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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

HANAFUDA

BY



SALLY S. ITO

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**Edmonton, Alberta
SPRING 1994**



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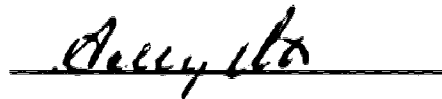
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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Hanafuda submitted by Sally S. Ito in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Dr. S. Arntzen

April 15, 1994

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and my late father (1934-1990).

CONTRACT

Hanafuda is a collection of short stories that explores the Japanese and Japanese North American sensibility.

HANAFUDA

List of Stories

1. Missionary	3500 wrds	.....	1
2. Kuyashi	5300 wrds	.....	18
3. Honeymoon	5600 wrds	.....	39
4. Teruko	4000 wrds	.....	62
5. Japonisme	1100 wrds	.....	79
6. Mishima	8000 wrds	.....	83
7. A Return	3900 wrds	.....	115
8. For the Love of It	3000 wrds	.....	130
9. Sansei	8000 wrds	.....	142
10. Michiyo	4300 wrds	.....	175

THE MISSIONARY

Yamaguchi, the missionary, set out early in the morning before sunrise. He had tightly strapped the large picture cards of the Gospel onto his bike and had checked his bag twice to make sure he had his lunch. It would be a long day and the meagre lunch of rice balls and pickles was his only sustenance till sundown.

The day was warm as he pedalled down the road to the first village. The sun was sparkling over the blue mountains, casting its yellowy orb into the wet paddies below in the valley. Here and there were farmers, hunched over the wet ground, broad straw hats bobbing like sails as they planted seedlings. From a distance, the scene appeared idyllic, but up close Yamaguchi knew the farmers to be an inscrutable and difficult people, their faces grim with black teeth and dirt-lined wrinkles. They scoffed easily or became suddenly suspicious. Often they were just fearful. They were afraid of Jesus, calling him the White Devil, the *Yaso*.

Yamaguchi slowed down at a nearby paddy where he noticed an old woman, the village gossip, planting alone. A conversation could be wrangled out of her even if it was mostly made up of hissing and clicking against the *Yaso*.

"Hey Obasan!" Yamaguchi called.

The old woman pretended to ignore him.

Again, Yamaguchi called out, this time louder. Closer.

The woman continued working, her face rigid underneath her hat. Seedling after seedling was plugged into the mud with steady and determined regularity.

Yamaguchi's hands curled into fists. He felt a surge of indignation, but when he opened his mouth the shape of his words became hymns, loud and booming over the muddy fields.

Startled, the woman looked up. She waved her hands in annoyance.

"Shush!" she hissed.

But Yamaguchi continued, the thrall of the hymn suddenly filling him with strength. From out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a few raised hats from the paddies beyond.

The old woman strode up to him and put her hand to his face.

"Be quiet, you!"

Yamaguchi stopped. "Obasan, you know what I am singing? A song about the wonderful love of Jesus."

"I know what you're singing!" The woman spat.

"Are you sure? Let me tell you the story with my picture cards. I'll get them now -- "

"No, no -- " the woman insisted. "You must go away from here. People don't want you here. Bad things are happening because you are here. Go away"

"What? What bad things?"

"Stealing. That's what. Sake, potatoes -- stolen "

"Well, don't you think you should report it?"

**The woman laughed. "Ha! To who? No one can do anything about this thief
He's too small, too wily."**

A small secretive smile grew on her lips.

"You don't know who it is, do you?" she asked, this time tauntingly

**"No, of course not," Yamaguchi retorted, "and if you think it was me, why, I
would never do such a thing!"**

**The old woman bent down, took her wrinkled fingers and traced a mask-like band
across her eyes. Then putting her two index fingers upright against her temples in the
form of pointed ears, she bobbed. Laughter spilled out of her lips as she hopped around
Yamaguchi.**

**"I don't understand," Yamaguchi said, following the woman's movements. "Are
you sure it's not someone from the village?"**

The old woman stopped, indignant.

"Of course not," she said coldly. She drew back. "Go away!"

**"Wait!" Yamaguchi called, but it was too late. He had said the wrong thing. The
woman had returned to her paddy, going to the farthest corner away from him even
though it meant planting out of sequence.**

**Yamaguchi waited. Then he struck out a few tentative bars of a hymn, but his
voice soon wavered. Crows squawked above him. Dejected, he got onto his bike and
slowly pedalled away.**

Nothing I say is right. How can I ever understand these people and their superstitions? They say they worship the Buddha, but they do not know anything about him. They carry charms and chant spells over their sick and dying. They believe in animals that change shapes, in ancestors that haunt them nightly -- beliefs we have discarded long ago in Tokyo. Why can they not be inquisitive as we were in Tokyo? We were always asking the foreign professors and missionaries questions and they were always willing to answer us. You could learn about everything by just asking. I could not have become a Christian if I did not ask, if I were not curious to know the truth. How can these farmers live without wanting to know the truth? How can they live in such darkness?

Yamaguchi was on a hill, his feet slowly pushing against the pedal, one at a time, grinding forward. Sweat gathered on his brow. The sun seemed hotter today, the heat penetrating through his clothing. Yamaguchi's throat felt dry, parched. Already his stomach was growling with hunger. He would soon stop for lunch. *I wonder what the old woman has packed for me today?* he thought. *Maybe there will be fish -- if I'm lucky.*

A cool shudder of wind blew over Yamaguchi as he reached the road's highest point. He paused for a moment to look down into the valley. Watery paddies shimmered like sunlit panes of glass. In the middle of the valley was a cluster of wooden houses, the local village. Yamaguchi frowned. *Soon I will be down there trying to find some place to tell my story. They will come at me again with their taunts and catcalls, my beautiful picture cards mocked and made fun of.*

Yamaguchi turned away, looked at the mountainside. There was a thin opening between the trees, a trace of a pathway. *Why should I go down to the village now?* Yamaguchi thought. *Why not go up this path a little, find somewhere quiet to eat my lunch?*

He pushed his bike off the road and placed it against a tree. He was about to set off with his lunch when he noticed the Gospel cards strapped to his bike. They lay face up, shiny and incandescent, reflecting the sun. Yamaguchi stopped. *The cards! -- I must take them with me.* He unstrapped them carefully from the bike. *Tsuneko*, he whispered. It was she who had drawn the cards, presented them to him at his home church in Tokyo. Yamaguchi remembered her shyly stretching out her hands, holding the cards like a tray as if serving him the most delicate bowl of tea. Later when he unwrapped the cards, he was surprised by the brilliance of colour in them -- the rich blues and violets of the Sea of Galilee, the tawny yellows of the desert, the lush green of Judea's hills; but most of all Yamaguchi admired the way Tsuneko had drawn Jesus's eyes -- a warm glitter of amber, soft as candlelight. *How could the farmers spit on such a thing?* Yamaguchi thought. *How could they not know the beauty of such art?*

Yamaguchi carried the cards under his arm, remembering what the old woman had said about thieves. A small trail, barely visible, wove in among the trees. *Must be a trail for pilgrims*, Yamaguchi thought. *Only monks and pilgrims climb mountains.* He smiled in spite of himself. *I too, am a priest, but of a different kind.*

The trail suddenly grew broad and flat. Yamaguchi paused to catch his breath. He was at the edge of a clearing. The sun shone warm and heavy, filling the grassy field with

a dolorous amber light. Branches hung over the clearing, bent as if in a stupor. Insects thrummed through the grasses, their wings dully beating against the sweet flower-scented air. Yamaguchi turned his head slightly. Out of the corner of his eye he spotted a small wooden building at the far end of the field. It looked abandoned. *An old shrine,* Yamaguchi thought.

As he drew near the wooden structure, he noticed two stone statues of foxes facing one another. *Ah, just as I thought, it is a shrine.* Yamaguchi went to one statue and touched its worn, nubby surface. The ears of this fox had long dropped off, its face barely distinguishable except for its long snout, chipped at the end. A dirty white dish for offerings sat empty on the ledge in front of the fox.

Yamaguchi stepped back and looked once more at the shrine. Then he turned towards the clearing. *That path -- it must have been for pilgrims to come here. There must have been a regular stream of them coming to offer their gifts, and make their prayers and petitions before returning to their villages. Why do they not come any more?*

Yamaguchi put down his cards and sat down at the base of one of the statues. He felt tired and hungry from the climb. Laying his warm, sweaty back against the cool stone, he reached into his satchel for his lunch.

The sight of food quickened his appetite. He quickly picked up a rice ball with his chopsticks and stuffed it into his mouth, the sweet white stickiness as refreshing as a gulp of water. He picked up a pickle when he noticed something. *Fish!* -- the old woman had given him a thin slice of cod. Yamaguchi eagerly picked up the fish and was about to put

it in his mouth when he realized that he had forgotten to pray. The fish dropped out of his chopsticks and the rice in his mouth went down like a lump of clay in his throat. *'Oh Lord! Please forgive me! What a glutton I must look.'*

Setting aside his lunch box, Yamaguchi prayed.

Dear Father in Heaven, forgive me for my haste in eating. I thank You for all the wonderful blessings You have given to me and ask that You be with me this day as I work to bring Your message to those who do not yet know You. I pray for the church in Tokyo, for Pastor Moriyama and his family, and for the Schmidts as they go back to Germany. I pray for the Mission Board that they will receive all the support they need for the upcoming year.

Lord, I pray especially for the people You have sent me to here. Open up their hearts, make them seek after You. Help me endure their taunts and cruel names. Lord, please help me reach these souls, even one, Lord, that I may bring him to the light of Your salvation.

In the name of Your Son Jesus,

Amen.

Yamaguchi opened his eyes and was suddenly confronted with a man squatting in front of him holding Yamaguchi's empty lunch box. The man grinned, exposing a blackened cavern of rotting teeth. Rice stuck to his beard and throat. He wore animal skins, tattered and ragged around the edges. A fox tail hung precariously from his waist, tied on with a strip of dirty cloth. His fingers, curled around the lunch box, looked like claws, the nails pointed and sharp, darkened with dirt as if he had been digging. He did

not make a sound even though his chest heaved with breathing.

"Hey!" Yamaguchi said sharply. "You ate my lunch!"

The man did not flinch, but threw the empty lunch box at Yamaguchi. For a brief moment, the nauseous stench of sweat overwhelmed Yamaguchi. He held back a choke.

The man turned around, still squatting, and poked at the picture cards.

"Don't touch those!" Yamaguchi said, suddenly standing up.

The man turned to Yamaguchi, his eyes filled with fear. Yamaguchi felt bad. He pitied the man.

"I'm sorry," he said, changing his tone of voice. "Don't be frightened. I don't mean any harm."

Slowly, Yamaguchi stepped towards the man. Hissing, the man jumped back. But instead of running away, he lingered behind a statue.

"You like these cards, don't you?" Yamaguchi called out. He waved a card.

"Aren't they pretty?"

He caught the attention of the man. The man drew near.

"I'll tell you a story," Yamaguchi said slowly and soothingly. "You want to hear a story?" He took the cards and began telling the story of the Gospel just as he had rehearsed so many times in his church and in his room at the old woman's house where he boarded. *Now this is the man, Jesus Christ, who was sent to us from God. He came to redeem us from our sins. To bring light into the darkness.* The man sat transfixed. He did not spit, nor poke, nor jibe, but followed the candlelight-eyed man on his journey in the desert, by the sea, on hilltops, now followed by men, now all alone, now dead and then

suddenly alive. So absorbed was the man that he did not know when the story ended -- it was always beginning, one card after another, even after dying, there was the coming back to life, walking and talking, dying and coming back to life. *Now this is the man, Jesus Christ, who was sent to us from God. He came to redeem us from our sins. To bring light into the darkness.* Again.

Yamaguchi was tired of the circling tale. He had repeated himself five times already, each rolled away tombstone picture bringing out an urgent grunt from the man to begin again. The afternoon was quickly slipping away and there was still the other village to attend to before nightfall.

Yamaguchi wondered what he could do for the man. *He's helpless -- a crazy mountain man. He must be starving, living off whatever he can scabble for on these slopes. Look at those eyes -- so filled with spiritual darkness and hunger. He is desperate for the light.*

The man reached out for the cards.

"No -- no, you can't have those!" Yamaguchi took the cards back under his arm, covering the face of Jesus. The man drew closer. A low rumble in his throat grew into a painful whine. He stretched out his fingers into the air.

Yamaguchi made motions to pray, clasping his hands, bowing his head and closing his eyes in the most affected way. *Maybe he will copy me, watch my movements* Yamaguchi prayed aloud for the man. When he opened his eyes, the man had vanished.

A cool breeze rustled through the trees as Yamaguchi headed down the mountain. His bike lay by the tree where he had left it. He got on and pedalled on to the next village. His usually racing mind was curiously silent. He felt an almost dull numbness by the time he pulled up to the crowd of farmers awaiting him on the road.

They formed a barrier, grim looking and unfriendly, with upturned hoes and sticks in their hands.

"Get out, Yaso!" said one stocky man, his face peppered with dirt. Thrusting his hoe ominously at Yamaguchi, he spat.

"What? What have I done?" Yamaguchi cried out.

"You're bad luck. That's what. Get out!" the man said again this time louder.

The crowd hissed. A baby began crying.

"I don't understand," Yamaguchi said.

"There's a thief underfoot -- a thief, y'hear me?" the man said.

From the side, an old man whimpered. "He's not afraid of us any more, he steals and he steals, because the gods are not happy with us, that's why he steals -- "

"I haven't stolen a thing. I haven't. What are you talking about?" Yamaguchi said. "Look, you can check my bike, my bag."

He offered them his bag but they stood back aloof.

The old man whined. "No, no -- we don't want your god here. He makes our gods angry, he makes our friend steal, he does, he does, we didn't have that stealing before, no, because we gave him things, we did, always. Please, please go away."

The old man bowed deeply, pleading, raising his clasped hands high in the air. For

a moment, Yamaguchi had a glimpse of belief -- a ray of faith that hadn't been there before. Suddenly he understood the meaning of the words *sore afraid*

The pepper-faced man stepped abruptly in front of the old man, cutting him from view.

"Get out!" he said again, waving his hoe.

"But you don't understand, I'm sure it's someone else. You must report this to the police."

"Report this to the police?" The man laughed in loud disbelief.

The crowd raucously laughed with him.

"But it seems clear to me that someone is stealing your things," Yamaguchi said, trying to maintain a cool tone of voice. "You must stop him. Make a plan, trap him."

The crowd fell silent.

"Well, I'll bet he can get caught," Yamaguchi replied briskly. "I'll go to town and tell the police commissioner."

He got onto his bike and looked at the faces of the villagers. Each face was etched with suspicion, as if drawn by a mysterious unseen hand. Penetrating their souls was no easier than reaching into a painting to touch its subject.

"I'm sure this can all be settled," Yamaguchi said bravely. "This is just a bad misunderstanding."

Yamaguchi felt shaken. He had not been prepared for such whole-hearted rejection. The taunting and the ignoring he could endure, but this sudden wall of defiance was disturbing.

I must show them, I must, he thought pedalling hard towards town. The pebbly surface of the road spun below him like a wheel. The sun was setting and darkness was closing in. The afternoon had passed so quickly, and yet all Yamaguchi could remember was the tranquil hum of insects and the lush green of the wood where he had sat and eaten his lunch. But something pressed against his mind as if against water, a memory of something more persistent, of something that had happened there. *Am I losing my memory? What am I forgetting?*

The climbing of the mountain, he remembered, the cool sweat when he arrived. But there was something else there that was cool. Water? No, he had not drunk. It was stone, something made of stone, cool against his back. And then suddenly he remembered -- a flash of colour -- the colour of the cards bright and gleaming with the Gospel. And the curious man who wanted the story told over and over again.

Yamaguchi remembered him now in vivid detail -- the hair stringy and long, arms blackened with dirt, breath the stench of dead fish. It was not a dream. No, the man had been real. Was standing there that bright afternoon in that grassy glen by the shrine.

Suddenly it dawned on Yamaguchi who the villagers spoke of. He began pedalling faster. *The sooner I get to town the better. The sooner this foolishness can be reported the better. The sooner, the sooner sense can come ...*

And then two eyes distinct as moons appeared in the middle of the road, unflinching, as if waiting. Two eyes in a huddle of darkness, in the bristle of fur and hair.

Yamaguchi swerved off the road and skidded towards the edge of the wood. He landed with a hard thump on the ground, his head hitting a large stone. A sickly-sounding

crunch reverberated through the air, filling Yamaguchi's head with a tide of nauseous blackness. His fingers groped like worms on the ground.

The wind drove down from above, thrusting past the dark leafy branches of the trees, roaring, roaring like the Holy Ghost, sounding out its accusation. MY STORY, YAMAGUCHI -- HAVE YOU TOLD MY STORY?

What story, My Lord?

The cards, the story on the cards. *Where are they?* Yamaguchi cannot move his legs. He weakly stretches out his hand, reaching beyond the mangled wreck of his bicycle into the road, grabbing the air, searching, searching. Two eyes glitter in the road, yellow and obstinate, fur and teeth snickering, licking, bristling. The creature stands up on its hind legs, sniffs the air, then backs away, the clawed hands scratching the surface of the road like nails scraping, scraping against the surface, the shiny surface of seas, hills, and deserts, pebbled ground, the grass, a tree -- Yamaguchi feels bark beneath his hand. He must find a branch now; he must pull himself up before it escapes. There is a thundering in his head. DON DON DON like the heavy thudding footsteps of angry villagers. It is coming nearer, the footsteps. DON DON DON. There is a black shadow in the sky, the shape of a man, blocking out the light, the light of the moon. Yamaguchi puts up his arm to protect himself. The shadow bends, becomes small. The moon's light bursts forth, a halo over the huddled shape of darkness creeping around Yamaguchi's body. There is the prickly feeling of fur and the damp odour of rotting fish. Yamaguchi's head throbs with words. *Get out Yaso! You're bad luck!* They spit at him. He feels it - a warmth trickling down the side of his head, dribbling past his cheek into his mouth. Salt. *Ye are*

the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

Yamaguchi desperately reaches again for the cards. It is as if he can see them, but the light flickers and fades each time the shadow moves. Yamaguchi draws back his hand. Hears the sound of licking, shuffling. Then there is feeling in his leg. A rough, gritty warmth.

Yamaguchi leans forward. A black rush of air hurtles behind his eyes. Wetness trickles down his face into his mouth. The taste lingers, pools around the inside corner of his lips, mingles with saliva. Blood. *This is the blood of my covenant which is shed for many.*

Yamaguchi's head drops. He can hear the faraway sounds of the desert, the hills, the seas receding slowly, the moonlight ebbing into the dark forest. *It is finished,* he hears. *And darkness came over the land.*

"O! Yamaguchi-san! Wake up! Are you all right?"

The voice comes through as if from a long tunnel of black air, echoing and re-echoing against the walls of Yamaguchi's head. His eyes roll against the thick heaviness of his lids and flutter into the light.

There is his friend Jimbo, looking down on him, the large round face with its ruddy skin, filling up Yamaguchi's vision.

"Oh, you're awake!" Jimbo's thick arm slides under Yamaguchi's head, propping it up slightly. "You've hit your head good." The other large hand comes down with a wet

cloth and gingerly dabs above Yamaguchi's eye.

"You've spilled some blood here."

Jimbo removes his hand a moment. Yamaguchi sees the white cloth stained with a splotch of red.

"Can you sit up?"

Yamaguchi nods weakly. Jimbo wraps his arms around Yamaguchi's thin body and pulls him up under the arms in one strong swoop, leaning him against the tree behind him. The sudden movement makes Yamaguchi's head swim. Sunlight rushes in, fills his head with birdsong, rustling grass, breezes. It is morning.

"Looks like you've done something to your leg here." Jimbo points to a tattered piece of hide wrapped around Yamaguchi's knee. It is stained with blood.

"I didn't, I mean I don't recall -- " Yamaguchi says weakly.

"I sure was worried about you." Jimbo's voice booms into the woods. "The old woman told me you hadn't come home last night. She went to your room for breakfast but you weren't there so she came over to my place right away. Lucky it was Sunday, or I would have been off to school by then to prepare for class by that time. I got on my bike as soon as I could and came out here looking for you. I knew you would be heading back to town on this road. Then I saw your bike. What a mess! It looks like you must've hit a tree. What happened?"

"Cards ... I need the cards," Yamaguchi says weakly. He thrusts his head forward again into the air. Jimbo lays a warm hand on the forehead and gently pushes Yamaguchi back against the tree.

"Just wait awhile there. We don't have to go anywhere."

"Cards," Yamaguchi repeats.

"Don't know anything about any cards." Jimbo shakes his head.

"Gospel cards."

"Oh!" The words register on Jimbo's face. "You mean those picture cards you have!"

Yamaguchi nods vigorously. His head feels like a bowl of hot *an*, the thick liquid burbling against the back of his eyes.

"Oh well, those! I didn't see them anywhere. You want me to check?"

"Onegai. Please."

Jimbo gets up from the ground, his big body creating a whoosh of air that scatters the leaves on the ground. The spot where he has been feels suddenly empty to Yamaguchi. He watches the big man lumber towards the road.

Yamaguchi closes his eyes. The cards, his precious gospel cards. He must have them back.

Jimbo returns empty-handed. Sorry, he says. Yamaguchi drops his head, disappointed. The blackness lunges forward, pooling at once into the recesses behind his eyes. His body falls forward.

"Whoa there, caught you!" Jimbo's broad arm forms a stiff plank-like barrier against Yamaguchi's chest.

There is a rustling sound. From out of the corner of his eye, Yamaguchi sees a sliver of orange fur creeping through the trees, the white tip of its tail floating in the air.

"Hora! A fox!" Jimbo points excitedly.

Yamaguchi does not speak. The fox pauses, the yellow eyes with its dark middles staring intently at the two men. Then it darts away.

.

Suddenly it did not matter to Yamaguchi that the cards were gone. A quiet gratitude filled his heart. He would not blame anyone for what had happened. He would go home with Jimbo and would go out to the villages again the next day.

KUYASHI

Hide Ichimura was feeling good about himself. He ambled down Banff Avenue with his hands in his pockets, fingering the hundred dollars he had won at the mah-jongg game. It was easy to win, playing the new guides at the staff house. A whole crop had come from Japan to work for the summer tour season. A mah-jongg game always broke the ice -- an old company trick that veteran guides like Hide knew all about.

Hide smiled smugly as he looked up at the sky. What should he do with that extra hundred dollars, he thought to himself as he gazed at the moon. For a quick generous moment, he thought he might send the money to his wife. Did she say in her last letter that Chinami needed some clothes? A dress for the Christmas concert? Was that how old that letter was? Well, Christmas was long past. Chinami wouldn't need that dress now.

Hide pushed his wife out of his mind. The moon, so big and yellow, was shining very brightly. The air was warm and sweet with the smell of lilacs. Summer had just begun. Why worry about Minako and her petty money troubles?

On a whim, Hide turned the corner. Instead of going home, he thought he would visit the boys at Sakuraya restaurant. They would probably be cleaning up right about now, there might be some leftover sushi to eat and beer to drink. Hide wanted to talk

about the new guides. There were a couple of new girls from Osaka on working holiday visas, planning to stay at least a year. Yuri -- that was the name of one of them. A small girl with delicate features, hair down to her shoulders. She seemed intriguing.

Sakuraya restaurant was dark. Hide cupped his hands to the glass and peered through the window. Even the kitchen lights were out. There must have not been many customers that night. Hide looked at his watch. Only 1:30. Disappointed, Hide turned towards the street. There was no choice now but to go home to bed.

"I'm putting you on a tour in Edmonton."

"Edmonton?" Hide frowned at his boss.

"Ika-gen ni shiro. Buck up!" Kawaguchi growled. "You got a wife and kid there, remember?"

Hide did not answer. He stared at a poster of West Edmonton Mall pinned up behind Kawaguchi's head. It was true he knew Edmonton the best. Lived there for ten years.

"When did you see them last, anyway? Huh?" Kawaguchi looked Hide in the eye.

Hide shrugged his shoulders. Made himself poker-faced.

Just then the sound of women's laughter came through the door.

Kawaguchi stood up. "Orientation today. I'm taking the new ones to the icefields."

"You? I can do it. I've done it so many times before."

"Nope. Taka will take you to the bus station and you can rent a van when you get

to Edmonton Here's Taka now "

Taka walked into the office and smiled broadly at Hide. They walked out to the car

"So! Can't go on the orientation, eh? That's too bad."

"Don't rub it in," Hide snapped. "*Kuyashii yo!* Just when those new girls need showing around!"

"Yeah, well, I'll show them around," Taka said, smiling. He leaned over. "I guess you already got your eye on one, don't you?"

Hide did not answer.

"The small one -- Tanikawa, Yuriko. That Osaka girl, right?"

Hide looked to the ground, kicked a stone.

"*Kuyashii!*" he muttered. He abruptly raised his head, pointed his finger at Taka. "You leave her alone now, eh? She's mine."

Taka shrugged his shoulders. "Hey, there's no doubt about it -- she *is* cute. And -- " Taka took a breath. "Of course, I'm not married. I got advantages you don't."

Taka smiled his sickening broad smile. They drove the rest of the short way to the bus stop in silence.

"*Ja -- matta neh!* See ya!" Taka said as he dropped Hide off. "I'll pick you up when you get back!"

Hide boarded the bus. He just made it. Within minutes, the bus was on its way, rumbling down the highway.

Taka won't tell her, Hide thought to himself as he stared out the window. *Besides*

he owes me one. I'm the one that got him this job in the first place. (Of course, he won't tell. Or would he? Nah! He's probably not that interested in her anyway. He's always said he's liked taller women. Hide squinted, looked at the mountains. The jagged peaks were an implacable wall, rising and falling crescendos of stone.

Damnably marriage! Hide thumped his fist on the window. The bus rounded a curve, bringing into view a shallow brown lake covered with muddy ripples. Beyond stood the ugly cement factory belching out white smoke, its trucks hauling away slabs of mountain. The bus had left the splendour of the park and was now entering the foothills.

Hide persisted in his thoughts. *If I get her to like me, she'll hear about it. Sooner or later. About Minako and Chinami. She's going to be here a year. There is no way she won't hear. Not with that Kawaguchi around in the office -- meddling do-right Kawaguchi.*

Kayashu! The word repeated itself over and over in Hide's mind. *Kayashu* wasn't remorse or regret; it was plain frustration over things that could not be changed. "Life is full of *kayashu* things," Hide remembered his uncle telling him. "But you must understand life will always be so. You cannot have all the things you want. You must stop your wanting."

Stop your wanting. What a sobering thought! Hide looked out the window again. It was raining. The clouds had sunk in low and covered the mountains. There was nothing to see but a grey mist.

I never wanted marriage. The thought crept into Hide's mind. *I never wanted it. Why should I suffer for something I did not want in the first place?*

Hide closed his eyes. He could see his parents, and Minako in her wedding dress, bowing, bowing to them like some ridiculous doll. Everyone had tears in their eyes except for him

That was almost ten years ago now. Ten years! It seemed like only yesterday Hide had come to Canada, single and eager to pursue adventure in the new country. The face of every new guide who came each summer reminded him of those days, free and easy, travelling across Canada with some of the other men who had come looking for adventure and opportunity -- Yasuda, Ohmori, Matsumura. They all had such a good time; all decided Canada was for them. It was easy to immigrate in those days. Now it was much tougher.

Hide imagined what life would have been like if he had stayed in Japan. He would likely be one of those tired, overworked salary men like his brother-in-law, living in a cramped house with family and relatives always poking their noses into his business. Here he was free, able to pursue whatever he felt like. He always managed to make money somehow, get by, and still enjoy life. He had even taught kendo for a year to a group of local enthusiasts in Edmonton. Got paid for something he did as a hobby in Japan. And then he learned how to golf. Took him a few summers to get the knack of it. And now he was quite good at it, had placed second in the last tournament for the local guides.

A shallow streak of sunlight broke through the clouds, scattering light on the green hills. Hide mentally measured to himself the distance from a light pole to a faraway farmhouse. *Par four*, he thought.

Minako used to golf, Hide remembered. They went a couple of times together

when she first visited Canada with his cousin. Hide was just learning how to golf then, but that did not prevent him from teaching Minako how to position herself, hold her club, aim for the putting green. She would make a decent shot and then watch as he shot his ball into the lake.

He probably looked the grandest fool. *'That's the best thing,'* Ohmori had told him *'Women fall in love with fools.'*

Hide smacked his lips. He hit that door, right in the middle, he thought, watching the farmhouse whiz by. He leaned back in his seat. The little game was over now. Hide closed his eyes. He felt sleepy.

Minako, Minako, Minako -- Hide's wife's name was a dull chant in his ears. He was advancing ever closer to her. His stomach grew thick and knotted, as if a stone wrapped in twine had been placed there. An old stone with white streamers, the sacred stone from the shrine in his parent's village where couples were married. His parents' voices, a steady insistent stream of words, garbled over the phone lines across the ocean came back to him. This was not the typically polite *shukai* to a woman, but was a whining desperate demand.

We want you to marry her, neh? She's a good woman, will look after you well.

English was her best subject in high school. It would be good for her to use it.

No, this isn't an omiai. We just thought you might like to meet her. She said she wanted to come to Canada herself. We didn't ask her to go. Your cousin asked her to come with her.

We want you to marry a Nihonjin, neh? You'll only suffer if you marry some other person. Kuro suru yo. Suffer, you'll suffer. Marry a Nihonjin, please, we beg of you.

Nihonjin, Nihonjin, Nihonjin. Hide furrowed his brow in his sleep, ground his teeth. He awoke suddenly to see the pinnacled tops of the Calgary skyline in the distance. The weather had cleared considerably. Soon they would be arriving at the Calgary bus station where Hide would transfer onto the express to Edmonton. But first he would phone Minako, tell her he was coming.

The stop in Calgary was brief, the phone call short and perfunctory. Minako sounded bland and indifferent, Hide reflected as he sat down again on the bus. Stuffed under his arm was a small teddy he bought for Chinami.

Hide stared out the window. The green prairie grass seemed to shudder and bend under the weight of the heavy blue sky. Cars zoomed past, speeding down the highway towards the city. The bus rumbled on, slower than the rest, but still moving forward. Inevitably forward.

Hide felt the knot in his stomach return.

He wished he did not have to see his wife.

He wished and he wished. For something else. What he wished for, he knew he should not ask for. The word hung on his lip.

Rikon. Divorce.

Hide dropped the teddy from his arm and pressed his face to the window. Every stalk of grass seemed to quiver like an arrow, dozens and dozens of them, row after row of pin-like shafts, narrowed heads pointing accusingly at the sky.

Divorce.

Hide slumped back onto his seat. His eyes fell on the teddy. He picked it up and fingered the little red vest it was wearing.

Chinami.

The name was like a small light. Unexpected joy. Sometimes marriage was like that.

Chinami.

Hide drove up to the house in his rent-a-car. He got out of the car with his bag and went to the back door. It looked as if Minako was not at home. The screen door was ajar, the top half of the door hanging loose from a rusted hinge. The paint was peeling. The inside door was unlocked. Hide walked in.

"Mina-chan? Chinami?" Hide called out. No answer.

The kitchen window was open, a breeze blowing through the curtains. The left corner of the screen that had the hole in it last summer was now patched.

Hide was hungry. He could smell food, although there was nothing on the counters except for the rice cooker, which was switched on. Hide lifted the lid. The rice was not cooked yet. Minako must have turned it on shortly before he had arrived and stepped out for a moment.

Hide ambled over to the fridge and opened it. A six-pack of beer was on the top shelf. His favorite brand. He opened a can and sat at the kitchen table to wait for Minako and Chinami.

As he sipped his beer, Hide stared at the pictures taped to the fridge. There were several of Chinami -- one with her Grade One class, one in a group shot at the church, one of her standing by a Christmas tree holding up a present. There were a couple of postcards too, of young missionaries with their children -- PLEASE PRAY FOR US in bold print on the bottom.

Hide finished his beer, wiped his mouth with his hand. The house hadn't changed much, he thought. Everything looked pretty well the same except for the pictures on the fridge. Chinami had grown.

Hide's eyes wandered to a small stack of Japanese aerogrammes wedged in by the phone. Curious, he took them out and looked at them. Most were from Minako's parents. He opened a few.

Please do come home -- there's no point in your suffering there alone in Canada with that husband of yours. It's not good for Chinami.

Your brother has agreed to lend you three thousand dollars. He can't give you five. If you want to stay, you'll have to find more permanent work even if it is part-time. Sada-chan is having a baby and Shin-chan can't afford to give you more than three thousand.

Hide remembered sending Minako a thousand dollars once sometime in the past year. What? Had she used it up already? Hide sniffed and put the letters back. He noticed one with his father's handwriting on it. Quickly, he grabbed it, opened it at once.

We are sorry about our son. We feel he has treated you shamelessly. Yet we ask that you persevere for Chinami's sake.

*We hope Hide will change his ways.
Thank you for the pictures of Chinami.*

Angry, Hide scrunched up the letter. *Treated you shamelessly.* Who were his parents to say he had treated anyone shamelessly? Hide closed his eyes. He remembered his father's stern, insistent face, the eyes commanding Marriage. The blast of his father's will was so loud it could be heard a continent away. Meanwhile they were all marrying around him -- Yasuda, Matsumura, Ohmori, falling down like blades of grass in the wind, succumbing, returning to Japan, finding wives, bringing them back.

His father was smart. Knew Hide wouldn't come back. So he sent her. Minako. On an innocent trip. A holiday.

Hide wanted to throw the letter into the garbage, but he felt helpless, pinned down by the weight of his father's lines.

"It's Papa!" a shrill voice called from the back door. Hide quickly shoved the letter back by the phone.

"Chi-chan!" Hide called back.

Chinami was standing at the threshold. She glanced briefly back at her mother and then ran to Hide. Minako stood at the door with two heavy grocery bags in her arms.

"*Okaerimashi,*" she said to Hide. The tone of the greeting was flat, dull. She walked into the kitchen and set the two bags on the counter.

"I'll have dinner ready soon," she said. She turned to Chinami. "Go take your father into the living room and play with him there until Mommy fixes supper."

"*Hai!*" Chinami got off her father's lap and pulled him by the hand into the living

room. Hide glanced back at Minako but she did not look at him.

Hide sat on the couch, Chinami on his lap.

"Chinami -- *okikikunatte, neh?* You sure have grown!" Hide said in Japanese.

Chinami had her back up straight, stiff as an arrow.

"Yes. Forty-six pounds," Chinami crisply replied in English.

"*Honto?*"

"Yes, and I grew three centimeters. That's more than last time. I can't fit into my old clothes any more."

Hide did not reply. He noticed that the sound of chopping had stopped in the kitchen.

"I got a box full of clothes from the Imamoris. This sweater I'm wearing used to be Kana's."

"*Suteki neh!*" Hide replied, touching the bright colored sweater. He noticed its frayed edges. Still, the color had not faded and the pattern looked good on Chinami.

"I got a new friend now," Chinami announced. "Her name is Jessica. She's seven. She lives two doors away. Her mom's a single mom."

Single mom? Hide frowned, perplexed. Where did that term come from? What did it mean? Lately, it seemed he was running into English words he had never heard before. Somebody would use the word casually, thinking he was familiar when he wasn't. Like the other day when his tour driver said he was going back to Calgary to be with his *better half* -- he had wondered what *better half* meant. There were so many interesting English words that meant *wife* in this country, but he had never heard that one before.

Better half. He told the guys at the office and they all had a good laugh. A lot of the newer guides looked up to him, especially asked him for help with those tricky English words. Hide had been in Canada the longest, was a landed immigrant, knew the language better than any of them. Most of the time he could help, but sometimes he didn't know words. Like now, he didn't know "single mom". It irritated Hide that Chinami was using words he didn't know. Besides, why was she speaking in English? She wasn't the last time he was here.

Hide called out to the kitchen, "*Chi-chan Nihongo gakkō mada itteru na? Is Chi-chan still going to Japanese school?*"

"*Itteruyo!*" Chinami replied in clear Japanese. She slid off Hide's lap and stood in front of him, her eyes level with his.

"I go every Friday," she resumed in English. "I have lots of homework. You want me to show you?"

"*Hai.* Show your father," Hide persisted in Japanese.

Chinami went to her room and returned with some notebooks. She stood by Hide and explained her homework to him. In English.

"*Gokan!* Supper's ready!" Minako called out from the kitchen.

"*Chotto matte yo. Otosan ni setsumei shiteru kara.* Just wait, I'm explaining this to Papa."

"It's okay. Let's have supper now," Hide replied in English as if defeated. He took Chinami's hand and went into the kitchen.

The sharply distinct aroma of grilled fish hit Hide at once. He looked at the table

and saw the charred *saba* sitting on square plates with a little mound of grated radish on the side. The steaming white rice was piled in his familiar Papa-san rice bowl; the chopsticks, too, he noticed were the Papa-san ones that he had received long ago as a wedding present. There was his favorite *tsukemono* and some *tsukudani* he had not seen before. Minako had also made his favorite side dishes -- *tamago-yaki* and *kabocha ni-mono*.

Hide sat down. He was so hungry he could not contain himself. He grabbed the bowl of rice.

"*Oinari shimasho*. Let's pray," Minako announced sharply. Chinami bowed her head immediately. Hide sheepishly put down his rice.

"We thank You Lord for all that You have given us, this food and this day. Thank You that we can spend this time with Papa. Amen."

Chinami and Minako picked up their chopsticks and began eating. Minako ate slowly and delicately, the way a Japanese woman always ate in front of a man. Hide felt obliged to compliment her somehow.

"Huh! Fish's good," he grunted. "Where did you get it?"

"Yasuda-san," Minako replied. "They've gone into imports. Foodstuffs from Vancouver. They get things cheaply. The tour business is no good any more, he said. Too unpredictable. At least here anyway."

Minako put down her chopsticks and stared at Hide. Hide shrugged, continued eating. As far as he knew the tour business in Banff was just fine. No worries there.

Besides Yasuda wasn't the type to leave Edmonton -- especially now since he had

a wife and two kids. He would rather stick it out in town trying some new risky venture when he could've easily come down to the Rockies and made some good money

Yasuda and he had immigrated together the same year. But after a year, Yasuda wanted to go back to Japan to find a wife. "I want to be married," he said. He had asked his family to arrange an *omiai* with some local girl from his village. Hide thought he was crazy then, going back when there was still so much to see and do in the new country. He secretly scoffed at Yasuda, the first of his buddies to go back for a wife. Clean, pinched-faced Yasuda, always wearing the same cheap Japanese cologne and parting his hair in the middle. So now he was in the import business, was he?

"They bought a new car," Minako said. "Toyota Camry."

Hide made no comment. He glanced through the kitchen window where he caught a glimpse of Minako's old Toyota Celica. Why hadn't she parked it in the garage, he sourly reflected. Was she making him dwell on the sight of the aged old thing? She had made him buy that car when they were first married, forcing him to sell his beloved green Oldsmobile. Even now Hide felt a twinge of resentment at losing that car -- that impressive green vehicle he drove to pick up Minako and Sumiko at the airport that first summer. The girls were suitably impressed then. Even Minako cooed over the roomy interior. They all sat together in the front while Hide waved his arm at the wide open spaces, the bright blue sky, the strip of highway stretching out forever into the distance.

"Hide?" Minako interrupted his thoughts. "Your tour. What time do you have to meet it?"

Hide looked at his watch. They would be at the airport in another couple of hours.

There was still time. Hide looked up, caught Chinami's eye. Suddenly he had an idea.

"Chi-chan," he said. "How would you like to go to the airport with Papa? Huh? It'll be fun."

Chinami's eyes lit up, but she did not speak. She looked at her mother.

"*Ikenai*. No, you can't go," Minako replied. She began clearing the dishes at once. "We're going to Bible study at the Fujimuras tonight."

She looked at Hide. "We'll be back around nine thirty. *So-shite* ... "

She paused.

"*So-shite*, we will talk."

Hide looked down at the table. He could feel Minako's eyes on him.

"*Asondara dame yo*," Minako added. "And don't goof around with your tour. Come right home."

"*Mo wakatteru yo!* I get it!" Hide said angrily. He was being treated like a child. "*Doko ni mo ikanai*. I won't go anywhere."

Minako seemed satisfied with his answer. She told Chinami to get ready.

Hide watched them. They dressed quickly and went out to the car. The engine rattled to a start. Dark clouds of exhaust filled the air as the car lurched out into the alley. It was gone within seconds.

Hide got up from the kitchen chair. He wondered why Minako did not put the car in the garage. What was in there? He remembered her telling him once that she had moved some stuff out of the house. Got rid of some unnecessary things. Maybe he would help her by taking some of the stuff she had put in the garage back to Banff with him. He

knew there was some old sports equipment he might use in Banff. Golf clubs, baseball mitts, kendo gear --

Hide suddenly smiled.

Kendo gear. That girl -- Yuri, she said she did kendo. Now he remembered her telling him. She had even brought her equipment because she had heard some of the guides did kendo. Heard, too, that Hide was an expert. He laughed and told her he had given it up for golf. It was true some of the boys in Banff had asked him to help start a local kendo club for the Japanese community there, but he had declined. They went ahead on their own.

Still, it wasn't too late to help now. They would let him join up; he was too good to reject. He had master status and had won a few regional championships when he was in Japan.

And now that that Yuri was interested in doing kendo, why not pick up the old bamboo sword and show her a few good tricks? Hide laughed. Now *he* would have the one-up on Taka.

Hide hurried out to the garage. He went to the back entrance and tried opening it. It was jammed. Something was pressing up against it.

"*Chikisho!*" Hide swore. He hurried around to the garage door and tried swinging it open. But it too, was jammed. Something heavy was leaning against it. Too heavy to move.

Hide stood for a moment, puzzled. What in the world was in there? Hide returned to the back door and pushed against it. A grating sound came from above. Something was

scraping against the ceiling. The door opened slightly. It was dark inside. Hide could make out the outline of some metal pole leaning cross-wise against the doorway. When Hide gave it a push, it landed on the ground with a clang. Hide stepped inside the garage. The light was poor. He headed towards the middle of the garage where he knew the light string was, but he stumbled over a ledge of some sort, landing precariously on something spongy.

Hide grabbed the light string, turned on the light. Now he could see. Propped against the garage door preventing it from being opened was a box spring. Hide was standing on the mattress. The heavy metal bedframe had been dismantled, the long ends leaned against the wall. One of them had fallen sideways and had blocked the back entrance.

"Humpf!" Hide grunted indignantly. "No wonder she can't get the car in here!"

He quickly rearranged the bed parts so that there would be room for the car.

"Done," he thought. "Now where's that kendo bag?"

He found the white canvas bag shoved into an old cupboard. The armour, the mask, the swords were all there, just dusty. Hide took out a bamboo sword and swung it a few times. He made a stance, glared at his imaginary opponent, and then struck him in the side. He drew back, bowed. Another stance. This time a lunge for the head. Whump! The stick came down hard on the mattress.

Good one! Hide nodded. He was enjoying this. He thought of Yuri standing, waiting for his guidance.

"Like this!" Hide barked. His back straightened, became tight like a strung bow.

Every muscle twitched with the memory of the days when he was master, when he controlled every part of his body with his mind. He lunged forward, thrusting his stick into the air again and again.

Hide's technique had been so impressive and daunting that some of his students were afraid of him. But they came regularly to class in hopes of becoming like him. He had sixteen students who met in the evenings at one of the local high school gyms in Edmonton. He took up the offer to teach the class when he was still single, just after he decided to quit travelling and make Edmonton home.

His best student had been a woman. A tall, blonde-haired woman with small breasts and a sinewy body.

Hide put down his stick. He was sweating. And from so little exertion! How out of shape he was. He grabbed the stick once more and formed a stance.

That woman could practice for hours, Hide remembered. She was very determined and had lots of stamina. Even after an intense evening of duelling for a tournament, she would still be ready for more. She asked for extra lessons. Hide and she would duel on Saturday afternoons in her back yard, and when it rained they would duel in the basement. She lived in a small house by herself, an older home with dry, cracked wooden siding and windows that needed repairing. One day when Hide went over, the house had brand new siding. She told him she had done it all herself, she showed him the leftover siding in her basement beside her tool box. Hide was amazed, but did not let on.

They must've done that for several weekends before the big tournament -- duelling anywhere they could find space. Hide had lots of time then; he wasn't working. It was

getting to be summertime and he figured he would look for a job in the fall. For now, he would concentrate on kendo.

Hide slashed the air. His stick caught the light string, and *click!* suddenly it was dark. Hide's heart thumped uncontrollably, banging inside his chest. Sweat oozed down his face. He breathed -- rasping breaths -- desperate for air.

Mami Hansen. That was her name.

The stick dropped out of Hide's hand, rattled to the ground. Hide slumped against the mattress.

He remembered her now. The tenderness, the toughness -- the way she would sometimes laugh shyly when she managed to hit him in a duel, or the way she would cook him a meal and make him eat it even though it was burnt. He taught her how to use chopsticks and how to make miso soup. She learned everything in humbleness, but was quick to claim the skills as her own when she became expert.

Hide closed his eyes, winced from the pain in his chest. How his parents had ever gotten wind of her presence in his life he never knew. They just found things out. That was the summer Minako and his cousin arrived. Before he knew it, the tournament was over, Mami was gone, and Minako was his wife. There were Yasuda and Ohmori at the wedding, slapping him on the back, telling him what a prize he had found. Minako -- pretty, reliable, and strong -- what every Japanese man wanted in a wife. She was the perfect wife. That's what they all told him. There was his father, beaming from ear to ear, telling everyone how *medetai* the occasion was. This perfect wife for his not-so-perfect son.

Hide's breath was now uneven, choked by the lump in his throat. He grabbed the light string, snapped it so hard it broke. Light flooded the room.

Hide's eyes fell onto the mattress. He looked hard at the blue pattern, the quilted diamonds, the faint yellow stains. Then he remembered.

He dashed out of the garage and ran into the house to the master bedroom. The bed was gone. There was a big space in the middle of the floor. A small Japanese futon lay rolled up under the window.

Hide stood frozen to the ground, his hands clenching into fists

"Chikisho!"

He ran out of the room, back to the garage. He picked up the kendo stick and whacked at the mattress. THUNK! Again. THUNK! THUNK! THUNK!

The bed absorbed every blow, a small dent appearing, then seconds later, disappearing.

Hide looked out the bus window. The bland prairie landscape stretched out into the distance. The sky sat on the land, grey and heavy as a slab of stone. Soon it would rain.

He had not gone home last night. Booked a room in the hotel with his tour. They weren't sleepy. They wanted to drink in the bar, talk all night. Hide had to do his job.

Now it was finished; the tour was on its way to Vancouver. Hide turned away from the window, looked at the aisle floor. His white kendo bag stuck out from

underneath the seat. Gently, he nudged the bag back with his foot. Then he closed his eyes.

He was not sleepy but he could think pleasant thoughts. Like Yuri. Sweet Yuri. Waiting for him in Banff.

HONEYMOON

"Would Canada be all right?" He looks at her. On Shizuko's lap lie travel pamphlets of blue lakes and snow-topped mountains. Bright *katakana* and *kanji* lettering flashes across the top "KANADA -- DAISHIZEN." CANADA -- BIG NATURE.

Shizuko nods shyly. Years ago she would have preferred Europe for a honeymoon, but now she does not care where they go.

"I shall make the reservations tomorrow."

"Yes, that will be fine." She scoops up the pamphlets and carefully arranges them into a pile on the coffee table.

The two sit in silence. Shizuko folds her hands in her lap. Kosuke Tanaka, her fiancé, shifts positions, parting his legs slightly. He takes out a handkerchief and wipes his forehead.

"And so what have you decided?" Shizuko's mother appears with the tea tray

"Canada," they reply in unison. They look at one another and laugh nervously.

They arrive at the Calgary airport in the late afternoon and are put on a bus headed

towards the mountains. Shizuko has chosen to wear a suit, cream coloured with gold trim and buttons. She carries a square black handbag. Kosuke also wears a suit -- the exact same suit he wore the day they met. Theirs was an arranged meeting, an *omiai*.

Shizuko notices that all the couples around them are younger. They wear jeans and matching sweatshirts. Some are holding hands. Shizuko thinks how old she must look. Kosuke looks his age, forty-seven. Black tendrils of hair scraped up from the side cover a shiny bald spot. His stomach protrudes over his belt. *Not a handsome man*, Shizuko thinks, *but I'm no beauty either*. The years had passed by, steady as the march of ants. There was no flowering of looks or poise, just the cumulating of age -- now twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five. The *omiai* opportunities became fewer.

Kosuke Tanaka was introduced as something late -- a last effort by her now elderly parents. Shizuko had never told them she would not marry. When her mother heard through a relative that an older bachelor working in Asakusa was looking for a wife, Shizuko did not decline the offer to meet him.

They met in a small cafe in Asakusa on a rainy day. "I'm a *shitamachi* boy," he said, not unproud. "I've worked all my life in this part of town." He patted the table-top. He told her he lived with his widowed mother who was old. "She is eighty-two. I look after her," he said plainly. Though soft-spoken, the man displayed an earnestness Shizuko found vaguely appealing. There seemed to be no airs. That was what was considered noble in *shitamachi* people -- their earnestness.

In past *omiai*, Shizuko had easily determined *Yes* or *No*, but as she sat across from Kosuke Tanaka, she felt this time she could not tell. All she could think of was herself.

She looked at her hands and thought of them as old and wrinkled, absorbed by her lap. When would they touch a man? Would they ever?

She looked up at the man. He was looking out the window, his hand propped against the ashtray with a cigarette between his fingers. Shizuko loosened her hands in her lap. They would yet touch a man. Maybe even this man, Kosuke Tanaka.

That was six months ago. Now they are married and on their honeymoon. On the plane, they sat in silence. The brave but mindless chatter that marked their brief courtship had disappeared. Shizuko was secretly glad. What was their courtship anyway but an endless series of politenesses exchanged? Long and unimaginative conversations endured for the sake of that unspoken goal, marriage?

"We'll be in Banff in approximately an hour and a half," the tour guide says. The honeymoon tour has begun.

Shizuko shifts her attention to the window. The scenery is vast. Broad fields roll into the distance, the sky hanging above, pale and impenetrably blue. No living creature can be seen except for the occasional clump of cows clustered in a protective circle.

"Why do you think they're doing that?" Shizuko says to Kosuke, pointing to the cows.

"Hm?" Kosuke looks out the window. "It's probably to keep away the flies."

Flies? *Dai Shizen*. That was Canada. Big Nature. Shizuko looks around the bus again at the other couples. Most have fallen asleep, heads against each other's shoulders,

arms entwined. They are all wearing casual and comfortable clothing. Shizuko feels overdressed. Has she even brought a pair of pants? It looks windy outside and the mountain air will surely be cold.

"You know," Shizuko leans over. "I think we should phone your mother when we get to the hotel. Tell her we've arrived safely."

"I've already done that," Kosuke says. "I phoned Mother from the airport."

"You did?"

"I knew she would worry, so I called her right away. You know, we must call your parents, too."

Shizuko nods. She does not particularly care to call her parents. It is just a duty. But perhaps with Kosuke it is different.

While they were courting, she visited his mother only a few times. On the first visit, she brought the customary gift and spent an hour politely listening to the old woman talk about her son.

He's loyal, he's devoted, he's faithful. Over and over again the mother repeated herself -- how good Kosuke was, how much she as a mother did not deserve her son's love or attention.

The mother was old and frail. She walked slowly, putting her hand on the wall or on the furniture to steady herself. Kosuke was always at her side, scooping his arm around her to help her sit down, clasping her trembling hand firmly in his grip.

Shizuko thought it would be hard for the old mother to do things around the house, but as she looked around, she noticed how immaculately clean everything was.

The *butsudan* had fresh fruit in it and incense had recently been burnt there. A faded picture of a uniformed man was propped in the right corner. Kosuke's father. Kosuke had said he had served in the army. He told her he had been born shortly after the war when his father returned. His mother was in her mid-thirties then and was thought to have been barren. There were no other children. Kosuke's father died of tuberculosis soon after his birth.

Shizuko knew if she married Kosuke she would be obliged to live with and look after his mother. Married friends told her what an onerous task this was, but Shizuko had not found the idea particularly daunting. She was tired of living for herself. She wanted to live for others. For her husband. Her children. The family.

The bus pulls up to the Banff Springs Hotel. Everyone clambers over to the left side of the vehicle to look at the famous hotel while Kosuke and Shizuko quietly gather their things. They get off the bus and go to the lobby, following the others.

"The Tanakas. Room 506. Very nice room -- faces the mountains." The tour guide hands Shizuko the key. She feels the dull weight of it in her hand. She will guard the key carefully, put it near her person, in her pocket or purse.

When they get to the room, Shizuko notices the bed. Spacious and wide, covered with a white bedspread. There is much light in the room. The curtains are drawn wide open. Kosuke moves to the window.

Shizuko goes to the bathroom to change. She pulls in her suitcase and closes the

door. She worries about what to wear. They are soon having dinner.

She comes out wearing a navy skirt and a fresh blouse. Kosuke is staring out the window. She goes to him.

"Wonderful view, isn't it?" Kosuke says. The setting sun casts a pale yellow glow onto his face. He looks old. Sad. Shizuko feels a trembling of pity for him. She wants to touch him, satisfy him in some way. She will be what he has longed for all his life.

"Kosuke-san." She says his name softly, gently.

"Yes?" He turns to her.

"Oh, nothing." Shizuko turns down her eyes.

"That's a different skirt you're wearing."

"Yes, do you like it?" Shizuko unfolds her hands and runs them down the front of her skirt. She looks at him.

"Yes, it's very nice."

"Are you going to wear that suit to dinner?"

"I was thinking of it. Why?"

"You should change. Relax a little more."

"Yes, you're right. I'll change."

Kosuke brushes past Shizuko as he moves towards his suitcase. Shizuko can feel the rustle of his shirt against her, can smell his cologne.

"Which one?" Kosuke says, pulling out two shirts.

"The yellow one."

Kosuke begins taking off his shirt. Shizuko turns to the window. The sun is

beginning to set behind the mountains. She can faintly see in the darkest corner of the window a reflection of Kosuke changing, his hands slowly unbuttoning one by one the buttons, opening the shirt, exposing his chest. Shizuko looks up. She notices movement on the lawn. Two elk. The large one with the antlers, mounting the smaller one. Shizuko stares, her eyes glued to the rumbling mass of brown fur openly mating on the manicured lawn.

"Shizuko-san," Kosuke calls. "Should I wear a tie?"

"Yes, of course," Shizuko replies. The elk have moved away.

"Here, let me help you."

She goes to Kosuke. The light in the room has grown dusky, casting shadows. Kosuke leans back his head, darkness enveloping his face. Only his neck is exposed, thick and warm, the Adam's apple bobbing, almost imperceptibly, up and down as Shizuko knots the tie below his collar. *He's letting me do it, Shizuko thinks, knot his tie for him* She feels her cheeks grow warm.

They are the first couple down to dinner. The other couples come later, dressed up in suits and bright coloured dresses. Shizuko realizes she has again misjudged the situation. At least Kosuke is wearing a tie. Her skirt looks dull compared to the dresses of the other young women.

The tour guide seats them beside two couples from Kansai. They are young, in their twenties. They smile shyly at Kosuke and Shizuko, bowing their heads. Shizuko asks all the polite questions like an older sister. *Where are you from? What do your parents do? How long have you been married? What are your future plans?*

After dinner, Kosuke and Shizuko take a walk around the hotel. It is dark, the mountains invisible. For the first time, they hold hands.

When they return, Shizuko goes to the bathroom. She looks at herself in the mirror. The warm, red flush in her cheeks is still there. She closes her eyes. Slowly she brings her hands to her shoulders, onto her neck. Her skin feels smooth. She knows that her delicate white skin is a mark of beauty. She opens her suitcase and pulls out a lavender silk nightgown. She has bought it on the Ginza at Mitsukoshi two days before the wedding. A quiet, private purchase. She slips it on. It feels cool on her body, releasing a shudder of goosebumps on her skin. She breathes deeply, turns herself around and looks once more in the mirror. *I look fine*, she thinks.

She enters the bedroom. Kosuke is sitting straight up in bed in his pyjamas, his back against the headboard, hands folded in his lap.

As Shizuko turns off the lights and slips into bed, Kosuke turns and looks at her. When he doesn't move towards her, Shizuko reaches for his hand and gently places it on her breast. It feels like a damp, warm cloth, and for a moment it lingers on the curve of her skin before slipping off.

Kosuke swallows visibly. His brow shines with sweat. He cautiously raises his hand again and places it on her breast. Shizuko arches her back to encourage him. Again, his hand falls off.

Shizuko moves closer, pushing her body against him. She slips her arm around his waist and brings his arm up to her shoulder. The arm is heavy, leaden. Kosuke swallows again. His arm slips off her shoulder. He looks away. Shizuko looks at his groin. It is

lifeless, limp. A wrinkle of cotton pyjama.

"What is the matter?" she finally says in a high, tremulous voice

"I ... I c-can't ... I'm n-not normal," Kosuke wheezes out. He pushes himself down and turns the other way. His whole body trembles

Shizuko cannot speak. She is dumbfounded.

The dark ceiling hovers like a dead weight over Shizuko. She lies still, a corpse, her hands resting on her breasts as she breathes in and out, pretending to be asleep. Kosuke has gotten up and left the room.

What's the matter with him? How can this be? All night, questions dog Shizuko, the words spinning around her in the darkness. Why? Why is this happening?

She tries recalling their dates to see if there was a sign then. *The French restaurant in Aoyama, cherry blossom-viewing in Ueno Park, visiting Sensuji temple, seeing that Austrian symphony* -- nothing there to indicate that lack. He was always so polite on their dates, always running ahead to pay for tickets, buying small things like keychains, postcards, souvenir charms.

What is it? What is wrong?

Keychains, postcards, souvenir charms. Shizuko closes her eyes. Something forms in the back of her mind -- a memory, an image. *Postcards, souvenir charms.* Shizuko stops. Souvenir charms for who?

Why, for the mother, of course. Kosuke's mother. Everywhere Shizuko and

Kosuke went, he bought something for his mother, discreetly purchasing it and putting it into his pocket

The memory comes back A warm afternoon, sitting in the Tanaka living room, Mrs Tanaka kneeling on the tatami, bowing deeply, her head right to the ground, her hand clasping Shizuko's Over and over again, saying, "Thank you, thank you so much for agreeing to marry Kosuke He's not much, I know, for a woman like yourself, but he's been good to me, such a worthless mother I've been keeping him all these years. Thank you, thank you so much "

Shizuko had not known what to say. She remembered looking up. Kosuke stood in the hallway, partially hidden, his eyes dark and wet.

His mother. That's what it is. His mother.

Sunlight streams through the window. Shizuko gets up and opens the curtain. The lawn is bare, the sun harsh on the green surface. No trace of wildlife outside. The elks of the evening before seem an illusion, two brown masses, huddling in the half-dying light of the sun

"Shizuko-san."

Startled, Shizuko turns around to face Kosuke, standing behind her, his head hanging. He falls to his knees.

"Shizuko-san, I'm sorry," he says, unable to lift his head.

"You brute!" Shizuko's voice is a sudden thrust of anger. Her skin bristles, her heart thuds. She clenches up her hands. She is not as she always is, and she knows this, but something in her has snapped like a twig laden with rotting fruit.

"Please, please forgive me. I, I wanted to be, to be m-married."

His voice is a whimper. Shizuko feels like kicking him.

"I have never been with a woman. Only my mother. She has no one but me. I am afraid of what I am doing to her by marrying."

"What is wrong with you? We are not children. Everything we have done is proper and natural. How can you say that?"

"Natural? Please forgive me. I am not a natural man. I have discovered this long ago. I am unnatural. That is why I have been unmarried so long."

"It's your mother, isn't it? Poisoning you. Mother complex -- that's what you have, isn't it?" Shizuko says, her voice rising. The word *complex* fills her with a superiority of loathing. She has seen that word somewhere in a magazine. Suddenly buoyed by this, she continues vehemently, "You're afraid of women, aren't you -- that they'll control you like your mother, that they will suck you up, that they will drown you with their demands to provide for them, aren't you? Aren't you?"

Kouke stands stone-faced. The pitch of Shizuko's voice has risen higher and higher until it sounds like the shrill whine of a siren. Suddenly Kouke grabs her by the arms.

"Stop it!" he says. Alarmed by his own aggression, he lets go.

Shizuko is weeping.

"Listen," Kosuke says "It is probably as you say. I have a mother complex. I am afraid of women. They ask me to be things I cannot be. Look at yourself. What did you marry me for? Certainly not for love. We are neither doing this for love, are we? Then what are we doing it for?"

"Because it is a natural thing for men and women to do. And it is also natural that I should expect of you at least -- at least, this which you cannot do."

"Yes, it is a natural expectation. But I have told you already I am not a natural man."

"Too late. It's just too late."

Kosuke sits down. He pulls out a handkerchief and wipes away the sweat on his forehead.

"I know that. I, I was just hoping things would be different. I thought you could help me. You seemed so kind, understanding. But I see that I am too much a problem. I am not a man. You may leave me if you want."

"That's it?? Go?? After all this embarrassment, this shame upon our names?"

Kosuke shrugs his shoulders. "I am not unaccustomed to shame," he says bluntly.

Shizuko stops. She feels sheepish though she doesn't know why.

They go down to breakfast together but eat in silence. The chatter of voices, the tinkling of silverware, the busting of the hotel staff are like a dull buzz in Shizuko's ears.

She is tired and has little appetite. She eats a slice of toast and drinks a glass of orange juice. Kosuke does not eat.

"Please meet at the bus in ten minutes!" the guide announces to the group

Shizuko looks at Kosuke. He is fiddling for his bag.

"What are you looking for?" she asks.

"The camera."

"Then we're going?"

"I would like to," he says. "Please, we should go together."

Shizuko does not answer. She folds the napkin in her lap. What will she do all day alone in the hotel? She decides she will go with Kosuke.

They board the bus with the others. The guide begins talking at once. Shizuko shifts her attention to the window. Slowly the hotel -- a ruddy brown colour -- moves away. The bellman waves. Shizuko's hands tighten in her lap. *I will not wave.* She turns to Kosuke. He sits stiff and upright, his face thrust forward. Shizuko turns back to the window. *He won't see a thing, sitting like that.* She notices an elk grazing on the lawn of a house. *Look, an elk!* -- the words rise in Shizuko's throat but do not emerge. She swallows them.

They do not speak until the first picture stop.

"This is Castle Mountain," announces the guide. "We'll stop here for photos. Five minutes."

Shizuko and Kosuke step off the bus. Castle Mountain, tiered and pinnaced, stands in the distance, a picturesque block of stone. Shizuko closes her eyes before she

speaks. *Civil, I must be civil.* "Did you bring the camera?"

**"Oh -- " Kosuke begins checking his pockets. "N-no, I forgot. I'll go and get it."
He starts back to the bus.**

"No, never mind. Just forget it."

"I'm sorry." Kosuke hangs his head.

**"You're sorry about everything, aren't you?" Shizuko's voice rises without
warning. She is amazed at her own cutting quickness, the sharpness of her words.**

**Kosuke takes out his handkerchief and wipes his brow. They go back onto the
bus. The guide picks up the mike. "You'll notice how thin the trees are here. They're
called lodgepole pines and were used by the Indians to build teepees. As you know,
Canadian log houses are very popular in Japan right now, but these trees cannot be used
for house building. They're too thin."**

***Houses. House building. Trees too thin, too fragile, too brittle. The row of
matchstick trees shudders and topples in front of Shizuko's eyes. House. No house.
That's what marriage is for. Children. A family. It's my right.***

**As the bus nears Lake Louise, Shizuko notices Kosuke shoving his camera into his
pocket. They get off the bus. Shizuko lags behind, unconnected to the others.**

**In front of the hotel is a signboard. CHATEAU LAKE LOUISE. Couples are
having their pictures taken together there by the guide.**

"Mr. and Mrs. Tanaka! How about a picture?" the guide calls out.

**Kosuke begins pulling out the camera. Shizuko stops. *No*, she thinks, and gives a
harsh, quick glance at Kosuke. But it is too late, the guide has the camera in his hand.**

"Now stand together."

Shizuko freezes. She will not move from her position, left of the sign. Kosuke is standing on the right. He inches towards Shizuko. She puts out her hand. *No. Stay there.* She clasps her hands in front of her and looks straight at the guide. *Take the picture, please.*

After the shot, the guide hands the camera back to Kosuke. He puts it in his pocket.

"Shizuko-san," he says slowly. "Perhaps we should not take any more pictures?"

Shizuko does not answer and looks away at the mountains.

Kosuke begins to shuffle off. Quickly Shizuko puts out her hand. *Stop. Take pictures of the mountains. So beautiful you can't ignore them.* The words linger in Shizuko's mouth but she cannot say them.

Kosuke is looking at her, his eyes searching hers. *I've been sarcastic to him,* Shizuko thinks. *So unlike me, indulging his earnestness.* Earnestness. Shitamachi people are earnest. Shizuko remembers that thought from long ago -- the day of their *umikan*

Shizuko looks at the mountain. Slowly, Kosuke takes out the camera, aims it at the spot she is looking at -- a glacier gleaming in the sunlight, a white wall of ice.

When Shizuko gets back onto the bus, she thinks of all the other *umikan* she has had. Names, faces flash through her mind -- Miura, Kadota, Honda. She remembers odd things. The way Miura-san held his cup, what colour tie Honda-san wore, the first words

Kadota-san spoke. All the *omiai*s of that time were half-hearted attempts, something Shizuko did to please her parents. They were forever setting her up with somebody -- her father going through his business connections, her mother asking all the relatives. Shizuko wasn't really interested in any of the men. All she could do was compare them to Makimoto-bucho, her boss.

For seven years, she had nurtured a crush on Makimoto-bucho, a married man with two children. He was several years older than her. But Shizuko could not help it. She was so close to him, the most senior of his office secretaries. She served him tea, filed his documents, arranged his appointments. Day in, day out, seeing him always.

One night, he took the staff out to his favourite bar. He was being promoted, moved to a higher department. In a moment of drunken gruffness, he turned to Shizuko and spoke the words she had longed to hear. *"You want me, don't you?"*

Shizuko paled. She was paralyzed by his words. How had he known? Was she that obvious? Makimoto-bucho's hand moved into her lap. He was drunk. Suddenly repulsed, Shizuko stood up and fled.

Seven years mooning over a married man. Seven years wasted infatuation.

Shizuko closes her eyes. What did Makimoto-bucho look like? She can barely remember now. He was tall, taller than Kosuke. He had some grey hair. He wore blue suits ... or was it black? It was Kosuke who wore blue suits. Shizuko opens her eyes to check.

Kosuke is poking through his pocket. Slyly, covertly, he brings some small thing to his lips and pops it into his mouth. He puts his hand back into his pocket. A few

seconds later, he puts another one into his mouth. Shizuko looks down at his bag. There is a packet of *umeboshi* -- tart, red plums pickled into wrinkled balls. The kind of snack old people take on trips, the ones who believe *umeboshi* to be a cure-all, a daily vitamin. Kosuke notices Shizuko looking at him and smiles sheepishly, offering her one. Shizuko declines and turns her head to the window. Embarrassed, Kosuke offers some to the couple across the aisle. Shizuko cringes. *How silly -- offering umeboshi to that young couple.*

The sky outside draws Shizuko's attention back to the window. *How blue it is.* Impenetrable. Day after day, the same blueness. Indifferent to change, the perfect frame for mountains.

The guide is talking about glaciers now -- how they were formed by the packing of snow, the pressing of snowflakes into heavy layers of ice that began to move down the mountain, grinding the stone behind it. *Powerful.* Shizuko looks at the glacier. She feels small, suddenly impoverished.

The sound of heavy breathing comes from Shizuko's side. Kosuke has fallen asleep and leans precariously against her shoulder. Shizuko shrinks back against the window. The land has grown suddenly flat. There are no trees except a few small, stunted firs.

"We'll be reaching the highest part of the road here soon," the guide says. "This is alpine meadow. You'll notice the lack of trees. Cold winds constantly sweep down from the icefield, making it hard for things to grow here."

The land is barren. *Where are the buildings? Why so empty?* Shizuko looks again

at the flat expanse. *Where are the people? The children?* She thinks of the lakes, the open fields, the mountain air. *For the children. Land for the children.*

The bus toils up the hill, the sound of the engine rumbling louder. The driver shifts gears making a low, cracking sound. The bus slows down.

Children, Shizuko thinks. *Whose children? Not mine.* The land that has flowed across her eye now seems to creep and crawl to a standstill. Shizuko looks out the window. The reality is barren-ness.

It will be an hour before they will reach the ice-field. Shizuko is tired but cannot sleep. She thinks she will look for wildlife, fixing her eyes on the spaces between the trees in the forests, on rock ledges and shelves on the mountainsides. Miles, minutes creep by. Still nothing. The land rolls out before her like a scroll of painted scenery.

Shizuko's mind begins drifting. *Maybe I should look at this more practically. Kosuke's deficient. Such husbands are to be divorced. That would only be right. Divorce. But who would divorce who? How do you divorce, anyway?* Shizuko frowns. *Who would make the announcement? Kosuke? Would he be man enough? Man enough -- ironic.*

What if I announce it? How can I do it without sounding bitter? Harsh? They would all think I was over-demanding, unsatisfied. They would think I have no gaman. 'Oh, she's a selfish type, can't endure hardship' -- that's what they would say. 'Kosuke Tanaka is such a good man. It must be her fault. Ruining him like that.'

Shizuko looks out. They are fast approaching a cliff wall. *If I divorce where would I go?* The wall towers, sheer and upright, a mass of limestone. *A thirty-five-year-old woman now divorced?* Dark stains run down the front of the wall where water has seeped into the stone. *Same old routine again, every day. The way it was before.* The wall grows closer, tighter to the window. Shizuko can no longer see the sky.

Then she spots it. A small cream-coloured speck. Moving. Shizuko squints her eyes. It's an animal! A mountain goat, standing on a ledge no bigger than itself. It stands isolated, suspended, a small white blotch that looks almost like snow.

"Kosuke, look!" Shizuko cannot help but nudge Kosuke. "A goat!"

"Where?" He strains over to see.

"There!" Shizuko points.

"Where? Where?"

But it is too late. They have passed it. Shizuko falls back onto her seat. *He didn't see it. Of course, he didn't see it. He couldn't see it if he tried. (Or maybe it's just me wanting him to see. See things only I can see. Maybe it was just a patch of snow.*

They stop at a gorge. People clamber out of the bus to view the small canyon. Kosuke convinces Shizuko to come.

This gorge is small, deep. Water gushes down the sides, churning and foaming against the rock. Shizuko peers over the rail. The sight is mesmerizing.

"So beautiful, so beautiful," someone mutters. An old Japanese man from another tour group stands beside her.

"Makes you want to jump?" he says, "Neh?"

He looks at her. His eyes are small, milky.

Shizuko feels the cold spray on her hands and feet. The white water churns, leaps up from the stone, gushes and roars into her ear. The rock walls recede, stretched back as if elastic, the gorge widening like a mouth.

"Shizuko-san," Kosuke's voice interrupts. "We must go back to the bus."

Shizuko looks up. Her hands are trembling. She has been gripping the rail too tightly.

Back on the bus, Shizuko stares sullenly out the window. Words creep into her throat, seal themselves under her tongue. The sound of water even now thrums in her ear, vibrating against every nerve, every muscle in her body.

"And over there, you'll see Bridal Veil Falls." The guide points to a long column of water pouring down the mountainside. "An old Indian legend tells us these are the tears of a weeping warrior's wife. A woman who lost her husband in battle the eve of their wedding night."

Shizuko looks away from the falls to her lap. Her cheeks feel warm. Tears well up in her eyes, slowly trickle down her face.

Kosuke has been watching. Without looking at her, he extends his handkerchief. Shizuko notices how damp and dirty it is. He has been using it all day.

"We'll be at the ice-field very soon now!" the guide says excitedly. "Please get ready!"

Shizuko's feet crunch the grainy surface of the ice as she walks on top of the glacier, further and further beyond the others. For a fleeting second, she takes a look behind her. The sno-coaches are like small larvae in the distance. She turns forward and heads towards the mountainside. Peaks rise up around her, their bald rock surfaces exposed to the sky. The glacier, an opaque ocean, throws up waves of hardened ice, fixed like stone monuments. Above her, monstrous cracks and fissures of blue ice gleam like cavernous mouths waiting to swallow up the living. Shizuko squints at the glacier. The thoughts in her head grow thick with some dull purpose. *I cannot go back there. I cannot go back to a life I do not want to live. I want to disappear. I want to stop wanting. Become white-ness, pure and indifferent. Become snow.*

Shizuko has come close to the mountainside. She sees ahead a broad tumble of ice. Beyond, Shizuko knows, is the ice-field, the source of the glacier. She will walk and walk towards it, her feet moving her body forward, mapping out the ice, hoping for the moment when hard surface will give way, become air.

The sound of her feet is loud. Louder than she expects. Crunching. Grinding. Crushing.

Shizuko stops. The crunching noise continues. It is not just her feet making the sound. She hears, faintly, voices and turns to look behind her. Clambering down an icy ledge are a middle-aged couple, dressed in climbing gear and roped together. As they reach the ground, they are chatting amicably to one another. The man is tall, silver-haired, wearing dark breeches, a red jacket and hiking boots. A coil of rope hangs from his shoulders. The woman is about the same age, white hair gathered loosely in a bun.

She too is wearing breeches and a red jacket. They notice Shizuko.

"Well, hullo there!" the man says in a startlingly loud voice. "What are you doing here?"

Shizuko does not reply. She remains standing frozen.

"I don't think she understands, dear," the woman says. "She looks Japanese."

"Where do you think she came from?" the man turns to his wife.

"I don't know. I suspect she's from one of those sno-coach tours."

They look at her together. The woman's eyes are kindly, concerned. She extends her hand to Shizuko.

"My dear, you must go back to your group. They'll be waiting for you."

Shizuko nods even though she does not understand. They are speaking English far too quickly for her. She wonders where this couple has come from. Roped together. Friendly. Unafraid. The glacier suddenly recedes from her mind, the blue crack closing up its mouth, the ice growing flat and dull. The sky is now a dazzling blue, the sun shining broadly.

Just then, a shout.

"Mrs. Tanaka!" the guide waves his hand, running towards her. Kouke is a few steps behind.

"Mrs. Tanaka! Here you are!" the guide says. "We've been looking all over for you! You made us all worried. The sno-coach has been waiting for fifteen minutes!"

Kouke approaches Shizuko. Briefly his eyes meet hers. They are filled with something that makes Shizuko look away. Not anger, but something else. Suddenly he

embraces her, the force of his arms jerking Shizuko's back. The guide turns away, embarrassed.

Kosuke breathes hard into Shizuko's ears, the hot rasping sound tingling her skin. Shizuko's lower lip begins to shudder. She wants to push him away but his grip is strong like an animal's, his body pressed against her, the frantic heartbeat slowing down, the breaths now coming evenly, one after the other. Shizuko closes her eyes. Soon his breath will match hers and for a moment they will be one.

TERUKO

Teruko arrived at the Shimadas' at four o'clock Sunday afternoon. She took the bus from the hospital. The doctor there had looked at her eye and said the bleeding was bad. "Stay lying down for a few days or the blood will clot and possibly damage your vision."

Pressing a wad of bandages against her eye, Teruko walked out of the hospital. She realized she did not have enough money for a taxi. Luckily a bus was parked nearby that was headed towards the Shimadas' house. Teruko got on it immediately. She didn't want to go back to the group home where she worked. Antony was still on shift.

They had fought about the grocery money for the home -- it was always something trivial that they fought over. As usual they had gone downstairs where no one could hear or see them. They always fought in the spare room with the hot water tank. He had pushed her hard this time, so she pushed him back. And then he hit her in the eye.

He had yelled something at her in Chinese. He always slipped into his mother tongue when he got angry. But Teruko never slipped into Japanese when she fought with him. She was better at English than he was.

"You spoil rich Hong Kong boys don't know how to spend money!" she said when

she shoved him. "Especially when it's not yours!"

That was when he hit her. Perhaps, she thought to herself, she deserved it

No one was at home at the Shimadas' when Teruko rang the doorbell. She had forgotten they were at church. Finding the house key in the garage where Mrs. Shimada told her she had kept it, she opened the door and entered the house.

She went to the bathroom and looked at herself. The eye was blue-black and swollen. The purple swirl on her puffed eyelid mesmerized her -- the colour of spring irises. She touched it gently, her fingers sinking into the painful bed of puffed colour.

The doctor had given her painkillers. She took a couple and lay down on one of the Shimada children's bed. There was no use alarming the family by lying conspicuously on the couch in the living room. Betty-chan's room was good enough. Teruko curled up against Betty's stuffed panda. Her head throbbed, but despite the pain she fell asleep.

Mrs. Shimada looked at the eye carefully.

"It's terrible, just terrible what he did," she said. "Can you see?"

"It's blurry," Teruko mumbled. Little Betty had crawled onto the bed and was staring right into her face.

"Well, you sleep here tonight and stay here as long as you need to," Mrs. Shimada said.

Teruko nodded. She had explained to her aunt what had happened.

"Is Teruko sleeping here?" Betty said, looking up at her mother.

"Yes," Mrs. Shimada replied. It was decided. Teruko would sleep with Betty in her bed.

That night Betty woke up crying. Teruko raised her head groggily. She wrapped her arm around Betty's waist.

"Black! Black thing!" Betty cried.

"Shh," Teruko said, tightening her grip. But Betty squirmed her way out and ran towards her parents' room. Teruko fell back into a deep sleep, unaware that Betty had left.

Mrs. Shimada made Teruko move to Betty's sister's room the next day.

"You sleep on the floor in Sharon's room," she said.

Teruko nodded. She took her knapsack full of clothes and carried them down to the basement where Sharon had her room. It was cooler there. There was a poster of an English garden on one wall. On the other wall was Sharon's Japanese fan collection. She had meticulously pinned each one up to form a pattern.

Mrs. Shimada pulled out an extra mattress and laid it on the floor by Sharon's desk. As she began making the bed, she asked Teruko what she was going to do.

"I don't know," Teruko said.

"Well, are you going back there?"

"I don't know," Teruko said again.

"What did they say to you?"

"Who?"

"The group home people."

"They said I could go to the police if I wanted."

"What did you say?"

"No, I said no."

Mrs. Shimada stopped making the bed. She stood upright and looked at Teruko.

"You and Antony, are you -- "

"No!" Teruko said sharply. "That's what they say to me, too."

Mrs. Shimada resumed making the bed. She sat on it and motioned to Teruko to sit beside her. Taking her hand, she said, "If you want to talk, tell me, I am listening."

Teruko nodded, but she had nothing to say.

Sharon came home from school and found Teruko in her room. She had been asleep for a couple of hours, but was now awake reading Sharon's old magazines. Sharon sat beside her on the bed.

"Oh, you're staying with me? That's nice. Betty-chan has nightmares and then wakes everybody up. That's probably why Mom moved you here. You can help me with my sewing project." Sharon pulled out a pattern packet from her bag.

Teruko sat up and looked at the packet. It was for a blouse. There was a fuzzy

black hole in the middle of her sight. She shifted the packet to her left and stared at it from the corner of her eye.

"Which one?" she said, pointing to the two blouses on the front.

"That one -- I've got to pick the fabric tomorrow."

"Yes, that's a nice one. I like that one, especially the sleeves."

"Yeah, the sleeves are going to be the hard part."

"I can help you."

"Really?"

"Sure." Teruko opened the packet and took out the pattern sheet, laying it on the bed. The black dot persisted like the darting of a fly, jumping from one pattern shape to the other as Teruko arranged the sheet on the bed.

"Hey, is your eye all right?" Sharon said. She lowered her head and looked straight at Teruko's down-turned face.

"It's fine, just fine," Teruko answered. She flicked her head to the side. It was the only way she could see Sharon's face.

Mr. and Mrs. Shimada sat with Teruko late that night after the children had gone to bed. The table had been wiped clean. There were three cups filled with green tea. For a long time no one spoke. Finally, Mr. Shimada shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry, Teruko, I can't do anything. My English is so poor anyway. And who's going to listen to a sushi chef?"

He took a long sip from his cup and then remarked, "Who made this tea? It's bitter."

Teruko nodded meekly. She got up to fetch the hot water from the kitchen.

"There's nothing we can do really, *neh?* *Shikata ga nai, neh?*" Mrs. Shimada said, turning to her husband.

"I don't want you to do anything," Teruko called out from the kitchen. She came back and poured hot water into Mr. Shimada's cup. "I never asked you, did I? Besides, I don't really care."

"Still, we feel we have some responsibility ... " Mrs. Shimada said.

"People hit each other, so, it's a fact of life," Mr. Shimada said. He shrugged again.

"A fact of life," Mrs. Shimada echoed.

"Are you going to talk to the fellow in charge?" Mr. Shimada asked. "That director fellow?"

Teruko looked down into her teacup and did not answer.

"Well?"

"I don't like him. He won't believe me or anything I tell him. He'll just believe in whatever Antony says."

Mrs. Shimada sighed and said, "English is so hard. People never understand what you say to them. They already have their own ideas in their head and have made up their mind before they listen."

The director's office was spare. There was an old wooden desk with scratches on it. In front were two chairs for clients. Hanging on the wall above the director's chair was a large wooden crucifix. Teruko fixed her gaze on it when the director walked in.

"Teruko," he said. "How's your eye?"

He bent over to look at it. The swoop of the director's face into Teruko's vision made her blink.

"It okay," Teruko said.

"So," the director began, "we have a problem here -- I know we shouldn't have let you stay at Grace House. Christina had told me you were unhappy there."

"I ask move three times," Teruko said sullenly. "You no listen."

The director did not speak. He drew his hands together on the empty desk. Clenched them as if in prayer. Finally, after a long silence, he spoke.

"You can call the police, press charges, you know. We have let Antony go."

"Go where? He no go anyplace. He must back Hong Kong."

"Yes, we know that."

"Where he go? He got no money. What about visa?"

"Teruko, don't worry about Antony. We have to talk about you."

Teruko closed her eyes. She didn't want to talk.

"I forgive Antony," she said. "I forgive him."

The director cocked his head. "You do, do you?"

"Oh yes," Teruko said. She found it hard to look at the director. The black dot in her sight blotted out his face.

"Perhaps you should go into counselling," the director said.

Counselling? Teruko thought. For what?

"You have to talk to someone about this experience. You want me to make an appointment at the Catholic Counselling Centre for you?"

"No," Teruko said. "I don't want it."

She stood up to leave.

"Someone told me you were beaten as a child," the director said.

"Who say that?" Teruko said sharply.

"Someone. Is it true? It might explain your reaction to this problem -- why you're not facing it as you should."

Teruko looked at him blankly. Who had told the director such a thing? Was it Christina? Angela? Frederick? Did she ever tell anyone that her father had beaten her? Once maybe. They were talking about books and she must have slipped out how her father had hit her because she read too many books instead of being useful. But what did that have to do with what happened with Antony?

"Perhaps you think this is normal -- that it's your fault."

Teruko looked at the director.

"Not my fault! You understand? Not my fault!"

The black dot in her eye bounced fitfully in front of her. Teruko suddenly hated the director. He spoke again.

"You don't understand what I am saying. I'm telling you that if you've experienced this before, your attitude may be part of the reason why Antony hit you."

Part of the reason? Was this true? Teruko knew better. She had seen the signs. Antony's short-tempered-ness. The way he threatened. The way he threw things. That's why she had asked to be moved. Asked three times. She knew, too, the way she talked, how sharp her words, and how even though she knew better, she said things to his face he didn't want to hear. She knew it was coming and yet she had to say the thing. Was she so stupid and stubborn to have ignored the obvious? What was wrong with her?

Sudden, angry tears formed in Teruko's eyes.

The director went over to comfort her.

"There, yes, now cry, let it out."

"Please," Teruko said. "Leave me. I want alone. Go away."

The director left the room.

Teruko let herself cry for a few minutes longer. What was she crying for?

Nothing could be done. The director just wanted her to cry and now she had done it. She stopped and looked up at the wall. There was the crucifix and, right in the middle, the black hole.

Sharon took out the fabric she had bought and showed it to Teruko. Teruko was lying down on the mattress. She had been there all afternoon since she had seen the director that morning. She got up.

"Oh, very nice. It will match nicely with that skirt you wore to church Sunday."

"You think so? Will you help me?"

"Sure."

Sharon pulled out the pattern packet and handed it to Teruko.

"You have to take the pattern and lay it on the fabric," Sharon said.

Teruko opened the packet and began pulling out the beige pattern sheet as she had done before.

"You cut the pattern out," Sharon explained pointing to the outlined squares and curved shapes etched in blue on the beige sheet.

"Oh?" Teruko said. The black dot in her eye became a point tracing the pattern line on the beige paper.

Sharon got a pair of scissors. Teruko took them and began cutting out the pattern. The shapes and lines were different from the ones she knew in Japan. The shapes seemed all so symmetrical here. A triangle for the sleeve. A diamond for the front bodice. Teruko worked slowly, meticulously cutting along the edges of each shape. The black dot moved smoothly down the lines she was cutting. Teruko knew she shouldn't be straining her eye, but she could not help but concentrate on the task at hand. She needed to concentrate on something.

The next day Sharon came home upset. Teruko had laid out the pattern all wrong on the fabric. She had pinned the pattern shapes every which way, without design or plan, closely packed to one another. Sharon had not realized this was wrong. Now the teacher wanted her to do it again.

Teruko was puzzled. She had only done it the way she had always done it in Japan.

"Let me try again," Teruko said. She looked at the picture on the back of the packet and saw how it was supposed to be done.

"No!" Sharon grabbed the packet from Teruko's hand. "I got to do it. It's *my* project. I got to do it myself. That's what the teacher said."

"I'm sorry," Teruko said. She did not know what else to say. Now what was she going to do? She had hoped to help Sharon sew the shirt, but now Sharon was going to do everything herself.

For the next several days, Teruko lay in bed. In the evenings, she would get up and help Mrs. Shimada prepare dinner for the children. After dinner, Mrs. Shimada would help the children with their homework and then go to bed early so that she could be up before the children to make their lunches. Teruko would stay awake until Mr. Shimada came home late at night. While she waited, she made barley tea, *mugi-cha*, getting out the large brass teapot, pouring the barley seeds into the water and boiling it till it frothed and bubbled. She would wait for it to cool and then would pour the *mugi-cha* into a large glass pitcher that Mrs. Shimada had received as a wedding gift. Mr. Shimada liked *mugi-cha* and would drink it after his bath. Teruko would read magazines until she heard the back door open and then she would get up, run the hot water for Mr. Shimada's bath and get a glass of the *mugi-cha* ready for him for after his bath.

"Teruko," Mr. Shimada said one night. "Have you gone to the doctor yet?"

"No." Teruko handed Mr. Shimada his *mugi-cha*.

"You better go, *neh*. You still have that black dot in your eye?"

Teruko nodded. She would make an appointment tomorrow.

"Teruko, did Maki-chan talk to you?"

Maki-chan was the name Mr. Shimada called his wife. But he never called Teruko, *Teru-chan*, like Mrs. Shimada and the children did. Not even Teruko-san. Just Teruko. The way the people at the group home called her.

"No," Teruko lied. Mrs. Shimada had talked to Teruko many times about God. She assumed that was what Mr. Shimada was referring to.

"God -- " Mr. Shimada began, "God knows everything. He knows your suffering. He knows your heart, Teruko."

Teruko hung her head. She knew about God. She heard about Him all the time in the group home. How He loved the children and the poor and the suffering. That was what the home was for -- the children. The grown-up children who had trouble speaking, their hands and wrists curled up to their bodies, their tongues hanging out of their mouths and their eyes looking everywhere but at you. You looked after them because God loved them. Died for them.

Teruko remembered the crucifix in the director's office. The slim, emaciated figure of Christ pinned onto the cross, His head hanging down to His chest. How unlike the Buddha on his lotus, transcendent and peaceful. If she could choose gods, whom would she choose?

"*Kami-sama wa subarashii*. God is wonderful," Mr. Shimada said. "Sometimes when my life is hard and difficult, I remember that God is love and that comforts me."

Teruko nodded. The Shimadas had become Christians after they came to Canada. Life was hard in Canada. People turned to religion when things were hard.

The doctor shook his head.

"I don't know about that black dot. It might just be permanent. It should have healed up by now."

"Thank you," Teruko said. *Permanent*. The word echoed in her mind.

"Do you have someone to take you home?" the doctor said, worried.

"Yes," Teruko lied. She was going to meet a friend for lunch at a noodle house in Chinatown. That was good enough. She would tell Sanae what the doctor said.

Teruko got her prescription and headed downtown to the Happy Gardens. Sanae was waiting for her. She had changed her hair to a stylish bob and was wearing new earrings.

"How was it? The doctor?" Sanae said. Her earrings jangled, sharp glints of light flashing off them.

"That black hole is still there. He said it might be permanent."

"Oh really? That's awful! You have to tell the director. What about Antony? Where is he? Does he know what he's done to you?"

Teruko shrugged her shoulders. "*Nawai mo dekinai yo*. Nothing can be done."

"So what are you going to do then?"

Teruko shrugged her shoulders again. She was concentrating on the menu. She

wanted No. 6, egg noodle with pork. It came with bean sprouts and three slices of barbecued pork.

The waiter arrived and they ordered.

"So you cut your hair, neh?" Teruko said. "It looks very nice."

"I know. Clara did it. You know what? Clara's thinking she might want to open her own shop and she wants me to be her partner. Isn't that a great idea?"

"But you're still in hair-dressing school."

"I know, but after that."

Teruko smiled. Sanae moved like lightning with everything she did. They had met in an English class at the college they were studying at in Japan. Sanae had always wanted to go abroad. She had relatives in Canada and had visited them when she was in high school. When she found out Teruko had an aunt in Canada, she became Teruko's friend, talking to her about Canada even though Teruko had never been there.

"Canada is so free. Japan is so ... so narrow," Sanae once said. "Everyone is so narrow-minded. You can't do what you want. You have to do what everyone expects you to do."

It was Sanae who suggested they go to Canada together. Now almost a year and a half later, she was going to hair-dressing school and was thinking of staying permanently. They had both started out working at the group home since it was the only place they could find work with their limited English. But Sanae had stayed only a few months. She was determined to immigrate and had made an application to the government, using her relatives as sponsors. She went to night school, improved her English and registered at a

local hair-dressing school

"Teru-chan!" Sanae's voice broke into Teruko's thoughts.

"Huh?"

"What are you going to do now?"

Teruko did not answer. She looked down into the now empty bowl of noodles to the small pool of broth at the bottom. She couldn't tell if the dark spot on the bottom of the bowl was a puddle of pepper or was the black hole in her eyesight.

"Neh, Teru-chan? You don't know, do you? You never know what's coming next. You just let things happen to you. You can't do that here, do you know that? This is Canada. You have to make things happen. *You have to make choices, decisions.*"

Teruko lowered her head. It was true. Things just happened to her. Like being hit in the face.

"You're just the same way you were at home." Sanae complained. "I can't do anything for you now. I can't. I'm too busy."

Teruko smiled uneasily. She remembered how in Japan she had sat paralyzed at her desk at the travel agency where she worked, wondering if she should go to Canada. She hadn't said anything to her boss.

Finally, it was Sanae who called her boss and told him that Teruko was going to Canada. The tickets had been bought already. When the boss confronted Teruko, she tearfully admitted it was true. She was let go at once.

"*Warakatta wa neh.* I'm sorry." Sanae apologized later on the plane. "But I had to do it. I wasn't sure if you were serious about coming."

Teruko remembered looking out the plane window and thinking that, yes, she was glad she was going. The sky outside was mid-way between morning and night. It seemed endless, deeply endless. Teruko felt herself on the edge of a floating abyss, between two worlds she did not know. She felt vaguely hopeful, but even still a little sad.

Mrs. Shimada and Teruko were doing the dishes. They were standing by each other at the sink. Teruko was washing the large, glass pitcher that the *mugi-cha* was kept in. She would boil some more tonight for Mr. Shimada.

"You know," Mrs. Shimada began, "Shin-chan told me you serve him *mugi-cha* every night and that you run the bath for him."

Teruko nodded. The water was very soapy and Teruko's fingers slipped against the glass.

"He said to me, 'Remember before the children were born when we lived in Japan how you used to do that for me? Get the bath ready for me and then afterwards we would have *mugi-cha* on the balcony and look at the stars? *Natsukashii yo*. I remember it so fondly,' he said. Every night, right? You give him *mugi-cha*?"

Teruko picked up the pitcher and was about to move it to the drying rack when she felt a sharp bump against her side. The pitcher slipped out of her hands and fell onto the floor with a crash. The noise was loud and hard.

Mrs. Shimada looked at the broken glass and then looked at Teruko.

"You can't stay here anymore, Teruko. You must leave."

Teruko Not Teru-chan

Mrs Shimada left the kitchen. Teruko looked at the broken pitcher. It lay on the ground, scattered in pieces large and small, asymmetrical bits shaped like diamonds and triangles. She went and got a newspaper and pulled apart the pages. And then she began cleaning up. Slowly, piece by piece, she wrapped the broken glass in the newspaper, making sure the sharp edges were covered. There were the headlines and photos, creased and crumpled, folded against the broken glass. And sometimes there was a large wet blotch on the paper that came from her eyes. Unwillingly. Always unwillingly. These tears.

That night, Teruko packed her things. She wondered where she would go. Maybe she would phone Sanae and ask if she could stay there for a while. She couldn't go back to the home. It had been six weeks now since Antony had hit her and the black spot in her eye was still there.

She wondered what it would be like to see that way for the rest of her life.

Where is Antony now? she remembered Sanae asking. Antony. Teruko closed her eyes and a warm flush came to her cheeks. Antony and she had held hands once. They had gone to the park together with Emily in her wheelchair. No one had seen them but Emily, who laughed and clapped her hands, her eyes rolling up towards the sun.

JAPONISME

Her favorite cafe was called *C'hine Bleu*. She no longer remembered where in the Paris rabble it was but that it was blue, she was sure -- a twilight blue, the color of the evening sky before the stars -- a royal and imperious blue, the silk gown of a boy prince

It was run by a Chinese man, long haired, who had seen the world muscled and fisted in bullets and bloodshed. His face was muzzle rough, a bulldog's bristle, and his body thin and sinewy as hemp. *I am refugee* he said *from Vietnam*. He spoke perfect French. She supposed he was learned; she could never tell with refugees. He came to her table, bending over to take her order, his shirt billowing open at the neck where she could see the small smooth muscles of the neck twitch and twitter with each growl from his throat. She called him *Wang*.

In the early mornings, Wang would open up the cafe, and would sit in the front window to read the newspaper with a cup of tea, his enfant in his lap. He used to smoke he told her, but it was bad for the enfant so he quit. When it got busy, he would hand the enfant to the grandmother who sat in the back behind the cash register on an old red stool. It was she who took in the money, the wrinkled fingers smoothing out the bills, caressing the change. If there was a wife, she was nowhere to be seen.

She and her lover lived in an apartment across the street from the cafe. Their bed was near the window and in the mornings, they would stare out at the cafe, a snow white drift of sheet over their sleepy heads. Through the hole they had made in the snow, she could see all the people walking along Paris's grey boulevards. Her lover had a long, broad arm that he swept around her head -- the shape of which made a frame through which she could see the world, a painting crying out *look, look at me!*

Her job was translating japanese court poetry. She worked at the Musee Guimet, in the back where shelf-loads of manuscripts and scrolls were stored. From out of the densely dancing black strokes of the calligrapher's brush she extracted poems of autumn leaf, spring cherry, the moon's silver reflections -- laying them out into the sun-dusky light of the tiny back room for the curious western eye to peruse.

Her lover was French -- mud luscious French. He was to her the way e.e. cummings spoke of spring, goat footed satyr that panned his pipes into the flutter-rustle scarlet beneath her breast. Standing one day at her desk in a long black coat, with a belt knotted at the back of the waist, he was a shining prince of the court. Love-lorn dilettante here he was -- and, oh! in her heart's foolishness -- she dropped her pen. He picked it up, set it on her scribbings with his name card.

Guillaume de Lavison
Antiqueur d'objets orientale

In those first and luscious days they sat in the window seat of the cafe sipping

warm jasmine tea, their legs entwined underneath the table. The scent of white flowers floated up into the air, the delicious whiff of that faraway spring would bring their eyes dancing from cup to hand, from hand to face. The walls sighed, a shudder of their blue breath slipping over the chairs and tables, melting into the cupped white tea bowls, mingling with the gold trim. Their eyes closed to hear the soft and silent colors when *KA - THANG!*

ear-splitting crash of stone against glass, youths with swastikas running down the street, Wang after them, broom angrily in hand. Sometimes she and her lover would stay, watch the drama of the police -- note pads and sunglasses, black boots on splintered glass. Other times they would slip out leaving money in the teapot. *hurry, hurry, let's go home* -- nestle together in that warm snow.

Hours and hours she spent in the dusty chambers of the musée, poring over the gentle moonlit nights filled with soft scent of summer flowers, the whisper and shudder of a courtesan's gown as he hurried for the evening rendez-vous to meet his lover, coy and demure behind her screen -- how his words trailed like silk across her face, sheltered her from him -- his warm, broad palm cupping like a bowl to be appraised, her chin, her mouth and the small breaths that escaped between his fingers.

When they fought, she went to the cafe by herself where she would be beckoned into the kitchen by the grandmother. The kitchen was that private place, not for customers, oh no, but for the black-haired ones like her, like the old woman, like Wang. There the old woman would serve her pork soup and snow white buns filled with meat. They hardly exchanged words. The old woman would hold the enfant and watch her sip

the steaming soup The old woman smiled her golden tooth smile, clucking and cooing. Then stretching her gnarled, hawk-like hand with its one long fingernail, she would touch *her* -- her young smooth hand that held the pen, that was now holding the porcelain ladle with the dragon swimming in its shallow depths .

From that steamy kitchen the old woman released her, let her out onto the cobblestone alley strewn with garbage, old huddling men. In the low dim light, she would scurry like a frightened cat into the apartment, throw herself into the snow and press her face against the warm bitter smell of Guillaume's pillow. Later he would come in, smoke filled locks of hair rustling against her face, smelling the ginger of her closed eyes and waking her to finish, finish his silly argument.

His hands were so big the world fit in them, and yet like sand she filtered through, returned to the sea. She and Guillaume parted the day Wang closed down the cafe. The enfant was getting big now, too much for the old woman to handle by herself, and Wang was getting tired of the rock throwing. *You see, they hate us*, Wang said, waving his arm at the grey buildings, at the snow in their windows. *us*. tears sprang from her eyes as if she had suddenly stepped out of a palanquin to become a stone, hurling her way through his blue window to shatter into sand, the people they no longer were.

MISHIMA

Megan looked out the window of the tour bus as it roared down the street towards Kinkaku-ji. She wondered what the pavilion would look like now. The last time she had seen it was when she was fourteen and with her grandmother.

"Excuse me --" A voice with a clipped accent came from across the aisle. "I saw you at literature conference." Megan turned around. A thin square-faced Chinese man with black, bristly hair cropped close to his head was leaning towards her.

"You from Canada, right?" He pointed to her name-tag -- *Megan Johnson*
CANADA. "What is your study?"

"My area is contemporary Japanese literature," Megan said, wishing she had taken her name-tag off. It was misleading to say she was Canadian but she did not want to add the -- "*Even though I've lived in Japan in the past, even though my mother is Japanese.*"

"Contemporary literature?" The man said gleefully. "Me too!" He moved into the empty seat beside her.

"Poetry? Prose?" the man asked.

"Poetry, I guess -- I do translation, actually."

"Oh, I see. My specialty is Mishima. They're fond of him in the West, I hear."

Megan smiled and nodded. *Fond* wasn't quite the word she would use to describe the way the West viewed Mishima. Still, he was probably one of the more famous contemporary Japanese authors known in the West if only for his sensational suicide in the early seventies. She told the man that.

"Oh yes," he said most seriously. "It is the most famous thing he did. My research is on Mishima's death. Why do *you* think he killed himself?"

Megan thought for a moment. It seemed an odd question.

"I don't know," Megan began. "I've always thought he did it for art's sake. You know, the ultimate act of art being death -- making death art."

"Well, yes," the man replied. "That is the most common theory accepted by critics, but I myself have another theory."

"Oh really?" Megan was intrigued.

"Yes, but I cannot tell you my theory. No one must know until I finish my research."

"I see." Megan wondered what he had discovered. He was probably going to Kinkaku-ji because of Mishima. Megan vaguely recalled that Mishima had written a book about the famous pavilion. She had never read it. Her only memory of Kinkaku-ji was a personal one. She remembered dragging her feet after her grandmother. It was just after her parents' divorce when her mother had returned to Japan from Canada. *It would be good for the child to see the sights of her mother's country*, Megan remembered overhearing her grandmother say to her mother. *You've neglected the fact she's half Japanese, haven't you?* Her grandmother planned a grand tour -- a week in Kyoto and

Nara visiting all the old temples, castles and museums. Megan could barely remember what they had seen except for Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion. Only the Golden Pavilion had drawn her out of her sulky adolescent mood, out of missing her friends in Canada, out of coming to a country she barely knew. That little trip had made a difference, made the thought of living in Japan bearable. It wasn't until almost five years later that she was able to return to Canada, her father's country, to go to university. Now as a graduate student, she was back in Japan again, this time as a Canadian on a foreign student scholarship. People thought she was lucky, slipping between cultures whenever it was to her advantage.

Kinkaku-ji was the same dazzling gold that it had been years ago. The pavilion was so brilliant in the sunlight that it hurt the eyes. Megan squinted, preferring instead to look at its reflection in the water around it. The Chinese man, Yaozhu, had not left her side since they had got off the bus. He continued talking about Mishima.

"You know he wrote a book about this pavilion? I am very happy to be here to see this place. It helps me in my research to -- to get his feeling, you see. That book examined the power of beauty. A monk burnt the original building down. Did you know that? Would a person in the West burn down a church because it is beautiful?"

"I can't imagine," Megan said truthfully.

"It is most beautiful." Yaozhu sighed. "A man falls in love with it so much he wants to destroy it -- that was what Mishima's book was about, this monk and this -- " he

broadly swooped his arm towards the pavilion, "this building, his lover."

He pulled out a Fuji box camera from his pocket and proceeded to take several pictures. Then he asked someone nearby to take a picture of Megan and him standing together. Pushing his thin, wiry body close to hers, he rigidly fixed his face, neatly putting his arms in front, his hands clasped together. Megan could smell a faint trace of soap and oil.

"Thank you," he said politely after receiving his camera back. They began walking towards the pavilion.

"You know the book Mishima wrote about this pavilion made him famous -- I mean, *really* famous."

"Oh?" Megan said.

"Yes, he was very concerned about being famous. It is quite understandable. I myself would like to be famous, but I have no talent for writing so I must be something less ... like ... hmm ... " He looked around. "Ah, like that pebble under a great lantern." He pointed at a tall and imposing stone lantern nearby. Pleased with his little metaphor, he picked up a stone from the base of the lantern and gave it to Megan.

"Now you, you have a chance. You are from the West and everyone listens to what comes from the West. What you translate will be known everywhere."

Megan laughed, nearly dropping the stone. Who would ever know of her translations but a few literary magazines?

"Whose work are you translating?" Yaozhu asked.

"Satsuko Murakami," Megan replied. "Have you heard of her?"

"Hmm..." Yaozhu paused to think. "Oh yes, I think I know who she is. In fact she knew Mishima quite well, didn't she?"

"I don't know -- she's never -- oh, wait a second, you're right. She *did* mention him once, saying that he liked this one poem of hers very much," Megan said, remembering Setsuko showing her the poem and emphatically stating, "*Mishima* liked this one."

"I must talk to her," Yaozhu said suddenly. He pulled out his name card and gave it to Megan.

"Please give this to her. I would like to interview her."

Megan took the card reluctantly. Looking at it, she noticed that Yaozhu lived in the ward next to hers in Tokyo. He was probably in a foreign student dorm as she was. The Kyoto literary conference had attracted quite a few foreign student delegates from across the country.

"We-ll," Megan said slowly. "I don't know. I can ask Setsuko, but I'm not promising anything."

"We can all meet in Tokyo when we return. Now please -- your address and telephone number in Tokyo?"

Two weeks later in Tokyo, Megan received a letter from Yaozhu.

Dear Megan-san:

Now is spring and the cherry is pink

*in the blue sky. Also it is very warm.
I am glad to meet you in Kyoto. We had
a most pleasant stroll around Kinkaku-ji.
Do you remember stone I gave you?
Here is picture in this letter of together us.
Do you remember my secret theory
I tell you about Mishima? Please let's
talk. I would like to meet your poet
who knows Mishima.*

*Yours affectionately,
Yaozhu*

Megan read the last line with some guilt. She hadn't called Setsuko since she had returned from the conference. She was afraid to call. Just last week, she had received a rejection notice from a magazine for her translations and this had unnerved her. Setsuko would ask about the magazine sooner or later and Megan feared the consequences. Setsuko was determined to make a reputation for herself in the West. Any rejection of her work by Western magazines was always the translator's fault.

Megan looked at Yaozhu's letter. She realized with a heavy sigh that she would have to call Setsuko sooner or later. Perhaps Yaozhu's request could be a diversion in the conversation, a way to avoid the sticky talk of magazines and rejections. Reluctantly, Megan picked up the phone and called Setsuko. No one was home. There was a message on the answering machine that said that Setsuko was away on a reading tour. Megan put the receiver down in relief. Now she would call Yaozhu.

"Oh, Miss Megan-san!" Yaozhu's voice was cheerful.

Megan explained to him that Setsuko was away.

"Oh, that is too bad," he said lightly. "But she must be a busy woman because she

is so famous. She would not have time for me, I think. Thank you for trying."

"Oh, but Yaozhu, she's just not at home -- I didn't say she wouldn't see you,"

Megan insisted. She felt suddenly sorry for Yaozhu and his research project

"Really?" Yaozhu said in disbelief.

"I mean I will try again when she returns," Megan assured him. She realized she had unwittingly committed herself to Yaozhu's research.

"Oh, I am very grateful. Of course, you must come with me if she agrees."

"Of course," Megan said laughing. "of course, I'll come."

Yaozhu laughed, too. He asked if he could meet her for lunch at a Chinese restaurant the next day. He wanted to tell her some interesting things about Mishima that he had been thinking about.

"You see, many different theories why Mishima kill himself," Yaozhu explained as he sucked the meat out of a shrimp and spat the scales onto his plate. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve cuff leaving a translucent grease spot on the shirt. Megan did not know whether she was more intrigued by his words or disgusted by the way he ate.

"Main theories is 'he-is-mental-sick' theory, the 'he-cannot-do-anymore-good-art-so-he-give-up' theory, the 'he-do-it-for-Japan' nationalism theory, and the 'death-is-beautiful' theory."

Megan nodded. There seemed to be one missing.

"Yaozhu, what about for love?"

Yaozhu raised his hand, chopsticks dangling in mid-air. "Yes! Now how you guess?"

"I don't know -- it just seemed one of those things, you know, people do things for."

Yaozhu looked at her admiringly. "You are very, very good -- that is what I am trying to make my theory."

Megan wondered what Yaozhu had discovered, or even concocted. Literary biographers were always trying to figure out a writer's motives. The task resulted only in endless and fruitless speculation. Megan had hoped to avoid such speculation by translating a living writer, but her poet was as difficult to fathom as one dead -- one minute Setsuko would be telling her, "You don't understand what I'm saying," and the next minute she'd be shaking her head vigorously, saying, "I meant *this* before but now I see your meaning." Other times Setsuko yelled at her. Megan sheepishly acknowledged it was deserved. Art's meaning was so slippery that Megan stumbled over the paper with leaden words, unable, she sometimes felt, to convey little but her own incompetence. It would have been much easier, she reflected now, to have translated the works of someone dead.

Yaozhu bent forward, his eyes bright. "Now you must know already because everybody know, Mishima was homosexual. He also had special army called *Tate-ni-kun*. When he do *hara-kiri*, he had someone ... someone from his army, man named Morita, he cut off Mishima's head." Yaozhu gave himself a blunt chop on the back of the neck with his hand. "Then Morita -- someone cut his head off. I try to think how I feel if I die

like that. Maybe I think I don't want die alone. I want special person with me. I love that person, don't you think? And he love me because he do anything for me? Yes, even kill me. No?"

"Hmm," Megan replied, staring at the pile of scales on Yaozhu's plate.

"Mishima's death was love suicide," Yaozhu pronounced, slapping his hand on the table. His plate shook, a few scales falling to the floor. "A *shinju*, Japanese call it."

"Do you have proof?" Megan asked.

"I'm working on *proof* now. I contact family of Morita soon," Yaozhu said, his voice lowered.

"Really?" Megan said, her voice hollow. Was she impressed? She couldn't tell. She herself was working with a great literary figure, but working with Setsuko didn't have the same quality of feeling as working with Mishima -- there wasn't that mysterious and macabre odour of death. No, there was just Setsuko bustling around her house with her fax machines and publishers, her on-the-train scribbled documents carelessly lying on desks and tables.

"It very difficult getting interview," Yaozhu said. "They don't want to talk to Chinese."

He looked suddenly despondent. Then he looked at Megan and smiled, "But at least you, Megan-san, are interested. That is the way of the West, no -- to find the truth?"

Megan shrugged her shoulders. The knot of the scarf she had worn slipped awkwardly off her neck and onto her breast. She quickly brushed the lump of cloth aside but not without noticing Yaozhu's eyes. They lingered on her shoulders where a few

strands of her light brown hair glistened under the glare of the restaurant lights

Then he turned away and resumed eating, spitting scales, as before, onto his plate

Setuko agreed to meet Yaozhu. "Oh, of course, I talk to him!" she said to Megan on the phone. "I know Mishima very very well when he was alive. He was my good friend. I tell you that once, right? You must come to dinner with your Chinese man soon. I will tell him what I know."

On the arranged day, Yaozhu arrived early at Megan's dorm to pick her up. "I am nervous," he said, standing at the door in a brown suit that was too small for him. "We must not be late."

Megan laughed. "We have lots of time. Come in and sit down."

Yaozhu walked stiffly into the room, his bag clutched under his arm. Megan could see the shortness of his sleeve cuff, tight around his arm inches above his wrist. A ragged looking watch with a frayed yellow strap hung loosely above the hand. It rattled slightly as Yaozhu raised his arm to slick back his hair.

"Really, Yaozhu, it's only a dinner," Megan said. "It's not a big thing. Setuko is a casual sort of person."

"Oh," Yaozhu replied, unconvinced. He took a quick glance in Megan's dresser mirror to check his hair.

When they got on the train, Yaozhu produced a long list of questions he had prepared the night before for the interview. *How did Ms. Murakami feel about Mishima?*

What did she think of his writing? What did Ms. Murakami and Mishima speak about?

"You have to be more specific," Megan said. "You have to ask when and where Setsuko *first* met Mishima. Then you ask her how often she met him after that and in what circumstances. Then you can go on to the feeling stuff. And bring up your theory about Morita. Don't wait for her to give you her theory about his death."

Yaozhu nodded his head seriously. "Your technique is very good. Very-- " he paused, "aggressive " He vigorously rubbed out his questions with an eraser and began to write down Megan's questions.

The train ride was short. They arrived at Setsuko's house and rang the doorbell.

"Come in, come in!" Setsuko answered the door. She was wearing a large neon pink apron and was holding a frying pan. Her long hair was swept into an untidy bun, pinned at the back with a gaudy rainbow-colored barrette. She led them down a narrow corridor into a room with a small veranda. Megan knew the room well; that was where she and Setsuko worked on the translations. Piled on the floor were papers and files of assorted sizes. A large desk took up space by the veranda. On top was a fax machine and a portable photocopier. The table they were to eat off had been cleared away. It was the first time Megan had seen it that clean; she was used to seeing a stack of hand-scrawled manuscripts all over it. Beside the table were two chairs Setsuko had set aside for her and Yaozhu.

Setsuko was friendly and gracious to Yaozhu, telling him about her trip to Beijing and her very good Chinese writer friend from Shanghai whom she had met at a literary conference in Seoul. At dinner she told anecdotes about her travels around the world,

about artists and writers she had met from different countries. Megan was used to this kind of talk from Setsuko and was not particularly engaged by the conversation. She felt impatient and wished Yaozhu would get on with his interview. When they had finished eating, she offered to do the dishes so Yaozhu could get on with his job.

Megan carried the stack of dishes into the kitchen. The room was small and dirty, filled with the dank odour of rotting vegetables and old grease. Megan looked around. It was the first time she had ever been in Setsuko's kitchen. She noticed that all around the fridge were shelves filled with colorful, odd-sized books. The kitchen seemed a strange place to keep such things. Megan looked closer.

Tanikawa Shuntaro -- With Silence My Companion. Megan pulled out the thin volume of poetry by Tanikawa and cracked it open. The binding made a fresh popping sound. The book had never been opened. Megan quickly put it back. She spotted another book in German with the bold letters *GRASS* on the spine. Opening the front cover, she noticed a flourished inscription: *To my wonderful and beautiful Madame Butterfly, Setsuko, Gunter Grass 1978.* A small fruit fly was squashed on the corner of the front page -- the rest of the pages were bunched together in a sticky clump.

Megan felt a sickly rush of curiosity -- she began pulling out book after book, checking the front pages -- "*To Setsuko, the great poetess of Japan From Octavio Paz Mexico City Writers Congress July 1979.*" "*To the Fire Lady Setsuko Love Salman Rushdie, London 1980,*" "*To Setsuko Seamus Heaney,*" "*Setsuko, with sincerest affection, Nadine Gordimer Paris 1982,*" "*To Setsuko Margaret Atwood Toronto 1989.*" Megan lingered over the inked lines of Atwood's signature, tracing them with her

finger. She then flipped through the book, going over some of the poems she had studied in university. Had Setsuko even looked through this book once? Megan was about to put it back when she noticed a dusty red and yellow roach hotel pressed against the wall where the book had been. Megan dropped the book in disgust. She could see a brown scaly body squashed against the cardboard, imprinted like a picture. Quickly, she picked up the Atwood and shoved it back into its place.

Megan backed away from the bookshelf. She noticed a thin layer of kitchen grease on all the books, making each of them appear, in orderly perfection, shiny and slick to the touch. *Was Mishima here too?* Megan wondered. She searched carefully. On the bottom shelf, nearest the fridge door, was a black space where books had obviously been recently removed. One lone book lay flat on the shelf -- *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. Megan picked it up. The cover was faded and worn, the pages rather grubby. Inside was an inscription:

*Art's meditation, could it be you?
Oh, how I wish, oh, how I wish it were so.*

It seemed an odd inscription, but Megan thought she had perhaps read it wrong. Of course, as she could now see, writers wrote all sorts of silly sentimental things in book covers. But there was something disconcerting about the words in *this* book. Could Yaozhu's hunch be right? Was it love? But *who* was Mishima in love with?

Megan took out the book and went back to the other room.

"Oh, Megan-san! Come be with us!" Setsuko said. She was sitting in the one easy chair in the room, the Mishima books stacked on the floor beside her feet.

"I brought this one of Mishima's the one on the bookshelf -- " Megan said, handing her the book.

"Oh, *that* one -- I didn't think that one was important to bring out," Setsuko said, her voice lowered. She did not mention the inscription.

There was an awkward silence in the room before Setsuko finally said, "*I wanted to live. That was our essential conflict*."

"Yes, Mishima *did* want to die," Yaozhu said solemnly.

The phone rang. Setsuko sprang up from her chair to answer it.

"Oh, Mr. Rodriguez! Yes, I remember you. It was very nice of you to show me around Mexico City -- I have never forgotten that trip. Another festival? But of course, I'd like to come very much. I enjoy last time so much -- you know I enjoy meeting Mr. Paz. Yes, yes. I know, I will try to bring some more English translations. Yes, yes. I will wait for the fax. Thank you."

Setsuko hung up the phone. She looked slightly flushed as she said, "I am going to Mexico for writers festival again. They invite me."

Yaozhu began to clap. Megan looked at him strangely. He seemed entranced as if watching a diva.

"My! Your friend flatters me," Setsuko said. "Now I must get my writings together. I will need translations. Megan -- have you heard from that American magazine yet?"

Megan hesitated, dreading what was to follow.

"I'm afraid they didn't want my translations," she admitted quietly. To Megan's

surprise, Setsuko merely screwed up her face momentarily before she smiled and said, "Oh well. I *still* need translations for the festival. I'll get you to translate the shorter, lesser poems."

Lesser. Setsuko had a way of being gracious with a knife. Megan supposed it could be worse, but that was still not much consolation.

"You know -- " Setsuko began. "I know someone who will help you -- an American. His name is Basil Howard. Do you know him? He's done many translations. Mishima's works, too. They knew each other -- Mishima and Howard-san. Anyway, I think you need someone American to help you. He knows people; he'll help you get published."

The fax machine suddenly beeped. Yaozhu stood up and went to look at the machine as it produced its paper message.

"A writer can be famous all over the world now," he said, mesmerized by the paper with its Spanish and English message. "Not just in your own country."

"Yes," Setsuko said, her eyes bright.

The train was nearly empty when Megan and Yaozhu boarded. It was very late.

"Did you get what you wanted?" Megan asked Yaozhu when they were seated.

"Oh yes, many good things she told me."

"And what of Morita?"

"She says it is possible although she says no evidence, of course."

Megan leaned towards Yaozhu. "Are you sure?"

"Why do you ask?" Yaozhu looked at Megan oddly. "Have I done my research the wrong way? I ask all your questions."

"No, no," Megan said, shaking her head, "It's not your technique or my questions. It's -- "

"What is wrong?"

"Well," Megan said. "Did you ever think maybe ~~she~~ might have been his lover once?"

"Setsuko?" Yaozhu drew back, surprised at the thought.

"You know, she might've been."

"No, that is not possible." Yaozhu said firmly. "Mishima was a homosexual."

Megan sighed. She leaned back. Yaozhu sat stiff and upright, his eyes distant, a curl of a smile on his face. He had folded his thin, candle-like fingers together in his lap. Megan thought he looked stupidly enlightened, a student Buddha.

Megan sighed as she looked at the scrap of paper with Basil Howard's college address and phone number. She picked up the phone reluctantly. Why did she have to show anyone her translations? Weren't the magazine replies judgement enough? Now she would have to face a real person whose judgement meant everything -- Basil Howard, of all people, the man whose translations of Japanese literature she had studied in her university courses.

Megan made an appointment with Howard. When she arrived at his college office, he welcomed her warmly. He was a tall, thin man with a long, carved face and silver hair that hung in wispy strands around his neck. There was an elegant stoop to his shoulders as he bent down to shake Megan's hand. His voice was smooth and deep, with a faint trace of a Boston accent. But when he opened his mouth to laugh, Megan noticed one front tooth that was rotting, a chip of black in the corner. Without thinking, Megan ran her tongue over her own teeth.

Howard smiled at Megan. He let her speak for some time without interrupting. Nervously, Megan began babbling about her life. She started with the usual *I'm half Japanese* and then went on. *My father's a Canadian; he met my mother when he was working here on contract for a securities company. My mother's from Yokohama. After they got married, they moved to Canada where I was born.* Megan stopped for a moment. She didn't like talking about the divorce but there was no way to avoid it. *Well, it didn't work out, the marriage I mean. My Mom came back to Japan with me when I was fourteen. She put me in an American school so I could learn everything in English. My father got me into university in Vancouver. I graduated there and then got a scholarship to study here, to do translation.* Megan watched Howard's eyes, hoping for acknowledgement, but he looked benignly back at her, his cheek resting on the palm of his hand.

After she had finished, he said, "I see. And now, let me see your translations."

Megan's hand shook as she handed the folder across the desk. Howard's hand lightly brushed against Megan's as he tried to take the folder from her. But Megan's

fingers were curled tightly around the edges of the folder. Howard tugged at it. Finally, Megan let go.

"Setsuko told me on the phone you're quite a translator," Howard said reassuringly. "She said your being nearly bilingual helps enormously when you work together."

"Well, yes," Megan said shyly.

"I'll have to spend a couple of days on this. Do you mind if I call you when I'm done?"

"Oh that would be just fine." Megan picked up her briefcase to leave. She suddenly thought of Yaozhu. "Mr. Howard -- Setsuko told me you knew Yukio Mishima rather well. A Chinese student I know is researching Mishima's death and Setsuko said you knew quite a lot about the man."

Yes, I did know Mishima rather well -- " Howard said, "and this Chinese student friend of yours -- what is his angle? Literary? Biographical? Psychological?"

His. Megan wondered how Howard knew Yaozhu was a man

"Well, he seems to think Mishima committed a love suicide with his second, Morita. He thinks love was the cause of the death."

"Yes, that is one of the theories but not one often deeply explored."

"It is?" Megan said.

"Yes, I'm sure your friend has run into it in the biographical literature on Mishima. I wrote a book on Mishima myself and touched on the notion."

"No, he seems to have thought of it himself." Megan said. "He said he had

interviewed some members of the family."

"Oh? I wonder who?" Howard raised his eyebrows. "They are rather tight-lipped. And I suspect they wouldn't really know. The whole thing was a tragic embarrassment for them. Mishima lived out his obsessions in a public literary life that ran counter to a rather private and mundane family life. He kept the two quite separated."

"Then it must've been a shock to them when he killed himself."

"No -- it wasn't entirely unexpected." Howard shook his head. "I suppose for them it was really just a matter of *when* it would happen."

Megan wondered how such a death could not have been a shock. A deep shock, no matter what Mishima's strange impulses for art and life were. Perhaps she was not Japanese enough to understand -- she could only picture herself aghast like the western journalists who must have witnessed the scene only to feel that sudden great gap between cultures.

Howard's response to Megan's translations were positive.

"They're quite fine," he said over the phone. "I'd like you to come over and see me to go over some corrections I've made."

When Megan arrived at Howard's office, he showed her the translation of a poem he speculated Setsuko might have written to Mishima.

*Red memory licks
at bright wounds of metal
swordside shudders*

*of ecstasy inside me
now gone, now gone*

"People said they were lovers, you know," Howard said "In fact that was how I got to know Setsuko. She and I met through Mishima a long time ago when he was alive I've helped her now and then with foreign matters, and she's familiar with my translations of contemporary Japanese fiction writers."

"But I thought Mishima was a homosexual," Megan said

"Yes, but he was also married. I think he responded to anyone who loved him whether it was a woman or a man, but when *he* had to reciprocate, he would withdraw "

"Really?" Megan said excitedly. "So perhaps the Morita theory is right?" She felt a quick rush of curiosity for Yaozhu.

"Of course, there hasn't been any real conclusive evidence," Howard said slowly He leaned back on his chair and brought his hands together forming a tent on his stomach, "But I believe without a doubt that Morita was the cause. Mishima was a man deeply devoid of love -- all he knew was the tyranny of it from his over-possessive grandmother

"Whatever he had with Morita -- probably the purest and private love he had experienced -- would have sooner or later been corrupted by something from the outside - his family, his reputation, whatever. Japanese lovers are always committing suicide for this reason. There is no way for their perfect love to continue except in death -- especially in Mishima's case with its being homosexual love. Mishima coveted love He had to protect it from everything -- even himself, oddly enough. The only way he could protect it was in death. Love was his innermost longing, I believe -- not death -- but this

longing for love was unconscious."

"But surely he was more independent than that -- I mean from his family!" Megan blurted out. She was suddenly zealous, consciously aware of the progress she was making for Yaozhu. "I mean, Mishima had such great artistic success. That must obviously have given him the freedom to love whoever he wanted."

Howard laughed. "One never escapes the tyranny of one's success. And besides this success is relative. Let me tell you -- there are whole worlds of people out there for whom art means nothing. Haven't you heard of the notion *silly artist*? Well, that was what Mishima was to his father -- a silly artist with silly notions. You humour a creature like that until he does something perverse, and then you scratch your head and ask yourself what's wrong. For many people, Mishima was just queer."

Yaozhu's words *insanity theory* popped into Megan's head. She struggled to understand how one could look at genius as queer.

"I like this poem," Howard said, returning to the translations. "You might want to change this word here. Have you been using a dictionary? It seems to me this word could mean something else in this context."

"Oh yes, I do use a dictionary," Megan said off-handedly, "but I rely on my intuition sometimes." It was true -- there were times when she did not look words up.

Howard looked at her. "Do you write poetry yourself?"

"No -- " Megan began, "but -- "

"Then don't rely on your intuition. It's too dangerous," Howard said with a tone of finality. He quickly gathered up the papers and made a neat pile.

"And have you been sending out to magazines?"

"Oh yes, but I'm not having much success."

"Which ones?"

"The Kenyon Review, American Translators Review, Poetry Chicago"

"Well, I think the translations are fine. Why don't you go over the changes I made and give them back to me? I know some of the editors of those magazines -- I'll give you a reference. These editors can really be pompous asses sometimes -- they often toss out work by people they don't know."

"You'll give me a reference?" Megan said, flabbergasted. "Really?"

"Sure, I will." Howard smiled. The black tooth now seemed less ominous, just rotted with decay. Megan took her translations and put them in her briefcase.

"Remember to call me when you're done," Howard said, watching her.

"Oh, I will. And also -- maybe I should have you meet my Chinese friend."

"Oh no -- that won't be necessary. He can read my book. Do tell him, though, that he's on the right track."

Yaozhu was delighted with the new information Megan received from Howard. She told him about how Howard was going to help her.

"It is good! You make friend like I make friend, and we all help each other get what we want."

"Yes," Megan said cheerfully. "I guess that is what it boils down to."

"I am glad because I'm not having good success these days. I meet Morita's family and they say Morita was not homosexual. They say over and over again. They say he had girlfriend. They even give me her name."

"Really, you talked to Morita's family?"

"Yes ... is that maybe surprise? I learn many good technique from you how to do interview, so now I use them with this family."

"Oh," Megan said. She wanted to say *Bravo!*, but she felt suddenly deflated.

Yaozhu put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a plastic packet of school pins. He gave it to Megan.

"This is where I go to meet girlfriend. Her name is Makiko Tsurukawa. Her husband is principal of some kind of military school. They have big Japanese flag in the school and they make the students sing *Kimigayo* every morning. They sang to me when I come to visit. She's a nationalist, believes in Emperor."

"Well that explains her relationship to Morita, doesn't it? A marriage of ideologies, no doubt. What did she say about Mishima?"

"She said Morita admired him. That's all. Morita admired Mishima too much. But she said, though, Morita loved Japan and was not afraid to die for his country."

Howard listened to Megan's account of Yaozhu's story. He thought the story made-up.

"Nice touch though," he said almost sarcastically, "the military school."

Megan was offended. Yaozhu would not have lied about something like that. Howard brought out Megan's translations.

"I've looked over your poems and taken the liberty of faxing over a few to the editors of *The Kenyon*. They said they'd take them. I sent some down to *Kyoto* magazine as well. They're always looking for new translations of things."

"Oh, that's wonderful!" Megan clasped her hands. "I can't wait to tell Setsuko. Thank you so much!"

"Not at all," Howard said. "I've not written for many years now myself, but people still respect my opinion. I do that now and then -- help out a beginning translator."

He sighed.

"Being burnt out myself, it's consoling."

"Burnt out? You're not burnt out!" Megan protested. "People still study your anthology of contemporary Japanese short stories in university. It's the standard text."

"Heh!" Howard laughed. "I had a good distributor and the field of Asian literature was starting to boom when I translated those works. In those days, if you had a good mind to know languages and weren't into European culture -- and most people still were then -- you could translate Asian things and people would eat them up. You just simply were the first, *not* necessarily the best, translator. But somehow being the first makes you the best. My success was a mixture of fashion and promotional politics."

"And talent."

"Talent, what is that?" Howard laughed bitterly. "If I had talent, I would have written novels, not translations."

"Well, it's not as if you can't continue translating, is it?" Megan said, wondering why Howard had chosen to speak about himself in this way to her. "With Japan's profile increasing in the world, there'll be even more of a demand for work like yours."

"Yes, it ultimately does boil down to these socio-economic realities, doesn't it? But I'm too old to be cheered by that -- translations are for you to do, not me. Someone younger."

He handed back Megan's translations. "Let's meet at my house next time. The college will be closed for semester break."

Howard's house was set deep into a hilly suburb outside Tokyo. Megan had to take a bus from the station before she reached the address. The house was new but when Megan stepped inside, the place felt stale -- darkly cluttered with books and cumbersome furniture. It seemed as if Howard had just moved in without any concern for how things should be placed. Megan had been in houses like that with her mother when they visited Canadian friends in Tokyo. Her mother called them *gaijin* places. *They try and make it home*, she had said, *but it's not their home*.

Howard led Megan into a room filled with bookshelves. The air was damp. An old couch with its back pushed against a wall faced a large wooden desk. There was little natural light in the room except for a window above the couch. On its ledge was a clay pot filled with painted branches covered in dust.

By the desk were two chairs. Howard did not move towards them but sat on the

couch. He took out a cigarette. Megan stood still, wondering what to do. Should she sit on the chair or on the couch? She opted for the chair. Howard did not move.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he called out to her.

"We-ll," Megan began.

"Of course, you do," Howard said. "I'll open the window."

Howard remained sitting as he reached over to the window to open it. A cool stiff breeze blew in, rustling the branches in the clay pot, scattering dust onto the couch. Howard sucked at his cigarette and then blew smoke out the window. He looked sharply once at Megan sitting quietly in the chair. Then he stood up and abruptly shut the window. He butted out his cigarette.

"I'm not usually so considerate," he said almost gruffly as he walked over to where Megan was sitting. "Shall we begin?"

He took out her translations from his desk and gave them to her. Megan read silently, noting each mistake. She felt no compulsion to speak. Each mistake now seemed less of an insult than before. She would soon be published and that would absolve her of this tedious revising.

"And how is your Chinese friend doing with his research?" Howard said at last.

"Oh him -- well, he's fine. I mean his research seems to be going well. I think your information helped him a lot."

"So do you live near him?"

"He lives a few stations away from me," Megan said. "But I've never actually been to his place. We met at a conference and have just been keeping in touch because of our

mutual interest in literature."

"A Chinese interested in Mishima," Howard said, stroking his chin. "I wonder why -- and the Morita theory of all things."

"Yes, it is interesting, isn't it?" Megan said. She now knew more of Mishima's life than of Setsuko's.

"What power of insight, of intuition your friend must have," Howard said, "to have guessed about the Morita possibility."

Megan did not say anything. She thought of Yaozhu and his silly clapping.

"You know your friend is quite right about Mishima," Howard said slowly and deliberately, looking directly at Megan's eyes. "He committed suicide for love."

"But there's no proof!" Megan said adamantly. "You said so yourself! It can't be as simple as that."

"Oh, I have proof." Howard stood up. "Proof that no one else has." He reached to the top shelf of the bookcase beside him and pulled down a dusty lacquer box.

"You know about Mishima's private army, the *Tate-no-ka?* I was working as a free-lance newspaper correspondent when Mishima formed that army. I had translated some of his stories by that time, so we knew each other. He asked me to come out to one of his training camps in Gotemba because he wanted me to write an article for the western press by interviewing him and some of the other army members. It was quite an opportunity, so of course I took him up on it. I was able to interview quite a few of the men, including Morita. I had an interpreter with me. It wasn't Mishima but one of the other students who spoke fairly good English. We talked about several things -- I can't

remember now what -- but we got around to talking about Mishima himself. Morita was very proud to be Mishima's *disciple*, I guess you'd call it. He talked on and on about Mishima's abilities, mostly about his skill and strength, but not at all about his writing. *That* I thought was odd. He talked about devotion to the Emperor in relation to Mishima. There was something there I couldn't quite understand. Then Morita suddenly told the interpreting student to leave the room. When he left, Morita slipped me a large stuffed envelope. I have never understood why he gave it to me, a foreign journalist, except that he thought that that would have been what Mishima wanted."

Megan's heart was beating hard.

"I've kept those papers in this box for years. I've always thought about writing about them, but every time I take them out I can't bear the thought of exposing this vulnerability of Mishima's."

Howard opened the box and took out the wrinkled, yellowing papers. He passed them to Megan. She could barely make out the faded brown lines. There was one set of brown lines, alternating with another in slightly thicker brown. One line must have been Morita's, the other Mishima's. She could not coherently read the sentences but could only make out characters such as *glory*, *gold*, *sword* and *desire*. Then she found the character *love*, strangely thick in its lines as if whoever had used the brush had dipped it deeply in the ink. A sudden cold shudder rippled through Megan's body when she noticed the next character *chi* -- blood. *The whole letter was written in blood.*

A warm hand fell on Megan's shoulder, the fingers crawling into the groove of her collar bone. She stiffened. Slowly, the fingers moved up the shoulder to her bare neck.

Megan screamed. The hand suddenly withdrew. Megan whirled around to face Howard.

Howard laughed nervously. "Why weren't you ready for me, love? You came here, didn't you? You are so beautiful."

He moved towards her. Megan stepped backwards, forcing herself against the desk.

"I -- I don't want you," she said weakly, leaning farther back, her hands pressing hard against the desk. Her body was exposed to him. She had nothing to protect herself with. Howard moved closer, his thighs now touching hers, his hands moving around her waist, forcing her into his embrace. Megan blindly felt behind her and grabbed the letters on the desk. She scrunched them in her hands and shoved them hard into Howard's face.

"You b-bitch!" Howard sputtered. "Don't you know what those are?" He pushed forward, stepping onto the sheets.

Megan slipped out of his grasp and ran out of the house. How could she have been so stupid? Tears jarred her eyes as she stumbled down the street. She didn't know where she was running. Anywhere. Anywhere away from her stupid self wanting vain things -- reputation, approval, fame -- dead things. Dead. A nauseous sea of black invaded her body and she fell onto a garbage can, wanting to vomit.

Two young boys playing with a red ball stopped to stare at her. They looked at her and then one another. The oldest one pointed at her and jeered, *Gaijin da! Gaijin da!*

When Megan raised her face, they became alarmed and ran away.

By the time Megan reached the station, it was dark. Neon lights glowed around the milling throngs of people as they hurried out into the darkness in taxis and buses. Megan went directly to a phone. She picked up the receiver.

"Hello? Hello? Who's there?" a voice answered.

"Yaozhu, it's m-m-me, Megan. Are you busy?"

"Oh, Megan-san! How are you?"

"I-I'm fine, I-I guess, and you?"

"Very good! I saw your poet Setsuko-san in the paper today. She is going to Australia to accept a prize for some poetry that was translated into English. Did you do it?"

"W-what?"

"A prize. She won a prize. Setsuko-san won a prize."

Megan thought she heard the sound of clapping, but it was her heart beating.

"I don't know anything about it," she said. She felt like crying again.

"Megan-san?"

There was silence.

"Megan-san?"

"Oh Yaozhu!" Megan said, her voice shaking. "I want to see you now, is that okay? Can we meet somewhere? Please! I have to tell you something very important -- something about Mishima."

"What? What is it?"

"I can't tell you, I must see you."

It's true, it's all true what you said all along. You were right, Yaozhu, you were right. The words sung loud in Megan's head. She wanted to clap her hands to her ears, the resounding truth unbearably loud, so evident and yet so hidden. *Love, love, love* said the clacking wheels of the train pushing her toward Yaozhu -- there was no proof ever of these things, everything was felt and then proof found like brown words on white paper clenched in her hands, that was proof, wasn't it? *Wasn't it?*

Yaozhu was waiting for her at the Chinese restaurant. He stood up when he saw her.

"Yaozhu!" Megan could barely hold back the tears. She stumbled towards him, her hands dropping onto his shoulders.

Yaozhu stiffer >d.

"You were right, Yaozhu, you were right! Mishima *did* commit suicide for love, he did, he did," Megan said, her voice quavering. She grabbed Yaozhu's hands. "What's the matter, don't you believe me? Yaozhu -- I did this for you. I know the truth now. I've found it."

Distressed, Yaozhu abruptly pulled back his hands.

"Megan-san," he said stiffly.

"What? What's the matter?" Megan reached for his hands again, but he pulled them away.

"Megan-san -- I, I am a m-married man."

"What??" Megan drew back her arms. Her cheeks burned red

"Why didn't you tell me?" she cried.

Yaozhu looked bewildered. "But I don't understand, Megan-san, why are you surprised? Such information is not important -- not for you and I. Our concern is literature, no?"

Megan was not listening. She saw in her mind the picture of a face, placid and resigned. A Chinese woman's face. A wife's face. A face that knew the quiet duty of waiting, and not wanting. Megan's cheeks burned red with shame. The collapse was quiet and sudden -- the way Mishima must have felt when he realized he was truly dying. Everything then must have tasted of blood. A metallic sweetness. And then, the strong, cold reproach of death.

A RETURN

Mary Jane Nishikawa put the receiver down and sighed. The call was from Henry. He was at some gas station just outside the city limits. It was the second time he had called her since he left the city an hour ago. *I'm going now. I really am*, he said. *Good*, Mary Jane replied and hung up. She had told him before never to call again. He simply did not understand her words were final.

Mary Jane knew all along that the affair she had started with Henry was inappropriate. Still, she could not help herself. She knew she was lonely and book-curved, in need of company. Henry was company: Henry was flesh. He was also brilliant, one of the best grad students she had seen for some time. He was much younger than the rest of Mary Jane's students. Pale with reddish hair and fine features, he had been nicknamed "Lady-boy" by the other students. Mary Jane had practically nursed him into love. Now he was driving away to Toronto in his parents' pick-up truck with furniture he had once thought to use in an apartment with Mary Jane. In his gallant stupidity, he had told his parents about her and him -- the single, nearly forty Japanese Canadian English professor and he, barely into his twenties, the only son of a doctor and his patrician wife. They were shocked. But Mary Jane herself was even more shocked. Henry had broken the law of

discretion. That meant the end of the relationship. Two months before Henry's defense, Mary Jane withdrew from supervision of his thesis work. Henry stumbled through and after a long battle with his parents finally decided to follow them east where his father had been transferred to one of the bigger hospitals in Toronto. Henry would complete his Ph.D. at York.

The phone rang again. Mary Jane hesitated before picking it up.

"Mary Jane?" It was a woman's voice.

"Aunt Machi!" Mary Jane said, relieved. "What a surprise! What are you calling me here for?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Maybe I call back later. Your mother just say to me now 'Call her at the university' and give me your number."

"Oh no, that's just fine. So how are things on the farm? How's your back?"

"Oh, everything's okay. My back's sore -- picked all the carrots yesterday. I bring them to your mother's place on the weekend."

"You're coming into town, are you?"

"Yeah."

There was a pause. Mary Jane wondered where the conversation was going. And then she suddenly remembered.

"Oh, you're coming in because you're going to Vancouver this weekend -- for the women's Buddhist conference. I remember Mom telling me now. That'll be exciting."

"Yeah, but Omatsu-san is sick."

"Oh no! She was going with you, wasn't she? That's what I'd heard."

"I know, but now she's sick. And I don't want to go *hitori*, you know, by myself."

"That's a problem," Mary Jane said sympathetically. She didn't know what else to say. Is that what her aunt had called for? To tell her Omatsu-san was sick? Then it dawned on her what the point of the call was.

"You want me to go with you, is that it?"

"Yeah, can you? I ask your mother and she say 'Take Mary Jane'. Omatsu-san say I should go with someone, she don't mind giving her hotel away to you."

Mary Jane laughed, "Sure, why not? It'll be nice."

"Ah *yokatta!*" her aunt said, relieved.

Mary Jane smiled as she hung up the phone. How indirect her aunt was. They were all that way, that whole generation of Nisei women. Timid and self-effacing. Never asserting their desires or feelings. It was a wonder they ever got on with their lives after the war years. She had heard that many of the women had been unable to marry -- *Poor mi-and-mi-san had a beau back in Vancouver, so they say, but she never heard from him after they left the coast*, her mother said more than once. *Can't marry a hakujin, and no Nippon-jin around for miles, what you going to do? Shikata ga nai. It can't be helped. You don't marry at all.* Mary Jane remembered her mother telling her this, looking at her pointedly, without saying the obvious. They never said the obvious. They hinted. Their whole generation did. Leaning slightly to suggest -- *Ah, we are worried for you, too, Mary Jane. It is lonely not to be married.* Her mother had been one of the lucky ones --

daughter of Okinawan farmers in Taber who eagerly welcomed the ragged band of Nikkei from the coast. There was a sudden influx of eligible Japanese men. One of them was Mary Jane's father. He was a west coaster, from Vancouver. One of the displaced

Although Aunt Machi would never say it, Mary Jane knew she was afraid of going to Vancouver. It had taken courage for her to apply to the conference. She did not want to go when she first heard where the conference was. *Vancouver?* her face had paled slightly. She had gone to all the other international Buddhist conferences and meetings -- she had been to the big one in Hawaii two years ago and had thoroughly enjoyed herself. But that was when Uncle Mas had been alive. He had died of a heart attack only a year ago. Aunt Machi and he had been together almost forty years. They had met in Vancouver. Mary Jane was never told the circumstances. Things just happened in Vancouver the way things usually did until Pearl Harbour. Then whatever stories came afterwards got cut off -- some bits dribbled out here and there but only as an afterthought to very carefully culled memories.

Powell Street. Mary Jane squinted at the narrow strip of road with its storefronts and doorways. She had never been to this section of town although she had visited Vancouver several times before. Powell Street was merely a name uttered now and then by her father and her aunt. It wasn't a real place. It was just a memory. Powell Street was where the old community had been, people bustling back and forth between shops, bowing to each other on street corners. *Baachan*, her grandmother, would have been one

of those people Aunt Machi would have been a newly married young woman then and Mary Jane's father just old enough to drive the family car. They all would have been familiar with this street in the days before the war.

Go look around, her aunt said. Maybe you can find the school your Dad and I went to. It's around here. I know it. Mary Jane left the Buddhist Church where the conference was and walked down the street. She found the school a block north of Powell, still standing as it must have when her father attended -- a square white two-storey building with simple black lettering -- **VANCOUVER JAPANESE LANGUAGE SCHOOL** -- above the doorway.

Mary Jane went in. The school appeared empty and hollow-sounding except for the occasional noise coming from inside a classroom to her left. *Maybe there is someone there who could show me around,* Mary Jane thought. She went into the classroom. It was large, cluttered with cabinets and boxes. A large wooden table stacked with community newsletters took up most of the middle of the room. Black and white portrait photos of Nisei men in suits from the fifties hung in an arc on the back wall -- past presidents of the school or of some local Japanese association. A banner with **WELCOME TO THE J.C.C.A ANNUAL SALMON BARBECUE** lay crumpling on top of old boxes stacked below the window ledge. In the far corner of the room, barely visible amidst the piles of books and boxes on the floor, was a man sitting behind a desk, absorbed in a newspaper. A styrofoam cup and a half-eaten Chinese bun lay on a paper napkin nearby.

"Hello?" Mary Jane said.

The man looked up. He had a square face that seemed inscrutably boyish. His black hair was dark and coarse, with a faint sprinkle of grey in it. It was cut neatly, professionally. He wore a yellow Lacoste shirt with beige Bermuda shorts. Near his chair was a tennis racket in its case.

"Would you like something?" the man said.

"I'd just like to look around. My father went to school here when he was young so -- "

"Well go ahead then and look," the man said abruptly and returned to his paper.

How rude! Mary Jane thought, leaving the room. She wandered upstairs through the wood-floored halls into one of the airy classrooms where her father's generation used to learn Japanese. She stopped at a window and gazed at the street below. Was it too much for him to offer to show her around? Especially here where the very past her father and aunt seemed to evade became so real? Was it that much of an imposition? Mary Jane sighed loudly. The sound of her voice echoed as if the empty classroom too was in silent resignation to the past.

Mary Jane returned downstairs to say a sarcastic thank-you to the man, but when she arrived he was gone. A middle-aged Nisei woman was busy folding newsletters on the table.

"Oh -- that must've been Mike you saw." The woman said, raising her head. "He's gone off to play tennis. I'll tell him you said thank you." The woman smiled politely.

"And what are you here for, dear?"

"Oh, I'm just looking around. My father used to go to school here ... Actually my

aunt is at the Buddhist Church right now participating in the conference."

"Oh yes, I was just there myself! Who is your aunt?"

"Machi Nishikawa -- "

"Nishikawa, Nishikawa -- " the woman muttered, "she had a brother -- Yosh, no? -
- lived over near Jackson or around there."

"Yes, that's right. Yosh's my Dad."

"Well really? How about that? You tell your Dad you saw Emi Tanaka -- I was Tanaka then. I'm sure he'll remember." The old Nisei woman laughed softly. "You better get going there to the church. I think that session your aunt's at is over now."

Mary Jane hurried over to the Buddhist Church. She found her aunt chatting with a portly Nisei woman wearing an apron.

"Oh, Mary Jane!" Aunt Machi's face was flushed with excitement. "You can't imagine who I just met -- oh, but you wouldn't know anyway -- I wish your Dad were here -- this is Susan Matsumura, her mother was my *nakodo*, and Matsumura Obasan is still alive, do you believe it?"

"Eighty-nine and still going strong," Mrs. Matsumura said proudly. She had a loud, strong voice. "Mother's one of a kind. There aren't many Issei left, you know."

"*Na-ko-do*? What's that?"

"Oh honey -- that means matchmaker!" Mrs. Matsumura said, laughing. "We had those in the old days. Especially for ones like your aunt here that's too shy to say who she's been liking." Aunt Machi blushed slightly, waving her hand in embarrassment.

"I've invited you and your aunt over for coffee so's your aunt can see Mother.

Mother could hardly believe it when I told her on the phone. She's waiting for us at the house."

"Gee, it's been so many years," Auntie Machi said. "I can't believe it. I wish Mas were here."

Her eyes were wet. Mary Jane gave her a tissue.

The Matsumuras lived in Richmond. Old Matsumura Obasan was waiting for them, sitting on a chair by the door holding a cane in her hand. When she saw Aunt Machi, she stood up at once.

"*Nan-to mah!* Such a rong time." Matsumura Obasan said, wiping her eyes as she held Aunt Machi's hand.

"It's been almost forty years, neh, Obasan?"

"*So-desu-neh. Yonju-nen. Fohty iiazu.*"

Mary Jane stood well behind. She felt suddenly lost, displaced.

"Obasan -- *kore watashi no mei desu* -- my niece, Mary Jane "

Matsumura Obasan stretched out her hand to Mary Jane. "Nice meet you, Merry." She turned to Aunt Machi and spoke in Japanese.

"She says you're very pretty, Mary Jane -- she thinks you have lovely long hair."

Mary Jane spoke loudly. "Thank you, Obasan."

"*Kebhon-nazatteru?*" Matsumura Obasan turned to Mary Jane. "You marry?"

"No, I'm not married," Mary Jane said, laughing.

"Mottai-nai," Matsumura Obasan shook her head.

"What-a-waste," Aunt Machi translated.

The three of them sat down in the living room as Susan brought out Japanese tea and leftover cakes from the conference.

Susan began the conversation. *Remember Powell Street? Remember the way it was?* Aunt Machi nodded her head. *I sure do.* And from there it started, the banter of stories between the two Nisei -- old memories spilling out, a river of information long stagnant in silence. They talked about the old community on Powell Street, the language school where Matsumura Obasan taught Japanese to the children. *That's where Mother learned who everyone was.* There were baseball games in Oppenheimer Park -- an all-Japanese Canadian league. *My brother Yosh was short-stop.* It was in those days that Matsumura Obasan introduced Mas to Machi -- *He was a bit brash, I didn't like him at first. But at least he didn't gamble -- that's what counted in a husband in those days.* Susan laughed. *That's right. Those single men were always gambling in their spare time. But Mas was different. Remember that picture he gave you -- the one he got taken at a studio? Bet you that was the first time he ever wore a suit! Marrying's serious business, eh?* Aunt Machi laughed. *So what happened to Yosh?* Susan asked. *Well, they couldn't get married, you know -- Yosh and that Tanaka girl -- even though they really had a thing going. They were too young. The Tanakas went to a different camp. We never saw them again.* Aunt Machi fell silent. *Emi's in Vancouver now,* Susan said softly, *married a Nisei she met in Toronto -- George Goto. Really?* Aunt Machi's face lightened up. *I'm glad for her. It was sad when we left Vancouver. Yosh married,*

too -- an Okinawan from Alberta, Mary Jane's mother. Susan looked at Mary Jane. She must've been pretty -- look at her daughter. Okinawa girls are pretty, I hear. Mary Jane lowered her head shyly. Aunt Machi took Mary Jane's hand. Yeah, we were the lucky ones. I don't think I could have gotten through it all if it weren't for the family. I was just beside myself when they took Papa and Mas away for road camp. It was just Mother and I and Yosh. Poor Yosh -- they'd taken away the car. He couldn't see Fimi at all. She lived so far and there was that curfew to worry about. We didn't know what was going to happen. They were putting people in Hastings Park then. And there was talk about the camps in the interior. We didn't know what we should do. Shikata ga nai. Shikata ga nai. That's what Mother was always saying. We have to go where they send us. Next thing you know, we're on a train. We were at Lemon Creek. You? Susan responded at once. Greenwood. We went to Greenwood. Aunt Machi resumed. It got better when the men finally arrived. The houses were so cold and flimsy -- we needed the men to repair things. In the end we all decided to go to Alberta, so that's where we went and that's where we've been since. How about you? Susan took in a breath. Mary Jane could see these were painful memories. We went to Greenwood, like I said. We stayed there for a few years. We got a whole shack to ourselves because we were a large family-- there were five of us kids and Mom and Dad. I met my husband in Greenwood. Roy Horiguchi -- they were from Haney. Mother and Father wanted to go back to the coast. It was a crazy idea -- I mean there was nothing there for us. We lived in Merritt until the ban was lifted and then came back as soon as we could. Roy got a job at a bank -- just clerking, but that was all right. Then my babies were born -- Vanessa, Rachel and

James. Vanessa and Rachel are married now and live here in Vancouver. James lives in L.A. He's a dentist. Remember my younger brother Tats -- the one who played on the same baseball team as Yash? Well he's here, too. He's got two sons -- one's a doctor in Winnipeg, married with two kids and the other an accountant here in Vancouver --

Matsumura Obasan, who had been quietly listening to the two women, suddenly stood up. She walked over to a cabinet and pulled out a stack of albums and framed photos.

"Ah *kore da*," she muttered, pulling out a graduation picture of a young man. She laid it on Mary Jane's lap.

"Maiku *desu*, my grandson," Matsumura Obasan said proudly.

"Oh, yes," Susan said absently. "That's Tats younger son -- the one I was just telling you about. The accountant." She looked at the picture. "That's a pretty old photo though -- his university graduation was years ago."

Mary Jane picked up the picture and looked at it closely. She recognized the man as the one she had met in the language school office. He looked younger in the picture.

Matsumura Obasan turned to her daughter and spoke to her in Japanese. Susan laughed and said to Mary Jane, "My mother wants me to tell you that Mike is unmarried."

"I see," Mary Jane said smiling. She picked up the picture and was about to hand it back when she noticed Matsumura Obasan staring at her. Mary Jane paused. She drew the picture back onto her lap and looked at it again. In the reflection of the glass was her own face superimposed on the image below -- black hair against black, brown eyes in brown.

But in her reflection were wrinkles, especially around the eyes, lines of small wearinesses. She would have liked to erase them all and be as neat in the gown of her own achievement as Mike was then, but such a time was long past. Such young men, so many mistakes made with them, the Henrys whom she crowned with blows, the bitternesses of her own needs. This man in the photo was not young now, but they would preserve him as such for her, just for this opportunity to present him to her.

Susan's voice broke in. *Well that Michael, he's quite a fellow.* She began to talk about him -- where he had gone to university, what he studied, what his hobbies were. Mary Jane heard it all in careful attentive silence. Mike was a C.A., did his undergraduate at U.B.C and completed his M.B.A in California. He spoke relatively good Japanese, having spent a year in Tokyo at a trade company there just after his M.B.A. Now he was working for a large accounting firm downtown that dealt with Japanese corporations. He lived alone in a small condominium in False Creek. He liked to play tennis and did a lot of volunteer community work at Tonari Gumi with seniors and occasionally helped out at the J.C.C.A office -- the one located in the language school. He liked to read, but mostly history.

Then Aunt Machi spoke. She looked at Mary Jane. *Why, Mary Jane likes reading too -- she would rather read than watch TV even! And oh, she was always good in school, not at the mathematics but at the writing and spelling. She won a writing contest in high school. She went to university and studied literature -- oh and she was always getting scholarships -- that's why she went on to Ph.D. in Toronto, University of Toronto, a very good school they say, and her parents didn't have to pay a cent. She*

studied with that famous sensei there -- what's his name the Northern Fly one? And she did odori one year, one of the Issei in town taught all the Sansei girls -- it was the year of the Japanese Canadian Centennial, 1977, remember? Oh, Mike participated too? It was the first time Mary Jane took those silly barrettes out of her hair and did something different with her hair -- wore it in a bun. And now she's teaching at the university and she's very good at it -- has lots of students that all like her.

"Bungaku-shojo desu neh?" Matsumura Obasan spoke out.

"What?" Mary Jane turned to Susan.

"It means -- well, it's rather hard to translate, but I guess it would mean 'the book-loving little girl'."

"Me too, I was. I like reading berry much," Matsumura Obasan said, smiling, "and I, too, teacher once." She extended her hand to Mary Jane. Mary Jane reached out. Matsumura Obasan's clasp was firm and warm.

There was silence. Rain began pattering softly on the roof. Aunt Machi's flushed face turned slightly pale. Mary Jane could see she had exhausted herself. It was time to leave. They put on their coats. Matsumura Obasan left the room and came back with a bag full of packaged B.C. seaweed.

"Gift -- pureeze take home, give to Yosh-san. He remember, neh?"

"Oh yes! Arigato!" Aunt Machi said. "It will be such a memory for him. Thank you, Obasan."

"Yes, and don't be such a stranger, Machi!" Susan said. "Come back to Vancouver again." She hugged Mary Jane's aunt and then turned to Mary Jane. "And you, too --

whenever you're in Vancouver, stop in, you hear?"

Mary Jane nodded.

They walked out together to the car. The wind was moist and the air filled with the warm breath of rain.

"You can smell the sea here." Aunt Machi paused to breathe the air. She took hold of Mary Jane's hand and squeezed it.

"Thank you for coming with me," she said. "I'll remember this."

Two weeks later Mary Jane received a letter in the mail. It was from Mike Matsumura. There was also a photo enclosed -- this time of an older man with streaks of grey in his hair. He was wearing a suit.

The letter was handwritten in small broad strokes on company letterhead.

Dear Ms. Nishikawa,

This letter is an introduction of myself to you. My name is Mike Matsumura. My grandmother mentioned your name to me and suggested I write to you. I hope you do not find this letter too forward of me.

Mrs. Emi Goto has informed me that I have met you once already at the language school behind Powell but my memory seems to have failed me, and I regret not paying attention when it was due.

I sincerely hope that you will have a chance to come to Vancouver again. Until such time, would you mind exchanging letters with me?

I'm afraid I'm not a good writer as you can see by this letter, but if you do not mind I would enjoy corresponding with you. Also do you have a photograph you can send me of yourself?

Yours truly,

Mike Matsumura

Mary Jane picked up the photo and looked at it again. She laughed softly to herself. *Dear Aunt Machi*, she thought. *Is this your thank-you?* Then she wondered where that picture was -- the one Aunt Machi spoke of, the one from the Centennial where she was wearing a kimono with her hair in a bun -- *would that be good enough*, she wondered, remembering the day it was taken, how effortless it had been doing *odori* in the park, dancing the way the old Issei had taught her.

FOR THE LOVE OF IT

For want of an old Shakespeare, she phoned an old lover with whom she had not spoken for a few years.

"Hello, Ray? This is Marissa."

"Marissa?" There was hesitation. "Oh Marissa! So -- how have you been?"

"Fine," she replied. "I want to know if I can have my Shakespeare back. You know, the big orange volume of collected plays I had? Do you have it? I need it now."

"What for?"

"I'm going back to school."

"Oh." The voice sounded suddenly hollow and distant.

"Well, do you have it?" she said impatiently.

"I don't know. I'll have to look."

"I'll need it in a week. Can you call me if you find it?"

"Sure," he said. "I'll call."

She hung up the phone. Then she went to the kitchen table where a pile of new texts lay stacked on top of one another. After getting herself a pen, she methodically opened each text, and began to write her name in clear broad strokes on the first page.

Marissa Ayako Edwards

Marissa Ayako Edwards

Marissa Ayako Edwards

Marissa Ayako Edwards

She wrote her name precisely each time. She had always gone by the name *Marissa* -- it was easier to pronounce. *Ayako* was the intimate, what her mother and grandmother called her. He had called her that, too -- the old lover. But she had called him Ray. He preferred it that way. Rajeet, he said, was too Indian. *Don't call me that*, he said. *It's Ray*.

She merely nodded to his request though she found her mouth tripping off the 'a' into a 'j' when she looked at him. She was annoyed at herself for this. He seemed to take to *Ayako* at once even though it was difficult to trace the Japanese in her face -- her eyes were large, thick-lashed, and her skin fair. The tell-tale sign was the black hair, but even it glistened a reddish brown in sunlight.

The old Shakespeare text had come to mind when she was standing in line at the used book exchange at the university. She was holding heavy copies of Milton, Chaucer, the Romantic poets and the Old English dictionary when she remembered the orange volume of Shakespeare's collected plays Ray had given her as a gift when they were together. He was a theatre major.

He could quote from Shakespeare -- long passages from *Lear*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*. He loved reciting the parts of kings. She would watch him, fascinated by the

long brown arm waving above his head, the hands gesturing in the air. He had a regal and shapely face with dark brown eyes that were large and penetrating. His hair was long, a glistening shining black. Sometimes, it was hard for Marissa to keep a straight face. She could not picture him an old European king, but could easily imagine him an aging Indian patriarch, one of those old, slightly pathetic but still stately Sikhs she sometimes saw sitting on benches in the mall. But she did not interrupt Ray with her thoughts. He was a king to himself and that was what mattered. The delivery of his lines was perfect

He was the one who had encouraged her to study English literature while she was yet undecided about her major in her first year. *You gotta follow your heart, mm your head.* 'Head' meant what her mother wanted. *Go into beezu-ness*, she said in her clipped Japanese accent. *Make money; be successfuul. Shoo, beezu-iness huring but I terru yuu what make sense, what is practicuul.* Marissa wavered between the two options. *Yuu love reading, don't you? What you gonna do? Be a suit? Come on, that's mm yuu!* (Ray.) *Eberyone read English and talk about English book -- zat's easy -- but mm eberybody speak Japanese, talk about Japan. You go beezu-ness and speak Japanese -- bang! -- you make money and have secure life.* (Mom.) Marissa really wondered if there was even such a thing as choice. Choice was an illusion, wasn't it? It was not for the love of *it* that you made your choice, but for the love of *whom*. In the end, her mother won. *You take advantage of being Japanese*, her mother said almost threateningly. Marissa could hear the argument already if she pressed any further on the matter of her going into the arts. *Rook! -- I pay put yuu in Japanese language school; I buy Japanese book for you; Oji-chan send you magazine, toy, tape. This arru for you. This for your*

future. There was an edge in her mother's voice. It had been there ever since the divorce. Ever since she had to make her own way, start up her own translation agency. Marissa grudgingly admired her mother's toughness, her tenacity -- growing up with her that was what she felt most. But she knew there was that side of her mother that was impractical beyond measure. How else to explain her mother running away from her parents, meeting a Canadian bush pilot in the Anchorage airport, and then marrying him after only a few months? Wasn't such a union doomed to fail? Even Marissa could see that. But her mother was defensive to this day about her actions.

"I shock the family good. They want me to marry and be proper housewife. I no interest in zat. I do what I want," her mother said.

Marissa wondered. In spite of the defiance, her mother reconciled with her family. Marissa was taken to Japan when she was six and was proudly presented to all the relatives for the marvel half-and-half child she was. She remembered vaguely the titter of Japanese around her and the sound *mei* coming up over and over again. *Eyes* -- what lovely big eyes.

The phone rang abruptly. Marissa jumped to answer it.

"Aya-chan."

"Oh Mom, it's you. " Marissa was disappointed..

"Yah me. What -- you expecting carru from boy? So sorry. So, you get your books?"

"Yes, used like you told me to, but they were still expensive."

"Everysing expensive when you riv by yourself. And when you not making money."

"Mom -- please don't start that again. I *want* to live by myself. I *want* to be a student. I've told you so many times already."

"Okay, I ray off. I got a job for you. Translation. Want it?"

"What is it?"

"Sprendid lovu story of couple stranded in Canadian arctic stuck in airplane with nahsing to eat but salmon sashimi."

"Mom, come on, quit joking. What is it? Is it that computer company again?"

"Yeah, it's technical stuff -- maybe you have to spend too much time. Money's good. I don't have time myself to do so give you if want it."

Marissa frowned. Her mother had plenty of time as far as she knew.

Marissa changed the subject. "Mom, I phoned Ray tonight."

"That *Indojeen* boy? That one who run off with the *kimpatsu*?"

***Kimpatsu*. Blonde.**

"*Baka*! Why you do such a *baka* thing?"

***Baka*. Stupid.**

Marissa's eyes filled with tears. Why was her mother so difficult? She had disliked Ray from the beginning. Saw him as an evil influence.

"Mom, I just wanted to get my Shakespeare book back. I wanted to save money, you know, like you're always wanting me to -- it had all the plays in it, I could use it the

whole year, I'm trying to do the best I can, Mom, can't you see, I -- "

But all Marissa could hear was an indignant barrage from the other end, the squeaking squawk of Japanese that her mother used for reprimanding. Marissa hung up.

The phone rang again, but Marissa did not answer. She knew it was her mother. Besides, she realized now that Ray couldn't possibly get a hold of her. He did not have her new number.

Marissa tidied up her small studio apartment before she went to bed. It was nearly midnight, and she had an early morning class to attend the next day. Everything was in order, she knew, as it should be -- the books and notepaper in her briefcase, pencils and pens in her purse.

On the chair beside her bed, she had carefully laid out the clothes she was going to wear. A stiff white cotton shirt, a burgundy sweater and a black wool skirt. Collegiate-looking. She'd bought the sweater and skirt only yesterday. Everything else in her closet was inappropriate. Three-piece suits and silk dresses all bought in Japan -- she had a good job there. Her mother had been right. Japanese-speaking business majors could make a lot of money. But she spent it, spent it all on trips, books and expensive clothing. She deserved to spend, she thought -- silk felt good on her skin; she loved its smooth, cool indifference to her body.

She had worked in a bank in Japan, in the foreign investment branch. It was her English that stood her in good stead -- the Japanese-speaking part, though essential for

dealing with her superiors and co-workers, was not important in making the various foreign contacts. But Marissa knew she would never have had the job if she had been entirely white. She was half Japanese, which meant half familiar. And it was her grandfather who had made the all-important introduction to his old university friend who was with the bank.

Her co-workers were polite enough to her despite her sometimes convoluted-sounding Japanese. They called her *MA-RI-SAH* not *Ayako*, which was too dull and familiar sounding to them. Socially, however, they kept their distance, unsure of her position. Marissa herself was unsure. She was not one of the tittering *OL*-- office-ladies -- but neither was she a man. Her English intimidated the men. She would phone L.A. and have an easy bantering conversation, while the others struggled with their pronunciation and tripped over idioms. Some even, in exasperation, would hand the phone over to her rather than deal with the foreign client themselves. The *OL*'s deferred to her, serving her tea, much to her embarrassment. They seemed pinched in their uniforms, their faces made up to look like servant dolls while Marissa had the luxury of wearing anything she chose.

In the two years she was there, she was busy. She had an hour and a half commute to work. She had chosen to live far out of Tokyo, away from the bustle of the city. Most of the single employees had chosen to live in company dorms closer to the bank because of convenience of access, but Marissa did not mind the long commute. Sandwiched in a sea of jostling bodies, she was always able to slip out her novel and read it, pinned against a door, or person. She read voraciously on the train as did all the others, absorbed in their

newspapers and magazines, but her readings were conspicuously English. The time she spent in the mornings on the train seemed her only privacy.

In the evenings after work, Marissa was asked to accompany bank executives and their foreign clients to expensive dinners followed by rounds of drinks at the clubs in Roppongi. Having to oblige, she often found herself missing the last train only to have to take a taxi home. Blurred with fatigue, she would sit on the plastic-covered seat, her legs splayed beneath her like two tossed sticks, her purse and briefcase thrown against the back of the seat. The digital fare readout spun a dizzying red of figures -- now thousands of yen, now ten thousand.

She should have saved money, her mother said on her return. *What's wrong with you? -- got a good job with good company -- where your paycheque go anyway?*

Marissa didn't know, really. There was the one time -- the expanse of sand and blue water in Penang, the lying, lying on the beach wanting to be swallowed up by the sun's white light. And then there were the bolts of silk she had bought in Bangkok -- enough to clothe an army of those OL's in royal blues and purples, yellows and fuschias. And then, of course, there was England. Paying to stay at the ridiculously expensive Waldorf Hotel in London and then running off to the West End to see the plays. The plays -- over and over, Shakespeares -- now a tragedy, now a comedy, now lust, now jealousy, now fear, now love, every inch of unexplored feeling a sudden bombardment on her dulled senses. For the first time in months, she wept openly. She travelled to the Lake District -- took a room at a cottage and then did all the walks, not in the choppy striding manner she was used to in Tokyo, but in long and languorous steps, strolling aimlessly through the woods

and hills. She made the pilgrimage to Wordsworth's grave, laid a bouquet of daffodils by the headstone. She returned from England as if from exhausted reverie, having spent all her money on plays and hotels, not having bought one outfit. Her work then became unspeakably dull. She suddenly wanted to go home.

Marissa had all but resigned herself to buying the Shakespeare in the bookstore when Ray called her.

"My number?" Marissa said excitedly. "How did you get my number?"

"I called your mother."

"Oh."

"She yelled at me, of course, your Mom. But she gave it to me anyways -- I mean, after I told her about finding the Shakespeare."

"Of course."

There was silence. Then Raj's voice, distant, soft.

"Aya-ko."

Marissa's eyes fluttered downward. It was a natural reaction. She did not think she could still be so weak. Still so hurt.

"I gotta go now," she said shakily. "Let's meet in the arts lounge, okay? Tomorrow, one o'clock."

That night, she dreamt of him. His smooth brown limbs like waves shuddering over her body, inside and outside, penetrating her precious white skin, the skin her mother

never had, the skin her relatives told her must have come from her *hakujin* father because they were all so dark -- in Japan they too coveted fair skin, believed it to be the most beautiful, yearned for a glimpse of it underneath the layered silk of kimono, dresses. He thought it was beautiful too; his hands told her so, those slim delicate brown fingers that grew flat and passive as leaves on her skin, grazing the sides of her hips and thighs, gently, gently as some warm breeze from the sea, the sea in Penang.

Marissa awoke with a start. The bed was damp with her sweat. There was a dull ache in her abdomen. She stood up and went to the window. She could see the university across the river, a dark huddled mass of buildings. That was where it had all begun -- she and Ray -- in the old student lounge in the Fine Arts building.

The next day at one o'clock the arts lounge was filled with students pulling out sandwiches from plastic bags, peeling oranges, munching carrot sticks. Marissa sat down on the plastic chairs near the doorway to wait for Ray. It was only a few minutes later she saw him approaching. She could barely recognize him. He was thinner, his black hair shorn close to his head. He was wearing a white shirt and a tie with a pair of dark pants. The only colorful thing he had on him was the orange Shakespeare held loosely in his hand.

"Over here!" Marissa waved.

"Ayako!" Ray strode over to her and hugged her. Marissa closed her eyes but did not raise her arms. She reached for the book and took it out of his hands.

"You won't need this now, will you?" she said. "You did give it to me, but if you want to keep it, you can."

"Nah -- I don't need it anymore." Ray flipantly tossed his hand into the air. "I've given up on theatre. There's no roles for brownies like me."

"Oh that's not true, Ray!" Marissa said. She had seen a poster of a black Hamlet somewhere recently. But maybe that was in England.

"Raj. Everyone calls me Raj now. It was dumb of me to think I could get away with being called 'Ray'."

Raj. An Indian king.

"I'm working for my uncle's insurance company."

"And, and uh, what about Tanya?"

"Oh her." Ray shrugged his shoulders. "Well, that didn't work out. She wasn't what I expected, I mean, hoped for -- well, you know what I mean." Ray looked at Marissa.

"No, I don't really," Marissa found herself saying.

Ray looked at her, startled. But then he smiled and looked at his watch. "I gotta go -- my second cousin's here from Bombay. She's waiting at my uncle's office. I'm supposed to chauffeur her around. She's only seventeen. Her parents want me to marry her. Can you imagine that?"

Marissa only smiled in return. She was not unfamiliar with arranged marriages. Her mother had left Japan to escape one.

"Look, I.. I want to see you again," Ray said. "How about lunch next week? We can talk about Japan, London, whatever."

Marissa looked at Ray. He was leaning towards her, his shoulders slumped, ill-at-

ease in the tightly pulling linen shirt and tie. She knew where he was going -- to that small, dank office where his loud, bossy uncle worked. Ray had hated that uncle, the way he flaunted his money, driving a Benz, wearing gaudy gold rings on his thick, fat fingers. *He's got a mistress*, Ray said contemptuously of him once, *a white woman to show what a great fat cat he is. It makes me sick.*

"No," Marissa said loudly and deliberately. "I don't want to see you any more." She had once thought her voice would shake at this moment, but it came smoothly out of her as it did so many times in those bars in Roppongi when some silly drunken client of theirs wanted to take her back to his hotel, his country.

"No, Raj. I just wanted my Shakespeare back."

S A N S E I

Dale Horiuchi blew out the candles on his birthday cake. He was forty-two.

"*Yaku-doshi yo*," his mother said, slicing the cake. They were alone in the dining room. The clock ticked loudly above them.

"*Yaku-doshi*?" Dale answered absently. "What's that?"

"When you're forty-two, you celebrate it."

"Never heard of it."

"Forty-two is *shi ni*. You know, death. So we must stop death with a big party."

His mother sat down. "We've celebrated it before. When your Uncle Seij turned forty-two in Toronto. Remember?"

Dale vaguely recalled a party when he was a child, he and his cousins running around in the basement while the adults upstairs were stuffing themselves with sushi, chow mein, teriyaki chicken. That must've been Uncle Seij's *yaku-doshi* party.

"Yeah, I think I remember."

"I should've called your friends -- Ronny, Bruce and Chin." His mother frowned.

"We should've had a party."

"Don't worry about it, Mom," Dale said. "You're tired enough as it is. Besides, I'll

be seeing the guys later tonight."

Dale's mother nodded slowly. She looked down at her plate. There was a thin slice of cake on it but she was not eating it. Her hands were trembling slightly. Dale thought she looked frail, tired. The trips to the hospital were taking their toll -- every day going to visit Dad, taking him rice balls and thermoses of miso soup. She would take the bus after lunch and would sit by his bed every afternoon for four hours -- reading, knitting, sewing -- until Dale picked her up after work to take her home.

Dad was calm when Mom was at the hospital. The nurses wanted her to come. Otherwise, the old man was irritable, would yell and cry, throwing things or staring out the window for hours. The stroke had immobilized him -- made him helpless, childlike in his tantrums.

Dale hadn't gotten an emergency call from the nurses since his mother started going to the hospital every day. She had started doing that four months ago. It used to be she went twice a week, but he had gotten worse lately, especially now with his tantrums and tumultuous moods.

The dining room clock chimed the hour. It was eight o'clock.

"Gotta go, Mom." Dale stood up.

"Please," she said. "Take the cake. I'll put it in a container for you."

"No, Mom, it's okay. Give it to Dad, tomorrow. He'll eat it."

Dale put on his coat and left his mother's house. The guys were waiting for him at the Ho Ho in Chinatown.

As he drove into town, Dale thought of what his mother had said. *Yatsu dashi* --

that was an interesting Japanese thing he had never heard about before. Did Ronny know about it? Dale wondered. He was turning forty-two next year. What about the Chinese? Did they have such a custom? Bruce would know.

The guys were all sitting around their usual table when Dale arrived. A plate of *bao*, steamed buns, had already been ordered.

"Hiya Birthday Boy!" Ronny called out.

Dale smiled and sat down. He noticed someone missing.

"Where's Chin?"

"Oh he's not around." Bruce laughed. "He's found a WOMAN."

"A WOMAN?" Ron said. "You never told me that! What species?"

"White -- white as the driven snow." Bruce pointed to a *hau*. "Or should I say as 'white' as this 'snow white' bun?" He lewdly poked the *hau* with the butt of his chopstick.

"Steamed and full of pork?" Ron said.

"No, beef. Whites are full of beef."

"They're better that way -- I don't like porky whites."

The two men laughed crudely. Dale smiled, shook his head. He picked up a *hau* and dipped it in sauce. He no longer related to Ron and Bruce's jokes about women. There was a time when he attempted such jokes, but they always fell flat and made him appear ridiculously sexist. It was his face that ruined the jokes -- too earnest looking -- like Momotaro one Sansei woman told him. *It just wouldn't be proper for a decent honorable boy like Momotaro to make jokes about women.*

"Hey, there's Ted!" Ron pointed to a man by the cash register. "Ted! Ted, over

here!"

"Oh! How ya guys doing?" Ted walked over to the table. He was wearing a beige trench coat over a rumpled blue suit. In his hand was a briefcase with paper sticking out of it.

"Haven't seen you for a long time." Ted looked at Dale. "Been in hiding?"

"No," Dale said. "Just busy. How about you?"

"Committee meeting tonight. About the new centre. We need some help, Dale.

Ron "

Ron rolled his eyes. Dale looked at Ted. He was at it again, trying to recruit them for yet another JC cause. Ted never quit. He was always sitting on some committee, writing reports, lobbying for this or that. Dale had worked with Ted on Redress, but that was some time ago now.

"You know, Dad's been in the hospital," Dale said apologetically. "It's been rough."

"I know, I've heard. Why don't you get the Tonari Gumi people to bring over a hot lunch for him? They make *bentos*, you know. I sure am looking forward to the day when the seniors can have their own place. The Niseis are getting old now; they need facilities."

"My Pop wouldn't go near a JC seniors home," Ron said. "Niseis have got money and don't exactly relish ghettoizing themselves like their parents, you know."

Ted's eyes narrowed at Ron. "So you figure, eh?"

Dale sighed. The debate raged on. It was a never ending battle between those

who wanted to assimilate and those who wanted to retain identity. Everyone took their sides, figured out their positions. And then shot at each other.

"Look, I gotta go," Ted said, checking his watch. He picked up his briefcase and hurried off.

Ron shook his head. "I don't know -- he didn't use to be that way."

"What do you mean?" Dale replied. "He's always been that way. Ted was a born community activist. Totally pro-JC."

"Naw, I don't mean that part. I mean -- just his being so busy all the time. He used to drink with us, you know. The old Ted would have sat down with us now."

"It comes with age," Bruce said. "You either get more focussed or more fuzzy. Me, I think I'm getting fuzzy. Let's order."

The food came quickly. Bruce ordered drink after drink -- beer, Chinese wine. Dale did not normally drink, but tonight he felt obliged. After all, it was his birthday and it was good of his friends to fete him. He could feel the flush on his face from the liquor. Bruce and Ron were turning red, too. They all had that Asian intolerance to liquor.

"You'd think they'd develop something for us -- like Lactaid for milk drinkers," Bruce said.

"What? Just so we wouldn't turn red?" Ron retorted. "Where would they sell the stuff -- in the cosmetics department? Get real, it's too superficial."

"If they did make it, what would they call it? Ethanaid? I can just imagine the commercial: *'ETHANAID -- For those with liquor intolerance. Now you too can drink a martini without becoming permanently embarrassed.'*"

They all laughed.

"Hey, let's all go out after this!" Ron said.

"Where?" Bruce asked.

"I don't know. Somewhere to -- you know -- meet people." Ron smiled and waved his little finger.

Dale laughed. He was the one who had told Ron about that gesture; waving the little finger in Japan meant you were going off to see your mistress. Somehow Ron had translated the gesture to mean cruising for women.

"Why don't we go to that karaoke bar on Robson? Lots of cute Japanese girls there. Fresh off the airplane."

Bruce frowned. "Doncha think we're kind of too old for this?"

"Easy for you to say -- you got a woman. Me and Dale -- " Ron put his arm around Dale,

"We don't. We still gotta play the field."

Bruce shook his head laughing, but Dale knew Bruce would come. He always did. Bruce was loyal. Dale wondered if that sometimes caused friction with his girlfriend, but Bruce never said anything about Sabrina. They had lived together for almost five years now, but Dale had met Sabrina only once.

Dale thought it would be different if it were him. If he had a woman, he wouldn't go anywhere. Sure, there would be the occasional outing with the guys to maintain ties, but most of the time he would want to be with her.

As for Ron, he would just go on the way he always went on. He would meet a

woman, disappear entirely, and then suddenly show up when it all went sour. It was always going sour with him.

"Let's go!" Ron hurried the fellows along. They left the restaurant and drove to Robson in Dale's car. As they got out, Bruce leaned over to Dale. "You drink and sing as much as you want, eh? I'll drive you home. The beer's wearing off on me already and I don't want to drink any more."

Dale smiled, grateful for his friend's concern. They climbed up a narrow flight of stairs and entered the cramped, smoky bar. A yellow light shone in the corner where a young Japanese woman was singing *My Way*.

It was like being in Japan all over again. For Dale, it was nostalgic. The bar was like the little *snack* Dale and his white American friends used to go to in Shinjuku. He remembered ordering Kirin beers to drink with the dried squid snacks and peanut mixes set out on the small wooden tables. He would get red and bleary eyed, occasionally joining in with the singing. Sometimes, he would keep his eye out for women, but they wouldn't notice him. They were more interested in his *gaijin* friends, the Americans -- the blue-eyed, fair-haired men. Being friends with *them* was a liability for him. Everywhere he went with them, they would be the focus of attention. Dale would be looked to as the translator. When he spoke the little Japanese that he knew, he felt stupid. *You Korean?* one old Japanese man spat at him. *You speak awful Japanese.* "Don't worry," whispered his friend. "He's just a prejudiced old man."

The whole idea of going to Japan in the first place was to learn how to become Japanese. All of the Sanseis were doing it then. For them, the trip was a pilgrimage, a rite

of passage -- these third generation Japanese Canadians coming to Japan to find themselves, find their roots. "You know, did you hear Janie Sakaguchi is going to Japan to teach English? You ought to look her up." "Greg Hirai's gone to Kyushu to visit his distant relatives. He's planning on writing a book." "Kelly Nakamura is going to learn paper-making techniques with some famous master in Japan." They all found their ways of going. Some just up and went as if it were an adventure, others, more practically oriented like Dale, had applied for scholarships. In those days it was easy to get a Japanese Ministry of Education research scholarship. "It's great! You don't even have to know Japanese," one former scholar told him. "They just make you take language courses when you get there."

Dale had gotten his scholarship to study landscape architecture. And apart from the difficult language study, he enjoyed his year and a half in Tokyo. But like the others who had come to Japan, he realized that he was *not* Japanese. Dale remembered his visit to Greg's dingy apartment in Fukuoka. Greg had just finished a day of frustrating half-interviews with relatives he could hardly speak to. "You know," Greg sighed. "I don't know what I was trying to prove. I thought I was Japanese inside, like deep inside. But I'm not, I'm a *Kanada-jin*. You know. *Kanada-jin*. Right here." He thumped at his heart, his chopsticks still in his hand.

Dale remembered that moment so clearly. Later Greg came back, helped start Redress. It was as if not being Japanese meant fighting for what you were -- a Canadian. Dale fell in easily with the other Sanseis working for Redress. He attended the house-meetings, participated in the rallies, even wrote a letter or two. It was the most political

he had ever been. He would not have gotten involved if the reason were not so simple -- he owed it to his parents.

Every Sansei had a motive -- Ted was a born justice-seeker, Greg was interested in the political angle, fighting the fight of the underdog. Even Ron got involved, writing anonymous letters to the newspaper full of barbs and invectives against the Great White Oppressor. Meanwhile, Bruce and Chin had gotten involved in the Chinese community. They started working on the head-tax issue. Dale laughed. Thinking about it now, they were such idealists, but the cause was worth all their vigour. It had united them.

Dale took a long sip of the beer he had ordered. *Memories*, he thought, *such memories*. Maybe he *would* get good and drunk tonight. He looked for his friends. Bruce had gone out to buy cigarettes. Ron was already talking to some young Japanese woman. He moved fast.

"Hey Dale," Ron called. "I'd like you to meet -- ah -- "

"Ikuko, but just call me 'Ikki'." The Japanese woman smiled. She sounded very confident, almost brash for a Japanese woman. Her small bright face shone out from underneath a floppy black hat with a plastic daisy pinned to it just above her forehead. Straight black hair flowed down onto her shoulders. She was wearing a red striped T-shirt under a black jumper. Below the table, Dale caught a glimpse of her legs. She was wearing yellow and black striped panty hose.

They started chatting. Dale drank some more. He always felt nervous around

women in situations like this. Maybe it was because he always felt so hopeful, stupidly and giddily hopeful. He didn't want to see the evening end in disaster.

Bruce came back with his cigarettes. Ron moved to another table to talk to some other woman. Ikki wanted to sing. She would sing "Yesterday". *'Would Dehru-san like to do a duet?'* *'Sure, Dale would like to do anything with you.'* Bruce shoved Dale out of his chair. Dale stumbled after Ikki up to the stage. They picked up the mikes.

*yesterday all my troubles seemed so faraway
now it seems as if they're here to stay
oh, I believe in yesterday*

suddenly I'm not half the man I used to be --

The yellow light above them glared like a spotlight. Dale was sweating. He felt slightly sick and maudlin. A wave of nausea and memories of women he had dated in the past rose up in his stomach or his heart -- he was not sure which. Ikki was singing loudly, gesturing to the air as if she were Diana Ross. She flung her red-striped arm across Dale's face, obscuring his view of the songbook he was trying to hold up.

Dale tried to see beyond the stage. Bruce's face was obscured in smoke. Ron was pouring a drink for a woman. Dale wondered what the hell he was doing, singing like an idiot.

"Would you like to do *Singing in the Rain*?" Ikki looked at Dale.

"Yes, *Singing in the Rain* would be fine," Dale replied.

In the morning, the phone rings. Dale groggily gets up from the bed to answer it.

It's his mother. She asks him if it would be all right if she visits her friend in Hope for a few days.

"Sure, why not?" Dale says, noticing that he is still wearing the clothes he wore last night. "It's just ... I'm worried about your father ... leaving him."

"Well, it'll only be for a few days. I'm sure it will be okay."

There is silence on the other end.

"Mom? Don't worry, I'll look after him."

"Oh, Dale, thank you so much. I haven't seen Betty for so long. Her father's ill and she can't leave Hope as often as she used to. It'll only be for a few days. Sachi will take me to the bus depot. I'll be back by Wednesday."

"Okay, Mom. You go ahead and have a good time."

Dale hangs up the phone. He looks at his kitchen clock. Eleven thirty. His head is pounding and his throat is parched. He goes to the fridge, pours himself a glass of juice, and plunks himself down on the kitchen chair, trying to recall what happened last night. He can barely remember. There was a woman. Her name was Yucky or Yuki or something like that. She was cute. He remembers that much.

Dale downs the juice in one gulp and burps loudly. What does it matter anyway? Now it is morning. He slept alone. Bruce probably drove him home, carted him up to his apartment, and dumped him in his bed. That woman was long gone, disappeared into the mists of yesterday's memories.

Yesterday's memories. Yesterday. Memories. He sang such songs. He must've sung them all with her. Every last one in that stupid little songbook. Then afterwards,

they sat down and talked about Japan. He told her all about his life there, the scholarship he had gotten, the university he went to, the dorm that he lived in, the station he went to, the line that he rode. He told her everything he knew about Tokyo.

She turned to him then and said coyly, "*Anata Nihongo wo wakaru no, neh?* You understand Japanese, don't you?"

And Dale had nodded, shyly. But he continued speaking in English. He was wary of using his Japanese. He would never forget how speaking Japanese had caused him so much trouble with the Murai Gardens project. The Japanese architect on the project, Nakatsui, had looked at him with his eyes narrowed and said *Omae-san Nipponjin ka? Are you Japanese?* Dale replied in Japanese *Ii-ee, Nikkei-jin desu. No, I'm Japanese Canadian.* Nakatsui then leaned his wiry body towards Dale, inspecting him. The lines in his face were gritty and angular; his eyes squinting and suspicious. He opened his mouth a little, exposing a row of yellowed teeth with one silver tooth gleaming in the front. Dale drew back, regretting that he had spoken Japanese to the man.

Everything about the Murai Gardens project had gone wrong from the start. The land on which the gardens were to be made was owned by the City. A Japanese Buddhist sect owned the neighbouring lot and had built a huge temple on the site a few years earlier. It had been decided by the City and the temple that a Japanese Garden would be put on the city lot, but in a classic case of misunderstanding, the sect believed itself to be responsible for the design of the garden. They sent for the well known Japanese landscape architect, Goro Nakataui. City park officials were upset because they had not been consulted in the matter, so Dale was immediately assigned to the job as the city park's

landscape advisor. He had been hired by the City only months before and suddenly he was assigned to co-design a park with the reknowned Nakatsui.

Dale had heard about Nakatsui when he was in Japan. Nakatsui was a maverick in landscape design. He came from a small backwater town in northern Japan and had no formal training in landscape architecture. He had started as a lowly gardener and worked his way up through gardening into design. The excellent quality of his garden design gained attention and his reputation grew. By the time Dale had heard of him, Nakatsui was doing some major landscape design commissions for large corporations and government bodies.

Dale understood that he was subordinate to Nakatsui, but he was unprepared for Nakatsui's abrupt manner in letting him know *how* subordinate. For the first few days on the job, Nakatsui barked commands at Dale. *Pencil! More paper! Empty the garbage!* Dale couldn't believe his ears; still he obeyed, hoping Nakatsui would eventually reveal his plans to him. But it soon became apparent Nakatsui had no intention of sharing anything with Dale. He continued bossing Dale around, sending him on meaningless errands. Dale began to catch on. He realized that he had to be accountable to the City somehow. Furtively he started photocopying Nakatsui's sketches whenever Nakatsui stepped out of the office. Later, after hours, he pieced together the design from the sketches and drew up blueprints for City files. It was like working out a puzzle.

Finally, in a fit of frustration, Dale assembled his blueprints and dumped them on Nakatsui's desk.

"Mr. Nakatsui, as much as I respect your work, you have been most

uncooperative." Dale spoke loudly in English.

Nakatsui looked up. "*(Omae nani wo iutorunda? What are you saying, boy?)*"

"See these blueprints here? This is what I've pieced together from your shitty sketches, all right?" Dale rolled the blueprints out in front of Nakatsui.

Nakatsui folded his arms across his chest and carefully scrutinized the work.

"*Koko machigatterun da. You've made a mistake here.*" Nakatsui pointed, his brow furrowed. Then he looked to Dale and suddenly grinned. His silver tooth flashed brightly.

"*(Omae gambattanda! You really worked hard, boy! I'm impressed!)*"

Dale rolled his eyes. From then on there was a distinct change in Nakatsui's attitude. But that meant arguing over everything. Like the placement of trees.

"One pine tree. Over there. *Ippon no matsu. Asoko.*" Dale pointed to a spot.

"*Da-me! No!*" Nakatsui shook his head vehemently. "*Wa ja nai! It is not the right wa.*"

Wa -- that mysterious Japanese word for harmony. Over and over, Dale would hear the word from Nakatsui. Everything had to be *wa* in Japan. But *wa* was achieved through intuition; it was guessed at, groped for. When it was achieved it was as clear as a bell. You just knew it was right. You just *felt* it.

"*Wa desu yo! It is wa!*" Dale blurted out at last. "*Kanada no wa.*"

Nakatsui fell silent. He crossed his arms over his chest. Then he grunted and walked off. That was the last time Dale spoke Japanese to Nakatsui. In fact, it was the last time he had spoken Japanese to anyone. He had never thought he would have to

speaking it to anyone again, but now with this woman --

Dale sighed. Why was he being so hopeful? Things weren't going to go anywhere. He had just met a woman in a bar. That was all.

Frustrated, he thrust his hand into his pocket. He felt a piece of paper. Quickly, he pulled it out.

Ikki Matsumoto 487-3216.

Ikki. *That* was her name. What strange luck! And he had never even remembered receiving this note. She must have just slipped it into his pocket.

Dale dialled the number right away. A distinctly Japanese voice answered.

"Harro?"

"Ikki? This is Dale Horiuchi, from last night."

"Deh-ru?"

Dale's stomach tightened. "Ah, yeah, Dale. We met at Roppongi's last night. We sang together. You gave me your phone number."

"I don't remembah give numbah you".

Dale felt his face go red. Maybe he would just forget about this. Hang up.

"You ask me, remembah?" There was bright laughter on the other end.

"I did?"

"Yah. You must be drink too much. Your face berry red."

Not as red as now, Dale thought. Luckily, he was on the phone.

"Ah, well, ah -- would you like to, um, go out to a movie with me? Maybe Tuesday night?"

"Yeah. Berry good. Which one?"

Dale did not respond. He was stunned by the answer.

"Harro? Are you there? Mistah Deh-ru?"

Dale watered his plants for the fifth time. He looked nervously up at the kitchen clock. In five minutes he would leave for the theatre.

The phone rang. Dale froze. *She is cancelling on me, I know it.* He picked up the phone warily.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Horiuchi -- this is Sally McKay at the Glenwood. Your father's acting up again. Can you please come down?"

"Ah -- yeah, all right. I guess I'll be there as soon as I can get there."

"Thank you."

Dale hung up the phone. He quickly called Ikki but there was no answer. She had probably left already.

***Damn!* Dale banged the shelf with his hand. Water spilled out of the plant he had watered.**

When Dale arrived at the Glenwood, he could hear his father yelling from down the hall.

"Camera! My camera! I want my camera back!"

"Dad!" Dale said crisply as he entered the room. "I'm here."

The old man squinted his eyes and then slumped back onto the pillow, muttering, "I want my camera back."

Dale went to his father's bedside. The old man looked up at him, his eyes round and watery. Spittle was on his lips.

"Where's Mom?"

"She went to Hope to see Betty Iwanami."

"Where's Mom?"

"Dad, she went to Hope."

"She left me."

"No, she didn't. She's just gone for a few days."

"I'm no good no more. She left me."

The old man abruptly turned the other way.

"Dad, it's okay."

"I want my camera."

Dale sighed and slumped down in the familiar chair by the bed. His father said the same thing every time. *I want my camera.* At first, they didn't know what he was talking about. Then they brought in Dale's old Nikon and he looked at it and said it was the wrong one. He said he wanted the one *they* took. *Who* took? Dale asked. Them. The Mounties. Dale couldn't believe his ears. He wanted the camera back that they took from him in 1942.

Now the old man used the camera as a way of getting attention. Everyone knew how impossible his request was. Dale had asked his mother about the camera, but she did

not know anything about it. *Your father and I didn't meet, you know, until we were in Toronto*, she said. *He must've had that camera while he was on the coast working for his uncle. Our family was from Mission; we didn't know much about what was going on with the community on the coast. People told me your Dad was a great one for the photography. Took pictures for the TAIRIKU newspaper.* Dale's mother and father had both been relocated, but to different camps. They met at some social gathering for displaced Nikkeis in Toronto in 1949. By the time they met, they were older, his father forty, his mother thirty six. They married quickly. Dale was born soon after, their only child.

"They were lucky to have found each other," Dale's spinster aunt had said. "A lot of us couldn't find anyone in those days. We were just so scattered around, you know."

Dale had grown up in the quiet suburb of Scarborough. When his father retired in the early seventies, he decided he wanted to go back to the West Coast. It was a strange decision, unprompted by anything Dale had seen in his father while he was growing up. His father never talked about the past. And then all of a sudden he was talking about the coast.

Bulky, he said. *I want to go home.*

There were a couple of vacation trips out West, but then one summer he and Mother came back with news for Dale. They had bought a house in Burnaby.

"It's beautiful. You can see the mountains from our house. There's a university there you can go to, eh?" His mother seemed to sense Dale's apprehension. He was planning on entering the U. of T. that fall.

Dale changed his registration to enroll at Simon Fraser University

"I hear it's a pretty radical school," a Scarborough friend told him.

Radical. Dale laughed at the word. He was anything but. He supposed he could have stayed in Toronto; his parents certainly would not have stopped him. But he had wondered, *Who'll look after them out there?*

"Dad?" Dale looked at his father. The old man had fallen back onto the bed, the grey stubbled head barely indenting the pillow. His eyes were closed. His gaunt, hollow cheeks rose and fell with the breath of sleep.

Nen, nen, korori. The words of a Japanese lullaby. Dale did not know the whole song. Just the opening words, *Nen, nen, korori.* Everything Japanese was that way for him.

"Mr. Horiuchi?" a sharp, clipped woman's voice came from the door. It was Penny, the Filipino nurse. Dale knew he could leave. Father was all right with Penny. Nothing was ever said, but it was understood by all on staff that only Penny could comfort the old man. He spoke Japanese to her sometimes, told her about his parents.

"Talkie, talkie, talkie to me all the time!" Penny said, laughing. "Then he say he want to know everything about the Philippines. Silly boy! I be in Canada fifteen years!"

Dale was embarrassed for his father. So blatantly selective -- racist, even. Had not the war years taught him something?

Apparently not. But when Dale looked back on his father's life, he could see how

awkward his father's relationships with most *hakujin* had been. He either flinched in their presence or boasted pathetically about his achievements. He was never comfortable around them. All his leisure time was spent with other Nikkeis -- he curled regularly in a Nisei league, helped out at Centre fundraising activities, went to the Japanese Buddhist Church.

The only *hakujin* Dale's father had been truly comfortable with was Mr. Edelstein, his father's boss. Mr. Edelstein was Jewish. *It's different with him*, he had overheard his father say once to a Nisei friend. *The Jews are all different*, the friend replied, *they're the only ones that gave us jobs*.

But clearly as far as race was concerned, Mr. Edelstein was *hakujin*. And Penny? Well, she certainly was not *hakujin* but she wasn't *Nikkeijin*, either. Dale wondered sometimes about the whole issue of race. There were days when he thought it all seemed so arbitrary.

Dale got into his car and looked at his watch. Eight o'clock. He drove to the movie theatre, parked his car and ran up to the ticket window. It was closed. The show had already started.

Dammit all! Dale thought. Sullenly, he walked down the street. *Why does this always happen to me?* Things never seemed to go right with him when it came to women. Here he was, forty-two and still without a wife. He had never wanted it this way.

Dale let out a long, low breath. He could count on his fingers the women he had

dated seriously. Lisa Chan, second year university. Six months. Then there was the relationship he had in Japan with that Brazilian Nikkei, Nina Goto, but of course that ended after a year when Dale came back to Canada. After that was Marie Sakimoto from Richmond. They worked on Redress together as volunteers. It lasted a year and a half until Marie went to California for design school. She never came back. And then there was Sandra Kawanishi. That was probably the most promising relationship. If only she had not gone back to Toronto.

For every phase of Dale's life, there had been a woman. But like the moon in the calendar, love grew full, waxed and then waned.

"Love is not a permanent arrangement, you know," Bruce said once, "unless you *decide* to make it one."

Decide? The word sounded peculiar and cold, not at all related to the surge and thunder of emotion that rippled through Dale's heart. *That* happened every time. Love was a thick gauze of feelings, bandaging over and over again wounds from previous involvements.

Dale stopped, looked idly through a shop window. A beautiful Asian woman in a white suit was standing behind a counter arranging jewellery.

They were all beautiful. All Asian women. Even his quiet, delicate mother, his loud portly Aunt Susie, his opinionated Sansei girlfriends, Marie and Sandra. There was not ever a moment when he thought they were ugly.

Perhaps that was his greatest fault. All perfection and happiness was embodied in women -- mother, aunt, lover.

"You have a Kuan Yin complex," Chin told him. "All women to you are goddesses of infinite mercy."

Dale laughed quietly. *Goddesses of infinite mercy.* He looked to the window to see if the goddess was still there. She had disappeared as if swallowed by the wispy clouds that had floated her to the land of mortals. Dale stood, his shoulders hunched to the glass. How forlorn he felt!

"Deh-ru! Mistah Dehru!" a bright voice called.

Dale swerved his head. He saw an arm waving from a nearby outdoor cafe. A striped arm. It was Ikki.

"Come, come!" she said, calling him over with that particular downward Japanese hand movement. She did not seem at all disturbed, but rather, glad to see him.

Dale felt a bounce in his step as he headed towards her.

For a month, Dale felt he was floating on air. The goddess, indeed, had come for him. The strangest one of them all, this Japanese woman who wore floppy hats and striped panty hose, who laughed loudly without covering her mouth, who had a passion for flavoured popcorn and watching football. She was on a working holiday visa; she worked at the Minshu Mainichi New Immigrant Newspaper. *I do everything,* she said. *Word-processing, type, write stories, take photo, clean office. Minshu is very small.*

She read aloud to Dale the articles she wrote. "Adjusting to Life in Canada," "The Working Holiday Visa -- Finding A Job," "Football in Canada." This week it was "Spring

in Vancouver" -- an appropriate article to take on their weekend stroll around the Sea Wall. They usually stopped at a bench with a bag of popcorn so Ikki could read out her article.

It was years since Dale had been exposed to so much Japanese at once. It was pleasant to listen to it now, sitting on the bench with a box of popcorn in his hand as Ikki read her article aloud. He did not understand everything but could get the main points Dale had abandoned serious Japanese language study since he had come back from Japan. Japanese was such a difficult language. *The Devil's tongue*, Xavier the Jesuit missionary had called it. Dale had agreed. He had never spoken a word of Japanese until he took his first language course in university. His parents spoke English at home. That was natural enough for Dale's mother, a Nisei, but Dale's father also spoke English even though he had been born in Japan and had come to Canada when he was fifteen. There would be an odd slip here and there in his father's conversations, a Japanese word spoken for an English one, but for the most part Dale's father talked like any other Nisei. When Dale came back from Japan, his head full of the language, his father spoke more Japanese to him -- not just simple words for objects, but more complex words like *minshu-shugi* democracy, *kaishu* freedom, *kenri* rights. That was the time of Redress.

Dale leaned forward on the bench -- his mind had clearly wandered off while Ikki was reading. But she had stopped now, suddenly, in mid-sentence. She was looking at a couple walking by -- a young Japanese woman wearing an expensive-looking pink suit with black cuffs, clinging to the arm of a young man who looked like a university student. The woman glanced at Ikki and then at Dale. She turned away and clutched her man's

arm tighter, a thin smile on her face.

Ikki shook her head.

"*Yellow Cab*," she muttered.

"What? What's that?"

"Japanese girl who look for *gaijin* boyfriend. That's *Yellow Cab*. They go to America or Europe with parents' money and then find *gaijin* boyfriend and spend all their money on them. *Mitomanai yo*. It's disgusting."

"Oh." Dale put the popcorn down. "So what do you think about Japanese girls having *hakujin*, I mean, *gaijin* boyfriends? Is it wrong?"

Ikki shrugged her shoulders.

"No, it's okay if you *really* love *gaijin*. It's doesn't matter if you *really* love the person -- *gaijin*, *Nipponjin*, whatever."

"*Nikkeijin wa?*" Dale said shyly.

Ikki laughed. "Don't matter such thing. Personality matter, neh? You have nice personality, Dehru-san."

Dale leaned back onto the bench, elated. Perhaps it was a sugar high. All that green popcorn.

"Now, I read you my end article. I write haiku when I was in park."

*Ippon no matsu
Waga hitori mono
samishi koe*

"*Ippon no matsu?*" Dale sat up. "Where did you see this *ippon no matsu*? This one pine tree?"

"At the Murai Gardens. You know?"

"Yes, I know," Dale said excitedly. "The tree is near the bridge right? You can see it just after you cross over."

"Yes! How you know?"

Dale laughed and laughed. He couldn't stop. *I indicated at last*, he thought. Despite what Nakatsui had said, he had known from the start that a tree should go in that spot. The tree would draw the eye of the viewer from the bridge to the hill, causing the viewer to reflect on the tree's lone presence. Dale had learned in Japan what objects in nature were cause for reflection -- the lone pine tree, the gnarled branch, the displaced stone. He had learned these things in spite of Goro Nakatsui. Nakatsui only knew *when* things felt right but could not explain *why* they felt right.

"Ikki, can you read that haiku again?"

Ikki nodded.

*ippon no matsu
Waga hitori mono
samishi koe*

*one pine tree
as if to say 'only me'
how lonely its voice*

Dale smiled contentedly. He would photocopy that haiku, tape it to his desk at work.

"Let's go walk now," Ikki said.

"Sure, where would you like to go?"

"Let's go Gastown."

They got up and headed towards that part of town. Ikki slipped her hand into Dale's.

"I miss my family sometimes, you know," she said. "How about you? What about your family?"

"We-ll," Dale said tentatively, "They're here, so I guess I don't really miss them."

"I miss my *Obaachan* the most. She died last year. I was *Obaachan sodachi*, you know, raised by my Grandmother. My Mama was very modern; she wanted work, so Obaachan looked after me. She read books and told me stories. Before I was in school, Obaachan and I would watch the morning weather report on TV, and then we'd go for walk. Mama says my first words were 'Sunny with cloudy patches, temperature twenty-two degrees.' Isn't that funny?"

Dale squeezed Ikki's hand.

"How about you, Dehru-san, your family?"

Dale smiled uneasily. He did not want to talk about his parents. *They* were the reason he and Sandra had broken it off. He remembered the argument. They were in his apartment kitchen. The engagement ring was back in his pocket.

-- Look, I'm only here temporarily. Don't you understand that, Dale? Why don't you come back to Toronto with me? Toronto's your home, too.

-- It would be nothing to get into a law firm here, Sandra. You'd make more money here.

-- It's not money I want -- or even a good job, really. It's just that --

-- What?

-- My parents are in Toronto.

-- Mine are here.

-- So, don't you see? This just isn't going to work. I'm sorry, Dale.

"Hey, look!" Ikki squeezed Dale's hand, stirring him out of his thoughts. "Shop full of old stuff, let's go in!"

They stepped in. Ikki went to inspect some clothing. Dale hung around a glass counter filled with knickknacks. He noticed a camera. It was old, looked like something from the thirties. Dale asked to look at it. On a whim, he bought it. *For Dad*, he thought.

They left the shop and sauntered down the streets of Gastown. They ended up on Powell Street. There, at one of the Chinese markets with Ikki looking at some fruit a few feet away, Dale bumped into his mother.

"Mom, what are you doing here?"

"Shopping for supper. I've just been with your Dad. He was acting up again this morning, so I had to hurry over."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"You were out. It's okay, the bus got me there very quickly. You're still coming over for supper, aren't you?"

Dale glanced uneasily at Ikki who was inspecting some fruit a few feet away.

"Ah? You are with a girl, neh?" His mother craned her neck. "She looks like she's from Japan. Why don't you come home with me now? You can bring her too. It's been a long time since we've had company."

Dale introduced Ikki to his mother. Ikki bowed. Dale's mother bowed back, slightly embarrassed.

"Horiuchi-san," Ikki began. *"Nihongo hanashite mo ii desu ka? May I speak Japanese to you, Mrs. Horiuchi?"*

"Please -- eh, kamaimasen. It does not matter. But you must excuse me, my Japanese is very poor."

"She understands everything, though," Dale interrupted.

Ikki smiled. *"I know. It very comfortable for me to speak Japanese your mother."*

Dale went to fetch his car while Ikki and his mother shopped. He picked them up and drove them to his mother's house. Ikki insisted on helping Dale's mother prepare supper. *I always helped my Obaa-chan cook supper for the family,* she said.

Dale sat down to inspect the camera he had bought. The phone rang. Dale's mother hurried to it, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Horiuchi. Oh, I see. But he seemed all right this morning. You would like me to come, now? Yes. Well, I'll try and be there as soon as possible."

Dale stood up.

"It's Dad, isn't it? You have to go."

Dale's mother shrunk beside the phone. *"But I was there already this morning. I ... I'm so -- "*

His mother's voice trailed off. She glanced at Ikki and then at Dale. Dale squinted judgmentally. His mother looked down. Her hand was trembling.

"Never mind, Mother. I'll go."

"Oh, will you?"

Dale picked up the camera. He looked at Ikki. She turned abruptly to his mother

"Horiuchi-san, what should I do with these carrots?"

Dale hurried down the corridor to his father's room.

Camera, my camera! I want my camera!

"Mr. Horiuchi, please calm down. Your wife will be here shortly."

Dale stepped into the room. The nurse quickly retreated.

"Dad!"

"You? What are you doing here? Where's your mother?"

"She ... she's not feeling well."

"Honto ka? She was here this morning! Sick of me, eh? That's what she is, eh?"

Dale did not answer.

"She run off to Hope and now she thinks she doesn't have to come see me any more. That's it, isn't it?"

Dale looked at his father. Spittle shone on his lips; his eyes were dark and bloodshot.

"Well you tell her I don't want her to come any more. She can stay at home, I don't care," the old man sputtered angrily.

"Look Dad, I brought you something. Your camera. See?"

The old man examined the camera.

"Pfft! This isn't it!"

"Well, gee, I'm sorry," Dale said coldly, about to take the camera away.

"No -- " the old man's voice changed to a whimper. "Don't take it away. Let me see it. I want to see it closer."

The old man took the camera. He examined it intently, cradling it in one arm. Then he raised it with his one good arm and aimed it at the window. His face grew wan, the anger lines sagging into wrinkles. He squinted, attempting to focus.

Outside, it was dark. There was nothing to see but the empty metal frame with its loose blinds.

The old man spoke slowly, softly.

The camera I had was special -- a German one. I paid a lot of money for it back then. I wanted to take pictures, be a professional. People said I had the knack, said I could do it. I was working on my uncle's farm then, trying to save up enough to start my own studio.

Then the war came. They took our things. I didn't care that they took our radio -- I never listened to that dumb old box anyway. But they did take my camera. I'd taken photos for the TAIRIKU, see -- they thought I might be a subversive. Jeez -- I'd only taken pictures of picnics and berry-picking and stuff like that.

Then they sent us to road camp. It was the first time I'd been anywhere beyond the coast. I was on that train thinkin' -- Hey this is an adventure! The other guys were all worried, you know -- they had families -- but I was single and my parents were dead.

When we got to the mountains, I was stretching my neck so hard at that window

my jaw hurt. I'd never seen anything so beautiful. The Japanese think they've got the most beautiful mountain in the world, but Fuji-san's only one mountain. Canada has so many Fuji-sans you can't blink without seeing one.

Everyday working on them roads, I would see those mountains.

I'd stop what I was doing, look up and frame a shot.

Click!

That's a shot of Silver Mountain.

Click!

That's a shot of Ruby Creek.

Click!

That's a shot of the boys in front of the falls.

I took so many pictures, they'd fill albums. They'd have been good pictures too, because everything was new to me. Fresh.

But like I said, we weren't allowed no cameras then.

Nobody.

The old man stopped speaking. Then, slowly, his arm came down. The camera slid out of his hands.

It was like we were nothing then. Nothing. We didn't matter; we were no good. Just a nuisance. Like I am now. A big nuisance.

A low wail came out of the old man's mouth.

"Dad?" Dale leaned over.

His father turned his gaunt face towards Dale.

I'm a nothing, son. A nothing.

Dale turned away, closed his eyes to gain his composure. Then, without speaking, he took the camera from his father and let the old man weep.

By the time Dale returned home, Ikki had left.

"She took the bus," his mother said, reheating his food. "She didn't want to be a bother." Dale noticed his mother's trembling hand as she set his plate in front of him.

"Did she eat, at least?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. We made lots of *gyudon*. I'll take it to your father tomorrow." His mother paused. "How was he?"

"Fine." Dale snapped his chopsticks and began to eat. He ate silently, steadily like when he was a child.

His mother sat in front of him, her hands folded in her lap.

"You know," she said timidly. "That Ikki is a very nice girl."

Dale looked up.

"You think so?"

"I ... I enjoyed this evening very much, even though ... your Dad ... Well, I ... shouldn't have, I guess, I ... I'm sorry, Dale."

His mother put her hands to her face. Small muffled sobs shook her body. Dale looked down at his food. He could hear the clock above him, ticking loudly.

A week later, Dale's father passed away. Quietly, on Penny's shift. *Toki ga kitta* -- the time had come, said the *o-ho-san*, the priest. He came to the house to burn a stick of incense at the family altar. Dale's mother had put a photo of the old man in the altar beside the crinkling yellowed photos of his mother and father.

The day of the funeral was cold but clear. Inside the temple when the *o-ho-san* finished his sermon, Dale noticed Ikki standing with a group of mourners in the back. He wondered how she had found out. When she came to the front to pay her respects, a ripple of breath filled the room. Ikki was wearing yellow stockings, bright as the sun. She pulled out a string of beads from her pocket and put them on her hands. She bowed to the body. Then she turned to Dale and bowed again.

Dale returned her bow, thinking only foolishly. *When is she going back, when can I ask her to marry me?*

MICHIYO

She came in November. I remember the day because it had been the coldest one so far that winter. She was waiting for me in the front hall of the YWCA just as Mother had told me she would be. I had never met her in my life although Mother spoke of her now and then when she talked about her days studying English in the New Canadians language program offered at the local high school.

Michiyo was a quiet woman, very refined. I'm sure she came from a wealthy family -- she had an exquisite taste for things -- but she never told us anything about her family or her life. I asked her to come to our house many times but she always refused.

In those days, Mother was always inviting Japanese foreigners to our house and most people accepted the invitation; it was a very different Japanese person who would decline my mother's hospitality.

Michiyo stood up when she saw me. She was a small, thin woman who looked about thirty-five. Her hair was pulled back in a bun and her face neatly and naturally made-up -- not in the usual pale and overly-white way most Japanese women make up their faces. She was wearing a thin brown coat with a pink crepe scarf wrapped around her neck. Her shoulders were hunched over, and her handbag hung limply on the crook

of her arm.

"You are Etsuko-san's daughter?" she asked me in halting English

"*Hai so-desu.*" I nodded.

She looked relieved and began speaking in Japanese. *Thank you for coming to pick me up. How's your mother? Is she well?*

Mother told me Michiyo was shy. She had trouble in English class because she was too afraid to speak up. She did not stay for the duration of the course, but mysteriously disappeared after a couple of months. It was not until nearly a year later that Mother received a hastily scribbled postcard from her from France. That was almost four years ago.

Two nights ago, Michiyo phoned our place at two o'clock in the morning. She was calling from Narita airport to tell us she was planning to arrive in Edmonton the following day. She wanted to meet Mother. Mother offered her a room at our house. Father was away on business for a couple of weeks and there was a spare bed in the den. But Michiyo refused. She said she was going to stay elsewhere.

As it turned out, elsewhere was the YWCA. For a woman who I presumed came from a wealthy family, the Y seemed an odd place for her. As for her exquisite taste in things -- the only trace of such taste was in her small handbag made out of a wine colored leather with a gold clasp on the front. Otherwise she appeared plain and unadorned.

We walked out together to the car which I had parked a block away. The wind was biting cold and even I was chilled in my heavy winter coat. Michiyo was visibly shivering, she was hugging herself, her arms tightly wrapped around her body. She did not have gloves and there were no pockets in her coat. I wondered why she had come back to Canada so unprepared for a winter she had probably experienced before.

When we got into the car, Michiyo sat in the back seat. It seemed she did not want to sit in the front to chat with me. I started the car and headed down the hill towards the river valley. Everything in sight was clear and white except for the roads that criss-crossed the valley like dark winter branches. Occasionally I glanced at the rear-view mirror. Michiyo was staring out at the wintry landscape as if transfixed.

When we arrived at the house, Mother swept in on Michiyo right away with her typical maternal chidings in Japanese about the weather and Michiyo's pitifully thin apparel. Michiyo responded warmly and I felt instantly unburdened of her silent company. Mother took her into the kitchen. I sat in the living room and picked up a magazine. I could hear most of their conversation.

And so you've come here to see him, have you? It was Mother speaking. Do you think he wants to see you now? You've been separated so long. You know, I can barely remember him from class. So how long has it been? Since France?

There was a long silence. Then Michiyo's quiet voice.

Not since France. He tried to get me into Iran; tried to get me a visa, but it was dangerous then and his family would not sponsor me. I had to return to Japan.

And so when did you find out he was married?

Two months ago. She's an Iranian-Canadian. He married her in Iran so he could leave the country. I know it. He's back in Edmonton now.

How do you know all of this?

His wife wrote me. Sent me a picture of their wedding. He must have told her about us. There was silence and then a huff from Mother

It's too late now. He is married.

He married her because he wanted to get out of the country.

How do you know that?

I just know.

And so you are here just to see him? To change his mind? Does he know you are here at all?

No.

Well, that's silly. How are you ever going to find him?

There was a long pause. I leaned over. Michiyo's voice was now a whisper

I will find him. I know I will.

Michiyo wanted me to show her the sights around Edmonton even though she had been there before. I would like to see the university, she said knowing I was a student there. I was in my first year of arts. My favorite classes were that day -- a modern poetry class and a creative writing class. I told Michiyo I wrote poetry.

"That's wonderful," she said. "Many people in Japan write poetry. My mother and

I used to write haiku "

A mother and daughter writing haiku together. I could not imagine. When I thought of Japan, I always thought of Mother and her straightforward, matter-of-fact ways of doing things. Japan was embodied in her. Japan was polite efficiency.

I left Michiyo in the campus bookstore while I went to class. When I came to pick her up for lunch, she showed me a book she had bought. It was *Snow Country* by Yasunari Kawabata. The cover showed a beautiful woman in a kimono standing on a snowy street holding a dark red parasol. She was looking demurely, wistfully, behind her at a man walking away from her.

"That is Komako," Michiyo said. "She is the main character in the book."

I nodded. I had not read the book. I wondered why Michiyo had bought it -- especially an English translation of a book written in her own language.

"Komako, you see, was impatient for love. She tried to deny it and yet she was drowning in it -- in her passion for a man. That is why I like her. She loved with her whole heart."

"Oh," I said. I took the book out of her hands and idly flipped through it.

Komako. I found the name of the character. It seemed she was a geisha.

"Listen -- " Michiyo leaned towards me. "Can you help me find an apartment here?"

"An apartment?"

"I must move out of the Y."

"We'll sure," I said tentatively. "There are apartments around, but you usually have

to stay longer than a month."

"That is fine," Michiyo said. "An apartment-hotel is what I'm looking for. The kind that is completely furnished, where you can stay for a number of weeks."

It will be expensive, I thought. Michiyo seemed to have little money, I had offered to pay for her lunch and she had not protested.

I took her to the only apartment-hotel that I knew of. It was downtown. As I proceeded to check her in, she slipped away to a nearby telephone. From the corner of my eye, I could see her anxiously fumbling through what looked like a small address book. She picked up the receiver.

"Miss --" the clerk said to me. "Her room will be number 805."

I took the key and waited for Michiyo to finish her call. She came back to the front desk, her face distraught, but she did not say anything. She opened her handbag and pulled out a gold compact. I could tell she had been crying. She dabbed a little powder underneath her eyes.

"Do I look all right?" she asked.

"Sure," I said. She blinked. The powder formed a damp, wrinkled cake beneath her lower eyelid.

I handed her the keys, hoping she would invite me up to see her room, but she seemed in a hurry as if wanting to be rid of me.

"Thank you very much," she said, nervously glancing back at the glass door. "That will be all. You've been a great help. And tell your mother thank you. Tell her I'll be all right now."

I nodded and walked her to the elevator. She bowed to me slightly before the heavy metal doors slid shut.

I stood there for a moment, wondering what to do. The bus stop was in front of the apartment-hotel, but the bus going back to the university would not be there for another twenty minutes. I sat down on one of the lobby chairs and pulled out my poetry book to read our assignment for the week. We were doing Yeats' "The Song of the Happy Shepherd."

*The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Gray Truth is now her painted toy;
Yet still she turns her restless head:*

A cold blast of air blew in through the front door. I looked up. A dark-haired man walked in, holding a little girl in a yellow snowsuit. He looked agitated as he strode up to the front desk. No one was there. He nervously tapped the counter with his gloved fist. The child, whom he had let down on the ground began to cry. The man spoke softly to her in another language and gave her her soother. Finally the clerk arrived.

"Miss Enomoto -- what room?" The man asked abruptly.

"Room 805," the clerk replied. "She just checked in."

I stood up to leave. My bus had arrived.

When I got home that evening, I heard Mother on the phone.

"And so I told her it was silly to have come all the way over here just for his sake

as if she could salvage something of this."

I sat down at the kitchen table where Jake my younger brother was noisily slurping at a bowl of cereal. He was reading a comic.

"Who's Mom talking to?" I whispered.

"Atsuko-san at the Consulate's office," Jake replied, turning over the page of his comic. He was not interested in anything but his comics and hockey cards.

"No, no -- " Mom was shaking her head. "Apparently they parted just before he returned to Iran. His family didn't approve of her, I imagine. What? She called about how to get Canadian citizenship? She only just got here! Yes, apparently he's married now, but she's treating the marriage as if it was only a formality, a way for him to get out of the country. No, I don't remember him at all. I've taken so many English classes since then."

There was a pause. Then Mother nodded her head emphatically. "I agree. It is a hopeless situation. I've been praying for her since she arrived. If I can, I will take her to Church."

I rolled my eyes. Mother's solution for everything was Church.

Mother got off the phone and looked at me. "Oh, you're home now, are you? Did you have a nice day with Michiyo?"

"Yeah," I said. "She wanted to move."

"Move? Move where?"

"To an apartment-hotel."

"Then she's found him, hasn't she?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "I saw him. He's got a kid."

My brother looked up from his comic. "She's dumb! Who would come all the way over here when it's thirty below for a married man anyway? Dumb!"

"Jake!" I said sharply. "That's mean!"

Mother laughed. Surprised, I looked at her.

"We-ll, you know Jake is right," Mother said. "She is rather silly coming all this way."

Jake stuck his tongue out at me and smugly resumed eating his cereal. I poked him in the side. "Well, you don't know what it is to be in love so much that -- "

"You're blind," Mother finished my sentence. "There is nothing anyone can do for someone like that except pray for them. Prayer, I say, makes all the difference."

I groaned. Jake snickered at me.

"You're dumb too," he said. "You don't know what it's like to be in love either."

We did not see Michiyo for five days. There was no mention of her around the house except for Mother's occasional worried remark. *I wonder how she is doing? I hope she has gotten herself some proper winter clothing.*

Mother's concerns were always so practical, I thought one evening as I stood by the living room window. But I had different concerns. I stared at the falling snow. *I wonder what snow is like in Japan?* I thought, remembering the cover of *Snow Country*. I imagined a small Japanese inn with sliding paper doors opening onto the verandah where

you could sit and look out at a garden. All the leafy curves and shapes of the trees and shrubs would be softly dusted in white, a faint and delicate trace of green visible through the snow. And there would be the woman, kneeling in her kimono, her face towards the garden, her hands folded in her lap. Small wisps of white breath would escape from her mouth as she sighed into the air. Beyond in the darkness of the room, there would be a man standing at the threshold, his face obscured in the gloom.

"Cold! Cold!" Mother said as she dragged the vacuum cleaner into the living room. She stopped to check the thermometer outside.

"Minus thirty!" she said. "Poor Michiyo -- to come at this time of year!"

"Yes," I replied softly. "Isn't it sad?"

"Don't forget to pray for her," Mother said, starting up the vacuum. The noise was deafening.

I left the living room and went downstairs to my desk to jot down a few of my impressions.

*Snow, soft snow gentle as love
that will soon melt, disappear*

Somehow that was not right. Canadian snow was not like that. It was hard and brittle. But how could I make a poem about hard snow?

*Snow, hard snow cold as love
that stings, cuts then disappears
into sudden spring.*

I put down my pen and re-read the poem. It did not sound the way I wanted it to sound and it had an altogether different meaning than I intended. I got up and walked over to a

bookshelf full of Mother's old books from Japan. Maybe there would be a book of pictures of a snowy Japan, the kind I had imagined. I ran my finger over the titles, sounding them out like a child. MA-DA-MU BO-BAH-RI, TES-SU, JAY-NU OH-SU-TEN, YU-RI-SHE-ZU, MO-BI DIK-KU. I sighed. Mother had all the great western classics in beautifully bound hardbacks, the gold *katakana* titles embossed on the spine. But where were the Japanese books? In the corner of the shelf, I found at last a small, thin paperback. The title was in a *kanji* I could easily read -- *Yuki-guni*. Snow Country. I picked up the book, and although I knew I could not read it well I eagerly took it upstairs.

The vacuum cleaner lay abandoned in the middle of the living room. Mother was hastily putting on her coat.

"Michiyo called," she said anxiously. "She wants to see me."

She opened the door. A cold rush of air swept into the room.

"Get the bed ready in the den," she said before heading out into the snowy darkness.

It was late when Michiyo arrived at the house. I was already in bed, my light turned out. I could hear the padding of footsteps into the kitchen, the voice of mother. It was as if she spoke to silence, for I could not hear Michiyo's voice at all.

I closed my eyes and tried to remember the man I had seen in the apartment-hotel. I tried to imagine him with Michiyo, but all I could see was his gloved fist pounding impatiently against the counter and the little child in the yellow snowsuit crying beside

him.

Next door I could hear my brother's wheezy snores through the wall. He had asthma and was always needing to take some sort of medication. Tonight it seemed his breathing was noisier than it ever was, an annoying whistling rhythm of sound that demanded more attention than it deserved. I wished I could turn it off, listen to the soft voices below, hear the sad story of failed love.

The next morning I hurried downstairs. Mother was awake already, doing the laundry.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well nothing we didn't expect," Mother said. She pointed to the wastebasket where there was a fluff of used tissues. "Poor deluded girl. Of course, the affair was doomed to end. I can't help but wonder why she would think otherwise. He did lead her on though -- spending those days with her -- can you imagine?"

"Perhaps he still loves her," I said.

"But he has a child now," Mother said, pressing one of my blouses. "Things are different when you have children. Your children become the most precious things and you will try to do everything you can to protect them."

"Oh," I replied. I did not find the answer very satisfactory.

Mother handed me my blouse. "Now go on," she said. "You better get ready for Church."

I took the pressed blouse upstairs to my room to change. Church was in a couple of hours. We all went to a Japanese church held in rented chapel space. Our

congregation was very small, so we had mixed services in Japanese and English. Our pastor, Pastor Shiotani, was from Japan, he was a very friendly and relaxed man even though he had only been in Canada for five years.

I put on the blouse and looked in the mirror. The blouse was from Japan. I was always wearing things from Japan. Clothes were of better quality there, of better design. I looked at my round, white face with its two small eyes. My black hair was straight and fine, cut in a bob. I could just as well be Japanese. Judging by the mirror, no one could tell the difference. And yet I *felt* different. I wasn't Japanese. I wasn't at all like Michiyo.

By the time we were ready to leave for church, Michiyo was up. She was coming with us; Mother was making sure of that. We all put on our coats and got into the car. It was a warm day, warmer than usual, and the sun was shining brightly.

When we arrived at the church, Pastor Shiotani was at the door shaking everyone's hand before the service. He had somehow gotten the custom reversed, but no one in the Sunday school had the heart to tell him.

"Wonderful day!" Pastor Shiotani said to me in English. He vigorously shook my hand. "How's the pottery? Coming good, yes?"

"Poetry," I corrected, but he was already talking in Japanese to Mother.

My brother and I entered the sanctuary and sat in one of the back pews. Mother went up ahead to her usual pew in the front where she had to sit as an usher. Michiyo stayed with us but sat farther down the pew. She sat alone underneath one of the church windows. A soft red and blue light shimmered through the stained glass above her.

Pastor Shiotani strode up to the front and took his place at the pulpit. He began his address in Japanese

"Isn't it wonderful how God has made the snow stop this day? What pleasant rides we must have all enjoyed in coming to church this day!"

He cleared his throat and then stiffly spoke in English.

"What wonderful God's blue sunny day for us to see! No snow, no ice, just happy cars!"

My brother rolled his eyes. I looked over to Michiyo. She was hunched over, her hands on her purse. I could not see her face.

"Let us pray," Pastor Shiotani said.

I lowered my head, wondering all the while what Michiyo was thinking. *Why did Mother bring her here?* I thought in bitter helplessness. *What would it do?* All the unhappy, doubtful feelings I had about church and believing and God that I had with me since high school surfaced in my mind.

"We all know what the Bible says about love, don't we?" Pastor Shiotani began his sermon. "That it is patient, good, and slow to anger. But did you know that above all, love is suffering?"

I turned to Michiyo. She seemed to me the perfect picture of suffering love. An exquisite and delicate suffering, not like the heavy and morbid suffering of Christ on the cross.

"Love is suffering because we are all failures at it. We want of love things we cannot have. We expect of lovethings it cannot do for us. When we are young, we think

it means happiness. When we are old, we think it means fulfilment. When we suffer for it, give up things for it, sacrifice our lives for it, and it is not returned to us, we feel cheated and are angry and bitter and helpless. We love this way because we are broken. But we also love this way because God put in us the seed of yearning for His perfect Love. And that Love is found only in Christ."

A small murmur of assent filled the sanctuary. I looked at the people sitting all around us. There was Mr. and Mrs. Aoki who had lost their son in a car accident. There was old Mrs. Tsuruta whom everyone thought was a little crazy, rumour had it she was a prostitute in Japan in the years before the war. There was Mrs. Ichimura whose husband was never around to support her and her daughter. Beside her were the Shimadas who had lately been bringing their niece Teruko -- the one with the bandaged eye -- to church with them. Mrs. Edwards was sitting next to Mrs. Shimada, Mrs. Edwards was not a regular church goer, but she sometimes translated the church newsletter into English for people who couldn't read Japanese. In the next pew was the Hayashi family. Mr. Hayashi had been saved when he was single and working for a Japanese Canadian farmer in Redwater. Pastor Shiotani used to visit him every Saturday -- *until I got so sick of him, I just had to accept the Lord to get him off my back*, Mr. Hayashi said, a twinkle in his eye. There was Mr. and Mrs. Sakaguchi. Mr. Sakaguchi, or rather *Dr.* Sakaguchi, was a professor of religion at the university; he was always making little sniffs about this or that in Pastor Shiotani's sermons. He said he came to church only for the hymns which seemed funny to me because we didn't have one single good singer in our whole congregation. *We sing broken hymns around here*, Pastor Shiotani would say. He was fond of the word

"broken" as if all of us were these fragile glass globes floating and bouncing against each other until some tragic thing shattered us into little pieces.

I looked at Michiyo. A painful whimpering sound came out of her throat as she tried to suppress a sob with her hand. I could see a shiny trail of wetness down her eyes and nose. Strands of loose hair had fallen onto her face but she did not smooth them away. Quietly I took a tissue out of my pocket and passed it over to her. She took it, bowing her head slightly.

Everyone stood up for the last hymn. Michiyo remained sitting. She had her hands clasped together as if in prayer. Her eyes were closed.

After the service was over, I had to hurry downstairs to help the others make coffee. As I left the pew, I could see Mother going down the far aisle by the window towards Michiyo. Pastor Shiotani was directly behind her.

"Who is that?" one of the girls in the Sunday School asked me.

"No one important," I said. "Just someone from Japan Mom used to know."

We went down the stairs together and started helping the other women in the kitchen. It seemed like a long time before Mother and Pastor Shiotani came down the stairs. The tables had been set out already and the *ocha* served long ago. Mother had a weary smile on her face; her eyes were red. Pastor Shiotani was his usual jovial self, shaking everyone's hands and chatting with the others.

"Where's Michiyo?" I asked Mother.

"She is still upstairs."

I quickly slipped out of the room and went upstairs. Through the glass windows at

the back of sanctuary I could see Michiyo by herself, a dark, upright figure in the line of empty pews. She sat very quietly, her hands folded in her lap, her face raised to the stained-glass window. She was staring at the depiction of Christ's entry into Jerusalem

Two days later, Michiyo left our house to return to Japan. Before she packed away her things, she gave me the English copy of *Snow Country* she had bought in the bookstore.

"Here," she said. "When you fall in love, you will know."

I took the book and read it soon after she left. But it was not until several years later that I finally understood the bittersweet feelings of love Michiyo had experienced that cold winter my first year of university.