

Friday, 22 October

I reached the University about 11 a.m. I do not normally teach on Fridays but today I was supposed to undergo a 'medical test'. Shortly before I left the house my assistant phoned me: 'I am waiting for you, we will go to the test together, but do not eat anything from now on, particularly sweets'. After a modest breakfast (milk plus cereals) I had no chance of treating myself to a candy bar...

As soon as I arrived, my assistant took me to another building. The big room on the ground floor was divided into several small spaces by means of curtains. Each patient was given a ticket and a questionnaire to be completed. Having coped with formalities I began to follow my 'health path'. First body weight check (!), then blood pressure readings, eye test, ECG, blood sample collection into several test-tubes (the needle mark very professionally treated with a special band for 5 minutes and a mini-dressing, so no scars), then general auscultation, hearing test, some other examinations and finally – a visit to a special bus that brought an X-ray apparatus to the site. Everything took 45 minutes!!! Shocking efficiency! Everybody was smiling, no usual queue-jumping arguments ('I was there before you but just went to a different room for a while'), and no noisy clogs banging on the corridor floor. The test results are due in two weeks' time and shall be delivered to our cabinet lockers, in the form of correspondence.

And so it happened that I had some time for myself that morning. I went to my studio (available to me any time of day) and practiced on one of the fabulous instruments standing in that room. After that I quickly ate my 'packed lunch' and went to the underground station where a friend was waiting for me to spend the afternoon together. First we went to the Tokyo Station - the central city station. When I get off the underground train I am always worried about choosing the right exit, therefore I rarely use the tube on my own. However today I had company, and I also had tickets for the Tokyo Sightseeing Tour, bought online. So we embarked on a double-decker (similar to those one can see in London) and were touring Tokyo for an hour, admiring the Imperial Palace gardens, the new Fuji TV building and a lot of interesting but ugly buildings made of aluminium, concrete and glass. The final moments of the tour we spent in the famous Ginza district (which I am planning to re-visit, perhaps even on my own, as I already know the right exist from the station). Our guide was a charming Japanese woman in a funny little hat. She was speaking only Japanese, so I did not understand a word of what she was saying, but suddenly she started singing some popular song in a characteristic voice, very high and vibrated. Some of the tourists joined in and the atmosphere was nice, despite the wind that was really bothering us, especially on bridges.

After our mini-tour was over we sat down, me and my Teruko, in a café. Mysteriously named A 16, it was situated in a patio surrounded by high buildings. In the patio there were several old trees, a fountain and some small shops with antiques similar to our Desa shops with one interesting difference – almost all the objects had little notes from previous owners attached to their price tags. And the variety of exhibits (I really cannot bring myself to write 'goods') was considerable: from jewellery to incomplete sets of beautiful tableware, some furniture, trays, tablecloths, vases. What immediately caught my attention was a butterfly. It was lying on a

silver tray among other brooches. Its wings were made of fine metal openwork, and instead of its butterfly body it had a figure of a little angel with two coloured stones set in places where angels have wings. Alas, the butterfly did not carry a note from its previous owner; the only thing I learned from the salesman was that it was made 40 years ago by some then-famous artist. So it is going to be the pride of my collection, already including several objects purchased in Japan. The afternoon in the café passed pleasantly; we were chatting about the recently concluded Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, followed with interest by Japanese pianists. In a while we were to move to another district to dine in a fish restaurant chosen by my Japanese friend.

We got off the train at the Ikebukuro station and I even recognized the surroundings, close to the Metropolitan Hall in which I had played many times. The restaurant turned out to be very pleasant. Tables were arranged along the windows, and counter seats along a water pond at the centre of the room. We chose to sit with ‘a view to the sea’: fish were scooped up with nets by the chef to be cooked right away. I left the choice of dishes entirely to Teruko, who already knew my culinary preferences. In a short while, a stream of bowls, plates and platters, with lids or lidless, started arriving ... And on those plates we saw fine decorations made of colourful autumn leaves, pebbles, small pieces of wood, flowers: small works of art which, according to the Japanese, is to appeal to all senses. You are not supposed to eat hastily. First of all, they do not provide cutlery, just chopsticks, so you slow down anyway; secondly, everything looks so interesting that you take your time to look and admire before you start your meal. I even made some pencil sketches of various food arrangements to remember them better. And though I have read many a cookbook in my life, I do not undertake to describe those dishes. Let me just tell you that many types of raw fish were served, ‘Katsu Madai Sogata zukuri’ (which translates into: live, name of fish, figure, creation), in almost transparently thin slices, on chopped ice (neither cubed nor finely crushed, but actually chopped), several fish pates, stuffed persimmons, lots of seaweed and unknown vegetables, fancifully cut, mini-cubes of omelettes, one soup in the middle of the meal and miso soup to complete the meal, accompanied with a bowl of rice plus some typical Japanese marinades. And for the pudding – something sweet and slightly bland, chestnuts or small dumplings, so no second helpings. This evening I took chilled sake with my meal – it goes better with fish. It was served in a clever jug that had a separate container for ice inside, cooling the sake but not diluting it. Our dinner took several hours but I left the restaurant feeling light and conscious of the fact that my meal contained virtually no fat. And all that took place at the TAKEWAKA restaurant, where kimono-clad waitresses taking very small steps waited on us with marvellous politeness.

Saturday, 23 October

A trip to the town centre, the famous Ginza district of Tokyo, to attend a concert at the Chanel salon. I was invited by my student, Rieko. The concert was a success, the audience attentive. The Chanel stylist made my Rieko up so she played and looked beautiful. The programme took an hour, and as the concert was held in the afternoon, I had the evening to myself. I decided to visit my favourite paper store. Everybody knows it! Gentlemen have got their beloved Akihabara, where they can buy latest electronics; they enjoy it for a while and soon a

newer model is launched on the market and their joy is over, leaving them with the question of what to do with the 'obsolete' stuff. On the contrary, my pieces of paper are timeless, they do not become obsolete. I take them out from the drawer from time to time and enjoy looking at them. Sometimes I write something on the beautiful stationery, sometimes I wrap something up in a colourful, velvety sheet. Small pleasures of life ...