

## prologue

I was born after my country had lost World War II, in a city notorious for dry winds. When I was a little girl, I often bicycled against the wind up a steep slope to the ruined castle on a hilltop. I heard the wind weeping, bending its head.

My father sat in our kimono store like a hollow tree, while my mother and grandmother went out to sell kimonos in the surrounding region. My aunt was recuperating from tuberculosis, although she often left the house for a date wearing makeup and an expensive dress.

When I came home from my ride, I would sit in the sun on a tatami mat at the back of the store, listening to a song on our gramophone, the same song you could hear everywhere.

*A girl in red shoes  
She's gone  
Taken by a stranger.  
Boarding a ship in Yokohama port  
She's gone  
Taken by a stranger.*

The melancholy song made me feel like the small orphan girl in red shoes. In front of me, the blue ocean waved soundlessly, and on the far shore, America rose in a dazzling light, as if calling me.