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Vassar College

## **Japanese Senior Project**

Nabi Taryong (The Lamenting Butterfly), Promise

Abigail Ren

Advisor: Hiromi Dollase

Spring 2020

**Translated Work:**

Nabi Taryong (ナビ・タリヨン (嘆きの蝶) *trans. The Lamenting Butterfly*)

**Book Information**

Title: Yuhi, Nabi Taryong (由熙、ナビ・タリヨン)

Author: Lee Yangji (李良枝)

ISBN-10: 4061975846

**Reflection:**

The main work I translated this semester was *Nabi Taryong*, the first work published by Lee Yangji, who was a second generation Zainichi Korean novelist born in Japan in 1955. Her parents acquired Japanese citizenship when she was in grade school, so her nationality became Japanese. She published *Nabi Taryong* (The Lamenting Butterfly) in the literary magazine *Gunzou* in 1982 while studying abroad at Seoul National University, and in 1988, her work *Yuhi* won the 100th Akutagawa Prize, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in Japan. However, while writing her novel *Ishi no Koe*, she contracted acute myocarditis and passed away in 1992 at age 37.

Lee Yangji's works focused on the experience of living as a Zainichi Korean and the search for her identity as a Korean person growing up in Japan. The term Zainichi (在日, *trans. Japan resident*) refers to ethnic Koreans who have permanent residency status in Japan, or have since gained Japanese citizenship, and specifically refers to the immigrants who came to Japan during World War II and their descendants who continued to live in Japan. When Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula ended after World War II, the Zainichi Koreans lost their Japanese nationality and faced heavy discrimination.

*Nabi Taryong* follows the journey of the narrator Aiko, a Zainichi Korean searching for her identity in the midst of her parents' never-ending divorce trial. Trapped between the ideas of what it means to Japanese and what it means to be Korean, at one point, she runs away to Kyoto to escape from the continuous legal battles between her mother and her father, only to come home, having realized she was treated as a Korean foreigner no matter where she went. Aiko eventually comes to reject the idea of being a citizen of Japan, choosing to identify with her Korean roots, taking on the name Aeja, and angry with her father and brother for gaining Japanese citizenship. She finds solace in learning to play the gayageum, a traditional Korean instrument that acts as a gateway to understanding her home country. After the death of her brother and the eventual resolution of her parents' divorce, she eventually leaves Japan to go to Korea, intending to continue her studies and return to the country she wants to call home, but soon sees that even there, she is a foreigner. Ultimately, Aeja finds a release for her suffering in *salpuri*, a ritual folk dance meant for cleansing spirits, and finally comes to terms with her Korean identity. *Nabi Taryong* draws from a lot of the author's personal life experiences, from the divorce of her parents, the sudden deaths of her two brothers, and the discrimination she faced as a Zainichi Korean growing up in Japan. Lee Yangji had also learned how to perform traditional Korean folk music and dance, so the work *Nabi Taryong* was likely heavily influenced by the author's own search for identity between the cultures of Japan and Korea.

I faced several difficulties when translating this work. The text contained a lot of difficult vocabulary that I hadn't previously learned as well as kanji that ended up being a word or phrase I already knew, so throughout the process of translating this work, I spent a lot of time looking up the meanings of different words. In addition to the difficult vocabulary, due to the differences in how sentences are structures in Japanese and in English, I initially had difficulty figuring out how to restructure words into English while persevering the original meaning and style of the Japanese text. Throughout the translation process, I was also faced with many Japanese words or phrases that didn't have a counterpart in English, especially with terms that specifically referred to aspects of traditional Japanese or Korean culture or architecture.

*Nabi Taryong* itself was also a challenging text to read, as the narrative only slowly reveals to the reader what happened and doesn't always follow a linear narrative. This made it difficult for me to translate in some parts because it was important for me to understand what the narrative was talking about, and while sometimes I would understand parts of the literal meaning in a sentence or section of text, I still needed time to process its meaning and function within the narrative in both Japanese and English. This was mainly due to the fact that the author often used metaphors, some of which was difficult for me to understand, while others didn't always translate well into English. The presence of Japanese onomatopoeia would often make literal translations redundant, so I also had to make decisions about how to translate the text in a way that would be natural in English. Additionally, oftentimes different scenes throughout the story would blend together, so that that narrative itself was difficult to follow without rereading parts several times, so I was challenged in my reading comprehension in order to be able to understand what the author had originally written in Japanese.

Overall, my experience translating *Nabi Taryong* helped me further my understanding of the Japanese language and culture. In addition to the many new vocabulary words and phrases I learned through reading and translating *Nabi Taryong*, it made me think critically about the differences and language barriers when translating from Japanese to English. The work *Nabi Taryong* also challenged me to practice and improve my Japanese reading comprehension ability, especially because I would sometimes try to read sections of the text to understand the plot and context before trying to reword what I'd written into English. The socio-political issues discussed in *Nabi Taryong* also taught me a lot about Japanese history and culture, specifically its historic relationship with the Zainichi Koreans. Although the work was published in 1982, and thus set around or before that time period, it provided a starting point for me to understand the issues foreigners, especially Zainichi Koreans, might face growing up in Japan. The narrative of *Nabi Taryong* depicts an emotional turmoil of one person's search for her own identity. The struggle of reconciling the fact that she's viewed as a foreigner for her ethnicity despite being born and raised in Japan, and the fact that her Japanese upbringing also makes her a foreigner of her ancestors' home country is emphasized throughout *Nabi Taryong*, and in translating this work and reading the text closely, I think I was able to understand and analyze the text much more closely than I would've been able to just reading it in either Japanese or English.

## Nabi Taryong

1.

My finger shook as I turned the dial. Even though my finger was pressing the hole, somehow it would let go helplessly. While I was spinning the dial, I put down the receiver. Sighing, I placed my two hands on top of each other on the receiver.

Twilight was approaching. The illuminated lights began to flicker. People walked as if they were on top of burnt iron, as the daylight disappeared into the depths of the fading colors of the road. The arrangement of the lined up buildings didn't change. With a sense of bewilderment and nostalgia like I had just come back from a country in a different timezone bubbling in my veins, I lost my balance. Looking around my surroundings, I rethought again and picked up the phone receiver. The phone number in my memory shouldn't be wrong. Even if covered by the skin in the time of two years, the seven numbers were deeply familiar singular notes that could be ruminated on. The sound of making a call began to ring in my ear. Something bitter began to spread deep in my chest. Having difficulty finding a place to look, I looked only at my own shoes, but because my feet were also looking uncomfortable, as if to avoid my gaze, my feet began to rub the side of my bag. Inside the bag was worn down underwear and several blouses. The rest of my luggage was all put into paper bags and thrown out in the trash at Kyoto station. The slightly brown liquid that drunks throw up everywhere dried and clung to the top of the concrete, where the homeless, looking like small people, were curled up sleeping. Next to it were men sitting in a circle surrounding cups of alcohol. Amongst them, one person was staring at my movements. I clearly intentionally threw out the paper bags.

“Hello?”

A deep voice. It was Tetsu's voice. Without thinking my hand squeezed the receiver, and as if bringing out my voice, I said, “Hello, Tetsu?”

“Hello... Are you Aiko?”

“Yeah.”

“So you've come back.”

“Yeah. I'm doing ok.”

“Idiot. That's my line.”

“Yeah.”

“Where are you right now?”

“Yeah.”

“Hey, I said where are you?”

“In front of the Kinokuniya bookstore.”

“Is that so? Wait there. I'm heading there now.”

“Yeah.”

“You better not move from there.”

“Yeah, I've come back after all.”

“Is that so... Have you been well?”

“What about you, Tetsu?”

“I'm the same as usual, having troubles with a bad younger sister.”

“Yeah.”

“Ok, I’m going to go to you now.”

Even after Tetsu hung up the phone, I held onto the receiver for a while. Tsuu, tsuu. After hearing the sound, I came back to my senses, hung up the phone, and picked up my bag. The side of my bag was dirtied.

“You really made us worry.”

When I thought Tetsu appeared from out of the crowds, a huge body of 100 kg approached and patted me on the shoulder. I just shrugged my two shoulders. I wanted to put a hand on Tetsu’s large chest and lean on him. However, the bottom of my armpits had been itching for a while. In this scene of reunion and chance meeting, as if I were an amateur actor suddenly made to go on stage, it made both me and the people watching embarrassed.

Suddenly going down the stairs of the building, we opened the iron door of a jazz bar. The sound of saxophones filled the store, and the sound resonated against the iron pipes decorating the walls and ceilings. Even sitting down in the corner on boxes and facing each other, I tried not to meet his gaze and looked down, and Tetsu seemed to restlessly order a bottle of gin and look only in the direction of the counter. My armpits were itchy again. In the corner of my eye, Tetsu, who said he would drink the gin straight, mixed the gin with the tonic in my glass.

“I see, it’s been two years.”

“Yeah.”

Unable to look him straight in the eye, I stared at the area above Tetsu’s stomach, where his polo shirt was stretched.

“Hey, cheers.”

“For various things, I’m sorry, Tetsu.”

Tetsu’s face came close to mine. My throat suddenly got hot.

“Tetsu, your face doesn’t look well.”

“Is that so?”

“Do you still have high blood pressure? You’re still only drinking medicine like usual, right?”

While holding up his glass, Tetsu pushed back the bridge of his glasses.

“Rather, you’re the one with a sickly face. It’s as if you have been inside a cave.”

“It’s because it was like I was in a cave. There weren’t many chances for me to be in the sun.”

“It must have been hard.”

“Not really.”

“For me, after you left home, I took a picture of your face and went around searching for you in Kyoto hotels.”

“Really? Why didn’t you come to where I was staying?”

“How could I know something like that? I must have passed by you.”

Oscar Peterson’s piano slowly ebbed and flowed. The sound entered with the gray ash of the tobacco smoke. We were both silent. In the drunkenness of gin and the sound, the awkwardness of meeting for the first time in two years began to disappear.

“Tetsu?”

“What?”

“Is everyone... doing well?”

“Ah, it’s soon, the district court’s judgment.”

In a moment, the two year’s gap disappeared, like the door of a dark room had opened with a sound. It was a door that had to be opened no matter what.

“Aiko, don’t run away anymore.”

Suddenly feeling like something was pressing tight against my chest, I looked up at Tetsu. He curled his lips to smile, and the corner of his eyes tightened.

“I guess... So, who will win?”

“There’s a chance it’s Dad.”

“Why?”

As if predicting that question, Tetsu shut his mouth and reached for the bottle with his hand. After pouring it into a glass, he stabbed at some ice and stirred it.

“Hey, why is it?”

“I became a witness. My testimony made Dad super happy.”

“What a child, that’s horrible.”

“It’s horrible, I know, but there was nothing we could do.”

“...”

“It was because you left home, so it got worse and worse for Mom.”

“Why? It’s Dad that’s bad, right?”

“No, it became such that it was because the mother’s education was bad that the eldest daughter left home.”

“That’s the way Dad put it then. That Lawyer Y really can do anything, it’s so disgusting, I feel like running away again.”

While saying that, I became upset about how I vented my anger to Tetsu like a spoiled child, and I stabbed an ice cube in my glass with my finger.

“Stop that, running away. Michiko has been suffering in your place all this time. Think about your younger sister. There’s nothing we can do. They’re our parents.”

“Our parents, huh.”

I kicked the bag I’d put under the table.

“Tetsu, I ran away from home to Kyoto, and then ran away from Kyoto back here.”

“Right, no matter where you go it’s the same. It’s the same, no matter how far you run, you can’t escape.”

I didn’t respond. My body felt hot, and I felt so dizzy that I could see several overlapping lamps on the counter.

“Hey, are you drunk? Stop drinking. You’re still underage after all.”

“I’m fine. I’ve just remembered something, that’s all.”

Tetsu’s face was like Otis Redding. If he was just thinner and was wearing sunglasses...

“Tetsu, you know, one day when I was in Kyoto, I realized my life had no sound, so I went to a store called Champ Clair<sup>1</sup>. It was a day when it was snowing heavily.”

“Ah, that’s a famous store.”

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<sup>1</sup> Champ Clair (シアンクレール, *Shiankure-ru*) was a jazz cafe in Kyoto that operated from 1956 to sometime before 1990.

“The sound was so wonderful.”

“It’s wonderful.”

“... Hey Tetsu, in the end, can’t we just run away?”

“Stop saying that already.”

“But...”

“It’s already been decided, hasn’t it? We can’t run away because we’re children. The children of those two.”

“Children, huh.”

I chugged down my gin and tonic. By the time I realized it, the bottle of gin was already half gone.

“Tetsu, speaking of which, how’s Kazuo doing?”

“He’s doing well, I heard.”

Next to the lamp, my brother Kazuo’s expressionless face came to mind. My two brothers were on my dad’s side, my younger sister and I on my mom’s, which is how we lived separately. My socially closed off brother at some point drew a line from our family itself and began to live like that. On occasion, when we met to report on our parents’ trial proceedings, he only nodded looking bored. However, by the lamp, the face of my brother’s that appeared was like that day when he suddenly started talking like a dam had broken. “If they didn’t love each other, they should just frankly separate. When I see them slowly dragging out this judgment for a long time, it makes me wonder if maybe they are still in love with each other and are just causing trouble for their children. They’re the ones who freely gave birth to us, so sometimes they should just listen to what the children have to say.”

My own face as I watched the lamp felt hot. Loving each other... It was a phrase that I had forgotten about, and it had not come to mind in a very long time. Kazuo’s work year after year was to chop cabbages. He’d stay at one place to work, and when the place seemed about to give him responsibility, he’d immediately resign, and at the next place he worked at, again he’d start to chop cabbages into threads like string. Each time he quit, the strings of cabbage grew thinner and thinner.

“Hey, Kazuo, don’t you have anything you want? It’s boring if your only speciality is cutting cabbages forever, right?”

At that time, when I asked that, with a mumbling voice Kazuo replied like it was a bothersome thing to do.

“I’m not interested in something like standing above others and giving orders.”

Tetsu said in a mumbling voice, “I want to quit being the eldest son. Why’d I have to get born as the eldest?”

I moved my eyes away from the lamp and held the glass.

“I want to quit being the child of those two.”

“Me too.”

Tetsu clinked his glass to mine, but as if I could hear the lingering dull sound, I tilted my head and quietly looked down.

That night, we put our arms around each other’s shoulders, and with tottering footsteps, we went to multiple bars one after another.



“It’s awkward that they make minors drink alcohol.”

Tetsu’s articulation had become bad.

“It’s okay. It’s because I drank a Screwdriver in one shot.”

“A female high schooler who is still young and has bangs, late at night, drinking Screwdrivers in one shot, discipline penalty, if that’s not good enough, then leaving school half way, running away from home, leaving hurriedly... Hey, at first everyone thought you had gotten a boyfriend and then had run away from home together with him.”

“Well, that’s my honor.”

“Don’t say something so stupid.”

“Did Tetsu think that too?”

“No, I know your personality well. I was jealous of you who got to run away. This family is really, completely beyond help. My blood pressure was rising. And then suddenly now, I’m in front of Kinokuniya, really. Hey, Aiko, drink, drink.”

Tetsu began to sing as he walked.

*You’d be so nice to come home to.*

Tetsu would sing, and then I would sing. Tetsu stopped in his steps and started to mimic the sound of a saxophone. I beat my fingers and danced. Passersby began to look back at us. There was also the sound of people clapping their hands. *You’d be so nice to come home to.* The embodiment of the thoughts of two years and the complicatedness that clung to the two of us was melting in the song.

Soon after I returned to Tokyo, my mother lost her court case. If she didn’t appeal to a higher court, it would be bad for the request for consolation money. The old lawyer who did the first trial was let go, and it became such that we relied on Lawyer S for the higher court.

“This time, let’s battle with calm minds,” said Lawyer S. Counting from the family court mediation, it had been five years since the result of the court case, and even though we lost, it was good to meet Lawyer S, who could finally argue for us properly. From the connection to our neighbors, we consulted an old lawyer who was almost 70 years old. In front of the judge, the lawyer was moved to tears by the sight of my mother as she accused my father and hit the table, crying. He was just a good-natured old man. That couldn’t be called a lawyer, and we thought that if we cried and complained of our misfortune, we would definitely win in an easy to understand, emotional battle, without realizing that our way of exit was slowly disappearing.

Lawyer S looked through the documents in front of him. The coffee a female office worker had left had hardened milk floating on top and began to get cold just like that. The sunlight from the afternoon spilled out from the blinds in a striped pattern. While listening to the sound of flipping documents, if I followed the line of light, within the cigarette smoke a small point was enlarged, and I could see the backs of a small mother and son.

“During the trial, you must go wearing your school uniform. That will be more advantageous.”

The old lawyer had said it was to buy sympathy. The judge’s tone was uninterested, revealed like when the paint chipped off a door handle exposed the true colors underneath. After leaving the district court into the brightness outside, I had stood there many times. Passersby were walking by quickly. The roadside trees were the same color as one hour ago and swayed in

the wind. This scenery which had nothing to do with me suddenly made my eyes burn, and I turned my face down.

Lawyer S placed the bundle of files on the office desk, and as he opened a new file on top of the table, he held a cigarette in his mouth and said, “Well then, let me hear the continuation of the story just now. It must have been difficult, at that time what were you thinking? What were you feeling? I want you to try telling me in as much detail as possible, though it’s unfortunate, if only there were pictures it would be advantageous... At this point, it’s too late to request a detective agency, and it will also cost too much money. There’s nothing we can do.”

It was strange, but for me, the words advantageous and disadvantageous made me feel extremely nostalgic. When I was small, I was good at remembering these adult words and used them at school. My work at the time— it was being a cameraman.

I leaned my body against the telephone pole and looked up at the window of my father’s apartment. The light from the lit up street lamps highlighted the moths sticking on the telephone pole, and I was underneath, eating bread while being afraid. There was no indication that my father would come out of his apartment. However, finally, the door to the room opened. I gulped and held my camera tightly. My father and a woman passed in front of me, and I wanted to cough violently so that my throat was numb, my hands and feet were numb, and when I came to, while standing there, my eyes followed the sight of their two backs. For the young me, the camera that I had never pressed the shutter button on felt heavy.

Elementary school, middle school, my thoughts were not colorful. There wasn’t even sound. A dark water surface spread out, the faces of adults, faces— the moths that stuck to the telephone pole, the door handle, the broken glass door in the living room— all of it was only dimly reflected in a blur.

“Aiko. Hey, Aiko.”

I turned around and saw my father, who was waving his hand beckoning, “Come here, come here” while inside a car stopped near the school gate of my middle school. I quickly said good-bye to my friends and ran towards the car. My friends, who didn’t know that he had been lying in wait, mistakenly thought my father had come all the way to pick me up and sighed. My father also accepted that I who was running towards the car was childlike and cute and was content. Only I had a hunch that made it hard to breath, and I made a stern face and slammed the door shut as hard as I could.

The car sped down the Central Highway, towards the Kawaguchi lake shore. My father continued to speak by himself. There were no cars in front, and my father’s hand was set firmly on the steering wheel. A day where my father was lying in wait, bringing me to Kawaguchi Lake, was so unthinkable, as Mt. Fuji calmly rose up in the blue and serene sky in the background in front of us.

“I don’t want to say something like this to you.”

My father added after there was a pause in the conversation. I would stare at Mt. Fuji each time. If the steering wheel was moved from one side to the other, Mt. Fuji would disappear, my father’s words would disappear, and would I also be able to disappear?

“The woman from Jeju Island has no education. In the end, she doesn’t think of men as men. I don’t want to say something like this to you, but... as for why your mother and father

have become like this, you need to understand. As long as you guys don't understand, you'll become like your mother."

My father continued to talk to my side as he sniffled his snot. My father was wrapped up in the intonation of his own voice, and it was like he was drunk with the sadness that was gaining momentum. Even my eyes that stared at Mt. Fuji began to grow wet. Why is it like this? For my mother too. As I listened, I no longer understood which side was in the wrong. The air was stagnant like that of a hidden room, and it heavily bound my body, and in the irritation like that of hurting teeth, Mr. Fuji shakily began to be distorted.

"Well then, why don't you stop living separately and just hurry up and get divorced?" I simply pressed my body into the seat. My father strongly pressed the accelerator, and the car's body momentarily floated up. The side view of my father who was biting down on his lip hard. My father's hand swelled red as he gripped the steering wheel. The car facing Mt. Fuji began to race forward with intense speed.

The surface of the water of Kawaguchi Lake was black, and the lights of the lake shore shops were reflected and moving. As if listening to a song I couldn't understand, I listened to my father talk. While I watched the movement of the waving lights on the water surface, I vaguely thought of the seven wonders surrounding Mt. Fuji's five lakes. Somewhere at the lake bottom of West Lake and Sei Shin Lake, the water is connected so the water level is always fixed there...

The hatred my father had for my mother. The hatred my mother had for my father. I looked at the unexpected water surface of that endless hatred, which, somewhere in the knowledge I couldn't acquire, I didn't know if it connected to something else. For me, I had no power to acquire that knowledge. There wasn't any room for me to kindly consider and feel my emotions. The water surface spreading out before my eyes was an empty and black pressing silence. Only the lake shore lights that were swaying there were light. The lights that only told that people were living were ironically light and alive. I suddenly thought that light was for some reason improper, improper, improper, I began to search in my head for the kanji.

Lawyer S closed the documents.

"Miss Aiko, then next month on the 26th, at 10 a.m., let's meet in front of the entrance to the higher court. It's advantageous in various ways that you've come back from Kyoto. Any little details will be good. If you recall anything, please contact me and let me know."

When I left the lawyer's office, my throat felt extremely dry. The trance of the sympathy I received that suddenly appeared in my head disappeared without a trace, and the disgust pierced my dry throat without mercy.

"Tetsu, today there's something I have to tell you. I... I'm planning on quitting school."

"What are you saying? You're always saying that to scare me."

"If I think of it, I always make sure it happens. I'm really going to quit."

That day, when I said good-bye to my mother and the old lawyer at the entrance of the district court, I walked as if cutting across the middle of a storm of sunlight. When I entered the cafe where we were to meet up, Tetsu was in a corner reading a newspaper. In the court, we were each sitting on our father and mother's side respectively, and for us who had to face each other, when the court was over, we would always meet up somewhere to drink tea. The quiet but good with people Tetsu, even though he was more or less on our father's side, he declared himself

neutral amongst us siblings. Unable to tell between black and white but forcefully distinguishing between the colors did not fit his personality. The words and actions of such a gentle Tetsu held the hope that perhaps there could be a small chance that the lawyers and judges would end the trial. I also thought that Tetsu was the only one in our family who was the most healthy human being. However, that day, the huge body of Tetsu who sat in the corner of the store for some reason only looked like the embodiment of foolishness. I sat down on a chair, and, flustered, I blew out cigarette smoke as I said, “Tetsu, if people are too good, they become indecisive. That Lawyer Y who works for Dad, he’s like a criminal. You should get rid of him.”

“Aiko, what’s wrong, saying that suddenly again?”

“That’s enough.”

“Hey.”

I couldn’t stand Tetsu’s usual generosity. I couldn’t hold back my anger and fell on the table in front of me crying with a loud wail. I happened to overhear the voice of Lawyer Y today in the district court hallway. Father had stood next to him in silence. Something hot had stabbed the center of my body, and I had forcefully dragged myself and walked all the way here. Next month, I’ll drink coffee with Tetsu like this after returning from the district court. The month before, and the month before that were the same. In the middle of this immense time, trials, separation of living, divorce, consolation fees, division of wealth and property, parental rights, with those words in the center, insulting words were being exchanged. From now on, it will be like that. From now on...

“I’m going to quit school.”

Tetsu’s surprised face stared at me when I said that.

“No matter what I do, no matter what I say, it’s a family where it’s like I’m talking to air, so I’m going to leave.”

“...”

“... It’s something I’ve always been thinking about.”

“Aiko, you’re probably just reluctant to go to school after the discipline penalty you got. It’s only less than a year until graduation, so endure it till then.”

“I only had a Screwdriver. It has nothing to do with that, such a thing.”

“Hey, Aiko, you must be hungry, let’s go get something to eat. It’s because you’re hungry that you’ve gotten so desperate.”

Feeling like I was letdown, I burst into laughter without thinking. I could rely on the rhythm of Tetsu’s usual words and had come to depend on them. My rough breathing slowly began to calm down.

“Tetsu, for me, whether it’s our family or school, places where such people gather has no connection to me, is what I think.”

“What are you saying, there’s no place where people don’t gather up.”

“...”

“Think it over again.”

In Kyoto at the end of June, even if I cooled down while stopping between cafes, the moment I walked outside, sweat soaked through my blouse. I was looking for employment signs while walking.

“Mom, when I decide on where to stay, I’ll tell you immediately so don’t worry.”

My mother was quiet.

“That place, don’t tell Dad or Tetsu, okay?”

“Ah.”

The left side of my mother’s face which was diagnosed with a facial nerve disease was pulled along with her mouth muscle, and unclear words slipped out from between her teeth. After making a twisted face, my mother became expressionless again and dejectedly stood at the front door.

While bathing in the dazzling sunlight at the beginning of the summer, I continued to walk. I arrived in front of Rokkakudou.

“Hello? Tetsu, I’m about to get on the Shinkansen, good-bye.”

“What? Aiko, you already quit school? Does Mom know?”

“Who cares about something like that? Tetsu, no matter what you’re on Dad’s side. You can’t be neutral. When you’re in front of Dad’s lawyer, don’t forget that you’re a Japanese person. See you.”

“Wait a second, Aiko.”

I bought juice from a sweets store at the station. From the courtyard of an elementary school, I could hear the sound of children having fun. I strongly shook my head. The children’s cheers came from the middle of the spot where the sun was shining, and I recalled the voice of Lawyer Y that I had heard in the district court.

“President, the women in your country cry with such threatening attitudes like that in front of people. It’s not something that men can withstand.”

Ah, I said with my voice and broke through the memory, and I threw the empty can of juice. I started to walk again. I saw a board for Wahou Inn as I continued along the right side of the stone wall. As I got closer to the service door, I saw a poster for employment. The outer front of the traditional Japanese door was open, and across the stone path leading inside was an entrance where slippers were lined up. From the service entrance exited an older woman. The woman had a round, puffy face and was grinning as she faced the road and began to talk to herself. Carrying my bag, I walked on the stone path and stood at the entrance.

2.

My job was to lay out futons and wash the dishes.

“Aiko-chan, no, from today I’ll call you Ai-chan, do your work well, and then, boss? You can find a perfect husband for Ai-chan?”

“Ah, of course, it depends on Ai-chan’s attitude.”

The company president was someone who didn’t often talk about the work at the traditional inn, and seldom showed up, but the unfocused gaze of his young wife, along with a shrill voice that seemed stingy, went back and forth between the kitchen and the front.

The vitality released by my mother and father, stuck between these two large magnetic forces and unable to reach a balance, I could only lay on my stomach and look up at them. My small self-pride and self-assertion fought between the magnetic forces and was distorted and withered. I left home as if I were plucking off my body. An employee room with a gaping large

hole in the ceiling, a wet futon—however, even in this small inn in Kyoto, I was still lying down on my stomach, looking up while scared of mice falling from the dark ceiling.

“If it’s revealed, what do I do, if it’s revealed, I won’t be able to stay here either.”

Talking to herself by the back door, the round faced woman whose specialty was the washing room was called Ochika. Ochika lived by the side of the back door on the mezzanine floor. If you approached the small staircase through the mezzanine floor, a moldy rotten smell entered your nose. About to be eaten bread and fish paste that’s grown mold, egg shells, Ochika was always chewing something. When it was time for food, she would put the customer’s leftover side dishes into a bowl from one end, put clear broth soup and break an egg over it. And then, using chopsticks, she’d stir it until it was soft and eat it like that.

“Ochika, go over there and eat it where no one can see you. It can’t help but be disgusting.”

When the head of staff, Yamada, said such, Ochika held the bowl like she treasured it and went to the room with the dirt floor. The way she walked was like a baby crawling when it first started to walk.

“That idiot Ochika, she must be Korean.”

Yamada spat out like it was a common phrase. Moving my chopsticks without thinking, my hand suddenly stopped.

Ochika’s dish washing and leftover cleanup was completely unable to meet expectations. All she would do was put one hand on her mouth and act flirtatiously, saying “That’s really so” and “Is that so?” while shaking her body and smiling.

“Ochika, hurry up and do the washing for the inner room.”

The old wife bent her back and entered the kitchen. The old wife on every occasion beat Ochika. Holding her grandson Kenichi’s wooden sword, she struck her in front of everyone. Ochika didn’t know how to make the expression of crying. No matter what was done to her, she’d smile and say “Is that so?” while putting one hand on her mouth. That made the old wife even angrier. On top of that, from the door of the storage room between the front and the kitchen was the crying of Kenichi that occurred once every few days and the shrill voice of the young wife. As if that were the reason for living, the noisiness of shouts that were always coming from somewhere never rested.

“Wrapping Kenichi with a hose and striking him with a slipper, really, that’s like a barbarian, or hysteria.”

Ikeda, the chef, said and curved his mouth that didn’t have teeth. The only one who opened the door to the storage room and entered to stop what was going on was Kazuko.

“You should just stop it already. Now, Kenichi, here, hurry up and get out, poor you.”

The young wife threw the slipper at Kazuko.

“Kazuko, to tell me to stop my scolding, we can easily fire you. You’ll regret this.”

When she said that, Kazuko resolutely stared back at the young wife.

“Ah, I’ve always wanted to quit, but the boss wouldn’t let me. The boss told me to stay here, therefore, that’s why I’m here. Now, Kenichi, come quickly. ”

However, Kenichi shook off Kazuko’s hand and left the storage room. Then, in the kitchen sink, he rinsed out his mouth that was full of blood.

No one spoke. I also looked as if I couldn't see what was happening. I remembered the times when I had cried in the middle of the dark closet too when I was younger. Wiping away my snot, when I stuck my hand in the gap between the sliding doors, something black and sticky got stuck on the back of my hand. Kenichi also vaguely understood that he had work imposed on himself without a doubt. Kenichi, with his small body and his small head, in his own way had probably identified the work he had to take on and the portraits of the adults.

The employees every night, before they slept, had to go to the inner room, and beyond the sliding screen they had to greet the owner's family, which had become the tradition.

"I will be taking my rest first."

When I raised my face, from the gap between the sliding screens, I could see the picture of the emperor's family. At that time, I experienced an unpleasant dizziness and heard the sound of the joints in my body creaking. It was a moment I fully realized that I was in another dark secret room different from my own home.

"Ochika, it's been a while since you went on a date with Naitou."

Ikeda said such jeeringly. Naitou was Ikeda's Hanafuda partner, and he was the doorman in charge of footwear for a nearby inn.

"Ochika, it's been a while since she had sex, and before she did it, if she didn't wash well, it'd smell."

The people present in the kitchen laughed.

"I'm a beautiful girl, aren't I?"

And then, when it was time for Ochika to prepare dinner, she shook her body to the left and right and entered through the back door. Her tied up hair had come loose, and the tips of her hair were wet.

"How is it, Ochika, to think only good things about yourself?"

Ikeda stopped his hand that was moving the kitchen knife to ask.

"It's good. Naitou is a good person."

"Ochika, Naitou gave you a lot of pocket money, right?"

Ochika laughed flirtatiously.

Ochika's body was covered in cold patches. It was made up of bruises from the old wife's beating, and on there, while blowing heavily on the bruises, she covered them with cold patches. That voice of heavy breathing sounded like *suu, suu* to me. However, on the mezzanine floor where Ochika lived, the smell of the patches didn't counter it. In the time of forty something years, the walls and the ceiling and even each and every grain of wood on the stairs were soaked in Ochika's body smell. For reasons I couldn't dislike Ochika. Just sitting there, I got used to the rotten smell of the mezzanine floor that assailed my nostrils. Ochika had given me canned pineapple and broken *baumkuchen*. There were so many cheap snacks and canned foods in the cardboard box by the side of her futon, that it was enough to be a shock that made me think just when she had bought so much.

"Ochika, are these socks for Naitou?"

"That's not it, those I received from Katsura."

Ochika's eyes suddenly started to shine. However, for Katsura, everyone knew that Ochika's flirtatiousness would not get through to him. Katsura was an old man in charge of cooking rice and was always smoking tobacco and wandering about.

"Ochika, go over there. You're so noisy I can't stand it."

Sometimes from the direction of the dirt room where the gas kettle was, Katsura's loud voice could be heard. It was when that happened, while her button was still off and her breasts were exposed, without buttoning her front, Ochika stared at the dirt room and came out.

"Hey Ochika."

In becoming Katsura's topic, Ochika's appearance took on consciousness, so I spoke up.

"Ochika, are you really Korean?"

Ochika raised her eyes that didn't have a place to focus on, and held her mouth with one hand.

"That's right, is that so?"

From the gap between her pinky finger, Ochika flirtatiously said and only absent-mindedly smiled.

Kanemoto, the electrician who came in and out of Wahou Inn, was clearly Korean. Kanemoto spoke fully in a Korean dialect of Japanese. Sometimes, without any purpose, he dropped by the service door to make small talk with the head clerk Yamada and Ikeda, and subsequently without being asked to, he repaired the door to the guest room. The moment Kanemoto dropped by the kitchen, I held my breath and listened in on the conversation between Kanemoto and a worker. Perhaps it was because they'd known him for over ten years, there wasn't anyone who deliberately stated the fact that Kanemoto was Korean. Without any change in expression, on the contrary there was even a sense of friendliness. Even then, I stole glances at each and every person's correspondence while holding my breath.

Fear continuously attacked me. Even if I were to quit this inn, the fact that I was Korean was a reality that followed me around no matter where I went.

One year passed.

I gave directions for work to the student who'd just started their part-time job, and it became such that at the front desk, I'd speak badly about the young wife together with Machie. From high school till now at thirty-five years old, Machie was an office worker who lived at the inn, and also worked as the receptionist. When her white face covered thickly with makeup smiled, her front teeth always had a line of lipstick across it. So that I wouldn't be disliked by anyone, while maintaining amiable behavior, I pretended to take other people's complaints and life stories seriously, sympathizing and getting angry for their sake. I was used to this lifestyle. However, fear continuously pierced my side. When I made a small mistake or was scolded when I did something wrong, it was the only thing I could think about, and I couldn't sleep. Rather than my unwillingness to be scolded, I was more afraid of the delusion that I might've been exposed.

I welcomed the new year a second time at Wahou Inn, and as I started to get tired of the white miso soup with rice cakes and vegetables, when I was watching over the front desk by myself, Machie came over, bringing a teacup. While watching the singing show on TV and



talking about various topics, Machie suddenly said, “Ai-chan, do you plan to keep working here forever?”

“That...”

“You should quit, just quit, or you’ll be slaughtered like me. From the outside, it looks like a showy business, but it’s completely locked down. Bounded by work from early in the morning to late at night, I can’t even do anything that I want to do. Like an occupational disease, by the time you realize it, you won’t be able to quit anymore. While it’s still early, it’s better to quit. Of course, if Ai-chan were to stay, I would be able to leave and get out, but I really can’t recommend it, this kind of work.”

“Ha...”

Machie sipped her tea and said, “Ai-chan, you’re a person of that country, right?”

“What?”

“No, never mind.”

Machie’s eyes moved to the television screen. With a start, from the sudden shock, what I’d held in until now seemed about to come out. Machie had known...

“Machie, does the young wife and the boss know about this?”

“Something like that, the moment you came here they’ve known about it.”

My head began to feel tightened by the feeling of sour pleas. The footsteps of the mice running above the ceiling filled my ears.

“You don’t have to mind it. The reason I told you it was better to quit this place doesn’t have to do with that. That young wife, as long as it’s someone who doesn’t complain and can be cheaply used, she doesn’t mind who it is.”

The atmosphere of the kitchen and the attitudes of the young wife and the boss have never changed. However, the unexpectedness that everything had already been exposed added meaning to the nonchalant actions of the employees, and there was a moment when I was paralyzed with shock. I thought it was better to be criticized and blatantly receive contempt. Nothing changed. That it was just me showing a bold front on my own and getting nervous, made it disappointing that nothing changed. Ochika sat in the dirt room as usual, eating her soft rice bowl, Kazuko, the waitress, who argued with Yamada about whether the number of small trays was too many or too little, Ikeda who, while licking around the parts of his lip where there weren’t teeth, moved his kitchen knife. Peeking at the front desk, the young wife said to Machie, “Yesterday night, I became husband and wife with my husband for the first time in a long time.” while sticking out her stomach and wriggling it while laughing. It was like I was getting so nervous on my own, that I was being ridiculous, as nothing had changed.

“Ah, is that so?”

My murmurs spread through my body like a drop of water that’d fallen with a plop. I was a colleague to the other employees, nothing more than a person simply amongst people who had nowhere to go and had gathered here. I just happened to be nothing more than a Korean person.

That day, around dawn, large snowflakes began to fall in Kyoto. When I saw the white glowing from the small window of the employee room, I leapt out of bed, and still wearing pajamas, I ran towards the entrance. The front desk was dark, and Yamada’s snoring could be heard. Slipping on wooden sandals, I undid the lock on the entrance. The snow was blowing with

the cold wind. From the white sky, the snow was swirling and dancing as it fell. While absentmindedly looking at it, I didn't realize that my body was getting cold like a doll wrapped in snow. I returned to the employee room to change into western clothes, and I went out wearing shoes. Yamada's snoring disappeared into the distance the moment I shut the door.

I, who had been in Kyoto for two years, hadn't even had the chance to go to any place that could be called a famous place. I got on the earliest city train, and went to Sanzen-in Temple. There wasn't a single person walking about. In the quiet atmosphere, the snow fell and piled up. As if my ears could hear the dim sound of the snow, the many trees that exposed their bark were stretching up towards the sky. It was not particularly cold. The lit street lights in the snow were dim lights that became fuzzy. I walked slowly while smoking a cigarette. The purple smoke I spit out throughout two years gently disappeared in the white snow. Walking down the mountain road with no one around, sometimes when I looked back, the only thing there was were my footprints in the white road. In between the footsteps, suddenly Tetsu's face came to mind. And then, next came my father and mother, my younger sister's side profile, the entrance to my house, the door to the district court, that tree lining the street that reflected the dazzling sunlight, the me falling forward in the storm of light. One after another, all of a sudden I was hit by a flood of memories that began to overflow, and I turned on my heel and stomped down on the snow. However, even if I walked out, the stiffness of my body didn't soften. Before my eyes, the signboard of Wahou Inn appeared. The preparation for breakfast, the assigned rooms that I had to put away futons. Bitterness stiffened my body, and with two hands, I covered my head and felt like couching down. My thirst began to entangle my throat, and the ceiling of the employee room that was full of stains fell with a splintering sound. There was no place for me to go anywhere. My life that was hardened by excuses and force of habit, I stood still and stared up at the sky.

"You really don't know something like gratitude."

"Even if you're Korean, I have been letting you work here."

Striking towards my forehead, the angry shouts of the young wife and the old wife struck and scattered. Around the time the spring season of field trips came to an end, when both the kitchen and the front desk were catching a break, I gathered all of my luggage and sat down in the middle of the center.

"Today, please let me resign."

The two could only stare at me, who had bowed down my head, in shock. It was a calmness that even I couldn't believe, a quiet feeling. The pieces of insults that tumbled and hit my forehead, while casting my eyes down, I quietly followed them with my eyes.

"Korean people originally don't know gratitude or embarrassment, really, I can't find the words to say anything."

I stood up and started walking down the hallway, and behind me, the sound of the sliding door slamming shut with a bang rang out. Carrying my luggage and leaving from the service door, I found Ochika loitering about.

"Ai-chan, so you're leaving?"

When Ochika said that, she took out a paper bag and gave it to me. Ochika's long rubber boots were soaking wet and fragments of leftover food were stuck to it.

"This, eat it when you ride the train."

The paper bag that Ochika had given me had a strong fishy smell. Looking inside, baumkuchen and boiled eggs were inside, and underneath that were apples.

“Thank you, Ochika.”

I walked a little, and when I looked back, Ochika shook her body and raised her hand. Her hand covered in cold patches looked like it was wearing gloves.

“Tetsu, that Ochika person, for me, she’s someone I can’t really forget.”

Tetsu hummed in agreement, and nodded as he listened to my story. Moving the glass in the palm of my hand, the squeezed drops of lemon floated up. The night of the day of the trial, even if we drank together, we would quickly start to fight. Today, I was asked by Tetsu and talked about my life in Kyoto. Ochika’s plump face and her hands covered in cold patches came to mind, and I thought embarrassedly of how I always became so belligerent.

“But you know.”

The silent Tetsu opened his mouth.

“But you know, Aiko, I have been living thinking that I’m Japanese, that’s what I decided.”

“Tetsu, even if you have citizenship, a Korean person is still Korean. You can’t become Japanese so easily like that.”

“No, it’s not like it’s easy. When Dad got his citizenship, I was against it. I thought he was betraying his people. I doubt you know because you were still in pre-school, but Dad got his citizenship. He visited the government everyday, and from that time on, I...”

“.....”

Both Tetsu and I were silent. The rolling sound of the ice melting in the glass rang out.

“I’ll tell the truth, I... My body is so heavy, it’s bothersome... Various things, that is.”

Tetsu looked like he was going to sink into the chair. Like he had just recalled something, his body got up, and Tetsu retrieved from his bag a bundle of medicine from an adult medical center, and he threw several pills into his mouth.

Sonny Criss’s sad saxophone sound began to play. The two of our mouths were sealed again.

Just like Tetsu had said it was bothersome, for me as well, the words Korean and Japanese sounded like words that seemed far and not real. However, upon stepping out of our home, I understand that it’s definitely a word that I fear, a thought that makes it hard to breathe. Just until a while ago, I was staring up at the ceiling of the employee room, wondering when the mice would fall.

Absentmindedly, as I watched the fate of the cigarette smoke, within the sound of the saxophone rebounding off the walls, the entrance to the courthouse floated up. Even after returning to Tokyo, the dreadful scene of the dissection room hadn’t changed in one bit. In fact, it was just as if even more than before, my father and mother were spitting on each other’s scattered blood clots and exposed wounds, as if they were maintaining their energy to live off of that.

In the dissection room that was called the courtroom, our entire family was forced to sleep naked. Without anesthesia, our bodies were cut and broken apart, our organs gouged out. Both my father and my mother were gritting their teeth and withstanding the pain. In the

cruelness of that unimaginable pain, even while losing sight of themselves, they intently stole glances at the other's expression. Not yet, not yet... The process of the surgical operation, with an uninterested tone, was being summarized in the files. The cut apart stomach area that was weaved together was already being left to the people who weren't concerned with the matter. On top of that, who that person was remained unclear. While carefully deliberating the last scene, without wishing to stop the surgery and simply spurring on their hatred, there was only insistence that their own words were right. Our bodies that began to bleed had simply become lumps of meat rolling around. The circumstances of the last scene was something no one could even imagine.

"Tetsu, I remember it. When I was in my second year of middle school. When Tetsu was still in Mom's home. In the garden, Tetsu, you broke all the records you had with a stone, right? Do you remember? It's such a waste, why did you break it, I asked you, but you kept breaking them. You broke the hundreds of records you had one by one. At times, before you broke it, there were records that you would stare at intently. You were quiet even when I tried to ask you why you were breaking them, and when I tried to persuade you by saying it was such a waste, you stared at me with an awful look in your eyes, hey do you remember? At that time, I felt so ashamed."

"I had my heart broken, it was a sense of desperation."

"That's a lie. It wasn't like that. When I felt ashamed, I suddenly recalled this. Just a little while before, Tetsu, you were crying in the middle of the night, right, while listening to the record. I saw it. That's when I thought, my feelings that thought it was such a waste was really unpleasant, that maybe it was something emotional, and that I was so disgraceful."

"Is that so? Maybe there was something like that."

"Yeah, and then I wrote it in my diary. Haha, I can't become a poet."

"You're exaggerating too much."

Matching my condition and smiling, Tetsu's face quickly clouded over. Sonny Criss as usual without changing blew his saxophone like the sound was lingering on the walls and the bed.

"To tell the truth, that night, I bought medicine."

"..."

"And then, I was thinking while staring at the sleeping faces of Kazuo, you, and Michiko. Should I wake you up so we can die together, or should I just die alone?"

"..."

"In the end, I thought it would be better if we were together. We're still children if we're alive, and we're still children if we're dead, and to leave you guys behind would be so sad."

"... Tetsu, at that time, it would have been good if you'd woken us up."

"And then, I heard Bach nonchalantly, and then dying somehow seemed stupid. That's all that happened."

"... Tetsu, I want to die."

"Hey, I want to die, that's what you always say. Despite that you keep eating snacks. ... I'm going to go to the bathroom for a bit. You can order what you like again."

Saying that, Tetsu matched the saxophone and walked as he snapped his fingers. The eyes of Tetsu when he returned from the toilet were bloodshot and wet. I immediately looked down and mixed the water in my glass.

“But, if you don’t go down the wrong path, I’ll be relieved. Well, thinking about it, with parents like that, you can’t even go down the wrong path.”

“Tetsu, I’ve already gone down the wrong path though.”

“Yeah.”

“To the very end of the wrong path.”

3.

Lawyer S picked up a phone call coming from outside and was talking. From the gap of the sliding window, the cool, early autumn wind was blowing in and making the documents on the table flutter. I stared at those written words. When I looked at the words on the documents, my throat always stung with pain. From when I was aware of my surroundings, my scattered family also began the proceedings to become scattered legally, and the passage of time until today was buried in lined paper depending on the hands of others and shut away in files.

At this point, what decided the victory or defeat of this trial simply depended on which side to what extent dug up and exposed the other’s weak points and disadvantages. Our parents quarreled, saying they tolerated each other for the sake of the children, and the judge persuaded them, saying they should come to an agreement for the sake of the children.

“For the sake of the children?”

I could only make a bitter smile. My sobbing that soaked the blouse on my chest started out of my control as my shoulders trembled and tears fell.

I confirmed the date and time of the next trial with Lawyer S, who had hung up the phone and returned, and went outside.

It hadn’t even been half a year since I’d come back from Kyoto, but, to the extent that I felt like I was someone else, my will to work had disappeared. While feeling the discomfort of feeling as if I was being a freeloader at my mother’s home, I moved around doing a few part time jobs, and at some point, “I want to die” became my common phrase.

Inside my body, my overbearing blood that was made up of an indescribable murkiness that could only be called a murky stream always sprayed bubbles and splashed as it rushed about. The stronger the flow of my blood became, the stronger my sense of fatigue only grew.

One day, I wrapped up the leaves of tobacco in wafer paper and gulped it down. Thinking it was a lie that three rolls was enough to be lethal, even though I buried my head in the wastebasket in the room, nothing came out from my mouth. When I woke, I was alive. Holding up the box that had the name Ikoi, when I swallowed my sour spit, it stung the swelling that’d spread throughout the inside of my mouth, and as my stomach ironically complained about its hunger, I wasn’t able to put anything in my mouth.

After the tobacco, I tried fasting. I tried to get through a week with only water, and I washed down my empty stomach with brandy. Nevertheless, I stayed alive.

Starting in the morning, I started to drink alcohol. One day, when I woke up, I realized I was sleeping in a hospital bed. I looked around at my surroundings. A dull pain shot through my head. My younger sister was sitting by the side of the bed reading a book. For some reason,

suddenly, I was filled with unease wondering what happened to my mother. My mother wasn't there. My memories began to turn over inside my body. From yesterday morning I was drinking whisky. Ashtrays were placed in the four corners of the room, and I told myself that other than going to the bathroom, I needed to walk. I walked. One bottle was empty, and I opened the lid of the second. In the ashtray, cigarette butts were piled up. After I threw up, I drank, and I walked. While doing so, I lost consciousness. The back of my left hand hurt, and when I looked at it, the part where my veins intersected was terribly burned. It must've pushed onto a cigarette, and as I remembered it, the memory suddenly became vivid. My mother had held onto my fallen body. I shook off that hand. I brushed aside my mother's hands, and then I tightened my hands around my mother's neck.

I was alive. No matter what I couldn't stop being a child. I had to continue my work no matter what.

“Does Korea also have koto?”

On the day I had just turned twenty, I asked a single female university student. Anti-dictatorship, anti-foreign influence, anti-military power, with only those words I couldn't know the sound of *Uri Nara* (my mother country)<sup>2</sup>.

The tone of the gayageum was low. The sound, the sound itself was deep like a thought that couldn't be expressed and was distressing. Gayageum didn't use picks. It was played by sitting crossed legged and putting it directly on top of the traditional Korean long skirt. Through the fingertips, the sound resonated in the paulownia body, and it was transmitted through the player's entire body.

Through the introduction from the female university student, I began to go to the home of a Korean teacher. When I started learning, the fingertip of my index finger immediately got a red blister, and I licked it tenderly. When I finished learning a basic folk song, around the time I started learning a solo song called *Gayageum Sanjo*, the blister on my fingertip hardened.

When I tried playing the gayageum in front of Tetsu, he nodded with an expression that showed he thought it was unexpected. In the small instrument that was about as small as my back, I thought proudly that *Uri Nara* dwelled within it. By touching the gayageum, which has been continuously played since a thousand and five hundred years ago, rather than *Uri Nara* which was made up of words that felt distant and unreal, the tone became a sturdy line tying me to shore, connecting me with *Uri Nara*.

In the time at the home of the Korean teacher, to me that was *Uri Nara*. There, it was fine for me to sing any song as loudly as I wanted to. For two hours, three hours, even after finishing practice I wouldn't go home. The faint smell of garlic that hung over the room, the coloring of kimchi, while looking upon the gayageum that was standing up, I soaked in the never-ending *Jangdan* (rhythm).

However, I took a step outside and left after practice. I crossed the pedestrian crossing. I leaned on the straps on the Yamanote Line. When I came to, the *Jangdan*, the *Sanjo*, and the

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<sup>2</sup> The term *Uri Nara* literally translated means “my country” in Korean. It's used by Koreans to refer to their home country of South Korea. In the original text, the narrator uses the various Korean words like *Uri Nara*, explaining them only once in parentheses, so these terms have been left untranslated. Any other terms in italics are Korean words or phrases that the narrator is using instead of Japanese.

melody had all disappeared from my body. As if drawing in the sound from a distant place, I hummed to myself. I tapped my knee as if to draw out the rhythm. While the sound had disappeared, no matter how I shook my head, or how I moved my shoulders, it couldn't fill me up. The scenery of Tokyo that was visible in the train windows, the conversation of the women next to me, the train broadcast, the sweat in the palm of my hand that gripped the straps, the arm of a man that repeatedly touched my shoulder. Each and every of these mundane things persistently put pressure on and interfered with me. The sound disappeared. The voices disappeared too.

At the same instant that I could forget myself in the tone of the gayageum, depending on the times I played, when I thought of the Japan that was needlessly fully realized, I immediately glanced at the gayageum that's standing upright, and it became the case that I even thought of irrationally touching it with my hand.

It was a day when a mild wind was blowing. That day, I went with Tetsu to the office of Lawyer Y to ask about the problem of my mother's living fees. If it wasn't through Lawyer Y, my father wouldn't listen to anything we said. Even for an extremely trivial problem like asking him to slightly raise my mother's living fees, we had to follow the procedure of going through a lawyer in order to negotiate with my father.

Without properly washing my face, I left the house and went to the cafe in front of the station where Tetsu was waiting. Tetsu, who came late, also still had the alcohol he'd drunk with me last night in his body, so we sat in silence like it was troublesome to speak. Tetsu sat on the chair sideways and opened the newspaper. It was near noon. Settling in the aimless mild wind around us, I listlessly folded my arms on top of the table, resting my jaw on top, and for some reason, my stomach hurt as if I'd suddenly grabbed it. I breathed in the tobacco of Tetsu that had been left as it was in the ashtray. The pain in my stomach eased slightly. However, this time a sharp stabbing pain began underneath my left breast. Tetsu crushed the tobacco in the ashtray. A fat finger moved in front of my nose. Tetsu closed the newspaper and stood up. I couldn't see Tetsu's stomach or finger.

"Hey, what are you being so absentminded for? Come on, let's go."

Tetsu shook my shoulder. Somehow, my body got up and followed behind Tetsu out of the cafe. Outside was bright and sunny. I can't stand it when it's so bright, I muttered, and when I turned my eyes downwards, the bottom of my left breast felt a sharp pain again. Even though it was close to noon, the train was still crowded, and the rays of light that came in through the window spilled on the people's head and the fronts of their shoes, and glittering lint and dust glowed and floated about. I remember feeling like it was hard to breathe and I felt like throwing up. By burying the side of my face into Tetsu's arm, I was able to keep my body standing up. An old lady was sitting in front of me, and one person away, an old man was sitting. The two of them seemed to be husband and wife, as they were frequently sticking their face out to talk with a person squeezed between them. The person sitting in the middle who looked like he was a salaryman was nodding off and didn't seem to notice.

"Tetsu."

While still keeping my mouth on Tetsu's arm, I spoke.

"What?"

“Tetsu, just why did our mom and dad end up like that?”

The end of my sentence disappeared into Tetsu’s arm, and my mouth became hot too.

“I don’t know. I doubt those two know why either.”

The man who looked like a salaryman woke up. Then, he noticed the presence on his two sides, and switched seats with the old man. I absentmindedly watched the scene. I had the feeling that I was going to throw up. The rays of light shone on my feet without forgiveness. Kill me, kill me, if you want to kill me then kill me—. I muttered. By the time I realized it, my tears piled up. I was flustered. The bottom of my left breast still hurt. My tears didn’t stop as I began to sob. I wondered just what I was doing. The moment Tetsu asked in shock, “Hey, what’s wrong?”, having lost my support, I squatted down where I was.

“Hey, stop that, stop that.”

Tetsu’s voice sounded distant. I understood that all the passengers were staring at me all at once. Even then, I wasn’t able to stop my sobbing. At the Takadanobaba Station, carried by Tetsu who got off the train, I walked around in the underpass to the subway and continued to cry.

“Aiko, it’s fine if we don’t go to the lawyer’s place today. Should we go home and rest?”

I shook my head.

“It’s ok. I’m fine now.”

The one section of the Touzai subway line probably felt very long for both Tetsu and me. I continued to sob, and Tetsu hid me from the eyes of the people around us and rubbed circles on my shoulder and hung his head with me. It wasn’t clear just why my tears had come out. The stuffy air and the body heat of the people touching my body upset my nerves more and more.

“It’s madness.” I heard the voice of a man from somewhere.

“Kill me, kill me... If you killed me...”

My snot was clogging my nose, and my head felt heavy. A bitter juice made a gurgling sound and seemed like it was about to erupt from my mouth. I bit down on my lip. The door opened. As if we were pushed around, Tetsu and I got off on the train platform. In my side, a knife was piercing it. I tried to touch my side with my hand. There wasn’t a knife. There wasn’t a single wound.

I was being killed by Japanese people. That kind of hallucination started from that day. When I rode a full train, at each station, I got off on the platform and made sure I wasn’t hurt, and then rode the train again. Pushed by the crowds of people like a flood, I went down the steps of the subway station. Here, if I was killed, I’d become covered in blood and die by the road. If I was somehow able to go down the stairs safely, I still had to go back up the stairs no matter what. From behind rushed a wave of people. The moment I stepped on one step of the stairs, someone from underneath me would cut up my achilles heel. I was being pinned down by Japanese people, and my breath was being cut off. I was also scared of dark movie theaters. I thought that the back of my head that was sticking out from the seats could be stabbed by a sharp object, and my head would be cut off, so without watching the movie properly, I would quickly go outside and leave.

The scenery inside me floated up. During the time I was training, Katsura would appear in the kitchen while smoking a cigarette. The chef Ikeda and the rice cooker Katsura both had the same habit of saying “I’m different from the people in this unsophisticated inn.” However, unlike Ikeda, Katsura was an old man who looked spiteful, and his balding forehead always had greasy



sweat that stuck and shone. He was always wearing a blue upper shirt for sports and trousers that had two white lines across. The base of the two openings of the trousers that fit perfectly to his feet were strangely swelled out, and when he walked they would sway wildly. The greasy sweat on his forehead, the white spit that stayed on the two sides of his mouth, his huge crotch, his thick voice as he said “Ochika, you’re so incredibly noisy”, even now, I could hear it from the dirt room—.

Katsura would wave around a bat at the student part-timer when it became break time, and showed how to cut off a person’s neck. Katsura washed the rice with his hands that had cut off Chinese people’s heads. Those hands that had washed off blood were serving rice—.

The pockets of my jeans always had a few small stones in them. When I passed by the front of the police box, when I passed by the patrol officer, the small stones in my pocket became sweaty. In my head, “A retribution payment for Japan” were the only words that didn’t disappear. In the train, even when old people were standing in front of me, I would never stand up for them. On the contrary, I’d stare and make fun of them. When I saw small children, I was driven by the action of wanting to use the tips of my shoes to twist and crush those faces and small hands and feet. The fear that I would be killed, and its opposite, the killing intent of that I wanted to kill swirled around inside of me.

Dust had piled up on the cover of the gayageum. The trial of the high court was still dragging on. It was when my throat was still dry. I drank alcohol, and I had planned to go home, but I ended up going towards my father’s apartment. By the time I came to, I was sitting on the kitchen chair on one knee, staring at the back of my father’s figure.

“Dad, why did you do something like get citizenship?”

While unable to articulate my words, I raised my voice.

“Aiko, a woman shouldn’t talk like that.”

“It’s not a joke. What’s a woman’s words, what is it? Don’t be so pretentious. Dad, just why in the world, why did you become a citizen of a country like Japan?”

“I was thinking of your guys’ happiness.”

“What? Our *happiness*? What about this is happiness, just who became happy?”

“Aiko, just go home. You’re a woman, just what are you doing?”

My father wanted to hit me. However, my father was reading documents in a corner of the room and didn’t even turn around in my direction.

“Dad, if you like Japan that much, do you like Japan’s women, you like Japan’s women so you became a citizen?”

My father became angry. In the room, there wasn’t the smell of a woman. My tipsiness vanished, and I awoke. My snot flowed into my mouth along with my tears. I stood up, and as if I hadn’t comprehended the sound of my crying, I slowly said, “Dad, when I’m sober, I’m coming back, okay?”

“What is your mother doing, is she quiet even when her daughter is drinking so much?”

“This has nothing to do with Mom. It’s about time, you should stop dragging it out, Dad, it has nothing to do with you either...”

“What does?”

At the same time my father turned around, I immediately closed the door. Since then, I hadn't gone to my father's room. There wasn't the smell of a woman. There wasn't a woman.

“Why? Just what is happening?”

I could see that there were two or three electric poles in front of the apartment. Underneath them, I squatted down.

4.

The bicycle was moving. The sound of breaks slid through the morning air. I quietly got out of the futon and stood in front of the bathroom mirror. I traced around my breast with my finger. Shyly, my nipple trembled with a twitch. I couldn't understand if I was making a face like I was about to cry or laugh. I heard a creaking sound from the bed. The face in the mirror immediately turned red, and in an attempt to run away from there, I turned on the faucet of the bathroom's shower. I adjusted the hot water to cool down. Water droplets splashed and flew on my flushed body. When my finger pressed down on my thigh, it got entangled in a sticky bodily liquid. When I came to, Matsumoto had entered the bathroom and hugged me from behind. The shower hit my face and made it hard to breath, and when I turned around to face Matsumoto, while he held my earlobe in his mouth, he used the soap to start rubbing my back. I put my hands around Matsumoto's neck and pushed my lips into his shoulder. It was the same smell as last night, and I was relieved.

Tickled by Matsumoto's hands, I bit into his shoulder. It's been a while since we passed the night together, and in the morning, I once again confirmed Matsumoto's smell, and I was scared of the hallucination that my body would dissolve in the shower and flow away.

Matsumoto had both a wife and a child. I was 23 years old, separated from Matsumoto by 20 years.

“That night, the moment I saw you, I thought that this child is mine. For you too, Aiko, you were looking only at me and paying me attention, isn't that right?”

While embracing me inside the futon and brushing my thin hair, he stared at my face as if he were a child. After coming out of the bathroom, while our bodies were still wet, inside the sheets, steam was slightly rising up. I was silent. As I was about to waveringly draw near and entangle my feet with him, at the same time there was also myself who was about to push away Matsumoto and get up. Matsumoto said he liked my skin. I also liked Matsumoto's skin, the rhythm of his skin. There was a sense of calmness, and I was able to feel relieved. The breaths I spat out became longer. I became scared of entering the bath by myself. As if from the time I'd been born, I'd never washed my body on my own, inside the bathtub, I'd suddenly become helpless and end up crying. It wasn't just because Matsumoto wasn't there, but I also became scared of changes in myself.

I shook my head. I wanted to violate the men of “Japan”, I wondered just where the me who thought that had gone.

“Professor, I wish you would call me Aeja. I'm Kim Aeja<sup>3</sup>, not Aiko.”

“Ah, that's right, I'll correct myself.”

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<sup>3</sup> Aeja is the Korean pronunciation/name of the kanji characters used for her Japanese name Aiko (愛子).

The way Matsumoto was so obedient also irritated me. I purposely made a bored face and smoked a cigarette as I got on Matsumoto's body.

“Aeja, go to sleep for me already.”

That night, Matsumoto sleepily opened his eyes halfway and caressed my hair. He was partly fed up with me as he sighed. When he stopped moving his body, the lamp by his pillow began to buzz. That sound of electricity was grating, and for some reason it sounded like it was making fun of me. I continued to caress him. As if to show off that I wasn't cowardly to the me who was on my own, my body became hot, and something that was like impatience changed into a sweaty long sigh. Matsumoto looked suspicious of the requests of my loving caress that didn't seem to end. When I saw the pitying, seemingly sad look in his eyes, I suddenly separated my body from him. I was twisted with a sense of embarrassment all the way up to my head, and I buried my face in my pillow.

“I just wanted to know about things like this, it's not a big deal, something like this. Aah, how boring.” I spit out as I suddenly turned around to stare up at the ceiling.

Flying bugs were flying at the light bulb of the lamp. At some point, Matsumoto turned his back to me and faintly the sound of breathing as he slept began.

I heard the crying sound of a woman's voice. On the ceiling, a black hole opened its mouth, and on the wall that was covered in traces of rain leaking, there was a spider web.

Machie was wriggling in her futon on the neighboring couch and bent backwards.

“Machi-chan, tonight, I can date you. A single woman's body is tough, really tough, isn't that right?”

Recalling Ikeda's voice, I swallowed my saliva. The sound of my gulping echoed in my head a lot. Without thinking I saw Machie. Machie didn't notice. Because the sound of me swallowing my saliva was loud, I kept my saliva in my mouth and kept my eyes wide open. At that time, I recalled myself from when I was small. The younger me was also scared to hold onto my saliva, and I stared out of the corner of my eye at the light of the small lightbulb that came through the crack in the sliding door. I told myself that it was my job to not swallow my saliva. Each time I swallowed my saliva, that job left something like a secret bittersweet aftertaste, and while I counted each gulp, my younger self would fall asleep. Machie didn't notice. Matsumoto's back was also quietly moving. There, Ochika's breasts were displayed. I could also see her round face as she laughed flirtatiously. “Boss, boss,” said the waitress Kazuko who ran up to him. “Yesterday night, I became husband and wife with my husband for the first time in a long time.” The young wife's protruding stomach wriggled. Matsumoto's eyes that I'd just seen, it shouldn't have been like that. “He's a good person, Naitou, he's a good person.” Ochika was carrying her rice bowl. It's wrong, it's wrong, my feeling, there was no way Matsumoto would understand. It's not something like a man of “Japan” could understand...

I bit Matsumoto's back. I bit into it with all my might.

“That hurts.”

Matsumoto rose up. This time, I bit into Matsumoto's nipple, which had appeared before me.

“Aeja, what's wrong, just sleep already.”

Matsumoto began to caress my back. I let go of the power of my teeth which were biting down, and the strength in my entire body left, and my feelings became calm as my back was rubbed. That was something Matsumoto knew.

“Can you be a good girl now?”

As his right hand rubbed my back like it was creeping along, Matsumoto embraced me strongly. I gently bit Matsumoto’s bottom lip, and I timidly looked up into his eyes. It wasn’t the pitying look that I’d seen just then. I felt relieved, and with that momentum, strength entered my body.

“I don’t want to,” I said as I pushed Matsumoto with both arms and faced the wall. “I don’t want that, I’m tired of it already.”

In the trees of the nearby children’s park were the cries of cicadas. The apartment was highly elevated, so that you could see Shinjuku’s high-rise buildings from the window. The steaming hot days that make me recall the day I met Matsumoto returned again.

From the dusty cover, I took out the gayageum. I wiped the body, and I fixed the twelve strings one by one. The blisters on my fingers that should’ve hardened hurt as they reddened and became swollen as if to expose that I hadn’t been practicing. Matsumoto held my index finger in his mouth and gently licked it.

“When I listen to the gayageum, I think of your body.”

In front of Matsumoto, who was like that, I played the gayageum. I began to practice while only thinking of having Matsumoto listen to me play. I didn’t have a single fear. I was able to calmly search for the sound. I realized that only when I was in front of Matsumoto was I able to be honest with myself. Looking forward to his loving caress, I played the gayageum only for Matsumoto’s sake, that was something I was also able to honestly acknowledge. My daily routine was decided based on the times when Matsumoto visited this room, and I made my gayageum echo with a sweet tone only for the sake of Matsumoto, who was my single listener. When I stopped playing, Matsumoto would embrace me and rub my back. With ecstatic eyes, when I looked at the window, the high-rise buildings blurred by a dark mist seemed about to slightly disappear with a sigh. At those times, I had the feeling that the times when I sent off Matsumoto at the door, the moment when I always should’ve been filled with the pain of parting and jealousy wasn’t there just for today.

I looked at the neon signs of the high-rise buildings that didn’t have the power to shine as it was blurred by the dark mist. Just how much time had it taken. When I thought that the nights where it was hard to sleep had come again, Matsumoto’s smell closed around my throat and grated it. It’d already been ten days with no contact from Matsumoto. I changed my mind that something like ten days was no big deal. The universities were on summer break. In order to contact him, other than calling his home, there was no other method. I couldn’t call his home. On top of the thoughts turning in my mind, while I was burning from the hot sunlight that covered and surrounded me, the long afternoon grew dark, and wrapped in the wet darkness, I realized I had been stuck in a daze. Although I had times when I condemned Matsumoto out of terrible jealousy, Matsumoto had in his own way worked hard to not irritate me. The fact that he hadn’t contacted me was not normal. I stood up and turned on the light. As I averted my eyes from the

sudden brightness, the phone on the table in the corner that even now began to ring immediately appeared.

Standing in the court hallway that had become deserted in front of me, Lawyer S wiped the sweat from his forehead and approached. "I'm busy, so let's talk while we walk," Lawyer S continued talking from the side. I only moved my head, but I didn't listen to him. It had become the nineteenth day that I had been waiting for Matsumoto to contact me. The bottom of my left breast felt a sharp pain, and tears immediately welled up in the corners of my eyes.

"The new judge is going to do a policy of moving towards a path of divorce by consent, so well, somehow..."

The words that I should've been used to hearing pierced my ears. The realization that I was a human who had to hold onto these kinds of realities abruptly made my feet stop, and my body stiffened.

"And as for that you see, I visited the registry office several times, so for the time being..."

Lawyer S's voice continued to strike my ears. I walked as if dragging my feet.

"Well then, next month on the tenth, please come to the office at four."

As Lawyer S put his notebook into his pocket, his feet quickly walked away. Standing outside of the high court, my eyes burned and I squatted down. It was something I'd experienced so many times, but today I was numb all the way into my eyeballs. I couldn't stand up. I didn't have the right to chase after Matsumoto.

After separating from Lawyer S, I went to Shinjuku, entered a cafe, and ordered an ice tea. When I touched the cold wind inside the store that had the A/C on, my sweat finally settled down. I absentmindedly stared at the public phone. I heard the sound of a phone being called in my ears, and when I came back to my senses, I was gripping the phone receiver. As I listened my sweat started to pour out and flow down on the back of my neck, and while I was still in a daze, I hung up the phone. Matsumoto's wife must have sensed something. She had smelled it. I left the cafe. In the crowd of people, my shoulder was forcefully pushed down. The child had gotten into an accident and was hospitalized, the sound of the voice of Matsumoto's wife, the rhythm of her voice, Matsumoto caressing the child's cheeks and forehead. The child— My sweat suddenly came rushing out.

In the window of the subway, my own face was reflected. By the time I realized, the me in the dark window was wearing a stiff smile on her face. As expected, Matsumoto's body was only mine. Even if he caressed his child's cheeks, he probably was constantly thinking about me, and feeling my presence. The work for the court was when I was a different me. The completely different me was doing a realistic job. I took off my sunglasses and wiped the sweat from my nose. However, no matter how much I wiped, the unpleasant sweat wouldn't stop.

The next day, when Matsumoto came to the room, without calming down from my restlessness, he said, "I have been busy."

My feelings of blaming Matsumoto disappeared in that moment, and there was only myself who sidled up to him feeling happy and proud about meeting again.

"Lately, I've been busy with my paper. I might not be able to come here for a while, but don't worry."

Matsumoto got up without even spending an hour.

“Your paper, what if you wrote it in my room?”

“I can’t do something like that.”

“... Why won’t you hug me?”

“I have a little headache today, I still haven’t been getting enough sleep.”

“That’s strange, it’s strange.”

“What are you saying?”

“I, I’ll call your home.”

“You can’t.”

Matsumoto put on his shoes. Facing Matsumoto’s bent over back, I said, “I can’t meet you, and you won’t even contact me.”

“I said no, so you can’t.”

I was being overpowered by Matsumoto’s tone and stood upright. From the other side of the door that had been closed, the sound of his footsteps disappeared.

As expected, the divorce negotiations that dragged on reached a standstill. The trial in the courtroom started again. From around the time fall had begun, I had begun to have briefing sessions with Lawyer S, and that winter, I stood at the witness stand. I made an outline of my testimony with Lawyer S.

“It’s something that absolutely cannot be emotional.”

That day, that was the first thing Lawyer S had told me. In a calm voice, I would argue just as we’d done in our briefing sessions, and for the parts that were dangerous, I would immediately behave as if I was mumbling my words.

Father and child, mother and child, blood relationships, flesh and bone, just what exactly were those things? As if I were an actress, on the witness stand, I simply acted out the role I had been given. The courtroom, the courthouse, even “Japan”, just about everything was entirely blown away into small pieces, and it would be nice if my own body could disappear like that too...

That day, on top of the shoulders of the navy blue suit I was wearing remained traces of burnt tobacco. After I’d arrived at the courthouse, I became aware of the burnt traces and looked at it, and with the discomforted feeling that I’d dampened my chances of success, I began to feel down. On top of that, when I looked at my fingers, my fingernails were grown out. It wasn’t something to the point where it was something to worry about, but, as I hated long fingernails, I regretted that I’d been so busy in the morning that I’d completely forgotten to cut them. It was my habit to think that if there were two misfortunes, there was bound to be a third. My testimony was progressing smoothly. Once in a while, the female transcriber would lift her head and stare at me. The presiding judge was also intently listening carefully to my testimony. On my father’s side, Lawyer Y was simply looking down and taking notes. At some point, I forgot about both the burnt marks on the shoulder of my suit, and also my long fingernails. My testimony was about to successfully finish, just as I’d prepared.

“I’d like to ask some questions, your Honor.”

“Go ahead.”

Lawyer Y stood up on my left from the chair he'd been sitting in. I also looked in his direction.

“Witness, a few years ago, you went to Kyoto for about two years, is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“What were you doing there?”

“I lived at an inn as an employee and worked there.”

“During that time, did your father know about where you were living?”

“No, although I contacted my mother.”

“Witness, please just answer the question simply. So, I heard that the reason you went to Kyoto was to run away from home.”

“Yes, it was something like that.”

“Why then, did you run away from home?”

At that time, I thought it was a strange question. If I said the reason, it would be bad for my father. I wondered just why Lawyer Y would make me make a statement that would be bad for my father.

“It was because it was painful being at home.”

My breathing stopped. I recalled the voice of Lawyer Y in the hallway of the district court.

“The trial was constantly continuing to not reach an agreement, and because of various things, I lost my confidence to continue going to school. Because of this and that, my father as well.”

Lawyer Y interrupted me.

“And then, when you returned from Kyoto, you changed quite a lot. From what I heard from your father, it seems that after you went to Kyoto, you became concerned about political problems.”

At that moment, I glanced at the judge's face. The judge also pushed his glasses up without thinking and looked back at me.

“Um, just what relationship does this question have with the current question of divorce?”

“Witness, you should only be answering the question. It appears that you often argue with your father about the problem of gaining citizenship.”

“Yes, but, that...”

“You do not think well of the fact that your father became a Japanese citizen... Is that correct?”

I tightly kept my mouth closed and looked down. Aah, I really wanted everything to explode into tiny pieces. Underneath the witness stand, my hands clenched into fists.

“Your Honor, I think this has nothing to do with the question of my parents' divorce.”

When I made up my mind and said such, Lawyer Y clicked his tongue annoyingly and turned to the side and said, “Your Honor, I would like to continue my questioning.”

“Go ahead.”

“Witness, it appears that you've countlessly stated that you can't forgive your father for gaining citizenship.”

My father was sitting in the visitor's gallery in the back. I held back my desire to turn back and look at him. If I turned around, I would expose the fact that I'd become emotional.

"Um, well, it may be that there was something like that, but..."

"It appears that you continuously argued with your father about that."

"Could you stop transcribing this? There's absolutely no relationship between the problem of gaining citizenship and this problem of divorce."

"Your Honor, I would like to continue."

"Go ahead."

"Witness, you thought about the independence of Koreans and also participated in political movements, quite radically as well."

My mind immediately went blank as I felt like collapsing from the scorn and the listlessness that attacked me. Independence of Koreans? Those words that came out of Lawyer Y's mouth. Completely different from the atmosphere in the courtroom and my testimony up until then, the words spoken with a different intonation stood out. Lawyer Y asked and talked about the words my father said just like that. Independence of Koreans — Summarizing my political activities with that word, the feeling that I was a first generation *Zainichi*<sup>4</sup> was shown. I looked at Lawyer S. Lawyer S was also shocked. Was he actually shocked that the situation had become disadvantageous, or rather, was he shocked that I had participated in political activities? This was "Japan", whatever the circumstances this was "Japan." Whatever the circumstances —

"Witness, please answer."

I came back to my senses at the sound of the judge's voice, and raised my face.

"Well, that is true..."

"Which means, Witness, you habitually argue with your father about the problems of getting citizenship and political problems and are breaking up your relationship with him. Your Honor, just as I said above, I believe that because of the habitual problems, the statements made today by the witness are quite lacking in calmness. With this, I am done with my questions."

Lawyer Y said such and sat down. It'd happened in the blink of an eye. The trial ended just like that. In the corner of my vision, my father and Lawyer Y were talking. I tried as much as possible to keep an ignorant look on my face and went towards the exit.

My mother and I left the courthouse to go eat. Hamburger rice and beer. Holding the glass that beer had been poured into, the nails of my fingers were long. Three unfortunate things, they really had happened, I thought as I glanced at the shoulder of my suit. Without speaking, my mother drank up her beer and lit a cigarette, then placed it between my fingers. My mother consoled me in this way. My mother who had been silent opened her mouth.

"It's finally over for this month, they said the next time is in two months."

My mother unskillfully used her hands to move her knife and fork. Her manner of using her hands was so unskillful that it seemed dangerous, and even the broken pieces of the meat that she finally put into her mouth fell on her knees, and I lowered my eyes.

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<sup>4</sup> *Zainichi*: The term *Zainichi* (在日, *trans. Japan resident*) refers to ethnic Koreans who have permanent residency status in Japan, or have since gained Japanese citizenship, and refers to the immigrants who came to Japan during World War II and their descendants who continued to live in Japan. When Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula ended after World War II, the *Zainichi* Koreans lost their Japanese nationality and government support and faced heavy discrimination.



It's been nine years since we were forced to sleep in the dissection room. The ending curtain still didn't seem like it would come. Just where was the place we'd arrive at? Just what would happen to us? My mother's face was slightly hanging down. Even though her facial nerve disease had pretty much been cured, her eye and mouth on one side still remained twisted and swollen, and her cheeks and the back of her hands were stained with a light brown color that spread out.

This mother and me, that father and me— I was waiting for Matsumoto. I was there, alone on the side of the woman who'd made my mother cry. I was there, alone on the side of the woman who'd told my father not to return home as she sidled up to him. When I left the courtroom, the bitterness that'd filled my throat began to break apart with a sound.

“You're still young, and you have a future... Just what do you think you're doing, you should know your place...”

The woman stared fixedly at my face, and outside the door, she began to spit out words in a loud voice. As if it were dizzying, my body seemed about to stumble. Darkness came nearer, and the woman and I together were confronted by the light and stood up. There were no children. I felt relieved. Looking downwards, reflected in my eyes were Matsumoto's sandals that were lined up in the front entrance. The angrier Matsumoto's wife was, the more the anchor sank deeply inside of me. I looked outside over the woman's shoulder. Underneath the electric poles that were on the road in front of the apartment, a younger me was standing there, holding a camera. A dull pain ran through my head, which felt like it'd been wrapped in steel wires. Once more, I lifted my eyes. The younger me wasn't there.

From the balcony of the next door room, the smell of soy sauce boiling food floated over. After losing interest in that smell, the darkness surrounded the woman and me, and we disappeared.

“I'll break up with Matsumoto. That's what I want to do,” I told her in a low voice.

A few days ago, I sat by the window smoking a cigarette. Matsumoto was rubbing his face against my knee. While that was being done to me, I was looking at the ash that fell apart and scattered under the window.

“I want you to wait, my wife and I haven't been on good terms for a while. It's not your fault. Just wait a little longer.”

Matsumoto stared up at me. A hot breath was blown between my legs. The excitement that should've come like a wave was warped, and I began to shiver. My body had been rearranged by Matsumoto's will, and the sweet moment that should've felt like I'd been a doll he'd created was now empty.

“Professor, let's break up.”

I stood up. Although the end of my sentence was almost unnaturally bright as it inflected upwards, while feeling perplexed, I pushed my cigarette into the ashtray.

Sleet was falling. As I paced back and forth in the emergency room, sometimes I'd peek at the sleeping face of my older brother Kazuo. Michiko closed the curtain. As if woken up by the sound, Kazuo slightly opened his eyes.

“Kazuo was transported by the ambulance.”

After I hung up the phone with Tetsu and finally arrived at the hospital he'd told me about, I found Kazuo sleeping on a bed in the corner of the emergency room. It was a cold night. Kazuo's face, which I hadn't seen in a long time, was pale white and bony, and he was being injected with Ringer's solution as his quiet breathing while he slept made sounds. A middle-aged nurse with heavy makeup pulled out the corner of a futon, and, looking annoyed as if we dared to be here on a Sunday, no less for an evening emergency, she said, "It's just a cold, we've just injected him with a fever-reducing medicine, that's all," and left the hospital room. Kazuo, who'd slightly opened his eyes, was still peacefully sound asleep. The nurse had said it was simply a cold. And then, she treated Kazuo as if he were just one person amongst the many emergency patients, and after dinner when the coffee she'd poured in had gotten cold, she was sure to have thrown it away frustratingly and poured a new cup. Inside her head, there wasn't a single fragment left about Kazuo. Without even drinking a sip of the coffee that she'd poured again, she probably would quickly have to leave the emergency room, force the next patient that'd been carried in to sleep, and pull out the side of the futon rack and strike it.

Kazuo woke up. The drip had almost run out, so I'd just been about to say that it was about time to wake him up, so we stared at Kazuo's face. Kazuo looked around at us with eyes that didn't know who was there.

"Big brother, are you okay?"

When Michiko said such, as if he'd come back to his senses, Kazuo blinked his eyes rapidly, and suddenly loudly yawned.

"Oh, you really came."

The way my brother spoke was strange. The person in question was using a normal voice, but for each word he often broke off, and you had to listen carefully. I a...m so... rry for thi...s, e... ve... ry... one. Like that, each time his voice made a single sound, it would disappear deep into his throat, and the next sound would finally be spit out from the depths. His entire voice was shaking, and the sound of his chattering teeth was mixed in.

"Big brother, are you cold?"

"I a...m no...t col...d," he said while blinking his eyes framed by black eyelashes, and the words he spat out hopelessly disappeared as expected.

Three days later, even if the urine bottle was applied to get out bloody urine, not even a single drop of Kazuo's urine would come out. The neighborhood doctor had also said it was just a simple cold and had been careless. Without dropping, his fever continued to rise to above forty degrees celsius. The next morning, my brother was brought to a university hospital, and he waved his hand at us when we were told to get out from the medical examination room. My brother's voice had pretty much been unable to form words. When the curtain closed, my brother's face disappeared.

After being moved to a hospital room from the medical examination room, my brother was sleeping. The fever reducing medicine had worked, and his fever had reduced for the first time in a long time so that Kazuo was snoring as he slept with a happy and calm expression. However, after that, he didn't wake up again. No matter how many hours had passed, because he wouldn't wake up or turn over, the nurse doubtfully shone a light in his eyes. Opening his eyes, there was no response even if he was pinched or hit. The doctor came running over. The head nurse also came running over. Countless doctors came in and out of the hospital room in turns.

My brother only snored and continued to sleep. Through an incision in his larynx, they opened a hole in his throat, and from there they delivered oxygen and took out phlegm with a suction machine. For meals, using a tube stuck from his mouth to his stomach, fluids and grape sugar were injected, and his urine came out one drop at a time from a tube attached to his genitals into a bottle placed under his bed. We hired a professional housekeeper. Whether the housekeeper had gotten tired of taking care of a patient who couldn't respond, or whether she'd been filled with dislike for my father's nagging, for a few weeks, they changed after a few days. The doctors determined that the disease was cerebrospinal meningitis, and that they didn't know what had caused it. A virus, or perhaps tuberculosis germ, or maybe even a new type of pathogen, from those three types, they couldn't determine which it was, and they said it was a rare disease that even in the university hospital, there might not have been a person like that in ten years.

Without even being designated as a handicapped person, my brother entered a vegetative state with all hopes of recovery completely denied, and my father began to pay the many monthly bills of the treatment fees to the hospital.

"The fever reducing medicine that they gave to him on the first day had problems, Dad, you should call your lawyer," I said.

While hanging his head, my father said, "If I do something like that, the hospital will have a bad impression of us," while simply peering at my brother's face. Vegetative people, euthanasia, searching for these printed words I walked through the bookstore. However, no matter what printed words any book had, they couldn't give me an answer.

Caught between two large magnetic forces as we lay on our stomachs, one person among us was now lying down, facing the universe with eyes that couldn't see. Until today, my brother Kazuo had lived as if he'd cut off all ties from his family. Our father for the first time used an enormous amount of money for his son, and we also knocked on the door of the hospital room and, in order to visit my brother, Kazuo's name was spoken from our mouths, and we were able to meet together. For the first time since he'd been born, Kazuo drew our attention and care, and as our parents took care of him, our scattered family was gathered in the one place called the hospital room.

Kazuo's skin was not like the colorless, ashen dry skin that was often seen in sick people. Staring at him closely, as his breathing in his sleep was heard, his peaceful expression gave off the feeling that his eyes would open and words would come out of his mouth.

"I'm not interested in something like standing above others and giving orders."

While looking at my brother's face, I couldn't avert my eyes from him. Just what had my brother wanted to say? Just what in the world—

I was thirsty, extremely thirsty. No matter how much I struggled, the tangled chains wouldn't come loose. Standing on the witness stand, meeting Matsumoto's wife, breaking up with Matsumoto. And then Kazuo's hospitalization. The more I struggled, the tighter the chains cut into my body. If I even slightly pulled apart the tightly intertwined chains, a human face, moreover a human face that breathed and had expression, would crowd up.

If I saw my father in Kazuo's hospital room, I'd always start arguing with him. Both of us would raise our voices, and attack each other with piercing words filled with nothing but hatred, glaring at each other seconds and minutes at a time. If the nurse hadn't come in to stop us, the moment of hatred would never come to an end.

Unable to feel relieved, in the middle of every day which felt sluggish, my throat grew increasingly thirsty. I stopped thinking. Hating someone, pushing the reason everything was tangled onto someone else and firmly believing in my own righteousness. I lost to the ease of getting angry. Tetsu was always shaken up as he stood between my father and me who hated each other. I scorned and made fun of Tetsu's good nature and weakness. It would've been correct to call it shouting.

As if to bury the empty hole inside me that couldn't be satisfied, I began to drink alcohol out of desperation.

From the gap between the fingers of my right hand that gripped my left, blood was dripping and falling.

"That hurts, it really hurts."

I decided I wasn't going to play the gayageum again, but as I brandished my knife, I was suddenly seized with fear, and when I came to, the first joint of my index finger had been cut, and the end of my finger was dangling as it hung down. However, somewhere in the reality of the pain, there was myself who began to faintly smile. I was living, similar to that kind of happiness was a languid feeling. The anesthesia didn't take effect, and as they sewed my finger tip back on, I clutched the white clothes of the doctor, clung onto it, and loudly and continuously repeated "It hurts, it hurts", and I was nothing but a cowardly, spoiled child.

One day, at a loss of what to do about my drunkenness, Tetsu threw a glass. It hit my head, and I started crying and shouting, and even though it wasn't a big deal, I was taken away in an ambulance. I had been objecting to Tetsu's marriage in a half-crazed state.

"Tetsu, just because you were drunk and had an affair, you don't have to take responsibility for every little thing, if that were the case you'd have to get married multiple times."

However, somewhere in my heart, I had to acknowledge the strength of the magnetic force that we couldn't go against. Just as our father wanted Japanese women, Tetsu also wanted Japanese women. As a Korean woman by their side, I was too passionate and deplorable.

The days of pressing down on the side of my torso and rolling about in my futon continued. In the middle of the night, Michiko called for an ambulance. On the bed in the ambulance, when I crouched down and looked at the window, the townscape that was quiet in the dead of night made me think of *Uri Nara*, which I had never once seen before.

"Michiko, it'll be good if I die just like that, but in case I end up like Kazuo... If I become like that, let me die, okay? This is your older sister's wish. If it seems like I'll have to live at the hospital even just a little, just what will you do about the hospitalization fee, we don't have any savings after all, when the invoice comes, I plan to split it up and give it back to Dad..."

Putting up with the pain, I muttered that as if I were saying my will, and Michiko cut me off.

"Sis, why are you so uncharming like this. A time like this, just what are you saying?"

Running by outside the window, the rays of the lights from the street lamps were blurred and out of focus. I was going to die without once seeing *Uri Nara*. Born in "Japan", just what had I been doing up until today? Work, alcohol, and then...

“Kidney stone? There’s a stone in my kidney?”

Without thinking, I started laughing in front of the doctor. It was a despairing laughter, and with each laugh, my sides grew numb.

A few days later, I laid on my right side on the hospital bed. From my mouth, through a tube that had been stuck deep within my throat, a yellow liquid was accumulating in the test tube. As I absentmindedly stared at the rows of test tubes, I thought of Matsumoto. Matsumoto’s warm knees, the palms of his hands that rubbed my back were nostalgic. Without thinking, my thighs were filled with energy. Whenever I thought of Matsumoto, always, as if by reflex, my bodily liquid would soak my underwear, and inside my body, I would experience a feeling as if my bones were melting. The nurse moved the tube to the next test tube and left the hospital room. I felt perplexed, as if a secret pleasure had been found.

From then on, the men who appeared in front of me did not sit me on their knees and rub my back like Matsumoto had done. I was annoyed with the caresses that, on top of being unrefined and out of self-interest, were direct, and inside my heart, I even felt pity for them. Matsumoto had practically understood my desires with his sense of smell. He would naturally make the smell of the two of our bodies, the rhythms of our smell that would be a sweet moment without any additional things. I would immediately cut off my relationships with men. The smell of a person’s chest that I gleaned from their dress shirt. In my soaked underwear, I could feel Matsumoto’s hot tongue. Waiting impatiently for the moment we could meet up in secret, as if craving for each and every moment, our bodies were in turmoil. The test tube before my eyes disappeared. In the middle of my rough breathing, I felt listless.

Whenever I went to Kazuo’s hospital room, he was always only making the quiet sound of his breathing in his sleep. Because of the side effects of his medicine, all over his body red dots had appeared. Even though there was the sound of him breathing in his sleep, my brother’s two eyes were wide open. However, in those eyes, there wasn’t a light. When I stared at my brother’s eyes from above, a strange feeling welled up from inside my body. No matter where they pinched or hit his body, he wouldn’t react. With no choice but to live as if he were dead, my brother’s two eyes which couldn’t see protruded from his white face that had puffed up from the medicine, and somehow they ended up pinning me in place.

“Kazuo, say something, just what should we do? Please tell us, just what in the world should we do?”

When I touched his eyelashes with my finger, my brother’s eyes would suddenly slowly blink before again turning his unseeing eyes into space.

In my brother’s hospital room, I also saw countless times the sight of my father with tears appearing in his eyes. That was a state of my father that I hadn’t expected. During those times, my father would abruptly face the side with a tired unpleasantness. And then, when he recovered, he’d stare at the side profile of my brother’s face as if telling me to get out of the hospital room, stretching out strongly his string of emotion. I would softly hold my brother’s cheek in my hands and say, “I’ll leave for today,” and on that day I would leave the hospital room in just a few minutes. I’d leave the hospital, get out of the shopping district, go to the station and get on the train, and even then my father’s figure that I’d seen in the hospital room was burnt in my eyes

and wouldn't leave. My mother was lonely, and my father had been lonely too. With their own separate and strong magnetic force, the two of them kicked around their sadness while living.

"I am made from that person's sperm," the single thought ran about inside me without any logical connection. That thought disappeared just as quickly. The scenery I was looking at through the window on the Yamate Line, the moving humans, they all stopped their movements. Even around my body, anything and everything had stopped moving and returned to being silent. I simply stood in the middle of a space that had no sound nor color. My father's sperm and my mother's egg one day were connected, and I was born. And now, I'm standing like this. Kazuo and Tetsu and Michiko were all the same. Bearing our each and different bodies, with our own faces, we were living. That thing like fate was having difficulty drawing closer, and we were bound up by the activity called livelihood and kept living. At this point, no one could stop. As if my father and mother were being punished for their actions, they were only feeling flustered anguish. The complicated feelings as I leaned on my side towards Matsumoto's body, that complicatedness also became heavy on my back.

I leaned on the subway handles and absentmindedly looked outside. In the sky after the rain, the orange color of the sunset was spreading. The walls of the white buildings in the glass window were reflecting the sunset. Like the surprise when one discovers the method of solving a problem that was hidden in a given math equation, following that was a strange sense of relief.

Before I knew it, the orange sunlight slowly became blurred, and I tightly closed my eyes.

That night, as if to pick up my spirits, I drank gin. I drank again to the point where I had had too much, nearly throwing up and losing consciousness. I wet my pants, and raising my voice, I cried aloud. Following my stocking, my shoes were making a sound like something was sloshing about. Crying loudly, my voice echoed a lot in the small shop, and my voice filled my ears. I heard my own crying as if I could hear it booming in the middle of a tunnel. I was held onto by the store owner and went outside. As I was walking, from behind a man came and put his hand on my shoulder. I forcefully shook off that hand. The man muttered and walked away.

There was a public phone. I picked up the receiver. The phone number was freshly written down inside my mind. Each time I looked at the public phone, Matsumoto's phone number that I thought about was not something I should forget.

"Professor, hurry up and come. Hurry."

In the dark sky, the trees were slightly illuminated and the thickly growing leaves were shaking. I sat on one of the benches in the park and waited for Matsumoto. I turned my wet eyes towards the sky. The melody of the *Gayageum Sanjo* appeared. My bent left index finger pressed down on the string with force, and the otherworldly slight sound soaked across my knee. However, the way I was pressing it was still not enough, was what I thought back on. *Chiniyanijo, chunmori, chunjunmori*—. In my eyes that were chasing after the melody, a white butterfly was reflected. In the dark, a white butterfly was flying. A white butterfly was surely flying through the dark gap. I stood up and walked towards the butterfly. I blinked. And then, all of a sudden the butterfly disappeared in the darkness, and again, that small figure appeared. Because of my tears, the silhouette became blurry, and the butterfly slowly grew in size and soared upwards. Suddenly, just when I thought I couldn't see the butterfly anymore, I was hugged tightly by Matsumoto. Sitting on the bench, Matsumoto held my cheeks in his two hands.

I rubbed my cheeks against the palms of those hands. Matsumoto's smell— I put my hands around his neck and buried my face. Smelling the scent of his neck, I was finally able to feel a sense of relief. Matsumoto quietly began to rub my back.

“Professor, the *nabi*... the butterfly... A white butterfly was flying over there.”

When I stretched out my arm, my finger only pointed at the darkness without a single star.

The thin rain shower hit the window frame and was making the veranda wet. When I opened the window, the street lamps on the slope under my eyes were twinkling, shining dimly like stars reflected on a water surface.

“I'm planning to go to Korea.”

Matsumoto had been in the middle of turning a page of a book, and he gave me a vague answer. I had been worrying about when I would tell him, and so for a few days I hadn't had the chance to say anything.

“Hey, Professor, I'm going to go to Korea.”

Matsumoto finally lifted his head.

“What'd you say?”

“I'm going to receive training for the gayageum. I want to try singing *pansori* too.”

“.....”

Matsumoto smoked his cigarette and was searching for a match. When I took the match pinned under the open book and held it out to Matsumoto, he was silent as he lit a light.

“I've already made up my mind.”

Matsumoto stayed like that, with his gaze turned away towards the window. You can't, don't go, I understood that was what his expression was saying. However, Matsumoto didn't speak. He understood that if he spoke, instantly something unbearably real would come up between us. Matsumoto closed the book and turned to face me.

“Do you dislike Japan?”

“If I don't go to Korea, I feel like I'm going to die. I'm running away from Japan. It's so complex I hate it, Japan.”

Suddenly, Tetsu's face came to mind.

“No matter where you go it's the same, no matter how far you run, you can't escape.”

The day I came back from Kyoto, Tetsu had said that. Ever since I became a witness, our relationship had unfortunately completely transformed. Other than occasionally meeting in Kazuo's hospital room, we didn't ever see each other, and the memory of listening to jazz together and drinking alcohol had become a faraway memory. I ought to properly apologize to Tetsu. Now, I can do it.

Matsumoto hugged me from behind as I stood by the window, and he pressed his lips into my hair.

A little after Matsumoto had gone back, my phone rang. I could hear the crying of a woman. Her voice mixed with crying cut off. It was Michiko's voice.

The digital clock on the wall of the Seoul municipal office read 10:23. The red words were wet from the rain, and they were blurred like dripping raindrops. The ringing in my ears finally went away. From around when the airplane began to descend, there had been a horrible ringing in my ears, to the point where I thought my eardrums would break. After we landed, the moment when I finally was able to swallow my spit, along with a sharp pain that pierced through my head, the flap deep inside my ear opened with a loud noise. I picked up my luggage and stood in front of customs. The pain had disappeared, but the surrounding sounds that I could hear were twisted inside my ear while kept in a far away place, and while I was still absent-minded, I left the airport and stood at the place to get on a taxi. Was I able to pass through customs without a problem? Such uneasiness seemed to brush away the ringing of my ears, and at some point it disappeared, but when I arrived at the hotel and my ears finally could hear like normal, I wasn't able to experience the uplifting of my emotions that I had been looking forward to.

While following the writing on the digital clock, I smoked a cigarette. "Unasu" "Seoul" "Geobukson" I bought a box of each at the kiosk and I lit the cigarettes one at a time and tried to smoke them. As I expected, without any significant uplifting feeling or discomfort, I simply felt an irritableness in my mouth that I couldn't describe.

Leaving the airport, getting on the taxi, the scenery that burst into my eyes from the windows on both sides was entirely *Uri Nara*'s. Even if the townscape started to be surrounded by darkness, for me, it was obvious that the formation of the small particles of the shapes and smells were lively sparkling about. The *hangul* written on the signboards of the shops. *Uri Nara Saram* (my fellow countrymen) who were walking about at a brisk pace. The pop songs with a fast tempo. The city buses that were covered in dust. When I got off the taxi in front of the hotel, a gust of wind hit me in the face like a wet cloth. Throwing my body back, feeling as if I were receiving a baptism from *Uri Nara*, I felt comfortable as I walked through the gust of wind. However, as I continued to sit by the window of the hotel, the night of Seoul that shone through the glass somehow seemed lonely. The white rays of light that spilled from between the buildings that stood close together was mixed with the rain and became a milk white haze that disappeared into the lonely darkness. When I looked at the window, I saw Matsumoto's face as he held my hand in Narita Airport, and he came closer towards my wet eyes.

"Aeja, come back soon."

Suddenly, ignoring the eyes of others, Matsumoto hugged my shoulder. As if recalling the leisure of thirty minutes prior when we'd been at a hotel near the airport, Matsumoto dug his finger into my shoulder.

Having hidden all the clocks at the hotel, Matsumoto was laying face down on the bed. I placed my lips on that wide back, and as if I were soothing an unruly child, I asked him what the time was. Matsumoto made a grumbling voice as he muttered. I asked him again. I nostalgically smelled the smell of Matsumoto's back.

"Don't worry, Professor."

It was my first time hearing words of jealousy from Matsumoto. At the same time as I was bursting with a happiness that was similar to a sense of cheer, I suddenly acted as if I was about to fall over, and I was perplexed as I remembered how I'd made arrangements so that I could quickly check the time.



Matsumoto remained as he was, lying face down, and he didn't seem like he was going to get up. My lips continued to move on top of his back. In the end, I softly asked for the time as if soothing an unruly child. His back began to shake like a wave. I slipped my hand onto Matsumoto's abdomen, and with that gave him a final loving caress.

"Professor, I'm going now. Really, Professor, you should smile. That's right, just a little more, just a little more."

As I walked towards the boarding gate, when I turned back, Matsumoto brushed back his thin hair and firmly nodded.

The red writing of the digital clock clouded up in white.

"Tetsu."

Once again, I muttered that towards the glass. Because the glass had fogged up, in comparison to the neon lights of the buildings, down on the main street, the lights of cars were flowing by, flickering and blindingly bright. The bottom of my left breast began to feel a stabbing pain.

The drizzling rain, a cold night, February... In February, something just kept happening.

Tetsu— I wiped the white fog on the glass with the palm of my hand. The feeling of the cold glass soaked into the palm of my hand, and I recalled Tetsu's hard hands.

Tetsu was dead.

Thinking my younger sister had meant to say Kazuo's name, when I asked again, my younger sister repeated that it was indeed Tetsu who she was talking about. My younger sister seemed to be confirming it to herself that way. I hung up the phone, took off my pajamas and changed into clothes. I did my fastener and attached my buttons. My movements paused, and I stood upright. I changed my mind and put my hands through my sleeves.

There wasn't a taxi that was passing through the residential street after two in the morning. I walked towards the station. The rain traveled down my cheeks and made the inside of my mouth bitter.

Tetsu was laid down in the morgue at N Police Station. His huge, hundred kilo body was grandly laid down as if he was about to snore loudly. White foam was emitting from his mouth. I used a handkerchief and tried to wipe away that foam.

"Until the investigation of the corpse is over, please don't touch anything."

When the police said that and pushed away my hand to stop me, my father said while sniffing and sobbing, "The cause of death or whatever, other than the fact that he's dead, we don't want to hurt the body."

"However, this is required by the law. I understand how you feel though..."

Tetsu had been crouched inside the toilet in M station on the Keiyou Line. Thinking it was strange that the door wouldn't open despite the last train having already left, the train station attendant climbed over the door, and Tetsu was finally found like that. They said that four or five hours had passed since he died. How many people must've entered the toilet and knocked on the door? During that entire time, without even letting out a sound, Tetsu remained crouched there, his body cold. I sat down by Tetsu's feet and held onto his hand which protruded from the bed. It was a strange coldness that could make one think that his skin was made of viscous ceramic. No matter how much I looked back at Tetsu, he looked like he was snoring loudly while fast asleep.

At times, his large stomach would move up and down, which would take me by surprise as my eyes froze. Even now, I felt like he'd wake and get up at any moment.

It was aggravating. My tears were flowing, but more than being sad, it felt like it was because I'd been so shocked that it was aggravating and frustrating. On my sweater which I'd worn inside out, my drool and tears had become small balls tangled together. I rubbed it away with my hand as if I were striking it violently.

"Hey, just what is everyone doing here?"

I began to want to shout angrily like that.

Tetsu was 31 years old. The cause of death was subarachnoid hemorrhage. Tetsu's funeral was grand, so I was in high spirits. Maybe it was just Tetsu making a bad joke as a way to gather up the friends he hadn't seen in a long time—. Hey, just what is everyone doing here? As expected, I still ended up wanting to shout angrily like that.

After the funeral, we gathered in Kazuo's hospital room. While crying, my father whispered into his ear, "Kazuo, Tetsu's passed away."

"Kazuo, Kazuo."

My mother also massaged Kazuo's feet. The skin on my brother's chest was dried up and completely lacked water, and it would stretch and loosen up each time he violently coughed. I took out the phlegm in the hole of my brother's throat with the suction machine. Kazuo shouldn't have been able to hear the sound of people's voices. However, the way my brother was coughing violently was similar to a voiceless sobbing. Suddenly, Michiko who was by his side shouted, "Brother, you can hear us!"

We exchanged glances with each other. Tears were lining Kazuo's eyes which had no light like a membrane.

"Kazuo, Kazuo, can you hear us, you see, Tetsu, he..."

My father repeatedly whispered the same words into Kazuo's ear.

We shook my brother's body and stared at his face. My brother's tears gathered, and his entire throat was shaking. Alongside his sobbing, the phlegm that clung to his throat rattled as he made a sorrowful sound.

My parents' trial ended.

The consolation money was taken to be in the middle of the amount my father had taken out and the amount my mother had requested. The divorce papers were officially stamped with a seal. The trial that had continued on for ten years had now unexpectedly come to an end. One by one, we left the dissection room, scattered and alone. However, Kazuo still continued to sleep there with his lightless eyes that stared into space, his voiceless sobbing bringing our attention to something.

"Tetsu."

I muttered towards the glass window. Tetsu, I wrote his name on the fogged up glass with my finger. By the time I realized it, down on the main street, there wasn't a single car. The digital clock of Seoul's municipal building had become midnight.

I climbed the stairs up to the door of the training room and stood in front of it with my chest throbbing, and inside my coat, my shaking body suddenly became warm. The tone of gayageum, the raised voices of singing, the sound of *Changu* (drums), the people waiting for the

teacher's lessons and the people who were done with their lessons, each of these at the same time were the form of practicing is what came to mind. In the narrow stairway, each bundle of sound penetrated the thin walls and swirled around. I sat down like that on the top of the stairs. I understood that if I opened the doors, the bundles of sound would directly close in on me. However, I couldn't open that door no matter what. I had the fear that the sound I'd been innocently listening to would get distorted and flow in an unexpected direction.

Instructor Park began to sing pansori with one of his pupils. It was the Tale of Shim Chong. The gayageum wrapped around the voices and became a large air current, and separated by the door, my body began to shake. Yesterday, and the day before yesterday, and three years before that, and ten years before that, no, from the time when I was born, I had the feeling that I'd always been lost in a sound like this. I wanted to open the door and touch this sound directly. However, in the end, I remained sitting on the stairs, listening with my ears.

With this, finally I'd be able to sing pansori and play the gayageum as much as I wanted to, that's what I thought as I came to *Uri Nara* and eagerly took out my gayageum from its cover. However, I also started to fear "*Uri Nara*". It didn't take long for me to realize that I was a strange foreigner whose body was covered in the pungent smell of "Japan". Even if the location was different, there wasn't much of a difference from when I sang songs as I covered one wall in a room in "Japan" with a blanket. After about half a year had passed till the present, and I couldn't sing the way I wanted to. I couldn't even open up the throat for the basic pronunciations of pansori in front of others.

About one month ago, when I received the training for White Hair song from Instructor Park, behind my back, the other pupils looked at my training and laughed. When I realized it, Instructor Park, who I was facing, had a troubled expression as she tried to keep from laughing.

"Once again, can you sing that for me?"

Without understanding anything, while feeling perplexed, I was urged by Instructor Park and tried singing again, and again behind my back there was the sound of laughter.

"Aeja, a waterfall in *Uri Mal* is *Pogpo*— (waterfall). What you were doing is like this, *Poppo*—, see, it's different."

However, for me, the difference in pronunciation wasn't easy for me to grasp. I tried singing again.

"Aeja, when you make the sound for *Pogpo*— you should make your lips break off. When you say *Poppo*—, it's not waterfall, it has the meaning of kissing, you see."

The snickering laughter that was desperately being bitten back now became roars of laughter that pressed hard against the muscles in my back.

I was afraid of "Japan", and I was afraid of "*Uri Nara*" too, leaving me perplexed as I wondered just where I could go so that I could play the gayageum and sing without any reserve. On one hand, I wanted to get closer to *Uri Nara*, I wanted to be able to completely and skillfully use *Uri Mal*<sup>5</sup>, and when I thought of those thoughts, the fact that there were fellow Zainichi strangely made my self-confidence raise its head, mimicking, getting closer, getting better, things like that felt like I was being compulsively pushed towards a dead end, and this side was always at a disadvantage and no good, and because I never had place here from the start, it made me

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<sup>5</sup> *Uri Mal*: In Korean it means "our language". Used to refer to the Korean language by Koreans.

aggravated. It wasn't like I liked it or that it was my preference that I ended up having a strange pronunciation. The reality that I'd been born and raised in Japan for twenty five years was simply a result I couldn't do anything about, which made me want to shout in frustration. However, in the end I sat down on the staircase. My strange pronunciation made me so embarrassed to the point where fire was coming out from my face, and as I sat there on the staircase, I hesitated to open the door.

“*Unnie*, it's the *Irupon* (Japan) *Sen-se*.”

The youngest daughter of the boarding house, Misugi, called out to me with her sweet voice and knocked on the door. *Unnie*, come here, it's the first time I've seen a gayageum up close, touching the instrument, Misugi was a busy university first year who was on her way to the disco. Misugi would make fun of me because Matsumoto would call internationally about once every three days, saying “*Sen-se, sen-se*” as she tried to mimic the way I spoke.

“*Aeja*, it's about time, you should come back to Japan. You want to come back, right?”

Last night, Matsumoto's voice which I heard from the other side of the receiver was still left inside my ears.

“It's a wonderful country here, I won't go back to a country like Japan.”

I said with deliberate encouragement.

“Don't you want to meet?”

“Well... It's not that I don't want to meet. ... Professor, don't make me feel bad, from now on, letters and phone calls are all off-limits, okay?”

A part of the words I spat out came from the sound passing through my nose, and with the feeling of displeasure all the way to my mouth, I became unhappy with my flirtatious attitude, so last night, I was the one who hung up the phone. Normally, I was supposed to ask Matsumoto to hang up the phone from his end.

The forceful vigor that I'd had when I came flying from “Japan” had unexpectedly shriveled away quickly, but I was agitated. The reason for that agitation was as if Matsumoto was there, and I was flattering and getting angry in order to deceive him. The reality of that unpleasantness was suddenly making various scenes float up inside of me. It was as if it was being released from a dull halo and began to flow as a single film, flowing backwards into the past without any way to stop it.

I was both afraid of “Japan” and afraid of “*Uri Nara*”, and on the other hand, I was also wavering about returning as Matsumoto's mistress. It could be said that it was a fear of the comfortableness of being a mistress.

While feeling the troublesome self-pride of being a fellow Zainichi, on one hand I loathed the careless imitation to the point that it made my body shake, but while I was happy to submit to being Matsumoto's mistress, it began to overlap with myself who'd ended up seeing that happiness as a lie.

No matter where I went, I was a non-resident citizen— There was nothing else I was like except for a creature who exposed its distorted body and wandered about. While letting out a long sigh mixed with lamentation, I complained as I turned over in my bed.

Inside my futon, as I was being absent-minded, Misugi came into my room. When she saw the disordered state of my room, she dramatically breathed heavily and began to clean up the

scattered books and clothes. Letting *ajumoni* (a middle-aged woman) do it, letting Misugi do it, the mother and child of the boarding house naturally liked taking care of others, because they didn't find it unpleasant, the two of them often closely spoiled me who was bad at household chores and tidying up. From inside the futon, I looked up at the gallant figure of Misugi's back, and I opened up the inside of my futon and said, "Misugi, do you dislike Japanese people?"

When Misugi looked back, she was perplexed. Whether it was because of the sudden question, or because she was confused like always by focusing too much on the strangeness of my pronunciation, I didn't know.

"Dislike."

Misugi said that and looked back at me.

"Then, Misugi, are the Japanese government and each and every Japanese person the same?"

Just why had I said something like that today, as if wanting to say that her blank look of bewilderment didn't change. For a while, Misugi kept her mouth shut and turned her face upwards.

"I suppose you could call them the same."

I made up my mind and carried on.

"Misugi, in the end am I still just a fellow Zainichi? Or rather a Japanese person?"

"....."

"Misugi, it's okay, just tell me."

"*Unnie*, your room has a smell."

"Huh? What kind?"

"How do I say it, it's the smell of make-up, like perfume."

"....."

I felt silent, and so Misugi kindly said as if to comfort me, "*Unnie*, you're planning to continue studying in *Uri Nara* from now on, right?"

"... Yes, I was planning to do that."

"*Unnie*, as long as you're in *Uri Nara*, you'll definitely someday be able to become *Uri Nara Saram*."

"... I can become *Uri Nara Saram*?"

In the back of a private garden was a steep hill, on top of which was my boarding house. From my window in my room on the second floor, you could see an extensive view of the city of Seoul, and Namsan Tower rose up ahead in the distance.

On a Saturday afternoon that even now seemed about to rain, I had the idea of trying to climb up to the Namsan Tower's viewing platform.

Beyond the glass walls, the Han River stretched out, looking like the back of a large snake. While following the lazy curve of the Han River, I made a lap around the viewing platform. The skies above the city were shrouded in a gray fog, and in the far distance, the many mountains that exposed their rock surfaces were quietly slipping in and out of sight. I trembled many times. Ever since I'd arrived at the viewing platform, uncannily, I couldn't stop trembling.

As I grabbed onto the handrail and stood still, the scenery rubbed against my two eyes, but even then, without blinking, in my clear head I heard a throbbing. The bottom of my left

breast began to sting with pain. I let go of the handrail and closed my eyes, taking deep breaths. The buildings that stood in line without order buried the scenery, the groups of apartments that were like a cassette box, the Han River which watched over Seoul's changes was cut across by many bridges, and even immediately below, Namsan also looked as if it'd been cut down by a rake as roads stretched out, with buildings creeping upwards. Disappointment, pity, resentment, my twisted feelings pierced my body, and suddenly as I thought that my vision had gone white, I leapt forward towards the glass. The glass shattered, and my body floated in midair. Namsan's sea of green spread out beneath my eyes. I lost consciousness and fell head first.

The nausea and dizziness that resembled the wobbly, sick feeling that would strike my head from being on the boat—

When I came back to my senses, when I looked down, there were only the thick trees whose leaves fluttered in the wind. Standing, my feet felt like they'd lost their energy, and shakily I headed towards the elevator. Young men and women and families were staring up at the flashing numbers on top of the elevator. There was also a group of travelers who carried cameras and bags filled with souvenirs. It was difficult to lift my head up. I went down from the viewing platform and went down the stone stairs of Namsan. As I slowly went down step by step, suddenly, the nearby city opened up, and in the branches of the trees that obstructed the sky, I saw a single magpie.

When I looked up at the sky, water droplets hit my cheeks. I finished going down the stone stairs and bought a 300 won umbrella.

Before I knew it, I arrived at Myeong-dong's lively street. I no longer needed the 300 won umbrella. As I walked the paved roads that were wet for the first time in a long time, a single old woman was crouching on the side of the road and was incessantly dozing off. In the basket in front of her head, there were only several ten and hundred won coins thrown in. The old woman didn't have feet. The bases of her two feet were covered by a rubber cloth, and at the end they were tied closed by a string. The back of the old woman who'd been left to get soaked by the rain was slightly trembling. Her expressionless face that was round and puffy, her sunken in narrow eyes, it made me think that she was like Ochika, and I walked a little and turned back. The old woman was indeed nodding off, her head moving up and down. I had the feeling that I could hear the sound of her faint groaning. In my suit pocket was the change from when I bought the umbrella. I turned back and approached the old woman. In order to give myself boldness, in my mouth I counted, "*Hana, Tul, Set, Net* (One, two, three, four)."

It was no good. I went too far. I walked a little and turned around.

"*Hana, Tul, Set, Net.*"

And then again I ended up going too far. While I came and went, like I was chanting a curse I counted the numbers. The silver coins in my pocket became sticky with sweat, and I was alarmed by the passersby's nonchalant *Uri Mal* that sounded as if it was insulting me.

Spring in Seoul was short. Just as I thought the huge petals of the white lily magnolias had stopped fluttering in the air, already the sun was beating down right on top of my head. No matter where I walked, I bumped into people's shoulders, and amidst the hot air and sweat, the road began to look twisted. Exhaust fumes and clouds of dust clung to the inside of my nose, and while searching for air that was air I could breathe, I walked around.

The city buses were running around, making their engines whirl. The news broadcast like a repeating rifle, Cho Yong-pil's husky enka that could be heard from the storefronts, the sweat that began to flow down between my legs. The pharmacy that appeared every ten houses, the boxes of new medicine piled up, in front of the color picture of athlete's foot that was pasted on the entrance, I was startled and came to a stop. A group of students who were wearing camouflage clothing, I choked back a sob and pressed both hands to my chest. The women who passed by as they emitted flirtatious voices, their double eye-lids from plastic surgery, high heels, the stains on the cuffs of their sleeves.

My body suddenly lost its balance. When I looked to the side, a short young man with short hair was holding my shoulder bag. The leather strap didn't come off so easily from my shoulder. Just as I wondered if he had said something under his breath, he pushed aside the crowd and ran away. As I stayed there, crouching, I stared at the back of that young man's figure. I didn't have the strength to call out after him, nor did I have the strength to get up and chase after him. The young man disappeared into the crowd of people. I was completely dazed. I couldn't even recall the color of the young man's dress shirt. Placing both hands on the ground, when I was somehow able to stand up, my shoulder bag slipped to the ground.

When I went inside Dongdaemun Market, along the green galvanized iron signboards, dense steam was rising up. Pig's feet with white bristles that shone were tossed into baskets. When I approached the *ajumoni* who were pitching forward metal basins and peered over their shoulders, pale pink hearts were pounding in the *ajumoni*'s hands. With one ear cut off, the pig's head was looking up at the passing people in the market with a pleading expression. As I was choked by the hot air, I dragged my feet along.

Tetsu's face suddenly appeared in the crowd of people. I exclaimed "Ah!" as I raised my voice. However, in the next moment, Tetsu disappeared, and someone bumped against my shoulder and walked away. Maybe it was the continuation of last night's dream; in my dream, I held onto Tetsu's cold hands. And then, I stared intently from the side at Tetsu's face as white foam came bubbling out.

"Tetsu is in *Uri Nara*."

The thought bothered my mind every day. Suddenly, behind my eyelids, Tetsu's face passed by, and in the corner of the street, I caught sight of his retreating figure and started running. Tetsu as he snapped his fingers while listening to jazz. Tetsu as he smoked a cigarette. His side profile that I saw that time as he chugged gin, laughed, walked while drunk, putting his arms around my shoulder. Those mundane points in time suddenly appeared and left behind a sticky coldness in the palms of my hands before disappearing.

6.

Climbing up the long and steep slope and returning to the lodging house, my right hand was shaking. The package filled with books that I'd bought from the old bookstore was heavy. While wondering if it'd been that heavy earlier, I put them on the desk. I had forgotten how heavy books were. While shaking out my numb right hand, I opened the window. Seoul's autumn was just as short as its spring. Already, a chilly wind had begun to blow.

Before my eyes, there was still a *sugon* (handkerchief) fluttering. In front of that *sugon* was a fluttering white butterfly—. I closed my eyes.

The small theater that could barely fit just under a hundred people was stuffy with the body heat of so many people. It was jam-packed to the point that I could even hear the sighs of the person sitting next to me, and from where I was sitting, I could see Instructor Kim's fingertips, the blemishes on the back of her hand, and even the sweat shining on her forehead.

Instructor Kim's eyes, her gaze. And then the white, the completely white *Chima Jeogori*, the *sugon* was white too, the white *salpuri*—. Amongst the whiteness, the sharp eyes that stood out were wet and shining. I could even hear her breathing. As if she were about to smile, she didn't smile at all. I could even see that she looked like she was about to cry. Suffering and trying to plead with something, no, it was silence that was like she'd given up without pleading. With a resolute gaze that didn't flatter the audience, a smell oozed out from her body, that's right, it was something that could only be called a smell.

It was *Han*<sup>6</sup>.

During the fifteen minutes of *salpuri* that I saw, I wasn't able to breathe. It was as if I'd been rooted to my seat.

The sky was a black gloom without a single star, and only dark clouds were spread out. As the chilly wind struck my cheeks, I replayed Instructor Kim's *salpuri* inside my head. Tetsu's face appeared. I thought of Kazuo who was sleeping in the hospital. Matsumoto's face also came to mind. My father and mother and Michiko crossed my mind one after another.

"Winter is coming again. February is coming."

As I muttered to myself, I saw the white butterfly. In the darkness before my eyes, the butterfly was fluttering as if it were pulling out all of my past memories. My memories relentlessly came welling up. My mouth moved like a fish that was dying. A thirst that felt like it was burning my throat, my throat's thirst that was to the point of irritation, that time when I'd writhed and squatted down in that complicatedness—. Tetsu had died. The bottom of my left breast began to hurt. Kazuo's shriveled up chest, his two eyes without light, as usual it was a stinging pain. I struck my own head. As if I were trying to drown out my memories, I continued to strike it. The white butterfly was still flying. No matter how many times I closed my eyes and struck my head, the white butterfly continued to flutter about.

Turning across the pharmacy that was at the exit of Nagwon Market, on the left was something I wasn't sure if I could call a building, and I climbed up the stairs of the run-down building and stood in front of the door on the fourth floor. Feeling like I'd bump into the mountain of coal briquettes in front of the door if I stumbled, when I heard the melody of *salpuri* playing from the cassette tape, as if I were pulled in, I opened the door. For some reason, I didn't feel the fear and hesitation that I had felt when I stood in front of the *Gayageum Byeongchang*<sup>7</sup> practice room. In the mirror that furnished the wall on my left was Instructor Kim, and behind her, I could see her students dancing. I bowed slightly and in the corner of the practice room, I

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<sup>6</sup> *Han* is a concept that has been described as embodying sorrow, resentment, grief and other emotions and is said to be a characteristic of Korean culture. It originates from the period of the Japanese occupation of Korea, and the concept was popularized in the 20th century as a sense of shared suffering amongst the people of Korea.

<sup>7</sup> *Gayageum Byeongchang* refers to a performance of a singer singing while playing the gayageum.



sat down on a sofa that had cotton sticking out of it. In order to observe Instructor Kim's lessons, I had already been visiting frequently for a month.

While looking at the *salpuri*, inside my heart I was praying.

When I was watching the *salpuri*, the thought that "Tetsu is in *Uri Nara*" was something I became more and more sure of, and it would change depending on the growing chants accompanied by subtly husky voices. As if it were pulling out those growing chants, the white butterfly began to flutter inside my head.

From Instructor Kim's hand, a white *sugon* was gently thrown into the air. The long *sugon* that was several times longer than one's body stretched out in length as if it were connecting this world with the afterlife, and in the next moment, Instructor Kim bent her knees into a half-sitting posture and caught it with both her hands. Holding up the *sugon* as if she were presenting a prayer, like always, Instructor Kim's eyes were wet as they stared into the distance.

Kazuo's neck drew closer as it rattled and the phlegm that stuck to it rang out. The palms of my hands that had pressed together inside my heart began to be soaked in sweat. Tetsu hadn't died in a war, and it wasn't some honorable death for an ideal that was represented by all kinds of words like the people or the nation. "My body is so heavy, it's bothersome," while saying that he died abruptly from subarachnoid hemorrhage. Kazuo too, he caught a cold and without the fever subsiding, for unknown reasons he ended up in a vegetative state. The both of them, without ever once seeing *Uri Nara*, in "Japan", without even saying good-bye, they suddenly—

My body which was still praying was being spun around in circles by the white *sugon*. And then, inside my body, I heard the growing chanting that contained a husky voice.

The whirling wind that seemed to be howling, in the middle of the wind's magnetic forces was me.

"Aeja, would you like to try dancing once?"

The instructor held out the *sugon* in front of me.

"No, I, I'm fine with just watching."

When I said that without thinking, Instructor Kim stared at me with a serious expression.

When the practice for the *gayageum* ended, with those feet, I would head towards Instructor Kim's practice room. When I pushed on the door, inside my bag, other than the *pansori* lyric notes, there were practice clothes for *salpuri* folded inside. The *jangdan* of *salpuri* didn't make me feel out of place at all. It was like it was naturally pulling out the *jangdan* in my body that was already there. The something that had been waiting inside me, I was waiting for the moment when that something that had always been hiding as I'd waited and yearned for it would jump out. The moment when I spat out my breath in one go, as if the next *jangdan* had been stuck in the pause of the *jangdan*, my breathing would become slightly out of sync. My shoulders trembled.

Instructor Kim held my hand and said, "The *sal* of *salpuri* is the common people's han, and *puri* is what releases it. Aeja, see, you can see something in the distance. I don't know what that something is, but I can definitely see it. That's what you stare at as you dance."

My voice was dancing in a circle.

After the new year, on a night in February, in the warm air that steadily enveloped the room from the ondol floor, I looked around at my surroundings. My voice was going along with the *jangdan* and dancing in circles around my body. The moment I realized it, I opened my throat, and, putting my strength in my abdomen, as I completely thought “It won’t come out. It won’t come out,” the high note rang out without difficulty. Following my voice, voices rang out. Voices were being drawn out by the *jangdan* and were waiting impatiently for the next voice. I had the feeling that even the gayageum that was being played together was leisurely looking for a good sound. Not just as a simple musical accompaniment, the tone of the gayageum wrapped around the voices and also danced in circles.

I stared at the white butterfly. I didn’t let my eyes leave the butterfly at all. Each time the butterfly fluttered, it left a white line. While chasing after that, I continued to sing.

From the other end of the receiver, I could hear my younger sister’s disjointed voice. However, that sobbing was calm unlike the time when she called about Tetsu.

“Big sis, it’s the fault of the medicine you see... while our big brother’s face was still really swollen up, the whites of his eyes were flowing out... it was flowing no matter how much we rubbed at it with cotton balls... And then the bedsores were on his butt... on the bone under his butt, you could see them. Even though he was constantly exposed to infrared light, the bedsores... they only became even worse. Big sis... Kazuo’s Adam’s apple... The people at the crematory prayed. They said it was a really sacred shape. They were asking what kind of person he was while he was alive...”

I put down the receiver, went into my room and the gentle curves of the Joseon dynasty white porcelain on top of the bookshelf slightly curved and seemed to be shaking.

I poured Jinro soju into a cup and chugged down three cups in a row. However, the points in my head were only shudderingly clear-headed, and the drunkenness wouldn’t come at all. Tetsu was also dead. Kazuo was also dead. I could feel a strong wind. The magnetic force of that wind grabbed up my body. I would also die and enter the inside of that strong wind.

It was nearing dawn. I opened the window and meticulously cleaned up my room. Then, I wiped off my body and took out the clothes for the *salpuri*. The pure white *Chima Jeogori*, the *poson* (Japanese split toe socks) that I’d just washed, I changed into the clothes and with the long *sugon* in hand, I climbed onto the roof of the lodging house.

At the base of the sky that was covered in a splash of purple cream, as if hiding the premonition of morning, the city of Seoul quietly stretched out. In the gaps between the scattered stars, a coldness like a knife was piercing my body. In the forest in the private garden that I could see on my left, the bark of the trees whose leaves were scattered rubbed against the sound of the wind and echoed, and far ahead, the Namsan Tower towered up, waiting for the morning sun.

The scenery that hadn’t changed in a year, no, I simply hadn’t noticed that it had changed. Ten years later, twenty years later, there was no doubt it was changing as much as one might sigh.

*Uri Nara* was living. The scenery came and went. Inside that, I was playing the gayageum, singing *pansori*, and then dancing *salpuri*. I had no choice but to live in that way. The act of living didn’t change no matter where I went.

The gayageum began to play its melody. The white butterfly began to fly. While I followed the butterfly with my eyes, I danced *salpuri*. Without stopping, the gayageum continued its rhythm, and in the blowing wind, the *sugon* fluttered.

A few days later, I wrote a parting letter to Matsumoto.

At the post office, I mailed the letter, and I walked along the stone wall that continued from Shokeien to the private garden. Last night's sudden rain unexpectedly continued falling until dawn, and the puddles of water here and there on the walkway were frozen white. My idle two hands were in my coat pockets growing numb with cold with nothing to do. The city buses were running about on the main street beside me, and weaving between them, the taxis made whirring sounds. While walking, I began to sing the *Saranga* (a song of love) that I'd just finished learning. I filled my two freezing hands with strength, and my shoulders started to move.

*Sarang, sarang*, I sang out, and as people I didn't know passed me by, they cast out the word "*Pabo*". While walking, rather than looking like I was happily singing a song to myself, it was possible that I looked as if I was moving my head and groaning something. However, I didn't mind it in the least. I thought I was pleased with myself for not caring. More than the way the Japanese "*Baka*" sounded, "*Pabo*" which came from *Uri Mal* sounded much warmer.

The stone wall still continued. My voice danced in circles.

**Additional Translated Work:**

Promise (約束)

**Book Information**

Title: Ai ni Nita Mono (愛に似たもの *trans. Something like Love*)

Author: Yuikawa Kei (唯川恵)

ISBN-10: 4087464865

**Reflection:**

The short story *Promise* is taken from the short story collection *Ai ni Nita Mono (Something like Love)*, published in 2007 and written by Yuikawa Kei, a Japanese novelist and essayist born in 1955. After working an office job for around ten years after graduating college, she published *Umiro no Gogo* in 1984, and since then has become a prolific writer whose work has also been adapted for television series. The short story follows the life of Ikuko, who works at a publication company and views happiness as a future in which she retire upon marriage to become a housewife with a loving husband and children. One of the main characters she interacts with is Hazuki, an illustrator who draws flowers for a monthly magazine that Ikuko publishes, and after Hazuki suffers from a relapse of cancer, she tells Ikuko what she plans to draw in the following months. This is one of the promises referred to in the title of the short story, as Hazuki passes away before she can fulfill her “promise” of drawing cherry blossoms, but another promise is the one she made to her husband when she was first diagnosed with cancer, a promise to stay by her husband’s side. This promise is broken not just by Hazuki’s death, but by her husband, Akio, and Ikuko herself. Ikuko, envying the love Hazuki and her husband share, decides to test their love and make Akio’s love her own, and the two begin an affair as Hazuki’s condition worsens. After Hazuki passes away and Akio and Ikuko marry, just as Ikuko begins to think that she’s attained the happiness she’s always wanted, the birth of Akio and Ikuko’s child Chika disrupts that, as Akio turns his love towards their child and Chika, while drawing a picture of the cherry blossoms, mentions the promise Hazuki made to Ikuko to draw them.

I translated *Promise* in the beginning of the semester when I was first starting my senior project. Looking back, I think I found the story easier to translate than *Nabi Taryong* as the plot was more straight-forward and the dialogue between the characters was relatively quicker to translate than the heavy details and narrative of *Nabi Taryong*. Also when translating *Promise*, I had been able to read the entire short story before working on my translation, so my understanding of the narrative helped me in transcribing the work into English. This was something I couldn’t do when I later translated *Nabi Taryong*, not just because the latter was a much longer text, but also because I think the language and writing style of *Nabi Taryong* made it a much more difficult text to read, which challenged me to think more critically about both the content and language that I was translating.

## Promise

Once or twice a week, after making adjustments for work, Ikuko comes here.

The general hospital near Inokashira Park.

Seventh floor. Room 706.

Half a month ago, Hazuki was moved from a four person room to a private room.

Upon knocking on the door, a bright voice calls out, "Come in!"

Ikuko puts on a smile and enters. Because of the back light flowing in from the window, Hazuki's face always glows white. While narrowing her eyes, Ikuko walks closer.

"Hello."

"Welcome."

"I've brought you cream puffs. I heard there was a very delicious store in Shinjuku."

"I'm delighted. Thank you for going to the trouble every time," Hazuki says merrily.

Setting herself down on a chair, Ikuko is finally able to face Hazuki. It seems that she's grown a little thinner again.

"That's right. The work for this month, I've completed it already."

From the bedside drawer, Hazuki brings out a large manila envelope.

"Oh, that was quick."

"After all, it's not like I have anything else to do."

"Well then, I'll take a look."

Ikuko respectfully takes the paper out of the envelope into her hands. A picture of autumn cherry blossoms is drawn with a gentle touch.

"How is it?"

"It's very good. It's like it's filled with your kindness."

"Really? I'm relieved to hear that."

Ikuko returns the drawing to the envelope and places it in her bag.

"Well then, for this time, we'll go with this."

"By all means. I was thinking of drawing daffodils for next month. After that, snow willows. And afterward, I plan to draw cherry blossoms."

"That sounds good. I'll be looking forward to it."

After that, the two would have casual conversations like usual. A little gossip about common acquaintances, conversation about popular movies. It didn't matter that there's no point to the conversation or that they make many digressions while talking. The original goal is to have a whimsical chat after all.

A little after an hour, Ikuko cuts the conversation with, "Well, it's about time."

"Oh, it's already that time?"

"It's unfortunate, but I need to return to work."

"I suppose so." Looking slightly reluctant to part, Hazuki turns her face towards Ikuko.

"Take care. I'll come back again."

"Of course. I'll be waiting." Hazuki laughs slightly and nods.

Ikuko was currently working at an editing production company.

The company took care of the publication of in-company magazines and free papers.

This was her second time getting a job. Before that, after graduating college, she had worked an office job at a major construction company for three years. She was able to get the job by breaking through the tough competition, which made her envied by her friends.

The reason she quit her job there was simple.

Around that time, the co-worker she was dating was two-timing with a woman around Ikuko's age, and ultimately, he got married to that woman.

When he started the conversation to break up with her, Ikuko couldn't believe her ears. Naturally, Ikuko had thought that in the near future, she would be married to that man. They were basically an officially recognized couple within the company, and she had believed that she would be able to resign due to marriage and have kids someday. She had believed without a doubt that the happiness that everyone naturally has was about to be hers.

However, the man easily turned his back on her. She couldn't understand what was what. In her confusion, she was left behind alone.

It was a serious wound, but what drove Ikuko further into a corner was the rumors that spread throughout the company as if it were true.

"It seems she was abandoned."

"In the end, she was just being played around with then."

"So basically, having sex and then running away?"

The amusing rumors spread about the locker rooms and office kitchens.

By the time she realized it, eyes filled with sympathy, but also curiosity, were all directed towards her throughout the company. It was a situation that shook her body so much that she couldn't endure it.

The one who experienced something horrible was her, so why was it that she was being talked about in such a way?

Coupled with her broken heart from the man leaving her, in the end, she felt uncomfortable and decided to resign.

She understands now, that she was too young. However, at the time, she didn't even have the leisure to think about the consequences.

After quitting, for a while she lived absentmindedly off of her resignation money and unemployment insurance.

However, she soon woke up to reality. Even if she didn't do anything, her rent, gas, electric and water bills were all slowly decreasing her back account. At any rate, she had to find a way to live. After seeing an employment advertisement, she applied and then was employed by her current job.

It was a small company. Counting the president, there was only five people. The project planning, interviews, transcribing interviews, proofreading, design, sometimes even recording. She had to be able to everything. Of course, the work was hard, and it was common for it to go until late at night.

Ikuko, who only had the experience of a typical office job, at first found the work to be very exciting. The fact that her notebook was filled with so much to do was something that she even was proud of.

However, seven years later to the present, she was tired out from the bottom of her heart.

There was no end to her work. Like a hamster running on a wheel, every single day, all she did was frantically complete the work presented before her. She often received many different jobs that needed to be moved forward at the same time, so there were times when she didn't even know what she was currently working on.

Even if she wanted to quit, she didn't have any other jobs she could do. She didn't have any special qualifications or skills. Of course, she knew it was her fault that she hadn't acquired any qualifications or skills. Because of that, she had been working like this in order to live.

In these seven years, even the men she's dated were all good-for-nothings.

The first man was something like a pimp, the next was addicted to gambling, and the last would get violent when he drank alcohol.

The reason she only met good-for-nothings was because she was leading a good-for-nothing lifestyle, but even then she hadn't effectively let go of the idea of having a man's warmth after her tiring every day. In any case, she wanted a man who could stay by her side.

And then, at some point, Ikuko was not just tired out from her job, but she also became tired of men.

When she returned to the company, Ikuko immediately sent Hazuki's illustration to the printing department.

There was an illustration that decorates the cover of a prudish company magazine that they publish every month. It'd been about two years since they first asked Hazuki to draw the picture of a flower that fit the season.

Hazuki was the same age as Ikuko. As an illustrator, she was quite well-known for a while in the business world. After getting married, before one knew it, her name was no longer heard of, but Ikuko was once her fan, so she boldly found a way to contact Hazuki to request her work, and was able to get her to agree after two correspondences. She could only think that it was her luck.

When they met in real life, Hazuki had a friendly personality, and they strangely got along well with each other. Soon, they developed a friendship beyond just work.

In order to receive Hazuki's drawings, Ikuko would go to her home, and, together with Hazuki's husband when he arrived home, she would frequently have dinner there.

About half a year later, the two went out to eat together.

Hazuki's illustration was received well by the higher ups of the company, and even the president said, "Occasionally, maybe you should treat her to a meal."

The place was an Italian restaurant in Aoyama. While amusing themselves with chatter about this and that, they emptied an entire bottle of wine.

After ordering another bottle, with a drunk look in her eyes, Hazuki spoke.

"You know, right after I got married, they found a tumor on my uterus."

Ikuko stopped filling the glass and stared at Hazuki, dumbfounded.

"The phrase like a thunderbolt from a sky, it must have been talking about things like this. I wanted kids, so I went to the hospital for research only for that. I had surgery immediately, and they treated the part they couldn't take out with chemotherapy, but it was so difficult. I kept throwing up, my head wouldn't stop hurting, and all my hair somehow fell out. It was one of the reasons why I disappeared from the world of illustrators."

Hearing this for the first time, Ikuko could only be surprised.

“Even though we had no choice but to give up on kids too, my husband didn’t even say a word to blame me. More than kids, your body is more important is what he told me. Those words alone supported me.”

“I see.”

“Even then, I once thought of dying.”

“Really?”

“I pulled out the IV and went to the roof by myself. At the time, I couldn’t feel anything but despair, that the only path waiting for me was death. I was immediately found by a nurse and returned to my bed, but my husband came running while crying. He told me to stay by his side forever, that he didn’t need anything else.”

Still listening, Ikuko let out a long breath.

“It may be that this is something I shouldn’t say, but somehow, that’s an amazing story.”

“At the time, I promised my husband, that I’d always stay by his side. That no matter what happens, I’ll never ever leave him.”

Hazuki took a sip of wine.

“You have a kind husband.”

“Yes, there’s no one kinder than him. I think I was really lucky to be able to get married to him.”

What Hazuki said seemed like a mix between bragging and confessing her love.

It was three months ago that Ikuko heard from Hazuki that she was going to be hospitalized.

“There was a relapse,” Hazuki said.

Not knowing how to respond in that moment, Ikuko faltered.

“It’s been four years since the surgery, so I thought it would already be all right, but I guess it’s as expected.”

Hazuki was pretending to be bright on the surface, but Ikuko could tell she was filled with uneasiness.

“Still, I want to keep drawing illustrations from now on. I’ll try my best.”

Ikuko nodded.

“Of course. Hazuki has a lot of fans, and I would also be super happy if you continued.”

Replying like that was the best Ikuko could do.

“Thank you. It’s really encouraging when I think that a lot of people have my illustrations.”

However, the condition of Hazuki after the relapse was not going well. Ikuko heard from Hazuki’s husband that they had found that the tumor had spread to numerous places.

Just how many more illustrations would she be able to receive?

Whenever Ikuko leaves the hospital room, she always can’t help but think about it.

Around this time, spending her weekends with Akio is a must.

On that day, she won’t take on any work no matter what. Even if she’s told off distastefully by the president, even if she’s made fun of by her colleagues, she won’t go to collect



manuscripts or go on business trips. Even if she did receive her work properly, it isn't like she would be compensated properly either.

That day, Ikuko will shake her arms and cook.

Home cooking made up of grilled fish, boiled vegetables and steamed egg. Sometimes she'll make yosenabe, sometimes it'll be sukiyaki. She'll also prepare two or three appetizers that might go well with alcohol.

Akio changes into a jersey left in Ikuko's room and sits down at the table. At first, he'll have beer, then when he's drunk, he'll change to shochu. They don't talk much, but they feel at home.

Afterwards, they enter the bath, and then they have sex on the bed freely.

Sex with Akio is very proper. There's no compulsion or over-the-top acting. They kiss, he caresses her breast, his finger crawls in her underwear, and after doing cunnilingus for a while, he puts it in.

When she was young, Ikuko had wanted to forcibly experience shock and excitement, but now she no longer needs something so troublesome. It's the same as if she were saying that she no longer needs troublesome men.

Akio is 36 years old. He's a salaryman at a proper company. In Kichijouji, though it's on a loan, he has a mansion. His personality is calm, and he is a good person. While coming over, he'll bring over potted flowers that he thought were pretty and seasonal fruits that happened to catch his eye.

He doesn't do things like extort money, get addicted to gambling, or wave around violence. Of course, excuses for sex, deception, he's done nothing to make the things they have now into nothing or tried to take advantage of Ikuko.

Sex is best with a serious man, is what Ikuko keenly thinks after she got to know Akio.

On Saturday, Akio will stay over like that, and during the afternoon on Sunday, he'll leave, but in the evening, he'll come back again. Then, once again, they'll have sex.

Akio is a man Ikuko is grateful for.

He has what the men she's dated until now didn't have. That is the thing that Ikuko once wanted, that she thought she would never get and would have to give up on.

Now, if she were to voice this aloud, she knows she would be laughed at.

Even then, it's what Ikuko thinks.

She wants a calm life. She wants a steady lifestyle. She wants a family where she's surrounded by her husband and children.

Akio is the perfect partner. It's likely that she'll never meet another man like him.

She wants to get married to Akio as soon as possible. She wants to spend her whole life with him.

However, there's a reason why that can't happen right now.

Akio is married.

His wife is Hazuki.

The first time she met Akio in Hazuki's home, it felt like she was meeting someone nostalgic.

If love was a door that needed to be opened deep within one's heart, there was no doubt that Akio had the key.

He was nice and a good person. He represented the gentle happiness that everyone seemed to be able to have but that Ikuko could only enviously look at. It was something that could be seen from him.

Of course, Ikuko knew the reality that he was Hazuki's husband.

She had a sense of morality. She heard many stories from Hazuki about how good they are as husband and wife.

It was just, she wanted to test the love that Hazuki wouldn't stop believing in. That feeling of jealousy was something that Ikuko at the time had not yet been properly aware of.

After she ate with Hazuki at the restaurant, after a while, she called Akio's company.

"I wanted to consult with you a bit about Hazuki's condition."

When saying that, Akio defenselessly made plans to meet her at a cafe.

"What did you need to know about Hazuki?" Akio asked while sipping on his coffee.

Around seven in the afternoon, all the customers seemed like there were telling lies somewhere.

"Well, about her sick condition..."

"Ah, you heard about it."

"I heard it for the first time just a while ago. We didn't know anything, so I was worried we were unreasonably asking her to work for us. Hazuki told me that she was fine, but I wanted to ask you as her husband if that was really true."

Akio smiled gently.

"If Hazuki said so, then I don't think there's a problem."

"Is it really okay to accept that?"

"Rather, I think she's happy to be working again. She thought she'd already been forgotten by the world of illustrators and had times when she was upset about it. Now, she's become quite lively again, and she seems to be drawing happily. Thus, for me, I pretty much want to thank you for that."

"Is that so? Then, I'm glad."

While nodding to Akio's words, Ikuko took a sip of her lukewarm coffee.

"Somehow, I'm jealous of Hazuki."

"Eh?"

"She has a kind husband like you."

Akio laughed sarcastically.

"Can I really be called kind, someone like me?" he said, absentmindedly avoiding Ikuko's eyes.

In his eyes, Ikuko felt like she could see doubt and a sign of giving up on something spreading, something that probably only she could comprehend.

"Hazuki really is lucky."

Then, what was this impatience that was surrounding herself?

Even after finishing her coffee, Ikuko didn't want to say goodbye to Akio just like that. While complexed by feeling such emotions, Ikuko moved forward on impulse.

"Just now, you said you wanted to thank me, didn't you?"

In response to Ikuko's words, Akio nodded, blinking rapidly.

"Yes."

"Then, maybe you can treat me to something."

It was supposed to have been said jokingly, but instead it turned out to be an extremely nervous voice. An awkward smile appeared on Akio's cheeks.

"Of course, that sounds good."

Akio's voice in response was also reversed.

On that day, they ended up sleeping together.

Akio was hungry for sex. Not for anything special. He was simply hungry for extremely normal sex with a healthy woman.

Without any weird positions, without any strange devices, Ikuko and Akio had sex on a bed in a love hotel. Their heavy breathing was slowly soaking into the cheap sheets. Their silhouette was suspended in the slightly foggy mirror.

Even in the room next door, even in the room above, the same thing was being done. Not just in this hotel, but in all the love hotels in this world, just how many men and women were doing something like this?

For the two of them, there was nothing more obscene than this commonplace action.

When it was done, their bodies separated, and they both lay down facing upwards.

Akio slowly breathed out and muttered, "So this is what sex is."

Ikuko raised her head. She could see Akio's sharp chin.

"I always thought she might break, and so I was always uneasy. After all, she was so sick, so of course it probably wasn't possible. It would be bad if something were to happen, and I was scared since I didn't know how far I could take it."

"I see."

"A healthy body is amazing. Somehow, it's so strong."

On top of that, within a healthy body, usually, unhealthy plans are going around.

"You really treasure Hazuki, don't you?"

"This might make you feel bad, but I really do treasure her."

"It's fine, don't worry about me."

"As a husband, I want to be able to do anything for Hazuki."

"I understand, that feeling."

"Really?"

"As long as there's something that you'd wished you had it, it will leave a strong regret."

Akio was quiet for a while.

"Yeah, I guess so."

"You should treasure Hazuki. When you're like that, I'll treasure you."

Akio looked at her with a surprised expression and then slightly smiled.

At that moment, Akio may not have realized that the two of them have become accomplices.

At some point, the location changed from love hotels to Ikuko's apartment.

After Hazuki was hospitalized, it became such that Akio would stay at Ikuko's place.

The trifling things that normal men and women do was cherished by them and repeated over and over again.

As if they were slowly tumbling down a gentle, very gentle slope.

“How do these daffodils look?”

Ikuko takes the illustration held out to her. Before she knew it, Hazuki’s wrists are so thin that they seemed like they would completely fit between a circle made with Ikuko’s thumb and index finger.

“It’s pretty. It’s really pretty.”

Drawn was a daffodil within a dark gray color, looking like a single ray of light was shining upon it.

“Next are the snow willows.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

It’s not like I hate Hazuki. It’s not like I’m a monster who wishes for her death.

For Hazuki’s sake, I wish from the bottom of my heart for Akio to be a husband who loves Hazuki until the end.

It’s just, Hazuki already has a time limit marked off. I’m simply wishing for that time limit to not change.

When she’s alive, she can love Akio as much as she wants.

But once Hazuki dies, Akio is mine.

After drawing the snow willows, Hazuki’s condition suddenly gets worse.

From within her bed, facing Ikuko with an expression devoid of vitality, Hazuki spits out in intervals with a breath that smells like medicine, “I’m sorry I couldn’t fulfill my promise.”

“Promise?”

“I promised to draw a picture of the cherry blossoms.”

“Don’t worry about something like that.”

“I really wanted to draw it.”

“I understand.”

“I really did.”

“Hazuki...”

“The cherry blossoms, I really wanted to draw them.”

Then, without being able to draw the cherry blossoms, Hazuki passed away.

One year later, Ikuko got married to Akio.

The mansion at Kichijouji was sold, and they moved to a similar mansion on a different subway line. Out of consideration for Ikuko, the kind Akio threw away everything that would remind them of Hazuki. In their new house, there was no altar, and there weren’t even any photos.

Ikuko quit her job, and became a professional housewife. Her life of waiting for Akio to return every day began.

She never thought of it as boring. She was originally suited for this kind of lifestyle after all. Saying that she liked a job that she didn't like, Ikuko had already exhausted herself enough.

Without ever drinking outside, the serious Akio would return home at around seven o'clock. On weekends, they would go out to large-scale shopping centers and spend time by taking a walk in a park.

The housewives in the neighborhood would say "It's annoying whenever the husband is at home" half-jokingly, half-seriously, but for Ikuko, there was nothing more fun than spending time with Akio.

Surely, those housewives have never experience being betrayed by someone they thought they were going to marry, nor were they so busy with work that their period didn't come for three months.

In this world, what people call an ordinary lifestyle is what Ikuko finally got just as she wanted.

Half a year after getting married, Ikuko became pregnant.

Akio was delighted to the point that bewildered Ikuko.

Eventually, she gave birth to a girl, and they named her Chika.

Ikuko was happy.

Chika is turning five this year.

She's a child who sticks to her papa. Whether it's taking a bath or going to sleep, she'll complain whenever she's not with her papa.

Whenever she plays pranks, no matter how much Ikuko scolds her, she'll act nonchalant, but when Akio scolds her, she'll immediately start crying "I'm sorry" over and over again.

Such is Chika, who Akio irresistibly and sweetly is always stuck to.

After dinner, Chika will completely fit into Akio's lap, and together they'll watch TV.

After cleaning up, Ikuko sits down next to down.

"Chika, don't you think you should be sleeping now?"

"Not yet. I'm watching tv with Papa."

"It's not my fault if you oversleep."

"It's fine."

She's already skilled at speaking.

"If she's sleepy, she can just sleep here."

Akio hugs Chika closely. Chika clings to Akio's neck and says, "Papa, I love you."

Ikuko involuntarily sighs.

"If it's like this, when it's time for Chika to get married, it'll be a big problem."

"Chika won't become something like a bride."

Akio turns towards Chika as if for emphasis as he says, "That's right, she'll become Papa's bride."

"Really, then good, I'll always be with Papa."

"Forever and ever, Chika will be together with Papa. We won't ever be apart."

In that moment, suddenly, Ikuko's chest is struck by a feeling as if she's been pricked by a small stinging thorn.

Forever and ever.

From deep in her memories, something is shaking violently.

“I hope you’ll still be saying that when she’s comes of age,” Ikuko says exasperatedly.

The spring sunlight flows down from the veranda. The neighbor’s blooming cherry blossoms were in full bloom, causing flower petals to flutter down, dancing.

Pausing her hand as she busied herself with the laundry, Ikuko turned her eyes towards them.

In line with the ordinary mansion, the laundry is drying on the veranda. From far away, the chime of an elementary school can be heard. The barking of dogs, the sound of futons being hit. And then, the cherry blossom petals equally flutter down, dancing.

How casual happiness is.

Turning around, at the living room table, Ikuko sees that Chika is drawing a picture. Recently, the drawing paper and crayon set that Akio bought is Chika’s favorite.

“What are you drawing?”

When Ikuko calls out from the veranda, a clear voice replies, “Cherry blossoms.”

“Is that so? They’re really pretty, aren’t they?”

Ikuko takes off Chika’s pajamas and Akio’s T-shirt from the clothespins and into her hands.

“After all, I promised, didn’t I?”

“Huh?”

Ikuko slowly recalls those words.

“Just now, what did you say?”

“I said, I made a promise, didn’t I? That I’d draw a picture of cherry blossoms.”

“You made a promise like that?”

“I did, didn’t I? Properly?”

Suddenly Ikuko’s fingertips feel cold, and the laundry in her hands slips out and falls. Her fingers which weren’t holding anything begin to shake.

“Chika...”

“Promises have to kept after all.”

As Chika replies with an innocent smile, Ikuko feels pain from deep within her body. She can only stare back, pretending to feel nothing at all.