Yuko Tsushima

Child of Fortune

PENGUIN JAPANESE CLASSICS

Child of Fortune

Yuko Tsushima was born in Tokyo in 1947, the daughter of the novelist Osamu Dazai, who took his own life when she was a year old. Her prolific literary career began with her first collection of short stories, *Shaniku-sai* (*Carnival*), which she published at the age of twenty-four. She won many awards, including the Izumi Kyoka Prize for Literature (1977), the Kawabata Prize (1983) and the Tanizaki Prize (1998). She died in 2016.

Geraldine Harcourt (1952–2019) was a translator of modern Japanese literature. Born in Auckland, New Zealand, Harcourt lived in Japan for much of her life. There, she developed a close working relationship with Yuko Tsushima and translated five works by the author, including *Territory of Light* and *The Shooting Gallery*.

PENGUIN JAPANESE CLASSICS

Botchan – Natsume Sōseki

The Frolic of the Beasts – Yukio Mishima

Child of Fortune – Yuko Tsushima

The Ark Sakura – Kōbō Abe

Japanese Ghost Stories – Lafcadio Hearn

YUKO TSUSHIMA

Child of Fortune

Translated by Geraldine Harcourt

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN CLASSICS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

Penguin
Random House
UK

First published as *Choji* by Kawade Shobo Shinsha 1978
This translation first published by Kodansha International Ltd, Tokyo, and
Kodansha International/USA Ltd 1983
Published with a revised translation in Penguin Classics 2018
This edition published in Penguin Japanese Classics 2023
001

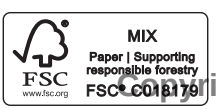
Set in 11.25/14pt Dante MT Std
Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–67527–4

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

‘Hark, my distant, quiet friend, and feel
Your breath still enriching this emptiness.’

Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*

I

. . . Earth's primeval atmosphere was not yet, as it is now, 'homogenized'. It was as though sheets of glass of every shape and size glided there in shifting, grating masses. Some portions were too dense, others rarefied almost to a vacuum. Though frozen in some places, in others it boiled. Under these conditions it was almost impossible to judge the correct form of objects on the planet. What was actually a sphere might appear now as an elongated cone, now a parallelogram, now a rod; it might even be seen to sway limply like a strand of sea grass. Over hundreds of millions of years, however, the air eventually homogenized and these aberrations in the refraction of light disappeared. Only then did creatures with two eyes first walk the Earth . . .

Kōko concocted this explanation herself as, in her dream, she stared intently at a sharply peaked mountain of ice. It was transparent, exactly like an inverted icicle, in brilliant outline against a blue sky. Kōko knew at once what she was seeing: it was like an image mirrored there, and that was why it dazzled so. No, she thought, for all the beauty it has to offer, the primeval atmosphere isn't easy for human beings to bear. Yet she was not in any great pain herself, she was only a little chilly, and her chest felt constricted.

The dream consisted simply of staring at the ice mountain. It had no beginning and no end. When she opened her eyes the

mountain was there, and when she closed them it was gone. Cold and abrupt, it wouldn't allow her emotions free play like any ordinary dream.

The primeval atmosphere, and the fact that this transparent mountain was Mount Fuji: these two things were fixed in the dreamlike chains binding Kōko's body. A flawless Fuji – it had to be so, though its contour was nothing like the real mountain. She was sure the atmosphere accounted for the way it looked; more likely, though, 'Fuji' had been the only name to come to mind when she faced a transparent mountain that had existed since time immemorial. She marveled: there really was no denying Mount Fuji's beauty. Her body didn't move; she didn't even feel like moving. Her ears were numbed by the enveloping stillness, a silence clearer than human senses had ever known: Kōko perceived it as cold.

It was Saturday morning. Saturday was the day her daughter Kayako came to stay. Kōko dressed quickly, still turning the brief dream over in her mind.

When she opened the heavy metal door, the milk carton on the step caught her eye. It was marked with the English word 'Homogenized'. The dream had lacked the special texture of a nightmare and yet now that she was awake it left her very uneasy. The uneasiness receded in the crisp morning air, to leave her feeling vaguely unsatisfied.

On Saturday afternoons, after school was out, Kōko had to hear piano lessons, five very young pupils at a time for an hour each. She would work her way along the row of five rooms, listening to their Hanon, their Bach, their Burgmüller, with a word of advice for each one – lower your wrists, your left hand is too heavy, keep the tempo slow – until she could no longer tell the tunes apart. Wearily she would motion a child aside, play the set piece herself, and send the children home with instructions to practice the same thing for next week. They

were happy to go. Not one of her pupils liked the piano; in fact even those who'd enjoyed it at first came to hate it after a few sessions. This system is just too awful, Kōko often thought. But I'd never pass for a teacher otherwise. And she would avert her eyes from the children. In any case it wasn't doing them positive harm. Still, in spite of herself, she would find them gradually setting her nerves on edge. Why does that boy make such a performance of yawning? Why does that girl have such stiff fingers? They're like sticks. Could she be playing volleyball at school?

That day she allowed just one to advance to a new piece. For a change she selected one of Mendelssohn's 'Songs Without Words'.

– That's not what I call a real job – Kōko's older sister had said to Kayako. – It's only part-time. What makes her think she can support herself and a daughter on her pay? If anything goes wrong she'll turn to us in the end. Which means in fact that she's relying on us all along. Of course she has to, she couldn't expect to make ends meet otherwise, so she should stop being so stubborn and simply come and live here. We'd be delighted to have her. She is my only sister, after all. Really, for someone who's thirty-seven she has less sense than you, Kaya dear. –

– That's what Auntie said – Kayako had reported to Kōko.

– I'm only thirty-six – Kōko had protested with a laugh. – And I'm getting along just fine as I am. She's always been a worrier. –

Admittedly, though, what she was doing was a bit of a fraud. She'd long since dropped her own piano studies, and though there was a piano in her apartment it was a while since she'd even lifted the lid. Her sister Shōko had always been the better pianist; no wonder she was worried. And yet Kōko couldn't bring herself to abandon something that she had carried on so far.

After their mother's death, two years earlier, Kōko had taken the advice of her sister's husband – who was a lawyer – and used

her inheritance to buy the apartment she now lived in. That was enough for her. But her sister seemed troubled because the apartment had cost less than Kōko was entitled to receive, and since then she had tried to do various favors for Kōko by way of her daughter: Kayako's clothes; sets of junior classics; a microscope. She arranged for Kayako to have piano lessons together with her own daughter, and she took her to concerts.

Had all this appealed to Kayako? At New Year she had simply moved in – alone – with Kōko's sister and begun going to school from there. She explained that she wanted to concentrate on a last burst of study before the junior high-school entrance exams, which were only days away now, in February. – At Auntie's they don't make the children do all the stuff you make me do, Mom. When I told them how I clear up after dinner, and wash and iron my own things, and even sew on buttons, they were sorry for me. I was so embarrassed. –

Kayako had long been against going to a municipal junior high, but when Kōko asked where she did want to go she always fell silent. At the last minute she named a school, adding hurriedly, – Auntie says she'll pay for it. She says don't worry because it's really Mom's money. –

Kayako's choice was a private Catholic school, the one her cousin attended. Kōko didn't object. It would have been useless anyway, for Kayako had already put a distance between them. If this was to be the result, Kōko could only regret having let her sister and brother-in-law keep the small share of the estate that by right was hers. But then they'd have had to subdivide the land on which they were living – something she couldn't bring herself to suggest. And after she'd left all the legal ins and outs to her lawyer brother-in-law, too, it had seemed only natural not to claim her full share. This wasn't something that she could explain to the satisfaction of Kayako, still in elementary school.

Kayako now returned to her mother's apartment only on

Saturday nights. She kept strictly to this schedule, arriving on Saturday evening and leaving early Sunday morning. She would set off to take a practice test, or to meet a friend, or for some such reason. Each time, Kōko felt she was being tormented for her own weakness – it was always the same, always a turned back that she was forced to look at. She wanted to keep her daughter with her on Sunday morning at least. But to tell her so might be taken as nagging, and then Kayako mightn't come near her at all. And so she would see her off with a smile; it could be worse, she told herself. It had been the same with the girl's father Hatanaka, and with Doi. But her daughter Kayako was different, Kōko would quickly add – she must be different, whatever happened.

– I suppose your aunt told you to come? – Kōko had asked on the second Saturday. – I'll bet she said you should at least show up once a week? –

Kayako nodded matter-of-factly. – That's right. She said we can't let your mother out of our sight or there's no telling what she'll get up to next. –

The wind had risen and the streets were hazy with dust. The sky, though, was clear and bright. Kōko remembered the perfectly clear primeval sky of her dream.

She did some quick shopping on the way home from the station. Kayako wasn't there yet when she reached the apartment. Not slowing even to change her clothes, she started to fix dinner. She had eaten nothing since the plain noodles she gulped down for lunch. Her hunger had already turned to an ache. Her appetite had been steadily growing lately, and she was beginning to put on weight: she couldn't tell exactly, without bathroom scales, but she was sure she must have gained seven or eight pounds. Yet she felt so unwell every day that she wondered if she wasn't sickening for something. Her chest would feel so heavy that she had to check her temperature, and each time she

was running a slight fever. It had been exactly like this when she had Kayako. She'd been troubled by a fever and a cough which made her suspect something seriously wrong, yet all the while she was gaining weight – nearly ten pounds in less than two months. It was when she was telling Hatanaka about this that she first wondered – could it be . . . ? It wasn't as though she hadn't been aware of the possibility all along.

Now, too, that possibility had crossed her mind. As she sliced the vegetables she worked out the dates, over and over again. The last time she'd seen Osada was in mid-December: it tallied all too well. But I can't be certain yet, she told herself. Fighting down a half-knowledge of some change inside her, she went on preparing the meal. She eventually decided on a chicken dish to be cooked at the table: it would give her more time to talk with Kayako while they ate.

When the ingredients were nearly ready she vacuumed Kayako's room. The apartment had two bedrooms and a kitchen and dining area. Kōko had given the smaller room to Kayako and kept the larger for herself; what with the piano, the chest of drawers, and the dressing table, however, in the end hers was more cramped than Kayako's. And so she was in the habit of spending time in Kayako's room when she wanted to stretch out and relax, as she did on Sundays. It was the only sunny spot apart from the kitchen. Its windows were still hung with curtains that Kayako had made last summer vacation, choosing the cheap cotton fabric herself and running them up neatly on her aunt's sewing machine. Their red checks made Kōko rather less comfortable there. Kayako used to buy a flower or two sometimes, when she was in the mood, to brighten her desk. Kōko would ask for a share to go on the dining table, but it was no good, she never parted with any. Now, photographs of kittens and alpine plants were still pinned on the wall, but her satchel, the things she needed for schoolwork, and enough changes of

clothes for a while were gone – and with them the warmth, the breath, the smell of Kayako.

If she could, Kōko would have liked to punish Kayako during this visit, as she used to do when she was three or four years old, by taking her food away or sending her outside barefoot. At that age such measures had been wonderfully effective: between sobs, Kayako would take mouthfuls of meat or eggs. She was a skinny child who, given her own way, would have eaten nothing but fruit and plain rice.

Close on seven o'clock the doorbell rang. Kōko deliberately did not go to the door. The chimes sounded again. Then there was the click of a key in the lock.

On the spur of the moment, Kōko asked Kayako, who, having eaten nearly all the chicken, was dispatching her second bowl of rice:

'Do you remember the time we went to Karuizawa in the winter? You were only five . . .'

Kayako paused, munching, to think for a moment.

'Where there was a lot of snow?'

'That's right. Remember, we had snowball fights.'

'Mm, I remember, sort of . . . The snow really hurt.'

'It made you cry. You were so sore, after you'd played in it for ages with your bare hands.'

'Didn't I have mittens?'

'I forgot yours. So I gave you mine. You were thrilled they were so warm.'

'Was I?'

'Yes, and then you started right in to complain. "How come you're the only one who's got these nice things?" You were always complaining when you were little.'

'Oh, yeah? . . . Wasn't there a slide I played on, too?'

'Ah, you do remember, then? You kicked up a fuss about

wanting a slide even though it was covered in snow, and in the end I let you have a go. You're the one who's in for a cold time, I thought. But you were smart enough to try it only once. The snow slid down with you and gave you a fright *and* a wet bottom.'

'Mm, yes, I remember that . . .' Kayako picked a morsel of chicken out of the pot. 'But listen, Mom, the exams are next week. Next Friday and Saturday.'

'Really . . . I hope you're working hard.'

'That's not the point. You have to come too, Mom . . . Parents have to be there for the interviews. Please, will you come?'

'At such short notice . . .' Kōko refilled her beer glass and drank.

'Mom!' Kayako's face reddened. Not hiding the surge of annoyance she felt, Kōko said quickly:

'You should have told me sooner. It's not as easy to arrange as you might think. But, well, this time it can't be helped, I suppose . . . Just this once . . . They'll all be rich little ladies, though, won't they? Can't say I'm looking forward to it.'

'It won't be like that . . . So, you will come, won't you, Mom?'

'I said I'd have to, didn't I?'

Kayako nodded and then, silent again, began stoking rice into her mouth. Lately she had developed a definite stoop, perhaps because she'd grown too fast. Her hair was parted girlishly down the middle and softly curled at the ends. But Kōko could only think: if this is what's meant by growing up, then I wish she hadn't. Once, baby Kayako used to break into a big, toothless smile at just a glimpse of her mother's face. Now Kōko was furious with her young self: why hadn't she tried more greedily to soak up and save the laughter? If she had it to do over again, she would cuddle the child and nestle its cheek against hers for all she was worth, leaving nothing to regret.

With Kayako, she'd been reluctant even to bare her breast

and nurse her. No matter how Kayako cried in the night, she never picked her up from the cradle; she wouldn't even bother to get out of bed and take a look. – It's all part of her training – she'd say knowingly to Hatanaka, but the simple truth was that she indulged herself more than the baby. Hatanaka's accusations of neglect filled her with resentment. He'd say: – Surely most mothers would naturally want to give all the energy they've got? – and she would look away from Kayako's smiling face with a show of boredom. But Hatanaka himself had been too attached to his own youth; it came before everything else. They had both been very young parents. It was only after Hatanaka moved out, and Kōko found a new apartment and began taking care of Kayako on her own, that genuine fatherly and motherly feelings had sprung up in them for the first time.

She took Kayako to Karuizawa in the spring of their second year alone. It was the first holiday she'd taken with Kayako since her father had gone from their day-to-day scene. Perhaps the morning's strange dream was still on her mind now, for Kōko could feel the dazzling brilliance of the snow on that trip, and she could have sworn it came from behind Kayako as she sat at the table.

'I've finished, thanks.' Kayako rose and began clearing away the empty dishes. When the two of them were together, their roles continued just as before: Kōko cooked the meals, Kayako set the table; Kayako washed the dishes, and Kōko did her laundry. Now that Kayako lived with her aunt the laundry was much less trouble, so instead she would clean the bath or give the kitchen a once-over. But today Kōko stayed on sitting at the table. She stared at Kayako's tall, narrow back as she drank, picking from time to time at the tidbits of mushy cabbage and tofu left in the pot.

As long as they could go for a trip she hadn't minded where they went. Even when they had more or less decided on

Karuizawa, she wasn't expecting snow. She might actually have preferred Izu or the southern tip of the Bōsō Peninsula. She couldn't quite remember how it came to be Karuizawa. It didn't sound like Doi's idea – he wasn't the sort of man to be attracted to snow and ice. Maybe they'd come up with that hotel in the middle of the Karuizawa golf course because, with Kayako only five at the time, they had to allow for a good heating system and a menu that offered some plainer Western-style dishes.

Kōko had boarded the train at the last minute, leading Kayako by the hand.

– Oh, you've brought her along – Doi, on his feet watching tensely for Kōko, murmured when he saw Kayako.

– Is Uncle Doi coming too? Why? – Kayako, in turn, caught sight of Doi with surprise.

– It's better to have someone to carry the luggage, isn't it? It's so heavy – Kōko replied, handing him a sizeable overnight bag as she spoke.

– Mm, Uncle Doi is strong – said Kayako to no one in particular while her eyes followed the bag's movements. It was crammed full of her picture books, jigsaw puzzles, stuffed toys, crayons and coloring books.

For at least a month, Doi had been suggesting they go away somewhere for a break. Of course Kōko had taken to the idea immediately, but she was held back by a suspicion that he didn't mean to include Kayako. She could have simply asked him outright, could have told him she wanted to take Kayako along, and Doi wouldn't have refused. He would have said easily, as he always did: – We haven't any choice, have we? – He had already kept them company on Kayako's outings to department stores and the zoo. But entertaining Kayako couldn't have been much fun for Doi, for he had a child of his own of about the same age.

Soon after Kayako was born, Doi had come around to congratulate them with his wife and their own baby, who was

crawling all over the place by then and must have been about a year old. They brought a set of quoits as a present. When she thought of the old Doi, and then of this new thoughtfulness which extended even to other people's children, Kōko sensed the weight that fatherhood must have in Doi's own life.

Kōko couldn't forget his dejected tone when he'd told her – This time she wants to have the baby. – There was no show of indifference in the words. Kōko had been concerned for the woman – who was then living with Doi – and often wondered aloud what they would do. She believed she understood pretty well, in her own way, how they'd come to live together and how sour it must have turned. And every time she saw them she would be chilled by her own reading of the situation: when would they split up?

– Well, anyway, she seems to want to have it – Doi had said. – Though she's only letting herself in for a hard time. – As soon as the baby was born, however, Doi had registered their marriage. And only a couple of months after she heard Doi's news of his girlfriend's pregnancy, Kōko herself had begun living with Hatanaka. Then when she found she was pregnant, she and Hatanaka had made their marriage official.

– Look, he's an angel, an angel . . . –

Balancing one of the plastic quoits on top of his son's head, Doi had shared the joke with his wife like any doting father. When they were about to go, it had been Doi who picked up the boy as they took their leave.

Five years later, Kōko had remembered the fatherly figure that Doi had been then – and that even he had surely forgotten – and her heart was heavy as she looked at him with Kayako. For, astonished though she'd been at the earlier change in Doi, she had wanted to give her blessing to the small peace she saw in that new scene, not least for the sake of the woman who had become his wife.

Doi would cheerfully take five-year-old Kayako for monorail rides, fetch her bottles of pop, take her to the toilet. Seeing Kayako's excitement, Kōko would be happy too. But on such occasions she couldn't look Doi squarely in the face. The very depth of her pleasure bewildered and shamed her, and finally left her helplessly annoyed at her own reaction. She shouldn't bring Kayako and Doi together after all, she would decide. At the time Kayako would romp around in childish high spirits, but after Doi had left she always clutched her mother's hand and held on tight. – Don't go away, Mommy. Stay with me, 'cos if you die I'll die too. – Kōko would resolve never to let Doi near them again, but that resolution never lasted for a week at a time. When she next heard Doi's voice she would go to meet him as she always did, with Kayako in tow. Always Kōko was goaded by the same greedy wants: wanting the child to adore Doi, wanting him to be loving to her.

Until just a few days before the trip, too, she'd been intending to leave Kayako at her mother's, as she'd often done in the first year or two after the divorce. Her mother shared the old house with Shōko's family, and Kayako liked to play with her two cousins. As she grew older, however, she seemed to want to spend all the time she could with Kōko. Since she was easy enough to take out by then, Kōko heeded the child's feelings and no longer left her with anyone – apart from her nursery school – if she could help it. Besides, she was growing reluctant to leave Kayako in the company of the cousins, who had a home with two parents, and a big grassy garden, and their own sandbox in the corner, and even a swing and a bar for acrobatics. Kōko was in fact proud of the way she and her daughter lived in their apartment – with no frills, and entirely on her own earnings – and she wanted Kayako to share that pride, but the cousins in their setting made a too-perfect picture. (Perhaps, she thought, it was only natural that Hatanaka, being young at the