

## ❧TRANSLATION

### *Matsu*

#### WAITING

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EVERY day, I go to that little station of the government railroad line to meet someone. To meet someone—who, I don't know. I go shopping at the market, and on my way back, I never fail to drop into the station, sit down on the cold bench in the station, put my shopping basket on my lap, and stare vacantly at the ticket gate. Each time the up-train and the down-train arrive at the platform, many people are disgorged from their doors and throng over to the ticket gate. Wearing uniformly angry-looking expressions, some show their commuter passes, others hand over their tickets; then they hurriedly walk off without even looking aside, pass in front of the bench where I am sitting, go out into the plaza in front of the station, and then scatter, each in his own direction. I sit there absent-mindedly. A lone person says something to me, smiling. How fearful! What'll I do? My heart beats wildly. Even just the thought of it makes me shudder as if I had cold water poured down my back, and my breath chokes. Nevertheless, I still wait for someone. Who on earth am I waiting for, sitting here every day? For what sort of person? Maybe what I'm waiting for isn't even a human. I dislike humans. No, I fear them. When I meet someone and indifferently exchange such greetings as 'How are you?' or 'It's become cold,' greetings I don't want to make, I somehow get the unpleasant feeling that there is no such horrible liar in the whole world as I, and I wish I were dead. Also, the other people, too, are unduly wary of me and use diplomatic speech which tries very hard to be harmless and inoffensive, and relate their pompous, false feelings. As I listen to it all, I find their petty cautiousness deplorable, and the world becomes more and more unbearably odious. Are 'people in the world', I wonder, creatures that spend their whole lives greeting each other in stiff, formal pat-

terns, being cautious about each other, then growing tired of each other? I hate meeting people. And so I never took the initiative and visited a friend's house or any such thing as long as there was no great necessity for doing so. I felt most at ease when I stayed at home, just my mother and I, sitting silently and sewing. However, after the war had begun and the tensions had increased terribly all around, I began to feel very guilty about sitting alone at home, doing nothing day after day; I felt vaguely uneasy, and couldn't relax any more. I want to work myself very hard and be of some direct use. I have lost my self-assurance in my way of living up till now.

I feel I could not just stay sitting at home in silence; still, after going out and taking a look around, there is no place for me to go. So I go shopping and on the way back drop by at the station and idly sit on the cold station bench. The hope that 'If someone were perchance to appear . . .!'—the terror of 'If someone does appear, heavens, what'll I do?'—the resignation-like determination that 'There's nothing else to do when he has appeared; let me offer the person my life; my destiny will be decided at that time'—these and various other shameful fancies intertwine with one another in strange fashion; my heart gets choked with emotions and I just about suffocate from pain. I feel the floor dropping out from under me, as if not knowing whether I were alive or dead, as if dreaming in broad daylight; the comings and goings of the people in front of the station, too, seem small and far away, as though I have peeked through the wrong end of a telescope; and the world is completely hushed. What on earth am I waiting for? Just possibly, I may be a very lewd woman. Maybe 'The great war has begun and so I feel vaguely uneasy; I want to work myself very hard and be of use' is a lie, and the truth is that I am setting up such a high-sounding pretext while watching for a good chance to have my own rash fancies come true. Here I am, sitting here like this, with a vacant expression on my face, but in my heart I am also conscious of a wicked scheme flickering there.

Who in the world am I waiting for, I wonder? There's nothing that stands out clearly; it's only hazy. Nevertheless, I wait. Every since the war began, day after day, on my way back from shopping I stop by the station, sit on this cold bench, and wait. Someone comes up to me alone and smiles to me. How fearful! What'll I do? The one I'm waiting for is not you. Well then, who *am* I waiting for? Your husband. No. Your lover. No. Your friend. No! Money. Nonsense. A departed spirit. Stop it now!

It is something more peaceful, flashingly brilliant, wonderful. I just don't know what it is. For example, something like spring. No . . . not that. Green

leaves. May. Clear water flowing through a wheat field. It's not that, either. Sigh! Still, I wait. I wait with my heart aflutter. People pass in front of me, pass by in hordes. It isn't that one; it isn't this one. I hold my shopping bag, shivering as I wait intently. Please don't forget me. Don't laugh at a 20-year old girl who goes to a rendezvous at the station day after day and then returns home without success; please remember me and keep me in your heart. The name of the little station, I purposely won't tell you. Even without my telling it to you, you'll catch sight of me someday.