

Irene: Hello, welcome to Queer as Fact. I'm Irene.

Alice: I'm Alice.

Eli: I'm Eli.

I: We're a queer history podcast which comes out on the 1st and 15th of every month covering people and events from queer history throughout time and throughout the world. This week we're going to be talking about Yoshiya Nobuko, a Japanese author from the early 20th century.

[Intro music plays]

For this episode we don't really have many content warnings, there's one brief mention of suicide, and that's all I can think of. So if you don't want to hear that, then feel free to skip this; there are other episodes that you can enjoy. So, Yoshiya Nobuko. Just to be clear, Yoshiya is her surname, Nobuko is her given name. So yeah, Yoshiya Nobuko, one of the most influential writers in 20th century Japan. She's considered, like, the founder of the yuri genre.

E: Wow, okay.

I: She's quite great, um, and she's just generally, like, a massive, like, influential force in the, like, writing, writing fiction for young women. Yuri is essentially this genre in Japanese media which is all stories about queer women, generally young, attractive, feminine queer women, but...

E: So I am aware of this only insofar as people call it the female version of yaoi...

I: I disagree.

E: Yep. Can I just ask, who is it generally written by and who is it generally written for? Because if people don't know, yaoi is written by straight women for straight women generally, and so the impression that I've always gotten from people is that yuri is kind of likewise quite fetish-y.

I: Not really.

E: Mhm.

I: The, um... A lot of yuri is written by women for women essentially.

E: Mm, okay.

I: Both straight women and queer women.

E: Yep.

I: It does have a lot of similar tropes in it to yaoi in that you get the same kind of... like you'll get the same kind of character tropes where there's the young shy timid one and the more worldly sophisticated one and that kind of thing, but it doesn't have... If you imagine it being written by straight men for straight men then you're not really in the right...

E: Yep, yep.

I: ...place.

E: Cool.

I: So Nobuko was hugely commercially successful generally. One source I read told me she earned three times more than the prime minister.

E: Oh wow.

A: [laughter]

I: At one point she was super successful. She expressed resentment about having to pay tax when she wasn't allowed to vote though. Other fun facts, she was the first Japanese woman to own a racehorse.

E: Okay.

A: What did she call her racehorse?

I: I don't know, actually.

E: Do Japanese people have likewise nonsense race horse names? Surely.

I: Surely.

E: Surely this is universal.

[laughter]

I: I don't know. I really don't know, I really don't know.

A: Okay, that's a fun fact we'll find out later and put on our blog.

I: Yeah, if we can find out what she named her race horse. So yeah, she's hugely successful, hugely influential but, thanks to fact I think that most of her works are written for young women, she's been pretty much dismissed by critics in Japan and... ignored by the rest of the world.

E: Mm.

I: Even, like, in my research I would find things that sort of said... Even in writing where they were celebrating her as a queer woman, they would say things like, Nobuko began her career writing sugary girls' fiction and gradually developed her position as an established fiction writer.

E: Wow, okay.

I: So yeah. I just want to be clear before I start that her success and her influence are, like, 100% due to writing sugary girls' fiction and-

E: And that's a legitimate form of literature.

I: Exactly. So Yoshiya Nobuko was born on the 12th of January, 1896. One of my sources said that she was the only girl of four siblings, another said she had six brothers.

A: It may be one of those things were some died in infancy and quite young so she was the only girl of four siblings who lived to adulthood maybe.

I: Yeah... I was going to say, the impression I got was that there were four.

E: One girl, many brother.

I: One girl, many brothers is the important part there. Her father was an ambitious public servant: he began his career as a police officer, and then became a government official, which meant the family moved several times to follow his job. Her mother was fairly conservative, she had fairly conservative ideas about womanhood and raising girls, and she tried to raise Nobuko to be a sort of obedient, domestic, like, housewife. She recognised her daughter's voracious appetite for reading materials and tried to feed it on, like, books about cooking and etiquette and Nobuko was not super keen and read a lot of novels, and she talked about trying to get her hands on her older brothers', like, teen boy adventure magazines, and that kind of thing. And then when teen girl magazines start being published, she starts buying them and reads those, like, voraciously and collects them. She talks about the satisfaction of having, all, like, the issues stacked up on her desk in order.

E: [laughter]

A: When you say teen girls' magazines, like, I immediately picture, like, Girlfriend and Dolly that I used to read in high school.

I: That is essentially what you should be picturing.

A: Okay.

I: Like, it's a teen magazine aimed at girls, like, teens and young women probably. They tend to contain, like, advice, short stories...

A: Mhm.

I: Just sort of fun approachable media for young women.

A: Yep.

I: So yeah, her father believed education for a woman was a waste of time, she's sort of continually having to convince him that it's worth her doing another year of school.

A: Mhm.

I: But she keeps going through school anyway. She shows talent in writing from very young. She published her first short story in a, like, tween sort of magazine at the age of 12.

A: Aw, good on her.

I: By seventeen, she's being published in prestigious literature magazines.

E: I wonder if she was embarrassed to read her story from when she was twelve later.

A: [laughter]

I: I often think that about people who have been published very young. Like, when I was fourteen I would read authors who had published their first novel at fourteen, and be like, I'm so jealous, why are they so far ahead of me in life and now I look back at them and I'm like, I'm relieved...

E: Yeah.

I: ...that the stuff I wrote then was not in public. So [indecipherable], you let me stop thinking about my twelve year old writing.

E: Yeah, we're all just having flashbacks now, I'm sorry.

[laughter]

I: Okay. In 1915, when she's nineteen her father gets transferred to Utsunomiya, which is like 120 km north of Tokyo and she's like, I'm an adult now, I don't want to go and live in the country, I've got things going on in the city, I'd like to stay. So she wants to stay in Tokyo, so she moves in with her youngest brother, so she's the youngest of the children.

E: Uh huh.

I: And so she moves in with her, like, next oldest brother, Tadaaki, who is studying at Tokyo Imperial University at the time. He's the only one of the brothers who is doing, like, higher education, and his parents are very proud of him and his being in higher education, but he's always been very, kind of, very supportive of Nobuko's education and her writing, and has always been fighting on her side with their parents that's it worth her continuing to be educated. So she moves in with him and he's like, yeah, you should stay in Tokyo and do more study, you can become like a teacher or something, it'll be great.

Her oldest brother, meanwhile, is this... He studied fine arts, he's not a very successful painter himself, but he's good friends with Takehisa Yumeji, who is well-known at the time for these drawings he does of pretty willowy young women. And Takehisa Yumeji gets in touch with Nobuko through her brother and is like, so I read some of your short stories in, like, a magazine and you write about, very, like, pretty feminine young women and I draw those so we should do a collaboration.

A: Can I just clarify, are these short stories she's published so far queer or are they just short stories about women?

I: They're essentially about, like, relationships between young women, they're not overtly queer.

A: Oh, okay.

I: So, he gets in touch with her and says, hey, do you want to a collaborative project? And she doesn't really like him as a person, she thinks he's this sort of wealthy bachelor stereotype, and she's not very interested in him as a person but she thinks, look, that will be good for my career as a writer, sure, you can illustrate some of my short stories. And so over the next eight years, the two of them collaborate on this long series of short stories called Hana Monogatari which is, like... The translation is Flower Tales, there are 52 of them, I think, and every one is named after a different flower, and they're...

[laughter]

I: Yes.

E: They're really scraping the bottom of the barrel by the end of that, I bet.

[laughter]

I: Yes. I should have actually given you some of the flower names because they did get a bit...

A: Cos I feel like the first five are like rose and violet and lily and the last one is just like...

I: Ah yeah, by the end it's, like, Japanese foxglove.

E: [laughter]

I: Anyway, so it's this series of short stories about girls having relationships with other women basically. Some of them are more overtly queer than others, but the whole thing was very popular among young women. I'm going to give you again some, like, social context here. You've probably heard the word shojo as in, like, shojo manga or whatever.

A and E: Mhm.

I: It's, like, the genre that's devoted to, like, teen and young adult women. It's almost, it's like a marketing category essentially.

E: Mm.

A: Yep.

I: Like shojo literature, shojo manga or whatever is basically just media directed at young women and that's a very new category at this time.

A: At the time you're talking about here?

I: Yes.

A: Okay.

I: At the time we're talking about. So we're in like 1915, we're in the early twentieth century, and due to, like, a variety of social changes, basically young women are spending a lot more time unmarried, and are a lot more likely to work and thus have their own, like, spendable income while they're sort of young and single. So there's essentially this, there's this whole, like, new market of, like, late teen and young adult women who are looking for, like, magazines and reading material and, like, stories they can connect to that are about young women. Up until point, the word shojo has kind of been like... Like, you would probably think of it as the equivalent of where we would say maiden or something.

A: Oh okay.

I: It's like an unmarried woman, the implication being that she's like, I guess, a virgin or innocent but in this era it becomes connected to a whole bunch of other stereotypes. So the shojo now, she's kind of like a flapper, I guess.

A: Oh, cool, okay.

I: Yeah, think of it like that, she's this kind of modern, free, progressive woman who's scandalous or like, what's the word, like, pushing boundaries. And while she's thought of as having, like, no heterosexual experience, the stereotype shojo is thought of as having romantic experience with other women.

E: Okay.

I: Or semi-romantic. Again we're in that kind of romantic friendship category to some extent.

E: Mhm.

A: Mhm.

I: The word they used for this at the time was *douseiai*, which is same-sex love. I'm keeping this in here because I really like the fact that now this is used a general word for same-sex love of, like, men or women. At the time, it was... it seems to have been coined just to refer to young women with each other.

A: Okay.

I: And I like the fact that we've gone in that direction where we have this word which is about women...

E: Becoming the general term.

I: Yeah, becoming the general term because usually what happens is you get these words that are about men and then they've kind of looked as an afterthought and gone, huh, looks like gay women do exist too, so I like the fact that...

A: Hey, gay men exist as well, I guess they'll have our word.

I: [laughter] Yeah, I like that it went in the other direction. So yeah, there are a bunch of social commentators at the time seeing this trend which they think is, like, bringing down society as they know it of young women delaying marriage and instead building, like, significant relationships with each other. One of the books I read said that adolescent women and young women at the time have these intense passionate friendships, we've talked about romantic friendships before, and it's that kind of thing. One of the books I read said, this is the quote, "sexologists found it difficult to distinguish between friendship and homosexuality: where did one end and the other begin?" So it's that kind of thing, so that's what *shoujo* is here, it's this new kind of demographic with this undercurrent of, like, slightly queer.

A: Mmkay.

E: I love when we find stuff like this in the podcast where it's not just like this one person was queer, but queerness kind of pervading an entire, y'know, we had a profession in the Sylvia and Charity episode or a like social strata or whatever. It is good.

A: Yes, it is good.

I: Yeah, it's definitely, it's a thing. One of the other things I found was a newspaper, again in like maybe the '20s or the '30s, and there were a bunch of scandals had come out with like lesbian suicide pacts and all kinds of weird things.

E: Okay.

I: Yeah, and there's this comment in the newspaper where someone goes, "One can only infer that females these days are monopolising homosexuality".

E: Okay

[laughter]

I: And that was the quote, it was just him being like, why aren't I having sex with men? Why do women do this?

A: [laughter]

I: It made me laugh a lot when I read it.

A: Um, you read a lot of things which are like, y'know, queer people have always existed and they're trying to make that point that just because, y'know, we may not have talked about queer people as much in the past, they didn't not exist in the past, and often there's kind of an implication of, queer people have always existed, but they've all been forced to be closeted, and only now are they able to come out, where actually it's just like, queer people have always existed and had, like, their communities and everything.

I: And the newspaper has been writing about them.

A: And the newspaper was angry.

I: Yep.

E: The one newspaper.

I: [laughter]

A: The newspaper.

I: Yep.

E: That demonic entity.

I: So, yes, like I said, Hanamonogatari, there are these 52 short stories, each named after a flower. The settings are often all-girls environments, so they're like boarding houses for single women, or all-girls schools, or, like, similar environments with no men in them, or if there are men in them, the men tend to be, like, fairly undeveloped characters who appear to, like, say one thing or serve a purpose or drive the plot and do pretty much nothing.

A: That's so satisfying.

I: So yeah, their plotlines basically involve a lot of, like, lonely young women pining after other lonely young women and, like, giving each other flowers and the style, it's very, like, stylistically kind of dream-like, kind of fantasy.

A and E: Mhm.

I: With very kind of... I don't know how to...

A: I think that makes sense though.

I: Yeah. You understand.

A: So you know how you said that each story is named after a flower?

I: Yeah.

A: Does the flower feature in the story?

I: Sometimes.

A: Okay.

I: Sometimes it's a metaphorical flower.

A: Okay. I was just wondering what happened when they go to the later stories and had to be like, how can we include this?

I: [laughter]

E: What's the flower a metaphor for?

I: There are like... the reason, and this is one of those, like this is just something vaguely related, when I talked about yuri before, the word yuri is lily.

A: Ah, okay.

I: So like, the flower is queer women.

E: Okay.

I: I don't, can't go into a lot of detail but these, like, representing women with flowers is not that big.

A: Is pretty standard.

I: Is a, yeah.

E: Well, representing female genitalia with flowers in, like, queer lady art is a thing also.

A: Yeah.

I: Yes. Yeah.

E: So. I guess my question was how sexual are the flowers?

I: [laughter] Were they sex flowers?

E: [laughter] Were they sex flowers, yes, thank you.

I: She's not very, like, sexually explicit in her work. Although she definitely talks about, like, physical desire and people do kiss, there's not explicit sex in most of this work. It's a lot more...

A: Is there implicit sex?

I: Yes, I would say sex is implied, but there's a lot more romance...

E: More sensual than sexual.

I: Sensual, that's...

E: This all just sounds so much like Sappho.

I: Sappho is about to come up.

E: Yeeeeeees!

[laughter]

I: And the reason why I wanted to bring up, when I found this quote in one of these short stories about Sappho, is that you see a lot of, when you read about like, LGBT history in Japan, you see a lot of people making this, no this is totally different to the West, this is a separate culture, this is, they didn't see themselves as connected to...

A: Mhm.

I: ...like the LGBTI movement in the West, they didn't see a connection between this until quite recently, and I think the fact that she's bringing up Sappho and drawing these parallels between her queer characters and Sappho is kind of saying, no, she belongs to... She wants you to know that she belongs to this bigger history.

A: Mhm.

I: Um.

E: Sorry, is the point that's being made there is that they didn't kind of conceptualise themselves as part of a burgeoning political movement or that they just didn't conceptualise identity in the same way or is it vague?

I: Um, the point there I think is that they didn't conceptualise themselves as, yeah, as connected with the queer rights movement in the West.

A: So when you're talking about they didn't or these people who say they didn't have this conception of being connected with the queer movement in the West, are those people specifically talking about the women of this time or is that just a general statement that gets made about queer Japanese history compared with queer Western history?

I: It's a general statement I have seen in writing about queer Japanese history.

A: Okay.

I: In like the 20th century. But anyway, I want to read you this quote from Sappho really just so Eli can be like, what is this.

[laughter]

I: What is this? Anyway, she's talking to... Like, the premise of the story is it's this very young, like, teacher who's teaching, it's, like, her first year out of university and she's got this older student, so there's not really a big age difference between them.

A: Mhm.

I: But it's definitely a teacher and a student and they're having this like, very intimate, personal conversation about love, and one of them says there's this ancient poet Sappho, and what she says is, "Sappho was a person who gave her passionate devotion to a beautiful friend of the same sex and was betrayed...she loved her maid Melitta deeply - she was betrayed by this girl, Melitta too - she took her

sad heart, broken from fruitless offerings of passionate devotion, threw herself into the blue ocean from the Leucadian Rock, and disappeared amid the waves - Sappho, the tragic female poet - I love her." If you want to read this story, you can buy it as an ebook for \$3 with, like, translator's notes and an introduction and everything, it's the only one of these stories that's been translated and published. So you can read it.

E: I'm going to. I'll give it to you.

I: I'll give you a \$1.50 and we can split it. So, anyway, we have to leave her queer woman stories for a little bit to get back to her real life. Goodbye, Sappho. Um, so, a year after Nobuko moves in with her brother in Tokyo, her brother got a job surveying forests in northern China.

A: That sounds like a real job, yeah.

I: It sounds like a real job. He, um, actually, nah, I think he studied agriculture so this makes sense.

E: I want to survey forests in northern China.

I: [laughter]

A: I mean, you could, it's just you mightn't get paid for it.

E: Just travel to China and look at some trees and be like, yes.

[laughter]

A: Yes.

I: So yeah, her brother leaves for China in order to go and look at some trees.

E: [laughter] Sorry. Good.

I: And so, Nobuko, who still wants to stay in Tokyo, moves into a women's dormitory, like a boarding-house sort of situation run by Baptist Missionaries.

E: Mhm.

A: Are these Baptist Missionaries from Europe or are these Japanese Baptist missionaries?

I: Ah, it wasn't clear.

A: Okay.

I: It was never specified in what I read. In any case she... The place is quite restrictive, they have a strict curfew, and they're quite, like, prudish, I guess?

A: Mhm.

I: About what you can do in this boarding house, and she finds the place too restrictive, and she gets quickly expelled after she misses the curfew because she's out seeing a movie, like, several times, and she gets thrown out. So she moves instead to the YWCA, which is the women's equivalent of the YMCA, and at this time, in this place has all the same queer implications. It is just as queer. So, she's in the YWCA, so she moves in there and she has a roommate there.

E: [knowingly] Mhm.

A: [laughter]

I: Yes. So she has a roommate there, her name is Kikuchi Yukie, and they get into a relationship. Her given name is Yukie, Kikuchi is her family name. Around this time, Nobuko writes, so it's published in 1919, Nobuko writes a novel, a standalone novel called Yaneura no Nishoujo. Which, the translated title of this that I always found was Two Virgins in an Attic, but we've...

[laughter]

I: Yes.

E: That's just... It sounds like a really bad joke set up maybe. Two virgins walk into an attic...

I: [laughter] Yes. The word that they're translating there as virgins is shojo...

E: Yep.

A: Mhm.

I: ...which we've discussed already.

A: Mhm.

E: Has implications.

A: Two lesbian flappers in an attic.

E: [laughter]

I: Yeah.

A: I would read Two Lesbian Flappers in an Attic.

E: You can!

A: And will!

I: You really can. It hasn't been translated, but you can try.

A: My Japanese is like... basically gone but I can get it back for this cause.

I: [laughter] Okay. So the, um, plot line essentially, of Two Virgins in an Attic...

[laughter]

E: Sorry.

I: I know.

A: It's so good.

I: Is... the story basically: Two young women in an attic, they share an attic room in this, like, women's boarding house...

A: Can I just clarify, before we continue, do her and Yukie share the attic room in the boarding house?

I: It's not clear that it's an attic.

A: [laughter]

I: But they do share a room in the boarding house.

A: Okay.

E: So this is incredibly self-insert.

I: Yes.

E: Cool. Cool, cool.

I: Yes. But, yeah, it is notable for, like, laying down a bunch of the tropes of, like, yuri, so female-female romance in Japanese media. They move into this attic room together, one of them is worldly and sophisticated and beautiful, and the other one is, like, immature for her age and daydreams a bunch about the first one and there are a lot of flower metaphors and a piano scene...

E: [laughter] Good.

A: Sorry, clarify 'a piano scene' for me.

I: One of them plays the piano and the other one is very admiring.

A: Oh, I see what you mean, just a normal piano scene .

I: Yep, a piano scene.

[laughter]

A: I wasn't sure if I was missing something here, but that's...

E: If no one in your romance plays a piano, is it even a romance?

[laughter]

A: No.

I: And yeah, spoilers, they fall in love.

A: [gasps]

E: Rude. Sorry.

[laughter]

A: I was going to read this, Irene, I'm not going to anymore.

I: [laughter] I won't tell you the ending then. So what is notable about this novel is, like, two things. Their love is allowed to, kind of, continue into adulthood. So you get this, and we've talked about this before as well, this kind of framework where same-sex relationships are considered allowed and acceptable when you're young.

A: As long as they don't get in the way of you eventually marrying and having kids? Is it that kind of...?

I: Yeah, it's that thing. And so the fact that these two... I don't know, I don't want to give away the ending to you again.

A: I think you may just have to give away the ending to us.

I: Yeah.

E: Spoilers for Two Virgins in an Attic.

I: Yes.

E: Turn the podcast off now if you're midway through this book.

I: [laughter] Yes. Spoilers for Two Virgins in an Attic. At the end of the book, the two of them move out of their attic room together, and decide to, like, go and travel together and they stand there and they look at their attic room and they're standing there and they're like... Wasn't it great? It was our room, it was, like, our space where we fell in love, and then they kiss and then they leave to, like, go on a trip together.

A: Aww.

E: I hope this has an intense amount of titles in the series and it's just... Two Virgins in this Locale and then...

I: [laughter] That would be nice.

E: So the next one's like Two Virgins in a Train Station...

[laughter]

E: ...and then Two Virgins in...

A: This sounds like a series of children's picture books but I realise that's not correct.

E: Yeah, no, this is an Enid Blyton series now.

[laughter]

I: So, yes, the fact that they're allowed to leave the, like, women's boarding house situation and continue to be in love in the world is quite notable. And also that their love has a physical element. Like I said, you see them kiss at the end, but also, physical desire is kind of referenced. Like there are those

sort of scenes where one of them is standing there, and the other one will come up behind her to, like, put the necklace on her or something and it's like an intense moment where she's so aroused.

E: [laughter]

I: It's, like, it's still referred to obliquely but the fact that physical attraction between women is a thing in here...

E: Mhm.

I: It's very much like the framework in Japan is, in this time, is very much love, like, men's love is carnal and women's love is spiritual.

A: Yep.

E: Mhm.

I: And so, like, the fact that women are having sexual attraction here is quite big.

A and E: Mhm.

I: So, as you both noted, it is very self-insert.

A: When she wrote this book - you may not know the answer - I'm assuming that her and Yukie are going to be in a relationship or are already in a relationship.

I: Yes.

A: When she wrote this, were they in a relationship, or was she like, hey, I wrote this book about these two girls who share a room in a boarding house and then they hook up!

I: [laughter] I hadn't actually thought about that but I like to imagine her just coming in casually to Yukie one day and being like, Yukie, do you mind, like, proofreading my novel for me?

[laughter]

A: Yeah. That's how I want this to be.

I: So, I mean, she does... Several of her short stories have been based on real events, too, not always real events about her. One she read a, um, a well-known female poet published this open letter to her husband who she was asking for a divorce from in a newspaper.

E: Oh wow.

A: Ooooooh.

I: And Nobuko read it and was like, wow, that's dramatic and writes this short story about a fictional female poet who divorces her husband publically in a newspaper.

A: Oh yeah.

I: And then goes off and hangs out with women.

E: So she was like, what if this but lesbians?

I: Yeah. Basically. And, um... So yeah, it's very much assumed that this novel is based off her experiences with Yukie.

A and E: Mhm.

I: Unfortunately their relationship doesn't last.

A: Mm...

I: She, um, Yukie, she writes about her in her diaries as being quite jealous and controlling, which she interprets, Nobuko interprets as masculine traits and finds them undesirable for that kind of... The one quote I've got here, and she's talking about having sex with Yukie, and she says, "Sex is a most natural human desire. But the irritating thing about Yukie is the way she equates sex with possession and ownership, the way men do. The physical act is just a cover for a coarseness of spirit."

E: Okay.

I: So, yeah, she's not happy in that relationship in the end, she finds Yukie quite, like, possessive and she doesn't want that.

A and E: Mhm.

I: And so they break up in 1920. Following this, she has a, like, short-lived relationship with an older woman which I couldn't find much information on, but also didn't end happily. And so a few years later, we find her complaining to a close friend that, "Close friendship between women is impossible."

A: Mmkay.

I: Which, she's like... what's she's saying there is definitely finding a romantic partner is impossible.

A and E: Mhm.

I: And her friend disagrees, and is like, no, I'm going to introduce you to my friend, who I think you'll really like.

A: Oh, what a good friend.

I: And so, on January the 12th, which is her 27th birthday, in 1923, she... I am assuming she goes out for drinks with her friend and her friend brings along Monma Chiyo, whose first name, to be clear, is Chiyo, who is a 24-year-old high school maths teacher and Chiyo is going to be a very important figure in Nobuko's life, Chiyo is, so I'm going to give you a bit of background on her here.

So she's a high school maths teacher. In contrast to Nobuko, her parents, Chiyo's parents supported her professional ambitions, supported her education and thought it was great that she wanted to get educated and become a teacher and have a career. And so, they come from, like, quite different...

E: Family backgrounds.

I: Yeah, they come from quite different family backgrounds and, sort of, experiences of being female, I guess.

E: Mm, yep.

I: But they, um, click immediately with each other and they become pretty much inseparable.

E: Good. Good job, Nobuko's friend.

I: [laughter] Yeah, Nobuko's friend really nailed that one.

E: Mhm.

I: I did find... and I couldn't find the, um, actual source for this but one of the books I was reading, apparently, Chiyo's first impression of Nobuko is to describe her short, unfashionable haircut as cute.

A and E: Aww.

I: Which, I was like, aw, she had a queer haircut.

[laughter]

E: Yes. She just had an undercut.

[laughter]

A: In the '20s.

E: Yes. That's going to date this podcast, if anyone's listening to this in like five years. They'll be like, wow, remember when undercuts were a thing.

[laughter]

I: So true. So yeah they become pretty much inseparable very quickly. They started meeting every day after Chiyo finished work. They would either meet at Chiyo's house and hang out or they would go and trawl secondhand bookshops together.

A: Aww.

E: Oh my God.

A: I love them.

I: Which is super idyllic and I love them.

E: Goals.

I: So, they become super close and then a year after they met, Chiyo takes a job outside of Tokyo. So she's going to be working away from Tokyo for ten months.

E: Okay. That's at least a definite time frame.

I: Yeah, it's like, it's manageable.

A: I hope they write cute love letters

I: They write over 150 of them.

A: Aww.

I: Most of which are between five and ten pages long

A: Oh my God, guys.

I: So they committed to the love letters. Anyway, yeah, in, um... It seems to be quite formative for their relationship, like I said they wrote more than 150 of these like essay-length letters. And Nobuko misses Chiyo a lot and is quite lonely without her and at one point in her diary, I have this quote. She writes, "Chiyo's letters always purify my soul."

A and E: Awww.

I: The letters are available now, they've been published but in Japanese, and I didn't have to go through them myself.

A: Yeah, fair.

I: But I really want to. Um, so yeah, I have a bunch of quotes here from their letters which people have translated which are just incredibly sweet and I want to read them and if this gets long you can cut some.

A: No, read them all.

I: Here are some of my favourite quotes. This is from Nobuko to Chiyo. "Darling, you are the light of my life, my very conscience. With you I am a better person."

A: Mm...

I: And, um, she writes, this is also really lovely, "Beloved Chiyo..." This is one of her very short letters, it's a few lines long, this is the whole letter:

"I will love you no matter what

I do not wish to make you lonely

Nor do I want to be lonely

I want you to be the source of my strength

And, if you will let me, I would like to be the source of your strength

May 23 [1923], 8:30 p.m.

Arriving home soaking wet from the rain

Nobuko"

A and E: Aww.

I: And that's the letter she writes.

E: I, sorry, I thought you were going to be like, this is one of the shorter letters, it's only like three or four pages.

I: [laughter] No, it's an incredibly short letter, it's, like, these few lines and Chiyo writes these long florid replies. This one is also quite lovely. I'm going to read it to you because it has physical attraction in it again! Women, they have sexual desires!

A: Sounds fake but...

E: Heard it here first!

[laughter]

I: Yes. Um, yeah, she writes... And she addresses it to my beloved elder sister, which sounds weird to us but is a fairly common euphemism at the time for, like, how you address your lesbian lover.

A: I mean, we have the thing where people call their lover baby so like... who are we to judge?

I: Yeah. In Mandarin, it's quite common to call your girlfriend little sister.

E: We also have the thing in English where people call their, um, boyfriend 'daddy' so we can't judge anyone ever.

A: We sure do.

[laughter]

I: Anyway, so she writes: "To my beloved elder sister. I am unspeakably lonely when you leave. My heart becomes hollow, and all I am able to do is to sit in a chair and stare blankly at the wall. It's now nighttime, isn't it? As I wrap my unlined black kimono around my bare skin and adjust the hem, my body is aroused by feelings of longing; instead, what stretches before my eyes is dusty reality. Ah, this evening. My heart finds no consolation in this evening dream of mine or in reality. My heart sinks from a heavy sadness. If only on this night we were together in our own little house, lying quietly under the light of a lantern, then my heart would gradually warm and neither would you be so sad. I am so sad that I won't be able to see you either tomorrow or the day after. Let us please meet on Tuesday. Farewell for now; I am forever yours."

A: Awww.

E: I like the quick, hey, I bet you were wondering what I was wearing.

[laughter]

I: I know. I love it.

A: Yes.

I: I was wearing my black kimono and I was so aroused.

E: Please think about me in my black kimono and also be aroused.

I: [laughter] Yes.

E: And then on Tuesday we can, we can do something about that.

I: Yes. And this is another one that Chiyo writes later on to Nobuko, and she's thinking about the future, she's going to come back to Tokyo soon and she's thinking about what they're going to do: "I can only think of how soon we can arrange to live together. There's nothing I need more than your warm embrace. It is unfortunate that we are not a male and female couple, for if you were a male, our union would be quickly arranged. But a female couple is not allowed. Why is it that [in our society] love is acknowledged only by its outward form and not by its depth of quality – especially since there are so many foul and undesirable aspects to heterosexual relationships?"

So that's the letter, she writes this letter not long before she comes home and Nobuko writes her a reply. Essentially what she's doing here is planning for their marriage, it's unquestionably their marriage. She uses the word.

E: Well. That's the end of that debate.

I: That's yep. They're gonna get married. Um...

E: We've had a lot of women having wives thus far.

A: We have.

I: Yeah, it's, yeah... It's more common than I expected, women having wives in history. So yeah, she writes this reply: "Chiyo-chan."

A: I'm just going to make you clarify Japanese again, do you want to clarify what -chan is?

I: Ah, yes, sorry, so Chiyo-chan. Chan is, it's like an affectionate diminutive.

A: Yep.

I: It's like, yeah...

I: Anyway, "After reading your letter I resolved to build a small house for the two of us.

E: Um, is she physically building this house with her own two hands?

I: No, she's wealthy.

E: Oh, of course

I: She's going to hire an architect.

E: She's three times as rich as the prime minister!

I: And she's got a racehorse.

E: [laughter] And she's got a racehorse.

I: I don't think she's bought the race horse yet. But anyway..

E: I want them to ride off into the sunset very fast.

[laughter]

I: Anyway, "Once it is constructed..." And this is a very practical letter, actually, about how they're going to do this. "Once it is constructed, I will declare it to be a branch household..." Which is like a legal thing, she's going to register their household. "...initiate a household register, and become a totally independent household. I will then adopt you so you can become a legal member of my household..." Which is, again, it's quite a common thing even now, I think, for Japanese same-sex couples to do.

A: Yeah, I've heard of this.

I: For the older partner to adopt the younger partner because then, even though it's not recognising the actual nature of their relationship, it makes a bunch of legal things to with, like, recognising next-of-kin and inheritance super easy.

E: I think that this is talked about in, um, that show that Ellen Page and her friend are doing, Gaycation?

A: Oh, yes.

E: In the Japanese episode. That show is good, by the way. I say, having watched...

I: One episode.

E: Only that episode, yeah.

[laughter]

I: It was a good episode.

E: That episode was good.

I: Yes.

E: And it's, it's a thing in the West too, I think... Oh, I read about someone doing this recently, it might have been Bayard Rustin? Or someone, someone did this in the last... In the fairly recent past in, like, America.

A: I see why it makes sense, when you have all those issues of, like, next-of-kin and stuff.

I: Yeah.

A: That does get around those.

I: So, yeah, she says, "I will then adopt you so you can become a legal member of my household," and then in brackets, "(adoption being a formality since the law will not recognize you as a wife. In the meantime, I aim to get the law reformed)."

E: Oh wow.

A: In the meantime, I'm going to make gay marriage legal so don't stress, I've got this.

I: [laughter]

E: We should post this on Tumblr as a to do list, like the lesbian agenda.

I: [laughter] Yes. One translation... There was a different translation of this letter that I saw where it was laid out, and I didn't see the original letter, so I don't know how it worked, but it was laid out with like, as a numbered list and it was like, 1. I will build us a small house.

[laughter]

I: 2. I will, like, register the household and become it's, like, legal head. 3. I will adopt you.

A: 4. I will get the law reformed.

[laughter]

I: Yes.

A: So can we back up a bit to the part where she, um, where Nobuko is going to become the household's legal head.

I: Yeah.

A: Does that represent a general dynamic in their relationship or is that just how've they'd decided legally that's how it's going to work?

I: They seem... I was gonna say, there are certain things about their relationship that you could map onto a heterosexual marriage. Nobuko continues to work but as soon as they're like, financially stable, Chiyo quits work...

A: Okay.

I: ...to, like, keep the house, but I don't think it's fair to assume that implies a, like, power imbalance.

A: Mhm.

I: They, um, yeah, I feel they generally see each other as equals.

A: Mmkay.

I: Anyway, um, the rest of the letter, she goes, "That's what I've decided. We'll celebrate your adoption with a party just like a typical marriage reception. It will be our wedding ceremony. I want it to be really grand. We will ask Miyaka Yasuko and Shigeri." - Shigeri is the friend who introduced them in the first place.

A: Good on Shigeri.

I: "I wonder what kind of wedding kimono would look best on you?"

A and E: Aww.

A: So, she's planning their wedding, and their wedding reception, and everything. Do their family know that they're a couple who are planning to get married? Are they...like how open are they about this?

I: I don't know how they are with their families at this point.

A: Mhm.

I: They're very open to their friends. Their whole social circle knows.

A: Okay. Is their whole social circle lesbians or is their whole social circle just accepting?

I: Their whole social circle is not all lesbians. Their whole social circle is quite accepting.

E: Are they all women?

I: Yes.

E: Okay.

I: Or like, vastly women.

E: Mhm.

I: She does have male friends, but their social circle is like, vastly women and vastly like, women in, like, creative fields or things like that, they're other women writers...

A: Mhm.

I: There's a whole circle of them. There are other queer women, I discovered them on my way.

They visit them in Moscow later.

A: Yes, do more episodes.

E: Yes.

I: So there's gonna be more of this.

E: Good.

I: They, like, I will tell you later about their trip to Moscow. So, yeah, at the end of the letter she closes with "Please come back as soon as possible and don't ever leave me again."

A: Awww.

I: "I promise I'll stay with you until the day that death parts us."

A and E: Aww.

I: And, so yeah, they don't get married immediately, when Chiyo comes home. They seem to be vaguely hoping that the law will change and that they'll be able to actually get married.

E: Awww, I'm in pain.

A: Was that just wishful thinking, or was there like, a strong movement to change the law at this time.

I: There wasn't so much a strong movement to change the law, as generally Japan is rapidly changing socially at this time.

A: Okay.

I: And they're kind of just hoping, I think, that this is going to be something that's picked up and carried along with it. And it is not, so eventually they're like, "All right, I guess, I will adopt you, and we can have our marriage like I planned in the letter." And so, they move in together in 1926, three years after they met. Yeah, Nobuko uses her income from writing to build them this house. It's apparently, it's a very nice house. It's got like, modern architecture, it's very open and bright and there are windows, like large glass windows, and it's just a very welcoming house. All their friends always - it's this kind of - it becomes this kind of social hub for their friends, and people describe it as this very friendly, welcoming house.

A: Do you know if it's still standing? I want to visit it.

I: Yes - one of the houses - I don't know if it's this one or one they lived in later. It's still standing, it's now a memorial museum to her.

A: Let's go on a Queer As Fact excursion to Japan.

E: Yeah, first, Mount Egerton. Then, Japan!

A: [laughs]

I: That was like the first thing I did when I read that - I sent this message to Claire. I was like, "I have found a queer writer museum in Japan. We must go."

A and E: Yes.

A: Well we can at least find some pictures of it.

E: If that's going to stay in should we mention that Claire's your girlfriend.

I: Yes. My girlfriend. We will go to Japan and be queer together.

E: Yes.

I: Right now we're queer in Melbourne.

E: Yes. Before, you were queer in Japan. Then you were back again.

I: This is true. We have been queer in several places.

E: Yeah, you had a brief stopover while you were queer in...

A: Hong Kong?

E: Hong Kong, or wherever.

A: How many countries can you be queer in?

I: [laughs] Challenge...Anyway, so they live in this like, nice, welcoming happy house. They have a German shepherd.

E: Yes.

A: What's it called? I'm sorry, I'm really invested in what all the animals are called.

I: I don't know. I actually tried to look for the dog's name, because I knew you were going to ask, but...

A: [laughs] Okay.

E: I want a German shepherd.

I: And then, so they're, as we've established, they're comfortably well-off, and after a few years, Chiyo is able to quit her job as a maths teacher, and she essentially - she becomes Nobuko's secretary, so she deals with a whole lot of administrative stuff, she edits her writing, she...and she does a whole lot of housekeeping stuff. And then in 1928, the two of them decide they're going to go on a, like, world tour, essentially. They're going to go on this year-long trip to Europe and the United States. Nobuko expresses being particularly keen to go to the Soviet Union because "a revolution has succeeded there".

E: Okay.

A: Is Nobuko a communist?

I: Nobuko herself is actually not deeply involved in organised politics or anything like that. She has a lot of friends who are like, in the Japanese Communist Party and that kind of thing. But herself doesn't get involved sort of, in organised political activism.

E: Okay.

I: She's the same with feminism: she has a lot of opinions about it, and she writes about it, but she doesn't consider herself to be in the movement.

A: Okay, yep.

I: But in this case, she's just keen on the fact that a revolution has succeeded there, and she hopes for...

E: Wait, what year are we in?

I: Ah, 28. 1928.

E: Okay.

A: So you mentioned before that she's upset that she can't vote, when do women get the vote in Japan?

I: Quite late. I don't remember when.

A: Okay.

I: I can look it up, easily, but I don't know off the top of my head. So, yes, they do, they go to Moscow, where they meet up with a couple of friends - Yuasa Yoshiko and her partner, Shuujou Yuriko, who are another pair of queer Japanese women writers.

E: Good.

I: Yuriko is better known now - I think it's probably worth saying, these two don't stay together. Yuriko is better known by her married name, Miyamoto Yuriko. And she's quite a well-known writer. But the two

have lived in Moscow together, as a couple, for a year, and they meet up with Nobuko and Chiyo, and show them around Moscow, and Yuriko and Nobuko wind up being quite close friends, which they don't seem to have been before they meet each other in Moscow, like they seem to have known about each other, but not be super close at this point. And they see each other often for like, the rest of their lives.

A: That's good.

I: Nobuko and Chiyo also go to the US, where Nobuko comments on like, women's liberation there compared to Japan, and she's like, the women here are so much more free and so much more progressive, and so much more confident in themselves.

A: Mhm.

I: And she's like, "I'm never going to write again about a woman who cries and accepts her fate."

She wants to like, make this change in her writing to reflect what she thinks women could be like.

A: Mhm.

E: She's meeting like, the OG flappers.

I: Yeah.

E: Like, I don't - I don't know if they came before or after the Japanese quote-unquote flappers, but you know. Who are called flappers.

I: She's meeting the other flappers.

E: [laughs] Yes. Did....just thinking of Japanese flappers, is there, like, styles of dress associated with them?

I: What's, like, noted about them, is that they tend, they're more likely to sort of adopt Western forms of dress, and that kind of thing.

E: Okay.

I: It's very much all tied up with this idea of kind of modernity and being like progressive or technologically advanced. Japan is still kind of, I think, very self-conscious in this era, that they've... Since the Meiji Restoration....so in the...Okay.

E: I'm sorry.

[laughter]

I: Okay.

E: Oh, I thought about Meiji chocolate, because you mentioned the Meiji Restoration.

I: Oh no.

E: Mmmm.... Anyway. Onwards.

I: Basically, what happens in the sort of mid-nineteenth century, is that Japan opens its borders again for the first time in some time, and they look out, and they're like, "Wow, everyone is industrialised in Europe, and we're kind of concerned," and so Meiji, who is the emperor at the time, is super efficient and forward thinking, and I'm quite impressed with him, and he sends out a bunch of people like engineers to go to Europe and be like, 'Go and learn what they're doing over there, and bring it back to me, and we'll see how we can use it.' And so, Japan's had this kind of really rapid modernisation and industrialisation in the last kind of fifty years. So yeah, I think, at this point there's still this kind of almost self-conscious idea that anything Japanese is a little bit backwards, and something Western is modern.

A: Mhm.

I: And so, when you get these women wanting to present themselves as like modern women, and independent women, they'll go to Western clothing to do that.

E: Mm, okay.

A: Yup.

I: So. So, after her... After their trip around the world, Nobuko and Chiyo come home to Japan. Um...she continues to write. She's generally very successful, but there are a couple of things I wanted to raise in terms of criticism for her writing. She's not uncontroversial and she's not uncriticised, and she gets criticism kind of from both ends of the political spectrum. Half of it is that kind of obvious sexist criticism that you'd expect critics to sort of write, and they say well this is frivolous, this is childish, this is populist rubbish.

E: Mhm.

A: Can I just ask you spoke, right near the start, about somebody saying she began writing sugary stories for females, and then eventually went...

I: Oh, she does write, after the war, I will get to it.

A: Okay, so she does go into a different genre later on?

I: She's still writing later on focussed on women, but it's less... I will talk about it later on, I think.

A: Okay, sure.

I: Yep. Um, so yeah, she, um, gets these kinds of criticisms that are very, like, obviously sexist and they call it childish populist rubbish, basically. She writes this, like, delightfully kind of blunt response to someone at one point which goes, "You assert that I write like a child, but how old must a woman be before you cease calling her a child? [...] Do you regard women as children by definition?"

E: That's great.

I: And I just enjoyed how blunt she was about calling that out.

A: Mm, yeah.

E: That's all... like you can just very easily imagine that kind of exchange happening with any given popular young adult woman writer today.

I: Right now, immediately, on Twitter.

E: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

E: Yes. Just that in... 140 characters or less. I don't know how many characters a tweet is.

[laughter]

A: It's 140. I know because I've been trying to use Twitter and it's hard.

[laughter]

I: Yes.

E: We are not the cool millennials.

I: We are not. We would be having avocado toast then. Anyway. She does also, she gets criticism from, like, women in the feminist movement as well though because a lot of her, like, the vast majority of her characters, her female characters, are these very hyperfeminine...

E: Okay.

A: Mm.

I: ...characters, they're very, kind of, pretty, they're very... There's sort of an implicit sense of, kind of, sweetness to them or purity to them, I guess, or something like that which feminists will like... Which people in the feminist movement, feminist writers, will see this as a kind of anti-feminist thing that she's building up, this traditional view of women.

E: Mmkay.

A: Mhm.

I: And um, also I think people are getting... They're upset with her refusal to engage with the sort of organised feminist movement, they're... a lot of those critiques are kind of objecting to the fact that she's writing these dreamlike, melancholy sort of fantasies of womanhood...

A: Mhm.

I: ...and they tell her that she's refusing to engage in the reality of womanhood essentially. Um.

E: Do we want to have any discussion about how she's not engaging with the realities of womanhood or are we happy to just move on?

I: I... I like I do have opinions on that. I can kind of see... I can see where... why they're upset about this.

E: Mm.

I: But... I also think that wish fulfillment for young girls is an inherently feminist act.

A: I don't think it's everyone woman's job to engage with the harsh realities of womanhood.

E: I don't know if it's an inherently feminist act but I don't know if she's obliged to write an inherently feminist work. I don't know.

A: Yeah, she...

E: I haven't read any of these books which makes it incredibly difficult to critique them in any kind of meaningful way.

I: Yeah. So yeah, we get to this point now where I just couldn't find a lot of detail about her life beyond this point.

A and E: Mhm.

I: I suspect it exists in Japanese but as we've established I'm writing a thesis and don't have time to struggle through articles in my second language.

E: Mm.

I: But in 1938, World War II is on the horizon, as we know.

A: Mhm.

I: And she and a lot of other, like, well-known Japanese writers at the time are essentially kind of compelled by the government, they're very gently conscripted into what is sort of colloquially called the Pen Brigade, which is this... it's essentially a propaganda department, it's business is, like, writing stories to boost people's morale and doing the kind of war correspondence but in an uplifting way that will make people enthusiastic.

E: Here's a dreamlike flower story about buying war bonds.

[laughter]

I: Yes. Yes. The government, like, they're somewhat ambivalent about her as a writer because they're concerned that her fiction up to this point has emphasised, like, women's independence and women's free will more than they want for the war effort.

A and E: Mhm.

I: They're like, we don't have time in this war to deal with you and women making choices, just please shut up and have babies. We need them for the war. Um, but they do like her celebrity, she's quite famous and quite, like, well-liked, and so they're hoping her celebrity will have value for them in terms of, like, boosting morale and boosting support for the war. It was difficult to find much about her activities during the war. People don't like to talk about WWII.

A: Fair enough.

I: Um, but she does seem to have toured South East Asia while it was under Japanese control, and sent back, like, reports.

E: Okay.

A: Sent back reports for public consumption?

I: Yeah, so sent back... Yeah. Reports for public consumption about what it's like. She wrote a play called Mura to beitai (Village and Soldiers), in 1939, which, again, I couldn't figure out what it was about and she published in a number of, like, wartime propaganda magazines for public consumption, so she published short stories still but a lot of this was, this was essentially, it was heavily controlled by censors.

A: Mhm.

I: Like what she was allowed to publish and what kind of...

E: Mhm.

I: ...themes were allowed in it. And so at this time, I guess she's trying to find a different outlet for her own, like, creative urges. She develops an interest in poetry at this time. When she's in Japan and not overseas on this Pacific tour, she studies haiku under Takahama Kyoshi, who is a well-known poet and writer at the time himself. Again, I looked for examples of her poetry but I didn't manage to find any.

A: Mhm.

I: They're probably out there and I will continue to look, and if I find them, they will go on our social media and you can admire them.

E: That is sad because probably we could have managed to translate some haikus.

I: Yeah, that's what I thought.

E: Like, not, y'know, into haikus but...

I: [laughter] Not prettily but we could have translated them, yeah.

E: Yeah.

I: So I'll keep and looking and do a, if I find them, I will read them and do a shoddy translation for you all. So yeah, after the war, and this is where she starts writing fiction which is considered more literary. After the war when she comes home...

A: I hate that word.

I: I hate that word too, but it's very much the, um, like, academic discussion around her is this very, so was she a populist writer or was she writing literature, and I'm like...

A: It's just always used to make elitist comments about...

I: Mm. Popular fiction.

E: Genre fiction.

A: And genre fiction and women's fiction.

E: Women's fiction is genre fiction according to, like, people who like literature.

I: She continues to write both, like, prolifically and very successfully after the war is over. In 1951, she wins the Women's Literature Award for a short story.

A: The Japanese Women's Literature Award I assume?

I: Yes. Yes, the Japanese Women's Literature Award for a short story called Onibi. In the '60s, she turns to writing historical fiction.

E: Okay.

I: And this is when, I think, people start to take her seriously as a writer. They start looking and going, well she's not writing romance for young women anymore. She's writing something serious now.

A: Is her historical fiction about historical lesbians?

I: It's not about lesbians. It's about women.

A: Mm.

I: She, like, maintains, a focus on women. She expresses this desire to, like, restore the place of women in Japanese history essentially. To like, put back into history what's been erased.

A: Good on her.

I: And so she does quite successfully at this as well. In 1967, she won the Kikuchi Kan Prize for her historical novel Tokugawa Women. Kikuchi Kan, incidentally, is a, um, another Japanese writer who was also in the Pen Brigade with her.

A: Mhm.

I: And now he has a famous award named after him and she wins it. But, um, yeah, she basically continues to write. Somewhere during this time, I'm told she built her and Chiyo no less than eight houses.

E: Oh my God.

A: This woman must be so rich.

I: She's very rich. She's like the richest woman in Japan. She earns three times as much as the prime minister.

E: Does she have a race horse yet?

I: Yes, she bought a race horse. I think she might had more than one race horse by this point.

E: Good.

A: So when you say she was the richest woman in Japan, is that a fact or is that just kind of a way of you saying she was super well off?

I: Hard to tell.

A: Okay. May well be the richest woman in Japan at this time?

I: May well be. Definitely the richest woman writer in Japan, she's also earning three times as much as the prime minister, she is one of the first Japanese people to own a car.

A: Oh!

I: She does many things, or so one of my sources said anyway.

E: She owns many exciting things.

I: She owns many things. And like, usually I'm angry at rich people but I'm quite proud of her because she's a female writer and she's getting rich off writing stories for young women about relationships with young women.

E: I wonder what colour her horse was.

I: That is important.

A: We're gonna...

E: Important commentary.

I: [laughter] I'll do some research on the horse and then I'll just post it on our tumblr and be like, this is her horse!, in like a black and white photo.

A: Yeah.

I: It's name is Potatoes!

A: It's not Potatoes, it's...

E: Should we mention that there was a race horse named Potoooooooooo?

A: That being "Pot" with eight O's?

E: Yeah. "Pot" with eight O's. Um.

A: Pot-ooooooooo.

E: [laughter] Her...

I: So in May 1972, she was diagnosed with cancer. She... At this point, she's in her, like, late seventies.

A and E: Mhm.

I: She and Chiyo remain in love until the end.

E: Ohhhh...

I: They live together until the very end. In, like, the last year of her life, she writes in her diary: "Chiyo, on your birthday I give thanks to fate which gave this person to me. Life is happiness because of Chiyo."

A and E: Awww.

I: And on July 11, 1973, she died, aged 77, holding Chiyo's hand.

A: Aww.

E: Oh God, okay.

I: And they had been together at that time for fifty years.

A: That's such a long time.

E: I'm just going to quietly cry in the blanket fort now.

[emotional sounds]

I: And yeah, I had the note at the end that I've already told you now, that the house that they lived in is now a museum in her memory.

E: Which house?

I: The house...

A: Which of the eight houses?

I: Which of the eight houses? The house in, I think, um, it's just out of Tokyo, they move into it after the war.

A: Mhm.

I: Um.

E: Okay.

I: And it is a museum, it is the Yoshiya Nobuko Memorial Museum.

A: So.

I: And you can go there.

A: Is it a museum just of her?

I: Yeah, like. She's important, it's a museum about her.

E: Does Chiyo get mentioned in it?

I: Chiyo lives with her for fifty years.

E: Well, I don't know, I just...

I: I would be disappointed.

E: I don't know how...

I: I was going to say, I don't know they treat Chiyo in the museum.

E: Mm.

I: But, like, given that we've got letters where she explicitly talks about how she's aroused by Chiyo and they're getting married...

E: Mm.

A: I hope her black kimono is in the museum.

[laughter]

I: Unlined black kimono.

E: Iconic kimono.

I: Yes.

E: I want there to be a movie about her.

A: Do you know if there's any, like, um, what's the word I want... If there's any media about her, like, novels or movies or TV or anything?

I: Several... There are several biographies in Japanese.

A: Yep.

I: One of... Like, at least one of the recent ones is, like, focussed on queerness.

A: Oh, that's good.

I: They're in, again, they're in Japanese.

A: Yeah.

I: And I haven't got hold of them.

A: Fair enough.

I: But one day when I have some more time I do will do some more reading and I will report back to you. Her writing, some has been made into, like, movies or TV series...

A: Oh okay.

I: In Japan, that kind of thing. Um...

A: Is *Two Virgins in an Attic* a Japanese TV drama?

I: I don't know.

E: We really overfocussed on *Two Virgins in an Attic*.

[laughter]

I: Look, that title made me laugh too, to be fair, when I was researching for this. But yeah, that is where I am at, that is the end of her life, and I'm just glad that she was very happy.

E: Mm...

I: Yeah, I just love that she was very happy, like, the whole way through, I love that she started this seeing, like, saying to her friend, it's so hard to find a partner, and her friend was like, I have someone you'll like, and she was just like, I do. I like her. I like her for fifty years. I like her so much.

A: I'm so impressed with that friend.

I: [laughter] I know, that friend is probably sitting there being like, yesss, yes, I did this.

E: I like to think that like twenty years later she's like, Nobuko, I need a loan and I think we both know you should give me that loan.

[laughter]

I: Yes.

A: It's just so satisfying when the queer stories are just happy and they just get married and live together for their entire lives and nobody, like, dies horribly or anything.

E: We've had a few of those.

I: We have.

E: Recently. I mean, like, horrible stuff happened in the, um, in our episode about, um, Chinese people but that wasn't because they were queer...

A: Mm.

E: That was just because politics.

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

E: And we're not even doing this deliberately, I don't think.

A: Mm.

I: It may just turn out that being queer doesn't kill you.

A: No.

E: Wow. This is contrary to what the media has told me my entire life.

A: Yeah, I think we've definitely been conditioned by the media to assume that everyone queer is going to die young and sad.

I: Especially, I think, in history.

E: Mm.

I: We've all been sort of led to believe that, yeah, queer people existed in history but they were repressed and it was horrible.

A: They were all closeted and if they came out they would be rejected by their communities.

E: That's...

I: And in actual fact, she was married and she was like... Her household was this, like, hub for her social circle and they were all like, it was such a lovely house.

E: Mm.

A: Yeah.

I: We remember it so well, it was always warm and full of laughter. Thanks for listening, this has been Queer as Fact. I'm Irene.

A: I'm Alice.

E: I'm Eli.

I: We hope you've enjoyed this episode. If you've got anything to say, or you want to make any suggestions or comments or express your love for us...

E: [laughter]

I: ...or whatever we are queerasfact.tumblr.com, you can find us on Facebook at Queer as Fact, on Twitter at Queer as Fact, and we are on Podbean and now we're on iTunes which is very exciting, so if you don't want to wrangle with a new podcast app, you can get us on iTunes. Please review us, please rate us and review us, it really helps us. And, if you want to get in contact with us, you can email us at queerasfact@gmail.com. We'll be back on August 15th with our next episode, which will be Hamish telling you about John Maynard Keynes, who was a super influential economist who wrote extensive journals about his relationships with both men and women. See you then, thank you for listening to Queer as Fact.