidt,' I said, 'I bet I know what this address refers to. About six months ago a high-ranking officer came to the office. It seems he and Mr. Frank grew up together. He promised to help Mr. Frank if it was ever necessary. As I recall, he was stationed in Maastricht. I think this officer has kept his word and is somehow planning to help them cross over to Belgium and then to Switzerland. There's no harm in telling this to any friends of the Franks who come asking about them. Of course, you don't need to mention the part about Maastricht.' And after that I left. This is the story most of your friends have been told, because I heard it later from several other people."

We thought it was extremely funny, but we laughed even harder when Mr. van Daan told us that certain people have vivid imaginations. For example, one family living on

our square claimed they saw all four of us riding by on our bikes early in the morning, and another woman was absolutely positive we'd been loaded into some kind of military vehicle in the middle of the night.

Yours, Anne

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21, 1942

Dear Kitty,

Now our Secret Annex has truly become secret.

Because so many houses are being searched for hidden bicycles, Mr. Kugler thought it would be better to have a bookcase built in front of the entrance to our hiding place. It swings out on its hinges and opens like a door. Mr. Voskuil did the carpentry work. (Mr. Voskuil has been told that the seven of us are in hiding, and he's been most helpful.)

Now whenever we want to go downstairs we have to duck and then jump. After the first three days we were all walking around with bumps on our foreheads from banging our heads against the low doorway. Then Peter cushioned it by nailing a towel stuffed with wood shavings to the doorframe. Let's see if it helps!

I'm not doing much schoolwork. I've given myself a vacation until September. Father wants to start tutoring me then, but we have to buy all the books first.

There's little change in our lives here. Peter's hair was washed today, but that's nothing special. Mr. van Daan and I are always at loggerheads with each other. Mama always treats me like a baby, which I can't stand. For the rest, things are going better. I don't think Peter's gotten any nicer. He's an obnoxious boy who lies around on his bed all day, only rousing himself to do a little carpentry work before returning to his nap. What a dope!

Mama gave me another one of her dreadful sermons this morning. We take the opposite view of everything. Daddy's a sweetheart; he may get mad at me, but it never lasts longer than five minutes.

It's a beautiful day outside, nice and hot, and in spite of everything, we make the most of the weather by lounging on the folding bed in the attic.

Yours, Anne

COMMENT ADDED BY ANNE ON SEPTEMBER 21, 1942: Mr. van Daan has been as nice as pie to me recently. I've said nothina, but have been enjoyina it while it lasts.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Mr. and Mrs. van Daan have had a terrible fight. I've never seen anything like it, since Mother and Father wouldn't dream of shouting at each other like that. The argument was based on something so trivial it didn't seem worth wasting a single word on it. Oh well, to each his own.

Of course, it's very difficult for Peter, who gets caught in the middle, but no one takes Peter seriously anymore, since he's hypersensitive and lazy. Yesterday he was beside himself with worry because his tongue was blue instead of pink. This rare phenomenon disappeared as quickly as it came. Today he's walking around with a heavy scarf on because he's got a stiff neck. His Highness has been complaining of lumbago too. Aches and pains in his heart, kidneys and lungs are also par for the course. He's an absolute hypochondriac! (That's the right word, isn't it?)

Mother and Mrs. van Daan aren't getting along very well. There are enough reasons for the friction. To give you one small example, Mrs. van D. has removed all but three of her sheets from our communal linen closet. She's assuming that Mother's can be used for both families. She'll be in for a nasty surprise when she discovers that Mother has followed her lead.

Furthermore, Mrs. van D. is ticked off because we're using her china instead of ours. She's still trying to find out what we've done with our plates; they're a lot closer than she thinks, since they're packed in cardboard boxes in the attic, behind a load of Opekta advertising material. As long as we're in hiding, the plates will remain out of her reach. Since I'm always having accidents, it's just as well! Yesterday I broke one of Mrs. van D.'s soup bowls.

"Oh!" she angrily exclaimed. "Can't you be more careful? That was my last one."

Please bear in mind, Kitty, that the two ladies speak abominable Dutch (I don't dare comment on the gentlemen: they'd be highly insulted). If you were to hear their bungled attempts, you'd laugh your head off. We've given up pointing out their errors, since correcting them doesn't help anyway. Whenever I quote Mother or Mrs. van Daan, I'll write proper Dutch instead of trying to duplicate their speech.

Last week there was a brief interruption in our monotonous routine. This was provided by Peter -- and a book about women. I should explain that Margot and Peter are allowed to read nearly all the books Mr. Kleiman lends us. But the adults preferred to keep this special book to themselves. This immediately piqued Peter's curiosity. What forbidden fruit did it contain? He snuck off with it when his mother was downstairs talking, and took himself and his booty to the loft. For two days all was well. Mrs. van Daan knew what he was up to, but kept mum until Mr. van Daan found out about it. He threw a fit, took the book away and assumed that would be the end of the business. However, he'd neglected to take his son's curiosity into account. Peter, not in the least fazed by his father's swift action, began thinking up ways to read the rest of this vastly interesting book.

In the meantime, Mrs. van D. asked Mother for her opinion. Mother didn't think this particular book was suitable for Margot, but she saw no harm in letting her read most other books.

You see, Mrs. van Daan, Mother Said, there's a big difference between Margot and Peter. To begin with, Margot's a girl, and girls are always more mature than boys. Second, she's already read many serious books and doesn't go looking for those which are no longer forbidden. Third, Margot's much more sensible and intellectually advanced, as a result of her four years at an excellent school."

Mrs. van Daan agreed with her, but felt it was wrong as a matter of principle to let youngsters read books written for adults.

Meanwhile, Peter had thought of a suitable time when no one would be interested in either him or the book. At seven-thirty in the evening, when the entire family was listening to the radio in the private office, he took his treasure and stole off to the loft again. He should have been back by eight-thirty, but he was so engrossed in the book that he forgot the time and was just coming down the stairs when his father entered the room. The scene that followed was not surprising: after a slap, a whack and a tug-of-war, the book lay on the table and Peter was in the loft.

This is how matters stood when it was time for the family to eat. Peter stayed upstairs. No one gave him a moment's thought; he'd have to go to bed without his dinner. We continued eating, chatting merrily away, when suddenly we heard a piercing whistle. We lay down our forks and stared at each other, the shock clearly visible on our pale faces.

Then we heard Peter's voice through the chimney: "I won't come down!"

Mr. van Daan leapt up, his napkin falling to the floor, and shouted, with the blood rushing to his face, "I've had enough!"

Father, afraid of what might happen, grabbed him by the arm and the two men went to the attic. After much struggling and kicking, Peter wound up in his room with the door shut, and we went on eating.

Mrs. van Daan wanted to save a piece of bread for her darling son, but Mr. van D. was adamant. "If he doesn't apologize this minute, he'll have to sleep in the loft."

We protested that going without dinner was enough punishment. What if Peter were to catch cold? We wouldn't be able to call a doctor.

Peter didn't apologize, and returned to the loft.

Mr. van Daan decided to leave well enough alone, though he did note the next morning that Peter's bed had been slept in. At seven Peter went to the attic again, but was persuaded to come downstairs when Father spoke a few friendly words to him. After three days of sullen looks and stubborn silence, everything was back to normal.

Yours, Anne

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Today I'll tell you the general news here in the Annex. A lamp has been mounted above my divan bed so that in the future, when I hear the guns going off, I'll be able to pull a cord and switch on the light. I can't use it at the moment because we're keeping our window open a little, day and night.

The male members of the van Daan contingent have built a very handy wood-stained food safe, with real screens. Up to now this glorious cupboard has been located in Peter's room, but in the interests of fresh air it's been moved to the attic. Where it once stood, there's now a shelf. I advised Peter to put his table underneath the shelf, add a nice rug and hang his own cupboard where the table now stands. That might make his little cubbyhole more comfy, though I certainly wouldn't like to sleep there.

Mrs. van Daan is unbearable. I'm continually being scolded for my incessant chatter when I'm upstairs. I simply let the words bounce right off me! Madame now has a

new trick up her sleeve: trying to get out of washing the pots and pans. If there's a bit of food left at the bottom of the pan, she leaves it to spoil instead of transferring it to a glass dish. Then in the afternoon when Margot is stuck with cleaning all the pots and pans, Madame exclaims, "Oh, poor Margot, you have so much work to do!"

Every other week Mr. Kleiman brings me a couple of books written for girls my age. I'm enthusiastic about the loop ter Heul series. I've enjoyed all of Cissy van Marxveldt's books very much. I've read *The Zaniest Summer* four times, and the ludicrous situations still make me laugh.

Father and I are currently working on our family tree, and he tells me something about each person as we go along. I've begun my schoolwork. I'm working hard at French, cramming five irregular verbs into my head every day. But I've forgotten much too much of what I learned in school.

Peter has taken up his English with great reluctance. A few schoolbooks have just arrived, and I brought a large supply of notebooks, pencils, erasers and labels from home. Pim (that's our pet name for Father) wants me to help him with his Dutch lessons. I'm perfectly willing to tutor him in exchange for his assistance with French and other subjects. But he makes the most unbelievable mistakes!

I sometimes listen to the Dutch broadcasts from London. Prince Bernhard recently announced that Princess Juliana is expecting a baby in January, which I think is wonderful. No one here understands why I take such an interest in the Royal Family.

A few nights ago I was the topic of discussion, and we all decided I was an ignoramus. As a result, I threw myself into my schoolwork the next day, since I have little desire to still be a freshman when I'm fourteen or fifteen. The fact that I'm hardly allowed to read anything was also discussed. At the moment, Mother's reading *Gentlemen, Wives and Servants*, and of course I'm not allowed to read it (though Margot is!). First I have to be more intellectually developed, like my genius of a sister. Then we discussed my ignorance of philosophy, psychology and physiology (I immediately looked up these big words in the dictionary!). It's true, I don't know anything about these subjects. But maybe I'll be smarter next year!

I've come to the shocking conclusion that I have only one long-sleeved dress and three cardigans to wear in the winter. Father's given me permission to knit a white wool sweater; the yarn isn't very pretty, but it'll be warm, and that's what counts. Some of our clothing was left with friends, but unfortunately we won't be able to get to it until after the war. Provided it's still there, of course.

I'd just finished writing something about Mrs. van Daan when she walked into the room. Thump, I slammed the book shut.

"Hey, Anne, can't I even take a peek?"

"No, Mrs. van Daan."

"Just the last page then?"

"No, not even the last page, Mrs. van Daan."

Of course, I nearly died, since that particular page contained a rather unflattering description of her.

There's something happening every day, but I'm too tired and lazy to write it all down.

Yours, Anne

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Father has a friend, a man in his mid-seventies named Mr. Dreher, who's sick, poor and deaf as a post. At his side, like a useless appendage, is his wife, twenty-seven years younger and equally poor, whose arms and legs are loaded with real and fake bracelets and rings left over from more prosperous days. This Mr. Dreher has already been a great nuisance to Father, and I've always admired the saintly patience with which he handled this pathetic old man on the phone. When we were still living at home, Mother used to advise him to put a gramophone in front of the receiver, one that would repeat every three minutes, "Yes, Mr. Dreher" and "No, Mr. Dreher," since the old man never understood a word of Father's lengthy replies anyway.

Today Mr. Dreher phoned the office and asked Mr. Kugler to come and see him. Mr. Kugler wasn't in the mood and said he would send Miep, but Miep canceled the appointment. Mrs. Dreher called the office three times, but since Miep was reportedly out the entire afternoon, she had to imitate Bep's voice. Downstairs in the office as well as upstairs in the Annex, there was great hilarity. Now each time the phone rings, Bep says 'That's Mrs. Dreher!' and Miep has to laugh, so that the people on the other end of the line are greeted with an impolite giggle. Can't you just picture it? This has got to be the greatest office in the whole wide world. The bosses and the

office girls have such fun together!

Some evenings I go to the van Daans for a little chat. We eat "mothball cookies" (molasses cookies that were stored in a closet that was mothproofed) and have a good time. Recently the conversation was about Peter. I said that he often pats me on the cheek, which I don't like. They asked me in a typically grown-up way whether I could ever learn to love Peter like a brother, since he loves me like a sister. "Oh, no!" I said, but what I was thinking was, "Oh, ugh!" Just imagine! I added that Peter's a bit stiff, perhaps because he's shy. Boys who aren't used to being around girls are like that.

I must say that the Annex Committee (the men's section) is very creative. Listen to the scheme they've come up with to get a message to Mr. Broks, an Opekta Co. sales representative and friend who's surreptitiously hidden some of our things for us! They're going to type a letter to a store owner in southern Zeeland who is, indirectly, one of Opekta's customers and ask him to fill out a form and send it back in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Father will write the address on the envelope himself. Once the letter is returned from Zeeland, the form can be removed and a handwritten message confirming that Father is alive can be inserted in the envelope. This way Mr. Broks can read the letter without suspecting a ruse. They chose the province of Zeeland because it's close to Belgium (a letter can easily be smuggled across the border) and because no one is allowed to travel there without a special permit. An ordinary salesman like Mr. Broks would never be granted a permit.

Yesterday Father put on another act. Groggy with sleep, he stumbled off to bed. His feet were cold, so I lent him my bed socks. Five minutes later he flung them to the floor. Then he pulled the blankets over his head because the light bothered him. The lamp was switched off, and he gingerly poked his head out from under the covers. It was all very amusing. We started talking about the fact that Peter says Margot is a "buttinsky." Suddenly Daddy's voice was heard from the depths: "Sits on her butt, you mean."

Mouschi, the cat, is becoming nicer to me as time goes by, but I'm still somewhat afraid of her.

Yours, Anne

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Mother and I had a so-called "discussion" today, but the annoying part is that I burst into tears. I can't help it. Daddy is always nice to me, and he also understands me much better. At moments like these I can't stand Mother. It's obvious that I'm a stranger to her; she doesn't even know what I think about the most ordinary things.

We were talking about maids and the fact that you're supposed to refer to them as "domestic help" these days. She claimed that when the war is over, that's what they'll want to be called. I didn't quite see it that way. Then she added that I talk about 'later" so often and that I act as if I were such a lady, even though I'm not, but I don't think building sand castles in the air is such a terrible thing to do, as long as you don't take it too seriously. At any rate, Daddy usually comes to my defense. Without him I wouldn't be able to stick it out here.

I don't get along with Margot very well either. Even though our family never has the same kind of outbursts they have upstairs, I find it far from pleasant. Margot's and Mother's personalities are so alien to me. I understand my girlfriends better than my own mother. Isn't that a shame?

For the umpteenth time, Mrs. van Daan is sulking. She's very moody and has been removing more and more of her belongings and locking them up. It's too bad Mother doesn't repay every van Daan "disappearing act" with a Frank "disappearing act."

Some people, like the van Daans, seem to take special delight not only in raising their own children but in helping others raise theirs. Margot doesn't need it, since she's naturally good, kind and clever, perfection itself, but I seem to have enough mischief for the two of us. More than once the air has been filled with the van Daans' admonitions and my saucy replies. Father and Mother always defend me fiercely. Without them I wouldn't be able to jump back into the fray with my usual composure. They keep telling me I should talk less, mind my own business and be more modest, but I seem doomed to failure. If Father weren't so patient, I'd have long ago given up hope of ever meeting my parents' quite moderate expectations.

If I take a small helping of a vegetable I loathe and eat potatoes instead, the van Daans, especially Mrs. van Daan, can't get over how spoiled I am. "Come on, Anne, eat some more vegetables," she says.

"No, thank you, ma'am," I reply. "The potatoes are more than enough."

"Vegetables are good for you; your mother says so too. Have some more," she insists, until Father intervenes and upholds my right to refuse a dish I don't like.

Then Mrs. van D. really flies off the handle: "You should have been at our house, where children were brought up the way they should be. I don't call this a proper upbringing. Anne is terribly spoiled. I'd never allow that. If Anne were my daughter. . ."

This is always how her tirades begin and end: "If Anne were my daughter. . ." Thank goodness I'm not.

But to get back to the subject of raising children, yesterday a silence fell after Mrs. van D. finished her little speech. Father then replied, "I think Anne is very well brought up. At least she's learned not to respond to your interminable sermons. As far as the vegetables are concerned, all I have to say is look who's calling the kettle black."

Mrs. van D. was soundly defeated. The pot calling the kettle black refers of course to Madame herself, since she can't tolerate beans or any kind of cabbage in the evening because they give her "gas." But I could say the same. What a dope, don't you think? In any case, let's hope she stops talking about me.

It's so funny to see how quickly Mrs. van Daan flushes. I don't, and it secretly annoys her no end.

Yours, Anne

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

I had to stop yesterday, though I was nowhere near finished. I'm dying to tell you about another one of our clashes, but before I do I'd like to say this: I think it's odd that grown-ups quarrel so easily and so often and about such petty matters. Up to now I always thought bickering was just something children did and that they outgrew it. Often, of course, there's sometimes a reason to have a real quarrel, but the verbal exchanges that take place here are just plain bickering. I should be used to the fact that these squabbles are daily occurrences, but I'm not and never will be as long as I'm the subject of nearly every discussion. (They refer to these as "discussions" instead of "quarrels," but Germans don't know the difference!) They criticize everything, and I mean everything, about me: my behavior, my personality, my manners; every inch of me, from head to toe and back again, is the subject of gossip and debate. Harsh words and shouts are constantly being flung at my head, though I'm absolutely not used to it. According to the powers that be, I'm supposed to grin and

bear it. But I can't! I have no intention of taking their insults lying down. I'll show them that Anne Frank wasn't born yesterday. They'll sit up and take notice and keep their big mouths shut when I make them see they ought to attend to their own manners instead of mine. How dare they act that way! It's simply barbaric. I've been astonished, time and again, at such rudeness and most of all. . . at such stupidity (Mrs. van Daan). But as soon as I've gotten used to the idea, and that shouldn't take long, I'll give them a taste of their own medicine, and then they'll change their tune! Am I really as bad-mannered, headstrong, stubborn, pushy, stupid, lazy, etc., etc., as the van Daans say I am? No, of course not. I know I have my faults and shortcomings, but they blow them all out of proportion! If you only knew, Kitty, how I seethe when they scold and mock me. It won't take long before I explode with pent-up rage.

But enough of that. I've bored you long enough with my quarrels, and yet I can't resist adding a highly interesting dinner conversation.

Somehow we landed on the subject of Pim's extreme diffidence. His modesty is a well-known fact, which even the stupidest person wouldn't dream of questioning. All of a sudden Mrs. van Daan, who feels the need to bring herself into every conversation, remarked, "I'm very modest and retiring too, much more so than my husband!"

Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous? This sentence clearly illustrates that she's not exactly what you'd call modest!

Mr. van Daan, who felt obliged to explain the "much more so than my husband," answered calmly, "I have no desire to be modest and retiring. In my experience, you get a lot further by being pushy!" And turning to me, he added, "Don't be modest and retiring, Anne. It will get you nowhere."

Mother agreed completely with this viewpoint. But, as usual, Mrs. van Daan had to add her two cents. This time, however, instead of addressing me directly, she turned to my parents and said, "You must have a strange outlook on life to be able to say that to Anne. Things were different when I was growing up. Though they probably haven't changed much since then, except in your modern household!"

This was a direct hit at Mother's modern child-rearing methods, which she's defended on many occasions. Mrs. van Daan was so upset her face turned bright red. People who flush easily become even more agitated when they feel themselves getting hot under the collar, and they quickly lose to their opponents.

The nonflushed mother, who now wanted to have the matter over and done with as quickly as possible, paused for a moment to think before she replied. "Well, Mrs. van Daan, I agree that it's much better if a person isn't overmodest. My husband, Margot and Peter are all exceptionally modest. Your husband, Anne and I, though not exactly the opposite, don't let ourselves be pushed around."

Mrs. van Daan: "Oh, but Mrs. Frank, I don't understand what you mean! Honestly, I'm extremely modest and retiring. How can you say that I'm pushy?"

Mother: "I didn't say you were pushy, but no one would describe you as having a retiring disposition."

Mrs. van D.: "I'd like to know in what way I'm pushy! If I didn't look out for myself here, no one else would, and I'd soon starve, but that doesn't mean I'm not as modest and retiring as your husband."

Mother had no choice but to laugh at this ridiculous self-defense, which irritated Mrs. van Daan. Not exactly a born debater, she continued her magnificent account in a mixture of German and Dutch, until she got so tangled up in her own words that she finally rose from her chair and was just about to leave the room when her eye fell on me. You should have seen her! As luck would have it, the moment Mrs. van D. turned around I was shaking my head in a combination of compassion and irony. I wasn't doing it on purpose, but I'd followed her tirade so intently that my reaction was completely involuntary. Mrs. van D. wheeled around and gave me a tongue-lashing: hard, Germanic, mean and vulgar, exactly like some fat, red-faced fishwife. It was a joy to behold. If I could draw, I'd like to have sketched her as she was then. She struck me as so comical, that silly little scatterbrain! I've learned one thing: you only really get to know a person after a fight. Only then can you judge their true character!

Yours, Anne

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

The strangest things happen to you when you're in hiding! Try to picture this. Because we don't have a bathtub, we wash ourselves in a washtub, and because there's only hot water in the office (by which I mean the entire lower floor), the seven of us take turns making the most of this great opportunity. But since none of us are alike and are all plagued by varying degrees of modesty, each member of the

family has selected a different place to wash. Peter takes a bath in the office kitchen, even though it has a glass door. When it's time for his bath, he goes around to each of us in turn and announces that we shouldn't walk past the kitchen for the next half hour. He considers this measure to be sufficient. Mr. van D. takes his bath upstairs, figuring that the safety of his own room outweighs the difficulty of having to carry the hot water up all those stairs. Mrs. van D. has yet to take a bath; she's waiting to see which is the best place. Father bathes in the private office and Mother in the kitchen behind a fire screen, while Margot and I have declared the front office to be our bathing grounds. Since the curtains are drawn on Saturday afternoon, we scrub ourselves in the dark, while the one who isn't in the bath looks out the window through a chink in the curtains and gazes in wonder at the endlessly amusing people.

A week ago I decided I didn't like this spot and have been on the lookout for more comfortable bathing quarters. It was Peter who gave me the idea of setting my washtub in the spacious office bathroom. I can sit down, turn on the light, lock the door, pour out the water without anyone's help, and all without the fear of being seen. I used my lovely bathroom for the first time on Sunday and, strange as it may seem, I like it better than any other place.

The plumber was at work downstairs on Wednesday, moving the water pipes and drains from the office bathroom to the hallway so the pipes won't freeze during a cold winter. The plumber's visit was far from pleasant. Not only were we not allowed to run water during the day, but the bathroom was also off-limits. I'll tell you how we handled this problem; you may find it unseemly of me to bring it up, but I'm not so prudish about matters of this kind. On the day of our arrival, Father and I improvised a chamber pot, sacrificing a canning jar for this purpose. For the duration of the plumber's visit, canning jars were put into service during the daytime to hold our calls of nature. As far as I was concerned, this wasn't half as difficult as having to sit still all day and not say a word. You can imagine how hard that was for Miss Quack, Quack, Quack. On ordinary days we have to speak in a whisper; not being able to talk or move at all is ten times worse.

After three days of constant sitting, my backside was stiff and sore. Nightly calisthenics helped.

Yours, Anne

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1942

Dear Kitty,

Yesterday I had a horrible fright. At eight o'clock the doorbell suddenly rang. All I could think of was that someone was coming to get us, you know who I mean. But I calmed down when everybody swore it must have been either pranksters or the mailman.

The days here are very quiet. Mr. Levinsohn, a little Jewish pharmacist and chemist, is working for Mr. Kugler in the kitchen. Since he's familiar with the entire building, we're in constant dread that he'll take it into his head to go have a look at what used to be the laboratory. We're as still as baby mice. Who would have guessed three months ago that quicksilver Anne would have to sit so quietly for hours on end, and what's more, that she could?

Mrs. van Daan's birthday was the twenty-ninth. Though we didn't have a large celebration, she was showered with flowers, simple gifts and good food. Apparently the red carnations from her spouse are a family tradition.

Let me pause a moment on the subject of Mrs. van Daan and tell you that her attempts to flirt with Father are a constant source of irritation to me. She pats him on the cheek and head, hikes up her skirt and makes so-called witty remarks in an effort to get's Pim's attention. Fortunately, he finds her neither pretty nor charming, so he doesn't respond to her flirtations. As you know, I'm quite the jealous type, and I can't abide her behavior. After all, Mother doesn't act that way toward Mr. van D., which is what I told Mrs. van D. right to her face.

From time to time Peter can be very amusing. He and I have one thing in common: we like to dress up, which makes everyone laugh. One evening we made our appearance, with Peter in one of his mother's skin-tight dresses and me in his suit. He wore a hat; I had a cap on. The grown-ups split their sides laughing, and we enjoyed ourselves every bit as much.

Bep bought new skirts for Margot and me at The Bijenkorf. The fabric is hideous, like the burlap bag potatoes come in. Just the kind of thing the department stores wouldn't dare sell in the olden days, now costing 24.00 guilders (Margot's) and 7.75 guilders (mine).

We have a nice treat in store: Bep's ordered a correspondence course in shorthand for Margot, Peter and me. Just you wait, by this time next year we'll be able to take perfect shorthand. In any case, learning to write a secret code like that is really interesting.

I have a terrible pain in my index finger (on my left hand), so I can't do any ironing.

What luck!

Mr. van Daan wants me to sit next to him at the table, since Margot doesn't eat enough to suit him. Fine with me, I like changes. There's always a tiny black cat roaming around the yard, and it reminds me of my dear sweet Moortje. Another reason I welcome the change is that Mama's always carping at me, especially at the table. Now Margot will have to bear the brunt of it. Or rather, won't, since Mother doesn't make such sarcastic remarks to her. Not to that paragon of virtue! I'm always teasing Margot about being a paragon of virtue these days, and she hates it. Maybe it'll teach her not to be such a goody-goody. High time she learned.

To end this hodgepodge of news, a particularly amusing joke told by Mr. van Daan: What goes click ninety-nine times and clack once?

A centipede with a clubfoot.

Bye-bye, Anne

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1942

Dear Kitty,

Everybody teased me quite a bit yesterday because I lay down on the bed next to Mr. van Daan. "At your age! Shocking!" and other remarks along those lines. Silly, of course. I'd never want to sleep with Mr. van Daan the way they mean.

Yesterday Mother and I had another run-in and she really kicked up a fuss. She told Daddy all my sins and I started to cry, which made me cry too, and I already had such an awful headache. I finally told Daddy that I love "him" more than I do Mother, to which he replied that it was just a passing phase, but I don't think so. I simply can't stand Mother, and I have to force myself not to snap at her all the time, and to stay calm, when I'd rather slap her across the face. I don't know why I've taken such a terrible dislike to her. Daddy says that if Mother isn't feeling well or has a headache, I should volunteer to help her, but I'm not going to because I don't love her and don't enjoy doing it. I can imagine Mother dying someday, but Daddy's death seems inconceivable. It's very mean of me, but that's how I feel. I hope Mother will never read this or anything else I've written.

I've been allowed to read more grown-up books lately. Eva's *Youth* by Nico van Suchtelen is currently keeping me busy. I don't think there's much of a difference between this and books for teenage girls. Eva thought that children grew on trees, like

apples, and that the stork plucked them off the tree when they were ripe and brought them to the mothers. But her girlfriend's cat had kittens and Eva saw them coming out of the cat, so she thought cats laid eggs and hatched them like chickens, and that mothers who wanted a child also went upstairs a few days before their time to lay an egg and brood on it. After the babies arrived, the mothers were pretty weak from all that squatting. At some point, Eva wanted a baby too. She took a wool scarf and spread it on the ground so the egg could fall into it, and then she squatted down and began to push. She clucked as she waited, but no egg came out. Finally, after she'd been sitting for a long time, something did come, but it was a sausage instead of an egg. Eva was embarrassed. She thought she was sick. Funny, isn't it? There are also parts of Eva's Youth that talk about women selling their bodies on the street and asking loads of money. I'd be mortified in front of a man like that. In addition, it mentions Eva's menstruation. Oh, I long to get my period -- then I'll really be grown up. Daddy is grumbling again and threatening to take away my diary. Oh, horror of horrors! From now on, I'm going to hide it.

Anne Frank

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1942

I imagine that. . .

I've gone to Switzerland. Daddy and I sleep in one room, while the boys' study is turned into a sitting room, where I can receive visitors. As a surprise, they've bought new furniture for me, including a tea table, a desk, armchairs and a divan. Everything's simply wonderful. After a few days Daddy gives me 150 guilders -- converted into Swiss money, of course, but I'll call them guilders -- and tells me to buy everything I think I'll need, all for myself. (Later on, I get a guilder a week, which I can also use to buy whatever I want.) I set off with Bernd and buy:

3 cotton undershirts @ 0.50 = 1.50
 3 cotton underpants @ 0.50 = 1.50
 3 wool undershirts @ 0.75 = 2.25
 3 wool underpants @ 0.75 = 2.25
 2 petticoats @ 0.50 = 1.00
 2 bras (smallest size) @ 0.50 = 1.00
 5 pajamas @ 1.00 = 5.00
 1 summer robe @ 2.50 = 2.50
 1 winter robe @ 3.00 = 3.00
 2 bed jackets @ 0.75 = 1.50

. Anne's cousins Bernhard (Bernd) and Stephan Elias.

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1 small pillow @ 1.00 = 1.00
 1 pair of lightweight slippers @ 1.00 = 1.00
 1 pair of warm slippers @ 1.50 = 1.50
 1 pair of summer shoes (school) @ 1.50 = 1.50
 1 pair of summer shoes (dressy) @ 2.00 = 2.00
 1 pair of winter shoes (school) @ 2.50 = 2.50
 1 pair of winter shoes (dressy) @ 3.00 = 3.00
 2 aprons @ 0.50 = 1.00
 25 handkerchiefs @ 0.05 = 1.00
 4 pairs of silk stockings @ 0.75 = 3.00
 4 pairs of kneesocks @ 0.50 = 2.00
 4 pairs of socks @ 0.25 = 1.00
 2 pairs of thick stockings @ 1.00 = 2.00
 3 skeins of white yarn (underwear, cap) = 1.50
 3 skeins of blue yarn (sweater, skirt) = 1.50
 3 skeins of variegated yarn (cap, scarf) = 1.50
 Scarves, belts, collars, buttons = 1.25

Plus 2 school dresses (summer), 2 school dresses (winter), 2 good dresses (summer), 2 good dresses (winter), 1 summer skirt, 1 good winter skirt, 1 school winter skirt, 1 raincoat, 1 summer coat, 1 winter coat, 2 hats, 2 caps. For a total of 10g.00 guilders.

2 purses, 1 ice-skating outfit, 1 pair of skates, 1 case (containing powder, skin cream, foundation cream, cleansing cream, suntan lotion, cotton, first-aid kit, rouge, lipstick, eyebrow pencil, bath salts, bath powder, eau de cologne, soap, powder puff).

Plus 4 sweaters @ 1.50, 4 blouses @ 1.00, miscellaneous items @ 10.00 and books, presents @ 4.50.

OCTOBER 9, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Today I have nothing but dismal and depressing news to report. Our many Jewish friends and acquaintances are being taken away in droves. The Gestapo is treating them very roughly and transporting them in cattle cars to Westerbork, the big camp in Drenthe to which they're sending all the Jews. Miep told us about someone who'd managed to escape from there. It must be terrible in Westerbork. The people get almost nothing to eat, much less to drink, as water is available only one hour a day,

and there's only one toilet and sink for several thousand people. Men and women sleep in the same room, and women and children often have their heads shaved. Escape is almost impossible; many people look Jewish, and they're branded by their shorn heads.

If it's that bad in Holland, what must it be like in those faraway and uncivilized places where the Germans are sending them? We assume that most of them are being murdered. The English radio says they're being gassed. Perhaps that's the quickest way to die.

I feel terrible. Miep's accounts of these horrors are so heartrending, and Miep is also very distraught. The other day, for instance, the Gestapo deposited an elderly, crippled Jewish woman on Miep's doorstep while they set off to find a car. The old woman was terrified of the glaring searchlights and the guns firing at the English planes overhead. Yet Miep didn't dare let her in. Nobody would. The Germans are generous enough when it comes to punishment.

Bep is also very subdued. Her boyfriend is being sent to Germany. Every time the planes fly over, she's afraid they're going to drop their entire bomb load on Bertus's head. Jokes like "Oh, don't worry, they can't all fall on him" or "One bomb is all it takes" are hardly appropriate in this situation. Bertus is not the only one being forced to work in Germany. Trainloads of young men depart daily. Some of them try to sneak off the train when it stops at a small station, but only a few manage to escape unnoticed and find a place to hide.

But that's not the end of my lamentations. Have you ever heard the term "hostages"? That's the latest punishment for saboteurs. It's the most horrible thing you can imagine. Leading citizens -- innocent people -- are taken prisoner to await their execution. If the Gestapo can't find the saboteur, they simply grab five hostages and line them up against the wall. You read the announcements of their death in the paper, where they're referred to as "fatal accidents."

Fine specimens of humanity, those Germans, and to think I'm actually one of them! No, that's not true, Hitler took away our nationality long ago. And besides, there are no greater enemies on earth than the Germans and the Jews.

Yours, Anne

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1942

Dear Kitty,

I'm terribly busy. Yesterday I began by translating a chapter from *La Belle Nivernaise* and writing down vocabulary words. Then I worked on an awful math problem and translated three pages of French grammar besides. Today, French grammar and history. I simply refuse to do that wretched math every day. Daddy thinks it's awful too.

I'm almost better at it than he is, though in fact neither of us is any good, so we always have to call on Margot's help. I'm also working away at my shorthand, which I enjoy. Of the three of us, I've made the most progress.

I've read *The Storm Family*. It's quite good, but doesn't compare to Joop ter Heul. Anyway, the same words can be found in both books, which makes sense because they're written by the same author. Cissy van Marxveldt is a terrific writer. I'm definitely going to let my own children read her books too.

Moreover, I've read a lot of Korner plays. I like the way he writes. For example, *Hedwig*, *The Cousin from Bremen*, *The Governess*, *The Green Domino*, etc.

Mother, Margot and I are once again the best of buddies. It's actually a lot nicer that way. Last night Margot and I were lying side by side in my bed. It was incredibly cramped, but that's what made it fun. She asked if she could read my diary once in a while.

"Parts of it," I said, and asked about hers. She gave me permission to read her diary as well.

The conversation turned to the future, and I asked what she wanted to be when she was older. But she wouldn't say and was quite mysterious about it. I gathered it had something to do with teaching; of course, I'm not absolutely sure, but I suspect it's something along those lines. I really shouldn't be so nosy.

This morning I lay on Peter's bed, after first having chased him off it. He was furious, but I didn't care. He might consider being a little more friendly to me from time to time. After all, I did give him an apple last night.

I once asked Margot if she thought I was ugly. She said that I was cute and had nice eyes. A little vague, don't you think?

Well, until next time!

Anne Frank

PS. This morning we all took turns on the scale. Margot now weighs 132 pounds, Mother 136, Father 155, Anne 96, Peter 14g, Mrs. van Daan 117, Mr. van Daan 165. In the three months since I've been here, I've gained 19 pounds. A lot, huh?

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

My hand's still shaking, though it's been two hours since we had the scare. I should explain that there are five fire extinguishers in the building. The office staff stupidly forgot to warn us that the carpenter, or whatever he's called, was coming to fill the extinguishers. As a result, we didn't bother to be quiet until I heard the sound of hammering on the landing (across from the bookcase). I immediately assumed it was the carpenter and went to warn Bep, who was eating lunch, that she couldn't go back downstairs. Father and I stationed ourselves at the door so we could hear when the man had left. After working for about fifteen minutes, he laid his hammer and some other tools on our bookcase (or so we thought!) and banged on our door. We turned white with fear. Had he heard something after all and now wanted to check out this mysterious-looking bookcase? It seemed so, since he kept knocking, pulling, pushing and jerking on it.

I was so scared I nearly fainted at the thought of this total stranger managing to discover our wonderful hiding place. Just when I thought my days were numbered, we heard Mr. Kleiman's voice saying, "Open up, it's me." We opened the door at once. What had happened?

The hook fastening the bookcase had gotten stuck, which is why no one had been able to warn us about the carpenter. After the man had left, Mr. Kleiman came to get Bep, but couldn't open the bookcase. I can't tell you how relieved I was. In my imagination, the man I thought was trying to get inside the Secret Annex had kept growing and growing until he'd become not only a giant but also the cruelest Fascist in the world. Whew. Fortunately, everything worked out all right, at least this time.

We had lots of fun on Monday. Miep and Jan spent the night with us. Margot and I slept in Father and Mother's room for the night so the Gieses could have our beds. The menu was drawn up in their honor, and the meal was delicious. The festivities were briefly interrupted when Father's lamp caused a short circuit and we were suddenly plunged into darkness. What were we to do? We did have fuses, but the fuse box was at the rear of the dark warehouse, which made this a particularly unpleasant job at night. Still, the men ventured forth, and ten minutes later we were able to put away the candles.

I was up early this morning. Jan was already dressed. Since he had to leave at eight-thirty, he was upstairs eating breakfast by eight. Miep was busy getting dressed, and I found her in her undershirt when I came in. She wears the same kind of long underwear I do when she bicycles. Margot and I threw on our clothes as well and were upstairs earlier than usual. After a pleasant breakfast, Miep headed downstairs. It was pouring outside and she was glad she didn't have to bicycle to work. Daddy and I made the beds, and afterward I learned five irregular French verbs. Quite industrious, don't you think?

Margot and Peter were reading in our room, with Mouschi curled up beside Margot on the divan. After my irregular French verbs, I joined them and read *The Woods Are Singing* for All Eternity. It's quite a beautiful book, but very unusual. I'm almost finished.

Next week it's Bep's turn to spend the night.

Yours, Anne

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1942

My dearest Kitty,

I'm very worried. Father's sick. He's covered with spots and has a high temperature. It looks like measles. Just think, we can't even call a doctor! Mother is making him perspire in hopes of sweating out the fever.

This morning Miep told us that the furniture has been removed from the van Daans' apartment on Zuider-Amstellaan. We haven't told Mrs. van D. yet. She's been so "nervenmassig"* [*nervous] lately, and we don't feel like hearing her moan and groan again about all the beautiful china and lovely chairs she had to leave behind. We had to abandon most of our nice things too. What's the good of grumbling about it now?

Father wants me to start reading books by Hebbel and other well-known German writers. I can read German fairly well by now, except that I usually mumble the words instead of reading them silently to myself. But that'll pass. Father has taken the plays of Goethe and Schiller down from the big bookcase and is planning to read to me every evening. We've started off with *Don Carlos*. Encouraged by Father's good example, Mother pressed her prayer book into my hands. I read a few prayers in German, just to be polite. They certainly sound beautiful, but they mean very little to me. Why is she making me act so religious and devout?

Tomorrow we're going to light the stove for the first time. The chimney hasn't been swept in ages, so the room is bound to fill with smoke. Let's hope the thing draws!

Yours, Anne

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1942

Dear Kitty,

Bep stayed with us Friday evening. It was fun, but she didn't sleep very well because she'd drunk some wine. For the rest, there's nothing special to report. I had an awful headache yesterday and went to bed early. Margot's being exasperating again.

This morning I began sorting out an index card file from the office, because it'd fallen over and gotten all mixed up. Before long I was going nuts. I asked Margot and Peter to help, but they were too lazy, so I put it away.

I'm not crazy enough to do it all by myself!

Anne Frank

PS. I forgot to mention the important news that I'm probably going to get my period soon. I can tell because I keep finding a whitish smear in my panties, and Mother predicted it would start soon. I can hardly wait. It's such a momentous event. Too bad I can't use sanitary napkins, but you can't get them anymore, and Mama's tampons can be used only by women who've had a baby. i

COMMENT ADDED BY ANNE ON JANUARY 22, 1944: I wouldn't be able to write that kind of thing anymore.

Now that I'm rereading my diary after a year and a half, I'm surprised at my childish innocence. Deep down I know I could never be that innocent again, however much I'd like to be. I can understand the mood changes and the comments about Margot, Mother and Father as if I'd written them only yesterday, but I can't imagine writing so openly about other matters. It embarrasses me awfully to read the pages dealing with subjects that I remembered as being nicer than they actually were. My descriptions are so indelicate. But enough of that.

I can also understand my homesickness and yearning for Moortje. The whole time I've been here I've longed unconsciously and at times consciously for trust, love and

physical affection. This longing may change in intensity, but it's always there.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1942

Dear Kitty,

The British have finally scored a few successes in Africa and Stalingrad hasn't fallen yet, so the men are happy and we had coffee and tea this morning. For the rest, nothing special to report.

This week I've been reading a lot and doing little work. That's the way things ought to be. That's surely the road to success.

Mother and I are getting along better lately, but we're never close. Father's not very open about his feelings, but he's the same sweetheart he's always been. We lit the stove a few days ago and the entire room is still filled with smoke. I prefer central heating, and I'm probably not the only one. Margot's a stinker (there's no other word for it), a constant source of irritation, morning, noon and night.

Anne Frank

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Mother's nerves are very much on edge, and that doesn't bode well for me. Is it just a coincidence that Father and Mother never scold Margot and always blame me for everything? Last night, for example, Margot was reading a book with beautiful illustrations; she got up and put the book aside for later. I wasn't doing anything, so I picked it up and began looking at the pictures. Margot came back, saw "her" book in my hands, knitted her brow and angrily demanded the book back. I wanted to look through it some more. Margot got madder by the minute, and Mother butted in: "Margot was reading that book; give it back to her."

Father came in, and without even knowing what was going on, saw that Margot was being wronged and lashed out at me: "I'd like to see what you'd do if Margot was looking at one of your books!"

I promptly gave in, put the book down and, according to them, left the room 'in a huff.' I was neither huffy nor cross, but merely sad.

It wasn't right of Father to pass judgment without knowing what the issue was. I would have given the book to Margot myself, and a lot sooner, if Father and Mother hadn't intervened and rushed to take Margot's part, as if she were suffering some great injustice.

Of course, Mother took Margot's side; they always take each other's sides. I'm so used to it that I've become completely indifferent to Mother's rebukes and Margot's moodiness. I love them, but only because they're Mother and Margot. I don't give a darn about them as people. As far as I'm concerned, they can go jump in a lake. It's different with Father. When I see him being partial to Margot, approving Margot's every action, praising her, hugging her, I feel a gnawing ache inside, because I'm crazy about him. I model myself after Father, and there's no one in the world I love more. He doesn't realize that he treats Margot differently than he does me: Margot just happens to be the smartest, the kindest, the prettiest and the best. But I have a right to be taken seriously too. I've always been the clown and mischief maker of the family; I've always had to pay double for my sins: once with scoldings and then again with my own sense of despair. I'm no longer satisfied with the meaningless affection or the supposedly serious talks. I long for something from Father that he's incapable of giving. I'm not jealous of Margot; I never have been. I'm not envious of her brains or her beauty. It's just that I'd like to feel that Father really loves me, not because I'm his child, but because I'm me, Anne.

I cling to Father because my contempt of Mother is growing daily and it's only through him that I'm able to retain the last ounce of family feeling I have left. He doesn't understand that I sometimes need to vent my feelings for Mother. He doesn't want to talk about it, and he avoids any discussion involving Mother's failings. And yet Mother, with all her shortcomings, is tougher for me to deal with. I don't know how I should act. I can't very well confront her with her carelessness, her sarcasm and her hard-heartedness, yet I can't continue to take the blame for everything.

I'm the opposite of Mother, so of course we clash. I don't mean to judge her; I don't have that right. I'm simply looking at her as a mother. She's not a mother to me -- I have to mother myself. I've cut myself adrift from them. I'm charting my own course, and we'll see where it leads me. I have no choice, because I can picture what a mother and a wife should be and can't seem to find anything of the sort in the woman I'm supposed to call "Mother."

I tell myself time and again to overlook Mother's bad example. I only want to see her good points, and to look inside myself for what's lacking in her. But it doesn't work, and the worst part is that Father and Mother don't realize their own inadequacies and how much I blame them for letting me down. Are there any parents who can make

their children completely happy?

Sometimes I think God is trying to test me, both now and in the future. I'll have to become a good person on my own, without anyone to serve as a model or advise me, but it'll make me stronger in the end.

Who else but me is ever going to read these letters? Who else but me can I turn to for comfort? I'm frequently in need of consolation, I often feel weak, and more often than not, I fail to meet expectations. I know this, and every day I resolve to do better.

They aren't consistent in their treatment of me. One day they say that Anne's a sensible girl and entitled to know everything, and the next that Anne's a silly goose who doesn't know a thing and yet imagines she's learned all she needs to know from books! I'm no longer the baby and spoiled little darling whose every deed can be laughed at. I have my own ideas, plans and ideals, but am unable to articulate them yet.

Oh well. So much comes into my head at night when I'm alone, or during the day when I'm obliged to put up with people I can't abide or who invariably misinterpret my intentions. That's why I always wind up coming back to my diary -- I start there and end there because Kitty's always patient. I promise her that, despite everything, I'll keep going, that I'll find my own way and choke back my tears. I only wish I could see some results or, just once, receive encouragement from someone who loves me.

Don't condemn me, but think of me as a person who sometimes reaches the bursting point!

Yours, Anne

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Yesterday was Peter's birthday, his sixteenth. I was upstairs by eight, and Peter and I looked at his presents. He received a game of Monopoly, a razor and a cigarette lighter. Not that he smokes so much, not at all; it just looks so distinguished.

The biggest surprise came from Mr. van Daan, who reported at one that the English had landed in Tunis, Algiers, Casablanca and Oran.

"This is the beginning of the end," everyone was saying, but Churchill, the British Prime Minister, who must have heard the same thing being repeated in England, declared, "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." Do you see the difference? However, there's reason for optimism. Stalingrad, the Russian city that has been under attack for three months, still hasn't fallen into German hands.

In the true spirit of the Annex, I should talk to you about food. (I should explain that they're real gluttons up on the top floor.)

Bread is delivered daily by a very nice baker, a friend of Mr. Kleiman's. Of course, we don't have as much as we did at home, but it's enough. We also purchase ration books on the black market. The price keeps going up; it's already risen from 27 to 33 guilders. And that for mere sheets of printed paper!

To provide ourselves with a source of nutrition that will keep, aside from the hundred cans of food we've stored here, we bought three hundred pounds of beans. Not just for us, but for the office staff as well. We'd hung the sacks of beans on hooks in the hallway, just inside our secret entrance, but a few seams split under the weight. So we decided to move them to the attic, and Peter was entrusted with the heavy lifting. He managed to get five of the six sacks upstairs intact and was busy with the last one when the sack broke and a flood, or rather a hailstorm, of brown beans went flying through the air and down the stairs. Since there were about fifty pounds of beans in that sack, it made enough noise to raise the dead. Downstairs they were sure the house was falling down around their heads. Peter was stunned, but then burst into peals of laughter when he saw me standing at the bottom of the stairs, like an island in a sea of brown, with waves of beans lapping at my ankles. We promptly began picking them up, but beans are so small and slippery that they roll into every conceivable corner and hole. Now each time we go upstairs, we bend over and hunt around so we can present Mrs. van Daan with a handful of beans.

I almost forgot to mention that Father has recovered from his illness.

Yours, Anne

P.S. The radio has just announced that Algiers has fallen. Morocco, Casablanca and Oran have been in English hands for several days. We're now waiting for Tunis.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Great news! We're planning to take an eighth person into hiding with us!

Yes, really. We always thought there was enough room and food for one more person, but we were afraid of placing an even greater burden on Mr. Kugler and Mr. Kleiman. But since reports of the dreadful things being done to the Jews are getting worse by the day, Father decided to sound out these two gentlemen, and they thought it was an excellent plan. "It's just as dangerous, whether there are seven or eight," they noted rightly. Once this was settled, we sat down and mentally went through our circle of acquaintances, trying to come up with a single person who would blend in well with our extended family. This wasn't difficult. After Father had rejected all the van Daan relatives, we chose a dentist named Alfred Dussel. He lives with a charming Christian lady who's quite a bit younger than he is. They're probably not married, but that's beside the point. He's known to be quiet and refined, and he seemed, from our superficial acquaintance with him, to be nice. Miep knows him as well, so she'll be able to make the necessary arrangements. If he comes, Mr. Dussel will have to sleep in my room instead of Margot, who will have to make do with the folding bed.*
[*After Dussel arrived, Margot slept in her parents' bedroom.] We'll ask him to bring along something to fill cavities with.

Yours, Anne

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Miep came to tell us that she'd been to see Dr. Dussel. He asked her the moment she entered the room if she knew of a hiding place and was enormously pleased when Miep said she had something in mind. She added "that he'd need to go into hiding as soon as possible, preferably Saturday, but he thought this was highly improbable, since he wanted to bring his records up to date, settle his accounts and attend to a couple of patients. Miep relayed the message to us this morning. We didn't think it was wise to wait so long. All these preparations require explanations to various people who we feel ought to be kept in the dark. Miep went to ask if Dr. Dussel couldn't manage to come on Saturday after all, but he said no, and now he's scheduled to arrive on Monday.

I think it's odd that he doesn't jump at our proposal. If they pick him up on the street, it won't help either his records or his patients, so why the delay? If you ask

me, it's stupid of Father to humor him.

Otherwise, no news.

Yours, Anne

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1942

Dearest Kitty!

Mr. Dussel has arrived. Everything went smoothly. Miep told him to be at a certain place in front of the post office at 11 A.M., when a man would meet him, and he was at the appointed place at the appointed time. Mr. Kleiman went up to him, announced that the man he was expecting to meet was unable to come and asked him to drop by the office to see Miep. Mr. Kleiman took a streetcar back to the office while Mr. Dussel followed on foot.

It was eleven—twenty when Mr. Dussel tapped on the office door. Miep asked him to remove his coat, so the yellow star couldn't be seen, and brought him to the private office, where Mr. Kleiman kept him occupied until the cleaning lady had gone. On the pretext that the private office was needed for something else, Miep took Mr. Dussel upstairs, opened the bookcase and stepped inside, while Mr. Dussel looked on in amazement.

In the meantime, the seven of us had seated ourselves around the dining table to await the latest addition to our family with coffee and cognac. Miep first led him into the Frank family's room. He immediately recognized our furniture, but had no idea we were upstairs, just above his head. When Miep told him, he was so astonished he nearly fainted. Thank goodness she didn't leave him in suspense any longer, but brought him upstairs. Mr. Dussel sank into a chair and stared at us in dumbstruck silence, as though he thought he could read the truth on our faces. Then he stuttered, "Aber . . . but are you nicht in Belgium? The officer, the auto, they were not coming? Your escape was not working?"

We explained the whole thing to him, about how we'd deliberately spread the rumor of the officer and the car to throw the Germans and anyone else who might come looking for us off the track. Mr. Dussel was speechless in the face of such ingenuity, and could do nothing but gaze around in surprise as he explored the rest of our lovely and ultrapractical Annex. We all had lunch together. Then he took a short nap, joined us for tea, put away the few belongings Miep had been able to bring here in advance and began to feel much more at home. Especially when we handed him the following

typewritten rules and regulations for the Secret Annex (a van Daan production):

PROSPECTUS AND GUIDE TO THE SECRET ANNEX

A Unique Facility for the Temporary
Accommodation of Jews and Other
Dispossessed Persons

Open all year round: Located in beautiful, quiet, wooded surroundings in the heart of Amsterdam. No private residences in the vicinity. Can be reached by streetcar 13 or 17 and also by car and bicycle. For those to whom such transportation has been forbidden by the German authorities, it can also be reached on foot. Furnished and unfurnished rooms and apartments are available at all times, with or without meals.

Price: Free.

Diet: Low-fat.

Running water in the bathroom (sorry, no bath) and on various inside and outside walls. Cozy wood stoves for heating.

Ample storage space for a variety of goods. Two large, modern safes.

Private radio with a direct line to London, New York, Tel Aviv and many other stations. Available to all residents after 6 P.M. No listening to forbidden broadcasts, with certain exceptions, i.e., German stations may only be tuned in to listen to classical music. It is absolutely forbidden to listen to German news bulletins (regardless of where they are transmitted from) and to pass them on to others.

Rest hours: From 10 P.M. to 7:30 A.M.; 10:15 A.M. on Sundays. Owing to circumstances, residents are required to observe rest hours during the daytime when instructed to do so by the Management. To ensure the safety of all, rest hours must be strictly observed!!!

Free-time activities: None allowed outside the house until further notice.

Use of language: It is necessary to speak softly at all times. Only the language of civilized people may be spoken, thus no German.

Reading and relaxation: No German books may be read, except for the classics and works of a scholarly nature. Other books are optional.

Calisthenics: Daily.

Singing: Only softly, and after 6 P.M.

Movies: Prior arrangements required.

Classes: A weekly correspondence course in shorthand. Courses in English, French, math and history offered at any hour of the day or night. Payment in the form of tutoring, e.g., Dutch.

Separate department for the care of small household pets (with the exception of vermin, for which special permits are required).

Mealtimes:

Breakfast: At 9 A.M. daily except holidays and Sundays; at approximately 11:30 A.M. on Sundays and holidays.

Lunch: A light meal. From 1:15 P.M. to 1:45 P.M.

Dinner: May or not be a hot meal.

Mealtime depends on news broadcasts.

Obligations with respect to the Supply Corps: Residents must be prepared to help with office work at all times. Baths: The washtub is available to all residents after 9 A.M. on Sundays. Residents may bathe in the bathroom, kitchen, private office or front office, as they choose.

Alcohol: For medicinal purposes only.

The end.

Yours, Anne

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Just as we thought, Mr. Dussel is a very nice man. Of course he didn't mind sharing a

room with me; to be honest, I'm not exactly delighted at having a stranger use my things, but you have to make sacrifices for a good cause, and I'm glad I can make this small one. "If we can save even one of our friends, the rest doesn't matter," said Father, and he's absolutely right.

The first day Mr. Dussel was here, he asked me all sorts of questions -- for example, what time the cleaning lady comes to the office, how we've arranged to use the washroom and when we're allowed to go to the toilet. You may laugh, but these things aren't so easy in a hiding place. During the daytime we can't make any noise that might be heard downstairs, and when someone else is there, like the cleaning lady, we have to be extra careful. I patiently explained all this to Mr. Dussel, but I was surprised to see how slow he is to catch on. He asks everything twice and still can't remember what you've told him.

Maybe he's just confused by the sudden change and he'll get over it. Otherwise, everything is going fine.

Mr. Dussel has told us much about the outside world we've missed for so long. He had sad news. Countless friends and acquaintances have been taken off to a dreadful fate. Night after night, green and gray military vehicles cruise the streets. They knock on every door, asking whether any Jews live there. If so, the whole family is immediately taken away. If not, they proceed to the next house. It's impossible to escape their clutches unless you go into hiding. They often go around with lists, knocking only on those doors where they know there's a big haul to be made. They frequently offer a bounty, so much per head. It's like the slave hunts of the olden days. I don't mean to make light of this; it's much too tragic for that. In the evenings when it's dark, I often see long lines of good, innocent people, accompanied by crying children, walking on and on, ordered about by a handful of men who bully and beat them until they nearly drop. No one is spared. The sick, the elderly, children, babies and pregnant women -- all are marched to their death.

We're so fortunate here, away from the turmoil. We wouldn't have to give a moment's thought to all this suffering if it weren't for the fact that we're so worried about those we hold dear, whom we can no longer help. I feel wicked sleeping in a warm bed, while somewhere out there my dearest friends are dropping from exhaustion or being knocked to the ground.

I get frightened myself when I think of close friends who are now at the mercy of the cruelest monsters ever to stalk the earth.

And all because they're Jews.

Yours, Anne

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

We don't really know how to react. Up to now very little news about the Jews had reached us here, and we thought it best to stay as cheerful as possible. Every now and then Miep used to mention what had happened to a friend, and Mother or Mrs. van Daan would start to cry, so she decided it was better not to say any more. But we bombarded Mr. Dussel with questions, and the stories he had to tell were so gruesome and dreadful that we can't get them out of our heads. Once we've had time to digest the news, we'll probably go back to our usual joking and teasing. It won't do us or those outside any good if we continue to be as gloomy as we are now. And what would be the point of turning the Secret Annex into a Melancholy Annex?

No matter what I'm doing, I can't help thinking about those who are gone. I catch myself laughing and remember that it's a disgrace to be so cheerful. But am I supposed to spend the whole day crying? No, I can't do that. This gloom will pass.

Added to this misery there's another, but of a more personal nature, and it pales in comparison to the suffering I've just told you about. Still, I can't help telling you that lately I've begun to feel deserted. I'm surrounded by too great a void. I never used to give it much thought, since my mind was filled with my friends and having a good time. Now I think either about unhappy things or about myself. It's taken a while, but I've finally realized that Father, no matter how kind he may be, can't take the place of my former world. When it comes to my feelings, Mother and Margot ceased to count long ago.

But why do I bother you with this foolishness? I'm terribly ungrateful, Kitty, I know, but when I've been scolded for the umpteenth time and have all these other woes to think about as well, my head begins to reel!

Yours, Anne

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

We've been using too much electricity and have now exceeded our ration. The result:

excessive economy and the prospect of having the electricity cut off. No light for fourteen days; that's a pleasant thought, isn't it? But who knows, maybe it won't be so long! It's too dark to read after four or four-thirty, so we while away the time with all kinds of crazy activities: telling riddles, doing calisthenics in the dark, speaking English or French, reviewing books -- after a while everything gets boring. Yesterday I discovered a new pastime: using a good pair of binoculars to peek into the lighted rooms of the neighbors. During the day our curtains can't be opened, not even an inch, but there's no harm when it's so dark.

I never knew that neighbors could be so interesting. Ours are, at any rate. I've come across a few at dinner, one family making home movies and the dentist across the way working on a frightened old lady.

Mr. Dussel, the man who was said to get along so well with children and to absolutely adore them, has turned out to be an old-fashioned disciplinarian and preacher of unbearably long sermons on manners. Since I have the singular pleasure (!) of sharing my far too narrow room with His Excellency, and since I'm generally considered to be the worst behaved of the three young people, it's all I can do to avoid having the same old scoldings and admonitions repeatedly flung at my head and to pretend not to hear. This wouldn't be so bad if Mr. Dussel weren't such a tattletale and hadn't singled out Mother to be the recipient of his reports. If Mr. Dussel's just read me the riot act, Mother lectures me all over again, this time throwing the whole book at me. And if I'm really lucky, Mrs. van D. calls me to account five minutes later and lays down the law as well!

Really, it's not easy being the badly brought-up center of attention of a family of nitpickers.

In bed at night, as I ponder my many sins and exaggerated shortcomings, I get so confused by the sheer amount of things I have to consider that I either laugh or cry, depending on my mood. Then I fall asleep with the strange feeling of wanting to be different than I am or being different than I want to be, or perhaps of behaving differently than I am or want to be.

Oh dear, now I'm confusing you too. Forgive me, but I don't like crossing things out, and in these times of

scarcity, tossing away a piece of paper is clearly taboo. So I can only advise you not to reread the above passage and to make no attempt to get to the bottom of it, because you'll never find your way out again!

Yours, Anne

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Hanukkah and St. Nicholas Day nearly coincided this year; they were only one day apart. We didn't make much of a fuss with Hanukkah, merely exchanging a few small gifts and lighting the candles. Since candles are in short supply, we lit them for only ten minutes, but as long as we sing the song, that doesn't matter. Mr. van Daan made a menorah out of wood, so that was taken care of too.

St. Nicholas Day on Saturday was much more fun. During dinner Bep and Miep were so busy whispering to Father that our curiosity was aroused and we suspected they were up to something. Sure enough, at eight o'clock we all trooped downstairs through the hall in pitch darkness (it gave me the shivers, and I wished I was safely back upstairs!) to the alcove. We could switch on the light, since this room doesn't have any windows. When that was done, Father opened the big cabinet.

"Oh, how wonderful!" we all cried.

In the corner was a large basket decorated with colorful paper and a mask of Black Peter.

We quickly took the basket upstairs with us. Inside was a little gift for everyone, including an appropriate verse. Since you're famthar with the kinds of poems people write each other on St. Nicholas Day, I won't copy them down for you.

I received a Kewpie doll, Father got bookends, and so on. Well anyway, it was a nice idea, and since the eight of us had never celebrated St. Nicholas Day before, this was a good time to begin.

Yours, Anne

PS. We also had presents for everyone downstairs, a few things left over from the Good Old Days; plus Miep and Bep are always grateful for money.

Today we heard that Mr. van Daan's ashtray, Mr. Dussel's picture frame and Father's bookends were made by none other than Mr. Voskuijl. How anyone can be so clever with his hands is a mystery to me!

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

Mr. van Daan used to be in the meat, sausage and spice business. He was hired for his knowledge of spices, and yet, to our great delight, it's his sausage talents that have come in handy now.

We ordered a large amount of meat (under the counter, of course) that we were planning to preserve in case there were hard times ahead. Mr. van Daan decided to make bratwurst, sausages and mettwurst. I had fun watching him put the meat through the grinder: once, twice, three times. Then he added the remaining ingredients to the ground meat and used a long pipe to force the mixture into the casings. We ate the bratwurst with sauerkraut for lunch, but the sausages, which were going to be canned, had to dry first, so we hung them over a pole suspended from the ceiling. Everyone who came into the room burst into laughter when they saw the dangling sausages. It was such a comical sight.

The kitchen was a shambles. Mr. van Daan, clad in his wife's apron and looking fatter than ever, was working away at the meat. What with his bloody hands, red face and spotted apron, he looked like a real butcher. Mrs. D. was trying to do everything at once: learning Dutch out of a book, stirring the soup, watching the meat, sighing and moaning about her broken rib. That's what happens when old (!) ladies do such stupid exercises to get rid of their fat behinds! Dussel had an eye infection and was sitting next to the stove dabbing his eye with camomile tea. Pim, seated in the one ray of sunshine coming through the window, kept having to move his chair this way and that to stay out of the way. His rheumatism must have been bothering him because he was slightly hunched over and was keeping an eye on Mr. van Daan with an agonized expression on his face. He reminded me of those aged invalids you see in the poor-house. Peter was romping around the room with Mouschi, the cat, while Mother, Margot and I were peeling boiled potatoes. When you get right down to it, none of us were doing our work properly, because we were all so busy watching Mr. van Daan.

Dussel has opened his dental practice. Just for fun, I'll describe the session with his very first patient.

Mother was ironing, and Mrs. van D., the first victim, sat down on a chair in the middle of the room. Dussel, unpacking his case with an air of importance, asked for some eau de cologne, which could be used as a disinfectant, and vaseline, which would have to do for wax. He looked in Mrs. van D.'s mouth and found two teeth that made her wince with pain and utter incoherent cries every time he touched them. After a

lengthy examination (lengthy as far as Mrs. van D. was concerned, since it actually took no longer than two minutes), Dussel began to scrape out a cavity. But Mrs. van D. had no intention of letting him. She flailed her arms and legs until Dussel finally let go of his probe and it . . . remained stuck in Mrs. van D.'s tooth. That really did it! Mrs. van D. lashed out wildly in all directions, cried (as much as you can with an instrument like that in your mouth), tried to remove it, but only managed to push it in even farther. Mr. Dussel calmly observed the scene, his hands on his hips, while the rest of the audience roared with laughter. Of course, that was very mean of us. If it'd been me, I'm sure I would have yelled even louder. After a great deal of squirming, kicking, screaming and shouting, Mrs. van D. finally managed to yank the thing out, and Mr. Dussel went on with his work as if nothing had happened. He was so quick that Mrs. van D. didn't have time to pull any more shenanigans. But then, he had more help than he's ever had before: no fewer than two assistants; Mr. van D. and I performed our job well. The whole scene resembled one of those engravings from the Middle Ages entitled "A Quack at Work." In the meantime, however, the patient was getting restless, since she had to keep an eye on "her" soup and "her" food. One thing is certain: it'll be a while before Mrs. van D. makes another dental appointment!

Yours, Anne

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

I'm sitting here nice and cozy in the front office, peering out through a chink in the heavy curtains. It's dusky, but there's just enough light to write by.

It's really strange watching people walk past. They all seem to be in such a hurry that they nearly trip over their own feet. Those on bicycles whiz by so fast I can't even tell who's on the bike. The people in this neighborhood aren't particularly attractive to look at. The children especially are so dirty you wouldn't want to touch them with a ten-foot pole. Real slum kids with runny noses. I can hardly understand a word they say.

Yesterday afternoon, when Margot and I were taking a bath, I said, "What if we took a fishing rod and reeled in each of those kids one by one as they walked by, stuck them in the tub, washed and mended their clothes and then. . ."

"And then tomorrow they'd be just as dirty and tattered as they were before," Margot replied.

But I'm babbling. There are also other things to look at cars, boats and the rain. I can hear the streetcar and the children and I'm enjoying myself.

Our thoughts are subject to as little change as we are. They're like a merry-go-round, turning from the Jews to food, from food to politics. By the way, speaking of Jews, I saw two yesterday when I was peeking through ; the curtains. I felt as though I were gazing at one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It gave me such a funny feeling, as if I'd denounced them to the authorities and was now spying on their misfortune.

Across from us is a houseboat. The captain lives there with his wife and children. He has a small yapping dog. We know the little dog only by its bark and by its tail, which we can see whenever it runs around the deck. Oh, what a shame, it's just started raining and most of the people are hidden under their umbrellas. All I can see are raincoats, and now and again the back of a stocking-capped head. Actually, I don't even need to look. By now I can recognize the women at a glance: gone to fat from eating potatoes, dressed in a red or green coat and worn-out shoes, a shopping bag dangling from their arms, with faces that are either grim or good-humored, depending on the mood of their husbands.

Yours, Anne

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1942

Dearest Kitty,

The Annex was delighted to hear that we'll all be receiving an extra quarter pound of butter for Christmas. According to the newspaper, everyone is entitled to half a pound, but they mean those lucky souls who get their ration books from the government, not Jews in hiding like us who can only afford to buy four rather than eight ration books on the black market. Each of us is going to bake something with the butter. This morning I made two cakes and a batch of cookies. It's very busy upstairs, and Mother has informed me that I'm not to do any studying or reading until all the household chores have been finished.

Mrs. van Daan is lying in bed nursing her bruised rib. She complains all day long, constantly demands that the bandages be changed and is generally dissatisfied with everything. I'll be glad when she gets back on her feet and can clean up after herself because, I must admit, she's extraordinarily hardworking and neat, and as long as she's in good physical and mental condition, she's quite cheerful.

As if I don't hear "shh, shh" enough during the day because I'm always making "too much" noise, my dear roommate has come up with the idea of saying "shh, shh" to me all night too. According to him, I shouldn't even turn over. I refuse to take any notice of him, and the next time he shushes me, I'm going to shush him right back.

He gets more exasperating and egotistical as the days go by. Except for the first week, I haven't seen even one of the cookies he so generously promised me. He's particularly infuriating on Sundays, when he switches on the light at the crack of dawn to exercise for ten minutes.

To me, the torment seems to last for hours, since the chairs I use to make my bed longer are constantly being jiggled under my sleepy head. After rounding off his limbering-up exercises with a few vigorous arm swings, His Lordship begins dressing. His underwear is hanging on a hook, so first he lumbers over to get it and then lumbers back, past my bed. But his tie is on the table, so once again he pushes and bumps his way past the chairs.

But I mustn't waste any more of your time griping about disgusting old men. It won't help matters anyway. My plans for revenge, such as unscrewing the lightbulb, locking the door and hiding his clothes, have unfortunately had to be abandoned in the interests of peace.

Oh, I'm becoming so sensible! We've got to be reasonable about everything we do here: studying, listening, holding our tongues, helping others, being kind, making compromises and I don't know what else! I'm afraid my common sense, which was in short supply to begin with, will be used up too quickly and I won't have any left by the time the war is over.

Yours, Anne

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 1943

Dearest Kitty,

This morning I was constantly interrupted, and as a result I haven't been able to finish a single thing I've begun.

We have a new pastime, namely, filling packages with powdered gravy. The gravy is one of Gies & Co.'s products. Mr. Kugler hasn't been able to find anyone else to fill the packages, and besides, it's cheaper if we do the job. It's the kind of work they

do in prisons. It's incredibly boring and makes us dizzy and giggly.

Terrible things are happening outside. At any time of night and day, poor helpless people are being dragged out of their homes. They're allowed to take only a knapsack and a little cash with them, and even then, they're robbed of these possessions on the way. Families are torn apart; men, women and children are separated. Children come home from school to find that their parents have disappeared. Women return from shopping to find their houses sealed, their families gone. The Christians in Holland are also living in fear because their sons are being sent to Germany. Everyone is scared. Every night hundreds of planes pass over Holland on their way to German cities, to sow their bombs on German soil. Every hour hundreds, or maybe even thousands, of people are being killed in Russia and Africa. No one can keep out of the conflict, the entire world is at war, and even though the

Allies are doing better, the end is nowhere in sight.

As for us, we're quite fortunate. Luckier than millions of people. It's quiet and safe here, and we're using our money to buy food. We're so selfish that we talk about "after the war" and look forward to new clothes and shoes, when actually we should be saving every penny to help others when the war is over, to salvage whatever we can.

The children in this neighborhood run around in thin shirts and wooden shoes. They have no coats, no caps, no stockings and no one to help them. Gnawing on a carrot to still their hunger pangs, they walk from their cold houses through cold streets to an even colder classroom. Things have gotten so bad in Holland that hordes of children stop passersby in the streets to beg for a piece of bread.

I could spend hours telling you about the suffering the war has brought, but I'd only make myself more miserable. All we can do is wait, as calmly as possible, for it to end. Jews and Christians alike are waiting, the whole world is waiting, and many are waiting for death.

Yours, Anne

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 1943

Dearest Kitty,

I'm seething with rage, yet I can't show it. I'd like to scream, stamp my foot, give Mother a good shaking, cry and I don't know what else because of the nasty words,

mocking looks and accusations that she hurls at me day after day, piercing me like arrows from a tightly strung bow, which are nearly impossible to pull from my body. I'd like to scream at Mother, Margot, the van Daans, Dussel and Father too: "Leave me alone, let me have at least one night when I don't cry myself to sleep with my eyes burning and my head pounding. Let me get away, away from everything, away from this world!" But I can't do that. I can't let them see my doubts, or the wounds they've inflicted on me. I couldn't bear their sympathy or their good-humored derision. It would only make me want to scream even more.

Everyone thinks I'm showing off when I talk, ridiculous when I'm silent, insolent when I answer, cunning when I have a good idea, lazy when I'm tired, selfish when I eat one bite more than I should, stupid, cowardly, calculating, etc., etc. All day long I hear nothing but what an exasperating child I am, and although I laugh it off and pretend not to mind, I do mind. I wish I could ask God to give me another personality, one that doesn't antagonize everyone.

But that's impossible. I'm stuck with the character I was born with, and yet I'm sure I'm not a bad person. I do my best to please everyone, more than they'd ever suspect in a million years. When I'm upstairs, I try to laugh it off because I don't want them to see my troubles.

More than once, after a series of absurd reproaches, I've snapped at Mother: "I don't care what you say. Why don't you just wash your hands of me -- I'm a hopeless case." Of course, she'd tell me not to talk back and virtually ignore me for two days. Then suddenly all would be forgotten and she'd treat me like everyone else.

It's impossible for me to be all smiles one day and venomous the next. I'd rather choose the golden mean, which isn't so golden, and keep my thoughts to myself. Perhaps sometime I'll treat the others with the same contempt as they treat me. Oh, if only I could.

Yours, Anne

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1943

Dearest Kitty,

Though it's been ages since I've written to you about the squabbles, there's still no change. In the beginning Mr. Dussel took our soon-forgotten clashes very seriously, but now he's grown used to them and no longer tries to mediate.

Margot and Peter aren't exactly what you'd call "young"; they're both so quiet and boring. Next to them, I stick out like a sore thumb, and I'm always being told, "Margot and Peter don't act that way. Why don't you follow your sister's example!" I hate that.

I confess that I have absolutely no desire to be like Margot. She's too weak-willed and passive to suit me; she lets herself be swayed by others and always backs down under pressure. I want to have more spunk! But I keep ideas like these to myself. They'd only laugh at me if I offered this in my defense.

During meals the air is filled with tension. Fortunately, the outbursts are sometimes held in check by the "soup eaters," the people from the office who come up to have a cup of soup for lunch.

This afternoon Mr. van Daan again brought up the fact that Margot eats so little. "I suppose you do it to keep your figure," he added in a mocking tone.

Mother, who always comes to Margot's defense, said in a loud voice, "I can't stand that stupid chatter of yours a minute longer."

Mrs. van D. turned red as a beet. Mr. van D. stared straight ahead and said nothing.

Still, we often have a good laugh. Not long ago Mrs. van D. was entertaining us with some bit of nonsense or another. She was talking about the past, about how well she got along with her father and what a flirt she was. "And you know," she continued, "my father told me that if a gentleman ever got fresh, I was to say, 'Remember, sir, that I'm a lady,' and he'd know what I meant." We split our sides laughing, as if she'd told us a good joke.

Even Peter, though he's usually quiet, occasionally gives rise to hilarity. He has the misfortune of adoring foreign words without knowing what they mean. One afternoon we couldn't use the toilet because there were visitors in the office. Unable to wait, he went to the bathroom but didn't flush the toilet. To warn us of the unpleasant odor, he tacked a sign to the bathroom door: "RSVP -- gas!" Of course, he meant "Danger -- gas!" but he thought "RSVP" looked more elegant. He didn't have the faintest idea that it meant "please reply."

Yours, Anne

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1943

Dearest Kitty,

Pim is expecting the invasion any day now. Churchill has had pneumonia, but is gradually getting better. Gandhi, the champion of Indian freedom, is on one of his umpteenth hunger strikes.

Mrs. van D. claims she's fatalistic. But who's the most afraid when the guns go off? None other than Petronella van Daan.

Jan brought along the episcopal letter that the bishops addressed to their parishioners. It was beautiful and inspiring. "People of the Netherlands, stand up and take action. Each of us must choose our own weapons to fight for the freedom of our country, our people and our religion! Give your help and support. Act now!" This is what they're preaching from the pulpit. Will it do any good? It's definitely too late to help our fellow Jews.

Guess what's happened to us now? The owner of the building sold it without informing Mr. Kugler and Mr. Kleiman. One morning the new landlord arrived with an architect to look the place over. Thank goodness Mr. Kleiman was in the office. He showed the gentlemen all there was to see, with the exception of the Secret Annex. He claimed he'd left the key at home and the new owner asked no further questions. If only he doesn't come back demanding to see the Annex. In that case, we'll be in big trouble!

Father emptied a card file for Margot and me and filled it with index cards that are blank on one side. This is to become our reading file, in which Margot and I are supposed to note down the books we've read, the author and the date. I've learned two new words: "brothel" and "coquette." I've bought a separate notebook for new words.

There's a new division of butter and margarine. Each person is to get their portion on their own plate. The distribution is very unfair. The van Daans, who always make breakfast for everyone, give themselves one and a half times more than they do us. My parents are much too afraid of an argument to say anything, which is a shame, because I think people like that should always be given a taste of their own medicine.

Yours, Anne

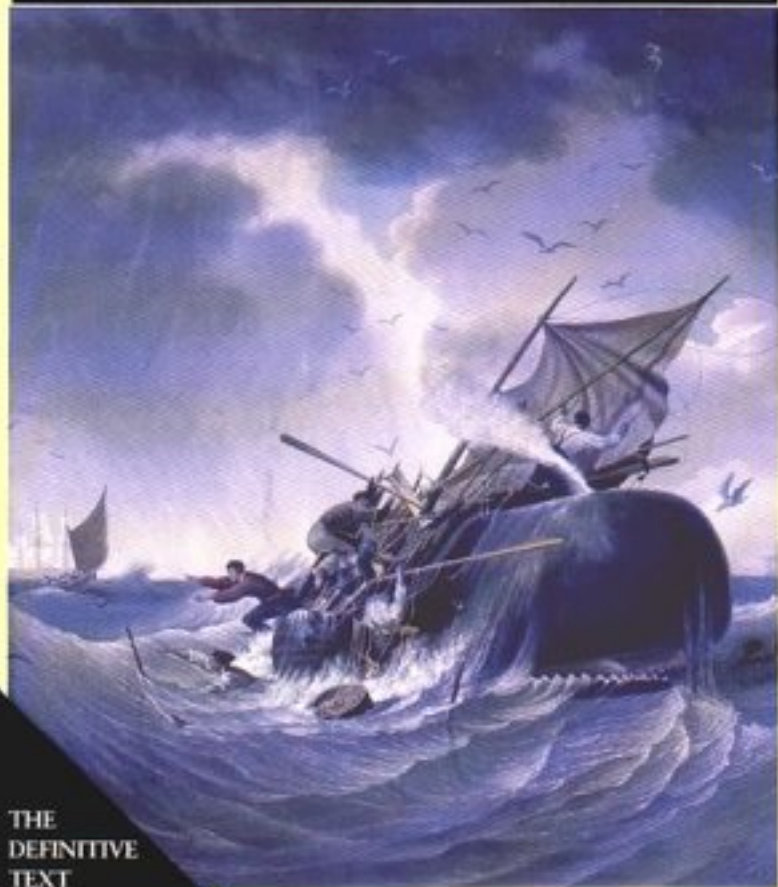
THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 1943

Dearest Kitty,

PENGUIN CLASSICS

HERMAN MELVILLE

MOBY-DICK
or The Whale



THE
DEFINITIVE
TEXT

"'Stern all!' exclaimed the mate, as upon turning his head, he saw the distended jaws of a large Sperm Whale close to the head of the boat, threatening it with instant destruction;- 'Stern all, for your lives!'"

WHARTON THE WHALE KILLER.

"So be cheery, my lads, let your hearts never fail,
While the bold harpooneer is striking the whale!"

NANTUCKET SONG.

"Oh, the rare old Whale, mid storm and gale
In his ocean home will be
A giant in might, where might is right,
And King of the boundless sea."

WHALE SONG.

Loomings

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago- never mind how long precisely- having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off- then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs- commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme downtown is the battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?- Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster- tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this?

Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling. And there they stand- miles of them- leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets avenues- north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Once more. Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries- stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever.

But here is an artist. He desires to paint you the dreamiest, shadiest, quietest, most enchanting bit of romantic landscape in all the valley of the Saco. What is the chief element he employs? There stand his trees, each with a hollow trunk, as if a hermit and a crucifix were within; and here sleeps his meadow, and there sleep his cattle; and up from yonder cottage goes a sleepy smoke. Deep into distant woodlands winds a mazy way, reaching to overlapping spurs of mountains bathed in their hill-side blue. But though the picture lies thus tranced, and though this pine-tree shakes down its sighs like leaves upon this shepherd's head, yet all were vain, unless the shepherd's eye were fixed upon the magic stream before him. Go visit the Prairies in June, when for scores on scores of miles you wade knee-deep among Tiger-lilies- what is the one charm wanting?- Water- there is not a drop of water there! Were Niagara but a cataract of sand, would you travel your thousand miles to see it? Why did the poor poet of Tennessee, upon suddenly receiving two handfuls of silver, deliberate whether to buy him a coat, which he sadly needed, or invest his money in a pedestrian trip to Rockaway Beach? Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land?

Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.

Now, when I say that I am in the habit of going to sea whenever I begin to grow hazy about the eyes, and begin to be over-conscious of my lungs, I do not mean to have it inferred that I ever go to sea as a passenger. For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse, and a purse is but a rag unless you have something in it. Besides, passengers get sea-sick- grow quarrelsome- don't sleep of nights- do not enjoy themselves much, as a general thing;- no, I never go as a passenger; nor, though I am something of a salt, do I ever go to sea as a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook. I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them. For my part, I abominate all honorable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever. It is quite as much as I can do to take care of myself, without taking care of ships, barques, brigs, schooners, and what not. And as for going as cook,- though I confess there is considerable glory in that, a cook being a sort of officer on ship-board- yet, somehow, I never fancied broiling fowls;- though once broiled, judiciously buttered, and judgmatically salted and peppered, there is no one who will speak more respectfully, not to say reverentially, of a broiled fowl than I will. It is out of the idolatrous dotings of the old Egyptians upon broiled ibis and roasted river horse, that you see the mummies of those creatures in their huge bakehouses the pyramids.

No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the fore-castle, aloft there to the royal mast-head. True, they rather order me about some, and make me jump from spar to spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow. And at first, this sort of thing is unpleasant enough. It touches one's sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. And more than all, if just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe of you. The transition is a keen one, I assure you, from a schoolmaster to a sailor, and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it. But even this wears off in time.

What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom and sweep down the decks? What does that indignity amount to, weighed, I mean, in the scales of the New Testament? Do you think the archangel Gabriel thinks anything the less of me, because I promptly and respectfully obey that old hunks in that particular instance? Who ain't a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about- however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way- either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content.

Again, I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of paying me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers a single penny that I ever heard of. On the contrary, passengers themselves must pay. And there is all the difference in the world between paying and being paid. The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us. But being paid,- what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition!

Finally, I always go to sea as a sailor, because of the wholesome exercise and pure air of the fore-castle deck. For as in this world, head winds are far more prevalent than winds from astern (that is, if you never violate the Pythagorean maxim), so for the most part the Commodore on the quarter-deck gets his atmosphere at second hand from the sailors on the fore-castle. He thinks he breathes it first; but not so. In much the same way do the commonalty lead their leaders in many other things, at the same time that the leaders little suspect it. But wherefore it was that after having repeatedly smelt the sea as a merchant sailor, I should now take it into my head to go on a whaling voyage; this the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in some unaccountable way- he can better answer than any one else. And, doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago. It came in as a sort of brief interlude and solo between more extensive performances. I take it that this part of the bill must have run something like this:

Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States.

WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL.
BLOODY BATTLE IN AFFGHANISTAN.

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces- though I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment.

Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these, with all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds, helped to sway me to my wish. With other men, perhaps, such things would not have been inducements; but as for me, I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts. Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it- would they let me- since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in.

By reason of these things, then, the whaling voyage was welcome; the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air.

The Carpet-Bag

I stuffed a shirt or two into my old carpet-bag, tucked it under my arm, and started for Cape Horn and the Pacific. Quitting the good city of old Manhatta, I duly arrived in New Bedford. It was a Saturday night in December. Much was I disappointed upon learning that the little packet for Nantucket had already sailed, and that no way of reaching that place would offer, till the following Monday.

As most young candidates for the pains and penalties of whaling stop at this same New Bedford, thence to embark on their voyage, it may as well be related that I, for one, had no idea of so doing. For my mind was made up to sail in no other than a Nantucket craft, because there was a fine, boisterous something about everything connected with that famous old island, which amazingly pleased me. Besides though New Bedford has of late been gradually monopolizing the business of whaling, and though in this matter poor old Nantucket is now much behind her, yet Nantucket was her great original- the Tyre of this Carthage;- the place where the first dead American whale was stranded. Where else but from Nantucket did those aboriginal whalers, the Red-Men, first sally out in canoes to give chase to the Leviathan? And where but from Nantucket, too, did that first adventurous little sloop put forth, partly laden with imported cobblestones- so goes the story- to throw at the whales, in order to discover when they were nigh enough to risk a harpoon from the bowsprit?

Now having a night, a day, and still another night following before me in New Bedford, ere could embark for my destined port, it became a matter of concernment where I was to eat and sleep meanwhile. It was a very dubious-looking, nay, a very dark and dismal night, biting cold and cheerless. I knew no one in the place. With anxious grapnels I had sounded my pocket, and only brought up a few pieces of silver,- So, wherever you go, Ishmael, said I to myself, as I stood in the middle of a dreary street shouldering my bag, and comparing the towards the north with the darkness towards the south- wherever in your wisdom you may

conclude to lodge for the night, my dear Ishmael, be sure to inquire the price, and don't be too particular.

With halting steps I paced the streets, and passed the sign of "The Crossed Harpoons"- but it looked too expensive and jolly there. Further on, from the bright red windows of the "Sword-Fish Inn," there came such fervent rays, that it seemed to have melted the packed snow and ice from before the house, for everywhere else the congealed frost lay ten inches thick in a hard, asphaltic pavement,- rather weary for me, when I struck my foot against the flinty projections, because from hard, remorseless service the soles of my boots were in a most miserable plight. Too expensive and jolly, again thought I, pausing one moment to watch the broad glare in the street, and hear the sounds of the tinkling glasses within. But go on, Ishmael, said I at last; don't you hear? get away from before the door; your patched boots are stopping the way. So on I went. I now by instinct followed the streets that took me waterward, for there, doubtless, were the cheapest, if not the cheeriest inns.

Such dreary streets! blocks of blackness, not houses, on either hand, and here and there a candle, like a candle moving about in a tomb. At this hour of the night, of the last day of the week, that quarter of the town proved all but deserted. But presently I came to a smoky light proceeding from a low, wide building, the door of which stood invitingly open. It had a careless look, as if it were meant for the uses of the public; so, entering, the first thing I did was to stumble over an ash-box in the porch. Ha! thought I, ha, as the flying particles almost choked me, are these ashes from that destroyed city, Gomorrah? But "The Crossed Harpoons," and the "The Sword-Fish?"- this, then must needs be the sign of "The Trap." However, I picked myself up and hearing a loud voice within, pushed on and opened a second, interior door.

It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of 'The Trap!'

Moving on, I at last came to a dim sort of light not far from the docks, and heard a forlorn creaking in the air; and looking up, saw a swinging sign over the door with a white painting upon it, faintly representing tall straight jet of misty spray, and these words underneath- "The Spouter Inn:- Peter Coffin."

Coffin?- Spouter?- Rather ominous in that particular connexion, thought I. But it is a common name in Nantucket, they say, and I suppose this Peter here is an emigrant from there. As the light looked so dim, and the place, for the time, looked quiet enough, and the dilapidated little wooden house itself looked as if it might have been carted here from the ruins of some burnt district, and as the swinging sign had a poverty-stricken sort of creak to it, I thought that here was the very spot for cheap lodgings, and the best of pea coffee.

It was a queer sort of place- a gable-ended old house, one side palsied as it were, and leaning over sadly. It stood on a sharp bleak corner, where that tempestuous wind Euroclydon kept up a worse howling than ever it did about poor Paul's tossed craft. Euroclydon, nevertheless, is a mighty pleasant zephyr to any one in-doors, with his feet on the hob quietly toasting for bed. "In of that tempestuous wind called Euroclydon," says an old writer- of whose works I possess the only copy extant- "it maketh a marvellous difference, whether thou lookest out at it from a glass window where the frost is all on the outside, or whether thou observest it from that sashless window, where the frost is on both sides, and of which the wight Death is the only glazier." True enough, thought I, as this passage occurred to my mind- old black-letter, thou reasonest well. Yes, these eyes are windows, and this body of mine is the house. What a pity they didn't stop up the chinks and the crannies though, and thrust in a little lint here and there. But it's too late to make any improvements now. The universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted off a million years ago. Poor Lazarus there, chattering his teeth against the curbstone for his pillow, and shaking off his tatters with his shiverings, he might plug up both ears with rags, and put a corn-cob into his mouth, and yet that would not keep out the tempestuous Euroclydon. Euroclydon! says old Dives, in his red silken wrapper- (he had a redder one afterwards) pooh, pooh! What a fine frosty night; how Orion glitters; what northern lights! Let them talk of their oriental summer climes of everlasting conservatories; give me the privilege of making my own summer with my own coals.

But what thinks Lazarus? Can he warm his blue hands by holding them up to the grand northern lights? Would not Lazarus rather be in Sumatra than here? Would he not far rather lay him down lengthwise along the line of the equator; yea, ye gods! go down to the fiery pit itself, in order to keep out this frost?

Now, that Lazarus should lie stranded there on the curbstone before the door of Dives, this is more wonderful than that an

iceberg should be moored to one of the Moluccas. Yet Dives himself, he too lives like a Czar in an ice palace made of frozen sighs, and being a president of a temperance society, he only drinks the tepid tears of orphans.

But no more of this blubbering now, we are going a-whaling, and there is plenty of that yet to come. Let us scrape the ice from our frosted feet, and see what sort of a place this "Spouter" may be.

The Spouter-Inn

Entering that gable-ended Spouter-Inn, you found yourself in a wide, low, straggling entry with old-fashioned wainscots, reminding one of the bulwarks of some condemned old craft. On one side hung a very large oil painting so thoroughly besmoked, and every way defaced, that in the unequal crosslights by which you viewed it, it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its purpose. Such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows, that at first you almost thought some ambitious young artist, in the time of the New England hags, had endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched. But by dint of much and earnest contemplation, and oft repeated ponderings, and especially by throwing open the little window towards the back of the entry, you at last come to the conclusion that such an idea, however wild, might not be altogether unwarranted.

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber, portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant. Ever and anon a bright, but, alas, deceptive idea would dart you through.- It's the Black Sea in a midnight gale.- It's the unnatural combat of the four primal elements.- It's a blasted heath.- It's a Hyperborean winter scene.- It's the breaking-up of the icebound stream of Time. But last all these fancies yielded to that one portentous something in the picture's midst. That once found out, and all the rest were plain. But stop; does it not bear a faint resemblance to a gigantic fish? even the great leviathan himself?

In fact, the artist's design seemed this: a final theory of my own, partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons

with whom I conversed upon the subject. The picture represents a Cape-Horner in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale, purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads.

The opposite wall of this entry was hung all over with a heathenish array of monstrous clubs and spears. Some were thickly set with glittering teeth resembling ivory saws; others were tufted with knots of human hair; and one was sickle-shaped, with a vast handle sweeping round like the segment made in the new-mown grass by a long-armed mower. You shuddered as you gazed, and wondered what monstrous cannibal and savage could ever have gone a death-harvesting with such a hacking, horrifying implement. Mixed with these were rusty old whaling lances and harpoons all broken and deformed. Some were storied weapons. With this once long lance, now wildly elbowed, fifty years ago did Nathan Swain kill fifteen whales between a sunrise and a sunset. And that harpoon- so like a corkscrew now- was flung in Javan seas, and run away with by a whale, years afterwards slain off the Cape of Blanco. The original iron entered nigh the tail, and, like a restless needle sojourning in the body of a man, travelled full forty feet, and at last was found imbedded in the hump.

Crossing this dusky entry, and on through yon low-arched way-cut through what in old times must have been a great central chimney with fireplaces all round- you enter the public room. A still duskier place is this, with such low ponderous beams above, and such old wrinkled planks beneath, that you would almost fancy you trod some old craft's cockpits, especially of such a howling night, when this corner-anchored old ark rocked so furiously. On one side stood a long, low, shelf-like table covered with cracked glass cases, filled with dusty rarities gathered from this wide world's remotest nooks. Projecting from the further angle of the room stands a dark-looking den- the bar- a rude attempt at a right whale's head. Be that how it may, there stands the vast arched bone of the whale's jaw, so wide, a coach might almost drive beneath it. Within are shabby shelves, ranged round with old decanters, bottles, flasks; and in those jaws of swift destruction, like another cursed Jonah (by which name indeed they called him), bustles a little withered old man, who, for their money, dearly sells the sailors deliriums and death.

Abominable are the tumblers into which he pours his poison. Though true cylinders without- within, the villanous green goggling glasses deceitfully tapered downwards to a cheating

bottom. Parallel meridians rudely pecked into the glass, surround these footpads' goblets. Fill to this mark, and your charge is but a penny; to this a penny more; and so on to the full glass- the Cape Horn measure, which you may gulp down for a shilling.

Upon entering the place I found a number of young seamen gathered about a table, examining by a dim light divers specimens of skrimshander. I sought the landlord, and telling him I desired to be accommodated with a room, received for answer that his house was full- not a bed unoccupied. "But avast," he added, tapping his forehead, "you haint no objections to sharing a harpooneer's blanket, have ye? I s'pose you are goin' a-whalin', so you'd better get used to that sort of thing."

I told him that I never liked to sleep two in a bed; that if I should ever do so, it would depend upon who the harpooneer might be, and that if he (the landlord) really had no other place for me, and the harpooneer was not decidedly objectionable, why rather than wander further about a strange town on so bitter a night, I would put up with the half of any decent man's blanket.

"I thought so. All right; take a seat. Supper?- you want supper? Supper'll be ready directly."

I sat down on an old wooden settle, carved all over like a bench on the Battery. At one end a ruminating tar was still further adorning it with his jack-knife, stooping over and diligently working away at the space between his legs. He was trying his hand at a ship under full sail, but he didn't make much headway, I thought.

At last some four or five of us were summoned to our meal in an adjoining room. It was cold as Iceland- no fire at all- the landlord said he couldn't afford it. Nothing but two dismal tallow candles, each in a winding sheet. We were fain to button up our monkey jackets, and hold to our lips cups of scalding tea with our half frozen fingers. But the fare was of the most substantial kind- not only meat and potatoes, but dumplings; good heavens! dumplings for supper! One young fellow in a green box coat, addressed himself to these dumplings in a most direful manner.

"My boy," said the landlord, "you'll have the nightmare to a dead sartainty."

"Landlord," I whispered, "that aint the harpooneer is it?"

"Oh, no," said he, looking a sort of diabolically funny, "the harpooneer is a dark complexioned chap. He never eats dumplings, he don't- he eats nothing but steaks, and he likes 'em rare."

"The devil he does," says I. "Where is that harpooneer? Is he here?"

"He'll be here afore long," was the answer.

I could not help it, but I began to feel suspicious of this "dark complexioned" harpooneer. At any rate, I made up my mind that if it so turned out that we should sleep together, he must undress and get into bed before I did.

Supper over, the company went back to the bar-room, when, knowing not what else to do with myself, I resolved to spend the rest of the evening as a looker on.

Presently a rioting noise was heard without. Starting up, the landlord cried, "That's the Grampus's crew. I seed her reported in the offing this morning; a three years' voyage, and a full ship. Hurrah, boys; now we'll have the latest news from the Feegees."

A tramping of sea boots was heard in the entry; the door was flung open, and in rolled a wild set of mariners enough. Enveloped in their shaggy watch coats, and with their heads muffled in woollen comforters, all bedarned and ragged, and their beards stiff with icicles, they seemed an eruption of bears from Labrador. They had just landed from their boat, and this was the first house they entered. No wonder, then, that they made a straight wake for the whale's mouth- the bar- when the wrinkled little old Jonah, there officiating, soon poured them out brimmers all round. One complained of a bad cold in his head, upon which Jonah mixed him a pitch-like potion of gin and molasses, which he swore was a sovereign cure for all colds and catarrhs whatsoever, never mind of how long standing, or whether caught off the coast of Labrador, or on the weather side of an ice-island.

The liquor soon mounted into their heads, as it generally does even with the arrantest toppers newly landed from sea, and they began capering about most obstreperously.

I observed, however, that one of them held somewhat aloof, and though he seemed desirous not to spoil the hilarity of his shipmates by his own sober face, yet upon the whole he refrained from making as much noise as the rest. This man interested me at once; and since the sea-gods had ordained that he should soon become my shipmate (though but a sleeping partner one, so far as this narrative is concerned), I will here venture upon a little description of him. He stood full six feet in height, with noble shoulders, and a chest like a coffer-dam. I have seldom seen such brawn in a man. His face was deeply brown and burnt, making his white teeth dazzling by the contrast; while in the deep shadows of his eyes floated some reminiscences that did not seem to give him much joy. His voice at once announced that he was a Southerner, and from his fine stature, I thought he must be one of those tall

mountaineers from the Alleghanian Ridge in Virginia. When the revelry of his companions had mounted to its height, this man slipped away unobserved, and I saw no more of him till he became my comrade on the sea. In a few minutes, however, he was missed by his shipmates, and being, it seems, for some reason a huge favorite with them, they raised a cry of "Bulkington! Bulkington! where's Bulkington?" and darted out of the house in pursuit of him.

It was now about nine o'clock, and the room seeming almost supernaturally quiet after these orgies, I began to congratulate myself upon a little plan that had occurred to me just previous to the entrance of the seamen.

No man prefers to sleep two in a bed. In fact, you would a good deal rather not sleep with your own brother. I don't know how it is, but people like to be private when they are sleeping. And when it comes to sleeping with an unknown stranger, in a strange inn, in a strange town, and that stranger a harpooneer, then your objections indefinitely multiply. Nor was there any earthly reason why I as a sailor should sleep two in a bed, more than anybody else; for sailors no more sleep two in a bed at sea, than bachelor Kings do ashore. To be sure they all sleep together in one apartment, but you have your own hammock, and cover yourself with your own blanket, and sleep in your own skin.

The more I pondered over this harpooneer, the more I abominated the thought of sleeping with him. It was fair to presume that being a harpooneer, his linen or woolen, as the case might be, would not be of the tidiest, certainly none of the finest. I began to twitch all over. Besides, it was getting late, and my decent harpooneer ought to be home and going bedwards. Suppose now, he should tumble in upon me at midnight- how could I tell from what vile hole he had been coming?

"Landlord! I've changed my mind about that harpooneer.- I shan't sleep with him. I'll try the bench here."

"Just as you please; I'm sorry I cant spare ye a tablecloth for a mattress, and it's a plaguy rough board here"- feeling of the knots and notches. "But wait a bit, Skrimshander; I've got a carpenter's plane there in the bar- wait, I say, and I'll make ye snug enough." So saying he procured the plane; and with his old silk handkerchief first dusting the bench, vigorously set to planing away at my bed, the while grinning like an ape. The shavings flew right and left; till at last the plane-iron came bump against an indestructible knot. The landlord was near spraining his wrist, and I told him for heaven's sake to quit- the bed was soft enough to suit me, and I did not know how all the planing in the world could make eider down

of a pine plank. So gathering up the shavings with another grin, and throwing them into the great stove in the middle of the room, he went about his business, and left me in a brown study.

I now took the measure of the bench, and found that it was a foot too short; but that could be mended with a chair. But it was a foot too narrow, and the other bench in the room was about four inches higher than the planed one- so there was no yoking them. I then placed the first bench lengthwise along the only clear space against the wall, leaving a little interval between, for my back to settle down in. But I soon found that there came such a draught of cold air over me from under the sill of the window, that this plan would never do at all, especially as another current from the rickety door met the one from the window, and both together formed a series of small whirlwinds in the immediate vicinity of the spot where I had thought to spend the night.

The devil fetch that harpooneer, thought I, but stop, couldn't I steal a march on him- bolt his door inside, and jump into his bed, not to be wakened by the most violent knockings? It seemed no bad idea but upon second thoughts I dismissed it. For who could tell but what the next morning, so soon as I popped out of the room, the harpooneer might be standing in the entry, all ready to knock me down!

Still looking round me again, and seeing no possible chance of spending a sufferable night unless in some other person's bed, I began to think that after all I might be cherishing unwarrantable prejudices against this unknown harpooneer. Thinks I, I'll wait awhile; he must be dropping in before long. I'll have a good look at him then, and perhaps we may become jolly good bedfellows after all- there's no telling.

But though the other boarders kept coming in by ones, twos, and threes, and going to bed, yet no sign of my harpooneer.

"Landlord! said I, "what sort of a chap is he- does he always keep such late hours?" It was now hard upon twelve o'clock.

The landlord chuckled again with his lean chuckle, and seemed to be mightily tickled at something beyond my comprehension. "No," he answered, "generally he's an early bird- airley to bed and airley to rise- yea, he's the bird what catches the worm. But to-night he went out a peddling, you see, and I don't see what on airth keeps him so late, unless, may be, he can't sell his head."

"Can't sell his head?- What sort of a bamboozingly story is this you are telling me?" getting into a towering rage. "Do you pretend to say, landlord, that this harpooneer is actually engaged this blessed Saturday night, or rather Sunday morning, in peddling his

head around this town?"

"That's precisely it," said the landlord, "and I told him he couldn't sell it here, the market's overstocked."

"With what?" shouted I.

"With heads to be sure; ain't there too many heads in the world?"

"I tell you what it is, landlord," said I quite calmly, "you'd better stop spinning that yarn to me- I'm not green."

"May be not," taking out a stick and whittling a toothpick, "but I rayther guess you'll be done brown if that ere harpooneer hears you a slanderin' his head."

"I'll break it for him," said I, now flying into a passion again at this unaccountable farrago of the landlord's.

"It's broke a'ready," said he.

"Broke," said I- "broke, do you mean?"

"Sartain, and that's the very reason he can't sell it, I guess."

"Landlord," said I, going up to him as cool as Mt. Hecla in a snowstorm- "landlord, stop whittling. You and I must understand one another, and that too without delay. I come to your house and want a bed; you tell me you can only give me half a one; that the other half belongs to a certain harpooneer. And about this harpooneer, whom I have not yet seen, you persist in telling me the most mystifying and exasperating stories tending to beget in me an uncomfortable feeling towards the man whom you design for my bedfellow- a sort of connexion, landlord, which is an intimate and confidential one in the highest degree. I now demand of you to speak out and tell me who and what this harpooneer is, and whether I shall be in all respects safe to spend the night with him. And in the first place, you will be so good as to unsay that story about selling his head, which if true I take to be good evidence that this harpooneer is stark mad, and I've no idea of sleeping with a madman; and you, sir, you I mean, landlord, you, sir, by trying to induce me to do so knowingly would thereby render yourself liable to a criminal prosecution."

"Wall," said the landlord, fetching a long breath, "that's a purty long sarmon for a chap that rips a little now and then. But be easy, be easy, this here harpooneer I have been tellin' you of has just arrived from the south seas, where he bought up a lot of 'balmed New Zealand heads (great curios, you know), and he's sold all on 'em but one, and that one he's trying to sell to-night, cause to-morrow's Sunday, and it would not do to be sellin' human heads about the streets when folks is goin' to churches. He wanted to last Sunday, but I stopped him just as he was goin' out of the door with four heads strung on a string, for all the airth like a string of

inions."

This account cleared up the otherwise unaccountable mystery, and showed that the landlord, after all, had had no idea of fooling me- but at the same time what could I think of a harpooneer who stayed out of a Saturday night clean into the holy Sabbath, engaged in such a cannibal business as selling the heads of dead idolators?

"Depend upon it, landlord, that harpooneer is a dangerous man."

"He pays reg'lar," was the rejoinder. "But come, it's a nice bed: Sal and me slept in that ere bed the night we were spliced. There's plenty of room for two to kick about in that bed; it's an almighty big bed that. Why, afore we give it up, Sal used to put our Sam and little Johnny in the foot of it. But I got a dreaming and sprawling about one night, and somehow, Sam got pitched on the floor, and came near breaking his arm. Arter that, Sal said it wouldn't do. Come along here, I'll give ye a glim in a jiffy;" and so saying he lighted a candle and held it towards me, offering to lead the way. But I stood irresolute; when looking at a clock in the corner, he exclaimed "I vum it's Sunday- you won't see that harpooneer to-night; he's come to anchor somewhere- come along then; do come; won't ye come?"

I considered the matter a moment, and then up stairs we went, and I was ushered into a small room, cold as a clam, and furnished, sure enough, with a prodigious bed, almost big enough indeed for any four harpooneers to sleep abreast.

"There," said the landlord, placing the candle on a crazy old sea chest that did double duty as a wash-stand and centre table; "there, make yourself comfortable now; and good night to ye." I turned round from eyeing the bed, but he had disappeared.

Folding back the counterpane, I stooped over the bed. Though none of the most elegant, it yet stood the scrutiny tolerably well. I then glanced round the room; and besides the bedstead and centre table, could see no other furniture belonging to the place, but a rude shelf, the four walls, and a papered fireboard representing a man striking a whale. Of things not properly belonging to the room, there was a hammock lashed up, and thrown upon the floor in one corner; also a large seaman's bag, containing the harpooneer's wardrobe, no doubt in lieu of a land trunk. Likewise, there was a parcel of outlandish bone fish hooks on the shelf over the fire-place, and a tall harpoon standing at the head of the bed.

But what is this on the chest? I took it up, and held it close to the light, and felt it, and smelt it, and tried every way possible to arrive at some satisfactory conclusion concerning it. I can compare it to nothing but a large door mat, ornamented at the edges with little

tinkling tags something like the stained porcupine quills round an Indian moccasin. There was a hole or slit in the middle of this mat, as you see the same in South American ponchos. But could it be possible that any sober harpooneer would get into a door mat, and parade the streets of any Christian town in that sort of guise? I put it on, to try it, and it weighed me down like a hamper, being uncommonly shaggy and thick, and I thought a little damp, as though this mysterious harpooneer had been wearing it of a rainy day. I went up in it to a bit of glass stuck against the wall, and I never saw such a sight in my life. I tore myself out of it in such a hurry that I gave myself a kink in the neck.

I sat down on the side of the bed, and commenced thinking about this head-peddling harpooneer, and his door mat. After thinking some time on the bed-side, I got up and took off my monkey jacket, and then stood in the middle of the room thinking. I then took off my coat, and thought a little more in my shirt sleeves. But beginning to feel very cold now, half undressed as I was, and remembering what the landlord said about the harpooneer's not coming home at all that night, it being so very late, I made no more ado, but jumped out of my pantaloons and boots, and then blowing out the light tumbled into bed, and commended myself to the care of heaven.

Whether that mattress was stuffed with corncocks or broken crockery, there is no telling, but I rolled about a good deal, and could not sleep for a long time. At last I slid off into a light doze, and had pretty nearly made a good offering towards the land of Nod, when I heard a heavy footfall in the passage, and saw a glimmer of light come into the room from under the door.

Lord save me, thinks I, that must be the harpooneer, the infernal head-peddler. But I lay perfectly still, and resolved not to say a word till spoken to. Holding a light in one hand, and that identical New Zealand head in the other, the stranger entered the room, and without looking towards the bed, placed his candle a good way off from me on the floor in one corner, and then began working away at the knotted cords of the large bag I before spoke of as being in the room. I was all eagerness to see his face, but he kept it averted for some time while employed in unlacing the bag's mouth. This accomplished, however, he turned round- when, good heavens; what a sight! Such a face! It was of a dark, purplish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large blackish looking squares. Yes, it's just as I thought, he's a terrible bedfellow; he's been in a fight, got dreadfully cut, and here he is, just from the surgeon. But at that moment he chanced to turn his face so towards the light, that I

plainly saw they could not be sticking-plasters at all, those black squares on his cheeks. They were stains of some sort or other. At first I knew not what to make of this; but soon an inkling of the truth occurred to me. I remembered a story of a white man- a whaleman too- who, falling among the cannibals, had been tattooed by them. I concluded that this harpooneer, in the course of his distant voyages, must have met with a similar adventure. And what is it, thought I, after all! It's only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin. But then, what to make of his unearthly complexion, that part of it, I mean, lying round about, and completely independent of the squares of tattooing. To be sure, it might be nothing but a good coat of tropical tanning; but I never heard of a hot sun's tanning a white man into a purplish yellow one. However, I had never been in the South Seas; and perhaps the sun there produced these extraordinary effects upon the skin. Now, while all these ideas were passing through me like lightning, this harpooneer never noticed me at all. But, after some difficulty having opened his bag, he commenced fumbling in it, and presently pulled out a sort of tomahawk, and a seal-skin wallet with the hair on. Placing these on the old chest in the middle of a room, he then took the New Zealand head- a ghastly thing enough- and crammed it down into the bag. He now took off his hat- a new beaver hat- when I came nigh singing out with fresh surprise. There was no hair on his head- none to speak of at least- nothing but a small scalp-knot twisted up on his forehead. His bald purplish head now looked for all the world like a mildewed skull. Had not the stranger stood between me and the door, I would have bolted out of it quicker than ever I bolted a dinner.

Even as it was, I thought something of slipping out of the window, but it was the second floor back. I am no coward, but what to make of this headpeddling purple rascal altogether passed my comprehension. Ignorance is the parent of fear, and being completely nonplussed and confounded about the stranger, I confess I was now as much afraid of him as if it was the devil himself who had thus broken into my room at the dead of night. In fact, I was so afraid of him that I was not game enough just then to address him, and demand a satisfactory answer concerning what seemed inexplicable in him.

Meanwhile, he continued the business of undressing, and at last showed his chest and arms. As I live, these covered parts of him were checkered with the same squares as his face, his back, too, was all over the same dark squares; he seemed to have been in a Thirty Years' War, and just escaped from it with a sticking-plaster

shirt. Still more, his very legs were marked, as a parcel of dark green frogs were running up the trunks of young palms. It was now quite plain that he must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whaler in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country. I quaked to think of it. A peddler of heads too- perhaps the heads of his own brothers. He might take a fancy to mine- heavens! look at that tomahawk!

But there was no time for shuddering, for now the savage went about something that completely fascinated my attention, and convinced me that he must indeed be a heathen. Going to his heavy grego, or wrapall, or dreadnaught, which he had previously hung on a chair, he fumbled in the pockets, and produced at length a curious little deformed image with a hunch on its back, and exactly the color of a three days' old Congo baby. Remembering the embalmed head, at first I almost thought that this black manikin was a real baby preserved some similar manner. But seeing that it was not at all limber, and that it glistened a good deal like polished ebony, I concluded that it must be nothing but a wooden idol, which indeed it proved to be. For now the savage goes up to the empty fire-place, and removing the papered fire-board, sets up this little hunch-backed image, like a tenpin, between the andirons. The chimney jambs and all the bricks inside were very sooty, so that I thought this fire-place made a very appropriate little shrine or chapel for his Congo idol.

I now screwed my eyes hard towards the half hidden image, feeling but ill at ease meantime- to see what was next to follow. First he takes about a double handful of shavings out of his grego pocket, and places them carefully before the idol; then laying a bit of ship biscuit on top and applying the flame from the lamp, he kindled the shavings into a sacrificial blaze. Presently, after many hasty snatches into the fire, and still hastier withdrawals of his fingers (whereby he seemed to be scorching them badly), he at last succeeded in drawing out the biscuit; then blowing off the heat and ashes a little, he made a polite offer of it to the little negro. But the little devil did not seem to fancy such dry sort of fare at all; he never moved his lips. All these strange antics were accompanied by still stranger guttural noises from the devotee, who seemed to be praying in a sing-song or else singing some pagan psalmody or other, during which his face twitched about in the most unnatural manner. At last extinguishing the fire, he took the idol up very unceremoniously, and bagged it again in his grego pocket as carelessly as if he were a sportsman bagging a dead woodcock.

All these queer proceedings increased my uncomfortableness,

and seeing him now exhibiting strong symptoms of concluding his business operations, and jumping into bed with me, I thought it was high time, now or never, before the light was put out, to break the spell in which I had so long been bound.

But the interval I spent in deliberating what to say, was a fatal one. Taking up his tomahawk from the table, he examined the head of it for an instant, and then holding it to the light, with his mouth at the handle, he puffed out great clouds of tobacco smoke. The next moment the light was extinguished, and this wild cannibal, tomahawk between his teeth, sprang into bed with me. I sang out, I could not help it now; and giving a sudden grunt of astonishment he began feeling me.

Stammering out something, I knew not what, I rolled away from him against the wall, and then conjured him, whoever or whatever he might be, to keep quiet, and let me get up and light the lamp again. But his guttural responses satisfied me at once that he but ill comprehended my meaning.

"Who-e debel you?"- he at last said- "you no speak-e, dam-me, I kill-e." And so saying the lighted tomahawk began flourishing about me in the dark.

"Landlord, for God's sake, Peter Coffin!" shouted I. "Landlord! Watch! Coffin! Angels! save me!"

"Speak-e! tell-ee me who-ee be, or dam-me, I kill-e!" again growled the cannibal, while his horrid flourishings of the tomahawk scattered the hot tobacco ashes about me till I thought my linen would get on fire. But thank heaven, at that moment the landlord came into the room light in hand, and leaping from the bed I ran up to him.

"Don't be afraid now," said he, grinning again, "Queequeg here wouldn't harm a hair of your head."

"Stop your grinning," shouted I, "and why didn't you tell me that that infernal harpooneer was a cannibal?"

"I thought ye know'd it;- didn't I tell ye, he was a peddlin' heads around town?- but turn flukes again and go to sleep. Queequeg, look here- you sabbee me, I sabbee- you this man sleepe you- you sabbee?"

"Me sabbee plenty"- grunted Queequeg, puffing away at his pipe and sitting up in bed.

"You gettee in," he added, motioning to me with his tomahawk, and throwing the clothes to one side. He really did this in not only a civil but a really kind and charitable way. I stood looking at him a moment. For all his tattooings he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal. What's all this fuss I have been making

about, thought I to myself- the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian.

"Landlord," said I, "tell him to stash his tomahawk there, or pipe, or whatever you call it; tell him to stop smoking, in short, and I will turn in with him. But I don't fancy having a man smoking in bed with me. It's dangerous. Besides, I ain't insured."

This being told to Queequeg, he at once complied, and again politely motioned me to get into bed- rolling over to one side as much as to say- I won't touch a leg of ye."

"Good night, landlord," said I, "you may go."

I turned in, and never slept better in my life.

The Counterpane

Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife. The counterpane was of patchwork, full of odd little parti-colored squares and triangles; and this arm of his tattooed all over with an interminable Cretan labyrinth of a figure, no two parts of which were of one precise shade- owing I suppose to his keeping his arm at sea unmethodically in sun and shade, his shirt sleeves irregularly rolled up at various times- this same arm of his, I say, looked for all the world like a strip of that same patchwork quilt. Indeed, partly lying on it as the arm did when I first awoke, I could hardly tell it from the quilt, they so blended their hues together; and it was only by the sense of weight and pressure that I could tell that Queequeg was hugging me.

My sensations were strange. Let me try to explain them. When I was a child, I well remember a somewhat similar circumstance that befell me; whether it was a reality or a dream, I never could entirely settle. The circumstance was this. I had been cutting up some caper or other- I think it was trying to crawl up the chimney, as I had seen a little sweep do a few days previous; and my stepmother who, somehow or other, was all the time whipping me, or sending me to bed supperless,- my mother dragged me by the legs out of the chimney and packed me off to bed, though it was only two o'clock in the afternoon of the 21st June, the longest day in year in our hemisphere. I felt dreadfully. But there was no help for it, so up stairs I went to my little room in the third floor, undressed myself as slowly as possible so as to kill time, and with a bitter sigh got between the sheets.

I lay there dismally calculating that sixteen entire hours must elapse before I could hope for a resurrection. Sixteen hours in bed! the small of my back ached to think of it. And it was so light too; the sun shining in at the window, and a great rattling of coaches in the streets, and the sound of gay voices all over the house. I felt worse and worse- at last I got up, dressed, and softly going down

in my stockinged feet, sought out my stepmother, and suddenly threw myself at her feet, beseeching her as a particular favor to give me a good slippering for my misbehaviour: anything indeed but condemning me to lie abed such an unendurable length of time. But she was the best and most conscientious of stepmothers, and back I had to go to my room. For several hours I lay there broad awake, feeling a great deal worse than I have ever done since, even from the greatest subsequent misfortunes. At last I must have fallen into a troubled nightmare of a doze; and slowly waking from it- half steeped in dreams- I opened my eyes, and the before sunlit room was now wrapped in outer darkness. Instantly I felt a shock running through all my frame; nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard; but a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine. My arm hung over the counterpane, and the nameless, unimaginable, silent form or phantom, to which the hand belonged, seemed closely seated by my bed-side. For what seemed ages piled on ages, I lay there, frozen with the most awful fears, not daring to drag away my hand; yet ever thinking that if I could but stir it one single inch, the horrid spell would be broken. I knew not how this consciousness at last glided away from me; but waking in the morning, I shudderingly remembered it all, and for days and weeks and months afterwards I lost myself in confounding attempts to explain the mystery. Nay, to this very hour, I often puzzle myself with it.

Now, take away the awful fear, and my sensations at feeling the supernatural hand in mine were very similar, in the strangeness, to those which I experienced on waking up and seeing Queequeg's pagan arm thrown round me. But at length all the past night's events soberly recurred, one by one, in fixed reality, and then I lay only alive to the comical predicament. For though I tried to move his arm- unlock his bridegroom clasp- yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught but death should part us twain. I now strove to rouse him- "Queequeg!"- but his only answer was a snore. I then rolled over, my neck feeling as if it were in a horse-collar; and suddenly felt a slight scratch. Throwing aside the counterpane, there lay the tomahawk sleeping by the savage's side, as if it were a hatchet-faced baby. A pretty pickle, truly, thought I; abed here in a strange house in the broad day, with a cannibal and a tomahawk! "Queequeg!- in the name of goodness, Queequeg, wake!" At length, by dint of much wriggling, and loud and incessant expostulations upon the unbecomingness of his hugging a fellow male in that matrimonial sort of style, I succeeded in extracting a grunt; and presently, he drew back his

arm, shook himself all over like a Newfoundland dog just from the water, and sat up in bed, stiff as a pike-staff, looking at me, and rubbing his eyes as if he did not altogether remember how I came to be there, though a dim consciousness of knowing something about me seemed slowly dawning over him. Meanwhile, I lay quietly eyeing him, having no serious misgivings now, and bent upon narrowly observing so curious a creature. When, at last, his mind seemed made up touching the character of his bedfellow, and he became, as it were, reconciled to the fact; he jumped out upon the floor, and by certain signs and sounds gave me to understand that, if it pleased me, he would dress first and then leave me to dress afterwards, leaving the whole apartment to myself. Thinks I, Queequeg, under the circumstances, this is a very civilized overture; but, the truth is, these savages have an innate sense of delicacy, say what you will; it is marvellous how essentially polite they are. I pay this particular compliment to Queequeg, because he treated me with so much civility and consideration, while I was guilty of great rudeness; staring at him from the bed, and watching all his toilette motions; for the time my curiosity getting the better of my breeding. Nevertheless, a man like Queequeg you don't see every day, he and his ways were well worth unusual regarding.

He commenced dressing at top by donning his beaver hat, a very tall one, by the by, and then- still minus his trowsers- he hunted up his boots. What under the heavens he did it for, I cannot tell, but his next movement was to crush himself- boots in hand, and hat on- under the bed; when, from sundry violent gaspings and strainings, I inferred he was hard at work booting himself; though by no law of propriety that I ever heard of, is any man required to be private when putting on his boots. But Queequeg, do you see, was a creature in the transition stage- neither caterpillar nor butterfly. He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manners. His education was not yet completed. He was an undergraduate. If he had not been a small degree civilized, he very probably would not have troubled himself with boots at all; but then, if he had not been still a savage, he never would have dreamt of getting under the bed to put them on. At last, he emerged with his hat very much dented and crushed down over his eyes, and began creaking and limping about the room, as if, not being much accustomed to boots, his pair of damp, wrinkled cowhide ones- probably not made to order either- rather pinched and tormented him at the first go off of a bitter cold morning.

Seeing, now, that there were no curtains to the window, and that

the street being very narrow, the house opposite commanded a plain view into the room, and observing more and more the indecorous figure that Queequeg made, staving about with little else but his hat and boots on; I begged him as well as I could, to accelerate his toilet somewhat, and particularly to get into his pantaloons as soon as possible. He complied, and then proceeded to wash himself. At that time in the morning any Christian would have washed his face; but Queequeg, to my amazement, contented himself with restricting his ablutions to his chest, arms, and hands. He then donned his waistcoat, and taking up a piece of hard soap on the wash-stand centre table, dipped it into water and commenced lathering his face. I was watching to see where he kept his razor, when lo and behold, he takes the harpoon from the bed corner, slips out the long wooden stock, unsheathes the head, whets it a little on his boot, and striding up to the bit of mirror against the wall, begins a vigorous scraping, or rather harpooning of his cheeks. Thinks I, Queequeg, this is using Rogers's best cutlery with a vengeance. Afterwards I wondered the less at this operation when I came to know of what fine steel the head of a harpoon is made, and how exceedingly sharp the long straight edges are always kept.

The rest of his toilet was soon achieved, and he proudly marched out of the room, wrapped up in his great pilot monkey jacket, and sporting his harpoon like a marshal's baton.

Breakfast

I quickly followed suit, and descending into the bar-room accosted the grinning landlord very pleasantly. I cherished no malice towards him, though he had been skylarking with me not a little in the matter of my bedfellow.

However, a good laugh is a mighty good thing, and rather too scarce a good thing; the more's the pity. So, if any one man, in his own proper person, afford stuff for a good joke to anybody, let him not be backward, but let him cheerfully allow himself to spend and to be spent in that way. And the man that has anything bountifully laughable about him, be sure there is more in that man than you perhaps think for.

The bar-room was now full of the boarders who had been dropping in the night previous, and whom I had not as yet had a good look at. They were nearly all whalemens; chief mates, and second mates, and third mates, and sea carpenters, and sea coopers, and sea blacksmiths, and harpooneers, and ship keepers; a brown and brawny company, with bosky beards; an unshorn, shaggy set, all wearing monkey jackets for morning gowns.

You could pretty plainly tell how long each one had been ashore. This young fellow's healthy cheek is like a sun-toasted pear in hue, and would seem to smell almost as musky; he cannot have been three days landed from his Indian voyage. That man next him looks a few shades lighter; you might say a touch of satin wood is in him. In the complexion of a third still lingers a tropic tawn, but slightly bleached withal; he doubtless has tarried whole weeks ashore. But who could show a cheek like Queequeg? which, barred with various tints, seemed like the Andes' western slope, to show forth in one array, contrasting climates, zone by zone.

"Grub, ho!" now cried the landlord, flinging open a door, and in we went to breakfast.

They say that men who have seen the world, thereby become quite at ease in manner, quite self-possessed in company. Not always, though: Ledyard, the great New England traveller, and Mungo Park, the Scotch one; of all men, they possessed the least

assurance in the parlor. But perhaps the mere crossing of Siberia in a sledge drawn by dogs as Ledyard did, or the taking a long solitary walk on an empty stomach, in the negro heart of Africa, which was the sum of poor Mungo's performances- this kind of travel, I say, may not be the very best mode of attaining a high social polish. Still, for the most part, that sort of thing is to be had anywhere.

These reflections just here are occasioned by the circumstance that after we were all seated at the table, and I was preparing to hear some good stories about whaling; to my no small surprise nearly every man maintained a profound silence. And not only that, but they looked embarrassed. Yes, here were a set of sea-dogs, many of whom without the slightest bashfulness had boarded great whales on the high seas- entire strangers to them- and duelled them dead without winking; and yet, here they sat at a social breakfast table- all of the same calling, all of kindred tastes- looking round as sheepishly at each other as though they had never been out of sight of some sheepfold among the Green Mountains. A curious sight; these bashful bears, these timid warrior whalemens!

But as for Queequeg- why, Queequeg sat there among them- at the head of the table, too, it so chanced; as cool as an icicle. To be sure I cannot say much for his breeding. His greatest admirer could not have cordially justified his bringing his harpoon into breakfast with him, and using it there without ceremony; reaching over the table with it, to the imminent jeopardy of many heads, and grappling the beefsteaks towards him. But that was certainly very coolly done by him, and every one knows that in most people's estimation, to do anything coolly is to do it genteelly.

We will not speak of all Queequeg's peculiarities here; how he eschewed coffee and hot rolls, and applied his undivided attention to beefsteaks, done rare. Enough, that when breakfast was over he withdrew like the rest into the public room, lighted his tomahawk-pipe, and was sitting there quietly digesting and smoking with his inseparable hat on, when I sallied out for a stroll.

The Street

If I had been astonished at first catching a glimpse of so outlandish an individual as Queequeg circulating among the polite society of a civilized town, that astonishment soon departed upon taking my first daylight stroll through the streets of New Bedford.

In thoroughfares nigh the docks, any considerable seaport will frequently offer to view the queerest looking nondescripts from foreign parts. Even in Broadway and Chestnut streets, Mediterranean mariners will sometimes jostle the affrighted ladies. Regent Street is not unknown to Lascars and Malays; and at Bombay, in the Apollo Green, live Yankees have often scared the natives. But New Bedford beats all Water Street and Wapping. In these last-mentioned haunts you see only sailors; in New Bedford, actual cannibals stand chatting at street corners; savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh. It makes a stranger stare.

But, besides the Feegeians, Tongatobooars, Erromanggoans, Pannangians, and Brighggians, and, besides the wild specimens of the whaling-craft which unheeded reel about the streets, you will see other sights still more curious, certainly more comical. There weekly arrive in this town scores of green Vermonters and New Hampshire men, all athirst for gain and glory in the fishery. They are mostly young, of stalwart frames; fellows who have felled forests, and now seek to drop the axe and snatch the whale-lance. Many are as green as the Green Mountains whence they came. In some things you would think them but a few hours old. Look there! that chap strutting round the corner. He wears a beaver hat and swallow-tailed coat, girdled with a sailor-belt and a sheath-knife. Here comes another with a sou'-wester and a bombazine cloak.

No town-bred dandy will compare with a country-bred one- I mean a downright bumpkin dandy- a fellow that, in the dog-days, will mow his two acres in buckskin gloves for fear of tanning his hands. Now when a country dandy like this takes it into his head to make a distinguished reputation, and joins the great whale-fishery,

you should see the comical things he does upon reaching the seaport. In bespeaking his sea-outfit, he orders bell-buttons to his waistcoats; straps to his canvas trowsers. Ah, poor Hay-Seed! how bitterly will burst those straps in the first howling gale, when thou art driven, straps, buttons, and all, down the throat of the tempest.

But think not that this famous town has only harpooneers, cannibals, and bumpkins to show her visitors. Not at all. Still New Bedford is a queer place. Had it not been for us whalemens, that tract of land would this day perhaps have been in as howling condition as the coast of Labrador. As it is, parts of her back country are enough to frighten one, they look so bony. The town itself is perhaps the dearest place to live in, in all New England. It is a land of oil, true enough: but not like Canaan; a land, also, of corn and wine. The streets do not run with milk; nor in the spring-time do they pave them with fresh eggs. Yet, in spite of this, nowhere in all America will you find more patrician-like houses; parks and gardens more opulent, than in New Bedford. Whence came they? how planted upon this once scraggy scoria of a country?

Go and gaze upon the iron emblematical harpoons round yonder lofty mansion, and your question will be answered. Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. One and all, they were harpooned and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea. Can Herr Alexander perform a feat like that?

In New Bedford, fathers, they say, give whales for dowers to their daughters, and portion off their nieces with a few porpoises a-piece. You must go to New Bedford to see a brilliant wedding; for, they say, they have reservoirs of oil in every house, and every night recklessly burn their lengths in spermaceti candles.

In summer time, the town is sweet to see; full of fine maples-long avenues of green and gold. And in August, high in air, the beautiful and bountiful horse-chestnuts, candelabra-wise, proffer the passer-by their tapering upright cones of congregated blossoms. So omnipotent is art; which in many a district of New Bedford has superinduced bright terraces of flowers upon the barren refuse rocks thrown aside at creation's final day.

And the women of New Bedford, they bloom like their own red roses. But roses only bloom in summer; whereas the fine carnation of their cheeks is perennial as sunlight in the seventh heavens. Elsewhere match that bloom of theirs, ye cannot, save in Salem, where they tell me the young girls breathe such musk, their sailor sweethearts smell them miles off shore, as though they were

drawing nigh the odorous Moluccas instead of the Puritanic sands.

The Chapel

In the same New Bedford there stands a Whaleman's Chapel, and few are the moody fishermen, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific, who fail to make a Sunday visit to the spot. I am sure that I did not.

Returning from my first morning stroll, I again sallied out upon this special errand. The sky had changed from clear, sunny cold, to driving sleet and mist. Wrapping myself in my shaggy jacket of the cloth called bearskin, I fought my way against the stubborn storm. Entering, I found a small scattered congregation of sailors, and sailors' wives and widows. A muffled silence reigned, only broken at times by the shrieks of the storm. Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable. The chaplain had not yet arrived; and there these silent islands of men and women sat steadfastly eyeing several marble tablets, with black borders, masoned into the wall on either side the pulpit. Three of them ran something like the following, but I do not pretend to quote:

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY
OF
JOHN TALBOT,
Who, at the age of eighteen, was lost overboard
Near the Isle of Desolation, off Patagonia,
November 1st, 1836.
THIS TABLET
Is erected to his Memory
BY HIS SISTER.
SACRED
TO THE MEMORY
OF
ROBERT LONG, WILLIS ELLERY,
NATHAN COLEMAN, WALTER CANNY, SETH MACY,
AND SAMUEL GLEIG,
Forming one of the boats' crews
OF
THE SHIP ELIZA

Who were towed out of sight by a Whale,
 On the Off-shore Ground in the
 PACIFIC,
 December 31st, 1839.
 THIS MARBLE
 Is here placed by their surviving
 SHIPMATES.
 SACRED
 TO THE MEMORY
 OF
 The late
 CAPTAIN EZEKIEL HARDY,
 Who in the bows of his boat was killed by a
 Sperm Whale on the coast of Japan,
 August 3d, 1833.
 THIS TABLET
 Is erected to his Memory
 BY
 HIS WIDOW.

Shaking off the sleet from my ice-glazed hat and jacket, I seated myself near the door, and turning sideways was surprised to see Queequeg near me. Affected by the solemnity of the scene, there was a wondering gaze of incredulous curiosity in his countenance. This savage was the only person present who seemed to notice my entrance; because he was the only one who could not read, and, therefore, was not reading those frigid inscriptions on the wall. Whether any of the relatives of the seamen whose names appeared there were now among the congregation, I knew not; but so many are the unrecorded accidents in the fishery, and so plainly did several women present wear the countenance if not the trappings of some unceasing grief, that I feel sure that here before me were assembled those, in whose unhealing hearts the sight of those bleak tablets sympathetically caused the old wounds to bleed afresh.

Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing among flowers can say- here, here lies my beloved; ye know not the desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave. As well might those tablets stand in the cave of Elephanta as here.

In what census of living creatures, the dead of mankind are included; why it is that a universal proverb says of them, that they tell no tales, though containing more secrets than the Goodwin

Sands! how it is that to his name who yesterday departed for the other world, we prefix so significant and infidel a word, and yet do not thus entitle him, if he but embarks for the remotest Indies of this living earth; why the Life Insurance Companies pay death-forfeitures upon immortals; in what eternal, unstirring paralysis, and deadly, hopeless trance, yet lies antique Adam who died sixty round centuries ago; how it is that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings.

But Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope.

It needs scarcely to be told, with what feelings, on the eve of a Nantucket voyage, I regarded those marble tablets, and by the murky light of that darkened, doleful day read the fate of the whalemens who had gone before me. Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine. But somehow I grew merry again. Delightful inducements to embark, fine chance for promotion, it seems- aye, a stove boat will make me an immortal by brevet. Yes, there is death in this business of whaling- a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity. But what then? Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot.

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**HARUKI
MURAKAMI**



A NOVEL

BOOK 1 APRIL-JUNE

CHAPTER 1

Aomame

DON'T LET APPEARANCES FOOL YOU

The taxi's radio was tuned to a classical FM broadcast. Janáček's Sinfonietta—probably not the ideal music to hear in a taxi caught in traffic. The middle-aged driver didn't seem to be listening very closely, either. With his mouth clamped shut, he stared straight ahead at the endless line of cars stretching out on the elevated expressway, like a veteran fisherman standing in the bow of his boat, reading the ominous confluence of two currents. Aomame settled into the broad back seat, closed her eyes, and listened to the music.

How many people could recognize Janáček's Sinfonietta after hearing just the first few bars? Probably somewhere between "very few" and "almost none." But for some reason, Aomame was one of the few who could.

Janáček composed his little symphony in 1926. He originally wrote the opening as a fanfare for a gymnastics festival. Aomame imagined 1926 Czechoslovakia: The First World War had ended, and the country was freed from the long rule of the Hapsburg Dynasty. As they enjoyed the peaceful respite visiting central Europe, people drank Pilsner beer in cafés and manufactured handsome light machine guns. Two years earlier, in utter obscurity, Franz Kafka had left the world behind. Soon Hitler would come out of nowhere and gobble up this beautiful little country in the blink of an eye, but at the time no one knew what hardships lay in store for them. This may be the most important proposition revealed by history: "At the time, no one knew what was coming." Listening to Janáček's music, Aomame imagined the carefree winds sweeping across the plains of Bohemia and thought about the vicissitudes of history.

In 1926 Japan's Taisho Emperor died, and the era name was changed to Showa. It was the beginning of a terrible, dark time in this country, too. The short interlude of modernism and democracy was ending, giving way to fascism.

Aomame loved history as much as she loved sports. She rarely read fiction, but history books could keep her occupied for hours. What she liked about history was the way all its facts were linked with particular dates and places. She did not find it especially difficult

to remember historical dates. Even if she did not learn them by rote memorization, once she grasped the relationship of an event to its time and to the events preceding and following it, the date would come to her automatically. In both middle school and high school, she had always gotten the top grade on history exams. It puzzled her to hear someone say he had trouble learning dates. How could something so simple be a problem for anyone?

"Aomame" was her real name. Her grandfather on her father's side came from some little mountain town or village in Fukushima Prefecture, where there were supposedly a number of people who bore the name, written with exactly the same characters as the word for "green peas" and pronounced with the same four syllables, "Ah-oh-mah-meh." She had never been to the place, however. Her father had cut his ties with his family before her birth, just as her mother had done with her own family, so she had never met any of her grandparents. She didn't travel much, but on those rare occasions when she stayed in an unfamiliar city or town, she would always open the hotel's phone book to see if there were any Aomames in the area. She had never found a single one, and whenever she tried and failed, she felt like a lonely castaway on the open sea.

Telling people her name was always a bother. As soon as the name left her lips, the other person looked puzzled or confused.

"Miss Aomame?"

"Yes. Just like 'green peas.' "

Employers required her to have business cards printed, which only made things worse. People would stare at the card as if she had thrust a letter at them bearing bad news. When she announced her name on the telephone, she would often hear suppressed laughter. In waiting rooms at the doctor's or at public offices, people would look up at the sound of her name, curious to see what someone called "Green Peas" could look like.

Some people would get the name of the plant wrong and call her "Edamame" or "Soramame," whereupon she would gently correct them: "No, I'm not soybeans or fava beans, just green peas. Pretty close, though. Aomame." How many times in her thirty years had she heard the same remarks, the same feeble jokes about her name? My life might have been totally different if I hadn't been born with this name. If I had had an ordinary name like Sato or Tanaka or Suzuki, I could have lived a slightly more relaxed life or looked at people with somewhat more forgiving eyes. Perhaps.

Eyes closed, Aomame listened to the music, allowing the lovely unison of the brasses to sink into her brain. Just then it occurred to her that the sound quality was too good for a radio in a taxicab. Despite the rather low volume at which it was playing, the sound had true depth, and the overtones were clearly audible. She opened her eyes and leaned forward to study the dashboard stereo. The jet-black device shone with a proud gloss. She couldn't make out its brand name, but it was obviously high end, with lots of knobs and switches, the green numerals of the station readout clear against the black panel. This was not the kind of stereo you expected to see in an ordinary fleet cab.

She looked around at the cab's interior. She had been too absorbed in her own thoughts to notice until now, but this was no ordinary taxi. The high quality of the trim was evident, and the seat was especially comfortable. Above all, it was quiet. The car probably had extra sound insulation to keep noise out, like a soundproofed music studio. The driver probably owned his own cab. Many such owner-drivers would spare no expense on the upkeep of their automobiles. Moving only her eyes, Aomame searched for the driver's registration card, without success. This did not seem to be an illegal unlicensed cab, though. It had a standard taxi meter, which was ticking off the proper fare: 2,150 yen so far. Still, the registration card showing the driver's name was nowhere to be found.

"What a nice car," Aomame said, speaking to the driver's back. "So quiet. What kind is it?"

"Toyota Crown Royal Saloon," the driver replied succinctly.

"The music sounds great in here."

"It's a very quiet car. That's one reason I chose it. Toyota has some of the best sound-insulating technology in the world."

Aomame nodded and leaned back in her seat. There was something about the driver's way of speaking that bothered her, as though he were leaving something important unsaid. For example (and this is just one example), his remark on Toyota's impeccable sound insulation might be taken to mean that some other Toyota feature was less than impeccable. And each time he finished a sentence, there was a tiny but meaningful lump of silence left behind. This lump floated there, enclosed in the car's restricted space like an imaginary miniature cloud, giving Aomame a strangely unsettled feeling.

"It certainly is a quiet car," Aomame declared, as if to sweep the little cloud away. "And the stereo looks especially fine."

"Decisiveness was key when I bought it," the driver said, like a retired staff officer explaining a past military success. "I have to spend so much time in here, I want the best sound available. And—"

Aomame waited for what was to follow, but nothing followed. She closed her eyes again and concentrated on the music. She knew nothing about Janáček as a person, but she was quite sure that he never imagined that in 1984 someone would be listening to his composition in a hushed Toyota Crown Royal Saloon on the gridlocked elevated Metropolitan Expressway in Tokyo.

Why, though, Aomame wondered, had she instantly recognized the piece to be Janáček's *Sinfonietta*? And how did she know it had been composed in 1926? She was not a classical music fan, and she had no personal recollections involving Janáček, yet the moment she heard the opening bars, all her knowledge of the piece came to her by reflex, like a flock of birds swooping through an open window. The music gave her an odd, wrenching kind of feeling. There was no pain or unpleasantness involved, just a sensation that all the elements of her body were being physically wrung out. Aomame had no idea what was going on. Could *Sinfonietta* actually be giving me this weird feeling?

"Janáček," Aomame said half-consciously, though after the word emerged from her lips, she wanted to take it back.

"What's that, ma'am?"

"Janáček. The man who wrote this music."

"Never heard of him."

"Czech composer."

"Well-well," the driver said, seemingly impressed.

"Do you own this cab?" Aomame asked, hoping to change the subject.

"I do," the driver answered. After a brief pause, he added, "It's all mine. My second one."

"Very comfortable seats."

"Thank you, ma'am." Turning his head slightly in her direction, he asked, "By the way, are you in a hurry?"

"I have to meet someone in Shibuya. That's why I asked you to take the expressway."

"What time is your meeting?"

"Four thirty," Aomame said.

"Well, it's already three forty-five. You'll never make it."

"Is the backup that bad?"

"Looks like a major accident up ahead. This is no ordinary traffic jam. We've hardly moved for quite a while."

She wondered why the driver was not listening to traffic reports. The expressway had been brought to a standstill. He should be listening to updates on the taxi drivers' special radio station.

"You can tell it's an accident without hearing a traffic report?" Aomame asked.

"You can't trust them," he said with a hollow ring to his voice.

"They're half lies. The Expressway Corporation only releases reports that suit its agenda. If you really want to know what's happening here and now, you've got to use your own eyes and your own judgment."

"And your judgment tells you that we'll be stuck here?"

"For quite a while," the driver said with a nod. "I can guarantee you that. When it backs up solid like this, the expressway is sheer hell. Is your meeting an important one?"

Aomame gave it some thought. "Yes, very. I have to see a client."

"That's a shame. You're probably not going to make it."

The driver shook his head a few times as if trying to ease a stiff neck. The wrinkles on the back of his neck moved like some kind of ancient creature. Half-consciously watching the movement, Aomame found herself thinking of the sharp object in the bottom of her shoulder bag. A touch of sweat came to her palms.

"What do you think I should do?" she asked.

"There's nothing you can do up here on the expressway—not until we get to the next exit. If we were down on the city streets, you could just step out of the cab and take the subway."

"What is the next exit?"

"Ikejiri. We might not get there before the sun goes down, though."

Before the sun goes down? Aomame imagined herself locked in this cab until sunset. The Janáček was still playing. Muted strings came to the foreground as if to soothe her heightened anxiety. That earlier wrenching sensation had largely subsided. What could that have been?

Aomame had caught the cab near Kinuta and told the driver to take the elevated expressway from Yohga. The flow of traffic had been smooth at first, but suddenly backed up just before Sangenjaya, after which they had hardly moved. The outbound lanes were moving fine. Only the side headed toward downtown Tokyo was tragically jammed. Inbound Expressway Number 3 would not normally back up at three in the afternoon, which was why Aomame had directed the driver to take it.

"Time charges don't add up on the expressway," the driver said, speaking toward his rearview mirror. "So don't let the fare worry you. I suppose you need to get to your meeting, though?"

"Yes, of course. But there's nothing I can do about it, is there?"

He glanced at her in the mirror. He was wearing pale sunglasses. The way the light was shining in, Aomame could not make out his expression.

"Well, in fact, there might be a way. You could take the subway to Shibuya from here, but you'd have to do something a little ... extreme."

"Something extreme?"

"It's not something I can openly advise you to do."

Aomame said nothing. She waited for more with narrowed eyes.

"Look over there. See that turnout just ahead?" he asked, pointing. "See? Near that Esso sign."

Aomame strained to see through the windshield until she focused on a space to the left of the two-lane roadway where broken-down cars could pull off. The elevated roadway had no shoulder but instead had emergency turnouts at regular intervals. Aomame saw that the turnout was outfitted with a yellow emergency phone box for contacting the Metropolitan Expressway Public Corporation office. The turnout itself was empty at the moment. On top of a building beyond the oncoming lanes

there was a big billboard advertising Esso gasoline with a smiling tiger holding a gas hose.

"To tell you the truth, there's a stairway leading from the turnout down to street level. It's for drivers who have to abandon their cars in a fire or earthquake and climb down to the street. Usually only maintenance workers use it. If you were to climb down that stairway, you'd be near a Tokyu Line station. From there, it's nothing to Shibuya."

"I had no idea these Metropolitan Expressways had emergency stairs," Aomame said.

"Not many people do."

"But wouldn't I get in trouble using it without permission when there's no real emergency?"

The driver paused a moment. Then he said, "I wonder. I don't know all the rules of the Corporation, but you wouldn't be hurting anybody. They'd probably look the other way, don't you think? Anyway, they don't have people watching every exit. The Metropolitan Expressway Public Corporation is famous for having a huge staff but nobody really doing any work."

"What kind of stairway is it?"

"Hmm, kind of like a fire escape. You know, like the ones you see on the backs of old buildings. It's not especially dangerous or anything. It's maybe three stories high, and you just climb down. There's a barrier at the opening, but it's not very high. Anybody who wanted to could get over it easily."

"Have you ever used one of these stairways?"

Instead of replying, the driver directed a faint smile toward his rearview mirror, a smile that could be read any number of ways.

"It's strictly up to you," he said, tapping lightly on the steering wheel in time to the music. "If you just want to sit here and relax and enjoy the music, I'm fine with that. We might as well resign ourselves to the fact that we're not going anywhere soon. All I'm saying is that there are emergency measures you can take if you have urgent business."

Aomame frowned and glanced at her watch. She looked up and studied the surrounding cars. On the right was a black Mitsubishi Pajero wagon with a thin layer of white dust. A bored-looking young man in the front passenger seat was smoking a cigarette with his window open. He had long hair, a tanned face, and wore a dark red windbreaker. The car's luggage compartment was filled with a number of worn surfboards. In front of him was a gray Saab 900, its dark-tinted windows closed tight, preventing any glimpse of who might be inside. The body was so immaculately polished, you could probably see your face in it.

The car ahead was a red Suzuki Alto with a Nerima Ward license plate and a dented bumper. A young mother sat gripping the wheel. Her small child was standing on the seat next to her, moving back and forth to dispel its boredom. The mother's annoyance showed on her face as she

cautioned the child to keep still. Aomame could see her mouth moving. The scene was unchanged from ten minutes earlier. In those ten minutes, the car had probably advanced less than ten yards.

Aomame thought hard, arranging everything in order of priority. She needed hardly any time to reach a conclusion. As if to coincide with this, the final movement of the Janáček was just beginning.

She pulled her small Ray-Ban sunglasses partway out of her shoulder bag and took three thousand-yen bills from her wallet. Handing the bills to the driver, she said, "I'll get out here. I really can't be late for this appointment."

The driver nodded and took the money. "Would you like a receipt?"

"No need. And keep the change."

"Thanks very much," he said. "Be careful, it looks windy out there. Don't slip."

"I'll be careful," Aomame said.

"And also," the driver said, facing the mirror, "please remember: things are not what they seem."

Things are not what they seem, Aomame repeated mentally. "What do you mean by that?" she asked with knitted brows.

The driver chose his words carefully: "It's just that you're about to do something out of the ordinary. Am I right? People do not ordinarily climb down the emergency stairs of the Metropolitan Expressway in the middle of the day—especially women."

"I suppose you're right."

"Right. And after you do something like that, the everyday look of things might seem to change a little. Things may look different to you than they did before. I've had that experience myself. But don't let appearances fool you. There's always only one reality."

Aomame thought about what he was saying, and in the course of her thinking, the Janáček ended and the audience broke into immediate applause. This was obviously a live recording. The applause was long and enthusiastic. There were even occasional calls of "Bravo!" She imagined the smiling conductor bowing repeatedly to the standing audience. He would then raise his head, raise his arms, shake hands with the concertmaster, turn away from the audience, raise his arms again in praise of the orchestra, face front, and take another deep bow. As she listened to the long recorded applause, it sounded less like applause and more like an endless Martian sandstorm.

"There is always, as I said, only one reality," the driver repeated slowly, as if underlining an important passage in a book.

"Of course," Aomame said. He was right. A physical object could only be in one place at one time. Einstein proved that. Reality was utterly coolheaded and utterly lonely.

Aomame pointed toward the car stereo. "Great sound."

The driver nodded. "What was the name of that composer again?"

"Janáček."

"Janáček," the driver repeated, as if committing an important password to memory. Then he pulled the lever that opened the passenger door. "Be careful," he said. "I hope you get to your appointment on time."

Aomame stepped out of the cab, gripping the strap of her large leather shoulder bag. The applause was still going. She started walking carefully along the left edge of the elevated road toward the emergency turnout some ten meters ahead. Each time a large truck roared by on the opposite side, she felt the surface of the road shake—or, rather, undulate—through her high heels, as if she were walking on the deck of an aircraft carrier on a stormy sea.

The little girl in the front seat of the red Suzuki Alto stuck her head out of her window and stared, open-mouthed, at Aomame passing by. Then she turned to her mother and asked, "Mommy, what is that lady doing? Where's she going? I want to get out and walk too. Please, Mommy! Pleeese!" The mother responded to her cries in silence, shaking her head and shooting an accusatory glance at Aomame. The girl's loud pleading and the mother's glance were the only responses to her that Aomame noticed. The other drivers just sat at the wheel smoking and watching her make her way with determined steps between the cars and the side wall. They knit their brows and squinted as if looking at a too-bright object but seemed to have temporarily suspended all judgment. For someone to be walking on the Metropolitan Expressway was by no means an everyday event, with or without the usual flow of traffic, so it took them some time to process the sight as an actual occurrence—all the more so because the walker was a young woman in high heels and a miniskirt.

Aomame pulled in her chin, kept her gaze fixed straight ahead, her back straight, and her pace steady. Her chestnut-colored Charles Jourdan heels clicked against the road's surface, and the skirts of her coat waved in the breeze. April had begun, but there was still a chill in the air and a hint of roughness to come. Aomame wore a beige spring coat over her green light wool Junko Shimada suit. A black leather bag hung over her shoulder, and her shoulder-length hair was impeccably trimmed and shaped. She wore no accessories of any kind. Five foot six inches tall, she carried not an ounce of excess fat. Every muscle in her body was well toned, but her coat kept that fact hidden.

A detailed examination of her face from the front would reveal that the size and shape of her ears were significantly different, the left one much bigger and malformed. No one ever noticed this, however, because her hair nearly always covered her ears. Her lips formed a tight straight line, suggesting that she was not easily approachable. Also contributing to this impression were her small, narrow nose, somewhat protruding cheekbones, broad forehead, and long, straight eyebrows. All of these were arranged to sit in a pleasing oval shape, however, and while tastes differ, few would object to calling her a beautiful woman. The one problem with her face was its extreme paucity of expression. Her firmly closed lips only formed a smile when absolutely necessary. Her eyes had the cool, vigilant stare of a superior deck officer.

Thanks to these features, no one ever had a vivid impression of her face. She attracted attention not so much because of the qualities of her features but rather because of the naturalness and grace with which her expression moved. In that sense, Aomame resembled an insect skilled at biological mimicry. What she most wanted was to blend in with her background by changing color and shape, to remain inconspicuous and not easily remembered. This was how she had protected herself since childhood.

Whenever something caused her to frown or grimace, however, her features underwent dramatic changes. The muscles of her face tightened, pulling in several directions at once and emphasizing the lack of symmetry in the overall structure. Deep wrinkles formed in her skin, her eyes suddenly drew inward, her nose and mouth became violently distorted, her jaw twisted to the side, and her lips curled back, exposing Aomame's large white teeth. Instantly, she became a wholly different person, as if a cord had broken, dropping the mask that normally covered her face. The shocking transformation terrified anyone who saw it, so she was careful never to frown in the presence of a stranger. She would contort her face only when she was alone or when she was threatening a man who displeased her.

Reaching the turnout, Aomame stopped and looked around. It took only a moment for her to find the emergency stairway. As the driver had said, there was a metal barrier across the entrance. It was a little more than waist high, and it was locked. Stepping over it in a tight miniskirt could be a slight problem, but only if she cared about being seen. Without hesitating, she slipped her high heels off and shoved them into her shoulder bag. She would probably ruin her stockings by walking in bare feet, but she could easily buy another pair.

People stared at her in silence as she removed her shoes and coat. From the open window of the black Toyota Celica parked next to the turnout, Michael Jackson's high-pitched voice provided her with background music. "Billie Jean" was playing. She felt as if she were performing a striptease. So what? Let them look all they want. They must be bored waiting for the traffic jam to end. Sorry, though, folks, this is all I'll be taking off today.

Aomame slung the bag across her chest to keep it from falling. Some distance away she could see the brand-new black Toyota Crown Royal Saloon in which she had been riding, its windshield reflecting the blinding glare of the afternoon sun. She could not make out the face of the driver, but she knew he must be watching.

Don't let appearances fool you. There's always only one reality.

Aomame took in a long, deep breath, and slowly let it out. Then, to the tune of "Billie Jean," she swung her leg over the metal barrier. Her miniskirt rode up to her hips. Who gives a damn? Let them look all they want. Seeing what's under my skirt doesn't let them really see me as a person. Besides, her legs were the part of her body of which Aomame was the most proud.

Stepping down once she was on the other side of the barrier, Aomame straightened her skirt, brushed the dust from her hands, put her coat back on, slung her bag across her chest again, and pushed her sunglasses more snugly against her face. The emergency stairway lay

before her—a metal stairway painted gray. Plain, practical, functional. Not made for use by miniskirted women wearing only stockings on their otherwise bare feet. Nor had Junko Shimada designed Aomame's suit for use on the emergency escape stairs of Tokyo Metropolitan Expressway Number 3. Another huge truck roared down the outbound side of the expressway, shaking the stairs. The breeze whistled through gaps in the stairway's metal framework. But in any case, there it was, before her: the stairway. All that was left for her to do was climb down to the street.

Aomame turned for one last look at the double line of cars packed on the expressway, scanning them from left to right, then right to left, like a speaker on a podium looking for questions from the audience now that she had finished her talk. There had been no movement at all. Trapped on the expressway with nothing else to occupy them, people were watching her every move, wondering what this woman on the far side of the barrier would do next. Aomame lightly pulled in her chin, bit her lower lip, and took stock of her audience through the dark green lenses of her sunglasses.

You couldn't begin to imagine who I am, where I'm going, or what I'm about to do, Aomame said to her audience without moving her lips. All of you are trapped here. You can't go anywhere, forward or back. But I'm not like you. I have work to do. I have a mission to accomplish. And so, with your permission, I shall move ahead.

Aomame had the urge at the end to treat her assembled throng to one of her special scowls, but she managed to stop herself. There was no time for such things now. Once she let herself frown, it took both time and effort to regain her original expression.

Aomame turned her back on her silent audience and, with careful steps, began to descend the emergency stairway, feeling the chill of the crude metal rungs against the soles of her feet. Also chilling was the early April breeze, which swept her hair back now and then, revealing her misshapen left ear.

CHAPTER 2

Tengo

SOMETHING ELSE IN MIND

Tengo's first memory dated from the time he was one and a half. His mother had taken off her blouse and dropped the shoulder straps of her white slip to let a man who was not his father suck on her breasts. The infant in the crib nearby was probably Tengo himself. He was observing the scene as a third person. Or could the infant have been his twin? No, not likely. It was one-and-a-half-year-old Tengo. He knew this intuitively. The infant was asleep, its eyes closed, its little breaths deep and regular. The vivid ten-second scene was seared into the wall of his consciousness, his earliest memory in life. Nothing came before or after it. It stood out alone, like the steeple of a town visited by a flood, thrusting up above the muddy water.

Tengo made a point of asking people how old they were at the time of their first memory. For most people it was four or five. Three at the very earliest. A child had to be at least three to begin observing a surrounding scene with a degree of rationality. In the stage before that, everything registered as incomprehensible chaos. The world was a mushy bowl of loose gruel, lacking framework or handholds. It flowed past our open windows without forming memories in the brain.

Surely a one-and-a-half-year-old infant was unable to grasp what it meant for a man who was not his father to be sucking his mother's breasts. That much was clear. So if this memory of Tengo's was genuine, the scene must have been seared into his retinas as a pure image free of judgment—the way a camera records objects on film, mechanically, as a blend of light and shadow. And as his consciousness matured, the fixed image held in reserve would have been analyzed bit by bit, and meaning applied to it. But is such a thing even possible? Was the infant brain capable of preserving images like that?

Or was this simply a false memory of Tengo's? Was it just something that his mind had later decided—for whatever purpose or plan—to make up on its own? Tengo had given plenty of thought to the possibility that this memory might be a fabrication, but he had arrived at the conclusion that it probably was not. It was too vivid and too deeply compelling to be fake. The light, the smells, the beating of his heart: these felt overwhelmingly real, not like imitations. And besides, it explained many things—both logically and emotionally—to assume that the scene was real.

This vivid ten-second image would come to him without warning and without consideration of either time or place. He could be riding on the subway or writing formulas on the blackboard or having a meal or (as now) sitting and talking to someone across a table, and it would envelop him like a soundless tsunami. By the time he noticed, it would be directly in front of him, and his arms and legs would be paralyzed. The flow of time stopped. The air grew thin, and he had trouble breathing. He lost all connection with the people and things around him. The tsunami's liquid wall swallowed him whole. And though it felt to him as if the world were being closed off in darkness, he experienced no loss of awareness. It was just a sense of having been switched to a new track. Parts of his mind were, if anything, sharpened by the change. He felt no terror, but he could not keep his eyes open. His eyelids were clamped shut. Sounds grew distant, and the familiar image was projected onto the screen of his consciousness again and again. Sweat gushed from every part of his body and the armpits of his undershirt grew damp. He trembled all over, and his heartbeat grew faster and louder.

If he was with someone when it happened, Tengo would feign momentary dizziness. It was, in fact, like a dizzy spell. Everything would return to normal in time. He would pull his handkerchief from his pocket and press it to his mouth. Waiting for the "dizziness" to pass, he would raise a hand to signal to the other person that it was nothing to worry about. Sometimes it would all be over in thirty seconds, at other times it went on for over a minute. As long as it lasted, the same image would be repeated as if on a tape machine set on automatic. His mother would drop her shoulder straps and some man would start sucking on her hardened nipples. She would close her eyes and heave a deep sigh. The warm, familiar scent of mother's milk hovered faintly in the air. Smell is an infant's most acute sense. The sense of smell reveals a great deal—sometimes it reveals everything. The scene was soundless, the air a dense liquid. All he could hear was the soft beating of his own heart.

Look at this, they say. Look at this and nothing else, they say. You are here. You can't go anywhere else, they say. The message is played over and over.

This "attack" was a long one. Tengo closed his eyes, covered his mouth with his handkerchief as always, and gritted his teeth. He had no idea how long it went on. All he could do was guess, based on how worn out he felt afterward. He felt physically drained, more fatigued than he had ever felt before. Some time had to go by before he could open his eyes. His mind wanted to wake up, but his muscles and internal organs resisted. He might as well have been a hibernating animal trying to wake up in the wrong season.

"Tengo, Tengo!" someone was calling. The muffled voice seemed to reach him from the depths of a cave. It finally dawned on Tengo that he was hearing his own name. "What's wrong, Tengo? Is it happening to you again? Are you all right?" The voice sounded closer now.

Tengo finally opened his eyes, managed to focus them, and stared at his own right hand gripping the edge of the table. Now he could be sure that the world still existed in one piece and that he was still a part of it. Some numbness remained, but the hand was certainly his. So, too, was the smell of sweat emanating from him, an oddly harsh odor like a zoo animal's.

His throat was dry. Tengo reached for the glass on the table and drank half its contents, carefully trying not to spill any. After a momentary rest to catch his breath, he drank the remainder. His mind was gradually coming back to where it belonged and his senses were returning to normal. He set the empty glass down and wiped his mouth with his handkerchief.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm okay now"

He knew that the man across from him was Komatsu and that they had been talking at a café near Tokyo's Shinjuku Station. The sounds of other nearby conversations now sounded like normal voices. The couple at the neighboring table were staring at him, obviously concerned. The waitress stood by with a worried expression on her face as though she

expected her customer to vomit. Tengu looked up and nodded to her, smiling as if to signal, "Don't worry, no problem."

"That wasn't some kind of fit, was it?" Komatsu asked.

"No, it's nothing, a kind of dizzy spell. A bad one," Tengu replied. His voice still didn't sound like his own, though it was getting closer.

"It'd be terrible if that happened while you were driving or something," Komatsu said, looking directly at him.

"I don't drive."

"That's good. I know a guy with a cedar pollen allergy who started sneezing at the wheel and smashed into a telephone pole. Of course, your thing is not just sneezing. I was shocked the first time. I'm more or less used to it now, though."

"Sorry."

Tengu picked up his coffee cup and gulped down what was left. He tasted nothing, just felt some lukewarm liquid passing down his throat.

"Want to order another glass of water?" Komatsu asked.

Tengu shook his head. "No, I'm okay now."

Komatsu took a pack of Marlboros from his jacket pocket, put one in his mouth, and lit up with the café's matches. Then he glanced at his watch.

"What were we talking about again?" Tengu asked, trying to get back to normal.

"Good question," Komatsu said, staring off into space, thinking—or pretending to. Tengu could not be sure which. There was a good deal of acting involved in the way Komatsu spoke and gestured. "That's it—the girl Fuka-Eri. We were just getting started on her and Air Chrysalis."

Tengu nodded. That was it. He was just beginning to give his opinion on Fuka-Eri and her novella, Air Chrysalis, when the "attack" hit him.

Komatsu said, "I was going to tell you about that odd one-word pen name of hers."

"It is odd, isn't it? The 'Fuka' sounds like part of a family name, and the 'Eri' could be an ordinary girl's name: 'Eri' or 'Eriko.' "

"That's exactly what it is. Her family name is 'Fukada,' and her real first name is 'Eriko,' so she put them together: 'Fuka' plus 'Eri' equals 'Fuka-Eri.' "

Tengu pulled the manuscript from his briefcase and laid it on the table, resting his hand atop the sheaf of paper to reaffirm its presence.

"As I mentioned briefly on the phone, the best thing about this Air Chrysalis is that it's not an imitation of anyone. It has absolutely none of the usual new writer's sense of 'I want to be another so-and-so.' The style, for sure, is rough, and the writing is clumsy. She even gets the title wrong: she's confusing 'chrysalis' and 'cocoon.' You could pick it apart completely if you wanted to. But the story itself has real power: it draws you in. The overall plot is a fantasy, but the descriptive detail is incredibly real. The balance between the two is excellent. I don't know if words like 'originality' or 'inevitability' fit here, and I suppose I might agree if someone insisted it's not at that level, but finally, after you work your way through the thing, with all its faults, it leaves a real impression—it gets to you in some strange, inexplicable way that may be a little disturbing."

Komatsu kept his eyes on Tingo, saying nothing. He was waiting to hear more.

Tingo went on. "I'd hate to see this thing dropped from the competition just because the style is clumsy. I've read tons of submissions over the years—or maybe I should say 'skimmed' rather than 'read.' A few of them were fairly well written, of course, but most of them were just awful. And out of all those manuscripts, this Air Chrysalis is the only one that moved me the least bit. It's the only one that ever made me want to read it again."

"Well, well," Komatsu said, and then, as if he found this all rather boring, he released a stream of smoke through his pursed lips. Tingo had known Komatsu too long to be deceived by such a display, however. Komatsu was a man who often adopted an expression that was either unrelated to—or exactly the opposite of—what he was actually feeling. And so Tingo was prepared to wait him out.

"I read it, too," Komatsu said after a short pause. "Right after you called me. The writing is incredibly bad. It's ungrammatical, and in some places you have no idea what she's trying to say. She should go back to school and learn how to write a decent sentence before she starts writing fiction."

"But you did read it to the end, didn't you?"

Komatsu smiled. It was the kind of smile he might have found way in the back of a normally unopened drawer. "You're right, I did read it all the way through—much to my own surprise. I never read these new writer prize submissions from beginning to end. I even reread some parts of this one. Let's just say the planets were in perfect alignment. I'll grant it that much."

"Which means it has something, don't you think?"

Komatsu set his cigarette in an ashtray and rubbed the side of his nose with the middle finger of his right hand. He did not, however, answer Tingo's question.

Tingo said, "She's just seventeen, a high school kid. She still doesn't have the discipline to read and write fiction, that's all. It's practically impossible for this work to take the new writers' prize, I know, but it's good enough to put on the short list. You can make that happen, I'm sure. So then she can win next time."

"Hmm," Komatsu said with another noncommittal answer and a yawn. He took a drink from his water glass. "Think about it, Tengu. Imagine if I put it on the short list. The members of the selection committee would faint—or more likely have a shit fit. But they would definitely not read it all the way through. All four of them are active writers, busy with their own work. They'd skim the first couple of pages and toss it out as if it were some grade school composition. I could plead with them to give it another try, and guarantee them it would be brilliant with a little polishing here and there, but who's going to listen to me? Even supposing I could 'make it happen,' I'd only want to do that for something with more promise."

"So you're saying we should drop it just like that?"

"No, that is not what I'm saying," Komatsu said, rubbing the side of his nose. "I've got something else in mind for this story."

"Something else in mind," Tengu said. He sensed something ominous in Komatsu's tone.

"You're saying we should count on her next work as a winner," Komatsu said. "I'd like to be able to do that, too, of course. One of an editor's greatest joys is nurturing a young writer over time. It's a thrill to look at the clear night sky and discover a new star before anybody else sees it. But to tell you the truth, Tengu, I don't believe this girl has a next work in her. Not to boast, but I've been making my living in this business for twenty years now. I've seen writers come and go. And if I've learned anything, it's how to tell the difference between writers who have a next work in them, and those who don't. And if you ask me, this girl doesn't have one. Her next work is not going to make it, and neither will the one after that or the one after that. First of all, look at this style. No amount of work is going to make it any better. It's never going to happen. And the reason it's never going to happen is that the writer herself doesn't give a damn about style: she shows absolutely no intention of wanting to write well, of wanting to improve her writing. Good style happens in one of two ways: the writer either has an inborn talent or is willing to work herself to death to get it. And this girl, Fuka-Eri, belongs to neither type. Don't ask me why, but style as such simply doesn't interest her. What she does have, though, is the desire to tell a story—a fairly strong desire. I grant her that. Even in this raw form, it was able to draw you in, Tengu, and it made me read the manuscript all the way through. That alone is impressive, you could say. But she has no future as a novelist. None. I hate to disappoint you, but that's my honest opinion."

Tengu had to admit that Komatsu could be right. The man possessed good editorial instincts, if nothing else.

"Still, it wouldn't hurt to give her a chance, would it?" Tengu asked.

"You mean, throw her in, see if she sinks or swims?"

"In a word."

"I've done too much of that already. I don't want to watch anybody else drown."

"Well, what about me?"

"You at least are willing to work hard," Komatsu said cautiously. "As far as I can tell, you don't cut corners. You're very modest when it comes to the act of writing. And why? Because you like to write. I value that in you. It's the single most important quality for somebody who wants to be a writer."

"But not, in itself, enough."

"No, of course, not in itself enough. There also has to be that 'special something,' an indefinable quality, something I can't quite put my finger on. That's the part of fiction I value more highly than anything else. Stuff I understand perfectly doesn't interest me. Obviously. It's very simple."

Tengo fell silent for a while. Then he said, "Does Fuka-Eri's writing have something you don't understand perfectly?"

"Yes, it does, of course. She has something important. I don't know what it is exactly, but she has it, that much is clear. It's obvious to you, and it's obvious to me. Anybody can see it, like the smoke from a bonfire on a windless afternoon. But whatever she has, Tengo, she probably can't carry it on her own."

"Meaning, if we throw her in the water, she'll drown?"

"Exactly."

"And that's why you don't want to put her on the short list."

"That is exactly why." Komatsu contorted his lips and folded his hands on the table. "Which brings us to a point in the conversation where I have to be very careful how I express myself."

Tengo picked up his coffee cup and stared at the puddle inside. Then he put the cup down again. Komatsu still had not spoken. Tengo asked, "Is this where I find out what you mean by 'something else'?"

Komatsu narrowed his eyes like a teacher gazing upon his prize pupil. He nodded slowly and said, "It is."

There was something inscrutable about this man Komatsu. You couldn't easily tell from his expression or tone of voice what he was thinking or feeling. He appeared to derive a good deal of pleasure from keeping others guessing. Mentally, he was very quick, that was for certain. He was the type of man who had his own sense of logic and reached his own conclusions without regard to the opinions of others. He did not engage in pointless intellectual display, but it was clear that he had read an enormous amount and that his knowledge was both wide-ranging and deep. Nor was it simply a matter of factual knowledge: he had an intuitive eye both for people and for books. His biases played a large role here, but for Komatsu bias was an important element of truth.

He never said a great deal, and he hated long-winded explanations, but when necessary he could present his views logically and precisely. He

could also be quite caustic if he felt like it, aiming a quick and merciless jab at his opponent's weakest point. He had very strong opinions about both people and literature; the works and individuals he could not tolerate far outnumbered those he could. Not surprisingly, the number of people who disliked him was far greater than those who thought well of him—which was exactly what he hoped for. Tengo thought that Komatsu enjoyed the isolation—and even relished being openly hated. Komatsu believed that mental acuity was never born from comfortable circumstances.

At forty-five, Komatsu was sixteen years older than Tengo. A dedicated editor of literary magazines, he had established a certain reputation as one of the top people in the industry, but no one knew a thing about his private life. He met with people constantly in his work, but he never spoke of anything personal. Tengo had no idea where he was born or raised, or even where he lived. They often had long conversations, but such topics never came up. People were puzzled that a difficult man like Komatsu was able to solicit manuscripts from writers—he had no friends to speak of and displayed only contempt for the literary world—but over the years he managed, almost effortlessly, to obtain work by famous authors for the magazine, and more than a few issues owed their contents to his efforts. So even if they didn't like him, people respected him.

Rumor had it that when Komatsu was a student in the prestigious University of Tokyo's Department of Literature in 1960, he had been one of the leaders of the huge leftist demonstrations against the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. He was said to have been near fellow student Michiko Kanba when she was killed by riot police, and to have suffered serious injuries himself. No one knew if this was true, but there was something about Komatsu that made the stories seem convincing. He was tall and gangly, with an oversized mouth and an undersized nose. He had long limbs and nicotine-stained fingers, reminiscent of those failed revolutionary intellectuals in nineteenth-century Russian novels. He rarely smiled, but when he did it was with his whole face. Not that it made him look especially happy—he was more like an old sorcerer chuckling to himself over an ominous prophecy he was about to reveal. Clean and decently groomed, he always wore a tweed jacket, white oxford cloth or pale gray polo shirt, no tie, gray pants, suede shoes—a "uniform" meant to show the world he didn't care about these things. Tengo imagined a half-dozen three-button tweed jackets of a subtly different color, cloth, and pattern that hung, carefully brushed, in Komatsu's closet. Perhaps Komatsu had to attach number tags to distinguish one jacket from another.

Komatsu's fine, wiry hair was beginning to show a touch of gray in front. Tangled on the sides, it was long enough to cover his ears, and it always stayed that length, about a week overdue for a haircut. Tengo wondered how such a thing was possible. At times Komatsu's eyes would take on a sharp glow, like stars glittering in the winter night sky. And if something caused him to clam up, he would maintain his silence like a rock on the far side of the moon. All expression would disappear from his face, and his body seemed to go cold.

Tengo first met Komatsu five years earlier when he was short-listed for the new writers' prize competition of Komatsu's magazine. Komatsu called and said he wanted to get together for a chat. They agreed to meet in a café in Shinjuku (the same one in which they were now

sitting). Komatsu told Tengu there was no way his work would take the prize (and in fact it did not). Komatsu himself, however, had enjoyed the story. "I'm not looking for thanks, but I almost never say this to anyone," he said. (This was in fact true, as Tengu came to learn.) "So I'd like you to let me read your next story before you show it to anyone else." Tengu promised to do that.

Komatsu also wanted to learn about Tengu as a person—his experience growing up, what he was doing now. Tengu explained himself as honestly as he could. He was born in the city of Ichikawa in nearby Chiba Prefecture. His mother died of an illness shortly after he was born, or at least that was what his father told him. He had no siblings. His father never remarried but raised Tengu by himself, collecting NHK television subscription fees door to door to make a living. Now, however, his father had Alzheimer's disease and was living in a nursing home on the southern tip of Chiba's Boso Peninsula. Tengu himself had graduated from Tsukuba University's oddly named "School 1 College of Natural Studies Mathematics Major" and was writing fiction while teaching mathematics at a private cram school in Yoyogi. At the time of his graduation he could have taken a position at a prefectural high school near home, but instead chose the relatively free schedule of the Tokyo cram school. He lived alone in a small apartment in the Koenji District west of downtown Tokyo, which gave him an easy half-hour commute to school.

Tengu did not know for certain whether he wanted to be a professional novelist, nor was he sure he had the talent to write fiction. What he did know was that he could not help spending a large part of every day writing fiction. To him, writing was like breathing.

Komatsu said practically nothing as he listened to Tengu's story. He seemed to like Tengu, though it was not clear why. Tengu was a big man (he had been a key member of his judo team in middle school, high school, and college), and he had the eyes of an early-waking farmer. He wore his hair short, seemed always to have a tan, and had cauliflower ears. He looked neither like a youthful devotee of literature nor like a teacher of mathematics, which was also something that Komatsu seemed to like about him.

Whenever Tengu finished a story, he would take it to Komatsu. Komatsu would read it and offer his comments. Tengu would rewrite it following his advice and bring it to Komatsu again, who would provide new instructions, like a coach raising the bar a little at a time. "Your case might take some time," he said. "But we're in no hurry. Just make up your mind to write every single day. And don't throw anything out. It might come in handy later." Tengu agreed to follow Komatsu's advice.

For his part, Komatsu would occasionally send small writing jobs Tengu's way. Anonymously, Tengu wrote copy for the women's magazine produced by Komatsu's publisher. He handled everything: revising letters to the editor, writing background pieces on movies and books, composing horoscopes. His horoscopes were especially popular because they were often right. Once when he wrote, "Beware an early-morning earthquake," there actually was a big earthquake early one morning. Tengu was grateful for the extra income and for the writing practice this work provided. It made him happy to see his writing in print—in any form—displayed in the bookstores.

Eventually Tengo was hired as a screener for the literary magazine's new writers' prize. It was odd for him to be screening other writers' works when he himself was competing for the prize, but he read everything impartially, not terribly concerned about the delicacy of his situation. If nothing else, the experience of reading mounds of badly written fiction gave him an indelible lesson in exactly what constituted badly written fiction. He read around one hundred works each time, choosing ten that might have some point to them to bring to Komatsu with written comments. Five works would make it to the short list, and from those the four-person committee would select the winner.

Tengo was not the only part-time screener, and Komatsu was only one of several editors engaged in assembling the short list. This was all in the name of fairness, but such efforts were not really necessary. No matter how many works were entered in the competition, there were never more than two or three of any value, and no one could possibly miss those. Three of Tengo's stories had made the short list in the past. Each had been chosen not by Tengo himself, of course, but by two other screeners and then by Komatsu, who manned the editorial desk. None had won the prize, but this had not been a crushing blow to Tengo. For one thing, Komatsu had ingrained in him the idea that he just had to give it time. And Tengo himself was not all that eager to become a novelist right away.

If he arranged his teaching schedule well, Tengo was able to spend four days a week at home. He had taught at the same cram school for seven years now, and he was popular with the students because he knew how to convey the subject succinctly and clearly, and he could answer any question on the spot. Tengo surprised himself with his own eloquence. His explanations were clever, his voice carried well, and he could excite the class with a good joke. He had always thought of himself as a poor speaker, and even now he could be at a loss for words when confronted face-to-face. In a small group, he was strictly a listener. In front of a large class, however, his head would clear, and he could speak at length with ease. His own teaching experience gave him renewed awareness of the inscrutability of human beings.

Tengo was not dissatisfied with his salary. It was by no means high, but the school paid in accordance with ability. The students were asked to do course evaluations periodically, and compensation hinged on the results. The school was afraid of having its best teachers lured away (and, in fact, Tengo had been headhunted several times). This never happened at ordinary schools. There, salary was set by seniority, teachers' private lives were subject to the supervision of administrators, and ability and popularity counted for nothing. Tengo actually enjoyed teaching at the cram school. Most of the students went there with the explicit purpose of preparing for the college entrance exams, and they attended his lectures enthusiastically. Teachers had only one duty: to teach their classes. This was exactly what Tengo wanted. He never had to deal with student misbehavior or infractions of school rules. All he had to do was show up in the classroom and teach students how to solve mathematical problems. And the manipulation of pure abstractions using numerical tools came naturally to Tengo.

When he was home, Tengo usually wrote from first thing in the morning until the approach of evening. All he needed to satisfy him was his Mont Blanc pen, his blue ink, and standard manuscript sheets, each page lined with four hundred empty squares ready to accept four hundred

characters. Once a week his married girlfriend would come to spend the afternoon with him. Sex with a married woman ten years his senior was stress free and fulfilling, because it couldn't lead to anything. As the sun was setting, he would head out for a long walk, and once the sun was down he would read a book while listening to music. He never watched television. Whenever the NHK fee collector came, he would point out that he had no television set, and politely refuse to pay. "I really don't have one. You can come in and look if you want," he would say, but the collector would never come in. They were not allowed to.

"I have something bigger in mind," Komatsu said.

"Something bigger?"

"Much bigger. Why be satisfied with small-scale stuff like the new writers' prize? As long as we're aiming, why not go for something big?"

Tengo fell silent. He had no idea what Komatsu was getting at, but he sensed something disturbing.

"The Akutagawa Prize!" Komatsu declared after a moment's pause.

"The Akutagawa Prize?" Tengo repeated the words slowly, as if he were writing them in huge characters with a stick on wet sand.

"Come on, Tengo, you can't be that out of touch! The Akutagawa Prize! Every writer's dream! Huge headlines in the paper! TV news!"

"Now you're losing me. Are we still talking about Fuka-Eri?"

"Of course we are—Fuka-Eri and Air Chrysalis. Have we been discussing anything else?"

Tengo bit his lip as he tried to fathom the meaning behind Komatsu's words. "But you yourself said there's no way Air Chrysalis can take the new writers' prize. Haven't we been talking about that all along, how the work will never amount to anything the way it is?"

"Precisely. It'll never amount to anything the way it is. That is for certain."

Tengo needed time to think. "Are you saying it needs to be revised?"

"It's the only way. It's not that unusual for an author to revise a promising work with the advice of an editor. It happens all the time. Only, in this case, rather than the author, someone else will do the revising."

"Someone else?" Tengo asked, but he already knew what Komatsu's answer would be.

"You."

Tengo searched for an appropriate response but couldn't find one. He heaved a sigh and said, "You know as well as I do that this work is going to need more than a little patching here and there. It'll never come together without a fundamental top-to-bottom rewrite."

"Which is why you'll rewrite it from top to bottom. Just use the framework of the story as is. And keep as much of the tone as possible. But change the language—a total remake. You'll be in charge of the actual writing, and I'll be the producer."

"Just like that?" Tengo muttered, as if to himself.

"Look," Komatsu said, picking up a spoon and pointing it at Tengo the way a conductor uses his baton to single out a soloist from the rest of the orchestra. "This Fuka-Eri girl has something special. Anyone can see it reading *Air Chrysalis*. Her imagination is far from ordinary. Unfortunately, though, her writing is hopeless. A total mess. You, on the other hand, know how to write. Your story lines are good. You have taste. You may be built like a lumberjack, but you write with intelligence and sensitivity. And real power. Unlike Fuka-Eri, though, you still haven't grasped exactly what it is you want to write about. Which is why a lot of your stories are missing something at the core. I know you've got something inside you that you need to write about, but you can't get it to come out. It's like a frightened little animal hiding way back in a cave—you know it's in there, but there's no way to catch it until it comes out. Which is why I keep telling you, just give it time."

Tengo shifted awkwardly on the booth's vinyl seat. He said nothing.

"The answer is simple," Komatsu said, still lightly waving his spoon. "We put the two writers together and invent a brand-new one. We add your perfect style to Fuka-Eri's raw story. It's an ideal combination. I know you've got it in you. Why do you think I've been backing you all this time? Just leave the rest to me. With the two of you together, the new writers' prize will be easy, and then we can shoot for the Akutagawa. I haven't been wasting my time in this business all these years. I know how to pull the right strings."

Tengo let his lips part as he stared at Komatsu. Komatsu put his spoon back in his saucer. It made an abnormally loud sound.

"Supposing the story wins the Akutagawa Prize, then what?" Tengo asked, recovering from the shock.

"If it takes the Akutagawa, it'll cause a sensation. Most people don't know the value of a good novel, but they don't want to be left out, so they'll buy it and read it—especially when they hear it was written by a high school girl. If the book sells, it'll make a lot of money. We'll split it three ways. I'll take care of that."

"Never mind the money" Tengo said, his voice flat. "How about your professional ethics as an editor? If the scheme became public, it'd cause an uproar. You'd lose your job."

"It wouldn't come out so easily. I can handle the whole thing very carefully. And even if it did come out, I'd be glad to leave the company. Management doesn't like me, and they've never treated me decently. Finding another job would be no problem for me. Besides, I wouldn't be doing it for the money. I'd be doing it to screw the literary world. Those bastards all huddle together in their gloomy cave and kiss each other's asses, and lick each other's wounds, and trip

each other up, all the while spewing this pompous crap about the mission of literature. I want to have a good laugh at their expense. I want to outwit the system and make idiots out of the whole bunch of them. Doesn't that sound like fun to you?"

It did not sound like all that much fun to Tengo. For one thing, he had never actually seen this "literary world." And when he realized that a competent individual like Komatsu had such childish motives for crossing such a dangerous bridge, he was momentarily at a loss for words.

"It sounds like a scam to me," he said at length.

"Coauthorship is not that unusual," Komatsu said with a frown. "Half the magazines' serialized manga are coauthored. The staff toss around ideas and make up the story, the artist does simple line drawings, his assistants fill in the details and add color. It's not much different from the way a factory makes alarm clocks. The same sort of thing goes on in the fiction world. Romance novels, for example. With most of those, the publisher hires writers to make up stories following the guidelines they've established. Division of labor: that's the system. Mass production would be impossible any other way. In the self-conscious world of literary fiction, of course, such methods are not openly sanctioned, so as a practical strategy we have to set Fuka-Eri up as our single author. If the deception comes out, it might cause a bit of a scandal, but we wouldn't be breaking the law. We'd just be riding the current of the times. And besides, we're not talking about a Balzac or a Murasaki Shikibu here. All we'd be doing is patching the holes in the story some high school girl wrote and making it a better piece of fiction. What's wrong with that? If the finished work is good and brings pleasure to a lot of readers, then no harm done, don't you agree?"

Tengo gave some thought to what Komatsu was saying, and he answered with care. "I see two problems here. I'm sure there are more than that, but for now let me concentrate on these two. One is that we don't know whether the author, Fuka-Eri, would go along with having someone else rewrite her work. If she says no, of course, that's the end of that. The other problem, assuming she says okay, is whether I could really do a good job of rewriting it. Coauthorship is a very delicate matter; I can't believe things would go as easily as you are suggesting."

"I know you can do it, Tengo," Komatsu said without hesitation, as if he had been anticipating Tengo's reaction. "I have no doubt whatever. I knew it the first time I read Air Chrysalis. The first thing that popped into my head was 'Tengo has to rewrite this!' It's perfect for you. It's aching for you to rewrite it. Don't you see?"

Tengo merely shook his head, saying nothing.

"There's no rush," Komatsu said quietly. "This is important. Take two or three days to think about it. Read Air Chrysalis again, and give some good, careful thought to what I'm proposing. And—oh yes, let me give you this."

Komatsu withdrew a brown envelope from his breast pocket and handed it to Tengo. Inside the envelope were two standard-size color photos, pictures of a girl. One showed her from the chest up, the other was a

full-length snapshot. They seemed to have been taken at the same time. She was standing in front of a stairway somewhere, a broad stone stairway. Classically beautiful features. Long, straight hair. White blouse. Small and slim. Her lips were trying to smile, but her eyes were resisting. Serious eyes. Eyes in search of something. Tengo stared at the two photos. The more he looked, the more he thought about himself at that age, and the more he sensed a small, dull ache in his chest. It was a special ache, something he had not experienced for a very long time.

"That's Fuka-Eri," Komatsu said. "Beautiful girl, don't you think? Sweet and fresh. Seventeen. Perfect. We won't tell anyone that her real name is Eriko Fukada. We'll keep her as 'Fuka-Eri.' The name alone should cause a stir if she wins the Akutagawa Prize, don't you think? She'll have reporters swarming around her like bats at sunset. The books'll sell out overnight."

Tengo wondered how Komatsu had gotten hold of the photos. Entrants were not required to send in photos with their manuscripts. But he decided not to ask, partly because he didn't want to know the answer, whatever it might be.

"You can keep those," Komatsu said. "They might come in handy."

Tengo put them back into the envelope and laid them on the manuscript. Then he said to Komatsu, "I don't know much about how the 'industry' works, but sheer common sense tells me this is a tremendously risky plan. Once you start lying to the public, you have to keep lying. It never ends. It's not easy, either psychologically or practically, to keep tweaking the truth to make it all fit together. If one person who's in on the plan makes one little slip, everybody could be done for. Don't you agree?"

Komatsu pulled out another cigarette and lit it. "You're absolutely right. It is risky. There are a few too many uncertainties at this point in time. One slip, and things could get very unpleasant for us. I'm perfectly aware of that. But you know, Tengo, taking everything into consideration, my instincts still tell me, 'Go for it!' For the simple reason that you don't get chances like this very often. I've never had one before, and I'm sure I'll never have another one. Comparing this to gambling might not be the best way to look at it, but we've got all the right cards and a mountain of chips. The conditions are perfect. If we let a chance like this slip away, we'll regret it for the rest of our lives."

Tengo stared in silence at Komatsu's utterly sinister smile.

Komatsu continued: "And the most important thing is that we are remaking Air Chrysalis into a much better work. It's a story that should have been much better written. There's something important in it, something that needs someone to bring it out. I'm sure you think so too, Tengo. Am I wrong? We each contribute our own special talents to the project: we pool our resources for one thing only, and that is to bring out that important something in the work. Our motives are pure: we can present them anywhere without shame."

"Well, you can try to rationalize it all you want, you can invent all kinds of noble-sounding pretexts, but in the end, a scam is a scam."

"Look, Tengo, you're losing sight of one crucial fact," Komatsu said, his mouth opening in a big, wide grin the likes of which Tengo had never seen. "Or should I say you are deliberately choosing not to look at it? And that's the simple fact that you want to do this. You already feel that way--'risk' and 'morality' be damned. I can see it. You're itching to rewrite Air Chrysalis with your own hands. You want to be the one, not Fuka-Eri, who brings out that special something in the work. I want you to go home now and figure out what you really think. Stand in front of a mirror and give yourself a long, hard look. It's written all over your face."

Tengo felt the air around him growing thin. He glanced at his surroundings. Was the image coming to him again? But no, there was no sign of it. The thinness of the air had come from something else. He pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat from his brow. Komatsu was always right. Why should that be?

CHAPTER 3

Aomame

SOME CHANGED FACTS

Aomame climbed down the emergency stairway in her stocking feet. The wind whistled past the stairway, which was open to the elements. Snug though her miniskirt was, it filled like a sail with the occasional strong gust from below, providing enough lift to make her steps unsteady. She kept a tight grip on the cold metal pipe that served as a handrail, lowering herself a step at a time, backward, and stopping now and then to brush aside the stray hair hanging down her forehead and to adjust the position of the shoulder bag slung diagonally across her chest.

She had a sweeping view of National Highway 246 running below. The din of the city enveloped her: car engines, blaring horns, the scream of an automobile burglar alarm, an old war song echoing from a right-wing sound truck, a sledgehammer cracking concrete. Riding on the wind, the noise pressed in on her from all directions--above, below, and 360 degrees around. Listening to the racket (not that she wanted to listen, but she was in no position to be covering her ears), she began to feel almost seasick.

Partway down, the stairs became a horizontal catwalk leading back toward the center of the elevated expressway, then angled straight down again.

Just across the road from the open stairway stood a small, five-story apartment house, a relatively new building covered in brown brick tile. Each apartment had a small balcony facing the emergency stairway, but all the patio doors were shut tight, the blinds or curtains closed. What kind of architect puts balconies on a building that stands nose-to-nose with an elevated expressway? No one would be hanging out their sheets to dry or lingering on the balcony with a gin and tonic to watch the evening rush-hour traffic. Still, on several balconies were stretched the seemingly obligatory nylon clotheslines, and one even had a garden chair and potted rubber plant. The rubber plant was ragged and faded, its leaves disintegrating and marked with brown dry spots. Aomame could not help feeling sorry for the plant. If she were ever reincarnated, let her not be reborn as such a miserable rubber plant!

Judging from the spiderwebs clinging to it, the emergency stairway was hardly ever used. To each web clung a small black spider, patiently waiting for its small prey to come along. Not that the spiders had any awareness of being "patient." A spider had no special skill other than building its web, and no lifestyle choice other than sitting still. It would stay in one place waiting for its prey until, in the natural course of things, it shriveled up and died. This was all genetically predetermined. The spider had no confusion, no despair, no regrets. No metaphysical doubt, no moral complications. Probably. Unlike me. I have to move with a purpose, which is why I'm alone now, climbing down these stupid emergency stairs from Metropolitan Expressway Number 3 where it passes through the useless Sangenjaya neighborhood, even if it means ruining a perfectly good pair of stockings, all the while sweeping away these damned spiderwebs and looking at an ugly rubber plant on somebody's stupid balcony.

I move, therefore I am.

Climbing down the stairway, Aomame thought about Tamaki Otsuka. She had not been intending to think about Tamaki, but once the thoughts began, she couldn't stop them. Tamaki was her closest friend in high school and a fellow member of the softball team. As teammates, they went to many different places, and did all kinds of things together. They once shared a kind of lesbian experience. The two of them took a summer trip and ended up sleeping together when a small double was the only size bed the hotel could offer. They found themselves touching each other all over. Neither of them was a lesbian, but, spurred on by the special curiosity of two young girls, they experimented boldly. Neither had a boyfriend at the time, and neither had the slightest sexual experience. It was simply one of those things that remain as an "exceptional but interesting" episode in life. But as she brought back the images of herself and Tamaki touching each other that night, Aomame felt some small, deep part of herself growing hot even as she made her way down the windswept stairway. Tamaki's oval-shaped nipples, her sparse pubic hair, the lovely curve of her buttocks, the shape of her clitoris: Aomame recalled them all with strange clarity.

As her mind traced these graphic memories, the brass unison of Janáček's Sinfonietta rang like festive background music. The palm of her hand was caressing the curve of Tamaki's waist. At first Tamaki

just laughed as if she were being tickled, but soon the laughter stopped, and her breathing changed. The music had initially been composed as a fanfare for an athletic meet. The breeze blew gently over the green meadows of Bohemia in time with the music. Aomame knew when Tamaki's nipples suddenly became erect. And then her own did the same. And then the timpani conjured up a complex musical pattern.

Aomame halted her steps and shook her head several times. I should not be thinking such thoughts at a time like this. I have to concentrate on climbing down the stairs. But the thoughts would not go away. The images came to her one after another and with great vividness. The summer night, the narrow bed, the faint smell of perspiration. The words they spoke. The feelings that would not take the form of words. Forgotten promises. Unrealized hopes. Frustrated longings. A gust of wind lifted a lock of her hair and whipped it against her cheek. The pain brought a film of tears to her eyes. Successive gusts soon dried the tears away.

When did that happen, I wonder? But time became confused in her memory, like a tangled string. The straight-line axis was lost, and forward and back, right and left, jumbled together. One drawer took the place of another. She could not recall things that should have come back to her easily. It is now April 1984. I was born in ... that's it ... 1954. I can remember that much. These dates were engraved in her mind, but as soon as she recalled them, they lost all meaning. She saw white cards imprinted with dates scattering in the wind, flying in all directions. She ran, trying to pick up as many as she could, but the wind was too strong, the sheer number of cards overwhelming. Away they flew: 1954, 1984, 1645, 1881, 2006, 771, 2041 ... all order lost, all knowledge vanishing, the stairway of intellection crumbling beneath her feet.

Aomame and Tamaki were in bed together. They were seventeen and enjoying their newly granted freedom. This was their first trip together as friends, just the two of them. That fact alone was exciting. They soaked in the hotel's hot spring, split a can of beer from the refrigerator, turned out the lights, and crawled into bed. They were just kidding around at first, poking each other for the fun of it, but at some point Tamaki reached out and grabbed Aomame's nipple through the T-shirt she wore as pajamas. An electric shock ran through Aomame's body. Eventually they stripped off their shirts and panties and were naked in the summer night. Where did we go on that trip? She could not recall. It didn't matter. Soon, without either of them being the first to suggest it, they were examining each other's bodies down to the smallest detail. Looking, touching, caressing, kissing, licking, half in jest, half seriously. Tamaki was small and a bit plump with large breasts. Aomame was taller, lean and muscular, with smaller breasts. Tamaki always talked about going on a diet, but Aomame found her attractive just the way she was.

Tamaki's skin was soft and fine. Her nipples swelled in a beautiful oval shape reminiscent of olives. Her pubic hair was fine and sparse, like a delicate willow tree. Aomame's was hard and bristly. They laughed at the difference. They experimented with touching each other in different places and discussed which areas were the most sensitive. Some areas were the same, others were not. Each held out a finger and touched the other's clitoris. Both girls had experienced masturbation—a lot. But now they saw how different it was to be touched by someone else. The breeze swept across the meadows of Bohemia.

Aomame came to a stop and shook her head again. She released a deep sigh and tightened her grip on the metal pipe handrail. I have to stop thinking about these things. I have to concentrate on climbing down the stairs. By now, I must be more than halfway down. Still, why is there so much noise here? Why is the wind so strong? They both seem to be reprimanding me, punishing me.

Setting such immediate sensory impressions aside, Aomame began to worry about what might await her at the bottom of the stairway. What if someone were there, demanding that she identify herself and explain her presence? Could she get by with a simple explanation—"The traffic was backed up on the expressway and I have such urgent business that I climbed down the stairs"? Or would there be complications? She didn't want any complications. Not today.

Fortunately, she found no one at ground level to challenge her. The first thing she did was pull her shoes from her bag and step into them. The stairway came down to a vacant patch beneath the elevated expressway, a storage area for construction materials hemmed in between the inbound and outbound lanes of Route 246 and surrounded by high metal sheeting. A number of steel poles lay on the bare ground, rusting, probably discarded surplus from some construction job. A makeshift plastic roof covered one part of the area where three cloth sacks lay piled. Aomame had no idea what they held, but they had been further protected from the rain by a vinyl cover. The sacks, too, seemed to be construction surplus, thrown there at the end of the job because they were too much trouble to haul away. Beneath the roof, several crushed corrugated cartons, some plastic drink bottles, and a number of manga magazines lay on the ground. Aside from a few plastic shopping bags that were being whipped around by the wind, there was nothing else down here.

The area had a metal gate, but a large padlock and several wrappings of chain held it in place. The gate towered over her and was topped with barbed wire. There was no way she could climb over it. Even if she managed to do so, her suit would be torn to shreds. She gave it a few tentative shakes, but it wouldn't budge. There was not even enough space for a cat to squeeze through. Damn. What was the point of locking the place so securely? There was nothing here worth stealing. She frowned and cursed and even spit on the ground. After all her trouble to climb down from the elevated expressway, now she was locked in a storage yard! She glanced at her watch. The time was still okay, but she couldn't go on hanging around in this place forever. And doubling back to the expressway now was out of the question.

The heels of both her stockings were ripped. Checking to make sure that there was no one watching her, she slipped out of her high heels, rolled up her skirt, pulled her stockings down, yanked them off her feet, and stepped into her shoes again. The torn stockings she shoved into her bag. This calmed her somewhat. Now she walked the perimeter of the storage area, paying close attention to every detail. It was about the size of an elementary school classroom, so a full circuit of the place took no time at all. Yes, she had already found the only exit, the locked gate. The metal sheeting that enclosed the space was thin, but the pieces were securely bolted together, and the bolts could not be loosened without tools. Time to give up.

She went over to the roofed area for a closer look at the crushed cartons. They had been arranged as bedding, she realized, with a number of worn blankets rolled up inside. They were not all that old, either. Some street people were probably sleeping here, which explained the bottles and magazines. No doubt about it. Aomame put her mind to work. If they were using this place to spend their nights, it must have some kind of secret entrance. They're good at finding hidden places to ward off the wind and rain, she thought. And they know how to secure secret passageways, like animal trails, for their exclusive use.

Aomame made another round, closely inspecting each metal sheet of the fence and giving it a shake. As she expected, she found one loose spot where a bolt might have slipped out. She tried bending it in different directions. If you changed the angle a little and pulled it inward, a space opened up that was just big enough for a person to squeeze through. The street people probably came in after dark to enjoy sleeping under the roof, but they would have problems if someone caught them in here, so they went out during the daylight hours to find food and collect empty bottles for spare change. Aomame inwardly thanked the nameless nighttime residents. As someone who had to move stealthily, anonymously, behind the scenes in the big city, she felt at one with them.

She crouched down and slipped through the narrow gap, taking great care to avoid catching and tearing her expensive suit on any sharp objects. It was not her favorite suit: it was the only one she owned. She almost never dressed this way, and she never wore heels. Sometimes, however, this particular line of work required her to dress respectably, so she had to avoid ruining the suit.

Fortunately, there was no one outside the fence, either. She checked her clothing once more, resumed a calm expression on her face, and walked to a corner with a traffic signal. Crossing Route 246, she entered a drugstore and bought a new pair of stockings, which she put on in a back room with the permission of the girl at the register. This improved her mood considerably and obliterated the slight discomfort, like seasickness, that had remained in her stomach. Thanking the clerk, she left the store.

The traffic on Route 246 was heavier than usual, probably because word had spread that an accident had stopped traffic on the parallel urban expressway. Aomame abandoned the idea of taking a cab and decided instead to take the Tokyu Shin-Tamagawa Line from a nearby station. That would be a sure thing. She had had enough of taxis stuck in traffic.

As she headed for Sangenjaya Station, she passed a policeman on the street. He was a tall young officer, walking rapidly, heading somewhere in particular. She tensed up for a moment, but he looked straight ahead, apparently in too much of a hurry even to glance at her. Just before they passed each other, Aomame noticed that there was something unusual about his uniform. The jacket was the normal deep navy blue, but its cut was different: the design was more casual, less tight fitting, and in a softer material, the lapels smaller, even the navy color a touch paler. His pistol, too, was a different model. He wore a large automatic at his waist instead of the revolver normally issued to policemen in Japan. Crimes involving firearms were so rare in this

country that there was little likelihood that an officer would be caught in a shootout, which meant an old-fashioned six-shooter was adequate. Revolvers were simply made, cheap, reliable, and easy to maintain. But for some reason this officer was carrying the latest model semiautomatic pistol, the kind that could be loaded with sixteen 9mm bullets. Probably a Glock or a Beretta. But how could that be? How could police uniforms and pistols have changed without her being aware of it? It was practically unthinkable. She read the newspaper closely each day. Changes like that would have been featured prominently. And besides, she paid careful attention to police uniforms. Until this morning, just a few hours ago, policemen were still wearing the same old stiff uniforms they always had, and still carrying the same old unsophisticated revolvers. She remembered them clearly. It was very strange.

But Aomame was in no frame of mind to think deeply about such matters. She had a job to do.

When the subway reached Shibuya Station, she deposited her coat in a coin locker, then hurried up Dogenzaka toward the hotel wearing only her suit. It was a decent enough hotel, nothing fancy, but well equipped, clean, with reputable guests. It had a restaurant on the street level, as well as a convenience store. Close to the station. A good location.

She walked in and headed straight for the ladies' room. Fortunately, it was empty. The first thing she did was sit down for a good, long pee, eyes closed, listening to the sound like distant surf, and thinking of nothing in particular. Next she stood at one of the sinks and washed her hands well with soap and water. She brushed her hair and blew her nose. She took out her toothbrush and did a cursory brushing without toothpaste. She had no time to floss. It wasn't that important. She wasn't preparing for a date. She faced the mirror and added a touch of lipstick and eyebrow pencil. Removing her suit jacket, she adjusted the position of her underwire bra, smoothed the wrinkles in her white blouse, and sniffed her armpits. No smell. Then she closed her eyes and recited the usual prayer, the words of which meant nothing. The meaning didn't matter. Reciting was the important thing.

After the prayer she opened her eyes and looked at herself in the mirror. Fine. The picture of the capable businesswoman. Erect posture. Firm mouth. Only the big, bulky shoulder bag seemed out of place. A slim attaché case might have been better, but this bag was more practical. She checked again to make sure she had all the items she needed in the bag. No problem. Everything was where it belonged, easy to find by touch.

Now it was just a matter of carrying out the task as arranged. Head-on. With unwavering conviction and ruthlessness. Aomame undid the top button of her blouse. This would give a glimpse of cleavage when she bent over. If only she had more cleavage to expose!

No one challenged her as she took the elevator to the fourth floor, walked down the corridor, and quickly found Room 426. Taking a clipboard from the bag, she clutched it to her chest and knocked on the door. A light, crisp knock. A brief wait. Another knock, this one a little harder. Grumbling from inside. Door opened a crack. Man's face.

Maybe forty. Marine-blue shirt. Gray flannel slacks. Classic look of a businessman working with his tie and jacket off. Red eyes, annoyed. Probably sleep deprived. He seemed surprised to see Aomame in her business suit, probably expecting her to be a maid, here to replenish the minibar.

"I'm terribly sorry to disturb you, sir. My name is Ito, and I'm a member of the hotel management staff. There has been a problem with the air conditioner and I need to do an inspection. May I come in? It won't take more than five minutes," Aomame announced briskly, with a sweet smile.

The man squinted at her in obvious displeasure. "I'm working on something important, a rush job. I'll be leaving the room in another hour. Can I get you to come back then? There's nothing wrong with the air conditioner in this room."

"I'm terribly sorry, sir. It's an emergency involving a short circuit. We need to take care of it as soon as possible, for safety's sake. We're going from room to room. It won't even take five minutes ..."

"Ah, what the hell," the man said, with a click of his tongue. "I made a point of taking a room so I could work undisturbed."

He pointed to the papers on the desk—a pile of detailed charts and graphs he had printed out, probably materials he was preparing for a late meeting. He had a computer and a calculator, and scratch paper with long lines of figures.

Aomame knew that he worked for a corporation connected with oil. He was a specialist on capital investment in a number of Middle Eastern countries. According to the information she had been given, he was one of the more capable men in the field. She could see it in the way he carried himself. He came from a good family, earned a sizable income, and drove a new Jaguar. After a pampered childhood, he had gone to study abroad, spoke good English and French, and exuded self-confidence. He was the type who could not bear to be told what to do, or to be criticized, especially if the criticism came from a woman. He had no difficulty bossing others around, though, and cracking a few of his wife's ribs with a golf club was no problem at all. As far as he was concerned, the world revolved around him, and without him the earth didn't move at all. He could become furious—violently angry—if anyone interfered with what he was doing or contradicted him in any way.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," Aomame said, flashing him her best business smile. As if it were a fait accompli, she squeezed halfway into the room, pressing her back against the door, readied her clipboard, and started writing something on it with a ballpoint pen. "That was, uh, Mr. Miyama, I believe ...?" she asked. Having seen his photo any number of times, she knew his face well, but it wouldn't hurt to make sure she had the right person. There was no way to correct a mistake.

"Yes, of course. Miyama," he said curtly. He followed this with a resigned sigh that seemed to say, "All right. Do as you damn please." He took his seat at the desk and, with a ballpoint pen in one hand, picked up whatever document he had been reading. His suit coat and a striped tie lay on the fully made double bed where he had thrown them.

They were both obviously very expensive. Aomame walked straight for the closet, her bag hanging from her shoulder. She had been told that the air conditioner switch panel was in there. Inside she found a trench coat of soft material and a dark gray cashmere scarf. The only luggage was a leather briefcase. No change of clothes, no bag for toiletries. He was probably not planning to stay the night. On the desk stood a coffeepot that had obviously been delivered by room service. She pretended to inspect the switch panel for thirty seconds and then called out to Miyama.

"Thank you, Mr. Miyama, for your cooperation. I can't find any problem with the equipment in this room."

"Which is what I was trying to tell you from the start," he grumbled.

"Uh ... Mr. Miyama ...?" she ventured. "Excuse me, but I think you have something stuck to the back of your neck."

"The back of my neck?" he said. He rubbed the area and then stared at the palm of his hand. "I don't think so."

"Please just let me have a look," she said, drawing closer. "Do you mind?"

"Sure, go ahead," he said, looking puzzled. "What is it?"

"A spot of paint, I think. Bright green."

"Paint?"

"I'm not really sure. Judging from the color, it has to be paint. Is it all right if I touch you back there? It may come right off."

"Well, okay," Miyama said, ducking his head forward, exposing the back of his neck to Aomame. It was bare, thanks to what looked like a recent haircut. Aomame took a deep breath and held it, concentrating her attention on her fingers' nimble search for the right spot. She pressed a fingertip there as if to mark the place, then closed her eyes, confirming that her touch was not mistaken. Yes, this is it. I'd like to take more time if possible to make doubly certain, but it's too late for that now. I'll just have to do my best with the situation I've been given.

"Sorry, sir, but do you mind holding that position a bit longer? I'll take a penlight from my bag. The lighting in here is not very good."

"Why would I have paint back there, of all things?"

"I have no idea, sir. I'll check it right away."

Keeping her finger pressed against the spot on the man's neck, Aomame drew a hard plastic case from her bag, opened it, and took out an object wrapped in thin cloth. With a few deft moves she unfolded the cloth, revealing something like a small ice pick about four inches in length with a compact wooden handle. It looked like an ice pick, but it was not meant for cracking ice. Aomame had designed and made it herself. The tip was as sharp and pointed as a needle, and it was protected from breakage by a small piece of cork—cork that had been

specially processed to make it as soft as cotton. She carefully plucked the cork from the point and slipped it into her pocket. She then held the exposed point against that special spot on Miyama's neck. Calm down now, this is it, Aomame told herself. I can't be off by even one-hundredth of an inch. One slip and all my efforts will be wasted. Concentration is the key.

"How much longer is this going to take?" Miyama protested.

"I'm sorry, sir, I'll be through in a moment."

Don't worry, she said to him silently, it'll all be over before you know it. Wait just a second or two. Then you won't have to think about a thing. You won't have to think about the oil refining system or crude oil market trends or quarterly reports to the investors or Bahrain flight reservations or bribes for officials or presents for your mistress. What a strain it must have been for you to keep these things straight in your head all this time! So please, just wait a minute. I'm hard at work here, giving it all the concentration I can muster. Don't distract me. That's all I ask.

Once she had settled on the location and set her mind to the task, Aomame raised her right palm in the air, held her breath, and, after a brief pause, brought it straight down—not too forcefully—against the wooden handle. If she applied too much force, the needle might break under the skin, and leaving the needle tip behind was out of the question. The important thing was to bring the palm down lightly, almost tenderly, at exactly the right angle with exactly the right amount of force, without resisting gravity, straight down, as if the fine point of the needle were being sucked into the spot with the utmost naturalness—deeply, smoothly, and with fatal results. The angle and force—or, rather, the restraint of force—were crucial. As long as she was careful about those details, it was as simple as driving a needle into a block of tofu. The needle pierced the skin, thrust into the special spot at the base of the brain, and stopped the heart as naturally as blowing out a candle. Everything ended in a split second, almost too easily. Only Aomame could do this. No one else could find that subtle point by touch. Her fingertips possessed the special intuition that made it possible.

She heard him draw a sharp breath, and then every muscle in his body went stiff. Instantly, she withdrew the needle and just as quickly took out the small gauze pad she had ready in her pocket, pressing it against the wound to prevent the flow of blood. Because the needle was so fine and had remained in his skin for no more than a few seconds, only a minuscule amount of blood could possibly escape through the opening, but she had to take every precaution. She must not leave even the slightest trace of blood. One drop could ruin everything. Caution was Aomame's specialty.

The strength began to drain from Miyama's body, which had momentarily stiffened, like air going out of a basketball. Keeping her finger on the spot on his neck, Aomame let him slump forward onto the desk. His face lay sideways, pillowed on his documents. His eyes were wide open in apparent surprise, as if his last act had been to witness something utterly amazing. They showed neither fear nor pain, only pure surprise. Something out of the ordinary was happening to him, but he could not comprehend what it was—a pain, an itch, a pleasure, or a divine

revelation? There were many different ways of dying in the world, perhaps none of them as easy as this.

This was an easier death than you deserved, Aomame thought with a scowl. It was just too simple. I probably should have broken a few ribs for you with a five iron and given you plenty of pain before putting you out of your misery. That would have been the right kind of death for a rat like you. It's what you did to your wife. Unfortunately, however, the choice was not mine. My mission was to send this man to the other world as swiftly and surely—and discreetly—as possible. Now, I have accomplished that mission. He was alive until a moment ago, and now he's dead. He crossed the threshold separating life from death without being aware of it himself.

Aomame held the gauze in place for a full five minutes, patiently, but without pressing hard enough for her finger to leave an indentation. She kept her eyes glued on the second hand of her watch. It was a very long five minutes. If someone had walked in then and seen her pressing her finger against the man's neck while holding the slender murder weapon in the other hand, it would have been all over. She could never have talked her way out of it. A bellhop could bring a pot of coffee. There could be a knock on the door at any moment. But this was an indispensable five minutes. To calm herself, Aomame took several slow deep breaths. I can't get flustered now. I can't lose my composure. I have to stay the same calm, cool Aomame as always.

She could hear her heart beating. And in her head, in time with the beat, resounded the opening fanfare of Janáček's Sinfonietta. Soft, silent breezes played across the green meadows of Bohemia. She was aware that she had become split in two. Half of her continued to press the dead man's neck with utter coolness. The other half was filled with fear. She wanted to drop everything and get out of this room now. I'm here, but I'm not here. I'm in two places at once. It goes against Einstein's theorem, but what the hell. Call it the Zen of the killer.

The five minutes were finally up. But just to make sure, Aomame gave it one more minute. I can wait another minute. The greater the rush, the more care one should take with the job. She endured the extra minute, which seemed as if it would never end. Then she slowly pulled her finger away and examined the wound with her penlight. A mosquito's stinger left a larger hole than this.

Stabbing the special point at the base of the brain with an exceptionally fine needle causes a death that is almost indistinguishable from a natural sudden death. It would look like a heart attack to most ordinary doctors. It hit him without warning while he was working at his desk, and he breathed his last. Overwork and stress. No sign of unnatural causes. No need for an autopsy.

This man was a high-powered operator, but also prone to overwork. He earned a high salary, but he couldn't use it now that he was dead. He wore Armani suits and drove a Jaguar, but finally he was just another ant, working and working until he died without meaning. The very fact that he existed in this world would eventually be forgotten. "Such a shame, he was so young," people might say. Or they might not.

Aomame took the cork from her pocket and placed it on the needle. Wrapping the delicate instrument in the thin cloth again, she returned it to the hard case, which she placed in the bottom of the shoulder bag. She then took a hand towel from the bathroom and wiped any fingerprints she might have left in the room. These would all be on the air conditioner panel and the doorknob. She had been careful not to touch anything else. She returned the towel to the bathroom. Placing the man's cup and coffeepot on the room service tray, she set them in the corridor. This way the bellhop would not have to knock when he came to retrieve them, and the discovery of the body would be delayed that much more. If all went well, the maid would find the body after checkout time tomorrow.

When he failed to show up at tonight's meeting, people might ring the room, but there would be no answer. They might think it odd enough to have the manager open the room, but then again they might not. Things would simply take their course.

Aomame stood before the bathroom mirror to make sure nothing about her clothing was in disarray. She closed the top button of her blouse. She had not had to flash cleavage. The bastard had hardly looked at her. What the hell did other people mean to him? She tried out a medium frown. Then she straightened her hair, massaged her facial muscles with her fingertips to soften them, and flashed the mirror a sweet smile, revealing her recently cleaned white teeth. All right, then, here I go, out of the dead man's room and back to the real world. Time to adjust the atmospheric pressure. I'm not a cool killer anymore, just a smiling, capable businesswoman in a sharp suit.

She opened the door a crack, checked to see that there was no one in the corridor, and slipped out. She took the stairs rather than the elevator. No one paid her any mind as she passed through the lobby. Posture erect, she stared straight ahead and walked quickly—though not quickly enough to attract attention. She was a pro, virtually perfect. If only her breasts were a little bigger, she thought with a twinge, she might have been truly perfect. A partial frown. But hell, you've gotta work with what you've got.

CHAPTER 4

Tengo

IF THAT IS WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

The phone woke Tengo. The luminous hands of his clock pointed to a little after one a.m. The room was dark, of course. Tengo knew the call was from Komatsu. No one but Komatsu would call him at one in the morning—and keep the phone ringing until he picked it up, however long it took. Komatsu had no sense of time. He would place a call the moment a thought struck him, never considering the hour. It could be the middle of the night or the crack of dawn. The other person could be enjoying his wedding night or lying on his deathbed. The prosaic thought never seemed to enter Komatsu's egg-shaped head that a call from him might be disturbing.

Which is not to say that he did this with everyone. Even Komatsu worked for an organization and collected a salary. He couldn't possibly go around behaving toward everyone with a total disregard for common sense. Only with Tengo could he get away with it. Tengo was, for Komatsu, little more than an extension of Komatsu himself, another arm or leg. If Komatsu was up, Tengo must be up. Tengo normally went to bed at ten o'clock and woke at six, maintaining a generally regular lifestyle. He was a deep sleeper. Once something woke him, though, it was hard for him to get to sleep again. He was high-strung to that extent. He had tried to explain this to Komatsu any number of times, and pleaded with him not to call in the middle of the night, like a farmer begging God not to send swarms of locusts into his fields before harvest time.

"Got it," Komatsu declared. "No more nighttime calls." But his promise had not sunk deep roots in his brain. One rainfall was all it took to wash them out.

Tengo crawled out of bed and, bumping into things, managed to find his way to the phone in the kitchen. All the while, the phone kept up its merciless ringing.

"I talked to Fuka-Eri," Komatsu said. He never bothered with the standard greetings, no "Were you sleeping?" or "Sorry to call so late." Pretty impressive. Tengo couldn't help admiring him.

Tengo frowned in the dark, saying nothing. When roused at night, it took his brain a while to start working.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I did."

"It was just a phone call. But I did talk to her. Or at her. She just listened. You couldn't exactly call it a conversation. She hardly talks. And she's got an odd way of speaking. You'll see what I mean. Anyhow, I gave her a general outline of my plan, like, what did she think of the idea of going after the new writers' prize by having somebody rewrite *Air Chrysalis* to get it into better shape? I couldn't give her much more than a rough idea on the phone and ask her if she had any interest, assuming we'd meet and talk over the details. I kept it sort of vague. If I got too direct about stuff like this, I could put myself in an awkward position."

"And so?"

"No answer."

"No answer?"

Komatsu paused for effect. He put a cigarette between his lips and lit it with a match. Hearing the sounds over the phone, Tengo could imagine the scene vividly. Komatsu never used a lighter.

"Fuka-Eri says she wants to meet you first," Komatsu said, exhaling. "She didn't say whether or not she was interested in the plan, or whether or not she liked the idea. I guess the main thing is to start by meeting you and talking about it face-to-face. She'll give me her answer after that, she says. The responsibility is all yours, don't you think?"

"And so?"

"Are you free tomorrow evening?"

His classes started in the morning and ended at four. Fortunately (or unfortunately) he had nothing after that. "I'm free," he said.

"Good. I want you to go to the Nakamura Café in Shinjuku at six o'clock. I'll reserve a table for you in the back where it's quiet. It'll be in my name and on the company's tab, so eat and drink as much as you like. The two of you can have a nice, long talk."

"Without you?"

"That's the way Fuka-Eri wants it. She says there's no point in meeting me yet."

Tengo kept silent.

"So that's how it is," Komatsu said cheerily. "Give it your best shot, Tengo. You're a big lug, but you make a good impression on people. And besides, you teach at a cram school. You're used to talking to these precocious high school girls. You're the right guy for the job, not me. Flash her a smile, win her over, get her to trust you. I'll be looking forward to the good news."

"Now, wait just a minute. This was all your idea. I still haven't even told you if I'll do it. Like I said the other day, this is a tremendously risky plan, and I don't see it working all that well. It could turn into a real scandal. How am I supposed to convince this girl I've never met to go along with it when I myself haven't decided to take it on?"

Komatsu remained silent at his end. Then, after a moment's pause, he said, "Now listen, Tengo. We've already pulled out of the station. You can't stop the train and get off now. I'm totally committed. And you're more than half committed, I'm sure. We share the same fate."

Tengo shook his head. Share the same fate? When did this melodrama get started? "Just the other day you told me to take my time and think it over, didn't you?"

"It's been five days since then. You've had plenty of time to think it over. What's your decision?" Komatsu demanded.

Tengo was at a loss for words. "I don't have a decision," he said honestly.

"So then, why don't you try meeting this Fuka-Eri girl and talking it over? You can make up your mind after that."

Tengo pressed his fingertips hard against his temples. His brain was still not working properly. "All right. I'll talk to her. Six o'clock tomorrow at the Shinjuku Nakamura. I'll give her my explanation of the situation. But I'm not promising any more than that. I can explain the plan, but I can't convince her of anything."

"That's all I ask, of course."

"So anyway, how much does Fuka-Eri know about me?"

"I filled her in on the general stuff. You're twenty-nine or thirty, a bachelor, you teach math at a Yoyogi cram school. You're a big guy, but not a bad guy. You don't eat young girls. You live a simple lifestyle, you've got gentle eyes. And I like your writing a lot. That's about it."

Tengo sighed. When he tried to think, reality hovered nearby, then retreated into the distance.

"Do you mind if I go back to bed? It's almost one thirty, and I want at least a little sleep before the sun comes up. I've got three classes tomorrow starting in the morning."

"Fine. Good night," Komatsu said. "Sweet dreams." And he hung up.

Tengo stared at the receiver in his hand for a while, then set it down. He wanted to get to sleep right away if possible, and to have good dreams if possible, but he knew it wouldn't be easy after having been dragged out of bed and forced to participate in an unpleasant conversation. He could try drinking himself to sleep, but he wasn't in the mood for alcohol. He ended up drinking a glass of water, getting back in bed, turning on the light, and beginning to read a book. He hoped it would make him sleepy, but he didn't actually fall asleep until almost dawn. Tengo took the elevated train to Shinjuku after his third class ended. He bought a few books at the Kinokuniya bookstore, and then headed for the Nakamura Café. He gave Komatsu's name at the door and was shown to a quiet table in the back. Fuka-Eri was not there yet. Tengo told the waiter he would wait for the other person to come. Would he want something to drink while he waited? He said that he would not. The waiter left a menu and a glass of water on the table. Tengo opened one of his new books and started reading. It was a book on occultism and it detailed the function of curses in Japanese society over the centuries. Curses played a major role in ancient communities. They had made up for the gaps and inconsistencies in the social system. It seemed like an enjoyable time to be alive.

Fuka-Eri had still not come at six fifteen. Unconcerned, Tengo went on reading. It didn't surprise him that she was late. This whole business was so crazy, he couldn't complain to anybody if it took another crazy

turn. It would not be strange if she changed her mind and decided not to show up at all. In fact, he would prefer it that way—it would be simpler. He could just report to Komatsu that he waited an hour and she never showed. What would happen after that was no concern of his. He would just eat dinner by himself and go home, and that would satisfy his obligation to Komatsu.

Fuka-Eri arrived at 6:22. The waiter showed her to the table and she sat down across from Tengo. Resting her small hands on the table, not even removing her coat, she stared straight at him. No "Sorry I'm late," or "I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long." Not even a "Hi" or a "Nice to meet you." All she did was look directly at Tengo, her lips forming a tight, straight line. She could have been observing a new landscape from afar. Tengo was impressed.

Fuka-Eri was a small girl, small all over, and her face was more beautiful than in the pictures. Her most attractive facial feature was her deep, striking eyes. Under the gaze of two glistening, pitch-black pupils, Tengo felt uncomfortable. She hardly blinked and seemed almost not to be breathing. Her hair was absolutely straight, as if someone had drawn each individual strand with a ruler, and the shape of her eyebrows matched the hair perfectly. As with many beautiful teenage girls, her expression lacked any trace of everyday life. It also was strangely unbalanced—perhaps because there was a slight difference in the depth of the left and right eyes—causing discomfort in the recipient of her gaze. You couldn't tell what she was thinking. In that sense, she was not the kind of beautiful girl who becomes a model or a pop star. Rather, she had something about her that aroused people and drew them toward her.

Tengo closed his book and laid it to one side. He sat up straight and took a drink of water. Komatsu had been right. If a girl like this took a literary prize, the media would be all over her. It would be a sensation. And then what?

The waiter came and placed a menu and a glass of water in front of her. Still she did not move. Instead of picking up the menu, she went on staring at Tengo. He felt he had no choice but to say something. "Hello." In her presence, he felt bigger than ever.

Fuka-Eri did not return his greeting but continued to stare at him. "I know you," she murmured at last.

"You know me?" Tengo said.

"You teach math."

He nodded. "I do."

"I heard you twice."

"My lectures?"

"Yes."

Her style of speaking had some distinguishing characteristics: sentences shorn of embellishment, a chronic shortage of inflection, a

limited vocabulary (or at least what seemed like a limited vocabulary). Komatsu was right: it was odd.

"You mean you're a student at my school?" Tengo asked.

Fuka-Eri shook her head. "Just went for lectures."

"You're not supposed to be able to get in without a student ID."

Fuka-Eri gave a little shrug, as if to say, "Grown-ups shouldn't say such dumb things."

"How were the lectures?" Tengo asked, his second meaningless question.

Fuka-Eri took a drink of water without averting her gaze. She did not answer the question. Tengo guessed he couldn't have made too bad an impression if she came twice. She would have quit after the first one if it hadn't aroused her interest.

"You're in your third year of high school, aren't you?" Tengo asked.

"More or less."

"Studying for college entrance exams?"

She shook her head.

Tengo could not decide whether this meant "I don't want to talk about my college entrance exams" or "I wouldn't be caught dead taking college entrance exams." He recalled Komatsu's remark on how little Fuka-Eri had to say.

The waiter came for their orders. Fuka-Eri still had her coat on. She ordered a salad and bread. "That's all," she said, returning the menu to the waiter. Then, as if it suddenly occurred to her, she added, "And a glass of white wine."

The young waiter seemed about to ask her age, but she gave him a stare that made him turn red, and he swallowed his words. Impressive, Tengo thought again. He ordered seafood linguine and decided to join Fuka-Eri in a glass of white wine.

"You're a teacher and a writer," Fuka-Eri said. She seemed to be asking Tengo a question. Apparently, asking questions without question marks was another characteristic of her speech.

"For now," Tengo said.

"You don't look like either."

"Maybe not," he said. He thought of smiling but couldn't quite manage it. "I'm certified as an instructor and I do teach courses at a cram school, but I'm not exactly a teacher. I write fiction, but I've never been published, so I'm not a writer yet, either."

"You're nothing."

Tengo nodded. "Exactly. For the moment, I'm nothing."

"You like math."

Tengo mentally added a question mark to her comment and answered this new question: "I do like math. I've always liked it, and I still like it."

"What about it."

"What do I like about math? Hmm. When I've got figures in front of me, it relaxes me. Kind of like, everything fits where it belongs."

"The calculus part was good."

"You mean in my lecture?"

Fuka-Eri nodded.

"Do you like math?"

She gave her head a quick shake. She did not like math.

"But the part about calculus was good?" he asked.

Fuka-Eri gave another little shrug. "You talked about it like you cared."

"Oh, really?" Tengo said. No one had ever told him this before.

"Like you were talking about somebody important to you," she said.

"I can maybe get even more passionate when I lecture on sequences," Tengo said. "Sequences were a personal favorite of mine in high school math."

"You like sequences," Fuka-Eri asked, without a question mark.

"To me, they're like Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. I never get tired of them. There's always something new to discover."

"I know the Well-Tempered Clavier."

"You like Bach?"

Fuka-Eri nodded. "The Professor is always listening to it."

"The Professor? One of your teachers?"

Fuka-Eri did not answer. She looked at Tengo with an expression that seemed to say, "It's too soon to talk about that."

She took her coat off as if it had only now occurred to her to do so. She emerged from it like an insect sloughing off its skin. Without bothering to fold it, she set it on the chair next to hers. She wore a thin crew-neck sweater of pale green and white jeans, with no jewelry or makeup, but still she stood out. She had a slender build, in proportion to which her full breasts could not help but attract attention. They were beautifully shaped as well. Tengo had to caution

himself not to look down there, but he couldn't help it. His eyes moved to her chest as if toward the center of a great whirlpool.

The two glasses of white wine arrived. Fuka-Eri took a sip of hers, and then, after thoughtfully studying the glass, she set it on the table. Tengo took a perfunctory sip. Now it was time to talk about important matters.

Fuka-Eri brought her hand to her straight black hair and combed her fingers through it for a while. It was a lovely gesture, and her fingers were lovely, each seemingly moving according to its own will and purpose as if in tune with something occult.

"What do I like about math?" Tengo asked himself aloud again in order to divert his attention from her fingers and her chest. "Math is like water. It has a lot of difficult theories, of course, but its basic logic is very simple. Just as water flows from high to low over the shortest possible distance, figures can only flow in one direction. You just have to keep your eye on them for the route to reveal itself. That's all it takes. You don't have to do a thing. Just concentrate your attention and keep your eyes open, and the figures make everything clear to you. In this whole, wide world, the only thing that treats me so kindly is math."

Fuka-Eri thought about this for a while. "Why do you write fiction," she asked in her expressionless way.

Tengo converted her question into longer sentences: "In other words, if I like math so much, why do I go to all the trouble of writing fiction? Why not just keep doing math? Is that it?"

She nodded.

"Hmm. Real life is different from math. Things in life don't necessarily flow over the shortest possible route. For me, math is—how should I put it?—math is all too natural. It's like beautiful scenery. It's just there. There's no need to exchange it with anything else. That's why, when I'm doing math, I sometimes feel I'm turning transparent. And that can be scary."

Fuka-Eri kept looking straight into Tengo's eyes as if she were looking into an empty house with her face pressed up against the glass.

Tengo said, "When I'm writing a story, I use words to transform the surrounding scene into something more natural for me. In other words, I reconstruct it. That way, I can confirm without a doubt that this person known as 'me' exists in the world. This is a totally different process from steeping myself in the world of math."

"You confirm that you exist," Fuka-Eri said.

"I can't say I've been one hundred percent successful at it," Tengo said.

Fuka-Eri did not look convinced by Tengo's explanation, but she said nothing more. She merely brought the glass of wine to her mouth and took soundless little sips as though drinking through a straw.

"If you ask me," Tengo said, "you're in effect doing the same thing. You transform the scenes you see into your own words and reconstruct them. And you confirm your own existence."

Fuka-Eri's hand that held her wineglass stopped moving. She thought about Tengo's remark for a while, but again she offered no opinion.

"You gave shape to that process. In the form of the work you wrote," Tengo added. "If the work succeeds in gaining many people's approval and if they identify with it, then it becomes a literary work with objective value."

Fuka-Eri gave her head a decisive shake. "I'm not interested in form."

"You're not interested in form," Tengo said.

"Form has no meaning."

"So then, why did you write the story and submit it for the new writers' prize?"

She put down her wineglass. "I didn't," she said.

To calm himself, Tengo picked up his glass and took a drink of water. "You're saying you didn't submit it?"

Fuka-Eri nodded. "I didn't send it in."

"Well, who did?"

She gave a little shrug, then kept silent for a good fifteen seconds. Finally, she said, "It doesn't matter."

"It doesn't matter," Tengo repeated, emitting a long, slow breath from his pursed lips. Oh, great. Things really are not going to go smoothly. I knew it.

Several times, Tengo had formed personal relationships with his female cram school students, though always after they had left the school and entered universities, and it was always the girls who took the initiative. They would call and say they wanted to see him. The two of them would meet and go somewhere together. He had no idea what attracted them to him, but ultimately he was a bachelor, and they were no longer his students. He had no good reason to refuse when asked for a date.

Twice the dates had led to sex, but the relationships had eventually faded on their own. Tengo could not quite relax when he was with energetic young college girls. It was like playing with a kitten, fresh and fun at first, but tiring in the end. The girls, too, seemed disappointed to discover that in person, Tengo was not the same as the passionate young math lecturer they encountered in class. He could understand how they felt.

Tengo was able to relax when he was with older women. Not having to take the lead in everything seemed to lift a weight from his shoulders. And many older women liked him. Which is why, after having formed a

relationship with a married woman ten years his senior a year ago, he had stopped dating any young girls. By meeting his older girlfriend in his apartment once a week, any desire (or need) he might have for a flesh-and-blood woman was pretty well satisfied. The rest of the week he spent shut up in his room alone, writing, reading, and listening to music; occasionally he would go for a swim in the neighborhood pool. Aside from a little chatting with his colleagues at the cram school, he hardly spoke with anyone. He was not especially dissatisfied with this life. Far from it: for him, it was close to ideal.

But this seventeen-year-old girl, Fuka-Eri, was different. The mere sight of her sent a violent shudder through him. It was the same feeling her photograph had given him when he first saw it, but in the living girl's presence it was far stronger. This was not the pangs of love or sexual desire. A certain something, he felt, had managed to work its way in through a tiny opening and was trying to fill a blank space inside him. The void was not one that Fuka-Eri had made. It had always been there inside Tengo. She had merely managed to shine a special light on it.

"You're not interested in writing fiction, and you didn't enter the new writers' competition," Tengo said as if confirming what she had told him.

With her eyes locked on his, Fuka-Eri nodded in agreement. Then she gave a little shrug, as if shielding herself from a cold autumn blast.

"You don't want to be a writer." Tengo was shocked to hear himself asking a question without a question mark. The style was obviously contagious.

"No, I don't," Fuka-Eri said.

At that point their meal arrived—a large bowl of salad and a roll for Fuka-Eri, and seafood linguine for Tengo. Fuka-Eri used her fork to turn over several lettuce leaves, inspecting them as if they were imprinted with newspaper headlines.

"Well, somebody sent your *Air Chrysalis* to the publisher for the new writers' competition. I found it when I was screening manuscripts."

"*Air Chrysalis*," Fuka-Eri said, narrowing her eyes.

"That's the title of the novella you wrote," Tengo said.

Fuka-Eri kept her eyes narrowed, saying nothing.

"That's not the title you gave it?" Tengo asked with an uneasy twinge.

Fuka-Eri gave her head a tiny shake.

He began to feel confused again, but he decided not to pursue the question of the title. The important thing was to make some progress with the discussion at hand.

"Never mind, then. Anyway, it's not a bad title. It has real atmosphere, and it'll attract attention, make people wonder what it

could possibly be about. Whoever thought of it, I have no problem with it as a title. I'm not sure about the distinction between 'chrysalis' and 'cocoon,' but that's no big deal. What I'm trying to tell you is that the work really got to me, which is why I brought it to Mr. Komatsu. He liked it a lot, too, but he felt that the writing needed work if it was going to be a serious contender for the new writers' prize. The style doesn't quite measure up to the strength of the story, so what he wants to do is have it rewritten, not by you but by me. I haven't decided whether I want to do it or not, and I haven't given him my answer. I'm not sure it's the right thing to do."

Tengo broke off at that point to see Fuka-Eri's reaction. There was no reaction.

"What I'd like to hear from you now is what you think of the idea of me rewriting Air Chrysalis instead of you. Even if I decided to do it, it couldn't happen without your agreement and cooperation."

Using her fingers, Fuka-Eri picked a cherry tomato out of her salad and ate it. Tengo stabbed a mussel with his fork and ate that.

"You can do it," Fuka-Eri said simply. She picked up another tomato. "Fix it any way you like."

"Don't you think you should take a little more time to think it over? This is a pretty big decision."

Fuka-Eri shook her head. No need.

"Now, supposing I rewrote your novella," Tengo continued, "I would be careful not to change the story but just strengthen the style. This would probably involve some major changes. But finally, you are the author. It would remain a work by the seventeen-year-old girl named Fuka-Eri. That would not change. If it won the prize, you would get it. Just you. If it were published as a book, you would be the only author listed on the title page. We would be a team—the three of us, you, me, and Mr. Komatsu, the editor. But the only name on the book would be yours. He and I would stay in the background and not say a word, kind of like prop men in a play. Do you understand what I am telling you?"

Fuka-Eri brought a piece of celery to her mouth with her fork. "I understand," she said with a nod.

"Air Chrysalis belongs entirely to you. It came out of you. I could never make it mine. I would be nothing but your technical helper, and you would have to keep that fact a complete secret. We'd be engaged in a conspiracy, in other words, to lie to the whole world. Any way you look at it, this is not an easy thing to do, to keep a secret locked up in your heart."

"Whatever you say," Fuka-Eri said.

Tengo pushed his mussel shells to the side of his plate and started to take a forkful of linguine but then reconsidered and stopped. Fuka-Eri picked up a piece of cucumber and bit it carefully, as if tasting something she had never seen before.

Fork in hand, Tengo said, "Let me ask you one more time. Are you sure you have no objection to my rewriting your story?"

"Do what you want," Fuka-Eri said, when she had finished the cucumber.

"Any way I rewrite it is okay with you?"

"Okay."

"Why is that?" he asked. "You don't know a thing about me."

Fuka-Eri gave a little shrug, saying nothing.

The two continued their meal wordlessly. Fuka-Eri gave her full concentration to her salad. Now and then she would butter a piece of bread, eat it, and reach for her wine. Tengo mechanically transported his linguine to his mouth and filled his mind with many possibilities.

Setting his fork down, he said, "You know, when Mr. Komatsu suggested this idea to me, I thought it was crazy, that there was no way it could work. I was planning to turn him down. But after I got home and thought about it for a while, I started to feel more and more that I wanted to give it a try. Ethical questions aside, I began to feel that I wanted to put my own stamp on the novella that you had written. It was—how to put this?—a totally natural, spontaneous desire."

Or rather than a desire, hunger might be a better way to put it, Tengo added mentally. Just as Komatsu had predicted, the hunger was becoming increasingly difficult to suppress.

Fuka-Eri said nothing, but from somewhere deep inside her neutral, beautiful eyes, she looked hard at Tengo. She seemed to be struggling to understand the words that Tengo had spoken.

"You want to rewrite the story," she asked.

Tengo looked straight into her eyes. "I think I do."

A faint flash crossed Fuka-Eri's black pupils, as if they were projecting something. Or at least they looked that way to Tengo.

Tengo held his hands out, as if he were supporting an imaginary box in the air. The gesture had no particular meaning, but he needed some kind of imaginary medium like that to convey his feelings. "I don't know how to put it exactly," he said, "but in reading *Air Chrysalis* over and over, I began to feel that I could see what you were seeing. Especially when the Little People appear. Your imagination has some special kind of power. It's entirely original, and quite contagious."

Fuka-Eri quietly set her spoon on her plate and dabbed at her mouth with her napkin.

"The Little People really exist," she said softly.

"They really exist?"

Fuka-Eri paused before she said, "Just like you and me."

"Just like you and me," Tengo repeated.

"You can see them if you try."

Her concise speaking style was strangely persuasive. From every word that came to her lips, he felt a precise, wedge-like thrust. He still could not tell, though, how seriously he should take her. There was something out of the ordinary about her, a screw slightly loose. It was an inborn quality, perhaps. He might be in the presence of an authentic talent in its most natural form, or it could all be an act. Intelligent teenage girls were often instinctively theatrical, purposely eccentric, mouthing highly suggestive words to confuse people. He had seen a number of such cases when it was impossible to distinguish the real thing from acting. Tengo decided to bring the conversation back to reality—or, at least, something closer to reality.

"As long as it's okay with you, I'd like to start rewriting *Air Chrysalis* tomorrow."

"If that is what you want to do."

"It is what I want to do," Tengo replied.

"There's someone to meet," Fuka-Eri said.

"Someone you want me to meet?"

She nodded.

"Now, who could that be?"

She ignored his question. "To talk to," she added.

"I don't mind," Tengo said, "if it's something I should do."

"Are you free Sunday morning," she asked, without a question mark.

"I am," Tengo said. It's as if we're talking in semaphore, he thought.

They finished eating and parted. At the door of the restaurant, Tengo slipped a few ten-yen coins into the pay phone and called Komatsu's work number. He was still in his office, but it took him a while to come to the phone. Tengo waited with the receiver on his ear.

"How did it go?" Komatsu asked right away.

"Fuka-Eri is basically okay with me rewriting *Air Chrysalis*, I think."

"That's great!" Komatsu exclaimed. "Marvelous! To tell you the truth, I was a little worried about you. I mean, you're not exactly the negotiator type."

"I didn't do any negotiating," Tengo said. "I didn't have to convince her. I just explained the main points, and she pretty much decided on her own."

"I don't care how you did it. The results are what count. Now we can go ahead with the plan."

"Except that I have to meet somebody first."

"Meet somebody? Who?"

"I don't know. She wants me to meet this person and talk."

Komatsu kept silent for a few seconds. "So when are you supposed to do that?"

"This Sunday. She's going to take me there."

"There's one important rule when it comes to keeping secrets," Komatsu said gravely. "The fewer people who know the secret, the better. So far, only three of us know about the plan—you, me, and Fuka-Eri. If possible, I'd like to avoid increasing that number. You understand, don't you?"

"In theory," Tengo said.

Komatsu's voice softened as he said, "Anyhow, Fuka-Eri is ready to have you rewrite her manuscript. That's the most important thing. We can work out the rest."

Tengo switched the receiver to his left hand and slowly pressed his right index finger against his temple. "To be honest," he said to Komatsu, "this is making me nervous. I don't have any real grounds for saying so, but I have this strong feeling that I'm being swept up in something out of the ordinary. I didn't feel it when I was with Fuka-Eri, but it's been getting stronger since she left. Call it a premonition, or just a funny feeling, but there is something strange going on here. Something out of the ordinary. I feel it less with my mind than my whole body."

"Was it meeting Fuka-Eri that made you feel this way?"

"Maybe so. She's probably the real thing. This is just my gut feeling, of course."

"You mean that she has real talent?"

"I don't know about her talent," Tengo said. "I've just met her, after all. But she may actually be seeing things that you and I can't see. She might have something special. That's what's bothering me."

"You mean she might have mental issues?"

"She's definitely eccentric, but I don't think she's crazy. There's a logical thread to what she says, more or less. It's just that ... I don't know ... something's bothering me."

"In any case, did she take an interest in you?" Komatsu asked.

Tengo searched for the appropriate words with which to answer him, but was unable to find them. "I really can't say about that," he replied.

"Well, she met you, and she must have thought you were qualified to rewrite Air Chrysalis. That means she liked you. Good work, Tengo! What happens from here on out, I don't know, either. There is some risk, of course. But risk is the spice of life. Start rewriting the manuscript right away. We don't have any time to lose. I've got to return the rewritten manuscript to the pile of entries as soon as possible, switch it for the original. Can you do the job in ten days?"

Tengo sighed. "What a taskmaster!"

"Don't worry, you don't have to make it absolutely polished. We can still touch it up in the next stage. Just get it into reasonably good shape."

Tengo did a general estimate of the job in his head. "If that's the case, I might be able to pull it off in ten days. It's still going to be a huge job, though."

"Just give it everything you've got," Komatsu urged him cheerfully. "Look at the world through her eyes. You'll be the go-between—connecting Fuka-Eri's world and the real world we live in. I know you can do it, Tengo, I just—"

At this point the last ten-yen coin ran out.



The Raven- Edgar Allen Poe

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door -
Only this, and nothing more.'

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore -
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels named Lenore -
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me - filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door -
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; -
This it is, and nothing more,'

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
'Sir,' said I, 'or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you' - here I opened wide the door; -
Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore!'
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!'
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
'Surely,' said I, 'surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore -
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; -
'Tis the wind and nothing more!'

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door -
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door -
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
 By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
 'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, 'art sure no craven.
 Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore -
 Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!
 Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
 Though its answer little meaning - little relevancy bore;
 For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
 Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door -
 Bird or beast above the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
 With such name as 'Nevermore.'

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only,
 That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
 Nothing further then he uttered - not a feather then he fluttered -
 Till I scarcely more than muttered 'Other friends have flown before -
 On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.'
 Then the bird said, 'Nevermore.'

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
 'Doubtless,' said I, 'what it utters is its only stock and store,
 Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore -
 Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore
 Of "Never-nevermore."

But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,
 Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
 Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore -
 What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
 Meant in croaking 'Nevermore.'

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
 To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
 This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
 On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
 But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
 Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
 'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he has sent thee
 Respite - respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
 Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!'
 Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

`Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! -
 Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
 Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted -
 On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore -
 Is there - *is there* balmin Gilead? - tell me - tell me, I implore!
 Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

`Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil!
 By that Heaven that bends above us - by that God we both adore -
 Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
 It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels named Lenore -
 Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels named Lenore?'
 Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

`Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked upstarting -
 `Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
 Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
 Leave my loneliness unbroken! - quit the bust above my door!
 Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!'
 Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
 On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
 And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
 And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
 And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
 Shall be lifted - nevermore!

LibriVox

5

by Rudyard Kipling

IF—

By Rudyard Kipling

IF YOU can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too;
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or being hated don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim,
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much;
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!