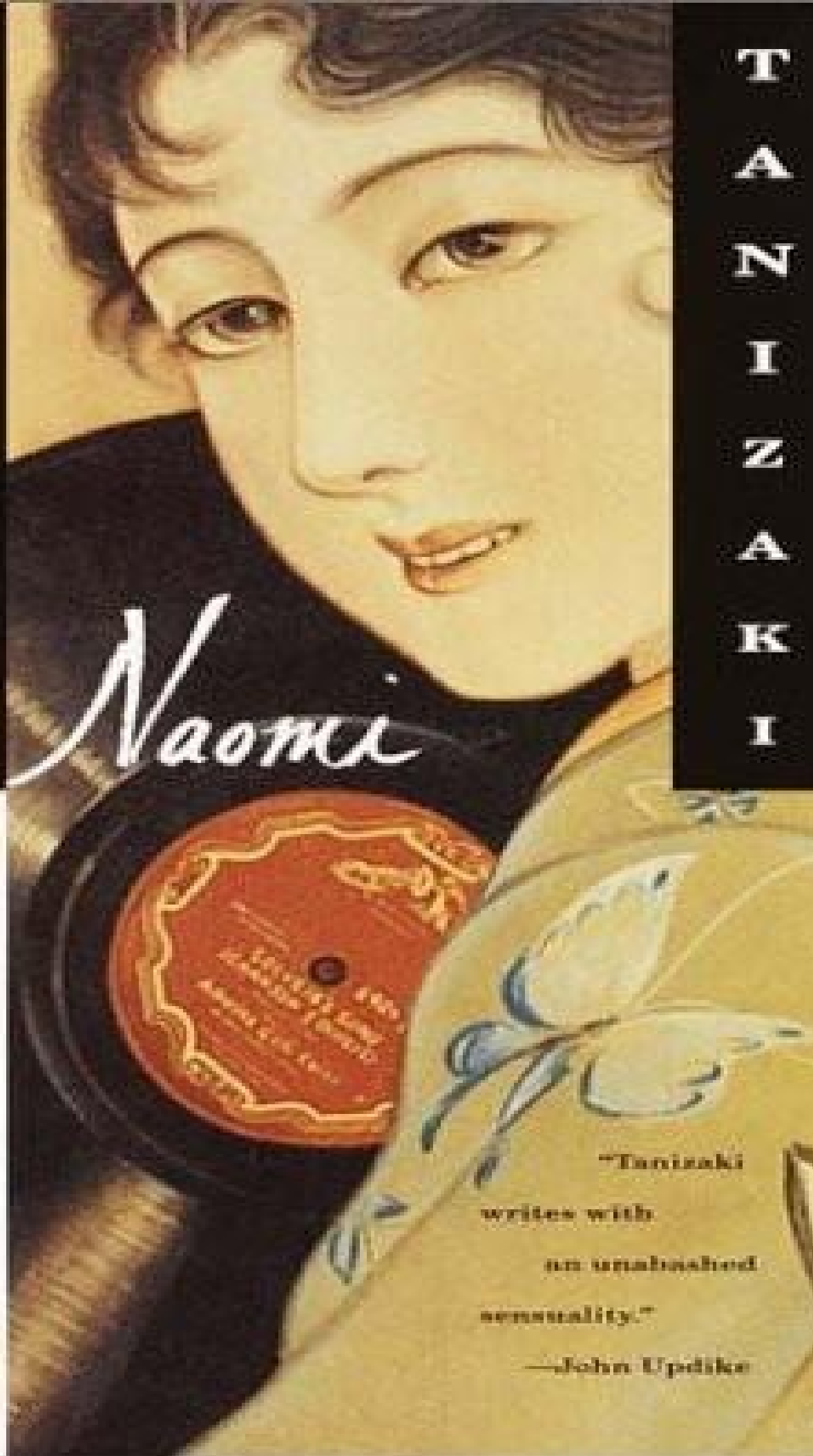


SHUNICHI  
OKURAI

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TANIZAKI

*Naomi*

"Tanizaki  
writes with  
an unabashed  
sensuality."

—John Updike

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# NAOMI

BY JUNICHIRO TANIZAKI

# ONE

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I'M GOING to try to relate the facts of our relationship as man and wife just as they happened, honestly and frankly as I can. It's probably a relationship without precedent. My account of it will provide me with a precious record of something I never want to forget. At the same time, I'm sure my readers will find it instructive, too. As Japan grows increasingly cosmopolitan, Japanese and foreigners are eagerly mingling with one another; all sorts of new doctrines and philosophies are being introduced; and both men and women are adopting up-to-date Western fashions. No doubt, the time being what they are, the sort of marital relationship that we've had, unheard of until now, will begin to turn up on all sides.

In retrospect, I can see that we were a strange couple from the start. It was about seven years ago that I first met the woman who is now my wife, though I don't remember the exact date. At the time she was a hostess at a place called the Cafe Diamond, near the Kaminari Gate of the Asakusa Kannon Temple. She was only in her fifteenth year and had just started working when I met her. She was a beginner—an apprentice, a budding hostess, so to speak, and not yet a full-fledged employee.

Why I, a man of twenty-eight, had my eye on a child like that, I don't understand, but at first I was probably attracted by her name. Everyone called her "Nao-chan." When I asked about it one day, I learned that her real name was Naomi, written with three Chinese characters. The name excited my curiosity. A splendid name, I thought; written in Roman letters, it could be a Western name. I began to pay special attention to her. Strangely enough, once I knew that she had such a sophisticated name, she began to take on an intelligent, Western look. I started to think what a shame it would be to let her go on as a hostess in a place like that.

In fact, Naomi resembled the motion-picture actress Mary Pickford: there was definitely something Western about her appearance. This isn't just my biased view; many others say so, even now that she is my wife. It must be true. And it's not only her face—even her body has a distinctly Western look when she's naked. I didn't learn this until later, of course. At the time, I could only imagine the beauty of her limbs from the stylish way she wore her kimono.

I can't speak with any assurance about her disposition in the days when she was working in the cafe; only a parent or a sister can understand the feelings of a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girl. If asked today, Naomi herself would probably say that she simply went about everything impassively. To an outsider, though, she seemed a quiet, gloomy child. Her face had an unhealthy look. It was as pale and dull as a thick pane of colorless, transparent glass—having just begun work there, she hadn't yet started to wear the white make-up the other hostesses used, and she hadn't gotten to know her customers or her fellow workers. She tended to hide in a corner as she did her work silently and nervously. This may also be why she looked intelligent.

Now I must explain my own background. At the time, I was an engineer with a certain electric firm, earning a monthly salary of one hundred and fifty yen. I was born in Utsunomiya, Tochigi Prefecture. After finishing middle school I came to Tokyo, where I enrolled in the higher technical school at Kuramae. I became an engineer shortly after graduation and every day except Sundays commuted from my rooming house in Shibaguchi to the office in Oimachi.

Living alone in a boardinghouse and earning one hundred and fifty yen a month, I had a rather easy life. Though I was the eldest son, I was under no obligation to send money to my parents or siblings. My family was engaged in farming on a large scale; as my father was dead, my elderly mother and

loyal aunt and uncle managed everything for me. I was completely free. This doesn't mean that I led a fast life, though. I was an exemplary office worker: frugal, earnest, conventional to a fault, even colorless, I did my work every day without the slightest complaint or discontent. In the office, "Kawajoji" was known as a "gentleman."

For recreation, I'd go in the evening to a movie, take a stroll on the Ginza, or, once in a great while, treat myself to an outing at the Imperial Theater. That's the most I ever did. Of course, being a young bachelor, I had nothing against the company of young women. Still a country bumpkin at heart, I was awkward with people and had no friends of the opposite sex, which no doubt is what made me a "gentleman." Yet I was a gentleman only on the surface. Each morning, as I rode the streetcar, and whenever I walked in town, I secretly used every opportunity to observe women closely. Once in a while, Naomi would appear before my eyes.

But I hadn't concluded that Naomi was the most beautiful woman in the world. In fact, there were many women more beautiful than she among the young ladies I passed on the streetcar, in the corridors of the Imperial Theater, and on the Ginza. Whether Naomi's appearance would improve with something only time would tell; she was only fifteen then, and I viewed her future with both anticipation and concern. My original plan, then, was simply to take charge of the child and look after her. On the one hand, I was motivated by sympathy for her. On the other, I wanted to introduce some variety into my humdrum, monotonous daily existence. I was weary from years of living in a boardinghouse; I longed for a little color and warmth in my life. Indeed, why not build a house, I thought, even a small one? I'd decorate the rooms, plant flowers, hang out a birdcage on the sunny veranda, and hire a maid to do the cooking and scrubbing. And if Naomi agreed to come, she'd take the place of both the maid and the bird. . . . This is roughly what I had in mind.

In that case, why didn't I find a bride from a respectable family and set up a proper household? The answer is that I simply lacked the courage to marry. This requires a detailed explanation. I was a commonsensical person who didn't like to act recklessly—indeed, was incapable of doing so; and yet I held rather advanced, sophisticated opinions about marriage. People tend to get all stiff and ceremonious when someone mentions "marriage." First, there has to be a "bridge-maker," who tries roundabout ways to learn what the two sides are thinking. Next, a *miai* is arranged—a formal meeting of the two parties. If neither side has any objections, an official intermediary is chosen, engagements are made, gifts are exchanged, and the trousseau is carried to the groom's house. Then there is the bride procession, the honeymoon trip, and the bride's ceremonial visit to her parents—a very tiresome set of formalities, which I thoroughly disliked. If I'm going to marry, I thought, I'd like to do it in a simple, freer manner.

At the time, there would have been any number of candidates had I wanted to marry. It's true that I was from the countryside, but I had a strong constitution, irreproachable conduct, and, if I may say so myself, at least average good looks, and the trust of my company. Anyone would have been glad to help me. The fact is, though, that I didn't want

to be "helped." Even if a woman is a great beauty, one or two *miai* are not enough for prospective partners to get to know each other's temperament and character. The idea of choosing my companion for life on the basis of a casual impression—"Well, I could live with that," or, "She's not bad-looking"—is too foolish. I couldn't do it. The best approach would be to bring a girl like Naomi into my home and patiently watch her grow. Later, if I liked what I saw, I could take her for my wife. That would be quite enough; I wasn't interested in marrying a rich man's daughter or a fine, educated sort of woman.

Moreover, to make friends with a young girl and observe her development, day by day while I lived a cheerful, playful life in our own house—that, it seemed to me, would

have a special appeal, quite different from that of setting up a proper household. In short, Naomi and I would play house, like children. It would be a relaxed, simple life, not the tiresome existence associated with "maintaining a household." This was my desire. The "household" in modern Japan requires that every cabinet, brazier, and cushion be in its proper place; the chores of husband, wife, and maid are fastidiously distinguished; hard-to-please neighbors and relatives must be humored. None of this is pleasant or beneficial to a young office worker, as it requires a good deal of money and makes complicated and rigid what should be simple. In this respect, then, I considered my plan an inspiration of sorts.

I first spoke of it to Naomi after I'd known her for about two months. During that time, I'd gone to the Cafe Diamond whenever I was free and contrived as many opportunities as possible to talk to her. Naomi was fond of the movies, and would go with me on holidays to a theater in the park. Afterward we'd stop for a bite of Western food or some noodles. Even on these occasions, she hardly said a word; she usually had such a sullen look that I couldn't tell whether she was happy or bored. Yet she never said no when I invited her. "All right, sure," she'd reply docilely, and follow me anywhere.

I didn't know what sort of person she thought I was or why she came with me, but I supposed she was still a child who regarded men without suspicion, and that her feelings were uncomplicated and innocent. My assumption was that she came with me because I took her to the shows she liked and treated her to dinner. For my part, I was a baby-sitter, a gentle, kindly uncle; I never behaved in any other way, nor did I expect anything more from her than that sort of relationship. When I recall them now, those fleeting, dreamlike days seem like a fairy tale, and I can't help wishing that we could be again the guileless couple we once were.

"Can you see, Naomi?" When there was no place to sit, we'd stand at the rear of the movie theater.

"I can't see a thing," she'd reply, straining to stand on tiptoe, trying to see between the heads of the people in front.

"You won't be able to see that way. Get up on this rail and hold my shoulder." I'd give her a boost up and seat her on a high handrail. Legs dangling and one hand on my shoulder, she seemed to be satisfied as she gazed intently at the picture.

When I asked, "Are you having a good time?" she would only say "Yes." She never clapped her hands or bounced with joy; but I could tell how much she liked the movies from her face as she watched in silence, her intelligent eyes wide open like those of an alert dog listening to a distant sound.

"Naomi, are you hungry?"

Sometimes she'd say, "No, I don't want anything." But more often, when she was hungry, she'd say "Yes," without the slightest reserve. Then, when I asked, she'd tell me whether she wanted to eat Western food or noodles.

## TWO

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"NAOMI, you look like Mary Pickford." This came up one evening at a Western-style restaurant which we'd stopped after seeing a Mary Pickford movie.

"Oh?" She didn't seem particularly pleased. She looked at me quizzically, as if to ask why I should say such a thing out of the blue.

"Don't you think so?" I persisted.

"I don't know if I look like her or not, but everybody says I look Eurasian," she said nonchalantly.

"I'm not surprised. To begin with, you have an unusual name. Who gave you a sophisticated name like 'Naomi'?"

"I don't know."

"Your father, maybe, or your mother?"

"I'm not sure . . ."

"Well, what does your father do for a living?"

"I don't have a father."

"And your mother?"

"I have a mother . . ."

"How about brothers and sisters?"

"Oh, I have lots—a big brother, a big sister, a little sister . . ."

These subjects came up again from time to time, but whenever I asked about her family, she'd look annoyed and give evasive answers.

When we went someplace together, we usually arranged to meet at a certain time at a bench in the park or in front of the Kannon Temple. She was always on time and never broke an appointment. Sometimes I was late for one reason or another, and would worry that she might have gone home; but she was always right there waiting for me.

"I'm sorry, Naomi. Have you been waiting long?"

"Yes, I have." She didn't seem to be particularly resentful or angry. Once we were to meet at a certain bench, when it suddenly began to rain. I wondered what she'd do. When I got there, I was touched to find her crouching under the eaves of a little shrine by the pond, waiting for me.

On these occasions she wore a well-used silk kimono—probably a hand-me-down from her sister—with a colorful muslin sash. Her hair was done in a traditional style appropriate for her age, and her face was lightly powdered with white. On her little feet she wore tight-fitting, white Japanese socks, patched but nonetheless smart. When I asked why she did her hair in the Japanese style on holiday, she just said, "Because they tell me to at home." As usual, she didn't offer a full explanation.

"It's late. I'll walk you home." I made this suggestion a number of times, but she always said, "That's all right. I can go by myself. It's not far." When we reached the corner by the Hanayashiki Amusement

Park, she'd say good-bye over her shoulder and run off toward the alleys of Senzoku.

- I almost forgot. There's no need to dwell too much on the events of those days, but we did have one rather intimate, leisurely talk.

It was a warm evening at the end of April; a gentle rain was falling. Business was slow in the cafe and it was very quiet. I sat for a long time at my table, sipping a drink. That makes me sound like a great drinker, but in fact I hardly drink at all. To pass the time, I'd asked for a sweet cocktail of the sort that women drink, and was nursing it slowly, one sip at a time.

When Naomi brought my food, I asked, "Won't you sit down here for a minute?" I was somewhat emboldened by my drink.

"What is it?" She sat down obediently beside me and struck a match when I took out a Shikishima cigarette.

"You can talk for a few minutes, can't you? You don't seem to be very busy tonight."

"It's hardly ever like this."

"Are you always busy?"

"Morning to night. I don't have any time to read."

"Do you like to read, then, Naomi?"

"Yes, I do."

"What do you read?"

"I like all kinds of magazines. I'll read anything."

"I'm impressed. If you enjoy reading so much, you ought to go to girls' school." I said this deliberately and looked into her face. Perhaps she was offended; she turned up her nose and stared off into space, but the sad, helpless look in her eyes was unmistakable.

"Naomi, would you really like to study? If so, I can help you." She still said nothing, and so I added in a more cheerful tone, "Speak up, now. What do you want to do? What would you like to study?"

"I want to study English."

"English, and . . . anything else?"

"Music."

"Well, then, you ought to go to school. I'll pay your tuition."

"But it's too late to go to girls' school. I'm already fifteen."

"Fifteen isn't too late for girls, only for boys. And if you just want to study English and music, you don't need to go to school. We could hire a tutor. How about it, Naomi – do you feel like going into this seriously?"

"Well, yes. . . Would you really do that for me?"

"Yes, indeed. But you couldn't go on working here. Would that be alright with you? If you're willing to quit this job, I wouldn't mind looking after you. I'll take full responsibility and bring you

up as a splendid young woman.”

“Yes, that would be fine,” she said without the slightest hesitation. Her prompt, definite answer startled me.

“Do you mean that you’ll quit your job?”

“Yes.”

“That might be all right for you, Naomi, but you ought to ask your mother and brother what they think.”

“I don’t need to ask them. They won’t say anything.” So she said, but I was certain that she was more concerned than she appeared to be. Unwilling to give me a glimpse of the inner workings of her family, she was pretending there was nothing to worry about. I didn’t want to pry when she was so reluctant; but to fulfill her desires I’d have to call at her home and discuss things thoroughly with her mother and brother. As our plans progressed, I asked her repeatedly to introduce me to her family, but she was strangely unenthusiastic. Invariably she’d say, “You don’t need to meet them. I’ll talk to them.”

There’s no reason to make Naomi angry by airing all her family linen; she’s my wife now, and for her sake, for the sake of “Mrs. Kawai’s” good name, I’ll dwell as little as possible on the subject. It will all come out someday; and even if it doesn’t, anyone will be able to guess what sort of family he was, if he considers that her home was in Sensoku, that she was sent out to be a cafe hostess at the age of fifteen, and that she didn’t want anyone to see where she lived. Not only that: when I finally prevailed and met her mother and brother, they weren’t at all concerned about their girl’s chastity. I told them I thought it would be a pity to leave her at the cafe when she’d expressed an interest in studying, and I asked if they’d consider entrusting her to me. There wasn’t much I could do for her, but I was in need of a maid, and if she’d do the cooking and scrubbing, I’d see that she got an acceptable education in her spare time. Of course I told them frankly about my circumstances and that I was still single. When I’d made my appeal, they responded with something anticlimactic, like, “That’d be wonderful for her.” It was just as she had said. There was no point in meeting them.

The world has its share of irresponsible parents, I thought; but to me that made Naomi’s case all the more touching and pitiable. From what her mother said, I gathered that Naomi was a bit more than the family could handle. “We were going to make the child a geisha,” the mother told me, “but she wasn’t interested, and so we were obliged to send her to the cafe. We couldn’t let her just go on playing.” The fact was that it would be a relief for them if someone else took charge of Naomi and brought her up. After talking with the family, I finally understood why she always went to the show on holidays. She hated to be at home.

Nevertheless, it was fortunate for both Naomi and me that she came from such a household. As soon as I reached an understanding with her family, she gave notice at the cafe and joined me every day. I look for a suitable house to rent. We wanted a place as convenient as possible to my office in Oimachi. Sundays we met early in the morning at Shimbashi Station—weekdays, in Oimachi, right after my office closed—to explore the Kamata, Omori, Shinagawa, and Meguro suburbs and, in the city, the area around Takanawa, Tamachi, and Mita. On the way home we dined together and saw a movie or strolled along the Ginza, if time allowed. Then she went home to Sensoku, and I returned to my morning house at Shibaguchi. We went on this way for about two weeks. Rental houses were scarce at the time, and we had trouble finding what we wanted.



If anyone took notice of us—an office worker and a poorly dressed girl with a Japanese coiffure walking side by side through the verdant suburbs of Omori on a bright Sunday morning in May—what might he have thought? I called her "Naomi," and she called me "Mr. Kawai." We couldn't have been mistaken for master and servant or brother and sister, man and wife, or friends. We must have made an unlikely couple as, a little shy with each other, we walked about happily on a long, late-spring day. We hunted out addresses, gazed at the view, and turned to look at blossoms in a hedge, in a garden, or on the side of the road. The blossoms remind me that she loved Western flowers and knew the names—troublesome English names—of many flowers that I was unfamiliar with. Apparently she'd learned them at the cafe, where she was in charge of the vases. Sometimes we saw a greenhouse beyond a gate as we passed. Always alert, she'd stop and cry happily, "Oh, what beautiful

flowers!"

"Which flower do you like best, Naomi?"

"I like tulips best."

Her longing for spacious gardens and fields, and her love of flowers, may have been in reaction to the squalid alleyways of Senzoku where she had grown up. Whenever we saw violets, dandelions, lotus grass, or primroses growing on a levee or by a country road, she would hurry over to pick them. By the end of the day, she'd have a great many flowers grouped in any number of bouquets. And she would still be holding them carefully on the way back.

"They're all wilted now. Why don't you throw them away?"

"Oh, they'll come right back if you put them in water. You ought to keep them on your desk, Mr. Kawai." She always gave the bouquets to me when we parted for the day.

Search as we might, a good house wasn't easy to find. Eventually we rented a shoddy Western-style house near the tracks of the National Electric Line, twelve or thirteen blocks from Omori Station. Modern and simple, it was, I suppose, what people would nowadays call a "Culture Home," though the term was not yet in vogue then. More than half of it consisted of a steep roof covered with red slates. The white exterior walls made it look like a matchbox; rectangular glass windows had been cut into them here and there. In front of the entrance porch was a small yard. The house looked as though it would be more fun to sketch than to live in, which isn't surprising, as it was built by an artist who had married one of his models. The rooms were laid out in the most inconvenient way. On the ground floor were an absurdly large atelier, a tiny entryway, and a kitchen—nothing else. Upstairs there were two small, Japanese-style rooms, six feet by nine feet, and nine-by-nine, respectively. Hardly more than attic storerooms, they were really quite useless. This attic was reached by a stairway in the atelier. Climbing the stairs one came to a landing enclosed by a handrail, just like a box at the theater, from which one could look down into the atelier.

Naomi was delighted with the house from the first time she saw it. "Oh, it's ever so modern! This is the kind of house I want." Seeing that it pleased her so, I immediately agreed to rent it.

No doubt the odd design—it was like an illustration for a fairy tale—appealed to Naomi's childish curiosity, despite the impractical arrangement of the rooms. To be sure, it was just right for an easygoing young couple who wanted to live playfully and avoid the trappings of a conventional household. No doubt this is the sort of life the artist and his model had in mind when they occupied the house. In fact, the atelier by itself was large enough to satisfy the needs of two people.

# THREE

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IT MUST have been late in May that I finally took full charge of Naomi and moved into the "fairytale house." Once there, I realized that it wasn't as inconvenient as I'd thought. The attic rooms were sunny and had a view of the sea; the yard in front had a southern exposure and was the perfect place to plant a bed of flowers. The trains that passed from time to time on the National Line were a drawback, but a small rice paddy between the house and the tracks kept the noise down. I decided that it was a perfectly acceptable place to live. What's more, in view of the house's unsuitability for most people, the rent was surprisingly low. Even in those days of low prices, twenty yen a month, with no deposit, was very appealing to me.

"Naomi, from now on, call me 'Joji' not 'Mr. Kawai,'" I said the day we moved in. "And let's live like friends, all right?" Naturally, I informed my family that I'd moved from the rooming house to a house of my own, and that I'd hired a fifteen-year-old girl to serve as a maid; but I did not tell them we were going to live "like friends." My relatives hardly ever came from the country to visit, and someday there was a need to tell them, I would.

We spent many busy, happy days buying furniture appropriate to our strange new home and arranging it in the various rooms. To help cultivate her taste, I asked Naomi's opinion on almost everything we bought. I used her ideas whenever I could. There was no place to put the usual household items like cabinets and braziers in a house like this, so we were free to choose our pieces and carry out whatever design we liked. We bought some inexpensive India prints, which Naomi, with her uncertain fingers, sewed into curtains. At a Shibaguchi shop that specialized in Western furniture, we found an old rattan chair, a sofa, an easy chair, and a table, all of which we set out in the atelier. On the walls we hung photographs of Mary Pickford and several other American movie actresses. I also wanted Western-style bedding, but I gave up that idea because two beds would have been expensive, and I could have Japanese bedding sent from my home in the country.

When the bedding arrived, Naomi's turned out to be the kind a maid uses: a stiff cotton quilt as thick and hard as a cracker, adorned with the usual arabesque pattern. I felt sorry for her. "This won't do for Naomi. Let's exchange it for one of mine."

"No, it's fine," she said, pulling it over her as she lay down alone in the six-by-nine attic room.

I slept in the room next to hers—the nine-by-nine room in the attic—but every morning we'd call each other, from room to room, without getting up.

"Naomi, are you awake?"

"Yes. What time is it?"

"Six-thirty. Shall I boil the rice for you this morning?"

"Would you? I did it yesterday, so you can do it today."

"All right. But it's a lot of trouble. Shall we make do with bread?"

"We can. But you're sneaky, Joji."

When we wanted rice we cooked it in an earthen pot, which we put directly on the table without bothering to empty it into a wooden tub. With it we'd eat something out of a can. When that was too much trouble, we got by with bread, milk and jam, or a piece of Western pastry. For dinner we had

noodles or went to a Western-style restaurant in the neighborhood, if we wanted something fancier.

"Joji," she'd often say, "order me a steak today."

After breakfast, I left Naomi alone and went to work. She spent the morning putting in the flowerbed. In the afternoon she locked up the house and went to her English and music lessons. Every other day, she went to Meguro to practice English conversation and reading with an American woman named Miss Harrison—we thought it best that she start right out with a Westerner—and at home I helped her review her weak points. I had no idea what to do about music lessons, but then we heard of a woman, a recent graduate of the music school at Ueno, who gave instruction in piano and voice at her home at Isarago in Shiba Ward, and so Naomi went every day for an hour's lesson. Wearing a dark blue cashmere formal skirt over a silk kimono, black socks, and charming little shoes, she looked every inch the pupil. Bursting with excitement at having realized her dream, she went off to her lessons diligently. Now and then I ran into her on my way home, and I could hardly believe that she had grown up in Senszoku and worked as a hostess. She never did her hair in Japanese style anymore; she wore it in braids, tied with a ribbon.

I think I said earlier that I would "keep her like a little bird." Since coming under my charge, her color had improved and her disposition had gradually changed, so that now she'd become a truly radiant, vivacious little bird, and the enormous atelier was her cage. May came to a close and bright early-summer weather set in. The flowers in the garden grew taller and more colorful day by day. In the evening, when I returned home from work and she from her lessons, sunlight streamed through the India-print curtains and played on the white walls as though it were still the middle of the day. Wearing slippers on her bare feet and an unlined flannel summer kimono, Naomi would stamp time and she sang the songs she'd learned. Sometimes she'd play lag or blindman's buff with me. Racing around the atelier, she jumped over the table, crawled under the sofa, and knocked over the chairs. And when that wasn't enough, she ran up the stairs and scurried back and forth like a mouse on our theater box on a landing. Once I played horse and crawled around the room with her on my back.

"Giddap, giddap!" she cried. For reins, she made me hold a towel in my mouth.

It must have been one day when we were playing that Naomi, squealing with laughter, ran up the stairs too fast, lost her footing, tumbled all the way down from the top, and burst into tears.

"Where does it hurt? Show me." As I picked her up, she went on sniffing and drew up her sleeve for me to see. She had scratched herself against a nail or something as she fell; the skin was broken on her right elbow and a little blood was oozing out. "Here, this isn't worth crying over. I'll put a bandage on it for you."

I applied some ointment and tore up a towel to use as a bandage. She sobbed all the while like a small child, her eyes full of tears, her nose dribbling. Unfortunately, the scratch became infected and it took five or six days to heal. I changed the dressing every day, and she cried each time.

Was I already in love with Naomi? I'm not certain. I suppose that I was; yet it was my intention and delight to bring her up as a fine young woman, and I believed that I'd find satisfaction simply in doing that and nothing more. But that summer, when, as every year, I went home to the country for my two-week vacation, leaving Naomi with her family in Asakusa and closing up the Omori house, I found my days in the country to be unbearably monotonous and lonely. Can it be, I wondered, that life without her is so dull as this? It occurred to me for the first time that I might be experiencing the beginning of love. Making excuses to my mother, I returned to Tokyo ahead of schedule. I arrived after ten o'clock at night and, despite the late hour, rushed by taxi from Ueno Station to Naomi's house.

"Naomi, I'm back. I have a car waiting at the corner. Let's go to Omori."

"Oh? I'll be right there." Keeping me waiting outside the sliding lattice door, she finally emerged carrying a small bundle. It was a hot, humid night; Naomi had changed into a thin, unlined, white muslin kimono with a grape design in pale lavender, and had tied her hair with a wide, bright, pink ribbon. I'd bought the muslin for her during the recent Bon Festival, and during my absence she asked someone at home to make it up into a kimono.

"What did you do every day, Naomi?" Sitting beside her as the car moved off toward the bustling thoroughfare, I brought my face a little closer to hers.

"I went to the show every day."

"I don't suppose you were lonely, then, were you?"

"Not particularly. . . ." She thought for a moment. "You came back early, didn't you, Joji?"

"I was bored in the country, so I cut it short and came back. There's no place like Tokyo." Heaving a sigh of relief, I gazed through the window at the gay, flickering lights of the city at night.

"But I think it'd be nice to go to the country in the summer."

"That depends on the place. My family lives in an out-of-the-way farmhouse. The landscape is dull there are no historic sites, flies and mosquitoes buzz around in broad daylight, and it's unbearably hot."

"Oh, dear. Is it that kind of place?"

"That's right."

"I want to go to the beach," she said abruptly. Her tone was very appealing, like that of a willful child.

"All right. One day soon I'll take you someplace to cool off. How about Kamakura? Or Hakone?"

"I'd like the ocean better than a hot spring. Oh, I do want to go."

The ingenuous voice sounded like the same Naomi as before, but somehow, in the ten days that I hadn't seen her, her limbs seemed to have stretched and grown perceptibly. I couldn't resist stealing a glance at the contours of her full shoulders, moving under the unlined muslin kimono as she breathed and at her chest.

"You look nice in that kimono," I said after a pause. "Who made it for you?"

"Mother did."

"What did she say about me? That I made a good choice of material?"

"Yes, she said it wasn't bad, but it's far too modern and stylish."

"Your mother said that?"

"Yes. She doesn't understand anything." With a far-off look she added, "Everybody says I've changed."

"Changed in what way?"

"They say I've gotten terribly modern."

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"I'm sure they do. I think so, too."

"I wonder. They told me to try doing my hair in Japanese style, but I didn't want to."

"And that ribbon?"

"This? I bought it myself at a shop in front of the Kannon Temple. Do you like it?" She turned her head away so that I could see the fluttering pink cloth as her clean, unoiled hair caught the wind.

"It's very becoming. Much better than doing it Japanese style."

With a toss of her button nose, she gave a little laugh, as though in agreement. This was mannerism of hers. It was an impudent, nasal laugh, but I thought it made her look clever.

# FOUR

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NAOMI was constantly begging me to take her to Kamakura. We went at the beginning of August with the intention of staying two or three days.

"Why does it have to be only two or three days?" she asked. "It's no fun unless we go for a week or ten days." Her face showed her displeasure as we left the house. But I'd come back early from the country with the excuse that I was busy at work, and out of deference to my mother, I didn't want to risk my ruse being exposed. If I'd put it to Naomi in this way, though, she'd have felt humiliated. Instead I said, "Try to be content with two or three days this year. Next year I'll take you for a long stay somewhere else. All right?"

"But just two or three days . . ."

"I know, but if you want to swim when we get back, you can go to the beach at Omori."

"I can't swim in a filthy place like that."

"You shouldn't say things like that when you don't really know. Be a good girl. I'll buy you something to wear, instead. Didn't you say you wanted some Western clothes? I'll get some for you."

Caught with the bait of Western clothes, she finally agreed.

In Kamakura we stayed in the Golden Wave Pavilion at Hase, an unremarkable inn for bathers. It makes me laugh to think of it now. There was no need to economize, because I still had most of my semiannual bonus. Thrilled to be taking my first overnight trip with Naomi, I wanted to leave her with the most beautiful impressions possible: we'd stay in a high-class place and not worry about the cost. But when the day came and we boarded a second-class coach bound for Yokosuka, we were seized by a kind of timidity. The train was full of women and girls headed for Zushi and Kamakura, sitting in resplendent rows. In their midst, Naomi's outfit, to me at least, looked wretched.

As it was summer, of course the women couldn't have been particularly dressed up. But when I compared them to Naomi, I sensed an unmistakable difference in refinement between those who are born to the higher classes of society and those who aren't. Though Naomi seemed to have become a different person from the cafe girl she'd been, there's no concealing bad birth and breeding. And if that is what I was thinking, she must have felt it even more. How pitiful it looked now, that muslin kimono with the grape design that had made her seem so stylish. Some of the women sitting around us were wearing simple summer robes, but their fingers glittered with gemstones and their luggage was luxurious; everything bespoke their wealth and station, while Naomi had nothing to show but her velvety skin. I can still remember how she hid her parasol self-consciously under her sleeve. And when she might—though the parasol was brand-new, anyone could see it was a cheap item, worth no more than seven or eight yen.

At first, then, we'd pictured ourselves staying at the Mitsuhashi Inn, or even at the Kaihin Hotel. But when we approached the buildings, we were so intimidated by their magnificent gates that we walked up and down the Hase road two or three times until we finally found ourselves at the Golden Wave Pavilion, a second- or third-class establishment, by local standards.

There were too many noisy students staying at the inn to allow for any relaxation there, so we spent nearly all of our time on the beach. Tomboy that she was, Naomi cheered up as soon as she saw the ocean and forgot how dispirited she'd been on the train.

"I *must* learn how to swim this summer," she said, clinging to my arm and splashing about wildly in the shallows. I held her with both hands and showed her how to float on her belly, taught her how to kick, as she grasped a post in the water, and let her go suddenly, so that she tasted the brine. When she was tired of that, we practiced riding the waves, played with the sand as we lay on the beach, and, in the evening, rowed out toward the bay in a rented boat. With a big towel wrapped around her bathing suit, she'd sit on the stern or lie back against the gunwale, gaze at the blue sky, and sing the Neapolitan boat song "Santa Lucia"—her favorite—in a shrill voice:

*O dolce Napoli,*

*O soul heato . . .*

As her soprano voice reverberated over the sea in the evening calm, I gently rowed the boat and listened, entranced. "Farther, farther," she cried, as though she wanted to travel across the waves forever. Before we knew it, the sun had set and the stars were sparkling; as the darkness gathered around us, Naomi's form, wrapped in a white towel, blurred into indistinctness. But her bright voice continued. She sang "Santa Lucia" over and over, then "Lorelei," "Zigeunerleben," and a melody from *Mignon*. Song followed song as the boat moved gently forward.

I suppose that everyone experiences something like this in his youth, but for me it was the first time. Being an electrical engineer, I knew less than others did about literature and art and hardly ever read novels; but that evening, I thought of Natsume Soseki's *Pillow of Grass*, which I'd read. The line "A Venice sank, as Venice sank" appears in that novel, and somehow I was reminded of it as Naomi and I rocked by the boat, gazed from the offing and through the veil of evening haze toward the flickering lights on the shore. Moved to a tearful ecstasy, I wanted to drift away with Naomi to some uncharted faraway world. For a rustic like me to experience this sensation was enough by itself to make our short stay in Kamakura worthwhile.

To tell the truth, our three days in Kamakura allowed me one other important discovery. Though I'd been living with Naomi, I'd never had a chance to observe her figure—the shape of her naked body, I put it bluntly—but on this trip I was able to. When she appeared on the beach at Yuigahama, wearing the dark green cap and bathing suit that we'd bought on the Ginza the evening before, I rejoiced at the beautiful proportions of her limbs. Yes, I rejoiced: from the way a kimono fit her, I'd already speculated on the curves of her body, and I'd been right. My heart cried out, "Naomi, Naomi, my Mary Pickford! What a fine, well-proportioned body you have. Your graceful arms! Your legs, straight and streamlined like a boy's!" And I couldn't help thinking of Mack Sennett's lively "bathing beauties" whom I'd seen in the movies.

I suppose that no one likes to advertise the details of his own wife's body. I don't enjoy boasting about the girl who later became my wife, and relating these details to so many people. But if I avoid the subject, it'll be hard to tell my story properly, and the point of making this record will be lost. I must note here, then, what kind of figure Naomi cut as she stood on the beach at Kamakura in August of her fifteenth year. At the time, she was about one inch shorter than I. (Please keep in mind that though I had a robust physique, I was a small man, only about five feet, two inches tall.) But a striking characteristic of Naomi's frame was that her trunk was short and her legs long, so that from a distance she looked much taller than she was. Her short trunk tapered to a wonderfully slim waist, then swelled into richly feminine hips.

We'd seen a movie called *Neptune's Daughter*, about a mermaid, starring the famous swimmer Annette Kellerman. "Naomi," I said, "let me see you imitate Kellerman." She stood up with her arms

straight over her head and showed me her "diving" pose. As she stood with her thighs together, her legs, so straight there was no space between them, formed a long triangle from her hips to her ankles.

She was pleased with her legs. "Joji, are my legs crooked?" she asked. Taking a few steps, standing still, stretching out on the sand, she happily studied the shape of her legs.

Another distinctive feature of her body was the line from her neck to her shoulders. I had many opportunities to touch her shoulders: whenever she put on her bathing suit, she made me fasten the shoulder buttons. Normally a person like Naomi, with sloping shoulders and a thin neck, is rather thin, but she had surprisingly full shoulders and a thick chest that suggested strong lungs. When I tried to fasten the buttons for her, she'd take deep breaths and move her arms so that the muscles of her back rippled and swelled. The bathing suit, which already seemed at the bursting point, would stretch even more tightly across her bulging shoulders and threaten to split. In sum, her shoulders were powerful and brimming with youth and beauty. When I surreptitiously compared her with the other girls on the beach, it seemed to me that none of them had her combination of healthy shoulders and a graceful neck.

"Stand still, Naomi. If you move like that I can't fasten the buttons." I gripped the edge of her suit and pushed her shoulders into it, as though I were stuffing something large into a small sack.

With such a build, it's only natural that she was a tomboy and loved sports. She was good at everything athletic. After our three days at Kamakura, she went to the beach at Omori every day to practice swimming and by the end of the summer had mastered it. She also learned how to row and sail. Having played all day, she'd come home clutching her wet bathing suit, cry "I'm starved!" and fling herself exhausted into a chair. Bored with cooking dinner every night, we sometimes stopped at a Western restaurant on the way home from the beach, and gorged ourselves as though we were in an eating contest. Beefsteak followed beefsteak, as she put away three or four helpings.

I could go on indefinitely about my happy memories of that summer, so I'll stop here. But there's just one more development that can't be omitted. Around that time, I got into the habit of bathing Naomi's arms, legs, back, and so on with a rubber sponge. The practice began when Naomi came home too sleepy to bother with the public bath. Instead, she'd rinse off the salt water by pouring water over herself in the kitchen, or by taking a sponge bath from a basin. "Naomi," I said, "if you go to bed this way your body'll be all sticky. Get in the washtub and I'll rinse you off." She did as I said and let me wash her. Gradually this became a habit. The washtub baths continued into the cool fall weather, until finally I installed a Western-style bathtub with a bathmat in a corner of the atelier and enclosed it with a standing screen. There I helped Naomi with her bath all through the winter.



# FIVE

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SOME of my more perceptive readers are probably thinking that Naomi and I were already more than just friends. We weren't though, in fact. It's true that a sort of unspoken understanding developed between us as the months went by. But not only was she still a girl of fifteen and I a scrupulous "gentleman" who had had no experience with women; I also felt responsible for her chastity, so I didn't let the impulse of the moment push me beyond the bounds of our understanding. Of course the notion had gradually taken root in my mind that Naomi was the only woman I could ever think of marrying, and that even if there were someone else, I couldn't abandon Naomi now. This is another reason I didn't want to make the first move frivolously, or in a way that might hurt her.

It was in the spring of the following year—April 26 of Naomi's sixteenth year—that our relationship entered a new phase. I remember the exact date because around that time - no, it was when we began to use the washtub—I started a diary in which I recorded everything about Naomi that caught my attention. Her figure was growing strikingly more feminine every day. Like a new parent who keeps track of his baby's development with entries like "Laughed for the first time," or, "Spoke for the first time," I wrote down everything I noticed. I still leaf through it now and then. Here's what I wrote on September 21 in the fall of Naomi's fifteenth year:

*At 8 p.m., I bathed her in the washtub. She still has her tan from the beach. She's very dark, except under the bathing suit. I'm dark, too, but Naomi has such a light complexion, the contrast is sharp. Even when she has nothing on, you'd think she was wearing a suit. "You look like a zebra," I said. She laughed.*

About a month later, on October 17, I wrote:

*Her tan is fading and her skin doesn't peel any more. It's even smoother and lovelier than before. When I washed her arms, she watched quietly as the soap bubbles dissolved and ran down against her skin. "Beautiful," I said. "Yes, isn't it?" she said. Then she added, "I mean the soap bubbles, you know."*

On November 5:

*We tried using the Western tub tonight for the first time. Not being used to it, Naomi slipped and slid around, shrieking with laughter. When I said, "Big baby," she called me "Papa."*

After that, we sometimes called each other "Baby" and "Papa." She always called me "Papa" when she was trying to coax something out of me.

"Naomi Grows Up" was the title I gave my diary. Of course I only wrote about Naomi. Before long I bought a camera and photographed her face, which was looking more and more like Mary Pickford in different lighting and from various angles. I pasted the photos here and there among the diary entries.

But the diary has taken me off the subject. According to the diary, she and I began a deep relationship on April 26 of the year after we moved to Omori. Because of our unspoken understanding it came about silently and spontaneously. Neither of us had taken the initiative, and we hardly exchanged a word. Finally she put her mouth to my ear.

"Joji, don't ever leave me."

"Leave you? Absolutely not. You don't need to worry about that. I think you know how I feel."

"Yes, I do."

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"How long have you known?"

"Let's see, how long has it been?"

"What did you think of me when I said I'd take care of you? Did you think that I intended to marry you eventually?"

"Yes, I thought that's what you had in mind."

"Then you agreed to come because you were willing to be my wife?"

Without waiting for her answer, I hugged her with all my might. "Thank you, Naomi, thank you. You understood. I'll be completely honest now. I never thought that you would come this close to my ideal woman. I'm so lucky. I'll always love you . . . only you. . . . I won't mistreat you the way so many husbands do. I live for your sake. Go on studying and grow up as a fine young woman, and I'll give you whatever you want."

"Oh, yes, I'll study hard. And I'll be the sort of woman you want, I promise." There were tears in her eyes, and I'd begun to weep, too. We talked all night about the future.

Shortly after that I spent a weekend at home and told my mother all about Naomi. There were several reasons for reporting to her quickly. I wanted to reassure Naomi, who seemed to be concerned about my family's reaction, and I wanted everything to be out in the open. I told my mother my ideas about marriage and, in a way that would make sense to an old woman, explained why I wanted to marry Naomi. My mother had always understood and trusted me. She said only, "If that's what you want, then you should marry her. But if she's from that kind of family, there might be trouble in the future. Be careful."

We decided to wait two or three years before announcing our marriage publicly, but I wanted to have her officially registered as my wife right away. I went to Senzoku to negotiate with her mother and brother. As before, they were nonchalant and everything went smoothly. They may have been a little negligent, but they weren't bad people, and they didn't say anything to suggest that they were motivated by greed.

Our relationship evolved rapidly after that. No one knew of the change yet, and outwardly we were just friends. But legally we were now married and had nothing to hide.

"Naomi," I said one day, "let's go right on living together like friends, shall we?"

"Then are you going to go on calling me 'Naomi'?" "Of course. Or shall I call you 'wife'?"

"No, I wouldn't like that."

"And will I always be 'Joji'?"

"Naturally. What else would I call you?"

Naomi lay down on the sofa with a rose in her hand. She pressed it to her lips and fingered it for a moment, then said suddenly, "Joji?" Opening her arms, she dropped the blossom and embraced my head.

"My darling Naomi," I gasped from the darkness under her sleeves. "My darling Naomi, I don't just love you, I worship you. You're my treasure. You're a diamond that I found and polished. I'll buy

anything that'll make you beautiful. I'll give you my whole salary."

"That's all right, you don't need to. My English and music lessons are more important."

"Oh, yes, yes. I'm going to buy you a piano soon. You'll be such a lady, you won't even be ashamed to mix with Westerners."

I often used phrases like "mix with Westerners" and "like a Westerner." Clearly this pleased her. "What do you think?" she'd say, trying out different expressions in the mirror. "Don't you think I look like a Westerner when I do this?" Apparently she studied the actresses' movements when we went to the movies, because she was very good at imitating them. In an instant she could capture the mood and idiosyncrasies of an actress. Pickford laughs like this, she'd say; Pina Menicheli moves her eyes like this; Geraldine Farrar does her hair up this way. Loosening her hair, she'd push it into this shape and that.

"Very good—better than any actor. Your face looks so Western."

"Does it? *Where* does it look Western?"

"Your nose and your teeth."

"My teeth?" She pulled her lips back and studied the row of teeth in the mirror. They were wonderfully straight and glossy.

"Anyway, you're different from other Japanese, and ordinary Japanese clothes don't do anything for you. How would it be if you wore Western clothes? Or Japanese clothes in some new style?"

"What kind of style?"

"Women are going to be more and more active in the future. Those heavy, tight things they wear now won't do."

"How about a narrow-sleeved kimono with an informal sash?"

"That'd be fine. Anything's all right as long as you try for original styles. I wonder if there isn't some outfit that's neither Japanese, Chinese, or Western . . ."

"If there is, will you buy it for me?"

"Of course I will. I'm going to get all sorts of clothes for you, and we'll switch them around every day. You don't need expensive stuff. Muslin and common silk will do. The important thing is to have original designs."

After this conversation, we often went to drapers and department stores together to look for fabrics. We must have went every Sunday at Mitsukoshi and Shirokiya. But it was hard to find patterns we liked, because neither of us was satisfied with the usual women's things. Run-of-the-mill drapers were of no use to us, so we went to cotton-print dealers, carpet shops, and stores that specialized in Western fabrics. We even went on full-day outings to Yokohama, where we dragged ourselves from shop to shop in China-town and to dry goods stores in the foreign settlement, foraging for the right fabric. We studied the outfits of Westerners we passed on the street and scrutinized every shop window. If there was something unusual, one of us would cry, "Look, how about that?" We'd rush into the shop to have the fabric brought in from the window and see how it looked on Naomi, draping it from her chest and wrapping it around her torso. We had great fun walking around and window-shopping this way, even when we didn't buy anything.

Nowadays, it's fashionable for women to make summer kimonos out of organdy, Georgette, and cotton voile, but Naomi and I were probably the first to use these fabrics. For some reason the textures were very becoming to her. We weren't interested in conventional kimonos. Instead, she made the material into narrow-sleeved kimonos, pajama suits, and robes that looked like nightgowns. Sometimes she'd simply wrap a bolt of cloth around her body and fasten it with brooches. Dressed in one or another of these outfits, she'd parade around the house, stand in front of the mirror, and pose while I took pictures. Wrapped in gauzy, translucent clothing of white, rose, or pale lavender, she was like a beautiful large blossom in a vase. "Try it this way; now this way," I'd say. Picking her up, laying her down, telling her to be seated or to walk, I gazed at her by the hour.

Under the circumstances, her wardrobe grew enormously in the space of a year. She couldn't possibly store it all in her room; she hung things or rolled them up in piles everywhere. We could have bought a cabinet, but that would have cut into our clothes budget, and in any case there was no need to treat her clothes that carefully. She had lots of them, but they were all inexpensive and quick to wear out. It was more convenient to spread them around where we could see them and try various combinations whenever we were in the mood. They also served as decoration for the rooms. The atelier was just like a property room at the theater, with clothes strewn everywhere—on the chairs, on the sofa, in corners, even on the stairs and over the theater box rail. Most of them were soiled, because Naomi was in the habit of wearing them right against her skin, and we hardly ever laundered them.

Most of the designs were so outrageous that she could wear only about half of them outside the house. Her favorite, which she often wore when we went out, was a lined, cotton-padded satin kimono with a matching jacket. Both the jacket and the kimono were a solid, reddish brown, as were the thongs on her sandals and the cord on her jacket. Everything else—the neckpiece, the sash fastener, the lining of the underkimono, the sleeve ends, and the trim at the bottom—was pale blue. The narrow sash, too, was made of thinly padded satin; she wound it tightly, high on her chest. For the neckpiece she bought a ribbon, wanting something that looked like satin. She wore this outfit most often when we went to the theater in the evening. Everyone turned to look as she walked through the lobby of the Yakuza or the Imperial Theater in that glistening fabric.

"I wonder who *she* is?"

"An actress, maybe?"

"A Eurasian?"

Hearing the whispers, we'd move proudly toward them.

If *that* outfit amazed people, then Naomi could scarcely have gone out in her more fanciful creations, however much she liked to be unconventional. They were no more than containers—various varieties of packages into which I'd put her when we were home, and gaze at her. I suppose it was like trying out a beautiful flower in one vase, then another. There's nothing so surprising about this. When she was my wife, she was also a rare, precious doll and an ornament. She never wore ordinary clothes at home. Her most expensive indoor outfit was a three-piece, black velvet suit that she said was inspired by a costume she'd seen a man wear in an American movie. When she put it on with her hair rolled up under a sports cap, she was as sensuous as a cat. Both summer and winter (when we heated the room with a stove), she often wore nothing but a loose gown or a bathing suit. She had countless pairs of slippers, including embroidered ones from China. She always wore them without socks.

EVEN while I was indulging her this way, I hadn't abandoned my original desire, which was to give her a good education and bring her up as a fine, respectable woman. I didn't have a clear idea of what "respectable" and "fine" meant, but I must have been thinking of something vague and simplistic like "a modern, sophisticated woman whom I wouldn't be ashamed to present in any company." Was "making Naomi a fine woman" compatible with "cherishing her like a doll"? It seems ridiculous now, but I was so befuddled by my love for her that I couldn't see such an obvious inconsistency.

"Naomi, play is play, study is study," I was always saying. "If you'll just work hard to make something of yourself, I'll buy you all kinds of other things."

She always responded in the same way: "Yes, I'll study, and I promise, I'll be a fine woman."

Every day after dinner I'd spend half an hour with her, reviewing her English reading and conversation. No matter what I said, "play" and "study" had a way of merging. Wearing her velvet suit or a gown, she'd slouch in a chair and dangle a slipper from one toe, like a toy.

"Naomi, what are you doing! Mind your manners when you're studying!"

She'd sit up, bow her head, and assume the wheedling tone of an elementary-school student: "I'm sorry, teacher," or, "Excuse me, Mr. Kawai." Then she'd steal a glance at me and give me a peck on the cheek. I didn't have the courage to be firm with my adorable pupil; my scoldings always ended in childish horseplay.

I didn't know how Naomi was doing with her music, but she'd been studying English with Miss Harrison for about two years. It seemed to me that she should have made good progress by now. Having started with the first reader, she was now more than halfway through the second; her conversation text was English Echo, and for grammar she used Kanda Naibu's *Intermediate Grammar*. This would be equivalent to the third-year level in middle school. Yet she still seemed to be below the level of a second-year student, at best. Puzzled, I called on Miss Harrison.

"No, nothing of the sort," said the kindly, stout spinster with a cheerful smile. Her Japanese was a little odd. "She is very bright. She is doing well."

"It's true that she's a bright child, but I don't believe her English is as good as it should be. She can read, but when it comes to translating into Japanese or analyzing the grammar . . ."

"No," she interrupted with a smile. "You have the wrong idea. Japanese people always think about grammar and translation. Very bad. When you study English, you must not think about grammar. Must not translate. Read it over and over as English—this is the best way. Miss Naomi has beautiful pronunciation. She is very good at reading. Her English will be very good soon."

She had a point. But I didn't mean that Naomi should systematically memorize the rules of grammar. Having studied for two years and completed the third reader, she should have known at least how to use the past participle, how to form the passive voice, and when to use the subjunctive. But when I had her translate from Japanese to English, it was clear that she hadn't learned any of these things. She was no better than the most backward middle-school student. At this rate, she'd never speak English proficiently, however good she might be at reading. I wondered what on earth she'd been taught for two whole years. But the woman ignored my look of displeasure; she nodded with a confident, magnanimous air. "Miss Naomi is a very bright child," she said again.

My guess is that Western teachers have a certain bias with regard to their Japanese pupils. Or "bias" is too strong, I might say that they have preconceived ideas. It seems to me that when they see a Westernized, sophisticated, sweet-faced boy or girl, they conclude without a second thought that the child is clever. This tendency is particularly strong among spinsters. That's why Miss Harrison was so lavish with her praise of Naomi—she'd made up her mind at the outset that Naomi was "a bright child." Naomi's pronunciation was extremely smooth, as Miss Harrison said. Her voice was beautiful to listen to, thanks to her singing lessons and her straight teeth. Her English sounded marvelous, and I was sure that I, at least, was no match for her in this respect. No doubt Miss Harrison was dazzled by Naomi's voice. I realized how much she loved Naomi when, to my astonishment, I saw photographs of Naomi tacked up all around Miss Harrison's dressing-table mirror.

While I was dissatisfied with Miss Harrison's opinions and teaching methods, here was a Westerner who was partial to Naomi and who said that she was bright. This was just what I'd hoped for, and in spite of myself I was as pleased as if Miss Harrison had praised me directly. Not only that—like most Japanese, I tended to feel helpless when I came into contact with Westerners and lost the courage to state my opinions clearly. Undone by Miss Harrison's confident chatter, delivered in her odd Japanese, I didn't say what I ought to have said. It doesn't matter, I told myself. If that's how she feels, then I'll just fill in the gaps at home. To Miss Harrison I said, "Yes, that's very true. Just as you say. I understand now. I won't worry anymore." And with an Ambiguous, flattering smile, I excused myself and came home dispirited. I hadn't settled anything.

"Joji, what did Miss Harrison say?" Naomi asked that evening. Her tone suggested that she was confident of the woman's backing and wasn't taking the matter seriously.

"She said you're doing very well. But Westerners don't understand Japanese students' psychology. She's wrong if she thinks that it's enough to have good pronunciation and be able to read smoothly. You're good at memorizing, but when I ask you to translate, you haven't understood the content at all. That's no better than a parrot can do. At this rate, your English will never be of any practical use."

That was the first time I gave Naomi a real scolding. I was irritated by her triumphant look and the way she sided with Miss Harrison, as if to say, "What did I tell you?" But more than that, I doubted now whether Naomi could become the "fine woman" we'd talked about. Her English aside, it was hard to see what future there might be for a mind that couldn't even grasp the rules of grammar. Why do boys study geometry and algebra in middle school? The objective is not so much to provide them with a practical tool, as to cultivate their ability to use their minds with precision. In the past, a woman could get along without an analytical mind; but not anymore. A woman who wanted to be "the equal of Westerners" and a "fine woman" wasn't very promising if she had no aptitude for systematic thinking and analysis.

Formerly I'd spent only about thirty minutes a day reviewing her lessons. Now I was more obstinate and taught her Japanese-English translation and grammar for an hour to an hour-and-a-half and more every day. I no longer permitted the previous playful mood; I scolded her crossly. Since she was the weakest in comprehension, I refrained from making detailed explanations and instead gave little hints so that she could figure out the rest for herself. If she were studying the passive voice, for instance, I would immediately present her with an exercise. "All right, translate this into English," I'd say. "If you understand what you just read, you should be able to do this." Then I'd wait patiently for her to come up with the answer. If her answer was wrong, I wouldn't tell her where the mistake was. "You don't understand, do you? Read the grammar again," I'd say, and send her to the textbook over and over.

If she still couldn't do it, I said, "Naomi, how will you get anywhere if you can't do something that

simple? How old are you now? You've been corrected again and again on the same point, and you still don't understand. Where's your head? Miss Harrison says you're bright, but I don't think so at all. you couldn't do this, you'd be at the bottom of the class if you were in school." In the end I'd get too zealous and start shouting at her. Naomi would puff out her cheeks in a pout and start sobbing.

Normally, we were the happiest, most loving of couples—I laughed whenever she laughed, and we never quarreled. But when the time came for her English review, the mood darkened and became suffocating for both of us. Once a day, I'd lose my temper and she'd sulk. Cheerful until a moment before, suddenly we'd be sitting rigidly, staring each other down with hostile eyes. I'd forget my original desire to make her into a fine woman; frustrated by my own ineffectiveness, I'd begin to find her exasperating. If she'd been a boy, I might well have lost my temper and hit her. As it was, I was always shouting "idiot!" at her. Once I even rapped her on the forehead with my knuckles. Her reaction was to be perverse. She wouldn't respond even when she knew the answer. Fighting back the tears that streamed down her cheeks, she sat there as silent as a stone. Once she fell into this contrariness mood, she was amazingly stubborn, and it wasn't in her nature to back down. In the end I'd give up and leave the matter unresolved.

Then, one day, the following happened. I'd told her repeatedly that the present participle ("doing," "going," and the like) has to be preceded by the verb "to be," but she couldn't grasp it. She was still making mistakes like "I going" and "He making." "Idiot!" I shouted again and again. I made myself hoarse explaining the various forms of "going," including the tenses—past, future, future perfect, and past perfect. To my astonishment, she didn't understand any of it. She'd write "He will going" and "I had going." In a rage, I cried, "Idiot! What an idiot! How many times do you have to be told that you can't say 'will going' and 'have going'? If you don't understand, then we'll keep at it until you do. I won't let you go until you can do it right, even if we have to stay up all night." Violently I thrust the pencil and notebook back at her. Naomi had gone pale. Her lips pressed tightly together, she glared at me from her down-turned face. Suddenly she grabbed the notebook, tore it in half and threw it on the floor. Then she fixed those frightening eyes on me again, as if to bore a hole in my face.

"What do you think you're doing!" Taken aback by the brute ferocity of her stare, I needed a moment to collect myself. "You're feeling rebellious, are you? 'Who wants to study?' you're thinking. 'I'll study hard,' you said. 'I'll be a fine woman.' Have you changed your mind? Why did you tear up the notebook? Apologize. If you don't apologize, I'm through with you! Get out of this house today!"

Naomi remained stubbornly silent, her face white as a sheet. A faint smile played around her lips, as though she were going to cry.

"All right, don't apologize. Get out. Get out, right now!" Nothing short of this would make an impression on her, I thought, and so I stood up, gathered several pieces of her clothing and rolled them into a bundle. I brought my pocketbook from the second floor and took out two ten-yen notes. "Naomi," I said, thrusting it all at her. "I've put a few of your things in this bundle. Take it and go back to Asakusa tonight. And here's twenty yen. It's not much, but it'll do for the time being. I'll work out the details in a few days, and I'll send the rest of your things tomorrow. . . . Well? Naomi, why don't you say something?"

Despite her defiant look, she was still a child after all. Flinching at my determination, she hung her head ruefully and seemed to shrink in on herself.

"You're stubborn, but once I've said what I did, I'm not going to let it go. If you think you're in the wrong, then apologize. If you don't want to, then go home. Make up your mind. Are you going

apologize? Or are you going back to Asakusa?"

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She shook her head.

"Then you don't want to go back?"

She shook her head again.

"Will you apologize?"

She nodded.

"In that case, I'll forgive you. Let's have a proper bow of apology."

She pressed her hands reluctantly to the table, but she still seemed to be mocking me as she made a careless little bow, her eyes averted.

Whether it had been there from the beginning or was a result of my spoiling her, her insolent, willful nature was clearly getting worse as the days went by. Or perhaps I'd let it pass as girlish charm when she was still fifteen or sixteen, and now that she was older it was proving more than I could handle. When she'd been fretful and demanding before, she'd always submitted tamely to a little scolding; but these days she'd start sulking as soon as anything displeased her. When she sobbed, she was still appealing; but at times, however fiercely I scolded her, she'd provoke me by playing the innocent, and take aim at me with her sharp upward glare. If there's such a thing as animal electricity, Naomi's eyes had it in abundance. It seemed beyond belief that they were a woman's eyes. Glittering, sharp, and frightful, they still brimmed with a certain mysterious allure. And sometimes when she shot her angry glance at me, I felt a shudder pass through my body.



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