

Xin Ma

Anthropology 254 | Fall term, 2004

Hitomi's Journals

March 31 Sunday Rain

It's been drizzling for a whole day, but the weather report said that tomorrow would be nice and sunny, which I'm happy about. I really like the breeze washed by the spring rain, because the air would be tinged with a warm scent of earth and sakura flowers, which can seep through every vein of mine and melt me down completely. But of course, tomorrow I cannot let myself fall apart, because it's the first day of my high school life! I have already promised mom to sleep and kissed her good-night. But I knew that I was simply too excited to go to bed now, so after she left my room I got up again and opened this notebook – I just bought it the other day because I've decided to start a new weekly journal with the start of high school. I need to stay quiet, though. It sounds that Takeshi is still doing his English listening, so mom must be around.

Oh, Takeshi was so annoying this afternoon! He said I looked like a penguin in my new school uniform! Well, I agree the black colour is a little too stiff – navy blue would have been better – but we girls do have a blue vest and a red scarf, and the shape is not bad at all. If I look like a penguin Takeshi must be even worse – he must have forgotten that we're now in the same high school and guys' uniforms are all black! Well, I guess everybody sometimes finds their siblings annoying, and this older brother of mine is generally pretty good – except that he teases his only sister too often. But still, he's got good grades and is the captain of the basketball club. Hehe, it must be great to have him as a bodyguard to and from school everyday. Oh wait a minute – we cannot come home together after school. The third-year students have extra classes everyday, and he leaves for Towake Juku directly from school. Yeah, how can I have forgotten this – classes started early for them 3rd-year students and Takeshi has been on that schedule for two weeks. Maybe he has had enough from high school by now, and he'd definitely make fun of me if he saw my excitement. But for me everything has just started, so there's no reason for him to tease me again!

Is it 1am already? That *is* pretty late – even Takeshi is wrapping up. OK, after they retire I'll just try on the uniform one more time, and then I'll really go to bed. Over dinner I thought of a new way of tying up the scarf, and I'll see how it looks... Then, I'll be ready for a fresh sunny morning!

April 6 Saturday Sunny

After dinner Takeshi headed for Towake – the crazy juku has classes even on Saturday nights. Dad was out on a golf trip with his Buchoo for the weekend, so the two female members of the family occupied the household and watched TV. Then the phone rang. It was Auntie Akiko. She and my mom call each other regularly for their sister talks, but today she has something unusual to tell us.

“Hitomi, I have big news for you all: Aone is engaged!”

“Wow, that’s great!” I exclaimed, “Congratulations!”

The last time I saw Aone was over the New Year’s dinner, when she came back to Japan for the winter break of her graduate school in USA. As people asked about her love life, as always, she laughed and said self-mockingly: “I’ll soon become the New Year’s Pine!” Indeed, Aone is my oldest cousin, and everybody has been worried about her single status, especially her mom, Auntie Akiko. As early as when I was still in elementary school, Auntie Akiko would talk about Aone’s marriage over and over when she chatted with my mom. I don’t like this aunt very much, because she whines about everything – especially about her daughter. I remember hearing her complaining about how Aone refused to go to an Omiai and caused her parents to lose face, how Aone quitted her jobs at will, and how Aone suddenly decided to go to the USA for graduate school without discussing the issue with the family. However, it is those very anecdotes that made this cousin a legendary figure in my heart. Aone always seems to be doing amazing things. She got in the Literature Department of Tokyo University after high school – even though Auntie Akiko insisted that with her test scores she could have chosen a more promising faculty, such as Economics. After undergraduate studies Aone did get recruited by a prestigious bank, but I guess she didn’t enjoy that job very much because she left there for a food company after two years. Yet that second job did not keep her for a long time, either, for she left Tokyo for California to study literature in an American university when I entered junior school.

And now, Aone surprises everyone again: she is engaged to an American man, and they will get married at the end of this year.

“That’s so cool!” I thought to myself as mom talked to her sister on the phone. The thought of marrying a foreigner has never occurred to me, but I know that mixed babies are very cute! Wouldn’t it be great if I’d have such a nephew or niece!

Yet, apparently Auntie Akiko had her concerns, because I heard mom saying to her on the phone: “Don’t worry; I’m sure she wouldn’t do so” or “Of course she doesn’t want to leave you” etc. Later mom told me that Auntie Akiko worried that Aone was trying to get rid of her family in Japan. My aunt said that her daughter and the man had only been together for half a year, and she also really wondered why Aone would ever want to marry a foreigner. Since they are planning to live in the USA after marriage, Auntie Akiko insisted that this marriage was a means of escape. But I think that is just her crazy thoughts. Why can’t my cousin happen to have found her true love?! Finally mom made her conclusive comment: “Aone is independent and always has her own ideas. She’s not an ordinary Japanese woman, so it’s difficult for her to marry a Japanese man anyway.”

For the whole night I couldn’t get the thoughts out of my mind. So Aone had just met that guy when we last met at the New Year. She didn’t mention anything then, but now she has decided to get married! That *is* a little too fast, isn’t it? Well, maybe she is getting too much pressure about the whole marriage thing as she

approaches 30? Why didn't she want to marry earlier, though? Why a foreigner? Does she not worry about the cultural differences? Can she really be trying to escape? Aone already lived away from her parents before she went to America. So what is she trying to escape from? Oh so many complicated questions which I cannot quite find answers... Well, perhaps I'm just thinking too much. She may well have just found her Mr. Right who happens to be an American! Yeah, it must be. Marriage without love is unimaginable. Even though my parents don't see each other all the time they must love each other, because they don't even quarrel. Anyway, it's definitely an exciting thing that my cousin is marrying an American and moving abroad – then I can look forward to their beautiful children and I will have place to stay when I visit the US! Hmm, mom said it would be hard for Aone to marry a Japanese man. Why is that, though? Because she's too independent? I guess I'm a different type, because I enjoy living at home with mom – gosh, I can not imagine studying abroad all alone! So I'll probably be able to get a Japanese husband... But would I ever want to marry a foreign man? Oh well, that's too far away for me to think about now...

April 17 Wednesday Cloudy

It has been almost three weeks since the semester commenced, but I feel as if everything had just begun, for which I am not yet ready – it is amazing that life slips away so rapidly, almost without a trace. Well in fact there are traces being left – my textbooks are not as shiny as when I got them on the first day, and all sorts of exercise papers are piling up; also, I have had my first physics exam in high school.

Today is the day that we got back our exams.

I shall never forget that moment, when I got my test paper this afternoon, unfolding the sheets, the bold red mark jumped into my eye: 46 points (the full mark is 100); my mind went completely blank; only the scarlet number swirling in my skull...

Even now, 5 hours later, I still feel that suffocating tension as I write down that shameful number into my journal – the lowest test score I have ever got since the first day I started elementary school. At the very moment when I saw the score, actually, I couldn't feel anything, as my mind was completely blank. But one minute later the number started to make sense, urging me to face the disgrace I never had expected to encounter even in my dream. A suffocating pain clutched my heart, making me physically paralyzed, because a slight movement would exacerbate the gnawing of my heart. It was lunch break. But I sat at my seat, jaw on my palms, staring at the desk.

Now I'm alone in my own room, writing all these down. There is nothing but silence in the house: Dad and Takeshi don't get back this early of a day, and mom is out shopping for fresh shrimps for dinner, as her note on the fridge reads. Somehow I feel grateful for this stillness, as if the world has been frozen like a movie scene, and can remain that way forever – as long as I don't hit the "play" button anymore.

Indeed, everything that happened today after I got the paper back was more dreamlike than real. I vaguely remember myself listening to the teachers in the afternoon classes without hearing what they were saying, and escaping from the classroom as soon as school was over, and reading mama's note she left on the fridge as I stepped into the house, and locking myself up in the room, totally exhausted. Tonight I am supposed to re-write all the wrong answers on the test, but I can't even bear to take the test paper out of my bag...

If I had a fire, I would burn the paper into complete ashes. Or else how can I erase it from this world?

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After dinner I ended up having a long talk with mom, about the horrible test, and my high school life so far. Dad came home earlier than usual today because his Buchoo somehow didn't want to go drinking, so dad also joined our conversation. I told them my problems: I find what we're learning in high school so much harder than what we learned in junior high school, and I always have problems keeping up with the assignments. Moreover, I feel that everyone in my class are really intelligent and hardworking, which was giving me a lot of pressure. "You are not unintelligent. So if you try harder than your classmates, you'll do better!" Dad commented abruptly. I felt a little bit angry at his words, because I thought I already worked hard. He just couldn't really see my efforts for he's never home! But well, he said I was not "unintelligent." Maybe that was he best recognition he could give to his daughter. At least, mom was very supportive, and said that the transition from junior school to senior school can be very tough and I definitely shouldn't give up.

I really appreciate her encouragement, even though I think Takeshi was pretty fine two years ago. (In fact he had the same Physics teacher as mine.) But, he has always liked physics and math, whereas I have no interest in them at all. In junior school all my grades had been good, including these two subjects, because they were not as difficult and I worked very hard. But now the questions have become so complicated that I often have problems even understanding them. But I couldn't really complain to mom about my lack of interest, because I knew she would have said – as she had done so before – "You have to take all of the subjects for the college entrance exam, so there're no choices. If you don't have interest in a subject, just try your best to develop some." In junior school I used to think it possible, but now I really start to wonder if everyone can learn the same thing equally well – while I always have a headache whenever reading a physics problem, the guy in front of me never takes more than five minutes to solve it! Well, maybe I just never notice his working hard... But still, develop some interest? That is the most unreasonable thing mom has said. Well, there's nothing really I can do about that. >_< Nevertheless, even if I cannot develop interest in physics, as long as I work hard I should be able to do well, isn't it?

So my parents came to the conclusion that I should go have a talk with my physics teacher about my learning problems. Frankly that's the last thing I would ever do –

I feel so stupid in front of Tanaka Sensei! He is actually a nice teacher and cracks jokes in class. Takeshi liked him a lot. But the mere thought of that big red 46 deprives me of all my confidence to talk with him. Finally mom agreed to go with me to meet him at school. Well, I do hope he can give me some suggestions in learning physics, though. Even though I am not be born with a physics brain, if I try harder I would surely make progress! My parents have always said so, and dad has acknowledged that I'm "not unintelligent," after all.

April 28 Sunday Clear

I am sixteen now!

People say that girls of this age are supposed to be the most beautiful. I doubt that, because we're not allowed to wear make-up yet, and make-up can make a huge difference! (I'll definitely use eyeliner to make my eyes look bigger, for example.) But well, sixteen is a lovely number! We are energetic and lively, and it feels like we have half-entered the adult world. Indeed, girls can get married at this age. I feel I'm no longer a little child!

I guess mom thinks that way, too, for she took me to a famous Takarazuka show yesterday for celebration. Mom used to say that I need to be older to appreciate the beauty of Takarazuka, which I didn't really understand. She likes this group a lot and goes to their concerts now and then. But I have never taken any interest in those performances. Just as I don't like male actors playing female roles in Kabuki, I thought it would be equally weird to see the female Takarazuka actresses cross-dressing as male roles.

The performance we saw was a western musical by the Star troupe, and the leading male role was played by this famous Wataru Kozuki. As we browsed through the program, mom explained to me that the more popular actresses in Takarazuka troupes are those who play male roles. This fact aroused my curiosity. What on earth are these 'males' like? I wondered to myself. The answer came in no time, when Wataru emerged on the stage, who totally stunned me.

The elegant movements of her brows, the brightness shining from her eyes, and the sentiments of her half-closed eyelids, all caught my heart on my first sight. She has done a great job imitating the male movements. But she does not look at all like any men I've seen in real life. The man played by Wataru has such an elevated grace that no ordinary men I've known have, which makes me sympathize from the bottom of my heart – maybe that is because she is a woman, after all. My heart kept pounding, and my eyes couldn't leave her shiny form on the stage. Her body, on top of the dazzling costumes, is glowing with a graceful yet powerful masculinity. Indeed it was a somewhat strange mixed quality – it's easy to tell that this is faked masculinity even though Wataru imitates very skillfully. However, this turns out to be of an astonishing beauty and attraction, instead of an absurd ridicule that I had expected to see. Takarazuka has created something new, something neither male nor female – no, it's something beyond the two genders!

I think I've fallen in love with Takarazuka, just like many other women. I should call Rin-chan tomorrow to tell her about these performances. We've been best friends throughout the junior school so I'm sure she will also like them. Next time when we go shopping we can look for Takarazuka products together!

I just found out that this year is the 90th anniversary of Takarazuka, and in order to celebrate this, the company will be performing a special musical, called *Phantom*, for the first time in Japan. There will be a spectacular 90-person line dance and some stars from each troupe will perform together – that should certainly include my Wataru! How exciting! Oh, it is on in the Tokyo Takarazuka Theater starting July 17, in less than three months. So I should start saving my pocket money now!

May 2 Thursday Sunny

My resolution to save for the Takarazuka special show ended up to last for less than a week, because when I mentioned this to mom the other day, she appeared to be interested as well, and offered to get tickets for the both of us. Though I was originally thinking of going with Rin, it seemed a better idea to go with mom – I can save a lot of money, and after all, this is the few occasions that I go out with her, which I know will make her happy.

I sometimes hear mom complaining that I am growing more and more distant to her. In fact we two are always together – mom stays at home anyway, and I never go anywhere else after school. So she supervises me doing homework every night, while she does her knitting or reading. This semester she has been focusing more on Takeshi due to the life-deciding tests next year, but still we are together at home most of the time. Maybe she hopes that I can talk to her more and go shopping with her, etc. But I guess girls of my age simply don't go out our moms anymore. That is the way things are. We are living in different worlds and neither side can ever understand the other one. For instance, I still remember the quarrel we had last winter.

I had longed to do the surgery for a double-eyelid. My almond-shaped eyes are small, and I feel they're almost closed when I smile! Eye is the feature that I like the least on my face, and I adore Ayumi Hamasaki, whose eyes are as big and round as those figures in manga. Oh my goodness she is so cute! If only my appearance could resemble 10% of hers... So, I made up my mind to go for the surgery after graduation from junior high, so that I could start a new phase of life with a fresh self! At first I was thrilled at mom's approval of my plan, but later I realized that it was only her tactic: to keep my motivation for studying to get into a good high school. I cannot forget my shock and disappointment when mom's attitude suddenly changed after I finished the tests. She insisted that my eyes are perfectly those of the "traditional Japanese beauties" and wouldn't allow me to do anything to them. When I showed Ayumi's poster to her, she merely glanced at it and commented that it looked odd. Fine, mom might have her own preference for tiny single-lid eyes, but I have mine as well! I was especially mad that she broke her promise and refused to talk to her for a few days.

Well, to be objective I should say that such conflicts are quite rare between the two of us, whereas I know some girls who are in a long-lasting “cold war” with their moms. Actually Rin-chan is one of them. Her mom was a horrible woman and would read Rin’s emails without her permission. Once she even destroyed Rin’s secret collection of rock CDs in the front of her daughter. One by one, she broke the plastic discs and threw them on the ground. Rin seldom talked to her ever since. Like me, Rin has no sisters – only a younger brother – so we hung out a lot and became good friends. Rin came to my home now and then and has always envied my mostly understanding and supportive mother. So, well I guess I have nothing to complain about.