

# White and Purple

by SATA Ineko

Translated by Samuel Perry

Winner of the William F. Sibley Memorial Translation Prize, 2010

We had cut our conversation short, my guest and I, as we listened silently to the three o'clock news drifting in from the living room. "Oh, it's the news," Ōsawa Yoshiko had said, whereupon our conversation suspended itself quite naturally, I tilting my face slightly toward the living room, and Ōsawa Yoshiko fixing her line of vision on the garden as we listened. Sinking into silence at the sound of the news, it was not as though the topic of our conversation was about to alter its direction.

Once the broadcast ended and the announcer began introducing the next program, the radio in the living room abruptly cut off, and in its stead came the same announcer's voice echoing loudly but indistinctly from somewhere else beyond the bushes outside. Ōsawa Yoshiko said nothing of what we had just heard on the news, but instead turned up her gaze ever so slightly toward the sky.

"Is that the call of a wild cuckoo?" she ventured.

The flowers had fallen by now from the chestnut tree, whose foliage had already grown flush with the eaves. A single black cloud had stretched itself across the overcast sky, making for a curious mix of colors, dark but beautiful. Just below, a low grove of oaks and chestnuts hid itself amongst a green canopy of trees, their slender black trunks standing out in contrast to the others. And somewhere in their midst was that wild cuckoo, making its distinctive call: *bau-bau gu-ruu-ruu*.

With an elegant silk sash of the striped Hakata style, Yoshiko wore a single-layer kimono of a brownish hue, its creases showing crisply on the shoulders. Her collar and sash had been wrapped as tightly as possible, giving her the appearance of being rather prim and proper, but at the same time make her look like a young boy dressed in work clothes with tightly fitted sleeves. Yoshiko's dark skin and firmly-set face, the seemingly confident purse of her lips, and those constantly shifting eyes—fixing themselves on her interlocutor only to suddenly shift away—all suggested the cleverness of a professional mischief-maker, but also left one with the impression of a woman who was rather unkind. This may be attributed in part to the blunt candor for which

'Saga natives' are well known, but to me, as someone whom she occasionally visited during her college years, having come from the same hometown as she, this particular impression was far stronger now than it ever had been a decade before.

With her eyes averted, she began to speak.

"It was such a beautiful town, you know. More a village than a town, I guess, but it was ever so lovely."

Whenever she spoke, it was a habit of hers to look away from her addressee, though I do not mean to suggest she appeared to be melancholic. On the contrary, she possessed a very fine sense of humor, which she employed quite frequently. Whenever she said something light-hearted, however, she never looked her addressee straight in the eye. And for that reason one always felt as though her pleasantries were employed as a means of avoiding some other topic of conversation. The tone of her voice as she began to speak once again was now anything but humorous. Picking up from where our conversation had previously broken off, she suddenly turned serious, so I held my peace and waited for her to continue.

I suppose it's rather odd for me to be speaking now about how lovely the scenery is in the villages over there. But let me I assure you, this 'rather odd' feeling is something that I've always been keenly aware of. In fact, the last thing I want to do is set myself up for anyone's sarcasm, which is why I've even made it a rule never to speak about what's going on over there when I'm in the office. I also know that it hardly suffices to preface anything I can possibly say with this kind of explanation.

But, you see, every time I listen to the radio, I can't help thinking about what the villages must look like now. The announcer just mentioned Suwŏn, didn't he? Well, it's actually just a small village, just a farming village scattered with the ruins of ancient palace walls. The Suwŏn I remember was such a quiet, lovely place, surrounded by the elegant traces of a Yi Dynasty long gone by. The palace walls themselves, I remember, were barely half-standing—as though they were simply lying asleep beneath the brilliant, early-summer sun. Even in their state of ruin they seemed to suggest something far grander than the tranquility of their final resting place, the authority perhaps that the palace once commanded long, long ago. The tall, wide flights of stone stairs, the lookout towers with curved roofs rising several floors higher, and the brick enclosure of the palace itself—these had all been built in preparation for something approaching from far below. I can almost see my two friends and I sightseeing there one Sunday afternoon. We're perched atop the ancient walls of P'aldal Gate, and except for the vast sky soaked with the golden rays of the mid-day sun, there isn't another living soul to be seen. I remember the palace walls being lush with summer grasses, and how even the insects were singing. Half-destroyed though they were, the walls stretched far out into the distance. Off on the embankments there were pine trees sending up branches high into the air, where they seemed to swim against the sky. From high atop the palace walls even the village huts were visible down below, their thatched roofs standing out like so many turtle shells, flat and round amidst the low canopy of trees.

I remember the Grand Vermillion Gate, the Willow and Blossom Viewing Pavilion and many other buildings, located close to the village proper or even within the village limits.<sup>1</sup> But some of the other pavilions, somewhat shy of such splendor, seemed to appear almost out of nowhere in the midst of the surrounding green fields. This made for a setting that was strangely

---

<sup>1</sup> Hwahong-mun; Panghwasyu-chŏng.

serene. I remember the newly planted rice patties, their seedlings swaying softly in the breeze, and the white herons making their slow descent into the light green fields, folding their wings only as they made contact suddenly with ground. I'd heard that Suwŏn was famous for its many herons, but there were actually flocks of them gathered atop the upper branches of the tall pines. When they soared gently through the air, their pure white feathers showing crisply against the clear blue sky, they somehow reminded us of works of folk art—almost as though the birds themselves were painting us a living portrait of beauty itself.

Even the grander buildings like the Grand Vermillion Gate weren't without their own connection to the ordinary lives of the local villagers. One time we happened to climb up the flight of stone stairs next to the gate, and at the top we found a wide pavilion with expansive views stretching out in every direction. Its roof was supported by decaying pillars, peeling with old paint, and inside we came across two young girls, no more than 10 years old, playing ball. They were wearing white *chogori* and peach-colored *ch'ima*, and one of the girls had a red ribbon tied to the tip of her long braid of hair.<sup>2</sup> You know, I can still remember that red ribbon bouncing up and down as the girl bounced her ball. At the time, I think it came as a shock for us to realize that the song these girls were singing was a Japanese tune: *Signing a treaty . . . at Port Arthur . . . and Kaesŏng*. It was the same tune about General Nogi that we ourselves had once sung while playing with beanbags as little kids.<sup>3</sup> I wouldn't say it was unusual to come across something like this—in fact I'd say such encounters were quite common. But my friend and I were so enchanted by the Yi dynasty ruins surrounding us that when we recognized the song to be General Nogi's it must have somehow etched itself into our minds.

Since I was working in the Business Department of the Railroad Bureau in the Office of the Governor General, I myself wasn't especially interested in the daily lives of Koreans. After graduating from an elite woman's college, as you well know, I was obliged to return to my hometown in Kyūshū, where I ended up working for two or three years at a local school. But I was fortunate enough to meet someone there, through whose good offices I found myself moving by sheer chance to Keijō.

In the beginning I'd expected something far more different from what I was used to, and it was quite disappointing to find the city of Keijō to be just like any other large city in Japan. Nor was my everyday life in Keijō all that different from my life in Japan. I rented the second floor of a Japanese family's house in Motomachi and commuted to the Railroad Bureau in Yongsan. So on the surface of things, everyday life for me was really quite similar to what it had been on the mainland—the 'mainland' being, of course, what everyone over there called Japan at the time. But, you know, it's also true that having moved to Keijō I did somehow feel quite liberated. Perhaps it has something to do with my own situation, feeling something of a hayseed amongst my fellow Japanese, but in comparison to my life back home, where I worked as a teacher at an all-girls school, I had a job in Keijō that actually brought me out into society. Though I'd found Keijō to be like any old Japanese city when I first arrived, the city too came to seem more and more Korean as I grew accustomed to it. Even those bare northern peaks behind

---

<sup>2</sup> *Chogori* are Korean blouses, *ch'ima* Korean skirts.

<sup>3</sup> This song by Okuno Jun'ichi and Sasaki Nobutsuna, entitled "The Meeting at Suishiei," appears in several elementary school textbooks of the pre-WWII period. An Army general at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, General Nogi (Count Nogi Maresuke, 1849-1912) and his wife famously committed suicide after the death of Emperor Meiji, a suicide that was celebrated as a traditional act of *junshi*, whereby a loyal samurai followed his lord to the grave.

the Office of the Governor General I came to see with brand new eyes. The mountains now seemed more like white coral—solid and yet beautiful at the same time—as they stretched on and on, encircling the city. To me, the plain white clothing that Koreans always wore seemed to harmonize so naturally with the white color of those distant peaks.

But, you know, I can still recall something that happened to me once, on a Keijō-bound train running along the Han River.

“Pew! Can’t you move over there?” It was the voice of a young girl, who had spoken without a moment’s hesitation. At the time her words didn’t come off as particularly arrogant or cruel to me. And the man, who had just settled down beside this group of schoolgirls, simply stood up again and walked away. With only the faint trace of a smirk on his face, meant for no one else but himself, he strode up to the front of the car dressed in a pair of short pants and a traditional Korean jacket stained yellow with grime. The girls glanced up at him as he walked away, but for no more than an instant. They quickly resumed their animated chatter as any schoolgirls might do, as though the incident had left little impression on the man who’d walked away, or any impact whatsoever on the words the girls were now exchanging. The entire incident seemed to play out so very naturally.

For seven years I lived in Keijō until we were repatriated at the end of the war and I can tell you this sort of scene was all too common. It’s only one of many such memories I have of Keijō—though at the time it was nothing more to me than a bit of local color. I myself was far too focused on living life on my own. And before I knew it, the challenges of living alone as a woman—living overseas at that—had led me to become proud of myself, and even stubborn, I suppose. I was conscious of being proud in relation to my Japanese compatriots. But what transformed that pride into arrogance was that same feeling that crept up upon us before we even knew it—that *Pew! Can’t you move over there!* I was hardly alone in feeling proud of myself in relation to those who had come from the mainland. And I like to think now that this had something to do with the hand that fate dealt me. You see, no one ever understood how serious a person I was during my college years, or even after. Whenever I explained to people, for example, that I’d come to Korea because I’d wanted to live more freely, they would always misinterpret my words to mean something, well, rather shady. Not everyone of course believed that every unmarried woman living abroad had a skeleton in her closet, but time and time again I found people giving me the once-over in that belittling way they often do. Perhaps it is less so now than it once was in the past, but for about thirty years or so, ever since Japan had annexed Korea, the idea of someone going “all the way to Korea” gradually took on quite a negative connotation, making any acknowledgment of the trip itself into a subtle marker of past experiences. We mainlanders followed a tacit set of rules amongst ourselves, whereby we made a show of our own accomplishments only to look down on those of others—while pretending the whole time to be the very best of friends. And because of all these unpleasant feelings, whenever we found ourselves face-to-face with Koreans, we ended up giving free reign to our contempt and our sense of superiority, almost as though it were a matter of self-preservation. I’d even hazard to guess that all Japanese in the colony were plagued by self-disparaging feelings that transformed into an expression of superiority toward Koreans. It must have also been a sign of how afraid we were—in some sort of calculated and yet uninformed way—in response to the deeply rooted resistance of the Koreans around us. Perhaps even those schoolgirls on the train were projecting an aspect of this kind of self-awareness when they said things like:

“Pickled brats like us, in any case, can’t get hitched back on the mainland.”

Pickled pollock roe was one of Korea's well-known exports, and the term 'pickled brat' came to refer to any Japanese who had been born in Korea or anyone who had grown up there. It was precisely this sense of self-awareness that led to a feeling of superiority toward Koreans, especially on the part of the 'pickled brats.'

I myself was focused on constructing a shell around my daily existence and was only so conscientious about my work as I needed to be toward that end. So when I interacted with people at work, I suppose I tended to be somewhat indifferent. I don't think my attitude altered significantly when it came to the Koreans I worked with.

The only woman among my Korean colleagues was Den Teiki. Now, I say colleague, but it wasn't as though the two of us were doing the same kind of work. Den Teiki was hired to help produce the tourist magazine published by our sales department, which no doubt speaks to the extraordinary nature of her own career as a woman in Korea. Having traveled to Japan and graduated from a specialized training college for women there, Den Teiki was a true intellectual. She kept her hair casually tied up in a bun at the back of her head and she had typically Korean facial features—a round face, and a broad, flat bridge on a small nose. Her mouth was firmly set as though she were clenching her teeth and her eyes were always narrowed; her brows were habitually pinched together as though she were keeping something bottled up inside her. It wasn't a cheerful expression, to be sure, but it seemed little else than the natural expression of her innermost self, and it didn't leave one with the impression that she was particularly somber.

Den Teiki at one point seemed to have sought out my friendship. The naked earnestness with which she addressed me, however, disagreed with me. I was more the type to animate a situation with a bit of humor, and quickly accomplish whatever task was at hand. As a means of resisting against my male colleagues, I'd developed this tactic well before I was even aware of it. Though I say "resisting" all I mean to imply is that this attitude of mine proved to be an effective means of gaining a certain level of recognition amongst my male peers. I'd become a favorite of my section chief, and in a way served as his personal secretary, making arrangements for special receptions and attending to all the necessary preparations for the occasional visitor and for tourists coming from the mainland. I also became friendly with the section chief's wife and used to accompany her when she shopped for clothes in Honmachi or at the Mitsukoshi Department Store.

Our department chief was a well-built man with strong, broad shoulders, and while his features were delicate and, constitutionally, he was rather faint of heart, he had come from Hiroshima more than a decade earlier to join the Office of the Governor General. He had gradually worked his way up to his present position. He also seemed to take some pride in having a subordinate like me who had graduated from an elite women's college.

He once asked me, "Ōsawa, you're not one of those 'single forever' types, are you? Got any plans for the future?" It was in his nature to be like this—half paternal and half provoking.

"Spinsterhood isn't exactly fashionable, you know. So don't you go teasin' me anymore. . . ." I retorted playfully in the Kyushu patois we shared in common.

"Hmm . . . I suppose you're right," he replied, this time with all the pathos of a truly concerned parent.

"Oh, please. Enough of your 'pity the poor little girl' routine. It's just plain rude. I'll get married if and when I please! And when I do, you can rest assured that I shall abandon this job and you along with it . . . No offense intended, of course."

Such was the nature of our interactions. But when it came to Den Teiki, she would simply assail me with questions about classical Japanese literature or about writers like Shimazaki Tōson. I hate to say this to you of all people, but you know I'm no literary wondergirl.

"Miss Ōsawa, might I ask you who you prefer, Murasaki Shikibu or Sei Shōnagon? I've been told that one's preference reveals something about one's true character."<sup>4</sup>

Den Teiki's Japanese was so advanced that she had practically mastered all her voiced consonants. It was a habit of hers to employ rather refined language with a feminine inflection.

"Goodness, those two? We've got pioneers of our own, don't we!" I replied light-heartedly.

"Have you by any chance read *The Tale of Genji*?"

"And what would I want to read that for! With all its 'Thus spake his lordship' and 'So-and-so attended upon his Excellency.' You know, I remember back in high school a friend of mine lent me a copy when I had my appendix removed. But I only started reading it because I was stuck in bed the whole time. After a while all I wanted to do was flip through the gossip pages of a newspaper. I'm sure I gave up on it well before the young Murasaki chapters."

"Do you suppose it's necessary to read classic works of literature?"

Regardless of my own reply, Den Teiki persisted in asking these questions that only she found interesting.

"I'm not really sure."

"Well, I myself find the sensibilities of Sei Shōnagon to be quite splendid."

Once the conversation had taken this turn in direction, the expression on Den Teiki's face seemed newly animated. Her experience studying in Japan was something that she no doubt cherished. And I imagine she could have hardly come across anyone in her homeland, with whom she might have engaged in the sort of conversation that stroked her ego. This, I now understand.

"Would you by any chance have read Shimazaki Tōson's *When the Cherries Ripen*?"

Den Teiki had seized on an opportunity that she was now loath to abandon. Had I still been a student, I might have at least shown some interest if asked such a question. But our desks were lined up side-by-side, mind you, and Den Teiki kept me in her relentless grip like this on a daily basis.

Den Teiki always dressed in Korean clothing. And I myself always wore a kimono. It must say something about my personality that I refused to wear Western clothes, but for Den Teiki, as indeed for any Korean woman, the decision to wear Korean clothes spoke to an altogether different state of mind, I imagine. As I've already mentioned, Den Teiki often knit her brows as though she were keeping something bottled up inside her, but never did she behave in a servile way towards me, or consequently, act competitively. This is why, being somewhat indifferent even to my fellow Japanese, I was no more invested in her than I was in anyone else in the office, nor was I particularly inclined to be sympathetic toward her. This was the essence of our relationship.

For my own part I tried to enjoy the single life to the fullest, and in just the way I pleased. Once, it happened that my heart was stirred by a man. He was a painter from Tokyo who had

---

<sup>4</sup> Murasaki Shikibu, author of *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*), and Sei Shōnagon, author of *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*), are perhaps the most well-known women writers from Japan's Heian Period (794 to 1185). Their works were rediscovered and popularized in the 1930s when the state turned to its classical traditions to reconstruct a national identity in the context of Japanese imperialism.

come at the invitation of the Railroad Bureau and was spending his time wandering through famous sites and cities on the Korean peninsula. His travels brought him back to Keijō on several occasions, and whenever he passed through town, I made reservations for him at the Chosŏn Hotel, helped him decide on his next destination, and took care of all the arrangements for each leg of his journey. This was a rare pleasure for me, one that eventually moved my heart. The painter himself treated me with the kind of tenderness and respect—and a genuine interest in me as a person—that I'd never once in my life experienced before. My heart would start pounding whenever I approached his room in the Chosŏn Hotel. And if we happened to be standing beside each other on the ivy-covered Hwanggungu Pavilion in the hotel garden, I would lose myself in the sweetest of reveries. On several occasions he invited me to go on evening walks with him. We also did things like attend the Korean theater together at the playhouse in Chongno. Surrounded by only Koreans in that tiny theater—without any other Japanese around—I remember taking on a superior air and thinking I might even get away with acting in the most vulgar way with him. When he told me he wanted to visit a *kisaeng*, whom he'd once had the occasion to meet, I went so far as to accompany him to a traditional Korean restaurant. Dressed in a blue silk blouse, the *kisaeng* we visited sat there Korean-style with one knee raised beneath her bright white skirt as he sketched her. While I myself sat to the side on a round rush mat, twisting around to catch a glimpse of his pencil racing across his pad, the white, almost transparent, face of that *kisaeng* somehow lodged itself in my mind. In another room there was a party going on, I remember, and we could hear the *pishiri, pishiri* beat of a drum being pounded so vigorously, as well as the violent tones of a verse sung with the primal voice of what I'd assumed to be an old geisha. It certainly wasn't one of those well-known plaintive tunes such as *Arirang*, but rather something rough, almost violent. And there was something about those vibrations that helped to stir the feelings inside me. Having fanned the flames of my heart in this way, however, this man eventually decided to return to the mainland. He'd always had this way of staring straight into my eyes when he spoke to me, but perhaps that look on his face was all too common among people who spend time abroad. In fact, the whole affair might have been entirely in my head after all. But the damage was done, and I eventually lost the capacity to develop such feelings for the people around me. Eventually I hardened even more, and I spend all my time traveling and shopping for nice clothes.

Now, I assure you, all I ever wanted to do was to tell you about the beautiful scenery in Korea today. I know I've taken a path through life that's been nothing short of irresponsible and arrogant, and yet my memories of Korea make it seem so very lovely to me. Korea truly is such a lovely place, you see. And I've tried to embrace, in my own quiet way, what its ancient history has left behind for us, a part of which I think still lives and breathes inside my soul. Once, I remember mentioning to Den Teiki that I'd be going on a tour of Mt. Kŭmgang, whereupon she turned to me with that typical expression on her face—the same expression as ever—saying,

“All Koreans hope to make one trip to Mt. Kŭmgang before they die. I haven't been there yet myself. But I'm sure it's beautiful.”

I didn't need Den Teiki to tell me that it was the hope of all Koreans to see Mt. Kŭmgang at least once in their lifetime. Indeed, whenever Japanese living in Korea boasted about the beauty of Mt. Kŭmgang to tourists coming from Japan, they always referred to this very fact—as though it somehow served as evidence to support their own claims on it. When I think about it now, I can certainly see how the Japanese foreigners referred to this ardent Korean desire simply as a way of boasting about all the sites on the peninsula that they now believed to be their own. I

can also understand how unjust this was, and how cruel, though I must admit I can only say this with the benefit of hindsight. It was only after I found myself struck by the reality of repatriation that I realized for the first time that *well, yes, of course, Korea is a country of its own*. I believe I just described the expression on Den Teiki's face as being 'the same as ever.' This, too, was simply a matter of me being accustomed to it, for I hadn't the slightest interest in probing its meaning. When she told me, *I haven't been there yet myself*, there wasn't of course the slightest trace of jealousy on her face, or even the suggestion of sarcasm or indignation for that matter. It was just that she was perpetually holding something back when she addressed other people, and consequentially this became a natural part of her normal, everyday expression. It never occurred to me that this 'something' had already settled itself into the way she presented herself on a daily basis.

For me and my friends, our own trip to Mt. Kūmgang was all about the hiking. A friend of mine from girls' school in Kyūshū had married an official in the Office of the Governor General and subsequently moved to Seoul, and I found myself accompanying her and two married friends on what turned out to be a rather boisterous trip to Mt. Kūmgang. Having come all the way to Korea we might as well see the place, or so that was the idea. When we finally started climbing along the stream at the base of the mountain, we first noticed a house built in the gorge on the opposite side of the stream. And just below it was a young woman dressed in bright white Korean clothes, who had come down to the stream to wash her rice. The mountain was looming in front of us, but in that calm, wide ravine the sight of this young woman in bright white Korean clothes, crouching at the side of the river to wash her rice, was truly a peaceful and lovely scene. As we traveled further along into the gorge, we unexpectedly caught sight of the rooftops of an entire temple compound. The way the vividly colored buildings suddenly revealed themselves mid-way up the mountain—surrounded on all sides by trees—was so breathtaking that it somehow felt like we were seeing them in dream. Its gently rising stone stairway had been beaten by the wind, rain and sun, and even the surface of its stonework bore the color of this slow, but sure, decay. Its two-tiered gate, its main hall and covered passageways all seemed to evoke a certain elegance with their multicolored and detailed brushwork, an elegance that had faded over the years into the complex beauty of a patina that was almost monochromatic. When we looked up above us into the gate tower, we saw a monk dressed in white linen sitting there cross-legged, tranquilly looking down upon us as we climbed the stone stairs. The peonies blooming in the courtyard, at the very height of their splendor, boasted a brilliance of color that was strangely out of place against the subdued hues of the buildings surrounding them.

As we took our leave from Changan Temple and began climbing once again through the mountain ravine toward Manp'okdong, there were squirrels scrambling over the rocks and jumping from one tree to another. On the mountain trail we caught sight of a woman ahead of us leaning on the arm of a Korean mountaineer, whom we proceeded to ridicule.

"Looks like someone's out fishin'. Out on a date with a mountain Gook!"

We made a point of using our native dialect whenever we felt particularly carefree.

Den Teiki's hometown was Kaesōng. But her family apparently no longer owned a house there. Kaesōng was a town that had aged quite tragically. The rise and fall of the Koryō Dynasty had left behind its traces even on the city's stones, stained as they were with the blood of many a loyal retainer. The Namdae Gate temple bell still sat atop a crumbling stone foundation, from whence it tolled its plaintive knell, hidden deep inside an antique pavilion. The village houses, too, visible to us from atop the pavilion, were at the time bathed in sunshine, but they seemed to



us more washed-out and withered by the rays of the sun. Manwöldaе itself, or what was left of the Koryö Palace, sat atop a fairly high hill, while small, graceful stone stairways and foundation stones remained here and there, all but abandoned to a thick blanket of wild grasses, and to a sadness that seemed to speak of long-forgotten dreams. Kaesöng had preserved all of this history into the present day and indeed the city felt as though its very survival depended on this pride in its antiquity.

*Not a soul out in the sunshine?* I'd wondered that day we visited, but it turned out that an archery competition was being held between the city's low hills. The wisely armed archers—strapping men each one of them—were shooting arrows using short bows not half the length of Japanese bows. In the rugged faces of these brawny men was something reminiscent of the heroes of ancient tales. These hills carried a history of warriors practicing the ancient techniques of the bow and arrow, and this history now lingered on even in the faces of these archers. Flapping between the pines, there were also long flags erected, each a different color, it seemed, to represent the different teams. There were white, red, even black flags, all quite suggestive of an ancient warrior painting. It was hardly a proper gathering—no more than a small group of men in the mountains—but on this day not a single one of them was dressed in Western clothes. The elders even wore traditional hats and carried long pipes in their hands. Once an arrow was released by an archer on one hillside, there came from the other side the *do-do-don* sound of a drum if it hit its mark. When the sound of the drum sounded through the valley, the flag bearer, sitting on the ground, would wave his flag and let out a long, drawn-out call, *yaaa*. They took no notice of the Japanese women who happened to be scattered amongst the crowd.

After I returned from Kaesöng, Den Teiki asked me for my impressions.

“And how did you find Kaesöng?”

“Kind of quiet, no? I'd even say quite gray. Still, I'd say it's the most Korean place I've ever been.”

Given that Den Teiki was a fan of literature, it was rather careless of me to let these words slip. When I said that Kaesöng was rather gray, I meant not only the city of Kaesöng itself but in fact all of the old sites where traces of Korea's ancient past still remained, whether this was Kyöngju or Pulguksa Temple, or even the washed-out brilliance of the temples on Mt. Kümgaᅅg. My impression of all of these places was, in a word, gray. I was thinking of the low-roofed commoner houses and the sight of barefoot old peasants, wearing sweat-soiled clothes and pants rolled up to their knees, but donning elegant hats on their heads all the while. These were all, in my eyes, gray. It wasn't so much that these things appeared to us as quintessentially Korean; in fact I wonder if we didn't actually find pleasure in trying to see them in this way. The streets of Pyöngyang, of course, which reeked with the body odor of laborers, and the long line of factory smokestacks along the Taedong River were far more representative of present day Korea than the ancient sites of Rangnaᅅg or the splendid ruins of Yi Dynasty architecture. And it's not as though we didn't know this at the time.

It was unusual, indeed quite rare, for Den Teiki to do so, but upon hearing my impressions she knit her brows even more sadly than usual and spoke with words that almost gushed.

“Gray, do you say? Does Kaesöng truly seem gray to you? That makes me very sad,” she said, smiling faintly before going on.

“For me, Kaesöng is white and purple. You see, I used to sit alone on Manwöldaе when I was a young girl long ago, and I often lost myself in my dreams there, dreams of the past and of

the future. Kaesöng is so very beautiful. It makes me sad that you see it as gray. For me, Kaesöng will always be white and purple.”

At the time I sympathized with Den Teiki, though it was rather unlike me to do so. I sympathized with the love these women had for their homeland, and with their desire to see its beautiful colors. White and purple—even I couldn’t altogether disagree.

Den Teiki was born into what must have been a distinguished family in Kaesöng. What sort of dreams had she embraced at Manwöldae, as she traced the stone foundations of those palace ruins rank with weeds? There was something rather self-evident about her choice of white and purple, and I wonder if her plans for the future had first taken shape at Manwöldae as well. Once, I remember, Den Teiki’s work brought her on a visit to the home of an upper-class Korean family, and I asked her take me along with her. The house was located near Changdök Palace, on a residential street lined with low earthen walls and tall pine trees casting their shadows over the road. When we entered the front gate, we found that the house was constructed in the triangular style, built with a kitchen leading to a sitting room, then a reception room, and then finally the inner quarters. Just inside the gate, where large jars and pots were stored, there was something of a small courtyard. The lady of the house was a widow close to sixty years old, but she had full, soft cheeks, which had been whitely powdered, and there was something about her that seemed dynamic, and yet at the same time fully at ease. It was in a heated reception hall, decorated with ornamental boxes and small bureaus inlaid with mother-of-pearl, that I distinctly recall this grand lady nodding in our direction. Here, Den Teiki was using the language of her homeland. And as I sat there left completely out of the conversation, listening to the motley of Korean words echoing around me, I found myself exceedingly disinterested. Something about their conversation also suggested that they were talking about me, which cast a chill over my feelings toward even this grand lady who continued to nod at Den Teiki’s words and occasionally glance in my direction.

On the way back to the office I said something to Den Teiki.

“We haven’t got a clue when it comes to understanding Korean.”

“Well, I suppose there’s not much need for you to learn it,” replied Den Teiki.

For some reason I felt compelled to accommodate her feelings, so I replied, “And your Japanese is so perfect, Miss Den.”

“Oh, it’s hardly perfect,” she replied almost instantly, as though with a well-rehearsed reply.

“I don’t believe the Japanese language will ever be a perfect fit for us. But at the same time, the Korean language somehow seems imperfect as well. Putting pen to paper makes it all the more obvious, you know. It’s simply impossible for us to write in either Korean or Japanese.”

“But don’t you get by on an everyday level? Isn’t that good enough?”

I wasn’t in the least worried that my own words came off as rather rough with their heavy Kyūshū accent, so I could hardly sympathize with the point she was now making.

“Get by? I wonder.”

Den Teiki cast her eyes downward and walked along in silence. She hung her hands in front of her, clasping onto her handbag all the while. Then she pressed her shoulders gently forward, striking the perfect pose of a modest, female Oriental. The cord of her bow, tied at the side of her chest, hung down below the hem of her Korean blouse. The swelling nostrils of her tiny, flat nose, the purse of her lips, her tightly-clenched teeth—even the way her hair was tightly

drawn back exposing her ears—this all made the small shape of Den Teiki’s head seem so much more apparent.

Den Teiki then looked up with an intense, almost glaring look in her eyes, and without the slightest hesitation, or display of reserve, she began speaking with a single-minded passion.

“But you see I have always wanted to become a writer. And I’ve always wanted to write novels. I have been trying to write one in fact for a very long time now. But when I try to describe things correctly, or try to capture nuances of the human mind, I often find myself at a loss for words. Which language should I even write in? I often wonder, when the Japanese words won’t come out gracefully and the Korean words hang there on the page half-finished. I then tell myself, with desperation, that it isn’t simply a question of words for me, but a matter of my very own self, somehow suspended there in mid-air. To this day, I often find myself in tears when I ask myself, how on earth shall I ever become a writer?”

“You don’t say!” I replied, in my typically tongue-in-cheek manner. And yet, *You don’t say!* is exactly what I was thinking at the time. It wasn’t the fact that Den Teiki was losing her own language that I found so extraordinary, but rather the way she spoke with such frankness about wanting to become a writer. This is what accounted for my light-heartedness.

“Become an aspiring novelist, Miss Den? Now that’s what I call ambition! The thought would never have crossed our minds.”

Den Teiki drew her gaze far up toward the sky. Was she listening to what I was saying, or was she lost in her own train of thought? Her line of vision wandered, suggesting she was in fact deaf to my words.

It’s always been a bad habit of mine not to take things people say very seriously, and had I been with a fellow Japanese friend of mine in the same situation, I think I would have responded in exactly the same manner. Though I wonder if by saying so I’m simply trying to defend my own behavior . . . In any case, my light-hearted manner, finding itself rebuffed, managed to spoil our conversation.

Japan at the time had been sending more and more so-called settler troupes into Manchuria and was in the process of expanding a variety of its enterprises there. These events coincided with intensified efforts to integrate Korea into a part of the Japanese mainland. The Name Order, for example, had just been put into effect, whereby Koreans were ordered to replace their own names with more Japanese-sounding ones. Japanese officials working in the provinces, thinking primarily of their own careers, essentially enforced this policy with an iron fist. And it seems as though this was a horrible insult to the Koreans. Even after marriage Koreans did not traditionally change their surnames. One’s wife would always carry the surname of her birth parents. Forcing Koreans to change their surnames was, under the circumstance, tantamount to the eradication of the traditional family, and a burning resistance to this policy seems to have inflamed the hearts of many Koreans.

Den Teiki (田貞姫) in fact followed through with the Name Order, and became Tamura Sadako (田村貞子). I imagine she thought it best to do so as a woman who’d had the chance to study in Japan and was now working in the Office of the Governor General. After changing her name, however, Den Teiki seemed to become even more irritable. Never before had she been overly humble toward us and thus never competitive. Quite on the contrary, she had from the very beginning considered herself an equal among her Japanese peers and had treated us accordingly. Perhaps she had adopted this self-consciousness attitude of equality while she was

attending school in Japan, and only upon returning to her motherland did she come to understand herself to be in a far more delicate situation. Once a new set of business cards were printed with her new Japanese name, Tamura Sadako, she presented me with one of them.

“The editor-in-chief was ever so kind to have given me this name.”

There was something dark, almost servile, about the way she spoke, which I’d never sensed in her words up until then. And from that point on, it seemed, she never once tried to get close to me as she’d done in the past. Though, honestly, I couldn’t have cared less.

I remember once, when on a matter of official business, I entered the office Den Teiki shared with her co-workers, and I found her arguing with a male journalist from the Japanese mainland.

“Oh, I’m afraid I must object. It’s just fine the way it is now. The style is the person, as they say. And here the style captures my very essence. If you cut it out, the writing will simply die.”

Her interlocutor was saying something to the effect that it wasn’t a matter of style, but rather a grammatical error. From this man’s perspective, here was a woman—a Korean woman at that—who was defying his judgment, and his eyes narrowed with irritation.

“Well, by all means please feel free to drop the piece entirely—I’m perfectly willing to accept that. As it happens I had straight As in grammar on the mainland, you see. Which makes all of this talk rather odd, don’t you think?”

Den Teiki straightened up the things on her desk with efficiency, then took her leave of the office. I placed my hands on the desk of the editor-in-chief, and turned my head around to watch her leave. My own reaction clearly speaks to how I identified with the general feeling of the editorial office, where almost everyone else was Japanese.

As Japan’s war effort expanded and grew into the so-called Greater East Asian War, the wartime regime intensified in Korea as well. Within the space of a single year the production of traditional Korean handicrafts—such as boxes inlaid with mother-in-pearl or decorated with metal fittings—was banned along with the sale of other beautiful things deemed luxury goods; consequentially, many shops experienced a precipitous drop in business.

I think I already mentioned how Den Teiki seemed to become more irritable after becoming Tamura Sadako in accordance with the Name Order. But as the wartime regime intensified the same kind of irritability surfaced in all aspects of life in Korea. It was something that gradually cast a shadow over us, just as the sky gradually becomes gray. The junior high student, for example, living in the house where I rented a second-floor room used to say things like this:

“Don’t you think Koreans are ungrateful? They rely on Japan for everything, but they refuse to cooperate whatsoever. That’s what my teacher tells us.”

I also heard what his mother said in reply:

“They’re Koreans, dear. What can you expect. . . ?”

This attitude on the part of the Japanese wasn’t especially related to the intensification of the war, or to the general change of air in Korea. The manner in which those schoolgirls on the train had turned to the man and said, *Pew! Can’t you move over there?* had been driven into them on a daily basis at school. It was the attitude of Koreans, rather, that was noticeably different, and changing the air of the times along with it.

Once, a relative of mine working in Manchuria made a pit stop in Keijō, and in the course of showing him around town I took him to Hwasin. Hwasin was a Korean-run department store

that catered to Koreans. Mitsukoshi was for Japanese, as was Hwasin for Koreans. Thinking that this relative of mine might want to pick up some Korean souvenirs, I'd made a point of bringing him to Hwasin. And hoping to begin the tour of the building, working our way downward from the top floors, we boarded the elevator. The elevator arrived at the second floor and then the third, and thinking that the next stop was perhaps the top floor, I asked the elevator attendant,

"Is this the top floor?"

Upon which the seventeen or eighteen year-old girl with rounded shoulders replied, "This is the rooftop."

"Rats, we came up to the rooftop. I don't think they have any souvenirs up here."

"You mean one of those little monkeys?" replied my cousin, upon which we burst out into laughter.

The elevator had now reached the rooftop, but just as soon as the girl opened the door, she suddenly shouted something and ran out of the elevator before any of the passengers could disembark. It was almost as though she were tearing herself away from us.

This was quite unexpected and only after collecting myself for a moment did I understand what she had actually shouted.

"How dare you laugh at me!" she'd said.

Only then did we realize that the girl's unexpected behavior had been an expression of defiance against us. She'd misunderstood what we were saying and mistaken our peal of laughter as a form of contempt. After the girl ran out of the elevator ahead of us, we made our way outside. The girl was squatting in a corner now, talking to a fellow employee. Both of them glared at us.

"How dare you laugh at me!" was an expression that any housewife might have used to scold her maid. I wonder if this girl, too, had felt the sting of these biting words spoken by a Japanese housewife.

"Scary, huh? These Koreans," said my cousin.

I also remember a gentle-mannered Korean woman, entering the Mitsukoshi Department Store with her child, when a fat, stern-faced woman approached her, looking the part of any wife of a government official.

"You people aren't welcome here. Now, go off to Hwasin," she said, standing firmly in place, as though determined to witness for herself this Korean woman taking her child out of the store.

"Well, if this is any indication, the Koreans *will* be hard to deal with when I get to Manchuria," said my cousin. When I think about it now, it seems utterly ridiculous the way we reacted.

In the Railroad Bureau, too, there was talk of how Korean employees had recently become difficult to manage. I had no way of knowing how things were amongst the Koreans themselves.

It was winter when it happened. There was no snow falling, but the fierce cold in Keijō was of the biting kind, and even mainlanders found it in themselves to praise Korea's traditional form of under-floor heating. When I arrived at work, rumors had already begun to circulate. Apparently Den Teiki had attempted suicide the night before.

"You don't say."

I wasn't someone to join in the gossip under circumstances such as these. What use was there in talking about the incident? But when the section chief arrived in the office and learned

of the rumors himself, he told me that I, being a woman, should pay her a visit in the hospital. She'd been admitted into a small clinic on a street near Pagoda Park.

Den Teiki was lying on a dirty bed, with a Korean woman sitting at her side. The middle-aged woman could very well have been the owner of the boarding house where Den Teiki stayed; she didn't seem to understand Japanese and only nodded when she saw me. Den Teiki was muttering something in her sleep. In order to learn more about her condition, I went to the reception desk and was told that she would be fine as long as she got through the day. She had occasionally come to, but truth be told nothing about her condition was quite certain. She appeared to have taken some combination of drugs, I was told.

The entire hospital reeked of a strange odor. Once again I entered the sick room. The woman attending her was staring into Den Teiki's face and speaking to her. From behind the woman, I too peered into Den Teiki's face. Though her eyes were now open, her gaze was blank, as though she weren't looking at anything in particular. Perhaps in reaction to the woman's words Den Teiki's eyes then shifted onto me, and widened. Almost instantly she turned her head away.

"Not her!" she shouted. "I can't stand her."

It's a funny way of putting it, but this was an unequivocal Declaration of Intent. These weren't the self-indulgent words of an invalid, but something far more lucid, even if the patient herself didn't know what she was really saying. Her state of unconsciousness had given way, in a flicker of clarity, to something that rose to the surface of her mind, expressing itself clear and free from impurity. And to me, it felt like a stinging slap across the face. Whether the woman attending Den Teiki understood what she had said or not, she alternatively shook her head and nodded in my direction.

Den Teiki began to say something under her breath. Then her voice suddenly gained intensity.

"I took the black pi-ills. I took the red pi-ills . . ." she drew out her final vowels like a first-grader reading from a textbook.

"Black . . . white . . . pur . . . ple . . ." she shouted, shifting suddenly in tone as she broke out into Korean. "Aa-an chekcho . . . aa-an chingsho"—this is what it all sounded like to my ears. As she shouted, Den Teiki threw up one of her arms and tossed it around violently in the air. The women tending to her trembled fearfully and tried to hold it down. Den Teiki was shaking her head violently now as she continued to rant on in her delirium. Her peculiar, delirious words were mostly Korean, but also scattered meaninglessly among them were Japanese words as well. She was screaming something out in Korean, when all of a sudden she shifted into Japanese. "I don't know . . . I don't know . . . I don't knooooow!" she cried, then switching back into Korean. Den Teiki drew herself back, her face now straining, now flushing red in color, her eyes staring out into space under tightly knit brows, her mouth moving tirelessly. The words "Okazaki-sensei" I manage to catch. She was perhaps recalling an experience she'd once had at a school in Japan.

"In any case, up until now I . . ." she continued, incomprehensively.

When she switched into Korean, her words were interspersed with what sounded like laughter, "Ha, ha, han." But then came a wordless cry, "Oh, oo-oh." Until finally she seemed to have exhausted herself completely, and settled back into a quiet slumber. Winter was well upon us, but her forehead now was soaked with sweat.

I myself was so alarmed by this course of events that I decided to quickly take my leave. I'm hardly the best judge of these matters, but something about the scene I'd witnessed didn't sit right with me. That said, my skepticism was still far less pronounced than was the sheer terror she'd instilled inside me with those bizarre, delirious words. It was much more than the cold air outside that sent shivers down my spine.

In the end Den Teiki managed to survive her ordeal, though she ended up resigning from her post at the Railroad Bureau. As it happened, I was out of the office the day she dropped in to say goodbye, and I never had the chance to meet Den Teiki again. I heard through the grapevine that she went home to her small village near Pyöngyang.

Well, here I've gone ahead and told this ghastly tale when all I really wanted to do was talk about the lovely scenery in Korea. Ever since repatriating to Japan I've managed to keep myself busy with work, you see, but nowadays I can't help thinking about how beautiful Korea was way back when. I have my own reasons for not talking about Korea where I'm working now. When I once mentioned in the office the nostalgia I still feel for Korea today, a young male colleague of mine, sitting beside me, turned strangely cold, almost mockingly so, as he addressed me.

"It must be awfully hard to forget the charms of living in the colonies, Miss Ösawa. I suppose it would be for anyone. But you can't ever go back there, you know, not even one last time. And even if you somehow managed to go back, it wouldn't be remotely like it was before."

"Oh, certainly not," I replied almost defensively. "I'm aware that it's impossible for me to return."

But I have to say that ever since coming back to Japan, I've always felt something inside of me that I find rather difficult to come to terms with. And I wonder if that's why I think of Den Teiki from time to time.

If I said this directly to Den Teiki, however, I can only imagine what she might say in reply.

"I'm afraid it would be rather difficult for you to understand," she'd probably say. "Yours is an entirely different case altogether."

Still, Den Teiki's country, Korea, was such a lovely place, you see, and that's really all I ever wanted to say.