

2020

BONE PAINTING, A NOVEL, WITH CRITICAL DISSERTATION ON THE EKPHRASTIC PRACTICES OF NATSUME SOSEKI AND AKUTAGAWA RYUNOSUKE

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/15775>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.24382/1246>

University of Plymouth

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UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH

BONE PAINTING, A NOVEL,
WITH CRITICAL DISSERTATION
ON THE EKPHRASTIC PRACTICES OF NATSUME SŌSEKI
AND AKUTAGAWA RYŪNOSUKE

by

JAMIE EDGECOMBE

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Humanities and Performing Arts

April 2020

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ABSTRACT

Name of Candidate: Jamie Edgecombe

Title of Thesis: *Bone Painting*, a Novel with Critical Dissertation on the Ekphrastic Practices of Natsume Sōseki and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

This novel and critical dissertation explore one of the central characteristics of Japanese aesthetics, that of suggestion and how suggestion can interconnect with ekphrasis. Although *Bone Painting* is a complex work, one with two distinct view point characters – the doctor, Seichiro, and the artist, Kasumi – my writing of it was very much influenced by my understanding of the Japanese aesthetic category of *yūgen*. *Yūgen*, the *kanji* of which can be directly translated as *dark* and *dim*, is often considered one of the most recondite and ineffable categories of Japanese aesthetics. Often translated as ‘subtlety and depth,’ or ‘mystery and depth,’ *yūgen* promotes attention to the depths of the world we live in, as aided by a cultivated imagination: an approach to life, art and the world that favours allusiveness over explicitness. Ekphrasis, on the other hand, in its original conceptualisation, celebrated vividness and clarity. As such, ekphrasis could then be taken as the antithesis of the *yūgen* sensibility. However, as both *Bone Painting* and the critical dissertation demonstrate, the two concepts can be brought meaningfully together through ekphrasis’s rejection of mimesis, and its exploration of a dynamic relationship between various agents and mediums, and *yūgen*’s invigoration of ‘emptiness,’ through a similar emphasis on dynamic interplay. *Bone Painting* dramatises the importance of interplay through the artistic practices of Kasumi, the artist, as informed by own reading of modern Japanese writers who include ekphrasis within their fiction. The critical dissertation pursues this interest through the concrete examples, namely the prose fiction of Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927), both of whom imbue their ekphrastic practices with *yūgen* sensibility. These readings have allowed me to reflect on how the interplay between *yūgen* and ekphrasis is central to my own novel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The genesis of this novel and research lies in the writing of my first published novella, *The Art of Kozu* (Sandstone Press, 2014; winner of the Manchester Metropolitan Novella Prize, 2014). I knew even before starting that work that I wanted to create a second novel that would connect to the characters and events of the first. Such a novel would allow me to create and explore the rich interplays that can form between different historical moments and diverse artistic practices. Having set *The Art of Kozu* in both the Paris of 1910 and Saigon of 1945, I wanted, through this second novel, to return to Hokkaido, and particularly the city of Sapporo, where I lived and worked between 2001 and 2004, a landscape I have returned to several times since because of family connections.

I would first and foremost like to thank the inspirational Professor Anthony Caleshu, whose passion, dedication and insight have helped me at every stage along the way. It was Professor Caleshu who first saw promise in my short story *Selling Yumiko*, a work which he published in the journal, *Short Fiction*. This piece became the germ for my novella and, eventually, my first full-length novel, *Bone Painting*. I would also like to express my gratitude to Chris Cook and Dr David Sergeant, who have provided me with critical insights into the art world and academic writing.

I would like to record my gratitude to the School of Humanities at the University of Plymouth for taking me on as Writer in Resident for two academic years (2016-2017 and 2017-2018).

A special thank you to Sarah Swinburne for her valuable contributions and assistance in this project. Sarah offered her help without reservation and with grace. This is much appreciated.

I would also like to say thank you to my mother and father, Carol and Colin Edgecombe, who not only helped to partially finance this project, but who also gave me their moral support at all times. They filled the house with books and now I can add my own contribution to those stacks.

Finally, I am much indebted to my family – to my wife and children, whose loving care, encouragement and insights into Japanese life and history have enabled me to see this project through to completion.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

I ask the examiners to consider this thesis despite it being over the word limit of the Doctoral College.

Word count of main body of thesis: 99,292

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Date:

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Section 1

BONE PAINTING, a novel

Part I

SEICHIRO

1.

Little fingers, he thinks. Black, burned, little fingers. That is what his beans look like.

The resemblance leaves Seichiro stunned, standing alone inside his bean tunnel, until a familiar voice calls out his name. It carries across his field and belongs to Mr Toda, the section-chief of the local postoffice. He has a special delivery, he shouts out, sounding quite unperturbed by the early hour. There is still a thick band of river mist at the foot of the mountain.

‘A private courier just dropped by,’ Toda says once Seichiro is close enough, ‘said he couldn’t find your house. He claimed the number didn’t exist. I told him I knew exactly where to find you at this time of the morning.’ He hands Seichiro a box which he has signed for on his behalf.

Seichiro thanks the postman for his troubles and does not wait before opening the package. Inside are three apples in a presentation case, big Aomori reds, each the size of a baseball and stringed in polystyrene fibres. He looks for a note and is not disappointed.

‘They are from Kasumi,’ he says. ‘She says she’s is coming up to visit.’

Mr Toda, beaming at him, says. ‘How nice.’ He always seems to take personal pride in the happiness he helps deliver to people’s doors. ‘Chiaki will be thrilled.’

Back at home, while Seichiro sits at his desk, working a scalpel under the skin of the first apple, he thinks about good news, how it can sweep in and brush away a bad omen, as if the desiccated beans had crumbled to dust in his hands and scattered over his plot. If only everything in life could balance out so easily.

Peel ribbons around his hand. Juice slicks the blade. What surgeon these days would hold a wooden-handled instrument to an open wound, no matter how scrubbed, boiled, soaked in iodine? 'A wound has its own fate.' His father's words. 'Every doctor knows that.'

When the bevelled edge kisses his thumb, he breathes. He hadn't realised he was holding his breath. Good steady fingers, he thinks. Seventy-five years old and no a trace of a tremor.

The apple's wetness soaks the air, a scent sweetened by the heat seeping in through the surgery's windows. Milky white in colour, the grid of frosted glass panes looks like paper doors. Their light is soft.

He feels a haiku come to him, as he carves the fruit into segments, a poem by Masaoka Shiki.

this small knife:

sharpens a pencil

peels a pear

Yes, Kasumi will fly up from Tokyo tomorrow. The thought is as fresh and clean as the white of the apple's flesh. Chiaki was so pleased that she has already headed into Kotoni Station with their help, Miss Himura. She will buy new bed-linen, even a new pillow. She wants everything to perfect, which is why she has forbidden him from dusting down the upstairs' room. She is convinced that a thorough job is beyond him, that their granddaughter will fall ill from dust-inhalation. After years of typing out his notes, Chiaki believes that she is just as qualified as he is. More so, perhaps. He can do nothing but wait.

From his desk draw he lifts out an old writing box. It is coated in black lacquer, its lid emblazoned with a gold-filigree chrysanthemum, the flower of the Imperial Household.

Most of the space inside is taken up by an ink stone, a hefty slab of slate, its edges rough, though the circle worked into the middle is perfect. Underneath this are deep compartments. Each is allotted a particular item. The mink heads of the two calligraphy brushes look untouched. He knows otherwise. His father wrote every day of his life, whether a letter to an acquaintance or the notes of a patient; then there were the instructions for the household staff, instructions for him, too. His father preferred actions to words and calligraphy was as much an action as the words his strokes signified. Given their years of use, the brushes are remarkably well-preserved. He was a thorough man, his father, and neat. Tucked into the corner is an old pill bottle half-filled with diacoprizine salts, the powder kept dry by a sachet of absorbent jelly stuffed in beneath the stopper. In the neighbouring compartment, its sides flush with the woodwork, is an ivory *hanko*. Rather than use a professional engraver, his father produced the name stamp himself. Carved into the signature stamp's end is an ideogram, *ko*, god, the first *kanji* of his family's name, Koze.

He lifts out the stamp. Beneath a thin layer of crepe silk lining the bottom of the trench, are foil squares torn from larger blister packs. They do not exist, not officially. They are the culmination of clerical errors, leftovers from when he has prescribed rohypnol to one of his more careless patients, someone suffering from acute insomnia and who pays their bill without looking over the fine details (these are not uncommon, not in Fukui). The pills are brown in colour, unattractive and purposefully so. Sleeping drugs are not supposed to appeal to the appetite.

Breaking the foil with his thumb, he lets the tablet stick to the residue coating his blade.

On his desk is a porcelain incense stand, another chrysanthemum (oh, how his father wore his loyalty like skin). The circulating beads of the flower's petals curl inwards to a smooth, open centre. Propped over this disk, an incense stick can smoulder and drop its ash,

easy to clean up afterwards. It is here that he places the pill, using the scalpel to shave off a slither that crumbles to powder. He is careful. The grains are so fine, the amount so small, that the brown trace looks like a squashed mosquito. He dabs the blade into the water dish and retrieves a touch of its salts. As if using a surgical spatula, he crushes the two substances into a paste and smears a tiny amount into the apple's flesh, one slice at a time. Too much of this particular barbiturate and he would drop out of time, anaesthetised into forgetfulness. This is not the day for that. It has been a morning of bad omens, what with the blight taking his bean crop, but more importantly good news. After all, the apples were delivered to him in a presentation box. They are a gift and an apology for coming up on so short notice. At least, she will not arrive until late this evening. Chiaki and Miss Himura have plenty of time to fuss amongst themselves and get everything prepared. How he would love to lock up his surgery and go out to buy spider crab and *Yubari* melon and *tai-yaki* and all the other treats Kasumi loved as a child. But Chiaki would be insufferable if everything did not go to her plan.

He studies the first apple slice.

A shadow breaks into the room.

When the surgery's windows rattle in their frames, he takes his first bite. A truck is passing by outside. That is all. One, no doubt, filled with gravel and heading down the Teine-Sugata Highway into central Sapporo.

By the time he has chewed through the segment and swallowed, the room is bright once more. White walls, white sink, grey plastic-covered examination bed, every surface softened by the windows' light.

Usually, he would need only a couple milligrams of barbiturate to see him through the day, to deal with Chiaki's sharp tongue and to stretch his office hours into something pleasant. Something balanced. A single pill can last a week, often longer.

The rohypnol is quick-working, but not instantaneous. He goes to work on another of Kasumi's apples, carving out the pips with deft twists of the scalpel.

Apples. Pears. Oranges. Each fruit has its season. Even in Aomori, where this gift originated from, the harvest is a month away, perhaps two. He wishes that the dead had the same discipline. July is not the time for apples.

He thinks of Shiki. Persimmons were the poet's favourite. How adept that a dying man should love autumnal fruit best of all. Their taste was a great source of joy, like the rich contrast between the orange skin of the fruit and an early flurry of snow.

Beyond the sliding door to his surgery, the house is still. He listens, leaning into its spaces with his ears, searching. Perhaps he is being paranoid. It is an occasional side effect of the drugs, as is memory loss. Crops can perish and do so all on their own. But this morning, on his trip down to his vegetable plot, there was something else beneath the sour smell of ripening green matter that greeted him (usually so pleasant). His entire bean crop had withered on the vine overnight. The dried husks of the pods resembled a harvest of burnt fingers. He waited for another sign, for a shiver to ripple through the blackened vines, or a flame to appear, even for his strength to fail him, leaving him in a space between life and death: all the signs that a *goryō* is close by, the vengeful remnants of a once noble soul.

To distract himself, he considers how, from the highway, the house must look like an exhibit in the historical village over in Ebetsu, that strange retirement home for the settler and colonial buildings constructed, and then abandoned, over the last one hundred and fifty years. Surely, the truck drivers must take note of it on their way past. It must be a little spectacle to mark on their way into the city. It no longer bothers him that the back of the house is different. Chiaki saw to those innovations. She could not face another Hokkaido winter with nothing but wood and glass to keep out the snow. Winter is a presence, she said, that took up residence in her bones and refused to leave until June.

‘Make this place habitable or I’ll divorce you.’ That was her ultimatum.

As a consolation for modernising most of the house, she let him keep the front façade, the main entrance hall and the old wing, with its wall of milk-white glass, where he set up his practice almost fifty years ago. The original owner, a government cartographer, had designed the room as a photography studio. Chiaki let him keep the wide eaves and the veranda that encircles the whole house. It was a compromise that struck her as mutually beneficial, a fashionable design concept she picked up one year when they were down in Hakodate tending the family graves. Many of the old families down there, in Motomachi, have modernised in this way. She can be warm and the same old patients, those who come to Seichiro to talk crop rotations and urine infections, can still drop by and enjoy a cup of tea in the only old house left in the ward. The interior they tidied up, a new kitchen, parlour stove, fresh green *tatami* mats. The renovations angered their daughter, Fusako, even though she hasn’t visited for years. It was as if their daughter, always the free spirit, brilliant but impossible to control, wanted to lock them and the house in the past, a fall-back position awaiting her return should she ever fail in her attempt to conquer the Tokyo medical establishment, and all the while raising Kasumi by herself (she never told them who the father was). But as Chiaki pointed out, it is easy to be sentimental about a house that you no longer live in.

He glances down at his empty appointment roster. If only things will come to a head quickly. Then, the afternoon would be his own. How delicious that would be, a point blanc, with nothing but Kasumi’s arrival to occupy him. Who cares about blighted beans? Good news must surely triumph.

He feels thinner. The light pooling on the wooden surfaces of the room – his desk, his old filing cabinets, even the floorboards – is deepening, like amber melting back into sap. His muscles loosen. Shiki’s words drift back to him and he lets them linger with the taste of the

fruit. How wonderful it is to sit alone with a poem, to forget, and yet remember, and, in doing so, to commune with someone from the past (he and Shiki would have hit it off, of that he has no doubt). This is how to enjoy an afternoon of waiting, with deliberate ease.

He settles into the rohypnol.

What remains of the apple, blazes white.

His thoughts roll and fold into one another, like soil before the blades of his cultivator. He thinks about Chiaki, how she grinned like someone deranged when he let her see Kasumi's note (the apples he put away in his surgery; Chiaki's sweet tooth often gets the better of her). Four years and their granddaughter has not come north, not once (her mother's absence is longer again – but they do not discuss that). 'She is busy studying,' is Chiaki's ready excuse. 'You know how pushy Fusako is. After all that fuss about medical school, Fusako will make damn sure Kasumi takes her art classes just as seriously. Poor child.'

With Miss Himura by her side, Chiaki had cycled down the highway, calling out to him as he ripped the dead pods from their vines and threw them into a basket. 'We need bedding and groceries,' she had said. 'We're going to Kotoni.'

'Yes, yes. Groceries.' He knew she would also, no doubt, treat herself (and Miss Himura) to one of those buttery pastries he has long forbidden her to indulge in.

He pops a whole slice into his mouth and sucks the flesh to pulp. That he is close to devouring a second apple, on his own and in one sitting, brings him no shame. Chiaki has her sweets, after all.

Kasumi's apples must be early specimens. Some of the first clipped from the trees of the Kuroishi Orchard, the vanguard of the year's first wave, though many smaller specimens must have been culled along the way. That is how the orchards manage to grow them so big, so sweet. He gathers up the peel, an accordion brought to a silent note. He studies the ideogram stencilled there, sliced through by his knife, but still readable.

Ishi. Stone.

Set against the sun-pinked skin, the strokes look Paris green and stand out like scars from a branding. Come the harvest, the contrast will be even sharper, as if the ideogram, the last character of the orchard's name, were painted on the fruit in oils.

So Kasumi remembers their trip to Aomori. He is amazed.

He cannot be sure of how many years have passed since he took his granddaughter under the Tsugaru Strait, beneath the cold sea by train, to spend a week at the orchard near Kuroishi City. Kasumi was a little girl, not yet ten. Her mother was busy doing her internship at the hospital and Chiaki had had to tend her sick father in Omu, leaving him and Kasumi to themselves. The pension attached to the orchard was a simple affair. It smelled of pine sap. He took Kasumi hiking around the foothills of Mt. Hakkōda, exploring the villages of Kotōge, Tashiro (where they spent one night; all that walking, then sleeping, only to set off again in the morning, they felt like itinerant mountain priests), all the way to Namioka Station, where they caught the train back to their lodgings. These were places he had wanted to teach Fusako about for years, but never had the chance. She always followed her own plans. He had heard of them himself as a child growing up on the southern coast of Hokkaido. Aomori was just across the Tsugaru Strait. They had inspired his uncle Yuichiro, too. So much so that he had visited those snowy parts to paint the killer mountain and to try and track down any survivors of a doomed military exhibition that had foundered there a few years before he left for Paris and stardom. Kasumi (barely 10!), had walked the full twenty kilometres of that course with him. Not once did she complain. Such a pleasant time, that week, all those years ago.

He breaks the foam net from around the last apple. The postage label on the presentation box says it was purchased last night at a fancy department store in Meguro,

Tokyo. The note that he showed Chiaki simply says, ‘Dear Grandpa and Grandma, I’m coming up tomorrow, late. I hope that’s okay?’

He is feeling better now. Buoyant. The sunlight is warm. It is a beautiful day. No wonder the dead would want to come wandering early. What a thing, to have bean pods announce their arrival at the same time as the living coming to visit! Why wait for *Obon*, the end of August and the festival of dead? By then, the autumnal chill will have already returned to the north.

‘Aomori,’ he thinks, remembering how, as he and Kasumi walked through those villages, he told her ghost stories fit for the summer season, local legends about the ghost company wandering about the mountainsides, marching up and down Hakkōda’s braes and escarpments, perfect stories for the coming of *Obon*.

He tugs a tissue from the box on his desk and is about to wipe the scalpel clean when, again, something shifts. Another change of light. Only, no truck is passing along the highway. Someone is standing on the veranda outside. Their outline is sharp, like that of a shadow puppet.

‘Kasumi?’ he says.

But it is much too early. Her flight won’t get in until later and then there is the train to catch into the city from the airport. Surely, Chiaki and Miss Himura have returned. It is good that he has softened his nerves with the rohypnol.

He calls out, ‘*Okaeri!*’ Welcome back.

But the shadow shrinks, grows indistinct, and moves along the veranda, until it disappears around the corner of the house. Going over to the veranda door, he unbolts the lock. ‘Come on then,’ he says. Warm air puffs into his face, the smell of hot blacktop from the supermarket’s parking lot. No patient of his is due. An emergency, perhaps?

And, yet, the veranda is empty.

‘Typical,’ he mutters, thinking one of Chiaki’s friends has come calling. They are prone to drop by unannounced. ‘Chiaki’s not in. You know that full well. Why be coy?’

Circling the house, he finds no one. It is only after he arrives back to where he started, on the highway-side of the house with its wall of white glass, that he realises he is still holding the old scalpel in his hand. Its blade is wet with juice.

2.

Chiaki returns from the shops. He can hear talking to their help, Miss Himura, in the courtyard between the kitchen wing and his surgery.

‘*Oi, anata – anata!*’ she calls up to him.

He slides open the window by his desk and looks down at her. ‘*Okaeri,*’ he says. Chiaki is standing beside her silver bicycle, her arms are no thicker than the handlebars. Her cheeks are flushed. She gestures to the carrier bag in her bicycle’s basket. It is filled with groceries.

‘How about coming out here and lending a hand.’

‘I’m busy.’

‘Is that so? We’ve been all the way down to – what’s its name?’

‘Jazuko,’ Miss Himura replies.

‘Yes, the new mall over in Miyanosawa, and you say you are busy.’

You’ve ridden all the way there and back? What for? he could add. *You never said anything about venturing off to the other side of the ward. It’s hot outside. You could dehydrate.* But he does not. It is undignified to spar in front of Miss Himura, who, by the way, is paid to lift grocery bags from bicycle baskets. What is more, the residual of the barbiturates in his system is keeping him tired.

‘Oh, don’t you give me that face.’ Whether it is thinness of her arms, the thought of his blackened beans, or the drugs in his system, he does not know, but a wave of tenderness washes over him. She is strong for her age.

‘What is it? What? You’re insufferable. So I wanted to go to Miyansosawa. What’s your problem with that? The mall is much nicer than Kotoni Station.’

No doubt, there are some new cafés at this mall, too. Foreign-styled patisseries have good things to eat. How could Kotoni hope to compete? He keeps his face indifferent.

Her bicycle falls against the kitchen's wooden slants. She wags her finger at him. 'If you're just going to sit in there and brow beat me, all magnanimous, then go to hell. Get your own groceries.'

'Is that so?'

'Yes.'

Miss Himura takes hold of Chiaki's bicycle and pushes around the side of the house, no doubt to put it away in the shed round back.

'And, seeing that you're in the mood to be judgemental,' Chiaki goes on, 'why don't you do something useful. Take yourself next door to Tokkyu and pick up the sashimi for lunch.'

'*Sashimi?*' So they are to have a cold supper. Miss Himura, who does most of their cooking, must be tasked with cleaning the upstairs' room. 'You didn't think to buy any fish whilst you were out?'

'What?'

'Surely, there was a fancy fishmongers at this fancy mall of yours?'

'What's your point?'

'Why didn't you get something while you were out?'

'Fish would spoil on the ride home.'

'Spoil?'

'That's right, spoil.'

'They pack the stuff up in ice.' It is as good a time as any to state the obvious. 'If you ask them, they'll put it in a cool bag.'

'Ice melts.'

‘Ice melts? Ice in a cool bag melts?’

‘Do you have any idea how hot is it out here? It’s sweltering, especially when you’re hauling up some ungrateful crab’s groceries. I bet you haven’t even started dusting down, have you?’

He smiles down at his wife, the woman whose name means *scattered flowers*. He could remind her that she told him not to, but chooses not to.

‘No, you wouldn’t,’ she says. ‘Not when you’ve been in the cool of your office all day.’

‘And I’m lazy.’

‘Yes.’

She knows full well that he was up with the sun this morning, that he went down to water his field before taking breakfast. An image of black bean pods floats before him. The river carried them away.

He can hear Miss Himura in the kitchen putting away the shopping. She has slipped inside by the back garden and is now listening to them bicker, no doubt.

‘Sashimi, eh?’

Chiaki says, ‘Yes. Sashimi. You know how crestfallen you get when you don’t have any fish for supper.’

‘Ok, I’ll go.’

‘What a martyr.’

He asks whether she would like some abalone. Chiaki always likes to have a glass of *sake* whenever they have sea snail. And when she drinks *sake*, she gets sleepy. An evening of quiet opens up before him.

‘Get whatever you like.’

‘Abalone it is then.’

*

He walks through Tokkyu's parking lot without stopping. Crossing the highway, he makes his way down the back of 4th Street. On his right are backyards filled with bamboo poles, each polyped with tomatoes. His own field stretches out to his left, his vegetable plants lined up, row upon row of them. Asparagus bushes, potatoes, corn, his tunnel thick with bean vines and no beans. His plot is the size of the local school's baseball field and is as meticulously organised as a *sushi* platter. It stretches all the way down from the highway to the bank of the Sugata River, its narrow flood plain, as it threads between the suburb and the small mountain that rises up on the far side.

His step is light, although the rohypnol must be fading from his system (it was only a touch, after all; he is sensible). Equilibrium has returned, an uneasy balance, one solidified by age and chemistry. After finding his beans ruined, he watered everything else thoroughly, the omen reversed by the sunshine of Kasumi's coming visit and the verdant green fleshing out the rest of his plot. Summer in Hokkaido may be short, but the days can be very warm. The banality of buying fish is a welcome distraction to the day's long wait for her arrival.

He reaches the edge of his plot and keeps going, down the steps which lead to the river, logs he cut from the side of the Mountain and laid himself. He knows it would be quicker to take the direct route down the highway to Nishino, but the rohypnol haze of his brightening mood better suits this path.

The Sugata's surface is dotted with large pebbles, like those of a Zen garden. Sand pretending to be water and water, sand. The irony amuses him. Across the river, the closest flank of the mountain rises. It does not have a name. It is not high enough for such official signification. Vertical cliffs patch the slope in places, but none to a great height. It is in the shade of this hollowed-out, geological molar that he walks, balmed by the humming of its

insects. Moments like this, he knows, are best enjoyed with the poetry of others – one of Bashō’s haiku perhaps. Shiki is best saved for a quiet room or a garden. He wonders which poem is most appropriate for an afternoon such as this and is gratified by the choice that comes to mind.

ADD ONE

*

The chill of the fishmonger’s air conditioning electrifies his damp shirt. The fish look so comfortable inside their ice-gravel blankets. Bashō wrote some beautiful verses on the look of dead fish. Chiaki’s face floats up before him. She used to be so pretty, but the years have drained the plumpness from her cheeks. These days there is something almost piscine about her. Only, he cannot decide which species of fish she most resembles. As he walks between the steel tables stacked with ice and fish, he considers each in turn, the shapes of their eyes, the lines of their mouths. Eventually, his mind drifts to those found only in the deep, deep oceans. Even then, there are none that come to mind, none that satisfy.

He asks for an extra portion of abalone because Chiaki is bound to insist that Miss Himura take one home. For himself, he decides on amberjack. The delicate flavour will compliment his mood superbly.

The curved blade of the monger’s knife goes to work and within seconds the fish is de-scaled, filleted, and laid out in neat strips on a styrofoam tray. The abalone all but falls into thin disks. The man is an artisan.

He doesn’t forget the cool pack.

Outside, the sky has shifted to a deeper blue, as if it is holding its breath. The valley’s plummet into purple and, then, black is always abrupt, even in summer. He looks at his watch. Chiaki is probably wondering where he is and so he walks to the bus stop, the one

in front of the highway's little coffee-house-come-whiskey-bar, which is just up the highway from the fishmongers. It is called Gas Point Jr. For him, it is another of the suburb's wonders. It is completely out of place amongst the cracked pavements, with their flowering weeds, cosmos and foxgloves.

Jazz piano is staggering out of the bar's open door and he wonders who could be inside on an afternoon like this – Mr Oguma, perhaps, his friend and oldest patient. Like himself, after the war, Oguma had means to survive and to do so well. While Seichiro was rewarded for his service in Manchuria, Mr Oguma had his family's land to return to. Over the years, and piece by piece, he sold it off, some to Seichiro, and some to speculators looking to build houses. As such, both he and Oguma have enjoyed a floating existence, safe within the valley's crumbling, green walls.

Two boys are playing tennis on the public courts opposite. Mt. Teine, the great flat-topped peak, behind which the sun will drop, hangs over them all. The music, the *pop-pop* of a rally, the purple mountain, they all co-exist inside him, in a place not even he can prod and locate with his fingertips.

*

He goes around the side of the house and, leaving his shoes down on the gravel, he sneaks into the parlour. The television is on. Live baseball. The Tokyo Giants make a double play and his heart sinks. The same team wins, day in day out.

Chiaki is banging plates around inside the kitchen.

Picking up the TV control, he turns down the volume and calls out, '*Tadaima!*'

Chiaki shouts something back. It does not sound like, *okaeri*.

'What's that?' he says.

She comes out from the kitchen, asking him what took him so long. ‘You only went next door?’

He lifts up the plastic bag. ‘I went down to Nishino for abalone.’

‘*Ma*, and you complained about Miyanosawa.’

He denies the accusation. He never said anything so direct.

‘And it’s not the right season,’ she says. ‘I hope those abalone of yours aren’t farmed. They have no flavour when they’re farmed.’

She takes the bag and disappears back into the other room.

He pictures a monkfish in his head, dispels the likeness, and calls after her, ‘I forgot to ask about their lineage.’

Upstairs, there is an encyclopedia series he signed up for years ago, back when Kasumi had school projects to keep up with while she stayed over. There’s bound to be a natural world edition, something with pictures. Chiaki’s double is bound to be found in there.

Chiaki calls out something incomprehensible. He doesn’t answer back.

Her head pops through the doorway. ‘Why bother walking all that way if you’re not going to eat?’

‘I have just got in.’

‘Sort the table out, it’s your fault supper’s late.’

He pulls out the folding table they use for their meals. There is a fine, western-styled dining room in the back of the house, away from his surgery, a room reserved for entertaining visitors. They never use it these days. For years, when Kasumi was a little girl, Chiaki would lay on the most magnificent spread there at New Year’s.

Chiaki returns to the doorway and Seichiro takes a tray from her, transferring its pickles and chopsticks and bowls of miso soup onto the table. The plate of abalone he puts centre place. As he expected, there is a jar of chilled *sake*.

He turns down the TV (good food deserves concentration) and waits for Chiaki. He peels the lid off the *sake* and pours their drinks, taking a quick sip from his own cup before he can be caught. Chiaki continues to mess around in the kitchen and so, rather than stand on ceremony, he digs in. The pickles are especially good. Pitching a slither of the chilled mollusc between his chopsticks, he brings it to his lips. Only, an odd smell catches him by surprise. If Chiaki is sorting out the garbage, he thinks, while he is trying to eat, he will give her a piece of his mind.

The smell persists. It is strangely sweet, like rotting apricots. Something deep inside him stirs, as if he recognises it.

Hoping it will pass, he brings the quivering grey flap back to his lips – but here he recoils.

Chiaki comes in with the second tray, saying something but he is not listening.

‘Did you leave the sashimi next to the gas hob?’ he says.

‘What?’ Her eyes are fixed on the TV.

‘The abalone – did you put it on something hot?’

‘Did you turn off the sound?’

‘Listen to me woman.’

‘What are you on about?’

‘It’s off.’

‘Off?’

‘The abalone.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous.’ She hands him her tray so that she can ease herself down on to the floor opposite him. ‘The heat’s got to you.’

‘Smell it.’

‘You picked them.’

‘I’m serious.’

She lifts the plate and sniffs. ‘It’s fine. You did you wear a hat on that walk of yours? What a fine doctor you are!’

She snaps the snail up. And there is it. The answer to the question that has been entertaining him since he set off on his walk down to Nishino. A wolf fish! That is what she resembles. Only, the realisation fails to strike a smile onto his face. Rotting food is another bad omen, the second, and the day has only just tumbled into the afternoon.

‘You’ll poison yourself,’ he says.

‘Delicious.’

‘You’re crazy.’

‘Crazy, eh?’

‘The stuff is rotten.’

Now, she goes on the attack. She tells him to stop complaining over nothing; that he’s ruining her lunch. Getting to her feet, she storms into the kitchen and returns with the amberjack. He flinches, expecting her to throw it at him. Instead, she rips a plastic refuse sack from a canvas storage bag she has pinned under her arm and scrapes the snail into it.

‘The organic trash won’t be collected for another two days,’ she says without looking at him. ‘Put this outside and it will attract the crows, cats, a bear for all I care. You can be the one to go outside and shoo it off.’ She wraps the bundle up with a second second plastic bag. ‘I don’t care how you do it, but make sure I can’t smell it through the window tomorrow, when it really does turn.’

He stares at his wife, the wolf fish, until she stamps her foot. When he reaches for the bag, she tosses it out the window.

3.

He opens every rain shutter around the house, every window and door. In his surgery, the residues of wood polish and disinfectant overpower the smell of rotten apricots. He considers lighting some incense, too, but decides an extra dose of rohypnol, mixed again with a touch of diacoprizine, a mix of his own little invention, will better settle his stomach.

Chiaki is not in the house. He suspects, she is not even in Fukui. This is a pattern he knows well. Most of their neighbours avoid fighting with spouses they have lived with for over forty years. Many have run out of things to say to one another. Chiaki has always found it easier to release her words, although sometimes she takes to silence. An oilcloth bag waits in the entrance hall for such occasions. Fresh underwear, a makeup pouch (a tube of sun cream, some lipstick) and a coin purse, are all she needs. Anything else can be rented at the bathhouse.

He takes out the calligraphy box, licks the tip of his finger and transfers the pill back to the incense burner. Rather than taking the edge off his mood with a little scratch, he is tempted to cut it in two. Such a dose would knock him out until tomorrow morning. He restrains himself. He is a physician after all. He can hear Miss Himura Hoovering the *tatami* upstairs. A damp cloth is more effective, but takes more effort. He does the calculations in his head. If Chiaki stays out too long, he may have to dust the downstairs' rooms himself. Then, there is the kitchen to consider. How mad she would get if he intervened in there – he is forbidden.

A sprinkling of powder, no wider than the tip of his little finger, dabbed on his tongue, and he waits.

On the wall there is a framed poem by the poetess, Chiyo-ni. It reads

one must bend
in the floating world –
snow on bamboo

The paper is textured like aged skin. The hand is Mr Oguma's. The haiku has hung on his surgery's wall for nearly fifty years. His friend brushed it for him the winter he first came to the valley, back when Oguma had already lost his own taste for poetry, or so he once said, in his flight back from Manchuria when the Russians came and Chinese bandits hunted the bands of Japanese refugees trying to get to the coast. With its yellowing paper, it is more beautiful now than it has ever been. In those early years after the war, some of his patients, especially the old men, liked to remind him when the poem crept out of season. Their sincerity always made him happy. It was as if they felt obliged to wind him up like a pocket watch. Their expressions were wonderfully warm and, yet, resolute. They must have felt that they were performing a grand public service. Nobody has mentioned it for years.

Along the wall is a shelf of books, none of which are remotely to do with medicine. The complete works of Shiki (all eight volumes); a collection of Mishima's essays; Kawabata's *Palm of the Hands Stories*; several boxes containing hand-bound tomes, some printed over two hundred years ago. These are his treasures. Money has never been a concern of his. His father was a frugal man, but Seichiro's time in Manchuria, the special allowance his research afforded him, even after the war and his unit's research efforts had ended, set him up for life. For many, it was an age of despair and austerity and so he felt honour-bound not to show off his mounting wealth. He let the house age around him, until Chiaki made her complaints a couple years ago and fixed-up the place herself. He rarely mentions the fact that Fusako, his daughter, attended Kyoto's Prefectural University of Medicine, the most exclusive medical university in the country. He bought some land from Oguma and later, the

Tokkyu supermarket chain decided to rent some of it from him. Living inconspicuously on good means has been the greater challenge.

He takes down one of the boxes. Chiyo-ni's first collection of haiku poems. With his scalpel, he retires to the surgery's veranda to enjoy the evening's quietude.

*

Seen from the outside, the surgery's windows are milky white, like cataracts. A part of him wishes Chiaki would phone, complaining of an upset stomach. Of course, he would go to her and bring her back in a taxi, knowing full well she would never apologise.

Gently, gently, he unpacks the old book. Words, Seichiro reflects, have medicinal powers. Waka poems, the forbearer of his beloved haiku, evolved out of shamans' chants. Such words could move gods and demons alike. By the time haiku flourished in the Edo period, poets were convinced the little poems were particularly potent. The scientist in him does not resist such folklore.

With the blade, and at random, he parts pages, moving back and forth, between spring and winter, autumn and summer.

moonflowers:

when a woman's skin

is revealed

A favourite of his. Perhaps the blade fell neatly into the gap between these pages because he has read them so many times before. The words feel fresh when given voice. Moonflowers. A woman's body. The tension is wonderful. What is it he is supposed to

imagine? Skin as white as blooms, a milk white? Or, is the act of undressing a surprise, a delicious mix of anticipation and energy, given how quickly moonflowers unfold, taking well over a minute to peel themselves open. Short-lived and delectably slow. Eternal. Come first light and they'll be closed again. Either way (and of course it is both), an image of a young woman's naked flesh flashes before him, a body bathed in lunar rays and, in turn, made luminous. Such pleasures have always been his weakness. His joy and his grief.

He lets the valley come to him. Although too great a dose of rohypnol can obliterate memory, his careful management should keep him balanced for the rest of the evening at least. And, so, the poem spins a thread of nostalgia down inside him.

The spell of the mountain hanging over his field is no different from all those years ago when he first brought Chiaki to the house. Only, the valley was louder then at night. Of that he is sure. There was frog song. The crickets, calling out from across the highway, although making the most of the short summer, would be no match for frogs. Today, there is not a single rice field left in all of Sapporo City. Fifty years ago and Fukui was dotted with them, here and there, and, when they were flooded, before the fresh shoots feathered over their surfaces with a green almost too bright to be real, the valley sparkled as if a mirror had been dropped from a great height. Freed from the social hierarchies of the southern islands, the settlers dug down into the black soil where they thought it best, not where time immemorial had dictated, or where the old land owning families had told them to. He pictures those fields. How they shone like sheets of oiled steel. Patches of corn separated them, potatoes, too, and the barracks of the gravel miners, those itinerant men who came to the valley, stayed a couple of months, and over the years managed to reduce Five Points Peak to an enormous hole in the ground.

Chiaki was a country girl from Omu, Honshu, a mainlander whose family had fallen prey to the power of those rural landlords, and so had moved to Tokyo, where she met

Seichiro just after his return from Manchuria. That was in 1944, a good year before the end of the war and the Russian assault on Manchuria, although the tide had already turned by then. To his surprise, she agreed to follow him north. The promise of fresh vegetables, she said, was more alluring than that of being a doctor's wife. She was young and green in spite of the war (he admired that) and had insisted he buy a mosquito net that first summer they spent in the valley. She did not believe him when he said that mosquitoes rarely made it this far north.

Lost within the mist of those cotton threads, they made love.

There were so few people about (the highway was twenty years away) that they kept the *shōji* open, even the rain shutters during summer squalls, just so Chiaki could lay back afterwards and let her nerves run wet with that ancient song.

'Moonflowers, indeed,' he says and moves on to a fresh page, a fresh set of poems, but something in him sticks. He remembers the morning's blighted beans and the shadow that haunted the veranda earlier this afternoon. The feelings such omens mix up inside him put him ill at ease. He is horrified and shamed by the excitement they boil up inside him.

He tugs on the thread, but it does not come free. He pictures snow, great mounds of the stuff, shapeless drifts that sealed off the house that first year he and Chiaki spent in the valley. Winter came early and lasted into May. It is not a memory he cares to remember, but the thread is hanging down, taut, as if having snagged on something. He cannot pull it up, not without breaking it. Even with their futons pulled up close to the stove, Chiaki would rarely give herself up to him. Wrapped up in layer after layer of clothing, she kept her body straight and rigid as she slept, because any movement, she claimed, let in the cold. He could not believe what had happened to her; that her passion could have left her so soon after marriage. A crushing disappointment settled over him.

He replaces the poetess's collection and retreats back into Shiki, where a poem depicting the crippled poet's sister cutting charcoal, her fingers blackened with soot, smothers

out any spark that Chiyo-ni's verse may have left smouldering inside him. He gives himself up to the numbness.

*

An hour passes, two.

The veranda's planking numbs his buttocks. He needs a cushion, a mug of coffee. Something to warm him up. The kitchen has aired out, thankfully, and, while waiting for the water to boil, he thinks on those ancient Chinese aesthetes, those who inspired Japan's poets to believe in plainness. An element of this philosophy is restraint. To eat too much of something delicious is to dull its flavour. The same is true of poetry.

He makes his coffee sweet and milky and drinks it standing up, looking out over the highway to the mountain, then to a wild camellia which has colonised the edge of his plot. The bush is small. Its flowers are wet spots of red in the sun. The coffee is good and he thinks that, maybe, he is waiting for one of the camellia heads to fall off in that dramatic way they do. Never the slow release of petals for a camellia. When the time comes, it's all at once, the head striking the floor with all the drama of a decapitation. There are countless poems written about that particular allusion and, as he tries to drag one up from his memory, it happens.

Just like that.

From his perch on the veranda, he looks up the highway, to where the suburb disappears into the heart of the mountains, and then back to the bush, to the patch of sidewalk up on which, right there, is a red camellia head.

4.

His wakes on his surgery's examination bed in the morning. A cloud of wood polish wakes him, tickling his nose, making him sneeze. Chiaki, apron on, hair tied back, is polishing the wooden filing cabinets by the bed. When he asks her what time she got in, she says that he lefts all the windows and shutters open over night. This is her greeting to him. 'Wide open!' she repeats. 'The insects will get in.'

'It was hot – it still is.'

'Try actually moving around. It's even hotter then.'

'Did any patients phone?'

'How am I supposed to know? Unlike you, I'm busy.'

He takes some Creotin to settle his stomach and walks through the house, upstairs and down, just to make sure. Chiaki draws his bath. The rest has done him good. Chiaki has turned on the TV and the newscaster says it is raining in Tokyo. The humidity must be intense. Serves Tokyo right, he thinks. All those air-conditioning units. No wonder Kasumi has decided to come north for the summer.

Once inside the hot liquid cocoon of the bath, he soaks for a good while, a pressure building up inside his head, one strong enough to start flushing the rohypnol hangover from his body. When he gets out, he sits down to a simple cup of green tea. A breeze passes through the parlour from the garden. He is as light as a cicada husk.

'You cannot sit around like this all morning. We still have the bedding to get.'

'Bedding? You ordered that at your fancy mall, no?'

'They didn't have anything I liked. I think it's best we go downtown.'

'What, to Odori? But Kasumi's arriving today.'

'We'll have it delivered. They can do that within an hour and, besides, Miss Himura said she'd come over and wait for it. Kasumi's flight doesn't get in until late and so I've told

her that we'll both meet her at Sapporo Station. She can catch the airport express in from Chitose and we can get taxi back here with her.'

'So what's the rush then? We won't have to leave until this afternoon.'

'I thought we'd make a day of it. We never go to Odori.'

'A day of it?' he says.

'It's me who's done all the cleaning. So what do I want to enjoy myself.'

'And the beer festival just so happens to be on, right?'

'Now, who is being troublesome?'

They take the bus Hasamu-minami and take the subway downtown, getting off at Nakajima Park, where they order an expensive new futon for Kasumi at an exclusive retailer close to one of the park's smaller gates. She wants to spend money and he cannot find it in himself to rein her in. He suspects that this is how it will be while their granddaughter is here.

When they come out of the shop, she requests that he take her out on the park's lake. He refuses. It is undignified for people their age to do such a thing. 'Leave that to the courting couples and parents of small children.'

'We've got time,' she says.

*

He arcs the scull into a narrow strait between an island and the bank of Nakajima Pond. Willow branches finger his back and shade falls over them both, a palpable presence, one drenched with the green buzz of cicadas. The white-blue heat of early August charges the water's surface beyond the shade of the trees. Luxury apartment blocks tower over the trees lining the far side of the park. Resting up the oars, he picks his trousers from his knees and waits for Chiaki to make some snide comment. Who, after all, sweats from their knees? I am

having an ice cream after this, he thinks, a whipped vanilla cone from the little shack where they hired the boat.

His skull feels like the business end of a pressure pump, a symptom of his rohypnol hangover mixed with the heat. He wants the sugar and has already taken two salt tablets. What is more, imagining another ten minutes with Chiaki on the water, her bobbing this way and that, looking out for rocks she is convinced are hiding under the water's surface (it matters not that the pond is man made), he decides that he will enjoy his cone inside the little shack's snack room, the one with the wheezing air-conditioning unit, cheap postcards, and dust motes. If she will not join him (she has probably already picked out somewhere fancier down in Odori), then she will just have to watch him and wait.

Chiaki counts the island's terrapins.

He nods and says how ghosts are supposed to inhabit the drooping fingers of willows. He pictures his ice cream.

She stops counting.

'I could do with a nap,' he says.

'Haven't you slept enough?'

'I'm unwell.'

'Serves you right for not wearing a hat yesterday.' Her tone is sharp. 'And for sleeping in the surgery again.'

'Thank you, doctor.'

A whistle blows. The cicadas pause and then wind up again.

'That'll be for us,' he says.

'It can't be. There were other boats out before ours.'

'They're already in.' A necessary lie. There is ice cream to eat.

*

Having walked past the city's music hall and the old Hōheikan building, its white paint blazing with the last of the afternoon's sun, they arrive at the intersection between the park and Susukino, Sapporo's entertainment district. He asks Chiaki if she wouldn't mind catching the subway to Odori. One stop, two minutes at the most, the train is the easiest option. Walking through Susukino and then the city's shopping district will tire them both out. Where is the fun in that?

She peers up at him. 'Tire *you* out more like it.'

He lets her come to her own conclusions. The thought of walking through Susukino with Chiaki makes him uncomfortable. Even if they were to keep to the main boulevards, with their restaurants and bars and gaming centres, all gearing up for the evening rush, he knows he will feel the presence of the district's upper floors, its backstreets, those little doorways causally left open during the afternoon, curtained off and impersonal. When he was a young man, this was where he came to warm himself in the wake of Chiaki's coldness, her avoidance of her conjugal duty. Come the summer and Obon and the ghost would make her presence known to him and, although her appetites left him drained and sick, ashamed at himself, too, he took his pleasure where he could find it.

He takes off his hat and wipes down his brow. Chiaki tuts at him and agrees to take the train.

*

It is past to four o'clock by the time they make it to Odori, the centre of Sapporo City, with its strip of twelve city blocks given over to grass and shrubs, flowerbeds, and fountains and

paving stones. The park carves a straight line through the financial and shopping districts, ending at the foot of the city's huge red and white striped TV mast and viewing tower. To Chiaki's great pleasure, for a couple weeks each summer, it is converted into beer gardens.

Although Chiaki prefers Yebisu Beer (she would, it's the more expensive brand), they perch on the end of a makeshift banquet table in the Asahi garden, the only one with trees mushrooming up into the air overhead, breaking up the lines of tables, and offering a little shade against the last of the afternoon's heat. It will be dark soon and they will block out much of the city's electric light. Although the beer taps will not flow until five, the tables are already filling up. Many are taken by older people, like he and Chiaki, couples and small groups out for a lively drink and some snacks. For now they make do with bottled green tea and small talk, salted soy beans they bought from one of the expensive food courts hidden underneath the big department stores. The rest are watched over by low-ranking office workers, youngsters sent to secure enough seats for their senior colleagues.

He and Chiaki have come prepared. Tucked in between his legs are three beer cans in a carrier bag. Without breaking cover, he opens one with a *pissst* and fills two 7-11 takeaway coffee cups. Foam soaks his fingers, but no one around them takes any notices. The idea was Chiaki's. Apparently, last year, when she came here with Miss Himura, she caught a group of foreigners using the same strategy, a clever way of enjoying the atmosphere without having to dig too deep into their pockets. She thought such behaviour looked mischievous and fun. In the subway station's convenient store, he had laughed at the suggestion. 'Now look at me,' he thinks, 'a co-conspirator.' They toast a ruse well done.

When the sun drops behind the city's office buildings, paper lanterns and coloured lights take over. The temperature is a touch cooler. Pop music plays. Bodies are cramming onto every chair and people are squeezing between the tables, looking for somewhere to sit.

Chiaki's face and neck are flushed with the beer and they haven't even ordered anything, not officially. The ticket attendants are slow.

'Be patient,' Chiaki tells him. 'It's not like we're dying of thirst.'

He apologises for not having her level of expertise in beer garden etiquette and she waves him quiet. Her cellphone is ringing. Taking the call, she bounces to her feet. Soon after, Miss Himura emerges from the crowd. So, Chiaki has invited another. The two women wave at each other, as two ticket girls converge upon their table at the same time. Chiaki redirects them towards his open wallet. 'Three large steins,' she says. He settles the bill.

As the two women get down to the serious business of baseball scores and Fukui's gossip, he is left to look around. Three young women take up seats on the table behind him. They are dressed in jeans and summer blouses and are pretty enough to be bank clerks. A group of salarymen at the other end of their table soon attempt the delicate negotiations required for attaining such wonderful company.

A friend of these women arrives and is presented her seat by one of the salarymen. Hand over her mouth, eyes wide (a little too wide), she laughs at the noisy welcome lavished upon her. The men call out her name, much to her surprise, tell her that her floral one piece dress was worth the wait. With an embarrassed bow, she accepts a beer glass (the stein looks huge in her hands). When she sits down, she bows again. Seichiro watches her, her legs, how she scissors them together and wiggles her hips as she adjusts the hem of her dress. Her thighs are the colour of royal milk tea. How soft they must be, like freshly planed wood, only supple.

Maybe a visit to Susukino wouldn't be such a bad thing. Life is short and what is a little money compared to a quickened pulse, a curtained doorway, a little waiting room, a woman bowing in *seiza* as he steps into the room, the bath already running behind her. Where is the hurt in a little self-indulgence?

‘*Oi*, don’t embarrass me.’ It is Chiaki. ‘Stop staring.’ She hands him an envelope and says that Miss Himura has brought it with her from the house.

Opening it, he recognises Mr Oguma’s hand. The note reads: *Having some difficulties. I’ll be waiting at Gas Point.*

5.

When Seichiro's taxi passes over the Hasamu River Bridge, the mountain is revealed, peak to base. It is like a splash of ink across black silk.

He has already been back to the house and picked up what he needs from the surgery. Although Oguma did not mention what was ailing him in his note, his choice of venue is a prognosis in itself. Seichiro is to treat a wound that does not exist –not officially, according to his patient files and tax returns– a gash his friend received in Manchuria, after he himself had returned to Japan to finish his studies.

The wound is between Mr Oguma's anus and his testicles and, when freshly torn, resembles a kite. He has sown it up many times over the years and has never asked after its origins. Such tactfulness, however, has never stopped him from speculating. Given its shape, it could be the grizzly aftermath of a Russian bayonet strike. That is most likely. Though it could well be the legacy of a Chinese broadsword –just the tip– the type carried by some units of the Eight Route Army, those ragged men who looked like warriors of old rather than modern fighting men. Neither explanation, however, specifies how such a point came to pierce his friend's perineum. Of the two triangular segments required in geometry to form such a shape, the isosceles, drawn-out and narrowing to a very shallow angle, points towards Mr Oguma's testicles, while the squashed equilateral his anus. If the shape were reversed, the resemblance to a vagina would be uncanny. Such a resemblance might have been intentional. He was a warrant officer in the military police, after all. That would have made him a target for such humiliation, especially in the chaos that swept across Manchurian after the Russians came.

The front door of Gas Point Jr. is shut, its 'Closed' sign up. Seichiro admits himself.

He steps into low lighting and is greeted by the *whoop-whoop* of a hand-grinder and jazz music. Trumpet, not piano. Oguma's choice, never his.

The bar's owner, who he and Oguma call Master, stands between the hard wood counter and a honeycomb of art-books and whiskey bottles. They greet each other. Neither man expects the other to say anything more. The distance suits them both fine.

After a pause, Master says, 'He's in the john.'

'Ah.'

'Kozu-san.'

'Yes?'

'The door.'

Seichiro locks the door and leaves the key in place.

Eventually, Oguma emerges. After stepping awkwardly up to the counter, he apologises for taking Seichiro away from Chiaki and their wait for Kasumi. Seichiro is not surprised that Oguma knows. Miss Himura has probably informed half the valley.

He says that is no bother, that Oguma is better company than Chiaki anyway, especially when she's out drinking.

'Kasumi doesn't know what's she in for,' says Oguma. He asks for whiskey and Master takes down a bottle of Scotch. The label attached to its neck reads, *Oguma-sama*. He lets Oguma pour his own measure.

'You're having one, too,' Oguma says. 'You were out celebrating.'

'Just passing the time. You know what Chiaki's like...Now, you drink too much of that stuff and I won't be able to give you any pain relief.'

'Fuck your pain relief.' This Oguma says with a smile.

'You know it'll make the bleeding worse.'

Oguma runs a palm over his bald head. Seichiro has always expected him to shrivel up into the double of General Tojo. He never has. Oguma looks as tough as ever. ‘Well, in that case,’ he says, ‘fuck the bleeding too.’

From his doctor’s bag Seichiro takes out his suture kit, antiseptic wipes and some pain killers. He knows the latter will be refused. Mr Oguma, nevertheless, likes to show off his mettle. Master lays out two towels on a table. A plate follows (it is still hot), onto which Seichiro places the forceps, a scalpel (a light German-type – all steel, no wood), a curved suturing needle and his Kilner needle-holder from the suture kit. Straight onto one of the towels goes his antiseptic lotion, cotton pads, a packet of disposal sutures, a tub of surgical glue, replete with tapering nozzle.

‘Superglue?’ Oguma smirks. ‘What, no needle and thread?’

‘Not if it can be helped. As you can see, I am prepared should it not hold.’

The remaining towel is spread so that it hangs over the edge of the table. Over this, Seichiro drapes a padded sheet, the kind used by midwives, plastic layer and all.

Pulling on a pair of latex gloves, he tells his friend to remove his trousers and underwear. Oguma does as he is told. A sanitary towel is pasted to his skin. Seichiro considers how best to remove it without causing any more damage. He is tempted to tell Mr Oguma to use a senior citizens’ diaper next time, but decides against it. Instead he says, ‘Part your legs.’ The old man’s scrotum drops down like a dog’s chew toy. And those swaying genitals are part of the mystery, Seichiro thinks. If someone had meant to humiliate Oguma, why hadn’t they castrated him?

He peels the sanitary towel away from its edges and towards the wound and, there, between the old man’s scrotal sack and anus is the deep laceration. Its edges are plumped into lips. The skin is white with scarring and smeared with blood (a healthy colour; there is no

discolouration of the pad's fibres). Despite some oozing, the tissue inside the wound bed is a redish-pink, a good sign. The santiuary towel has not ripped any fresh tissue forming inside.

He evaluates his choices in his head. The tear is uneven and widest towards the testicles. There is a good possibility the glue will dehisce. He will have to stitch up his old friend, after all, and given the sensitivity of the area, and how the dressing will rub against Oguma's underwear, he decides to use a running subcuticular suture. In this instance, Oguma's age is on his side. The wound is in need of debridement, a good deal of it, but the skin around it is loose. He'll be able to approximate the edges by cutting through the macerated material, and tug them back together, all without the stitches tearing through skin. No big deal. From what he has read in some recent medical journals, emergency room practitioners have abandoned this type of closure. For a surgeon, it is second nature.

He lets Oguma know his mind and that he will to have to prep the wound, first.

His old friend is unphased and says, 'It's been prepped for hours.'

'When did this happen?'

'Does it matter?'

'We've been through all this before. You cannot leave it so long – remember? I will just clean and irrigate and we will have to pick this up in a couple of days.'

'And leave me splitting in two?'

'The rules of primary repair.'

'Just get on with it.' The look in Oguma's eyes is final.

Seichiro peels off the plastic coating over the irrigation kit. Inside is an empty plastic bottle with a wide neck and a thick syringe. He pours a good quality of saline into the bottle and, making sure to keep the nozzle of the syringe clean and clear of his hands and the towel, inserts the syringe into the bottle.

Oguma takes another straight shot of whiskey and asks Master for soda water and ice.

A silent minute passes, while Seichiro draws the saline into the syringe and then brings the nozzle to the wound. With Oguma bent over the table, he irrigates from top to bottom, and then back to the top again, so that all the saline runs down and away from the wound.

‘I like getting my balls wet like this,’ says Oguma and laughs. ‘Brings back good memories.’

‘Stay still.’

Seichiro explores the edges of the tear with the tip of his scalpel. It is a simple rule. Dead tissue does not bleed. If Oguma is in pain, he makes no show of it. He keeps his voice steady as he says, ‘Taking a knife to a wound...that never fails to amuse me.’

‘It’s always best to cut away the dead meat.’ Seichiro knows such butcher’s talk appeals to Oguma.

As if to prove his strength of mind, Oguma asks whether Seichiro has heard that Onedera is dead. Seichiro is concentrating and so ignores such an act of bravado.

Oguma repeats the question.

‘Who?’

‘It was on the news. You know the guy,’ Oguma straightens up a little. ‘He was the guy they found out in the Philipinnes. Must be, what, twenty years ago, now? The one who didn’t believe the war was over.’

‘So?’

It is not intended to be so pointed a question, but Oguma’s shoulders roll under his shirt. He asks Master to skip back to the beginning of the CD playing over the bar’s sound system.

When Seichiro finishes preparing the wound, he threds his suture needle with vicryl thread and clamps the needle inside a pair of surgical forceps. He gets in close to its apex,

close to the old man's anus and studies the slash (bayonet or sword tip? Something else entirely?).

'You know what?' Oguma says, as Seichiro presses down on the lip of the wound with the arc of the steel's curve. 'Onedera's passing got me thinking, what with the 50th anniversary coming up next month.'

Seichiro exerts a little the pressure and the epidermis leans back, but not enough. He must use his tweezers to get the best view of the dermis underneath. He goes in deep. The knot will sink into the wound this way. It will not catch on the dressing he will apply afterwards.

Oguma grunts and asks for Master to turn the volume up on the sound system.

He says something else to Seichiro but he does not catch it, not while he moves onto the reverse on the other side of the wound, not while he is careful not to pierce the underlying line of fat.

'Are you listening to me?' Oguma asks.

Seichiro ties off. 'What?' he says. His needle dips under the knot and comes up and out again at the wound's apex. Anchor complete. Now he can start pulling Oguma back together again.

'What I was saying about this song?'

'What about it?'

'That I arrested a man for listening to it.'

Seichiro can well imagine Oguma arresting and beating someone over a jazz record. He says, 'That was the way of things.'

Nevertheless, he does not like the direction Oguma is taking this one-sided conversation. They are old friends and have gone through much together. Silence should be allowed to grow over some things. It should be allowed to petrify. So, Seichiro concentrates

on the sutures' run, how his needle surfaces and sinks into the wet, pinked epidermal-dermal junction, one side then the other, and back again and again. Not once does he break the surface of the skin. For the second time today, he is amazed by the steadiness of his fingers. He was always a skilful technician.

'He was Japanese, too,' says Oguma. Either he is oblivious to Seichiro's signals, his willing him to stop, or he is purposefully ignoring them. 'Not much older than a boy,' he continues, 'than my grandson these days. He worked for a lacquer-ware shop in Harbin. We broke his door in and there he was, in black white wing-tips. It's strange what you remember, isn't it?'

'What's past is past.'

'What's past is past,' Oguma echoes, drawing out the words. 'What is past. Yes. Would you believe that I heard from Asanuma-san last week?'

This is where his friend must have wanted the conversation to go all along. If he must, Seichiro would rather hear about Onedera, the hideout who refused to believe that Japan could lose the the war, let alone surrender. Nostalgia can be as aggressive as bacteria when left to multiply. Feeling equal parts obligation and irritation, he back-tracks the needle twice (for extra draw) and, as he ties off. 'And what did Asanuma want this time?'

'Same as he does every year. He asked if I will be attending this year's reunion.'

'You said?'

'No. As always.'

'I really don't understand the whole reunion thing. We were told pretty clearly at the Village what to do, come the end.'

'Yes, we were. It's like that column in the Asahi Newspaper – do you get the Asahi?' (Seichiro does not.) 'Well, there's this column which publishes letters sent in about people's experiences during the war. It wouldn't surprise me if Asanuma wrote in.'

‘He wouldn’t dare. He was one of yours.’

‘People are getting old.’

The record ends while Seichiro packs a sterilised dressing over the wound and tells his old friend to pull his trousers back up. Affecting a nonchalant air, Oguma says, ‘Seeing that I’m not going to fall apart at the seams for at least one more night, I say we split this bottle and have something to eat. Look, there isn’t that much left.’ He asks Master for one of the bar’s special little pizzas.

‘I can’t stay. Kasumi will be arriving soon, remember?’

‘All the more reason to have a drink.’

Master provides a second glass and ice. Oguma pours out two fingers of whiskey. Seichiro pulls off his gloves. The whiskey tastes good.

Oguma says that Seichiro had best wash his hands. ‘Who knows where I have been these days.’ Yet, in spite of the laughter and the drink, a strange tension persists in Oguma. Something beyond the routine embarrassment and bravado that surrounds stitching him up.

‘It’ll all be over soon enough,’ Seichiro says when he gets back from the toilet. To buoy his friend up, makes a show out of helping himself to a second shot.

‘True enough.’

Their pizza arrives. Oguma insists Seichiro take the first slice.

Only when Seichiro bites into it, there is a strange crunch. He knows Master uses a water cracker to keep the pizza’s centre crisp, but this is something much drier, brittle. He pushes at it with his tongue. It feels like the fibrous inner-membrane of a bean pod. With his chopsticks, he pulls an part of an enormous locust wing from off the tip of his tongue.

‘What on earth is that?’ laughs Oguma.

‘A bug’s wing.’

He lifts the pizza up and finds the rest of the wing. Master is horrified and reaches for the tray, bowing deeply as he does, and apologizing several times.

Oguma guffaws and says to Master that it's okay. 'I don't know why you're looking so squeamish,' he says to Seichiro. 'Didn't your mother ever roast crickets when you were a child?'

'No,' says Seichiro.

Oguma keeps laughing. 'Well, we didn't all have your privileged upbringing.'

Seichiro washes out his mouth with another whiskey and reminds his friend that he was the son of a landlord. He cannot shift the fibres lodged between his front teeth, though. He thinks about his bean pods from the morning. The rotten fish this afternoon. Surely, this isn't another omen?

'You know what?' he says to Oguma. 'You're right. There isn't that much left in this bottle after all.'

6.

Seichiro is drunk. The long walk up the hill takes an age and tires him out.

Once back at the house, he struggles to pull open the front door. When it gives, the panel slides all the way and bangs against the frame. He calls out, ‘*Tadaima*, Chiaki,’ and then curses. There is residue on his hands. There is residue on his hands. Something from the door. He smells his fingers, thinks beer, and steps into the dark. There is no need to wait for his eyes to adjust. He knows about Chiaki and clutter. And this is his home, after all, more than it has ever been hers. His research set them up, his savvy, and when he was only a young man. He found the place, paid for it, and all by himself. So what if his practice never bloomed into something grand? He never wanted it to. All these years he has provided for his family – his daughter and the expense of medical school, Chiaki and her cakes and expensive bath-houses. Not that Chiaki will ever admit to all that he has done for her. Of course not. It was his lot. His choice. But he knows. He slides his feet along the flagstones and puts out his hand, ready to grasp the lip of the *genkan*’s high step. The floors of most modern houses are low and so the step up into the heart of the homestead is barely recognisable. Not here: although he has often worried about getting old, about how his body will fail him and render the house impractical, for now he is strong. His is steady, like his fingers. Oguma’s sewn up ass is testament enough of that. The high step and the veranda? They comfort him.

Finding the wooden lip, he pauses and clicks his tongue. The residue is here, too. Chiaki, empress of all things neat and tidy (when it suits her) has made a mess herself, one she can mop it up tomorrow. And strange stuff it is, slick and oily, as if the wood is wet with decay. He dabs his fingertips this way and that, looking for a dry patch to sit down on and slide off his shoes. He congratulates himself. If he had followed Oguma into that second

bottle of whiskey, he would have sat straight onto whatever it is Chiaki has spilled. He would have ruined the seat of his trousers and what would she say to that?

‘Look at you!’ he says to the empty house, mimicking the Wolf Fish’s voice. ‘Always the fool!’ He smiles.

‘Okaerinasai.’

The welcome is formal and tentative, the voice female and young.

He is not surprised to be greeted in such a way and says, ‘You have left me nowhere dry to sit.’

It is true. The step is covered and unevenly so. Some patches are grainy, like meal mixed with water, others include larger lumps of some fibrous material, something ridged like coral, but with the texture of velvet. It is not dissimilar to brain tissue. And he recognises it – yes, he does. Many an October morning has he forded the stream by his field and ventured onto the mountain, looking for hen-of-the-woods mushrooms. He picks up one of the masses and brings it up to his nose. He breathes in its familiar beer-like smell and puts such a strange thing alongside his beans, dead on the vine, the rotten abalone, and the texture of a locust’s wing on his tongue. ‘Was a fourth omen really necessary?’

The ghost says how pleased she is to see him, that it has been such a long time.

He will not look at her and answers, ‘Has it?’ To look upon her will only weaken his resolve and the whiskey gives at least that small amount of courage to straightens up and peer into the darkness beyond the entrance hall and catch sight of her bare feet. She is standing on the bottom step of the stairs that lead to the second floor and so he keeps his eyes moving and her shape in his peripheral vision, nothing more. He finds, nevertheless, that he cannot say, [] and invoke the name of the Buddha for protection. He cannot. He just cannot. He is tired.

Surely sensing his will to ignore her, the ghost keeps talking and he does not hear the voice of his granddaughter (he is thinking again of his beans, the rotten food, insects and now

mushrooms – four omens in all – four. He pauses. *Shi*. The homonym for death). ‘I hope you’re not angry, Grandpa,’ she says. ‘We waited up for you. But you know what Grandma Chiaki’s like. She put our bedding out together, you know, upstairs. I hope you don’t mind. She said you were with a patient, that you would have a drink afterwards. She said you’d be late. She didn’t want you tripping you over her.’

He steps up and into the house proper. The oily liquid soaks into his socks. She is staring at him through the dark, staring hard, he knows it. When he reaches the corridor that leads to the parlour, he removes his socks. He leaves the lights off. The parlour is clear of Chiaki’s bedding. This is good. Although he is sure that she cannot see the ghost, he does not want her near him, not now. A *fusuma* door is no boundary at all when the ghost is close to hand – the ghost’s young, young skin.

The lights of the highway seep through the surgery’s wall of milky glass. An orange hue stains everything. He sits on the edge of the examination bed and hugs himself for warmth. There are night sounds. Crickets. The doughy flappings of moths. These worry him. The dead can pull at the threads of reality and weave illusions of their own. They can cast their enchantments and lead the living into places that do not exist except in the past. And he has touched the ghost’s blighted beans and now her mushrooms. He glances at the doorway through which he has just come. She has not followed. *Why did I have to take the locust’s wing into his very mouth?* he thinks. She can be spiteful when she does not get her way. His touching of these omens could be enough to induce a fever, to pierce him with a cold so deep it takes root inside his bones. This has happened before, just as some of her visits have left no physical traces. Again, he checks the doorway. If he gives in now, there will be consequences. He knows it will. While here in Japan, Obon lasts for just three days, the Chinese Festival of Lanterns is a month long. She will come again and again, until that time is up and she wanders off to wherever the dead go when it is not their season. He is not young

anymore. The vitality he felt earlier tonight, while he was stitching up Oguma, does not mean he has strength to spare. He watches the windows and hugs himself tighter but it is no good. He is cold. He will have to retire to his futon, to his room beside the parlour and whatever warmth his bed can offer. But he will not do so without help. From the draw he takes the calligraphy box and from that an entire dose of rohypnol. Bulbous and dry, the pill clots in his throat, like cancer. He swallows and swallows again, panic causing his muscles to clench down, making the barbiturate feel as if it is swelling. He washes it down with water from the sink.

The coldness of that water stays with him. It lays in his stomach as he yanks his futon from its cupboard in his room off the parlour. It is here when he spills his sheets and his winter duvet onto the *tatami*. It is here when he buries himself into the thick down and seals himself off from the room, from the house, from his past.

But he cannot keep himself from listening.

There is the pad of her feet.

The rohypnol, and no doubt the alcohol in his system, settles any question about his old appetites returning and overpowering his will to leave the ghost well alone. He senses her, her bare feet, how they have come close to his face. There have only been a small number of women in Seichiro's life, those he has cared for. Chiaki, his daughter Fusako, Kasumi – but before them all there was the Chinese girl. And as he drops out of time, away from blighted beans and rotting fish, from dead insects and mushrooms, away from a pretty girl standing before him in the dark –safely away– he knows that she is a month early, that she has come a month before *Obon*, the Festival of the Dead.

He dreams of their meeting.

7.

Two girls are arguing in the square before St. Nicholas's. It is dusk and in a place where to be out after curfew is a death sentence.

The shorter of the two is Chinese, the other Caucasian. In Harbin, that means White Russian. And they are pretty, the both of them, so pretty the violence of their gestures reminds Seichiro of kabuki theatre. Their voices are hard – hard because everything here absorbs the cold: the dusk, its sky as impenetrable as a frozen lake; the red and green tiles of the cathedral, its dome, squat and fat like an enormous cock – everything. Sentry flares ignite with star-white pops and the glass is gone from the cathedral's windows. Steppe grasses feather the sills – there is no need for blackout curtains. The Cathedral, like the Russian city itself, is feeling the squeeze of the Manchurian Steppe. Soon, the grand streets and European buildings will be muffled by snow. He can smell it. He wonders if the tall Russian girl still calls it Little Moscow. Those other foreigners, the ones who left before the Chinese took the city back, called it Petite Paris. It is the perfect backdrop for two beauties to stand before and drag through their vowels, the way cats growl at night.

Dusk deepens.

Oguma is as mystified as he is. Even his bagman, Corporal Osaki, is quiet. They watch on, all three of them. They smoke their cigarettes and make no effort to part them.

Not that he can do anything himself. Like Oguma told him back the Village, they are not on a raid. He could never justify Seichiro's presence on anything like that and so refused him a sidearm. They were to go out and 'Check the traps.' Nothing more. Osaki would carry a sub-machine gun. That would be enough.

'Three Japanese out in the city?' Oguma said as they left the guardroom. 'Best we draw as little attention as possible. You just to observe, Kozu-kun. Be the good scientist.'

Oguma's meaning is clear now. Their trip into the city will not locate any weapon stashes, no communist radios; they will not haul in any criminals, or bandits, or saboteurs (not any real criminals, or bandits, or saboteurs, though he expects that is what they will become in Oguma's report, any who they find out on the streets after curfew).

He is glad that he cannot understand any of what these girls are hurling at each other. He does not think the Chinese girl is a coolie. If Osaki were not present, he would point this out to Oguma. The girl's complexion, her porcelain cheeks, is surely proof of this. Most probably, both girls are from Harbin, both born out here on the steppe, only the Russian's parents have tried to convince her she is from somewhere else. In Manchuria, superiority is like smallpox. He is disappointed when, quite unasked for, Osaki translates. Although Oguma's subordinate is a big man and looks quite uncouth type, he is fluent in Mandarin because he used to be stoker on the Southern Manchurian Railway. He can make nothing concrete out of the sounds being hurled between the Chinese and Russian girl.

'This is all over door knobs,' Osaki says.

Oguma laughs and claps his hands.

Taking this as a signal to continue, the big man says, 'From the Russian's restaurant. Apparently, they were made of brass.'

'Then why is she out here?' Oguma wags a finger at the white girl. 'Why didn't she send out a coolie if these doornobs are so important? Fucking doorknobs, indeed.'

Osaki says something in Mandarin to the two girls and they ignore him. Oguma asks what the Russian is saying. 'I cannot catch it all, sir.' Osaki answers. 'She keeps slipping into Russian.'

Seichiro listens out for these gaps himself, the moments when that other tongue spills out and hangs in the cold air, all hard syllables and self-pity.

Oguma feigns disinterest, but on turning to Seichiro says, 'Li Po.'

'Li Po?'

Over the last year, ever since they met out in the testing fields and discovered they were both Dosanko, men of the north island, Seichiro has found that this is a habit of Oguma's, this shifting disource without signalling why. It is a way of prompting Seichiro to ask questions of him.

'The great poet,' Oguma continues, 'the expositor of the Tao: he wandered the wilds in his youth. He put wrongs to right with the edge of his sword.' He removes his officer's cap and braces it under his arm. He cuts a fine figure, with the collar to his great coat open in spite of the cold. 'Can you believe that, Kozu-kun? Do you believe in Li Po? Or, at least, can you believe in his mission?'

'The transformation of wrongs into rights, Kozu-kun, that was Li Po's mission. And he loved his women as much as any of us. It was all part of the aesthetic, a way of thinking. Of living. Even his excessive drinking was part of it. And he ventured all over the place, even further west than we are now. Do you follow?'

Seichiro laughs and says he does not. Only since meeting Oguma has poetry held any interest for him.

Oguma calls him a heathen. 'What I'm saying is this, Kozu-kun: a thousand years ago and one of the greatest thinkers mankind has ever produced was Chinese...Chinese! And he was a poet. What we would call a rōnin, I guess, at least in his youth. And now listen to these two going at it. Door knobs, indeed. Who cares if they are brass or not. It is not the stuff of great philosophy, is it? This place has descended into savagery.' He pulls open his coat to reveal the hilt of his sword. 'Now it's our turn, Kozu-kun. Our time. We've ventured into the west. And what could be more neighbourly then to lend the common peace some assistance? Today, we are the Li Pos of modern Asia.'

Osaki slings his machine gun and draws a pistol from the holster at his waist. The girls jerk at this and a fresh volley of abuse slaps the stonework, the loudest so far. They are desperate. Against all odds, they must be hoping to convince Osaki that they are the aggrieved party; that Oguma will let them go. Seichiro has heard angry foreign words before, back in the International Concession of Nanking, where, amongst the bodies and ashes of General Tang's defenders, an American missionary dropped his pity here and there like copper coins. With the Russian border so close, Harbin is too far north for such sentimentality. It is too deep into the steppe. He was younger then, tasked with administering penicillin to troops with the clap, men who were issued with reusable condoms. Scared and disgusted at himself, he fantasised over what he would do if ever caught out in the countryside, alone and with a sidearm, a farm house open to his appetites. There is a war is on. Who wants to die a virgin?

Oguma nods at Osaki, who drops his translation of the girls' struggle like phlegm. He opens the back doors of Oguma's black Dodge van. The girls stop their bickering as the big soldier indicates that they climb in. Seichiro has heard Oguma talk of how he and his men usually hide the prisoners they take from the city in bales of straw. He says it is the best practice for transporting logs without drawing attention, especially when there has been no official raid, no radio or weapons or leaflets seized. Not tonight. Curfew is curfew. There are no witnesses and the streets on their way back to the Village are empty. From the back of the van, the Chinese girl looks at Seichiro with the intensity of a trapped animal. She is so pretty. The doors are shut.

A light snow falls on the drive back to the Village.

Part II

KASUMI

1.

The Yamanote Line rattles along its circuit and she pictures herself as the artist-narrator from Natsume Soseki's novel, *Kusamakura*.

If there's one thing Hiroki has, other than utter self-belief, it is timing. Nothing comes out of him before its appointed time, whether that's life changing news, or semen. If he were reincarnated as a woman, he would decide the day and hour of conception, the day and hour of his period, and Nature would obey. And so must she, it appears. She is to meet him near his office downtown. Why? Because he has the kind of news that can only be delivered in person (his secretary was insistent over the phone), the kind that means she has had to drop everything she was doing on campus, her reading, her mixing pigment (Hiroki does not get that paintings are not prophetic visions secreted by the gods).

Only, rather than the water-colour mountains of Kyushu, she has downtown Tokyo. The track is raised and cannot make out the streets below. Highrise offices and apartment blocks bar the train's windows, like pillars supporting a roof that is way out of frame. And like Soseki's unnamed hero, she is moving towards the great emptiness of another afternoon – not empty as in dull and uneventful, but empty of the certainty schedules. She can let whatever subjects the city has to offer her rise up before her like rocks breaking through mist and all because she suspects Hiroki will cancel their lunch date. Although he was the one who called her up and asked to meet, claiming that he great news for her –the kind that just has to be delivered in person– she knows he won't give a shit if he has to text and cancel. Business is business.

Besides, Hiroki's office is in Shibuya, not that far from Ueno really (the rain makes it feel longer), and whenever he summons her like this, she feels like she is drifting from the real world into a dream. Maybe that is because Shibuya always reminds her of a movie set.

The ceaseless tread of its crowds look staged, like they are about to be stomped into soup by some super-sized, intergalactic monster. Or maybe it is because she cannot take Hiroki seriously. He is full of shit and she is his hobby. Like her heading down to Shibuya in the rain: he knows he will cancel last minute (he always does), but she will not care. She carries her sketching things with her. She carries them everywhere. And she is not stupid enough to believe his efforts to support her career are in anyway motivated by altruism. Sifting through his company's accounts, the guys he takes out for dinner and drinks, all to get them to sign over their advertising campaigns to his bosses, he finds little ways of securing her commissions. He says they are to help her get through her PhD. He always expects pay back. She would not be surprised if he tallies up the commissions he brings her in a ledger, the way the Yakuza keep track of their debtors. One of these days, he will probably command her to lop off her little finger. And for what? A sign of her loyalty? Asshole.

Still, given her family history and the fact she has a renegade artistic version of a baby killer as a great uncle, she needs all the help she can get. As Hiroki pointed out the first time he researched called her so-called unique selling points, things are going to be tough with a war criminal in the closet. She should have followed the other family tradition and gone into medicine. At least her mum would be happy.

She can hear Hiroki's voice inside her head even now. Looking about the train carriage, at the faces of the salarymen around her, she contemplating which of them has that same trace of malice. 'Do you know how many wannabe artists there are in this city?' Is a favourite of his. 'Do you have any idea? Everybody wants the glitz, a creative identity. And it's not like you're working in a cutting edge medium. You're not installing giant, fucked-up tulips in little white rooms, or pissing or bleeding on the floor and contextualising your humours as the essences of human existence. Where are your little snippets of Kierkegaardian

philosophy? Your nods to Marx or your wet patch for Andy Warhol? Geez, Kasumi, you don't even do cute!

He always mixes things up in his speeches – dates, venues, even artists. He thinks reading a few Taschen guidebooks is knowing your shit. Still, she gets his little reference to Yayoi Kusama's *I pray with all my Love for Tulips* and wants to scream at him that Kusama displayed that work in Venice two years ago. This year's choice for the Japanese Pavillion has already been announced. The Europeans will get their Asian kicks from a set of Hiroshi Senju's *fusuma* doors. And they will be covered in his huge waterfalls. How much more *nihonga* can you get!

The train slows into Shinjuku Station. Once free of the carriage, she can turn on her phone and check her texts. Something has come up. Hiroki says he will meet her later, back in Ueno. She smiles. She had hoped that this would happen. She has the afternoon to herself. Of course she has. A point blanc. She hugs her satchel into her side and again, imagines herself as Soseki's unnamed artist.

Back at the post-graduate workroom, before Hiroki's call, she had fallen into re-reading Soseki's little, plotless novel, the very copy her grandfather sent her when she was accepted into the Tokyo University of the Arts (she had refused to even apply to the Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine, her mother's alma mater). Her Grandpa Seichiro has even underlined parts (for her? himself?), lines like: 'Yes, a poem, or painting, can draw the sting of troubles from a troubled world and lay in its place a blessed realm before our eyes.' A quaint notion (almost sickly), one wrapped up in Soseki's belief that good artists inhabit a state of *hininjō* (non-emotion). A word he coined, though the idea is old enough (the novel was his thesis). And like Soseki's artist-narrator, she is filled with an irresistible urge to go on an adventure.

The morning rush is over and, because of the rain, most commuters keep to the platforms and underground walkways. They will surface only when they need to, stepping out into the rain from one of the station's sixty exits. She does not wait. Passing through the basement of the Odakyu Department Store, she takes the escalator and comes out into the dank, monsoon air under a stretch of covered sidewalk. The hive floats on around her. Their umbrellas are rolled tight, like batons.

She crosses the thoroughfare at the station viaduct. The bird-like tweets of a walk-sign mix with the rattle of trains overhead. Go north, she thinks, parallel the tracks. She has no particular destination in mind, just a vague circuit that will get her out from underneath the shiny glass of the station malls and department stores and corporate headquarters. A short walk to the west and she'd be in amongst the polished façades of government offices, those close by to Hiroki's office. She thinks about how Soseki's artist-narrator starts out his journey into the mountains of Kyushu in a similar way, in the rain, only he's out on a ridge, weaving along a path strewn with boulders. But while he wanted to venture into the hinterlands, to cut himself off from Tokyo, from its trains and police snitches and city thinking, she is taken by a whim. She will get stuck into the dirty side of the city. For Soseki's artist-narrator, the mountains spark memories – reveries that resound like poems: other landscapes, other paintings, what he's seen, what he's read, a true literati painter. A cosmopolitan eye. Although he doesn't know it, yet, he is on his way to a hot spring and the mystery of how best to paint a beautiful stranger – the daughter of the inn where he will stay. She likes that he struggles along, windblown, rain-soaked, like her. Only, his confidence is high and his sense of aesthetic purpose is unquestioned. *What does it matter if I find anything of value or not?* he thinks. He is just the eye and never actually paints anything. He just sketches and drafts a fair few poems down in his sketchbook. The pressures of life are distant. Art is a balm. What a marvellous lightness of spirit he has. Tokyo, on the other hand, is an

ugly city. In the monsoon rains, it is filthy. All this water (a month of it!) and the grime is sluiced out, only to dry into a sooty layer when the sun manages to peep through. It is not washed away.

Yes, she thinks. I will sketch something vile. Something that will become painting.

At the edge of Seibu Shinjuku Station, the next station along the line, she cuts under the tracks and, after that brief pause, all exhaust fumes and noise, she comes out into the full force of the rain in her cut-off jeans. The toes of her canvas shoes are dank with soot, but her mother's pink poncho (pink! her?) keeps her head and satchel dry. The rain on the polythene drums pleasantly.

When she mounts a footbridge over to Kabukichō's 2nd District, a man and woman come down in the opposite direction and force her to move up against the rail. But what a marvellous pair they are, huddled together under a transparent, disposable umbrella! They are not touching, either. He looks much younger and is smug about his conquest; she is embarrassed into silence. Lost in their little drama, the woman brushes past her, without even a 'Sumimasen' (Pardon me). It is all so cliched. That is Kabukichō. A fantastic shade of shitty.

Across the bridge and between two high-rises and the road narrows, all blacktop and no sidewalk and a good centimetre of groundwater. Good job she did not wear socks. She does not go as far as Okubo Hospital (what a cruel joke that is, all those sick people holed up in a building humped by the dirtiest red light district in the city), before taking another side street and then another. She is in amongst it, now, not the main drag (that still has some glitz to it), but Kabukichō proper. Other than the hospital and the towering black façade of the Gracery Hotel, the buildings drop down in height and shuffle in on her. The humidity gets in close. Unlike much of the district, with its crazy flashing mix of bars and tiny eateries, the

street she is on is only wide enough for four people to stand abreast. It is filled up by love hotels, host and hostess clubs, soap shops, blowjob bars, and the city's Samurai Museum.

She finds a great little perch at the next crossroads, a *teishoku* diner with a view of the street. Standing before the door are two men holding black umbrellas and wearing matching black suits. One is tall. The younger partner has a grungy M-cut fringe, dyed platinum blonde. Like the old lady at the mountain teahouse in *Kusamakura*, they are aesthetically useful. Like rocks in a river, they could drag some interesting patterns into the water.

Mr Tall clocks her and holds his umbrella over her head. He says, 'Hey, slow down,' as Mr M-Cut comes up on her other side. Pack tactics.

She gives them a little bow, but Mr Tall isn't put off. Evenings are when Kabukichō takes off. That's when scouts like these two make their money, bringing fresh meat into the district's establishments, convincing girls that they can earn enough money to buy whatever they want. Designer handbags, easy rent money. All they have to do is pleasure some lonely men. Obviously, these two are hunting for a little afternoon bonus.

'Come on,' he says. 'I bet there's a pretty face under that hood. See, here it is. You look clever, too. Why don't you stop a while and talk. Listening to me is the smart thing to do.'

She pulls the diner's door open and steps out of the rain without saying a word back. The place is empty. It cannot have long reopened after yesterday's late night. Still, here it is, ready for another. She orders the day's special and takes her place at the window. The scouts retire to their doorway and light up cigarettes. If they can see her, they pay her no notice. The downpour continues and out comes her sketchbook. Lunchtime is approaching. More bodies appear on the street. Tourists pull along suitcases. Delivery men, sent out into the rain by the area's wholesalers, heave about trolleys of alcohol and polystyrene boxes of ingredients.

She tests out her *fude*-pen. The ink from its cartridge should percolate through to its brush-tip before she gets started and do so evenly. On a spare page she keeps for testing, she

lays down a lick of ink, two. The pen is a wonderful piece of kit. Its body resembles a fountain-pen and must look exactly how the novelist and cultural critic, Jun'ichiro Tanazaki imagined, when, in his *Praise of Shadows*, he wrote, 'Had the fountain pen been invented by the ancient Chinese or Japanese it would surely have had a tufted brush at its end.'

The street outside suits black ink. It is a chaos of watery blotches, cut over by sharp lines. There's no unity to work with here and there would be little point imposing any rhythm or lyricism. The essence of the place would disappear. Every building in the district is fucked up by a different colour and design of cladding, from fake terracotta-coloured marble, to shiny sheets of orange polyester, a chaos of angles scratched over by exposed wires that race along the overhead girders. Occasionally, a set of stone steps leads down off the blacktop, or a set of steel steps lead up. Potted plants and bouquets of yesterday's flowers droop in raised stands. There are pulled-down shutters and bolted grates, vending machines, a plastic ice-cream and a fibreglass gorilla wearing a pair of Stars and Stripes pants. Signboards and posters are everywhere. Cheap paper ones, glossy plastic, light bulbs dead in the late morning light: the street is a veritable portrait gallery, filled with images of arrogant men and (supposedly) lusty women. Everyone seems to have time for sale. Some of the faces are whole. Others have little black rectangles over their eyes to hide the women's identities. Empty beer cans sit on concrete ledges, above torn refuse sacks wilting under the deluge. Dilapidated bicycles glitter and rust. The abjection is as palpable as the ground water. The place is truly hideous.

Her meal arrives and she bites through a fried half-moon of lotus root without paying it much attention. The scouts are pulling hard against the current of life walking past them. Whenever a young woman passes by, the scouts perk up. From the quickness of their movements, the expressions she catches on their faces, she tries to guess at their appraisal system, why it is that they approach some girls with vigour and others not at all. Do they just

go for the cute ones or can they work out, just by looking at them, who could find it in them to become a hostess, who can bedazzle a salary man into buying champagne and expensive gifts and with nothing more than sweet talk and a glitzy dress? And then there is the other side of the entertainment district. There are those women who suck cocks for money. Can they tell them apart? How? For the scouts, out on the street, talk is all they have. She has read about the changes in the law. There can be no touching. Not yet. Nevertheless, Mr Tall gets in close whenever he has the chance, ducking down, under some girls' umbrellas, while Mr M-Cut trails behind. The girls' reactions are good fun to study: the raised shoulders and feigned deafness, the re-shouldering of their handbags. The scout's attempt to flatter them into stopping and these women just weaponise their smiles, a great variety of them, everything from *nice try*, to *please don't*, and all the shades in between, even the occasional *fuck off*, and all without uttering more than, '*Sumimasen.*'

Watching the scouts reminds her just how much she loves sketching from life, all part of the alchemy of process, what Soseki's friend, the poet Shiki, called *shasei*. In fact, life drawing, although not officially part of her undergraduate curriculum as a *nihonga* artist, was one of her favourite classes. Just like the Fine Art students working in oils, she likes to study anatomy. And she is good at it. 'Of course you are,' said her instructors, 'you're a Koze!' The classes were tough and necessary and, looking into the faces of these girls, their logic is made clear to her all over again, and especially to an artist working in *nihonga*, a medium focused on outlines and planes of colour – in abstractions and essences. It is a medium that demands discipline, the sparest of architectures, the drive required to forgo most details.

Time passes and although it takes a while, the scouts do finally convince someone to listen to them. To Kasumi's good fortune, the girl is facing her, framed by the men's shoulders. She readies her brush-pen.

She smiles a lot, this woman, but her eyes are unfocused, lids partially down over her irises. She must be afraid and, yet, she has stopped. She *is* talking back. Kasumi imagines her voice, what all three of them are saying.

It takes her several attempts to get the overall shape of the face down, with particular care paid to the jaw and chin, keeping them soft, but nuanced. The same goes for the lips and nose, the balance between them. The girl is talking, the edges of her mouth responding to the promises laid before her, the money (and, what, freedom? The ease of it all? The fun?), but when she stops to listen, that distant look returns to pinch her brow. Kasumi gets the basic shape of one eye down, the closest, and then adjusts the angle of the lid curving out from the tear-duct in the other, making it a touch more severe. By the third sketch, she has worked out the rhythm of the muscles into which the lids tuck. These are more pronounced in Japanese faces, more bulked out by a layer of fat than those in the Caucasian-filled manuals she poured over in university. The fat produces a curved epicanthic fold that mirrors the border between flesh and the gloss of the eye. The girl is too far away and the light too flat for Kasumi to determine exact colouring, but that doesn't matter. She has learnt to keep the irises of her portraits pale, a greying violet, rather than the deep browns and blacks of real women. Mr Tall claps his hands in celebration and the three of them walk over to a doorway across the street (he has his hand on the small of her back), where they disappear down a flight of steps. What happens now? What promises have been made? How does a woman prove she has what it takes to work in Kabukichō? What demonstrations of willing are necessary?

All this Kasumi thinks without any repulsion. Of that, she is proud. She can lose herself in *hininjō*, in non-emotion. The calling of the true artist.

Lifting her bowl to her lips, she takes a sip of *miso* soup. It is still warm.

2.

With Hiroki tied up at work and the Kabukichō girl's face in her sketchbook (her expression is hanging inside her head, as a painting, a complete one), she takes the Yamanote Line up to Ueno.

Back on campus, she spreads a huge sheet of mulberry pulp paper over her worktop, and, onto that, she pencils a sketch, an *oshitazu*, the final draft of the idea that she will become the outlines of her painting. She was taught the general motifs a long time ago, as an undergraduate: a beautiful woman at her toilette is a long-standing tradition. That is always the easy part. What to do with these motifs –how to imprint those mixed feelings of the Kabukichō girl upon them, to have her inhabit *nihonga*'s delicate way of representing women and yet, have her come *alive*– this is the challenge.

What she will do is to divide the sketch into three sections. Each section will be its own silk panel. There will be no background, as such, as is often the way in *nihonga* portraits. The grounding will be open, a shade of pearl grey. There will be a makeup box and, atop this, a mirror. Both will be angular and detailed, the box dark brown, a means to establish the delicacy of the girl's curves and the softness of her colouring. Rather than a traditional pose associated with a trainee *geisha*, like sitting in *seiza*, on her knees, back straight, the *maiko* will be on all fours, as if she has just crawled up the mirror stand, after a heavy night's drinking. So that the viewer will see her face in the mirror, she will be painted from behind, her kimono's outer-robe (she is undecided over the pattern) will be ruffled around the girl's hands and knees (she will omit the sash). The white under-robe will be open around her chest, so that her breasts hang down and full, innocent with nonchalance, but also drawn up at the back. The flesh of her buttocks, smooth like porcelain and rosily pinked, like a vase stood next to red curtains, will stand out, unashamedly, her sex open, a quivering lily.

*

It takes her an hour to complete the *oshitazu*. A good time, for her.

Once she is done, she sits on the deep window sill of Studio 3's postgraduate workroom, lulling over the sketch, the idea of it, picturing how the *kotsugaki* will turn out, the next phase, the inking of the girl's outlines, the *bone painting*.

A group of music students are wrestling with a marquee outside. The end of semester is fast approaching, she thinks. The Music Department's festivities are a reminder of this. A week and campus will shut up for summer vacation and she'll have no choice but to work at home, at her mother's apartment in Jiyugaoka, the only place in downtown Tokyo that has the stillness of a small town to it.

Hiroki calls again. He suggests they go out for dinner: 'My treat. I don't mind trekking up to Ueno, if that makes things easier.' He does not apologise for letting her down earlier.

She returns to her workbench, her phone to her ear. She looks at the sketched out thighs, the crumbled silk, the mirror from which those eyes stare out from ('Who is looking back?' they say). The white powder of the *maiko*'s profession will still be there, she decides, once she arrives at the colouring. It will be on the face reflected in the mirror, bleaching her skin, imbuing her with the look of an animated corpse. It will end in a line cutting across the girl's throat. Beneath this line, the flesh will be red, a rich shade of inebriation and the true symbol of her profession.

Cheers and laughter burst out of the gloom. The marquee is finally up. Good for them.

She says to Hiroki, 'I'm just getting into something here.'

'Fine,' he replies. 'I've got things to finish up here, too. How about eight?'

He hangs up first.

In a metal sauspans, she heats a good amount of animal hide glue. She will need it all when mixing up enough red paint.

3.

She meets Hiroki at Ueno Station, Exit 4, and is surprised to find him out of his suit and in slacks and a polo shirt. He obviously wants to make a night of it. The rain has let up, but for how long is anyone's guess in this season of downpours and fug. They walk out and underneath the raised tracks of the Yamanote Line, into the little district of Ameyoko. The narrow streets are busy with Friday night revellers, with salarymen in suits and youngsters in jeans slung so low their underpants are on show. Office women chatter past in groups. Everyone is out for a cheap dinner and drink. She likes Ameyoko, likes its lights and noise far better than the milling drone of Shibuya or the dirt of Kabukichō. The area has an intimacy about it, like the bustle of a festival. The shop fronts are two stories, no more. The tracks above make sure of that. They hem everything in, keep everything low, personal. And what a mix there is. Tiny restaurants of every kind, green-grocers, hawkers selling cheap suitcases, slot bars, the occasional shop selling adult VHSs and vibrators. Some of their lights are a steady glow, others flash, pause, and go off flashing again. Any vertical surface that isn't covered in advertising is pocked with air-conditioning units, all whirling and crowding up upon themselves like mussels. Stereos are on loop, their slogans championing cut-price electrical goods. There are songs about fish and mushrooms.

Through this bustle they go, checking out all the bill-boarded menus, weighing up their options. Should they wait for a table outside or not? Should they keep following their noses? Grilling fish, frying tofu and vegetables (in batter and not), the heavy swell of soy beans in a hundred guises, the zing of ginger, tang of garlic, curry, the grounding calm of fresh fruit ripening quickly in the July heat: the smells of Ameyoko do more to animate the place than its crowds.

Hiroki settles on *yakitori*. She doesn't catch the name of the place, but who cares. That's half the charm. There are a hundred similar grills up and down the street and they're all delicious, all in their own fatty, smoky, glorious ways. This restaurant is little more than a counter and a pair of three-*tatami*-mat booths up on a dais, separated by a curtain. Both rooms are already full, a combination of two women and two men. Co-workers, or organised double-dates, who knows? A couple of the men are already showing off, manoeuvring. Others are too shy to talk. It is all the same tragi-comedy of city life that gave woodblock printers half their subject matter two hundred years ago.

They grab stools at the counter. Behind a low barrier of Perspex, grills are hissing. Hiroki orders them both beer and the two cooks repeat the order back at them. Their fingers never stop moving, spinning skewers of chicken and vegetables, heart, cubed steak, dusting whatever needs to be dusted with salt and pepper, beating away the occasional bloom of smoke with handheld fans. They never stop joking around, either, and they almost pull it off, this blasé attitude, the illusion that *yakitori* and beer are the only cures for exhaustion, for the Tokyo ennui to which they're immune. Them alone, these sages of the grill. But Hiroki has this same energy, the same bullshit. That's why he's done so well after moving to the city to attend Waseda's business school, then getting his job at the advertising agency, his promotion. He has not long come back from a secondment to London, but it didn't take long for her to fall back into his most important project: himself. Still, she gets to make a little money and he often pays for her meals.

He asks her if there's anything in particular she wants to eat. The menu, brushed in *sumi* ink down narrow rectangles of paper, is nailed to the walls. She picks out a selection and he calls it out. The grill is appropriately restocked.

'Look,' Hiroki says, 'this place does sparrow!'

'That's gross.'

‘What are you taking about? They’re an aphrodisiac!’

He orders three portions (his lips are primed with the confidence of a date who expects to get laid), and onto the grill go three little corpses. Each bird would fit inside the palm of her hand. Naked of their feathers but beaks intact, they are monstrously proportioned, wings stubby (comically so), their chests as round and bulbous as meatballs, a fascinating and appalling sight. As she stares, amazed to think how those tightly wrinkled sinews once snapped so taut they could produce flight, Hiroki talks about a trip to France he went on whilst away, about songbirds thrown into burning Armagnac.

Salt and pepper rain down like falling ash.

‘Apparently, the Armagnac marinates and cooks the little bastards at the same time. Poof! Like magic.’

A dish of chicken and green onion arrives in front of them, followed soon after by the sparrows. She finishes her beer and looks at the grilling birds. Their eyes look like dollops of tofu. She orders a second.

Hiroki’s smile broadens. ‘Good, good – out to party.’ He brandishes a skewer like a wand. ‘Magic.’ The bird’s skull crunches between his teeth.

She asks after his good news. ‘The kind that can only be delivered in person, right?’

‘All in good time, Kasumi. And, actually, before we get into that, I would like you to clear up one thing to me: like how did you manage to fuck things up with Mr Tanaka?’

If this is what day have been about, his hauling her around the city and now this, if all this has been about getting at her for making him appear a little foolish in front of a client, then he can go fuck himself. She thought they had moved on from Mr Tanaka of Tanaka Breweries. Yes, the guy wanted to buy the rights to the painting she had submitted for her graduation salon, a painting Hiroki had showed him during some meeting. At the time of the salon it was titled *An Apprentice Geisha Whitens her Neck*. She doesn’t know what to call it

these days; she has moved on. Still, the brewery wanted it for a label. Her apprentice was to be the face of a new line of *genmai sake*.

‘You wanted to meet me to go over this again?’

‘Tanaka was very earnest. I would go as far as humble. He even invited you in to the brewery to meet in person – the company CO himself.’

She remembers the conversation well. Mr Tanaka had spoken mostly to her chest as he explained that, ‘Come October,’ and his family would have been distilling premium rice wines for three hundred years. ‘We are marking the occasion with a special line of *sake*, high end, of course, the recipe of which I have personally selected from our archives.’

Hiroki had stepped right in, praising the brewery’s inspirational business sense. ‘A wave of nostalgia is indeed sweeping through the country,’ Hiroki said and she could have puked. ‘People are returning to old recipes, as well as old styles of art. Old wisdoms. Something needs to fill the vacuum, now the bubble economy has burst, and I’m sure that such a line will demonstrate Tanaka Brewery’s pedigree – your company’s sticking power. Miss Kozu’s image, sleek and graceful as it is, would fit the brewer’s vision perfectly.’

‘The girl’s charm,’ Mr Tanaka said three or four times, ‘her innocence, well, it’s simply...’ And then, likewise, three or four times, he paused, as if searching for some quality beyond the reach of words, only to settle back upon the same refrain, ‘She’s so graceful.’

Pulling a pepper from its skewer, she doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry. She says, ‘So you do want to get into this again?’

‘What do you mean, *again*? You refused to speak about what happened over the phone. And Tanaka’s offer was generous. You know full well that you could have funded the next year of your PhD with that kind of money. And he wanted to use your image too – to get you recognised. Your work and your face would have been put *out there*. People would have

seen it. I'm surprised that you of all people can't see that: the dimly lit piano bars, captains of industry out with their clients – and your painting right *there*.'

Hiroki's rhapsodising bubbles up the same old demon that had her reject Mr Tanaka's *generous offer*. *Nihonga* has become a niche medium, an anachronism fit for the odd museum exhibition, for old ladies looking to fill up an afternoon's boredom with the earnest, scholarly pursuit of fine art, something to schedule between flower arranging and tea ceremony lessons. What kind of career is that? One of endless demonstrations, is what, a life of teaching how best to render flowers, of elementary school workshops. *Sake* bottle labels. If she was lucky, NHK would have her star in her own mini-documentary (all elevator music and esoteric goodness), she in her *jimbei*, soothing the insomniac with the intricacies of painting kimono folds and patterns. And in what light would they portray her? As a member of the avant-garde, what once was an essentially *Japanese* war party, a style raised from the ashes to put the muddying details and ungainly heft of oils in their place? Oh, no. She would be the zen-ed out artisan, the monk-like harbinger of ancient wisdom, of buried rhythms.

'What am I?' she asks. 'The off-spring of some endangered species? A panda of the art world?'

'Kasumi, pandas aren't even Japanese.'

'No shit...And come on, what kind of remark is that? *Me of all people*: what does that even mean?'

'You've heard of the Shin Midori Gallery, right?'

'Of course.'

'The gallery run by the Takayanagi family.'

'I said cut it out. You know I have.'

'Well, my firm is doing some work for the gallery.'

'You met with Takayanagi?'

‘He was very interested in you.’

‘Bullshit.’ She takes a swig of beer. ‘You’re just teasing me because you’re pissed I turned down Tanaka.’

‘I told him that I’d found the only Kozu who still paints.’

‘Yeah, and what did he say to that? Did he explain how he dumped my great uncle a long time ago? Just like that. The Shin Midori made a fortune off of Yuichiro Kozu’s work and then, nothing. Was he very interested in that?’

‘All in good time, Kasumi. All in good time.’

4.

By the time the taxi rounds the southern edge of Ueno Park and has pulled up behind the love hotel's screened entrance, it is raining again. The foyer is decorated with hieroglyphs and Egyptian caskets, a cosplay charm that appeals to Hiroki but has never worked its magic on her. Hiroki looks at the screen displaying the hotel's different rooms and their prices (two hours; all night). None of the photographs are backlit. The place is full. He curses, blaming the rain, the fact it is Friday night. The list goes on, but the hotel's choice air freshener (*and is that lubricant?*) turns her stomach.

'We'll wait,' he says,

'What if someone I know comes in? This is Ueno.'

'It was you wanted to come back here. There are cubicles in the waiting room, remember?'

'I wanted to come back to Ueno, yes, but back to the campus. I want to paint.'

'See, I knew The Shin Midori would get your blood up.'

'I am not waiting in one of those boxes again.'

They exit via a different shielded door to the way they came in. Even under Hiroki's umbrella, the street makes her uneasy. The houses' front doors give straight out onto the asphalt and she can't imagine the neighbours are too pleased at having a love hotel on their doorstep.

He tries to phone for another cab, but says his battery is dead.

They wait for a taxi on Ueno Park Avenue, but it is very late, the road quiet. They walk in the direction of Keisei-Ueno subway station in the hope of finding a taxi rank. There are no sidewalks, not until the road bisects the zoo. Trees hang like blackout shades over the

street lights. She listens out for a lion grumbling, or monkeys chattering, something. The rain raps on the umbrella.

At Shinobazo Pond, there are building works. A wall of steel slants cuts off any view of the water. This absence annoys her more than it ought to. Eventually, the barriers end. A promenade heads out towards the Benten Shrine, which stands on a small island out in the middle of the pond.

She suggests they walk out to the shrine and he insists that a taxi is bound to come by any minute. There are thousands of love hotels in the city.

‘I want to look at the lotus blossoms in the dark,’ she says.

Dykes link the shrine’s island to the rest of the city, cutting the pond into three sections, one of which is famous for its lotus blossoms. She reflects on how some of Japan’s most celebrated artists have walked the same shore. How they have looked out over this same disk of black water and captured the pond when its banks are pinked with cherry blossoms. Some even walked up the little hill around which Ueno Avenue skirts. From there, they have gathered in the view from the Kiyomizu Temple, which stands at the southern tip of the park. There is one woodblock print she recalls from that angle. It has the foreshore lined with great pines, the branches of one twisting around into a perfect hoop. Old woodblock artists could get away with such bravado.

She remembers those summer days when she used to come here with one of her mother’s few boyfriends. He was the gentle sort and always tried his best to be fatherly by buying her ice cream.

They reach the island. Pink and white paddle boats, shaped like swans, tug at their moorings. Their painted eyes stare out over the water. In front of a shuttered gift shop, she takes hold of a railing.

Hiroki says, 'If we can't get a room tonight, how about a little outdoor fun then?' He steps up behind her.

'It is raining.'

'I'll be quick. And it's not cold, is it?' He presses his cock up against her ass. 'Actually, it's quite warm and as wet. Sound like fun?'

'For you.'

Street lamps on the dykes illuminate the lily pads. The lotus flowers have not long bloomed. Rain falls through these balls of light in straight lines. She is reminded of the hush of a bamboo grove.

She says, 'When my father used to bring me here (she knows that she is lying, but it is just easy to tell the story this way), 'he used to tease me by saying that *kappa* lived in the pond. An entire kingdom of them, all down amongst the lotus roots. That's why people built the shrine here, to placate them. I asked him once why it was that no-one ever saw them and he said that they're afraid of humans. Still, no matter how shy they are, to the *kappa*, humans are something of a delicacy. We taste great, apparently, better than *tempura*, or curry rice, or *shabushabu*. Then he asked if I knew how they liked to devour us. He loved that part. By sticking a reed stalk right through our belly buttons, he said. By sucking out our guts.'

'You owe me,' Hiroki says. 'Takayanagi is a big shot.'

And you haven't told me what he said, she thinks. You met a celebrity. Big fucking deal.

He crushes his cigarette under his heel and looks out over the pond. 'Your campus isn't far, right, if we cut through the park?'

'Not really.'

'I bet you look cute when you paint.'

5.

Soaked through, they walk around the L-shaped pond which frames the Studio 3 foyer. Carp crowd its surface. They are chewing at the rain. Hiroki asks for her key-card and does the honours himself. The campus's janitors have already started the summer's deep clean, but even under a fresh coat of whitewash and floor polish, the place looks tired. *Nihonga* doesn't have the sizzle-factor of modern art, its new buildings and trendy spaces.

Hiroki closes the workroom door behind them and locks it. 'What is that stink?'

She tells him that it's animal hide glue, and even those he says it smells rotten, she can tell that he isn't really listening to her. He gestures to the back of the door where her *jimbei* is hanging. 'Is that what you paint in?'

'That's right.'

'Cute.'

She shrugs her shoulders, but, as he slips out of his shoes and steps up onto the *tatami* area, she is suddenly afraid. She has not put away the *oshitazu* of the Kabukichō girl; she is heavy pencil over lighter lines and she in the room with them, looking them through her mirror.

He tells her to get dressed. He is here to watch her paint, remember?

She removes her top and wraps the folds of the *jimbei* around her waist, tying them off. His eyes never leave her. They watch every centimetre of her legs as she slides down her jeans. When the show is over, he takes up a couple cushions and heads over the raised platform where she paints.

'What is this?' he says, kneeling down before her sketch. 'Shit. You really are a dark horse.'

He tells her to gather up her brushes and pats the cushion he has laid down before him. ‘Time to moisten your ink stone.’

She tells him to slow down. There is a routine to follow.

She removes three, long rectangles of silk from a draw. The silk is already prepared. Hand-washed (mild, mild suds), ironed, and primed. These she arranges over the paper sketch, adjusting what falls inside their borders. The last panel needs more empty space.

Hiroki says, ‘We’ll be here all night at this rate,’ but she doesn’t hurry things along.

She says that this isn’t some dumb demonstration. There is venom in her voice. ‘This is a real painting.’

The lines of the sketch blanch under the silk, but the strongest do not disappear. They emerge, instead, percolating through the gossamer-thin weave, as if through a mist. They float. The procedure is different for paper-to-paper transfer, but she rarely produces such works. She prefers silk. Though colouring comes next, she is glad to have arrived at the bone painting, the *kotsugaki*. Like the painting it will eventually flesh out into, outlining is a crossroads. There is some room for alterations. The shifting of a line. The odd addition. More than likely, she’ll decide to leave something out.

Using her lips, she spirals the tip of a brush into a spike and gives the sketch one last look over.

She says, ‘You still haven’t told me what your special news is.’

‘Ah, yes. Mr Takayanagi.’

He places his hand on her hip and his grasp feels different to how it did back at the Shinobazu Pond, when he pressed himself against her before the lotus blooms. The heat of his palms comes through the thin cotton of her *jimbei*. ‘The Shin Midori is sponsoring a retrospective tomorrow night over at the Tokyo Photography Museum,’ he says. ‘That new place over in Meguro. The show’s for some guy called Harada, a photojournalist.’

‘What has some photojournalist got to do with me?’

‘He means nothing. What’s important is that I’ve managed to secure us invitations to the preview party. That’s right, you and me both. It’s black tie. Very exclusive. Kiichi Takayanagi will be there, of course and I’ll make sure to get the two of you talking. Something is bound to come of that.’

And that’s your special news? she thinks. *That’s it? A non-starter.* Has he forgotten that the Takayanagis cut ties with her family a long time ago? Or has he just kidding himself?

‘Just imagine, Kasumi, tomorrow you can dress up in a kimono, just like these girls you like painting. This is Kiichi Takayanagi we’re talking about. This is the big league and it was me that got you this *in*. Just leave the talking to me and who knows what could happen. All I ask is that you don’t fuck it up...and of course, to say thank you in that special way you do.’ His breath on the back of her neck. ‘Now, paint.’

She leans over the layers of paper and silk and folds up her body, so that her breasts rest on top of her thighs. The back of her thighs are flat on her calves, her shins deep into the foam pillow. She slips her big toes apart and knits them back together again. If she sat up, back straight, neck extended, she could pass for a guest at a tea ceremony, always a good image for an artist working with traditional media (Hiroki has told her that before). People expect it.

She slides her ink stone closer and drops some water into it with a pipette. Then, she breathes it in, the ghost of rain, wet rock, the scent welling up from her ink stone. She is both enamoured by it and embarrassed by the poetry she reads into it. The Kabukichō girl is out to shock, she reminds herself. Not to meditate. Not to savour green tea. Or spend her afternoons deep in the mountain sides of old scrolls abstracting the essence of pine trees, bamboo, the twists and turns of flower petals, whatever it is people (her mother, Hiroki) imagine she does all day. But it is here nonetheless (isn't it always?): ink, black and glowing, scented like fine

drizzle on hot black-top, a change of density that could, at any moment, wisp into thin air. Kasumi dips the point of the brush into her ink stone's well and holds it there, pricking the reflections of the overhead lights (white bars at strange angles). The longer she waits, the more loaded the brush becomes. Some brushes she leaves in water overnight.

She imagines the stroke to come.

Satisfied, she hangs the brush over the silk and pictures the long, curving wire that will seep out from its loaded head. She will complete the outline, hip-into-rump-into-thigh-into-calf, in one go, a single brush stroke. She will control it through her posture and nerve. There can be no change in pressure, not once she starts. No shifts in angle. Otherwise, the line will thicken in places and thin in others. At worst, it could break. Consistency is paramount. Uniformity. That way, when the painting is finished, the outline will separate the body from the background, while simultaneously seeming to disappear into the figure's whole.

In the gap between silk and brush, she paints air. A practice stroke. Once. Twice. Closer. Closer, until, there it is.

A black cut opens up.

It pulls out from the brush, an extension of her wrist, her elbow (steady, steady, steady), the movement of her fingers, but only in the severing of the connection, her lifting away of the brush.

She sits up on her knees and looks down at the body she is bringing through the silk, through from the mulberry paper underneath, like a spirit passing through one film of existence and into another. The girl is in pieces at the moment, little more than a section of a girl-shaped membrane on the silk, her ghost just visible underneath, transparent, but she is growing whole.

Moistening the tip of her brush with her lips again (she doesn't care if she leaves ink on her teeth), she leans in close once more, closer than before, close enough to peer down through the silk, a doctor transfixed by an x-ray. So little is yet set in stone, here, in this moment. There is room for choice. Move this line a millimetre. Clip this one. Leave this detail unpainted. Lightness, after all, is an exacting goal.

But Hiroki slides in behind her. No sooner does she return the brush to the well of the stone, then his open mouth is on the back of her neck.

She tries to lose herself in the geometry of this other woman's body. She evaluates the dynamics of her anatomy, all her angles and planes. If she must touch down the brush, the mark will be so small it will not alter the careful balance she has spent all afternoon orchestrating.

When she leans forward again, Hiroki's body shifts with hers. He mirrors her pose. She can feel him unbuckling his belt, unzipping his fly. And then, his hand is on her back, reaching around her waist and up, up inside her smock. He digs under her bra, fingers her nipple. Her forearm presses into the silk. She is desperate not to crease the sketch underneath, but his other hand is sliding inside the elastic of her shorts, her panties. Their material clots between her legs. She picks out the heavier pencil lines, the sketch underneath. He forces himself inside her, dry. She reduces herself to nothing but these lines on the other side of the silk. She wants to sink away from the pain he is beating into her lower abdomen. A thumping, dull regularity. He tells her how much he has missed her while he was in London.

She keeps her wrist taut, lays down another line.

*

Hiroki comes and, afterwards, says he has to get back home. It is close to midnight. He says they have a big day ahead of them. He needs to show his face to his wife and get some rest.

He leaves her elbow deep in soap suds. There is swelling between her legs, soreness. She cannot stop the tears from coming. She will scrub cat bones, make up black paint, ready to complete the bone painting, its metamorphosis from the sketch. Anything to stop her from screaming. The ritual of making pigment is not enough, the alchemy of process, but she focuses on it anyway, she sheathes of bone between her fingers. Feline scapulae make the best bone black. Lying on the bottom of the workroom's sink, the shoulder blades remind her of the fossilised ears of tiny, embryonic elephants. Boiling alone will not remove their waxy coating. A wire brush is needed. She wishes she had some ice cubes, something cold, very, very cold. She could wrap them in one of the clothes she uses to clean her brushes with and slip it between her legs.

On her worktop, amongst her water dishes, takeaway coffee cups, her pestle and mortar, antique iron (a gift from Grandpa Seichiro), is a blowtorch, and beside that a bowl of peach stones. When she has finished cleaning, she'll torch them both, bone and peach. She'll crush them down together. The bone char will be more granular. Why? Because bone grains are more porous, pocked by microscopic cavities, as they are the trenches where nerves and blood vessels once nestled. A little walnut oil to thicken the animal hide glue and, despite their minute differences, the chars will blend into a deep, velvety black. She has perfected this recipe herself. All trial and error and aching limbs. Where do any of Hiroki's promises figure in this world of metamorphoses, his connections and slimy words? But he has got her into a party hosted by the Takayanagi family, the Tokyo elite, the very gallerists who represented Yuichiro Kozu, her disgraced ancestor.

She scrubs harder. Her great uncle Yuichiro knew all too well the excitement of experimentation, of the freedom that can come from cutting loose from traditions, from

mixing his own paints, of melding things together. It was easier for him in some ways. He was a painter of oils, a foreigner in Europe, during the first decades of the century, already alien enough when *make it new* was on every young artists' lips. But he did more than just find ways to externalise his inner landscape; as a young man, he spent months in Paris experimenting with different formulas for white, for some way to wrap up his nude women with a skin so incandescent, it was touched by something other than white (an echo of blue?). His white paint made present all those years Japanese women had lived in the shadows, those dark rooms which had soaked *into* such women. Tanazaki refers to this presence as the *cloudiness* that *darkness under their skin*. Yuichiro Kozu wanted make the skin of his nudes come alive, in this respect, to give that darkness an erotic tactility, a touch that would equal his genius for mapping out and rendering their Japanese physiologies. The French loved his balancing act. He was an exotic and he was striving for truth, and not only their truth.

Kremnitz white was a crucial ingredient. Only, the heavy pigment dries to a rough texture. How he kept such an unstable ingredient to remain so smooth is a mystery. After his death, his studio in Nice was found to be filled with the stuff, so much of it that there was speculation in the French press (the Japanese haven't wasted any words on him in years): if it wasn't his exile that killed him, it was all that lead.

She knows what it feels like to be poisoned.

*

When she cannot stick it anymore, she takes off. She is exhausted, but not sleepy. She walks out of Ueno, into Bunkyo, to the Fujiview Hotel and its twenty-four hour spa. She hires a towel and scrubs herself at one of the open shower stalls beside the public baths. Even at this

hour, the place has a few other women milling around, though everyone is quiet. Some people love to bathe at night.

But a long soak does not help. She feels dirty. Inside and out. Wrapped up in just the towel, hair wet and loose over her shoulders, she lies down on a lounge before the floor-to-ceiling windows. The sky brightens by degrees, but, at dawn, Mt Fuji does not appear, not even as a white shadow against the blue-white haze of the horizon. It must be swathed in cloud this morning. The city's lights fade into grey buildings.

*

She arranges to meet Hiroki at a kimono rental shop in Meguro. Over the phone, he sounds wired. 'This is our chance,' he says several times over.

He is already inside the shop when she arrives. Three kimono are hanging up. He has already narrowed down her choices. Splayed across their special hangers, they look like crucified ghosts. She asks for something plainer, something suffused with the blue of early summer irises. Hiroki bristles, but she explains to the shop's manager that such a choice would better match the aesthetic of the season. She had decided on irises whilst dozing back at the hotel, at the same moment she decided to take Hiroki on, to go to his party and play the part of the wannabe artist, the dried up blood of a has-been. She'll do it better than even he could imagine. She'll get her own back. She will find Mr Takayanagi and she will make it work. Old men must have their weaknesses. Youth, surely, is one of them.

It takes three middle-aged assistants almost an hour to wrap her up in the layers of undergarments, to do her hair (nothing too fancy), and apply her makeup so skilfully that she doesn't look to be wearing much at all. The pace is frenetic (what had she expected, the slow order and drama of the tea ceremony?). Hands pull and tuck and tighten. Wrinkled mouths

never stop chattering. The women reassure her how pretty she is. ‘A natural beauty,’ they say. A kimono suits her. And all the while, she distracts herself with thoughts of irises. If anyone asks her about the kimono’s design, she’ll explain how the colour reminds her of the tenth-century classic, *The Tale of Ise*, the “Eight Bridges” poem to be exact and its young nobleman for whom irises are a reminder of his distant lover. Kasumi has spent years studying and painting the classics and will effortlessly shift into her observations of the Rinpa artist, Ogata Kōrin. He loved the poetry and reflected such poetry in his painting style.

Yes, she will beat Hiroki at his own game.

Finally, they swathe her in the rich-coloured silk. The whole ensemble is pleasantly heavy. Best of all, she likes the wide *obi* sash they wrap around her waist and press over her breasts. It is cream-coloured and has a streak of foliage is at its centre. The changing room’s walls are hung with mirrors; in these, she makes out the sash’s knot beneath her shoulder blades, its splash of green topped and bright red camellia bloom.

6.

Tokyo Photography Museum is found on the corner of the Yebisu Garden Palace, a mall and business park, its entrance inside a covered walkway. At the end of this tunnel are tall windows filled up with the Yamanote Line tracks beyond. Built into the walls of the walkway are iconic photographs. Black and white and each blown up to epic proportions, they tower over Kasumi's head. She has never been to TOP before (it has not long opened) and the museum's choice of images strikes her as odd. If this were Paris, or the foyer to the MoMA, New York, she could understand the selection of the Caucasian nurse hanging, like a limp coat, over the arm of a Caucasian sailor (their kiss has all the pageantry of a perfume advertisement) and Robert Cappa's soldiers struggling through waist-deep water towards a French beach. At least the last panel (huge sands dunes dotted with four old people) draws the eye to a woman in a black kimono; it is the only photo in the series to have a Japanese subject. She mentions this to Hiroki but he's too busy to listen. He tells her to prepare herself. Whatever that means.

They cross the first of two rope barriers and slip into and amongst the event's guests. An army of pretty women in matching uniforms (grey, with red-scarves at their throats, black hair netted back in buns) greets everyone with a complicated flurry of syncretised actions. Umbrellas are taken and wrapped up in clear plastic, names checked off lists, exhibition catalogues dispensed, table tops re-tiled with fresh glossy covers. Every interaction is bracketed with bows and polite words of greeting. The women never stop smiling. Even their lipstick is the same shade of pink-pearl. They would make a great painting. Something very *Pop*.

The other guests spread out in the foyer, taking their time out front as if to maximise the gaze of the shoppers gawping at them from across the ropes, paper shopping bags in hand.

and, ironically, caught on film – his own. While covering the plight of civilians left behind after the runway of Tan Son Nhat Airport was put out of action by bombs discarded by fleeing South Vietnamese pilots, an exploding shell buried him alive. Despite the efforts of an American journalist to dig him out, Harada suffocated.’

She feels self-conscious. Perhaps, this is not the scene for a discourse on the gentle colours of her kimono, the segue she had hoped would allow her to talk about *nihonga* and, ultimately, her own work.

While Hiroki sips his drink and scans the room, she checks her catalogue for a map.

Inside the adjoining room, there is a huge light-box and, fitted across it, a colour photograph. It is blown up to proportions so heroic the colours (mostly rush-green; that shade of jungle foliage found only in old film stock) reach out into the gloom and highlight the ruffles and folds in the guests’ clothes, their cheeks and hair.

‘Stop rocking on your heels,’ Hiroki says. ‘It’s making your *geta* click on the floor.’ His eyes are gleaming, but he says nothing more. He must be nervous, she thinks, even though he has assured her that he has met Mr-Mogul-of-the-Tokyo-Art-World before – that Kiichi Takayanagi is expecting them.

To calm herself, she steps right up to Harada’s photograph, not so much for a *closer look*, but to immerse herself in it.

In the photograph, two Asian girls, both dressed in black pyjamas, are kneeling over a third. This last girl, whose body is level with Kasumi’s waist, is lying on the floor, the wooden butt of a machine gun pressed into her shoulder. The other girl beside her is inserting what looks like a curved fin into the top of the weapon. Kasumi leans in closer, face-to-face with the girl laying down behind the weapon. What striking eyes she has. Whether it is a trick of the light, or biology, she doesn’t care. The girl’s eyes are jet black, and focused, confident, quite unlike the exhausted, blank expressions of the American soldiers in the catalogue, or the

hysterical tears of the South Vietnamese civilians at the airport, or her portrait of the Kabukichō girl for that matter. Kasumi likes this girl. She is not looking at the camera, the prone girl before the machine gun, but in the direction of the gun's barrel. She is not taking aim as such, but looks as though she is willing a target to appear. A man she remembers, perhaps? A Frenchman, an American? Someone with violence in the sway of his hips. Someone like Hiroki.

Hiroki pinches her elbow and says something into her ear. Then in a louder voice, he continues, 'This is Kasumi Kozu.'

She turns away from the photograph and bows instinctively to the well-groomed man in horned-rimmed spectacles standing beside Hiroki. 'I am Kasumi Kozu. It is an honour to meet you.' The words are automatic, the ceremony of introductions preventing her from clamming up.

The man dips his head in recognition of her formal greeting and, in turn, goes through the motions, introducing himself as Takayanagi-of-the-Shin-Midori-Gallery.

'Takayanagi?' she repeats.

'That's right.' His smile puts her at ease. 'You were expecting my father, I think.'

She was and is now lost. But his voice is deep, his mouth kind. High cheek bones pull in his cheeks, causing deep brackets to form at the corners of his mouth. He is handsome, confidently so, and everything Hiroki wants to be. She has the urge to say something about Harada's photographs, about his past, something clever, insightful (controversial?) to see if his face will change, to work out if the gallerist's congeniality is a stock mask, one brought out for parties and public events. But, already, his arms are open, palms out, gesturing towards the photograph. 'Have you seen something you like, Miss Kozu?'

Hiroki takes up a position just behind Takayanagi's shoulder. Unblinking, he presses her to reply.

‘Like?’ she repeats (Hiroki’s face hardens). ‘I don’t know what to say, Mr Takayanagi. Something about the photo is striking.’ She points to the girl behind the gun. ‘Especially her.’

‘Do you know what they are doing?’

‘Learning to shoot?’ Hiroki chips in.

‘Not quite.’

She can sense the story welling up inside Mr Takayanagi. Most men in his position would barely say a word to some lowly pawn like her; Hiroki wouldn’t fare much better. She senses that it is best to wait.

After taking a glass from his assistant, he continues. ‘I can remember when Harada first showed me this picture. It must have been 1964. Viet Cong attacks were in the news a lot. The communists were gaining ground in the countryside and we were told that they were a dark shadow, a ruthless army of faceless ghosts. Harada was in-country for years, since the French war, and, somehow, he managed to make contact with these so-called monsters. He had an uncanny knack for that. Perhaps, his Asian face helped. Even after the Americans came in force, he wasn’t one to embed himself with their units, like many journalists did, those who liked the security of barbed-wire perimeters and helicopter gunships. He liked being amongst the peasants. This photograph was the outcome of such dedication. Where are your faceless ghosts? it seems to proclaim, don’t you think?’

She lets the question hang. She expects Takayanagi wants it to. He is the story-teller, after all.

Hiroki says how Harada managed to humanise the enemy wonderfully.

‘So I say again,’ Takayanagi presses on, ‘what is it they are doing?’ (Hiroki keeps quiet this time). ‘Well, they’re going through their drills, that’s what. They’re field-stripping that light machine gun. It’s a Type-99. A relic, even by 1964. Just look at them: three pretty

girls, honing their skills, getting their speed up, transforming learned steps into instinctual movements: breaking the gun down, oiling it, reassembling, reloading. But that's not what really wounds me when I look at something like this – I'm sure the same was true of Harada. It's that machine gun. It's not Russian-made, nor Chinese. It's not even French. It was developed by the Japanese military for use in the Pacific War. It must have been left behind after our occupation of Viet Nam.'

'They are learning to kill with our leftovers,' she says.

'Exactly, Miss Kozu. Exactly.'

She holds his gaze for the briefest of moments and, aware that he has been examining her as much as she is him, touches his arm.

'We haven't long arrived,' she says, 'and still haven't had a good look around. Why don't we do so, together?'

'I'd like that,' he says.

When the gallerist leads her off to collect a refill, Hiroki follows behind them. While they are at the refreshment table, the gallerist explains some of the postcards stacked there. His family's gallery, the Shin Midori, he explains, helped organise the sponsorship needed to get the retrospective off the ground. 'I made sure to secure the dates while this place was still being built,' he says. He felt obliged to. Certain government agencies have had a tendency to steer clear of Harada's legacy. 'His political sympathies have always been contentious. It is hard to believe that he was ever awarded a Pulitzer.'

He explains how the two of them had become friends after Harada had visited his university dormitory house to give a lecture. 'He was like a sage to us. One day he was deep within the kind of horror our fathers must have endured during in the Fifteen Year War, but, of course, never talked about, and the next day, there he was, sitting amongst us, his skin textured like seaweed, his eyes sparkling.'

Takayanagi comes in close to her, as if to impart some great secret. ‘Not unlike Yuichiro Kozu, don’t you think?’

The sudden redirection stuns her and before she can answer, he has moved on, stopping a couple of metres away and calling her over, so that he can introduce her to a group of guests, then another, until they eventually stroll into the installation’s central space. It is large and angular, like a parade square. Takayanagi looks up and points. High above the crowd, amongst the projected photographs and suspended by cotton-thin wires, is a camera. A shard of something is spiking out of the viewfinder. It looks like a dried-out bean pod, split and twisted.

Hiroki asks, ‘Is that Harada’s camera?’

‘The one from Tan San Nhat Airport, yes,’ Takayanagi replies. ‘That’s how high it shot up when the shell exploded. Some of its film was rescued. The pictures are on the wall over there.’

While she stands directly under the macabre artefact, considering how it hangs there, in stasis, picked out by spotlights, at the apparent apex of Harada’s violent unearthing (she tries to imagine the heat of that blast, the concussion, noise, speed of flight, how solid grass can be when crashed down upon hard. But she can’t do it. Maybe that’s the point), the museum’s staff appear. With bowed apologies and polite hand gestures, they clear a space. A dais is wheeled in and locked down. Microphones are handed around and sound-checked. A crowd congeals for the official addresses, chatting and drinking, looking serious one moment and laughing the next.

All of a sudden, the ceiling lights up. The floor space and the crowd drop into shadow. Projected aerial photographs, military in source, cycle above them. Burning city, after burning city. Each has a tag in the corner. Hanoi, Tokyo, Hyphong, Kobe, and so on.

The museum's director is first to take the stage. After giving the initial vote of thanks, he introduces Mr Takayanagi. The gallerist takes his time congratulating TOP for its vision, implying that no other photographer in modern history deserves a retrospective as much as Harada. The spell of Takayanagi's voice falls over the room. He has no need for notes.

'Tsuji Harada was a war orphan,' he says. A black and white photograph bursts onto the ceiling above him. An aerial shot, military: Tokyo burning from the air. Then another: the city in ruins from the ground. 'His mother and sister perished in the first firebombing raid against Tokyo, in March 1945, while he was in China, apprenticed to his uncle, a noted Sinologist. The year before, his father had disappeared, lost to the *green desert* of New Guinea, his body never to be recovered. These were events that were to haunt Harada for the rest of his life; events that saw him travel to the most dangerous of places. This exhibition is an ambitious attempt to meld these pasts together: the teenager taking pictures of ancient Chinese temples amongst misty mountains and the burning fields and jungles of Viet Nam. Harada documented the French colonial war and stayed on to witness the Americans wade in with all their firepower.'

Takayanagi begs everyone's patience for his poor English skills. He says how he is sure there are others in the room that could produce a more graceful translation of Harada's 1967 Pulitzer Prize acceptance address (muted laughter). That is where he would like to start in earnest tonight, with Harada's own words.

'Ladies and gentlemen, we have an old saying in Japan.' He slows his pace right down, down to a rhythmic cadence, as if he can hear Harada whispering in his ear at this very moment. 'We call something that does not affect us directly a *fire across the river*. This is because distance mitigates horror.'

Next slide. A high altitude bomber in colour. What looks like a string of fish eggs is squirting from its belly. The black nuclei are stark against the blue sky. Takayanagi continues his recitation of Harada's old speech, the words rolling out of him, smooth and deep.

'Two years ago, when I saw bombs falling from B-52s, when I saw the flames from their explosions, I wanted to cross the river, so to speak. I wanted to feel the heat of that fire. I wanted others to feel that heat, too. So, I journeyed to Hanoi.'

Takayanagi pauses to let that sink it.

Another picture, one she recognises, but never knew it was Harada's. This was the image that brought Harada international recognition Takayanagi explains. A mother is holding up the half-skinned body of her baby to the crew of an anti-aircraft gun. The soldiers are North Vietnamese and look uncomfortable. Her expression, however, is unreadable – or rather, can be read in several different ways at once. *Look: you let them through*, she seems to be saying. Or is it, *Look what they did: kill them all*.

'Many people have asked me for a long time, why it is that I do what I do for a living. When is enough, enough? I always give the same answer. I say, incineration is incineration.'

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At the end of Takayanagi's speech, there is applause and the gallerist steps down to be swallowed by a group of well-wishers. The party resumes. Hiroki walks off, looking for something to eat and she leaves him to it.

She enters the last of the exhibition's large rooms. In her catalogue, it is titled *Foreshore*. The room itself is broken up into three parallel corridors. Their sides are radiant with large, panoramic photographs stretching down their lengths. She enters the first tunnel. There is only one other guest inside, but she pays him little heed. The boulevard in the

photograph is more arresting, its street corners, its little landmarks. She recognises them. The trees look smaller, the shop fronts old fashioned, their advertisements familiar but warped, nostalgic. This is Shinjuku – a Shinjuku from over thirty years ago, from the 60s, before she was born, a manifestation she knows only from other old pictures and films. But the streets are in disarray. She is standing amidst a riot.

On the wall to her left, there are young men in helmets, the type worn by construction workers. Their faces are covered with white T-shirts. White clouds (tear gas?) engulf them. They are scattering. Across from them, in the other photo, the one that takes up the other side of the corridor, are the police, dark paint on their riot shields, dark uniforms, white batons in their hands.

She strolls down the length of the corridor and around its end, coming into the second corridor. Instead of a riot, there is a burning train on one wall. The details of one photo are largely obscured by a blur of white heat; on the other wall is the railway siding across the tracks from this conflagration. Its chain link fencing is flash-bright, mercurial. She stops to pick out the details of the neighbourhood beyond it, the apartment blocks thrown into relief by the fire.

She talks to herself (to the eye behind the lens?), says, ‘What discipline.’

‘I agree,’ comes a voice close by to her. She looks around. Just along from her is the old man, the guest who was standing in the tunnel when she arrived. He comes closer. ‘Like you said, you can’t help but admire his discipline.’

His starched collar cuts out from his blazer and is white – as white as his hair, which he wears brushed back, neat and dapper. Unlike so many men she has studied whilst out in the city with her sketchbook, men whose features have fleshed out with age, their jowls loosening, their cheeks puffing out with good living, this man looks sculpted from some rare form of ivory, a substance the colour of white oak. Only his goatee and lack of necktie lend

him an air of someone who has spent his life around art and its creators, the way a bow tie or pair of round-lensed spectacles have done for so many of the foreign curators pictured in her glossary art magazines. ‘The presence of mind to look away; to take in what’s around you...I mean,’ his eyes are locked on the photograph, ‘all this drama and he turns us in the opposite direction.’ His tone is intimate, like they have known each other for years.

She says, ‘He’s still watching the fire, though.’ Dressed in a kimono, her hair up (with Hiroki out of sight), she has the confidence to hold her own. Reaching up, she points to the face of an old woman leaning out of a second story window. ‘It’s here. It’s all over the concrete. See? It’s on her skin.’

‘That’s an interesting way of putting it.’

‘The fire’s radiance, I mean.’

‘Yes, yes. I follow you. Fancy leaning out of your window and finding the world on fire?’

What answer is there to that?

They stand side by side, quiet, gathering in the details of the huge, oblong print, until the old man says, ‘And look at her expression. When you tally up her possible age with the fact that this image was taken all those years ago, yes, yes, even more than that, you get the feeling, from her look, that she has seen her neighbourhood burn before.’

‘The heat must have been unbearable, too – that close up.’

‘Would you believe that my son invited a survivor to tonight’s proceedings?’

‘A survivor of this fire?’

‘No, no. Of the firebombing of Tokyo – from the war.’

‘But that’s great, right? To have a witness here, someone to bring the photographs to life?’

‘The man was burned.’

She remembers a photograph from the other room, a boy whose head looked like a melted balloon.

Kiichi Takayanagi comes strolling down the tunnel towards them. Giving her a nod, he says to the older gentleman, ‘What are you up to father?’

‘Your father...’ The realisation deepens. She bows to the old man and apologising for her lack of manners, stepping backwards, away from the photo, but the old man reaches out and touches the glass. He picks out a tiny silhouette, a cat running into the blur, tail raised.

‘And I do like the shadows here,’ he says, not quite ignoring his son, or so it feels to her. He simply hasn’t finished with his point and is reminding him of his place. He is busy talking art, after all. ‘Harada always had such skill at striking light against dark.’

And he is right. With the walls so bright, the fence branded into the cinderblocks, any gaps or holes, the street backing away behind the old woman's head, they appear pitch black.

The younger Takayanagi smiles and adds, ‘But there is something important to consider here, Miss Kozu. All the fire? It is aviation fuel that is burning. Fuel manufactured in Japan. It was being transported to an American airbase when it caught ablaze in this neighbourhood. You see, one does not need fancy chemistry to manufacture napalm. You just mix a black powder with gasoline. Nevertheless, the airplanes had to get down to South East Asia in the first place and that required proper fuel. Japanese companies helped refine and provide such assistance. But, like my father said, this woman here must have known full well what it was like to face such an onslaught.’ He takes a breath. ‘Father just doesn’t like to dwell on such complexities.’

The old gallerist does not reply and she is lost for words. Kiichi Takayanagi comes to her rescue by formally introducing her.

Old Man Takayanagi says, ‘Kozu, you say? I should have known. Look how pretty you are in kimono.’ She bows again but he assures her that there is no need for such ceremony. ‘Our families go back for generations, girl.’

Looking pleased with himself, Kiichi Takayanagi says, ‘Your great uncle Yuichiro had this same skill.’ He points to the burning station. ‘He knew how to grab people by the guts.’

‘I guess so,’ she says.

‘You guess?’ Kiichi laughs. ‘Oh, yes, he knew how to rile an audience. Genius and controversy, that sums him up, the two in equal measure. He was the kind of artist who makes Harada pale into a saint by comparison, whether you think he was communist sympathiser or not. And like my father said, he was angered when I invited an actual burn victim to this show.’

Old Man Takayangi eyes turn hard. He says, ‘That isn’t art.’

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The number of guests begins to thin out (the night is still young – there are other parties in the city, other venues). Kiichi Takayanagi suggests they go for dinner, the three of them, himself, Kasumi and Hiroki. When she asks after his father, the gallerist says that his old man rarely stays out of an evening anymore. He is not well.

‘But for us,’ he adds, ‘there is always a *nijikai*.’

From the ease with which he invites her out to a second party, she can imagine that he enjoys the company of women and does so often. Hiroki looks excited by the prospect (something to brag about in the office, she guesses). Takayanagi says they’ll take his car.

7.

Takanagi has a driver (white gloves, no hat) and, once en route to dinner, his manner changes. His mouth is still just as warm, his eyes, too, but his posture is more relaxed. He insists they both call him Kiichi. He asks about her studies, about why she took up *nihonga* and not oils, like her great uncle, about the university and which instructors are still there. ‘Do you live in Ueno?’

‘No,’ she says. ‘I live with my mother in Jiyugaoka. She’s a consultant at Tōkai University Hospital.’

‘A doctor? Fancy that. And here you are, an artist.’

They take the expressway into Chiyoda. When the road comes back down to earth, they drift off the main thoroughfares, until Takayanagi’s driver pulls the car over in a side street. On one side there are apartment buildings, their balconies facing the street; on the other side is a line of trees hemmed in by a low, ornate wall – clearly the outer barrier to a temple or shrine. Takayanagi says he has some business to attend to before they can head off to the restaurant he has recommended they try back at TOP. Would they might alighting?

‘We are at your leisure,’ Hiroki assures him.

When they round the end of the street and into a junction, she can make out the top of the lighthouse at Kudan Hill. The shell of the old, defunct lighthouse is lit up for the tourists and marks one of the bridges over the moat to Kitanomaru Park and the Imperial Palace around which it coils. Kiichi has the driver pull over.

On foot, she and Hiroki follow the gallerist up a black-topped incline, one that levels out beneath a huge *torii* gate. Its pillars are as thick as cedar trunks. Lined with trees and only partially lit, the grand avenue of Yasukuni Shrine extends away into the evening’s half-light. She gets that shrines are supposed to be cut off from the outside world; that *torii* mark their

thresholds. Still, the trees rising in silhouette, puffed out like two parallel banks of black cloud, give her the creeps. Unlike most shrines, she feels no sense of calm welcome here. The avenue stretches off for a good half kilometre. It is still littered with the remnants of the Mitama Matsuri, the shrine's early celebration of *Obon*, a big deal in the city, she knows, though she's always avoided it herself. The thought of what the shrine stands for has always put her off.

Collapsed food tents wait to be packed away, along with little walls made of paper lanterns, hundreds of them, each made up of row upon row of paper cylinders, all stacked, one atop the another. Last night, they were aglow. Now, without their candles, they look sad. Their paper coverings are thick and waxy. Normally, she would say something playful, like how the lanterns remind her of larvae –the mutant firefly type– but not here. She cannot fathom why Kiichi would bring them here, not after what he said back at TOP.

In the distance, standing aloft over the festival's debris, is the shrine's gatehouse. Last night, the avenue was alive with lights and revellers (a shout out to the dead: *Welcome back!*), with girls dressed up in light, cotton *yukata* and not the formal kimono she has on, while above them all, those gates held firm, protecting the shrine's inner sanctum. It is an unsettling contrast to make.

'Have you ever been here before?' Takayanagi asks.

Of course not, she is tempted to say. *Why would I?* This is where the nation's war dead are interred. This is where countless sons and brothers and fathers were told their souls would transmogrify into gods. To her, the shrine is nothing more than a magnet for Fascists and neo-nationalists, some of whom even campaigned to have her great uncle's bones disinterred from his grave in France and brought here.

She says, 'No, I haven't.'

‘I know this shrine right down to its paving stones,’ he says. ‘See how they leave little ruts, these groves. They shoot out from here, under our feet, past that statue down there and seem to draw together as they race towards those gates. Can you believe that?’ A blue flame from a Zippo sparks and the tip of his cigarette glows orange. ‘They go all the way inside, right under the gatehouse, all the way up to the prayer hall itself, to its prayer bell. That’s where they stop.’

He looks from her as if to say, *Get it? All this is supposed to be some kind of divine geometry.* Does he really want her to get wrapped up in such details, to be awed by how everything here is subordinated to that ceaseless drive towards that point in space? To where the living can talk to the dead?

Halfway along the avenue, they pass a statue of Ōmura Masujirō, the medical doctor who founded the Imperial Army, but keep going until she is able to make out the golden chrysanthemums marking the centre of the gatehouse’s three great doors. Like tigers’ eyes, they burn in the dark.

‘Kasumi, The purification font is just over here,’ the gallerist says. ‘It is best we wash our hands.’

Are they to go inside? She looks to Hiroki, but even he looks unsure.

She follows the two men under the fountain’s low roof, into the sound of running water. Kiichi hands her a wooden ladle and, then, taking one himself, he fills it up from a running faucet. He does not use the fountain’s flooded basin. After spooning water over his free hand, he does the same for the other. He rinses out his mouth. She follows suit. The water is cool, but not cold.

While they are doing this, Kiichi apologises to Hiroki. He thanks him for all his efforts in arranging this meeting, but he is afraid that only he and Kasumi can go any further. ‘This is a delicate business,’ he says. ‘The abbot is quite insistent.’

Hiroki says, 'Of course,' and backs off to smoke a cigarette.

Eventually, a priest in white kimono appears from the darkness. The man's legs and waist are covered with a black *hakama* and the skirt produces a strange, floating effect, as if he has no legs. His head is bare – there is no lacquer hat tonight. This is not to be a formal greeting. As Takayanagi and the priest exchange stiff greetings (he ignores her and Hiroki), she expects one of the great doors beside them to creak open. Nothing of the sort happens. Instead, she and Takayanagi are led to a much smaller portal hidden in the bushes around the corner. Who'd have thought it: a service entrance for the gods.

The night is much darker inside. Black-trunked cherry trees, their limbs jagged and thick, hover close overhead. The winking lights of a vending machine make the darkness move.

While Kiichi and the priest keep talking in hushed tones, she lets her eyes adjust to the gloom. She is standing on the edge of a courtyard. Around her are low, wooden buildings, though at a distance, a hall built of white stone rises up above the trees. Its design is similar to that of Kuroda Hall, near the campus in Ueno, all Europeanised pomp and Imperialistic angles. It is towards this larger building that the eventually priest turns. The sudden movement of his white kimono startles her.

Takayanagi protests, his voice still low and, before the priest can challenge him, he walks off in the opposite direction, gravel crunching beneath his feet.

They come around the back of the gatehouse, behind a second, smaller *torii*, and re-join the main avenue's path. Immediately in front of them is the entrance to a second courtyard, and, inside it, the shrine's prayer hall. There are no trees inside and, the gravel on both sides of the path is brighter because of it. A pair of great, white curtains half-cover the open side of the prayer hall. Aglow in the half-darkness, their fabric throws into stark relief the black chrysanthemums printed upon them.

Takayanagi's pace does not falter. He approaches the hall, mounts its steps. Before the prayer bell, he takes out his wallet and throws some money through the wooden grate of the alms box. No coins rattle. It must have been a note.

The bell's toll is unbearably loud and lingers, as if seeping into all the surfaces around them. Wood. Gravel. Her skin. Kiichi brings his hands together in prayer. The clap that follows strikes her as indulgent. Only Hiroki, she thinks, waiting outside, will know it is them and not some hungry ghost disturbing the quiet of the grounds.

Kiichi tosses another note into the box and suggests that she also pay her respects.

She does not hesitate.

*

The white stone building in the shrine's inner complex is the infamous Yushukan, the shrine's museum, built initially to house the Empire's spoils of war and, after that, to monumentalise that same, long dead military power. Takayanagi explains all this in whispers as the priest leads them through a grand entrance and foyer, where security lights throw into relief several pieces of field artillery (renovations are to start soon, he adds, an entire glass foyer that will house a Zero fighter aircraft, the engine that traversed the Thai-Burma railway, and a gift shop) and, then, into the museum proper, with its cases of military relics –uniforms, maps, swords, pistols, rifles, tanks, suicide submarines, a dive bomber, photographs, poems. There are diagrams installed on partitions, maps tracking the 'greedy reach of European powers,' those who would have 'subjugated the country if Japan had not modernised so efficiently.'

On the third floor, hidden away from the public galleries, lost down an access corridor smelling of incense and floor polish, the priest opens a door to a long room. Takayanagi

thanks the man for his help and asks that he leave the two of them alone. She cannot imagine what kind of authority the gallerist has here, but his instructions are followed.

The room inside is almost as dimly lit as the grounds outside, but she can make out the metre or so of wooden tiling before a step and a raised area of *tatami*. It looks much like her workroom back at the university, only, the walls and ceiling are panelled in wood so dark it looks black. For all she knows, it could be ebony. There are no windows and she figures they must be up in the roof. The place looks forgotten, locked up. Storage made out of a room that once held some kind of importance. Spread out and leaning against the walls are picture frames. They are so tall they almost touch the ceiling and are held in place (safe against tremors, she guesses) by wooden rails nailed directly into the matting. White sheets hide their images. Sheets perforated by the same black chrysanthemums as the curtains before the prayer hall.

8.

‘Well now, Kasumi,’ Kiichi says, securing the door behind them, ‘you must be wondering what on earth is going on. But, before I let you in on a little secret, let us first take a seat.’

He slips off his shoes and steps onto the *tatami*. ‘Come on, come on,’ he says, ‘come up here, there is something I want to show you.’

She follows him and, together, they walk past eight of the silk-clad frames, four each side, to where a ninth rests against the far wall. The gallerist gestures and she kneels down in *seiza*, folding her kimono into the arches of her knees, just like she has seen done in the movies. Kiichi sits opposite her, but instead of removing his jacket, or sitting cross-legged (he’s been so at ease all evening), he sits in *seiza*, too, his back straight.

‘Look at you,’ he says, ‘you could be the subject of a *bijinga* yourself. A kimono really does suit you...’ It is a gesture to lighten the mood, no doubt, but his eyes are on her, not cold, but serious. ‘I know it must feel like you have been brought here under false pretences – we will go out to dinner, I assure you – but, first, I want to discuss something with you. A delicate matter. So, if you wouldn’t mind, I ask that you just listen for a moment. That you hear me out. How can I put this? A certain amount of luck abounds in the art world. Certain figures come together because it is the will of a notable institute, or because they share a common acquaintance who makes the connection and insist they meet.

‘Sometimes, however, our attraction to a particular person is more intuitive. As such, we become open to the more unusual curatorial opportunities that can arise, and can do so quite by chance. You see, Kasumi, as the director and patron of a gallery, I also see myself as a curator. I am sure that in your undergraduate studies, you covered the business of art and not just the methodologies surrounding your paintings. As such, I am sure you are aware that, as a curator, I have a number of responsibilities. These include, the preservation of old works,

the selection and promotion of the new, contributing to debates on art history, and, of course, exhibit making. Now, when it comes to the latter, I also believe a curator should not shy away from taking on the role of mentor. Dialogue, Kasumi, that is what I am talking about. Artists coming together, even artists across time. It is my responsibility to sound out new talent, to challenge it. That's how the best exhibitions happen. That's how artists grow.

‘Naturally, one of the questions I like to put to new artists that I meet is a simple one. I ask what unrealised projects they have pent up inside them. I want to ask you that same question. What is it that you want to do? What dialogues can I help facilitate?’

Here, he stops and it takes her a moment to realise that these last questions are not rhetorical but directed at her.

‘Unrealised projects?’ she says. ‘Mr Takayanagi, other than some pieces I displayed at my graduation salon, I haven't exhibited much at all. Just little things. Coffees shops, a book cover.’

‘But what do you wish to achieve?’

‘A show of my own, just like everyone else.’

‘A show of your own: independence. That isn't much of a concept, is it? You have talent. That I have seen. Don't look so surprised. Of course, I asked some of your instructors after your gentleman friend informed me that there was a Kozu in Tokyo. That she was an artist. But I think you're afraid of something.’ Before she can answer, he motions her to be quiet. ‘I think I know what you fear most of all. Your name.’

‘My name?’

‘Yes. You have quite a lineage dragging at your heels. That can be quite the burden. But it could also be your greatest conceptual asset.’

‘I don't know, Mr Takayanagi.’

‘Tell me, Kasumi: can you keep a secret?’

‘Depends on the secret.’

‘Of course, of course. But, given what I am about to show you, I do need assurances. Your silence must be absolute. Nobody can know about the proposition I have for you until the right time. That is why I asked Hiroki to wait for us outside.’

There is no menace in his voice, just simple conviction and so she agrees.

‘Good,’ he says. ‘Now, tell me this, how many of your great uncle’s paintings have you actually seen? And by *seen*, I mean in the flesh, and not in some textbook, or newspaper archive.’

‘None.’

‘And why is that?’

‘Because his early works are all held by the French government and most of what he painted after returning to Japan was destroyed in the war.’

‘Is that so?’

She blushes. ‘The Americans did confiscate some, too.’

‘Many paintings, in fact, by many artists, not only your great uncle’s. But they were especially interested in his war work. They thought Yuichiro Kozu particularly subversive. Good. I am speaking to the right person. I had a feeling that you would have read up on such things.’

‘He was a celebrity.’

‘Yes he was, once. Now, look.’

The silk sheet before them makes a whizzing sound as he pulls it clear from the frame. It slumps into a tumble of its own weighty material. Despite its size, the details of the painting underneath are hard to make out. The room’s light is poor, the paint dark. She shuffles in closer. Before her is a mess of shapes. Some are human. Some are the scrambled forms of broken equipment. Trees, like black pillars, cut the verticals.

‘Tough to see what’s what, isn’t it?’ says Takayanagi. ‘He did like to tangle up his earth colours. All that mud. All those bodies. It’s all rather suffocating.’

‘This is an original?’

‘That’s right. Look at the bodies, how they’re all twisted up into one another, their uniform merging. But if you get in close enough, look, you can see that those with the weapons –like him with the pistol yelling, him using his rifle as a club, anyone with a blade– they are the Japanese troops. If I were permitted, I would turn up the lights. Then, you could make out the others. You can only tell they’re Caucasian by the features of their faces. That, and the way they seem to be drowning.’

‘And all these other paintings...?’

He nods. ‘Why don’t you take a closer look?’

‘You mean?’

The first sheet she pulls away reveals a sky so bright and blue it holes the darkness. The composition is clearer in this piece, a pilot bowing to a prop-driven fighter.

‘Ah, this is *Late Blossoms*. The Americans were particularly interested in finding this one after the war.’

‘When they were deciding whether or not to arrest him, to try him as a war criminal?’

‘Exactly.’

Takayanagi stands up and she follows him, walking from frame to frame, pulling at the silk and letting it slide away from every frame onto the *tatami* with a hiss.

He explains how the Americans wanted to cleanse the country of malicious influence. That’s what they said. From every painting of the Emperor in a military or religious context, to the most banal, the parades and the like. They wanted them gone, the ideologies they embodied dissolved. The Americans even wanted to hold an exhibition of their so-called war loot in the States. MacCarthur refused.

‘I’ll tell you this, Kasumi, when I come here, my world spins. These paintings, the knowledge of their very existence, could cause such a fuss. And not just here in Japan, no. Could you imagine the Chinese response to such a collection? Knowing that it has survived? That it was protected, hidden away? It doesn’t matter that the war finished fifty years ago. Whether in these paintings or in people’s hearts, the dive bombers are still angling down into their attacks, the last stands are still to be annihilated. The wounded are in pain. They are not yet dead. You can mark down dates, plot them out on a timeline, but, in the end, what does any of that matter?’

For a while he just stands there.

Then, with a mirthless laugh, ‘All those efforts to sniff out Koze’s paintings,’ he says, ‘and they never got what made him so popular. Why my father hid his works away in places like this. And, to think, this is only a fraction of the collection. The rest are hidden out in the mountains, over in Nagano – the western ranges. Every year the pieces held in this room are rotated for the September Rites. Then they go back again. And all along no one else knows of their existence.’

‘The September Rites?’

‘Do you know what a *shintai* is?’

The question is filled with such expectation that she is ashamed to admit her ignorance.

‘A *shintai* is a divine body. People thought your great uncle was some kind of, I don’t what to call it, but he created *shintai*.’

‘God-paintings? What does that mean? That they were possessed?’

‘Yes and no. The painting isn’t the *kami* itself. It is not a god. But a *shintai* is an object inhabited by *kami*. A kind of abode. You get them here in shrines. They are usually mirrors, or a sword, a statue. They can be a hunk of rock. No one ever knows for sure

because no one is allowed to see them. Not even the abbot. They're usually wrapped up, hidden away, articles of faith, a mysterious, living presence and not some idol on display. People came to see Kozu's paintings in the same light. Could you say they were *possessed*? The word doesn't ring right, but, let's put it this way: the spirits of those killed in combat were said to return to Japan, right? *See you at Yasukuni* and all that. Some officers commissioned your great uncle to depict the heroic acts of their men, those that died. Some would say their desperate acts. Such spirits needed to be recognised, they thought. Respected. If angered, or forgotten, they could wreak havoc upon the living. So Kozu's paintings were to function as placatory offerings. Like talismans. And Kozu did like to promote such an image of himself. Have you read any of his articles, what he put out in the press?

'A couple of pieces.' She wishes now that she had read more.

'Well, there were quite a few. He loved the press and for a time, the press loved him, once they thought he had shaken off his European excesses. When he painted his biggest war work, *Broken Jewels of Attu*, that one at the head of the room, he wrote about how, in the middle of the night, as he feverishly worked himself into a stupor, he saw the dead. They flooded his studio, guided his hand. And people believed him. When his works were exhibited, the experience was so visceral that people swore they saw the figures move before their very eyes. They got down on their knees and prayed. They reached out to their loved ones through your great uncle's paintings. An alms box was even set before *Jewels of Attu*.'

'And, moreover, he is here, you know. Your great uncle. Kozu himself.'

'Are you saying that you feel his presence, too?'

'No, I don't and I don't mean metaphorically, either, what with his paintings here. What I mean is that he is interred here, in this shrine.'

'That's impossible.' She says this without thinking and hears the strain in her voice.

'He's buried in France. He even converted to Catholicism before he died.'

‘That may be so. But certain powers thought his soul would rest more peacefully here. And before he ever went to China to paint the war for the first time, he clipped his nails and provided some of his hair. Just in case he was killed. After his death in Nice, these relics were interred here, at Yasukuni.’

‘So, he’s supposed to be what now, some kind of protective deity? A defender of Japan?’

She looks around and feels cold. Here she is, surrounded by works she has read so little about. Uncle Kozu’s Paris years held all the glamour for her. She doesn’t have clue what *Attu* means.

‘That is what my father believes at least,’ says Kiichi.

‘And you?’

9.

Kiichi treats her and Hiroki to a meal at Hisakawa's in Minato Ward. Despite waiting for them at the entrance to the shrine's inner complex (and running out of cigarettes, or so he jokes), Hiroki is back on form and playing up to the intimacy of the restaurant (it holds only four tables). Admiring the place's aesthetic, he says at one point, how it reminds him of the setting for a tea ceremony. 'I wonder if they have any *genmai sake* here?' He nudges her leg with his knee.

She suspects that Kiichi made the reservations in advance. There is an extra setting laid out, too. After a couple of drinks, she asks Kiichi whether his father will be joining them after all.

'Sadly not,' he replies. 'Don't be fooled by how hardy he appears. He is not well. That is why I have taken over as chair of the Shin Midori.'

She apologises for touching upon so private a matter, but the gallerist waves away her embarrassment.

'There is no need to be glum,' he says. 'Old age comes to us all – if we are lucky. And we are here tonight to celebrate, are we not?'

A fresh bottle of *sake* arrives and, as the group's only woman, it is her duty to refill the men's cups.

Part III

SEICHIRO

Seichiro admires Dr. Uezono's watery, tired eyes.

While the senior surgeon sketches a diagram of the pancreas on the chalkboard, he pays little heed to anatomical verisimilitude. His simplification of a pancreatic duct, running through the organ's lumpy, surrounding matter, reminds Seichiro of a vine plumped with grapes, but it does not matter. Seichiro can follow the surgeon's lecture. He is good at anatomy. Oguma has made sure of that. And now the speed of his fingers is to be tested, the hours he has spent suturing pigs' legs back together, mending their kidneys. His unit chief, Dr Yoshikawa himself, has put his name forward, and here he stands, before a theatre full of MDs and military officers, each awaiting the operation to come.

The senior surgeon runs through all the complications that can arise from a laceration to the pancreas, moving on to the procedures required to attend a full rupture, never pausing, not even when the prisoner is brought in. His voice remains as tired as his eyes.

When Dr Uezono bows, Oguma unholsters his pistol.

The shot makes a remarkably neat hole in the man's abdomen, but, the pistol being so close, punches out a ragged exit wound.

'Right, gentlemen,' says Uezono, 'first, the pancreas.'

1.

The August heat wakes Seichiro, the dust rising from the hot pipes of Pingfang. He opens his eyes and can smell the ghost. Her scent is like an unclean woman. Ever since Kasumi has come up from Tokyo, near on a month ago, now, the ghost that was absent has become a visceral part of his life.

Is she here? he thinks. *Is she watching?*

Around his bed, gloom, an incomplete darkness. There is *tatami*, two fusuma doors, and where they meet, a slither of light. Chiaki's futon is a couple of metres away, on the other side of the paper doors, his granddaughter just upstairs.

'Piss off!' he says. She knows what he means. After all these years, he has enough Chinese and the ghost enough Japanese for them to understand each other.

Reaching above his head, palms open, he slaps the air, his movements piston-sharp now that his blood is up. Nothing. He pushes out with his feet, too, only he cannot move them. His legs are tied. He sits up, straining at his bonds, waiting for the brush of her hair on his cheek, the weight of her fingers on his shoulders.

Slowly, the room gives up its shapes, its wall of cupboards, one of its doors open, like a gapped tooth. He is alone. His legs are wrapped up in nothing more than his damp bed sheets.

He tells himself to relax, to breathe. The ghost is not worth a stroke. Chiaki would be most put out by that. *Obon* has arrived, after all, not yet the three days that many people take as a holiday, but the week culminating in the seventh full moon of the year is half spent. The dead are everywhere.

The smell lingers.

His muscles are tender and threaten to cramp. He will bathe and brush his teeth.

The ghost never stays beyond Obon. Three more days, he tells himself, working his way loose from the sheets and getting to his feet. Three more days and things will settle.

He pulls open the *fusuma* doors and is hit by more light and heat. Like the green of young rice stalks, the parlour's *tatami* is iridescent. The floor is clear of Chiaki and her bedding. The television is off. Through the open veranda doors, the mossy stones of the back garden look set in amber. He considers this, how they should be deep in the shadow of the surgery wing. He has overslept. Onto the warm mats he pads; it must be almost noon. No matter what else the day brings, Chiaki will not let him forget something as innocuous as a lie in.

There is some relief. In the *tokonoma*, the parlour's display alcove, the most prized space in the house, stands a single black calla lily, its bloom held aloft by the high neck of a thin, gold lacquered vase. So, it is not the ghost whose scent has unsettled him, but this flower. Though many of its kind are engineered to give off little scent these days, this lily seems to take pride in its raw power. Its colour and shape are just as bold, glossy and sleek, as if carved from ebony.

Accompanying the arrangement is an ink painting. Kasumi must be feeling playful. Rather than a bloom outlined against the white background of the square *kakejiku*, she has inked in the surrounding board instead, leaving behind the spindly feelers of a white spider lily, the flower's head seeming to lean out from the paper surface of the mounting board. The ink is so black, so lustrous, it has the petroleum sheen of his granddaughter's hair. Kneeling down before the alcove, he pushes aside any thoughts of the flower's fragrance. He concentrates on the arrangement. The *yin-yang* symbolism is a little heavy-handed for his taste, but it is a gift. The hanging of the small cardboard squares on the *tokonoma's* cotton scroll-mount is a routine of hers, one which started with a sketch of a dried camellia head she

found on his desk. She says it is a way of steadying her nerves, of getting her eye in, before she loses herself for hours in her enormous tableaux.

Somewhere inside him, there is a poem he could pen for her in response, a haiku or tanka with a suitable lily reference, or better yet, a link not so direct. The most tasteful connections, after all, are loose in their associations. They are referred to as scent, an unsettling irony, in this case. For the bowl of the calla lily does resemble the fleshy curves of a woman's vulva.

*

Chiaki is on her knees, scrubbing the bathroom's plastic flooring.

'So, you've decided to get up,' she says, as he opens the linen cupboard outside the unit's door, in search of a fresh towel and finding none. 'I've finished cleaning upstairs.'

With the coming of *Obon*, it is customary to make the house presentable to the family's returning ancestral spirits. He has always wondered whether his father or mother, or even Uncle Koju himself, have ever stopped by, here, to this the Fukui house. Or is it that they go to the family homestead in Hakodate? That is where they spent their lives after all. It is where the family's altar is.

Watching Chiaki from the doorway, he says that he didn't hear the vacuum cleaner. 'I didn't even hear you and Kasumi take breakfast.'

'We ate in the kitchen. I used a damp cloth on the *tatami* upstairs. You wouldn't believe the dust up there. To sleep amongst all that: it's a miracle Kasumi hasn't taken ill.'

'Thank you, doctor.'

'And you've not lifted a finger to help clean this house. Or have you forgotten: we leave tomorrow?'

He does not answer. She is always like this when they travel down to Hakodate to tend the Kozu family grave and this year. He is looking forward to the trip more than he has in years, he will not let her sour moods distract from his time with Kasumi.

‘All that way,’ Chiaki goes on, ‘and for what? To clean another house, and all by myself, knowing you.’

‘If you had woken me,’ he says, ‘I would have helped –’

‘Is it my responsibility to wake you up, now? Lazy man. Who do think you are? The Shogun? Many women my age are divorcing their husbands, I’ll have you know. It said so on the news. They’re tired of their husbands taking them for granted.’

‘Where is Miss Himura?’ He pays the woman well enough and now that *Obon* is here, the help is no where to be seen.

‘She’s not free until after lunch. She has family, too, you know.’

‘So wait for her to come,’ he says, thinking that there’ll be nothing left for Miss Himura to do otherwise. He holds his tongue. Baiting Chiaki will achieve nothing. She hates cleaning at the best of times, and come the August rites, when the two of them travel down to Hakodate and take care of the house his grandfather built, the official Kozu homestead according to the government’s Family Register, her recalcitrance turns nasty. He cannot blame her. Every year they make the three hour journey to the southern tip of the island, where will tend the graves of his kin, and never to Omu on Honshu, where her own family graves moulder.

He asks how long she is going to be.

‘No – no you’re not. I just cleaned the bath.’

‘I would prefer to bathe before eating.’

‘What, lunch? I’ve already tidied up.’

He turns back into the corridor. He will not demean himself by preparing something to eat just for himself.

From the bathroom comes Chiaki's parting shot. 'Go get your hair cut,' she calls. 'You hear me? And a shave. I'm not going out in public with you looking such a mess.'

'Then you should let me bathe!' he says, quickly dressing, so he can escape her mood and be out of the house.

2.

On the way to the barbershop, Seichiro observes which houses have their *Obon* lanterns out and which do not. There are so very, very few, barely any, and getting fewer by the year. He does spot one lantern upon a gate post, another beside a porch entrance. They are guiding lights set out to welcome home the families' ancestors. In Hakodate, where he was born, a few families take lanterns down to the waterfront when drawing the spirits to them. On the southern islands, this is nothing unusual for communities living by the sea, just as those living inland may do the same at ancient graveyards and mountains. There have been plans for a shrine up on the northern flanks of the mountain by his field for years, but nothing has come of them. Oguma, who owns the land, has always refused to cooperate.

Sapporo, like Hokkaido itself, is too new for any such marches. It is the frontier, the new land, though he doubts there are any cynics in the valley. The lost do feel close at this time of year, if only in people's hearts. *Obon* is a practical time of year in that way.

The old-timers who have left the lantern by their porch, have also left their front door open – an additional sign of welcome. Seichiro can well imagine how, beyond the *genkan*, there will be all the incense and ardent prayers demanded by funerary custom. There will be a well-stocked altar cabinet, extended maybe by a little table put out especially for the visiting ghosts. If the occasion arose, these are the folks who would welcome in a neighbour long dead. For neighbours are close in places like this, in the valley –old, old neighbours, that is– the likes of him and Oguma. But how many of them, young or old, have actually communed with the dead? How many have felt, quite sensibly, their cold bodies, their hands? How many have laid with them, like people used to do with ghosts in old folktales?

He looks across the valley, to a smudge of mist clinging to the cooler air atop Mt. Teine. A shiver passes through him, but his legs are moving and his heart is still beating, so he follows the path his thoughts have taken. Old Shinto beliefs proclaim mountains the realm

of the dead. No wonder poets like to gaze upon them. Even when Bashō could not see Mt Fuji, he knew it was there. He felt its presence and what others had written, and painted, and so wrote his poems. This is what artists must understand so well. They feel at the pregnant absences. Seichiro pictures a stream of souls congealing after the war, like that lone cloud above the valley, how it must have grown in mass around the country's peaks. This year has seen its share of disasters, too. The dead can only grow in number. In January, the earth shook Kobe to the ground; in March cultists poured their zealotry into plastic bags filled with nerve agent on the Tokyo subway. And then there are all the banal endings of peacetime, lives spluttering out, their drama little more than local colour, the way he too will, eventually, move on.

Suzuki's place is on the edge of 3rd Street, opposite the Fukui branch of the National Post Office. It is little more than an extension to the ground floor of a modern house, its entrance marked by the white and red stripes of a barber's pole. The sign can swirl around, he expects, but is still. He likes that about Suzuki. There is, however, a fake terracotta flower container underneath it, one filled with shop-bought carnations weaned, no doubt, on coloured dyes. Seichiro hopes this is the work of the man's wife.

Suzuki is inside, puffing cigarette smoke into the mouth of an extractor fan and listening to the news on a handheld radio. The announcer is explaining how US spy planes have located a mass grave outside Srebrenica, Bosnia.

A man of fifty or so, with well-groomed, grey hair, Suzuki answers Seichiro's request for a wash, trim and shave, with nothing more than, 'Certainly.'

Leaving his cigarette to smoke, he gets straight to work, massaging Seichiro's shoulders, neck, then scalp. Seichiro is amazed at the strength in the other man's hands. His build is so slight. But when Seichiro thinks about it, he has seen men much thinner than the barber fight for their lives with great vigour. Some large men gave up even before the straps

on the operating table were tightened. A select few, though they had the capacity to strain against their bonds, were stoic. How awe inspiring such strength of spirit was. Instead of flailing fists and feet, they used only their eyes and silence to convey their rebellion. Their hate. Where did such a fierce spirit emanate from? Certainly, it could not be measured, not in the weight of a heart, or the diameter of a liver.

Suzuki inclines the back of the chair so far that Seichiro's back presses into the faux leather. After checking the temperature, the barber fingers a warm stream of water through his hair, lulling Seichiro further into his meditation, one into which the radio's voices filter. The announcer moves on, stating how a former Imperial soldier, a die-hard who hid out in the Philippine mountains after the surrender, has committed ritual suicide. There is speculation about his motives. Some believe he did so as to protest Prime Minister Murayama's plans to make a formal apology for Japanese aggression during the war. *The magic of words*. Seichiro wonders if, after the act, the spirit of the old soldier has flown off to Yasukuni Shrine, or whether it is free to wonder where it pleases, as the ghost seems to be. If free, where would such a man go? Back to the tropical mountains of his youth, if only to say goodbye to them? Will he, too, come back to his family home in Japan for the holiday?

Suzuki wraps a hot towel over his face and he starts. The gauze impresses itself on his cheeks. When the towel is removed, he looks into Suzuki's wet eyes – not those of the ghost.

The same blank look remains on the barber's face as he takes a straight razor from its bath of sanitizer. His hands act as if under their own volition, separated from the head that listens to the radio, that smokes, a man thoroughly entrenched in the routines of his labour. Self-assured, the barber doesn't seem to be concentrating much at all when, after pinching a flap of skin under Seichiro's neck, he proceeds to draw the blade upwards, against the grain. There is no other rasp like it in the world. Seichiro knows his own hands are just as steady –

how, when properly angled, a strong steel edge makes no sound at all when meeting something as yielding as skin.

3.

Under the blue sky, the mountain looks further away than it is.

Coming back across the scuffed blacktop of Tokkyu's parking lot, he decides to look in on Kasumi. He will say the sprinklers needed turning on. It is not really a lie, after all. It is hot.

The pointed roof of Kasumi's shed sticks out above his bean tunnels. It is a hut fit for a sage, like the one Bashō's followers built for him, only this one, he hopes, will last. The poet's pen-name, after all, meant *banana tree*: all sturdy stalk and fragile fronds. Situated at the bottom of the field, its entrance gives out onto the log steps he cut down to the flood-plain of the river. He has three such structures, each more dilapidated than the next, the way things go in the valley. After the first roof sagged, during a particularly heavy winter, he built another, bigger this time, stronger, and so forth. Nowadays, the oldest shack is little more than a dark place to store his harvested potatoes and carrots. Then, there is his tool shed, and, finally, the largest of the three, his last great indulgence before Chiaki's renovation of the house. This he built to store his cultivator in, a prized possession whose beauty is second only to his antique haiku collections. Since Kasumi's arrival, it has resided in Oguma's garage. The buzz that went through the valley when he bought this machine was something special. He gained a handful of new patients overnight, some from as far away as Miyonasawa. Old farmers love to talk machinery. Bright and functional, with a deep sink and bare electric light bulbs on an adjustable cord, Kasumi has holed herself away in this shed for days since her arrival last month.

Much to his disappointment, she has proven intensely private, just like her mother was at her same age. She is working things out in her head, she says, through her sketches. She's not ready to let anyone else see her project. Not yet.

This bold declaration came two days after her arrival. Chiaki had laid out a pile of brochures on the low table and pestered Kasumi to choose a hot spring hotel for them to stay at as a treat, seeing that she had not been up for so long.

‘I’m sorry Grandma, but I’ve actually come up to work,’ Kasumi said. ‘And, with your permission, of course Grandpa, do you mind helping me set up in one of the sheds. I have a deadline looming, a real gallery show. A good gallery, too. I just need to get my head down for a while.’

What resolution was in her face! Long gone was the child they used to look after on summer vacations. In her stead was a young woman with her mother’s determination and Chiaki’s directness. How splendid, he thought.

‘You can stay for as long as you like,’ Chiaki replied on his behalf. ‘You can use the entire upper floor of the house if you want.’

A list of reasons followed for why she would prefer to work in one of the sheds, including how she made her own paint, that the pigments spread like dust, that the smell of animal hide glue was noxious and the fumes left a sticky residue on things. She did not want to cause any trouble, she said.

He, for one, did not protest. He understood her desire to be alone, to want to paint through the mornings and evenings in peace, away from her grandmother’s fussing, waiting out the July heat in a backwater like the valley. He would help her set up a little studio, knowing that, soon, the northern summer would peak, right around *Obon* time. Tokyo would continue to swelter into late September. Up here, cooler nights were on their way, followed by cooler days. For him that meant the promise of sleep – deep sleep, the kind where you remember nothing of the night but the shadow of a bottomless abyss.

After *Obon*, the ghost would go off to wherever the restless wander outside of the month of lanterns. For everyone else, there was the pleasure of cool, dry bed linen, and,

before they knew it, the fall. Mid-September would sweep upon them before they knew it and he decided there and then to take Kasumi and Chiaki up to Asahikawa, up to where the maples and gingkoes of the island's interior make the mountains burn. He hoped Kasumi would stay until then. Surely, by this stage in her training, she had moved beyond the lecture hall and was done with demonstrations. Hadn't she come to Sapporo to work on her own? Why go back down south, to that southern heat and humidity, to the noise and grime, when the days are pleasant here, the air warm and enriched by his crops' fleshy vigour made mineral? Of course an artist would want to paint here, he thought, in Hokkaido, in Fukui. In a valley like this, an artist can think. In winter, there is little else to do but to think harder.

He enters his field by the camellia bush, smiling at life's ironies, how his granddaughter has left Tokyo to work here on her PhD, while he did just the opposite, completing his training in the capital before marrying and returning north. He carries on straight through to the middle shed first, leaning inside the door to get at the main spigot. The hose swells to life, sprinklers hiss, some close, some far away. The smell of hot earth rises.

He knows the ghost is behind him without having to look around. She is in the bean tunnel closest to him, just back from the mouth. He does not turn around. She is very pretty, the ghost, and she knows it. More than that, she knows him, what attracts and pulls him, pushes and twists, like an electrical pulse passing through a tendon. Her very presence makes him want to run to skulk back to his surgery and his father's calligraphy box. A milligram or two of rohypnol, enough of his cocktail to see him into the evening, and he can ignore her without any worries. But he has not wet his afternoons with that light, yellowed feeling for a month. He could not do that to Kasumi. He doesn't want to miss *any* of her. And with her here he feels strong enough to give up the rohypnol, feels a stronger man.

He whispers, 'What is it?'

‘You’re ignoring me,’ she says, her voice growing as she comes forward. He regrets talking to her at all. For her accent catches him off guard. It is so beautifully light, a tenor that cannot be anything else but sad.

‘Of course. You are dead.’

‘You used to think me beautiful.’

‘You are full of fairy tales and that is all.’

‘I am lonely.’

A crow caws and he looks around before he can stop himself. There is the tangle of his vines, their collective shadow. She is gone. He paces the length of the tunnel to be sure. At the far end, a jet of water from a sprinkler whips his thighs.

He does not knock. When he pulls open the shed’s door to, he cannot see much inside. It is so dim and the sun outside so bright. Kasumi has the shed’s bulb collared by a sheet of cardboard and has this make-shift light-shade pulled low down over a platform she has made from piling up old *tatami* mats. She is working on a long rectangle of silk, so long it stretches over the sides of her little plateau. He talks before she can, keeping his voice cheery, asking if he can bring her anything down from the house, a juice, or a coffee – how about a cold beer?

‘It’ll be getting hot soon,’ he says. ‘Your grandmother is worried.’

‘I’m fine,’ she says.

She is holding a slither of torn *washi* paper over the silk at her knees, pinning it there, and he can tell, she cannot sit up. From the tension in her voice it is clear she does not want him here. But she does turn her face to him. The shadows falling across it are thick as coal dust. A loose hair is caught at the edge of her mouth. She has good teeth. Her fingers are black, too – darker again, with ink. She looks both handsome and angry

He wants to keep talking, to ask about how things are progressing, but she gets in there first. ‘Sure Grandpa,’ she says. ‘A beer – anything. That’ll be great.’

He stares at those black fingers and, then, back at her face. The smile she gives him twists his insides because that is what women do – they smile and smile and reveal nothing of themselves.

‘You know what?’ she says, still leaning on the paper. ‘I’ll come up to the house and have one with you – unless you’ve got any patients booked in?’

‘No, no,’ he says. ‘Nobody booked in today.’

4.

Since her arrival a month ago, Kasumi has painted every morning until lunchtime and again in the evening after dinner. In the afternoons, she has enjoyed all the comforts of Sapporo, sometimes with Chiaki, more often alone, the restaurants and department stores, the art galleries, the air-conditioned cafés where she likes to sketch the faces of strangers (or, according to her grandmother, to talk to a gentleman friend of hers on the phone). When she leaves the city behind, she comes back to her raised platform and spotlight, the plank of wood she balances across the rectangle of cinder blocks that surround her workspace. It is a clever idea of hers, to hang over her silk-pasted boards like this. She says it is a little unorthodox, but it means she can work at scale. For the most part, he and Chiaki have left her to it, as they promised they would.

His eyes adjust to the dimness of the shed. At Kasumi's knees, a tableau is spread out across three, large, vertical silk panels, two of which are on the work table, coloured and complete, while the third is laid out by her knees, on her little *tatami* platform. With this last panel separated from the rest, the painting's subject is clear: the fuselage, wing and a tail (disappearing out of frame) of a Reishiki-sen "Zero" fighter, its form brought forward by a taupe-washed expanse of empty space, common enough in *nihonga* paintings. She has caught the spirit of the aircraft superbly. Its lightness and manoeuvrability, the beauty of their curves. They used to drop in low over the Village, their colours lost to the steppe grasses until they pulled up and burst out from the cover of the distant hills and into the sky.

She gets up and pulls down on her smock, straightening her hair, and slipping into an old pair of ink-spattered pumps.

Meeting him at the door, she says, 'Hey, Grandpa, that beer?'

But he comes forward, past her and into plain view of the painting-in-progress. He gazes at the plane, its dismantled parts, the hard lines of aluminium alloy made dreamlike.

He says, 'My, you have been busy.'

He would like to touch these painted surfaces. They look so smooth, as if the silk is only a membrane and the painted surface is actually underneath it. This is especially so where, on the plane's side, she has coloured in the bright red disk of the *Hinomaru*, the Rising Sun. It is as flat as a pool of blood.

The panel on the floor, however, is far from completion. He studies it while Kasumi rubs her hands down on a rag. He can sense her anger. He was supposed to keep his distance.

The incomplete panel contains little more than a collection of ink lines. There is no wash to give its empty spaces a pearl-like sheen. From these outlines the structure of what is to come is clear enough, the aircraft's propeller and engine-housing. The pilot is missing, covered over by the torn sheet of paper, he guesses, the young man bending at the hips, a deep bow, a gesture of honourable supplication to the machine that, once he mounts the wing and steps into its cockpit, will transmogrify him into a human-bomb, an embodiment of the Divine Wind. *Kamikaze*.

'What's this?' He points to the torn and pasted paper. 'Having trouble?'

'I've changed my mind about something.'

'And now you have to sketch it out afresh?'

Her smile thins. 'It's best I work out the knots before starting again.'

'That bad?'

He would like to stay and talk here, away from Chiaki in the house and the ghost, wherever she is prowling, to tell Kasumi that it's okay. He would like to talk about her paintings, about Uncle Yuichiro, but Kasumi is already talking. 'I see you've had your hair cut,' she says.

‘My hair?’

‘Was he drunk?’

‘Drunk! What – what a thing to say!’

She holds his stare, clearly waiting for him to say something else, expecting it.

When he doesn’t respond, she says, ‘You remember that, don’t you?’

‘Remember what?’

‘It’s in Soseki’s *Kusamakura*. You sent it to me for my birthday.’

He’s lost and waits for her to explain.

‘There’s that chapter in it, you must remember it, when the artist goes to the country barbershop? The barber is from Tokyo and thinks he knows everything. And he’s drunk. It’s quite a funny episode. Like when the barber says he’s fed up with Tokyo because the police like to count people’s farts.’

‘*Kusamakura*, you say?’

‘She puts her hands on her hips, wears a mock frown like one of the women from Chiaki’s TV dramas. ‘I’ve been rereading it. Thought it would help give me some inspiration. Fukui kind of reminds me of the little spa village the artist escapes to in the mountains.’

He has no recollection of sending her any books, especially not Soseki’s odd, but beautiful, little tale. How strange. It is a favourite of his. It would make sense.

‘It’s a good book for an artist,’ he says.

‘You wrote that on the dust jacket.’

He waits for her to say more, but she is already out the door. He loses sight of her when she enters the closest bean tunnel.

5.

Kasumi does not stay at the house for long. After one can of cold beer, she disappears back down to the shed and does not return until after dark.

Seichiro is sitting at his desk in the surgery, whetting the blade of the wooden-handled scalpel. He is thinking about Kasumi's painting. He thought he recognised it and, after a while of thinking hard about the matter, he does indeed recall seeing it back when he was a student in Tokyo and could still enjoy the benefits of the Kozu name. His uncle Yuichiro was a national celebrity and, more than that, the strength of his own research in Manchuria kept him safe from the sharp tongues of his seniors and the suspicions of the nationalists. He no longer had to rely on his father's friends, not when he was just establishing himself as a capable researcher.

It was April, the last year of the war, and he had been invited to attend a joint art exhibition held by Army and Navy. That the exhibition was on at all was a mark of something special. The air raids that had begun in March were burning whole cities to the ground. That and the antagonism that existed between the armed forces often precluded such joint ventures. SCAP must have also thought the exhibition worthy of note, because, come September and the surrender, his uncle awaited the American MPs to come and take him to Sugamo Prison, where he was convinced his neck would snap at the end of a prison rope, until the Occupation authorities decided to prosecute no war artists for their hand in leading the nation to the brink of its destruction.

And there it was again, under Kasumi's blocks of pastel colours and the heavy black outlines she had carved in ink. It is a shame that Kasumi was so agitated by his arrival. Although she kept her cool, there was a certain resemblance to Chiaki in her forced mannerisms, a coldness that has wounded him. He would enjoy engaging her in a

conversation about Uncle Yuichiro very much. It could help bring them back together after all these years.

The surgery's screen door is pulled over, so that the cars in the Tokkyu parking lot and highway are fuzzed up by its insect mesh. Several times, he has thought the ghost was on the veranda outside, watching, waiting to mock him, like the ghost of the old embittered lover in the *Tale of Genji* – the old hag who haunts the nobleman's house and waits for Genji's wife to take ill. With every false alarm, he has touched the handle to his desk's right-hand drawer, yearning to feel beneath his fingers the calligraphy box's mother-of-pearl chrysanthemum. He has remained strong.

The door through to the house is also open and he welcomes his granddaughter's voice, how it breezes down the corridor from the parlour as if from another world. She is talking to Chiaki about laundry and tomorrow's early start, about how she isn't hungry. She apologises for missing dinner.

He leans back in his chair and listens to both Kasumi's voice and, then to the crickets outside. For the old poets, the song of night insects such as these meant autumn. And in spite of its beauty, the vibrancy of its colours, especially in Hokkaido, they believe autumn to be the season of melancholy.

He should have said something to soothe Kasumi, he tells himself. He should have let her know he was not angry. Why should entire lives be bleached into nothingness because of the folly of a few years?

He wants to see her painting again.

*

It is gone ten o'clock by the time he walks through to the parlour. Chiaki has her bedding out and is perched atop her duvet watching TV. She tells him that Kasumi is in the bath. He sits on the room's small sofa. It is neat and modern, and very uncomfortable. He can see why Chiaki rarely uses it.

Chiaki is watching some kind of variety show. Comedians, stars from TV dramas, some young fashion models: they are all sat cross-legged around a low table in what looks like an *izakaya*. A large bowl filled with candles is given pride of place. The lighting is low, but strong enough to show off their beautiful faces.

'Really Chiaki,' he says, 'a *kaidan-kai*?'

It is the last thing he wants to watch.

'Kasumi said she wanted to watch it.'

'There is baseball on.'

The host comedian makes a great fuss over pinching out one of the candles. The guests applaud. His heart sinks. The idea of such a gathering is an old one. After an age of war, the shogunate unified the nation and peace took the edge off ghost stories. Over time, they became as much a part of the summer's entertainments as the season's fireworks. People still love this old tradition, one that has been around since Edo times. The chill of fear is supposed to be a salve against the summer heat. But rather than meeting up in person, they watch the spectacle on TV. With one candle extinguished, another story must follow, then another, the room darkening and darkening, the stories growing ever more grotesque, until, on the completion of the last story, what should really be the one hundredth tale, the room collapses into darkness. It is at this moment that something truly *strange* is supposed to happen.

Much to the guests' delight, a chef arrives on screen, bringing with him a plate of sautéed Kobe steak. The producers want to create a little contrast, Seichiro thinks, a little variety to mitigate the otherwise dark contents of the show. How distasteful.

He mentions the baseball again, but already the next guest is off, offering up her story to the others.

He asks Chiaki if she would like a drink.

In the kitchen, he warms a saucepan of water on a gas ring. From the cupboard, he takes out the good *sake* and a small ceramic flask. Pouring himself a good measure of the alcohol, he places the flask in the warming water, a ritual he usually reserves for cold winter nights.

When he comes back into the parlour, Kasumi is there, dressed in her pyjamas, towelling her hair. When Chiaki watches such rubbish, he would usually retire to the surgery, but tonight, he sits back down on the sofa and drinks. Kasumi is rubbing moisturising lotion into her arms and legs, using the front of the sofa as a backrest. She looks like a painting herself, what with her tangled hair.

On the TV, it is a model's turn to tell a story. The camera zooms in to a photograph held in her hand. It is of a middle-aged couple in their hiking gear, some mountain trail. A dead face peers out from behind some tree roots, or rather, the image of what the living assume a dead face to look like. The show's guests jump. Chiaki calls them fools.

'You need to blow-dry your hair,' Chiaki tells Kasumi, handing her the appliance. 'Before you catch you death.'

Seichiro feels cold.

Two park rangers are talking to the camera, as they walk through a forest, the one shown in the photograph. It is the Sea of Trees at the base of Mt Fuji. In a car park, they point out which cars are covered with moss and which have leaves gathering underneath them.

Once into the woods proper, off any trails, they discover two pairs of shoes. They are set neatly upon a rock, a man and a woman's. They are made of fine leather.

He refills his cup from the flask, but would prefer the slightest scrape of rohypnol instead. Chiaki tells him that he'd better get up earlier tomorrow morning than he did today. They have a train to catch.

The scent of Kasumi's hair and the *sake* mix together. Then, Chiaki's voice is back again, sharper, 'Don't you fall asleep with that drink in your hand.'

The cup is tugged from his fingers.

It might be a dream, or the next story in the *kaidan* –his eyes are closed– but there is talk of jungles and shoot-outs with the Filipino police. There are platters of steak brought out to pretty, leering faces, and jokes made about how best to dry beef in the wet season. He is sure Chiaki says, 'Malaria,' at one point. 'That's what got him. Once you've got it, it stays with you forever. There's no cure. Nothing complete.' He smiles at this and someone lifts his head to place a pillow behind it. He does so like it when Chiaki proffers her medical opinion. The war ends and a man calls out his brother's name through a megaphone – calls it right out into the unrelenting fecundity of the jungle. All that green. There are years and years of jungle paths ahead of him, of staying in old loggers' huts. Eventually, the father makes a trip out to the island, himself, and does so on the eve of his own death. He pens a poem for his lost son, hoping, one day, that the boy he knew will come out of the jungle and read it.

*

Seichiro wakes with a pain in his side. He rolls over, but there is no futon underneath him to absorb his weight. When he sits up, a great pressure gathers at his right temple, as though the point of a sharp tool is resting there, awaiting the punch of a hammer. The room is dark, but it

is not a smothering blankness. He is in bedroom, the *tatami* room beside the parlour. The *fusuma* are drawn open and the ambient light of street lamps, beaming in from outside through the latticed windows of the parlour, leaks into the room. Chiaki is snoring.

He makes his way around his sleeping wife and into the corridor leading to the *genkan*. He heading for the toilet, but his rubber boots are there, lined up beneath the entrance hall's step. He can just see their tops. He thinks of the shed, of Kasumi's painting. Of the ghost. His movements are so practised that, when he lifts his weight away from the step and into the boots, one at a time, the wood does not creak.

From the top of the shoe cupboard, he retrieves his large torch. Attached to its sling is a bell. He pinches its little clapper silent. The front door is closed, but well-polished. It opens without a sound. There is no lantern to watch out for on the step. Chiaki never leaves one out during Obon.

Once out in the middle of the highway, he lets go of the clapper and adjusts the flashlight's strap. When he slings the torch over his shoulder, the bell sounds out. The night's hush amplifies the brittle sound, makes it flutter. That's the point of a bear bell.

His dream is still about him, like a smell. He wants to know what the haiku was that the old man left his son. The image of mildewed paper floats before him. It is tacked to a logger's hut. The brushwork is careful, if unsophisticated, the sentiments as hard as the beads on a Buddhist rosary.

no echo

of mine returns

blue mountains

Blue mountains because tropical peaks have to swelter in their eternal summers. There must be few seasonal words to choose from in the tropics.

Once across the road, he stops at the camellia bush. He looks into the darkness. The mountain hangs above.

But he cannot do it, not to himself, not to Kasumi.

*

There is live music at Gas Point. Piano and double-bass, slow jazz.

The three tables tucked into the bar's side are all full and some extra fold-out seats have been crammed in somehow. The old typewriter that usually decorates the central table has been put away. There are candles everywhere, an intimate atmosphere. Seichiro doesn't recognise anyone but Oguma, who is perched on his stool at the counter, his private whiskey bottle down off the shelf. A red-faced stranger with a shaved head is sitting beside him. The man is big and smiling, taking up a lot of room, a display of mirth that makes Oguma look hawkish, as studies the musicians with a cynical concentration. Everyone is deep in their glasses, every one of them enjoying the easy-going hubbub. People are talking and listening to the music and passing comment on the performers' little flourishes, pouring each other drinks. They are too focused on having a good time to notice Seichiro's sloppy appearance. They are jazz hounds for the night. He wishes he had brought his wallet with him.

He had not intended on walking down the highway to Nishino in the first place. The camellia had stopped him. But this is Gas Point. He can always settle his bill later. Besides, now that the walk has broken up his thoughts a little, he decides that, if he had brought some money with him, he would have kept going on down the highway, walking on until he could hail a taxi and go in search of a late night spa, just as Chiaki likes to do. To scrub himself

clean and then sit neck-deep in hot water, that be would be wonderful thing, especially at this time of night. He would venture into the hottest pool, too. He would let his face flush to the same shade of red as Oguma's neighbour, the man who apologises and shuffles aside so that Seichiro can join them at the counter. Master brings over his own stool out for Seichiro to sit on.

Oguma says, 'There was supposed to be a trumpeter on tonight.'

Master bows in apology and explains to Seichiro how the original booking had pulled out last minute. The duet is a step-in. Oguma grunts. To keep the peace, Seichiro praises their talent, especially the pianist, although he keeps to himself how he would prefer something with a little more energy in it, a twisting out of the notes, something rawer and more rung out. The music, as it is, is pleasantly accomplished. It is all rhythm and no bounce.

The big man at the edge of the counter turns around and nods at Seichiro, thanking him for his compliment. Seichiro begs his pardon and the guy explains that he is a friend of the lady on piano.

'Is that so?' says Seichiro. 'She is good.'

Oguma watches on in silence.

Introducing himself, the man says that he's the abbot of a temple over in Kitahiroshima.

Seichiro feigns interest, says, 'That's far from here.'

'She is a dear friend.'

She is pretty, more like it, he thinks, following the abbot's and Oguma's gaze. The pianist is in her forties and is wearing a black dress with a low-cut back. Her hair is up and her back is visible. For a woman half her age, such skin would be appealing. Surely, this is a charm-point, a gift she has learned about from her lovers. Their compliments have made her prideful. What with her flawless posture, she can turn her back on an audience and get their

blood up. For this reason alone, he surmises that she is unmarried. Perhaps the abbot is one of many male friends she has.

On the walk down the highway, he had a poem in his head. Now, he has thoughts such as these. But there are mundane things to fall back upon, trivialities, like his asking whether the abbot's temple is a family-run establishment. No matter what the man says, he simply follows up with, 'Is that so?'

The abbot is clearly drunk. Clearly his height and bulk do not help him absorb his liquor, unlike Oguma. He must be in his early fifties. When he smiles, his eyes all but disappear behind his protuberant cheeks. His bottom-front teeth are crooked. He has the air of a country bumpkin, a harmless demeanour that arouses a deep suspicion in Seichiro. How many family-run temples have a Mercedes Benz parked in their garage these days? And here he is, having come into Sapporo from out of town, to do what? Chase sultry women?

Seichiro declines Oguma's offer of a drink.

'Come on,' the abbot says, 'join us.' He drops two ice-cubes into a glass with a pair of tongs. Over them, Oguma pours three fingers of Scotch. The smell of the whiskey uncurls the pain in Seichiro's head. He is not in the mood.

The abbot asks Seichiro is a local.

'He's from Hakodate,' Oguma says. 'Now me? I'm as local as the bears.'

The abbot thinks this, 'Marvellous!'

Seichiro looks into the man's expectant face and realises that he has not introduced himself properly. 'Yes,' he says, 'I am Seichiro Kozu,' and, as if unable to take the shame of his ramshackle appearance, adds, 'I have a little practice up the hill, in Fukui. It is an honour to meet you.'

'You're a doctor?'

'Nothing grand.'

Again, this is, ‘Marvellous!’

The whiskey tastes like the ash of a very ancient and very fine tree. There is something almost *silver* about it.

‘Do you specialise in any branch of medicine in particular?’

‘No, not anymore. Just general medicine.’

‘You have semi-retired, is that it? What a marvellous place to retire to. And it must be very fulfilling to keep yourself busy.’

‘Busy?’ Oguma gives Seichiro a smile.

‘Now, please excuse me.’

He stands, rocks back and forth, and places a hand on the counter to steady himself. With this same hand kept stretched out before him, as he makes his way to the restroom at the back of the bar.

‘A friend of yours?’ Seichiro asks once he is alone with Oguma.

‘Nope. He was here when I arrived.’

Seichiro looks at the remnants of Oguma’s bottle of scotch. ‘An expensive new acquaintance, I see.’

‘A drunk monk: *how marvellous!*’

Oguma chuckles and refreshes their glasses, saying that he wants to finish off the bottle before the abbot can return from the john. He leaves Seichiro to add his own ice. ‘So what’s with the get up? You look like you’ve come in from pulling up your potatoes.’

‘I was weeding.’

‘In the dark?’

He wants to say something to Oguma about the *kaidan-kai* on TV. For some reason, Onodera’s passing is playing on his mind. That, and the ghost. He does not know how to mention such things with so many people around. With piano music in the air.

Oguma asks after Kasumi. Whether he suspects something about Seichiro's manner, or is bored by his hesitancy, Seichiro cannot tell, but his friend looks tense. The abbot's buffoonery and the whiskey must be getting to him.

Seichiro says that she is industrious. 'I still don't often see her. She's in her shed all day.'

'You let her have the place, you can't complain.'

'I'm not complaining. I know she has work on her mind. A PhD takes a lot of effort.'

He pictures the zero, its final silk panel on the *tatami* platform, its forms all cut down to the bare bones, a sheet of *washi* pasted over the failed outline of the pilot. It must be tough to try and follow Uncle Koze's genius. He wonders if her supervisors have given her a hard time over her choice of role model, even if she is working in a different medium, one naturally imbued with a dreamy lightness. Maybe that's why she came up to the valley. To escape them. To be free, if only for a little while, though she cannot pull herself from her research. It keeps her sucked in. Focused. He gets that. Research takes discipline and self-belief, no matter the battles.

Seichiro says, 'Painters must paint.'

Oguma looks like he is about to say something more on the matter, but the abbot is back and standing at Seichiro's elbow. He is listening in. 'You're an artist as well?' he says.

'My granddaughter,' Seichiro replies, willing the large belly, and the heat it is oozing, to back away from him. The expectant look on the man's face is repulsive. Wasn't it Soseki who wrote that there is nothing more tedious than a tea enthusiast? Surely, the same can be said for amateur art lovers.

'What does she paint?'

'Portraiture.'

'Oils?'

‘In the *nihonga* style.’

‘*Nihonga*, you say? How marvellous. I cannot imagine many young people are interested in *nihonga* these days. Does she live in Sapporo, too?’

‘She studies in Tokyo but has come up for the summer.’

‘How very exciting.’

Seichiro looks at Oguma. ‘I really must be going. I have an early morning planned.’

But now that the subject of Kasumi’s art has been raised, he does not want to leave without discussing it with Oguma. He wants to tell him about Kasumi’s project, about the zero and her attempt to get the pilot just right. He is curious, anxious even, about how Oguma would react if he were to learn that Kasumi was repainting his uncle’s painting of the *Tokkō* pilot, no matter her reasons. Surely, she is using her art to try and better understand him as a man. Oguma would be glad of that, no? he would be happy that a youngster has seen past Kozu’s shaming, the ridicule, all that hypocrisy? For his demise illuminated his countrymen’s duplicity. His uncle’s disgrace was also the nation’s disgrace.

He excuses himself from the abbot by saying how he is to travel south to Hakodate tomorrow. ‘Someone has to take care of the family graves.’

The abbot’s eyes disappear into his cheeks. ‘Yes! Yes! Of course. Can’t be helped. It is a busy time of year.’

Though it makes sense that the abbot should be so pleased with his show of filial loyalty, Seichiro’s loathing for the man intensifies. He is a parasite. If he were not there, Seichiro could talk to Oguma at length and gauge his impression of Kasumi’s work. He could talk on and forget the true reason he rolled out of bed and, then, stepped into his rubber boots and took up his torch. Seichiro looks again the pianist’s back, at the patch of skin she has put on display for her audience. He will just have to wait and, so, he asks his old friend if he could drop by the plot and turn on the sprinklers while he’s away.

‘Oh, and if it’s not too much trouble,’ he adds, trying to keep his voice light, ‘could you look in on Kasumi’s shed for me – just to make sure things are okay in there?’

‘You should get a cat,’ says Oguma.

‘A cat?’

‘Mice like silk and cats like mice. The natural order of things. Or, do you think they’d be at the brushes? They’re made of what, mink?’ He laughs, bitterly. ‘Isn’t that akin to cannibalism?’

‘What?’ asks the abbot. ‘Mink aren’t like mice, are they?’

‘Of course they are.’ Oguma returns his gaze to the pianist. ‘And I bet she’s got a fine little flash of mink between her legs. But what could I do about it? I’m drunk.’

*

The pavement gives way to mulch and total darkness. He enters his field and his senses flare out around him. There are few lights on in the neighbouring houses. The moon is brighter here. He had intended to use his torch, but decides against it now that he’s here. Once he has the shed’s light, the neighbours will probably assume Kasumi is working late.

The fresh draft of the poem in his head goes

blue mountains,

into my echo

a fresh voice

He likes the humble quality of its *kiri*, its cut. It has that necessary degree of rawness. The composition overall rings hollow, nevertheless, and, so, is not good enough for a ghost

poem. That is how the dead used to communicate with the living in the stories of old China, through lines of poetry. If only the ghost would visit him in poetry. Then he could adore her and be at peace.

He arrives at the bean tunnels and slows down. He listens, but can make out only the light rush of water from the nearby river. The tunnels are empty. Each one of them.

Inside the shed, he pulls on a cord and shields his eyes as neon flickers on. The ghost is not here, either. This is probably for the best. He should just go back and sleep off this strange mood.

He puts the torch down on the table top beside the two completed panels of Kasumi's fighter aircraft. The panel Kasumi was working on during the afternoon, the one laid out on the her platform on the floor, all ink outlines lines, looks little changed.

He steps up close to the mound of *tatami* mats and their cinderblock cordon. He leans over and takes the panel in his hands and moves it aside, clearing a space where can lay down, his booted feet hanging off the side. The *tatami* is cold to the touch. His joints feel strange. The beginning of a fever? He slides off his boots and places his soles flat down on the cool concrete. The weather has been unseasonably hot.

The glare of the bulb burns little patches of colour into the backs of his eyes. He cannot resist and so rolls over. He brings Kasumi's painting close to him, the panel with the sheet of paper pasted onto its silk. There are many pencil lines. A hard lead. Taking up the pillow Kasumi uses to kneel on, he props himself up. He will take his time and so at his ease.

The pilot's outline is here, although the draftsmanship is loose and fluid. He tries to recall as best he can his uncle's original figure. Nothing solid comes to mind, nothing that can help him work out if she has been particularly faithful in her reproduction or not. Certainly nothing strikes him as out of place and he cannot think of why such a loose sketch would have kept his granddaughter away from dinner. Perhaps, she has reached an impasse. Surely

her professors have warned her of this, that striking newness, bold individuation, these can be vulgar. Difference by degrees, the past held in the present, these have long been the Japanese way – in the arts at least.

‘I knew you would come.’ The ghost’s voice is as soft as the panel’s silk panel – softer.

He sits up and there she is, her eyes wide with expectation.

‘You?’ he says.

‘Me.’

Dressed, this time, in her prison smock, she is squatting on her haunches, her elbows resting on her knees. She looks about the same age as Kasumi, though he knows she was younger when Oguma brought her to Pingfang. Girls on the continent grew up quickly.

The ghost reaches out and takes his hand in hers. Her supple skin is the mark of her class. He likes to think that this hand still has no other purpose than to turn the pages of a book or to hold a writing brush. And it is cold – so very, very cold.

She sits down on the mat beside him and pulls his hand over to her, to her braid, where it hangs over her shoulder. It is thick, but sleek, like running his palm over a length of mossy *shide*, those divine ropes Shinto priests tie to holy sites, around the trunks of trees and great rocks, growths and promontories, so old, they can be nothing other than gods. He mentioned such a comparison to Oguma, once, back in the Village’s guard room. ‘Don’t say anything like that in public,’ his friend snapped back at him in a whisper. ‘There is nothing holy here. Only *logs* to burn.’

She moves his hand down to her chest. She slips it inside her smock. Her breasts are bare beneath.

‘I thought the courtly ladies in your stories were shy and retiring,’ he says. ‘Or are you some wily fox come to trick me?’

‘We foxes know a thing or two.’

6.

The ghost lays on her back and crosses her legs in the air, like a woman trying to conceive. Under the harsh light of the neon bulbs, her genitals glisten. She is saying something to herself in Chinese, something too light and cheerful to be a prayer.

This is always a strange moment for him, when he is left to dress, his fluids spent, and the ghost before him, so young and beautiful and satisfied that, all too soon her nakedness offends him. Whether he has brought her any closer to the warmth and solidity of living flesh, he does not know. In the stories of her people, the seed of a virile man, saturated with his life force, has the power to resurrect. He has never thought of himself in such vainglorious terms. He has urges. That is all. Japanese stories are not so optimistic. For all he knows she has bewitched his senses and he has done little more than make love to a skeleton, as happened to the Lord Ogiwara in the *Tale of the Peony Lantern*. No, she looks no different from any other time she has come to him.

Watching her, he slips back into his long cotton underwear, then his trousers. His shirt he kept on. The ghost does not object. She does not even stir. He is not brave enough to ask if she feels any different. Death should have its mysteries. And who is it that writes such ghost stories anyway, if not the living?

A wave of nausea pulls at his stomach, as if the pressure in his head has congealed, petrified and is now sinking through the raw miso paste of his intestines. Pins and needles fizz up the nerves in his feet as he slips back into his boots. When he stands up, he stamps on the concrete floor and, then, snaps off the light's cord, breaking the room back into darkness.

Outside, the air is damp. The moisture in his underwear chills him.

Beneath the mountain, the lights from the houses backing onto the river are illuminating slithers of rising mist. So much cloud, he thinks, for such a quiet thread of water.

Nothing as furious as Basho's monsoon swollen Mogami River, but the veil drifting across the blackened ridge has its own magnificence. He gives the highway a cursory glance, up and down. The road is empty. Its asphalt is dotted with the blurred balls of street-lamps. Like two chains of festival lanterns, these stretch out into the mountains and disappear at the base of a big nothing. Above the suburb's roofs, the sides of the valley are dark swathes. Except, that is, for the peak of Mt. Teine, where hazard lights mark out antennae installations. They are red flashes amongst the constellations.

7.

He wakes in his bedroom.

‘I told him to get up early,’ Chiaki is saying in the corridor between the parlour and the *genkan*. ‘And look at us, moving the cases all by ourselves.’ Her voice is loud. She wants him to hear.

Cases, he thinks. The three of them will only be down in Hakodate for a couple of days. A bag each will do. Nothing more. *Cases?*

He gets out of bed and stretches, hoping to catch Kasumi’s voice. It will be another warm day, he figures.

Chiaki comes back into the parlour. No doubt she has heard movement behind the *fusuma* and says, ‘And there’s no time for breakfast, now. The taxi will be here soon. We’ll have to get something to eat at the station.’

*

Mr Donuts, like the railway’s station’s ticket halls and walkways and shops and restaurants, is too bright, too noisy and, despite the early hour, the place is crowded with *Obon* holiday traffic, those family members arriving home for a couple of days, those heading out to the mountain-locked villages of the island’s interior, its salt-washed hamlets by the sea. Some will continue south, as he will, but they will keep going, shooting out from under the Tsugaru Strait and into Aomori and onwards to family homesteads all over northern Honshu. *Good for them*. Chiaki’s suitcase is wedged against his knee and nausea is rummaging through his bowels. He was a fool to stop taking the rohypnol. His body is punishing him for his abstinence. Either that or the ghost’s demands have worn him thin. It is a good thing that he is

getting away from the valley. He can never trust the ghost's appetites. How can the dead ever be satisfied? Although she has never done so, thoughts of her appearing at the Hakodate house haunt him and what with Chiaki's having hurried and harried him, he feels unprepared. He has no rohypnol with him. Not a single pill.

With Chiaki and Kasumi out amongst the station's *obento* stalls in search of their lunch (he has asked for something light, flaked salmon and white rice, nothing fried) he gestures the waitress and her coffee pot over to him. His cup he leaves just where it is, in the middle of the table, so that she will have to lean in. Young and charming, she has good skin. He takes in the swell of her breasts, the bend of her back, as first she bows and then comes in close with the coffee pot. No attraction flickers through him. None whatsoever. He is an old man, again. Dried up. It is time to leave the ghost behind, the image of her with her legs up in the air and lit by the shed's bare bulbs, her cooze semen-slicked.

*

Kasumi comes back first, an art glossy under one arm, and a small book wrapped in brown paper, which she offers him.

'What is this?'

'The only Soseki they had was *Botchan*,' she says. 'And *I am Cat*. No *Kusamakura*.'

They both agree this is a shame, but she bought him something for the train anyway, a newly released selection of Taneda Santoka's haiku and diary extracts. A peace offering?

She says that Santoka knew Shiki. 'And you like Shiki, right?'

'More like the generation that came next,' he says. 'Soseki and Shiki, however, were good friends.'

She has already skimmed through the introduction back at the bookstall and proclaims the poet *quite the character*, a drunk and beggar-wanderer. With a conspiratorial smile, says, ‘I like him, probably more than I like his poems, though I don’t mind them either. He’s not what I expected of a *haijin*. In fact, he kind of reminded me of Uncle Kozu.’

‘Uncle Kozu?’

‘Yes.’

He raises his eyebrows at this, but in truth, he is full of pride at the beauty of his grandchild.

‘It’s good to break a few rules every now and then, eh Grandpa?’

‘But he was thrown away for it – Santoka, that is, the man, whilst he was alive.’

He takes the book from her and reads the title page, ‘*Eating Dried Cuttlefish and Talking of the Past.*’

A good omen.

It is May, Manchuria, 1938. From the train the plain's grasses are green, blue at a distance. Of the few hamlets that border the track, all are muddy and cramped despite the horizon balancing upon them, as if each patch of squalor is the centre of some immense centripetal force. Seichiro is drifting again. China has taught him that he has this capacity. Its huge open spaces have opened up huge open spaces inside him. Spring is here and, with it, the winter routines are to be thrown off. He can return to his own projects. He can pour over them now. There will be no more outside detail in the frigid cold; no more time spent on others' experiments; no more listening for the moment when the thwack of a baton upon an arm, a leg, turns into a knock, wood on wood; no more slaving over gas burners for Dr Yoshiwara, heating vats of water to different temperatures, each checked by the good doctor and re-checked for the sake of precision, his Kyoto drawl softly packaging his hard words. There will be no more taking orders from the bacteriologists.

He cannot tell the Chinese girl much about the conference from which he is returning, but she is bound to sense his excitement. He is bursting with pride. All morning and, before that, all night, he has been picturing the Chinese girl's face, hearing her sad voice.

But he will not see her until this afternoon. He must be content with anticipation alone, with the success of his trip and the thought of returning to a landscape that has so overwhelmed him. Oguma has told him about the pride educated Chinese wives take in writing letters to their husbands, men sent away from their homes to govern distant lands. The letters can read like poetry. Seichiro wonders whether the Chinese girl is thinking of him and with such magic.

Lt. Colonel Wakamitsu, his travelling companion in the carriage's birth, has stripped his conversation down too. They have spent much of the last three weeks together. Wakamitsu, the head of his section, has taken Seichiro under his wing, guided him through the development of his copper node. It was he who arranged for Seichiro to accompany him north, up to Suifenho, on the Manchurian-Soviet border. But after sharing many of their meals and drinks together at the hospital there, they haven't much more to say to one another, not with the difference in their ages and statuses on base.

The monotony of the plains leaves him to slide inward, but also, to look forward.

Seichiro has imagined everything from his walking into his father's house to the announcement he would make in his father's study. Standing in front of the desk, he would hand over a copy of his first medical publication. The apparatus he designed to test rates of epidermal heat loss has been peer reviewed and praised. He has been ordered to broaden his efforts. Lt. Col. Wakamitsu wants no fewer than five hundred test subjects to be included, an industrial sized sampling. Seichiro will be busy for the next year and, by its end, will have enough data to submit for his thesis. He would expect no exclamations of surprise from his father, for his intention would not be to shock. To wait until the journal was properly released, before revealing it to his old man, would just be an acknowledgement of his father's exacting standards. Dr. Jun Kozu finds any form of bragging distasteful.

Given the enormity of the plans Seichiro has rolling around his head, the emptiness of the plains is a cleansing presence. From newsreels he has watched at the Village's cinema, the south of the country is supposed to be full of people, the countryside still wide and open in places, but covered in black dots. Peasants ploughing fields, peasants planting paddies. This far north, there is a lone cloud, one shaped like a jelly fish. Genghis Khan must have swept through this country, he thinks. He could have fed a million horses on all this grass – ten million. Seichiro has heard tell that the horse lord extinguished the light of an entire nation

who went back on an oath of loyalty and supported an uprising by a southern kingdom. They were a different racial group from the local northern tribes and the Han Chinese who muster around the cities and mining camps today. Perhaps this domain is now their burial ground. The soil, visible around the edges of small pools, is the colour of iron. That is why no one wants to live here. Having been brutalised into extinction, there is no one left in the modern world who knows their language, who can recognise the poetry their ghosts mutter. Their voices have grown thin. They are mistaken for the wind. The Chinese do love a good ghost story. The Chinese girl has told him this.

He will give her some tea, he decides.

Tea, and something sweet to eat.

8.

Seichiro's grandfather was a military man, one trained in the Dutch style of medicine. Fusako, Seichiro's own daughter, is the fourth generation of Kozu to dedicate her life to the preservation of the human body. Theirs is a family tradition that parallels the birth of Japan as a modern nation. Seichiro's father, Jun, followed his own father, as Seichiro's daughter has followed him. But Seichiro's uncle, Yuichiro Kozu, followed his own path. He became an artist against his family's wishes. Seichiro wonders if Kasumi's talents, like his uncle's before her, are the signs of something older, something beyond his grandfather's relocation to Hokkaido. The family's history is foggy at best before that time. He has heard some intimations of greatness, of a samurai past, but what family doesn't like to kid itself in this way? This is especially so in Hakodate, the site of the warrior class's bloody last stand against government troops – against modernity itself. Humbler is the truth, the families who came north and cut a new life from the wilderness. Seichiro's grandfather made a name for himself, nonetheless, as a darling of the port's social scene, as it was back then, though what had led him to cut his ties with the south is a mystery. The city was growing, but for a nation having not long opened its borders, Hakodate was at the edge of the world.

Such thoughts pass the time for Seichiro on his journey south. Chiaki is sitting across the aisle from him on the train and next to her, beside the far window is Kasumi.

He is waiting for the sea to come into view. Though he has fallen asleep several times, rest his bodily needs, he has come to with a start each time. He does not like the dreams he has been having recently.

He has laid aside Santoka for now. His stomach hurts and he has tired of reading about the poet's own bodily aches and addictions. Chiaki's choice of lunchbox, ginger-fried chicken on rice with egg, has his stomach turning over like a flooded engine. He is sweating.

Chiaki is dozing, of course, her body slumped down in her seat, Kasumi's face just visible beyond the Wolf Fish's, like a ridge pushing out against its more rugged neighbour. She looks bored. If she were on her own, he suspects that she would be sketching, piecing together the fragments of a battlefield, or planning out where to posit the individual faces of a suicide charge.

When the train emerges from a long tunnel, the sea is there to greet him. Black cliffs. Open sky. He is disappointed by how little they do for him.

*

The three of them take a taxi from the station. The streets of the port city are busy.

Like two sickles, one laid atop the other, blades out, the port city is built on the spit of land that ties Mt. Hakodate to the mainland. The mountain itself, if seen from above, must resemble an eye dislodged from its socket. Uoichiba Boulevard, one of the main roads bisecting the thin flat strip, is crowded with holiday traffic and rumbling streetcars. It is only a short ride, however, to Motomachi, the fashionable district built onto the lower flank of the great, wooded mountain. It is here that, beginning in the 1860s, when Japan opened to foreign trade, the British built their first consulate, the Russians their Orthodox Cathedral, the Chinese a great temple, a German entrepreneur a sausage factory, and Seichiro's grandfather a large house. In this house he raised his two sons, Yuichiro and Jun, and here, too, Seichiro would later be born. After the low-rises of downtown, its scruffy residences, Motomachi has a charm all of its own, one born of wooden-slats and shingles, a style not a world away from those Cape Cod houses the Americans so cherish. Many of the roads and lanes are narrow and cobble-stoned. Although he is feeling no better, Seichiro puts on a show for Kasumi. She has not been here since she was a little girl, after all, and, back then, she had no idea of the

shadows looming over her, the likes of her great uncle, Yuichiro, with his mighty rise and fall and her own great grandfather, Seichiro father, one of the most sullen men of all time.

‘These are some of the first painted houses in the country,’ he says, figuring that such minutiae will interest her because his uncle once said the same thing to him. ‘The paint was imported to maintain foreign ships.’

She nods, but when the taxi pulls up before a severe-looking house, Chiaki says it’s a shame not everyone in the city liked such exuberance. And she is right. Standing above them on a raised wall of interlocking stones, is what the Kozu family has longed referred to as the *Hakodate House*, the family’s official homestead. Its slatting and shingles are bare of paint and blackened with age. Rains and snowmelt have feathered some of the boards with silver patterns. There is not much difference in age between this house and his own home in Sapporo, his beloved valley, but when it comes to atmosphere, the Hakodate house is oppressive. Its narrow windows do not help, the wooden grates caging them in, all designed to stave off the winter squalls that whip in off the sea. He knows the design –his grandfather’s– is practical, but he cannot help but read his father’s iron will in it.

‘Originally, it was apple green,’ he says, looking up at the house from the lane. ‘I was only a boy, but I remember that colour. It was warm and cool at the same time.’ It was his father who did away with such extravagance, as he saw it, stripping the wood back to its original grain and narrowing the windows. With *Obon* only a day away, he will leave it at that. He will not speak ill of the dead, not here, and not to Kasumi. ‘And there was a persimmon tree, too, here, in the front garden.’ It never gave up much fruit, he remembers, so was removed to clear a better view to the sea.

Inside is more spacious than the outside view belies. The three stories are all floored with wooden boards, with only one of the bedrooms bedecked with *tatami* matting. When Seichiro was a child, this room belonged to his father.

While Kasumi wanders off into one of the side rooms, he watches Chiaki from behind. He could swear that his wife shrinks as she passes through the *genkan* and then again in the corridor beyond. He follows her into the large reception room, its air heavy with years of incense, where she recedes into herself even further. The room is empty except for its shadows, the family's *butsudan* and a painted portrait of Colonel Roan Kozu, Seichiro's grandfather. The funerary cabinet's doors are shut and dusty, as is the painting of the long dead patriarch, frozen in his prime by the brush of Uncle Yuichiro, a youth the artist would never have even met, standing at his leisure, his hand upon the hilt of his sword. Seichiro has always sensed the beginning of a smile in the painting – a smile that would one day break out across the soldier's face and crack the paint.

He puts the suitcase down and kneels down before the *butsudan*. Opening its doors, he pulls out one of the little drawers inside and retrieves an incense stick, a box of matches, three of which fail to catch before Chiaki says that they must be old or damp. He does not draw out the little altar table because he has brought nothing to place on it. Not for the moment. He sounds the cabinet's bell with a ringer so thin it feels like a knitting needle between his fingers. His prayers made, he makes way for Chiaki to pay her respects. Watching her face change as she gets down onto the hard floor, a line from an old novel comes into his head. *Being at home is like hiding in a deep pool.*

After walking through every room of the house, upstairs and down, Kasumi finally joins them.

'Smell that,' he asks her, and to widen the smile that is already brightening the girl's face, he adds, 'and I do not mean the dust.'

For years, this room, its wood, its grain, has released the sweet, spiced scent of incense, slowly, little by little, like a reservoir of spent prayers. He inhales, tasting the years on the back of his throat. It is as if his father is with them in the room. Throughout his

childhood, incense sticks burned on the altar's table all day long. Only at night did his old man close those doors. Upon the altar table he placed the most delicate morsels of food, the most expensive *sake*, though he never drank himself. He preferred good tobacco. Brought up with such behaviours, Seichiro never thought of them as extreme. People these days are so relaxed in their interactions with the dead. They chat as if they are equals. Tomorrow, they will dance at the *Obon* festivities as if no spirits are truly dancing with them. His father was severe. He had faced the big Russian guns at Port Arthur. Obligation was seared deep into his heart. He inhales the room, its years.

He catches Kasumi's perfume, too. Her presence warms him. She lifts his spirits so much he regrets having shared so few words with his own mother, a strange thought. After Seichiro's father's death, it was his mother who took over his old man's vigil, augmenting it with her own silent words to the newly dead, her grizzled old husband, her recalcitrant. Every morning, the cabinet doors were opened, its bell rung. More incense burned. She was a woman given to long silences and, then, was gone. The house settled into disuse.

'See, Kasumi,' Chiaki says taking the suitcase from his hand, 'a hotel would be much cheerier.'

She crosses the room, heading towards the flight of the stairs at the back of the house.

Kasumi hangs back and when the stairs creak, she turns to him and says how she likes it here. 'But it's so different to how I remember, Grandpa. I had all the rooms mixed up in my head.'

9.

Chiaki insists they go out again immediately. ‘We’ve sat on our rumps all morning,’ she says having deployed her case in the *tatami* room. Because Kasumi is with them this year, she has already made it clear that Seichiro will sleep on his own in the downstairs parlour. He can see it now, his futon laid out before the portrait of his father, as the women fuss about overhead.

They take a streetcar back downtown.

Once in amongst the stalls and water tanks of the fish market, the sprawling complex beside the railway station and municipal dispensary, Chiaki insists that Kasumi pluck out a live squid from the big blue tub the place has set up in its centre. People are crowding the bath, each with a little fishing rod. Every time one of the squids bites, a middle-aged woman in an apron, her hair tied back with a handkerchief, washes the little, wriggling prisoner and dissects it with a sharp knife. The flesh of the squids is white and awash with a glutinous shine, like the waxy pliancy infused into the skin of the Russian girl – the girl who Oguma had picked up from the square before St Nicholas’, along with the Chinese girl, only, she did not last so long. A couple of months after that cold evening in Harbin, Oguma played a trick on him, Seichiro remembers, leading him into the Village’s specimen room, where the white Russian was floating in a huge jar of formaldehyde. Unknown to him at the time, Oguma had caught some fireflies over by the air strip. When he released them, their light illuminated the jar’s liquid. Seichiro had almost fainted. He thought he had seen the girl’s soul.

The woman’s knife falls again and again. Every execution is over within a matter of seconds. Seichiro doubts whether he could perform so precise a procedure on a wriggling creature – so quickly. Not once does the woman slip. It would be good sport to try, though. When he was young, no problem. His hands were so steady. But now? He is impressed.

Kasumi gets a bite and she squirms with excitement. Chiaki makes a great fuss over the thatch of shredded squid that is delivered before them on a paper plate, along with a ball of wasabi and some soy sauce.

‘It’s so tender,’ Kasumi says. ‘And sweet.’ She offers him a pair of disposable chopsticks. ‘You’re not having any, Grandpa?’

‘No thank you.’

‘You’re not still feeling rough, are you?’ There is a cold edge to Chiaki’s voice.

‘I’m fine,’ he says and reminds them how he was called out to a patient during the night. The lie leaves him low, wretched. A shiver passes through him, like the one induced by the cold and the ghost’s wetness. He is exhausted. He says, ‘I’m just saving myself.’

‘Then order something.’

‘I thought we could take a snack at that place on the other side of the mountain – the teashop you always like so much.’

‘But that’s back the way we just came. We’re heading over to Fort Goryokaku now. Later there’s the night view from the mountain.’

‘We can visit the fort another day. There is no need to rush about like tourists.’

‘And why not?’

‘I am a tourist,’ Kasumi says.

He feels solidarity with her and so decides to continue the fight, despite Chiaki’s frown. ‘I just fancy something sweet,’ he says. ‘And so few people get out that way, Kasumi, that it really is a little treasure.’

In truth, he would prefer to go back to the house and curl up in a ball, to be left alone to wait out this fresh bout of the sweats. Some withdrawal symptoms are to be expected. He is

not foolish enough to think he could sail through his abstinence from the rohypnol without any bother. He wants to sit down, again, to spend some slow, mindless time.

Usually, he would expect the old Wolf Fish to fight her corner to the end, but he suspects she likes the sound of going out to the teahouse for her afternoon snack. Of course, she will not openly admit it, but the idea of the best confections to be found in the city, perhaps even the island, must appeal to her own sweet tooth.

‘I just hope you don’t mind, Kasumi,’ Chiaki says, ‘this is your holiday.’

He looks for a softening in her jaw, anything to give away just how relieved she is that he has handed her an excuse to relax, a target to blame, to admit, if only to herself, that she is feeling tired, more so than she expected she would. Staying at the old house cannot be all that pleasant for her. It cannot hold any endearing memories for her.

Kasumi says she doesn’t mind and so Chiaki leads the girl away, talking as she does so about this and that, about how they’ll visit the teahouse after they have sent something down to Fusuko, a good-sized spider crab or something, about how it will arrive in Tokyo before they’ve even had breakfast tomorrow morning. He lets them walk on, buys three good sized urchins himself and asks they be delivered to the house later on (for the family’s altar – his father would approve), before taking a seat on one of the plastic garden chairs by the squid-fishing tank.

The fisherwoman is still going strong. There is no hint of fatigue or boredom in her actions. She is all about ruthless efficiency. Her blade, its sharp, wet shine, arrests his attention, the flash of it as it falls, and falls, the angling of its bevelled edge, the tight pull towards her abdomen she executes, as another and then another squid falls into strips as thin as rice noodles. There are people all around exclaiming, ‘*Oishi!*’ How delicious.

There are crabs in the glass tanks behind her. The roofed-market is full of them. Their pincers could lop off a man's finger – could do so with ease. And, yet, they sit, unmoving, motionless, while the fisherwoman's blade glides.

Not once does she miss. Not once.

10.

On the seaward side of Mt Hakodate, on the edge of the Yayoicho District, stands the Teashop Yūhi. Little more than a single-decker, painted a light fuchsia, most of the building is a long, covered veranda, whose windows face out onto a sea view edged with purple mountains. Small tables line the veranda, each with a chair or two tucked underneath. Behind the main serving area are two back offices, their front walls removed, so that the few tourists who get this far around the mountain can see the place decked out in all its Meiji era finery (glass-covered cupboards, a flurry of white cotton doilies, even a huge clock-faced barometer), the period during which his grandfather, bored after his retirement from the army, lorded over what was then the city's newly established Quarantine Control Office. It was like he was the commander of an ancient barrier outpost, the Shirakawa, or some other place passed through by Bashō, a border between the civilised world and the wilderness.

Not even Chiaki knows much about this man, despite the number of years she has sat with her back to his portrait when she pays her respects at the *butsudan*, but she is irascible this afternoon, taking up the space between him and Kasumi with a long, drawn out conversation about heading up the cable car later ('The night view, Kasumi, it trumps Yokohama's! We simply must go!'). She sounds as if it were she who was born on the side of the mountain and not he. Not once does Kasumi pay the display even the most cursory of glances. She looks out to sea mostly, at the kind of view that softens the heart. He follows her eyes and considers how he could unfold, here, all the stories he has stored away inside him. Because of the summer heat, such stories would sound incredible, close to madness. If only he could be assured of Kasumi's clemency. If his mood was slowed and made easy with a little rohypnol, then, perhaps, the words could bubble up regardless.

He produces the little book of poems Kasumi gifted him in the morning from the back pocket of trousers and taps its papered cover with the flat of his hand. 'You can lose yourself here,' he says. 'I'm sure Santoka would agree. Do you know, I've come here ever since it opened as a teahouse?'

His voice is a touch too loud and the waitress smiles. And why not? It is true. Whenever Chiaki has sought refuge from the house in Motomachi in the bathhouse up the street, he has walked around the mountain and come here.

'Doesn't it remind you of the house in Fukui?' he says. 'That touch of frontier magic?'

'Hakodate? The frontier?' Chiaki takes a menu from the waitress, but asks Kasumi where she wants to sit.

'It was,' he says, 'once.'

There are plenty of tables to choose from. Two other customers are sitting on separate tables at the far end of the veranda, each alone except for a novel and a magazine. Seichiro suggests a table where the view is striped by the trunks of two sea-gnarled pines. He points to the window. 'Look: a Yokoyama Taikan painting.' It is a safe frame of reference. Old Taikan had a great love of both the sea and Asia's mountains. Even he knows that.

Kasumi nods. 'The light is amazing.'

He agrees and sits, reaching under the table and into his sock, to scrape at the moist skin behind his ankle. It comes away with his nails like wax. His fever, too, is worsening.

He says, 'A good place to work, no? And we won't be that busy tomorrow. The graveyard is just down the road. You could work, if you wanted, while your grandmother and I are finishing up there.' Chiaki flashes him a look. 'You could bring your sketch book and that strange brush of yours, the one that looks like a fountain pen. Tanazaki Junichiro wrote in an essay of his that, if we had invented the pen, it would have had a brush-tip.'

For the girl is right, there is a lightness to the veranda. It is a calm that he enjoys himself when he is left alone, undisturbed by the living and the dead, especially on a rohypnol-yellowed afternoon, while skimming through a poet's oeuvre, breaking off every now and then to gaze out at the bay and its mountains, especially in the hour before dusk.

Kasumi does not follow his lead and her silence could split him like a bean pod – only, he fears there would not even be two beans inside him. ‘Look – did you notice,’ he says, ‘there are no overhead lights? Just that lamp over there and this?’ He gestures to the sea.

‘I get it,’ Kasumi says. ‘*Yūhi.*’ Evening light.

But before he can keep the momentum going, she is back into deep deliberations with Chiaki. Who would believe that desserts are so important?

Chiaki is declaring that simple foods, kept simple, are best. Her voice is mellowed by her own sense of profundity, as when she proffers her medical opinion. ‘Take ice cream for example.’

Kasumi agrees and orders a mellow blend of green tea and *mizu manjū*. Chiaki orders the same, and, though he might do better with water and something simpler, a slice of bitter *macha* sponge, he follows suit.

After the stomach pain he has suffered all day, the tea turns out to be welcome. The sweet, soybean paste desserts come in rough ceramic bowls. Their potato starch glaze is so clear they each look encased in glass. It is a beautiful choice for a girl as young and pretty as his granddaughter. Despite the sweat streaking his lower back and musking up his armpits, Kasumi stirs something *clean* in him, something he refuses to acknowledge as nostalgia. There are still young women in the world with such grace. The ghost had such a softness to her manner, too. She must have come from a fine household, an official's residence with an inner courtyard and a south facing wall hung with wisteria.

He says, ‘I remember there was a photograph of my grandfather standing in front of this place when it was still part of the city administration. It is somewhere back at the house, the old study. Do you think the teashop would want it?’

It is a little uncouth of him to so obviously steer the conversation, but Kasumi does not seem to mind. In fact, she is intrigued. He tells her all about it – about the respect Colonel Roan Kozu commanded, the foreign dignitaries he mingled with. ‘I went to tea with the British consulate as a child. I remember thinking it strange that they put milk in their tea. The old building is still there, you know. It has a blue roof.’

Chiaki gazes out of the window. In the line of her jaw, he sees some of the prettiness she once inhabited, like a girl wearing her mother’s kimono. Hers was never the exquisite beauty of Kasumi...or, for that matter, the Chinese girl, who ran towards him through the snow, across the square before St Nicholas’s. When they first met, he had even found Chiaki’s forwardness refreshing.

Kasumi asks, ‘Is there portrait of Great-Grandfather Jun?’

‘No. But there are some other paintings by Uncle Yuichiro locked away somewhere. There’s a safe – a couple of them, actually. And boxes of photographs. Most of them of Uncle Yuichiro and his friends. He did like having his picture taken. Especially, in Paris. Did you know the French government has turned the old farmhouse he lived in outside of Nice into a museum?’

‘These are good!’ Chiaki says, tucking into her dessert.

‘Are there any photos of you at the house?’ Kasumi continues. ‘You know, when you were young, anything with you and Great Uncle Yuichiro?’

‘And photos of me, you say?’ He looks past Kasumi, to Chiaki, watching for a reaction. ‘Well, I don’t really know. There might be. A great many of them.’

‘How about any paintings?’

The light in Kasumi's eyes is intoxicating. He decides to savour the moment, to move around the question of paintings. It is best he let things seep out slowly. 'Uncle Yuichiro met Picasso, and he knew Chagall,' he says. 'And did your textbooks at university tell you that he fought Modigliani – bare-fisted? My old man told me that. Down in the catacombs beneath Montparnasse, it happened, some drunken rivalry. He said Yuichiro won too. And it was all over a woman. Now, where's that written in the history books?'

He means this lightheartedly, but when Kasumi's laughs with him, he is struck serious all of a sudden. It is true. His uncle was quite the notorious man about town and was so even before he left for Europe. That must have been the reason his grandfather allowed his eldest son to go abroad and to stay away so long. That is why his father, the second son, took over the household. And there have been those moments in his life, when Seichiro has been walking through the port and wondered about his uncle's wild oats, whether the Kozu bloodline has continued on elsewhere, hidden at first, then forgotten.

'Family secrets, eh?'

'I've heard Great-uncle –'

Chiaki's spoon clanks on the inside of her bowl. 'What is this obsession with that man tonight?' she says. 'Why must you two fixate on him?'

Heads turn towards them from the far end of the veranda.

'What is wrong with you?' he barks back in a low voice.

'Yuichiro Kozu was a criminal.'

'Criminal? What –'

'The way you two speak of him, you'd think he did some great service to mankind. He painted propaganda for a government bent on destroying us all. He was part of that. No surrender. Remember? Resist to the last? Japan is lucky the Yanks bombed us, if it meant his works were all turned to ash.'

‘Come on Chiaki.’

‘No.’ She raises from her chair. ‘Is it not enough that you drag me down here every year? Must I suffer your ghost stories about a deservedly forgotten man, as well?’

11.

He is back at the Motomachi house and in bed before the two women come back. The late hour and Chiaki's loud voice makes it clear that they have taken in more than the night view from the top of the mountain. They are tipsy. What a bitter, little insult to his sobriety.

He has his bedding out in the parlour downstairs while, upstairs, before retiring himself, he laid out the women's futons in the room with the *tatami* matting.

Despite the initial noise, the house soon goes quiet and he is once again left in silence and darkness and the scent of incense. In the parlour, looming over him is the family's *butsudan*, the funerary cupboard with its foldout prayer table tucked inside its closed doors. Even in the darkened room, its black lacquer thrusts its bulk forward, as if it will topple onto him. His sheets are again damp with his sweat and the skin under his armpits and between his legs is raw where he has scratched away at tiny, phantom mouths.

He drifts in and out of consciousness, unable to tell whether if he is dwelling upon Chiaki's pleading look in his dreams, or whether sleep is the only escape from it. Sometimes he starts and looks up at the *butsudan* as if expecting his father to open its doors and come leering out and into the room towards him. His old man would not say anything if he did. He would not even stare. He would open the cupboard's doors, bring out its table, light incense and ring its bell. His obligations to the dead fulfilled, he would pass on by, pacing over the boards on his way to the study, his contempt for his son born in his gait.

His father was rigid in his filial obligations, setting before the *butsudan*, votive offerings of tobacco and food, which was always chosen to fit the season and his grandfather's love of salty treats, particularly dried squid. How satisfied the household *kami*

must have been – and still is. Not even the American’s bombers, when they reached this far north and fire-bombed the city, damaged the house.

It is no wonder that the ghost has never bothered with him here. The *kami* has always warded off evil.

*

Chiaki’s voice is loud when she and Kasumi come through the *genkan* door. He has been back in Motomachi for hours, long enough to lay out all the futons, upstairs and down and to have taken a cooking knife to the prickly black carapace of the sea urchins he ordered at the fish market, cracking them partially open so their bright orange innards can quiver on *butsudan*’s pull out table. He has lit himself an old paraffin storm-lamp that has been around in the house for years. He has the flame down low, dim enough so that it won’t distract Chiaki from finding her bed. Still, it is company in the dark.

Above him, Chiaki’s heavy footsteps make it clear that she has taken in more than the night view from the top of the mountain, a drunken pounding. But at least they have come home safe.

Soon, she is down on her *tatami*, however, and the house soon recedes back into its quietude. He can move the lamp further out into the room, off to the side of his grandfather’s painting. Placed just right, he keeps the wick from pulling his eye while preventing any direct glare catching on the canvas’s oils. Only when he is satisfied with the effect does he sit back and cross his legs.

The dark green of the background is black and deep. It drops away from the figure’s head, from the young man’s raffish tilt, a swagger originating in the shoulders, as its contours come forward, those ridges of paint that give the face its structure and solidity. The handsome

brow is prominent, the sensual cheeks. Roan Kozu's eyes shine with the same wit that Seichiro remembers creeping out from around the mouthpiece of his pipe. It was the same spirit his Uncle Yuichiro exuded, the same greediness. Both men embraced modernity and gave back to it tenfold, but not for any altruism greater than themselves. They wanted to reap the rewards. This is why Seichiro moved the painting from his father's study to this wall before the *butsudan*. Here, if he wanted to, he could open the altar's doors, light a stick of incense, and *talk*. The young man will always listen. If there is any resemblance to his father, he has never found it –and not for want of trying– not even if he tries to imagine his father without the scars and gold teeth, the set especially made to replace those removed by the Russian guns, along with all his humour and compassion. The spell cast by the painting is indifferent to such an absence. Roan Kozu is a moment away from laughing.

It is a little early in the year, he thinks, but Shiki once wrote:

*For me, on leaving
you, staying behind:
two autumns*

*

When the stairs creak, he looks to the back doorway and the corridor beyond it, expecting Chiaki to come stumbling through the dark, heading for the toilet, drunk and happy. But instead, dressed in a loose, white nightdress, the ghost breaks out against the shadows. Her hair is spread around her shoulders. Her feet and legs are bare. She raises her hand at him.

He is too exhausted to muster much anger. His side hurts, again, as if something is coiling around his kidney, squeezing.

‘You shouldn’t be here,’ he says.

Despite the stillness of the night, his voice is small against so much house, all this wood.

‘I know,’ she says and is gone, out of frame, her footfalls moving off, down the corridor.

He buries his head in his hands. She has never shown her face in his father’s house before and never dressed such a way. In her winter khaki over-clothes, or her black prison smock and shorts, but never in a white nightshirt, her erect nipples on view and the shirt just covering her dark pubic hair, the rise of it above her buttocks as she walks away, not looking back. She wants to twist the blade. Only yesterday she came for him and he sent her away with his seed inside her. This is how it is between them. Whether she needs him to flesh out her half-existence, to stop her from fading into the true abyss, he does not know. He has poured over the old stories, Japanese lore and Chinese –those that oscillate between the two– looking for answers and finding little more than inconsistencies. For all he knows –for all he has ever known, these fifty years past– his semen has transmogrified her into something *fuller*, something *persisting*, a girl who walks amongst the living as if she is one of them, who eats and sleeps and makes love like one of them, and needs him only when this life-force runs dry. Or, perhaps, it is more simple than all that. She takes pleasure in tormenting him. She does this because she can, because she couldn’t stop him from hurting her when she was alive. There were many diabolical spirits like that in old Japan and old China alike. And she is here again.

When she reappears, he says again, stronger this time, ‘You should not be here.’

She enters the room anyway, the sway of her hips echoing in the white cotton. She kneels down beside him *seiza*, the white cotton of her nightshirt riding well up her thighs. In the lamp-light, her skin is wheat-tea brown.

He starts at the voice that comes next, the girl saying how he shouldn't worry, that, 'Grandma Chiaki is fast asleep,' that she has had a little too much to drink.

He looks to the doorway, then about her shoulders, looking for the face of the ghost, expecting it to be hovering behind her, leering from the darkness. Kasumi stands in her place, dressed in the same knee-length white nightshirt. 'Sorry, if we woke you.'

His jaw flexes twice, before he manages to say that he was up anyway.

'Are you okay, Grandpa?' She leans in close to him. Their shoulders graze. 'Wow, doesn't Great-Grandfather look magnificent!' Stifling a hiccup, she continues. 'There is a *nihonga* painting by Gyoshū Hayami that does something similar, only, that painting has a great cone of flame reaching up from the bottom, all warm oranges and soft reds, it's really beautiful, really stark given the black paint closing in from the edges, Gyoshū doesn't need bright pigments, and around the cone's peak –if you'd call it that– there are moths. Big ones. They look like they are dancing in the flames, hypnotised, and caught in that moment before they're incinerated. Oh, what's the title again ? It comes from a Buddhist sermon, the Flame Sermon, or something.'

'You mean, The Fire Sermon. *All is burning, burning with birth, ageing and death, with sorrows, with lamentations, with pains, with griefs, with despairs.* That one?'

But she is not listening. 'It's a marvellous painting. Yokoyama Taikan, himself, said he could never have painted such a fire.'

There is something in the way she adjusts the hem of her nightshirt that unsettles him, a modesty the ghost has discarded in death. He can smell the alcohol on her breath. She is drunk.

'Don't you think he looks like he's going to smile,' she continues.

Seichiro does not voice his agreement. Not now, not to her. He is tired, stuck between the ghost and this girl, his granddaughter, who has stayed up to sit with him. The look of her

thighs, their smoothness, brings to his mind that other body, the intimacies they have shared together. It is enough to make him want to reach out, through his embarrassment, to touch them, to squeeze and feel the supple give of youth, whether his palm meets with warm flesh or cold, whichever is the truth of this strange night.

She says, ‘Do you think if we wait long enough, he’ll move?’

‘Where did you hear that?’

‘Come on Great-Grandpa Roan, do something, move. Give us a sign.’

‘Someone told you that about Uncle Yuichiro’s paintings?’

‘I’m just being silly. Besides, you lit the lamp light. All very dramatic.’

Dramatic? He has never thought of lamp light in this way. This is how he grew up. It is why he likes the dilatory light that filters through his surgery’s windows. There have been those who have written about old Japanese houses and their need for shadows, and they were not extolling the exceptional. Dimness was the way of things. A way of life.

‘This is how the monks at the Kaneiji Shrine Temple exhibit their collection of ghost paintings,’ she continues. ‘The shrine is in Ueno, grandpa, right behind my campus.’

‘Is that so?’ he says, wondering how she will remember him.

He looks away from the girl’s legs, startled at himself and at the heaviness of the room, the weight of the great black wooden structure, how it pushes down on him. There is silence between them, again, lamp light. There is that old invisible lake of incense, in which they are sitting, their knees on its mossy bottom. There are stories that are in need of telling. Things he needs to say. Things that he does not want take with him to whatever comes next. They are rustling inside him, dry with age, like old maps. But this silence –how it can last and last– is such a convenient accomplice. It is a shade away from forgetfulness.

He says, ‘No, I have never seen this painting move.’

Maybe it is the drink in her, maybe she is more tactful than either her mother or grandmother has ever been, but he senses that Kasumi is giving him space. That she is willing him to talk. That she is expecting him to. He just needs time to unfold his things first. Delicate things. She understands that the past has no beginning, and so, has many. An artist's instinct. Painters must live it, that acceptance of how we can only cut up the pieces, give them a shape. They are ink drops in water. Leave them long enough and they disappear. He sighs and is relieved to feel the pain in his side subside. Some stories have to start far away in order to get close, to arrive at the heart of the matter, and, so, work their magic.

He chooses his words carefully, says, 'He was quite a man, you know. I don't think I have met anyone with such flair as Uncle Yuichiro. I so admired that about him.'

He lets the maps of the stories he feels the need to tell begin to unfold inside him. To his surprise, their surfaces are much brighter than he expected.

12.

‘My father told me that medicine and good draftsmanship go hand in hand. *They’re co-creative*, he would say and, as if to prove such a hypothesis, he showed me the notebooks he compiled when even younger than I was at the time. A challenge no doubt. Or at least, so he must have thought. Why else would he have kept them all those years? And they are here, somewhere, in this house, in the study, I expect, or the third floor rooms. I tell you, all these years and I still haven’t the strength of heart to go through all his papers.

‘At first, they frightened me, his drawings. There was something raw about them, closer to reality in their smeared pencil lines than even a photograph. There was something deliberate. To my untrained eye, they were horrible, visions of hell from a Buddhist painting. Flayed animals, their bodies rent, I saw them as the machinations of an unstable mind. And it is true, he hated cats most of all. Why else do you think Yuichiro painted them so often?

‘But it was in those notebooks, in his observations, that he honed his eye and nerve. He never told me so, of course he didn’t, my old man? But you can see it, the hours he spent dissecting animals with whom? Why, with Uncle Yuichiro. They did it all together. They were boys playing at doctor and artist. Playing with life and death. That is how they received their first insights into the workings of our inner worlds, our dark and silent places. You can sense the wonder in the fussiness of their styles.

‘Yuichiro was the eldest, as you know, the future patriarch of the family. But he was more besides. Athletic, handsome, like his own father, and particularly skilled at catching stray cats upon which he and his brother practised their dissections, operations undertaken with the utmost care. They even used a scalpel from their father’s discarded surgical kit, the one with a wooden handle. And these boys were competitive, the very spirit of the age, vying

with each other over who could know more, who could map it out in a sketch better, who could do so the quickest. Medical science would accept nothing less from them.

‘But there was a difference between them. Yuichiro was a braggart, an extrovert, what my father called, *vulgar*. It was a matter of course that he never followed in the family profession. When Yuichiro left Hokkaido, it was not for medical college in Tokyo or Kyoto. He left Japan all together and not for a prestigious university in Germany. He wanted to paint in Paris. To make a name for himself as an artist.

‘How like him to flourish in Europe. But only after he had set himself apart from the crowd – that is how he referred to his fellow countrymen, those other Japanese who had set up their easels in the Louvre or squandered their inheritances by joining some dusty *academie* – to learn how to be unimaginative from unimaginative men.

‘Though he had an eye for anatomy, a gift, my father said, he went to Paris to paint Japanese beauties. They were neither the whimsical fantasy projected upon our women by the whites – a strange paradox, when you think about it because, at a time, they were hell-bent on picturing us as deformed monkeys. But, that aside, some said he was obsessive about his models, that he poured over their every detail, every hair, every curve, but also taking an interest in how they dined, and how they interacted with different people. How they made love. He soon had a reputation as a playboy, a lover who would switch from ecstasy to disgust in a matter of days. It helped that he painted quickly.

‘On his return to Japan, he displayed his works to the embassy crowd in Tokyo, those nudes of his which had gripped the world. And he took to writing about himself in the dailies, too, about how he had broken free of the style the French critics had expected of him, had expected of a Japanese painter.’

‘So you see, these were the these stories I heard when I was a boy. I think my father wanted to use them as a kind of warning. I was to be purer in spirit. In school, I recited the

Imperial Rescript for Education with gusto. At home, I read the *Hagakure* aloud and studied my father's anatomy texts. He thought it best I study in Manchuria, so I went.

I was spoiled, you see, or so my father said. He thought I was soft, a child filled up to the very top with the decadence of the age. He liked that the militarists were growing strong. He had watched men give up their lives in the name of Emperor, watched them do what the world had said was impossible and in doing so they had given Japan a chance to become something great, a world power, and not some colony. He thought someone needed to make a stand, those who knew best. The nation's morals were at stake. *Stop the rot*, he said. When those young officers started assassinating ministers, he grew quiet. But then the Army made all those gains in Manchuria – they set up an entire state and all without the express will of the government. Then he was happy. He thought it was the perfect opportunity for me to show my mettle. After all, even his brother had come back from Europe, the greatest dilettante of them all. He had journeyed out to the continent to paint the troops and contribute to Asia's grand future. That was when Uncle Yuichiro still painted heroic scenes, flag-waving charges and the like. The darkness would come out later.'

He asks Kasumi if she understands, but the girl's head has already slumped forward. She is snoring.

13.

It is a long trip back.

Long and refreshing.

The train curves into a long bend, the first in hours. Through the open window comes the stink of cinders. Seichiro watches Wakamitsu's reflection, watches his chin fall onto his chest, and his head bob along in fluid rhyme with the tracks, and wishes he could fall asleep himself. He knows he cannot. If the Lt. Col. wakes up and finds him lallygagging in the spring sunshine, he might snap out of his congenial mood. You can never tell with military types. Living with his father taught him that. To fall asleep now would be to drift off into some fantastic dream. He already has a feeling he will remember these two days of travelling for the rest of his life. It is easy to be sentimental about such country with the sun out and the air warm. There are wildflowers. When he flew north from Pingfang by plane, the air was ragged with the last short, wet flurries of the Manchurian spring. From the air, the steppe looked bruised, the long dead grasses finally rotting in the thaw. He feels at the centre of some moment, a point of time that isn't quite his and yet is deeply personal to him. Only a short while ago it was deep winter. Soon enough, the weather will turn clammy. After that, the heat and dust will come and he will think upon the clement breezes of Hokkaido with a nostalgia bordering on homesickness.

Lt. Colonel Wakamitsu must be thinking something similar because, all of a sudden, he wakes, coughs and, on checking his watch, calls in his orderly, Murasaki, in from the outside corridor. 'Coffee,' he says to Murasaki, and asks if Seichiro would like a cup, too. He need not say anything else. That he has a cousin who liaises with the International Concession in Shanghai, and so can procure the best American blends, he mentioned

yesterday, after he interrogated Seichiro on his surname, his place of birth, and any possible connection to Yuichiro Kozu.

Corporal Murasaki cannot be much younger than Seichiro, but he has the square face of a farmer and the rigid military discipline that suits a selective mute. When he returns, the tray he bares has two cups upon it. Wakamitsu is delighted, but Seichiro can feel Murasaki's nonchalant attitude towards him when he offers Seichiro his cup. In Japan, this would never do. If his father were here and Murasaki was attached to his household, there would be trouble. But out here Murasaki gets to suckle his arrogance whenever he snaps at the train's car-boys and native guards.

Wakamitsu is obviously pleased with himself and can afford to feel magnanimous. On his return to Pingfan he will hand over the day-to-day administration of the cold injury unit to his civilian subordinate, Dr Yoshiwara. From there, he will return to Tokyo, by way of Mukden.

Yoshiwara is already asserting himself and has requested a refrigeration unit be built into the lab, the kind seen in pictures of great American trucks. The engineering works are to have commenced already, while he and Wakamitsu have been away. Such eagerness smacks Seichiro as impropriety, especially given the fact that the Lt. Col. is a military man!

Perhaps, Wakamitsu is hiding his resentment under all his polish. He needn't take advantage of his status. Not this time. At the conference he proved his worth. His efforts in the field, orchestrating the research findings from the Village's cold injury lab with its sub-units in Hsinking, Hailar, and, of course, the Southern Manchurian Railway Hospital in Suifenho, have borne fruit, a drug called Lebanarin, which has been proven to increase the Japanese physiological resistance to the cold. He is to oversee the Yamanouchi Pharmaceutical Company's production of this wonder, while Seichiro's data on ethnic and gender variation is to be used to develop the drug's wider applications in this war, ready for

a general distribution amongst the local workers. Wakamitsu has admitted to Seichiro that he doubts, however, about whether the army is willing to spend money on drugs that simply keep the Manchurian coolies out in the open for longer, no matter how many bomb craters need filling, or airfields need building. 'There are always more coolies,' he said when deep into his drink.

Seichiro sips his coffee and scans the horizon. He wonders if the pistol on Murasaki's belt is loaded. The Chinese girl says there are bandits in the open countryside. He wonders what a derailment would feel like – that and taking the Chinese girl by force. Oguma has made his jokes and paid his visits to the White Russian, in the evenings, taking the keys from the office when it empties out in the evening, and with impunity. But he is older and a soldier to boot. Nobody, not even Dr Yoshiwara, would interfere with a Kempeitai officer.

He imagines what Murasaki's reaction would be if he were to stroll out into the corridor right now, this very instant with that swagger Oguma has, and ask for more coffee. He could offer the cold, little bastard a cigarette, too, make small talk, and then tell the good corporal about the cells beneath his laboratory.

'There are women,' he could tell him, 'stacked up the way Europeans store wine.'

The train is a civilian transport and so does not pass through the railway siding at Pingfang. Seichiro, Wakamitsu and Murasaki alight at Harbin Station. While the corporal organises their escort out to the Village, Wakamitsu leaves Seichiro to wait in the officers' waiting room. He has things to attend to in the city. He does not say what; he is an officer. The station building is a grotesque attempt at art nouveau, but does have an expansive square before it. Seichiro prefers to wait here, watching the sun drop behind the city's buildings and shivering as the cold rises back out of the ground. He buys a bag of caramels for an exorbitant price and, to his disappointment, fails to sight a single black Dodge.

14.

He wakes at 2am. The heaviness in his guts twists into stomach cramps. He is cold and shivering, slicked as he is in his oily balm of sweat, like a seal. Three times he gets up to void his bowels, but, having eaten little over the course of the last two days, spurts muddied water. His anus is swollen, his skin breaking open again with every excretion.

But, after taking rohypnol for so long, this is his brain is just readjusting his neurotransmitter. Cold comfort. He is assailed by so many different shades and textures of pain. It could be worse, though. He is not vomiting.

I should have been ready for this, he thinks. There's plenty of Pepto-Bismol in the surgery at home – and Kaopectate.

He knows it was foolish of him to think he could come off the sleeping drug so abruptly – no matter his good intentions. And now Kasumi and Chiaki are upstairs, sound asleep and he is down here wrapped in agony. That he can suffer so, and that they are so close in proximity and yet ignorant of it, amazes him to the point that tears come rolling down his cheeks.

He is desperately thirsty. He sips water straight from the spout of an old iron kettle. He does not care that the wet base of the object will mark the boards besides his futon. Every time he goes to the toilet, he refills it in the kitchen, adding a little sugar and salt. A dash of lemon juice would hurt his guts initially, but would be good for him in the long term. That and some yogurt. But the house's kitchen is all but bare. He and Chiaki never stay long.

‘Little sips,’ he reminds himself, returning again to bed. ‘Just little sips.’

He can hear Chiaki's voice inside his head. *Water intoxication?* she is saying. *Is that what you're doing to yourself? Fine doctor you are.*

The door to his father's study clicks shut.

He finds Chiaki's handbag in the front hallway, at the bottom of the stairs. From inside it, he fishes out her cellphone. Locking the toilet door, he sees his face in the mirror. This will not do. He splashes water on his face from the sink. He runs a comb through his wet hair. There is nothing he can do for the black bags under his eyes. He changes into fresh clothes. A white shirt hides the sweat. He makes sure his wallet is in his jacket pocket.

Around the corner of the house, well out of earshot of the *tatami* room's window, he makes the phone call he told himself he would not make.

*

The city's twenty-four hour dispensary is downtown, by the railway way station. There, he pulls his credentials from his wallet, requests the rohypnol he phoned for half an hour ago, some bentlyl.

'Sorry, emergency call out,' he says to the pharmacist who looks too sharp and clean to be working the night-shift, and so makes him nervous. 'At my age. I should retire.'

He explains how he has rushed down from Sapporo to take care of an old patient of his. Keeping a vision of his father in his head, he paints a picture of a particularly fastidious

individual, an old-timer who has recently returned to the city after his retirement, but is yet to register with a new doctor and is too fussy to visit a general hospital.

‘What a drive,’ he continues. ‘I’m exhausted.’

The sickness in him, his frailty, forces the lies out of him, like the first solid stools after an upset stomach.

The pharmacist does not even look at him while he fills out his forms. After asking to take down Seichiro’s professional information, he asks no other questions. Seichiro realises there is no need to spin out such a long-winded explanation and so joins the man in his silence.

After disappearing for a few minutes, the pharmacist returns with a box, similar in size to a shoe-box, and a bottle of bentyl. ‘As you know, doctor,’ he says, ‘we can’t dispense individual packets of rohypnol. There are twelve here. The rest you’ll have to take back to your surgery and stow away. Are you returning home in the morning?’

Fearing his ruse will be uncovered, Seichiro walks away from the building, walks until he can no longer see the railway station, walks until the wretchedness from lying so easily dissolves into a burning expectancy.

He arrives at the seawall that runs along the length of the city’s western edge. There are lights twinkling out to sea. The port’s squid fishing fleet.

The coolness of the concrete on his buttocks brings him out in goose-bumps. He unscrews the bentyl and takes a sip of the chalky liquid. He has no means of measuring the quantity. He just guesses. With the box of rohypnol he is more careful. Inside this, the twelve boxes are efficiently packed, like bandages in a dressings kit. These smaller boxes are white with blue writing. Instead of his normal brown pills, there are three capsules inside. Their

shells are half blue and half transparent, their contents visible within, the grains large for this kind of delivery system. He eases the two halves apart and tips a tiny pile of balls onto his palm. He is surprised by the steadiness of his fingers and the clarity of his mind. Smoothing the drug out flat with a fingertip, he gets a sense of his bearings. He licks the tip of his finger and subtracts a third. He has no intention of knocking himself out. He rubs the residue from his palms. If there is a *kami* of the beach, here is his libation.

At first he feels no different, the pain rips him, but after a quarter of an hour or so his body lightens like the sky over the bay. He feels as if some great power is releasing a seam of stitches that were pulled tight inside him. It is a contentment he has not felt for days.

He decides to wait until the sun's disk breaks into view over the far mountains before heading up the beach towards Chiaki's questions. He needs to think about where to hide the box of sleeping drugs and how best to placate his wife. But the drug is sinking his mind into liquid amber.

15.

breakers at dawn

obediently, they bloom

white flowers

Seichiro walks under the seawall, its concrete curve illuminated by a low sun, deep red through a veil of high cloud, and perfectly shaped, like the roundel on Kasumi's painted airplane. If there were any early risers on the beach, he would feel foolish, what with his shoes hung around his neck, his shirt sleeves rolled up. The air is still and too cool for such a get up. If she were with him, Chiaki would insist they walk along the concrete promenade behind the seawall. She has never cared for the touch of sand between her toes.

He walks on towards the mountain. As a child, he thought its wooded peaks, resembled a great mythical creature that had laid down in the sea and slumbered for so long it had become furred with moss. He is heading towards the beast's half-submerged nose.

Left as he is to his own devices, he is free to walk where he pleases.

He enjoys the peace, this quietude made manifest by waves breaking. Bashō understood the paradox. Silence within sound. He heard it inside the call of summer insects, felt it seeping into hot rocks with cold centres.

Knowing Chiaki, especially what she is like when away from home, she will sleep in and when she hears the front door slide open, will call down to him that she is up, that she has been waiting for him to return so that they can dine out for breakfast. That she drank a little too much last night will mean nothing to her. She has never suffered from a hangover, a quirk of her physiology that has annoyed him no end over the years. There will be the fuss of a hurried departure, confusion over where to go, a leisurely pace once seated at some little

family restaurant down by the fish market. At such a pace, they won't make any headway on cleaning the house. It will be lunchtime before they head out to the Hakodate-hoseiin Cemetery, the very destination of their little annual pilgrimage to the port.

He peers into the distance, to where the beach terminates at the eastern flank of Mt. Hakodate. Unlike the other side of the spit, here, few buildings clutter up the shoreline above the seawall. The beach ripples along beside it, split in two distinct colours. Silver, where the waves slap down. Black for the rest. So much black sand, in fact, he imagines it as the ash from the Village's great incinerator.

'*White flowers*,' he reflects. The image is too generic for his mood, though some ancients would praise such a cool-headed rejection of ostentation. *Wild chrysanthemums* would offer a more specific texture to such frothy curls of water. His poem owes no small debt to Santoka's.

'Ah, Santoka,' he thinks, as the strain of walking for so long with the chemicals in his system pulls on his lungs, 'you old rascal.'

Not only did the poet break free from the rules other *haijin* had adhered to for centuries, but he broke free from the constraints of society as well, quite an achievement for the military years – what people still called the *Dark Valley*. Wandering drunkard, beggar, Zen priest (self-ordained, of course), Santoka followed his feet, pockets full of nothing, detached from the world and thoroughly entwined in its seasons and sensations. The poet's mother committed suicide when he was a child. Pushing his way through the legs of villagers, he caught sight of the body. It hung on the end of a hook. Such haunting memories, along with his father's ineptitude with money, ensured he was sad and poor his entire life. He was a poor husband and father, in turn. He died in 1942, the same year Seichiro returned to Japan from China and finished his medical studies.

As if shaking off all energy, the sea rolls down hard upon the shore. It is a strange extravagance given the motionless air. Aomori is out of sight behind the morning haze.

How his father adored chrysanthemums.

*

By the time he leaves the beach and starts the climb up the lower part of the mountain, the sun is warm. It will be a hot day. He is fine with that. The suburb of Aoyagicho is sleepy. The ramshackle houses of the shoreline, with their rust and gravel parking lots and wild grasses (the occasional collapsed roof of some abandoned one-decker), have given way to large modern residences. Between them, he catches brief views of the sea. He skirts the long, low wall of Hakodate Park and sees only one other soul, a young man washing his motorcycle, who offers him a friendly, quarter bow. After ten minutes, he passes under the platform to the cable car station. The shortcut up the mountain to the viewing platform is not yet open. He wonders whether Chiaki and Kasumi visited the viewing platform last night or went straight out to dinner in the end.

He crosses a wide road which leads straight down the slope and heads towards the Orthodox Church, along from which is the Yohane Church. Motomachi is so full of churches. Seichiro has never set foot in any of them.

He finds Chiaki in the parlour, kneeling between two stacks of old newspapers. A beam of light is coming through the window and illuminating her. The rest of the room is in shadow. The black lacquer doors of the family's altar cabinet are open. Inside, gleaming, are its two golden Buddhas. A rice ball is laid on a plate upon the cabinet's pull-out table. Chiaki has been burning incense.

They greet each other and he asks after Kasumi.

‘At the bathhouse on Kusaga Street.’ She doesn’t look up. ‘She’s not feeling well.’

Such news weighs on him, more than it ought to. Her absence will be a short one, but he had so looked forward to being there when she woke up. So she has gone to bathe. He would like to do the same. That is one thing about the Hakodate house, other than its narrow windows and dark wood. A private bath was never fitted. For his granddaughter, a young lady from the capital, he and Chiaki must seem hopelessly rustic. She has only ever known her mother’s apartment. How foreign a house without a bath must be. The thought produces a strange pride within him. When he was growing up, this was nothing unusual. Even today, he imagines there are some university dormitories where the bathing facilities are a public bathhouse down the street. His father’s walks down to the Plum Blossom Baths on Kusaga were part of his strict, daily routine. Seichiro went there, too, but with his mother, until he was old enough to go alone. It amazes him that the place is still there, no doubt, smelling of both freshly soaked and almost dry cedar planks, a wonderful concoction given that the trees do not grow on the island.

Chiaki lays out a fresh paper before her. She presses out the wrinkles. ‘Kasumi will be a half hour or so.’

‘Half an hour? That is not long enough for a bath.’

‘*If* we had known where you were, *we* would have been better organised. I told her to meet us at the cemetery.’

The way she says *we* grates. It has only been a month since Kasumi’s arrival from Tokyo and Chiaki has fallen back into her old routines, into what she did with Fusako, their daughter. She is pulling the children towards her, like a bitch brooding over her litter.

‘Besides,’ he says, ‘she doesn’t have to go with us. She can work. We could always pick her up at the *Yūhi* on the way back.’

Chiaki reads the page’s headlines aloud to herself.

He says, 'I'm surprised you're up.' But he is in no mood for sniping and so asks after the papers.

'I didn't take them from under the trash net, if that's what you're thinking. I asked Mrs Kobayashi next door if I could procure hers old papers for cleaning the windows – which I have done by the way. Like I've said a thousand times, if you're not going to sell this place, you really ought to rent it out. Every time we come here I have to spend most of my time cleaning. And then we do what? Leave it to moulder for another year.'

The high stacks either side of her make her look very small. It is clear she has been making her way through them for some time. He doubts whether she has cleaned a single window pane. She needles him from above her reading spectacles. 'And what do you mean you're surprised? We aren't here to be idle. It was Kasumi's idea. She made an early start, and I thought I'd better join her. And we weren't the only ones, were we?'

'And breakfast?'

'We have already eaten.'

She palms another page flat. A headline states how, once again, North and South Korea cannot decide on the wording of a memorial, one to be installed in Hiroshima Peace Park so as to commemorate those Korean labourers killed during the war.

'Like I said,' Chiaki says, eventually, 'we didn't know where you were, or what time you'd be back.'

'The Plum Blossom Baths, you say? A bath sounds like a wonderful idea.'

'Don't even think about it, we need to get a move on.'

'What about the house?'

'Didn't you hear me? Kasumi and I have given this place a good dusting. More than it deserves. Well, everywhere except the study. You never left the key out.'

‘Should we drop some taxi money off for Kasumi? It’s quite a walk around the mountain.’ The distance is not even half that from the station back to Motomachi, but he cannot imagine any youngster from the capital walking very far. His own legs are tired from his morning’s trek and so he asks: ‘Do you want to take a taxi?’

‘No. The sea air will do us good.’ She returns to her paper. ‘So why don’t you go out to the shed and get things ready. You could have at least picked up some fresh flowers.’

16.

They take their time walking to the cemetery. The road is long and gently arcs. Not a soul is to be seen. There are few properties found at this seaward edge of the city. Out to sea, there is a large white ship. It is not a container ship. It does not look like a ferry. Behind it, the horizon is toothed with mountains fading into three different shades of purple. When Kasumi arrives, he will ask her how she would describe the colour. In the crook of his elbow rests a bucket. In it are three some soft-bristled brushes and old rags. Resting along the length of Chiaki's forearm is has a small bouquet of white chrysanthemums (he had insisted). In her other hand, is a *fukoroshi* cloth bag containing some rice balls, sugar cakes and a packet of cigarettes.

Located on the far side of Mt Hakodate, Hakodate-hoseiin Cemetery lines both sides of the Funamicho Road, blacktop cutting its narrow band around the foot of the mountain. Seichiro stops to take in the view. Because he has slept so little, he has indulged in one more pick-me, the smallest kind, and the last for a day or two, he promises himself. It is a wise choice, given the landscape before him: there can be no better place for a cemetery in all of Japan. If Santoka, or even the aged Bashō saw it, they would pen something. Other than the scruffy little beach resort where the road gives out (though there isn't much of a beach and the houses that serve it have rusting window frames), there is only the cemetery, the cliffs of the great mole's hind leg, the sea. Most of the grave markers are cut into tall rectangular pillars, very narrow in aspect. If it were not for an occasional, umbrella-like flourish (the same type of little pagoda flute found on stone lanterns), the host of flat topped rocks would look like some geological wonder. Or so Seichiro entertains himself by thinking, as Chiaki chats on about how, after they're done with their cleaning, she wants to take Kasumi around the coast, to the tip of the peninsula and the Mizunashikaihin Hot Spring, under Mt. Esan.

‘Good food and hot springs,’ he thinks. ‘She sounds just like the TV programmes she spends so much time watching.’

But at least her mood has improved. He had feared the worst. On their way round the flank of the mountain, he had called in the Koryu Temple so as to check on the time the priest would be calling round to the Kozu plot. That had ruffled her feathers.

‘Priests have wristwatches, too,’ she had said. ‘Don’t be presumptuous.’

He had walked into the old wooden structure with the image of the drunk monk he had endured at Gas Point the other night in his head. That was part of the reason why he felt another small taste of rohypnol necessary. He had not liked the priest he spoke to, either. A man in such a position should be more standoffish, he fancied, aloft with metaphysical insight. Soon the temple would be busy with the *Obon* obligations. A little early trade, however, seemed to please this man immensely. He chatted freely with Chiaki and in a tone devoid of solemnity. Seichiro said as much to Chiaki when they continued on their way and she scolded him, telling him not to be ridiculous.

For a good ten minutes afterwards, she walked behind him, deep in the silence of the Wolf Fish. But it did not last, thankfully. Either she had mulled over the point and found him right (of course, she would never say so), or the thought of staying in an expensive hot spring hotel frosted over her temper.

They arrive at the Kozu family grave stone, their legs a little tired, but in good spirits.

After a short break, they get down to work.

Seichiro fills his bucket at the public faucet. Chiaki brushes away dried bird excrement and beach sand from his family’s stones. He wonders what words she could have spoken inside her head when she put the rice cake on the *butsudan*’s pull-out table. The chrysanthemums are leaning against one of the stones, their heads full and bright like puffed-up coral. By the time Chiaki is through, the granite will shine, doubling the flowers’

presence. Thoughts of Pingfang surface. He remembers the steppe's enormous sky. It was quite unlike the sky over the strait to Aomori. Hot and dry in summer; frostily dry in winter; dust-hazed for a good half year; then, it lifted into a sharp blue, like the Russian girl's eyes, only softer. There was no menace in it.

There were those days and nights choked with snow, of course, followed by a cold more intense than anything even Hokkaido could muster. After he started borrowing books from Oguma (he liked the image the Kempeitai warrant officer cultivated for him, an intellectual in high boots), the snow's beauty grew intense. 'Imagine:' he thought, 'this wind ripping through Manchuria will tumble over the Sea of Japan, soaking up moisture, softening, until, from air so still a crow's bark pierces the heart, fat flakes wobble. Such a world has no sharp edges – save the crow's impudence. It is a season fit only for the minds of Japanese poets.'

'And artists,' he adds.

This admission, along with another quarter tablet of rohypnol, his third intervention (though who's counting?), lets such thoughts unfurl. He returns down the slope, bucket sloshing, taking his time, imagining his stomach pulling the drug apart and into his system. Falling to, washing down and scrubbing the debris from the grave markers to side of the Kozu stone, all good manners, he remembers how the sun would peel back the clouds over the steppe's horizon. How its rays flew along that great white expanse all the way into the inky ripples of distant hillocks. There were no trees, nothing to stand black against all that much whiteness. This awed him. He wondered whether poets like Bashō could cope with such magnitude – such open vistas, against which, when he returned by truck from the testing sites way out beyond the airfield, Ro Block stood out like a temple building in an ink painting almost given over to white silk. Its four great chimney stacks threw four black columns into the great blue nothing. If Oguma were with him, as he often took an interest in his work ('It'll

be my feet on the line, one day, not yours,' he said), he would look up and, judging from the porosity of the black clouds, make jokes about how fat or thin the *logs* were that day.

*

'*Oi!*' a voice calls out from the Funamicho Road.

His eyes are heavy. When he drags his gaze up from the surface of the grave, he has to concentrate on casting it out again, to get things back in focus. His head is swimming, the sea is so bright.

Down the road is the ghost.

He looks out to sea and then back again at the figure. He is not mistaken.

The ghost shortens her path by coming off the asphalt and threading a route between the grave markers, veering this way and that, steering around clumps of square pedestals, where the makers have been clumped together. He cannot muster much surprise. He is too busy watching her movements, pleased that there are no clearly delineated grids in this place, nothing so rigidly organised, like you would find at sites in most cities. Where the mountain buckles, the markers rise and fall. It is as if the cliffs are giant, petrified trees; the cemetery is built over and between their roots. It is a satisfying comparison to make, he thinks. He had always hoped to have more children. They would have made a fine sight weaving amongst the stones, like a little procession of goblins.

Chiaki looks up and waves.

And waves.

The ghost's voice is full of an unusual vitality when she returns Chiaki's hail. She apologises for being late.

Chiaki says not to worry.

‘No one’s about,’ returns the ghost.

Only, now that she is closer, Seichiro can hear Kasumi’s voice emerging out the very same distance. ‘I had thought I had missed you.’

His high is playing tricks on him.

The ghost has arrived at the Kozu grave and, now in Kasumi’s voice, explains that she lost her way. She had taken the road lower down the slope, the one parallel to Funamicho.

He moves onto the next grave marker, snatching short little glances at this strange apparition. A couple of minutes, he tells himself, and his granddaughter’s face will settle into place. He gets in close to the stone and puts out his hand to absorb some of its coldness. Its inertia. *Work through the knots*, he thinks, *all will be fine*. This stone is particularly dirty and gives him the chance to push into the surface, to dig into his actions and get his elbows loose. Maybe the family ran out of people to take care of it. This is the ghost’s problem too. No sooner does the thought surface from the neon mist of his high than he tries to grab at it, to wrestle it away because in Manchuria, a woman who dies unmarried has no one to perform the pacifying rites for her spirit. He looks up again, over to where the two women are talking. The ghost looks as beautiful as ever. More so, because there is colour in her cheeks, a strand of wet hair sticking to her cheek.

The girl is saying how sorry she is, that she should have delayed going to the bathhouse until after they’d finished up for the afternoon.

There is no malice in Chiaki’s voice when she says, ‘It wasn’t you who we were waiting around for, was it?’ She has kept her good humour, and Seichiro’s sinks further into himself as he watches her keep on talking and smiling – straight into the face of a dead girl.

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The sun is still to break over the top of Mt Hakodate by the time they finish up. Beyond the mountain's shadow, the sea is bright. A rice ball, a little pyramid of sugar cakes and a packet of cigarettes are offered to the spirits of his family. The three of them clap their hands together, falling into their own silent prayers.

Their respects paid, Chiaki packs away the flowers and food again. 'It is unacceptable to leave flowers to wilt and rot in a cemetery,' she says, 'or food to turn.' The cigarettes she places inside the stone flower holder, out of sight.

17.

‘I’m not staying for dinner,’ Chiaki says. Leaving him in the hallway of the old house, she takes the stairs up to the second floor. Seichiro, caught by surprise, stands at the foot of the staircase. Kasumi has been in the *tatami* room ever since they got back from tending the graves. He can hear them speaking, but can make out no words. Chiaki is keeping her voice low.

When she comes back down again, her oil cloth bag in hand (filled, no doubt, with her toiletries), she announces once more that, tonight, he will have to feed himself.

‘What about Kasumi?’ he says.

‘She understands.’ And with that, Chiaki brushes past him. At the end of the corridor, before entering the *genkan* proper, she calls back over her shoulder that Kasumi is not a child. ‘And neither are you.’

He wonders what words have passed between his wife and his granddaughter, all out of his ear shot. Shame stings him. What must Kasumi think?

Chiaki slips into her shoes and pulls aside the front door. She does not slide it to again after she passes through. She wants him to watch her walk away. This is what she is like. She always has been. And red-faced and speechless, he cannot help himself. He pads down onto the cool stones of the entrance hall and out onto the front step. There, he remains for some time, looking down the street, then over the shingle roofs opposite. The sea is calm and catching the afternoon sun. A steep path cuts down between two of the houses before him. Although he knows its cobbles end abruptly when the path meets the main street at the bottom of the hill, he thinks to himself of Bashō’s poem

pouring the hot sun into the sea, the Mogami River

When he looks back again, Chiaki is out of sight.

He is tempted to go straight upstairs and ask whether Kasumi would like to go out for dinner. They can dine wherever she wants. If Chiaki is going to act the fool, why should they both play along?

But, instead, he retreats into his father's old study. There, he sits at the old leather-topped desk. It is covered over with boxes, each filled with old tat. But not everything in the study is useless. There are things in this room that he could show Kasumi, remnants of Uncle Yuichiro's life in Hakodate. They would diffuse the tension brought on by Chiaki's absence. 'Your grandmother has always had a short fuse,' he could say, but Kasumi's footfalls are on the stairs.

'Grandpa!' she calls down the hallway when she reaches the *genkan*.

He gets up, goes to the doorway. She has her satchel with her.

'Oh, you're in there,' she says.

'You're going out?'

'To sketch.'

'You can use the desk in here, if you want. There is plenty of space.'

'It's okay. I like to work in plain air.'

What a skilled meddler you are, he thinks of his wife, after Kasumi too walks out of sight down the lane. Even in her absence, the old Wolffish can push herself between him and his granddaughter, leaving them both ill at ease. He wonders if the old house's *kami* is watching him, watching the head of the Kozu clan, the wretch who cannot control any of the family's women. Every part of him feels heavy. It is as if the silence of the house at his back is seeping into him. This is not the afternoon he had imagined. After such a wonderful

morning, he had thought Chiaki had blown off her steam last night. He focuses and breathes, searching for some of the morning's lightness.

The sea is unchanged, only now he recalls how Bashō had first penned quite a different version of his Mogami River haiku, one that started with

how cool

Back in the study, he knocks several boxes off the desk and onto the floor. This makes him feel petty. His head whirls from the remnants of the morning's heavy dose of rohypnol, but it is waning. It would be dangerous for him to take any more, he thinks, and, calculating how long he shall have to wait before he can do so again, he is not pleased with the results. The quiet of the house feels enormous.

It was not always thus. It was in this room, after all, that Dr Jun Kozu met his patients. He did so until the week before his death. It is a large room, the largest in the house. This is what he should be telling Kasumi, he thinks and sighs. He should be telling her about how, before his father took over the running of the household, the study was the most westernised room in the house. Surely, such a room as this affected his uncle Yuichiro? That would get her attention. It was the only room –and still is– with a stone fireplace. Chiaki looks to have run a damp cloth over the mantle. Its jade-green tiling gleams, like those fireplaces at the old British consulate. The room's carpet is long gone. It was a dull red. He cannot picture it with any exactitude (Uncle Yuichiro, now, he had an eye for such details, down to the very weave). All Seichiro has is an impression of the pattern, how it must have had some black or brown running through its fibres. That carpet was a marvel. To have such a rough padding underfoot, instead of the chill of the floorboards, was astonishing to him as a child. Even on a summer's day, one as warm as this, after the initial pleasure of the boards' coolness, the soles

of his feet, his toes, would grow cold. He always wore slippers. Likewise, the *tatami* room upstairs was his grandmother's and, eventually, his father's room, and so he never benefitted from the warm touch of *tatami*, not unless they went out to eat, or until he owned his own house – the Sapporo house. He grew up on these cold boards and slept in a cot-bed, just as his uncle did, a bed not dissimilar to the one issued him when he was in Manchuria, for his dormitory was situated above the cold unit's laboratories. Most of the other unmarried civilians at the Village were billeted together in the communal barracks with their large, open rooms, and homely routine of laying out and rolling away one's futon. He was a Koza – a youngster, yes – but he was given his own room, nonetheless. And now he cannot keep his own wife under the same roof as him. His daughter lives on a different island entirely, along with his granddaughter, who, although she has come up to stay, has disappeared off into the afternoon sun and done so without him.

He stares at the opposite wall. It looks to be built almost entirely out of books. The shelves start a hand's width from the floor and continue all the way up to the ceiling. Some of the old tomes belonged to his grandfather, though most were his father's. Most are medical in nature – some in English, others in German. Seichiro considers taking them all down, to pile them up on the back porch and flick through every page, showing the paper to the sun, airing them out, like the maid used to do. Shiki did the same with his favourite volumes of poetry and his histories, only he did so during the monsoon season in Tokyo (how glad he is that the *tsuyu* rains do not travel this far to the north). Shiki would then write poems about the experience. How antiquated the contents of these books must be. Things move so quickly in the realms of medical research.

His gaze falls upon the large safe in the room's back corner and he guesses the same is both true and untrue of art.

The safe is a huge thing. Like the rest of the room, his father obviously wanted to make an impression on those who came seeking his help, the great son of a great doctor. He kept his practice's store of drugs behind this huge metal door, the household's accounts too. But after his death, when Seichiro attempted to go through the old house and decide what could be taken back to Sapporo and what could be let go of, he found several of his uncle's paintings in there. One was particularly poignant. He had thought it lost years ago. It was of an old man who had lost both his feet to frostbite whilst on a failed military expedition in his youth, a training venture over the strait in Aomori. He was one of only a handful to survive the slopes of Mt Hakōda and had done so because he had grown up in the mountains as a charcoal burner. By the time his uncle found him and his story, he was in the twilight of his life and living beside the railway station in Hakodate. Seichiro hadn't seen that picture in decades. He hasn't looked upon it since. All those works have stayed in the safe, paintings he doubts Kasumi knows exist. His father had never mentioned keeping them. But he never finished tidying up the house. He hadn't the strength of heart to set it order. He has returned intermittently ever since.

He wonders where Kasumi is going. He hopes she is walking out to the Teashop Yūhi. He hopes she will work through these last precious hours of sunlight, after the sun drops behind Mt Hakodate, leaving him and the old house to sink into the mountain's twilight. That is when the café's veranda is at its most delightful. Surely, the walk will clear her head. It will ink out Chiaki's wilfulness.

He pictures the girl leaning over her sketchbook. Before her is the window, its view of the sea framed by those twisted pines. She has her brush-pen in hand and is laying down stroke after stroke on the thick paper. Her fingertips are black with the effort.

*

Chiaki is first to return. It is dark outside.

He is making coffee in the kitchen, when she comes in and hoists onto the kitchen table a convenience store bag. From this she removes a bottle of *sake* and a large selection of snacks. Her hair is dry and limp. He guesses that she has not visited the bathhouse.

The sight of his wife with a bottle of rice wine, however, does not make Seichiro smile. He knows this display does not signal a long, quiet evening of reading, say, one of Bashō's longer works, like the poetic travel diary that contains the master's Mogami River poems. With the smell of the coffee in the air, he misses the veranda of the house in Sapporo. Already, across his allotment, the Mountain must have darkened into a deeper presence than the night sky. He can just imagine sitting there, listening to the insects, as other mountains emerge from the magic of Bashō's words. Not tonight. Chiaki will not drink to make herself sleepy, nor to pass the time. She can be a nasty drunk.

'Where is Kasumi?' she asks.

'She left not long after you did.'

'She *left*?'

'She went out.'

'I understand that. Where did she go?'

'How should I know? She's not a child, remember? Besides, I could ask the same of you.' He gestures to the snacks (there are so many!). 'And what's all this?'

She ignores him. With two glasses tucked under her arm, she takes the *sake* bottle and some dried squid upstairs.

*

When Kasumi finally returns, he is in bed, his futon laid out beneath the portrait of Grandfather Roan. And although Kasumi is quiet, Chiaki soon has the hallway light on. His wife's appearance is so abrupt that he suspects that Chiaki has been listening out for the girl's return, awaiting her summons, just as the maid used to do. Together, the two women go into the kitchen. Chiaki's voice is easy to make out (so she *is* drunk!). She asks Kasumi several times if she is hungry. 'I didn't know what you liked,' she adds. 'They didn't have many *obentos* left and what was there looked unappetising. I picked up some odd bits. Nothing special. I have already taken a glass upstairs for you, so just take what you want from here – you do look famished.'

Neither woman looks in on him as they pass the parlour door. He feels invisible, a half-presence. Like a shadow, looking on.

*

Bare light bulbs hang in a line down the subterranean corridor. Although hot water is pumped into the cellar's overhanging pipes, the cold persists. It lifts out of the concrete like a ghostly presence. He imagines the smell of the Chinese girl's skin. Her hair.

'Oi,' he says down the corridor. 'Tadaima.' I have returned.

As if preparing for a magic trick, he hides the bag of caramels he bought at the station behind his back.

18.

The phone rings and Seichiro is awake. It is not as though he has been asleep, no, just, elsewhere, a scalpel in his hand, cutting through shards of charcoal in his old laboratory. Wiping a strand of saliva from the corner of his mouth, he is startled by his surroundings, by the room and its bookcases and shadows, the blanket over his shoulders. There is a light on in the hallway. This is not his bedroom? Neither is it his surgery. He looks up at the portrait of Grandfather Roan. He is in the parlour of the old house, he realises.

The phone on the desk rings and he looks at it. This is what snapped him out of time, or rather, back into it. It rings again and he lets it be.

He turns on his father's desk lamp. The cone of light it throws out casts the rest of the room into a deeper gloom.

The phone rings on and on.

Only when he hears the stairs creak and Chiaki's angry mutterings does he finally pick up. It takes him a moment to understand what it is exactly he is being told.

He asks, 'What do you mean by a fire?'

'It was in the shed,' comes the voice down the line. 'Down on your field.' Miss Himura is on the line. She sounds exhausted. 'Kozu-san, there has been a fire,' she repeats.

'What? At the house?'

Miss Himura asks for Chiaki.

From the doorway Chiaki says, 'What has happened to the house?'

He says, 'I don't understand,' and realises he does not know which woman he is addressing.

'Please come back as soon as you can,' says Miss Himura. 'The police want you to sort this out.'

‘The police?’

‘I’m sure they will contact you soon.’ Miss Himura sounds on the verge of tears. ‘I thought it my duty, Kozu-san, I thought it best I –’

But Chiaki snatches the receiver from his hand.

‘In Kasumi’s shed?’ his wife says into the phone, looking at him straight in the face.

‘But how?’

19.

Back in Sapporo, after the fire, he works through the insurance papers at the western-styled dining table.

Kasumi and Chiaki are downtown. After they arrived back in Fukui to find the shed scorched by the fire but not gutted, Chiaki has promised replenish Kasumi's lost supplies. It was all she could think to do for the poor girl and said that Seichiro would spare no expense. Pigments, brushes, even silk, if they can find a good enough supplier, Chiaki has promised Kasumi anything she wants. It is a kind if useless gesture, he knows. She knows nothing of artist-grade silk, if there is such a thing, nor where to acquire it.

'There's so little time,' Kasumi kept saying. 'What am I going to do?'

He tried to assure her that her professors would understand. University's these days are much more protective. Her supervisors must give an extension to whatever deadline have set her.

Knowing Chiaki, she has taken Kasumi straight to a fancy department store's stationers. He can see them now, Chiaki buying up the store's most expensive items. She will think this an act of kindness, a job well done.

He puts down his pen and decides that he will take a closer look at the damage. The police report on the dining table records the cause of the conflagration as accidental. Fortunately, Mr Oguma was close by, attending to the field's sprinklers as Seichiro had requested he do. He used the garden hose to douse the flames. If Oguma had hesitated, the whole shed would have burned to the ground.

*

The shed's structure looks fine to him. He doubts the insurers will give up any of their precious capital over some scorch marks on its floor. What remains of Kasumi's pile of *tatami* mats reminds him of a brazier, one that has been left out in the rain. The sight leaves a deep impression on him. Ash should have a lightness to it, he thinks, a sense of incorporeality, as if awaiting a good gust of wind. But, just in case something else should ignite, the fire brigade have doused everything down with an extinguisher. The weather has been so hot. From what he can tell, the painting on the floor burned first. The two completed panels, those on the worktop, were casualties of the fire crew's good intentions. Torn and wrinkled, their silk resembles submerged skin. The paints have mostly dissolved, bled away. He can still hear Kasumi's sobs, from when she stood on this very spot and took in the extent of the damage for herself.

He heaves the burned mats outside. Two, however, look little damaged. One is slightly scorched, where the heat from the fibres above it burned through. The bottom-most mat looks untouched. 'This one's still useable, no?' he mumbles to himself. It is thrown out nonetheless. In their wake: a grey rectangle stands out from the soot.

Looking at the untouched mat outside, an odd feeling comes over him. The image of the ghost, her raised legs, holding in his semen, returns to him. He tries not to react, to not even frown. The sun is on the mat's yellowed fibres. The ghost has lain only a few centimetres above it. She has wet them, a girl younger in flesh than Kasumi and so much older, and now these old husks of grass have burned, he wonders if by her own hand.

Using the watering hose, he fills a bucket and collects a steel-headed broom from the tool shed. He sets to, scrubbing at the concrete floor of the shed. When he is done, he decides, he will take a set of stepladders and inspects the shed's roof. This will give him a chance to

look over the allotment. He has already walked through the bean tunnels on his way here. They are verdant. The ghost is gone, he tells himself. He fucked her. Accidents happen.

Two pale butterflies zigzag through the corn stalks.

*

‘Oi, anata!’

Chiaki and Kasumi are standing by the camellia bush. They must have seen him and alighted at the bus stop by the crossing. He smiles. Taking the bus, instead of a taxi, means one thing. Chiaki is feeling guilty over the amount of money she has spent on whatever is in the glossy-bag Kasumi is holding.

Before he can even dust himself down, the two women are on their way down the field’s path.

‘Look what Kasumi has!’ Chiaki says, and when closer again, ‘Look, look!’

He holds up his blackened hands to his granddaughter, hoping for what he does not know. A show of solidarity, perhaps? He says, ‘My, my, look at you, Kasumi. You look, well?’

‘I phoned the university and explained what has happened. They said I can have an extension. It’s not very long, but...’

‘At least it’s something.’

‘I thought they’d be incensed. In fact, they want me to take some pictures of the shed.’

‘Pictures? Whatever for?’

She evades his question and adds, ‘And grandma bought me clothes.’

‘A *yukata*.’ Chiaki’s eyes meet his momentarily. ‘It’s nothing too expensive, just something pretty to wear to the *Obon* festival.’

‘The *Obon* festival?’ he says.

‘Of course.’ And to Kasumi, ‘Like I said earlier on, your grandfather hasn’t been to the dance in years and he should show his face. He is the neighbourhood’s doctor!’

‘This isn’t some country village,’ he says.

‘It’s only over in Chuō Park. Do you remember going there when you were a little girl, Kasumi? You always looked so adorable in a *yukata*. I couldn’t resist. You have a good neck.’

A flash of anxiety passes over Kasumi’s face, a look far too grave than can be caused by an unexpected gift. Its familiarity worries him.

He says, ‘I thought you were buying paints?’

‘I did,’ says Kasumi. ‘I bought some more silk as well.’

‘That’s what gave me the idea to find a kimono shop,’ Chiaki chirps. ‘The feel of it.’

Kasumi admits that it is an extravagant present.

‘Nonsense!’ her grandmother chides with a smile. ‘Every young woman should have a *yukata* for the summer festivals. I bet you have two or three hanging up at home at your mother’s. She always liked wearing a *yukata* in the summer. Now come back up to the house. You’ll want a bath before we go out. Don’t worry about him. He *will* like it. And he *will* be joining us. Now, Seichiro, you need to finish up here and then go and get washed up. We don’t have that much time. It’ll start getting dark soon.’

The girl does as she is told, but Chiaki hangs back, obviously waiting to speak to him alone. He pushes at the mats with the broom, deciding on how best to dispose of them.

Eventually, she says, ‘You are coming, whether you like it or not. I know it was Oguma who put the fire out and you’re lucky he stopped by when he did. Now you swallow

your pride. You know he'll be running the beer tent tonight and you *will* go and you *will* thank him in person. I cannot believe you haven't done so already. You've had all afternoon. And he'll expect it, you know that. It's just good manners.'

'I'll just get a hatchet and chop these up first,' he says. 'That'll be best. I'll burn them afterwards. That will finish off the job properly. I'll set up a space for Kasumi in the other shed and she can get straight on. There's no need to cause such a fuss.'

'I said: you are coming with us.'

'To what end? To watch you drink beer and hang about with Miss Himura?'

'You have to pay your thanks. If it wasn't for Mr Oguma's level head, half of Fukui would have gone up in flames!'

*

While Kasumi takes a shower, Chiaki prepares the thin cotton *yukata* and its narrow sash in the parlour. Anyone would think she were laying out the five layered robes of a Heian princess. She has even bought a matching purse for it.

He is in the surgery. If he could have his way, he would stay here all evening, sipping coffee on the veranda.

Kasumi has left grey scuffs on the blade of the old scalpel. There are sharpenings on the chrysanthemum-shaped incense stand. He can imagine his old man would not be happy with her neglect of such an instrument. He thinks again how

this fruit knife

peels a pear

sharpen a pencil

He should ask Mr Oguma to present him Shiki's haiku. He would frame it and hang it in place of the Chiyo-ni. The poetess's snowflakes should have melted a long time ago. He can picture the freshly brushed characters easily, their strong, vibrant strokes across a wide expanse of good *washi* (something off white and flecked, though he would let Kasumi select the paper). His old friend's calligraphy has never had a gentle quality to it. Graceful, yes, but filled with the same strength he wore like a sword as a young man. It is a physical strength the tubercular Shiki never had. Seichiro would like to think that the poet's confidence in literary matters, his robust opposition to the hackneyed manifestations of conformity, was the sign of his deep spiritual strength.

He picks up Kasumi's sketchbook with the same reverence he would administer to his oldest and most precious tome. He wonders how close she came to completing the pilot, before his image burned, to getting him just right, so that he could hold his own against the pilot in Uncle Yuichiro's painting. His double and yet not quite. Maybe it's inevitable; *Nihonga* could never hope to compare to the vitality of those oils, just as oils could never hope to inspire the same sense of ease of being as pigments mixed with animal hide glue. Such a style is best used to evoke a dreamy mood.

'Are you still in there?' Chiaki does not bother leaving the parlour. 'Oi! It's getting late: get dressed – we're leaving.'

'I'm not coming, I told you.'

'Yes, you are, I *told you*.'

20.

It is mountain twilight.

Drums boom down the valley. The long vowels of the *Sōran Bushi* are warbling out of a microphone, like a call to worship. People are everywhere, great droves of them. And children –so many children– so many girls and young women dressed in bright cotton *yukata*. They are heading along the sidewalks towards the elementary school, to the lane that passes between its swimming pool and its own small mountain. Chuō Park is tucked in behind.

By the time the three of them arrive, the park's open field is bustling. A ring of dancers have already coiled around the *yagura*, the tower built of scaffolding and covered in red and white banners, its top crested with large *taiko* drums and the singers' platform. The dancers are all children. The adults will join them later, in several rings, to dance the same dance, paper fans in hand, pacing and clapping in step, an entire neighbourhood calling out the same refrains. Chiaki bows and speaks to those neighbours of theirs that she recognises, the old timers, those who have long come to Seichiro's surgery, and their grown up children. She introduces one and all to Kasumi. They nod and agree; she is lucky to have her granddaughter come all the way up from Tokyo. Kasumi is so pretty, they all say.

He is surprised, however, by just how many strangers there are. There are young families he does not recognise, new comers who must prefer the swanky hospitals downtown to his humble, neighbourly service. All of them are smiling and eating and drinking beer from plastic cups. They act as if they own the place. Many are standing around talking, their temples wet with the heat, while their wives sit on camping chairs and blankets they have brought with them.

Cooking smells drift out from the festival's line of marquees: fried pork noodles in soy sauce, grilled chicken, octopus dough balls.

After waving over Miss Himura, Chiaki sends him in the direction of the beer tent.
'Go on then, pay your respects to Mr Oguma before things get too busy.'

*

The moon is full above the park.

Step, wave-wave, clap, step, go the dancing children, their rhythm continuous, unflinching.

Step, wave-wave, clap, step.

This is how the living have greeted the dead for centuries, though this particular version of the dance is local to Hokkaido, a newcomer to the ancient rites. The spirits are to be imagined amongst the dancers. Dancer and spirit are to circle the *yagura* together, unified by song and action. It is a spectacle best endured through the haze of rohypnol. If only he had thought to prepare himself before leaving the house. How much more pleasurable the evening would be, Kasumi by his side, the cicadas' songs blending into the ambered chill of cold beer. He could let the dead come easily then.

*

Oguma is working the beer tent. He has on his Tokyo Giants baseball cap. His shirt sleeves are rolled up.

Seichiro does not go straight up to his old friend, but joins the queue of revellers waiting to wet the warm night with a cold beer. He does not want it to look like he is cutting into line. That he would be rude. He figures Chiaki and Kasumi will want a drink, Mrs Himura, too. She is bound to turn up, eventually. While he waits, he separates the deep hum

of the cicadas on the hill across the park, from the electric buzz of those lost amongst the branches of the silver birches over head. He does not remember the insects' call being so shrill as this in recent years. When he lived in Tokyo, any green space was swamped with sound, but in Hokkaido, the cicadas have always seemed more subdued.

Before Seichiro can reach the front of the queue, however, Oguma wipes his hands on the towel hung around his neck and excuses himself. He walks away.

It is busy, Seichiro thinks. He hasn't noticed me. When does he ever attend the *Obon* dances, after all? He figures his old friend is taking a bathroom break and so orders four beers. He will wait at the edge of the tent for Oguma's return. The plastic cups are fragile and threaten collapse.

Oguma's orange baseball cap keeps heading away.

Finally, the old-timer cuts behind the grilled chicken tent. Seichiro paces to the back of the beer tent and picks up his friend's familiar gait on the gravel path winding through the children's play area.

'*Oi, Mr Oguma!*' he calls out and decides to head him off.

When he ducks under the climbing frame, beer foam slops over his hands. Some lands on his shoes.

He calls out again, louder: '*Oi!*'

Mr Oguma reaches the little hedge separating the playground from its adjoining picnic area.

Catching him up, Seichiro says, 'Hey there, where are you running off to?' Then, in a lower voice, 'I wouldn't overdo it tonight, you'll strain your wound. Have a beer with me and let the youngsters manage the stall.'

'A strain?' Oguma says, stopping under the hard roof of a picnic stand. 'Stall? Fuck you.' The intensity in his old friend's voice catches Seichiro off guard. Oguma comes out

from under the shadow of the picnic stand's roof. When he lifts the visor of his cap, Seichiro can see that his face is red with rage.

‘Oguma? I didn't mean anything by it. At our age, we all have our ailments.’

Oguma steps in close. ‘You should leave me alone, fool.’ His breath is rank with the bitterness of old age.

‘What has gotten into you? I just came by to thank you. Miss Himura saw you at the shed. She said you put out the fire. The police report –’

‘Are you such a fool? Drunk? Or are you high, again?’

‘What?’

‘What do you mean, *what?* I looked in that shed of yours, the one you gave to Kasumi. I saw that painting. I saw the girl who has haunted both of us for the last fifty years.’

‘What girl? What are you talking about?’ Seichiro does not like having the old soldier so close to him. It is his turn to walk away.

‘Clearly, you've forgotten your orders.’ Oguma pursues him, pushing on. ‘And where are you going, hey? Those orders were not given lightly. And they came from the top – from Isshi himself – and they were very simple.’

‘Colonel Isshi?’

Seichiro hasn't thought much about Isshi over the last fifty years. The colonel was in his prime when he left Pingfang, a man in his early fifties, ready to continue the fight, to keep researching despite the inevitability of defeat. ‘You will take all this to the grave!’ he said to the gathering of the medical staff, the dinner put on for those medics departing for Japan (Seichiro was amongst them). ‘The world will not understand you.’

From what Seichiro has heard, Isshi escaped trial at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, though he did not last long after that. He died in the 1950s. Seichiro found that hard to believe, at the time. He figured Isshi would live longer. The man had a special presence. And

the voice of a train. Seichiro remembers the dispatch he received from a particular branch of the War Department soon after the surrender. *The data you have gathered is valuable to mankind. Our enemies know this. We will protect you.* It said little else, but the subtext was clear. Every researcher at the Village, or any of the other research stations for that matter, those dotted around China, Korea and Japan, knew the value of their work. Either the Soviets or the Americans would want their data. And everybody, especially Isshi, knew who it was best to negotiate with. ‘But the Americans are purists...’ the Colonel said at that farewell dinner. ‘They don’t like to dirty their hands. Once we give up our results, we will not be able to remember them, nor lay any claim to the benefits they bring. The Americans will have it all and they will say nothing about it. So we say *nothing*.’

The dispatch reiterated such sentiments without saying so directly. It simply ended with, *Remember your orders: you are prohibited from talking about any of the activities you took part in or have any knowledge of.*

Oguma says, ‘And you were just a civilian. Still, I know what you were told. You’ve told me so yourself before. And after you came back to Japan and got on with your precious studies, safe and sound and off the continent, they kept paying you. How else could you afford to buy all that land off me?’

‘You were good. You were generous.’

‘I was.’

‘Because we had served together.’

‘Served? Did you really serve, Kozu? I wore the uniform. I took orders. I gave them. What honour do you have? We were ordered to keep quiet. Not just the military personnel, but you civilians, too. I can’t believe that you would betray everything at the last. That you’d ever let Kasumi paint *her*, and for what? For all the world to see? Why would you do such a thing?’

‘You’re mistaken. I –’

‘You’re just like all those other weaklings. Death is coming and you want to dump everything here, in this life. You want to lighten the load for whatever comes next.’

‘All that ended a lifetime ago.’

‘These things never end. They can’t. We burned her up, you and I. Remember that? I helped you take her down to the Village’s furnances. By then, she was no use to anyone. Your unit finished with her first and, then, so did the virologists. There was hardly anything left. She burned up like paper. Remember that? How would you like to have Kasumi paint that picture, hey? All ash and embers, a study in black – what a fine wash of ink Kasumi could conjure. No one outside the Village was supposed to know what happened to her. She was supposed to have just disappeared. You don’t know how many times down the years I’ve thought about that – about why she comes back. But that’s what I have come to believe, that she comes back because she’s been forgotten at home. Haven’t you ever wondered – wondered why? Why she does it? Or is that why you let Kasumi use her? As a *life* model? Was that your idea? Did the irony amuse you? Or did you think that a little attention would appease her soul, would let her drift off and never come back?’

Seichiro says, ‘You started the fire in the shed.’

‘Of course I did. One of us has to stay strong. We have to take what we did to the grave. Take it all with us. That’s what we were ordered to do. And it makes sense. It’s good policy. We’ll knock off soon enough, but our families will go on. I don’t care if that Kasumi of yours doesn’t give a shit about what you’ve done. I doubt she knows the full story. I can’t imagine what it is you’ve told her about what you did in Pingfang. About how the likes of us are remembered in Harbin. But it’s not military secrets we’re guarding now. We’re not fighting for the grand *kokutai* anymore, for the Emperor, or the prosperity of greater fucking Asia. I’m protecting my own. I’m protecting them from me. From our past.’ At last, he backs

off, his voice quieter. 'I bet you've told Chiaki, too. Only a weak man burdens others with his memories.'

'Told me what?' Chiaki is coming across the picnic ground.

Oguma turns to leave but she calls him back. The old soldier turns to her, his mouth contorted with sadness and restraint.

'He's duped us both, you know?' Oguma says to Chiaki. 'What kind of man poisons the future with the past?'

'*Ma*, Oguma-san, you looked flushed,' Chiaki says. 'Surely you haven't been lifting beer kegs all afternoon?'

He attempts a smile. 'Why, do I look like a red-faced monkey?'

'Not at all. Not at all.'

Seichiro says, 'Where is Kasumi?'

'I hope Seichiro has apologised for the incident with our shed,' Chiaki says, but Oguma's shoulders drop. Before she can say anymore, he turns his back on them both. He walks off, back towards the festivities, passing through the children's park, past its plastic animals. Bloated and deformed, a tiger stares back at Seichiro, its legs replaced by thick, metal springs.

*

On the field, the children's dance is over and the adults are enjoying themselves. They are little more than shadowy figures, ring after ring of them. This is all a trick, he feels. None of this is real. It is a goblin's parade. A festival of fox spirits. He is afraid. Take Chiaki and her movements. They are all wrong. They are too lithe for a woman of her age. There is none of the Wolf Fish's brooding. She is all but swimming through the sultry air.

Kasumi comes strutting into view, just another dancer coiling around the *yagura*, smiling and joining in the *Bon-dori*, as if she has spent all her life in Fukui. She looks so comfortable, so alluring that she could, indeed, be a fox spirit, a shape-shifting trickster, as pretty as the ghost has ever been.

*

He cuts through the side streets and alleyways to get back to the highway. He has left Kasumi and Chiaki to lose themselves in the festivities. After Oguma's outburst he needs something less esoteric.

Back in his surgery, he opens the draw to his desk and takes out his father's calligraphy box. He uses the graphite-scuffed scalpel blade to tear into a fresh packet of pills.

Kasumi's sketchbook is still on his desk, where she left it this afternoon. Moving through its first pages is like watching shadows twist on a wall. Then, she is here. Although little more than an outline, a black brushstroke carving through a hatch of pencil lines, he recognises his ghost instantly. The Chinese girl. There is no flight-suit, no leather cap in hand and pressed to the side of the thigh, no sprig of cherry blossom jutting from any chest-rigging. She is a nude. Like the pilot in his uncle's painting, she is lowering her head and shoulders into a respectful bow, only, in the sketch, she is supplicating herself to empty paper. Her bare breast narrows into a seductive point, a crossing of pencil lines bleeding out into space. There is no other breast, not from this angle. The backs of her legs rise up into the small buttocks of a young woman. And she looks flayed in parts, her muscles and tendons on display. Neat annotations label bone and meat. *Santorius. Gluteus medius. Soleus*. These bodily threads and fibres are dashed out in pencil, lines over and about lines, reworked, repositioned, corrections only a plastic surgeon could envision.

He washes down two whole tablets with a cup of hot coffee.

*

The cells are unguarded at night. There are no white rubber suits with hoods here, no barbed wire, no machine guns. The cold unit is outside of Ro Block and the Village's central compound. There is just simple doctoring. Since its establishment, the unit has overturned some of the fundamental beliefs about treating frostbite, procedures and physiological misconceptions formulated during Napoleon's route from Moscow.

If Oguma is unavailable to bid the White Russian girl goodnight, he has one of his non-comms oversee the evening count. Seichiro has nothing to fear, he tells himself. Oguma gave him his word that the Chinese girl would be left well alone. The lab's own set of keys is kept in Lt Col Wakamitsu's office, on the ground floor, by the front entrance. Wakamitsu has always allowed the cold unit to operate regular hours. From what Seichiro has gathered from the talk in the refectory, speed and reactionary prowess belong to the world of microbiology, the world inhabited by those who work in Ro Block, behind its high walls and pill boxes. Freezing takes time, the collection of data takes time, and although gangrene sets in quickly, it is not with the speed of a pathogen taking hold of an organ, or a body emptying of fluids during a vivisection.

The lab is dark and empty. The senior men will be at home in their villas, eating dinner with their wives and children. He hopes they are as talkative as they are at work. He wonders if his father was friendlier when he was in the Army, before he sawed through limbs beneath the Russian guns at Port Arthur. The younger men are most likely taking in a movie at the Village's cinema.

He has dreamed of this moment on the train; he has caramels in a brown paper bag.

He will tell the Chinese girl about the steppe and its wildflowers. He will say they look like a blanket of snow when seen from a great enough distance. He wonders if she been outside of Harbin. Will she think he's exaggerating?

It is dark, but he has no problem negotiating the spiral in the stone steps that lead down to the building's basement and its line of bare bulbs. Each cell has a metal door with a slit peep-hole and, because of the turn of season, most are empty. Their wooden decking, laid down to keep out the chill of the concrete and the earth pressing in from all sides, gleams with damp from where it has been scrubbed down. He is glad he missed all the fuss. Surely, Dr Yoshiwara would have instructed him to grab a mop and bucket, no matter how satisfied Lt. Col. Wakamitsu is with his work – perhaps, because of it. How he will handle five hundred test subjects, Seichiro cannot fathom, at least for now. He will enjoy asking Yoshiwara to sign off on his equipment requests and travel papers. There are not the facilities here to cover his needs. No matter. He will have to go to the mines, into Harbin itself, into the city's factories and warehouses. Oguma will help him. The thought of such adventures excites him.

The Chinese girl's cell is at the end of the corridor.

'Oi,' he says. 'Tadaima.' I have returned. The concrete walls make his voice sound tinny.

To be assured of their privacy, he looks through the peep-hole of the first cell, the White Russian's. She is gone, as to where, that is Oguma's business. The wooden decking is clean, the porcelain toilet –Japanese style– gleams, the girl's futon has been taken away to the laundry. There are pipes overhead for heating; in the summer, because the cells are built underground, they are cool. For most of the logs, such facilities must be a luxury. He thinks of Lt Col. Wakamitsu, of those orders which are to take him home to Japan. Seichiro is not

jealous in the slightest. He likes the Village. At home, who could imagine him walking through a medical facility at night with a bag of caramels and butterflies in his stomach?

He pulls aside the door's viewing shutter and is pleased to see her wrapped up in her futon, asleep.

'Oi, wake up!' He unbolts the door. 'It's me.'

The light from the corridor is all he needs. He does not intend spending the night in her cell. His bed, up the stairs and up again, is softer. He has locked the front entrance behind him and the windows are barred. Besides, he cannot envisage her trying to escape. She likes him as much as he does her. She has told him about her father's house, about its wall of wisteria, how it blooms late because of the northern climate. Perhaps, they are the last wisteria to flower in all of Asia.

He produces the bag of caramels from behind his back like a magic trick, and, holding the bag open to his nose, takes a deep, deep breath. 'Umm, delicious!'

She stirs and the movement swirls up a strange energy in his loins.

He says, 'I know it's late, but look what I've have brought you. A treat!'

Her face emerges from beneath the blanket. Her eyes are misted over with sleep; she is unable to focus on him. Pulling the blanket tighter around her, she mumbles something in her foreign tongue.

Kneeling down on the decking, he playfully holds one of the candy blocks under her nose. She takes no notice and so he takes hold of the blanket and pulls it away from her shoulders, tugging hard, tearing it away from her chest and arms. The smell hits him and he gags. It is like menstrual blood, a mixture of iron and cervical mucus, bacteria. She should be clean, he thinks, free of unintended infection.

She tries to cover herself and he sees her hands, her fingers. They are black and swollen, like rotten beans. The nails are ashen grey.

He grabs her by the wrists, but she screams, throwing him off. Panicked, he stumbles backward, searching for a gag, anything to quieten her. If someone sees her like this – if a guard should hear.

He rushes back upstairs to the laboratory, to its medicine cabinet. There, he scrambles around for a bottle of pills. Something strong enough to knock her out. He realises that he has no choice. He will have to operate.

21.

He retreats above ground, reeling from the shock that Dr Yoshiwara has experimented on her while he was away at the Soviet border, and railing against the bastard and his new programme and his new machine, the refrigeration unit he has managed to install during the time Seichiro has been away, what now feels like both an eternity and no length of time at all. The laboratory's lights are on, their luminescence weak, and Seichiro is haunted by doubt, by a growing conviction that Yoshiwara has left her alive to spite him, and that in the morning she will be whisked off to Ro Block. She will be made useful all over again. He slams his fists onto a table and wants to scream at Oguma. He failed to protect her. But he can well imagine his friend's mirthless smile; how he would claim that, 'Progress is progress. Pussy is pussy.'

He cannot tell how long she has been left in her cell. Long enough for delirium to smoke out her thoughts, that is for sure, to stop her from seeing sense, from seeing that he can help her. That he wants to. Maybe she has wounds elsewhere. He did not see her feet.

Nor ear earlobes.

Breasts.

But he is gifted with a knife. The senior staff have made sure of that. He has practised the procedures under Dr Uezono himself.

Yes, he can help her but must hurry. Her fingers have already thawed. The damage is done. The cells have burst. Decomposition is underway – its bacteria are some of the most aggressive on earth. He must stop the rot, before any more seeps into her blood.

Yes, he must help her and so he gathers the necessary equipment, organises himself. Kidney bowl, scalpel, the one with the wooden handle his father gave him (he needs the comfort of it, tonight), a suture needle, surgical silk, iodine, antibiotics and syringe, surgical gloves. He tests the mechanism of his bone rongeur. The smoothness of its jaw's clipping action settles his nerves and brings his fear back under control. He is trained for this. He is gifted with a knife. There is no lamp under which Seichiro can check his instruments for

cracks and pitting. There is no sterilisation bath, either. They must have been packed away for the night or taken away for deep cleaning. There is no time to go looking.

He pours a generous amount of liquid ether into the thick fibres of a pressure dressing.

He is back in her cell within moments, blade in hand, but he is careful, a blur of breath and muffled screams, the wet gauze in his hand, the point of her nose underneath it. She kicks up and her body lifts, jerking up and away from the floor. But she must breathe. The reflex is as unavoidable as the widening of her black irises. Another stifled yell and he keeps the wad locked in place.

'Hush,' he hears himself saying. 'It's okay. I can help you.'

Warm breath in the fibres. She grows heavier in his arms. The fight leaves her. He loosens his grip and she flinches, pushing at him, wildly, but fumbling – the blade in his hand meets something – he feels the contact – and she hunches forward, clutching at her blackened fingers. Hot tears are on his cheeks. He embraces her again. The heat of her body, of her panic and fever, radiates out to him through her black cotton smock, and her hands grab at him, at his forearm, pulling at him. Her strength amazes him and, to his surprise, he keeps her pinned. He looks at her poor hands. The discolouration of their digits is absolute. And they are wet. Their bullae are leaking, having burst the edge of his blade and against the sleeve of his white coat, like the discharged innards of raw shrimp. He holds on.

'The rot will poison you.' His mouth is pressed to her hair. 'The infection – it's spreading. Shush.'

She shakes her head, but drops to her knees, and he pulls his hand in tighter again.

Once she slips away, out of consciousness, he lets go of the knife and holds the swell of her breasts. 'It's okay,' he repeats, 'I can help you.'

*

He pulls her body up the stairs and into the building proper with a quiet that even Oguma would admire.

With her quiet at last, he can concentrate. In the sink, he scrubs his hands raw, a rough job, brush and soap up under his nails, but that cannot be helped. He goes through his lessons. There are goals to achieve when amputating fingers. He was planning on operating on the least affected hand first, on the finger where he would have not had to cut away too much. But the laceration he has inflicted during the struggle to sedate her means he must change his course of action. And he tells himself that he is fine with this. He is well trained. He is gifted with a knife. He strips off her smock and coats her hand with iodine. Over her body, he lays a clean sheet and imagines Dr Uezono watching over him. This gives him the distance he needs. For this is no ordinary wound. One moment the fingers are swollen with black liquid; the next, they are brittle, like dissipated bean pods. There are strange flashes of pink, healthy flesh. He pictures Uezono's wet eyes, his bored looking-face.

With most of the other fingers, there will be no need to worry about preserving functional length, as there is with this one, though achieving durable coverage will be tricky. He considers how much of a flap to leave. Modifying his plans, he fortifies himself with what certainties he can muster. As his father once told him, all wounds have their own fate.

To forestall haemorrhaging, he manoeuvres, with great difficulty, the hand and its blackened digits into one of the surgical gloves he brought with him. He slits and peels back the rubber of the appropriate finger, a second epidermis, looping the elasticated material around the base of the finger and tying it in place. Tourniquet achieved. Direct pressure. If this were a traumatic amputation, he would have to irrigate thoroughly with saline, but that will have to wait. He must deal with the necrotic matter first. With the scalpel, he makes a circumferential incision into the brittle meat, snapping through the lumbrical muscles like dried noodles. Applying the bite of the bone rongeur, he pares away small chips of bone, until he is left with a reddened pit, much like a cigar with its hot ash tapped away.

Sowing up the wound is a relief. The skin is white, like raw squid. She will need large-doses of penicillin. But, at last, the charcoal-black finger is in the kidney bowl.

Three more to go on this hand.

And half thumb.

*

He hears the scream and does not hear it.

When it comes again, its violence is distant, like big guns firing over the horizon. Something strikes him on the back of the head and bursts coloured lights across his vision.

Kasumi's naked torso is so close he can reach out and touch her shoulder. A sheet covers her waist. He rubs the back of his head and looks at his fingers. There is no cut and yet his hands are covered in blood. He blinks hard and stares at them.

Chiaki's face looms before him, the twisted face of a demon mask. Another cry forces its way through her throat. It has no shape, just volume. It frightens him. And she is at his fingers, pulling and them, biting. He lets go of the knife. And he is in his surgery. Kasumi is on his examination bed. And he has blood on his hands, his fingers, Kasumi's blood. He must get out and is through the door to the veranda when he loses his slippers. The asphalt of the highway is warm on the bottom of his feet.

Ahead of him, the mountain hovers over his field and its blackened beans and the houses of Fukui.

Part IV

KASUMI

A Brief History of Evil

By Kiichi Takayanagi

Preface essay to the catalogue of Art-of-the-Flesh, a joint exhibition of Yuichiro Kozu and Kasumi Kozu, the Shin Midori Gallery, Sumida, Tokyo, December 1996.

Kasumi Kozu *is not evil.*

...

Tokyo was a ruin in my childhood, a city of horizontals, strangely monochrome.

Something remarkable took place in those ashes. People, for the first time in perhaps a century, could grow spiritually into their own bodies. Their flesh and blood belonged to them, no one else. Not the state. Not the state's religion. Not the Emperor. After the country's long march through the self-denial and sacrifice of the Dark Valley, some hurled themselves into the post-war world. For the Surrender brought with it the opposite of surrender. Some artists celebrated this fresh lease of life through its bodily excesses.

In writerly circles, the name Literature-of-the-Flesh, was not only coined, but materialised. It was lived. In painting, too, the body was again exalted, as Tokugawan print makers had done with their hyperbolised images of coitus, despite the shogunate's attempts at suppression. Some of the post-war libertines tore the body into grotesque pieces. They gave up their canvases to a fresh horror, an explosion of angst and rage after years of brutal state censorship. 'Here is what we have become,' they expressed. 'You broke us.'

Some couldn't abide this apotheosis of life; many others just could not give themselves up to such freedoms. The social mores of the Fascist period, of those conventions that stretched on before that (though erotic art was profuse before the Meiji Restoration, before the absorption of a European morality, one named modernisation), the horror of what they had endured, the shame of defeat, the physical wounds they bore, constricted them; the

psychic manacles of the war years never fell off: always there was that sense of threat; that image of the military police waiting for you, for a loved one; there was that need to demonstrate, unrepentantly, the surrender of the self to the kokutai, the national body politik.

But there were Americans on the streets after September, 1945. There were foreign lawmakers and administrators in the government buildings. Great forces gathered their evidence and persecuted their trials, hanging our former leaders, while their soldiers drank and whored and paraded their tall, muscular bodies, like lions. What did that make us? Sheep? Or the remains of some other violent beast? (The hyena?) But the Americans did bring some comfort to those artists I am talking of, those for whom sex was at last rapturous and those who sort to express –to give shape and local colour– the violations they had endured: the invaders brought with them the new Constitution.

And article 21 of that document bids that, ‘No censorship shall be maintained.’

...

Kasumi Kozu’s paintings are not evil.

...

What is the role of art, if not to embody change?

This art-of-the-flesh that I write of was not the protest art I, personally, became involved with in later years, during the 1960s and 1970s, when yet again Asians were consumed in the fires of war. The art-of-the-flesh I speak of was a release, a celebration, a reclamation of the body, after the leaders of our most reputable art circles (with very few exceptions) had joined forces with the military and helped shackle the spirit of the individual to the nullifying abstractions of a self-denying patriotism.

I repeat: ‘No censorship shall be maintained.’

Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code, however, ratified in the 1880s (the 1880s!), stipulates that, ‘The provocation of sexual feelings and shame among the public; and the

violation of “sexual morals” constitutes a violation of “public welfare” ... and, therefore, will be considered obscene and duly open to censorship.’

We have a paradox.

...

*The act of painting –of imagining, of responding to, looking backwards, edging forwards– where *Kasumi Kozu* is concerned, is not evil.*

...

It is 1996. Soon it will be 1997. Rather than the openness initiated by our own artists in the ashes of a burnt and bombed out city, the Meiji Era¹ moralism of Article 175 endures – a moralism that delimits the representation of naked bodies, especially those of women, in a society where sexual favours can be purchased almost at will in certain districts. How can this be? And how can this be the case fifty years after the so-called abolishment of censorship?

*Only five years ago, an obscenity prosecution was commenced against human rights academic Naohide Yamamoto for his book *Soldiers’ ‘Sexuality’ on the Battlefield*. Yamamoto took his materials from a members’ only publication that had fallen ill of paragraph 175. This is not an isolated case. There is an historical precedent. In 1954, the police investigated *Seishin repōto*, a magazine that often published confessions and accounts of its members’ sexual experiences. Many of these were former soldiers who detailed their disturbing sexual activities during the Asian Pacific War. Having been committed overseas, the accounts could not be used for criminal proceedings, but Yamamoto’s book could be censored under paragraph 175.*

Let us not also forget that Japan is one of the largest producers of pornography in the world. Mosaics must cover over any erect phallus, the vulva, pubic hair. Imported adult

¹ 1858-1912

magazines have the sexual organs physically scratched out of them. Nonetheless, they go on sale. Where is paragraph 175, then? The erotic woodblock prints of some of the most famous artists Japan has ever produced can only be displayed, in full, abroad.

Is this a case of definitions? The law says this is the case, and defines pornography as media which has as its primary intention the sexual arousal of its audience. This media includes both the exposing of sexual bodily parts or the depiction of those bodily parts in detail, including drawing and paintings, as well as film. Even narrative writing can fall foul of the law. Although a book may not expose genitals directly, the law says that it may have the power to produce a psychic desire for sexualized human degradation.

Kasumi Kozu's show, Art-of-the-Flesh, seeks to achieve something far removed from arousal. Her paintings, executed in the nihonga style, are a challenge. Though she may be the great niece of the propagandist war painter Yuichiro Kozu, through her works, she rallies against the perverse degradation of the Japanese body – of any Asian body. Yes, she is an artist of the female nude; yes, this was also her great uncle's forte in his heyday, before the war, but let us be clear, Yuichiro Kozu never combined such subject matter – his ability to celebrate the grace of the female form and his skill at rendering the brutal horrors of war. Yes, it was the body that lured him to take up the battle standard, to raise his patriotism above the parapet, and leave the safety of recognition –the status quo– but these were the bodies of our young men. Bodies to be sacrificed. And so, like them, he charged headlong into national glory and, afterwards, obscurity. The critics did not understand his veiled criticisms during the war years (good – his head would have rolled), but history has failed to see the horror he sought to publicise. And now the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, in their attempts to block this exhibition, not only fail to understand what it is that Yuichiro Kozu sought to reveal over fifty years ago, but also what his own flesh and blood, Kasumi Kozu, is trying to achieve.

What do the following months hold? I cannot say. Are Kasumi Kozu's works to suffer the fate of a Fascist book burning?

Where Yuichiro Kozu's early nudes released the Japanese body from the tyrannical hold of Western Orientalism and fetish, Kasumi Kozu's sexualisation of the female form is, likewise, a gift. She is giving back to the women whose lives were torn apart by the horrors of war, whether through direct assault or the collapse or denial of domestic happiness.

As for her method of engagement, her tactics? She repaints the very scenes of war her great uncle came to conjure before the masses. Yuichiro Kozu's bloody scenes of stalemate in China and executions in Indochina, the burnt villagers of Okinawa and the self-murder of the "broken jewels" policy on the home front: all are reclaimed by the women these campaigns tore apart or left behind, those left to remember the embraces of their husbands, or to dream of those young men who were denied the destiny of becoming their lovers. Wartime rhetoric is washed away by something distinctly private. Pain and defiant hopelessness are usurped by pleasure, a joy reduced to pathos.

Such paintings, as these, are as far removed from pornography as any artist of the nude could ever hope to achieve.

...

To deny the compassion behind Kasumi Kozu's paintings, is evil.

1.

Hakodate. It is October, 1996. It is time for the morning's sitting.

Through the room's large window, morning sunlight floods over the *tatami*. Kasumi believes the light is crisper here than at the house in Sapporo. Although both cities are on Hokkaido, the bay at the foot of the mountain ensures this. The house's old study, where Grandpa used to sit in for hours, is too dark for sketching. In this room, on the second floor of the old Koze homestead, with the sea outside, the sun having not long risen above the mountainous headland to the east, she can work

She places a sheet of tracing paper over a photograph and with a HB pencil quickly but attentively outlines the girl's profile. A second line articulates the curve of the zygomatic bone, out from under the eye, down, round, into the fleshy cheek itself. What a beautiful ear! The girl's braid hangs over her shoulder, a sleek black curve that accentuates the contours of her neck. She is leaning into her stance just a little, despite standing to attention, giving away the slight hunch she has, the exhaustion she must be trying to conceal, as if the weight of her breasts is pulling her shoulders forward, although, from what Kasumi can make out through the white cotton smock, they are small. She uses the girl's nipples, how they hang away from each, to sense their shape. There are no bras to be had in the jungle.

The tracing is done in a matter of minutes. Over this, her first impression, goes a second layer of tracing paper. The photo shifts a little, paling. The heavier, more confident, pencil lines come through this second surface – third, counting the photograph. She studies this other face. It is similar to that in the photograph, but also different. This is good. According to her show's catalogue, she is giving life back to this woman under her tracing

paper, patching together her hopes and dreams, reclaiming her happiness, though Kiichi will say she is Japanese. They all are. It is an easier narrative to keep hold of that way.

And Kasumi believed in all this, at first, when she left Tokyo and headed for the north, staying at her grandparents' house in Sapporo. But after the loss of her finger and Kiichi's capitalisation of her mutilation, his insistence that she make her paintings ever more extreme ('Never mind the censors: Think bigger!' he likes to say. 'Think of the international market.'), she has lost her nerve. Still, she must tell the press all about the phantom pains that twist up her nerves when she is painting, the digit she feels in its absence. Relocating to the family's house in Hakodate hasn't helped as she thought it would. The house has just become another thread in Kiichi's vision for her future.

In charcoal, a sharpened stick, she dashes over those pencil lines strong enough to come through the second sheet of paper. Brow, cheek, profile. The girl's features grow ever more familiar. The front curve of the neck, into the jaw, is more interesting this time round (the flesh of the girl's cheek is so full there is no trace of the zygomatic muscle, nor the messater, let alone the bones they connect to; who was she before joining the Viet Cong?). Her's is such a pretty, round face.

Who will consider such complexities after she's finished with her? After she has taken this stranger and gotten to know her features, imagined her life, pondered her fate (did she survive the war, become someone important, a veteran? Or was she captured and raped and executed?). Kasumi will pin down her body with pigments mixed with animal hide glue. She may use some touches of gold dust to make the metal shine because she hasn't decided the pose yet (what will excite Kiichi the most?). Just the face. She could abandon the stance from the photograph, her standing at attention during some training lecture in the jungle.

An idea comes to her. She is unsure as to whether it is her own or Kiichi's – the gallerist thinking through her. She stands up. The room is sparsely finished. Kiichi has had a set of raised boards installed for her. The design, in essence, is similar to the crude platform she built herself in Grandpa Seichiro's shed, only these boards are secured down and run on rollers. There is also a chest of drawers, a huge and heavy thing of dark wood and covered in iron cladding. It must be older than the house is. She tugs open the top draw and removes a cotton bag, the kind banks use to bag up coins.

She takes the bag back to where she is drawing and the smell of the grease quickly fills the air. The pistol she slides out is heavy and almost identical in colour to the chest of drawers. The hand-grip is wooden. The barrel is steel and looks like two tubes welded together, one thick, the other thinner, a simplicity of design that means it is easy to draw.

She leans back upon one hand and studies the weapon. Kiichi brought it up the house last month, when he arrived with a little team of experts to show around the old house – an architect, his favourite curator, and someone else whose name she didn't catch because he mumbled (a lawyer, perhaps – he did not hand her their business card, which struck her as rude). Rather than flying from the main island, they had come up from Honshu by train, the express that takes the tunnel under the sea.

'How could I fly with this in my satchel?' Kiichi had said, then laughed, but only once the two of them were alone. The others had gone into town to eat and, he assured her, were deep into their discussions about how to turn the old house how into a museum, one dedicated to her great uncle, but one in which she could also work in ('We will build you your own wing at the back of the house,' he said. 'People can come and watch you paint!'). He wanted to officially name the project *Kozu House* and claimed would be the gem of the Motomachi tourist trail. She had wanted to ask about the placement of the gift shop, but decided that such petulance was too much like her Grandma Chiaki.

She looks at the drawing coming through the tracing paper, while bringing the tip of the gun's barrel to her own mouth. An image of her sucking the metal as if it were a penis would have a voluptuous edge to it, the girl's lips are full, her cheeks so softly rounded. The straight-edged metal would set off these curves well. Or maybe such rounded cheeks, such a sensuous mouth, would better suit a ball-gag? She could scrap the standing pose altogether and keep just the face (as she tends to do). She could lay the girl on her back and spread her legs, bringing the knees up high, close to her abdomen (with such contortions, she would have a little roll of flesh accentuate her lower belly), the pistol barrel up her cooze. She would exaggerate the vulva, have it resemble a kala lily bloom. With the gun turned upon (into!) herself, the girl's thumb would be on the trigger. Her fingers would be wrapped around the hand-grip in reverse (her toes would be curled).

She lets such thoughts take her for a while, until the light alters in the room and she comes back to herself, back to the half-finished drawing of a Vietnamese girl's face and the onward march of the charcoal's black line.

Lifting the charcoal's tip from the paper, she collects herself, before dropping down again, down into the far breast, then up and the closest shoulder, the other breast. The results are good: clean and strong. But this is not enough. She is looking for a rhythm. Accumulation.

She repeats the process, only now, rather than using a fresh sheet of paper, she lightens her touch, dashing the charcoal over the drawing one last time. Lines smudge under her pressure of her hypothenar. The tip of the charcoal fattens. Curves deepen and flatten out, depending on the balance needed between them. One shift and the truth of another line falters.

When the girl's face is on the brink of destruction, she stops.

Now comes the moment she has been building up to. Right over the top, over everything –tracing papers, photograph– she lays a thick sheet of *washi* (a rough pile, light cream in shade, flecked with gold). The work of ten minutes disappears. She will not use a copying grid to gather up every detail like a tightly woven net. All she is left with is muscle memory, the vague impressions of a stranger’s face – a semblance that she can manipulate. These are what she will use to pull a dead girl back from the abyss. Knowing what will happen to them under her brush, she cannot abide painting faces that are too simliar to those who stare out at her from the photographs. She is not an executioner, someone who would like such a look to linger. What she wants is to keep with her is a sense of the truth, the knowledge that she is painting from a woman who existed, whose pain was real, to know that she isn’t faking it. There is a germ of truth in her works, no matter how hidden. No matter how far Kiichi pushes her to go.

She takes the blade of the wooden-handled scalpel to the charcoal once more. She remembers the lines she has just cut into the tracing paper. She’ll need a good, sharp point.

*

Sometimes, the likeness between the photograph and the final sketch is marked, despite her attempts to have the photographs’ verisimilitudes melt into something more open. At other times, like today, someone else entirely emerges.

While laying out her water dishes and her colours –those pastes she makes, occasionally, when the rhythms won’t settle, or the pain in her hand is too much– she studies the morning’s first portrait. The round-faced Viet Cong guerilla has slipped away. The ghost has taken her place. The ghost who visited her grandfather every year at *Obon*.

Kasumi is glad the sketch is in profile. There can be no eye contact with a girl who is as real as the tourists who come by the Plum Blossom Baths on Kusaga Street, and as fleeting. Grandma Chiaki spoke of her whilst Kasumi rested in the hospital, her hand wrapped in a pressure bandage, while the doctors pumped her full of antibiotics. Kasumi had never suspected. She had thought the girl little more than neighbour of her grandparents, a youngster who liked to cut between the rows of her grandfather's vegetables on her way to the river and its path down to Koton. She was so very pretty: how could Kasumi not have known the girl was dead? She, who has spent so much of her life studying people?

She remembers seeing the ghost several times on the flank of the little mountain that bordered the neighbourhood, the one right across the river from her grandfather's field. Every time, the girl wore a perfect mask of melancholy, even when she caught Kasumi watching her and she smiled back. Kasumi doesn't know whether her memory is clouded over with all the other faces she has studied since, those she has sketched and painted, but the ghost's face, as it has emerged in her drawing, has a similar quality in her eyes as the Viet Cong in the photograph.

It is a shame. Today's sitting felt good and the portrait, its gesture, though subtle (that slight turning away of the head), has a *rightness* to it. She will not use the drawing. It is too close to her own horror. And besides, there is something she cannot account for. Perhaps, it is innocence. To reinvigorate Great Uncle Yuichiro's war paintings, Kasumi needs to have more freedom to invent. The aspect of the girl she pictured penetrating herself with Kiichi's pistol must look *hungrier*.

She starts over, again.

*

Over the last year, since coming to live and work in Hakodate, she has amassed quite the collection of photographs. Some of these she returns to from time to time, especially when a painting goes wrong. Sometimes she is just curious to see how a paper sketch will turn out differently, how the character of the face appears changed, because she, herself, is different. At least she is working. She is healing. Kiichi has provided her with every proof sheet of Yuji Harada's photographs he can find. She turns to these often, but there is Kyoichi Sawada's photograph of a Vietnamese mother swimming away from her burning village, her teeth gritted as she struggles to keep her baby's head above water. Her older son (ten? younger? the fear in his eyes makes it hard to tell) clutches at her back. The tips of her hair are lost to black water. Akihito Nagai's blurred shot of two young women is another, shot of an evening (none in particular), in the border town of Ranong, Thailand. While the girl at the back of the shot is skinning up a cigarette and leaning against a metal shutter (they are under house arrest until they pay off their debts to a brothel owner), the girl up front, close to the lens, stares out across time, and stares hard. It is a wonderful illusion, this point of contact. In the poor light, her eyes and forehead are completely lost to the shadow cast by her fringe. Only her right cheek, her mouth and chin are clear of those impenetrable black patches. There is so very little to work with, but much to imagine. Nagai's caption marks both of these girls out to be refugees. They have fled the Burmese military's crushing of the Saffron Revolution. In the photograph, it is still 1988. A week before this moment was removed from the flux of time, these two women had crossed the border together. They were students. Now, they are prostitutes. And they always will be.

Then there are the photographs by anonymous photographers, professional military types, tools in the intelligence services or propaganda factories, the likes of whom were sent down to Chiran Airbase to shoot pictures of those high school girls, ordered to wave off the *tokko* pilots on their suicide missions. These girls are cheering in these pictures, sprigs of

cherry blossoms held above their heads, waving at boys their own age and crying inside; or they are nameless combatants, like those young American boys who found the enemy hiding in the bedrock of Saipan or Okinawa, an enemy so afraid of them, they leap from the cliffs at their coming.

All these photographs transform beneath her charcoal. They become paintings of Japanese women. War widows. Lost sweet hearts. Secret admirers. Those that keep their quiet spirit, she puts to one side, filing them away in a draw for later, whenever that may be – a time when Kiichi will let her step away from their commodification of war pornography and the sexualised women he wants her to shock the world with.

The act of painting... of imagining... is not evil.

Kiichi said something like that in his catalogue preface. She isn't so sure.

*

She is upstairs when the doorbell rings. She is transferring a fresh drawing to one of the door panels she has taken to painting on (she still cannot bring herself to work on silk – not yet). Down the stairs she walks, through the house, into the *genkan*, where she steps into a pair of plastic slippers and slides open the front door.

Standing before her, on the top step, with the city and the sea spread out behind him, is Old Man Takayanagi. His hat is pressed to the chest of his coat. A yellow yamabuki rose is in his jacket label. 'Good day,' he says.

'Good day,' she returns.

Her greeting is warm and informal but she cannot rinse away the surprise. Not completely. She had expected some kind of reaction from him to Kiichi's essay, but has

passed and she had heard nothing. She had never figured on so grand a gesture; it is a long flight up to Hokkaido from Tokyo.

Bowing deeply, Old Man Takayanagi apologises for arriving at her doorstep unannounced and she looks over his head, hoping to find whoever it is that Kiichi has sent up with his father. She has been working since dawn and the old man must have been up earlier still; that is, to have caught a flight early enough to bring him here by now. There is nothing to see but cobble stones, the shingles of the houses in front, the sea, autumnal mountains.

While he sits down on the *genkan* step to remove his shoes, she says how well he looks. Under his scarf, inside the V of his jacket, she can see that, as always, his collar is open. *Of course it would be*, she thinks. *To have a tie showing underneath a scarf just would not do, not for him.*

‘Some days are better than others,’ he says.

He follows her into the house proper and shakes his head when she offers to show him the second floor and her work in progress. He asks, instead, to pay his respects at the *butsudan*. He knows his way around and leads her into the parlour, to where the family altar still stands. The walls of the room are bare of any paintings. Kiichi assures her that security isn't up to par yet, not to house the collection of Kozus. And to think, the very same paintings had resided here for decades.

The doors of the altar cupboard are closed. This, he takes in his stride and, opening the doors himself, he pulls out the little table used for votive offerings. There are still some items left on it from the last time it was opened. The dried-out camellia bloom, like an old scab, disintegrates between his fingers when he removes it. Then, there is the gold *sake* cup she found in the study, the kind used in wedding ceremonies (she has no idea from whose wedding they are from). He looks into the cup, then at her, his expression as readable as a painting. *I take it these are not your grandfather's remains?* it says.

He clears the table. His movements are gentle, especially with the cup. It is as if he thinks it's filled to the brim with a sacred liquid. She can hear the bones shift inside. The metacarpals from her right hand. From his pocket, he takes a small parcel wrapped in a handkerchief. The crepe silk is plain, but vibrantly coloured (uranium blue?). She is reminded of the sea in summer. Inside is a tiny jar of sliced abalone preserved in vinegar and the chrysanthemum-shaped incense holder from her grandfather's surgery in the Sapporo house. He must know that none of her grandfather's remains are present in the altar. Not a hair, not a nail clipping. Surely, Kiichi told him this?

Before he can strike a match to light any incense, she is off, padding back up the stairs.

*

When Old Man Takayanagi steps inside her *tatami* studio, he has a stern look on his face. She scans the rooms, checking that she hasn't left out any props that could embarrass him. The chest of drawers is covered with jars of brushes and the like. The pistol and her other props are safely away inside it.

'I like the smell of fresh *tatami*,' he says.

'Kiichi had the room refitted,' she says. 'I needed a quiet place to work and, well, he thought Hokkaido would do me good.'

It is true about Kiichi's help. She figures Old Man Takayanagi knows all about his son's plans for the old Kozu homestead. After Grandma Chiaki gave up the Hakodate house to her ('Burn it for all I care,' were her exact words), Kasumi asked him for help. They came up to the port together several times, between her doctors' appointments in Tokyo. Her mother had insisted she see specialist after specialist, though what she hoped to achieve was anybody's guess; Grandpa Seichiro's work was impeccable, all the doctors concurred on that

point. Infection, however, was inevitable. ‘A wooden handle, really?’ they all asked, in one way or another. But all praised the amputation as a magnificent job. She was lucky on that front. One doctor even said that Grandpa Seichiro had managed to insert twice as many as sutures into her thumb as even he could – and he was a trained surgeon. At New Year’s, she moved into the house full-time. It felt good to escape Tokyo again. Grandma Chiaki, having moved into her mother’s apartment in Jiyugaoka, was smothering her. She filled up the apartment with talk of trivia, little things that showed how rocked she was inside. Things like how she could never eat *sashimi* again. She didn’t like the smell. Even when she took to long periods of silence, her presence was oppressive.

Old Man Takayanagi complements her on the room’s atmosphere. ‘I was worried Kiichi would have had the walls sanded down and the place covered with lights.’

‘The window is more than enough,’ she says.

His eyes soften. She takes this as a signal to talk. ‘When it was too hot over the summer, I painted in the room behind the parlour, in the shadows of the house and the mountain.

‘How cool and still – like the bottom of a shallow pond.’

Such an image catches her off guard. It is the kind of thing her grandfather would have said.

‘But I do like it in here,’ she says, ‘even in winter. The snow piles up on the *genkan*’s porch and covers the bottom half of the window’s glass. After that, everything in here was tinged with blue. Even the shadows were brighter.’

He lowers himself down onto one knee (his straining efforts remind her of how lithe her grandfather was, but she pushes the thought away). With his fingertips, he tests the fluidity of the boards and the rollers.

‘You lie on these?’

‘That’s right.’

‘You must be some sort of acrobat.’

‘I like working big.’

‘All very unorthodox and perfectly ingenious.’

He tells her that she is a true Koza. That her great uncle liked working at scale, too. ‘One time,’ he says, ‘when Yuichiro was commissioned by some rich landowner-turned-collector in Akita, he requested that an entire shed be built for him, all so that he could paint a single work, a painting so large and ambitious the patron had to have the canvas especially made. It cost a fortune! But, ah, what a wonderful work. It was a panorama celebrating the prefecture’s winter festival. Akita never looked so good. You would have liked the palette, all that white and blue, and soft pinks – the enormity of such swaths of colour. Only Kawabata himself could have described the painting your great uncle produced, how he captured all that chilly energy, what with children selling ice cones from inside a little snow cave, and men beating a huge taiko drum hoisted up on bamboo poles, others a gong. And my father asked him, you know, Kawabata; asked him to write a few words for the press, but he refused! That was after the war, of course. Yuichiro returned to France the following year.’

Old Man Takayanagi has told her this story, too, when she had visited the Kamakura villa last December. The mountains were capped in snow and he took her up to a bluff that overlooked Yuigahama Beach.

‘May I have a peak underneath this covering?’ He peels back the paper, looks anyway. ‘Have you given any thought to returning to the serpentine line, like you did before your accident? Your ability to outline is a gift. It should not be wasted. Given the dexterity that you have built up again over these few months, I am sure you will be able to return to such a fine line again.’

She says she has no plans to do so, not with brush and ink. Her handling of pencil and charcoal are going well enough, though.

‘So you will continue to colour without any outlining at all, no bone painting? Fancy that.’ His eyes remains soft. ‘But I guess you think you’re paying homage to old Yokoyama Taikan? To the old master himself? I know all about that particular experiment of his, his opting for open planes of colour, with nothing to gather them in. But remember: people were not too impressed by such innovation at the time, but he carried on regardless. Of course, he returned to the expressive line, eventually.’

She is unsure as to whether she is being chastised or not and so defends herself.

‘Even in his monochrome phase,’ she says. ‘Taikan produced some wonderful pieces in colour.’

Old Man Takayanagi gets to his feet and walks over to the window. Again, the slowness of his movements reminds her of just how strong her grandfather was at the end. They found him deep in the mountains. He had died of dehydration. There was no official service, save what her mother authorised. Neither she or her grandmother attended, only her mother.

The smile Old Man Takayanagi gives her is as warm and compassionate as the *yamabuki* rose in his lapel. ‘I thought you could see the spires of the Orthodox Church from here?’

‘Not from the front of the house.’ She is glad that he has changed the subject. ‘But from the back you can.’

After a pause, he points back at the floor and her painting. ‘And you truly lie down on that contraption?’

‘For larger works, yes.’

‘How marvellous. Now, why don’t you and I go outside for some air? It is a beautiful morning for a walk.’

2.

Outside, Old Man Takayanagi asks if the *yuki mushi* are yet to appear.

‘It’s about time,’ she says. The little white bugs that herald the coming of the first snows usually appear in November.

‘It feels cold enough.’

Only to a southerner, she thinks.

‘So, where should we go?’ she says. ‘The autumn foliage was best a couple weeks ago, but I reckon the view from the top of the mountain will still please you.’

He takes a deep breath, as if to demonstrate how invigorating he finds the Hokkaido air. ‘Kiichi tells me that you know somewhere better.’

*

There are small, neat piles of leaves all along Teramachi Street. Whoever swept them up has gone, probably to prepare a bonfire. Old Man Takayanagi comments on the tranquillity of the scene. She says that the seaward side of the mountain is always like this.

When they pass by the foreigners’ cemetery, Old Man Takayanagi stops. With his neck buried deep inside his scarf, shoulders hunched, he looks older again. He points out a squirrel burying something beside one of the headstones.

Expecting this to be a passing comment, she carries on walking and is five or six strides away when she realises he is not following.

‘Your family grave is up this way, no?’ he says as she retraces her steps.

‘If you follow the road.’

‘With your permission, I’d like to pay my respects.’

‘To Great Uncle Yuichiro?’

‘To everyone.’

They walk the length of Teramachi Street and she wonders why he would want to do so, having already offered incense at the house’s *butsudan*. What more could he have to say? Maybe walking the very streets that great Yuichiro Kozu used to has let something rise up to the surface in him, like an object, once buried in the silt, freed to gleam again. It is strange to think that generations separated her great uncle and this old man, that Yuichiro Kozu was old himself when they first met. It is always difficult to imagine how the elderly were once young.

Despite the lateness of the year, the mountain above them is bright with autumn leaves. In the late afternoon, she explains, when the sun climbs high enough, the leaves light up like a painting, as if gold filigree and ground cinnabar were drizzled down upon the trees and held in place by honey. Old Man Takayanagi nods and smiles. Her cheeks burn with embarrassment. Her’s was an exuberant description. Plainness suits him better.

At the entrance to the Teashop Yūhi, she apologises. ‘You will have to go on without me.’

‘But you are my guide, no?’

She gives him directions to the family plot and says that he’ll be fine. She will wait inside.

Taking her usual seat before the window, the one framed by pines, she watches the sea. It is more black than grey.

*

Old Man Takayanagi is not gone for long. Either he had little more to say, or the off-shore breeze was too cold. Over hot green tea and cakes, he tells her how much he likes the Yūhi. He believes every artist needs some kind of territory, a place the public can picture them in,

even if it's just a shack in the woods. 'Yuichiro's spot was a little café in Montparnasse. That's in Paris, you know. It was called the Houdini.'

She assures him that every art student has heard of the Café Houdini. Picasso frequented the place, Léger also.

'Of course, of course,' he says, smiling, 'though I thought every art student dreamed of holding their own at the Café de la Rotonde. Or is such a desire unfashionable these days? How about waking up and feeling wretched in some gutter in Greenwich Village?' He looks out to sea. 'Not quite the image of a *nihonga* artist, is it?'

'I suppose not.'

She laughs but he does not follow suit. Again, she cannot syncopate her rhythms with his.

'It is good what you have up here, Kasumi. Hakodate is a long way from anywhere. Your roots go deep.' He lights her cigarette, but does not take one for himself. 'You've had family up here almost as long as there has been a city on these shores. And what is more fitting for an artist like yourself than to herald from a place famous for its renegades?'

He is referring not only to those samurai who fled to the port when the shogunate fell and the modern world swept in on Japan, like Hokusai's great wave, but to Great Uncle Yuichiro, too. The samurai fled to the north island because they wanted to establish their own republic. They wanted their old world to live on. Yuichiro Kozu fled to Paris to escape that new order, only to come back again when Imperialism was at its peak. Bloody forces crushed them all.

'Your skill and vision are without doubt in spite of your accident, perhaps, even because of it. Kyoto would strangle you. That's for sure. You would never be able to stomach the pomposity. And Tokyo? Well, Tokyo is Tokyo, you know what to expect down there. But here? You can branch out, give *nihonga* a fresh lease of life. There is a darkness in your

work, I have no doubts about that, no matter how light your palette or deft your brushwork, outlines or not. But the softness of your style, of working in *nihonga*, those qualities will banish any sense of the macabre from your work.’ He turns around to look at her. ‘I have seen the paintings Kiichi has collected at the Shin Midori for safe keeping. Your grandfather really did lock away some treasures in that old house.’

‘He did.’

‘And I’m curious, did he ever mention me?’

‘Grandpa Seichiro?’ She rubs the end of her stump with her damaged thumb.

‘We met. Did you know that?’

When she does not reply, he continues, ‘I guess I have my own confession to make. I know that you never held a service for your grandfather. That is partly why I have come up to see you and because, in his absence, I feel it as my responsibility to look after you. Ours is a complicated relationship, the Kozus and Takayanagis. Our families have been entwined for almost a century – ever since we supported your great uncle. It is true, that his expulsion from the Art and Culture Association, let alone the New Art Association, crushed Yuichiro. They were very powerful forces in our world, especially during and after the war. Yuichiro had given his all for the nation and look what he got in return: exile. But does that mean his genius evaporated? Had he been judged wrongly for all those preceding years? No, no, no. Your Grandfather Seichiro shared my deep respect for Yuichiro’s work. It is true, he kept his secrets – just think of all those canvases Yuichiro painted during that summer before he went off to China. A good while after Yuichiro’s death, I came up here, up to Hakodate. I came to talk to your grandfather. I was negotiating the sale of some of Yuichiro’s last works, or what we thought were his last. The French wanted them, you see, and anything else they could get their hands on, diaries, sketchbooks, especially from his Paris years. Kiichi was young and acting as the go-between, but I said it was best that I spoke to your grandfather in person. He

was, after all, the executor of the Kozu estate. He was a good man, a practical man. It was a shame what the papers said about him last year. Although we can never shed our skin, we do not remain the same person over the years. We are many. Or maybe it is that we see things differently. It is hard to explain plain truths. Anyway, he and I both wanted to ensure that what little of Yuichiro's oeuvre was left would be looked after. I believed then, just as I believe now, that one day, your great uncle would be allowed to shine again. He was a trailblazer. But the war distorted everything, rising him up and then dashing him to pieces, all in the space of seven years. Seven out of a lifetime. Still, I was confident his name would emerge from the shadows of the Dark Valley. It has taken years, but here we are, now. His work will finally be exhibited again, though for the wrong reasons, I dare say.'

She thinks about those works of her great uncle's kept in the Yasukuni Shrine, those that she has spent the last year repainting, and wonders if the shrine's museum would agree with the old gallerist's assessment. It is her turn to smile and not smile, to wear her *soto* face, the mask presented to outsiders, an expression he reads easily.

'Kasumi, just acknowledging that his war paintings survived the bombings and the Occupation could cause an international incident. There are those abroad who would use them to further disgrace Japan, and do so after all this time. For them, the war, as far as we are concerned, refuses to pass into history. So, seeing that your grandfather is not here to advise you, permit me to be frank.'

'Of course.'

'Pull out of the show. Listen to me. These are not just reservations. I've seen the catalogue. Kiichi is trying to pre-empt a backlash. It doesn't take a visionary to know that such an exhibition will cause trouble.'

'Trouble?'

‘You have gentleman friend, I believe, a married one. Tell me, how many of your paintings did you show him?’

‘Hiroki? None, I –’

‘Well, he gave an interview last week. It went to print yesterday, the Sankei Newspaper.’

‘The Sankei?’

‘They have real conservative bent. It was clear he went to them to damage your credibility. To damage you.’

‘But what damage could Hiroki do? Besides, Kiichi’s prepared for this. He told me so. He said there would be a backlash. It was inevitable, given the show’s content.’

‘But has my son informed you of the powers the police have in such matters?’

She stares at him.

‘I’m afraid Kiichi has left you in the dark up here: that is the rub. I wondered why he took such a stance in the catalogue essay – and the way he released it so early. It was clearly defensive. Now I know the truth. You see, it is the police who monitor and judge what they believe to be illicit goods – and that includes artworks. Your *art*.’

‘You can’t stop the show because of one negative article.’

‘The Tokyo Municipal Police have the power to advise any producers to leave something well alone if they believe those goods –whatever they are– are a threat to the public’s morals. Such a warning, if heeded, can defuse a situation. A public prosecution can be averted. That’s how bureaucracy works. If there’s no fuss, there’s no trouble. A polite notice is issued, heeded and harmony is maintained. If the message is ignored, then they will attack. And they can not only jail Kiichi as the distributor, but they will jail the artist as well. That means you Kasumi. This is not a game. The Shin Midori was issued such a warning last night. The new Superintendent-General phoned me himself. I have spoken to Kiichi and he

knows the consequences as well as I do. Still, he wants to act the fool. Political martyrdom has always appealed to him. You, on the other hand, do not have to be so foolhardy.'

'But they are just paintings.'

'You know better than to say such things. Don't think for a minute that, what with your accident and your grandfather's passing, the authorities will show you any compassion.'

He unfolds a strip of newspaper from his coat pocket and hands it to her. 'Read for yourself. And then answer me this Kasumi, is this how we are to present our artists today?'

5.

A black sea.

Again that sensation of thinness. It drops the bottom out of her stomach. Old Man Takayanagi has taken a cab from the Yūhi and headed back into town. He has an early evening flight booked.

From Cape Tachimachi, the mostly southerly point of Mt Hakodate, she looks across the strait for the mountains of Aomori. They are in cloud, airy peaks backlit by a gun metal grey sky. She imagines a painting, one executed in the style of a wedding kimono, white on white, the image, like embroidery, brought out of the paper by the ridges and troughs in the paint. That's the joy of working with animal hide glue. Light can pass between the grains of pigment. Even soft colours can glow with an ethereal dazzle. You can't get that with oils. She tries to visualise the specifics, but there are other things inside her head and a hole in her guts. Hiroki is such an asshole. She focuses hard on the distant white slither, how it emerges from the black sea and grey sky. But it's no good. Her paintings: a police matter?

She returns to thoughts of snow, white peaks, shades of white paint (the sky and sea are darker because of them), but the newspaper's words won't dissolve into all that white. She can all but hear Hiroki's voice coming through the print, following her whenever she tries to find her way into those distant places. She touches her thumb to the stump of her finger.

She pictures the Sankei journalist and Hiroki meeting in some bar. For all she knows, it was in Kabukichō, some back alley shit hole, where they thought themselves noble and clever as they listed up their jabs, like how her name stamp reminded them of a brand, red and angry, on the flesh of her nudes; how she would do anything for publicity, even capitalising on her grandfather's madness. Hiroki probably got so excited over fucking her over that he went for a blowjob afterwards – he who called her out as a whore, Kiichi's plaything.

She thinks on Kiichi's mother's kimono. The pattern was really something. But the emptiness in her stomach reaches inside her chest, sucks on her ribs, holds them in.

*

She arrives back at the old house after walking the port's night markets. It is dark.

There is a hand-written note under the door. It is from Old Man Takayanagi and reads:

Forgive my temper, Kasumi. I have come back to your house to look upon your painting once again. I waited. I wanted to tell you that you are a fine painter. As good as Yuichiro, given the right circumstances.

He signs off with a poem.

*again, spring will come –
with no flowers
you will be firewood*

The sentiment brings tears to her eyes and there is a postscript. It says that the *haiku* is by a poetess called Chiyo-ni, an old favourite of her grandfather's. It was a poem penned to revive a governor's favourite cherry tree. It is the kind of apology she would like to think people used to send one another hundreds of years ago, during a more refined time, a different world, a naïve idea, but one to cling onto nonetheless. It is the kind of message her grandfather probably wished to deliver all his life. Only, he could never find the words.

3.

January in Tokyo. It is snowing. Her show will open tomorrow, two months late, but late is better than nothing.

Kasumi's taxi pulls up in front of the Shin Midori and the passenger door jerks open. Under the grey sky, the white walls of the gallery shine. The gallery itself is made up of three cubes, one inside another, growing smaller with each storey. The overlap is more pronounced than can be discerned from the street. The upper stories look boxed in, windowless, two pure geometrical volumes, all surface area and white industrial perspex. No other building in Tokyo looks like the gallery. But what does that mean? The city is a schizophrenic soup of designs. And it's an illusion, she has found out whilst coming here each day for the last week to help hang the show – there are French windows and patios around the bottom of each cube. They just cannot be seen from the street. Once inside, except for the basement exhibition space, natural light fills every room like water. And the whole of the structure is raised up on interlocking concrete foundations. With the snowflakes highlighting their edges, the place resembles a castle. Perhaps this is how Kiichi sees himself, as a feudal lord.

In the entrance hall, she removes her shoes and stores them in her own locker. A blast of air from an overhead heater and she is in the main lobby, a room of light grey walls (as if sketched over in light pencil), the ceiling black, the floor tiles a black and white geometric pattern: busy, but not vertiginous. All of this is to Kiichi's design. He has told her this. The bubble economy crashed and still he built a new building. His father did the same after American bombers burned the original gallery, the Midori, to the ground. The Takayanagi family endure. There is even a boutique coffee shop tucked into the ground

floor's glass corner. Whenever Kiichi requests her presence at the gallery, he asks to meet her here, on one of the several small tables that rest up against the window, before a bookshelf with its own ladder. The place isn't ever to feel crowded and is ludicrously expensive.

She hopes that Old Man Takayanagi might drop by and wonders if he would sit with her if he did. They have not spoken since he came up to Hokkaido to warn her about the police.

A hard, corn-like snow is flicking around outside.

Last week, when she left Hokkaido, the flakes were fat and slow drifting.

*

She is drinking her second cappuccino when Kiichi waves at her from the street. Once inside, his hair brushed free of the snow, he greets her by asking about whether or not she likes mannequins. He likes dropping into conversations like this, as if expecting the other person to know what is going on inside his head. He must think it makes him appear intense, pre-occupied, like a prophet listening to the words of a god.

'Your great uncle had a mannequin modelled after him. Did you know that? It was in the twenties and was given pride of place at the Galeries Lafayette.'

She shrugs her shoulders.

'Come on, really? You've heard of the Galeries Lafayette?' In his tweed suit, he looks as handsome as ever. 'You simply must have? Where else did Coco Chanel invent the little black dress? You surprise me. Well, we really must get you over to Europe. Paris is in

your blood. Anyway, just as you are sitting here in the window, the snow whirling about and with the lights falling on you, elegant as always, the Galeries Lafayette displayed the image of your great uncle. Think of it, a Japanese artist, respected that much for his presence. Sessue Hayakawa was melting hearts in Hollywood and your own blood loomed above everyone walking along the Boulevard Haussmann. I love the irony. Because you know he made his own clothes? Yuichiro Kozu never went *shopping*.’

She asks whether everything is okay with the hanging. The concierge at her hotel had delivered the message himself.

‘The hanging? Fine. We finished up last night.’

‘And the police? They’re happy?’

‘How come you hold your cup in your left hand? I’ve seen you handle a brush with your right: why not a cup? You shouldn’t hide your wound like that.’ There is genuine excitement in his eyes.

‘The truce is holding?’

‘There’s no need to look so worried. I rang you at the hotel because the snow storm last night inspired me.’

It was hardly a storm, she thinks. Last week, in Hakodate, half a metre fell in the space of just one night. ‘An inspiration?’

‘A public demonstration,’ he says. ‘Tomorrow – as part of the preview reception. I’ve already contacted some people to help us set up. You see, I want some photographs shot beforehand, of you at work, you making last minutes touches and the like. It doesn’t matter

that the paintings are finished. I want people to see that you take your work seriously, that you're a real perfectionist. We have to sell you as much as your paintings. Besides, how can a painting ever be finished? We'll get the pictures out tomorrow in the evening editions. That way, they'll coincide with the reception itself. That'll keep up the buzz. Then we do even better. That's why I wanted to run my idea by you first.'

He's already made up his mind. He must have. She may as well be one of the hapless soldiers from her great uncle's paintings. She is here to follow orders.

She says, 'Remember that I'm meeting my mother this afternoon.'

'She won't come to the reception?'

'She won't look at my paintings in public. Truth is, I don't think she wants to look at them at all.'

'The body can't hold much mystery for her, she's a doctor.'

Kasumi remembers how she cried into the lap of the school nurse when she had her first period. 'Yes, a fine doctor.'

*

The Shin Midori's exhibition space is down stairs in the gallery's basement. It has taken Kiichi's team just under five days to hang the show – no mean feat, what with the installation of the huge oblong partitions large enough to display even Yuichiro Kozu's most heroically sized campaign paintings. And then there is the dais built into the floor, reinforced-steel, strong enough to absorb the weight of not one but two Soviet tanks. The machines are

staggered one behind the other, as if manoeuvring into attack, their guns aimed in different directions. They are genuine articles, the very machines her great uncle used as models when he painted his *Brave Sappers of the 72nd Infantry Division*. Part of the installation is a large photograph: her great uncle playing the role of the great war artist. He is in his barn-like studio over on the far western side of Tokyo, in Ushigome. His sketchbook is balanced over his crossed legs, a cigarette on his lower lip. Before him are three soldiers dressed in full battle regalia, bayonets glinting at the ends of their rifles. Their helmets look like tufts of grass.

She and Kiichi walk between these colossal machines and she reaches out to draw her fingertips down a steel flank. Some of the paint flakes off. The context blurb reads: *Both BT-5 Soviet Fast Tanks were captured from Russian border forces near the Khalkhyn Gol River, the border between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia*. She knows the script off by heart. Kiichi insisted, just as he insisted on briefing her on all the major works she has repainted. The Khalkhyn Gol River, for instance, is near Nomonhan, the village where a bloody stale mate between Japanese and Soviet forces ground up thousands of men in a series of skirmishes and counterattacks, during the late thirties. Japan and Russia were not at war, not then (the Russians waded into that five years later, a week before the first atomic bomb was dropped). But she didn't mind the ground work. She even suspects Kiichi's motives for telling her about such things. There are rumours she came across, a suspected special unit operating in the area. After the debacle against the Russian tanks, high command knew the Soviets could roll over any army. A strong military spirit cannot steel a body against a caterpillar track. So this secret unit tried to poison the rivers and wells in the area. And there were other units like it, too. Ones engaged in all sorts of experiments, like the one her grandfather was attached to, a unit that developed treatments for frostbite. After the battles at Nomonhan, the Japanese commander, General Ogisu, was forced to retire. With the severance pay he received, he

commissioned her great uncle to create this enormous painting. Ogisu hoped the gesture of remembrance would appease the spirits of his fallen subordinates. Yuichiro Kozu's military career was born. A darkness that must have always haunted him came seeping out.

Her own response to *Brave Sappers* is locked away in the gallery's storage facilities. It is one of her most visceral works: a plane of churned up bodies extending to the long, low horizon. These same two tanks, backlit by the blue sky, are rolling over the corpses without a care. Nailed into the steel flanks are naked women, their limbs pinioned, their hands and feet severed. The Mongol horde of Genghis Khan, as they sailed on towards Kyushu and the typhoon that would defeat them, did the same thing to the Japanese women they captured on the island of Tsushima.

No doubt about it, the police censors have badly mauled her series of paintings. While her great uncle can look out from his photographs, happy that his pictures of the *glorious dead* and the *gloriously dying* are once again under the spotlight, her casualty rate was as high as the troops who took on these Russian tanks with bayonets and Molotov cocktails.

'Don't look so glum,' Kiichi says to her, picking up on her train of thought. 'Your work is amazing. Counterpointing it against Koze like this will pay off. Trust me. We stick to the script and things will work out, especially the international markets. Tomorrow, we'll say that the dead space behind your panels mirrors the sacred coverings used by shrines to conceal their *shintai*.'

He can make anything sound philosophical.

'And you think people will buy it?' she asks.

‘Why not? The whole reason why Kozu’s paintings were buried for so long is because people believed the souls of the dead were drawn to your uncle’s paintings, that they inhabited them. I have no doubt that people today will believe in the power of your work, also.’

‘People aren’t the same today.’

‘I wouldn’t worry about it. What I mean is that you have to push the boundaries. The interplays will bring the space alive... I saw all this come together in my head last night.’

‘Watching the snow fall?’

‘Exactly.’

The three paintings of hers to survive the cull are set up in the room’s centre. Each is made up five *fusuma*, the doors lined up like silk panels. Together, the three works form a tight triangle, one that can fragment if the doors are pushed aside, along the runners that Kiichi has had built into the flooring. It is around this centrifugal point that her great uncle’s paintings spiral and before which the Shin Midori’s in-house photographer has laid out a white sheet. Her brushes and paints, her inkstone and water dishes – even her pestle and mortar – are set up to look like she has been working here for hours. It is a little diorama as fake as the tanks taking aim at their ghostly targets. All that is missing is her.

‘You’ve been busy,’ she says.

‘That I have – and I hope you don’t mind that I took the liberty of sending someone up to your house up in Hakodate. Whilst I watched the snow, the idea just came to me.’ From the inside pocket of his jacket, he takes out an envelope, the thick kind with bubble-wrap inside. ‘Here, take this, the magic ingredient to your future.’

Before she has a chance to open the envelope and join in Kiichi's games, the gallery's photographer finds them. He looks harassed.

'I thought she would already be dressed,' he says to Kiichi.

*

Kiichi asks that she change into a *jimbei*, and not her usual navy blue robe and shorts, but a white one with light grey stripes. He requests that she ruffle her hair up a little, just on one side, and then, to remove her bra.

'We're shooting in black and white,' he explains. 'So the contrast in the photos will play out better if you ink up your fingers. I thought your hair would set off the *jimbei*, but in turn, the *jimbei* will set off your hands.'

'You want more close-ups of my hand, even after what people have said?'

'We are creating a brand. An image of you to promote your work. It's all about symbiosis. We do this right, people are interested in the work because they are interested in you and they love you because of your work. You're lucky. You look great. And you're talented. And now you have something even better: a narrative. Something to set off your paintings. To make them kind of *real*.' He nods at her. 'Now come away from the paintings for a second.'

There is already ink in the ink stone. Kiichi tells her close her eyes and mouth as he takes a thick brush from her rack and slooshes the bristles around in the watery black liquid. She flinches when he flicks the ink in her face.

'There, just a little,' he says. 'We don't want too much now, do we?'

At first, the photographer positions her on the sheet, so that she is an arm's distance from her own painting, her reimagining of her great uncle's *Broken Jewels of Attu*, the very painting which has been hung on the partition behind her. This way, the guy can kneel down

in front of her and snap away, capturing in the same shot both her face and her great uncle's dramatic last stand.

The camera's shutter blinks. Muffled flashes from the lighting umbrellas rip across the panel before her.

And she sits, stilled, wondering how long she will have to endure the prick's instructions, his, 'Move the sheet this way;' and, 'Angle your ink stone more like that;' and 'Get up close to the picture's surface...closer;' because, 'You don't paint at arm's length, right?' He tells her to 'Ignore me; no, get *into* it, the painting, not me.' She wants to throw her ink stone at him. How is she supposed to look oblivious, to him and his orders and his fucking clicking camera, when she isn't even painting? It's all pretend. And she doesn't even paint like this, not with the panel raised up vertically before her, as if it truly was a door, some painted threshold set in its runners in a temple, or a palace. But here she is, pretentious in her pose, an affected rigidity Kiichi tells her looks great.

For the most part, Kiichi keeps out of sight, out of frame, pacing up and down, saying that he wants her to mirror the women from her paintings. He wants her to be a *bijinga*, a clever twist on the old *portrait of the artist* trope. She is to be an exhibit *exhibited*. Art lovers get wet over a good paradox.

The photographer comes in low, back on his knees. The automated camera bursts sound like distant machine guns. She pictures what it is the guy is seeing through his viewfinder: her face, hair up, with several strands pulled down and loose, unruly; and behind her, her great uncle's *Broken Jewels of Attu*, that roiling scene of gouging fingers and tearing blades, the darkest phase of his career (and it was her work the police censored!). Given the fact that he is using black and white film, her body, in Kiichi's white *jimbei*, must float before the dark tones of that other painting, the one behind her and so big, she could be a figure inside it. Over a year and a half has passed since Kiichi first showed her this painting at

Yasukuni, asking her to repaint it, to change it, to enter into a dialogue. Another *Obon* has come and gone. And still, she is facing the dead. Or rather, the dead are forced to face her. This cannot be what Soseki had imagined when, in *Kusamakura*, he had his artist-narrator picture himself as a figure in an old ink painting.

The guy runs dry, leans the camera's body on his forearm, changes film. The process is repeated. This time, she is asked to swivel around, to face in the other direction, so that she is foregrounded against her own painting. White on white. Black hair and black hands.

Where her great uncle's painting is a seething mass of minute details, all khaki and black and the subtle graduations in between them, her painting is, as Kiichi said, a counterpoint. Although she has studied hard to grasp her great uncle's gift for facial variations, his uncanny ability to get inside racial differences (a skill he extended to the soldiers' uniforms and small-arms, the dimensions of their bayonets), she has moved away from his composition. Instead of borrowing the energy of a great wave, the Japanese troops crashing down upon the Americans (for all her great uncle's innovations, the rhythms of Delacroix and Géricault are most felt here), she has built the static, craggy form of an iceberg, like something by Peder Balke (though Kiichi will say the rhythm's resemble Hiroshige's), one cut over with great swathes of flattening white mist. This mound of naked female bodies has a gentle palette (*distant*, almost): white highlights over ivory, shades of violet, teal, and where some bodies have tumbled down and left a cleft, she has used a cold, cold cerulean. And where Kozu has captured the frenetic activity of hand-to-hand fighting, her shapes are softly sculptured, bound together by smooth curves of frost, no chiaroscuro, and the light touch of her brush – faces, nipples, pelvises, breasts, the occasional fish-bone weave of ribs.

All this, and not a single outline.

This is why the painting looks somewhat muffled. The snow is softening everything.
This is probably why the censors let it pass.

4.

Snow dusts a small park in Tokyo. At the edges, it is turning black.

It is at these crossroads, surrounded by a school with a rooftop playing field (its fence is like an aviary), apartment blocks, and, before them all, three thoroughfares slushed up by rush hour traffic, that she is standing, waiting for her mother and a meal – always her mother’s way of saying sorry without uttering the word. A little something to eat, a beer, two, and surely the silence between them will melt, the antagonism that erupted into tears and the slamming of doors after Hiroki’s interview went to print. A pagoda towers up over her head, but cannot break out from the taller buildings. It was built to house the cremated remains of those who perished in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. It is hard to believe that on the very spot where is she standing a *fire dragon*, whipped up by the conflagration that followed the earthquake, lurched down and incinerated every man, woman and child who sought shelter in the district’s only open space. A new crop of ashes swelled the park’s ossuary after the first napalming of Tokyo, 9th March, 1945, an attack that claimed more lives than the atomic apocalypse that engulfed Hiroshima. Yuichiro Kozu was in Paris during the earthquake, but he captured the firebombing in his tableau, *Mother and Daughter in Air Raid Hoods*. That painting is not to be found at the Shin Midori, nor the Yasukuni Shrine. She has read about it but has never seen a picture. Maybe Old Man Takayanagi has it secreted away in some mountain vault. Or is it simply that Kiichi wants to court the favour of those American critics he knows will be sympathetic to her show, those whose sense of credulity would expand to include the Japanese as victims, as well as criminals, but not as far as seeing the American firebombing campaign as a war crime. Best to keep the narrative clean, ordered, no matter what he said at Harada’s retrospective.

Having grown up in Meguro Ward, she had never been to Yokoamicho Park, not even to Sumida Ward, before Kiichi first brought her to the Shin Midori. Since then she has stopped by the park from time to time. The last time was in early fall – a Tokyo autumn. The heat drove her under the park's trees, then into the memorial hall itself, quiet as a church, quieter, if the churches of Hakodate are anything to go by. When she came out again, having read the hall's dedication and studied its pictures of ash piled high by Buddhist monks, like cement, a janitor stood before her. He was hosing the path, keeping the dust down. Rainbows flashed about his head. The moment stirred her: the sun through the cloud of vapour; the thought of the bones and human dust under the pagoda. That wasn't quite the day she decided not to wear the white cotton glove anymore, her way of camouflaging her stump, but it contributed to that decision. But baring her wound and turning it into some kind of performance, are not the same thing.

Maybe she should paint the park, she thinks, paint it as a complete original, no Yuichiro Kozu in sight. The fire dragon and napalm can burn the place up simultaneously. Or maybe, she should find some other muse. Straight *bijinga*, their beautiful women happy and content and lying in still waters somewhere, some *onsen*, listening to the cicadas in summer, or, come winter, watching the snow dissolve into the waters' hot mists.

She wishes she had been out last night, while the snow flurries were coming down at their hardest. She could have been out, walking back to her hotel from somewhere friendly, light in spirit, her belly full. She likes the hush of snow, how the sky pushes in, gets up close, bringing about a co-existence of distances, the snow up front and everything else held back, barely seen. Moving up to Hakodate has brought this home to her, although her neighbours say such euphoria will pass.

It is hard to believe that a week ago there was no show at all. The Shin Midori was set up and to Kiichi's exacting design, but there were no paintings. As Old Man Takayanagi had

warned her, the police issued their injunction the day after he flew up to Hokkaido to warn her. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yasukuni Shrine were prohibited from loaning the Shin Midori any Kozus they held in storage. Neither was the gallery permitted to display any of her works.

Kiichi was undeterred. He went international. Public taunts whilst traveling through Europe and, then, New Zealand, talk show appearances and radio programmes, a particularly provocative open letter in *The New Yorker*. He is an expert at stirring shit up. When he's abroad, apparently, he's notorious for it. Sitting in this park, amongst, perhaps, the only snow that will fall over Tokyo this year, away from the fuss and rush of the morning's shoot, which stretched on into the afternoon, she can see how well Kiichi has played his hand. He has forced the censors to concede that prohibiting any dialogue with Yuichiro Kozu's war works is tantamount to historical denial, a common enough practice, yes, an institutionalised one, but an argument that has caught the attention of the international press and even the likes of the Chinese International Bureau. If this was just a local problem, there would be no problem. As Kiichi has said to anyone who would listen, there are those who like to look back at the past through mists as obfuscating as those she has layered over her iceberg painting, a technique borrowed from an idol of hers, Uemura Shoen, the single mother who ran her own studio from the upstairs of her own house. Kiichi has proclaimed her work *an attack on cultural amnesia*.

But the pressure grew. Kiichi saw to that. Left-wing critics joined in. One pointed out how, on the very day her grandfather took a knife to her hand (a detail many like to foreground), former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama made a statement about the 'tremendous damage' and 'suffering' caused to the people of Asia by the Japanese Empire. How could such a sentiment sound anything but hollow if she were to be denied her voice? A particularly vocal pundit drew focus to the Prime Minister's desire that no such mistake be

made in the future: *How can such foresight be granted without hindsight?* he wrote in the Asahi Newspaper. *Even his Royal Highness, Emperor Akihito, has expressed his 'deep sorrow' for the subjugation of Korea at a dinner he attended in October. Does 'deep sorrow' wash away the need to bear witness?*

As part of Kiichi's negotiated truce, the police censors permitted most of the canvases by her great uncle to be hung as planned. The condition: that her more 'visceral works' be excluded. After an official inventory, any displays of fornication, especially those with explicit rendering of female genitalia, were deemed an *affront to public morality*.

Kiichi has promised her that the gallery will tour her full series aboard. *Paris! New York!* An apology well-curated.

She stretches out her fingers and then balls them up into fists. One finger of her leather glove remains straight.

'Kasumi-chan! *Oi*, Kasumi!'

She turns from her thoughts and towards the park's entrance. There, waving at her, is Grandma Chiaki. There is no sign of her mother.

It takes Kasumi a moment to wave back.

Grandma Chiaki shuffles up the avenue, as if she is afraid of slipping on the snow. Amazing, really, considering all the years she spent in the snow country.

'The hospital called,' she says by way of a greeting. 'Your mother had to go in. It is flu season, after all.' She looks up at the pagoda. 'I thought I had seen the last of snow.'

'It snows in Tokyo as well – sometimes at least. It'll be gone by tomorrow.'

'*Ma*, what a strange place to meet. Is this a temple?'

Kasumi is not in the mood for dealing with her grandmother. The prospect of facing her mother was a daunting enough.

She says, 'Mum and I were supposed to go out to dinner.'

‘Dinner? What about these infamous paintings of yours?’

‘There is a really good *unagi* restaurant just around the corner.’

‘But I’m not hungry.’

Bullshit, she thinks. When does her grandmother ever lack an appetite?

‘It’s been a long day, Grandma,’ she says. ‘And trust me, the eel at this place is delicious. You’ll like it.’

‘If it’s so good, we can get some *bento* boxes made up. I want to see this exhibition of yours – before the whole of Tokyo gets to.’

*

Even in the dimmed light of the hall, Kiichi’s spectacles have no effect on Grandma Chiaki. The two of them move between the hulking Soviet tanks with barely a murmur, just some comments from her grandmother on the smell of machine oil. She had not expected a motor show.

The sheet and her painting gear is still out, the photography equipment, too. Kiichi and the photographer, however, are gone. The note they have left is taped to the envelope Kiichi had given her at the gallery’s café. She must have put it down and forgotten it. They have gone out to eat, it says, but will return shortly. There is still work to do. She is to wait for them.

She takes off her coat and gloves and lays them down on the box bench installed between *Broken Jewels of Attu* and her own painting. Her grandmother follows suit, taking out the two grilled eel bento boxes from their carrier bag and handing Kasumi a pair of disposable chopsticks. ‘But I’m not looking at that,’ she says. ‘Not while I’m eating.’

‘I doubt it’s any better the other way round.’

They pass their meal in silence. Kasumi is the first to finish. Standing up, she packs away her box. ‘I’ve got to get back to work,’ she says in response to her grandmother’s tutting. Manners are the last thing on her mind. ‘I have to get changed and everything...So, sorry Grandma.’

Grandma Chiaki puts down the remains of her dinner and gets up with great ceremony. Walking over to her landscape of melding bodies, she says, ‘Why don’t you turn your talents to something warm and colourful? Sunflowers or the like?’

‘It’s a response.’

‘To what?’

‘To the last stand over there.’

‘But they’re nothing alike.’

‘That’s the point. Great uncle Yuichiro went for a wave of men, I went for an ice field of women. He used a dark palette and lots and lots of detail. I went for lightness.’

‘But why paint any of this?’

‘I’m challenging the bravado of Uncle Yuichiro’s paintings.’

‘Such a grand concept.’

The look on her grandmother’s face is more persuasive than any amount of Kiichi’s rhetoric. It says, *Some things are private.*

To deflect such a gaze, she says, ‘Like I’ve told you before, I knew you wouldn’t want to see any of this, not when you’ve always hated Uncle Yuichiro’s work and with such vehemence.’

‘Hate it, you say. It is more complicated than that. To tell you the truth, I was quite spellbound when your grandfather told me he was related to such a man as Yuichiro Kozu. He was a hero. As good as any European but with a Japanese heart. That is why I came to dislike him so much. He tricked us all into believing.’

Kasumi is not prepared for such a frank response and all that lay behind it.

Her grandmother leans towards her painting and points. 'I knew it! Look! I am so glad you painted *her*.'

'Grandma, please don't touch the panels.'

Her grandmother does not withdraw her hand. 'She's so cold,' she says, then examines her fingertips.

'Like I said grandma, I really have to get on. My boss has left me these instructions and everything.' She takes up the envelope from atop her mortar and opens it. Inside the bubble wrap is another polythene bag and yet another note. *This is how we make the world take notice.* It says. *This is how far you'll go to make your own pigments at tomorrow demonstration.* Inside the smaller bag are two small bones. She recognises them instantly. They are her own.

'Son-of-a-bitch,' she mutters.

But her grandmother is too engrossed in the painting to notice her anger. 'I never liked your grandfather's ghost stories,' she says, 'like the ones he tried to tell you when you were young. I couldn't believe that, of all people, he would want to indulge in such things. Then you came up that other summer and I didn't know what to do. You wanted to watch the *Obon* TV programmes like everyone else, so, we did. What I never told you is how popular such stories were when I was young. Growing up in Omi, out in the countryside, the place was rife with them. Every phenomenon, every family's poor luck, the sword kept in the local shrine, even the feeling of tiredness that sometimes overtook you if you were out in the wilds gathering mountain vegetables, all of them had some kind of story behind them. Nothing happens without a reason, people thought. The gods are present. They are watching. Some people even came out from the city, from as far away as Kyoto, educated people. They came to collect our stories. And they were so gruesome that, to a child like me, they were delicious.'

Stories of pregnant wives devoured by wolves, of foxfires chasing young hunters from the woods...of mothers coming back from that other place to feed their starving infants at their breasts.'

The room feels darker. Grandma Chiaki has stepped away from the panel. She is still examining her nails. The pathetic look on her face drives something deep into Kasumi's chest, something hot and angry. The weak tilt of her shoulders only intensifies her loathing. She wants to scream at the old woman, to let out whatever it is that is boiling away inside her, to let it spill, not ooze. She clutches the bones in the palm of her hand. They are so light, but hard. She cannot bear to listen to her grandmother for a second longer, to whatever little pageant she has worked out for tonight. If she has come to deride her work, so be it. She wishes her mother were here. Good eel and the chance to share in her excitement over tomorrow, no matter how diminished her debut is to be.

The soldiers in her great uncle's painting fight on oblivious to her. They are lost to the desperate throws of martyrdom. The figures in her own painting look so far away that none of them could hear her if she yelled out, whether in anger, for help, in self-pity.

'It's late, Grandma. I'm tired.'

'But there is one particular story that stuck with me. It stuck with me and soured most of my life. It was about a hermit called Nangakubō. He was a strange mountain priest, the kind of man who villagers used for exorcisms because the mountains are where the souls of the dead reside. But when he stayed in the village his strange ways worried the villagers, they broke their harmony and so the governor ordered him imprisoned and then executed. Only, he wouldn't do it himself. So, he tasked a lower official to undertake the beheading. When that other man took Nangakubō up to the execution spot in the mountains, he was fearful of the hermit's vengeance and so said that he was only following orders. And do you know what the mountain priest said?'

‘No, I do not. And, like I said, Grandma, it’s late.’

‘He said, *When a servant, on the orders of his master, goes out to cut the bamboo in the early morning, whose feet do you suppose will get heavy with dew?* I never meant to burden any of my family with this Kasumi. It was my shame to carry into old age and beyond. I have walked my entire adult life with feet heavy with dew. They told us we were great, that we were the moral leaders of Asia. I believed them. I celebrated the victories. I sewed thousand-stitch belts, I prayed for the defeat of our enemies. And we lost and that was, well, beyond words. Beyond belief. Then, the following year, she came.’

‘Who?’

‘Her.’ Grandma Chieki points at the panel. ‘I thought she was my shame as much as his. My mirror. She tortured me by torturing your grandfather.’

Kasumi walks over to her grandmother’s side. She will humour the old woman and then she will leave.

But when she follows her grandmother’s eyes, there are mushrooms boiling up at the edges of the door’s papered surface, black polyps, ripe and ready to burst, and gathering around a young woman standing at the foot of the iceberg’s great mount, a figure Kasumi did not paint, but whom she knows well. The girl is half covered by a ribbon of mist, her form indistinct in the hazy blur of colours. The woman grows, as if she is approaching. Her shape is subtle, emerging out from the darkness with a satisfying warmth. And although she is naked, there is no crude worldliness to her body. In fact, it barely looks present at all, like some apparition from a ghost painting, a presence suggested by a deeper swell of ink washed against a wide expanse of silk. But there is a kind of darkness within her whitened contours. It is the duller tones of her own painting, Kasumi realises. It is the mound of frozen flesh before which the girl is standing. And this face, she knows it. She knows the melancholy

smile. Here is a girl who likes to cut across her grandfather's plot, to walk in the shade of a mountain too small to have any name, along a river that cuts it off from the city.

Section 2

Critical Dissertation:

The Ekphrastic Practices of Natsume
Sōseki and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

The Ekphrastic Practices of Natsume Sōseki and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

in the misty rain
Mount Fuji is veiled all day –
how intriguing²
Matsuo Bashō

The central characteristics of Japanese aesthetics can be summarised as suggestion, irregularity, simplicity, and perishability³. Such characteristics are interrelated, and are to be found across the Japanese arts, from poetry to ink painting, architecture to gardening, Nō theatre to the tea ceremony. This commentary will focus in particular on the quality of suggestion, specifically the aesthetic category of *yūgen*, and how it relates to ekphrasis, a Western concept that originated in the rhetorical programmes of ancient Greece and has had a long history in the West. This relation will be pursued through the concrete example of the prose fiction of Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927), both of whom imbue their ekphrastic practices with *yūgen* sensibility. These readings will then allow me to reflect on how the interplay between *yūgen* and ekphrasis is central to my own novel, *Bone Painting*.

Yūgen is often considered one of the most recondite and ineffable categories of Japanese aesthetics.⁴ Its kanji directly translate as *dark* and *dim*, but it is more often translated as ‘subtlety and depth,’ or ‘mystery and depth,’ and as such it promotes attention to the depths of the world we live in, as aided by a cultivated imagination: an approach to life, art and the world that favours allusiveness over explicitness. Ekphrasis’s original celebration of vividness and clarity could then be taken as the antithesis of the *yūgen* sensibility. However, as I shall demonstrate, the two can be brought meaningfully together through ekphrasis’s

² Ueda M (trans.) (1992): Bashō and his Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary, Stanford University Press: 102

³ See Keene D (1969): *Japanese Aesthetics*, in Philosophy East and West, Vol. 19 No.3. (1969)

⁴ Parkes, G (2005): *Japanese Aesthetics*, in Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-aesthetics/> (last visited on 15th May, 2019): 6

rejection of mimesis, and exploration of a dynamic relationship between various agents and mediums, and *yūgen*'s invigoration of 'emptiness' through a similar emphasis on dynamic interplay. This will involve me first explaining something of the history and key conceptual scope of both terms; having done that, I will then go on to demonstrate how Sōseki and Akutagawa draw on *yūgen* aesthetics in ways that productively engage a contradiction: how can suggestiveness lead to successful ekphrasis?

1. Ekphrasis: clarity, interplay, ambiguity

Within four different *Progynasmata*, the rhetorical 'handbooks' of Ancient Greece, ekphrasis enjoys a stable definition. According to the rhetorician Theon, ekphrasis is a 'descriptive passage which brings the subject that is shown before one's eyes with visual vividness.'⁵ It is a 'descriptive process with a transformative effect: although derived from speech...it has a visual consequence, turning the object portrayed from something figuratively shown...into a sort of literal apparition.'⁶ Across these four handbooks, two key 'virtues' are attributed to the process of creating and receiving ekphrasis, those of *enargōs* ('with visual vividness') and *saphêneia* ('clarity'). As such, according to Hermogenes, ekphrasis is 'an interpretation that almost brings about seeing through hearing,' while to Nicolaus, ekphrasis 'bring[s] the subjects of the speech before the eyes and almost makes speakers into spectators.'⁷

It is important for the broader framework of this paper to define what is meant by 'with visual vividness' (*enargōs*) and clarity (*saphêneia*). Both terms are found outside of definitions of ekphrasis, as in Aristotle's attempts to understand the role of artistic rendering. Clarity was prized within antiquity as it was associated with enjoyment, learning, order,

⁵ Squire M (2013): *Apparitions Apparent: Ekphrasis and the Parameters of Vision*, in *Helios*, Vol. 40 No. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2013): 100

⁶ Squires (2013): 100

⁷ Squires (2013): 101

beauty, and truth. While Aristotle accepts that artistic representations lack the actuality (*energeia*) of ‘real’ things (*energeia* in this sense means ‘that which is happening,’ or ‘activity’), images aid man in seeing the thing itself. Through imitation, a likeness that is grounded in particulars, man can find himself learning or inferring what is true.⁸ Within ancient ekphrasis, the adverb *enargôs* has been translated as ‘vividly,’ but also as ‘clearly’⁹ and is tied to the function of clarity (*saphêneia*): to make something known. In relation to classical ekphrasis, what is to be ‘known’ is the absent subject. Related to clarity (*saphêneia*) is the act of being clear (*saphê einai*), in which the framer of a discourse should select and order the parts of their discourse to aid clarity, or to make the propositional content known (*gnôrisai kharin*). This act can include a mix of metaphor and ornamental equivalent, although, when engaged in the act of being clear, Aristotle promotes plain, familiar (*agnôstoterôn onomatôn*) and precise (*akribês*) language¹⁰. What must be precisely chosen is the clearest language possible (*saphestatêi*), so as to make the subject known (*gnôrisai kharin*). When utilised to aid clarification, reference to a range of senses is also favoured. The ‘bringing forth’ of the artwork with clarity through ekphrasis involves a transformation from obscurity to solidification. In Aristotelian terms, solidification also requires the framer to *diôristai* the subject, which can mean ‘to delimit,’ ‘to determine,’ to ‘draw distinctions,’ often through the rich, detailed accounts that Aristotle favoured.¹¹ Rationality, in the Aristotelian treatment, involved the forming of logical coherent arguments, but also the delimitation of the subject, which also involves the elimination of ambiguity, clarity’s antithetical concept.

In the classical sense, the value attributed to clarification is evidenced by Aristotle’s denigration of ambiguity. According to James Lesher, Aristotle highlighted how ambiguity could arise within language use and discourse. This could happen when incurring ‘a muddling or indistinctness among the individual elements of speech; ... using unknown or unfamiliar words; or ... using terms with multiple but unspecified senses,’ because they

⁸ See Marks (1998): G A (1998): ‘The Clarity of the Modern: Or, the Ambiguities of Henry James and Wallace Stevens.’ LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses, 6632, available at https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/6632 (accessed 27/06/2019): 7-8

⁹ Share M (trans.) (2004): Ancient Commentators on Aristotle: Philoponus: Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World 1-5, Bloomsbury: 120

¹⁰ According to Lesher’s overview of Aristotle’s comments on metaphor and ornamental equivalent, Aristotle saw their use as a means to prevent the discourse from seeming too common and prosaic (148)

¹¹ See Lesher J H (2011): *Saphêneia in Aristotle: ‘Clarity’, ‘Precision’, and ‘Knowledge,’* in Apeiron A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science, Vol 43, Issue 4 (March, 2011): 143–147

would render statements obscure (*asaphes*)¹². Such hindrances to clarity are not just to be reviled as shoddy workmanship. In the original Greek, ambiguity, from *amphi* + *blema*, meant to ‘cast in two ways’ and most probably came into English through the Latin *ambi* + *agere*, or ‘to drive in two different directions.’ Etymologically, the term was also related to another word meaning ‘casting a net’, which connoted the idea of being surrounded and attacked from all sides. Other interpretations are ‘to be doubtful,’ or ‘double-pointed’¹³. Ambiguity did have recognised roles in Ancient Greece but these were often associated with equivocation, double-sided praise and self-defence¹⁴. As such, ambiguity was often associated with corruption, danger, doom, and, within aesthetic judgement, ugliness. This is an important attitude as it would continue, more or less, through European history, gaining much power during the Enlightenment until the Romantic embracement of ambiguity.

Importantly, the act of creating ekphrasis was not viewed as a neutral process, but a mediated one. Aphthonius, for example, combines notions of narrative and description, whereby ‘in describing things, from those earlier than these and those things now in these and whatever is to spring from these things; in describing times and places, from those surrounding and those within them;’¹⁵ whereas Theon states, ‘If we describe places, times, procedures, or characters, we will have along with the narrative that results from these themselves, starting-points for arguments based on nobility, usefulness, and pleasure’¹⁶. Such attitudes as these are aligned with those concerned with clarity. Moreover, the orator will include the mediating consequences of focalisation, such as the dying influence of judgements, including blame and praise.

However, as Squires reminds us, quoting from Simon Goldhill, these Greek rhetoricians also knew well that ekphrasis involved techniques of illusion, of semblance, or making to appear; what Squires refers to as the ‘magical effect’ of being able to ‘see’ images of the thing that is described through verbal language (written or spoken), if rendered well¹⁷. As Hermogenes states, ekphrasis is ‘an *interpretation* that almost brings about seeing through

¹² Leshner (2011): 144

¹³ Marks (1998): 16

¹⁴ One notable exception with philosophy was to evoke contradictions or illustrate the meaningful connection of two concepts that are both covered by the same word so as to initiate new thinking processes.

¹⁵ D’Angelo (1998): 441

¹⁶ D’Angelo (1998): 441

¹⁷ Squire (2013): 101

hearing' (italics added); and as the adverb 'almost' here signals, the ancient rhetoricians were not oblivious to the medial differences between the language used to evoke the subject referent in its 'calling forth' through ekphrasis, and the subject referent itself¹⁸. There is no pure mimesis, whether as complete transferal or unmediated translation. An appreciation of such mediation has become an important concept within contemporary debates about the nature and parameters of ekphrasis, a practice and theory that gained in popularity throughout the 20th century.

Therefore, modern ekphrasis accepts that the act of ekphrasis is a mediation that can incur a lack of clarity in the classical sense. However, this ambiguity, rather than diminishing the experience of interaction, can aid the ekphrastic endeavour¹⁹. Liliane Louvel, commenting on how ekphrasis has become a widespread and highly debated paradigm within modern literature, also makes use of the 'magic' analogy, when she writes, 'the text summons up the strange *magic* of the image and engages it in a never-ending dialogue' (italics added).²⁰ While warning against the establishment of artificial analogies between a painting and text, such as misinterpretations of the *ut pictura poesis* formula ('as in painting, as in poetry') which were revived during the Renaissance, Louvel draws attention to how the analogy instead, 'charts the meeting ground between painting and poetry.'²¹ This concept promotes ekphrasis as a creative interaction between text and image and reader, rather than the need for one to dominate over the other and continue the *paragonal* debates that have existed since antiquity and which were reinvigorated by Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci (1452-1519] and again by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). As Louvel writes:

What is at stake in the analogical relation and deserves close analysis is the act of 'translating' in the strong sense of the word (from Latin *translatio*, *translates*, from *transferre*: the act of carrying). As a linguistic translation, the artist has to adapt the signs of a given object, i.e. a painting for instance, and

¹⁸ Squires also directs us to the 'almost' present in Nicolaus's 'bring the subjects of the speech before our eyes and *almost* make the speakers into spectators' (italics added): 101

¹⁹ According to Marks, ideas of vividness (*vividum*) have been contested over the ages. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762), for example, in his study of the aesthetics of poetry argued that artistic clarity can be different to logical clarity, where poetry can evoke a sense of 'more' to the senses and a sense of 'intensity' to cognition; both of which increase a sense of clarity. Marks states that a similar approach would be later undertaken by Modernists, like Pound and Stevens. See Marks (1998): 32-36

²⁰ Louvel L (2000): *The Eye in the Text or the Infinite Relation*, in *European Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 3: 340. It should be noted that the subjects put forward by the Greeks for ekphrasis's representations were numerous, with art works not featuring prominently. See D'Angelo F (1998): *The Rhetoric of Ekphrasis*, in *JAC* Vol. 18, No. 3 (1998): 441

²¹ Louvel (2000): 342

make them fit the point of arrival i.e. a text. One medium is truly being transferred or translated into another medium. This, of course, may either enrich the second medium or bring in haziness or even ‘brouillage’ [interference / jamming]. A certain amount of loss is to be expected as well. But this conception of translation, as a way of passing from one art into another, allows us to conceive the *ut picture poesis* model as a kind of arch-trope, a super-comparison that spans across heterogeneous media and modes of cognition.²²

What Louvel makes clear is that there is a dynamic relationship at the heart of ekphrasis, a complex and multifaceted interplay between mediums, as well as between the writer and the subject medium, the writer and the context of the subject, and the nature of the target²³, all of which form the ekphrastic encounter and its articulation. This interplay was acknowledged by the Ancients, and is often explored (indeed, enjoyed by) modern writers engaging with the paradigm²⁴. Furthermore, this interplay is furthered by the nature of narrative fiction, where the ekphrastic moment does not unfold within a vacuum – notwithstanding the temptation to look at ekphrases as ‘detachable units’²⁵ – but within a longer narrative and, as such, is both affected by the surrounding text and has an effect upon it²⁶. This complexity has led Claus Clüver to question ‘catchy definitions’ like that presented by Heffernan in his *Museum of Words*, where ‘visual representation’ is positioned as the ‘object of verbal representation.’²⁷

2. *Yūgen*

i. Subtlety and Depth

²² Louvel (2000): 343

²³ Contemporary art critics in the West also draw attention to limitations and quality of verbal expression. See Baxandall M (1992): *The language of art criticism*, in Kemal and Gaskell (1991): *The Language of Art History*, Cambridge University Press, 67-128

²⁴ Gregory Pardlo provides taxonomy of positions ekphrastic writers can take and processes they can engage in: see Pardlo G (2012): The Node 5: Ekphrasis and the Question of Perfect Equilibrium, in *Callaloo*, Vol. 35, No.3 (Summer 2012): 584-603

²⁵ Karastathi S (2015): *Ekphrasis and the Novel/Narrative Fiction*, in Rippl G (2015): *The Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound, Music*, De Gruyter: 94

²⁶ Karastathi (2015): 95

²⁷ For a detailed criticism of Heffernan’s definition and how it is ‘much cited by others,’ according to Clüver, such as Gabriele Rippl’s *Handbook of Intermediality* (2015), see Clüver C (2017): *A New Look at an Old Topic: Ekphrasis Revisited*, in *Todas as Letras*, Vol. 19 No. 1: 30-44

David Barnhill provides a brief unpacking of the common translation of *yūgen* as ‘subtlety and depth’ when he explains that the ‘subtlety’ signified here covers various interrelating qualities, including suggestive and sensitive expression (over descriptive expression and concrete imagery), subdued beauty (over the gorgeous), and tranquil sorrow (a quiet that runs deeper than personal emotion). *Yūgen*’s ‘depth’ is informed by non-dualistic notions of reality and consciousness influenced by Buddhism, wherein ‘reality’ is formed through the flux of impermanence, and involves a distinct lack of ‘thingness’ because things ‘interexist in a single interwoven web’²⁸. Such a web evokes a sense of the boundlessness of the world, beyond that which can be definitively comprehended²⁹. The analogy of the ‘web’ foregrounds the radical equality of all things within a monistic dynamic, whereby, the ‘suchness of things’ is infinitely ‘deep’ and ‘creative’ because of their infinite interrelatedness. As we will see, this relationality allows *yūgen* to be brought productively together with the mediation and ambiguity entailed in ekphrasis.

ii. Dark and Dim

The term *yūgen* appears in the Chinese introduction to the *Kokinshū* (905), the first anthology of Japanese verse to be compiled by Imperial order³⁰. It therefore has a legacy that stretches back to the very beginning of the Japanese literary canon. That said, it also predates this collection and has its roots in the Chinese cosmological terminology of *yin* and *yang* (literally, ‘shadow’ and ‘light’), the endless list of opposing and correlative concepts which celebrate the inter-relatedness of our sensory and social worlds and the patterns into which these can be organised.³¹ In turn, this interplay of opposites informed Daoism. Within the Daoist text, the *Daodejing*³², it is stressed that the negative principle of *yin* should not be overlooked, or overshadowed, by the more overt forms of *yang*. This includes *yang*’s more dominant sensory presence, which can be rendered through precise and hence vivid imagery in poetry or the foregrounding of particular features in a painting, over *yin*’s more ‘non-

²⁸ Barnhill D (unspecified): *Yūgen*, lecture notes. Available at <https://www.uwosh.edu/facstaff/barnhill/244/Test%20paragraph%20answers%202013.pdf> (last accessed 12/06/2019). This knowledge of impermanence leads to the quiet sorrow previously mentioned, often referred to as *wabi*.

²⁹ Again, a source of quiet sorrow.

³⁰ See Marra M (2002): *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader*, University of Hawaii Press: 123

³¹ Cho F (2016): *The Play of Shadows in Japanese Cinema*, in *Material Religion*, Vol. 11, Issue 4 (2016): 510

³² Also known as Tao Te Ching.

sensory' presence. Both are always paradoxically present. To this end, to follow the Daoist concept of 'The Way' (the *dao* in Chinese, *geidō* in Japanese³³), means looking and sensing beyond the given presences of phenomena, to the emptiness which is prior to, and a precondition for, all phenomena³⁴, the fertile female emptiness from which the embodied male phenomena emerge. Given the shapelessness and formlessness of *yin*, it is hard to describe. As such, it has come to be metaphorically and symbolically associated with images of darkness and empty spaces. The language used in Daoism also synergises with that of Buddhism, whereby the Buddhist notion of emptiness is an extension of the teaching that all phenomena are impermanent and dependent. As such, in China, *yūgen* was used to refer to sense of depth venerated in both Daoist and Buddhist teachings³⁵.

Subsequently, due to Japan's close relationship with China during the medieval period, in terms of religious teachings and artistic practices, the term *yūgen* was imported into Japan around the tenth century, where it surfaced within Japanese poetic theory as the quality of poetic profundity³⁶. In terms of poetic practice, this meant a poetry that eschewed explicit description in favour of subtle evocation because profound expression emerges, paradoxically, from incomplete expression³⁷. Poetry imbued with this incompleteness made use of the tensions created between terse, synchronic deployments of imagery, where interplays are engaged through the use of clear and vivid deployments of imagery – imagery focused through precision and brevity. Considering description within ekphrasis in light of this, we can say that the vivid is made present (*yang*) but through presentation and parataxis rather than explanation and hypotaxis, two elements of classical clarity. The result is a dynamic tension, one rich for writers and readers of ekphrasis to interact with and explore. Modernist poets, such as Ezra Pound, in his *In a Station of the Metro* and Wallace Stevens with *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* would explore and exploit this tension³⁸.

³³ This analogy of the 'path' became a key trope within both Zen Buddhism and Japanese literature.

³⁴ Cho (2016): 511

³⁵ Cho (2016): 511

³⁶ The contemporary literary scholars who theorised *yūgen* as such, include Fujiwara Shunzei (1114-1204), Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241) and Saigyō Hōshi (1118-1190).

³⁷ Konishi Jin'ichi (Gatten and Teele tans.) (1991): *A History of Japanese Literature, Vol. 3*, Princeton University Press: 183

³⁸ Pound was not only influenced by the diaries given him by the widow of famed Japanologist Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853–1908), but, like Yeats, the expat Japanese poet Yone Noguchi as well. See Hakutani Y (2009): *Haiku and Modernist Poetics*, Palgrave MacMillan: 69-88. The philosopher T.E. Hulme's celebration of the common was also influenced by Eastern aesthetics.

By way of summary, what lies at the heart of *yūgen* is paradox, particularly the co-existence of presence and absence. It is not a tension formed through dualism, such as between the material world and the thinking subject or the soul, as can be found often in the Western tradition, although the experience of *yūgen* does require the subject to have an attitude open to the experience³⁹. In practice, *yūgen* can be recognised in Japanese poems and visual arts through a number of key motifs. The most obvious of these are those phenomena which obscure the surfaces of things and, thus inhibit visual perception, while signalling the paradoxical co-presence of absence: these motifs include clouds, mists, shadows, night, and so forth. Moreover, because of the interplay of phenomena in the great web of associations, in which things are imbued with both a sense of lack and excess, precisely rendered images, especially of the commonplace, are important, even on a much reduced scale. Robert Anthony Siegel uses the poetic form of *haiku* as a means to expound this tensional style, evocative of the *yūgen* sensibility. Siegel reduces *yūgen* to two practices: 1) the eschewing of interpretation in favour of physical detail and imagery; 2) and the avoidance of direct statement in favour of suggestion and subtext⁴⁰. The suggestive quality is created by the plurality of connections that can form between images in haiku. Therefore, the clarity of imagery is important, as shared with the classical sense of ekphrasis, but also the creative ambiguity that is formed between these instances of precision. By not making the relationships between images explicit, the poet, and also the artist and Nō actor, can make manifest that which is hidden⁴¹.

One more useful example of the complex of presence-absence of *yūgen* can be found in Don Ihde's description of the dynamic in Japanese painting whereby a rendered object, such as a sparrow, along with a few other shapes, like two blades of grass, or a sprig of cherry blossom, is foregrounded against an expanse of paper or silk that is left unpainted, or covered with just a wash – effectively empty space. Within Western concepts of art, such a

³⁹ For an overview of such discourses in the West, see Marks (1998) and for a cross-cultural overview of both Western and Japanese traditions, see Odin (2001): *Artistic Detachment in Japan and the West*, Hawai'i University Press.

⁴⁰ Siegel R A (2013): *The Breeze in the Ink Painting: A Look2 Essay on Kawabata Yasunari*, in *Ploughshares*, Vol 39, No. 2&3 (Fall, 2013): 172

⁴¹ The creation of such connections between images is complex and, as theorised by the master *haikai* poet, Matsuo Bashō, and his followers, can take myriad forms. For an overview of these, see Shirane H (1998): *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory and the Poetry of Matsuo Bashō*, Stanford University Press: 48-49.

foregrounding is to draw focus to the articulated objects, such as the sparrow. The sparrow is the subject of the painting. Within Japanese painting, however, ‘the emptiness and openness...is the subject matter of the painting, the sparrow or the branch of cherry blossom being set there to make the openness stand out.’⁴² Often, within texts and paintings evocative of *yūgen* great care is taken in precisely and clearly rendering some aspects of the work precisely in order to evoke ambiguity and absence, and thereby an experience of mysterious, profound beauty. This has an important consequence for considering *yūgen* and ekphrasis because it means that the attributes of the art-object, what art critics refer to as character constitutive aspects (CCAs), become paradoxically illuminated by what isn’t apparently there. As we will now see, in the fictional works of Sōseki and Akutagawa characters often sense such absences as they are illuminated by the ‘presences’ disclosed to them by the storyworld. These characters can also come to embody this presence-absence dynamic, and often contemplate it.

3. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Natsume Sōseki: *yūgen* and ekphrasis in action

Despite rising to literary acclaim during Japan’s modern period⁴³, both Akutagawa and Sōseki were interested in ‘old Japan’ and their nation’s arts, including Japan’s long literary history⁴⁴. As well as producing fiction with artist protagonists, they often invested their ekphrastic stories with traditional ‘Japanese’ aesthetics, whilst also situating their works within the cultural milieu of their times – a milieu that was very much aware of its relationship to the West, both in terms of admiration, but also difference⁴⁵. While both Sōseki and Akutagawa include moments wherein ‘actual’ artworks (within the story world) are

⁴² Quoted in Odin (2001): 186

⁴³ Sōseki came to fiction writing later life, during the late-Meiji and early post-Meiji period, after a brief career as an English teacher and then a lecturer of English Literature at the prestigious Tokyo Imperial University; Akutagawa was a student of Sōseki’s and came to national attention whilst still a student in the second decade of the 20th century.

⁴⁴ Such an interest did not ignore, but rather embraced, the canonical influence of ancient Chinese culture on Japan’s cultural development.

⁴⁵ The fact that all three writers were interested in Western artists, paintings and aesthetics is proof of this relationship.

encountered, the idea of ‘non-painting.’ must also be considered when engaging with their use of ekphrasis. Both writers evoke *yūgen*, with its energising of absence-presence, in connection to their ekphrastic practices even – perhaps especially - when no ‘physical’ painting is encountered. Indeed, within a *yūgen*-invested conceptualisation of artistic production, these ‘non-paintings’ are equally as important as finished paintings, and reveals the complexities of these writers’ ekphrastic strategies just as much as the presentation of finished artworks.

i. Akutagawa’s Ryūnosuke *Autumn Mountain and Hell Screen*

In his aphorism ‘Interpretation’ (Jp. *Kaishaku*), Akutagawa, recognised in Japan as one of the most important writers of the Modern period, presented a theory that underpins his approach to literature:

Any interpretation of a work of art presupposes a degree of cooperation between artist and interpreter. In a sense, the interpreter is an artist who, using another artist’s work for his theme, creates his own work. Hence, every famous work of art that has withstood the test of time is characterised by its capacity to induce multiple interpretations. But, as Anatole France has pointed out, the fact that a literary work has the capacity to induce multiple interpretations does not make it ambiguous in the sense that the reader can easily give it any interpretation he likes. Rather it means that a good work is like Mount Lu: it is many-sided and therefore encourages viewing from many angles.⁴⁶

According to Steve Odin, the analogy to Mount Lu is telling in this instance because it explicitly uncouples a Western sense of ambiguity from a negative association with deformation, or nihilism: rather, it evokes profound beauty (*yūgen*). This aspect of Japanese aesthetics and of *yūgen* is expounded by Kawabata Yasunari, when he explains the generative emptiness which lies at the heart of interplay – of *yūgen*. Kawabata explains the ‘seemingly paradoxical’ tension between such myriad and interplaying nodes through the Zen conceptualisation of nothingness, which ‘is not the nothingness or the emptiness of the West. It is rather the reverse, a universe of the spirit in which everything communicates freely with

⁴⁶ In Steve Odin’s essay *Derrida and the Decentred universe of Ch’an/Zen Buddhism*, in Fu and Heine (ed.) (1995): *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, SUNY: 16

everything, transcending bounds⁴⁷. In Akutagawa's analogy, the use of Mt Lu makes use of the way in which such codified places within Japanese literature (*utamakura*) generate interplay, for automatically operating across time and the canon⁴⁸. As a nexus of interaction, Mt. Lu can be understood as a metaphor for the tensional dynamism of *yūgen*: when such a site and its intertexts are called upon within Japanese art, the mountain's physical presence is not denied, but is also interwoven into the boundless web of phenomena, as presented through Kawabata's idea of 'interplay,' which include those other re-presentations that are manifest in numerous other artistic works (visual and/or verbal). A novel, too invites many readings because of the complex web of occurrences that happen within its plot, the ways in which these are made manifest within the writing, and their intertextual interplay. Seen in the light of *yūgen*'s correlative structure both Mt Lu and a novel are 'no-places,' and yet sites for a plurality of meanings: they generate a dynamic interplay that exhausts any definitive interpretation or clear summation.

Addressing the influence of the visual arts on Akutagawa's outlooks as a literary writer, Anrin Yasuda explains that although his oeuvre is rich in vivid descriptions of artworks and analogies to the discourses of painting, the writer was well aware of the impossibility of direct mimesis, just as he was aware that prose cannot achieve the same synchronicity as a visual image⁴⁹. Instead, through such stories as *Autumn Mountain* and *Hell Screen*, Akutagawa explored what Yasuda names 'inter-artistic evaluations,' which accept the impossibility of mimesis through verbal description, but simultaneously champion the power of narrative ekphrasis. This power can be attributed to how, within both stories, Akutagawa utilises practices that evoke both paintings (presences) and 'non-paintings' (absence), so becoming bound up in the negative/positive interplay of *yūgen*.

Autumn Mountain (Jp. *Shūzanzu*) was published in the *Kaizō* magazine in January 1921, when Akutagawa was twenty nine, two months before he actually visited China, after which he lost his romanticised view of the country. Although not one of his most famous

⁴⁷ Taken from Kawabata's Nobel Prize acceptance speech. A transcript of the speech has been made available by the Nobel Prize Organisation at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1968/kawabata/lecture/> (last accessed 15th May, 2019): 7

⁴⁸ See Kamens E (1997): *Utamakura: Allusion and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry*, Yale University Press.

⁴⁹ Yasuda A (2016): *Endeavors of Representation: Writing and Painting in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Literary Aesthetics*, in *Japanese Language and Literature*, Vol. 50, No.2 (October 2016): 278

stories, it does pay testament to his interest in ekphrasis. The story's premise is simple: set in old China, the story is framed within a discussion held between two artist-scholars, Yun Nantian and Wang Shigu, who spend the entire narrative discussing 'The Painting of Autumn Mountains,' by their predecessor, Huang Yifeng. The subject matter also, of course, recalls the mountain at the centre of 'Interpretation', discussed above. Over the course of this conversation, Yun Nantian recounts how he came to know of the painting through his teacher, the artist and collector Yanke Nantian, who first ventured to the distant county of Jun in order to view the painting. Yun Nantian recounts to Wang Shigu how Yanke Nantian, enraptured by the painting's beauty, spent the next fifty years of his life desperately attempting to purchase the artwork. Only when the original owner dies and the painting passes to his grandson is a second viewing made possible. Yanke Nantian invites Yun Nantian to the viewing party. However, after so many years of waiting for this viewing, Yanke Nantian is disappointed by the painting presented to him at the viewing party. Similarly, after hearing of the painting's splendours and becoming enamoured with the idea of it through Yanke Nantian's oration, Yun Nantian is also disappointed. For both teacher and student, the painting is not the same one that Yanke Nantian saw fifty years previous; neither is it the painting Yun Nantian pictured. The authenticity of the painting hung before them, however, is verified by two other experts at the party. Therefore, although a great work, the painting does not live up to its remembered or imagined image.

Overall, there is a limited sense of dramatic structure to the story, where Yun Nantian and Wang Shigu's are concerned. Instead, the central dynamic forms around the powerful relationship between the paintings viewed and the 'non-paintings' remembered or imagined. This discussion is all Yun Nantian and Wang Shigu engage in. Nonetheless, at the story's conclusion, they come to an important realisation. As Wang Shigu states, 'that strange painting is no doubt engraved forever on [Yanke Nantian's] mind. And on yours, too.'⁵⁰ Yun Nantian agrees, adding, 'I still see the dark green of the mountain rock, as Yanke Nantian described it all those years ago. I can see the red leaves of the bushes as if the painting were before my eyes this very moment.' These utterances are important to the story's evocation of *yūgen's* subtle depths because, although the 'physical' painting, which is referenced throughout the narrative and forms the motif unifying its two levels of anecdote (both Yanke Nantian's first viewing of the painting in Jun and Yun Nantian's experience of the painting at

⁵⁰ Akutagawa: 180

the later viewing party), what is most powerful in terms of Yun Nantian's experience of the 'Painting of Autumn Mountains' is Yanke Nantian's ekphrastic representation of it. Wang Shigu reinforces this idea when he proclaims, 'So even if it never existed, there is not really much cause for regret.' This realisation signals to the reader that they, just like Wang Shigu, have encountered a painting through its ekphrastic re-representation. As such, the story also engages the correlative paradox of *yūgen*.

This dynamic becomes clearer on a close reading of the moment, early in the narrative, when Yanke Nantian, having travelled to Jun, first encounters the painting in the ghostly estate of a Mr Chang:

At first glance, [Yanke Nantian] let out a gasp of admiration. The dominant color was a dark green. From one end to the other a river ran its twisting course; bridges crossed the river at various places and along its banks were little hamlets. Dominating it all rose the main peak of the mountain range, before which floated peaceful wisps of autumn cloud. The mountain and its neighboring hills were fresh green, as if newly washed by rain, and there was an uncanny beauty in the red leaves of the bushes and thickets scattered along their slopes. This was no ordinary painting, but one in which both design and color had reached an apex of perfection. It was a work of art instinct with the classical sense of beauty.⁵¹

The painting's textual 'presence' is foregrounded and exhibits clarity through a straightforward ekphrastic description. A clear map of the painting's pictorial elements – what art critics refer to as the painting's character constitutive attributes – are presented to both Yun Nantian and the reader. We, like Yun Nantian, can picture a painting. This extended map includes the painting's shapes and colours, with some composition suggested, such as the mountain acting as a background, against which the mists are foregrounded. However, these elements play clarity off against ambiguity: the passage does establish the materiality of the painting, but does not provide much of a 'solid' impression, what can be called vividness. Despite all the proclamations of unique beauty ('the apex of perfection') which abound here, and throughout the story, the description itself could be of any number of works: the motifs related are very generic to Chinese landscape painting. Yanke Nantian's description Therefore, evokes what Tamar Yacobi refers to as an 'ekphrastic model', whereby a single description engages the reader with an entire artistic genre, or the generic

⁵¹ Akutagawa (1921): 177

style of an artist or a school.⁵² The paradoxes of *yūgen* are thereby evoked as there is both a painting to be imagined, a single referent, but it is multiply productive in the context of Chinese painting, and so a ‘no-painting’.

This reading of the initial ekphrastic episode is reinforced when, at the viewing party itself, the painting is hung before the party-goers, a crowd which now includes Wang Shigu, who states:

And then it all leaped forth before my eyes: the little villages on the river, the flocks of white cloud floating over the valley, the green of the towering mountain range which extended into the distance like a succession of folding-screens – the whole world, in fact, that [Huang Yifeng] had created, a world far more wonderful than our own. My heart seemed to beat faster as I gazed intently at the scroll on the wall.⁵³

The ekphrastic map presented here is much briefer, and, as such, is even more generic than the first representation of the painting; however, the simile - the mountains resembling folding-screens – is more particularly unique, though equally, it is Yun Nantian’s subjective reading of the image. The next paragraph develops this tensionalised ekphrastic model further:

These clouds and mists and hills and valleys were unmistakably of [Huang Yifeng]. Who but [Huang Yifeng] could carry the art of drawing to such perfection that every brush-stroke became a thing alive? Who but he could produce colours of such depth and richness, and yet at the same time hide all mechanical trace of brush and paint?⁵⁴

The reader is left to construct the image through common motifs that would be familiar to any reader with experience of viewing Chinese landscapes, but at the same time these supposedly become particularised through the nuanced style of the artist. Given this bewildering conflation of the generic and the particular, it is little wonder that Yun Nantian decides that, ‘this was not the same painting that [Yanke Nantian] had seen long ago ... a magnificent painting it surely was, yet just as surely not the unique painting which he had

⁵² Yacobi, T (1995): *Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis*, in *Poetics Today*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter, 1995): 599-649 (especially, 601-602).

⁵³ Akutagawa (1921): 180

⁵⁴ Akutagawa (1921): 180

described with such religious awe⁵⁵. Here the particulars of the painting style interplay with the model-like tropes of the artist's oeuvre: particulars are foregrounded and yet they engage with that which is beyond them.

Japanese aesthetics' celebration of artistic legacy is also at play in the story. The use of anecdote as a framing strategy is a clear example of this, but so is the presence of other intertexts. All four of the major characters (the two interlocutors, the artist-teacher, and the artist) were real historical figures, their lives collectively spanning five centuries of Chinese art history. Moreover, the narrative itself is a reshaping of a tale Akutagawa found in a book of Chinese paintings, one produced by a fellow Japanese, Imaseki Hisamaro. Within Akutagawa's tale, numerous time periods are thus overlaid, with the painting connected with all of them. The past painting is part of the present painting: legacy and materiality are co-present. The ghostly dimension of this dynamic is suggested at the narrative level, when the estate in Jun, within which the painting is first viewed, is described using numerous motifs from Chinese ghost stories. When Yanke Nantian confides to Yun Nantian at the later viewing party, he also says that he thinks they have all been tricked by a 'hobgoblin.' Ultimately, the question as to whether 'The Painting of Autumn Mountains' ever existed at all is left open – one that ironically mirrors the indeterminate presence/absence of ekphrastic production.

The relationship between language and image in Akutagawa's works is not unilateral but one of 'mutual exchange, in which the capacities of one medium highlight and augment the lacks of the other'⁵⁶: what Yasuda refers to as Akutagawa's 'inter-art evaluations.' Akutagawa's use of ekphrases reveals the capacity for literature to draw attention to the unique ability of language to express that which the visual arts can only suggest: temporality, and the mutability and multiplicity of dramatic perspectives (a trope found elsewhere in Akutagawa's fiction). This dynamic both obscures those ekphrases present within the text, while also deepening their resonances through interplay. As such, they demonstrate Akutagawa's ability to use ekphrasis to evoke *yūgen* within narrative writing. An understanding of this dynamic can be deepened by turning to *Hell Screen* (Jp. *Jigokuhen*), an

⁵⁵ Akutagawa (1921): 180

⁵⁶ Yasuda (2016): 294

early work considered to be one of Akutagawa's masterpieces⁵⁷. Originally published in instalments in 1918, in the evening editions of the *Osaka mainichi shinbun* and *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun*, the story, broken into 20 parts, tells of the medieval artist, Yoshihide, and how he was tasked by his feudal lord to create a screen painting of the eight Buddhist hells. Akutagawa uses an old servant as his framing/focalising device, in order to deliver a plot principally formed around the repugnant artist's processes and the suffering he is required to go through in order to paint his magnum opus, a process that has him witness and paint the burning to death of his only daughter.

Narrative structure has the power to energise ekphrasis in a manner that recalls the workings of *yūgen*. Tamar Yacobi, in seeking to broaden what she sees to be ekphrastic theory's fixation on the 'still moment' in lyric poetry, stresses the dynamising potential of narrative ekphrasis, including the manipulation of sequence and the 'force of perceptibility' (the shaping influence of focalisation), where ekphrastic episodes can 'make contact' with plot and thereby negate the perceived hierarchal tension that exists between narrative and description. Instead of valuing the narrative elements of a story over the story's descriptive elements, as has been the case in narratology, Yacobi promotes a broader conception of textual coherence, and stresses that rich inter-relations between ekphrases and the plot can exist in what she calls the text's 'part-whole web of relations,' an analogy that draws parallels to *yūgen*'s web of associations⁵⁸.

When viewing narrative ekphrasis in this light, the impact of *Hell Screen* is illuminated: the narrative power comes not only from the static visual image of the screen itself, but from, as Yasuda's writes 'the sum effect of visualising the infamous painting conjured *through* the narrative'⁵⁹ (italics added). Crucial to the energising of ekphrasis in relation to the temporality of narrative is Akutagawa's manipulation of narrative structure so as to break with linear chronology. The narrator's metafictional interjections not only shade the vivid presence of the hell screen with the hoary touch of legend, but more importantly invest the image with the cruel, haunting presence of the plot's events, especially the burning of Yoshihide's daughter which forms the story's climax. Such a tension is *yūgen* incarnate: as the story unfolds, the painting becomes invested with depths that reach beyond the static

⁵⁷ Murakami (1996): 38.

⁵⁸ Yacobi (1995): 623

⁵⁹ Yasuda (2016): 277

materiality of the painting to its process, a kind of ‘non-painting,’ that haunts its particular actuality.

A representative example of this is seen in a passage in Part 6, in which the creation of the painting as a series of plot points and its ‘viewing’ by the reader are inverted. By moving from the ekphrastic description of the screen in Part 6, into the narrative of its creation, any stillness the screen may exhibit as a painted object, and any autonomy it may have as a material object, are disrupted. This is because the painting’s pictorial elements and its status as material object become backlit by the world and processes beyond the painted surface. Each element has a story behind it. The gradual revealing of these contextual factors, such as how the tortures depicted were researched/visualised, and most importantly, that the burning girl is not a figment of the artist’s fancy (a creation of his mind alone), but that the image on the screen is a vision of a living person’s anguish, collapses the ontological difference between the painting as artifice and as record/witness⁶⁰. The painting, as celebrated artwork, continues to exist after the act of its creation and the death of its creator, and yet it will always bear the presence of its creation. An artwork within *yūgen* aesthetics is a whole, but also the tensionalised sum of its parts and what informs those parts: it is a nexus of those influences and those activities which brought the work from nothing into ‘reality’ and that continue to do through the servant’s narration of the painting’s legend. Such a reading, when contextualised with the correlative structure of *yūgen*, allows us to appreciate how the painting develops from a static site of visual presence in Part 6, to the dynamic field of ‘non-painting,’ or the creative potentialities of process, by the story’s conclusion.

Although the central interplay between the ekphrastic description of the hell screen and the climatic immolation of Yoshihide’s daughter takes place between Parts 6 and 18, Akutagawa starts manipulating the story’s structure from the very beginning so as to aid the interplay between ekphrasis and plot. While the hell screen’s pictorial elements, as presented in Part 6, foreshadow the immolation, the story’s initial characterisation of Yoshihide creates dramatic irony. In Part 1, the narrator states: ‘I will have to tell you about Yoshihide (the creator) before I can tell about what he created.’⁶¹ Key to the interplay between ekphrasis, plot and characterisation, here, is that Yoshihide is an artist of the eye. In order for him to

⁶⁰ Parallels can be drawn here to the ghostly dynamics of war photography as Berger argues in his essays *Photographs of Agony*. See Berger J (2009): About Looking, Bloomsbury: 41-44

⁶¹ Akutagawa (1918): 43

paint something in his realistic style, he must see it first. The placing of Part 6's main ekphrastic description after the establishment of Yoshihide's characterisation in this way, particularly his inability to paint without models and his cruel, competitive nature, means that every detail in the hell screen's extended map has been witnessed by the artist: Yoshihide must have 'seen' hell if he was to paint it at all, let alone so resplendently. The narrator states that the artist had already witnessed a great conflagration when Kyoto was swept by fire, so the skilful rendering of the fire storm that was 'so terrible you thought the swirling flames were going to melt the Mountain of Sabres' is justified⁶². Having seen such a sight he can translate it into 'black smoke clouds of hurled India ink and flying sparks of blow-on gold dust.' But what of the tortures depicted in the painting and, more importantly, what about the carriage and the burning girl?

So as to emphasise the importance of this event, the painting's central subject, Akutagawa again inverts temporality within Part 6's ekphrastic description of the painting. Because the burning carriage and its passenger are the dramatic focus of the masterpiece, it is reasonable to say that a viewer of the screen would focus on them first. They would then take in the complimentary details – those which are provided by Akutagawa in vivid and precise detail (the different sinners, for example, or the Ten Kings of Hell and the particulars of their costumes) afterwards. Akutagawa's narrator reverses this order, arriving at the dramatic point of the section by providing an even more detailed ekphrastic description of the burning carriage and its occupant, the identity of whom is withheld at this time:

But surely the single most horrifying image of all was that of a carriage plummeting through space. As it fell, it grazed the upper boughs of a sword tree, where clumps of corpses were skewered on fang-like branches. Blasts of hell wind swept up the carriage curtains to reveal a court lady so gorgeously appalled she might have been one of His Imperial Majesty's own Consorts or Intimates, her straight black hip-length hair flying upward in the flames, the full whiteness of her throat laid bare as she writhed in agony. Every detail of the woman, and the blazing carriage filled the viewer with an agonizing sense of the hideous torments to be found in the Hell of Searing Heat. The sheer horror of the entire screen – might I say? – seemed to be concentrated in this one figure.

⁶² Akutagawa (1918): 50-51

It is with a bitter irony, therefore, that the narrator draws this extended ekphrasis to an end by stating that the screen's 'inspired workmanship' was so great that 'all who saw it could hear the woman's dreadful screams' and that it was 'for the sake of painting this one image [that] the terrible event occurred.'⁶³ Given the previous exposition of Yoshihide's character and his artistic habits, the lacuna created through such vague language as the 'event' is filled in. The enigma that remains, however, regards whose screams we can supposedly 'hear,' a heightening of narrative tension which increases in Part 15 when Horikawa agrees to burn a 'voluptuous woman inside it,' one who remains unnamed as of yet, but will 'die writhing with agony in flames and black smoke.'⁶⁴ It is after this creation of dramatic irony, whereby the hell screen's pictorial properties are energised by the prospect of future events (in terms of the story's sequencing of plot), that Akutagawa can devolve the hell screen's presence into its intertexts, those which are biographical in nature, or procedural or that are simply narrative extensions and history. These, for example, include the torturing of his apprentices, the precise details of which, as they unfold after Part 6, have the reader recall the vivid pictorial elements of the hell screen.

The consummating point at which ekphrasis and plot interact comes in Part 18, during Yoshihide's witnessing of his daughter's immolation. It is here that the ontological difference between the painting's pictorial elements and the actuality of the daughter's death finally collapse. Buddhist doctrine warns against attachment; the purpose of painted hell screens was to teach this message. On seeing his daughter burn, Yoshihide's self dissolves into the dynamics of creation. This fleeting participation within the living moment, within the flux of the phenomenal as emerging from the pre-phenomenal, the articulated and the non-articulated, is the beauty of *yūgen*. His participation in this way leads him to view the death of his daughter with 'rapture,' an 'inexpressible radiance – the radiance of religious ecstasy.' This rapture is not voyeuristic enjoyment at witnessing pain, but the immediacy of beauty (Jp. *bi*), which forms within the living moment, rather than an aesthetically 'stilled' appreciation of an artwork which can come after the creative act. Interplay is the experience. Immersion into the beauty of the work involves action, so as to partake in the Creative, wherein all phenomena are in perpetual becoming.

⁶³ Akutagawa (1918): 52

⁶⁴ Akutagawa (1918): 65

In order to dramatise this dissolution, the painting's pictorial elements are imbued with this energising dynamic because they are both art and actuality. The narrator states:

The pale whiteness of her upturned face as she choked on the smoke; the tangled length of her hair as she tried to shake the flames from it; the beauty of her cherry blossom robe as it burst into flame: it was also cruel, so terrible! Especially at one point when the night wind rushed down from the mountain to sweep away the smoke: the sight of her against a flaming background of red flecked with gold dust, gnawing at her gag riding as if to snap the chains that bound her: it was enough to make our flesh creep, not only mine but the powerful samurai's as well – as if the tortures of hell were being pictured right before our eyes.⁶⁵

As the reader witnesses the girl's death, we are reminded of the painting. This dynamic is not just organised on a structural level, but signalled on the textual level as well. The scene is imbued with pictorial qualities, what with its 'background of red flecked with gold dust,' as if 'the tortures of hell were being *pictured* right before our eyes' (italics added). The precise details of the burning carriage, as real event, and the inclusion of precise elements of the painterly, paradoxically remove the representational distance of the painting as artifice (as created in Part 6 through ekphrasis), while simultaneously diminishing the immolation's status as real event by repositioning it to inhabit the ontological distance of art.

Ultimately, such insights are brief. The moment is lost: the act of creation ends and attachment returns: the sadness of life is revealed. Yoshihide hangs himself. The tensional becoming of the painting, however, as held within the dynamics of the servant's narration, lives on. Through the story's structure; we are offered a painting that is also more than a painting.

ii. Natsume Sōseki's *Grass Pillow*

The ekphrastic dynamic of *becoming* – of the image coalescing and yet refusing to become stable and static – is evocative of the profundity of *yūgen*. In 1906, novelist Natsume Sōseki wrote one of his most experimental works, in which this dynamic was intended to unify the novel's purposefully loose structure. *Grass Pillow* (Jp. *Kusamakura*) follows the self-narrated

⁶⁵ Akutagawa (1918): 70

journey of an artist, who is seeking to escape Tokyo and the world of human affairs by venturing into the mountains of Kyushu. At a hot spring inn, he encounters the inn-keeper's daughter, O'Nami, a beautiful, mysterious and clever woman, who, in the artist's decision to paint her portrait, becomes the unifying motif of the narrative. O'Nami's presence, however, is encountered before the narrator's arrival at the spa. He first hears about her whilst he takes shelter from a deluge at a mountain teahouse. As such, within the mind of the narrator, and thus the reader, through the power of his focalisation, O'Nami is imagined as a painting. However, the artist is yet to meet her in the flesh. All he has to gather up into a loose and hazy 'sketch' are the stories he hears about her, stories which are interpenetrated by other legends and the spatial-temporal locale he has wandered into. Returning to Louvel's definition of the ekphrastic act, the narrator here, instead of 'carrying over' the attributes of O'Nami's physical appearance into pictorial elements, whereby a likeness can be captured and mimesis achieved (an impossibility given her physical absence), O'Nami's being is 'translated.' She is created and enriched by the web of associations forming around her. Because of these associations, her characterisation becomes more vivid, but there is also loss. She is incomplete. The image forming in the artist-narrator's mind is obscured by absence: he cannot picture her face and, even after meeting her, he seeks her most beautiful expression. This dynamic, however, is as much part of O'Nami's beauty as her physical qualities, which he states at one point are not individually exquisite, but form a pleasing whole. This initial vision, in its incompleteness, illuminates her mystery, just as the painted sparrow in an ink painting illuminates the emptiness of the unpainted silk around it.

Sōseki's structuring of *Grass Pillow* is important to any understanding of how ekphrasis and *yūgen* intersect in this novel. Similar to Akutagawa's *Autumn Mountain* and *Hell Screen*, this sense of *yūgen* deepens as the text progresses and the artist-narrator continues in his quest to find a viewing of O'Nami suitable for her portrait. Throughout the novel, she is both image and imagining. After O'Nami is physically encountered at the inn and at other spots in and around the mountain village of Nakoi, her characterisation continues to sharpen: she is physically described; her wit is revealed; her family context is encountered and love life revealed. However, the mystery surrounding her also deepens. He never feels that she is fully open with him, not completely sincere. This mystery is structurally dramatized by Sōseki's inclusion of textual moments, wherein O'Nami appears before the artist-narrator (sometimes purposefully, sometime more by accident), in evocative circumstances, rather than his seeking her out. These scenes are often replete with motifs of

yūgen – such as moonlight, or mist – or they have O’Nami performing actions that baffle the narrator, such as her appearance with the dagger at Mirror Pool. As such, O’Nami is encountered in a perpetual play of tensions and is kept in a state of becoming. This dynamism is symbolised by the narrator’s continual search for the expression that would best set off her beauty and which he can then use to solidify into a painting. After all, the narrative seems to pose the question: how can the beauty of *yūgen*, which is dynamic, be captured by a static portrait? It is only at the novel’s conclusion that the beautiful expression the artist-narrator has been seeking is revealed to him. This is the sincere look that flashes across her face when, caught unawares, she spots her ex-husband boarding a train that will take him to the battlefields of the Russo-Japanese War, where he will likely perish. Sōseki uses the term ‘*aware*’ to signify this expression, a look of pathos at the perishability of things and hence the sadness of human life – a sadness emanating from the transience and impermanence (nothingness) that the *yūgen* sensibility illuminates. However, it is here, also, that the novel abruptly stops. Rather than capturing the vision upon a canvas, the ghost-like presence of a painting is left, one that is never committed to canvas and left open to the possibilities of the Creative.

In Akutagawa’s *yūgen*-inflected ekphrasis, and its suggestive correlation of painting and ‘non-painting,’ any presentation of an artwork as concrete object within the story world of the narrative is decentred into suggestive depths and dynamic interplay. Sōseki’s artist-narrator, in contrast, does not encounter nor create *any* physical paintings of O’Nami⁶⁶. Within Sōseki’s story world, although the artist-narrator looks to paint the portrait of O’Nami, no physical painting is actually rendered and, therefore, cannot be re-presented to the reader through a straight ekphrastic description. That said, the text resonates with the accumulative presence of vividly rendered images of O’Nami which, as I will argue, can be considered highly dynamic examples of ekphrasis – paintings that simultaneously occupy the position of ‘non-paintings.’ As such, where Akutagawa’s narratives displace or extend physical paintings into their correlation with ‘non-painting,’ Sōseki’s artist-narrator displaces imagined works into ekphrastic passages.

⁶⁶ That is not to say that he does not encounter other artistic mediums away from O’Nami, such as calligraphy or even an antique ink stone.

Before presenting some key examples of *Grass Pillow's* ekphrastic passages, it is important to engage with how Sōseki conceptualises these moments in relation to *haikai* poetics. This is because, as we have seen previously, haiku and other Japanese poetic forms are paradigmatic forms for the generation of *yūgen*. To do this, a brief overview of the novel's structure is needed. One of Sōseki's important contributions to the debate on what constitutes Japanese literature and what differentiates it from Western conceptions, particularly of the novel, was his advocating of *shaseibun*, a genre developed by his friend and poet Masaoka Shiki, and reoriented by Sōseki to create a new form of novelistic prose at the beginning of the 20th century, a period that saw the country transition from the Meiji Era (the era which saw Japan open up to the world), into the Taishō Era (a period that continued Japan's rapid modernisation). Sōseki's drive for innovation and celebration of Japan's literary heritage (mostly derived from poetry), advocated a Japanese prose style that moved away from Western models of the novel, as well as from the proletarian literature that was growing in popularity in Japan. This desire developed out of his ambivalence towards the western novel⁶⁷. In his essay *On Sketch Writing* (Jp. *Shaseibun*, 1907), Sōseki explains how he felt the western novel was too directly concerned with human emotion (Jp. *ninjō*) and social manners (Jp. *setai*).⁶⁸ Although human emotions could cover a range of emotions, influential critics like Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1886) used the term *ninjō* to refer primarily to male-female love and desire. As Daniel Poch points out, this type of emotion was synonymous with sexual desire (Jp. *jōyoku*), as well as spiritual love (Jp. *airen*), and the more generic word for love in Japanese, which often denotes romantic love, *ai/koi*. Such thematic material, with its focus set on sentiment, formed the dramatic structure of the western novel, a structure that, in Sōseki's view, collapsed the psychic distance between the writer and their characters, whereby the novelist was said to 'cry' alongside his or her characters. Sōseki, an academic who taught English literature for a time at the prestigious Tokyo Imperial University (where he lectured Akutagawa) was also steeped in the aesthetics of classical Chinese and Japanese literature. He sought to innovate the novel by reshaping and infusing it with the qualities of classical literary genres like *waka*, *haiku*, *haibun* (haiku-prose), *kanshi* (poems in classical Chinese), and / within the newly emerging genre of *shaseibun*.

⁶⁷ See Karatani K (2008): *Rethinking Sōseki's Theory*, in Japan Forum (2008), Vol. 20, No. 1: 9-15. Also, as Poch (2018) makes clear, such an understanding of the novel mirrors the critical interpretations of his time.

⁶⁸ See Poch D (2018): *Measuring Feeling as Theory of Literature: Romanticism and the Performance of Genre in Natsume Sōseki's Kusamakura and Critical Writings*, in Monumenta Nipponica, Vol. 73, No. 1 (2018): 1-26

As Kawabata and Poch expound, if one wants to understand the Japanese arts, one must understand Japanese poetry. Despite the general differences in their topic and thematic orientations, Japanese poetic genres share common ground. Namely, they eschew direct expression or description, in favour of creating resonances (Jp. *yōjo*). Through such resonances emotions can be felt in more indirect and subdued ways, and were often constructed through the suggestive interplays between natural (seasonal) imagery, which could include their juxtaposition against human topics, as well as allegorical displays of symbolism. As described previously, the distinction between the world of objects and the mind of the writer/reader is nullified within traditional Buddhist teachings, wherein the mind is considered the sixth sense. Developing Shiki's conceptualisation of *shasei* (poetic sketching), at the heart of which lay the aesthetic fundamentals of the poetic genres just named, Sōseki theorised how the psychic distance of 'sketching' could allow the novelist to be more detached, thus creating a narrative prose that did not revolve around plots of 'human emotion' and 'social manners.' Instead, and of key interest when considering Sōseki's manipulation of ekphrasis, *shaseibun* emphasised visuality and detachment, with the attendant primacy given to suggestion over explanation: effectively the components of *yūgen* within Siegel's summary of it, presented earlier. Shiki, in his essay, *On Narrative Description* (Jp. *Jojibun*, 1900), even advocated placing the affairs of the world at a distance, as if the people caught up within them were part of a landscape painting. Such a view was echoed by Sōseki in his essay, *Shaseibun*, when he argued for a new type of novel, in which the author observes and sketches their characters, along with their emotions, all the while utilising psychic distance to maintain a bemused interest.

Although Sōseki's first novel, *I am Cat* (Jp. *Wagahai neko de aru*, 1904-1906) proved to be a very popular example of *shaseibun*, *Grass Pillow* was still more bound up in the ambitions of this form. *Grass Pillow's* novelistic style fuses plot with Japanese poetic values, a narrative that dramatised Shiki's painting analogy by having, as its narrator, an artist encountering the mountains of rural Kyushu, and those who live amongst them, and doing so as part of his search for paintings. This search includes a conscious quest to move through the world, while inhabiting an artistic distance from it, what Sōseki, through his artist-narrator, calls 'non-emotion' (Jp. *hijinjō*). The artist-narrator's quest for 'non-emotion' encourages him to experience the world around him through the aesthetic distance of art. His experiences, moreover, are rendered like paintings. As such, his narration of events and scenes can be considered performances of ekphrasis. This interpretation does contradict

Louvel's typology of narrative ekphrasis, which Sylvia Karastathi uses as the basis for her *Ekphrasis and the Novel/Narrative Fiction*, in which she stresses how what is designated as ekphrasis in fiction should not include 'descriptive writing [which] is infused with pictoriality.' Louvel states that ekphrasis should be 'differentiated from moments of description in a text which suggest a painting-effect or a painterly-style.'⁶⁹ However, I will contend that Sōseki's artist-narrator views the world, and those with in it, pictorially and, as such, descriptions of those people he meets are intended to be complex word-portraits and can be considered ekphrastic.

O'Nami is the central locus whereupon ekphrasis and plot 'make contact.' She is presented through a number of stilled moments, which are loosely woven into the chronology of the artist-narrator's journey into the mountains and his staying at the inn. Moreover, the importance that these moments hold prevents them from becoming relegated to the decorative, what Gérard Genette deems to be *ancilla narrationis*, or a mere auxiliary of the narrative, 'the ever-necessary, ever-submissive, never-emancipated slave' to narrative thrust⁷⁰. Moreover, as Odin explains, an important element of the novel's form, as a narrative that weaves 'sketches from life' into a longer narrative, combining prose and poetry in order to evoke the immediacy of experience, is grammatical tense. Written in the present progressive tense, these sketches are a performance of genre, whereby the process of describing is contemplated and experienced. Therefore, what is mediated in this way becomes not something already fixed, but the emergence of the thing itself, not a description of a preformed model, but the very emergence of O'Nami (as well as the landscape around Nakoi, when engaged with by the artist-narrator). When she is encountered by the artist-narrator within different contexts, she evokes different associations. Thus, she is constituted and reconstituted in multivariant forms and is, as Odin writes of Sōseki's heroine, 'disseminated into an irreducible plurality of meanings and perspectives devoid of essence, center, or core.' In *My Grass Pillow* (Jp. *Yo ga kusamakura*, 1906), Sōseki provided the following exegesis of his novel, in this respect:

⁶⁹ Karastathi S (2015): *Ekphrasis and the Novel/Narrative Fiction*, in Rippl R (ed) (2015): Handbook of Intermediality, Walter de Gruyter GmbH: 92-112.

⁷⁰ Genette, G (1982): *Frontiers of Narrative*, in Sheridan A (trans) (1982): Figures of Literary Discourse, Columbia University Press: 127-44

In Kusamakura there is a painter who observes things in a peculiar way. He meets a beautiful woman by chance and observes her, and she becomes the heroine of the work. She is always standing in the same place and does not move at all. The painter observes her from the front from the back or from the left or from the right. He observes her from various directions – only that.⁷¹

Sōseki's 'only that,' here, does not signal a rejection of inter-human relations. What Sōseki celebrates in this apparent distancing is harmonisation, the interplay that is created when 'human materials' (Jp. *jinji*) are brought into a productively dynamic relationship with what he calls 'sensory materials' (Jp. *kankakutei*), which he equates with imagery of the natural world (Jp. *shizenkai*)⁷². Sōseki argues for this interplay in his critical text, *Bungakuron* (1907), when he differentiates what he regards as the 'realist school' (Jp. *shajitsu-ha*), with its realist method (Jp. *shajiitsuhō*), an approach to prose composition that focused on most often the 'human,' from the 'romantic school' (Jp. *roman-ha*). In Sōseki's conceptualisation, the method of this latter school, focused on the creation of nexuses, wherein different categories of 'materials' interpenetrate. Of key concern here was how human emotions were signalled to the reader through the images of the natural world⁷³. Such an appreciation of dynamic interplay can be considered to be at the heart of *yūgen*.

Such moments of interplay are the heart of *Grass Pillow's* form. When taken together, they create a montage-like effect, whereby the novel is structured as a series of poetic nexuses which connect across the plotline but are complimented by the artist-narrator's numerous other conjectural tangents (the Japanese, after all, believe that too contrived a plotline is overtly artificial and, hence, not beautiful⁷⁴). These moments are evocative of what Mori Atsushi (1912-1992) referred to in his studies of the *haikai* prose tradition as a *taiō*, translated by Eleanor Kerkham as fields where opposing and corresponding entities intersect⁷⁵. In other words, a *taiō* is a poetic nexus, often encountered by a wondering poet as he engages with a landscape's physicality and its poetic/historical resonances (similar to Akutagawa's Mt Lu analogy). Here the 'haiku imagination,' as named by Shirane Haruo,

⁷¹ Odin (1995): 18

⁷² Sōseki taxonomised four categories of what he refers to as literary content (Jp. *bungakuteki naiyō*): sensory (Jp. *Kankakutei* – which was synonymous with nature, or Jp. *shizen*), human (Jp. *jinji*), supernatural (Jp. *chōshizen*), and intellectual (Jp. *chishiki*).

⁷³ See Poch (2018): 13-21

⁷⁴ See Thomas J Harper's afterword to his translation of Tanazaki's *In Praise Shadows* (2001: 68).

⁷⁵ See Kerkham E (2006): *And us too Enclosed in Mori Atsushi's Ware mo Mata, Oku no Hosomichi*, in Kerkham E (ed) (2006): *Matsuo Basho's Poetic Spaces*, Palgrave Macmillan: 173-200

dissolves any opposition between the subjective and objective. This dissolution is celebrated in Japanese poetics and is to be enjoyed by the open-minded, and open-hearted, poet. Indeed, in his later essay *The Attitude of a Creative Artist* (Jp. *Sōsakuka no taido*, 1908), Sōseki wrote of the poet's and artist's ability to 'savour' and 'enjoy' (Jp. *tanoshimu*) the world, rather than merely describe it directly (as western novelists do, in Sōseki's analysis). Artists and poets, in Sōseki's estimation, with the aid of their aesthetic distance, can perceive a thing through its relationships with other things. They intuit and celebrate mediation – *taiō* are moments of such mediation. Therefore, the evocative power of poetry becomes manifest through the use of evocation of implication, as well as metaphors, similes, symbols. Sōseki believed that such tensions were more expressive than straight descriptions. He wanted his text to convey what he called, in his auto-commentary *My Grass Pillow* (Jp. *Yo ga Kusamakura*, 1906) a 'feeling of beauty,' rather than portray a chain of events dictated by cause and effect and referred to *Grass Pillow* as a 'haiku-novel' (Jp. *haikutekina shōsetsu*)⁷⁶, which he thought heralded a new literary genre, and what Toru Itō refers to as an 'imagery novel.'⁷⁷ When considering how such ideas connect to Sōseki's handling of ekphrasis, the tensions that he creates between O'Nami as a painting and as an actual person evoke the interplay between painting and 'non-painting,' in which suggestion and association make the ekphrastic passages more vivid and emotionally 'clear' than any straight description of an artwork's pictorial elements.

The instances and strategies through which Sōseki establishes and develops O'Nami as an ekphrastic nexus are numerous and often unfold over pages. To this end, I will illustrate these strategies through two of these moments. The first is when she is established at the teahouse, a scene that takes up the entirety of Chapter 2 and triggers the first imagined painting of O'Nami. Here, the mediating knowledge the artist-narrator has of paintings and poems and Nō theatre shape his experience of the worn shack: it becomes an otherworldly setting, one resonating with the interplays of intertextuality and a beautifying patina of decay (Jp. *sabi*), what the narrator calls the 'simple tranquillity' of poverty⁷⁸, but what also reveals the dynamic of the world in flux (the perpetual state of decaying). As the artist-narrator states, the scene is 'intriguingly otherworldly [and] imbued with the "non-emotion" realm I

⁷⁶ Quoted in Odin S (2001): *Artistic Distance in Japan and the West*, Hawai'i University Press: 242

⁷⁷ Itō T (2013): *Natsume Sōseki – An Attempt of Kusamakura as an Imagery Novel*, in *Bulletin of Kyoto Institute of Technology*, Issue 6 (Jun. 2013): 33-48

⁷⁸ Sōseki (1906): 15

aspire to.’⁷⁹ When the aged proprietress emerges, her haggard appearance is beautiful. This is because she is both a woman to be encountered and interacted with, but, in his view, she is also a character from the Nō play, *Takasago*, a play written by Zeami, one of the most influential expounders of *yūgen*⁸⁰. Such an encounter moves the artist-narrator to action: he takes out his sketchbook, that key symbol of artistic process⁸¹. As Deanna Petherbridge argues, sketches and drawings are as artworks in their own right (at any stage their marks embody a physical presence on the paper), works that paradoxically embody an absence, or ‘non-painting,’ because they are often precursors to a painting’s finished form. His sketchbook and, moreover, his desire to sketch, are symbols and manifestations of the Creative, the means through which he can interact that which is beyond ‘what is at hand.’

This dynamic deepens as he chats to the woman, learns from her about the local landscape, such as how to orientate his journey to the inn by using ‘Tengu Rock’⁸², and considers how to sketch her: he effectively enters the creative interplays at hand and presents her to the reader through the following extended ekphrastic passage:

I gaze first at the rock, then back at the old woman, then finally I hold them both in my line of sight, comparing. As an artist, my mind contains only two old woman images – the face of the old woman of the Noh play and that of the mountain crone of Rosetsu's painting⁸³. When I saw Rosetsu’s painting, I understood the eerie power inherent in the ideal image of the old woman. This was a figure set among autumn leaves, I thought, or beneath a cold moon. Seeing that Noh play at the Hōshō theater, on the other hand, I was astonished at how gentle her expression can be. That Old Woman mask could only have been crafted by a master carver, unfortunately I failed to learn the artist’s name. This portrayal brought out a rich, tranquil warmth in the image – something that would be not unfittingly depicted on the gilt screen, say, or set against spring breezes and cherry blossoms. As this old woman stands here, bare-armed and drawn up to her full height, one hand shading her eyes while the other points into the distance, her figure seems to match the scene of the mountain path in spring much better than does the

⁷⁹ Sōseki (1906): 16. *Mūkogawa fiction*, is a term coined by Japanese critic, Kin'ya Tsuruta. See Tsuruta K (1988): *Sōseki's Kusamakura: A Journey to 'The Other Side,'* in *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Nov., 1988): 169-188

⁸⁰ The superimposition of the Nō actor is interesting in this instance because such figures are present as human beings, but also not: they are a body and mask, a mask and a voice (what can be considered an omnibus art), moreover the actor’s movements are stylised and exaggerated to the point of looking otherworldly; the very balance of their movements themselves are also correlated with the paradoxes of *yūgen*, such as when the legs move quickly, the trunk should be still and vice versa.

⁸¹ See Petherbridge D (2010): *The Primacy of Drawing: Histories and Theories of Practice*, Yale University Press.

⁸² A *tengu* is mythical figure from Japanese folklore, similar to a goblin.

⁸³ ‘The mountain crone of Rosetsu’s painting,’ refers to the depiction of a mythic, wild-haired old woman in the famous painting by Nagasawa Rosetsu (1652?-1711).

rugged form of Tengu Rock behind. I take up my sketchbook again, in the hope that she will hold the post just a little longer, but at that moment she moves.⁸⁴

On hearing horse-bells in the distance, he then pauses mid-sketch, pens a haiku in which he invokes the travelling poet Izen (a disciple of the master poet Bashō), alongside the sound of the bells: this conflation of poem, sketch, of internal and external stimulus, acts as the scene's transition from the *yūgen*-invested double-ekphrasis of the old woman (who is both Nō character and image to be sketched) to the entrance of the packhorse-driver, Gen, a figure who inspires more poems, which he realises, are not his own. Indeed, he writes down a poem that invokes the Suzuka Pass, a difficult section of the old Tōkaidō Road that often appeared in travel poems. Such a symbol echoes the 'path' that Bashō sought in the writing of his magnum opus, *Oku no Hosomichi*, the poetic journey embarked upon by following the way of the Creative (Jp. *zōka*) and which has already been alluded throughout Chapter 1. Such an allusion is significant because it engages the technique of experiencing and creating *taiō*, or 'fields of tension and balance' between 'an all manner of concrete and abstract things'⁸⁵. For Mori, these fields create the 'living' world in and around the text. It is within the dynamics of such a scene that, in conversation with the old woman, Gen introduces O'Nami, through the story of her wedding-train crossing the mountains on horseback, a journey that will end in failure as the marriage has subsequently broken up. The creation of a scene akin to a *taiō* 'is just the sort of situation that a journey undertaken in the spirit of artistic 'non-emotion' needs to encounter to make it worthwhile'⁸⁶. So says the artist-narrator: such a field of tensions triggers the crucial ekphrastic passage, whereby the artistic-narrator re-imagines O'Nami as the drowned Ophelia from Millais's painting. As Yacobi writes, just naming a famous painting can bring forth its image without need of description⁸⁷. What happens in the narrator's mind, however, is that this image intersects with Japanese motifs and the conversation between the old woman and Gen. The formation of this composite can be seen when the old woman explains how O'Nami, 'stopped under that cherry tree, and just then there was a little flurry of falling petals. That splendid *takashimada* hair was all dotted with them'⁸⁸. This utterance sparks the image of Millias's painting, only, 'the figure of Ophelia, floating, hands folded, down the stream, still hovers dimly in the depths of consciousness,'

⁸⁴ Sōseki (1906): 18

⁸⁵ Kerkham (2006): 175

⁸⁶ Sōseki (1906): 23

⁸⁷ Yacobi (1995): 603

⁸⁸ Sōseki (1906): 21

but without a face. Millias's original will not do in this new complex⁸⁹. This incomplete image will persist throughout the text and accrue more detailed, for example, during his continued picturing of Millias's painting during the Mirror Pond *taiō* in Chapter 10. However, he still fails to find the right expression to paint. This tension is signalled by the smoke simile that follows his picturing of her as Ophelia. As if O'Nami's image, as nexus, is not complex enough (to the extent it rests on the brink of dissolution), the old woman and the packhorse driver then parallel her plight to a local legend, that of the Nagara Maiden, a beauty torn between the love of two men and, subsequently, driven to suicide. On hearing this story, one that further complicates his (re)imagining of O'Nami as painting and poem, and threatens to bring too much of the human into such an 'otherworldly' interplay, the artist-narrator exclaims, 'It would ruin my planned picture to hear any more.'⁹⁰ Crucially, for the development of individual *taiō* which connect together across the plotline, he leaves the teahouse with a 'painting in progress', a painting and 'non-painting': one inside his head, and a materially existent one that will interact with the even more heavily *yūgen*-invested encounters that follow, such as O'Nami's standing on the moonlit balcony outside the artist-narrator's room on the first night of his stay at the inn, while quoting a *waka* about a madwoman. The dynamics of such interactions are similar to the ekphrastic description of Akutagawa's hell screen and how it interpenetrates with the later description of Yoshihide's daughter's immolation. When considering O'Nami's re-presentations, Steve Odin refers to these accumulating and interacting webs of associations (or 'chains of differences and deferrals') within Sōseki's novel, as the decentring of the heroine's image into multiple perspectives, or the dislocation of the subject into a plurality of viewpoints devoid of any fixed centre or core. Odin explicitly refers to this dynamic as the function of *yūgen*.⁹¹ Masao Miyoshi, in summarising this technique and how it forms across Sōseki's novel, writes:

[O'Nami] is, then, the ever--expanding (living) series of images – some gossip, a haiku image, and oil painting, a Man'yōshū poem; each one is taken up at a different angle and from a different context, a different tradition... But there is even further amplification. Wakeful into the night, he keeps seeing a shadowy figure flitting about in the moonlit garden, and he tries again to arrest the vision in a series of haiku... As the artist comes to know her better, Nami continues to appear from all sorts of

⁸⁹ Sōseki (1906): 22

⁹⁰ Sōseki (1906): 24

⁹¹ Odin S (1995): *Derrida and the Decentered Universe of Ch'an/Zen Buddhism*, in Wei-hsun Fu C W and Heine S (ed) (1995): Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives, State of New York University Press: 18–19

unexpected angles: as a dancer-performer, a sharp wit, and eccentric. Her montage, too, becomes more complex: besides the Shakespearean Ophelia, the Pre-Raphaelite Ophelia, and the legendary maiden, we now have her own ancestor who drowned herself, and the generations of crazy women in her family.⁹²

Moreover, Miyoshi ends his summary by stating that: ‘As each add their own peculiarities to the composite, [O’Nami] takes on more and more aspects of a generalised woman figure.’ I would disagree with such a position, by arguing that she becomes ever more idiosyncratic, in terms of the character that she both gives up to the artist-narrator and that she conceals, as well as absorbing those associations that the artist-narrator imbues upon her. To combine both the language of *yūgen* and ekphrasis, she becomes ever more vividly mysterious.

The second scene I will consider is the important ekphrastic episode in which the artist-narrator projects artistic practices of production (namely outlining) onto the form of O’Nami. No longer is her image to be taken from a Western artist like Millais, but emerge from associations with the expressive line. Such a moment forms around the artist-narrator’s encounter with O’Nami in the inn’s bathhouse in Chapter 7⁹³. Sōseki again writes the scene as a *taiō*, only in this moment, rather than purely imagining O’Nami (as was the case at the teahouse), he engages with her physicality, a ‘present’ body that he incorporates into the field of associations and, eventually, the loose gathering of form achieved by the Japanese brush. Such a dynamic creates an even greater sense of satisfaction, as is signalled by the narrator’s explicit use of the term *yūgen* to signify the scene’s mysterious beauty. The ekphrasis, which forms the central focus of this scene, unfolds as he engages with the blurred sight of O’Nami’s body, a sight mediated by the tensions of the *taiō*. Soseki narrates this scene as a diachronic process, the act of painting with the mind, which collapses the ontological distance between artist and model. What the reader receives is a performance of ekphrasis, rather than ekphrasis as expositional description.

In terms of the *taiō*’s physical setting, Sōseki has the scene unfold at night, while a fine mist-like rain is falling outside the bathhouse. This combination of phenomena thickens both the mist and the poetic spirit it evokes, mirroring the porosity of the artist-narrator’s

⁹² Miyoshi M (1974): *Accomplices of Silence: the Modern Japanese Novel*, quoted in Odin (1995): 18.

⁹³ As with Chapter 2, this scene takes up the entirety of Chapter 7.

being to hidden depths of interplay. However, rather than a complete dissolution of consciousness into the haze, the artist-narrator's mind remains present, interpenetrating with the scene, and with the layers of association it evokes: the 'emptiness' of *yūgen* against which the 'transient form of the ephemeral self' is backlit. Such interplays bring forth the erotic charm of a Chinese poem which he often remembers when bathing thus: 'softly the warm spring waters, / bathed against the white beauty's skin.'⁹⁴ This poem is then set against his musing on Millais's Ophelia, thoughts deepened by another poem, this time by Swinburne, who celebrates the 'happiness felt by a drowned woman.' Such an apparent paradox (the happy suicide), leads him back into his deliberations upon aesthetic distance, his quest for 'non-emotion' (Jp. *hininjō*), one in which he considers the suitable face for such an image: he is yet to find a suitable expression for O'Nami's portrait. He decides that 'if she were writhing in a spasm of agony, it would quite destroy the spirit of the work, but on the other hand an utterly unalluring and indifferent expression would convey no trace of human feeling. What kind of face would work? I wonder idly.'⁹⁵ Here, the suggestive, over the explicit, is favoured⁹⁶; the 'human' must not collapse the distance between viewer and subject. However, a complete removal of the 'human' would sever the interplay between viewer and subject. When O'Nami enters, she is little more than a dark shape on the bathhouse's flagstones. The image of her naked body then partially solidifies into that of a woman. While the reader is left in no doubt that it is O'Nami, the description that follows, despite its erotic charge, has her occupy the paradoxical position of being both woman (in the flesh and that from the Chinese poem) and art, both a painting and 'non-painting.' His following of 'non-emotion' allows him to engage with O'Nami in such a way that he is not overtly sexually aroused and, so, does not call out to her, either as a decorous warning or enticement. This indistinctness, also, prevents O'Nami-as-nude from falling into the 'fussiness' and 'vulgarity' of explicit representation, what Sōseki calls the 'crude worldiness,' those methods and systems of representation that 'thrust' the flesh at the viewer, and have the body 'squirm' under its own nakedness. Instead, he is able to mediate and savour the experience through an ekphrastic appreciation, wherein, 'deep within the warm brimming steam that the millions of particles of light of tinged hazy pink, black hair drifting

⁹⁴ Sōseki (1906): 76

⁹⁵ Sōseki (1906): 78

⁹⁶ The artist-narrator is yet to have 'seen' enough of her to satisfactorily penetrate her depths. This is a similar way to Akutagawa's analogy of *yūgen* and the complex of tensions that is Mt Lu.

about like a cloud, and her body help poised... I am gripped by the single fervent conviction that I have discovered the subject for a splendid painting.⁹⁷

He then engages in the performance of ekphrasis through his ‘mind painting.’ . Quickly dismissing any possible allusions to Greek sculpture, he appreciates ‘the graceful beauty before my eyes... as natural [...] a figure [as one] conjured from the cloudy realms of the age of the gods, innocent of any necessity for clothes and draperies,’ and does so by tracing her ‘outside’ in a manner akin to the expressive line of Chinese and Japanese painting:

...Look at the contours of that shape!

A line begins lightly and modestly at the nape of the neck, then draws in from both sides to slide easily down over the shoulders, breaks into ample curves that flow down the arms till they no doubt finally part ways at the fingers. Beneath the full swelling breasts, the waves of line recede momentarily, to swell smoothly out again in the gentle curve of her abdomen. The line of force then slips around behind the form, and where the tension of the line gives out, the two columns of flesh tend slightly forward to balance it. The knees now receive the lines and reverse them, and when those long undulation have travelled to the heels, the flat plane of the feet brings all this intricacy to rest in effortless completion of the soles. The world could hold no more complex tension of forces, and none more unified. One could discover no contours more natural, more soft and unresisting, less troubling than these.⁹⁸

The amount of detail here, as well as the attention to specificity and precision of expression, does much to ‘bring forth’ the image of O’Nami in a manner akin to the classical definition of ekphrasis. However, such an analogy to the expressive line and the lack of ‘filling’ in this outline, still maintains a degree of ambiguity. The ekphrastic moment as *taiō* maintains its balance between oppositions and correspondences. This dynamic is then reinforced when the artist-narrator qualifies the ethereal quality of such an image through allusion to folktales of turtles and moon maidens, and particularly the ink painting of a dragon, with which ‘a few brief flecks of scale within a brushstroke wash’ can evoke the ‘warmth, and unfathomable depth that satisfies every instinct of the artistic sensibility.’

⁹⁷ Sōseki (1906): 81

⁹⁸ Sōseki (1906): 82

Ultimately, the balance between precision / presence and omission / absence, the key aesthetic of *Grass Pillow* as an ekphrastic enterprise, is summed up when the artist narrator declares:

If minutely depicting every scale on a dragon becomes ludicrous, then equivalently, veiling a naked figure from full and flagrant exposure to the eye resonates with a hidden profundity.⁹⁹

5. Writing *Yūgen*-inflected Ekphrasis in *Bone Painting*

Much like Sōseki's *Grass Pillow*, my own novel, *Bone Painting*, is saturated with ekphrastic practices. These include many instances of straight ekphrasis, but more importantly, a number of key passages within which I engage in the performance of *yūgen*-inflected ekphrasis.¹⁰⁰ By this I mean the presentation of images of paintings and sketches that are held in tension and interact with the concept of 'non-painting.' As inspired by the ekphrastic strategies of Sōseki and Akutagawa that dramatise the dynamic between presence and absence, painting and 'non-painting,' my aesthetic is concerned with narrating artistic process, allusion and intertextuality, juxtaposition, and through the orchestration of webs of associations – all of which include the interpenetration of ekphrases across the plotline. By interweaving such an aesthetic into my writing, I hope to create, not only a story set in Japan, one that revolves around Japanese characters and moments from Japanese history (some real and some fictionalised), but to engage with an important strand of Japanese aesthetics. It is through a conscious attention to *yūgen* that I hope to evoke the 'performance' of ekphrasis, as exhibited by those moments in the novel that can be savoured for the tensions I orchestrate deploying both precision and ambiguity, what one could refer to as 'vivid dimness.'

Because *Bone Painting* is so heavily invested in ekphrastic practice, it is impossible to present all instances of ekphrasis in this commentary. To this end, I will focus upon three key passages. The first two will present the interrelated scenes, wherein Kasumi sketches the

⁹⁹ Sōseki (1906): 83

¹⁰⁰ It is important to note, here, that my writing of *Bone Painting* did not exclusively focus on *yūgen*, but included a range of other Japanese aesthetic qualities, like *sabi*, *wabi*, *fūryū* and so forth, but that *yūgen* formed the central notion around which I wished to form my writing of ekphrasis in the novel.

Kabukichō girl and, later, incorporates this same girl into a portrait. Both scenes are from Part II, Chapters 1 and 5. The third passage will be taken from the end of the novel (Part IV, Chapter 4), when, during a photoshoot, Kasumi is placed between her painting of the frozen women and Yuichiro Kozu's *Broken Jewels of Attu*.¹⁰¹

i. Painting the Kabukichō Girl

During the opening phases of Part II, Kasumi's character is immediately placed inside a web of associations: she is physically walking the streets of downtown Tokyo, while contemplating the aesthetic distance desired by Sōseki's artist-narrator from *Grass Pillow*. This intertextual alignment is signalled from the very beginning of Kasumi's establishment. Rather than entering the *mūkogawa* realm of Nakoi¹⁰², however, she enters the alienating cityscape of the entertainment district, Kabukichō. Kasumi's conscious alignment with Sōseki's hero extends to the manner in which her quest for 'non-emotion' allows me, as the novelist, to narrate the moment when she encounters a subject she wishes to sketch and later paint and to do so in a manner that echoes a *taiō* (I create a number of these scenes throughout the novel). This is the girl she watches being solicited by two sex industry scouts. Here, I use Kasumi's meal as a framing device, so that she can study the girl's interaction with the scouts, while eating her 'lotus root' and, after the girl has been lured off the street by the two men, she can find that her 'miso soup [...] is still warm.' The scene unfolds before her and she captures the girl's look, one of horror and curiosity, all 'without the slightest repulsion.'

¹⁰¹ Although Seichiro's experiences are also heavily inflected with aesthetic sensibilities, including *yūgen* (these are mostly informed by his love of poetry; this said, he does also encounter and ponder physical artworks), I will focus on Kasumi Kozu. This is because she is the primary artist of the novel, the character who most actively engages with art making, acts of creation that enfold within and that trigger plot, and, thus, with artistic processes.

¹⁰² Kin'ya Tsuruta, a Japanese critic who, while accepting the importance of the philosophical content of *Grass Pillow*, defends the notion that the novel does have a loose plot. This plot is based around the artist-narrator's desire to escape Japan's steady push towards modernisation. Tsuruta presents a range of novelists (he does then focus on Sōseki and *Grass Pillow*) who have their heroes exhibit a penchant for regression, or a desire to submerge their egos with the environment (often aided by the women of these landscapes). These 'moist places' of fantasy (they often include isolated hot spring inns), enable a return to or dissolving of the hero into a pre-modern world where they can recuperate that radiate with the evocations of *yin* (and hence *yūgen*). See Tsuruta K (1988): *Kusamakura: A Journey to 'The Other Side'*, in The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese, Vol. 22, No.2 (Nov.1988): 169-188.

The ekphrastically narrated *act* of drawing significantly puts practice centre stage. While Kasumi makes several sketches in her attempt to capture the complexity of mixed emotions passing across the girl's face, a look reminiscent of the 'aware,' or profound compassion at the transience of things, that the artist-narrator recognises passing across the face of O'Nami at the conclusion of *Grass Pillow*. Such a moment enabled me to configure the following ekphrastic passage, one that dramatises the expressive haziness of *yūgen*:

It takes [Kasumi] several attempts to get the overall shape of the face down, with particular care paid to the jaw and chin, keeping them soft, but nuanced. The same goes for the lips and nose, the balance between them. The girl is talking, the edges of her mouth responding to the promises laid before her, the money (and, what, freedom? The ease of it all?) but when she stops to listen, that distant look returns to pinch her brow. Kasumi gets the basic shape of one eye down, the closest, and then adjusts the angle of the lid curving out from the tear-duct in the other, making it a touch more severe. By the third sketch, she has worked out the rhythm of the muscles into which the lids tuck. These are more pronounced in Japanese faces, more bulked out by a layer of fat than those in the Caucasian-filled manuals she poured over in university. The fat produces a curved epicanthic fold that mirrors the border between flesh and the gloss of the eye. The girl is too far away for Kasumi to determine exact colouring, but that doesn't matter. She has learnt to keep the irises of her portraits pale, a greying violet, rather than the deep browns and blacks of real women. Mr Tall claps his hands in celebration and the three of them walk back to the doorway across the street, where they disappear down a flight of steps. What happens now? What promises have been made? How does a woman prove she has what it takes to work in Kabukichō? What demonstrations of willing are necessary?¹⁰³

If one considers the basic principles that form the *paragonal* separation of written and visual representations, a straight ekphrastic description would re-present to the reader the artwork's pictorial elements and does so through the linear-temporal sequencing that we most associate with verbal language. The artwork itself, despite the sense of movement and temporality that maybe be interpreted from the nature of the CCAs, is static, a-temporal. However, within the passage above a 'picture' of the girl does emerge, both developing upon the pages of Kasumi's sketchbook, but also for the reader. The drawings are, at any given moment, both paradoxically concrete marks (they are themselves physically rendered) and unfolding (parts of a work in progress, a work incomplete). Therefore, while an impression of the girl's face can be appreciated (pictured) by the reader, accumulatively, there is no completed artwork to visualise: the passage both evoked a painting and 'non-painting.' Such a haziness is reflected

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in the language itself. Pictorial elements are alluded to, mostly shape-related (such as the shape of her face, the look of her eyes, lips), as well as composition (the balance ‘between’ the features) and colour (the ‘grey’ of the sketched woman’s eyes). However, the language used to orientate the reader towards just how to visualise these features is vague¹⁰⁴. Importantly, as reflected by my choice of writing *Bone Painting* in simple present tense¹⁰⁵ (as inspired by Sōseki), Kasumi’s act of drawing is an active engagement with her subject, a mutually shaping experience, despite her quest for non-emotion.

John Berger, in his essay *The Basis of All Painting and Sculpture is Drawing*, comments that, ‘For the artist, drawing is discovery...Drawing forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind’s eye and put it together again...[T]he matter lies in the specific process of looking.’¹⁰⁶ Such a process, moreover, is creative in more than the sense than a drawing is generated. A series of confirmation and denials takes place, an active sequence of choices and revisions. Each mark the artist makes is the threshold or bridge to the next mark. It can also be a reclamation of a previous step, a return that can facilitate movement forward along a different path¹⁰⁷. The process does not just involve recording what has been seen and then what is to be transferred onto the paper, but an entering of the artist into a tension with the object itself, as the artist uses this ‘shorthand’ to ‘arrange,’ to ‘set the scene,’ to ‘bring together,’ to ‘interrogate.’ The dynamic nature of the verbs Berger uses, here taken from his essay *To Take Paper, to Draw*¹⁰⁸, reminds us that drawing is an activity and that when looking at (or imagining) drawings, the viewer can sense movement, timefulness, more so than when gazing upon the stillness and a-temporality of finished works.¹⁰⁹

The importance of sketching and drawing in this active process is also argued for by Deanna Petherbridge, in her *The Primacy of Drawing*, when she writes, ‘An important aspect of the sketch in any medium is that it is part of a chain of evolution (systematic or chaotic)

¹⁰⁴ Balancing precision and detail against a reader’s comprehension did prove difficult at times. For example, relaying too many details of a painting / sketch, I found, can actually destroy any hope of conveying its map to the reader. Such a discovery reminded me of what AS Byatt wrote when she said that simple maps can be more universally understood. See Byatt A S (2002): *Portraits in Fiction*, Vintage: 1-2

¹⁰⁵ With some shifts into present progressive.

¹⁰⁶ Berger J (2018): *Landscapes*, Verso: 27

¹⁰⁷ Berger uses an analogy to stepping stones.

¹⁰⁸ Berger (2018): 24

¹⁰⁹ Berger even separates the investigative drawing from the drawing laid down to form a finished work in a similar way.

inviting sequential cognitive and practical procedures. Its essential aspect is its suggestiveness: open-minded, ambiguous, imprecise, it allows for interpretations, and lends itself to corrections, second thoughts, redrawings, rewritings, and reorderings.’¹¹⁰ Moreover, these sketches can stand alone or have particular ‘discoveries’ made during the process lifted and redrawn on successive sheets of paper, so that the artist can continue to refine them. Berger and Petherbridge’s comments parallel, for me, what Lucian Freud championed, when he said that pictures ‘in order to move us paintings must never merely *remind* us of life, but must acquire a life of their own.’¹¹¹ Martin Gayford’s account of sitting for Freud, from which this quote was taken, is itself a testament to artistic process, one which influenced my own conception of how ekphrasis and process interpenetrate.

Both Berger and Petherbridge present the act of drawing in a manner that resonates with the creative sensibilities of *yūgen*. We have already seen such a view of the ‘thinking hand’ reflected in Sōseki’s *Grass Pillow*. This is to be expected, given Sōseki’s investment in *shaseibun*, or literary sketching, and what he analogised through his art-narrator’s constant sketching of scenes in his sketchbook, whether pictorially or in the form a poem¹¹². These sketches, dramatise the intersecting influences of lived experience, medium, context, and the artist’s world view: intersections that can then play out through the novel’s plot (such as the artist-narrator’s goal to paint O’Nami). Taking such a view from art criticism and thus seeing it reflected in Sōseki’s novel, I wanted to weave the *act* of sketching into *Bone Painting* – an act, which when narrated, comes across as an active, mutually reciprocal *event*, rather than a passive moment of decorative writing: looking and drawing in *Bone Painting* are not intended to pause narrative thrust. Such a dynamic plays out textually, in the passage above, when Kasumi recognises the play of emotion upon the girl’s lips¹¹³. Through her thinking hand/sketch, she notes and responds to the girl’s reaction to the ‘promises [being] laid before her.’ For the reader, the girl is both Kasumi’s model, but also a real girl being lured into the

¹¹⁰ Petherbridge D (2010): *The Primacy of Drawing*, Yale University Press: 28

¹¹¹ Quoted in Gayford M (2010): *Man with a Blue Scarf: On Sitting for a Portrait by Lucian Freud*, Thames and Hudson: 108. Another illuminating analogy of Freud’s that Gayford quotes, in terms of process, goes: ‘Painting is rather like those recipes where you do all manner of elaborate things to a duck, and then up putting it on the side and using only the skin.’ (81)

¹¹² The active processes involved in conceiving, and constructing, reshaping poetry enjoys equal attention throughout the novel, as well. I, too, include such poetic process within *Bone Painting*, but within Seichiro’s sections.

¹¹³ Note that the mouth is the most expressive feature of the face. This focus was inspired by Gayford’s exposition of the complexities of interpreting and rendering the human mouth – see *Man a With a Blue Scarf*: 167-169.

sex industry. As Kasumi sketches, the girl decentres into the rendered drawing, while remaining a girl in the flesh (the ‘non-painting’). This tension is further dynamised, when one considers that Kasumi, while responding to the visual stimulus before her, is also augmenting the sketch. She imaginatively constructs elements of the girl and does so through her adoption of trope (the ‘grey,’ instead of ‘black’ eyes), her interaction with pictorial models (her negotiation with the girl’s eyes and how they fall within the parameters of the ‘Japanese’ eye – an active resistance to the Caucasian eyes displayed in Kasumi’s art manuals¹¹⁴), as well as Kasumi’s speculation over the scouts’ promises¹¹⁵. Indeed, the conversation unfolding before her is clearly informing the look on the girl’s face (and Kasumi’s impression of that face), but it is out of her ear-shot. In all, Kasumi’s sketching of the Kabukichō girl is no simple recording. This concentration upon the creative openness of process is developed throughout the novel. To this end, another important instance of this interpenetration of ekphrasis and process comes in Part 2, Chapter 5, when Kasumi is painting the *kotsugaki* (*bone painting*) for her portrait of the Kabukichō girl.

For this scene, in which Hiroki sexually assaults Kasumi, I could have chosen any number of stages within the completion of a *nihonga* painting. I purposefully chose the moment in which Kasumi is transferring the outlines of the portrait from her final sketch onto the silk mount. I did so to evoke this moment’s symbolism. The *kotsugaki* is an important stage within the creation of a *nihonga* painting. This is because, during this stage, the artist still has the opportunity to make changes to their composition, by deciding which lines to transfer from the sketch to the silk and whether or not they want to adjust these lines. Once the lines have been inked onto the silk there is no going back. They cannot be covered over and will remain strong, visible and expressive lines after the painting’s completion. Such a tension, between that which is already an artwork (the sketch) and that which is becoming an artwork, again, is purposefully evocative of *yūgen*. Such an analogy is suggested when I write:

¹¹⁴ My sensitivity to racially inflected anatomy formed the heart of my previous work, *The Art of Koze* (Sandstone Press, 2014; winner of the Manchester Metropolitan Novella Award, 2014)

¹¹⁵ In order to calibrate my ability to handle precision and detail, when writing paintings and the act of painting, I studied a range of artists’ works (notably Leonardo Fujita, Ikenaga Yasunari and Atsuhiko Suwa), *nihonga* theory, the history of Japan’s military paintings, as well as *nihonga* / *sumi-e* painting manuals. I even attended lectures at SOAS on *nihonga* and visited the Yamatane Nihonga Museum in Tokyo.

The lines of the sketch blanch under the silk, but the strongest do not disappear. They emerge, instead, percolating through the gossamer-thin weave, as if through a mist. They float. The procedure is different for paper-to-paper transfer, but she rarely produces such works. She prefers silk. Though colouring comes next, she is glad to have arrived at the bone painting, the *kotsugaki*. Like the painting it will eventually flesh out into, outlining is a crossroads. There is some room for alterations. The shifting of a line. The odd addition. More than likely, she'll decide to leave something out.¹¹⁶

The silk here is a motif of *yūgen*, only instead of the obscuring effects of darkness, the reader is lead to imagine the dimness incurred by the white material, similar to that other key motif, mist. With the laying down of this mist-like medium over the sketch, the image of the Kabukichō girl is obscured. During this stage of the process, also, the sketch (the girl) will transform from that rawer form of depiction to the more refined and abstracted form a *nihonga* painting. However, such an obscuring *act* draws parallels to the novel's plot itself. Throughout this scene Kasumi continues to move through the stages and sensations of composition (the correct stance, the reinforcing of her conviction not to fall into the clichés associated with 'traditional' Japanese media, down to the scent of the ink). At the same time, such a concentration on these processes reflects her attempts to distance herself from the rape. The distance between her and the Kabukichō girl collapses, to an extent, just as this event will form a parallel between her and the ghost of the 'Chinese girl,' an affiliation that is suggested by Kasumi's attraction to the ghost's sadness, and one that ultimately broadens into Seichiro's mistaking of Kasumi for the Chinese girl. As such, the dynamic ekphrasis, taken from this scene and from the scene previously presented, interact across, and interpenetrate, with plot, as inspired, not only by O'Nami's continual development within *Grass Pillow*, but also the interconnections Akutagawa forms between his ekphrastic passages and plots.

That said, in this scene I do include a more visually distinct rendering of the bone painting than is presented during the sketching of the girl in Kabukichō. However, as with Kasumi's initial sketching of the girl, and while paying homage to Sōseki's ekphrastic rendering of O'Nami in the bathhouse scene in *Grass Pillow*, this act is narrated *as* it forms within Kasumi's imagination. She sees the painting form in her mind (a 'non-painting') and the reader is presented, ekphrastically, with a partial painting, before the the brush touches the silk. I write:

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She imagines the stroke to come.

Satisfied, she hangs the brush over the silk and pictures the long, curving wire that will seep out from its loaded head. She will complete the outline, hip-into-rump-into-thigh-into-calf, in one go, a single brush stroke. She will control it through her posture and nerve. There can be no change in pressure, not once she starts. No shifts in angle. Otherwise, the line will thicken in places and thin in others. At worst, it could break. Consistency is paramount. Uniformity. That way, when the painting is finished, the outline will separate the body from the background, while simultaneously seeming to disappear into the figure's whole.

In the gap between silk and brush, she paints air. A practice stroke. Once. Twice. Closer. Closer, until, there it is.¹¹⁷

This process of visualisation before rendering, as well as the way such visualisation manifests itself physically in the slow process of drawing ink from the ink stone and then making several practice strokes, was informed by the research of Sawako Yokoshi and Takeshi Okada¹¹⁸, who systematically catalogued and interpreted the movements and motivations behind a Japanese brush artist's creation of a *sumi* ink painting on *fusuma* doors.

When Kasumi touches brush to silk, and '[a] black cut opens up,' I signal a more explicit movement into ekphrasis, wherein the symbolism previously explained becomes more apparent through the choice of verb. Within the passage that follows, I again emphasize the double exposure of the bone painting – there is the sketch underneath the silk, and now part of that sketch, as a new work, forms in the silk, which is itself part of a work in process. All of this process works towards creating a painting, but also to reveal the absences that will haunt this piece, once it is finished:

[The ink] pulls out from the brush, an extension of her wrist, her elbow (steady, steady, steady), the movement of her fingers, but only in the severing of the connection, her lifting away of the brush.

She sits up on her knees and looks down at the body she is bringing through the silk, through from the mulberry paper underneath, like a spirit passing through one film of existence and into another. The girl is in pieces at the moment, little more than a section of a girl-shaped membrane on the silk, her ghost just visible underneath, transparent, but she is growing whole.

Moistening the tip of her brush with her lips again (for now, she doesn't care if she leaves ink on her teeth), she leans in close once more, closer than before, close enough to peer down through the silk,

¹¹⁷ 78-79

¹¹⁸ These practices are documented in their paper, Yokoshi and Okada (2005): *Creative Cognitive Process of Art Making: A Field Study of a Traditional Chinese Ink Painter*, in *Creativity Research Journal*, Vol. 2 and 3 (2005): 241-255. Note, that 'Chinese' here refers to *sumi* ink – the artist under study, as well as his medium, the painting of *fusuma* door, is Japanese.

a doctor transfixed by an x-ray. So little is yet set in stone, here, in this moment. There is room for choice. Move this line a millimetre. Clip this one. Leave this detail unpainted. Lightness, after all, is an exacting goal.¹¹⁹

I expect that the western reader will most likely be unfamiliar with *nihonga* as a medium, as well as its compositional practices and history. This is another reason why I narrate these processes. Narrated as such, my novel also educates the reader in these regards. To this end, given the importance of allusion and intertextuality to evoking *yūgen*, I created a web of associations around Kasumi's painting of the Kabuchichō girl, one that allowed me to introduce some of the tropes of *nihonga*. This is significant, because I later have Kasumi re-imagine Yuichiro Kozu's oil paintings through this medium. As such, the reader would need to be familiar with it. In order to achieve these interconnections, I have Kasumi make reference to, and work against, a previously painted work, *A Trainee Geisha Whitens her Neck*, the piece she submitted for her undergraduate salon.¹²⁰

ii. Kasumi at the Shin Midori

Because intertextuality is an important component of what I have called *yūgen*-inflected ekphrasis, the relationship between Kasumi's paintings and those painted by Yuichiro Kozu is important. This interpenetration of stories binds Seichiro and Kasumi's plot threads together.

In line with Akutagawa's analogy to Mt Lu, Yuichiro Kozu is a complex figure, a figure who, like his paintings, is seen from multiple perspectives across the novel. Yuichiro is a dashing figure from Seichiro's childhood (a viewed shared by Kasumi, but also Old Man Takayanagi), an icon of Modernism a national hero, a war criminal. Unlike my first novella, *The Art of Kozu*, which narrates the circumstances under which Kozu created his oeuvre, in *Bone Painting*, his works are experienced through the context of their viewing and their remembrance (much like Akutagawa's *Autumn Mountain*). There is a greater sense of mediation at play. As well as being presented through direct ekphrasis in the scene at

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¹²⁰ Kasumi, Seichiro and both the Takayanagi's also provide exposition of different canons and artists through expositional dialogue and subjective narration.

Yasukuni Shrine, as well as at the old Koze house in Hakodate, Yuichiro Koze's works are also re-represented through photographs and, most importantly of all, through Kasumi's manipulation of them. Tasked with reimagining Yuichiro's war works by Kiichi Takayanagi, the owner of the Shin Midori Gallery, Kasumi re-orientates her great uncle's paintings away from their status as propaganda pieces (in support of Japan's doomed and fatalistic wartime militarism) to protest pieces that celebrate female sexuality, but also reveal the brutal treatment of women under Japan's wartime regime. Such an engagement thoroughly infuses her own work with the presence-absence (the depths via association) of *yūgen*.

A scene which dramatises this performative aspect of *yūgen*-inflected ekphrasis comes when, having completed her body of work for exhibition, a collection that has been thinned down by governmental censorship, Kasumi is forced to sit between her own work and that of her great uncle's, for a photo-shoot (Part IV, Chapter 4)¹²¹. Within the exhibition scene, Kasumi herself becomes the subject of an series of artworks, the in-house photographer's photographs, wherein she reflects that she is 'not her, but a woman in a photograph,' and depending on the angle of those photographs, either a figure superimposed over 'her great uncle's *Broken Jewels of Attu*, that roiling scene of gouging fingers and tearing blades, the darkest phase of his career,' or another woman 'foregrounded against her own painting. White on white.' It is at this point where the web of associations becomes focused, in terms of the scene's writing. Rather than separating out the ekphrases, a description for each separate work, for example, the ekphrasis runs from one painting into the other, and in doing so, causes them to interpenetrate:

Where her great uncle's painting is a seething mass of minute details, all khaki and black and the subtle graduations in between them, her painting is, as Kiichi said, a counterpoint. Although she has studied hard to grasp her great uncle's gift for facial variations, his uncanny ability to get inside racial differences (a skill he extended to the soldiers' uniforms and small-arms, the dimensions of their bayonets), she has moved away from his composition. Instead of borrowing the energy of a great wave, the Japanese troops crashing down upon the Americans (for all her great uncle's innovations, the rhythms of Delacroix and Géricault are most felt here), she has built the static, craggy form an iceberg, like something by Peder Balke, one cut over with a great swathe of flattening white mist. This mound of naked female bodies is gentle in palette (*distant*, almost): white highlights over ivory, shades of

¹²¹ Takayanagi's direction over the layout of the show, as well as his marketing of Kasumi, reveal the curator's efforts to promote Kasumi as an artist (a brand / an image); these efforts reflect the emerging importance of curationism during the mid-1990s. See Obrist H U (2014): *Ways of Curating*, Penguin Art; and Balzer D (2015): *Curationism: How Curating Took Over The Art World and Everything Else*, Pluto Press

violet, teal, and where some bodies have tumbled down and left a cleft, she has used a cold, cold cerulean. And where Kozu has captured the frenetic activity of hand-to-hand fighting, her shapes are softly sculptured, bound together by smooth curves of frost, no chiaroscuro, and the light touch of her brush – faces, nipples, pelvises, breasts, the occasional fish-bone weave of ribs. All this, and not a single outline.¹²²

Within this complex conflation of images, much attention is paid to a wealth of pictorial elements (CCAs) across both paintings, forming the base of the passage's direct ekphrastic description. However, these descriptions also include metaphorical interpenetrations of these pieces' compositions, which are themselves deepened through allusion. Yuichiro's sources of inspiration are provided (like *Delacroix and Géricault*), while his painting of the last stand of the Attu garrison (during the American assault on the Aleutian Islands, during WWII) is informed by his propagandist bent (the charge actually resulted in the massacre of the entire Japanese garrison) and forms the intertextual base for Kasumi's painting. A complex tension forms. Kozu's painting is haunted by a real historical event, but one reinvented by Yuichiro to spur on the Japanese on the home front; she then reinvents this painting under Takayanagi's influence, but importantly this time her own work is shaped by her own traumatic experiences, including the sexual assault and the loss of her finger to Seichiro. This trauma is reflected in her decision to move away from creating bone paintings and the use of expressive line, to her use of the 'dim style' experimented with by Yokoyama Taikan. Over all, both paintings are made both sharper and hazier through their juxtaposition within the scene (and their affiliations with images / events from across the plotline). They are haunted by each other, as Kasumi is haunted by the Kozu legacy, a figurative puncturing of the present by the past, one that blurs into the literal. The scene climaxes with the ghost of the Chinese girl coming through the mists of Kasumi's painting, affecting both Kasumi and Chiaki – not to mention the memory of Seichiro.

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