

ノルウェイの森 I

NORWEGIAN WOOD

I

Haruki Murakami

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Haruki Murakami

Translated by
Alfred Birnbaum

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1	7
Chapter 2	21
Chapter 3	51
Chapter 4	91
Chapter 5	163
Chapter 6	172
NOTES	275

CHAPTER 1

Here I am, thirty-seven years old, seated in a Boeing 747. The giant plane is diving into a thick cover of clouds, about to land at Hamburg Airport. A chill November rain darkens the land, turning the scene into a gloomy Flemish painting. The airport workers in their rain gear, the flags atop the faceless airport buildings, the BMW billboards, everything. Just great, I'm thinking, Germany again.

The plane completes its landing procedures, the NO SMOKING sign goes off, and soft background music issues from the ceiling speakers. Some orchestra's muzak rendition of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood." And sure enough, the melody gets to me, same as always. No, this time it's worse than ever before. I get it real bad. I swear my head is going to burst.

I crouch forward and cover my face with my hands, and I just stay like that. Eventually a German stewardess comes by to ask if I'm feeling ill. I'm fine, I answer, just a little dizzy.

"Are you sure you're all right?"

"Really, I'm fine. Thanks," I say. The stewardess smiles and heads off. Meanwhile the music changes to a Billy Joel number. I look up at the dark clouds over the North Sea and think of how many things I've lost up to now in the course of living. Lost time, people dead or gone, feelings never to return.

As the plane comes to a complete stop, all the while until people unfasten their seat belts and start taking down bags and jackets from the overhead compartments, I'm in the middle of a meadow. I can smell the grass, feel the breeze on my skin, hear the birds singing. It's the autumn of 1969. I'm about to turn twenty.

The same stewardess comes back, sits down beside me, and asks if I'm feeling better.

"I'm all right now, thank you. I was only feeling a little lonely," I say, cheerfully as I can.

"I get the same way once in a while. I know what you mean." She nods as she gets up from the seat, then turns a lovely smile my way. "I hope you have a nice trip. *Auf wiedersehen!*"

"*Auf wiedersehen!*" I echo.

Even now, eighteen years later, I can still picture the meadow with amazing clarity. Several days of drizzle had washed away the last speck of that summer's dust, bringing out a deep, vivid green in the

hills. Tall stalks of pampas grass were swaying in the October breeze, thin trailing clouds frozen precisely in place against the blue overhead. The sky reached such heights it hurt your eyes just to look at it. Her hair stirred slightly with each puff of wind that swept across the meadow and passed on to the woods. Leaves rustled in the treetops, and far off somewhere a dog was barking. Tiny muffled cries that seemed to issue from the threshold of another world. Other than that, all was silent. Not a sound reached our ears. Not a soul did we encounter. Just two bright red birds we chanced to see fly up startled from the grass, only to disappear into the woods. And as we walked, Naoko told me about a well.

Memory is a strange thing. When I was actually there, I hardly paid any attention to the scenery. It didn't impress me as particularly memorable, nor did I have any idea I'd be remembering it in minute detail eighteen years later. To be perfectly honest, at the time I couldn't have cared less about the scenery one way or the other. I was thinking about myself. I was thinking about the beautiful woman walking beside me. I was thinking about her and me, and I was thinking about myself again. I was at that age when no matter what I saw, no matter what I felt or thought, in the end it all boomer-

anged back to me. On top of which I was in love and the whole situation had put me in a difficult frame of mind. No way I'd have had a spare moment to notice the surroundings.

And yet now, the first thing that drifts into mind is that meadow. The smell of the grass, the breeze tinged with the hint of a chill, the line of hills, the dog barking, these are what come floating up first. And all too distinctly. So distinctly I feel I could almost reach out and run my fingers over each and every thing. Still, there is no one in that landscape. Not a soul. Naoko isn't there, and I'm not there, either. But where could we have disappeared to? How could this be? Everything that seemed so important at the time, her and my then-self, my own little world, where had they gone? Why, I can't even picture Naoko's face right away. All I have left is this setting with nobody in it.

Of course, given time, her face is well within recall. Her small cold hands, her sleek straight hair so silky to the touch, her full-fleshed earlobe with the tiny mole right below, the camel-hair coat she used to wear in winter, her habit of looking you in the eye when asking a question, the way some things set her voice atremble, as if she were speaking on a windswept hill. The images build up one by one until her face comes floating into view. All very naturally. First it's her profile, maybe because

Naoko and I always walked side by side. Then she turns toward me, smiles that little smile of hers, tilts her head a bit, and starts to speak, peering into my eyes. Almost as if she were gazing after tiny fish darting about the bottom of a crystal clear spring.

Even so, it's a while before her face registers in my mind like that. And it takes more time with each passing year. Sad, but true. What used to take only five seconds to recall began taking ten seconds, then thirty seconds, then a minute, longer and longer like shadows at dusk. Soon it will be swallowed up in the night. My memory has obviously strayed far from where Naoko stood, just as certainly as I have become distanced from the site of my own former self. So only the scenery, only that October meadow, keeps playing over and over again in my head like some symbolic film sequence. And the scene keeps tugging back at some part of me. Hey, wake up! I'm still here! Wake up! Make some sense of me, realize that I'm still here for a reason! Not that it hurts. Not in the least. Each tug brings only a faint ghost of a sound. And soon enough even that will go away. Just like everything else in the end. Still, here in this Lufthansa plane at Hamburg Airport the ghosts have kept at me, kicking me in the head longer and harder than ever—Wake up! Make some sense of it all! So here I am, writing this. I'm the type who has to set things

down on paper for myself before it all falls into place.

What was she talking about at the time?

That's right, she was telling me about a well. I don't even know if there really was such a well. Maybe it was only an image or a symbol of something inside her, like so many other things that unraveled in her mind in those dark days. All the same, no sooner had Naoko told me about that well than I couldn't picture the meadow without seeing that well. I never actually set eyes on the well, yet it was etched indelibly into the landscape in my head. I can even describe it in detail. It lay right where the meadow ended and the woods began. A dark, yard-wide opening, just right there in the ground, cleverly hidden by the grass. No fence around it, no raised stone enclosure, only an open hole. The edging stones have weathered to a strange milky white, cracked and broken here and there, and you can spot little green lizards scrambling in between the cracks. Lean over the edge and look into the well, and you won't see a thing. The only thing I can tell is that it's awfully deep. Just how deep, I have no idea, but it's dark down there. A thick, black stew of all the varieties of darkness in the world.

"It's deep, really deep," said Naoko, carefully

choosing her words, the way she sometimes talked. Slowly, searching for the right word. "It's really deep. Though no one knows exactly where it is. Only that it's around here somewhere."

With this, she thrust both hands into the pockets of her tweed jacket and smiled at me as though to say, "Honest!"

"But it must be incredibly dangerous," I said. "Having a deep well around and nobody knowing just where. If someone fell in, there'd be no way to get out."

"No way out. *Ayeeeeee, sploosh*, and that'd be that."

"Doesn't that ever happen?"

"Sometimes. Once every two or three years. Someone suddenly disappears and can't be found no matter how hard they look. When that happens, people around here say, 'Must've fallen down that well.'"

"Not a very nice way to go," I said.

"It's a terrible way to go," she said, picking off a stalk of grass that had stuck to her jacket. "It'd be okay if you broke your neck and died just like that, but if you only mangled your foot or something you'd really be out of luck. Shout all you want, no one would hear you. Not a chance anyone would find you. The whole place crawling with centipedes and spiders, bones lying around of God knows how

many others who'd died in there. It'd be all dark and dank. And up above, a tiny, tiny circle of light like a winter moon. All alone, you'd just shrivel up and die there."

"It's enough to make your hair stand on end just thinking about it," I said. "Somebody ought to find it and build a wall around it."

"But no one can find the well. That's why you mustn't stray from the beaten path."

"You won't see me straying."

Naoko took her left hand out of her pocket and grasped my hand. "You, you'll be all right. You've got nothing to worry about. You could walk through here blindfold in the dead of night and never fall in. And so long as I stick with you, I'll absolutely never fall in either."

"Never?"

"Never."

"And what makes you so sure?"

"I just know, that's all," said Naoko, holding tight to my hand, then falling silent as we walked on a while. "I know about these things. There's no logic to it, I just feel it. For instance, sticking right here beside you like this, I'm not the least bit scared. Not one dark or bad thing's going to get to me."

"Well, that makes it easy. All we have to do is stay like this," I said.

"Really? Do you mean that?"

"Of course I mean it."

Naoko stopped in her tracks. I stopped as well. Putting both her hands on my shoulders, she peered straight into my eyes. Far back, in the depths of her pupils, some thick, pitch-black fluid was charting strange whorled patterns. Such were the pair of beautiful eyes that peered on and on into mine. Then she stretched up and lightly pressed her cheek against mine. With that one little gesture, a heart-stopping instant of wonderful warmth shot through me.

"Thank you," said Naoko.

"You're very welcome," said I.

"You've made me so happy, saying that. Honest!" she said with a sad little smile. "But it's impossible."

"Why's that?"

"Because it can't be. It's just no good. It..." Naoko began, but then only pursed her lips and walked on in silence. I could tell that all kinds of thoughts were churning around inside her head, so I just kept quiet and walked along beside her.

"It...wouldn't be the right thing to do. Not for you, not for me," she resumed at last.

"And why wouldn't it be right?" I asked.

"Why, it's just impossible, the idea of somebody watching over someone else for ever and ever. Say

if, just if, I were to marry you. And if you went to work in a company. Who'd look after me while you were at work? Who'd look after me when you went away on business? Would you stay by my side until the day I died? That just wouldn't be a fair arrangement. You couldn't call that a relationship, could you? You'd only get discouraged with me. 'What kind of life is this,' you'd say, 'just baby-sitting this woman?' I don't want that. That wouldn't be any solution to the problems I've got."

"They're not going to last forever," I said, placing my hand on her shoulder. "You'll get over them. And when that happens, we can think things through afresh. We'll take it from there. Who knows? Maybe it'll be you who's helping me out. We're not living according to a balance sheet, you know. If you need me now, you should use what I can offer. It's that simple. Why do you have to look at things so hard? Relax. You're all tensed up, that's why everything seems so difficult. If you'd only loosen up a bit, you'd feel a lot lighter."

"Why'd you have to say that?" said Naoko in a distinctly drier tone.

I could tell from her voice that I'd said something wrong.

"Why?" she insisted, staring at the ground by her feet. "Don't you think I know that if I relaxed, things'd seem a lot lighter? I don't need you to tell

me that. Listen, if I loosened up, I'd go to pieces. This is the only way I've been able to hold myself together so far, and this is the only way I can go on living. If I let go, I'd never get myself back together. Pieces'd be scattered all over the place and be blown away by the first gust of wind that came along. Why can't you understand? If you don't understand that, what makes you say that you can look after me?"

There was nothing I could say.

"I'm far more confused than you think. Dark and cold and confused. Really, why'd you have to go and sleep with me? Why couldn't you have just left me alone?"

We walked on through the intense silence of the woods. The path was littered with cicadas that had died at the end of summer, their corpses crunching beneath our feet. As we slowly moved forward, Naoko and I kept our eyes trained on the ground, almost as if we were searching for something.

"Forgive me," said Naoko, gently taking hold of my arm. Then she shook her head. "I didn't mean to say anything to hurt you. Think nothing of it. I was just mad at myself, that's all."

"It may well be that I still haven't really figured you out at all," I said. "I'm not the brightest person and it takes a while for things to sink in. But give me time and I'll get to see the real you, and I'll

know you better than anyone else in the world.”

Pausing there amidst the stillness, I poked among the dead cicadas and pine cones with the tip of my shoe, then looked up at the sky through the pine branches. Naoko buried her hands in her jacket pockets and stared off vacantly, lost in thought.

“Tell me, do you like me?”

“You know I do.”

“Well, then, may I make two requests?”

“Three if you like.”

Naoko laughed and shook her head. “Two’s enough. Two’s all I ask. First, I’d like you to realize how much I appreciate you coming here to see me. You’ve made me very happy, you’ve...been my salvation. Even if it doesn’t seem that way, I want you to know it’s true.”

“You can count on me coming again,” I said. “And the other?”

“I want you to remember me. Always remember that I existed and that I was here beside you, will you?”

“Of course I’ll always remember.”

Without a word, she stepped forward and started walking. Autumn light filtered through the branches and danced on the shoulders of her jacket. The dog barked again, perhaps a little nearer than before. Naoko climbed a little rise,

strode out of the pine woods, and rushed down a gentle slope. I followed two or three paces back.

“This way, over here. The well might be around there,” I called after her. Naoko stopped and laughed, then quickly took my arm. We walked side by side the rest of way.

“You won’t forget me, ever?” she whispered softly.

“Never ever,” I said. “No way I’d forget you.”

*

And yet, in fact, memory drifts ever further away and I’ve already forgotten far too much. Tracing memories by writing like this, I’m sometimes overcome with terrible doubts. I find myself thinking, what if I’ve lost the most essential part of these memories? Suppose that somewhere in me, in some dark recess, all my most important recollections have become buried in the sludge of memory.

Be that as it may, whatever I’ve managed to hold on to is all I have to go on at this date. Already faint and growing still fainter with each passing moment, I must embrace these imperfect memories for all I’m worth and keep writing them with the same care I’d lay cremated bones to rest. For there’s no other way for me to keep my promise to Naoko.

Years back, when I was young and these

memories were still fresh, I tried any number of times to write about Naoko. But I never could get one line down on paper. I knew very well that if I could only manage to squeeze out that first line, the rest would write itself, but that line just wouldn't come. Everything was in such plain view, I had no idea where to begin. It's as if you have a map with so much detail that you don't even know where to start. But now I know. Ultimately, as I see it, imperfect memories and imperfect ideas are all you can put into something so imperfect as writing. What's more, the fainter these memories of Naoko become in me, the more I feel I've come to understand her. The man I am today knows the reason why Naoko asked me never to forget her. But, of course, Naoko knew it all along.

Which only makes it more unbearable, because Naoko never even loved me.

CHAPTER 2

Once upon a time, which means maybe twenty years ago at the most, I lived in a student dormitory. I was eighteen and had just entered university. Knowing nothing but nothing about Tokyo and being on my own for the first time, my parents had worried themselves into finding me that dorm. There I would be provided with meals, have the benefit of various conveniences, and generally get by well enough for one green eighteen-year-old. Of course, cost was a consideration, too. Especially since dorming worked out to be cheaper than living alone. You only needed bedding and a lamp, and had to buy nothing else. Still, if it had been up to me, I'd have rented an apartment and lived happily by myself. But what with the private university entrance fees and tuition, plus living expenses, I really couldn't complain. And, besides, in the end it was all the same to me wherever I lived.

The dormitory was located on a hill overlooking the city. The grounds were extensive and sur-

rounded by a high concrete wall. On entering the gate, you were confronted with a massive zelkova tree. It must have been at least one hundred and fifty years old. If you stood at its foot and looked up, you couldn't see the sky for the leaves.

A concrete path skirted the giant zelkova, then went straight across a courtyard. On either side of the courtyard stood two parallel three-story concrete buildings. From their size and the number of windows, they looked either like prisons remodeled into apartments or apartments remodeled into prisons. Either way, there was nothing the least bit unclean or dark about their appearance. A radio might be heard through a wide-open window, and in every room hung curtains of the same cream color, a shade least susceptible to fading.

Straight ahead along the path was the two-story main building. On the ground floor were the dining hall and baths, and on the second a lecture hall, several meeting rooms, and even a guest room that served no appreciable function. Next to the main building stood a third dorm, also three stories high. The courtyard was large, and sprinklers gleamed in the sun as they whirled about in the middle of the green turf. Behind the main building were a baseball/soccer field and six tennis courts. Everything you could ask for.

The only real problem with the dorm was that there was something fundamentally suspect about the place. It was run by some nebulous foundation that had sprung up around an extreme right-wing figure, so that the management policy—the little that met my eye, of course—came out rather warped. You could figure out as much by just reading the welcoming pamphlet and house rules. "Striving to cultivate persons of benefit to the state through strengthening the mainstay of education." This was the Founding Spirit, generously supported through the private contributions of numerous like-minded financial leaders who subscribed to this Spirit—so ran the official line, but behind the scenes it was all very murky. Nobody knew anything for certain. Some said it was all a tax-dodge or a gimmick to buy good press, while others held that setting up the dorm had been a ploy to get hold of prime real estate. No, there had to be something even deeper to it, said another theory, which had it that the Founder's Grand Plan was to rear a covert faction of former dormmates in various financial sectors. Indeed, the dormitory did function as a kind of elite club. I never knew the details, but several times a month there would be study meetings with the Founder, and so long as you were a member of this you had no problem

finding employment. I had no way of telling which theory held the most water, but they all recognized "something fishy" about the place.

In any case, for two years, from the spring of 1968 to the spring of 1970, I lived at this slightly questionable dormitory. I couldn't tell you why I spent two whole years in such a dubious place, but at least on the everyday level left-wing or right-wing, hypocritical-good or hypocritical-bad, didn't make much difference.

Dorm days commenced with the glorious raising of the national flag. With the national anthem playing, naturally. No separating the national anthem from a flag-raising any more than you could separate the sports news from rally music. The flagstaff was situated smack in the middle of the courtyard in full view of every dorm window.

Supervision of the raising of the flag fell to the supervisor of the East Dorm (the building I lived in). A tall, sharp-eyed man of about sixty with bristle-hard hair flecked with gray and a long scar extending down his ruddy, sunburned neck. Reputedly a graduate of Nakano Military Academy, but again this was unverifiable. By his side, a student-cum-assistant attended to the flag-raising. Nobody knew anything about this student. Crew-cut, always in uniform. His name and what room he lived in were likewise unknown. I never saw him once in the din-

ing hall or the baths. Was he even a student? Well, he was in uniform so he might well have been. What else could we think? Next to Mr. Nakano Academy, he looked positively short, pale, and pudgy. As unseemly a pair as ever raised a Rising Sun at six A.M. in the middle of a courtyard.

When I first entered the dormitory, I'd make an effort to get up at six just to take in this curious spectacle of patriotic pomp. At six A.M. prompt, almost simultaneously with the playing of the anthem on the radio, these two would make their appearance in the courtyard. Kid Uniform in uniform, of course, and black leather shoes. Mr. Nakano Academy in a windbreaker and white running shoes. Kid Uniform would be carrying a shallow paulownia-wood case, Mr. Nakano Academy a portable Sony tape recorder. Mr. Nakano Academy sets the tape recorder down at the foot of the flagstaff. Kid Uniform opens the case. Inside the case is a neatly folded flag. Kid Uniform holds out the flag to Mr. Nakano Academy with all due ceremony. Mr. Nakano Academy attaches the flag to the rope. Kid Uniform switches on the tape recorder.

The national anthem.

Flag ascends.

At "Yon pebbled shores," the flag is halfway up the pole. By "reigns eternal," it's up as far as it can

go. Then the two of them snap to "Atten—shun!" and look straight up at the flag. Quite a sight if the day's clear and the wind's blowing at a fair clip.

The evening flag-lowering followed the same regimented procedures, albeit in reverse. Flag glides down the pole and into paulownia-wood case. The flag does not fly at night.

Just why it was necessary to lower the flag at night, I had no idea. The state still exists at night. Many people are still at work—tracklayers and taxi drivers and bar hostesses and late-shift firemen and nightwatchmen. It seems pretty unfair to me that they can't enjoy the sovereign protection of the state, but perhaps it really doesn't matter all that much. Probably no one pays the least heed to these things. Probably no one but me. And even I don't hit upon such ideas unless something prompts me. Nor do I ever pursue the question to any extent.

As a rule, dorm room allocations put freshmen and sophomores two to a room, and juniors and seniors one to a room. The double rooms were six tatami mats in size and rather long and narrow, with an aluminum-framed window in the far wall and two sets of desk-and-chair facing each other by the window. To the left of the door, a steel bunk bed. Aside from that, there were two lockers, a small coffee table, and some built-in shelves. Hardly an inspiring space no matter how favorably you

looked at it. The shelves of most rooms were jammed with transistor radios and hair driers, electric thermos bottles and hot plates, jars of instant coffee, tea bags, and sugar cubes, maybe a pan for preparing instant noodles and some rudimentary tableware. On the plaster walls there'd be a pin-up from *Heibon Punch* or a porno movie poster ripped off from somewhere. One joker even pinned up a photo of pigs in coitus, but that was an exception. The walls of most rooms were covered with photographs of nude women or young girl singers and actresses. And the bookshelves over the desks would have your normal array of textbooks, dictionaries, and novels.

With only male occupants, the rooms were almost always a horrible mess. Moldy orange peel fused to the bottoms of wastepaper baskets, four inches of cigarette butts in the tin cans used as ashtrays, which were doused with coffee or beer if they started to smoke, causing a pretty disgusting smell. Dishes dull with grime, all sorts of useless doo-dads stuck on walls wherever you turned, floors littered with instant noodle packets and empty beer bottles and lids from who-knows-what. It never occurred to anyone to take a dustpan and brush to the clutter. Come a breeze and clouds of dust would billow up from the floor. That and a stale odor pervaded every room. Each room had a slightly dif-

ferent smell, although its components were invariably identical—sweat and body odors and trash. Everyone just tossed their dirty clothes under their beds, and there wasn't a single soul who aired his bedding with any regularity, so the sheets and covers were hopelessly stained with perspiration. Even today I find it strange that no fatal contagious disease ever broke out in that mess.

Compared to those rooms, mine was as pristine as a morgue. Not one speck of rubbish on the floor, not one smudge on the window. Bedding aired once a week, pencils neatly arranged in pencil stands, even the curtains washed once a month. My roommate was pathologically tidy. I told the others that the guy "even washes the curtains," but no one believed me. Nobody ever dreamed curtains were anything you had to wash. They all thought they were something that just hung on the windows. Everyone had him marked as a psycho. From which point on they started calling him "Nazi" or "Kamikaze."

In our room there wasn't even a pin-up on the wall. Instead, we had a photo of a canal in Amsterdam. When I put up a nude photo, all he said was, "You know, Watanabe, I don't really go for that kind of thing." Whereupon he took it down and put up the canal photo in its place. Not that I was particularly set on having a girlie photo on the wall,

so I let it go at that. Anytime anyone visited the room, they'd take one look at the canal photo and say, "What the hell's *that*?" And I'd say, "Kamikaze looks at it when he masturbates." I meant it as a joke, but everyone seemed to take it totally deadpan. So deadpan, in fact, that after a while I started to take it seriously myself.

Everyone sympathized with me having to room with Kamikaze, but I was never much put out by the experience. As long as I kept my things in order, he never interfered, so I probably had an easy time of it. He did all the cleaning. Laundering the bedding was likewise his doing. He even took care of the garbage. After three solid days without bathing, he'd inform me I'd better take a bath, and he'd tell me when I needed to go to the barber or trim my nose hairs. The only bother was that he'd fumigate the entire room with insect spray at the mere sight of a bug, at which time I'd retire to the chaos of a neighboring room.

Kamikaze was a geography major at a national university.

"I study m-m-maps," he'd stammered out to me at our first meeting.

"You like maps, eh?" I asked.

"Uh-huh. When I graduate, I'm going to enter the National Geodetic Institute and make m-m-maps."

Amazing variety of people in this world with all sorts of aspirations and life-goals. Once again, I had to hand it to humanity. It was one of the very first things to impress me on arriving in Tokyo. To be sure, we'd all be in a fix if there weren't at least a few people—no need for very many, mind you—burning with an interest in map-making. Still it did strike me as odd that someone who stuttered every time he said the word "map" would want to enter the Geodetic Institute. Other words might or might not cause him to stutter, but when "map" came up it was a hundred-percent certainty.

"And what's y-your major?" he asked.

"Theater," I answered.

"By theater, do you mean acting?"

"No, not exactly. We read plays, study them. Racine and Ionesco and Shakespeare and...you know."

No, he didn't know. Other than Shakespeare, that is. Hardly surprising. I'd scarcely heard of them myself. It was just what was written in the course description.

"But in any case, that's what you like, is it?" he asked.

"Not especially," I said.

This response puzzled him. And when he was puzzled, his stutter got worse. I felt as if I'd done something wrong.

"Anything was fine with me," I explained.

"Ethnology or Far Eastern history would've done as well. I just happened to feel like theater at the time, that's all." But, of course, that was not something he could accept.

"I don't get it," he said with a real I-don't-get-it look on his face. "M—Me, I like m—m—maps, that's why I study m—m—m—maps. For that reason, I came all this way to enter a Tokyo university and have my folks send me m—money. But you, saying it's not like that for you..."

His was the proper argument, so I gave up trying to explain. Thereafter we drew matches to decide who got which bunk. He got the top, I the bottom.

He was always in white shirt, black slacks, and a navy sweater. Crew-cut, tall, high-cheekboned. And he always wore his uniform top to school. Shoes and satchel gloss-black. To all appearances, your right-wing student. Which is why everyone insisted on calling him "Kamikaze," whereas in fact he was one hundred percent uninterested in politics. He always wore the same thing simply because he couldn't be bothered with choosing clothes. What interested him were shifts in the shoreline or the completion of a new railway tunnel—things of that nature. Bring up some such subject and you'd have him talking a stuttering streak, one hour, two hours on end, until finally you'd run out on him or fall asleep.

He'd get up every morning at six to the national anthem "reveille," so at least no one could say that the self-righteous flag-raising ceremony was totally useless. Donning his uniform, he'd head for the washroom to wash his face. He'd take such ages doing it I was almost sure he had to be taking out his teeth and brushing them one by one. Back in the room, he'd give his towel the necessary couple of snaps to take the wrinkles out and drape it over the radiator to dry, then he'd return his toothbrush and soap to the shelf. Next, it was on with the radio for exercise time.

I'd generally stay up late reading and would be dead to the world until maybe eight, often sleeping straight through his rise-and-shine bustle and radio exercises. Even so, he'd always wake me when he got to his jumps. No way I wouldn't be woken up. With each jump—quite high jumps at that—the vibrations were enough to jolt the mattress up and down. For three days I put up with it—communal living demands a certain degree of patience, after all, but by the fourth day I decided I wasn't going to take it any longer.

"Forgive me, but would you mind maybe doing your exercises on the roof or somewhere?" I snapped. "You wake me up doing them."

"But it's six-thirty already."

"I know that. Six-thirty? Six-thirty for me is still

bedtime. I'm sure I can't explain to you why, but that's the way it is."

"Out of the question. If I do them on the roof, the people on the third floor'll complain. Here at least there's only a storeroom underneath, so no one should mind."

"Well, how about in the courtyard, then? On the lawn."

"That's no good either. M—My radio's not a transistor, so I can't use it without an outlet and I need music to do my exercises."

To be sure, his radio was a beaut of an old model, with cord, while mine was a FM-only transistor job, good for nothing but music stations. Just great, I thought.

"Okay, then, one concession," I said. "You can do your radio exercises, but just hold off with those jumps. They make such a racket. How's about that?"

"The j-jumps?" he queried back, incredulous. "What d'you mean, 'jumps'?"

"You know, the jumps. Like in jumps. Bounce, bounce, up and down?"

"There's nothing like that."

I began to get a headache. I'd have thrown in the towel on the whole thing, but I figured, hell, I'd gone and opened my mouth, I might as well set the record straight. So I got up and hummed the first

tune of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation's Radio Exercises, jumping up and down on the floor the whole while.

"Look, like this. You do have this part, right?"

"Well, I g-guess so, now that you m-mention it. I just n-never noticed."

"Like I was saying," said I, plopping back down on my bed, "I'd appreciate it if you'd just cut out that section. Everything else I can handle. Just quit with the jumps and let me sleep in peace."

"Nothing doing," he retorted. "I can't just leave out one thing. I've been doing these exercises each and every morning for ten years now, and once I start, the whole thing just comes out autom-m-atically. If I leave one thing out, everything gets thrown out of k-kilter."

I couldn't bring myself to say another word. What was there to say? I suppose the fastest way of dealing with the problem would have been to chuck his blasted radio out the window while he wasn't around, but that would have been asking for trouble. Kamikaze was the kind of guy who takes the utmost care of his possessions. Yet seeing me sitting there disconsolately on my bed, at a loss for words, what could he do but smile and offer me the supreme consolation?

"W-Watanabe, you know we really ought to

think of getting up and exercising together." So saying, he headed off for his breakfast.

*

When I told Naoko about Kamikaze and his radio exercises, she just giggled. I hadn't meant it to be funny, but in the end I found myself laughing, too. It'd been ages since I'd seen her laugh, even if it lasted only for that one brief instant.

Naoko and I got off the train at Yotsuya and walked along the embankment above the tracks toward Ichigaya. It was a Sunday afternoon in mid-May. The intermittent showers since dawn had completely let up by noon, and even the dismal low rain clouds had been driven off by winds from the south. The cherry leaves tossed about in the breeze, a brilliant green glistening in the sunshine. It already felt like early summer. Passers-by had all taken off their sweaters and jackets, throwing them over their shoulders or clamping them under their arms. Everyone seemed so happy there under the warm Sunday afternoon sunlight. In the tennis courts across from the embankment, young men had stripped off their shirts and were swinging their rackets in their shorts. Two Catholic sisters sat side by side on a bench, all wrapped up in their winter habits as if the summer sun had failed to

touch their sphere, and yet they, too, seemed quite satisfied, enjoying a fine chat.

After walking fifteen minutes my back was all covered with sweat, so I peeled off my thick cotton shirt, leaving me in my T-shirt. She rolled up the sleeves of her light gray sweatshirt, faded nicely from many washings. I couldn't be sure, but I felt almost certain I'd seen her wear a top just like that before. Not that I'd known her long enough at the time to remember much about her.

"What's it like, communal life? Is it fun living with someone?" Naoko asked.

"Who knows? It's only been a month," I said. "But so far it's not been bad. At least there's nothing I really can't stand."

She stopped at a water fountain and took a sip, pulled a white handkerchief from her pants pocket, and wiped her mouth. Then she bent to carefully retie her shoelaces.

"Say, you think I could deal with living like that?"

"You mean communal living?"

"Yeah," said Naoko.

"Hmm, I wonder. It all depends on how you look at it. There's all kinds of annoyances if you care to count them. Petty rules, dumb jerks throwing their weight around, roommates who exercise at six-thirty in the morning. But that's the same every-

where, really, nothing to get worked up about. You tell yourself, 'Here's where I've got to make a go of it,' and you live how you have to live. That's all there is to it."

"Maybe so," she said, and seemed to mull it over a while. Then, overcome by something approaching amazement, she peered straight into my eyes. I hadn't realized until then how crystal clear her eyes were. Come to think of it, I hadn't had the chance to look at her eyes at all. It was our first time walking alone together, our first time to talk at such length.

"You thinking about entering a dorm or something?" I asked.

"Un-uh, nothing like that," said Naoko. "I was just wondering. I mean how it'd be, living with others. And..." She bit her lip, searching for the right phrase but failed to come up with anything. She sighed and looked down. "Oh, I don't know. It's nothing."

And that was the end of the conversation. Naoko strode off east again, with me close behind.

It had been almost a year since I'd last seen Naoko. And in the course of that year she'd grown distinctly thinner. The flesh had fallen away from those once-plump cheeks and her neck had grown leaner, but her loss of weight left no boney or unhealthy impression. It was an utterly natural,

unobtrusive slimming. It was as if she'd discreetly hidden herself in some long, narrow space and her body had simply pared itself down to fit it. What's more, she looked all the more beautiful for it, though I couldn't figure out the right way to tell her that.

We hadn't come here for any particular purpose but had just bumped into each another on the train. She'd set out for the day, maybe to see a movie, and I was on my way to Kanda to go book-browsing. Neither of us had anything especially pressing. Naoko had suggested we get off, so we left the train. And it just happened to be Yotsuya Station. Not that we had anything to discuss in the first place. I couldn't understand why Naoko had suggested the two of us should get off. What did we have to talk about?

Leaving the station, she strode off briskly without so much as a word where to. I had no choice but to follow, always a yard behind. Of course, I could have reduced that distance if I'd wanted, but somehow it didn't seem like the thing to do. So I walked a yard behind her, looking at her back and straight black hair fastened with a big brown hairclip, her tiny white ears peeking out at the sides. From time to time Naoko would turn around and say something to me. Some things I could answer, some not. Sometimes I couldn't even

hear what she said. Whatever, it hardly seemed to matter to her. She'd say what she had to say, then face forward and keep on walking. What the hell, I thought, anyway it's a nice day for a walk.

But Naoko's pace was a little too determined for your pleasant stroll. She hung a right at Iidabashi, cut over to beside the moat, crossed the intersection at Jimbocho, and headed up the hill to Ochanomizu, then kept on going all the way to Hongo. There she followed the streetcar tracks up to Komagome. No small excursion. By the time we reached Komagome the sun was already setting. A peaceful spring dusk.

"Where are we?" asked Naoko with a start.

"Komagome," I said. "Couldn't you tell? We've been walking all over the place."

"Why'd we come here?"

"You're the one who was leading. I only followed."

We stopped in a noodle shop by the train station and had a quick bite. I was thirsty, so I had a beer. From the time we ordered to the time we finished eating we didn't say one word. I was worn out from all that walking and she seemed lost in thought again. The TV news carried a report that this Sunday every pleasure spot in the city had been packed. Yeah, and we'd walked from Yotsuya to Komagome.

"You're sure in good shape," I ventured, once we finished our noodles.

"Surprised?"

"Well, yeah."

"I've trained long-distance, running the five- and ten-mile ever since middle school. That and my father's a mountain climber and we'd go climbing on Sundays since I was small. I mean there're hills right behind our house. So my legs just naturally got sturdy."

"You wouldn't think so to look at you," I said.

"Maybe not. Everyone seems to think I'm this cute little girl. But you can't judge people by appearances," she said, tacking on the barest smile.

"You'll have to excuse me, but I'm bushed."

"Sorry, putting you through a day with me."

"No, I'm glad we got to talk. 'Cause we never once talked up to now," I said, though I couldn't for the life of me remember what exactly we'd talked about.

She absentmindedly spun the ashtray on the table.

"You know, what say—and only if it's no imposition on you, that is—what say we get together again? Of course, I know it's not in the story to say that sort of thing."

"Story?" I said, startled. "Not in what story?"

She blushed. Probably I'd overreacted.

"I can't really explain," she excused herself. She rolled both sleeves of her sweatshirt up to her elbows, then rolled them down again. The lights turned the soft hairs on her arms to gold. "I didn't mean to say 'story.' It just came out."

Naoko planted her elbows on the table and glanced up briefly at the calendar on the wall, almost as if she expected to find a more appropriate expression there. Not locating any, she sighed, closed her eyes, and fiddled with her hairclip.

"Doesn't matter," I said. "I think I get what you mean. And I wouldn't know how to say it either."

"I'm not good at talking," Naoko said. "Haven't been for the longest while. I start to say something and the wrong words come out. Wrong or sometimes completely backward. I try to go back and correct it, but things get even more complicated and confused, so that I don't even remember what I started to say in the first place. Like I was split in two or something, one half chasing the other. And there's this big pillar in the middle and they go chasing each other around and around it. The other me always latches onto the right word and this me absolutely never catches up."

Naoko looked up at me. "Does that make any sense?"

"That happens more or less to everyone," I said.

"Everybody goes through times when they want to say something, but they can't and they get upset."

Naoko seemed almost disappointed at my answer.

"That's something else," said Naoko, but wouldn't explain any further.

"The answer is, I wouldn't mind at all seeing you again." I put the conversation back on track. "I'm never doing anything on Sundays anyway, and walking is healthy enough."

We got on the Yamate Line and Naoko changed for the Chuo Line at Shinjuku. She was renting a small apartment out in Kokubunji.

"Tell me, do I speak a little differently than I used to?" asked Naoko on parting.

"Maybe a little," I said. "But I couldn't say just how. If you really want to know, for all we saw of each other before I don't recall that we ever talked that much."

"Maybe not," she granted. "Can I call you next Saturday?"

"Sure thing. I'll be waiting," I said.

*

I first met Naoko the spring of my junior year in high school. She was also a junior, attending one of those good Catholic girls' schools. The sort of good school where if you studied too hard they all said

behind your back that you had no "class." I had a good friend named Kizuki (my only friend, in fact) and Naoko was his girlfriend. Kizuki and she had known each other almost from the time they were born. Their homes were only two hundred yards apart.

And like most childhood sweethearts, their relationship was quite open, with no compelling urge for them to be alone. The two of them were always spending time at each other's house, eating dinner with each other's family, playing mahjongg. I went on double dates with them lots of times. Naoko would bring some classmate of hers and the four of us would go to the zoo or the pool or the movies. But cute as the girls Naoko brought along were, the truth was they were always a little too well-bred for me. If anything, girls from public schools were much easier to talk to. I could never tell what went on in the cute little heads of those girls Naoko brought. Probably they couldn't make much of me, either.

So after a while Kizuki gave up inviting me on double dates, and the three of us—Kizuki, Naoko, and me—would just go somewhere and talk. Maybe it's strange, but finally that worked out simplest and best. Enter a fourth and things got just a little clumsy. But with three, it was me in the guest seat, Kizuki as the able-bodied host of the talk show, and

Naoko as his assistant. Kizuki was always the center of things and he carried it off very well. True, he did have a cynical streak, which made others think him stuck-up, but fundamentally he was one kind and fair-minded guy. As a threesome, he always took pains to talk as much to me as to Naoko, to tell us both jokes and make sure that no one was bored. If either of us fell silent for too long, he'd turn on the conversation and draw some talk out of us. Just to watch him, you'd wonder how he could keep it up, but probably it was nothing for him. He just had the ability to weigh the situation moment by moment and respond accordingly. Added to which, he had an uncommon talent for eliciting kernels of interesting conversation from even the dullest talker. Just talking to him made me feel I was an interesting person leading an interesting life.

Still, he was not your most sociable creature. He didn't hang around with anybody but me at school. I could never understand why someone so sharp, with such a gift for gab, didn't get out in wider circles instead of wasting himself on a gang of three. How could he possibly be content with just us? And what could he have been thinking of to choose us in the first place? Me, I was your regular read-books-and-listen-to-records type, with nothing special to make Kizuki single me out. Nonethe-

less we got along famously as a team. Kizuki's father, by the way, was a dentist, well known both for his skill and his high prices.

First thing after we met, Kizuki had asked me, "What say we go on a double date this Sunday? My girl goes to a girls' school and she'll bring along something cute." Sure, I told him. And so I met Naoko.

Me and Kizuki and Naoko saw lots of times together, but whenever he left the room and the two of us were alone, Naoko and I could never find much to say. What were we supposed to talk about? If the truth be known, we didn't have a thing in common. It was all I could do to down a glass of water or fiddle with the things on the table and wait for Kizuki to return. All in all, I was more of a listener, and Naoko wasn't much for talking either. So we'd only find ourselves uncomfortable. Not mismatched exactly, just plain not talkative.

Only once, maybe two weeks after Kizuki's funeral, did I meet up with Naoko. At a coffee shop, on some small errand, after taking care of which there was nothing to discuss. I did manage to dig up a couple of topics to throw her way, but the talk always snagged. And maybe there was something a little stiff about her words, some little bitterness. I seemed to sense that Naoko was mad at me, though I couldn't figure out why. We went our

separate ways and never saw each other until one year later, when we bumped into each other on the Chuo Line.

Maybe what Naoko was mad about was the fact that I, not she, had been the last to see Kizuki. Which may not be a very nice thing to say, but I can appreciate how she must have felt. I would have traded places if I could, but it was over and done with. File under "Never to Be."

One pleasant May noontime, we'd just had lunch when Kizuki suggested we cut class and go shoot some billiards. Not being too keen on that afternoon's classes myself, we skipped school and headed down the hill to the harbor, where we entered a pool hall and racked up four rounds. When I walked off with the first game, he suddenly got very serious and played the remaining three games to win. I paid for the games. A bet was a bet. He didn't crack one joke the whole time we played. Most unusual. When we'd finished, we had a smoke.

"You're awful serious today," I chided.

"Today I didn't feel like losing," said Kizuki with a self-satisfied laugh.

That night, he died in his garage. Hooked up a rubber hose to the exhaust of his N-360, taped up the cracks in the windows, revved the engine. How

long it took before he was dead, I don't know. When his folks came home from visiting an ailing relative and opened the garage door to put the other car in, he was already cold. Car radio playing, gas station receipt under the windshield wiper. No last letter, no plausible motive.

I was called to the police station for questioning as the last person to see him alive. There'd been no hint whatsoever he was contemplating such a thing, I told the detective. He'd appeared the same as ever. The police didn't seem to think too much of either me or Kizuki. To them, there was nothing strange about a kid who'd cut class to shoot billiards committing suicide. The papers ran a short obit and the case was closed. The red N-360 was disposed of. A white flower decorated his desk in class for some time thereafter.

For the ten months between Kizuki's death and my graduation from high school, I couldn't gauge where I stood with the rest of the world. I got close to one girl and slept with her, but it didn't last six months. Nor did she make any particular claims on me. I picked a private university in Tokyo where I'd be sure to get in with no great effort, took the exams, and passed. No big deal. The girl begged me not to go to Tokyo, but I just had to leave Kobe. That and I wanted to start all over again somewhere I didn't know anybody.

"You've had me, so now it doesn't matter what becomes of me, right?" she sobbed.

"You know that's not it," I said. I just wanted to get out of that place, but she couldn't be expected to understand that. So we split up. Riding the "bullet train" up to Tokyo, I recalled all the wonderful and nice things about her and I regretted the terrible thing I'd done, but there was no undoing it. I decided to forget about her.

On arriving in Tokyo and commencing dorm life, I hadn't a clue what to do. Only not to take things too seriously and not to let things get too close. I made up my mind to wipe my slate clean of green felt billiard tables and red N-360s and white flowers on desks. Of fingers of smoke rising from crematorium smokestacks and the clunky paperweights they have in police interrogation rooms—of everything. It promised to be easygoing for a while. But however much I cleared away, I was left with great lumps of void, of empty space. Then as time went on, these lumps began to assume a simple form, a form I can transpose into words.

Death exists not as the opposite of life but as a part of it.

Pretty ordinary when you put it into words, though for me at the time, this wasn't words but a lump inside me. Inside the paperweights, inside

those four red and white balls on the billiard table, death existed. And we, the living, breathed it into our lungs every day like a fine dust.

Up until that point I had always conceived of death as something utterly separate and independent of life. One day we shall surely fall into death's grip, but until the day death comes to claim us, it is we who have death in our grip. Which had seemed the quintessential logical stance. Life on this side, death on the other. Me over here, not over there.

Yet the night of Kizuki's death marked a dividing line, and henceforth I could no longer conceive of death (or life) in such simple terms. Death was not the antithesis of life but was already a part of my original makeup, and I couldn't put this truth out of my mind however much I tried. Because the death that claimed Kizuki that night in the May of his seventeenth year also claimed me at the same time.

So the spring of my eighteenth year was spent with that lump of empty space lodged inside me. But at the same time I was struggling not to let it get to me. I didn't want to take it all too seriously because I sensed, however indistinctly, that getting serious was not necessarily synonymous with getting to the truth. Yet death is a serious matter. And so I endlessly pursued that time-honored, circuitous course through the antipodes of an irreconcilable

dichotomy. To think of it now, those surely were strange days. There, in the very midst of life, anything and everything revolved around death.

CHAPTER 3

Naoko called the following Saturday and we made a date for Sunday. I guess you could call it a date. For lack of a better word.

We walked the same streets as before, stopped off for coffee somewhere, walked some more, had dinner, said goodbye, and went our separate ways. And like before, she only dribbled out the occasional remark, which I'm sure didn't seem strange to her, nor did I pay much mind. When we felt like it, we talked about each other's school and daily life, but again in unconnected fragments. We didn't say a word about the past. Generally speaking, we just walked. The good thing about Tokyo is its size. No matter how far you walk, you never come to the end.

We got together almost every week and walked, she taking the lead, I a little behind. Naoko wore a whole slew of different hairclips, always exposing her right ear. That's about all I can remember of her at the time because I only saw her from the

back. Naoko had a habit of fiddling with her hairclip when embarrassed. That and wiping her mouth with her handkerchief, especially when working up to say something. The more I saw of her, the more I found these little quirks of hers endearing.

She was attending a women's university on the edge of Musashino. Small, but with a solid reputation for English studies. A canal ran near her apartment and we'd often stroll along it. Naoko might take me to her place and make me a meal, but she never seemed to think anything of the two of us being alone in her room. She kept her place tidy, with not one unnecessary item, and except for the stockings hung up to dry in the corner, you'd never think it a girl's room. She lived simply and frugally, and had very few friends, an inconceivable break from her high school ways. The Naoko I used to know was always dressed in fancy clothes and surrounded by lots of friends. Seeing her room, I guessed that, just like me, she'd wanted to leave home and start a new life where she didn't know anyone.

"I chose this university because I figured nobody from my school would come here," Naoko joked. "Not us girls. We'd all go someplace a little more chic. You know what I mean, I'm sure."

Still, relations with Naoko were not entirely

without progress. Little by little, Naoko took to me and I to her. Summer vacation ended and automatically, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, a new semester found her walking alongside me. Which I took as a sign that Naoko had recognized me as a full-fledged friend. And it wasn't so bad having a beautiful girl by your side. We wandered aimlessly all over Tokyo—up hills, across streams, over train tracks, everywhere. No particular direction, just walking for the sake of it. Relentless as some healing spiritual rite. And if it rained, we'd open our umbrellas and keep walking.

Come autumn and the dormitory courtyard was covered in zelkova leaves. We pulled on sweaters and enjoyed the scent of the new season in the air. Having by now worn one pair of shoes to death, I bought a new pair of suedes.

I can't actually recall what we talked about, but it probably didn't amount to anything. As always, we never uttered a word about the past. The name Kizuki almost never came up. We didn't really exchange many words at all, having by then grown completely accustomed to sitting silently across from each other in cafés.

Naoko always asked about Kamikaze, and that was our standard topic. Kamikaze once went out on a date with a girl in his class (a geography major, obviously), but he'd only come home that evening

looking singularly depressed. This was in June. He asked me, "T-Tell me, Watanabe, what do you usually talk about with a g-girl?" What I said, I don't remember, but certainly he couldn't have picked a worse person to ask. In July, someone had taken down the photo of the Amsterdam canal while he was out and substituted a photo of the Golden Gate Bridge. "Just to see if he could masturbate to the Golden Gate Bridge," no other reason. I told the guy that he'd been really pleased, just to have something to say, and the next thing I knew someone else had put up a photo of an iceberg. Each time the photo changed, Kamikaze would be plunged into confusion.

"I mean, w-who is doing this?" he stammered.

"Hmm, dunno, but it's not so bad, is it? They're all pretty pictures. Whoever's doing it, we ought to be thankful," I said to console him.

"Sure, maybe, but it's un-un-nerving," said he.

These Kamikaze stories always made Naoko laugh. Honestly speaking, though, I never felt quite right about using the guy as joke material. He may have been about the only thing that always got a rise out her, but he was also merely the third son of a not-so-well-to-do family. Overly serious maybe, but that's all. And if making maps was the single modest dream of his modest life, who could fault him for that?

Me, apparently. By then the Kamikaze jokes had already become standard material throughout the dorm and no longer anything I could control. And there was definitely something to be said about seeing Naoko smile. So I kept supplying everyone with Kamikaze stories.

Only once did Naoko ask me if I had a girlfriend. I told her about the girl I'd broken up with, that she was a nice girl and I liked sleeping with her and I still thought of her from time to time. I don't know, I told her, things just never clicked. Probably I had a hard shell around my heart and only a very few things could break in. That's why I couldn't really love anybody.

"Haven't you ever loved anyone?" asked Naoko.

"No," I said.

She didn't ask any more.

As autumn drew to an end and cold winds whipped through the streets, she'd sometimes lean close to my arm. Through the thick material of her duffel coat, I could just barely feel Naoko's breathing. She'd take my arm in hers, or warm her hand in my pocket, or, when it got really cold, she'd cling shivering to my arm. But there wasn't anything more to it than that. I just kept walking with both hands in my pockets, same as ever. We both wore rubber-soled shoes, so we hardly made any sound as we walked. Only when we stepped on

the dead leaves from the plane trees lining the street did we make a rustle. The sound made me feel sorry for Naoko. What Naoko wanted was not my arm, but someone's arm, not my warmth, but someone's warmth. It made me feel almost sorry it had to be me.

With the advent of winter, her eyes seemed to take on a greater transparency, a transparency that led nowhere. Occasionally, for no particular reason, Naoko would gaze into my eyes as if searching for something. Each time I was filled with odd sensations of loneliness and inadequacy.

I began to think she was trying to get something across to me, only she couldn't put it into words. No, it was something preceding words, something she herself couldn't grasp. All the more reason why the words wouldn't come. Which had her constantly fiddling with her hairclip, wiping her lips with her handkerchief, and staring meaninglessly into my eyes. I would have loved to hold her, to comfort her, but I always stopped short. Probably that would only have hurt her. So it was that we kept walking the streets of Tokyo and Naoko kept searching for words in a void. Same as ever.

Whenever there was a telephone call from Naoko or I went out on Sunday mornings, the guys at the dorm would always kid me about it. Only to be expected, really. They all thought I'd gotten myself a

girlfriend. There was no way to explain otherwise and no need to, so I just let things ride. When I'd return in the evening somebody'd invariably ask me what position we'd made it in or what hers felt like or what color panties she wore or some other stupid remark. To which I inevitably made some appropriate response.

*

And so I turned nineteen. The sun rose and fell, the national flag was raised and lowered, and every Sunday I dated the girlfriend of my dead best friend. What the hell was I doing? What was I trying to do? I had absolutely no idea. In class we read Claudel, Racine, Eisenstein, all of which did precious little for me. I didn't make one new friend at school, and relations at the dorm were one-time-around at best. Everyone thought that because I was always reading I wanted to become a writer, but I never even entertained the idea. I didn't especially think about becoming anything.

On a number of occasions I tried to talk to Naoko about these things. She at least could come close to knowing what I meant. But I never could find the words to express myself. Strange, I thought. It was as if I'd caught her disease of groping for words.

Saturday evening I'd be in a chair in the lobby by

the phone, waiting for Naoko's call. Saturday evenings, with almost everyone out on the town, the place was emptier than usual. Sitting there in that stillness, I'd stare at the particles of light drifting through space, trying to divine my own thoughts. What the hell was I after? And what did people want of me? No answer was forthcoming. At times I'd reach out my hand toward those drifting particles of light, but my fingertips never touched anything.

*

I was always reading, yet I wasn't your voracious reader. I read my favorites over and over again, which at the time included Truman Capote, Scott Fitzgerald, and Raymond Chandler. I never ran into another soul in my classes or at the dorm with my tastes in fiction. They'd generally be reading Kazumi Takahashi or Kenzaburo Oe or Yukio Mishima. Either that or contemporary French writers. So, of course, our conversation never meshed. I'd just keep my nose to my own books, read them time and again, close my eyes, and inhale their essence. The smell of the print, the feel of the pages, these things alone were enough to thrill me.

To my eighteen-year-old tastes, John Updike's *Centaur* had been the pinnacle of writing, yet after

a few readings it began to lose its original luster, making way for *The Great Gatsby* to ease into the number one slot. Whenever I felt like it, I'd take *Gatsby* down from the shelf, open it at random, and read a passage. It never once let me down. Never a boring page. Just amazing. Nonetheless, there wasn't another person around who'd read *Gatsby*, or anyone even conceivably a *Gatsby*-reader type. Even if no one campaigned against the reading of Fitzgerald, no one exactly recommended it either.

At the time there was but one other person who'd read *The Great Gatsby*, and that was how he fell in with me. A Tokyo University law student named Nagasawa, two years my senior. He lived in the same dorm, so I pretty much knew him by sight. When I was sitting soaking up the sun in a spot in the dining hall one day with my copy of *Gatsby*, he came up and sat beside me. He wanted to know what I was reading and I told him *Gatsby*. Interesting? he asked. Interesting enough for me to read it three times through and still feel tingles.

"Any guy who reads *The Great Gatsby* three times through has gotta be okay by me," he said, half to himself. And so we became friends. That was October.

The more I learned about this Nagasawa, the more he struck me as an oddball. Now, I've crossed paths with and gotten to know my share of odd-

balls in my time, but none was as offbeat as he. I can't even begin to touch the number of books he'd read, yet he made it a rule never to read anything by writers who'd been dead for less than thirty years. Can't trust them, he'd say.

"It's not that I don't trust contemporary literature. It's just that I don't want to waste my precious hours on something that hasn't stood the test of time. Life is short."

"So tell me, Nagasawa, what sort of writers do you like?" I asked.

"Balzac, Dante, Conrad, Dickens," he rattled off.

"Nobody very up-to-date, as writers go."

"That's why I read them. If I read what everybody else reads, I'd only wind up thinking like everybody else. That's for hicks, riff-raff. People with a decent head on their shoulders shouldn't stoop to that. Think about it, Watanabe. Do you know you and I are the only two halfway decent guys in this dorm? The rest are trash."

"What makes you think that?" I asked, taken aback.

"I just know, clear as if there was a mark on our foreheads. That and we're the only ones who've read *Gatsby*."

I did a quick calculation in my head. "But Scott Fitzgerald's only been dead twenty-eight years."

"Who's to quibble over two years?" he said.

"Under par is fine for a writer as great as Fitzgerald."

Still, it was one of the best-kept secrets in the dorm that here was a closet classicist. Not that anybody would have cared much if they'd known. What he was famous for, above all, were his brains. He'd gotten into Tokyo University with no problem, had impeccable grades, and would pass his public service examinations and enter the Foreign Ministry and be a diplomat. His father ran a large hospital in Nagoya that his elder brother, predictably a Tokyo University med-school graduate, was slated to take on. Your storybook household. He had loads of pocket money, on top of which he had style, so everyone always showed him respect. Even the dorm supervisor couldn't bring himself to say anything too strong to Nagasawa. If he requested something of someone, it would get done, no complaints. That's all there was to it.

Nagasawa was equipped with an inborn something that made others just naturally fall in line. An ability to be up on everyone by assessing situations virtually instantaneously, by delivering succinct, well-calculated instructions, and by getting people to do his bidding promptly. An aura hovered halolike above his head as a sign of these powers. Anyone had but to set eyes on him to recognize with fear and trembling that "This man is

special." Accordingly, everyone was dumbfounded that Nagasawa should have chosen an undistinguished nobody like me to be his friend. Thanks to which, people I hardly even knew began treating me with no mean respect. It boggled the mind, but the reason was simple enough. Nagasawa liked me because I didn't pay him any special homage or attention. I was interested in his oddball human side, the convoluted workings of his person, but couldn't have cared less about any grade-point average or aura or manly stature. Very probably a refreshing change for him.

Nagasawa was a man of extremes, pulled together from a number of contradictory characteristics. Times he would be so kind even I'd be touched; yet, at the same time, deep down he was one nasty bastard. He embodied all the noble aspects of the spirit even as he indulged in the most common vulgarities. He'd forge ahead optimistically, carrying everyone along with him, a lonely sea of despair in his heart the whole while. I'd distinctly sensed these contradictions from the very first and couldn't for the life of me understand how the others could be so blind to them. The guy lugged around his own living hell.

As a rule, however, I believe I harbored good feelings toward him. His greatest virtue was his honesty: he positively never lied, and always admitted his

own errors and faults. Nor did he hide things that were not to his advantage. He was invariably considerate toward me and took care of all kinds of things for me. I'm sure that if he hadn't, dorm life would have been considerably more complicated and unpleasant. Yet I never once gave myself over wholeheartedly to him, and in that sense my relationship with him was completely different from my relationship with Kizuki. From the time I saw Nagasawa mistreat a drunk girl, I made up my mind never to give myself over to him no matter what.

There were a number of dorm legends concerning Nagasawa. One was that he'd swallowed three slugs; another was that he had an extremely large prick and had slept with one hundred women.

The slug story was true. He told me so himself when I asked him: "Three big ones."

"Why'd you want to do a thing like that?"

"It's a long story," he began, "but the year I entered the dorm, there was something of a row between the incoming students and the upperclassmen. September, I'm pretty sure it was. So I went on behalf of the newcomers to talk to the upperclassmen. Real right-wingers, the lot of them, with wooden *ken-do* swords, not a very conducive atmosphere for talking things over. I knew then and there it'd be up to me, so I told them I'd do whatever it took, just let's get things settled. All

right, then, let's see you swallow some slugs, they said. Fine by me, I told them, I'll swallow them. And I did. Three huge slugs the thugs rounded up."

"What'd it feel like?"

"What'd it feel like? Like nothing that anyone who hasn't swallowed slugs could possibly understand. That slimy ooze as the slugs slide down your throat and plop into your stomach. Unbearable. All cold and wet, and that aftertaste in your mouth. Simply revolting just to think of it. I wasn't going to retch up those things if it killed me. If I had, they'd just have made me swallow them again. Altogether I swallowed three of the things."

"What did you do afterwards?"

"I went back to my room and gulped down pitchers of salt water, of course," said Nagasawa. "I mean, what else was there for me to do?"

"You have a point there," I granted.

"But after that nobody could say a word against me, upperclassmen included. I dare say there's no one else around who'd swallow three slugs like that."

"Probably not," I agreed.

Verifying prick size was a simple matter. All I had to do was go to the baths with him. To be sure, it was a fine specimen. But one hundred women? Well, that was just bragging. More like seventy-five or so, he said after some reflection. Seventy, easy.

When I told him I'd only slept with one girl, he merely ribbed me that, hey, there was nothing to it.

"Tag along with me next time. Believe me, you'll get it right off."

His talk seemed all too incredible at the time, but in actual practice it really did prove remarkably easy. So easy, it almost took the fun out of it. We'd go to a bar or club in Shibuya or Shinjuku (generally one of his regulars), find two likely looking girls and strike up a conversation (the world is filled with girls sitting in pairs), have some drinks, then take them to a hotel and have sex. In any case, he was one smooth talker. Not that he talked about anything in particular, but when he turned on the charm, the girls would all swoon in a haze of admiration, get dragged along in the verbal undertow, drink too much in the process, and end up sleeping with him. And, of course, he was handsome, considerate, and clever, so the girls would be giddy just to be around him. Plus somehow—and this was the strangest thing of all for me—simply being with Nagasawa cast me in an attractive light, making even me seem a seductive type. Spurred on by Nagasawa, I'd say something and the girls would be all ears and laugh as they did for him. All because of Nagasawa's magic. An amazing talent, his. It'd bowl me over every time. By comparison, Kizuki's gift for gab was mere child's play. This was on a com-

pletely different scale. Even so, for all Nagasawa's flaunting of his abilities, I really began to miss Kizuki. I saw him in a new light: he'd been one faithful guy. Whatever minor talents he possessed, he'd saved them all for Naoko and me, whereas Nagasawa dispensed his overwhelming mastery all over the place as if it were all a game. Generally, he wouldn't even want to sleep with the girls sitting across from him. He was only playing.

I myself can't say I was too crazy about sleeping with girls I didn't know. As a method of letting off sexual steam it was easy enough, and the flesh-on-flesh contact felt pleasant as such. What got to me were those goodbyes the morning after. I'd wake up and there'd be some girl I'd never seen before fast asleep beside me, the whole room stinking of alcohol. The bed, the lights, the curtains, and the rest, all in that uniquely chintzy love-hotel decor, and me, my head blanked-out with a hangover. Eventually the girl would wake up and grope around for her underwear. Then, as she put on her stockings, she'd say, "I sure hope you remembered to wear one of those things last night, 'cause it was the worst possible day of my cycle." Then she'd sit at the mirror muttering about how her head hurt, or how she couldn't get her makeup right, while she put on lipstick and eyelashes. I just hated all that. Really, I always meant to leave before morning, but

you can't very well be casting lines at girls while minding a twelve o'clock curfew (physically impossible, that), the only alternative to which was obtaining night leave. Then you'd have no choice but to stay out until morning, whereupon you'd drag yourself back to the dorm disillusioned and hating yourself. Sun glaring in your eyes, mouth all grotty, feeling as if there was someone else's head on your shoulders.

After two or three rounds of this, I asked Nagasawa whether keeping it up for seventy times didn't leave him feeling kind of empty.

"If it leaves you feeling empty, that only goes to prove that you're a decent human being, and that's to be congratulated," he said. "There's nothing to be had from sleeping around with women you don't even know. You only get tired and fed up with yourself. Don't you think I feel the same way?"

"Then why make such a big thing of it?"

"That's difficult to explain. Take Dostoyevsky, what he wrote about gamblers. It's the same thing. I mean when you're surrounded with so many possibilities, it's hard just to pass things up, if you get my meaning."

"Kind of," I said.

"Come night and girls are all over the place, out on the town, drinking. They're looking for something, and I can give them that something they're

looking for. It's that simple. As simple as turning on a faucet to get a drink of water. Nail them in nothing flat. That's what they're waiting for, after all. That's what possibilities are. Who am I to turn up my nose at such possibilities? Here I am with abilities, and a stage on which to use these abilities. You're not going to tell me you'd walk by without a word?"

"For someone like me who's not in your position, I'm not going to say I know I would. I haven't the vaguest idea," I said with a laugh.

"For which, in a sense, you should be glad," said Nagasawa.

Nagasawa's womanizing had been one reason he'd entered the dormitory despite his wealthy family background. His father, it seems, had worried that he'd spend all his time in wanton dissipation if he lived on his own in Tokyo, and so had forced four years of dormitory life on him. Which was perfectly fine with Nagasawa, seeing as he did what he pleased and never paid much attention to dorm rules anyway. He'd get night leave whenever he felt like it and go girl-hunting or stay over at some lady-friend's apartment. It took some doing to get night leave, but in his case it was almost a standing free pass, and the same went for me as long as he put in a good word.

Nagasawa did have one steady girlfriend,

though, who'd been going with him from the time he entered university. Hatsumi was her name, same age as him and a nice enough girl from what I could tell the few times I met her. No breathtaking beauty; if anything, rather ordinary looking. So why would a guy like Nagasawa settle for a girl like that?—you'd almost think, until you talked with her and found it impossible not to like her. She was that kind of a girl. Good-natured, considerate, smart with a sense of humor, always tastefully dressed in good clothes. I myself liked her a lot, and I could only think if I had a girlfriend like her I wouldn't be caught dead sleeping around with all these nothing women. She took a liking to me, too, and offered to introduce underclasswomen from a club she belonged to, insisting that we go out as a foursome. But remembering my past experiences with double dates, I always came up with some polite excuse. Hatsumi's school was a women's university known for attracting beves of fabulously rich girls, none of whom could possibly have had anything in common to talk about with me.

She was well aware that Nagasawa slept around, but never once complained to him about it. She was deeply in love with Nagasawa, yet never forced anything on him.

"The woman's too good for the likes of me,"

Nagasawa used to say. Quite right, I thought.

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That winter I found part-time work at a small record shop in Shinjuku. The pay wasn't all that great, but the job was easy, night shifts only, three times a week. I also got to buy records cheap. At Christmas I bought Naoko a Henry Mancini record with the track "Dear Heart" she liked so much. I wrapped it up myself and tied it with a red ribbon. Naoko gave me a pair of woolen gloves she'd knitted herself. The thumbs were a little small, but warm they were.

"Sorry," she said, blushing. "I never get things right."

"Don't worry. Look, they fit fine," I said, putting them on to show her.

"Well, at least you won't have to keep your hands in your pockets," Naoko said by way of consolation.

Naoko didn't go back to Kobe that winter vacation. I worked until the end of the year and stayed on in Tokyo. It wasn't as if I'd miss anything exciting by not returning to Kobe, and there wasn't anyone I especially wanted to see. Over New Year's the dining hall was closed, so I ate at her apartment. We roasted rice cakes and made a simple broth, traditional New Year's foods.

All sorts of things happened between January and February 1969.

At the end of January, Kamikaze ran a fever of nearly 105 degrees and was suddenly bedridden. Thanks to which I had to pass up a date with Naoko, a performance of Brahms's Fourth, Naoko's favorite. She'd been looking forward to it, but Kamikaze was tossing and turning on his mattress in such agony he seemed about to die any minute. I couldn't just leave him like that. Nor could I find any kindly soul to take my place by his bedside. I bought ice and wrapped it in several plastic bags to make an ice pack, chilled towels to wipe away the sweat, took his temperature hourly, and even changed his shirts for him. The fever didn't go down for one whole day. Then, on the morning of the second day, he sprang up and began doing his exercises as if nothing had happened. When I took his temperature, the thermometer read just over 97. The guy couldn't have been human.

"And to think I haven't once had a fever before!" said Kamikaze, almost as if it had been through some oversight of mine.

"Well, you have now," I said, more than a little pissed off. And I showed him the two tickets I'd blown on account of him.

"Be glad they were free tickets," said Kamikaze. I

almost grabbed his radio and heaved it out the window, but my head hurt so I crawled back into bed.

February brought snow, a number of times.

At the end of February, I got in a fight over something stupid with an upperclassman living on the same floor of the dorm and threw him a punch. He hit his head on the concrete wall, but luckily wasn't hurt. Nagasawa interceded on my behalf, but still I was called to the supervisor's office for a reprimand, and from that time on dorm life became somehow unpleasant.

So ended one school year. Spring arrived. I missed out on a few credits. My grades weren't what they could have been. Mostly C's or D's, with a few B's. Naoko didn't lose any credits and so became a sophomore. We'd been one full time around the seasons.

Mid-April, Naoko turned twenty. My birthday was in November, so that made her some seven months older than I. Naoko twenty years old—there was something funny about that. It seemed more like we ought to have been going back and forth between eighteen and nineteen—eighteen then nineteen, then back to eighteen—that way it would have made more sense. But here she was twenty. And in autumn, I'd also be twenty. Only the one who'd died was forever seventeen.

It rained on Naoko's birthday. After school that day I bought a cake at a nearby shop, got on a train, and went to her apartment. After all, she'd turned twenty, so I'd said we ought to celebrate or something. I figured I'd probably hope for the same if it were the other way around. Spending your twentieth birthday all alone is nothing I'd wish on anyone. The train was crowded and, worse, it lurched from side to side. Thanks to which, by the time I reached her place, the cake looked like the ruins of the Coliseum in Rome. What the hell, we still lit the twenty candles I'd brought along, drew the curtains, turned out the lights, and did a passable rendition of birthday festivities. Naoko opened a bottle of wine, and we drank it, had some cake, and ate a simple supper.

"It seems so idiotic, turning twenty," said Naoko. "I didn't even prepare myself. It makes me feel strange. It's like someone's pushed me into this from behind."

"I've still got seven months ahead of me, so I can take my time getting ready," I said with a laugh.

"Aren't you the lucky one, still nineteen," jibed Naoko enviously.

Over supper I talked about how Kamikaze had bought himself a new sweater. Up to then he'd only had one sweater, his navy blue high school sweater, but finally he now had two. The new one had a

woven red and black deer pattern, a great-looking sweater in itself, but whenever he walked around in it, everyone would sputter with laughter in spite of themselves, although he could never figure out what they all found so amusing.

"Tell me, Watanabe, what's s-s-so funny?" he asked as he sat down beside me in the dining hall. "Is there something on my face?"

"No, there's nothing on it. There's nothing funny at all," I said, keeping a straight face. "But, say, that's a fine sweater you've got there."

"Thanks," said Kamikaze, smiling with pleasure.

The story amused Naoko no end. "I'd like to meet this fellow. Just once."

"No way. You'd only burst out laughing," I said.

"You really think so?"

"I'd even bet you. Me, I'm with him every day, and sometimes I can't control myself, he's so funny."

After supper, we washed the dishes and sat on the floor listening to records while finishing the last of the wine. For each glass I drank, she drank two.

That day Naoko was unusually talkative. She talked about her childhood, her school, her family, all at some length and with the clarity of a finely detailed painting. Just listening to her, I couldn't help being impressed at her powers of recall. But gradually I realized that what she was saying was

somehow strange, somehow unnatural, distorted. Each of the bits made sense in itself, but there was something queer about the way they were strung together. One led into the next and none of them ever came to an end. Until eventually I gave up following the drift altogether. I just put on records, one after the other, going through the whole stack, on back to the first record. There were only six records in total, a cycle beginning with "Sargeant Pepper" and ending with Bill Evans's "Waltz for Debbie." Outside, the rain kept falling. Time passed slowly as Naoko talked on without end.

The unnatural thing about Naoko's monologue was the way it consciously seemed to skirt certain areas. One of these, of course, was Kizuki, but I seemed to sense he wasn't all that she was avoiding. She went on and on about details that hardly mattered, all the while avoiding certain things. Yet, as this was the first time Naoko had gotten so absorbed in speaking, I just let her keep talking.

Still, when it got to be eleven o'clock and Naoko had been talking four hours nonstop, even I got to feeling uneasy. It was getting to be time for the last train home and I had my curfew to think about. Keeping an eye on the clock, I broke into her torrent at an appropriate moment.

"I ought to be going now. There's the train and all," I said, looking at my watch.

My words didn't seem to reach Naoko's ears. Either that, or she hadn't understood what I was saying. She pursed her lips a second, then immediately started talking again. I gave up and sat back down to finish off a second bottle of wine. The way things were going, it seemed wiser to let her keep talking all she wanted. I decided to let whatever happen just happen, last train, curfew, whatever.

In fact, Naoko didn't go on for long. Before I knew it, her words had trailed off, loose ends floating in the air. To be accurate, her talk hadn't ended, it had slipped off somewhere. She had meant to keep talking, but the words had simply vanished. She'd lost something. Or maybe it was me who'd lost something. Maybe my words had reached her ears and finally been understood, robbing her of the energy to continue. Lips parted slightly, Naoko looked at me vacantly, with glazed eyes, like some mechanical gizmo unplugged in mid-motion.

"I didn't mean to disturb you," I said, "but it's gotten late and..."

A tear squeezed out of Naoko's eye and rolled down her cheek, falling with a loud plop on a record jacket. After that first tear, there was no stopping the rest. She placed both hands on the floor and leaned forward, almost as if she meant to

vomit, but she was crying instead. Never before had I seen anyone cry so vehemently. I reached out and touched her shoulder. It was trembling. Then, almost unconsciously, I drew her close to me. She was quietly atremble in my arms, all tears. My shirt grew damp with her tears and warm breath, then sopping wet. Naoko's ten fingers groped—searching for some precious something—lost and wandering over my back. Supporting her with my left arm, I stroked her long, soft, straight hair with my right. For the longest time I stayed that way, just waiting for her to stop crying. But she didn't stop.

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That night I slept with Naoko. Whether it was the right thing to do or not, I don't know. Now, almost twenty years later, I still don't know and probably never will. At the time, though, it seemed like the only thing to do. She was all worked up and confused and I wanted to calm her down. I turned off the light, slowly and tenderly removed first her clothes, then mine. Then we embraced. On that warm rainy night, even naked we didn't feel cold. There in the dark Naoko and I explored each other's bodies without uttering a word. I kissed her, cupped my hands gently over her breasts. Naoko gripped my hardened penis. Her warm moist vagina wanted me.

Even so, she felt great pain when I entered her. I asked her if this was her first time and she nodded yes. Which scrambled up everything for me. Because I'd thought that Kizuki had been sleeping with Naoko all along. I pushed my penis in as far as it would go and kept it there, not moving, just holding her a good long while. Then, when I saw she'd relaxed, I began to move, slowly, taking my time until I came. At the very last, Naoko clung tight to my body and let out a cry. Of all the moans of orgasm I'd heard up to then, that had to be the saddest.

When it was all over I asked her why she hadn't slept with Kizuki. Something I should never have asked. Naoko let go of me and began to cry again. I pulled her bedding out of the closet and put her to bed. Then I had a cigarette, gazing out the window at the steady April rain.

Come morning, the rain let up. Naoko was sleeping with her back to me. Or maybe she'd stayed awake all night. Either way, her lips had lost the power of speech, and her body was as stiff as if it was frozen. I tried talking to her several times, but she made no reply and didn't even stir. I stared for the longest time at her naked back, then finally gave in to the urge to get up.

Record jackets and glasses and wine bottles and

ashtrays were all over the floor the way we'd left them the night before. On the table were the shambles of half the birthday cake. Everything looked as if time had suddenly stood still. I tidied up the mess on the floor and drank two glasses of water at the sink. On her desk was a dictionary and a table of French verbs. A calendar was tacked to the wall above the desk; a calendar without any photo or picture, just numbers. Nothing written on it.

I picked up the clothes that lay about. The front of my shirt was still damp. When I held it to my nose, it smelled of Naoko. On a notepad on her desk I wrote that I wanted to talk things over with her when she had collected herself, so she should give me a call. That, and Happy Birthday. Whereupon I glanced over at Naoko's back once more and left, closing the door quietly behind me.

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A week passed and no call came. Naoko didn't have a phone at her place, so Sunday morning I set out for Kokubunji. She wasn't there, nor was her name on the door. All the windows and shutters were closed tight. On checking with the superintendent, I learned the Naoko had moved out three days before and left no forwarding address.

Back at the dormitory, I wrote a long letter and addressed it to her care of her family in Kobe. No

matter where she'd moved, the letter would surely be forwarded to her.

I wrote down my honest feelings. That there were many things I didn't understand nor had even seriously tried to make sense of, and that it would take time. Who knows where I'll be when that time has passed, so there are no promises I can make, nor am I about to put forth demands or pretty words. First of all, there's too much we don't know about each other. Still, if you are willing to give me the time, I'll do my best so we can find out more about each other. Whatever, I want to meet again and take the time to discuss things. Ever since Kizuki died, I've been without anyone to whom I can tell my real feelings and I guess the same goes for you. Maybe we wanted more from each other than either of us cared to admit. Thanks to which we've gone about things the long way around and in a sense gone off-course in the process. Probably I should never have done what I did. But that's all I could do. What's more, the closeness I felt for you then was unlike any emotion I've ever felt before. I only hope you'll reply. In whatever form. So went the letter.

No reply came.

I felt as if something was missing inside me, which, for lack of something to fill it, left me with

an empty cavity in its place. My body was unnaturally light and resounded with phantom echoes. Weekdays I attended university more conscientiously than ever before, going to all my lectures. Boring as they were, I sat them out. I didn't even talk with my classmates. I ate my meals alone, quit smoking.

At the end of May, the campus went on strike. Those involved spoke of "dismantling the university." Fine, go ahead and dismantle it, I thought. Take it apart and trample it to pieces, I don't mind in the least. At least it'd give me a clean slate and I could take care of the rest. If you need help, I'll be only too glad to lend a hand. Just get done with it.

The university was barricaded and lectures cancelled, so I took a part-time job with a moving company. I'd sit next to the driver, load and unload the trucks. It was much harder work than I'd imagined, and at first my body ached so much I could barely get up in the morning. But the pay made up for that and, besides, keeping my body active made me forget about the empty cavity inside. Five days a week I worked for the movers in the daytime and three nights a week I had my record shop job. The nights I didn't work, I'd drink whiskey in my room and read. Kamikaze never touched a drop of liquor and was predictably hyper about the smell of

alcohol, complaining that he couldn't study for the stench whenever I lay on my bed swigging whiskey, so why didn't I go out to drink?

"You go out," I said.

"B-But you're not supposed to be drinking in the d-dorm. It's against the r-rules," he said.

"You go out," I repeated.

He didn't say another word. I felt miserable and went up on the roof to drink.

June rolled around and I wrote another long letter to Naoko, again sending it to her Kobe address. The contents were pretty much as before, with a final addition that it's hard waiting for an answer that doesn't come, so please write, if only to let me know how badly I hurt you. When I posted the letter, I could almost feel the cavity in my heart grow a tiny bit bigger.

Twice in June I went out on the town with Nagasawa and slept with girls. Sheer simplicity both times. One girl put up a bit of a fight when I took her to a hotel and started to take off her clothes. Yet no sooner had I decided it wasn't worth the fuss and had gotten into bed alone to read a book than she sidled up to me of her own accord. The other girl wanted to know all about me after we'd had sex. How many girls I'd slept with, where I was from, what kind of music I liked, whether I'd ever read any novels by Osamu Dazai,

had I traveled overseas, did I think her nipples were too big compared to other girls'—you name it, she asked it. I answered as tactfully as I could, then dozed off. On waking, the girl said she'd like to have breakfast with me, so we went to a coffee shop and ordered their morning special. Awful toast, awful eggs, awful coffee. Meanwhile the girl kept up a steady stream of questions. What kind of work did my father do, did I get good grades in high school, what month was I born, had I ever eaten frogs' legs, did I this, had I that? I began to get a headache, so when we'd finished breakfast, I told her I really ought to be going to my part-time job.

"Say, can't we meet again?" she asked despondently.

"We'll meet again in due time," I said, then split. Great, just great, I thought to myself as soon as I was on my own. What the hell was I doing? Thoroughly disgusted with myself, I nonetheless considered the alternative. There wasn't any. My body had cried out for sleeping with those girls. Yet the whole time I slept with them I'd been thinking of Naoko. Her naked body floating up pale white in the dark, her breathing, the sound of the rain. The more I thought of these things, the more acute the hunger my body felt, the thirst. I went up on the roof alone and drank whiskey, wondering what on earth I was to do with myself.

At the beginning of July a letter arrived from Naoko. A short letter.

"Please excuse my long delay in replying. But try to understand. It took me a long time before I could get myself to put things down on paper. This is my tenth time writing this letter. Writing comes hard to me.

"Let me start from the conclusion. I've decided for the moment to take a year off from university. I say 'for the moment,' but I doubt at this point I'll be going back to university at all. The leave of absence is merely a formality. This may seem very sudden to you, but it's something I'd been thinking of for a long time. I thought of talking to you about it many times, but just couldn't get it out. I guess I was afraid of opening up.

"There's too much here for you to be worrying about. Whatever happened or didn't happen, this is just how things turned out. Maybe putting it like this will hurt your feelings, and if that's the case I apologize, but what I want to say is that I don't want you to go blaming yourself on my account. This is something I have to do all by myself. I'd been letting it slide all this past year or so and was probably a burden to you because of it. This has to be the end.

"After I moved out of the Kokubunji apartment, I went back to my folks in Kobe and was going to a clinic for treatment. According to the doctor there's a sanatorium that could help me in the mountains near Kyoto, and I'm thinking of going there for a while. Not a hospital exactly, but a relaxed recuperation center. I can't say much about it now. I'll write you more details later. What I need now is somewhere nice and quiet, remote from the outside world, where my nerves can get a rest.

"I'm grateful in my own way for your having stayed by my side this past year. Please believe that, if nothing else. You did not hurt me. The one who hurt me was myself. Of this much I'm sure.

"I'm not ready to see you again just yet. Not that I don't want to see you—I'm just not prepared. I'll be sure to write you a letter as soon as I feel I am ready. Then I think we might be able to get to know each other a little better. As you yourself put it, we still have many things to learn about each other.

"Goodbye for now."

I read the letter hundreds of times. A desolate feeling possessed me with each reading, akin to the desolation I'd felt whenever Naoko stared into my eyes. An inconsolable feeling I couldn't deal with or find any place for. Without contour or weight, like

a wind whistling around my body, it was nothing I could even wrap around myself. Scenes passed before my eyes, other peoples' words failed to reach my ears.

Saturday nights I passed the hours sitting in the lobby watching television just as before. No expectations of a phone call, but nothing else to do. I was forever turning on baseball broadcasts and pretending to watch. Then I'd divide the vast awkward space lying between the television and myself into two, and divide those two spaces again into halves. Over and over again, until finally I'd made a space tiny enough to fit in the palm of my hand.

At ten o'clock, I'd turn off the TV, go back to my room, and fall asleep.

*

At the end of the month, Kamikaze presented me with a firefly.

The firefly was in an instant coffee jar. The jar contained some stalks of grass and a little water, and its lid was perforated with tiny air holes. It was still daylight, so it seemed only one rather unremarkable black bug, like any you'd find near water. Nevertheless, Kamikaze declared, this was definitely a firefly. He knew all about fireflies, he claimed, and I had no particular reason to challenge him. Fine, so it was a firefly. The firefly

looked kind of sleepy. It would slip each time it tried to scale the glass walls.

"It was in the yard."

"The yard here?" I asked, surprised.

"R-Remember there's a hotel nearby that lets out fireflies in the summer to attract customers? The thing just found its way here," he said, stuffing clothes and notebooks into his black Boston bag.

Already several weeks into summer vacation, we were about the only ones still at the dorm. I'd kept up my part-time work, not wanting to return to Kobe, and he'd had job training. Which he'd just finished and was now heading back home. Kamikaze's family lived in Yamanashi.

"You'd do well to give it to a girl. She'd be thrilled, I'm sure," he told me.

"Thanks," I said.

The dorm was dead quiet at the end of the day, a virtual derelict. Down came the flag, on came the lights in the dining hall windows. Only half of them lit since there were so few students. The right half off, left half on. Even so, there was a faint smell of evening meal in the air. Cream stew.

I took the coffee jar with the firefly up to the roof. There wasn't a soul up there. Only a white shirt someone had forgotten fluttered on the clothesline like some cast-off skin. I mounted the iron ladder at the corner of the roof and climbed up

the water tower. The cylindrical tank was still warm from the heat of the day. I sat down on it and leaned over the railing, with an ever so slightly clipped moon floating right there in plain view. To the right lay the lights of Shinjuku, to the left the lights of Ikebukuro. Rivers of car headlights poured between one center and another. A soft drone composed of all the different sounds hovered hazily over the metropolis.

The firefly glowed at the bottom of the jar, but all too weakly, with hardly any life to it. The last time I'd seen a firefly was long ago. Still, the fireflies of my memory shone far more brightly as they flitted about in the summer night air, nothing like this. I had believed in the brilliance of fireflies.

Maybe the firefly was dying and on its last glow. Holding the jar by the mouth I gave it a couple of gentle shakes. The firefly struck the glass and flew maybe an inch, but its light was as dim as ever.

Just when was the last time I'd seen a firefly? And where? I could picture the scene, but the place and time escaped me. I could hear the dark sound of water at night. There was an old brick floodgate, the kind you cranked the handle to open and close. It wasn't a big river, more a small stream, the surface thick with reeds that had spread out from the banks. It was dark all about, too dark to see even my own feet when I switched off the flashlight. And

there on the pool above the floodgate swarmed what seemed like hundreds of fireflies, skittering like sparks across the water.

I closed my eyes and for a while immersed myself in the dark night of memory. The sound of the wind came through clearer than ever. Not a very strong wind, really, yet it carved astonishingly vivid tracks as it lapped around my body. On opening my eyes, the summer night had grown a shade deeper.

I opened the jar and let the firefly out, setting it down on the inch-high rim of the water tank. This new state of affairs didn't seem to register with the firefly. It toddled around a bolt, kicking over a scab of paint in its path. It first headed right, ascertained that it had run into a dead end, then turned back left. Then it set at patiently scaling the bolt and squatted motionless there on top. The firefly almost seemed out of breath, not even twitching.

I sat there, leaning on the railing, just looking at the little fellow. Neither of us moved for a good long while. Only the breeze slipped past us, rustling the countless leaves of the giant zelkova in the dark.

I waited.

Ages later, the firefly took off. Flicking open its wings as if it suddenly remembered, the next instant it was over the railing and off into the gloom.

Then, making up for lost time, it dashed out in an arc beside the water tower, paused just long enough to let the streak of light adhere to the breeze, then finally flew off to the east.

The firefly had vanished, but its light trail still lingered, a pale glow through the thick eyeshut darkness like some homeless spirit wandering on and on without end.

Over and over I stretched out my hand into the night. My fingers touched nothing. That trace of light was always just a little beyond my fingertips.

CHAPTER 4

Over summer break the university called in the riot police, who broke down the barricades and arrested all the students holed up inside. This was nothing so out of the ordinary: the same thing was happening at all the other universities at the time. The university wasn't dismantled or anything like it. There was a lot of capital invested in the university and it was not about to come undone just like that—"Sure thing, whatever you say"—simply because some students raised a commotion. In any case, even those who'd barricaded the campus hadn't really thought to break up the university. All they'd sought was a hand in altering the directives, which to me couldn't have mattered less. Hence the squelching of the strike was no great loss as far as I was concerned.

Come September, I went back to the university half expecting to find the place in ruins, but the campus was untouched. No books looted from the

library, no classrooms in shambles, no Students' Union burned to the ground. I was shocked. What the hell had those clowns been up to?

The strike broke up and lectures resumed with riot police on the campus. The first students back in attendance were the very crowd who'd led the strike. They came to class, pulled out their notebooks, answered when their names were called. It didn't make any sense. The resolution to strike was still in effect: no one had declared an end to it. For all the incursion of the riot police and destruction of the barricades, the strike was still on in principle. These were the guys who'd been so vocal about striking, who'd been quick to knock down or string up any student opposing the strike (or even showing any doubts). I went up to them and asked straight out why they didn't keep on striking, why were they now going to lectures? They didn't answer. No way they would. How could they? They were afraid of losing credits because of poor attendance. And to think that these were the guys who'd called for the dismantling of the university! What a joke! This miserable flock of opportunists would raise or lower their voices with the least shift in the wind.

Hey, Kizuki! It's a rotten world we've got here, I found myself thinking. These worms'll be sure to get their college credits, go out into society, and

busily set about making one miserable little status quo.

I decided I'd go to class, but for the time being wouldn't answer when attendance was taken. A meaningless gesture, I knew, but I didn't feel right otherwise. Still, because of this gesture, I became even more isolated from the rest of the class. My name would be called, I wouldn't answer, and an awkward silence would sweep through the classroom. No one would talk to me and I would talk to no one.

The second week of September I arrived at the conclusion that my so-called university education was absolutely meaningless. Still, I decided to perceive it all as an exercise in withstanding boredom. There was no compelling reason to quit school and go out into the world. There was nothing I particularly wanted to do. So every day I went to the university, attended lectures, took notes, and in my free time read books and did research in the library.

*

By the second week of September Kamikaze still hadn't returned. This was more than just strange, it was earthshaking. Classes had already started at his university and it wasn't like him to miss them. A

fine layer of dust collected on his desk and radio. On the shelf above, his plastic cup and toothbrush, tea canister, bug spray, and other sundry items stood neatly arranged as ever.

While Kamikaze was away, I cleaned the room. Cleaning the room had become part of my routine this past year and a half, so if Kamikaze wasn't around, then it was up to me to maintain its cleanliness. I'd sweep the floor every day, clean the windows every third day, air the bedding once a week. I awaited Kamikaze's return, his words of praise, "W-Watanabe, what's come over you? Everything's so clean."

But he didn't return. One day, coming back from school, I found all his things had been removed. Even his name was missing from the door, leaving only my own. I went to the dormitory supervisor to ask what had become of him.

"He's left the dormitory," the supervisor said. "You'll be alone in that room for a while."

When I asked what had happened, he told me nothing. He was that type of scum who derives the utmost pleasure from maintaining an elite of one, managing things without telling others anything.

I left the photograph of the iceberg on the wall for a while, but eventually took it down and put up pictures of Jim Morrison and Miles Davis instead.

Made the place a bit more like my own. I bought a small stereo with savings from my jobs, and in the evenings I'd have a drink and listen to music all by myself. I thought of Kamikaze from time to time, but found I'd become a confirmed single-room-dweller nonetheless.

*

Monday mornings from ten o'clock I had "History of Theater II," lectures on Euripides, which ended at eleven-thirty. After the lecture, I'd walk to a little restaurant ten minutes from campus and have an omelet and salad. A bit off the main drag, the restaurant was slightly pricier than your average student spot, but the place was peaceful and they did serve a mean omelet. Three people worked there, a quiet couple and a girl part-timer. One day, I was sitting alone by the window eating my lunch when four students entered, two men and two women, all neatly dressed. They took a table near the door and looked over the menu, considered their choices a while, then assembled an order, which they relayed to the part-timer.

After a time I noticed that one of the girls kept glancing in my direction. Incredibly short-cropped hair, dark sunglasses, white cotton miniskirt, she wasn't anyone I recalled seeing before, so I went on

eating, until suddenly she stood up and came over. Putting one hand on the edge of the table, she addressed me by name.

"You're Watanabe, no?"

I glanced up and took a closer look at her face. Still no recognition. She cut such a striking figure I was sure I'd have remembered if I'd met her before. And yet there weren't that many people around the university who knew me by name.

"Mind if I sit here a while? Or are you expecting someone?"

I shook my head, not knowing exactly what to do. "No, no one's coming. Sit down."

She took the seat opposite, pulling out the chair noisily, stared at me from behind her sunglasses, then shifted her gaze to my plate.

"Looks good, that."

"It is. Mushroom omelet and green pea salad."

"Hmm," she said. "I'll try that next time. I already ordered something else."

"What did you order?"

"Macaroni au gratin."

"The macaroni's not bad," I said. "But, say, have we met somewhere before? I can't seem to remember."

"Euripides," she said flat out. "Electra. 'No, not even the gods lend an ear to our misfortunes.' The class that just finished."

I took a good long look at her. She removed her sunglasses. Then I remembered. She was a freshman I'd seen in "History of Theater II," only she'd changed her hairstyle so radically I hardly recognized her.

"Hold on, didn't you have long hair before summer vacation?" I asked, pointing to four inches below her shoulder.

"Right. Only I got a permanent this summer. A real horror, that. I seriously considered ending it all, it was so, like...really gruesome. Like seaweed tangles on a drowned corpse. But if it was worth killing myself over, I thought, I might as well lop the whole lot off, have a crew-cut. And this is loads cooler," she said, running a hand over her two-inch shag. Then she turned to me and smiled.

"It's not bad at all," I said, eating my omelet. "Let's have a look from the side."

She turned to the side and held the position for maybe five seconds.

"Mmm, looks good on you, I'd say. I guess it's the shape of your head. Shows off your ears nicely, too," I offered.

"Right you are. I think so, too. Cutting it all off like this wasn't half-bad, I thought. But y'know, guys, they never say so. 'Elementary school' or 'concentration camp,' that's all I get. Tell me, why are guys so hung up on girls with long hair? Downright

fascist. Stupid. Why do men have this thing about girls with long hair being so elegant, refined, feminine, and all that? Me, I must know two hundred and fifty low-life girls with long hair. Honest."

"I like you much better this way," I said. And that was no lie. When she'd had long hair, she hadn't made much of an impression on me. As far as I could remember, she'd been, well, your ordinary cute girl. Whereas the girl sitting across from me now seemed like some fantastic creature just sprung into the world with the advent of spring, body bristling with life. The pupils of her eyes darted about excitedly, separate life-forms unto themselves, laughing, raging, pausing, withdrawing. It'd been ages since I'd seen anyone so absolutely alive. I just gazed at her, enthralled.

"You really think so?"

I nodded as I ate my salad.

Donning her sunglasses once more, she looked at me from their depths.

"Say, you wouldn't lie to me, would you?"

"Well, if at all possible, I'd like to think of myself as an honest person," I said.

"Hmm," she said.

"Why do you wear such dark sunglasses?" I ventured.

"It was all so sudden, getting my hair cut short, I

felt defenseless. Like I'd been cast out naked into the crowd. It made me nervous. That's why I got these."

"Fair enough," I said, then finished the rest of my omelet. She watched me eat with singular intensity.

"You don't have to be getting back?" I asked, nodding at the three members of her group.

"No big deal. I'll get back to them when the food comes. Not to worry. Unless I'm bothering you."

"No bother at all, I was just finishing," I said. She showed no sign of heading back to her table, so I ordered a coffee. The lady of the house cleared away my plate and set down cream and sugar in its place.

"Tell me, why didn't you answer today in class when they were taking roll call? Watanabe's your name, isn't it? Toru Watanabe?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you answer?"

"I just didn't feel like answering today."

She took her sunglasses off once again, placed them on the table, and gave me a look as if she were peering into the cage of some rare species of animal. "I just didn't feel like answering today," she repeated. "Y'know, you talk like Humphrey Bogart. Cool and tough."

"Give me a break. I'm just an ordinary person. Like you find all over the place."

The lady brought my coffee and put it down in front of me. I took a sip. Black.

"See, what'd I tell you, no cream or sugar."

"I don't happen to like sweet things, that's all," I explained as patiently as I could. "Don't go getting any wrong ideas."

"Why are you so tan?"

"I took a two-week hiking trip. Here and there. Backpack and sleeping bag. That's why."

"Whereabouts?"

"From Kanazawa all around the Noto Peninsula. Up to Niigata."

"All by yourself?"

"Sure," I said. "Some places I might have company, though."

"Any romance along the way? A girl you maybe met at some stopover?"

"Romance?" I said, taken aback. "Listen, now I know you've got the wrong picture. Just tell me, a guy with a sleeping bag, unshaven, traipsing around, just where do you suppose he's going to run across romance?"

"You always travel around by yourself like that?"

"Pretty much."

"You like loneliness?" she asked, propping her

chin in her hand. "Traveling alone, eating meals alone, sitting off alone in class, is that what you like?"

"Nobody likes loneliness. I just don't go out of my way to make friends. I'd only get let down in the end."

She put her sunglasses to her lips and said in a low voice, " 'Nobody likes loneliness. I'd only get let down in the end.' If you ever write your memoirs, you could use that line."

"Thanks," I said.

"Do you like green?"

"Why?"

"Because that's a green polo shirt you're wearing. I thought I'd ask."

"It's nothing special by me. Anything'll do."

" 'Nothing special by me. Anything'll do.' " She was repeating again. "I just love the way you talk. It's like plastered over smooth. Has anyone ever told you that?"

Never, I told her.

"Well, I just did. My name's Midori. I know it means 'green,' but I don't look good in the color. Strange, isn't it? And my sister's name means 'pink.' It isn't fair."

"Does your sister look good in pink?"

"She was born to wear pink. It's just not fair."

The food arrived over at her table and a fellow in a Madras check shirt was calling. She gave a "gotcha" hand signal in his direction.

"Say, Watanabe, do you take notes in lectures? 'History of Theater II?'"

"Yeah, I do."

"I hate to ask, but could you lend me them? I missed two lectures. And there's nobody I know in the class."

"Sure, of course." I took the notebook out of my satchel, and after checking that there wasn't anything extraneous written in it, I handed it over to Midori.

"Thanks. So, Watanabe, you going to be in school the day after tomorrow?"

"I'll be there."

"Well, then, can you come here at twelve? I'll give you back your notes and treat you to lunch. It's not like you get indigestion if you don't eat alone, is it?"

"Come off it," I said. "And I don't need any thank-yous. Not for lending you my notes, I don't."

"That's okay. I'd like to. So it's set then? You don't need to write it down? You won't forget?"

"I won't forget. I'm to meet you here the day after tomorrow at twelve."

Again a call from across the room. "Hey, Midori, hurry up, the food's getting cold!"

"Tell me, have you always spoken like you do?" she asked, ignoring the call.

"I guess so. It's nothing I pay much attention to," I answered. In fact, it was the first time I was aware there was anything strange at all about the way I spoke.

She seemed to think something over for a second, then smiled and went back to her table. When I passed by her table as I was leaving, Midori waved. The other three just looked at me.

Wednesday at twelve Midori didn't show. I'd only meant to have a beer while waiting for her, but the place got crowded so I felt I ought to order some food. It was twelve-thirty-five by the time I finished eating. Still no Midori. I paid the bill and stepped outside, took a seat on the stone steps of a little Shinto shrine across the way and let the beer wear off, waiting for her until one. Nothing doing. I gave up and headed back to campus to read in the library. I had a German class from two.

When the lecture was over, I went to the Students' Union to look at the class register and found her name listed in "History of Theater II"—Midori Kobayashi. No other Midori in the class. Next I went to the student card file, searched out a "Kobayashi, Midori, matriculated 1969," and jotted down her address and telephone number.

The address was in Toshima, northwest Tokyo, her family home. I went to a phone booth and gave the number a call.

"Hello, Kobayashi Book Shop," came a man's voice. Kobayashi Book Shop?

"Excuse me, but would Midori be there?" I inquired.

"No, she's out right now," said the man.

"Has she gone to the university?"

"Hmm, er...maybe the hospital. And your name is?"

I didn't leave my name, but simply said thanks and hung up. Hospital? Had she injured herself or been taken ill? There'd been no out-of-the-ordinary urgency in the man's voice. "Hmm, er...maybe the hospital." From the sound of it, the hospital constituted a regular part of her life, like going to market to buy fish. All said in passing. I tried thinking this one through, but I could tell it was going to be a while before I got anywhere, so I simply went back to the dorm, stretched out on the bed, and finished reading the copy of Conrad's *Lord Jim* I'd borrowed from Nagasawa. Then I went to return it to him.

Nagasawa was just stepping out for dinner, so I went with him to the dining hall.

"How'd the Foreign Ministry exam go?" I asked. The second part of the exam had been in August.

"Straightforward," said Nagasawa blandly. "Passing's equally straightforward. You've got your group discussion and your interview. No different than spinning a line to a girl."

"So it was easy," I said. "When are the results announced?"

"Beginning of October. Buy you a good meal if I top the list."

"Tell me, then, just what is there to the Foreign Ministry exams? Is everyone who takes them 'Nagasawa class'?"

"You kidding? Most are jerks. If not, then loonies. Ninety-five percent of your would-be bureaucrats are downright trash. I kid you not. Most of 'em are functionally illiterate."

"Then why'd you want to enter the Foreign Ministry?"

"I have my reasons," said Nagasawa. "Say I like the notion of working overseas, things like that. But the greatest reason is that I want to test my own abilities. And if I'm going to give it the Nagasawa try, I want to test my mettle in the biggest pool around, the state. Just to see how far I can rise in this vast bureaucracy, how far I can go on my own talents. You follow?"

"It all sounds like a game."

"Exactly. It has all the makings of one. I don't have any of this lust for wealth or power—well,

hardly any. And that's the truth. Maybe I'm one small-minded jerk, but it'd surprise you how little of that there is in me. I'm your selfless, emotionless, detached man. What I do have is curiosity. That and a will to try my stuff in the tough, wide world."

"Which leaves no room for ideals, I take it?"

"Of course not," he said. "There's no need of that in life. What's needed isn't ideals but role models."

"But surely there must be loads of lives not like that," I protested.

"You have something against the way I live?"

"Oh, stop it," I said. "It's got nothing to do with like or dislike. Am I right or am I right? Granted, I didn't make it into Tokyo University and I don't have the knack for sleeping with any woman I want whenever I want and smooth talk doesn't come easy to me. Nobody holds me in awe or steps out of the way for me. I don't even have a girlfriend. And graduating from the literature department of a second-rate university, what hope have I of a future? What is there I could possibly say to you?"

"So does that mean you're jealous of my life?"

"Nothing of the kind," I said. "I'm much too used to my own. Moreover, to be perfectly honest, I haven't the least interest in Tokyo University or the Foreign Ministry. The one and only thing I'm

jealous of is your having a wonderful girlfriend like Hatsumi."

He ate his meal in silence.

"You know, Watanabe," Nagasawa said after he'd finished, "I just know our paths are going to cross somewhere ten, twenty years after we leave this place. And I also know that in some way or another we're both going to be in need of each other's services."

"A Dickens novel if ever there was one," I joked.

"Maybe so." He laughed. "But my hunches generally hit the mark."

After dinner Nagasawa and I went drinking in a nearby bar. We stayed there until past nine.

"So tell me, Nagasawa, what the hell kind of role model do you have?" I thought to ask.

"You'd laugh, I know," he said.

"Laugh? Not me," I said.

"A gentleman, that is what I aspire to be."

I didn't laugh, but I did nearly fall out of my chair, incredulous. "By gentleman, do you mean a...gentleman?"

"That's it—a *gentleman*," he said.

"And just what does this being a gentleman entail? If you've a definition, would you care to enlighten me?"

"A gentleman is he who does not what he wants to do but what he ought to do."

“Of all the people I’ve met up to now, you’ve got to be the biggest oddball,” I said.

“And of all the people I’ve met up to now, you’ve got to be the most regular,” he said. Then he paid the whole bill.

*

At the following Monday’s “History of Theater II,” there was again no sign of Midori Kobayashi. I scanned the entire classroom to make sure she wasn’t there, then took my usual seat in the last row and wrote a letter to Naoko until the professor showed. I wrote about my travels this past summer. The paths I’d walked, towns I’d passed through, people I’d met. Each night always brought thoughts of you, I added. Only since I’d been unable to see you have I come to realize how much I want you. University was boring beyond measure, but I’d resolved to attend classes and study as a form of self-discipline. Since you’ve been gone, everything’s seemed dull and lifeless. I want to see you, if only once, and just talk. If at all possible, I’d like to visit your sanatorium and spend some time with you. Could that be arranged? And again, if possible, I’d like to take a walk side by side with you, like before. And dare I make one last imposition, I wrote. Please send a reply, however short.

Keeping it at that, I neatly folded the four sheets

and slid them into the envelope I’d brought along, addressing it care of Naoko’s family.

At last the short, grim-faced professor made his appearance and wiped his brow with his handkerchief. He had a bad leg and always walked with a metal cane. “History of Theater II,” if not exactly a fun lecture, was at least a well-delivered, worthwhile listen. Starting off with “It’s as hot as usual,” he plunged into an explication of the role of the *deus ex machina* in Euripidean drama. The gods in Euripides were different from those in Aeschylus and Sophocles, he maintained. Ten minutes on, the door to the classroom opened and in walked Midori. She wore a dark blue sports shirt with cream-colored cotton slacks and the same sunglasses as before. Directing a sorry-I’m-late smile at the professor, she found her way to the seat next to me. Then she extracted a notebook from her shoulder-bag and handed it to me. Attached was a memo. “Sorry about Wednesday. Mad?”

The lecture was about halfway through and the professor was sketching the set-up of the Greek stage on the blackboard when the door flew open and two helmeted students strode in. A vaudeville duo, one lanky and wan, the other dark-complexioned, portly, and with a “radical” growth of beard that did absolutely nothing for him. The tall one was clutching a stack of handbills. The short one

filed over to the professor and informed him that, with all due respect, they would be turning the latter half of his lecture into a debate. There were issues in today's world far more serious than Greek tragedy, he said. It was not a demand; it was a simple declaration. I can't imagine anything more serious than Greek tragedy, the professor scoffed, but whatever I say will surely be pointless, so go ahead and do what you're going to do. Then, pulling himself up by the edge of the desk, he took up his cane and fumed out of the classroom, dragging his foot.

The tall student set about passing out handbills, while the round-faced student mounted the podium and began a speech. The handbills were in that facile block writing uniquely capable of reducing all phenomena to succinct formulae. "Smash the Deceitful Chancellor Elections!" "Gather Forces Behind the Renewed All-University Strike!" "Bring Down the Hammer on the Path of Industrial-Academic Collusion! Japanese Imperial System!" The argument was fine, the contents hardly objectionable, but the writing failed to convince. It imparted no confidence, nor was there any power to command hearts and minds. The round-faced student's speech likewise wove in and out, embroidering on similar themes. The same old song. The melody remained constant, only the lyrics of

who-did-what-to-whom had changed. This crew's real enemy wasn't the System, it was their own lack of imagination.

"Let's get out of here," said Midori.

I nodded and stood up, then the two of us walked out of the classroom. Round Face said something to me as we were leaving, which I didn't quite catch. Midori told him "Bye-bye" with a fluttering wave of her hand.

"Tell me, does this mean we're counter-revolutionary?" Midori asked once we were out of the classroom. "If the revolution succeeds, we're both sure to be hung from telephone poles."

"Well, before that I'd like to eat some lunch if we might," I said.

"Why yes, there's a little out-of-the-way place I'd like to take you to. That is, if you've got some time."

"Why not? I'm free until my two o'clock class."

Midori led me to a bus and we rode to Yotsuya. The shop turned out to be a tiny traditional box-lunch place tucked away in the backstreets. No sooner were we seated at a table than the day's set menu was brought forth in square vermilion-lacquered boxes along with bowls of clear broth. Well worth the bus trip.

"Delicious."

"And cheap, too. That's why I've been coming

here occasionally for lunch since high school. 'Cause you know, my high school was right around here. A real strict school. We'd have to sneak out to eat here. It was the sort of school that would suspend you if they ever caught you eating out."

Without her sunglasses Midori looked more sleepy-eyed than the last time. She fidgeted with the thin silver bracelet on her left wrist and scratched at the corner of her eye with her little finger.

"Sleepy?" I asked.

"A little. I haven't been getting enough sleep. Busy with things and...you know. But I'm all right, don't worry," she said. "Sorry about last time. That morning there was something really important I just couldn't get out of, so there was nothing I could do. I thought of phoning, but I couldn't remember the name of the restaurant and I didn't have your number. Did you wait long?"

"It's no big deal. I'm your individual with too much time on his hands."

"Really? So much?"

"Enough for me to want to give you some so you get some sleep."

Midori propped up her chin on her hands and looked at me with a smile. "You're very considerate."

"Not considerate, just idle," I said. "Incidentally,

that day I tried ringing you up at your house, but the person there said you'd gone to the hospital. Was something the matter?"

"My house?" she said, raising her eyebrows slightly. "How did you know my phone number?"

"I looked it up at the Students' Union, of course. Anyone can do that."

She gave a couple of nods, clever, clever, then fiddled with her bracelet again. "Now why didn't I think of that? I could have looked up your number, too. Still, about the hospital, let's talk about that next time, okay? I don't want to say anything just now. Sorry."

"Never mind. I guess I shouldn't have opened my mouth."

"Un-uh, nothing like that. I'm just very tired. Tired as a rain-beaten monkey."

"Shouldn't you go home and get some sleep?" I suggested.

"I don't want to sleep yet. Let's walk a bit," said Midori.

She led me to her old high school, a short stroll from Yotsuya Station.

Passing the station, those interminable walks with Naoko sprang to mind. Now that I thought of it, everything had started here. If I hadn't run into Naoko that Sunday in May on the Chuo Line, my

life would have been a whole lot different. Then the very next instant it occurred to me, no, things might still have happened pretty much as they did. We doubtlessly had been ordained to meet, and even if we hadn't met then and there, we would have at some other point. Not that I had any real grounds for thinking that. It was just a feeling.

Midori and I sat down on a park bench across from the high school. The walls were covered with ivy and pigeons perched on the balconies. The school building had a lot of character. There was a large oak in the yard and a column of white smoke rose straight up beside it, filtering the late summer light.

"Watanabe, do you know what that smoke is?" Midori asked unexpectedly.

I told her I didn't.

"They're burning napkins."

"Oh?" I said. I couldn't figure out what else to say.

"Sanitary napkins, tampons, you know the kind," said Midori with a giggle. "There're containers in the toilet stalls where everyone discards them, since it's a girl's school. So there's this caretaker whose job it is to collect them and burn them in the incinerator. And that's the smoke."

"Knowing that makes the sight of it seem somehow awesome," I said.

"Uh-huh. I always thought so whenever I saw the smoke from my classroom window. Awesome. What with junior high and high school combined, our school must have had close to a thousand girls. Well, make that nine hundred—there are girls who haven't started yet. Now figure that one in five of them will be having her period, that's about one hundred and eighty girls. One hundred and eighty girls' sanitary napkins discarded each day in the waste containers."

"Well, I guess so. Not knowing about detailed calculations."

"It's a sizable amount, you know, one hundred and eighty girls' worth. What must it feel like to gather and burn all that?"

"I haven't the foggiest," I said. How would I know something like that? The two of us viewed the white smoke a while longer.

"Actually, I didn't want to go to this school," said Midori, with a slight shake of her head. "I wanted to go to an ordinary public school where ordinary people go. That way I could have enjoyed growing up. But no, I got sent here on account of my parents' status consciousness. I mean, you get good grades in elementary school and they lay this whole trip on you, right? The teacher says that with this child's grades she could easily get in here. So they made me go here. I spent six years in the place,

but I never liked it. And the only thing I could think of the whole time was, I wanna get out, I wanna get out. Do you realize I got an award for perfect attendance, no absences, no tardies? And in spite of how I hated the school! Why do you think that was?"

"I don't know," I said.

"It was because I loathed the place. That's why I didn't miss one day. I wasn't about to let it beat me. If I lost out once, it would have been all over. I was afraid that if I lost out once, the bottom would slide out from under everything. I once crawled to school with a hundred-and-two-degree temperature. The teacher even asked me, hey, Kobayashi, you not feeling well? But I lied and said I was fine and stuck it out. For that I got a perfect attendance award and a French dictionary. That alone was enough to make me take German in university. Damned if I wanted to have a debt of gratitude to that school hanging around my neck. No joke, no way."

"What was it about the school you hated?"

"You liked school?"

"Didn't like it or dislike it. I went to an ordinary public high school, but it didn't strike me in any way."

"That school," she began, scratching the corner of her eye with her little finger, "is where all the

elite girls go. Nearly a thousand girls with good grades from good families. Nothing but rich girls. The cream. It's just the place you had to go. Tuition's high, contributions required all the time, school trips to Kyoto where they rent out an entire first-class inn and serve you *kaiseki* cuisine on lacquer trays, special courses in table manners once a year at the Hotel Okura dining room, not your ordinary anything. Do you know that out of the hundred and sixty girls in my year, I was the only one living in Toshima? I once checked the registry. And what kind of places do you think everyone else was from? Unbelievable, let me tell you: Sanbancho, Moto-Azabu, Denenchofu, Seijo—nothing but. Only one girl, she was from Kashiwa, out in Chiba, so I thought I'd get to know her. A nice girl. She invited me home once, with this sorry-it's-so-far-away and all, and me, I said, that's okay, and went out there. Blew me away. Well, first of all, the grounds alone would take you fifteen minutes to walk around. Amazing garden, two dogs the size of compact cars wolfing down chunks of solid beef. You wouldn't believe it. And that girl felt, oh, so disadvantaged about living in Chiba. She was the kind who, if it looked like she was going to be late for school, would be dropped off nearby in a Mercedes-Benz. Chauffeur and everything, wearing a chauffeur's cap and white gloves, like right out of the

"Green Hornet." But still the girl was embarrassed about her background. Have you ever heard of such a thing?"

I shook my head.

"From Otsuka in Toshima, look through the whole school and there'd only be me. On top of which, my parents' listing in the profession column was "book retailing." Thanks to which everybody in class made a big fuss over me like I was some rare species. Like, how wonderful it must be, reading whatever books you like as often as you like. No joke, no way. Everyone imagined some major bookstore like Kinokuniya. You mention bookstore to that crowd and that's the only thing they can possibly imagine. But the real thing, they had no idea, really pathetic. Kobayashi Book Shop. Sorry little Kobayashi Book Shop. Slide open the door, rattle, rattle, and you're face to face with magazine racks. The most reliable sellers, women's magazines, the kind with those special sealed inserts—"New Sex Techniques: Forty-eight Diagrams"—for neighborhood housewives to buy and pore over at the kitchen table. Just a little something for when the master of the house comes home. Explicit? You have no idea! What do they think they're teaching our happy homemakers? Then there's comics. Big sellers, too, let me tell you. *The Magazine, Sunday, Jump*. And, of course, your

weeklies. Well, you get the idea. Mostly magazines, a few paperbacks, but nothing great. Mysteries, historical novels, popular romances, that's all that sells. That and how-to books. *Guide to Go, Bonsai Hobbyist's Bible, Wedding Reception Speechmaking, Everything You Need to Know About Sex, You Can Quit Smoking Today*, et cetera, et cetera. We even sell stationery goods. A line-up of ballpoint pens and pencils and notebooks by the cash register. That's it. No *War and Peace*, no Kenzaburo Oe's *Homo Sexualis*, no *Catcher in the Rye*. That's your Kobayashi Book Shop. I mean, who in their right mind's going to be envious of that? Would you be?"

"I can picture the place."

"Well, it's that kind of store. The locals all come to buy books or we deliver. Lots of long-time customers. It's enough to feed a family of four. No mortgages or debts. Managed to send two daughters to college. But nothing more. No leeway to do anything special in our family. So what was I doing going to that school? It could only make me miserable. My parents griping to me whenever it came contribution time, getting all bent out of shape worrying that I wouldn't have enough money if I went out with classmates to a fancy place to eat. Who wants to live a life like that? Was your family rich?"

"Us? We're a regular workaday family. Not es-

pecially rich, not especially poor. Probably scraping a bit to send me to a private university, I imagine, but even that couldn't be all that difficult, me being an only child. I don't get much in the way of an allowance from home, so I've got a part-time job. A real run-of-the-mill house, small yard, Toyota Corolla."

"What kind of part-time job?"

"Three nights a week I work at a record shop in Shinjuku. An easy job. All I have to do is sit there and mind the store."

"Hmph," said Midori. "And I'd made you out to be someone who'd never been hard up for money. No special reason, just going on appearances."

"I've never been especially hard up for money. Not that I have money coming out of my ears or anything, but pretty much in the same boat as everybody else."

"Going to that school like I did, it seemed like everybody around me was rich," she said, turning the palms of both hands face up on her lap. "That was the problem."

"Well, then, you'll just have to see how the other half lives."

"Tell me, what do you think's the greatest advantage of being rich?"

"Can't say I know."

"That you can say you haven't got any money.

Say I get a classmate to go out and do something with me, but I only get this 'No go, I haven't got any money today.' Now turn the tables. I wouldn't be able to say that, because if I said, 'I haven't got any money today,' I *really* wouldn't have any money. Pitiful, let me tell you. Just like a really beautiful girl can afford to say, 'I can't go out because I look horrible today.' Let your plain-looking girl just try that line and see how far it gets her. She'd only make herself a laughing-stock. Well, that was my world. For six years up to last year."

"You'll get over it," I said.

"Believe me I'd like to, the sooner the better. I was so relieved just to enter university. To be surrounded by ordinary people."

She turned the corners of her mouth up into a sliver of a smile and ran a hand over her short hair.

"You got a part-time job?"

"Yeah, writing texts for maps. When you buy a map, there's this booklet that goes with it, right? Data on towns, population, famous places, all that kind of stuff. Here you'll find a hiking trail, this is the legend about this place, such-and-such flowers'll be in bloom when, these birds nesting. Writing all that's my job. Nothing to it. Done before you can say. If I go to Hibiya Library and spend the day researching, I can write a whole volume. Put a few tricks under your belt and more

work comes your way than you can handle.”

“What kind of tricks?”

“What I’m saying is all you have to do is write in a little something here and there that nobody else would think of. That alone’s enough to make the rep at the map company think, ‘That kid can write!’ They really go for it. For instance, you keep in mind that here a village was submerged when that dam was built, but the migratory birds still remember the place, so if you go there during the season you can see them circling over the lake. Things like that. Inject a little anecdote and they love it. It’s that little emotional something. Your typical part-timer wouldn’t make the extra effort, hardly ever. That’s why I can make good money just writing texts.”

“You really must have a knack for coming up with those anecdotes, though.”

“I guess,” said Midori, bending her neck slightly. “You go looking for them, you find them. And if you don’t, you make up something harmless.”

“Quite,” said I, duly impressed.

“Peace,” said Midori.

She was curious to hear about the dorm where I lived, so I ran up the usual Rising Sun and Kamikaze anecdotes. My Kamikaze had Midori in stitches. Kamikaze seemed destined to amuse people the world over. Midori said it all sounded so in-

teresting, she wanted to take a look at the dorm just once. There’s nothing much to look at, I told her.

“All you’ve got in a men’s dorm is hundreds of guys sitting around in filthy rooms drinking and masturbating.”

“Is that what you do, Watanabe?”

“Not a man alive who doesn’t,” I explained. “Girls have their periods, guys masturbate. Everyone and anyone.”

“Even guys with girlfriends? That is, with sex partners?”

“It’s not a question of that. There’s a Keio student in the room next to mine who masturbates before he goes out on a date. Says it calms him down.”

“That’s beyond me, having gone to girls’ schools all along.”

“And it’s not written in women’s magazine inserts, either.”

“You would say that,” said Midori with a laugh. “But tell me, Watanabe, are you doing anything this Sunday? You free?”

“Free any Sunday. I mean until I go to my job at six o’clock.”

“How’d you like to come out? To the Kobayashi Book Shop. The store’ll be closed, but I have to hang around until evening. There’s an important

phone call I have to be there to receive. Won't you come for lunch? I'll cook something."

"A real treat," I said.

Midori tore a page out of her notebook and drew a detailed map to her house, marking a huge X in red ballpoint pen at the location.

"You can't miss it. There's a large sign, 'Kobayashi Book Shop,' in big characters. Can you come around twelve? I'll have the food ready."

I said thanks and pocketed the map. Then I said I really had to be getting back to campus for my two o'clock German class. Midori said she had to go somewhere and hopped on a train at Yotsuya.

Sunday morning I got up at nine and shaved, did some laundry and hung it out to dry. It was a glorious day, full of the first freshness of autumn. Dragonflies darted about the courtyard with net-thrashing neighborhood kids in hot pursuit. Without a puff of wind the Rising Sun hung limp. I put on a carefully ironed shirt and walked to the station. The Sunday morning college town streets were deserted and dead, with most of the shops shut tight. The slightest sounds, which would never have been heard on a weekday, seemed magnified. A girl plodding along the pavement in wooden clogs, a bunch of kids throwing rocks at a row of empty cans lined up beside a streetcar shed. I found

one flower shop open, so I bought a few narcissuses. An odd purchase I admit, narcissuses in autumn, but I've always had a liking for the flower.

The Sunday morning streetcar was passengerless except for a group of three old ladies, who sized up me and my narcissuses. One lady smiled at me. I smiled back and took a seat at the back to watch the old houses swing past. At times the streetcar practically scraped the eaves. Here a glimpse of ten potted tomato plants on a platform for hanging laundry, where a cat lay sunning itself, there children blowing soap bubbles in a back yard. Somewhere an Ayumi Ishida tune was playing. The smell of curry drifted by as the streetcar threaded an intimate course through backstreet neighborhoods. A few more passengers boarded at stops en route, scarcely noticed by the old ladies, who huddled together, tirelessly chatting away.

I got off near Otsuka Station and followed Midori's map down a singularly unremarkable main street. None of the shops along the way seemed to enjoy much turnover. All the stores were old and dark inside. The characters on some signs were not even legible any more. I could tell from the age and style of the buildings that this area hadn't been bombed in the war. That's why these shops were still there. Additions and partial repairs only made the buildings seem more dilapidated.

Most people had left the area to escape the cars and smog and noise and high rents, leaving behind only run-down apartments and company housing and businesses that proved difficult to uproot, or else locals who stubbornly stuck to their longtime residences and refused to move. A haze hung over the place, probably from car exhaust, making everything seem vaguely dingy.

A ten-minute walk down desolation row, I came to a corner gas station, where the map had me turn right into a small shopping street, and midway down that I made out the Kobayashi Book Shop sign. Not a very big bookstore, granted, but not quite as small as I'd imagined from Midori's description. Your ordinary everyday neighborhood bookstore. The kind of bookstore I'd run to as a boy to buy that latest, anxiously awaited kiddie-zine the day it hit the stands. Somehow, just standing in front of the Kobayashi Book Shop made me feel nostalgic. Surely every town must have a bookstore like this.

The store shutters were all the way down, displaying the painted advertisement *Weekly Bunshun—On Sale Every Thursday*. It was still fifteen minutes before twelve, but I didn't feel very much like killing time puttering about the street, narcissuses in hand, so I pressed the bell beside the shutter and took a couple of steps back to wait. Fifteen seconds

later and no response, I was debating whether to ring again or not, when there came the sound of a window sliding open above. I looked up and there was Midori poking her head out and waving.

"Open the shutter and come on in," she yelled.

"I got here a little early," I yelled back.

"No problem. I'm afraid I've got my hands full at the moment, so why don't you just come on up," she said, then slid the window shut.

The shutter made the most horrible racket when I pulled it up a few feet to duck inside. And when I pushed it down again, the shop went pitch black. As I made my way to the back of the shop, I nearly tripped over bundles of magazines that lay about the floor. Once safely across, I took off my shoes, then stepped into the gloomy interior of the house proper. By the dim light that filtered in from a window like in some classic Polish film, I could see a fair-sized parlor of sorts, complete with a simple sofa set. Immediately to the left was a storage area-cum-trunk room as well as the door to a toilet. I maneuvered cautiously up the steep stairway to the right and was relieved to find the upstairs a good deal brighter than below.

"Over here, this way," I could hear Midori's voice calling. To the right of the head of the stairs was something of a dining room, with a kitchen beyond. Although the house itself was old, the

kitchen looked brand-new, a very recent addition, with sink and faucet and cabinets gleaming. And there was Midori preparing lunch. Something was simmering away in a pot, and there was a smell of grilling fish.

"There's beer in the refrigerator, so help yourself and take a seat," said Midori, glancing over her shoulder in my direction. I took out a can of beer and sat down at the table. The beer was so chilled I'd almost bet it had been six months in there. On the table were a white ashtray and a newspaper and a bottle of soy sauce. There was also a ballpoint pen and a notepad with scribbled telephone numbers and what seemed to be grocery accounts.

"It'll be about another ten minutes, so just be patient. I hope you don't mind waiting."

"Of course not," I said.

"Then get hungry while you wait, will you? There's a lot of food."

I sipped my beer and watched from behind as Midori worked. Utterly concentrated, her body moved with great efficiency, managing four separate cooking processes at once. One second she was tasting the simmering vegetables, the next she'd be dicing on the cutting board, then scooping something from the refrigerator into a dish, now washing up pots and pans. I felt as if I were watching an Indian musician ringing a bell here, striking

a block there, tapping on ox bones. Each motion was incisive and economical, the whole balanced and graceful. I looked on with admiration.

"Can I help you with anything?" I offered.

"Everything's fine. I'm used to doing it all by myself," said Midori, throwing a quick grin in my direction. Over slim blue jeans she was wearing a T-shirt with a big Apple Records logo emblazoned behind. She was unbelievably skinny from the back. Her hips looked as if she had skipped one whole stage of filling out in the course of her development. Far from blossoming, these were dried bulbs of hips. Which gave her an androgynous appearance not the least like your ordinary girl in tight jeans. The light from the window over the sink highlighted the outline of her body.

"You know, you didn't have to fix anything fancy," I said.

"It's nothing fancy at all," said Midori over her shoulder. "I was busy yesterday and didn't really have time to shop, so I'm only throwing together stuff that was in the fridge. So don't feel it's anything special. Honest. And besides, we always go all out for guests in this house. Basically, we like to treat people well. It's kind of a family tradition, almost pathological. It's not like we're especially generous as a family, or are especially popular

because of it, but whenever we have company it's simply something we do. All of us have this streak, for better or worse. Take Father, for example. He doesn't even drink, but he keeps a house full of liquor. What for? Just in case someone drops by. So don't be polite, drink as much beer as you like."

"Thanks," I said.

Suddenly I remembered I'd left the narcissuses downstairs where I'd laid them aside when taking off my shoes. I slipped down to retrieve the white blossoms lying there in the gloom and carried them up to Midori, who put them in a slender glass she pulled out of a sideboard.

"You know, I've always liked narcissuses," said Midori. "Back in high school, I once sang 'Seven Daffodils' for the school festival. You know the song?"

"Of course."

"I was in this folk group back then. Played guitar."

Which had her humming the tune of "Seven Daffodils" the whole while she was arranging the food on plates.

Midori's cooking far exceeded my expectations. Mackerel vinaigrette, plump rolled omelets, marinated turbot, Kyoto-style, simmered eggplant, a broth with cress, mushroom rice with an ample

side-helping of minced pickles and roasted sesame seeds. Her light hand with the seasonings hinted at subtle Kyoto culinary refinements and its understated flavors.

"Incredibly good," I said in all seriousness.

"Tell me honestly, Watanabe, you really didn't expect much of my cooking, did you? Not from appearances."

"Well, now that you mention it..." I hedged.

"You're from Kobe, so you like Kansai cooking, don't you?"

"You mean the light seasoning's on my account?"

"Are you kidding? However accommodating I might be, I wouldn't take that much trouble. It's the way we always cook in this house."

"Your mother or father's from Kansai, then?"

"Un-uh. Father's lived around here all his life and Mother is from north in Fukushima. Not a single relative from Kansai. Everyone in the family's either from Tokyo or Tohoku."

"I don't get it," I said. "Why are you able to cook such authentic Kansai-style dishes? Somebody taught you?"

"Sort of. It's a long story," she began as she ate her omelet. "Mother hated anything that called itself housework, cooking included. And what with the family business, she'd be so busy that every day

it'd be something from one of the stores, say, minced meat croquettes from the meat shop, practically all the time. Horrible. I couldn't stand it, growing up on that stuff. Really and truly hated it. Three days' worth of curry on the stove and having to eat the same thing day after day. Then one day, in my third year of junior high school it was, I made up my mind I was going to cook real meals from then on. So I went to Kinokuniya in Shinjuku and bought the best cookbook I could lay my hands on. Brought it home and mastered everything from cover to cover. How to choose cutting boards, how to sharpen knives, how to clean fish, how to shave bonito flakes, everything. Well, it so happens that the author of the book was from Kansai, so all my cooking came out Kansai-style."

"You mean to say you learned all this from a book?" I asked, surprised.

"That and from saving my money to eat out at good *kaiseki* cuisine places. To develop my palate. I tend to have a pretty good sense about these things. Not very strong on rational thinking, though."

"I've got to hand it to you, cooking this well without anyone teaching you."

"It wasn't easy," said Midori with a sigh. "I mean no one in this house has the least appreciation or interest in cooking. Say I wanted to buy a halfway decent knife or pan, nobody'd shell out the money.

Even now I get my share of flak. No joke, no way. 'You expect me to clean fish with this flimsy knife?' I'd say. But all I get is, 'Well then, don't clean the fish at all.' I just can't win. So whatever allowance I got went on kitchen knives or pots or colanders. Can you believe it? A fifteen-, sixteen-year-old girl scrimping and saving to buy colanders and whetstones and tempura frypans? Meanwhile all the other girls got to spend oodles of money on nice dresses and shoes. Pathetic, no?"

I nodded as I sipped the broth.

"My first year in high school I really wanted an omelet pan, the rectangular kind. So I took the money I had for a new bra and spent it on that. Which made for a good share of problems. I had only one bra to wear for three whole months. Can you believe it? I'd wash it every night, dry it as best I could, put it back on in the morning. A real horror story if it didn't dry out. Nothing more miserable in the world than having to wear a clammy bra, let me tell you. I'd be in tears. Especially to think it was all for one lousy omelet pan."

"I'd imagine so," I said, laughing.

"That's why, when Mother died—no offense to her—I actually felt a little relieved. 'Cause then I got my hands on the purse-strings and could buy whatever I wanted. So now we have pretty much all the kitchen utensils you could ask for. I mean

Father hasn't a clue about managing household expenses anyway."

"When did your mother pass away?"

"Two years ago," she answered succinctly. "Cancer. Brain tumor. She'd been in the hospital for a year and a half, in real pain, until finally she just went out of her head and they had to keep her drugged. But still she hung on. They almost had to put her to sleep. It was, in a word, the worst way to die. It was unbearable for her and hard on everyone else around her. And worse still, it used up all the family savings. Tons of injections at twenty thousand yen a shot, plus all sorts of incidental expenses, one thing leading to another. And what with all the days I'd spend at the hospital watching over her, I lost so much study time I had to pass up entering college for one whole year. I could've kicked myself. On top of which—" she stopped in mid-sentence, reconsidered, and sighed as she set down her chopsticks. "No, this is all too grim. How'd we get onto this subject?"

"From the brassiere," I said.

"Right. This is the omelet," she said seriously. "Bear that in mind when you eat it."

I ate my fill. Midori herself didn't eat that much. You get full just cooking, she said. After lunch, she cleared away the dishes, wiped the table, brought out a pack of Marlboros from somewhere and lit

up. Then she picked up the glass with the narcissuses and looked at them for a while.

"These are fine as they are," Midori declared. "No need to switch them to a vase. This way it seems as if they've only just been picked at some nearby waterway and have made it as far as this glass for the time being."

"I picked them by the waterway in front of Otsuka Station," I said.

Midori giggled. "You really are a strange one, aren't you? Able to keep a straight face and say that!"

Midori leaned her cheek on one hand and smoked half her cigarette, then ground it out in the ashtray. She rubbed her eyes, apparently from the smoke.

"Girls ought to put out their cigarettes with a little more style," I said. "That was your lady lumberjack. Don't think you have to make such an effort to put it out. Take your time and roll it out from the sides. That way you won't crush it out of shape. What you did was pretty damn awful. One more thing, never blow smoke out through your nose, no matter what. And when dining alone with a man, this talk of wearing one bra for three months is, well, most girls wouldn't bring it up."

"Afraid I am your lady lumberjack," said Midori, scratching the side of her nose. "I'll never be chic. I

put on a show sometimes for laughs, but it doesn't stick. Any other comments?"

"Marlboro isn't a girl's cigarette."

"I don't particularly mind. I mean they're all just as bad," she said. Then she turned the red Marlboro pack over and over in her hand. "I only began smoking a month ago. And in fact I'm not all that crazy about smoking. I just thought I'd try smoking."

"Why'd you think that?"

Midori put both hands firmly together on the table and thought it over a while. "Whatever. Don't you smoke, Watanabe?"

"Gave up in June."

"Why'd you give up?"

"Got to be a bother. The aggravation of running out of cigarettes in the middle of the night, things like that. So I just quit. Can't take being tied down by something like that."

"You must just be that type who has to think things through."

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe that's what makes me not very likable as a person. Been like that from way back."

"If you ask me, that's because it's plain to see that you don't mind not being liked. Which tends to drive certain people crazy," she mumbled, chin propped up in her hands. "Still I like talking with

you. Your strange way of talking and all. 'Can't take being tied down by something like that.'"

I helped Midori clear up, standing next to her, towel-drying the dishes she washed and stacking them on the kitchen counter.

"By the way, where's the rest of your family gone today?" I asked.

"Mother's in the grave. She died two years ago."

"Yes, you told me."

"Big Sister's got a date with her fiancé. Off on a drive somewhere I guess. Her guy works for an auto company. Big car person. Me, I'm not crazy about cars."

Midori went on silently washing dishes. I went on silently drying them.

"And Father," Midori spoke up after a bit.

"Yes?"

"Father went to Uruguay last June and never came back."

"Uruguay?" I said, startled. "What's this with Uruguay?"

"He up and moved to Uruguay. What a joke! Idiotic, really. An old army friend of his owns this farm in Uruguay and one day all of a sudden he starts in with this, 'I'm heading off there,' and he gets on a plane by himself and goes. I tried my best to stop him. I mean, what's he going to do in a

place like that? Can't even speak the language, and above all it's no good just running out on everything here in Tokyo. But no go. All I can think is that Mother's death came as a big shock to Father, undid some screws up there. He loved Mother that much, he did."

There was no appropriate response in my repertoire. I just sat there, mouth open, looking at Midori.

"When Mother died, do you know what Father said to Sister and me? He said, 'I'm so upset. I'd rather you two had died than have Mother die on me like this.' We were so shocked we couldn't say anything. You can imagine, right? Even under the circumstances, you'd never say anything like that. Okay, I understand he'd lost the love of his life, all the bitterness and loneliness and sorrow that must've meant. And I pity him for that. But actually coming out and saying something like that to Sister and me, that he'd rather we'd died. That's going too far, don't you think?"

"I guess so."

"I mean it hurt us," said Midori with a shake of her head. "But, anyway, all our family's a little off, somewhere. Each in his or her own way."

"So it would seem," I granted.

"Still, it's a wonderful thing when people love each other, don't you think? Imagine, to love your

wife so much you'd tell your own daughters you'd rather they'd died instead."

"Well, if you put it like that..."

"And running off to Uruguay. Tossing us aside like that."

I kept my mouth shut and dried the rest of the dishes. When I'd finished, Midori put everything away in the cupboard.

"No contact from your father since?" I asked.

"Only once, a picture postcard. Came this past March. Not that he wrote very much. It's hot here, the fruit's not as good as I'd expected, things like that. No damn joke, that. No way. One dumb postcard of a donkey. The man's got some nerve, something loose upstairs, I swear. Didn't even write whether he'd met up with that friend or acquaintance of his or anything. Toward the very end, he wrote that when he got more settled, he'd send for Sister and me. But after that, not a word. We sent off a letter, but got no reply."

"What if he did ask you to come to Uruguay, what would you do?"

"I'd go have a look. I mean it'd be an adventure. Sister says she'd never go. She can't stand unclean things and unclean places."

"Is Uruguay so unclean?"

"I don't know. But that's what she thinks. The roads all full of donkey shit, flies everywhere, toilets

that won't flush, lizards and scorpions creeping all over the place. She probably saw some movie like that. Sister hates bugs, too. The only thing she likes is going for a drive around Shonan in a flashy car."

"Uh-huh."

"Uruguay, I mean, why not? I wouldn't mind going there myself."

"So who's looking after the store?" I asked.

"Sister, and hating every minute of it. An uncle who lives in the neighborhood comes around to help out with the deliveries. And I help out whenever I have a spare moment. And hey, a bookstore's not such hard work, after all, so we get by. If we didn't, we'd just let the store fold."

"Do you feel any affection for your father?"

Midori shook her head. "Not especially."

"Then why would you head off to Uruguay after him?"

"I trust him."

"You trust him?"

"That's right. I may not hold much affection for him, but trust, yes, as far he's concerned. Someone who'd toss off his house and children and work and run off to Uruguay out of sheer shock over losing his wife—sure, I trust him. Make any sense?"

I sighed. "Kind of makes sense and kind of makes no sense at all."

Midori got a good laugh out of that and patted

me on the back. "It's perfectly fine with me, either way," she said.

That Sunday afternoon, it was one thing after the next, a strange day by any account. There was a fire right in Midori's neighborhood. We went up on the third-story roof platform to take in the sights and somehow wound up kissing. Put like that, it all sounds very stupid, but that was the order of events.

We were talking over coffee about things at the university when we heard fire trucks. The sirens kept getting louder and growing in number. Outside it sounded as if hordes of people were running around shouting. Midori went to the window that faced onto the street to have a look, then told me to wait right there and disappeared. The next thing I knew I could hear the thud, thud, thud, of footsteps racing upstairs.

I sat alone drinking my coffee, trying to picture just where Uruguay was. If Brazil was here and Venezuela over here and Columbia somewhere hereabouts, why couldn't I place Uruguay? Soon Midori came running back down and told me to come with her quick. I followed her to the end of the hall and up a steep narrow staircase onto the platform. We were higher up than any of the surrounding roofs, so we had a clear view over the

neighborhood. Black smoke was billowing up three or four houses away and wafted out to the main street on a slight breeze. The air smelled foul.

"That's the Sakamotos' place," said Midori, leaning out over the handrail. "Mr. Sakamoto used to be in the building supply trade, but he went out of business."

I leaned over the handrail to have a look. It was just out of sight behind a three-story building, but whatever was happening, three or four fire trucks had assembled to put out the fire. The streets were so narrow that only two trucks could get in, while the others waited out in the main thoroughfare. And of course, as expected, the streets were crawling with people come to see the show.

"Looks like we'd better gather up your valuables and make a break for it," I told Midori. "Right now the wind's in the other direction, so we're all right, but you never know when it'll change, and there's a gas station right over there. I'll help, so let's get packing."

"No valuables here," said Midori.

"But there's got to be something. Bank books or seals or documents, things like that. Whatever happens, you'll be out of luck with no money."

"No problem. I'm not going anywhere."

"You're going to stay here and burn?"

"Yes," said Midori. "Dying is fine by me."

I looked Midori in the eye. Midori looked me in the eye. I couldn't even begin to tell whether she was serious or not. I kept staring at her, but finally figured what the hell.

"Okay, I get it. I'll see you through," I said.

"You'll die with me?" said Midori, eyes sparkling.

"You kidding? If it gets dangerous, I'm getting out of here. If you want to die, you can die by yourself."

"Bastard!"

"Listen, I'm not about to die for a lunch. Dinner notwithstanding."

"Have it your way. But as long as we're here, why don't we sing some songs while we keep an eye on the situation. If it starts looking bad, we can take it from there."

"Songs?"

Midori brought up two cushions, four cans of beer, and a guitar from down below. And so we sat there, drinking beer, taking in the roiling black smoke. Whereupon Midori picked up her guitar and sang. I asked her whether this kind of thing would go down well with the neighbors. Sitting around on a veranda, drinking beer, and singing songs as you watched the local tragedy was not exactly your most praiseworthy activity.

"It's okay, believe me. We don't care what the neighbors think," she said.

Midori ran through some folk songs she used to sing. You couldn't call either her singing or her guitar-playing good, not even as a compliment, but she herself seemed to enjoy it. "Lemon Tree" and "Puff, the Magic Dragon," "500 Miles" to "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore," right on down the line. In the beginning I tried to sing along to the bass parts Midori taught me, but my singing was so horrible I gave up and let her sing alone to her heart's content. I just took swigs of my beer and listened, all the while paying careful attention to the fire's progress. One minute you'd think the smoke had suddenly picked up, only to see it come back under control the next, over and over again. People were shouting at the top of their lungs, barking orders back and forth. A newspaper helicopter swooped in overhead for photos, whipping up the air with its propeller, then headed off. I hoped we weren't in the picture. Policemen came around with loudspeakers, yelling at the crowds to please stand back. Mothers called out to their crying children. There came the sound of breaking glass. The wind grew unstable and began to shift, sending white waves of heat shimmering all around us. But Midori just kept daintily sipping her beer and singing merrily

through it all. Then, having done all the songs I knew, she sang a strange little composition of her own.

I wanted to cook you a stew
I have no pot
I wanted to knit you a muffler
I have no yarn
I wanted to write you a poem
I have no pen.

"The song's called 'I Have Nothing,'" said Midori. Horrible lyrics, horrible tune.

Listening to that pitiful excuse for a song, I thought, if the gas station catches, this house is going to go up in no time. Midori tired of singing and set down her guitar, curling up in the sun like a cat, her head resting on my shoulder.

"What did you think of my song?" Midori asked.

"Uniquely original, really expressive of your character," I phrased a cautious answer.

"Thanks," she said. "It was all about having nothing."

"I could sort of tell," I said.

"You know, when Mother died..." Midori dispensed the words in my general direction.

"Umm?"

"I wasn't even the least bit sad."

"Umm."

"Then Father went away and even that didn't make me at all sad."

"Oh?"

"No, really. Don't you think that's horrible? Doesn't that seem too cruel?"

"But there were all sorts of circumstances, right? All leading up to it."

"Well, yeah, maybe so. All sorts of reasons," agreed Midori. "Things were pretty mixed up in this family. Still, I can't help but think. Say what you will, but when your only Father and Mother die on you or go off somewhere, aren't you supposed to feel something? With me, it's no good. I don't feel anything, not sad, not lonely, not bitter—such feelings hardly even cross my mind. Maybe they come out occasionally in dreams—Mother'll be there, glaring at me out of the darkness, accusing me, 'Glad I died, are you?' I'm not glad that Mother died; I'm just not upset. To tell the truth, I didn't shed one tear. And to think I cried one whole night when a cat I had as a child died."

How can one building produce so much smoke, I was thinking. Can't even see any flames, no sign of the fire spreading. Just endless columns of smoke. What could possibly keep burning this long, I wondered.

"But it's not my fault. It's just that I'm not the emotional type. Maybe if they—Mother and Father—had shown me a little more love, I might have been able to feel differently. Like lots sadder or something."

"You feel you weren't loved much?"

She turned her head to look me in the face, then gave one solid nod. "Somewhere between 'not enough' and 'not at all.' Always starved for love, I was. Just once I would have liked to have been smothered with affection, enough to say I'd experienced it. That's all I asked. But they never gave me any, not even one lousy time. Cast aside if I sidled up to them, yelled at whenever I wanted anything that cost money, nothing but that straight through. All I could do was to say I'll show them, I'll go out and find myself someone who'll love me one hundred percent, all year long. That was in my fifth or sixth year of school. I made up my mind."

"Amazing," I said, quite impressed. "And how did you make out?"

"Tough-going," said Midori, then gave it some thought while watching the smoke. "Maybe it was because I'd waited so long, but I went to the other extreme, looking for something perfect. That's why the going was so tough."

"A perfect love?"

"No, no, no. Even me, I wouldn't dream of looking for that much. What I was looking for was simply my own greedy little way. Perfect selfishness. Say I turned to you now and told you I wanted to eat strawberry shortcake, you'd have to drop everything and run out to buy me some. Then, when you'd come running back, all out of breath, saying, 'Here you are, Midori, here's your strawberry shortcake!' I'd say, 'Hmph, I don't want to eat that any more!' and chuck it out the window. That's what I wanted."

"Seems to me that has nothing to do with love," I said, more than slightly fazed.

"No, it does. Only you just don't know," Midori said. "All that's very important to girls."

"Throwing strawberry shortcake out of windows?"

"Exactly. I'd have my guy tell me, 'All right, Midori, I understand. I was supposed to discern that you no longer wanted strawberry shortcake. I'm stupid and insensitive as donkey shit. By way of apology, let me go out one more time and buy you something else. What will it be? Chocolate mousse? Cheesecake?'"

"And what would that prove?"

"It'd prove him worthy of my love."

"Sounds pretty unreasonable if you ask me."

"But to me, that's what love is. Nobody under-

stands, though," said Midori, with a shake of her head as it lay on my shoulder. "To some people, love must have really humble, or even trivial, beginnings. If not, it just doesn't happen."

"You're the first girl I've ever met who thinks that way," I said.

"That's what everyone says," she pouted, picking at her cuticles. "But me, I can only seriously think that way, frankly speaking. Not that I think my way of thinking's any stranger than anybody else's, nor would I have them change on my account. But the truth is everyone thinks it's all either some kind of put-on or an act. And that sometimes gets to be a drag."

"Which is why you thought you'd show them all by dying in a fire?"

"Now just a minute, you don't get away with that! I was only...curious."

"About dying in a fire?"

"No, not about that. I wanted to see how you'd react," said Midori. "Even so, the idea of actually dying doesn't frighten me at all. Honest. All it'd take would be to be overwhelmed by smoke, lose consciousness and die, and that'd be that. What's there to be frightened of? Nothing compared to what I've seen of Mother's death or those of other relatives. Did I tell you? All my relatives seem to die from excruciating illnesses. I guess it runs in the

blood. It takes them forever to kick off, holding on until the last stretch when you can't even tell if they're alive or dead, pain and suffering the only consciousness left to speak of."

Midori put another Marlboro to her lips and lit it.

"What I'm afraid of is dying like that. The shadow of death slowly, ever so slowly encroaching upon the living, everything fading to black, those around you treating you as more dead than alive. That'd be unbearable. I absolutely wouldn't be able to stand it."

As it turned out, they had the fire under control in another thirty minutes. It hadn't really burned for so long. No injuries. One fire truck stayed behind and the others headed back, signaling the crowds to disperse. A patrol car, light revolving, was stationed on the street to regulate traffic. Two ravens flew in from somewhere to perch on telephone poles and survey the scene.

Midori seemed somehow exhausted by the time the fire ended. She listlessly gazed off at the sky and hardly said a word.

"Tired?" I asked.

"It's not that," Midori said. "It's just the first time I've let myself go in a long time, been really relaxed."

I looked Midori in the eye and she looked me in the eye. I wrapped my arms around her shoulders and kissed her. Midori gave the slightest little twitch of her shoulders, then immediately relaxed again and closed her eyes. Five seconds, six seconds, our lips met softly. The early autumn sun cast shadows of her lashes across her cheeks, trembling slightly.

It was a tender, gentle, undirected sort of kiss. If we hadn't made a time of drinking beer and watching the fire in the afternoon sun on the laundry platform like we did, I wouldn't have kissed her, and I got the same feeling from her. Up there, looking out over the glinting roofs, the smoke, and dragonflies, we'd gotten all warm and intimate and unconsciously wanted to produce some sort of memento of it all. Our kiss had been that kind of kiss. Still, like all kisses, this one could not be said to be wholly free of an element of danger.

Midori was first to pull away. Taking my hand in hers, she told me with some difficulty that there was a guy she was seeing. I told her I kind of figured as much.

"Is there some girl you're involved with?"

"There is."

"But you're always free on Sundays?"

"It's pretty complicated," I said.

Which told me in an instant that all the magic

of that early autumn afternoon had vanished.

At five o'clock I told Midori I had to go to my job, and left. I asked her if maybe she'd like to step out and get a quick bite to eat with me, but she declined, saying that maybe the call might still come through.

"You have no idea how I hate being cooped up in the house all day, waiting for a stupid phone call. When I'm all by myself, I feel like my body's rotting little by little."

"Well, just let me know if you ever need company when you're phone-sitting. I'd be glad to oblige, if lunch is provided," I said.

"It's a deal. And I'll be sure to throw in an after-meal fire," said Midori.

*

Midori didn't show at the "History of Theater II" lecture the following day. After class I went to a student eatery, had one cold and awful lunch, then sat in the sun checking out the scene. Sitting right next to me were two coeds engaged in a long conversation. One cradled a tennis racket as carefully as a baby, while the other held a few books and a Leonard Bernstein LP. Both were pretty and they were thoroughly enjoying their talk. I could hear someone practicing bass riffs in the nearby club-

house. Here and there sat other students in fours and fives, freely voicing their opinions about this and that, laughing and shouting. A professor cut across the parking lot, leather satchel in hand, avoiding marauding skateboarders. A helmeted coed crouched in the courtyard painting a placard denouncing the "American Imperialist Invasion of Asia." Your typical university lunch hour, the first I'd really observed in a good long while. Then it struck me. Everyone looked so happy doing what they were doing. Were they indeed happy, or did they simply seem that way? Whatever, with everyone in such seemingly high spirits out in the pleasant late September sun, before I knew it I was feeling lonely. I didn't belong in that picture.

So in what picture did I belong? Thinking back over the previous few years, the last scene I could really remember fitting in was that dockside pool hall shooting billiards with Kizuki. Then that very evening Kizuki was dead, and ever since some kind of jagged, icy gap had come between me and the world. What on earth had this guy Kizuki been to me? There was no answer. All I knew was that Kizuki's death had put a permanent end to one aspect of my so-called adolescence. That much I could clearly feel and comprehend. But just what that meant, what that engendered as a result, was completely beyond my comprehension.

I sat there for ages, killing time looking at the campus sights, all the people coming and going. Just maybe Midori'll turn up, I thought, but there was no sign of her. After lunch break I went to the library and studied up on my German.

*

Saturday afternoon that week, Nagasawa came to my room and asked if I'd like to go out on the town with him that night, saying he'd arrange the overnight passes. Fine, I told him. My head had been fogged all that past week and I felt like sleeping with somebody, anybody.

Toward evening I took a bath and shaved, put on a polo shirt and a cotton jacket over that. Then I ate supper in the dining hall with Nagasawa and the two of us took a bus into Shinjuku. We got off the bus amidst the bright lights, stretched our legs a bit, then ducked into a bar to wait for some likely looking girls. The bar had a largely female clientele, but for some reason no girl would come near us that night. We nursed whiskey-and-sodas for close to two hours, taking tiny sips so as not to get drunk. A promising pair of girls took seats at the counter and ordered a gimlet and a margarita. Nagasawa sprang into action and struck up a conversation, but they were waiting for men friends. Nothing to lose, we talked a while anyway, the four

of us, until their dates showed up and the two went off with them.

Suggesting we blow that scene, Nagasawa led me to another bar. A small place, sort of out of the way, where the action was already in full swing. A girl threesome was at a table in the back and we made it a ready five. Not a bad little place. Everyone was getting jolly. But when we invited them to another round somewhere else, the girls said they had curfews and had to be heading back. All three, it seemed, dormed at some women's university. It was just one of those "off" nights. We hit another place after that, but still no go. All signs read that tonight no girls were coming our way.

At half-eleven, Nagasawa decided to call it quits.

"Sorry about that, dragging you out like this," he said.

"Not at all, I'm happy just to learn that even the great Nagasawa has nights like this," I said.

"Once a year, maybe," said Nagasawa.

To tell the truth, I found myself perfectly indifferent about getting laid or not. Wandering around the neon night of Shinjuku on a Saturday for some three and a half hours, soaking up all those loose electrons of libido and alcohol only made my own puny sex drive seem inadequate.

"What're you going to do, Watanabe?" Nagasawa asked me.

"Think I'll go to an all-night show. Been a while since I've seen any movies."

"Well, guess I'll go to Hatsumi's. Okay?"

"Nothing wrong with that," I said with a laugh.

"If you want, I can set you up with a girl who'll put you up for the night. How about it?"

"Nah, I'll go to the movies for tonight."

"Sorry about things. I'll make it up sometime," he said, then disappeared into the crowd. I popped into a hamburger stand and had a cheeseburger, plus a hot coffee to counteract the drink in my system, then went and saw *The Graduate* at the nearby second-run movie house. Not the greatest movie in the world, I thought, but since I didn't have anything else to do, I stayed for another showing. When I left the theater it was just shy of four in the morning. Whereupon I walked the chilled-out Shinjuku streets.

Eventually I got tired of walking and decided to go sit in a round-the-clock coffee shop and read my book until the trains started running. After a while, the shop started filling up with other people who had the same idea. A waiter came by saying, sorry, but would I mind sharing? No, not at all, I said. After all I was only reading. What difference did it make who was sitting across from me?

It was two girls who came to sit at my table. Probably about the same age as I. Neither of them

beauties, but nice enough girls, I guess. Regular clothes and makeup. Not exactly your let's-go-running-around-Shinjuku-at-five-in-the-morningtypes. Probably something had made them miss the last train. They seemed rather relieved to have the likes of me as a table-partner. I looked presentable, had shaved the evening before, and to top it all, I was engrossed in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*.

One of the girls was large in build, wore a short gray parka, white shoes, shell-shaped earrings, and carried a large imitation leather purse. The other was petite, wore glasses, a blue cardigan over a checked shirt, and a turquoise blue ring. The petite one had a habit of removing her glasses from time to time and massaging her eyes with her fingertips.

Both girls ordered café au lait and cake, then talked in a whisper about something or other while taking their time eating and drinking. Several times the big girl bent her head forward to hear the petite one, who had her head turned to the side. Marvin Gaye and the Bee Gees were playing too loud for me to hear what they were talking about. As near as I could figure, the petite girl was troubled or angry and the big girl was trying to console her—there, there, now. I alternated between reading my book and observing the two of them.

The petite girl repaired to the ladies' room clutching her shoulder bag, whereupon the big one

turned to me. Ahem, she cleared her throat, might she interrupt? I set down my book and looked at her.

"Do you know of any place around here where we can still get a drink?" she asked.

"After five in the morning?" I asked incredulously.

"Well...yeah."

"Excuse me, but five-twenty is an hour when most people are trying to get off their drunk and hide themselves home."

"Er, I'm aware of that," she said, abashed. "But my friend says she just has to have a drink. She's, well, been through a lot."

"Wouldn't it be better to go home and drink, the two of you?"

"But, you see, at seven in the morning I have to be on a train to Nagano."

"Well, then, it looks like you haven't got much choice but to buy some saké from a vending machine and sit yourselves somewhere."

Then would I, she said most apologetically, would I mind tagging along with them? That was nothing for two girls to be doing alone. Now I'd seen my share of strange goings-on in nighttime Shinjuku, but this was a first, being invited to go out drinking by two girls, complete strangers, at five-twenty in the morning. It was too much trou-

ble to decline, and hell, I wasn't doing anything really, so we loaded up on snacks and a few rounds of one-cup saké from a machine and headed out to the west plaza of Shinjuku Station for an impromptu bash.

I found out that they worked in a travel agency. Fresh out of junior college this year, the both of them, they'd just started working and were best friends. The petite girl had a boyfriend she'd been seeing for a good year now, but had recently discovered that he'd been sleeping with another girl, at which she was furious and depressed. That was pretty much the story. The big girl's older brother was getting married that very day, which meant she was supposed to have gone home to her folks in Nagano the previous night, but instead she had hung out with her friend all night in Shinjuku, having decided to catch a special express to Nagano first thing Sunday morning.

"Tell me, how'd you know he was sleeping with someone else?" I thought I'd ask the petite girl.

She took little-bird sips of her saké, plucking at the weeds by her feet. "I opened the door to his place and there they were, doing it, right before my eyes. Wasn't any knowing or not knowing."

"When was that?"

"The night before last."

"Hmm," I said. "And the door was open?"

"Right."

"Why'd you suppose he left the door unlocked?"

I said.

"How should I know something like that? Really!"

"But can you imagine the shock? How awful it must have felt!" said the big girl.

"I really can't say, but you ought to at least get together and talk it out. Then the rest'd be a question of either forgiving or not."

"Nobody understands how I feel!" spat out the petite girl, still sipping at her saké and pinching weeds.

A squadron of crows swooped in from the west and over the top of Odakyu Department Store. Day was breaking. What with talking and this and that, it was getting time for the big girl to catch her train, so we gave what remained of our saké to a bum in the west exit underground, bought platform tickets, and saw her off. Once her train pulled out of sight, the petite girl and I found ourselves a hotel. Neither one's idea, really. And it wasn't as if either she or I wanted to go to bed with the other. There just wasn't any other way to lay things to rest.

Checking into our room, I stripped and was first into the bath. In the tub, I had myself a beer, half out of spite. Then the girl got in, too, and the both

of us just lay there soaking and drinking beer. Drink as we might, we weren't getting drunk. Or sleepy. Her skin was white and silky, her legs nicely shaped. I complimented her on her legs and she muttered a gratuitous thanks.

But once in bed, she was a different animal altogether, responding to each move of my hands, twisting and contorting, moaning. She dug her sharp nails into my back when I entered her, and called out another guy's name all of sixteen times as she approached orgasm. I spent all my energy just counting the number of times in order to delay coming. Then we both just slept.

At half-past twelve I woke to find her gone. No note, no message, no nothing. The strange drinking hours had taken their toll and my head was feeling all lopsided. I showered off my drowsiness, shaved, sat down naked in a chair and drank a fruit drink from the refrigerator. Then I set about putting the events of the previous night in order. Everything seemed unreal, sandwiched between layers of glass, but still unmistakably actual occurrences.

There were the glasses we'd drunk beer from, right on the table, used toothbrushes by the washbasin.

I ate a quick lunch in Shinjuku, then tried calling Kobayashi Book Shop from a telephone booth. Just

a thought—maybe she'd be phone-sitting again today. Fifteen rings later, there was still no answer. I gave it one more call after another twenty minutes, but with no better luck. I caught the bus back to the dorm. In the mailbox at the entrance was an envelope. Special delivery. It was a letter from Naoko.

CHAPTER 5

"Thank you for the letter," wrote Naoko. It had been forwarded "here" from her parents' house. My letter had been no imposition at all. In fact, she'd been overjoyed. Actually, she'd been thinking it was about time she wrote me and so on.

Having read that far, I opened my dorm room window, took off my jacket, and sat myself down on the bed. A breeze ruffled the curtains. Was that the cooing of pigeons I heard from some birdhouse nearby? I gave myself over to these seven pages from Naoko in my hands. After only the first few lines, the real world around me went faintly transparent. I closed my eyes and gathered myself. At length I took a deep breath and read on.

"It's been nearly four months since I came here," continued Naoko. "Over these four months I've done a lot of thinking about you. And the more thinking I do, the more I've come to realize that I wasn't fair to you. Couldn't I have acted more like a responsible human being?"

"But maybe this line of thought isn't quite normal. For one thing, girls my age would never use the word 'fair.' Basically, what does the average girl care whether something is fair or not? The really typical thing for girls is not whether something is fair or not, but whether it's beautiful or if it can make her happy, and that's the heart of it. 'Fairness' just seems to be one of these words that males use. Even so, I can't help feeling there is something perfectly apt about this word 'fairness.' Perhaps it's because I get so caught up in these questions of what's beautiful or what I have to do to be happy that I'd just as soon fall back on some other standard. Like fairness or honesty or universality.

"Be that as it may, I feel I was unfair to you. I'm aware I dragged you all over the place, hurting you greatly, I'm sure. And in the process, I dealt myself some scrapes and hurt myself, too. I have no excuses and no defense. If I've left you scarred, the scars are on me as well, so please don't hate me for it. I am an imperfect human being, far more imperfect than you think. All the more reason for me to beg you not to hate me. If you were to hate me, I'd fall to pieces. I'm not like you. I can't make it inside my own shell. It may seem I can, but you really have no idea. That's why sometimes I'm really envious of you, and maybe why I dragged you about more than was necessary.

"Perhaps I'm overanalyzing things. Although certainly not because the treatment here is analytic. The mere fact of undergoing treatment for several months has placed me in more or less a self-analyzing position. This happened because of that, or this really means this, or the reasons behind this are such-and-such. It's hard to tell whether all this analyzing actually simplifies things or just subdivides.

"All the same, I do feel I've got a lot better. Everyone here agrees I've made headway. It's been ages since I've been able to sit down and calmly write a letter like this. I barely managed to squeeze out that letter to you in July (I don't honestly remember a thing in it. How bad was it?), but now I'm quite relaxed about writing. I guess I do need the clean air, uninterrupted tranquillity, regular hours, daily exercise, and all that. It's great being able to write someone a letter. If I feel like telling someone what I feel, I just sit myself down at a desk with paper and pen like this and I write. It's really wonderful. Of course, when I look over what I've written, I've generally only expressed one part of what I wanted to say, but, still, that's something. I'm happy just to be able to feel that I want to write someone something. And so here I am, writing to you.

"Right now it's seven-thirty in the evening, after

dinner and a bath. All is calm, and outside it's dark. Not a light anywhere. Usually the stars are quite beautiful, but tonight just happens to be cloudy. Everyone up here is very knowledgeable about the constellations. They tell me which is Virgo and which is Sagittarius. Probably they memorized them just to have something to do after the sun goes down. By the same token, everyone up here is well versed in birds and flowers and insects. Talking to them shows me how ignorant I've been about a lot of things, which is good to know.

"Altogether there are about seventy people living up here. In addition to which, there are over twenty staffers (doctors, nurses, office workers, various others). It's a big place, so it doesn't seem like a large number. On the contrary, 'leisurely' would probably be the word for it. Spacious, with an abundance of nature, everyone living peacefully. So peacefully, in fact, I sometimes find myself wondering whether maybe this isn't how things should be normally. But, of course, that could never be. We're all living here under a kind of pretext, and that's what keeps it like this.

"I play tennis and basketball. The basketball teams are made up of patients (horrible word, but what's the alternative?) and staffers together. But when things get fast and furious, I lose track of just who's what. Which is kind of strange. But the real

strange thing is that when I look around me during the game, everyone and his neighbor look equally warped.

"One day my doctor told me that, in a sense, my intuition was right. That we weren't there to be straightened out, but to become adjusted to being warped. That one of our problems was that we couldn't accept being warped. For just as we each have some distinctive quirk in the way we walk, we all have quirks in our feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, quirks which would not only take considerable time and effort to correct if we set our minds to it, but it might actually warp something else if we forced the process. Of course, this was only a very simplified explanation touching but one part of our problems; yet I got the gist of what he was saying. I certainly doubt many of us can handle our own quirks that well. Which makes us hard put to locate the very real pain and suffering these quirks cause within us, hence the need to come up here for isolation. As long as we're up here, there's no hurting others and no being hurt by others. That's because we all know we're 'warped.' In this we're one up on the outside world. Most people in the outside world live with no awareness of being warped. But here in this little world of ours, what are we if not warped? It's our reason for being here, the tribal feather in our headdress. It's also how

we can live quiet lives without hurting anyone.

"Besides exercising, we raise vegetables. Tomatoes, eggplants, watermelons, strawberries, onions, cabbages—you name it, we grow it. We even have a greenhouse. People are all such serious gardeners here. They read books, invite experts, talk morning to night about what's the best fertilizer or how to improve the soil or who knows what. Even I've gotten hooked on vegetable gardening. It's wonderful just watching fruits and vegetables getting bigger little by little each day. Have you ever grown a watermelon? Well, watermelons fill out just like little animals or something."

"So everyday we eat nothing but freshly picked fruits and vegetables. Of course, they serve meat and fish, too, but the longer I'm up here the less I feel like eating such heavy things. Anyway, the produce here is crisp and delicious. We also go out picking wild greens and mushrooms. We have an expert (come to think of it, we're up to here in experts!) who tells us what's edible and what's not. Thanks to which, I've gained six pounds since I got here. I now weigh just about what I should, the result of exercise and regular eating."

"Other times I'm reading books, listening to records, knitting, and the like. We don't have TV or radio. Instead, we have a well-stocked reading

room and record library, with everything from Mahler symphonies to the Beatles. I'm always borrowing records to listen to in my room.

"The only problem with this sanatorium is that once you've entered, you become hesitant, even scared, to leave. So long as we're up here everything is peaceful and calm. We can feel perfectly natural about being warped. We think we've recovered. But will the outside world be as accepting of us? I have my doubts."

"My doctor is saying that it's about time for me to have contact with outside people. By 'outside people,' I mean sane people from the sane world, but somehow or other yours is the only face that comes to mind. To be honest, I don't much want to see my parents. They get really confused about me and make me feel miserable whenever I see them. And, besides, there are a number of things I have to explain to you. I don't really know if I can explain things well or not, but they're very important and not of the avoidable kind."

"Having said this, however, please don't think me a burden. For if there's one thing I don't want to be, it's a burden. I appreciate your kindness toward me and it makes me very happy. I'd like to get that across to you as honestly as I can. Very probably it's kindness like yours I need at this time. I'm

sorry if anything I write puts you off. Forgive me. As I said before, I'm far more imperfect as a human being than you seem to think.

"Sometimes I find myself thinking what it would have been like if you and I had met under extremely ordinary circumstances. Me normal, you normal (like you have been from the beginning, anyway). Supposing Kizuki hadn't existed. The trouble is, these 'ifs' are just too big. It's all I can do to just honestly try to be fair. At least then part of my feelings may get across.

"Unlike a regular hospital, there are no restrictions on visitors at this sanatorium. Just phone a day in advance and we can see each other whenever you like. We can eat meals together and there's guest accommodation. Please come whenever it's convenient for you. I'm looking forward to seeing you. I enclose a map. I didn't mean this to be such a long letter. Sorry."

I read it to the end and started rereading it from the top. Then I went down to the vending machine corner to buy a coke and reread it again. Finally I returned the seven pages to their envelope and placed it on my desk. Written on the pink envelope was my address in tiny neat characters, maybe even too neat for a girl's hand. I sat at the desk just looking at the envelope a while. On the back flap her

return address was given as "Ami Lodge." From the French word for friend? Strange name.

Putting the letter away in a drawer, I changed clothes and stepped outside. If I stayed anywhere near that letter, I just knew I'd be reading it over and over again ten, twenty times. Instead, I set out alone on a meandering Sunday walk through Tokyo like Naoko and I had always taken together in the past. Bringing line after line of her letter to mind, giving them the usual spin about in my consciousness, I wandered from street to street. Until the end of the day, when I returned to the dorm and placed a long-distance call to Ami Lodge. A receptionist answered and asked my business. I told her Naoko's name and whether it might be possible for me to visit her the next afternoon. She took my name and told me to call back in thirty minutes.

I called again after supper and the same woman answered, saying that it would be possible, so please feel free to come. I thanked her and hung up, then packed a knapsack with a change of clothes and wash things. After which I had myself some brandy and read *The Magic Mountain* until I started feeling drowsy. It was past one by the time I got to sleep.

CHAPTER 6

Monday morning I rose promptly at seven, washed and shaved, skipped breakfast and went straight to the dormitory supervisor to say that I'd be off mountain-climbing for two days. This barely elicited an "Oh?" from him as I'd previously taken any number of short trips when I had time on my hands. Next came a crowded commuter train ride to Tokyo Station, where I bought a non-reserved-seat ticket to Kyoto on the "bullet train," literally leaped onto the first super-express, grabbed myself a seat, and consumed a coffee and sandwich by way of breakfast. Then I got maybe an hour of sleep.

It was a little before eleven when I reached Kyoto. Following Naoko's instructions, I took a bus to Kawaramachi Sanjo, walked to the nearby private bus terminal and inquired about the next Number 16 bus. Eleven thirty-five from the farthest stop, I was told, and an hour's ride to my destination. I went to buy a ticket, then bought a map at a nearby bookstore and sat down on a bench in the

waiting room to see if I could pinpoint this Ami Lodge. Could the place really be so far up into the hills? I traced one good long bus ride north, over mountain after mountain, as far as any bus could go before turning back toward town. The stop where I'd be getting off was only a little before that. There, according to what Naoko had written, I'd find a trail, which after a twenty-minute hike would deliver me at Ami Lodge. That isolated, I couldn't help thinking the place had to be some kind of quiet.

No sooner had twenty passengers boarded the bus than we departed, heading up along Kamo River through Kyoto. The farther north we went, the emptier the town became, the more fields and vacant lots met the eye. Black-tiled roofs and plastic greenhouses glistened in the early autumn sun. After a while the bus started its ascent into the mountains, and the winding road forced the driver to keep the steering wheel in constant motion left and right. It made me kind of queasy, with my morning coffee still in my stomach. Eventually the curves eased off and a sigh of relief later we plunged deep into cedar forests. Chill, almost primordial, the cedars reached such heights they blocked out the sunlight and cast a gloom over everything. The breeze that blew in the open window grew markedly colder, the dampness piercing my skin. We pro-

ceeded along a mountain stream through cedar forests that went on and on, until you'd almost think the whole world had been claimed by cedars, only to emerge into a mountain clearing. What bottom land there was between the hills was green with crops, and a pristine stream ran beside the road. Off in the distance rose a single breath of white smoke, laundry was hung out on the line here and there, and a dog or two barked. Cords of firewood were stacked up under a house's eaves, a cat napping on top. Each bend in the road brought another such house into view, but never a soul in sight.

The scene repeated itself over and over again. Bus enters cedar forest, bus emerges at hamlet, bus leaves hamlet, bus enters cedar forest. Each time the bus stopped at a hamlet, another few passengers would get off. Not one new passenger ever got on. Some forty minutes after our departure we came to a pass with an expansive view, whereupon the driver stopped the bus and informed the passengers that there would be a five-to-six-minute wait in which they might get out if they wished. There were only four passengers on board at this point, myself included. We all got out and stretched, smoked, and gazed out over the city of Kyoto spread below us. The driver took a leak. A dark-tanned man of around fifty who had boarded carry-

ing a large cardboard box tied with string asked me if I was going hiking. I said yes. It seemed like the simplest thing.

Eventually another bus from the opposite direction pulled up alongside our bus. The driver got out, and after a few words with our driver, each got back in his vehicle. The passengers returned to their seats and the two buses went their separate ways. I found out why our bus had had to wait for the other bus when we started downhill and the road suddenly narrowed. It would have been impossible for two buses to pass; even squeezing by a light van or car generally required one or the other to back up to some wider spot in the road.

The hamlets along the stream got comparatively smaller, the areas of arable bottom land narrower. The mountains grew steeper, looming up immediately beside us. Dogs were everywhere, vying with one another's howls whenever the bus approached.

At the stop where I got off there was nothing nearby—no houses, no fields. Only a bus stop sign, a small rivulet, and a trail entrance. Shouldering my knapsack, I started up the trail, rivulet to my left, brush woods to my right. A gentle slope led up fifteen minutes until a side-trail barely the width of a car branched off to the right. Its entrance had a sign, "Ami Lodge—No Trespassing."

There were distinct tire tracks on the path. An occasional flapping of wings could be heard from the surrounding woods, an unusually vivid sound, seemingly magnified at moments. Just once off in the distance there was the muffled report of what might have been a gun.

Having made it through the woods, a white stone wall came into view. Not much of a wall really, since you could climb over it without too much effort. The gate was of heavy black iron, but it was wide open and there was no sign of a gatekeeper in the gatehouse. Beside the gate was another plaque identical to the previous one, "Ami Lodge—No Trespassing." There were signs that someone had been in the gatehouse only moments before: three cigarette butts in an ashtray, a cup with a few sips of tea left in it, a transistor radio on a shelf, the dry rasp of a clock ticking away the minutes on the wall. I considered waiting until the gatekeeper returned, but there was no indication that this would be soon, so I gave a couple of presses on what I took for a bell. Right inside the wall was a parking lot in which were a minibus, a four-wheel-drive land cruiser, and a dark blue Volvo. There was room enough to park thirty vehicles, but those were the only ones there.

After two or three minutes a gatekeeper in a navy blue uniform came riding down the path

through the woods on a yellow bicycle. A tall, bald man, aged sixty or thereabouts. Leaning the bicycle against the gatehouse wall, he turned to me and said, "Sorry to keep you waiting," though he hardly seemed sorry. The number "32" was written in white paint on the mudguard of the bicycle. I told the man my name and he telephoned somewhere, repeating my name twice. The person on the other end of the line said something, the man said yes, very good, certainly, then hung up.

"You're to go to the main building and ask for Colleague Ishida," said the gatekeeper. "Go straight up the path here and you'll come to a turn-about, and the second path from the left—You got that? The second from the left—that takes you to an old building. You turn right there and head through another patch of woods and you come out at a big square building. That's the main building. There're signposts all the way, so you can't miss it."

I took the second path from the left at the turn-about as directed and came upon an old building that had the look of a summer house of years past. The yard had nice rocks, a stone lantern and what-not, and carefully tended trees. Very probably the place had been someone's summer villa. Turning right from there took me through more woods straight to a three-story ferroconcrete building,

although the fact that the site had been excavated made the three stories something less than daunting. A simply designed structure, it was your study in antiseptic architecture.

The entrance was on the second floor. Mounting a short flight of steps and opening the large glass doors, I entered a reception area, where a young woman in a red dress was sitting at a desk. I gave her my name and said I'd been told to see Colleague Ishida. She smiled and pointed to the brown sofa in the lobby, asking me in a quiet voice to please wait over there. Then she picked up her phone and dialed. I sloughed off my knapsack and took a seat on the soft plush sofa, looking around at the immaculate, tasteful lobby. Several potted plants placed here and there, a soothing abstract oil on the wall, the floor buffed to a high sheen that invited me to gaze at the reflection of my shoes on the floor while I waited.

At one point the receptionist said that it would only be "a little while longer." This place was some kind of quiet all right. Not a sound anywhere around, as if it was siesta time. All the people and animals and insects and plants seemed deep into their afternoon snooze.

Presently, however, there came the soft padding of rubber-soled shoes, and a middle-aged woman with extremely stiff short hair appeared, briskly sat

down next to me, and crossed her legs. We shook hands, which allowed her to examine my hand back and front.

"You don't play any musical instrument, at least you haven't in recent years, have you?" were the very first words out of her mouth.

"No," I answered, somewhat taken aback.

"I can tell from your hands," she said with a laugh.

Strange woman. Her face abounded in wrinkles, which were the first thing that struck you about her, yet they didn't add up to a particularly aged appearance. If anything, her wrinkles underscored a youthfulness beyond age. So much a part of her face, they seemed to have been there from birth. When she smiled, the wrinkles smiled; when she looked quizzical, the wrinkles looked quizzical. When neither smiling nor quizzical, the wrinkles settled over her face in a way that was somehow warmly ironic. Here was a woman in her late thirties not only sympathetic but actually quite attractive in her own way. I took an immediate liking to her.

Her hair was cut with almost careless abandon and stuck out here and there, a fringe falling unevenly across her forehead, and yet the look became her. She wore a white dungaree workshirt over a white T-shirt, loose beige slacks, and tennis

shoes. A scarecrow of a figure with no breasts to speak of, she kept curling her lip up to one side half-jokingly, and teasing the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. She seemed like a skilled lady carpenter, kindly, but with her own inside scoop on how it all came down in the world.

She drew in her chin and looked me over top to bottom, lip curled the whole while. Any second I felt sure she was going to produce a tape measure and give me a fitting.

"So can you play an instrument?"

"No, I can't," I answered.

"Pity, could've had a lot of fun."

I guessed so, without the foggiest notion of why the topic of musical instruments should have come up at all.

The woman pulled a pack of Seven Stars from her breast pocket, put one to her lips and lit up, obviously taking great pleasure in smoking it.

"Well now—Toru, wasn't it?—before you see Naoko, there's a couple of things I ought to explain to you about the place here. That's why I arranged for us to have a few words in private. Things here are kind of different from other places and might prove a little trying without a bit of background information. You don't really know very much about the place, do you?"

"No, hardly anything."

"So, to start with," she began, then suddenly snapped her fingers as if something had occurred to her. "Have you had lunch? Are you hungry?"

"Hungry enough," I said.

"Well, then, we'll talk in the dining hall over lunch. Lunchtime is over, but if we hurry I'm sure there'll still be something to eat."

She stood up and walked briskly ahead of me, heading down a flight of stairs. The dining hall had seating for perhaps two hundred, but only half of it was in use, the other half partitioned off with a screen. Kind of like an off-season resort hotel. The lunch menu consisted of potato stew with noodles, salad, and orange juice. And as Naoko had written, the vegetables were all scrumptious beyond belief. I found myself eating every last bit on my plate.

"You really eat with gusto. Makes everything seem so good," she remarked admiringly.

"Everything is so good. And I haven't had a decent bite since morning."

"If you'd like to, why don't you finish off mine, too? I'm already full. Will you?"

"If you don't want it, I will."

"I've got such a small stomach, I can hold only so much. But what I can't fill with food, I make up for by smoking," she said, putting another Seven Stars to her lips and lighting it. "Oh, and by the way, you can call me Reiko. Everybody does."

She'd hardly touched her stew. I dug in, helping myself to the bread as well, my every motion followed closely by Reiko's curious eyes.

"Are you really Naoko's doctor?" I asked her.

"Me? A doctor?" She grimaced with surprise. "Why would I be a doctor?"

"All I was told was to see 'Colleague Ishida,' very authoritative-like."

"Well, yes, people do call me 'Colleague' because I'm the music teacher. But strictly speaking I'm a patient. I've been here seven years now, teaching music, helping out with the paperwork. Can hardly tell whether I'm a patient or staff any more. Naoko didn't tell you anything about me?"

I shook my head.

"Hmph," muttered Reiko. "Anyway, Naoko and I share the same room. We're roommates. It's certainly an experience living with her. All sorts of things to talk about. Talks a lot about you."

"What sort of talk about me?" I asked.

"Before we get to that, I really ought to explain a bit about the place," said Reiko, ignoring my question. "The first thing you've got to understand is that this isn't your ordinary hospital. The long and the short of it is, this isn't a place for treatment; it's a place for convalescence. Of course, there are doctors here giving one-hour sessions every day, but that's more like taking your temperature, not the

all-out active kind of curing that goes on in other hospitals. That's why there's no iron bars here, no lock on the gate. People come in as they please, people go out as they please. So that the only people who stay are those who can make a go of this way of convalescing. Not just anyone can stay here. People who need special treatment go to specialized hospitals as their case requires. Got it so far?"

"I think so. But what is this 'way of convalescing'?"

Reiko let out a puff of cigarette smoke and finished off her orange juice. "Living here is itself convalescence. A regular schedule, exercise, isolation from the outside world, peace and quiet, fresh air. We have our own vegetable gardens and are practically self-sufficient. No TV, no radio. It's hip enough to be a commune, though of course staying here is pretty expensive, so it's different from your regular commune."

"Is it that expensive?"

"Not cheap, but not impossibly expensive, either. I mean considering the facilities. And the grounds. Small number of patients to a large staff. Me, I've been here a good long while and I'm practically half a staffer by now, so I get my fees waived, but so much for that. Say, how about coffee?"

I told her I wouldn't mind a cup. Whereupon she put out her cigarette and got up, poured two cups

from a coffee warmer on the counter, and brought them back to the table. She stirred sugar in hers, made a sour face, and took a sip.

"This sanatorium's non-profit. That's how they manage to keep the fees reasonable. The property was all donated. It's legally incorporated. This all used to be a private villa up to twenty years ago. Still looks like one, doesn't it?"

That it did, I agreed.

"In the old days, there used to be only that building over there where they got together for group therapy. Which is to say that the whole thing got started because the son of the owner had some psychiatric problems and this specialist recommended group therapy. The doctor maintained that by living off by themselves away from town in a mutual-help situation, doing physical labor, with a doctor standing by to advise and check on their progress, people could heal themselves, as it were. That's how the whole thing got started. And gradually it got bigger and incorporated, the garden acreage increased, and the main building was added five years ago."

"So the cure worked, I take it."

"Yes, with exceptions. Nothing works for everybody and there's lots of folks who can't get well this way. Still, there's plenty of people who have found other treatments useless but who've

walked out of here fully recovered. The best thing about being here is that everyone helps one another. We all know our own imperfections, so we make a point of helping. Other places it's not like that, unfortunately. Other places, the doctors are strictly doctors, the patients strictly patients. The patients request help from the doctors and the doctors make it their business to help. But here we all help one another. We're one another's mirrors. And the doctors are our friends. They're standing by watching us, ready to lend a hand if we need it, but sometimes we help them out. Which is to say that we're better at some things than they are. For instance, I teach one doctor piano, another patient is teaching the nurses French, things like that. Despite our illness, there's a lot of us with specialized knowledge of one kind or another. So in that sense we're all equals here. The patients, the staff, even you. As long as you're here, you're one of us, so I help you and you help me." Reiko's face crinkled in a good-natured smile. "You help Naoko, Naoko helps you."

"So what should I do exactly?"

"First of all comes the willingness to help the other person. And the realization that somebody has to help you, too. Second comes honesty. Not to tell lies or fabricate things or gloss over indiscretions. That's all."

"I'll try," I said. "But tell me, Reiko, why have you been here for seven years? All this time I've been talking to you, I can't see that there's anything wrong with you."

"Not during the day," she said, her expression darkening. "It's nighttime that gets to me. As soon as night sets in, I'm foaming at the mouth and rolling all over the floor."

"Really?" I asked.

"Of course not. You actually expect such nonsense?" she replied with a curt shake of her head. "I'm pretty well recovered now. I've stayed on because I enjoy helping folks get better. Teaching music, growing vegetables, I like it here. Everyone's such good friends. By comparison, what do you have on the outside? Me, I'm thirty-eight, going on forty. Not like Naoko. Nobody's waiting for me to get out of here, no family to take me in if I did leave. I'd hardly even have any friends. And what with being in here for seven years, I'm sure the whole world's changed outside. Sure I look at the papers in the reading room sometimes, but the fact is I haven't set foot outside this place in seven years. And I wouldn't know what to do if I did."

"But you might have all sorts of new opportunities," I said. "Isn't that worth a try?"

"Maybe," she said, turning her lighter over and over in her hand. "But you know, Toru, I've got my

own agenda, as it were. My own circumstances. We can talk about it sometime if you want."

I nodded.

"And Naoko, is she getting better?"

"Well, we'd like to think so. She was pretty confused at first. We were all worried what was to become of her. But now she's settled down fine, she's speaking much more freely, gotten able to express her own mind. She's certainly heading in the right direction. But, still, she ought to have had treatment a little sooner. With her, the symptoms were already starting to show from the time her boyfriend Kizuki died. Which is something her own family should have realized. Then, what with her family background..."

"Family background?" I asked, surprised.

"You mean, you didn't know?" said Reiko, even more surprised.

I shook my head.

"Well then, that's something you should ask Naoko directly. It'd be better that way. She's ready to open up to you about all sorts of things," said Reiko, stirring her coffee again and taking a sip. "By the way, we've got one condition I ought to lay on the line first thing, which is that it's forbidden for you to be alone with Naoko. It's a rule here. Outsiders are not allowed to be alone with the person they're visiting. An observer—which in this

case will be me—has to be around at all times. It's not what you'd prefer, I'm sure, but you'll just have to bear with it. Agreed?"

"Agreed," I said with a smile.

"Still, you two get on with your talking and don't mind my being there. I pretty much know everything that went on between you and Naoko, anyway."

"Everything?"

"Pretty much," she said. "I mean, we have group sessions, after all. So how couldn't I know what's what? And moreover we talk, Naoko and I. There's not much in the way of secrets here."

I drank some coffee, my eyes on Reiko. "To be honest, I don't really know. I mean whether my actions toward Naoko while she was in Tokyo were right or not. I've thought it over for the longest time, but I still can't figure it out."

"I wouldn't know that, either," said Reiko. "Nor would Naoko. That's something better worked out between the two of you. Right? But whatever happened, you can always take it and move it in the right direction. Mutual understanding first, then you can come to terms with whether it was right or wrong, no?"

I nodded.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we three could all help each other. You and Naoko and me. That is, if

we've a mind to be honest and really try. Sometimes three's a very effective combination. How long do you plan on staying here?"

"I want to get back to Tokyo by the evening of the day after tomorrow. I've got a job and a German test on Thursday."

"That's fine, so why don't you stay at our place. That way it won't cost anything and we won't have to worry about the time."

"Whose 'our place'?"

"Naoko's and mine, of course," said Reiko. "The rooms are partitioned and there's a sofa bed where you can sleep. No problem."

"But is that all right? I mean a male visitor staying in women's rooms?"

"C'mon now, you're not about to sneak into our bedroom in the middle of the night and rape us in turn, are you?"

"Of course not."

"Then what's the problem? Stay at our place and we can have good long talks. That'd be best. That way we can get behind each other's space and I can play guitar for you. I'm pretty good."

"I wouldn't be imposing?"

Putting her third Seven Stars to her lips, Reiko tightened the corners of her mouth as she lit up. "The two of us talked it over. We're inviting you, personally. Hadn't you better politely accept?"

"Most gladly," I said.

Reiko looked me in the face, the wrinkles deepening at the corners of her eyes. "You have a funny way of talking," she said. "You're not imitating that *Catcher in the Rye* kid, are you?"

"Give me a break." I laughed it off.

Reiko laughed, too, cigarette still at her lips. "I must say but you are the straightforward type. Me, I can tell that just by looking at you. I've been here seven years and have met all kinds of people. There's a difference between those who can open up and those who can't. And you're one who can. Or, more precisely, you can open up if you've a mind to."

"And what does opening up lead to?"

Reiko, cigarette in place, looking very pleased, folded her hands on the table. "Recovery," she said simply. She didn't even care about the cigarette ash falling on the table.

We left the main building, crossed over a small rise, passed the pool and the tennis and basketball courts. Two men were practicing tennis, a thin middle-aged man and a stout young man, both good enough players, but theirs was a different game from the one I knew. It seemed less of a game than an investigative research into the resilience of tennis balls. They had at the ball, both strangely ab-

sorbed in thought, both also sopping wet with sweat. The closer, younger man halted play when he saw Reiko, smiled, and exchanged a few words. Alongside the tennis court an expressionless man sitting on a huge lawn mower was cutting the grass.

Heading on, we came to fifteen or twenty small Western-style cottages set apart from one another. Parked in front of most were bicycles, of the same yellow as the gatekeeper's. Here, Reiko informed me, was where the staff members' families lived.

"We have everything we need at hand, so there's no need to go into town," Reiko explained as we walked. "We're almost self-sufficient, I told you that, right? And we've got a chicken coop, so there's eggs. We have records and books and exercise facilities, a small supermarket of sorts, and every week a barber comes through. Weekends, there's even movies. You can ask staffers going into town to make special purchases, there's a catalog order system for clothes and such, so there's no going without."

"You can't go into town?" I questioned.

"That's off limits, except if it's a matter of having to go to the dentist or something, but as a rule it's not permitted. Leaving here is completely up to the individual, but once you've left you can't come back. A burned bridge. Two or three days in town, then back here, that you can't do. It only makes

sense, really. If they started that, it'd be nothing but in-and-out all the time."

From the woods we emerged onto a gentle slope. Scattered over the slope in no perceivable order were odd-looking two-story woodframe houses. Just what was so odd about them I couldn't quite say, but it struck you first thing. A pleasant picture of unreality. I couldn't help feeling that if Walt Disney had made a cartoon based on Munch's paintings, it might have looked something like this. All the houses were exactly the same in shape and color. Nearly cubic, symmetrical, with big entrances and lots of windows. Between the houses looped a driving-school maze of paths. Well-tended plants bloomed before each doorway. Not a soul in sight, all the curtains drawn.

"This is Sector C, where the women live. Like us. There're ten of these buildings, each divided into four sections, each section housing two people. Room for eighty altogether, though we've only got thirty-two living here at the moment."

"Sure is quiet," I said.

"There's nobody here right now," said Reiko. "I've got special status so I'm free to come and go as I please, but the others all follow a set curriculum of activities. Some are exercising, some are gardening, some are in group therapy, some out picking wild vegetables. You get to decide your own curriculum.

Naoko should be—What was it now? Wallpapering? Painting? I forget. But she's got a number of things to take care of until around five."

Reiko entered building C-7, climbed the stairs, entered an unlocked door on the right, then showed me around inside. A simple layout of four rooms: living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom. Agreeable quarters with no unnecessary frills or out-of-place furnishings, yet nothing drab about it, either. Not that there was anything special to speak of, but just being in the room put me at ease, the same way I had felt myself unwind in Reiko's presence. The living room had a sofa and table, and a rocking chair. The kitchen, equipped with your basic refrigerator and electric burner for rudimentary cooking, also had a dining table. Large ashtrays were placed on both tables. In the bedroom were two beds and two desks, a wardrobe, small bedside tables with reading lamps and open paperbacks lying face down.

"No bath. Only a shower. But good enough all in all, eh?" said Reiko. "Baths and laundry facilities are communal."

"More than just fine, I'd say. The dorm I live in is only a ceiling and a window."

"You can say that, but you've never lived through a winter here," said Reiko, patting me on the back and having me sit on the sofa, before tak-

ing a seat herself. "It's a long bitter winter. Nothing but snow, snow, snow, everywhere you look. That and damp, bone-chilling cold. When winter sets in it's snow-shoveling each and every day. It's the season for warming up in heated rooms, listening to music, chatting, knitting. Without this much space, we'd all go stir-crazy. You'd understand if you spent a winter here."

Reiko let out a deep sigh at the thought of winter and folded her hands on her lap. "I'll break this down and make your bed for you," she said, patting the sofa beneath us. "We've got the bedroom, so you sleep here. Fair enough?"

"Fine by me."

"Then it's settled," said Reiko. "I imagine we'll both be back here around five. Until then Naoko and I each have things to do, so would it be asking too much to have you wait here for the time being?"

"Not at all. I'll work on my German."

Reiko left and I stretched out on the sofa and shut my eyes. And as I sank silently into the stillness, an image of Kizuki and me riding off on a bike came into view. Yes, it had been autumn, I thought. How many autumns ago? Four, that's right. The smell of Kizuki's leather jacket, the unbearable racket that red 125cc Yamaha made. We rode off to a distant beach and returned that

evening, exhausted. We'd set off for no particular reason, but somehow that excursion stuck in my mind. The piercing whine of the autumn wind in my ear as I held tight to Kizuki's jacket and gazed up at the sky. I felt as if I were being blown along through space.

I lay in that position for ages, as scenes of far-off days floated into mind, one after another. For reasons unclear to me, just lying there in that room brought back visions of things and events previously beyond recall. Some were happy, some left me a little sad.

How much time passed? Drawn along by this unforeseen flood of memories (it really was like a spring welling up from a crack in a rock), I didn't even notice when Naoko quietly opened the door and walked in. I just happened to glance up and Naoko was there. I lifted my head to look into her eyes. She sat down on the arm of the sofa and looked at me. At first I couldn't believe this wasn't an image I myself had conjured out of my own recollections. But no, this was the real Naoko.

"Were you asleep?" she asked softly.

"No, only thinking," I said. Then I sat up. "How are you?"

"Well," she said with a smile. A pale, far-off vision of a smile. "I don't have much time. Actually, I'm not supposed to be here like this, but I made

just enough of a break to come. So I really do have to be heading back. Pretty horrible haircut, don't you think?"

"Not at all. It's rather cute," I said. She was bobbed like an elementary school girl, hairclip on one side, same as ever. The style suited her and she seemed quite comfortable with it. She looked like one of those cherub-faced girls you see in medieval woodcuts.

"It got to be a bother, so I asked Reiko to lop it off. You really think it's cute?"

"I really do."

"But Mother said it looked horrible," said Naoko, undoing her hairclip and running her fingers through the tumult of hair. The clip was butterfly-shaped.

"I wanted to see you one-to-one before the three of us got together. No special reason. Just to see you and get used to you. A head start, otherwise I couldn't handle it. I'm so awkward."

"Get used to me a little yet?"

"A little," she said, fiddling with her hairclip again. "But there's no time. I have to be going."

I nodded.

"Toru, thank you for coming here. You've made me very happy. But if staying here gets too heavy, please come out and say so. It's a peculiar place here, with its own peculiar system. Some people

never get used to it. So if it starts to get to you, be honest and tell us. We won't hold it against you. We all speak frankly here."

"I'll be sure to tell you frankly," I said.

Naoko sat down next to me on the sofa and leaned against me. I put my arm around her shoulder and she rested her head on my shoulder, the tip of her nose against my neck. She maintained that position, almost as if she were checking my temperature. Holding Naoko like that, I could feel the warmth building in my chest. In due course Naoko got up without a word, opened the door, and left as quietly as she had come.

Once Naoko had left, I fell asleep on the sofa. I hadn't meant to, but I slept more soundly there, feeling Naoko's presence, than I had in ages. There were dishes that Naoko used in the kitchen, Naoko's toothbrush in the bathroom, the bed where Naoko slept in the bedroom. I slept so soundly the rooms wrung out every last drop of fatigue in me. I dreamed of a butterfly gliding through the gloom.

When I awoke, my watch read four-thirty-five. The light had a different hue, the wind had let up, the clouds had changed. I was sweating, so I fetched my towel from my knapsack to wipe my face and changed into a new shirt. Then I went to the kitchen for a glass of water and looked out the window

by the sink. I could see the window of the building across the way. Inside hung a chain of cut-paper shapes, carefully trimmed silhouettes of birds and clouds and cows and cats. Still not a soul about anywhere. All was quiet. I felt like the lone occupant of a well-tended ghost town.

It was a little past five before people started to reconverge on Sector C. I could see two, no, three women pass directly under the kitchen window. All three wore hats, which hid their faces and ages, but from the sound of their voices they were none too young. No sooner had they disappeared around the corner than four other women came from the same direction and also vanished around the corner. There was a sense of evening gathering. The window in the living room looked out on the woods and the line of hills, the slightest wash of light edging their outline.

Naoko and Reiko returned together at five-thirty. Naoko and I exchanged greetings as properly as if we were meeting for the first time. Naoko seemed truly shy about it all. Reiko's eyes fell upon the book I was reading and she asked me what it was. Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, I told her.

"Why on earth would you want to bring such a book here?" Reiko exclaimed, disgusted, and of course she was right.

Reiko made coffee for the three of us. I told Naoko about Kamikaze's sudden departure. And about how he'd given me a firefly the last night I saw him. She seemed disappointed she wouldn't be hearing any more Kamikaze stories. Reiko, though, being a stranger to Kamikaze lore, warranted a retelling. And she, of course, couldn't help laughing, either. As long as the Kamikaze stories held out, there was a laugh a minute for everyone and all was right with the world.

At six o'clock the three of us went to the dining hall in the main building for dinner. Naoko and I had fried fish with salad, simmered vegetables, rice, and soup, while Reiko only wanted a macaroni salad and coffee, which she followed up with a cigarette.

"You get older and your body just stops needing so much food," she said by way of explanation.

There were maybe twenty people at the tables in the dining hall. During the meal a few people came in, others left. Other than the range in age of the people here, the scene could well have been of my dormitory dining hall. The only real difference was that here everyone seemed to speak at one level of volume. No loud voices, no whispers. Not one person bursting out laughing in surprise or calling anyone over with a wave of the hand. Everyone spoke at the same quiet pitch. They were divided in-

to groups to eat, each one with three to five people. First one person would say something, then another would speak. I couldn't tell what they were talking about, but their conversations had the curious look of that afternoon tennis game. Did Naoko talk this way when she was with them? It was all so strange I felt somehow excluded and jealous with loneliness.

At the table behind us a thin-haired doctor type in a lab coat was expounding without pause on the whys and wherefores of digestive fluid secretion to a nervous-looking young man wearing glasses and a mousy middle-aged woman. The two listeners interjected the occasional "Oh" or "Is that so?" but the more I listened the more I doubted whether this man in the lab coat was really a doctor.

No one in the dining hall paid much attention to me. No one stared or even appeared to notice my presence. My being there seemed the most natural thing in the world.

Only once did the man in the lab coat suddenly turn around and ask me how long I planned on staying.

"Two overnights and I leave on Wednesday," I replied.

"It's a nice season now, eh? But come again in winter. The whole place is completely white," he said.

"Naoko might be out of here before the snow," Reiko told him.

"But, really, winter here is something to see," the man repeated earnestly. More and more suspect, this "doctor."

"What does everyone talk about?" I asked Reiko, but she didn't seem to get my meaning.

"What do they talk about? Your usual things. The day's events, books they've read, tomorrow's weather, things like that. You don't really think someone would stand up and shout, 'Today the polar bear ate the little star so tomorrow it'll rain,' do you?"

"Of course not, nothing like that," I said. "But everyone's so quiet I couldn't help but wonder."

"It's quiet here so everyone just naturally takes to speaking quietly," said Naoko, placing a fish bone on the edge of her plate and wiping her mouth with her napkin. "There's simply no need to raise your voice here. Nothing you have to convince anybody of, no reason to draw attention to yourself."

"Well, I guess," I said. Still, I somehow missed the boisterousness of ordinary meals. As often as I had been put out of sorts by noisy mealtimes, I just couldn't get used to sitting there eating my fish amidst such a strange hush. The dining hall seemed more like an industrial fair for some special machinery. Of profound interest to persons in that

particular field, who all converged on this place to exchange information intelligible only to fellow experts.

After the meal we returned to the room, and Reiko and Naoko announced that they'd be off to the Sector C bathhouse and that I should feel free to use the shower in the bathroom if I wished. I told them I would, and after they'd left I took off my clothes, showered, and shampooed. Then, while going over my hair with a hair drier, I took down a Bill Evans record from the shelf and put it on, only later to realize that it was the very same record I'd played at Naoko's place on her birthday. That night she'd cried and I'd slept with her. A mere six months back, yet it seemed so long ago, probably because I'd gone over it and over it in my mind so many times I'd distorted all sense of time.

The moon was so bright I turned out the light and stretched out on the sofa listening to Bill Evans's piano. Moonlight beamed in through the window, elongating the shadows of things in the room, casting pale ink washes across the walls. I took my flat metal flask of brandy out of my knapsack and took a swig, then slowly swallowed. The warmth traveled down my throat to my stomach, then radiated outward to every part of my body. Another swig and I recapped the flask and returned

it to my knapsack. The moonlight seemed to sway in time with the music.

Reiko and Naoko came back from their bath twenty minutes later.

"You startled us, turning off the light. All we could see from outside was a dark room," said Reiko. "We thought you'd collected your things and split for Tokyo."

"No way. It's been a while since I saw such a bright moon, so I just thought I'd have a look with the lights off."

"Isn't it wonderful, though?" said Naoko. "Say, Reiko, do we have any candles left from the blackout?"

"In a drawer in the kitchen, probably."

Naoko went to the kitchen, opened a drawer, and came back with a large white candle. I lit it and dripped some wax in the ashtray to stand it up. Whereupon Reiko lit a cigarette from it. All was as still as ever. With us three sitting around a single candle in the hush, it was as if we'd been cut off and left stranded in some far corner of the world. Chill moonlight shadows layered over flickering candle shadows on the white walls in a dance of mingled shapes. Naoko and I sat next to each other on the sofa, with Reiko across from us in the rocking chair.

"How about some wine?" Reiko asked me.

"Is drinking allowed here?" I asked, slightly surprised.

"Actually, it's not," said Reiko, abashed, scratching her ear. "But they're pretty lenient. If it's wine or beer, at least, in moderate quantities. I even have a staff member buy the stuff for me."

"Sometimes we go on a binge, the two of us," said Naoko mischievously.

"I'm all for it," said I.

Reiko took a bottle of white wine from the refrigerator, uncorked it, and brought over three glasses. It was fresh and crisp, with a light "home vintage" taste. When the record ended, Reiko pulled a guitar case out from under the bed and lovingly coaxed the strings into tune before leisurely striking up a Bach fugue. Her fingers missed occasionally, but all in all it was a heartfelt rendition—warm and intimate and filled with the joy of performing.

"I began guitar after coming here as there wasn't a piano about. I taught myself, but my fingers just aren't cut out for the guitar, so I can't seem to get very good. Still, I like the instrument. It's light, simple, straightforward, like a warm little room, nice and cozy."

She struck up another short Bach piece, part of some suite. Gazing at the candle flame and sipping wine, we were all ears for Reiko's playing. A slow

soothing spell fell over us, and when she'd finished Naoko asked her to play a Beatles number or two.

"Request time," Reiko told me with a wink. "From the day Naoko arrived, she's had me play Beatles numbers every day, like some poor musician slave."

That said, she still played an impressive "Michelle."

"Wonderful song. One of my real favorites," said Reiko, taking a sip of wine and a puff of her cigarette. "Like rain gently falling over a vast plain."

Then it was "Nowhere Man," then "Julia." Occasionally Reiko closed her eyes and rocked her head back and forth as she played. Then she followed up with more wine and another cigarette.

"Play 'Norwegian Wood,'" said Naoko.

Whereupon Reiko went to the kitchen and brought out a traditional Japanese "beckoning cat" coin bank, into which Naoko put a hundred-yen coin from her purse.

"What's this now?" I asked.

"We have this arrangement. Whenever I request 'Norwegian Wood,' I have to put in a hundred yen," explained Naoko. "It's my very most absolute favorite, that's why."

"I use the money for my cigarettes."

Reiko stretched her fingers to loosen them, then

set at "Norwegian Wood." She played with real feeling, but not oversentimentally. I dug a hundred-yen coin out of my pocket and banked it.

"Thanks," said Reiko with a smile.

"Sometimes I get all lonesome when I hear that song. I don't know why, but I get to feeling like I'm lost in a deep dark forest," said Naoko. "All alone in the cold and dark. That's why she doesn't play it unless I request it."

"I always say it sounds like something from *Casablanca*," said Reiko.

This prompted Reiko to play a few bossa nova numbers. Which in turn prompted me to look over at Naoko. Just as she had written in her letter, she seemed much healthier than before, tanned and fitter thanks to the regimen of exercise and outdoor work. Only her lake-limpid eyes and shy little lips remained unchanged. Overall, her beauty looked well on the way to maturing. The sharp edge that had formerly obscured her beauty—a chill, blade-keen edge that cut people to the quick—that overlay had retreated and in its place a gentle caressing calm had now drifted up into view. I was struck by the change in her. And to think it had only been six months. I found myself as much attracted to her new beauty as before, possibly more, yet it was not without regret that I noted the passing of her former self. For gone was that pubescent-girl

quality, that fragile-yet-irrepressible loveliness, gone never to return.

Naoko said she wanted to hear about my life of late. I talked about school and I talked about Nagasawa. It was the first time I'd ever mentioned Nagasawa to her. It was next to impossible to put across with any accuracy his humanism, the Nagasawa ideology, his distorted morality, though ultimately Naoko did manage to get a general idea of what I was trying to say. I put a lid on my going about girl-hunting with him and simply made him my one odd best friend at the dorm. Reiko kept at her guitar the whole time, going back over the fugue for practice, all the while slipping in her regular wine and cigarette breaks.

"A strange character by the sound of him," said Naoko.

"A strange man indeed," said I.

"And you really like him?"

"I can't say for sure," I said. "But I guess you'd have to say I liked him, although he doesn't exactly fall within your range of either likable or dislikable. And what's more, that wouldn't matter in the least to him. In that sense he's utterly honest. He doesn't play up to people. In fact he's a real stoic."

"Odd thing, calling someone who sleeps around so much 'stoic,'" said Naoko with a laugh. "How many women did you say?"

"He's probably hitting eighty," I said. "But, for him, the more women he sleeps with, the less each sexual act means. Which, of course, is what the guy is after."

"And that's stoic?" queried Naoko.

"For him it is."

Naoko gave a moment's thought to what I'd said. "I'd say the guy's more screwed up than I am," she said.

"That's what I think, too," I said. "But he's entirely systematized his warped mind into a consistent logic. He's a terribly clever fellow. If he were put in here, you know, he'd be out and off within two days. He's up on this, that, and the other thing, and he can pull everything together. He's that kind of guy. And that kind of guy pulls a lot of weight with people."

"I'm sure I'm just stupid," said Naoko. "I still haven't figured out this place. I haven't figured out myself."

"You're not stupid. That's normal. There's lots I haven't figured out about myself either. It's like that with most people."

Naoko pulled both legs up onto the sofa and rested her chin on her knees. "So tell me more about yourself, Toru," she said.

"I'm just an ordinary person. From an ordinary family, raised ordinary, with ordinary looks,

ordinary grades, ordinary thoughts," I said.

"Didn't your Scott Fitzgerald write somewhere not to trust anyone who thinks he's ordinary? In a book I borrowed from you," teased Naoko.

"To be sure," I said. "My ordinariness is nothing I consciously decided, though, it's just something I know. Out to find something extraordinary in me?"

"Oh, come on now!" scolded Naoko. "Don't you even know that much? If I wasn't, why would I have slept with you? Do you really imagine I'd sleep with anyone, you included, just because I was drunk?"

"Of course not," I said.

Naoko just stared at the tip of her foot and said nothing. I didn't know what to say, so I drank some wine.

"And you, Toru, how many women have you slept with?" asked Naoko coyly.

"Eight or nine," I answered in all honesty.

Reiko stopped practicing and laid the guitar down on her lap. "You're not even twenty! What kind of a life have you been leading?"

Naoko made no comment but simply looked at me with those limpid eyes of hers. I briefed Reiko on the first girl I slept with and how I broke up with her, saying that somehow or other I'd just been unable to love her. Then I let it be known how at Nagasawa's invitation I'd slept with one girl after another I didn't know the least thing about. "I

don't mean to make excuses, but it was tough," I told Naoko. "Seeing you almost every week, talking, knowing all the while that your heart was given solely over to Kizuki. Just knowing that made things tough. That's probably why I slept with strangers."

Naoko shook her head repeatedly, then looked up at me. "Remember you asked me why I'd never slept with Kizuki? Do you still want to know?"

"I guess it's something I probably should know," I said.

"I think so, too," Naoko said. "The dead never come alive again, but we have to go on living."

I nodded. Reiko was practicing a difficult passage over and over again.

"I myself was perfectly willing to sleep with him," said Naoko, letting her hair down and toying with the butterfly-shaped clip. "And, of course, he wanted to sleep with me. So we tried any number of times, but it never worked. I didn't have any idea why it didn't. I still don't. After all, I was in love with him, and I didn't have any big hang-up about virginity or anything. Anything he wanted, I'd gladly have done for him. Still, it didn't work."

Naoko put her hair up again with the clip.

"I wasn't wet at all," said Naoko quietly. "I didn't open, not at all. So it was just painful. Dry and painful. We tried all different ways, but none worked.

Even lubricating didn't help. It still hurt. So all along I was doing Kizuki by hand or mouth—you get what I mean?"

I nodded.

Naoko stared out the window at the moon. It seemed even bigger and brighter than before. "You know, I would much rather have kept all this inside, but what's the use? There's no way I couldn't tell you. It's nothing I could even decide for myself. I mean I was really wet when I slept with you, wasn't I?"

"Umm," I agreed.

"That evening on my twentieth birthday, I was wet from the moment I saw you. And the whole time I was just hoping you'd lay me. Hoping you'd hold me and strip me naked and touch me all over and put it into me. The first time in my life I ever thought anything like that. I mean, why? Why should that have happened? After I'd been so much in love with Kizuki."

"Meaning in spite of not being in love with me."

"I'm sorry," said Naoko. "I don't mean to hurt you, but please understand. My relationship with Kizuki was something truly special. We'd been playmates since we were three. We were always together, talking about everything, perfectly in tune with each other. That's how we grew up. We first kissed in sixth grade. It was really wonderful.

When I got my first period, I ran crying to him. We had that kind of relationship. So when he died, I was lost. How was I supposed to go on relating to others? Just what did it mean to love someone?"

She reached for her wineglass on the table but didn't get a good hold and it slipped to the floor. Wine splashed on the carpet. I leaned down, picked up the glass, and put it back on the table. I asked Naoko if she'd like more wine, to which she said nothing. Then she burst out crying. She was bent over, trembling and burying her face in her hands. Like the night I slept with her, her breathing came in uneasy spasms as she choked on her own tears. Reiko put down her guitar and stepped over to pat Naoko gently on the back. Then, putting her hands on Naoko's shoulders, she let Naoko bury her face in her bosom just like a baby.

"Say, Watanabe," Reiko said to me. "If you don't mind, can I ask you to take a stroll for maybe twenty minutes? We should have things under control by then."

I nodded and stood up, pulling a sweater on over my shirt. "Sorry," I told Reiko.

"That's okay. It's not your fault. Don't be too concerned. By the time you get back, everything'll be okay," she said with a wink.

I took a path through the woods that shone

unreal with moonlight, letting my steps lead me where they would. Sounds took on strange echoes in the moonlight. My own footfalls walked the ocean floor, rebounding sharply from unexpected directions. From time to time, a short, crisp snap would come from behind. The woods were heavy with the stillness of nocturnal animals holding their breath until I passed.

Once out of the woods I sat down on a small slope and looked toward Naoko's building. Her room was easy to find. All I had to do was look for a faint glow glimmering in an unlit window. Resting there motionless, I fixed my eyes upon that tiny light. It reminded me of the last flickerings of a nearly consumed soul. I wanted to cup my hands over that light and keep it safe. Just as Jay Gatsby had kept watch each night over that tiny light on the far shore, I gazed on that feeble light, transfixed.

When I returned to the building after thirty minutes, I could hear Reiko practicing her guitar from the entrance. I quietly climbed the stairs and knocked on the door. I stepped in, but there was no sign of Naoko, only Reiko sitting on the carpet strumming her guitar. She pointed to the bedroom door. Naoko's in there. Laying down the guitar,

she took a seat on the sofa and told me to sit next to her. Then she divided the last of the wine between two glasses.

"She's all right," said Reiko, patting me on the knee. "She only needs to lie down a bit by herself and she'll be fine. She just got a little worked up, that's all. Why don't we take a little walk outside in the meantime?"

"Sure," I said.

Reiko and I strolled along a path-beneath the lamps over to the tennis court and basketball blacktop and sat down on a bench. She brought out a basketball from beneath the bench and spun it in her hands. Did I play tennis? she asked me. Very badly, I told her.

"And basketball?"

"Not my best."

"Well, then, what are you good at?" teased Reiko, squeezing a smile from the corners of her eyes, "other than sleeping with girls?"

"I really don't have a specialty," I admitted, a little hurt.

"Don't get mad. I only meant it as a joke. But tell me what sorts of things you are good at."

"I'm not so good at anything. But there are things I like."

"Such as?"

"Taking hiking trips. Swimming. Reading."

"You like solitary activities?"

"I guess so," I said. "From way back I was never much interested in playing games with others. I can never seem to really get into stuff like that. I just get by."

"Well, then, come here in winter. We all do cross-country skiing then. I'm sure you'd enjoy it, trudging over the snow all day, working up a good sweat," said Reiko. Then she stared at her right hand in the lamp light as if inspecting an old musical instrument.

"Does Naoko often become like this?" I asked.

"Mmm, sometimes," said Reiko, looking this time at her left hand. "Occasionally she gets like this. She gets worked up, starts crying. Which is fine. She gets her emotions out that way. What's really scary is when emotions won't come out. Then they start to build up inside and petrify. All kinds of emotions harden in the body and just die there. That's when things get difficult."

"Tell me, did I say anything wrong just now?"

"Not at all. You didn't say anything wrong, so don't worry. It's good that you spoke frankly. That's the best thing. In the long run, no matter how much you hurt each other or get someone worked up like just now, it's the best way. If you seriously want Naoko to recover, it's what you should do. Like I told you first thing, the idea is not

to try to help her, but to make her want to pick herself up and recover by letting herself recover. That's the way here. Which is to say you also have to speak honestly about things while you're here. Because out in the world, nobody speaks honestly about anything, right?"

"True enough," I said.

"I've been here seven years and I've seen all kinds of people come and go," said Reiko. "Probably too many. That's why I can tell pretty much intuitively, just by looking at someone, this one's going to make it and this one's not. But with Naoko I really can't tell. And nobody else seems to have any clue, either. Another month and she might be completely well. Then again she might stay like this for years and years, so there are really no insights I can give you. Only be honest, help each other, just generalities like that."

"Why is it only Naoko you can't size up?"

"Probably it's because I like the girl. My emotions are engaged so I can't get a clear picture. I really do like her. And, besides, she's kind of complicated, a tangle of problems, so the trick is to unravel each thread one by one. This might take a long time, or, again, the whole knot might come undone just like that. That's how it is. Nothing I can decide."

She picked up the basketball again, gave it a spin, then bounced it on the ground.

"The most important thing is not to rush things," Reiko advised me. "That is my only other advice. Don't rush. No matter how many loose ends are tied up in this knot, you mustn't get discouraged or lose your temper and pull at the strings with force. You have to take the time and work at it slowly, loosening each strand, one by one. Can you manage that?"

"I'll try," I said.

"It might take a long time, and even after that she might never get completely well. Have you thought of that?"

I nodded.

"It's hard, waiting," said Reiko, bouncing the basketball. "Especially for someone your age. Simply waiting and waiting and waiting for her to get better. And with no guarantee that you can expect anything. Are you up to it? Do you love Naoko that much?"

"I don't know," I said in all honesty. "I don't really even know what it is to love someone, Naoko or not. But I am willing to do all I can. Otherwise I wouldn't know what to do with myself. It's like you said just now, Naoko and I have to help each other. Nothing else is going to save us."

"You plan to go on sleeping with any girl you meet?"

"I really don't know what to do about that," I said. "I mean, what on earth am I supposed to do? Should I keep a vigil, masturbating the whole time? I can't very well control myself completely, if you know what I mean."

Reiko set the ball down on the ground and again patted me on the knee. "Listen, I'm not saying it's wrong for you to sleep with girls. If it's all right with you, that's fine. What I wanted to say was, it's no good for you to go wearing yourself down unnaturally. You follow? It's a real waste. Nineteen, twenty's such an important period in growing up. If you're careless and let it get somehow twisted at this time, it'll be tough for you later. Honestly, it's true. So just think about it. If you want to do good by Naoko, do good by yourself."

I said I'd keep it in mind.

"I was twenty once, a long time ago," said Reiko.

"Can you believe it?"

"Of course I can believe it."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes, really and truly," I said with a smile.

"I wasn't anything like Naoko, but I was fairly cute in my own way at the time. No wrinkles like now."

I told her I admired her wrinkles. And she thanked me.

"But, you know, from here on you mustn't make remarks to women about how attractive you find their wrinkles. I'm quite flattered, though."

"I'll be careful," I said.

She pulled a wallet out of her pocket and showed me a photo in the clear plastic train-pass holder. It was a color photo of a girl of about ten in ski wear, with skis on, standing on the snow and smiling.

"Not bad, eh? It's my daughter," said Reiko. "She sent me this photograph at the beginning of the year. She's in...fourth grade, is it now?"

"She has your smile," I said, returning the snapshot. Pocketing it with the wallet, she blew her nose, put a cigarette to her lips, and lit it.

"When I was young, I wanted to be a concert pianist. I was talented like you wouldn't believe. Everyone said so. A lot of fuss was made over my training. I had superb control, was at the top of my class straight through music college, and it was even pretty much decided to send me to study abroad in Germany. Your brilliant teenager. Whatever I did went well, and if it didn't, those around me tried to make sure that it did. But then the whole thing went haywire because of what happened one day. It was during senior year at music

college. All of a sudden I just couldn't get the little finger of my left hand to move. I couldn't figure out why, but the fact was it wouldn't budge. I tried massaging it, holding it under hot water, taking a couple of days off practicing, but nothing did any good. I was pale as a ghost and decided to go to the hospital. The doctors there ran all kinds of tests, but even they couldn't figure it out. There was nothing wrong with the finger, the nerves were in good shape, and there was no reason it shouldn't move. Which for them meant it had to be psychological. So I went to a psychologist. But even he couldn't tell me what was wrong. Only that maybe pre-contest stress had gotten to me. So why didn't I just lay off the piano for a while?"

Reiko took a deep draw on her cigarette and exhaled. Then she stretched her neck, moving her head from side to side a few times.

"That's when I decided to spend some time at my grandmother's in Izu, to rest. I gave up on the contest and told myself just to take it easy. I'd have two weeks off without touching a piano. But it was no good. Whatever I did, all I could think about was the piano. Just that and nothing else. Was I doomed to live life with a paralyzed little finger? And if so, what was I expected to do with my life? I kept going over and over the same ground in my mind. I mean piano was my whole life. I'd been play-

ing since I was four. I lived for the piano, thought of nothing else, could hardly imagine anything else. I'd been told to spare my fingers at all costs, never did any housework, had people fuss over me, simply because I was good at piano. Just see what happens to a girl raised like that when you take the piano away! What's left? *Sproing*, a screw gets loose somewhere up here. Your head gets all in a shambles and everything goes black."

She tossed her cigarette to the ground and trod it out, then stretched her neck again.

"Thus ended my dreams of becoming a concert pianist. Two months in the hospital, until I could move my little finger a bit, at which point I returned to music college long enough to graduate. But by then something was gone. Something, I don't know, some energy mass had dissipated from my body. Even the doctors told me my nerves were too weak to pursue a career as a concert pianist. So when I got out of college, I took on students and started teaching at home. That was really rough. Like my whole life was over then and there. Can you imagine? Me, the girl to whom all had been promised, turned around one day and had nothing. It all slipped through my fingers. No one to applaud me, no one to fuss over me, no one to praise me, just staying home day after day and teaching the neighborhood kids sonatinas and stuff. I was so

miserable I was crying all the time. Talk about crestfallen! Pianists obviously less talented than I were taking second place in contests and holding recitals at some hall or other. Each piece of gossip that reached my ears had me in tears.

“On the surface, my parents treated me the same as if I’d simply contracted some infection. But they weren’t fooling me—I could tell they were heart-broken. The precious daughter for whom they’d made every sacrifice, here she was, turned out from a mental institution. I was hardly even marriageable. Living in the same house, you can’t help but pick up on feelings like that. It was absolutely unbearable. I’d go out of the house and the neighbors would be talking about me. It put me so on edge, I ended up staying in. And then it was *sproing!* All over again, the screw popped, the ball of yarn came unraveled, and darkness descended. When I was twenty-four years old. This time I was in a sanatorium for seven months. Not here, but shut up with a high wall and a gate. Grim and dirty, no piano anywhere. By then I was a total loss. All I knew was that I wanted to get out, but quick. That thought and that thought alone had me in a frenzy. I was going to get well if it killed me. Seven months—a long time. It all increased my wrinkles little by little.

Reiko dragged a half-smile out of her lips.

“Not long after I got out of the hospital, I met my husband and we got married. He was one year younger than I, an engineer with an aeronautics firm, a piano student of mine. A good person. Your man of few words, but earnest and warm-hearted. After six months of lessons, he suddenly upped and asked me to marry him. Just like that, out of nowhere, one day after we’d finished the lesson and were taking tea. Can you believe it? We’d never once dated, never even held hands. I nearly panicked. And I said that I couldn’t marry him. Said I thought he was a good person and all, but there were circumstances that prevented me from marrying him. He wanted to hear what those circumstances were, so I explained the whole situation with total honesty. That I’d twice gone off the deep end and been hospitalized. I went into some detail about it all, what the causes were, why the problems occurred, how it might happen again at any time. He said he’d like to think things over a bit and I told him to take his time, no hurry or anything. But the following week he said he still wanted to marry me. That’s when I told him this. Wait three months. Let’s spend time together over the next three months. If at the end of that you still feel you want to marry me, we can talk things over again.

“For three months we dated once a week. Going

to different places, discussing different things. And you know what? I actually took a strong liking to him. With him I knew that at last I was back to where I could live my own life. Being together put me at ease. I could put distasteful thoughts out of my mind. Maybe I'd failed to become a pianist, and I'd been hospitalized in a mental institution, but that didn't mean my life was over, for who knew what wonderful things still lay in store? If only for this sense of relief, I was oh-so-grateful to him. Three months later, sure enough, he said he still wanted to marry me. I told him, 'If you want to sleep with me, you can. I've never slept with anyone, but I'm very fond of you, so if you want to have me, I don't mind in the least. But my wanting to marry you is something else entirely. Marrying me means taking on my problems, too. Which is a lot heavier than you think. You still don't mind?' I asked.

"He said he didn't mind. He wasn't looking just to sleep with me. He wanted to marry me, to share everything in life with me. And he wasn't kidding, either. He wasn't the type to say things he didn't mean, nor was he one not to act on what he'd said. Good enough, I told him, let's get married. I mean, what else was there to say? We got married four months later. Over which he got into a fight with his parents, who cut off relations with him. He was

from an old country family in Shikoku and they had me investigated, found out I'd been hospitalized twice. Grounds enough for them to fight. Well, I couldn't say I blamed them for opposing it, so we didn't hold a wedding ceremony. We filled out the papers at the city hall and went to Hakone for a two-day honeymoon. But we were very happy in every way. As it happened, I stayed a virgin until I got married, when I was all of twenty-five. Stranger than fiction."

Reiko sighed and picked up the basketball again.

"As long as I was with him, I thought I'd be fine," said Reiko. "As long he was by my side, I surely wouldn't suffer a relapse. You know, the most important thing for us who have these problems is reliability. Knowing that I could leave things up to him and if my condition took the slightest turn for the worse, if the screw started to come loose, he'd notice and carefully, patiently, fix me back up—tighten the screw, unravel the ball of yarn. Just knowing we can rely on someone is enough to keep our problems at bay. As long as there's that sense of reliance, it's pretty much no more *sproing!* I was in heaven. Life was wonderful. It was as if a cold, raging sea had retreated to find me snug in a nice warm bed. We were married two years when we had a child, and then all my time was taken up with the baby. Thanks to which I just about forgot

about my own problems. It was up in the morning, do the housework, take care of the baby, make dinner for when he got home, day after day. But I was happy. It was probably the happiest time in my whole life. How many years did that last? At least until I was thirty-one. Then *sproing!* It happened again. I fell apart."

Reiko lit a cigarette. The wind had died down by now, and the smoke rose straight up into the night sky and vanished. The sky, now that I noticed, was bright with countless stars.

"Something happened?" I asked.

"Well, yes," said Reiko, "something very strange. Something that lay waiting for me like a trap. It still gives me the chills just to think about it." She scratched her temple with her free hand. "But enough of this talk about me. Especially since you've come all this way to see Naoko."

"No, really, I'm all ears," I said. "That is if you don't mind telling me."

"Well, the baby entered nursery school, I took up the piano again, just for myself," continued Reiko. "For me, not for anyone else. Bach and Mozart and Scarlatti, starting with less ambitious pieces. Of course, by then there'd been a long blank, so I'd lost a certain knack—for good, I'm afraid. My fingers just wouldn't do my bidding like they used to. Still, I was happy. Gee, I can still play, I

thought. Playing piano like that, it really hit home how much music meant to me. That and how much I'd missed it. All I can say is that it was marvelous to be able to play just for myself.

"Like I said before, I'd been playing piano since I was four, but never once for myself. It had always been to pass some exam or to impress people. Assignments. Don't get me wrong, all that counts a great deal in mastering an instrument, but past a certain age you have to play for yourself. That, after all, is what music is about. At least that was my enlightenment at thirty-one or -two after dropping out of the elite track. I'd take the kid to nursery school, give the house a quick once-over, then sit down to a good one or two hours of playing my favorite pieces. No problems so far. Are you with me?"

I nodded.

"The trouble began one day when this woman neighbor, who I knew by sight, enough to maybe exchange greetings on the street, came to ask me whether I wouldn't teach her daughter piano. A neighbor in a manner of speaking, because we actually lived quite far away, so I didn't know the daughter, but according to this woman, her daughter often passed my house and was moved when she heard me playing. She'd even seen me on occasion and felt drawn to me. The girl was in her

second year of junior high and had studied piano under a number of teachers already, but things never went well for various reasons, so that now she had no teacher.

"Well, I declined. There were all those blank years, and even if the girl wasn't an absolute beginner, picking up where other teachers had left off wasn't for me. Above all, I had my hands full with my own child. Then—of course, I didn't tell the woman this—if a child changes teachers that often, there's bound to be problems that would make it impossible for any teacher to do a good job. But the lady wouldn't take no for an answer. Just this once, she said. Just teach her daughter one time, that's all she asked. Well, it would have taken some doing to shake off such a pushy woman, but since I couldn't very well dismiss the daughter with a flick of the wrist once I agreed, I said I wouldn't mind meeting the girl, but that was all. Three days later the girl came all by herself. A real angel. I mean it. Such clarity to her beauty! Never before or since have I seen such a beautiful child. Hair long and black as newly ground ink, slender arms and legs, bright eyes, lips perfectly soft and tiny like they were just fresh out of the mold. The first time I saw her, I could hardly speak, she was that beautiful. With her sitting on the parlor sofa, the whole room

looked like a different place, just gorgeous. I couldn't even look straight at her for too long. It was almost blinding. I practically had to squint. Such a girl. I can still picture her as if she were right here."

Reiko paused and narrowed her eyes to focus on some vision of the girl.

"We talked for maybe an hour over coffee. Talked about all sorts of things. Music and school. By all appearances, she was a smart kid. She could hold her own in a conversation, had well-thought-out opinions, a near-criminal way of winning you over. Frighteningly so. But what was it that so frightened me? There was just something frightening about how that bud of a nose sprouted out from between her eyes. Still, talking with her sitting there, I'd sometimes lose all grip on rational judgment. I was just overwhelmed by her youth and beauty, which made me feel such an awkward nonentity by comparison, so that if I wanted to contradict her, I could only believe there had to be something base or twisted in my thinking."

Reiko shook her head.

"If I'd been as beautiful and smart as that girl, I'd surely have had higher aspirations for myself. With those looks and that intelligence, how come she didn't seek better things? With everyone treating

her so special, why did she feel she needed to walk all over lesser mortals? I mean, what reason did she have?"

"Had she had some traumatic experience?"

"Well, to take things in order, the girl was a pathological liar. It was a real sickness. She'd make up stories about anything and everything. Not only that, she'd talk herself into believing them in the process, so that she'd end up reworking all the facts to match. Ordinarily you'd catch on and think, wait a minute, that's odd, how can that be? But this girl's mind turned over at such an amazing speed, she'd always get there a few steps ahead of you and change things around so you wouldn't be any the wiser, despite all the lies. Most people wouldn't imagine such a beautiful child could make up stories for nothing. And that included me, too. I listened to a whole mountain of lies over the course of six months and never once doubted, in spite of their being complete fabrications, beginning to end. What a fool I was!"

"What sort of lies?"

"You name it," said Reiko, with a sarcastic little smile. "It's like I just said. Once someone starts lying, they have to keep lying more and more just to make it all sound plausible. That's what compulsive lying is. The compulsive liar's stories are for the most part harmless and those around them general-

ly can tell. But with this kid, it was different. She didn't give a jot about hurting others in order to protect herself, and she'd use whatever she could lay her hands on. Then she'd lie or not lie, depending on whom she was talking to. With her mother or close friends, those who could tell easily, she'd hardly ever lie except when she absolutely had to, and even then only with great caution, only lies that would never be found out. And if it did look like she'd get caught lying, she'd turn on the tears in those beautiful eyes to make some excuse wash, her voice oh-so-plaintive. After that, nobody could say anything.

"Just why that girl singled me out, I still can't figure. Whether she chose me as a victim or she chose me in search of some kind of help, I still can't tell. Not that it makes any difference at this point. It's all over and done with, and here I am today."

Pause.

"The girl said exactly what her mother had told me. That she'd been walking by my house, heard the music, and had been moved by it. She said she'd seen me any number of times outside the house and was filled with admiration. 'Admiration'—she used that very word. It made me blush. To think that this doll of a child could admire the likes of me. Still, I'm not entirely sure it was all a lie. Of course, I was over thirty, not anywhere near as

beautiful or quick-witted as she, and not especially talented. Yet there probably was something about me that attracted her, something she herself lacked, who knows? All the more reason for her to find me interesting. At least that's what I've come to think. Still, it's nothing I am proud of."

"I didn't think so, somehow," I said.

"The girl brought some sheet music with her and asked if she could try playing. So I said go right ahead, and she played a Bach invention. What a funny way of playing she had! Funny or mysterious or I don't know what, but in any case it wasn't ordinary. And none too polished either, of course. After all, it's not as if she was going to school just for that, not to mention that she played in her own way and had only had lessons off and on. Hers wasn't your well-practiced sound. If she'd played in that way for a music school entrance exam she'd be out just like that. But that's how she played for me. That is, ninety percent was terrible, but she'd have me listening to the remaining passable ten percent. And with a Bach invention, mind you! That's what really interested me in the girl. What was with this kid?

"I mean there are all kinds of promising young pianists who can play better Bach, twenty times better than this kid. Most, however, don't have any content to their playing. It's all empty. But her, she

might not have been good technically, but at least there was something about her that potentially grabbed me. Or so I thought. Certainly there was no way for her to unlearn and practice enough to become professional. But just maybe she could know the joy of playing the piano for herself like me at the time—or like now for that matter. A vain hope that was. She wasn't the type to do anything quietly and discreetly for herself alone, not for anything. This was a child whose every move was calculated in minute detail to attract attention. How well she knew just what ploy to use, and when, so as to get people to admire her. And that included how she should play the piano for me. It was all precisely calculated. I'll bet she practiced just that part she wanted me to hear, over and over for all she was worth. I can just see it.

"Yet even now, when all this is clear to me, I still think it was a wonderful performance. I'm sure my heart would leap if I heard it again, even minus her deceit and lies and faults. There are such things in this world."

Reiko cleared her throat, interrupting her story.

"So you took the girl on as a pupil?" I asked.

"Right. Once a week, Saturday mornings. Her school had Saturdays off. She never missed one lesson, never came late, an ideal student. Always did her practice, too. And after the lessons, we'd

have cake and talk," said Reiko, suddenly remembering to look at her watch. "Say, maybe we ought to be heading back to the room. I'm a little worried about Naoko. Heaven forbid you've forgotten about Naoko!"

"No, I haven't forgotten," I said smiling. "I just got caught up in the story."

"If you want to hear the rest, I'll tell you tomorrow. It's too long for one session."

"Scheherazade couldn't have done it better."

"Now there's no going back to Tokyo for you," said Reiko, laughing.

We walked through the woods the way we came, back to the room. The candle had gone out, but the room light was still off. The bedroom door was open and a bedside lamp was on, spilling a dim glow into the living room. There amidst the gloom sat Naoko on the sofa. She'd changed into some sort of dressing gown, the collar pulled up tightly around her neck, both feet up on the sofa. Reiko went over to her and rested her hand on the crown of Naoko's head.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. Sorry," said Naoko quietly. Then she looked in my direction and shyly repeated her apology. "Startle you?"

"A little," I said, smiling.

"Come over here," she said. I took a seat next to Naoko, who leaned over as if to whisper a secret, but instead kissed me softly by my ear. "Sorry." Naoko voiced another quiet apology at ear level. Then she sat back upright.

"Sometimes I don't know what comes over me," she said.

"It happens to me all the time," I said.

Naoko smiled and looked at me. I told her that if she felt up to it, I'd like to hear more about her. Her life there. What she did, whom she met in the course of a typical day.

Naoko rattled off her day's activities, but without going into any great detail. Up at six, breakfast here in the room, clean the bird coop, then she usually worked in the field, tending the vegetables. Before or after lunch, for an hour or so, she'd have an individual session with her doctor or else a group discussion. Afternoons were set aside for a choice of classes or outdoor work or sports. She was taking a number of different things, French and knitting and piano and ancient history.

"Piano, Reiko teaches me," said Naoko. "She also teaches guitar. We all take turns being pupils and teachers. French is taught by this person who's good at French, someone who once taught social studies teaches history, and the best knitter teaches

knitting, and so on. Kind of like a little school. Unfortunately, I don't have anything I could teach."

"Me neither," I said.

"But anyway, here I'm much more into my studies than I ever was at university. I really enjoy learning, a lot."

"And after supper, what do you usually do?"

"I talk with Reiko or read or listen to records or go to someone else's room and play games, whatever," said Naoko.

"I practice my guitar, write my memoirs..." Reiko chimed in.

"Memoirs?"

"Just kidding," laughed Reiko. "So then it's lights out around ten. A healthy life, eh? Makes us sleep soundly."

I looked at my watch. It was a little before nine. "Well, then, isn't it getting on bedtime?"

"But it's okay today, we can stay up a little later," said Naoko. "It's been so long, I'd like just to talk. Tell me something, anything."

"A while ago, when I went off by myself, all sorts of things from way back suddenly came to mind," I began. "Remember the time Kizuki and I went to see you when you were sick? At that seaside hospital? The summer of our second year in high school, was it?"

"When I had that chest operation," said Naoko

with a smile. "I remember it well. You and Kizuki came out on a motorbike, right? With a box of melted chocolates. What a time it was trying to eat them! Gee, it seems like ages ago."

"Sure does. And weren't you writing some long poem at the time?"

"All girls that age write poems," confessed Naoko, giggling. "What on earth made you remember that?"

"I don't know. It just came to mind. The smell of the sea breeze and the oleanders, it all suddenly came back to me," I said. "Tell me, did Kizuki visit you there often?"

"No, almost never. We had a fight about that later. First he came once, then with you, and that was it. The creep! And even that first time, he was all antsy, hung around maybe ten minutes before he split. Brought me an orange, muttered some nonsense or other, peeled the orange, fed me it, muttered more of the same nonsense, and—*zip!*—he was off. Said something like he really couldn't take hospitals," Naoko said with a laugh. "In that respect, the guy never grew up. I mean, really. Name me anybody who does like hospitals. After all, that's why people go to cheer up their sick friends, to encourage them to get well, right? The guy didn't seem to understand that."

"When I came with him that time, though, he

wasn't so thoughtless. In fact, he was perfectly good about it all."

"That's because it was in front of you," said Naoko. "He was always that way when you were around. Went all-out never to show his weak side. I guess Kizuki liked you, so he was always trying to show only his good side. But when it was just the two of us he wasn't like that at all. He'd let down his guard. He'd change just like that. If he was talking up a storm to himself, the next instant he'd shut up and withdraw. He was like that ever since he was a child. Still he was always trying to better himself and improve."

Naoko rearranged her legs on the sofa.

"He'd always try to better himself and improve and get all irritated and depressed when he failed. In spite of all the terrific and beautiful things about him, to the very last he had no self-confidence. He had to take care of this, go changing that, it was all he thought about. Poor Kizuki."

"Well, all I can say is that if he was making an effort to show me only his good side, he certainly succeeded. I mean I only knew his good side."

Naoko smiled. "I'm sure he'd be happy to hear that, you being his only friend and all."

"And Kizuki was my one and only friend, too," I added. "There hasn't been a soul before or since I could call my friend."

"That's why I used to like the three of us hanging out, you, Kizuki, and me. We'd be seeing only our good sides, which was quite a relief. I was comfortable with being a threesome. I don't know how you felt about it, of course."

"I'm more concerned about how you saw the whole thing," I said with a brisk shake of my head.

"But, you know, the problem was that it couldn't go on like that. A tiny circle can't keep itself going forever. Kizuki knew that, I knew that, and you knew that. No?"

I nodded.

"To be perfectly honest, though, I loved his weak side. Just as much as his good side. There wasn't a shifty or mean thing about him, only a weak will. I'd tell him that, but he'd never believe me. And he'd tell me so. Naoko, he'd say, we've been together since we were three. With everything I knew about him, I'd lost all track of what were his faults and what were his strengths. He was always telling me that. But no matter what he said, I loved him, so much so I almost had no interest in anyone else."

Naoko threw me a forced smile.

"We had something different from your typical boy-girl relationship. It was as if we were joined in our bodies somewhere. No matter how far apart we moved at times, there was this special gravity that

would pull us back together in the end. That's why it was the most natural thing in the world for Kizuki and I to become lovers. We were already kissing at twelve, petting at thirteen. I'd go to his room or he'd come to mine, and I'd do him by hand. I don't think we were too young. It all came as a matter of course. If he wanted to fool with my breasts or my genitals, I didn't mind in the least, and if he wanted to shoot off semen, I didn't mind helping him at all. In fact, if anyone had criticized us for that, I'd probably have gotten very mad. I mean we didn't do anything wrong. We only did what we could have been expected to do. We showed each other every inch of our bodies; it was almost as if we shared each other's body. But for a good long while we never went any further. I was scared of getting pregnant, and we didn't really know how to go about preventing it. In any case, that's how we grew up, the two of us hand in hand, with almost no experience of the seriousness of sex or the inflated egos that accompany most kids' growing years. Like I said before, we had a thoroughly open attitude toward sex, each absorbing the other's self so that neither had to be excessively aware of things, if you know what I mean."

"I think so," I said.

"We were inseparable, a unit. That's why if Kizuki were alive, I'm sure we'd be together, loving

each other, getting miserable together by degrees."

"How's that?"

Naoko ran her fingers through her hair a few times. Without her hairclip, her hair swung across her face whenever she looked down.

"The way I see it, we were living a borrowed existence, one we could never repay," said Naoko, looking up. "We never paid our dues when we were supposed to and the slam just came around the back way. That's why Kizuki ended up like he did, that's why I'm here right now. We were naked babes playing on a deserted island. We got hungry, we ate bananas; we felt lonely, we slept together. It just couldn't last. We had to grow up and go out into society sometime. Which is what made you so valuable to us. You were our channel to the outside world. Through you, in our way we were trying to blend into the world at large. Can't blame us for trying, eh?"

I nodded.

"Still, I don't think we used you. Kizuki was honestly fond of you, while you just happened to be the first outsider we let into our midst. And that carries through to this day. Now that Kizuki's gone, you're still my only link to the outside world. And just like Kizuki, I'm fond of you in my own way, too. Yet, despite our best intentions, I guess this meant we were bound to wind up hurting

each other. Although it never occurred to me."

Naoko looked down again and fell silent.

"How about some cocoa?" interjected Reiko.

"That would be lovely," said Naoko.

"I'll have some of the brandy I brought with me, if it's all right with you," I said.

"Please do," said Reiko. "And I wouldn't mind a sip myself."

"Certainly," I replied with a laugh.

Reiko brought out two glasses, with which she and I had ourselves a toast. Then she went to the kitchen to make cocoa.

"Why don't we talk about something more cheerful?" suggested Naoko.

I, however, couldn't think of anything appropriately cheerful. Too bad Kamikaze wasn't still around. If only he'd been there, there'd have been some new episode to keep everyone in stitches. For want of anything better, I rambled on about the unsanitary living conditions in the dorm. It got to be a bit much for me, but the two of them seemed to be amused by it all. Then Reiko followed this up with impersonations of various mental patients. Another big hit. By that point it was getting on eleven and Naoko was all sleepy-eyed, so Reiko folded the sofa down into a bed and gave me sheets, blanket, and pillow.

"You can come in and rape us in the middle of

the night, but make sure you know who's where," said Reiko. "The one on the left without any wrinkles is Naoko."

"Liar! I'm on the right," was Naoko's rejoinder.

"Oh, and by the way, I've arranged so we can pass up on some of my curriculum tomorrow afternoon, so let's go on a picnic. There's a really nice place nearby," said Reiko.

"Sounds great," I said.

The women took turns brushing their teeth at the washbasin before withdrawing into the bedroom, leaving me to stretch out on the sofa bed with my brandy to think over the day's events in order, starting from the morning. And what a long day it had been! Moonlight continued to pour into the room. Not a sound came from the bedroom where Naoko and Reiko were sleeping. Almost nothing stirred. Just the occasional creaking of a bedspring. I closed my eyes and minute patterns flickered before my eyes in the dark, while the echo of Reiko's guitar lingering in my ears only dissipated now. At last sleep overtook me, dragging me down into the warm, sweet mire. And there were willows all around. A mountain path lined on both sides with willows. An unbelievable number of willow trees. The wind was blowing quite hard, but their branches didn't even sway. How could that be, I thought, when just then I noticed tiny birds

clinging to each and every branch. It was their weight that kept the branches still. I picked up a stick and struck the nearest branch to drive off the bird so the branch might swing freely, but the bird wouldn't budge. Instead of flying off, it turned into a metal bird, which fell to the ground with a thud.

I awoke, but it still felt like the dream. The room was bright with moonlight. My first reaction was to look on the floor for the nonexistent metal bird. Naoko was sitting on the foot of the sofa bed, staring out the window. A half-starved waif, her knees pulled up under her chin. I looked over to check the time, but my watch was not where I remembered putting it. From the look of the moon, though, it must have been two or three o'clock. I felt a mighty thirst, but decided to stay put and watch Naoko. She was wearing the same blue dressing gown as before, her hair pinned up to one side with her butterfly hairclip, her brow strikingly exposed in the moonlight. Strange, I thought, hadn't she undone her hairclip before she went to sleep?

Naoko kept that pose and didn't so much as quiver. She seemed like some small animal transfixed by the moon, her lips made fuller by the underscoring shadow, an ever-so-vulnerable shadow that seemed to throb slightly in time with each heartbeat, a pulse of silent words whispered to the dark night.

I swallowed some saliva to stave off my thirst, but even that was remarkably loud in the hush of the night. As if on cue, Naoko stood straight up, the fabric of her gown scarcely rustling as she came around to kneel on the floor by my pillow and gaze into my eyes. I looked into her eyes, too, but saw no hidden message there. Her eyes were unnaturally clear, portals into a world beyond, where there was nothing to be seen, no matter how much I peered. Our faces were a mere ten inches apart, yet seemed distanced by light years.

When I reached out to touch her, Naoko pulled herself back. Her lips quivered. Then she raised both hands and slowly began to unbutton her gown. There were seven buttons in all. I followed her slim, graceful fingers through this whole dream sequence as they traveled down the front of her gown from one button to the next. And when the seventh button was at last unfastened, Naoko peeled the gown down to her waist like an insect shedding its skin. She was completely naked underneath. All she wore was the butterfly hairclip. Stripping off her gown, she looked at me from where she kneeled. There in the soft moonglow her body looked painfully bare like the flesh of a newborn child. Moving her body slightly—the scantest trace of a motion—sent a tremble through her moonlit parts and a play of

shifting forms over her recesses. The round swellings of her breasts, the tiny nipples, the indentation of her navel, the grainy shadows cast by her pelvis and pubic hair, all shaping and reshaping like ripples sweeping easily over the surface of a lake.

Such physical perfection! was all I could think. When had Naoko's body attained such fullness? This was not the body I had known that spring night. What had become of it?

That night, when I'd slowly and tenderly removed Naoko's clothes amidst her tears, I'd somehow been more aware of imperfections. The breasts seemed hard, the nipples jutted out wrong, the hips were strangely askew. Of course, Naoko was a beautiful girl, with an attractive body, and it had excited me sexually and swept me along with a surging force. Yet even so, as I held and caressed and kissed that body, I could not help but sense a certain strange imbalance, an awkwardness about it. I'd wanted to tell her as we embraced, that, yes, I was in coitus with her, yes, I was inside her. Yet this really was nothing. This was only a play of bodies, wholly negligible, perishable. A dialogue we could only exchange through the touching of our imperfect physical forms. This was how we shared our imperfection. Naturally, it was nothing I could explain so as to make sense. It was all I could do to suppress my words and let my body do what it

would. And as I embraced, I could feel the abrasive, insoluble remnants of something foreign inside her. The sensation was both endearing and stimulating. It gave me an awesome, hard erection.

Nonetheless, this was a different Naoko before me now. Her body must have undergone diverse transformations until at last this perfect body was brought forth in the moonlight. For one thing, the girlish fleshiness of her body at the time of Kizuki's death had been trimmed away and supplanted with more ripened flesh. Naoko's body was so beautifully perfected that it did not even arouse sexual desire in me. I merely gazed on her lithe waist, her roundly polished breasts, the peaceful rise and fall of her abdomen, and the soft shading of dark pubic hair beneath.

It couldn't have been less than five or six minutes that she bared herself to my eyes. Presently she drew her gown around herself again and proceeded to refasten the buttons in order from the top down. No sooner had she done all the buttons than she jumped up, silently opened the bedroom door, and disappeared inside.

For the longest time I lay there motionless in bed. Then, having second thoughts, I got up, located my watch where it had fallen to the floor, and turned my eyes moonward. It was three-forty. I downed glass after glass of water at the kitchen sink before

lying back down on the sofa bed, but was not visited with sleep until dawn had washed away the moonlight from every last corner of the room. And just as I was on the cusp of sleeping and not sleeping, Reiko came along and slapped my cheek, shouting, "Morning, morning."

While Reiko tidied the sofa bed, Naoko stood in the kitchen preparing breakfast. "Rise and shine," she said, and I responded likewise. There she was, humming to herself, boiling a kettle of water and slicing bread, not a hint that she'd shown herself naked to me the night before.

"Say, why are your eyes so red?" asked Naoko as she made coffee.

"I woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't seem to get back to sleep."

"We weren't snoring, were we?" asked Reiko.

"No, you weren't," I said.

"I'm glad," said Naoko.

"He's just being polite," discounted Reiko, fighting back a yawn.

At first I couldn't tell whether Naoko was simply putting on a nothing-happened act for Reiko or if she was just shy, but even when Reiko stepped out of the room for a moment there was absolutely no detectable change in her manner, and her eyes sparkled as clearly as ever.

"Sleep well?" I asked Naoko.

"Yeah, blacked out," replied Naoko matter-of-factly. A simple, unornamented clip perched in her hair.

My mood kept up unbroken all through breakfast. Buttering my toast and peeling my boiled egg, I sought some kind of sign in Naoko's face across from me.

"What is it, Toru? Why are you looking at me so much this morning?" queried Naoko.

"He's in love with someone, I think," said Reiko.

"You in love with someone?" Naoko asked me.

Maybe so, I admitted, joining in the fun. At which point I settled back to watch the two women joking back and forth, deciding not to pursue the subject of last night any further and finishing off my toast and coffee.

After breakfast the two of them said they were off to feed the birds in the coop and I opted to tag along. Changing into their work jeans and shirts and white rubber boots, they led me to an enclosure in a little park behind the tennis courts where they kept all kinds of birds, from chickens to pigeons, and even a peacock and a parrot. Around it were banks of flowers, and various plants and benches. Two men, in-patients apparently, were sweeping leaves from the paths. Both looked to be between forty and fifty. Reiko and Naoko went

over and greeted them, then Reiko made some funny remark that had them laughing. The cosmos was in bloom in the flowerbeds and the other plants were neatly trimmed. When the birds saw Reiko, they began chattering and darting about their cages in excitement.

The women fetched bags of bird feed and a hose from the shed adjacent to the coop. Naoko attached the hose to a nearby faucet, turned on the water and began to wash down the coop, making sure that none of the birds got out, while Reiko scrubbed the floor with a deck brush. The water splashed and sparkled in the sun as the peacock trotted this way and that, trying to keep its feathers dry. A turkey thrust out its neck and glared at me like a crotchety old man. The parrot, distraught, flapped its wings from atop a branch, and when Reiko meowed like a cat, it huddled into a corner of the coop, only to come back a minute later with cackles of, "Thank you! Cra-zee! Shit-head!"

"I don't know who teaches it those things," said Naoko with a sigh.

"Don't look at me. I don't teach it such language," said Reiko, making the cat sound again to shut the parrot up.

"This fellow once had a run-in with a cat, so he's scared to death of the critters," said Reiko, laughing.

The cleaning chores over, the two of them proceeded to fill the feed boxes. The turkey came splashing through the puddles on the coop floor, burrowed its head into the feed box, and became absorbed in eating, completely oblivious to a whack on the behind from Naoko.

"You do this every morning?" I asked Naoko.

"That's right. Just like all the new girls. It's easy work. Want to see the rabbits?"

I did. Behind the bird coop was the rabbit hutch, where ten or so rabbits lay snoozing in the hay. She swept up their droppings with a broom, put food in their box, then picked up a baby rabbit and snuggled it against her cheek.

"Cute, no?" bubbled Naoko, giving me the rabbit to hold. A tiny, cowering ball of warmth with twitching ears.

"Don't be afraid. He won't hurt you," said Naoko, stroking the rabbit's head with her fingers, then looking over at me and smiling. Her smile was radiant, unclouded by the least complication, making it impossible for me not to smile myself. So what had gotten into Naoko the night before? That had been the real Naoko and no figment of my imagination—she had undressed before my very eyes, had she not?

Reiko whistled a snappy rendition of "Proud Mary" as she gathered up the waste, shoveled it

into plastic bags, and tied them up. I helped carry the tools and feed bags back to the shed.

"Morning's my favorite time of day," volunteered Naoko. "It's like getting a fresh start on everything. It even makes me kind of sad when noon rolls around. And evening's the worst of all. It seems that way every day."

"Thinking that way, in due course you get older like me. What with thinking dawn and dusk," said Reiko, as if it were her own private joke, "happens almost overnight."

"Yet you sure seem to have done well by growing older, Reiko," exclaimed Naoko.

"Not that I especially find aging fun, but then neither would I want to be young again at this point," said Reiko.

"Why's that?" I asked.

"Too much trouble, obviously!" answered Reiko. Then she went back to whistling "Proud Mary" as she heaved the broom into the shed and shut the door.

On returning to the room, the women traded their rubber boots for regular tennis shoes, saying they were off to the vegetable field. Not much to look at, Reiko claimed, and besides they'd be working with others, so why didn't I stay put and read?

"Also, there's a bucket full of our dirty

underwear by the washstand if you don't mind doing the laundry," Reiko added.

"You're kidding, aren't you?" I asked in surprise. I couldn't be sure.

"Really now!" laughed Reiko. "Of course I'm joking. But aren't you the cute one. Don't you think so, Naoko?"

"Yeah, I guess," she concurred.

"I'll study my German, then," I said with a sigh.

"Good boy. You do that. We'll be back before noon," said Reiko. And the two of them snickered out of the room. I could hear voices and footsteps passing under the window.

I went over to the washbasin and washed my face, borrowed a nail clipper and trimmed my fingernails. It was an incredibly clutter-free washstand for an apartment with two women occupants. For all the lineup of facial creams and lip balms and suntan lotion and whatnot, there were practically no cosmetics. After I'd trimmed my nails, I went to the kitchen and made coffee, sat myself down with a cup at the table and opened my German textbook. Sitting there in a patch of sunlight, wearing only a T-shirt, memorizing German grammar tables from one end to the other, it all began to do strange things to my head. German irregular verbs struck me as being possibly about as far removed from this kitchen table scene as you could get.

At eleven-thirty the two of them returned from the field and took turns in the shower, emerging in a fresh change of clothes. Then we all three went to the dining hall for lunch and walked to the gate afterward. This time the gatekeeper was in the gatehouse, thoroughly enjoying the lunch tray he'd been brought. The transistor radio on the shelf was tuned to a pop music station. As we walked into view, he greeted us with a wave and we greeted him back.

Reiko told him we'd be going for a walk and would be back around three.

"Good. It sure is nice weather for a hike. Just be careful where the rains washed out that patch of road down below not long ago. Other than that, I'm sure you'll be just fine," said the gatekeeper. Then Reiko entered Naoko's name and hers in the outbound column, along with the date and check-out time.

"Take care then," said the gatekeeper.

"Kind man," I offered.

"The guy's a little off up here," said Reiko, tapping her head.

Be that as it may, it surely was a fine day for a hike, just as the gatekeeper had said. The sky was a penetrating blue, with tentative dabs of cloud stroked white onto the heights. We walked along the low stone wall of Ami Lodge for a while, then

headed off and started up the narrow path single file. Reiko took the lead, with Naoko in the middle and me bringing up the rear. Reiko maintained a brisk pace that said she knew every inch of the hills thereabouts. We walked and walked and hardly uttered a word. Naoko wore a white shirt and jeans, and carried a jacket. I watched her long, straight hair swing left and right about her shoulders as she walked ahead of me. Naoko turned around from time to time and smiled when our eyes met. It was an exhausting climb, but Reiko never once slackened her pace. Naoko would occasionally wipe away the sweat, but she never let herself fall behind. I was out of breath, not having been hiking in a while.

"Do you go hiking like this often?" I asked Naoko.

"Maybe once a week," she replied. "Tough-going, eh?"

"A little," I said.

"We're two-thirds there, only a little farther. You're a man aren't you? Act the part," chided Reiko.

"Out of shape, I am."

"Playing around with women the whole time, that's why," said Naoko, as if to herself.

I tried to say something in rebuttal, but was too out of breath. Across my field of vision kept streak-

ing these red birds with head plumes framed vividly against the blue sky. The meadows were a riot of countless white and blue and yellow flowers, bees buzzing everywhere.

Ten minutes on, the slope leveled off into a high plain. We stopped and took a breather, wiped off the sweat and took swigs from the canteen. Reiko found some kind of leaf, which she rolled and blew upon until it whistled.

The path began to slant lazily downhill, hemmed in on either side by tall stalks of pampas grass. After a fifteen-minute walk, we came to a completely abandoned settlement of twelve or thirteen houses, all waist-deep in weeds, holes in the walls caked white with pigeon droppings. One house had caved in, leaving only the posts upright, but others looked positively inviting, as if you could just slide back the storm doors and move in. The path threaded through the midst of these dead, silent homes.

"To think that people were living here only seven or eight years ago," Reiko informed us. "They worked the fields around here, but they all up and left. The going was too hard. Snowed in over the winters, the soil worn out. They went to find their fortunes in town."

"What a waste! These houses are perfectly livable," I said.

"For a while some hippies did live here, but they couldn't take the winters and left."

Heading on past the settlement we came to a large pasture surrounded by a fence. We could see a few horses grazing in the distance. As we walked along the fence, a huge dog came up, wagging its tail gleefully. It sniffed at Reiko, then practically floored Naoko. I whistled for it to come over and the beast licked my hand with its long, wet tongue.

"The dog belongs to the pasture," said Naoko, patting it on the head. "Must be close to twenty years old, poor thing. Weak teeth, can hardly manage hard things. Sleeps the whole day in front of the shop and comes running to get attention when it hears people coming."

Reiko pulled a scrap of cheese out of her knapsack. The dog smelled it and raced over, pouncing upon it joyfully.

"We won't be seeing this one all that much longer," said Reiko, patting the dog on the head. "Mid-October they take all the horses and cows in a truck down to a barn below. They only let them graze up here during the summer months, when they run a little coffee house of sorts for the tourists. Well, not exactly tourists. They're lucky to get twenty hikers a day. Care for something to drink?"

"Sure thing," I said.

The dog went on ahead, leading the way to the coffee house. It was a small cabin with a white porch out front and a faded sign in the shape of a coffee cup hanging from the eaves. The dog bounded up onto the porch, flopped down, and shut its eyes. We sat down at a table on the porch, and a pony-tailed girl in a sweat shirt and white jeans came out and greeted Reiko and Naoko warmly.

"This is a friend of ours," said Reiko by way of introducing me.

"Hello," said the girl.

"Hello," I echoed.

The three women plunged headlong into chit-chat, leaving me to stroke the dog's head under the table. The dog's neck was gnarled with age, and when I scratched the hard spots, the dog panted with relief, eyes a gleam.

"What's his name?" I asked the girl.

"Pepe," she answered.

"Pepe," I called, eliciting not the slightest reaction.

"He can't hear you unless you shout, 'cause he's going deaf," she said, revealing her Kyoto accent.

"Pe-pe!" I shouted, at which point the behemoth opened its eyes, stood straight up, and barked.

"There, there, it's all right. Just go back to sleep and have yourself a long happy life," said the girl,

whereupon the beast plopped back down where it stood.

Reiko and Naoko both ordered cold milk and I asked for a beer. When Reiko asked the girl to turn on the radio, she tuned into an FM station. Blood, Sweat and Tears were singing "Spinning Wheel."

"I really only come here to listen to the FM, you know," said Reiko contentedly. "Don't even have a radio back in the room, so if I didn't come here every once in a while I'd never know what was going on in the music world."

"You stay up here straight through?" I asked the girl.

"You kidding?" she answered with a laugh. "I'd die up here it gets so lonely. No, the folks from the farm drive me down to town each evening and bring me back in the morning." So saying, she pointed to a car with four-wheel-drive parked over by the farm office.

"You're gonna have time on your hands soon enough, I guess," Reiko thought aloud.

"Yep, season's just about up," said the girl. Reiko offered her a cigarette and the two of them lit up.

"Be sorry to see you go," said Reiko.

"I'll be back next May, though," the girl said with a smile.

Cream's "White Room" came on, followed by a commercial and Simon and Garfunkel's "Scar-

borough Fair." When the song was over, Reiko told me she really liked that song.

"I saw the movie," I said.

"Who's in it?"

"Dustin Hoffman."

"Can't say I know the name," pondered Reiko, shaking her head. "Everything changes so fast, before you even know it."

Reiko asked the girl if she wouldn't mind lending her a guitar. Coming right up, was the reply, and she switched off the radio and brought out an old guitar from inside. The dog looked up and gave it a few sniffs. "It's not something for you to eat," Reiko said for its benefit. A grass-scented breeze wafted through the porch. The line of the hills floated up immediately in front of us.

"It's just like *The Sound of Music*," I told Reiko as she tuned up.

"What kind of a remark is that?" she said.

She struck up the opening to "Scarborough Fair." Playing for the first time without sheet music, there were a couple of false-starts before she found the correct chords and had the melody down to where she could play the whole thing smoothly. By the third time through she was adding grace notes and embellishments. "I have a feeling for these things," said Reiko with a wink and an it's-all-up-

here tap of her finger on her head. "By the third time around, I can generally pick up any tune."

Humming softly, she played "Scarborough Fair" from beginning to end. Then all three of us clapped and Reiko bowed her head politely.

"I used to get more applause when I played Mozart concertos," she admitted.

The shop girl said she'd put the cold milks on-the-house if Reiko would play the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun." Reiko gave her a thumbs-up and she was off, singing in accompaniment to herself. Not too loud and a little husky, probably due to excessive smoking, but it was still a voice with character. Sitting there drinking my beer, listening to her singing, I could swear the sun was about to peer into view. I felt all warm inside.

After "Here Comes the Sun," Reiko returned the guitar to the girl and asked her to turn the FM station back on. Then she suggested that Naoko and I take a little walk, just the two of us, for an hour or so.

"I'll stay here and chat and listen to the radio. Just make sure you're back by three."

"It's okay to let us be alone together so long?" I asked.

"Really it's not, but what the hell. I feel like taking a bit of a break from this chaperone routine

myself. And I'm sure you have loads to talk about, having come all this way," said Reiko, lighting another cigarette.

"C'mon," said Naoko, standing up.

I followed suit and trailed after Naoko. The dog perked up and tagged along behind us for a while before it gave up and headed back. We strolled along a level road that bordered the fenced perimeter of the pasture, sometimes holding hands, sometimes arm in arm.

"Just like old times, eh?" said Naoko.

"They're not so old. It's only been since this spring," I said with a laugh. "If spring's already old times, then ten years ago must be prehistory."

"It's prehistoric enough," said Naoko. "Sorry about yesterday, though. I got all nervous. And after you'd come all this way. Forgive me."

"Never mind. It's probably better that you let all sorts of feelings out, you and me both. So if anybody's going to run up against those feelings, I'd rather it be me. That way we can come to a better understanding of each other."

"And if you understood me, what then?"

"Hey, none of that," I said. "It's not a question of 'what then?' There's people in this world who get off reading timetables and that's what they do all day long. Or those who build yard-long boats out of matchsticks. So there's room in the world for at

least one person who's trying to understand you."

"Is it all just a hobby, then?" said Naoko coquettishly.

"Call it a personal pastime if you like. Most regular-minded people might call it 'good will' or 'love,' though."

"Tell me, Toru," said Naoko, changing the subject. "You liked Kizuki, didn't you?"

"Of course I did," I replied.

"And Reiko?"

"I like her a lot. She's a wonderful person."

"How come you go for all us off-types?" said Naoko. "All screwed up or twisted somewhere, real sinkers on the sink-or-swim scale. Me and Kizuki and Reiko, we're all like that. How come you can't see your way to liking normal people?"

"That's not how I look at things. The people I think are screwed up are all out walking around fine and dandy as can be."

"But we are screwed up. I know it," said Naoko.

We walked on a while in silence. The road veered away from the pasture fence, leading off to a small round clearing encircled by woods like a pond.

"Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night frightened out of my wits," confessed Naoko, snuggling into the crook of my arm. "Frightened that I'll stay twisted like this and never return to normal, that I'll just get old and rot away up here. When I

get to thinking like that, my whole body freezes to the core. It's too horrible. Bitter and cold."

I threw my arm around her shoulders and drew her close to me.

"It's as if Kizuki was reaching for me from the darkness, calling out to me, 'You're not going anywhere, Naoko, we're inseparable.' When I hear that, I really don't know what to do."

"So what do you do at times like that?"

"Now, Toru, don't think it strange—"

"I promise," I said.

"I have Reiko hold me," said Naoko. "I wake Reiko up, climb into bed with her, and have her hold me tight. And I cry. She rubs me all over until I'm thawed out. Strange?"

"No, it's not strange at all. Only I'd like to hold you instead of Reiko."

"Hold me then, now," said Naoko.

So we sat ourselves down on the dry grass and embraced. We were completely hidden in the tall grass. All we could see was the sky and the clouds above. I slowly let Naoko down on the ground and held her tight. Naoko's body was soft and warm. Her hands sought me out. We exchanged a real kiss.

"Tell me, Toru," said Naoko close by my ear.

"Hmm?"

"You want to sleep with me?"

"Of course."

"Can you hold off, though?"

"Of course I can hold off."

"Before we do that, I want to get myself more together. Together and more the sort of person who can give you what you want. Will you wait for me to do that?"

"Of course I'll wait."

"Are you hard?"

"The soles of my feet?"

"Silly!" snickered Naoko.

"If you mean whether I have an erection or not, of course I do."

"Say, would you cut out this 'of course' business?"

"Good as done," I said.

"Is it really tough?"

"What?"

"When it's hard..."

"Tough? Hard?" I wanted to get this straight.

"What I mean is, you know, is it really unbearable?"

"It depends on how you look at it."

"Shall I do it for you?"

"By hand?"

"Mmm," said Naoko. "To be honest, the thing has been shoving up against me and it hurts."

I shifted positions. "How's that?"

"Thanks."

"Say, Naoko...?"

"What?"

"I'd like that a lot."

"Okay," agreed Naoko with a smile. Whereupon she undid the zipper to my trousers, slipped a hand in, and grabbed my erect penis.

"It's warm!" exclaimed Naoko.

I had Naoko wait a moment on the hand job while I unbuttoned her blouse, reached my hand around her back, and unhooked her brassiere. Then I put my lips to her soft white breasts. Naoko closed her eyes, then slowly began moving her fingers.

"You're not bad at this, you know?" I said.

"Be a good boy and keep quiet," said Naoko.

When I finished coming, I squeezed her gently. Then we kissed again. Then Naoko did her brassiere and blouse back up. I zipped my fly.

"Think you can walk around a little easier now?" asked Naoko.

"Thanks to you," I replied.

"Well, then, if it's all right with you, why don't we do a bit more walking?"

"Most certainly," I said.

Cutting across the clearing, we headed through the woods and across another field. Meanwhile

Naoko told me about her older sister who'd died. She'd hardly ever told anyone about her, but she figured it would be better if I knew.

"We were six years apart in age and quite different in character, but we were still very close," said Naoko. "We never once fought. No, really. Granted, our not fighting was probably to do with us being on different levels."

Her older sister had been one of those people who had been the best at whatever she did. Tops in her studies, tops in sports, she had everyone's respect, she had leadership qualities. Yet she was kind and open-hearted, so she was popular with the boys and favored by her teachers. She was the girl who had a hundred awards, your always-one-in-every-high-school model girl. Still, she didn't pull any rank for being the older sister, wasn't spoiled or overbearing. Nor did she especially care to make a show of herself. She just naturally came out on top, whatever she set herself at doing.

"That's why, from when I was really small, I made up my mind to take the cute girl route," said Naoko, twirling a stalk of pampas grass. "I mean, what else? When you grow up listening to everyone talking about how your older sister's so smart, so good at sports, so looked up to. I could fall over backwards and there was no way I'd better her. But when it came to looks, I was pretty enough, and,

besides, the folks seemed intent on raising me cute anyway. That's why they had me going to those schools from elementary school on, dressing me in velvet dresses with frilly blouses and patent leather shoes, piano and ballet lessons, the whole works. Thanks to which, my sister was extra nice to me, her 'darling little sister.' She was always buying me little gifts and taking me different places and checking my school work. She even took me along on dates with her boyfriends. The perfect older sister.

"Nobody could figure out just why she committed suicide, any more than they could with Kizuki. It was exactly the same. Both seventeen, no forewarning, no farewell note—I mean, talk about coincidence, the similarities were incredible."

"Sure sounds that way," I said.

"Everyone said she was just too smart for her own good or had read too much, or whatnot. True, she did read a great deal. She had a lot of books, many of which I read after she died. It was so pathetic. All her notes in the margins, pressed flowers, letters from boyfriends. It was enough to make me cry more times than I care to remember."

Naoko paused and twirled the stalk of grass.

"She was the type who took care of most things for herself. Practically never asked anyone for advice or help. Not that she was so full of pride or anything. That's simply the way she was, and it prob-

ably just never even occurred to her. Our parents were used to her being that way and knew that left on her own she'd do fine. I often used to talk things over with my sister, and she'd always help me out in any way she could, but she herself never talked over anything with anybody. She'd do everything single-handed. Never got mad or out of sorts. No, really, I'm not boasting. I mean most girls, when they get their periods, they go to pieces in some way or another. That's just how it is. But she wouldn't get upset, she'd get depressed. Maybe once every two or three months, and for two days she'd just stay in her room and sleep. She wouldn't go to school, she wouldn't eat much of anything, she'd turn off all the lights and simply space out. But she wouldn't snap at anyone. She'd call me into her room when I came home from school, have me sit down and tell her about my day. Not that I had anything exciting to say. What games I played with my friends, what the teacher said, test grades, stuff like that. But she'd still listen intently and say what she thought, give me pointers. But as soon as I'd leave—say I went off somewhere with a friend or had to go to my ballet lesson—she'd just space out again all by her lonesome. Two days like that and, snap, she'd be up on her feet again and off to school, all perfectly naturally. This went on for, oh, maybe four years. Our parents were all worried at

first and took her to see a doctor, but they thought that as long as she's only dead to the world two days at a time, they might as well just reconcile themselves to letting things run their course. She was an intelligent, together kid after all.

"But after my sister died, I overheard my parents talking. About my father's younger brother who died a long time before. He'd been extremely intelligent, too, but then for four years between seventeen and twenty-one he'd stayed in the house, until one day he upped and jumped in front of a train. That's when my father said, 'Guess it runs in the family, on my side.'"

All the while she talked, Naoko was unconsciously breaking the head of the pampas grass between her fingers, letting the pieces fly with the breeze. And when it was all gone, she wrapped the stalk around her finger.

"It was me who found my sister when she died," continued Naoko. "The autumn of sixth grade. November. It was raining. A dark, gloomy day. She was in her junior year of high school. It was six-thirty, because I'd just come back from my piano lesson. Mother was preparing dinner and she told me to go call my sister. I went upstairs and knocked on her door to tell her it was dinner time, but there was just dead silence. Which struck me as a little strange. So I knocked again and opened the door.

Dozed off, has she, I must have thought. But she wasn't asleep. She was standing by the window, head a little to one side, looking out. Like she was thinking or something. The room was dark, the lights off, things just a bit hard to make out clearly. So I spoke up, 'Hey, what're you doing? Dinner's ready.' It was only then that I noticed she seemed taller than usual. Which made me wonder, hey, what's going on here? Is she wearing high heels or standing on some kind of platform? But when I went closer to say something to her, that's when I noticed it. The rope above her head. Leading straight down from a ceiling beam—I mean astonishingly straight, like a line ruled in space. My sister was wearing a white blouse—yes, something simple like the one I'm wearing now—with a gray skirt and standing on tiptoe like for ballet. Only there were eight inches of empty space between the tips of her toes and the floor. I examined it all in detail. The face, too. I couldn't stop myself from looking. I knew I should hurry downstairs and let Mother know, scream, something. But my body wouldn't listen. It was as if it had a mind of its own. No matter that I knew I had to run downstairs quick, my body moved of its own accord to try to get my sister down from that rope. But of course it was nothing a child's strength could manage and I just stayed there for five, six minutes, blanked out.

Not knowing what was what. Like something had died inside me. I just stayed there, in the cold and dark, together with my sister, until my mother came to look."

Naoko shook her head.

"After that, I didn't speak a word for three days. I just lay in bed like a corpse, my eyes open, with absolutely no idea what was what." Naoko huddled into my arm. "You can't say I didn't warn you in my letter. That I was a lot more imperfect than you thought. That I was much more gravely ill than you thought, that the roots ran deep. So if you want to go on ahead, I'd want you to go on your own, without waiting for me. If you want to sleep with other girls, then sleep with them. Don't hold back on my account. Go ahead and do what you like. I'd only drag you down otherwise, and whatever happens that's the last thing I want for you. I don't want to interfere with your life. I don't want to interfere with anybody's life. Like I said before, just come to see me from time to time and don't forget me. That's all I hope for."

"That's not all I hope for," I said.

"But you'll ruin your life if you have anything to do with me."

"I'm not ruining anything."

"But I might never recover. Would you still wait

for me? Ten years, twenty years, could you wait for me that long?"

"You can't let these things get to you," I said. "The darkness and painful dreams and dead people. What you have to do is forget about all of them, and as soon as you've done that, you'll recover for sure."

"If I can forget," said Naoko doubtfully.

"Once you're out of here, why don't we live together?" I said. "That way I can keep you safe from the darkness and dreams. Reiko won't be there, but I can hold you when things get bad."

Naoko burrowed even more deeply into my arms. "That would be so lovely," she said.

It was a little before three when we returned to the coffee house. Reiko was reading a book while listening to Brahms's 2nd Piano Concerto on the radio. Gazing across the pasture, not a soul in sight as far as the eye could see, Brahms playing, it was quite something. She was whistling snatches of the opening cello melody from the third movement.

"Backhaus and Boehm," said Reiko. "I listened to this record enough to wear scratches in it. Wore it right down. Listened to it from beginning to end. I was practically glued to the thing."

Naoko and I ordered coffee.

“Had a good talk?” Reiko asked Naoko.
 “Mmm, talked about a whole lot of things,” said Naoko.
 “Fill me in later, you know, about his thing.”
 “We didn’t do any of that,” said Naoko, blushing.
 “Really? You didn’t do anything?” Reiko asked me.

“Not this time.”
 “What a letdown,” said Reiko disappointedly.
 “’Fraid so,” said I, sipping my coffee.

*

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

- p. 7 4 about to land 着陸しようとする 5 turning the scene into a gloomy Flemish painting 何もかもをフランドル派の陰うつな絵の背景のように見せていた 12 issues from the ceiling speakers 天井のスピーカーから(BGMが)流れはじめた 14 the melody gets to me, same as always そのメロディーはいつものように僕を混乱させた 16 my head is going to burst 頭がはまりすぎてしまいそうになる
- p. 8 3 heads off 行ってしまう 4 a Billy Joel number ビリー・ジョエルの曲 6 in the course of living これまでの人生の過程の中で 13 I'm about to turn twenty. ちょうど20歳になった。 19 I know what you mean (おっしゃることは)よくわかります 21 turns a lovely smile my way とても素敵な笑顔を僕に向けてくれた 24 I can still picture that meadow with amazing clarity. 僕はあの草原の風景をはっきりと思い出すことができる。 26 washed away the last speck of that summer's dust 夏のはこりをすっかり洗い流した
- p. 9 1 were swaying in the October breeze 十月の風は(すすきの穂を)あちこちで揺らせていた 3 the blue overhead 青い天頂 5 each puff of wind 一吹き of 風 9 seemed to issue from the threshold of another world 別の世界の入口から聞こえてくるような 11 Not a soul did we encounter. 誰一人ともすれ違わなかった。 13 chanced to see 見かけた 19 in minute detail 細部まで 20 to be perfectly honest 正直なところ 21 couldn't have cared less どうでもよかった 25 was at that age when (という)年代だった

- p. 10 1 on top of which おまけに 2 in a difficult frame of mind ひどくややこしい心境に 3 No way I'd have had a spare moment to notice the surroundings. まわりの風景に気持を向ける余裕なんてどこにもなかった。 8 what come floating up first (そんなものが) まず最初に浮かびあがってくる 9 I feel I could almost reach out and run my fingers over 手をのぼせば指でなぞれそうな気がする 15 my chen-self その当時の自分 19 given time 時間をかければ 21 so silky to the touch さらにとした手ざわり 26 the images build up one by one イメージをひとつひとつ積み重ねていく
- p. 11 5 a crystal clear spring 澄んだ泉 6 her face registers in my mind like that そんな風に彼女の顔が浮んでくる 7 with each passing year 年月がたつにつれて 13 strayed far from where Naoko stood (僕の記憶は) 直子の立っていた場所から遠ざかった 17 like some symbolic film sequence まるで映画の中の象徴的なシーンみたいに 20 make some sense of me 理解する 21 Not that it hurts. 痛みがあるわけではない。 25 have kept at me 僕に〜し続けた
- p. 12 1 it all falls into place 物事を理解する 6 an image or symbol of something inside her 彼女の中に存在するイメージなり記号 11 set eyes on 目にした 12 has burned indelibly into the landscape in my head 僕の頭の中では風景の中にしっかりと焼きつけられている 15 a dark, yard-wide opening 一メートルばかりの暗い穴 18 weathered to a strange milky white 風雨にさらされて奇妙な白濁色に変色し 23 Just how deep, I have no idea. 見当もつかないくらい深い。 25 A thick, black stew of all the varieties of darkness in the world. 世の中のあらゆる種類の暗黒を煮つめたような濃密な暗黒。
- p. 13 12 that'd be that それで済ませい 20 not a very nice way to go あまり良い死に方じゃない 25 you'd really be out of luck どうしようもない 25 shout all you want 声を限りに叫ぶ
- p. 14 5 make your hair stand on end 身の毛がよだつ 10 you won't see me straying (僕) 離れない 12 You've got nothing to worry about. あなたは何も心配することはない。 14 in the dead of night 闇夜に 22 there's no logic to it 理屈

- があるわけではない 24 I'm not the least bit scared. ちっとも怖くない。
- p. 15 2 I mean it 本気だ 10 a heart-stopping instant of wonderful warmth shot through me 一瞬胸がつかまってしまうくらいあたたかくて素敵な仕草 20 pursed her lips ふと口をつぐんだ 21 all kinds of thoughts were churning around in her head いろいろな思いが、彼女の頭の中でぐるぐると回っている 28 Say if, just if, I were to marry you. ねえ、もしよ、私があなたと結婚したとすると。
- p. 16 5 That just wouldn't be a fair arrangement. そんなの対等でさえないじゃない。 7 You'd only get discouraged with me. あなたは私にうんざりするだけよ。 13 think things through afresh もう一度考えなおす 14 We'll take it from there. そこからどうするかってね。 16 we're not living according to a balance sheet 僕らは収支決算表を睨(にら)んで生きているわけではない 18 look at things so hard そんなに固く物事を考える 20 if you'd only loosen up a bit 肩の力を少し抜けば
- p. 17 1 I'd go to pieces 私バラバラになっちゃうのよ 2 hold myself together (こういう風に) 生きること 4 if I let go 一度力を抜いたら 11 far more confused than you think あなたが考えているよりずっと深く混乱している 19 kept our eyes trained on the ground 地面を見続けた 25 still haven't really figured you out at all (僕) 君のことをまだ本当には理解していない 27 it takes a while before things sink in 物事を理解するのに時間がかかると
- p. 18 2 pausing there amidst the stillness そこで立ちどまって、静けさの中で(耳をすます) 6 lost in thought じっと考えごとをする 14 you've...been my salvation とても...救われる 24 autumn light filtered through the branches 梢を抜けてくる秋の光 27 climbed a little rise 小さな丘のように盛りあがったところをよる
- p. 19 2 followed two or three paces back 二、三步あとをついて歩いた 9 No way I'd forget you. 君のことを忘れられるわけがないよ。 10 And yet, in fact, memory drifts ever further away. それでも記憶は確実に遠ざかる。 11 tracing memories 記憶を辿(た

ど)りながら 12 I'm sometimes overcome with terrible doubts 僕はときどきひどく不安な気持ちになる 20 be that as it may 何はともあれ 22 with the same care I'd lay cremated bones to rest 骨でもしゃぶるような気持ちで

- p. 20 2 I never could get one line down 一行たりとも書けなかった 3 if I could only manage to squeeze out that first line その最初の一行さえでてくれれば 14 the man I am today 今の僕 17 which only makes it more unbearable そう考えると(僕は)たまらなく哀しい

CHAPTER 2

- p. 21 5 knowing nothing but nothing about Tokyo 東京のことなんて何ひとつ知らない 6 being on my own for the first time 初めて一人暮らしをする 8 have the benefit of various conveniences いろんな設備が揃っている 9 get by なんとか生きていける 11 cost was a consideration, too 費用のことも考えに入っていた 13 still, if it had been up to me とはいっても、もし僕に選択権があったのなら
- p. 22 7 On either side of the courtyard stood two parallel three-story concrete buildings. 中庭の両側には、鉄筋コンクリート三階建ての棟がふたつ、平行に並んでいた。 12 there was nothing the least bit unclean or dark about their appearance それらの見かけについては、不潔なところも、暗い印象もなかった 16 a shade least susceptible to fading 日焼けが一番目立たない 20 a guest room that served no appreciable function 何に使うかわからない貴重室 26 Everything you could ask for. 至れり尽せりだ。
- p. 23 3 some nebulous foundation that had sprung up around an extreme right-wing figure あるきわめて右翼的な人物を中心とする正体不明の財団法人 5 the little that met my eye, of course もちろん、僕のみからみれば 8 house rules 寮生規則 12 numerous like-minded financial leaders (その精神に賛同した) 多くの財界人 13 so ran the official line そのように表向きは

なっていた 16 a tax-dodge 税金対策 16 a gimmick to buy good press 売名行為 18 a ploy to get hold of prime real estate 一等地を効率よく手に入れるための名目 21 a covert faction of former dormmates within financial sectors 政財界の寮の出身者から成る隠れた團 25 study meetings 研究会

- p. 24 1 which theory held the most water どの説が最も正しいのか 2 "something fishy" 何かうさんくさい 9 hypocritical-good or hypocritical-bad 偽善だろうが、偽悪だろうが 11 dorm days 寮での日々 20 bristle-hard hair いかにも硬そうな髪 23 Nakano Military Academy 陸軍中野学校 24 a student-cum-assistant 助手のごとき立場の学生
- p. 25 8 take in this curious spectacle of patriotic pomp この物珍しい愛国的儀式を見物する 15 a shallow paulownia-wood case 桐の薄い箱 21 with all due ceremony うやうやしく
- p. 26 1 snap to "Atten—shun!" <氣をつけ>の変勢をとる 3 the wind's blowing at a fair clip うまく風が吹いていけば 5 regimented procedures 儀式 5 albeit in reverse ただし、まったく逆の順序で 9 The state still exists at night. 夜のあいだも国家は存続している。 13 the sovereign protection of the state 国家の庇護(ひご) 15 no one pays the least mind to these things 誰もそんなことは氣にもとめない 27 built-in shelves 作りつけの棚 27 Hardly an inspiring space no matter how favorably you looked at it. どう好意的に見ても特約的な空間とは言えなかった。
- p. 27 5 rudimentary tableware 簡単な食器 15 the rooms were almost always a horrible mess 部屋は大体は、おそろしく汚い 21 dishes dull with grime 食器は、汚れて、黒ずんでいた 21 doo-dads わけのわからないもの 24 who-knows-what 何やかや 24 never occurred to anyone 誰も思いつかなかった
- p. 28 6 were hopelessly stained with perspiration たっぷりと汗をすいこんでいた 7 fatal contagious disease 致命的な伝染病 9 as pristine as a morgue 死体安置所のように清潔な 11 bedding aired once a week 布団は週に一度干された 19 "psycho" 「異常性格者」 25 I don't really go for that kind of thing ぼくは、こういうのあまり好きじゃない

- p. 29 5 everyone seemed to take it totally deadpan みんなあっさりとしてそれを信じてしまったようだった 9 never much put out by the experience 嫌な思いをさせられたわけではない 17 the only bother was that~ 唯一困ったのは~ 21 a geography major 地理学の専攻 27 the National Geodetic Institute 国土地理院
- p. 30 3 hand it to 手渡す 5 be in a fix 困ったこと 7 still it did strike me as odd 何かしら奇妙だった 12 it was a hundred-percent certainty 百パーセント確実だった 26 when he was puzzled, his stutter got worse 混乱すると、どもりがひどくなった
- p. 31 1 would've done as well (なんでも) よかったんだ 21 just happened to feel like theater たまたま気が向いたのが演劇だった 6 "I don't get it" 「わからないな」 9 have my folks send me m-money 家族から仕送りをしてもらう 13 we drew matches to decide マッチ棒 (のくじ) を引いて決めた 19 right-wing student 右翼学生 28 you'd run out on him 彼から逃げ出す
- p. 32 3 self-righteous flag-raising ceremony これみよがしの仰々しい国旗掲揚式 5 take such ages doing it (washing his face) 顔を洗うのにすごく時間がかかる 8 give his towel the necessary couple of snaps to take the wrinkles out バンバンと音をたてて、タオルのしわをきちんととる 13 be dead to the world 熟睡している 17 No way I wouldn't be woken up. 目を覚まさずいわけにはいかなかった。 20 put up with it がまんした 20 communal living 共同生活
- p. 33 9 That's no good either. それも駄目なんだよ。 10 outlet 電源 14 just great やれやれ 17 hold off with those jumps 跳躍はやめてくれ 25 I'd have thrown in the towel on the whole thing 何もかもどうでもいい 27 might as well set the record straight はっきりさせておこう
- p. 34 1 the Japan Broadcasting Corporation's Radio Exercises NHK のラジオ体操 8 cut out that section その部分を端折ること 9 Everything else I can handle. 他のところは全部我慢する。 11 nothing doing 駄目だ 15 everything gets thrown all out of k-kilter み、み、みんな出来なくなっちゃう 17 couldn't

bring myself to say another word それ以上何も言えなかった 18 What was there to say? いったい何が言えるのだろう。 18 the fastest way of dealing with the problem いちばんでっさり早いのは 21 asking for trouble 騒ぎをおこすこと 22 takes the utmost care of his possessions 自分のもち物を極端に大事にする

- p. 35 6 it'd been ages 本当に久しぶりだった 11 intermittent showers 降ったりやんだりの雨 12 let up (雨が) あがる 14 tossed about in the breeze (桜の葉が) 風に揺れた 17 throwing them over their shoulders (セーターや上着を) 肩にかけている 22 stripped off (シャツを) 脱いで 24 in their winter habits (黒い) 冬の制服を着て
- p. 36 2 enjoying a fine chat 会話を楽しむ 6 faded nicely from many washings よく洗いこまれて、感じよく色があせている。 8 wear a top just like that それと同じシャツを着ている 13 Whoknows? よくわからないよ。 16 took a sip ひとくち (水を) 飲んだ 24 It all depends on how you look at it. それは人の考え次第である。 26 dumb jerks throwing their weight around 下らない奴が威張っている
- p. 37 2 make a go of it 暮らすこと 3 That's all there is to it. そういうことだけだ。 7 peered straight into my eyes 僕の目をじっとのぞきこんだ 9 come to think of it 考えてみれば 22 with me close behind 僕はそのすぐ後ろを (歩いた) 24 grown distinctly thinner 見違えるほどやせた
- p. 38 2 her body had simply pared itself down to fit 彼女の体は、それに合うように細くなってしまった 8 bumped into each other on the train 偶然、電車の中で会った 10 go book-browsing 本を探しに行く 14 not that (話題なんて特に) あったわけではなく 20 no choice but to follow あとを追うしか仕方ない
- p. 39 1 it hardly seemed to matter to her それは彼女にとっては問題ではないようだった 3 what the hell まあいいや 6 hung a right at lidabashi 飯田橋で右へ折れた 7 the moat お堀 11 No small excursion. (短い距離ではなく) ちょっとした道のりである。 14 with a start ふと気づいて 21 had a quick bite 軽い食事をした 23 was worn out ぐったりと疲れていた

- 24 lost in thought 考えこんでいた
- p. 40 1 in good shape (体が) 丈夫である 5 I've trained long-distance 長距離の選手としてトレーニングした 9 my legs just naturally got sturdy 自然に足腰が丈夫になっただけ 14 tacking on the barest smile ほんの少しの笑いを付け足したように 16 putting you through a day with me 一日中私につき合わせてしまう 23 only if it's no imposition on you もし、あなたに迷惑でなければ 25 it's not in the story to say (こんなことを) 言える筋合じゃないこと
- p. 41 6 planted her elbows on the table テーブルに肘(ひじ)をついた 10 fiddled with her hairclip 髪どめをいじった 11 doesn't matter かまわないよ 22 chasing each other around and around まわりをぐるぐると、お互いを追いかけている 23 latches onto 抱えている
- p. 42 1 everybody goes through 誰もが(～時を)経験する 8 put the conversation back on track 会話を元に戻した 10 walking is healthy enough 歩くことは健康にいい 15 on parting 別れ際に 17 for all we saw of each other before 以前に僕たちがお互い会っていたわりには 22 sure thing いいよ、もちろん 25 Catholic girls' school ミッション系の女子校
- p. 43 1 behind your back うしろ指をさされる、悪口を言われる 7 childhood sweethearts 幼なじみのカップル 8 no compelling urge for them to be alone 二人だけでいたいという強い要求はない 16 a little too well-bred for me 僕には少々上品すぎた 20 they couldn't make much of me, either 彼女たちにも僕のことを理解できなかった 25 that worked out simplest and best (それが) いちばん気楽でうまくいった 26 enter a fourth 四人めが入ると 28 able-bodied host 有能なホスト
- p. 44 2 he carried it off very well 彼はそういうのがとても上手(うま)かった 3 a cynical streak 冷笑的な傾向 4 stuck-up 傲慢(ごうまん)な 6 took pains to talk 気を配って話した 12 weigh the situation 場の空気を見きわめる 20 hang around with ～と仲良くなった 24 be content with 満足する 26 regular read-books-and-listen-to-records type 本を読んだり音楽を聴いたりする平凡なタイプ 28 single me out 僕を選ぶこと

- p. 45 13 if the truth be known 実際 18 not mismatched exactly 相性が悪いわけではなく 24 dig up a couple of topics to throw her way いくつかの話題をみつけて彼女に話しかけた 26 a little stiff about her words, some little bitterness 彼女のしゃべり方にはちょっと角(かど)があった 28 went our separate ways 別々の方向に別れていった
- p. 46 7 I would have traded places if I could 僕としても、できることならかわってあげたかった 11 cut class and go shoot some billiards 授業をさぼって、玉撞(つ)きに行く 15 entered a pool hall and racked up four rounds ビリヤード屋に入って4ゲーム玉を撞いた 18 A bet was a bet. 約束は約束だつて。 20 we had a smoke 我々は一服した 22 chided おこった、きつく言った 26 taped up the cracks in the windows 窓のすきまをガム・テープで目ばりして
- p. 47 2 his folks 彼の両親 2 an ailing relative 病気の親戚 6 No last letter, no plausible motive. 遺書もなければ思いあたる動機もない。 7 was called down to the police station 警察に呼び出された 8 there'd been no hint whatsoever そんなそふりはまったくなかった 14 the papers ran a short obit 新聞に小さく死亡記事がのった 15 the case was closed 事件は終わった 20 got close to one girl ある女の子と仲良くなった 24 with no great effort たいして努力をしなくても 25 No big deal. たいしたことではない。
- p. 48 1 you've had me あなたは私と寝た 5 we split up 我々は別れた 8 there was no undoing it とりかえしはつかなかった 12 not to let things get within range of myself 物事と自分のあいだにある距離をおくこと 15 fingers of smoke rising from crematorium smokestacks 火葬場の煙突から立ちのぼる煙 19 was left with great lumps of void, of empty space ぼんやりとした空気のかたまりのようなものが残った。
- p. 49 4 up until that point そのときまで 6 fall into death's grip (我々は) 死の手に捉えられる 9 quintessential logical stance 至極までも論理的な考え方 14 the antithesis of life 生の対極存在 14 a part of my original makeup 僕の存在の中に本来的に含まれている 22 not to let it get to me 深刻にならないよ

CHAPTER 3

- p. 51 12 in unconnected fragments 断片的に 19 a whole slew of different hairclips いろいろな形の髪どめ
- p. 52 1 had a habit of よく～するくせがあった 3 when working up to say something 何か話をした時には 7 on the edge of Musashino 武蔵野のはずれ 13 kept her place tidy さっぱりとした部屋 17 an inconceivable break from high school ways 高校時代の彼女からは想像できないこと
- p. 53 1 took to me 僕に馴れた 4 a new semester found her walking alongside me 新しい学期が始まると彼女は僕のとなりを歩くようになった 6 a full-fledged friend ひとりの資格のある友だち 11 some healing spiritual rite 魂をいやすための宗教儀式 15 the scent of a new season was in the air 新しい季節の匂いが空気の中にあった 16 worn one pair of shoes to death 靴を一足はきつぶした 19 didn't amount to anything たいした話はしていなかった 22 grown completely accustomed to sitting silently 黙りこんですわっていることにすっかり馴れていた
- p. 54 1 looking singularly depressed とてもがっかりした様子で 4 couldn't have picked a worse person to ask 質問する相手を完全に間違えていた 7 substituted 取り替えた 14 plunged into confusion ひどく混乱した 21 never felt quite right about 決して気持ちの良いことではなかった 25 a not-so-well-to-do family あまり裕福とはいえない家庭
- p. 55 8 the girl I'd broken up with 別れた女の子 11 things just never clicked 何事もうまくいかなかった 11 had a hard shell around my heart 僕の心は固い殻で包まれて 18 autumn drew to an end 秋が終った 23 cling shivering to my arm 僕の腕にしがみついて震えている
- p. 56 7 with the advent of winter 冬が始まると共に 11 filled me with odd sensations of loneliness and inadequacy (僕は) 淋しいようなやりきれないような不思議な気持ちになった 13 trying to get something across to me 僕に何かを伝えようとする

- 16 All the more reason why the words wouldn't come. だからこそ言葉になって出てこない。 24 in a void 虚空の中に。
- 27 Only to be expected, really. 当然といえば当然であった。
- p. 57 4 what position we'd made it in どんな体位をとったか 13 did precious little for me ほとんど何も僕に訴えなかった 15 were one-time-around at best 通りいっぺんのもの 18 entertained the idea (作家になりたいという) 考えを持った 21 come close to knowing (ある程度) 正確にわかってくれる 24 her disease of groping for words 彼女の言葉探し病
- p. 58 2 out on the town 外に遊びにでている 5 divine my own thoughts 自分の心を見定める 20 keep my nose to my own books 僕は自分の本を読みつづけた 21 time and again 何度も (読みかえし) 26 the pinnacle of writing 最高の書物
- p. 59 2 ease into the number one slot バストワンの地位に動かす 5 It never once let me down. ただの一度も失望させられたことはなかった。 12 he fell in with me 彼と僕が親しくなった 14 two years my senior 僕よりふたつ学年が上 15 knew him by sight 顔だけは知っていた 24 half to himself 彼自身に言いしかせる 27 oddball 奇妙な男 27 crossed paths 人生の過程を歩んでいくうち
- p. 60 3 made it a rule 原則としていた 8 something that hasn't stood the test of time 時の洗礼をうけていないもの 12 rattled off 即座に答えた 15 I'd only wind up thinking like everybody else 僕も他人と同じようにしか考えられなくなる 16 hicks 田舎者 16 riff-raff 俗物 20 The rest are trash. 残りの者は紙屑だ。 21 taken aback あきれる
- p. 61 3 one of the best-kept secrets まったくの秘密 9 public service examinations 公務員試験 12 was slated to take on あとを継ぐことになっていた 13 Your storybook household. 申しぶんない一家。 20 was equipped with 備わっていた 25 do his bidding 彼の指示に従わせる
- p. 62 1 was dumbfounded ひどく驚いた 2 an undistinguished nobody like me これといって特徴のない僕のような男 5 with no mean respect ちょっとした敬意 11 probably a refreshing change for him たぶん彼にとっては新鮮である 15 be touch-

- ed 感動する 20 a lonely sea of despair in his heart その心は
孤獨に陰鬱な絶望の底にあった 24 The guy lugged around
himself living hell. この男は、彼よりの地獄を抱えて生きている。
26 harbored good feelings toward him 彼に好意を抱いていた
- p. 63 6 never once gave myself over wholeheartedly to him 僕は彼に
一度も心を許さなかった 12 a number of dorm legends 多くの
寮内での伝説 19 it's a long story いろいろとあるんだ
21 incoming students 新入生 21 upperclassmen 上級生
- p. 64 21 flue by me いいですよ 10 Simply revolting just to think
of it. 思い出してもゾッとする。 17 what else was there for
me to do 他にどうしようがあるか 27 bragging 誇張
- p. 65 3 tag along with me 俺についてこい 7 it almost took the fun
out of it 気が抜けるくらいだった 9 regulars きまっただころ
12 he was one smooth talker 彼は話がうまかった 15 swoon
in a haze of admiration ぼおっと感心してしまう 16 get
dragged along in the verbal undertow その話にひきずりこまれた
23 spurred on by せかさされて 24 be all ears 熱心にきく
26 It'd bowl me over every time. そのたびに僕を感心させた。
- p. 66 12 the flesh-on-flesh contact 体をさわりあうこと 14 those
goodbyes the morning after 次の日の朝の別れ 18 chintzy
love-hotel decor ラブホテル特有のけげげばしい装飾 19
hangover 二日酔い 20 grope around for her underwear 下着
を探しまわる 24 the worst possible day of my cycle ぼっちり
危い日 27 I just hated all that. そういうすべてがきらいだっ
た。
- p. 67 1 casting lines at girls 女の子を口説きながら 4 night leave 外
泊許可 10 after two or three rounds of this 2~3回こうい
うことあったあとで 13 that only goes to prove ~を証明する
だけだ 17 fed up with yourself 自分が嫌になる 19 why
make such a big thing of it どうしてあんなに一生懸命やるんです
か 23 it's hard just pass things up やりすごすことはむずかし
い 25 kind of なんとなく
- p. 68 2 Nail them in nothing flat. そんなもの簡単におとせる。
10 I haven't the vaguest idea どういうものか見当もつかない
14 womanizing 女遊び 24 it took some doing to get night

- leave 外泊許可をとるのはけっこう面倒だった 26 as long as
he put in a good word 彼が口をきいてくれる限りは
- p. 69 4 no breathtaking beauty はっとするような美人ではない 8
found it impossible not to like her 彼女に好感を持てばいわけに
はいかない 14 nothing women (他の) つまらない女たち
15 underclasswomen 下級生の女の子 18 came up with
some polite excuse ていねいな断りの理由を述べて (逃げていた)
23 was well aware だいたいには知っていた 27 too good for
the likes of me 俺にはもったいない
- p. 70 12 I never get things right. 私はすごく不器用だ。 17 by
way of consolation なくさめるように 20 staying on in
Tokyo 東京にいつづけることになった 25 roasted rice cakes
餅を焼いた
- p. 71 3 a fever of nearly 105 degrees 40度近い熱 5 pass up a date
with Naoko 直子とのデートをすっぽかす 8 tossing and turn-
ing on his mattress マットの上をごろごろ転がまわって 20
The guy couldn't have been human. 彼は人間とは思えなかった。
24 oversight 過失 25 more than a little pissed off 頭にきて
しまった 26 I'd blown on account of him 彼のおかげでふい
にした
- p. 72 3 February brought snow 二月になると雪が降った 4 got in
fight over something stupid つまらないことで喧嘩をした 6
threw him a punch 彼を殴った 9 for a reprimand 注意のた
め 12 missed out on a few credits いくつか単位を落とした
- p. 73 7 nothing I'd wish on anyone 誰にとっても (起こってはほしく
ない) 願うこと 8 it lurched from side to side よく揺れた
10 the ruins of the Coliseum in Rome ローマのコロッセウムの遺
跡 13 a passable rendition of birthday festivities なんとか誕
生日らしくなった 21 got seven months ahead of me まだ7
カ月ある
- p. 74 1 a woven red and black deer pattern 鹿の編みこみが入った赤と
黒の模様 3 sputter with laughter 思わず吹きだす 8 Is
there something on my face? 何か顔についているか? 13
amused Naoko no end 直子はとても喜んだ 17 I'd even bet
you. 賭けてもいいよ。 23 was unusually talkative 珍しくよ

- くしゃべった 27 her powers of recall たいした記憶力
- p. 75 3 something queer about the way they were strung together そのつながり方が奇妙であった 16 skirt certain areas あるポイントをさける 19 details that hardly mattered どうでもいような事柄 25 it was getting to be time for the last train home 最終電車の時間になりつつあった
- p. 76 3 pursed her lips 口をつぐんだ 11 her words had trailed off, loose ends floating in the air 言葉のきれはしがもぎとられたように宙に浮んでいた 17 robbing her of the energy to continue 彼女をしゃべらせ続けたエネルギーがなくなって 24 rolled down her cheek, falling with a loud plop 頬をつたい大きな音をたてて落ちた
- p. 77 51 drew her close to me 彼女の体を抱きよせた 8 sopping wet ぐっしょりぬれた 14 the right thing to do or not そうすることが正しかったのかどうか 18 calm her down 彼女を落ち着かせる
- p. 78 1 felt great pain ひどく痛かった 3 scrambled up everything for me 全くわけがわからなくなった 9 clung tight to my body からだをしっかりと抱きしめて 25 gave in to the urge to get up あきらめて起きた
- p. 79 1 the way we'd left them the night before 昨夜のままに残っていた 4 time had suddenly stood still 時間が突然止まってしまった 4 tidied up the mess on the floor 床の上に散らばったものを拾いあつめてかたづけた 6 table of French verbs フランス語の動詞表 10 the clothes that lay about 落ちていた服 14 when she had collected herself 彼女が落ちついたら 19 set out for 出かけた 22 on checking with the superintendent 管理人に訊(き)くと 24 forwarding address 転居先
- p. 80 5 tried to make sense わかろうとした 6 who knows where I'll be 自分かどこにいるか見当もつかない 10 willing to give me the time 僕に時間を与えてくれるなら 14 I've been without anyone to whom I can tell my real feelings 僕は自分の気持ちを正直に語る相手がいけなかった 18 we've gone about things the long way around すいぶん僕たちはまわり道をした 19 gone off-course 歪んでしまった 26 as if something was missing in-

- side me 体の中の何かが欠落したかのように
- p. 81 1 an empty cavity 純粹な空洞 2 phantom echoes うつろな響き 9 dismantling the university 大学解体 12 it'd give me a clean slate 僕もさっぱりするだろう 14 lend a hand 手伝う 14 Just get done with it. さっさとやってくれ。 17 moving company 運送屋 21 the pay made up for that 給料はその分よかった 22 keeping my body active 体を動かし続けること 27 never touched a drop of liquor 酒を一滴も飲まなかった 28 hyper about the smell of alcohol アルコールの匂いにひどく敏感
- p. 82 10 June rolled around 六月になった 13 waiting for an answer that doesn't come こない返事を待つこと 19 sheer simplicity とても簡単 20 put up a bit of a fight ちょっと暴れて抵抗した 22 it wasn't worth the fuss 大騒ぎする価値はなかった 24 sidled up すり寄ってきた
- p. 83 2 you name it ありとあらゆること 3 dozed off 眠った 7 kept up a steady stream of questions ずっと質問をあびせた 13 ought to be going to my part-time job アルバイトに行かなくてはならない 16 split 別れた 19 thoroughly disgusted with myself まったくうんざりした 27 what on earth I was to do with myself 僕はいっけい何をしようとしているのか
- p. 84 5 get myself to put things down on paper 文章を書けるように自分をもっていく 9 take a year off from university 大学を一年間休学にする 12 a formality 手続上 18 whatever happened or didn't happen 何かが起っていたとしても、また起っていなかったとしても 22 blaming yourself on my account 私のごとであなた自身を責めること 24 letting it slide それをのばして
- p. 85 3 treatment 治療 6 relaxed recuperation center 自由な療養の施設 10 my nerves can get a rest 神経をやさめる 14 Of this much I'm sure. これだけは確信している。 15 not that I don't want to see you あなたに会いたくないというのではなく 23 a desolate feeling 真しい気持 26 an insoluble feeling I couldn't deal with 僕はどうすることもできなかった、やるせない気持

- p. 86 6 no expectations of a phone call 電話のかかってくるあてはない
11 divide those two spaces again into halves その2つの空間を
もう一度半分に分ける 16 presented me with a firefly 僕に螢
をくれた 20 its lid perforated with tiny air holes そのふたに
は小さな空気穴があいていた 22 unremarkable 何も特徴のない
- p. 87 2 scale the glass walls ガラスの壁をのぼる 6 to attract
customers 客寄せのため 9 several weeks into summer vaca-
tion 夏休みに入って数週間 12 job training 実習 18 dead
quiet しんとして 18 a virtual derelict 事実上の廃墟 19
down came the flag, on came the lights 国旗が降ろされ、電気が
灯った 22 a faint smell 微かな匂い、 27 clothesline 洗濯ロ
ープ 27 like some cast-off skin 何かの抜け殻のように
- p. 88 3 slightly clipped moon 少しだけ欠けた月 6 rivers of car
headlights 車のヘッドライトの光の川 6 between one center
and another 街と街の間 13 flitted about ひらひら飛びまわ
る 15 I had believed in the brilliance of fireflies. 螢の鮮かな
光というものを信じていた。 21 picture the scene 光景を思い
出す 21 the place and time escaped me 場所と時間を思い出
すことはできなかった
- p. 89 2 skittering like sparks across the water 光は火の粉のように水面
に映える 4 immersed myself in the dark night of memory 記
憶の闇の中に身を沈めた 12 this new state of affairs この新し
い状況 20 leaning on the railing 手すりにもたれながら
22 rustling こすりあわせる 25 flicking open its wings その
羽を広げ
- p. 90 5 its light trail still lingered その光の軌跡は、僕の中にまだ留ま
っていた 11 fingertips 指先

CHAPTER 4

- p. 91 2 riot police 機動隊 4 the students holed up inside 中にこも
っていた学生 5 out of the ordinary 珍しいこと 11 raised
a commotion 騒動を起こした 15 couldn't have mattered
less 僕にはどうでもよかった 16 no great loss 何の損失もない

- 19 ruins 廃墟 20 untouched 無傷だった
- p. 92 1 in shambles 破壊されて 1 Students' Union 学生課 2
What the hell had those clowns been up to? あの道化師たち(学
生たち)はいったい何をしていたのか。 9 the resolution to
strike was still in effect スト決議はまだ有効だった 14 vocal
やかましく言う 17 straight out 率直に 21 poor atten-
dance 出席不足 23 this miserable flock of opportunists この
みじめな楽天家の連中 25 the least shift in the wind 風向きひ
とつて
- p. 93 1 status quo 世界 5 meaningless gesture 意味のないジェスチ
ャー 9 an awkward silence would sweep through the
classroom 教室の中に居心地の悪い空気が流れた 13 arrived
at the conclusion 結論に到達した 16 withstanding
boredom 退屈さに耐えること 17 there was no compelling
reason to quit school 学校をやめなければならぬような理由は
なかった 23 more than just strange 驚天動地 25 it
wasn't like him to miss them (classes) 授業をさぼるといのは彼
らしくなかった
- p. 94 3 bug spray 殺虫剤 10 air the bedding 布団を干す 12
what's come over you? どうしたの 18 what had become of
him 彼がいっただいどうなったのか 22 scum 俗物
- p. 95 2 savings 貯金 5 single-room-dweller 一人暮らし 8
"History of Theatre II" 演劇史II 11 a bit off the main drag
にぎやかな通りからは少し離れて 14 a mean omelet おいしい
オムレツ 23 glancing in my direction 僕の方をちらちらと見
ながら 23 short-cropped hair 短く切った髪
- p. 96 6 cut such a striking figure とても目立つ服装をしている 9
knew me by name 僕の名前を知っている 10 Or are you
expecting someone? 誰かここにくるの? 16 shifted her gaze
to my plate 僕の皿に視線を移した 26 said flat out 簡潔に言
った 27 lend an ear to our misfortunes 不幸な者の言うこと
に耳を貸す
- p. 97 1 took a good long look at this girl この女の子をまじまじと見た
7 pointing to four inches below her shoulder 肩から10センチく
らい下のところを手で示した 12 a drowned corpse 水死体

- 13 lop the whole lot off 全部切ってしまう 14 loads cooler 涼しい 21 looks good on you よく似合っている 24 Right you are. その通りよ。 26 'concentration camp' 強制収容所 28 so hung up on girls with long hair そんなに長い髪の子にこだわって
- p. 98 4 low-life girls 下品な女の子 6 that was no lie それは嘘ではなかった 7 hadn't made much of an impression on me 僕にはあまり印象深くなかった 10 fantastic creature just sprung into the world 世界に飛び出たばかりのすてきな小動物 15 it'd been ages 久しぶりだった 16 enthralled 感心して 19 donning her dark sunglasses once more もう一度濃いサングラスをかけて 22 if at all possible できることなら
- p. 99 1 felt defenseless 無防備に感じる 2 made me nervous 落ちつかない 4 fair enough なるほど 5 with singular intensity 興味深そうに 8 No big deal. いいのよ、べつに。 10 no bother at all まったく邪魔ではない 16 taking roll call 出席をとる 23 rare species of animal 珍しい動物
- p. 100 1 Give me a break. まさか。 6 don't happen to like sweet things たまたま甘い物は好きじゃない 16 Some places I might have company, though. ところどころで道づれがあったけれど。 20 taken aback びっくりして 21 got the wrong picture 思いちがいをする 24 run across romance ロマン스에めぐりあう
- p. 101 4 go out of my way to make friends 無理に友だちをつくる 5 get let down がっかりする 16 Anything'll do. 何だっていいんだ。
- p. 102 2 a "gotcha" hand signal 「わかった」という手の合図 4 take notes in lectures 講義のノートをとる 8 missed two lectures 2回休んでいる 18 treat you to lunch お昼をごちそうする 19 indigestion 消化不良 21 come off it まさか 23 it's set then それでは決まった
- p. 103 16 took a seat on the stone steps 石段にすわる 18 Nothing doing. だめだ。 26 matriculated 1969 69年度入学
- p. 104 2 gave the number a call 電話番号をまわした 13 injured herself or taken ill 怪我をするか病気になるか 25 stepping

- out for dinner 夕食に出かけるところ
- p. 105 3 No different than spinning a line to a girl. 女の子を口説くのと変わらない。 7 buy you a good meal うまいものをごちそうする 9 the Foreign Ministry exam 外務省の試験 12 jerks アホ 13 loonies 変質者 13 would-be bureaucrats 官僚になろうという人 18 I have my reasons いろいろ理由はある 18 like the notion of ~という考えが好きである 22 test my mettle in the biggest pool 一番大きな器の中で自分を試す 23 the state 国家 25 You follow? わかるか。
- p. 106 5 try my stuff 自分の力を試す 6 leaves no room for ideals 理想を持ちあわせていない 8 role models 行動規範 10 loads of たくさんの 15 make it into Tokyo University 東大に受かる 16 have the knack for ~するコツを知っている 17 come easy 簡単にできる 18 holds me in awe 一目おかれる 24 nothing of the kind そういう種類のものではない 27 the one and only thing I'm jealous of ただひとつうちやましいこと
- p. 107 5 our paths are going to cross (将来) 我々はまたどこかで出会う 11 hunches 予感 20 nearly fall out of my chair ほとんど椅子から落ちそうになる
- p. 108 13 each night always brought thoughts of you 毎夜いつも君のことを考えていた 16 boring beyond measure 退屈きわまりない 18 self-discipline 自己訓練 26 keeping it at that それだけ書いてしまおうと
- p. 109 3 grim-faced 陰気な顔 16 a sorry-I'm-late smile 「遅れてごめんさい」的な微笑 21 halfway through 半分進んで 24 a vaudeville duo ボードビリアンの2人組 27 absolutely nothing for him 全く彼には似合わない 28 handbills チラシ
- p. 110 1 filed over 近づいた 4 issues in today's world far more serious than Greek tragedy ギリシャ悲劇よりもっと深刻な問題が現在の世界を覆っている 11 dragging his foot 足をひきずりながら 14 mounted the podium 壇上に立って 18 Chancellor 総長 20 Industrial-Academic Collusion 産学共同路線 23 the writing failed to convince 文章は説得力に欠けた 24 power to command hearts and minds 人の心を駆りた

- てる力 26 speech likewise wove in and out, embroidering on similar themes 演説は似たりよったりだった
- p. 111 1 who did what to whom 誰が何を誰にというてにをは 10 counter-revolutionary 反革命 16 a little out of the way 少し遠い 21 box-lunch place 弁当屋 23 the day's set menu 日変りメニュー 25 broth 吸物 25 Well worth the bus trip. わざわざバスに乗って行くだけの価値がある。
- p. 112 3 sneak out こっそり隠れて出る 7 sleepy-eyed 眠そうな目 7 fidgeted with いじる 11 haven't been getting enough sleep 寝不足 19 It's no big deal. かまわないよ。
- p. 113 3 Was something the matter? 何かあったの? 6 looked it up 調べた 17 rain-beaten 雨にうたれた 26 sprang to mind 思い出した 27 run into たまたま出会う
- p. 114 2 it occurred to me 考えがうかんだ 7 grounds 根拠 22 with a giggle くすつと笑う 26 incinerator 焼却炉 28 awesome 凄(すご)味
- p. 115 6 one in five 五人に一人 16 I haven't the foggiest. 見当もつかない 24 parents' status consciousness 親の見栄
- p. 116 3 perfect attendance 無遅刻・無欠席 3 no tardies さぼらなかつた 9 let it beat me 負かされてしまう 11 if I lost out once, the bottom would slide out from under everything 一度負けたら、そのまますべてずるずるいってしまふ 16 stuck it out がんばった 19 damned if たまらない 21 No joke, no way. 冗談じゃないし、とんでもない。
- p. 117 14 nothing but そういふのばかり 17 with this sorry-it's-so-far-away and all 遠くて悪いけどという感じで 19 Blew me away. 仰天した。 19 the grounds 敷地 22 chunks of solid beef 牛肉のかたまり 23 felt so disadvantaged about living in Chiba 千葉に住んでることでひげめを感じる
- p. 118 7 profession column 職業欄 9 made a big fuss over 夢しがる、騒ぎだてる 19 reliable sellers 堅実に売れるもの 20 sealed inserts とじこみ附録 23 just a little something for ちょっとしたもの
- p. 119 1 weeklies 週刊誌 12 in their right mind 正気で考えたら 16 deliver 配達 19 no leeway to do anything special 何か特

- 別なことをする余裕はない 22 griping ぶつぶつ文句を言う 23 all bent out of shape (心配して) おどおどする 28 a regular workaday family 普通の勤め人の家
- p. 120 1 scraping やつと暮らす 5 allowance from home 家からの仕送り 13 someone who'd never been hard up for money お金に苦労したことのない人
- p. 121 3 money coming out of my ears 沢山お金がある 3 turn the tables 逆の立場になる 8 look horrible ひどい顔をしている 8 let your plain-looking girl just try that line ブスの子にそのセリフを言わせてごらんさい 10 laughing-stock 笑いの的 13 I was so relieved ホットした 17 ran a hand over her short hair 短い髪を手で撫でた 19 texts for maps 地図の解説 28 put a few tricks under your belt いくつかのコツをのみこんだら
- p. 122 7 They really go for it. 彼らは本当に感心してくれる。 8 a village was submerged 村が沈んだ 14 make the extra effort 工夫をする 17 have a knack for コツをもっている 21 make up something harmless 害のないものをでっちあげる 26 had Midori in stitches 緑を笑わせた
- p. 123 7 not a man alive who doesn't しない男はいない 16 that's beyond me 私には理解できない
- p. 124 3 a real treat 嬉しいこと 7 you can't miss it 絶対に見つけられる 7 a large sign 大きな看板 15 hung (the wash) out to dry 洗濯物を干した 17 darted about とびまわる 17 net-thrashing neighborhood kids in hot pursuit 網を持った近所の子供たちがあとを追う 22 were deserted and dead 人影もなく死にたえたようだった 25 wooden clogs 木製のヒールのついでたサボ
- p. 125 2 an odd purchase I admit, narcissuses in autumn 秋に水仙を買うというのは奇妙であるとわかっている 12 children blowing soap bubbles 子供たちがシャボン玉をふいている 13 an Ayumi Ishida tune いしだあゆみの唄 18 chatting away 話しつづける 22 enjoy much turnover 繁盛している 26 bombed in the war 戦争中爆撃をうける
- p. 126 3 run-down apartment 古びたアパート 3 company housing

- 社宅 5 stubbornly stuck to their longtime residences 頑固に昔から住んでいる土地にしがみついている 9 desolation row わけしい通り 10 a corner gas station 角のガソリン・スタンド 17 anxiously awaited kiddy-zine 待ちかねていた少年雑誌 25 kill time 時間をつぶす
- p. 127 1 was debating 考えていた 7 I've got my hands full 手ははなせない 11 duck inside 身をかかめて中に入る 12 pitch black まっ暗な 14 tripped over つまづく 19 parlor of sorts 対応室のようなもの 20 storage area-cum-trunk room 倉庫のような物置のようなスペース
- p. 128 3 something was simmering away in a pot 鍋で何かをぶつくと煮ている 13 scribbled 書いてある
- p. 129 1 each motion was incisive and economical ひとつひとつの動作が俊敏で無駄がなかった 3 with admiration 感心して 7 a big Apple Records logo emblazoned behind 大きなアップル・レコードのマークが背中に描かれていた 10 skip one whole stage 成長の一過程 13 androgynous appearance 中性的な印象 18 anything fancy 立派なもの 23 fridge 冷蔵庫 25 go all out for guests 客あしらいがよい
- p. 130 1 have company 客がある 2 have this streak この性分を持つ 6 don't be polite 遠慮するな 10 retrieve とって戻る 19 back then その当時 22 arrange the food on plates 料理を皿に盛りつけた 28 with an ample side-helping of minced pickles 細かくきざんだタクアンの大盛
- p. 131 3 subtle Kyoto culinary refinements 関西風の薄味 15 wouldn't take that much trouble そんな面倒なことはしない 22 I don't get it わからないな 26 hated anything that called itself housework 家事と名のつくことが大嫌い
- p. 132 3 I couldn't stand it 耐えられない 4 three day's worth of curry 3日分のカレー 8 from then on それからずっと 11 everything from cover to cover 隅から隅まで全部 13 how to clean fish 魚のおろし方 14 bonito flakes かつおぶし 22 rational thinking 論理的思考 23 I've got to hand it to you たいしたもんだよ 28 shell out the money お金を出す
- p. 133 4 I just can't win. 仕方ない。 5 colanders ザル 15 a

- good share of problems 大変なトラブル 20 clammy 生乾きの 26 got my hands on the purse-strings 家計費を自由に使う
- p. 134 1 managing household expenses 家計をやりくりする 5 Brain tumor. 脳腫瘍。 7 went out of her head 頭がおかしくなる 9 put her to sleep 安楽死させる 11 worse still 最悪なのは 17 pass up entering college 大学入学をあきらめる 25 ate my fill お腹いっぱい食べた
- p. 135 11 keep a straight face and say that 平気な顔してそんなことを言う 17 with a little more style もう少し上品に 18 That was your lady lumberjack. 木樵女(きこりおんな)みたい。 23 blow smoke out through your nose 鼻から煙を出す
- p. 136 1 put on a show 気どる 1 it doesn't stick 身につかない 8 crazy about smoking 煙草が好きである 11 put both hands firmly together 両手をびたりとあわせた 16 Got to be a bother. 面倒だった。 18 Can't take being tied down by something like that. そんな風に何かに縛られたくない。 20 think things through 物事をきちんと考える
- p. 137 5 towel-drying the dishes 皿をタオルでふく 21 What's this with Uruguay? なんてまたウルグァイなんかにか?
- p. 138 4 came as a big shock ものすごいショックだった 5 undid some screws up there (頭の)タカが外れた 11 I'm so upset. とても悲しい。 16 lost the love of his life 人生の最愛の伴侶を失った 20 going too far ひどすぎる 24 a little off ちょっと変ってる
- p. 139 4 tossing us aside 私たちを放り捨てて 9 No contact from your father since? その後お父さんから連絡はないの? 15 loose upstairs 頭がゆるんでる 18 would send for Sister and me 姉と私を呼びよせる
- p. 140 4 a flashy car はでな車 8 looking after the store 店をまかなう 11 the deliveries 配達 14 let the store fold お店をたたむ 26 makes no sense 意味をなさない 28 patted me on the back 背中を軽くたたく
- p. 141 8 take in the sights 見物する 10 the order of events 物事の起こる順序 15 hordes of people 大勢の人 19 the thud, thud, thud, of footsteps racing upstairs とんとんと階段を登る足

- p. 142 3 The air smelled foul. きな臭い匂いがした。 4 leaning out over the handrail 手すりから身をのりだして 6 building supply trade 建具屋 6 our of business 廃業する 11 put out the fire 消化する 16 gather up your valuables and make a break for it 大事なものをまとめて避難する 23 bank books 預金通帳 24 seals 実印
- p. 143 1 Dying is fine by me. 死ぬことはかまわない。 5 figured what the hell どうでもいいという気になつた 12 I'm nor about to die for a lunch. Dinner notwithstanding. 昼食くらいで死んだりしない。夕食ならともかく。 16 take it from there そこから考える 24 go down well with the neighbors 近所とうまくいく 26 not exactly your most praiseworthy activity あまりほめられる行為とはいえない
- p. 144 5 as a compliment お世辞にも 9 right on down the line かつぱしから 10 bass parts 低音の部分 12 to her heart's content 気のすむまで 14 the fire's progress 火事の進み具合、様子 18 at the top of their lungs 大声で 19 helicopter swooped in overhead ヘリコプターが頭上にとんできた 23 yelling at the crowds to please stand back 野次馬にうしろにさがるようにとどなって
- p. 145 2 composition of her own 自分で作詞、作曲した 13 if the gas station catches, this house is going to go up in no time ガソリンスタンドに引火したら、この家も一瞬のうちに吹きとぶ 19 really expressive of your character 実に君の人柄がよく出ている
- p. 146 7 there were all sorts of circumstances いろいろと事情があった 10 pretty mixed up かなり複雑である 16 hardly even cross my mind ほとんど思いださぬ 17 come out occasionally in dreams ときどき夢に出てくる
- p. 147 1 it's not my fault 私のせいではない 11 I'm not the emotional type 私は感情的タイプではない 7 look me in the face 僕の顔を見る 8 gave one solid nod こくと背(うなづ)いた 21 how did you make out 成果はどうだったのか 23 tough-going むずかしいところね 26 that's why だから
- p. 148 5 drop everything 何もかも放り出して 7 out of breath 息を

- きらす 10 chuck it out ぽいと投げる 21 by way of apology おおむね 27 sounds pretty unreasonable かなり理不尽にきこえる
- p. 149 13 put-on or an act 見せかけ演技 14 drag 面倒なこと 23 overwhelmed by smoke 煙にまかれる 28 excruciating illnesses 大病に苦しむ
- p. 150 8 encroaching upon the living 生を侵蝕して 19 ravens 隠す 22 listlessly ぼんやりと
- p. 151 9 unidirected あてのない 14 glinting きらきら光る 21 with some difficulty ちょっと気まずうりに
- p. 152 4 step out and get a quick bite to eat with me 一緒に外で軽く食事をする 8 cooped up in the house all day waiting for a stupid phone call 一日中家において電話を待つ 10 feel like my body's rotting little by little 体が少しずつ腐っていくような気がする 13 phone-sitting 電話待ち 14 lunch is provided 昼ごはんつき 17 a student eatery 学生食堂 20 coeds (男女共学大学の) 女子学生 21 cradled a tennis racket as carefully as a baby 赤ん坊を抱くように大事そうにテニスラケットをかかえて
- p. 153 1 here and there ところどころ 1 students in fours and fives 四、五人の学生のグループ 2 voicing their opinions 意見を表明する 7 "American Imperialist Invasion of Asia" 米帝のアジア侵略 16 So in what picture did I belong? どんな風景に馴染んできたというのだろう。 20 some kind of jagged, icy gap had come between me and the world 僕と世界の間に何かぎくしゃくとして冷やかな空気が入りこんでいた 27 what that engendered as a result どのような結果をもたらすか 28 beyond my comprehension 理解できない
- p. 154 1 for ages 長いあいだ 5 studied up on my German ドイツ語の予習をした 9 my head had been fogged 僕の頭はもやもやしていた 16 stretched our legs a bit 少しぶらぶらした 18 female clientele 女同士の客 22 a promising pair of girls 愛想のよきそうな女の子の二人連れ 24 sprang into action and struck up a conversation すぐに行動に移って話しかけた
- p. 155 3 we blow that scene 店を変える 5 where the action was

already in full swing すでに十分盛りあがっていた 6 a girl
 threesome 三人組の女の子 8 getting jolly かなり良い気分にな
 なって 8 invited them to another round somewhere else 別
 のところで飲まないかと誘った 12 one of those "off" nights
 ついてない一夜 17 dragging you out like this こんな風にひっ
 ぱりまわして 25 soaking up all those loose electrons of
 libido and alcohol そういう性欲やアルコールのエネルギーにつか
 っている

- p. 156 1 an all-night show オールナイトの映画 8 I'll make it up
 sometime いつか埋め合わせる 11 counteract the drink in
 my system 酔いをさます 13 second-run movie house 二番館
 15 stayed for another showing 次の上映も見てしまった 16
 just shy of four in the morning 午前4時少し前 20 a round-
 the-clock coffee shop 終夜営業の喫茶店
- p. 157 2 let's-go-running-around-Shinjuku-at-five-in-the-morning
 types 朝の5時に歌舞伎町をうろろしているタイプ 5 have
 the likes of me as a table-partner 同席の相手として僕を気にいる
 8 engrossed in 一心不乱に 9 large in build 大柄で 12
 petite 小柄 17 talked in a whisper 小声で話した 23 was
 troubled or angry 悩んでいるか腹を立てるかしていた
- p. 158 10 get off their drunk and hie themselves home 酔いをさまして
 家に帰る 14 been through a lot いろいろとあって 20
 vending machine 自動販売機 23 tagging along 一緒につきあ
 う 25 my share of strange goings-on 奇妙な経験
- p. 159 4 an impromptu bash 即席の宴会 10 for a good year now
 一年間も 22 took little-bird sips of her saké 日本酒をちびら
 びと飲む 25 Wasn't any knowing or not-knowing. わかるも
 わからないもなかった。
- p. 160 9 a question of either forgiving or not 許すか許さないかの問題
 16 Day was breaking. 夜が明けた。 18 a bum 浮浪者
 19 platform tickets (駅への) 入場券 20 train pulled out of
 sight 電車が見えなくなる 24 There just wasn't any other
 way to lay things to rest. 他には物事をおさめる方法がなかった。
 27 half out of spite 半分やけど
- p. 161 4 complimented her on her legs 彼女の脚をほめた 14 woke

to find her gone 目を覚ますと彼はいなかった 16 feeling all
 lopsided (頭の) 片方が妙に重くなっている感じ

CHAPTER 5

- p. 163 4 no imposition 迷惑ではない 9 A breeze ruffled the cur-
 tains. そよ風がカーテンをゆらした。 13 gathered myself 気
 持をひとつにまとめた
- p. 164 1 this line of thought このような考え方 10 perfectly apt
 about とてもぴったりしている 15 be that as it may なにはは
 ともあれ 17 dealt myself some scrapes and hurt myself 自分自
 身を引きずり回して自分自身を傷つけた 22 All the more
 reason for me to beg you not to hate me. だからこそ私はあなた
 に憎まれたくない。 24 fall to pieces バラバラになる
- p. 165 3 undergoing treatment 治療をうける 8 subdivides 細分化
 11 I've made headway 回復した 13 managed to squeeze out
 that letter 身をしばるような思いで手紙を書いた 17 uninter-
 rupted tranquillity, regular hours 邪魔されることのない静寂, 規
 則正しい生活
- p. 166 5 constellations 星座 8 by the same token 同じ理由で 9
 is well versed in よく知っている 14 staffers スタッフ 17
 abundance of nature 自然に充ちて 22 under a kind of
 pretext ある種の前提のもと 27 lose track of わからなくなる
- p. 167 2 equally warped 同じくらい歪んでいる 5 be straightened
 out 歪みを直すこと 6 become adjusted to being warped 歪み
 に馴れるようになる 12 set our minds to it やる気を出して
 16 I got the gist of what he was saying 彼の言おうとすること
 はわかった 25 no awareness of being warped 自分の歪みを意
 識せずに 28 the tribal feather in our headdress 頭に部族を
 あらわす羽根をつける
- p. 168 4 you name it その他なんでも 9 gotten hooked on 大好きに
 なる 13 fill out ふくらむ 18 the produce 野菜 (農産物)
 20 wild greens 山菜 21 come to think of it 考えてみれば
 22 edible 食べられる 24 the result of exercise and regular
 eating 運動と規則正しい食事のおかげ 28 well-stocked よく

整った

- p. 169 5 become hesitant, even scared, to leave 外に出るのが億劫になり怖くさえなる 12 have contact with outside people 外部の人々と接触をもつ 21 not of the avoidable kind 避けて通ることのできないもの 23 burden 重荷 23 one thing I don't want to be それだけはなりたくない
- p. 170 8 supposing ~だと仮定して 13 a day in advance 前日に 16 guest accommodation 宿泊の設備 26 too neat for a girl's hand 女の子にしては、きちんとしすぎている文字 28 on the back flap (封筒の)裏側に
- p. 171 6 set out on a meandering ... walk ぶらぶら歩く 9 bringing line after line of her letter to mind 彼女の手紙の一行一行を思いだしながら 13 placed a long-distance call 長距離電話をかけた 14 asked my business 僕の用件を聞く 20 hung up 電話をきる 21 a change of clothes 着がえ 24 feeling drowsy 眠くなる

CHAPTER 6

- p. 172 3 skipped breakfast 朝食を抜く 4 be off mountain-climbing 山登りに出かける 6 taken any number of short trips 何度も小旅行をした 8 a crowded commuter train 混んだ通勤電車 9 non-reserved-seat 自由席 10 the "bullet train" 新幹線
- p. 173 5 the stop where I'd be getting off 僕の降りる停留所 12 no sooner had twenty passengers boarded the bus than we departed 20人の乗客が乗るとすぐに出発した 15 the more fields and vacant lots met the eye より多くの畑や空地が目につく 20 steering wheel ハンドル 21 made me kind of queasy 少し気分が悪くなる 22 the curves eased off カーブがゆるやかになる 25 the cedars reached such heights they blocked out the sunlight 杉はそれほど高くなるので、日の光をさえぎった
- p. 174 4 emerge into a mountain clearing 山に囲まれた盆地に出る 7 a single breath of white smoke 一本の白い煙 10 firewood たき木 14 The scene repeated itself over and over again. その風景が何度もくり返された。 20 a pass with an expansive

view 眺望の開いた峠 22 a five-to-six minute wait 5,6分の待ち 27 took a leak 立小便をする

- p. 175 1 cardboard box 段ボール箱 5 pulled up 止まった 17 looming up immediately beside us 我々のすぐ近くまで迫ってくる 23 rivulet 小川 25 brush woods 雑木林 28 No Trespassing 立ち入り禁止
- p. 176 5 the muffled report of what might have been a gun 銃声のようなポオンという音 7 having made it through そこを抜けると 8 not much of a wall 堀というほどでもない 17 the dry rasp of a clock ticking away 時計のコツコツという乾いた音 28 navy blue uniform 紺の制服を着た
- p. 177 2 aged sixty or thereabouts 60歳くらいの 6 mudguard 泥よけ 13 turnout 回転台 17 another patch of woods もう1つの林 19 you can't miss it いやでも目につく 24 nice rocks, a stone lantern and whatnot 形の良い石や灯籠など 28 ferroconcrete 鉄筋コンクリート
- p. 178 6 mounting a short flight of stairs 階段を何段か上る 16 immaculate, tasteful lobby 清潔で感じのよいロビー 16 soothing abstract oil 趣味のよい抽象画 17 buffed to a high sheen みがかれてびかびかになっている 23 siesta time 午睡の時間 24 deep into their afternoon snooze 午後ぐっすりとした眠りにひきこっている 26 the soft padding of rubber-soled shoes ゴム底靴のやわらかな足音
- p. 179 10 Her face abounded in wrinkles. 彼女の顔には、たくさんのしわがあった。 13 her wrinkles underscored a youthfulness beyond age 彼女のしわは、年齢を超えた若々しさを強調した 22 took a liking to her 彼女に好感を持つ 26 the look became her 彼女によく似合っていた
- p. 180 1 a scarecrow of a figure with no breasts to speak of 乳房というものがなくてひょろりとやせている 7 she drew in her chin 彼女は顎(あご)を引いた 9 produce a tape measure and give me a fitting 巻尺をとり出して体のサイズを測る 14 without the foggiest notion さっぱりわけのわからないままに 23 have a few words in private 個人的にちょっと話す
- p. 181 5 over lunch 昼食中に 10 seating for perhaps two hundred

約200人の席 12 kind of a like an off-season resort hotel シーズン・オフのリゾートホテルのような 15 all beyond belief はっとするくらいにおいしい 19 a decent bite きちんとした食事 24 I can hold only so much そんなに多くは(胃の中に)入らない 25 make up for in smoking 煙草を吸うことで埋めあわせる

p. 182 1 hardly touched her stew 彼女のシチューはほとんど手をつけられていなかった 8 authoritative-like 権威のあるような 12 helping out with the paperwork 事務を手伝う 17 It's certainly an experience living with her. 彼女と暮すのは面白いわよ。 22 ignoring my question 僕の質問を無視して 24 the long and the short of it is てっとりばやくいうと 26 convalescence 療養

p. 183 5 those who can make a go of this way of convalescing この種の療養でうまくいく人々 8 Got it so far? そこまではわかったでしょ? 15 are practically self-sufficient 殆んど自給自足で 23 Small number of patients to a large staff. 患者の数は少くてスタッフは多い。 25 get my fees waived 費用を免除される 27 I wouldn't mind a cup (コーヒーを) 飲みたい

p. 184 3 made a sour face 顔をしかめた 4 non-profit 営利でない 17 physical labor 肉体労働 24 the cure worked 治療の効果があつた

p. 185 1 walked out of here fully recovered 完全に回復してここを出ていく 4 make a point of helping 必ず助けるようにする 27 fabricate things 物事をとりつくり 27 gloss over indiscretions 都合の悪いことをごまかす

p. 186 7 foaming at the mouth 口からよだれをたらす 15 what do you have on the outside 外の世界には何があるの? 23 I haven't set one foot outside this place この場所から一歩も出たことがない 26 worth a try 試す価値がある 28 got my own agenda 私自身にも事情がある

p. 187 1 My own circumstances. 私自身の状況。 6 what was to become of her 彼女はどうなるのかよ 21 she's ready to open up to you 彼女はあなたに正直に話そうという気になっている 24 lay on the line first thing 最初に言う

p. 188 1 it's not what you'd prefer お気に召さないこと 2 bear with it 我慢する 13 not much in the way of secrets here ここには、そんなに秘密はない 18 still can't figure it out 今でもまだわからない 21 something better worked out between the two of you 二人の間で解決すること 25 come to terms with 折り合いをつける 28 I wouldn't be surprised if ~ したとしても驚かれない

p. 189 16 sneak into our bedroom 寝室にこっそり入る 21 that way we can get behind each other's space そのほうがお互いの気心もよくわかる 24 I wouldn't be imposing 迷惑をかけたくない 28 Hadn't you better politely accept? 礼儀正しく受けた方がいいんじゃない?

p. 190 8 the straightforward type 素直な人 11 those who can open up 心の開ける人 20 crossed over a small rise 小さな丘を越えた 25 less of a game than an investigative research into the resilience of tennis balls ゲームというより、テニスボールの弾性を研究する 27 absorbed in thought 考えこむ

p. 191 4 an expressionless man 無表情な男 14 a chicken coop 養鶏場 15 exercise facilities 運動施設 20 there's no going without 不便はない 23 that's off limits それは駄目です

p. 192 4 in no perceivable order 不規則に 6 so odd 非常に奇妙である 13 a driving-school maze of paths 自動車教習所の迷路のようなコースに似た道 22 sure is quiet とても静かね 24 special status 特別扱い 28 You get to decide your own curriculum. 自分のカリキュラムは自分で決めることができる。

p. 193 8 agreeable quarters with no unnecessary frills 余分な飾りのない感じのよい部屋 9 out-of-place furnishings 場違いな家具類 9 nothing drab about the place 素っ気ないという感じはない 12 felt myself unwind くつろぐことができた 19 open paperbacks lying face down 伏せたままの文庫本

p. 194 7 stir-crazy 息がつまる 13 Fair enough? いいですか? 17 would it be asking too much to have you wait here ここで待っていていただけるかしら 24 came into view 思い出す 27 the unbearable racket that red 125 cc Yamaha made ヤマハの125ccの赤いバイクがたてる耐えられない音

- p. 195 3 the piercing whine of the autumn wind 秋風の鋭いなり
13 unforeseen flood of memories 予想もしなかった記憶の洪水
20 an image I myself had woven out of my own recollections 僕自身の記憶が つむぎあげたイメージ 26 A pale, far-off vision of a smile. 淡い色の遠くの情景のような微笑。 28 made just enough of a break to come ちょっとした時間をさいてここへ来た
- p. 196 6 the style suited her 髪型が彼女に似合う 8 medieval woodcuts 中性の木版画 10 got to be a bother 面倒だ 10 lop (頭髪を) 刈る 17 one-to-one 1対1で 20 I'm so awkward. 私はとても不器用です。 26 gets too heavy 負担になる
- p. 197 1 starts to get to you そう感じるようになる 11 the warmth building in my chest 胸の中にあたたかいものがこみあげる 15 hadn't meant to, but I slept 眠るつもりはなかった 16 Naoko's presence 直子の存在感 23 my watch read four-thirty-five 時計は4時35分だ 25 fetched かつてくる
- p. 198 2 a chain of cut-paper shapes 切り紙細工 5 the lone occupant of a well-tended ghost town 手入れの行き届いた廃墟の中に一人であること 8 reconverge 戻ること 15 a sense of evening gathering 夕暮の気配
- p. 199 6 warranted a retelling 再び話した 15 followed up with a cigarette 引続き煙草を吸った 21 the range in ages of the people いろいろな年齢の人々 24 at one level of volume 一定の音量 27 with a wave of the hand 手をふる
- p. 200 9 a thin-haired doctor type in a lab coat 白衣を着て医者タイプの髪が薄い男 11 digestive fluid secretion 胃液の分泌 24 two overnights 二泊
- p. 201 3 winter here is something to see ここでの冬は、見る価値がある 15 couldn't help but wonder ふと思わずにいられない 19 simply no need to raise your voice 声を大きくする必要がないだけ 21 draw attention に注意をひく 23 the boisterousness of ordinary meals 食事のざわめき 23 an industrial fair (機械工具の) 見本市
- p. 202 2 intelligible only to fellow experts 専門家にだけわかるような 6 bathhouse 湯宿 9 going over my hair with a hair drier ドライヤーで髪を乾かす 11 only later to realize しばらくして

から気づく 17 distorted all sense of time 時間の感覚が狂う 20 beamed in 射しこむ 22 casting pale ink washes across the walls 薄めたインクで壁を塗ったように 23 flask 水筒 24 took a swig 口にふくむ 25 the warmth traveled down my throat to my stomach あたたかさが喉から胃へとゆっくりおりにいく

- p. 203 1 sway in time with the music 音楽にあわせて揺れている 8 split for 出ていく 14 blackout 停電 18 dripped some wax 蝋をたらす 21 in the hush 静けさの中に 22 left stranded in some far corner of the world 世界の端にとり残された 24 in a dance of mingled shapes 交錯した 28 How about some wine? ワインでもどうですか?
- p. 204 4 lenient 寛大に 7 go on a binge 酒盛りをする 9 I'm all for it 賛成です 15 coaxed the strings into tune 調弦する 16 a Bach fugue バッハのフーガ 20 there wasn't a piano about ピアノがなかった 21 my fingers just aren't cut out for the guitar 私の指はギター向きではない 27 suite 組曲 28 were all ears for 耳を傾ける
- p. 205 2 a Beatles number or two ビートルズのを1つか2つ 7 that said それだけ言うと 14 rocked her head back and forth 頭を前後にゆらした 19 "beckoning cat" coin bank まねき猫の貯金箱 25 my very most absolute favorite 私が一番好きな
- p. 206 7 lost in a deep dark forest 深い森の中で迷った 15 tanned and fitter 日焼けして、しまっている(体つき) 16 a regimen of exercise and outdoor work 運動と屋外作業の養生法 17 lake-limpid eyes 湖のように澄んだ瞳 20 a chill, blade-keen edge that cut people to the quick 人をひやりとさせる薄らい刃物のような 23 struck by the change in her 彼女の変化に驚いた 27 not without regret 残念ではない 28 for gone was that pubescent-girl quality 思春期の少女特有の
- p. 207 6 next to impossible 不可能に近い 10 put a lid on 伏せておく 23 wouldn't matter in the least to him 彼にとってはいま一つたくどうでもいい 25 play up to people 人をごまかす 26 sleeps around (女性と) 遊びで寝る

- p. 208 1 probably hitting eighty たぶん80人はいってる 4 is after 求める 7 gave a moment's thought to what I'd said 僕の言ったことについてしばらく考えた 8 screwed up 頭がおかしい 11 systematized his warped mind into a consistent logic 自分の心の歪みを系統だてて理論化する 14 up on this, that, and the other thing これもあれも他のことにも通じている 16 pulls a lot of weight with people 人々に尊敬される
- p. 209 7 Out to find something extraordinary in me? 僕の中に何か普通じゃないものを見つける? 13 the tip of her foot 彼女の足の先 23 briefed 説明した 24 broke up with 別れる
- p. 210 1 make excuses 言いわけをする 4 knowing that made things tough そう思うととても辛かった 22 hang-up about virginity 処女性にこだわる 24 it didn't work できなかった
- p. 211 7 rather have kept all this inside むしろ言わないでいたい 25 playmates 遊び相手 26 in tune with 同調する
- p. 212 2 I was lost 私はおぼろしくなくなった 3 go on relating to others 他の人に接していく 10 burst out crying 泣き出す 13 choked on her own tears 息をつまらせながら泣く 19 take a stroll 散歩する 20 have things under control 何とかする 24 Don't be too concerned. 気にしなくていい。
- p. 213 3 my own footfalls walked the ocean floor 僕の足音は海底を歩いているように 7 stillness 静寂 23 stepped in (部屋に) 入っていくと
- p. 214 6 got a little worked up ちょっと気が高ぶった 18 what are you good at? あなたは何が得意なの?
- p. 215 1 solitary activities 単独行動 16 what's really scary 本当に怖いののは 24 in the long run 長い目でみれば
- p. 216 5 out in the world 外の世界では 11 this one's going to make it この人はなおりそうである 13 have any clue (彼女がよくなるかどうか) 手がかりがある 19 can't size up 見当がつかない 20 my emotions are engaged 感情が入りすぎる 23 a tangle of problems いろんな問題が絡(から)みあっていること 23 the trick is to unravel each thread one by one 紐をひとつひとつほぐしていくのがこつである
- p. 217 5 how many loose ends are tied up in this knot 物事が手に負え

ないくらい入りこんで絡みあっている 19 with no guarantee 保証なしで

- p. 218 6 can't very well control myself 自分でもうまく収拾できない 12 go wearing yourself down unnaturally 不自然な形で自分をすり減らす 13 it's a real waste. すごくもったいない。 14 in growing up 人格成熟にとって 25 I was fairly cute in my own way 私なりにけっこう可愛いかった
- p. 219 5 I'm quite flattered 私ほとてもうれしい 8 clear plastic train-pass holder 定期入れ 20 was at the top of my class クラスでトップの成績だった 26 went haywire 狂った
- p. 220 3 it wouldn't budge (指が) 動かない 5 nothing did any good 全然駄目だった 7 ran all kinds of tests いろいろな検査をした 12 had to be psychological 精神的なものに違いない 14 pre-contest stress コンクール前のストレス 15 lay off piano for a while しばらくピアノを離れる 21 take it easy のんびりする 26 what was I expected to do with my life 何をして生きていけばよいのか
- p. 221 1 lived for the piano ピアノを弾くことだけを考えて生きた 3 spare my fingers at all costs 指をどうあってもたいせつにする 7 a screw gets loose somewhere up here 頭のネジがどこかゆるむ 8 gets all in a shambles もつれる 17 dissipated from my body 体の中から消える 18 my nerves were too weak to pursue a career as a concert pianist 私の精神はプロのピアニストになるには弱すぎた 23 the girl to whom all was promised, turned around one day and had nothing あらゆる可能性を手にしていった女の子が、ある日突然何もかもなくした
- p. 222 1 Talk about crestfallen! 悔しくってね。 4 each new piece of gossip that reached my ears ひとつひとつ新しいうわさ話が耳に入ると 11 a mental institution 精神病院 11 hardly even marriageable 結婚話もうまく進まない 13 absolutely unbearable 嫌でたまらない 17 the screw popped, the ball of yarn came unraveled ネジがとんで毛玉ももつれた 22 a total loss 完全に迷ってしまった 24 that thought alone had me in a frenzy その一念のみで死にもの狂いで頑張った
- p. 223 5 man of few words 口数の少ない男 7 out of nowhere 突然

- 13 circumstances that prevented me from marrying him 彼とは結婚できないうい事情 16 with total honesty 全面的に正直に
16 gone off the deep end and been hospitalized 頭がおかしくな
って入院した
- p. 224 4 put me at ease ほっとする 5 could put distasteful
thoughts out of my mind 嫌いなことを忘れる 9 wonderful
things still lay in store (人生には) すてきなことがまだ残ってい
る 17 taking on my problems 私のトラブルも抱えこむことにな
って 21 share everything in life with me 人生の何れかをも
共有する 23 the type to say things he didn't mean 本当に思
っていることを言わないタイプ 28 cut off relations with him
彼と絶縁する
- p. 225 3 Grounds enough for them to fight. 反対するに十分な理由。
9 Stranger than fiction. 作り話よりも奇である。 14 suffer a
relapse (病気が) 再発する 19 fix me back up—tighten the
screw 私を直してくれる、ネジをしめなおして 21 keep our
problems at bay (病気という) 苦難を寄せつけない
- p. 226 7 fell apart ばらばらになった 11 countless stars 無数の星
14 Something that lay waiting for me like a trap. 罠 (わな) の
ように私を待っていたもの。 15 gives me the chills 寒気がす
る 19 I'm all ears 本当に聞きたい 21 nursery school 幼稚
園 24 less ambitious pieces 小さなやさしい曲 26 a cer
tain knack 一種の勘
- p. 227 1 hit home 胸にこたえる 8 counts a great deal ひしひしとわ
かる 9 past a certain age ある年齢をすぎる 12 my
enlightenment 私の悟ったこと 13 elite track エリートコース
14 a quick once-over す早くかたづける 20 I knew by sight
顔だけ知っている 26 moved 感動した
- p. 228 7 picking up where other teachers had left off 他の教師に習っ
ていた人を途中から受け継いで教えること 11 bound to be prob
lems with the kid その子供とはまず無理が生じる 16 pushy
woman 押し強い女性
- p. 229 2 it was almost blinding 眩 (まぶ) しいくらいだった 8 By
all appearances, she was a smart kid. 見るからに頭のよい子だ
った。 11 a near-criminal way of winning you over 相手をひ

- きつける天賦 (てんぶ) の才 13 something frightening
about how that bud of a nose sprouted out from between her
eyes 怖いくらい目から鼻に抜けるようなところがある 16 lose
all grip on rational judgment 正常な判断力を失う 24 higher
aspirations for myself もっと高い向上心を自分にもつ
- p. 230 6 pathological liar 病的な嘘つき 9 end up reworking all the
facts to match つじつまをあわせるために周辺の事情をつくりかけ
ていく 11 that's odd おかしいな 13 get there a few steps
ahead of you 人の先に回る 16 make up stories for nothing
つまらないことで嘘をつく 20 complete fabrications すべ
ての作り話 26 compulsive lying 虚言症
- p. 231 10 get caught lying 嘘がばれる 14 singled me out 私を選ん
だ 18 it's all over and done with 何れかとも終ってしまった
24 admiration 憧れ 25 It made me blush. 顔が赤くなった。
26 this doll of a child お人形みたいな子 26 the likes of me
私のような者
- p. 232 2 there probably was something about me that attracted her 私
の中に何か彼女をひきつけるものがたぶんあった 6 it's
nothing I am proud of 自慢しているわけじゃない 8 sheet
music 譜面 13 none too polished それほどうまくない
18 be our just like that 一発でアウトね 23 What was with
this kid? この子はいったい何なんだろう。
- p. 233 7 a vain hope that was 結局空しい望みだった 11 calculated
in minute detail 細かく計算をして (物事を) 行った 12 what
ploy to use (人を魅きつけるために) どういう手段をいつ使うか
ということ 16 over and over for all she was worth 一生懸命
何度も何度も 19 my heart would leap at やつぱりどきどきとす
ると思う
- p. 234 7 got caught up in the story 話にひきこまれる 11 there's no
going back to Tokyo for you 東京に戻れなくなる 16 spilling
a dim glow 仄 (ほの) かな光がこぼれて 21 the crown of her
head 頭のとっぺん 26 Startle you? びっくりした?
- p. 235 10 if she felt up to it 彼女がその気になったら 13 rattled off
ぼつぼつ話す 16 tending the vegetables 野菜の世話
- p. 236 17 sleep soundly ぐっすり眠る 24 things from way back 昔

- のこと
- p. 237 4 ages ago すぐく昔 10 came to mind 思い出した 16 The creep! ひどいヤツよ。 17 antsy そわそわしている 18 muttered some nonsense ぶつぶつわけのわからないことを言う 21 couldn't take hospital's 病院には弱い 25 cheer up 慰める
- p. 238 5 Went all-out never to show his weak side. 弱い面は見せないように一生懸命だった。 8 let down his guard 力を抜く 15 better himself 自分自身を向上させる
- p. 239 1 like the three of us hanging out 3人であるのが好きである 9 A tiny circle can't keep itself going forever. 小さな輪が永遠に維持されることはない。 15 a shifty or mean thing about him 彼についてのずるさとか意地悪さ 19 lost all track わけがわからぬよ 24 a forced smile 無理に作った笑顔 28 this special gravity that would pull us back together 私達がまたもとに戻ってくっついてしまうような特殊な引力
- p. 240 6 came as a matter of course 当然のことだった 14 every inch of our bodies 体の隅から隅まで 20 the seriousness of sex 性の重圧 20 the inflated egos エゴの膨張
- p. 241 1 by degrees 少しずつ 6 living a borrowed existence 借りの存在を生きる 8 paid our dues 代金を支払う 9 the siam just came around the back way つけがまわってきた 14 couldn't last 続かない 18 blend into world at large 外の世界に同化する 23 the first outsider we let into our midst 私たちにとって最初の他者との関り
- p. 242 6 if it's all right with you かまわなければ 18 keep everyone in stitches 誰もが楽しい気持ちにさせる 18 for want of anything better 何も他によいことがないので 23 impersonations of various mental patients いろんな精神病患者の物真似 25 was all sleepy-eyed 眠そうな目をしてた
- p. 243 1 make sure you know who's where 誰がどこにいるのか確認する 9 sounds great いいですね 10 took turns かわりばんこに 14 think over the day's events in order 今日の出発事を順にたどる 19 creaking of a bedspring ベットの軋(きし)み 21 lingering in my ears 耳に残る響き 28 birds clinging to each and every branch 枝の一本一本に鳥がしがみついている

- p. 244 3 drive off the bird 鳥を追い払う 5 wouldn't budge 動かさずともしない 16 stay put じっとする 22 didn't so much as quiver びくりともしなかった
- p. 245 1 some saliva to stave off my thirst 喉の乾きをいやすためにつばを(のんだ) 2 in the hush of the night 夜の静寂の中で 9 no matter how much I peered in どれだけ見つめても 11 seemed distanced by light years 何光年も離れているように感じられた 16 this whole dream sequence 夢のつづき 17 traveled down the front of her gown from one button to the next 彼女のガウンのボタンをひとつずつ外した。 23 stripping off her gown ガウンを脱いで
- p. 246 6 Such physical perfection! なんとという完全な肉体。 15 excited me sexually and swept me along with a surging force 性的に興奮させ巨大な力で僕を押し流した 22 only a play of bodies 体の遊び(まじわり)にすぎない
- p. 247 1 the abrasive, insoluble remnant of something foreign inside her 彼女の中にうまく馴染めないで残っているような異物の感触 7 was brought forth in the moonlight 月の光の中に生まれ落ちた 10 supplanted with a more ripened flesh 成熟という肉をつけ加えられて 13 her lithe waist しなやかな腰のくびれ 14 peaceful rise and fall of her abdomen 静かに上下する腹 15 soft shading of dark pubic hair beneath その下のやわらかな陰毛のかげり 20 refasten the buttons ボタンをはめる 24 lay there motionless in bed ベッドの中でじっとしている 25 having second thoughts 思いなおして 27 moonward 月の光の方に 27 downed glass after glass of water 水を何杯か飲んだ
- p. 248 1 not visited with sleep until dawn 夜明けまで眠りは訪れなかった 4 on the cusp of sleeping and not sleeping 眠ったか眠らないかのうちに 11 not a hint 気配がまるでない 20 discounted さしひいて 21 fighting back a yawn あくびをしなから 23 putting on a nothing-happened act 何もなかったふりをする
- p. 249 2 blacked out ぐっすりと眠った 2 matter-of-factly 例でもなさそうに 5 my mood kept up unbroken わりきれない気分

- 11 in love with someone 誰かと恋愛中 19 feed the birds 鳥に餌を与える 19 coop 鳥小屋 19 rag along ついでいく 21 led me to an enclosure 囲われた場所へ連れていく 26 in-patients 入院患者
- p. 250 3 were in bloom 花が咲いていた 5 chartering and darting about their cages in excitement 興奮して小屋の中をキキキという声を出して飛びまわる 8 shed 納屋 11 scrubbed the floor 床をゴシゴシとこすった 15 a crotchety old man 風変わりな老人 18 meowed like a cat 猫の鳴きまねをしてみた 22 with a sigh ため息をついて 28 a run-in with a cat 猫とのけんか 29 scared to death of the critters 猫が死ぬほど怖い
- p. 251 1 cleaning chores 清掃作業 5 oblivious 気づかない 10 rabbit hutch ウサギ小屋 12 droppings 糞(ふん) 13 snuggled it against her cheek (子ウサギに) 頬ずりした 21 unclouded by the least complication 何のかけりもない 24 no figment of my imagination 想像の産物ではない 28 the waste ごみ
- p. 252 1 plastic bags ビニールのごみ袋 2 feed bags 餌の袋 3 my favorite time of day 一日でいちばん好きな時間 12 have done well by growing older 年を重ねるに従っていい感じになった 14 find aging fun 年をとるのが楽しい
- p. 253 1 washstand 洗面所 1 doing the laundry 洗たくする 8 concurred 同意する 11 snickered out of the room 部屋を出ていく 15 nail clipper 爪切り 25 in a patch of sunlight 日だまりの中で 27 do strange things to my head 不思議な気持ちになる
- p. 254 2 took turns in the shower 順番にシャワーに入る 7 was tuned to~ ラジオからへが流れていた 18 outbound column 外出者リスト 22 a little off up here 頭が少しおかしい 24 be that as it may いずれにせよ 26 tentative dabs of cloud stroked white onto the heights ベンキのためし塗りでもしたように天頂にすうと白くこびりついた細い雲
- p. 255 1 single file 一列 2 took the lead 先頭に立つ 2 bringing up the rear しんがりを務める 10 when our eyes met 目が合うと 11 slackened her pace 歩調を乱す 14 was out of

- breath 息がきれて 18 Tough-going? きついでしょう? 22 You're a man aren't you? Act the part あなた男の子でしょ? しっかりして 24 Out of shape, I am. 運動不足だ、僕は。 27 in rebuttal 言いかえそうと
- p. 256 5 the slope leveled off into a high plain 坂道が終って高原のような平坦な場所へ出た 7 took swigs from the canteen 水筒の水を飲む 10 slant lazily downhill くだらかな下り 14 all waist-deep in weeds 腰の高さまで草が茂って 24 The going was too hard. 生活が厳しすぎた。
- p. 257 2 couldn't take the winters 冬に耐えられない 6 wagging its tail 尻尾をふりながら 12 the poor thing かわいそうに 16 a scrap of cheese チーズの切れはし 28 sure thing いいですね
- p. 258 3 a faded sign in the shape of a coffee cup hanging from the eaves 軒下から下がっているコーヒーカップの形をした色あせた看板 13 plunged headlong into chitchat 世間話に夢中になっていた 15 was gnarled with age 年老いて固く筋ばっていた 20 eliciting not the slightest reaction びっくりとも反応しない
- p. 259 1 plopped back down ぐろんと寝転んだ 12 straight through ずっと 14 I'd die up here ここで死んでしまう 18 a car with four-wheel-drive 四輪駆動車 22 season's just about up そろそろ終りだね 27 "White Room" came on 「ホワイト・ルーム」がかかった
- p. 260 4 Who's in it? 誰が出るの? 12 gave it a few sniffs (ギター)の匂いをくくん、嗅いだ 23 correct chords 正確なコード 24 by the third time through 3度目までには 26 have a feeling for these things こういうことには勘がいいの
- p. 261 2 pick up any tune どんな曲でも弾ける 8 on-the-house 店のおごり 10 gave her a thumbs-up 親指をあげてOKのサインを出した 12 excessive smoking 煙草の吸いすぎ 13 a voice with character 存在感のある素敵な声 15 the sun was about to peer into view 太陽が姿をのぞかせようとしていた 27 this chaperone routine つきそいげあさんをする事
- p. 262 1 have loads to talk about つもる話がある 5 followed suit 同じ行動をした(直子のあとを追った) 8 a level road 平坦な

- 道 14 prehistory 古代史 16 got all nervous 神経がたかぶった 18 all sorts of feelings いろんな感情 20 run up against those feelings そういふ感情をぶつける 20 I'd rather it be me むしろ僕にぶつけたい 21 come to a better understanding よりよく理解できる
- p. 263 12 you go for all us off-types 私たちみんな変わったタイプを好きになる 13 real sinkers どんどん沈んでいく人間 17 That's not how I look at things. それは僕の見方じゃない。 18 screwed up ねじまがっている 25 frightened out of my wits たまらなく怖い 28 get old and rot away 年をとって朽ち果てる
- p. 264 1 freezes to the core 体の芯まで凍りつく
- p. 265 2 Can you hold off, though? でも待ってられる? 10 The soles of my feet? 足の裏? 14 cut out やめる 17 tough つらい 23 depends on how you look at it 考えようによる 28 shifted positions 体の位置をずらす
- p. 266 6 undid the zipper ジャッパーをはずす 26 cutting across the clearing 草原を抜けて
- p. 267 4 quite different in character 性格がかなり違う 10 had been the best at whatever she did 何をやっても一番になってしまった 10 tops in her studies, tops in sports 勉強も一番、スポーツも一番 15 awards 表彰状 18 make a show of herself 人目につくようにする 20 whatever she set herself at doing 彼女がやろうとしたことは何でも 22 take the cute girl route 可愛い女の子になる 26 looked up to 人望がある 27 there was no way I'd better her 彼女にはどうしても勝てなかった
- p. 268 6 extra nice to me 特別に可愛がって(くれた) 8 checking my schoolwork 勉強をみる 13 no forewarning 素振りもない 14 talk about coincidence 偶然の一致といえど 21 her notes in the margins 欄外の書き込み 21 pressed flowers 押し花 27 full of pride ブライドが高い
- p. 269 7 single-handed ひとりで片づける 8 I'm not boasting 誇張しているのではない 11 get depressed 沈みこむ 15 space out ぼおとする 16 snap at かがみかみ言う 26 on her

- feet 元気になる
- p. 270 11 upped and jumped in front of a train 電車にとびこんだ 12 it runs in the family 血筋である 24 she'd told me to go call my sister お姉さんを呼んできてと言われたの
- p. 271 1 Dozed off, has she? 寝ちゃったのかしら? 8 which made me wonder 不思議に思った 14 astonishingly straight ひょくりするほどまっすぐである 14 like a line ruled in space 空間に定規で線をひいけように 21 hurry down stairs すぐ階下におりる 22 my body wouldn't listen 体が言うことをきかない 23 as if it had a mind of its own (体が) 意識を持っているかのよう 27 nothing a child's strength could manage 子供の力でできるものではない 28 blanked out 放心状態で
- p. 272 7 like a corpse 死体のように 8 no idea what was what 何が何だか全然わからない 10 a lot more imperfect than you thought あなたが考えているよりずっと不完全な 12 the roots ran deep 根が深い 15 Don't hold back on my account. 私のために遠慮しないで。 16 I'd only drag you down otherwise そうしないと私はあなたを道づれにすることになるだけである 19 interfere with 邪魔をする 24 ruin your life 人生を無駄にする
- p. 273 10 can keep you safe from the darkness and dreams 君を暗闇や夢から守る 19 it was quite something なかなか素敵だった 21 the third movement 第三楽章 23 wear scratches in it (レコードが) すりきれる
- p. 274 4 fill me in later あとで教えてね 10 what a letdown がっかりね

(翻訳家 藤井ひろこ)

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著者 村上春樹
訳者 アルフレッド・バーンバウム
発行者 野間佐和子
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発行所 株式会社 講談社
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電話 東京(03)945-1111(大代表)

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(書四)

Haruki Murakami

Translated by Alfred Birnbaum

PINBALL, 1973

1973年のピンボール

さようなら、スリー・フリッパーのスペース・シップ。さようなら、ジェイズ・バー。双子の姉妹との〈僕〉の日々。女の温もりに沈む〈鼠〉の渇き。やがて来る一つの季節の終り…



HEAR THE WIND SING

風の歌を聴け

夏休みに海辺の街に帰省した〈僕〉は、友人の〈鼠〉とビールを飲み、介抱した女の子と親しくなって、退屈な時を送る。二人それぞれの愛の屈托をさりげなく受けとめてやるうちに〈僕〉の夏はものうく、ほろ苦く過ぎ去っていく。青春の一片を乾いた軽快なタッチでとらえた出色のデビュー作。

