From the Antiworld to the "Other World:" A Translation and Critical Analysis of Kurahashi Yumiko's "The Passage of Dreams"

Emily F. Levine

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/masters_theses_2

Recommended Citation
https://doi.org/10.7275/6956063 https://scholarworks.umass.edu/masters_theses_2/233

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
From the Antiworld to the “Other World:”
A Translation and Critical Analysis of Kurahashi Yumiko’s *The Passage of Dreams*

A Thesis Presented

By

EMILY F. LEVINE

Approved as to style and content by:

______________________________________
Amanda Seaman, Chair

______________________________________
Stephen Miller, Member

______________________________________
Stephen Miller, Program Director  
Asian Languages and Literatures

______________________________________
William Moebius, Department Head  
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
DEDICATION

To my grandparents, Wardwell and Viola Leonard.

Thank you for your many years of love and support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Amanda Seaman, for her thoughtful advice and encouragement throughout this project. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Stephen Miller for sitting on my committee and for his careful review of the manuscript. Their contribution to my growth as a writer and a researcher has been immeasurable, and I am thankful for all they have done on my behalf.

Thanks also go to Kenichi Miura and Yumiko Ono of the Middlebury College Language Schools, who fostered my love of reading and writing in Japanese and introduced me to Kurahashi Yumiko and The Passage of Dreams.

I would like to thank my husband for his boundless support and reassurance, and my parents and grandparents for their years of love and guidance. A special thank you to my sister, who inspired me with her academic achievements.
ABSTRACT

FROM THE ANTIWORLD TO THE “OTHER WORLD:”

A TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF KURAHASHI YUMIKO’S

THE PASSAGE OF DREAMS

MAY 2015

EMILY F. LEVINE, B.A., BOSTON UNIVERSITY

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Amanda Seaman

This thesis represents a complete translation of the sixth volume of the “Keiko-san Series,” Yume no kayoiji, translated here as The Passage of Dreams. Published in 1989 by Kurahashi Yumiko, The Passage of Dreams is composed of twenty-one short stories, each of which details a bizarre, often sexual incident. The “Keiko-san Series,” written after Kurahashi’s ten year lapse in activity, has been largely dismissed and neglected by Japanese literary scholars. Through a comparative analysis of this work and Kurahashi’s earliest stories “Partei” and “The End of Summer,” this thesis delineates a clear rupture in structure and theme between the two parts of the author’s career and asserts that both are of significance to Japanese literature. However, the portrayal of female focused sexuality in The Passage of Dreams makes it especially deserving of the attention it has yet to receive.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART I: CRITICAL ANALYSIS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PERSPECTIVES ON KURAHASHI YUMIKO TODAY</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. KURAHASHI YUMIKO’S CAREER AND WORKS</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Hiatus Work: Would That Kurahashi Write Something Like This?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. FROM THE ANTIWORLD TO THE “OTHER WORLD”</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown and Unreliable: Structure in the Antiworld</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone Does Something: Structure in <em>The Passage of Dreams</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. FROM INVERSION TO EXCLUSION</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Death Itself: Love in the Antiworld</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure Paramount: Love in <em>The Passage of Dreams</em></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. FROM ERROR TO EROTICISM</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance and Disgust: Sexuality in the Antiworld</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy, Ecstasy, Strength: Sexuality in <em>The Passage of Dreams</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. DECIPHERING A DREAMSCAPE: TRANSLATION METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART II: THE PASSAGE OF DREAMS

1. BENEATH THE BLOSSOMS ................................................................. 49
2. THE BLOSSOM ROOM ............................................................... 56
3. THE CASTLE IN THE SEA ............................................................. 63
4. THE APHRODISIAC ................................................................. 70
5. THE MASK DREAM ................................................................. 77
6. THE ETERNAL TRAVELER ...................................................... 83
7. HELL IN AUTUMN ................................................................. 91
8. THE CITY UNDER THE CASTLE ............................................... 98
9. THE FLOWER FAERIES .......................................................... 105
10. THE MOON WOMAN ............................................................. 112
11. SECLUSION ................................................................. 119
12. AN ODE TO CLOUD, RAIN, AND RAINBOW ...................... 126
13. HOUSE OF THE BLACK CAT .................................................. 133
14. THE RED ROOM ................................................................. 140
15. THE WATER RAIL VILLAGE.................................................. 147
16. FIREFLY CATCHING ............................................................. 154
17. MAPLE VIEWING ................................................................. 161
18. THE SERPENT AND EVE ...................................................... 185
19. A SPRING NIGHT’S DREAM .................................................. 201
20. THE CAT’S WORLD ............................................................. 212
21. THE PASSAGE OF DREAMS ................................................ 225

APPENDIX: STORY SUMMARIES ..................................................... 239
PART I: CRITICAL ANALYSIS
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Kurahashi Yumiko was born in 1935 to a dentist and his wife. At the age of 21, she moved to Tokyo with the intention of following in her father’s footsteps and acquiring a dental hygienist’s certificate. Despite her original goal, she soon began pursuing a degree in French literature at Meiji University.\(^1\) As a student, Kurahashi was captivated by the writing of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Franz Kafka. By her own admission, it was these writers who inspired her to write fiction.\(^2\) Her first work of that nature, “Partei” 「パルタイ,」 was published before her graduation, and “The End of Summer” 「夏の終わり」 followed soon after.\(^3\) These two short stories sparked a degree of controversy that would characterize Kurahashi’s career for a long time, and she received alternating acclaim and dismissal from critics throughout the 1960s.\(^4\)

After a highly productive decade punctuated by several intense debates about the value of her work, Kurahashi took a nearly ten year hiatus in which she wrote almost nothing at all.\(^5\) When she returned in 1980, she continued writing the “Keiko-san Series” 「桂子さんシリーズ,」 a project which began with 1971’s *The Floating Bridge of Dreams* 「夢の浮橋.」 Consisting of both novels and collections of short stories, this

---


\(^3\) Sakaki, “(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko,” 153.


series represents the majority of Kurahashi’s fictional works since her break. The
volumes, sometimes divided into the earlier “Keiko-san Stories” and the later “Keiko-san Series” proper, are loosely linked by their shared protagonists,
Keiko Yamada and her relatives.\footnote{\textquotedblleft Kurahashi Yumiko ten\textquotedblright \ (Kurahashi Yumiko Exhibition), last modified June 2006, http://www.lib.meiji.ac.jp/about/exhibition/gallery/14/kurahashi_06mokuroku.pdf}

This thesis represents a complete translation of the sixth volume of the “Keiko-
san Series,” \textit{The Passage of Dreams}. First published in 1989, \textit{The Passage of Dreams} is composed of twenty-one short stories. Seventeen of the stories feature Keiko Yamada, but the final four introduce new female characters as their protagonists: Yuko, Saiko, Mrs. Shinoda, and Itsuko. Each story details a bizarre, often sexual incident. Perhaps because of these themes, this text and the rest of the “Keiko-san Series” have faced years of critical neglect. Nonetheless, I will argue that it is that very material that makes \textit{The Passage of Dreams} a unique contribution to Japanese literature, one deserving of the attention it has yet to receive.
CHAPTER 2

PERSPECTIVES ON KURAHASHI YUMIKO TODAY

Marked by an onslaught of controversy followed by a period of almost complete critical neglect, Kurahashi Yumiko’s literary career could be characterized as anticlimactic. Four years after her death, Bungakkai published a roundtable discussion concerning her life and works entitled “An Isolated Writer Living Between ‘Ōe and Murakami.’” Led by prominent literary critic Katō Norihiro, the three participants mused about why Kurahashi, in stark contrast to her contemporaries Ōe Kenzaburō and Murakami Haruki, has descended to a status described by Katō as that of an “illusive cult writer.” Though she was assailed by criticism in the 1960s, Katō and the others viewed these first efforts in a favorable light. And yet, their assessment of her post-1980 works as clichéd, elitist, and even “trashy” gives voice to the negative critical perception—and perhaps the reason for the neglect—of her later novels. According to Katō, Kurahashi had a promising, albeit contentious, career which devolved into relative obscurity.

Like Katō, Victoria Vernon, Julia Bullock, and Atsuko Sakaki have all found value in Kurahashi’s first works that many critics of the 1960s did not. Vernon and Bullock explore the themes of several of Kurahashi’s earliest novels and short stories through careful analysis of her controversial literary constructs and the role of the feminine in her work. Though they offer none of the roundtable’s vitriol for her post-1980 writing, they also do not address it in any way. Only Sakaki chooses to reference novels from the “Keiko-san Series” and other later works, presenting a convincing

7 Katō Norihiro 加藤典洋, “‘Ōe to Murakami’ no aida wo ikita kokō no sakka” 大江と村上の間を生きた孤高的作家 (An Isolated Writer Living Between “Ōe and Murakami”), Bungakkai 文学界 63 no.4 (April 2009): 162. Translation is my own.
8 Ibid., 161.
argument for the “(re)canonization” of Kurahashi’s oeuvre. Indeed, aside from Sakaki, it seems that the trend of critical neglect for Kurahashi’s later writing extends beyond Japanese literary circles.

Despite the positive evaluation of Kurahashi’s first short stories and novels by the aforementioned scholars and critics today, the literary climate of the 1960s was quite different. Denigrated by the likes of Etō Jun, Niwa Fumio, and Nakamura Mitsuo, Kurahashi was bombarded by criticism regarding her methodology, realism, and originality. In 1980, the publication of The Castle Within a Castle 「城の中の城」from the “Keiko-san Series” marked her first foray into writing after a period of inactivity lasting ten years. These later works were met largely with silence, and when addressed often faced the kind of harsh dismissal exemplified by Katō’s roundtable.

The novels that Kurahashi wrote following this decade-long hiatus were distinctly different from those of the 1960s, representing what can be thought of as a significant rupture in her career. The “Keiko-san Series” is characterized by more conventional methodology, a switch to Japanese sources for intertextuality and pastiche, and a novel presentation of sexuality and female eroticism in particular. In this analysis, I will argue that it is the latter trait, often overlooked or criticized, that qualifies Kurahashi’s later works as an important contribution to Japanese literature and makes them highly relevant to an inquiry into the representation of female sexuality therein. Through a comparative analysis of Kurahashi’s earliest short stories “Partei” and “The End of Summer” and 1989’s The Passage of Dreams, I intend to delineate the significant rupture in her work.

---

9 Vernon, 107.
and argue that she made an important contribution to Japanese literature in both parts of
her career. In particular, her portrayal of pleasure and power dynamics in *The Passage of
Dreams* is a valuable study in feminine eroticism in literature and should be treated as
such.

Katō’s observation that Kurahashi became an “illusive cult writer” may not be
incorrect. In fact, from the standpoint of literary criticism, the neglect of her later work
seems indicative of just that. However, this should not diminish the import of
Kurahashi’s depictions of female-focused sexual encounters in a literary world still very
much dominated by masculine perspectives. In these depictions, not only is the erotic act
portrayed from a woman’s point of view, it is she who finds empowering pleasure
through its climax. Kurahashi may have faded into “cult” obscurity as her career
progressed, but her works from that period deserve attention as examples of texts which
emphasize and celebrate the power of female sexuality.
CHAPTER 3
KURAHASHI YUMIKO’S CAREER AND WORKS


The first decade of Kurahashi Yumiko’s career was marked by heated debate. Three major disputes occurred among literary analysts concerning the methodology, realism, and originality of her writing. These criticisms were based upon the standards of Japanese literary circles at the time, many of which Kurahashi flouted with her radical constructs and subject matter. An examination of the rupture in the style and content of Kurahashi’s writing requires an understanding of her earliest work and its historical context, and the following section will explore the qualities of Kurahashi’s 1960s-era stories and novels and the surrounding controversy.

Kurahashi’s first work of fiction, the short story “Partei,” (1960) received mixed reviews from literary critics. Though it drew acclaim from many and was even shortlisted for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize, there were still some who disapproved of her approach. Niwa Fumio criticized “Partei” because it failed to evoke an emotional response in the reader, and Kurahashi’s constant detractor Etō Jun found fault in its reliance on “lucidity.” Indeed, her methodologically constructed plots were among the most condemned aspects of her writing at this stage in her career.¹¹

Kurahashi’s short story “Snake” 「蛇」 (1960) sparked a debate that would continue for several years. “Snake,” as Kurahashi herself has stated, is intended as a parody of Franz Kakfa’s Metamorphosis. As such, the story is unrealistic and concludes with the titular snake swallowing the protagonist whole. Etō Jun harshly criticized this

¹¹ Sakaki, “Kurahashi Yumiko’s Negotiations with the Fathers,” 294.
work, writing: “[Snake] is not an allegory, but a mere game of concepts… [It] does not convey any message because nothing exists outside the author’s brain.”¹² His argument was founded upon the criteria of the I-novel, which dictate that a particular message should be conveyed and that said message should have its foundation in the real world.¹³ The surreal “Snake” clearly ran counter to this ideal.

In the latter part of 1960 the debate over realism came to a head. Nakamura Mitsuo decried Kurahashi’s prose as failing at its “principal purpose.” He believed that in contrast to poetry, the objective of prose is to “explain” things, and Kurahashi’s current work failed at this task. He faulted her for the lack of cultural indicators such as settings, character names, and customs, as well as her unrealistic portrayal of human relationships.¹⁴ Moreover, her choice of topics was said to be amoral and not intended to better society at large.¹⁵

Kurahashi responded to these remarks in her essay “The Labyrinth and Negativity of Fiction”  「小説の迷路と否定性」. She wrote that she has no desire to write in the tradition of nineteenth-century realism, portraying the world mimetically as is. Her role, as she saw it, was not to “report facts” about her own “experiences or life.”¹⁶ Instead, she saw fit to create a world where “plausibility... has to be supported by the minute construction of details that appear to make sense.”¹⁷ In response to Nakamura’s criticism, Kurahashi problematized the distinction he makes between poetry and prose

---

¹² Ibid., 295.
¹³ Ibid., 296.
¹⁴ Ibid., 297.
¹⁵ Sakaki, “(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko,” 156.
¹⁶ Ibid., 157.
¹⁷ Sakaki, “Kurahashi Yumiko’s Negotiations with the Fathers,” 298.
writing. Prose, like poetry, does not have to be a “tool for communication;” rather, words can be an “objective in themselves.”

The publication of Kurahashi’s first novel, Blue Journey「暗い旅」(1961), heralded the most dramatic debate on the merits of her work to date. The question of realism was once again brought to the fore, due to Kurahashi’s experimentation with descriptive writing. Despite her effort, Etō Jun argued that Kurahashi’s portrayals of real places such as Kamakura were unrealistic, maintaining his position that mimetic description of the world was the key to successful fiction. Kurahashi rebutted his remarks by questioning what the “true Kamakura” Etō mentioned in his criticism could possibly be given the subjective nature of the world.

More significant, however, was the discussion of the originality of Blue Journey. Etō Jun was able to draw several parallels between it and a French novel entitled La Modification published just four years earlier. Kurahashi had misjudged her audience’s familiarity with literature, anticipating that they would simply recognize the reference to La Modification. To Etō Jun, however, the similarities were tantamount to plagiarism.

Kurahashi defended herself from accusations of plagiarism in various essays, some of which were directed specifically at Etō Jun. In her 1965 essay “The Sybil and the Hero”「巫女とヒーロ,」she alleged that “the respect [a writer pays to another writer] is shown only in the way the [precursor’s ideas] are stolen.” To Kurahashi, any such “stealing” was not really theft, but a tribute to the other writer’s skill. Moreover, in her rebuttal to Etō Jun, “The Misery of Criticism: To Mr. Etō Jun”「批評の悲しさ：江

---

19 Sakaki, “Kurahashi Yumiko’s Negotiations with the Fathers,” 205.
20 Ibid., 206.
21 Sakaki, “(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko,” 158.
Kurahashi explains that what she has done in *Blue Journey* is not plagiarism: it is pastiche, a technique which is indicative of intentional intertextuality.\textsuperscript{22}

As we shall see, Kurahashi changed her approach to these oft-criticized qualities in her post-hiatus work. There can be no doubt that her writing changed with respect to methodology and intertextuality. Additionally, in *The Passage of Dreams* and the “Keiko-san Series,” she introduces a new, powerful, and significant dimension: a sense of female eroticism lacking in her earliest works.

**Post-Hiatus Work: Would That Kurahashi Write Something Like This?**

Following Kurahashi’s trip to the United States to study at the University of Iowa in 1966 and the publication of her novel *Virginia* 「ヴァージニア」 (1970), her years of prolific—and controversial—activity came to a close. A period of nearly ten years passed in which she published almost nothing at all. When she returned to the literary scene in 1980 with the publication of *The Castle Within a Castle*, scholars and critics alike characterized her work as somehow changed. According to Victoria Vernon, her new novels were “less daring in their experimentalism and more realistic in subject matter and tone.”\textsuperscript{23} Katō Norihiro remarked that Kurahashi’s post-hiatus works were dramatically different from those of her debut, and even found 1984’s *Cruel Fairy Tales for Adults* 「大人のための残酷童話」 to be “trashy.” He recalled his own thoughts upon reading a later piece by Kurahashi: “Would that Kurahashi write something like

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{23} Vernon, 107.
His reaction may have been widespread. Indeed, the works that Kurahashi has published since her break have received very little critical attention of any kind.

A significant number of Kurahashi’s works printed since 1980 have been volumes of the “Keiko-san Series,” of which *The Passage of Dreams* is one. In the vast majority of the stories in *The Passage of Dreams*, Keiko travels to the “Other World” あちらの世界 and encounters a literary or historical figure or figures. All of the stories end with a sense of the surreal or bizarre, and most conclude with a climactic sexual encounter.

Through its differing methodology and use of intertextuality, this text exemplifies the distinctions between the style and content of her earliest works and that of the post-hiatus novels of the “Keiko-san Series.” And most significantly, *The Passage of Dreams* uses sexual themes in a new way, introducing strong female eroticism with a focus on pleasure.

---

24 Katō, 161. Translation is my own.
25 Tsukata, 63.
26 “Kurahashi Yumiko ten.”
CHAPTER 4
FROM THE ANTIWORLD TO THE “OTHER WORLD”

Kurahashi’s pre-hiatus writing was controversial in part because her methodology defied the literary norms of the time. While some traces of the structure of her earliest stories can still be seen in *The Passage of Dreams*, many aspects have changed dramatically. This is due largely to the demise of her “antiworld” 『反世界』 construct, a concept crucial to her first works. The antiworld is a “literary space” where the traditional conception of the world and the humans in it is inverted: ideologies, morals, religion, and love—it is wholly detached from all of these ideals. Kurahashi described her conception of the perfect novel as follows: “at an uncertain time, in a place that is nowhere, somebody who is no one, for no reason is about to do something—and in the end does nothing.” This too, is part of her negation of the “real” world, or as she called it, the “world of facts.” Taken together, these two ideas capture the essence of Kurahashi’s antiworld and stand in stark relief against the mimetic depictions and more conventional themes present in the writing of many of her contemporaries.

**Unknown and Unreliable: Structure in the Antiworld**

Kurahashi’s short story “Partei” includes many elements of the antiworld ideal. Published in 1960, “Partei” is narrated by an unnamed protagonist. In the text, she recounts her interactions with her equally anonymous lover, referred to as “you,” and the Party of which he is a member. The decision to leave the characters and settings nameless or identified only by initials like “S” or “K City” can be seen as a denial of the

---


28 Vernon, 114.
“world of facts.” Indeed, the use of initials in this manner is not uncommon among Kurahashi’s early works. In her essay “My Manner of Writing Novels” 「私の小説作法」 she explained that, “I often use characters expressed by symbols like K or L… They are like independent variables who move within a hypothetical condition I set.” As variables, “S” and “K City” do not reflect the “real world;” rather, they designate points in a carefully crafted world of words—the antiworld.

“Partei” incorporates aspects of the antiworld into its plot as well. The story centers on the narrator’s decision to become a member of the Party and the steps she takes to achieve that goal. After proclaiming her desire to join, the narrator learns that a prerequisite to entrance is writing one’s life history for examination by other Party members. However, she is unable to complete hers due to difficulties linking her past to her reasons for joining the Party. She admits this to her lover and the two have an argument in which he insists that it is in fact “inevitable” that she join. She responds:

I had chosen the Party and had resolved to let the Party restrict my freedom. I had not arrived at this decision for any clear reason or through some cause-and-effect relationship. Wasn’t it enough if the Party accepted my decision?

Here the reader learns that the narrator had no particular motive for joining the Party, and that her decision was in fact arbitrary. This fulfills the “for no reason” clause of Kurahashi’s antiworld stipulations: the narrator can provide no explanation, because there is not one. She cannot force her life into the pattern desired by the Party because she herself does not know why she has chosen it.

The influence of the antiworld extends even further in “Partei,” and it is its structural concepts that link the story’s first and last lines. In the opening scene, the narrator tells “you” that she intends to join the Party:

One day you asked me if I’d made up my mind. You had tried to bring up the subject several times before, and besides, this time you were unusually frank. So I told you I had decided, since I felt I too should be frank.\(^{31}\)

Her decision, later revealed to be lacking in clear motivation, sets off a chain of events as she and her lover make an effort to bring her into the fold of the Party. By the story’s conclusion, however, she has changed her mind. One day after she has broken ties with “you,” she finds a letter in her room:

On my desk I found an envelope without a sender’s address. Inside it was a notification to the effect that I had been accepted into the Party, and a red membership card. After inspecting it carefully, I threw it away.

I decided to begin the procedures necessary for leaving the Party.\(^{32}\)

Just as Kurahashi herself described, in “Partei” “[someone] is about to do something—and in the end does nothing.” The story begins with the narrator on the verge of joining the Party, but all of her efforts come to naught when she rejects the membership card and begins the process to reverse what she has done. The narrative comes full circle: in the final reckoning, she has done nothing.

Published mere months after “Partei,” “The End of Summer” is another of Kurahashi’s short stories that exhibits many of the hallmarks of the antiworld construct. Narrated by the elder of two sisters, it details their sexual relations with a young man and the plot they develop to murder him over the course of a summer vacationing at a seaside villa. As in “Partei,” some characters are referred to only by initials; in this case there is

\(^{31}\) Kurahashi, “Partei,” 3.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 16.
K, the sexual partner and eventual victim of the two sisters’ scheme. There is an intriguing twist with K, however. After meeting him one day at the oceanfront villa they are visiting, the younger sister asks the narrator about his name:

I answered with the initial K. This abbreviated, symbolic way of naming him amused my sister. I was rather pleased with it myself. We decided to go on referring to him that way.33

Here, the narrator of “The End of Summer” consciously designates him as “K,” which is not, presumably, his real name. Victoria Vernon notes that Kurahashi rarely provides any kind of explanation for the use of initials in her works themselves, but that this “history” adds to the narrative of “The End of Summer” in a meaningful way.34 The narrator states her goal in the story’s very first paragraph: to “possess” K as a lover and then “cram [him] into the maw of death.”35 This intention does not develop until later, however, and the way the sisters initially strip him of his name and identity is an indication of what is to come.36 Kurahashi’s use of K, then, can be seen as a way of taking the antiworld “variables” one step further by granting her characters the ability to designate others as just that—nameless individuals with no fixed identity, easily manipulated and cast aside.

Unlike the narrator of “Partei,” the sisters of “The End of Summer” have a clear motive in undertaking the main task of the text—the killing of K. As the narrator asserts in the first paragraph, his intrusion into their lives has been “festering like the wound from a noxious cactus spine under the skin,” and disrupting their bond.37 Killing him will allow them to jointly possess him for eternity. Nor does the narrator “do nothing:” at

34 Vernon, 118.
35 Kurahashi, “The End of Summer,” 229.
36 Vernon, 118.
37 Kurahashi, “The End of Summer,” 229.
the end of the story she kills K and leaves her sister to die while on a dangerous swimming excursion. There is neither the lack of purpose nor the circularity of “Partei” present in this text.

Still, as Victoria Vernon argues, “The End of Summer” is very much an antiworld story. This is because the narrator herself creates an antiworld, a “world of words,” with her claims that she and her sister are perfectly unified in purpose, with no resentment for each other. When the narrator first stumbles on her sister and K together in bed, her response is to join them:

Asking, how was he—K, I made it a threesome. I felt no jealousy. You might say that I couldn’t discover any of its poisonous fangs or dangerous slivers lodged in my emotions.

This claim of satisfaction with the “joint ownership” of K represents the narrator’s attempt to convince the reader of the immutability of her relationship with her sister. Despite K’s arrival, the two are said to be as close as ever. It is this ideology that denies all traces of the emotional and sustains her antiworld.

However, as time passes the affair with K begins to warp the sisters’ bond and no amount of self-reassurance—no reinforcement to her world of words—can restrain the narrator’s emotions when she finds out she is pregnant:

Even then the thought that inside my body a being that was not mine was eating up time and swelling ever larger filled me with nausea. The only idea that could counteract that nausea was K’s death… I desired the caretaker’s death, my father’s death, and even my sister’s death. Only a great number of deaths were worthy of the sea, lapping at the sand like a mollusk.

38 Vernon, 127.
40 Vernon, 128.
41 Kurahashi, “The End of Summer,” 238-239.
While the narrator could intellectualize the growing rift between herself and her sister resulting from their sexual relations with K, it is the possibility of a child and what it entails for her future that shatters her world of words. The destruction of this antiworld fills her with wrath, which she proceeds to act on by drowning K and abandoning her sister in the very same waters.42

**Someone Does Something: Structure in The Passage of Dreams**

Structurally, *The Passage of Dreams* can be seen as a complete departure from Kurahashi’s early antiworld stories. Most stories in this novel follow a similar pattern: the heroine Keiko meets with a person or persons from the fantastic “Other World,” and she and her companion(s) share in a bizarre experience, often sexual in nature. Characters in *The Passage of Dreams* are never identified only by letters. Those not from the “Other World,” Keiko’s immediate family, friends, and coworkers, are given names: her children, Tomoko and Takashi, who make an appearance in “The Flower Faeries” 「花の妖精たち」. Mrs. Hanada, her theater-going companion from “The City Under the Castle” 「城の下の街」 and the grieving Mr. Fujiwara of “Seclusion” 「遁世」 all receive traditional appellations. Similarly, each of the denizens of the “Other World” is an individual from history or literature, and as such comes pre-designated with a recognized name. Literary figures range from the villainous Lady Rokujō of *The Tale of Genji* to the tragic lovers Tristan and Iseult of Celtic myth; historical from the modern poet Nishiwaki Junzaburō to the prolific murderer Countess Elizabeth Báthory of 16th century Hungary. Characters, then, have specific referents in the “real” world. Whether Keiko is visiting the modern-day coast of Cornwall or Saigyō’s legendary hermitage in

---

42 Vernon, 130.
the “Other World,” the settings, fantastic or otherwise, are also often highly specific. In *The Passage of Dreams*, Kurahashi’s variable “world of words” has disintegrated, leaving in its place a system where the crucial questions—who and where—are always answered. This methodological transformation signifies the end of the antiworld and is an important component of the larger rupture evident in her work.

The second, and no less significant, aspect of the shift from the antiworld construct to a more grounded literary space is the way in which characters’ motives are defined and how the fulfillment of such objectives has a lasting effect on the fictional world, even within the short story format. A particularly salient example can be found in the story “Seclusion.” One of Keiko’s employees, Mr. Fujiwara, approaches her to announce his resignation from her company; a close female friend has died, and he is reevaluating his priorities in life. Keiko is sympathetic to his situation, and announces her intent to “treat him to a little something” in lieu of the severance pay that she cannot offer. After journeying to the “Other World” with the young man, Keiko finds herself in the body of another being, and the two have sexual intercourse:

> She realized that this was the young man’s first experience with this kind of intimacy between a man and a woman. For Keiko, too, the experience was unusual. In the end, it seemed as though the night’s feast continued until the break of day, and the promise Keiko had made earlier to treat Mr. Fujiwara had been fulfilled. 43

Keiko’s motivation—to comfort Mr. Fujiwara—is explicitly stated early in the story, and in this passage she realizes her goal. This is not an action taken “for no reason,” as the antiworld construct stipulates, nor is it without consequence. After Keiko and Mr. Fujiwara go their separate ways, she learns from her companion Mr. Satō that Mr.

43 Kurahashi Yumiko 倉橋由美子, *Yume no kayoiji 夢の通い路* (*The Passage of Dreams*) (Tokyo: Kōdansha 講談社, 1993), 100. All translations from this text are my own.
Fujiwara has gone to live in the “Other World.” The conversation between Keiko and Mr. Satō reveals the changes that have occurred:

“If he goes [to the Other World], he can move freely. Mr. Fujiwara might sometimes come here to enjoy himself, and he’s looking forward to being your companion at those times.”

“If that’s the case I am looking forward to it too,” Keiko said, and then she thought to verify something that had been worrying her. “By the way, there’s no sign of Mr. Fujiwara’s body remaining around here, right?”

“I wouldn’t do anything so uncouth. He has suddenly disappeared from this world.”

In “Partei” the protagonist lacks a clear motive, and the story’s circular plot leaves her right back where she began. Here, however, the story forms an arc: Keiko sets a goal, fulfills it, and this resolution leads to a changed state. In “Seclusion,” Mr. Fujiwara’s body has disappeared without a trace, and he and Keiko have developed an affinity that may lead to future liaisons. The non-equivalence between the starting and ending state of “Seclusion” contrasts sharply with “Partei,” and also conflicts with Kurahashi’s stated ideals for her antiworld. In The Passage of Dreams, someone does something: something that, as we shall see, is often a powerful expression of feminine sexuality.

There is a demonstrable rupture between Kurahashi’s first antiworld works and the “Keiko-san Series” novel The Passage of Dreams. While “Partei” can be said to exhibit many structural traits of the antiworld, “The End of Summer” differs in that it integrates the construct and its concepts into the narrative. “Partei” follows Kurahashi’s stipulations about a “world of words” closely, whereas the central conflict of “The End of Summer” involves the narrator’s own such “world:” its creation, weakening, and eventual destruction. In contrast, The Passage of Dreams possesses none of these qualities.

Ibid.
situating itself firmly in a static, albeit fantastic, world where characters’ intentions are clearly delineated and their actions have meaningful effects. The “Other World” is not a direct parallel to the antiworld, however; it is a result of the absence of such a restrictive construct. Without the constraints of the antiworld, Kurahashi was free to create somebody who was someone, acting at a fixed place and time with their own motives and accomplishments. That individual is Keiko, an empowered woman who embraces her sexuality and the pleasure it brings.
CHAPTER 5
FROM INVERSION TO EXCLUSION

Kurahashi’s antiworld has two components, however. Lacking defined characters, settings, motivations, and the like is only one piece of the puzzle; traditional ideals are contorted and inverted as well. In the case of “Partei” and “The End of Summer” this is most evident in the portrayal of love. Here, too, there is a rupture between Kurahashi’s earliest stories and The Passage of Dreams. As we shall see, the former works twist the ideal into something quite foreign to romantic notions of love. The Passage of Dreams takes a different approach, instead removing the question of love from the equation altogether.

Like Death Itself: Love in the Antiworld

In “Partei,” the reader learns early in the narrator’s account that she believes that she was “perfectly” in love with “you” until she agreed to join the Party. Reflecting on their relationship, she says:

Nevertheless, I think that the reason I had loved you for a comparatively long time—or more accurately, had believed in my love—was because I had spent my days within these abstract walls. It probably would not have happened that way if we had been someplace where the air was lighter—if we had made a big fuss about sharing the ordinary details of everyday life.  

Here, love is not romantic, nor glorified in any way. In fact, her love for “you” was only a belief, merely held together by the “abstract walls” which enclosed them in the Party-affiliated dormitory where he lives. Their love was sustained by their environment and had little to do with emotional attachment, and this passage highlights its illusory nature and distinguishes it from romantic notions of matters of the heart. In this way, Kurahashi

---

45 Kurahashi, “Partei,” 4-5.
inverts such notions, setting the relationship between the protagonists of “Partei” squarely within the bounds of the antiworld.

As was the case in “Partei,” the antiworld construct and its distorted ideals influence the portrayal of love in “The End of Summer.” Where the conception of love in “Partei” was unromantic, merely an erroneous “belief,” the narrator of “The End of Summer” makes no such concessions about her love for K. However, the idea of “love” is presented more radically, founded on the sisters’ “joint ownership” of K and the narrator’s attempts to remain wholly objective in evaluating their “triangular relationship.”

After the narrator first learns that her sister is sleeping with K, the two discuss what this means to them:

In the night, after K had gone down to his room to sleep, we exchanged opinions about our joint possession of love, especially in its outward manifestations. We looked at the skin of the human being, ignoring the bowels and bodily fluids, failing to recognize the fragile, unstable union that made up the jointly owned being whom we called our love.

The narrator goes on to detail how K is “a plaything in [their] hands” and how their sexual acts “resembled sport.” This vision of love is not only wholly unromantic—there is no affection evident, only a desire to “possess”—it is decidedly focused on the physical, “the outward manifestations.” In this way, Kurahashi inverts the conventional idea that love is based on a mutual emotional connection, instead creating a “love” based on ownership, manipulation, and raw sexuality.

The radical, antiworld “love” in “The End of Summer” only grows more distinct from its romantic counterpart as the story goes on. Sensing that their shared relationship

---

46 Kurahashi “The End of Summer,” 234.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 235.
with K is coming between them, the narrator mentions the possibility of his death to her sister:

Have you ever thought about K’s dying, I said to my sister. Sometimes people try to assert total ownership by destroying their own property. However, K’s death, the death of our love, rather than meaning destruction or loss, was the one transformation necessary to make our possession of him eternal. He would be changed into a tombstone on top of the sand, whereupon we would be able to have joint ownership of the then bleached bones of our love made into a fixed objet outside of ourselves. The two of us, arms wrapped around our knees, would discuss the thought of K in this new mode of joint possession. And now, under the midsummer sunshine, love truly resembled death.49

Here the idea of a love based on “joint possession” is extended. The only way the two sisters can both “own” K is to kill him, immortalizing their love through his demise. Kurahashi is quite explicit: in the world of “The End of Summer,” the death of a lover, something usually understood to be negative, is desirable. When “love truly resembles death” in this manner, there can be no doubt that the romantic ideal has been completely inverted. The conclusion of “The End of Summer,” then, represents an example of the antiworld and its distorted values at their most extreme.

**Pleasure Paramount: Love in The Passage of Dreams**

While Kurahashi’s earliest stories invert the ideal of love, *The Passage of Dreams* ignores it entirely. For Keiko and her female counterparts, love—at least in the traditional, romantic sense—is not a concern. This is demonstrated clearly in a passage from “The Mask Dream” 「慈童の夢」 in which Keiko and Fujiwara no Teika converse about her sexual fantasies:

Keiko and Teika often discussed a variety of types of “secret” and “lustful” love and debated sexual technique while chatting over long meals. However, one time Teika asked her about what kind of experience

---

49 Ibid., 237.
she would like to try at some point. Keiko answered that she wanted to have relations with an unbelievably handsome young man and feel true ecstasy.\(^{50}\)

In this passage, “love” is mentioned but qualified as “secret” and “lustful.” Keiko and Teika discuss physical techniques without lingering on romance. Though this bears some similarity to the “love” of “Partei” and “The End of Summer,” Keiko’s conviction and objectives differ. She seeks “true ecstasy,” an orgasmic state of extreme pleasure. Not only is she frank with Teika, she evidently knows exactly what she wants; her motivation is obvious to the reader, and her objective is her own enjoyment. Rather than inverting the ideal of love, here Kurahashi makes it none of Keiko’s concern. Indeed, this is a common thread running through *The Passage of Dreams*: Keiko is a woman who is prepared to act on her desires, paying no heed to questions of romance or emotional ties.

In the story “An Ode to Cloud, Rain, and Rainbow” 『雲と雨と虹のオード』, the narrative explicitly follows Keiko’s goal to experience sexual pleasure. A Chinese exchange student staying with Keiko proves to be a mountain witch from the “Other World” and offers to teach her a specialized sexual technique. The student states that she had previously judged that Keiko has the potential to learn such a method, and Keiko expresses her thanks:

“I would be grateful if you could instruct me in the technique at this juncture, but is it something that one can master without a great deal of training?”

“It’s exceedingly difficult if you scrutinize the theory, but simple if you master it in a dream. And once you internalize it, you won’t forget. Actually, I became proficient in this method by learning from someone, too.”\(^{51}\)

---

\(^{50}\) Kurahashi, *Yume no kayoji*, 44.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 107.
In this scene there is no mention of love, merely a concrete discussion of what the “internalization” of the technique entails. Later in the story, Keiko reaches the height of ecstasy as she learns this new skill, characterized as “the joy of vanishing into nothingness.” This combination of an analytical approach to lovemaking and the following orgasmic loss of self captures Keiko’s attitude toward love and pleasure: one insignificant, the other the ultimate goal.

Where love was illusory and inverted in Kurahashi’s early works, in *The Passage of Dreams* it is all but absent, replaced by sexual gratification. Both the inversion and exclusion of love are unconventional approaches to the ideal. However, the complete disregard for love in *The Passage of Dreams* lends the text the unique ability to focus entirely on female pleasure. As we shall see, this emphasis extends beyond the notion of love to what sex and sexuality entail, marking another rupture between her earliest stories and *The Passage of Dreams*. 
CHAPTER 6
FROM ERROR TO EROTICISM

While the decline of the antiworld construct and the shift in her treatment of love are crucial elements in the rupture evident in Kurahashi’s career, it is the transformation in her portrayal of sexual intercourse and its ramifications that is most pertinent to an examination of the greater significance of The Passage of Dreams and the “Keiko-san Series.” As we shall see, the result of this dramatic change is an empowered, erotic representation of feminine sexuality, one which celebrates rather than deprecates the effects of the sexual act. It is because of this representation that The Passage of Dreams deserves a serious analysis; not just “trashy,” it makes a bold statement on behalf of women and women’s literature in Japan.

Distance and Disgust: Sexuality in the Antiworld

Kurahashi’s first fictional account of a sexual encounter is found in “Partei.” The narrator meets a worker who she has been tutoring for the Party, and he treats her to a meal. They arrive at the usual study site only to find that no one else is present. Alone in this manner, they have sexual intercourse:

Breathing roughly, he did his best to make me love him. Rather than being actually hurt, I felt uncomfortable, as if I were being pushed open as far as I would go. The worker was alien even as he was inside of me, and I was irritated by the feeling of distance, as if we were two animals of different species that had accidentally met and copulated on the spot.\(^{52}\)

Here, the narrator’s “feeling of distance” is palpable. The worker with whom she is having intercourse is “alien” to the extent that he may as well be another species. There is no intimacy, and in fact the narrator does not even recognize him when she meets him again on an outing for the Party. Moreover, she characterizes the whole experience in

\(^{52}\) Kurahashi, “Partei,” 8.
negative terms: she is “uncomfortable” and “irritated.” Pleasure does not enter into the
equation, nor does any sense of power or control. She tolerates his advances and the
feeling of being “pushed open” with mild disdain, finding no enjoyment whatsoever.

At the story’s conclusion, the narrator’s carefully crafted plan to enter the Party
crumbles due in part to this sexual act, which has resulted in her pregnancy. When she
confesses to “you” that she is pregnant, he is shocked:

You were completely taken aback, but when I stopped vomiting and told
you, tears still in my eyes, that I was pregnant, you brought your pupils to
the center of your face and stared at me. Then you took off your glasses
and began to cry. Although I didn’t have much to say to you, I announced
that I didn’t love you and did not in any way love the worker, S, or the
Party. When I had finished I felt alone.\(^{53}\)

The revelation that the narrator is pregnant, the direct consequence of her affair with the
worker, leaves her profoundly isolated. Rather than pleasure, sexual intercourse has left
her with a being inside her womb, one whose birth she intends to prevent via abortion.
Ashamed of herself, she feels her actions were in error. Thus, Kurahashi’s
characterization of sexual relations is altogether negative in “Partei.” The process is
unpleasant, and its physical effects—pregnancy—are undesirable and a contributing
factor in the dissolution of the narrator’s social world.

Although the sisters of “The End of Summer” evidently find pleasure in their
relations with K, their sexual encounters lack intimacy, and the story’s conclusion
highlights the devastation the narrator experiences as a result of the sexual act. The
dissociation between the narrator and K becomes apparent after they have intercourse for
the first time. She describes the nature of their physical relationship as follows:

Without saying a word he would apply himself to the task. When we
began to try to put our situation into words, they had the quality of the

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 15-16.
dialogue of a classical play and were attended by symbolic gestures in this midsummer setting that reigned over the rocks and sun. K, the star performer, had no talent or taste for self-expression.\textsuperscript{54}

Here, as with “Partei,” there is a sense of distance between the narrator and her lover. K readily “applies himself to the task,” but it is as if the two are actors in a play: their words and gestures are symbolic, without any substantial sense of closeness. Moreover, K has no aptitude for such things, and the reader is left feeling that the two are almost on different wavelengths. They may speak and motion to each other, but there is neither communication nor affinity.

As “The End of Summer” draws to a close, the sexual relations between the narrator and K seem to have borne fruit. She believes she is pregnant, and brings up the possibility over dinner with K and her sister. That night, K inquires about the issue:

Late that evening, K knocked on the door of my room. He demanded to know if I were really pregnant, and without waiting for an answer said that the child should be born and raised. Me give birth? Feeling that I had been pursued to the very jaws of a trap, I yelled, I’ll never give birth to a child! I explained my feelings about pregnancy to K.\textsuperscript{55}

The “feelings” the narrator mentions here are detailed in a previous paragraph: to her, pregnancy is an “inadmissible foreign substance” akin to a “cancerous cell.”\textsuperscript{56} Burdened by this disease-like being, she feels an intense sense of powerlessness, as though chased into a trap. Thus, in “The End of Summer” the result of sexual intercourse is not carnal pleasure or empowerment; rather, there is a sense of despair at its physical manifestation in the form of a child, an outcome the narrator finds to be abhorrent. Once again, Kurahashi has painted an overwhelmingly negative picture of sexual relations and what they entail for the women involved.

\textsuperscript{54} Kurahashi, “The End of Summer,” 233.  
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 238.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
Intimacy, Ecstasy, Strength: Sexuality in The Passage of Dreams

Nearly thirty years later, The Passage of Dreams takes the negativity of “Partei” and “The End of Summer” and turns it on its head. Sexual encounters in this work involve orgasmic pleasure for its female protagonists and sometimes even the death, destruction, or dominance of their masculine counterparts. A striking example of this theme is found in the story entitled “Hell in Autumn” 「秋の地獄．」 In it, Keiko has an encounter with a mysterious masked figure, and when the two have sexual intercourse she experiences a sensation of extreme pleasure:

Would the embrace of someone wrapped in a twelve-layered kimono be like this? Or was it something akin to the intimacy of being imprisoned in a cocoon? In any case, the space was enveloped in a sense of rapture that was thicker than golden honey, and Keiko became one with the body of a man whose true nature she did not know, continuing to bathe in the ecstasy. \(^{57}\)

Here, Keiko is having a deeply intimate experience, akin to being “wrapped in a twelve-layered kimono” or “imprisoned in a cocoon:” an intense sensation of physical closeness. While the narrator of “Partei” was physically close to the worker with whom she had intercourse, there was none of the lavish description evident here in The Passage of Dreams. Moreover, Keiko “becomes one” with her mysterious lover, whereas the narrator of “Partei” felt as distant from the worker as two different species. In fact, their proximity caused her discomfort. In contrast, Keiko finds only “rapture” and “ecstasy,” liberating pleasure and orgasmic release derived from the sexual act.

At their climax, her partner’s mask becomes that of a dying woman and falls to the ground. It becomes clear that the mask was a demon woman, and that the man, revealed to be General Fukakusa from The Nightly Courting of Komachi, could not

---

\(^{57}\) Kurahashi, Yume no kayoji, 64.
remove it because of his obsession with the woman in life. Apparently having been freed from this curse by his intimate encounter with Keiko, the General plaintively asks her to take him away from the otherworldly realm. She replies that she cannot do so, and then grabs the fallen mask:

> When Keiko said this, she snatched the mask up and pressed it against the man’s face. It stuck there and returned to being the face of Ono no Komachi. It was like the face of a laughing young woman.

> Afterwards, Keiko walked off without looking back.\(^{58}\)

In the aftermath of their union, Keiko takes the reins: not only does she deny the General’s plea for freedom, by picking up the mask and reapplying it to his face she also reestablishes the curse of the demon woman, Ono no Komachi. Keiko condemns General Fukakusa to a haunted, hellish existence and abandons him to this fate without so much as a second thought. There is no trap that can snare Keiko after intercourse, biological or otherwise. Her strength, to take her pleasure and then do what she feels is right, represents a major adjustment in Kurahashi’s way of writing about female sexuality.

In “Hell in Autumn,” Kurahashi grants Keiko great power. Whereas the narrator in “Partei” possesses little or no agency—she joins the Party for a man and does not act according to any purpose of her own—Keiko savors the pleasure of her intercourse with the General and then refuses to liberate him from the curse of Ono no Komachi. Indeed, the curse too is of a feminine nature, the result of his longing for a former lover. Here it is the man instead of the woman who experiences isolation in the wake of intercourse.

---

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 66.
The story entitled “The Moon Woman” 「月の女」 presents an even more extreme example of female eroticism and empowerment than “Hell in Autumn.” One evening, Keiko is receiving a guest named Mr. Semimaru when a strange female visitor arrives from the moon. The moon woman is revealed to be Jōga from the Noh play *The Feather Mantle*, and she promises Keiko a mysterious “gift.” Jōga commences sexual relations with Mr. Semimaru, and Keiko finds herself enjoying it vicariously:

The relations in *The Feather Mantle* differed from the usual intimacy between a man and a woman in that there were no signs of male dominance whatsoever. The fact that even Keiko, who was watching, was about to cry out with pleasure seemed to indicate that Jōga had chosen to share this same sensation with her. *That must have been the “gift,”* Keiko thought.  

In this passage Jōga is in complete control, and through her Keiko experiences a pleasure so intense she feels the need to cry out in ecstasy. The orgasmic sensation the two share is not without consequence, however:

The heavenly maiden’s face radiated pleasure along with a light like that of the moon. The light had the same corrosive properties that Keiko had sensed at first, and it seemed like it dyed Mr. Semimaru’s face completely white, consuming it as it did so. In an instant, his handsome face wore the look of death. Though Keiko wondered whether men who had intercourse with the women of the moon had their spirits siphoned only to become like white pumice stone and die, the truth was that there was something difficult to resist about the pleasure of seeing that state of fatal joy before her own eyes.  

Here, Jōga, and by extension Keiko, are siphoning Mr. Semimaru’s soul from his body, deriving great pleasure from it all the while. This scene represents Kurahashi’s female protagonists at the height of their power: they are quite literally achieving orgasm from the death of the masculine. In “Partei” and “The End of Summer” the sexual act brings

---

59 Ibid., 91.  
60 Ibid., 92.
shame and isolation to the narrator in the form of the biological burden of a potential child. In *The Passage of Dreams*, however, the effect is quite the opposite: intercourse is rich with female eroticism, and it is the male characters that find themselves alone, or in the case of Mr. Semimaru, dead.

Not all of the stories in *The Passage of Dreams* show women in as clearly dominant a position as “Hell in Autumn” and “The Moon Woman.” In others, women achieve their ends in more subtle ways. In the fourth story entitled “The Aphrodisiac” 「媚薬」 Keiko encounters the spirit of Fujiwara no Teika’s fabled lover, Princess Shikishi. Upon identifying her, Keiko mentions the Noh play *Teika*, in which the poet becomes a vine which twines around the Princess’ grave after her death. Princess Shikishi reveals that in fact she detested Teika in life, and that she wants to use the aphrodisiac Keiko has acquired to experience sexual pleasure with him for herself. Upon drinking the potion, Princess Shikishi enters a state where she seems to be in the thrall of Teika:

> Teika manipulated Princess Shikishi’s body like a puppet, leading her to ecstasy. He seized her body under her costume with the hand he was using to incite her, and his fingers became innumerable tentacles connected to the Princess’s nerves. He played upon her senses as though he were playing a musical instrument. Keiko knew this from the ecstatic colors that floated in Princess Shikishi’s eyes and the exquisite music that escaped her mouth.

The aphrodisiac has caused Princess Shikishi to lose control of her body, and, in doing so, allowed Teika to use her like a puppet or musical instrument. His tentacled fingers are connected to her very nerves in a display of intense intimacy, and she is clearly experiencing a state of orgasmic pleasure. Despite this seeming powerlessness, it is

---

61 Ibid., 39-40.
important to note that feeling such pleasure was the Princess’ objective in using the aphrodisiac in the first place.

Moreover, at the story’s conclusion it is clear that Princess Shikishi’s plot has met with success. After Keiko herself narrowly escapes the effects of the intoxicating aphrodisiac, she enters a forested area:

Keiko was surprised to see that the stone monument was wrapped in bizarrely-shaped vines that she could scarcely believe were plants. Suddenly, the Teika vines wriggled and burst into flames as if they had been waiting to frighten her. The stone monument convulsed and melted, wrapped in flames.\(^62\)

Keiko was convinced it was the dramatic effect of the aphrodisiac. Though Teika manipulated Princess Shikishi’s body during their encounter, the destruction of the vines that bound her grave symbolizes the success of her plan to experience pleasure and free herself from his influence. The Princess reasserts control by achieving her goal and liberating herself at last. While perhaps not as dramatic as the story of the eternal curse of General Fukakusa or the soul siphoning of Mr. Semimaru, “The Aphrodisiac” showcases the way in which Kurahashi’s female protagonists use their intellect to fulfill their needs, sexual and otherwise. Conversely, in the grim conclusion to “The End of Summer” no amount of reason can save the narrator from the fate she has wrought for herself. Her sexual acts bring only vulnerability and death, whereas the Princess finds pleasure and long-awaited freedom in hers.

In “The Mask Dream,” a tale which follows a course similar to that of “The Aphrodisiac,” Keiko meets Teika one day, and he asks her if she has any particular sexual fantasies. She admits to wanting to have relations with a handsome young man, and Teika replies that he has someone in mind. Later in the year, Keiko travels to the

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 40.
“Other World” and encounters a beautiful boy named Jidō. He claims that he can grant her eternal life if she lets him write sacred scripture on her back, and as he does so Keiko feels her consciousness slipping away:

However, this was not simply drowsiness. Although her mind was steeped in a dream, here and there her body was fully awake and it began to quiver as though it were playing a subtle and wondrous music. She realized that Jidō’s hand, which should have been writing the scripture, had instead transformed into innumerable hands that played her like a musical instrument, extending the length of her body.\(^{63}\)

Like Princess Shikishi, Keiko finds herself under the sway of a male figure who plays upon her like an instrument. She has lost full control of her mind, and her body responds not to her will but to Jidō’s inciting hands. Though she is powerless in the face of this intimate stimulation, “The Mask Dream” concludes with Keiko controlling and acting on her own desire. She awakens next to Jidō only to find that she can peel off his face:

The face came off easily just like a mask, but there was no other face beneath it. Rather than nothing at all, in place of a head there was a mass of darkness. It seemed like a dark hole. Keiko regretted doing such a thoughtless thing, but the face was nowhere to be found. After that, Keiko, still thinking of herself as the beautiful boy’s mother, continued her sexual relations with him.\(^{64}\)

Here, Keiko takes charge of the situation and her own incestuous fantasies. Despite her bizarre discovery, she continues to have intercourse with the young boy. Jidō may have controlled her before, but it is now she who is in charge of his faceless body. This reversal represents the success of her plan to make love to a handsome young man on her own terms. His fate, it seems, is now up to her. The sexual scenes in “Partei” lack the sense of feminine agency and empowerment on display in “The Mask Dream” and the vast majority of *The Passage of Dreams*. The narrator of “Partei” touches the worker

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 47-48.
\(^{64}\) Ibid., 48.
“without knowing why,” but Keiko is aware of her own fantasies and is not afraid to act upon them, even dominating her now faceless lover.

As a post-hiatus work and a volume of “The Keiko-san Series” *The Passage of Dreams* presents feminine sexuality in a novel, unabashedly erotic way, going to great lengths to highlight the intimacy and pleasurable effects of the sex act. While they may lose themselves in ecstasy, Keiko and her female counterparts always regain control, sometimes even damning or destroying their male partners in the process. This combined portrayal of intimacy, pleasure, and strength in female sexuality distinguishes *The Passage of Dreams* from Kurahashi’s earliest works, and more importantly, makes it a unique and powerful contribution to Japanese women’s literature.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Despite the years of critical denigration and neglect, Kurahashi Yumiko’s literary achievements are significant and can be found in both her pre- and post-hiatus writing. There can be little doubt that one of her major contributions to modern literature was her use of the antiworld construct. Atsuko Sakaki contends that the antiworld served to subvert the patriarchal order by suggesting the fictional, subjective nature of the “real” world. Kurahashi herself claimed that her antiworld stories operated under the “logic of dreams,” a system that relied not on causality but on metaphorical imagery and the linking of sometimes disparate events. This nightmarish system of reason, Sakaki argues, reflects the position of women in a patriarchal society. Kurahashi felt that the antiworld of fiction was analogous to this position: fiction is an unfaithful representation of reality, and just as the former is subject to the latter, so too are women subject to men. By relating the circumstances of women to fiction in this manner, Kurahashi suggested that their standing was just as mutable as fiction itself. The antiworld, then, was a way of undermining society by calling attention to its suppositions and subjectivity. The variable identity of her characters and their nonexistent and fruitless motivations, the radical inversion of what “love” signifies—all of these traits ran counter to the realistic writing conventions of the time. Though “subject to reality,” they made a point in their own right: the power of fiction to present a mirror, albeit a warped one, and reveal truth.

Atsuko Sakaki states that, “A feminine discourse in modern Japanese language has been sought and established through a process of either simulating or challenging

---

65 Sakaki, “(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko,” 160.
66 Ibid., 159.
masculine discourse, while the converse has not been the case. As she points out, it is surely true that male writers have not made similar attempts to mimic or contest feminine discourse. If female writers have chosen to either “simulate” or “challenge” the discourse of the patriarchy, then Kurahashi stands alone in her role as neither imitator nor combatant. As a writer who delved into the world of fiction and fantasy, she certainly did not strive to emulate the dominant masculine discourse of the realistic I-novel.

Moreover, she made a point of avoiding direct conflict with the patriarchy in her early work, instead choosing to allude to the position of women through her employment of the concept of the antiworld. At the end of her essay “A Defiant Muse: Reading and Situating Kurahashi Yumiko’s Narrative Subjectivity,” Faye Yuan Kleeman attests to this fact:

[Kurahashi has] a penchant for positions opposed to accepted opinion, for example, her invention and employment of ideas such as the antiworld… [these ideas] delineate her combative stance and explain why she is a controversial writer. However, her textual subversion should be understood not as a resistance to power, but rather as an instrument, a sign of power itself.

Kurahashi’s intention was never to directly challenge the patriarchy; rather, the antiworld was a powerful symbol for the female station in such a society. Through her stories, then, she was able to question the assumptions of the “real” world.

Kurahashi’s antiworld disappeared after her break, however, leaving in its place a thoroughly different landscape. In the “Other World” of the “Keiko-san series,” everything is specified: characters, settings, and motives are all clearly delineated. There

67 Sakaki, “Kurahashi Yumiko’s Negotiations with the Fathers,” 305.
is a great deal to be said about Keiko’s character, however. Her very nature separates her from other female protagonists of modern Japanese literature. Chieko I. Mulhern describes Keiko as a “rare being among heroines in modern Japanese novels,” adding that, “Keiko chooses her every step and is fully aware of her responsibility.”69 This astute observation distills an important aspect of what makes Keiko’s character so subversive. Her independence, conscientiousness, and disregard for moral codes set her apart from both classical and modern heroines.70 Thus, what The Passage of Dreams may lack in terms of the suggestive power of the antiworld, it makes up for in bold characters and scenes which glorify female sexuality and empowerment. In a sense, The Passage of Dreams simply takes a different tack in its defense of the feminine. Rather than undermining society’s values through the antiworld, it celebrates what it means to be a sexual, female being, and how that sexuality can grant strength to its wielder. As such, Kurahashi’s works before and after her break represent two sides of the same coin.

For feminist writer Hélène Cixous the French term jouissance is rich with multi-layered meaning. Though it is most frequently used to signify “total sexual ecstasy,” in French philosophy and psychoanalysis the connotations of jouissance extend further: its core meaning of “enjoyment” can also refer to the “enjoyment” of rights and property. Thus as the translator of Cixous’ La Jeune Née observes, it is a word that implies “total access, total participation, as well as total ecstasy.”71 The Passage of Dreams gathers these threads of meaning and weaves them into Keiko and her “Other World” encounters. As we have seen, Keiko engages in orgasmic intercourse with a diverse range of

69 Mulhern, 200.
70 Ibid.
mysterious beings; often she acts as the dominant party, as with General Fukakusa’s mask in “Hell in Autumn” or the death of Mr. Semimaru in “The Moon Woman.” In other instances she guides her partner almost as a teacher in stories such as “Seclusion” and “The Water-Rail Village” 「水鶏の里」. Too, there are times when female characters seem to have been dominated only to reassert themselves, as when Princess Shikishi plots to free herself from Teika’s affections in “The Aphrodisiac.” The women of The Passage of Dreams are active participants in their own ecstasy, and use it to empower themselves and achieve their own ends—they have access to the tools and strategies necessary to do so. On a textual level, then, The Passage of Dreams encapsulates the triple meaning of jouissance.

Still, Kurahashi herself felt strongly that women could never aspire to having the power that men possessed in the “real” world—that they could never find jouissance. In her essay “My ‘Third Sex’” 「私の『第三の性』」 she makes this point abundantly clear:

This world has the sign of sex. Just as we forget that the numbers we deal with in our daily life have a positive sign, so we forget the sexual sign, the male sign, which exists in this world. Women are shut in the world of the negative sign, or the antiworld in the world, so to speak. In short, this world belongs to men.  

And yet, the worlds she constructed reinforce Cixous’ own contention about writing: “[It is a place] which is not economically or politically indebted to vileness and compromise…that is not obliged to reproduce the system.” Whatever the compromises she made in her life, whatever her sense of powerlessness, Kurahashi never “reproduced the system” in her works; rather, she used the antiworld construct to challenge

72 Sakaki, “(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko,” 159.
73 Cixous and Clément, ix.
assumptions about the presupposed nature of the reality she lived in and created a heroine who delights in her own sexual pleasure and dominance without qualms. Her works and personal experiences bring her to the fore as a fearless writer who can take charge of her own destiny, in turn creating female characters who take charge of theirs. Unbeknownst to her, Kurahashi walked a path to a future of greater equality hand in hand with her protagonists. She may not have experienced that equality in her lifetime, but there is no reason that her later writing, with its unique and positive portrayal of female eroticism, should not now find a place among the celebrated works of Japanese women writers.
CHAPTER 8

DECIPHERING A DREAMSCAPE: TRANSLATION METHODOLOGY

*The Passage of Dreams* presents the translator with a unique task through its extensive use of intertextuality. Nearly every story draws upon Japanese literary and historical figures as inspiration, and the few that do not make use of Western ones. In these instances in particular, I have taken an approach that focuses on the purpose of the text and the needs of its target audience over a concern for a more literal translation. In his highly influential *Skopos* theory, Hans Vermeer introduced the tenets of a new, purpose-based way of understanding translation. Vermeer explains the *Skopos* theory as follows:

> Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose… Translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people you want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function.

According to Vermeer, one should “translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting the target text.” As an independent text producer, I alone dictated the unifying purpose of my own translation. This, I decided, was to produce a text which was as entertaining and thought provoking as the original and that maintained the author’s language, intent, and style as much as possible. However, when it came to intertextuality I often deviated from the source text, and this too was one of my guiding principles as translator. I wanted an English language reader to be able to understand the numerous references to other works with minimal outside reading or research. Naturally, knowledge of the classical canon may enhance their appreciation of

---

75 Ibid., 45.
76 Ibid.
the characters and themes, but I did not want a lack of such information to hinder their comprehension and enjoyment. I imagine my target audience as individuals with a definite interest in Japanese literature and culture, but whose primary intent in reading or buying the book is to enjoy stories about Kurahashi’s fantastic “Other World” and Keiko’s strange adventures there. As Vermeer stipulated, I have determined a purpose for the text based on concrete parameters: the situation it would be read in, the people who would read it, and how they would want it to function. In the following section, I will introduce some of the choices I have made to accommodate the needs of an English language reader who may not be familiar with Kurahashi’s references to classical Japanese works.

In the story entitled “The Aphrodisiac,” Kurahashi introduces Fujiwara no Teika and Princess Shikishi, two characters that are real historical figures who have also been the subject of other fictional works. It seemed from the way the source text was written that the audience was expected to already have some degree of familiarity with them. For example, when Keiko travels to the “Other World,” she meets a mysterious woman who is shortly revealed to be Princess Shikishi. Keiko listens to her remarks about Fujiwara no Teika (here referred to as Kyōgoku Chūnagon), and then asks:

□ところで、先程の京極中納言のお話からしますと、あなた様は式子内親王様かとお見受けしますけれど

“Well, because of what you were saying about Kyōgoku Chūnagon just now, I suppose you must be his fabled lover Princess Shikishi?”

Without the added phrase “his fabled lover,” the reader of the English text understands that it follows from the Princess’s statements about Kyōgoku Chūnagon that she is indeed

---

77 Kurahashi, Yume no kayoiji, 37.
the Princess, but they have no indication of how Keiko is able to deduce this fact. Keiko has background knowledge that the reader is also expected to have about the relationship between Fujiwara no Teika and Princess Shikishi, namely, that they were thought to be lovers. While Keiko, a Japanese woman extremely well-versed in the classics, is familiar with the Noh play *Teika* and the ill-fated romance between the Princess and Fujiwara no Teika depicted therein, I felt that an English reader might very well lack this information. In accordance with the purpose and readership I have envisioned for myself, I inserted the descriptive phrase to clarify what a reader of the Japanese text is assumed to know already.

A similar situation arises in the story “The Moon Woman,” in which Keiko encounters a mysterious celestial maiden. Through their conversation Keiko learns that she is Jōga, a figure from Chinese myth who ascended to the moon after drinking an elixir of immortality. Keiko is curious if she also played a role in a Japanese legend called *The Feather Mantle* and asks:

「羽衣の話にある天女も嫦娥さんだったんですね」
「そうです。そんなこともありましたね」と嫦娥は嬉しそうに言った。「あの白竜というのは美男子でした」

“Were you the celestial maiden in *The Feather Mantle* story too?”

“Yes. There was that as well,” Jōga said, looking happy. “Hakuryō, the fisherman who discovered my mantle, was charming and handsome.”

In the Japanese myth and Noh play *Hagoromo* or *The Feather Mantle*, a fisherman named Hakuryō finds the mantle of a celestial maiden and agrees to return it if she performs a dance for him. However, none of this information is conveyed in the source text; Hakuryō is mentioned without any kind of identifier and the reader understands only

78 Ibid., 90.
that he was “charming and handsome.” As was the case with the nature of Fujiwara no
Teika and Princess Shikishi’s relationship, a sort of “knowledge imbalance” exists
between the Japanese and English target audiences that needs to be rectified in some way.
It is my belief that the average reader of the English text will not be equipped with
Keiko’s extensive knowledge of Japanese legend and theater, and that the underlined
explanatory phrase will make the text more meaningful to them, thereby bringing them to
the level of a Japanese reader of the original. Although the words may not follow
Kurahashi’s exactly, this insertion aligns with the purpose I have determined as translator.
I believe that with this adjustment, the text will function for my target audience as
Kurahashi intended.

As mentioned above, I have striven to concisely explain intertextual references
when necessary, and this extends to the case of the great Japanese work The Tale of Genji.
Though this classic is widely known among the Japanese and scholars of Japanese
literature, I did not want to assume my readers’ familiarity with it as Kurahashi does.
There are several cases in which the reader is expected to know the nature of specific
characters and events from The Tale of Genji, and I have tried my best to elucidate the
significance of these references while preserving the author’s style and intent. In one
example from the story “Hell in Autumn,” Keiko compares two young Noh actors to
characters from the later chapters of Genji:

こちらを匂宮とすれば、真面目で端正な顔立ちの弟は薫中将という
ところだった。桂子さんがそういう見立てをすることになったのも、
よく一緒に能楽堂に行く花田夫人たちが、この兄弟が一人の女性を
めぐって対立しているという噂を聞きこんできたからだった

If he were Prince Niou from The Tale of Genji, his serious and handsome
younger brother would be the Prince’s rival Kaoru. Mrs. Hanada, who
often went together with Keiko to the Noh theater, had got wind of a
rumor that the brothers were competing for a single woman, which was another reason Keiko had drawn the comparison.\textsuperscript{79}

In the source text, Prince Niou and Kaoru are identified only by their names and there is no mention of \textit{The Tale of Genji}. I thought it prudent to cite the work they originate from as a way to provide context for a reader who would otherwise have no reference point for who they were and what the reference signified. And, too, I thought it important to clarify their relationship as “rivals”. With that information in hand, the reader understands that Keiko draws the comparison not just because of their appearance, but also because Prince Niou and Kaoru competed for the affections of women in \textit{The Tale of Genji} just as the modern-day brothers do. In this way, my audience—the audience I have imagined—can enjoy the text as I think they would want to, without needing supplementary reading to grasp the full significance of Keiko’s allusions.

Characters from \textit{The Tale of Genji} are used much more extensively in the story “Maple Viewing” 「紅葉狩り」. In this section, Keiko and a group of women from history and legend go out to enjoy the autumn foliage to celebrate Keiko’s thirty-fifth birthday. On their excursion, they encounter Genji himself. Noticing that his eyes emit a mysterious light which transmits an electric shock to any who meet his gaze, Keiko wonders:

柏木を殺すほどの威力を備えた源氏とは本当にこういう男だったのだろうか。

Was Genji, who was possessed of such influence that his rival Kashiwagi fell ill and died when subjected to his ire, really this kind of man?\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 173.
In the source text, Kashiwagi is mentioned without further comment or identification, and a reader of *The Passage of Dreams* unfamiliar with *The Tale of Genji* will find it difficult to understand this reference. While it is clearly unnecessary to go into detail about how Kashiwagi forced himself on Genji’s wife, I have again added the descriptor “his rival” to concisely convey the way the two competed for her attentions. Additionally, the Japanese text indicates only that Genji possessed influence which resulted in the death of Kashiwagi, a statement I thought could easily be misconstrued by someone who had never read the intertextual source. A reader of *The Tale of Genji* knows that Genji is no killer in the most obvious sense; rather, Kashiwagi dies of illness after Genji publicly humiliates him, having himself learned of Kashiwagi’s affair with his wife. To that end, I tried to briefly convey what transpired in *Genji* to the English reader lest they misunderstand the nature of his power. It is my belief that this kind of clarification does not harm the integrity of the translation; it is concise, unobtrusive, and, in cases like this one, may actually prevent confusion. Most importantly, as my translation is purpose-driven, it works within the parameters I have chosen regarding my target audience and what they would want as readers.

Translation scholar Peter Newmark draws a distinction between what he calls communicative and semantic translation that is relevant to my own translation goals. He writes:

> Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original.

---

In translating *The Passage of Dreams*, I have taken an approach that mixes these two. When dealing with intertextual references that I believe my readership will be unfamiliar with, I have used a communicative strategy and tried to generate an effect “as close as possible to that obtained on readers of the original.” However, for the most part I have adhered strictly to the source text’s language and meaning with a more “semantic” strategy, the option which Newmark identifies as appropriate for “serious literature.” I have translated *The Passage of Dreams* purposefully and imagined the work’s potential audience and what they would want: a text that contains all of the rich language of Kurahashi’s original, but one that does not have any “prerequisite” reading attached. To that end, I have included concise explanatory phrases of classical references at times when their absence would cause confusion to a reader unfamiliar with the source. This, I think, is a way to increase the English language reader’s comprehension and enjoyment without interfering with the style or intent of the source text. I firmly believe that Kurahashi’s average Japanese reader—that is, her target audience—has a different set of needs than an English reader, and I have tried to act accordingly.

---

82 Ibid., 45.
PART II: THE PASSAGE OF DREAMS
CHAPTER 1
BENEATH THE BLOSSOMS

Around the time when night was falling and her dog, husband and children had fallen asleep, Keiko touched up her makeup and prepared to meet someone. She hadn't mentioned it to anyone, but it wasn't anything that had to be kept particularly secret. Since it wasn't necessary to discuss it she had simply stayed silent. Generally, it was difficult for others to understand that there was another world out there and that she was keeping company with its inhabitants.

Keiko looked at her face in the mirror. Because it was her evening makeup, her face emitted a mysterious phosphorescence. When she had confirmed that her face was disguised as though from the “Other World,” she sensed the arrival of someone outside and stood up and slipped out of the house. She literally passed through walls and doors at will.

When she entered the garden, Mr. Satō stood up from where he lay bathed in moonlight. After Keiko greeted him with the conventional “Sorry to keep you waiting,” she noticed that he was walking without casting a shadow as he nodded his reply. Of course, Keiko thought. Her shadow too was gone. She stroked her dog Odradek's head in passing, but he slept deeply and gave no indication of waking. When leaving for the “Other World,” she used this method to confirm that her body did not remain in this one.

They were going to view cherry blossoms that night because of a promise made a long time ago. There was a cherry tree in full bloom in Keiko's garden. Because it was a Yoshino cherry tree, when you looked up the night sky was filled with flowers like clouds giving off a ghostly white atmosphere.
“People could be driven mad by cherry blossoms like this,” Mr. Satō said. Keiko agreed. It seemed that if one passed the night of the full moon beneath the flowers, the combined effect of the moonlight and the flowers’ energy would certainly drive one insane.

“I think people probably looked at mountain cherries in the old days,” Keiko said while imagining the cherry blossoms from the Sagano Hermitage in the Noh play Saigyō and the Cherry Tree. It seemed her thoughts were immediately transmitted to Mr. Satō, and he smiled and said, “We could go there if you like.” When he took Keiko by the hand, Mr. Satō simply crossed time and space as one would a road. The two were in the garden at the Sagano Hermitage.

While Keiko was talking, she recalled once more that the poet Saigyō was originally named Norikiyo Satō. That being said, she didn't think the names Saigyō or Norikiyo Satō suited her Mr. Satō particularly well. Occasionally Keiko would meet Mr. Satō in town when he was visiting the area, and he was a tall, lean individual who wore fine tweed jackets. He seemed to be a gentleman with no discernable job or occupation. Even though he was clearly older than Keiko, his age remained mysterious. Truthfully, he seemed to have lived a very long life, and yet she could see no signs of aging in his appearance. In particular his lovely hands transcended both age and gender, and they had an air of elegance that would have been impossible to achieve without idling away hundreds of years with the flowers, the moon, and the clouds as companions.

“How do you like these flowers?” Mr. Satō said, still grasping Keiko's hand.
“They seem to be the mountain cherry blossoms that the poet Saigyō was fond
of,” Keiko said as she placed her other hand atop Mr. Satō’s, wrapping it up. She felt
awkward invoking Saigyō’s name.

“He probably preferred cherry trees like these where the flowers and leaves are
mingled together, don’t you think?”

Just like that, a branch covered in countless delicate flowers and leaves unfurled
from the old cherry tree, and there stood a figure that was both strangely gentle and
magnificent, crowned with flowers like a beautifully shining haze. It seemed to be
superimposed on the figure of Mr. Satō, no—on that of the great poet Saigyō.

“At the hermitage
a single cherry tree
and me alone
I had thought that there would be
no viewers but myself
and the blossoms—
that no more would join us here.”

Mr. Satō murmured the verse from *Saigyō and the Cherry Tree*. “If I found myself
beneath the evening blossoms with a beautiful woman, first I’d…”

“There's saké here if you'd like.”

Keiko filled the pale pink cup in Mr. Satō’s hand with the drink. Mr. Satō stared
into her eyes while he drained cup after cup. His eyes were not those of an ordinary
person. Under their gaze, her body became liquid; it seemed like she had drunk some
kind of saké and was being assailed by a mix of dread and sweet intoxication.

“Tonight your face looks flushed, like a flower in bloom. Why did you coldly
refuse me when I tried to rent lodging one rainy night some time ago?”

“I suppose it was because I mistook you for some prostitute.”
“Yes, I said that was truly bizarre.”

“It seems even after becoming a monk Saigyō’s lechery remained undiminished. That’s why it says in the war chronicle Genpei jōsuiki that love was the true motive behind his renunciation of the world.”

“That’s not it. The truth is quite simple. I think it was just that I stopped working for the court and lived life as I wanted to. In any case, extremely turbulent times followed. I’m not boasting, but I’m able to see a little bit of the future.”

“Would you say it was unfortunate that you were secluded from the world?”

“‘Unfortunate’ is a difficult word. Well, let’s just say that I liked material things. Fortunately, I had plenty of material assets, so I was able to live idly with nature and beautiful women as my companions.”

“I'm envious.”

“It seems that there were more than a few people who felt as you do at the time. For example, there was even a woman who imitated me and walked east and west across the country.”

“You mean the one who wrote The Confessions of Lady Nijō?”

“Yes. She was the daughter of Masutada Koga, and she too was quite beautiful.”

“Did you ever meet her?”

“Of course. But it happened after she died and came here. I can introduce you this time.”

Keiko drunkenly gazed at the setting moon with eyes intoxicated from the blossoms and saké.

“I feel like going to sleep beneath these blossoms.”
“I was also just considering that,” Mr. Satō said.

“I wonder what would happen if we sleep. It seems that we would die as our souls were absorbed by the blossoms in full bloom.”

“Shall we try?”

At that moment, Mr. Satō clearly became Saigyō dressed in priestly attire. Keiko sensed this, and in a corner of her mind she was thinking that if she were to die beneath the blossoms, it ought to occur as it had in Saigyō’s poem:

```
    My wish:
to die in spring
beneath the blossoms
around the full moon
of the second month

...It happened just as you wrote in this poem, didn’t it? How did you manage it…? It seems like you just stopped breathing.”
```

“Yes, it was simple. Like you said before, I just slept beneath the cherry trees.”

As Keiko listened to that voice, Saigyō embraced her. His chest didn’t feel like that of a human. “Who are you? The spirit of the cherry tree?” Keiko tried to get the words out, but no sound emerged. She could hear the other being’s voice from inside her body. There was no distinction between her and the other anymore; they had melted together. It was an enchanted tree, and Keiko felt as though she was being absorbed by it. Its black trunk had imprisoned her. Whether what it was absorbing was her body or her soul, or both, she still didn’t know. Keiko was merging into the sap inside the cherry tree. Or perhaps she was becoming the sap itself—was that saying the same thing? She felt herself becoming a vibrant green liquid.
She then heard a sweet noise: it sounded like the voices of countless souls talking together. When she tried asking if it was Mr. Satō, the voices replied in the affirmative.

“Here the souls absorbed by the cherry tree gather, here we talk idly and exchange pledges of love...”

“Like us,” Keiko said in a quiet, rapturous voice. This long-lasting intoxication, this intercourse, suited her with its plant-like qualities where everything had become a green liquid, and it had almost no relation to the usual animal frenzy of making love with one's body. Time flowed slowly as the intoxication heightened, and the cherry tree ceaselessly scattered its blossoms like a body made to tremble in quiet delight.

She had no sure recollection of whether Mr. Satō had accompanied her, or whether they had been separated somewhere along the way. She had slept well in her own room, and when she was awakened by the sounds of her dog and children, the light of spring flooded the area outside her window. The garden looked like an overturned jewelry box.

“Mother, the cherry tree is splitting.”

When Keiko went out to the garden to look, the area around the old cherry tree had become a thick cushion made of a surprising amount of fallen flower petals. In spite of herself, a classical Chinese verse about the storm that proceeds the fall of blossoms surfaced in her mind.

“It looks like its blood is streaming out,” said her daughter.

“It's green blood.”

From the cruelly rent trunk of the old tree, green sap poured out just like blood. It frothed tiny bubbles and dyed the petals before being absorbed into the black earth.
Keiko thought about whether it might be the result of last night's pleasure and whether the truth was that this might be the Sagano poet Saigyō's cherry tree.

“It’s scary!”

To that, Keiko said only “Last night's rain and wind were very violent,” and pressed her hands together in prayer for the dead cherry tree.

Odradek, who arrived unnoticed, eagerly licked the flowing sap while wagging his tail. When the child scolded, “Stop!” the dog turned around as if surprised and then turned once again and scratched around its neck with its hind legs while letting out a long yawn. On this Sunday morning, it was difficult to discuss what had happened during the night in detail. Keiko imitated the dog and let out an enormous yawn.
CHAPTER 2

THE BLOSSOM ROOM

The first time the girl appeared, Keiko had the feeling she had been greeted by
one of her daughter's classmates, and for a moment she didn't understand that she was
already stepping into the “Other World.” In any case, the girl was sitting on a bench on
the sunny main street beneath a cherry tree that had shed its blossoms and was now
covered in young red-tinged leaves. She was licking a soft serve ice cream cone that was
a bit early for the late spring season.

“I'm Nijō. I think you’ve heard of me from Mr. Satō,” the girl replied by way of
explanation before Keiko asked who she was. Then Keiko finally realized that what
happened beneath the cherry trees the other night was going to continue now, downtown
and in broad daylight.

“Oh, you're the Nijō from The Confessions of Lady Nijō.”

When Keiko called attention to this, the girl showed her the front cover of a book
she had been carrying and laughed. It was an annotated version of The Confessions of
Lady Nijō. Her behavior, personal appearance, and hairstyle all made her look like a
female student who was studying The Confessions of Lady Nijō for her graduate thesis.
But Keiko had no doubt that this girl had come from the “Other World.” Although she
could have been a beautiful girl oppressed by life in the chaotic city, the strange
transparent look of her face when viewed in the sunlight filtering through the trees
indicated that she was not someone from this world. It seemed that perhaps her flesh was
melting away due to profound sorrow. On the surface she was every bit the cheerful
young lady, but the proposal she brought to Keiko was ridiculous for a girl of her age.
“The truth is, I need your assistance with something,” Nijō's eyes were bright as she looked up at Keiko. “I want to get even with Papa. Using kayuzue as a pretense, he had members of the Imperial Court strike the court women—myself included—for fun. This time we're going to capture Papa and give him a thorough beating.”

“What's kayuzue?”

“Oh, it's the practice of taking wood from the embers of a fire used to cook azuki bean porridge and striking a woman's backside with it to encourage the birth of a son. But wouldn’t it be stupid if only boys were born?”

“That may be true, but are you referring to Emperor Go-Fukakusa when you say ‘Papa?’ I wonder if exacting revenge on someone like him is a good idea.”

“It's fine. Papa has a bit of a masochistic side, you see,” the girl declared, blushing.

“Then, are you going out to beat him in the middle of the day?”

“Anytime would be fine, but I’ll call for you at night.”

Keiko wasn’t sure she understood Nijō’s plot. She returned home and tried rereading the passage in The Confessions of Lady Nijō. After Nijō and Higashi no Onkata conspired and “struck” the Emperor “to their heart's content,” it seemed the Emperor was on the verge of taking serious offense. Thinking that involving herself in something like this would result in trouble one way or another, Keiko was somewhat reluctant to join in. Nonetheless, her curiosity about the aristocrats’ amusements and pranks moved her to help.

The Emperor was fourteen years older than Nijō, and it was her mother Dainagon no Suke who introduced him to the “matters of the bedchamber” when he was a young
man. After that, he considered Nijō to be “his own property”—beginning from when she was in her mother’s womb. He waited through her birth and development, and finally when she reached the age of fourteen he truly made her his own. This part was reminiscent of the circumstances of the first coupling of Genji and Murasaki in *The Tale of Genji*. At fourteen years old, Nijō gave birth to the Emperor’s child. Keiko could understand why she called an older lover who was also a father figure ‘Papa.’

That night, Keiko sensed someone knocking on the window from the rainy garden. When she went outside, Nijō was standing dressed like a court woman from a picture scroll in another world where it was no longer dark or raining.

“It’s just lead His Majesty here,” Nijō said. Now, the Emperor wasn’t “Papa.” She was calling him “His Majesty.”

Keiko could see a gazebo-style building near the garden. *Nothing like that should be there*, Keiko thought, her mind in a slight state of confusion. When Nijō took her by the hand and led her inside there was a corridor continuing on ahead. Before she knew it, she had been brought into a dim room. The air was perfumed with incense. It seemed like the mysterious peaceful light that filled the room was being emitted from a gilt leaf folding screen enclosing an offering stand.

“When His Majesty enters, please bind his arms behind his back.”

“I don’t have that kind of superhuman strength.”

“It’s all right. Papa is small and weak like a child.”

Nijō returned to a modern style of expression. Just as Keiko was wondering about her statement, a figure wrapped in flower-like attire suddenly came into view, and Keiko leaped upon it as if in a trance and clung to its front side. Strangely, it offered no
resistance. It was like squeezing a bundle of clothes inflated with air over and over again. Soon she realized that she herself was being wrapped in similar clothes, unable to move freely.

Nevertheless, Keiko put her strength into the task as she thought about how small men from this period seemed, and Nijō went around to the Emperor's back and folded his clothes aside, seeming to take a flexible tree branch and strike his backside. There was a high-pitched noise together with a scream. It was unbelievable that such a softly-voiced scream came from a man past thirty years in age.

“My child, it hurts, please don't strike me with all of your strength,” the Emperor let out a cry. He begged for forgiveness saying no one would be allowed to strike the court women anymore. But Nijō continued hitting him mercilessly. When Keiko started to suggest Nijō offer him forgiveness, she was pushed and fell backward.

In front of her eyes, a doll-like oval face drew near. It was made all the more eerie by the fact that it was not masculine or rough. Besides, it was as small as a Noh mask. For some reason, Keiko couldn't move. She and the Emperor were being restrained: they were both wrapped in something like a large flower petal. The area was filled with dim golden light and the scent of flowers, and she understood that she had arrived somewhere not of this world.

“Ms. Nijō? What on earth is going on?” Keiko started to say, but her voice wouldn't work anymore.

Keiko was being embraced by someone who seemed to be Emperor Go-Fukakusa. It felt more like becoming an insect imprisoned in a room of blossoms. If Keiko was a
brightly colored butterfly, the Emperor was like a sharply tapered stamen that invited her in, and this made Keiko feel as though he were a real man.

“When I caught sight of you, I thought you were a cherry blossom—to use a flower for comparison. The way you concealed your face with your sleeve was like cherry blossoms in the mist. My child teased me, knowing that I wanted you, and so I had her summon you here.” While these words were being whispered, Keiko felt her body becoming numb as if she were in the middle of a cloud or a dense mist.

“You say that now, but I know that later you and Nijō will lie and bed and talk about how the cherry blossoms’ color is beautiful, but the trees’ branches are fragile and break off easily.”

“Please don’t pay Nijō any mind. She is jealous of us, but she must see the whole story through as punishment for striking my backside just now...”

While this voice teased at her ears, Keiko herself was becoming an enormous flower and the Emperor was becoming smaller and smaller, shrinking to the size of a dwarf. She felt him slipping into the center of the dense flower. Now, like being injected with a sweet venom, her consciousness also became numb and ripples of intoxication ran through her. It seemed like her body, transformed into a flower, was immodestly open in every direction.

“How will I awaken from this dream of an unexpected night—a night that could only have occurred in another world...?” Keiko heard the Emperor’s voice dark with tears and far away. Meanwhile she was slipping out of the flower room, no, it felt more like she herself evaporated and diffused into nothing with the flower’s scent.
When she awoke, it was a rainy morning. Although the core of her mind was still numb, there seemed to be no mistaking that she had returned to this world. And yet, she was surprised by the sound of a light knocking on the window. When she looked, a girl's face peered out, tinted blue from an umbrella the color of hydrangeas.

“I'm sorry about last night,” Nijō said, sounding slightly depressed. “Papa asked me to bring a message for the morning after but I don't have the letter.”

*She must have thrown it away on the way here,* Keiko thought worriedly. Although Keiko was the one who needed comforting, she reconsidered upon seeing Nijō’s apologetic demeanor.

“Oh, don't worry about that. Besides, it looks like I need to thank you,” Keiko said.

“No, hardly,” the girl smiled in a lonely way. “Papa is a strange man. He makes love to other women that way in front of me, and he likes to have me make love to other men—driving me away from him. In spite of being small and frail, I've thought he might be a kind of evil spirit.”

Then the girl returned to silly stories. At some point Keiko remembered hearing the words “I want to be like Mr. Satō—like the poet Saigyō.” This feeling began when Nijō was nine years old, and now she said the desire was just becoming more intense. Come to think of it, Nijō from *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* was more than thirty years old when she became a Buddhist nun, and she traveled as far east as Kamakura and as far west as Ashizuri, a journey unthinkable for a woman in those times.

Two months later, Keiko was traveling to Europe. Around the time when the airplane leveled out, Keiko noticed a woman past her thirties seated to her left. It was a
face she had seen somewhere before. Her black clothes were vaguely reminiscent of a nun’s dark robe. Just then, Keiko realized that it was Nijō. It seemed like she raised her hand and smiled faintly. After Keiko returned the gesture, she closed her eyes. Lost in thought about Nijō’s reasons for traveling overseas, Keiko drifted off to sleep.
CHAPTER 3

THE CASTLE IN THE SEA

Keiko was flying on an early summer breeze that blew across the sky above the English Channel. She had concluded her business in Milan and Paris, and this trip to meet with an eccentric English writer who lived in the port city of Penzance on the tip of the Cornwall Peninsula was the last of her travel plans.

The relatively small aircraft was descending to sea level before she knew it. When she looked down from her window she caught sight of something that looked like a castle in the waters below, which shone brightly as they reflected the sunny sky. She could see spires and ramparts, and a forest beyond them. Thinking it impossible, Keiko wondered whether it might be a mirage that she was seeing from above. However, mirages are usually visible only on a horizontal plane, and she had never heard of a case where one was seen in the middle of the ocean from a vantage point in the sky. It occurred to her that this might be a sign that the “Other World” was wedging its way into her mind. And when she turned her thoughts to the dead that dwelt there, the names of King Mark of Cornwall and Tristan and Iseult suddenly surfaced in her mind. Keiko was about to cross over the very stage upon which the tale of “Tristan and Iseult” had unfolded.

Tristan was the nephew of King Mark of Cornwall, and he traveled across to Ireland seeking the golden-haired Lady Iseult who was to be King Mark's queen. While aboard the boat they were taking to return to Cornwall, Tristan and Iseult made a mistake: they drank a love potion. It was an aphrodisiac that Iseult's mother had designed to ensure the happy union of King Mark and his future bride. However, upon drinking it
Tristan and Iseult were linked together for eternity by the bonds of a powerful love. The two had also drunk of death. Iseult, who had fallen in love with Tristan, still accepted her position as King Mark’s queen. From that point forward, the story took a tragic turn and continued that way for the rest of their lives.

Keiko recalled the Bedier edition of the story of Tristan and Iseult she had read as a little girl. Then, it suddenly occurred to her that the golden-haired Lady Iseult may have shared the aphrodisiac with Tristan on purpose. Originally, Tristan did not say that Iseult was beautiful or appealing to him when she was tending to the wounds he had received from fighting a dragon. Moreover, he thought nothing of the fact that he was to deliver her to be the queen. In truth, he was a knight who displayed little emotion. For that reason Iseult, who found herself with unrequited love, gave Tristan the aphrodisiac thereby rendering him powerless to stop her from binding the two of them together until their deaths.

While Keiko thought about this, the castle in the sea went out of sight.

“Did you see something strange?” asked Ms. Sone, the secretary who was seated beside her.


That evening Keiko retired to her ocean view room at the Plymouth Hotel, planning to go to sleep early. She wondered whether the castle in the sea she had seen that day had rattled her nerves: she could not help but think that the port city’s stone buildings lined up between the dim light of the sky and the darkening blue of the ocean were a mirage.
Right then, there was a knock on her room's door. It could not be Ms. Sone coming without warning. The person outside the door identified herself in a woman's voice.

“It's Nijō.”

When Keiko hurried over to open the door, a woman wearing a gown like that of an elegant nun was standing there. Keiko recognized her as Nijō from The Confessions of Lady Nijō, who had once invited Keiko to join in the plot to strike Emperor Go-Fukakusa's backside. Nijō had been a young girl of fourteen at that time, and although that was not long ago she now appeared as a woman in her thirties. It seemed that time flowed differently in the “Other World”.

“I thought I saw you on the plane when I left Japan, but to see you again here is quite unexpected,” Keiko said.

“I caught sight of you in the lobby a while ago. I also happen to be going to the end of the peninsula.”

“To Penzance?”

Keiko started to ask what business she was on but stopped herself.

“From here, I'm going to those small islands by boat.”

“You must be talking about the Scilly archipelago. You really are going to the land's end.”

Beyond that point there is ocean and beyond the ocean there isn't really anything at all, Keiko thought. Did she plan to cross to Ireland? Come to think of it, Tristan also went to Ireland and found the golden-haired Lady Iseult.
After they had talked and drank locally brewed mead in Keiko's room for a little while, Nijō stood.

“Would you care to join me in my room? There's an interesting view from there. And, there's an unusual medicinal liquor I want to give you,” she said.

After hearing those words Keiko was led through the hotel's corridors, walking in a dreamy state of mind until they stood before an old door. When Nijō opened it, the interior of the room was filled to the brim with ocean water. Keiko was looking at a cross-section of the ocean. Although it was real water, it did not spill from the doorway.

“Was this what you were talking about?” Keiko said in awe. Nijō invited her to follow, and when Keiko tried entering the water she found that she could move as freely as if she had become a fish and that there was no feeling of being suffocated.

“It's said that in the olden days the Buddhist monk Genshin surprised the poet Jakushin during his visit to Eshin-in Temple by showing him a great expanse of water like this. The truth is, I'm trying to imitate that effect,” Nijō admitted.

“I've heard that somewhere before. According to the story the water seemed saturated with moonlight, as if the water's surface was connected to the heavens above. This water is the color of the northern oceans. Could there be any mermaids here?” Keiko wondered aloud.

“There's an old castle that sunk to the sea floor, and Tristan and Iseult should be there. The two of them might be becoming mermaids.”

Keiko walked through the swaying water. She had the feeling that her body was drifting by itself as it melted into the pale blue light. Eventually she could see a crumbling castle before her that looked as though it ought to appear in a spooky movie.
It was the same as the mirage she had seen during the day, and she could easily pass through its gates and ramparts as if they had no substance at all. When she peered into one of the towers she made out the forms of two large, limbed fish swimming upright and embracing. She called out to them without thinking.

The upper halves of their bodies were that of fish: covered in scales that were such a bright blue that they could have been a venomous species. Like tuna, they had a magnificent spindle shape. However, their faces still retained elements that reminded Keiko of something human. And their bottom halves... Nijō had said not long ago that “They might be becoming mermaids.” Keiko grasped the meaning of this strange utterance now. Tristan and Iseult were transforming, but they had not yet become fish completely. Their bottom halves were those of a caucasian man and woman, and they were clearly intertwined in a sexual act.

“Is this what has become of Tristan and Iseult?” Keiko asked, but when she turned around Nijō was nowhere in sight.

Feeling as if she were observing a rare animal in an aquarium, Keiko watched their endless fornication in the wavering blue light. The two fish embraced without arms as if clumsily rubbing their heads and chests together, but what was going on below their hips was graceful and elaborate enough to be human. They continued their obscene acts as if oblivious to the rest of the world. This went on without end. Rather than out of lust for sexual gratification, it seemed they were binding themselves together in this way so as to defy their progressive transformation into fish. When Keiko thought of it that way, it was a very sorrowful sight.
“Shall we head back?” The voice brought Keiko to her senses, and there was Nijō holding a bottle of what looked like wine and offering it to her. Completely indifferent to the fate of the two half-fish half-human creatures, Nijō turned her back and simply exited the water. Keiko hurried after her. They were once again in a hotel room.

“What did you find?” Keiko asked.

“It's a philter. A type of aphrodisiac,” Nijō said, giving an innocent smile. Before Keiko knew it, Nijō had returned to the form of a teenage girl.

“Is this the famous aphrodisiac? The one Tristan and Iseult drunk by mistake?”

“Was it a mistake? Iseult gave it to Tristan on purpose, and I've tried it,” Nijō said, echoing Keiko's thoughts from before. She poured an extremely small amount of the purplish red liquid into a glass.

*What will happen if I drink this?* Keiko was a little worried, but she gave it a taste because she had never placed much faith in aphrodisiacs and magic spells. The drink was both sweet and quite strong. Tristan and Iseult's aphrodisiac must have been made from a variety of medicinal plants, but this had no odor of herbs and its sweet taste and aroma were pleasing to the senses.

Then, a subtle change occurred. It was not the kind of change where she felt passion and the desire to seek someone out. It was also not a so-called aphrodisiac effect. Rather, her body became empty and she felt a compulsion to embrace another human being who shared that same emptiness. She had the sensation that death was spreading through her and eroding her insides. There was no mistaking that this was a dangerous drink.

Nijō gave half of the bottle's remaining contents to Keiko in a separate bottle.
“When you make someone drink this, it’s terrifyingly effective.”

Make who? Keiko thought immediately, but she decided to take the bottle home as a secret souvenir without learning the answer. She felt a throbbing sensation as if she were a homicidal maniac who had just come into possession of a poison powerful enough to kill...
CHAPTER 4

THE APHRODISIAC

It was slightly after midday during the season that poets have called “summer noon,” where the atmosphere itself seemed to burn with a white heat. Keiko was walking around town for a few minutes while waiting to meet someone for lunch at a shop near her workplace. The truth was, she was planning to share the aphrodisiac that she had acquired when she had encountered Tristan and Iseult on her trip to Cornwall with this acquaintance. Even though it was an aphrodisiac, it looked no different from a deep ruby-colored Medoc wine. It was in a small bottle containing enough for two glasses, and Keiko was giving it to her acquaintance so that he could share it with another man or woman. She intended to listen carefully to his detailed account of the circumstances.

In contrast with the fields and dry river beds in the countryside, the city at the height of summertime was a blazing hell from which a maddening multitude of buildings and cars spewed forth like a haze of heat. Suffering from the heat and feeling as though she were losing her sanity, Keiko regretted not taking a car despite the short distance. When she wondered whether the line of cars coming up the steep hill would stop for a moment, out of nowhere a dark black mass began to gradually rise up the slope. It was a group of trucks larger than any she had ever seen. They seemed to be breathing hard like beasts and drew closer shrouded in a flickering heat, exhaling hot air. Keiko felt dizzy under the heavy pressure, and knew that she was entering the “Other World” once again.

The approaching shapes were not trucks; they were black oxen. They were like the ox-drawn carriages depicted on picture scrolls from the Dynastic Period. When she realized this, she recalled a verse by the poet Fujiwara no Teika:
The tired oxen
raising dust with each footfall
plod slowly along;
even the faint breeze feels hot
blowing round the summer cart

The following verse also surfaced in her mind:

Rising in the south
as far as the eye can see
clouds linger, and yet
no shade; only blazing light
beneath this expanse of sky

However, the oxen had drawn up right in front of her. The mass of black flesh leaned forward without a sound. Keiko was drawn into it like asphalt melting in intense heat. She realized she was inside an ox.

Rather than having been swallowed and ending up in its stomach, she felt as though she were imprisoned in a cloud of flesh. The intense heat had dissipated, and there was a pleasant warmth. There was no noise from the outside world; she could hear only the ox’s heart and breathing. Keiko wondered if this was what it felt like to be in the womb. She was surrounded by walls of dark rose-colored flesh, but when she reached out her hand she could not touch it. This was a strange vehicle. Keiko lost track of time while she was transported to the “Other World”.

Abruptly, her field of vision grew brighter and she sensed that she was being released from the ox’s interior. Keiko stood somewhere that looked like the grounds of a temple. The arrangement of the trees and stones reminded her of the famous temple gardens near Kyoto. There was a pond and buildings that looked like gazebos, and she could hear crickets chirping from the grove of trees beyond. Here too, it appeared to still be summer. However, the sun was not shining down with such extreme heat: the area
was filled with a gentle pearl gray light and pleasant warmth. This seemed to be proof that she was in the “Other World.”

Keiko went halfway around the pond and went to rest in a gazebo. A previous visitor was there. It was a woman in her thirties, wearing no makeup whatsoever. For a moment Keiko thought she had met Nijō from *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* again, but when she took a better look, she realized it was not her. The woman's kimono resembled the costume of a village woman in a Noh performance. Her long hair was divided down the middle and left to hang from a bun in the back such that it concealed her ears. To stare too intently would be rude, so Keiko bowed and seated herself a short distance away to view the pond.

“Excuse me, where are you from?” the woman asked in a kind voice, still facing the pond. Her manner of speaking and voice were not that of a village woman. Keiko sensed that she was in the presence of someone born into nobility. And yet, it was not the kind of feeling that would make someone nervous. Instead, she felt a strange sense of nostalgia.

Keiko recounted the story of how she came across the mysterious oxen in the blazing heat of the town, and how they had brought her here as if in a dream. She also mentioned the poem by Fujiwara no Teika that she had been reminded of at the time.

“That's just like something Kyōgoku Chūnagon would do,” The woman smiled at Keiko when she saw her recognize the name.

“Kyōgoku Chūnagon, do you mean Fujiwara no Teika?” Keiko asked to make sure.

“Yes. It seems he has his eye on the goods you're carrying with you.”
Surprised, Keiko checked her bag for the small bottle.

“It's a philter, a medicinal liquor from Medieval Europe,” Keiko explained, avoiding the word aphrodisiac. “Perhaps you've heard of it from Nijō?”

“Yes, in our world we can transmit anything directly from our minds to the minds of others,” her companion said, then laughed mischievously and looked at Keiko. “In your world you call it telepathy, don't you?”

“I'm impressed you know that word... Well, because of what you were saying about Kyōgoku Chūnagon just now, I suppose you must be his fabled lover Princess Shikishi?”

“I've already forgotten such titles and status. However, Teika still struggles with a strange fate that follows him like a shadow.” Upon saying these words, the face of Princess Shikishi—the woman Keiko had been convinced was Princess Shikishi—darkened.

“I know that story from the Noh play Teika. So it really is true.”

According to the Noh play Teika, the poet Fujiwara no Teika was troubled by his love for Princess Shikishi, who was both older and higher in social status. After his death, his tenacious affection became a creeping vine that twined around the stone monument on the grave of the dead Princess such that they would not be separated.

When Keiko told this story, Princess Shikishi laughed. “The usual story of Teika and the vine? Is Teika's shameful behavior really perceived that way in your world?”

After that remark Princess Shikishi suddenly turned a serious eye on Keiko, facing her and staring.
“By the way, that secret Western medicine you have... Does it really have the effect of uniting lovers?”

“So it’s said. Unfortunately, I haven't had the chance to confirm this myself.”

“Will you share a little with me?”

Keiko was surprised by this turn of events. She had thought that Princess Shikishi intended to conspire with her to foil Teika's plan, namely, the plot to take the heart of the ever-resistant Princess captive with the aphrodisiac. This request was unexpected.

“Yes, I'll happily give some to you, but... are we going to drink it together?”

“During my life, I disliked people like Teika. Rather, I hated him and he knew this. There was no love lost in our relationship. However, when we met after death in this world things were different. If I drink that aphrodisiac, I will fall in love with Teika and the relations we have will not be against my will as they have been in the past. Perhaps I too will be able to experience pleasure. So please, may I have some?”

Keiko admired Princess Shikishi's candid manner of speaking. She called Teika by his first name, a choice that seemed to fill her speech with a sense of intimacy and tenderness.

When she accepted the small bottle of aphrodisiac from Keiko, Princess Shikishi blushed with embarrassment like a young girl.

“I'm going to try it right away, so just wait here for a little while...” she said, sounding pleased. Her lively voice trailed off as her form disappeared.

Eventually, Princess Shikishi returned wearing different clothes: a splendid kimono with short sleeves befitting a noblewoman. A slender-faced noble youth stood behind her. Keiko strained her eyes trying to see if it was Fujiwara no Teika, but the two
were enveloped in brilliant color and had begun to dance in such a way that she could not make out the details of their features. Moreover, the whole time Teika positioned himself in Princess Shikishi's shadow, and she moved just like a puppet under the control of someone else. At first, Keiko thought that this was the dance of gratitude performed in the second half of the Noh play Teika, but in truth that was not the case. She realized that the two forms' movement clearly had a sexual meaning. More than that, the dance was the motion of a sexual act. Teika manipulated Princess Shikishi's body like a puppet, leading her to ecstasy. He seized her body under her costume with the hand he was using to incite her, and his fingers became innumerable tentacles connected to the Princess's nerves. He played upon her senses as though he were playing a musical instrument. Keiko knew this from the ecstatic colors that floated in Princess Shikishi's eyes and the exquisite music that escaped her mouth. Their dream-bound embrace had unspeakable eroticism compared to that of two naked lovers, and although she was only watching Keiko felt herself melting too.

She barely managed to leave and enter the expansive forest beyond the gazebo. Surrounded by the chirping sounds of the crickets, Keiko arrived at a place that seemed to be the temple's cemetery. There was an old tomb there that seemed to be of some historical significance. Keiko was surprised to see that the stone monument was wrapped in bizarrely-shaped vines that she could scarcely believe were plants. Suddenly, the Teika vines wriggled and burst into flames as if they had been waiting to frighten her. The stone monument convulsed and melted, wrapped in flames.

Keiko was convinced it was the dramatic effect of the aphrodisiac.
When she returned to her senses after a moment of shock, Keiko stood in front of the restaurant where she was supposed to meet her acquaintance. She fumbled in her bag, but the small bottle of aphrodisiac she had intended to hand over was not there. Keiko wondered how she was going to explain this to her companion.
CHAPTER 5
THE MASK DREAM

That summer, Keiko met with Fujiwara no Teika several times. They had meals together and attended concerts. When Teika materialized in this world he appeared with long hair that was mostly white and a sharp nose, attired as if he had been cut from a men's fashion magazine. He looked like a music or art critic. He referred to Keiko by her first name as if they were old friends, so rather than address him as “Mr. Fujiwara” Keiko opted for the more familiar “Teika” instead.

“I'm surprised you like Beethoven,” Keiko said. They were eating together after listening to a performance of the second movement of Beethoven's last sonata at a young Polish player's piano recital.

“Did you think I preferred Debussy? That's not the case,” Teika said. “I prefer compositions with a firm structure to those where a mist of subtle sounds seems to drift about.”

Another time when they had watched a Noh performance, Teika had not liked it as much as Keiko did. He had said that the chanted words were uninteresting, and after going several times he said that he was bored by the monotony of the plots.

“How is it different from the rock music you hate so much? From my perspective as someone from an earlier period, Noh has too many of the same noisy elements as rock,” Teika had said.

“Is it because it's art from a later era?”

“It seems I'm the type who's only interested in the art of words.”
However, Keiko believed that Teika's antipathy towards later Noh plays was linked to the portrayal of his love for Princess Shikishi in the play *Teika*.

“I just can't stomach the fact that they say I was delusional,” Teika said indignantly. “It's the wild idea of a boor. Moreover, it's basically impossible.”

“I think so too. But how have your relations been since you two came to the “Other World?” Like that time you made that song together—didn't you enjoy that?”

“That's another question,” Teika said, becoming vague. “There's privacy in the “Other World” as well. I won't comment on that subject.”

Keiko thought that Teika was like an animal that lived in perpetual discomfort, as if he was always looking inward and cultivating a thorn there. His knowledge was extensive, and he was a witty and interesting conversationalist and a harsh critic of this world's new customs. He had opinions about the subtleties of relations between men and women both sexual and otherwise, and he didn't decline to engage in indecent talk. However, he carefully avoided talking about the thorn that seemed to prick him. Although Keiko wondered perplexedly if he desired her, she was hesitant to touch the thorn lest she were taking his feelings for granted. He also tried his best to avoid touching Keiko's body and seemed irritated when he did.

For that reason, Keiko and Teika often discussed a variety of types of “secret” and “lustful” love and debated sexual technique while chatting over long meals. However, one time Teika asked her about what kind of experience she would like to try at some point. Keiko answered that she wanted to have relations with an unbelievably handsome young man and feel true ecstasy. Teika listened and laughed, then suddenly became
serious. He told Keiko that if that was the case he could introduce her to a suitable companion.

“A young Genji from the classic novel *The Tale of Genji* would be fine,” Keiko said, intending it as a joke.

“No, Genji is not as handsome as the one I have in mind. I don't think you'd like him anyway. Just leave it to me,” Teika said, something in his appearance seeming expectant.

At the end of the summer, Keiko took her children to a holiday house in the high plains. She had already forgotten her conversation with Teika, but it seemed that the scrupulous man had taken great pains in order to realize her fantasy. One day a letter from Teika arrived. After an introduction that hinted at Keiko's idea, he inquired if this evening would be suitable. Keiko accepted the proposal and waited, and near midnight when her children were asleep and the moon was shining with its bewitching radiance, she saw what appeared to be a dim, limbed sphere of light approaching from the forest. It danced and leaped with a strange rhythm, weaving its way between the trees as if it were being accompanied by Golliwogg's Cakewalk by Debussy. Keiko thought that these were clearly the movements of a child. In the past, her children had frolicked and jumped about in the snow in much the same way.

When the sphere of light was clinging to her window, Keiko could clearly make out a human form. It definitely had the face of a boy. Of course, below his neck there was a body and legs as well. The boy moved his mouth, seeming to say “Good evening.” When Keiko smiled and opened the window he jumped in, landing lightly on the floor.

“Welcome. Are you Teika's envoy?”
“Yes. I'm Jidō,” he answered in the voice of a boy soprano.

“From the Noh plays *Jidō and the Chrysanthemum* and *Jidō and the Cushion*?”

“A long time ago, I served under King Mu of Zhou.”

“Are you an apparition from the Han Dynasty, like the one said to have lived for eight hundred years?”

Keiko was thinking of the line from the historical epic *Taiheki* which described a boy named Jidō who appeared youthful for eight hundred years, showing no signs of infirmity. If two thousand years had passed since the Han Dynasty, now he would be... Keiko stopped calculating and looked at the boy's face again.

His beauty transcended the idea of a lovely young boy. His face was almost free of idiosyncrasies and had no resemblance to those of any of the currently idolized singers. If anything, Keiko felt as though she was being watched through a Noh mask. It was similar to a mask used by a young male in the Noh play *Atsumori*, but lacked the sorrowful facial expression. It also had a captivating sense of emotion reminiscent of a woman's mask. Although he had received King Mu's favor, it seemed to Keiko that he had some traits that would appeal to men and others that would resonate with women.

Nevertheless, the beautiful boy's face appeared immaculately frozen as if a splendid Noh mask had taken form in flesh. Keiko had forgotten her exchange with Teika and the rather indecent joke she had made, so she asked Jidō about his personal history as if meeting a distant young relative on an unexpected visit. Although he had been exiled as a criminal for accidentally stepping on the Emperor's cushion, he recorded two verses of scripture that the Emperor had taught him on a chrysanthemum leaf. When water touched the leaf it suddenly became an elixir of perennial youth which Jidō then
drank, thereby preserving his beautiful youthful looks for two thousand eight hundred years. While he discussed this, an unhappy look spread across Jidō's face, and Keiko was touched by what seemed to be tears shining in his eyes. She wanted to make him one of her own children. The next moment, she was seized by the feeling that Jidō already was her child.

“I brought a gift for you,” Jidō said, offering Keiko a gourd-like vessel that contained what seemed to be a sample of the chrysanthemum miracle water. Keiko put the liquid in a glass and tried drinking some. It had no taste, and no scent. However, it was similar to what she imagined a cold sphere like the moon would be like if it were given liquid form.

“As an expression of my gratitude, I'd like to offer you this. You may have some if you'd like.”

After saying this, Keiko poured the few remaining drops of Tristan and Iseult's love potion into a wine glass. Jidō made a sweet face and drank it innocently.

“Let's go to sleep,” Keiko heard Jidō say.

“Together with Mommy,” Jidō added next. Keiko began to get flustered. However, even more surprising than what he had said was the way he seemed to have read her thoughts from before. He had addressed her as “Mommy.”

“Mommy, I would like to write the sacred verses I learned from the Emperor on your back before we go to sleep. I ask because if I do this, you will live without aging and be young forever, even without drinking the miracle water.”

When Keiko pulled back her shirt, Jidō began chanting the scripture while writing the words on her back with his finger. As Keiko endeavored to decipher what he was
writing from the movements of his fingers, she was quickly assailed by a pleasant
drowsiness. It felt like a very young child was playing a prank on her naked body.
However, this was not simply drowsiness. Although her mind was steeped in a dream,
here and there her body was fully awake and it began to quiver as though it were playing
a subtle and wondrous music. She realized that Jidō's hand, which should have been
writing the scripture, had instead transformed into innumerable hands that played her like
a musical instrument, extending the length of her body.

Keiko turned over in her sleep, trying to embrace whatever was lying behind her
from the front. At that moment, it suddenly occurred to her that everything that had
happened must have been Teika's evil plot: she suspected that Teika had put on Jidō's
mask and that he was the one lying here next to her. Keiko took her companion's head in
her hands and peeled off the beautiful boy's face that so closely resembled a Noh mask.
The face came off easily just like a mask, but there was no other face beneath it. Rather
than nothing at all, in place of a head there was a mass of darkness. It seemed like a dark
hole. Keiko regretted doing such a thoughtless thing, but the face was nowhere to be
found. After that, Keiko, still thinking of herself as the beautiful boy's mother, continued
her sexual relations with him. She had thought that a dream of incest with her own son
would be like this, but it seemed that the cynical Teika had garnished her wish for a
beautiful youth with yet another potent spice.
CHAPTER 6

THE ETERNAL TRAVELER

Keiko was thinking that it would soon be a year since Mr. Nishiwaki died when she received word from him. Because she was already accustomed to this sort of thing, she wasn’t particularly surprised. *He was always traveling, and it seems that going to the “Other World” is a continuation of his travels; I suppose that now he wants to see me during his trip*, Keiko concluded. He wrote that he wanted to walk beside a lighthouse, greet the late summer ocean, and eat exotic fruit together afterwards. Judging from the letter’s contents, it seemed that he planned on visiting the area near Keiko’s cottage on the coast. Or, he might already have arrived there and could be waiting for her. Keiko left immediately and drove by herself to her ocean view cottage.

The day of the autumn equinox was very sunny. It felt like she was in Mr. Nishiwaki’s uncharacteristically simple verse about being able to see a distant mountain clearly again after its having been obscured for a long time. Mr. Nishiwaki was a poet. His hair had turned entirely to silver, and it seemed that if an immortal Grecian god were to age they would look something like him. Even when he became a tall and venerable elderly man, he did not stop writing poetry that brought pleasure to the human mind. When someone read his poems, music would play in their head. From Keiko’s point of view, there was now and would never be another poet quite like Mr. Nishiwaki. Rather than making the complex nerve wirings in Keiko’s brain sing like a harp, other poets only appealed to her with shrill words, and this could be a little irritating.

The end of summer was approaching at the cottage, which had gone unused this year save for when her sister and her family visited in July. Inside, an unexpectedly fresh
sea breeze was blowing, and there were signs that her dear friend was there. *Just as I suspected, Mr. Nishiwaki is coming*, Keiko thought as she gazed through an open window at a currently deserted sand beach. At the arch-shaped border between the sand and the ocean, the racing white waves repeated their monotonous movements. Inside the room, there was a faint groan resembling the buzz of an insect: the refrigerator was running. Atop the table, there was a tropical fruit unlike any she had ever seen giving off a bittersweet perfume. *I wonder if this is the “exotic fruit,”* Keiko thought, and at that moment, the air behind her moved. When she turned around, Mr. Nishiwaki was standing there.

“I took a nap in that bed over there and woke up just now.”

Keiko was about to greet him with a standard expression of regret like “I’m sorry for your loss”, but she became flustered and gave her usual smile instead. By all appearances, Mr. Nishiwaki was not dead. He was, so to speak, an eternal traveler.

“I suppose this is the rare fruit you wrote about in your letter?”

“This is a fruit I brought from South America as a souvenir. Unfortunately, it already seems to have started to rot. Instead, let’s treat ourselves to a real exotic fruit. Care to join me for a walk?”

The ocean glittered like a blue jewel in the late summer afternoon. Once she had led Mr. Nishiwaki to the cape lighthouse along this path, but today he climbed up the hilly, rock-filled path first as though he were leading the way. *The lightness of his body seems to be characteristic of humans from the realm of the dead who have left the flesh of this world behind.* Keiko felt a sense of sadness that was like cold spring water spreading through her chest. However, Mr. Nishiwaki proceeded down the path which twisted
between the bushes with an extraordinarily lively step. And when he suddenly looked back, he stuck out his smooth, fire-red tongue and laughed as if teasing her. From a gap in the bushes, a field of purple eggplant was visible. Beyond that, there was a beach where pale mackerel were drying out. An afternoon where the ocean breeze was shining, a crooked lighthouse that seemed as though it might fall… Everything resembled the scenery in Mr. Nishiwaki’s poem.

“You traveler of fiery temper…” Keiko said suddenly, recalling a poem from Mr. Nishiwaki’s younger days.

“Your feces have flowed and dirtied the sea of Hibernia, the North Sea, Atlantis, and the Mediterranean. Return to your own village. Bless the cliffs of your birthplace. That bare earth is your dawn. An akebi fruit hangs like your soul all summer long.”

Mr. Nishiwaki looked back and laughed bleakly.

“It sounds like someone’s poorly written verse.”

“Come to think of it, long ago many akebi-fruits hung in the thicket atop that hill.”

“Ah yes, the fruit of the soul,” Mr. Nishiwaki said, seemingly full of longing.

“Let’s go and eat them.”

Saying this, he took Keiko by both hands. For some reason she felt pleasant, as if she was back in kindergarten and “playtime” was beginning. Mr. Nishiwaki led Keiko out onto the ocean’s surface. Judging from the rocks, olive trees, and the color of the sky it seemed that this was ancient Greece, as though they had stepped over the ocean and travelled to the “Other World” with a single stride. But the landscape transformed again, and they arrived in a place that looked like a tropical botanical garden.

*“The Traveler” from Nishiwaki Junzaburō’s Ambarvalia*
A multitude of rare plants dangled down from overhead. The strange and comical shapes of a variety of fruits that looked like akebi, tamarillo, kiwi, and mango hung there.

“It’s lovely, how they all seem to be playing like children up there.”

“They are the fruits of the soul,” Mr. Nishiwaki said, casually plucking one off. He divided it into two halves and gave one to Keiko.

The center of the cream-colored fruit flesh was a bright pink, and around it a crimson color spread outward in the shape of flower petals. A golden border encircled its outer edge.

“It looks like a cross-section of the sun. Is this the soul of a human?”

“Judging from its taste, I’m guessing it’s the soul of someone from Crete.”

“It does have an exquisite flavor, doesn’t it?

“It’s the flavor of eternity. There are pig souls and crocodile souls too. As you can see, there is an abundance of different kinds, and each one has a distinct flavor, color, and shape. My own soul hung here like this one summer. But it was eaten by a bird long ago,” Mr. Nishiwaki laughed like a young boy.

“But what happens when you eat a soul?”

“Nothing happens. First of all, no matter how many you eat you never become full. They may not extend your life, but you won’t die from being poisoned by an evil spirit either. The juice created when you squeeze them is nectar, the stuff which that lot from Mount Olympus drank so frequently.”

Feeling as though she had become a nymph, Keiko found herself bathing naked in a spring. Mr. Nishiwaki, perhaps fancying himself a centaur, began chasing the nymph-like Keiko. The spring was surprisingly large, and as Keiko fled and hid the water
expanded endlessly: it seemed like it was connected to the ocean. While she was swimming underwater, Keiko saw several shapes like cities that had sunken to the ocean floor. When she came to, she was standing on a familiar beach. The clothes she had been wearing when she set out on the walk were not wet anywhere. But Mr. Nishiwaki was holding three of four of the soul fruits from earlier in his hands.

That evening, Keiko and Mr. Nishiwaki lit an old lamp in the room that faced the ocean and put the soul fruits in long-stemmed glasses. They poured in wine, and while they drank the substance they spoke of the people of the “Other World”. Mr. Nishiwaki talked about many things, from the myth of Andromeda, the female disciples of Epicurus, and the Daoist text *The Liezi*, to the story of an ancient Cladoselache shark that he saw in a dream. Keiko spoke about Mr. Satō’s double identity as the poet Saigyō and about what had happened with him and with Lady Nijō. Mr. Nishiwaki’s eyes often met hers, and when they did the two would smile and toast to their companions.

While they talked, Keiko’s back became itchy. She occasionally tried to rub it on the back of her chair, and Mr. Nishiwaki asked her about it.

“What’s the matter? Let me have a look.”

Keiko removed the clothes on her upper body and showed him her back.

“It looks like some kind of magic spell is written here,” Mr. Nishiwaki read the text. “It seems to be verses from a Buddhist sutra. Is it the charm for eternal life?”

The scripture Jidō had written with his finger was still there. Its red color stood out against Keiko’s skin. Keiko described what had happened during Jidō’s visit in detail.
“Even if this does grant me eternal life, it would mean an eternity of itching,” Keiko laughed.

“Eternity is sorrowful. I wish to rain tears upon the back of this goddess forever.”

Saying this, Mr. Nishiwaki dribbled something cold on Keiko’s back.

“Ahh, that feels good… What is it?”

“It’s just water. Water souls that seep from between the rocks.”

As he said this, Mr. Nishiwaki stroked Keiko’s back with his warm palm. She sensed the itchiness going away as if by magic.

“With this, I have made the back of the goddess as smooth as marble once again.”

Keiko was grateful, and afterwards she kept her chest and back bare like a Grecian goddess as they continued to converse in the lamplight. After it had grown late at night, they drank the tea that Mr. Nishiwaki had brought as a gift. It was made from leaves picked from “The King of Tea Trees”, which had been planted by the military strategist Zhuge Liang in Yunnan China during his southern campaign long ago.

The next morning, Mr. Nishiwaki was making travel preparations and came to greet Keiko.

“Where are you going from here?” Keiko asked.

“I think I’m going to take a peek into Hell,” Mr. Nishiwaki answered.

When Keiko made a worried face, Mr. Nishiwaki stamped the floor forcefully like a Noh actor. The floor simply split open, and she could see a blue space that was neither ocean nor sky. A heavenly body that looked like the earth was sinking into the blue abyss. Keiko felt on the verge of dizziness in spite of herself, but she resisted the
sensation. Saying only, “See you soon!” Mr. Nishiwaki disappeared into Hell. Keiko panicked and tried to peer in after him, but only the floor was there.
CHAPTER 7  
HELL IN AUTUMN

The late summer heat was still stifling when word came from Mr. Nishiwaki. The postcard was made of Japanese paper, and it seemed like it had been manufactured using watered-down blood. It was written in wide lettering and the final line read “From Hell:” Keiko judged that it was news from there. She saw a postmark, but rather than saying that it was from one or the other of the Buddhist hells as she expected, only the word “Center” was printed there. She wondered which central office’s postmark it could be, and when she read the date carefully she saw that it was from two days ago.

“Here, there’s no summer, no lingering heat, and no city noise. There is only the voice of the wind. Generally when we speak of Hell, we think of the heat which torments people as its chief characteristic, just as we call the sixth Buddhist Hell the “Burning Hell.” But it’s not like that. There are no demons, and no devilish guards. Only souls who have moved here from somewhere else dwell in this place, floating along blown by the wind. I’ve met some of your dear friends here: Lady Rokujō, Saigyō, Lady Nijō, and Teika. There are other souls who would like to meet you. I expect they will turn up there sooner or later. To use a common phrase, they are unable to rest in peace. The truth is, I too am one such person, and now I am looking towards the realms of animals and of demigods and considering them as places to settle down in the future.

From Hell”

After Keiko read the letter, it seemed somewhat bothersome to have to go out to her usual social gathering, which was at the Noh theater this month. Still, gods, ghosts, and madwomen made appearances in many Noh plays. If the denizens of Hell Mr.
Nishiwaki had mentioned were to pour out onto the Noh stage, Keiko would tire of associating with them. There were certain preparations necessary to socialize with people from the “Other World.” This saddened her a little.

Today’s performance was *The Nightly Courting of Komachi*. The eldest son of the head of the Noh theater was going to play the lead role of General Fukakusa, and the younger the secondary role of Ono no Komachi. The brothers were very attractive. Keiko’s late father had become good friends with the chief player. From that point forward Keiko had favored the brothers, who were still boys at the time. Both of the brothers were beautiful, and although the elder was a man his features were such that one wanted to describe them as “sensual.” If he were Prince Niou from *The Tale of Genji*, his serious and handsome younger brother would be the Prince’s rival Kaoru. Mrs. Hanada, who often went together with Keiko to the Noh theater, had got wind of a rumor that the brothers were competing for a single woman, which was another reason Keiko had drawn the comparison.

“Recently, I saw Masao walking with a woman wearing a bright vermilion mini-dress,” Mrs. Hanada said.

“Is that the woman who’s causing the problem?”

“I’m sure of it. I turned around and saw her face clearly.”

Mrs. Hanada once again brought up the story that the woman was originally the younger brother’s fiancée and that as such the elder brother Masao would soon be disowned by his father. Keiko was now familiar enough with both the brothers and their father, the chief player, that she exchanged greetings with them in the dressing room, and as a result the truth of the scandal that piqued Mrs. Hanada’s curiosity did not concern
her. Today too she did not sense any particular air of malcontent when she went to greet them. The three men received her each with a smile on his face.

After watching the day’s chamber music performers, Keiko went outside. It was still too early to eat, and so she parted ways with Mrs. Hanada in front of the Noh theater and climbed a hill that was in the opposite direction of the station. Although the afternoon sun was weakening somewhat, it still burned brightly, and a dry breeze blew through the sweltering streets. It seemed as though the bright, desolate time of day Keiko liked was passing by along with the breeze, and in any case she wanted to be alone. Besides, a foreboding that something was going to happen was flickering in her mind. *It’s just as if someone with epilepsy is having a premonition of a seizure,* Keiko thought. She was right: when it seemed that the light and the breeze were showing otherworldly signs of autumn, someone came up behind her and began walking beside her.

It was someone wearing the costume of General Fukakusa from before. It could be Masao, who had played the lead role of the General. And yet, because they were wearing the mask of a young woman, it seemed like the youthful Ono no Komachi had appeared.

“Are you Miss Komachi? Or the General, perhaps?” Keiko inquired.

Keiko intended to ask about her companion’s true identity. Were they Ono no Komachi, in other words, Sadao? Or were they the General, in other words, Masao?

Without answering her query her companion said, “I have something to tell you.” Keiko did not know whose voice was coming from inside the mask. She could not tell if it belonged to a man or a woman.
Keiko considered saying something about how out of place her companion seemed. It was somewhat peculiar. People from the Noh stage walking in the street without changing their clothes made for a strange sight. But then why weren’t there any pedestrians who were surprised by her companion’s appearance? Keiko found that she had arrived somewhere which looked different from the normal world.

“Where is this place? Who are you?” Keiko said, but she knew that speaking of it was pointless. If they had arrived in another world, it must be somewhere in “Hell.” Even so, there was nothing frightening about her surroundings, which resembled an oddly simple Noh stage. Or perhaps it could be thought of as a bedroom from another world which no one visited. Keiko wondered whether her companion had meant that they wanted to do something that ought to be done in this bedroom when they had greeted her before with “I have something to tell you.” It would be good to be prepared.

“Have you met Mr. Nishiwaki?”

Her companion inclined their mask, nodding. The gesture was like that of a stage actor.

“Are you going to take off your mask?” Keiko said, but her companion shook his head slightly and refused. She had a bad feeling. Keiko reached out her hand and touched the mask’s chin, but it was as if mask and face were a single piece connected by flesh and could not easily be detached. Judging from this, it’s probably also impossible to remove their costume, Keiko thought, abandoning the idea. In the ordinary human world every time one undressed one then had to reclote their naked self, and perhaps following this absurd procedure was unnecessary for the inhabitants of Hell. After all, they didn’t even need words to communicate…
Once Keiko stopped using language, there was no longer anything standing between them. Her companion was covered by a voluminous Noh costume and wearing a mask, and though Keiko was wearing a close-fitting bodystocking under a dress and high heels the sensation of embracing her companion was exactly like the liberating feeling of wearing nothing at all: a sense of nakedness that felt more real than actually being naked. Would the embrace of someone wrapped in a twelve-layered kimono be like this? Or was it something akin to the intimacy of being imprisoned in a cocoon? In any case, the space was enveloped in a sense of rapture that was thicker than golden honey, and Keiko became one with the body of a man whose true nature she did not know, continuing to bathe in the ecstasy.

A change occurred in Ono no Komachi’s face, which should have just been a Noh mask. Bearing an expression that was neither crying nor laughing the young woman’s mask convulsed, looking as if it might be transforming into the face of a madwoman. Keiko was entranced by this eerie metamorphosis. More precisely, the mask was changing into the face of a dying woman. Keiko was having the rare experience of reaching the height of pleasure while closely observing this intercourse and the transition towards death as if from the outside.

At the climax, the young woman’s mask closed its eyes. It was once again just a Noh mask and fell like a leaf. A demon’s face was visible there. Its aberrant features—golden eyes burning within a lump of red blood and flesh—could only be that of such a being. However, strangely Keiko felt no fear or disgust. Rather, she had a feeling that resembled relief, as though she were looking at the reality of what she had foreseen.
“You must be General Fukakusa?” Keiko said. The demon’s face instantly lost its blood red color, turning back into the face of a young man. It was difficult for Keiko to distinguish whether the face belonged to Masao or Sadao since it was similar to both of their features. *That being the case, it's good enough to think of him as General Fukakusa,* she thought.

“You’ve guessed correctly,” her companion said.

“It seems like the demon has finally been removed.”

“This?” the General said, picking up the woman’s mask that had fallen there. “For some reason, I couldn’t remove this from my face. It was due to my ill-fated obsession: I’ve been possessed by Ono no Komachi because of my disgraceful behavior visiting her for one hundred nights. But why have I arrived here?”

“You came from Hell and went out on stage, and then you followed me here just as you were. You were wearing that fine costume, mask and all.”

“So it seems. I’d rather take them off,” the General said. He tried to strip off his crimson silk robes and pale purple skirt, but his clothing would not separate from his body.

“Keiko,” her companion addressed her with the tone of an ordinary young man. “Help me, please. Take me away from here.”

“I’m sorry to say that I can’t do that. I can’t bring you to this world and live together with you. We’re going to return as we are.”

“Return where?”

“To Hell.”
When Keiko said this, she snatched the mask up and pressed it against the man's face. It stuck there and returned to being the face of Ono no Komachi. It was like the face of a laughing young woman.

Afterwards, Keiko walked off without looking back. A dry wind was blowing, and as she descended the slope facing the station she saw the brightly burning setting sun before her and sensed the unmistakable signs of the arrival of autumn. And, too, she thought that there could be no doubt that the gates of Hell were now completely closed behind her.
CHAPTER 8
THE CITY UNDER THE CASTLE

Keiko had to leave for Kansai for Mrs. Hanada’s eldest daughter’s engagement. She would be meeting with the eldest son of a distinguished family from the region. Keiko’s husband had acted as the matchmaker, and although the formal exchange of gifts was already over, the Hanada family hoped that they would help with the matter of finding a home for the couple after their marriage among other things. Keiko was going out to discuss this with the fiancé’s family, so there was no reason for Mrs. Hanada to accompany her. Even so, Mrs. Hanada, not wanting to miss this opportunity, seemed to have the intention of traveling with Keiko, and Keiko finally relented due to her stubborn persistence. But, Keiko reminded her quite sternly, it was not a sightseeing trip, and they would be unable to socialize once their business was concluded.

Luckily the vital matter was settled successfully, and after spending the night Keiko had decided to return to Tokyo early the next morning. However, while she was eating breakfast at the hotel, something quite “fortuitous” happened.

Mrs. Hanada was about seven years older than Keiko, but like the ladies painted by Renoir, she was voluptuous and glamorous: the sort of middle-aged woman whose slightly boisterous coquettishness was reminiscent of the puppies accompanying Renoir’s ladies. Whatever her outward appearance, she wasn’t terribly sophisticated. On this trip, too, it was clearly Keiko who found herself in the predicament of having to take up the role of the senior leader. When she heard that said leader was returning home ahead of her, Mrs. Hanada’s expression looked hopeless, like that of a child who had gotten lost.
“Since we’re here, why don’t we just go see the castle and then return home?” Keiko said. Mrs. Hanada suddenly brightened, a genuinely happy look on her face.

This town’s famous castle was located atop a hill at its center, and Keiko espied its elegant five level tower above a dense growth of trees and shrubs. When she had viewed this scene before, the tower had left less of an impression on her than the striking hill that rose up darkly beneath it. It was as if the castle were riding atop a huge crouching turtle, and its form was that of a grave amassed by piling up a truly enormous amount of soil. In short, it seemed like a turtle-shaped tomb. The wild idea that the dark heap below the castle really came from the bodies of countless dead flitted through her mind.

However, Keiko had no intention of informing Mrs. Hanada of these thoughts. Anyhow Mrs. Hanada, who was finally getting the chance to savor the feeling of being a tourist, was now in high spirits like a child who had come on a field trip.

Abiding by the castle’s complicated system of roped-off areas, they climbed the spiral-shaped path of stone steps and arrived at the front of the tower.

“Can we use the elevator to go up?”

“Quite a while ago they rebuilt this castle with concrete reinforcements, and they added an elevator at that time,” Keiko explained noncommittally.

However, even as she said this Keiko had a premonition that something unusual was going to happen and felt vaguely uneasy. It was as if there was a voice in her ears that was instructing her not to board the elevator. As for Mrs. Hanada, she had just casually pushed the “Up” button. There was no abyssal darkness opening its maw and waiting beyond the open door. It was a completely ordinary automated elevator. When
the door shut and it began to move, it seemed to Keiko that the closed room, which should have been going up, was definitely descending instead. However, she made no mention of this to Mrs. Hanada either. Mrs. Hanada was looking tipsy, as if she were a little drunk.

When the door opened and they went outside, they were in a building corridor. It seemed like quite a large building. However, it was not like a building with offices in it. It looked to Keiko like an underground shopping complex below a large train station.

Keiko began to say, “We’ve come to a strange place, haven’t we?” but then stopped because Mrs. Hanada’s face reflected nothing particularly unusual, and she seemed completely unconcerned by the fact that they should have ascended to the castle tower. It was truly a bizarre thing.

“They’ve built quite a fine underground shopping complex haven’t they?” Mrs. Hanada said, looking serious. “Let’s go see the gifts and then head home after we eat.”

Feeling flustered, Keiko pretended to go along with Mrs. Hanada. Certainly, it was understandable that Mrs. Hanada likened this place to an underground shopping complex. Keiko’s sense was that they were now inside the hill beneath the castle. They had descended into the enormous turtle-shaped tomb and were walking along its passages, which extended onward like a maze. As Keiko saw it, this place was not an underground shopping complex beneath a train station. It was not a complex where businesses such as restaurants lined the sides. Many people were walking by, but in Keiko’s estimation they were all dead. However, it was not eerie. More than that, Keiko was constantly worrying about how unpleasant it would be if Mrs. Hanada realized the truth of the situation.
First of all, because the people walking by them were still wearing garments from
the period in which they had lived, if Mrs. Hanada were only to properly open her eyes
and look she ought to notice that her surroundings were peculiar. Moreover, because
buildings and rooms from every era lined both sides of the corridor, one should
understand that this place differed from an underground shopping complex with a single
glance. And yet… Keiko knew that from the moment Mrs. Hanada descended into this
city of the dead she must have been imprisoned in a membrane of delusion. That being
the case, Keiko could stop worrying for the time being.

Keiko walked aimlessly as she made her way down the corridors, and each time
she descended a level she wandered through more hallways. She searched for someone
whose face she recognized.

“Oh! Sadao and his girlfriend are over there,” Mrs. Hanada raised her voice
shrilly. Keiko also had the feeling that she had seen a vermillion dress so bright it
seemed to burn though the throng. It must be the woman that Mrs. Hanada had gossiped
about at last month’s meeting: the one causing the problem between the head of the Noh
theater’s two sons. The question was whether she was the brothers’ shared lover or
whether she was the fiancée of the younger.

When Keiko asked, “She’s there with the younger brother?” to make certain, Mrs.
Hanada nodded confidently.

“She’s gotten back together with the younger one. They're engaged to each other
once again.”

Keiko did not think so. If the two were living as normal, they ought not to have
descended to this place.
At any rate, I have to handle the situation while Mrs. Hanada is still confused, Keiko thought. I need someone’s help… Keiko searched through her memory for someone she knew well among the residents of this world, and the face of a relatively old acquaintance came to mind: Rokujō Miyasudokoro, a highborn lady depicted in *The Tale of Genji*. Then suddenly before her eyes, Lady Rokujō was there. Because her garments resembled a simplified version of a twelve-layered kimono, one should understand that she was not someone from the modern world at a single glance. It was bizarre that Mrs. Hanada did not find it strange.

When Keiko formally apologized to Lady Rokujō for her long silence, for some reason Mrs. Hanada also greeted her with a seemingly appropriate remark, as if she had arbitrarily become convinced that Keiko and the noble lady were old classmates.

“It’s strange, but we seem to have lost our way. We shouldn’t have come here in the first place,” Keiko said by way of an excuse. Lady Rokujō smiled as she gracefully waved a large folding fan. “Today we are preparing a rare feast unlike anything in your world, so please stay as long as you like,” she said, winking at the servants around her.

“This is a lovely Japanese restaurant, isn’t it? It’s just as if we’ve come to the Dragon King’s undersea palace,” Mrs. Hanada said, her face flushed. Keiko and Lady Rokujō exchanged glances and shrugged their shoulders.

The meal could have been described as a sumptuous feast, but saké was also served with the Heian era cuisine that must have appeared to Mrs. Hanada to be traditional vegetable dishes, and she became increasingly intoxicated. Men who looked like courtiers from the period appeared unnoticed and began to converse, and the
gathering became very busy. But as for Mrs. Hanada, she looked as if she thought she had arrived at a club somewhere.

It appeared that Mrs. Hanada interpreted the older vocabulary as a foreign language, since she remarked, “It seems like there are a large number of foreigners here.” At this point, Keiko asked a favor of Lady Rokujō. She whispered in her ear about the possibility of finding Mrs. Hanada, who was in the highest of spirits, a suitable gentleman to be her companion. The perceptive Lady Rokujō nodded and guided Mrs. Hanada to a separate room.

The truth was that on the flight here Mrs. Hanada had been saying things like, “Since we’re finally traveling, let’s enjoy a real adventure together!” She spoke like a schoolgirl as she recalled the lively activity of her younger days. At the time it was silly and Keiko took no notice of her remarks, but in the end Mrs. Hanada’s idle fantasy seemed to unexpectedly be coming true.

While Mrs. Hanada enjoyed her “adventure” in the separate chamber, Keiko spoke about various topics with Lady Rokujō in a quiet room.

During the flight home, signs of the night’s excitement remained: Mrs. Hanada’s eyelids were still pink, and she kept returning to the topic of her “adventure” in the “lively underground shopping complex.” From the way she spoke of it, it was the first time in her life that she had had an affair, or perhaps it was her first satisfying sexual experience. Keiko had no choice but to reply amiably, but it seemed as though those vivid memories were all that remained in Mrs. Hanada’s body, and Keiko could not help finding it annoying when she said, “I can’t get over it!”
“Oh, by the way,” Keiko said and showed Mrs. Hanada the newspaper the stewardess had brought over. Mrs. Hanada nearly uttered a strange sound. There was an extensive report on the double suicide of Sadao, the younger son of the head of the Noh theater, and a certain woman.

“So it’s come to this at last,” Mrs. Hanada said, sighing. “We definitely caught sight of them at that underground shopping complex. Afterwards, this is what became of the two! I should have called out to them.”

It was not that it had happened afterwards: they appeared together in the realm of the dead precisely because it had happened. However, clarifying the matter would complicate things, and Keiko kept quiet and put on a sorrowful face. She could not involve Mrs. Hanada in her associations with the “Other World” anymore.

“Nevertheless, I would like to go there again sometime!” Mrs. Hanada repeated. What a nuisance, Keiko thought.
A French family moved into the house with the large garden next door. According to Keiko's children who soon went over to meet and play with the children who lived there, it seemed the family was just a brother and sister of around the same age and their mother.

“We still haven't been formally introduced to their mother. She's often sick and doesn't seem to meet many people,” Tomoko said.

“The other day I saw her out in the garden. I had the feeling I was seeing a ghost at midday,” Takashi said. “Anyhow her hair was a ghastly silver color, and her shape from behind was that of a witch out of a Western fairy tale. When she turned towards me, her face was half transparent.”

“She might really be a witch or a ghost,” Keiko laughed. “I wonder if it's like the flowers that have appeared in their garden.”

Keiko said this because after their arrival the French family's garden had become covered in flowers, including foreign species that she had never seen. They completely filled the garden and were always in bloom.

“When you view the garden from above, the whole thing looks like a clock made of flowers.”

“It gives me a bad feeling. One time when I went into the garden the flowers' scent made me feel as though I were going to be ill,” Takashi said, frowning. Keiko also had the feeling that she might suffocate or lose her senses when she entered that overpowering world of flowers.
According to what Keiko saw when she passed by and peered through a gap in the hedge, there were flowers resembling roses, anemones, poppies, tiger lilies, foxglove, and trumpet creeper, but the majority were bizarre and brightly colored flowers of strange shapes, and they were all intertwined in such a way as to make a flower jungle.

“The strange thing is, those flowers have no leaves whatsoever,” Tomoko said tilting her head perplexedly. “The entire garden is becoming enormous cacti, and it looks as though innumerable flowers are suddenly springing up from the ground.”

The flowers were strange, but beyond that what worried Keiko was the matter of the children that lived there. The two children were a flawlessly lovely girl and boy with almost the same platinum blond hair as their mother. They were like the two most delicately constructed dolls in the world, and their blue eyes were too beautiful. More so than those of any human, these seemed like a dreadful wound which let the viewer peer into some kind of secret that went beyond human existence. When she saw the two of them walking side by side for the first time, Keiko thought she had strayed into a bad dream and crossed paths with an evil spirit, one that took the form of a pair of dolls.

Above all else, it was their symmetry that suggested that they were designed with sinister intentions. There was the sense that if you tried to fold them back up along the axis of gender they would meld perfectly into one being. The two of them were never apart.

According to the reports of her children, these two were living in a room in their attic called the “shrine.” By Keiko’s guess, this seemed to be the room on the third floor whose roof was in the Mansard style, where the middle was angled into a shape like that of a shōgi piece. Mansard was a royal architect who served under Louis XIV, and he was the one who devised the attic room shape, which could be seen in the Palace of Versailles.
and in Paris apartment buildings. As with an authentic example, there was a window projecting from the Mansard part of the roof.

“They haven't let us enter the room, but when I peeked inside I couldn't say whether what I saw were toys or strange collections of things, but at any rate there were mountains of rubbish and multicolored decorations. It seems that Elizabeth and Paul perform secret ceremonies there every night,” Takashi said, and Tomoko added, “I don't know whether it's a shrine or a chapel, but the inside is complex and mysterious like the interior of a crab or turtle shell, and it even looks like internal organs are scattered about.”

“It would be best if you didn't associate much with the two of them,” Keiko cautioned. “In particular, even if you are invited you should absolutely not enter the shrine in the attic.”

After that, Keiko continually paid attention to the house and its inhabitants. In spite of the deepening autumn, the mysterious flowers in the garden were blooming as much as ever. She only caught sight of the person who seemed to be the mother once, when the woman came out to the garden to care for the flowers. When Keiko stopped and stared at her strange silver hair from behind, the woman instantly turned around. Her face was not half transparent as Takashi had said; it was the pitch-black face of the dead. Keiko barely grasped the situation, but there was no mistaking that those who lived here were from a different world. At that moment, she heard an urgent voice from behind.

“Excuse me, do you know anything about these foreigners, Madam?”

“I'm afraid they're very mysterious people.”

“They're not in any conflict with immigration law, but what on earth are they doing here and how are they getting along?”
“Ah, they're living off those flowers they make,” Keiko said, laughing.

“I've heard that person is sick. The two children also don't go to school.”

“Since they're like ghosts, they don't need to work or attend school. They don't appear to be doing anything wrong, and I wonder if it wouldn't be best to just to leave them be.”

A little while after that, there was a day when her children returned home late. The two of them both wore faces that suggested they had suffered some kind of severe shock, and it was apparent that something in their minds had been destroyed and had not yet been restored.

“Did you enter the ‘shrine’ you mentioned? Did they show you something?” Keiko said, keeping her face as calm as she could manage. “What did you experience? Oh, I won't ask because I can imagine it more or less. Can’t you say anything at all?”

“We can't,” Takashi said.

“But, were you shown things?”

Tomoko nodded.

Truthfully, Keiko herself was experiencing quite a shock. There was no doubt that Tomoko was entranced by the beautiful young Paul and Takashi by the beautiful young Elizabeth. Seduction might be too strong of an expression, but it seemed they had been guided somehow. However, she could not believe that that symmetric and almost incestuous brother and sister had released those perfect bindings and formed a pair of couples with her children. Tomoko and Takashi were used as no more than an audience, and Elizabeth and Paul must have made them watch their sexual ceremony held at the “shrine” in that attic.
That was what Keiko imagined. Tomoko and Takashi were assigned to play those roles, and as a ritual they would lie down on an “altar” bed... Her imaginings went only this far. No, the truth was that she didn't want to think about it.

Be that as it may, Keiko resolved to try to meet the family. As she had already encountered people from a different world, there was no particular reason to fear this silver-haired woman. When she tried going in, the daughter and son lined up in the entryway.

“Is your mother here?”

“Mother has died,” the two said together in the same quality of voice as if chanting in unison. Then they laughed in the same way, their four blue eyes shining.

When Keiko asked “And the funeral?” Elizabeth replied, “She's buried.” They spoke fluent Japanese. Keiko interpreted this literally: perhaps she was buried somewhere beneath the flowers. This was not permitted by Japanese law, but she had no intention of mentioning it. Anyhow, because this woman was with them from the start, one didn't start trying to investigate the corpse's whereabouts and treatment at this late hour. After Keiko formally expressed her condolences she asked if the two of them would be all right from now on, but they answered innocently that they were fine while exchanging glances and chuckling. Keiko immediately felt a fear like snakes crawling on her spine.

The morning that frost formed in the garden in a sign of the coming winter, Keiko tried visiting the home of her French neighbors again. As one would expect the garden's flower jungle had shrunk, and only strange cauliflower-shaped blossoms as large as human heads remained in the center of the flowerbeds. It looked like an army of flowers
forming a dense battle formation in preparation for winter. No matter how many times
she called out, the children did not show themselves. Keiko became bold and peeked into
the hall from the entryway. She listened for signs inside the house. Then she called Paul
and Elizabeth’s names repeatedly, but there was no reply. Keiko became bolder still and
helped herself to some of the enormous flowers remaining in the garden. She then felt
like returning home. *If the children are not here, these flowers will weaken and die
anyhow.* She thought to take them home and try to care for them.

The flowers were as large as lopped off heads, and their complex shapes differed
from those of roses, peonies or lotuses. The glaze on their petals resembled the strange
mucous membranes of animals, and the petals themselves overlapped as though there was
something rolled up within. One morning some days after she had arranged them in a
vase, Keiko suddenly tried peering closely into the interior of a room formed inside the
flowers. Under the bright light, she could see two exquisitely crafted naked human
forms. The two humans were a young boy and girl, and they were intertwined like two
mating insects. Keiko hurriedly brought a magnifying glass over, thinking to observe the
behavior of the bonded blond lovers within the flower. What she saw there were four
arms and four legs tangled together; the siblings Elizabeth and Paul were becoming one
like hieroglyphs. It seemed like their attic “shrine” had now moved to this room inside
the flower.

Keiko sighed and put down the magnifying glass. Then, an idea came to mind
that made the blood throughout her body suddenly run cold. Since their drastic
experience Tomoko and Takashi’s appearance had become considerably strange. Keiko
wondered whether they might shut themselves in a cocoon in the same way. It was
worrisome how their faces as they woke this morning had looked strangely sweet and symmetrical. Keiko called their names over and over, but there was no sign that they were coming down...
“Bathing in the light of the moon leads to madness.” Keiko had read that kind of myth in old tales. It definitely seemed to be true. In another story, a man transformed into a wolf on the night of the full moon, which may also have been related to the magical power of its light.

Keiko thought about this sort of thing while “moonbathing,” her body stretched out on the wicker chair that was on the terrace. As opposed to sunlight, which had a harmful effect on the surface of her skin, the light of the moon might be permeating the deep places in her mind and bringing about a mysterious chemical change there. But I suppose that there’s not much danger in moonbathing for only a small amount of time, Keiko thought. Moreover, she had a feeling that for some reason the moon was safe during the early evening hours. The full moon probably refrains from working its magic and simply shines brightly until the human world goes to sleep, Keiko mused lightly. Still, the autumn evening seemed chilly and Keiko covered her legs with a blanket and wore a thick white sweater, turning her face to the moon and waiting.

The truth was that Keiko had come out to the moonlit garden tonight to wait for someone. The person who was going to visit went by the unusual name Semimaru, and he was a blind lute player. He was just like the character from the Noh play Semimaru who was said to be a biwa master, right down to the fact that he was an accomplished instrumentalist. As such, Keiko thought that the strange appellation was not his real name anyhow. Be that as it may, this lute player was a handsome young man with contemplative features like an Indian, and he could also play the veena, an instrument
from the region. They had become acquainted through Keiko’s eldest daughter, who had recently begun to play Indian music.

When Mr. Semimaru had asked, “Would it be all right if I pay you a visit?” Keiko had no choice but to reply, “Please do,” but the truth was she sensed something a little eerie in his tone. She did not know what he wanted, and moreover, he added:

“I want to meet on the night of a full moon if possible.”

“Surely you don’t mean to transform on the night of the full moon…?” Keiko joked, but Mr. Semimaru maintained his contemplative expression while a faint smile appeared on his lips.

“As you can see I am blind, but I should be able to see your face when the moon is shining brightly. It’s as if the light of the moon enhances the vision in my mind’s eye.”

“Is that because of the full moon?”

Keiko pretended that she believed him. Anyway, she had decided to wait tonight. It may have been her imagination, but it seemed that the moonlight was gradually becoming colder and more radiant while she watched it taking form like a pale frost on the surface of the garden. Moreover, unlike the burning light of the sun, she had a feeling that this moonlight had terrifying corrosive properties. Rather than light, something that was neither cold air nor water was descending from the sky and invading Keiko’s body. It colored the trees silver and left an oddly white frost in the garden. While sensing that the feeling of being corroded by the moonlight was changing into an alarming drowsiness, Keiko became unable to move in the wicker chair. She knew that she was not falling asleep or dreaming because everything before her eyes became increasingly bright. It was a brightness one ought to be terrified of, for with one’s eyes open one would surely
go mad. It seemed as though a sphere of light, small enough to hold, was drawing near. The moon descended and approached her seat. Having her eyes open was dangerous.

At this point, Keiko realized that nothing out of the ordinary was happening. It was just that someone from the “Other World” had come. Keiko considered that it might be Kaguya Hime, who descended to this world long ago, or a heavenly maiden as described in the legend *The Feather Mantle*, or else one of the nymphs who dwelt in the *katsura* trees in the gardens of the moon palace. Keiko’s own name meant “*katsura* child.” While she let her thoughts wander, she noticed that a female visitor was seated in the other chair that had been set out on the opposite side of the wicker table. She was wearing a nearly see-through dress that was too thin for the season. *At any rate, this must be a celestial being*, Keiko thought.

“Aren’t you cold wearing such a thin garment?” Keiko tried asking.

“Thank you, but I’m fine. I’m accustomed to the cold,” her companion replied in a soft voice.

“Now that you mention it, I’ve heard that it’s very cold there.”

“The temperature differs greatly from here. It may be many thousands of degrees below zero; it’s a cold that seems impossible to measure.”

After saying this, her companion adjusted her posture and gazed directly at Keiko. Keiko thought that the celestial being’s features, which were like a lotus flower that had taken on the guise of a woman, could only be described as otherworldly. And yet, there was nothing ghostly about them; it was simply the face of an elegant and noble flower.

Perhaps reading Keiko’s mind, the heavenly maiden began to give something of a self-introduction.
“I’m sorry if I’ve disturbed you. I descend to this place relatively frequently, but I am not the one known here as Kaguya Hime. My name is Jōga. I’ve been living on the moon for a very long time.”

“You said Jōga. Are you the wife of the master archer Gei, the one who ascended to the moon after drinking the elixir of immortality…?”

“Yes, that’s right. And while crouching down from complete exhaustion after my flight to the moon, I became a toad.”

“Yes, that’s what they say in China. But the truth of it is that you became a moon goddess…?”

“There’s that theory, too. Well, either is acceptable. Boredom is inevitable living on the moon, so from time to time I come here in this form to amuse myself.”

“Were you the celestial maiden in The Feather Mantle story too?”

“Yes. There was that as well,” Jōga said, looking happy. “Hakuryō, the fisherman who discovered my feather mantle, was charming and handsome. To tell the truth, I’ve come here to find another fine man to associate with.”

Keiko was surprised by the unexpected direction the conversation had taken, but upon reflection she also felt that it was a likely story. She had heard that long ago there were men who were kissed by celestial maidens who unexpectedly descended from the heavens, and that the fragrance of the maidens’ mouths never went away. Whether or not that was Jōga’s mischief, there were probably nymphs among her companions and servants at the moon palace who would do such a thing. Keiko was thinking that she wanted to hear about the celestial beings’ appearance and their life on the moon in more detail, but her companion suddenly got a strange look in her eyes.
“By the way, is this evening’s guest ready?” she asked. Keiko became a little disconcerted.

“Are you referring to Mr. Semimaru?”

“I’ve heard that he’s beautiful, no?”

“Yes, by human standards.”

“Could you leave him with me tonight? I’m thinking of giving you a gift.”

“Certainly, go ahead,” Keiko replied, at a loss. It was futile to explain that she had not invited Mr. Semimaru over with such intentions for herself, and Jōga seemed to be anticipating whatever was going to happen. Nevertheless, Keiko could not help secretly wishing that Mr. Semimaru would not make an appearance. She had a strong presentiment that something troubling, no, something sinister was going to occur between him and the heavenly maiden.

At that point Mr. Semimaru entered the garden, moving like a sleepwalker. It was his first time there, and although the blind young man was currently simply advancing as though led by something, Keiko thought that his fate was already all but sealed. Mr. Semimaru moved directly towards them and the heavenly maiden wrapped him in an embrace. He tried to speak, but his mouth was covered by hers.

There was a strange brightness around them. Keiko worried that those living nearby or passing by on the street might be suspicious, but everything was happening inside a luminous moon-like sphere. On second thought, it was likely that nothing was visible from the outside. And what was more, Keiko felt herself becoming enveloped in a cloud of strange pleasure, and she soon no longer cared about such concerns.
The relations in *The Feather Mantle* differed from the usual intimacy between a man and a woman in that there were no signs of male dominance whatsoever. The fact that even Keiko, who was watching, was about to cry out with pleasure seemed to indicate that Jōga had chosen to share this same sensation with her. *That must have been the “gift,”* Keiko thought.

The heavenly maiden’s face radiated pleasure along with a light like that of the moon. The light had the same corrosive properties that Keiko had sensed at first, and it seemed like it dyed Mr. Semimaru’s face completely white, consuming it as it did so. In an instant, his handsome face wore the look of death. Though Keiko wondered whether men who had intercourse with the women of the moon had their spirits siphoned only to become like white pumice stone and die, the truth was that there was something difficult to resist about the pleasure of seeing that state of fatal joy before her own eyes.

When she opened her eyes, both the sphere of bright light and the being from the moon had disappeared. An alarming numbness remained: it seemed like moonlight had permeated to the core of her body and corroded her bones. Keiko finally recognized that this sensation was “pleasure.” Mr. Semimaru’s figure was not visible nearby. When Keiko returned to her own room, she noticed the hair on her head was bristling. *This is just like what befell Semimaru’s elder sister Sakagami,* Keiko thought, recalling the Princess whose hair stood on end in the Noh play *Semimaru.*

At breakfast time, Keiko’s elder daughter Tomoko silently showed her the newspaper. There was an article reporting that Mr. Semimaru had collapsed and died in front of the entrance to his home last night. His death seemed to be the result of sudden heart failure. However, due to the strange debility that was witnessed and the many
details that were not yet fully understood, the situation was under further investigation by
the police.

“He was still young. It’s really a shame,” Keiko said. Then she added something
which no one else could understand: “Nevertheless, last night’s full moon was beautiful,
frighteningly so.”
CHAPTER 11

SECLUSION

Were today’s young men despairing of the world and becoming monks? Keiko listened in mute amazement to the reason that Mr. Fujiwara gave for his abrupt resignation from the company.

“I heard that a young woman who was an old friend of mine died suddenly, and now I can only think of the transient nature of this world,” the director of human resources said.

“You must have really liked her. It seems things ought to have proceeded like in the story of The Well Cradle.”

“Are you referring to the Noh play?”

“It’s the story of Narihira and Ki no Aritsune’s daughter, which also appears in the classic The Tale of Ise. The two old friends became husband and wife after an exchange of poems. He wrote:

The wooden well frame
when last we compared our heights
yet stood above me;
in your absence I have grown
taller than that well cradle

And she replied:

The length of our hair
we compared as well, and now
mine is past my shoulders.
Who will put it up for me
if you are not the one?”

“I suppose that’s the ideal, but in any case isn’t it the woman in the play who quickly goes on to the next world…?”
Keiko had called Mr. Fujiwara to the president’s office and heard the story directly. She knew that he had entered the company a little less than one year ago and now was a magazine editor. What was more, his rare beauty, reminiscent of a French romance actor, had left an impression on her recently. He was the type of young man Keiko liked: when she looked at his face again closely, the shadow of grief lay upon his long eyelashes and the sweetness and effeminacy of his constituent parts were well balanced. Although he said that he wished to become a recluse, there was no darkness in him; rather, he was tranquil and bright. Like the evening sun setting in the western sky, his colors suggested their own downfall. Still, they were bright. While Keiko listened to him speak, she realized she could not prevent him from sinking.

“It’s unfortunate, but it can’t be helped. We aren’t able to give you a severance payment, but I’d like to treat you to a little something in its place,” Keiko said.

At that moment, Mr. Satō came to Keiko’s mind. They had not been in contact since they met under the cherry blossoms, but Norikiyo Satō or Saigyō, as he was famously called after he renounced the world, was a specialist in that field. So, wouldn’t he be the best person to impart expertise about monastic seclusion? Keiko thought.

Aside from having them in mind, at present she had no other means of meeting people from the “Other World” like Mr. Satō of her own volition, and Keiko opened volumes like the Sankashū and reread his poems for the first time in a while. Quite a few poems were reflections on impermanence. However, from Keiko’s perspective as someone familiar with Mr. Satō, this kind of poem resembled an official proclamation
and seemed to have been written with excessive formality. Simply stringing the poems together did not bring his real form to mind. He was a rather complicated individual.

Late that night when Keiko sensed signs of a visitor in the garden and went out to check, there was a figure beneath the flowerless cherry blossom trees. Mr. Satō, who greeted her with a “Hello,” was not dressed in priestly attire. Upon closer examination he showed signs of having been a warrior: his appearance could have been that of an elderly gentleman of about seventy who had left university in his youth.

“I’ve been lured here by the moon,” Mr. Satō said enigmatically. “The truth is that when I came to this area, there was a full moon two arms’ lengths around shining from inside a home. When I peeked in, it was your house. It seems that what I saw as the moon was a *katsura* tree nymph. It seems it was you, Keiko.”

Keiko was delighted at this prompt and unexpected visit, and she received him by pouring saké into glass cups while relating the story of Mr. Fujiwara’s wish to become a monk.

“I see,” Mr. Satō said smiling and nodding. “Although one might call it seclusion, I myself had a special relationship with Emperor Toba. Mr. Fujiwara’s case resembles Tomonobu’s induction into the priesthood.”

This “special relationship with Emperor Toba” must be a reference to the rumor that Mr. Satō was Emperor Toba’s lover in his youth. Keiko wanted to inquire about that in more detail, but Mr. Satō began to talk about a warrior called Tomonobu without going further into it. This man was the grandfather of the three priests Jakunen, Jakuchō, and Jakuzen, close friends of Mr. Satō known collectively as the “Three Jakus of Ohara”. Tomonobu served Princess Yasuko, but when the beautiful woman died suddenly at the
age of twenty-one he became aware of the transient nature of the world and cut his hair to become a monk. Mr. Satō said that he retired from the world in the hills south of the capital, a place called Hino.

“Now that you mention it, there was that sort of story,” Keiko said. “I remember reading them in collections of priestly tales like the Hosshinshū or something similar. If I’m not mistaken, didn’t it say that Saigyō met Tomonobu in a field of flowers in Musashi after he became a monk…?”

“It seems that legend exists, but it’s a myth. I never met the Three Jakus’ grandfather Tomonobu. Still, at least I am familiar with the stories. Tomonobu was the son of Princess Yasuko’s wet nurse, and they were raised as if they were twin brother and sister from the time when they were little. That being said, he served her as a warrior to the last. I think that Tomonobu’s feelings for the Princess were likely similar to those of Sasuke for Shunkin, a story you know well.”

“You mean from Tanizaki’s Shunkinshō? You’re quite familiar with it then?”

“I’ve time on my hands in the afterlife, so I generally read novels. And, in a word, it was that kind of relationship. However, unlike Shunkin, Princess Yasuko was not sadistic. On the contrary she was kind like an angel, and it was the sort of relationship where she secretly thought of Tomonobu and he in turn secretly thought of her. When the Princess died and left this world due to an illness similar to what we now know as leukemia, I think that Tomonobu put this world in parentheses.”

“Put it in parentheses? Are you referring to something like Husserl’s philosophy?”

“I don’t know anything about this Husserl, but to use my own words, Tomonobu put the contents of the world in parentheses and then stood outside of them. And, from
time to time he would open the parentheses and enter the world only to close them and leave for the outside once again. Monastic seclusion is the method of securing circumstances where one can freely do such a thing. But that’s something that I invented after receiving a clue from Tomonobu.”

“And it’s not simply devoting oneself to the Buddhist priesthood either.”

“But one can act on that pretense.”

“What do you think about Mr. Fujiwara’s case?”

“By entering a sect somewhere and practicing a life of asceticism as a member of a specialized group of monks, isn’t one simply entering into another, different set of parentheses? One must become solitary and keep the world at a distance.”

“A hermitage is connected to somewhere…”

“It would be good if that somewhere was outside of this world.”

“I see. I’ll leave the rest to you,” Keiko said.

A few days later, Keiko invited Mr. Fujiwara to her home per Mr. Satō’s instructions. She had announced that she would be guiding him around a certain temple. It seemed Mr. Fujiwara thought that she would be introducing him to a temple where he could establish himself after entering the priesthood, and before they set out on their hike he was in high spirits like a child.

“Let’s wait here,” Keiko said, leading him to a spot beneath the cherry trees in the garden. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Satō appeared dressed as a priest. The next instant, before Mr. Fujiwara could even put on a puzzled look, they arrived at a place that resembled Saigyō’s hermitage in Sagano.
“If I told you that the cherry blossoms were in bloom here and that this man is Saigyō, I suppose you’d recognize the story’s plot, more or less?” Keiko said.

“You’ve brought me here to introduce someone experienced in entering the priesthood,” Mr. Fujiwara said, seeming worried.

“That is so,” Mr. Šatō said like a person from long ago, and he began to discuss his knowledge of seclusion from the world. They exchanged questions and answers for a while. Mr. Šatō, having thoroughly elaborated upon his explanation, unexpectedly said, “By the way, there’s someone I’d like to introduce you to.” Then he turned his back, and upon giving some kind of signal the sliding doors of his hermitage opened. A young lady dressed in a long-sleeved kimono appeared. She looked just like she had arrived for a formal marriage interview, and in spite of herself Keiko caught her breath at the young woman’s beauty, which was like the fragrance of a noble flower.

According to Mr. Šatō’s introduction, the young lady was Princess Yasuko from the story Keiko had heard the other day. Mr. Šatō recounted the story of the Princess and Tomonobu for Mr. Fujiwara, and said that Mr. Fujiwara might be able to continue this association even after going to the “Other World.” For the present, though, he had to depart. With a wink to Keiko, Mr. Šatō disappeared behind the sliding door. Keiko intended to pursue him, but before she knew it she was inexplicably inside a room. The person facing Mr. Fujiwara should have been Princess Yasuko, but it seemed that the one inside the elegant kimono was Keiko herself. Her body and consciousness were those of Princess Yasuko, and inside them Keiko was only a kernel of her self. On the other side, Mr. Fujiwara was moved to great depths of emotion. He saw traces of his beloved childhood friend who had died suddenly in the beautiful woman.
Keiko, who had become the Princess, embraced Mr. Fujiwara. Afterwards, things fell into utter disorder. At first, she felt impatient seemingly manipulating the Princess’ body from within, but eventually the pleasure became her own. She realized that this was the young man’s first experience with this kind of intimacy between a man and a woman. For Keiko, too, the experience was unusual. In the end, it seemed as though the night’s feast continued until the break of day, and the promise Keiko had made earlier to treat Mr. Fujiwara had been fulfilled.

As always, Keiko awoke in her own bedroom. Mr. Satō was standing outside her window, and when she beckoned he entered without hesitation.

“I brought Mr. Fujiwara to the ‘Other World.’”

“So that’s what you meant by seclusion?”

“I think there’s no other option. If he goes there, he can move freely. Mr. Fujiwara might sometimes come here to enjoy himself, and he’s looking forward to being your companion at those times.”

“If that’s the case I am looking forward to it too,” Keiko said, and then she thought to verify something that had been worrying her. “By the way, there’s no sign of Mr. Fujiwara’s body remaining around here, right?”

“I wouldn’t do anything so uncouth. He has suddenly disappeared from this world. When I have a hand in it, seclusion follows this kind of formula.”

Relieved, Keiko went back to sleep.
CHAPTER 12

AN ODE TO CLOUD, RAIN, AND RAINBOW

From the first time she saw her, Keiko thought that the Chinese graduate student who had been staying with her since the springtime was stunningly beautiful. Ryokuju pulled her hair back in a loose bun and wore almost no make-up, which made both her face and head seem rather small. Her slender long-legged figure naturally possessed strength like that of a distance runner. At a glance, she was a boyish but beautiful girl. Only the light in her large, wise-looking eyes stood out. In truth, she was a surprisingly intelligent young lady, and her femininity was sometimes diminished or lost by the strong intellectual impression she left.

At one point, Keiko learned by chance that long ago a beautiful woman with the name Ryokuju lived during the Chin dynasty, and that following that the name became a synonym for a beautiful woman. After this discovery, Keiko earnestly set about a strategy to train the latent beauty living in her home to be an “elegant flower” such that whoever looked upon her couldn’t help but be amazed. Keiko herself would consider the girl’s wardrobe, but make-up came first. As such, Keiko made a practice of taking her to the locations of up-and-coming “artists” in the field. Ryokuju adamantly refused, but Keiko persuaded her with the manner she would use to coax a child who did not want to go to the dentist. Although Keiko had to bring her herself at first, once she tried going Ryokuju was fascinated by the way her own face had transformed into a work of art in the mirror.

“I’m sorry about the trouble, but aren’t you a beautiful young woman now! Nearly unrecognizable, don’t you think?” Keiko said.
“I look like someone besides myself somehow.”

Ryokuju smiled cheerfully as she said this, and it seemed to Keiko that the classical Chinese word for “sweetly smiling” referred to just such a happy expression. Besides, now she had the face of someone who was clearly aware of the aurora-like phenomenon which results from dazzling someone else with one’s own beauty. This awareness added a ray of light to her natural good looks and was an essential element in a genuinely beautiful person. To put it simply, Keiko explained to Ryokuju, a beautiful person is someone who feels confident in the knowledge that others will see them as beautiful.

“Thank you very much,” Ryokuju said, and then put on a serious face. “Please allow me to express my gratitude,” she offered.

“Gratitude? Nothing could compare to keeping a splendid work of art on hand to admire.”

“But, there’s something, please…” Ryokuju was quite eager. “I don’t have anything impressive to give, but I think that there’s one technique I can teach you.”

“Surely it doesn’t have to do with the art of lovemaking, does it?” Keiko said, writing out the characters for “the art of lovemaking” for Ryokuju, who did not seem to understand the Japanese pronunciation very well.

“That’s a classical term,” Ryokuju said, and then wrote out several more characters. “There’s this expression too.”

“Mount Wu, cloud, and rain. When combined, the characters you’ve written are a metaphor for sexual intercourse. We also say ‘a dream of Mount Wu’ to mean the same thing,” Keiko said. Her companion’s face became a little flushed.
“Yes. The truth is, the matter I’d like to instruct you in has to do with the expression you mentioned. It’s a technique for lovemaking, and I judged beforehand that you had the qualities to master it.”

Ryokuju’s manner of speaking had become different from usual. She was no longer talking in somewhat clumsy-sounding Japanese. Along with her nearly unrecognizable beauty, she seemed to have been transformed into someone else right down to her most basic qualities. Keiko finally understood that her companion was no ordinary person; she must have come from the “Other World.” That being the case, her story was actually easy to understand.

“It seems like you’re one of the legendary mountain wizards who came from the area around Mount Wu.”

“You’ve guessed correctly. I’m a member of a mysterious race,” her companion said, smiling sweetly. Her appearance was no longer that of a serious young female exchange student. It was unclear how old she was, but she was from the “Other World” and there was no use in concerning oneself with the age of someone who traveled back and forth freely over spans of hundreds of years.

“I would be grateful if you could instruct me in the technique at this juncture, but is it something that one can master without a great deal of training?”

“It’s exceedingly difficult if you scrutinize the theory, but simple if you master it in a dream. And once you internalize it, you won’t forget. Actually, I became proficient in this method by learning from someone, too.”

“Was that person a monk of some sort?”
“Well, in fact,” Ryokuju said, reddening. “One time a man appeared to me in a dream and taught me the feeling of ecstasy, but afterwards I couldn't shake the feeling that he was my father.”

“Was your father a mountain wizard?”

“No he wasn’t, but it seems he knew of the technique,” Ryokuju had a strange look in her eyes: she appeared to be viewing another world. “Anyway, shall we go over there?”

Ryokuju spoke as if they were simply moving to the next room, and she invited Keiko outside. This too seemed very natural to Keiko, but there where she exited stood a huge, towering mountain mass which looked as if it were clad in mists. Keiko was musing that this might be Mount Wu, and when she looked at her surroundings she found that they were in a place that resembled a mausoleum. It seemed as if the entire floor was becoming a bed, and Keiko lay down, feeling at ease.

“How I feel very relaxed, but is it all right to be so carefree about this?”

“That’s fine. It’s extremely difficult to do this with those who have wicked thoughts or terrible fears, or those who are inordinately nervous,” her companion said, sprawling out leisurely beside her. She did not have the manner of someone setting about to prepare specifically for lovemaking. A curious green medicinal liquor had been brought out. Wondering whether it was a kind of elixir, Keiko took a sip and instantly became intoxicated.

“I’m getting sleepy,” Keiko said.

“Please sleep just as you are. It’s a pity, but I cannot be your partner and teach you directly. I will summon a man who will be your partner in this…”
After that dream and reality became mixed together, perhaps because the clouds and rain over Mount Wu expanded and engulfed her. They gradually became thicker, and just as she wondered if they were beginning to condense, a great man the likes of which she had never seen enfolded her in his grasp. Rather than being embraced by someone with powerful muscles, Keiko felt as if she were wrapped in strange clouds. The clouds changed forms freely as they entered through every opening in Keiko’s body; it seemed that they penetrated directly into each of her cells, too. When she opened her eyes, she was most definitely being embraced by the great man. She sensed his strong arms and firm chest. She felt the weight of a man’s flesh. There was also the sensation that something was revolving like a spinning top around an axis that had been driven into her body. When she closed her eyes her flesh suddenly began to liquefy. While the top revolved she melted and became a whirling current, and the clouds of the wet dream penetrated her cells one by one.

“How was that?” Keiko heard a voice. She returned to herself and opened her eyes. Atop the bed, which was enveloped by the mists that had drifted down from Mount Wu, sat Ryokuju and the great man. They were both nude. The more she looked at the great man’s features the more noble they seemed; his appearance was such that one might think he was the prime minister of a nation somewhere. Sitting upright next to him, Ryokuju looked as if she were his pupil. Suddenly, an idea flashed into Keiko’s mind: No, this is Ryokuju’s father.

“I think we’ve taught you the essence of the technique. From now on, you will learn through repetition. Just to be certain you’ve got it, we’re going to show you the methodologies of a variety of styles…”
Once she said this, Ryokuju and the great man adopted various positions of sexual intimacy. Even during this flowing “model performance” they appeared to be reaching a state of profound pleasure. Keiko was watching admiringly when she noticed that she had exchanged places with Ryokuju unawares and was herself playing the role of the partner. She was receiving a lesson from the instructor, the great man. This time the quality of the pleasure was different: it was as if they were enjoying a graceful dance together, and she felt that no matter the duration she would never tire of it. During this time the instructor taught her precisely what she ought to pay attention to, but rather than the guidance at a dance lesson it was an extremely pleasurable sensation like that of lover’s talk being breathed into her ear.

“This type of technique will open your eyes, so to speak,” her partner said. “To move to a state of true intoxication, all you have to do is close them.”

When she tried closing her eyes, the cloudy, rainy substance suddenly permeated her, and both her body and consciousness dissolved… This disintegration continued endlessly, seeming all the while to possess a certain deadly quality. Could this be the joy of vanishing into nothingness?

Keiko was thinking such things when she returned to herself, and before she knew it Mount Wu, the clouds, and the rain had disappeared. A delightful rainbow brighter than any she had ever seen stretched from the inside of her head to the sky above. Before her eyes sat Ryokuju, returned to normal.

“How was that?” Ryokuju inquired once again. “Aren’t you tired?”
“No, not at all,” Keiko said. “Maybe it’s due to the special liquor or thanks to that technique, but I feel as if I’m floating through a dream, wrapped in clouds. I wouldn’t mind if this sensation lasted forever.”

“The longer the better, and it’s best to practice every day to preserve your youth. But in order to do that, your partner must master the technique too.”

“You mean my husband?” Keiko said, somewhat taken aback.

“I think he’ll get the hang of it if we practice together two or three times.”

“I feel a little uneasy about that, but I suppose I might as well ask.”

As she said this, Keiko noticed the rainbow inside her head gradually disappearing.
CHAPTER 13

HOUSE OF THE BLACK CAT

“I borrowed an interesting looking video from Mr. Kamiya,” Keiko’s husband said.

“Mr. Kamiya? So is it another one of his homemade pornos?” Keiko responded. Mr. Kamiya, who had graduated behind her husband at university and currently worked as a producer at a television station, was extraordinarily eccentric. He wrote poems using a pen name and had received an award for his work. If Keiko remembered correctly, that poetry collection was called The Black Cat. She recalled that a black cat appeared throughout the whole volume, and that the poems described the intimacy between a young man reminiscent of Mr. Kamiya himself and a cat, “a female, noble like a prostitute and coquettish like a dark goddess.” They had a relationship akin to that of two lovers.

“I don’t know if it’s a porno or not, but in any case it seems that he filmed the black cat in this production.”

Since it was Mr. Kamiya’s work, Keiko doubted that he had simply passively filmed the black cat’s lifestyle and habits. She was convinced that it would be some sort of reflection of a sequence of verses from The Black Cat. Keiko always watched this kind of suggestive thing together with her husband in the middle of the night when the children had fallen asleep. For some reason, she was reluctant to view this sort of blush-inducing and provocative video on her own. When her husband was watching along with her, the feeling became that of watching a film or a preview in a spectator-filled movie theater and she was able to relax.
The *Black Cat* video began with a shot of a white-walled house. The walls sunk into the pale light—either that of dusk or dawn. When the camera zoomed in, something that looked like a charcoal sketch became visible beneath their rough surface. Upon closer examination it had the form of a cat, and the way it squirmed slightly seemed just like the agonized writhing of a cat that had been trapped in a wall by plaster or the like. Keiko suddenly recalled Poe’s “The Black Cat.” The truth was that she did not care for that short story, which described a brutal cat killing.

“It’s Poe’s plot,” her husband said.

The cat took shape while moving inside the wall, and though Keiko watched for a long time she never lost interest. Finally, as the interior of the cat’s silhouette filled in, a jet-black animal condensed inside the wall, and suddenly a pair of golden eyes blazed… While Keiko considered this, the cat itself had broken free of the wall and was approaching. The cat rounded its flexible back and made the shape of the Greek letter omega, continuing to stretch. Keiko let out a sigh of wonder.

If this had been a picture, it would have been drawn with enchantingly beautiful curves.

“It’s more alluring than a woman’s silhouette.”

“I wonder if it’s a woman who’s taken the shape of a cat?”

“It’s behaving like a woman who’s just woken up in the morning.”

There were definitely elements in the cat’s movements reminiscent of a woman languidly walking about her room, hair still disheveled with the remnants of sleep. The cat was inside a room where light slanted in from a window. There was a bed there. There was also a three-sided mirror and a wardrobe. But the cat was treating these
objects like furniture it used itself… Just as Keiko thought this, she noticed something unusual happening. Before she knew it, the relationship in size between the cat and the furniture became the same as that between a human and their furniture. In other words, either the furniture had shrunk or the cat had become huge, but Keiko naturally assumed that the cat had attained human size. “Sure enough, it’s a woman in the form of a black cat,” her husband said, voicing the same opinion.

The “black cat woman” turned her back, which was covered in glossy fur, and sat facing the mirror. She lifted her forelegs, no, they were her arms, and as she combed her hair she styled it into an elegant diamond-shape. Then, she lined up her cosmetics and set about applying her make-up. *I wonder what kind of make-up cats use on their faces?* Keiko took a strange interest in it. *Do cats have the kind of lips one uses lipstick on?* While she was considering this, the black cat took something out of the closet which resembled a light purple robe. After putting it on, the cat exited the room on two feet.

In the next scene, the cat woman took a seat at a dining table and ate breakfast. At this point, there would be nothing to wonder at if she used a knife and fork to eat an omelet and drank a café au lait. She was actually doing so. It would have been more natural if there had been a husband or lover sitting opposite the cat woman and eating. Keiko was a little surprised by the fact that a human man was seated there. More than that, she felt a sense of unease.

The man’s back was turned, and both his face and age were unknown. Accordingly, the cat woman was now facing towards them.

“She’s beautiful,” Keiko sighed again with admiration.
It was natural that cats’ faces could have beautiful or ugly traits too, and Keiko, who had loved cats since she was a child, had standards for judging such qualities. This cat’s face was arranged as if both its contours and the shape of its features were perfectly copied from those of the “ideal cat.” In particular, its golden eyes, which were faintly tinged with green, were more beautiful than those of any woman. Keiko’s husband sighed too. When the cat’s face grinned at its male companion, Keiko unintentionally shivered. Seeing that bewitching smile, one was seized by a desire to be eaten by its maker.

Perhaps the man had gone to work, for his form was no longer visible, and the cat woman’s everyday life continued on screen. However, her lifestyle was that of a cat: she walked on four legs, jumped up on window frames, climbed a magnolia tree, and curled up in a ball and slept. Before Keiko knew it, the black cat had returned to the size of an ordinary cat.

When night came the cat once again became the size of a human, and finally a spectacle unfolded which met Keiko’s expectations, or perhaps exceeded them. It was a scene of the very strange and graceful intercourse between the cat woman and the human man. The black cat did not take on human form. She still had the body and face of a cat, but her intimate position and the movements with which she embraced the man upon the bed were no different from that of a human. Keiko had not thought that a cat’s limbs could move this freely, or that they were capable of caressing. And there was also the cat’s rough tongue. The man’s hands stroked the cat’s fur. It seemed that under the chin was a common pleasure point for all cats. The cat began to let out the usual purring sound, and a mysterious woman’s voice mingled with it. It appeared that the woman’s
voice was being employed as background music. It resembled a piece by a modern composer which featured a soprano voice used like an instrument, the kind that seemed like it might drive the listener mad. Still, it went very well with the movements of this intimacy. Keiko had the sense that it was actually the cat woman speaking seductively while she undulated the black curve of her body.

The man’s back was turned the whole time, and Keiko could not see his face. The intercourse had begun in the usual position for male and female humans, and continued as they took on a variety of forms. Last, they adopted the position of two beasts. Rather than being thrust inside the black cat’s darkness, it looked as if part of the man’s body was being sucked inward. When a long-lasting sound that was either a scream or a cry of delight swelled forth, the screen suddenly became white.

“I wonder how he managed to record it?” Keiko’s husband said in a voice hoarse with excitement. However, Keiko had lost all feeling and her imaginative abilities were bloodshot and swollen for a time. In these circumstances there was nothing else they could do, and the natural progression of things was to reproduce what they had just seen with each other. While Keiko pretended to be a white cat and endeavored to portray feline flirtatiousness, she could hear the strange music with its wordless soprano vocals flying about. “The white cat is pretty good too,” her husband said after they had finished.

Keiko and her husband were strangely fearful of watching the Black Cat video again and waited for word from Mr. Kamiya, intending to return it. However, there was no news, and when Keiko’s husband tried calling the television station, he was told that Mr. Kamiya was traveling overseas on holiday and that his whereabouts were unknown.

“I wonder if his wife is at home?”
“He’s married, and he supposedly has four children too. I’ve heard he has two sets of twins: a boy pair and a girl pair.”

“I’m worried about him. Why don’t we go and check out the house together?” Keiko said. She did not want to go alone—she sensed that something sinister might have happened.

Keiko and her husband visited Mr. Kamiya’s home on a chilly Sunday afternoon before the cherry blossoms were in bloom, and the house that they were looking for was a Spanish-style residence with elegant white walls. In the garden a deep red quince bush was blooming, and a huge magnolia tree bore clusters of flowers.

“It’s the magnolia tree from the video.”

“The white walled house from the beginning looked like this too.”

“It seems that no one’s here.”

When they pushed the wooden gate and entered the garden, there was a cat cry above their heads. Here and there in the magnolia tree’s branches they could make out shapes reminiscent of black fruit. There were five black cats in all. The cats descended from the tree headfirst as if they were welcoming their guests. When Keiko looked at the black cats, who were sitting lined up atop a white bench in the garden, she recognized one face which was noticeably larger. There was no mistaking that it was the cat who had become the “black cat woman” and had intercourse with the human man. At this point, Keiko had almost no doubt that the cat woman’s partner had been Mr. Kamiya. And that meant that this beautiful black cat was Mr. Kamiya’s wife, and that her four kittens were Mr. Kamiya’s children… There was no other way to look at it, was there?
“Is your husband in?” Keiko greeted her, but the cats turned aside without a reply and jumped up through a window with their mother in the lead, disappearing inside the house. When Keiko tried peeking in, she saw indications that people were living normally there, and she couldn’t believe that it was an uninhabited house whose owner had disappeared. But, and perhaps it was her imagination, something akin to the scent of fresh blood was wafting faintly through the air. Could it be the odor of what the cats had eaten?

After Keiko’s husband climbed in through the window and checked that there were no humans in the house, the two decided to return home for the time being. They exited through the garden. When she turned her head again, and perhaps this too was her imagination, she had a feeling there was a woman’s voice coming from the house:

“My! That was frightening. Those people arrived out of the blue.”

“Did you hear something, Keiko?”

“No, not really,” Keiko said.
CHAPTER 14

THE RED ROOM

At a party organized by the Hungarian ambassador, Keiko saw an old-fashioned
noblewoman speaking to the ambassador and her heart began to beat wildly. She had
seen her somewhere before. In addition to the agitation from being unable to place her,
there was the woman’s strange beauty: Keiko was completely fascinated by her sinister
loveliness, which seemed like it would corrode the eyes of those who looked upon it.

When the woman’s eyes met Keiko’s, it appeared as if she nodded faintly. Her
pupils were a deep black that was not of this world, and they were filled with a light
which made it seem like she was seeing a dream, and even more so, made it unclear what
she was looking at. The truth is she might only be seeing her own internal world, Keiko
thought, but a flame of cold contempt towards the humans around her guttered in those
unreadable pupils.

While Keiko mixed French in with English speaking with a Hungarian woman
writer who had independently published three translated volumes, from time to time she
would peek at the noblewoman’s appearance. Keiko asked the woman writer, but she
said it was her first time seeing the woman and that she did not know her. Keiko’s
anxiety became unusually intense. However, she was finally convinced of the
noblewoman’s true identity by the very nature of the anxiety. Put simply, it was the
conviction that she must be someone from the “Other World.” Along with that, a
membrane that had concealed her memories was peeled back as one would peel the skin
off of a pale peach, and the events of their previous meeting vividly came to mind.
She was the Countess Elizabeth Báthory. Her elegant and cold physical appearance, inconceivable for a modern person, remained unchanged since that time, but her looks were disguised by a dress the color of the deep sea which seemed to be that of an Italian designer. It was difficult to remember the Countess who had appeared before in sixteenth century noblewoman’s attire just like in her portrait.

The Countess approached Keiko before she left, and this time she distinctly inclined her head and greeted her. Keiko expressed her happiness at seeing her again after such a long time and smiled warmly, and her companion responded with a mysterious smile of her own.

“You were so hospitable to me on that occasion…” the Countess said, and then explained that in truth there was something she wished to give Keiko as a thank you gift. She invited Keiko to her hotel.

“I would love to, if that’s all right,” Keiko responded, but in all honesty she felt a shiver as if ice needles were forming in her bones when she was alone with this individual.

When Keiko had invited a group of her unusual female visitors from the “Other World,” including Elizabeth, to go maple viewing, she had not found any of them especially frightening. However, the circumstances were different when she met them individually. In terms of the terror of those times, Keiko thought that Elizabeth might be exceptional. While she lived she was a woman who took delight in slaughtering countless young maidservants and extracting their blood. She did not perform such behaviors exclusively at her castle at the foot of the Lesser Carpathian mountain range; she also did so when she went to Vienna and stayed at inns there. It is said that every
night one could hear the screams of the young women, and that when morning came
blood flowed through the streets.

However, this time Keiko had instantly managed to steel herself and make light of
the situation; she was a little amazed at herself as she rode in Elizabeth’s car. The driver
was a tall woman who gave the sense of a real beauty dressed in men’s attire.

“It was nice meeting you,” Elizabeth said. “Socializing is not a particularly
strong point of mine, so it seems I haven’t made any friends besides you here. I’ve given
up my customary pastime now, too.”

“I’m relieved to hear that,” Keiko said, laughing.

“The truth is, I’ve moved and now I live here. In short, I’m a changed woman:
the wife of a millionaire of sorts who is a descendent of exiled Hungarian nobility. But,
of course no one knows my true identity.”

“Is it all right to discuss that kind of thing now?” Keiko said, lowering her voice.

“It’s fine. Ordinary humans can’t hear our conversation, you see.”

The Countess said this and let out a laugh, and before Keiko knew it all of the
frightening coldness had disappeared from her face. Her flamboyance and generous
spirit had surfaced, and she seemed like the wife of a former aristocrat or a multi-
millionaire that one would find in the European upper class. However, Keiko simply
could not conceive that this woman had become the wife of a millionaire. Keiko did not
believe that a man had married the Countess or that she had performed duties as a wife or
borne children. Wasn’t her marriage for appearance’s sake only, and didn’t she live her
life without letting a man lay a finger on her? In truth, the act of gathering maidens and
extracting their blood might also stem from a natural propensity to prize young women instead of men.

They arrived at a Neo-Baroque style building which was surrounded by trees blooming out of season with flowers that resembled those of a dogwood tree. Keiko did not know that this kind of hotel existed in Tokyo. She understood that she was once again coming to a place not of this world. However, the interior was like a hotel, and there were the figures of porters and guests. They were guided to a room which was styled like some kind of hotel suite.

Here, Keiko was greeted by a group of women wearing dresses whose lace-ornamented collars spread like those of frill-necked lizards: the spitting image of the ones she had seen in period portraits. They seemed to be the Countess’ maids, or perhaps the servants of the millionaire’s wife.

Elizabeth spoke to one of the maids and had the young woman bring her two drinks with a blood-like hue. Keiko was nervous in spite of herself, but it seemed that it was just extraordinarily fine wine. They toasted, and when Keiko gave it a try, the drink had a taste and aroma reminiscent of a very rare aphrodisiac. It was not wine. *Just as I suspected*... Keiko thought. Elizabeth, perhaps reading her mind, kept her beautifully shaped mouth closed and laughed with her eyes.

“As you’ve guessed, this is a liquor created from a fluid in the human body.”

“That accounts for the strange affinity I feel.”

“It can rid a person of any fatigue all at once.”
She’s right, Keiko thought. It was written that one must not drink blood in Leviticus or somewhere similar, but if drinks brewed from human blood were so delicious she felt that she could understand the existence of such prohibitions all the more.

“I’ve been meaning to ask this for a long time,” Keiko said. “In truth, you prefer women to men, no?”

“You’re referring to the individuals who circulate the drink’s ingredients inside their bodies?” the Countess said. “Yes, I like them. Men are of no interest to me. And, once a woman has enjoyed herself sufficiently you can make use of her blood.”

“Do you do anything with it besides make liquor?”

“I use it as an ingredient in cosmetics. But, the best of all is a bath. Please wait a moment.”

Elizabeth called one of her maids and gave an order. Then, she extended an invitation: if Keiko liked, the two of them could take a special bath together. Keiko was prepared for the worst, but the first thing that came to mind was the lake of blood in Hell. When the maid returned shortly thereafter and notified them that the preparations had been made, Elizabeth began removing the clothes she was wearing. Keiko was surprised that her manner was ladylike and innocent, and at the same time she marveled at Elizabeth’s body, which was reminiscent of delicate and highly wrought waxwork. It was semi-transparent and seemed almost to be melting away. Asked to do the same, Keiko undressed.

Keiko was guided through the small neighboring chamber and into a place that seemed like a bathroom. Upon opening the door, instead of a thick shroud of steam an oval bathtub filled with a deep crimson liquid caught her eye. Furthermore, the liquid
seemed to have a mysterious luminescent effect, and it reflected a dark rose-hued light on the white walls of the bathroom. Even the air shone red.

“It’s a marvelous bath.”

“It looks like it’s in an ideal state of fermentation,” Elizabeth said. “It has a lovely scent.”

It definitely smelled good. It was not the scent of blood itself. It was a complex and heavy aroma, a cross between that of certain types of fruits, flowers, and meats. If one were to enter into the human body, it seemed as though it would smell like this. Enveloped by this scent, Keiko lined up beside Elizabeth and submerged her body in the tub.

“It’s surprisingly light and transparent. It’s like it was made by dissolving a deep crimson jewel…”

“Yes. But it doesn’t turn out this way unless you use the blood of virgins.”

“Do you drain their blood with the device referred to as an ‘iron maiden’?”

Keiko had now become bold enough to ask such a thing.

“I’ve tried using that, too. But it quickly rusts together with blood and becomes unusable. I usually have them drink a magical potion and when they’re sleeping in a trance-like state I put them in the bathtub and cut through their carotid arteries.”

As she said this, Elizabeth lifted a delicate arm and, with a graceful manner, acted out the motion of putting a blade to her own neck.

Upon leaving the bath of blood, Keiko was guided to a bedroom and the two of them, still naked, slept wrapped in each other’s embrace. Her mind alone seemed to be sleeping; her body, perhaps due to the effects of the bath, was in a pleasant electrified
state. As she was caressed in all manner of ways, Keiko became entwined with her partner like a flexible serpent, undulating. At that point, a cold blade severed her carotid artery and her blood was released… This is a fitting and marvelous fate, Keiko thought, half-asleep and half-awake.

When she awoke, Elizabeth’s figure was not there beside her. Keiko first went to see the bathroom, but the bathtub was already empty and not a single bloodstain remained. Elizabeth appeared at the breakfast table dressed like a countess.

When she returned home, Keiko received a present. It was cream and bathing powder in pearl-colored containers. The cream was the same luminous deep crimson color as the liquid that had been collected in the bathtub. And when she dissolved the bathing powder in lukewarm water, it too created something similar to what she had seen on that occasion. Keiko had learned the secret behind the beauty of the Countess’ jewel-like skin.
CHAPTER 15

THE WATER RAIL VILLAGE

When it was decided that a modern edition of *The Tale of Genji* picture scrolls was to be published, Keiko was introduced to a woman who was a researcher in the field. She was introduced by Lady Rokujō, who had come to visit again after a lengthy absence.

“If she’s an acquaintance of yours, she must be from the ‘Other World,’” Keiko said, but her companion looked unconcerned.

“It seems she’s from Kansai, but… Anyway, she’s someone I owed a great deal to long ago.

The woman, who was called Ms. Fujiwara, appeared at Keiko’s home soon afterwards. There had been no advance notice by letter or telephone, and her arrival was like that of an old friend unexpectedly stopping by on a visit to the capital. It seemed she knew Keiko, and although she was not overly friendly, the two ended up meeting in Keiko’s room as if they were colleagues who saw each other and worked together on a daily basis.

Ms. Fujiwara’s level of intelligence was a cut above that of today’s career women, and her composure and elegant manner were that of an individual with complete self-control. The beautiful woman’s age was unknown, though she appeared to be around thirty, and she wore a dress the color of wisteria. Only her hair was old-fashioned: her long tresses flowed behind her, gathered in a style reminiscent of that of a Heian period woman one would see in a picture scroll.

Keiko searched her mind for someone who seemed similar to Ms. Fujiwara’s type among the women who appeared in *The Tale of Genji*. Lady Akashi, Lady
Hanachirusato… Still, Keiko lacked the confidence to draw a conclusion. Because Ms. Fujiwara was someone Lady Rokujō knew, Keiko had assumed from start that she also had to be a character from *The Tale of Genji*. Typical of someone from the “Other World,” her companion seemed to read her mind:

“Lady Rokujō introduced me, but the truth is that I’m the author.” Ms. Fujiwara spoke modestly, but she gave a bewitching smile.

“Forgive me,” Keiko beamed too. “That was thoughtless. You were born into the Fujiwara clan but took the name Murasaki Shikibu. Even your clothes are purple, the color associated with your name.”

To Keiko, the fact that the author of a tale and the fictitious characters created therein appeared to live together undifferentiated in the “Other World” was quite strange, but as she talked to Ms. Fujiwara this too came to seem natural. Ms. Fujiwara answered Keiko’s questions and spoke of her female characters Lady Murasaki, Yūgao, and Oborozukiyo as if she were discussing news of her peers. The stories were precise, leaving nothing to waste. When she spoke dispassionately it was like listening to the sound of wind blowing through bamboo, and Keiko once again admired Ms. Fujiwara’s intelligence. The established image for the author of *The Tale of Genji* was that of a melancholic, spiteful, and difficult to get along with intellectual woman writer, but Keiko had always thought this could not be the case. The beautiful woman matched her expectations, no, she far surpassed them, and Keiko felt a rare sense of joy at what she revealed.

If the author herself collaborated with them on a new edition of *The Tale of Genji* picture scrolls, all that was left would be to create illustrations which satisfied her. Keiko
had already thought of an artist for the job, but Ms. Fujiwara had some bold ideas: she believed that instead of settling on a single artist, a competition among several would be ideal. And, rather than the illustrations being like picture scrolls, she felt it would be best if they were styled like the works of Dufy, Delvaux, and O’Keefe.

“You’re very familiar with recent artwork, too.”

“I have free time in the ‘Other World,’ so I can go and view it anywhere.”

Ms. Fujiwara said this modestly, but the more they spoke the more Keiko was impressed by her extensive knowledge.

One day, Keiko and Ms. Fujiwara were eating out and having a discussion about Eastern and Western cuisine. In this field as well, Keiko was surprised by what subjects her companion had a wealth of experience and knowledge in. When the conversation turned to cooking wild birds, Keiko was suddenly struck with an idea:

“I wonder if water rails, those birds that have been made famous in poems since long ago, are edible?”

“I hear that water rails brought from Hokkaido in the wintertime are delicious. But I think that the rails that appear in poetry are of a different variety called the ruddy crake. They’re lovely reddish-chestnut and olive colored birds.

Even though it knocks
Even though it knocks
The water rail is not allowed in

It seems that the ‘water rails’ which appear in haiku like this are ruddy crakes as well.”

“The ‘knocking’ of the water rail, that refers to the fact that their cries resemble the sound of someone knocking on a door. Is it a summer bird?”
“If you go to the riverside district this time of year, they might be walking through the thickets.”

Ms. Fujiwara squinted her eyes, seeming to gaze into the distance. All of a sudden, she said:

“Shall we go?”

Thinking that Ms. Fujiwara meant to reveal her otherworldly abilities at last, Keiko stood and the two left the building together.

Upon exiting, Keiko found herself in a waterfront district with a large river and a swamp. A small boat was waiting, and the two of them boarded it together. When Ms. Fujiwara said something to the boatman, the boat began to move through a gentle breeze which was tinged with a pale green hue. After winding their way from one complex canal to another, they arrived at what seemed like an old-fashioned villa.

Keiko had thought of them as “old-fashioned”, but the truth was they might be buildings from the time of Ms. Fujiwara and The Tale of Genji. However, they also resembled the old traditional inns in Kyoto, and the woman who came out to greet them wore an ordinary kimono.

“If it’s all right with you, let’s stay here for the night,” Ms. Fujiwara said as if it were perfectly natural.

“Can you see water rails here?”

“Maybe… There is supposed to be a splendid one in this area,” Ms. Fujiwara said enigmatically, and then threw open the windows of the room where they had arrived. The surface of the water quivered before Keiko’s eyes, and she had the sense that the
room, overhanging the water below, had become a boat and was drifting along the riverside.

Among the food they had eaten at their meal there had been one French-style dish which resembled pigeon, but Ms. Fujiwara had laughed slightly and said “This is it,” and so Keiko had thought that it must be water rail.

Now when she asked, “Do water rails appear only on plates, then?” Ms. Fujiwara said nothing and laughed. Would the real thing turn up here? The sun was already going down. Keiko was reminded of something, and, nodding her head to herself, concluded that it had to be the case.

A passage in The Diary of Lady Murasaki had been on her mind for some time. There was a playful exchange where Lady Murasaki was teased by Grand Minister Fujiwara no Michinaga, who commented on her reputation as a promiscuous “tart,” and she replied with a clever play on words: “I have been tasted by none yet; so who could smack their lips and call me tart?” According to the story, afterwards someone who seemed to be Michinaga paid her an evening visit, and though he knocked on the pinewood door, it did not open. And so, Keiko suddenly understood the true nature of the “splendid” water rail that Ms. Fujiwara had mentioned.

“Perhaps… Could it be that the splendid water rail is the Grand Minister?”

“Yes, that’s him, but he seems a little overzealous in his affections. It’s problematic.”

“But you don't hate Michinaga, do you? From what I’ve imagined, I’ve always thought of him as a magnificent man.”
“He’s too magnificent, and there is something a little depressing about taking him as a partner. In any case, I don’t have much talent in that arena, and I doubt I could satisfy him sufficiently… So, I have a request. Tonight, I’d like you to take my place and serve as his partner.”

Keiko thought worriedly that this was nonsense, but for some reason her anxiety quickly subsided. Ms. Fujiwara discussed various subjects at length until late at night, and it seemed that she sincerely cared for Michinaga. Although the genealogical text Sonpi Bunmyaku stated that she was Michinaga’s mistress, such things did not bother her at all. The truth was that they had a more pleasant, flirtatious relationship. Keiko listened to her story, finding it entirely reasonable. Michinaga was a self-confident person who was full of wit, but he was not at all arrogant, nor was he the type with boundless sexual energy. Ms. Fujiwara complained that he had developed diabetes, and that his physical condition was not perfect. Despite that, she said, he overworked himself engaging in flirtation with her.

The night wore on, and before Keiko knew it she had the sensation that her body was sinking within a dream. However, the quiet, sharp sound of a knock on a door suddenly reached her ears.

“It seems he’s come,” Keiko said, rising.

“There’s no need to rush to open it. We have to keep him in suspense for as long as possible,” Ms. Fujiwara said.

Come to think of it, in The Diary of Lady Murasaki someone knocked on the Lady’s door one night, but she was frightened and did not open it. In the early morning, this poem arrived from Michinaga:
All throughout the night
More stubborn than a water-rail
I cried and cried
Knocking on your pinewood door
Grieving at your indifference

“Isn’t it a bit cruel not to open it, knowing that it’s Michinaga?” Keiko said.

“In a diary one shows to others, one has no choice but to write that way,” Ms. Fujiwara replied. “Anyway, I leave the matter of tonight up to you. I’ll be disappearing now.”

Keiko caught Ms. Fujiwara’s meaning and prepared for an intimate encounter, straining her ears for signs of the water rail which had been continuously knocking on the door for some time.

Her partner was smaller than she had expected, and he threw himself enthusiastically into their intercourse without a word. However, Keiko was unsure whether he had noticed that she had taken Ms. Fujiwara’s place. Perhaps the traditional Chinese lovemaking techniques from that period had spread among the aristocracy, for Michinaga’s execution was polished and fluid. The technique from the “Other World” that Keiko had recently learned from Ryokuju proved useful. Suddenly the “Misty Rain of Mount Wu” shrouded the area, and Keiko forgot who her partner was. From the whispered words, “You’re different from your usual self,” Keiko knew that she had skillfully carried out her duty, and she continued her dalliance with him until morning. All the while, she could hear the intermittent cry of a bird that seemed to be a real water rail from outside. “It’s lovely to meet in a water rail village,” her partner said, and Keiko felt the same way.
CHAPTER 16

FIREFLY CATCHING

There were places where the air was especially cool in certain corners of Kyoto in the summertime. It was an indication that a corner of the “Other World” must be cropping out into this world. Even upon entering the hotel the signs were there, subtly different from the cool of the air conditioning. After dinner, Keiko was scanning the material pertaining to the woodblock artist she was scheduled to meet the next day in her room, which looked out over the Higashiyama district. All of a sudden, she felt that unearthly cool air again. When she turned around, a woman of about thirty with gentle features was standing there.

“I hope I’m not interrupting,” the woman said in a gentle voice that suited her face.

“Oh, Ms. Fujiwara!” Keiko reflexively called her by her original name, and her companion laughed and nodded, sitting down on the sofa.

In stark contrast to the wisteria-colored dress from the other day, Ms. Fujiwara, or Murasaki Shikibu as she became known, was wearing a strange outfit consisting of a dull gray silk gauze kimono in which only the obi was the flame-like color of a red spider lily. Keiko was secretly impressed. This seemed to be their sense of fashion in the “Other World;” there was no relation to the conventions of this one.

“I wanted to thank you for what happened in the water rail village the other day,” her companion said. “It seems Michinaga was very satisfied as well.”

“He said I was different from my usual self, but I wonder if he guessed that his partner had exchanged places with someone else.”
“Who knows?” Ms. Fujiwara hid behind the membrane of a weak smile. “That aside, I’m visiting today because I’d like to give you something to express my gratitude.”

Keiko replied that such concern was unnecessary, but Ms. Fujiwara shook her head.

“How about going firefly catching?” she said.

“That’s a very good idea.”

“Well then, I’ll lead you towards Kifune. Although, I do have one request…”

Ms. Fujiwara wanted to borrow a change of clothes. Keiko brought out a wisteria-colored blouse and a white linen skirt and offered them to her.

“It’s difficult to move in this kimono, and I wanted to try wearing something from your era for once.”

“As expected, purple suits you well. Now then, what would you like to do for shoes and a handbag?”

As she said this, Keiko saw Ms. Fujiwara’s slender porcelain-white feet. It was difficult to imagine that she had ever worn shoes and set foot on the ground; they seemed to be the feet of a noble ghost.

“Footwear won’t be…”

Upon signaling with her eyes that she wished to leave at once, Ms. Fujiwara took the lead and exited Keiko’s room. It was the same turn of events that she had experienced several times before on occasions like this: it was not a hotel corridor but a place deep in the mountains, and that being the case the shrine which Keiko could see beyond the cedar grove must be Kifune. It seemed that the clearly audible sound of running water was that of the Mitarashi River.
“I’ve heard that nowadays you don’t see fireflies in your places anymore,” Ms. Fujiwara said.

“It’s become difficult to find them. Although we call it ‘firefly catching,’ it’s just watching fireflies gathered at great pains being released into hotel gardens. At any rate, do fireflies exist in the mountains like this?”

“They do exist. No, I wonder if it wouldn’t be better to say that they ‘appear.’ They’re of a rare variety not seen anywhere else.”

“Appear? So they’re like ghosts of some kind?”

“Now that you mention it, they might be something similar to ghosts, yes.”

“Like souls that have broken free of their bodies, or…?”

But Ms. Fujiwara put a finger to her mouth and forestalled Keiko, pointing to a place which was more like a Noh stage than a temple. Faintly lit, it was the only thing she could make out against the darkness.

“She should enter before long.”

There was no time to ask who “she” was; a female form wearing the mask of a mature young woman appeared on the stage. By all appearances she was walking towards them, moving like a Noh actor. There was no musical accompaniment or chanting chorus, but it looked as if a torch-lit outdoor performance was beginning.

“Just as I suspected, she must be embarrassed if she’s wearing a mask,” Ms. Fujiwara murmured. Bearing this remark in mind, Keiko guessed that the woman who had appeared just now must be someone who was quite displeased with Ms. Fujiwara.

“Is she an acquaintance of yours?”

“Her name is Izumi.”
Keiko understood that this was Izumi Shikibu. She was the contemporary that Ms. Fujiwara, or Murasaki Shikibu as she was better known, had sharply criticized in her *Diary*. Izumi was one of her juniors, and it could only be expected that even now she would harbor no good will towards Ms. Fujiwara.

“Do you mind if we watch from a closer spot?” Keiko asked.

“That’s fine,” Ms. Fujiwara readily replied.

The two approached until they were just beneath the front of the stage. Perhaps recognizing them, Izumi Shikibu seemed to incline her mask in greeting. Ms. Fujiwara did not lower her voice, and gave an explanation in her usual tone.

“Izumi came to the Kifune shrine because she was abandoned by a man and felt depressed. She’s what you might call a ‘woman of many loves.’ You know that her relationships with men were unusual?”

“Yes, I have a general idea.”

“In truth, it seems she also has a certain purpose in appearing here tonight. She’s not the type of person who has admirable intentions like imploring the gods to relieve her of her troubles.”

“Is she planning to have a secret rendezvous here?”

“Your intuition is quite keen. Her partner is someone surprising.”

“Perhaps the deity of Kifune…?”

While Keiko sensed Ms. Fujiwara nodding, her attention was drawn to another individual who had appeared on the stage. They were dressed like a shrine maiden and wore a similar mask, but according to Ms. Fujiwara, this was the deity of Kifune.

“This deity is a man?”
“Yes, that’s right. Otherwise she wouldn’t come to a place like this. Afterwards she was boastful, and she wrote that the god gave her a poem in reply, speaking with the voice of a man. I’ve heard that the poem goes like this:

Deep in the mountains
the surging, plunging falls
scatter in jewels;
do not sink in sorrow thus
lest you scatter like a drop

But it seems to be a poem she threw together herself.”

“And that is the reply to another poem. It goes:

When I sorrow at
your absence, the marsh firefly
seems to be my soul
separating from my body
and leaving in search of you…”

Keiko finally understood the idea behind tonight’s firefly catching. Perhaps Ms. Fujiwara read Keiko’s mind, for she said:

“The fireflies will be appearing soon."

The area around them returned to darkness. However, for some reason they could clearly see what was beginning to unfold atop the stage. The two individuals floated in the darkness like two dolls that had been covered in luminous paint. Dancing slowly in the Noh style all the while, before long the two began engaging in a behavior entirely foreign to Noh theater. They started to cast off the clothes they were wearing. Keiko caught her breath.

“Sure enough, the deity here is a man.”

“He is a god who is kind to women. You could call him a dabbler.” Ms. Fujiwara said sarcastically.
When the two individuals on stage revealed their nude bodies, music broke out. Different from that of a Noh orchestra, it could have been described as a strange, cosmic sound. Both of them still wore their masks. Their naked bodies were white like dolls, and the god had a cold, lunar brightness against the pale red tinged form of Izumi Shikibu. The two were merging into one, still suspended in midair. Or perhaps they were embracing while afloat. In any case, the stage disappeared and the glowing bodies hung in the darkness intertwining and making a shape like a mysterious hieroglyph.

Ms. Fujiwara caught Keiko by the hand. While they watched hand in hand, eventually something unusual occurred; it was just as Keiko had expected. Something blue-tinged and luminescent escaped from Izumi Shikibu’s body and flew through the air. It was too large to be a firefly, and was similar in shape to a sphere. Still, its form was not fixed and it seemed be made of a watery substance which had the flexibility of a jellyfish, and it drifted around the two of them while emitting light in a respiratory rhythm. Before their eyes the number of spheres increased, until it looked like an enormous swarm of fireflies.

“They’re splendid fireflies, aren’t they?” Ms. Fujiwara clasped Keiko’s hand tightly, so Keiko squeezed back.

“They’re actually her soul, right?” she said.

“Izumi has a condition that causes them to separate from her body and drift about when she enters an ecstatic state. There are people who are jealous of her, but I find it weird.”

“Can her male partners see them as well?”

“Of course they can. That’s exactly why they’re crazy for her.”
Keiko was rather interested and felt like learning the technique herself, but Ms. Fujiwara grasped Keiko by both hands as if she were trying to keep such feelings in check.

“Please stop,” she said in a low and forceful voice.

The number of fireflies which were escaping from Izumi’s bewitching naked body and flitting through the darkness had now become too numerous to count. The area was so bright that she thought the full moon might have descended there.

“Shall we go home?” Ms. Fujiwara put out her hand.

“What will happen to her after this?”

“She will look like a broken doll. She always loses consciousness, and until the sun rises she collapses in an unbecoming state.”

“But what about the fireflies, or rather, her soul?”

“It seems the majority land on her body and slip back in just as they were before.”

Keiko let out a sigh.

They returned to the hotel, and Ms. Fujiwara changed back into her original clothes. After showing her out, Keiko was about to fold the borrowed blouse and skirt when a great number of fireflies spilled out of the garments and began to fly feebly around the room. They were large for fireflies, and the fleeting movements they made were like those of soap bubbles. Eventually they dropped to the floor by ones and twos, disappearing without leaving a stain on the carpet. Keiko considered that this might be how Izumi lost a part of her soul; it was not any concern of hers, and yet she grew sad and let out another sigh.
CHAPTER 17

MAPLE VIEWING

Somewhere down the line Keiko had reached a point where she was associating with the inhabitants of the spirit realm, and she decided to invite some individuals from that world to her thirty-fifth birthday gathering this year. Since she had traveled to Yoshino and held a blossom viewing party this past spring, the idea of autumn moon or maple viewing was more of a natural progression than a birthday celebration. Whenever the Noh verse “Let us make haste to the deep mountains to view the maples, before the drizzling rains arrive” rang in her ears, she forgot about the matter of her birthday and her mind became filled with images of maple viewing. As usual she consulted with Lady Rokujō, who she was most familiar with.

“That’s a lovely idea. We couldn’t see the harvest moon due to rain this year, so let’s drink saké together while viewing the autumn leaves along the mountains,” Rokujō said.

“I’ll leave the guests up to you.”

“All right. Because it’s a gathering for your birthday, all of the attendees will take the form of their thirty-five year old selves.”

“Thank you for being so considerate,” Keiko expressed her gratitude for Lady Rokujō’s continual and prudent thoughtfulness.

“Instead, this time we’ll include some demonesses. It’s fitting for autumn leaf viewing. Would that be alright with you?”

“You mean women who practice diabolic magic?”

“They’re all noblewomen too, naturally.”
With the help of Empress Wu, it was decided that they would use the poet Wang Wei’s retirement estate at the foot of the Zhongnan Mountains as a meeting place on the appointed day. Although the Noh image of a rich brocade of autumn leaves darkened by evening drizzle in the deep mountains around Togakushi fit the bill, the first thing that Keiko was reminded of by the “autumn leaves along the mountains” which Lady Rokujō had mentioned was a hillside bathed in the light of the setting sun and shining brilliantly. Her mind turned next to Wang Wei’s poem “Magnolia Enclosure” which began, “The autumn mountains gather the lingering light,” and she thought to use the view of crisply colored mountains visible from the magnolia enclosure in Wang Wei’s riverside villa for the day of the gathering. Empress Wu’s name surfaced because the riverside villa’s original owner, Song Zhiwen, was a poet from her time. The Empress herself wanted to come, and so one guest was promptly decided.

“Anyway, this time we’re expecting a great woman to attend.”

Keiko was imagining a giant woman like a towering bronze statue, but Lady Rokujō laughed.

“She’s a surprisingly unpretentious old lady,” she said, and then hurriedly corrected herself. “Excuse me. She lived a very long life, so I always inadvertently treat her like that… But when she was thirty-five she was a spirited woman in the prime of her beauty. She was tall for her time, probably as tall as you are now.”

“If that’s the case, it seems there’s nothing to fear. Still, I thought the way she threw people like Lady Wang into wine casks after cutting off their arms and legs was awful.”
“Indeed. But when it comes to frightening things, I can think of others worse than the Empress,” Lady Rokujo said, and then revealed the guests they were expecting.

“In terms of ancient times, we have Medea from Greece. A curious woman named Elizabeth Báthory from Hungary. And, Kaguya Hime from the moon. That makes six people including us. How is that?”

“I don’t think that’s enough for a maple viewing party. Like the flower viewing fêtes when the cherry blossoms bloom, there should be dozens of demons and witches gathering and making merry.”

Before noon that day, Lady Rokujo appeared at the tearoom in Keiko’s home. They always did this when individuals from the spirit world gathered. However, recently the Lady was turning up more and more often simply to enjoy a cup of Keiko’s thin tea and talk about all sorts of things, and it was at those times that she showed Keiko the flowing form of her glossy hair. The interior of the room was illuminated by her beauty, which could only be described as that of a goddess. Of course, no one else could see it. And at those times, Keiko too entered a kind of ecstatic state; something that felt like a part of her own soul escaped to the spirit world. If that’s the case, you might as well transfer completely and become a resident of the spirit world. Rokujo Miyasudokoro had been extending the invitation for a long time.

“Shall we return to that story later and head out?” Lady Rokujo rose, gracefully lifting her dress. It was not the formal twelve-layered kimono one would expect for an excursion. It was a casual and lightweight garment that resembled the costume of the lead actor in the Noh play Maple Viewing.
“All right,” Keiko stood and followed her. When the two went to make their way out into the garden in front of the teahouse, they had already arrived at a mountain trail on the outskirts of Chang’ an.

There were no people visible on the mountain, brightened as it was by rays of autumn sunlight, but a human voice could be heard coming from nowhere in particular. The trail, which took the form of a stone staircase, wove its way among scattered groves of trees, sloping upwards.

“This is what the poet Du Mu was referring to when he wrote ‘I can see the settlement beneath the white clouds hanging in the distance?’”

When Keiko mentioned this, the very thing she had described was already becoming real: the two arrived at the monastery-style residence written of in “Magnolia Enclosure,” which appeared from within a white mist.

The first guest to arrive was Empress Wu. Just as Lady Rokujō had described, she was a beautiful woman who seemed both regal and intelligent. When Keiko greeted her following Lady Rokujō’s introduction, the Empress extended her hand and offered to shake in the Western style. If her attire and hairstyle had not been in the traditional Chinese fashion, she would give the impression of a young wife of a company president; she was obviously a sociable type of woman.

And this must be Kaguya Hime: the heavenly maiden, who was wrapped in a mist-like feather mantle, came swooping down from the clear sky like a dream. However, in contrast to Keiko’s preconceived notion of a slender young girl, she was a voluptuous and beautiful woman, reminiscent of the legendary imperial consort Yang Guifei. Beside her, perhaps having sprung forth from the earth unnoticed, stood a shockingly pale
Hungarian noblewoman. Keiko felt an indefinable sense of terror at the chill of her touch when they shook hands and at her mysterious black pupils in which she was not certain what she was seeing. This was “The Bloody Countess” Elizabeth Báthory.

“We’re just waiting on Medea now.”

When she said this, a strange flying body described an arc through the air, descending and drawing near with an oppressive roaring sound.

When she looked at the now landed flying being, it had grown countless legs like a centipede and its body was that of a very long reptile. Its head was that of a monster crossed between a lion and a wolf, and instead of wildly exhaling air it breathed fire. The woman who dismounted from its back was a beautiful, dark complexioned individual who displayed more of the dreadfulness of a witch than a demoness.

“Is this Medea’s famous dragon carriage?” It was Empress Wu who immediately showed interest. Keiko too was immensely curious, as though she had seen a bizarre sports car. Come to think of it the otherworldly “dragon,” which closed its eyes and put its chin to the ground without moving when Medea stroked its head, looked very much like a modern day vehicle. And Medea, who was riding it, seemed to have the air of a gallant female racecar driver.

“When it flies through the air it coils itself into a ball. And, to take flight it sprays poisonous gas from the holes in its flanks and spins around.”

“What was Kaguya Hime’s ‘flying carriage’ like when she returned to the world of the moon?” Keiko inquired.

“That was quite different from this kind of terrifying animal. It was a lunar illusion, in other words, a carriage of light in the shape of a crescent moon. When it
envelops celestial beings—celestial maidens—and descends to earth, humans lose their minds from seeing moonlight up close and become unable to move.”

“It will be the night of the harvest moon, and Kaguya Hime is going to let us see her moon carriage,” Lady Rokujō said.

“In any case, today let’s view the red autumn leaves covering the mountains while enjoying a ‘diversion.’”

“Yes, let’s get out the saké at once.”

Naturally it seemed Empress Wu was familiar with Tao Yuanming’s “drinking” poems, in which “diversion” was used as an epithet for imbibing alcohol.

Incidentally, that was something Keiko wondered about on a regular basis: did inhabitants of the spirit world get by with only the knowledge and experiences they had while alive? Or did they obtain new information through their associations in the spirit world and attain a state of erudition beyond any human’s reach? And another thing, were they also familiar with what occurred in the human world, thereby reaching a state of omniscience? One time Keiko tried putting this question to Lady Rokujō; her reply was that ultimately there were all manner of people. For example, a sociable spirit should at least be intimately familiar with the personal affairs of the spirits they associated with. If that were not the case, it could be necessary for them to give some kind of self-introduction then and there, even though it might seem uncouth…

Perhaps Lady Rokujō guessed Keiko’s thoughts, for when the toast was over she said:
“Although those of us gathered here today should be familiar with each other, I wonder what we have all done, and in what manner, to arrive in our present shapes, that is to say, those of our thirty-five year old selves?”

Lady Rokujō turned first to Countess Elizabeth Báthory.

“Me?” Elizabeth said and lifted her head, which was encircled by a lace collar in the style of a frilled lizard’s crest—the kind that was typical of 17th century noblewomen. At that moment, the setting sun, which was illuminating the mountains, shone on the Countess’ face with the color of autumn leaves, and the beautiful features of her delicate silhouette gleamed with the vivid hue of blood. But, when she lowered her head slightly the color suddenly faded, and the return to her terrifyingly white, cold face was just like the momentary change in expression that accompanies the subtle tilting of a Noh mask.

“As you can see, because I have no color to my complexion there’s no use in putting on rouge and wearing makeup. It was right around the age of thirty-five that it occurred to me to bathe in blood.”

“I’ve heard of the lake of blood in Hell, but bathing in blood…?” Empress Wu said.

“Yes. It’s a beauty treatment: you drain the blood of live women, and then submerge your whole body in the liquid.”

“Then, the legend is true, isn’t it—that during your lifetime you killed over six hundred young women and drained their blood?” Keiko asked.

“I don’t remember the exact number of individuals, but I think that’s about right.”

“I heard you used something called an ‘iron maiden’ as a mechanism for draining their blood,” Medea said.
An “iron maiden” is a human figure made of steel that moves via cogwheels. It has the appearance of an actual woman: its surface is painted the color of human flesh, its face is made up, and it even has hair grafted on. When a button is pressed, the iron maiden smiles and lifts its arms, squeezing the human inside. Its chest splits into two doors, but its interior is hollow and sharp knives spring out along each side. The person imprisoned inside the iron maiden’s tight embrace has their blood drained away and dies.

“Well, that’s not really all it’s cracked up to be. Anyhow, it quickly rusts together with blood, and in truth taking the time to kill them with your own hands is the most fun.”

“I’ve heard that in the old days there were vampires in your region too. Don’t they feed on the blood they drain?” Keiko asked.

“I’ve tried that as well. It’s quite delicious. Similar to nectar… but more than that, the freshly squeezed blood of young women is good for your skin. When you bathe and scrub with blood, in all modesty, your skin will resemble a jewel like this.”

“Just as I thought, you’re some sort of vampire!” Lady Rokujō breathed a sigh.

At that point, Medea picked up a cluster of autumn leaves and manipulated them somehow in her hands, finally setting one afloat in each glass. The high-grade amber saké suddenly changed to a blood red color more vibrant than that of a ruby.

“How about we all pretend to be vampires?”

“When we drink that, our faces will probably become more and more like ‘drunken visages resembling frosted autumn leaves,’” Keiko quoted Bai Juyi’s poem.

“But, ‘Although they are crimson, it is not the blush of spring,’” Empress Wu replied without missing a beat.
The saké that Medea had steeped with autumn leaves glittered like a jewel the color of blood and gave off a fragrance reminiscent of heavenly fruit.

“You’ve altered them somehow, haven’t you?” Empress Wu turned to Medea with a suggestive smile, and Medea smiled back.

“Well, I am an expert in this kind of thing, after all,” she said.

“What do you mean, ‘this kind of thing?’”

It seemed that Kaguya Hime was not very familiar with Medea’s history. Keiko volunteered to explain.

“Medea has attained a sorceress’ level of skill in handling medicinal herbs and poisons. At any rate, she can use those techniques to kill her enemies when confronted.”

“In short, she's a first-rate witch—just what you’d expect of someone who is the granddaughter of the sun god Helios and the niece of Circe,” Empress Wu said, but Medea looked doubtful and objected.

“Well, it’s fine to say I was a witch, but in my case I was simply well-versed in scientific knowledge and conjuration that exceeded the standards of the time. So, I suppose you could also see me as a sorceress. But as far as having a good command of supernatural powers, Kaguya Hime and Lady Rokujiō are the real witches, aren’t they?”

“Nevertheless,” Lady Rokujiō’s eyelids flushed pink and she lifted the cup of crimson saké, “To make such splendid saké in an instant, you are indeed a sorceress. And it took a very powerful love spell for you to become so obsessed with Jason, didn’t it?”

“Unfortunately, the goddess Hera, who favored Jason, bribed Eros, otherwise known as Cupid, and he shot me in the chest with one of his fabled love arrows. The
result was that I was taken with Jason at first sight. Then, I betrayed my parents, even killing my younger brother to help him. Despite this, after Jason obtained the Golden Fleece that he was seeking, he began to be very unkind to me and proposed to the king of Corinth’s daughter Glaucé. He tried to abandon me and move on to a young woman… Afterwards, as everyone knows from the hack writer Euripides’ play, I used a poison and killed my enemies: the princess and the king. I even killed the children that I had borne to Jason, escaping in that dragon carriage. But there’s still a lot more after that.”

“That’s a familiar story,” Lady Rokujō nodded.

“The point being, it’s useless to lose oneself over a man.” Elizabeth Báthory and Kaguya Hime were the ones who spoke, exchanging glances.

“I understand why you two say that,” Empress Wu said. “Before we draw any conclusions, I want to ask Medea something. This is my own bias, but you didn’t really think of Jason as a great man, did you?”

“You’re right,” Medea seemed happy as she gestured for a toast. “Admittedly, I fell in love with Jason at first sight. That was because of a powerful love arrow, and there was nothing I could do. But now that I think about it, he was handsome, had a good physique, and seemed strong. He was the sort of man typical of the Grecian hero, but he couldn’t do anything by himself. How ecstatic he became, thinking that he could become the husband of Creon’s daughter, whose only redeeming quality was being a princess younger than myself…”

“You were born into royalty too—you’re the princess of Colchis,” Kaguya Hime said comfortingly.
“I was exactly thirty-five years old when those events transpired, and although I was no longer young, there was one other thing which had not faded along with my beauty. That was my wrath, which was more intense than that of a human… I was not just a princess; you mustn’t forget I am also the descendent of a god. And when I flew into a temper, I was willing to become a witch or a demoness.”

Here Keiko suddenly realized that if she were forced to put it in words, the thing which fueled Medea’s rage had to be “pride,” and as she was about to mention this her eyes met Lady Rokujō’s gaze. Perhaps the Lady read Keiko’s mind, for she looked to be in agreement and seemed to wink slightly. In Lady Rokujō's case as well, the escape of her vengeful spirit and the terrible things she did to Yūgao and Lady Aoi must not have been out of jealousy alone.

“Jealousy is different,” Medea murmured and looked up at the sky, which was bordered by the autumn leaves that covered the mountains. “It seems that’s the point that Euripides did not understand. In that play, the motive for my every action is the resentment, despair, and sorrow of a pitiful woman who devoted herself fully to a man, only to provide for their children and be abandoned, is it not? I was only disgusted with Jason’s foolishness, but even now the spark of the rage I feel for that hack writer has not disappeared. One of these days I will frighten him to the point of madness.”

“If you like, we could work together,” Lady Rokujō laughed, and Kaguya Hime looked like she wanted to join in the plot as well.

“I love teasing and poking fun at unintelligent men!” she said.

“This conversation has taken a surprising turn. Shall we try changing the scenery around here?” Empress Wu suggested.
“Twilight will probably begin to fall in this magnolia enclosure before long.”

“Indeed. The brocade of autumn leaves that covers the mountains shines, but for a while now the birds, which follow their companions as they hurry to their roosts, have been crossing the sky like thrown black stones,” Keiko said, and Lady Rokujō picked up upon her thoughts:

“Even so, it has cleared up as if the heavens themselves have been polished; it’s ‘an autumn sky where not even a breath of evening mist remains.’ And there’s no sign of showers either…” Adding to Keiko’s remark in this way made it seem as if the Lady was thinking of the verse from Wang Wei’s poem “The Magnolia Enclosure” which read “The evening mist has no place to stay.”

“If that’s the case, shall we try calling the brightly shining moon here?”

Taken aback, everyone agreed to Kaguya Hime’s proposal.

What did “calling the moon” mean? Keiko tried to curb the anxiety that grew along with her curiosity. She remembered that there was a story in an English mystery novel she had once read about the powerful light of an abnormally enlarged moon driving people mad. If that pockmarked heavenly body drew near enough that its size overwhelmed the mountains, people would surely lose their minds.

“Could we have some music relating to the moon?” Kaguya Hime asked, and Keiko came to her senses, taking a shining silver flute out of her purse.

“It would be better if this was the court music Emperor Xuanzong heard when he went to the moon palace in a dream,” Keiko apologized, referencing the Chinese fable. She then began to play Debussy’s “Clair de Lune” on the flute.
“That’s quite nice,” Kaguya Hime said and stood. Keiko thought she might be about to perform the celestial dance from the Noh play *The Feather Mantle*, but that was not the case: the princess casually raised her hand and gestured as if beckoning something. Suddenly, an unusual phenomenon occurred in the sky. A cold sphere of light, distinct from the sun, appeared in a corner of the heavens. As it rapidly drew closer an “evening brilliance” spread outward; it was a dream-like light different from the excessive brightness of moments ago. The autumn leaves covering the mountains lit up in a mysterious unearthly blaze and burned brightly. For some reason, the sensation was like that of seeing a world photographed on color infrared film.

Before long, the moon’s size was about two arms’ lengths around; it was at that point that it ceased to move.

“That’s about right, no?”

Kaguya Hime’s manner was nonchalant even under the lighting conditions.

“That’s enough. I was wondering whether we would collide with the moon if it continued to approach that way,” Medea shrugged. “It’s all right,” Kaguya Hime laughed.

“It’s not the real moon; it's a lunar illusion. Look! As proof, you can’t see its usual pockmarks, can you?”

“She’s right. It’s an unbelievably beautiful sphere of light… We could do worse than viewing the autumn leaves under a full moon this way,” Empress Wu said.

Keiko observed that the faces of the beautiful women were becoming all the more bewitching bathed in this unusual moonlight, and at the same time their forms gradually seemed to take on a resemblance to grey-haired demons. It was a scene of revelry as the demonesses shared saké against the bright moon and blood red autumn leaves.
“By the way, I’ve been wanting to ask you this for a while,” Lady Rokujō said while pouring sakē for Kaguya Hime. “What was your purpose in descending to earth that time? Was it to tease the rather foolish young noblemen who courted you, in the end jilting even the Emperor and ascending to the heavens?”

“That was prompted by a situation in lunar society. We have various kinds of scandals there as well.”

“Then you were an illegitimate child, and it was awkward to be born into lunar society, or something along those lines…” Empress Wu said unreservedly.

Kaguya Hime gave a smile like moonlight shining on mist.

“According to one theory, I was the child of an illicit union. It is said that I was created from a liaison between a celestial nymph, in other words one of the consorts of the lord of the heavens, and a man named Gogō.”

“You speak so dispassionately about it. But, do celestial nymphs bear children like humans and beasts do?”

“If they are intimate with humans and beasts,” Kaguya Hime answered with her usual broad smile. “So, as punishment for ascending to the moon and doing as he pleased, Gogō, a former hermit, was forced to work cutting down the moon’s katsura trees for all eternity. However, according to another theory, the man was not actually Gogō. With the guidance of a certain hermit, this man switched places with Emperor Xuanzong unnoticed—the one who had previously visited the moon in secret.”

“That Xuanzong…” Empress Wu muttered with disdain.
“Leaving that aside, when you rejected the Emperor’s efforts at courtship and returned to the moon, was that a compulsory summons? If it were me, I would never have let that kind of man go—you couldn’t ask for someone better to provide for you.”

It was Medea who spoke. After she killed her children with her own hands and fled from Corinth, Medea was cared for by Aegeus, the king of Athens.

“No, it was I who summoned my people in the hope of returning to the moon,” Kaguya Hime explained. “If I wanted to stay on earth forever I could have, but there was a problem: I age extremely fast here. After the old bamboo cutter found me I grew to adulthood in three months, didn’t I? When the Emperor accosted me I was already in my mid-thirties. If I had lingered, I would have become Grandma Kaguya in the blink of an eye. So, I ascended to heaven in great haste.”

“What a revelation!” Keiko said admiringly. “For some reason I assumed you were a girl or a young woman, graceful and thin.”

“But in China we prized rather heavy and voluptuous beautiful women like yourself in the old days,” Empress Wu said to Kaguya Hime. Then, Kaguya Hime explained how she had now gained weight beyond her wildest imagination because her tedious and dull life in the lunar world continued interminably. She made a face like she was stifling a yawn.

“You say it’s tedious, but don’t you enjoy the company of the lord of the heavens and the other celestial beings each night?”

“It’s more like all day every day. The other side of the moon, where the lunar palace is located, is always this bright, and in the court it’s never-ending banquets and lovers’ play; it repeats itself.”
“Doesn’t that sound like fun! Even after turning seventy, I gathered beautiful youths together in a place known as “The Palace of Twinkling Stars” and enjoyed myself to the fullest—just as much as I would have with the lord of the heavens.”

“It seems there’s no use in trying to rival your appetite for food, sex, or power! Shall we send the moon back?”

When she said this, Kaguya Hime gestured and drove away the moon. The dream-like light disappeared, and the autumnal evening sky, looking as if it had been polished, came into view once again.

“Don’t we need water at this point?” Lady Rokujō said. “Rain is an essential part of maple viewing, and in the Noh play they sing things like ‘Let us make haste to the deep mountains to view the maples, before the drizzling rains arrive’ and ‘Delightful, the evening drizzle which colors the brocade of leaves,’ do they not?”

A classical verse by Fujiwara no Ietaka sprang to Keiko’s mind:

The evening drizzle
upon the mountain where
the lower leaves scatter…

“But before we make it rain here, I feel like viewing the leaves by a river,” she said, and everyone agreed. “Well, then!” Empress Wu said and took the lead, beginning to descend the mountain.

She said she was leading them near Zhengzhou in Jiangsu province. Keiko did not know the route from Wang Wei’s retirement estate on the outskirts of Chang’an to Zhengzhou, but she felt her feet move naturally, and after no more than a few minutes of walking the scenery had already changed completely. Like an ink painting of a landscape,
there was a river filled with colorless water. The houses of fishermen lined the banks. Willows drooped along the path. Plants similar to water chestnuts were growing around an old pond, and yet strangely there was something that captivated the human heart in this very dreary scene. Now the sun was going down, and there was no wind. Fishermen lined up their fish for sale beneath the red maples that partially concealed the river.

“This is what was meant by ‘Fishermen selling redfin perch in the evening calm,’” Empress Wu said, quoting the final line of a Chinese poem. “From Zhengzhou Quatrains written by Wang Shizhen of the Qing dynasty,” she clarified. “For some reason I like this.”

She understood that Empress Wu had guided them into a scene from Wang Shizhen’s poem, but from Keiko’s point of view it made little sense that someone who possessed such an extraordinarily strong spirit would be fond of this delicate scene, which was even reminiscent of haiku. Could this be due to Empress Wu’s current state of mind living in the spirit world? When she was thirty-five years old like Keiko, she must have led an existence that could not be measured by the standards of ordinary people…

Deciding this was the case, Keiko noticed the famous fish known as redfin perch. They were freshwater fish, like larger gobies.

“In Japan, the character for redfin perch can also refer to sea bass, but these fish are completely different from sea bass.”

“That’s right. If I’m not mistaken, there was a man named Chang Han during the Jin Dynasty who said he wanted to eat perch served raw with vinegar and resigned from his position in the court to return to his hometown for that very purpose.”
At that moment, Medea gave a meaningful smile and spoke to Empress Wu.

“Well, I don’t know if he’s the Chang Han you mentioned, but aren’t you a bit curious about that man fishing over there?”

Keiko had also been aware of this man for some time. At a glance, his appearance was different from the other fishermen in the area. Most noticeably, his clothes were like those of a Heian period nobleman.

“Indeed, he looks like a noble youth from your country,” Empress Wu said.

“That man arrived here by following us when we began to descend the mountain.”

Surprisingly, it was the Countess who demonstrated a sharp eye. Something occurred to Keiko, and she looked over at Lady Rokujō’s face. However, the Lady was silent, showing only a rigid profile.

“Anyway, first let’s have a drink with an appetizer of redfin perch—raw with vinegar or grilled.”

Empress Wu said this and pointed, and they could see a flag for a tavern ahead. A small liquor establishment with a roof covered by red leaves looked out on the river.

“That fisherman also comes here to drink when he feels so inclined.”

The saké that was served there had a mysterious fragrance like that of sweet olive blossoms, and the redfin perch had a flavor more refined than one would expect from a river fish. The more inebriated Keiko became the more she felt as if a river were flowing slowly through her mind, and she could even sense clearly the autumn leaves drifting down upon the river’s surface. However, no matter how much spirit world saké she drank, it never made her mind murky.
“When we’re drinking like this it looks like just a gathering of wealthy wives, but
the truth is that we’re all supposed to be exceptionally frightening women. With the
exception of Keiko and myself.”

When Kaguya Hime articulated this impression, Empress Wu immediately
objected.

“You may not have killed anyone, but in truth you must be a frightening woman
too, no?”

“Come to think of it, we’re killers on a grand scale,” Medea said. “No one is a
match for Ms. Báthory if you go by the numbers, but you’ve done your fair share as well.”

Empress Wu laughed.

“In my case I only did away with individuals as part of my work in the
government.”

“Nevertheless, first you killed your own daughter, then Empress Wang, and then
the relatives and high-ranking officials of Emperor Gaozong; it was over one hundred
people in total,” Keiko enumerated.

“That’s more than I expected,” Empress Wu said, as if admiring someone else’s
effort. “I wonder if I was just about your age, that is to say, mid-thirties, when I began
that work in earnest. Emperor Gaozong had fallen ill, and I administered matters of state
in his place. That was fun, but I had no time to have affairs with men back then. I
thought that men were things to be moved like chess pieces. It was after I was through
doing what I did that I started to be a so-called nymphomaniac.”

“About how old were you then?” Kaguya Hime asked.
“Well now, I wonder if it began when I was over sixty. Even when I was seventy-five, I couldn’t restrain myself when I saw a handsome man. Thinking back it seems capricious, but I wonder if this too was a way of using—and enjoying—those chess pieces we call men. Still, the tale of a seventy-five year old grandmother taking the two twenty-something Zhang brothers as lovers was not well spoken of in the years that followed.”

“Say, what about the story where you perfumed your mouth with cloves and invited the Zhang brothers to your bedchamber...?”

Having noticed the fisherman from earlier sitting in a corner of the tavern, Keiko, now unable to hold back, blurted out, “It’s Genji!” When Lady Rokujō shook her head faintly, it was not at Keiko; her gaze met Genji’s, and it seemed she was signaling for him to leave.

It was not that Keiko had an exceptionally clear image of the man referred to as “The Shining Genji.” She had not thought of him as merely a delicate youth, but the age of the individual currently drinking saké alone in a corner of the establishment was unclear. And yet, by all appearances he was older than Keiko and her companions. Before she knew it, his garments were changing into clothes of the latest fashion. There sat a slightly suntanned middle-aged gentleman who could have been returning from a golf excursion.

Keiko had been observing this gentleman out of the corner of her eye for quite a while, and she had never seen a face with such handsome features. There was a thickness to the contour of those features appropriate for his age, and overall it was a noble countenance endowed more with enigmatic strength than delicacy. There was a
mysterious light in his eyes, and at the moment when her gaze met his, Keiko sensed a magical force that seemed to transmit an electric shock. Was Genji, who was possessed of such influence that his rival Kashiwagi fell ill and died when subjected to his ire, really this kind of man? When she thought about that, she had a feeling it made sense.

Lady Rokujō’s face bore the same frosty expression as before.

“What are your thoughts on chancing upon your former lover?” Kaguya Hime inquired with a serious face, but the Lady replied curtly:

“The Genji I was deeply in love with is different from that person over there. He was a cold, selfish, hateful, splendidly handsome youth.”

“But wasn’t that when the two of you were still young? By all appearances, the man over there is older than your current self. I wonder if he is in his forties,” Empress Wu said.

“I don’t know about that,” Lady Rokujō muttered in a bland voice. “The last time I encountered that man I was returning to the capital after accompanying my daughter to the shrine at Ise where she was a priestess. That happened when I was thirty-five or thirty-six, and if I’m not mistaken he was still younger than thirty. The truth is that shortly thereafter I fell ill and quickly arrived in this world, but he remained over there for a long time; I’ve heard he died in his fifties. I’ve never imagined that kind of elderly Genji.”

“But after you both became people of this world, didn’t you meet as you pleased and rekindle or develop your old friendship?” Medea said, and Keiko too thought this was a natural way of looking at it.

“Well, if I felt so inclined.”
Concealed by the film of a weak smile, Lady Rokujō’s face seemed to show signs of the ferocity of a demoness in addition to the usual elegant beauty befitting a noblewoman. For some time, Keiko had been aware that she could not move freely; her whole body was restrained by something soft yet invisible to the eye.

“You have psychic powers, don’t you?” Kaguya Hime said.

“Since long ago, I have been in the habit of letting my spirit slip out and doing what I please. As a result, I could pay that man frequent visits if I felt so inclined. There was an even wider variety of things I could do freely in the world after death, but I did not do them. Instead, my spirit became a vengeful one, and went to torment Yūgao and Lady Aoi.”

“It seems like you’re trying to use that power to pin us down,” Empress Wu said. It appeared the other women were experiencing the same thing as Keiko.

“It’s because you must not take an interest in him and approach.”

Then the Countess expressed her feelings unusually candidly:

“In the past I’ve only been interested in draining the blood of women, but from the moment I saw that man it’s like my own blood is stirring. If possible, I’d like to try draining all of his blood…”

“I agree,” Medea said. “There is a terrible magical power about him. He may be emitting a pheromone-like substance that is impossible for women to resist.”

“I wonder if he’s using some sort of special fragrance?”

“Even if that’s the case, it seems its power is different from that of your clove perfume,” Medea said sharply, turning to Empress Wu. Keiko was beside herself with fear and sensed that her companions’ superhuman passions were steadily on the rise and
taking on a crazed quality. The psychokinetic threads issuing from Lady Rokujō were coiling around the others’ hair, seeming to suppress their movement. Now, for the first time, Keiko was personally experiencing the incomparable terror brought on by the Lady. Did she grab the hair of Genji’s lovers like this in *The Tale of Genji* too?

This power was difficult to endure, and before long its balance was upset. Just as Keiko was thinking that something akin to a severe tornado might have occurred, her surroundings changed into a scene of mountains covered in autumn foliage on a dark night. Right away, Keiko noticed that this was like the setting for the second half of the Noh play *Maple Viewing*. Next these women would all reveal their true demonic forms, which, if it were the play, the hero Koremochi would end up slaying. But in this situation would it be Genji who slew them? While she considered unimaginable things along these lines, the women really began to change into demons. Lady Rokujō was a demoness bristling with silver hair who opened her blood red mouth wide and had a blue flame burning in her eyes. Medea became a masked demon from a Greek tragedy, and Empress Wu became a demon resembling a fox disguised as a beautiful woman. There was a face suspended in the darkness which gazed at the demons as it played a fife beneath the autumn leaves. Keiko was convinced that this had to be Genji—it seemed more like him. He was different from the middle-aged man of before: rejuvenated, with the face of a handsome youth that looked like a Noh mask. Soon the face floated into midair and tried to fly off somewhere. The demonesses stood all at once. Then, as if pursuing Genji’s face, they flew up into the air, leaving behind a pale beam of light.

When Keiko came to her senses, she first looked for Genji’s figure in the darkness. For some reason, she had a feeling that he had shown himself because of her. Keiko,
who did not find that to be a crazy idea, already felt herself becoming something else. That something else was a demon. Her hair burned bright red. Her eyes turned gold and shone like a blaze. Once she became a demon like this, she would no longer care about matters pertaining to her children, her husband, or her work. In accordance with Lady Rokujō’s longstanding invitation, Keiko decided that it was about time she moved to the spirit world and led her life there, and she entered the darkness beneath the autumn leaves.
Yuko, who oversaw the editing of a magazine called “High Life” at a certain publisher, met with a science journalist named Mr. Ogawa several times a year, and the two had an ongoing relationship where they discussed a variety of topics over meals. It always seemed something would happen and nothing in particular did; they were each independent working adults, and they found pleasure in simply conversing. And yet, it was a delicate relationship where the aftertaste of that pleasure had a slight sense of loneliness reminiscent of having eaten a dainty confectionery.

This year she received a call from Mr. Ogawa when cherry blossom season was ending, just as she had the year before. It was Yuko’s turn to make arrangements at an appropriate restaurant and treat him. She had heard that Mr. Ogawa had just returned from a reporting assignment in the United States, and she made a reservation at a traditional Japanese restaurant that her father had frequented. If possible, Yuko also wanted to appear dressed in a kimono for once to try and surprise Mr. Ogawa. Of course, that was not an option on an evening when she had work during the daytime, but her feelings persisted and she ended up settling on the quiet restaurant with formal tatami rooms.

“Wow, this place is really nice. It’ll be hard to go back to the norm after coming here.”

“This was my last resort, and I needed to use my father’s name to get in,” Yuko said, ducking her head. “Anyhow, since it seems you’re the only one who has something to share at our information exchange this time, I should offer to treat at the very least.”
“Nothing interesting is happening domestically?”

“There’s the occasional discussion about accidents or crime or such and such a reform.”

“And somewhere or other there’s the usual circular arguments and repetitions thereof?”

“Meanwhile, the cherry blossom season has ended.”

“Nevertheless, the blossoms’ color seems increasingly vivid. It’s that brilliant time in late spring,” Mr. Ogawa said cryptically. Yuko was slightly confused, and all she could do was respond with a cheerful smile.

Mr. Ogawa changed the subject to stories from his travels after their meals were served, and they felt an early summer breeze.

“The question of the origins of humanity is receiving a lot of attention over there now. It’s because of ‘The Search for Adam and Eve.’”

“That subject has spread to Japan little by little as well, and we’re about to put together a similar feature in my magazine called ‘All About Eve.’”

“That’ll be a very significant report.”

“It's just a pun on the title of an old film. But, do they think that ‘Eve’ existed?”

“Yes. In addition to the conclusion publicized by a group of molecular phylogeneticists asserting that she lived more than 180,000 years ago, based on their work with the molecular clock method of DNA analysis the Berkeley group released a shocking hypothesis which claimed that evolutionary lineages go back to that approximate time. Quick on their heels, Israeli religious anthropologists published a different theory, and there was journalism and heated debate among American scientists
as well. The other theory was put aside, and beginning in the latter half of the 1980s the Americans used a method which followed the genealogical trees of mitochondrial DNA, which is only transmitted through one’s mother, and discovered information about the existence of ‘Eve.’”

“That much even I’ve managed to understand. I intend for the feature in ‘High Life’ to be concerned with topics like that.”

“Is that so? But if you were to use what I’m going to say next, it would cause an uproar as if a UFO had landed in Tokyo. Even if that’s a slight exaggeration, well, quite a bit of confusion would occur. This claim far exceeds the level of ‘Eve’ having existed.”

“Could we review for a moment?” Yuko put down her chopsticks. “Are you saying that the idea that ‘Eve,’ the common ancestor of all of humanity alive today, once existed is something that you can logically explain even without doing things like mitochondrial DNA analysis?”

“Yes, that’s right. There are many people in the world who don’t know of that theory either. That’s why I was surprised at the very mention of ‘Eve’ having existed.”

“This is becoming accepted and may not bear mentioning, but at the time when this ‘Eve’ lived there was a great number of other humans. So, when you seek the common ancestor of the humans from the time of the ‘Garden of Eden,’ which included ‘Eve,’ and trace the lineage back for a while, you finally reach an older ‘Eve.’ If you repeat this, eventually you reach the monkey that is our common ancestor. And then the crocodile, the fish, and lastly a unicellular organism…”

“Logically speaking, that’s what it’s all about. But that’s the theory of evolution, an idea premised on a rather questionable grand theory.”
Mr. Ogawa folded his arms and watched Yuko’s face intently as he said this.

“Is evolutionary theory in question after all?”

“The group of molecular anthropologists from Berkeley that I mentioned before have released quite a definitive hypothesis on that subject. Basically, previous thought on the molecular clock dictated that the probability of nucleotide substitution occurring by way of mutations was constant through time, but we can see that it is inconstant by using and analyzing the pseudogenes inside of DNA. As you go back in the past, the rate of mutations occurring decreases. And, it turned out that the DNA that today’s people possess can only be traced back hundreds of thousands of years. That’s because the ‘first edition’ of a person was created just hundreds of thousands of years ago.”

“That’s a serious claim.”

“Indeed. And it doesn’t just apply to people. We can see that this pertains to chimpanzees, gorillas, and even pronuclear organisms like bacteria. As a result, it’s turned out not to be the case that the genealogical trees of evolution have expanded over several billion years or that people and chimpanzees diverged five million years ago.”

“All living things including people, suddenly appearing all at once hundreds of thousands of years ago…”

“The theory of evolution just flies out the window.”

“So then the religious are having their turn in the spotlight. The Bible verses which said that people and animals both were created by God were correct after all…”

“You’d be tempted to say that, yes. The research of the Berkeley group must contain a significant error, and those who are not associated with the molecular anthropologists have become desperate in trying to expose it. However, as of the
moment it seems their counterattacks are not succeeding. I have documentation of the
debate from an academic conference on this issue here with me, so I’ll give you a copy
afterwards."

Deeply moved, Yuko could not help but let out a sigh. After casually filling
Yuko’s saké cup, Mr. Ogawa appeared to concentrate on his food for a while. Though it
was a little early in the season for such cuisine, it was a refreshing meal reminiscent of
the summer tea ceremony where one first uses a brazier.

“It becomes an interesting, albeit quite dubious, story after this point, so please
help yourself to a drink while you listen.”

“Is it really the story of creation?”

“Well, it’s closely related. Recently, an international symposium sponsored by a
biotechnology think tank was held in Boston. I went to have a look at that as well, and
after the usual heated arguments about current issues, on the last day a minor incident
occurred. Molecular anthropologists, traditional anthropologists, paleontologists,
religious anthropologists—the cohort of evolutionary theory—were all jumbled together,
and instead of a wild dispute, they waged a battle of insults. As you would expect, I was
completely exhausted at that point; however, I went to the venue because there was a
special surprise lecture being given. When I arrived, a man named Dr. Hevahay, well,
thinking back on it now, they might have been a woman—or perhaps neither—a person
of indeterminate age and sex began giving a lecture on the subject of ‘Mankind’s Origins
and the First Humans’ while using a LaserDisc. I have no idea what language they were
speaking. It was being simultaneously interpreted into English, French, Russian, and
Japanese too, so for the time being I listened to the Japanese with my headphones. The
other people also wore puzzled-looking faces, each listening with their own headphones. At first, I thought the speaker might be someone associated with religious anthropology who preached the usual story of ‘God’s Creation.’ They said that Eve lived roughly 180,000 years ago. She was the first and only person on Earth; there were no other people then, nor were there any people before her. She was created by God, and They and the people of Earth created every living thing beginning with all of the animals. It seemed the doctor had a solid understanding of the molecular anthropologists’ results, and they also said that the dubious theory of evolution would finally be crushed by the recent debate. As you would expect, a wave of booing surged through the venue. Then, after extending their hand and gesturing to silence the crowd, they projected an image on the screen and began their explanation. There was something akin to a strangely solemn dignity in their perfectly composed appearance, and we all instinctively fell silent and listened closely.”

If you were to summarize Mr. Ogawa’s account, Dr. Hevahay’s lecture went something like this:

*Today’s subject is Eve’s life at the time of the creation of heaven and earth. Of course, Eve is a name arbitrarily given to her. No one can pronounce her name from that time; thus, the familiar ‘Eve’ will be used here today. It might seem strange that Adam does not appear here, but the important one was Eve; it was the woman. And that was Eve.*

“He said this, and projected an image on the screen for us to see: a slender, beautiful woman who looked like she came from a painting by someone like Cranach. At that point, we were caught by surprise. Generally, it was thought that Eve, the common
ancestor of all humanity, lived in Africa. As for an image, the first thing that came to
mind was a dark-skinned, wild woman. However, this Eve was completely different.
Furthermore, this was not a painting; it was an image of a living, moving woman. Of
course, she was wearing nothing. At first, I felt as if I was being shown a sketchy
pornographic film, but when we saw what appeared on screen next we were completely
mesmerized.”

This will be an introduction to one part of Eve’s life in the so-called paradise.
Since she is the ancestor of us all, she ate when she became hungry just as we do.
However, because there was no shortage of things to eat there, there was no need to work.
Basically, there was nothing required of her. It was a simple existence; if she wanted to
do something, she did it.

Now, to introduce Eve’s favorite companion. This is it. It may be an animal you
are unfamiliar with—it is a snake from that time.

“So did a snake appear?” Yuko shivered. She disliked snakes so much she got
goosebumps just hearing the word.

“On the contrary, this ‘snake’ was nothing like the snakes of today; it was quite a
magnificent and beautiful animal. It was tall, and when it lifted its head upright it
resembled a camel. It had a torso that curved elegantly as if elongating the letter ‘S,’ its
legs were long, and its face… well, if I had to describe it, its eyes, which seemed to
contain wisdom no human man possessed, shone out from the innocent face of a unicorn,
and it had whiskers with a splendid majesty to them… However, what surprised me
most of all was the color of its body. What color do you think it was?”

“Green…?” Yuko said the most unlikely color.
“Yes, it was green. A somewhat dark green with a profound luster. It wasn’t covered in hair like a horse. You could even say its skin was like a polished jewel that appeared to be tinted purple in the shade. It was quite a bewitching animal.”

“Truly a fantastic creature. I wonder why such a lovely animal was identified as a snake.”

“An image of the snake and Eve playing in an ancient forest just like the ones painted by Henri Rousseau appeared on the screen, but after that point it was pornography pure and simple—I can’t explain it in words.”

Though he said this, Mr. Ogawa yielded to Yuko’s curiosity and could not avoid explaining such that she could roughly understand, choosing his words carefully.

Eve loved the “snake.” All day long, at all hours, she shadowed it and would not leave its side. And Eve coaxed the “snake” to caress her. It seemed to be of an exceedingly tender nature, and returned Eve’s affections without ever showing irritation. Put simply, these caresses were performed through the use of its long tongue.

“The ‘snake’ would stick its long tongue out of its mouth, but the tongue itself was exactly like a modern snake. It was difficult to believe how long it was, and it lengthened indefinitely, at first twining and tightening around Eve’s body. At the end, it penetrated into her. I’ll leave the rest to your imagination. You see, that long, snake-shaped tongue left the animal’s mouth. At first, I thought the animal might be slowly pulling its intestines out. That’s how long its serpentine tongue stretched.”

“In other words, that animal had a snake inside of its body. I wonder if its body has a dual structure, like a scabbard that the snake goes in…”
“That’s right. And, when the serpentine tongue played with Eve and penetrated her body, it seemed it was being eaten little by little.”

“She ate the snake?”

“When the tongue entered Eve’s body, she ate it while crying out with delight. However, Eve didn’t devour it with her mouth—not the one that has teeth. To be more precise, it might have been dissolution or suction, but each time the tongue of the ‘snake’ advanced into her body it looked like it was being eaten.”

“Similar to a praying mantis in that situation.”

“Anyhow, after we were shown this clip the lecturer’s tone suddenly changed. They began speaking in the first person.”

“Why the switch? Surely not…”

“It’s difficult to believe, but when someone says ‘I’ in an academic conference like that, it has sort of an Old Testament feel to it—such an authoritative ‘I’ would have to be God, right? When I looked in amazement at the lecturer on the stage, they were speaking dispassionately and wearing their sunglasses just as before.”

_I thought that I could not leave Eve and the snake’s relationship as it was. Eve played with the snake to her heart’s content, and before long she had consumed its tongue. That was both a grave insult and a treacherous act perpetrated against Myself, the Creator. It was not just Eve. The way that the snake quite willingly let its own body be eaten by Eve was also an unpardonable offense. Allow Me to be clear: among the varied animals I created, there were antelopes and the like whose fate it was to be eaten by lions. However, those were created with that intent; it was quite infuriating that the_
snake, perhaps my greatest masterpiece, and Eve were enjoying themselves and doing as they pleased.

At that point I decided to punish the snake and Eve. But that is merely putting it in a way that everyone can easily understand, and the truth is that ‘change of plans’ or ‘revision’ are more accurate than ‘punishment.’ Now, let us watch the whole story.

“So Eve was banished from paradise?”

“Before that, the snake was treated very cruelly.”

“Castration…” Yuko began to say, and Mr. Ogawa nodded admiringly. “Indeed. Behind that beautiful name and face, you seem quite cruel too. Under these circumstances, cutting its serpentine tongue might be the most appropriate punishment. But God did something more cruel.”

According to Mr. Ogawa’s explanation, God’s form did not appear on screen. Their invisible hand moved, and though he could only tell that something terrible had been done to the snake, the end result was that the snake’s tongue had been extracted completely. If one were to estimate based on Eve’s size, the tongue, which was the spitting image of a modern snake, was easily five or six meters long. It was as large as a python. At first it shone with a brilliant green color that matched that of the host animal’s body, but it quickly lost its luster and turned to a ghastly dark green. It became something far uglier than a present-day snake and writhed on the ground.

“Then what became of the ‘snake’ whose tongue had been extracted?”

"That was the real ‘snake.’ When that original ‘snake,’ which had an elegant torso and wise face, had its tongue completely extracted, it changed into a miserable empty husk. It became like a torn and crumpled sack and was discarded somewhere.”
“That’s awful!”

“It’s truly an awful story. The problem stems from the modern snake, which writhes in a state where one cannot tell if it is alive or close to death. Seemingly, God’s intent was to remake the snake into a full-fledged animal in its own right, and They added eyes and a mouth. For some reason, its eyes were a blood-like color. And instead of adding limbs, God covered its whole body in scales, the friction from which allowed it to wriggle its body and move forward. It gave me the impression of extreme negligence, but that’s more or less how it was made. That very snake, now bereft of the ability to speak, only looked out from its ghastly eyes and pursued Eve while flicking its blackened tongue. Eve tried to flee, screaming all the while. A woman would surely find this new snake horrifying.”

“And what of Adam?” Yuko asked.

“As for that, Adam finally made an appearance during the doctor’s question and answer session later on. After Eve broke off her relationship with the snake in that way, she married Adam and was ordered to bear children. The doctor presented the familiar ending in which the two were banished from paradise, giving only a simple introduction.”

Mr. Ogawa’s notes were helpful in recalling the question and answer session. Dr. Hevahay had replied to every query with perfect composure.

Q: Who are you?

A: I am God. (There was some snickering, but also scattered applause.)

Q: So you are God, and you said that at some point you created all living things on this earth at once. However, there is still much evidence in support of our theory of
evolution. For example, there are animal fossils which correspond to intermediate stages in the evolution from one animal to another. How do you explain that?

A: That is simple. I created those fossils too. These things that seem like the intermediate stages of animal evolution are my prototypes. I did not suddenly make the horse as it is today. After testing several smaller, miserable creatures, I decided on forms much like the ones we have now. The prototypes I discarded became the fossils that everyone prizes today.

Q: Is it true that you not only created plants and animals and planet Earth, but also the entire universe through the Big Bang?

A: I was certainly the one who brought about the Big Bang. Although it could be thought of as the creation of the universe, for me it was something akin to an unexpected yawn.

Q: Is the Book of Genesis in the Bible an accurate account?

A: One could say that it is basically accurate. Of course, it seems there are also numerous errors.

Q: Just now you introduced Eve in great detail. Would you please explain the important role played by Adam?

A: Adam was a secondary creation. As you wish, I’ll introduce him as he lived at that time. This is Adam.

“With these words, God projected an image of Adam on the screen: he was a young man. If Eve had the air of a graceful woman, Adam was similarly delicate, and in that sense the two were quite well-matched. However, upon closer examination Adam was still not a complete man. At any rate, he didn’t have everything he ought to have had.
After that, when God married Eve and Adam, They cut off the part of the snake that Eve had loved and affixed it to Adam’s abdomen. They said it was to make him a man, but…”

Q: According to the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, you created Adam first from the dust of the earth and then removed one of his ribs to create Eve. So it is written, but you have said this is in error.

A: That is typical of the mistakes in the Bible. Eve was the first person, and she was the original. Adam was a copy I created afterwards. While there were some things that I changed, there were also crude points, and overall the craftsmanship was poor.

Q: But it seems that by and large the poorly crafted man has been the one to hold a dominant position in the human world thus far…

A: Is that so? But if you look closely, you will realize that woman is always the arbiter of truth. Men came to have superficial influence because they are deeply jealous and have powerful inferiority complexes; they are cunning, collectivist, and they love government. The Book of Genesis was falsified in that way according to man’s needs.

Q: But isn’t God Himself male?

A: I am neither male nor female. I am creativity itself.

Q: You made the universe, the Earth, and all living things. Now that the task of creation is finished, are you not responsible for the fate of all your works?

A: I do not instruct the things I have made or intervene in their affairs. My preference is to create, not to rule.

Q: Or punish them…?
A: I do not bother with such tiresome things. Currently, I am taking a lengthy break.

Q: What are your thoughts on the Last Judgment? Do you have any plans to put an end to this world someday?

A: I have no such intentions. I am letting it take its own course. That way, this world will eventually be destroyed in accordance with the principle of entropy increase that you all invoke so frequently.

Q: Have you considered coming to humanity’s rescue?

A: Again, I will not engage in that kind of unnecessary intervention.

Q: So, God once existed, but now They have fallen into a deep slumber, and the situation is such that They may as well not exist at all. Does that mean that we will be neither rewarded nor punished, no matter what we do?

A: That is correct. Your fate is none of my concern.

Q: That seems cold.

A: It may be cold, but that is what true kindness is.

Q: Why did you come here today—for what purpose?

A: Just on a whim.

“So what ended up happening to God?”

“They disappeared. I remember the question and answer session going on interminably, but before I knew it the person known as Dr. Hevahay was nowhere to be found on stage. The organizers hadn’t expected this kind of special lecture in the first place, and their memories seem to be blank with regards to that time. The reporters covering the event were filming during the lecture, but they didn’t manage to record
anything either. Even if it was an elaborate prank, it’s still an incident that we can’t really explain.”

“I just realized,” Yuko said, taking out a small notebook and writing. “If you write Hevahay backwards it becomes Yahaveh. There’s another elaborate prank for you.”

“So it is. Then did that person fancy themselves to be ‘Jehovah’? Come to think of it, someone was saying that the lecture might have been in ancient Hebrew.”

“Still, why did God marry Eve and Adam?” Yuko murmured in a slightly vacant tone.

“If you think of it in simple terms, it was to have them create offspring. In the relationship between the original ‘snake’ and Eve, the two were able to enjoy themselves, but they may not have been able to have children.”

“I wonder if Eve was satisfied with that.”

“Would you be?”

“Isn't marriage about convenience anyway? Having children, establishing a household, aren’t those just things one is compelled to do for some reason or other? If it were me, that fantastic ‘snake’ would be enough.”

After saying this, Yuko wondered whether the alcohol had caused her to blurt out such irresponsible things.

By the time the dessert arrived, Yuko felt as if her mind, which had begun to wander between intoxication and nightmare, had settled down somewhat.

“Tonight’s meeting was like traveling hundreds of thousands of years through time. In my mind, I feel as though there’s still time left. But, do you think that this strange story will change the way people think if it spreads throughout the world?”
“I don’t think it will change very much. People don’t understand what they don’t want to understand.”

“My thinking has been profoundly changed.”

“Yes, I can see you’ve got a fickle look in your eyes.”

“You’re so mean!”

“Please don’t glare at me like that.”

“What I mean by ‘changed’ is…”

“For example?”

“For example, I’ve come to like snakes.”

“Meaning that this broke through a barrier deep in your psyche?”

As they continued this conversation in the car Mr. Ogawa had called, Yuko found herself being transported to the same destination as her companion. She had the feeling that something akin to a barrier—assuming it once existed—was now indeed completely gone. Since Eve loved the snake and followed it always, coaxing it to caress her, I’m going to behave similarly from now on. Yuko constructed an illogical line of reasoning.

That night’s pleasure began with Mr. Ogawa’s transformation: he was no longer himself, instead taking the form of a snake. The snake played with Yuko, and she was able to savor it to her heart’s content. Yuko fell asleep satisfied that Mr. Ogawa was not Adam; he was, in fact, the snake.
Saiko had a weakness for cherry blossom season. It was not that she had the pollen allergies everyone complains of nowadays; rather, a haze the color of blossoms would rise in her mind as if the flowers were luring her in, and, intoxicated by that haze, her body wandered almost of its own accord. In other words, she entered a state that was very nearly sleepwalking.

“So I’m afraid of walking beneath cherry blossoms in full bloom. Isn't there something unmistakably weird and ghostly about Yoshino cherry trees under a hazy moon when only their flowers are blooming—before the leaves come out?”

“In short, you’re lured into a dream-like state by the flowers,” Mr. Sakai teased.

“Longing for the moon veiled in the blossoms’ fragrance at this hour alas I cannot even clearly see my own dreams through the haze

Is that how you feel?”

“Isn’t that poem by Fujiwara no Teika? It certainly has a sense of mystery, but my situation is more of a malicious and serious illness.”

“Saiko, psychic, psychedelic, psychosis…” Mr. Sakai said as though he were reciting a verb conjugation.

Saiko glared at him, but smiled too.

The truth was that there was more to the problem than that. The “illness of the psyche” that she was not disclosing to Mr. Sakai, and could not easily disclose, was progressing inside of her. For some reason, each spring for the last two or three years the
illness had grown increasingly noticeable and intense. It became warmer day by day, and a mass of obsessions swelled in Saiko’s chest as if keeping pace with the opening of the blossoms. Saiko herself recognized that it grew like a malignant tumor, and that the true nature of these fever-inducing obsessions was jealousy. For Saiko, cherry blossom season was the season of jealousy.

Mr. Sakai started going to Saiko’s place five years ago in autumn, and after that their ongoing relationship was such that Saiko awaited his visits at her home: though they were irregular and he never consulted her, he came several times a month without a lapse. The visits were always unexpected and late at night. Saiko accepted that meeting under other circumstances was difficult for someone with his occupation and social status. But she wished only that he would meet with her more frequently. A nightly visit would be ideal were it possible. If that happened, living together under the same roof would be most logical, but that too was out of the question. Mr. Sakai already had someone whom Saiko respectfully called “Madam” with a heart filled with complicated sentiments. Even assuming that she herself married Mr. Sakai, she was uncertain whether she could live a life where she became a “Madam” in her own right, cohabitating and waiting on him hand and foot. That too was something she could not imagine at all. Saiko was someone who could only abide securing her own comfortable nest and living alone, and she doubted that she could live together with anyone—even someone like Mr. Sakai. However, she wanted Mr. Sakai to come every night. As for why this failed to occur, aside from things like his professional activities and his home where “Madam” and his children lived, the extremely busy Mr. Sakai seemed to have several lovers.
Mr. Sakai did not deny this, and at first Saiko too overlooked it. Since Mr. Sakai’s appearances were like a huge comet capriciously straying from its orbit and chasing Saiko, there must already have been several stars arranged along his original orbit; the fact that the comet appeared to habitually make a round of house calls as it revolved seemed like nothing out of the ordinary and she wasn’t especially bothered by it.

“It’s all right with me that you keep several lovers besides myself,” Saiko said one time.

“That’s a worrisome thing for you to say.”

“If ‘keep’ is too vulgar, I could say that you ‘employ’ them…”

“I can’t easily dismiss them, for various reasons. Not having them sign a contract with specific terms was a huge mistake on my part. Still, I can only hope that you will sympathize with my predicament.”

“Yes, I sympathize completely. But, honestly it has nothing to do with me,” Saiko said, laughing. Mr. Sakai laughed back.

“If carrying on as we do now is causing you trouble, I can ‘keep’ you anytime. Domestically, internationally, wherever you like.”

“I’m tempted to try being ‘kept’ by you, but continuing as we are is definitely best. Though it may be inconvenient, please be patient and come visit me.”

“I feel like a man from the time of the old imperial court.”

“Yes, and I imagine I’m receiving a secret visitor like Prince Genji from The Tale of Genji.”

“Fortunately for the Prince, he was visiting noblewomen who lived at the corners of his grand estate—thus he could do so secretly even in the middle of the night.”
Saiko was about to crack a joke about how Mr. Sakai could emulate Prince Genji, turning his home into the Rokujō Palace and installing “Madam” and his other lovers there, but she restrained herself.

Saiko’s residence was located in a former suburb of Tokyo. It was large enough that one corner of the grounds bore traces of the Musashino groves, and several old cherry trees bloomed there. At the estate, there was the house that her parents lived in, as well as that of their eldest son—Saiko’s older brother—and his family. Saiko lived together with a Thai maid in a Tudor style half-timbered house that her grandfather had built in his later years. She referred to it as “my cabin.” After she returned home from studying abroad and became a lecturer at a university, Saiko built an addition: a study complete with overhead windows. It was so she could see the moon and stars above her when she wrote stories at night. Ever since she had received a literary prize for new writers during graduate school, Saiko had been regarded as one of the “talented young authors.” Since she was required to teach at the university and meet with people during the day, Saiko made a rule of working on her writing in her “cabin” at night. Accordingly, she was almost never away from home even when Mr. Sakai came over unannounced. But the real reason she did not go out in the evenings was that she wanted to stay at home and await Mr. Sakai’s unpredictable visits. Saiko recognized this and viewed herself, utterly preoccupied with Mr. Sakai as she was, through a critical lens.

“I don’t know when my prince will come,” Saiko murmured as she listened to Keith Jarrett’s ‘Someday My Prince Will Come’ at one point. Without hesitation, Mr. Sakai crossed out the word ‘prince’ in the printed lyrics, replacing each instance with the word ‘king.’
“I’m a little too old to be categorized that way, and besides, I might rise to greater heights than a prince could,” he said. After gazing at her companion’s face as if dumbfounded, Saiko said:

“The best case scenario is a promotion to prime minister, right?”

“Is being king too much to ask? Well, then perhaps something like this,” Mr. Sakai said as he drew another line, crossing out ‘king’ and changing it to ‘erlkönig.’

“The Spirit King?” Saiko breathed a sigh. “You’re elusive, and you always appear in the middle of the night—so yes, that’s about right. Every night, and tonight was no different, I’ve been so frightened that the spirit king will come that I can’t even write properly, and after he holds me close and absorbs all of my life energy I can do nothing but sleep like the dead. What should I do?”

Mr. Sakai looked tenderly at Saiko as he listened to her words, but suddenly he said something strange.

“Long ago, there were three women known as the Great Beauties of Japan. You could very well be one of them today, but at that time one of the three Great Beauties was a woman known as Empress Somedono.”

“She was the daughter of Fujiwara no Yoshifusa and ascended to the throne. Her beauty has been compared to that of cherry blossoms. But what does she have to do with me?”

“You two have something in common: you’re both remarkably beautiful women. There was a distinguished monk named Shinzei, a disciple of the great Kūkai, who fell in love with the Empress when first he saw her. Somehow, word of this leaked out and spread. Shinzei was troubled and ashamed, and died soon after. As a monk, he was
supposed to enter nirvana, but he became a dark blue demon and possessed the Empress, tormenting her instead.”

“So what became of the blue demon and the Empress?”

“That I don’t know. He was originally a monk, so he probably became a Buddha eventually through prayer.”

“What exactly are you trying to say?”

“In other words, I was on the verge of following in that monk’s footsteps and being reduced to a demon—red or blue, I don’t know—when I first saw you and became completely enamored.”

“If you had become a demon, I would have kept you by my side and fed you—such a pity,” Saiko said and laughed.

“It seems that you’ll be treating me to a feast tonight as well,” Mr. Sakai said, seeing her smiling face.

When Mr. Sakai came over, Saiko made a rule of “treating him to a feast.” She did not know whether he was a blue demon or a red demon, but the demon was always hungry and eager to take her and devour her. So… Saiko tried to rationalize it, but concluded that in truth she herself was a covetous demoness, and whenever Mr. Sakai came over she would devour his body and yet never be sated. Whatever the case, the two of them would hold a banquet and devour each other, and Mr. Sakai usually returned home at dawn.

How did I get here? Saiko wondered countless times as she lay in the bed where Mr. Sakai had left her. In reality, it’s like I was taken by surprise, hypnotized, made to drink a powerful aphrodisiac, and then raped, she thought.
They had first met at a party held to celebrate her winning the literary prize for new writers. Thinking back on it now, she still had no idea why he had been at that venue. Several days later, a letter arrived requesting a meeting; he wanted to call on her. Saiko ignored him, and although they saw each other at a few gatherings afterwards, Mr. Sakai said nothing at all. Since he merely smiled at her, she smiled in return. Then, after several months had passed, Mr. Sakai suddenly came to Saiko’s home one night. Perhaps he somehow talked the Thai maid into letting him in, for he intruded into Saiko’s study. By the time she noticed him the castle walls had crumbled. In any case, the enemy stood before her eyes and smiled. When he spoke, she was hypnotized, and when she remained silent, she was dusted with an aphrodisiac of words; in the end, she was dealt a coup de grace in the form of a confession of love. Thereafter, things proceeded as if Saiko had agreed to follow his lead, and Saiko surrendered herself to this person—who seemed to be her “prince,” a demon, and the Spirit King himself. But, thinking on it now, from that point forward Saiko was the one who transformed into a demon-like being and lay in wait for Mr. Sakai’s visits.

Saiko’s sickness, the jealousy that was aggravated during cherry blossom season, was triggered when she learned about one of Mr. Sakai’s lovers through a photo essay featured in a weekly magazine that specialized in that kind of thing. Saiko had heard about the article from other people (who admittedly did not know that Saiko was among Mr. Sakai’s lovers) and bought the magazine for the express purpose of seeing it for herself. And the moment she saw it, she fell ill. To make matters worse, it was on the subject of “Madam” and his household, and the information it provided was much more detailed than the little that Saiko knew.
“I read something interesting,” Saiko said.

“How embarrassing that was. I’ve been having a hard time,” Mr. Sakai laughed awkwardly but appeared quite unperturbed, and Saiko was amazed by his strength of nerve.

“I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“I’ve become numb to that kind of thing, so I don't care about the fuss they make.”

Although Saiko said that she did not care about the situation, her cherry blossom season jealousy and sleepwalking syndrome began at that time, proving that, “Madam” aside, she did care about the existence of his other lovers.

That spring, the fireworks of another scandal burst luridly in the sky. An article appeared in the weekly magazine revealing that one of Mr. Sakai’s lovers—different from the mistress previously featured in the exposé—had had a child. It concluded by saying that Mr. Sakai had again sunk “to the depths of depravity.” That hit the mark exactly, but there was no use in trying to interrogate him about his low moral standards or the clumsy way he handled his various relationships. Whatever happened, Mr. Sakai would only be Saiko’s lover.

Saiko looked in the mirror when she began to experience chest pains from the furious expansion of the mass of jealousy inside her, and the face she saw in the mirror was not like her normal face. Perhaps the face of another person, one from the other world beyond the mirror, had risen up and now clung to her own face. Or perhaps, she was viewing herself wearing a mask. The more she looked at the “mask” the more it resembled a Noh mask worn by an actor portraying a jealous demoness. When she opened her eyes wide and contorted her mouth, there could be no doubt that it was the
face of such a creature. “I’ve finally become a demon,” Saiko murmured, staggering as if she were being sucked inside the mirror.

From that time forward, whenever Saiko was alone she could change her face into the demoness mask at will. When she underwent the change, it felt as if a cold mask was being affixed to the flesh on her face. Once she had transformed into a demoness she was seized by the strange feeling that she possessed magical powers appropriate to her new form, and it seemed that her body would wander on its own while she dreamt.

One evening, Saiko was dozing in her demonic state. This was a dangerous thing.

Even in my dreams
the wind blows on the blossoms
their beauty fading
O what little peace I find
in this restless spring slumber

She heard the verse being spoken like a spell. Outside an artificial-looking moon shone, and although it was nighttime it was bright as if an unnatural day had dawned. A warm breeze blew, scattering the cherry blossoms like rain. A heat haze distorted the false space. Saiko realized that her body had floated through this mirage and almost instantly arrived at the home of the mistress who had borne Mr. Sakai’s child. What was she going to do when she met her? As a demon, she should find it easy to haunt women and children to their deaths, shouldn’t she?

Curiously, Saiko remembered everything in great detail, from the look of the room where the mistress stayed to the newborn child’s face, which was like that of a monkey fetus. When the woman saw Saiko, she let out a beastly cry and fainted in agony. The baby too convulsed and then went still.
When she awoke, Saiko found that it was still nighttime in the real world, and outside of her window the cherry blossoms fluttered and fell at a fantastic speed in the moonlight.

Saiko drew a bath and submerged her body in the hot water. Before she knew it, fallen cherry blossom petals were floating in the tub. It was just as if, still nude, she were bathing in—and wandering through—the falling blossoms. Her face was still half that of a demon, but as she carefully massaged it her features gradually reverted back to their original form.

Mr. Sakai did not make an appearance for about a week.

“I’ve been having a hard time again,” Mr. Sakai said abruptly, but to Saiko his smile, as charming as ever, was a gift.

“What happened?”

“You don’t read the weekly magazines or watch the news?” Mr. Sakai looked at Saiko’s face once more. “One of my mistresses, the one who had the child, died suddenly. And the baby died of shock at the same time—a strange way to go indeed. I was questioned by the police, but for better or for worse I was out of the country for three days when they died.”

As they talked in bed that evening, Saiko recounted her strange experience from one week earlier, saying that she believed herself to be the one who had haunted the woman and her child to death. She also confessed that her true face was the spitting image of a demoness’ mask in the mirror. But what astonished Saiko was how unsurprised Mr. Sakai seemed as he listened to her story.
“At this rate, someday I might appear before your wife and show her the demoness’ face. I think that those who see it petrify and die from fright. Even you…”

“I’ve believed for a long time that an ordinary woman would die if they saw that face of yours. But I’m different. You see, I grew accustomed to it some time ago. I’ve known of your true identity: you’re a demon.”

“Have you seen the face?”

“I see it even now,” Mr. Sakai said in a jocular tone. “Well, why don’t you try looking in the mirror?”

Saiko’s face was now flickering in the mirror as if it were made up with a heat haze, and the demoness’ mask emerged from beneath her flesh. Saiko screamed.

“You’re an honest person, and you’ve always shown me this face. And yet, I come here without fear. It’s not bad to have a demoness lover.”

“If you stopped coming, I would become a real demon.” Held in Mr. Sakai’s arms, Saiko barely managed to get the words out through her tears.
CHAPTER 20

THE CAT’S WORLD

They did not know what the catalyst was. As for the routine “bullying,” ostensibly the school was denying it. It seemed the male teacher in charge of physical education had suddenly smacked her without listening to the explanation for her late arrival. And apparently when Ai spoke like a courteous adult to her homeroom teacher, the woman had scolded, “Be more familiar! You’re just a child!” seeming thoroughly displeased. These were among a variety of things being said. Her mother, Mrs. Shinoda, could only proclaim that one way or the other the fault lay with the teachers, or perhaps the school itself. At least, that is what she told her parents, in-laws, and other relatives. In any case, it was a troublesome affair. To put it briefly, one day Ai, who had just entered sixth grade, abruptly declared her intent to stop attending school.

Tall for her age, Ai was a thin, beautiful young girl who gave an impression of cold maturity. In particular, the way she obsessively spoke using flawless formal language left one with an impression of artificiality atypical of a child. At the same time, something extremely childlike peered out from under the thin film of her facial expressions. Her strange absentmindedness, as if inwardly she were living in another world, distanced her from the other children, and she had not a single friend who really got along with her. In short, it was doubtless only natural for a young lady like herself to cause trouble through truancy.

“Mom, I’m not going to go to school anymore. From now on, I’m going to live with my cat Pozai—we’ll be roommates.”
“You can’t be ‘roommates’ with a cat,” Mrs. Shinoda said with a perplexed look on her face.

“All right. Then we’ll be ‘floormates’—both of us cats,” Ai corrected herself.

Mrs. Shinoda started over.

“You have to go to school—you’re still in the middle of your compulsory education. And, if you stay locked up in the house like this, you’ll be seen as a peculiar girl.”

“It’s the school and the country that suffer if I don’t receive compulsory education. For me, it’s no trouble at all. What’s more, I go out for walks and to concerts, so I don't think I’m particularly peculiar.”

“That’s not what I…” Mrs. Shinoda started to say, but gave up. Something did not mesh when she and her daughter argued, and the words that should be coming out of her mouth remained there like a malfunctioning false tooth.

Mrs. Shinoda had made light of it at first. It was not that she thought that if Ai spent a few days getting her own way she would probably feel like going to school again; in truth, Mrs. Shinoda brushed it aside believing that Ai’s truancy was likely not of enormous consequence. Eventually, beginning with her mother and her mother-in-law, her relatives became upset. Rather than realizing the importance of the matter, Mrs. Shinoda knew only that one ought to approach the situation as a serious one, and as a result she began to say and do things typical of a “harried mother.” Whenever Mr. Shinoda came home from working at his distant job, he listened to the stories and shared in his wife’s distress. He seemed seriously troubled.
Beginning with the homeroom teacher, the sixth grade teacher, the vice principal, and the principal all came by from the school. Mrs. Shinoda was treated like a mother at her wit’s end. What actually had her at her wit’s end was how to deal with people like the school officials. Ai showed no intention of going to school. First of all, even if someone came from school, she would brush them off. The female homeroom teacher tried to ambush her and strike up a conversation one day when Ai went out for a walk with her cat Pozai in her arms, but Ai treated her like an adult she had never met, speaking as courteously as ever. She was unapproachable, the teacher had said. The school had advised Mrs. Shinoda to place Ai in a different school and had introduced her to a counselor who specialized in this kind of problem. Ai declared to the counselor that she had no intention of going to another school either, and the woman was obliged to go and discuss matters with Mrs. Shinoda alone.

The counselor doubted that the school was expressly responsible for the incidents and believed the problem was in their home. She identified its source as their family relationships; in particular, there was a “deformation” in Ai’s relationship to her absent father. And, there were the so-called over-protective and over-possessive tendencies in the mother’s behavior. However, that analysis came about because Mrs. Shinoda acted the part of an education-minded mother in front of the counselor. She had been strict on all counts with the demands she placed on Ai, her only child: Ai had been made to attend piano and English conversation lessons, and Mrs. Shinoda had been exceedingly fastidious when it came to etiquette. The truth was that that was a lie, and by nature Mrs. Shinoda treated children with a kind of negligent kindness that stemmed from indifference, and she never took a strong tone with one either. It seemed the counselor,
who was in her forties, had taken Mrs. Shinoda’s comments and painted an image of her that missed the mark somewhat. The counselor’s advice was to coddle Ai like a child and cease making strict demands of her for the time being. It would be best if Ai’s father returned home as soon as possible and they relocated to a home near his new post, living all together.

When Mr. Shinoda received this report he agreed about the matter of their living together. However, when he learned that his wife was loath to part with their current house, he eventually had to admit that they would have to wait and see, unable as he was to find a solution to Ai’s truancy problem.

“The counselor said it would be best if we moved to your father’s new post and the three of us lived together, but you wouldn’t want to go to such a rural area, would you?”

“Of course not. Pozai doesn’t want to leave here, either,” Ai said to her mother.

“It appears that Papa won’t be able to return home for a while because of his work. Though, it seems like it makes little difference whether he’s here or not,” Mrs. Shinoda said.

“You’re on to something,” Ai chimed in lightly. “I don’t see any point in having that person around. You feel that way too, don’t you Mama?”

“I have no comment on that, but let’s forget about school and take it easy until you recover from your illness—you and your Mama both.”

Ai gave her mother a piercing look.

“What kind of ‘illness’ are you referring to?”

“Why, your truancy illness.”
“Is that really an illness?”

“It’s something abnormal, so yes, it’s an illness.”

“You didn’t want to go to school, did you Mama?”

“I didn’t want to go, but I went all the same.”

“Isn’t that an illness?”

“I attended school because I was ill. There are many types of illnesses that must be cured.”

“It’s just like going to the hospital. Is school a kind of hospital?”

“I suppose it is. It’s closer to a beauty parlor than a hospital, though. That’s because at school they correct what’s wrong with you and make you more like everyone else.”

“So when I go to school, I’m gradually becoming less attractive. Though I hope you’re right that it’s like a beauty parlor. Generally when someone goes to and from the hospital, they eventually really do become ill, right?”

“Yes, and so you’ve fallen ill.”

“Seems that way. If that’s the case, I’ll be cured by not going to school.”

Mrs. Shinoda changed the subject without voicing her agreement.

“What will you do shut up in your room every day?”

“I’ll do what I like together with Pozai.”

“If shut up in a room for too long, a cat will become ill. Hasn’t he grown too fat recently?”

“It’s good if cats are positively huge—fluffy and fat,” Ai concluded. “And the best kind of cat is a lazy, graceful, and clever male with a magnificent tail.”
The cat Pozai exited Ai’s room and came over to them. His melancholic eyes were two different colors and shone brightly in a mass of long white fur. He snuggled up to Ai’s feet with an unbelievably leisurely gait for an animal that walked on four legs.

Mrs. Shinoda created a barrier of indifference to prevent the cat from drawing near. As a rule, Mrs. Shinoda did not touch animals: that included this cat, as well as dogs and small birds. The exception was horses, as she had ridden them when she was young. Horses were less of an animal and more of a vehicle with a hot and powerful engine…

“Mama, do you know the story of Tobermory?”

“Is that about a cat?”

“Yes. It’s about a cat that speaks like a human. It’s from a short story by Saki.”

“Is it a magical cat?”

“It’s not magical; it thinks about nearly the same things as Sōseki’s cat from “I am a Cat” and watches the humans and then talks about them. It’s impossible for Pozai to talk, but it seems he can understand human words almost like Tobermory.”

“How do you know that he understands us?”

“It’s something I’ve learned from living together with him. We eat together, we bathe together, and we sleep together; I stroke his fur, tickle him, and hold him in my arms. I talk to him constantly, and he understands what I say.”

“If you’re that friendly with a cat, you might become one yourself.”

“Would that be so bad? I’m trying to become a cat. I’ve thought about what I’d try to become if I ceased to be human, and something like a cat would surely be best, don’t you think?”

“I don’t think I’d want to become an animal.”
“You’d like to stay a human?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Shinoda’s eyes were focused nowhere in particular. “Something that isn’t human… Perhaps I would become something else. If I fell ill, I’d become an inhuman monster—whether I liked it or not.”

“You mean ill like your uncle?”

“My uncle died while he was still in the hospital, and my youngest sister committed suicide. What’s more, I might have transmitted those genes to you.”

As if she were enjoying the sensation of playing with the destiny locked in her genes, Mrs. Shinoda smiled faintly.

“Yes, which means you might eventually fall ill too,” Ai replied, arming herself with a stiff smile. “Actually, no, the illness may have already started. Sometimes I can see a demon’s face underneath yours, Mama.”

“It seems that human skin grows thinner as one ages. Even I am aware of how one can see a demon’s face through my skin. But if we were to become demons, you would be first. My will is strong, and I think the mask of flesh I wear is built quite robustly. It still can’t be easily torn.”

“I think that’s a pity,” Ai said, laughing as if baring her fangs. It was an imitation of the laugh of a cat.

The two of them sometimes played serious games of this sort where they crossed swords of words. Mrs. Shinoda and her daughter were well-matched opponents in these contests. The counselor had strongly emphasized the importance of “the dialogue between parent and child” and “communication,” but Mrs. Shinoda had answered that
they had plenty of that sort of interaction. In fact, in addition to this kind of dialogue, mother and daughter sometimes had real debates.

When Ai had been home from school for over a month, the relatives who had thought it best to keep silent began to come over uninvited. Mrs. Shinoda’s mother stubbornly insisted that she be allowed to take charge of Ai. However, when it was decided that there was some merit to her idea and the two set about trying to convince the girl, the words “I won’t go without Pozai,” issued from her mouth, and the plan fell through. At this point, Mrs. Shinoda was at the height of confusion and exhaustion, and it seemed as if she’d lost her better judgment. The truth was that she had no intention of exercising such judgment anyway, but based on her appearance the people around her could only see her as a victim to be sympathized with. That being the case, her older sister and her brother-in-law tried to forcibly take charge. In short, there was a facility that specialized in taking in truant children and treating them, and they were trying to send Ai there.

“I think that the sooner we do it, the better. ... You know what happened,” Mrs. Shinoda’s older sister exchanged glances with her husband, referring to their younger sister who became mentally unstable and committed suicide.

“If you worry like that, it will happen to you too,” Mrs. Shinoda rebuked her sister in a clear voice. “And your children will follow suit.”

When her sister decided that something needed to be done whether it was treatment or a return to school, mother and daughter formed a strange united front and resisted; the situation changed but remained unresolved. Around the time when the second month of absence became the third, no one was coming to meddle in their affairs
anymore. As long as others refrained from making a fuss when they came calling, Mrs. Shinoda continued living as if the problem did not exist; rather, as if Ai herself did not exist. For Ai’s part, she continued living by herself with Pozai as if neither school nor family existed.

A cat’s life may seem free and unfettered because it has no schedule or lessons to speak of, but it is unexpectedly dull. Sleeping, eating, licking its body, scratching itself here and there with its hind legs, stretching, yawning, and then moving: its life is made up of a repetition of these things. When it moves, it is reminiscent of the “Promenade” sections of “Pictures at an Exhibition” with their regular, walking rhythm. *A cat elegantly performs all of these actions like a ceremony,* Ai thought. In Pozai’s case, a number of capricious musical bars had been inserted. That is to say, he would do things like suddenly jump into Ai’s lap, lick her nose, and swing his tail to the piano music. And sometimes when Ai played the piano he would stand on the stool next to her and strike it with his fat forefeet like a pupil playing together with his teacher.

However, once Pozai went outside circumstances would change completely. Unexpectedly encountering other cats, exploring the garden and the grove, hunting, secretly relieving himself, conflict and escape, sexual intercourse—the cat’s world was full of small wonders. When Pozai went out, Ai tried to accompany him and match his behavior as closely as possible. Merely imitating a cat and trying to crawl on all fours gave the world a different appearance.

One time Pozai caught a pigeon. Seeming proud as he wriggled his whiskers, he looked up at Ai.

“How about we eat this together?” Pozai said.
“Wait a moment, I’ve brought something to drink,” Ai said and poured red wine and milk into two small glasses. In the shadow of the garden’s fully bloomed azaleas, a splendid feast began. The pigeon’s viscera—spilling out of its abdomen, which was torn to pieces by Pozai’s teeth—shone brilliantly, as if they were opening a jewelry box. Ai recalled a verse written by some poet:

A white cloud floats,
and I have a very elegant appetite.

Such early summer clouds were in the sky today.

“What kind of wine is it?” Pozai asked.

“I wonder if it’s last year’s Beaujolais. It’s from Mama’s leftovers, you see.”

“I’m going to have this ‘white.’ It goes well with pigeon liver.”

Pozai finished, leaving Ai the heart.

“Thank you,” Ai said and put the heart, covered in a warm sauce of blood, into her mouth.

Summer passed, autumn wore on, and with the exception of the fact that Pozai grew increasingly fat—larger than the average dog—the quiet daily life of the Shinoda household continued completely unchanged. Ai never went to school anymore, and that autumn she also stopped attending her piano lessons. Her teacher, who was a professor at a college of music, complained about Ai and said that she did not play seriously. As a result, the lessons stopped. According to the teacher, although she had expended considerable effort to teach Ai to play Chopin, Ai played his “Little Dog Waltz” like his “Cat Waltz,” and played Schubert’s “Impromptus” in a modern musical style.

“Yes, she plays in a strange manner, like Xenakis or Bozay…”

“You said Bozay—our cat is named Pozai,” Mrs. Shinoda said, seeming happy.
“I didn’t know that,” the piano teacher continued in a cold voice.

“Leaving that aside, I heard that Ai has not gone to school since this past spring, and with all due respect, what with being separated from your husband…”

“Let’s see, have I paid you for this month’s lesson?”

The piano lessons ended on that note. Winter came, and Ai and Pozai seemed to live harmoniously in their room like happy newlyweds. Mrs. Shinoda did not have anything in particular to do, and she too lived an idle, elegant, cat-like life. Occasionally Mr. Shinoda came home and cleaned and did the laundry. The house seemed full of shed cat hair, fallen flower petals, and minute particles of boredom. Mrs. Shinoda generally lay sprawled on the sofa. Books that she had begun to read were scattered around her. They were like leftovers she had only nibbled on, and the tidy Mrs. Shinoda frowned despite herself. However, during this several month period where she was free of all responsibilities and lived amidst the wine, flowers, and dust, her body grew a little thinner and her flesh seemed to become softer. Her nails shone with a dim lustre, her hair swirled luxuriously, and upon closer examination she looked like a noble lady or an upper class prostitute from the Late Baroque era. Mr. Shinoda desired her once again after a long lapse.

“How is Ai doing?”

“The same as ever. It's been a long time since she’s shown her face.”

Mr. Shinoda suddenly embraced Mrs. Shinoda. With her eyes open—shining brightly yet with a hint of drowsiness—she surrendered herself, neither accepting nor rejecting him, and purred like a cat.
“How would you feel about living together near my workplace?” Mr. Shinoda said.

“It feels like we’ve been divorced for some time now. It doesn’t matter to me.”

“Who said that? Divorce is out of the question.”

With that declaration, Mr. Shinoda returned to his distant post.

One mild late autumn afternoon, Mrs. Shinoda suddenly grew hungry and entertained the thought of going out for a meal. Then, another rare whim: she felt inspired to try and invite Ai and ventured to her room. There was no reply. Come to think of it, when she had called out to her two or three days earlier the reply had been, “We’re eating right now, so don’t come in.” Mrs. Shinoda had that kind of feeling now, too. There was a sound like animals intently eating something. Thinking that was a spectacle she did not wish to see, Mrs. Shinoda waited for a long time.

When evening was approaching, Mrs. Shinoda changed her clothes and tried knocking on the door of Ai and Pozai’s room again.

“Are you done eating?” she called out. There was a growling reply that she could scarce believe was a human voice. When she opened the door and peered inside, a stench wafted out and there was a whirlwind as something rushed at her. It was an enormous cat. It was a cat just like Pozai, its whole body pure white except for tabby stripes along its back and tail. But it was much too big to be him: larger than even the most gigantic dogs. To all appearances, it was the size of a human. Once the cat had sent Mrs. Shinoda flying and slipped through the door, it slowed its pace and calmly departed for somewhere else.

There was no one remaining in the room. The same stench—which may have been that of blood—seemed like the odor one encounters when stepping into a room
where someone has just finished a meal. There were traces of something having been eaten on the parquet floor.

*What happened here?* Mrs. Shinoda tilted her head to one side, puzzled. However, she put that question aside and met her elder sister and her brother-in-law at a stylish restaurant, feeling an unusual sense of liberation. As they were eating, Mrs. Shinoda began to talk about the earlier incident. Her brother-in-law fixed his eyes on her and gave her a stern look.

“It was definitely a giant cat. There’s no doubt about it. The problem is whether it’s Pozai or Ai, but I think it’s Ai. She ended up eating Pozai. Wouldn’t it be impossible for Pozai to consume Ai with that little body of his? Ai has wished to become a cat for a while now, and so she ate a cat, combined with it, and at last she became one herself.”

Mrs. Shinoda’s eyes sparkled as she explained her logical reasoning. Her sister and brother-in-law waited for their chance to speak and exchanged glances. It seemed she needed to get in touch with the appropriate authorities.

“So where did Ai go?” Mrs. Shinoda’s sister asked again.

“I don't know,” Mrs. Shinoda said, sticking a knife in her roast duck. “But I’ve thought of a good idea. Businesses that locate lost cats and dogs have been cropping up recently. Let’s try asking one of them right away.”

“I hope all goes well and she’s found.”

“I think they’ll find her. Anyhow, she’s an enormous cat the likes of which they’ve never seen,” Mrs. Shinoda said matter-of-factly and grinned.
CHAPTER 21
THE PASSAGE OF DREAMS

Two months after she remarried, Itsuko began to dream about her late former husband. Although he ought to have been dead, he seemed just as healthy as he had been in life, and Itsuko felt a wistful sorrow as if part of her innermost heart was missing. 

_However healthy he appears in this dream, I can never live with that man again_, she thought.

The scene was a city—probably somewhere in Tokyo. Itsuko was worried that she might look like a ghost herself. Her exceedingly long hair was all one length and rustled as it was blown by the breeze. Thinking that it was just as if she had stepped back in time to her girlhood, Itsuko walked through the city carrying her violin case. Her late husband Mr. Minami walked a little ahead of her, carrying his familiar flute case. _We might be going somewhere to get a meal after our group finished a concert_, Itsuko thought as she watched the dream. When she quickened her pace and walked alongside him, she could not say a word. _He’s a ghost after all_, Itsuko thought and looked at his profile—his face seemed to be made of the black flesh of the dead. The appearance of the city was strange, too. It resembled a scene of a metropolis that had sunk to the bottom of the sea, and both the buildings and the airships seemed to sway back and forth. Although it ought to have been crowded, the other people were thin and insubstantial, like seaweed swaying in the water. Itsuko was anxious to call out to her husband when the water’s fluctuations became increasingly violent, the city collapsed, and finally the dream ended.
The next night, Mr. Minami appeared on television in her dream. He was performing with a jazz piano trio at a live music club somewhere. Itsuko was easily able to step through the television screen, and the next thing she knew she was sitting in the front row at the music club. At that moment, Mr. Minami began to play a jazzy rendition of the toccata section of Debussy’s “Pour le piano.” For the first time in ages, the music living in Itsuko’s body turned into hot foam and boiled over. That night the two were husband and wife again, and they went to bed together to do the countless things that they had used to do. The few remaining conscious cells in one corner of Itsuko’s cerebrum murmured, *Is it all right to do this kind of thing with someone who’s dead?* Still, she lost herself completely in her first husband’s arms. Her whole body changed into a fleshy flute, and he played her freely as a wind of music rushed through her body. When she awoke, Itsuko was utterly drained as if it had all really happened; she was unable to get up for quite a while.

From then on, she met secretly with her late husband every night in dream. Fortunately Itsuko currently had no plans to perform in a large concert, because even she knew that she was losing energy at a dramatic rate. That being the case, her new husband Mr. Kamiya must be aware of the anomaly: he was a doctor. Itsuko decided to confess her strange dreams to him.

Mr. Kamiya was forty-five years old, and it had been ten years since his previous wife had passed away. He said that he had been a secret fan of Itsuko’s ever since he went to see one of her performances in London about three years ago, and he would show up at her concerts whenever he could.
It was quite recently that Itsuko was introduced to Mr. Kamiya and the two had their first meeting alone together. One time a record company executive and acquaintance of hers had whispered into her ear that he knew a gentleman wishing to become her patron and asked her if she would meet with him.

“He said he wants to take you to a restaurant and treat you to duck.”

Itsuko loved birds. She could eat whatever flew in the sky, whether it was thrush, pheasant, or duck—and she found them charming at the same time. Fish were similar because they had fins and floated through the water. However, she hated four-legged animals. She was extremely sensitive to the odor of beasts.

After the two of them sat down at the table and exchanged greetings on the appointed day, Mr. Kamiya suddenly proposed to her. “What?” Itsuko said like a young girl, opening her eyes wide. Strangely, she was not really taken aback. The absurd abruptness did not make her particularly uncomfortable either. *This man is proposing,* Itsuko thought, almost as if it were happening to somebody else. Without deciding on her reply—and thus without making her intent clear—she began to eat as if nothing had changed, and their conversation spiraled gently, spreading out across the table.

“I always sit near the front at your concerts—do you recognize my face?”

Itsuko viewed him head-on again. His face, that of a middle-aged gentleman, was handsome, and he seemed like the type who could be found in a salon frequented by Virginia Woolf.

“I’m sorry,” Itsuko said, tilting her head in puzzlement. “I almost never look at the audience. It's dark and eerie, and it feels like a group of beasts are crowded together holding their breath, you see. So, I don’t look; I always close my eyes and perform from
inside my own personal pearl grey membrane. I listen to my own sound in isolation…

But, that’s no good. What I really want is to play music that resounds clearly, music that makes everyone’s bodies resonate. At a fundamental level, I might not have the talent to be a performing musician.”

Her companion shook his head in disagreement.

“Well, I still haven’t said anything about myself. Shall I give you my card?” Mr. Kamiya said, producing his business card. It said that he was a neurosurgeon.

“What a scary line of work!”

“Does it smell like blood?”

“No. It has a botanical fragrance. Like green bamboo, maybe. That reminds me of the episode long ago when someone, maybe it was the writer Wang Huizhi, referred to bamboo as ‘this gentleman.’ The elegant, shining green stalks of bamboo make it a fitting metaphor for a noble and honorable man.”

“You’ve made me out to be quite brilliant with that comparison there. But then, what are you? Among the plants called ‘The Four Gentlemen’—plum, chrysanthemum, bamboo, and orchid—you would be the latter.”

“I would be a more childish flower, for example…” Itsuko began to say, but an appropriate flower did not come to mind.

By the time they finished their meal that day Itsuko had already agreed to the marriage. She was amazed at what a calm appearance she maintained. She smiled just as if she had discussed a record deal or something else easily arranged.

“But, I have a request. I would very much appreciate it if we skipped the wedding and reception. I’ll notify the regional office right away. And then I’ll inform my family
and friends. ‘I have married. I will still be using Itsuko Kojima as my stage name…’

Something like that.”

“That’s fine. Please move in with me at your convenience. I’ll make preparations this week.”

Ten days after that, the two were officially married. Being courted by a man so like the “gentleman” of Wang Huizhi’s musings gave her a feeling akin to vertigo. Her friends often teased her and called her the “Dreaming Faerie,” and at that time she may very well have seemed to be walking through the clouds. Despite this, she managed everything in an uncharacteristically business-like and efficient manner and delivered herself to Mr. Kamiya like an article purchased by an enthusiastic customer. Now they slept under the same roof in two separate but adjacent rooms. Itsuko and Mr. Kamiya coincidentally shared the custom of sleeping in their own rooms from their previous marriages, and they decided to continue that way. For Itsuko, saying “Goodnight” to her husband and entering her own room had been the last and greatest pleasure of each day of her former married life. Especially after dallying with the “midnight sun”—which is how Itsuko referred to their intimacy—returning to her own room and throwing her flushed body upon her own bed… That was why she loved visiting her husband’s bedroom. It seemed that Mr. Kamiya immediately discerned Itsuko’s desire, for he began to invite her into his room.

At those times Itsuko became curious what his first wife was like, but the “Dreaming Faerie” lacked both the wits and enthusiasm to cautiously extract the information from him. One time he let her see a photograph of his late wife. She was a completely different type from Itsuko: a beautiful, wise-looking woman with sharp
features. *She looks like she might play piano,* Itsuko thought. Itsuko asked him only that, and Mr. Kamiya shook his head as if it were a pity that she had not.

During the lengthy period where he lived as a bachelor after his wife died, Mr. Kamiya effaced almost all traces of his marriage to the point where one would think this to be his first marriage were he not to say otherwise. That was not necessarily the case with Itsuko. Mr. Minami had died three years earlier in a traffic accident, and recently that same Mr. Minami had appeared in Itsuko’s dreams every night.

“How are things going with Mr. Kamiya?” her late husband asked her in a dream one night.

“Things are going well,” Itsuko answered with composure. *Even so, how do people in the world of the dead know about my present life?* she thought doubtfully. Itsuko had been under the impression that they were meeting as their past selves.

“I meant how are you performing with him—as a duo.”

“Oh, you mean that.”

Itsuko blushed and lowered her long eyelashes. She gave an evasive reply—that it takes time to produce satisfactory music when one’s costar has changed—but Mr. Minami seemed not to understand, folding his arms.

The truth was that Itsuko had never reached the height of pleasure during what Mr. Kamiya shyly referred to as their “lovemaking.” On the contrary, for some reason at that time alone the “gentleman” Mr. Kamiya would transform from an elegant stalk of bamboo into something akin to a fat snake. Itsuko could not help but feel that way each time her skin touched his. And there was the sensation that she was being penetrated by a
foreign substance; even now she had not grown accustomed to it. Of course, her body
had never quivered and rung out like a wind instrument. Itsuko was saddened by this, but
her husband was kind in every respect and treated her with great care as if he were
handling a broken doll.

It seemed Mr. Minami even knew of the new couple’s intimate secret, for he
remarked: “Just as I thought, things don’t appear to be going well.”

*It’s all your fault, isn’t it?* Itsuko was on the verge of uttering the words, but she
avoided speaking further about her relationship with her new husband.

The following night, Itsuko finally confessed her troubling dreams to Mr. Kamiya.

“I can’t say whether they’re nightmares or not, but it’s inexcusable. They must be
bad dreams, Doctor—don’t you think?”

Itsuko had fallen into the habit of calling Mr. Kamiya “Doctor” in formal
situations. She liked the dependent tone she took when she said it.

“Tell me, how does Mr. Minami look?” Mr. Kamiya asked, taking a somewhat
formal tone himself.

“He looks healthy. He’s still himself—the same as ever—and it appears that he’s
kept his body and is living another life in the ‘Other World.’ I don’t know where he gets
his information, but he seems to be well-informed on the affairs of this world, too. And
sometimes when he comes here he enters my dreams.”

“It seems he’s discovered a passage that allows him to return,” Mr. Kamiya said.

“Yes. I don’t feel like I’m departing for the ‘Other World’ when...” Itsuko began,
but she suddenly became uneasy. The city where she met Mr. Minami, the room, the sky,
and the sun, too—was everything in her dream actually part of the world of the dead?
The city that seemed to stand on the sea floor and the people who walked as if they were floating particles did not appear to be of this world.

“There’s a phrase: ‘the passage of clouds.’ In one poem, the speaker orders the winds to close the passage of clouds so that he can enjoy the company of the visiting heavenly maidens a little longer. In your case, you should block this ‘passage of dreams’ so that the dead cannot come here.”

“How could I do that?”

“It may be my area of expertise, but it’s out of the question for me to cut open your brain and erect a barrier somewhere.”

“Please try.”

“I was just kidding. The best I can do is give you some medicine to help you sleep.”

But she didn’t end up using the sleeping pills. Itsuko, who played violin, had to avoid taking medication that might adversely affect her performance.

That summer, Mr. Kamiya took a holiday and accompanied Itsuko on her European concert tour. After her final performance had gone smoothly and the two of them had settled into a London hotel, her former husband, who had not appeared when she slept in the same room as Mr. Kamiya before, came to her again in dream. Itsuko immediately woke up. Her dream disappeared like a television image when the switch is turned off. Thinking that her visitor should have vanished along with the dream, Itsuko realized that was not the case; for some reason, she had the feeling that a presence from a different plane lingered in the area. There were signs that the ghost of her dead husband
was there. Although she had never been afraid of him in her dreams, the Mr. Minami who had escaped could only be a ghost—and Itsuko was afraid of that ghost now. Mr. Kamiya slept soundly in the bed next to hers, but Itsuko restrained herself from waking him. Instead, she stiffened her body and watched for signs of the ghost until morning. She brought up the matter over breakfast.

“I thought that he wouldn’t pursue me overseas.”

“Ghosts can go anywhere. If a ghost were to travel overseas, they wouldn’t need to fly in an airplane, and they wouldn’t need to pay,” Mr. Kamiya laughed.

“But how did he arrive in London? Do ghosts fly through the sky, like birds?” As she said this, Itsuko imitated a bird flapping its wings with a childish gesture.

“I don’t think ghosts have wings.”

“Then perhaps they put their hands together above their heads and fly like squid?”

“They might travel across the sky like a vapor trail,” Mr. Kamiya replied, and then changed the subject to the first time he saw Itsuko three years ago in London. He asked her if she remembered what she had played at that concert.

“I remember it perfectly even now. You played Schnittke’s ‘A Paganini,’ Rochberg’s ‘Caprice Variations’, and then Ravel’s posthumous sonata and ‘Tzigane’—all with your usual dreamy air.”

“I know it was a strange program.”

“You were lovely, like a living doll playing the violin with a pair of delicate arms. As I watched, I thought ‘I want this doll.’ Three years later, I’ve finally got it.”

“Am I still a doll, even though I’m already in my thirties?”

“A doll doesn’t age,” Mr. Kamiya said definitively.
They stayed in London for one more day, and Itsuko dreamt of her late husband again that last night.

However, this dream was different from all of the others. When Itsuko arrived at the appointed place, Mr. Minami was talking enthusiastically with a woman who was about thirty years old. Looking at his smiling face, Itsuko sensed intuitively that their relationship was special. With her long hair and sharp profile, the woman looked like an actress or a fashion model. *I’ve seen her somewhere before,* Itsuko thought, but her mind was in a state of chaos and would not function properly. She became her former self again—the one that had been married to Mr. Minami—and experienced a shock as if her organs were being removed by her husband’s unthinkable act of betrayal.

At length Mr. Minami noticed Itsuko. He moved his hand as if urging his companion to leave, and the woman disappeared. They were somewhere that seemed like a live music club crowded with dead patrons. Itsuko was nearly suffocating from the tobacco smoke and the odor of the dead. Coming to her senses, she returned to her present self. *I shouldn’t have come here,* she thought.

It looked like Mr. Minami was wearing an additional thin layer of skin over his face. *That’s the face of a man trying to break off an affair,* Itsuko thought. Sure enough, he lit a cigarette and spoke.

“You shouldn’t come to this place anymore. I want to end things between us now.”

“You’ve found someone you love in this world. Was that her a moment ago?”

“That’s the pianist who will be performing with me.”

“Could you introduce me please?”
“I can’t do that.”

“But I’d like to ask her to take good care of you.”

“Then I’d have to appear before Mr. Kamiya and ask him to take good care of you.”

“That won’t work.”

Mr. Minami suddenly lifted Itsuko in his arms and carried her to their usual bed. *This will be our last duo performance,* Itsuko warned herself. Just as before, her body transformed into a wind instrument and began to ring out. However, tonight the music was not like a warm breeze blowing through her body: as the fleshy flute rang out it grew inflamed and filled with a tear-like liquid. Her flesh dissolved in the flood of those tears, and she felt as though even her eyeballs had melted away. There was no music anymore.

*My eyes will be swollen when I wake up,* Itsuko thought as she slipped out of the dream. Mr. Kamiya saw her face.

“You look like an actress who’s just performed a tragic scene,” he said.

“I finally ended it with him.”

“And now the passage of dreams is closed.”

“Thanks to you,” Itsuko said casually with a weak smile on her face. She had a feeling that her husband was uncannily familiar with the situation—there was still something that did not make sense.

During their flight back to Japan, Itsuko fell into her usual dream-like state with her large eyes wide open. Then suddenly she let out an “Oh!” in an acute whisper.

“What is it?” Mr. Kamiya turned towards her.

“I’ve got it. I remembered who the woman I saw last night was.”
Itsuko explained last night’s dream to Mr. Kamiya, omitting only the “performance” at the end.

“So you see, that woman was your wife, Doctor. I’m certain of it.”

“That’s an interesting account. It seems your musical talent is rivaled by your skill at storytelling.”

“Are you saying that I make up stories and dream them?”

“Don’t look at me so sharply,” Mr. Kamiya laughed. “To tell the truth, I might very well be the cowriter of the scenario in your dream. The woman who appeared in your dream last night was probably my former wife. It’s quite possible that she made the acquaintance of Mr. Minami in London… My wife died near Heathrow Airport ten years ago along with two other passengers from the same car, employees of a television commercial production company. It seems it was a horrific accident. If she were still roaming that area, she may have happened to make Mr. Minami’s acquaintance when he came to London.”

“That sounds a little far-fetched.”

“But if she holds on to him, he won’t come into your dreams anymore. That way, you can sleep in peace. I think it’s a good thing.”

Itsuko felt something akin to pleasure, as though she were being shown a masterful magic trick. The story seemed consistent, but the more she thought about it the stranger it became. Did the Doctor ask his former wife to do this? Was he still in contact with her even now? If so, through what means? Questions that she would like to ask crowded into her mind, but she restrained herself from giving voice to her concerns.
Just once I’d like to peek into Mr. Kamiya’s mind—the brain of someone whose own specialty is the brain—and see what’s inside, Itsuko thought. She sometimes mused that men’s minds must be terribly complex, sheltering lovers and spies as well as refugees, criminals, and others that women cannot even imagine in their neural labyrinths. And, it seemed that a man’s cerebrum could successfully process having multiple lovers at a time. They appeared to be performing complex operations that were incomprehensible from the outside. Itsuko tried explaining her thoughts to Mr. Minami.

“What do you call something whose contents are unknowable from the outside?”

“A black box.”

“Since women’s brains are structured very simply, you can see anything and everything in them. Isn’t that right, Doctor?”

“I suppose. Instead, their bodies are like complex and mysterious musical instruments, and I don’t know how to play them to produce a good sound.”

“I have a suggestion. In my case, it would be better to blow rather than press or strum. If you blow and create a vibration, a good sound will emerge. You see, it seems I’m a wind instrument—not a keyboard or a stringed instrument.”

Then Itsuko told him how she did not particularly care for the sound of a violin. She did not feel like its sound resonated inside her body. It rang out externally, causing her ears to prick up.

“I want a sound that resonates inside my body. I think the best thing would be to become panpipes or a pipe organ.”

Mr. Kamiya may have taken what Itsuko said on the plane to heart.

Summer’s folding fan
no sooner has it become
familiar in my hand
than it stirs unbidden
just a home for autumn winds

Just like in the poem, Itsuko could sense the coming of autumn. It was around that time that she began to ring out beautifully in Mr. Kamiya’s arms; the feeling that her body had transformed into a wind instrument had definitely returned. Thrilled, Itsuko struggled like a caught fish, almost soaring into the sky like a bird.

“I wonder if your former wife will become jealous and intrude if we carry on like this.”

“She’s wouldn’t do that. She’s the type who doesn’t bother other people,” Mr. Kamiya said. However, doubt flitted through Itsuko’s mind upon hearing the way he spoke. *There must still be a secret link between him and his wife—they must be able to consult and conspire about everything. There’s no question that she’d do anything he asked. Like what happened in my dream that last night in London...*

Having thought that far, Itsuko felt a strange affection for the dead woman she had met in the dream. She wanted to meet her again, and begged Mr. Kamiya to show her the photograph.

“There’s no mistaking it.”

“So it was her?”

“Yes.” As Itsuko replied, she was convinced that the woman had complied with Mr. Kamiya’s request and closed “the passage of dreams.”
APPENDIX

STORY SUMMARIES

Beneath the Blossoms

**intertextual references**: *Saigyō and the Cherry Tree* (Noh)

**climax**: Keiko is embraced by Saigyō / the spirit of the cherry tree and experiences an ecstatic (orgasmic) state as she melds into its sap.

**aftermath**: The next morning the trunk of the cherry tree in Keiko’s home garden has split, pouring forth sap. Keiko wonders about this turn of events but ultimately shrugs it off.

The Blossom Room

**intertextual references**: *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (14th century memoir)

**climax**: Keiko turns into a flower and experiences an ecstatic (orgasmic) state as Emperor Go-Fukakusa falls into its center.

**aftermath**: Keiko meets with Lady Nijō, who says that Emperor Go-Fukakusa has not provided a post-sexual liaison letter. Initially Keiko is disappointed, thinking that Nijō may have discarded it out of jealousy. However, she soon realizes that the Lady may be the one in need of sympathy.

The Castle in the Sea

**intertextual references**: “Tristan and Iseult” (legend)

**climax**: Keiko views the now half-human half-fish Tristan and Iseult endlessly fornicating as they try to recover their humanity.

**aftermath**: Keiko acquires the aphrodisiac that ostensibly left them in such a position, and discovers that it creates a feeling of emptiness and death in its imbibers.

The Aphrodisiac

**intertextual references**: *Teika* (Noh)

**climax**: Keiko voyeuristically engages in the intimacy between Teika and Princess Shikishi, in which Teika pushes a passive Princess Shikishi towards an ecstatic (orgasmic) state.

**aftermath**: Keiko observes the “Teika” vines covering Princess Shikishi’s grave burst into flames, an event she concludes is the result of the aphrodisiac they shared.
The Mask Dream

*inter textual references*: *Jidō and the Chrysanthemum* (Noh)

**climax**: Jidō, addressing Keiko as his mother, writes a lotus sutra on her bare back. His touch causes her to enter an ecstatic (orgasmic) state.

**aftermath**: Keiko awakens to find a masked body beside her, but when she removes the mask there is nothing there. Still, she continues her relations with the faceless form, fulfilling her incestuous fantasy.

The Eternal Traveler

*inter textual references*: “Traveller” (poem – Nishiwaki Junzaburō)

**climax**: Mr. Nishiwaki applies soul water to Keiko’s back, all the while referring to her as a goddess. This relieves the itching from the lotus sutras inscribed there by Jidō.

**aftermath**: Keiko and Mr. Nishiwaki enjoy tea while Keiko keeps her chest and back bare like a Grecian goddess. The next morning Mr. Nishiwaki departs for Hell.

Hell in Autumn

*inter textual references*: *The Nightly Courting of Komachi* (Noh)

**climax**: Keiko experiences an ecstatic (orgasmic) state through intimacy with a mysterious Noh-costumed man. At their climax, the mask of her partner becomes that of a dying woman and falls to the ground.

**aftermath**: It becomes clear that the mask was a demon, and that the man, revealed to be General Fukakusa, could not remove it because of his obsession with the woman in life. Rather than helping the man free himself, Keiko reattaches his mask and departs.

The City Under the Castle

*inter textual references*: *The Tale of Genji*

**climax**: Keiko observes a couple she knows from the real world in an underground shopping complex in the “Other World.” Also, her friend Mrs. Hanada has a night of pleasure with a man from the Heian period per the recommendation of Lady Rokujō.

**aftermath**: Upon her return to the real world, Keiko discovers the couple committed a double suicide due to disgrace in their family. Mrs. Hanada is very enthusiastic about the intimacy of the night before.

The Flower Faeries
intertextual references: none

climax: Keiko harvests flowers from her bizarre neighbor’s garden, only to find their son and daughter inside, wrapped together like mating insects.

aftermath: Keiko’s own son and daughter have been acting increasingly strange, and won’t respond to her calls…

The Moon Woman

intertextual references: The Feather Mantle (Noh)

climax: Keiko voyeuristically engages in the intimacy between Mr. Semimaru and Jōga, in which Mr. Semimaru’s soul is siphoned away by the beautiful woman and the corrosive light of the moon.

aftermath: According to the next day’s newspaper, Mr. Semimaru suddenly died during the night.

Seclusion

intertextual references: The Well Cradle (Noh)

climax: Keiko takes her coworker Mr. Fujiwara to the “Other World,” where he engages in intimacy with Princess Yasuko. Keiko finds herself in Yasuko’s place during their encounter, guiding Fujiwara with her sexual experience.

aftermath: Mr. Fujiwara disappears to the “Other World,” finding the seclusion he sought.

An Ode to Cloud, Rain, and Rainbow

intertextual references: none

climax: Keiko engages in intimacy with a great man made of clouds and rain and feels her body melt in his embrace. When she closes her eyes she experiences a sensation characterized as “the joy of dissolving into nothingness.”

aftermath: When Keiko returns to herself, a rainbow stretches from her head to the heavens. The daughter of the great man informs her that she could practice this (sexual) technique with Keiko’s husband. Keiko is uneasy, and the rainbow disappears.

House of the Black Cat

intertextual references: “The Black Cat” (short story – Edgar Allen Poe)
climax – Keiko and her husband watch a mysterious video made by a friend which features his relations with a black cat woman. At the end of the video, the cat and the maker of the film have intercourse in which the man’s body is sucked into that of the cat woman.

aftermath: The man goes missing and Keiko and her husband visit his home to investigate. Only a mother cat, her kittens, and the scent of fresh blood remain.

**The Red Room**

intertextual references: none

climax: After bathing in the blood of maidens, Keiko and the Countess Elizabeth Bathory engage in intimate relations. Keiko’s mind is sleeping, but she experiences physical pleasure. Finally, a blade severs her artery.

aftermath: No trace of the night’s pleasure remains, and when Keiko returns home she receives cosmetics the color of the liquid in the bathtub.

**The Water Rail Village**

intertextual references: *The Diary of Murasaki Shikibu*

climax: Keiko hears Michinaga knocking on the door of Ms. Fujiwara’s room, but waits to open it per Ms. Fujiwara’s instructions. When she disappears, Keiko and Michinaga have intercourse, and Keiko employs the “Misty Rain” technique she learned earlier.

aftermath: Michinaga characterizes Keiko (who he believes to be Ms. Fujiwara) as “different from her usual self”, and Keiko interprets this as a sign of her success and sexual prowess.

**Firefly Catching**

intertextual references: *The Diary of Izumi Shikibu*

climax: Keiko watches Izumi Shikibu and the deity of the Kibune shrine have intercourse. Firefly-like spheres escape from Izumi’s body when she reaches an ecstatic (orgasmic) state.

aftermath: The fireflies are parts of Izumi’s soul, and when Keiko returns home she finds that some have become caught in her garments. One by one they drop to the floor and die.

**Maple Viewing**
intertextual references: Maple Viewing (Noh), The Tale of Genji

climax: Lady Rokujō uses her psychokinetic powers to restrain Keiko and the other four party guests from approaching Genji. Shortly thereafter, all of the party guests transform into demonesses and pursue Genji into the heavens.

aftermath: Keiko herself becomes a demoness and moves to the “Other World,” accepting Lady Rokujō’s longstanding invitation.

The Serpent and Eve

intertextual references: The Book of Genesis

climax: A question and answer session with God reveals that the Book of Genesis is not entirely accurate. Eve was the first human, and as a copy of her Adam was incomplete. God corrected this by affixing a part of Eve’s first lover, the serpent, to Adam.

aftermath: Yuko declares that, like Eve, she would be satisfied with the strange serpent, and resolves to behave accordingly. That night, she experiences the pleasure of the “serpent” with her long-time friend Mr. Ogawa.

A Spring Night’s Dream

intertextual references: various tanka

climax: Saiko transforms into a demon, killing one of Mr. Sakai’s other mistresses and her newborn child in a dream-like state.

aftermath: After Saiko confesses her “dream” to Mr. Sakai, he reveals that he has always known she had a demonic side. Sobbing, Saiko says that if he were to cease visiting she would become a real demon.

The Cat’s World

intertextual references: “Tobermory” (short story – Saki)

climax: When Mrs. Shinoda goes to investigate her reclusive daughter’s bedroom, a giant cat rushes out, knocking her over. There is no one else in the room.

aftermath: Mrs. Shinoda concludes that her daughter ate her cat, thereby combining with it and becoming one herself. She believes the authorities will find her.

The Passage of Dreams

intertextual references: various tanka
climax: Itsuko meets with her late husband in dream, only to discover that he has taken a lover in the spirit world: her new husband’s late wife. The sensation is not the same when he and Itsuko have intercourse that night, and she awakens with eyes swollen from tears.

aftermath: Itsuko advises her new husband on how to give women physical pleasure, and he readily takes note. Later, she feels a newfound affinity for his former wife and is convinced that the woman has closed the “passage of dreams” through which the dead travel to our unconscious.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


