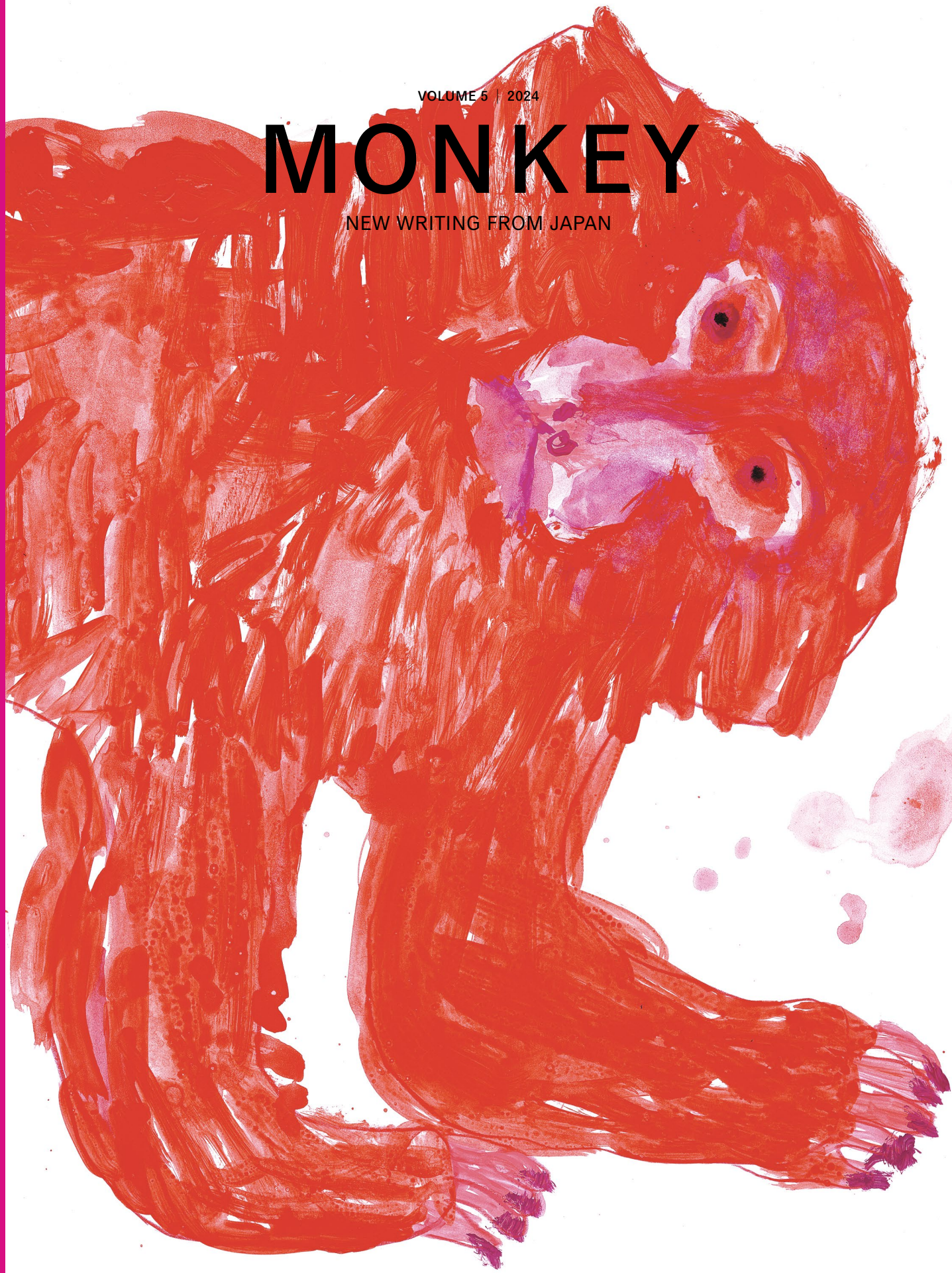
VOLUME 5 | 2024

MONKEY

NEW WRITING FROM JAPAN



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THE MONKEY SPEAKS

Animals appear in so many guises in literature: they can be prey or predators, mirrors of human frailty, or windows into unknown realms. Or they can just be themselves, creatures possessing their own reality, who stand apart from all human concerns. Back in old Japan, when shrines to frogs and snakes, foxes and bears, dotted the Japanese landscape, they were often seen as gods (kami). But what of today? This year we have a wealth of stories and poems on all sorts of creatures, overflowing the usual "Monkey's Dozen," so welcome to our menagerie!

In this issue we are publishing work by Natsuki Ikezawa for the first time; the wonderful Leo Elizabeth Takada joins our team of translators; and we are lucky to feature original work by five brilliant English-language writers: Laird Hunt, Kelly Link, Sawako Nakayasu, Adam Ehrlich Sachs, and Eleni Sikelianos.

Volume 5 comes on the heels of our first post-pandemic "Monkey tour," which took us to Providence, Rhode Island, to New York City, and to Pittsburgh, where *MONKEY New Writing from Japan* is based—our home outside Japan. We were joined on our travels by Hiromi Kawakami, whose story collection *Dragon Palace* is the second book released under the Monkey imprint at Stone Bridge Press, and her husband, the celebrated haiku poet Minoru Ozawa. There were many high points, including, in Providence, Sawako Nakayasu and Moto's bilingual reading at Brown University; in New York, Kawakami's joint appearance with Kelly Link at SEIZAN Gallery and her reading from *Dragon Palace* at Kinokuniya bookstore; and in Pittsburgh, an inspiring panel on translation at Carnegie Mellon University, hosted by Chris Lowy, and Kawakami's appearance with Adam Ehrlich Sachs at the University of Pittsburgh, hosted by Charles Exley.

We hope you will enjoy all the creatures in this volume, from your ever-mischievous monkeys:

Ted Goossen
Motoyuki Shibata
Meg Taylor

VOLUME 5 | 2024

MONKEY

Aoko Matsuda

This Precious Opportunity

translated by Polly Barton

I'D LIKE TO TAKE THIS PRECIOUS OPPORTUNITY to explain why I stopped licking the lids of my yogurt containers.

For many years, licking the lid was a secret indulgence of mine. I knew it was bad form, but if there was so much as a sliver of yogurt stuck to the foil it seemed a waste not to, and I'd be restless until I'd gone and done it. It was a guilty pleasure, through and through.

Every morning before work, I would eat a small container of yogurt together with a slice of toast. I wasn't too fussy about the brand. In the supermarket, I would sling a few of those four-cup packs that crowded the shelves—plain, assorted fruit, aloe vera—into my shopping basket rather indiscriminately, which I would then arrange on the shelves of my 118-liter fridge.

After opening the yogurt at the breakfast table, I'd lick the lid. Then I'd dip my spoon into the plastic container, move it to my mouth, and savor. Those little yogurt cups didn't contain much, and on occasion I'd find myself wanting a second.

When I was finished, I'd throw on my jacket, and the day would begin.

The end to these halcyon days of mine came quite recently.

One day, as I licked the lid of my yogurt as usual, a message appeared:

Have a great day!

It seemed as though this particular yogurt manufacturer had decided to start printing messages on the undersides of their lids. It was plausible that they'd made that decision without ever entertaining the possibility that yogurt would cling there, but the effect was nonetheless that the words would be obscured by yogurt, becoming a secret message legible only to those who licked the lid. I always licked it with a guilty feeling, as though I were transgressing in some small way, and yet the message that had materialized was so utterly cheery that I couldn't help but feel sort of embarrassed.

Yet I forgot about all that in an instant, tossing my empty yogurt container in the bin.

The following day, the previous day's message wiped clear from my memory, I peeled the top off my yogurt to find another buoyant message greeting me:

Counting on you!

And who the hell are you, I thought to myself. Once again, the message left me with a feeling of discomfort, and I averted my eyes as I tossed the yogurt container in the bin. It ruined my whole morning.

The next day the message read:

Some days things just don't turn out your way, but never give up!

Yeah, I'd known a few teachers and classmates who came out with this sort of superficial positive-thinking crap, I brooded irritably as I made my way to the bus stop, turning over incidents in my past that I had no wish to recall.

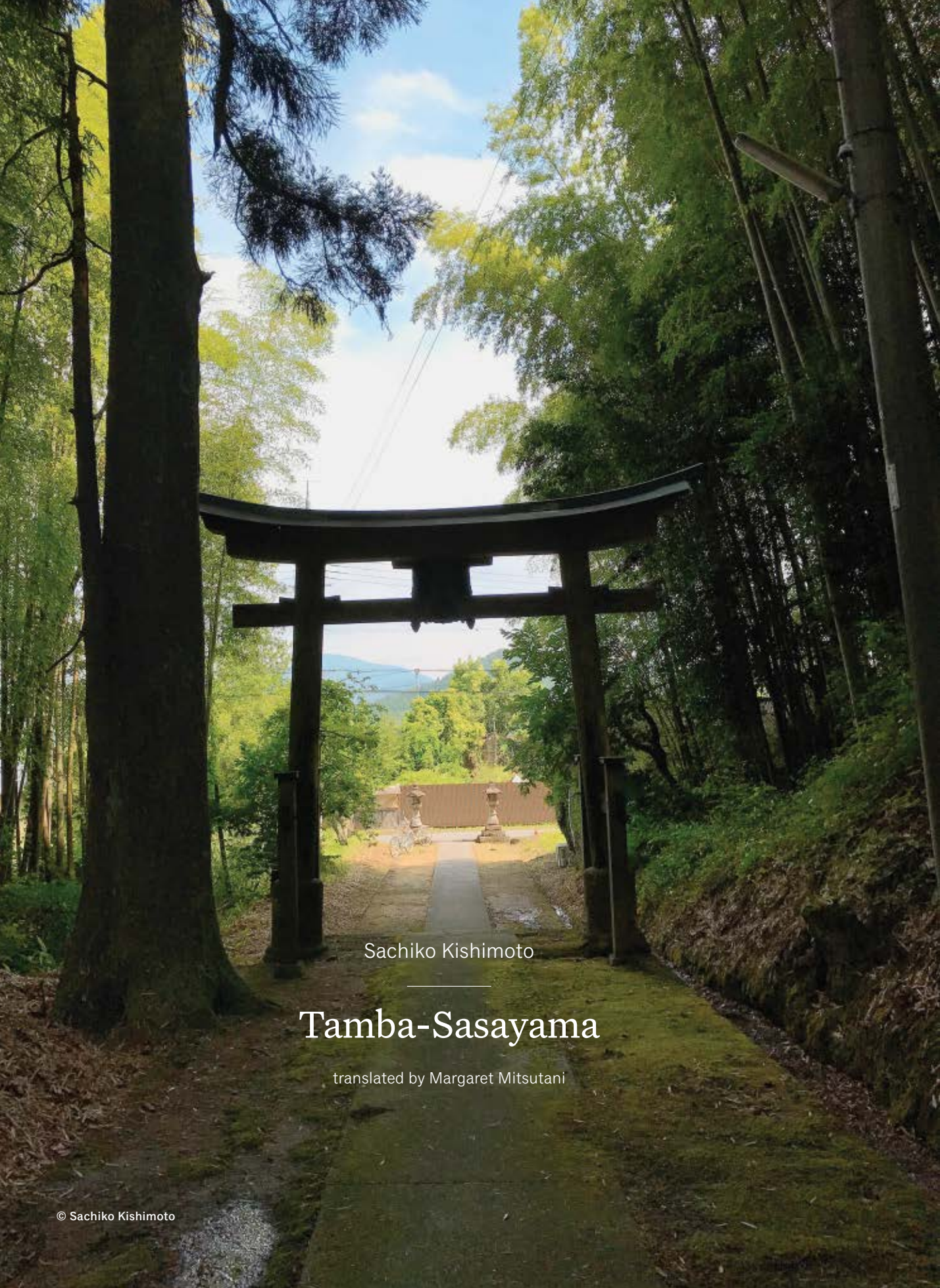
For the following few days, I ate the yogurts made by other brands which I'd bought at the same time, and licked their lids to my heart's content. Nothing was written there. My pure, simple relationship with the lids remained uninterrupted, and my mood unspoiled.

Then came the fateful day. I woke up slightly later than usual and was in a rush, so when I grabbed a yogurt cup from the fridge I did so somewhat at random. From the underside of its lid emerged the line:

Did you lick it?

I was so furious I didn't know what to do with myself. It was as if that clandestine joy that I'd taken in licking the lid, which I'd believed had been uniquely mine, had been stomped into the dirt by someone. The feeling was that of being well and truly ridiculed.

Which is why I stopped licking the lids of my yogurt cups. I've been ridiculed enough in this life of mine, and I'm done with it. Now I exclusively buy Bulgaria-brand yogurt. Their foil is such that the yogurt doesn't stick to them at all, meaning I don't even have to manage the temptation to lick them. It's wonderful.



Sachiko Kishimoto

Tamba-Sasayama

translated by Margaret Mitsutani

A BOY WITH A BUZZ CUT, about ten years old, runs home and heads straight for the well. Grabbing one of the slender cucumbers cooling in a wooden tub, he chomps down on it, enjoying the taste. This is his afternoon snack. He's deeply tanned, wearing a sleeveless white undershirt. Around him, cicadas are churring.

This vivid memory keeps replaying in my mind. I know that the child is my father, so logically speaking it couldn't be a memory, yet recently it comes back to me more and more often, the image sharper every time.

The place must be the house where my father was born and grew up, in Tamba-Sasayama. My parents took me there many times when I was a child. We usually went during summer vacation, and stayed about a week.

THE HOUSE WAS OLD, with a thatched roof. You stepped over the threshold onto a dirt floor; to the left you could slip off your shoes and climb up into the tatami living room with an alcove for the family altar; to the right, the dirt floor widened out into the kitchen with its old-fashioned *kamado*—a tile surface with iron cooking pots embedded in it. You could keep walking on the dirt floor past the kitchen and out to the back of the house where the warehouse and the well were. Beyond them was my grandmother's vegetable patch, with some trees planted behind it. A stream flowed in back of the trees; on the far side of the stream was an expanse of paddy fields, and off in the distance, the mountains.

AS A THIRD GRADER, I found everything in Tamba wonderful and strange. I cried when it was time to leave. And I kept on crying every day after we got back to our apartment in Setagaya, owned by my father's company, where I filled my special notebook with the strawberry pattern on the cover with sentimental, poetic lines about my memories of Tamba. Using a 4H mechanical pencil, I erased and wrote them over so many times the pale-pink pages got all fuzzy.

The bath in Sasayama was old-fashioned, *goemon* style. The tub, made of stone, was shaped like a deep, narrow bowl, with a round wooden lid floating on top of the hot water. When you got in, you stepped on the lid to push it down to the bottom of the bowl. There was a pit toilet in back of the house, and because I was afraid to go by myself at night, I'd ask one of my cousins to take me. I couldn't look down for fear I'd see a white hand reaching up toward me from the pit, or up, either, because I was sure a face would be peering down at me from a corner of the ceiling, so I'd shut my eyes, pee as fast as I could, and rush outside.

IT WAS AROUND THIS TIME that I saw the Milky Way for the first time. The sky, covered with stars, sent chills down my spine. It was more creepy than beautiful. Realizing that the earth and outer space were actually touching frightened me.

Outside the front door was an unpaved road. The houses along it also had thatched roofs, and the families living in them all had the surname "Kishimoto." Kitty-cornered across from our house was an old, unused building, a storehouse left over from the days when my father's family brewed soy sauce. It was empty inside, except for a couple of wooden troughs, wider than most people are tall, lying on the floor. The whole place smelled of *kōji,* the fungus that starts the fermentation process, mixed with dust.

MY FATHER used to put soy sauce on everything, from dried fish to pickled vegetables. "My family made soy sauce, you know," he always said when the doctor warned him to cut down on salt.

ACROSS FROM THE HOUSE was an abandoned Shinto shrine. You walked up the crumbling stone steps into a clearing surrounded by trees, with an old wooden stage for performing *kagura* dances, the boards dried and whitened with age. There was a wooden plaque with writing on it in the back near the ceiling, but the ink was so faded you couldn't tell what it said. The stone lantern was covered with flakes of whitish-green lichen that looked like scales. The cicadas were noisy, like a shower pouring down right next to your ears.

Beside the shrine was a small pond. There were lots of water bugs darting across the surface but no matter how hard I tried, I never managed to scoop up a single one in my net. I caught lots of crayfish, though. Once I put a really big one in a bucket I filled with water from the well, and the next time I looked in on her,

she was a mother with lots of little babies. Not eggs, but tiny red crayfish.

MY UNCLE AND HIS FAMILY lived with my grandmother in the house in Tamba. My four cousins were all girls. My uncle, ten years older than my father, looked just like him without his glasses. Born in the year of the tiger, my uncle was named Tora-nosuke (*tora* meaning tiger). His oldest daughter was always embarrassed in elementary school when she had to go to the front of the room to get her report card, because the teacher called her by her father's full name, "Toranosuke Kishimoto."

IN THE 1990S Uncle Toranosuke retired from his job as a civil servant, and became a local poet, with two published collections.

This is the first line of his poem "Melancholy Journey":

The donkey who eats the new moon resides in my belly

"Early Spring" begins:

Pussy willows flower in a woman's breast
In a man's the snow begins to melt

But his most avant-garde poem is definitely the fifteen-line one entitled "Intestinal Exam." It begins:

On the Xth day of X month, entered the National Sasayama Hospital

and ends:

At 1:00 pm left the hospital

The lines in between record the entire process—the exact times when my uncle drank a glass of water, took a laxative, had an enema, then had the X-ray—no frills, just the facts.

MY TINY, WRINKLED GRANDMOTHER was a hard worker. She grew a little of all sorts of things in her vegetable patch. I used to pick corn with her. The stream flowing behind was narrow enough to step over. That's where she'd chill vegetables and wash dishes. The banks of the stream were lined with cattails, just like the ones in children's picture books. Peppermint, too, that you could smell on your fingers after you picked it.

Sometimes when I dug in the earth, a mole cricket would come scurrying out. In the paddy fields on the far side of the stream, grey herons stood with their long necks stretched out. It was my youngest cousin who told me how smelly they are.

MY COUSINS TOOK ME to lots of different places. We went swimming in the river, and in the pool at the junior high school. One day on our way home from the river, we saw a dead cat in a clump of grass with its ribs poking out. That was the first time I'd seen a dead body. There was a vine with sweet little pale-pink flowers on it, but they told me it was called a stink vine, and that I mustn't touch it. One evening, we saw a huge double rainbow beyond the pool.

One day we climbed a hill and were spreading our lunch out when we heard strains of the folk song "Dekansho Bushi" off in the distance. The Dekansho Festival was being held nearby, so the music was broadcast from loudspeakers in various locations around town.

At the Dekansho Festival, lots of people gather in the square on the grounds of the old Sasayama Castle to dance Bon Odori around a wooden tower, to celebrate the annual visit of the spirits of the dead. I got very excited, jumped into the circle, and danced like crazy, rounding the tower several times. My cousins joined in more discreetly, their hands waving as they made the delicate gestures that go along with the dance.

The summer I was in my second year in junior high, I didn't join in the Bon dancing. I was too self-conscious

for that, though I did buy a pink Momo-renger mask at one of the stalls. It's still stashed away in a closet somewhere at my parents' house.

I ALWAYS LOOKED UP to my four cousins, who were between five and ten years older than me. Everything about them—their gestures, the rhythm of the local dialect they spoke, their clothes, the things they liked—seemed very grownup.

One day they were trapped in the warehouse by a sudden rainstorm. I put a big plastic sheet over my head, ran out to the warehouse, and with my cousins lined up underneath the sheet, we all made our way back to the house. "You're really on the ball!" they said, which made me very happy.

RIGHT BESIDE THE FRONT ENTRANCE to the house, there was a room with a big glass window facing the road outside. Though the floor of the entranceway around it was dirt, this room alone had a wooden floor. It might have been an office at one time. In one corner was a mysterious space about the size of a telephone booth partitioned off with glass walls; inside were two benches, facing each other. Sitting on them felt like riding on a train, which was kind of fun.

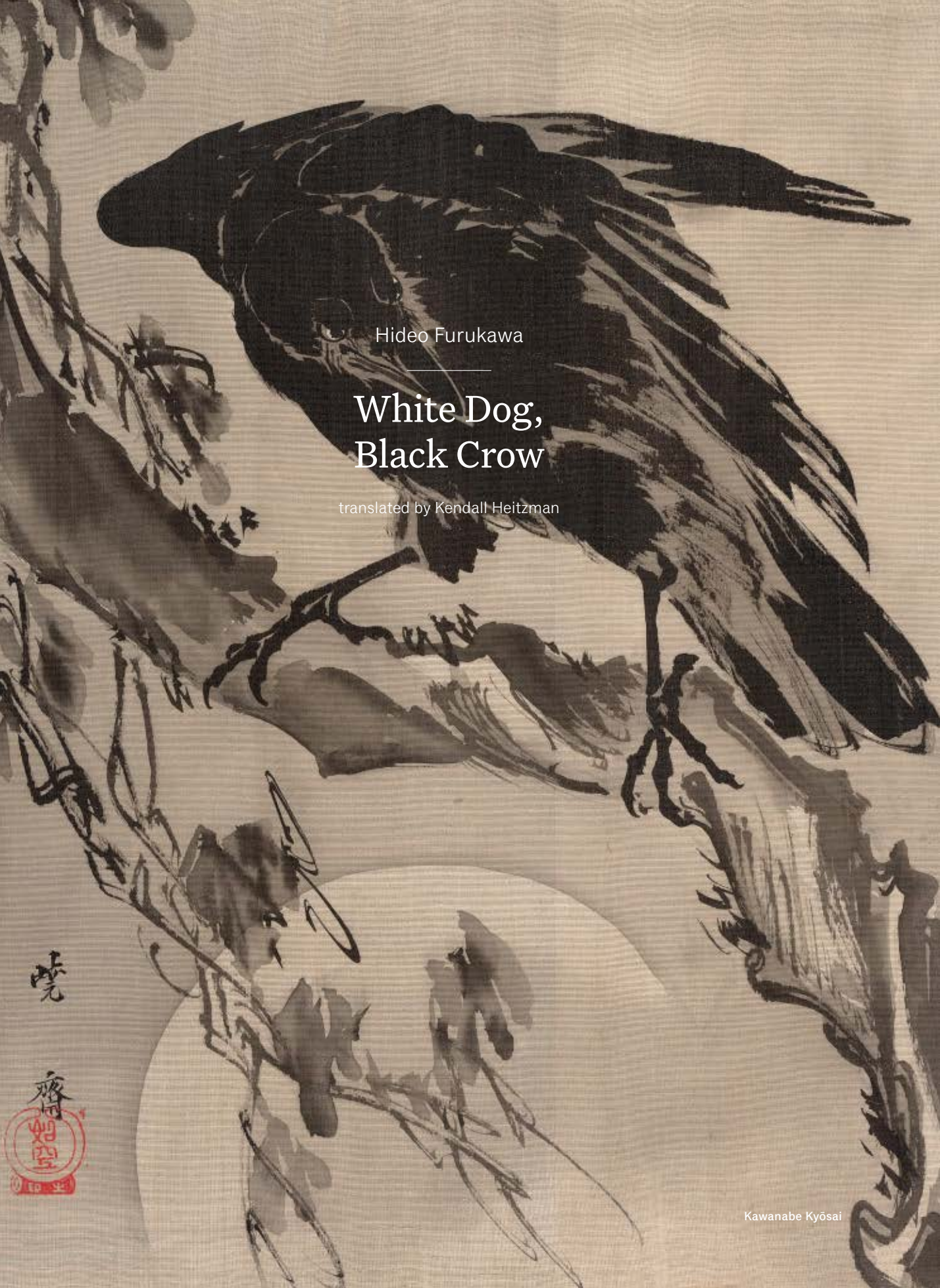
One night, someone broke into this room. The door to the outside was halfway open, and on the desk was a package wrapped in newspaper. Inside was a medal and certificate my eldest cousin had been awarded at school, along with a note saying, "I'm sorry," written in a flowing hand. The things had been stolen some years earlier. There were a few muddy footprints on the floor. Even now when I hear about a "Summer Night Mystery," I remember this break-in.

LAST MAY, I went back to Sasayama for the first time in decades, for my aunt's funeral. She'd lived an active life after my uncle died, surviving him until the age of ninety-three. My cousins were all married, and the funeral was a lively affair, with my aunt's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in attendance. I went straight to the funeral home from Tokyo, then back again on the same day, so I didn't see the old house in Sasayama. I wonder if the well is still there.

I've lost the chance to ask my father if he liked to eat cucumbers chilled in the well water as a boy. When I show him old photos of Tamba now, he looks at them as if he's never seen the place. He sometimes mistakes me for my sister. He forgets my name.

SO MANY MEMORIES are never talked about, or written down. The thought of everyone's experiences all being lost when they leave the world—even things so small they've forgotten them—is unbearable to me. The taste of those French fries somebody really enjoyed, or the moment someone else noticed a flower blooming by the side of the road and thought how pretty it was—all these memories should be preserved somewhere in the cosmos.

AN OLD DIESEL ENGINE with only one train car cuts straight through the paddy fields. Only one train an hour. The line was in the red—my father and uncle used to joke that to earn 100 yen they had to spend eight times that much. I'm in the train, on my way back to Tokyo, when someone tells me it's almost time to look out the window. My youngest cousin will be waiting for our train to pass by so she can see us off. For just a moment, I catch a glimpse of her in the sea of green, standing beside her bicycle, waving until she's swallowed up again.



Hideo Furukawa

White Dog, Black Crow

translated by Kendall Heitzman

Kawanabe Kyōsai

THE THING IS, the mushroom in question looks very similar to momitake, which are fit for human consumption. This one is growing in a beech forest, out of the forest floor. It's a bit on the large side. So let's start with the mushroom itself. It juts up out of the earth there, all but commanding a person to look at it. We shall oblige. When a mushroom is just beginning to grow, it is enveloped in a membrane, which is really more like a vessel. It breaks out of that vessel, stretches up, and develops a cap. Right now, this particular mushroom has a cap like an umbrella. Dusted with powder, the cap appears to have a certain stickiness, and half of its surface is covered by the remains of its splintered vessel. These fragments are a sulfuric yellow color, but the cap itself is white. It is the purest of whites, with not a tinge of color to it. On the underside of the cap is a tight fan of pleats, the hue of butterfat, whose job is to release white spores. These, too, are the whitest of whites, making their presence known in the interstices between the folds. And then there's the stalk, which has shuttled straight up, more slender than not. This part, too, is wrapped in gauzy whiteness, but because of its cottony texture, it harbors shadows that cast a pall. The bottom of the stem flares out in a bulb—here, too, is a vestige of the vessel, a yellow formation that sinks into the ground out of sight. Well, I'll stop there—that is probably enough of a description of the shape and coloring of the mushroom. But there is something else that needs to be said about it. Most of what we commonly think of as mushrooms are, taxonomically speaking, in the division of fungi *Basidiomycota,* in the order *Agaricales.* The mushroom we are looking at here, needless to say, falls under these, in the family *Amanitaceae,* which in Japanese are called "tengu mushrooms." Yes, tengu, the mishmash creature of folklore with a long nose like a bird's beak, a tendency to dress like a mountain priest, and a name that literally means "heavenly dog." The taxonomic family that takes its name is famous for the sheer number of highly toxic mushrooms it contains. Granted, there are other mushrooms in the tengu family that are perfectly edible. But not this one. Despite the fact that it looks for all the world just like a harmless momitake, it is one of the most poisonous things in the whole region. It may not be lethal, but its poison is potent and lasting. The mushroom has a name: the white tengu mushroom. Not just a tengu, but a white tengu, mind you.

And now someone has plucked it and eaten it. We are once again in the Warring States period.

I SAW IT. I saw the bird. Well, at first I couldn't see the bird at all—it was black, after all. And I was in a place that was blacker than black can be. I was caught in a place that was like the blackness of night. Was I here? Was I not here? But a voice called out, and I thought, oh, I really am here all right. I reasoned that if something other than me exists, then it follows that I am one who exists as well.

So what kind of voice was it, you may wonder.

This kind of voice: *arkd,* it said.

Hearing this, I understood right away. There was a bird darker than dark in here. This was nothing other than a bird calling over and over, *arkd-arkd-arkd-ark.* The voice of a single, solitary bird. The moment I plumbed this, I saw the bird. I became able to see the bird. It was indeed a bird darker than dark.

But how was it that I was able to see this *arkd-ark* bird in the folds of the night, I wondered, and just as soon saw why it was. This place where I was had become just a little brighter than before. And so was I able to see. The logic behind this was quite unassailable.

It was a bird 鳥. A bird one line short of a bird. It was a crow 烏.

Somehow, somehow, a crow had appeared here.

Out of nowhere . . .

It had two feet, not three.

And two wings, not four.

And one head, not six.

That kind of crow. Meaning, an ordinary crow with features like any other. And as for me, by the way, I'm an ordinary mountain ascetic, a *yamabushi* 山伏 with features like any other. In the mountains 山, a dog of a human. The reason being, the reason being, as you surely must know, the *-bushi* 伏 of *yamabushi* is a person 亻 to which has been affixed a dog 犬.

Well, just when I was wondering where this was going, I had a startling realization. I looked at this crow and I thought, well, it's taking on an ordinary form, all right, but there is nothing ordinary about this bird.

It was perhaps someone else, even, tethered to the feathers of a crow. Someone else, even, tied to the guise of a crow, but I couldn't fathom who. *Someone else, even, tied.* Someone else, eventide. Now, in this twilight, here, not so far from Haguro 羽黒, this stranger beat his black 黒 wings 羽. My heart was battered, my ears pricked.

In that wailing *ark*.

In the call of the crow.

I felt a native pain sail my way.

Whyever would it be? The more I suffered that calling, the more my feeling grew: I exist. I exist here. Whereupon, to my great surprise, a presence came forth to respond to the crow. A voice abruptly rose from the stillness. But this one wasn't a caw. It was something less bird than beast.

The howling of a beast. I don't need to tell you that a howl 吠 is a mouth 口 with a dog 犬. A mandog of the mountains like me parsed it posthaste: this was nothing other than the howl of a lone dog in the darkness. And with that, it appeared out of the gloom.

So, a dog.

No, a white dog!

That whiteness . . . it was divinity itself. And by his white coat the darkness of the place where I was lifted into light—more yes more, shade by shade. And with that, the light of understanding enveloped me as well. Something had happened to take my soul from my body. I had been pulled away from myself and brought to this place.

But where was this?

If we had to define it, the liminal space between the living and the dead.

In the borderlands between the known world and the land of the dead, I must have lost the right road. I got myself lost, and now I was here.

And so, I heard this dialogue between crow and dog. A white dog without its pack, a black crow without its murder. Their dialogue was my travelogue, a record of what I saw and heard as I left my body behind and found myself here.

"I'm telling you, it's not water we're looking at," a voice said.

"What is it, then?" a voice said.

"A mirror, of course," a voice said.

Which voice belonged to which, I couldn't be certain, except to say that if one voice was the dog's, then the other one was the crow's. Logically, all that remained was to decide which voice belonged to which creature, but no matter how hard I stared directly at the owners of the voices as they spoke, I simply couldn't discern between them. This white presence and this black presence were carrying on with their conversation, never mind me.

"Can you see your reflection in it?"

"Can I see my reflection— . . . of course I can see my reflection in it."

"But they distort things more than when you look at yourself in water, right?"

"Copper mirrors do? But look, there is nothing shimmering here."

"Ah, a reflection in the water always shimmers, doesn't it."

"Exactly. Now, that said, we can't forget, a true image is never there to begin with."

"It isn't?"

"In the time it takes for the image to reach our eyes, time has elapsed. The only thing we will ever see in a reflection is the past."

"Only you would care about that."

"Do you think so?"

"Anyway . . . so what we are looking at is not water?"

"What we are looking at is definitely not water."

"So what is it then?"

"It's a mirror. A copper mirror, made right here in our country. Look!"

"It is round."

"That's right. It's disc-shaped—and made in the capital."

"In Kyoto!"

"Indubitably, indubitably."

"But, this is a Haguro mirror, from the northeast?"

"Did you finally figure that out?"

"Yet it was crafted in Kyoto?"

"It was brought here by ship."

"All the way here, to Michinoku?"

"It's a disc."

"It's a disc . . . in which images appear."

"Well, it's a disc in which images are reflected. And without leaving any record of the things that appear

there, it leaves an impression on the memory of anyone who views it. That's what kind of disc it is."

"The things that are reflected there are in the past, you say?"

"But nevertheless, the one who sees them takes them as the present. That's my face there . . . as it exists in the present . . . I think to myself."

"The present."

"The past."

"A record?"

"A memory."

THE MAN HAS FALLEN. This man on an ascetic journey. This figure shaking off defilements deep in the mountains. It is the Warring States period. He has performed his austerities day in and day out, night in and night out, garnering merit with every step in his religious practice. And now, at this moment, he exists in suspended animation. Let us observe. But before we observe, let us untangle the chain of events that led to this point. The man made a soup of the mushrooms he had gathered. He thought he had picked the edible momitake, but he had made a mistake. The cap of the mushroom, the stalk, the spores that germinated in the pleats underneath—all of it was white. It was simply far too white. At first, he was stricken with a headache. Then he started heaving, over and over. Next came the violent shivering. His heart raced. His body temperature was abnormally low. And then his eyes betrayed him, changing the size of whatever he looked at, warping it. One thing was smaller than it should be, another thing too large, but he couldn't say which was which. His mind went muddy, and it has only gotten worse. Let's take a look. At this very moment, he is in some sort of stasis. He does not move a muscle. But wait, his eyes. Underneath their sleepy lids his eyeballs are rolling back and forth. As far as we can discern, that is the sum total of his movement. He is watching something, something that we who are outside of him cannot perceive. The man is hallucinating, but is what he sees really a hallucination? The man is seeing all of time—the past, present, and future. But are they *his* past, present, and future? Are they the three states of existence possessed by this man? And now, based on what we have before us, let us untangle the chain of events that will proceed from this point. What the man says, about the experience he is now having, will be recorded. From this, the man will be seen as a witness, of sorts, to what lies ahead, in the land of the dead. His tales of the place beyond—the record of his hallucinations—will be propagated as religious sermons. They will be esteemed here in this place, this region, this sweeping northland of Michinoku, in the time of the Warring States.

SO, ONE OF THEM SAID, "A record?" and the other one said, "A memory." One was the white dog and the other was the black crow. Which one asked the question and which one answered it? As I said a moment ago, I couldn't begin to hazard a guess. But this is hardly the kind of thing we need to worry about. Whichever was whichever, the blessed conversation continued on. It was truly blessed, truly august.

What stays in my memory is this portion of their exchange:

"Let's circle back to the subject of the capital. A while ago, we touched on the capital, did we not?"

"To be sure, to be sure, we did indeed touch on the capital."

"But we weren't talking about the capital to the south, were we. Not Nara. It was Kyoto we were talking about. The capital to the south was done away with."

"Why?"

"The old Buddhist sects ran rampant, and the city fell prey to them. So the capital was relocated. But at first they didn't move it to the north. They started constructing the Nagaoka capital in Yamashiro Province. But that one was cursed, and they soon abandoned it. Then they turned their attention to Kyoto. Kyoto, however, had a weak point."

"The unlucky northeast—the so-called demon's gate."

"It goes without saying, every location has a demon's gate. No matter where you build a city, the geomancy is the same, right? There is no place that has a south and a west, but not a north and an east. And if it were to exist . . . well, I don't know what it would be, but it wouldn't be a place."

"I suppose you're right."

"That said, where the demon's gate falls in relation to Kyoto is where Mount Hiei lies, to the northeast of the capital."

"Ah, so they used the Tendai esoteric practices?"

"No, those hadn't been established yet. But the role of protecting the capital was entrusted to the monks of Mount Hiei. Later, the great Saichō joined the mission to China and encountered esoteric practices. This was the new Buddhism. But it was the third head priest who initiated the work of merging these practices with the mysteries of Tendai Buddhism."

"And who was that?"

"That was Master Ennin."

"What did they call him posthumously?"

"Jikaku Daishi."

"And did this Master Ennin go to China as well?"

"In the fifth year of Jōwa. This was the last of the missions to Tang China, the fifteenth."

"And when did this Master Ennin come back?"

"The fourteenth year of Jōwa he came back. By boat. I guess that's obvious. He returned by way of the coast of what was then called Silla. Meaning, he came along the west coast of the Joseon peninsula and headed southward from there to Tsushima. Then on to Dazaifu. Bearing with him a prodigious number of sacred texts. Master Ennin had acquired the secret teachings of esoteric Buddhism at Chang'an. He collected everything that Kōbō Daishi of the Shingon sect had brought back with him, and much more. And sacred artifacts, a great many of those. And so, that's how it crossed over from the continent. The true Buddhism."

"And was it new?"

"It was new, the power was new."

"From the continent."

"That's right. Master Ennin came back and perfected the esoteric Buddhism of the Tendai Lotus School. And thus were the Tendai esoteric practices—"

"Mixed."

"—syncretized."

"And then what?"

"And then Mount Hiei became a seminary devoted to the reciting of Buddhist prayers for the protection of the country. The demon gate for Kyoto was protected by their esoteric practices. By all of the secret rituals of the Tendai monks."

"The demon gate—meaning, the northeast."

"The east and the north, as in Tōhoku."

"You're saying Michinoku is the northeast of our entire land."

"Well, there's an even deeper connection to Michinoku in this, you know."

"Who's connected? What's connected?"

"Master Ennin. He kept thinking, 'We must protect the northeast, we must protect the northeast,' and finally he came to Michinoku and traveled throughout the country, preaching. He founded over a hundred and forty temples."

"In Michinoku?"

"Right here in Michinoku. In Ushū and Ōshū."

"Master Ennin did that?"

"The very same. Jikaku Daishi."

This is what I heard. This conversation bearing good omens, between a white dog and a black crow. Oh, how grateful I am. Such an edifying conversation. Indeed, the bones of Master Ennin are in Ushū at the temple Risshakuji, known to one and all as Yamadera. In other words, Master Ennin was once here in Michinoku, is now here in Michinoku, and will forevermore be here in Michinoku. He brought the true power of Buddhism to this region and . . . mixed it with the beliefs they had. This place, in its essence, is one grand fortification against a demon's gate.

THE GRAVE WAS EXCAVATED, in a future scarcely imaginable to this prophet from the Warring States period. In the future of his past, present, and future. In the world to come. Let's peruse the record. Well, now. Risshakuji certainly recognizes Ennin as "founder of the temple," and holds that his disciple An'e was "founder of the faith." Risshakuji has a cave where Ennin "attained Nirvana"—meaning, it's his grave. Legend holds that when Ennin passed away in the sixth year of Jōgan, his earthly remains were carried up in a purple cloud and whisked off here to Risshakuji. But, back to the historical record. The excavation of the grave was carried out from 1948 to 1949. In the cave where he was said to be interred, sure enough, they found a coffin gilded with gold leaf. Inside was a single carved wooden head and the bones of five people. All tossed together. As though they had belonged to a single person.

Inuo Taguchi

A Phone Call from Emily Dickinson

translated by Leo Elizabeth Takada

"*Without any body,* I keep thinking.
What kind can that be?"
—William Luce, *The Belle of Amherst*

I THE NORTH STAR

With poetry for a keel,
she was saved from the wreck
Whenever she fell into a daze
she had the North Star to be her God
and guide her on her way

What does
an earthly reputation matter?
You whispered to the wall,
your forehead paler than the dead

Knowing
how every soul
lives without a name—

II CRIES

Only her body
secluded itself
Her soul loved and longed
for the farthest reaches of the earth

Only the sick know
what it truly means to be well,
Though in the thin air
on the plateau of souls
her heart sometimes cried—

III A MIRROR

Good souls stay away
from writing poetry

Indeed, what inspired you to do so
was what crushed you to the bone

In the darkness
I see you give off a dazzling glow

No matter how mercilessly shattered,
you remained as a mirror—
indomitable and undefeated, vibrantly reflecting
God, death, and joy

IV SILENCE

Oh, your glibness,
Your one-woman play—

You were just scribbling in the margins
of a book called Silence,
As a memorandum to leave behind
when you are summoned into the world
beyond death—

That is why,
When I uncover your book of verse,
Silence too opens up
like a book

V THE TEMPLE OF WRATH

You once dwelt
in the temple of wrath,
where you fought to cut a path
that belongs to one alone
in the labyrinths of nerves that bleed when cut,
with all your body and soul
And there
you had only words

Your wounds,
they moan and refuse
to be healed
Hear them lament
that once they are cured
no more poems will be prescribed to soothe

They wish
for other words of consolation
to apply to their permanent bruises

VI DANCE

Words will get you
from behind
Not from behind your body,
but from behind the soul

Poetry happens in a mere moment
when the only witness is the poet
Scream
No one would come

For you
it is a duel of life and death
But words—
they are certain
that this is an elegant dance

VII FEAST

Only poetry could bring you relief, a pleasure
greater than self-pleasure of any kind
In the depths of the cave called *self*,
where words are the solitary visitor

Yes,
writing a poem
is to welcome guests from afar,
is to give all your strength
solely to treat them to a feast

Lest they lose interest in you
and turn away

VIII LIFE

Eternal life
is the only true life
I will no longer be concerned
with any other life
We shall overcome death
All poems will perish,
but our souls, the mother of poetry,
will never be destroyed

We are the children of immortality!
And every soul spins
a skein of poetry

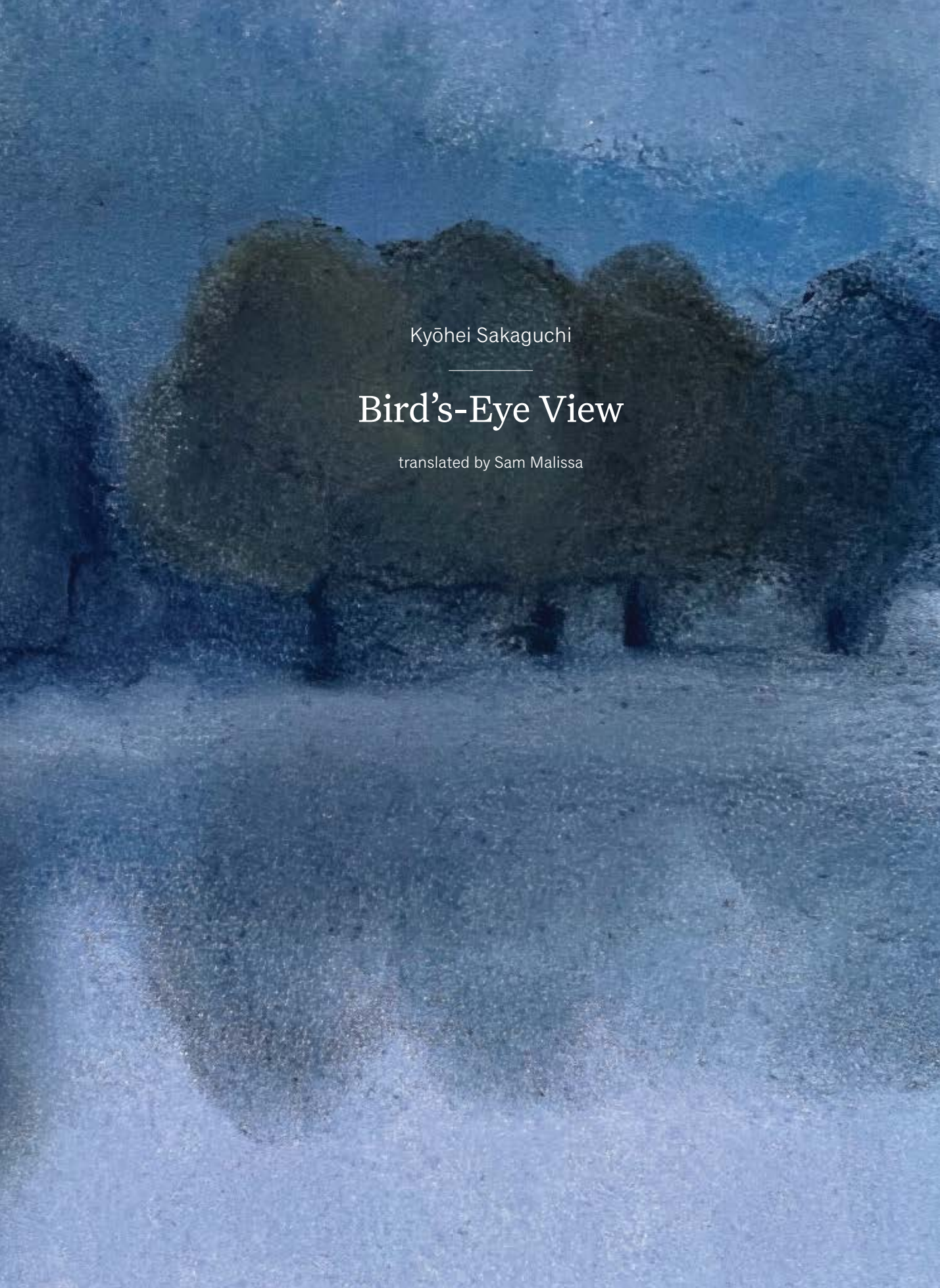
IX A PHONE CALL

I am on a call—how beautiful it is
This is what reading a poem is
You are there
on the other end,
and yet your breath
is here now

Your suffering
and joy
are happening in this very moment

Whenever I return
to your words
they ask me

Is your life
happening now
at this moment?
In a quiet tone—



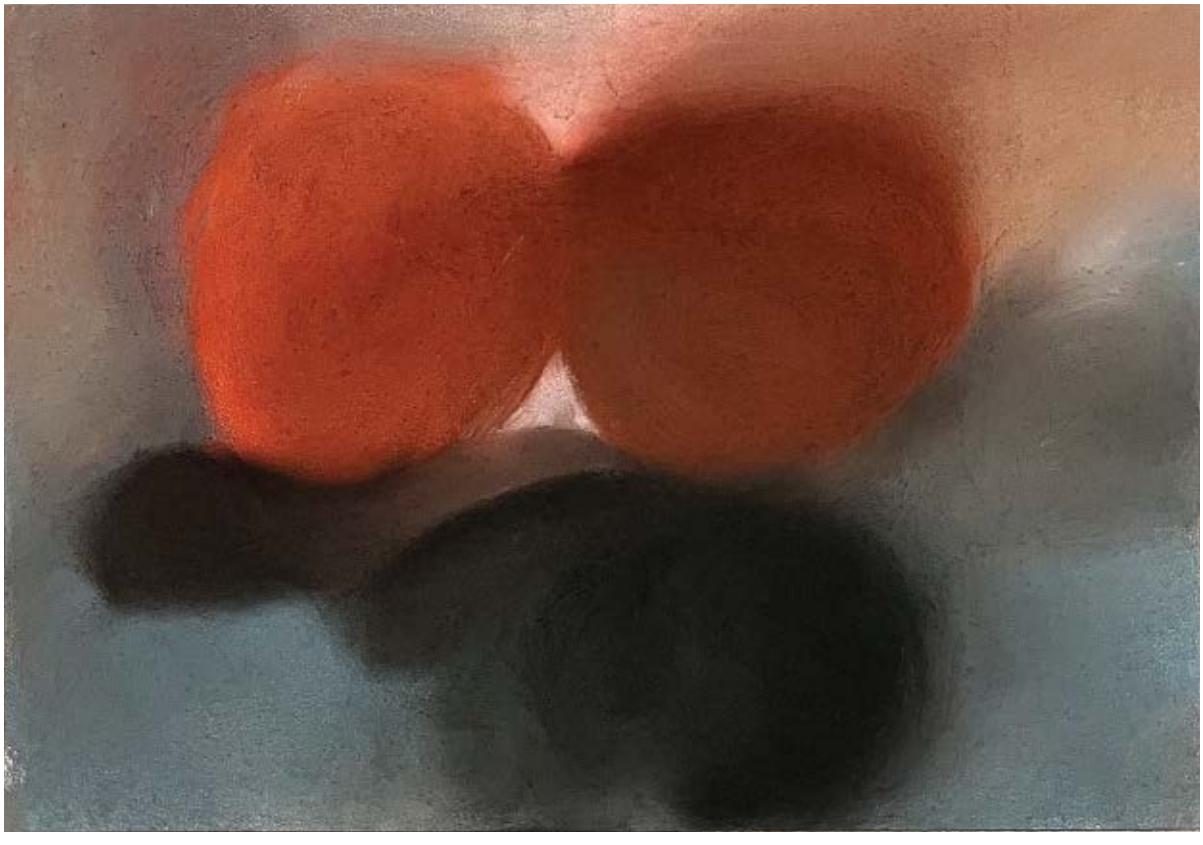
Kyōhei Sakaguchi

Bird's-Eye View

translated by Sam Malissa

I WENT BACK. Because I could hear the drums. The humans were beating drums. I was between human and human. I was between myself and myself. Between birds and spiders. Between eyes and innards. Not to say that I was *everywhere*. It's not like I appeared all of a sudden. I hadn't chosen that particular day. It just happened—just like that. But though it was sudden for me, the forest knew all along. I had wandered into the forest of my own free will. This certainly wasn't a tentative step. My legs knew. I had heard the sound of the drums somewhere before. I had observed this scene for so long. I was still all disassembled inside the viscera, still all manner of different shapes. And I remembered all sorts of things. I remembered things I never knew. The humans were gathering. I went toward them. They formed a ring directly beneath my nest. They arranged bits of wood from the tree to look like my eye. It wasn't a trap. Such stratagems don't exist in the forest. It isn't that kind of place. I had been all sorts of things, so it's not like I headed toward them merely because the bird's eye spotted them. No, there were multiple steps before that. It would be difficult for me to relate here everything that happened. Nor is that my job. I'm just a bird's eye. Of course, I was still being broken down within these guts. I saw on the inside something that looked like a needle. At that point I wasn't even an eye. The needle was extraordinarily fine, and sharp. I still couldn't see a thing. But I could feel the whole scene. That's why I can talk about it now. Though at that time I didn't have a mouth. Still, I tried to give voice to something. Where did the bird go, the one that was up in the sky just a moment ago? Did it return to the nest? I was here, left behind. The drums grew steadily louder, but I was still nowhere. The needle came closer, closer. Have you ever been pierced by a needle from the inside? *You* might not know this, but the needle comes from within for everyone, no exceptions. Everyone must go through this to be able to see. There isn't always an eye. You can only have an eye once you have felt that inner needle. And that was the exact moment. The humans had seated themselves in a circle, but then they started rising to their knees, first one, then another, shaking their bodies as they rose, and before long they were all up and stomping their feet. I was inside the stomach. The stomach was perfectly still. That's odd, I thought, but the road continued on ahead. It was unpaved and covered with weeds. Still, I could see the road. It wasn't a game trail in the forest. I could walk it in a straight line. I wasn't flying. Just walking. You know, with legs. Not eyes. I didn't have eyes yet. The legs belonged to someone else. They weren't my legs. I'd never even seen legs. I was getting smaller and smaller. Meanwhile, the disassembled me was getting bigger and bigger. They started to tell me tales, one after the next. Coarse and gritty. Some grabbed at me to appraise with their own hands. I did nothing. I just felt the speaker's voice. Finally the needle pierced me all the way through. There was nothing especially frightening about this. Do whatever you want to me. That's what I felt at that moment. My body began to melt. I have no idea how I must have looked in your eyes. However loud your voice, I don't think I'd ever hear it. I haven't heard much for a while. All I could hear was the sound of the drums. They stab at the ears. On a whim I flung myself down. I went limp, horizontal. I was lying on the grass. Roots pushed up from the earth. Ants marched about. They were big ants. How small had I become? Being disassembled is a terrible thing. A man was standing there. I called out to him. I knew it wouldn't help at all. But then he came closer to me. Before I knew it he was pressing up against my body. I could feel it. I had the sense that he spoke to me. Words in a language I had never heard. He was gazing in my direction. I wanted to ask him something, but my voice didn't reach him. He was talking to my other disassembled selves. Could they hear him? Out of nowhere the needle pierced me. As if bursting a water balloon. I seeped out of the broken membrane, like pus from a pimple. The fluid exploded like an atomic blast. It even covered you. That's how huge it was. I was like a mushroom cloud, billowing bigger and bigger. But translucent. So I could see you. Finally, I could see you. I was a bird's eye. Because of the needle, I became an eye. Several things happened at once. Don't push me, though. If you push, I might break. "Handle with care," the man said. I could still hear his voice. Though I couldn't understand a single word. I gave up asking him to repeat what he said. If you can hear it, tell me. Are my words reaching you?

How big is my eye? It's grown past just you, now it's enveloping the whole tavern. The bigger I get, the wider the tubes and ducts inside my innards. The children kept staring at me. There was the sound of wings beating against leaves. I had returned. The humans were all gathered. I had the sudden sensation of weight. That man was there as well. Rain fell. Droplets streamed down from the leaves. Water poured onto the man. He removed his cloak and let the water run over him, looking up as he did. The sky was clear. The tubes in my viscera had gone white. I perched on a branch and peered down at the humans. I was a bird's eye. I look like a human to you now, don't I? Is that a strange question to ask? I don't think so. I didn't choose to become this way. I was just disassembled. But I kept breathing. The humans, still swaying listlessly, all closed their eyes. I swelled ever larger. I realized that humans weren't beating the drums after all. The sound was coming from within the giant tree that the humans were circling. The inside of the tree could have been a cavern. And I was resting on one of its branches. I gulped the water that had pooled in the leaves. I was parched. I got drunk, as if I had been quaffing liquor. The water cascaded into my innards. There was nowhere to escape to. The water found me. Though the me on the branch was enjoying the gentle light filtering through the leaves, the situation inside the viscera was dire. The humans could only stand facing me. Their faces blank, their eyes still closed. Some pointed at me. Humans are bizarre. That was what I, a bird's eye, thought. You are reflected in my eye. Can't you hear it? There's no need to be afraid. Whether it's a flood, or who knows what, everyone goes through it. There's no one in this world who hasn't. Listen. See if you can hear. You can keep your eyes open if you like. You can look at me. I have no eyes. You can become a bird's eye if you want. The humans still have their eyes closed. Let yourself be pulled in with me. Then you'll understand. Like I did inside the viscera. The drums grew louder. It's coming now. The water is coming. I watched it. My disassembled self was also you, was also the bird's eye that the humans were pointing to as they stood there asleep. I heard the rumbling of the ground. It's there too, amid the earth. Someone resembling a whale. Just relax! That way you can be swept away. Let yourself be shaken. Let yourself be swallowed up. There's no point in worrying about where you'll go. You'll end up somewhere. Either way, you and I will meet again. I'll *see* again. I knew this to be true. Up there on the branch was my home. All I did was come back home.



Tomoka Shibasaki

After two years in a first-floor apartment, the tenant realizes that a certain cat would pass along the street in front at precisely the same time each day; following the cat, the tenant sees it disappear into a vacant house; when the tenant first moved into the apartment, the house wasn't vacant

translated by Polly Barton

IN THE EVENING THE CAT would make its way across the narrow street in front of the apartment building. It was a tabby, neither skinny nor fat, with no distinguishing features to speak of, and when the tenant in the first-floor apartment saw it, she paid it no particular notice. It was only after living there for two years that the tenant realized the cat passed by at almost exactly the same time each day. She couldn't quite remember when she'd begun to notice the cat, but she definitely remembered seeing it in the summer, and back in the spring.

The cat always came walking from the corner where the parking lot was, and would vanish beneath the gates of a vacant house at the end of the street. Several times, the tenant attempted to follow the cat but, once it entered the grounds of the vacant house, she didn't know where it went next. Perhaps the cat was using it as a place to sleep, she thought, but she had never seen any indication that someone in the neighborhood was feeding it.

When the tenant commented to a friend that she hadn't been aware that cats were creatures of such set habits, the friend seemed astonished. The friend's family had kept cats since before she was born—not just one, either, but two or three at a time. The friend now lived alone, but she'd brought one of the cats from home to her new place. It was a black cat, terribly shy. When the tenant visited her friend, the cat would always hide in the closet, so she'd seen it only once.

Well, how could I know that about cats if I've never had one, the tenant asked sulkily. Besides, she argued, people who have cats say that they like the fact they're so easygoing, don't they? The friend replied that this clearly came from someone who was not a cat person. People who don't understand cats will declare knowingly that cats don't take to people, or that they're more attached to places than to people, or that they don't show affection like dogs do, she said, but when I was growing up my cats would always be waiting in the entrance for me when I got home, and the one I'm living with now wasn't fazed at all by the move from my parents' house, because I was there with him.

Yet hearing about cats from the friend didn't help the tenant to understand where the tabby appeared from and where it went. When fall came, and the sun began setting earlier in the day, the hour of the cat's passage also grew earlier. The tenant felt strangely impressed to discover that the cat was moving in accordance not with time as it appeared on the clock, but with more natural rhythms. The tenant, who worked at home as a writer, began taking a walk at the same time that the tabby passed by.

Shortly after the tenant emerged from her apartment one evening, the cat turned the corner into the parking lot. Its gait seemed slightly hurried. It walked with its gaze pinned straight ahead, not turning its head to look around. Noticing the tenant, it stopped, and slowly turned its head toward her. The tenant returned its gaze. So long as the pair's eyes remained locked, the tabby didn't move. Its front leg, which it had begun to extend, was frozen in position. She had learned from watching the cat that in dim light a cat's pupils expand to black orbs. She had previously believed that their pupils were always vertical slits. Feeling bad for staring so intently, the tenant looked away and the cat continued walking, as if it had just been on pause and now someone had hit the play button. It passed under the gate of the vacant house and disappeared from sight.

When the tenant had first moved in, there were signs that someone was living in the now-vacant house. Several times she had seen the gates slightly ajar, with a bike parked in front. She didn't recall ever seeing lights on in the windows, though, and there was no sign of life apart from the bicycle. Of course she'd never seen the people who lived there.

It was a two-story house with no decorative features—neither a traditional wood construction steeped in a sense of history, nor a modern concrete cube declaring its designer credentials. The textured-plaster walls and sliding windows were the kind that you could see in any neighborhood. As the tenant watched the cat disappear, it occurred to her how difficult it must be to crawl beneath the floorboards of this house to sleep. Maybe the vacant house was just a stage on its journey, and the cat had a destination beyond. Its fur looked glossy enough, so it must be getting fed somewhere. The tenant's observation of the tabby continued, but just before winter came, she had to

return suddenly to her family home. Her father had taken ill, and they needed her help with the family business. On the day before she moved out, the tenant watched the cat disappear into the vacant house.

The house had definitely not been fully vacant when the tenant moved into her apartment. Its owner had been in and out of hospital for six months, and her second daughter, who lived close by, would come round to collect the mail and clean the house. When the tenant moved in, the owner was midway through a final, protracted stay in hospital. For a while after the owner died, the daughter would come by to sort out the house. During that time, the daughter would also spot the cat from time to time. While cleaning the house, she would open the glass door to the garden—though really that space barely deserved the appellation, described more accurately as a long thin gap between house and wall—and the cat would stroll past. It always approached from the direction of the gate, using the stack of empty flower pots as a platform from which to jump up onto the concrete wall, and walked off toward the house at the back. The daughter was always amazed by the cat's light-footed movements when it leapt onto that five-foot wall.

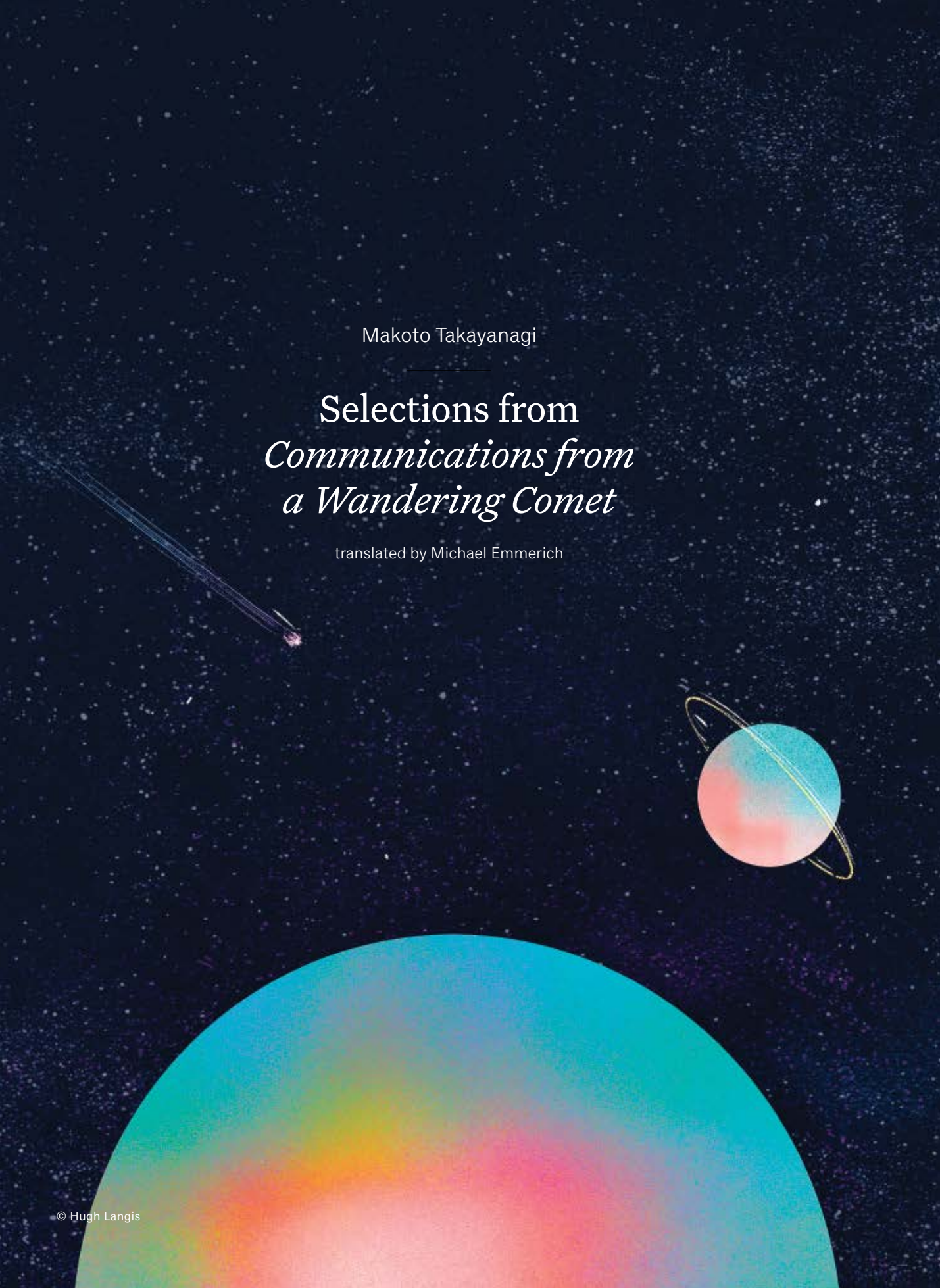
The daughter had never had a cat, either. When she was a child, growing up in this house, there'd been a dog. Her older brother had rescued it, on his way home one day from junior high school. He said that it had followed him home from near the school. They named the dog Goro. At first it was small and round, but it was a mongrel and grew to be larger than expected, and walking it became a lot of work. It was mostly their father who walked the dog. The daughter, who had just started elementary school when Goro arrived, loved him very much but had always wanted a cat. Both her parents, however, hated cats, and later, so did her husband, and so her wish had never been fulfilled. Whenever she noticed the tabby, she would be taken by the desire to see it up close, but if she tried approaching, it would run away.

The tabby, having leapt up onto the wall, now made its way along the top. Another cat lived in the house behind. It was a pure-white long-haired cat. The people in that house were careful not to let it outside, and it was always sitting in a window on the second floor. When the tabby looked up, the white cat would look down.

The window in which the white cat was sitting was in the bedroom belonging to the daughter of the house. An only child, she had left home to attend university in a different city and subsequently found a job there, but her room in the family home remained as it was. During the long holidays, the daughter would return home for three or four days. She would lie around in her room, petting the cat. The cat had been given to them by someone her mother knew, back when the daughter was in junior high school. When the kitten first arrived, she was hesitant to touch it, concerned that a creature that small would die if she so much as laid a finger on it. The white kitten grew rapidly, and was soon bigger than her friend's cat. The daughter found the cat's presence reassuring. Now almost fifteen, the cat no longer rushed over to play with its favorite toys when the daughter offered them, but merely glanced in their direction. Her mother had told her that when she wasn't there, the cat would spend practically the whole day sitting by the window. The daughter wanted to bring the cat with her to the place she now lived, but she felt bad about leaving it alone in a small apartment during the day, and she knew that her mother took better care of it than she did. When the daughter left, the white cat jumped up to the windowsill. It was waiting for the tabby to pass.

The tabby appeared just before sunset. After glancing up at the white cat, it would sit on the wall for a while, washing its face. Then it would walk farther along the wall and use the roof of the row house and the shed to jump down into the narrow alley, turning the corner by the small roadside shrine. Its routine was exactly the same every day, except when it was pouring rain or snowing.

One day, demolition work began on the vacant house, and the cat no longer passed by.



Makoto Takayanagi

Selections from *Communications from a Wandering Comet*

translated by Michael Emmerich

LIFE FORM H—
Reproductive Activities

Specimens of Life Form H may be divided into two distinct types depending on whether they possess a protuberance near the midheight of their bodies—or, more precisely, at the juncture where the two anatomical structures they use for locomotion connect to their torso. In organisms of both types, this particular area of the body ordinarily performs the function of ejecting liquid waste; current research suggests that it serves an additional function. According to our observations, in the hours when there is no light from Star T, Life Form Hs often shed the substances within which their bodies are otherwise enveloped; then they layer their bodies in a highly peculiar fashion, and commence an odd sort of exercise. Typically, they engage in this behavior in pairs comprising one of each type—one that has a protruding organ, and one that does not.

During these encounters, the Life Form Hs repeatedly apply the organ through which they ingest food matter to various spots on each other's body. One observes a tendency to focus on certain areas, chief among them the feeding organ, the mammary glands, and the excretory organs. The process reaches its conclusion when the Life Form H with the protruding organ, which has become enlarged and rigid, injects it into the corresponding area on the H that does not have this organ. Following this, the exercise grows increasingly intense as the first Life Form H rapidly inserts and extricates the organ, until at last, quite suddenly and often with a bizarre burst of noise, it all comes to an end.

In most cases, Life Form Hs carry out these activities not merely inside their nests, but in a tightly enclosed, ill-lit space within the nest. There have occasionally been reports, however, of instances in which Life Form Hs have engaged in the same behavior away from their nests, and in the full light of Star T. Additionally, while as a rule the behavior is undertaken by two organisms, one with a protuberance and one without, encounters have been observed in which two Life Form Hs with the protuberance, or two without it, engage in the behavior; or in which two or three pairs have undertaken it in unison; or even, in rare cases, in which large numbers have collected and engaged in the behavior as a group, seemingly at random.

Researchers have not yet fully clarified the purpose of this behavior, but since we know that Life Form Hs without the protuberance produce members of the next generation through their excretory organs, it seems plausible that it has a reproductive purpose. Some uncertainty remains, however, because, as previously noted, the behavior sometimes occurs among two Life Form Hs with protruding organs, which does not create members of the next generation. Furthermore, some Life Form Hs seem to belong neither to the first nor to the second category—a consequence, perhaps, of evolution. More research will be required to clarify this point.

To date, no animal life forms have been discovered here. There are plant-like life forms (though it has yet to be confirmed that they are alive) which at first glance seem quite similar to terrestrial cacti, except that they vanish as soon as one discovers them, only to reappear a moment later in an altogether different location. There is no way to tell whether the two are indeed the same. In fact, it remains uncertain at this point whether these life forms actually exist. Some have suggested that the forms researchers have perceived with their eyes are no more than projected images.

One can quite distinctly feel the presence of these things, however—this is a fact. Each is identical in form, yet one hesitates to declare that they are truly one and the same. They resemble each other, yes, but somehow they are different. Perhaps it might be helpful to say that they convey a different impression, much like a copy and an original.

Still, one cannot deny the possibility that the same form is, indeed, moving instantaneously through time and space, or equally that utterly distinct forms keep popping up willy-nilly only to disappear again, whack-a-mole style. In any event, the phenomenon takes place only during the day, as the three suns—Great, Middle, and Small—rise one after the other.

It is common knowledge that daytime results from the interactions of the three suns' circular orbits. Doubtless the complex interplay of their gravitational pulls has a substantial effect on the ecology of these plant-like life forms. It is worth noting, in this connection, that the phenomenon is often observed at noon, when the Great and Middle suns rise together, but not at seminoon—a time reminiscent (indeed identical) to a Terrestrial autumn dusk—when the Small sun appears alone in the sky. The phenomenon has never been observed at daynight, when all three suns rise at roughly the same time.

Or rather, we should say that these cactus-like life forms do not appear at daynight. Perhaps the conditions necessary for them to live are not present at this time. In the nighttime hours of daynight, clothlike life forms (it has yet to be confirmed that they are alive) reminiscent of giant pieces of seaweed spread out across the land and, all at the same time, begin writhing toward the sky.

LIFE FORM H—
An Outline

It is necessary to report on the life forms on this planet, which have certain remarkable characteristics. In contrast to the vast majority of locomotive life forms, those here use two anatomical structures to move themselves about in an upright posture. For the sake of convenience, we will call these creatures "Life Form H." Life Form Hs are believed to lack the protuberance frequently found on the backside of other locomotive life forms, near the midheight of their bodies. There is a reason for the vagueness of this formulation.

One characteristic that separates Life Form H from other life forms is its peculiar habit of enveloping much of its body in other substances. This renders impossible direct observation of much of the surface of their bodies. No one has yet understood the meaning of this behavior. Some have proposed that it serves as a way of insulating their bodies from the cold; seeing as they envelop their bodies in this way even in the most brutal heat, however, this hypothesis should probably be rejected. Considerable variety has been observed in the color and shape of the substances; the materials might be derived from the bodies of other non-locomotive life forms.

Surprisingly, Life Form Hs have been observed engaging in the brutish behavior of ingesting other life forms. Indeed, it is apparent that they derive tremendous pleasure from ingesting other life forms, both locomotive and stationary, of the water and of the land. In rare cases, they ingest other life forms just as they are; as a rule, however, they first subject them to an extremely complex series of processes. Often this involves the application of fire. The ability to control and make use of fire on a regular basis is an important characteristic that distinguishes Life Form H from other life forms on the planet.

Life Form Hs tend to live in groups. Sometimes these groups consist of just a few organisms; often, however, they build enormous nests in which great numbers of them live together. The interiors of these giant nests are frequently partitioned, with each small subnest being inhabited by a group of four or five organisms. Coincidentally, from the outside the nests closely resemble those of the ahato found on this planet. Shortly after the starlight begins to reach them, Life Form Hs leave their nests to engage in activities whose purpose is not yet well understood; they return long after the star ceases to shine. Not much has been observed of Life Form H's behavior inside the nest.

LIFE FORM H—
Communication

Life Form Hs engage in mutual communication by means of sounds produced by their feeding organs—a fascinating if inefficient method. Their feeding organ appears to be quite highly evolved, as it plays a role in various aspects of Life Form Hs' lives—not just in feeding, essential to the sustenance of life, and in communication, but also, and quite prominently, in reproductive activities. The extent of the organ's development is evident even in its communicative function, as it is capable of producing a wide variety of pitches, timbres, and rhythms. Life Form Hs combine these diverse sounds in complex ways to mark their intentions, often accompanying sound with rudimentary physical expressions.

That these various methods are only partially successful may be ascertained through comparison of behavior before and after attempts at communication. Often, when it is clear that a message has not been adequately conveyed, Life Form Hs will become physical in a manner unique to moments of failure, and observation has shown that this particular physical mode frequently leads to fighting. The systems of communication via sound that these creatures have developed appear, moreover—despite their real complexity—to be limited in their efficacy to extremely limited geographic regions. Life Form Hs that inhabit different areas make use of divergent communication systems.

The incompleteness of their communication may, perhaps, explain the massive conflicts in which Life Form Hs engage, here and there, across the planet—fights that involve not just individual creatures, but entire regions. They pursue these conflicts so relentlessly that it is hard to understand what meaning they might have: occasionally members of different groups use instruments of fire on each other until nearly all of them have died. To be sure, some have hypothesized that these fights result less from failures of the communicative function than from Life Form H's inherent cruelty and belligerence. Certain others have suggested, too, that the fighting may serve a societal function—that it may be the result of an intentional effort to manage sudden increases in population.

As a supplementary means of communication, Life Form Hs also make marks on pieces of a thin, flat substance, which they then share—an approach equally bizarre and inefficient. Though they have an extremely well-developed system for producing these marked objects, nothing suggests that the information they contain is ever successfully transmitted to a large number of organisms. And while they possess sexual organs, these do not seem to play much of a role in communication—perhaps because they function in ways so different from ours.

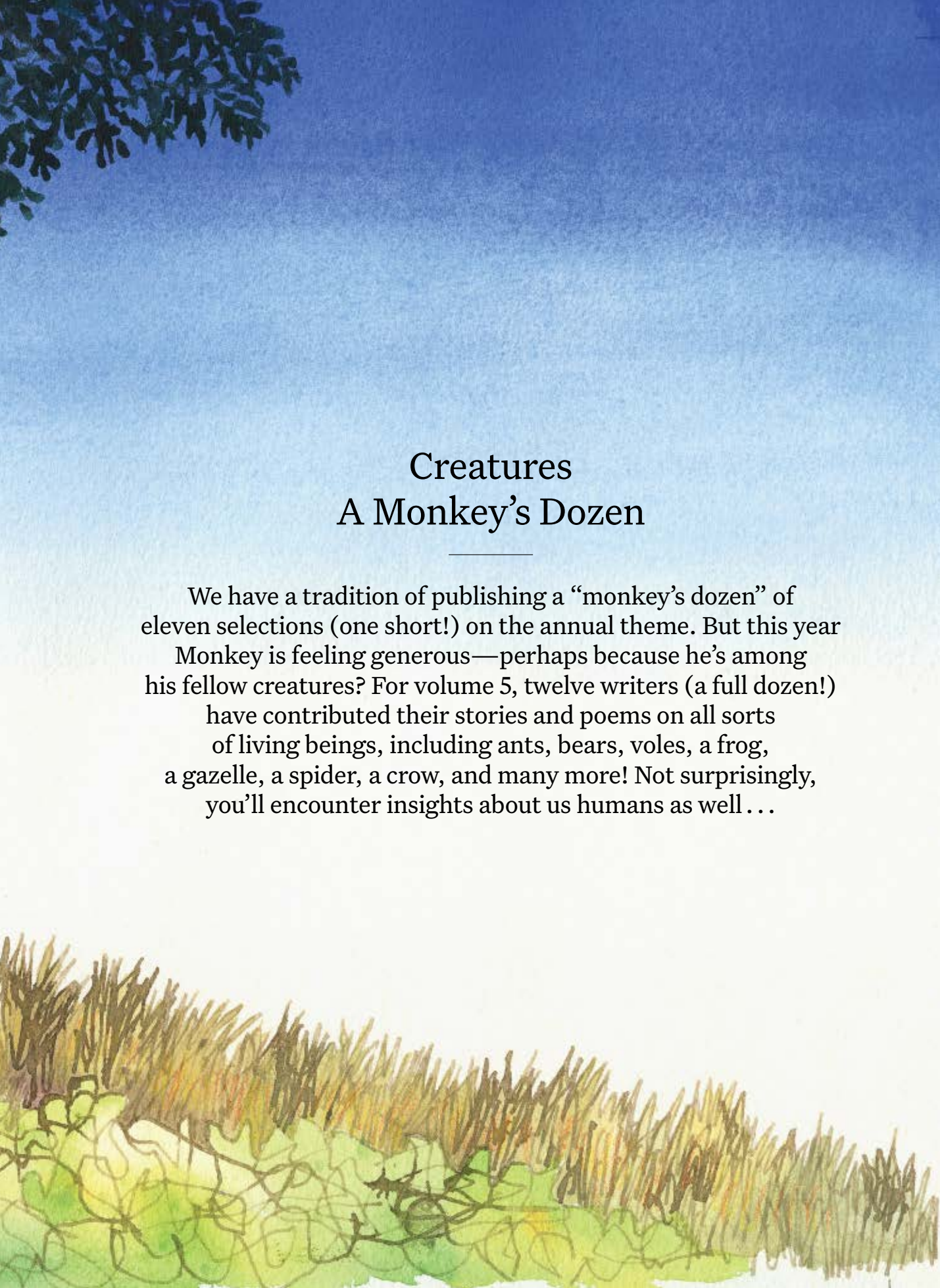
To date, hardly any large life forms have been observed on this planet—only tiny organisms. A range of evidence indicates, however, that in the past (and most likely quite recently) a highly intelligent life form did indeed exist here, and that it had built up an advanced civilization.

For example, there are, scattered across this planet, complex structures that clearly could not have been produced by natural forces. These structures have all been destroyed, however—and, as we can clearly see from the traces that still remain, destroyed with great violence. There are exposed iron rods. Ruins of geometrical structures, likely architectural in nature. Remains composed of compounds of various elements. All this is so shockingly vivid in its presence that one can only assume the destruction must have taken place fairly recently.

That life forms from another planet would, lacking any reason for doing so, nonetheless destroy with such violence the structures on this planet (which is now covered by the Galactic Environmental Protection Treaty) is unthinkable. One must assume, then, that the destruction was wrought by these beings themselves.

It is difficult to hypothesize what may have precipitated the destruction, but since researchers have yet to discover such a highly intelligent life form on this planet, one can only assume that the creatures responsible for creating these advanced structures were driven to extinction by some event (disease? collision with a minor planet? radioactive pollution?). Faced with the prospect of extinction, this life form chose for some reason to destroy the structures rather than to allow them to remain. (But why? To keep other life forms from using them? Out of sheer recklessness, precipitated by their impending extinction?)

Alternatively, one might suppose that a sudden mutation in their genes—and Dr. Undamonda has already proposed that such mutations are not uncommon among life forms on this planet—programmed them to kill each other en masse, and to leave nothing behind. Or one might suppose that an unanticipated environmental shift left them with no option but to commit mass suicide, as the rhyeming do on our own planet. No evidence of such a dramatic change has yet been uncovered, however, leaving us even more perplexed.



Creatures
A Monkey's Dozen

We have a tradition of publishing a "monkey's dozen" of eleven selections (one short!) on the annual theme. But this year Monkey is feeling generous—perhaps because he's among his fellow creatures? For volume 5, twelve writers (a full dozen!) have contributed their stories and poems on all sorts of living beings, including ants, bears, voles, a frog, a gazelle, a spider, a crow, and many more! Not surprisingly, you'll encounter insights about us humans as well . . .

Hiromi Kawakami

Cathedral

translated by Ted Goossen

DA-DA-DA-DUM. Da-da-da-dum. My neighbor's morning alarm in Apartment 2 goes off again. The bells of Westminster Cathedral is my guess.

I have been living in this apartment for two months.

But I've yet to see the face of whoever lives in Apartment 2.

THE ROOM'S INNER CURTAIN was pulled back, revealing a brown rabbit, a black-and-white tabby cat, and a small animal I had never seen before.

"Please choose one," the girl from the rental agency said. Her voice was soft and gentle.

"Choose?" I blurted out. It was March, shortly before I was to enter university. I could expect hardly any money from home, so I needed to find an inexpensive room, not too far from school if possible.

"The rent is dirt cheap, but you have to look after one of these little guys—those are the rules."

The university was only two stops away on the train. A good shopping street was located nearby. The apartment had a bath. The rent was a mere 20,000 yen. A real steal—yet, as the girl had said, it came with this very particular stipulation.

"Are you saying I have to look after one of these animals?"

"Yes. That is the landlord's expectation."

"But what if I can't do it? What if the animal dies or something?"

"Barring a natural death, your contract would be void, and you would have to vacate."

"If there were an accident?"

"That would depend on the circumstances. If the accident was unavoidable, the contract would still be valid."

The girl's nose was pointed and turned up at the tip. The type of nose I find irresistible.

"It's 20,000 yen, for real?" I exclaimed. "No maintenance fee? And the refundable deposit and key money are just one month's rent each?"

"That's right."

Our conversation was flowing smoothly, but my internal warning system was sending out loud signals: Something fishy is going on here! Definitely, something very fishy!

THAT WARNING SYSTEM OF MINE was usually on the mark. The bullies I had to deal with in junior high probably account for its inception. Avoid this guy like the plague, it told me. Keep a measured distance from that one. At some point or other, I had picked up the ability to sense who was safe and when it was okay to interact with someone.

Yet I ignored the warning signals and rented the apartment, despite the strange caveat attached to it. The place was just too cheap to pass up. The nose of the girl from the rental agency may have had something to do with it too.

"I'll take it," I told her.

"And which animal will you choose?" she said, smiling.

I considered the cat first. It probably required the least looking after. But cats were liable to run off from time to time. That would make an unforeseen accident more likely, wouldn't it? The rabbit, on the other hand, was an animal I had a distinct aversion to. An old girlfriend who had ditched me used to say, "Rabbits waste away when they're neglected. Just like me."

What could I do? I chose the little animal I had never laid eyes on before.

"What an unusual choice," the girl said. "But I'm glad. This poor baby has been passed over by everyone, so it always looks lonely."

The girl gently scooped up the animal with both hands and passed it to me.

"You can feed it cat food," she said. "And it will stay quietly in your room."

Gingerly, I took the animal from her. It was quivering. Its body was very warm.

THE LITTLE CREATURE had four legs. It was between the size of a cat and a guinea pig and was covered in fluffy white fur. Its ears were pointy, its eyes big and round. It had a long, narrow torso and its paws were soft. It seldom made any noise, but sat unobtrusively in a corner of the room. It resembled an ermine or Japanese sable, but a pair of wings were folded on its back. That struck me as pretty weird, however I looked at it.

I checked it out online, even made a trip to the library, but couldn't discover what species it might be. I was completely stumped.

Finally, I phoned the girl at the rental agency.

"Is this a bird?" I asked.

"No."

"But the wings . . ."

"They're vestigial. It can't fly."

"Vestigial?"

"In other words, a remnant, something left over."

Vestigial. Remnant. I dumbly repeated the words.

"So, they're wings that can't be used, right? Still, I've never seen or heard of any animal like this."

"Are you having problems taking care of it?"

There were no problems whatsoever. To the contrary, it was so easy to look after I almost felt let down.

"No, not really. It's just that, you know, I feel a little uneasy not knowing what it is I'm taking care of."

"Why don't you try giving it a name?" she said.

I could hear her faint breathing on the line. A name. Once again, I parroted her words. That's right, a name, she said. In her soft voice.

WINGS. Once I had decided on that name—so simple and direct, so lacking in artifice—it felt like that was what the creature had always been called. As if it had been born "Wings."

Wings took to me right away.

"Want to come along?" I would ask, opening my bookbag, and it would burrow in.

Wings remained quiet on the train to school and during my classes. I sometimes peeked inside my bag, worried it might have suffocated, only to find it staring back at me with those big eyes. On my lunch break, I would let it loose on the campus green. At first it just sat there, but before long it was scampering all over the place.

MY APARTMENT BUILDING had two floors with four rooms on each.

The landlord occupied the four rooms on the second floor, while the first-floor rooms were rented out to four individual tenants.

The only other tenant I met was the middle-aged man whose room was at the far end of the building.

"I'm Kawai. In Room 4," he called out to me a few days after I had moved in. "I'm looking after a ferret. How about you?"

"Um, well, you know . . ." I stammered. I hadn't named my pet yet, so his question flustered me.

"I bet it's that thing with wings. Am I right?" I could see he was burning with curiosity.

"Um, well, you know," I stammered again.

Kawai laughed so hard his shoulders shook. He gave me a big wink.

"Good luck with that one, buddy," he said.

Kawai always took his ferret out when he came home from work. The ferret would happily twist and turn around his legs as they walked along.

I STILL HAVEN'T MET the inhabitants of Rooms 1 and 2. Yet their presence is unmistakable. And so I have secretly given each a name.

Room 2 is "Westminster."

Room 1 is "Carver."

Carver is the name of an American writer. I have just learned about his prodigious drinking in my English Literature class.

The number of empty cans and bottles the occupant of Room 1 sets out on garbage day is nothing to sneeze at. How can a single person consume so much wine, sake, and shochu, not to mention all that beer? Yet Room 1 is strangely silent.

As a matter of fact, no one in the building seems to make any noise at all. Nor have I ever seen anyone come to visit any of the residents.

I am no different. I have no friends at school. I've joined none of the clubs, and I spend what spare time I have working part-time jobs. In my apartment, too, I am always alone.

Sometimes I want, need, someone to talk to!

So, I begin talking to Wings.

Why can't Westminster turn off the snooze button on his alarm?

Why were the bulk of the empties in front of Carver's door this week shochu bottles?

Wings doesn't answer, just flaps its wings in response.

"HEY, WHY DONCHA POP OVER for a visit?" Kawai called out.

It was a rare day when I had no part-time job to attend to. I instinctively hesitated, then changed my mind.

Kawai's place was a mess. There were numerous little nooks set aside for the ferret. Each of these "sleeping spots" was strewn with piles of trash.

"Makes you feel right at home, don't it?" Kawai crowed. "Um," I mumbled noncommittally. In fact, I preferred rooms that were kept clean and orderly.

"How is that little winged bugger?" he asked.

"It's fine," I answered.

"You should have brought it along. I bet it and my ferret would hit it off."

I uttered another noncommittal "um." Would the two pets really get along? I had serious doubts.

Time passed, the night deepened, and still Kawai wouldn't call it quits. It turned out he worked in a boxing gym.

"Not that I box," he said. "I just happen to be chummy with the master. I look after his books."

"Do you really call him master?"

"Yeah, that's what we all call him. I may not be a real boxer myself, but, hey, I've picked up a few things watching them for so long." He jumped up and began shadowboxing to demonstrate.

I have never liked boxing. I hate the idea of two men punching each other until they bleed. Maybe that's why I was tormented in junior high—the bullies saw right through me.

"I guess I'll be heading home," I said, beginning to stand up.

"Why so soon?" he said, placing a hand on my shoulder and pushing me back down. The shove was an extension of his shadowboxing, so that when his hand slipped it hit my head with unexpected force, knocking me to the floor.

I squatted there, eyes closed.

"SORRY, SORRY!" Kawai kept apologizing. His voice seemed to be coming from far away.

Silver dots were dancing behind my eyelids.

"I'm okay," I said as I crouched before him. That set off another round of apologies. The ferret clambered up on my knee. When the dizziness passed, I opened my eyes.

Kawai's face was mere inches from mine. I cried out and started back in alarm. Having my space invaded is something else I hate.

The ferret was licking the back of my hand.

"Ain't that something!" Kawai said. "He's never been this friendly with strangers before."

Using the ferret as a shield, I attempted to edge toward the door. What on earth had possessed me to visit this guy's room in the first place?

"C'mon, man, you need to take it easy," Kawai said. He slipped behind me, blocking my path. Now I was penned in.

Avoiding his gaze, I cast my eyes around the room. They fell upon two books on his shelf: *Playing the Stock Market* and *Cathedral*. Once again, silver dots danced across my field of vision.

I ENDED UP DRINKING all night in Kawai's room.

Once my fainting spell had passed, Kawai pulled out a bottle of his "very special" cheap wine, and we started emptying it.

We weren't exactly talkative, but we still found things to say. We took our time killing two bottles of that "very special" wine. At some point in our drinking, my objections to the messy room and boxing all faded away.

"Have you ever seen the guy who lives in Room 1?" I asked.

"No, not once," Kawai shook his head. "But man, can he drink."

"I was told I'd be kicked out if my pet dies. Is that for real?"

"You bet. The old woman who lived in your apartment before you—she squashed her hamster. Stepped on it by mistake."

"Holy smokes."

Westminster in Room 2 turned out to be a reclusive man in his thirties. He worked at home and seldom went out—Kawai thought he might be a manga artist or something of the sort. He was taking care of a turtle.

"I thought the girl from the rental agency was really cute, didn't you?"

"What? It was a middle-aged guy who showed me this place."

The sun was coming up when I left Kawai's room. He accompanied me into the hall.

Someone was moving about the garbage disposal area.

"Ah!" Kawai and I exclaimed together. It was the occupant of Room 1, depositing a large bag of empty cans and bottles. Carver was not a man at all, but a very pretty woman in her twenties!

"Good morning," Carver said, nodding her head in our direction.

KAWAI AND I have been drinking buddies since that night.

My room, though, seems to make him uncomfortable.

"This place is too shipshape for my liking," he sighs, stroking Wings's neck in a bored sort of way. Wings puts up with this for a while before escaping to another part of the room.

"Hey, any luck tracking down the email address for the chick at the rental agency?" Kawai teases. "If I had the guts to do something like that," I counter, "I would have done it long ago." He snickers.

Had I met Kawai at the university, I doubt we would ever have become friends. As things stand, however, we spend a lot of time together drinking and talking about all sorts of nonsense.

"Do you like Carver's *Cathedral*?" I work up the nerve to ask him one day.

This time I'm not talking about the Carver in Room 1 but the famous author of that particular collection of short stories. His answer, though, is a real letdown.

"Naw, I picked it up off the street."

"So, you haven't read it?"

"Reading's a pain in the ass."

Kawai changes the subject. "Any luck with the rental agency girl?" he presses me. "None of your business," I reply, looking away.

"Well," I go on, "If you're not going to read the book, can I have it?"

"No way."

"Why not?"

"It's there to impress the chicks."

The young woman in Room 1 put out another pile of empty shochu bottles this week. How I want to return to my apartment! But for some reason I am unable to rouse myself to leave. Wings and the ferret are merrily running around the room. From far away, I hear the bells of Westminster Cathedral chime once again: da da da dum, da da da dum.

Natsuki Ikezawa

Bearman

translated by Chris Corker

WITH A RUMBLING STOMACH but nothing in my apartment to eat, I set out late at night to buy some food. I wandered the aisles of the local convenience store and without thinking picked up bread and a few onigiri—carbs with a side of carbs. After adding a beer to the list, I figured that would probably do. Back on the street with my purchases in hand, I wondered if I should have at least bought some fruit, but the thought was easily shrugged off.

I took the longer route home to avoid the tedium of going back the way I'd come. The breeze felt good on my skin, and I wished, on a night as fresh as this, that the moon was out for me to admire.

I arrived back at my building roughly half an hour after I'd left it. The elevator was no longer at ground level, so I pushed the button and waited while it made its leisurely descent from twelve, the penthouse floor above my own. Odd that there was someone besides me coming home at this hour of the night. Then again I knew next to nothing about the people who lived above me, and my ignorance extended to the building as a whole. The ground floor was reserved for retail units accessed from the street, but there were still twenty-two apartments in the building, two on every floor from the second floor up. From all those apartments I knew five people at most, and even then only for the most perfunctory of hellos.

The moment I stepped into the elevator, I caught my breath.

The stench was incredible.

It had to be from some kind of animal. It was like that of a large dog that had not been bathed for months, except somehow five times worse. The essences of five extremely stinky dogs distilled into one. Whoever was responsible for this nasal assault must have been riding the elevator until only a moment ago. All the way up to the twelfth floor.

Whoever or *what*ever.

Surely we couldn't be dealing with a "who" here. No human could smell like this. Even a person who hadn't bathed for years could not produce such an extreme stink. As a woman highly averse to baths and showers, I knew a little something about body odor. I could make an educated guess at just how bad human stink could get.

Instead of going to my floor, I pressed the button for twelve.

I was visited by visions of a huge beastlike hound standing on two legs that had only minutes earlier pressed this same button. As the elevator rose, I felt an increasing desire to see this creature for myself. The odor, while still undeniably potent, had become, more than anything else, intriguing.

The twelfth floor was rife with the scent. As on the other residential floors, there were two entrances. Which was harboring this pungent individual? Beside one door was a plaque embossed with the name "Yamamoto Shōichiro," while its neighbor had no plaque at all. However you looked at it, Yamamoto Shōichiro was not the name of a smelly man, so I rang the bell of the other, anonymous unit.

After a few moments of audible hesitation, the door cracked open and a man's head tentatively emerged. Given how late it was, his caution was understandable, but I also had a sneaking suspicion he was trying to prevent the strange odor from leaking into the corridor. His face was rugged and dark, his eyes wide; he had long hair and a scruffy beard. His tall frame was outfitted in practical work clothes. Further inside the apartment was a large shape, but the man, who had wedged himself into the crack in the door, seemed determined to block my view of it.

"Yes?"

"What's that smell?"

Without another word, the man closed the door.

I had fallen at the first hurdle.

It was only my overdeveloped curiosity that had gotten me this far, so I saw little point in persisting. As I was turning to leave, however, the door swung open. "Give me a hand," the man said.

With the door fully open, I saw that a square cage was blocking the narrow entranceway. The man was in the space between it and the door. Crouched inside the cage was something large and black.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A bear. I want to move it further into the apartment."

I could see that what he'd said was true: there really was a bear in there. It was about the size of a very large dog, making it not very big at all by ursine standards. Its restless swaying from side to side, however, demonstrated extremely bear-like behavior.

The cage took up so much of the entranceway that the man had to clamber over it to reach the other side, with the bear observing him all the while from below. Stooping to take hold of the bottom of the cage, he heaved it over the small step dividing the entranceway from the rest of the apartment.

"Push," he said, and I began to do so from my side. Fitted with little wheels, the cage became easier to maneuver once it had cleared the step. We pushed it to a room at the end of the corridor, accompanied by a chorus of creaking metal and squeaking rubber. The room was bare, with no real furniture to speak of. Maybe the man had only just moved here, and the bear was the only thing he'd brought with him. Hard to imagine. Besides, weren't moves supposed to be done during the day?

The man went into the bathroom and returned with a shallow plastic bowl filled with water. He placed it inside the cage, which was now in the center of the room. Retrieving a grocery bag from a far corner, he dumped some potatoes and apples into a little bucket and put that inside the cage too.

"The bucket won't last long," the man said. "They chew on them like toys, and they soon end up in pieces."

The bear drank some water and ate a potato.

Watching it eat, I remembered my onigiri and bread and went to fetch them from the hallway. I held out one in each hand to the man. "Which one?"

He took the bread. We shared the beer.

"Is it yours?" I asked.

"No, someone gave it to me to look after. I have to let it go, though."

"You mean give it back?"

"No, release it. Bears are mountain animals, so I'll do it there. But this is Sapporo, and Hokkaido is brown bear territory. This, obviously, is an Asian Black. I have to get it to Honshu."

The man continued on this topic and spoke of nothing else, mumbling to himself as the night drew on and he ate the bread and washed it down with some beer. I drank the rest of the beer while I finished an onigiri and ate one of the bear's apples, happy that

I hadn't needed to buy fruit from the convenience store after all. The bear, meanwhile, chowed down on its apples and potatoes with apparent delight. I wondered whether it might be content to stay forever in that cage, so long as the food kept rolling in. Or would it rather be gorging itself on acorns, wild honey, and bamboo shoots in the mountains?

Eventually the bear was sated and slumped heavily to its side.

"I only have one futon," the man said as he laid out the bedding next to the cage.

"You sleep in the same room as the bear?"

"It gets lonely otherwise."

The man and I undressed and slipped under the covers. The lights were off but the glow from the entranceway leaked into the room and formed shapes of the bear and its cage on the wall. The man pressed up against me, so I climbed on top of him and we had sex. At the end I cried out, the man moaned, and the bear woke with a groan. Maybe it was upset that it couldn't get under the covers with us.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Bearman," he replied.

I was skeptical.

WITH THE BEAR IN THE SAME ROOM I slept far better than usual, which was an interesting discovery for me. That morning for the second time, I cried out, the man moaned, and the bear groaned. Then, still sprawled out on the futon, we discussed our plan.

"It's simple," Bearman said. "We load the cage onto a vehicle, drive to the port at Tomakomai, and then take the ferry. We get off at Hachinohe, head into the mountains, and release the bear there."

"I'm coming too then, am I?"

"Of course. You can drive, right?"

"I'm driving?"

"Well, I can't."

"Then how did you get the cage here?"

"In a truck. A guy helped me get it to this floor and into the entranceway, but then he left me to it. Pretty thoughtless really."

"So you don't have a car?"

"No."

"Well, neither do I. What should we do?"

"Steal one, I guess."

This enviable task would also be left to me. Bearman didn't drive after all.

"The bear's cage will be too visible in a truck, so probably better to steal a van. Like a Toyota HiAce or something."

These days, few people are careless enough to leave their vehicle by the side of the road with the keys in the ignition. Trying to brainstorm a place where someone might do this, we came up with the idea of a construction site. A large building on a busy street would have tight security and too many prying eyes, but an unfinished house in a residential neighborhood held much better prospects. The plan was that I would ride the bus until I spotted just such a place, then get off at the next stop and walk back.

In the end, I was so insistent that I didn't want to go on my own that Bearman agreed to come with me. He was worried about leaving the bear alone, but there was no clear reason for his anxiety. The smell in the elevator had long since dissipated. On the way out we passed the building's superintendent, who I'm sure thought that I had brought a man back home with me last night. In reality, the only one being brought to the building last night was the bear.

"How long have you lived on twelve?" I asked.

"Since yesterday. Someone gave me the key."

The key was probably stolen because someone knew the unit was empty. Maybe the thoughtless guy with the truck had organized the whole thing.

However long we rode around on the bus, no perfect opportunity presented itself. Even when things looked promising and the two of us got off and walked back to the site in question, all of the cars parked there were locked. In many cases, construction workers were only a few yards away, meaning we'd have been far too conspicuous checking for keys left in the ignition.

Later, as we traipsed dejectedly down a main road, a plain white van appeared ahead and by sheer coincidence pulled up right beside us. The driver hopped out carrying a document folder and disappeared into a nearby four-story building, leaving the engine running. Dragging ourselves around construction sites for half a day had been unnecessary after all.

We jumped into the van and drove away. The interior was spotless and the back empty, meaning we had somehow managed to steal a van with no extras to worry about. Behind us there were two rows of five seats, with additional cargo space in the back. It was perfect for the bear.

"Try and find a quiet parking lot," Bearman said. "The fewer people the better."

"Why?"

"I'm going to switch the plates."

Outside of Sapporo's city center the roads are wide and deserted, and we found a quiet lot right away. There were only a few cars on the road, and no pedestrians whatsoever.

"You stay here. It'll look suspicious if we both do it."

So saying, Bearman got out with his tools and headed to a dilapidated car parked behind us. He knelt and loosened the screws before removing the plate. From there he moved from car to car until he had switched the plates of four different vehicles. To disguise the absence of the Transport Bureau seal, he smeared the edges of the plates with mud from a puddle. The mud reminded me that the rain had not stopped until late last night; there was no way the moon would have been out for me to admire.

"People don't normally bother to check their own plate," Bearman explained as he climbed back into the passenger seat. "And even if one or two are reported, it won't lead anyone back to us now."

From the car park we headed to the local outdoor market and bought a bunch of wholesale potatoes, apples, and carrots. At ¥500 for 5 kilograms, we could hardly complain about the price. Parking the van down a local side street, we walked back to our apartment building.

The bear was calm. Seeing that we had returned, it raised itself in the middle of the cage and began swaying from side to side. It clearly wasn't getting enough exercise, but how could it when it was stuffed into such a cramped space? It should have been roaming through open meadows while snuffling out food, rolling down grassy hills and cavorting with the opposite sex; it should have been bulking itself up for winter, hibernating, and giving birth. That's what living is for a bear.

Bearman doled out the potatoes, apples, and carrots. After eating, the bear proceeded to push out a giant turd. Bearman scooped up the copious scat with a small shovel he retrieved from the back of the room. He carried it to the bathroom and flushed it down the toilet. I had my doubts the plumbing could handle it.

Afterwards, Bearman watched the bear with palpable glee.

"How did an Asian Black bear even end up in Hokkaido?" I asked.

"No clue. The issue isn't why it's here but that it's here at all. That's something we have to put right. It's as simple as that."

WE WANTED TO SET OFF RIGHT AWAY, but if anyone saw us loading the bear into the van, it was bound to cause a scene. We had no choice but to wait until the early hours of the morning. At 1:00 am, we did a final check to make sure most of the late-night stragglers were gone from the street. After pulling the van up in front of the building, we rolled the cage out of the apartment and took it down in the elevator. In the enclosed space the smell of the bear was stronger, but it didn't bother me so much now. The real trial was the backbreaking work of getting a heavy cage, complete with a heavy bear, into the back of the van.

"Bend your knees and push up with your thighs," Bearman advised. "If you just lift with your back, you're going to hurt yourself. Just think, if this bear was a bit bigger, we would've had to get a truck with hydraulics."

"Hydraulics?"

"With a crane on it. Or maybe we could just steal a forklift?"

"How about enlisting a new recruit?"

"No. This is a two-person job," Bearman said, as if this was glaringly obvious. It was news to me.

From the city we got straight onto the highway and headed south. Bearman quickly fell fast asleep, but in the back the bear was restless. The noises it made were oddly comforting. Even with the window open there was still an odor, but it didn't seem all that bad as time passed. Maybe I had some prior experience living with bears.

At the Tomakomai ferry terminal I went with my driver's license to buy the tickets, for which Bearman had handed over his wallet. I decided on a "special-class" passenger ticket that came with a private room for the two of us. The second-class fee for the van, which included the crossing and an additional passenger, was ¥22,500, while the cost of the room was ¥11,250 per person. However, because of a ¥4,500 savings on the second-class ticket for the additional traveler, it came to ¥40,500 in total.

I expected Bearman to be angry that I'd spent so much on the fare, but he slipped his wallet back into his pocket without a word. The ferry departed at 4:30 am, filled almost exclusively with long-haul trucks.

To keep the bear hidden, we had thrown a tarp over the cage. Now we just had to hope that there would be no ruckus from within. While the boat was at sea, no one was allowed on the vehicle deck, which made checking on the bear impossible. Bearman was worried that it might be lonely down there all by itself.

"Well, it's going to be alone in the mountains too," I said, trying to put his mind at ease, but his expression made it clear that he was unconvinced. It wasn't as if they had been together for years.

The special-class room had two gaudy beds. I slipped naked under the covers beside Bearman, but he didn't make a move, even staying unresponsive when I reached over to touch him.

"I can't without the bear," he said, and while still facing away from me, fell asleep.

Defeated, I returned to my own bed and settled down, but my sleep was shallow and riddled with bad dreams. It seemed I too was at a loss without the bear.

THE FERRY PULLED INTO HACHINOHE at 1:30 pm. As we were leaving our cabin I made to hand Bearman his bag and noticed that it was far heavier than it looked, even taking his tools into account.

"What's in here? It weighs a ton."

He dug into the bag and took out something wrapped up in a towel. It was a pistol. Considering its weight, it was probably the real deal.

"I get it," I said. "In case the bear gets out of control or attacks someone."

"No. This is for anyone who means the bear harm."

I was so moved by his response that I pulled him to me right then and there and kissed him on the lips. All I received in return, however, were a few pats on the back. The stairwell was busy with people returning to their vehicles, and to get to ours we had no choice but to join their ranks. As most were driving those long-haul trucks, the vast majority of the passengers were male. The few other women also seemed to be employed as drivers of one sort or another, meaning that Bearman and I were the only exceptions. Although, I suppose we were technically drivers for a bear.

The bear in question was agitated when we returned to the van, growling loudly and hurling itself against the side of the cage. It had been lonely after all. We wanted to remove the tarp so it could see us, but it was too risky while we were on the boat; the truck drivers on either side of us would have a great view into the van from their high windows. We decided to see to the bear once we were off the ferry and out of Hachinohe, or at least somewhere where people were few and far between.

Hurrying along with the bear still banging around in its cage, we soon arrived at a fish market. Ahead of us was the dead end of the ocean. Turning right up a slope that we assumed would take us away from the coast, after navigating a few narrow winding roads, we crossed a railway track and came face to face with the head of a giant fiberglass shark displayed in front of the unusually named Shark Station.

Noticing a convenience store ahead, I parked the van off to the side and went in. I bought some food and drinks, plus a map of the area. Bearman wandered behind the building and filled a bucket with water from an outdoor faucet. With so many potential onlookers still around, we continued down the road. Bearman wedged the bucket between his legs, explaining that he was worried it would spill if he put it on the floor.

Soon the houses began to thin out, and we stopped at a dirt road that led into a forest. Popping open the trunk, we removed the tarp. As we had expected, the bear had made a mess, pulling the tarp through the bars of the cage and tearing it to pieces. We fed it and then gave it some water. It was so intent on its food

that I felt bold enough to pat it on the rump, but it seemed oblivious to my show of affection.

"It isn't a pet," Bearman cautioned with rather a stern look. "So we shouldn't treat it like one." I knew he was right.

Content now that it had seen us and been fed and watered, the bear would likely fall asleep the moment we started up again.

"How far are we going?" I asked.

"To Tōno."

"Never heard of it."

"It's a ways south. But still within Iwate Prefecture."

It sounded distant already, but a glance at the map showed just how far away it really was. "Why are we going to all that effort? There are plenty of mountains here."

"Because that's where the bear is from."

"It has roots, does it, in Tōno?"

"Yes," Bearman said with a serious expression.

Back on paved roads, we soon came across an unmanned carwash. It was fully automated, but it seemed as if no one had used it for many weeks. Off to one side was an outdoor faucet that we used to wash the bear—or, more specifically, to attempt to remove the now truly repugnant smell of the cage. Pulling right up to the faucet and opening the trunk, we liberally hosed down bear and cage alike. While this was fun for all involved, the bear seemed particularly delighted as it played around with the spray. Perhaps it was imagining itself in fresh mountain streams.

We went a little overboard, and by the time we were done the inside of the van was soaking wet.

"Let's drive up a steep hill," Bearman suggested, "so all the water leaks out of the trunk."

I thought we were unlikely to find such an incline on the highway.

BEARMAN BEGAN to tell me a story.

Long ago, a woman discovered a fallen pine deep in the forest that was perfect for firewood. Dragging the tree behind her, she set off for home. On the way, however, the tree became snagged on something and wouldn't budge. Turning around to look for the problem, the woman could find no impediment, and when she started pulling the tree again, it moved freely. A little while later, the pine once again became stuck, and the same process was repeated. When this happened for a third time, however, the woman turned to see a bear with one of its hind legs on the trunk, chuckling away to itself. "Come listen to the sound," said the bear, "of a brook full of fish." The woman and the bear walked for a long time. Maybe a week, maybe more. During the arduous journey in the summer heat, the bear provided the woman with fish it drew from its own body. When winter came, the two of them crawled into a cave to hibernate. During that cold season, the bear continued to give the woman fish and water from its body. After three months the bear poked its arm out of the hole and found a thin layer of fluffy snow beneath its paw. Spring had arrived. A hunter, discovering the paw print, killed the bear and took the woman from the cave. She was pregnant. Though she had lived with the bear in that cave for three months, she said it had felt to her no more than a single evening.

WITH THE ROADS drawing ever closer to the coast, I expected that we'd hit a more populated area, but instead we entered one of sheer desolation. A great wave had washed away the shops and houses that once stood here, leaving only a void. Heavy machinery was at work here and there, and scrap wood and rubble had been gathered into large isolated piles; a dry, dusty smell filled the air. The flattened earth looked like a stage set for some legend to begin, but being here made it clear that the story was yet to be told. I had the feeling that throughout this wasteland, there was something new just below the ground, waiting to emerge. One day it would break through the surface and grow. This still dormant beginning was being nourished underground by the souls of those who had lost their lives here, like the embryo of new life held tightly within a seed.

"Where's it from, that story about the woman and the bear?"

"It's an indigenous myth from Canada. You hear that kind of tale a lot when you're there." He spoke as if he had often been there himself.

"If our bear was like the one in the story, I could go hibernate with it."

"Only if the bear chose you."

I was about to protest, but on reflection he was right. Would the bear in the back of our van choose me? It would probably prefer Bearman. But then again it was still only a baby. Just a cub.

THE NIGHT DREW IN. Since we were unlikely to find anywhere willing to accommodate guests traveling with a wild bear, we decided to sleep in the van. We exited the highway and parked up along a forest path. My body was stiff from driving, so I jogged up and down the road, keeping within a hundred meters of the van. By some fluke of fortune the moon was out that night, which meant I could see where I was stepping. I worried at first that running around like this might attract bears, but when I thought about the one that had been my companion for the whole day, I felt reassured. It's not as if the bears around here would want to attack me. Most likely they would see me coming and make themselves scarce. Even supposing I were to run into a truly oblivious bear, I'd just have to bring it to my little bear, who could use bear-speak to straighten the whole thing out. *They may look funny but these folks have been real kind to me, so I'd like you to cut them some slack.*

The rear seat folded down so that you could stretch out on it. The two of us climbed into the back, got half undressed, and had sex. I cried out, Bearman moaned, and the bear groaned. Afterwards I surrendered the sheet to Bearman and crawled into the fully reclined front passenger seat. It wasn't the most natural position, but with the bear there I slept soundly. When I woke in the morning I again went jogging to relieve the stiffness from sleeping in the van. I felt invigorated and refreshed.

Back on the highway, we stopped at another convenience store and bought some breakfast, also stocking up on water for the bear. Passing some schoolchildren on their commute as we left the center of a tiny town, we again entered the mountains and waited for a deserted place to give the bear its food and water. It was a shame we couldn't let those children have a peek. The bear might have excited them or scared them half to death, but either way they'd have a story to tell their own kids one day.

The highway rejoined the coast, and we continued south, passing signs for town after town. Whenever the road drew closer to the sea, we were met with scenes of devastation wrought by the tsunami. The ocean was calm now, offering no hint of the terrible fate it had carried here. That bleak landscape seeped into me until I felt desolate too. It was relentless.

Bearman slept through the whole journey. I don't think I'd ever met a man who slept quite as much as he did.

When we had traveled far enough south, I exited the highway and joined a road that went through the mountains. We climbed and descended winding, narrow passes before coming alongside the Yakushigawa River and heading deeper into the mountains, where we yet again turned off and began climbing another pass. Bearman insisted we continue, adamant that we return the bear to its true home. Finally, we arrived at a place that met with his approval, turned up one last branching road, and stopped. Choosing a wide spot in the road, Bearman watched the front and rear of the van as I did a three-point turn so that we were ready to leave on a moment's notice.

After scattering the bear's carrots, apples, and potatoes on the forest floor, we lifted the trunk and opened the gate to the cage. The bear didn't come out, seeming unsure whether it was even allowed to do so. Bearman picked up one of the apples and used its scent to draw it out. Once on the forest floor, the bear eagerly set to work on the rest of the food. There was far less now than what we had bought at the wholesale market, but still probably enough for three days. Hopefully eating it all at once wouldn't give the bear a stomachache. I was also worried that any leftovers could attract other bears, who might fight over them. Then again, maybe that was just part of being a bear.

"Let's go," Bearman said. "I'm sure it's fine now."

This seemed more to reassure himself than me.

The two of us drove down the mountain in silence. When we finally came out onto a road with other vehicles, Bearman turned to me.

"I found a puppy once when I was a kid. It was really cute, beautiful even. I thought that coming across it like I did was fate or something. When I took it home,

though, my parents were furious and said I couldn't keep it. It's not a particularly uncommon story, but I think I really did love that puppy."

"Did you feel the same way about the bear?"

"No, that was different. Just a bit of an attachment. In three days I will forget all about it, and the bear will forget about me in five minutes. Now that it's back where it belongs, it can live the life it was meant to."

"Right," I said, knowing this was what he needed to believe.

"I took that puppy and left it at the university campus near where we lived. I want to say I released it, but it had nowhere it really belonged, so I can only say I abandoned it. I just thought some of the girls there might take pity on it and feed it, since it was so beautiful. In hindsight, I know it was just an excuse to make myself feel better, but I put all my hope in those students."

"So much time has passed since then and that puppy is no longer part of this world," I said. "It already lived a long and happy life."

"I suppose that's one reassuring way of looking at it."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Can you take me as far as Tōno Station? I'll get the train from there."

"And me?"

"You have a van."

"I have a stolen van."

"There are people working all the way down that battered coast. A lot of them are from out of province like you. You should go and see for yourself. I'm sure you'll find something worth doing, and a big van like this is sure to come in handy."

"I suppose."

"This," Bearman said as we parted at the station, "is only for those who mean bears harm."

He handed me the pistol.

Note from the translator: The author wishes to acknowledge that the Indigenous Canadian story recounted here comes from *Kanada Indian no Sekai kara* (*From the World of the Canadian Indians*), a book complied by Takashi Irimoto and published by Fukuinkan in 2002. The location of Tōno is likely a reference to renowned folklorist Kunio Yanagita's *The Legends of Tōno,* a book that would be familiar to many Japanese readers.

Kelly Link

Other People's Ghost Stories

HERE IS THE WRITER on a fine spring day. She is in possession of an office—a perfectly fine and private office—but she chooses, habitually, to sit at her dining room table. Upon the table are plates heaped not with food but with pens, a litter of perfume samples, dustjacketing supplies, galleys to be read, a blue ceramic bowl holding old billiard balls, a broken doll's head, beach glass, sorted piles of mail (unopened, read, to be answered), and scraps of paper upon which her child has drawn monsters.

To either side of the table is a wall of bookshelves, and behind the writer is a painted blue wall hung with art, two brass candlestick holders, two windows. In one window hangs a curtain of paper, cut out in the shapes of flowers and animals. In the other, there is no curtain. Instead the dark leaves of a monstrously old, monstrously tall rhododendron press up against the glass. The rhododendron is full of fat bees and small, quarreling birds who cannot be seen, only heard. In the afternoon, the writer's mother lets a small flock of chickens out to forage, and they like to go under the rhododendron and hunt for bugs and dust-bathe until the writer's mother rings a small brass bell and leads them back to the coop. If the writer goes out, the gray chicken will ask to be picked up and tucked under the writer's arm. The gray chicken likes to be carried around like a football. The scales on her legs are shining blue-gray, claws tipped in dirt.

Outside everything is flowering, everything is singing, everything is calling attention to itself. Look here, no, look here, oh, look here! Why, oh why, doesn't a story ever sing like this? Instead the song of the story goes, "Why now? What will happen next? Oh, who knows, who knows, go and do something else instead."

The writer is working on a story. This story, in fact. Except she isn't. There are dishes to be washed, laundry to sort and fold. She selects books from the bookshelves, hardcover books whose jackets are not in the best of condition and places them on the table to be wrapped in Mylar. She takes table scraps and frozen blueberries and vegetable peelings out to the chickens.

Yellow-bellied toads have gathered in the small pond between the house and the chicken coop. They are fighting, bellowing, fucking. There are more males

than females, fourteen toads in all, and each time a male mounts a female, two or three unlucky males volley themselves at the couple, attempting to knock the successful male off. What story could be more comical, more lively, more tragic than what is happening here?

Nevertheless the writer goes back into her house and sits down again at the dining room table. Instead of writing, she cuts several lengths of Brodart. Pressing a book jacket into the crease between plastic Brodart sheet and paper backing, she is transfixed by an author's photo. The book is thirty years old, the author is someone the writer has met several times, but in this photo the author is young and beautiful in a way writers shouldn't be. Beautiful in the manner of poor Elizabeth Siddal, a Calvin Klein model, or a sphinx—an oracle—a lamia. The author is gazing off into the distance as if someone stands behind the photographer. Perhaps a lover, perhaps a monster, perhaps a small child who wants help with homework. The writer does a terrible job with the dust jacket. Beauty makes one stumble.

Now back to the other chair, the place at the table where there is just enough space for a laptop. Back to the story that needs to be written. A ghost story, perhaps. But when the writer glances up for a minute, here is a cat-faced spider dangling down from the ceiling on a line of web. There are always cat-faced spiders in the house, especially at this time of year. The writer gets up from the chair and clears a space on the other side of the table and sets up her laptop here. This way she will not disturb the spider and the spider won't disturb her. The writer has spiders, chickens, a hairy black dog who lies on a nearby couch and licks her crotch. Sometimes slugs ride into the house on the wiry curls of her black fur. The writer has all of this—all of this, and, too, a mother, a husband, a child—but she has no ghost stories of her own. If there are ghosts in this house, they do not appear to her. Instead she collects other people's ghost stories. She tells these, when given the opportunity, at gatherings, and in return she is given more ghost stories. Ghost stories are travelers. They collect like slugs on fur, making their way from one place to another.

Her friend's story, for example. This friend grew up in an unhappy household in a house where things happened and could not be explained. There was the Christmas Eve when, late at night, the writer's friend lay in her bed in her room at the top of the stairs, unable to sleep. Her siblings were asleep already, and her mother sat in the room at the foot of the stairs, watching television. The writer's friend listened as someone began to come up the stairs to the landing just outside her bedroom. But when this person reached the landing, the writer's friend saw no one, although her bedroom door was open, and there was a light in the hallway. While she strained to see who stood on the landing, the unseen person began to walk heavily down the stairs again, back to the first floor. And then, back up again to the landing, where they stood, invisible to her eye, then back down again, slowly and heavily. The unseen person did this over and over again, the writer's friend counting the stairs as they came up and went back down again, over and over, until at last her mother yelled from the living room, "Will you fucking kids stop playing on the stairs and go to sleep?"

At this, the footsteps stopped abruptly. The writer's friend, frozen in fear, still could not close her eyes and go to sleep. Hours later, her mother came up the stairs and went to bed, and after some time had passed, the unseen person began to go up and down the stairs again.

When the writer told this story at a bookstore on Halloween, a woman came up later and asked, "Where did your friend grow up? I'm wondering if I once lived in the same house. I lived there with my mother, my grandmother, my aunt, and my cousin. It was a house with bad energy, but my cousin and I were good friends, about the same age, and when we were supposed to be asleep, we would sit in the doorways of our rooms, and play card games across the hallway. We couldn't cross the hallway to go into each other's bedrooms, because the floor was wooden and creaked so loudly that our mothers would have woken up. So we would sit and play Uno or Hearts, with the cards laid out on the hallway floor. One night while we were doing this, we began to feel we were being watched and turned and looked down the dark hallway,

where, at the end, we saw a woman standing and looking back at us. She wore old-fashioned clothing, and was smiling at us in an unsettling manner. Seeing that we'd noticed her, she said, 'Shouldn't you kids be asleep right now?' Without saying anything, my cousin and I got up from the floor and, without picking up the cards, we went into our bedrooms and climbed into our beds. I lay there, shivering in fright, and in a few seconds, the woman glided past my doorway, looking in at me, and still smiling terribly. She made no noise as she went down the hallway, despite the creaky floor.

"My cousin and I never discussed what had happened, but we never, ever played cards in the hallway again. Years later, when we were both home from college for Thanksgiving, I heard someone shriek in the kitchen and then dishes dropping on the floor. It was my cousin who had dropped the dishes—she just carried them in from the dining room when she heard my aunt say my mother, 'I saw that fucking ghost again.' It turned out the same ghost had appeared to all of the women in the family when they were children, but no one had ever spoken about it until that moment."

But, of course, it wasn't the same house that the writer's friend had grown up in. There are houses all over western Massachusetts infested by ghosts, even if the writer herself has never, ever seen one. She will take these two ghost stories and make a piece of fiction out of them, only there will need to be more than just the ghosts, of course. There will have to be incident, a sense of place, creatures, other people. Something came to her the other night that she has been pondering, an old woman who is wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Here for a good time, not for a long time"—or perhaps the reverse. "Here for a long time, not for a good time." She decides this old woman will appear in the story she is writing. Perhaps she is someone the main character never speaks to, only someone they pass by at the grocery store or the post office. Only, the writer can't decide what the T-shirt should say. Should it start with "Here for a long time" or "Here for a good time"? It isn't an important question, but the decision, she senses, firms up the kind of detail a story can thicken around, the tendril that begins to collect other pieces of story the way fur catches burrs or slugs.

Perhaps, the writer thinks, she's done enough work for today. She can go away and do other things, things that need to be done. She can take a shower, take the dog for a walk, go see if the turkey vultures or the crows have come back to feast on the dead raccoon she carried on a shovel from her property over to the vacant lot where vultures could get at it and her dog could not. She wants, badly, to make friends with crows, but one is supposed to do this with peanuts and not with animal carcasses. And anyway, the raccoon's skeleton has mostly been picked bare of flesh. In a day or two, the writer or her husband will retrieve it, carry the little stack of bones and the neat hull of the skull back to their own garden, put it under a tree where the ants can burnish it further. The tree is in bloom and the bones will startle the writer each time she sees them because she never remembers they are there. It's a bit like when the writer has an idea for a story and texts it to herself. The text arrives immediately, and each time the writer thinks, "Someone has sent me a text!" forgetting that this someone is herself.

The writer can think about the ghost story, the old lady and her T-shirt, and come back to work tomorrow or the day after tomorrow or some day next week, next month. The writer's story says, "Here for a long time, not for a good time." Stories are patient that way, only the writer isn't always patient enough to sit with one, to let the story coalesce. The writer is rarely patient enough. Except, she decides, she will sit with this one. Let the vultures pick at the dead raccoon. She will be a vulture, too. Her sad dog on the couch, the spider above her head, the old lady in her T-shirt, these will keep her company.

Except now there is a noise from the bookshelves, a kind of needling, squeaking noise. When the writer goes over to investigate, she finds a nest of leaves behind a short, stout edition of *Moby Dick*. In the nest of leaves are two silky dust-colored voles. "Oh," she says, "oh no. What on earth are you doing here?" Do voles eat books? There are worms, she knows, that eat the glue used to bind books. She goes to get a shoe box from the closet. She will use *Moby Dick* to gently sweep the voles and their leaves into the box. Except, when she begins to do this, she finds that she cannot.

Like the spider, the voles insist on their right to stay. They are not harming anyone. They do not eat books. The pellets of excrement they produce are small and dry and harmless. And isn't she a writer? Oughtn't she be openminded when it comes to incidents of strangeness, of trespass, of mess? Don't mice occasionally fall upon her head when she opens the door of her tool shed? Hasn't she, nevertheless, come to terms with those mice? And shouldn't she be working on the story?

The voles don't speak, but nevertheless they say all this. They are not afraid of her. Neither do they wish to distract her from her work.

Mollified, somewhat enchanted by her own generosity, the writer goes back to her dining room table and the question of the old woman and the T-shirt. The old woman isn't the story, not at all, but nevertheless she is the key the writer believes will unlock it, if only she can get the T-shirt right. She ought not to be thinking of the voles, but she can't help it. She wishes she might have reached out, stroked one of them with her finger. What must it be like to have such a fine, sleek, dusk-colored coat? One that never needs to be washed or hung up, one that is suitable for company but may also be worn to bed? She envies the velvet coat and the tail, not to mention the slender, twitching whiskers. The writer, now that she is older, has a whisker herself, one that grows right under her chin. No doubt she will grow more whether she wishes to or not.

As she is thinking of the voles (and not of her story), she becomes aware that there is a chicken sitting on her dining room table, just there, beside the Brodart roll. Well, it's unusual, no doubt about that. Birds have gotten into the house before—every spring a bird or two flies down the chimney into the woodstove, where it thrashes around until they close off the room, open up the all the windows, then lift the lid of the stove so the bird can fly out. But a chicken? "How did you get in here?" she says to the chicken. It's a white chicken, very solemn. Not Middy, the only white chicken in their flock. Middy has flecks of gray in her feathers. This one is pure white. It makes a strange, hiccuping sound.

And now the writer fancies she knows this chicken. Her name is Smaug, and she died three years ago in a crate in her downstairs shower. She'd put Smaug there in a nest of old towels because her dying was frightening the other chickens. They refused to go into the coop to roost while Smaug was there. Smaug died of some kind of parasite or lung disease, hiccuping, gulping, unable to breathe. The writer took her to the vet to see if anything could be done, but the vet, though kind, was unhelpful. The visit cost three hundred dollars, and the writer later spent ten dollars on a roast chicken, feeling guilty about both these things. Poor Smaug.

The white chicken on the dining table hiccups again and then, though she doesn't speak, the writer understands her perfectly. Or perhaps she doesn't! Nevertheless, she believes she does. The chicken, the writer believes, is telling her that she belongs here as much as she does anywhere. The chicken belongs here as much as the writer does.

"Oh?" the writer says. "Do you pay the mortgage?"

The chicken knows, though, there is no mortgage to pay. The house was cheap enough, years ago, that the writer and her husband bought it outright. And in any case, the chicken doesn't believe in things like mortgages. Go on writing your story, the chicken is saying. No need to worry about me. I'm not company. I don't need to be entertained. But I will keep you company while you work.

"Oh," the writer says happily, "that's the best kind of company." And she feels, now, that perhaps she might get some writing done. She works best when she is distracted. Ever since the pandemic began, she has been too much on her own when she sits down to work. She is tired of keeping herself company, of making her own, unsatisfactory distractions.

And yet, instead of working on her story, she begins to wonder about the spider. Is it, too, communicating with her? Surely a spider knows something about narrative art, about how to snare a reader, about the gluey power of sentence after sentence. Surely a spider uses its spinneret to communicate things like, "Work while you may work," or perhaps something in Latin. *Timor mortis conturbat me.* But when she looks up, the spider is ignoring her. It has nothing it wishes to say to the writer. It's a little insulting, actually. And the dog on the couch! All the balls the writer has

thrown, all the pieces of cut-up apple, the bits of cheese, the frozen blueberries, the long walks. If a chicken can say something of use, if two voles can offer the writer encouragement, why not a dog? But the dog has never made even the simplest suggestion as to a word that might serve the writer better. Only, "Put down your work so you may feed me, love me, walk me, pet me." There's no story in that! The dog is jealous of stories. Stories take too much attention, too much devotion, which the dog knows she instead is owed.

Back to the old lady, the T-shirt, the ghost stories belonging to other people, which the writer wishes to remake so they will belong to her. Her mother-in-law, oh, she wishes she'd asked her mother-in-law for her ghost stories. Once, visiting her in Scotland, the writer remarked on the Isle of Arran, visible from the town of Ayr, saying she'd like to take the ferry to Arran. "You could go if you like, but I'd never stay there past dark," her mother-in-law said, which so startled the writer she never asked anything more. When her mother-in-law and father-in-law visited this house in Massachusetts, a bear came up through the garden and sat down in the grass outside the kitchen window and began eating bittersweet vine. Just beyond this window, in fact, where the writer sits working. On the other side of the house, a bobcat once came along the fence while the writer's mother was putting the recycling into her car. The writer's mother is small and elegant and completely bald. She wears a black headwrap, pants tucked into her boots, long sleeves to keep the ticks farther from her skin, and the writer feels lucky the bobcat didn't carry her mother away. They're careful with the chickens now—this is why her mother only takes them out for an hour or so, and stays with them while they free range. The writer's mother keeps an eye on the chickens, and the writer keeps an eye on her mother. What shirt would her mother wear? Her mother has been here for a long time, but the writer wishes her to be here even longer. But she wishes, too, for her mother's time to be good. Can't one have both? She doesn't wish, however, to make her mother into a character in a story. The writer is superstitious about things like that. Too many things happen in stories, most of them bad. A few weeks ago, her mother went with a group of her friends to a cemetery one town over, which allows green burials. You can be wrapped in a shroud and placed in the ground to gently, peacefully decompose. Her mother wants that. When she called the cemetery to ask for a tour, she wanted to make sure no one would mind a group of five or six women. "Oh, not at all," the woman at the cemetery said. "Last week we had a group of nine! When I showed them possible sites, they all lay down on the grass and asked me to take a picture of them." Then, the woman says, the nine women began to argue about who would be buried beside whom. One said, "But I can't be in the middle! I'm claustrophobic!"

The writer ended up going with her mother to visit the cemetery, to consider the possibility that they might all buy plots, all be wrapped in shrouds and buried here. Emily Dickinson's sister-in-law is here. Her brother-in-law, too, as well as his mistress and his mistress's husband, though Emily Dickinson is not. Surely there's a ghost story in there. There are wooded sections, and meadows full of wildflowers, and the dead, of course. People come to birdwatch. How wonderful it would be, to ghostwatch. To keep note of all the ghosts that you've seen. Except, how do you know that you've seen a ghost, thinks the writer, who is sure that she's never seen one. It's possible that some—or even most—of the birds you see are ghosts, the writer thinks. Isn't it? Perhaps she's seen a ghost after all, but she can't decide whether this possibility is satisfying or unsettling.

Perhaps the old woman in her T-shirt might be a ghost, the words on her T-shirt a kind of warning. Though the writer isn't sure of the meaning. She is tired of thinking about the old woman. In the story she will probably only get a sentence or two. She isn't important, or at least the writer doesn't think she is.

But now the writer becomes aware that there is something else in the room with her. Not the voles, not the chicken, which is preening, running her beak along the fleshy pike of her uropygial gland, then along its feathers, coating them in deister oil. This makes a pleasant dry sound, a bit like cards woven into a bike wheel, flicking as the wheel spins. Not the spider, of course. No, this is a squirrel, crawling slowly along the floor toward the writer and the table.

The squirrel is horribly injured, and this is how the writer recognizes it. The skin has been flayed from its skull. One eye, lidless, stares wildly at the writer. Two years ago, while the writer was walking her dog, she found this squirrel dying in agony beneath a car parked on the street opposite her house. She took her dog home, then returned with a towel and wrapped the squirrel in it. There was nothing that could be done for the squirrel except to end its suffering, and so she placed it on the ground and smashed its head in with a rock. It was the worst thing she's ever had to do, and yet here it is again. Here is her ghost at last. Her first impulse is to once again wrap it in a towel, take it to a quiet place where she can put it out of its misery once more, but the squirrel stares at her and she understands that she is not allowed to do this. The flayed squirrel belongs here as much as the white chicken and the voles and the spider do, as much as she herself does.

And now the chicken has finished preening. She hiccups. The squirrel creeps a little closer. The chicken speaks without speaking. She says, Here for a long time, not for a good time. If this is what is written on the old lady's shirt, what does it tell the reader about her? That she's had a hard life, but she's managed to keep her sense of humor about all of it anyway? More interesting, don't you think, if her T-shirt says, Here for a good time, not for a long time. Because then there's something not quite right about her. Though perhaps it oughtn't be an old lady. Perhaps it's a baby in a stroller. Imagine a baby with a onesie that says, Here for a good time, not for a long time.

"That's awful!" the writer says. "Who would put a baby in something like that?"

Awful, says the squirrel on the floor, though it doesn't, in fact, say anything at all. It's practically at her feet now, which the writer finds distressing. Oughtn't the squirrel be afraid of her dog, even if it isn't afraid of her? But her dog is now asleep, having grown weary of waiting for the writer to do something interesting. The squirrel begins, very slowly, to pull itself up the writer's leg. At last it reaches her lap, where it curls into itself, its scraped raw head against the writer's thigh. And this, too, the writer must bear, having murdered the squirrel once. Even though she only did so to be kind. She no longer feels like writing at all, in part because she feels that the white chicken has made some very good points about the old woman and the T-shirt and what might turn the key in the lock of the story. It's a terrible thing, to have to admit that a chicken has a better grasp of your own story than you yourself do.

The writer doesn't say any of this and yet the chicken somehow hears it. They are in sympathy with each other. The chicken says, In any case, you might as well give yourself a break. Leave the story and I will write it. It's well past time for you to be off.

Off, says the squirrel in the writer's lap.

"I don't understand," the writer says. "Off to where?"

Off to wherever you go next, the chicken says. Leave the story to me.

"But I can't do that," the writer says. "You don't even have hands! How will you type? And where am I supposed to go?"

The chicken hops down from the dining room table. It stretches out its wings, its neck, and begins to change. It grows, elongates, gains mass, legs, arms, a face, long wiggly fingers. It grows paler, fleshier, becomes passably human. It hiccups again. It isn't a perfect likeness of the writer, but it's close enough, the writer thinks. Certainly it's now capable of typing.

The writer isn't sure about any of this, but perhaps it wouldn't be the worst thing, to let someone else write this story. And in a pinch, she could always rewrite it.

The chicken gently picks up the squirrel in her human hands. And oh, the writer is truly grateful for this, to have the horrible burden of the squirrel lifted from her. She asks again, "But where am I to go? And if I go, may I come back again? If I don't come back again, who will look after my husband, my child? Who will do the dishes and fold the story? Who will take the dog for walks?"

The chicken has a human mouth now. She could reply if she wished to, but she does not. Her gaze says, Someone will do these things, or someone won't, but whether they do or they do not is nothing you need concern yourself with. There are other matters that require your attention.

"But what are these other matters?" the writer says, already standing up from her chair. The writer feels

change coming upon her. It's uncomfortable in the way that change is often uncomfortable. She is becoming something new. Will she be a chicken? A fisher cat? A fly? Food for the spider? Will it be a good time or a long time?

The chicken, still holding the squirrel, opens up a window. The first word she uses her human voice to speak is to the creature that was once the writer. "Shoo!" she says, and the writer flies out, and where the story goes next, the writer will never know.

Adam Ehrlich Sachs

The Heron

THE NATURALIST RETURNS FROM THE NORTH with innumerable specimens of rare and beautiful birds, which it is his highest aspiration to display in the hallowed cases of the Natural History Museum. He skins and stuffs bird after bird. Yet the museum declines every one of them. It gives no reasons, but none are needed, for the truth is plain to see: The birds have no life in them. He has failed to imbue them with the spirit of living things. The problem is his little girl, for whom, now that her mother is dead, the naturalist suddenly finds himself solely responsible. He loves his daughter—that goes without saying. But her exuberance makes taxidermy difficult. Her laughter, her squeals, her constant questions about the meaning of things: it gladdens his heart but destroys the conditions necessary for taxidermy.

So, as he prepares to skin and stuff the very last of his birds, a large heron with white plumage, he enjoins her to be quiet. After that it is possible to concentrate. The heron is a tricky bird to mount, on account of its long kinked neck in which the vertebrae are visible. It takes him a while. But he produces in the end a marvelously animated bird, its neck tensely coiled as if on the verge of spearing a fish. He feels at last that he has made something with life in it.

When, however, he takes his daughter's hands for a celebratory waltz, he realizes that besides being all grown up now and nearly as tall as he, she has been struck dumb in the interim. She no longer laughs, squeals, or speaks. She keeps silent and stares straight ahead.

It is clear what has happened: All the qualities that made his little girl a living being have been absorbed by the heron. That can be seen, for example, in the heron's neck. He weeps about it, but the naturalist knows that his tears are an indulgence, for what's done is done. He removes the red ribbons from her hair and finds a place for her where her silence will not seem out of place. Then he sets out to honor her: to honor her by honoring the heron. He brings the heron to the Natural History Museum, where it is acquired at once and mounted posthaste in the Hall of Birds.

ALL OF THE ABOVE is deduced by a certain museumgoer, a neurologist by trade. He deduces it from close inspection of the stuffed white heron.

As a boy the neurologist had frequented the Natural History Museum, and especially the Hall of Birds, because his mother thought it important for a child to know about the natural world, in which birds obviously play a not insignificant part. Of late he has been frequenting it again with her, because in his mother's dementia it was the only place where her agitation was stilled. Everywhere else she still tried to formulate words and sentences, with all the distress that entailed. But here among the birds she was content to clutch his hand and sit in silence.

The white heron, in particular, brought her peace.

In the final stretch of his mother's illness his colleagues were wholly understanding about his prolonged leave of absence from the Pathological-Anatomical Institute. She, after all, had no one else. And he, a lifelong bachelor, had no one else either. Yet one, two, even three months after her death, his laboratory remains locked and shuttered. Still they say nothing. At least not to him. It can well be imagined, though, that among themselves they have begun to grumble or speculate.

The neurologist explains himself by posting a placard in one of the Institute's communal spaces which states that the answers to the questions neurologists like to pose are as likely to be found in the Hall of Birds as in the human brain. Naturally his colleagues will take this as a critique of neurology. He's grown pessimistic, they'll say, that the study of the brain can explain all of the mental phenomena it is asked to explain. He lets them think that. But actually it is just the opposite. It's not that he's grown pessimistic about the brain, what the brain can explain, it's that he's grown optimistic about birds, what birds can explain . . .

Yes, after her death he comes to realize that his mother was right about birds: It is important to know about them. Each of these taxidermied birds tells us something not only about the natural world but (inasmuch as it was shot by man, brought to the city by man, skinned, stuffed, and sold by man) about the human world as well.

Now, by gazing carefully and continuously at the stuffed white heron that in her waning days gave his mother such peace, he realizes that the spirit with which it has been imbued is not a heron's but a young woman's, who was herself most likely reduced to silence by what happened. The neurologist can't say this definitively, of course, but everything points to it. The neurologist realizes that the naturalist who stuffed this heron must have felt confident that no one would be able to deduce what he'd done, or else he would never have displayed the evidence so publicly! He probably wasn't expecting a museumgoer who by virtue of both personal circumstance and scientific training had such interest and expertise in the growth and atrophy of the linguistic faculty!

The neurologist writes up his findings and submits them to the world's most prestigious neurological journal, which, however, declines the paper, on the grounds that they cannot understand it, or discern its connection to neurology.

Actually no one can figure out exactly which field the neurologist is working in. The psychopathology journals consider his paper too preoccupied with ethical prescription, the ethics journals consider it too ornithological, the ornithology journals consider it too psychopathological.

In the end, he puts the paper in a drawer. Publication, he realizes, is not the point. The point is not publication but rather the liberation of a spirit from the vessel in which it is trapped.

WHAT HE DOES NOT REALIZE is that he has fallen in love! Not with the white heron but with the young woman whose exuberant spirit the heron has co-opted! It is as if his mother, who in life was not exactly eager to share her son's affections with another, has led him in death to the woman with whom he'll find happiness!

He doesn't realize it. It is therefore only in *unconscious* expectation of the kind of romantic companionship that until now has always eluded him that the neurologist one Sunday morning shatters the glass of the display case and absconds with the stuffed white heron.

He brings it to the square at the center of the city, places the bird on the cobblestones, and starts sawing through the vertebrae of its long kinked neck with a serrated kitchen knife. Only unconsciously is he seeking romantic companionship.

Just then, in the distance, there's an ecstatic cry. He has never made a woman make a sound like that.

As he saws through the neck the cry becomes increasingly ecstatic until, at the very instant he cuts off the heron's head, it joins with other voices in a splendid cantata. He runs toward these voices and finds himself before the gate of a nunnery. The gate is open. But the Mother Superior, as big as a man, blocks his way.

The neurologist tells her: You have among you a nun who is no nun, who, owing to her naturalist father's singleminded pursuit of his craft, has been condemned to a perpetual silence of which she has taken no vow, and who in consequence has led the loneliest life imaginable! He informs the Mother Superior that the young woman in question was just then singing in the choir. If only he was allowed to enter . . .

But the Mother Superior, glancing doubtfully at the head of the bird he is holding in one hand and the bird's body he is holding in the other, and also the kitchen knife, allows herself to utter a white lie that she probably feels is justified by the circumstances: But that's a boys' choir!

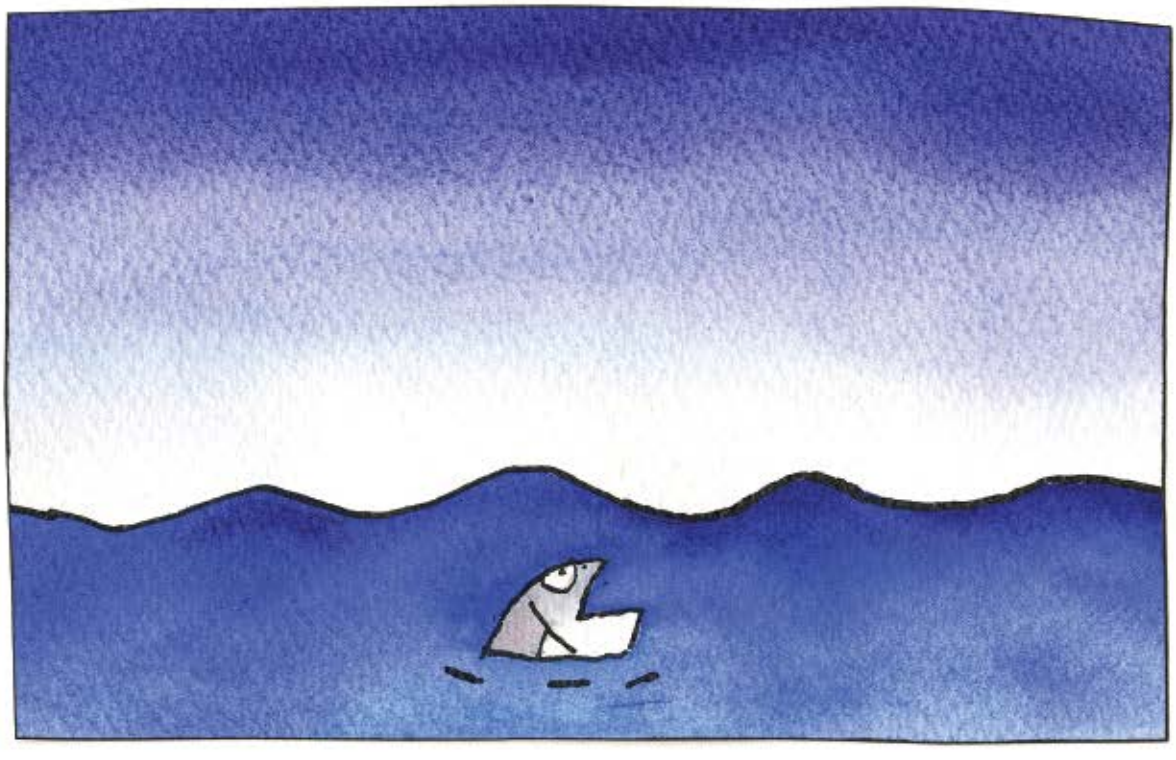
Then she clangs the gate shut and walks quickly away. When she is quite a ways off, she laughs derisively and murmurs something the wind carries straight to his ears: Lonely?! It is impossible to express how happy she is, in constant communication with the Lord!

FISH IN MUDDY WATERS

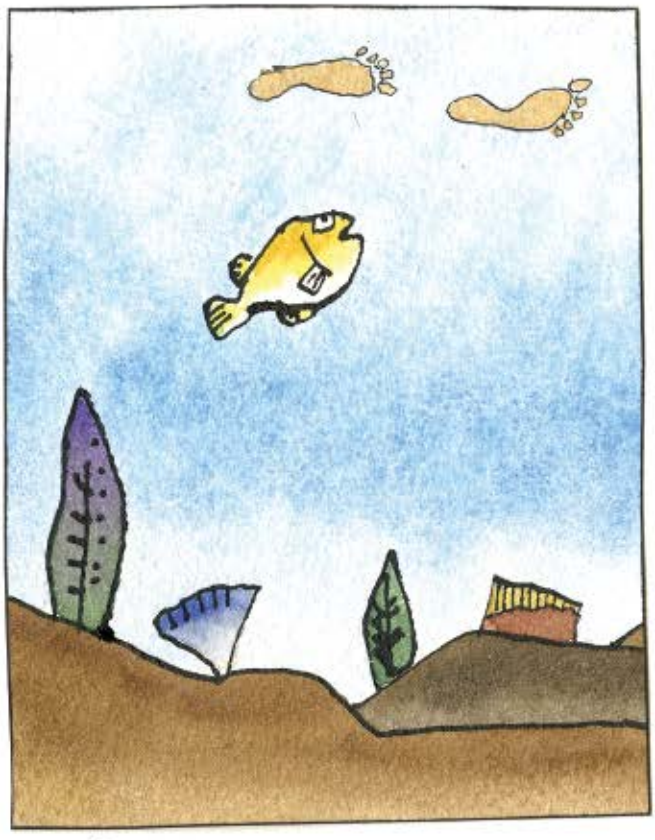
by Satoshi Kitamura

FISH IN MUDDY WATERS

CIGARETTE BREAK FOR MAVIS



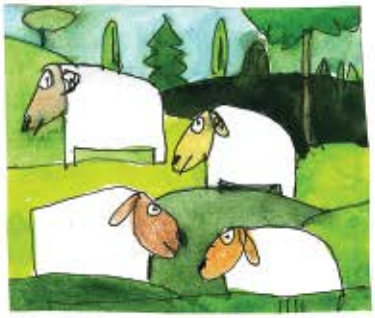
GEORGINA SEES THE WORLD ABOVE THE SEA FOR THE FIRST TIME



FRANK WATCHES SOMEONE WALKING ON THE WATER

HESTER THE FITNESS FREAK

CLAUDIA FINDS HER CONTACT LENS



BUG DOGS

Our downfall began when our ancestor, Wolf, met Homo Hypnosis, whose only survival skill was to hypnotize animals, including themselves, and use them.

When they met, Homo Hypnosis said to Wolf, "I'll feed you something better than the meat on my thigh." He led Wolf to a flock of sheep. And thus a pact between them was established: Wolf guarded Homo Hypnosis, and Homo Hypnosis fed Wolf.

One day he told Wolf, "I'll call you 'Dog' from now on because it sounds cuter."

Wolf didn't know what to make of this, but because Homo Hypnosis kept calling him Dog, he quickly forgot what he had been called before.

Some of us kept our role as guards while most became companions and playthings for Homo Hypnosis.

Generations passed, and we grew smaller. Our genes must have been hypnotized. We were taken to the hairdresser to transform us into Barbies with four legs. "You are so cute!" said Homo Hypnosis.

But eventually their self-hypnosis went haywire, for Homo Hypnosis became extinct.

Free at last, we thought, but still we continued getting smaller.

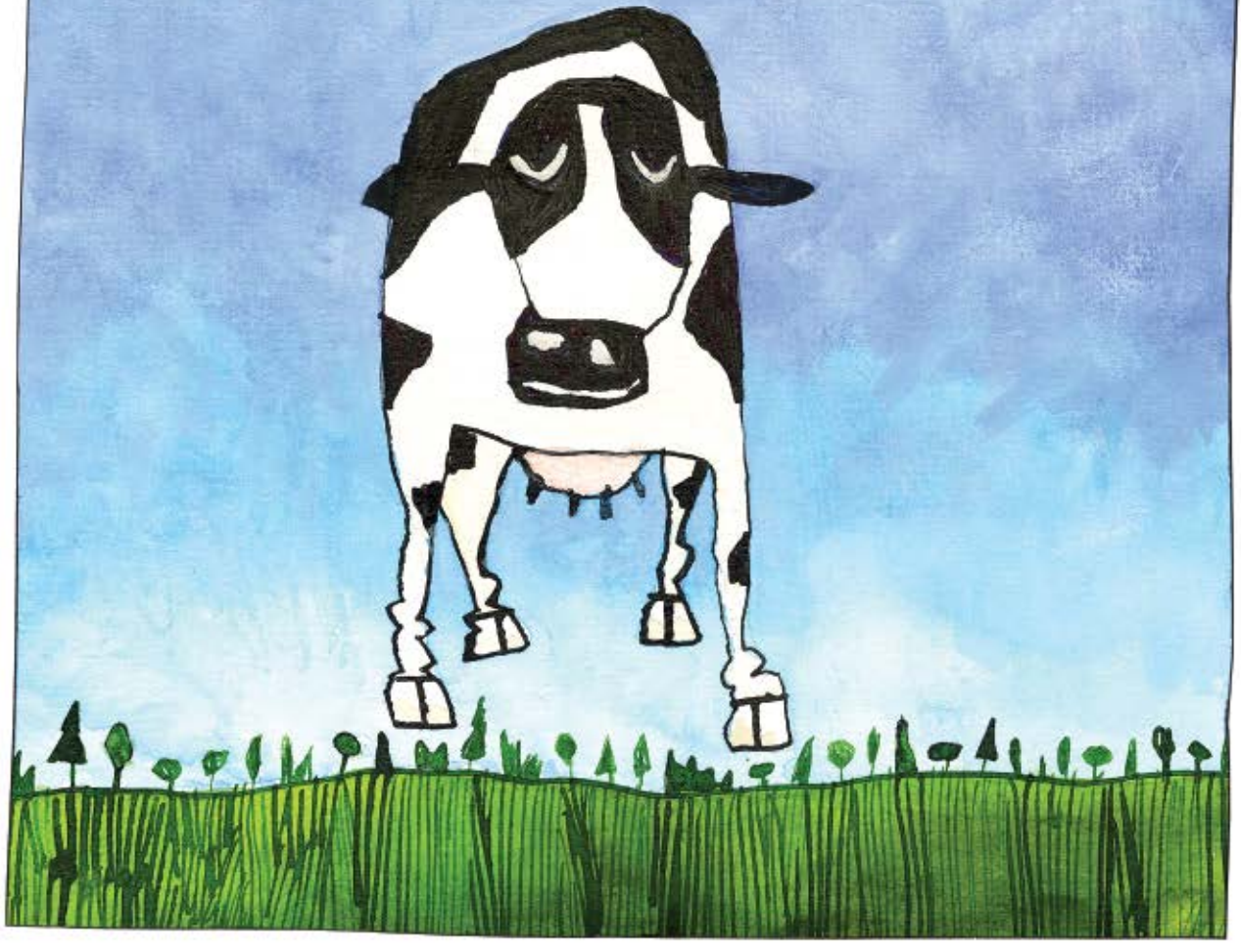
Our size probably helped us to survive.

Most of the large animals went extinct with Homo Hypnosis.

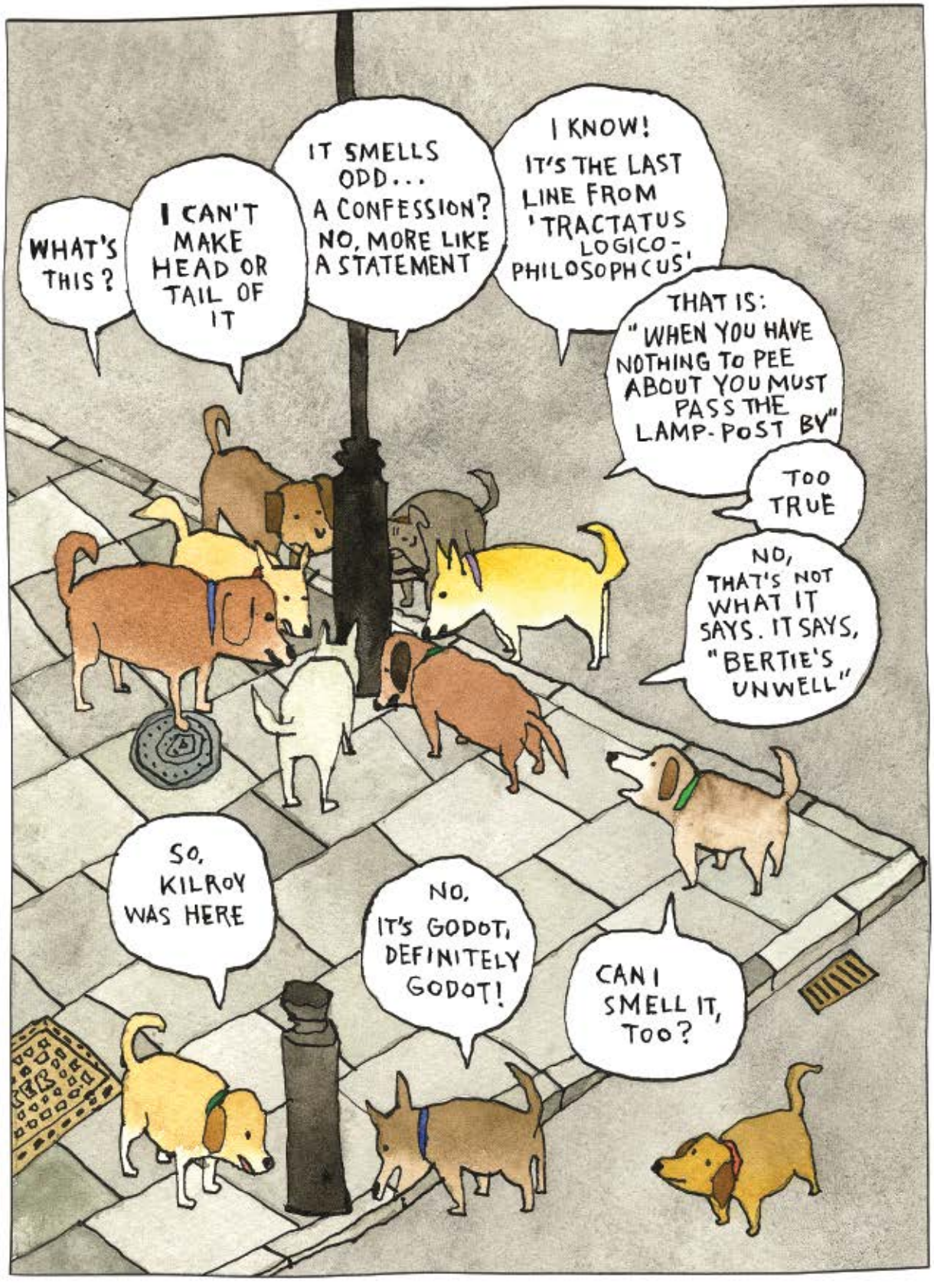
Now we were competing with stinkbugs or ladybugs for aphids or mites. But life for Dog wasn't so bad without Homo Hypnosis. At least we didn't have to be cute anymore.

I LEVITATE WHEN I RUMINATE

Praise God for giving us many stomachs!
When I regurgitate, the past returns in full flavor.
Dandelion takes me back to my childhood, while
white clover, as sweet as a madeleine,
summons the memories of my youth.
Sometimes my whole life fills my mouth
and brings tears to my eyes.
It's then that I feel a pull from above.
Just an inch or two, so no one ever notices.
Even though it happens only occasionally,
when it does,
I feel divine.



BETWEEN YOU, ME AND THE LAMP-POST



Sawako Nakayasu

Four Poems

T-SHIRTS FOR ANTS WHO HAVE COME UNDONE

I hate to put it so bluntly but there is room in the world for everything, for everyone and their every desire to make a buck off of something, anything, anyone. Such is the logic of the world—one that leads to the creation of the company that makes T-shirts, very special T-shirts, T-shirts for ants who have come undone. I know, these ants don't want to wear such T-shirts any more than they want to be ants who have come undone. Some of them didn't even want to be ants in the first place, and some of them didn't mind all that much, at least not until they became *these* ants, the ones wearing T-shirts for ants who have come undone. They were fine being ants, regular ants, until now. Let me introduce you to a friend of mine, the one that runs the matchmaking service, the one that matches ants who didn't want to be ants in the first place with ants who only recently became aware of their anthood as a function of finding themselves wearing T-shirts for ants who have come undone.

What? All this time I thought I was a bear. The service is overpriced, I agree. Isn't everything, these days? A voice out of nowhere says, in a faux-benevolent tone: *Go ahead, little ants, take off those T-shirts.* Who are you calling little, the ants shout back. *Oh that's right, that's right, almost forgot, these are the ants, the ants who have come undone. Try again. Go ahead, ants, take off those T-shirts.* What? It's just like you to take the shirts off our backs, isn't it enough you've already taken everything else? *Well then. Go ahead, ants, go ahead.* Go where, go where, go where, the ants cry.

CAR

I am sorry to say I have no more patience. All the camels have broken their backs and there are too many nails in the coffin. I am well beyond that tipping point, when a certain something must be purged, expelled, or removed, by any means necessary. And if that something is on the hood of the car, and is not permanently attached, as might be the case with the paint, or enamel, or even a hood ornament, then there exist two and only two ways to remove it.

The first way, the quickest, is by hand: pick it up and remove it. With a few exceptions, like snow, this is easy enough to comprehend and to execute. To be done with it, to drive away, move on with life as if nothing had ever happened.

There are other times, though, when the task of "picking up and removing" might appear easy enough at first, but eventually lands in the category of "harder than it looks." Such occasions demand more of us. I do not know how often this happens to others, but today it is me, I am facing once again a situation that I wish did not feel quite so familiar. Rather it should be rare, something closer to one in a million, and yet, in spite of me, here I am. I say to myself, just to articulate the dumb and simple fact of it: "Here we go again."

I have come to refer to this as the "belligerent ant on the hood of the car" problem. As I approach my car in the morning, early in the bitter cold, I can hear it snarling and snapping its mandibles, I can see its legs planted firmly on the surface of the hood, I see it shaking its head violently from side to side, as if to say, *don't you dare, don't you dare, don't you dare*. I am not sure if this display of belligerent trespassing is unique to my situation, or if it is a problem experienced by other car owners across the planet. I am not sure if this is happening right now in particular as a function of all the other factors in my life that point toward this outcome. I have spent a considerable amount of time trying to do the math. The results are inconclusive, and I am unsure whether to file this as a solvable or unsolvable problem. Thus I resolve to rejoice and delight in the fact that although its degree of solvability remains to be seen, it is nonetheless a describable problem, and my circumstances have conditioned me to count my wins wherever I can get them.

So there you go, I've described it. Now what. I don't even bother reaching forward in an attempt to remove the ant by hand, my sores are still healing from the last time this happened and the last time I tried. The snarls are telling me that it'd be of utmost foolishness to even consider it. So I have no other choice but to get in the car and attempt the other way of removing an undesirable something from the hood of the car. I adjust the seat in order to maximize my vision, as I will now have to get better at driving the car with a giant ant on its hood. I am resigned to the fact that the only way I can hope to remove the ant, and even then I am not sure how effective I can be, given the tenacious and belligerent grip of the ant, is to get on the freeway and drive faster, and faster still, and still faster, hoping and wondering what it means for things to end well.

And thus it is implied that you have its consent to use it as such, as writing implement. When the ant locks eyes with you, you understand it to mean that you are expected to hold it in your writing hand with sincere, full-bodied respect, with all the diligence and care that the situation warrants. That you will not press too hard, for fear of breaking its ant neck, that you will give adequate pause between words, no matter how fast the thought flows. Your care of the ant is concomitant with your use of the pencil. Thus it should come as no surprise if it takes you a long time to write the words you need to write. And yet here they come, jangling and demanding why it takes so long for you to produce your words, when you could be doing other things like untangling the kite from the oak tree.

No. You can't have everything. Especially not all at once.

The ant, after briefly wondering if the kite in the oak tree might possibly become a source of reprieve, is holding the position. Is it a patient ant or resigned ant or hopeful ant—or even—resplendent. It is intriguing, the way people think. The ant has graciously agreed to not exert its own forces upon the writing. It has relinquished all editing rights, will allow consistent release of its lead so as to lend itself to smooth delivery of language on paper. It will have fulfilled its duties to the letter, though not without questioning why it, as an ant, should have to be a lead pencil at all. Or gracious, for that matter. Look at all those other ants who are not lead pencils, but are clouds. Or glasses of wine. Or motorcycles. Look at them. Some are even just ants, ants as ants as ants as ants.

HAMBURGER vs BEAR

When I really think about it, the situation is very simple, there are only so many ways to look at it, so many angles to spin, prisms through which to focus that light leaking out of the cracks in the heavy walls. If it's going to be the hamburger, I trust there are enough people nearby who know what to do, who know how to rustle up enough chef's hats, enough ground meat and breadcrumbs and egg yolks and salt and pepper to properly prepare enough hamburger meat for the occasion, and perhaps an extra set of people in chef's hats to bake the extra-large bun needed for the massive hamburger to come, the one that's going to be large enough to overcome the bear, no matter the size of the bear that ultimately chooses to rise to the occasion. In a country as efficient as this one, it doesn't take long before everyone's poised and ready to work. But let us not forget the just-as-likely possibility that it might very well turn out to be the bear and not the hamburger, in which case we'll need to tap all our connections in order to find the best bear agents in the whole world, the ones who have the experience and ability to recruit the most perfect bear for the occasion, the very best bear with the correct training and background and manners and dialect, I can't imagine there are more than a handful of qualified bears existing on the planet right now, and who knows how many of those bears would even be willing to entertain a request such as ours, all we need is one single perfect bear, just one, but we all know that this in itself will be a near-insurmountable challenge, the fact of a single warm bear who can handle it, handle the hamburger without crushing it, who will lift up the bun, test the burger itself for doneness, spread some ketchup on the meat, return the bun and center it atop the perfectly seasoned patty, hold the whole thing carefully without letting it fall apart, without putting too much furry-paw pressure on it, and carry the whole thing to your open mouth, your lovely open mouth, thank you you've been waiting oh so very patiently, I can no longer recall if you asked for the hamburger or the bear, but in any case I sincerely hope you are pleased with what you get, because what you get is what you get.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Kikuko Tsumura

The Q-Town Gazelle

translated by Polly Barton

IT WAS ABOUT A WEEK after reading an article online reporting that a gazelle had been discovered on the riverbank in Q-Town that I saw a job posting from the Nature Protection department at the town hall. They were looking to hire security to patrol the perimeter of the fence around the gazelle's temporary enclosure. Since I was on a break from my studies at the time, I was attracted to the job description, which promised eight hours a day of pretty much solitary work at an hourly rate of 1,000 yen. I submitted my application and was called in for an interview.

And do you like gazelles? Such was the question put to me, after I'd given a brief summary of my employment history and answered the interviewer's query as to why it was that I was not currently attending university. I do, I replied. Do you have a passion for them, came the next question, to which I replied, honestly, that no, I didn't have a passion for them. Thinking back now, I suspect that if I'd answered that I did have a passion for them, I probably wouldn't have been given the job. I never discussed the matter with anyone, and the interviewer didn't directly imply as much to me, but I just get that feeling.

I was taken on to work weekdays, between 1:00 and 9:00 pm. It transpired that I wasn't to be guarding the gazelle alone at all times, and that there was in fact a fairly steady flow of people from the Nature Protection department coming to observe and care for it, which lessened the sense of pressure that, if I messed up, some unwanted fate might befall the gazelle. I was provided with a set of binoculars, but mostly I did without, keeping one eye on the gazelle to make sure it didn't jump over the fence, and the other on the spectators to make sure they didn't attempt to enter the enclosure.

For a creature like a gazelle to show up within an everyday habitat like this one was not just rare, but practically unheard of, and it was also quite simply a very beautiful animal. Ever since its presence on the riverbank had first been reported on the news, visitors had flocked around the perimeter of the enclosure to take photographs of the gazelle, talk to it, or simply gaze at it. The gazelle was a very docile creature, with an air of serenity about it, but according to the Nature Protection department, it was also

extremely sensitive to having its territory infringed upon, and suffered great stress as a result. I'd therefore been instructed to caution anybody that I found attempting to climb the fence or making excessive noise.

The stream of people arriving to see the gazelle remained more or less constant. On weekdays, when my shifts were scheduled, the visitors were mostly men and women past retirement age and mothers with young children, so it never felt like too much for me to handle. Everyone watched the gazelle very peacefully.

All of this was happening in September, when summer's cloying heat still lingered, and for the first while, the Nature Protection department took it upon themselves to distribute cold barley tea to the gazelle-watchers. I helped them hand out the paper cups. It wasn't long before suggestions were made from inside town hall that a vending machine should be installed at the site. The proposal was put to a vote, where it was defeated seventy to thirty, thereby putting paid to the opportunity for Q-Town to monetize the situation. It was, after all, still less than a month since the appearance of the gazelle. It seemed extremely unlikely that it would still be there on that riverbank in a year's time, and it hadn't yet been decided whether the town should continue to keep the animal or whether it should be taken in by some kind of zoo. In fact, those in charge remained unsure whether it lay within its purview to make decisions about the gazelle's future at all.

For the moment, the gazelle was there on the riverbank, and a simple fence had been set up to secure a large area in which it could move about, around whose perimeter people gathered daily to view it. That was where we were at, and I had been given a job there. It might be misleading to call it easy, but it certainly wasn't challenging.

THE WOMAN IN QUESTION had been coming to see the gazelle about three times a week since the news of its arrival had been first reported. She always carried either a mobile phone or a camera, which she used to take photographs and videos of the creature. She'd been coming for about ten days when I heard from someone who was helping me to reinforce the fence that she was an acquaintance of the director of the Nature Protection department, and was known to spend her free time posting tons of photographs and videos of the gazelle on social media. Apparently the number of people across Japan interested in how the gazelle on the riverbank was faring was steadily rising, and the woman was garnering new followers and increased attention by the day. She was a freelance designer, which was why she was able to come to the riverbank in the daytime to photograph the gazelle. She was older than me, certainly, but I didn't know by how much—she looked to be somewhere between her late thirties and her forties. She was always immaculately made-up, and there was a noticeable smartness about the way she dressed and held herself. Sometimes she would hold forth to other visitors about the gazelle's daily routine, advising them on how best to photograph it and so on, and she had also offered to help us out reinforcing the fence.

By this point, I had come to understand that the slow pace of this work suited me pretty well, and I began thinking that I didn't want to return to university, and would rather stay on here indefinitely. I'd started to hope that the gazelle didn't go anywhere. As I patrolled the perimeter of the fence, I imagined a world where lectures, essays, and finding a job were expunged from my life completely, and I could live out the rest of my days beside the gazelle enclosure.

It was the woman who pointed out that the gazelle seemed to feel a kind of familiarity toward me. I liked the gazelle, but I didn't have a passion for it, and I'd never thought that much about how it might feel toward me, so her suggestion was quite unexpected.

"It often walks in whatever direction you're walking in," the woman said, as she poured some tea that she'd brought with her from home into a collapsible cup and handed it to me.

"Oh, really?"

The tea was good, neither too hot nor too cold. It smelt like roses.

"That's why, whenever I arrive, I always look to see where you're standing. That's the best way of locating the gazelle."

So I was something like a moving signpost, I thought. It had been a long time since I'd felt that I was of use to

anybody, so her comments gave me a flush of pleasure, even if I half-suspected that it was either pure flattery or totally unfounded.

The woman inquired about my working hours, so I told her that I worked from 1:00 until 9:00 pm on weekdays. I see, she replied, noting this information down in an app on her phone. She then attempted to take a photo of me and the gazelle together, but I politely refused, saying I didn't like having my picture taken.

For around an hour after that, the woman took photos and videos of the gazelle, and speaking at length to the other employees dotted around the fence. I found it impossible to think of her as someone with no previous connection with Q-Town. Held up against the intensity of her affection for the gazelle, my fondness-that-wasn't-quite-a-passion appeared half-baked. I felt as though she were a bona fide gazelle expert.

Indeed, it was this same woman who informed me that Q-Town had sent out a public call for name suggestions for the gazelle. There had already been a lot of requests for the names "Gazetta," "Galezze," and "Q-chan," so it'll probably end up being one of those, she said, and then gasped and clasped a hand over her mouth. Oh, I wasn't supposed to talk about that, she said, and asked me not to tell anyone. I wasn't on social media and didn't have anybody to talk to about the gazelle anyway, so I assured her that I wouldn't. For a moment I wondered where she'd gotten that information, but then figured that she'd probably heard it from the Nature Protection director.

Yeah, she said, with a look of dissatisfaction, none of them are very good, but it looks like it'll be one of those three. I felt like Q-chan was quite a good name, but not wanting to displease her, I didn't say so.

There were plenty of other people who came to see the gazelle with some regularity, but the only person whose face or physical appearance stuck with me was a young boy who must have been in the last years of elementary school, or else his first year of middle school. He wasn't a super-frequent visitor, but when he did come, once every three or so weeks, he would spend the entire day by the enclosure, leaning up against the fence. On those days he would be there throughout the entirety of my shift, and I'd heard from the person on the shift before me that he always arrived first thing in the morning.

The dreamy stare that the boy directed at the gazelle informed anyone watching him that here was someone who had a passion for the creature, but to me, the even bigger giveaway was the way he had of leaning over the fence as if making to call out to the gazelle, lifting his hands to his mouth, but in the end saying nothing at all.

This sequence of gestures painted a vivid picture of the boy's hesitation around speaking to the animal: he wanted to say something but didn't know what to say. It appeared that the more he looked at the gazelle, the less certain he became that the gazelle wished to be called out to.

I'd never once seen the boy photographing the gazelle, or otherwise documenting its presence in any way. When I asked the morning shift person, they too reported that he remained standing quietly by the fence throughout his time there. Occasionally, he would be reading some kind of illustrated encyclopedia. Once, an employee asked him if it was okay to take a photo with him and the gazelle for the Q-Town blog, but he'd obstinately refused to give his consent. It seemed that, even as he stared at the gazelle, he didn't really want the gazelle to know of his existence.

The boy didn't make any personal records relating to the gazelle, but he did request two copies of the town's monthly newsletter, which we distributed at the fence's perimeter. The newsletter was a printed pamphlet, and this particular edition featured numerous photos of the gazelle. The boy wanted one to look at, and one to keep for posterity. When I handed him two copies as requested, he didn't put them into his backpack, but kept them in his hand. I assumed he worried that if he put them in with other things, they might get creased. I wished I could have given him a plastic file to put them in, but we hadn't been provided with any, and so all I could do was watch as he kept switching the pamphlets between his right and left palm to keep them from getting sweaty.

That day, he headed home with the two unprotected pamphlets in hand. I had no idea what kind of distance he traveled so as to see the gazelle, but I hoped he was

able to get the pamphlets safely home in a reasonable condition.

THE WORLD WAS RIFE WITH CONFLICT, and society as ridden with all manner of incidents as ever, and yet it came to pass that the gazelle would make an appearance on TV. Of course, the gazelle itself wasn't aware of this appearance, and it fell to the Nature Protection director to give his consent on its behalf.

Perhaps because it was considered mightily rare for a gazelle to appear anywhere in Japan outside of a zoo, the camera crew that showed up by the riverbank was from a national evening news show. Someone at the Nature Protection department had suggested that the crew might want to interview me, too, but this turned out not to be the case. The only people featured in the snippet were the Nature Protection director and the woman posting photos and videos on social media. I'd gradually grown friendly with a Nature Protection department employee with whom I'd been working for several months, who had reported back to me after watching the filming up close.

I feel loath to bring the subject round to myself at this point in the story, but I will say that, for me, finding a conversational partner was an unexpected benefit of the fence-patrolling job. The two of us were twenty years apart, and different enough as people that we would never have had any occasion to spend time together, but I suppose we were both in need of someone to talk with at work, because we began, little by little, to speak with one another about the gazelle, and the people who came and went around it. There hadn't been anyone I'd got on with at university, and I had no appetite to start looking for gainful employment like everyone else my age was doing. Still, it seemed to me that if I could be in relationships like this one, where it was mutually accepted from the beginning that you would never understand one another fully and you were both careful not to encroach on one another's territory, then having a job wouldn't be such a terrible thing.

The Nature Protection director should smile a bit more, the employee now said. It's like his whole attitude is saying, this gazelle has come to us unsolicited, and we'll do our best to care for it, but we'd like to reap some of the benefits of the situation—do you know what I mean? It's like he's making such a show of being so *unexcited* by it all that he ends up just looking silly, he should just tell everybody to come and see it, for goodness sake!

In the months since the gazelle had first appeared on the riverbank, Q-Town had been in a state of near-constant excitement. The town's intention was to continue giving protection to the gazelle and drawing visitors, using the gazelle as a kind of town mascot. When one thought of the costs generated by providing protection for the gazelle on the riverbank, it was perhaps understandable that they would expect something in return. In time, though, winter would set in, which the gazelle would presumably not like very much. It was still unclear what would happen then.

With the television cameras turned on her, the woman photographing the gazelle conducted herself flawlessly. Declaring herself "less a fan, and more just someone trying to keep a record of what's happening," she said things like, "There's something deeply restorative about looking at the gazelle, it's a direct encounter with life force in its purest form," and, "I want to document, with as much evidence as possible, the miracle that is this gazelle inhabiting the riverbank in the Japanese town of Q." When the interview with her concluded, her social media handles flashed up on the screen of the national news show, as a voiceover announced that anybody wanting to see more photos or videos of the gazelle should take a look, meaning that when the show aired she must have been inundated by viewers.

Shortly after the camera crew had packed up and left, the boy who'd gone home with two pamphlets arrived at the enclosure, panting heavily. It was past three in the afternoon, which was late by his standards. It being a weekday, I couldn't help but wonder if he wasn't supposed to be at school, but then reminded myself that I myself had dropped out of my studies and decided not to say anything about it.

From the way he was gasping for breath, I guessed that he must have run quite a distance, and as he stood grasping the fence, following the movements of the gazelle, I held out my own water bottle to him. I'm not fussed if you drink directly from it, I said,

and he bowed his head several times in thanks, before downing its entire contents.

When I told him that the camera crew had been here not long before, he said, ah, right, his shoulders heaving as he continued to stare at the gazelle grazing in the grass by the river. Even when I told him that the director of Q-Town's Nature Protection department and the woman who'd been uploading loads of photos and videos onto Twitter and Facebook had been interviewed for TV, his response was still just, ah, really.

Not knowing what to offer up next, I told him that I imagined that the time and date of the TV broadcast and the woman's social media handles would be posted on Q-Town's website, but the boy just continued to gaze at the gazelle with a faraway expression as if he had digested almost nothing of what I'd said. He raised his right hand in a gesture suggesting he wanted to say something to the creature, but then lowered it again, as if unsure of what to say, and then continued just to stare.

In that moment, it finally dawned on me that this kid didn't need a ton of information or documentation. What mattered to him was the time he spent with the gazelle, of which he even didn't have that much. I walked away so as not to encroach upon that time any further. He continued to stare at the gazelle. For a moment, I wondered to myself if I couldn't make time stop for him, and then felt foolish for having such a ridiculous thought.

THE VOTE DETERMINED that the gazelle would be name "Galezze," but because I'd been rooting for "Q-chan," I decided that I'd continue to call the gazelle "the gazelle."

Once the gazelle's name had been determined, Q-Town announced a competition to create a stylized image of the animal, which would move them further down the path toward the creation of the kind of local mascot so often used to promote towns and cities. Illustrators both local and countrywide were invited to submit. This, too, I came to know through the woman taking photographs of the gazelle. I've heard you're a designer, are you planning to apply? I asked her. I think the gazelle is beautiful just as it is, there's no need to make it into a character, so I've no intention of applying, she replied with a shrug. And yet, she added, the Nature Protection director had pleaded with her to serve on the jury for the competition, and she'd been unable to say no.

By this point, the woman had become the go-to online source for information about the Q-Town gazelle. After her appearance on the national news show, she had been interviewed by other stations, and the general perception was that, when it came to the gazelle, she was the most knowledgeable of anyone.

One weekday afternoon not long afterward, the boy returned, and I informed him of the plan to create a mascot character of the gazelle. Ah, right, the boy said, nodding in a way that betrayed a total lack of interest, then placed both his hands on the fence, leaned over, and began to follow the gazelle's whereabouts with his upper body. I found myself on the verge of asking him about himself in a bid to find out if he was skipping school, but then remembered that I was also doing something very similar to skipping school myself, and held back.

That day the boy seemed to be in luck, for the gazelle stayed facing in his direction. Whether or not it was the boy that it was looking at was impossible to say. I had no idea what the gazelle was thinking. All I knew was that it continued to stare with its perfectly black eyes, either at the boy or what lay behind him. After hesitating somewhat, the boy slowly lifted his right hand and waved at the gazelle. I was on the verge of saying, careful, it's going to stop looking at you if you make such dramatic movements, but the gazelle continued to look at him.

"Is there nowhere you want to go?" the boy said, seeming to have finally hit upon the thing that he wanted to communicate to the animal. "I want to go to Hokkaido. I don't want to go to school."

Is that so, I thought, taking a seat on the ground. I leaned back against the fence and unwrapped the bun that I'd brought for my three-o'clock snack. I didn't especially want to go to Hokkaido, but I didn't not want to go to Hokkaido, either, so I felt in a way that his outcry was my outcry. Putting Hokkaido aside, I definitely didn't want to go to school. If it were a choice between school and Hokkaido, I'd a million times sooner go to Hokkaido.

Whether it was surprised by the sound of the boy's voice, or else sensed something in the interaction that it didn't take to, the gazelle immediately turned around and, heading for the riverbank, began grazing on the grass there. The boy continued to gaze at it. Then he said in a loud voice, Thank you for coming here! The gazelle didn't so much as look at him. Instead, it trotted off to a spot even further away.

IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME before people began expressing the view that, if Q-Town truly had the gazelle's best interests at heart, then it wouldn't keep the creature fenced in on the riverbank. When you thought the matter through, this seemed fairly self-evident. The reason that the gazelle's appearance was viewed as such a special event was because its current habitat was so unusual for it, which in itself suggested that it probably wasn't totally comfortable in that environment.

It seemed unthinkable that those in charge of Q-Town, which had been so enlivened by the gazelle's arrival, would let the animal go without a fuss, but they were adults, after all, and they judged that keeping the gazelle confined would ultimately damage the town's reputation. Thus the idea began to surface that the gazelle should be taken in by a zoo in another prefecture. The creature already had a high profile among those who kept abreast of animal matters within Japan. Several zoos put themselves forward right away, offering to give the gazelle a good home.

In this way, Q-Town came to take an alarmingly mature stance on the issue, declaring that they would do their utmost to relocate the gazelle to a habitat that would be suitable for it in the future, resolving to collaborate closely with whichever zoo took it in, and viewing this collaboration as an opportunity to build up an amicable relationship with whichever region this zoo was located in.

The gazelle's disappearance from the riverbank would mean I was out of a job, which was a sub-optimal outcome for me, to say the least. And yet there was part of me that had known from the beginning that the gazelle wasn't going to be a long-term fixture here, and I accepted the development surprisingly quickly. More than anything, I knew that there was no way that I could go on doing a job that was both so easy and so well suited to me forever. Life wasn't that kind. I knew that in theory—I had, after all, been left a total wreck by my time as a student, which was supposed to be the most enjoyable phase of one's life. The Nature Protection department employee with whom I sometimes talked said things like, well, it's going to start getting colder soon, and working outside for such long hours will be hard, so maybe it's for the best.

There was to be a thorough examination of various alternatives before the gazelle's next destination was determined, so my job patrolling the fence was set to continue for a while even after it had been officially decided that the gazelle would go. While patrolling, I would think aimlessly about the day that the gazelle would finally be taken away, and I would have to leave this job that suited me so well.

ONE DAY, the woman who was always photographing the gazelle approached the section of fence where I was standing, a severe expression on her face. Showing me a clipboard with some sheets of paper attached, she handed me a ballpoint pen.

"I'd like to hear your thoughts, as one of the security personnel here."

The woman wanted me to add my name to the long list of people who had signed the petition. It had only been a week so far, she said, but they'd put the petition up online as well, and had already gathered two thousand signatures.

"They say that the move is for the gazelle's benefit, but if it gets taken in by a zoo, it'll be kept in a far smaller enclosure!"

That was definitely true, I thought. The fence by the riverbank spanned around 300 meters. It was hard to imagine that the animal would be afforded that kind of space in a zoo.

"It's clearly not fair to the gazelle," she went on. "Besides, I want people to remember that the gazelle came here of its own volition. Don't you think it's possible that it simply likes it here? I've been observing it all this time, and I've never once seen it looking stressed. I think it wants to be here."

Her tone brooked no objections. I felt that what she was saying was reasonable.

"Rather than forcing a sudden change of environment on it, isn't the obvious way forward to convert this place into an amenable habitat for it? Besides, the gazelle is this town's pride and joy! It should be kept where the local residents have easy access to it."

I listened to everything she had to say, nodding in response, and then added my name to the end of the list as directed. Thank you, she said. It struck me that in her final sentence, "the local residents" could easily have been replaced with the word "I." Her composure was firm and showed no cracks, but I could sense a slick of panic running beneath its surface. She told me that the issue had led to a rift between her and the Nature Protection department director. Apparently there was talk of sending the gazelle to a zoo in southern Kyushu, where the temperature was relatively warm, or even one in Okinawa—in other words, to a place far from Q-Town.

Our interaction consisted entirely of me listening to what she had to say and then adding my own name to the petition, but after she left, I was hit by a wave of exhaustion. It was as if her desperation had come sneaking up on me from behind.

It was about an hour later that the boy who wanted to go to Hokkaido but not to school showed up. I suspected that he didn't want the gazelle to go away, either, so I explained that there was talk of the animal being taken in by a zoo, and that there was someone collecting signatures to oppose that move. Ah, right, the boy said, nodding with a glum expression.

"I imagine you'll want to sign it, so I'll get her to leave it with me when she comes tomorrow," I said. The boy nodded several times, saying, ah, yes, in a way that made it impossible to say whether he'd understood what I was saying.

He seemed more diverted by the gazelle, which had suddenly broken into a run. Leaning over the fence and crying out "Waahh!" he waved his arm from side to side. The gazelle didn't turn its head.

"So you wanted to run!" the boy said, verbalizing what he'd just seen. I watched as the gazelle moved over to one side of the fence, then went dashing over to the other side.

"If you want to run, then run!"

The boy raised his right hand toward the gazelle. Having run all the way to the edge of the territory afforded it, the gazelle then made its way slowly along the fence in our direction. I swallowed in anticipation as I watched, thinking that this might be the moment that the gazelle finally came close enough for the boy to touch it, but then it suddenly swung to the right and trotted off toward the riverbank.

Man, he must be bitterly disappointed, I thought, glancing down at the boy's face, but that didn't seem to be the case. It wants to run, he murmured. It wants to run, I said, not minding if he heard me or if he didn't. The gazelle was grazing serenely.

IN THE END, the petition received over ten thousand signatures. The woman explained to me that, of course, the residents of Q-Town were in part to thank, but the biggest factor in securing that much support had been the way the news had spread on social media. This was the day that she was going to present the petition to the mayor of Q-Town. During my first hour of work, which is to say between 1:00 and 2:00 pm, the woman stayed on the riverbank taking photos and videos of the gazelle with an intensity of focus that spoke of her unwillingness to let even the tiniest detail escape her. She's got a real passion for that gazelle, I thought to myself.

After explaining to the people who had assembled around the perimeter of the fence to see the gazelle how she was trying to prevent it from being sent away, and collecting a final few signatures, she set off for the town hall. I noted to myself that, in the end, the boy had never signed the petition. I viewed him as someone, like her, with an indisputable passion for the gazelle, and so this struck me as odd.

As with the day the camera crew was there, the boy showed up late, arriving at the fence so as to just miss all of the action. It was a weekday afternoon, so I figured his desire not to go to school remained unaltered. I guessed, though, that so long as I myself was cutting class, the argument that he would really be better off going to school would have no persuasive power whatsoever, and I didn't have the right to even try it out, and so even when he turned up with

his regulation school rucksack on his back, I kept my mouth shut.

That petition to keep the gazelle here on the riverbank was submitted today, I explained to him. Ah, right, he said in a tone that left me unsure if he knew what I meant. It struck me that the most important thing as far as he was concerned was to turn his head in the direction of the gazelle, to keep the creature in his line of sight, and what I said to him, and everything else, all went over his head. I somehow felt slightly relieved that he hadn't shown any reaction to the news of the petition.

It was one of those days around the change of the seasons when the temperature plummeted from one day to the next. Aside from the boy, the first words to issue from people's lips when they encountered another person were "It's chilly today, isn't it!" The weather appeared to be morphing into something that would present problems for the gazelle, hailing as it did from the savannah. Certainly Q-Town could offer the creature a wide enclosure, but it was hard to think of any feasible ways of shielding it from this cold.

Could we put a roof over one section of the enclosure and heat it? Though that sounds like it could quickly get expensive, doesn't it? I said this to the boy, thinking that I didn't care if he listened to me or not, but for once he gave me a proper reply. They should make the river into a hot spring, he said. It was unheard of for him to give an opinion about something other than the gazelle itself. Reflecting that implementing this suggestion would likely cost even more than the roof-and-heater option, I laughed. The boy explained that he'd seen monkeys bathing in hot springs on TV a little while back, and had had the thought that that might work for the gazelle too, when it got cold. We discussed how maybe you could section off one part of the river so that the water there didn't mingle with the rest, and pump hot water into that section every day.

That evening, the temperature dropped again to what it had been in the morning when everyone was commenting on how chilly it was, and there was barely anyone around watching the gazelle. Apart from the boy, that is. I didn't have it in me to ask if he wasn't going to go home. It was, after all, none of my business.

Even when it got to 8:00 pm, though, the boy showed no signs of going home. His eyes kept tracing the movements of the gazelle, now lit up by the industrial lights in the enclosure. I asked the Nature Protection employee who brought me my dinner to bring a hot drink and some food for the boy. I added that they could take the cost out of my wages but was told that it was fine, there was no need.

The Nature Protection employee reported that back at the town hall, the mayor, the woman who took photos, and the director had been deep in discussion all this time. I guess when there are ten thousand signatures on a petition, they can't just ignore it, can they? the employee said, adding that ten thousand was about a quarter of the population of Q-Town. And this is how I discovered that the population of the town in which I lived was forty thousand.

As we sat eating our dinner by the fence, the boy opened up a bit. He told me that he lived in another prefecture, but he saved up his pocket money and used it to travel here, to see the gazelle. That at recess today, he'd suddenly been unable to take it any more and had slipped out of school. That he wanted to go to Hokkaido. In particular, he wanted to visit Kushiro and Monbetsu. My revelations to him were scant in comparison, but I did tell him that I was on a break from university, and that I wanted to do this job forever, but it didn't seem like that would happen.

As far as the gazelle's move to a zoo was concerned, the boy's view was that there wasn't really anything to be done about it. I wish I could keep on seeing it, but that's the way things go, the boy mumbled, staring down at the ground. Looking at the gazelle brought great joy, but as joyful as the situation might have been for him, it wasn't that way for the gazelle. He didn't feel certain that it was the best thing for the gazelle to be transferred to a zoo and taken care of there, but the same was true of it continuing to be kept here.

It was right after we'd finished eating and had gotten to our feet to see what was happening with the gazelle that we registered an outburst of movement. The gazelle, which had been sitting quietly with its back to the fence, had suddenly broken into a run. It was heading upstream at a speed I'd never seen it run before. Upstream lay the mountains. The employees

of the Nature Protection department who had come to adjust the lights and cameras used to monitor the gazelle called out, what's going on? And began chasing after the animal, but they had no hope of keeping up with it on their human legs.

The boy set off sprinting in the same direction, along the fence, and I followed after him. As I was running, I saw the gazelle turn around to look at the boy, for just a split-second.

"Go!" the boy screamed. "If you want to go, then go!"

The industrial lighting along the fence illuminated the figure of the gazelle as it stamped its hooves and leapt into the air, soaring over the fence and dashing off upstream.

The boy ran as far as the end of the fence before coming to a halt, bending forward to rest his hands on his knees as his shoulders heaved. The gazelle had disappeared. The Nature Protection staff would certainly report this, I thought, and there'd be a search of the area upstream. Would the gazelle escape into the mountains before then? I couldn't imagine there were mountains in the savannah, which meant it probably wasn't the best environment for the creature, I thought to myself as I stared dazedly upstream, but then again, there probably were trees in the savannah, so those it might be more familiar with. Ultimately, I supposed that whether the gazelle was on the river-bank, or in the zoo, or in the mountains upstream, it would be out of place. If it was going to be ill at ease wherever it was, it made sense for it to choose to live where it wouldn't be hemmed in by fences and cages.

I heard the boy calling, "Go! Run!" again. Nodding in agreement, I prayed that things would turn out okay for the gazelle.

Hiromi Itō

Hildisvínis

translated by Jeffrey Angles

I WAS IN THE MOUNTAINS with my dog, taking photos of the paths where we walk.

Some lead into the trees, some out. Some slope up, some down. When we take our walks, I like to choose paths where I know no one else will be. That's what we were doing—walking alone in the woods—when I came to a realization: all paths are traces of humanity. Even if a path has no one on it now, by its very nature it has been traveled by many people. Sometimes paths are hardened by walking feet, sometimes by people who bring in heavy machinery to dig up the topsoil and lay gravel. In any case, it's impossible to get where you're going without walking along a path, even if you're in the mountains.

I used to take photos and put them on Twitter with the caption "The paths we walk," but these days I don't share my pictures with anyone.

THE FIRST TIME WE ENCOUNTERED a wild boar was six years ago. Back then, we usually set out about an hour before sunset, but on that day the light was already starting to fade. Either the sun was about to sink below the horizon, or twilight had already fallen. I don't entirely recall.

My dog started to run and bark. I called her name, but she just dashed down the slope into a thicket, barking the whole time. Usually when I give her a command, she listens. She is well trained, so I was surprised when she ignored me. I chased her only to find she'd cornered a wild boar deep inside the thicket.

The boar was up against the base of a big tree, staring at the ferocious-acting animal so much smaller than she was. She looked confused. *What should I do?*

A moment later, the boar turned and ran into the forest, disappearing almost immediately.

MY DOG SEEMED CONFUSED TOO. I could practically hear her shrieking in surprise, *What?! What on earth?!* Her fur was standing on end, and she looked so frightened that I thought she might bolt. But then she scratched the ground and stomped her feet angrily, barking loudly. A very specific set of movements.

It was the first time I'd seen a wild boar—a live one, that is—at such close quarters.

Part of me suspects that the entire point of human existence is to come in contact with animals in the wild. Even encounters with common animals like rabbits and coyotes give me this impression, but our run-in with the large boar was so extraordinary that I was left feeling as if half my life's purpose had just been fulfilled. I kept thinking how much the boar looked like a *kawahagi*—a thread-sail filefish. Of course, boars and *kawahagi* are entirely different creatures and different sizes, but they are alike in that their faces protrude dramatically from their bodies. The boar's thin chiseled face stuck out so far that, like a *kawahagi,* it was best viewed in profile.

That was the first time that I—no, that we—encountered a wild boar.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH through a broad-leaf evergreen forest.

This time a young boar appeared before us. Just like a human child, she seemed unable to contain her curiosity and approached.

My dog was on her leash. The hair on her back bristled and she started barking, but she seemed to understand that the boar was young and was displaying no hostility or fear. She probably also felt secure being connected to me by the leash. Her reaction was completely different than when she'd cornered the full-grown boar against the base of the tree.

As the young boar approached, my dog stopped barking and started to retreat. My human brain felt a mixture of emotions. Like the young boar, I was curious, but concerned too. What would happen if she followed us?

So, I turned to the boar and spoke in a gentle, high-pitched voice.

"Home."

Why that word? And why in English? I'd raised my dog in the States, so English is the language we use even now that we're back in Japan. However, the wild boar didn't understand English, or any human language for that matter.

As she approached us, the boar looked around nervously. She seemed more interested in my dog than in me, and in her back haunches and tail in particular. My dog, however, wasn't keen to engage with the

overly familiar, wild-smelling creature and took a few more steps back. She arched her back and looked around wildly as she distanced herself from the boar, and in the process, she and I got completely tangled up in the leash. At that moment, the boar pricked up her ears as though she'd heard something, then turned toward the forest and ran, disappearing into the trees.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH through the shade of the broad-leaf evergreen forest.

This time I veered off the path and went along the mountain slope. We climbed over fallen trees and broken branches, rustling through the dried leaves. A small animal suddenly ran by my feet—so close that it nearly touched my toes. All it had done was run by, but I could sense its panic. It was in such a hurry that it practically tumbled down the slope.

What was it? Compared to a dog, it was about the size of a pug, with a similar build—squarish and hefty, dark in color. It was far smaller than the curious young boar we'd encountered earlier. My dog was so surprised that she didn't even bark.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH through a hardwood forest.

The trees there are more spaced out than in the broad-leaf evergreen forest, and Asiatic jasmine and Japanese mountain yams send their vines climbing up the tree trunks. After the mountain cherries bloom in the spring, the path becomes completely covered with fallen petals. In early summer, jasmine vines burst into bloom, filling the woods with their fragrance. When autumn rolls around, the leaves on the mountain yam vines turn yellow all at once.

Suddenly my dog started barking and dashed down the mountain path. She'd caught the scent of a wild boar. I continued walking. The path started to slope. The trees on the slope were deciduous, surrounded by sasa, a type of dwarf bamboo. I saw the expanse of sasa *stirring, stirring, stirring.* Eventually, I glimpsed the black back of an animal dashing through it, but it disappeared almost immediately.

PLANTS BELONGING TO THE GENUS *Arisaema* grow along the forest path. They bloom in early summer, pushing out green and purple flowers. The flowers don't bloom so much as just raise their heads, opening into a bowl-like shape and exposing their reproductive organs to the world. Some of the plants in the *Arisaema* genus are *mamushigusa* (literally, viper flowers), *musashi abumi* (Musashi stirrups, but better known in English as Japanese cobra lilies), and *urashimasō* (Urashima grass). When their flowers fade, it's time for the Solomon's seal to bloom. Their flowers so resemble a row of bells that you'd think they'll start ringing at any moment. Maybe I'm wrong, and the plant I'm thinking of isn't Solomon's seal, which belongs to the genus *Polygonatum,* but *hōchakusō,* of the genus *Disporum.* In any case, the leaves look much like those of *Arisaema.* To complicate matters further, the leaves of Solomon's seal also resemble sasa. Sometimes I mistake the two. Sometimes I think it's *urashimasō* blooming, but looking closer I see it's really *hōchakusō.* Sometimes I think that the Solomon's seal is sprouting, but then I see it's really sasa. When we walk away from the path a bit, it looks like the entire forest floor is covered with it.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH up a fairly steep slope.

The path leads to the top of the mountain, but that's not where we were headed. My destination was the grove of muku trees on the north slope, offering a nice view overlooking the north part of the city. I had gone there around the time of our first encounter with a boar. I remember this because there was construction on the new bridge on the road leading into town.

I'm not sure where that road originates, and I don't know where it goes. On an impulse, I decided I would drive across the bridge. Urging my dog onward, I walked down the mountain path, put her into the car, and headed in the general direction of the bridge. I felt like we were searching for the end of a rainbow.

It actually wasn't hard to find the entrance to the bridge. The road broadens into a highway right there. Before I knew it, the highway carried us onto the bridge, far above the valley below. It was like we were at the top of a Ferris wheel, looking down on the city. I could see the mountain where we'd been walking just a few minutes ago. I couldn't spot the grove of muku trees, but that was because I was driving fast. If I'd been

able to go slower, I could've picked it out. The highway was brand new and almost empty, so I should have been able to take it easy, but I can't help myself. Whenever I'm behind the wheel, I get the urge to put the pedal to the metal. Right then, the sun, looking far bigger and more swollen than usual, trembled heavily in the sky and sank behind the mountain straight ahead.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH through the forest, toward the grassy field that lies on the other side.

This time, I heard an animal cry out ahead of us. I'm not exactly sure how to represent the sound in writing, but it sounded like "*boo-hee*." Like a pig. I was just reflecting on the fact that I'd never really heard a pig up close when two animals shot out from the trees, fleeing in different directions. I didn't get a good look. My dog was quiet too. I'm sure she heard the boars, and probably smelled them, but she stayed silent.

I decided to leave the path and take another. My dog followed. Once again, I heard "*boo-hee*" from somewhere up ahead.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH that sloped upward through the woods.

One side of the mountain is covered in cryptomeria trees. I've seen owls there many times, sometimes perched on branches like the folk-art owls, sometimes flying silently through the darkness, wings outstretched.

Suddenly my dog started barking and running, so I ordered her to stop and put her on the leash. Sometimes we encounter people. It's scarier to run into a person than to run into a wild boar, especially when the person doesn't like dogs.

My dog started barking again, and I caught a glimpse of a wild boar dashing through the woods on the far side of a little ravine.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH next to the fence at the edge of the forest.

The path was completely covered in dry leaves and fallen branches. I saw holes in the fence here and there, where boars had broken through. They must pass through a lot, judging from the width of the holes.

This time, my dog started barking and running back and forth along the fence.

When she finally stopped, her back hair was bristling. On the other side of the fence was a huge boar. She barked furiously. Safe on this side of the fence, she barked and barked for all she was worth.

WHEN YOU TELL PEOPLE you have frequent run-ins with wild boars, they never really believe you.

Some people say, "I've been taking walks for decades, but I've never run into one—not even once!" Some say, "You must be terrified! How frightening." I can't count the number of people who say, "Watch out! Those creatures are dangerous." There are even some who, as soon as they hear me talk about boars, start sharing some horror story from a friend or acquaintance who had a terrible experience with one. Maybe they hit a boar with their car, leading to a near fatal accident. Maybe they were chased by a boar and barely managed to escape. Maybe they adopted a baby boar, and it grew to be as tame as a pet dog.

When I heard about the pet boar, I asked the man who told me the story, "So, what became of the boar?"

He answered, "After three years, a friend slaughtered it for me. I simmered it in a nice broth and ate it."

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH at twilight, soon before sunset.

I've heard that, long ago, wild boars were active only during the day, but now that they've been exposed to human habits, they are active at night too.

Back when we lived in California, my dog and I used to walk at dusk. The sun would set in the ocean. As it sank below the horizon, the air became nice and clear. The birds grew quiet. Rabbits bounded in the grass. Coyotes showed up to growl at us. That liminal moment between day and night was really special.

There is a word for that in English. A word that refers to a creature that is active during the transition between day and night. Not nocturnal, not diurnal.

I happened across it by chance. When I first heard the word, it took my breath away. I thought, how could I have been ignorant of such a beautiful word until now? But the word was hard to remember. Difficult even for native English speakers. I forgot it as soon as I heard it.

Whenever we walked in the mountains at twilight, treading the boundary between day and night, I'd try to remember the word, but despite recalling the concept, I couldn't summon it up. I kept trying to remember. Later at home, I'd find it again, and the beauty of the word would take my breath away once more.

The word is *crepuscular*.

I looked it up in a dictionary, and the definition says, "having qualities associated with twilight and dusk." What a wonderful word. Like poetry.

WE WERE WALKING ON A PATH through a forest of chinquapin and oak trees.

At the far end of the forest is a grassy area, and toward the back is a place where wild boars love to wallow. A wooden walkway stands just above the grass. When it rains, the land below gets flooded. It's not a creek bed or a marsh exactly, but the ground is always wet. Persimmon and pear trees grow wild on the embankment, and every year they produce fruit. In early summer, the *hanaudo* (a variety of hogweed) and *hankaisō* (a variety of lingularia) come into bloom. Once in a while I find some *sawatoranō* (*Lysimachia leucantha*) blooming there too.

So, the boars like to rut and wallow in the back of the grassy area. Sometimes we see them there. When we cross the walkway, I put my dog on her leash, and we pay close attention to our surroundings. We try to walk carefully, so the boards of the walkway don't creak.

Once, as we were approaching the walkway, a woman around my age came running toward us, exclaiming, "Oh, my god! How frightening!" She pointed behind her. "There's a wild boar over there! Do you think it will attack?" Not wanting to miss a chance to see a boar, I urged my dog on and rushed in the direction she'd pointed. The wild boar the woman had seen was still there.

From the safety of the raised walkway, my dog started barking. No doubt the leash added to her sense of security. She didn't seem frightened. Her bark seemed to be saying, *There she is! There she is!* The wild boar was near the back of the grassy expanse, completely covered in mud. She looked over at us for a bit, then rushed off into the bushes.

There are lots of Japanese mountain yams in the area. Many plants grow vines, and the yams get tangled up in them and are hard to see during spring and summer, but in autumn their leaves turn yellow all at once. Then wild boars dig them up and eat them.

Sawtooth oaks and chinquapin trees grow there too. A sign identifies the site as "The Acorn Forest" and includes this note: "The nuts of the chinquapin are as tasty as chestnuts or walnuts." In autumn, the ground is completely covered in acorns, and the boars dig up the whole place, rooting for tasty treats with their rough, rugged noses.

SOMEONE SET A TRAP in the forest for the boars.

It's a large cage, so large that a single glance tells you what it's designed for. On it, someone has posted a sign: "Please keep your distance." I can read, so I don't get too close, but I'm not alone. My dog keeps her distance too, though she can't read a word.

I've never seen a boar in the trap.

I wonder what would happen if the trap did catch one. Maybe an alarm would sound in some office, and someone would rush over. I hear they kill the boars with spears. Maybe a local hunting club comes to dispose of it. I imagine a group of people surrounding the cage and grunting and groaning as they spear the boar to death. I think about the last moments of the boar's life as it dies, trapped in the cage. I noticed what looked like rice husks scattered around the cage. At first I thought it was food to attract the boars, but then I realized they might be there to absorb blood under the cage.

Whenever we pass the cage, my dog barks at it a few times before staring intently. Then she barks again as if a wild boar is actually trapped there.

If some human feces or food scraps happen to be on the ground, my dog will be sure to detect them. But that's not all. She then completely forgets the cardinal rule: listen to your mother. She starts ignoring me completely and sometimes even refuses to budge from the spot. Whenever we come across a stray cat or wild animal, she forgets me entirely and runs off, chasing the poor creature. But when she spots the big cage and detects the strong scent of wild boars coming from it, she holds back. She doesn't want to go look. She doesn't even want to go near. That's how scary the cage is.

DURING SUMMER, large numbers of *mematoi* appear in the woods—those tiny bugs that like to fly around the faces of large animals. I'm not talking about mosquitoes. *Mematoi* don't bite. They just follow you around and try to land in your eyes. That's why they're called *mematoi,* "clinging to the eyes." If you swat them, it's like squashing a tiny fly.

One flew right into my eye once. Despite its size, it felt like I had a rock in my eye. I tried rubbing my eye and washing out the bug, but it didn't work. Eventually I went to a pharmacy and bought some eyewash that comes with a little cup. You fill the cup with eyewash, put it over your eye, and look up, letting the fluid run into your eye, giving it a thorough bath. Even that didn't work. My eye still felt rough and inflamed that night as I tried to sleep. The next morning, I found my eye had expelled the intruder. It looked like a very small fly—dead, of course.

I try to keep the *mematoi* away by wearing glasses and waving a towel around my face, but a dog can't do those things. The little bugs cling to the exposed mucous membranes around a dog's eyes. They make my dog fussy, and she tries to rub her eyes with her paws, which aren't nearly as flexible as human hands. In the end, she plants herself on the ground and covers her eyes. Even so, she can't stop the bugs from bothering her, so I decided to avoid the mountains during the summer.

When October rolls around, the temperature drops. Lower temperatures mean the tiny bugs disappear. It's incredible that a creature that emerges in such tremendous numbers will suddenly vanish entirely. Does the cold stop them from moving? Do they die? Do they suddenly drop dead while flying through the air? The mountains must be covered in dead bugs.

That's why it wasn't until autumn that we finally resumed our walks in the mountains.

IT WAS OCTOBER 7 by the time we returned to the mountains. There were still some *mematoi* left, but their numbers had decreased significantly since midsummer. The sun was going to set at 5:55 pm, so we parked a little before five and set out.

Right before sunset, the sunlight trickles through the tree canopy, illuminating the boulders and tree trunks beneath. That day, wherever the light fell, the scenery looked oddly red, as if coated in red paint. Not quite sure what I was seeing, I approached the red patches only to discover nothing there, other than the dwindling light. Soon the sun shifted position, and the light stopped trickling through the trees.

Right then, I saw a wild boar. It was on the path that leads from the shrine of the mountain god to the shrine of the water god.

At first, all I saw was a dark mass. There were no boulders or tree stumps in the area. Because of the dwindling light, I wasn't sure what I was seeing so I went a little closer. My confusion lasted only an instant. What could it be but a boar? My dog was sniffing the ground behind me. When she noticed the animal, it took off, dashing nimbly up the mountainside and disappearing into a thicket.

AGAIN, THE NEXT DAY, we went for a walk right as the sun was setting. The light was just like before.

We were walking through the forest.

Suddenly, a boar appeared on the path in front of us. I was in the lead, so I was the first to notice. My dog was still sniffing the ground behind me when she noticed the boar too—a bit faster this time—and took off down the path. The boar fled, rushing up the mountainside into the woods. My dog followed her into the trees. A moment later, the boar dashed back out of the trees and ran right in front of me, so close that I thought we might collide. Then it disappeared, running back into the same part of the forest where I'd heard the cry "*boo-hee*."

EVERY DAY, the sunset arrived approximately one minute earlier than the day before.

On October 11, the sun set at 5:50 pm.

On October 12, the sun set at 5:49 pm.

We were walking on the path with the fairly steep slope.

We were not headed to the summit but to the grove of muku trees on the north side of the mountain.

On the way, we saw a boar ahead. My dog was sniffing the ground behind me as usual, but as soon as she saw it, she started to growl and run after it. As she chased it, the boar dashed up the mountainside.

By this point, my dog was completely used to chasing wild boars, so she barked loudly and dashed into the bushes. She did the same thing nearly every day.

ON OCTOBER 15, the sun set at 5:45 p.m.

We left the gravel path and walked down a little unmarked trail.

When it rains, my feet slide on the moss, and when it's dry, the trail is covered with fallen leaves. We walked through a grove of jolcham oaks, which were dropping their leaves.

Right then, my dog started panting and running ahead. She stopped in front of a thicket, planted her paws firmly on the ground, and stared into the leaves. A moment later, a boar exploded from the thicket.

It was a young, healthy-looking boar with a heavy build. The boar appeared to be conversing with my dog, but the two animals were only making guttural vowel-sounds, like "*uuuuh*" and "*aaaah*." These verbal cues, however, seemed less important than their body language.

The boar shuffled a few steps forward, forcing my dog to retreat a little, then grunted, as if scolding her: *Whatcha looking at? Go away!* Then the boar started to chase her. Having been reprimanded, my dog was frightened, and she dashed back to hide behind me. The boar stopped advancing and stood still. This left me face-to-face with the big, bold, energetic animal.

The boar was staring at me. Acknowledging me.

A human, I see.

An enemy.

But not so scary.

Dogs are no big deal. But this is a human. Humans are big. Bigger than dogs but smaller than trees. They move slowly but have powerful weapons. But this human isn't carrying anything. This human doesn't want to kill me. This human isn't so scary.

She had acknowledged me. We spent only a single moment staring into one another's eyes, but there's no question about it.

Suddenly the boar looked away, turned around, and ran back into the thicket, disappearing from view. My dog and I were left behind.

My dog was still terrified.

"The boar is gone. Let's go home," I said in our shared language, urging my dog to start walking, but she refused to move. She was still rattled from being scolded. She was still scared from being chased. When I knelt on the ground and hugged her, she was shaking.

All this time, I thought I was the one who chased things, but now I know better. I can be chased too. That was what she was thinking. I doubt dogs think *I should repent for all my boar-chasing,* but as she stood there, frozen in fear, it was as though something along those lines was going through her head. She seemed to be thinking about all her bad deeds, past and present, perhaps even future deeds too. She seemed terrified, as if anticipating the consequences of her actions.

I put her on the leash and spoke to her.

"Don't worry. It's okay.

"The boar's gone now.

"I'm right beside you.

"I love you.

"Come on, let's go home."

Using the same tone I might use with a frightened child—the same calm voice, the same soothing words—I encouraged her to start walking. She took one step, then another. With her on the leash trudging along behind me, we walked down the path through the grove of jolcham oaks.

SINCE THEN, every time my dog catches the slightest whiff of a wild boar, she barks to let me know. She's terrified. The memory of the boar chasing her hasn't faded. Wherever we go in the mountains, she sniffs for boars. She feels the need to bark and let me know if one's there. She's got to bark and raise a racket to keep us safe.

WE WERE WALKING DOWN THE PATH from the northern mountaintop.

The path I'm talking about passes behind the spot where the boars like to wallow—the spot on the other side of the grassy field when you approach from the walkway.

This time, my dog remained silent as she planted her legs firmly and stared into the thicket. I also

stopped walking and strained my eyes, but I couldn't see a thing. No sooner did the words "There's nothing there" leave my mouth than a shape darted out from the spot where I'd just been looking. Right before my eyes, the shape transformed into a boar and ran off, disappearing into the dark woods.

PLANTING ALL FOUR LEGS on the ground and standing firm is a posture that seems to come naturally to my dog.

She's got the DNA of military and police dogs. There's probably some herding dog in her too. I imagine her ancestors were good at snapping at sheep to keep them in the herd and chasing wolves away, but I doubt they ever hunted wild boars. My dog doesn't know how to set or point. She developed this mode of communication on her own. When she takes this pose, I understand. *Mom, something's there, something different.* She stands in front of a thicket—tense, legs planted, staring at the spot where she detects a scent. And as she stares, she also looks back at me with the eyes in the back of her head.

ON OCTOBER 22, the sun set at 5:37 p.m.

We were walking along the path from the forest to the grassy field.

Right then, my dog started barking and bounding toward the trees at the edge of the field. A boar, I thought. I guessed the boar would hear her bark, come running out of the trees, then disappear back into the woods. Quickly, I moved to a spot that would give me a better view of the whole area. The grassy field beyond the trees was completely quiet. I couldn't see or smell a thing, but judging from my dog's barking, there had to be a wild animal nearby.

At the edge of the grass was a tall tree, a persimmon growing wild in the mountains. It produced a lot of fruit high in its branches. I had watched the fruit grow, turn orange, and fall to the ground. No doubt the fallen persimmons are sweet and full of flavor. No doubt the boars come to eat them.

My thoughts had progressed this far when I noticed the goldenrod between the back of the woods and the persimmon tree starting to sway.

I was right. A boar was walking through the goldenrod toward the persimmons. As quietly as possible, I walked over to a position near the tree. That's when I saw the large boar.

Why are you here?

The boar was looking straight at me.

HOW SHOULD I DESCRIBE what happened that day with the boar? A chance encounter? An unexpected meeting of minds? As I think about it now, I realize that it was a little like the conclusion of a long boar hunt—one without weapons or loss of life. I feel like we communicated somehow. Our communication involved mostly body language but still, there was something about it that reminded me of human language.

By the time we returned to the parking lot and got into the car, the last light of the day had faded. I started the engine, turned on the headlights, and took off. Rounding the first curve, I saw a boar ahead of us on the road. It wasn't the same boar I'd seen by the persimmon tree. It was a different one.

I stopped the car and got out alone. As if to demonstrate that she was a unique individual living a life completely unlike that of any of the other boars I'd encountered to that point, this boar didn't turn to look at me. Calmly, without rushing, she bounded from the road onto the tree-studded mountain slope. A number of large chinquapin trees grew there. Even I know the nuts of chinquapin trees are as tasty as chestnuts and walnuts. With its long snout, the wild boar began to root in the dirt. Slowly.

Four Modern Haiku Poets on Encounters with Creatures

selected and translated by Andrew Campana

Hokuto Iboshi (1901–1929)

蛙鳴くコタンは暮れて雨しきり
Frogs croak
and the *kotan*, our village, gets dark—
the rain doesn't stop

春浅き鰊の浦や雪五尺
Early spring
at the bay of herring
snow lying five feet deep

伝説の沼に淋しき蛙かな
In that legendary swamp
how lonely
must that frog be!

浮氷鷗が乗って流れけり
Pack ice—
a seagull hitching a ride
on its flow

塞翁の馬で今年も暮れにけり
Like in that saying about Old Man Sai's horse—
good fortune turned bad, bad turned good—
this year too has come to an end

Kijō Murakami (1865–1938)

長閑さや鶏の蹴かへす藁の音
A peaceful field
only the sound of chickens
kicking back straw

川底に蝌斗の大国ありにけり
At the bottom of the river
lies the grand kingdom
of tadpoles

風吹いてうちかたまりぬ蛙の子
In the blowing winds
all huddled together—
little frogs

虻飛んで一大円をゑがきけり
A horsefly flies
tracing an enormous circle
in the air

蛞蝓の歩いて庭の曇かな
Gliding slugs—
the clouds
over the yard!

さいかちの落花に遊ぶ蟇
Toads
playing in the falling flowers
of the honey locust tree

浮草や蜘蛛渡りゐて水平ら
Floating weeds—
spiders crossing
over calm waters

船ばたに竝んで兄鵜弟鵜かな
Perched on the edge of the boat
a big cormorant—
and his little brother!

山寺や蝙蝠出づる縁の下
Mountain temple—
bats emerging
from under the veranda

涼しさや犬の寐に来る蔵のかげ
Finally, some relief—
a dog comes to nap
in the shade of the storehouse

さみしさに窓あけて見ぬ虫の声
In my loneliness
I tried opening the window
and was greeted by insect voices

朝寒や馬のいやがる渡舟
Horses reluctant
to board the ferryboat—
morning chill

壁土を鼠食みこぼす夜寒かな
Mice nibbling and scattering
the plaster from the walls—
a cold night!

大根引馬おとなしく立眠り
The daikon-harvesting horse
obediently
sleeps standing up

水鳥に吼立つ舟の小犬かな
A puppy
on the boat, howling
at the waterfowl

美しきほど哀れなりはなれ鴛
Mandarin ducks
their partings as painful
as they are beautiful

市の灯に寒き海鼠のぬめりかな
City lights
coldly shining
in sea cucumber slime

楢の火に大きな猫のうづくまる
A huge cat
curls up next to
the bonfire

猫のゐて両眼炉の如し冬の月
Cat's eyes
each of them like a furnace—
winter moon

遠山の雪に飛びけり烏二羽
They've flown through the snows
of a distant mountain—
two crows

Moppo Tomita (1897–1923)

藁灰を掻き散らす鶏や雪催ひ
Chickens
scratching and scattering the straw ashes—
looks like it's about to snow

五月雨や鶏の影ある土間の隅
Early summer rain—
shadow of a hen
in the corner of the dirt floor

荒壁に虻狂ひをる西日かな
On the rough clay wall
the horseflies swarm
in the light of the setting sun

明け寒き嵐の中の鶏の聲
A chilly morning storm
and in its midst
the rooster's cry

夕月の木込み去らずよ寒雀
Lingering in the trees
under the evening moon—
winter sparrows

野良犬の水飲みに來つ草いきれ
A stray dog
comes for a drink
through the humid summer grasses

蟲けらの壁からも出る五月雨
Bugs creeping out
from the cracks in the walls—
early summer rain

蚊の唸り箱の底炭掻きにけり
The buzzing of mosquitoes
skittering at the bottom
of the charcoal basket

菓子やれば日々來る犬や秋の雨
A dog comes back every day
for more sweets—
autumn rain

頭上渡る椋鳥の大群光りけり
A huge flock of grey starlings
passes by overhead
gleaming

蟻共の尻みな光る春日かな
The ants' posteriors—
how they all glow
in the spring sun

干潮に犬遊び居る蘆の角
At low tide
the dogs play
in the reed shoots

花鶏の蠅移りくる晝餉かな
Flies move among the flowers
of the birdlime tree—
it must be lunchtime

ともすれば灯奮ふ風や時鳥
As often happens
the wind stirs the lantern flame—
cuckoo's cry

乏しさの湯槽に浸たり冬の雁
Bathing
in my shabby bathtub—
winter geese

鷗しきり鳴くこの通夜の明易き
Endless seagull cries
as the dawn breaks far too soon
after a wakeful night

喀血にみじろぎもせず夜蟬鳴く
I cough up blood
the cicadas, unbothered
sing through the night

病犬の咽喉鳴らしゆく落葉風
Throat of a sick dog—
the rattle of dead leaves
in the wind

行く雁に電車の音も冴ゆる夜や
How vivid the departing geese
and the sounds of the train
on this cold night

蟲賣や宵寢のあとの雨あがり
The seller of caged crickets
goes to bed early—
but then the rain lifts

Takako Hashimoto (1899–1963)

野火跡を鹿群れ移る人の如
A herd of deer
step through the remains of the brushfire
just like people

嘆かじと土掘る蜂を見てゐたり
I refused to grieve
and instead watched the wasps
dig into the earth

雉啼くや胸ふかきより息一筋
A pheasant's cry—
from the depths of my chest
I let out a single breath

春嵐鳩飛ぶ翅を張りづめに
Spring storm
pigeons flying
wings stretched to their limits

切株ばかり鶯のこだまを待つ
Only tree stumps remain
to await the echo
of the nightingale's song

蝶食ひし山蟻を許すか殺すか
Mountain ants that devoured a butterfly—
do I forgive them
or destroy them?

鶯の必死の誘ひ夕渓に
The nightingale's
desperate cry of courtship
as dusk hits the valley

海風に尾羽を全開恋雀
Fully unfurling its tail feathers
in the ocean breeze—
a sparrow in love

かなしき声羊腹毛刈られをり
What a mournful voice—
a sheep's belly
is being shorn

静臥の上巣つくり雀しやべりづめ
Above where I rest
sparrows build their nests
and chatter nonstop

山中に恋猫のわが猫のこゑ
Deep in the mountains
the cries of love-struck cats
my cat among them

一羽鳩春日を二羽となり帰る
In the spring sunlight
one dove leaves
and two return

風に乗る揚羽の蝶の静止して
Riding the wind
a swallowtail butterfly
pauses in midair

灯をめぐる大蛾のかげや蚊帳くらき
A huge moth by the lamp
casts its shadow
darkening the mosquito net

蝙蝠は夕焼消ゆる地を翔くる
Bats flying over
those places where
the sunset's glow has vanished

蛍火が掌をもれひとをくらくする
A firefly
escapes from my cupped palm
leaving me in the dark

萓の葉蛍をらしめ列車いづ
A firefly
settles into a tobacco leaf—
the train departs

雨の沼蛍火ひとつ光り流れ
In the rainy marsh
the glow of a single firefly
flows alongside the water

吾去ればみ仏の前蛇遊ぶ
After I leave
snakes start to play
in front of the Great Buddha

わがそばに夜蟬を猫が啼かし啼かし
The cat beside me
makes an evening cicada
cry out, and cry out again

断崖へ来てひたのぼる蛍火は
Arriving at the cliff
they immediately begin to climb—
fireflies

蟻走りとゞまりて走り蟻に会ふ
Running ants
only pause
when running into other ants

仔鹿追ひきていつか野の湿地ふむ
Following a fawn
I found myself
treading on a wetland

馴れざる水に金魚の尾鰭ひらく
In unfamiliar waters
a goldfish's tail fin
opens

泉に入れ胸腹熱き碧蜥蜴
Azure lizard
your chest and belly must be overheating—
take a dip in the spring!

雀ゐてどんぐり落ちる落ちる
Sparrows in the tree
acorns fall down
and keep falling

秋蝶に猫美しく老いにけり
Among the autumn butterflies
my cat has grown old
so beautifully

息あらき雄鹿が立つは切なけれ
A stag standing
gasping for air
a heartrending sight

にはたずみ鹿跳び遁げてまた雲充つ
The deer leaps away
from the pool of rainwater
the sky filling again with clouds

さかしまに螳螂よこのまゝ暮るゝか
Upside down—
is that your way of life,
praying mantis?

熟柿つつく鴉が腐肉つつくかに
A crow pecks at a ripe persimmon
just like it would peck at
rotten meat

鶏と猫雪ふる夕べ食べ足りて
Both hen and cat
on this snowy evening
have eaten their fill

Takako Hashimoto (1899–1963)

猫歩む月光の雪かげの雪
A cat steps
from the moonlit snow
to the shadowed snow

一つづゝ落暉ふちどるみな冬鹿
One by one
each deer is outlined
by the winter sunset

熊が口ひらく旅の手に何もなき
The bear's mouth opens wide
and in the traveler's hands
nothing useful

家鼠を見て野鼠が走るや雪明り
The field mouse
catches a glimpse of the house mouse
and flees under the shining snow

地を掘り掘る狐隠せしもの失ひ
The fox digs
and digs—
but it cannot find what it has hidden

われに向く狐が細し入日光
A fox turns to me
its body slender
in the setting sun

雪嶽越ゆ白鳥の白勝ちて
A swan soars over the mountains
its whiteness whiter
than the snowy peaks

雪明りこゑももらさず餌場の鴨
In the brightness of the snow
the ducks at the feeding ground
keep quiet

TAKAKO HASHIMOTO (1899–1963) is the pen name of Tama Hashimoto, born in Tokyo. She was highly influential as one of the first women to include herself as an active presence within her verses. She was also the first prominent woman haiku poet in the modern era to have been trained by another woman poet, Hisajo Sugita, and came to be known as one of the most well-known haiku poets of the postwar period.

HOKUTO IBOSHI (1901–1929) was born in Yoichi, a town in Hokkaido. He was an indigenous Ainu poet and activist, and his works were closely linked to his aim of promoting a unified Ainu identity and recovering aspects of Ainu history and culture. He died at the age of twenty-seven of tuberculosis.

KIJŌ MURAKAMI (1865–1938) is the pen name of Shōtarō Murakami, a haiku poet and judicial scrivener who was born to a samurai family in what is now Koishikawa, Tokyo. Deaf for most of his life, he often said that he composed his poems according to his "mind's ear," rather than his mind's eye.

MOPPO TOMITA (1897–1923) is the pen name of Hajime Tomita, born in Tokyo. Due to an early childhood illness, his legs were paralyzed; as mobility aids, he fashioned himself a pair of wooden legs ("moppo," the origin of his haiku name). He wrote poems about nature, poverty, and his experience with tuberculosis and disability. He died at the age of twenty-six in the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923.

Laird Hunt

A Bear's Tale

I USED TO OWN A PAIR OF GLASSES. The optometrist who tested my eyes had them specially made by a company in Newark. I sat on them almost immediately but for the several hours before I broke them, I enjoyed looking handsome and seeing so far and so well. Please note that my ocular deficiencies were all my own and had nothing to do with my species. Not all bears would benefit from glasses. Most see at worst adequately and at best, especially in the dark, very, very well. Would you like to know something of my life? I suppose that's why you're here. Why we're here. Though probably I shouldn't speculate. Is that a pun? Speculate? Spectacles? I'm never sure. In my youth I had a friend, a small brown bear (as you can see I am black and fairly big for my kind), who would have told me in an instant. He was as quick upstairs as I was slow and his impatience combined with my annoyance frequently brought us to blows. We fought throughout our younger years. The fact that he was small for his species and I was large for mine meant we were unusually evenly matched. We would both stand and grunt and then I would walk forward roaring after which he would walk me back roaring in his turn. It was quite an impressive display. At some point one of us would make our move and then the inimitable chaos of bear fighting would ensue. It was not unusual for us to draw a crowd. Probably he was stronger as well as smarter but there are ways to offset almost any kind of martial advantage and slow wits are not dull wits plus the underlying fact of the matter was we were rarely interested in causing real harm. Usually, our fights either started in the river or ended up in it because we were always there. I've liked nothing better in life than brawling, then splashing in a river, and I think he felt the same way. We probably both thought it would go on like that forever but then one day I realized it was over, that it had been over for a while, and we had gone our separate ways. I was living in the city by then. Which city? Let's just say it wasn't Paris or New York. I had a job bussing tables and washing dishes at a restaurant in one of the nicer suburbs. One night late a few of us were fooling around and on a dare I cooked a trout pie. The evening sous-chef had forgotten his keys and walked back in on us just as I was pulling the pie out of the oven. He couldn't believe his nose.

Right there and then he had me show him exactly how I had done it. The next week trout pie was on the menu, and I was wearing a very large toque. After that the years went by in a blur. Salmon torte and saffron cod-fish pancakes and bacon-wrapped venison cookies were among the many things I added to my repertoire. I gave so many interviews I began to have out-of-body experiences whenever a journalist walked into the room. I had long since supplanted the evening sous-chef, but he remained a mentor and confidant. On days off he and I would take long walks through the city. He was the only one I felt I could be myself around, and whenever we came to one of the many small parks, he would wait patiently while I roared, rooted for grubs, terrified ducks, and climbed trees. Sometimes we would walk as far as the docks where, beyond the boats and abandoned pilings, you could see the deep brown-green water that the former sous-chef told me could take you to the far side of the world. Being a bear, I could not see very far, but I still loved to hear him talk about boats and travel and roads that had no end. It was because I wanted to better share his enthusiasm that I invested in the glasses I mentioned briefly having. With my arm laid companionably over his little shoulders we gazed together far, far out to sea. It was a lovely moment but after a while I was forced to remove the glasses because they were hurting the sides of my head. I set them down next to us, forgot them, stood to better smell something out on the water, then sat on them with an obliterating crunch. The sous-chef laughed (not meanly) and called me a big idiot. Forgetting myself I roared and slapped him, sending him flying 10 feet through the air and out into the water. It was later, when I visited him in the hospital, that I told him about my old friend, about how we used to fight, how we were so evenly matched, how he had always called me dumb, stupid, and idiotic. "You're homesick," he said. He told me to take a break from the restaurant, go back to the woods, and get hold of my old friend. I left at once. I couldn't track my friend down but had so much fun galloping around and splashing in the old river that I decided to stay. I launched a small company that specialized in outdoor adventure. At the start, there was competition galore but over time none could compete with expert local knowledge and the gourmet refreshments I included in even the most basic package. I did so well that I was forced to take on more staff (almost all of the core team were family) and eventually, though some of the numbers were hard for me to parse, to incorporate. In cooperation with my old restaurant, and under the initial direction of the sous-chef, we set up a restaurant that specialized in river pancakes and river trout pie. We had plenty of visitors, but despite the cross-country ski and snowshoe adventures we developed, winter business couldn't match summer, so we built a series of rustic cabins in the woods that could be rented "off-season" for spiritual and artistic retreats. My siblings and cousins, who had each grown richer through the endeavor, were forever putting fresh ventures before me. I signed off on them all. If this had been a play, the audience would have long since been waiting for the crash and the ruin of us all, but it never came. Not because of inherent ursine inclination, although more than one outdoor magazine and travel supplement covered it that way. We were among the first on the continent to add "eco" to our offerings, and this positioned us brilliantly. So solid did it all seem that I began taking time off. I found that once I was back in my natural habitat, I longed for my elected one. I took a small apartment in the city and began spending time there. Though my relative ease and considerable celebrity could have opened any doors I wished, I found that all I wanted to do was muse on the bear I had once been. I wandered my old neighborhood. I went down to the docks and thought about distant parts of the world. I chased ducks in the park. I was older, fatter, and slower, but I still struck fear into their hearts. Of course, sometimes I stopped by the restaurant, which had long since mounted my portrait in a place of honor on the wall, and either amused myself by chopping scallions or cleaning fish, or sat at the front-room bar where they had had a special triple-strength stool set up in my honor. One day when I had Old-Fashioneds on my mind I walked in and found another bear in my place. From the back I could see he was a real monster and wondered if even a triple-strength stool would be able to hold him for long. Some distant cousin, I thought. Or a fan. I began to quietly backpedal but

before I could reach the door the behemoth twitched an ear, gave a sniff, started abruptly, and whipped around. My old friend! We roared, we growled, we laughed and embraced. I quickly commandeered the private room, gave instructions to keep the Old-Fashioneds coming, and we set to catching up. After high school he had drifted north and then west, as far as Alaska, where he spent years working both on and off shore for a fishing concern. He was always good at making money but, despite his quick wits, not at keeping it. Surrounded by figurative sharks, he was cheated, bilked, defrauded, and just generally, regularly, stolen from. Times at times had been terribly hard. Addiction had been part of his journey. He had spent years stumbling in and out of rehab. During one of these stints, he had fallen in with a Russian used car salesman who convinced him to try his luck on the Volga. Though he wouldn't go into any detail about that experience he did point grimly to the swathes of hair he was missing, and which I hadn't wanted to mention. His escape had taken him ever farther west, through many a harrowing situation, and for some years he had despaired of ever being able to leave the French refugee encampment he had washed up in. Only a terrible fire and his innate ability to lose himself in a nearby forest long enough to stow away on a ship bound for Halifax had saved him. His years in eastern Canada had been good ones. Decent, honest, if anything but glorious. Through stupendous luck he had managed to acquire a pharmacist's license and for the past five years, up to his recent retirement, he had very happily filled prescriptions. It was his savings that had allowed him to purchase a customized RV and travel. The idea of looking in on me had often occurred to him over the years. Indeed, during the dark days first in Russia then in Kazakhstan, it was thoughts of me and of our early friendship that had sustained him. He had followed the highlights of my career, my many successes, my philanthropic work. Indeed, in his meager pensioner's wallet, as he showed me, he had a neatly folded though time-worn clipping of my very first profile in a national paper. Tears filled my eyes. I asked him why he had never contacted me, said how happy I would have been to help him. If he had been a human, he might have blushed. I told him it didn't matter. I said we were together now. I told him about the docks, about the park with its trees and ducks. I said we could fight like we used to. That even if he had grown so gigantic I had learned a few tricks over the years that might keep things fair. He laughed politely at all this. Even, at one point, patted my paw. The ensuing remarks about rheumatism, conflict aversion after so much trauma and, most tellingly, a parking meter that was set to expire on his RV, were paper-thin cover for an embarrassment that clearly plunged far below the surface. For fear of further upsetting him, I did not propose sending someone out with the parking tokens we kept on hand at the restaurant any more than I offered to make him an appointment with one of my many specialists (I had my own aches and pains to contend with) or perhaps even the therapist who had done me so much good. But during his years as a pharmacist he had earned, it was clear to me, the one thing which my good wishes might best damage: his dignity. We were both drunk, I considerably more than he, when we made our farewells and slurred out promises to see each other soon. I left the city the next day convinced I would never see him again. This has so far proved true. Every now and again I pick up the phone and dial the number he gave me but it always goes straight to voicemail. Curiously, this state of affairs has been wonderfully soothing. While I have formally left the company, I have the right, in perpetuity, to inhabit these woods. And like the poet "I lean and loafe at my ease . . ." So much ease. My therapist chalks it up in large part to longing that has been usefully assuaged. Now, if I have understood her correctly, my old friend can be both absent *and* present in his absence. One of the happiest side effects of this turn of events is that the sous-chef and I have become close again. Always in the past the specter of my old friend and what he might one day again come to mean to me had stood between us. Sometimes he even visits to overnight with me in the cave I call home, for it is warm and dry and very cozy. Everything is above board, by the way. We are far too old for friskiness and this is not that kind of tale. Anyway, mostly of course I'm alone. And the taste of this solitude, my friends, is delicious.

Hiroko Oyamada

Discoveries

translated by David Boyd

NORI HAS JUKU, Yo's whole family is out of town, Maki isn't home, my brother doesn't want me around (as usual), and now Morimorimorimo's got juku on Saturdays, too? The sweet olive flowers in Morimo's garden smelled like they were on the way out. They have a nice smell early on, but they kind of stink when they start falling and turning brown, almost like a pear or apple core that's been left out on the cutting board, and even if it hasn't actually gone bad yet it definitely isn't good—at least that's how they always smell to me—"Nanami-chaaan!" It was Saturday afternoon, and I was riding my bike, still trying to wrap my head around the idea that even Morimo was at juku, when I heard a voice behind me. I tried glancing over my shoulder as I pedaled, but I started losing my balance so I had to put my feet down. The bike my parents bought me a couple of weeks ago was a little too big; even with the seat all the way down I could only reach the ground when I was on my tiptoes. Fifth grade? Then I'd recommend going with this one, she'll be able to ride it all the way through middle school. A bright-red bike pulled up next to me and came to a sudden stop. "Where ya goin', Nanami-chan?" It was Yamadate, one of the girls from my class. "Oh, hey, Yamadate-san . . ." We were right across from West Park, and behind the trees I could hear a bunch of voices—talking, laughing, shouting—and a metallic ree-ree-ree-ree! The chains on the swings twisting around, I thought. If you hold the part you sit on and turn yourself around and around, when you lift your feet off the ground you start spinning super fast. We weren't allowed to do it at school—because you can end up going really, really fast, and if you're aiming for that kind of speed, you're definitely leaning off the seat, which makes it way more dangerous—not that the kids who did that cared if it was allowed or not. The other day, one of the younger kids at my school flew off the swing, landed face-first, and broke a tooth. Could have been worse, though. It was just a baby tooth. "You goin' to the park?" Yamadate was smiling right at me. "Me? No . . ." She was a little taller than I was, and skinny. She had fairish skin, and freckles all over her nose and cheeks. That day, she had her hair in tails. I wouldn't call Yamadate pretty or ugly, but I guess she was above average.

The rounded letters on her yellow sweatshirt said HAPPY HAPPY, which made her seem three grades younger than she was. "Hey, Nanami-chan, your house is the white one by the Circle S, right?" Yeah, but why do you know that, I thought as I wrinkled my nose. It's not like we've ever hung out together, and she's definitely never come over, so why does she know where I live? I guess sometimes when you hang out with other kids they go, "See that house? That's where so-and-so lives," or maybe we have siblings in the same grade, or maybe our parents talked at a PTA meeting? I had no idea where Yamadate lived, and I didn't want to know. We barely spoke at school, but she was calling me "Nanami-chan" like she thought we were the best of friends. The other girls in our class kept their distance from her, but Yamadate never noticed, which made it, I dunno, kind of worse. Then again, she always seemed happy, and the teachers liked her. Matsushiman and Yokoi gave her little jobs to do, then heaped praise on her. They weren't even big jobs or anything—just erasing the blackboard when the monitor wasn't around, or going to get a rag when somebody had an accident—but she always did them with a smile. "They have the best prices, huh?" "Circle S?" "Especially on Wednesdays, right?" "Wednesdays, yeah . . ." On Circle Saver Wednesdays, there are twice as many shoppers as any other day of the week. Plus, they blast their jingle over the parking lot speakers all day long: Circle S, Circle S, where S marks the spot! Yes! Mom never goes on Wednesdays. She says no discount is worth those crowds. Besides, she says, they knock the prices up first, so you aren't actually saving that much. "I love the korokke on Wednesdays, don't you?" "Korokke?" "Yeah! The potato ones? Fifty yen off when you get four of them," "Oh . . ." "I'm heading to my dad's house now!" "Okay . . ." My toes were starting to get numb, so I tilted the bike to one side, away from Yamadate, planting one foot on the ground and putting the other up on the pedal. When I did, Yamadate moved along with me, lifting off her seat and leaning in. "Did you know? My mom de-vorced my dad, and now he's living on his own," "Oh . . ." I did know. Mom came home from a meeting once and asked me what that girl Yamadate was like. Maki also mentioned one time how she'd heard Yamadate's dad had moved out. Then Yo said, "I wish my dad would move out, I hate him so much," and even Morimo started nodding. I got what they were saying, but wouldn't it be really hard with money and everything not having a dad at home? That's what I thought, but I didn't say anything, not even, "Oh, so that's why all the teachers are so nice to her." Whenever I think things like that, I keep them to myself. "I go to my dad's every Saturday after school," "Oh, cool," "Wanna come?" "I . . ." I was so taken aback that I literally recoiled, but I only had one foot on the ground, so the other one slipped, sending the pedals spinning and scraping my calf. "He's got a frog," "A frog?" "Yeah, he got it a little while back . . . a really big one!" Yamadate held her hands up like she was gripping a deflated ball, but the space between her hands was about as big as her face—way bigger than any frog I'd ever seen. She's got to be kidding, I thought, so I laughed and said, "Whoa, that is big!" "She's green, with black stripes, and covered in all these little bumps!" "Wow!" Sounds like a real monster. "Seriously, her eyes pop out, too. . . . You'll think she's super-cute, though . . . since you like frogs and all," "I what?" "Remember your summer project, the frog one?" "Oh, I . . ." Yamadate still had her hands up in the shape of a gigantic frog, looking at me through the space between her fingers, almost like she was pretending to look through a pair of binoculars. With her hands cupped around her eyes like that, I could tell that Yamadate's eyes were light brown, and anything but flat; they were round and bulging, with liquid inside them, and kind of freaky. Last year, for my summer project, I turned in a notebook called OBSERVATIONS OF A FROG. Why did Yamadate remember that, though? We weren't friends, and it's not like our teacher had anything positive to say about it, or like it won something at the city science fair. Anyway, I didn't have strong feelings about frogs one way or the other. "So does your dad like frogs?" I asked. Yamadate broke into a smile, then said, "He got this one from a friend!" Dad came home last year holding a plastic bag, saying he caught a frog on the way home. "Nana, check this sucker out! You should use this little guy for your

project." I didn't say yes, I didn't say anything at all, but he dug out the plastic case with the lime-green lid that we used to keep crickets in, poured in a little water, added a rock and some ripped-up grass and leaves, then dropped the frog in. "There you go, Froggo! Home sweet home." Dad was so excited he even bought me a notebook that said DISCOVERY DIARY and had a picture of golden sunflowers on the cover. The pages inside were blank on the top so you could draw pictures, and ruled on the bottom so you could write about what you drew, with a space on the right for the day's date. It was pretty much a sketch diary, but it had an extra section called DISCOVERIES. "Keep a close eye on him and see what you can learn!" Dad said as he went into the house, leaving me outside with the case. The frog was green, with golden eyes, horizontal pupils, and brown markings on its cheeks. I opened the discovery diary to the first page and drew the frog from above and from the side. It didn't move the whole time. I could see its throat kind of quivering, but that was all. Even when I took the lid off, even when I got right up next to it to observe it through the plastic, the frog never made a jump for it. Its back legs were tucked in, folded up, and when I looked down from above, I couldn't see its legs at all. Its backside was pointy, kind of like a chickpea, and its round eyes bulged. It looked like it was going to be sticky and slimy, but it was actually pretty dry when I touched it. I could feel its skin shifting over its tiny bones. Even then, the frog didn't budge. There was a line, a groove, running down its back. That had to be its spine. I watched the frog sit on the gray rock for a while, wondering if it might change color, then Dad came back out, picked it up, guffawed and said, "Hmm, no wee-wee! No lady parts either. Bwahaha!" Hanging in the air with its legs all stretched out, the frog looked like it didn't have any bones—like it was made of slime or maybe some kind of jelly. It was as if the joints in the frog's legs had melted away, but I could see its toe pads, perfectly round at the end of each toe. I tried counting them to see how many toes it had, but Dad kept laughing and swinging the frog around, so I couldn't. After a while, he tossed the frog back into the case, where it landed with a plop. Then, with one swift movement, the frog darted from one end of the case to the other. "Whoa," Dad muttered, plucking the frog off the rock again and dropping it back into the water. Same as the first time, it shot across the case with a single kick. When the frog was in the water, its legs didn't look limp at all. It didn't even use its arms, or front legs, I guess, holding them up against its body. How does that work? When I do the breaststroke, my arms do way more work than my legs. Dad dropped the frog into the case, over and over, until eventually he lost interest. This time, when he left, he didn't go back inside. He headed down the street instead. But what am I supposed to feed it? Bugs? Live ones? Does it eat them straight out of the air? On tv and in magazines, I'd seen frogs shoot out their long pink tongues to snatch up flies. Would it eat a fly? Maybe a mosquito? How am I supposed to catch one of those anyway? I could catch a mosquito with a belly full of blood, I thought, but the idea of feeding the frog a mosquito that had probably fed on me grossed me out a little. I ended up catching a tiny moth about the size of my pinky nail, which was still sort of gross, and put it in the frog's case, but when I dropped it in, it didn't fly normally, like maybe it had a bad wing. It slammed itself into the plastic wall again and again until it finally dropped into the water with a little splash, its scales spreading over the surface like oil. Meanwhile, the frog didn't so much as glance at the struggling moth. It stayed right where it was, only its jaw kept trembling. I dug into a corner of the garden, found an earthworm, and dangled it in front of the frog's face, but that didn't work either. The frog just turned away, apparently annoyed. After that, I found a piggyback grasshopper, one of the little ones that rides on a bigger one's back, and threw it in the case, but that didn't turn out any better. It hopped off the rock and escaped. "Dinner time?" Dad came back with another plastic bag, this time from the convenience store. "What," he said as he put the bag down, "he won't let you feed him?" Then he grabbed the frog with one hand and used the thumb and forefinger on his other hand to squeeze its mouth open. "This trick works on dogs, too." I was surprised by how pink it was inside the frog's mouth. It was all wet, with no teeth, just a big bulge in the middle—its tongue? But even

when Dad cut the worm into pieces with a pair of tweezers and stuffed it into the frog's mouth, it wouldn't swallow. The frog just kind of thrashed its arms—or, you know, its front legs—while its back legs dangled there. With a click of his tongue, Dad put the frog back on the rock in the case, but it was too late: its mouth wouldn't shut. A chunk of worm was hanging out, with something green and muddy-looking dribbling out of the end. "What's the deal?" Dad laughed. The frog was moving its face awkwardly, like its bones, its jaws, were damaged. Or broken? Later on, when Dad took his bath, I took the frog out of its case, found the part of our yard that looked the dampest, put it down, then poured water all around it. I watched the frog for a little while, but it didn't go anywhere. It sat there with its legs tucked in, just like before, but this time when I looked down at it from above, maybe because of what had happened to its mouth, it didn't look like a chickpea anymore; it was misshapen, twisted to one side with its backbone bent. I wondered if it was going to be able to survive on its own like this, but when I checked the same spot in the morning, it was gone—it was nowhere. I told Dad that, when I came out, I found the case on its side with the top off and the frog was missing. He just cracked up and said it had to be one of the neighborhood cats. I hadn't observed the frog well enough to write my report, so after that I got Mom to take me to the library to borrow a book on amphibians. I copied some of the pictures into my notebook and summarized what I read. The male frog uses its call to attract the female. When it does, its throat inflates, but in some species, it's their cheeks that inflate. Frogs have four toes on their forelegs and five on their hindlegs. They hibernate in the winter. Some species are edible. While frogs have smooth, slimy skin, toad skin is dry and warty. That's when it occurred to me. If you're going to do a summer project on a live animal you should probably choose one you're actually interested in and get everything you need to be prepared ahead of time. A boy wearing shorts, maybe a first-grader, came running out of the park with his knees red and bloody-looking, but he had a giant smile on his face as he sped away, swinging his arms like crazy. "Your dad got a frog . . . as a present?" "Well, the frog used to belong to his friend, but she couldn't keep her anymore, so he's holding onto her," "Holding onto her?" "Yeah, Dodoko," "Do-do-ko?" "Uh-huh, that's the frog's name. My dad's friend is Tomoko-san," Tomoko . . . Dodoko. "But Nanami-chan, you like frogs, right?" The way Yamadate was looking at me, I didn't feel like I could say, Oh no, that whole project was my dad's idea. But this is what Yamadate does. It makes me so—"I love watching her eat! It's so cool!" "Wait, what do you feed it? Live bugs?" Yamadate shook her head. In the light of the sun, her hair looked brown at the tips. "Nope. Tuna," "Tuna?!" "Yup, I hold up a chunk of raw tuna and shake it a little, then Dodoko gobbles it up. Her mouth opens up real wide and the tuna just disappears!" Raw fish . . . "Wanna see? C'mon, let's go!" Yamadate plopped back onto her seat and started to pedal. When she did, I heard a tiny bell: dee-dee. "Follow me!" I got back on my seat, then stepped on the pedals. The first couple of seconds with this bike were always a little scary—I knew I should have gone with the one with the whatever-inch wheels, the bike that was one size up from my old one—but I gripped the handlebars and pushed on the pedals, and once I got into rhythm I felt as stable as I used to on my old bike. On this one, I felt like I was seeing the world from a lot higher up. . . . I'm still going to get taller, right? I really, really hope so. Maybe eight more inches? At least six? When do people stop growing? What grade? In middle school? High school? Yamadate rode down the street next to the park, past Panda Cleaners, past the community center with the haunted toilets, then headed down a residential street. We were still in our school zone, but I didn't usually come this way. I didn't have any friends who lived over here. I thought I could smell gingko, but there weren't any gingko trees around. "—know what I mean?" I heard Yamadate say from ahead, but I couldn't hear what she'd said before that, so I didn't say anything back. Blithely, she made a turn onto a small street with no sidewalk, her bike dropping down onto the road with another dee-dee! It was a red bell dangling from the lock on her bike. Yamadate slowed down so we were riding next to each other, then looked to the side and said, "See that blue building?" There was a two-story apartment building—square and blue,

small but pretty-looking. "That's my grandpa's," "The whole building is?" "Famille Yamadate," "Famille Yamadate . . ." "It's an old building, but Grandpa just had it painted. Looks great, huh? Rent's cheap, too. That's why it's so popular!" "Oh," "I'm gonna get my own room there when I get into high school," "Seriously?" Three or four doors down from Famille Yamadate was a house that had a small yard overgrown with weeds, and in the yard was a white dog with its paws up on the fence, barking wildly, so Yamadate shouted G'MORNING, PES! It wasn't morning, though. "That dog's name is Pes?" "I dunno, but don't you think he looks like a Pes?" Grrr, rawh, rawh rawh. Pes was wearing a red collar, looking kind of unhappy, but his tail was wagging. Maybe a dog wagging its tail doesn't actually mean it's happy? Fruit had fallen off some branches hanging over the fence and been smashed flat on the road. Persimmons. The bits of flesh looked slick and glossy, and seeds covered in orange gel were scattered everywhere. There were all these strange leaves on the ground, too . . . They had red, green, and black splotches and were full of holes. We swerved so we didn't hit them. There was a tiny stream by the side of the road, which had a bunch of what looked like grains of rice lining the bottom, and sweet olive flowers floating along the surface that must have come from somewhere upstream. "My name's actually Aikawa now . . . my mom's maiden name," Yamadate said as she kept biking. "Really?" "I didn't want to change my name before graduation, so I asked if I could stay as Yamadate. . . . Oh, hey, this is my grandpa's house." Yamadate stopped suddenly and turned toward the gate. It was a huge black gate with a hand-carved nameplate that read YAMADATE. I stopped, too, putting one foot down and keeping the other on my bike. NO SOLICITING and BEWARE OF DOG. "What kind of dog does your grandpa have?!" "Oh, that sign's been there forever, since before I was born!" Beyond the huge gate was a huge house, and a garden with topiary pines and chrysanthemums. "Wow, your grandpa's house is really big," "You think so?" I mean, if he owns that blue building we saw earlier, too, doesn't that make him rich? "My dad's apartment isn't far from here, just a little more," Yamadate said as she started riding again. "Does your grandpa own that building, too?" I asked as I chased after her. "No, my dad pays rent. My grandpa said he was wasting money, but that was what he wanted," "Oh . . ." Maybe they didn't get along? But, if that was true, why not move farther away? Why move into a place only a bike ride away? No, wait, I guess then he wouldn't be able to see his daughter . . . "Anyway, you know how when they take attendance I'm always the last one they call? If I'm Aikawa, I'm gonna be right at the top!" "That's true . . ." Akiyama was always first in our class, but not if we had an Aikawa. "My report card and all that stuff already says Aikawa, not Yamadate, but when the teacher takes attendance he still calls me by my old name . . ." "Wow," "Yeah, he said he was happy to do it, but what about when we graduate? You know how they print out those things that have our names on them?" "Diplomas?" "Yeah, those! I wonder which name they're going to put on mine. . . . We don't change homerooms between fifth and sixth grade, right? So, if I'm Aikawa, I'm gonna be the first student in our whole year!" "Oh, good point," "I hope that doesn't happen. . . . I've always been right at the end. I want to keep using my old name, but I don't know, think they'll let me?" "Hmm, good question." Matsushiman might be okay with it, but what about the principal? He doesn't have that much hair left. I'd seen graduations on tv shows before, where they call all the students up to collect their diplomas, one at a time, but are we seriously going to do that with everyone in our grade? How long would that even take? Four or five boys in our grade but not from our class came toward us on bikes, all of which were black with bulky gear shifters and no baskets up front. I was worried they were going to say something to us, not that they did—then, right when we passed each other, the boys started whooping and laughing wildly. Among the laughter, I thought I heard them say "that blubber girl"—or maybe "that other girl"? Just ignore them, I told myself, no matter what they say or do, but Yamadate turned around. Of course. Of course she did. The boys were really far from us now, but their voices got louder again, "—er girl, whatchu lookin' at?" It was like they were tethered to us, boomeranging back. "One of those boys was Hisamitsu-kun, right?" There was something kind of

excited in Yamadate's voice. "I'm not sure." But I was. He was right at the front, with a black baseball hat on. He wore that a lot these days. "We went to preschool together," "Oh yeah?" "He was so tiny back then . . . Like a girl," "Really?" "Then he got all tall when he started playing soccer. . . . Where do you think they're going?" "To hang out?" "At the park?" "No idea. . . ." We took turn after turn but didn't cross a single traffic light. We passed a rice shop, a liquor shop, and a shop where I couldn't tell what they sold. "That place sells everything," "Everything?" "Yeah, dish scrubbers, batteries, different kinds of bread . . . They even have some snacks . . . Not that many, though. This is it, where my dad lives." The building was set back from the road a little. "Our bikes go over here," Yamadate said, getting off and wheeling hers the rest of the way. The building looked old—and not in the same way as the blue apartment building from before. This one looked seriously old. The handrail on the staircase was blue, but it was brownish red in places where it had rusted and the paint was peeling off, and there were streaks of brown and light green going down the walls. "This is where he lives?" "Uh-huh, upstairs. He used to live with me and my mom at my grandpa's house, but this is where he is now," "Mmm . . ." So the whole family lived together in one big house, then her dad moved into this tiny place after the divorce, and Yamadate and her mom moved out of her grandpa's house, too. At the same time, they're all so close to each other that Yamadate can ride her bike between all three. I thought about saying something like "Sounds really tough," but I decided not to. Yamadate parked her bike next to the adult-sized bikes and motorcycles (mopeds, maybe? I don't know what the difference is) and locked it with a little dee-dee! Getting a better look at her red bell, I could see it had a face. A Daruma. I put my bike right next to hers. "Your bike's really big, Nanami-chan," "Oh, yeah," "I like the color a lot. You like blue?" "Mmm, I guess so," "My dad's in room 203," Yamadate said as she headed up the peeling blue stairs. Following her up, I could see the bottoms of her sneakers as she stepped on red flakes of rust that looked like fish scales, crushing them into little bits. Right at the top of the stairs was a toppled-over toy car, the kind that has a seat and a tiny wheel in the front for a kid, and a long handle on the back so an adult can push when the kid isn't using their feet. It was round and faded, but it was still red, a fire engine. There was a white plastic drying rack up against the rail, hanging at an angle with a single skinny towel dangling down from the clips. At the bottom of the towel it said KOTOBUKI upside-down. I saw an old peach can with a mound of cigarette butts inside, a potted aloe, a kalanchoe, a jade plant, a pogo stick, a frisbee. "My dad's room is over here." There were three doors upstairs, meaning there were only three units, but the amount of stuff cluttering the walkway made it look like there could have been five or six families at least. 203—the room farthest from the stairs—no nameplate. Yamadate walked right up to the door and tried to pull it open, but she couldn't. "It's locked," "You don't have the key?" "It's never locked. Cause he knows, every week, I . . . Daddyyy," Yamadate knocked. The door sounded lighter than it looked, like there wasn't anything inside. Nocnoc. "What if you ring the bell?" The button next to the door had a little music note with a curly tail on it. "My dad took off the part that makes it ring," "He took it off?" Are you even allowed to do that? "He says he hates being interrupted," "Oh," "Daddyyy! I brought a friend!" nocnocnoc, noc. I walked past Yamadate to the side of the building and looked over the rail. We were one story up, so it should have been around the same height as my balcony at home, but the ground seemed a whole lot closer from here—maybe because there was a big gap between the rail and the panel below it, which only came to the top of my legs. I could see the ridged plastic roof over the place where we parked our bikes and a dirty rag clinging to the ridges. I got the feeling that rag had been there for a really long time. The wind must have picked it up at some point and dropped it on the roof, but how long had it been up there? Why hadn't another gust of wind picked it up and carried it somewhere else? nocnocn'noc "Daddy . . . Daddyyy . . ." "Maybe he isn't home?" I said as I leaned over the rail and looked at the wall on the side of the building. There was a window that stuck out a little, and I could see something inside. The glass was frosted, with dark wire crisscrossing in diamonds, so I couldn't see in that well, but I could

see some color moving around—a person? Yamadate's dad? Just then, something landed on the glass. No. It was five things, small and round, lined up like a bunch of suckers, but little by little the flesh-colored dots grew longer, meaning they had to be fingers, the five fingers of an adult hand up against the other side of the window. . . . "Maybe my dad's taking a nap?" "A nap . . . ?" Then the raised part of a left palm appeared in the window, pressing against the glass, quivering a little. I noticed my hands getting slick with sweat, and I shivered. That's . . . That's— "I guess . . . I shouldn't wake him up, right?" I could hear a tremble in Yamadate's voice, and when I turned back to look at her, her eyes were big, brown, and wet, and getting bigger by the second when the door where the toy car was opened up and a brownish old lady popped her head out, looked at us, then shut the door with a slam. I looked at the window again. The hand was still there, pressed against a slightly different part of the window. I wiped my hands on the legs of my jeans. Then the door to room 201 opened again, and the big brownish woman with brownish hair stepped out and came toward us. She smelled like cigarettes and sweet flowers. In her hand, she had a white, lumpy-looking plastic bag. As she held the bag out toward Yamadate, the woman said, "Look at you, you're crying!" The water that had been making Yamadate's eyes bulge was trickling down now, one big drop after another, leaving gray circles like stains on her yellow sweatshirt. "Why are you two fighting?" the woman asked, looking at me now. I shook my head, and Yamadate said we weren't. Her voice sounded pretty perky, but it was still shaking. The woman walked back to the opposite end of the walkway and plucked the KOTOBUKI towel off the rack. In the gutter in the far corner, I could see rust and paint flakes, dust bunnies, leaves, and hair, BBs, and I don't know what but something white that looked like little pieces of eggshell. The woman came back over and wiped Yamadate's face. "It's okay," Yamadate said, "I'm okay." Her voice was still bright, still shaking. "You can keep the towel, sweetie." Now she held the bag out toward me. "And for you . . . ," I didn't know what else to do, so I took it. My hands felt really clammy, so I wiped them on my jeans, one hand then the other, switching the plastic bag from my right hand to my left. It was heavier than I thought it would be, and really wrinkled, like it had been used over and over and over. Inside were red and orange persimmons, lots of them, covered in little spots where they'd probably been damaged by bugs. The spots were ringed in black or red or white—some of them looking kind of like eyes. "You'll like 'em, trust me. The house they come from has a river running right by it, so they're sweet as can be. Persimmons love water!" "Uh-huh," "Don't worry about the marks. You can pick those parts off and eat the rest. Don't throw them away, okay?" "Okay . . ." The woman patted Yamadate on the back. "203, right? That's your . . . dad, isn't it?" "Uh-huh. It's locked, though . . ." "I see, I see," the woman said, giving me a quick, firm nod over Yamadate's downturned head. I nodded back without thinking. "Well, you'll see him next time," she said, giving Yamadate another gentle pat on the back. "Everything'll be okay. Don't cry. Just go home and have some of those persimmons." Yamadate took a breath, let it all out, lifted her head, then walked off slowly, towel in her hand. I followed. As I stepped down onto the first step, I looked back toward room 203. The door was still closed. The woman nodded at me again. I almost lost my footing, and without realizing what I was doing I reached over to grab the handrail. A big flake of blue paint came off and stuck to my palm, but when I looked down it was all rusty red. "Hey," I said as I stopped on the bottom step. When Yamadate turned around, her face looked kind of splotchy, pink in places and weirdly yellowish in others. Her freckles were darker, and her eyes were red and puffy. I remembered my discovery diary with all those empty pages. "If you want to . . . let's hang out again next Saturday," I said with a smile as I wiped my sweaty hands on my jeans again. Every time I did, the little bits of rust prickled, but I couldn't stop. Yamadate looked at my mouth for a while, then smiled back and said, "Oh, me too."

Kaori Fujino

To Abuse a Monster

translated by Laurel Taylor

RUMORS ARE FLYING. Apparently the monster is on the verge of death. But that's what people always say.

We pull our cotton dresses over our heads and lace up our thigh-high boots. In every house, mothers look on dumbfounded.

"Again?"

"Yeah."

"I can't believe girls these days."

The mothers act like they think their daughters going off to abuse the monster is a bad thing. A perfectly reasonable attitude. But on the inside, they all think it's a good thing, probably. Besides, it's not like the mothers don't want to beat the monster themselves. They're thinking, If we had half a chance, we'd thrash the beast all the time.

The truth is that since they were little, the mothers have been secretly attacking the monster, hiding their actions from the men. They snuck out of their houses alone in the dead of night. If one of them ran into a man on the way to the monster's glen, she ran back home so the man wouldn't discover what the girls were up to, but if she ran into another girl, they'd exchange a knowing look and silently join forces to mount the assault.

The mothers and all the generations of women before them never made their campaigns against the monster public knowledge. At night, the girls worked together, listening to each other's labored breathing, but in the light of day, if they happened to meet, they exchanged only the blandest of greetings. Common sense dictated that it was improper for women to do things like beat a monster. In spite of the fact that men brazenly formed militias, went to the glen, and once they were done, proudly and loudly recounted every detail, describing how the hunt had gone and how precisely they'd injured the creature.

That women covertly abused the monster was, in fact, an open secret, but there was a tacit understanding that everyone should at least pretend they didn't. At least, not normal women. While men whipped the monster to their hearts' content, normal women washed the blood-stained clothes; quivered as men recounted their heroic struggles; furrowed their brows, shook their heads, and remarked that men just couldn't help themselves; then they folded the clean

laundry into neat stacks. So the men could renew their assault whenever they liked.

And unbelievably, when the mothers could no longer resist the impulse, they'd go out alone on cat's paws. They didn't want their husbands, their sons, or even us, their daughters, to know what they were doing.

What a joke. As if we wouldn't notice.

We younger women don't hide our monster assaults. We beat the beast whenever we want to, setting out together, chatting as loudly as we please as we make for its glen. We don't *need* to be in groups to act. You can go alone if you're in the mood, but it's more fun to go together, so mostly we gang up. Not furtively in the dead of night, but in broad daylight with a spring in our step. The boys never call us out for it. No "What do you think you're doing? You're a girl!" In fact just the opposite—some boys and girls even go together. Our mothers might be taken aback, but to us, it's not strange at all.

Our matching boots and cotton dresses are the outfits we've chosen for our monster abuse adventures. Like a uniform. No single person decided—we arrived at these outfits out of practicality. Because the dresses slip on over our heads, there aren't any ties or fasteners, which makes them easy to move in. The cotton is sturdy enough to stand up to hundreds of washes in the heavy-duty cycle. We each choose the color that best suits us. Besides, the dresses get splattered in all sorts of neon-bright monster blood. The blood stains show up well against black, and they're just as eye-catching against white. Gray, red, and beige are nice too. Dress colors tend to trend in waves—you might see a group of girls all wearing the same green-blue dresses, laughing with embarrassment because they chose the same outfit.

And then the boots. The boots are usually black, but that's just because black boots are the easiest to come by, and they go with any color dress. The ones with laces that you can bind to your legs are best. The monster is in the woods. The woods are full of mud, and what's more, monster blood is slippery. You have to be able to take a good firm stance when you're at work, and you should be wearing something that guards against stray pebbles or sticks or blood or monster bits. The boys wear the same sort of boots.

When we feel like we need to go out and hurt something, we run home from school, toss our bags aside, and undress. We slip on our monster-beating dresses, yank our boots out from under the bed, and put them on, lacing them tight.

"Again?" the mothers ask. "How about a snack first. At least have a little juice before you go."

"Thanks," we say, draining our glasses in the blink of an eye.

"Honestly, girls these days. Back in my day . . ."

"Yeah, yeah. You've told us a million times. We're sick of it."

"But it might not be good for you. You all go out so often, beating and battering . . ."

We feel the urge to jump in with "Weren't you out there just last week?" The mothers don't always succeed in hiding their forays. But we usually pretend we haven't noticed. Even if the mothers knew that we knew, we'd all pretend we didn't. If the mothers want to act like they haven't seen the monster in ages, we'll respect their wishes.

So what we say instead is "We're fine, really. There's nothing to worry about."

"Really? People are saying the monster is on the verge of death."

"But they've said that before, right? Those rumors were flying around even when you were a kid."

"Well yes, but—"

"So nothing's really changed. Seriously, we're okay."

"I suppose so . . ."

"Bye!"

We pick up our weapons of choice—axes, knives, hammers, ropes, whips, chainsaws, bottles of poison, syringes, crossbows, bolt cutters, blowtorches, branding irons stylized with smiley faces or cat paws or our own initials—and we're off. Behind us every mother calls out, each voice tinged with laughter, "Don't go killing the beast now, you hear?" We turn back, wave our lethal weapons, and then dash off, skirts fluttering.

We meet at the designated spot and casually check each other's weapons. What did you pick for today, did anyone bring a new weapon, what horrible things are you planning to do with *that*? Then we head into the forest, laughing and joking. Sometimes we even sing.

As we grow more excited, we begin to daydream about the monster, though we don't describe what we imagine. It's more fun to go in a big group than alone, and this is why. Our wild, joyful voices, brimming with youth. The monster can probably hear us coming. At first it might think it misheard. But we grow louder and louder. So loud the beast can no longer doubt what's coming. Like sunlight as the clouds part, rays filtering through the leaves, our voices reach the monster, first in narrow shafts, then stretching wider and longer and stronger. We imagine how it looks as it realizes we are approaching, its expression of despair and terror.

Wait for us, our monster, we're coming. We're nearly there.

We summon our youthful spirits and raise our voices even higher, as though trying to fill the forest with sound.

THE MONSTER IS IMPRISONED in a meadow that forms an abrupt and perfect ellipse in the middle of the forest.

The monster is huge, the meadow almost completely filled by the hillock of its body. It is bound in chains with links as big around as our wrists, and the chains in turn are anchored to thick tree trunks in every direction.

The monster was discovered and captured long ago when our ancestors first wandered into this land and built their village.

According to legend, it was so hideous, so disgusting, that it filled the people with fear and confusion, hatred and rage. That's when the brave, bold men rose up to discipline the beast. Sadly for the men, the beast hardly resisted—it lost all will to fight and, quaking and dejected, accepted its chains. At first, the chains were secured by stakes driven deep into the earth. To celebrate their triumph, our ancestors planted trees in an ellipse around the beast. Eventually those trees grew into a small but elegant forest, and it was decided that our monster should be bound to the trunks instead.

Ever since then, the monster has taken our single-minded abuse, unable to offer any satisfactory resistance.

It survives by licking the morning dew, sipping the rainfall, and nibbling the grass within its reach. The monster does not die. It recovers from its wounds with terrifying speed. No matter the injury, it usually heals in a single night. Our monster is fiercely resilient.

But that resilience isn't the kind that could be used to rout us or take revenge or secure its freedom.

If it were, wouldn't the beast have broken free long ago? You can't say it hasn't had the chance. Every ten years, the chains have to be repaired and replaced. Of course in the hours before the work begins, volunteers from town diligently beat the monster, but it still has a few hours without its chains. And even the best chains begin to rust and disintegrate after about eight years. Still, the beast never tries to fight back—its fortitude is of a different kind. An endurance strong enough to barely survive a beating, and then withstand another.

That's why we abuse the creature. We're doing it a favor.

When the monster cowers, trembling and keening, that's its invitation to us. We batter it, and so do the boys. The men beat the monster to prove their manliness, and the mothers sneak off to assault it too. When women marry into our village, they timidly learn our methods of monster abuse, and when women who've married outside the village come for a visit, or when people return on holiday from school or work, they thrash the beast. Sometimes people who've heard of our village's reputation come just to assail our monster.

Of course we say we're doing it a favor, but this isn't some act of charity. We love our monster. We're grateful to it. Its existence doesn't enrich the town's wealth, but it does enrich our souls. Our monster teaches us the joys of ingenuity, the breath-taking pleasures of using our bodies to injure and maim another's body.

We're grateful to the ancestors who first captured our beast too, but we can't help but question certain aspects of their wisdom. Our monster hideous? Disgusting? How could they possibly have thought that?

But then again, maybe the ancients had different values. We don't feel the same.

Our monster is beautiful, stunning.

After stomping through rotting leaves, breaking through overgrowth, clambering over boulders,

kicking up mud, and leaping over fallen trees, when we at last lay eyes on the monster wrapped in warm, gentle daylight, our chests burst with feeling, and we sigh helplessly.

The monster is quivering. It hunches up under the chains, as though it would like to be even just a little bit farther from us. Its faint calls and cries seem to be begging us for a reprieve.

The monster resembles what you might call a dragon. Its neck is long, and it looks like a lizard that has sprouted wings. Its mouth is large and sharp-toothed. Its four paws are tipped in thick, deadly talons. Fleshy wings that look like thin tanned leather fan from its forepaws. A row of hard jagged fins line its spine, all the way down the long tail curled around its body.

But what makes the beast different from a dragon is the color and texture of its hide.

We've never seen a dragon, but they're probably brown or black or gray. Our monster, however, is pure white.

And dragons are supposed to be covered in granite-hard scales. Parts of our monster's body are scaly. But not every part.

Some places are covered in full white plumage like a swan, while other places are soft and furry like a rabbit, and still others are thin-skinned like a frog. Some parts have bouncy elastic skin, and others are covered with skin like tree bark or a carpet of moss. Our monster is a patchwork. Maybe the crooked, craggy silhouette created by the beast's motley skin was hideous to our ancestors. But if our monster were covered all over with rock-hard scales, imagine how backbreaking our assaults would be. Especially for weak girls like us.

We shake out our dresses and surround the monster.

The lengths of chain crisscrossing its body serve as our footholds, and we climb up and begin, swinging our axes down on the peaks of its dorsal fins. Fluorescent yellow blood arcs from the wound, and the beast wails. Its glossy black eyes well with tears.

The moment the monster opens its mouth to scream, we jam a thick tree limb in to hold its jaws open. It keens brokenly—*kaaa—haaa*.

It tries to shake its head, so we kick the sides of its face.

Those eyes reflect us as clearly as any mirror, so we sear them with a propane torch, holding the flame until they turn as white as the rest of the beast's body.

With wooden mallets and chisels, we carve beautiful flowers into the bark-like skin of its rear.

We seize the swan-like feathers on its hind legs in both hands and tear them out.

Its wings are crushed beneath the chains, and we stab through the membranes, hands firmly gripping the hilts of our knives, guiding the blades along the wing bones as we rip them back out.

We circle the beast, using bolt cutters to snap and rip out its claws and teeth.

Into the mouth forced open, we shoot arrows.

Into the mouth forced open, we pour noxious poison. We grumble about the poison. The girls performing delicate operations along the monster's body find its violent convulsions inconvenient.

We use acid to dissolve one of the beast's dorsal fins. Smoke billows upward, so white it threatens to outshine the monster's hide.

With a chainsaw, we sever the tip of its tail.

In the springiest parts at the base of its neck, we jam in billhooks.

From all quarters, blood dribbles and gushes. Fluorescent yellow, hot pink, electric blue, neon green, safety-vest orange, lurid purple. We don't know if the blood actually glows, but the white blood is so bright it's blinding.

As we bathe in the blood, we laugh and make merry, absorbed in our work.

On the right side of the monster's back, we discover a growth of kaiju bindweed, so we grasp it at the base where it grows from the skin, and with all our might slowly pull it free. The roots twine deeply into the flesh, so to keep them intact, we are careful, so careful. Blood spurts into our faces, and the monster gasps with pain and anguish.

Kaiju bindweed is planted on other parts of the beast, too. On its flanks, in the space between its eyebrows, in the shadows between its foretalons—the lucky girls who find the weed cheer as they uproot it. When we find some whose roots look undeveloped, we leave it alone.

Leaping down from the monster, we canvas the forest for more kaiju bindweed. We dig up any sprouts we find and bring them back. When we remove a plant raised in the monster's body, it's only polite to plant something fresh for the next troop (even if that next troop is us again). We split into groups to plant the grass in the beast. In fleshy places that are soft like moss or like a rabbit, we cut and hollow a space, and gently set the root ball in the wound, which we then stitch closed with needle and thread, leaving only the stalks exposed. In about a week's time, the roots will have pierced through and woven into and around the flesh.

With all our strength, we crack and shatter the hard parts, and tear and gouge the soft parts. We jam our branding irons in, cooking the meat.

The beast convulses from time to time, hacking up marbled fluorescent blood. Blood runs from its many wounds, its breathing growing so weak it seems ready to expire.

One by one, we kiss the monster on its nose and then go to rinse our hands, faces, and hair in the nearby spring.

"The monster was about to die on us."

"Yeah, I thought so too."

"You don't really think it would die, do you?"

"That's just a rumor, right?"

"A dumb rumor. Completely made up."

"I wonder who started it."

Hair still wet, dresses painted in violently fluorescent blood spatters, we make our way back home. The patterns the blood makes are so cool, we think it's a shame to wash them out. Some of the girls like the spatters so much that they stop mid-beating to drip blood over their dresses in an effort to make the patterns even cooler. But we know this isn't the last time, so when we get home, we give our dresses a proper wash.

Night, and we toss boots still dripping mud and blood under our beds, hang our dresses out our windows to dry, and go to sleep.

ON THE NIGHTS WE ABUSE OUR MONSTER, the dream we dream is always the same.

Our dream is identical. What about the mothers? They go to so much trouble to hide the fact that they beat the monster, so of course they wouldn't reveal their secret dreams to us. But we think they must see it, too.

In the dream, each of us is running alone, panicked, through the pitch-dark woods.

I am running with everything I have. Wearing the dress and boots I wear when I abuse the monster, I flee through the forest. Behind me they have begun the chase. I don't know who they are, but there are a lot of them. I know perfectly well what will happen to me if they catch me.

I run until I'm gasping, until it feels like my lungs will burst. In front of me there is a place that is slightly brighter. It is a place where the forest opens into an ellipse. Where our monster is chained. It must be brighter there because of the moonlight, the way it glints off the white beast.

I have to get there, I think.

I pass between the trees, their whippy branches hitting me, and emerge into the grassy clearing. The monster is not there like I had expected. Nothing is there. Just the short, soft grass. The moon directly overhead. I can't run anymore.

I stand motionless in the center, panting, heaving, and from the woods a crowd of people emerges and pounces on me.

Men and women both. They force me to the ground and swiftly remove my dress. It's easy to put on, but even easier to rip off. They take my boots, too. My underthings. I am completely naked.

My legs are yanked apart so violently that my hips dislocate. I scream in pain. But none of them relent. A man's member forces its way inside my vagina. Dirt and grass are stuffed in my mouth. My long hair is pulled in every direction until it rips free, sending waves of pain thrumming through my skull. The very skin of my scalp is torn from my head. My arms, too, are wrenched in opposite directions. My shoulders dislocate, my elbows are twisted until my arms break, my teeth and nose too are broken. One man's member pulls out only to be replaced by another and another. Other things too, not penises, are forced inside me. My breasts are crushed, my knees shattered, chunks of my sides and ankles and neck bitten off.

My eyeballs have already been crushed and plucked out, but this is a dream, so I can see with perfect clarity

the people crowding over and around my thin body. Looking down from the moon, I observe as my body is raped, carved with knives, and torn to shreds.

Though the crowd of people slaughtering me is huge, they are all of them dyed pitch-black with my blood.

Turned into bloody black shadows, the people finally grow tired. Heads drooping, they retreat into the forest.

My corpse is left behind.

No, I'm alive. As I peer down, I see the pieces of flesh I thought had been ripped away are somehow still attached to me, and I rise, exhaling frothy blood with each breath. I pick up my dress and slip it over my head. I jam my filthy feet in my boots and lace them with trembling fingers. The knots are loose, but I manage to stand. Body listing, feet dragging, vomiting blood and spittle, throat whistling with each breath, I walk.

As I walk, my gait grows steadier. The horrific pain gradually recedes. Breathing becomes easier. My posture grows straighter and taller. The blood and mud dry and flake off my skin.

I am all right, I think. Joy and confidence build within me until I am about to burst. I am all right. In spite of all this, I am all right. Look! No matter how cruel and outrageous your violence, you cannot crush me. You probably thought that once I was down, I would just give up. But here I stand, walking forward—no, not walking, I am running!

Hair flowing, skirt fluttering, I run through the pitch-dark forest. I throw up my smooth arms, knocking aside branches, and my boots kick off the ground. Brimming with pride, I sweep through the forest.

Soon I realize I can hear the pounding of many feet behind me. Apparently I am being chased. I flee. I run for my life. I know perfectly well what will happen to me if they catch me. Up ahead is a place that is slightly brighter. That is where the forest opens onto an elliptical clearing. Our beautiful monster's prison. But when I emerge onto the grass, nothing is there.

And repeat.

THE BOYS STROKE OUR HAIR and exclaim over how terrifying our dream is. "How horrible. We feel bad for you. Don't worry, no one's going to do anything like that to you."

But the dream doesn't make us uneasy, and we're not afraid to dream it either. It's just a dream, after all.

What we want to know is how the boys can so flippantly assure us that no one's going to hurt us. No one? What about you? You definitely won't do anything like that to me?

We stare at the boys. Just stare, without accusation. We're not trying to pick a fight with them.

Instead, we ask.

"What about you? What kinds of dreams do you have?"

The boys stay tight-lipped.

"We don't dream," they say. "On nights when we come home from beating the monster, we sleep like babies till morning."

We don't believe them. It's an obvious lie. If they think they can just keep avoiding the question forever, they've got another think coming.

We don't give up. The boys could burst into hysterics or squirm or sob, but we're not afraid of that.

At last the boys give up and begin to tell us.

Just like us, the boys all dream the same dream on nights after a beating.

This is their dream.

The boys, each one of them, running alone through the pitch-dark woods.

"Wait. That's just the same as ours."

"It's not," they say, pouting.

He is running with everything he has. Wearing the boots he wears when he abuses the monster, he runs through the forest. No one is chasing him. He wishes there was someone with him, even someone chasing him, horrible as that would be. Why is he all alone? Why must he go alone? As anxiety and despair threaten to overwhelm him, he races onward.

Soon, he sees a place in front of him that is slightly brighter. It is a place where the forest opens into an ellipse. Where our monster is chained. The light fills him with such relief that he wants to cry. It's all right, the rumors were false. The clearing couldn't be so bright if it were lit only by the moon. It must be the light glinting off the white beast, he's sure of it.

He must go there, must see proof, he thinks.

He passes between the trees, their whippy branches hitting him, and emerges into the grassy clearing.

The monster is there. Bound by chains, glowing with faint trails of fluorescent blood left from the last beating, eyes closed in slumber. Its fins rise and fall with the steady, slow rhythm of its breathing.

He circles the white, shining beast. Nods, satisfied: Look, I knew it, thank goodness, it wasn't dead after all. Who was it who said the monster would die tonight? He leans against the flank of the creature, and feels with his whole body the torrents of blood and oxygen circulating within.

I guess I'll go home. He straightens and turns his back on the monster.

At that very moment, though, the world suddenly darkens around him, even though he's still in the clearing. Maybe a cloud has passed in front of the moon. But when he looks up, the moon is shining coolly, not a cloud in the sky.

It is then that the wretched scent of rotting flesh assails him. Fearfully, he turns back.

He bears witness as the monster turns black, the putrefaction spreading from its dorsal fins downward. As its color changes, it loses its beastly form and begins to crumble and collapse.

"You wouldn't believe the smell. Have you ever smelled a smell in a dream? We haven't. Except in this one."

Careful not to touch the monster's rotting, dripping flesh, he walks backward into the forest. He trips over something, a tree root maybe, and tumbles down onto his rear. He scrambles to his feet and flees through the forest and back to the town. There, the men are waiting, and though his breathing is ragged and he cannot speak, they press in around him, asking "How was it?"

Gasping, he collapses and finally manages: "D-dead, dead. Our monster is gone. All dark . . ."

Here, something strange happens. Though he is the boy reporting the monster's death, he is also one of the people in the crowd who cannot accept that the monster could possibly be dead.

The men consult amongst themselves and decide they should send someone into the forest to check. Though there are many boys there, he, the one who cannot believe what he's hearing, is given the task.

He races off. Runs with everything he has. Wearing the boots he wears when he abuses the monster, he runs through the forest. He wishes there was someone with him. Why is he all alone? Why must he go alone? As anxiety and despair threaten to overwhelm him, he races onward.

And repeat.

"Wow," we say to the boys, exclaiming over how terrifying their dream is. "But don't worry, the monster isn't dead. If you like, we can go check, and maybe abuse the monster while we're at it."

So that's it, we think. The men must have been the ones spreading the rumor that the monster is going to die somehow, the same rumor our mothers heard, that all the generations before us heard.

The boys lean on us. We hold them close and stroke their hair.


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Fish and Bird

Fish What is it like to swim in the air?

Bird I guess it's more or less the same as flying in the water.

Fish Maybe you're right. By the way, I love your songs.
They're so beautiful. I wish I could sing, too.

Bird It's not so hard. Why don't you give it a try? I'll show you how.
Repeat after me: *pqrpqrpqrpqrpqr, ppq, qqr*...

Fish *xyzxyzxyzyz, xxy, zzx*... No, I'm no good!

Bird That's not bad at all. Try again: *pqrpqrpqrpqr*...

Fish *fghfghfghfgah*... I'm hopeless!

Bird One more time: *pqrpqrpqrpqr*...

Fish *jkljkljkljkl*... No, I can't do it.

Bird Don't give up! Look, it's getting late. I must go home.
Let's do it again tomorrow.

Fish Could we? That would be nice. Thank you.

Bird Good night, Fish.

Fish Good night, Bird.

Midori Osaki

A Night in Anton's Basement

translated by Asa Yoneda and David Boyd

From Tōhachi Kōda's travel notebooks

In times of happiness, the heart is drawn to bitter poetry; in times of suffering, the mind seeks sweet dreams. This characterizes the perverse type of the schizo-psychological condition.

From Kyūsaku Tsuchida's handwritten booklet The Celestial, the Terrestrial, the Subterranean

In the sky—setting aside the sun, the moon, and their orbits—there are clouds. Somewhere within them, these clouds contain the source of rain. Low-lying clouds may cause the human heart to feel forlorn, but this is no sin on the clouds' part. The crime belongs rather to those who go searching in them for reflections of their own sorrow.

Just below the sun, the moon, their orbits, and the clouds, we find the smoke from the crematorium. The northerly wind. And the southerly wind. Once night falls, the stars form a backdrop immediately behind the crematorium chimney. A planet that abuts the stars with nothing in between to distract the eye is a very strange place. Once you raise your sight-line just above the horizon, the clutter vanishes. When the wind blows from the north, the smoke from the crematorium scatters to the south, while on evenings when it blows from the south, the smoke drifts aimlessly to the north. This is the smoke's way of dragging its feet. It moves so lazily that it proceeds at about the pace of my pen. On days when the north wind blows, my mind is relatively clear, but never so on days when the wind blows from the south. On these days there's a dull ringing echoing endlessly within the walls of my skull. This shoddy head of mine. When the south wind starts up I have to give it a good shake, then another, and another. It takes roughly four sharp shakes from side to side before I can even remember that I have a head on my shoulders.

So the sky has always been punctuated with such objects as mentioned above. Yet never do these various things collide with one another. They clash only when human beings enter the picture. Take the ringing between my ears—when a human head stands in the path of the south wind, only then does this cacophony begin. Left to blow peacefully through the sky, this wind would cause no such murmuration in my skull. . . .

The empyrean world is by nature quiet.

On earth, by contrast, things are not so calm. In this realm, collisions are never-ending.

First of all, it is on the ground that I reside. This is a fact I cannot deny. Just because I hole up in my upstairs room and don't come out, I can't have you thinking that I'm some kind of smoke-like presence. I may from time to time need to make sure my head's still there by giving it a few good shakes, but I am in fact here, breathing in and out. And when I think too much, my heart has a tendency to clench with worry, to the point of stopping from time to time, but most of the time it keeps a regular pulse. Admittedly, when I'm lost in thought and waiting for a good line to come to me, my spirit sometimes gets sucked into the furoshiki I keep hanging in the window opposite my desk to keep the sun out, and I get so I can't tell if the furoshiki is me or if I'm the furoshiki. Even so, my mind extricates itself from the cloth and returns to me before too long. It always does. It returns with a constancy that none may doubt—not even Mr. Matsuki the zoologist or his wife. They have always misunderstood me, and make no effort to see me as I am. I find it most objectionable, though I've never told them so.
A zoologist will, after all, be a zoologist until the end. In his eyes, a tadpole will never be anything but the offspring of a frog. Oh, I know—tadpoles rise from frogspawn, suspended like freckles in nebulous chambers of endless jelly. Take any three-centimeter-wide slice and what you see will look just like the pattern on a bolt of Satsuma cotton. What a monotonous world. Yes, the zoologist's world must be so predictable that it inevitably descends into stereotypy.
At any rate, my home and Matsuki's laboratory may be two rooms upon this earthly realm, but they have absolutely nothing in common. In my room, even the sunshade furoshiki has a soul of its own.
In the zoologist's laboratory, the souls of tadpoles and the souls that reside inside the glass test-tubes are all doomed to be extinguished sooner or later. It saddens me so. And yet with every soul that Mr. Matsuki snuffs out, his stack of publications grows taller. *The Appetite of the Goat When the Paulownias Are in Flower; On the Life of the Chameleon; Tapirs and Dreams; Mammoth, Human, Amoeba; A Zoological Analysis of Motion Pictures; The Myriad Changes That a Jar of Out-of-Season Tadpoles Brought About in a Human Heart on a Night When the Osmanthus Was in Bloom*—Oh, Mr. Matsuki has written so many books that I can't keep track of all the titles! And with each new study, he adds another volume to the stack against his wall. Soon it will be tall enough to reach the ceiling. Meanwhile, I have yet to publish a single book of poetry. This is a huge problem. It is, in fact, nothing less than a paradox. Aside from several handwritten collections, I have no books to my name.

What is a handwritten book of poetry? It is a volume that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. And because it is entirely singular, it can have but one reader. Meaning that the writer and the reader are necessarily one and the same.

The handwritten book of poetry is always covered in the dust of the poet's room, its pages accustomed to receiving the sighs of its solitary reader. As for the color of these sighs, the gods only know.

Among Mr. Matsuki's many publications, just one falls within my domain. *On a Night When the Osmanthus*... How can so many words even fit onto a single spine?

The myriad changes
That a jar of out-of-season tadpoles
Brought about in a human heart
On a night when the osmanthus was in bloom

When I first came upon these words, I nearly mistook Mr. Matsuki for a lyric poet. Yet I have never looked inside any of his dozens of books (the reason being that he removes the esprit from all things, then boils up the remains in test-tubes, scooping them up with measuring spoons and weighing them on his scales—This is the stuff he turns into his tower of books. Rather than reading such things, my task is to consider the whereabouts of the innumerable souls bowdlerized by the zoologist), which is why I know nothing of the appetite of the billy-goat when the paulownias flower, or how many years the color-changing chameleon spends on this planet.

But see—my thoughts are inclined to wander.
The human animal is one that witters on about this and that when it has something it wants to get off its

conscience. It's most inconvenient. To cut to the chase, all I need to do is make a confession about Matsuki's *On a Night When the Osmanthus Was in Bloom*. That's the whole of the matter. . . . It's utterly simple. And what happened on the night in question? Hasn't the zoologist somehow captured my state of mind in the title of his book? Perhaps Mr. Matsuki is no mere zoologist, but a psychic visionary. Yes, I cannot help but suspect him. And the more my suspicion grows, the more monstrous he becomes. His expression is invariably cool—as if to disavow any and all human emotion. He's the type of person whose pulse doesn't budge during an earthquake. He possesses the heart of a firebird. Just imagining a quake is enough to send mine racing! Even if I were to be reborn seven more times, I'd never achieve a heart like his. Oh, Mr. Matsuki! I can no longer hide it. The longer I keep this secret from you, the tighter my heart becomes. It gets worse by the minute—oh, by the second! Mr. Matsuki! I'll confess: with this book's title, you have truly seen into my soul. On that fateful night when the osmanthus was in bloom, that jar of tadpoles undeniably brought about many changes in this heart of mine. I'll tell you all about it. At that time, I wanted nothing more than to write a poem about tadpoles. This is what I wanted more than anything in the world. From the rainy season to summer, from summer to autumn, I sat in my rented upstairs room thinking only of tadpoles. Tadpoles appear on the earth's surface around the same time as the paulownia flowers bloom. During this time, the sky above is heavy with rainclouds. Both the sky and the ground are so gray and dreary, it dulls even the mind. It's a season when one vacillates between knife, powder, gas, and extra-sturdy rope. Yet one never goes so far as to purchase any of these items. Soon, summer arrived, and the westerly sun intruded on my room without a mote of hesitation. When one's surroundings become that warm, it takes the mind off death for a time. Not that it helps in finishing poems about tadpoles. Then, before long, it was autumn again.

When the osmanthus blooms, it draws human beings into a fresh pessimism. It's a pessimism that cools the back of the throat. A wind rises that promises to inspire one to write a tadpole poem—a northerly wind, of course, which sends the smoke from the crematorium scattering toward the south. It was on one such night, just as I was about to set to work on my poem about tadpoles, that I received a jar of lab-hatched tadpoles from Mr. Matsuki. The messenger was Machiko Ono—sent from Granny to the Matsukis, then from the Matsukis on to me.

Mr. Matsuki, your actions on this night were a total failure. Being confronted with real tadpoles when trying to write about tadpoles made it impossible for me to produce even a single line. At the very moment that Machiko Ono set those creatures on my desk, I became utterly incapable of completing my tadpole poem. I must confess, out loud for all to hear: I'M NO EXPERIENTIALIST. No, I'm something else. I'm the kind of poet who can't write a love poem when I'm in love, and yet I can write the most romantic lines when I'm not. If you'd make me a lyric poet, please don't send any messenger girls to my home. But Mr. Matsuki, you went ahead and sent me the most dreadfully depressed girl. And as a result, I had to abandon my tadpole poetry, slamming head-first into a romance instead. Oh, Mr. Matsuki—what have you done?

The moment I laid eyes on her, I could tell that Machiko the tadpole messenger was suffering from a broken heart. The sighs of love's victims are so faint they're almost imperceptible. Yet it was through their very faintness that Machiko's sighs first captivated my affections. Once I noticed what was happening, I sent the girl out time and time again to the pharmacy. Conveniently, I was running low on many of the medicines I take daily and keep in my desk drawer. I don't care for the company of a girl I'm falling for. The more time she spends in my presence, the more real that love becomes. The more real it becomes, the less capable I become of writing love poems.

Mr. Matsuki—I'm feeling a little tired. One is bound to feel drained and downcast after making a confession. Let me press quickly on. I sent Machiko Ono to the pharmacy multiple times. And each time she came back, she let out a series of sighs. A girl with a broken heart is like a glove with no match. To have a girl like that hanging around my room. . . . Yet the girl herself had no inkling that she was standing next to someone just like her. All I could do for the oblivious Machiko

Ono was to write her a poem. That poem went something like—When you're heartbroken, go walking outside. The wind will wash away your sadness.

Machiko Ono folded my poem in half three or four times, then placed it in the sleeve of her kimono before heading home through the wind, but as to whether the wind that night was able to wash away her heartbreak, I can't say. That's because I haven't seen her since. I sat in the room she'd left, staring at the jar of tadpoles she had delivered. Gazing endlessly at tiny creatures is one of the first signs of falling in love. Through the glass of the jar, the unseasonable tadpoles appeared to shrink into black sesame seeds, then swiftly stretch into black tablespoons. Every last one of those tadpoles—the diminutive ones and the elongated ones—was unhappily in love. Once even small creatures start to look as if they're endowed with human emotions, all is lost. It's proof that he who is staring at those tadpoles has himself fallen in love. An empathic transfer has occurred, through which the state of the human heart acts upon the animals'; then, in turn, their hearts act upon ours. This is a psychic domain that sciences such as Mr. Matsuki's zoology dare not address. If you want to laugh, be my guest. I know my piece on the whiteness of the crow once sent Mr. Matsuki into a fit of rage, but what is white will never be anything but white. To be sure, the bird looks black to the human optical organ—I've known that since I was two years old! But we all grow out of toddlerhood. Of course the same can't be said of zoologists. And anyway, the human eye is only one of countless, truly countless eyes in the universe, is it not?

Oh, I feel a sudden urge to leave this room and slug Mr. Matsuki. Just once would suffice. One good punch. If I could do that, perhaps it would correct the slant of his zoologist's eye, at least a little. Maybe then he'd come up with a new, more interesting branch of zoology dedicated to exploring the hidden depths of the animal psyche. Maybe then he'd mind his own business and stop getting worked up over my crow poetry, or sending over jars of lab-grown amphibians. I simply want to show up on his doorstep and slug him—just once. When throwing punches, it's best to land a single decisive blow. That's all I'd need to get my point through that thick skull of his. In all my years, I've never managed to throw a punch like that. It exists only in my mind and has never actually landed on the head of another. My fists have always been conceptual—but today I have a wonderful opportunity to go and give the zoologist a well-deserved wallop. That's exactly what I'll do. I'll descend eleven steps, pass the empty rooms downstairs, and walk the twenty-seven minutes it takes for me to reach the home of the zoologist. Then I'll deliver up one blistering punch, instantly opening Matsuki's eyes to a fresh position on the zoological subterconscious. And just like that, a wonderful and never-before-seen animal world will dawn upon this earth! An elephant will struggle with multiple personalities. A duck en route to Japan from the South Seas will lose his Frau mid-journey and experience profound heartache. A guinea fowl will catch sight of the bulldog next door through the hedge and ask herself what kind of ancestral blood runs through her own veins. A neurasthenic cricket will develop the habit of shaking her head uncontrollably. The remedy: two teaspoons of bitters, one teaspoon bromide of potash, bicarbonate of soda, aqua. Meanwhile, the dragonfly has made a full recovery from the doldrums to pen a whole series of comedic plays. — It's imperative I leave my room and give Mr. Matsuki what he has coming. . . . At the same time, I can't help but worry about his wife. She keeps a beady eye on the state of my clothes. Once, when I visited them with the slightest rip in my trousers, she got it into her head that the tear was a meter and a half long! My height in meters would be somewhere around one-and-seven-tenths, while that of Mr. Matsuki would be approximately one-and-three-fifths. Regardless, Mrs. Matsuki took the damaged trousers, and sent me home with a pair of Mr. Matsuki's winter trousers in their stead. What a sight I was. For the entire journey home, I sported a summer jacket and winter trousers, with a gap of three-twentieths of a meter between my shoes and the bottom of the trousers. It was a miserable trek! Completing the twenty-seven-minutes' walk in under twenty, I fled into the safety of my room. And yet that was not the end of my woes. Mrs. Matsuki did not return my trousers for an unreasonably long time. During those weeks, there

were two occasions when I had to leave the house, and in both cases I delayed my daytime errands until I could complete them under cover of darkness. By the time my summer trousers were finally mended, it was late autumn.

Then, when I went to see her wearing my autumn yukata, she said, "You look as if you've draped yourself in old rope. . . . There's such a thing as being too modest, you know," and brought out the zoologist's dotera for me to wear. Far be it for her to understand I was hardly wearing that yukata out of modesty. The zoologist's dotera was extremely ample in the chest, by the way. My yukata eventually made its way back to me the following summer—and in a far more hygienic condition. In the meantime, though, what was I supposed to think inside such an overly padded get-up? I felt as though the contents of my wardrobe were escaping from me, and it brought my train of thought to a complete standstill. It was a misfortune even greater than being forced to wear winter trousers with my summer jacket.

In short, this is the relationship between me and Mrs. Matsuki—we can never get along. Our tastes are consistently at odds. And while she and I happen to be brother and sister according to the customs of this earth, the zoologist's wife remains a creature wholly beyond my ken.

As I was saying, going out and punching the zoologist will remedy my lack of exercise, and it should also result in the discovery of a new realm of animal psychology. I have one other hope: In giving Mr. Matsuki a thump on the head, I might also forget all about Machiko Ono. Then how cool, how breezy my heart would be! Yet I sense something holding me back. What could it be, this cloud-like corner of my heart?

Oh! There's more to Matsuki than meets the eye. The more I think about it, the more obvious it becomes. He's no mere zoologist, but a Röntgen of the mind, Strewth! He must somehow know that I've been in love with the girl ever since the night of the tadpoles. Otherwise, why would he have written *A Jar of Out-of-Season Tadpoles*? Oh, Mr. Matsuki, it's exactly as you imagined. Ever since that night, I've been head over heels. And this love is a giant insect-pin, skewering me to the tatami floor. My room is but a specimen-box! Within its confines I keep wondering—has Machiko Ono, who couldn't keep herself from sighing for someone out of reach, recovered from her heartbreak? Or is she still . . . ?

Alas, I'm weary enough that I'd better stop there. The longer I allow myself to dwell on it, the more I suspect the girl is still suffering, and that saddens me so.

The above is a list of earthly concerns; all that remains to be addressed now is what may be found underground. When it comes to these subterranean concerns, I feel a strong desire to arrive at a pleasant conclusion. As a doctor somewhere is said to have written in his travel notebooks:

"In times of happiness, the heart is drawn to bitter poetry; in times of suffering, the mind seeks sweet dreams."

I second this heartily. It embodies a kind of contrarian attitude. . . . Some might call it a perverse type of the schizo-psychological condition, which can in extreme cases require hospitalization; yet what difference does that make to me? If that doctor shows up and tries to force me into a facility, I'll run away to some underground room. And if he catches me, here's what I'll say: "There's no one as irresponsible as a psychologist! You invent all these maladies of the mind—single-handedly creating patients who suffer from them. Before you hospitalize us, how about institutionalizing all of your own kind first?"

At any rate, I can't help but agree with the observation that the pained heart seeks sweet dreams. I'm in love with Machiko Ono. All the while, she pines for another. It's a terribly bitter, convoluted situation. . . . That being the case, I'd like to contribute my own minor addendum to the psychologist's law:

"When all above ground is bitter, the heart seeks sweet dreams beneath."

And what is to be found underground?

Underground Train: Merely a train laboring through stale air; I hear it's the most meandering of conveyances. Only people like the Matsukis would deign to ride around on such a thing.

Underground Water: Water that is said to flow through the dark in silence. Redolent of my love life—How it fills me with sadness!

Underground Room: In my heart of hearts, I yearn for a splendid room beneath the surface! A basement room equipped with a door that makes the most refreshing sound. A room into which I can descend, leaving the earthly world behind. Long ago, in the twilight years of a certain empire, there lived a doctor by the name of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, who was never seen without a smile on his lips. I'd like the door to my basement room to resemble his ever-smiling face. Anton Underground. Let me go find it now—I'll be far happier there than heading off to sock the zoologist.

From the diary of Mr. Matsuki the zoologist

I have been conducting research into the snout of the pig. My methods are in every regard empirical. Not once have I entertained the notion that an exchange of spiritual energy takes place between the pig's snout and a slice of bread. That is the noble task of Kyūsaku Tsuchida—a "poet of the spirit"—and is well beyond our purview. Irredeemable claptrap!

Our research requires the following:

1: a sturdy tree (living and firmly rooted to the earth, a tree upon which not a single leaf will quiver no matter how the pig tugs)
2: a length of jute rope
3: a pig
4: a piece of bread
5: a ruler — a stethoscope — a scale

First, I take the rope and draw a straight line from the pig's right hind-leg to the tree. With an extremely indolent attitude, the tethered animal resists the rope and attempts to walk away from the tree. Now the pig is headed toward a hill, atop which is a line of four cedars, and beyond the tops of the trees, clouds, et cetera. At this time, I use the stethoscope to listen to the pig's heart. My animal feels no small amount of homesickness toward the hill; at the same time, its bound leg experiences a keen desire for freedom.

Yet it is still too early to release the pig. Soon, it begins to retreat, describing a spiral with the tree at its center. Then it rests upon the earth. At this time, its heartbeat is surprisingly steady. The pig is an animal that feels no sadness at moving backward. In my opinion, the romantic scientists are mistaken in their theory that the boar evolved from the pig; it is surely more experiential to view the pig as having regressed from the boar.

Now I place a piece of bread on the grass, one centimeter from the nose of the resting pig. Accordingly, the grass is green, and the bread is white. The pig's snout is a faded rose. That snout extends itself in a direct line toward the white bread—one centimeter, and one centimeter only. The ruler I've brought proves supremely useful at this point. Owing to his yellowish ideas, Kyūsaku Tsuchida appears to despise instruments such as stethoscopes, rulers, and scales; we empiricists, however, would be helpless to undertake any zoological investigations in the want of a ruler.

At this stage, I adjust the position of the bread. Another centimeter from the tip of the pig's nose. Once more, the snout extends—again, by precisely one centimeter.

I have found the snout of the pig to possess the property described above.

Next, using the scale, the stethoscope, et cetera, we move closer to the completion of this study.

Goodness! I've ended up writing something that resembles a research paper within the pages of my diary. This is the kind of mistake that Kyūsaku Tsuchida might make when composing his poems. It seems my head is fatigued from my investigations into the noses of animals. Let me give it a couple of good shakes.

Here starts today's diary entry.

There seems to be something unempirical in the air tonight. On a night like this, Kyūsaku Tsuchida must be churning out one poem after another—Isn't there anything that can be done about this? Yet I do hope that Kyūsaku will see his tadpole poem through to completion. Some time ago, I arranged to deliver a jarful of tadpoles to his residence. The messenger was the girl from Granny's house. My aim: to have Kyūsaku write just one poem based on the real thing. That was my hope. Kyūsaku hasn't visited once since then, but who knows—perhaps on this very night he's on the verge of completing a masterpiece based on objective fact.

Yes, there's something very odd about this evening. My thoughts keep turning toward Kyūsaku's home. I think I'd better go and investigate.

It took some time, but I've finally reached Kyūsaku Tsuchida's residence. The rooms beneath his are uninhabited and pitch-dark. According to my wife, Kyūsaku rents only the second story of this building. The downstairs is always passing from one tenant to the next, or going empty for stretches of time. I'm not presently at leisure to contemplate what the cause of this might be.

Oh, what's this? How sadly these steps cry out. Never in my life have I set foot on stairs like these. There's a light on upstairs, which trickles out onto the steps.

At last I've entered Kyūsaku Tsuchida's room. Its occupant is not at home. What a dim, unhealthy glow! Just being here, I feel I too might fall prey to some kind of nervous affliction. Let me take the shade off his lamp.

Kyūsaku's notebook is lying out on his desk. Perhaps I ought to have a look at the current state of his poesy.

But oh, what's this? Kyūsaku Tsuchida thoroughly rejects all my theories. What fin-de-siècle nonsense! He claims here that he can't write poetry about tadpoles when faced with actual tadpoles. This concept-monger! Here he says he's fallen in love, and that's why a kiss is all but impossible. What an herb! He writes he'll come and give me a beating. Oh, how am I supposed to redeem a mind-set so far gone as his? Fine. Right around now, Kyūsaku Tsuchida will be arriving at my house, looking for me. I'll go home and give this poet of delusions a thrashing he'll never forget. If his fists win out, so be it—I'll become a doctor of abnormal animal psychology, just as he has predicted. But, conversely, should I win, the wan spiritual poet shall be converted to empiricism with a single blow. This is shaping up to be a very strange face-off indeed.

Perhaps I'll just finish reading this notebook first. There's something rather compelling in the stupidity of these pages.

Oh, what a mercurial fellow! In the end, he starts philosophizing about the hypogeal, and muttering about being happier not to resort to fisticuffs but to descend instead into some basement. The Anton Underground? That actually sounds quite appealing. I'm finding myself more and more drawn to this place. Let me go and look into it.

Underground

This basement room was a crepuscular space, beyond the usual rules of polite conversation or the reach of romantic influences. After all, as we have already established, this is a room that has been created by the mind of a poet. Among ourselves, we have no doubt—the mind is vast and without limit. Therefore we wish to refrain from precise definitions as to the size of the room, the color of its walls, and so on. Let us say only that the room was a good size, and its walls were of a quiet hue.

When Mr. Matsuki arrived, he found the psychologist Tōhachi Kōda sitting in a chair with the mien of having only just returned from a long journey. Mr. Kōda's trip was a research tour, during which he had people at each destination read aloud from the pages of the anthologies of plays he had stuffed inside his suitcase. Presumably, his interlocutors' voices and enunciation harbored information significant to members of his particular school of psychology.

Matsuki took a seat.

"A fine night, isn't it? How was your trip? Did you encounter any interesting subjects?"

Kōda put down his notebook.

"A fine night indeed. It was a thoroughly enjoyable trip. My notes are abundant, thank you. I trust your studies are proceeding apace?"

"Swimmingly, in fact. The future of zoology is as bountiful as it is boundless. I'm now looking into the nose of the pig."

"We psychologists, too, would seem to have our work cut out for us. Afflictions of the mind are multiplying all the time. I really should have brought more notebooks on my trip. Tell me, what have you discovered about the nose of the pig?"

"It grows. It extends more than you might ever presume. It was my understanding that Kyūsaku Tsuchida was on his way to this place, but he isn't around, is he?"

"We're the only ones here. How much does the pig's nose grow?"

"One centimeter, to start. But Kyūsaku is supposed to have left his house before I did."

"Maybe he's gotten lost along the way. A centimeter, to start—and then?"

"Another centimeter. And then another. Kyūsaku Tsuchida, lost! Of all the—"

Just then, the door to the underground room opened with an airy *zing*—a refreshing sound that was proof of the state of Kyūsaku Tsuchida's heart. After all, this was the entrance to Anton Underground. The poet made his way down the wide steps, one at a time: eleven in all. Human beings will count the number of steps in a flight of stairs either when they are feeling miserable, or when their minds are so refreshed as to be entirely clear.

Kyūsaku Tsuchida took the remaining seat and turned to Kōda.

"Good evening. I got caught up in the wind on my walk over. I take it you're the one who's left Machiko Ono heartbroken?"

(Matsuki sat back in his chair and stayed out of this love-colloquy. Instead he lit a cigarette. The smoke rose two feet from his lips before drifting over Tōhachi Kōda's back. The air in the basement room was comfortably cool.)

"What a wonderful night it is. And how did it feel to get out and walk in the wind? Yes, I'm likely the cause of Machiko Ono's heartbreak."

"Oh, I quite enjoyed being blown about. I've practically forgotten all about the girl. My heart is feeling much taller now. It feels kite-shaped for the first time in who knows how long. So, Mr. Kōda, tell us—what kind of shape do we three make now?"

"A triangle. One in which no two of us forms a pair. Kyūsaku Tsuchida, don't you feel ready now to go home and take up your pen again?"

"That's exactly what I've been thinking. Spending a night in the company of a physician of the psyche has—as I imagined it would—set my heart free."

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure. This may be just another delightful night in Anton's Basement."

From the modern Japanese
translation by Seikō Itō

UTŌ
A Noh Play

translated and with an introduction
by Jay Rubin

HELL ON EARTH: AN INTRODUCTION

NOH PLAYS BREAK one of the most fundamental Aristotelian rules of drama by narrating rather than portraying their action, but this enables them to imaginatively transport the audience to the depths of the sea, to mountainous heights, to violent battlefields, to distant lands, and—as here—to the environs of Hell. A realistic production of *Utō* would require gallons of fake blood raining from the sky. Not even the Kabuki theater, with its tolerance for the luridly sensational, has attempted to do that.

Guilty of having violated the parent-child bond in order to practice his sinful profession, a hunter is punished in Hell by monstrous incarnations of the gentle birds he used to kill, but he is tortured even more by being eternally separated from his own child. The opening of this tale of Hell on earth is set in the kind of volcanic region of geysers and boiling mudholes that even today in Japan is known as a "hell."

UTŌ

"I who stand before you here am a monk traveling throughout the provinces. Never having seen the sacred peak of Tateyama, I have decided now to climb its steep flanks as a religious austerity and from there to continue my pilgrimage on to the far-flung end of Michinoku."

The monk goes on to say:

"Here now on Tateyama's sacred peak, Hell itself seems to lie before me. Anyone who could see this horrible sight without a pang of terror must have a heart even more frightening than a demon. The pathway has many branches that plunge straight down into the hells that swallow sinful mankind, the very thought of which brings forth my tears without respite. In shame, I reflect upon my own sins for a time before returning to the mountain's base. Here I am again at the foot of the mountain."

An old man appears when the monk has finished speaking.

"You there, honored priest! I have something to say to you."

"Are you speaking to me? What is it you wish to say?"

"If you are going on to Michinoku, I have a message I wish you would deliver for me. Last autumn a hunter died in the village of Soto-no-hama there. I would have you visit the home of his wife and children. Tell them to offer up his straw rain cape and sedge hat when they pray for his soul."

"This is a most unexpected request! I can easily convey your message to them, but without some sort of evidence, how are they to know it is true?"

"Yes, of course. They will probably not believe you unless you can show them some sure sign to back up your words. Ah, I have an idea. This is the Kiso hempen robe this old man was wearing to the very end of his life. I will tear off this sleeve . . ."

The old man removes the left sleeve of his robe.

Telling him to use it as evidence, he tearfully hands the sleeve to the traveling monk. Yes, his tears go with the traveler, in whose wake both clouds and smoke arise as he heads for far-off Michinoku amid the flaming spring blooms of Tateyama. Shedding tears, the dead man watches him go until he is lost from sight, his path unknowable.

When the monk arrives at the hunter's home, he finds a woman in tears.

"Of course I always knew that life is but a fleeting thing, but still I let myself pledge my love to my husband in this dreamlike world. All he left me is this child of mine, a source as well of deep sorrow. What can I do about the love a mother feels for her child?"

The monk calls to her from outside.

"Please let me into your home."

"And who might you be?"

"I am a monk making the rounds of the provinces. When performing religious austerities atop Mount Tateyama, I was approached by a dreadful-looking old man who asked me, if I was going to Michinoku, to visit the home of a hunter who died last autumn in Soto-no-hama and ask his family to offer up his straw rain cape and sedge hat with prayers for his soul. But how was I to get them to believe me, I asked, without some proof to show them? Whereupon he tore the sleeve from the hempen robe he was wearing and handed it to me. I have it here: do you recognize it by any chance?"

"So shocking this is, could it be a dream? They call the cuckoo a messenger from Hell, the one who comes from the mountain where the dead linger. My tears gush forth before I have heard all you have to say about my dead husband. But I want so badly to hear, let me see the cloth he left behind as a memento, crudely woven though it may be."

The woman begins to speak, and the monk joins his words with hers.

"Surely it is long since you last saw it, this robe he left in memory."

"I take it out now. . ."

". . . and when I look closely . . ."

. . . bringing this thin, crudely made summer robe next to the sleeve that you, O priest, have brought with you, this single-layered cloak woven here in the Michinoku village of Kyō, there can be no doubt, none at all, that they belong to the robe my dear husband left behind. No sooner has the woman said

this than the priest begins to perform services for the dead, among which he offers up the straw rain cape and sedge hat as the dead man had requested.

"NAMU YŪREI SHUTSURI SHŌJI TONSHŌ BODAI: Hear, O ghost, cast off your worldly attachments and attain the enlightenment of a Buddha!"

So the priest intones, his hands joined in prayer, and instantly the hunter's ghost appears, singing:

"'Utō-yasukata,' cry the child-calling birds of Soto-no-hama in Michinoku. 'Utō!' the parent birds call, and their young reply, 'Yasukata!'"

As he dances, the ghost continues:

"IKKEN SOTOBA YŌRI SANNAKUDŌ: One glance at a *sotoba,* forever free from the Three Evil Ways, the sutra tells us: all one need do is pray once to a holy *sotoba,* a pillar carved to represent the five elements of Buddha's body (earth, water, fire, wind, and void), and one can escape eternally from the three evil realms of Hell, Hungry Ghosts, and Bestiality. All the more so if the *sotoba* is made expressly for use in funeral services for oneself. The holy names of the Buddha and the flames of His wisdom will melt the ice even in such frozen places as the Hell of the Crimson Lotus or the Great Hell of the Crimson Lotus, where the intense cold splits the body open and freezes the blood into the shape of open lotus blooms. And even if one is burned by the fierce flames of the Hell of Scorching Heat or the Great Hell of Scorching Heat, those flames cannot conquer the water of Buddha's Law. Yet, for all that, my great sins weigh down upon me, and my heart can have no peace, for I have killed many peaceful creatures, among them the gentle birds that cry 'Yasukata.'"

SHUZAI NYOSŌROE NICHI: I beg you, O priest, please melt away my sins in the sunlight of Buddha's wisdom.

The ghost sings on:

"Here in Michinoku, yes, deep in Michinoku, on the desolate shore in the crumbling village where the tidal reeds droop among the lower branches of the pine grove, stands my sparsely thatched hut, the sedge roof so poor and scanty that the moon shines through as brightly as it does on Outer Beach, dear Soto-no-hama, so moving to my heart."

Meanwhile, his wife nears their child and says:

"That's him! But if I were to say even that much, he might disappear. All the mother and child can do is clasp each other's hands and weep."

The ghost, her husband, says:

"Oh, truly, the bond is fading with the wife and child with whom I shared such deep affection long ago. Now they only stand and weep, and though I call to him like the parent bird, 'Utō,' no comforting response, no 'Yasukata' do I hear from my boy. Oh, why did I ever kill the young of those birds? As dear as my boy is to me, so do the birds and beasts love their young. I long to reach out and stroke the hair of my little Chiyodō and tell him how much I have missed him!"

But instead I feel only sorrow as thick clouds of delusion roll in to separate us. Until this moment, I saw him standing there before me, as fresh and straight as a little pine tree, but now, oh sorrow, he has vanished somewhere as if lost between the trees or like a face hidden beneath the brim of a sedge hat. "Sedge hat" recalls the hat-shaped pine tree of Wada in Settsu Province, and a *mino* rain cape recalls Minō Falls, likewise in Settsu Province, the gush of the hunter's tears like that waterfall, wetting his sleeves in copious waves. Who is it you say stands outside the house in which the memorial *sotoba* stands? I am the one, none other, and inside the house my rain cape and sedge hat serve as keepsakes while by death I am kept apart from my still-living wife and child. I want to see the interior of this poor hut, but I am outside, where all I can do is cry like the plovers on Outer Beach.

The ghost laments and says again:

Everything is vast and boundless as a dream,
and most of my old friends have died and gone below.

"As long as I was bound to make my way in this world, I should have been born into a family that belonged to one of the four classes: warrior, farmer, artisan, or merchant. But that did not happen."

Nor did I become one of those who indulge themselves in music or games or painting.

"Day and night, I did nothing but work to butcher the innocent."

I would keep myself busy on those long spring days when the sun sets late, and on long autumn nights I would go sleepless as I kept my flares burning white.

"The ninety days of summer's heat was of no concern to me,"

Nor did winter mornings strike me as cold.

In pursuit of deer, they say, the hunter does not see the mountains, and so it was with me: consumed with the hunt, I would forget all pain and sadness, chasing birds through the thicket of forgetfulness, catching birds using taut ropes smeared with birdlime. And though my sleeves would be drenched by the waves stirred by the winds that tore through Matsuyama far across the surging tides, I would depart for that village over the sea as if it were close by, forgetting about the burning punishment awaiting me in the next world. How I regret what I did all those years! "Utō-yasukata," the birds would cry, and I killed them in so many ways!

"Among which the cruelest . . ."

. . . exploited the birds' own stupidity. If only they had spread their nests in the branches of trees as high as Mount Tsukuba or floated them atop the surging ocean waves! But no, they hatched their young on the open sandy beaches, believing they had hidden them well enough, but their time on the sand was as brief as the momentary touchdown of the migrating geese that swooped from the autumn sky. All I had to do was imitate the parent birds' cry of "Utō," and the young would answer "Yasukata." It was so easy for me to take them.

"Utō,"

The hunter says, and dances, miming the way he would strike the young birds with his stick.

The parent birds rain down tears of blood, tears of blood from the sky. He runs back and forth, trying to dodge them beneath his sedge hat and rain cape, but his hat and cape do not make him magically invisible, and so the tears fall ever more heavily. The hunter's eyes are stained red, blinded by the tears of blood, tears as red as a bridge made of falling autumn leaves, tears as red as those shed by the cowherd and weaver girl when they saw the bridge of feathers sacrificed by the magpies for them over the Milky Way's River of Heaven.

When he was alive in the everyday world, it seemed so easy to take the gentle parent birds and their young who called to each other, "Utō-yasukata," but in hell those kindly creatures have turned into monster birds that pursue the sinner, clanking their iron beaks, flapping their wings, and flashing the copper claws with which they tear at his eyeballs and rend his flesh. He tries to scream, but, choking on the smoke that billows from the hellfires, he can raise no cry, perhaps in punishment for his having killed so many mute mandarin ducks. He tries to flee but cannot, perhaps in retribution for his having killed so many molting, earthbound birds.

"The gentle earthly utō has in Hell become a mighty hawk."

And I a powerless pheasant in its claws, unable to flee the blizzard-swept hunting plain of Katano, attacked by hawks from the air, chased by galloping dogs on the ground, my heart overflowing with sorrow, not a moment's relief from my pain, like the birds that cry "Utō-yasukata." Please help me, O priest, I beg you, please save me.

No sooner has he called to the priest than the ghost has disappeared.

Note from the translator: The authorship of *Utō* is now considered unknown, though the play used to be credited to Zeami, the foremost Noh playwright and theoretician (1363–1443). It is a fourth-category play of common human feelings raised to the level of madness. Such plays in the dramatic mode feature unnamed protagonists who have not been distinguished by appearance in the Heian classics as in the lyrical feminine third category or the Kamakura war tales as in the narrative masculine second category. We saw another nameless fourth-category ghost, angry at his pointless death, in *Fujito,* which appeared in volume 1 of *MONKEY,* Shinto gods from the congratulatory first category in *Takasago* (vol. 4), the ghost of a famous warrior of the second category in *Tadanori* (vol. 3), and a demon from the spectacular fifth category in *Kurozuka* (vol. 2).

The word *utō* (善知鳥; literally, "virtue-knowing bird") refers to a pigeon-sized sea bird in the plover family, the rhinoceros auklet or hornbilled puffin (*Cerorhinca monocerata*), which was hunted for its tasty flesh but is better known for the legend of the parent birds' cry of "*utō*" and the response of the young, "*yasukata*," which makes them "easy" (*yasu*) to hunt.

This translation of novelist Seikō Itō's modern Japanese rendering of the fifteenth-century text first appeared in the December 2021 issue of the magazine *Shinchō,* where it benefitted greatly from the attention of Maho Adachi and other members of the editorial staff. Itō sensibly omits the utilitarian 8-line *kyōgen* interlude in which the traveling priest asks a local resident for directions to the dead hunter's house in Soto-no-hama (literally, "Outer Beach"), where the ghost is doomed to remain "outside" his family. The "soto" of "Soto-no-hama" is echoed in "*sotoba*," a funeral pillar carved to represent the five elements of Buddha's body.

Eleni Sikelianos

Poems

TRUE STORY

My man tells me he saw a snake swallow
a fish or a fish swallow
a snake at the wedding.
What wedding?
Our wedding, he says
indignantly. You saw
a snake swallow
a fish at our wedding?
Or a fish swallow a
snake, I can't remember
which. Did anyone else see it?
I showed you! Do you think
I'd see a fish swallowing a
snake at our wedding and
I didn't show you?

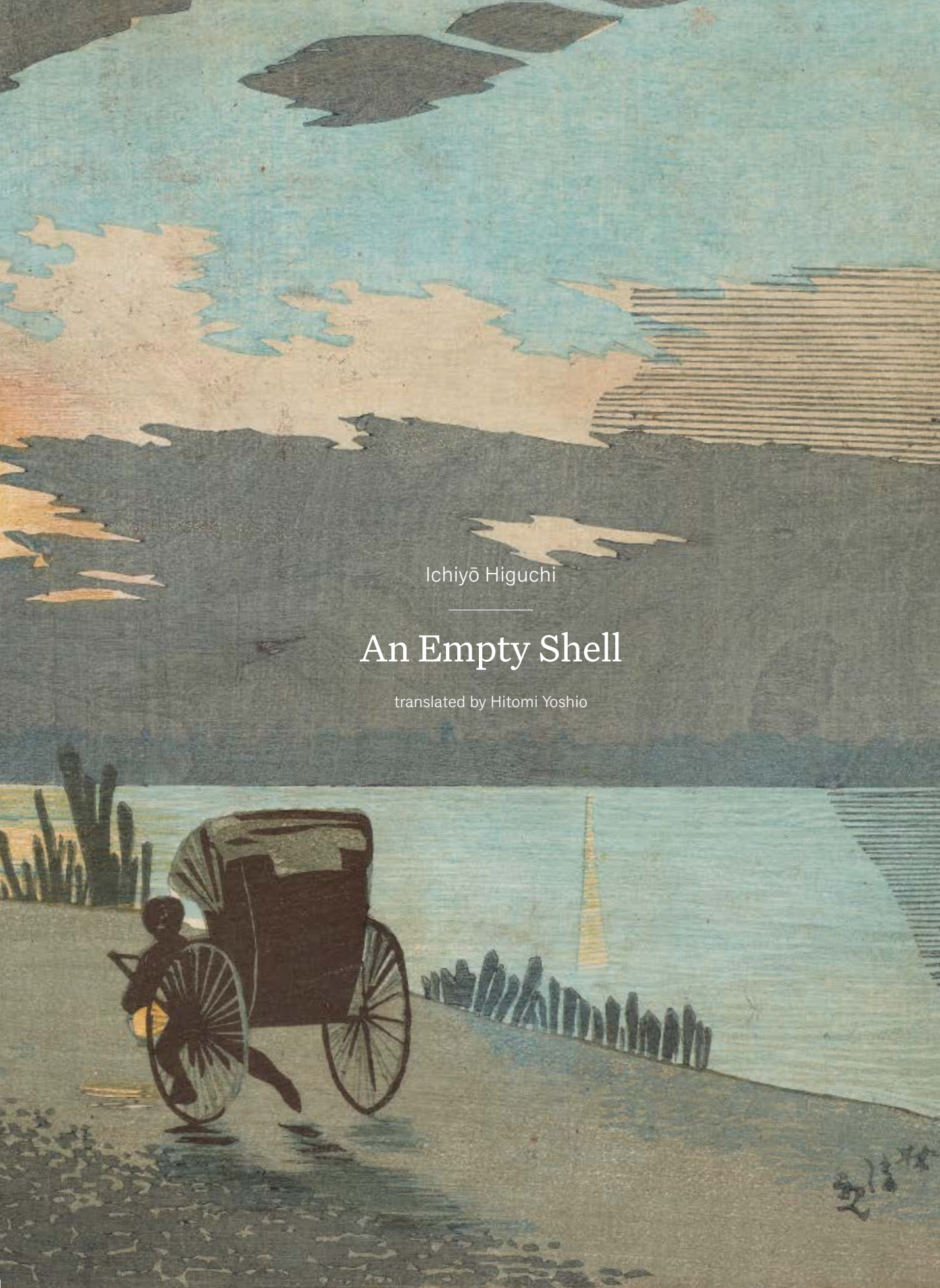
Years fold into the mouth
of the fish where I have no
memory of snakes but here
is this man before me. I show him
my poem (I always show him
my poem). He says
It's done! I know him

to be a true teller of tales & truth but this
snake-fish-wedding story I can't
quite swallow.

THEY SAY

the rooster crows
but the crow caws
and the cow moos
while the moon goes
the ghost moans
so the men say
the snake hisses
when the hyssop heals
the hello greets
and the greedy grease
the glaciers weep
when the whip bites
the begats beget
bedazing the stunned
crow whose crow
the rooster stole

Kobayashi Kiyochika



Ichiyō Higuchi

An Empty Shell

translated by Hitomi Yoshio

I

The house had five rooms including a modest foyer. It was not spacious, but was pleasant and airy, especially when a breeze passed through the rooms from one end to the other. The garden was large and shaded by trees, making it ideal for a summer residence. Located in a quiet neighborhood near the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens, it was an inviting abode despite some minor inconveniences.

Still, the house remained unoccupied for almost three months after the rental sign went up. The willow tree by the gate stood lonely, its branches swaying in the wind. Charming and well maintained, it certainly attracted more than a few would-be tenants, but the hefty rent and a three-month deposit made it unaffordable for most, though it was by no means an unreasonable sum for the neighborhood.

One early morning, before the sun had risen, a man of around forty wearing a faded, cheap yukata came to see the custodian of the house. He seemed ill at ease. The custodian showed him around, walking him through the rooms and pointing out the cupboards and closets. The man seemed preoccupied, but expressed satisfaction with how quiet the neighborhood was. "Let us arrange the rental today," he said to the custodian. "I'll give you the deposit now, and the move will take place this evening. Apologies for the rush, but if I may, I'd like to get started on the cleaning." The agreement was concluded swiftly. When the custodian inquired about his occupation, the man answered vaguely that it was nothing to speak of. When asked how many were in his household, the man replied, "Four or five, but sometimes seven or eight. It's not quite settled—an unfortunate circumstance."

The custodian thought this was strange. But the cleaning was completed by evening, ready for the new family to move in. An elegant rickshaw soon entered through the gate and stopped at the front entrance. As the custodian looked on, bewildered, a woman of around thirty emerged, perhaps the maid, followed by a sickly beauty of about eighteen or nineteen. The young lady had no color in her face and hands, so pale that her skin seemed almost translucent. She did not appear to be related to the brusque man who had rented the house.

The new occupants had arrived with all their belongings in a large hand-drawn cart. Aside from the customary gift-giving visits to their neighbors, the house remained oddly quiet without the usual commotion of settling in. In addition to the man and the maid, there was a rather large woman who seemed to be the cook. Then, later in the night, two others arrived by rickshaw, a gentleman around sixty years old with a shaved head, and a lady who appeared to be his wife, her hair neatly tied in a small bun. The sickly young lady had been brought inside the house to rest as soon as she arrived, and now was sleeping with her head buried in a pillow. There was some resemblance between her and the elderly couple, who sat hunched over by the young lady's side all through the night. They were her parents, perhaps, and were addressed as "my lord" and "my lady" by the maids and the brusque man, who they called Takichi.

The next morning, before the gentle breeze gave way to the summer heat, another rickshaw stopped in front of the house. Out stepped a gentleman of around thirty, wearing a silk kimono with a white *chirimen* sash around his waist. He was well built and good-looking, sporting a thin mustache. He had identified the house by consulting the small piece of paper on the gate that bore the name Takichi Kawamura. The kitchen maid, whom the family called Osan, was the first to greet him, straightening her kimono and calling out, "Young master!" Takichi rushed out after her. "Why, good morning, sir! I hope you had no trouble finding us? We were in Otsuka until only yesterday, but our young lady tired of the place and begged to be taken elsewhere, anywhere but where we were staying. So what could I do . . . I scrambled and finally found this place. Take a look, sir—the garden is spacious, and we are quite secluded here. It'll surely improve our lady's mood. Oh yes, she slept very well last night. And this morning . . . well, her mood seems to have changed again. Please come in, and see for yourself." Takichi led the way into the house, and the young master followed, anxiously stroking his mustache.

II

When in good spirits, the young lady could be as gentle as a three-year-old girl, happily making paper dolls

or napping in her mother's or father's lap. If asked a question, she would smile sweetly and nod without understanding the meaning. But when her mood changed, it was as if a windstorm had suddenly arisen and was violently shaking the treetops. She would hide herself in a dark corner and whimper, "Father, Mother, Brother, I beg you . . . never show me your faces again . . ." or choke out the words, "It's all my fault. Please forgive me, oh, forgive me." She would repeat this over and over, as if she were apologizing to someone standing in front of her. Then, suddenly, she would exclaim, "I'll be there, I will come . . . I'm coming after you!" When in these moods, the young lady might escape the watch of her guardians and dash outside before anyone could stop her. As a result, no matter where they lived, the well in the garden was covered with a heavy lid and not a single pair of scissors was left in sight. Her illness made her a danger to herself. As frail as she was, whenever she had an outburst and bolted, even two strong men had difficulty restraining her.

The young lady's main residence was in an affluent neighborhood in Tokyo. The family was so well known that anyone walking by the gate would recognize the nameplate. To save the family from embarrassment, the young lady's parents invited their trusted doctor to make home visits rather than send her to a hospital. If they rented a new house in the hope that their daughter could rest comfortably, it was always in their servant's name. But within a month, the young lady would become displeased with everything around her, and her illness would worsen to a point that was truly frightening.

The young master had been brought into the family as an adopted son and betrothed to the daughter, so that their future children could carry on the family lineage. The young lady being an only child, one can imagine how her parents must have grieved her condition. The rumor was that her illness had started in the spring, when the cherry trees were in bloom. Since then, her parents had been plagued with worry, day and night, and their frail bodies looked drained of strength. When their daughter had an outburst, jumping out of bed and running outside, shouting, "I'll never come back!" all they could do was send Takichi after her. They felt quite helpless.

The young lady had slept soundly the previous night, and this morning she was the first to wake up. She washed her face, combed her hair, took out her favorite kimono, and fastened her colorful obi with a scarlet silk cord without anyone's help. She looked so poised and beautiful that it was hard to believe she was ill. Her parents looked upon their daughter with tears in their eyes. Yet, when the maid brought a tray with rice porridge for breakfast, she shook her head like a child and clung to her mother's knees.

"Is it today that my contract is up, Mother?" she asked. "The day I can go home?"

"What do you mean by your contract, my dear child?" her mother chastised her. "This is your home, right here. There's nowhere else to go. Why do you talk such nonsense?"

"But Mother, I must be going somewhere. See that rickshaw over there? It has come to take me away," she said, pointing her finger. A large spider's web was hanging from the holly tree beyond the eaves, shimmering in the golden light of the morning sun.

Her mother's heart filled with pity. "Did you hear that, dear?" She whispered to her husband in an anxious tone.

"Oh, do you remember?" the young lady suddenly broke out, her cheeks reddening. "It was the year before last, when we went to see the cherry blossoms."

"What are you talking about, child?" her mother asked.

"Oh darling, how beautiful the schoolyard was!" The young lady laughed, her eyes shining.

"I still have the flower you gave me, my dearest. I pressed it in a book. It was such a pretty flower, but now it's wilted. That was the last time I saw you. Why don't you come see me anymore, darling? Why don't you come back? Will I never see you again for the rest of my life? Oh, it's all my fault. I'm to blame, there's no doubt. But it was my brother . . . my brother . . . oh, I'm so sorry. It's all my fault. Forgive me, please forgive me . . ."

The young lady burst into tears, clutching her chest and writhing in agony.

"Yukiko, my dear child, you must not think such things. This is your illness talking. Forget the school, forget the cherry blossoms. Your brother is not even

here yet. Your illness is making you see things. Try to calm down. Please be yourself again, the Yukiko you used to be. There, there . . . Are you all right now, dear child?"

As her mother stroked her back, Yukiko buried her face in her lap. All that could be heard were her low sobs.

III

When the elderly lady heard that the young master had arrived, she gently nudged her daughter, "Yuki, dear, your brother Masao has come to see you." But instead of greeting him properly, Yukiko turned her face away and refused to look at him. She would have reprimanded her daughter, but Masao stopped her. "Please don't be bothered, Mother. We don't want to upset her even more." Then, taking the leather cushion that his adoptive mother handed to him, he moved away from Yukiko's bedside and turned toward their father, who sat silently by the pillar. There, next to the veranda, they quietly conversed.

Masao, the young master, appeared to be a man of few words. He fanned himself from time to time, and occasionally flicked the ash off the cigarette he was holding and relit it. He kept glancing towards Yukiko and murmuring, "Oh, what can be done," over and over again.

"If we'd known things would come to this, we might have acted differently. But it's too late now. What a pity the whole thing is . . . for Uemura too," Masao sighed, lowering his eyes.

The elderly man, looking at a loss, stroked his shaved head. "I am not a worldly man, and you see how her mother is. Everything has become so difficult and complicated. It's all because our Yukiko was much too naive . . . and, well, so was Uemura. And one thing led to another. We don't know how to make it up to you. But take pity on our Yukiko, won't you? Even in this unfortunate state of affairs, she thinks only of her duty toward you. She's not without education, you know, but her madness has brought shame to the family. Her behavior is disgraceful, unforgivable, but please have compassion. She has protected her chastity, though it may have driven her mad. Take pity on her, if only for that. She's a fool, no doubt, but she has caused little trouble since she was a child . . . it's such a pity. You must think us foolish for doting on her like this. But how could we give up on her? These days, she behaves so erratically, says such awful things, that we worry her death may be near. The other day, Yukiko made a big fuss about someone coming to fetch her at the Otsuka house. Her mother grew so concerned that she consulted a fortuneteller, who divined that her life was in danger and that she might not last the month. It's stupid to worry, we know. But it was enough to make us uncomfortable, and the girl herself was so restless that we decided to find a new place to live. So here we are. But still her condition has not improved. Every day, Yukiko tells us she will die, and as you can see, her luster has faded. She hasn't had a single morsel to eat in a week. How exhausted and weak she must be. But what's the use of telling an invalid what to do? She refuses to listen. We're at our wits' end. Our doctor, Dr. Yasuda, tells us every time, 'It's no good trying to take care of her at home. It'll only make her more spoiled and stubborn. Why don't you bring her to my hospital?' But her mother's reluctance makes me hesitate. A hospital may not be as comfortable, but these days, not even Takichi and Okura can restrain Yukiko when she has a fit. We worry she might jump into the well, so we make sure to seal it up. But what if she runs into the street? I do wonder if a hospital might be better for her. . . though what a pity that would be. It's impossible to decide. Please, help us, tell us your thoughts."

Masao could only sigh with him.

Yukiko was still shaking from her outburst. Utterly exhausted, she seemed to doze off in her mother's lap. Her mother called out to Okura, who, together with another maid, moved her to a silk futon where she could rest. Soon Yukiko was in a deep sleep, lost in a world of dreams. Masao quietly moved to her side to look at her. As disheveled as she was, her hair was dark and thick, pulled almost too tight and folded multiple times into a gingko-leaf hairstyle, fit for a young lady. Her thin ghost-like hands were thrown on top of one another near the pillow. The scarlet silk cord was untied, and her breast was partially revealed through the loosened yukata. It was a strangely pathetic sight.

Next to her pillow was a small table, where Yukiko would occasionally read books and mix ink on the inkstone, as if remembering her school days. As Masao flipped through the stack of papers, he saw that her scribbles were filled with unidentifiable characters. Her malformed brushstrokes filled his heart with pity. Then, from the pages emerged the vivid letters, *mura* and *ro*. Ah, here he is again, *Uemura Rokuro* . . . he laid down the papers without a word, unable to go on.

IV

Since it was his day off, Masao stayed until evening. Normally a nurse would tend to Yukiko's needs, using precious ice to keep her head cool and comfortable. Today, it was Masao who offered to take on this duty.

"Here, let me give it a try," he said, as he awkwardly held out his hand.

"Thank you, sir, but I'm afraid your clothes will get wet," replied the girl.

"No matter, just let me try," Masao insisted, and clumsily opened the bag of ice to squeeze out some water.

"Yuki, dear, do you know who this is? It's Masao, your brother. He's going to take care of you," her mother spoke encouragingly. Yukiko opened her eyes but stared blankly, not understanding what was going on.

"What a pretty butterfly. Look, look. Oh, be careful, dear brother," she cried, "please don't kill it!"

"What's the matter, Yukiko? There's no butterfly," Masao replied. "I'm here for you, I'm not going to kill any butterfly. All right? Do you recognize me? Do you? It's your brother, Masao. Come to your senses, Yukiko. For the sake of Father and Mother. Do you understand what I'm saying? Our dear parents haven't slept well, not even a single night, since you fell ill. They've grown so thin, and they look exhausted. Can't you see that they're trying to help you get better? You've always been a sensible, good girl. Calm down and think." Masao continued, "What happened to Uemura can't be undone. It was terribly unfortunate, but if you mourn him with all your heart—offer him incense and flowers—surely, he will rest in peace. That's what he wrote in his will, remember? He left this world willingly, giving you up in the process, free of any lingering attachments. There's no reason why you should behave like this, losing your mind, causing sorrow for our parents. Sure, you could have done things differently, but Uemura never resented you for what happened. He was a man of reason, isn't that so? You always praised him for that—for being the best in school. Think about it. He would never die resenting you. It's just not possible. He was angry at the world, as anyone could see. His will made that clear. Come back to your senses, Yukiko. Come back to us. You can be released from our promise—live your life as you like. Think of our parents, of their suffering and grief. Do you understand? If you put your mind to it, you can get better and go back to your old self right now. You don't need a doctor or medicine. Just put your heart in it, and everything will be as it was. Isn't that right, Yukiko? Yuki, do you understand me?"

"Yes, brother. Yes," Yukiko nodded along.

The maids had withdrawn from her bedside, and only Masao and the parents remained. It was unclear if she understood what he had told her.

"Masao, dear brother," Yukiko whispered.

"What is it?" Masao approached with the bag of ice in hand.

"Could you be kind and help me sit up? My body aches all over. . ."

It was no surprise that Yukiko felt such pain. When she dashed out of the house in a frenzy, there was always a terrible altercation, so it was no wonder she had bruises here and there. But the mere recognition of pain, however trivial, made her parents hopeful.

"Do you know who is holding you, dear?" her mother asked.

"Yes, it's Masao, my brother," Yukiko answered.

"That's right. Good girl. Do you understand what he just said to you?"

"Yes, Mother. *Are we to look at flowers in full bloom* . . ." Yukiko replied nonsensically, quoting from the opening of a well-known poetic treatise. All who were present exchanged looks, feeling pity.

After a few moments, Yukiko sighed and whispered in a low voice, "Please, I beg you, please don't mention it again. I don't know what to say. . ."

"Yukiko, what are you . . . ?" Her mother looked alarmed.

"Oh, Uemura-san, my darling, where are you going?"

Yukiko suddenly stood up, pushed away the astonished Masao, and rushed out toward the veranda. Takichi and Okura came running from the kitchen. Yukiko fell to her knees next to the pillar.

"Forgive me, it's all my fault. It was my fault from the very beginning. You did nothing wrong, my dearest. I didn't tell you, I'm the one to blame. I call him my brother, but in truth, he's . . ."

There was loud sobbing, punctuated by broken words. The blinds along the eaves were half raised now, no longer needed to shield against the strong afternoon sun. As evening fell, the wind shook the blinds and echoed mournfully.

V

Yukiko had spoken the same words yesterday, the day before yesterday, three months ago in the spring, and even before that. "Forgive me," "at school," "your letters," "my sins," "I will follow you," and "my dearest"—she would repeat in no logical order. If a name came to her lips, it was always Uemura. Yukiko's body was a shell of what it once was, empty of heart and mind. She understood nothing others said. A joyful laugh meant she was dreaming of the past, when she was free from suffering. When she clutched her chest in anguish, it was as if she was reliving those tragic days all over again.

"Oh, how I pity her," Takichi sighed, and so did Okura. No one, not even Osan, the lowly kitchen maid, would say her lady bore even the slightest guilt. "I still remember," Okura recalled, "how lovely our lady looked going to school, in her long-sleeved yellow *haori* jacket with her hair elegantly tied up. The pretty ornaments made of white and pink paper against the single flat silver hairpin looked so playful and chic. I worry whether she'll ever return to her old self. And to think what a nice gentleman Mr. Uemura was . . ."

"Hmph, that dark-skinned ruffian," Osan countered. "Who cares if he had smarts, he was no match for our lady. I won't say a good word about him." "Now, now, Osan," Okura replied, "you didn't know him. If you had known Mr. Uemura for even three days, you'd want to follow him to his death. I don't mean to speak ill of the young master, but Mr. Uemura was of a different caliber altogether. He was a good man beyond words. Even I cried when I heard about his passing—I can only imagine the pain our lady must be feeling. If she were a carefree sort like you or me, it would have been easier—but our lady is so thoughtful and tenderhearted, she must feel sorrow more deeply than the rest of us. Like I said, I don't mean to speak ill of someone so kind and gentle, but . . . if it weren't for the young master, our lady wouldn't have needed to worry herself so. For that matter, if it weren't for Mr. Uemura, well, things would have fallen into place quite nicely. Oh, what a miserable world this is! Why can't we be frank and truthful about things, tell them as they are?" Okura lamented.

Masao would find time to visit Yukiko whenever he could. Every two or three evenings, after work, he would take a rickshaw to the willow tree. Sometimes Yukiko would receive him with joy; other times, she would cry and refuse to see him. Sometimes she would put her head in his lap like a child and fall asleep. When Masao would chide her for not eating her dinner, she would sit next to him and obediently sip her rice porridge. "You'll get better, won't you?" "Yes, Brother." "Will you get better today?" "Yes, dear brother, I will. I'll get better today and sew you a pair of *hakama* trousers. I'll even make you a kimono." "How kind you are. Get better quickly and make them for me." Even in the midst of this sort of conversation, though, Yukiko would ask, "If I get better, will you ask Uemura-san to come? Can I see him again?" "Sure, you can see him," Masao would reply. "I'll bring him myself. Get better soon and put our parents' minds at ease, all right?" "Oh, yes," Yukiko would reply ecstatically. "I will get better tomorrow!"

Masao knew he couldn't count on this happening. Yet, desperate to believe she was in earnest, he'd arrive while it was still daylight the next day. By then, though, Yukiko would be another person. She'd turn her face from anyone who came near and reject everything. She wouldn't let her parents or Masao or even the maids approach. She'd sob and cry out, "I don't know, oh, I don't know. What do I know about anything!" The house would seem to her like a vast barren field in which she had been stranded, and her endless sorrow moved others to tears.

In the middle of August, when the heat reached its peak, Yukiko's mad frenzy became so intense that she no longer knew who or what was before her. She cried and whimpered day and night. Sleep became impossible. Her eyes were sunken, her countenance ghastly. She no longer looked human. Those who took care of her were exhausted, and Yukiko grew weaker by the day. She spoke only of Uemura—how she'd seen him yesterday, that she'd see him again today. There he was, across the river, standing just out of reach in the fog. And tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . . Those were the only words on her lips.

Would she ever awaken from this dream and regain her senses? Her parents waited, holding out the hope that she would one day call them Father and Mother again. They found strange comfort in the fact that their daughter was still there before them. A cicada leaves its empty shell behind for loved ones to remember it by—so the old poem goes. So they waited, day after day. May the autumn wind not arrive so soon; may the willow tree that stands by the gate retain its leaves but a little longer.

Note from the translator: This story was originally published in five installments in the *Yomiuri* newspaper in August 1895. The Japanese title "Utsusemi" refers to a tenth-century waka poem included in the *Kokinshu,* which became a popular cultural reference. In *The Tale of Genji,* Utsusemi (Lady of the Cicada Shell) attracts Genji's attention but rejects his advances, only to leave behind her robe like a castoff cicada shell. In Ichiyō's story, Yukiko's "chastity" is mentioned by her father despite her romantic entanglement with Uemura; yet she is not simply depicted as a woman who is sacrificed to protect the family name. In this modern tale, Ichiyō highlights Yukiko's psychological complexity and anguish through her escalating madness, and focuses a critical lens on the social pressures placed on individuals in a patriarchal society.

As was common practice in families of high social standing with only daughters, a male heir was adopted into the family from a young age, destined to marry the daughter and become head of the household to carry on the family name. To heighten the narrative drama, the relationship between Yukiko and Masao is intentionally left ambiguous, to be slowly revealed as the story progresses. At first Masao is referred to as Yukiko's brother, and it is only midway through the story that their true relationship is disclosed. This story is not only about love between individuals; it also captures the intricate web of family and social relations that determined one's life in traditional society. The maid Okura perhaps expresses this most poignantly when she cries out in exasperation, "Oh, what a miserable world this is! Why can't we be frank and truthful about things, tell them as they are?"

Haruki Murakami

Remembering Seiji Ozawa

translated by Ted Goossen

WHEN I THINK ABOUT THE LATE SEIJI OZAWA, scene after scene pops into my head—always followed by a swirl of emotions—but it's the fragmentary, concrete memories that come first, most with some humor in the mix.

I ONCE SAT BESIDE A PRONE SEIJI backstage in Geneva's old concert hall, frantically rubbing his hands. He had just conducted a student orchestra, young musicians drawn from across Europe, and then, right after the performance, he'd collapsed and lost consciousness. No doctors were around, and I had no idea what to do, so I sat beside him as he lay stretched out on the couch backstage, calling his name and massaging his arms and legs, trying to bring him back. I thought it might help his circulation, but it didn't appear to be working. Still, I kept it up for what felt like ages, and all the while he remained unconscious.

To be honest, I was terrified that he would pass away right there on the spot. Could someone so important die that easily? Since there was nothing else I could think of to do, I kept massaging until, finally, a student who knew some shiatsu arrived to lend a hand. Soon, Seiji began to show signs of life: his eyes opened, and he tried to sit up. What a relief!

The following day, a fully recovered Seiji explained what had happened. "I was hungry before the concert," he said, "so I gobbled up a plate of red bean rice. A big mistake, I guess."

Not long before this, Seiji had undergone surgery for cancer, and a section of his esophagus had been removed. The doctors had told him to avoid heavy foods. Sticky rice with red beans is hard to digest, so that would have been a definite no-no.

"But it looked so tasty," he said. He'd wolfed it down just before stepping onstage. That was how he lived, who he was: the epitome of maturity with respect to music, yet still an impulsive boy in so many other ways. Thanks to that impulsiveness, I spent a summer night in Switzerland bathed in cold sweat. The concert, by the way, was fantastic.

WALKING THE STREETS OF VIENNA WITH SEIJI was a time-consuming exercise—even a short stroll could take forever. Seiji appeared to know every busker along

the way. "Yo, Maestro!" one would call, and he would stop and converse. This slowed us down, but I could tell from his expression how pleased he was. I think in his heart of hearts Seiji wanted to live as freely as those buskers did. At the time, he was chief conductor of the Vienna State Orchestra, a heavy responsibility. The work was obviously meaningful, and Seiji was proud of the honor his position conferred. Yet I suspect that he felt tied down by the institutional demands that came with working in such a big organization, and longed to play his music unhindered, like a breeze passing over a meadow. Indeed, my impression is that dreams of a freer life occupied half his soul.

I REMEMBER BUMPING INTO SEIJI one evening in Honolulu's Kapiʻolani Park when I was out for a stroll. He was walking toward me with a bag in each hand. I asked him what was up. "I had a craving for Peking duck," he replied, "so I phoned in my order, but they mistakenly thought I'd ordered two, so I had to pay double." Seiji lived by himself in a Honolulu apartment at the time. "What will you do?" I asked. "I'll probably end up eating them both!" he replied with a laugh. I immediately grew concerned. Would this be a repeat of Geneva? Yet it seems he managed all that food with no problem. I still wonder, did he really polish off both ducks by himself?

MEMORIES LIKE THESE pop into my head, one after another. Of course, Seiji and I talked a lot about music. Clearly, he was a very special musician, with unique talents. A true genius, no doubt, whose brain seemed to be deeply connected to music. That profound connection left me speechless. It was natural for him, but for a layman like me, it was a gift one could only marvel at.

I loved watching Seiji rehearse with an orchestra. There are many kinds of conductors—dictators, teachers, quiet types, loquacious types, those who are relaxed and laid-back, those who fly into a rage at the slightest provocation. Seiji was the type of conductor who keeps his feelings under wraps. He went over an orchestra's performance like a workman tightening screws, carefully adjusting every detail. He listened with the deepest concentration, and when a problem arose, he'd point it out in a friendly, often humorous way. This was how he constructed the sound, the music, that he sought, tightening one screw after another with the utmost patience and stamina.

I never tired of watching this process. With each screw he tightened, strangely, the music became slightly freer and more open. This impressed me no end. How was such a thing possible? It should have made the performance stiffer—wasn't that how things worked? Yet Seiji's patient approach had a relaxing effect. The more he tightened, the smoother and more natural the music became, the more expressive and free. He breathed life into the notes. That skill, I believe, is at the core of the "Ozawa magic."

His profound musical vision, built up within himself, was what gave him this unshakable talent. He had only to transfer his expertise and understanding to the multifaceted musical instrument that was his orchestra, and then let the musicians do the rest. No extraneous messages were involved, no theatrical gestures or artistic self-indulgence, no emotional manipulation. What came through instead were his thoughts on music, pure and unadulterated, stripped of ostentation and affectation. He was able to reconstruct his sonic vision and impart it to a concert hall full of people. The more a writer endeavors to perfect their style, the more style itself fades from the picture until only the story remains—that to me is the novelistic ideal. Such was the level of mastery, I believe, that Seiji Ozawa attained in the performances of his later years.

I can think of no one else who has attained—and in such a natural way—that level of mastery. I want to hear more of Seiji Ozawa's music. To discover in which direction it will move, where it will end up. Such are my true feelings. Ozawa left behind a treasury of recordings, but I'm sad that I will never hear all he had yet to accomplish.

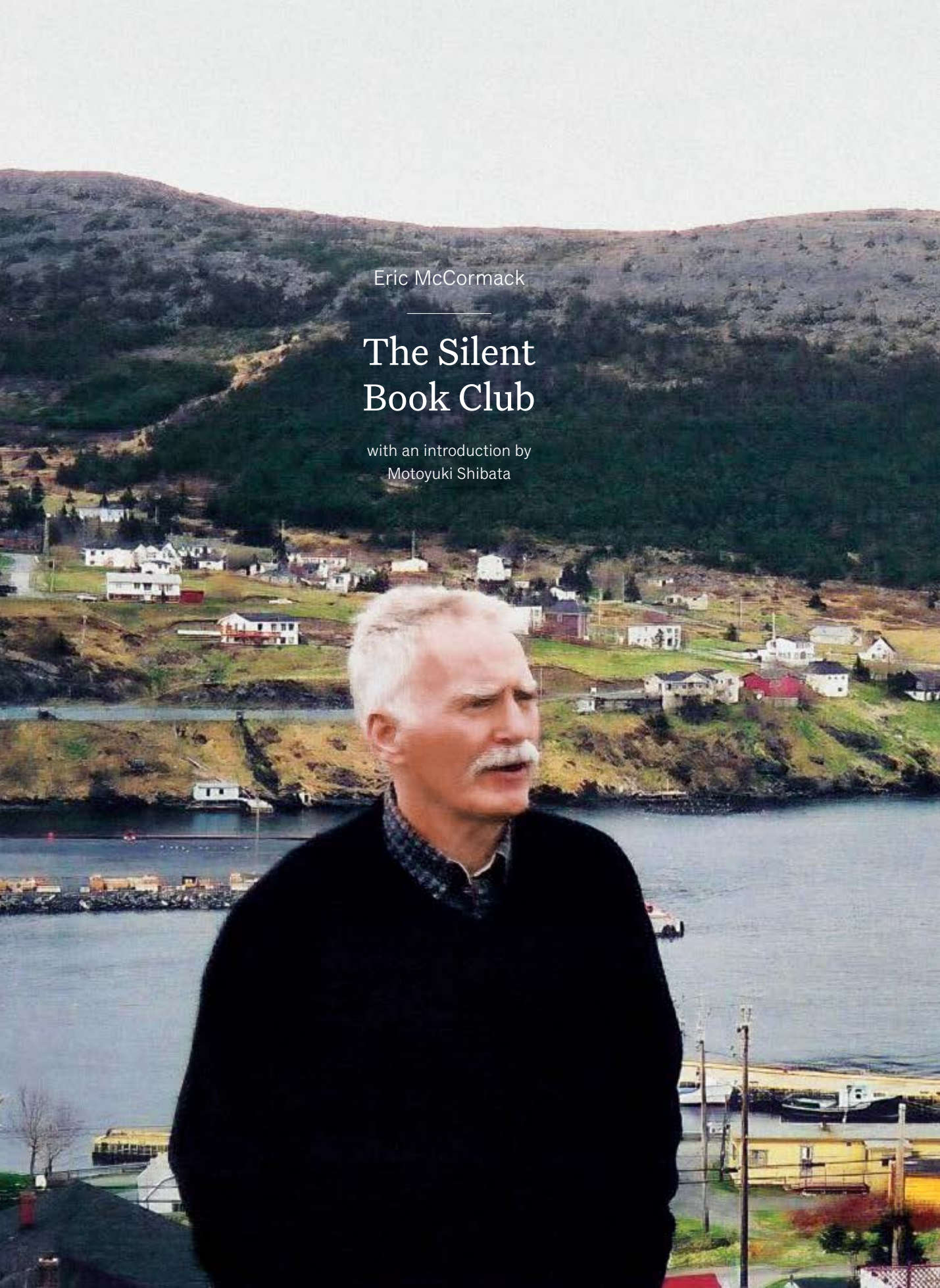
"MY FAVORITE TIME OF DAY are the hours before dawn," Seiji once told me. "I read musical scores then, when everyone is asleep. With nothing to distract me, I can really get into them."

I imagine his mind filled with music during those hours, when all about him was silent. When he opened

a score, a world of pure music awaited him—endlessly pure, like a philosophical system, and just as complete. Perhaps only there in the dark, in the hours before dawn, was such a thing possible.

It is a bit presumptuous to compare myself with him, but I, too, often set to work in those early, predawn hours. I think of him then, as I plug away on my novel in the surrounding silence. "Seiji is up too," I think, drawing energy from his example, "wholly engrossed in his music."

It saddens me that my dear predawn comrade is no longer of this world.



Eric McCormack

The Silent Book Club

with an introduction by
Motoyuki Shibata

SINCE OCTOBER 2016, Takashi Akutsu has hosted the Silent Book Club at Fuzkue, one of his cafés in Tokyo. A book is selected, a dozen people gather, sit and read the book for two and a half hours, and then leave. All this is done in silence—no talk before or after. All they share is the experience of reading the same book at the same time and place. Books read at the club so far include Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (the first one selected), Cixin Liu's *The Three-Body Problem*, Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs,* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*—all in Japanese.

In January 2020, when the café selected our late friend Eric McCormack's *Cloud,* which I had translated, they invited me to speak briefly about the author and the book (an exception to the rule!) before they started reading. I asked Eric to write a short greeting for the audience, and he loved the whole idea of the Silent Book Club. The following is what he sent to me.

Dear Silent Book Club Members,

I love the idea behind your club! It's just the sort of thing that—if I'd had the wit to think of it—I might have put into one of my own novels.

If I had written such a novel, I would have made the meeting of a reading club such as yours, in Tokyo, on this very night, the setting for the novel's dramatic conclusion. Up to that point, the story would probably have been filled with violent incidents, recurrences, coincidences of every sort—and maybe one or two atrocious villains.

In the final chapter, everyone would be assembled here, just as you are tonight. They obviously wouldn't be aware they themselves were characters in a hypothetical novel. And, unlike you (I'm *almost* sure of that), they would be a strange and quite offbeat group, with well-concealed fantasies and neuroses—some of them verging on the criminal. In fact, one of the readers might well turn out to be the more atrocious of the villains.

After the two and a half hours of reading, they would stop reading and close their books. They'd show no emotion and keep their views to themselves, just as they'd promised. Of course they'd have no idea that the book's all-seeing narrator (a disguised form of me, McCormack) would know exactly what their true feelings were. They might just as well have screamed from the rooftops in voices loud enough to alarm all Tokyo.

Not to worry, though! The all-seeing narrator had already completely forgiven even the most hostile of them. For he loved them all and shared with them, as they shared with each other, that most incurable of passions:

An infatuation with books!

(One of the readers, not satisfied, might pipe up: "And was one of them really that atrocious villain?" To which my all-seeing narrator would reply, on my behalf: "He says that's going to be a tricky part. He hasn't got around to working it out yet.")

My thanks to you all for being here tonight.

Best wishes,
Eric McCormack

What do you do when a straightforward translation sounds weird? Remarks from twelve translators

“Four-and-a-half-mat room,” for example, might sound strange to people unfamiliar with tatami mats, plus it conveys nothing of the frugality implied in the original Japanese. In the following pages, a dozen translators weigh in, recounting how they dealt with specific challenges.

JEFFREY ANGLES
on peculiar poetry and lucid prose

Poetry is one the most underrepresented genres of Japanese literature in English, so to help fill in this critical lacuna, I've concentrated much of my energy on translating poetry. In recent years, however, I've also translated novels, memoirs, and essays too. In the process, I've found myself adopting slightly different strategies, depending on whether a work is poetry or prose.

Poets value originality of expression more highly than just about any other quality, so when a poetic line sounds unusual in English, that isn't necessarily a negative quality. If anything, unusual turns of phrase linger in the mind. If one thinks of a translation as a kind of zero-sum game, then a quirky line might help offset some of the more domesticizing tendencies in Japanese-to-English translation, such as the addition of subjects, clarification of grammatical relationships between parts of a sentence, and so on.

By contrast, in prose works, and in quoted dialogue in particular, odd turns of phrase are more likely to attract negative attention, so I try to figure out ways to convey the same information in a way that sounds more natural. Linguists note that when people speak, there is a tendency to employ the "cooperative principle"—speech that is clearly expressed, unambiguous, brief, and easily digestible—simply to facilitate communication.

Keeping these principles in mind when translating can serve as helpful guidelines.

SONJA ARNTZEN
on the power of names

A translation problem I faced recently was not the presence of a word that is difficult to translate because its freight of connotations do not accompany it into English, but rather the absence of an absolutely vital word in the original. The text is *Ochikubo monogatari,* a tenth-century tale of a persecuted stepdaughter. As is common in Heian tales, the heroine has no name. Translators in European languages up to now have opted to use Ochikubo for her name—for example, in *The Tale of the Lady Ochikubo,* translated by William Whitehouse and Eizo Yanagisawa and published in 1970. Ochikubo, meaning "lower chamber," is a derogatory nickname given by her stepmother that refers to where in the house she is forced to live, but also evokes a crude word for vagina (*kubo*). When her lover and eventual rescuer first hears it as he hides in her bedchamber, he is horrified.

I decided that I could not use it as her name, even stripped of all its connotations for an English audience in its romanized form. Most vexing, as I worked on the translation, with no name to guide me, the heroine refused to come into focus. I could not relate to her. One day, a name for her floated into my mind, and suddenly my problem vanished. I am not sharing the name here because it may change before publication. But this placeholder name has made all the difference for me.

I am still left with the mystery of the absence of names for Heian women, whether fictional or real. I wonder what Heian women called themselves in the privacy of their own minds. Like T.S. Eliot's cats, perhaps they engaged in "rapt contemplation" of their

"... ineffable effable
Effanineffable
Deep and inscrutable singular Name."

DAVID BOYD
in defense of weirdness

Does "four-and-a-half-mat room" sound weird?

Sometimes, when we say something "sounds weird," we're talking about the way it *sounds.* Other times, we're saying it's going to be a challenge to get a particular term or concept to do the same thing in the translation that it does in the source. When faced with this second kind of weirdness, I'd recommend stepping away from the keyboard, at least for a little while. If we act too quickly and whittle away at our work to satisfy unexamined impulses, we can end up with a smooth translation that lacks the life of the original. That's an entirely different type of weirdness, and one I try to avoid at all costs.

Not long after the novelist Minako Oba wrote *Urashimaso* in the late 1970s, her daughter, Yu Oba, translated the book into English. She then let it sit for almost two decades before sharing her work with the world. When she finally published her version of *Urashimaso* in the nineties, she attached a one-and-a-half-page note (or does that sound weird?) in which she explains how her attitude toward the translation—and toward translation itself—had transformed over the intervening years. She writes about coming to accept the fact that it's "impossible to say the same thing in two different languages," and experiencing a newfound "sympathy for the imperfection of things." In other words, she had learned to let her translation breathe.

While sitting on a complete draft for years might seem a bit extreme, some amount of extra time can go a long way when it comes to feeling out what is or isn't "weird." Time can help us decide if the text actually needs to change—or if it's the translator who needs to adjust.

TED GOOSSEN
on translating onomatopoeias

I'm remembering a conversation from more than thirty years ago.

"It means squishy, Daddy, like you," my younger daughter giggles, pinching my middle-aged middle. I've just asked her if she knows what *gunya-gunya* means. For twenty years I've studied Japanese, but now a six-year-old with a scant year of elementary school in Tokyo is teaching her scholar father. Maybe I should stop dillydallying and start reading more kids' manga!

I love Japanese *giseigo*, but that love is often unrequited. *Barabara, baribari, batabata*—the list goes on and on (and on). The cartoonist Gomi Taro sketches several hundred in his hilarious *Illustrated Dictionary of Japanese Onomatopoetic Expressions,* my favorite bathroom reading for many years now; yet these are just the tip of the iceberg, and his book seldom includes the specific expression I seek. This can drive me loony tunes. Long after our return to Canada, both my daughters still have a better feel for Japanese onomatopoeia than I do.

So, who, of all writers, do I choose to translate? Hiromi Kawakami, of course, an author whose rich prose is made even richer by her frequent use of *giseigo.* In "Hokusai," for example, the first of the eight stories that make up *Dragon Palace*, *gunya-gunya* is used eleven times in less than twenty pages! There, however, it describes not squishy tummies but the shape-shifting figure of its main character, who drives the narrator bonkers by claiming to be an octopus in human form. Is it the cheap hooch they are guzzling that's to blame, or do the man's blurry arms and legs—so like an octopus's writhing tentacles—reveal his true identity?

I am often flummoxed by the hodgepodge of onomatopoetic terms I encounter as a translator. Willy-nilly, I roam my thesaurus, groping for English words whose sounds somehow match, mumbling and grumbling like a true curmudgeon as I ransack my lackadaisical brain for equivalents in English.

KENDALL HEITZMAN
on discovering what a thing meant

I often find that the problem isn't what the thing is, it's when the thing is. I trust readers to know what to do with the past and the present, but for me the biggest problem is the not-quite-the-past-but-not-quite-the-present, a sliding window of time that in my mind currently hovers over the mid-1990s to 2019. It isn't far enough in the past to treat as a period piece, but there are little things here and there that may well jar many readers, perhaps because they aren't sure whether to chalk something up as being "weird" because it's the past, or because it's happening in another culture, or both. We start to think, is it worth it to explain how something ephemeral from ten years ago worked?

In one short story from 2011 that I translated a few years later, a character appears to have a phone in each hand, one to search for information and the other to text with a friend. The author didn't feel it was necessary to clarify that the texting happened on what is now known as a *gara-kei* phone; it was obvious enough to contemporary readers. Did I really need to explain what this object was? Even if English-language readers are aware that Japan's cell phones were once so advanced and so specialized that even the advent of the mighty iPhone didn't spell their immediate doom, how many of them will know that there was a brief span of time when a good number of early-adapter, tech-savvy consumers kept a thumb in both camps? I eventually decided that even if extra explanation was necessary, the *gara-kei* had to stay; elements of an old world lingering on into an uncertain new one were surely symbolically crucial to a story with the triple disaster of 3.11 hovering in the background. In trying to explain what the thing *was,* we often discover what the thing *meant*.

SAM MALISSA
on putting the pieces together

The short and not-intentionally-flippant answer for me is that there are no rules because every translation is its own unique puzzle to solve. That said, I have a few guiding principles that I bring to every such knot of language:

One, try to make the text feel in English the way it feels in Japanese.

Two, try to retain cultural specificity.

Three, try to factor in any associated shades of meaning.

Four, if there's a notable rhythmic or sonic element, try to keep some of that intact.

Five, if the beginning of the passage seems to point in one direction and swerves by the end, try to preserve the moment of the reveal (even though many Japanese sentences work best in English when you invert the order of words or ideas).

And so on. This approach is inspired by Antoine Berman's idea of the deforming tendencies of translation—what to be wary of—adapted for my own practice.

The reader will note that in each of these guiding principles I use the word "try," because of course it isn't always possible to account for every element. I have to pick and choose which to prioritize, based on what the story needs. If the situation allows, I often try to incorporate any elements that I can't get into the translated phrase itself into the surrounding sentences instead.

For the stories by Kyōhei Sakaguchi, it has felt a bit easier because these vignettes depict fever dream worlds with their own internal logic, often uncanny in the original Japanese, so I can focus on reproducing the feel of each line and idea without having to worry as much about communicating any specific cultural references.

It helps me to look at each text as a series of choices, some interlocking and some mutually exclusive. You open one door, another closes. You find a window to get into the room behind the closed door, but the neighboring room vanishes. That Rubik's Cube dynamic is what makes it a puzzle. And that's what makes it fun.

JAY RUBIN
on the freedom to improvise

When speaking or writing about practical translation problems, it's hard to resist the temptation to list examples of one's own cleverness in transforming seemingly untranslatable phrases into natural English that subtly conveys the implications of the original. I've been in this business long enough that (a) I've forgotten most of my innumerable brilliant solutions and (b) "four-and-a-half-mat room" no longer sounds weird to me. You could keep that particular expression unchanged and surround it with language that contains the necessary implications: "The seven of us squeezed into Aomame's little four-and-a-half-mat room but had to remain standing." My basic rule of thumb is that Japanese and English are so different, you're free to do just about anything that works.

MARIKO SAITŌ
on Japanese loanwords in Korean
translated by Ted Goossen and Hana Kim

The Korean author Giho Yi drops Japanese loanwords into his writing. "Stack up those rafters [*taruki*]," says one of his characters, or, in another instance, "I'm just a laborer [*nogata*]," pronounced *dokata* in Japanese. Terms like these that are still used in Korea on construction sites are relics of the colonial era (1910–1945), and can be used to create a type of gritty realism.

In Korean cinema noir, a gangster's "turf" is his *nawabari,* while his boss is his *oyabun.* One might be tempted to think that only words like these, associated with the criminal underworld, have survived. Although there may be a kernel of truth to that, some Korean novelists use Japanese terms to heighten the sense of reality in their work. There are also instances where Japanese words imply the injustices of the past, or collusion with the Japanese. Japanese words can be used to convey a lurking threat, or intimations of a dark history.

What should the Korean-to-Japanese translator do with these loanwords? One could simply plug in the same terms, in which case *taruki* remains *taruki,* while *nogata* becomes *dokata.* Yet I wanted to alert the Japanese reader to the fact that these are Japanese words in the Korean original, so I touched on the issue in the Translator's Afterword, but in the end, it was likely no more than an empty gesture, just one more example of a translator's fruitless struggle.

MOTOYUKI SHIBATA
On "you"

Some things are easier to say in some languages and other things are easier to say in others and no language is better or worse than any other, but when you often have trouble referring to the person right in front of you—in other words, when no handy second-person pronoun is readily available—you begin to think there may be something wrong with your language. In English you can say "you" to your boss as easily as to a friend, but in Japanese you have to use different pronouns depending on your relationship with the person you are talking to. Of course honorifics help a lot (quite often honorifics even make it possible to dispense with the subject of a sentence), but if you and your interlocutor happen to be talking about someone you should also address in a similar manner, honorifics can be confusing (at least for a clumsy honorific-user like me). So in some situations something as primitive as vaguely pointing to your interlocutor can be the best solution (whereas *clearly* pointing to them is downright rude and not allowed), but in print this option is not available.

In *Ghosts* by Paul Auster (may his soul rest in peace), a detective is so engrossed with his work that he neglects his fiancée, and the fiancée gives up on him after months of waiting in despair and finds another man. One day the detective and the ex-fiancée ("the ex-future Mrs. Blue") run into each other on the street, and the moment the woman recognizes the man she begins to shout, "You!" and pounds him savagely on the chest. There's just no apt second-person pronoun for this in Japanese. I settled on *hitodenashi* (an inhuman person), but of course it's a far cry from the simple fury of "You!"

ASA YONEDA
on rooms to dream in

One day in translation class, we're talking about metaphor:
彼の命は、風前の灯火だった。

"What's the image?" I ask. *A flame,* someone says. *In front of a gust of wind.* "Okay. What does that mean here?" *Flickering?* "And?" *It's weak, helpless.* "Yeah. So his life is . . ." *In danger.* "Sure. How would you translate it?" (Crickets.)

"I think this one can be pretty straightforward," I suggest. (More crickets.)

"What would be a 'literal' translation?" (Yet more crickets.)

"Isn't it just a candle in the wind?" (General teeth-sucking, *ehh*-ing, head-shaking.)

"You don't like that? Why not?" *It sounds weird.* "It's a phrase people use from time to time." *Never heard it.* "There was a song by Elton John . . ." *Um, was it about Marilyn Monroe?* "I was thinking of Princess Diana, but that must have been a remake. 'It seems to me / You lived your life / Like a candle in the wind—'"

It doesn't work. "How would you translate it, then?" *I'm thinking . . . Hog on a highway?* (Class expands into more and more whimsical suggestions.)

One of the things I find myself doing when I try to teach translation is interpreting my students' responses to language, both translated and translated, like a Jungian analyst trying to interpret a dream. (Sometimes a four-and-a-half-mat room is just a room, and sometimes it can be a whole galaxy.)

"It sounds weird" is a nonspecific complaint—a general malaise, a symptom that can't be pinpointed. To dismiss a potential translation simply for being weird (or reject a weirdness that comes up in a translation you're reading) would seem to be to disengage from the richness and strangeness of the human unconscious.

If it's a function of writing to create more spaces for weirdness to manifest in the world, then maybe we as translators can take the risk of describing to the reader exactly what the room is like . . . In case they might once have seen it in a dream.

HITOMI YOSHIO
on titles and cover designs

While I was translating *Kochira Amiko*, a novella by Natsuko Imamura, my working title was, simply, *This Is Amiko.* But that was a bit like translating Natsume Sōseki's *Wagahai wa neko de aru* as *I Am a Cat*: the meaning is correct, but everything is missing. I remember Jay Rubin saying many years ago, when he was a guest in Motoyuki Shibata's graduate seminar at the University of Tokyo, that he might translate the title of Sōseki's beloved novel as *Gentlemen, You See Before You a Cat.* I thought that was brilliant. That *aha* feeling I experienced back then, before I had ever translated anything, comes back to me every time I encounter this type of translation challenge.

So when it came to *Kochira Amiko,* I tried to think of some walkie-talkie lingo that I could use to convey the nuance of "kochira"—including *Amiko, Speaking* or *This Is Amiko, Over.* But none of them seemed quite right, and the title remained the same until the first cover design arrived.

It featured a simple white flower against a lacquer black background. The image played into every stereotype a Western reader might have of a traditional Japanese woman. It had nothing to do with Amiko at all. Amiko is complicated. Amiko is irrepressible. Amiko is a child.

For me, the most important image in the entire book is the walkie-talkie. It is a metaphor for Amiko's lonely existence—she speaks into a toy walkie-talkie without ever receiving a reply.

So I added "Do You Copy?" to the title, and that changed everything. In hindsight, it's such a simple solution, but it took me a long time to arrive at it. And the next cover design was perfect.

ANNA ZIELINSKA-ELLIOTT
on the temptation to add

The example of "four-and-a-half-mat room" weirdness brought to mind an early Kawabata story I translated recently. It was serialized in *Bungei shunjū* in 1929–30. If an English translation exists, I haven't found it. (I was translating into Polish.)

In that story, the protagonist, Shinpachi, is a poor student who needs a quiet place to study and arranges to share the use of a room above a hatmaker's shop with a girl, Yuki, who is a bus conductor. The two never cross paths, because the girl works in the daytime when he is usually studying. One day, Shinpachi sees her working on a bus and is attracted to her, but they never meet, because Yuki catches pneumonia and dies. She has no family, so Shinpachi ends up taking charge of Yuki's corpse, which he decides to donate to a medical school.

The body is lying in the room where Shinpachi used to study. The hatmaker and his wife are there together with Shinpachi, who is stunned by Yuki's beauty seen up close. The old couple begin to go through her belongings looking for money: first the desk drawers, then the closet. As they comb through the girl's meager possessions, the atmosphere grows ever more suffocating.

We never find out how big the room is, but considering the period and the relative poverty of everyone involved, it was probably a four-and-a-half-mat room, six mats at the most.

In movies, the deceased is often placed on a catafalque and surrounded by flowers in a spacious dark room. But Kawabata's scene takes place in a cramped space: four people (one of them dead) and a morbid atmosphere filled with sexual desire and greed. At first, I thought it was important to somehow convey how close the space must have felt. I kept wondering whether I should add some adjective to indicate the size of the room. In the end, I didn't. The story was almost a hundred years old: Who was I to say how big or small the room felt to the characters at that time?

JEFFREY ANGLES (b. 1971) is a professor of Japanese language and literature at Western Michigan University. His translation of Hiromi Itō's novel *The Thorn Puller* was published under the Monkey imprint with Stone Bridge Press in 2022. He has also translated eleven other books, including two poetry collections by Hiromi Itō: *Killing Kanoko* and *Wild Grass on the Riverbank*. Angles is also a poet; his book of Japanese-language poems *Watashi no hizukehenkōsen* (My International Date Line) won the 68th Yomiuri Prize for Literature. His essay "Finding Mother" appears in vol. 1 of *MONKEY,* and excerpts from *The Thorn Puller* appear in vols. 1 and 2. His translations of poems by Mutsuo Takahashi are featured in vol. 3, and his translations of microfiction by Taruho Inagaki and Haruki Murakami's "The Zombie" appear in vol. 4; vol. 5 includes his translation of "Wild Boar" by Hiromi Itō.

SONJA ARNTZEN (b. 1945) taught Japanese literature at the University of Alberta and the University of Toronto. Now living in Vancouver, she writes poetry and continues her research in Japanese literature of the Heian and medieval eras. Her books include *Ikkyū and the Crazy Cloud Anthology* (Tokyo University Press, 1986; revised and expanded edition, Quirin Press, 2022), *The Kagerō Diary* (University of Michigan, 1997), and *The Sarashina Diary: A Woman's Life in Eleventh-Century Japan* (Columbia University Press, 2014; Reader's Edition, 2018). Her current project is a new translation of *Ochikubo monogatari*.

POLLY BARTON (b. 1984) is a literary translator and writer, based in the UK. Her translation of *A Hundred Years and a Day* by Tomoka Shibasaki will be published under the Monkey imprint with Stone Bridge Press in 2025. Other recent translations include *Butter* by Asako Yuzuki, *Mild Vertigo* by Mieko Kanai, *Where the Wild Ladies Are* by Aoko Matsuda, *There's No Such Thing as an Easy Job* by Kikuko Tsumura, and *So We Look to the Sky* by Misumi Kubo. In 2021 she published *Fifty Sounds,* a personal dictionary of the Japanese language. Her translations of stories by Aoko Matsuda and Tomoka Shibasaki appear in vols. 1–5 of *MONKEY,* and her translations of stories by Kikuko Tsumura appear in vols. 2, 3, and 5.

DAVID BOYD (b. 1981) is an associate professor of translation and Japanese studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His translation of *Takaoka's Travels* by Tatsuhiko Shibusawa was published under the Monkey imprint with Stone Bridge Press in 2024. He has translated three novellas by Hiroko Oyamada: *The Factory* (2019), *The Hole* (2020), and *Weasels in the Attic* (2022). He won the 2022 Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for his translation of *The Hole*. With Sam Bett, he has co-translated three novels by Mieko Kawakami: *Breasts and Eggs* (2020), *Heaven* (2021), and *All the Lovers in the Night* (2022). *Heaven* was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2022. His translations of Kuniko Mukōda's "Nori and Eggs for Breakfast" and Kanoko Okamoto's "Sushi" appear in vol. 1 of *MONKEY.* For vol. 2, he contributed an excerpt from *Takaoka's Travels*. His translations of Hiroko Oyamada's stories appear in vols. 1–5. For vols. 3–5, he co-translated stories by Midori Osaki with Asa Yoneda.

ANDREW CAMPANA (b. 1989) is an assistant professor of Japanese literature at Cornell University. He has been published widely as a translator and as a poet in both English and Japanese. *Expanding Verse: Japanese Poetry at Media's Edge* (University of California Press, 2024) explores how poets have engaged with new technologies such as cinema, tape recording, the internet, and augmented reality. His collection "Seven Modern Poets on Food" was published in vol. 1 of *MONKEY,* "Five Modern Poets on Travel" in vol. 2, "Four Modern Poets on Encounters with Nature" in vol. 3, "Eight Modern Haiku Poets on Music" in vol. 4, and "Five Modern Haiku Poets on Encounters with Creatures" in vol. 5.

CHRIS CORKER (b. 1985) is a British-Canadian writer and translator of Japanese fiction and nonfiction. He is currently writing his doctoral dissertation on the relationship between nostalgia and natural disaster in Japanese literature and film at York University. His translation of an essay by Kengo Kuma is included in *Touch Wood: Material, Architecture, Future,* edited by Carla Ferrer et al. (Zurich: Lars Müller, 2022). His translation of poetry by Keijirō Suga appears in vol. 3 of *MONKEY,* and his translations of poems by Toshiko Hirata, Mizuki Misumi, and Shii appear in vol. 4. His translation of "Bearman" by Natsuki Ikezawa is featured in vol. 5.

MICHAEL EMMERICH (b. 1975) teaches Japanese literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. An award-winning translator, he has rendered into English books by Gen'ichirō Takahashi, Hiromi Kawakami, and Hideo Furukawa, among others. He is the author of *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature* (2013) and *Tentekomai: bungaku wa hi kurete michi tōshi* (2018); the editor of *Read Real Japanese Fiction* (2008) and *Short Stories in Japanese: New Penguin Parallel Text* (2011); and the co-editor of *BeHere 1942: A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration* (2022). His translations of Masatsugu Ono, Makoto Takayanagi, and others are featured in *Monkey Business* and *MONKEY.*

KAORI FUJINO (b. 1980) is an award-winning author. Her debut work of fiction, "Greedy Birds," was awarded the Bungakukai Newcomers Prize in 2006, and her novel *Nails and Eyes* won the Akutagawa Prize in 2013. In 2017 she was a resident at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program. Her story "You Okay for Time?" was translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori and appeared in *Granta* in 2017. *Nails and Eyes* was translated by Kendall Heitzman (2023). Her stories "Someday with the One, the Perfect Bag" (*MONKEY,* vol. 3), "Transformers: Pianos" (vol. 4), and "To Abuse a Monster" (vol. 5) are translated by Laurel Taylor.

HIDEO FURUKAWA (b. 1966) is one of the most innovative writers in Japan today. His novel *Belka, Why Don't You Bark?* was translated by Michael Emmerich; his partly fictional reportage *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure: A Tale That Begins with Fukushima* was translated by Doug Slaymaker with Akiko Takenaka; and his short novel *Slow Boat* was translated by David Boyd. His work appears in every issue of *Monkey Business* and *MONKEY*; vol. 1 of

Monkey Business features an interview with Haruki Murakami by Hideo Furukawa; vol. 3 of *MONKEY* features "The Little Woods of Fukushima," an excerpt from his memoir *Zero F*; vol. 4 includes an excerpt from his epic poem *Ten-On*; and vol. 5 features an excerpt from *The Holy Family,* translated by Kendall Heitzman.

TED GOOSSEN (b. 1948) is a literary translator, professor emeritus at York University in Toronto, and one of the founding editors of *Monkey Business* and *MONKEY New Writing from Japan*. He is the editor of *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*. He translated Haruki Murakami's *Wind/Pinball* and *The Strange Library,* and co-translated (with Philip Gabriel) *Men Without Women* and *Killing Commendatore*. His translations of Hiromi Kawakami's *People from My Neighborhood* and Naoya Shiga's *Reconciliation* were published in 2020. His translation of *Dragon Palace* by Hiromi Kawakami was published under the MONKEY imprint with Stone Bridge Press in 2023. His translations of Murakami, Shiga, Kawakami, and others are featured in every issue of *Monkey Business* and in *MONKEY,* vols. 1–5.

KENDALL HEITZMAN (b. 1973) is an associate professor of Japanese literature and culture at the University of Iowa. He has translated stories and essays by Yūshō Takiguchi, Li Kotomi, and Tomoka Shibasaki, among others. He is the author of *Enduring Postwar: Yasuoka Shōtarō and Literary Memory in Japan* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2019). His translation of Kaori Fujino's *Nails and Eyes* was published by Pushkin Press in 2023 and won the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize. His translations of the work of Hideo Furukawa appear in *MONKEY,* vols. 3–5.

ICHIYŌ HIGUCHI (1872–1896) was a celebrated poet and short story writer. She studied classical poetry at Haginoya under Utako Nakajima. Following her father's death, she became the head of household at the age of seventeen and began to write stories to help support her mother and sister. She also ran a small shop near the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, which became the setting for many of her later stories. A selection of Ichiyō's work was published in translation by Robert Lyons Danly in his critical biography *In the Shade of Spring Leaves*. Her stories, translated by Hitomi Yoshio, are featured in vols. 4 and 5 of *MONKEY.*

LAIRD HUNT (b. 1968) is the author of nine novels, a story collection, and two book-length translations from the French. His most recent novel, *Zorrie,* was a finalist for the 2021 National Book Award. *Kind One* won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Fiction and was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner, and *Neverhome* won the Grand Prix de Littérature Américaine and the Bridge Prize and was shortlisted for the Prix Femina Étranger. He is a 2024 Guggenheim Fellow and teaches in Literary Arts at Brown University. "Star Date" appears in vol. 5 of *Monkey Business*; "Whale Leg" appears in *MONKEY*, vol. 2; and "A Bear's Tale" in vol. 5.

NATSUKI IKEZAWA (b. 1945) is a Japanese novelist, poet, essayist, and translator. He has won numerous literary awards, including the Akutagawa Prize, Tanizaki Prize, Yomiuri Prize, and Mainichi Shuppan Bunka Award. He is an avid traveler, and much of his work deals with the intersections of cultural identity, and the relationship between humanity and the natural world. "Bearman," part of a novel of interconnected short stories written in response to the 2011 Tohoku disaster, appears in *MONKEY,* vol. 5.

HIROMI ITŌ (b. 1955) is one of the most important voices in contemporary Japanese poetry. English translations of her poetry collection include *Killing Kanoko* and *Wild Grass on the Riverbank,* both translated by Jeffrey Angles. *Monkey Business* (vols. 5–7) and *MONKEY* (vols. 1–2) feature excerpts from her novel *The Thorn Puller,* translated by Jeffrey Angles and published under the Monkey imprint at Stone Bridge Press in 2022. "Wild Boar," translated by Jeffrey Angles, appears in *MONKEY,* vol. 5.

SEIKŌ ITŌ (b. 1961) is a writer, performer, and one of the pioneers of Japanese rap. His novel *Imagination Radio* (2013) reflects on the March 2011 earthquake and nuclear disaster through the eyes of a deejay.

He also writes nonfiction, including a 2017 book on Doctors Without Borders. Itō has long been interested in Noh, and he and Jay Rubin have collaborated with Grand Master Kazufusa Hōshō in a contemporary performance of the traditional Noh play *Hagoromo*. Rubin's translation of Itō's *Fujito* appears in vol. 1 of *MONKEY, Kurozuka* in vol. 2, *Tadanori* in vol. 3, *Takasago* in vol. 4, and *Utō* in vol. 5.

HIROMI KAWAKAMI (b. 1958) is one of Japan's leading novelists. Many of her books have been published in English, most recently the story collection *Dragon Palace* and the novel *The Third Love*, both translated by Ted Goossen. Other titles include *Manazuru,* translated by Michael Emmerich; *Record of a Night Too Brief,* translated by Lucy North; and *The Nakano Thrift Shop, Parade: A Folktale, Strange Weather in Tokyo* (shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2013), and *The Ten Loves of Nishino,* translated by Allison Markin Powell. *People from My Neighborhood,* translated by Ted Goossen, was published by Granta Books in 2020. "The Dragon Palace," appears in vol. 3 of *Monkey Business* and "Hazuki and Me" in vol. 5. "Banana," which was published in vol. 4 of *Monkey Business*, was included in *The Best Small Fictions 2015* (Queen's Ferry Press). "Sea Horse" appears in *MONKEY,* vol. 2; "Yoshiwara Dreaming" in vol. 4; and "The Cathedral" in vol. 5.

HANA KIM (b. 1976) is the director of the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library at the University of Toronto and the editor of *Asian Canadian Voices: Facets of Diversity* (2022). A poet and translator, Kim received the Sunshik Min Prize at the 2008 Min Chapbook Translation Competition, held jointly by Harvard University and Tamal Vista Publications, as well as the 41st Modern Korean Literature Translation Award for poetry from *Korea Times.* Her translations are included in *Love Is the Pain of Feverish Flowers* (2016); her own poetry has been published in *Ricepaper Magazine*, *Variety Crossing*, and *Han Kŭt: Critical Art and Writing by Korean Canadian Women* (2007).

SACHIKO KISHIMOTO (b. 1960) is known for her translations of Nicholson Baker, Lucia Berlin, Judy Budnitz, Lydia Davis, Thom Jones, and Miranda July. She is also a popular essayist; her latest collection, *Seas I'd Like to See Before I Die,* appeared in 2020. Excerpts from *The Forbidden Diary,* a fictional diary, translated by Ted Goossen, are featured in vols. 1–7 of *Monkey Business*. His translations of "Misaki" appears in vol. 1 of *MONKEY* and "I Don't Remember" in vol. 3. "Tamba-Sasayama," translated by Margaret Mitsutani, is featured in vol. 5.

SATOSHI KITAMURA (b. 1956) is an award-winning picture-book author and illustrator. His own books include *Stone Age Boy, Millie's Marvellous Hat,* and *The Smile Shop.* He has worked with numerous authors and poets. His graphic narratives are featured in vols. 5–7 of *Monkey Business*: "Mr. Quote" in vol. 7, "Igor Nocturnov" in vol. 6, and "Variation and Theme," inspired by a Charles Simic poem, in vol. 5. In vol. 1 of *MONKEY,* he published "The Heart of the Lunchbox"; "The Overcoat" appears in vol. 2, "The Cave" in vol. 3, and "Five Parallel Lines" in vol. 4, to which he also contributed the cover illustration. "Fish in Muddy Waters," appears in vol. 5.

KELLY LINK (b. 1969) has published five collections of short stories, including *Get in Trouble*, *Magic for Beginners*, and *White Cat, Black Dog*. In 2024 she published her first novel, *The Book of Love,* which quickly became a national bestseller. She has won a Hugo Award, three Nebula Awards, and a World Fantasy Award for her fiction, and was a 2018 MacArthur Fellow. With Gavin Grant, she is the co-founder of Small Beer Press and is the owner of Book Moon, an independent bookshop in Easthampton, Massachusetts. "Horoscopes," a collection of very short stories, appeared in vol. 6 of *Monkey Business,* and "Other People's Ghost Stories" is featured in vol. 5 of *MONKEY.*

SAM MALISSA (b. 1981) holds a PhD in Japanese literature from Yale University. His translations include *Bullet Train* by Kōtaro Isaka (Harvill Secker, 2021), *The End of the Moment We Had* by Toshiki Okada (Pushkin Press, 2018), and short fiction by Shun Medoruma, Hideo Furukawa, and Masatsugu

Ono. His translations of stories by Kyōhei Sakaguchi appear in vols. 1–5 of *MONKEY.*

AOKO MATSUDA (b. 1979) is a writer and translator. In 2013 her debut, *Stackable,* was nominated for the Mishima Yukio Prize and the Noma Literary New Face Prize. In 2019 her short story "The Woman Dies" (from the collection *The Year of No Wild Flowers*), translated by Polly Barton and published by Granta online, was shortlisted for a Shirley Jackson Award. And in 2021, *Where the Wild Ladies Are,* translated by Polly Barton, won a World Fantasy Award in the best collection category. Her short novel *The Girl Who Is Getting Married* was published by Strangers Press in 2016. She has translated work by Karen Russell, Amelia Gray, and Carmen Maria Machado into Japanese. Her stories appear in vols. 5–7 of *Monkey Business,* translated by Jeffrey Angles. Her short fiction, translated by Polly Barton, is featured in vols. 1–5 of *MONKEY.*

ERIC McCORMACK (1938–2023) was a Scottish-born Canadian writer known for skillfully blending elements of gothic fiction, black humor, metafiction, magic realism, and straightforward good storytelling. He published a collection of stories and five novels, including *The Paradise Motel*, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, and *The Dutch Wife*. His last novel, *Cloud* (Penguin, 2014), was translated by Motoyuki Shibata and published in Japan. "Family Traditions" appears in *Monkey Business,* vol. 5, and "The Trail" in *MONKEY,* vol. 2. His "Letter to the Silent Book Club" appears in vol. 5.

MARGARET MITSUTANI (b. 1953) is a translator living in Tokyo. Her translations of short stories by Kyōko Hayashi have appeared in *Manoa* and *Prairie Schooner*. She has also translated works by Kenzaburō Ōe, Mitsuyo Kakuta, and Yōko Tawada. Her translation of Tawada's *The Emissary* (New Directions, 2018) won both the National Book Award for Translated Literature and the Miyoshi Award. Tawada's *Scattered All Over the Earth* (New Directions, 2022), the first volume of a trilogy, was short-listed for the National Book Award for Translated Literature. *Suggested in the Stars,* volume two of the trilogy, is forthcoming from New Directions. Her translation of Sachiko Kishimoto's "Tamba-Sasayama" appears in *MONKEY,* vol. 5.

HARUKI MURAKAMI (b. 1949) is one of the world's best-known and best-loved novelists. All his major novels—including *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle,* and *1Q84*—have been translated into dozens of languages. "On Writing Short Stories" in vol. 7 of *Monkey Business* is the second half of his conversation with Motoyuki Shibata, published in vol. 9 (Summer/Fall 2016) of the Japanese *MONKEY.* An interview by Hideo Furukawa appears in vol. 1 of *Monkey Business.* His essays "The Great Cycle of Storytelling" and "So What Shall I Write About?" appear in vol. 2 and vol. 5 of *Monkey Business*. Vol. 4 of *Monkey Business* includes an essay by Richard Powers on Murakami's fiction. "Good Stories Originate in the Caves of Antiquity," a conversation with Mieko Kawakami, appears in vol. 1 of *MONKEY*; the essay "Jogging in Southern Europe" in vol. 2; the story "Creta Kano," translated by Gitte Hansen, in vol. 3; "The Zombie," translated by Jeffrey Angles, in vol. 4; and "Remembering Seiji Ozawa," translated by Ted Goossen, in vol. 5.

SAWAKO NAKAYASU (b. 1975) is an artist working with language, performance, and translation—separately and in various combinations. Her most recent books include *Pink Waves* (Omnidawn), a finalist for the PEN/Voelcker Award; *Some Girls Walk into the Country They Are From* (Wave Books), and the pamphlet *Say Translation Is Art* (Ugly Duckling Presse). Translations include *The Collected Poems of Chika Sagawa* (Modern Library), as well as *Mouth: Eats Color—Sagawa Chika Translations, Anti-translations, & Originals* (Rogue Factorial), a multilingual work of both original and translated poetry. "Ant as a Glass of Water" appears in *MONKEY,* vol. 4, and four more of her poems are featured in vol. 5.

MIDORI OSAKI (1896–1971) was a modernist writer. Born in Tottori prefecture, she was most active in the

1920s and 1930s. Her best-known work, "Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense," was translated by Kyoko Selden and Alisa Freedman. Her stories, translated by Asa Yoneda and David Boyd, appear in vols. 3–5 of *MONKEY.* Hitomi Yoshio's translation of the 1929 play "Apple Pie Afternoon" is featured on the MONKEY website under "Translators to watch for." Her life was the subject of the 1998 film *Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense: In Search of Midori Osaki* by pink film director Sachi Hamano.

HIROKO OYAMADA (b. 1983) is one of Japan's most promising young writers. Her short novels *The Factory, The Hole,* and *Weasels in the Attic* were translated by David Boyd and published by New Directions. Her story "Spider Lilies" was translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter and published in the Japan issue of *Granta* (Spring 2014). "Lost in the Zoo" and "Extra Innings," translated by David Boyd, appear in vols. 6 and 7 of *Monkey Business.* Her stories are featured in *MONKEY,* vols. 1–5.

JAY RUBIN (b. 1941) is professor emeritus of Japanese literature at Harvard University. One of the principal translators of Haruki Murakami, he translated *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Norwegian Wood, After Dark, 1Q84* (co-translated with Philip Gabriel), *After the Quake: Stories*, and *Absolutely on Music: Conversations with Seiji Ozawa.* Among his many other translations are *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories* by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and *The Miner* and *Sanshirō* by Sōseki Natsume. He is the author of *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* and the editor of *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories.* His translations into English of Seikō Itō's modern Japanese translations of Noh plays appear in every issue of *MONKEY.*

ADAM EHRLICH SACHS (b. 1985) is the author of three books: *Gretel and the Great War, The Organs of Sense,* and *Inherited Disorders*. His fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker, n+1,* and *Harper's,* and he was a finalist for the Believer Book Award and the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature. Aoko Matsuda translated five of his stories from *Inherited Disorders* for the Japanese *MONKEY* (Spring 2018); for the same issue, she wrote a story in response to his work, which was translated into English by Polly Barton as "A Father and His Back" and published in *MONKEY New Writing from Japan,* vol. 3. "The Heron" appears in *MONKEY,* vol. 5.

MARIKO SAITŌ (b. 1960) translates Korean literature into Japanese and is widely acknowledged as an advocate for contemporary Korean fiction. Among the numerous authors she has translated are Han Kang, Jeong Yi-hyeon, Hwang Jungeun, Chung Serang, and Cho Nam-joo. Saitō has also published books on Korean literature and history. In 2015 she was the recipient of the first Best Translation Award for Park Min-gyu's *Castella,* which she co-translated with Hyun Je-hoon.

KYŌHEI SAKAGUCHI (b. 1978) is a writer, artist, and architect. His work explores alternative ways of being, as in his books *Zero Yen House* and *Build Your Own Independent Nation.* His novel *Haikai Taxi* was nominated for the Yukio Mishima Prize in 2014. Translated by Sam Malissa, "Forest of the Ronpa" appears in vol. 1 of *MONKEY,* "The Lake" in vol. 2, "The Tale of Malig the Navigator" in vol. 3, "Listen for the Perfume" in vol. 4, and "Bird's-Eye View" in vol. 5.

TOMOKA SHIBASAKI (b. 1973) is a novelist, short story writer, and essayist. Her books include *Awake or Asleep, Viridian,* and *In the City Where I Wasn't.* She won the Akutagawa Prize in 2014 with *Spring Garden,* which has been translated by Polly Barton (Pushkin Press). "The Seaside Road" appears in vol. 2 of *Monkey Business*, "The Glasses Thief" in vol. 3, "Background Music" in vol. 6, translated by Ted Goossen, and "Peter and Janis" in vol. 7, translated by Christopher Lowy. Her stories, translated by Polly Barton, are featured in vols. 1–5 of *MONKEY.*

MOTOYUKI SHIBATA (b. 1954) translates American literature and runs the Japanese literary journal *MONKEY.* He has translated Paul Auster, Rebecca Brown, Stuart Dybek, Steve Erickson, Brian Evenson,

Laird Hunt, Kelly Link, Steven Millhauser, and Richard Powers, among others. His translation of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was a bestseller in Japan in 2018. More recent translations include Eric McCormack's *Cloud* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.* He is professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo.

ELENI SIKELIANOS (b. 1965) is the author of ten books of poetry, including *The California Poem* (Coffee House Press, 2004) and *Your Kingdom* (Coffee House Press, 2023). She has also published two hybrid memoir-verse-image-novels: *The Book of Jon* and *You Animal Machine.* She has been at the forefront of ecopoetics and hybrid work since the early 2000s, exploring family as well as animal lineages. Her work has been translated into French and Greek, among a dozen other languages. She is a professor of Literary Arts at Brown University. Two of her poems appear in *MONKEY,* vol. 5.

INUO TAGUCHI (b. 1967) is an award-winning poet. His second poetry collection, *Moo Shōgun,* published by Shinchōsha in 2000, won the 31st Takami Jun Award. He has published a series of collections including *Armadillogic, Taishi: Doro no koyomi* (dialogue-poems: co-authored with Yasuhiro Yotsumoto), and *Sei Franchesca no Tori.* In 2021, *Haydn na Asa,* his first collection in twelve years, was published by Nanarokusha; it was translated into English by Takako Lento and published as *Haydn Morning* (Vagabond Press, 2022). "A Phone Call from Emily Dickinson," translated by Leo Elizabeth Takada, is featured in *MONKEY,* vol. 5.

LEO ELIZABETH TAKADA (b. 1991) is a translator and self-translating poet born in Japan, raised in Scotland, and currently living in Tokyo. Takada is the English translator of the screenplay and subtitles for the award-winning feature film *Perfect Days,* and the Japanese translator of the interview series with the film's director, Wim Wenders. Takada's bilingual poetry collections include *Sapere Romantika* and *Kyoto Remains.* Their translation of "A Phone Call from Emily Dickinson" appears in *MONKEY,* vol. 5.

MAKOTO TAKAYANAGI (b. 1950) has published numerous books of poetry. His collected works appeared in two volumes in 2016. A third volume was published in 2019. *Aliceland* was his first publication, in 1980; a translation by Michael Emmerich appears in vol. 7 of *Monkey Business*. "Five Prose Poems" appears in vol. 1 of *MONKEY,* "The Graffiti" in vol. 3, selections from *The Art of Interstellar Transcription* in vol. 4, and selections from *Communications from a Wandering Comet* in vol. 5 (all translated by Michael Emmerich).

LAUREL TAYLOR (b. 1989) is a translator, poet, and assistant professor of Japanese at the University of Denver, where she researches and teaches contemporary Japanese literature, gender and sexuality, and translation. Her translations include fiction and poetry by Yaeko Batchelor, Minae Mizumura, Aoko Matsuda, and Noriko Mizuta. She is the co-translator (with Hitomi Yoshio) of Mieko Kawakami's forthcoming *Sisters in Yellow* (Knopf). Her translations of stories by Kaori Fujino appear in vols. 3–5 of *MONKEY,* as well as on the MONKEY website under "Translators to watch for."

KIKUKO TSUMURA (b. 1978) is a writer from Osaka, and she often uses Osaka dialect in her work. She has won numerous Japanese literary awards, including the Akutagawa Prize and the Noma Literary New Face Prize. Her first short story translated into English, "The Water Tower and the Turtle," won a PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers. Her novel *There's No Such Thing as an Easy Job,* translated by Polly Barton, was published by Bloomsbury in 2020. Her stories, translated by Polly Barton, appear in *MONKEY,* vols. 2, 3, and 5.

ASA YONEDA (b. 198Q) is the translator of *The Lonesome Bodybuilder* (Soft Skull Press, 2018) by Yukiko Motoya and *Idol, Burning* (HarperVia/Canongate, 2022) by Rin Usami. With David Boyd, Yoneda is co-editing *KANATA,* a collection of Japanese fiction chapbooks for Strangers Press. Yoneda's translation of "The City Bird" by Natsuko Kuroda is featured in *MONKEY,* vol. 3.

Her translations of stories by Midori Osaki, co-translated with David Boyd, appear in vols. 3–5.

HITOMI YOSHIO (b. 1979) is professor of Japanese literature at Waseda University. During 2022–24 she was a visiting scholar at Harvard University. She is the translator of Natsuko Imamura's *This Is Amiko, Do You Copy?* (Pushkin Press, 2023) and is the co-translator of Mieko Kawakami's forthcoming works, *Ashes of Spring* (Amazon Audible), *Sisters in Yellow* (Knopf), and *Dreams of Love, Etc.* (Knopf). Her translation of Midori Osaki's "Apple Pie Afternoon," a play, is featured on the MONKEY website under "Translators to watch for." Her translations of Mieko Kawakami's work are featured in *MONKEY,* vols. 1–4; vols. 4 and 5 include her translations of stories by Ichiyō Higuchi.

ANNA ZIELINSKA-ELLIOTT (b. 1963) is the director of the MFA in Literary Translation at Boston University. She is a translator of modern Japanese literature into Polish. Best known for her translations of Haruki Murakami, she has also translated Yukio Mishima, Banana Yoshimoto, and Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. She is the author of a Polish-language monograph on gender in Murakami's writing, a literary guidebook to Murakami's Tokyo, and several articles on Murakami and European translation practices relating to contemporary Japanese fiction.

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MONKEY

CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE FICTION IN TRANSLATION

The MONKEY imprint at Stone Bridge Press is proud to announce the publication of **TAKAOKA'S TRAVELS** by Tatsuhiko Shibusawa, translated by David Boyd.

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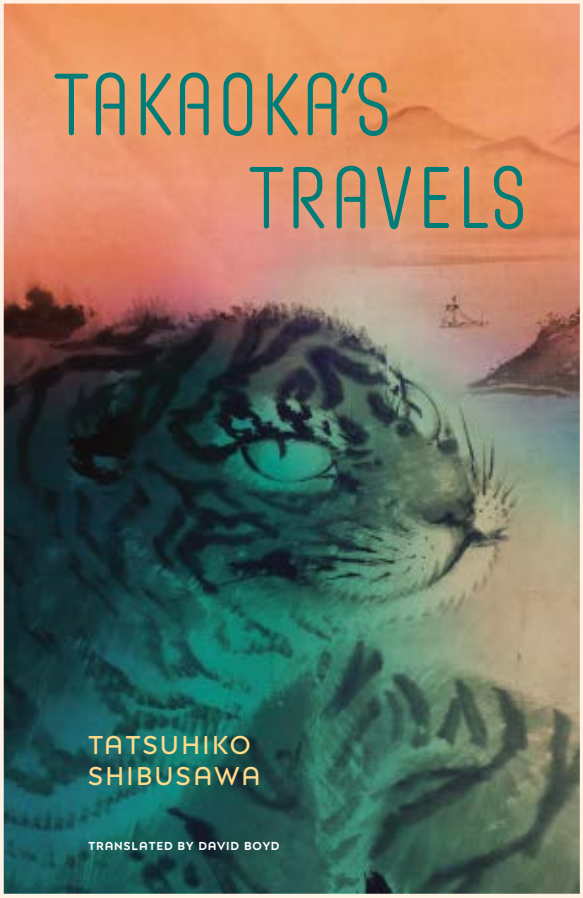

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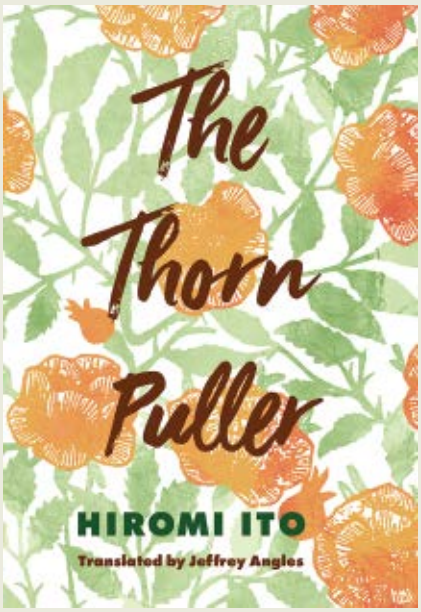

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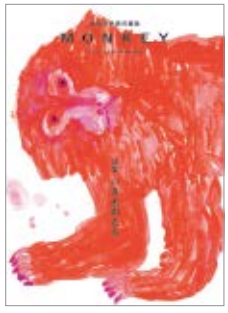


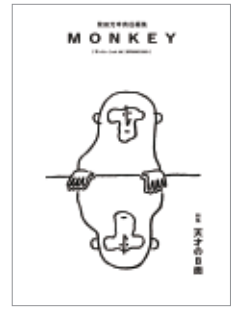
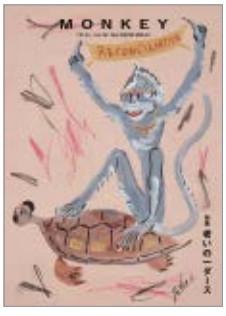



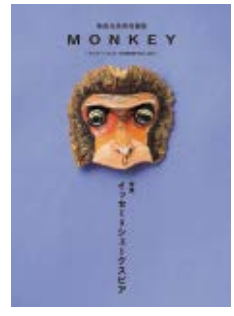

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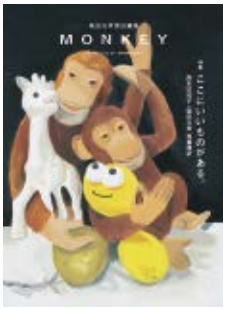






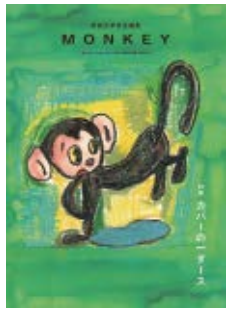

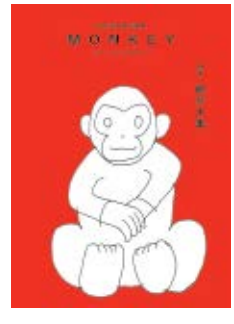

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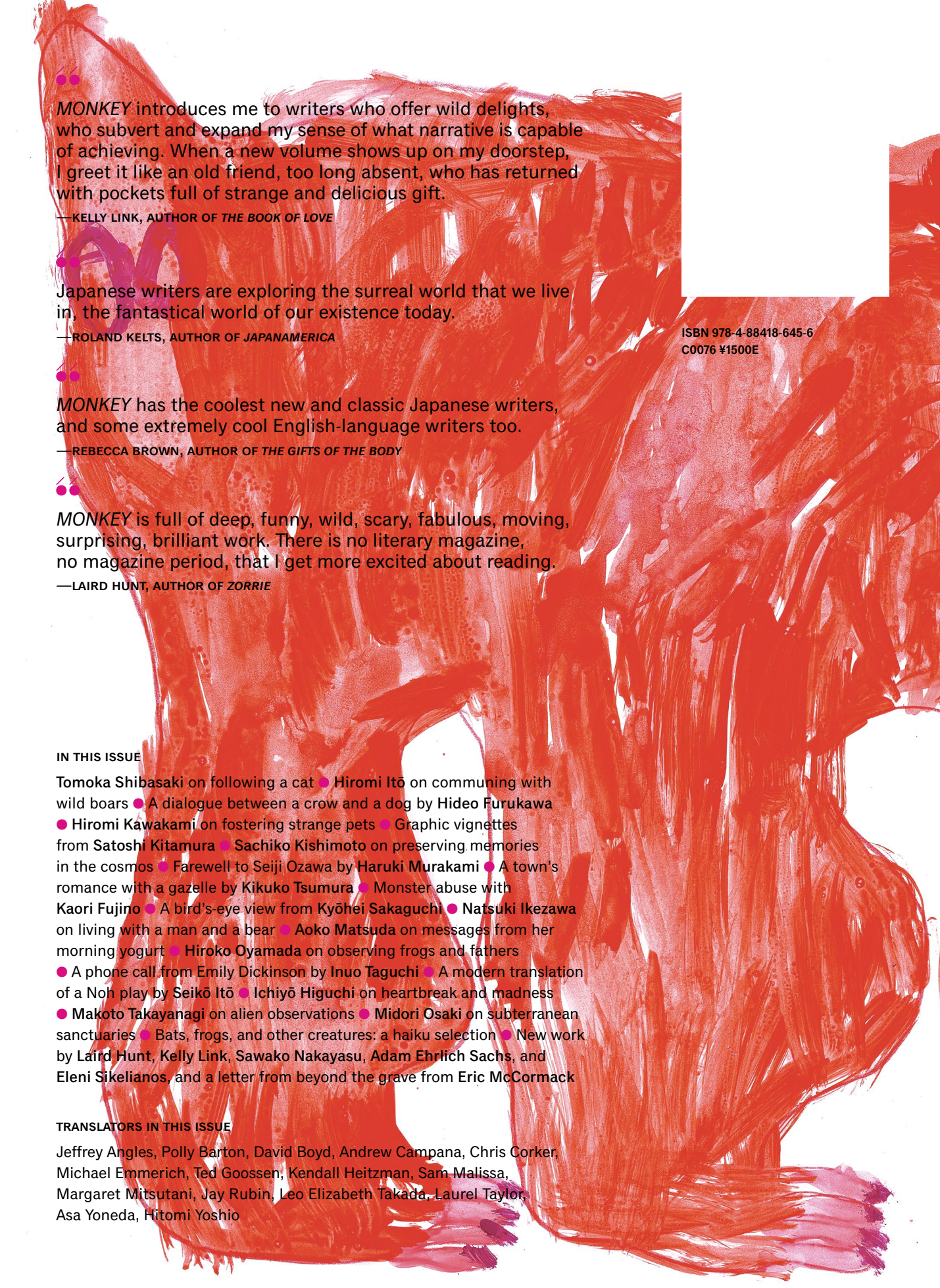

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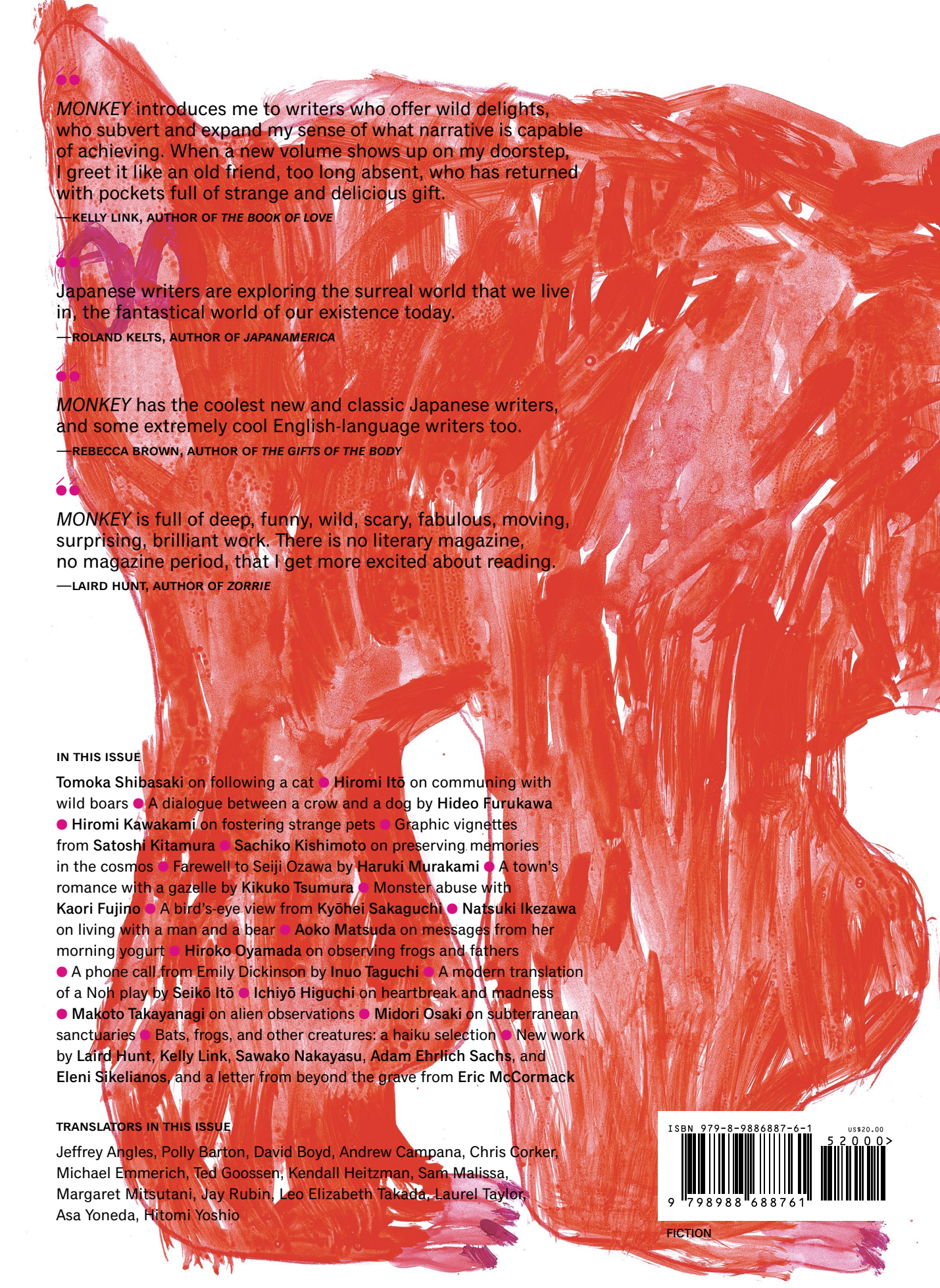

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