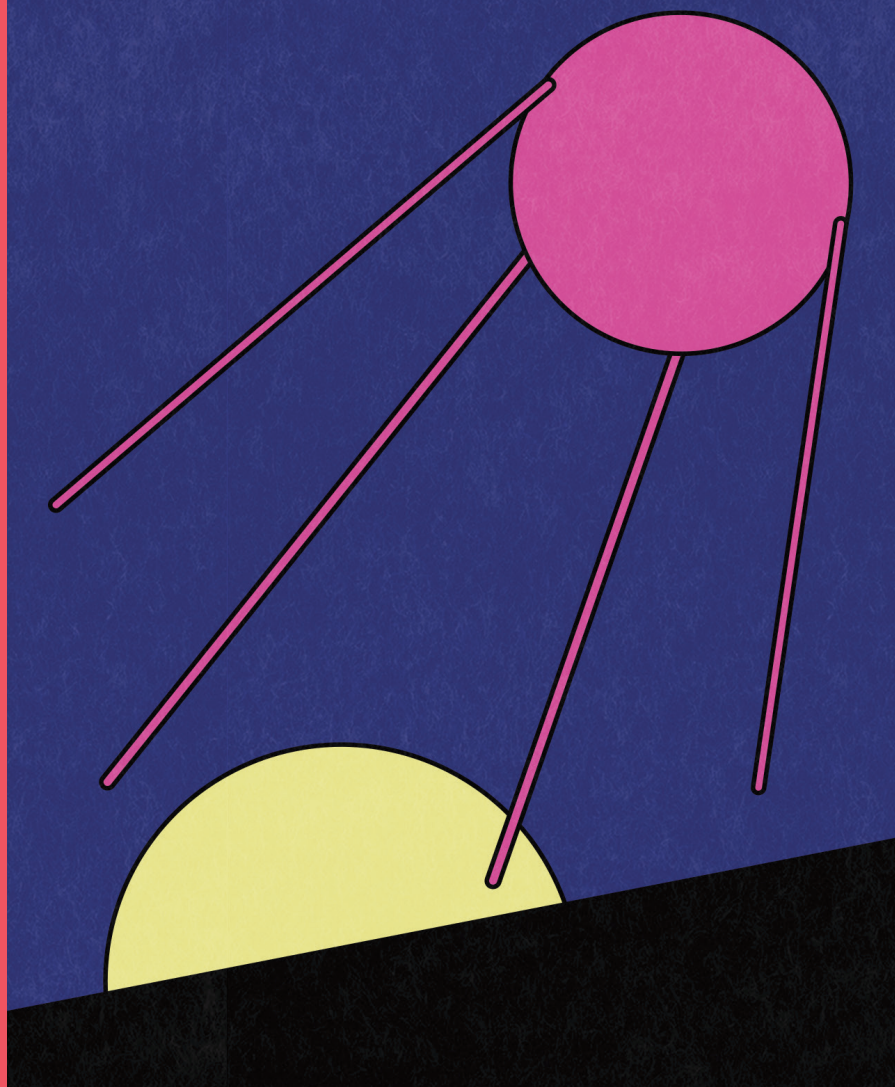


VINTAGE CLASSICS



HARUKI MURAKAMI
SPUTNIK SWEETHEART

'Confirms Murakami as a master of his craft...

Out of this world'

Time Out

EX LIBRIS

VINTAGE CLASSICS

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

HARUKI MURAKAMI

In 1978, Haruki Murakami was twenty-nine and running a jazz bar in downtown Tokyo. One April day, the impulse to write a novel came to him suddenly while watching a baseball game. That first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, won a new writers' award and was published the following year. More followed, including *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, but it was *Norwegian Wood*, published in 1987, that turned Murakami from a writer into a phenomenon.

In works such as *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *1Q84*, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* and *Men Without Women*, Murakami's distinctive blend of the mysterious and the everyday, of melancholy and humour, continues to enchant readers, ensuring his place as one of the world's most acclaimed and well-loved writers.

PHILIP GABRIEL

Philip Gabriel is an American translator and Japanologist. He is a full professor and former department chair of the University of Arizona's Department of East Asian Studies and is one of the major translators into English of the works of the Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami.

Copyrighted Material

ALSO BY HARUKI MURAKAMI

FICTION

1Q84

After Dark

After the Quake

Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman

The City and Its Uncertain Walls

Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage

Dance Dance Dance

The Elephant Vanishes

First Person Singular

Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World

Kafka on the Shore

Killing Commendatore

Men Without Women

Norwegian Wood

South of the Border, West of the Sun

Super-Frog Saves Tokyo

The Strange Library

A Wild Sheep Chase

Wind/Pinball

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

NON-FICTION

Absolutely on Music: Conversations with Seiji Ozawa

Murakami T: The T-Shirts I Love

Novelist as a Vocation

Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche

What I Talk About When I Talk About Running: A Memoir

HARUKI MURAKAMI

**SPUTNIK
SWEETHEART**

TRANSLATED FROM THE JAPANESE BY
Philip Gabriel

VINTAGE CLASSICS
Copyrighted Material

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Vintage Classics is part of the Penguin Random House
group of companies

Vintage, Penguin Random House UK, One Embassy Gardens,
8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

penguin.co.uk/vintage-classics
global.penguinrandomhouse.com



Penguin
Random House
UK

This paperback first published in Vintage Classics in 2026
First published with the title *Supūtoniku no koibito* in 1999 by Kodansha Ltd
First published in Great Britain by The Harvill Press in 2001

Copyright © Harukimurakami Archival Labyrinth 1999
English translation © Harukimurakami Archival Labyrinth 2001

The moral right of the author has been asserted

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner
for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.
In accordance with Article 4(3) of the DSM Directive 2019/790,
Penguin Random House expressly reserves this work from
the text and data mining exception.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised 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 9781529982336

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.



Copyrighted Material

Introduction

The starting point for the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* was a short, one-page prose sketch. I wrote it without any idea how I might use it. That happens sometimes. Something will suddenly spring up in my head, a particular image, or scenery, or words. Like a small, hard clump of clouds, it pops up in the air. Something I have no use for, at least for the present. Merely an isolated idea, unconnected to anything. Even I have no idea what meaning it might contain. It's unclear if it has any value or not, but I think it's hoping, for now, to be written down.

At those times I go straight to my desk and write it down, relatively quickly, like an artist doing a rough sketch. Then I toss what I've written in a drawer. After time passes, I might suddenly remember it and pull what I wrote out of the drawer and re-read it. I may feel like *Hmm. I can do something with this.* I might start writing that *something* right away. Or I may not feel a thing, and assign the written sketch to the oblivion of my desk drawer again. Worse case scenario I crumple it up and toss it in the trash can.

In *Sputnik Sweetheart* that little written sketch became the opening pages of the novel pretty much as is:

In the spring of her twenty-second year, Sumire fell in love for the first time in her life. An intense love, a veritable tornado sweeping across the plains. . . . The person she fell in love with happened to be seventeen years older than Sumire. And was married. And I should add, was a woman. This is where it all began, and where it all wound up. *Almost*.

I can't understand myself why I came up with this odd fragment of writing. (Odd's the only word to describe it). All I can say is, it's a mystery. But I took what popped into my mind then and quickly wrote it down.

In other words, the novel *Sputnik Sweetheart*—a fairly short novel as my works go—started with this idea and image that came out of who knows where. A young woman named Sumire fell in love with an older woman—I started writing the novel based on that fragment. When I started writing it, I couldn't predict what sort of story would develop from that. I merely pushed my key into what seemed to be the right keyhole, turned it, and started the story's engine. To exaggerate a bit, after that I just kept my hands on the steering wheel and literally followed the road that appeared before me. In a word, I let that little sketch lie forgotten in my drawer for a year, then took it out at just the right time, and started to write the story in a very natural way.

In that sense *Sputnik Sweetheart* was a very easy work to write for me. As far as this work is concerned—as far as the work of writing it was concerned—all I have are happy memories. I found it enjoyable to write, and never ran up against a wall in the middle of writing. I'd regularly spend a few hours each day writing, and I recall finishing it in about half a year. I wrote as things came to me, and at first the structure was quite simple, but later on I fleshed it out with a few other episodes. In the first version, for instance, the young boy named Carrot appeared very little, but as I re-read the whole, I realized I needed to give

Copyrighted Material

him a bigger role, so I gradually expanded his story. Thus the character Carrot took on more substance as a response to Sumire's worldly flesh being lost. This sort of overall reflection was needed in the novel.

I also tried out several novelistic techniques I hadn't used before. More precisely while the story was basically in the first person, one major issue was how to incorporate (without forcing things) third-person elements into the story. Resolving this made it easier, in part, for me to go on to write longer novels afterwards.

I wrote most of this novel in 1998, on the island of Kauai in Hawaii. The place I was staying at was near a deserted beach, with few tourists, and it rained most of the time. There were lots of clouds and the sunsets were gorgeous. The ideal environment for me to work in. I need that kind of somewhat noise-free surrounding when I write a novel, particularly the beginning.

If you divided my novels into those that were *relatively enjoyable for me to write* and those that were *relatively a struggle to write*, *Sputnik Sweetheart* would rank at the top of those I enjoyed writing. It goes without saying that the process of constructing a story from scratch, and pressing forward to complete a work, is no half-hearted task, and in fact is trying and exhausting. But still, I'd have to say I really enjoyed writing this novel. As I mentioned, I had a strong, natural desire to write a novel, and I was able to complete this one smoothly, without any worries, generally without any missteps along the way. This was after I'd published the quite serious nonfiction work *Underground*, and my body needed healing, some novelistic solace... This might make it sound like too easy an explanation, but that definitely was a factor. Finishing this novel, I really did feel something inside me suddenly relax and let go, and that gave me the conviction I could handle the next, probably more large-scale, work (and indeed a little after this I began writing *Kafka on the Shore*.)

Copyrighted Material

To get a bit more granular about things, one great joy for me with this novel was being able to include the scenery of Greece. In the latter half of the 1980s I lived for quite some time on an island in Greece (where I finished writing *Norwegian Wood*). From a long time ago I'd been wanting to take the air I'd breathed there, the scenery imprinted in my memory, the special texture and feel of the place and, in my own way, make it come alive in my writing. This scenery had long since been inputted into me, but had lain there, dormant, without any effective output. As I reproduced that scenery in writing I felt I had returned there and was once again breathing in the air. And that was a wonderful experience.

So if any of my readers read this novel and feel like they'd love to rush off to visit Greece, I'll have been achieved one of the novelistic goals I set myself in writing *Sputnik Sweetheart*.

Haruki Murakami, 2023
(Translated by Philip Gabriel)

Copyrighted Material

Sputnik Sweetheart

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

Sputnik

On 4 October 1957, the Soviet Union launched the world's first man-made satellite, *Sputnik I*, from the Baikanor Space Centre in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Sputnik* was 58 cm in diameter, weighed 83.6 kilograms, and orbited the Earth in 96 minutes and 12 seconds.

On 3 November of the same year, *Sputnik II* was successfully launched, with the dog Laika on board. Laika became the first living being to leave the Earth's atmosphere, but the satellite was never recovered, and Laika ended up sacrificed for the sake of biological research in space.

from *The Complete Chronicle of World History*

Copyrighted Material

1

In the spring of her twenty-second year, Sumire fell in love for the first time in her life. An intense love, a veritable tornado sweeping across the plains – flattening everything in its path, tossing things up in the air, ripping them to shreds, crushing them to bits. The tornado’s intensity doesn’t abate for a second as it blasts across the ocean, laying waste to Angkor Wat, incinerating an Indian jungle, tigers and everything, transforming itself into a Persian desert sandstorm, burying an exotic fortress city under a sea of sand. In short, a love of truly monumental proportions. The person she fell in love with happened to be 17 years older than Sumire. And was married. And, I should add, was a woman. This is where it all began, and where it all ended. *Almost*.

At the time, Sumire – “Violet” in Japanese – was struggling to become a writer. No matter how many choices life might bring her way, it was novelist or nothing. Her resolve was

a regular Rock of Gibraltar. Nothing could come between her and her faith in literature.

After she graduated from a public high school in Kanagawa Prefecture, she entered the liberal arts department of a cosy little private college in Tokyo. She found the college totally out of touch, a lukewarm, dispirited place, and she loathed it – and found her fellow students (which would include me, I'm afraid) hopelessly dull, second-rate specimens. Unsurprisingly, then, just before her junior year, she simply upped and left. Staying there any longer, she concluded, was a waste of time. I think it was the right move, but if I can be allowed a mediocre generalization, don't pointless things have a place, too, in this far-from-perfect world? Remove everything pointless from an imperfect life and it'd lose even its imperfection.

Sumire was a hopeless romantic, a bit set in her ways – innocent of the ways of the world, to put a nice spin on it. Start her talking and she'd go on nonstop, but if she was with someone she didn't get along with – most people in the world, in other words – she barely opened her mouth. She smoked too much, and you could count on her to lose her ticket every time she took the train. She'd get so engrossed in her thoughts at times she'd forget to eat, and she was as thin as one of those war orphans in an old Italian film – like a stick with eyes. I'd love to show you a photo of her, but I don't have any. She hated having her photograph taken – no desire to leave behind for posterity a *Portrait of the Artist as a Young (Wo)Man*. If there were a photograph of Sumire taken at that time, I know it would provide a valuable record of how special certain people can be.

I'm getting the order of events mixed up. The woman Sumire fell in love with was named Miu. At least that's what everyone called her. I don't know her real name, a fact that caused problems later on, but again I'm getting ahead of myself. Miu was Korean by nationality, but she didn't speak a word of Korean until she decided to study it when she was in her mid-twenties. She was born and raised in Japan and studied at a music academy in France, so as well as Japanese she was fluent in both French and English. She always dressed well, in a refined way, with expensive yet modest accessories, and she drove a twelve-cylinder, navy-blue Jaguar.

The first time Sumire met Miu, she talked about Jack Kerouac's novels. Sumire was absolutely nuts about Kerouac. She always had her Literary Idol of the Month, and at that point it happened to be the out-of-fashion Kerouac. She carried a dog-eared copy of *On the Road* or *Lonesome Traveler* stuck in her coat pocket, thumbing through them every chance she got. Whenever she came across lines she liked, she'd mark them in pencil and commit them to memory as if they were Holy Writ. Her favourite lines were from the fire lookout section of *Lonesome Traveler*. Kerouac spent three lonely months in a cabin on top of a high mountain, working as a fire lookout.

Sumire especially liked this part:

No man should go through life without once experiencing healthy, even bored solitude in the wilderness, finding himself depending solely on himself and thereby learning his true and hidden strength.

Copyrighted Material

“Don’t you just love it?” she said. “Every day you stand on top of a mountain, make a 360° sweep, checking to see if there are any fires. And that’s it. You’re done for the day. The rest of the time you can read, write, whatever you want. At night scruffy bears hang around your cabin. That’s the life! Compared to that, studying literature in college is like biting down on the bitter end of a cucumber.”

“Okay,” I said, “but someday you’ll have to come down off that mountain.” As usual, my practical, humdrum opinions didn’t faze her.

Sumire wanted to be like a character in a Kerouac novel – wild, cool, dissolute. She’d stand around, hands shoved deep in her coat pockets, her hair an uncombed mess, staring vacantly at the sky through her black plastic-framed Dizzy Gillespie glasses, which she wore despite her 20/20 vision. She was invariably decked out in an oversized herringbone coat from a second-hand shop and a pair of rough work boots. If she’d been able to grow a beard, I’m sure she would have.

Sumire wasn’t exactly a beauty. Her cheeks were sunken, her mouth a little too wide. Her nose was on the small side and upturned. She had an expressive face and a great sense of humour, though she hardly ever laughed out loud. She was short, and even in a good mood she talked like she was half a step away from picking a fight. I never knew her to use lipstick or eyebrow pencil, and I have my doubts that she even knew bras came in different sizes. Still, Sumire had something special about her, something that drew people to her. Defining that special something isn’t easy, but when you gazed into her eyes, you could always find it, reflected deep down inside.

Copyrighted Material

I might as well just come right out and say it. I was in love with Sumire. I was attracted to her from the first time we talked, and soon there was no turning back. For a long time she was the only thing I could think about. I tried to tell her how I felt, but somehow the feelings and the right words couldn't connect. Maybe it was for the best. If I had been able to tell her my feelings, she would have just laughed at me.

While Sumire and I were friends, I went out with two or three other girls. It's not that I don't remember the exact number. Two, three – it depends on how you count. Add to this girls I slept with once or twice, and the list would be a little longer. Anyhow, while I made love to these other girls, I thought about Sumire. Or at least thoughts of her grazed a corner of my mind. I imagined I was holding her. Kind of a caddish thing to do, but I couldn't help myself.

Let me get back to how Sumire and Miu met.

Miu had heard of Jack Kerouac and had a vague sense that he was a novelist of some kind. What kind of novelist, though, she couldn't recall. "Kerouac . . . hmm . . . Wasn't he a Sputnik?"

Sumire couldn't work out what she meant. Knife and fork poised in mid-air, she gave it some thought. "Sputnik? You mean the first satellite the Soviets sent up, in the fifties? Jack Kerouac was an American novelist. I guess they do overlap in terms of generation . . ."

"Isn't that what they called the writers back then?" Miu asked. She traced a circle on the table with her fingertip, as

if rummaging through some special jar full of memories.

“Sputnik . . . ?”

“The name of a literary movement. You know – how they classify writers in various schools of writing. Like Shiga Naoya was in the White Birch School.”

Finally it dawned on Sumire. “*Beatnik!*”

Miu lightly dabbed at the corner of her mouth with a napkin. “Beatnik – Sputnik. I never can remember those kinds of terms. It’s like the Kenmun Restoration or the Treaty of Rapallo. Ancient history.”

A gentle silence descended on them, suggestive of the flow of time.

“The Treaty of Rapallo?” Sumire asked.

Miu smiled. A nostalgic, intimate smile, like a treasured old possession pulled out of the back of a drawer. Her eyes narrowed in an utterly charming way. She reached out and, with her long, slim fingers, gently ruffled Sumire’s already tousled hair. It was such a sudden yet natural gesture that Sumire could only return the smile.

Ever since that day, Sumire’s private name for Miu was *Sputnik Sweetheart*. She loved the sound of it. It made her think of Laika, the dog. The man-made satellite streaking soundlessly across the blackness of outer space. The dark, lustrous eyes of the dog gazing out of the tiny window. In the infinite loneliness of space, what could Laika possibly be looking at?

This Sputnik conversation took place at a wedding reception for Sumire’s cousin at a posh hotel in Akasaka. Sumire wasn’t particularly close to her cousin, in fact they didn’t

get along at all. She'd just as soon be tortured as attend one of these receptions, but she couldn't back out of this one. She and Miu were seated next to each other at one of the tables. Miu didn't go into all the details, but it seemed she'd taught Sumire's cousin the piano – or something along those lines – when she was taking the entrance exams for the university music department. It wasn't a long or very close relationship, clearly, but Miu felt obliged to attend.

In the instant Miu touched her hair, Sumire fell in love, as if she were crossing a field when *bang!* a bolt of lightning zapped her right in the head. Something like an artistic revelation. Which is why, at that point, it didn't matter to Sumire that the person she fell in love with happened to be a woman.

I don't think Sumire ever had what you'd call a lover. In high school she had a few boyfriends, guys she'd go to the cinema with, go swimming with. I couldn't picture any of those relations ever getting very deep. Sumire was too focused on becoming a novelist to really fall for anybody. If she did experience sex – or something close to it – in high school, I'm sure it would have been less out of sexual desire or love than literary curiosity.

"To be perfectly frank, sexual desire has me baffled," she once told me, making a sober face. This was just before she left college, I believe; she'd downed five banana daiquiris and was pretty drunk. "You know – how it all comes about. What's your take on it?"

"Sexual desire's not something you understand," I said, giving my usual middle-of-the-road opinion. "It's just *there*."

She scrutinized me for a while, as if I were some machine running on a previously unheard-of power source. Losing

interest, she stared up at the ceiling, and the conversation petered out. No use talking to him about *that*, she must have decided.

Sumire was born in Chigasaki. Her home was near the seashore, and she grew up with the dry sound of sand-filled wind blowing against her windows. Her father ran a dental clinic in Yokohama. He was remarkably handsome, his well-formed nose reminding you of Gregory Peck in *Spellbound*. Sumire didn't inherit that handsome nose, nor, according to her, did her brother. She found it amazing that the genes that had produced that nose had disappeared. If they really were buried for ever at the bottom of the gene pool, the world was a sadder place. That's how wonderful this nose was.

Sumire's father was an almost mythic figure to the women in the Yokohama area who needed dental care. In the examination room he always wore a surgical cap and large mask, so the only thing the patient could see was a pair of eyes and ears. Even so, it was obvious how attractive he was. His beautiful, manly nose swelled up suggestively from under the mask, making his female patients blush. In an instant – regardless of whether their dental plan covered the costs – they fell in love.

Sumire's mother passed away from a congenital heart defect when she was just 31. Sumire hadn't quite turned three. The only memory she had of her mother was a vague one of the scent of her skin. Just a couple of photographs of her remained – a posed photo taken at her wedding, and a snapshot taken immediately after Sumire was born. Sumire used to pull out the photo album and gaze at the pictures.

Copyrighted Material

Sumire's mother was – to put it mildly – a completely forgettable person. A short, humdrum hairstyle, clothes that made you wonder what she could have been thinking, an ill-at-ease smile. If she'd taken one step back, she would have melted right into the wall. Sumire was determined to brand her mother's face on her memory. Then someday she might meet her in her dreams. They'd shake hands, have a nice chat. But things weren't that easy. Try as she might to remember her mother's face, it soon faded. Forget about dreams – if Sumire had passed her mother on the street, in broad daylight, she wouldn't have known her.

Sumire's father hardly ever spoke of his late wife. He wasn't a talkative man to begin with, and in all aspects of life – as though it were a kind of mouth infection he wanted to avoid catching – he never talked about his feelings. Sumire had no memory of ever asking her father about her dead mother. Except for once, when she was still very small, for some reason she asked him, "What was my mother like?" She remembered this conversation very clearly.

Her father looked away and thought for a moment before replying. "She was good at remembering things," he said. "And she had nice handwriting."

A strange way to describe someone. Sumire was waiting expectantly, the snow-white first page of her notebook open, for nourishing words that could have been a source of warmth and comfort – a pillar, an axis, to help prop up her uncertain life here on this third planet from the sun. Her father should have said something that his young daughter could have held on to. But Sumire's handsome father wasn't going to speak those words, the very words she needed most.

Copyrighted Material

*

Sumire's father remarried when she was six, and two years later her younger brother was born. Her new mother wasn't pretty either. On top of which she wasn't so good at remembering things, and her handwriting wasn't any great shakes. She was a kind and fair person, though. That was a lucky thing for little Sumire, her brand-new stepdaughter. No, *lucky* isn't the right word. After all, her father had chosen the woman. He might not have been the ideal father, but when it came to choosing a mate, he knew what he was doing.

Her stepmother's love for her never wavered during her long, difficult years of adolescence, and when Sumire declared she was going to quit college and write novels, her stepmother – though she had her own opinions on the matter – respected Sumire's desire. She'd always been pleased that Sumire loved to read so much, and she encouraged her literary pursuits.

Her stepmother eventually won over her father, and they decided that, until Sumire turned 28, they would provide her with a small stipend. If she wasn't able to make a living by writing then, she'd be on her own. If her stepmother hadn't spoken up in her defence, Sumire might very well have been thrown out – penniless, without the necessary social skills – into the wilderness of a somewhat humourless reality. The Earth, after all, doesn't creak and groan its way around the sun just so human beings can have a good time and a bit of a laugh.

Sumire met her Sputnik Sweetheart a little more than two years after she'd dropped out of college.

She was living in a one-room apartment in Kichijoji where