

〈翻 訳〉

‘My Daily Life When I Was Very Young,’¹ by Hagiwara Yoko²

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The Time We Lived in Magome Village³

At the end of 1926 our family of four moved from Zaimokuza, Kamakura to Hirabari in Magome village in Omori. The reason for this was that Mother, who had weak pleura had completely regained her health after leading a quiet life in Kamakura for a year and on top of that, the following year I, the oldest girl in the family would be starting elementary school.

The home to which we moved in front of Mikuni Kindergarten looked out on a narrow gravel road and was reached right after climbing a slope like a narrow mountain path, surrounded by bamboo thickets. It was a small ancient-looking, two-storey house with hardly any garden.

Both my father⁴ and mother being dog-lovers, we kept an Alsatian called Nonay. Since there was a high, light brown wooden fence we couldn't see the nearby houses. In spite of this I became particularly friendly with the Uchida family to the east of us, who Mother had been acquainted with before we moved there.

The fair-skinned Reiko Uchida and I, who had become deeply tanned from being in the ocean at Kamakura, soon became friends and began to play together.

She came round to get me calling in a loud clear voice “Yoko, let's play together.” Playing around like puppies in the narrow street in front of our houses and in the open fields overgrown with Japanese pampas grass, became our daily routine.

Every day father spent his time writing upstairs. Once in a while when he came

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- 1 An extract from the memoir *Chichi* (Father) (1959) which won the Japan Essayist Club Prize in 1960.
 - 2 Hagiwara Yoko (1920~2005) Novelist and essayist. Eldest daughter of Hagiwara Sakutarō.
 - 3 Also known as Magome Writers' Village. Many writers and artists went to live in Magome in Tokyo between the end of the Taishō era and the beginning of the Showa era.
 - 4 Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886~1942) Major poet noted for his free-style poetry.

downstairs I was happy and badgered him to give me a ride on his back. Whereupon he said “All right,” and got down on his hands and knees. Father, who was young and full of vitality, crawled round and round the room. I put reins around his neck and when I pulled his hair hard saying “Giddy up! Giddy up!” Father said “Yoko, this is too much for me.” Since he sounded like he was having a hard time of it, I finally got off his back. Mother, who was holding my well-behaved sister, who was two years younger than me, on her lap laughed and said, “You’re just like a boy, aren’t you.”

When the weather was fine we would set off early in the morning, taking with us lunchboxes prepared by Mother going to places like Ueno Zoo to see the elephant or to Kagetsuen⁵ in Tsurumi, where Father would hold me in his arms and slide down the Oyama slide.

I always went home in a happy mood, hanging on to my parents’ hands and swinging between them, my father smoking his Shikishima cigarettes and my mother holding my sister, who had become exhausted from walking.

School Entrance

The new year came and in March the day arrived when I would enter Magome Elementary School. Wearing a white apron over a light brown dress, I was quite tense on the day that for the first time Reiko and I left for school by ourselves with our bags, embroidered with red flowers, hanging from our shoulders. Our mothers seemed to be anxious about us saying things like, “I wonder whether they’ll be O.K.” and “They’ll manage somehow”.

When we turned left at the open field, I looked over my shoulder while continuing to hold Reiko’s hand. Whereupon Mother, who was standing in front of the lattice door watching us intently called to us once again, “Do be careful”. When I heard this, all of a sudden my eyes filled with tears, which trickled down my cheeks.

On rainy days a young man called Miyoshi Tatsuji⁶ who was lodging nearby often brought an umbrella to me in school, at Mother’s bidding. Mr Miyoshi had a ruddy face and always wore *hakama*. Goodness knows when we started doing this, but when Mr. Miyoshi, who was in the corridor, suddenly stuck his large face through the window into

5 An amusement park for children.

6 Miyoshi Tatsuji (1900~1964) Poet and literary critic. Founded critical journal *Shi to Shiron* (Poetry and Poetic Theory) with Hagiwara Sakutarō in 1928.

the classroom, everyone jeered at him, shouting things like “Miyoshi’s a drunk” and “Miyoshi’s a tramp.” Whereupon in an instant his ruddy face became much redder, his eyebrows, eyes and mouth sagged and when it seemed at any moment he would explode, he burst into hysterical fits of raucous laughter. Then, with gentle eyes, like an elephant’s, while looking at the other children, he said “Yoko, I’ll leave you the umbrella here then” after which he left showing us his solidly-built, large-boned back as he did so.

Mother often came to observe my classes. Usually she came with Reiko’s mother who did her hair up in a low pompadour. Both wore kimonos with blackish stripes but Mother had her hair done in a new hairstyle called a radio bun.

Mother’s Western-Style Dress

Uno Chiyo⁷ was about the same age as my mother but she wore Western clothes, which were then uncommon, stylishly. Also she had short bobbed hair. She was the kind of person who possessed intellectual brilliance and who seemed to be perpetually full of enthusiasm.

When Ms Uno, who often came to visit us, was talking to Father about something, Mother was nearby, gazing at Ms Uno with both admiration and envy, and said “You look really nice in Western clothes”. Whereupon Ms Uno replied in a clear, crisp, high-pitched voice, “Oh! Western clothes would definitely suit you as well. Let’s both wear Western clothes!” However Mother who always seemed to lack confidence said, “I would never look any good in Western clothes. What is more, I have such a large chin.”

For Mother, whose father had served as a samurai for the Kaga clan, whose fiefdom yielded one million *koku*⁸ of rice and who herself had been raised in a very protective environment just like girls used to be raised in feudal times, there’s no doubt that at that time Western clothes would have been the last thing that she would have thought of wearing.

In those days popular songs such as ‘I miss you,’ ‘Arabian song’ and ‘My blue sky’ were in vogue and a languid, decadent feeling was in the air for some reason or other.

One day Mother, who ended up being captivated by Ms Uno’s Western clothes, overcoming the opposition of Reiko’s mother, made up her mind to cast aside her plain and subdued kimonos and begin to wear showy Western clothes. White legs, which I was not

7 Uno Chiyo (1897~1996) Novelist. Partner at one time of Ozaki Shiro.

8 One *koku* = 5.119 U.S. bushels

used to seeing, emerged from a short flared skirt with which she wore a newly-bought puffy blouse. It was so different to Ms Uno's style of Western dress to the point of being unimaginable. I said to her, "After all, kimono suits you better."

I was so embarrassed at the sight of this strange, new Mother that I wanted to burst into tears. Mother too looked at herself countless times in the mirror, smiling with her narrow, slanted eyes, saying "There's something strange about how I look, isn't there?"

When they saw Mother suddenly appear in Western clothes, people in the neighbourhood stopped and laughed, staring at her like she was a curiosity, saying things like, "Look! She's one of those modern girls⁹ isn't she?" or "Just look at those legs!" When Mother came to observe the class as well, laughter broke out here and there and in the end the class had to be abandoned. I felt my heart was choked with shame when I heard people comparing me with Mother saying, "Here comes the modern girl. She's Miss Hagiwara's Mother." And then before I was aware of it people fell into the habit of laughing whenever they saw Mother so that even on those few occasions when Mother appeared in kimono, people still laughed at her behind her back.

Muro Saisei¹⁰, Mr. Miyoshi and Ms Uno all lived near our house in Magome. Besides them we also saw Ozaki Shiro¹¹ Kawabata Yasunari¹² Hirotsu Kazuo¹³ Kinumaki Seizo¹⁴ Shiga Naoya¹⁵ Akutagawa Ryunosuke¹⁶ and Kitahara Hakushu¹⁷. In addition to these, young poets increasingly gathered at our house.

I was often taken by father to Mr Muro's house, which was very close and I liked to peer into the strangely-shaped stone lanterns in the garden, which seemed to lack sharp edges and so appeared soft to the eye.

Father, who liked going for a walk, took me walking along paths in nearby fields in the early morning and we walked as far as Bentenchi and Yanaka on Sundays.

9 The term 'modern girls' refers to those women in 1920s Japan who were financially and emotionally independent. This reflected the changes occurring in gender roles.

10 Muro Saisei (1889~1962) Poet, novelist and essayist.

11 Ozaki Shiro (1898~1964) Novelist.

12 Kawabata Yasunari (1899~1972) Novelist. The first Japanese to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature (1968).

13 Hirotsu Kazuo (1891~1968) Novelist and literary critic.

14 Kinumaki Seizo (1900~1978) Minor poet and novelist.

15 Shiga Naoya (1883~1971) Novelist and short-story writer.

16 Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892~1927) Short-story writer, poet and essayist. In 1935 the Akutagawa prize for new writers was established in his honour.

17 Kitahara Hakushu (1885~1942) Poet known for his tanka and modern poetry.

From the large trees at Bentenchi, which bring out the dreamer in a child, the high-pitched droning of cicadas struck my ears. Located by a narrow path entirely paved with stone, there was a small mysterious house surrounded by dark bamboo thickets. The children's song 'The sparrow's home' came into my head. I decided that this was the house in the story 'The sparrow which had its tongue cut out'¹⁸ which father had told me at some time. I enjoyed going there with Father on many occasions. With a vague feeling of sadness I tagged along after Father who was walking hurriedly along the narrow paths through the fields and rice paddies of Arajuku and Magomebashi stretching as far as the eye can see, enveloped in the overpowering green smell of ripening barley.

And when we came close to a wood overgrown with tall trees we arrived at a narrow path where the young fresh greenery hung over our heads like a tunnel. The morning sunlight broke through the gaps between the trees, one shaft of light streaming after another like a green sash. When Father, who was a quick walker, arrived here, he finally began to walk slower. Then he busied himself with extracting his cigarettes from the sleeve of his kimono and smoked one looking as if he was enjoying it.

'I miss you'

The following year, 1928, when I was a second year student, Mother rarely came to observe my class. The brokenhearted, distressing melody of the song 'I miss you' with the lyrics 'When dusk falls and worries know no end, whose figure will be reflected in my disordered mind' became more and more popular to the point that I could not escape hearing it even when I was at home or going to and from school.

Mother appeared to be utterly obsessed with it as if she had been bewitched. And she sat in front of an antiquated-looking phonograph with an attached horn, idly lost in her thoughts with an extremely sad smile on her face. She would blurt out half to herself things like "Oh! While I'm listening to the song I want to die." And then she started looking better in Western clothes than she had to begin with and she often went out.

One day Mother who was wearing Western clothes which made her torso look awfully long and had also put on lipstick shouted from the bottom of the stairs on the ground floor to my father who was studying on the first floor in a loud voice which made my ears ring. "There are dried horse mackerel in the tea cabinet. Please make lunch for

18 *Shitagiri Suzume* (The sparrow which had its tongue cut out). A folktale found in the 13th century collection *Uji Shui Monogatari*.

the children.”

No matter what was said to Father when he was sitting at his desk, he only ever grunted in reply.

When Mother was standing in the entrance of the house in her knitted socks and low-heeled shoes just on the point of going out, Reiko’s mother opened the lattice door and came in. And when she saw Mother she appeared to be surprised saying with a frown, “Good gracious! Are you going out again?”

Mother replied “Well, my husband is a good-tempered person and never complains.” Looking carefree and smiling, Mother picked up her bag, knitted with beads, and went out.

Father opened this cupboard after that and finally located the dried horse mackerel, which he laid on a dirty mesh and clumsily grilled. The three of us started our late lunch in the dark, four and a half tatami mat room. I was accustomed to such things occurring before I became aware of them and I made no complaint. I didn’t begin with the dried fish but let a few drops of the deep purple soy sauce fall on the cold rice and after I had eaten a mouthful or so I went to Reiko’s house to play. However on that day, before very long Father came around to Reiko’s house in a flurry. When I looked at Father who was standing in the un-floored part of the house his face was unlike it was usually. His normally dark-skinned visage appeared to be on fire and had swollen in a ghastly way. His normal skin colour was nowhere to be seen from his breast, which was visible through the top of his kimono, to his wrists.

With his face completely changed into the trembling countenance of a feverish patient, Father said, “When I ate the horse mackerel, my tongue felt a stinging pain which I thought was strange. I’m ashamed that it has turned out like this.”

Reiko’s mother was taken aback and replied, “Oh my goodness! That’s terrible. I’ll go and call the doctor,” and ran hurriedly to get him. Father, waiting for the doctor to arrive, looked like he was having a hard time of it, sometimes trembled like a leaf and looked completely worn-out. The spoiled fish had caused him to develop a fever and on top of that he had an outbreak of hives. With an injection from the doctor, the swelling subsided after a fashion. From that time on Father who already had a slender build, seemed to become skinnier and skinnier.

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Bibliography

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