Citadel in Spring

A Novel of Youth Spent at War

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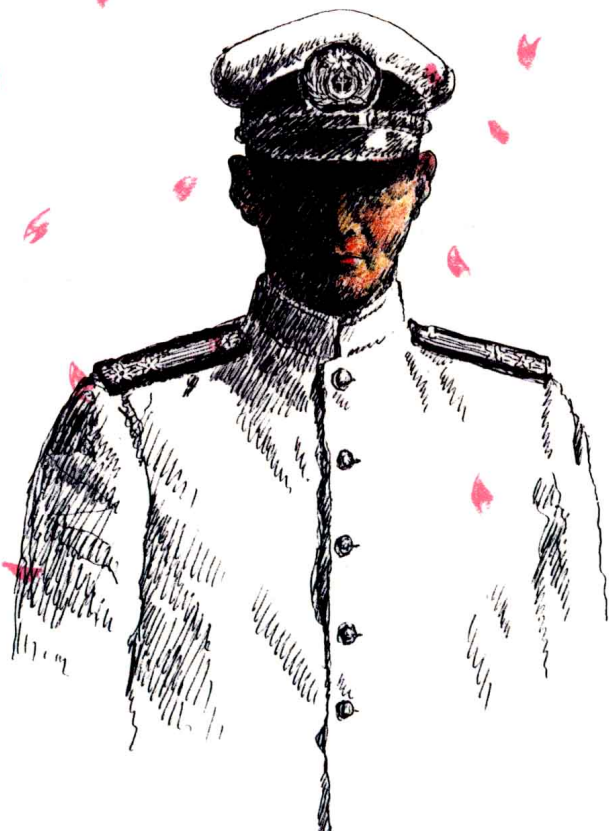

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Translator's Preface

A comment on the title: the phrase "citadel in spring" is taken from "Spring Prospect" by the T'ang dynasty poet Tu Fu. The poem laments the occupation of the great city of Ch'angan, capital of T'ang China, by a rebel army. It begins:

> The realm is destroyed, yet the mountains and rivers abide;
> The citadel in spring stands deep in tree and grass.

In ancient China the sinograph translated here as "citadel" meant "city," but later came to mean "castle" in Japan. Although the Japanese title *Haru no shiro* could be translated literally as "Castle in Spring," I have taken the liberty of using the word "citadel" in an attempt to encompass both senses, since the word is used in the novel specifically for Hiroshima Castle, and, in the title, becomes a metaphor for the city itself.

I would like to thank the author for explaining a number of terms, especially those related to the old Imperial Navy. I have also profited from discussions with my colleagues George Durham and Richard Howell concerning, respectively, the music festival at the Itsukushima shrine and cryptanalysis. For those readers who wish more information on the latter I recommend David Kahn's *The Codebreakers*. I would also like to thank Laura F. Jones and Shinji Ichiba of Kodansha International for their comments and suggestions. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my wife, Kazuko Fujihira, for her constant encouragement and support.

Lawrence Rogers
Hilo, Hawaii

One

Their houses in Hiroshima were on the same river. From the Ibuki drawing room, which stood above the stone-lined riverbank, you could drop a line right into the water and fish for little goby. Koji's house was seven or eight blocks upstream, and the white riverbed behind it came alive in summer with children playing in its waters. The glistening granitic sands teemed with shellfish, and if you dove into the deep water along the opposite bank, by the woods which stood on the shrine grounds, you would see crawfish warily moving their pincers among the huge, moss-covered rocks. At flood tide the river there would be engorged bank to bank, its incoming waters laden with discarded wooden clogs and fruit peels. But when the tide ebbed, it became a limpid stream which flowed over the hiding places of crawfish, roach, shellfish, and goby, as it murmured its way toward Hiroshima Bay. When the boat rental shops began to appear along the river it was a sign that spring had come, and the closing of the shops signaled that the city was well into autumn.

Koji Obata was four years younger than Yukio Ibuki. The two of them had been good friends since middle school days, skiing and mountain climbing together, fishing, and taking trips to see plays and visit art galleries. Even now they always returned to Hiroshima during vacations and spent time together. Sometimes Ibuki's younger sister Chieko, who was one year older than Koji, would join them.

For them and those around them, at least, it was still a time of

peace. Yet almost every day long columns of soldiers going off to war paraded through the city on their way to Ujina Harbor, stopping the street cars as the heavy thud of their boots kept time with the bugles. But neither Ibuki nor Koji particularly concerned themselves with this—they felt a vague distaste for the military, a distaste Chieko naturally shared. Yet from time to time the young men could not help thinking that the day when they would join those lines of men was slowly drawing nearer.

Koji was studying literature at Tokyo Imperial University, but he was not terribly enthusiastic about his studies. He hoped to become a novelist someday. Yukio Ibuki had graduated in the spring from a college in Osaka and was doing research at the Institute of Microbiological Research. Soon Ibuki was to take his pre-induction physical exam, then an examination for the navy's two-year medical course for active duty officers.

For some time now Koji had thought of Chieko as more than a friend. He liked the unpretentious way she wore her hair in braids, and several times he managed to catch the clean fragrance of her skin, a scent without a trace of make-up. He enjoyed it when she joined in animated conversation with him and her brother, and was delighted whenever she joked with him and teased him with her arch little thrusts.

Chieko, for her part, was fond of Koji, too, but her fondness seemed to grow out of her respect for her scholarly brother, and whenever she began to think of the younger Koji as a possible marriage partner, she always felt an inexplicable resistance to the idea. Koji's feelings were much the same.

Koji himself had never given any serious thought to what he ought to do about his relationship with Chieko, so he simply took pleasure in her company, and their relationship continued unclarified. His friendship with Ibuki helped to stabilize his feelings.

Yet whenever Chieko thought of the reality that her brother, and then Koji, would soon be going off to war, she felt a vague sense of irritation.

Koji's acquaintances, and Chieko's, too, had a general idea of

their feelings for each other, and yet no one, not even Ibuki, made mention of it.

* * *

Just before the summer of 1941, in his second year at Tokyo Imperial University, Koji received a letter from his elder brother's home in Manchuria. It was in his sister-in-law's hand.

I suppose you are at your studies every day. No doubt you will soon return to Hiroshima for the summer vacation. We should also like to return to the home islands and visit Mother and Father, whom we have not seen for such a long time. The current situation being what it is, though, the two of us could not possibly just drop everything here to go home.

We saw Mr. Onodera, Director of the South Manchurian Railway, the day before yesterday. He stayed with us one night and then returned to Dairen. As you probably know, he is a cousin of Mrs. Ibuki in Hiroshima. It was a business visit, but we talked about Hiroshima, and then about the Ibukis' eldest daughter and about you as well. We understand that several prospective husbands were suggested to Chieko recently, but she rejected them, and this is causing her parents some concern. Mr. Onodera laughed and said that these days daughters are loath to assent to marriages arranged by their parents. We sensed—and perhaps we are over-reacting—that Mr. Onodera may have come on behalf of Miss Ibuki's parents to inquire roundabout through us what you intend to do regarding Chieko.

Not being with you, we really do not know the state of affairs, but we know that though a man can be carefree about this, a woman of marriageable age most certainly cannot. We are concerned about the fact that she is older than you, but if you intend to actively pursue this course, then Mother and Father, and ourselves as well, could reconsider this. Since we have no children we are certainly not opposed to your marrying a little early.

And so the letter went. Koji put it down with a sense of incredulity. He suddenly felt that he had somehow become an adult now, part of a family, his freedom restricted. They were asking him what he intended to do. Was it wrong, he wondered, to simply relax and enjoy the company of his friend's sister?

He did not relish having to think seriously about marriage so soon. First of all, it seemed to him that he had no reason to believe that Chieko herself was thinking along those lines. In fact, just a few days earlier he had received a casual note from her, and there was, of course, not the slightest hint of anything of the sort in it.

He left his lodgings in the afternoon, the letter in his briefcase. His friend Ishikawa was stopping off in Tokyo on his way back from Hokkaido and they had agreed to meet that evening on the Ginza. Ishikawa was a medical student at the University of Hokkaido and had been a classmate of Ibuki's in middle school, and he and Koji had been close friends since childhood.

Somehow Koji did not feel up to going to the campus before his meeting with his friend. Apart from the question of Chieko, lately he'd been in a constant state of apathy. He had entered the Department of Japanese Literature at the suggestion of Mr. Yashiro, one of his teachers at his high school in Hiroshima, but he could generate absolutely no interest in the lectures at the university. He had been attracted to a course entitled "The Literary Environment of Medieval Japan," but when he attended a lecture he found the professor earnestly belaboring the obvious.

"Hail. Defined in the ancient dictionary *Wamyosho* as frozen rain. Forest. Forest means a place having many trees. Grove. A grove refers to a place that has somewhat fewer trees than a forest." The students conscientiously took this all down.

Kurimura, a friend who was also a student in the Department of Japanese Literature, had tried to cure him of his boredom by telling him what it was like to go to the "immoral areas," as they were called.

"It's bad for your health to hang around here all the time," he had said. "Go on. You just go in like you own the place. It's as sim-

ple as going to an *oden* restaurant for the first time. And it'll clear your head."

Koji recalled his friend's advice as he passed through the great gate of the Yoshiwara prostitution district, which he knew about only from novels. He went twice. Neither time, however, did he return home feeling it was something that he could abandon himself to.

He was looking for something that he could confront openly, something—immoral or not—that could really engage his emotions, but he was utterly unable to find it.

* * *

Ishikawa was leaning against the entrance to the subway reading the evening paper. He was very nearsighted, and kept his eyes fixed on the paper until Koji had come up right under his nose and spoken to him.

It was a sunny spell during the rainy season and the streets of the Ginza were full of people out for a stroll. Joining the crowds, the two friends began walking toward Shimbashi.

Married couples loaded down with shopping bundles. University students and their girlfriends. Saucy-looking little girls. Office workers swiftly cutting their way through the columns of people. Shoulders jostling shoulders again and again. A Westerner with an Eyemo camera on a wooden-legged tripod threaded his way through the crush of people, stopping from time to time to trip his shutter at the passers-by. The lamps in the streetlights came on, clear and colorless as water.

Ishikawa looked back at the man with the camera. "He's going around taking pictures to show what wartime Tokyo is like."

"Uh-huh." Koji was wondering where they could eat. "Where'll we go?"

"Well," Ishikawa asked, "how about some Western food?"

"Okay, let's," said Koji. "Hey, it's going to be tough for you going all the way back to Hiroshima by train tonight."

"No, no," Ishikawa said, "Nothing to it. The porter will give me

a third-class sleeper if I put a little money in his hand. I'll sleep all the way. You want to go back with me?"

"I'm going back in another week or so," Koji answered.

They went into Lohmeyer's, a basement restaurant. The ceiling was low, and large painted pipes ran along the wall, giving Koji the impression that they were on a steamship or man-of-war. He mentioned this to his companion.

"That reminds me," Ishikawa responded, "I hear Ibuki has gotten into the navy's short-term active duty program."

"Oh, he has? I think he made the right move. It's better than the army, at least."

"Really? Yet it seems to me that if I have to go I'd rather join the navy, but a literature major is useless in the Paymaster's Office, and there's really nothing else I can do."

"They'd probably take you as a seaman, if that's what you want," said Ishikawa, "but I hear they whack your butt with a rope."

"Well, what'll you do?" Koji asked his friend.

"I don't want to have anything to do with either of them," Ishikawa answered. "You're the kind of guy who'd rush his graduation in order to fight, so I'll tell you something right now. Try your damnedest to stay alive. If they order you to charge, make a break for the rear if you can. As for a glorious death in battle, a man who's killed is just a poor sap. You can count me out."

"You've got it all figured out," responded Koji, "but I can't quite see it your way. I really don't know what to do."

"What's to be confused about? You certainly can't tell me it's a just war. In any case, I want no part of it. I'm going to keep failing my courses and staying in school as long as I can."

The two of them continued in this vein as they ate, their voices lowered so as not to be overheard by those around them.

Koji suddenly felt a hand seize his shoulder. Startled, he turned around to see Tanii, a friend majoring in Japanese literature, standing behind him.

"Damn! Don't do that!" Koji rebuked his friend. "Can't you see you scared me to death? What is it?"

"Sorry, sorry," said Tanii hurriedly, "I was just on my way out after dinner with my family when I noticed you were here. But you're with someone, aren't you. I'll see you later."

"No. Sit down with us. We'll all leave together."

"No, I'm with my family, so I'll—"

"Oh, come on," persisted Koji, angry at having been startled. "Sit down."

"Oh, okay, then, I'll tell them to go on ahead," Tanii said, and left.

"Who's that?" asked Ishikawa, glancing up at the departing Tanii as he cut his meat.

"The most congenial friend I have at the university. He's a connoisseur of the theater and such a naive brat that everyone calls him a *botchan*."

"If *you* call him a *botchan* he must really be green," said Ishikawa, and the two young men laughed.

Tanii returned, sat down beside them, and began smoking a cigarette.

"Hey, you know Helmick?" he began. He was talking about an American, born in Japan, who was a year ahead of them in the Department of Japanese Literature at Tokyo Imperial University. "He was talking big to the owner of a second-hand bookstore in Kanda yesterday. 'If a war starts between Japan and America,' he says, 'I'm going straight back to the States to join up.'"

"He did, did he?" said Ishikawa. "So America has its share of idiots too."

Tanii stared dumbly at Ishikawa, an expression of astonishment on his face. Koji laughed and introduced the two men to each other.

* * *

That night, Ishikawa went back to Hiroshima on the express train. Koji decided he would return home after attending two more sessions of his Chinese class. He had taken the course more on impulse than anything else, yet now it was the only course at the university he had the slightest interest in. The students in the class,

each a little self-consciously, imitated the teacher's pronunciation, their mouths gaping wide like so many grammar school pupils at their lesson. Koji felt at home with this new foreign language, which was falling into place for him little by little. It was much more safisfying than the incomprehensible, purely theoretical lectures he encountered in his other courses.

The instructor, Mr. Chu, had been born in Beijing and his pronunciation of the tongue-twisting Mandarin dialect was absolutely flawless. He was a tall, spare man with a dark complexion. One day he wrote a string of words down the blackboard: "Peihai Park," "Tungtan," "cooked wheat cakes," and so on, and began to talk proudly of the city of Beijing. Then he wrote the word "Shanghai," mumbling something to himself. After that he wrote "Americanized" next to it and quickly crossed it all out. His dark face flushed red.

Mr. Chu blushed a lot. When they asked each other questions about their families in the conversation period, he would turn red as a beet when talking about his own. As Koji watched him, he thought of his high school teacher, Mr. Yashiro, who often blushed the same way.

Mr. Chu's class always ended at 4:30. He would bow farewell to his students, leave the classroom, and, with his well-worn black leather briefcase under his arm, light the inevitable cigarette. Then he would stroll alone along the road lined with ginkgo trees to the main gate of the campus. He was a strangely melancholy figure. Koji sometimes wondered to himself what the professor thought of the war that Japan and his country were bogged down in.

Koji went back to visit Hiroshima at the beginning of July. He always enjoyed watching the different scenes pass by as the train drew near the city. The train, its brakes squealing, described gigantic arcs again and again as it swung down through the long mountain pass. Then the arcs would give way to gentle curves as the train traveled along the river through a cut at the foot of a bluff. Vineyards would come into view on his right. Station signs whipped past the window facing the mountains. As the train approached the harbor, the conductor would come and lower the shades of the windows on the ocean side to hide the military transports from view. A huge

building, a brewery in the middle of a field, appeared. Beyond it, Mount Gosasau, which Koji had climbed many times with Ibuki and Ishikawa. The whitish surface of the mountain. Newly planted rice paddies. A long marshaling yard on the far side of a railway bridge. A light locomotive making its steam sounds as it shunted freight cars. More locomotives. Huge crossings. The sound of bells. The train's speed would slacken. And then they would arrive at the familiar platform in the station.

The city of Hiroshima was beautiful at the end of the rainy season. Koji knew of rivers that turned into shallow streams at low tide, exposing their sandy beds. At flood tide they were transformed into deep, green pools of high water. Each of the many rivers would be full of swimming children.

* * *

That spring, Mr. Yashiro had decided that the house he was renting by the foul-smelling drainage ditch behind the high school was not a healthy place to raise his two children, so he had moved his family to a house near the heart of the city. Koji went to visit his former teacher at his new home.

Mr. Yashiro was a student of the *Man'yoshu*, the ancient Japanese poetry anthology, and books and journals on poetics stood in piles all over his study. When Koji arrived, two students from the high school were there talking with Mr. Yashiro over food and saké.

"I went to the Buttsu Temple the other day," he was saying, "and found it rather pleasant. I admire the Obaku sect too—you know the passage written on the sounding board in the temple dining hall, 'With deference we address this assembly'?" Taking pencil and paper in hand, he wrote it out for them. *Vital to salvation the cycle of life and death, impermanent and swift. Be circumspect and not wanting in restraint.* "Very well put, I'd say."

His wife brought in chopsticks and a plate of food for Koji. His son, six, and the daughter, four, followed her, circling the table again and again.

"Have whatever you like, if you've an appetite," he told Koji. He poured saké into his own drinking cup and poked at the vinegared bean paste with a piece of lettuce.

"Colleges these days," he went on, "make the exaggerated claim that their dormitories are just like home, but the truth is it's important for a man to live now and again where he can breathe undomesticated air, completely free of womanish influences."

"When we graduate and go into the army," said Koji, "that'll happen soon enough."

"Right you are," the teacher replied, forcing a smile. He changed the subject. "Obata, are you working on your senior thesis now?"

"No, I haven't done anything yet," Koji answered. "Somehow I've lost all interest in my lectures and seminars, although I never had that problem when I took courses from you. I tell people I'm writing a novel, but that and everything else seems like wasted effort now when I realize I'll be going straight into the service in two years."

The teacher chose not to respond to that, but continued: "Most students like to grapple with a grand theme when they write their senior thesis, but it's better to get a firm grasp on something modest, as long as it's worthwhile, and write a solid paper."

"But is it true," asked Koji, "that the students in Japanese literature at the University get better grades if they write long senior theses, the kind you have to trundle about in a wheelbarrow?"

"True or not, it's beside the point," said the teacher. "It's *your* work, after all. It's stupid just to put on a empty show."

Mr. Yashiro often went to student gatherings and listened with pleasure to the naive discussions. He was on friendly terms with Ibuki, and Chieko knew him through his outside teaching. Naturally Ibuki's decision to join the navy came up in their conversation that day.

The letter from his sister-in-law in Manchuria had made Koji reluctant to visit the Ibuki household very often. Most of the time he chose to invite Ibuki and Ishikawa out with him instead.

One day in August the three of them met at the small house on the outskirts of town that Ishikawa was renting for the summer. They