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Translator's Preface

Hiroko Inose

Fumiko Hayashi was born in 1903 in Yamaguchi, in the western part of Japan. She was an illegitimate child and when she was 6 years old her parents separated. Fumiko grew up in poverty, travelling all over Kyushu (the southern part of Japan) with her mother and her step-father, who were itinerant peddlars. The poor and vagabond lifestyle she experienced then would strongly influence her literary works later.

Her talent for writing was evident from a very young age, and after graduating from the women's high school in Hiroshima, Fumiko moved to Tokyo to become a writer. Her first days in Tokyo were tough, and she took whatever work she could find – as a cleaner, waitress, factory worker, hospital assistant, office worker etc. Her life did not settle until she married Rokubin Tezuka, a painter, in 1926.

In 1928, she started writing the novel *Horoki* (Diary of a Vagabond) which was to become her most famous work. It is based on her experience as a young woman, trying to survive alone in Tokyo. The novel was a huge success and established her fame as a writer.

During the Second World War she worked as a staff writer, travelling to China and French Indochina with the Japanese army. However as the war continued, her doubts grew stronger and towards the end of the war, she was singled out by the authorities for having expressed her opinion that Japan should find a way to “lose cleanly.”

The present piece, “*Rinraku*” (“Falling”) is one of her post-war works. It was first published in 1947, and through a vivid description given by the main character we see how Tokyo was at that time, just after Japan had lost the war. The young and innocent girl from the countryside changes rapidly in this savage society, showing how the war affected the lives of people—poor and otherwise. The piece could be positioned among a series of works written in the years between 1946 and 1951, treating the theme of average people affected by the war: returning soldiers, widows, those who died in the war and those who lost their loved ones.

Translating this piece was a challenge, both for its style and its theme. The original is written in the first person, and the use of long phrases with many commas makes the reader almost hear the voice of a young woman

talking non-stop about her life story. As the feeling of speed (of her chatting, and of her "falling") was very important in this piece, I tried not to stifle the vividness of her voice, even though sometimes cutting long phrases into two or three separate sentences might have made it easier for readers to understand.

As for the content of the piece, it has to be said that the setting is very special. It is Tokyo after the defeat in the war, before its economic recovery took off – a period of confusion and poverty, when almost everyone had to survive from day to day, doing anything he or she could. Some of the characters (such as Koyama or Seki) represent people whose lives have been destroyed by the war and have lost the energy to go on living. Meanwhile the main character, "Momoko," whose nickname means plum flower, shows the strength to live. To "fall" morally in order to survive does not scare her, and she does so without hesitation. And although she confesses that she "hates thinking," her monologue shows that she understands all that is happening to herself and others around her. The contrast between the heaviness of the theme and the lightness (or matter-of-factness) of the chatty tone in the original has a strong effect, which I have tried to maintain.

"Falling" by Fumiko Hayashi

Translated by Hiroko Inose

I came to Tokyo, without telling anyone in the family. Everyone who had come to our village from Tokyo went home as soon as the war was over. Even people like Mr. Honda or Mrs. Yamaji, who had talked about living in the countryside for the rest of their lives, they too went back to Tokyo after the war. I wondered if Tokyo was such a nice place, and wanted to see it. My elder sister was working as a maid in Osaka for a long time, but she came back when the war broke out and now is helping at home. Both my elder brothers went to the war, but they were not sent abroad, and came back at the end of the war and now they just stay at home. My sister said that we would have to find jobs, sooner or later. My big brother, too, says that we won't be able to keep on living like this, so many of us in the same house, all fit and healthy but without having much land. We are six brothers and sisters, and I have three younger siblings, and these days my father complains repeatedly about how hard it is to feed us all every day. I made up my mind one day, and asked my friend who works in the railway station to get me a ticket to Tokyo. Making sure that my mother wouldn't find out, I packed food for about ten days in my rucksack, and came to Tokyo on my own by the night train, in October of last year. I remembered Mrs. Yamaji repeatedly telling us each time she came to our place to buy rice and vegetables, that we should visit her when we went to Tokyo, and she would like to pay us back for what we did for her. So as soon as I arrived to Tokyo, I searched and searched for their house, and went to visit Mrs. Yamaji. They said they owned a factory, and also a second house in a place called Atami, so I thought that they had a huge house, but actually it was quite small. Mrs. Yamaji looked at me, surprised. I told her that I had left home, and she told me confusedly: "We don't have much food in Tokyo – and our house has been burnt down, so now we are renting a place." I arranged with them to stay there for just two days, and thought I would find work as soon as possible. Tokyo was very burnt, so burnt that I felt so bad for the people there. Mrs. Yamaji kept complaining to me about people in the country, and said country folks were all villains, which really annoyed me. When she was in the

countryside she was so servile, but in Tokyo she was like a different person, and said she wanted to rescue all the kimono-dresses and watches that she had lost in the country. She had given me two of her daughter's kimonos, but I wanted to give them back to her as she was complaining so much. I don't think the Yamaji family are nice people. The wife, the husband's mother, and the two daughters that go to women's universities, all of them are putting on airs, and they lent me the worst, dirtiest futon mattress when we went to sleep. I stayed at their house only for one night, and then went to Ueno station. There, I met Koyama. I was at the entrance to the platforms at Ueno station, absent-minded, and the man came to me and asked me where I was going. I said I came to Tokyo to find work, counting on people I knew, but as they had treated me badly, I was going back to the countryside, but I could not buy the ticket and was upset. The man said if I wanted to work in Tokyo, he could find me work really easily, and asked if I wanted to come to his apartment. I couldn't care less and thought it didn't matter who I trusted, so I went with him. He lived in an "apartment" in Urawa. It was on the second floor of a really dirty apartment block, and in a tiny room of four-and-half tatami mattress size, there was only a futon mattress to sleep on and cooking utensils. The tatami-floor was worn, and next to the window was a futon that he never folded up. Koyama was working in a small pharmaceutical company in Kanda. He was about forty. He had a lot of money and I wondered why.

His wife died in an air raid and now he lived alone, he said. That night, I slept in the same futon as Koyama. He did all sorts of things to me and I was surprised and frightened at the beginning, but tolerated it, not wanting to go back to the country. Koyama said that he had thought I was over twenty years old. I said I was only eighteen, and he said country girls look older than their age. I thought it didn't matter. I wouldn't be able to do anything even if I knew what to do, and thought I was lucky enough to have someone so sympathetic. Koyama pampered me a lot, and I got to like him little by little. We went to see films when Koyama came back from work. Then the cold winter came. I didn't have a kimono, so I consulted with Koyama as to whether I should go back to get my kimonos. He said I should not go, and from somewhere got me some western style clothes and coats that suited me well. I went to the town without telling him, and got my hair permed in a hair salon. Koyama said that my face had strong

features, and that I looked like a westerner. He said I would succeed as a dancer, and I thought I would like to become one. I bought newspapers and looked through the ads, and thinking Koyama would not agree if I told him, I went alone for an audition. It was a dance hall only for Japanese customers, and those who didn't know how to dance could have lessons for about two weeks. I went there during the daytime. There I met a musician called Kuriyama. Kuriyama was still young, just back from the war, and he had a pure heart. I felt good when I talked to him. He said he was eating with meal vouchers, and wanted to eat some home cooked food for a change, so one day I brought him back to the apartment in Urawa. Koyama used to buy rice in the black market, so I cooked for Kuriyama. I made him boiled rice, grilled sardines and meat stew with miso paste.

Kuriyama looked shocked when I told him about how I came from the country and started living with Koyama. He said "I can't believe you are so ignorant, you look so smart and intelligent, God shows such a sense of irony . . . you think life is easy, but you are living very dangerously." But having lived in Tokyo for several months, I know that in today's world, there are many like myself. I saw Kuriyama off at the station, and bumped into Koyama carrying large luggage. Kuriyama just went off, and in the apartment, Koyama told me off and treated me very violently, pulling my hair, hitting and kicking me. After such treatment, I started hating him, feeling disgusted. I put on my coat to go out, and Koyama forced me to the ground, kicking my stomach a few times. It was so painful that I thought my back was breaking. Then he pulled me onto the futon mattress, and ferociously cut my permed hair with scissors. I felt such a pain in my stomach, that I just closed my eyes - the pain continued for a couple of days and I could barely move. I looked into the mirror, and was pleased to see that my eyelashes are much longer than normal. My cheekbones are a little high, but my lips are full, and with lipstick, I looked like a westerner. I have broad, big front teeth and very large breasts. I thought I was prettier than those women in the dance hall that I went to for a little while. The dance teacher praised my legs, and I was one of the tallest among the women who came for the job. I could not forget the colourful scene of the dance hall, and detested the idea of staying in such a dirty apartment and sleeping with an old man. Kuriyama said that God was being ironic to have created me the way I am, but I felt I just could not stay in such a

place. When I think about something complicated, my whole body itches. I hate thinking. After a couple of days, I left the apartment. I knew a middle aged woman who had a little stew stall in front of the station, and I knew where she lived, so I went there. She has two kids and lives behind a garage. I went often to eat at her stall, so we knew each other, and she kindly let me stay. They say there's no real devil in the world, and I started going to the dance hall from her place. Kuriyama, by then, was working in another dance hall and I went there to see him. He said "I probably shouldn't ask you to understand, but I am selfish and fastidious, so I can't be with you." He is always dreaming, and his feet are not really on the ground. He refused to be with me, but it just gave me more energy to fight. I haven't seen him for about two months, but precisely because there wasn't anything between us, I can't forget about him. I haven't seen Koyama at all and I don't feel like seeing him. I went to stay in some hotel in the country with someone else a few times, and these days sometimes I feel as if I have already become a bad woman, and feel cold inside. The woman from the stew stall said I dress differently these days. Their house has only two six-tatami mattress size rooms, and is a little humid, but I feel at home here. The kids are a girl of 14 and a boy of 12, both such nice kids, and surprisingly well mannered and caring towards their mother. The woman does not scold me at all even if I come back really late, and treats me like one of her own kids. I thought how rare it is to see someone with such a heart of gold.

I got to know a businessman in the dance hall. He didn't dance at all, but always came with his cronies and just absentmindedly looked at others dancing. One day I bumped into him in front of the Yaesu exit of Tokyo station. He invited me for coffee and we chatted - he was just demobilised from military service and came back from Java, and still wasn't working. Coming home, he found his wife staying with someone else, and his house burnt down, so now he was staying at his friend's place. There is neither joy nor sorrow in this world, I am only living by chance, he said. Also he said that he did not understand complicated matters, but it seemed like his life had left him, and his days were like an eternal and horrible hangover. I was so lonely that I immediately fell in love with this man, Seki. Seki was thin and tall, and his face had a greyish complexion. Every time we met, he asked me, "So, having fun?" and so I always answered, "Yeah, great

fun." In the summer, we visited a hot spring in Ohito, Izu island, and stayed in a small hotel. Seki brought a bottle of whiskey. I had asked the stew stall woman to buy some rice, and brought it there. The hotel was in the middle of a field and there was nothing special about it, but we drank whiskey until late, surrounded by the noise of frogs. He only talked about death; I only talked about how much more fun it is to live. We went under the mosquito net to sleep, but Seki was probably too drunk, he was very quiet and crying from time to time. I thought it was extremely funny. In the middle of the night I went to the hot spring on my own. We stayed for one night in Ohito and went back to Tokyo. After a couple of days, Seki killed himself. I imagine Death had been with him since that time. I was sad for a couple of days, but then little by little I forgot about him. I called myself Momoko, and changed dance hall again. Dancing and having a good time took all my time, and daily matters were so important for me then that I did not think about the country or about my future. I spent all my money so I was still poor, but when I wanted to eat, always some stranger treated me.

In September, I noted a change in my health and remembered Seki immediately, but I didn't want to have a baby. I talked to the woman from the stew stall, but she insisted that I had to have the child - said if I had a child, a woman like me would grow up and think about her future as well. I didn't want to think about having a child. I danced non-stop, wildly. I feel sorry for the kids who are borne by women like me. The autumn wind arrived, and I bumped into Koyama one day, in a street in the Shinjuku area. He looked worn out. I don't think he's had a good time since we split up. We just chatted standing, but he said he had been detained by the police for two months, and said "I got into such trouble because of you."

Koyama asked whether I could think again about being with him, but I said no. The old country girl had disappeared and Koyama was taken aback, saying, "my God, what an elegant girl; what kind of family would people think you're from?" He asked what I was doing then, so I lied that I was a film star. I said that in a few years time, you would find me in the cinema, and Koyama pleaded with me to live with him again, promising that he would never even touch me. I thought it was so funny - and thought men were just so weak. I hate weak men. Koyama wanted to have a coffee, but I suspected that he wouldn't have enough money for it,

so I just left him saying I had to go to the office. I don't like men like Koyama. When I walked on to the platform of Shinjuku station, I noticed that a beautiful woman was standing right beside me. She was wearing a grey jacket, had a big brown handbag and wore matching brown shoes, and although she wasn't wearing any makeup, her skin was well cared for and smooth. Her eyes were large and brilliant. Men were passing by, noticing the beautiful woman, and then looked at me, and an ironic smile appeared on their faces. I felt as if they were sniggering at me. I went to the dance hall but I couldn't find anyone like that beautiful woman I had seen at Shinjuku station. She must be different from us, she must be a daughter of a rich family. I looked into the mirror and felt that I was becoming different from all those "decent" women. We make up our faces in such a colourful, flashy way, putting on black eyeliner and lots of lipstick. These days it is hard to find a good quality cream, and some of the girls put cooking oil on their legs and backs, which is quite an unpopular remedy as they stink of fried food. I am wearing such thin clothes, like cellophane, just like those women I saw in the circus that came to the country ages ago. Since I saw that woman in the station, I couldn't help thinking I was dirty, and it made me sad. I am wearing a glass necklace, a gold plated bracelet in the shape of a snake, and a paper-thin pink dress. On my hair I have a large pale blue ribbon, my earrings are blue beads, and I have a ruby stone ring. My co-worker, Rose, found me a pair of second hand black leather high heel shoes, which I bought, although they were very expensive for me. A man said I was like a show horse for the first business day of the year,¹ and at first I didn't understand what it meant, but when I found out, I was very annoyed. "You look much better without makeup; your build is quite large, so you look much older when you put on makeup," Kuriyama used to say often, but I can't stop putting on a lot of makeup. In another dance hall where I used to work, the manager called me a parakeet.

These days I am not well, and I often don't feel like going to the dance hall. When I take days off, I sleep all day, without eating anything. The woman from the stew stall gets worried and cooks for me, but I don't want

¹ In an old Japanese custom, the horses that loaded goods for businesses for the first time in that year were heavily decorated.

to eat at all. Recently, I started smoking. I feel I am going from bad to worse, but I can't reflect on it too much. If I try to think, my whole body itches, so I just sleep all day, and when I get bored late at night, I read my future using playing cards. When I read my future, I feel as if the happy event is just about to happen. I feel I could have a beautiful marriage, and give birth to a cute baby, in a house full of sunshine. I think of such things, but soon again, the tune of the dance hall music comes back into my mind. Most of my co-workers, the girls in the dance halls, are living one day at a time, betraying men and being betrayed by them, but I must say that most of them are being betrayed; they are quite innocent and kind girls in reality. There is a man who comes to our dance hall these days to see me. I don't know what he does, but he is so snooty and I hate him. His habit of wiping his face with a blue handkerchief, and arranging his hair with a tiny red comb make me feel disgusted. In the dance hall we get many weirdoes that you would never see in the country, and we have no idea what they do for living. My friends all have someone they fancy or boyfriends, but they love sincerely those men whom you'd consider as nothing if you observed them with a cool head. They break up and meet other men, and then break up with them and meet someone else; fleeting days just pass by. During the day, we all look like grass in the shadow without lustre, but at night, we come back to life, little by little. Backstage, some women take hormone pills as if they were eating sweets. In our bags, we only have dirty underwear, homemade bread, a half-sewn blouse and a half-read novel or magazine. Most of us have just a little bit of money in our handbags; decorated houses are all poor.

These days, sometimes I feel I want to go back to the country, but it's just a thought and I do not feel very strongly about it. I pay 300 yen every month to the woman from the stew stall. She hasn't changed at all and is still very kind, and always says to me that I shouldn't force myself to do more than I can, and should look for a decent job one of these days. I don't think I could find a decent job, I never even finished high school. They all say we are entering a period of great unemployment. One day, after such a long time, I saw Kuriyama in Ginza. Surprisingly, he was very kind and said, "It's all the same whichever path you choose. So many women are becoming like you and it's not a big deal. I was thinking of you, Momoko, wondering how you were. We can't do anything about our lives for the

time being; it can't be helped." I was very moved. As we didn't fancy having coffee, we just strolled in the twilight in the Marunouchi area, towards Miyagi. We could hear insects making noises; it was already autumn. Kuriyama said that he was in a small orchestra and travelling around, playing. He said the money was good, but apparently he was looking after a big family, so it was not easy. I said to him, "Mr. Kuriyama, I want to get married to someone," and he said, looking serious, "What's the point of getting married in today's world? You won't find anyone good even if you are thinking about marriage." I said maybe I was pregnant, and Kuriyama said, "Good, anything is good - have a baby then. Let me know when you have a baby, I could help you a little financially." We were walking down the main street of Miyagi, in the wind. When we said goodbye at Sukiyabashi, Kuriyama said, "I'll see you again, call me anytime," and gave me a clean business card and two 100 yen bills. He was wearing new shoes. He must be earning a lot, I thought.