

FETISHES AND PHILANDERERS: A
TRANSLATION OF TWO OF TANIZAKI'S EARLY
WORKS

by

CHRISTINA LEE

Hosea Hirata, Advisor

Kagawa Kiyomi, Reader

A senior honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in the Department of International
Literary and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Japanese

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Medford, Massachusetts

© Christina Lee

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Spring 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
I. Tanizaki in Tokyo	2
II. Beautiful Boy	7
III. Fumiko's Feet	12
TRANSLATION NOTES	16
TRANSLATED WORKS	17
"BEAUTIFUL BOY" (美男, 1916)	17
"FUMIKO'S FEET" (富美子の足, 1919)	36
WORKS CITED	70
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	71

INTRODUCTION

I. Tanizaki in Tokyo

With a writing career spanning over fifty years and a massive legacy of work encompassing short stories, essays, plays, and even translations of foreign and pre-modern works, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro (1886-1965) can easily be considered one of the most versatile, if not one of the greatest, Japanese writers of the modern age. A born and bred child of the lowtown Tokyo *shitamachi* neighborhood, Tanizaki first gained his literary bearings while balanced upon the cusp of the Meiji and Taisho Eras. His first short story “The Tattooer”(刺青 *shisei*), published in 1910, depicts a beautiful young woman’s transformation from a damsel in distress to sadistic goddess due to the horrific power of the tattoo forcefully inscribed upon her back¹. The piece served as nothing less than the young Tanizaki’s creative manifesto, combining the exoticized setting of distant Edo era Japan with his overflowing aesthetic sense to deliver a powerful statement on the transformative power of art, the bloodcurdling supremacy of beauty, and as famously stated in his opening sentence, “the noble virtue of frivolity”. This opening salvo of stylistic flair and literary talent earned Tanizaki no small amount of recognition early into his career, even garnering him the recognition of his creative idol, fellow writer Nagai Kafuu². However, Tanizaki was not content to merely reprise this success in his later works, and instead chose to explore a broad range of settings and ideas within his work, exhibiting the breadth of his proficiency as a writer.

¹ Trans. Howard Hibbett. Tanizaki Junichiro. *Seven Japanese Tales* (New York NY:1st Vintage International, 1996), page number.

² Ito, Ken K. *Visions of Desire : Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), .

Even a cursory glance at Tanizaki's collected works allows readers a glimpse at the evolution of his interests and ideas across the years: Early in his career Tanizaki demonstrated an early interest in the aesthetic flair and tantalizing secrets of Tokyo's merchant lowtown, especially in the old cultural loci of Asakusa and the red light districts, shown not only in "The Tattooer" but also "The Secret" (秘密 *Himitsu*, 1911)³, "The Children" (少年 *Shounen*, 1911)⁴, and "The Magician" (魔術師 *Majutsushi* 1917)⁵, which are either set in the lowtown itself or in fictive locations that bear resemblance to the area. Later changes in paradigm can be detected from works such as "A Night in Qinhuai" (秦淮の夜 *Shinwai no Yoru*, 1919)⁶ and "The Gourmet Club" (美食倶楽部 *Bishoku Kurabu*, 1919)⁷, in which the use of Chinese spaces, people, and objects as the subjects of exoticism and wonder show Tanizaki's interests drifting abroad in tandem with his own overseas travels. In the 1920's, Tanizaki set his sights even further than the neighboring country, and the dizzying, self-destructive embrace of westernization and the West is conveyed through the stories of modernized femme fatales in "Aguri" (青い花 *Aoi Hana*, 1922)⁸ and *Naomi* (痴人の愛 *Chijin no Ai*, 1924)⁹. However, before the end of the decade, Tanizaki seems to subscribe to the old cliché that "the past is a foreign country", and spirals back to explore old Japan once again, this time with a heavy emphasis on traditional arts, folklore, and history as shown in *Some Prefer Nettles* (蓼喰ふ虫 *Tade Kuu Mushi*, 1929)¹⁰, "Arrowroot" (吉野葛

³ English translation available in: Trans. Anthony H. Chambers, Paul McCarthy. Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. *The Gourmet Club: A Sextet* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017), page number.

⁴ Chambers 2017, page number.

⁵ Trans. Anthony H. Chambers, Paul McCarthy. Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. *Red Roofs & Other Stories* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 107-131.

⁶ Chambers 2016, 85-106.

⁷ Chambers 2017

⁸ Hibbett 1996, pn

⁹ Trans. Anthony H. Chambers. Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. *Naomi* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Trans. Edward Seidensticker. Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. *Some Prefer Nettles* (New York NY: 1st Vintage International, 1995).

Yoshino Kuzu, 1931)¹¹, and “The Secret History of the Lord of Musashi” (武州公秘話 *Bushuu Kou Hiwa*, 1935)¹². Late in his life, the final “fantasy land” that captures Tanizaki’s imagination is none other than the western Kansai region of Japan, his fascination with which is most greatly exemplified in his Ashiya family saga *The Makioka Sisters* (細雪 *Sasameyuki*, 1943-1948¹³). In compiling this brief summary, I have only listed works that have already been translated and published in English, not only to demonstrate the attention and acclaim that Tanizaki has received in the English-speaking world, but also to show off Tanizaki’s prolificacy, for these only make up a small proportion of his life works.

The two works translated for this thesis were published in 1916 and 1919 respectively, during the early stages of Tanizaki’s career when his interests had yet to migrate overseas. “Beautiful Boy” (美男 *Binan*, 1916) records the life and times of a Tokyo playboy as he seduces his way through the city, while “Fumiko’s Feet” (富美子の足 *Fumiko no Ashi*, 1919) tells the tale of a young artist and an old man whose unlikely friendship is built upon the foundation of a shared foot fetish. Both of these stories differ vastly in theme, structure, and style, but what they do share is a deep-rooted connection with their physical setting of the Tokyo lowtown, the hub of merchant culture, arts, and entertainment all throughout the Edo period, and Tanizaki’s childhood neighbourhood.

In his 1955 memoir *Childhood Years* (幼少時代 *Youshou Jidai*)¹⁴, Tanizaki admits that he used to consider his identity largely formed by experiences from his adolescence, but over time he has come to realize that “perhaps [his] accomplishments as a novelist owe far

¹¹ Trans. Anthony H. Chambers. Tanizaki Jun’ichirou. *The Secret History of the Lord of Musashi and Arrowroot* (New York NY: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1982).

¹² Chambers 1982, pn.

¹³ Trans. Edward Seidensticker. Tanizaki Jun’ichirou. *The Makioka Sisters* (New York NY: 1st Vintage International, 1957).

¹⁴ Trans. Paul McCarthy. Tanizaki Jun’ichirou. *Childhood Years: A Memoir* (Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, 1989).

more to [his] childhood surroundings than [he] had previously imagined". What comes to Tanizaki as a revelation here is hardly a surprise to any reader of his early works. Tanizaki's eye for detail and penchant for atmospheric description transform the locale and geography of any given piece into an active character of its own, vivid and present in the narrative. Of particular note in this regard is *The Makioka Sisters*, which is so abundant and specific in its depictions of Kansai region life that it is possible to track the exact years and dates of events within the novel using the data provided on weather and natural disasters. While Tanizaki does not take such pains with describing the weather in "Beautiful Boy" and "Fumiko's Feet", Tokyo is no less intrinsically crucial to these pieces' identities than *The Makioka Sisters* is entrenched in the location and zeitgeist of West Japan.

Readers of "Beautiful Boy" who are unfamiliar with Tokyo may find the story dry, for it draws upon a great wealth of assumed prerequisite knowledge about the city landscape and its characteristics. Tanizaki seems to delight in tossing out names of neighborhoods and districts as often as possible, ensuring that his readers know exactly where each event takes place, but this can easily result in confusion for those not privy to the vast wealth of knowledge of Tanizaki naturally possessed himself, being a native Tokyoite. For example, hearing that K has a dalliance with a schoolgirl who lives in Hongou rings hollow until one is aware that Hongou is an elite district of high class families, an austere and scholarly neighborhood filled with mansions and educational institutes. Only then is the ostensible strictness of the girl's family is better understood, as well as the stakes of K being caught having improper relations with her. This local insight adds an additional layer of tension and scandal to K's events that elevate his actions from a mere sexual affair to one that straddles class boundaries, albeit between upper class and an even higher, richer echelon of upper class. Knowledge of the distance of K's Nishikichou-Kinsukechou commute, of the beautiful cherry blossom trees that line the bank of the Ushigafuchi moat where Kokutarou makes her

confession, or of the Asakusa district's stylish yet deviant reputation all contribute to an unspoken world building that is mostly left to be read between the lines. Rather than stating the characteristics of the city outright, Tanizaki draws upon his readers' assumed urban knowhow of the specific landmarks and locations to enrich his otherwise sparse description. One could say that relying on the reputations of names and places instead of actually describing them is a mark of bad writing, but Tanizaki's passion for the city can be inferred even from his sparse depictions of "the labyrinth of Asakusa" and "the looming figure of the Ryouunkaku". One cannot deny how deeply intertwined the story is with Tokyo and its locals. In the process of translating, I have attempted to share some of the local information that Tanizaki would have relied on to enrich readers' understanding of specific locations within the story through the use of footnotes.

In contrast, "Fumiko's Feet" is much more a story of the interior, focused upon what goes on in the back rooms of the Old Man Tsukakoshi's Muramatsuchou house. Much less presumed knowledge is required about these settings, for the Old Man's urge to keep his secret hidden from the public confines all events of the novel inside his own home, rather than allowing anyone involved to interact with their urban surroundings. Nonetheless, the locality of Tokyo is vivid and important through the figure of the Old Man himself, a "bonafide Edoite" brimming with the loquacious, faux-connoisseur attitude attributed to his Tokyo upbringing. The Old Man's Tokugawa-era habits and old merchant attitude are vestiges of the old lowtown, one that Tanizaki grew up immersed in but began to rapidly disappear due to its vulnerability to natural and manmade disaster, impeding westernization, and an influx of outsider immigration from all corners of Japan into the booming Tokyo. In fact, we see signs of even the Old Man's lowtown tastes waning away within the novel. Most obvious of course is his presumption that his distant nephew's Western medium of oil paint must be able to produce a superior image over traditional Japanese painting to represent Fumiko's form. Old

Man Tsukakoshi also uses blinding electric lamps to light up the dim Japanese rooms of his house, the shadows of which Tanizaki later goes on to praise as supreme Japanese aesthetic in his 1933 essay “In Praise of Shadows”. Nonetheless, if we are to believe the narrator’s attribution of the Old Man’s qualities to certain Tokyo stereotypes, such as smooth talking and purported taste for quality, then it is clear that the Old Man attempts to cling to these as long as he is able, just as he persists in his scolding of the maid Osada even when he is bedridden on the verge of death. The fact that Fumiko herself, “an almost perfect example of the Edo type” woman whose beauty and image have persisted throughout the ages from the woodblock to present, is the subject of admiration and artistic record. In this sense, “Fumiko’s Feet” can be read as no less than an attempt to preserve a scarce, sacred bit of the old Edoite merchant culture that Tanizaki saw vanishing from his home bit by bit, ironically transposed through the lens of one of those migrant country hicks whose influx to the city contributed to the low town culture’s disappearance.

While the two stories translated below differ greatly in style, structure, and theme, they both share an unmistakable reek of the Tokyo locale, and the grave importance of their setting within Japan’s capital city reveal a rare and early glimpse into the author’s great passion for his own hometown early in his career. I beseech you to look upon these works and see in Tokyo the same wonder and exotification that Tanizaki later applies to China, the West, and then Kansai, all in the search of his ideal “fantasy land”.

II. Beautiful Boy

First published in the *Shinchou* literary magazine in 1916, “Beautiful Boy” was one of Tanizaki’s first works to receive government censorship, though far from the last. The most famous of Tanizaki’s censored works is possibly *The Makioka Sisters*, which, despite its relative lack of the intensely erotic, psychosexual content that Tanizaki is better known for,

received abrupt military censorship for detailing with “the soft, effeminate, and grossly individualistic lives of women” during wartime emergency, and “rankest indifference to the war effort”.¹⁵ More understandable perhaps, is the first instance of Tanizaki’s work to suffer the censor: the 1911 short story “Blizzards” (“Hyoufuu”)¹⁶, which depicted an artist’s eventually fatal fetish for a courtesan’s nostrils. However, the banning of “Beautiful Boy” came amid a flurry of strikes against Tanizaki in the year of 1916, during which four of his works were banned in close succession. While K, the protagonist of “Beautiful Boy”, does lead a life of mostly uncriticized decadence and dissipation, the work is very much a record of K’s activities through the lens of a third-party narrator and devoid of the fleshy, sensual descriptions of debauchery that Tanizaki got away with uncensored in some other works.

While it is not difficult to imagine the Police Bureau raising its eyebrows at the accounts of K’s unabashed and relentless infidelity, the extent of K’s womanizing is taken to such extremes and described so buffoonishly that one cannot help but wonder if Tanizaki really means to parody the behavior of a Tokyo dandy; a point of subtlety that must have been lost upon the censures. Despite the narrator’s attempts to excuse K as a villain only out of his own “carefree thoughtlessness”, K remains an utterly irredeemable character throughout the piece, despite his excess of inborn beauty and talent. “Beautiful Boy” is the account of K’s decline from an envied playboy who attracts women like moths to flame, to a desperate leech who only manages to reel in “fat, garish, kitchen-maid type wenches” and relies upon his women’s money to pay off debts from other affairs. Even K’s friends, Kubomura and the narrator, who shares the name and ostensibly the identity of Tanizaki himself, who defend K’s character so fervently in their youth, eventually grow tired of his irresponsible debauchery once his scandals lose their ability to thrill and excite. Kubomura

¹⁵ Jay Rubin. *Injurious to Public Morals : Writers and the Meiji State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 264.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, there is no English translation available of this work, but see Rubin 139 for a summary.

ends up siding with K's abused wife and serves as a sympathetic ear to her plight, while the narrator eventually finds himself despising K towards the end of the story. For all his purported charm and charisma, K is ironically left with neither friend nor ally who is willing to aid him when he needs it, though it is difficult to tell whether any intervention would have made a difference for K's outcome.

Readers of "Beautiful Boy" may find the story somewhat lacking in Tanizaki's usual aesthetic and dramatic flair. While the events described are certainly shocking enough in their content, from shotgun marriages to suicide attempts to a climactic confrontation between wife and mistress, they are recorded in a cut-and-dried manner that is hard-pressed to convey K's life with any sense of excitement or theatricality. In fact, despite the title of the story itself serving as testament to K's extraordinary good looks, Tanizaki shelves his usual descriptive pen and never once provides detailed description of K's, or any other character's, appearance at all, aside from K's features holding "not even one bit of Geistig in them". Not only does the reader see nothing of K's supposedly remarkable beauty, but none of K's seductions or romantic overtures are recorded either, only the fact that women fell for him, whatever the reason. K is never described with the sensual and deft appeal of a true Lothario, but instead shown singing off-tune to geishas' music and drunkenly licking waitress' faces, making it all but impossible to take him seriously as a character or a skilled womanizer. As opposed to the prudish fools in some of Tanizaki's works who go from stuffy pretension to comical slobbering, K is a fool through and through because of his indiscriminate and overactive libido. Even if Tanizaki does not mean to condemn K's hedonist way of life, it is hard to imagine that K is posited as anything other than a comical parody of the Edo playboy stereotype.

In contrast to the bumbling dissolution of the story's leading man, it is the women who stand out as particularly dashing and awe-inspiring figures. From Kokutarou's long-

standing devotion and taking of her first love's name, to the bravado of K's unnamed but long-suffering wife as she swallows cleaning lye in protest of her husband's philandering, all heroism, virtue, and chivalry appears exclusively in the domain of the females. Experienced readers of Tanizaki's work may find the story's treatment of women at odds with Tanizaki's usual approach: rather than being simultaneously objectified and worshipped as in other stories, the women of "Beautiful Boy" are treated with contempt and tossed away with little care. However, it is in contrast to the callous and harrowing treatment they suffer through that the women in K's life are lionized, if not as goddesses, then at least in the same manner as unfortunate and persecuted heroes of Kabuki dramas. The fact that their affections are squandered on so unworthy a man makes their plights all the more tragic and sympathetic; the romance of Kokutarou's years-long pining gains an additional level of noble melancholy when she is discarded so soon after, never to be mentioned again.

These women are not only suffering heroes, but also the driving forces of action within the story. For all his womanizing, K is a rather passive figure, whom women fall for rather than him seeking them out. Dissipation is his default state, and he is unable or unwilling to fight it, simply drifting along with whatever new affair or scandal happens upon him with no boundaries or standards whatsoever. It is only the actions of women, such as K's wife who beseeches his friends to search for her vanished husband, or the vengeful, possessive advances of K's final, exceptional proprietress lover, that bring the story to its climax, and even then, the primary conflict is acted out between the two of them with K merely being caught in the crossfire. K's inferiority to these valiant, dandy women is apparent even in more mundane realms such as financial management: while K is constantly absent from work and dependent upon his women, or sometimes Kubomura, to pay off his debts, his wife is able to harness what little resources she has to scrape by when her husband abandons her, and his lover's rags-to-riches story is evidence enough of her business savvy

and self-discipline. Despite being constantly used and abused, the women of “Beautiful Boy” take up surprisingly masculine roles in the absence of reliable men, whether they be providing for the family, courting K, or fighting for love.

In light of K’s humiliating and incompetent portrayal, one might be inclined to think that the lifelong “luck” which Tanizaki ascribes to K in the closing sentence of the story may be that K was lucky any woman loved him at all. After all, K’s final capitulation does not exactly strike the reader as a particularly fortunate event. However, the fact that this is the first major consequence that K has suffered as a result of all his womanizing is remarkable in and of itself, especially considering that it is a far more merciful end than all other options posited in the story. Even while doubtlessly leaving a trail of broken hearts and financial debt, K has not suffered so much as a venereal disease in all these years of dissipation. He is notoriously capable at hopping from one affair to another completely scot-free. Even the forced union with his premaritally pregnant wife barely serves as a hindrance, let alone a halt, to his womanizing lifestyle. With all the descriptions of K’s supposed “carefreeness”, it is highly possible that he has no clue of the damage he causes simply because of the utter lack of consequence he has enjoyed all his life. When he incurs debt, he begs Kubomura to pay it off. When he sings terribly, geisha are still willing to praise him for lack of pretension. He is able to float through all of life taking vast liberties with societal norms, his marriage, and his friendships, not only due to his charm, but mainly due to his beauty. It is here that Tanizaki reveals the true power of the beautiful boy, even one as bumbling and low-mannered as K: In the face of beauty, all is forgiven. Beauty trumps all, and no matter how despicable the heart or low the morals, it is difficult to hate beauty even when it has crossed all ethical bounds. As it turns out, K’s luck is one that fits perfectly with Tanizaki’s worship of aesthetics and fantasy in his life and his work.

III. Fumiko's Feet

Despite Tanizaki's worldwide prominence as a face of Japanese literature, the fact that "Fumiko's Feet" remains untranslated and virtually unknown in the West is nothing short of a mystery, considering its renown in Japan. Recently adapted into film by Ueda Atsushi, this story of an old man's obsession with his mistress' beautiful feet is considered one of Tanizaki's representative works in his homeland, if not also the apotheosis of his career-long foot fetish. In stark contrast to the cut-and-dried, objective narrative style of "Beautiful Boy", "Fumiko's Feet" holds all that one expects from a Tanizaki, brimming with pulsing eroticism, painstaking lyricism, and overflowing sensuality on par with even Tanizaki's more graphic works such as *Naomi* or *The Key* (1956)¹⁷.

Once again, Tanizaki himself is publicly named within the story, but this time, his role is neither narrator nor bystander: the entire piece is framed as a letter from fervent fan Noda Unokichi to Tanizaki, urging Tanizaki to write a story based on the events in his letter. Tanizaki's character as recipient of the story places him in the unique position somewhere between reader and active participant, as Noda's occasional asides to "Sensei" (as he calls Tanizaki) remind us. The premise of a letter from a fan allows Tanizaki to fully indulge himself in the confessional mode of storytelling while keeping the subject matter distant from his own experiences, yet Noda's pleading for Tanizaki to adapt the letter's story into a literary work serves as an explicit nod to the writer's power behind the scenes to edit or fictionalize as much or as little as he chooses. This approach to confessional writing is completely at odds with the Naturalist school of writers whose mode of thinking was popular during the time of this piece's publication. Advocates of Japanese naturalism purported that literature should be used to represent reality in wholesale, with as little embellishment or

¹⁷ Trans. Edward Seidensticker. Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. *The Key* (New York NY:1st Vintage International, 1960).

artifice as possible. As a result, naturalism soon became nearly synonymous with the I-novel (*shishōsetsu*) genre, a form in which authors wrote candidly as they could about their own personal life experiences. Tanizaki, whose breadth and versatility of content make him difficult to align with any specific school or movement of writing, seemed to hold particular contempt for naturalism due to its fundamental opposition to his modus operandi of writing for the joy of writing. Tanizaki actively resisted writing about politics or philosophy, and while obvious parallels can be drawn between certain aspects of his work and his life, there is always just as much fictionalized, artificial content that keeps his stories at an arm's distance. Even in Tanizaki's rare autobiographical works such as *Childhood Years* and "Sorrow of a Heretic" (異端者の悲しみ *Itansha no Kanashimi*, 1917), he is deliberately rewriting and reframing his past in order to fit a certain narrative, especially in the case of "Sorrow of a Heretic", which Tanizaki resorted to as a concerted attempt to break away from his usual risqué content and end the 1916 wave of bans against him.

The epistolary premise of "Fumiko's Feet" allows Tanizaki to speak with the candor and close, personal perspective of a confessional piece while still representing a fictional fantasy as opposed to naturalist reality. In fact, the characters and fetishes of the story are so wild and indulgent that the reader cannot help but wonder if Tanizaki is taking advantage of the ostensible honesty of the confessional in order to present such an exaggerated, unrealistic tale. Ironically, this is something that the protagonist and letter-writer Noda is guilty of himself, when he exaggerates stories of his fetish-related exploits in order to drive shame from the Old Man's mind. Noda's confessions are posited as tools shaped deliberately to serve his ulterior motives, presenting Tanizaki's rather cynical view on naturalists' attempts to bare all in I-novels. Tanizaki acknowledges the need and possibility of editing, fictionalization, and reframing of events in order to create a published piece, and questions as to whether any confession ever shows a "pure" realistic portrayal.

Equally telling of Tanizaki's utter rejection of naturalism, however, are his lyrical interludes, during which he departs entirely from the plot to devote page after page rhapsodizing about a point of beauty in excruciating detail. While translating, I speculated that about half of "Fumiko's Feet" is made up of such descriptive detours praising everything from Fumiko's hair to her feet to the protrusion of her lower lip. The naturalists would have never approved of such flowery, unnecessary description filled with lush metaphors and rambling praise, but Tanizaki indulges in it with great gusto, flexing his descriptive muscles in providing these sensory rides that serve solely to pleasure and entertain both himself and the reader.

"Fumiko's Feet" touches upon many themes that are further explored and developed upon in Tanizaki's later literature, such as the power dynamics of a cruelly beautiful woman who is financially or otherwise dependent upon her willing and submissive worshipper that is re-examined in "Red Roofs" (赤い屋根 *Akai Yane*, 1925)¹⁸ or "A Portrait of Shunkin" (春琴抄 *Shunkinshou*, 1933)¹⁹, or the almost vampiric process of a man being sucked dry of life, declining more and more as his lust and devotion to his femme fatale mistress grows stronger that is once again portrayed in "Aguri" and *Naomi*. Fumiko's noted resemblance to and crossing of identities with the female figure in Kunisada's print posits her as the sort of "eternal woman" that is mentioned in *Some Prefer Nettles*, whose beauty transcends time, space and identity in order to signify something of a universal Japanese sense of aesthetic. However, I believe that above all, "Fumiko's Feet" is meant to be enjoyed as pleasurable piece in which Tanizaki's worship of the female body and descriptive virtuoso are placed on

¹⁸ Trans. Anthony H. Chambers, Paul McCarthy. Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. *Red Roofs & Other Stories* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016),

¹⁹ Trans. Howard Hibbett. Tanizaki Junichiro. *Seven Japanese Tales* (New York NY:1st Vintage International, 1996), page number.

full display. I hope that as you traverse through these erotic rhapsodies to pearly toes and creamy heels, you will be able to enjoy it fully as such.

TRANSLATION NOTES

All names are given in the Japanese order, with surname preceding given name. For example, “Tanizaki Jun’ichiro” with Tanizaki as the surname and Jun’ichiro as given name.

Measures of distance and length in “miles” or “feet” given in the text reflect archaic Japanese terms of measurement such as *ri* (里) and do not correspond to modern units of measurement in the Imperial system. However, measures of distance and length in the footnotes correspond to modern terms.

All translations are based off the Chuuou Kouron Shinsha (中央公論新社) 2015 edition of the Tanizaki Completed Works (谷崎全集).

TRANSLATED WORKS

“BEAUTIFUL BOY” (美男, 1916)

I first met K about 10 years ago.

At the time, I was friends with Kubomura, the son of a wealthy family, and it was from him that I'd always hear the latest gossip about K. “I went to middle school with a beautiful boy named K. From the time that he was seventeen or eighteen years old, he was already so popular that all the girls and geisha were smitten with him. You'd always hear stories of his love affairs, as exciting as any new play. I'll introduce you to him one of these days, so come meet him with me sometime,” Kubomura would always say to me.

Whenever Kubomura and I gossiped about K, we'd be filled with unbearable jealousy. Back then, the pursuit of romantic love had been the greatest aspiration in our lives. Someone as uncommonly beautiful as K, who stole the hearts of women as easily as he pleased, was a subject of unparalleled envy.

According to Kubomura's appraisals, aside from possessing natural good looks, K was blessed with clever speech as well as literary talent, and was a deft composer of modern *waka* poetry. On top of that, he was in frightfully good physical shape, so that even while drowning in hedonism alongside his studies, he never felt weary or tired. One spring, just as annual exams were upon us, a geisha named Kokutarou from Shintomicho²⁰ fell hard for him. She dragged him over to a teahouse in her neighborhood, and he spent a full week there in drinking and revel without leaving even once. However, despite this chaotic lifestyle, K was somehow able to keep up with exam preparations as well. One way or another, he amazingly

²⁰ Shintomi 新富 neighborhood in Kyobashi 京橋 District, home of the Shin-Shimabara 新島原 red light district aimed towards nearby foreign settlement

managed to score average grades and graduate from middle school while all this was still going on.

Now, how did Kokutarou came to fall so hard for K? That is an interesting story indeed. Under normal circumstances, a middle school student like K would never have had the opportunity or means to hire geisha to his parties like any usual client. However, as it happens, K's father owned a house in the Himonochou neighborhood of Nihonbashi²¹, and directly across the street from it lay three geisha houses all side by side. From K's home, you could see the geishas coming and going from the side doors of their houses, and you could often hear them exchanging greetings in the mornings and evenings. Living in such close proximity, it is no wonder that K's household became well-acquainted with the neighboring geisha. Of course it was not long before K's beauty became the talk of the neighborhood, and you would often hear gossip such as "I have a crush on the young master next door", until there came to be five or six geisha who were thoroughly infatuated with him. Out of these women, the one who most fervently yearned for K was an apprentice geisha who had just barely turned sixteen years old, a girl by the name of Yoneko.

Yoneko belonged the geisha house Tsukinoya, and at some point, the head girl there had become intimate acquaintances with K's father. Although K's father was not quite as handsome as his son, he was no less of a womanizer and would spend at least half of each day across the road at the Tsukinoya, playing cards with the geisha, exchanging jokes, and enjoying himself thoroughly. It was for this reason that K would sometimes be called over to the neighboring house, where he made himself quite comfortable after befriendng five or six of the employees starting with the head girl Shimeji. K would even head over alone behind his father's back on occasion, and on those nights the girls would welcome him more than ever, doting upon him as they would a beloved doll. On chilly winter nights, they would idly

²¹ Central merchant district of Tokyo.

crowd around the kotatsu together and indulge in frivolous conversation of all sorts. K looked forward to these visits above all else. Thus, in the spring of his fifteenth year, he lost his virginity to the head girl Shimeji.

When Yoneko discovered the relations between the two, intense jealousy flared to life within her small breast. Deep in her heart she prayed to whatever gods or Buddha who could hear her that she would one day be able to complete her training, establish herself apart from Shimeji's influence, and bring her first love to fruition. It was around the same time that K's family moved from Himonochou to Nishikichou in Kanda, where he soon found himself a new woman and any trace of the Tsukinoya disappeared from his memory.

Two years passed and one day, in the winter of K's fifth year of middle school, he came upon a lone rickshaw driver waiting for him at the entrance of his school. "There's someone who'd like to see you, would you spare a moment to come meet them with me?" The driver asked. K was brought all the way from his school in Iidamachi to the park near Ushigafuchi moat. What he found there was a familiar figure with parasol in hand, standing in the shade of trees beneath the riverbank. It was none other than Yoneko.

"Since when we last met, I moved to Yanagibashi and slaved away for a year or two, but I have now finally established myself in Shintomichou. I do apologize, for the truth is that I have been using your name 'Kokutarou' as my professional name all this time. I must ask for your forgiveness, young sir."

As she said this, Yoneko produced a business card from the folds of her kimono and offered it for him to see. For the record, K's real name was actually Kokutarou.

"How troublesome," K said, but despite his words, he secretly felt happy on the inside.

Being called "young sir" by a geisha for the first time made him feel as though he were the dandy from some Izumi Kyouka novel, and he was immediately taken by the woman's advances.

When I happened to be in my first year of high school, during March Anniversary celebration, Kubomura dragged K over to me and introduced us amidst the crowd and din of Oumei Hall²². K wore the uniform of a high ranked commercial school, and his newly-bought cape of black felt was blind stitched as such that it looked like a stage costume from some modern garden party.

“Oi, oi, look at the hair on that girl over there. What the hell is that look?” K was blunt and honest from the very first impression, making comments such as these while we gossiped about the female students around us.

"Even with your playboy reputation, I bet you'd have a hard time laying hands on her, eh?" Kubomura replied coolly, to which K shook his head.

“I’ll leave that one for Tanizaki,” he said, casting a brief glance at my face before smirking to himself.

K did not put on the airs of a womanizer, and he was completely without sarcasm. I could not help but think of him as a rather innocent boy. The whiteness of his skin and his strong silhouette marked him as a fine man indeed, but I felt that he was not as beautiful as the rumors had led me to believe. Surely he must have possessed some spark of poetic genius within him in order to have bewitched as many women as he did, but I saw none of it. I do not say this out of mere jealousy, but his features showed not even one bit of Geistig in them.

By the time that I had been introduced to K, he had already tired of Kokutarou and was involved in yet another affair- he was now embroiled in a romance with some schoolgirl. Through this affair, it was once again apparent that his unparalleled health and vigor had not flagged in the least. The schoolgirl's home was in the Kinsukechou neighborhood, in the elite high town district of Hongou, and because her family was incredibly strict, the two of them had slim opportunities any sort of rendezvous. K ended up with no other choice but to sneak

²² Event hall located in The First Higher School of Japan, now part of University of Tokyo.

out of his home in Nishikichou late each night at about one or two in the morning, then walk through two districts to the girl's home in Kinsukechou. By a stroke of good fortune, the girl was in the habit of sleeping unattended and would always keep the back door unlocked for K to sneak through. Then, after coming together for an hour or so, he would leave at the crack of dawn around 4 a.m. and return to his own home, crawling back into his futon for a quick doze as if nothing had happened all night. This went on for about two months. He repeated this journey over and over again on many a sleepless night, as he told me later. All the more surprising was that during this time, he was still attending school every single day.

"Back then, I'd always get sleepy in the middle of the day. I was constantly falling asleep at my desk in the middle of class," he said. He would recount these events in that same carefree tone whenever the topic was brought up.

The route from Nishikichou to Kinsukechou spanned nearly half a mile. I daresay that in all the Meiji Era, there was no man but K would sneak through Tokyo's city center night after night just to see a woman like this. The fact that he kept it up for two months on end without being questioned by police even once for suspicious activity is unbelievable in and of itself.

Even when we had become friends, K and I spent little time together. But it was not long after the schoolgirl from Kinsukechou that I began to hear rumors from Kubomura about a third woman. This time, K's partner was the young daughter of a certain high ranking official in the Koujimachi diplomatic ward, and she herself was a talented woman who attended a well-known girl's academy famous throughout the capital. Interestingly enough, she and K came to know each other through their mutual teacher in new style waka poetry. As disciples of the same master, they would often go out for fun together and grew close because of it. By matter of course, K began to show up more and more frequently at the common places where high school girls and entertainers gathered, widening his connections

in those circles as much as he could. He practiced tanka poems, showed off his skill at hanafuda cards, and excelled at billiards, all relying upon his natural born deftness so that he could reel that girl further in with his charms.

K and his wealthy girlfriend had spent a year as if floating in a beautiful dream when suddenly, they were married.

“K’s finally marrying his woman.”

When I heard the news from Kubomura, I could not help but be surprised. But once I learned of the story behind the affair, the entire situation began to seem rather comical.

Just a month before the happy couple's eventual marriage, the girl's parents finally found out about their daughter's indiscretion and immediately administered a harsh scolding before forcing her to break up at once. Even after she had complied, her parents still felt ill at ease with the situation when they found out, lo and behold, there just so happened to be a Chinese employer recruiting for a female teacher from Japan at the time. Her parents came up with the idea of sending the girl abroad for a bit and had her apply for the position at a school in Beijing. The girl departed from Tokyo, took a steamboat from Kobe, and landed at Dalian, but before even reaching Beijing, she soon returned to Tokyo in tears. It appeared that she had gotten pregnant. Given the circumstances, the girl's parents had no other choice but to begrudgingly have the couple married. And that is how, despite still being a student at a business high school, K somehow ended up having to find a small rental house in Tomisakashita in Koishikawa to set up his newly acquired household.

"A high school family man"- just hearing about it aroused our curiosity, so of course we made our way up to visit the rumored new household in Tomisakashita. K's wife was a woman well-learned in English, arithmetic, penmanship, and needlework, and it had been hinted at that she was proficient in an even wider range of subjects. She had many freckles, and her lips as well as the tip of her nose were sharp and pointed, almost like a tengu's,

giving her the look of an unpleasant woman. Her manner of speaking was oddly irreverent and she had a bad habit of moving her neck and shoulders in a strange, flirtatious way. Even though schoolboys such as us longed for a bride and household, we were entirely unable to feel friendly with her. What's more, she put on years far quicker than expected after giving birth until there was not even a speck of girlish youth left within her, nor the graceful spirit of a matured woman. She had the condescending attitude of a midwife or nursemaid and always stalked around with a sour, dried-up expression upon her face.

“It seems that playboys don’t always fall for beautiful women after all, huh? I certainly don’t envy him, being married to a woman like that,” I said, and Kubomura readily agreed.

“She’s all dried out now, but she must have held some sort of charm, back when she was still a round-faced little schoolgirl. In any case, how she ended up like this is still quite a tragedy, ain’t it? Surely she should still have more sex appeal than that, no matter how many children she's borne. Couldn't she least wear more flattering clothes or even put on some make up? She has all the attitude of a vain woman, but none of the looks!”

Truth be told, it was just as Kubomura had said. Ever since she had come to live with K, the woman no longer took care in her clothing or appearance. Whenever we came to visit, we always found her with her unstyled hair all disheveled and with a faded kimono carelessly tied round the waist as she greeted us shrilly at the entrance, still cradling a baby in her arm. She would constantly use girlish speaking habits entirely unsuited to her, and pretentiously appropriated Chinese and English words into her speech in a way that stirred up feelings of undeniable revulsion within us.

“It’s all K’s fault, really. He should at least rebuke her, tell her to clean up her act or something. He’s always dressing up so fancily himself, how could he leave his wife looking like that?” Kubomura groused.

In contrast to his wife, whose appearance grew shabbier by the day, K seemed to grow more and more splendid as time passed. On top of his scholarly good looks, he grew plump as a rich merchant heir and he wore magnificently embellished clothes that no-one would ever imagine belonged to a high school student. Rather than putting effort into his studies, all his labor was devoted to enhancing his own good looks. Shaving his beard, sprinkling on perfume, parading around in stylishly matching footwear and yukatas: these were the sorts of activities he immersed himself in constantly. Despite not having the money to cover all these expenses, he seemed to possess some mysterious source of income that allowed him to continue with this lavish lifestyle unlike that of any other high schooler in the world. With this money, he would order elegant tailor-made clothes, and put on gleaming outfits worthy of any actor or celebrity whenever he had to show his face for even the briefest outing. "Leaving his wife in such a shameful state while he himself dresses up like this all the time, how shameless can he be?" I thought to myself.

By this point, any normal person would surely despise K's unfaithful ways after having heard all this. But while I did possess some measure of pity for his wife's unfortunate circumstances, I was unable to muster up any feelings of hatred for K. K was, indeed, a womanizing lecher, but he showed none of the deceit and arrogance so often seen in most run-of-the-mill perverts. Rather, he behaved as one who had never known hardship in all his life, with a lively and carefree innocence that was difficult to despise. K's unworried grin, as bright and honest as the clear blue sky, was irresistibly infectious, no matter the time or place. In the face of such a grin, even those who should hate him would inevitably forget their resentment and end up smiling along with him. It was as if his inherently optimistic disposition and straightforward attitude more than made up for his faults. Even when he overdressed himself in gaudy clothing or left jilted women in his wake, these acts were not performed out of some malicious intent he held in mind, but rather out of a natural-born

carefree nature. Half the time, he hardly even realized the wrong in his deeds, having committed them out of mere carelessness. His lack of remorse for the harm that he caused was also due to this same carefree nature. As K's friends, this is how we justified his deeds to ourselves. Anything reprehensible or loathsome that he had ever done was simply due to that "carefree nature" of his.

"So, I heard that guy's picked up a new woman again these days."

"Is that so? My my, K is rather carefree after all, isn't he?" It was like this that we spoke of his carefree nature as though it were but another one of his charms.

For a while, we stopped visiting K's house out of a desire to avoid the screeching sound of his wife's voice. At the time, he was already toying around with his fourth or fifth mistress and would come to Kubomura's home when he grew tired, so that he could report to us his latest escapades. He told us about how a Kagurazaka geisha house proprietress' infatuation with him had eventually led to her shop's ruin, or about the time he'd persuaded the waitress at a Yanagibashi teahouse to reduce his tab, then ran away from the remaining debt. He spoke of the time he'd been courted by two courtesans in a single night, or about how a geisha had bought him under-kimonos as a gift. Each time he visited, he returned with delightful new stories to regale us with. Sometimes, K would even come to throw himself at the mercy of Kubomura's deep pockets and beg Kubomura to pick up his outstanding debts.

It was around this time that the following episode occurred. One day, Kubomura and I had arrived on a visit to K's home for the first time in a while, when we heard a loud commotion from the inside. The couple's yelling could be heard from beyond the door.

"Get a grip, just get a grip!"

We heard the sound of K shouting, as well as the voice of his four year old child (K was already father to two children at the time) weeping himself hoarse, crying, "Mommy,

mommy!" Surely whatever troubled them could be no small matter, so we burst into the house at once.

Upon entry, we were greeted with the sight of K's wife curled up in a fetal position upon the veranda floor, her eyes upturned with a frightfully pale expression as her body shook and spasmed. Some sort of substance frothed at her lips as she screamed, "damn you, "damn you", writhing in pain all the while as she dissolved into tears. She was so occupied with her wailing that she hardly seemed to realize that Kubomura and I had even entered the room. K immediately went behind her and began to stroke her back.

"Please, hang in there," Kubomura and I whispered into her ear as we joined K in massaging the woman's back.

"Come now, won't you get a grip already? You're causing me a lot of trouble, behaving in such an unsightly manner while my friends are here, " K reprimanded, but his voice remained enviably calm. Judging from this scene along, I could guess that K's wife had ingested some sort of poison, but even this dire situation was not enough to throw a man like K in panic. No matter how his wife moaned and twitched, he kept telling her over and over again to get a grip, all the while maintaining a calm and composed tone of voice.

"If only this man were not such a womanizer, then he would be a remarkable member of society indeed," I secretly thought to myself in admiration.

It was only when his wife had begun to calm down that Kubomura finally let out a sigh of relief and turned towards K.

"What the hell happened here?"

"Nothing to fret over. It's all my fault, I'm afraid. You see, she's been suffering from hysteria as of late, and she when she found out about all those other women that I told you about, she went right ahead and gulped down the cleaning lye she'd had lying around the house. I'm so deeply sorry you had to walk in on this entire mess."

For once, K's tone was uncharacteristically serious, completely unlike his usual self.

About four or five days later, K's wife went over to Kubomura's house in order to apologize and offer her thanks. Afterwards, she revealed everything to him about her husband's cruelty and mistreatment. Lately, K had been going out for three or four days at a time and the few times he did return, it was only to rifle through his wife's drawers for some clothes to pawn off before heading right out again. If his wife so much as tried to stop him, he would rain blows and kicks down upon her.

"I beg of you gentlemen, please talk some sense into him!" K's wife pleaded through her tears. However, Kubomura and I were unable to think of the savage husband K from her description as the very same person as the happy-go-lucky friend that we usually knew. In our company, he seemed an innocent man without any malice at all. Even if we grew to hate the K as portrayed in his wife's stories, there was no way that we could hate the K that we ourselves knew.

By matter of course, K eventually graduated from his business high school and was employed at a bank in Nihonbashi. But by then, he had already been entrenched in idleness for so long that he'd long lost all intention whatsoever of dumbly toiling away at some corporate job for the rest of his life. As if to make matters worse, feeding a wife and two children on his modest salary of thirty yen a month meant that K was unable to afford even a bottle of warm sake for himself, which only caused his resentment against them to grow. Sometimes he would skip work and come to Kubomura's place instead for a round of *go* or *hanafuda*, staying over until late into the night. His character began to grow mean and base. He dined on delicacies all year round, and stooped so low as to mess around with any woman until not even the maidservants were safe from him.

"Bringing K to the teahouse really is not something to be taken lightly. He's such an awful glutton, and he always gets so drunk that he starts licking the waitresses' faces, it's

unbearable," Kubomura would sometimes complain with a grimace. But despite his many complaints, Kubomura would still find himself frequently ensnared by K's invitations and dragged out to go drinking.

"How about it, let's grab a drink together," K would say. "Why don't you treat me to somewhere nice, eh? This feels like the perfect night to go out!" He prompted and plied Kubomura with such honeyed words and infectious cheer, until Kubomura found himself stumbling out the door heading to some bar or another without even realizing.

It did not matter if the woman was a cafe waitress, a server girl at a western restaurant, or a teahouse hostess, K quickly and easily got friendly with them even in the midst of idle conversation, demonstrating the full power of his womanizing capabilities. In truth, K's skills in this field were nothing short of outstanding. Time after time, we watched as K engaged in brazen and indecent flirtations with these women right before our eyes.

"If only I had twenty sen on me, then I'd head down to my old stomping grounds in Asakusa. Having horse meat hot pot while flirting with the waitresses, that's as good as it gets. That's right, all I want right now is horse meat hotpot," he would sincerely declare.

The horse meat restaurant was a place where the atmosphere agreed with K immensely and he could toy with the waitresses as much as he wanted, so he preferred going there over eating at first-rate restaurants or even hiring first-rate geisha. That being said, a libertine like K should have possessed at least a basic skill in the performing arts, but in that respect, he himself was entirely lacking.

Whenever the geisha would play the shamisen for him, he would say, "alright, I'll sing the accompaniment for you." He immediately began singing along as vigorously as if he were some famous performer, only his voice was horrendously out of tune and unbearably shrill, making for a thoroughly miserable listening experience. He would carry on this farce by

singing *dodoitsu* poems and *hauta* love songs as well, all with the same brash shamelessness, somehow believing that this was a trick that could draw in the listening geisha.

"Really, this man. You can tell he's reliable because despite being such a good-looking man, he isn't pretentious at all," the geisha would say, and K, delighted that they would praise him even now, would rub his chin and smirk. However, this trick did not work often, and no matter how much of a "good-looking man" he was, he failed to draw in the sort of "good-looking woman" that would have aroused our envy. The only kinds of women who could possibly fall for him and his tricks were ones such as prostitutes, waitresses, and third or fourth rate loose geisha. Even so, he became very busy rushing to and fro in order to attend to all his affairs with these different women, and of course, he incurred a large amount of "womanizer's expenses" in the process.

"It's fine to have women on the side, but at least go for the ones with some class, won't you?" I'd say, but he'd simply shake his head in disagreement.

"No, you don't get it at all. Doing it with a steakhouse maid is much more interesting than any first-rate geisha" he'd say, and continued to indulge in these carnal pleasures until he was well sated. Rather than picking women with well-shaped contours and sophisticated looks that would have wowed us with their beauty, K tastes leaned more towards fat, garish, kitchen-maid type wenches instead.

After two or three years of such behavior, K was as much of a sex fiend as ever, taking on new mistresses one after another. This was his only pleasure in life. Even though he had lost all class in character and interests, his beautiful looks, lighthearted manner, and flashy tastes never changed. He incurred more and more debt from many a teahouse rendezvous, but despite being utterly penniless, he was mysteriously able to afford dressing himself up in unbelievably lavish clothing without the slightest hint of worry. Another amazing thing was that despite drinking heavily every day while visiting brothels as often as he liked, none of

this seemed to take the slightest toll upon his health. His complexion was healthy and robust at all times, and he never contracted any venereal disease even once. It was around then, towards the end of the year, that K's wife suddenly visited Kubomura's home. "It's been ten days since I've lost track of K's whereabouts, would you happen to have any clue where he may be?" She asked, with a child cradled upon her back and an unnerving smile upon her face. As we listened to her story it became apparent that half a month ago, the proprietress of an Asakusa brothel had fallen for K, and they had cloistered themselves up in a love nest somewhere since, making it impossible to find them without knowledge of their location or room number. During the day, K's wife would call the bank asking if K was there or not, but all they could ever tell her time after time was that, "we have not seen him today either".

"K's never given up his vices for as long as he's lived, and it would likely be wisest if I gave up on finding him already, but him not being home at the end of the year causes us a great deal of trouble," his wife said. "Then there is the matter of the bank. I only wish he would go to work each day without taking constant leave like this, and yet..."

"The brothel that you speak of is must be the Hatsune in Senzokumachi. If you make an inquiry at any police station near there, I'm sure they'll direct you to its location right away." Kubomura had heard of this latest affair from K already, and revealed all to her without reservation.

Once she left, we heard nothing of what followed. Even after the New Year had dawned upon us and we entered into February, we saw neither hide nor hair of K or his wife, up until mid-March, when K's wife came calling to Kubomura's house once again.

"Thanks to your help, I was able to discover K's whereabouts and drag him home, but this spring, he has started going to the brothel again. The bank is fed up with him and may fire him soon. That may not mean much to K himself, but how am I to feed the two children at home..." K's wife sobbed, breaking into tears. Since the new year, her husband had stopped

sending her any allowance, and without anyone to support her, she'd resorted to needlework and tutoring neighborhood children in English and mathematics just to scrape by.

"Leave it to us. We will do all we can to get a hold of K and tell him to return home immediately. He's already caused you so much trouble after all."

At times like this, Kubomura always took pity on the poor wife and would console her most kindly.

"The truth is, I went searching for K at the Hatsune house a few days ago and happened to meet the woman in question. I asked for her help, but she's hidden K away somewhere and will not let me see him. She's but an uneducated, vapid little whore, but she is younger than me, and with some good meat on her bones, so she's certainly superior from a solely biological standpoint. It isn't completely unreasonable for K to have fallen so hard for her, and yet..."

K's wife went on with idle complaints such as these until she finally left to go home. Later, Kubomura mimicked to me the odd way that she said things such as "an uneducated, vapid little whore" or "superior from a solely biological standpoint".

The next morning, out of my own curiosity, I went in Kubomura's place to the Hatsune brothel in Senzokumachi in search of K. I wandered lost through the labyrinth of Asakusa streets shadowed beneath the looming figure of the Ryounkaku for nearly an hour until I found the house that I was looking for, but to this very day, I have no clue of how I was able to arrive there, nor could I remember the route I had taken.

Upon entering the brothel, I introduced myself by my real name, and presented my business card at the front, before a young girl led me up to a squalid four and a half mat room on the second floor, telling me, "Please wait here a moment." It was close to noon at the time, but it seemed that K was still asleep, and it was only after about thirty minutes of waiting that he quietly entered the room before me with a pleasant smile on his face.

"Is this the face of a man who allows his wife and children to fall into destitution while running off to chase skirts?" I thought in wonder, taking note of how suspiciously cheerful K's expression was.

"My man, let me tell you, one sees such outlandish things while living in a place like this. It's practically a whole different world!"

And it was with such high spirits that K began to tell me all the insider gossip of the Asakusa red light district.

The proprietress who was the current object of K's affections was a woman of but twenty-six years old. She was sold into prostitution at the age of fifteen and had worked abroad in Dalian and Beijing before arriving in Japan having gained a reputation as a woman skilled in service. Last spring, when she still plied her trade in Kakigarachou in Nihonbashi, she took a shine to K when he became her customer for a night, and they gradually grew more and more intimate. By late autumn of the same year, she had put together a thousand yen of savings and used it to buy ownership of the Hatsune, thus becoming the proprietress herself and dragging K into the business with her.

"How impressive that she managed to save up a thousand yen," I said, and K nodded.

"It's very impressive indeed! For seven or eight years, she ate nothing but scraps and saved like a miser in order to get here. Ever since we started this business, as long as I don't spend too extravagantly, we're usually left with one or two hundred yen profit at the end of the month. And, listen to this, each month she sends the earnings to her mother in the country, so that her teenaged little brother can attend middle school. Ain't that something?"

As I listened to K's account, I could not help but think that this was an admirable lady indeed. I thought she was merely an illiterate woman who had been born into poverty, who had never received a day of schooling in her life and could barely read hiragana. However, for anyone born into an environment such as hers, if they ever wished to rake in enough profit

to establish themselves independently as well as support their parents, her path of hardship was surely the only one to take. Her life had been filled with such struggle that it was undeniably worth of respect and admiration.

Most unfortunate of all, however, was that she had never fallen for a single man before in her life, but was now hopelessly ensnared by K's charms for the first time as he bled her dry of all her savings. Being the clever woman that she was, she had witnessed many other women in her position tragically losing all they had for the sake of some man, so up until now, she had held fast in guarding her heart against men. Despite selling sex for a living, she had never given any man so much as a single *rin*²³ of money, and secretly, she had been proud of it. When she first met K, she had warned herself, "do not falter, do not falter," but in the end, she too fell to his traps.

"How about it? My skills really are something, aren't they?" K kept bragging, and as he forced me to listen to him recount this whole affair, I could not help but despise him in that moment.

Addressing him with stiff formality, I gave K a stern scolding and that morning, I somehow succeeded in dragging him out of the brothel and returning him to his wife and children.

"Well, I'm just about tired of her so I was already thinking about breaking up, but I don't know what kind of a spectacle a tough woman like her will make once she gets all jealous," K warned me. Just as he predicted, by the following evening, the woman was there at Tomisakashita to rail at K and his wife. She was normally a rather docile woman, but it was hard to tell if she'd drunk a lot before going there, or if she just burst into the home all of a sudden. After a heated exchange with K's wife, she raised a medicine kettle in her hand and immediately to beat the wife's face with it, grappling at her shoulders.

²³ Meiji era coin worth one-thousandth of a yen, roughly 1/20 of an American penny at the time.

"What the hell, it's your own damn fault that you can't keep your own husband from straying, don't you dare talk shit to me! You should've died a long time ago, you bitch, you bitch!" The woman yelled, straddling K's wife as she beat her relentlessly.

Even as blows were being rained upon her, K's wife raised her voice in a hysterical shriek, screaming, "No matter what you say, I am still K's wife!"

K was only barely able to pull the woman off his wife and it took all his strength to pin her down, hitting her face several times in the process. But try as he might, he was unable to silence her howls of rage. By the time that he had successfully restrained her, her kimono had been shredded to pieces and half her face was all swelled up, making her look like some sort of monster.

Even after all this, the woman did not learn her lesson at all, and each night she would come to K's house crying, howling, scolding, and going mad all the while. Sometimes when K was not at home, she would come to the house and beat the wife half to death, before crowing her victory all the way home.

It seems that this fiasco went on for about a week before K went back with the Senzokuchou woman. After all that, K hid away from his wife and friends alike so we did not see him for a while. But before long, I caught wind of rumors that the shop in Senzokuchou had closed down and that K had accompanied the woman over to Qingdao for work.

About half a year had passed when K was finally able to dump the woman in Qingdao and escaped back to his home Tomisakashita at long last.

"I swear, this time I've learned my lesson. I've caused you all so much trouble through all of this, but rest assured that I will never get involved with another woman like that ever again. That being said, I was just barely able to give her the slip. It still feels as though she might chase me back here from the mainland at any moment," K said to Kubomura and I when we finally saw each other again.

Indeed, ten days had barely passed when an acquaintance of mine, a detective named O-san who was well-versed in the affairs of the Kakigarachou Red Light District, informed me that a girl looking for K had arrived from Qingdao all of a sudden, taken up residence around Hamachou, and went around searching for K every single day.

"That woman has always been a strong-willed one and isn't the type to give up easily, so she'll likely find K eventually. No matter if it's on the train or passing by in a crowd, as soon as she bumps into K again, she'll definitely make him pay. As revenge for abandoning her, she might splash acid on his face so that no woman will ever fall for him again. These days she carries around a vial of poison and a pistol concealed on her person, there's no knowing what she might do," O san told me.

Even the famously carefree K turned pale as soon as he heard this. In order to minimize the danger to his wife and children, he hid himself away on the second floor of a rice cracker shop in Iikura, Azabu, and scarcely showed his face in the daytime. The details of the situation are unclear to me, but the woman tried whatever means possible in order to find him and ended up hiring a private detective to search for K far and wide. And at long last, they found him, there on the second floor of the rice cracker shop.

K was finally caught by the woman and had anticipated a fearsome confrontation to come, but the whole situation actually came to an unexpectedly peaceful conclusion. Two or three days later, the woman returned to Qingdao in high spirits and with K tightly in her grasp. In all this, K was fortunate enough to escape having his beautiful boy looks seared off by acid. Surely, he was a man blessed with such luck throughout his entire life.

“FUMIKO’S FEET” (富美子の足, 1919)

Sensei

I offer my deepest apologies for having sent you this letter so suddenly, despite being but a lowly student who has never met you even once. The story that I am about to tell you may be a long one, but I must implore you to read it through until the end- I know what a busy man you are and am dearly grateful for your time but- please allow me to make this one request in advance.

It may be rather selfish of me to say this now that you've already begun reading, but I wonder myself if this story may not be of interest to you after all. If you think that there even a speck of value in what I have to say, if there is any part of this story that you would wish to use as material for your works, then I have no objections whatsoever. To speak frankly, I dream of the day that you would write these events into a novel, and it is because of this aspiration that I write to you today. I firmly believe that none other than you, the author whom I have idolized for so long, who would understand the twisted, unfathomable psychology of this story's protagonist. Of all the writers who could bear any sympathy for this character, there is no other but you - Convinced with this as I am, it was these motives that I decided to write this letter to you. Of course, a mere fan such as myself should be more than content should you decide to so much as listen to my story, but I beg of you, if at all possible, please use this story as material for your writing. Whether you choose to portray the protagonist in a sympathetic light or are filled with disgust towards him, I am certain that he would be delighted either way. At any rate, I am sure that after taking but the first glance at the facts of this case, one with your imaginative prowess and vast accumulated experience will recognize at once that this story is undeniably of value. The writings of a man lacking in

literary skill such as I are hardly of note, but I hope that you may at least take interest in the events of the story, and implore you once again to read on until the very end.

The protagonist of this story is some who has just recently passed away. This man's surname was Tsukakoshi, and he belonged to a family that had plied their trade as pawnbrokers in the Muramatsuchou neighborhood of Nihonbashi since the Edo period, but the Tsukakoshi whom I speak of was in the tenth generation of this line. He died a mere two months ago on the eighteenth of February at the age of sixty-three. He was as plump as a sumo wrestler and developed diabetes forty years ago, but after a case of pulmonary tuberculosis just five or six years ago, he grew more and more emaciated by the year until he was as skinny as a thread in the year or two before his death. Those last few years he mostly spent at his villa in Shichirigahama beach in Kamakura, and it was while he was there that rather than his diabetes, his tuberculosis got worse and eventually killed him. When he moved to Kamakura, he retired from his store and left it to his adopted son Kakujirou, so his family began to refer to him as "the Old Man", and I will continue to refer to him as such throughout this story. The Old Man did not get along well at all with his family in Tokyo, and when he was on his deathbed, the only one who raced to his side was his sole daughter Hatsuko, Kakujirou's wife. The Tsukakoshis were an old house of Edo and he must have had at least five or six families of relatives within the city of Tokyo alone. But despite this, those relatives did not visit the Old Man even once the entire time he was ill, and his funeral was extremely frugal, and conducted in utmost desolation. The only ones who witnessed the course of the Old Man's sickness and death were Osada, the maid who attended to him at his bedside, his mistress Fumiko, and me. Now, before we go any further, I must inform you of my relationship with the Old Man- and by extension, my own circumstances. I am a twenty-five old arts school student who was born in the rural Akumi county of Yamagata prefecture. My family are extremely distant relatives of the Tsukakoshis, and when I first set out for

Tokyo, there was nobody else in the city whom I could rely upon. So upon arrival, I got off at Ueno station with a letter from my father held close to my breast, and immediately set off in search of the pawnshop in Muramatsuchou. At the time, the Old Man was still owner of the shop there, and he provided me with all sorts of help. As such, from then on I'd come visit Muramatsuchou two or three times a year, but I did not truly get to know the Old Man until recently- we only became close in the past year or half year. Now, the protagonist of this story is the Old Man, while his mistress Fumiko serves as the female protagonist. As for myself, think of me as someone who has been dragged into this whole story. Of course, I am hardly an innocent bystander of the whole affair, though I'm unsure if you could consider me as a key player, given the circumstances. Moreover, in the process of explaining the Old Man's psychology, I may be dissecting my own at the same time.

How was it that I had gotten on such close terms with the Old Man? Or rather, how was it that I began to get close with him? This is where our story must begin. I, a young man raised in the backwaters of Yamagata, and the Old Man, advanced in age and born in the cultured low town of shogunate era Edo, had not a single common point between us, whether it be interest nor knowledge nor basic human temperament. I was a countryside student fresh off the farm, filled with longing for the Western arts and the youthful aspiration of someday becoming a Western-style painter. As for the Old Man, he was a bona-fide Edoite who clung firmly to old habits and traditions dated back as far as the Tokugawa era. In my view, he was a little snobbish about all sorts of things in order to give off the air of being a born and bred connoisseur of the Tokyo low town. As a result, anyone who so much as looked at the Old Man and me could tell that we came from drastically different walks of life, and nobody would have ever expected us to get along at all. It was only because of my own active efforts to befriend the Old Man that we became close at all. From the Old Man's perspective, he was absolutely despised by all his own blood and kin, so although I was but a distant relative, he

must have been rather glad whenever I went to visit him calling upon "Retired uncle, retired uncle". Especially towards the end of his life, I was the only one aside from his mistress Fumiko whom the Old Man would get upset over if I did not visit his sickbed every day. However, if I had not taken the initiative to get close to him, we certainly would not have developed such a relationship otherwise. To those unaware of the situation, it would seem as if I were befriending him out of pity since he had been abandoned by the rest of his family. It always embarrassed me to think that they might think of my repeated visits to him as some sort of kind or noble deed when in fact, I held no such noble intentions for getting close with the Old Man. To confess it plainly, the reason why I visited the Old Man so often was not to make nice with him, but rather because I wanted to see his mistress, Fumiko. It was not as if I had any wild ideas of what to do when I saw her, and I was well aware that any such fantasy would be far beyond the powers of a mere countryside student, but even so, when I was not with her, the image of Fumiko's figure would

Fumiko's figure would flicker before my eyes. I was so deeply infatuated that I became restless if I was unable to see her face in ten days. As a result, I made up all sorts of pointless excuses to visit the Old Man's house.

It seems that the reason why the Old Man had become ostracized by his entire family because he had fallen for Fumiko, whom he first met as a geisha in Yanagibashi, and since then he had brought her in to live with him. This happened the December before last, when the Old Man had just turned sixty years old, and Fumiko, who had just been promoted to a full-fledged geisha, was only sixteen. But it appears that his prodigal behavior had been a problem since long before then. Back in his youth, the Old Man had been an expert hedonist, and now that he was already sixty, his relatives had probably given up on hoping that he'd clean up his act sooner or later. From what I had heard, the Old Man first married when he was twenty years old, and had switched wives three times ever since. He had lived on his

own ever since divorcing his third wife at age thirty five. (His only daughter Hatsuko was born to him by his first wife.) These repeated divorces were not just the result of the Old Man's womanizing lifestyle, but also due to secret reason that nobody could be allowed to discover: the Old Man had been indulging himself in a certain sexual fetish that had only come to light very recently. His wife never noticed his secret, and even when hiring geisha he was extremely capricious; whenever it seemed that he had begun to favor a particular woman, he would grow bored of her just as quickly and fall for yet another before within the month.

All this seemed only befitting for the life of a womanizer. To him, there were countless women that he fell head over heels for, but from the women's perspectives, they were only giving themselves up to him for the sake of earning money, so the Old Man never found a single woman whom reciprocated his love. The Old Man possessed no less vigor than your typical Tokyo playboy and his looks were fine enough, so in all that time he should have found at least one woman whom he could have built a close relationship, but instead he was met exclusively with revulsion and deception. Perhaps this was why no matter how infatuated he was with a woman at any given time, he had learned not to engage too closely with any of them.

"That man really won't stop with his womanizing, will he? It's fine if he wants to have a woman on the side, but can't he just pick a mistress and settle down already?" His relatives would often complain.

In the end, Fumiko alone was special. The Old Man met her in the summer before last, and once he lit a torch for her, there seemed no sign of it ever going out. With every passing month, his affections only grew. So in the November of that year, he took on all the expenses for her graduation from apprentice to full-fledged geisha, and even bought out her contract. Before long, he went all the way to have her move into his Muramatsuchou home as his mistress. But as per usual, no matter how fervent the Old Man's passions were, the woman

bore no love for him whatsoever. Of course there was no way she could have truly fallen for a man over forty years her senior, that much was simply common sense. She must have anticipated that the Old Man would not be around for much longer, and set her sights upon the fortune that he would soon leave behind.

It was just in the January of last year when I first discovered this mysterious woman living at the Muramatsuchou house, during my new year's courtesy visit to the Old Man's home. When I arrived, I requested entry at the lattice door leading to the Old Man's living quarters behind his pawnshop. A voice answered, "Ah, Uno-san, (My name is Unokichi, but at some point, the Old Man had shortened it to Uno-san, and wouldn't stop calling me that. The name 'Uno-san' made me sound like some plain old craftsman, and I hated the sound of it.) You've finally arrived. Come right in! Just this way!"

As soon as I entered the Old Man's room, I could tell that he had already been drinking. His sturdy, square face was flushed so red that it glowed, and despite being indoors, he was wrapped up in a warm scarf of woolen yarn. Sitting beneath the kotatsu²⁴, he chattered blithely away with the renowned smoothness of born Edoites, as if he were a professional rakugo storyteller himself. It was then that I noticed sitting at the kotatsu right across from the Old Man, was an unfamiliar, rather stylish woman. As I entered the tatami-matted room, the woman rested her elbow upon the kotatsu tabletop as tight press of her knees parted into a slightly more relaxed pose, and her neck and torso turned to face me. When I say that her “neck” and “torso” turned around, it is because at that moment, those two parts of her body seemed as though separate, isolated pieces of beauty seared into my memory. If I had said that her “body” turned around, it would not have accurately conveyed the image before me. To describe it better, it was as if that graceful, shapely neck and slender torso moved in a smooth rippling motion, like one wave after another. Even after she had already turned

²⁴ A small table with a heating element attached beneath and a heavy quilt draped over to trap the heat.

around, that rippling motion continued to spread through her body, so that a slight swaying could still be felt from the long nape of her neck to the curve of her shoulders beneath her clothes. When I looked at her, I could not help but feel that her body must be supple and seductively gentle, possibly due to the influence of her clothing choices. Rather than following recent trends, she was wearing an outdated Touzan stripe patterned kimono with the sleeves pulled low on her arms. The Old Man however did not seem particularly flustered at her gorgeous display, and calmly looked between me and the woman as he said, “This here is Unokichi-san. He’s a distant relative of mine who studies at an art school around here. I’ve been taking care of him as a favor to his father back in the countryside...” As he spoke, his eyes narrowed and his lips pulled into a thin smile. Under normal circumstances, the Old Man should have introduced the woman to me at this point, but he did not say a word about her at all.

“My name is Fumi, how do you do,” the woman said. She sounded mildly embarrassed and kept her head lowered even as she spoke, but somehow, this seductive greeting left me feeling as though I had been bewitched by a fox.

“Ah, this must be his mistress,” I thought to myself as I peered into the Old Man’s face. His bloated red nose resembled the shape of a person sitting with legs crossed, and the heavy wrinkles at the sides of his cheeks made his mouth look gapingly large, earning it the nickname of “the toad mouth”, which was currently stretched wide in an unsettling smile. Hidden beneath that grin was unspoken message of, “As you may have guessed, this is my mistress. I’ve just recently taken her in.” However, it was already clear to see that he was incredibly taken with this woman and I was bound to have noticed it sooner or later.

That being said, although the woman was not what you could call an outstanding beauty, her pleasant physique and features fit the Old Man’s dandy, low town tastes to a tee. Just as I was thinking this, the Old Man’s broad smirk seemed to say, “How about it? I’ve

found a fine woman, haven't I?" Just from looking at him I could practically sense his gloating. The mistress herself tugged awkwardly on the hem of her kimono, and I happened to notice that her thick black hair, as glossy as enamel, was strangely done up in a Tsubushi Shimada style. The hairdo made her look like a geisha on hire at a dinner party, and along with her Touzan striped attire, it seemed likely that she had been made to dress up exactly according to the Old Man's tastes. (The Old Man's Edo tastes certainly leaned towards the eccentric; I was only making conjectures about it now, but later I would come to fully understand the extent of his eccentricity.) If you asked me where my interests lay, I actually preferred more exotic women instead, but looking at this woman, who was an almost perfect example of the Edo type, I could not say that I disliked the look of her at all. Of course, to say that she was a perfect example did not mean that her features were entirely without flaw, but rather it was as if there was a certain atmospheric quality to even her flaws that contributed all the more to her gallant, stylish impression. In order for a woman to exhibit this sort of beauty, there were certainly flaws that were required, but she could not possess any extraneous flaws either. The contours of her face were egg-shaped with a pointed chin and high cheekbones, but not to the point that her face looked stiff and hard. There was a bit of plump flesh on her cheeks that stretched out with every movement of her lips, like the rise and ebb of waves upon the shore, so that her face looked soft and full. Her forehead was narrow and her hairline was not arranged with a widow's peak in the so-called "Fuji" style. There were slight bangs on each side of the pointed tip, but both sides were tucked up to create the illusion of a peak that arced out towards the outer corners of her eyes. However, breaking the shape of her widow's peak were small sections of white forehead that interrupted the straight line of her hairline and dimly shone through the coat of lush black hair. This hairstyle indescribably transformed the shape of her forehead, giving it the illusion of fullness and at the same time emphasizing the blackness of her hair. Her wide eyebrows

arched sharply upwards, but luckily, unlike the hair of her head, the hairs there were sparse and with a hint of redness, so that her eyebrows did not appear so harsh. As for the shape of her nose, it was tall, straight, and pointed, but that too was flawless. The tip of her nose was slightly fleshier, so that the straight slope from between her eyebrows to the base of her nostrils had a slight swell to it, like the flesh of one's calves, that dulled its sharpness. However, I daresay that if this nose were perfectly sculpted, it would undoubtedly give her entire face a much colder appearance. An excessively round button nose would have entirely ruined her features, but this nose with a slight plumpness at the tip carried with it a lovely sense of warmth. Next was the matter of her mouth shape. (Out of all the components that made up her face, my unskillful description of this feature especially is sure to cause Sensei great trouble. However, I cannot help but describe this woman's features as detailed as I am able to. One way or another, I wish to convey to Sensei exactly the caliber of woman that Fumiko was. As much as this may trouble you, Sensei, please bear with me for now.)

Complementing the slender egg-shaped point of her chin was a lovely small mouth, but even more lovely was her protruding lower lip, a trait particular to Edoites known as the *Ukeguchi*. That's right, if her lower lip had receded flatly as usual, I believe that her face would appear far more solemn. Her looks would have lost that hint of flirtatiousness and become completely bereft of that sly, clever-looking charm. And to speak of cleverness, most clever-looking of all were those eyes. Large and bright, the whites of her eyes gleamed like mother-of-pearl, with black irises that shone like lapis set right in the center. Even the deep-sunken appearance of her eyes made her look all the more clever. Her eyes resembled nimble fish which lay in wait at the bottom of a pond, watching the dancing sunlight as it reflected through the surface of the water. Serving as the waterweed which the fish hid in were her eyelashes, which were so long that they would reach almost halfway down her cheeks whenever she closed her eyes. Even now, I have never seen such fine, impressive eyelashes

on anyone else. Her lashes were so long that they seemed as though they might even obscure her vision. When she opened her eyes wide, there was no way of knowing where her eyelashes ended and her bulging irises began. What made her eyelashes and irises all the more conspicuous was the color of her skin. As with most young woman at the time (especially among those who were former geisha), the sheer layer of light makeup over her bare skin was not gaudy in the least, but blurred her features slightly as if looking at her through smoked glass. Amidst the pale, dreamy plane of white skin, her black irises stood out in stark contrast, as dark and alive as a lone beetle crawling across a sheet of blank paper. In truth, I have not exaggerated this woman's beauty in the least. I am merely reporting my honest impression of her.

In all the years before, I had always rushed off immediately after delivering my new year's greetings, but this time I felt as if I had discovered a hidden treasure and could not bear to leave so soon. So from the morning until two or three in the afternoon, I served as the Old Man's companion all throughout his midday feast. As we ate, the woman ensured that our sake cups were never empty, and I remember that both the Old Man and I got fairly drunk.

"Hey Uno-san, I know I haven't seen a single piece of your artwork yet, but since you study Western painting, surely you must be pretty good at drawing oil portraits and all that, right?"

The Old Man brought this up all of a sudden, after a considerable amount of sake had been passed around.

"When you put it like that, you make it sound as if he isn't actually good at all! Uno-san, you should scold him for that." Ofumi-san said this in a friendly tone of voice, and as she turned to face me, she made a flirtatious dipping motion with her neck as if scooping something up in that protruding lower lip of hers.

“When I said you must be pretty good, I didn’t mean to insult you or anything, Uno-san. As you know, I’m the old-fashioned type, so when looking at things like oil paintings, I really have no sense of whether it’s good or bad at all...”

“Well isn’t that all the more rude? You shouldn’t speak like that of something you don’t even understand!”

Despite how impudent and bold her scolding was, Ofumi-san was only in the spring of her seventeenth year at the time. Each time the Old Man tried to defend himself against her chastisement, the corners of his eyes and lips would rise in a faint, indescribable smile. Seeing such a joyful expression laid bare upon his face made me feel all the more embarrassed.

“Ahahaha, you got me there,” he said, scratching his head as he exaggerated his apology. In order to win over Ofumi-san’s favor, he acted cloyingly sweet and spoiled as if he were an overgrown infant. Of the three people here, the Old Man was aged sixty one years old, I was nineteen, and Fumiko was the youngest at only seventeen years old, but judging by the way we were behaving, you would have thought that the order of the age was exactly the opposite. It was as if both the Old Man and I turned into children while in front of Ofumi-san.

At first, I found it strange that the Old Man had brought up the topic of oil paintings out of the blue, but it turns out that he wanted me to paint a portrait of Ofumi-san for him

“I wouldn’t be able to tell if it was good or bad, but either way, an oil painting would still look more realistic than a Japanese style painting, wouldn’t it?” The Old Man said, and asked me to draw as exact a resemblance to her as possible. I felt very uncertain as to whether or not I’d be able to fulfill the Old Man’s request, but in hopes that I would be able to use this opportunity to get close with Ofumi-san, I accepted the task without hesitation. So from then on, I would go visit the Old Man’s house around twice a week, and painted with Ofumi-san as my model.

Most merchant homes in the Tokyo low town are built in a similar fashion: the shopfront takes up comparatively little space, concealing a much wider space in the back of the building. The deeper you go in, the worse the light, so even at midday, the rooms are as dark as a cellar. Of course, the Tsukakoshi home was built this way as well, and the Old Man's back room separate from the rest of the house was lit so poorly that on days that were even a little cloudy, it became so dark in there past three in the afternoon that you you could not read so much as a word of the newspaper. To make matters worse, in the short, midwinter days after the new year, I would come to visit the Old Man's house after attending my classes for the day. By that time I reached his house, even if the outer rooms were still brightly lit, inside the Old Man's room, it was as if the sun had already set. It was quite impossible to paint and oil portrait in this sort of room environment. Even if I were to request for better lighting, the only space available was the small five *tsubo*²⁵ courtyard in front of the house. From there, the weak ray of winter sunlight looked desolate and pale, as if the sun had already abandoned us and these were but the leftover dregs of light. Sitting amidst that darkness was beautiful, oval-faced Ofumi-san, sitting with her shoulders squeezed together as tightly as though they might fall off at any moment. The boldly uncovered nape of her neck reflected faint light with a pale glow,-- I don't know how to describe it, but at any rate, the sight of her was seductive enough to throw my nerves into complete disarray. All I wanted to do was put down my brush and gaze upon the soft, white curves of her flesh forever.

Just when I had planned to get to work on the painting itself, the Old Man happened to acquire some 60-candlepower²⁶ blue electric light bulbs and gas lamps that lit up his dim room brightly enough to hurt the eyes. With that, lack of lighting was no longer a problem- or rather, it had been far too compensated for. However, we immediately came upon another problem, this time in regards to the deciding model's pose. At first, the Old Man had only

²⁵ Archaic unit of measurement, one *tsubo* equalling to approximately 3.3 squared meters.

²⁶ Archaic unit for measuring electric light brightness

requested that the painting be a realistic portrait, so I had decided to paint the Ofumi-san from waist up.

“But Uno-san, don’t you think that drawing her just sitting there isn’t interesting at all? Would you be able to draw her in this sort of pose?” The Old Man had said, before reaching into his floor cupboard to pull out a musty old volume of woodblock prints, before displaying one of the illustrations for me to see. The volume was Tanehiko Ryutei’s *The Rustic Genji*, and I remember the print was one by the artist Kunisada. The image was of a young girl, with beautiful Kunisada-esque features just as Ofumi-san did, who had been walking barefoot along a long countryside road. She had just arrived at an empty house that looked like an old temple, and just as she was about to step up into the house, she sat upon the veranda and used a handkerchief to wipe dirt off the bare sole of her right foot. As she did this, her upper body leaned far towards the left, slanted so diagonally that it looked as though she might topple over one moment, since her entire torso was propped up on only one thin arm. Her left foot dangled from the edge of the veranda, its toes just barely reaching the ground below, and her right leg was folded at an angle beneath her so that she could wipe her foot with her right hand. The entire pose itself was demonstrated proof of the profound interest that Ukiyo-e artists of old held towards the bodies of young women. The startling deftness with which this girl’s limbs were drawn served as testament to how closely the artist must have observed the movements of her body. But what astonished me most was how supple and soft the girl’s limbs looked despite the outlandish pose it had been twisted into. This was no thoughtless contortion of the female form, for it possessed a perfect balance of delicacy and strength that seeped through her entire figure. Even the way that the girl sat upon the veranda was no normal seated pose. As I mentioned before, her body was twisted to the left with her right leg folded beneath her. She remained in so precarious a position that if one so much as tugged on the left arm that she had propped up against the veranda surface,

then she would immediately lose her center and fall tumbling to the ground. As she held this imbalanced pose, there were parts of her body where the dainty muscles were drawn taut as a wire. I could sing countless praises of the beauty that brimmed from every part of her body. For example, if you gazed down the arm that supported her sloping shoulder, then you would see the palm of her hand pressed flush against the floorboards of the veranda. The fingers of that hand were frozen in the middle of a wavelike tapping motion against the wood, all five spread wide and pointed at different angles as if convulsing. Even the left foot hanging off the edge of the veranda did not dangle or flop there meaninglessly. In trying to reach the ground, she stretched her leg out as far as she could, so that the instep of her foot formed a straight line with her shin and the tip of her big toe was pointed like the beak of a bird. But most delicately drawn of all was her bent right leg and the hand that brushed dirt away from the sole of her foot. Realistically speaking, there was no need at all for her to take this peculiar pose with her right foot deliberately pulled up with her right hand. If she were to let go of that foot, it would immediately drop down to the ground. Therefore, her hand was not only wiping away the dirt but also holding up the foot at the same time. As I beheld this print, I could not help but acknowledge the exquisite detail of the piece and the abundant skill of the Ukiyo-e artist. For some reason, rather than taking the easier option of having the girl pull her foot up by the ankle or grabbing it by the instep, the artist chose not to draw that, and instead had her insert her hand in between the third and fourth toes of her foot while pinching onto the two small toes so that she was just barely able to hold the foot up. Her small, lovely hand was slipped between those two toes, pressing them down so they were wound up and ready to stretch out again like the coiled head of a royal fern. One could almost see her raised knee trembling in midair from the tension of it. I have done my best to describe this illustration as well as I am able so that even you, Sensei, likely have a rough idea of what it looked like. If the artist had drawn the woman in a pose like a weeping willow, with her

limbs relaxed and draped about, then it already would have possessed an exquisite, sensual gentleness. How much more difficult a task it must have been to draw this model's twisted position and the whip-like elasticity of her form without damaging the beauty of the pose! In this print, "softness" existed alongside "rigidity", "delicacy" held "tension" within, and "dynamism" masqueraded as "frailness". The image carried all the effortful, devoted beauty of of a prized nightingale which sings on until its throat grows hoarse. Really, what gave such a remarkable pose its remarkable beauty was that every part of the woman's figure, from her hands to her feet, from the tips of her fingers to the bulge of her muscles, was drawn as such that it brimmed with an overwhelming sense of aliveness. Surely the craftsman had strained every bit of his considerable abilities in order to evoke her attitude of forceful flirtatiousness, yet nothing about the pose appeared unnatural or forced. However, in order for this pose to look as seductive as it did, flirtatiousness alone was not enough. It also required a woman born with such naturally erotic limbs in the first place. If an ugly-looking, chubby woman with short legs and a fat neck were to strike pose, it would look like nothing more than an unsightly mess. Surely Kunisada, the artist behind this drawing, must have once witnessed such a beautiful woman in this sort of pose with his own eyes. The very sight of her must have struck his heart and driven him to recreate that image again somewhere in his work. Even if this were not the case, how could he have possibly illustrated such a challenging figure so perfectly if he were relying solely upon his own imagination?

At the Old Man's request, I had Ofumi-san assume the pose from the drawing, and just as I feared, I had to inform him that it would be utterly impossible for me to recreate that figure. Even if I were to make an attempt, as unskilled as I was, there was no way that I would be able to reproduce the beautiful effect of Kunisada's version. No matter how unlearned in western painting the Old Man claimed to be, what a selfish request he had made, I thought to myself. IN his heart of hearts, the Old Man must have thought that if a colorless

woodblock print could present such a beautiful lifelike image, then my oil painting recreation with a live model would certainly turn out all the more beautiful, or something like that. What he failed to realize was that the image's beauty lay in the choice of woodblock print as its medium, and to recreate that same beauty with oil paint required far more talent and skill than I possessed. I fervently attempted to explain this to the Old Man as best as I could, until I finally had to turn down his request. But despite my continued protests, the Old Man simply refused to listen. No matter what, he insisted that we bring a bamboo bench in to the center of the room, have Fumiko sit upon it to wipe her feet, and that I should draw the scene for him. He said that since he couldn't tell if the painting was good or bad at any rate, he would be satisfied as long as some likeness of the model was achieved, so I might as well make an attempt anyways. He was even willing to offer me as much money as I wanted. Time after time, he lowered his head and persisted in making his request.

“Come on, don't keep saying no to me like this. Won't you do this one favor for me? Just one little favor...” The Old Man kept saying as he grinned hideously at me with his massive “toad mouth”. In a tone that was neither joking or serious, he kept repeating the phrase “just one little favor” over and over. In all the time I had known him, the Old Man had always been such a cool-mannered connoisseur that this was the first time I had ever seen him so obstinate. I was completely caught off guard by the Old Man's sudden persistence, so fervent that it seemed he might throw himself begging at my feet at any moment. As he pleaded with me, I noticed that the Old Man's expression had turned into something dreadful. There were unchanging aspects of him such as his attitude and manner of speech that seemed the same as usual, but when he spoke to me, his gaze seemed fixed upon something in the distance, and his bloodshot eyes looked sunken into his skull. Without a doubt, the mad look in his eyes revealed that something must have suddenly snapped in his mind. Perhaps the madness that festered behind the shadows of the Old Man's gaze was the source of his family

estrangement, the reason why all his kin had turned their backs on him. In the spur of the moment, I felt that this must be true, and I was overcome by a quiet sense of shock.

Perhaps it was Ofumi-san's demeanor at the time that led me to this sudden insight. As soon as she noticed the change in the Old Man's gaze, her expression immediately became troubled as if to say "not this again", and she furrowed her brow before making a "tch" sound with her tongue, as if to shush an unruly child.

"Dear, what are you doing? If Uno-san has told you that he can't do it, then there's nothing you can do to change the fact, is there? Surely you should know this already! As for sitting on a bench in the middle of the main house and imitating that annoying pose of yours, I will have no part in it," she said, casting a sharp look at the Old Man. Upon hearing this, the Old Man began bowing repeatedly before Ofumi-san as he pleaded for her forgiveness, flattering and bribing her with all sorts of things in order to win back her good favor, all so that she would sit on the bench and wipe her feet for him. (Of course, as he begged her like this, his face was smiling but his eyes were utterly bloodshot.) Upon seeing this, I immediately forgot about my own troubles and felt an immediate sympathy towards Ofumi-san. Because Kunisada had only captured a single instance during which the motion had occurred, it would be considerably difficult for any model to hold that pose for an extended period of time, probably for no longer than three minutes at once. Despite her usual selfishness however, Ofumi-san gave in to the Old Man's demands surprisingly easily, finally taking a seat upon the bench while tutting all the while-- there must have been some deeper cause for her agreement, I secretly reasoned to myself. It seemed that if Ofumi-san were ever to turn down his requests, the Old Man would refuse to listen and throw a fit, starting from the darkening of his gaze before escalating to all sorts of mad words and actions-- Perhaps it was out of fear that Ofumi-san gave in so quickly? Somehow, this was where my speculations took me.

“I’m terribly sorry for the inconvenience Uno-san, but as you can see, this one’s fits of madness are impossible to handle. It doesn’t really matter if you actually draw me or not, but please, let us play along for a little while so that he’ll calm back down.” These were Ofumi-san’s parting words to me before she went over to sit on the bench, and hearing this only made me feel even more certain of my deductions.

“Well if you say so, I suppose I’ll give it a shot,” I said, heading to my easel. Of course, I had no intention of attempting the painting in earnest, but just as Ofumi-san had said, it was impossible to go against the Old Man’s wishes.

Before long, Ofumi-san had assumed the girl’s pose from the Old Man’s print collection, propping herself up on the bench with her right arm and holding onto the toes of her right foot with her right leg bent beneath her. Even if I were to say that she looked the spitting image of the girl from the original print, it would not suffice to express the amount of surprise I felt. No sooner had Ofumi-san had sat upon the bench and struck that pose, than she immediately transformed into the very girl from Kunisada’s drawing. That is how close a resemblance she held. Earlier, I had described that in order for this pose to appear seductive, the woman in question required a set of naturally erotic limbs as well. What I had not realized when saying this was how perfectly it would describe Ofumi-san’s supple limbs. If the model had possessed a figure any less bewitching than Ofumi-san’s, then there would have been no way they could so effortlessly channel the girl from the print. I had heard that Ofumi-san specialized in dance back in her geisha days, but it was only now that I saw how true that was. Otherwise, there was no way she could have assumed that difficult pose that most model girls wouldn’t have even been capable of, let alone with such ease and comfort. For a moment, I felt intoxicated by the vision of Ofumi-san as I looked over her and the girl in the print, comparing them to one another time after time-- I looked between them so many times that I could no longer tell which was the human and which was the print. Ofumi-san’s body--

the girl in the print's body, Ofumi-san's right arm, -- the girl in the print's right arm, Ofumi-san's left toe tip-- the girl in the print's left toe tip,-- Examining each of these body parts one by one, I discovered that they both held the same power, the same tension. You may think me long-winded at this point, but allow me to once again describe exactly how bewitching Ofumi-san's body was. While it may not be completely impossible for a normal model to imitate the pose of the girl in the print, aside from just mimicking the pose, she would have had to possess the perfect balance of equal beauty and strength present in each curve of her exquisite muscles. The only one who could possibly mimic this pose to such an extent must be none other than Ofumi-san. In fact, I would daresay that it was not Ofumi-san who was imitating the pose in the print, it was the girl in the print who was imitating Ofumi-san's pose. I would have even believed that Kunisada had used Ofumi-san as his model for this very print.

Nevertheless, out of all the woodblock prints in his possession, the Old Man had selected this specific one. Could it be that he had chosen it specifically because the girl in it resembled Ofumi-san? Why was he so fascinated with this particular pose? The Old Man's fervor was so intense that I became suspicious of his motivations. Of course, this seductive pose certainly elevated the beauty of Ofumi-san's body to a higher level, but if that were the only reason, then the Old Man's eyes would not have looked so mad and bloodshot, nor would he have become so obsessed. Suspicious as I was of the Old Man's "gaze", I felt that there must have been some deeper intention hidden within this pose. But as soon as I thought about what part of the female body this print emphasized that a normal pose would not show, I realized that I had found my answer. Needless to say, this pose had Ofumi-san's legs spread wide, pulling her kimono open and exposing her beautiful, lively feet-- from the curve of her shin to the tips of her toes. Ever since childhood, I had always been predisposed to gaining abnormal pleasure from the wishg ot young woman's legs, so I had long been

infatuated with the splendid curves of Ofumi-san's bare feet. Her shins, straight and shapely as if carved from wood, gradually narrowed as you went down her leg until they tightly tapered into the shape of her ankle. Afterwards was the gentle slope that made up her insole and ended in her five toes, from pinky to big toe, each of which poked out a bit longer than the last. In my opinion, the shape of Ofumi-san's big toe was far more eye-catching than even her face. Beautiful "faces" like Ofumi-san's were not unheard of in the world, but to this day I have never encountered beautiful "feet" as well-formed as hers. Feet with terribly flat insteps or with large exposed gaps between the toes give off as bad an impression as an ugly face. However, Ofumi-san's instep was rounded and plump with flesh, while her toes fit snugly together like the shape of the English letter "m", all five lined up neatly like a row of teeth. Her toes were so courteously arranged that it was as if someone had kneaded the shape of a foot out of rice flour, taken a pair of scissors and snipped a series of cuts along the front of it. And if her toes were also molded from the same flour, then what craftsmanship could possibly compare to those lovely nails, which clung tightly to the banks of her toes? Part of me wishes to compare her toenails to the stones upon a *go* board, but in truth, her nails were far more alluring and petite. If a skilled craftsman were to carve out tiny flakes of mother of pearl, carefully polish each petal to perfection, and then embed them upon the tip of rice flour toes with a pair of forceps, then perhaps he could recreate the likeness of those splendid toenails. Upon witnessing something so beautiful as this, I deeply felt that the God of Creation certainly had not made all men equal. For us normal beasts and men, nails "grew" upon our feet, but in Ofumi-san's case, surely her nails were not "grown" but in fact "inland". Yes, it must be that instead of toenails, Ofumi-san had been born with a single jewel studding each toe. If those toes were cut off their feet and sewn into a string of beads, surely they would go on to garnish the neck of some truly magnificent queen.

Even when those feet of hers were carelessly used to step on the ground or casually tossed upon the tatami matting in no particular pose, they already were equals in beauty to any magnificent piece of architecture. But now, twisted around in such a difficult position, Ofumi-san looked to be on the point of collapse, with the weight of her entire upper body supported by a single left foot. She stretched it out with as much strength as she could and was just barely able to reach the surface of the ground with her big toe. The weight of her whole body rested upon this single point of contact, firmly grinding the tip of her toe against the ground. As a result, the skin from her insole to her toes was stretched almost to the point of splitting. I could see that her foot was trembling as if it was afraid, and a fearful expression came upon it. (You may find it absurd that I use the word “expression” here, but I believe that feet are just as capable of conveying emotion as any face. I feel as though I can tell whether someone is emotionally turbulent or stoic and coldhearted simply from looking at the expressions of their feet.) This foot felt that its safety was being threatened, and it resembled the look of a little bird in the moment before taking flight, tensing its wings and filling its lungs with bated breath. The instep of the foot tensed and arched like a bow, and I could see every fold of flesh on the inner side of her foot. Gazing from the bottom, the way her toes bunched together resembled pieces of mollusks flesh. As for her other foot, it was held up two or three feet above the ground with her right hand, but it displayed a completely different expression entirely. If I were to say that “the foot was laughing”, most people would have no way of understanding my meaning. Even you, Sensei, may tilt your head and make a strange face at reading these words. However, I know of no other way to describe that right foot’s expression other than that it was “laughing”. The foot was twisted into a shape with its small and fourth toe held up in mid air, leaving the other three toes dangling spread out below them. The foot had twisted itself in a flirtatious manner, as if it were having its bottom tickled. In fact, this was an expression that I would often see on feet that were being tickled.

It does not seem so unnatural to refer to the expression that something makes while being tickled as “laughing”. When I say that the foot was flirting, it is because the toe and the instep were spread wide in completely opposite directions, creating the impression a huge gap between the two-- the entire foot was bent around like the shrimp on a decorative new year’s wreath, which displayed a certain kind of charm to the eye of the beholder. If not for Ofumi-san’s background as a dancer, then the soft, pliant joints of her body would not be able to stretch and contract so easily, nor would she be able to bend her foot back in this bewitching manner. But this alluring pose already held all the eroticism of a seductive dance itself. In addition, it would be completely amiss of me to go without mentioning that plump, rounded heel. When looking at the shape of most women’s feet, many of them have breaks and interruptions in the line from ankle to heel. Not so with Ofumi-san, hers was a smooth line without a single fault to be seen. Several times I circled behind Ofumi-san for no particular reason, solely so I could appraise the curves of her heel that were less visible from the front. I would devour the sight with my gaze, as if to burn the image of it into my memory. I would wonder what sorts of bones lay beneath, how the flesh was shaped around them to make such a gentle, round, glossy heel. It was as if in the seventeen years since birth, Ofumi-san’s heel had never tread on any hard thing aside from a mattress or tatami mat. Rather than living as a human man, if only I could become this beautiful heel and cling to the bottom of Ofumi-san’s foot forever, how blissful my life would be! If not that, then at least I would want to become the tatami floor which Ofumi-san’s heel stepped upon. If you were to ask me which was more sacred, my own life or Ofumi-san’s heel, I would immediately answer that the latter was far more precious. For the sake of Ofumi-san’s heel, I would gladly give my life.

Ofumi-san’s left and right feet- Did any other two such beautifully matching sisters ever exist? And with both of them being so stunningly beautiful, did they not compete against one another for attention?-- I realize that I have spent many words exalting the beauty of

these feet, but allow me to add just one final word on the subject. That is, on the color of the skin that wrapped these two beautiful sister feet. No matter how shapely the feet, there could never have attained this level of beauty had they possessed an unpleasant skin color. One could presume that Ofumi-san took pride in the beauty of her feet, and I wondered if in the bath, she would take care of her feet as carefully as she did her own face. In any case, the skin of her feet gleamed with such light and luster that she must have polished it with tireless diligence until it was as sleek and white as ivory. In fact, even ivory did not possess the mystical glow that her skin did. If one could infuse ivory with the warm blood of a young maiden, then perhaps it would be able to come close to the same level of vibrancy and divinity as that wondrous color of Ofumi-san's skin. Although I called it "white" before, it was no ordinary white; the edge of her heel and the tips of her toes were faintly tinged with a rosy color, creating a thin crimson border to her skin. The sight of it prompted memories of summertime foods drenched in strawberry milk. The color of strawberries melted into fresh white milk-- That was the color that flowed through the curves of Ofumi-san's foot. Now, this was simply my own speculation, but wasn't it possible that Ofumi-san had agreed so easily to performing this uncomfortable pose solely so that she would have the opportunity to show off her wondrous feet?

The feelings that I possessed towards the feet of the opposite sex were as such that just the sight of a beautiful woman's feet would elicit insuppressible longing within me, providing a remarkable psychological effect similar to worshipping a god. Even as a child, I became aware of these vulgar, diseased emotions that dwelled deep within me, and tried hard as possible to conceal them from all others. However, I recently discovered that I was not alone in suffering from this mad psychological response, that there was an entire group of people who worshipped the feet of the opposite sex just as I did-- Those known as the "Foot-

Fetichists”²⁷. Since learning that countless others of these people existed besides just myself, I had always wondered if even one such comrade could be present around me, and I secretly sought him out. Before I knew it, the Old Man Tsukakoshi had appeared and joined the ranks of my comrades. Unlike me, there was no way that the Old Man ever had or ever would read modern psychology books, so he never would have become familiar with the buzzword “Foot-fetichism”. He must have never even dreamed that there were so many other comrades like him in the world, and thought as I did when I was a child, that he was the only one in all the world cursed with such vulgar sexual inclinations. If he were a young man like me instead then this would have been a different story, but witnessing such a modern pathology hiding within this Old Man so proud of being a chic old town Edoite seemed somehow anachronistic.

“How could a connoisseur like me be inflicted with such a freakish disease?” The Old Man had surely said to himself, creasing his brow in consternation. It would be nothing short of humiliating if others were to find out about this condition, and the Old Man hid his secret deep in fears of this happening one day. If I had not been cursed with the same affliction and scrutinized the Old Man in search of it, then never in all eternity would I have been able to expose the Old Man’s secret. But from the very beginning, I had searched for the slightest bit of anything out of the ordinary in the Old Man’s behavior, and noticed that there was something suspicious in his gaze when he occasionally stole a glance at the shape of Ofumi-san’s feet.

So I said to him, “Pardon me, but Ofumi-san’s feet really are amazing, aren’t they? I’m quite used to seeing woman models at my school all the time, but this is the first time I’ve seen such fantastic, beautiful feet.”

²⁷ Archaic term for “Foot Fetishists”.

I said this intentionally trying to grab the Old Man's attention, and it worked. His face flushed suddenly red and there was a glint in his uncanny gaze as he turned to face me, a forced smile coming to his face as if he were trying to suppress intense embarrassment. But I continued to enthuse about the great many important factors in the curves of the foot and the beauty of a woman's flesh that determined a beautiful foot, and I made out the worship of feet to be a typical, natural human emotion. As he listened to me, the Old Man slowly began to relax, and little by little, his true colors started to show.

"Hey Old Man, I know I rejected your request at first, but you really do have an ulterior motive for choosing this pose, don't you? Isn't it because with Ofumi-san in this kind of pose, the beauty of her feet can be exhibited in all its glory? So you can't claim that you're entirely clueless about painting."

"Ah, you flatter me, Uno-san. It makes me really happy to hear you say that. I don't really know about the West, but back in old Japan, women would take pride in the beauty of their feet, y'know? So, look at this, you can see that back in the days of the old shogunate, the geisha were so determined to show off their feet that they wouldn't wear socks to cover them, not even in the winter chill. Back then, their guests would sing praises of those dashing feet, but these days, geisha put on socks whenever they go outdoors, so it's become completely backwards, you see. It's probably because girls these days have such misshapen feet that they can't even take off their socks right, but Fumi's feet are a rare beauty, so I insist that she keeps them sockless at all times." As he spoke, the Old Man's chin bobbed up and down in delight.

"I'm so delighted that you understand my feelings, Uno-san. Honestly, the craftsmanship of the painting doesn't matter at all. If it's too much trouble, you don't even have to draw the other parts, just please, carefully capture a likeness of her feet, that is all I ask," the Old Man finally said, pushing his luck once more. Most people would reduce their

request to a portrait of just the face, but in the Old Man's case, he wished for a painting of just the feet instead. As someone who shared the same illness as he did, I found no grounds to object to his request.

After that day, I made almost daily visits to the Old Man's home. Even while attending school, the image of Ofumi-san's feet would flicker before my vision, so much that I was unable to concentrate on schoolwork. However, that did not mean that I was always motivated to work while at the Old Man's place either. I carelessly procrastinated on the painting, spending my time there admiring Ofumi-san's feet and exchanging praises of them with the Old Man. Ofumi-san had often catered to the Old Man's fetish like this before, so aside from the occasional grimace during her strenuous modeling work, she stayed mostly quiet and paid no mind to our conversation. However, modeling though she may be, she was not modeling for the drawing; she was model for the adoring gazes of a deranged geriatric and a sick young man- gazes that must have seemed rather disgusting to Ofumi-san herself. She was a model for the purpose of being worshipped, what a peculiar situation to be in indeed. It was as if to be born with such bewitching feet had become her greatest burden. Most girls would most certainly refuse a task as ridiculous as this, but Ofumi-san was clever enough to meekly act as the Old Man's plaything. That being said, even her role was merely that of a plaything, she still held the power to drive us to overwhelming throes of ecstasy with scarcely a single touch, so depending on how you look at it, this may have been an easy task to perform after all.

Before long, the relationship between the Old Man and me had become without reservation, and the Old Man gradually laid bare to me the depths of his madness. Out of a sort of curiosity, I had deliberately prompted this to happen, as if luring him into a trap. In order to do so, of course I had to bring some of my own shameful nature to light as well, but I actually exaggerated and disparaged stories of past experiences far more than necessary in

order to drive all concept of shame from the Old Man's mind. Thinking about it now, perhaps this was not simply out of an innocent desire to know another's secrets, but I must have been driven by this uncontrollable desire hidden deep within me. The Old Man and I had become partners in crime, hurtling hellwards together to see how deep these abominable desires would go. Upon hearing my confessional stories, the Old Man felt terribly sympathetic for these experiences so similar to his own, so when he shared with me about his own life, he hid absolutely nothing. He told stories from his childhood to his sixties, stories of the absurd, the repulsive, the fantastical, drawing from a wealth of wild experiences that far surpassed mine. I doubt I could even write down all the stories that he recounted to me, so I have chosen to omit them from this letter. However, one particularly striking example, was that the bamboo bench we had been using as a modeling stand all this time had actually been brought into the house many times before. Time and time again, the Old Man had made Ofumi-san sit upon the bench as he toyed with her feet like a dog. Rather than acting the part of Ofumi-san's husband, this sort of role play brought him far more joy. Finally towards the end of March, the Old Man told me that he was preparing to retire at last. He would hand over the pawnshop to his daughter and her husband, then move to his villa in Shichirigahama. The official reason was that his diabetes and tuberculosis were gradually becoming worse, so he was following his doctor's orders for a change of scenery. In all actuality, this was all so that he could finally hide away from the world and play around as wildly as he pleased with Fumi without having to worry about the others' opinions. However, no sooner than he had moved to the villa, the Old Man's health took a turn for the worse, and his supposed "official" reason soon became the truth. The Old Man had always been relatively unbothered by his illness, continuing to wine and dine as he pleased despite his diabetes, so it was only a matter of time until his health was bound to decline. Moreover, it was not his diabetes, but his tuberculosis that became more severe by the day, reaching the point where he would regularly suffer from

thirty-nine degree fevers every evening. The Old Man had been gradually losing weight before, but now he rapidly withered into skin and bones, going from relatively healthy to visibly emaciated within half a month. Due to this illness, he was obviously in no position to fool around with Ofumi-san all day as he'd originally planned. The retirement villa was built facing south on a mountainside overlooking the ocean, with a well-lit, spacious ten-mat²⁸ master bedroom. But the Old Man was could do nothing but in bed all day with his pillow placed near the bright sunlit veranda, unable to get up for anything other than his three daily meals. Sometimes after coughing blood, he would raise his pallid forehead towards the ceiling, shut his eyes, and lie there in dead silence, as if he'd already prepared himself for that eventuality. A Doctor S from Kamakura's XX Hospital came to examine him every other day. "He is in grave condition. It may be sooner than expected if his fever doesn't go down, but even so, I doubt he'll last another year," he said, gently informing Ofumi-san of the prognosis. As the geriatric's illness worsened to the point where it became difficult for him to breathe, he would frequently find faults in the taste of his food or some other trivial matter, and grab at the maid Osada to scold her.

"You think I'd eat this sickly sweet shit? Just because I'm ill, you think you can treat me like a fool?" He'd say, hurling foul-mouthed abused at her in his cracked old voice, just because she'd added too much salt or cooking wine to the dish. He posed all sorts of challenges and complaints to her just to show off his supposedly inherent "connoisseur" tastes. But in truth, the declining condition of his body had already affected his sense of tastes, so no matter how many delicious foods the patient was fed, he would never be pleased. Because of this, the Old Man's temper grew worse and worse until he was flying off the handle at Osada at every meal of the day.

²⁸ In keeping with the Japanese tradition of measuring room area by the number of standard-size tatami mats fitted within, a ten-mat room is roughly 16.5 square meters, a rather large room.

“On about this again? For the last time, it isn’t Osada’s fault that your food doesn’t taste good, you’ve just lost your sense of taste. For a sick old geezer knocking on death’s door, you sure know how to complain! Osada, don’t mind a single thing he says. If the food really is so terrible, then he needn’t eat all!” Every time he flew into a rage, Ofumi-san would shout at him like this, and as soon as she raised her voice, the Old Man would immediately shut his eyes and go quiet, shriveling up like a slug sprinkled with salt. At times such as these, Ofumi-san was like a beast tamer wrangling a raging lion or tiger, and all others present could not help but worry.

It is difficult to tell when or how Ofumi-san had gained such impressive authority over this selfish and unmanageable Old Man, but it was around this time when she began to abandon the patient and leave the villa, disappearing to who-knows-where for half the day or even whole days at a time.

“I’m going to do a bit of shopping in Tokyo,” she’d say as if talking to herself, and no matter what the Old Man said or thought of it. She would take great pains in applying her makeup and dressing up to go out before heading out in a hurry. These affairs (Why yes, that’s exactly what they were. Not long after the Old Man died and Ofumi-san had gotten her hands on his inheritance, she married the ex-actor T, so it’s likely that she had been meeting him in secret during this time.) were rather shameless of her, but the Old Man’s family and relatives were all so sick of his deranged infatuation that nobody cared to do anything about it. Stuck immobile in his bed all the time with nothing to do, the Old Man could scarcely tell one day from another, and on top of that, he was now suffering cruel abuses at the hands of his cold-hearted mistress. But his relatives must have thought he was merely reaping what he had sown. From Ofumi-san’s point of view, one could have hardly expected a beautiful young woman like her to keep waiting upon the bedside of a crusty Old Man who was little more than a skeleton, spending day after monotonous day gazing at the distant color of the

ocean. Even the mere thought of it was enough to make one feel depressed. She had never borne the Old Man even a speck of love in the first place, and now he had been sucked dry of all that he could provide. Deserted by his family and afflicted with disease that left his body immobile, Ofumi-san could see that it was nearly time to wash her hands of him, and she had finally revealed her true colors while laying in wait for his death.

As it were, Ofumi-san would disappear on a lison at least once every five days, and it was during those days that the patient's mood would always worsen. At Ofumi-san's slightest word, would shrink up without complaint and be as docile as a pet cat, but no sooner than she had walked out the door, he would immediately throw a fit and scold the maids for anything that he could. But even if he was in the middle of throwing a tantrum, as soon as he heard the sound of Ofumi-san's returning footsteps entering the doorway, he would immediately cease his scolding and feign sleeping as if nothing had happened. The sudden change in his demeanor was so jarring that even the maid Osada could not keep herself from bursting into laughter.

Aside from the Old Man and Ofumi-san, there were three others who lived at the villa: Osada the maid, Osandon the cook, and the manservant in charge of the bath, making up a total of five people. As you can tell, Ofumi-san barely ever took care of the patient anymore, so the bulk of nursing duties fell to Osada alone. The doctor strongly recommended that they hire a nurse as well, but the Old Man firmly refused. The reason for this was-- Even now, despite being confined to his bed with his body rendered immobile, the Old Man still harbored that secret fetish within his heart, and he felt that having a nurse hanging around would spoil his fun. The only ones who knew the truth were the owner of those beautiful feet Ofumi-san, Osada, and me-- none but the three of us. Ever since the Old Man had moved to Kamakura, I would frequently come over to pay visits, less because I missed Ofumi-san herself but more because I missed her feet. Since she did not go out to Tokyo every single

day, Ofumi-san would usually be bored sitting there without anyone to talk to, so she welcomed me whenever I came to visit. But delighting in my visits all the more than Ofumi-san did, was the Old Man himself. It was understandable that he should bear such affection for me, since the Old Man likely had no other ways of satisfying his secret desires when I was not present. Though he would never say this aloud, to the Old Man, I was as crucial to his pleasure as Ofumi-san herself. Over the course of his illness, the Old Man had developed bedsores upon his back and it was no longer possible for him to get up to use the bathroom, let alone play dog at Ofumi-san's feet. All he could do was stare at Ofumi-san's feet without being able to do anything himself. So whenever the three of us were gathered, he would have the infamous bamboo bench brought to his bedside, make Ofumi-san sit upon it, and watch intently as I played the role of the dog instead. As he saw this scene laid out before him, the Old Man would be struck with an excitement far greater than his frail body could bear, drowning in pleasure so great that it felt as if his heart were being scooped out from his chest. And at the same time, as I pretended to be a dog at Ofumi-san's feet, I felt the same level of excitement as the Old Man. In that moment, I could taste the same pleasure as he did. So I was more than happy to carry out the Old Man's requests. Even when the Old Man did not ask for it, I would sometimes even go on to perform all sorts of charades out of my own volition. Each and every one of those scenes we acted out remains fresh and vivid in my memory, even as I recall them to write them down. I still remember the sensation of the time Ofumi-san used her foot to step upon my face-- As I was being stepped on, I thought to myself that despite how captivated the Old Man was as he watched from the sidelines, I was far more lucky than he. To put it simply, I became the Old Man's substitute, and I carried out my task of lavishing worship upon Ofumi-san's feet for his viewing pleasure time and time again. As for Ofumi-san, she likely thought of us as mere eccentrics who simply liked to toy around with her feet.

The Old Man had found in me a perfect surrogate for his frenzied sexual proclivities, but as a result of this frequent excitement, his tuberculosis worsened by the day. Having been so complicit in bringing the pitiful old geriatric to this state, I consider myself far from blameless. But before long, the Old Man was no longer satisfied with remaining a spectator, and began to think of ways that he could touch Ofumi-san's feet once more.

“Ofumi, since I'm dying, won't you take your foot and just step on my forehead for a moment? If you'll do this one thing for me, then I can die here without regrets...” As he cried out with his phlegm-choked throat, the Old Man's feeble breaths came in intermittent gasps, but he continued pleading softly for this every chance he could. And so, Ofumi-san would furrow her beautiful brow with the sort of disgusted expression normally reserved for stepping upon a caterpillar, raise her foot above the patient's sallow forehead, and wordlessly place the sole of her soft foot upon it. Beneath that lustrous, youthful, creamy foot lay the patient's bony cheeks and close-eyed face. In these moments, the patient's ashen, expressionless face was like melted ice in the morning sun, and as he silently thanked his goddess for her infinite grace, it looked as if he had softly fallen asleep, or perhaps had even died. Sometimes as he lay like this, he would slowly raised his emaciated hands above his head and attempt to touch the nails of Ofumi-san's feet.

As the doctor had predicted, this February, the Old Man finally lapsed into critical condition. However, his mind remained relatively clear, and at times, his memory would return and he would continue to ask for his mistress' feet. He had entirely lost his appetite for food, but even so, Ofumi-san would soak up some milk or soup with a piece of cotton, then hold it between her toes and bring it to his lips. Only then would the patient greedily lap at it for ages and ages. At first, it was the Old Man himself who first suggested this method of feeding, and as his sickness worsened, it became normal practice. If he was not fed like this,

then he would refuse whatever food anyone brought him. If Ofumi-san did not feed it to him using only her feet, then he refused to eat.

On the day of his death, both Ofumi-san and I stayed by his bedside the entire time. At three in the afternoon, the doctor came to administer an injection of camphor. After he had left, the Old Man spoke.

"Aah, this is it... I'll be taking my last breath soon.... Ofumi, Ofumi, won't you place your foot on me until I die? I want to die with you stepping upon me..." His voice was so soft that he could barely be heard, but his mind seemed to be clear. Ofumi-san was as silent as always, and placed her foot upon the patient's face with a disgusted expression. For two and a half hours, from then until the Old Man's passing at five thirty in the evening, she remained stepping upon him, standing until her legs grew tired, then sitting upon the bench at his bedside, and switching between her right and left foot as needed. All this time, the Old Man only spoke once.

"Thank you...." He said, bowing his head ever so slightly. Ofumi-san gave no response, remaining as silent as ever. I may just have imagined it, but for a moment, I thought I saw a faint smile upon her lips that said, "Well, this is the end for him anyways. I might as well endure it a bit longer."

About thirty minutes before the Old Man's death, his daughter Hatsuko suddenly burst into the room having rushed here from the main family house in Nihonbashi. Of course, she immediately caught sight of this incredible, shameful, absurd, and amazing scene. Rather than mourning for her father's final moments, she spent the whole time sitting stiffly on the side with her head lowered, all but shaking with fright. But Ofumi-san remained calm all the while, keeping her foot placed upon the geriatric's brow as he had requested. While this must have been unimaginably difficult for Hatsuko to witness, for Ofumi-san, there was no love lost between her and the main house, so it is possible that she continued doing this purposely

out of spite. But it just so happens that this spite was the greatest mercy that could ever be bestowed upon the patient. Because Ofumi-san had fulfilled his wish, the Old Man was able to give up his last breaths while in endless bliss. In the eyes of the deceased Old Man, Ofumi-san's beautiful foot upon his face was as Amida's purple cloud, descended from heaven to deliver him to paradise.

Sensei,

The tale of Old Man Tsukakoshi ends here. I had only meant to give a general summary of events, but it seems that I've drawn this letter out with my verbosity. I am deeply sorry for having taken up Sensei's precious time with my rambling. But surely, this Old Man's story which I've told you holds at least a tiny bit of value, does it not? Don't you think this story holds some sort of message, about the tenacity of human nature, or symbolize something like that? My skill at writing is crude at best, but if Sensei were to add some embellishments and make some corrections, then I'm sure that this story would become a fine novel, I firmly believe so.

Thank you very much, and from the bottom of my heart, I wish you all the best in your writing.

XXth May 1919

To Tanizaki Junichiro Sensei

Signed, Noda Unokichi

WORKS CITED

Ito, Ken K. *Visions of Desire : Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991)

Rubin, Jay. *Injurious to Public Morals : Writers and the Meiji State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 264.

Tanizaki, Jun'ichirou. Trans. Edward Seidensticker. *The Makioka Sisters* (New York NY:1st Vintage International, 1957).

Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. Trans. Anthony H. Chambers. *The Secret History of the Lord of Musashi and Arrowroot* (New York NY: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1982).

Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. Trans. Paul McCarthy. *Childhood Years: A Memoir* (Tokyo; New York:Kodansha International, 1989).

Tanizaki Jun'ichirou. Trans. Anthony H. Chambers. *Naomi* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).

Tanizaki, Jun'ichirou. Trans. Edward Seidensticker. *Some Prefer Nettles* (New York NY:1st Vintage International, 1995).

Tanizaki, Jun'ichirou. Trans. Howard Hibbett. *Seven Japanese Tales* (New York NY:1st Vintage International, 1996)

Tanizaki, Jun'ichirou. 全集 Zenshuu. (東京:中央公論新社, 2015)

Tanizaki, Jun'ichirou. Trans. Anthony H. Chambers, Paul McCarthy. *Red Roofs & Other Stories* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016)

Tanizaki, Jun'ichirou. Trans. Anthony H. Chambers, Paul McCarthy. *The Gourmet Club: A Sextet* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many parties for their continued support, encouragement, and guidance in writing this thesis. I must thank Alyssa Savoie, whose initial recommendation of “The Tattooer” back in 2013 unwittingly seduced me into a fixation half a decade in the making, and has left me spellbound ever since. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Ero Guro Book Club, particularly to Erin Walden; without your faithful companionship as a fellow writer and fanatic, I would never have mustered the motivation to begin this project. Credit for spurring me on to finish this project through the late hours of the night goes to Cassidy Driscoll, a co-conspirator in Tanizaki theses, provider of libations, collations, and many a less-than-dignified literary laugh. I must also give a nod to other members of the Spring 2018 Gourmet Club seminar: Pranav Menon, Eileen Li, and Alissa Hansford; studying a whole semester’s-worth of Tanizaki would never have been as insightful or delicious without you all.

Further thanks go to my second reader Kagawa Kiyomi-sensei, the late-night security guard at Eaton Computer Lab, and miss Olivia Ambo, my own personal Ofumi-san.

Most of all, I would like to offer my deepest gratitude and admiration to my thesis, major, and personal advisor, Professor Hosea Hirata. Thank you for convincing me that it would be possible for me to write a thesis in the first place, and for your limitless patience when I proceeded to miss every single proper deadline thereafter. Thank you for the third-floor Olin coffees, the impromptu unscheduled meetings, and for finally teaching the Tanizaki seminar that Cassidy and I had harassed you about for three years. There are few figures who have defined the course of my academic, and possibly life course as single-handedly as you have. This glass of Courvoisier’s to you, Professor.