

SOLITUDE IN THE PLAZA (3)

By Yoshie Hotta

Translated by Horo Shirakawa**Chapter V**

If you've ever walked through the Marunouchi district early in the morning, you will remember the scene. Tall buildings of different shapes stand facing the stagnant water of a broad moat flanked by thick walls that look as if they had been standing there for centuries. Lining the edges of the worn asphalt roads which stretch like valleys between the buildings are automobiles of many different colors—red, green, cream, dark blue, gray, and finally, olive drab. Young Japanese boys in their teens and early twenties, holding polishing cloths in one hand and cans of wax in the other, are polishing the cars with painstaking care. As the small, short-necked boys work over the machines for hour after hour, they almost seem to become a part of them.

As Kigaki and Mikuni passed in front of the Correspondents' Club, boys wearing caps copied from those worn by the Occupation soldiers were washing the jeeps and sedans of the correspondents. Kigaki spotted Hunt's jeep among them. Smells of like rancid cream or human sweat were hanging in the air between the ancient, low red brick buildings. The boys were humming modern jazz melodies, which

Kigaki could never learn no matter how many times he heard them.

“O. K. *ha?*”

“No good *yoi!*”

Some of the boys were calling back and forth in their own private language, while others worked away without speaking. Singing boys, chatting boys, silent boys—all paused occasionally to step away from their cars and see how the shine was coming along. As they looked at their work their eyes took on the soft, far-away expression common to all Japanese when they are analyzing something. Sometimes a look of pleasure crossed their faces as they looked at the shining cars, while sometimes they laughed nervously if the job was not yet perfect. Others saw mirrored in the shining surface of the cars a look of vague dissatisfaction on their faces and laughed in self-mockery, almost happy to see their frowning faces reflected back at them. No matter how hard they polished, they can never hope to own cars like these.

Kigaki was thinking, *Where have I seen faces like this before? Somewhere I have seen boys, and adults too, with this same complicated expression on their faces…… Yes, the boys who were polishing cars and shoes for the Japanese, the adults who were guarding cars and doors in Hong-kong, or Shanghai, or Saigon, or Singapore during the war! Chinese, Annamese, Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, White Russians—they all had the same expressions under the Japanese Occupation that these boys who are polishing the cars have now. The look on the faces of these Japanese boys shows clearly enough that Japan is on a level with the rest of Asia now…… And the uneasy look on the faces of the laborers whom I saw in Yokohama a few days ago…… The people in the sake shop who took me for*

a spy The young men in the train from Sakuragicho and the young women dressed in bright costumes looking like the flags of many nations..... And it's my face too, and Mikuni's and Chang's..... Maybe true peace and serenity are found only in the face of the Buddha.

Kigaki had a sudden impulse to tell Mikuni what he had been thinking, as the latter strode along beside him. *Mikuni is a Communist and Communists seem to be the only group who take a real interest in this racial problem and focus on it in its elemental form, he thought. But this problem mustn't be allowed to bring about another Korea—Hunt called Korea the worst disaster in the history of modern man. And then the demands of practical politics enter in..... I wonder if this problem can be settled without the use of force.....* Kigaki's thought broke off abruptly, his judgment suspended again. He was tired of walking. *If you suspend judgment time after time each day, you end by suspending judgment on everything, no matter what you think about. And so, no matter what restlessness or commotion there may be inside your heart, as far as the outside world is concerned, you might as well not be alive. Your existence is more shadowy than that of characters in a novel. What are you? A shadow with a heart full of restlessness and commotion. And what are you doing? Trying to stop the hand of the clock as they move past the noon of the twentieth century in July, 1950. You are walking toward Tokyo Station under the bright, metallic light of a summer morning, not fully alive and yet not quite dead.*

He checked the impulse to tell Mikuni what he had been thinking

about. *To share your thoughts with others when your own judgment is suspended is like having sexual intercourse without love.* He looked around at the boys holding cans of wax in their hands and polishing the cars. Their faces remained unchanged. A Wac from the Occupation Forces was walking toward them, her heels clicking on the pavement. Her uniform was clean and stiff and she looked straight ahead as she walked. Kigaki was glancing restlessly around him as he walked.

"I've been thinking of going back to my home town for a visit," Kigaki found himself saying.

He had spoken so abruptly that Mikuni started and said, "What's that?"

Kigaki had been thinking, *These boys with the complicated expressions on their faces, who are polishing the cars, say nothing. They keep silent, not waiting to express with their mouths the thing that are mirrored in their faces. Feelings that can't be put into words are locked in our hearts, along with the memories that bring nostalgia. Nostalgia.....* The word had brought thoughts of his boyhood and his mother to him and made him say, almost unconsciously, that he had been thinking of going back to his home town for a visit. *What a strange conclusion for my thoughts about the racial problem in Asia.* He thought he could hear insane laughter echoing in the distance. He caught his hand to his throat and ran it down over his chest. The hand stopped on the bulge from his inside pocket, Tilpitz's roll of bills. His whole body felt numb and hunched over as he walked, trying unconsciously to bury these thirteen hundred dollar bills within himself.

"I'm all in," Mikuni said, "aren't you? But I've got to go out:

again after I get home." Mikuni had not spoken until then, probably waiting for Kigaki to say something about his talk with Haraguchi. But Kigaki didn't want to talk about it. He guessed that Mikuni had to go out again on some business for the Party.

"If I should..... well..... that is, I don't suppose you'd work in a Communist cell with someone like me," Kigaki said. "You'd probably think you couldn't trust me."

"No. If you enter the Party, I'm sure you will change."

"Well, right now I....." Kigaki was about to say "I have thirteen hundred American dollars in my pocket," but he checked himself, thinking, *Why should I tell Mikuni about that?* A wave of dizziness, almost of nausea, swept over him. Mikuni stopped walking and stared tensely into Kigaki's face. He had thought Kigaki was going to say, "Well, right now I am thinking seriously of joining the Party," after his remark about working in a Communist cell. The paralyzed look of excitement on Kigaki's face further confirmed his surmise.

"Not everyone who wants to enter the Party has enough knowledge about Communist policy or enough determination to make a good Communist. It's like everything else— you can't always tell beforehand."

The conversation had veered sharply in a direction that Kigaki had least expected. He didn't know what to say. He tried to speak, and from the depth of his throat came a strange cry, like the cry, of an animal.

Kigaki's figure was reflected on the big plate glass window of a foreign air line office, along with those of men passing by on their way to work. He looked much like the others, except for the fact that

he was wearing a coat in spite of the heat. Mikuni took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his face and arms. They stood there looking at each other for about thirty seconds and Mikuni gradually realized that he had mistaken Kigaki's thought. He turned away from Kigaki's troubled look and started to walk away.

During those few seconds I might have made a decision, Kigaki thought. The words I chose to finish that sentence might have changed the rest of my life. 'Now' means the present, and the present is the sum of the past. Thirteen hundred American dollars, the Communist Party, the National Police Reserve, a regular job at the office, my idea for a novel, entering Kyoko's and the baby's names on the city records, my 'legal' wife, running away to Argentina, thoughts about the chances for war or peace—all these things that bump into each other and contradict one another if I think about them separately, they are all contained in the present moment of my life.

Mikuni had started to cross the street and strode over to the safety island in the center before Kigaki noticed that his reflection had disappeared from the big window. Just as Kigaki was about to step off the curb after him, the light changed to red, as if it had been waiting for him.

"Kigaaaki!" Chang stepped out of the airline office and called to him. "I'm sorry I couldn't go with you last night. I got a telegram after you and Hunt left. I'm leaving on the plane tonight for New York. Hey, I thought you were with Mikuni. What happened to him?" He spotted Mikuni and shouted at him, "Mikuuuni!"

Mikuni pivoted on his heels, saw them, and came back from the safety zone.

"Let's have a cup of coffee somewhere," Chang said. "Lately you get much better coffee in the Japanese shops than in the Correspondents' Club. Life is getting easier all the time in Japan. I guess it's natural that the other countries in Asia are jealous of Japan's recovery." Chang talked along excitedly, his hand on Kigaki's shoulder. "Oh, incidentally. That damn fool Hunt started to bang away on his typewriter as soon as he got back last night. And then just when I thought I could get some sleep after he'd stopped typing, he got another phone call from his wife in San Francisco. That call was really something! Apparently his wife and their friends had gone on from his apartment to some nightclub. She was calling from there and she was drunk. I could hear the blaring of a jazz although I was clear across the room from the receiver. And Hunt's wife was really drunk—her voice was thick and she had trouble talking. Hunt was awfully worried and seemed to lose all his ambition for typing after the call."

"What's the Japanese saying?"

"*Aona ni shio*— he had the wind taken out of his sails."

"Yes. He was groaning like a wounded tiger. I thought I could get some sleep after this act of the drama was over, but that wasn't all. A telegram came."

"Your orders for transfer to New York?"

"No. It was for Hunt. He's being sent to Hanoi in Viet Nam. The correspondent who had been there is down with malaria. So he started banging his suitcases around, getting his baggage together, and I didn't get much sleep. I could just as well have picked up my ticket and checked my baggage this afternoon, but I decided I might as well get out for a while, so I came over here early. Hunt was just going over to get his typhoid and yellow fever shots when I left. He

said that Ho Chi Minh has stepped up his raids in Viet Nam, apparently timing them to coincide with the Communist attack in Korea. In a way the same pattern of events that's taking me to the U. N. is taking him to Hanoi..... Anyway, he dashed out the door, calling '*Matanai*' over his shoulder.

"What did he mean by '*Matanai*'? The three picked up their coffee cups in the gesture of a farewell toast.

"Well, when he asked me a long time ago what the Japanese was for 'See you later', I explained that it is '*Mata nee*'. But no matter how many times I corrected him, he could never get the pronunciation right, even when I explained that '*Matanai*' means 'I won't wait'. Anyway, I was so tired that I decided I wouldn't wait until his pronunciation improved and I came over here."

Chang laughed happily as he made the pun, but there was a sense of irritation behind the laugh. He had been talking a little too fast and his laugh was a little too loud—so loud that people at the neighboring tables turned and looked at him. *It's nothing to change that Hunt's wife got drunk or that Hunt is being transferred, Kigaki thought. He ought to be able to laugh off last night's annoyances. I wonder what kind of a correspondent he'll make if he gets upset over trifles like these.....*

"'*Matanai*', eh?" Mikuni said. "That's a good one. Maybe Mrs. Hunt is tired of waiting. It happens enough when the husband has gone to war. She probably got drunk because she was tired of waiting. Incidentally, Chang, how's your family?"

Kigaki nudged Mikuni to try to stop him from asking the question, but it was too late Chang had looked happy and excited until then, but his face fell and he began to sip his coffee sullenly.

Talk about families is always taboo, Kigaki thought. This U. N. job is a break for Chang professionally, but it is also driving him further apart from the ties that are rooted in the very depths of his flesh. Not only distance, but politics too have come between his career and his heart, cutting him off from his family. The further he goes in his career, the wider the gap becomes and he will end up a lonely man with no ties left with his homeland or his family.

Chang was staring absently in front of him without answering Mikuni's question. Mikuni, not aware of the blunder he had committed, looked over questioningly at Kigaki for a moment before he continued in an unconcerned tone, "With the U. N. the only open forum where the two worlds are talking publicly all the time, you ought to get a pretty good idea how the world drama is going. You'll have a front row seat."

Mikuni was trying to draw Chang out, but the latter had been sitting aloof, his coffee cup clenched in the fat fingers of both hands. Suddenly he burst out, "United Nations! *United* Nations?" spitting out the words. "Do you want to know a better name for the United Nations? The Not-So-United-Nations. It's just a safety valve for postponing issues and delaying the third worldwar. But if people keep breathing its evil atmosphere day after day they'll get softening of the brain. The only air that rises from those international debates is stale and poisonous."

Stale and poisonous. The image of Tiltitz flashed through Kigaki's mind.

The shrillness had left Chang's voice and he had finished in a low tone of resignation. He looked at his watch and stood up to go.

"*Matanai, nee,*" he said.

While Chang is obsessed with the stale air at the U. N., what will be happening to Formosa and to his wife and child in Shanghai? It would be a pity for him to lose all his ties both with Formosa and with his family. Of course from the point of view of the Chinese Communists he's a reactionary or one of the anti-revolutionary elements—No, actually he's—

The train of thought was broken at that point and Kigaki returned to his previous musings. *Maybe it isn't really a suspension of judgment with me. Just the way that tiny fish are swallowed up in the center of a typhoon as soon as they are born, perhaps my judgments are swallowed in the vast commotion at the center of my brain as soon as they are formed.. This center of my brain ought to be cut out and exhibited in a museum with a sign reading 'Species: Homo Sapiens' hung on it!*

Mikuni had stood up and was shaking hands with Chang. Watching them, Kigaki felt a cool, refreshing sensation, as if time were flowing quietly from one to the other of the three people. It was as if a fourth person had joined the group. And when he got outside he realized that a new door had opened. The bright, warm glare of the summer sun fell around him, dispersing the misty, stagnant air in the dark corridors of his heart. He thought about his novel again. *I won't bother about the plot yet. I'll just follow wherever the commotion and disturbance in my heart may lead.* The novel had already begun to be a reality for him.

"I've got some things to attend to," Mikuni said after they had walked a little way from the coffee shop. "I'm afraid I'll have to say

goodbye here."

Kigaki continued along with Chang, having decided to see him to the Correspondents' Club.

"I saw Baron Tilpitz last night," Kigaki said.

"Oh? You knew him in Shanghai, didn't you? But you'd better watch your step. I guess he's in the clear right now, but if they ever catch up with him he's apt to be tried in an Occupation court. Maybe he won't stay around that long. I'd steer clear of him if I were you, and certainly don't get into any financial deals with him. No matter what you Japanese may think, it's an all-out war in Korea and in wartime contacts with people of his kind are especially dangerous."

Chang didn't seem to want to say anything very specific about the Baron beyond his general warning. Kigaki wondered how seriously Chang's warning should be taken. Apparently Chang himself had broken off relations with the Baron. Almost as if he had guessed Kigaki's thoughts, Chang added, "Once you get tangled up with Tilpitz in any financial deals, he'll chase you to the end of the world."

Kigaki wanted to tell Chang about the money that Tilpitz had contrived to slip into his pocket and see what Chang would advise him to do, since from the way the latter talked, it sounded as if he might have had a similar experience. But just then Hunt drove up in his jeep, called to them, and started rattling along at machinegun speed. His arm was sore from the yellow fever shots. What time did Chang's plane leave? Chang must be sure to call on his wife if he got to San Francisco. Would Kigaki please remember him to the people at the office? Pushed out of the conversation in this way, Kigaki left without telling Chang about the money.

chapter VI

It was just two weeks since Kigaki had started his temporary job at the paper. Usually, no matter how crowded the tram was, he felt a sense of relief when he was riding home. The door of the tram closed on the business world where noise was synonymous with life and the door on the other side of the car opened automatically toward Kyoko and his baby, toward the 'other life' which Tachikawa had mentioned.

But this morning was different. Both doors remained open and neither would close, or he couldn't forget the things that had happened in the outside world as he went home to his own private world.

"Have you got any money?" Kyoko asked. "Kato brought some American cheese around this morning and I've got to go and get out rice ration today. All I've got is forty yen."

Kigaki's hand started automatically to move toward his inside pocket. Flustered, he quickly reached into his pants pocket and pulled out some money. He told Kyoko that he had been to Yokohama, that he had met Tilpitz there, that he had spent the night at the office—all the details of the night before except the money. Kyoko was never satisfied with a mere report of what Kigaki had been doing; she always wanted to share his feelings and experiences. And she had said she would follow him anywhere. They had been brought especially closely together both because they had lived abroad among foreigners, and because in the society of their own country their marriage had no legal status—they had only each other.

The change that crossed Kyoko's face when he mentioned Tilpitz's name showed more than mere surprise to learn that he had met a mutual acquaintance by chance. When he had finished his account of

the events of the night before, she stood up without a word and brought an airmail letter.

"This came yesterday afternoon." Her face was tense as she waited to find out what he would say about the letter and she was preparing two responses in her mind. If he were pleased she would say, "What do you think about it? I managed to do this much toward the arrangements by myself without bothering you." If he were displeased she would say, "You don't want to go? Well, then, what can we do?"

The letter was postmarked Buenos Aires. The sender's name was Robert Zimmermann.

"Zimmermann is a relative of Tilpitz," Kyoko explained, her voice dying away as she spoke. Kigaki stiffened at the mention of Tilpitz's name. He read the letter: "I can understand your wish to escape from the danger zone of Japan. A great many immigrants came here from all over Europe after the war— 300,000 from Italy alone. But more than ten per cent of them have gone back to their former homes because they couldn't make a living with the way things are here, I can't raise enough money at present to send you for travel expenses, even though I know you could pay it back after you got settled I can vouch for your character and arrange for your entry permit. I hope you will be able to get the money you will need for your passage and for getting started here. I'd give it to you myself if I were luckier at the casino...."

"I met Zimmermann once or twice in Shanghai after the war when he stopped off there on a trip around the world," Kyoko said. "We'd need about five hundred dollars apiece for our passage. Children under four are free."

Five hundred dollars apiece, Kigaki said to himself. A

thousand dollars for both of us. And three hundred dollars left over to get started with in the new country.

“You went to see Tilpitz, didn’t you?” Kigaki said. “Have you been seeing him often?” Without waiting for a reply he continued, “And you asked him to write to Zimmermann for you. It’s funny, though. Tilpitz didn’t say anything about it.”

“I didn’t tell you about it, because I thought if I did, something might go wrong. Whenever you have to make a decision, you always foresee all the difficulties. You even create obstacles that aren’t there.”

“And you asked Tilpitz for money too?”

“No, I certainly didn’t. Any money we got from him would only get us into trouble. I don’t want any part of the kind of money that comes from international intrigue. Can’t you see? That’s why I want us to go to South America. It’s getting so that people can’t talk about someone else without saying he’s pro-American or anti-this or pro-that. And if we get caught between the two sides— like Germany— what kind of a future will our baby have to look forward to? I can’t stand the thought of it……”

If Kyoko talked that way to Tilpitz, Kigaki mused, he must have put the money into my pocket because he pitied Kyoko and maybe guessed that Zimmermann wouldn’t be able to help us. And that might explain what he said about disorder and human suffering in Europe……

Escape seems to be the very essence of our life. Not only escape from the dangers of war. but escape from life itself. In the world today any method of escape you may take to avoid the dangers of war becomes an escape from life itself. And our dream of escaping has become so important that it

is the basis of our life together. Just as bits of earth stick to the lives of farmers, our dreams of peace in another country are stuck to the center of our existence.....

Although Kyoko seems so anxious to go, I think she's a little afraid too..... afraid of our committing ourselves to a life with the new dangers of a foreign country. I guess we can't shake the belief of all Asiatic people that trouble and danger lurk outside your own country. It's too much a part of us all. But if we let the chance slip by and our dream is gone, how will Kyoko take it? Won't she be crushed and lose all interest in life?

There would be a lot of difficulties. Even if we got the entry permit for Argentina, the Foreign Office probably wouldn't give us passports as husband and wife without some proof of a marriage. Kyoko is apparently ignoring this difficulty intentionally.....

Looking out into the garden where the baby was playing in her sand box, Kyoko asked, lowering her voice, "Do you know what business Tilpitz is in now?"

"He said he's a florist."

"A florist? I don't believe a word of it, although I suppose it's possible. I've heard he's an agent for a Panamanian shipping company. There's a law in Panama which makes it possible for ships to transfer their registry to Panama just by paying a small fee to any Panamanian consulate. During wartime unethical ship owners transfer their ships to Panamanian registry and sell war materials and contraband to enemy countries and their satellites under the Panamanian flag. The company that Tilpitz is connected with doesn't have any ships of its

own—and it's selling things behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains..... I think he's probably being watched pretty carefully.....”

“Hmm. So..... does that mean the Baron is a Communist? He told me that although he didn't know, he thought his sons might have become Communists.”

“I wonder. Somehow I don't think making money is his only purpose. But in our crazy world I guess anything can happen.”

Chang's somewhat vague references to Tilpitz became clearer to Kigaki. He pictured again in his mind the figure of Tilpitz, his long arms hanging loosely like those of an orangoutang as he threaded his way through the din of the cabaret, drawing everyone's attention away from the floor show. He felt as if the sharp eyes, like those of a bird of prey, sunken deep into the flesh, were staring at him even now.

Thirteen hundred dollars. Thirteen scraps of paper which would let us escape to Argentina and also make our marriage legal. The figure kept going around in Kigaki's brain.

“Would you go by yourself..... without me?” Kigaki asked. “Are you that anxious to get out of Japan?”

Kyoko had been dreading this question and now it had been asked. She was leaning forward with her head in her hands, her breath coming in little gasps. “By myself..... away from my own people..... I might die of loneliness,” she answered, suddenly turning her face away and running out in the garden where the child was playing.

Left alone in the room, Kigaki looked down at a newspaper on the floor at his feet. The four-column headline read “Chances Slight for Over-All Peace Treaty”, Underneath it in smaller type he read, “Opposition to Deal with U. S. for Military Bases Considered Impractical”.

Kigaki was tapping on the table with his perspiring fingers one, as if he were counting up all the factors in his life that he must balance and resolve before he could have peace of mind. He breathed deeply, thinking, *There are so many things to reckon with, so many choices to be made. . . . I can't resolve them all and keep my independence. It would be so much easier to commit myself to one side and oppose all the others.*

He stared distractedly at the four oversize characters which spelled out "Over-All Peace Treaty", took a box of matches out of his pocket, and lit one. Transferring his stare from the newspaper to the little flame of the match, he remembered a winter night three years ago. He was working at the Sekai Newspaper office. A few days before there had been the furor about whether the paper should, accepted 'tainted' money from a purgee. And that night everyone was excited, waiting for news about Japan's first general strike. All of the editorial staff had stayed late. Finally the announcement came that the strike had been prohibited by MacArthur. A young reporter, slightly drunk on cheap gin, had been throwing scraps of paper into the stove and warming his hands. Kigaki remembered that the flame in the stove had looked just like the flame of the match in his fingers now. The young reporter stood up and recited a parody of a famous poem that every school child learned by heart:

There was a little mouse
with a funny face;
He ran around the house,
And didn't know his place.

One day the big cat came
To catch the frisker;

But he wasn't so tame
And bit the cat's whisker.

The little mouse fainted;
The cat was surprised;
He let him go— waited—
But Mouse didn't get wise.

He's just gone on scampering
From that day to this,
Himself always pampering
In a state of false bliss.

As you can surely see,
The mouse has no plan;
So the mouse might be me,
The mouse might be Japan.

The youth, swaying drunkenly as he recited the poem, was the same reporter who had spoken out in the union meeting and who later became a Catholic.

The match burned short, the flame licking toward the tips of Kigaki's fingers. Two seconds..... three seconds..... his brain was stung with the heat. He endured the burning, staring straight ahead with wide-opened eyes, as if it was necessary for him to bear it to achieve confidence in himself. The flame went out, leaving the tips of his fingers faintly whitened, with the finger prints standing out in relief. He struck another match which sputtered into life loudly as the sulphur exploded. He continued to stare distractedly, as he picked up the newspaper at his feet, set fire to it, and threw it into the brazier at his side. He piled two more newspapers on the fire, pulled the thirteen green scraps of paper out of the inside pocket of his coat,

which he had started to take off, and threw them into the dark red flames. The flames drew back for a minute as if to see if these new objects were inflammable, and then started exploring them cautiously, licking the edges of the oblong scraps of paper. Kyoko, who had been squatting in the garden watching the child, happened to look back toward the house. She ran back into the room, one hand lifted in the air, and dropped down on her knees beside the brazier as if she had been hit by a bullet. She stared in fascination at the blue flame for a moment, then stretched out her trembling hands into the fire little by little, the palms turned upward as if she were scooping up water. Kigaki suddenly kneeled down too, and stuck his hands into the fire. He grasped the burning bills and threw them out on the floor, but he did not try to stamp the fire out of them. Kyoko looked at the heap of bills in fascination for a minute as Kigaki wondered what she was thinking about. Then suddenly she reached for the smouldering pieces of paper and threw them back into the brazier.

But it won't change things whether the bills are burned up or not, thought Kigaki. *It will only mean we have burned our fingers for nothing.* He gasped for breath as the smoke filled his lungs and the burning pain stung his hands. As he exhaled, an odd cry came out with his breath. He breathed in deeply and opened his eyes wider, but he was staring blindly without seeing anything.

An odd smell filled the room, not exactly like burning hair, but almost like varnish. Kyoko was still holding her hands down close over the flame. Kigaki seized her arm and pulled her away. She fell down on the floor with a thud, like a stone statue which is knocked over.

That evening between ten and eleven Kigaki and Kyoko were lying in bed. Their love making had been accompanied by the stinging

of the burns on their hands. Kyoko was looking up at the ceiling with a look in which fatigue and desperation were mingled. Kigaki, as soon as he had withdrawn his body from hers, had picked up a book by the side of the bed. While he was searching through the pages of small print trying to find his place, someone in the street outside started knocking on the windowpane at their heads.

"Kigaki, are you still up? It's Mikuni and Tachikawa."

Wondering what Mikuni might want, particularly since he had come with Tachikawa, Kigaki remembered the conversation that morning on their way to the station.

"Kigaki! It's happened! A coup d'etat. They pulled a coup d'etat."

Kigaki jumped up, throwing down his book. The lock on the window had been broken some weeks before and so they fastened it with a rope every night. As he fumbled at the knot, Kyoko jumped up too and tried to help him. While they were still trying to undo the knot, Kigaki remembered the faces of the Communist leaders who had gone underground. For a fleeting moment he wondered what fate the coup d'etat might bring to him, as he glanced around the room to make sure it was in order. The closed room had a strange stale odor hanging in the sultry air.

At last he got the window open and a burst of cool air flowed into the room. The two young men were silhouetted against the streetlight, their faces red and the smell of alcohol coming from their open mouths.

"A coup d'etat?" asked Kigaki.

"That's right. We got the axe."

"You?"

"That's right." Mikuni replied calmly, at the same time making

the gesture with his hand of having his throats out.

"We got fired all right," Tachikawa added.

"Fired? So it wasn't your side that pulled the coup d'etat," Kigaki said.

A look of physical pain distorted Tachikawa's face.

Kigaki helped the two into the room over the low windowsill, making some vague reply to their questions about the bandages on his and Kyoko's burned hands. They sat down, talking in low tones so as not to wake the baby. A general purge of Communists was being carried out all over Japan in business and industrial circles as well as newspapers, Mikuni explained. Mikuni and Tachikawa were among the first to be fired. Their union had objected to the firing on the basis of the Constitution and various labor laws, but the management had replied that this was a supra-constitutional measure. Mikuni had resolved to present his case later to the Central Labor Relations Board, and in the meantime had attended the farewell party at the office for those who had been fired. Then he and Tachikawa had come to see Kigaki on their way to visit Kato, who had been fired sometime before for Communist activity.

"It wasn't only Party members that were fired," Mikuni continued. "Communist sympathizers who were not Party members, members of the Labor Reporters Press Club and some of the outspoken leaders in the union got it too. Thirty-eight guys in our office in all."

Mikuni was sitting bolt upright, looking at the baby. Tachikawa was leaning back, but there was a look of tenseness and excitement on his face.

"What do you mean by Communist sympathizers?" Kigaki asked.

"In English they're called 'fellow travelers',"

Mikuni replied.

"Fellow traveler." Kigaki thought he had heard the words somewhere recently, though he couldn't remember where. "A fellow traveler should mean a shipmate..... or a traveling companion. Say that Japan is a ship"—

"That's right," Tachikawa broke in. "And therefore we Communists and the fellow what-do-you-call-'em's are not really shipmates at all. Even someone like you, Kigaki, if you'd been a regular employee for some time, would have been included along with the fellow— what is that word? I'm damn sure you would."

Tachikawa had gritted his teeth as he spoke. The taut muscles in his cheeks twitched occasionally. His face had a look of simple animal cruelty.

Kyoko, who had gone out into the hall outside the door to change from her pyjamas, came back into the room. She got out a bottle of imported whiskey and oct slices of cheese. Kigaki looked at the bottle. It was the best imported Scotch. Wondering where she had gotten it, he looked up into her face. After they had burned the money that morning, she had gone out abruptly, not coming back until nine in the evening. She had probably gone to see Tilpitz, he thought.

Mikuni sipped the whiskey and remained silent, withdrawing into himself; but Tachikawa rattled on, reporting what the executives at the office had said that morning. First they had explained that the move was a supra-constitutional one and that in a crisis the Constitution must be disregarded. And then they ended up by saying that the step had been taken to protect and defend the Constitution itself. Tachikawa cursed them for their inconsistency and stupidity.

"Incidentally, Mikuni," Kigaki interrupted, "did Haraguchi come

to your farewell party?" Kigaki had asked the question mainly to bring Mikuni out of the brown study into which he had fallen.

"No, he certainly didn't. God, it was a gloomy affair. Like a wake as if we were dead." Mikuni laughed weakly. "Soneda didn't come either. Said he had 'official business' to attend to. Doi was there though. He was almost in tears."

"Oh?" Something in Kigaki's brain clicked and he remembered that it was Haraguchi who had used the term 'fellow traveler'. *That's the place to start if I want to understand all this*, he thought. *If I start from that fact..... but understanding alone won't get me anywhere. Then comes choice...*

"There was one stupid guy at the farewell party," Tachikawa said. "He got drunk and was shouting in a maudlin voice about all his comrades having been fired. Then he got up in front of everybody and started to sing one of the wartime patriotic songs. We asked him where he thought he was and hushed him up quickly."

Mikuni frowned over at Tachikawa, as if telling him not to get so excited. "Japan has already begun to tremble to her foundations," he said, "and now with the war in Korea Japan will sink lower and lower."

Kigaki looked at Mikuni's face, guessing that this was what Mikuni had seemed to withdraw into himself to think about. *Mikuni probably thinks of the war in Korea as a war of liberation. And this is one of the results. But dose he really think that?*

Kigaki wanted to ask Mikuni about this, but Tachikawa broke in excitedly. "That's it. We must stop this sinking. We must put all our strength into stopping it. If Japan lets the chance for an over-all peace slip by, she will become the kept mistress of other countries and

become an outcast in Asia. It's hard to imagine what deformed bastards might be born. Don't you think so, Mrs. Kigaki?" Tachikawa, apparently drunk, kept raising his voice until the baby woke up and started crying. Tachikawa and Mikuni got up to go, apologizing to Kyoko for disturbing them so late at night.

After they had gone, Kyoko asked, "What was the young one's name? Tachikawa?"

"That's right." Kigaki had been holding up the whiskey bottle and reading the label deliberately. His brain was strangely alert.

"All his talk about mistresses— it made me think about us," Kyoko said. She was smiling faintly as one does when he makes a little joke to relieve a tense situation. The smile quickly faded when she noticed that Kigaki was inspecting the bottle of whiskey.

"What's that?" Kigaki said. "Just what did he say anyway?"

Kyoko went on, without answering his question, "This morning, after the money was burned, I felt so low I thought I'd go for a walk. After wandering around for a while, I finally went looking for Tilpitz."

"Did you find him?"

"Yes, at a German restaurant."

And the money— did you tell him—"

Kyoko answered before he had finished the question. "Yes, I told him about the money. When I told him you had burned it all he put his hand to his forehead and passed it down over his face— like this— pressing so hard that the skin changed color. He said no European would have burned the money no matter how he got it. There's no problem about what happens to money *before* you get it— it's just a matter of deciding what to do with it afterward— whether to use it or

give it back. He said you must have been obsessed to analyze the history of the money before it came to you."

Kigaki remained silent.

"Oh, and he said something else," Kyoko continued. "He said that the aristocracy, who have security while other people are struggling and worrying, are the prostitutes of society. But he said that prostitution is one of the realities of society after all, and that if we didn't want to accept enough money to go to Argentina, he would give us enough to go to Christobal in Panama. He smiled sarcastically as he said it."

"Christobal?"

"Yes, it's a port in the Canal Zone. I guess it's the home office of the shipping company that he's acting as agent for."

"And he wanted us to help throw fuel on the flames by working for a company whose ships carry contraband munitions?"

"I don't think so necessarily..... Then I said to him, almost without stopping to think, 'Baron, I don't think security or happiness can ever come from prostitution, no matter what kind of prostitution it is. Aren't you yourself the proof?' I had spoken carelessly without thinking, but he stood up and said, 'Well, let's say goodbye then. I wish good luck to you.' He stood up, took my bandaged hand in his and raised it to his lips. He was polite and he only kissed me on the hand, but his voice when he said 'I wish good luck to you' made a chill run up my spine. Then he ordered the bottle of whiskey and gave it to me to give to you..... Oh, and he said he was starting soon for Hong Kong."

Kigaki wanted to be gentle and understanding with Kyoko, but he wasn't in a mood to talk to her. The conversation died. He remembered

his love making with Kyoko before Mikuni and Tachikawa had stopped by. She had not said a word after she came back home looking worried and exhausted. He and Kyoko had thrust so many things into the dark well of sex. *Human beings push down so many hopes and desperations into the darkness of sex*, he thought. *And yet life itself rises from that darkness.* The events of the last two weeks flickered through his brain as he looked over at the baby which was snoring lightly, its head turned to one side. *And Tachikawa said, 'It's hard to imagine what deformed bastards might be born.' My baby was born from that deep well into which Kyoko and I sank all our frustrations from the outside world.*

"Are illegitimate children still called bastards?" Kyoko asked.

"Not in the eyes of the law any more," he said.

"What do you mean 'not in the eyes of the law?'" She too had been thinking about the same thing although Kigaki didn't know what had caused her to think about it.

"Well, in the international sense, to contradict Tachikawa, it means that even a limited peace is peace in the eyes of the law."

"Oh."

A late reveller came down the street in front of the house, singing drunkenly. It was a popular song in a minor key telling about the frustrations that stick to the frail fibers of the human heart. *The poisonous air of the international situation makes this current of frustration appear even in the daily lives of the people.* Kigaki thought.

"I'm going to try to get some sleep," Kyoko said. She lay down beside the baby, two deep wrinkles showing between her eyebrows. Soon she began to breathe deeply.

Nothing is solved. Kigaki thought. *I can almost see everything shimmering vaguely before my eyes. But things you can really see you should be able to describe. That's the beginning of the solution.* And then the plan for his novel became clear.

An airplane droned in the distance. It came nearer and nearer and then roared directly over the house, making the baby toss in its sleep. He went to the window and looked up at the sky, as the flashing red and green lights on the plane gradually disappeared in the East, leaving the geometry of the stars alone in the sky. *Is Chang in that plane on his way to New York, or Howard Hunt on his way to Hanoi? Or maybe the Baron is leaning back in one of the seats on his way to Hong Kong with his big eyes staring in front of him.*

A clock in the next house struck two. Footsteps came down the street and then Mikuni and Tachikawa's faces appeared at the window in the light thrown from the lamp on the table. Both had a gloomy expression and worry and exhaustion showed in their sunken eyes.

"We came to say goodnight," Mikuni said.

"I don't think there are any trains at this hour," Kigaki said, "but we—"

"No, don't worry. Mikuni and I can walk along as we talk things over," Tachikawa broke in.

'As we talk things over.' Yes, we all have too many things to talk over, Kigaki thought.

The footsteps of the two died away in the distance and Kigaki looked up at the sky again and shivered convulsively. The stars had already disappeared and the sky was dark as before. *The only place*

in the world where the light is shining is on the squares near the Kremlin and the streets of Washington, he thought. And he imagined himself sitting there naked in the light. For the first time in his life he said a prayer.

He went to the table, drew a sheet of paper toward him, and picked up a pencil. He felt as if a lens inside him were being sharply focused as he wrote in big letters at the top of the page, SOLITUDE IN THE PLAZA.