

## TRANSLATION

### *Asa*

#### MORNING

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**M**ORE than anything else, I like having fun. Even while working at home, I always secretly am prepared for a visit from some distant-dwelling friend. When I hear the sound of the sliding door at the entrance, I knit my brows and screw up my lips, but the truth is, I am quick to put away my unfinished manuscript and greet the visitor with heightening excitement.

‘Ah! You’re right in the middle of your work. . . .’

‘No, not at all.’ Then we go out together to have a good time.

However, since at this rate I would never be able to do any work at home, I have set up a secret work room in a certain location. Even the members of my family don’t know where it is. Every morning about nine, I have a lunch made for me and I set out with it for my little work room. Naturally, since no one goes to visit me there, my work usually proceeds according to schedule. However, when it gets around three in the afternoon, I get tired and feel the need for company and some fun. I break off my writing at some suitable spot and head for home. Sometimes I stop at an *odenya* or the like and don’t return home till late at night.

Now it happens that my study room is a woman’s apartment. This young lady leaves early in the morning for work at a certain bank in Nihombashi. Afterwards I arrive, work there for four or five hours, then leave before she comes back from the bank.

She’s not my lover or anything like that. I know her mother; she parted ways with her daughter for some reason, and is now living in the Tōhoku. Once in a great while, she writes to me, asking my opinion about her daughter’s marriage offers, and I in turn write to inform her I’ve met the young prospect, the fellow would make a good husband, I’m all for it, and so on—making it sound like what a highly respected man of the world would say.

At present, however, the daughter puts more trust in me than in her husband-to-be, or so it seems to me.

‘Kikuchan, I met your future husband the other day.’

‘Is that so? How was he? A little conceited, isn’t he? Don’t you agree?’

‘Well, but you’ve just got to expect that. Next to me, any fellow will look like a fool. Be satisfied with what you got.’

‘Hmm, I guess you’re right.’ The young lady seemed casual about her forthcoming marriage.

A few nights ago, I drank a lot of sake. Drinking a lot is a nightly affair with me, and so there wasn’t anything unusual about just that. But that day, on my way back from the apartment I met an old friend by the station; I hadn’t seen him in a long time, so I immediately took him to my favorite *odenya*, where we drank a great deal. I was just about beginning to feel sick from too much drink, when the editor from the magazine showed up with some whiskey—he figured he would find me there, he said. I kept him company, and we killed off the whole bottle. I felt I was going to vomit. I wasn’t sure what was going to happen to me. I couldn’t control the fright I started feeling, and I wanted to quit right then and there. But my friend suggested that we go somewhere else, that next it would be his treat, so I was dragged to a streetcar and over to a small restaurant my friend knew. There we again drank sake. When I at length parted from my friend and the editor, I was too stoned to walk.

‘Let me stay here overnight. I don’t think I can make it home. I’ll go to sleep as I am. As a favor, okay?’

I stuck my feet under the *kotatsu*, and fell asleep with my Inverness on.

In the middle of the night, I suddenly awoke. It was pitch dark. For several moments I thought I was sleeping in my own home. I moved my feet and was startled when I discovered I had gone to sleep with my *tabi* on. Good Lord! ‘Ah! How many hundreds of times, how many thousands of times, have I repeated this sort of experience already?’

I groaned.

‘Aren’t you cold?’ Kikuchan asked in the darkness. She seemed to be lying at a right angle to me, her feet poked into the *kotatsu*.

‘No, I’m not cold.’ I sat up and said: ‘Mind if I take a leak out the window?’

‘Not at all. That’s the easiest way.’

‘Bet Kikuchan goes this way sometimes too, eh?’ I got up and snapped on the light switch. Nothing happened.

'Power's off,' Kikuchan said softly.

Groping, I made my way slowly toward the window, and stepped on her. She didn't move. 'Mustn't do that,' I muttered to myself, then finally brushed against the curtain; I pushed it aside and opened the window a little, and the sound of splashing water began.

'On top of Kikuchan's desk there was a book called *La Princesse de Cleves*, wasn't there?' I remarked as I lay on my side again. 'The ladies of that time took a leak in the garden of the palace and in the darkness at the foot of the corridor steps, you know. To do it from a window, too, therefore, is basically aristocratic.'

I wanted a drink. However, I thought it would be dangerous if I did. 'No, aristocrats disliked the dark, because they were cowards, essentially. Isn't there any candle around here? If you can light a candle for me, I wouldn't mind a drink.'

She got up without a word. Then she lit a candle. I heaved a sigh of relief. This way, I thought, I'd be all right tonight and not make any trouble.

'Where shall I put it?'

'"Put thy candlestick high up"—that's in the Bible, so high up would be best. How about the top of the bookcase?'

'How'll you have the sake? In a glass?'

'"Pour thy midnight sake in a glass" says the Bible,' I lied to her.

Grinning, Kikuchan brought me a large glass filled to the brim with sake. 'There's still enough for another glassful.'

'No, this'll be enough.' I took the glass, drained it down in gulps, and lay on my back. 'Okay, now for another snooze. You sleep too, Kikuchan.'

Kikuchan also lay on her back, at a right angle to me. Her long-lashed, big eyes blinked often, and it didn't look like she would fall asleep.

In silence, I watched the flame of the candle on top of the bookcase. The flame moved, like a living creature, stretching and contracting. As I watched it, I suddenly thought of something, and grew apprehensive.

'This is a short candle. Soon it'll be gone. Don't you have a longer one?'

'This is the only one.'

I remained silent. I felt like praying to Heaven. Unless I fell asleep before that candle went up in smoke, or else sobered up from that glass of sake, Kikuchan would be in danger.

The flame fluttered and slowly grew shorter, but I still didn't feel a bit sleepy; the intoxication, instead of diminishing, heated my whole body and only made me more and more bold. Without thinking, I sighed.

‘How about taking off your *tabi*?’

‘Why?’

‘You will be warmer that way.’

I removed my *tabi* as told. ‘This is going too far already. When that candle goes, watch out,’ I began preparing myself.

The flame dimmed. Then, writhing to left and right, it grew larger and brighter for an instant, but then sputtered, abruptly shriveled up, and went out.

There was still a gloom in the room, but it was no longer dark. Dawn was breaking faintly. I arose and started getting dressed to leave.