

Chapter 10

Ogasawara Sada (1887–1988)

Her eyes riveted on one spot of her huge stomach, the woman felt uncontrollably jealous of the power of the new life within her, which grew and grew without a second's pause.

The audacity of the Bluestockings' initial pledge to "give birth to the female genius of tomorrow" reminds us of the ambition, the youthful dreams of fame and fortune, that inspired *Seitō*. Read against this narrative of hope, Ogasawara Sada's 1913 short story "Higashi kaze" (Eastern Breeze), a tale of ambitions dashed by pregnancy, presents a bleak picture indeed.¹ In telling the tale of a young couple's anxiety at impending parenthood, Ogasawara creates an overwhelming sense of confinement by describing the couple's dismal living quarters. She imagines them living in a room as dingy and airless as a prison cell, a room where scratches covering the walls bear an uncanny resemblance to claw marks, and suggest a trapped beast trying to break free. Where once these same walls might have called to mind a kind of reckless bohemian adventure, and the space itself might have been infused with the electricity of sexual attraction, all that remain now are disappointment, anger, and poverty.

Ogasawara underscores the extent of her characters' feelings of confinement by allowing the reader to see into each character's unspoken anxieties, in effect letting us into the space from which the characters cannot escape. Nameless, the characters become the sum of their frustrations. The woman might be an educated, middle-class New Woman, especially if we read the story autobiographically. But she could also be a woman from a much less privileged background, even a former geisha or maidservant. Ogasawara does indicate that the man has not always been poor, and had been raised and educated to expect a much higher status in society. It is his impetuosity, and perhaps the woman's as well—combined with their romantic desire to abandon propriety—that have brought them face to face with a harsh reality. Outside, the air is fresh with the promise of spring. Budding blossoms call to mind the imminent birth of the couple's child. The young woman identifies with the blossoms, too, clinging to a future full of possibility, while the man sees his youth passing him by as surely as the clouds

traverse the sky. As he says, it is the child who will enjoy the full measure of new beginnings, not the parents. Consequently, the cool breeze outside and other intimations of spring only intensify the stifling quality of the couple's confinement in the dark room, in their no longer passionate relationship, and in their responsibility for a new child.

Ogasawara's attention to the woman's pregnant body and her taut emotions communicates the sense that she is doubly confined. Much like Nogami Yaeko's descriptions of the expectant mother in "New Life" (translated in Chapter 9), Ogasawara's view of pregnancy is anything but romantic. References to the woman's awareness of the man's body and the "feminine plumpness of his skin" develop her as a sensual person. Well into her pregnancy, she retains her sensuality and strong emotion but finds that she is unable to control the physical and mental pain provoked by the changes in her body. Her body and her passions, once the source of her liberated sexuality, have rendered this woman a caged and unhappy beast.

Intriguingly, there is one passage in the narrative where it is impossible to tell in the original Japanese if a certain impulse belongs to the woman or to the man. This is where one of them imagines stabbing the fetus through the woman's body. Positioned between the thoughts of the woman and the thoughts of the man, the passage could represent either a continuation of her frustration or a transition into his. Given the flexibility of subject references in Japanese and Ogasawara's habit of shifting the point of view in her stories, we might wonder how much to make of this. Did the author intend two possible readings, or was the subject so clear to her that she felt no need to make it any plainer for her reader? My translation mirrors the ambiguity I see here. Read in either voice, the image shows deep frustration and a sense of being trapped.

Ogasawara Sada herself was about three months pregnant in April 1913, when this story appeared. She had become pregnant shortly before or after her marriage early that year to Okumura Toyomasa, a friend of her elder brother and the lifelong employee of an insurance company. Unfortunately, the child, a daughter who was born in November 1913, died in 1920, and her second daughter, born in 1921, died in 1926. Ogasawara did have one other child, a son born in 1925, who survived and whom she raised to become an artist. Ogasawara Sada lived longer than any other Bluestocking, celebrating her hundredth birthday in 1987, about six months before her death in June 1988.

"Higashi kaze" (Eastern Breeze) apparently foretold the end of Ogasawara's own brief writing career. The story was the last of her five contributions to *Seitō*, although she did publish one further story in *Shojo* (Maiden), a magazine for girls, and served as fiction editor for *Seitō* in 1913.

Ogasawara's stories stand out among others in *Seitō* for the way the point of view shifts among her characters and for her use of color and nature, described in detail, as metaphors for a character's feelings. Two of Ogasawara's stories, "Aru yoru" (One Evening) and "Doromizu" (Muddy Water), are especially interesting for their portraits of the emotionally turbulent lives of young girls' school graduates.² Neither Osumi of "Doromizu" nor the "young maiden" of "Aru yoru" wishes to become like her staid mother; both of them long for involvement in a passionate love relationship and creative work. Yet they are at loose ends, unsure of which way to turn. Osumi—who, like her creator Ogasawara, has always enjoyed painting—wants to develop the self-assurance that she sees in a certain young male painter, and thus break free from following her art teacher's instruction to paint in a way that reveals her own vision. Yet when her mother Oichi imagines that one day Osumi will win fame as a painter, Osumi retorts that she is not pursuing art to win her mother glory. She also confesses her fear that her work is simply not very good. The "young maiden" in "Doromizu" envies her boyfriend's absorption in the study of plants he has amassed but feels that he sees her, who has no mission in life, as little more than a curiosity to add to his collection. She, too, needs to find herself before she can enjoy either a mature romantic relationship or a happy relationship with her mother.³

After her brief foray into writing and publishing, Ogasawara evidently lost ties with the artistic world. She moved from city to city with her husband, whose company continually transferred him to new locations all over Japan. It was only after his death in 1954, at the age of seventy-one, that Ogasawara Sada, then sixty-six, decided to return to her childhood love of painting. Her first one-woman show took place when she was eighty-four, and she continued to paint until she was ninety-five.

"Eastern Breeze" and the other *Seitō* stories mentioned above make one wonder what ambitions Ogasawara Sada harbored for herself when she came to Tokyo in 1904 as a young woman fresh out of a girls' school in Nagano Prefecture. For example, how were her own ambitions affected by the success her father had enjoyed, and by his death when she was only fifteen? By the time Sada was born in 1887, the family had moved to north-eastern Japan, where her father was to preside as judge at the first court in Sendai City. Two years later he moved the family to Fukushima, opened his own legal practice, and became such a prominent leader in the area that he served many terms as a representative to the Lower House of the Diet. After his death in 1903, his wife found herself in financial straits that forced her to try one thing after another to make ends meet. At one point she and Sada operated a rather rundown rooming-house for college men from Waseda University. There Ogasawara must have met many young men who could

have served as models for the male characters in “Eastern Breeze” and her other stories.

By the time she was a young woman, Ogasawara had been linked to an elite male world of power and politics through her father, and had also been forced, through her mother’s widowhood, into economic insecurity. Despite this insecurity, Ogasawara was able to take advantage of the opportunities open in Tokyo to young women of an artistic bent and ambition: she briefly studied at an art academy for women and took to contributing stories to young women’s magazines in 1910. She also worked at a bank in Tokyo before beginning to write for *Seitō* in 1912, at the age of twenty-four.

According to a biographical piece written by Hiratsuka Raichō Association member Inoue Mihoko, when Ogasawara was interviewed in 1978 for a program that aired on Japan’s national radio station, she reported that she had vivid memories of her involvement with *Seitō*.⁴ Though she had lost contact with other members of the group (indeed, Raichō even wrote in her 1971 autobiography that she thought Ogasawara had died young), Ogasawara Sada expressed pride in having been a part of the Bluestockings.

Eastern Breeze
Ogasawara Sada
Seitō 3.4 (April 1913)

The room felt dark and empty. Since the dormer windows faced north, only the palest light filtered in through the one tiny window among them that could actually be opened. The couple had spent half the day cooped up in this gloomy space.

Outside, it was a wonderfully pleasant day. A breeze coming from the east wafted by so softly that one could not hear it at all but only sense its moist warmth. Inside, a dim, murky light passed through the dormers, casting faint shadows over the room’s brownish walls and sinking the whole room into a sallow yellowish haze.

Plopping one foot on the low windowsill, the man wearily stretched the full length of his slim body out on the floor. Turning on his side with his back to the woman, the man fixed his gaze on the wall in front of him, staring stone-still at its coldness. Once painted light brown, the wall now had scuff marks everywhere. The marks had been made over some period of time, without either the man or the woman noticing what was happening. Apparently, the corners of a piece of furniture had scraped here and there, scratching the wall and scarring it like so many claw marks. Sad and lonely

impressions, he thought.

The old suit the man habitually wore to work was worn out, and so shiny around the shoulders and the lower back that the stripes in the material were no longer visible. His face, even in profile, looked pale and gaunt, and bore an expression of total defeat. All the same, his ears had an aristocratic shape to them and a rosy color, and that, combined with the slenderness at the nape of his neck, gave him the appearance of one still quite youthful somehow.

The man kept staring at the images of claw marks scrawled wildly about the wall.

"What is love? What on earth is it?" The man asked himself the same question over and over. His job was so dull that it had long been parched dry of any fun whatsoever, yet day in and day out, he had been dutifully going to work. Finally, he had come to the point where he could no longer bear the idea of spending another warm, sunny spring day like this having to go out and perform such a lackluster job.

He felt the same way about his relationship with this woman. He no longer sensed any excitement toward her, either. Things had become even more difficult between them this spring, for as her body had changed, she had also become quite anxious. At times she had even become hysterical, and when that happened there was nothing at all he could do to calm her down.

At the time the two of them had begun living together, the man had not felt the slightest bit of regret about all that he had been forced to give up, even though he'd had to sever connections with every influential person he knew and break off with his many friends. The man had, in effect, shattered all his hopes for a prosperous future. His only thoughts had been about the woman's welfare, about how he could take care of her. So even though he'd had to give up his schooling and all his ambitions to devote himself to her, the man had not felt that this was a hardship in any way. Not only had he willingly made such sacrifices, he had also acquiesced to a job he could barely endure. All to take care of her.

But as the years had passed, and while the two of them were quite unaware of it, the gaudy colors painted over their love had peeled away of their own accord. Now the man felt nothing but misery as the lonely, desolate colors of their true relationship appeared plainly to him. It seemed as though he stood at a kind of impasse these days, unable to feel much of anything. Every day was the same as the last, for he could do nothing to overcome the bleak thoughts that gripped him so tightly. Even this morning, the two of them had begun arguing over some trivial matter until the man had been so late for work that he'd ended up not going at all.

A desk had been placed in one corner of the room, and a rather shabby chair set in front of it. The woman sat on this chair, slouching under the weight of her heavy body. Although she was trying to keep her anger in check, she glared in spite at the man's back. For over an hour now, he had stubbornly refused to speak to her.

The breeze from the east came through the tiny space of the one open window, blowing here and there about her face as if flirting with her. The sensation annoyed her to no end, and felt even nastier than when someone deliberately tickled her under the arms. Whenever the moist warmth of the breeze brushed ever so lightly against her cheeks, it made the woman's skin itch. It was as if the breeze were taunting her, driving her to want to scratch and tear at her face. A horrible fever bore down on her like a heavy, hot river of molten lava flowing from her head. It turned her lips a bright blood-red.

Nevertheless, the woman's hands, and her feet, too, had grown as cold as those of a corpse. From time to time a piercing chill emanating from her spine would send shivers throughout her body. These attacks made her so cold that whenever they struck every hair on her body stood on end. Her body was burning up inside with a strange kind of fever that returned swiftly in the wake of each chill. The woman knew that there was no mistaking this.

The woman stared at the reclining figure of the man. He was lying so still that one might wonder whether he had fallen into a deep sleep and would stay that way forever. Suddenly, and for no particular reason, the sight of the soiled suit covering his limp body infuriated her. She had the urge to spring at the man and slap him awake.

But in the end, the woman confined herself to a steely glare. Strangely, as she fixed on that stained and dirty old suit, a powerfully vivid picture of the man's body appeared to her. She could see the beautiful, young male body encased within that suit and recall the feminine plumpness of the touch of his skin. When this vision came to her, the woman could hardly bear the terrible choking sensation that seized her. Only a moment ago she had been consumed with anger, but this vision was wringing all the rage from her body. Cold tears slid down her cheeks, even before the woman realized that she was crying.

The man lying on the floor before her had given up everything in his life for her. Memories of how tenderly affectionate he had once been jolted her emotions. Yet, in an instant, the woman's feelings reversed themselves once again. Strong feelings of regret, deeper than she had ever known before, rooted out the tender memories so intense only moments ago.

The woman sighed tiredly. Abruptly, she got up, determined to make an effort to change her mood. She shook her head briskly, as if to sweep

away all the heavy feelings that had been closing in on her, and walked over to the window in a purposeful way. The woman tried to look casual and lighthearted as she flopped down by the windowsill. She peered through the tiny open window in the dormers at the peaceful scene outside, where fleecy, milk-white clouds stretched wide and low in the sky.

The woman looked at the plum tree planted in the middle of the small, boxlike garden running between the wooden fence next door and the storehouse. It was luxuriant with what looked like soft white pearls stuck all over it, like candy. Until now, gazing at this tree had invariably made the woman feel lonely. Little scraps of discarded tissue and such, caught at the tips of its pitiful withered-looking branches, always fluttered so plaintively. But now pearl-like buds had appeared at the tips of these same branches, painting a scene surprisingly full of the energy of life. The woman stared out the window, wondering at the mystery of nature.

Before long these buds would bloom, opening wide like fine, silky angels' robes and giving off a musky fragrance rather like that of an orchid. Recalling their scent made the woman realize that there was no reason she, too, should not feel the sensual warmth of her own youth lingering still, somewhere deep inside her.

"Look, the plum tree is blooming," the woman said suddenly, in a deliberately sweet, childlike voice. She turned around toward the man and, gently shaking one of his legs, tried to rouse him. And then, her face back in the path of the damp breeze, the woman returned to marveling at the quiet scene outside.

"While we have been doing all this arguing, spring has come," exclaimed the woman softly.

As the woman rested her icy palm on his leg, the man felt a chill shoot through his entire body. He couldn't help but recoil from her touch, causing the woman's hand to slip from his leg and fall smack on the windowsill. Instantly, the anger and pain the woman had momentarily forgotten stabbed her anew. Her nerves stood on edge all over again.

"So, even the touch of my hand revolts you now, does it?" the woman cried. Pressing her knees hard into his prone back, the woman scowled at the man. "Well? What about it? Have I really become as repulsive to you as all that? Well, have I?"

Beside herself with anger, her body shaking with rage, the woman kept asking this of the man, all the while pushing her knees into his back. For a moment, however, she stopped her tirade, and in that instant, the woman's eyes happened to light on the beautiful slenderness of the man's neck. But even this sight made her angry, for it ignited feelings of envy in her.

The woman pushed her flushed face into the man's back, and when she

did so, tears of regret began to stream down her cheeks.

The heat coming from the woman's feverish face spread into the man's back in an annoyingly ticklish manner. Gently, he pushed the woman away and, sitting up himself, examined her weakened appearance for the first time. Blue veins stood out conspicuously on her hands as she pressed them against her face, her stomach was huge, and she heaved her shoulders painfully when she tried to breathe. All in all she made him feel as if he were looking at some wretched animal. Yet when he thought about the mysterious changes taking place within her body, he felt a strong fatherly love for his unborn child, something he had never experienced before. The thought made him shudder with excitement.

"Come on, now. This is silly. Please stop." Looking intently at the woman, the man stretched his hands out toward her. He took her hands in his and forced them away from her face.

"No! Please don't touch me anymore. You certainly don't want to touch a filthy woman like me!" Sulking like some disobedient child about to throw a temper tantrum, the woman buried her face in her kimono sleeves again.

"What is this?" the man chided. Drawing the woman close to him, the man pulled her head into his chest and held her tightly. "Silly! I only drew back because your hands were so cold. Now stop this stupid crying and pull yourself together."

Embraced in the strong arms of the man, the woman breathed raggedly as she gasped for air. "Well, I thought because . . .," she said in a flirtatious way, giving him a bit of a smile through her tears.

When he saw her smile, the man quietly pulled away from the woman and went to stand by the window. Trying to soothe her, he asked, "You said the plum tree is blooming? Which one? Where is it?"

Standing with his back to the woman, he asked these questions in a way that clearly showed how much he wanted to win her over. Yet all the while he had the most unbearable feeling that there was some voice inside laughing at him, telling him what a fake he was.

With a sigh, the man put both his hands on his head. He quietly remarked, "Ah, our spring is all gone. No, not just our spring. Everything is lost."

At some point the woman had come over to stand beside the man and was also looking out the window. But at these words, her eyes darted at the man, flinty with anger. "Are you saying that because of me?" she demanded.

"No, I don't mean that this is because of you. Look: spring is gone for both us. But even you . . . you've lost everything, too, haven't you?"

The woman was speechless.

“You don’t think that there is anything you can actually do now, do you? From now on, we have to live for the child,” the man said.

“For the child, you say?” The woman doubted her own ears. She felt as if he were spinning some bizarre fantasy about her. “For the child, you say?! I am not that kind of tired-out old matron yet, you know! Why, there are still plenty of interesting things I intend to do!”

“But don’t you see? You can’t do them now. It’s the child’s turn to have fun. That’s the whole reason this child is coming!” The man smiled sadly as he said this.

Although the woman had first taken what he’d said as some mean kind of provocation, she gradually began to feel as though a tremendous pressure were weighing against her, as though she could barely breathe. Only a moment passed before she found herself shouting, her tone of voice vicious: “I have absolutely no need for *that* kind of child!”

The man felt he should say something, but kept silent for fear of making the woman even more upset. Then, he deliberately began whistling a song that he had been fond of a long time ago. Her eyes riveted on one spot of her huge stomach, the woman felt uncontrollably jealous at the power of the new life within her, which grew and grew without a second’s pause.

Suddenly, the desire came to draw a sword and pierce the spot beneath her breasts, thus destroying the stubborn new creature. Imagine looking down from somewhere while laughing scornfully and watching her body, too, perish along with the new life.

Lost in this sort of fantasy, the man was looking deep within himself. He could see that all the energy and passion of his youth had been consumed by the figure of a cruel love that had all too soon turned its back on him.

The man’s love seemed to have been but an endless struggle against insecurity, jealousy, anguish, and passion. He felt as if he had been cast out into a space so empty that it knew no limits. Gazing out the window at nothing in particular, the man looked up at the sky. White clouds were drifting by.

Notes

¹Ogasawara Sada, “Higashi kaze” (Eastern Breeze), *Seitō* 3.4 (April 1913): 62–71.

²Ogasawara Sada, “Aru yoru” (One Evening), *Seitō* 2.7 (July 1912): 42–53; idem, “Doromizu” (Muddy Water), *Seitō* 2.9 (September 1912): 7–27. “Doromizu” is also interesting for its depiction of the mother, a young widow in her thirties, who is feeling free after the death of her overbearing husband. Her daughter Osumi disapproves of the mother’s affection for Honda, a young male student who helps the two women with their finances and other business. The mother does not know that Honda has

also been pursuing Osumi. Osumi, however, finds him loathsome and is far more interested in a relationship with a painter.

³Ogasawara's other stories in *Seitō* are "Kyaku" (Guest), *Seitō* 2.6 (June 1912): 100–109, which is told from a man's point of view and concerns his thoughts about having an old flame turn up at his home and becoming good friends with his wife; and "Hina-tori" (Chick), *Seitō* 3.1 (January 1913): 49–64, which describes a young man feeling bored with the young woman whose naïveté once attracted him; he is trying to find out about her past sweethearts as a way to rekindle his own interest in her.

⁴Inoue Mihoko, "Ogasawara Sada," in Raichō Kenkyūkai, ed., "*Seitō*" *jinbutsu jiten: 110-nin no gunzō* (Taishūkan Shoten, 2001), 58–59. I have drawn on Inoue's biographical notes in writing about Ogasawara's life here.