

## Asakusa Juunikai

When he heard the news that the package he ordered from Yokohama had come in, he thought what he had long looked forward to was finally beginning.

As the back door of the Juunikai, which had closed for the evening, stood open, the car carrying the package pulled up.

"Be careful. It'd be easy to break."

"Is there glass inside? It's awfully heavy..."

They carried the many wooden boxes into the tower of Asakusa. Their contents were indeed made of glass; but they were nothing that could be called works of art.

After the carriers had left, he was left alone in the basement of the Juunikai. He would wait until tomorrow to run any power through the still boxed-up instruments, he decided. The road ahead of him would take many days to complete.

As he left the Juunikai, he looked up at the tower.

Originally named the Ryoukaku, this building was better known as the Juunikai of Asakusa. Although upon its establishment in the Meiji years it was crowded with pleasure seekers, in the more than ten years since the beginning of the Taisho period, the brick walls had been covered with grime and the tower was reduced to a shop selling souvenirs one could find anywhere.

That said, it wasn't as if he—Takeshita Hirotake, rather, had purchased the Juunikai itself. He replaced the lightning rod that had been at the apex of the building since its construction with a much thicker and longer pole, and then rented the basement, which was nothing but a warehouse, indefinitely.

No matter how dull its existence, the fact remained that in Asakusa, and really the entirety of Tokyo, there was hardly any building as tall as the Juunikai. That was why Takeshita chose it, and it didn't matter what lay beneath it.

When one thinks of the Sixth Ward, one first thinks of small opera theaters and movie houses, but the area below the Juunikai was thronged with little shops called *meishuya* [artisan alcohol shops]. The *meishuya* were not in the business of selling alcohol. They were shops where women sold their sexuality much more cheaply than in Yoshiwara. There were also the types who found themselves drawn to this den of sin: those who wanted to become novelists like Mori Ougai-sensei and Natsume Soseki-sensei, Communists and ideologues cradling their dissatisfaction with the state of post-Restoration society, and the like.

Though on a normal day Takeshi would've passed by without giving it so much as a glance, the euphoria inspired by the beginnings of his plan somehow propelled him unknowingly into the alleyway along which stood the *meishuya*. The stink of cheap white makeup and the stink of filth mixed together and produced a peculiar foul aroma that hung in the air. He paid no mind at all to the women calling to him from behind the latticed windows. But, with a quick glance into a corner, he noticed something that caught his eye, and turned toward it.

It wasn't the backdrop of women entwining their fingers with the latticed doors he noticed; behind them, crouched on the dim dirt floor, there was a young girl.

Perhaps she had just been sold. Insufficient to service any customers herself, maybe she had been made to work as a servant.

It wasn't like he felt any pity for her. But the downcast expression of the girl in that dark room had been irrevocably burned into Takeshi's memory.

About half a month after that night, as the machines finally began their operation, Takeshita, barely leaving the house, was continuously locked into his basement. But he was not alone there, as he had been previously.

The girl named "Ain" had come to live with him.

*wan wan wan wan...*

Now, a low reverberation not unlike ringing in the ears constantly reverberated from that underground room.

If such a sound were made in the area of Yanaka Cemetery, it would surely invite frowns of disapproval, but in the Juunikai's whereabouts there was no one who would notice such a thing.

*wan wan wan wan...*

The machine responsible for the sounds was a power generator that had been placed in a room below the one containing Takeshita and the girl.

As for Takeshita, he had spent many hours shut up in his room surrounded by the countless machines he had made himself.

Around him, like the lamps on a fishing boat, were large glass bowls lit like lamps, and inside each of them were hazy letters and images, floating like the images on a revolving lantern. These fishbowl lamps were said to have been invented by an English man named Braun.

The man was sitting there fixedly gazing at the letters and images floating inside the lamps.

"Hey, aren't you satisfied yet?"

Unable to endure her boredom, the girl finally spoke for the first time in some hours.

"If you're bored, why don't you go outside? But don't go threatening people with your electricity like you did the other day."

"Ain wouldn't do something like that!"

Going by her apparent age, one might guess she was about twelve, but her expression appeared somewhat more mature. On her head a giant ribbon was perched in a rather implausible way. One couldn't say it didn't look almost exactly like the big ears of a cat.

"That's right, I just remembered, today there's a lecture in Mita—hey, by that professor that came from Germany!"

"Oh, is that so, that was today?"

"Weren't you planning to go meet him?"

"Well..."

Since he had been formally invited by the magazine *Kaizou*, the visit of Prof. Einstein, who had been awarded a famous prize the previous year, had become a much-discussed topic of conversation.

"Hey, let's go! And I'll tell you what! Professor Einstein, his theory of relativity is what's going to allow me to see the future through this cathode-ray tube!"

"It's not *just* the theory of relativity, you know."

While Takeshita had built his instruments himself, his designs had been heavily influenced by Nikola Tesla, under whom he had studied in America.

All day long he would stare into the images projected by the cathode-ray tubes, but once in a while, he would decide to go to Kabutochou, only to return carrying a huge sum of money in his bag. This is why he could do as he liked in the Juunikai's basement: because he always had an appropriate sum of money.

Once Ain's goodwill toward the man, who was single-mindedly determined not to go outside, was exhausted, she returned to the small, low-ceilinged room she had claimed as her own. On the floor, in the center of scattered wires and disassembled electrical parts, there lay an incomplete mass of gears and pulleys that was even larger than the seated figure of Ain. When Ain began to work on it, she entered into such a trance that she even forgot about the man's dinner. But what stupefied the man more than anything else was that he had no idea whatsoever what Ain was making.

## The Nobleman of Surugadai

Second Lieutenant Enoki was wearing not a military uniform but an everyday outfit as he came to Asakusa that morning. At that time, soldiers were becoming less and less respected in the streets, to the point where those who would stupidly wear a military sword in public couldn't even board a shared tram. *It's because of all these useless military expeditions to Siberia, wasting the common people's tax money*, thought Lt. Enoki, but he wasn't in any position to say such a thing out loud. *With everyone crying for demilitarization*, pondered Lt. Enoki grimly, *how long can my Army Science Institute hold out, I wonder...* He had not come all the way to Asakusa from the research institute in the woods of Shinjuku-Toyama to play with the ladies beneath the Juunikai, but instead for an investigation, ordered by his superior officer, of the unsettlingly powerful radio waves that had been emitting from the area.

Even so, with no radio stations yet in existence, the only facilities that would be able to emit radio waves at this point would have to be the Ministry of Communications and Transportation's telecommunications laboratory on Daiba, or the slightly more distant Choushi wireless telegraph station, and both of these were initiatives of the Navy, and used a huge amount of power, which had to be generated by giant turbines. Such a facility could not be found in Asakusa. If he had to say, the Ryouunkaku known by the name Juunikai could be compared to a radio tower just on the basis of its height, but before he enlisted, during a trip from Fukushima to

Tokyo, he had climbed the Ryouunkaku and found nothing but a dim stairway decorated with pin-ups and a gift shop selling souvenirs from God knows where; he knew that the Ryouunkaku housed no such facility.

Despite this, he went to the base of the Ryouunkaku just to ensure he hadn't missed anything, and there, even though there weren't yet many people out, he saw someone coming out of the Juunikai. It was a man of about thirty wearing a dark expression on his face, along with a girl about half his age. *My goodness, to bring a child sightseeing at the Juunikai in this day and age - how thoughtless!* said Second Lt. Enoki to himself disapprovingly; but in the midst of his indignance, he noticed another figure following the couple. *If it isn't a military policeman targeting a Rotan (Russian spy)...! Why would he be following this man?* thought Lt. Enoki, who was suddenly beginning to develop an interest in the situation.

*Oh, I see, he must've received a report that that man was engaging in suspicious activity at the Juunikai...it must be that man Takeshita,* thought Lt. Enoki, now determined to follow the group.

He boarded a tram in pursuit, and followed Takeshita and the girl to Surugadai. Upon doing so, the nimble military officer he had noticed before vanished. *My goodness, where on earth are those two going?*

Takeshita and the girl entered the gates of an especially large mansion.

When Lt. Enoki saw the mansion's nameplate, he was not a little startled.

Fuenokouji Kimiyasu's main residence was in Sanbanchou, but he had also built a secondary home in Kanda-Surugadai, and it was here he spent almost all of his time. Upon entering the newly-built secondary home, one was struck by the illusion that they had just walked into a New York hotel, for it was laid out in a Western style. However, the Viscount was housing a Russian emigre, Varvara Andreyeva, at this secondary home; perhaps it was for her sake that it had been built this way.

"Hey, that woman is so white it's scary!"

Takeshita scowled at Ain's insolent comment.

"Don't stare, Ain."

"But..."

Fuenokouji Kimiyasu smiled with amusement.

"That is a Russian lady, who fled here from Harbin."

Though she looked to speak hardly any Japanese, seemingly noticing that the conversation had turned to her, Varvara rose from the couch across the room on which she had been sitting. Without turning to look at her, Viscount Fuenokouji said in a frigid voice,

"Варя, танценка."

"Сейчас?"

It seemed that the Viscount had told her to dance. Varvara's skin flushed like baked clay from confusion and shame.

As Varvara, still standing stock-still, hung her head, it was as if the Viscount was staring at her even as she was outside his field of vision. Breaking her self-esteem was something the Viscount very much enjoyed, and her acceptance of it allowed her to continue to live as an aristocrat even in this foreign country.

"Seems like plenty of nobles and soldiers are being killed over there."

Unable to bear the oppressively awkward atmosphere, Takeshita changed the topic of conversation.

“Ah. That woman’s husband was also executed. They said she can dance ballet, so I took charge of her.”  
Recently, the world-famous Anna Pavlova had come to Japan to dance in front of a sold-out audience.  
“Before we get to the real discussion, I have a small favor to ask...”

Takeshita somewhat uncomfortably broke the ice.

“Well, what is it? Please, tell me.”

“I’ve noticed that I’m being watched, for a while now, by the Tokkou. Or, I wonder if it’s a military officer—I noticed that someone who looked like a soldier started following me...”

“...I’ll look into it. If there’s anything I can do, please allow me to be of assistance.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Well, then, let’s hear about today’s discussion. Ah...no, not so much today’s discussion as ‘tomorrow’s’...hahahaha!”

“Hara Takashi will be assassinated. I’m a bit early, but it will happen on November 4th, at Tokyo Station.”

Viscount Fuenokouji’s eyes narrowed and his gaze sharpened as he listened.

“The culprit will be a railroad employee, Nakaoka Kon’ichi, who is actually Nakaoka Tarou’s grandson...”

The matters which Takeshita discussed were in fact “tomorrow”; he included nothing beyond the immediate future. By revealing just a small fraction of the future he observed through the machines in the Juunikai’s basement, Takeshita had extracted accommodations from the Viscount. And while the men talked, Ain seemed on the verge of death by boredom.

After half an hour, the Viscount, who had been listening to Takeshita’s stories, finally appeared satisfied. He handed the money to Takeshita, who pocketed it, and left the room.

When he left, Takeshita said a few words in English to Varvara, who had been standing in the corner. For the first time, Varvara allowed her face to brighten, finally looking like a human being. Seeing that face, for reasons beyond her, Ain felt a burning, inexplicable anger.

Rather than immediately returning to Asakusa, Takeshita instead set out with Ain to Ginza. From there, they could return via the subway, so it was a bit more convenient.

As they walked along the brick path shrouded by drooping willow branches, Takeshita remarked to Ain that it was as if they had stepped into a European town; but Ain, who had never so much as considered visiting a foreign country, simply looked around with unusual interest at her surroundings, which were so different in character from Asakusa.

Takeshita couldn’t help but remember the disaster from when he was on the West coast of America so many years ago, and he unconsciously took on a grim look. Suddenly, he noticed that someone was still following the two. But, not feeling the sense of danger that one normally feels in such a situation, Takeshita surprised himself and decided to call out to him.

“I can see you, you know! Have you come to do some shopping?”

Lt. Enoki gave a violent start and dropped his cigarette.

“Who are you?”

“Ah— well, I, uh...”

“You’re not Tokkou, eh? You don’t look like a member of the military police either. But I’m certain you’re from the military.”

Lt. Enoki relented and revealed his identity and the reason for his presence.

As they entered the beer hall, the two found themselves forgetting the moment and talking enthusiastically as acquaintances who could speak technically with one another.

Meanwhile, Ain, though Takeshita had brought her all the way to Ginza, was bored as usual.

Lt. Enoki lowered his voice and offered a warning to Takeshita.

“The military hasn’t yet grasped what you’re doing at the Juunikai, but they’ve detected powerful radio waves. There are those who see it as a threat, and they may mobilize soon.”

“Aren’t you putting yourself in a bad position by telling me that?”

“As a scientist, I have an interest in your experiments. I wouldn’t want to interfere.”

Lt. Enoki looked at Ain. *What a mysterious girl*, he thought.

“Interfere? What do you mean?”

## The Electric Girl vs. the Tank Squadron

Accompanied by a thunderous roar, three boorish tanks were en route to Ueno Forest. Unlike the rhomboid tanks built in England that had previously been experimentally introduced by the Army, the France-built Renault tanks were hardly larger than a one-yen taxi; but in these tree-lined groves that would prove too dense for the taxis to enter, these tanks carelessly trampled the trees and open-air stands that blocked their progress. After all, the owners of these open-air stands were only in business illegally, so even if evicted in such a violent manner, they had no grounds to voice their displeasure.

The commanding Army Infantry School Guidance Officer brushed off the Ueno residents’ complaints, explaining that the deployment of the tanks into the city was merely part of a practice exercise.

Witnessing this state of affairs from a distance, Lt. Enoki of the Army Sciences Institute spoke with amazement.

“This is hardly the Aoyama parade grounds—what a ridiculous thing they’re doing. Don’t you agree?”

Startled by Lt. Enoki’s voice, a man also dressed in civilian clothes and a hunting cap, turned to look at him.

“...it’s an initiative of the Army Cavalry Company.”

The man with the hunting cap, testing Lt. Enoki, said only this.

“Hahaa, then big shot with some influence over there must be thinking there’s something mighty rotten in this neighborhood.”

The man with the hunting cap gave a slight smile of agreement.

“You’re a member of the military police, aren’t you? I’m Enoki, from the Toyama research institute.”

“...Military police, Sergeant Yamanoi.”

“You were looking into the matter of the man who seemed to be living at the Juunikai, weren’t you?”

Enoki, knowing he was higher than Yamanoi in rank but about ten years younger in age, continued to speak in polite Japanese.

“This must be training for later use on the continent, but to run tanks through the middle of town like this is insane, isn't it?”

“They couldn't match its power without using tanks...was probably what they were thinking.”

Lt. Enoki cocked his head.

“Against Takeshita alone? Even though it's just him, and that girl?”

“Girl?”

“Weren't they living together?”

Now it was Yamanoi who cocked his head in puzzlement.

“Don't know...I didn't see her myself.”

*Weren't they together when you were tailing them, too, though?* Enoki prepared to say, but Yamanoi changed the subject before he could speak.

“Most likely, it's a connection with the suspicious radio waves, but lately in the Juunikai's basement, there's been a mechanism that—well, I'm not sure how to explain it, but it's strangely humanoid, but also not humanoid, almost like a two-ken (3.636 meter) rabbit, walking around.”

Enoki was completely shocked. Was this another creation of Takeshita's?

At that time, below their gaze, there spread a dazzling light.

“That's the girl—!”

The light spread immediately in front of the tanks. *In the middle of the light, it's Ain—!!* thought Enoki, sure of what he saw, but it seemed like Yamanoi was totally unaware of her presence.

As the light died away, the tanks began to move around frantically, firing their machine guns at each other. *What a truly outrageous spectacle*, thought Enoki, even as he knew it would never appear in any newspaper.

Ain never went outside alone. When she did go out, it was always as Takeshita's companion. Surely Takeshita cared for Ain as a much younger sister; so it may have seemed, but in reality it was nothing of the sort.

As if she had multiple personalities, Ain would sometimes yammer on like a baby bird no matter how much Takeshita warned her to shut up, while at other times she would go days at a time without saying a single word.

Finally, the man reached a point where he could no longer hear the tones of the shakuhachi player standing at the intersection. Though his ability outshone even that of professionals, the person playing the shakuhachi was a Dadaist poet.

After taking a lap around Hyoutan Pond, Takeshita lit a cigarette, and watched as a neurotic-looking man and his two foreign companions crossed in front of him.

“Can you see the gears yet...?”

In a low voice that he surely didn't intend to be heard, Takeshita muttered into the neurotic-looking man's receding back.

“Did you say something?”

He turned, surprised, at the unexpected voice from nearby.

It was a man standing next to a postcard-seller's open-air stand.

“...Ah, no, I was just talking to myself.”

“Ah, that's what it was? So you're alone today, master?”

“Eh...?”

“Some time ago, when you came with a young lady, you bought a few postcards.”

The merchant was wearing dark shades, and it seemed like his eyesight was bad, but he had a sure memory of people's voices.

“Ah, that's true, isn't it? You have a good memory.”

“That young lady...is she your younger sister?”

“No...well, something like that, perhaps...”

“My apologies, sir, for asking an insolent question like that. It's just that, that girl's voice, I feel like I heard it somewhere before.”

This alone wasn't terribly surprising to Takeshita.

“That girl was...employed as a servant by a *meishuya* below the Juunikai, and given those circumstances, I took her in.”

“Well, now...but still, I reckon that wasn't the voice of someone being sold as a prostitute?”

“Ain...that girl has been in Asakusa since before she started at that shop. She was probably some kind of street urchin.”

“I see...well, now that you mention it, a while back, I heard a rumor about a strange girl.”

“Strange? How so?”

“They said her skin was extremely white, and it's not that she looked bad or anything, but whenever someone from the local bureaucracy tried to catch her, he would always get numb, like from electricity, and she would always get away.”

“Electricity...”

“Yeah, and I heard once, when they made her take care of a prostitute's baby, the baby suffocated while she was carrying it on her back—Lord, what a terrible thing!”

Takeshita was completely lost in thought.

“Well, anyway, the lady's voice reminded me of that girl's, but I could be hearing things. If I'm wrong, please forgive me.”

“Ah...well, then.”

Still deep in thought, he started on his way back to the Juunikai.

Perhaps he had gone into some izakaya somewhere; anyway, the shakuhachi playing at the crossroads could no longer be heard.

As he returned to the Juunikai's basement, he noticed that the figure of Ain was absent. She'll return soon, Takeshita told himself, but the reality was nothing of the sort.



Three months passed since Ain had disappeared from the Juunikai. Takeshita, as “that day” approached, lost his calm and began to act in a way that he had carefully avoided before. He met with Viscount Fuenokouji and warned him not to be in Tokyo on “that day,” and told the same thing to Lt. Enoki of the Army Research Institute, but when he was advised in turn not to say dangerous things, he finally understood that no one would listen to him. He went to a bar on the outskirts of town and collapsed from drunkenness, and laying on the street like garbage he tossed and turned in his sleep, screaming “Soon this whole place will burn. Everyone’s homes will collapse, and even the innocent will be driven to kill each other cruelly like animals. Wahahahahaha! Wonderful, wonderful!” and other horribly frightening things. Ain must not have wanted to be by the side of a man like him. Of course she would leave. He would eventually get used to life without Ain, as if she had never been there from the start. That was what he tried to think. But it was all nothing but self-deception. Ain was gone. To him, it was much the same as if a part of his body and soul had gotten up and disappeared.

*Where did I first mean Ain? It was in front of the meishuya. No, actually, wasn't it on the way to Dangozaka? Come to think of it, since then I haven't climbed Dangozaka at all...* he thought confusedly as he stumbled away from the glare into the gloom of the Sixth Ward's movie theaters.

These days the opera houses had become remarkably quiet, and the dilettantes who commuted to Asakusa were engrossed in their pictures. Famous novelists were starting their own movie production companies and releasing movies for which they had written the scripts, and it was even said that new art exhibitions couldn't match the energy and momentum of the moving pictures.

Meanwhile, Takeshita, whose daily existence in the Juunikai consisted of looking at vague, dreamlike images reflected in the cathode-ray tubes, couldn't help but be impressed by the crisp, clear images of foreign lands and the faces of actors. *Speaking of which, wouldn't it have been fun for Ain to join me for some movies?* Whenever he remembered this, even when he tried to immerse himself in the darkness of the small theater, he couldn't quite concentrate on the images project onto the screen.

*Damn*, thought Takeshita. As expected, lately there had been no new appearances on the silver screen by onnagata actors, and compared to foreign films, there was a dearth of Japanese actors who were fitting to be the subject of a close-up. So Takeshita had ordinarily been avoiding Japan-made films; but somehow, he now found himself accidentally entering a theater playing a Japanese film.

But the dark, gloomy scene projected on the screen was something entirely removed from Japan. In this film, directed by Nikkatsu's new director Mizoguchi Nanagashi and titled *Chi to Rei (Blood and Spirit)*, the warped shapes of walls and doors created strange, maddened illusions of perspective, and in the midst of it there was an actor made up in white like a ghost. *It's an imitation of the recently-shown famous German film The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari!—or, no, if I follow the narration I can see that it's trying to tell a more original story. I see, it's clear that this is an ambitious film.* But in his eyes, the story of the film had already vanished, and he saw only the warped indoor and outdoor scenes projected on the screen. *Isn't this the essence of the film? After all, the real world is warped just like this one,* Takeshita thought, lost in his cloudy ponderings.

"Ain!"

Though not in a loud voice, he called her name aloud. Ain was there in the projected image. Behind the performing actors, completely removed from the action, Ain was standing behind the set design, looking sadly his way—no, directly at him.

In his confusion, Takeshita now began to wish strongly to go himself to the place being projected onto the screen. He stood from his seat, began to walk unsteadily toward the screen, grabbed the narrator's arm; but that's where his memories suddenly stopped.

When he awoke from his drunkenness, Ain was by his side.

"An illusion.....?"

Ain, looking at him, seemed on the verge of tears.

"Where did you go, Ain?"

"Where? Ain's always been right here."

## The Anarchist and the Majin

If in those days you were to climb Dangozaka, then continue all the way to upper Hakusan, you'd find a shop selling new and secondhand books, and on the second floor of that building, you'd find a cafe. Though they served fairly standard Western fare, that shop had at some point become a place where ideologues of the Anarcho-Bolshevist Question and Dadaist poets would meet, drink, raise a ruckus, and fight from noon till evening.

For that reason, the Haramachi intellectuals that originally frequented the shop had begun to dislike the place and finally stopped coming altogether.

The second floor of the shop also housed the master's room and office, as well as a triangular space that was left empty; it was not at all spacious. It is said that the employees started wearing Russian blouses even before the trend had been picked up by Nakamura in Shinjuku. The waitresses wore aprons on top of their kimonos, and were at first chosen only from the ranks of actresses who had performed onstage; lately, however, the choice of waitresses, too, had become somewhat more questionable. The latest addition to the store had slightly darker, Southern skin, and a distinct nose and clear eyes; and she gave off a slightly dangerous atmosphere as she whispered something into the ear of a young, Russian blouse-clad waitress. The Gramophone was playing "Fra Diavolo" for the umpteenth time that day.

"I'm tired of this song."

"Just don't listen to it."

"I can't do that!"

"I know you can, Ain."

To Takeshita's proposal, which was based on nothing in particular and completely devoid of even a scrap of consideration of Ain's feelings, Ain said disinterestedly, "I don't know about that."

"Hey, how come whenever we come here, we take some roundabout tram route?"

The aforementioned Dangozaka climb was reasonably close to Asakusa. Old people with weak legs would more typically take the tram that circled the Imperial University, but Takeshita's legs were on the strong side.

“Well...how come indeed?”

He had intended to brush off the question, but he found himself genuinely wondering why they didn't commute here on foot as Ain said. An answer did not readily present itself.

Takeshita was intently staring at a burly-looking man reading a book by the window.

“What time is it?”

Takeshita asked Ain without looking at her.

“Don't know. Ain isn't carrying a watch!”

Ain answered while glaring at a clock hanging on the wall.

They heard somewhat violent footsteps coming toward them, and a slim man emerged from the second-floor stairs. His eyes were big and strong-willed.

Ain understood that this was the person Takeshita had been waiting for.

“Oosugi—!”

It was the man by the window who raised his voice.

The man called Oosugi seemed a bit flustered, but he quickly gave a weak smile and sat down by the window.

As if completely unaware of their presence, Oosugi never looked at Ain or Takeshita, who was still staring.

“It's...been a while, hasn't it, Miyajima?”

“Ah—”

Sakae Oosugi ordered wine from the waitress, who had appeared next to them without saying anything.

“I'm surprised to see you drinking alcohol here.”

To Miyajima, it seemed like everything Oosugi did was a surprise. After Oosugi's three-sided or four-sided affair with Noe Itou, when his stabbing at the hands of Ichiko Kamichika shocked the world, his close friend Sukeo Miyajima distanced himself from Oosugi and began to plan his own original anarchist literature.

“No, it's fine. Thank you. I'll have to leave here soon enough.”

Miyajima sensed something decisive in Oosugi's words.

Detecting his colleague's presumption, Oosugi, still smiling, said, “Not quite that far. I'm just going to Arishima-sensei's house for a little bit. As you might've guessed, he's sponsoring me.”

Miyajima's quick nasal breathing was his only response.

Oosugi downed his red wine in one go and put the money on the table.

“Oosugi, take care.”

Oosugi smiled at Miyajima and gave a slight nod, then descended the stairs, raising the same violent ruckus as before.

Ain noticed Takeshita's body violently stiffen in hesitation.

“Why...?”

Takeshita suddenly stood up, paid for his food, and hurriedly went after Oosugi. As they walked toward the Upper Hakusan station, Takeshita called out to Oosugi's Inverness cape-clad back.

“Oosugi-san!”

Oosugi stopped and turned around, but wore a cautious face, not knowing who Takeshita was.

“After you borrow some money from Takeo Arishima-sensei, you intend to go to Berlin, yes?”

Oosugi's gaze turned scornful.

“You're Tokkou too, aren't you?”

“It doesn't matter who I am. Please listen to me. You can get to Paris by way of Shanghai. But you cannot cross the national border. You will be sent back to Japan before you can attend the World Anarchist Convention.”

Ain, seeing that Takeshita was trembling, began to tremble as if she herself was frightened.

“Well, you've done your research, sure enough, but as for me, I can go wherever I please.”

“You don't understand! Oosugi-san. If you return to Japan, it won't just be you. Noe Itou-san and...and others will lose their lives! So you absolutely cannot return.”

Thinking Takeshita an underling of a higher authority, Oosugi's scornful face softened a bit.

“Well, now, I can see that you truly are concerned for me. But your concern is unnecessary.”

Unintentionally lowering his eyes as if in thought, Oosugi quickly boarded the tram as it came and was gone.

After that, Takeshita stood stock still for a long while.

He well understood that Sakae Oosugi had not paid half a mind to what he who knew the future had said.

But he couldn't have lived with himself if he hadn't tried.

By the side of the road, Takeshita let his frustrated tears spill continuously. Ain could do nothing but miserably watch his tears wetting the earth.

Though she felt she had only dozed off for a minute, when Ain awoke and looked around the basement, she couldn't find Takeshita anywhere.

Takeshita's machines were still humming quietly as they ran. The CRTs were still displaying news of the disaster to come.

His disappearance absolutely terrified Ain. Though she would normally reproach him for his uncaring behavior, for some reason this time she was assaulted with an unassailable anxiety, as if he had been erased from the world.

Unable to calm herself, Ain burst out of the basement and ran up the stairs into the outdoors.

*Hey, where? Where are you?*

*If you go away, Ain will disappear.*

Her chest tightened from anxiety and sadness.

Looking around Asakusa Park, she could not find Takeshita anywhere.

Groaning aloud in despair, she looked up at the sky, and there she saw people on the observation deck of the Juunikai. Possibly—no, definitely one was him. Standing next to him was another man, small in stature.

*That's all it was?* Ain's chest relaxed, and she ran up the stairs in two-step jumps to scold the man for going out alone without telling her.

The uppermost observation deck was already closed to visitors due to deterioration, but the door had a bad lock, making it easy for those in the know to use the deck.

As she exited onto the deck, Ain could hear the two's conversation. She was surprised to find that the petite figure she had thought was a man was actually a young woman.

"The Tokkou and the military police and even the officials in Totsuka's Army Sciences Institute are chasing me around. It's no wonder they're suspicious of you."

"There's no helping that. But it looks like my judgment was correct after all."

"And you say you're a newspaper reporter, miss...um..."

"I'm Igarashi. Mayumi Igarashi. And last year, in, for instance, the crash of Hoshiyama Pharmaceuticals stock, there was only one person who sold out in time to make a profit—is this your first time hearing that?"

As Ain, hiding in the back, peeked out from behind cover, she could see that the woman, who had a voice like a 10-year-old girl, was in fact a lady journalist sporting a bob cut and a strange outfit that seemed like a man's suit. She couldn't tell if only her lips were painted or if she was wearing no makeup at all, but her mouth was moist and red, and moved in a strangely seductive way. Getting the feeling that she was seeing something she shouldn't be, she retreated to her hiding place, and there, as if it had been there all along, a small black cat, still a kitten, approached Ain and looked up at her face.

"Yes, and there was a rumor that that person was regularly visiting the notable personage Viscount Fuenokouji, and receiving some kind of compensation in exchange for talking about something. And the East Asian Industrial Group—"

"No, that's not me. You're probably thinking of Kita-san."

"Kita? Mr. Ikki Kita? Of the Japan Remodeling Bill Outline..."

"It's not like I have anything terribly important to say about him."

"But you can see the future, am I correct?"

"...That's an unfounded rumor. I'm not a clairvoyant or anything like that."

"You may not have any supernatural power, but you have the ability to know future events. At least, it seems that's what the Viscount and others were thinking."

"It was just an eccentricity of his."

"Well, if it was just a rumor about financial predictions, it would hardly interest me. You've recently been going around talking about things that have piqued my interest. That Tokyo will soon be the site of a major disaster, for example."

"....."

"Some years ago, the Oomoto Sect had made a similar prediction. But they were suppressed. Are you worried about a similar thing happening to you?"

"I don't have any intention of spreading the information, but if I were to be captured because of it, that itself wouldn't worry me. What I'm afraid of isn't just the earthquake. What frightens me is what will happen after."

"After...?"

"Ten-and-something years ago, I was in America. Around the time I was set to return to Japan, a major earthquake hit San Francisco."

"....."

“Many buildings that were better-constructed than those here in Tokyo were easily destroyed. The fires that spread afterwards were terrifying, as well. But after that, the most terrifying thing was what happened in people’s hearts. Baseless rumors were spread in the newspapers, and the mayor ordered the military and the police to immediately execute looters. It’s true that looters were running rampant, but soldiers were also looting bars and the like. Even if there was no evidence, if you were proclaimed a looter by the mayor, you would be put to death by firing squad with no trial.”

“And you’re saying, the same thing would happen here...?”

“...Worse.”

Listening, Ain understood Takeshita’s feelings well. The future he had learned from his machines pertained not just to the earthquake, but for a while now he had been able to think of nothing else. That the earthquake alone held his mind captive was something Ain knew. But Takeshita, who had never discussed these things with Ain, was spilling his guts to that lady journalist. That was difficult for Ain to accept.

The cat approached Ain’s sad downturned face and rubbed it with its forehead. *This kitten must have been lonely too*, thought Ain.

Taking a deep drag of her cigarette, Mayumi lowered her voice as if she were about to reveal something she’d been holding back.

“Now I have something to tell you, as well.”

“...What is it?”

“The people following you haven’t just been Tokkou and military police.”

“Eh...? What is this?”

“There are people far above the military. Do you remember when that ‘Emperor Kumazawa’ was in the news a while back?”

“Ah...wasn’t that a man from Touhoku who claimed to be a descendent of the Southern Dynasty? I don’t think anyone believed him, though. Don’t tell me you think he’s the real deal?”

Having revealed her secret, Mayumi regained her composure.

“It’s highly unlikely that that old man from Touhoku would be recognized as a legitimate descendant of the Southern Dynasty. But, you know, for people who take the position that his claims are legitimate, it’s something of a revelation.”

As he slowly understood the meaning of the conversation, a chill began to run down Takeshita’s spine.

“The people who think that Japan should turn from its current position toward a dictatorship, in preparation for war...you mean?”

“Actually, there were continental expeditioners and military men who’ve gotten close with Emperor Kumazawa, too. That old man hasn’t provided any evidence or impartial testimonials to substantiate his claim, so his movement hasn’t become particularly conspicuous...but if there were someone...”

“.....”

“Possibly, if there were someone who possessed the means to know the future...”

With a dark feeling, Takeshita looked down at the base of the tower.

“...Please be careful, Takeshita-san.”

Mayumi stamped out her cigarette with the sole of her shoe and went down the stairs.

When she heard the footsteps fading away, Ain clutched the cat to her chest and came up behind Takeshita.

*I want to say something to him,* thought Ain, but she only gazed at Takeshita's features as he looked down, as if into a deep pit of despair.

Today in Asakusa Park, the voices echoing from the theaters advertising various spectacles were as loud and boisterous as ever.

A stout bald man was standing on the street, eagerly listening to the advertisements without entering any of the theaters. The Juunikai's tenant, Takeshita, was gazing at him from afar. He knew that this bald man would eventually become an established author of detective novels; he also knew that he was fonder that of the soon-to-disappear Asakusa of that day than anyone, and would write much to document it.

"Hey, you. The Tokkou have been following you from back in the Sixth Ward."

Takeshita whirled around, startled at the gruff voice that suddenly came from behind his back.

"....."

"I thought surely they were following me, but it looks like they're actually following you. What a pitiful state of affairs for both of us, eh? Be careful—and I sincerely mean that."

Saying nothing more, the person who had spoken to Takeshita dodged into the crowd. His continental outfit and the single cold, glassy eye hidden by his hat were unmistakable.

After thinking for a moment, Takeshita started after him. As the man dodged into a street lined with stalls, Takeshita was afraid he had lost him; but, strangely enough, the man paused for a minute, almost as if he was waiting for Takeshita.

"Don't stop walking. It's better if you don't turn toward me either."

"You're Kita-san, aren't you?"

Ikki Kita, slowing his pace and walking ahead of Takeshita at a slight offset, began to speak.

"Why are you being followed by the Tokkou, eh? You don't seem like a socialist, but...ah, that's right...it's you, isn't it? You're the one spreading that prediction of an earthquake set to come to Tokyo."

It seemed that Kita had already known about Takeshita.

"Until now, the only people who have been spreading a prophecy about a great ruinous earthquake until now have been descendants of the Oomoto sect, but you're a celebrity hiding yourself away in Kabutocho. It would seem that your prophecy has no basis in the oracles of Shinto or Buddhism."

"You're quite well-informed."

"This region suffers large earthquakes that come in cycles some decades long. The mere fact that we may be approaching the end of one of those cycles is nothing mysterious in and of itself, and many of the people of this region are beginning to feel that such a thing may in fact be occurring."

"If that's true, then there must be something we can do. That's why I—"

"It's useless. Mere witticisms and such."

"Many people will die. Not just in the catastrophe—many more will be brutally murdered in the aftermath."

"Naturally, such things will occur. Some may even call it a favorable result."

Hearing the bluntness of Kita's words, Takeshita lost his composure.

"Who would wish for such a thing?"

"Lately, we've been hearing plenty of such statements. 'Ah, everything's so boring. Ah, nothing is profitable anymore. Can't we just go to war again?' There are many such people."

"Those are just the wishes of fools who think we could win any war we enter."

"Naturally. 'The rich grow fat, while the poor are stomped into the dirt. That's the way the world is and such, so wouldn't it be best to just burn it all down and start over?' You don't wish to wipe out everyone who thinks this way, do you?"

Takeshita, hearing Kita's words as an outburst of bitter sarcasm, let out a small chuckle under his breath.

"What's that? Have I said something funny?"

"No, I just thought what you said might indicate some sympathy for those who wish for a socialist revolution."

"Perhaps so..... Leaving the matter of the people aside, there are government officials and military men who can afford to think lightly of the present state of affairs, and they are making various plans to take advantage of the coming earthquake."

Takeshita's face stiffened. So it was true. They were already making preparations.

"The prediction given by the descendants of Oomoto was excessively imprecise regarding the time of the occurrence. Those who wished to make plans found it impossible to rely on. You, on the other hand, seem to have received information that includes a precise time estimate. Your days of walking around freely may soon come to an end."

Such was Kita's warning to Takeshita.

"Kita-san, you as well...you've heard the prophecies the gods handed down to your wife?"

"...So you know about that, too...Unfortunately, she hasn't received any specific information about the time of the earthquake."

Takeshita still had not told anyone the date of the occurrence. But it seemed that Kita had already perceived that Takeshita knew the date and time.

"Fifteen days after the great earthquake, the anarchists Sakae Oosugi and Noe Itou will be arrested and executed by the Army. They'll pin the blame on a certain major from the military police."

Kita, now at a loss for words, continued to listen.

"Many more anarchists and socialists will be arrested, and vigilante groups will hunt down foreigners in the streets. And, Kita-san. You yourself will attack Oosugi's funeral and steal away his ashes—"

"That's enough."

Kita-san had become somewhat pale, and though he held up his hand to stop Takeshita from speaking, he continued nonetheless.

"The Taisho Era will end immediately following the earthquake, and the Showa Era will begin. Though they've tried many times already, the young generals of the military will begin to take matters into their own hands more and more, in the hopes of enacting a military revolution, but you—"

"Stop it!!"



Kita stopped and stared at Takeshita with his cold eyes—eyes like the Devil's themselves.

“If you explain to me exactly what will happen...”

“.....”

“I'll have to be like you...doing nothing but watching in despair...”

“I'm sorry. I've said too much.”

“I doubt we'll meet again. If Oosugi returns to Japan, tell him to stay far away from Tokyo—”

“I told him.”

“...I see. That's only natural... But you should worry about yourself before you think of other people.”

“Ehhh...”

“It is already known that you're hiding yourself away in the Juunikai, and that there are a number of machines in there. If you are using those to see the future...they will definitely try to seize them for their own purposes...”

Suddenly, Takeshita was seized by a violent sense of unease.

Kita may have possessed some strange, strong power of intuition after all.

Takeshita hurriedly excused himself and ran madly toward the Ryouunkaku.

It wasn't just the machines that he cared about. Those could be rebuilt. But, Ain...!

As he feared, the room beneath the Juunikai lay in shambles. They had stolen most of the CRT's and input devices, but the central components of the machine lay untouched, hidden beneath the floor. But his heart would not settle down. *What if they...* he peeked into the next room to find... beside a completely incomprehensible machine, Ain lay on the floor, curled into a ball.

“Ain...?”

No one had so much as touched her. He could hear her sleeping breath. Going by her slight smile, she must've been having a nice dream.

He sighed deeply, knelt beside Ain on the floor, and softly stroked her hair.

## Ain Flies

In any case, the engine running just under Ain's nose was producing sounds and vibrations so terrific that she wanted to squeeze her eyes shut and stop up her ears.

But if she did, then she might as well have never boarded the airplane.

So Ain clung tightly to the over-large seat and stared at the sky as she faced desperately into the wind that pummeled her cheek.

This German-built airplane, a so-called Taube, differed greatly in appearance from the birdcage-like France- and USA-built aircraft that were one would've been used to seeing. The Taube looked exactly like the kites designed after an eagle with spread wings that one often sees around the New Year, except scaled up, with an engine attached, and able to seat two people.

During the battle to capture the fortress at Qingdao, the enemy's planes had proved overwhelmingly superior to the Japanese Navy's Farman aircraft; in a hurry, the Navy commandeered all of the privately-owned

Taube planes in the country, but before they could be deployed, the Germans surrendered. The plane Ain was riding was one of these.

Noriko Inbe was driving the plane. A female pilot, she was first inspired by Katherine Stinson, an aerobatics performer who had visited Japan some five years prior. Although Inbe enrolled in Tachikawa Aviation School, she was forced to drop out due to her inability to continue paying tuition; but then, after receiving another chance due to the generosity of a certain aristocrat, she managed to follow her dreams and become a pilot.

Occasionally she would call out, though Ain didn't know if it was to her or to the plane; she couldn't make it out at all over the din of the engine.

Stripped of the flying element, to continue sitting in a seat like that would be tantamount to torture, Ain felt. But she was getting what she wanted.

In the basement of the Juunikai, Ain was building a huge machine she called "Father." She had been making it for a long time, and though it must've been near completion, it was still covered in exposed electrical parts and steam tubing, and no one could tell you exactly what it was for.

"Ain."

Ain turned around in surprise.

After all, normally, it was rare for Ain to hear even a peep from Takeshita.

"Whaaat?"

"Yes, well, is there anywhere that you might want to visit?"

"Where are we going?"

"No, I mean, somewhere that *you* might want to go. Not just in Tokyo, but maybe in the Northeast, or even another country?"

"....."

Ain settled into deep thought. She had never considered any places beyond those she was used to.

"If Ain says a place, will you actually take me there?"

"...Ah. Yes, I suppose so."

Ain became afraid. Takeshita had never been this kind to her before.

Ain had already fallen into the pattern of thinking she would always be with him, and this was all she wanted. But it seemed like Takeshita was hinting that the current situation was soon to come to an end.

After Ain had sat quiet for a while, Takeshita finally spoke in a resigned tone,

"...Fine. If you don't want to go anywhere..."

"Ain wants to try flying."

"...Flying?"

No matter how many aviators there may have been in the country of Japan, it was not as if a normal person could waltz up into the sky on a momentary whim.

But Takeshita seemed already to have an idea of where to ask, and only a few days later, he brought Ain to the Aoyama parade grounds.

He introduced the pilot who came to greet them as Noriko.

“I won’t be coming along. I’d like you to take this girl. If you can, she’d be happy if you could fly over Asakusa.”

At the man’s words, Noriko’s face took on a dubious expression.

“So by ‘this girl,’ you mean...well, that’s fine. I understand.”

Ain was surprised that he wouldn’t be joining her, and she looked up at him in protest.

“You promised that we would go everywhere together!”

“It’s just for a little bit, isn’t it? Only one person can fit in the front seat. You wanted to fly, right? Please try to enjoy it.”

In a hurry, Ain was made to put on her flight helmet and goggles. She was to be seated in the front seat, which was positioned in the front of the cockpit.

“I have a favor to ask.”

As she went, she entreated Takeshita with deathly seriousness.

“What is it?”

“Would you stand on the Juunikai’s viewing deck? Ain’ll surely fly right over. I want you to wave to me.”

“...If I make it in time. I’ll try, but...”

Ain broke into a shining grin and ran to the plane, jumping as she went.

Then, the Taube that carried Ain approached Asakusa Park. The Juunikai towered above Hyoutan Pond. None of the other buildings were nearly as tall.

Ain puffed up her chest expectantly and trained her eyes on the Juunikai’s observation deck.

Though the plane took its time in circling the Juunikai’s surroundings, his figure was nowhere to be found.

At that time, Takeshita was in Surugadai, in a guest bedroom of the estate of Viscount Fuenokouji.

“He’s gone to Shanghai right now.”

Varya’s English had a slight accent to it after all.

“Right. So I’ve heard.”

“And that’s why you came?”

Varya closed the curtains, darkened the room, and smoothly slid out of her clothes, showing him her fair back.

On Varya’s beautiful porcelain-white skin, there rose innumerable welts.

“Don’t get the wrong idea. It’s not like he bullies me one-sidedly. I bully him too.”

“I don’t really care to hear much about that anyway.”

As he caressed Varya’s cold body, which was rather small for a Westerner’s, his nose was hit by a powerful scent of perfume.

Varya’s body was beginning to warm in his hands.

Biting his earlobe, Varya whispered something.

“Which are you? The bully...or maybe the bullied?”

Takeshita could not answer.

He was beginning to be confused about how Varya's posture was even physically possible, so intensely did her caresses envelope Takeshita's entire body. As he tried to immerse himself in that feeling, Varya's whispers seeped into his consciousness.

“There's someone who wants to hear your stories. You'll meet them, won't you? For me?”

“.....”

Even after he opened his eyes, Takeshita couldn't tell where he had been taken. But he understood well that he had come to the present state of affairs by his own actions.

The narrow room he found himself in was perhaps in the basement of some building. Unlike the Juunikai's basement, the moisture here was near unbearable. Looking around the room, he noticed that the walls were covered with a cotton-stuffed cloth as if to prevent noise leakage. If he could find a way to escape, he would, but there was no way he could stand up to the burly-armed men who had taken him here.

After a while, he heard the sound of the door unlocking, and two men came into the room. One was a foreigner about the same age as Takeshita, and the other was a man above fifty who was, of course, also a foreigner.

The younger one talked to him in...yes, heavily accented Japanese.

“Mr. Takeshita, we apologize for making you so pitiable.”

That's right, thought Takeshita. Varya is facing those same Bolsheviks who now hold power in her mother country. In order to continue to live with what little pride she has left, Varya has no other choice, he had to think.

“We know you were studying under one who is our countryman.”

Countryman... In fact, Nikola Tesla, under whom Takeshita had studied, was from the Kingdom of Hungary, and while it may be close to Russia, surely a Hungarian would not be a Russian's countrymen; but Takeshita suspected the two men were aware of this.

“Well, then, what does this have to do with me?”

“You have a machine that knows things of the future, no? That is something you were able to make because our countryman was there. Therefore, we also have the right to that machine. You are able to follow our thinking, no?”

“I've no idea what you're talking about,” Takeshita answered in English.

The older man made an unpleasant expression and whispered something into the younger man's ear. *Perhaps that older man had had a bad experience during the Russo-Japanese War all those years ago,* thought Takeshita.

“We are able to take you to our country. But it seems that you are not yet finished with his machine.”

“..Why do you think that?”

“If you were finished with it, you would not be passing your time aimlessly.”

*I see,* thought Takeshita, understanding. *They mean that if they were granted the ability to use a future-predicting machine as they liked, they as people with greed in their hearts would not live as I do. I see...*

“We have achieved a revolution in our mother country. Of course, that was due to the greatness of our fellow leaders, but for a revolution, a document that symbolized our ideology was also necessary.”

They were referring to the *Communist Manifesto*.

“There is the same kind of document in Japan. Do you not agree?”

He couldn't have been talking about the Meiji Constitution. Takeshita cocked his head.

“For example...the *Risshou Ankokuron*?”

It took some time for Takeshita to figure out what the young Russian had said.

The *Risshou Ankokuron*... that was the document Nichiren had written in order to enlighten his followers, the one in which he had predicted the crisis of the Mongol Invasion, was it not?

Takeshita knew that even now there were more adherents of Nichiren's teachings than there ever had been. He suppressed the urge to point out that this kind of document was something altogether unlike the machines in the Juunikai's basement.

“The *Oomoto Shinyu* was another one like that.”

It was strange to hear a foreigner utter such a name. The Oomoto Shinyu was a collection of the sayings of Onisaburo, who had inherited a religious sect founded on the prophecies of Nao Deguchi, who had been possessed by the Konjin of the Northeast. There were many in the military and the academy who were sympathetic to his prediction of a reorganizing, even a destruction and rebirth of the present world.

After the coming of the great disaster, it would be certain that the masses would flock to one who had accurately predicted it.

As Takeshita came to understand anew the magnitude of the danger posed by his machines, he took on the expression of someone standing at the precipice of a great, black chasm.

“You do not intend to use the machines for the sake of the current Japanese government, do you? Let us end for today. But when you are in danger, we have become your brothers. Please remember that.”

The older man scowled at Takeshita as if to negate everything the younger man had said.

*Ain is scared.....*

Ain felt like she was in the middle of a long nightmare.

Takeshita had never left Ain alone for this long before.

The machine Ain had been building in the Juunikai's basement, the one she called “Father,” was nearly complete, but before its engine could activate, it required a control message to be output from Takeshita's “future-seeing machine.” But even after she waited for many days, he never returned.

Perhaps he never would. She avoided such thoughts as much as she could, but having nothing to do except lie on the floor staring into nothingness, she could not escape the feeling that she had been abandoned.

As the days passed, her ability to distinguish between the waking and the sleeping world began to fade.

Unable to tell whether the ceiling that spread in front of her was the ceiling of her own basement or that of some other room, Ain gazed upward.

There was someone in her field of view.

It was not Takeshita, but some others, instead.

Because the lights on the ceiling were so bright, she couldn't quite make them out. The men spoke in muffled voices.

"...I wonder if that's really true, you."

"I don't know, but even though he's clearly been receiving information from some machine, the machine in the basement of the Ryouunkaku doesn't seem to be its main body. If so, this girl, who he's been taking care of—I may be overstepping my bounds by saying this—but one can't deny the possibility that she's where the heart of the matter lies."

Ain finally understood that they were talking about her. Then she realized she had been stripped of her clothes and her arms and legs bound to a kind of bed. Rather than indignant, Ain only felt sad.

Because if he had only stayed with her, surely she would not be in such circumstances.

"You think she knows something?"

"...I don't see any evidence of that."

The one man that she could see bore some resemblance to that viscount from Surugadai that Takeshita would occasionally visit, but she wasn't certain.

"How long will he be confined, you think?"

"There isn't much for him to confess, so not too long, most likely."

"We need him back soon."

"As you wish."

Ain shut her eyes. If she squeezed hard enough, she could even block out all the light.

Because surely next time she opened them, he would be by her side again...

## Day of Prophecy

He was released in the morning, a few days after his capture. Compared to what an ideological criminal would've faced, the torture they put him through was quite insignificant, but still he was covered with bruises, and his body was emaciated from eating close to nothing for days.

The lady journalist, Mayumi Igarashi, and Lt. Enoki from the Aoyama Army Research Institute came to meet him.

"Are you all right...?"

"Ahh, if I had found out earlier, maybe I could've used my influence somehow...!"

They took his arms and supported him from both sides.

He simply stared blankly as if he didn't even recognize them.

"First off, shouldn't we get something to feed him somewhere?"

"Let me see...Do you understand? It's me, Enoki!"

Lt. Enoki looked searchingly into his face.

Instead of answering, he finally squeezed something out, in a hoarse voice.

"What day is it today.....?"

"It's the first. The first of September."

His already pale face grew even paler.

“What time is it, right now?”

This time, it was Mayumi who answered.

“It's almost noon.”

Suddenly, he tore away from his supporters and tried to break into a sprint, before pitching forward onto the ground.

“What's wrong, all of a sudden?”

The two brought him to his feet, but he continued to stare frantically into the distance.

“Ain is— Ain is at the Juunikai—”

“Ain...? Who is that?”

Lt. Enoki suddenly recalled the little girl that was always with him. But he also remembered that the Tokkou detective was unable to see her.

“Aaahhh!! Hurry!! Fuck—!!”

“What is he so worked up about? I wonder if he was driven mad by the interrogation?”

Lt. Enoki gave a start.

“What if... ‘that time’ was right now?”

“Eh?”

“...September 1, in the 12th year of Taisho, at 11:58am...”

Lt. Enoki's face grew as pale as the man he was carrying.

Looking at his watch...wasn't that moment mere minutes away?

No matter how much they hurried, they wouldn't make it from there to the Juunkai in time.

The man just continued to call the girl's name.

It was a mystery where he stored the energy to keep going, so vehemently he called.

*BOOOM*

As a huge shockwave seemed to almost push its way up through the ground, Ain simply sat in a daze, not understanding what was going on.

But soon, there came a violent side-to-side rolling motion, accompanied by short repeated vibrations. Already, many of the things in the Juunikai basement had been carried off, but the remaining items all tipped over and shattered, and the brick walls began to crumble.

“So this is what he was so worried about...”

There was the muffled sound of the top of the spire beginning to collapse.

But Ain's head was now suddenly clear. She crawled on all fours to the machine she herself had built in the next room.

“Father, it looks like we can't stay here anymore.”

She opened a small door she had installed on its back, and slipped inside. It was so cramped that she had to curl into a ball to fit. She closed the door, and turned the machine on from the inside.

Debris began to pour in through the basement's damaged ceiling.

The good-for-nothing, botched machine called “Father” shakily pushed through the rubble and assumed its full stature.

*CRAAAASH*

The Ryouunkaku was built with the same blueprint as a water tower, and was not originally designed for people to climb, much less for people to live in.

The top of the tower fell to the great earthquake much too quickly, and the inside completely caved in. The maze of brothels that swarmed below the Ryouunkaku like any other town, used fire for energy during daily operations, and during the countless aftershocks that came after the first great heave, building fires began to break out and spread until they merged into a great inferno.

There was no one around to see what seemed like a giant, measuring at least two ken, rise from underneath the wreckage of the Juunikai and disappear into the smoke and dust.

After some time had passed since the great earthquake, the partially destroyed Asakusa Juunikai, the Ryouunkaku, was declared a public safety hazard by the Army Engineer Corps and demolished by explosives. Some time before that, the Engineer Corps examined the basement of the Juunikai, hauled out the ruins of some of the machines that had resided there previously, and concealed them.

The fires that had begun during the earthquake continued to spread, until nothing remained of Asakusa but a burnt-out hellscape.

Until the fires finally died, Takeshita was nowhere to be found.

There was no doubt that he had inspected the Juunikai before the arrival of the Engineer Corps. But he didn't find Ain, and he couldn't have known that the machine she had been making, “Father,” had vanished.

Takeshita, who had made the Juunikai into his fortress, now had nowhere to go. Indistinguishable from the tramps he would often see in the former Asakusa, he simply sat staring into space with a woven mat hung loosely over his head.

Around him, he heard the clearly baseless rumors start to form.

*Just as there is someone who spreads blue in the water well...*

It was the same as it was in San Francisco. Takeshita believed without a doubt that the place he now found himself in was exactly like the place he found himself after that earthquake, and the same rumors were being spread, particularly those with pointed ill intent.

In San Francisco, there were those who took the earthquake as an opportunity to spread rumors to eliminate the swelling and prosperous Chinatown.

And—God!—there were the rumors intended to foment the slaughter of the Japanese, which grew from whispers into screams and beyond.

He stood from where he sat and, without gathering his belongings, began to walk aimlessly.

When he finally took note of his surroundings, Takeshita had started to climb Dangozaka.



Midway up the hill, the fires had stopped, and because of the relative peace of the area he had come here without noticing.

For many years, he had unconsciously avoided Dangozaka.

He had often gone to upper Hakusan to bring Ain to the cafe in the second floor of Nantendou, but his avoidance of the place was so strong that he took a long route around via a city tram.

Takeshita had lived here once.

But after he returned from America, he had never once come near the place.

Why did he hate this place so much...?

Coming here for the first time, he could feel the nostalgia of the place.

There was Ougai-sensei's house, and nearby was the soba shop he frequented.

If you climbed the hill a little further, there was the old doll-maker's workshop and residence—

Takeshita suddenly noticed a tightness in his chest.

In the Meiji Era—but no, he didn't know much about the Meiji Era. Because by the time he had come to live there, chrysanthemum dolls had already declined in popularity.

Still, there were a few doll-makers left in Dangozaka who were making *ikininyou*.

*No good...!* He couldn't stand to remember anymore.

No matter how much he screamed at himself, he had no way to stop himself from being buried in the overflowing, long-suppressed memories. That he had first met Ain in the *meishuya* below the Juunikai...that he had paid for her with some small amount of money...that all these memories were correct...he could not believe such a tale any longer.

The first time he saw Ain was here in Dangozaka.

Suddenly, on a whim, the former Takeshita had thought to enter the alley and peek into the doll-maker's shop.

It seemed that the old doll-maker had already retired, because when he looked in from the window the shop was deserted.

But then his eye was caught by someone in the shop.

It was a doll, in the shape of a young girl, that was so realistic it could be mistaken for a red-blooded human.

Clearly, it wasn't a person. After all, although it was decorated simply with a simple kimono below the neck, it was nothing but a wooden doll.

After he first laid eyes on the doll, he spent all day and night tirelessly gazing at it. She didn't move an inch. Of course. But no matter what he did, he couldn't shake the thought that the doll possessed a consciousness, and with it a desire to break out of the workshop and gain her freedom.

In order to bring the revelation brought to him by the American Professor Tesla's to its realization, what Takeshita needed to do must have seemed like an unscalable mountain.

But day and night, he couldn't bring himself to forget about that young girl doll, and he began to grow afraid that at this rate he would go mad.

No, that would not do. Thinking he had to do something, his mind finally settled on something truly unthinkable.

One night, Takeshita waited for the old doll-maker to fall asleep, broke down the door of the workshop and went inside, where he clutched the doll in his arms and ran off with her.

In his arms, the doll turned to look at him and said "Thank you." He was first shocked, and then overjoyed.

From then on, he began to call the living doll Ain, and to him, she became like a living human being.

#### In Conversation with Viscount Fuenokouji

"A certain Takeshita, eh? I don't remember him too well, but I remember he had gone to America to study, and I was interested enough in his stories to invite him over. Did he bring a young girl with him? (He laughs for a while.) You must be talking about his doll? I remember hearing stories of Mr. Descartes bringing a doll around in his bag, but that man walked around with the doll clutched in his arms. Sometimes he would talk with the doll in a low voice, so my wife and I would half-heartedly try to play along, but..."

#### In Conversation with Lady Journalist Mayumi Igarashi

"Ah—yes, that's right. After Takeshita was released by the Tokkou, I did go to meet him. At that time, the doll you mentioned was not present, as one would expect. But in a conversation I had with the female pilot Noriko Inbe, who I had covered previously in an article, she mentioned that Takeshita petitioned her for a sightseeing flight, but in actuality put that doll on the plane—he called her Ain, but in any case, he only put that on the plane, and it seems that he himself did not fly with them."

#### In Conversation with Toyama Military Research Laboratory's First Lt. Enoki

"Originally, I was conducting research at the research laboratory in Shinjuku Toyama, on radio weapons already developed by the Navy. I heard that there were radio waves emanating from Asakusa that surpassed the Navy's machines in strength, and when I went to Asakusa to investigate them on my own, I got to know Mr. Takeshita. His daughter, Ain? Eh?...I met her. A doll? What insolence are you spouting? She was a person. Yes, definitely."

Takeshita ran uphill with all the strength in his body to escape from Dangozaka. It felt that his heart might explode, as if his body was screaming at him to stop, but he felt that if his heart was going to stop, it should stop now and forever.

That he should remember such a thing—!  
If everything until now was a nightmare, it would be better if he never woke up.  
It would be better for him to stay in the nightmare forever.  
Ain was gone.  
No, from the beginning, such a girl never existed.  
He wanted to refuse to recognize it.  
But he could no longer do that.

## Showa

After the arrival of his earthquake, no one knew much about the whereabouts of Takeshita, who had lost Ain, or how he was spending his time.

Perhaps he took the machines he installed in the Asakusa Juunikai somewhere to fix them, but the more likely possibility is that, in his despair, he simply lost all direction in life and spent his time wandering here and there.

After the great earthquake, those who had predicted it became known and found themselves in the limelight; but that was not limited only to Takeshita.

In Koishikawa, a man by the name of Sakamoto handed out a slip of paper on which he had written *Reiyaku* to employees at the main office in Fukagawa, and told them “This is a year when many people will die;” and when the earthquake came, it was said that all of those people were saved.

The lady journalist, Mayumi, gathered information from various sources that, according to rumor, Takeshita had crossed over to the continent and was engaging in suspicious activity of some sort.

The only thing that is certain is that in the seventh year of the Showa era, he returned to Tokyo.

The one area that was not much affected by the earthquake was Ikebukuro. Originally, there were no particularly notable settlements in that area, so it stands to reason that the suffering caused by the earthquake was minimal.

At that time, when night fell around the east gate of Rikkyo University, one could find not just students but also suspicious-looking young people gathering at cafes and bars.

These were the years of the Murderers' Rebellion Incident by the military, and there was a feeling in the air that, away from the oversight of the public, things were progressing that no one could stop; but for these worthless, penniless young people, it was an age of rejoicing in their own freedom.

Takeshita was no longer young, but he nevertheless found himself adrift in the same way a student would be, and so he felt at home in the neighborhood surrounding the west entrance of Ikebukuro Station. He often sat alone at the counter of local cafes.

“Those fellows are rather noisy, aren't they?”

Suddenly hearing a voice from his side, he found himself suddenly panicked.

“No, I don't really mind.”

Once, he had lived a life where mysterious figures were constantly blindsiding him, ceaselessly, from morning till night. It was hard for him to forget those times.

Takeshita decided to ask the man who had spoken to him, who was somewhat older than the boisterous youths around him, a question.

“Are you an artist, too?”

Takeshita knew that many of the youths who lived around the west entrance were art students who were aiming to become painters or sculptors.

The man who had spoken was wearing a beret, so of course one would assume that the man was an artist, but that would be a mistake.

“I’m a poet.”

“Aaahh, I see. In any case, why are so many artists—well, most of them are aspiring artists, but why are they gathering in this area?”

This was something he had been curious about for a while.

“If you head towards Shiinamachi for a bit, there are some ateliers that are built cheaply, almost like rowhouses. That area was originally wetlands. The person who bought the land spread charcoal on the ground and built them with the intent of attracting young artists.”

“Oh, I get it.....”

“At the end of the day, it’s a lot like Montmartre in Paris. No—well, in terms of appearance, there’s a huge gap between the two, but they’re quite similar in terms of their passion for the arts.”

As he spoke, the poet swayed pleasantly.

Just at that moment, noticing a man with bad legs, a cane, and a tough expression on his face walk into the shop, the poet said, “Well, excuse me,” to Takeshita, and went away.

The next evening, Takeshita walked towards Shiinamachi.

It’s not as if he had much interest in the atelier village, but after hearing the poet’s story, he may have wanted to see it once, at least.

He quickly found a street lined with distinctive triangular roofs built of red concrete shingles.

In the afternoon, as expected, the artists were hard at work on their individual projects, and the whole area was blanketed with a death-like quiet, completely different from the liveliness of the West Exit at night.

Walking around with no particular goal in mind, he may have been struck by some premonition.

Around the sculptors’ ateliers, plaster figures, perhaps studies or pieces already retired from exhibition, were strewn about.

Many of them were human figures, and in the gloomy, shadowed alleyway, the numerous pale figures left a somewhat horrific impression.

Lazily stopping to stare at the sculptures, he was suddenly stunned by a feeling as if a cold hand had grabbed hold of his heart.

Among the discarded statues, he found himself staring at something he couldn’t believe.

It was a life-sized nude statue of a young girl. And no matter how much he tried to disillusion himself, that girl was the very same one he had once lived with—it was impossible to see her as anyone other than Ain.

He must have been wrong. After all, Ain was only a doll. Before the great earthquake, he had spent a period of time believing that Ain was a living human being. But it's not as if she disappeared. She had never existed to begin with.

Even after telling himself that for so long, it was nevertheless true that Takeshita, believing that no matter where he went, Ain might possibly be waiting for him, continued to unconsciously search for her.

Takeshita stumbled away from the statue of Ain, trying to distance himself from his frantic thoughts, and he found himself looking into the window of another atelier.

It seemed to be the room of an abstract painter who had been swept up by the Surrealist movement. It seemed that the owner of the room was away. In the room there was a painted canvas left on an easel, and this was not an abstract painting but a realist one.

Takeshita wondered if his sanity had finally abandoned him.

On the canvas was a portrait of Ain. *Abhh, I want to see her again...* he wondered if such thoughts had strengthened until they finally caused him to begin to see phantoms.

*I see...well, if that's all it is, then that's all well and good.* Thinking that, he picked up his heavy feet and began to find his way out of the atelier village.

Then, he saw, behind the last atelier, a bronze statue of a little girl. This was made by a completely different artist from the previous works, but it was still unmistakably Ain.

After staring at the sculpture for a while, Takeshita softly touched it with the tip of his finger. He felt the cold surface of the bronze.

No...! It wasn't a phantom.

He finally understood, clearly, that it was a statue made using Ain as a model.

He turned back toward the atelier village.

Ain was here.

Just as Montmartre in Paris had their muse, Kiki, this atelier village had Ain.

With the exact same appearance as she had before the great earthquake, Ain existed somewhere. And those who existed close to that place continued to feel some sort of inspiration from her.

To the man named Takeshita, such influence was no longer present. He was conscious of that fact.

*But, Ain still exists...* Just by being sure of that, Takeshita felt the warmth return to his heart.

He began to walk toward the lights of the town, and what happened after that no one knows.

*End*