

The Makioka Sisters Study Guide

The Makioka Sisters by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki

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Plot Summary

The Makioka Sisters is the story of four sisters in a wealthy Japanese merchant family that is in declining fortune in the years leading up to World War II. The novel focuses on the viewpoint of Sachiko, the second oldest sister, who with her husband Teinosuke play an increasingly important role in the family's affairs as the oldest sister Tsuruko and her husband, Tatsuo the head of the "main house" of the family, move away from the family's seat in Osaka to Tokyo. Meanwhile, Japan becomes increasingly hostile toward China as it prepares for war. The Makioka family sees many of its European acquaintances in Japan leaving for home as the situation in Europe moves toward war.

The family's affairs are primarily concerned with the two younger sisters, Yukiko and Taeko, who live most of the time with Sachiko. Yukiko, a shy and quiet woman, is well past the age at which women of her class should be married, but no suitable husband has been found for her. Each prospective suitor has been either ruled out by the main house for something in his background or else refused by Yukiko herself. Taeko, the youngest sister, cannot marry before Yukiko. As a young woman, Taeko had eloped with her lover Okubata causing a minor scandal before she returned home and actually got married.

The family struggles with maintaining proper outward appearances while dealing with the seemingly docile but stubborn Yukiko and the increasingly independent Taeko, who begins to see other men while she waits for a husband to be found for Yukiko. Despite several attempts to match Yukiko with a husband, something always seems to break down the negotiations. When Yukiko herself sours an ongoing negotiation by refusing to meet with a suitor, Sachiko grows to resent her for her apparent ingratitude. Taeko disturbs the main house of the family by announcing her intention to learn sewing and make clothing for a living. The main house insists that she either come live with them in Tokyo and wait to be married or be disinherited. Taeko leaves Sachiko's house to live on her own.

A match is finally made for Yukiko with a man named Mimaki, a son from a noble Tokyo family. During the negotiations, which are handled mainly by Teinosuke, Sachiko learns that Taeko is pregnant and the father is a bartender named Miyoshi. Ever concerned with ruining Yukiko's chances of marriage, the family hides Taeko away during her pregnancy. Tragically, her child dies shortly after birth. Nevertheless, Taeko is married to Miyoshi and the novel closes as Yukiko sets off to Tokyo to be married.



Book I, Chapters 1-9

Book I, Chapters 1-9 Summary

The Makioka sisters are four daughters of a wealthy merchant family from Osaka, Japan. While once very prosperous, the fortunes of the family have declined somewhat in the 1930s, when the novel takes place.

Tsuruko is the oldest sister and by tradition the head of the main house of the family located in Osaka. She is married to a man named Tatsuo, who has taken the Makioka name and runs the family business after the death of the sisters' father. Sachiko is the second oldest sister and lives just outside Osaka. The third and fourth sisters, Yukiko and Taeko, also live with Sachiko, along with her husband, Teinosuke and their young daughter Etsuko.

As the novel opens, Sachiko and Taeko are getting dressed and discussing a marriage prospect for Yukiko, who has reached the age of thirty, well past the traditional age of marriage, without finding someone she thinks is suitable. An acquaintance of the family, Mrs. Itani, who is their hairdresser, has a man in mind to introduce to Yukiko. Mrs. Itani is very insistent and presses Sachiko to arrange a meeting. Sachiko is reluctant to pressure Yukiko, who has had several suitors in the past but has always rejected them. The result, as Itani subtly reminds Sachiko, is that the family has started to get a reputation for being haughty.

The issue of Yukiko's marriage is frustrating to Taeko, the youngest sister, who wants to marry her lover, Okubata, but according to Japanese tradition cannot marry before her older sister. Taeko is now 25, but when she was 19 she had run off with Okubata intending to marry him, but returned home without getting married. The incident caused a minor scandal which was reported in the newspapers, but the papers mistakenly reported that it was Yukiko, not Taeko who had run off. Even though the papers print a correction, the hint of scandal is one more thing to make it difficult to find suitors for Yukiko. Taeko is an independent young woman who has started a successful business making and selling dolls from her private studio. She also continues to see Okubata.

Yukiko is devoted to Etsuko, her niece, and Etsuko is equally devoted to Yukiko. This bothers Teinosuke somewhat to see Etsuko apparently preferring Yukiko to her own mother, but Sachiko is not worried.

Mrs. Itani is pushy and repeatedly asks Sachiko to arrange a dinner introduction between Yukiko and Mrs. Itani's prospect. Finally, with Yukiko's permission, Sachiko relents. Chapter 9 describes the scene as Sachiko and Yukiko are getting dressed for the dinner. Etsuko comes in and remarks that Yukiko is off to meet her new husband. This upsets Yukiko and Sachiko, who have tried to keep the matter quiet. Learning that Etsuko had heard about the dinner from the maid, O-haru, Sachiko scolds the maid.



Yukiko then complains to Sachiko in turn that she and the other family members are often talking loudly about private things that O-haru can overhear.

Book I, Chapters 1-9 Analysis

The main characters are all introduced in these first nine chapters. Chapter 1 almost immediately introduces a central problem, which is that Yukiko, the third sister, is reluctant to marry and has rejected every offer the family has tried to arrange for her. Chapter 2 introduces Mrs. Itani, the busybody hairdresser who has a prospect she insists on introducing to Yukiko. Chapter 3 describes the independent young Taeko and her frustration at Yukiko's apparent refusal to marry. Chapter 4 describes Sachiko as she tries to put off Mrs. Itani while also encouraging Yukiko. Chapter 5 is a busy episodic scene of the three sisters getting dressed for a piano recital. Chapter 6 is an interlude that recounts Yukiko's devotion to Etsuko, her niece, and the tension it causes between Etsuko's parents, Sachiko and Teinosuke. Chapter 7 returns to the sisters and their night at the private piano recital. They leave the house and take a cab to the train station. They never fail to turn heads whenever they go out. This chapter establishes their reputation among Japanese society. Chapter 8 is an exchange between Etsuko and Yukiko, who is looking over one of Etsuko's compositions for school. Yukiko crosses out a part of the composition where Etsuko has described Yukiko touching Etsuko's pet rabbit with her foot. Yukiko had not wanted to touch the rabbit with her hands at the time. When Etsuko asks Yukiko why she should not include the event in her composition, Yukiko replies that it may give her teacher a bad impression of Yukiko's manners. The episode demonstrates Yukiko's constant consideration of her appearance to Japanese society. Chapter 9 is a dressing scene similar to Chapter 5, but the mood is more somber as Sachiko and Yukiko prepare to meet another suitor.



Book I, Chapters 10-16

Book I, Chapters 10-16 Summary

Yukiko meets her potential husband, a man named Segoshi. At the dinner, Yukiko barely speaks with Sachiko supporting much of the conversation. Following the meal, Segoshi asks to speak to Yukiko alone for a few minutes and they move off alone. In the car on the way home, Sachiko asks Yukiko what they discussed, but Yukiko reveals nothing.

After the meeting, the negotiations continue. Despite having told himself he would not be involved in such things any more, Teinosuke finds himself dealing directly with Mrs. Itani on the matter. Itani tells him that Segoshi has heard Yukiko may be in poor health and Teinosuke offers to have her examined by a doctor. Yukiko also has a dark spot above one eye that comes and goes. The spot is nothing and the examination results are good, and Segoshi asks for another private meeting at the home of Mrs. Itani. At the second meeting, Yukiko again barely speaks. Segoshi professes his preference to have just such a quiet, traditional Japanese wife.

The final decision is in the hands of the main house in Osaka, and Tatsuo and Tsuruko are slow to respond while they conduct their own investigations into Segoshi's background. Finally, Tsuruko comes to Sachiko and tells her they have discovered that Segoshi's mother, who had supposedly died of illness, may have been mentally ill. This background of insanity means that they must refuse the match with Segoshi.

Teinosuke is annoyed, because the same thing has happened to him before with negotiations for Yukiko's marriage. He has put himself out on a limb and been cut off by the main house. Nevertheless, he resolves to be the one to break the news to Mrs. Itani. Their meeting is very polite, with each side taking the blame for the lack of success.

As the new year approaches, Yukiko and Taeko go to Osaka for the celebrations. Taeko puts on an exhibition of her dolls and sells many of them, making a good profit. At the exhibition, she introduces Sachiko to a woman named Katherina, a Russian woman who had been living in China and who had come with her family to Japan after the Russian revolution. Taeko tells Sachiko and Yukiko about Katherina and her family, including her entertaining older mother who speaks Japanese in an amusing way.

Book I, Chapters 10-16 Analysis

Chapters 10 and 11 recount a "miiai" dinner, a traditional meal at which a prospective bride and groom and their families meet one another. Yukiko does not appear very enthusiastic and is not active in the conversation. Sachiko overshadows her and does most of the talking. Still, it appears that Segoshi finds Yukiko's deference and silence attractive. Yukiko reveals very little about how she feels. She is willing to follow the



decisions of her oldest sister and her husband, she says, but does not seem to want to be actively involved.

Chapters 12, 13 and 14 describe the thoroughness of the mutual investigation undertaken by both sides in the negotiations. Teinosuke goes so far as to have Yukiko's lungs X-rayed to assure Segoshi that she is in good health. When the main house rejects the match, Yukiko gives no sign of her disappointment or pleasure at the news.

The character of Yukiko stands in bright contrast to those of her sisters in this section of the book. Unlike Yukiko, Sachiko is confident and talkative in public situations. Taeko is independent and sometimes impatient with the formalities her family observes. In a way, Yukiko makes Taeko's independence possible, since she is the present focus of the family's attention, allowing Taeko to choose her own path for the time being. This theme will be developed in future sections.



Book I, Chapters 17-22

Book I, Chapters 17-22 Summary

At the invitation of Taeko's friend Katherina, Taeko, Sachiko and Teinosuke go to dinner at Katherina's home. It is a small place she shares with her brother and mother. When they arrive, Katherina is alone, explaining her mother and brother are out. They sit and talk for some time until the hour gets so late that the Japanese visitors wonder if they may have come on the wrong day, since Katherina makes no mention of eating and there seems to be nobody preparing any food. They carefully ask her if they have made a mistake, and she quickly leads them into the dining room, where there are many plates of food. Her mother arrives, along with her brother and a friend of his. They eat and drink and enjoy their conversation, although the Japanese visitors find the portions of food to be too large.

Sachiko receives in the mail a photograph of a man named Nomura. The photo has been sent by a former classmate of Sachiko's named Mrs. Jimba. It is still soon after the breakdown of negotiations and Sachiko feels she should not urge her sister on just yet. On the other hand, she fears that Yukiko may find out about the photograph on her own and think Sachiko is hiding something from her. She decides to tell Yukiko about the photo, but to assure her they do not need to proceed with anything just yet. Yukiko affirms that she will follow the family's decision, but asks that all the investigations be completed before the meeting.

It is spring and the time of the cherry blossoms. Sachiko, Taeko, Yukiko and Etsuko put on traditional Japanese dress and go to Kyoto to view the cherry blossoms. Teinosuke also comes along. Everywhere the women go, they are stopped and asked if they can be photographed. They seem to enjoy the attention.

After their return, Sachiko is sitting in her yard one day while Teinosuke is gardening. He notices her eyes look yellow and the doctor is called. She has jaundice, and he puts her on a light diet for several days. Although she is not feeling well, she manages to entertain when a friend comes to tea bringing guests from Tokyo. The visit annoys her somewhat, however, and she does not ask them to stay for dinner.

Sachiko receives a sudden call from Tsuruko. Tatsuo has been transferred by his company to Tokyo. It is sad news for the family, which has long ties to Osaka. They have to make quick arrangements to find a house for their large family with seven children. Tsuruko distracts herself by throwing herself into packing for the move.

An aunt of the Makioka sisters, Aunt Tominaga, arrives at Sachiko's house to suggest that it is more proper that the unmarried sisters live at the main house rather than with Sachiko. Sachiko feels she must follow this tradition at the insistence of her elder aunt but it distresses her to think of Yukiko separated from Etsuko. She realizes she is being a bit selfish, too, because Yukiko helps care for Etsuko and this will now mean more



work for her. Yukiko should make plans to move to Tokyo as soon as practical, the aunt says. Taeko, who has her business to think of, can take some time to wrap up her affairs before joining the main house in Tokyo. Yukiko and Taeko are saddened but not surprised by the decision.

Book I, Chapters 17-22 Analysis

Despite their adherence to traditional ways and their devotion to their ancestral region of Osaka, the Makiokas are not shy about associating with people of other cultures and backgrounds. This is demonstrated at their pleasant night spent with the Russian family in their tiny but friendly house in Chapter 17.

In Chapter 18, Yukiko makes a rare statement of her opinion on the marriage issue. She is getting tired of going through the motions of negotiations time after time only to have the marriage called off.

The trip to Kyoto in Chapter 19 is another pleasant interlude of family life. Just as they do at home, the Makioka sisters turn heads and become an attraction wherever they go. The traditional dress and manners are becoming less and less common and the traditional Makioka family stands out more and more. Chapter 20 describes a domestic scene between Sachiko and Teinosuke.

The family is pulled up from its roots in Chapter 21 when the head of the family, Tatsuo, is transferred from Osaka to Tokyo. The cultural differences between Osaka and Tokyo have been hinted at during the visit Sachiko has with her friend's Tokyo guests. There are different dialects spoken in each place, and different cultural aspects. Tsuruko and her sisters wonder how she will get along in the new environment.

There is further upheaval in Chapter 22 when Aunt Tominaga politely insists that the family follow the tradition of having the unmarried sisters live with the main house. Sachiko and Teinosuke have conflicted feelings about Yukiko leaving them. Her presence has caused some tension between them because she seems to be so close to their daughter. On the other hand, Sachiko appreciates the extra help and Teinosuke has grown fond of Yukiko, possibly a result of having taken on a paternal role in her marriage negotiations.

Once again an exception is made for Taeko, who is not expected to go to Tokyo right away. Yukiko's move will temporarily satisfy their aunt and Taeko avoids having to move for the time being.



Book I, Chapters 23-29

Book I, Chapters 23-29 Summary

Sachiko receives a letter from Yukiko in Tokyo explaining that at the last minute the lease on Tatsuo and Tsuruko's house was cancelled and they have had to move into a small rental house. After this letter, there is no word for some time. Sachiko, Teinosuke, Etsuko and O-Haru the maid compose a joint poem and send it to Yukiko. Yukiko responds with a sentimental letter, then is silent again.

Meanwhile, Etsuko is troubled. She becomes obsessed with cleanliness and has trouble sleeping. Teinosuke and Sachiko quarrel about how to deal with Etsuko's problems. They are reluctant to admit that her behavior may be related to Yukiko leaving. Teinosuke has to visit Tokyo on business and looks in on the main house. He is somewhat astonished at the small size of the place, where eleven people live. He finds Yukiko has become withdrawn. She sometimes goes alone to her room and cries.

Sachiko receives another letter from Mrs. Jimba about Mr. Nomura. She sees that she might use it as an excuse to have Yukiko return to her house to meet him. Tsuruko agrees that Yukiko should return while the negotiations take place. Nomura is investigated, but the main house acts much more quickly than previously. He is older than they would like, but this is not a crucial objection. He is a widower who lost his wife and children to illness. He has only one odd habit, that of talking to himself when he thinks he is alone.

Yukiko returns to Sachiko and all are happy to see her. She stays up late talking with her sisters. She explains that the move to Tokyo has been somewhat liberating for Tsuruko who does not need to keep up the appearances of the grand old Osaka family. In Tokyo, nobody knows who they are. Although the house is small, Yukiko thinks they will stay there because it is inexpensive. While Tatsuo is making more money, he and Tsuruko have become more thrifty. The house is very small and there is no discussion about how they would fit Taeko in. The matter of her moving to Tokyo seems to have been dropped.

Sachiko's illness culminates in a miscarriage. She tells herself that she knew deep down that she was probably pregnant and was denying it. Teinosuke is concerned for her health. Because of the situation, the initial meeting between Nomura and Yukiko is delayed, but goes on despite Sachiko feeling very ill. Teinosuke asks Mrs. Jimba to be sure the meeting does not require them to move around much so that Sachiko will not be strained.

The meeting does not go well. After a slight disagreement about where to meet and the restaurant, Teinosuke is dismayed that very little consideration has been given to his wife's frail condition. Nomura is talkative, but appears even older in person than in his photograph. After the dinner he insists they all return to his house for a drink.



Reluctantly, they agree. He shows them around his house, including the small shrine that holds photographs of his deceased wife and children.

Mrs. Jimba presses Sachiko for an answer in the days following the meeting. She discusses it with Yukiko, who tells her to refuse the marriage. She had been put off by Nomura showing them the photo of his former wife.

Book I, Chapters 23-29 Analysis

Yukiko apparently struggles to adapt to living in Tokyo in Chapters 23 and 24, although she sends little news. She would clearly be more happy back with Sachiko, but the family's adherence to tradition and willingness to follow the direction of the matriarch Aunt Tominaga take precedence over Yukiko's happiness. Only on the pretext of having her meet a prospective husband can the family allow her to return.

In Chapter 25, the main house relaxes its previously hard line on the suitability of a husband for Yukiko, leaving the matter with Sachiko. Things move relatively quickly, and Yukiko returns in Chapter 26. Sachiko's miscarriage in Chapter 27 delays the meeting for a short time, but she persists in the traditions despite her great discomfort. Chapter 28 describes the ill-fated dinner with Nomura.

Perhaps because Sachiko has been given authority over the negotiations, Yukiko feels she has the power to refuse Nomura on her own terms. The author closes the first book of the novel on this note.



Book II, Chapters 1-5

Book II, Chapters 1-5 Summary

As Book II opens, Sachiko is visited by Okubata, Taeko's fiance. He informs her that Taeko intends to give up her doll making and take up sewing. She also intends to go to Paris for a time to learn sewing. He asks for Sachiko's help in preventing it. Sachiko speaks with Taeko and learns that Okubata's description of her plans is correct.

At first, Sachiko thinks Taeko is trying to distance herself from Okubata, having decided she no longer wished to marry him. Taeko says she does still intend to marry him, even though she has learned that he has taken on some undesirable habits such as going out and getting drunk with other women.

In addition to taking sewing lessons, Taeko has also started taking classes in traditional dance. She asks Sachiko if they might use their house to present a recital. Sachiko agrees. The recital is a success. The Stoltzes, the German neighbors whose backyard adjoins that of Sachiko's house, attend the recital and enjoy it very much. Taeko looks very different from her usual Western style, dressed in the formal manner of a Japanese dancer. She is photographed by an attentive young photographer named Itakura, who is an apprentice at Okubata's photography studio.

There are heavy rains one morning as Etsuko is preparing for school and Taeko is leaving to attend her sewing classes. O-haru, the maid who usually walks with Etsuko to school to help her cross a busy highway, is worried about the heavy rain and walks with her all the way to the school building. Soon there are reports of flooding nearby. Teinosuke returns home and sets out with O-haru to retrieve Etsuko from school. The two of them have some difficulty, as a torrent of muddy water has cut the school off. Together they waded through the strong current and bring Etsuko home safely. Sachiko sits at home worried. When Etsuko returns safely, her thoughts turn to Taeko.

Teinosuke leaves again, this time to find Taeko. He walks along the raised train tracks toward her sewing school until he reaches a point where the tracks are flooded. A train is stopped there, near Taeko's school, and he climbs into one of the cars where several others have taken refuge. When the train is threatened by the flood he and the others make their way through the current to a nearby school building. Teinosuke is nearly caught in the deep sand and drowned, but is pulled out by some others.

Book II, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Book II opens with a dramatic development in Taeko's story when her fiance practically demands that Sachiko make her give up her goal to become a clothing designer in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 describes the sisters' discussion over Taeko's plans.



Chapter 3 recounts the dance recital in which Taeko takes part. Despite her independence and somewhat Westernized habits, Taeko also displays a devotion to tradition in her design of traditional dolls and learning traditional dance. The character of Itakura, who will play a more prominent role in Taeko's story, is introduced in this chapter.

Chapters 4 and 5 are suspenseful accounts of a sudden and severe flood that strikes the region. The family is not concerned much at first, but the situation rapidly worsens. Teinosuke is nearly killed while trying to find Taeko. The maid O-haru displays a special tenacity and bravery while helping retrieve Etsuko.



Book II, Chapters 6-13

Book II, Chapters 6-13 Summary

Shokichi, the son of the caretaker living in the Osaka house, comes to Sachiko to see how the family is faring in the flood and to offer his help. Sachiko asks him to go after Teinosuke. Mrs. Stoltz is worried about her children, who are at school. Her husband has gone after them and she is greatly relieved when he returns with them, although their description of the flooding worries Sachiko even more.

Okubata comes by to inquire about Taeko. Sachiko thinks he is perhaps partly motivated by a desire to ingratiate himself to the family. She notices that he has brought his camera. He leaves to go after Taeko and Sachiko is essentially alone. She goes into Taeko's room and looks at the photographs taken by Itakura of Taeko in her traditional Japanese dance garb. She decides that she will let Taeko follow her plan to go to Paris and that she will let her marry Okubata.

Suddenly, Shokichi is back and with him is Teinosuke and Taeko. Sachiko notices that Taeko is dressed differently than when she left. There is much excitement and Sachiko learns only that Taeko was somehow rescued by Itakura. Taeko collapses in tears.

Sachiko learns the story of what happened to Taeko. When the rains become heavy, the sewing class is cancelled and Taeko goes to the home of her teacher, which is next to the school, for some tea. The two women are chatting when her teacher's son, Hiroshi, rushes in and tells them about the flooding. As he does, an ankle-deep wave of water rushes into the house, washing across the floor. At first they are amused rather than worried, but the water level continues to rise. Soon they are climbing up onto the furniture to escape the water. The water rises even more, until they are trapped, unable to get out. Suddenly, Itakura appears at one of the windows. He first helps Taeko get out and onto the roof of the house, then returns and helps the teacher and her son.

The water subsides, leaving mud and sand in its place. Shokichi finds Teinosuke, Taeko and Itakura and they walk back toward home. Along the way they stop at Itakura's house and he gives Taeko a kimono belonging to his sister to wear. After the flood, many people come to see the damage and to check in with Sachiko and her family. Yukiko returns from Tokyo, and Itakura becomes a regular visitor to the household. His visits are welcomed, since he is a good talker and entertains Etsuko and the sisters.



Mrs. Stoltz tells Yukiko they are leaving Japan. Because of the war between Japan and China, business at her husband's firm is slow and they will return to Germany. Mr. Stoltz and their oldest son will take a ship from Tokyo and plans are made for Yukiko and Etsuko to go to Tokyo to see them off and show them some of the sights of the large city. Sachiko must attend a festival in Osaka on behalf of the family.

Book II, Chapters 6-13 Analysis

The dramatic flood episode continues in Chapter 6 as Sachiko remains home, worried about her sister and husband. Okubata's appearance both comforts and disturbs Sachiko as she wonders about his real intentions. In Chapter 7, Sachiko resolves some of the conflicting feelings she has about whether Taeko should be allowed to go live in Paris and marry Okubata. The realizations that Taeko may be dead or in great danger from the flood has focused her mind and given her resolve.

Chapter 8 recounts the suspenseful situation in the house of Mrs. Tamaki as the flood waters threaten. Itakura's sudden appearance foreshadows his increased presence in Taeko's life in the upcoming chapters. Chapter 9 reconstructs Teinosuke's adventure in the flood after leaving the train.

In Chapter 10, the flood has given Yukiko another excuse to return to Sachiko and she arrives almost unannounced. Chapter 11 describes Itakura's increasingly common visits to see Sachiko and her sisters. He pays close attention to Etsuko and teases O-haru the maid that he will talk her into marrying him, but it seems apparent it is Taeko he is really coming to see. His visits will be a source of tension between Taeko and Okubata in later chapters.

In Chapter 11, Taeko's dance teacher passes away and she attends her funeral. Chapter 12 further develops one of the underlying themes of the novel, the growing hostilities that will eventually emerge into full world war. Sachiko's German neighbors, the Stoltz family, plans to leave Japan because Japan's war with China has affected the business climate.



Book II, Chapters 14-20

Book II, Chapters 14-20 Summary

Sachiko joins Yukiko and Etsuko in Tokyo, leaving Taeko and Teinosuke at the Ashiya house. She takes O-haru along with her as well. She has not been to Tokyo for many years. While there she intends to take Etsuko to a specialist to consult about her sleeping trouble and behavior problems. She is greeted at the train and taken to Tsuruko's house in a neighborhood called Shibuya.

The house is crowded and noisy, as Tsuruko has many children. Teinosuke had warned her of the small quarters and suggested she stay at an inn. Sachiko reconsiders going to an inn after arriving and seeing the house herself but is afraid of offending her sister. On September 1, a great typhoon strikes the area. The house is of fairly new construction, but is not as well made as older houses. It begins to pull apart in the high winds. The family gathers together downstairs wondering what they should do. O-haru takes the initiative and goes out in the storm to a neighboring house and asks if they might all take shelter there. The neighbors let them in and there they pass the rest of the storm, returning home at four in the morning. The house has withstood the storm.

After the storm, Sachiko resolves to move to an inn. It will be several days until Etsuko can see the doctor. Tsuruko comes to see Sachiko at the inn and the two sisters enjoy a long talk.

While staying at the inn, Sachiko receives a letter from Okubata. In his letter, he tells her that he suspects Taeko is possibly having an affair with Itakura, the photographer. He claims to have evidence. Sachiko does not know if everything he says is true but realizes she has left Taeko virtually alone in Ashiya. She makes plans to return as soon as possible after Etsuko sees the doctor.

The doctor tells Sachiko not to worry about Etsuko, and they board the train toward home. Sachiko reflects that except for the day spent alone with her sister, the entire trip to Tokyo has been very stressful.

Sachiko shows Okubata's letter to Taeko and asks her if there is any truth to it. Taeko scoffs at the accusations. She tells Sachiko she plans to go to Paris with her sewing



teacher, Mrs. Tamaki, for at least six months to learn about making clothing. To fund her trip she intends to ask Tatsuo and Tsuruko to give her the money that had been set aside by her father to pay for her wedding.

Book II, Chapters 14-20 Analysis

Chapter 14 finds Sachiko looking forward to a visit to Tokyo, where she has not been since taken there by her father before she was married. She arrives at the crowded house in Shibuya in Chapter 15 and is surprised and somewhat pleased to find her sister holding up well. The crowded house disturbs her, however, and she is once again reluctant to follow her own instinct for fear of causing offense.

The typhoon episode in Chapter 16 recalls the flood episode from earlier in the book. Once again the family is challenged by a natural occurrence and once again the maid O-haru plays a crucial role through her quick action. O-haru is the topic of much of the conversation between Sachiko and Tsuruko in Chapter 17.

Chapter 18 further develops Taeko's story as Okubata places pressure on Sachiko to influence her against seeing Itakura. Sachiko does not know the full story, although she suspects much of it may be true. In Chapter 19 she quickly returns to her home to address the matter with Taeko. Taeko dismisses the accusations in Chapter 20 and Sachiko appears to take her at her word. As will be revealed later in the story, however, the letter becomes a source of conflict between Taeko and Okubata.



Book II, Chapters 21-27

Book II, Chapters 21-27 Summary

Mrs. Stoltz and her younger children pack up the last items in their house and prepare to leave. Sachiko has always admired Mrs. Stoltz for her careful housekeeping, even though she has heard from her maid that Mrs. Stoltz is very strict with her servants. On the last night Mrs. Stoltz is to have in Japan, her daughter Rosemarie comes and stays the night with Etsuko. The following day Sachiko and Etsuko see them off on the ship.

Shortly afterward, Sachiko receives a letter and gift from Mrs. Stoltz. It is autumn, and the house is quiet with Yukiko in Tokyo and Taeko busy outside the house. Sachiko suddenly grieves over the baby she lost to miscarriage.

Sachiko asks Teinosuke to approach the main house about Taeko's plan to go to Paris. They discuss their strategy and decide they should not mention Itakura but perhaps hint that Taeko may be thinking of eloping again and so should be separated from Okubata for a time. Teinosuke talks with Tsuruko, who responds after several days by letter.

Tsuruko hints that there may not be any money set aside especially for Taeko's wedding. She explains that Tatsuo is very opposed to Taeko going to sewing school and becoming a working woman and that they have no opposition to her marrying Okubata. Taeko is furious at first, but calms down. Her plans have changed, anyway, she explains to Sachiko. Because of the threat of war and because she wants to get her school running again as soon as possible, Mrs. Tamaki has decided not to go to Paris after all. Taeko says she will stay in Japan and return to sewing school. Sachiko expects trouble at this defiance of Tatsuo's wishes.

Sachiko wanders what Taeko's real reasons are for wanting to go to sewing school. She has noticed that Taeko's manners have changed. She is more familiar with people than before, and sometimes crude. She asks her again about whether she still plans to marry Okubata. Taeko becomes emotional at the question. She has learned that Okubata has had two mistresses and does not deny it to her. She also is angry that he only made a show of concern for her during the flood but stopped short of actually trying to help her. Itakura, on the other hand, had risked his life for her. She started looking at him differently at that point and decided it is he she really wishes to marry.

Sachiko is taken aback at this, but realizes she is not actually surprised. She gets an assurance from Taeko that she and Itakura have done nothing but make a promise to one another. She asks that they hold off on doing anything more. Itakura is the son of a simple country family, and is well below the class of the Makioka family. They have discussed the consequences and expect people to talk, Taeko says, but they accept this. Taeko tells Sachiko she will wait for Yukiko to marry.



Sachiko takes the full matter to her husband. Teinosuke does not care for Itakura, but prefers him to Okubata. He supports Taeko's plan to be independent, but does not want to get involved, especially if it means conflicting with Tatsuo.

A dance recital is announced to take place in Osaka. Recitals have become more infrequent since the war with China has escalated and it is a special event. Taeko renews her lessons in preparation to dance at the event.

Book II, Chapters 21-27 Analysis

Chapter 21 describes the last days of Mrs. Stoltz in Japan. Her departure intensifies Sachiko's feeling of isolation, since the neighboring house is quiet. In Chapter 22, Sachiko is suddenly overcome with grief over her previous miscarriage. She will continue to have similar episodes, which worry Teinosuke, but from which she always seems to recover quickly.

In Chapter 23, the conflict between Sachiko and the main house begins to heat up as she and Teinosuke try to plot a way to convince them to allow Taeko to follow her plan to become an independent woman. They are not entirely clear about Taeko's motives, but are themselves partly driven by considerations of appearance. Teinosuke is sympathetic to Taeko's desire to become independent, but is worried that he will come out looking bad in the ensuing conflict with the main house. The conversation between Teinosuke and Sachiko is a good example of how every decision they make is carefully examined, first in light of how it will affect the entire family and what the main house will have to say. At the end of the chapter, they learn they have guessed wrong about the main house's opinions on the matter.

Chapter 24 reveals more of the complete story of Taeko and Itakura. Sachiko is perhaps sympathetic to Taeko's insistence that she should choose a husband based on love and the man's character, but she cannot let these considerations overrule her dedication to tradition or her submission to the wishes of the main house. The best she can do is convince Taeko in Chapters 25 and 26 to hold off on doing anything until she can decide how to take up the matter with Tsuruko and Tatsuo. Chapter 27 describes the planning of a dance recital in which Taeko will dance, and which will be the backdrop for an encounter between the two men vying for Taeko.



Book II, Chapters 28-35

Book II, Chapters 28-35 Summary

Teinosuke leaves work to attend the dance recital in which Taeko is dancing and arrives after she has already started. He stands at the back, where he sees a man taking photographs, whom he recognizes as Itakura. Suddenly, Okubata is rushing back from his seat. He takes Itakura's camera from him and throws it down, breaking it. Itakura does nothing.

Sachiko tells Yukiko about Taeko and Itakura. Yukiko agrees with her that Taeko should not marry him. Yukiko is back at the Ashiya house again. She still gets along well with Taeko, despite the potential tension between them over Yukiko's delay in getting married.

Sachiko has another short emotional episode over her miscarriage one year before. Taeko tells the family that her friend Katharina is leaving for Germany and then will go on to England. They see her off at the ship at Kobe, then go on to a favorite sushi restaurant.

It is spring now, and the family goes to Kyoto as usual for the cherry blossoms. On the return trip, Etsuko develops a fever and is later diagnosed with scarlet fever. She is shut away in Teinosuke's study where Yukiko acts as her nurse. A new foreign couple moves into the Stoltz house, a Swiss man and his Chinese wife. Sachiko does not trust them.

Taeko announces her intention to go to Tokyo and demand her money from Tatsuo and Tsuruko. Sachiko feels she should go along but is afraid she will be seen by the main house as supporting Taeko's plan. She goes to Tokyo and stays at an inn while Taeko stays at the main house. Taeko makes her case to Tsuruko, who says she will have to wait several days for an answer since Tatsuo is very busy.

The three sisters attend a theater performance. Before it begins, Taeko is called out to receive a message. It is about Itakura. He has become very ill. She returns immediately to Ashiya. Sachiko does not tell Tsuruko the full reason for Taeko's sudden departure; however, Tsuruko has already heard rumors that Taeko is seeing someone other than Okubata. She has received the results of investigations done regarding Yukiko's marriage.

Itakura has had surgery on one of his ears, and an infection has apparently spread to his leg. He is in great pain, and his doctor recommends amputating the leg. Itakura's family is reluctant to make a decision, however. Taeko is there at the hospital with them and tries to get Sachiko to intervene to convince them to go ahead with the surgery. Finally the doctor insists on the surgery and has Itakura moved to another hospital.

His leg is amputated and he has some relief for a short while. The infection has spread, however, and he dies.



Book II, Chapters 28-35 Analysis

The conflict over Taeko reaches a high point in Chapter 28 as Okubata confronts Itakura in public. The scene concerns Teinosuke, who does not want men fighting over Taeko in public.

More of the family's foreign friends leave Japan in Chapter 29, as Katharina departs for Germany. Chapter 30 is a pleasant interlude at a sushi restaurant with an idiosyncratic owner.

In Chapter 31, Taeko appears not to be as accepting as she has been of the main house's opposition to her working. Sachiko is alarmed that she intends to confront the main house and demand her money. This breach of traditional behavior is deeply disturbing to Sachiko, and she again worries that it will damage not only the family but her own standing in it. In the end, the confrontation in Chapter 32 is not so dramatic, with Taeko talking to Tsuruko and Tsuruko putting her off using Tatsuo as an excuse.

The final three chapters of Book II resolve the issue of Taeko and Itakura as he is taken suddenly ill in Chapter 33, grows worse in Chapter 34 and finally dies in Chapter 35.



Book III, Chapters 1-6

Book III, Chapters 1-6 Summary

As the third book of the novel begins, there is yet another prospect for Yukiko's marriage. Tatsuo's sister, Mrs. Sugano, has arranged for her to meet a wealthy man named Sawazaki in the region of Ogaki. Sachiko, Yukiko, Taeko and Etsuko travel by train to Ogaki. The arrangements have been rushed and they are not certain when the actual meeting will be. Just in case, they put on their finest clothes for the train trip. The train breaks down for a time, which Sachiko takes as a bad omen. Upon reaching the home of Sugano, they learn the meeting will not be until the next day. That evening they go on a firefly hunt, to Etsuko's delight.

The following day, Taeko takes Etsuko off to see a local landmark while Sawazaki comes to the house for a meal. He is polite, but Sachiko senses that he is not really very interested in Yukiko. The sisters board the train back to Osaka. Yukiko parts with them along the way to continue back to Tokyo. As she is riding alone she notices a man glancing at her. She realizes it is a man named Saigusa, a man to whom she had been introduced by Tatsuo years before and refused to marry. She says nothing to him.

Book III, Chapters 1-6 Analysis

The trip to Ogaki takes up the first several chapters of the third book. In Chapter 1, Sachiko is surprised and somewhat alarmed at the hurried instructions from the main house to go to Ogaki to meet Sawazaki. Chapter 2 describes the train trip there and Chapter 3 the arrival and first day with Sugano, during which they learn more about Sawazaki. Chapter 4 is a pleasant interlude where the sisters go firefly hunting with Etsuko.

The actual meeting with Sawazaki takes up much of Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 the return to Osaka. The episode as Yukiko is returning alone to Tokyo is unusual in that it is told from the point of view of Yukiko as she recognizes and recalls the man Saigusa, one of the earliest men to whom she had been introduced and refused some ten years before. The episode emphasizes just how long Yukiko's family has been trying to arrange a marriage for her. As she thinks about the man sitting across from her on the train she imagines what her life would have been like had she married him. She appears to believe she made the right choice in refusing him.



Book III, Chapters 7-12

Book III, Chapters 7-12 Summary

As Sachiko, Taeko and Etsuko continue on to Osaka on the train, Sachiko confides in Taeko that she is not optimistic about the match with Sawazaki. A few days later she receives a letter from Mrs Sugano, and enclosed with it is a letter that Sawazaki had sent to her that says he is not interested in proceeding with the marriage talks. His letter is short and offers no explanation. Sachiko is slightly offended by the letter. For the first time, the Makioka family is the one being refused. The entire episode, from the rushed arrangements to the short refusal, has left her with a bad feeling.

In Tokyo, the main house is preparing to host memorial services marking the anniversary of the deaths of the Makioka sisters' parents. The services, which involve ceremonies and a large feast, will be in Osaka. The family is concerned that the two unmarried sisters will be "on display" during the ceremonies, publicly showing that the family has failed to find husbands for them.

Sachiko learns that Taeko has started seeing Okubata again. From O-haru, she learns that Okubata has been thrown out of his family home by his older brother and has taken a house of his own. Sachiko asks Taeko about it, and Taeko says she has been seeing Okubata, more out of pity for his situation than out of love for him. Sachiko still thinks Taeko should marry Okubata eventually, and is pleased they are seeing one another again.

Sachiko learns more about Okubata's situation through Teinosuke. He has apparently been taking things from his family's jewelry shop. Sachiko is reluctant to pass the information on to Tsuruko.

The memorial service in Osaka takes place and afterward Yukiko stays behind instead of returning to Tokyo. Sachiko tells her about Taeko and Okubata and Yukiko agrees they should be married. A letter comes from Tsuruko insisting that Taeko cannot marry Okubata unless he is taken back in by his family. Furthermore, she is to come to Tokyo and stop seeing him. Furthermore, if she refuses to come to Tokyo she is to be thrown out of the family. Sachiko shows Taeko the letter. Taeko says she will move out.

Taeko takes an apartment, apparently supporting herself with her savings and money from her sewing. From England there is news from Katharina. She has married a wealthy man. Sachiko ponders the cultural differences that allowed her to quickly find a husband in England. The news of Katharina's marriage saddens her.

Book III, Chapters 7-12 Analysis

Sachiko is discouraged in Chapter 7 when she realizes that the Makioka family is being refused by Sawazaki. Her pride is hurt. In Chapter 8 there is some tension between the



main house and the rest of the family as Tatsuo prepares for the memorial services honoring the Makiokas' parents. Tatsuo has become more frugal and looks for ways to save money on what by tradition should be a lavish affair. Sachiko herself plans a smaller affair with the close family.

Taeko's story takes a turn in Chapter 9, when Sachiko learns that she is once again seeing Okubata and that Okubata has been disinherited by his family. Sachiko learns more in Chapter 10. Okubata has been stealing from his family's shop. It does not occur to her that Taeko might be involved in any way with Okubata's problems, but it will be revealed later that she does not know as much as she thinks about Taeko.

After the memorial services in Chapter 10, Tsuruko returns to Tokyo in Chapter 11. She delivers an ultimatum to Taeko, through Sachiko, that she is to come to Tokyo and stop seeing Okubata or be disinherited. Taeko calmly chooses to leave the family and in Chapter 12 has taken her own apartment.



Book III, Chapters 13-18

Book III, Chapters 13-18 Summary

Through Mrs. Niu and Mrs. Itani, another prospect for Yukiko has been found. He is a doctor named Mr. Hashidera whose wife has died and who has a school-age daughter. A dinner is hastily arranged for Yukiko to meet him along with Teinosuke. The dinner is pleasant and Hashidera is in good spirits. Teinosuke is not sure he is actually interested in getting married, however.

A few days later, Hashidera comes to the Ashiya house and meets Sachiko and Etsuko. Sachiko likes him. Teinosuke goes to Hashidera's office a few days later and has lunch with him. The reports are good on Hashidera, and Teinosuke writes him a long letter explaining why Yukiko has not yet married. It is the fault of the family, he explains, not because of any fault in Yukiko. Teinosuke follows up his letter with a visit to Hashidera.

Sachiko is pleased to see Teinosuke acting so forwardly. News through Mrs. Niu and Itani is enthusiastic and promising. Hashidera and his daughter come to Ashiya and they all go out to dinner.

The next day Hashidera calls the house and asks for Yukiko. Sachiko has stepped out to the post office and Yukiko panics. She sends O-haru out to find Sachiko. O-haru finds her nearby and explains the situation. Sachiko rushes home and finds the phone is on the hook. She asks Yukiko what has happened, and she explains that Hashidera had asked her if she would meet him at the local station and go for a walk with him. She declined.

Sachiko is inwardly furious with Yukiko, and as she learns shortly from Mrs. Niu, Hashidera is furious as well, feeling he has been strung along and made a fool of. Teinosuke sends a letter of explanation and Hashidera responds politely, but the negotiations are over.

O-haru brings news that Taeko is very ill. She became ill while at Okubata's house and has remained there. Sachiko's instinct is to call their family doctor, Dr. Kushida, but she cannot allow him to visit Taeko in Okubata's house for the sake of appearances.

Book III, Chapters 13-18 Analysis

Chapter 13 begins another failed attempt to find a husband for Yukiko despite a promising beginning in Chapter 14. In Chapter 15, Teinosuke once again takes a lead role in pushing forward the negotiations. Chapter 16 further describes Teinosuke's efforts.

Everything comes undone with a single phone call in Chapter 17. Yukiko is so dependent on Sachiko and the rest of her family she panics when she receives a phone



call. Sachiko, knowing that Yukiko's usual shy and quiet manner is even more pronounced on the phone, blames herself for not being home to take the call herself. Yukiko herself seems oblivious to the repercussions of her refusal to meet Hashidera, and Sachiko's resentment bubbles up to the surface.

In Chapter 18, dramatic news of Taeko's illness reaches the family. While Taeko has officially been thrown out, her sisters are still concerned for her. Sachiko faces a difficult situation, however, over whether to have the family doctor visit Taeko at Okubata's house. Ultimately, the shame of revealing that Taeko has been kicked out and is openly visiting an unmarried man's house overrides her desire to have the doctor visit.



Book III, Chapters 19-24

Book III, Chapters 19-24 Summary

Taeko grows more ill, possibly with dysentery. She remains at Okubata's. Yukiko goes to help nurse her and Sachiko tells Teinosuke. It is now April, and the cherries have started to blossom.

Sachiko herself goes to Okubata's to see Taeko. She is being attended by a local doctor who says she may have anthrax. Sachiko arranges for Taeko to be moved to a private hospital where she can be seen by Dr. Kushida. Okubata is upset at this.

Taeko is moved to the hospital and Sachiko writes a long letter to Tsuruko explaining what has happened. Taeko begins to improve and Sachiko writes another letter to Tsuruko with the promising news. Tsuruko's response reveals that she is glad Taeko is getting better, as it would have been a smear on the family had she been discovered at Okubata's.

Okubata, despite having promised Sachiko he would stay away, finds where Taeko has been taken and shows up at the hospital. Yukiko treats him coldly, but he remains.

Meanwhile, Sachiko learns through O-haru, who has been talking to Okubata's housekeeper, that Okubata has been supporting Taeko since she moved out and has been giving her presents and money for some time. Sachiko had noticed Taeko sometimes had new clothes and jewelry, and assumed she had bought them herself with money from her dolls and sewing. Furthermore, it seems that even when Taeko was seeing Itakura, she had continued to see Okubata and receive things from him. These things had often been stolen from his family's store, which Taeko seems to know. Also, it appears that Taeko has been seeing yet another man, a bartender named Miyoshi.

Sachiko shares this information with Yukiko, who agrees with her that the only thing to save Taeko's reputation is for her to marry Okubata.

Book III, Chapters 19-24 Analysis

Sachiko and Yukiko ignore the instructions of the main house to abandon Taeko and go to her in Chapter 19 when they learn she is very ill. Unhappy with the local doctor's diagnosis in Chapter 20, Sachiko arranges for Taeko to be moved to a private hospital. She explains everything to Tsuruko by letter in Chapter 21. Tsuruko's response, which arrives in Chapter 22, seems more concerned with Taeko's affect on the family's reputation than with her health.

Chapter 23 contains a revelation for Sachiko. Through O-haru, she learns Taeko has been complicit in Okubata's thefts and has lied to her family about the source of the



clothes and jewelry she begins to wear. Sachiko sees that she had evidence of Taeko's behavior in front of her for some time, but had refused to see it or allow herself to admit what was going on. The man Miyoshi is first mentioned. He will continue to play a role in Taeko's story.

Sachiko brings Yukiko in on her side in Chapter 24. They decide that they must do what they can to see that Taeko marries Okubata.



Book III, Chapters 25-30

Book III, Chapters 25-30 Summary

Sachiko and Teinosuke enjoy a "second honeymoon" trip together. Taeko recovers and begins to spend more time at the Ashiya house. For the sake of appearances, she does not come over while Teinosuke is there and she returns to her apartment at night. She still spends part of every day somewhere else. Sachiko does not inquire where. Taeko tells her sisters that Okubata is considering going to Manchuria. They try to encourage her to go with him, but she says she is not considering it. Yukiko confronts Taeko with the information they have learned about her and Okubata. Taeko does not defend herself, but leaves in an angry rush.

Taeko returns after a few days and is calm once more. Mrs. Itani comes to the house and says she is selling her shop and going to America. Before she leaves, however, she has one more man for Yukiko to meet, a man named Mimaki. He is from a noble family, has lived abroad and never married. He has shown some promise as an architect but seems to have a lack of ambition and is in financial straits. He has been supported by his wealthy family.

The sisters see Itani off to Tokyo, where she will catch her ship to America. They go on to Tokyo to meet Mimaki a few days later and have an enjoyable time. Taeko is often very tired during the trip.

Book III, Chapters 25-30 Analysis

Chapter 25 displays the closeness than Sachiko shares with her husband as they escape their family pressures temporarily on a second honeymoon trip. In Chapter 26 it appears that relations with Taeko are on the mend but in an unusual scene, Yukiko confronts Taeko relentlessly about her behavior. It appears to be quite out of character for the shy, quiet Yukiko. Sachiko watches in admiration as Yukiko bluntly states her low opinion of Taeko's actions.

Chapter 27 begins the now familiar routine of trying to match Yukiko with a prospective husband. Itani's news that she is leaving for America surprises Sachiko; however, more and more people are leaving Japan as the tensions with China increase. In Chapter 28 they see Itani off to Tokyo and they join her there in Chapter 29. Chapter 30 describes their meeting with the agreeable Mimaki in an informal setting. Taeko's frequent fatigue will be explained in the next chapter.



Book III, Chapters 31-37

Book III, Chapters 31-37 Summary

The day after the meeting with Mimaki, Sachiko and Yukiko go to see Tsuruko during the day when they know Tatsuo and the children will be away. Taeko stays behind, saying she is very tired. They are also unsure whether Tsuruko, who they have not told about the reason for their trip to Tokyo, may not wish to see Taeko.

Tsuruko is pleased to see Sachiko and Yukiko and wishes that Taeko had indeed come. Sachiko tells her about Mimaki. Yukiko is afraid Tsuruko will insist that she remain with them in Tokyo, but she says nothing about it. When the sisters leave, Tsuruko cries. She is sad that she has been left out of the picture.

Upon returning to their hotel room, Sachiko remarks on Taeko's constant fatigue and wonders aloud if she is still recovering from her illness. Taeko remarks calmly that she suspects her problem is that she is three or four months pregnant with a child by Miyoshi.

Sachiko does not sleep that night, lying awake and worrying about the effect Taeko's pregnancy will have on Yukiko's chances of getting married. Mimaki has already been informed of some of Taeko's earlier indiscretions and has dismissed them as unimportant. Again she realizes that she has missed the signs of Taeko's condition. She had noticed that she had put on weight, but this was natural after her illness. She had also started wearing kimonos rather than the Western clothes she preferred.

Sachiko tells Teinosuke about Taeko's pregnancy when she returns from Tokyo and together they formulate a plan. Teinosuke will speak with Okubata and convince him to break with Taeko. They would send Taeko away to a hospital under a false name and arrange for her to marry Miyoshi, trying to keep everything as secret as possible.

Teinosuke meets with Miyoshi and finds him an agreeable young man. He suspects that Taeko had probably seduced him. Taeko learns she is almost five months pregnant. She goes to a hospital in Arima Springs with O-haru who is under instructions to keep her identity secret and to watch for any contact Taeko may have with others.

Teinosuke's meeting with Okubata is tense. Okubata has decided not to go to Manchuria and is not happy at being asked to break with Taeko. Teinosuke finally convinces him it is the thing to do and asks him to keep news of Taeko's pregnancy a secret so it will not interfere with Yukiko's marriage negotiations. Okubata agrees, then later comes to Teinosuke and obliquely asks for money. It is repayment for the money he has "lent" Taeko over the years, he says, but Teinosuke understands he is paying for Okubata's silence.

The meeting with Mimaki having gone well, Mimaki asks to come to Ashiya to meet Teinosuke and see the family again. They go out for a meal, which goes well. Teinosuke



is cautiously optimistic. They learn what they can about the man and find nothing very bad. Their biggest concern is his financial situation. He has the backing of a successful business family who have promised to find him a good job, and his family has agreed to buy him and his new wife a house. Satisfied, Teinosuke contacts the main house, who must give the final approval. Tatsuo delays giving a formal answer, but Tsuruko tells him she thinks Tatsuo will agree.

The only person left to approve is Yukiko, and Sachiko and Teinosuke bring the matter to her. Yukiko answers she intends to marry the person they find for her, but asks if she might have a few days to give her answer. Teinosuke gives her until the next day. She is put out, but agrees.

Things move forward and the Makioka family goes to meet with Mimaki's family. The affair is a success and soon an agreement is in place to proceed with the betrothal and marriage. Tatsuo finally responds to Teinosuke and gives his formal approval. He thanks Teinosuke for all he has done and asks for some help paying for the wedding.

The wedding is planned for April and Yukiko returns to Ashiya to say goodbye to her sister. Taeko goes into labor, but has difficulties. Sachiko goes to the hospital where she is in labor and intercedes with the doctor to treat her. The baby is born, a girl, but it dies shortly after its birth.

Taeko recovers. She returns home to get her things and moves in with her new husband, Miyashi. Yukiko becomes sick shortly before she is to leave for Tokyo to be married, but continues on. The novel closes as she is leaving Ashiya for Tokyo.

Book III, Chapters 31-37 Analysis

Taeko shocks her sister in Chapter 31 with news that she is pregnant, and Sachiko is awake all night in Chapter 32 worrying about what is to be done. In Chapter 33, Teinosuke takes control of the situation and arranges for Taeko to go away secretly to have the child while he ties up the loose ends with Miyoshi and Okubata. Okubata displays his true character when he essentially blackmails Teinosuke over keeping Taeko's pregnancy a secret.

Chapters 34 and 35 describe the hurried but ultimately successful negotiations of marriage between Yukiko and Mimaki. Things move quickly and it is apparent that the Makiokas have dispensed with their previous strict standards so that they might finally get Yukiko married. Teinosuke is forceful with Yukiko when she once again asks for a delay. Tatsuo, while still the official head of the family, has essentially let Teinosuke take charge. Teinosuke boldly proceeds with the negotiations even without having received official approval from Tatsuo.

Chapter 36 is a short chapter made up of two letters from friends of Sachiko in Germany. They hint at the turmoil that the growing war is causing, but hope that they will be able to see one another again. It is early 1941, and the reader is aware that World

War II is on the horizon as the characters in the novel look optimistically to their own future.

Chapter 37 is the final chapter. Taeko's story winds down with the tragic loss of her infant daughter. She nonetheless marries Miyoshi and seems eager to settle into her new home with him. Yukiko is finally engaged and prepares to marry, with her leaving for Tokyo marking the end of the novel.



Characters

Sachiko

Sachiko is the second oldest of the four Makioka sisters, all daughters of a successful merchant family in the Japanese city of Osaka. She lives in a suburb of Osaka called Ashiya with her husband, Teinosuke, and their daughter, Etsuko. Although her older sister and her husband are the official heads of the Makioka family, Sachiko plays a central role in the decision making. The two younger unmarried sisters prefer to live with her rather than with the oldest sister, as tradition would dictate.

Sachiko is in her mid 30s at the time of the novel, but looks much younger. She is lively and outgoing and a good conversationalist. She speaks with an Osaka dialect, but is also familiar with the Tokyo dialect. She understands simple English and a few words in German. She has had musical training and enjoys playing.

Sachiko is close to her husband and keeps little from him. Like her, he has taken on a central role in the family and she is proud to see him taking the initiative on some family matters such as the marriage of Yukiko.

Sachiko suffers a miscarriage and is sometimes overwhelmed with grief over the incident. She is resilient, however, and quickly recovers from any setbacks.

Yukiko

Yukiko is the third of the four Makioka sisters. She is unmarried despite years of attempts by the family to match her with a suitable husband. Each time a prospective marriage seems possible, the man is rejected by the main house or by Yukiko herself. She is in her early 30s, well past the usual age of marriage, but appears much younger than she looks.

Yukiko is quiet and shy nearly to the point of being rude, to the resentment of her older sister Sachiko. At the dinners where she is to meet a prospective husband she merely sits quietly and smiles while her other sisters carry most of the conversation. But while she appears to be docile and submissive in public, she can on occasion be forceful, as she displays in an incident when she scolds her younger sister Taeko for her behavior.

Yukiko's family has tried for over ten years to find her a husband. In the end, she is betrothed to a man named Mimaki, a son of a noble family who probably would not have passed the high Makioka standards at one time.



Taeko

Taeko is the youngest of the four Makioka sisters, and the most "modern" of the four. She prefers Western clothes to traditional kimonos and she smokes. She has started her own business making Japanese dolls and intends to learn sewing and open her own fashion shop. These intentions of hers alarm the main house who forbid her from becoming a working woman. She defies the family and is outwardly expelled.

Taeko falls in love with a man named Okubata at a young age and elopes with him, causing a minor scandal. She returns home without marrying him, but continues to see him. She is frustrated because she cannot marry before her older sister, Yukiko, and Yukiko has not been able to find a husband. After she is rescued during a flood by a shop clerk named Itakura, she begins to see him as well as Okubata. Itakura dies suddenly and Taeko begins seeing a bartender named Miyoshi. She has a child out of wedlock with Miyoshi. The child dies, but she marries Miyoshi nonetheless.

Tsuruko

Tsuruko is the eldest of the sisters and, along with her husband, the head of the Makioka family. She has several children, and they all live in the old family home in Osaka until her husband takes a job in Tokyo, uprooting them from the family house.

Tsuruko becomes isolated from her sisters in Tokyo and is often caught between the wishes of her husband and her desire to be closer to her sisters.

Teinosuke

Teinosuke is the husband of Sachiko. Upon marrying her he took the Makioka name. Because the two unmarried sisters live in his house, Teinosuke plays an increasingly important role in the negotiations over Yukiko's marriage and in handling the sometimes disturbing affairs of Taeko. While he and Sachiko are the actual decision makers over many of the family's affairs, he pays traditional deference to Tatsuo, the official head of the family.

O-haru

O-haru is a young maid in the employment of Sachiko and Teinosuke. She is an unkempt girl, but is devoted and quick. She displays remarkable bravery at times, such as when she wades through a torrential flood to help Teinosuke bring Etsuko home from school safely. She is a gossip, but is also a rich source of information for Sachiko on the activities of Taeko when she is away from the house.



Okubata

Okubata is the youngest son of a wealthy merchant family. He is the onetime lover of Taeko, with whom he eloped at a young age. He is a confident young man who enjoys nice clothes. He is eventually expelled from his family by his older brother when he is discovered stealing items from his family's jewelry store. It is revealed that he had been stealing things to give to Taeko and that she had known about the thefts. Okubata eventually breaks with Taeko when she becomes pregnant, and blackmails Teinosuke to keep the matter secret.

Itakura

Itakura is a young shop boy in the employ of Okubata who falls in love with Taeko. He is a brave young man, and rescues Taeko from drowning in a great flood. Itakura develops an infection after having surgery and suddenly dies.

Tatsuo

Tatsuo is the head of the Makioka family, having taken the role upon marrying the eldest daughter. He has taken the Makioka name. He partially alienates the sisters when he sells the family business and goes into banking, later moving his wife and children to Tokyo. While Tatsuo is the official head of the family, he leaves much of the decisions over matters such as Yukiko's marriage to Sachiko and Teinosuke.

The Stoltz Family

The Stoltz family are a German family who rent a house with a back yard adjacent to Sachiko's house in Ashiya. Their youngest child, Rumi, is a playmate for Etsuko. Mrs. Stoltz enjoys Japanese culture and is fascinated at a dance recital that takes place at the Ashiya house. When growing hostilities between Japan and China affect Mr. Stoltz's business, the family returns to Germany.

Mrs. Itani

Mrs. Itani is a hairdresser frequented by Sachiko. She prides herself on being a matchmaker and has set herself the goal of finding a husband for Yukiko. Although her first attempt fails, it is Itani who arranges the introduction to Mimaki, the man to whom Yukiko is finally betrothed.

Miyoshi

Miyoshi is a bartender in a restaurant in Kobe. He is the father of Taeko's baby and becomes her husband as well.



Mikami

Mikami is the son of a Japanese nobleman who becomes betrothed to Yukiko after a brief set of negotiations. He is an aspiring architect.

Etsuko

The school-age daughter of Sachiko and Teinosuke, Etsuko is very close to her Aunt Yukiko. She is sometimes a difficult child and is often ill.



Objects/Places

Japan

Japan is the Asian country in which the Makioka family lives.

Osaka

Osaka is a city and region of Japan which is the home of the Makioka family. Osaka is famous for its cherry blossoms, in which the family takes great pride.

Ashiya House

The house of Sachiko and Teinosuke, located in a suburb of Osaka called Ashiya. It is a large house with several servants. Yukiko and Taeko, the two younger sisters also live in the Ashiya house.

Osaka House

The Makioka family home is in Osaka. It is a traditional style Japanese house and is occupied by Tsuruko, the eldest of the Makioka sisters and her husband and children. When Tsuruko's husband takes a job in Tokyo, the house is left in the hands of a caretaker.

Shibuya House

The house where Tsuruko and Tatsuo move after leaving Osaka is located in a suburb of Tokyo called Shibuya. A house of new construction, it is much smaller than the Osaka house and the family is cramped. During a strong rainstorm, the house nearly comes apart.

Taeko's Studio

Taeko establishes a studio to create and sell traditional Japanese dolls.

Kabuki

A traditional form of Japanese theater greatly enjoyed by the Makioka sisters is called Kabuki.



Miai

Miai is a traditional meeting between families who have prospective marriage partners. Yukiko attends several miai over the course of the novel.

Tokyo

The largest city in Japan is Tokyo. The Makioka sisters in Ashiya begin visiting Tokyo regularly once the oldest sister moves to Shibuya.

The China Incident

An early incident between Japan and China leads to increased hostilities and invasions of China by Japan.

Manchuria

Manchuria is a region of China that Japan actively attempts to colonize.



Themes

Traditional Family Responsibilities

The traditional family structure is an important part of Japanese culture among the wealthier families such as the Makiokas. How the characters balance their responsibilities to the family with their personal lives and responsibilities to one another forms a central theme of the novel.

The family tradition is that the oldest son takes over as the head of the family upon the death of the father. In the case of the Makioka family, which has only four daughters, the responsibility has been given to the husband of Tsuruko, the oldest daughter. Her husband, Tatsuo, has even taken the Makioka name. Along with his responsibilities as head of the family, he is expected to maintain the main family house and manage the inheritance of the unmarried daughters. Tatsuo has the final word on matters such as who the unmarried Makioka sisters will marry.

Family tradition calls for all the unmarried daughters to live in the main house while a marriage is being arranged for them. Yukiko and Taeko prefer the company of their sister Sachiko, however, and choose to live with her. This is a cause of tension in the family, but a kind of unspoken agreement is reached that Taeko can stay with Sachiko because she has made business commitments, and there does not seem to be any opposition to Yukiko using any excuse to visit Sachiko and, once she has come, finding reasons to stay. When things begin to unravel, however, Tatsuo flexes his authority and calls the sisters back to the main house.

Taeko refuses and is disinherited from the family. For appearances, she takes her own apartment but her sisters do not break off contact with her. After her illness, she spends much of her time at Sachiko's house and takes part in Yukiko's marriage negotiations.

Her family responsibilities have placed Tsuruko in a position between her husband and her sisters. She does not have the luxury of relaxing the traditions that her sisters do. Toward the end of the novel, Sachiko realizes that Tsuruko has grown deeply sad because of her isolation from her sisters.



The End of an Era

The Makioka Sisters takes place in the late 1930s, on the eve of World War II. Families such as the Makiokas still hold on to the traditional manners and customs of an earlier era; however, all around them they see hints that things are changing and becoming more modern. When the sisters step out to view cherry blossoms they dress in their traditional kimonos and are constantly stopped and asked to pose for photographs. The implication is that not many Japanese are still dressing in the traditional fashion. They are something of a relic, preserved in time. Even their youthful appearance, something that is commented on frequently, seems to suggest that they are a never-changing window into the past.

But the modern world is encroaching on the Makioka family. Tatsuo and Tsuruko leave the traditional Japanese house in Osaka and move to a home of new construction in Tokyo. Taeko, the youngest of the sisters, can usually be found wearing Western clothes. She smokes and wants to learn a trade so she can support herself.

Sachiko, who of the four sisters seems the most eager to preserve the traditional ways, sometimes finds herself impatient with the constraints that tradition places on her and her family. When she hears of Taeko's friend Katharina having gone to England and quickly finding a wealthy husband on her own, she is filled with admiration as well as sadness that it is not so simple for her family to find a suitable husband for Yukiko. Taeko makes a case for marrying for love rather than social reasons and Teinosuke appears to sympathize with this viewpoint. Sachiko would like to, but cannot reconcile this modern notion with her devotion to tradition.

Appearance and Reality

Appearances are very important to the Makioka family. They have been respected in Osaka for some time and feel a responsibility to maintain an outward appearance of a unified and dignified family. When a youthful indiscretion by the youngest sister, Taeko, is mentioned in newspapers the family is horrified and feel as if the incident prevents Yukiko from finding a husband. When Taeko later is seen publicly with men, the family is immediately concerned about how it will appear. In one incident Yukiko is reluctant to have her niece mention her in a school composition for fear that it might reveal her displaying poor manners to the teacher.

The concern with appearances is extended to the great care the sisters take in their personal appearance. They choose their clothing carefully and are proud of their youthful looks. When Yukiko develops a dark spot that comes and goes over one eye, Sachiko and the others in the family are greatly worried that it will spoil her chances at marriage.

Of course, no family is as harmonious as the Makiokas would like to always appear; however, when a crisis arises the first consideration is usually how it can be managed so as to maintain a proper appearance. When Taeko's defiance causes Tatsuo, the



head of the family, to declare her expelled, the sisters maintain the appearance that Taeko has moved out but they maintain contact with her. When she becomes pregnant out of wedlock, she is sent away until the child is born in the hope that she can be quietly married afterward. Ironically, while it is Taeko who is outwardly expelled by the family, it is actually Tsuruko who has been most alienated and isolated from her sisters because of her role as head of the family. The appearance and reality of the Makioka family are often in conflict.



Style

Point of View

The Makioka Sisters is told primarily from the point of view of Sachiko, the second oldest sister with whom the two younger unmarried sisters live. Sachiko recognizes her responsibility to maintain proper appearances for a family of her standing and to follow traditional Japanese custom in family matters. As she is confronted with situations that challenge her traditional outlook, she struggles to cope with them while remaining faithful to tradition. Her first reaction when something like Taeko's defiance arises is to imagine how it will affect the reputation of the family and how she might best explain it to her older sister who, with her husband, has the traditional role of authority over all family matters.

Short passages of the novel temporarily take on the point of view of other characters when the action of the narrative takes place outside Sachiko's direct involvement. For example, when Teinosuke sets out alone to rescue Taeko during the flood or when he goes to meet directly with one of Yukiko's suitors the story is told from his point of view. Also, a brief passage from the point of view of Yukiko is included when she is traveling alone on a train and encounters a man she had once refused as a marriage prospect.

Setting

The Makioka Sisters takes place in Japan in the late 1930s and early 1940s, spanning several years. It concludes in early 1941, just months before Japan would enter into war with the United States. The primary setting is Ashiya, a suburb of Osaka where Sachiko and her husband live with their daughter, Etsuko. Despite the tradition that unmarried sisters live at the "main house" of the family, the two unmarried sisters choose to live with Sachiko rather than in Osaka where the oldest sister, Tsuruko, lives with her husband and several children.

The family travels frequently within Japan, visiting popular shrines and taking an annual day trip to see the cherry blossoms at a favorite place. When Tsuruko's husband takes a job with a Tokyo bank, the main house moves to Shibuya, a suburb of Tokyo, and many of the scenes take place there. The family is deeply connected to its Osaka roots, however, and retain a close identity with its home region.

The backdrop for this mainly peaceful setting is the growing threat of world war that is developing. While the narrative occasionally makes reference to the "China incident" and the hostilities in Europe, war is not a central part of the setting. There is one reference to an air raid drill, and one of the characters considers going to Manchuria as part of Japan's efforts to colonize China, but these are only minor concerns in the lives of the characters. They do serve to remind the reader, however, that war is close despite the characters' optimistic outlooks.



Language and Meaning

The Makioka Sisters was originally written in Japanese and then translated into English. Some of the idioms and vocabulary are inevitably lost when a work is translated and the translator must make choices about how to best relate the meaning of the original text. In this translation, there are occasional notes that describe people and things that would have been familiar to Japanese readers but may not be well-known outside the country.

The Makioka family is a wealthy merchant family that observes a traditional formality when it is appropriate. The language used by the characters is at times also suitably formal. Part of the Japanese polite tradition is not to speak too bluntly about matters in public, but to be circumspect and approach the subject from a sideways angle. Tanizaki's description of conversations between people follow this polite structure where neither person says directly what they mean but each relies on the other to understand what is being referred to.

Lost in the translation but referred to several times are the different dialects of Japanese that are spoken. There is an Osaka dialect and a Tokyo dialect, for example. Sachiko and her sisters are familiar with both and able to use them when appropriate. Sometimes Sachiko uses her Osaka dialect as a point of pride to distinguish herself from others in the conversation.

Tanizaki's prose is straightforward and descriptive. There are no flowery descriptions of the settings or scenery, although he does depict his characters enjoying the natural beauty of their surroundings at times. He does not shy away from describing some of the less attractive aspects of his characters' lives, such as their medical symptoms. His language is direct and practical.

Structure

The Makioka Sisters is presented in three books, each made up of several numbered chapters. Book I introduces most of the main characters and establishes the main setting in Ashiya, a suburb of Osaka. It establishes the sometimes tense relations between the "main house" of the eldest sister, Tsuruko, and Sachiko's household, where the two younger sisters prefer to live. The book ends shortly after another unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a marriage for Yukiko.

Book II continues to describe the efforts to secure a husband for Yukiko and introduces a major turning point in the story of Taeko, who is rescued from a major flood by the photographer Itakura. Taeko's defiance of her family's wishes that she wait and marry Okubata create much of the tension in the second book. The book ends with the sudden death of Itakura, apparently resolving the matter.

Book III focuses on more of the efforts to marry Yukiko. Dramatic revelations about Taeko are also central to the third book. Teinosuke emerges as the real decision-maker in the family's affairs as he quickly moves to deal with Taeko's situation while also



negotiating Yukiko's latest proposal. The novel finally ends with Taeko married and Yukiko about to be married.

The story is told in chronological order with occasional "flashback" episodes that fill in missing parts of the background of the characters. There are many repetitive events around which the story is structured, such as the annual visit the sisters make to view cherry blossoms in the spring and the repeated dinners the family has where Yukiko meets a potential suitor.



Quotes

"To Yukiko, however, drawn as she was to the past, there was something very unsatisfactory about this brother in law, and she was sure that from his grave her father too was reproaching Tatsuo." Book I, p. 9

"The ancients waited for cherry blossoms, grieved when they were gone, and lamented their passing in countless poems. How very ordinary the poems had seemed to Sachiko when she read them as a girl, but now she knew, as well as one could know, that grieving over fallen cherry blossoms was more than a fad or convention." Book I, p. 85

"Teinosuke preferred not to be too deeply involved in domestic problems, and particularly with regard to Etsuko's upbringing he was of the view that matters might best be left to his wife. Lately, however, with the outbreak of the China Incident, he had become conscious of the need to train strong, reliant women, women able to support the man behind the gun." Book I, p. 118

"It had occurred to Sachiko that she might just possibly be pregnant. But nearly ten years had passed since Etsuko's birth and doctors had even told her that surgery might be necessary before she could have another child. And so she had been careless." Book I, p. 133

"Teinosuke, upon hearing all this from his wife, said he thought it best not to interfere. They should see how serious Taeko was, and if it appeared that her decision was final, they could take up the task of winning over the main house. So the matter ended." Book II, p. 159

"Sachiko did not in fact know Tokyo as well as she pretended. When she had been perhaps sixteen, she had stayed, once or twice, with her father at a downtown inn, and she had been shown the city, but that was before the earthquake." Book II, p. 216

"It was true that Sachiko wanted a good rest before she grappled with her problem, but as a matter of fact the suspicions she had brought back from Tokyo showed a strange tendency to fade as the days passed. The shock when she had opened the letter, the fears that had clutched at her heart all through the following day, the nightmare that had tormented her on the train - the feeling of intolerable urgency - began to leave her the moment she was at home in the clear morning sunlight." Book II, p. 244

"Tears streamed over her cheeks and she sniffled occasionally, but she had told her story thus far clearly and with great composure. Her tone became heavier as they moved on to the question of her relations with Itakura. Her replies to Sachiko's questions being limited to affirmation or denial, Sachiko had to fill in the gaps for herself." Book II, p. 270

"Sachiko worried about Yukiko, helpless in the main house, a different sort from Taeko, who would do what she wanted regardless of the trouble it might cause and the rumors



it might start. Sachiko thought she could never apologize enough to Yukiko." Book II, p. 279

"Never before had the Makiokas been so humbled. Always they felt that the advantage was with them, that the other side was courting their favor - always it had been their role to judge the man and find him lacking. This time their position had been weak from the start." Book III, p. 356

"Perhaps Teinosuke thought that the sisters had quite severed relations with Taeko, or perhaps he knew that a certain amount of secret intercourse was inevitable. In any case, he seemed satisfied now that Taeko had at least outwardly been expelled from the family." Book III, p. 383

"Confident that Yukiko would be satisfied if they but made a show of respecting her wishes, Teinosuke and Sachiko spoke to her that evening. Her answer did not come as easily as they had hoped." Book III, p. 514



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the interpersonal relationships between the four Makioka sisters. How do they differ from one another?

Tanizaki includes two major natural disasters in his narrative. What role do they play in the story? Are they symbolic?

How does Tanizaki describe the effects of separation on his characters?

The growing worldwide hostilities are rarely mentioned in the story, despite being a looming reality at the time the story takes place. Why does Tanizaki keep war in the background? What effect does it have on the overall story?

How does Tanizaki create a sense of the different regions of Japan and what they mean to the characters?

There are several foreign characters in the novel. What role do they play? How do they affect the outlook of the Makioka family?

How is traditional Japanese culture depicted in the novel. How does it create conflict between the characters?