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Murayama/Dying in a Strange Land

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Sawa

The wounded came home first. Poor Minoru Sakata was so shell-shocked, he sat all day on the swing in his yard and ran into his house whenever anyone approached. But Kahana was lucky; nobody was killed, whereas over a dozen boys from Pepelau died in France and Italy.

There was a mild celebration on V-E day. We still had 4 boys in the Pacific War. The papers raved about the heroic 100th and 442nd, but said nothing about the boys in military intelligence. Then Japan surrendered.

I worried and worried. Did Chiyako survive the firebombing of Tokyo? She was married now to Mr. Kuni and had two children by him. Father Takao was living with Masako and her family in rural Fukuoka, which was not bombed. Sister Tomi and Mother and all of Tomi's family lived in rural Fukuoka too. The Hiroshima-ken people and the Okinawans had the biggest worry.

Then the boys from Europe straggled home. Each family threw a huge party to welcome home their hero. The whole camp turned out. But three boys—Miwa's brother-in-law, Tetsuo Shiotsugu, Tadashi Koyama, and Nobuo Tsuda—refused to come home. *Why were they so unfilial?* Tetsuo re-enlisted to stay in France, Tadashi got his discharge in New York to study art to become a painter, and Nobuo got his discharge in Tokyo and went to work for the occupation.

Toshio, who had an opinion on everything, said, "You know why they're not coming home? They tasted freedom, freedom from *oya kohkoh*" (filial piety).

"Don't think you'll have your parents forever," I rattled off an old proverb.

"That's what I mean. It's freedom from debt. To the Japanese you owe your parents for life."

We gave you life, I was going to say, but let him win this time.

We mailed a care package of coffee and chocolates to both Father's and my families.

"Your people are fine. Fukuoka wasn't bombed," Father assured me.

Elder sister Tomi wrote that *chonan* (eldest son) Tadashi came home, Kaoru was killed in Burma. Yasuo came home but was near death with TB. "Can you send us some streptomycin? We can't get it in Japan."

Right away Father went to ask Dr. Shimokawa in Pepelau to buy monthly rations of the drug to send to Japan. We had saved \$500 from the monthly \$50 Kiyoshi deducted from his pay.

"How is Mother?" I wrote back. She was now 75.

Father's younger sister, Aya, and her family in Fukuoka had all survived. Also safe in Fukuoka were Masako and her husband and Father Takao, who lived with them. Chiyako and her family had survived the bombing in Tokyo.

Mr. Takeda had a store on Main Street and was an old family friend. He and Father had belonged to the "Calabash Club," made up of successful entrepreneurs. When he drove to Kahana on his weekly rounds for his store, I mentioned that Joji had been drafted and was now in Germany.

"They're not drafting workers in pineapple or sugar," he said. "He must've volunteered." He knew English and was more informed than us.

I showed him Joji's enlistment papers.

"This serial number is for volunteers," he said.

"*Ah soh?*"

I was dumbfounded. *Why did he have to lie? We'd refused when he wanted to volunteer for the 442nd. We'd refused when he wanted to marry Evelyn Kikawa.* She was 4 years older and had 2 children, and it was rumored he'd broken up their marriage. Thomas Kikawa's family was originally from Kahana. "It's like stealing a brother's wife," Father had said. "If you marry her, we'd have to move out of West Maui. It'd be too shameful to stay here."

We'd heard nothing from Kiyoshi since the war ended. *He's probably in Japan. He's probably visiting Fukuoka, bringing them gifts of American candies.* I'd written him the names and addresses of our Fukuoka relatives just in case.

Then he materialized out of Toshio's bagasse truck. Tsuneko was so startled she ran and hid. He picked up 2-year-old Jun and bounced and bounced him. "So you're my baby brother!"

"*Dohmo, dohmo,*" I bowed and bowed, tears streaming down my cheeks.

But he stayed only 2 weeks.

"I'm twenty-three, I have so much catching up to do," he said.

"Thank you for coming home," I said, remembering the 3 who didn't.

"You know why he left? He was scared your *oya kohkoh* trapdoor would shut," Toshio said.

“Hah-hah, heh-heh, *naruheso*,” I said, nonplussed. He was so strange, I had no comeback to the things he’d say.

When the *Nippu Jiji* described Hideki Tojo’s attempted suicide, Father scoffed, “That *baka*, he can’t even commit suicide!”

Soon we dropped everything to prepare for the strike. We stocked up on rice and canned meats, raised more chickens, stored eggs, and enlarged our Victory gardens. The union would provide rations of bread, rice, sugar, and milk.

Twenty-six plantations went on strike on September 1, 1946. The Filipinos and Japanese were united now. There was nobody to dump our belongings onto “Government Road.” Hideo Tsuda, who’d returned a war hero a year ago, was now called a “scab.” The Christian strikers boycotted the Methodist Church because Hideo’s older brother was also a *luna* and pillar of the church. At Kahana Grade School the Takeshita brothers yelled at the children of the *lunas*, “Yo’ faddah one scab, you all scab!”

“Why are the Japanese so *komakai*?” Tsuneko asked.

Two weeks into the strike, Nishino of Nishino Fish Market drove up to our house.

“It looks like the strike is going to last a long time,” he said, and proposed that Father go out fishing with Nishino’s sampan. He’d supply the bait, ice, and fuel, and they’d split 50/50 after expenses. “You’re the only one left. You’re the only one who knows the old fishing holes. Nobody’s fished them for four years! Imagine how plentiful they must be!”

The fishermen, 95 percent of whom were Japanese, had over-fished the grounds before the war and were forbidden to fish during the war.

“Well, I’ll have to talk to the union,” Father said.

“Well, they shouldn’t object. I’m supplying the boat and expenses.”

Father asked Bill Toda, the Kahana union representative, who said Father could do so if he gave half of his share to the strike kitchen.

Father had Takako’s husband, Yukio Tanji, help him. “It’s fantastic! There’re so much fish they practically jump into the boat!” Father said after the first day. They fished for *ulua* on this side of Molokai.

The second and third times were like the old \$100-dollar days.

He took one-quarter of his share in the catch and gave the bulk to the strike kitchen and kept some for us and Miwa’s and Takako’s families.

Soon he got tired of his day trips and packed more ice and diesel and went out for 2 to 3 nights and brought back bags full of *onaga*. *What if something happened? Both Takako and I would be widows. But it’s daijobu. Yukio used to be a sumo wrestler and was strong.*

“If this keeps up, I’ll quit my job and become a fisherman!” Father said.

“You’ve already had your chance at fishing.”

“But nobody else knows all the fishing holes.”

“But you’re a *makule* of fifty-one! Where will you buy your sampan? What about the expense of bait and gasoline? What if we get into debt again?”

“You worry too much.”

“And you don’t worry enough.”

The next time he brought up the subject I said, “Why don’t you write Toshio. He suffered the most from your failure.”

Then it struck me. He was splitting 50/50 with Mr. Nishino, but I hadn’t seen anything. I remembered the Tani Fish Market and how they’d cheated him.

“He’ll pay me when it’s all over. Don’t worry, he’s honest,” he said.

You trust too much, I was going to say, then realized it wasn’t trust. He was so afraid to bring up unpleasant subjects.

Tsuneko must’ve been starved for bread. She unconsciously pulled out and ate the whole insides of a loaf on her walk home from the strike kitchen. The union was running out of white rice, but we had stocked up enough for us.

Father finally wrote Toshio, who wrote in angry katakana: “*Bakatare!* . . . You’re *koh-fukoh!* . . .” It was just like Toshio to call his own father “un-filial!” Nobody else would think up such a thing! But it stopped Father from talking about becoming a fisherman.

All the plantations except our Frontier Mill settled in late November. Mr. Carlyle, our *pilau* manager, wanted several union leaders fired. He accused them of beating up some haole bosses who’d gone to irrigate the fields. Without the water the cane would have dried up.

Harry Bridges-san came to the Pepelau Honganji after Christmas and told the crowd of strikers that nobody was going to be sacrificed.

The isseis were as *pa’akiki*. When Carlyle threatened to turn the plantation into pasture land, they said, “Let him!” “I can be a fisherman again!” Father said.

We celebrated the New Year with chicken sukiyaki that we called chicken *heka* and homegrown vegetables and a sea bream cooked whole.

Mr. Nishino dropped in and paid Father \$800 in cash. Father promptly gave \$400 to the strike kitchen and \$150 to Yukio and Takako. I’d worried needlessly thinking Mr. Nishino was dishonest like Mr. Tani.

The workers went back to work on January 2. They’d won. The bosses could no longer yell at them or fire them on the spot. Father got a raise to \$158 a month from his previous \$105. He got a Jeep to replace the old mare. He could now drive to the sluice gates in no time. It left him more time to

carve coat hangers from koa wood as he waited for instructions in his ditchman's hut. And being "caught" by the bosses was no longer a worry.

He felt so proud driving the Jeep. He'd signal right- or left-hand turns entering and leaving Pig Pen Avenue, where there was hardly any traffic.

"Splendid! Splendid!" our *pa'akiki* neighbor said, rubbing his bald head.

But we got bad news from Japan. Father Takao was dead at 74. After Chiyako had remarried, he was left all alone, and Masako, who'd remarried Mr. Fukami, 20 years her senior, had asked him to come live with them. Then Chiyako died in Tokyo at 42. "She was so filial she followed her father into death," Masako wrote.

Before the strike the plantation had given us "free" rent and 10 "free" gallons of kerosene a month. Now the families junked the kerosene stoves and bought propane ones.

"Why isn't the pilot lit?" Tsuneko demanded one day.

"We're trying to save gas," I said. The propane tank sat outside the kitchen.

"You people are so *pi'itare!*" she said, and shamed us into keeping the pilot lit.

Another time when Father was scolding me at supper, she said to me in pidgin Japanese, "*Nashite dammate oru? Hantai sento!*" (Why are you silent? You have to oppose him!)

Father backed off, laughing, "Heh-heh."

"It doesn't bother me. We're like brother and sister," I said.

"Are you related?" she asked.

"My mother and Father's mother are first cousins," I said.

"So you're second cousins? You're not afraid? What if there's insanity in the family?"

"That's nothing," I said. "The Tanigawas are first cousins."

"You allow first cousins to marry?!"

"They don't have any insanity either," I said. "In fact, it's safer to marry a relative, whose lineage you know is clean. That's why I was chosen as Father's bride. Being related, they knew my family line had no retardation."

"No wonder the Japanese are so snobbish!"

Father and I slept in separate beds now. I slept cuddling Jun. I couldn't chance it to have Father get high on *sake* and get amorous. Getting pregnant at 45 had been a shock.

After 2 years, elder sister Tomi wrote that we needn't send any more streptomycin. Yasuo was cured of TB. "You saved his life," Tomi wrote. When little

brother Toru died of TB in 1926, Mother wrote me, "What are you going to do about it?" I ignored her question. I wasn't about to give her Toshio, Joji, or Kiyoshi. Besides, I doubted if any of them would agree to go to Japan just to carry on the family line. Then happily Tomi, who had 5 sons, gave up her third son, Yasuo, who changed his surname to Ito.

The next year Yasuo married Mr. Nakai's daughter by his first marriage. When both Father and brother Toru died, Mother married Mr. Nakai, a widower who was 15 years older. He was a grade-school principal, and Mother became the school's janitor. When Mr. Nakai died, Tadashi, Tomi's *chonan*, invited Mother to live with him and his family.

"Mother keeps saying she wants to see you once more before she dies," Tomi wrote. "She gets more frail every day." My last image of her was when she exhorted: "Forget the samurai talk, persevere like a peasant!" That was 35 years ago. Most families sent "celebration" photos of weddings, departures, and reunions. But I'd received none that she was in. I prayed every night: *Kami-sama, please let me see her again. I won't ask for anything more.* I would need about \$1,000. I had saved \$900, but I had to think of Tsuneko's college first. She and Jun had sansei needs and we had issei incomes.

Maxine, Miwa's eldest, who was 6 months younger than Jun, her uncle, asked him over and over, "You no feel funny, your Papa and Mama so old?"

"No," Jun would say.

"But they old like grandpa and grandma!"

Joji wrote that he'd married a Gertrude Beck in a Catholic Church in Vienna and sent us photos of the wedding. We gave her a Japanese name: "Aiko," or love child. Six months ago Kiyoto Kagawa had brought home a tall, red-haired German wife. *How is he going to support her?* we wondered. The only haole women we knew were the spoiled daughters of plantation bosses. But the bride turned out to be a good wife. She worked in the fields, outdrank the men, and nursed her cancer-stricken mother-in-law day and night. *European haoles are different.*

In June Kiyoshi became our first college graduate. Not any college, but Columbia! "It'd be *zannen* to have so many children and not have one finish college!" I'd always said.

Now it was Tsuneko's turn. I'd been saving \$10 a month after Father got his raise, and with \$200 left from his fishing I had \$900 in the *tansu*. I wrote Toshio. He was helping Fujie's brother and so he couldn't help Tsuneko, he said. He owed the Nakamas more than he did us, he said, because they loaned him the \$2,000 to buy his house. I wrote Takemoto sensei, who now ran the Nuuanu Methodist Church. They charge boarders \$100 a month, he said. I wrote Toshio again, saying he was the only one in Honolulu we could

count on. Fujie-san must've persuaded him. He agreed to board Tsuneko for \$30 a month.

It depressed Tsuneko. She'd come home listless from her summer job at the pineapple cannery in Pelelau.

"I can't live with them. He's an *oni*," she said.

"You have to *gaman*. There's nobody else in Hawaii."

Then in mid-August Kiyoshi wrote from Washington, D.C., that Tsuneko could come and live with him and attend George Washington University. Tsuneko lit up like a Haleakala sunrise. What she made at the pineapple cannery would pay for her plane fare and tuition.

"Why don't you buy Tsuneko a car? Then she won't go away," Jun said.

"Well, you still have Maxine to play with," I said. Maxine was so good natured. Jun treated her like a younger sister.

We asked Robert Kuni to drive us to the Kahului Airport. Chiyako, who'd been married to his older brother, had died in 1947, but we were still relatives.

Soon afterward Joji and Aiko came home. Aiko was pretty and red-haired too, but she didn't raise the same curiosity as Kiyoto's wife, who was now accepted as part of the camp. *Maybe she and Kiyoto's wife can become friends*. But Joji wanted to leave in 2 weeks, and he recruited Yukio to accompany them back to California. Johns Manville Co. in Lompoc was looking for workers and they paid more than the plantation. Yukio would go first and send for Takako and the children as soon as he and Joji built a house in Lompoc. Joji had bought 2 adjacent lots and would sell one to Yukio.

I worried. *Why? His family is here. He has five younger siblings.*

The Takeshita family on Pig Pen Avenue had waited till their youngest was discharged from the Army, and then the family pulled out en masse for San Jose. Two other families in Pelelau were recruited to become "independent" strawberry farmers in California. Then the whole Kubo family left for San Jose to open a store specializing in Japanese foods. Their *chonnan* Hoichi-san had returned a hero with the second highest medal. Most of the Okinawan families had left soon after the war to become gardeners in Honolulu. Japanese camp was now half Filipino. *Hanawai* was *pau*. Irrigation was by drip. And the plantation wasn't hiring. Besides, no sansei worked for the plantation. It would've been a loss of face for the family.

"Why did Yukio leave? He had a good-paying job," I said to Takako.

"He said he wanted a new beginning," she replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, his father has a bad reputation."

Toshio called Yukio's father the "town drunk." He'd pass out all over

camp, and it was sad seeing Yukio helping him home. When drunk, he yelled at his wife and children, their neighbors said. Takako, who lived with them after her marriage, said to him one night, “Your wife works forty-eight hours in the fields to help you support your family. You can’t do it because you spend most of your pay on *sake*. She deserves gratitude, not scolding.”

“His bullying stopped after that,” Takako said.

Was that it? All it needed was somebody to stand up to him? Why didn’t it work with Toshio?

Joji and Yukio built their house in 4 months while they worked 8-hour days at Johns Manville. Aiko helped too. Yukio wrote to Takako, “I hope you come soon. I really miss rice.”

When Yukio sent for Takako and her 3 children, we hired 2 taxis to see them off at Kahului Airport. Mr. Tanji had given up drinking now and stood tall. Mrs. Tanji, who’d seemed so timid, was now full of smiles.

I felt sad. Jun and Miwa were the only ones left.

Every Saturday morning I gave Jun a 2-hour lesson in hiragana before he went out to play. We could pay now for his Boy Scouts and Little League so that he could keep up with his sansei playmates. Twenty years ago the Boy Scouts was only for rich families, and there was no Little League.

The Korean War stalled and Japan signed a peace treaty. Suddenly the *Nippu* and *Hochi* were full of advertisements for sightseeing tours to Japan! They were allowing tourists now that the occupation was over! Mother was 79, and no telling how much longer she’d live. *I have to go now!* The \$900 I’d saved for Tsuneko would more than pay for the trip!

“Go. I’ll go make reservations for you,” Father said. “I’ll book you on a thirty-one-day sightseeing tour.”

“I just want to go home.”

“It’s your chance to see Japan. It costs only about seven hundred dollars.”

“I’ll have to get *omiage*.”

“Gifts will be too cumbersome to carry around for three weeks. Just give them money. They’ll appreciate it more,” Father said.

“*Sahh*, how much?”

“Give them two hundred,” he said with a flick of his wrist.

It’ll be a belated betrothal gift. I remembered how angry Father was at the small *yuino*.

I went to Maui Trading in Pepelau and bought a light blue jacket and skirt for \$40 and a new pair of black shoes. I dug out of the *tansu* the pouch of dirt I’d borrowed from the San-O’s shrine, our village god. *I’ll return it in five years*, I’d promised.

Maxine made me a paper lei and Jun tied together 5 candy leis. Toshio, Joji, Kiyoshi, Takako, and Miwa each gave me a \$100 *sembetsu*.

Father, Jun, and I flew into Honolulu and stayed overnight with Toshio and Fujie-san's family.

"Tsuneko is very happy in Washington," I said. ("Kiyoshi was like a *kami-san*, next to the *oni*," she'd written in katakana.)

"I'm glad," he said. "It would've been hard on us."

He drove us to the pier the next morning.

The SS *President Wilson* stood like a tall building next to the pier. It made the old *Tenyo Maru* look like a sampan.

I stood at the railing and threw streamers to Father and Jun below. *It's the first time I'm going to be away*. No, the first time was when I went to Kula for 4 months and left 2-year-old Toshio with strangers and infant Joji with a wet nurse.

There were over 30 of us, including 2 children. I needn't have worried about being the oldest. At least 10 were older. Over half of us were women. We slept 2 to a cabin, ate in a spacious dining room, and sunned ourselves in deck chairs. *Tenyo Maru* had taken 10 rough days. Now it was so smooth you forgot you were at sea, and beautiful Mt. Fuji loomed into view on the fifth day. The boat trip would take 10 days, the sightseeing 11, which left only 10 days with my family!

In Yokohama Mr. Nozaki, our guide, had us pose for one group photo after another. "Hold on to your purses," he said. "Thieves are everywhere."

We went first to the Imperial Palace grounds, then Korakuen Garden. At the Ueno Park station a young woman in Western dress approached me. "Oyama-san?" she asked.

"Ah, Yoshiko-san?" I peered at the face. The last I'd seen her was in her mother's wedding photo to Mr. Kuni. She must've been 5 or 6.

"*Hai!* My late mother was Oyama Chiyako," she said in a high-pitched, ultra-courteous voice.

Robert Kuni had asked for a copy of my itinerary. He must've sent it to his brother. Both Chiyako and Tadashi had been born in Kahana and were the youngest members of the Kahana Methodist Church.

"Please forgive Mother, *ne?*"

"What do you mean?"

"When she was dying, she kept saying she should've apologized to you for having treated you so badly when you first arrived in Hawaii."

"Oh, that's old history."

"Please forgive her, *ne?*"

"Oh, yes. I forgave her long ago."

“Thank you, thank you. It bothered her so much when she was dying. That was all she could talk about. People said she was *oya kohkoh*. That’s why she followed her father into death. I remember her laughing only once, when little sister tried to eat a banana without peeling it.”

My group was moving off.

“Oh, something else. Why did you stop sending me all those beautiful dresses? I was so hurt!” she said.

“*Nani?*”

“You used to sew dresses for me? Remember?”

“Oh, yes, twenty, twenty-five years ago! When you and your mother were living with Father Takao in Tokyo! I stopped when your mother remarried! I thought Mr. Kuni might be offended if I kept sending you dresses!”

“I cried and cried! I thought I’d done something to displease you!”

“No, it was nothing like that. I should have written you. I’m sorry.”

“No, it was my fault.”

“What do you do?”

“I work for a toy factory. I took time off hoping to catch you.”

“Please give my regards to Mr. Kuni,” I said, joining my group.

“It’s just a little thing.” She bowed and handed me a gift packet of stationery.

She kept bowing and bowing as I ran after my group.

Much of the rubble had been cleared. There was so much noise and rebuilding. Beggars were everywhere and derelicts urinated in the streets.

The next day we toured Nikko and spent the night at a spa. Bathing at a hot spring was a first for me. I kept my purse nearby as I bathed.

Then we took the train 180 miles north to Yamagata, which had escaped the bombings. The prefectural governor greeted us in person. But there was nothing of historical significance to see there. It was probably to give them some business. The whole country needed it. We spent a night there and trained back to Tokyo and Kamakura.

I’d known the historical sights only through photos. Now the great Buddha loomed overhead and made my scalp tingle. Izu, Atami, Hakone . . . we went in circles. *I hope we can get to Fukuoka soon. How are Jun and Father doing?* Then the tour was finally heading south. We visited the grand shrine of Ise Island and the women pearl divers of Nagoya. Our group dropped off members as we neared their native villages. We spent several days in Kyoto, a day each in Nara and Osaka. We numbered only 8 when we reached the famous *torii* in the water off Miyajima.

Finally there were only 5 of us left for Kyushu. We had taken the full tour, so we must’ve paid more. At Shimonoseki Mr. Nozaki instructed us on which

trains to catch when we got off the ferry at Fukuoka station and where to meet on October 2 for our return trip.

It was my first ferry trip across Shimonoseki. I was finally home! Much of Fukuoka City was bombed out, but they'd rebuilt the station. I said good-bye to my fellow travelers and boarded the train for Togo 50 miles away. My heart was beating so fast I had trouble breathing. *Please don't let me have an asthma attack now!*

When we reached Togo I grabbed my suitcase and topcoat and ran out, expecting to see Mother. Instead a blur of happy faces greeted me! Sister Tomi and her balding husband with his pointed face. And dear Masako was now a pretty 43 in full kimono, and her scholar husband with his thin moustache, and Aya also fully kimono-ed and her spectacled teacher husband. I hadn't seen Tomi since 1915, Masako since 1920! The others looked exactly like their photos. *It's a good thing we celebrate every occasion with a family photo.* The others were unphotographed relatives and children.

The greetings went on and on. Then the men left and Tomi took my suitcase and topcoat and led the way home. Rice paddies were all around and hillocks and gulches in the distance. No bombs had been dropped here. I wanted to walk faster, but my skirt hobbled me. Tomi and Mr. Shoji's home sat on 3 acres planted with azaleas, pines, and cherry some 4 kilometers from the station. Tomi had done well marrying a man with property. He was successful, unlike my father and Father Takao.

I rushed into the *genkan* and kicked off my shoes. Mother came out. I jumped onto the landing and embraced the small, frail body.

"*Furui natta*" (You've grown old), she said.

I burst into tears. "Five years became thirty-eight!"

"It's good you've come," she said.

We held hands and wept.

I thought about it later. *Furui natta* could mean "I've grown old" or "You've grown old." The "subject" is always omitted. You're supposed to know "who" from the context. She must've meant "I've grown old."

Tomi joked, "You've always been Mother's favorite. I'm like an old slipper to her."

"*Todai moto kurashi.*" (It's darkest beneath the lighthouse.) I repeated a proverb I'd learned at school. "You stayed back and helped her. You are the filial one."

Later I gave Mother the \$200.

"*Nani?*"

"It's a belated *yuino*," I said, and we both laughed.

"Ah, thank you. It'll pay for my funeral."

Tomi arranged so many reunions. All the relatives, near and far. People from our old village. Students from our grade school.

None of the Shibatas came. *Mother and her elder sister must still be feuding.* I'd been promised to my first cousin when I was 5.

I spent a night with Aya, Father's little sister who was left in Japan. Both she and her husband were teachers, and their only son, who'd been exempt from the draft because of it, was also a teacher.

Their neighbor, a Mr. Suemori, said at dinner, "You watch, Japan will rise again."

Afterward I helped Aya with the dishes. What happened to Obaban's two boys? I wanted to know. When the Taniguchi grandparents died, Aya and her older brother, Azumi, were farmed to their paternal grandmother, Masa Oyama, who was already looking after Obaban's two boys. Masa Oyama was Isao's grandmother, whom I'd bathed with in 1915 on the night of my farewell party. She was the beautiful maid whom Grandfather got pregnant while engaged to another woman.

Obaban's two boys bullied Aya, but Grandmother Oyama did nothing to stop them. She slept all day, complaining about her number-one son, Takao, in Hawaii. Aya would wait every day for Azumi to be let out of school so she could walk home with him. He was older and the boys didn't bully her in his presence. She lived in terror when Azumi left for Hawaii. Then Towa, Mother Haru's younger sister, married a man 20 years older and invited Aya to come live with them. "She saved me," Aya said.

Father Takao and Mother Haru had sent money for Aya's education and returned just as she graduated from normal school. A year later Father Takao asked her to come to Tokyo to help the family make paper wrappers for monosodium glutamate for the Ajinomoto Co. She couldn't go because the prefectural normal school required graduates to teach for the first 3 years in Fukuoka. Then came the Tokyo earthquake.

"I was saved by the earthquake," Aya said, laughing.

"Me too," I said.

"What happened to the Ono children?" I asked, wondering about Obaban's children, the 2 bullies and 3 others, including Anshan, that Mr. Ono brought with him to Japan after the divorce. Obaban's new husband, Mr. Kitano, had paid for their boat fare, as was the custom.

"Mr. Ono farmed them out as maids and apprentices and abandoned them," Aya said. "They were Aunt Setsuko's children, so he wanted nothing to do with them. I heard he remarried and began a new family."

"Where are Obaban's children now?"

"Nobody knows."

"How could he be so mean?" I asked.

“Aunt Setsuko ditched him. What’s *kataki-uchi* [vendetta] to samurais is everyday spite to us commoners. But commoners are just as barbaric and proud of it,” she replied.

“Why are we so mean to each other?”

“My real parent was Towa,” Aya said, referring to Mother Haru’s sister. “She saved my life. Aunt Setsuko’s boys would have bullied me to death. As soon as Towa got married, she invited me to live with her and her husband. When she became a widow I asked her to come and live with us, and we cared for her till she died.”

“That’s *on-gaeshi*,” I said.

Masako followed me around everywhere. It was like in 1915, when she’d jumped into my lap and said, “Mother, you can die now. Elder sister has come to look after me.” She was still the impulsive Hawaii-born one. She’d left her first husband and their 5 children and remarried Mr. Fukami, a widower 20 years older, and had a daughter by him.

We visited graves. I combed and fixed Mother’s hair every other day. Old friends came by, and new faces I’d seen only in photos. The days flew by.

“I can die happy now,” Mother said.

Tomi, Aya, Masako, and niece Toshi, all in kimonos, walked me back to the Togo station.

“You’ve given Mother a lift,” Tomi said.

Aya and Masako saw me to my seat and stayed till the conductor yelled, “All aboard!”

I felt so happy. I was going home now to Father and Jun.