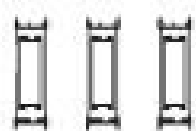


T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

THE WOMEN

A NOVEL



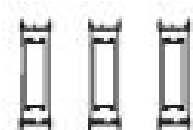
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GREASY LAKE ■ DESCENT OF MAN

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T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE  
THE WOMEN

A NOVEL  
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*For Karen Kvashay*

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The following is a fictional re-creation of certain events in the lives of Frank Lloyd Wright, his three wives—Catherine Tobin, Maude Miriam Noel and Olgivanna Lazovich Milanoff—and his mistress Mamah Borthwick Cheney. While actual events and historical personages are depicted here, all situations and dialogue are invented, except where direct quotes have been extracted from newspaper accounts of the period. I am deeply indebted to Frank Lloyd Wright's many biographers and memoirists, especially Meryle Secrest, Bren-dan Gill, Robert C. Twombly, Finis Farr, Edgar Tafel, Julia Meech, Anthony Alofsin, John Lloyd Wright and Ada Louise Huxtable, and I would like to thank Keiran Murphy and Craig Jacobsen, of Taliesin Preservation, Inc., for their assistance, and Charles and Minerva Montooth and Sarah Logue for their kindness and hospitality.

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*Early in life I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility; I chose arrogance.*

*—FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT*

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# PART I

## OLGIVANNA

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## INTRODUCTION TO PART I

I didn't know much about automobiles at the time—still don't, for that matter—but it was an automobile that took me to Taliesin in the fall of 1932, through a country alternately fortified with trees and rolled out like a carpet to the back wall of its barns, hayricks and farmhouses, through towns with names like Black Earth, Mazomanie and Coon Rock, where no one in living memory had even seen a Japanese face. Or a Chinese either. Stop for fuel, a sandwich, a chance to use the washroom and you'd think a man had come down from Mars and propped himself up on the seat of a perfectly ordinary canary-yellow and pit-of-hell-black Stutz Bearcat roadster. (And what is a bearcat, anyway? Some hybrid monster out of an adman's inventory, I suppose, a thing to roar and paw and dig at the roadway, and so this one did, as advertised.) Mostly, along that route on a day too hot for October, and too still, too clear, as if the season would never change, people just stared till they caught themselves and looked away as if what they'd seen hadn't registered, not even as a fleeting image on the retina, but one man—and I won't take him to task here because he didn't know any better and I was used to it by then—responded to my request for a hamburger sandwich by dropping his jaw a foot and a half and exclaiming, "Well, Jesus H. Christ, you're a Chinaman, ain't ya?"

The whole business was complicated by the fact that the ragtop didn't seem to want to go up, so that my face was exposed not only to the glare of the sun and a withering cannonade of dust, chicken feathers and pulverized dung, but to the stares of every stolid Wisconsinite I passed along the way. The ruts were maddening, the potholes sinks of discolored water that seemed to shoot up like geysers every fifty feet. And the insects: I'd never in my life seen so many insects, as if spontaneous generation were a fact and the earth gave them up like grains of pollen, infinite as sand, as dust. They exploded across the windscreen in bright goutts of filament and fluid till I could barely make out the road through the wreckage. And everywhere the lurching farm dogs, errant geese, disoriented hogs and suicidal cows, one obstacle after another looming up in my field of vision till I began to freeze at every curve and junction. I must have passed a hundred farm wagons. A thousand fields. Trees beyond counting. I clung to the wheel and gritted my teeth.

Three days earlier I'd celebrated my twenty-fifth birthday—alone, on the overnight train from Grand Central to Chicago's Union Station, a commemorative telegram from my father in my suitcase alongside my finger-worn copies of the *Wendingen* edition and the Wasmuth portfolio and several new articles of clothing I felt I might find useful in the hinterlands, denim trousers and casual shirts and the like. I never did bother to unpack them. To my mind, this expedition was a ritual undertaking calling for formal dress and conventional behavior, despite the rigors of the road and what I can only call the derangement of the countryside. My hair, combed and re-combed repeatedly against the buffeting of the wind, was a slick brilliantined marvel of study and composition, and I was dressed in my best suit, a new collar and a tie I'd selected especially for the occasion. And while I hadn't opted for the goggles or cap, I did stop in at Marshall Field's for a pair of driving gloves (dove-gray, in kid leather) and a white silk scarf I envisioned fluttering jauntily in the wind but which in fact knotted itself in a sweaty chokehold at my throat before I'd gone ten miles.

I kept my spine rigid and held to the wheel with one hand and the mysterious gearshift with the other, just as the helpful and courteous man at the automobile agency had demonstrated the previous

night in Chicago when I'd purchased the car. It was a 1924 model, used but "very sporty," as he assured me—"in terrific condition, first-rate, really first-rate"—and I paid for it with a check drawn on the account my father had set up for me when I'd disembarked at San Francisco four years earlier (and to which, generously and indulgently, he continued to add on the first of each month).

I have to admit I liked the looks of it as it sat there at the curb, motion arrested, power in reserve, all of that, though I wondered what my father would have thought of it. Inevitably it brought to mind loose women and undergraduates in raccoon coats—or worse yet, gangsters—but the other cars looked ordinary beside it. Funereal, even. There was one black Durant that should have had a mortuary sign on the window, and there must have been a dozen or more Fords sitting there looking as dull as dishwater in the faded paint Henry Ford had dubbed Japan black (and I can't imagine why, unless he was thinking of ink sticks and *kanji*, but then how would he or any of his designers in the remote xenophobic purlieus of Detroit know anything of *kanji*?).

There didn't seem to be any bullet holes in the fenders, not as far as I could see, and the engine sputtered and roared in a gratifying way. I climbed in, took a turn or two around the block, the salesman at my side shouting out directions, admonitions and beginner's praise, and then I was on my own, creeping out of town as the ratcheting high-crowned Fords and Chevrolets came roaring at me or shot up to overtake me from behind. I didn't give them a second glance, even when my fellow drivers crowded me with derision and made rude gestures out the streaming windows. No, I was too busy, gearshift, clutch, brake and accelerator requiring my full and very close attention. (In theory, piloting a car was nothing at all, a mere reflex—anybody could do it, even women—but in practice it was like plunging into a superheated public bath over and over again.)

As for the countryside, the closest I'd come to a rural setting was at Harvard University, where my dormitory room looked out on well-kept lawns, shrubbery and the deep continents of shade cast by the oaks and elms that had brooded over the heads of generations before me. I'd never been to a farm, even to visit, and I found my meat and eggs in the market like anyone else. No, I was a thorough urban being, raised in a series of apartments in the Akasaka district of Tokyo and in Washington, D.C. where for six years my father was cultural attaché at the Japanese embassy. Sidewalks appealed to me. Paved avenues. Streetlights and shops and restaurants where you could find a French maitre d' and perhaps even a chef who was familiar with béchamel and sauce béarnaise instead of the ubiquitous brown gravy and mashed potatoes. I traveled by train, streetcar and hackney cab like anyone else and the only animals I saw with any frequency were pigeons. And dogs. On the leash.

And yet here I was, fighting the gearshift and the clutch that was so stiff it all but dislocated my kneecap every time I disengaged it, weaving down a godforsaken unpaved lane in the hinterlands of Wisconsin, immured in an ever-deepening layer of dust and insect parts, frustrated, angry, lost. But not simply lost: irretrievably lost. I'd seen the same farmhouse three times now and counting, the same staved-in wagon with the weeds growing through the spokes of its rusted wheels, the same wedge-faced cows in the same field, gazing at me out of the maddening nullity of their bovine eyes, and I didn't know what to do. Somehow I'd fallen into the trance of the roadway, my limbs working automatically, my brain shut down, and all I could do was turn left and then right and left again till the familiar barn loomed up in front of me and I found myself creeping past it yet again in my growling sleek road machine that had become my purgatory and my prison.

As it happened, I was in possession of a hand-drawn map sent me by one Karl Jensen, secretary of the Taliesin Fellowship, of which I was a new—and charter—member, but it showed a purported road

along a purported river that didn't seem to exist. I was wondering where I'd gone wrong, the persistent whine of the engine sending up sympathetic vibrations in my head, when on what must have been my fourth pass, the scene suddenly shifted: there was the barn, there the wagon, there the cows, but now something new had entered the picture. A stout woman in a plain gray shift and apron was stationed by the side of the road, a brindled dog and two small boys at her side. When I came within sight she began windmilling her arms as if we were at sea and she'd fallen over the rail and into the green grip of the tailing waves, and before I could think I was jerking at the gearshift and riding the brake until the car came to a lurching halt some twenty feet beyond her. She waited a moment till the dust had cleared, then came up the side of the road wearing a stoic expression, the boys (they must have been seven or eight, somewhere in that range) dancing on ahead of her while the dog yapped at their heels.

"Hello!" she called out in a breathless delicate voice. "Hello!"

She was at the side of the car now, the boys shying away at the last minute to poise waist-deep in the roadside vegetation and peer up uncertainly at me. I was conscious of the distance between us, the high-flown seat of my Stutz automobile and the prodigious running slope of its fenders. Tall weeds, flecked here and there with the rust of the season, crowded the roadway, which wasn't much wider than a cart-path in any case. One of the boys reached down for a stem of grass and inserted it between his front teeth. I couldn't think of what to say.

I watched her expression as she took me in, two pale Hibernian eyes measuring my face, my clothes, the splendor of the automobile. "Are you looking for something?" she asked, but plunged right on without waiting for the answer. "Because you been up this road four times now. Are you lost"—and here she registered the truth of what her eyes had been telling her all along: that is, that I was foreign, and worse, an exotic—"or something?"

"Yes," I said, trying for a smile. "I seem to have—got myself in a bind here. I'm looking for Taliesin?" I made a question of it, though I didn't realize at the time that I was mispronouncing the name, since I'd never heard it spoken aloud. I suppose I must have given it a Japanese emphasis—*Tā-yay-seen* rather than the more mellifluous *Tal-ee-éssin*, because she just stared blankly at me. I repeated myself twice more before one of the boys spoke up: "I think he means Taliesin, Ma."

"Taliesin?" she repeated, and her features contracted round the sourness of the proper noun. "What would you want to go there for?" she asked, her voice rising to a kind of suppressed yelp on the final (superfluous) syllable, but even as she asked, the answer was settling into her eyes. Whatever the association was, it wasn't pleasant.

"I have a, uh"—the car shuddered and belched beneath me—"an appointment."

"Who with?"

The words were out of my mouth before I knew what I was saying: "Wrieto-San."

The narrowed eyes, the mouth gone rancid all over again, the dog panting, the boys gaping, insects everywhere: "*Who?*"

"Mr. Lloyd Wright," I said. "The architect. Builder of"—I'd pored over the Wasmuth portfolio till the pages were frayed and I knew every one of his houses by heart, but all I could think of in that extremity was the pride of Tokyo—"the Imperial Hotel."

No impression, nothing. I began to feel irritated. My English was perfectly intelligible—and I had



sufficient command of it even to pronounce with little effort that knelling consonant that gave my countrymen so much trouble on the palate. “Mr. Lloyd Wright,” I repeated, giving careful emphasis to the double *L*.

And now it was my turn for a moment of extended observation: Who was this woman? The farmwife with the unkempt boys and outsized bosom and the chins encapsulating one another like the rings of a tree? Who was she to question me? I didn’t know, not at the time, but I suspected she had never heard of the Imperial Hotel or the unearthly beauty of its design and the revolutionary engineering that enabled it to survive the worst seismic catastrophe in our history with nothing more than cosmetic repairs—for that matter, I suspected she’d never heard of my country either, or of the vast seething cauldron of the Pacific Ocean that lay between there and here. But she knew the name Lloyd Wright. It exploded like an artillery shell in the depths of her eyes, drew her mouth down till it was closed up like a lockbox.

“I can’t help you,” she said, lifting one hand and dropping it again, and then she turned away and started back down the road. For a moment the boys lingered, awed by the miraculous vision of the gleaming sporty first-rate yellow-and-black automobile drawn up there on the verge of their county lane and the exotic in command of it, but then they slouched their shoulders and drifted along in her wake. I was left with the insects, the weeds and the dog, which squatted briefly in the dirt to dig at a flea behind one ear before trotting off after them.

As it turned out, I did ultimately find the road to Taliesin, whatever the symbolism of that might imply or portend—if I hadn’t, there wouldn’t be much point in putting any of this down on paper. At any rate, I sat there a moment, dumbfounded by the kind of show of indifference that might have been usual here but would have been unheard of in my country—*Americans*, I muttered, and I couldn’t help thinking of my father, an inveterate rumbler and declaimer whose mounting frustrations during his Washington years seemed almost to have buried him—then jerked my hand to the gearshift and reversed direction. The farmhouse passed by on my left this time and before long I was taking a series of random turns until I found myself discovering new barns, new lanes and new ruts until finally—*mirabile dictu*—the purported river came into existence and the road along with it. I felt my spirits soar. Things were looking up.

*Any minute now*, I kept telling myself, *any minute*, but then, in the midst of my mounting joy, my insecurities began to take hold. I had no idea what to expect. While I was confident in my education at this point—after a full course of study at Tokyo Imperial University, I came first to Harvard and then to M.I.T. for advanced work because I wanted a modern outlook on architecture, a *Western* outlook, and I was willing to work all day and lucubrate till dawn to get it—I was coming to Taliesin on impulse. My life was as simple as this: one afternoon the previous spring I’d been trudging down the hall of the architecture building with a ziggurat of books under one arm and my case of drafting tools in the other, feeling out of sorts and depressed (what the popular musicians call “blue,” the true hue of anomie and hopelessness, my inamorata having left me for a Caucasian who played trombone, the most phallic of instruments, my studies repetitive and insipid and as antiquated as the Ionic column and plinth on which they were founded) when I took a bleary, world-weary moment to stand before the notice board outside the dean’s office.

An announcement caught my eye. It was exquisitely printed on creamy dense high-fiber paper and

announced the founding of the Taliesin Fellowship under the auspices of Frank Lloyd Wright at his home and studio in Wisconsin, tuition of \$675 to include room and board and an association with the Master himself. I went directly back to my room and drafted a letter of application. Five days later Wrieto-San personally wired back to say that I was accepted and that he awaited the arrival of my check.

And so here I was, at the moment of truth. At the crossroads, as it were, and could anyone blame me for being more than a little anxious? I felt like a freshman coming to campus for the first time wondering where he was going to sleep, what he would eat, how his coevals would view him and whether he'd experience the grace of acceptance and success or sink into disgrace and failure. Unconsciously, I began to increase my speed, the wind seizing my hair, the scarf slapping at my shoulders like a wet towel ripped down the middle, and I can only think it was providence that kept the loping dogs and blundering cows and all the rest off the road and out of the way on that final stretch to Taliesin.

The river ran on and the road with it. Five minutes passed, ten. I was impatient, angry with myself, anxious and queasy all at once—and where was it, where was this architectural marvel I knew only from the pages of a book, this miracle of rare device, the solid heaven where I'd be living for the next year and quite possibly more? Where? I was cursing aloud, the engine racing, the vegetation falling back along the sides of the road as if beaten with an invisible flail, and yet I saw nothing but more of the same. Fields and more fields, stands of corn, hills rising and dipping all the long way through whatever valley I was in, barns, eternal barns—and then, suddenly, there it was. I looked up and materialized like one of the hidden temples of *The Genji Monogatari*, like a trompe l'oeil, the shape you can't see until you've seen it. Or no, it didn't appear so much as it unfolded itself from the hills before me and then closed up and unfolded and closed up again.

Was I going too fast? Yes. Yes, I was. And in applying the brake I somehow neglected the clutch—and the wheel, which seemed to come to life all on its own—and my Bearcat gave an expiring yell and skewed across the road in a tornado of dust and flying litter, where it stalled facing in the wrong direction.

No matter. There was the house itself, an enormous rambling place spread wide and low across the hill before me, struck gold under the afternoon sun, a phoenix of a house, built in 1911 and burned three years later, built again and burned again, only to rise from the ashes in all its golden glory. I couldn't help thinking of Schelling's trope, great architecture existing like frozen music, like music in space, because this was it exactly, and this was no mere chamber piece, but a symphony with a hundred-voice chorus, the house of Wrieto-San, his home and his refuge. To which I was invited as apprentice to the Master. All right. I slapped the dust from my jacket, worked a comb through my hair, and tried above all to *get a grip*. Then I started up the car and drove off in search of the entrance.

It wasn't as easy as all that. For one thing, in all this hodgepodge of roads and cart-paths I couldn't determine which one led into the estate, and once I did find what I took to be the right road, winding through the muddy chasm of a hog farm, I was arrested by the proliferation of signs warning against trespass. These could hardly apply to me, I reasoned, and yet an innate uncertainty—shyness, if you will, or call it an inborn cultural reverence for the rules and norms of society—held me back. The automobile shivered in the mud. I jerked the gearshift to the neutral position and stared for a long moment at the nearest sign. Its meaning was quite plain—incontrovertible, in fact. NO, it read. TRESPASSING.

It was just then that I became aware of a figure observing me from behind the slats of a wooden fence on my left periphery. A farmer, as I took it, in spattered overalls and besmeared boots. He was standing ankle-deep in the ordure of the hog yard—right in the heart of it—the very animals nosing around him and giving rise to one of the rawest and most unpleasant odors I'd ever encountered. I watched him watching me for a moment—he was grinning now, something sardonic and judgmental settling into his eyes—and then I raised my voice to be heard over the engine and the guttural vocalizations of the animals. “I wonder if you might—” I began, but he cut me off with a sharp, stabbing laugh. “Oh, go on ahead,” he said, “—he don't care for nothing like that. That's just for tourists.” He gave me a long bemused look. “You ain't a tourist, are ya?”

I shook my head no and then, thanking him with an abbreviated bow, I found the lowest gear and started up the hill, which seemed, unfortunately, to grow ever steeper even as the limestone walls and terraces and broad-hipped roofs of the house drew closer. But there was gravel under the wheels now and the prodigious Bearcat seized it, the wheels churning and the engine screeching like a mythical beast beating its wings and belching fire. Up I went, up and up—till the gravel suddenly deepened into a kind of lithic sludge and the wheels vacillated and then grabbed with a vicious spewing of rock and I thought to apply the brake just as I crested the hill and nosed up to the bumper of the car parked there. I was lit up with excitement, trembling with the exertion, the tension, the glory of it all. So what if I had mistakenly come up the back road, used only by the tractor and the dray horses? So what if I'd come within an ace of hurtling into the rear bumper of Wrieto-San's Cord Phaeton, the swiftest and most majestic automobile manufactured anywhere on this earth? I was here. I was home.

My first impressions? Of peace, of beauty abounding, of an old-world graciousness and elegance in every line. And there was something more too: a deep-dwelling spiritual presence that seemed to emanate from the earth itself, as if this were a holy place, a shrine where the autochthonous tribes had gathered to worship in a time before Wrieto-San's ancestors, the Lloyd Joneses, had come over from Wales, a time before Columbus, a time when Edo was cut off from the world. I felt as if I'd entered one of the temples of Kyoto—Nanzenji, or better yet, Kinkakuji, its gold leaf harboring the light. All my anxieties dissolved. I felt calm, instantly calm.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. The sun hung above the treetops like a charm on an invisible string. I cut the engine and all the birds in the world began to sing in unison. Almost immediately the exhaust dissipated and I became aware of the lightness and purity of the air. It was scented with clover, pine, the chlorophyll of new-mown grass and the faintest trace of woodsmoke—and food, the smell of cookery that reminded me I hadn't eaten since that ill-fated hamburger sandwich. I took a moment to breathe in deeply, considered lighting a cigarette and then thought better of it. Taliesin awaited me.

I was just stepping out of the car, pulling off my (sweat-soaked) gloves preparatory to unknitting the scarf, when a figure emerged from one of the garage stalls in the courtyard just beyond the coruscating hood of the Cord. It took me a moment—my eyesight was far superior at a narrow range, the range of the drafting table, that is, than it was at a distance—before I realized, my pulse pounding all over again, that I was in the presence of the Master himself.

I bowed. Deeply. As deeply as I'd ever bowed to anyone in my life, even my reverend grandfather and the regent of Tokyo Imperial University.

He returned my bow with one of his own—abbreviated, a bow of the head and shoulders only,

befitted his position in respect to my own. At the same time he surprised me by offering a greeting in Japanese. “*Konnichi wa,*” he said, leveling his eyes on me.

---

“*Hajimemashite,*” I replied, bowing a second time.

Wrieto-San was then sixty-five, though he admitted to sixty-three and looked and acted like a man ten or even fifteen years younger. In his autobiography, which had been published to great acclaim that year, he claimed to be five feet eight inches tall, but he was considerably shorter than that (I stand five feet seven and over the course of the ensuing weeks had the opportunity on a number of occasions to compare height casually with him and I certainly must have had at least an inch on him, perhaps two). He was dressed like an aesthete heading to an art exhibition: beret, cape, high-collared shirt, woolen puttees and the Malacca cane he affected both for elegance and authority. His hair, a weave of thunderhead and cumulus, trailed over his collar.

“*Ogenki desu-ka?*” he asked. (How are you?)

“*Genki desu,*” I replied. “*Anata wa?*” (I’m fine. And you?)

“*Watashi-mo genki desu.*” (I’m fine too.)

This seemed to have exhausted his Japanese, because he leaned in against the hood of the Corvair seeking the light as if to get a better perspective on me, and switched to English. “And you are?”

I bowed again, as deeply as I could. “Sato Tadashi.”

“Tadashi? I knew a Tadashi in Tokyo—Tadashi Ito, one of Baron Ōkura’s group.” He gave me an appraising look, taking in the sheen of my shoes, the crease of my trousers, my collar and tie. “Your name means ‘correct, ’ yes?”

I bowed in acknowledgment.

“And do you suit your name? Are you correct, Tadashi?”

I told him I was—“at least at the drafting board”—and he let out a laugh. He was a great one for laughing, Wrieto-San, a repository of playfulness and merriment and a natural soothing charm that only underscored the magnetism of his genius. And, of course, he was famous for his acerbity too, his moods and his temper, especially if he felt he wasn’t getting the respect—adulation, worship even—he felt he deserved.

“And proper too?”

Another bow.

He was grinning now, his whole face transformed. “Well, I tell you, Tadashi, I have to say this is one of the features I like best about your people,” he said, straightening up and dancing a little circle round me on the paving stones—he could never remain static for long, his enthusiasm inexhaustible, his energy volcanic. “The following of the norms and strictures. I can be like that too,” he said, and he gave a wink to preface the sequel, “but I hope you won’t be shocked, Sato-San, if I’m *improper* more than I am proper. Wouldn’t want to pin a man down, would you? Shackle him with convention?”

I didn’t know where the conversation had sailed off to, but I understood that this was a form of banter and that the only answer necessary was a soft murmured, “No.”

“But you’re the one from Harvard, via the Institute of Technology, isn’t that right?”

“Yes.”>

“My observation”—he was forever making pronouncements, as I would come to learn, and he made this one before—“is that Harvard takes perfectly good plums as students and makes prunes of them.”

His tone indicated that laughter was called for and so I laughed and told him that he was right. Knowing how deeply he’d been influenced by the architecture of my nation, by the simplicity and cleanness of line of our homes and temples, I bowed again and said, “I simply could not go back to Japan with the sort of classical and ornamental education I was getting at the university . . .”

“So you came to me.”

“I wanted a hands-on approach, organic architecture, the use of native materials and the design of buildings that complement rather than dominate nature, all of this, all you’ve pioneered, in the Robb house, the Darwin Martin, the, the Willits and—”

His expression—and I mean no disrespect at the comparison—was like the drawing-down of a lapdog’s features when it’s rolled over and stroked. He looked gratified—I’d said the right thing, precisely the right thing—and he was inwardly complimenting himself on his choice of Sato-San as pupil. “Good,” he said, holding up a hand to forestall me. “Excellent. But I warn you, I am no teacher and there will be no instruction here. The Fellowship, as I see it, will offer you an opportunity to work at my disposal, for my purposes, in all phases of supporting my enterprise as a working architect. You do understand that, don’t you?”

I said that I did.

“All right, fine. You’ll start in the kitchen. Mrs. Wright tells me we need an extra hand there.” A bell had begun to ring—it was, as I’d soon learn, a Chinese artifact he’d brought back with him from one of his far-eastern excursions and it tolled every day at four so that the Fellowship could gather outdoors in the tea circle for afternoon refreshment. He’d already turned and started off in the direction of the sound, when he swung back round on me. “And this car, Tadashi—is it yours?”

“Yes, Wrieto-San.”

We both looked to the Bearcat crouched there behind the Cord, its fenders flaring and canary hood aglow despite the layer of dust. Wrieto-San’s expression had become sober, judgmental, the sort of look he adopted for discussions of all pecuniary matters, which, sad to say, were at the very heart of his life. To think that a man of his stature—not to mention age, wisdom and genius—should have to scramble continually to make ends meet, struck me then as unconscionable, as it does now, all these years later. And yes, I’d heard the rumors—that he was broke, pitifully few commissions coming in as a result of his misadventures and the scandals that had dogged him through the course of the past twenty years, the Depression drying up the pool of potential clients, his work considered derrières en garde in the face of changing fashion, the Fellowship simply a way of milking money out of those gullible enough to think his aura could communicate anything bankable to them—but still I was shocked to discover how much of the man was involved in simply keeping things afloat. He was tightfisted, no other way to say it. Maybe even something of a confidence man. And what did they call him in Spring Green, the nearest town? *Slow-Pay Frank*.

“Isn’t it a bit extravagant?” he wondered aloud. “That is, wouldn’t it have been wiser, all the way around, if you’d put your money into the Fellowship? This tuition—it can hardly cover room and

board, let alone all the other benefits you'll see here—and I've kept it artificially low in order to get things started, given the difficult times. But really, Tadashi, this is . . . *excessive*.”

It wasn't for me to point out the discrepancy here. Though I will say privately that the Cord must have cost many times what I'd paid—or rather my father had paid—for the Bearcat, which was, admit, something of an indulgence. But then I liked fine things too—and I'd never before owned an automobile. What I said, however—with a bow—was that the car wasn't what it appeared to be.

“It's a Stutz, isn't it?” he asked, narrowing his eyes.

“*Hai*, Wrieto-San. It is. But this is an old car, eight years old. Used. I bought it used. Yesterday. In Chicago.” I attempted a smile, though frankly my mood was in decline. “So that I could be here promptly to join the Fellowship and work under your guidance and direction.”

He seemed to consider this a moment. “All right,” he said finally. “Fine. But don't expect instruction from me. I am not a pedagogue, not by any means. Remember that.” The bell rang once more. Several small birds—swallows, swifts?—darted out from under the eaves and shot across the courtyard. Wrieto-San turned to go, but caught himself. He gave me another long look. “You don't cook,” he said, “don't you?”

In fact, I didn't cook. Or I cooked in the way any bachelor in any society cooks: minimally. The boiled egg. Beefsteak flipped twice in the pan. Frankfurter on a bun. None of this mattered, however, because my kitchen apprenticeship would consist entirely in chopping cabbage, husking corn and peeling the potatoes the other apprentices had dug out of the manure-enriched earth. The cooks, in fact, were two women of the community, the sisters of one of the workmen Wrieto-San had hired to renovate the Hillside Home School (formerly a progressive boarding school run by Wrieto-San's spinster aunts) which stood on the far southwestern verge of the Taliesin property and was meant to house a portion of the Fellowship, and they had their own view of the Master, a view considerably less awestruck than my own. In any case, on that first evening, as I stood there watching Wrieto-San's squared-shoulders recede in the distance while he strode briskly away, the cane in constant motion—jumping right and left, twirling in the air like a magician's wand—I didn't have time to reflect on my status. At that moment an absurdly tall and powerfully built young man appeared out of nowhere, flinging himself over the near parapet like an acrobat and striding up to me with his right hand outstretched. He was dressed in overalls, work boots, a very casual flannel shirt with rolled-up sleeves. “*Hiya*,” he said, “you must be the new arrival.”

I attempted a bow, but the hand thrust itself at my own for the inevitable handshake, the half-amicable, half-aggressive and thoroughly unsanitary ritual greeting by which the men of this country test and judge one another. His hand enveloped mine—a rough hand, callused and work-hardened—and I tried to exert an equal pressure as we held to each other, sending my message through the flesh as he was sending his. His message was that he held no prejudices though he was nine inches taller than I and outweighed me by a good seventy-five pounds and had been raised in a place where a Japanese face was as rare as an Eskimo's or a Bantu's, and my message was that I was the equal of anyone and prepared for anything the Master might require of me—including kitchen duty.

“Wes Peters,” he said, giving one last crushing squeeze (which I resisted with my own negligible insignificant pressure), before dropping my hand by way of completing the ceremony. “And you are Sato, right?”

I bowed in acknowledgment, but this was an abbreviated bow, a bow reserved for equals. “Call me

Tadashi,” I said.

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“Right,” he said, “Tadashi. Glad to meet you. And welcome.”

“You’re one of the apprentices, I presume?”

“Yes,” he said, and he was grinning now. “Our ranks are growing by the day. Mr. Wright says there’ll be thirty of us eventually. A whole squad. Including women. Five of them. From Vassar.”

I didn’t know what to say to this—was thirty a large number? Or small? How much work could there be? I’d envisioned myself laboring side by side with Wrieto-San on drawings of significant plans for great edifices like Unity Temple, the Fukuhara house or the Larkin Administration Building, my pencil under command of his. And women. I hadn’t expected women, not in an architectural enterprise. Distracted, I murmured, “Good. That sounds good.” Or perhaps I said, “Capital.”

I’d been drawing since childhood, and where my fellow students at the Yasinori Academy might have sketched biplanes or automobiles, I created a private world for myself, doing perspective drawings of invented cities and then peopling them with fully fleshed figures striding down spacious boulevards on their way to the country houses I created for them, replete with sketches, floor plans and elevations. (Floor plans held a special fascination for me because I could so easily manipulate them to the greater good and insurmountable happiness of these blithely striding people for whom I devise names and occupations and emotional histories, pulling a wall back here for the billiard room or a sweets room there or a boy’s bedroom with a three-tiered bunk bed, ten-gallon hats and mounted bison heads on the walls and a private chute to the street below.) It seemed I always had a pencil in my hand, doodling, sketching, shading and coloring. I’d sometimes sit for hours dreaming over a sheet of paper till I saw things there no one else could see, compass, protractor and straight edge guiding my knees knocking beneath the table in sheer excitement, my whole being groping for coherence. It was incantatory, a form of magic, an electric current running from brain to hand to pencil till the page came to life.

“But listen,” Wes was saying, his eyes jumping from mine to the Bearcat and back again, “I think we’re going to have to miss the tea circle today because we need groceries, I mean, we *really* need groceries, and I was just wondering if you wouldn’t mind . . .” he trailed off. He gave the car a significant look.

It took me a moment—I can be a slow study at times, particularly when I’m fatigued, and I was more than ten minutes out of the car, my bags still in the rumble seat, impressions washing over me like a tsunami—before I understood. “Oh, yes,” I said. “Of course.”

“If you don’t mind,” he repeated in a meliorating tone, the tone of someone who’d got what he wanted, and he was already ambling toward the car with his great scissoring strides even as I fell beside him. “It’s only four miles.”

“Oh, no,” I said, swinging open the door on the driver’s side and peering down the hellish incline of the twisting road and the pig farm in the distance as he squeezed in beside me, “I don’t mind. No, not at all.”

The woman at the grocery gave me—gave *us*—the sort of look the farmwife had impressed on me earlier, the clamped lips and burning eyes, no hint of sympathy or even common humanity, as Wes

called for catsup, coffee, tea, flour, sugar, massive sacks of dried beans and rice and all the other necessities the farm and vegetable gardens at Taliesin were unable to provide. (This look, incidentally, was one I would become inured to in the coming months. It had something to do with my racial difference, of course, but it was leveled almost equally on Wes and Herbert Mohl and just about anyone else associated with Taliesin, and was chiefly due to Wrieto-San's attitude toward paying no account and the reservoir of bad feeling in the immediate environs over his past flings and flirtations and what the deeply conservative local populace considered the immoral way in which he conducted himself. Publicly. Here in the heartland. And he the son and nephew of preachers.) Once Wes had put his signature to the account—the woman livid, overheated, the tendons standing out in her neck, and her eyes flaying the very skin from our bones—we climbed into the Bearcat, our arms laden, and made our way back to Taliesin.

And then I was in the kitchen, peeling onions.

The *chef de cuisine* (Miss Emma Larson, forty-five years old, vigorous and plump, her graying hair bobbed and swept forward in a way that might have been fashionable on a mannequin in a department store window a decade earlier) bent over a blackened cauldron that was vigorously rattling atop the woodstove while her sister Mabel beat eggs with a whisk, and what must have been several pounds of cured meat made the journey from fry pan to platter. After the onions I peeled potatoes, and after the potatoes I peeled carrots. After that I washed dishes, hundreds, thousands of them, for weeks on end. What did I learn from the experience? That Wrieto-San (or Mr. Wright, as everyone, even his enemies among the farmwives and grocers, invariably called him) liked his food plain. He liked whitefish, calf's liver *aux oignons*, stewed vegetables, good honest fried potatoes and berries ripe from the bush and swimming in the cream he was denied as a boy. And I learned that Taliesin was a true and democratic communal undertaking, save for the god in his machine who presided over it all in his freewheeling and unabashedly despotic way, and I saw too that a practicing architect was like the general of an army, like the general of generals, and that a whole host of amenities, civilities and mores had to be sacrificed along the way to the concrete realization of an inchoate design.

He ran our lives, that was the long and short of it. *Daddy Frank*. How many times had I heard our apprentice or another call him that behind his back? *Daddy Frank*, paterfamilias of Taliesin. He stirred the pot continually, interfering in our personal affairs, our amours and disputes and loyalties, even as he squelched our initiative and individualism as fiercely as he'd asserted his own when he was apprentice to Louis Sullivan a generation earlier. Truly, I don't think I'll ever forgive him for coming between me and Daisy Hartnett—or for the loan he inveigled from my father (and, of course, failed to repay).

But I'm not complaining—that's not the purpose of this exercise. Not at all. And I was not of the subset of snickerers and wiseacres who acted as if the Fellowship were some sort of extended summer camp and Wrieto-San an archaic figure out of the dim past, "the greatest living architect of the nineteenth century," as one wag had it. I stayed at Taliesin for nine years, longer than practically any apprentice, if you exclude Herbert Mohl and Wes, who wound up marrying Svetlana, Wrieto-San's stepdaughter, and they marked the defining epoch of a long, fortunate and prosperous life. Nine years I had a nine-year association with greatness, with the man who could sit down and spin out the design for perhaps the single most significant dwelling of the century as if he'd been born with it in his head—I'm talking of Fallingwater here—even as the exasperated client was en route from Milwaukee and expected to pull into the drive at any moment. I witnessed that. I handed him the paper, sharpened the



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