

...To give a superficial explanation, my soul still belonged to Sonoko. Although it does not mean that I accept the concept outright, I can conveniently use the medieval diagram of the struggle between soul and body to make my meaning clear: in me there was a cleavage, pure and simple, between spirit and flesh. To me Sonoko appeared the incarnation of my love of normality itself, my love of things of the spirit, my love of everlasting things.

But such a simple explanation does not dispose of the problem. The emotions have no liking for fixed order. Instead, like tiny particles in the ether, they fly about freely, float haphazardly, and prefer to be forever wavering...

A year passed before Sonoko and I awakened. I had been successful in the civil-service examinations, graduated from the university, and had an administrative job in one of the ministries. During that year we managed to meet several times, now as though by chance, now under the pretext of some trivial business, but only every two or three months and even then only for a daylight hour or so—meeting without anything happening, and parting the same way. That was all. No one could have censured my behavior. Nor did Sonoko venture beyond trifling reminiscences or conversations making modest fun of our present situation. Our connection could never have been called an intrigue, and one would even have hesitated to call it a relationship. Even when we met we would be thinking of nothing but how to make each parting a clean-cut break.

I was satisfied with this. More than that, I was thankful to something for the mystic richness of this desultory relationship. There was not a day in which I did not think of Sonoko, and each time we met I experienced a

tranquil happiness. It seemed as though the delicate tension and pure symmetry of our rendezvous extended to every corner of my life and imposed on it a clear though exceedingly fragile discipline.

But a year passed and we awakened. We discovered that we were living in a nursery no longer but were inhabitants of an adult edifice where any door that opened only part way had to be repaired promptly. Our relationship was just such a door, one that could never be opened beyond a certain point, and it was sure to require repairing sooner or later.

Beyond this there was also the fact that adults cannot endure the monotonous games that delight children. The many meetings which we examined one by one were nothing but stereotyped things, each of like size and thickness—a pack of playing cards whose edges matched to a fraction of an inch when stacked one above the other. Moreover, from this relationship I was cunningly extracting an immoral delight, which only I could understand. My immorality was a subtle one, going even a step beyond the ordinary vices of the world, and like an exquisite poison, it was pure corruption. Since immorality was the very basis and first principle of my nature I found an all the more truly fiendish flavor of secret sin in my virtuous behavior, in this blameless relationship with a woman, in my honorable conduct, and in being regarded as a man of lofty principles.

We had stretched out our arms to each other and supported something in our joined hands, but this thing we were holding was like a sort of gas that exists when you believe in its existence and disappears when you doubt. The task of supporting it seems simple at first glance, but actually requires an ultimate refinement of calculation and a consummate skill. I had called an artificial “normality” into being in that space within our

hands, and had induced Sonoko to take part in the dangerous operation of trying to sustain an almost chimerical “love” from moment to moment. She seemed to have become party to the plot without realizing it. This lack of realization on her part was probably the only reason her assistance was so effective.

But the time came when even Sonoko became dimly aware of the indomitable force of this nameless danger, this danger that differed completely from the usual roughhewn dangers of the world in having a precise, measurable density.