



Shards of Depravity

A Collection of Short Stories Written
by Dazai Osamu

Translated by Dominic DiTaranto

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愛灯、

君の風情や知性がなかったら、この作品をきっと書き上げられなかった。

ありがとうございました。

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Translator's Note

Dazai Osamu as a Human

Dazai Osamu (太宰治) had a very unique childhood that definitely comes through in the many different writing techniques and themes he utilizes. Born on June 19th 1909 as Shuji Tsushima (津島修治), Dazai became the 8th child (11th if you count the deceased) of the Tsushima family. He grew up in a town named Kanagi¹ in his parent's mansion. This mansion contained around 30 people, most of which were servants. His father Gen'emon was a wealthy landowner in Kanagi while his mother, Tane², became chronically ill after giving birth to a succession of 11 children, deeming her useless when it came to her maternal role. Gen'emon, whose empire quickly rose in power and respect eventually lead him to be offered a seat in the house of peers. Of course, his new position in politics caused he and his wife to become busier than ever; frequent trips to Tokyo left young Dazai at the hands of his servants. Although Dazai had his own wet nurse, she apparently left the mansion to get married one year into her relationship with Dazai. The confusion that this caused Dazai as an infant must have been tremendous, leaving him abandoned by the only woman who provided him with food and essentially the only mother figure he had until that point in his life.

Favoritism filled the Dazai household. With Tane's continued "health" trips to the hot springs, Dazai was left behind with his aunt Kiye, while his older sisters and younger brother Reiji were allowed to join their mother on her retreats. He considered Kiye his mother, the woman who would scold him and praise him. He was also raised by a maid named Take who took care of him during the day. She was his tutor and his friend. This lasted for about four years until Kiye started a new home in Goshogawara and took Take with her. It was at this point Shuji had lost his second and third mother figure; truly a blow to his young self-esteem that left an eternal scar.

I think it is impossible to talk about Dazai's relationship with his family without mentioning his tell-all quote from his essay "*June Nineteenth* (六月十九日)":

I felt as if I were an outcast from my siblings. Maybe they treated me that way because I was ugly, I wonder if that caused my doubts. I went to the cellar and investigated a bunch of documents. I found nothing. I would always stealthily ask around to the people who came in and out of my house. They all had a great

¹ Kanagi (金木町) was a town located in Aomori Prefecture, Japan. Due to its northern location it was subject to severe blizzards during the winter. Its economy consisted mainly of commercial fishing and agriculture. On March 28, 2005, Kanagi was merged with its neighboring town Shiura (市浦村) into the city of Goshogawara (五所川原市). Goshogawara is considered a regional commercial center today.

² "She was easily intimidated, and her own mother Ishi often called her incompetent. Already she was showing signs of the lung complications [(tuberculosis)] that plagues the whole family... She spent most of her time retreating to hot springs... With her own mother and even grandmother still alive... her household duties could be split.... [She was] prostrated by her tenth child's birth." (Lyons)

laugh. They all knew about the day I was born in this house. It was evening. It was in that small room. I was born under a mosquito net. It was an extremely easy birth. I came out instantly. My nose was big. They were able to clearly recall so many things that even I had to abandon my own doubts. For some reason, I was disappointed. Discontent with my average personal history.

I think, while it is important to realize that Dazai feels a disconnect between he and his family, the real fact to take away from this is that he was disappointed to learn that there actually is no disconnect at all, just an incongruence. Where that incongruence lurks is the actual question though: is he actually out casted, are these doubts caused by insecurity alone or is this just a fabrication, a tactic to sell more books by eliciting feelings of pity in his readers? Even when he meets with Take again after thirty years, he is reported to have only two questions to ask of her: Was he truly one of the Tsushima brothers? and, Was he truly not the child of his aunt? (Lyons). Only Dazai could be so thick headed in a time of reunion. The aforementioned questions will be looked at in more depth later.

At age seven, Dazai entered Elementary school where he performed superbly. This is probably due to the influence Kiye and Take's constant storytelling had and his amazing ability to read at the young age of five. His father, who he was never really close to, died right around the time Dazai was taking his middle school entrance exams. In 1920 he entered Aomori Middle School where in which his second year he started writing fiction. He entered Aomori Prefectural high school in 1923 where he began publishing his works in local literary magazines. These works included *Mirage*, *Seiza* and more. He finished high school a year early.

He went on to enter Hirosaki University literature department and developed an interest in Edo culture. He published a magazine with his friends called *Cell Literature*. This caused him to become a staff member of the University's newspaper team. His success was halted when his idol, Ryunosuke Akutagawa³ committed suicide in 1927. Dazai spiraled out of control. He spent all of his allowance on clothes, alcohol, drugs and women. He stopped caring about his studies and put his efforts into Marxism. He felt guilty of the wealth that he was born into and felt he was in the incorrect social class. "[He] was taken by the notion of the inevitable perishing of the ruling class.... At age 19 and the best dressed student in high school⁴, he was intensely aware of his family's wealth - the pretentious art, the solely decorative piano - and he saw the origin of their fortune as stemming from the family's position as landlord exploiting tenant farmers" (Wolfe). Although some of his friends were arrested due to their involvement in the communist movement in Japan, Dazai is overlooked due to his family name. He realizes at this point that it would be impossible for him to ever become a true communist and

³ Ryunosuke Akutagawa (芥川 龍之介, March 1, 1892 - July 24, 1927) is a Japanese writer who is regarded as the "Father of the Japanese short story." His notable works include "In a Grove", "Rashomon", and "Hana". He committed suicide at age 35 by overdosing on sleeping pills. The literary award, the Akutagawa Prize, is named after him.

⁴ This quote, originally from Kamei Katsuichirou's "Dazai Osamu no hito to saku hin," and referenced by Alan Wolfe in "Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan," is incorrect. Dazai was in college when he was 19 years old. Although it is true that Dazai and his high school classmates spoke about the issues of class in Japan.

decides to kill himself by taking drugs in December 1929. Of course, he fails. Although he tries to commit suicide many times after this, this suicide attempt was more of a symbolic killing of his name and ties with aristocracy. This caused him to abandon his career in literature in order to become a “revolutionary.” He was defected from the movement a year later.

It is this same year that Dazai begins to live with a young geisha named Oyama Hatsuyo. His family did not approve, formally expelling him from the family. Dazai meets a girl named Tanabe Shimeko who worked at a cafe in Ginza. One week later, they committed suicide after getting drunk in a hotel together. They tried killing themselves by drowning themselves but only she succeeded. Of course, Dazai would not be blamed for her death considering his family’s high status. The reason behind this suicide is believed to be due to his alienation from his family due to his relationship with Hatsuyo and the alienation from the world caused by his involvement in revolutionary activities. Dazai marries Hatsuyo in December of 1930 in Ikarigaseki⁵, where he was recovering from his failed suicide attempt. His mother was there for the wedding. He and Hatsuyo move frequently during the following years, probably due to his involvement in the communist party.

Finally, Dazai gets the recognition he always wanted and is arrested three times throughout 1930 - 1932 for his involvement in the Communist Party of Japan. Of course, he is released into the custody of family friends each time. The second time he is arrested his oldest brother Bunji, who took over the Tsushima family once their father died, cuts off Dazai’s allowance of 120 yen (approx \$580.00 as of 2015) but reinstates a reduced allowance of 90 yen (approx \$435.70 as of 2015) after two months. His participation can be summed up by a quote from one of his essays, “15 years (十五年間)”

Dazai’s fringe participation in the left wing was an action of self-negation. His real intention was not the high motivation of a revolutionary but an acute form of his own downfall and destruction. It could be called a form of suicide. The peculiar nature of the link between Dazai and his age was due to a process of self-negation, in which he used a revolutionary movement as a means of self-persecution.⁶

After a few years, his relationship with Hatsuyo disintegrates. Unable to graduate from university, and his failed attempts at gaining recognition in the literary world has left Dazai dependent on his brother’s money. His drug addiction has been agitating his lung condition. His writings during this time are dark and filled with self pity. His mentor Satou Haruo sent him to a mental institution to cure him of his drug addiction. During this time, Hatsuyo cheats on him with his best friend Zenshirou Kodate. Dazai finds out after his is released from the mental institution (still addicted to drugs) and attempts, again, to commit suicide with his wife. Dazai and Hatsuyo took sleeping pills but both suicide attempts failed. They got a divorce and he remarried in 1938 to woman named Ishihara Michiko. Michiko was twenty-six years old and a middle school teacher. His

⁵ Ikarigaseki (碓ヶ関村) was a village located in south central Aomori Prefecture. This town was merged with the towns of Hiraka and Onoe to form the new city of Hirakawa.

⁶ Translated by Alan Wolfe.

mentor, Ibuse Masuji, arranged their meeting and two months later they were engaged. They get married and move to Kofu⁷. It is at this time Dazai begins to start getting his work regularly published including “Discarding the Old Woman” and “The Firebird.”

Dazai continues writing and traveling for the next four years and then in June of 1941 his first daughter, Sonoko, is born. The next month, his novel “A New ‘Hamlet’” is published.

Japan was mobilizing for war at this time as well but Dazai was exempted from the draft due to his weak lungs. While he did not say much about the war, but he felt a moral obligation to be a responsible citizen. Dazai has finally become a serious writer at this point and is working on his next novel, “Righteousness and Smiles.” And by 1943, Dazai could be considered a responsible family man and a writer (Lyons).

During wartime, 1944, Dazai was commissioned by the Japanese government to write a story that will help foster a friendship between the partners of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere called “Regretful Parting (惜別).” It tells the story of a young student in Tohoku Medical School in Sendai Japan. This novel is considered a failure due to his lack of understanding of Chinese culture and misrepresentation of Lu Xun, who the story is based on. (Huang). Considering that Dazai relied on the income from his work to support his family, Dazai had to be careful not to annoy the censors or his audience.

Later that same year, Dazai was commissioned to write about Tsugaru⁸. He travels and stays there for almost a month and leaves early June. This journey really makes Dazai realize just how important his birth-place and family are to him. This novel can be considered one of his most mature works. He gets in touch with himself and on this emotional journey he visits his home town, Kanagi, and reunites with his tutor Take.

In 1946, the war was coming to a close, Japan was forced to surrender and Dazai could feel nothing but shame. This showed in his work as he began to move away from his typical autobiographical style and write about more distant subjects. One of his biggest publications during this time is called “Fairy Tales (御伽草子)” which is a collection of four different fairy tales retold by Dazai. His change in writing style is not surprising and can be explained in a quote from “Cherries”: “When I am sad, my efforts contrarily go to writing light and fun stories. All I wanted to do, more than anything, was to give out some type of free and delicious service.”

In December of 1946, Dazai returns to his house in Mitaka after fleeing during US air raids and rents his workroom that is mentioned in “Morning”. He is out drinking most nights at this point. It was around this time that he meets a girl named Yamazaki Tomie. At this point, Dazai had three children with his wife, but he would spend almost all of his time with Tomie. Tomie’s husband was missing in action in the Phillipines and was later pronounced dead. Dazai’s relationship with Tomie is a difficult and abnormal one. Apparently they had a suicide pact and Dazai had promised to die with her within the year.

Two years later, Dazai’s wife’s younger sister died and while his wife was arranging the funeral, Dazai brought Tomie to the house. His older daughter informed her mother about the visit and Dazai was worried that his wife knew everything (Lyons).

⁷ Kofu city (甲府市) is the capital city of Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan. Much of the city was destroyed during World War II.

⁸ Tsugaru (つがる市) is a city in the northwest of Aomori Prefecture. Very close to Dazai’s birth-place.

Dazai's personal was in shambles and his professional life left him scrambling to finish his work on time.

He began one of his greatest received novel, "No Longer Human," and finished the first half of it in Atami, a vacation town. He finished it in mid-May, physically and mentally exhausted. He was coughing up blood due to his weak lungs. His final novel, left unfinished, is called "Good-bye."

On June 13th, Dazai went missing. He left behind what was finished of "Good-bye" along with notes to friends and family. On his birthday, June 19th, 1948, the bodies of Dazai Osamu and Yamazaki Tomie were found in the Tamagawa Canal.

Many critics do not believe that Dazai willingly committed suicide considering his final novel "Good-bye" is actually a good-bye to women and not to life. Considering Tomie may have known about this, she may have gotten him drunk and lured him to the river, where she killed him and killed herself.

Because of the timing of his death, many people took the news of Dazai killing himself during this post-war period as some significant and martyr-like act. Many people identified with Dazai, especially the younger generation and many of them believed that he must have killed himself as some poetic way of ending his career.

Translating Dazai:

Dazai Osamu writes most of his work in an autobiographical style. While the concepts and themes are complex, his sentences are terse and easily literally translated. In my opinion, Dazai Osamu's short stories are the stories that learners of Japanese should be reading, not only for developing vocabulary and grammar, but for getting a more intimate look into Japanese society and most of all, break into Japanese literature. Dazai as a handbook for starting off the journey into Japanese literature will be covered another essay. A lot of the themes Dazai Osamu writes about are still prevalent today, not only in Japan, but around the world as well.

While Dazai employed many different writing styles over the years, I would like to focus on his autobiographical style. The diary-entry-like style of these works really lend themselves to translation. Translation can only be done when the translator is intimate with the author he is going to translate. Dazai essentially opens himself up and asks you to come inside with his work, and the people who decide to enter are captivated by his honesty. For example, in "Cherries," Dazai talks about his mute and late-blooming child:

Mom and Dad avoid talking too deeply about this child. They just spit out words like "retard" or "mute", confirming these qualities to each other because the situation is just too miserable for anything more. Sometimes mom holds the child tightly in her arms. I spasmodically think to myself about just how much I want to grab him and jump to our deaths into the nearest river.

His ability to lay everything detail of himself out for his readers with a concise and informal writing style makes Dazai Osamu a joy to read and translate, especially for a learner of the Japanese language.

Concision is also an important part of Dazai's writing. He speaks curtly to his readers, allowing little room for misinterpretation of his content. It also emphasizes his

informal and terse manner. This curt style that is prevalent in many of his works creates an illusion of actually sitting down and having a conversation with Dazai Osamu.

I suddenly woke up in the middle of the night. It was pitch black. For a few seconds I felt as if I was asleep at my house. I went to move my leg and was shocked to realize I was still wearing my socks. Shit.

It is recollections like this one found in “Morning” that really encapsulate the feeling of an idle chat that Dazai probably has had so many times with himself and the people around him. This really allows a reader to feel as if he actually were Dazai’s friend or confidant. This feeling is the most important thing when translating. Without the feeling of responsibility Dazai elicits through his informal tone, one may not feel the need to do Dazai and his stories (his life) justice.

While I enjoy Brudnoy and Oka’s translation of “Morning” I think they lack in certain key areas. Dazai was not a stranger to run on sentences. In fact, there are many that fill his autobiographical works. I think they are there to, again, emphasize the relationship between he and his readers through his informal tone. I also believe that his run-on sentences help portray a deep incongruence within Dazai that may have stemmed from his dealings with Marxism in his early twenties. Dazai always felt as if he was not meant to be born into such wealth and at a young age would feel sympathy for his servants. An incongruence arised within him when he realized, that despite his personal political views, he would always be an aristocrat due to his name. This internal conflict is portrayed through his writing as the articulate rambler. His arduous run on sentences seem to flow beautifully despite their lack of pause. Brudnoy and Oka did not pick up on this and translate Dazai’s recollection of his drunken night as:

Drinking a lot is a nightly affair with me, and so there wasn’t anything unusual about just that. but that day, on my way back from the apartment I met an old friends by the station; I hadn’t seen him in a long time so I immediately took him to my favorite *odenya*, where we drank a great deal. I was just about beginning to feel sick from too much drink, when the editor from the magazine showed up with some whiskey - he figured he would find me there, he said. I kept him company, and we killed off the whole bottle. I felt I was going to vomit. I wasn’t sure what was going to happen to me. I couldn’t control the fright I started feeling, and I wanted to quit right then and there, But my friend suggested that we go somewhere else, that next it would be his treat, so I was dragged to a streetcar and over to a small restaurant my friend knew. There we again drank sake. When I at length parted from my friend and the editor, I was too stoned to walk.

As you can see there are many sentences that replace the once lengthy sentence that Dazai original planned. I translate this paragraph as:

I drank a lot last night. This is nothing too surprising considering I drink a lot every night, but yesterday as I was coming home from my secret work place I ran into an old friend and immediately took him to my usual oden shop, and once the alcohol became too agonizing, a magazine editor walked in with a bottle of whisky in his hand saying, “I thought I would find you here!”, so I buddied up with him and gulped back a glass of whiskey, I was afraid I would throw up from just one glass, what would become of me and even though I was thinking along these lines, I have come

this far and even if I thought I should stop at this point, my friend told me he's going to pay for me for the rest of the night, we got on the train and he pulled me to a small restaurant he frequented and there we started to drink sake again, and as I was about to part ways with my friend and the editor, I was finally so drunk I couldn't walk.

As you can see, the run on sentence is preserved but still flows naturally.

There were other situations where I ran into run on sentences and was unable to translate them into a naturally flowing and coherent sentence. This is where I began to employ other techniques that could reserve the uniqueness of Dazai's writing while creating an echo suitable enough to represent Dazai's life and work. For example:

But the more I think about it, the more I realize the selfishness of my opponent and the belief that I am not the only one who is evil comes within reach but, starting the war over again even though I have already lost is just depressing, so because of that, the quarrel remains as filled with uncomfortable hatred as a fist fight would, And so I laugh while I shake with anger and become lost in thought about various things.

Notice in the second to last line of this run on sentence from *Cherries*, the "A" in "And" is capital after the comma. The capitalization of a letter after a comma or a semicolon gives the reader the impression that the actual idea of the sentence has changed while still preserving Dazai's rambling technique. It is important to keep in mind that these run on sentences, especially from Dazai's work, can never be translated perfectly into English. That does not mean though, that they should be overlooked for the sake of English grammar. Echoing Dazai's work, which is essentially his life, requires much more thought than just proper grammar and creating coherent sentences. Not everything has to, or should be, coherent with Dazai.

Using Dazai to Break into Japanese Literature

Japanese literature is inherently difficult, especially for non-native speakers. Grammar patterns and kanji (logographic characters that are adopted from the Chinese writing system in order to convey an idea) that are not seen in everyday speech become commonplace. Students of the Japanese language, based on my own personal experience, are barely taught how to have a regular conversation in Japanese during their classes at an American university, let alone learn how to read literature. So while I think Dazai still may be difficult for the university student placed into "Advanced Japanese," I still believe it is the best starting point for anyone wishing to start reading Japanese literature.

The main reason I believe Dazai is so easy to read is his aforementioned terse and informal style. While, although you may not hear everything Dazai writes in a normal conversation, with a dictionary handy there is no reason why someone with a strong grasp on the Japanese language wouldn't be able to read a short story like "Vow Fulfillment" or "Morning," while they may have trouble reading other author's like Natsume Soseki or the more contemporary Haruki Murakami. Dazai's terseness allows for him to keep his themes deep while keeping his grammar and vocabulary accessible to most. Looking at this section from "Cherries,"

"We have three children. I am useless when it comes to house work. I can't make the bed. I only tell foolish and absurd jokes all day."

Dazai's informal attitude shines while he is still able to continue his explanation of his family in a concise way. This concision allows for Japanese learners to be exposed to

new grammar and vocabulary slowly without becoming intimidated by advanced literary techniques from the beginning.

Another reason Dazai is a great way for an advanced Japanese student to start enjoying the wonderful world of Japanese literature is Dazai's diary entry-like short stories. In Japanese, it is not uncommon to omit the subject or even the copula of the sentence. Although, when everything is written in an autobiographical form, it is not very difficult to figure out who Dazai is speaking about considering he is talking about himself most of the time. On top of this, Dazai's short stories do not have very many characters and when he does speak of someone other than himself there are usually other clues in surrounding sentences that can inform the reader who he is speaking about if need be.

One of these clues is Dazai's frequent labeling of his paragraphs. Sometimes, before Dazai changes subjects he will start off his paragraphs with a heading like "Workroom", "Children" or "Alcohol". This is extremely helpful for students of the Japanese language because it is a constant reminder of exactly what is being spoken about at all times. This also allows for readers to focus on one part of the story for an extended period of time (I would spend weeks reading and re-reading the same pages to make sure that I knew exactly what was being said in order to further my reading comprehension) and not get lost when deciding to move forward or forget about what was said before because almost everything is labeled. It is also helpful for the learners of the Japanese language because these sections can be looked at as their own entity and without context if the reader so desires.

Another great reason to read Dazai when learning Japanese is his overall popularity. Dazai has been popular since the 30s in Japan and has been being translated since the 50s in America. Finding someone to talk to you about Dazai and what he is talking about is not a difficult task considering most Japanese people read Dazai as a part of their middle school and high school curriculum. Being able to read Dazai will also help gauge what level of a Japanese speaker are you. In my opinion, being able to read Dazai means one would be at the same level as a second year Japanese high school student. Being able to read Dazai will also impress your Japanese friends and create a stimulating and rewarding conversation that may further your Japanese even more.

Dazai's short stories also help the learner of Japanese to become more intimate with Japan's unique and beautiful culture. For example, suicide is one of Dazai's major themes. In Japan suicide is not considered a sinful and horrible act like it is in the western world, but as a noble way out of a terrible situation. Cancer patients for instance, may find comfort in killing themselves then burdening their family and loved ones. In Dazai, suicide is looked at deeper than the basic outline I have given you and reading his works may foster a greater appreciation for culture that may have gone misunderstood or convoluted due to this neo-orientalism in western societies when it comes to Japan. It seems that everyone in America thinks that Japan is just a country filled with cartoons and comic books, robots roam the streets while perverted salary men buy used female panties from a vending machine, but it is so much more than that. There is a rich and unique culture that is begging to be understood and the only way it can be is by looking at its past. Dazai is a good starting point for someone who would like to become more intimate with the way the Japanese mind works

満願

Vow Fulfillment

Vow Fulfillment

This story is four years old. It takes place the summer I was living on the second floor of an acquaintance's house on Nii-Jima⁹; right about the time I was writing my novel, Romanesque. One night I was riding my bike around town and injured myself. The area above my right ankle was cut. It wasn't very deep but the amount of blood seemed pretty serious, probably because of the alcohol. I galloped to the doctor's office in a panic. The town doctor is a 32 year old fat man who resembles Saigou Takamori¹⁰. He was also extremely drunk. I found it funny that he stumbled into the examination room as staggering drunk as I was. I giggled while he treated me and he began to chuckle as well. Finally, unable to control ourselves, we burst into a fit of laughter.

From that night on, we became close friends. The doctor enjoyed philosophy over literature. I have no trouble speaking about that subject so our conversations always grew lively. The doctor had a worldview resembling primitive dualism and saw all of the world's conditions as a battle between good and evil people. He was articulate. Although my desire to worship love, the one true god, stayed strong, I can remember a burst of freshness fill my heart when I heard the doctor's explanation of good and evil. For instance, I cannot help but agree with this example the doctor gave me: demanding his wife to serve us beer made the doctor a good person, but his wife, who jovially suggested that we should play a game of bridge instead, should be considered an evil person. His wife was short and plain looking, but despite that, her face was white and refined. She didn't have children but she did have a younger brother who was a student at the business school in Numazu¹¹, he also lived on the second floor.

The doctor received five different newspapers to his house, so almost every morning I would drop by and read one for thirty minutes to an hour. I would grip the newspaper with one hand as the wind ruffled the pages while I sat out back of the tatami room on the veranda and drank the cool mugicha¹² the wife brought me, and not even 3.5 meters away from my vacation, there was a field of green grass and a small stream filled with slowly moving water, the milk-boy would ride his bike on the narrow path that ran along the side of the stream and every morning he would shout "Good morning!" to me. Around then, there was a girl who would come to pick up medicine. She looked pure; she wore lightweight clothing and a pair of geta¹³ and was always laughing with the doctor in the examination room. Once in a while he would walk her to the door and with a loud and encouraging voice he would say:

"Please, just have a little more patience madam!"

⁹ Nii-Jima (新島) is one of the seven Izu islands. It is a volcanic island located in the Philippine Sea.

¹⁰ Saigou Takamori (西郷 隆盛) is considered one of the most influential samurai in Japanese history. He lived from late Edo Period (1603 - 1868) to Early Meiji Period (1868 - 1912).



¹¹ Numazu (沼津市) is a city located on the northern end of the Izu peninsula, in Shizuoka Prefecture.

¹² Tea made from barley

¹³ Geta are wooden sandals traditionally worn with a Kimono or Yukata. They have a cloth thong resembling western style flip-flops.

One time, the doctor's wife clued me in on the situation. Apparently, her husband was an elementary school teacher who ruined his lungs three years ago but has recently made great progress. The doctor would sternly and vigorously prohibit anyone from visiting him because this was an important part in his recovery. She obeyed. But sometimes, for whatever reason, she would come into the office and pitifully ask about her husband. Every time she did, the doctor would hide his sympathy and strictly remind her that she must have more patience.

One morning towards the end of August, I saw something beautiful. I was reading the newspaper on the doctor's veranda and his wife who was sitting next to me whispered in a small voice,

“Ah, look how happy she looks!”

I looked up and right in front of my eyes I could see a pure and lightly dressed silhouette walking down that narrow path as if she were floating on air. She was whirling her white parasol around her.

“She was granted permission this morning,” the doctor's wife whispered.

These three years, in short: “My heart became full.” The image of that girl in my mind grows more beautiful as time passes. Maybe the doctor's wife had something to do with her permission.

満願

これは、いまから、四年まえの話である。私が伊豆の三島の知り合いのうちの二階で一夏を暮し、ロマネスクという小説を書いていたころの話である。或る夜、酔いながら自転車に乗りまちを走って、怪我をした。右足のくるぶしの上のほうを裂いた。疵は深いものではなかったが、それでも酒をのんでいたために、出血がたいへんで、あわててお医者に駆けつけた。まち医者は三十二歳の、大きくふとり、西郷隆盛に似ていた。たいへん酔っていた。私と同じくらいにふらふら酔って診察室に現われたので、私は、おかしかった。治療を受けながら、私がかすくす笑ってしまった。するとお医者もくすくす笑い出し、とうとうたまりかねて、ふたり声を合せて大笑いした。

その夜から私たちは仲良くなった。お医者は、文学よりも哲学を好んだ。私もそのほうを語るのが、気が楽で、話はずんだ。お医者の世界観は、原始二元論ともいふべきもので、世の中の有様をすべて善玉悪玉の合戦と見て、なかなか歯切れがよかった。私は愛という単一神を信じたく内心つとめていたのであるが、それでもお医者善玉悪玉の説を聞くと、うっとり胸のうちが、一味爽涼を覚えるのだ。たとえば、宵の私の訪問をもてなすのに、ただちに奥さんにビールを命ずるお医者自身は善玉であり、今宵はビールでなくブリッジ（トランプ遊戯の一種）いたしましよ、と笑いながら提議する奥さんこそは悪玉である、というお医者の例証には、私も素直に賛成した。奥さんは、小がらの、おたふくがおであったが、色が白く上品であった。子供はなかったが、奥さんの弟で沼津の商業学校にかよっているおとなしい少年がひとり、二階にいた。

お医者のお家では、五種類の新聞をとっていたので、私はそれを読ませてもらうにほとんど毎朝、散歩の途中に立ち寄って、三十分か一時間お邪魔した。裏口からまわって、座敷の縁側に腰をかけ、奥さんの持って来る冷い麦茶を飲みながら、風に吹かれてぱらぱら騒ぐ新聞を片手でしっかり押えつけて読むのであるが、縁側から二間と離れていない、青草原のあいだを水量たっぷりの小川がゆるゆる流れていて、その小川に沿った細い道を自転車を通る牛乳配達青年が、毎朝きまって、おはようございます、と旅の私に挨拶した。その時刻に、菓をとりに来る若い女のひとがあった。簡単服に下駄をはき、清潔な感じのひとで、よくお医者さんと診察室で笑い合っていて、ときたまお医者が、玄関までそのひとを見送り、「奥さま、もうすこしのご辛棒ですよ。」と大声で叱咤することがある。

お医者のお奥さんが、或るとき私に、そのわけを語って聞かせた。小学校の先生の奥さまで、先生は、三年まえに肺をわるくし、このごろずんずんよくなった。お医者は一所懸命で、その若い奥さまに、いまがだいじのところと、固く禁じた。奥さまは言いつけを守った。それでも、ときどき、なんだか、ふびんに何うことがある。お医者は、その都度、心を鬼にして、奥さまもうすこしのご辛棒ですよ、と言外に意味をふくめて叱咤するのだそうである。

八月のおわり、私は美しいものを見た。朝、お医者のお家の縁側で新聞を読んでいると、私の傍に横坐りに坐っていた奥さんが、

「ああ、うれしそうね。」と小声でそっと囁いた。

ふと顔をあげると、すぐ眼のまえの小道を、簡単服を着た清潔な姿が、さっさと飛ぶようにして歩いていった。白いパラソルをくるくるっとまわした。

「けさ、おゆるしが出たのよ。」奥さんは、また、囁く。

三年、と一口にいても、――胸が一ぱいになった。年つき経つほど、私には、あの女性の姿が美しく思われる。あれは、お医者のお奥さんのさしがねかも知れない。

朝

Morning

Morning

Because there is nothing that I love more than leisure, even when I am working at home, I am always secretly waiting for friends from far away places to show up at my door; and then, my door, it suddenly opens and even though my chest begins to dance as I rush to clean up my unfinished manuscripts, my eyebrows raise and my mouth distorts as I go out to meet my guest.

“Oh, you must be in the middle of work.”

“Nope, what is it?”

Then, my guest and I hit the streets.

But, because I never get anything done in those situations, I set out to find a designated place to create my workroom. I won't even let the people in my own house know where it is. Every morning around 9 o'clock I have my bento made for me and I take it with me to my workroom.

As you can expect, no one ever comes and visits my workroom so my work generally progresses according to plan. But once it hits 3, I get tired, I begin to long for human interaction, for excitement; and it is at that suitable time that I wrap up my work and head home. On my way home I usually get caught up in some oden¹⁴ shop or something and sometimes I won't get home until very late.

Workroom.

It's actually a girl's room. This young girl commutes to a bank near Nihonbashi¹⁵ every morning. Once she is gone, I go there, work for four or five hours, and leave before she gets back.

It's not like she is my lover or anything like that. I know her mom, and she, for whatever reason, has separated from her daughter and is now living in the Tohoku area. Once in a while I get letters from her mom regarding her daughter's marriage proposals. She asks for my opinion on the matter and I will go as far as to meet these young candidates and send letters back that say things like ‘Oh, he will make a great son in law, he has my permission!’ like I am some sort of superior and worldly wise man.

But lately, I have begun to think that the daughter trusts me even more than the mother does.

“Kiku-chan, the other day I met your future husband.”

“Really? How was it? He's a little snobby isn't he?”

“Well... yeah but, any guy you compare to me will seem like an idiot. Just try to deal with it, okay?”

“Yeah, you are probably right.”

She was easily convinced.

I drank a lot last night. This is nothing too surprising considering I drink a lot every night, but yesterday as I was coming home from my secret work place I ran into an old friend and immediately took him to my usual oden shop, and once the alcohol became too agonizing, a magazine editor walked in with a bottle of whisky in his hand saying, “I

¹⁴ Oden is a dish that contains boiled daikon, eggs, konjac and more. It is usually served as a winter dish in Japan.

¹⁵ Nihonbashi (日本橋) is a business district located in Tokyo. It grew around a bridge with the same name. It was originally a place for merchants to sell their wares during the Edo period.

thought I would find you here!", so I buddied up with him and gulped back a glass of whiskey, I was afraid I would throw up from just one glass, what would become of me and even though I was thinking along these lines, I have come this far and even if I thought I should stop at this point, my friend told me he's going to pay for me for the rest of the night, we got on the train and he pulled me to a small restaurant he frequented and there we started to drink sake again, and as I was about to part ways with my friend and the editor, I was finally so drunk I couldn't walk.

"Wait up. There is no way I can walk all the way back to my house. At this point I will fall asleep on the street. I'm counting on you guys."

...

I crammed my legs under the kotatsu¹⁶ and fell asleep while still wearing my coat.

I suddenly woke up in the middle of the night. It was pitch black. For a few seconds I felt as if I was asleep at my house. I went to move my leg and was shocked to realize I was still wearing my socks. Shit.

Agh... this has happened to me hundreds, no, thousands of times.

I groaned.

"Aren't you cold?" Kiku-chan asked me in the middle of the darkness.

She was laying with her legs under the kotatsu as well, perpendicular to me.

"No I'm not cold."

I sat up

"it's cool if I piss out the window right?"

"I don't mind. That way *is* easier."

"You probably do it too sometimes don't you!"

I stood up and flipped the light switch. Nothing happened.

"There's a power outage," Kiku-chan said in a small voice.

I stumbled over her as I fumbled through the darkness trying to make my way to the window. She didn't move a muscle.

"I cant do this shit," I murmured to myself and finally, I grasped the window curtain, thrust it aside, opened the window a bit, and began pissing out it, creating the sound of flowing water.

"You have the book *The Princess of Cleves* on your desk I see," I said as I laid back down.

"Ladies in those days would easily piss in the palace garden or in a dark place under the stairs in some corridor. So even pissing out the window is a naturally aristocratic affair."

"If you want to drink, I have sake. Didn't the aristocrats drink before going to sleep?"

I wanted to drink but I thought it would be dangerous if I did.

¹⁶ A kotatsu is a small and low to the ground, square table that is usually covered with a blanket. There is a heat source underneath the table. It is generally found in the living area of Japanese homes.

“No, the aristocrats were cowards that loathed the dark. It is too scary when it is dark. You wouldn't happen to have a candle would you? If you lit a candle for me I would feel safer to drink.”

Kiku-chan stood up silently.

She lit the candle. I gave a sigh of relief.

“At this point, tonight will end smoothly,” I thought to myself.

“Where should I put the candlestick?”

“Put it somewhere high. It says so in the bible, so a high place would be the best. How about on top of your book case?”

“Would you like your sake in a cup?”

“Alcohol should be poured in a cup late at night. It says so in the Bible,” I lied.

Kiku-chan filled a large cup to the brim and brought it to me with a huge grin on her young face.

“There is still about a cup left if you like.”

“No, this is fine.”

I took the cup, drank it forcefully until it was empty, and lay on my back.

“Well, its time for bed! You too Kiku-chan, goodnight.”

Kiku-chan also laid back down, She batted her long eyelashes at me continuously; she didn't seem tired at all.

I stared silently at the flame of the candle on top of the bookcase. It moved as if it were alive, growing and shrinking. While I watched it, I suddenly realized something frightening.

“That candle is pretty short huh. It will disappear soon. You don't have a longer one do you?”

“No, that is all I have.”

I fell silent. I wanted to pray to the heavens. If I don't fall asleep or sober up before that candle burns out, Kiku-chan will be in danger.

The flame flickered and little by little it grew shorter, but I still couldn't fall asleep at all and I wasn't even close to sober, Now was the time to do something daring, I warmed myself up.

Without thinking, I let out a sigh.

“How about taking off your socks?”

“Why?”

“It is warmer that way.”

They were off before she finished talking.

I can't do this anymore. When that candle goes it, that's it.

I prepared myself.

The flame grew dim and writhed in agony, turning left, tossing right, one moment full, illuminating, and then, fizzling, growing smaller and smaller until it finally vanished.

The night was growing brighter.

The room was dim. The darkness had vanished already.

I got up and dressed myself to go home.

朝

私は遊ぶ事が何よりも好きなので、家で仕事をしていながらも、友あり遠方より来るのをいつもひそかに心待ちにしている状態で、玄関が、がらっとあくど眉をひそめ、口をゆがめて、けれども実は胸をおどらせ、書きかけの原稿用紙をさっそく取りかたづけて、その客を迎える。

「あ、これは、お仕事ですね。」

「いや、なに。」

そうしてその客と一緒に遊びに出る。

けれども、それではいつまでも何も仕事が出来ないので、某所に秘密の仕事部屋を設ける事にしたのである。それはどこにあるのか、家の者にも知らせていない。毎朝、九時頃、私は家の者に弁当を作らせ、それを持ってその仕事部屋に出勤する。さすがにその秘密の仕事部屋には訪れて来るひと無いで、私の仕事もたいてい予定どおりに進行する。しかし、午後の三時頃になると、疲れても来るし、ひとが恋しくもなるし、遊びたくなくて、頃合いのところで仕事を切り上げ、家へ帰る。帰る途中で、おでんやなどに引かかって、深夜の帰宅になる事もある。

仕事部屋。

しかし、その部屋は、女のひとの部屋なのである。その若い女のひとが、朝早く日本橋の或る銀行に出勤する。そのあとに私が行って、そうして四、五時間そこで仕事をして、女のひとが銀行から帰って来る前に退出する。

愛人とか何とか、そんなものではない。私とそのひとのお母さんを知っていて、そうしてそのお母さんは、或る事情で、その娘さんとわかれわかれになって、いまは東北のほうで暮しているのである。そうして時たま私に手紙を寄こして、その娘の縁談に就いて、私の意見を求めたりなどして、私もその候補者の青年と逢い、あれならいいお嬢さんでしょう、賛成です、なんてひとかどの苦労人の言いそうな事を書いて送ってやった事もあった。

しかし、いまではそのお母さんよりも、娘さんのほうが、よけいに私を信頼しているように、どうも、そうらしく私には思われて来た。

「キクちゃん。こないだ、あなたの未来の旦那さんに逢ったよ。」

「そう？ どうでした？ すこうし、キザね。そうでしょう？」

「まあ、でも、あんなところさ。そりゃもう、僕にくらべたら、どんな男でも、あほらしく見えるんだからね。我慢しな。」

「そりゃ、そうね。」

娘さんは、その青年とあっさり結婚する気であるようであった。

先夜、私は大酒を飲んだ。いや、大酒を飲むのは、毎夜の事であって、なにも珍らしい事ではないけれども、その日、仕事場からの帰りに、駅のところで久しぶりの友人と逢い、さっそく私のなじみのおでんやに案内して大いに飲み、そろそろ酒が苦痛になりかけて来た時に、雑誌社の編集者が、たぶんここだろうと思った、と言ってウイスキー持参であらわれ、その編集者の相手をしてまたそのウ

iskyを一本飲みつくして、こりゃもう吐くのではなからうか、どうなるのだろう、と自分ながら、そらおそろしくなって来て、さすがにもう、このへんでよそうと思っても、こんどは友人が、席をあらためて僕にこれからおごらせてくれ、と言出し、電車に乗って、その友人のなじみの小料理屋にひっぱって行かれ、そこでまた日本酒を飲み、やっとその友人、編集者の両人とわかれた時には、私はもう、歩けないくらいに酔っていた。

「とめてくれ。うちまで歩いて行けそうもないんだ。このままで、寝ちまうからね。たのむよ。」

私は、こたつに足をつっこみ、二重廻しを着たままで寝た。

夜中に、ふと眼がさめた。まっくらである。数秒間、私は自分のうちで寝ているような気がしていた。足を少しうごかして、自分が足袋をはいているままで寝ているのに気付いてはっとした。しまった！ いけねえ！

ああ、このような経験を、私はこれまで、何百回、何千回、くりかえした事か。

私は、唸った。

「お寒くありません？」

と、キクちゃんが、くらやみの中で言った。

私と直角に、こたつに足を突込んで寝ているようである。

「いや、寒くない。」

私は上半身を起して、

「窓から小便してもいいかね。」

と言った。

「かまいませんわ。そのほうが簡単でいいわ。」

「キクちゃんも、時々やるんじゃないか。」

私は立上って、電燈のスイッチをひねった。つかない。

「停電ですの。」

とキクちゃんが小声で言った。

私は手さぐりで、そろそろ窓のほうに行き、キクちゃんのからだに躓いた。キクちゃんは、じっとしていた。

「こりゃ、いけねえ。」

と私はひとりごとのように呟き、やっとな窓のカアテンに触って、それを排して窓を少しあけ、流水の音をたてた。

「キクちゃんの机の上に、クレーヴの奥方という本があったね。」

私はまた以前のとおり、からだを横たえながら言う。

「あの頃の貴婦人はね、宮殿のお庭や、また廊下の階段の下の暗いところなどで、平気で小便をしたものなんだ。窓から小便をするという事も、だから、本来は貴族的な事なんだ。」

「お酒お飲みになるんだったら、ありますわ。貴族は、寝ながら飲むんでしょ？」

飲みたかった。しかし、飲んだら、あぶないと思った。

「いや、貴族は暗黒をいとうものだ、元来が臆病なんだからね。暗いと、こわくて駄目なんだ。蝋燭が無いかね。蝋燭をつけてくれたら、飲んでもいい。」

キクちゃんは黙って起きた。

そうして、蠟燭に火が点ぜられた。私は、ほっとした。もうこれで今夜は、何事も仕出かさずにすむと思った。

「どこへ置きましょう。」

「燭台は高きに置け、とバイブルに在るから、高いところがいい。その本箱の上へどうだろう。」

「お酒は？ コップで？」

「深夜の酒は、コップに注げ、とバイブルに在る。」

私は嘘を言った。

キクちゃんは、にやにや笑いながら、大きいコップにお酒をなみなみと注いで持って来た。

「まだ、もう一ぱいぶんくらい、ございますわ。」

「いや、これだけでいい。」

私はコップを受け取って、ぐいぐい飲んで、飲みほし、仰向に寝た。

「さあ、もう一眠りだ。キクちゃんも、おやすみ。」

キクちゃんも仰向けに、私と直角に寝て、そうしてまつげの長い大きい眼を、しきりにパチパチさせて眠りそうもない。

私は黙って本箱の上の、蠟燭の焰を見た。焰は生き物のように、伸びたりちぢんだりして、うごいている。見ているうちに、私は、ふと或る事に思い到り、恐怖した。

「この蠟燭は短いね。もうすぐ、なくなるよ。もっと長い蠟燭が無いのかね。」

「それだけですの。」

私は黙した。天に祈りたい気持であった。あの蠟燭が尽きないうちに私が眠るか、またはコップ一ぱいの酔いが覚めてしまうか、どちらかでないと、キクちゃんが、あぶない。

焰はちろちろ燃えて、少しずつ少しずつ短くなって行くけれども、私はちっとも眠くならず、またコップ酒の酔いもさめるところか、五体を熱くして、ずんずん私を大胆にするばかりなのである。

思わず、私は溜息をもらした。

「足袋をおぬぎになったら？」

「なぜ？」

「そのほうが、あたたかいわよ。」

私は言われるままに足袋を脱いだ。

これはもういけない。蠟燭が消えたら、それまでだ。

私は覚悟しかけた。

焰は暗くなり、それから身悶えするように左右にうごいて、一瞬大きく、あかるくなり、それから、じじと音を立てて、みるみる小さくいじけて行って、消えた。

しらじらと夜が明けていたのである。

部屋は薄明るく、もはや、くらやみではなかったのである。

私は起きて、帰る身支度をした。

(「新思潮」昭和二十二年七月号)

樱桃

Cherries

Cherries

I lift up my eyes to the mountains.
-Psalms 121

I want to think that parents are more important than their children. ‘For the sake of my children...’, even if I did think in that way, in some admirable, archaic Taoist fashion -- but come on, parents are weaker than the children. That is how it is in my house at least. Constantly checking up on my children’s wellbeing is by no means some type of shameless and lowly ulterior motive that I grasp at in hopes of being taken care of when I become an old man. My children, if I can even call them children, are all extremely young. The oldest girl is only seven years old, the oldest and only boy, four, and the second daughter is one. And yet, each of them already overwhelms their parents. The father and the mother, they have the appearance of these children’s s.

In the summer, the whole family gets together in a small room and as a result of the great confusion and liveliness of dinner; the father blindly wipes the sweat off of his face with a towel.

“Although the Yanagidaru¹⁷ says that it has become vulgar to sweat while eating, somehow, with children this loud, despite however much of a father of elegance I am, the sweat continues to flow,” the father complains to himself in a mutter.

Mom lets the youngest daughter suck on her breast while she performs various cut throat jobs like setting the table for Dad and the two older children, wiping up spills, picking up messes and blowing noses.

“Your nose sweats the most doesn’t it, you are always so pre-occupied wiping it.”

The father gave a sarcastic laugh

“Oh yeah? Well where do you sweat the most? Between your thighs?”

“What an elegant father.”

“What are you trying to say? I am literally speaking about your thighs. This is not a matter of elegance.”

“As for me,” the mother said as she grew more serious. “Between these breasts there is... a valley of tears....”

Valley of Tears.

Dad went silent and continued eating.

I am always telling jokes when I am in this house. You could say because I am constantly riddled with anxiety, I must feign an appearance of happiness even when I don’t feel like it.

No, not just this house, but whenever I have to deal with anyone, no matter how much pain is in my heart, no matter how agonizing my body feels, I am almost always frantically working to create a light and fun atmosphere for everyone. Then, when I finally get away from them, my body wavers to its fatigue and I begin to fall victim to thoughts and worries of money, morals, suicide. When I am sad, my efforts contrarily go to writing light and fun stories. All I wanted to do, more than anything, was to give out some type of free and delicious service but people fail to realize this and criticize me with

¹⁷ The Haifu-Yanagidaru (俳風柳多留) was an annually released anthology of poems in Japan from the middle of the Edo Period until the Fall of the Shogunate (1706 - 1868)

claims like “He only gets readers by amusing them,” or “All of his works lack complexity.”

Is providing a service for another something evil? Is it better to put on airs and stifle your own laughter?

In other words, I am a too-fucking-serious killjoy who cannot handle anything **uncomfortable**. Even in regards to my own home I am always telling jokes, telling them as if I were walking on thin ice, and some of the readers’ and critics’ guesses would be betrayed by my new tatami mats in my room, the organization of my desk, a kind, respectful and loving relationship with my wife, whom I have never hit, never even raised my voice to in some violent tone, screaming at her to get out of the house, no, and the children, the children cheerfully hang on to both of us, physically and emotionally.

But that is only on the outside. Mom open her chest and it is a valley of tears, dad’s night sweats become increasingly worse but, moreover, we know each other’s agony yet we strive not to touch upon it; I tell a joke, she laughs.

But that time, when Mom said “Valley of tears” and Dad fell silent, even though I wanted to strike back with some witty remark, there were no smart words floating around in my mind in that moment and the longer I stayed silent, the more the awkwardness continued piling on top of itself; even I, the expert¹⁸ grew grim.

“Why don’t you just hire someone, at this rate we have no other choice,” I grumbled to myself nervously, careful not to upset my wife’s mood.

We have three children. I am useless when it comes to house work. I can’t make the bed. I only tell foolish and absurd jokes all day. Registration and rations¹⁹, I know absolutely nothing about them. Nothing, like I am staying at some sort of Inn. A guest. My feast. I carry my bento box to my work room and at that, I may not return for a whole week. Work, work, work, I am always making a fuss about it yet I can’t even write more than two or three pages in one day. Alcohol. When I drink too much, I lose weight, grow gaunt and stop leaving my bed. On top of that, it looks like young female friends surround me all the time.

Children... My seven-year-old daughter and my second daughter who was more this spring may catch a cold a little more easily than others but they are pretty much average children. But my four year old son, he is way too thin and weak to even stand on his own. As for speaking, he can only make noises like “Aaa” and “Daa,” let alone understand anything that is being said to him. He crawls around but won’t tell you when he shits or pisses on himself. Despite all of this, he actually eats a hell of a lot. But he has always stayed too small, his hair thin and dull, not developing one bit.

Mom and Dad avoid talking too deeply about this child. They just spit out words like “retard” or “mute”, confirming these qualities to each other because the situation is just too miserable for anything more. Sometimes mom holds the child tightly in her arms. I spasmodically think to myself about just how much I want to grab him and jump to our deaths into the nearest river.

¹⁸ “The expert”, written as 「通人」 in the original text, is meant as “someone who understands the delicate nature of male-female communication.” We can assume he is an “expert” due to the constant show the main character must put on to hide his melancholia.

¹⁹ Registration and rations refers to the food rationing in post-WWII Japan

“Mute Son Murdered, X Day, noon-ish, X district, X town, X road, X house number, Mr. So-and-so kills his 18 year old son with a hatchet. A failed suicide attempt consisting of a stab wound to the throat with a pair of scissors has left the father in critical condition at the town clinic. Recently, he accepted his 22 year old daughter’s husband into the family, but his son, who was also pretty slow on top of being a mute, left him at a loss for what to do out of sheer pity.”

It is newspaper articles like these that drive me to drink.

Ahh, if only he was a late bloomer. Our first son, he would rapidly develop normally and Mom and Dad would be able to laugh at their past doubts and fears. We pray secretly for this as we keep our mouths shut about him to family and friends, acting as if we do not care as we ridicule his shortcomings.

Mom handles life as best as she can and Dad is working his hardest. I was never someone who could even write that much in the first place. A complete coward. This is drawn into the public eye and I flounder through my writing. It is painful when I write and I long for my yakezake to come and save me. Yakezake is an alcoholic drink that you drink when you cannot declare your own thoughts, you drink it out of frustration and annoyance. People who can declare their own thoughts do not need to drink this drink (this is why women do not drink much).

I have never tasted victory when it comes to arguments. I lose not matter what. I become overwhelmed by the terrific self-affirmation and strength of conviction my opponent holds. Then I fall silent. But the more I think about it, the more I realize the selfishness of my opponent and the belief that I am not the only one who is evil comes within reach but, starting the war over again even though I have already lost is just depressing, so because of that, the quarrel remains as filled with uncomfortable hatred as a fist fight would, And so I laugh while I shake with anger and become lost in thought about various things. And finally I drown it all in my yakezake.

Let me be frank. I have been tediously writing indirectly here and there but the truth is, this is a story about a fight I had with my wife.

“Valley of Tears”

That was the fuse. As I have already stated, we are an extremely reserved couple who won’t even curse let alone be violent towards each other, but that situation, between two complete cowards²⁰, had such a danger of becoming explosive it left both of us trembling in fear. Both of us speechless, the danger of one gathering enough evidence about the other’s depravity, a glimpse at a shard of corruption, aversion, one more glance, aversion; Sooner or later, the danger of finally collecting all of the shards that reveal atrocity and out wittingly seeing the whole picture: it is not like we could say this isn’t the reason we must be so reserved. Putting my wife aside, the more I fight, the more pride I am able to reveal.

“Valley of Tears”

When I was told that, I felt persecuted. But I don’t like arguing. I fell silent. You may have said that with some intention of criticizing me, but you are not the only one who is crying. I worry about the children just as much as you do. I believe my household is important. If one of our children has just one weird sounding cough in the middle of

²⁰ “Between two complete cowards” was added in to emphasize the similarity of weakness between the couple.

the night, my eyes will open and I will be stuck worrying about it unbearably all night. More than anything, I want to be able to give you and the children a better home, to be able to fill your hearts with joy but, as for me, no matter how I try, that is something I just cannot accomplish. I am doing my best already. I am not some brutal demon. Calmly watching my wife and children die without lifting a finger is a form of bravery that I do not have. It is not that I do not know anything about registration and rations, it is that I do not have the time to know.... This is something Dad grumbled in his heart but is something he has no courage to say, and even if I did, you would just lash back; and in my loss for words, it would be like me requesting "Someone, please hire somebody."

Mom would also usually have nothing to say, but when she did they were always said with a cold-hearted confidence. (Not just this mom, but most women generally have this quality).

"But people just don't seem to come"

"If you search you will definitely find someone. It isn't that people won't come but the fact that people aren't willing to *stay*, isn't it?"

"Are you trying to imply I am not a good employer?"

"No, But I..."

I fell silent. In actuality that *is* what I thought. But instead I fell silent.

Ahh, someone just please hire somebody. Mom is burdened with the youngest child so when she goes out to run errands I have to take care of the other two. On top of that we have at least ten different guests for each of us show up at our door every day.

"I want to go to my work room."

"Right now?"

"Yes I have a job that I need to finish tonight no matter what."

"I was thinking of going to my younger sister's tonight though."

I knew that as well. Her younger sister is in critical condition. But if my wife goes to check up on her, I will be left to watch the children.

"If you would just hire some-..." I attempted to say but stopped myself. Just mentioning something regarding my wife's relatives will cause trouble for both of us.

Living, it is a difficult thing. There are chains coming from here and there, all of them entangled with each other, and if you try to move, even a little, blood will begin to pour out.

I stopped talking and stood up. I took an envelope containing the advance for my next manuscript out of my desk drawer and put it in my kimono sleeve, I took out my manuscript paper and my dictionary and wrapped it in black cloth and softly crept outside as if bodiless.

I cannot work at this point. I can only think about suicide. And at that I went directly to my normal drinking spot.

"Welcome!"

"Let's drink! Oh you are wearing that beautiful striped kimono again today..."

"It's not bad, huh! I knew you liked it."

"I just had a fight with my wife and I am unbearably depressed. I am going to stay over tonight. I am definitely staying over."

I want to believe that parents are more important than children. Parents are weaker than children.

The cherries are out.

At my house we do not let the children eat anything luxurious. They may never have even seen cherries for all I know. I bet if I let them try some they will be happy. I will carry the cherries home and they will rejoice. They will tie the vines together and wear it like a corral necklace, the cherries replacing the rocks.

But, when Dad served them a big plate of those cherries, the children ate them with revulsion; They ate them and spat the seeds out, ate them and spat the seeds out, ate them and spat the seeds out, and then, in my heart, I grumbled these words with a feigned confidence: Parents are more important than children.

桜桃

われ、山にむかいて、目を挙ぐ。
——詩篇、第二百二十一。

子供より親が大事、と思いたい。子供のために、などと古風な道学者みたいな事を殊勝らしく考えてみても、何、子供よりも、その親のほうが弱いのだ。少くとも、私の家庭においては、そうである。まさか、自分が老人になってから、子供に助けられ、世話になろうなどという凶々しい虫のよい下心は、まったく持ち合わせてはいないけれども、この親は、その家庭において、常に子供たちのご機嫌ばかり伺っている。子供、といっても、私のところの子供たちは、皆まだひどく幼い。長女は七歳、長男は四歳、次女は一歳である。それでも、既にそれぞれ、両親を圧倒し掛けている。父と母は、さながら子供たちの下男下女の趣きを呈しているのである。

夏、家族全部三畳間に集まり、大にぎやか、大混乱の夕食をしたため、父はタオルでやたらに顔の汗を拭き、

「めし食って大汗かくもげびた事、と柳多留にあったけれども、どうも、こんなに子供たちがうるさくては、いかにお上品なお父さんといえども、汗が流れる」と、ひとりぶつぶつ不平を言い出す。

母は、一歳の次女におっぱいを含ませながら、そうして、お父さんと長女と長男のお給仕をするやら、子供たちのこぼしたものを拭くやら、拾うやら、鼻をかんでやるやら、八面六臂のすさまじい働きをして、

「お父さんは、お鼻に一ばん汗をおかきになるようね。いつも、せわしくお鼻を拭いていらっしゃる」

父は苦笑して、

「それじゃ、お前はどこだ。内股かね？」

「お上品なお父さんですこと」

「いや、何もお前、医学的な話じゃないか。上品も下品も無い」

「私はね」

と母は少しまじめな顔になり、

「この、お乳とお乳のあいだに、……涙の谷、……」

涙の谷。

父は黙して、食事をつづけた。

私は家庭に在っては、いつも冗談を言っている。それこそ「心には悩みわずらう」事の多いゆえに、「おもてには快樂」をよそわざるを得ない、とでも言おうか。いや、家庭に在る時ばかりでなく、私は人に接する時でも、心がどんなにつらくても、からだがどんなに苦しくても、ほとんど必死で、楽しい雰囲気を作る事に努力する。そうして、客とわかれた後、私は疲労によるめき、お金の事、道徳の事、自殺の事を考える。いや、それは人に接する場合だけではない。小説を

書く時も、それと同じである。私は、悲しい時に、かえって軽い楽しい物語の創造に努力する。自分では、もっとも、おいしい奉仕のつもりでいるのだが、人はそれに気づかず、太宰という作家も、このごろは軽薄である、面白さだけで読者を釣る、すこぶる安易、と私をさげすむ。

人間が、人間に奉仕するというのは、悪い事であろうか。もったいぶって、なかなか笑わぬというのは、善い事であろうか。

つまり、私は、糞真面目で興覚めな、**気まずい事**に堪え切れないのだ。私は、私の家庭においても、絶えず冗談を言い、薄氷を踏む思いで冗談を言い、一部の読者、批評家の想像を裏切り、私の部屋の畳は新しく、机上は整頓せられ、夫婦はいたわり、尊敬し合い、夫は妻を打った事など無いのは無論、出て行け、出て行きます、などの乱暴な口争いした事さえ一度も無かったし、父も母も負けずに子供を可愛がり、子供たちも父母に陽気によくなつく。

しかし、これは外見。母が胸をあけると、涙の谷、父の寝汗も、いよいよひどく、夫婦は互いに相手の苦痛を知っているのだが、それに、さわらないように努めて、父が冗談を言えば、母も笑う。

しかし、その時、涙の谷、と母に言われて父は黙し、何か冗談を言って切りかえそうと思っても、とっさにうまい言葉が浮かばず、黙しつづけると、いよいよ気まずさが積り、さすがの「通人」の父も、とうとう、まじめな顔になってしま

って、
「誰か、人を雇いなさい。どうしたって、そうしなければ、いけない」

と、母の機嫌を損じないように、おっかなびっくり、ひとりごとのように呟く。

子供が三人。父は家事には全然、無能である。蒲団さえ自分で上げない。そうして、ただもう馬鹿げた冗談ばかり言っている。配給だの、登録だの、そんな事は何も知らない。全然、宿屋住いでもしているような形。来客。饗応。仕事部屋にお弁当を持って出かけて、それっきり一週間も御帰宅にならない事もある。仕事、仕事、といつも騒いでいるけれども、一日に二、三枚くらいしかお出来にならないようである。あとは、酒。飲みすぎると、げっそり痩せてしまって寝込む。そのうえ、あちこちに若い女の友達などもある様子だ。

子供、……七歳の長女も、ことしの春に生れた次女も、少し風邪をひき易いけれども、まずまあ人並。しかし、四歳の長男は、痩せこけていて、まだ立てない。言葉は、アアとかダアとか言うきりで一語も話せず、また人の言葉を聞きわける事も出来ない。這って歩いていて、ウンコもオシッコも教えない。それでいて、ごはんは実にたくさん食べる。けれども、いつも痩せて小さく、髪の毛も薄く、少しも成長しない。

父も母も、この長男について、深く話し合うことを避ける。白痴、唾、……それを一言でも口に出して言って、二人で肯定し合うのは、あまりに悲惨だからである。母は時々、この子を固く抱きしめる。父はしばしば発作的に、この子を抱いて川に飛び込み死んでしまいたく思う。

「唾の次男を斬殺す。x日正午すぎx区x町x番地x商、何某（五三）さんは自宅六畳間で次男何某（一八）君の頭を薪割で一撃して殺害、自分はハサミで喉を突いたが死に切れず附近の医院に収容したが危篤、同家では最近二女某（二二）さん

に養子を迎えたが、次男が唾の上に少し頭が悪いので娘可愛さから思い余ったもの」

こんな新聞の記事もまた、私にヤケ酒を飲ませるのである。

ああ、ただ単に、発育がおくれているというだけの事であってくれたら！ この長男が、いまに急に成長し、父母の心配を憤り嘲笑するようになってくれたら！ 夫婦は親戚にも友人にも誰にも告げず、ひそかに心でそれを念じながら、表面は何も気にしていないみたいに、長男をからかって笑っている。

母も精一ぱいの努力で生きているのだろうが、父もまた、一生懸命であった。もともと、あまりたくさん書ける小説家では無いのである。極端な小心者なのである。それが公衆の面前に引き出され、へどもどしながら書いているのである。書くのがつらくて、ヤケ酒に救いを求める。ヤケ酒というのは、自分の思っていることを主張できない、もどっかしさ、いまいましさに飲む酒の事である。いつでも、自分の思っていることをハッキリ主張できるひとは、ヤケ酒なんか飲まない。（女に酒飲みの少いのは、この理由からである）

私は議論をして、勝ったためしが無い。必ず負けるのである。相手の確信の強さ、自己肯定のすさまじさに圧倒せられるのである。そうして私は沈黙する。しかし、だんだん考えてみると、相手の身勝手に気がつき、ただこっぴどかきが悪いのではないのが確信せられて来るのだが、いちど言い負けたくせに、またしつこく戦闘開始するのも陰惨だし、それに私には言い争いは殴り合いと同じくらいにいつまでも不快な憎しみとして残るので、怒りにふるえながらも笑い、沈黙し、それから、いろいろさまざま考え、ついヤケ酒という事になるのである。

はっきり言おう。くどくどと、あちこち持ってまわった書き方をしたが、実はこの小説、夫婦喧嘩の小説なのである。

「涙の谷」

それが導火線であった。この夫婦は既に述べたとおり、手荒なことはもちろん、口汚く罵り合った事さえないすこぶるおとなしい一組ではあるが、しかし、それだけまた一触即発の危険におののいているところもあった。両方が無言で、相手の悪さの証拠固めをしているような危険、一枚の札をちらと見ては伏せ、また一枚ちらと見ては伏せ、いつか、出し抜けるに、さあ出来ましたと札をそろえて眼前にひろげられるような危険、それが夫婦を互いに遠慮深くさせていたと言えないうところが無いでも無かった。妻のほうはとにかく、夫のほうは、たたけばたたくほど、いくらでもホコリの出そうな男なのである。

「涙の谷」

そう言われて、夫は、ひがんだ。しかし、言い争いは好まない。沈黙した。お前はおれに、いくぶんあてつける気持で、そう言ったのだろうが、しかし、泣いているのはお前だけでない。おれだって、お前に負けず、子供の事は考えている。自分の家庭は大事だと思っている。子供が夜中に、へんな咳一つしても、きっと眼がさめて、たまらない気持になる。もう少し、ましな家に引越して、お前や子供たちをよろこばせてあげたくてならぬが、しかし、おれには、どうしてもそこまで手が廻らないのだ。これでもう、精一ぱいなのだ。おれだって、凶暴な魔物ではない。妻子を見殺しにして平然、というような「度胸」を持ってはいないの

だ。配給や登録の事だって、知らないのではない、知るひまが無いのだ。……
父は、そう心の中で呟き、しかし、それを言い出す自信も無く、また、言い出し
て母から何か切りかえされたら、ぐうの音も出ないような気もして、

「誰か、ひとを雇いなさい」

と、ひとりごとみたいに、わずかに主張してみた次第なのだ。

母も、いったい、無口なほうである。しかし、言うことに、いつも、つめたい
自信を持っていた。(この母に限らず、どこの女も、たいていそんなものである
が)

「でも、なかなか、来てくれるひともありませんから」

「捜せば、きっと見つかりますよ。来てくれるひとが無いんじゃないかな、いてく
れるひとが無いんじゃないかな？」

「私が、ひとを使うのが下手だとおっしゃるのですか？」

「そんな、……」

父はまた黙した。じつは、そう思っていたのだ。しかし、黙した。

ああ、誰かひとり、雇ってくれたらいい。母が末の子を背負って、用足しに外
に出かけると、父はあとの二人の子の世話を見なければならぬ。そうして、来客
が毎日、きまって十人くらいずつある。

「仕事部屋のほうへ、出かけたんだけど」

「これからですか？」

「そう。どうしても、今夜のうちに書き上げなければならない仕事があるんだ」

それは、嘘でなかった。しかし、家の中の憂鬱から、のがれたい気もあったの
である。

「今夜は、私、妹のところへ行って来たいと思っているのですけど」

それも、私は知っていた。妹は重態なのだ。しかし、女房が見舞いに行けば、
私は子供のお守りをしていなければならぬ。

「だから、ひとを雇って、……」

言いかけて、私は、よし。女房の身内のひとの事に少しでも、ふれると、ひ
どく二人の気持がややこしくなる。

生きるという事は、たいへんな事だ。あちこちから鎖がからまっていて、少し
でも動く、血が噴き出す。

私は黙って立って、六畳間の机の引出しから稿料のはいつている封筒を取り出
し、袂につっ込んで、それから原稿用紙と辞典を黒い風呂敷に包み、物体でない
みたいに、ふわりと外に出る。

もう、仕事どころではない。自殺の事ばかり考えている。そうして、酒を飲む
場所へまっすぐに行く。

「いらっしやい」

「飲もう。きょうはまた、ばかに綺麗な縞を、……」

「わるくないでしょう？ あなたの好く縞だと思っていたの」

「きょうは、夫婦喧嘩でね、陰にこもってやりきれねえんだ。飲もう。今夜は泊
るぜ。だんぜん泊る」

子供より親が大事、と思いたい。子供よりも、その親のほうが弱いのだ。

桜桃が出た。

私の中では、子供たちに、ぜいたくなものを食べさせない。子供たちは、桜桃など、見た事も無いかもしれない。食べさせたら、よろこぶだろう。父が持って帰ったら、よろこぶだろう。蔓を糸でつないで、首にかけると、桜桃は、珊瑚の首飾りのように見えるだろう。

しかし、父は、大皿に盛られた桜桃を、極めてまずそうに食べては種を吐き、食べては種を吐き、食べては種を吐き、そうして心の中で虚勢みたいに呟く言葉は、子供よりも親が大事。