

〈翻譯〉

## This Child

by Higuchi Ichiyo

Juliet Winters CARPENTER

If I came right out and said this child means the world to me, everyone would laugh. What mother hates her own child, after all? It would sound ridiculous, as if I thought I alone were blessed with such a treasure, and so I'll never say anything so extravagant — but in my heart I do adore him. He's so precious I could press my palms together in reverent thanks.

He's my guardian angel. All he does is laugh sweetly and play innocently, but that smile of his has taught me more than I could ever say. The books I read in school and the lessons I learned from my teachers were beneficial, of course, and I think back on them whenever I have the chance, yet none of them has the power of this little one's smile to stop my hurried steps and still my frenzied thoughts. Unlike the opinions that brilliant scholars declaim over people's heads, the sight of him sleeping in all innocence with his head on his beanbag pillow and his little arms outstretched, his hands by his shoulders, brings heartfelt tears to my eyes. So for all my obstinate pride, I could never pretend he doesn't mean the world to me.

At the end of last year when I heard his newborn cry and saw

his little face for the first time, I was in such a daze that — although it wrings my heart to remember it now — all I could think was “Why did you have to be born healthy? If you’d been born dead I could have gone back to my parents’ home as soon as I recovered, and not stayed near that husband of mine one second more! Oh, why were you born healthy? I can’t bear it! Must I live without a glimmer of hope, tied to that man forever?” I thought only about how miserable I was, how wretched, and when people offered me congratulations I didn’t feel happy at all. I only felt sad at the prospect of my life becoming still more constrained.

But anyone in my situation would have felt the same way, I’m sure you’ll agree. Anyone, no matter how gracious and enlightened a lady she might be, would be bound to grow despondent and depressed. My complaints about his cruelty and indifference, about the lack of justice in the world, weren’t just a sign of temper — anyone would have said the same things. In my mind I wasn’t the least bit at fault and hadn’t done anything wrong, so I blamed every falling-out on my husband. I was in a perpetual blaze of resentment. And the thought that by marrying me off, my own parent (he’s the same as a parent to me, an uncle to whom I’m indebted) — the thought that my own parent had condemned me to a lifetime of suffering made me resent him, too. Above all, since I’d done nothing wrong, had obediently gotten married just as I was told, I deeply resented God or whatever power it was that had inflicted such a fate on me, like pushing a blind man over a cliff. In short, I was convinced that this world is a

disagreeable place.

People say a strong spirit is a good thing, that without it you can never get anything difficult accomplished; a person lacking determination is as spineless as a sea slug, they say. But it's all a matter of time and place. Flaunting your spirit day and night doesn't do you the slightest good. A woman may be better off keeping her determination under wraps and quietly apprising herself of things. Someone like me who wears her emotions on her sleeve and can't yield gracefully must strike others as shameless. I'm sure my husband used to sigh over what a terrible wife I was to him, but at the time, unable to stop and reflect on my behavior, I couldn't read his mind. His looks of displeasure grated on my nerves, and if he was cross with me at all, I'd get hot with anger. There were times I couldn't stop myself from answering back. More often, I'd refuse to speak or eat, and take my anger out on the maids. More than once I went to bed and wouldn't get up all day. I weep easily, and for all my stubborn pride I'd shed helpless tears, biting the collar of my bedclothes in sheer frustration. I wept in fury that I couldn't make my will prevail.

When I came here as a bride three years ago, we got on well enough, and neither of us had any complaint. But familiarity is both good and bad; it wasn't long before our underlying willfulness showed through. Desires and dissatisfactions of every sort came out. I even had the nerve to demand to know what he did outside the home. "You keep things from me," I said bitterly. "You never talk to me about what you do, and that can only mean you want to hold me at arms' length." He laughed and wouldn't take my

grievance seriously. "I'd never be so unfriendly," he said. "You know I tell you everything." I could see as plain as day that he was concealing things, and it killed me. Once I started being suspicious, my suspicions multiplied ten- and twenty-fold. Morning and night I obsessed about what I took to be his lies, my thoughts a knotty tangle of suspicion.

Now, looking back, it seems only natural that he kept things from me. A woman's tongue is careless; it wouldn't have done for him to tell me about his work. To this day he keeps a great many things from me, and I understand. Even though I know he isn't being open with me, it doesn't rankle me at all. Saying nothing about his work is a matter of principle with him, I now see, and he was only right to hold firm no matter how I cried and carried on.

Back when I was acting so irresponsibly, had he ever spoken to me of what went on at court there's no telling what senseless thing I might have done. As it was, a great many people used to come round to the house — plaintiffs and defendants alike — trying to ply me with gifts and pouring out their troubles with assurances that the coming verdict was a matter of life and death. I never had anything to do with any of them, though I didn't excuse myself straightforwardly and honestly, as the wife of Judge Noboru Yamaguchi ought to have done. In view of our constant bickering, I couldn't possibly have brought up such matters with him, and rather than suffer through a lecture it seemed better to greet all petitioners with silence. That was the extent of my thinking. Fortunately it was enough to keep away the taint of

bribery, but the gulf between my husband and me kept on growing, rancor deepened, and slowly we became unfathomable strangers to each other. I now realize that this was all my doing. My behavior was undeniably bad, and my misguided attitude is what made him go wrong. Thinking of it now, I can't hold back tears of regret.

At the lowest point in our relationship, we each turned our back on the other. When he went out I didn't ask where he was going, and he left no word for me of his destination. If a message came while he was out, no matter how urgent it was I never even broke the seal. Though I was his wife, I accepted all such missives stonily and sent the messenger away without a reply. When my husband found such a letter callously tossed aside, naturally he'd be angry. He'd scold me, reason with me, lecture me, cajole me, but I stayed obstinate, and so resentful of his everlasting secretiveness that a kind word here and there had no effect. Finally he lost patience and gave up. While we were quarreling, things weren't so bad, but when we stopped speaking and just looked frostily at one another, even though our home had a roof and walls it was bleaker than any bed out in the open, and so cold it's a wonder my tears didn't turn to ice.

When you think about it, people are self-centered. As long as things are going well, they don't remember the past, but in times of anguish and unhappiness their thoughts turn to what used to be and what might have been, which they envision as the most wonderful, marvelous, splendid time imaginable. The more they do this, the more detestable their present situation becomes, until

they're desperate to sever their ties and escape. If only they could get away, they think, they could go someplace pleasant and beautiful. I was caught up in the same sort of fantasy. Surely I wasn't meant to end my days in such an unhappy marriage! Before I was married, when I was still the adopted daughter of Mr. Komuro, various people introduced suitors to me and I had a number of offers. A naval officer named Ushioda made a great impression on me, and I was almost engaged to a handsome physician named Hosoi, but somehow I ended up the wife of this uncommunicative man instead. There had to be some mistake. It seemed too cruel to let the mistake go uncorrected and endure a lifetime of suffering as a result. And so I made no effort to discipline my emotions, but simply envied others.

Faced with a wife whose head was filled with troublesome thoughts like these, and whose treatment of him was equally troublesome, how could the finest man be kind? When my husband came home from work, I greeted him mechanically, with never a warm word. I was curt, all but inviting him to lash out at me. He found such treatment so intolerable that he would turn and leave. This behavior of his tormented me and I resented him all the more for it, but to be truthful I didn't know how to calm him. He left only because I made life at home so disagreeable that he couldn't wait to get away. And that's how I pushed my husband into a life of dissipation. He became a regular man about town and a stranger at home.

He wasn't like a rich man's wastrel son, though, someone susceptible to the flattery of geisha who gives himself over to fast

living. Deep down, he never really enjoyed himself. He was just trying to contain his aggravation and lift his spirits. When he went drinking he never got pleasantly drunk, but turned ashen, and a blue vein throbbed at his temple.

His speech turned harsh and rough. He lit into the servants over little things and gave me sidelong contemptuous looks. He didn't scold me, but he was peevish, with no trace of the gentle ways he has now. While he glowered, I sat beside him full of indignation. This was hard on the servants, and we had a steady turnover of two per month. Every time someone left, great quantities of objects around the house would go missing or turn up damaged. I could only wonder how there could be so many heartless people in one place. Was society itself heartless, or did people around me turn heartless just to set me off? Whichever way I turned, there was no one to rely on.

I was in despair. I made no effort to be gracious to guests. When my husband's colleagues came to the house, I didn't show myself unless he ordered me to. Otherwise I had a servant take my place, pleading toothache or headache as my excuse. I dressed as I pleased whether we had company or not, and didn't so much as answer when spoken to. I can't imagine what people must have thought of my behavior. They must have said that I'd be the ruin of the Yamaguchi family, that as a wife I was a complete and utter disgrace.

If my husband had ever mentioned divorce, I'm sure I'd have leaped at the chance for freedom without thinking twice. I'd have shut my eyes to the impropriety of such a thing, deciding that if

Providence decreed such a miserable, mortifying end for me, so be it: I'd become anything, live as I saw fit even if it meant going to the dogs, and consider myself lucky if by some remote chance things turned out well. I shudder to think what might have become of me if I'd acted on such wild notions. How lucky I am that my husband never did divorce me! Of course, for all I know perhaps he was so exasperated with me that he deliberately chose to make me suffer by keeping me confined, rather than granting me easy freedom.

But I have no resentment. I don't feel the slightest bitterness towards my husband, since my present happiness is owing to the difficult time he put me through. The pain of those experiences has enabled me to become a person of greater understanding. With that in mind, I have no reason to bear a grudge against anyone. Even my personal maid Haya, who used to be rattlebrained and quick to advertise my faults, and the cook Katsu, who used to be a sharp-tongued lazybones, can now well be counted among my greatest allies. None but excellent servants like these come to work here anymore. I've even heard people say "No one is so good to servants as the mistress here" — incredible yet gratifying. It's all because I came to see that everyone's uncooperativeness was the reflection of my own attitude. Society has no rogues who go about causing random suffering, nor does God send heartbreak to those who are entirely innocent of wrongdoing. But because I never set out deliberately to do wrong, even someone like me — a person whose home life was built entirely on misapprehension, a troublemaker with nothing to

recommend her — was granted this darling, this beautiful baby boy.

Just before he was born, I was enveloped in a cloud of ill will that lingered on quite a while even afterward. Yet from the moment he uttered his first cries, my heart went out to him. If anyone were to try to take him away now, I'd abandon all pride and wrap my arms around him tightly as if to say "He's mine and I won't let you lay a finger on him!"

It was this child who taught me that my husband and I think alike. I used to squeeze him and say, "You don't belong to Papa, you're all mine. Mama will take you with her wherever she goes and never ever leave you behind. You're mine, all mine!" When I kissed him on the cheek, his face lit up with a smile that made me melt. He smiled so adorably that I was convinced he couldn't possibly belong to a hardhearted beast like my husband; he must be mine alone.

When my husband came home he'd go sit at the baby's bedside with a disconsolate air, clumsily hold up a pinwheel or a rattle, and tell him "You're the only one in this household who's any comfort to me." I'd watch him rub his swarthy cheek against the baby's, certain the little thing would burst into tears or act frightened, but instead, to my surprise his face lit up in a smile, exactly the way it does with me.

One day my husband twirled his mustache and asked me if I thought the baby was sweet. "Naturally," I answered primly. "In that case, you're sweet too!" he said in a joking way, unlike his usual self. When he laughed out loud there was no denying that

the baby's face took after his. Once I saw that, since the baby does mean the world to me, how could I hate my husband? I softened towards him, and he towards me. "Out of the mouths of babes," they say, but the one who taught me a life-changing lesson was an infant too young to speak.

## Lemon

by Kajii Motojiro

Juliet Winters CARPENTER

An indefinable, ominous mass weighed constantly on my mind. It felt something like fretfulness, or aversion. Just as drinking leads to a hangover, so after days of drinking there comes a time of extended hangover in a person's life. The time came, and it was pretty bad. The pulmonary tuberculosis and shattered nerves I ended up with weren't the trouble. My bone-crushing debt wasn't the trouble, either. The trouble was that ominous mass. Every piece of beautiful music, every line of beautiful poetry I had ever loved was now unendurable. I would set out to listen to a phonograph record somewhere, and after the first few bars of music I would want to jump to my feet. Something made me restless. And so I spent my time drifting around the city streets.

I remember that for some reason I was strongly attracted then to things of shabby beauty. In scenery, my taste ran to broken-down neighborhoods. Rather than aloof main streets I preferred the intimacy of back alleys where grubby laundry hung to dry, trash lay scattered on the ground, and here and there a squalid room peered out. The kind of neighborhood that was eroding in the wind and rain and would turn to soil in the end, with crumbling fences and rows of tilting houses. The only vigorous

things there were the plants. Now and again I'd see an amazing burst of sunflowers or canna lilies in bloom.

Sometimes as I walked along such lanes I'd try to create the illusion in my mind that this wasn't Kyoto but Sendai or Nagasaki, or some other city hundreds of miles away. *That's where I am right now, in one of those cities*, I'd tell myself. If I could, I wanted to run away from Kyoto and live where no one knew me. Somewhere tranquil, above all. A spacious, empty room in an inn. Clean bedding. Fresh-smelling mosquito netting and a crisply starched summer kimono. I wanted to lie down in a place like that for a month and not think about anything. Oh, if only my surroundings would just transform themselves without my even noticing! When the illusion finally began to take over, I would paint it with the colors of my imagination. I could easily foist my illusions onto the broken-down neighborhoods around me. And in the process, my actual self slipped pleasantly out of the picture.

I came to love fireworks. The shows were secondary. Bundles of firecrackers painted in garish reds, purples, yellows, blues and all manner of stripes, with names like Falling Stars Over Chusanji Temple, Flower Wars, Withered Pampas Grass. Boxes of round little pinwheels, each one tucked in its place. These things strangely stirred my heart.

And I came to love little discs of colored glass embossed with fish or flowers, and glass beads. Rolling a glass bead around in my mouth was a source of unutterable pleasure. No taste is so faint and cool as the taste of glass. When I was little, my parents

often scolded me for putting glass beads in my mouth. Perhaps because that tender childhood memory revived at a time when I was down-and-out, the beauty of the faint, fresh taste took on a definite tinge of poetry.

You won't be surprised to hear I had no money. Yet when such items touched my heart even slightly, the solace that they offered made them necessary luxuries. They cost only a penny or two, yet they were luxuries. They were beautiful, yet their beauty flirted with my enervated senses. Such items could naturally console me.

Before I was in such straits, among the places I used to love was Maruzen department store. Red and yellow bottles of *eau de cologne* and *eau de quinine*, amber and jade-colored perfume vials of charming cut glass, with raised rococo designs. Pipes and penknives, soap and tobacco. I sometimes spent the better part of an hour examining such things before treating myself to the luxury of a pencil of the finest quality. Now, however, I found Maruzen merely oppressive. The books, the students, the cashiers: they all looked like phantom bill-collectors to me.

One morning — at the time I was staying in various friends' boardinghouses, making the rounds from friend A to friend B and so on — One morning, my host trotted off to school, leaving me all alone in the empty room. Once again I had to get up and wander out. Something drove me on. So I traipsed from street to street, meandering down back alleyways like those I mentioned before, pausing in front of a penny candy store or at a grocer's to look over the dried shrimp, dried cod, and dried beancurd before traveling down Teramachi Street toward Nijo Avenue and coming

to a stop at the greengrocer's.

Let me take a moment to introduce this greengrocer's, which was of all such stores my favorite. Though there was nothing fancy about it, the distinctive beauty of fresh produce was vividly apparent there as nowhere else. Fruits were laid out on a stand that was tilted up at a fairly steep angle — an old wooden board covered in worn black lacquer. The array of fruits suggested nothing so much as a gala and beautiful melody in allegro that had, like people turned to stone by a Gorgon's monstrous visage, hardened somehow into precisely these colors and sizes. There were green vegetables, too, piled higher and higher toward the rear. The lush beauty of the carrot leaves was magnificent. Beans and arrowroot bulbs glistened under water.

This greengrocer's was especially beautiful at night. Teramachi is a busy street — though far more serene than streets you'll find in metropolises like Tokyo or Osaka — and flooded with light from shop windows. Yet somehow, the area around this one shop was mysteriously dark. Since it was situated on the corner of Nijo Avenue the darkness may have been only natural, but that doesn't explain why the neighboring store should have been dark, too, even though it faced on Teramachi. Yet if not for the pervading darkness, I doubt if the greengrocer's would have held such fascination for me. Its awning looked like the visor of a cap drawn low over the eyes — a description that is by no means fanciful; when you saw that awning you wanted to say, "Look, that store is wearing a cap pulled low!" Above the awning it was pitch black. In this blackness, with no competition to dim their

luster, the few light bulbs attached to the storefront gave off a dazzling shower of light that rained freely down on the exquisite fruits and vegetables. Whether I saw this sight standing on the pavement — when the naked bulbs sent out narrow spirals of light that bored into my eyes — or saw it through the second-floor window of a nearby café, nothing else on Teramachi gave me such delight.

On the day in question I chanced to make a purchase there. Something unusual was for sale — lemons. Any of the fancier fruit shops carry them, of course, but that place was, if not exactly shabby, just run-of-the-mill, and I hadn't noticed any there before. And oh how I love lemons! Their pale color, like a gob of lemon yellow pigment squeezed from a painter's tube and left to dry; their shape, like a squat spindle.

In the end I purchased just one. After that, where did my feet take me? For a long time I wandered the streets of Kyoto. I was happy, for the moment I grasped the lemon, the ominous mass that had weighed on me so relentlessly seemed to lighten. Yes, I know, it's ridiculous to think that a single piece of fruit could relieve my persistent depression. Paradoxical this may be, but the truth. How strange are the ways of the mind!

The coolness of the lemon felt indescribably good. The bronchial catarrh I suffered from meant I was always feverish. To show off my fever I would take friends and acquaintances by the hand; my palm was invariably warmer than theirs. Probably that heat explains why holding the lemon, feeling its chill seep through my palm and inside me, was so refreshing.

Time and again I brought the fruit to my nose and sniffed it. Visions of California, where it was supposed to be from, rose in my mind, along with a scrap from something I'd once been assigned to read in school, the Chinese classic *What the Fruit Merchant Said*. The phrase was "assaulting the nose." I found that when I inhaled the lemon fragrance deeply, letting it fill my lungs — never before had I breathed so deeply — I felt a rush of warm blood within me, heating my body and my face as if with a resurgence of health.

Odd now to think that such simple sensations of coolness, texture, scent, and sight should have seemed so perfect that I felt they were just what I'd always been looking for — but at the time, they did.

Buoyed by lilting excitement and even a touch of pride, I continued jauntily on my way, visualizing myself as a tastefully attired poet out for a promenade. As I strolled, I placed the lemon on my dirty handkerchief or held it up against my cloak to take in the contrast of colors.

"So this is the weight of a lemon," I murmured. That weight above all seemed to be the very thing I'd wearily been searching for, the conversion into ounces of all that was good and beautiful in the universe. Carried away with my own drollery, I came up with ridiculous notions like this. In a word, I was happy.

How I got there I cannot say, but eventually I found myself standing in front of Maruzen department store. Although until that moment I'd deliberately avoided the place, I felt that now I could slip easily onto the premises. "Today I'm going in." And in I

boldly stepped.

But to my dismay, the happiness that had swelled my heart now began to subside. The arrays of perfume bottles and pipes did nothing for me. As my depression began to kick in again, I decided I must be tired from all the walking. I headed for the Fine Arts section. How heavy the big books there were, even more so than usual! Yet I pulled them down and opened them listlessly one by one, without the least desire to examine any of them in detail. As if under a spell, I would haul down the next tome, no more interested in it than in any of the others, but unable to stop myself from flipping through the pages; then, quickly wearying, I'd set the book down without the strength to return it to the shelf. I repeated this sequence of actions over and over again. Finally I selected an orange-colored book on the works of Ingres — normally one of my favorites — only to lay it down immediately, unable to bear the sight of it. Ah, what curse had fallen over me! My arm muscles ached with lingering fatigue as, sunk in depression, I surveyed the scene.

What had happened to the art books that once entranced me so? After feasting on their pages I used to glance around this all-too humdrum interior with an agreeable sense of distance. And then with a jolt I remembered it: the lemon tucked in my kimono sleeve. An idea came to me. What if I heaped up the colors of the books helter-skelter and topped them off with the lemon? “That’s it!”

The airy excitement I'd felt earlier came back. I grabbed books randomly and piled them up, then hastily tore down the edifice

and started over in a flurry. I pulled down new volumes and added them, removing others. A weirdly beautiful castle of dreams took shape, now red, now blue.

At last it was finished. Restraining the flutters of joy in my heart, I gingerly set the lemon on the castle tower's peak. And it was brilliant.

I looked over my creation. The lemon pigment silently absorbed the harmonious jangle of hues, absorbing them into its spindle shape and presiding over them, crystalline and serene. Here alone the mote-filled air of Maruzen seemed oddly charged with electricity. I stood for a while and gazed at the tower.

Out of nowhere a second idea popped into my head. The peculiar daring of the plan left me shaken: I would leave everything as it was and walk outside, pokerfaced.

I felt strangely ticklish. "Maybe I *will* leave. Okay, here I go." And out I briskly stepped.

On the street, the strangely ticklish sensation curved my mouth in a smile. I was a weird desperado who had planted a deadly bomb of gleaming gold on a shelf in Maruzen, and in ten minutes' time an explosion would rip through the building, centered on the Fine Arts section — how exciting if that were true!

Eagerly I pursued the fantasy. "And then that stuffy Maruzen will be blown to smithereens."

After that I walked on down to the Kyogoku area, where motion picture billboards colored the streets with bizarre charm.