Maihime

(The Dancing Girl)

by MORI ŌGAI

Translation and Background

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Translation

THEY HAVE FINISHED loading the coal, and the tables here in the second-class saloon stand in silence. Even the bright glare from the electric lights seems wasted, for tonight the group of card players who usually gather here of an evening are staying in a hotel and I am left alone on board.

It is now five years since the hopes I cherished for so long were fulfilled and I received orders to go to Europe. When I arrived here in the port of Saigon, I was struck by the strangeness of everything I saw and heard. I wonder how many thousands of words I wrote every day as I jotted down random thoughts in my travel diary. It was published in a newspaper at the time and was highly praised, but now I shudder to think how any sensitive person must have reacted to my childish ideas and my presumptuous rhetoric. I even recorded details of the common flora and fauna, the geology, and the local customs as if they were rarities. Now, on my way home, the notebooks that I bought intending to use for a diary remain untouched. Could it be that while studying in Germany I developed a kind of *nil admirari* attitude? No, there is another reason.

Returning to Japan, I feel a very different person from when I set out. Not only do I still feel dissatisfied with my studies, but I have also learned how sad this transient life can be. I am now aware of the fallibility of human emotions, but in particular I realize what a fickle heart I have myself. To whom could I possibly show a record of fleeting impressions that might well be right one day and wrong the next? Perhaps this is why my diary was never written. No, there is another reason.

Twenty days or more have passed since we left Brindisi. Usually it is the custom at sea to while away the cares of travel even in the company of utter strangers, but I have shut myself up in my cabin under the pretext of feeling somewhat indisposed. I seldom speak to my fellow travelers, for I am tormented by a hidden remorse.

At first this pain was a mere wisp of cloud that brushed against my heart,

hiding the mountain scenery of Switzerland and dulling my interest in Italy's ancient ruins. Then gradually I grew weary of life and weary of myself, and suffered the most heart-rending anguish. Now, remorse has settled in the depths of my heart, the merest shadow. And yet, with everything I read and see it causes me renewed pain, evoking feelings of extreme nostalgia, like a form reflected in a mirror or the echo of a voice.

How can I ever rid myself of such remorse? If it were of a different nature I could perhaps soothe my feelings by expressing them in poetry. But it is so deeply engraved upon my heart that I fear this is impossible. And yet, as there is no one here this evening, and it will be some while before the cabin boy comes to turn off the light, I think I will try to record the outline of my story here.

Thanks to a very strict education at home since childhood, my studies lacked nothing, despite the fact that I had lost my father at an early age. When I studied at the school in my former fief, and in the preparatory course for the university in Tokyo, and later in the Faculty of Law, the name Ōta Toyotarō was always at the top of the list. Thus, no doubt, I brought some comfort to my mother who had found in me, her only child, the strength to go through life. At nineteen I received my degree and was praised for having achieved greater honor than had any other student since the founding of the university. I joined a government department and spent three pleasant years in Tokyo with my mother, whom I had called up from the country. Being especially high in the estimation of the head of my department, I was then given orders to travel to Europe and study matters connected with my particular section. Stirred by the thought that now I had the opportunity to make my name and raise my family fortunes, I was not too sorry to leave even my mother, although she was over fifty. So it was that I left home far behind and arrived in Berlin.

I had the vague hope of accomplishing great feats and was used to working hard under pressure. But suddenly here I was, standing in the middle of this most modern of European capitals. My eyes were dazzled by its brilliance, my mind was dazed by the riot of color. To translate Unter den Linden as 'under the Bodhi tree' would suggest a quiet secluded spot. But just come and see the groups of men and women sauntering along the pavements that line each side of that great thoroughfare as it runs, straight as a die, through the city. It was still in the days when Wilhelm I would come to his window and gaze down upon his capital. The tall, broad-shouldered officers in their colorful dress uniform, and the attractive girls, their hair made up in the Parisian style, were everywhere a delight to the eye. Carriages ran silently on asphalt roads. Just visible in the clear sky between the towering buildings were fountains cascading with the sound of heavy rain. Looking into the distance, one could see the statue of the goddess on the victory column. She seemed to be floating halfway to heaven from the midst of the green trees on the other side of the Brandenburg Gate. All these myriad sights were gathered so close at hand that it was quite bewildering for the newcomer. But I had promised myself that I would not be impressed by such captivating

scenes of beauty and I continually closed my mind to these external objects that bore in on me.

The Prussian officials were all happy to welcome me when I pulled on the bell rope, asked for an interview, and handed over my open letter of introduction, explaining to them why I had come. They promised to tell me whatever I wished to know once formal application had been received from the Legation. I was fortunate enough to have learned both French and German at home, and no sooner was I introduced than they asked where and when I had learned to speak so well.

I had already obtained official permission to enter Berlin University and so I enrolled to study politics whenever my duties might permit. After one or two months, when the official preliminaries had been carried out and my investigations were making good progress, I sent off a report on the most urgent matters, and the rest I wrote down in a number of notebooks. As far as the university was concerned, there was no chance of providing special courses for would-be politicians, as I had naively hoped. I was irresolute for a while, but then, deciding to attend two or three law lectures, I paid the fee and went to listen.

Some three years passed in this way like a dream. But there is always a time when, come what may, one's true nature reveals itself. I had obeyed my father's dying words and had done what my mother had taught me. From the beginning I had studied willingly, proud to hear myself praised as an infant prodigy, and later I had labored unremittingly in the happy knowledge that my department head was pleased with my excellent work. But all that time I had been a mere passive, mechanical being with no real awareness of myself. Now, however, at the age of twenty-five, perhaps because I had been exposed to the liberal ways of the university for some time, there grew within me a kind of uneasiness; it seemed as if my real self, which had been lying dormant deep down, was gradually appearing on the surface and threatening my former assumed self. I realized that I would be happy neither as a high-flying politician nor as a lawyer learning statutes off by heart and pronouncing sentence.

My mother, I thought to myself, had tried to make me into a walking dictionary, and my department head had tried to turn me into an incarnation of the law. The former I might just be able to stand, but the latter was out of the question. Up to then I had answered him with scrupulous care even in quite trifling matters, but from that time on, I often argued in my reports that one should not be bothered with petty legal details. Once a person grasped the spirit of the law, I grandly said, everything would solve itself. In the university I abandoned the law lectures, and became more interested in history and literature; eventually I moved into the world of the arts.

My department head had obviously tried to turn me into a machine that could be manipulated as he desired. He could hardly have been very pleased with someone who entertained such independent ideas and held such unusual views. I was in a precarious situation. If that were all, however, it would not have been

enough to undermine my position. But among the students studying at Berlin at the time was an influential group with whom I did not see eye to eye. They were only suspicious of me at first, but then they began to slander me. They may have had good reason.

Attributing the fact that I neither drank nor played billiards with them to apparent stubborness and self-restraint on my part, they ridiculed and envied me. But this was because they did not know me. How could anyone else know the reason for my behavior when I did not know it myself? I felt like the leaves of the silk-tree which shrink and shy away when they are touched. I felt as unsure of myself as a young girl. Ever since my youth I had followed the advice of my elders and kept to the path of learning and obedience. If I had succeeded, it was not through being courageous. I might have seemed capable of arduous study, but I had deceived not only myself but others too. I had simply followed a path that I was made to follow. The fact that external matters did not disturb me was not because I had the courage to reject them or ignore them, but rather because I was afraid and tied myself hand and foot. Before I left home I was convinced I was a man of talent. I believed deeply in my own powers of endurance. Yes, but even that was short-lived. I felt quite the hero until the ship left Yokohama, but then I found myself weeping uncontrollably. I thought it strange at the time, but it was my true nature showing through. Perhaps it had been with me from my birth; or perhaps it came about because my father died and I was brought up by my mother.

The ridicule of the students was only to be expected, but it was stupid of them to be jealous of such a weak and pitiful mind.

I used to see women sitting in the cafés soliciting for custom; their faces were heavily made up and their clothes were gaudy. But I never had the courage to go and approach them. Nor did I have the nerve to join in with those men about town, with their tall hats, their pince-nez, and that aristocratic nasal accent so peculiar to Prussians. Not having the heart for such things, I found I could not mix with my more lively fellow countrymen, and because of this barrier between us, they bore a grudge against me. Then they started telling tales, and thus I was accused of crimes I had not committed and had to put up with so much hardship in so short a time.

One evening I sauntered through the Tiergarten and then walked down Unter den Linden. On the way back to my lodgings in Monbijoustrasse, I came in front of the old church in Klosterstrasse. How many times, I wonder, had I passed through that sea of lights, entered this gloomy passage, and stood enraptured, gazing at the three-hundred-year-old church that lay set back from the road. Opposite it stood some houses with the washing hanging out to dry on poles on the roofs, and a bar where an old Jew with long whiskers was standing idly by the door; there was also a tenement house with one flight of steps running directly to the upper rooms and another leading down to the home of a blacksmith who lived in the cellar.

Just as I was walking past I noticed a young girl sobbing against the closed door of the church. She must have been about sixteen or seventeen. Her light golden hair flowed down from under the scarf around her head, and her dress was spotlessly clean. Surprised by my footsteps, she turned around. Only a poet could really do her justice. Her eyes were blue and clear, but filled with a wistful sadness. They were shaded by long eyelashes which half hid her tears. Why was it that in one glance over her shoulder she pierced the defenses of my heart?

Perhaps it was because of some profound grief that she was standing there in tears oblivious of all else. The coward in me was overcome by compassion and sympathy, and without thinking I went to her side.

'Why are you crying?' I asked. 'Perhaps because I am a stranger here I may be able to help you all the more.' I was astounded by my audacity.

Startled, she stared into my sallow face, but she must have seen my sincerity from my expression.

'You look a kind sort of person,' she sobbed. 'Not cruel like him or my mother!'

Her tears had stopped for a moment, but now they overflowed again and ran down her lovely cheeks.

'Help me! You must help me from having to lose all sense of shame. My mother beat me because I did not agree to his proposal. My father has just died and we have to bury him tomorrow. But we don't have a penny in the house.'

She dissolved into tears again. I gazed at her as she hung her head and trembled.

'If I am to take you home, you must calm down,' I said. 'Don't let everyone hear you. We're out in the street.'

She had inadvertently lain her head on my shoulder while I was speaking. Suddenly she looked up and, giving me the same startled glance as before, she fled from me in shame.

She walked quickly, as if unwilling for people to see her, and I followed. Through a large door across the road from the church was a flight of old worn stone steps. Up these steps on the third floor was a door so small that one needed to bend down to enter. The girl pulled on the twisted end of a rusty piece of wire.

'Who's there?' came a hoarse voice from inside.

'It's Elis. I'm back.'

She had hardly finished speaking when the door was roughly pulled open by an old woman. Although her hair was graying and her brow clearly showed the traces of poverty and suffering, it was not an evil face. She was wearing an old dress of some wool and cotton material and had on some dirty slippers. When Elis pointed to me and went inside, the old woman slammed the door in my face as if she had been waiting impatiently.

I stood there vacantly for a while. Then, by the light of an oil lamp, I noticed a name painted on the door in lacquer: 'Ernst Weigelt', and below, 'Tailor'. I presumed it was the name of the girl's dead father. Inside I heard voices raised as if in argument, then all was quiet again. The door was reopened, and the old

woman, apologizing profusely for such impolite behavior, invited me in.

The door opened into the kitchen. On the right was a low window with spotlessly clean linen curtains. On the left was a roughly-built brick stove. The door of the room facing me was half open and I saw inside a bed covered with a white sheet. The dead man must have been lying there. She opened a door next to the stove and led me to an attic; it faced onto the street and had no real ceiling. The beams sloping down from the corners of the roof to the window were covered with paper, and below that, where there was only room enough to stoop, was a bed. On the table in the middle of the room was spread a beautiful woollen cloth on which were arranged two books, a photograph album, and a vase with a bunch of flowers. They seemed somehow too expensive for the place. Standing shyly beside the table was the girl.

She was exceedingly attractive. In the lamplight her pallid face had a faint blush, and the slender beauty of her hands and feet seemed hardly to belong to the daughter of a poor family. She waited until the old woman had left the room and then spoke. She had a slight accent.

'It was thoughtless of me to lead you here. Please forgive me. But you looked so very kind. You won't despise me, will you. I suppose you don't know Schaumberg, the man we were relying on for my father's funeral tomorrow. He's the manager at the Viktoria Theater. I have been working for him for two years so I thought he was bound to help us; but he took advantage of our misfortune and tried to force me to do what he wished. You must help. I promise to pay you back from the little I earn, even if I have to go hungry. If not, then my mother says. . . .'

She burst into tears and stood there trembling. There was an irresistible appeal in her eyes as she gazed up at me. Did she know the effect her eyes had on me, or was it unintentional?

I had two or three silver marks in my pocket, but that would probably not have been enough. So I took off my watch and laid it on the table.

'This will help you for the time being, 'I said. 'Tell the pawnbroker's man if he calls on Ōta at 3 Monbijoustrasse, I'll redeem it.'

The girl looked startled but grateful. As I put out my hand to say goodbye, she raised it to her lips and covered it with tears.

Alas, what evil fate brought her to my lodgings to thank me? She looked so beautiful there standing by the window where I used to sit reading all day long surrounded by the works of Schopenhauer and Schiller. From that time on our relationship gradually deepened. When my countrymen got to know, they immediately assumed that I was seeking my pleasures in the company of dancing girls. But it was as yet nothing more than a foolish trifling affair.

One of my fellow countrymen—I will not give his name, but he was known as a mischief-maker—reported to my department head that I was frequenting theaters and seeking the company of actresses. My superior was in any case resentful that I was neglecting my proper studies, and so he eventually told the

Legation to abolish my post and terminate my employment. The Minister at the Legation passed this order on, advising me that they would pay the fare if I returned home immediately, but that I could expect no official help if I decided to stay on. I asked for one week's grace, and it was while I was thus worrying what to do that I received two letters which brought me the most intense pain I think I have ever suffered. They had both been sent at almost the same time, but one was written by my mother and the other by a friend telling me of her death, the death of the mother who was so dear to me. I cannot bear to repeat here what she wrote. Tears prevent my pen from writing more.

The relationship between Elis and myself had in fact been more innocent than had appeared to others. Her father had been poor and her education had been meager. At the age of fifteen she had answered an advertisement by a dancing master and had learned that disreputable trade. When she had finished the course, she went to the Viktoria Theater and was now the second dancer of the group. But the life of a dancer is precarious. As the writer Hackländer has said, they are today's slaves, tied by a poor wage and driven hard with rehearsals in the daytime and performances at night. In the theater dressing room they can make up and dress themselves in beautiful clothes; but outside they often do not have enough clothes or food for themselves and life is very hard for those who have to support their parents or families. It was said that, as a result, it was rare for them not to fall into the lowest of all professions.

Elis had escaped this fate, partly owing to her modest nature and partly because of her father's careful protection. Ever since a child, she had in fact liked reading, but all she could lay her hands on were poor novels of the type lent by the circulating libraries, known by their cry of '*Colportage*'. After meeting me, she began to read the books I lent her, and gradually her tastes improved and she lost her accent. Soon the mistakes in her letters to me became fewer. And so there had grown up between us a kind of teacher-pupil relationship. When she heard of my untimely dismissal, she went pale. I concealed the fact that it was connected with her, but she asked me not to tell her mother. She was afraid that if her mother knew I had lost financial support for my studies she would want nothing more to do with me.

There is no need to describe it in detail here, but it was about this time that my feeling for her suddenly changed to one of love and the bond between us deepened. The most important decision of my life lay before me. It was a time of real crisis. Some perhaps may wonder and criticize my behavior, but my affection for Elis had been strong ever since our first meeting, and now I could read in her expression sympathy for my misfortune and sadness at the prospect of parting. The way she stood there, a picture of loveliness, her hair hanging loose—I was distraught by so much suffering and powerless in the face of such enchantment.

The day I had arranged to meet the Minister approached. Fate was pressing. If I returned home like this, I should have failed in my studies and bear a dis-

graced name. I would never be able to re-establish myself. But on the other hand, if I stayed, I could not see any way of obtaining funds to support my studies.

At this point, my friend Aizawa Kenkichi, with whom I am now travelling home, came to my aid. He was private secretary to Count Amakata in Tokyo, and he saw the report of my dismissal in the Official Gazette. He persuaded the editor of certain newspaper to make me their foreign correspondent, so I could stay in Berlin and send back reports on various topics such as politics and the arts.

The salary they offered was a pittance, but by changing my lodgings and eating lunch at a cheaper restaurant, I would just be able to make ends meet. While I was trying to decide, Elis showed her love by throwing me a life line. I don't know how she did it, but she managed to win over her mother, and I was accepted as a lodger in their rooms. It was not long before Elis and I found ourselves pooling our meager resources, and managed, even in the midst of all our troubles, to enjoy life.

After breakfast, Elis either went to rehearsals, or, when she was free, would stay at home. I would go to the coffee shop on Königsstrasse with its narrow frontage and its long deep interior. There, in a room lit by an open skylight, I used to read all the newspapers and jot down the odd note or two in pencil. Here would come young men with no regular job, old men who lived quite happily by lending out the little money that they had, and jobbers stealing time off from their work at the Exchange to put their feet up for a while. I wonder what they made of the strange Japanese who sat among them writing busily on the cold stone table, quite oblivious that the cup of coffee the waitress had brought was getting cold, and who was always going back and forth to the wall where the newspapers were hanging open in long wooden frames. When Elis had rehearsals, she would call in about one o'clock on her way home. Some of the people there must have looked askance when we left together, myself and this girl who seemed as if she could dance in the palm of your hand.

I neglected my studies. When she came home from the theater, Elis would sit in a chair and sew, and I would write my articles on the table by her side, using the faint light of the lamp hanging from the ceiling. These articles were quite unlike my earlier reports when I had raked up onto paper the dead leaves of laws and statutes. Now I wrote about the lively political scene and criticized the latest trends in literature and the arts, carefully composing the articles to the best of my ability, more in the style of Heine than Börne. During this time Wilhelm I and Friedrich III died in quick succession. Writing particularly detailed reports on subjects such as the accession of the new emperor and the fall of Bismarck, I found myself from then on much busier than I had expected, and it was difficult to read the few books I had or return to my studies. I had not cancelled my registration at the university, but I could not afford to pay the fees and so seldom went to any lectures.

Yes, I neglected my studies. But I did become expert in a different sphere—popular education, for this was more advanced in Germany than in any other European country. No sooner had I become a correspondent than I was constantly reading and writing about the variety of excellent discussions appearing in the newspapers and journals, and I brought to this work the perception gained from my studies as a university student. My knowledge of the world, which up to then had been rather limited, thus became much broader, and I reached a stage undreamed of by most of my compatriots studying there. They could barely read the editorials in the German newspapers.

Then came the winter of 1888. They spread grit on the pavements of the main streets and shoveled the snow into piles. Although the ground in the Klosterstrasse area was bumpy and uneven, the surface became smooth with ice. It was sad to see the starved sparrows frozen to death on the ground when you opened the door in the mornings. We lit a fire in the stove to warm the room, but it was still unbearably cold. The north European winter penetrated the stone walls and pierced our cotton clothes. A few evenings before, Elis had fainted on stage and had been helped home by some friends. She felt ill from then on and rested. But she brought up whatever she tried to eat and it was her mother who first suggested that it might be morning sickness. Even without this my future was uncertain. What could I possibly do if it were true?

It was Sunday morning. I was at home, but felt somewhat uneasy. Elis did not feel bad enough to go to bed; she sat on a chair drawn up close to the small fireplace but said little. There was the sound of someone at the door and her mother, who had been in the kitchen, hurried in with a letter for me. I recognized Aizawa's handwriting immediately, but the stamp was Prussian and it was postmarked Berlin. Feeling puzzled, I opened the letter. The news was totally unexpected: 'Arrived yesterday evening as part of Count Amakata's suite. The Count says he wants to see you immediately. If your fortunes are ever to be restored, now is the time. Excuse brevity but sent in great haste.'

I stared at the letter.

'Is it from home?' asked Elis. 'It's not bad news, is it?'

She was probably thinking it was connected with my salary from the newspaper.

'No,' I replied. 'There's no need to worry. You've heard me mention Aizawa. Well, he's just arrived in Berlin with his Minister. He wants to see me. He says it's urgent, so I'd better go along without delay.'

Not even a mother seeing off her beloved only child could have been more solicitous. Thinking I was to have an interview with the Count, Elis fought back her illness. She chose a clean white shirt and got out my *Gehrock*, a coat with two rows of buttons, which she had carefully stored away. She helped me into it, and even tied my cravat for me.

'Now no one will be able to say you look a disgrace. Look in my mirror,' she said. 'Why so miserable? I wish I could come too!'

She straightened my suit a little.

'But when I see you dressed up like this, you somehow don't look like my Toyotarō.'

She thought for a moment.

'If you do become rich and famous, you'll never leave me, will you. Even if my illness does not turn out to be what Mother says it is.'

'What! Rich and famous?' I smiled. 'I lost the desire to enter politics years ago. I don't even want to see the Count. I'm just going to meet an old friend whom I have not seen for a very long time.'

The first-class *Droschke* that her mother had ordered drew up under the window, the wheels creaking in the snow. I put on my gloves, slung my slightly soiled overcoat about my shoulders without putting my arms through the sleeves, and picked up my hat. I kissed Elis goodbye and went downstairs. She opened the ice-covered window to see me off, her hair blowing in the north wind.

I got out at the entrance to the Kaiserhof. Inquiring the room number of Private Secretary Aizawa from the doorman, I climbed the marble staircase. It had been a long time since I had last been there. I came to an antechamber where there was a plush sofa by the central pillar and directly ahead a mirror. Here I took off my coat and, passing along a corridor, arrived at Aizawa's door. I hesitated a little. How would he greet me? When we were at university together, he had been so impressed by my correct behavior. I entered the room and we met face to face. He seemed stouter and sturdier than of old, but he had the same naturally cheerful disposition and did not appear to be concerned about my misconduct. But we were given no time to discuss in detail what had happened since we had last met, for I was called in and interviewed by the Count. He entrusted me with the translation of some urgent documents written in German. I accepted them and took my leave. Aizawa followed me out and invited me to lunch.

During the meal it was he who asked all the questions and I who gave the answers, because his career had been in the main uneventful, whereas the story of my life was full of troubles and adversity.

He listened as I told him about my unhappy experiences with complete frankness. He was often surprised, but never tried to blame me. On the contrary he ridiculed my boorish countrymen. But when I had finished my tale he became serious and remonstrated with me. Things had reached this pass because I was basically weak-willed, but there was no point in laboring the fact now, he said. Nevertheless, how long could a man of talent and learning like myself remain emotionally involved with a mere chit of a girl and lead such an aimless life? At this stage Count Amakata merely needed me for my German. Since he knew the reason for my dismissal, Aizawa would make no attempt to make him change his preconception of me—it would do neither of us any good if the Count were to think that we were trying to deceive him. But there was no better way to recommend people than by displaying their talents. I should show the Count

how good I was and so try to win his confidence. As for the girl, she might be sincerely in love with me and our passions deeply involved, but there was certainly no meeting of minds—I had merely allowed myself to slip into what was an accepted practice. I must decide to give her up, he urged.

When he mapped out my future like this, I felt like a man adrift who spies a mountain in the distance. But the mountain was still covered in cloud. I was not sure whether I would reach it, or even if I did, whether it would bring satisfaction. Life was pleasant even in the midst of poverty and Elis' love was hard to reject. Being so weak-willed I could make no decision there and then, so I merely promised to follow my friend's advice for a while, and try and break off the affair. When it came to losing something close to me, I could resist my enemies, but never could refuse my friends.

We parted about four o'clock. As I came out of the hotel restaurant the wind hit me in the face. A fire had been burning in a big tiled stove inside, so when the double glass doors closed behind me and I stood outside in the open, the cold of the afternoon pierced my thin overcoat and seemed all the more intense. I shivered, and there was a strange chill in my heart too.

I finished the translation in one night. Thereafter I found myself going to the Kaiserhof quite often. At first the Count spoke only of business, but after a while he brought up various things that had happened at home recently and asked my opinion. When the occasion arose, he would tell me about the mistakes people had made on the voyage out, and would burst out laughing.

A month went by. Then one day he suddenly turned to me.

'I'm leaving for Russia tomorrow. Will you come with me?' he asked.

I had not seen Aizawa for several days as he was busy with official business, and the request took me totally by surprise.

'How could I refuse?' I replied.

I must confess that I did not answer as the result of a quick decision. When I am suddenly asked a question by someone whom I trust, I instantly agree without weighing up the consequences. Not only do I agree, but, despite knowing how difficult the matter will be, I often hide my initial thoughtlessness by persevering and carrying it out.

That day I was given not only the translation fee but also my travel money. When I got home I gave the fee to Elis. With this she would be able to support herself and her mother until such time as I returned from Russia. She said she had been to see a doctor, who confirmed that she was pregnant. Being anaemic she hadn't realized her condition for some months. She had also received a message from the theater telling her that she had been dismissed as she had been away for so long. She had only been off work for a month, so there was probably some other reason for such severity. Believing implicitly in my sincerity, she did not seem unduly worried about the impending journey.

The journey was not long by train and so there was little to prepare. I just packed into a small suitcase a hired black suit, a copy of the *Almanach de Gotha*,

and two or three dictionaries. In view of recent depressing events, I felt it would be miserable for Elis after my departure. I was also anxious lest she should cry at the station, so I took the step of sending her and her mother out early the next morning to visit friends. I collected up my things and locked the door on my way out, leaving the key with the cobbler who lived at the entrance.

What is there to tell of my travels in Russia? My duties as an interpreter suddenly lifted me from the mundane and dropped me above the clouds into the Russian court. Accompanying the Count's party, I went to St Petersburg, where I was overwhelmed by the ornate architecture of the palace, which represented for me the greatest splendors of Paris transported into the midst of ice and snow. Above all I remember the countless flickering yellow candles, the light reflected by the multitude of decorations and epaulets, and the fluttering fans of the court ladies, who forgot the cold outside as they sat in the warmth from the exquisitely carved and inlaid fireplaces. As I was the most fluent French speaker in the party, I had to circulate between host and guest and interpret for them.

But I had not forgotten Elis. How could I? She sent me letters every day. On the day I left, she had wanted to avoid the unaccustomed sadness of sitting alone by lamplight, and so had talked late into the night at a friend's house. Then, feeling tired, she returned home and immediately went to bed. Next morning, she wondered if she had not just dreamed she was alone. But when she got up, her depression and sense of loneliness were worse than the time when she had been scratching a living and had not known where the next meal was coming from. This was what she told me in her first letter.

Later letters seemed to be written in great distress, and each of them began in the same way.

'Ah! Only now do I realize the depth of my love for you. As you say you have no close relatives at home, you will stay here if you find you can make a good living, won't you? My love must tie you here to me. Even if that proves impossible and you have to return home, I could easily come with my mother. But where would we get the money for the fare? I had always intended to stay here and wait for the day you became famous, whatever I had to do. But the pain of separation grows stronger every day, even though you are only on a short trip and have only been away about twenty days. It was a mistake to have thought that parting was just a passing sorrow. My pregnancy is at last beginning to be obvious, so you cannot reject me now, whatever happens. I quarrel a lot with Mother. But she has given in, now she sees how much more determined I am than I used to be. When I travel home with you, she's talking of going to stay with some distant relatives who live on a farm near Stettin. If, as you say in your last letter, you are doing important work for the Minister, we can somehow manage the fare. How I long for the day you return to Berlin.'

It was only after reading this letter that I really understood my predicament. How could I have been so insensitive! I had been proud to have made a decision

about my own course of action and that of others unrelated to me. But it had been made in entirely favorable rather than adverse conditions. When I tried to clarify my relationship with others, the emotions that I had formerly trusted became confused.

I was already on very good terms with the Count. But in my shortsightedness I only took into consideration the duties that I was then undertaking. The gods might have known how this was connected to my hopes for the future, but I never gave it a thought. Was my passion cooling? When Aizawa had first recommended me, I had felt that the Count's confidence would be hard to gain, but now I had to some extent won his trust. When Aizawa had said things like, 'If we continue to work together after you return to Japan,' I wondered whether he had really been hinting that this was what the Count was saying. It was true that Aizawa was my friend, but he would not have been able to tell me openly since it was an official matter. Now that I thought about it, I wondered whether he had perhaps told the Count what I had rashly promised him—that I was going to sever my connections with Elis.

When I first came to Germany, I thought that I had discovered my true nature, and I swore never to become used as a machine again. But perhaps it was merely the pride of a bird that had been given momentary freedom to flap its wings and yet still had its legs bound. There was no way I could loose the bonds. The rope had first been in the hands of my department head, and now, alas, it was in the hands of the Count.

It happened to be New Year's Day when I returned to Berlin with the Count's party. I left them at the station and took a cab home. In Berlin no one sleeps on New Year's Eve and it is the custom to lie in late the next morning. Every single house was quiet. The snow on the road had frozen hard into ruts in the bitter cold and shone brightly in the sunlight. The cab turned into Klosterstrasse and pulled up at the entrance to the house. I heard a window open but saw nothing from inside the cab. I got the driver to take my bag and was just about to climb the steps when Elis came flying down to meet me. She cried out and flung her arms around my neck. At this the driver was a little startled and mumbled something in his beard that I could not hear.

'Oh! Welcome home! I would have died if you had not returned!' she cried.

Up to now I had prevaricated. At times the thought of Japan and the desire to seek fame seemed to overcome my love, but at this precise moment all my hesitation left me and I hugged her. She laid her head on my shoulder and wept tears of happiness.

'Which floor do I take it to?' growled the driver as he hurried up the stairs with the luggage.

I gave a few silver coins to her mother, who had come to the door to meet me, and asked her to pay the driver. Elis held me by the hand and hurried into the room. I was surprised to see a pile of white cotton and lace lying on the table. She laughed and pointed to the pile.

'What do you think of all the preparations?' she said.

She picked up a piece of material and I saw it was a baby's nappy.

'You cannot imagine how happy I am!' she said. 'I wonder if our child will have your dark eyes. Ah, your eyes that I have only been able to dream about. When it's born, you will do the right thing, won't you? You'll give it your name and no one else's, won't you?'

She hung her head.

'You may laugh at me for being silly, but I will be so happy the day we to go church.'

Her uplifted eyes were full of tears.

I did not call on the Count for two or three days because I thought he might be tired from the journey, and so I stayed at home. Then, one evening, a messenger came bearing an invitation. When I arrived, the Count greeted me warmly and thanked me for my work in Russia. He then asked me whether I felt like returning to Japan with him. I knew so much and my knowledge of languages alone was of great value, he said. He had thought that, seeing I had been so long in Germany, I might have some ties here, but he had asked Aizawa and had been relieved to hear that this was not the case.

I could not possibly deny what appeared to be the situation. I was shaken, but of course found it impossible to contradict what Aizawa had told him. If I did not take this chance, I might lose not only my homeland but also the very means by which I might retrieve my good name. I was suddenly struck by the thought that I might die in this sea of humanity, in this vast European capital. I showed my lack of moral fiber and agreed to go.

It was shameless. What could I say to Elis when I returned? As I left the hotel my mind was in indescribable turmoil. I wandered, deep in thought, not caring where I was going. Time and time again I was cursed at by the drivers of carriages that I bumped into and I jumped back startled. After a while I looked around and found I was in the Tiergarten. I half collapsed onto a bench by the side of the path. My head was on fire and felt as if someone were pounding it with a hammer as I leaned back. How long did I lie there like a corpse? The terrible cold creeping into the marrow of my bones woke me up. It was nighttime and the thickly falling snow had piled up an inch high on my shoulders and the peak of my cap.

It must have been past eleven. Even the tracks of the horse-drawn trams along Mohabit and Karlstrasse were buried under the snow and the gas lamps around the Brandenburg Gate gave out a bleak light. My feet were frozen stiff when I tried to get up, and I had to rub them with my hands before I could move.

I walked slowly and it must have been past midnight when I got to Klosterstrasse. I don't know how I got there. It was early January and the bars and tea shops on Unter den Linden must have been full, but I remember nothing of that.

I was completely obsessed by the thought that I had committed an unforgivable crime.

In the fourth-floor attic Elis was evidently not yet asleep, for a bright gleam of light shone out into the night sky. The falling snowflakes were like a flock of small white birds, and the light kept on disappearing and reappearing as if the plaything of the wind. As I went in through the door I realized how weary I was. The pain in my joints was so unbearable that I half crawled up the stairs. I went through the kitchen, opened the door of the room, and stumbled inside. Elis was sewing nappies by the table and turned round.

'What have you been doing?' she gasped. 'Just look at you!'

She had good reason to be shocked. My face was as pale as a corpse. I had lost my cap somewhere on the way and my hair was in a frightful mess. My clothes were torn and dirty from the muddy snow as I had stumbled many times along the road.

I remember trying to reply, but I could say nothing. Unable to stand because my knees were shaking so violently, I tried to grab a chair, but then I fell to the floor.

It was some weeks later that I regained consciousness. I had just babbled in a high fever while Elis tended me. Then one day Aizawa had come to visit me, saw for himself what I had hidden from him, and arranged matters by only telling the Count that I was ill. When I first set eyes on Elis again, tending me at the bedside, I was shocked at her altered appearance. She had become terribly thin and her blood-shot eyes were sunk into her gray cheeks. With Aizawa's help she had not wanted for daily necessities, it was true, but this same benefactor had spiritually killed her.

As he told me later, she had heard from Aizawa about the promise I had given him and how I had agreed to the Count's proposal that evening. She had jumped up from her chair, her face ashen pale, and crying out, 'Toyotarō! How could you deceive me!', she had suddenly collapsed. Aizawa had called her mother and together they had put her to bed. When she awoke some time later, her eyes were fixed in a stare and she could not recognize those around her. She cried out my name, abused me, tore her hair, and bit the coverlet. Then she suddenly seemed to remember something and started to look for it. Everything her mother gave her she threw away, except the nappies that were on the table. These she stared at for a moment, then pressed them to her face and burst into tears.

From that time on, she was never violent, but her mind was almost completely unhinged and she became as simple-minded as a child. The doctor said there was no hope of recovery, for it was an illness called paranoia that had been brought on by sudden excessive emotion. They tried to remove her to the Dalldorf Asylum, but she cried out and refused to go. She would continually clasp a nappy to her breast and bring it out to look at, and this seemed to make her content. Although she did not leave my sickbed, she did not seem to be really

aware of what was going on. Just occasionally she would repeat the word 'medicine', as if remembering it.

I recovered from my illness completely. How often did I hold her living corpse in my arms and shed bitter tears? When I left with the Count for the journey back to Japan, I discussed the matter with Aizawa and gave her mother enough to eke out a bare existence; I also left some money to pay for the birth of the child that I had left in the womb of the poor mad girl.

Friends like Aizawa Kenkichi are rare indeed, and yet to this very day there remains a part of me that curses him.