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Dream Time and Which Dreamed It: a Translation and Critical Exploration of Kanai Mieko's Yume no Jikan

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DREAM TIME and WHICH DREAMED IT: A TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL
EXPLORATION OF KANAI MIEKO'S *YUME NO JIKAN*

A Thesis Presented

by

JARROD R. MINTO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
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ABSTRACT

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EXPLORATION OF KANAI MIEKO'S *YUME NO JIKAN*

SEPTEMBER 2012

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The text that I have translated below, and for which the paper that precedes it is a critical introduction, is Kanai Mieko's short novel, *Yume no jikan*. I have translated the title quite literally as *Dream Time*. The following critique will focus primarily on *Yume no jikan*, read with special attention paid to its intertextual relationship with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and how I see those texts as informing Kanai's treatment of the perceiving subject not only in *Yume no jikan*, but also in much of her fiction through the 1970s. In the end, I hope to articulate those elements of this piece that make it utterly fascinating to me as a reader, namely how I see Kanai constructing a Carrollian unsolvable riddle that thoroughly dismantles the authority of the perceiving subject, and by extension, challenges the authority of the narrative itself. I will demonstrate how this deconstruction is achieved through direct questioning of self-identity, omnipresent intertextuality, and persistent use of temporal ambiguity. In *Yume no jikan*, descriptions of the protagonist's dreams are interwoven into its basic framework, imbuing the narrative with an atmosphere resembling the liminal space/time between sleep and waking. In this narrative universe, dreams operate as unreliable memory, and the dreaming self as unreliable narrator.

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PART ONE:
WHICH DREAMED IT?

CHAPTER I.

AN INTRODUCTION TO *YUME NO JIKAN* AND ITS AUTHOR

Is This the Novelist, Kanai Mieko?

Kanai Mieko (1947-) is one of Japan's most versatile and prolific living writers. Since her successful first strike into the publishing world with an award-winning series of poems in 1967, she has engaged in non-stop production in a multitude of genres. She is not only active in the penning of poetry, short stories, and novels, she has published a vast body of criticism on literature and film, and virtually any other cultural product or process. By the age of 45, a three-volume anthology (*Kanai Mieko zentanpenshû*, 1992) of her short stories had already been published, signaling early on her significance and the reverence for her in the contemporary Japanese literary world.

Kanai was born in Takasaki in Gunma Prefecture in 1947, and grew up inheriting a deep affection for cinema, especially Western cinema, from her mother. She has said that her oldest memories are of watching John Ford's western films on the silver screen. At Takasaki Girls' High School, she developed an interest in French New Wave Cinema, contemporary art, and music. Having initially been interested in a career in visual art (the current profession of her sister and sometimes collaborator, Kanai Kumiko), Kanai was inspired to become a writer after reading Ishikawa Jun's novel, *Fugen* (The Bodhisattva, 1936).¹

After graduating from high school, Kanai decided against attending university, trying her hand at poetry instead. She was first published in the poetry journal, *Gendaishi*

¹ Enamoto, Masaki, *Ôe kara Banana made : gendai bungaku kenkyû annai* (Tôkyô: Nichigai Asoshiêtsu, 1997), 89.

techô, in May, 1967, with her poem, “Obsessing About What I Would Say to Humpty Dumpty.”² She published more poems the following month and eventually won that journal’s annual poetry prize. In August, 1967, Kanai’s first work of fiction, *Ai no seikatsu* (Life of love) was published in the literary journal, *Tenbô*, and received a nomination for the Dazai Osamu Prize. The following year she moved to Tokyo to commit to a life of writing, and began associating with artists and writers, such as Amazawa Taijiro (b.1936) and others affiliated with the poetry journal, *Kyoku*, as well as the film critic and French literature scholar, Hasumi Shigehiko (b.1936).

Kanai’s output over the course of the 1970s consisted heavily of short stories and novella-length fiction, and during this time she produced some of her most well-known stories, including, “Usagi” (Rabbits, 1973); “Puratonteki ren’ai” (Platonic Love, 1979), which won her the Izumi Kyôka Prize; and her first full-length novel (her last one until the mid-eighties), *Kishibe no nai umi* (Sea without a shore, 1974).

In the 1980s, Kanai’s fiction transitioned into mostly long novels of manners, which have been compared to Tanizaki Jun’ichiro and Jane Austen. These include what is known as the “Mejiro Quartet” (*Bunshô kyôshitsu*, 1985; *Tamaya*, 1987; *Koharu biyori*, 1988; and *Dokeshi no koi*, 1990), which are stand-alone novels, connected by character and place (Mejiro, a neighborhood of Tokyo). The nineties saw the release of Kanai’s epic novel, *Ren’ai taiheiki* (Chronicle of love, 1995), also written in a more accessible, popular style, categorized by Japanese critics as *fûzoku shôsetsu*, sometimes translated as “novel of manners.” For those same critics, said category usually carries with it a

² The original title is “*Humpty ni katarikakeru kotoba ni tsuite no omoimegurashi*.” Mary Knighton has translated this poem and translated the title as, “Turning Over in My Mind the Words to Say to Humpty Dumpty,” in Knighton, 2002.

connotation of inferiority.³ Kanai did continue her experimentation with the art-novel, however, with dense, stream-of-consciousness efforts such as *Yawarakai tsuchi o funde*, (Steeping on soft soil, 1997). Her focus since the turn of the century has shifted greatly toward non-fiction, having published (as of this writing) eleven books of essays and criticism since 2000, along with four novels in the same period. Kanai stopped writing poetry in the early 1980s, claiming in a 1994 interview with philosopher and critic Karatani Kôjin (in which Karatani was actually the subject), “I just felt there was something incredibly ridiculous about expressing things through metaphor.”⁴ She followed this glib explanation by clarifying that this judgement only applied to a preference in her own creative process, not universally to all use of metaphor.

Placing Kanai’s writing into any particular genre or category of literature is not an easy task, although a few scholars have suggested as much. While admitting that, “Kanai’s work defies easy categorization,” Sharalyn Orbaugh proposes that some might be considered science fiction or fantasy, noting, “her characters constantly contravene both the normal laws of physics and the normal laws of narrative realism.”⁵ Susan Napier includes a critique of Kanai’s story, “Rabbits,” in her discussion of women in modern Japanese fantasy, claiming that the story’s allusion to Lewis Carroll, “brings the reader into the world of international fantasy.”⁶ In his book, *Ellipse of Uncertainty: An*

³ Sakaki (2004) notes that Kanai herself does not respect this critical distinction, chooses the styles of each of her works quite deliberately, and claims that she “rank[s] Jane Austen higher than Fyodor Dostoevsky.” (Atsuko Sakaki, “Materializing Narratology: Kanai Mieko’s Corporeal Narrative,” *PAJLS: Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies* *PAJLS*: 5 (2004): 212-213.)

⁴ Mieko Kanai and Karatani Kôjin. Interview. “‘Karatani teki’ naru mono,” *Bungakukai*. Feb. 1995: 198.

⁵ Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Arguing With the Real: Kanai Mieko,” in *Oe and Beyond*, ed. Snyder and Gabriel (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 246.

⁶ Susan Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 88.

Introduction to Postmodern Fantasy (1989), Lance Olsen laid out a set of descriptors, defining postmodern fantasy as “worlds of phobia, neurosis, entrapment, and oppression, whose topography. . . is filled with labyrinths of corridors, doors and stairs that lead to nothing. . . innumerable signs that line the road and lead to nothing.”⁷ Although I would hesitate to attempt to lump Kanai’s vast body of fiction together to make a generic assessment, the subject of this paper specifically, one of the author’s earliest works of fiction, seems to qualify as the very quintessence of the above definition.

The text that I have translated below, and for which this paper is a critical introduction, is Kanai’s, *Yume no jikan*. I have translated the title quite literally as *Dream Time*. The following critique will focus primarily on *Yume no jikan*, read with special attention paid to its intertextual relationship with Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and how I see those texts as informing Kanai’s treatment of the perceiving subject not only in *Yume*, but also in much of her fiction through the 1970s. In the end, I hope to articulate those elements of this piece that make it utterly fascinating to me as a reader, namely how I see Kanai constructing in *Yume no jikan*, a Carrollian unsolvable riddle that thoroughly dismantles the authority of the perceiving subject, and by extension, challenges the authority of the narrative itself. I will demonstrate how this deconstruction is achieved through direct questioning of self-identity, omnipresent intertextuality, and persistent use of temporal ambiguity.

⁷ As quoted in Susan Bouterey, "Journeys into the Underworld: Dream, Illusion and Fantasy in Shōno Yoriko's Fiction," *Japanese Studies* 21.2 (2001): 166.

***Yume no jikan*: a riddle without an answer**

Yume no jikan was first published in the *Shinchō* literary journal in July, 1970, and was nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. Her story only received one vote from the nine judges that year, though, and that vote happened to come from Ishikawa Jun, the author of Kanai's initial inspiration. In fact, he was the only member of the selection committee to even mention Kanai's story in the published commentary, saying merely that it "stands apart from the conventional novel."⁸

Yume is a story about a woman named Ai, who embarks on a road trip for reasons never revealed to the reader. After her car breaks down in an abandoned rock quarry, she rides a bus into a town called Kagami, which means "mirror," checks into a hotel called the Kagami Palace, and meets a couple of strange men who seem to know more about her than they should. Despite making these new acquaintances, she spends most of her time in her room(s) staring out the window. Several descriptions of the protagonist's dreams are interwoven into this basic framework, imbuing the narrative with an atmosphere resembling the liminal space/time between sleep and waking. In this narrative universe, dreams operate as unreliable memory, and the dreaming self as unreliable narrator. All of Ai's decisions (and indecisions) are driven by a yearning to find (perhaps be reunited with) a person simply called, *ano hito* ("that person" or "him"), who may be someone from her past, or from her dreams, or perhaps both.

The narrative point of view fluctuates frequently and fluidly between third and first person perspectives, even within dream sequences, and even within paragraphs. This

⁸ Jun Ishikawa, "Watashi no Shiten," *Bungei Shunjū* 48.9 (1970): 270.

is but the most fundamental technique Kanai employs in order to undermine the reader's faith in the truth of what is seen and conveyed. Kanai frequently and openly questions Ai's legitimacy as a storyteller, perhaps even attempting to convince readers in the end that her authorial power has indeed been usurped by another. She forces the reader to inquire: Who is *ano hito*? Who is *moto sakka* ("the original author")? Are they one and the same, or is "the original author" some alternate version of Ai? Kanai's narratives thrive on this kind of ambiguity.

While Carroll's Alice is confronted by a series of unsolvable riddle posed by strange counterparts, Ai is faced with the unsolvable riddle of the Self, illustrated by a narrative that is itself of the same puzzling nature. Kanai places her narrator in an impossible space between sense and nonsense, logic and illogic, giving the reader the impression that if she looks hard enough, she will find the clues that lead to what is "really happening." But her intention is not to propose a puzzle to solve, in which the discovery of the narrator's true identity is the key that unlocks the story's meaning. She simply insists that identity itself is always suspect, and that narrative voice is no exception to the rule. Of the many devices Kanai assembles to delegitimize the authority of the storyteller, this paper only explores a few. The exploration will begin with the most transparent method of asserting the resulting uncertainty—direct questioning of the self.

CHAPTER II.

WHO AND WHAT AM I?

From the outset of her writing career, Kanai positioned herself as conducting a dialogue with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, titling her first published poem, "Obsessing About What I Would Say to Humpty Dumpty," and following that by epigraphing her first published work of fiction with one of Humpty Dumpty's verses. A few years later, she again used an epigraph from Carroll for her story, "Usagi," and in that story, even parodied the opening scene of *Wonderland*, having her frame narrator follow a white rabbit into its hole.

Yume no jikan does not allude to the Alice books as overtly as the above examples, but owes a significant debt to them, thematically and narratologically. Chronologically centered between her debut and the publication of "Usagi," it reveals an ongoing and crucial intertextual dialogue with Carroll's tales that constitutes a major feature of her early output. The central problem of *Yume no jikan* is very similar to Alice stories: a young female on a quest to recover what she believes is her true self, faced with increasing evidence that no such thing exists. Near the start of *Wonderland*, unaware that she is dreaming, Alice faces an undeniable identity crisis, and addresses the problem of knowing oneself head-on:

'Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if not the same, the next question is, "Who in the world am I?" Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!' And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them.⁹

⁹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, ed. Donald J. Gray (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 15-16.

With this monologue, delivered as Alice plummets down the rabbit hole with no bottom in sight, Carroll establishes the primary puzzle that the reader should keep in mind as his protagonist encounters a plethora of less significant puzzles, riddles, and other nonsensical thought experiments throughout her journey. There is no riddle to this particular rhetorical device, though, of posing fundamental existential questions. The effect is simple—if the character asks the question, the reader asks it in turn. Kanai also employs this device at a moment when Ai has just come out from a dream.

Lying still, she began to think about who she was and why she was here like this. Of course, starting into such thoughts as ‘who am I?’ and ‘what am I doing here?’ was no different than taking that first step into a labyrinth. ‘I am I,’ Ai answered tautologically, then, ‘But, why am I here?’ she said in a low voice, and repeated those words as if she were speaking with someone.¹⁰

The basic questions Ai asks are the same as Alice, but the impetus for the interrogation differs, as is the way the questions are dealt with. Whereas Alice has just descended into a dream, Ai has just woken up. She has already been tormented by the unsolvable labyrinth of her dreams, and knows that such questions likewise lead nowhere. She settles on a simple answer—“I am I”—only to avoid another futile journey. Her answer is unconvincing for the reader, however, who is led down countless murky pathways of suggestion about who the author is, if the story has already been told, if the author of that story was Ai, or someone else, and so on. A reader may even conclude from all this uncertainty that the plot has been reduced to the cliché “It was all a dream” scenario, just as in Alice’s adventures.

Ai’s questioning of her own identity carries an important additional implication

¹⁰ Mieko Kanai, *Kanai Mieko zentanpen*, (Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1992), 273.

beyond Alice's. Because the narrator of *Yume* is identified as a writer herself, this line of questioning naturally extends to a more focused interrogation, which is, "Who is writing? Whose voice is the reader hearing? Through whose eyes are we seeing? And even then, how much of what we see should we believe?" In this way, Kanai's narrative puts into practice a discourse concerning authorial authenticity that contemporary theorists at the time, Roland Barthes and Gilles Deleuze among them, were engaged in.

In his essay, "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes, examining a passage out of Balzac, proposes that the perspective from which the ideas in a literary text are expressed cannot be precisely determined. He is skeptical about whether a reader can ever distinguish any of the ideas in the text as those of the author, the narrator, or any of the characters, all of these, or none of these. He writes:

It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes.¹¹

Kanai's conception of the author seems to fall in line with Barthes's assertion about this composite voice. In *Yume*, these several indiscernible voices are even named, as Ai, "the original author," and *ano hito*. While Ai's individuality is the closest of these to being concrete, it is nonetheless repeatedly compromised and conflated with the others. *Ano hito* often appears in Ai's dreams and memories as distinct from her, but in other moments, they are indistinguishable. In one dreamy passage, their bodies seem to bond and blend in some kind of cosmic swirl of color and light. Later, the painter claiming to

¹¹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Participation*, (2006): 42.

be a friend of *ano hito* recounts *ano hito*'s experience in coming to Kagami City, which eerily mirrors Ai's: "That's when he came here... looking for someone. According to what he told me, he made it about halfway by car, but it broke down in a rock quarry, and he walked the rest of the way. He looked completely like a vagrant, worn out and filthy. Impossible to tell he was some successful writer! Face, hands, and feet covered with motor oil and mud, soaked from the rain."¹² The experiences of Ai and *ano hito* are impossibly similar. In light of Ai's vague sense that all of this has happened before, there is a strong suggestion that these are not two separate individuals, or even two different experiences. As Barthes describes it, Proust casts his narrator as merely a potential author, "by making the narrator not the person who has seen or felt, nor even the person who writes, but the person who will write."¹³ Kanai can be read as complicating this proposition even further by introducing additional potential authors, posing an initial implied author against a kind of doppelgänger in a contest of narrative will. In doing so, she creates a stunning sense of anxiety about whether the narrative voice can trust itself, let alone be trusted by the reader.

Deleuze offers a similar theory of indeterminacy, and applies it not only to narrative voice, but literature itself and the act of writing, suggesting that the act paradoxically results in the virtual destruction of the writer. "Literature," he writes, "rather moves in the direction of the ill-formed of the incomplete. . . Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midsts of being formed."¹⁴ This view of

¹² Kanai, 1992, 270.

¹³ Barthes, 2006: 43.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "Literature and Life," *Critical Inquiry*. 23.2 (1997): 225.

writing is reflected in fine definition in Kanai's treatment of the problem of the storyteller's identity as unsolvable. Ai's journey has a distinct sense of perpetual process which projects onto the structure of the narrative, as though if she could only figure out what is going on, find who she is looking for, or navigate the maze in her dreams, her story might take shape, might come to completion. But the fact of the matter is that things always happen the same way, every time. Or at least the differences are so marginal as to produce no apparent progress. Takehiko Noguchi addresses this sense in an analysis appended to *Yume no jikan*, writing, "The time that Ai follows does not proceed directly to a set future, but repeatedly travels back to a starting point in an eternal Samsara. The difference between the former life and the next is unclear; it is only a dislocation of time, with a complicated, uncanny connectivity."¹⁵ Ai is haunted by a two-fold *deja vu*. First, she feels as though this has all happened before. Second, on a metafictional level, she has the sense that "the original author" has already written the story she is supposedly living in the present.

Kanai leaves virtually no aspect of identity unquestioned. Gender, too, becomes suspect in consideration of Ai's relationship with "the original author." Because Ai seems to be merely repeating steps that "the original author" once took (checking into the same hotel room in the same city in search of a mysterious other), and because of the dreamlike randomness of the narrative structure, the reader might deduce that Ai *is* "the original author," mysteriously displaced from her body, experiencing and seeing as two different characters simultaneously. Each character being clearly gendered as female (Ai) and male (the original author), the protagonist can be perceived as possessing each. The blending

¹⁵ Takehiko Noguchi, "Kaishaku," in Mieko Kanai, *Yume no jikan* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1970), 216-217.

of the two characters (or the two manifestations of a single character) through the mechanism of disrupting perspective, is clearest in the final image of the story.

In the narrative's jarring final moment, Ai finds herself looking into the strangest of mirrors. Looking out of the window of her second story room, she sees a beggar woman caught in the pouring rain. Drawn to her by a vague sympathy, she bounds out of her apartment and into the street. And then, "Pelted by rain, Ai walked toward the beggar lady; turning back, she looked up into her second floor window to see the man standing there, and thought vacantly, 'I'm looking at my own figure.' And then, gazing at myself, I thought, 'What would *he* do?'"¹⁶ In this tableaux, the female and male figures, though physically separate, apparently share the same identity. The gender ambiguity in this scene, however, is a consequence of an even more fundamental question of identity.

Piling upon the question of the abstract self, is the similarly transparent interrogation of the concrete self. In other words, instead of 'Who am I?' one asks, "What am I?" In this disorienting final image, Ai is paralyzed by indecision, by a sense of futility, and perhaps most significantly, by the uncertainty of the location of her own body in relation to her perceiving self.

Metamorphosis and physical dislocation function as additional dimensions of the corruptibility of identity in *Yume*. This is another theme that it shares with Carroll's tales. Recall the well-known scene in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in which Alice is attempting to figure out how to pass through the very small door leading to the garden. Having consumed a mystery potion, she begins to shrink. "What a curious

¹⁶ Kanai, 1992, 306.

feeling!’ said Alice. ‘I must be shutting up like a telescope!’” She becomes so small that she even fears her total extinction, imagining herself “going out altogether, like a candle.”¹⁷ After subsequently eating some cake in order to restore her size, she says, “‘Now I’m opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye feet!’ (for now when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off).”¹⁸ The distance between Alice’s eyes and her feet begin to give her the feeling of being entirely separated from at least a portion of her physical body. Like Alice’s terrifying experiences of shrinking, expanding, and “shutting up like a telescope,” Ai also experiences the sensation of inexplicable corporeal growth. In a scene of transfiguration and dislocation from the body, Ai describes a kind of recurring waking dream she has to “the original author,” who she has now become intimate with:

Suddenly, I get the feeling that I am much bigger. I have to stay absolutely still. If I move even a little, just barely turn my head or curl my pinky, it goes away. In the blink of an eye, I return to my normal size. And sometimes, only my legs get bigger, or only my head gets bigger. It’s the weirdest sensation. . . it seems like my body is simply filling a void in space, but I also have the rather odd feeling that I am leaving my body, that it’s a far away object, and yet it is unmistakably my own body.¹⁹

For both Ai and Alice, challenges to the definitive nature of the physical self cut deeper than the metaphysical question. The suggestion that the borders of the body are not fixed, but flexible, perhaps even permeable, causes dreadful anxiety. This image of Ai looking down on her own body as a “far away object,” and the image in the final scene described previously, are variations on pervasive theme: the subject in the mirror as object.

¹⁷ Carroll, 1971, 12.

¹⁸ Ibid, 14.

¹⁹ Kanai, 1992, 286-87.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF BODY, IN THE LOOKING-GLASS

In his classic essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin observes that, “The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror.”²⁰ Benjamin further describes the anxiety of the fragmented self in the context of the actor in front of a movie camera. The film actor, Benjamin argues, is often denied the opportunity to identify with the character he is portraying in the same way a stage actor can because the final performance is an amalgamation of many performances cut up and put back together. Taking the recorded and edited performance as an analogy for the self as constructed from memory, it becomes clear that those experiences which shape one's identity, and yet are forgotten, are like those scenes printed on discarded strips of film left on the cutting room floor.

The saturation of the text with the mirror motif is the most obvious use of symbolism to express the process of self-identification in *Yume*. In broad strokes of heavy-handed metonymy, Ai journeys to a place called “Mirror City,” stays at a place called the “Mirror Palace Hotel,” and speaks of crossing “Mirror River.” Further, the only physical description of the protagonist in the entire text is actually one of her mirror image. This scene offers the reader a distinct sense of the “estrangement” the Benjamin describes. In the mirror, Ai sees something like a fragment of a conceptual whole, like

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 230. In “Fiction,” Kanai also makes reference to Pirandello his play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. A group of elderly patients convalescing at a hot springs assume the main character is a novelist, prompting him to think, “Were they, like the characters in Pirandello, in search of an author, he asked himself, while knowing that it was actually he himself who was in search of ‘an author.’”(Kanai, 2009: 70)

reading a page of a novel out of context. Getting out of bed after what seems like a very long time, Ai sits alone in the room of the character known as “the original author.” In an introspective moment, she sees this: “In the large mirror hanging on the wall sat a woman with her elbows propped on a table. She was wearing a pullover the color of milky coffee; her short-cropped hair outlined a pale, weary face that somehow gave the impression that her spirit had been removed from this place. Her eyes were bloodshot from sleeplessness and alcohol.”²¹ In this scene, the mirror functions as another site of separation from the body. The sudden use of the generic “a/the woman” (*onna*) to name the figure in the mirror rather than “she/her,” (*kanojo*) or even “Ai,” creates a psychological division between Ai and her reflected body. The suggestion that the mirror image also appears separated from her own spirit further stratifies the already disrupted relationship. To her eyes, this figure is not truly her own.

This disturbing function of the mirror is a frequently occurring trope in Kanai’s work. To offer one example, the narrator in Kanai’s short story, “Vague Departure,” (*Aimaina shuppatsu*, 1977) experiences just this type of dreadful estrangement gazing at himself in a familiar mirror:

Almost thirty years had passed since I first saw this mirror in the museum restaurant, but it still hangs in the same spot, seeming steadfastly to refuse to change; and it occurred to me that the face reflected in it was the face of a man who, with gloomy resignation, accepted the fact that it remained his own. Would I, after twenty or thirty years had passed, be able to see in the mirror the face of an old man who was satisfied with his life? And would I remember, then? About today? Would I remember this moment when I was thinking, Would I remember?²²

²¹ Kanai, 1992, 276.

²² Mieko Kanai, *The Word Book*, trans. Paul McCarthy, (Champaign, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press), 49.

The characterization of the mirror itself as unchanging stand in sharp contrast to the reflected identity, which is subject to transformation by time and the fallibility of the perceiving self. In this passage, the mirror is used not only to demonstrate the character's estrangement from his physical body, it emphasizes the important role that time and memory play in how we go about attempting to identify ourselves, which is precisely the crisis faced by Benjamin's actor.

CHAPTER IV.

TEMPORAL AMBIGUITY

The interplay of time, memory, and identity has been a major feature of Kanai's writing throughout her career. In her analysis of Kanai's novel, *Karui memai* (Vague vertigo, 1997), Atsuko Sakaki describes as recurring, "the concept of sudden disclosure of a perceivable element that until that point went unnoticed or less recognized within the whole present-ness, which consequently from a blow to the perceiving subject—so much so he or she is urged to re-claim his/her temporal location."²³ Sakaki made this observation about a story written twenty-seven years later, but we can see evidence of this phenomenon already being employed by Kanai in *Yume*. In one case, Ai is overwhelmed by pain and fatigue that causes her to have to pull her car over to the side of the road:

She suddenly began to feel pain in her eyes and the appearance of the sky began to change; the wind coming in the window imported moisture; above the hills ahead and to her right, a cluster of gray clouds began to move, and she was overcome by a heavy sense that it would rain. The road continued still further beyond, deep into a darkness where her headlights could not shine. Fatigue that had gathered in her, stretched across all the muscles in her body, and then concentrated itself in the fundus of her eyes; she desired to sleep rather than bear the pain. How had she kept her good mood until just moments ago?²⁴

In another instance, Ai's dreaming self flies into a very sudden panic about the situation she finds herself in, insisting on establishing temporality where it had been previously forgotten:

Then, although I had been completely consumed by our predicament, I suddenly fly into a panic, wondering what that predicament is, exactly—and then, as if

²³ Atsuko Sakaki, "Materializing Narratology: Kanai Mieko's Corporeal Narrative," *PAJLS: Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies PAJLS*: 5 (2004): 215.

²⁴ Kanai, 1992, 236.

remembering what it was, my panic intensifies, and I ask him, What day is it, today? He answers that it is the 17th. And I, yet again in a startled panic, say, I have a manuscript deadline on the 18th! What do I do? I haven't written a single page. Why am I in this place? I should have been writing at my desk last night and today. I should be writing. How did I end up here with you being chased by someone, needing to escape?—I say all this, wondering whether this is really my present situation.²⁵

Disruption of temporality is a key obstacle to Ai's ability to solve her situation, not just in the above moments, but throughout the novel. These moments of panic and pain result from a sudden presence of mind that surges up from a deep chasm of lost experiences. We sense that Ai will never be able to retrieve that present of which she was previously unaware so that she might piece together a past. Furthermore, if this is her normal mode of experience, it is no wonder that her past is so difficult to determine—that the possibility that she has already been where she has arrived, and done what she is doing, continues to haunt her. To a certain degree, the only elements of Ai's past that she remembers happen to be nearly identical to things that are also occurring in the present. The fallibility of her presence of mind works in lockstep with the fallibility of her memory. Therefore, as Sakaki writes, "there can be versions of recollection simultaneously seeming viable to the perceiving subject him/herself," which obliterates the typical expectation that, "the narrator, in the present, stands at a vantage point from which to command and make sense of what happened in the past."²⁶

Here we have come to a kind of perceiving that goes so far as to suggest simultaneous realities created by the uncertainty of memory. In Deleuze's analysis of

²⁵ Kanai, 1992, 240-41.

²⁶ Atsuko Sakaki, "With Traces: The Iterability of Memory and Narration in Kanai Mieko's *Yawarakai Tsuchi o Funde* (Stepping on the Soft Soil)," *PAJLS: Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies* PAJLS: 4 (2003): 296.

literary techniques of Lewis Carroll, he identifies a technique that creates a similar disruption of temporality. “Serialization,” Deleuze writes, occurs when, “...we are confronted with a synthesis of the heterogeneous; *the serial form is necessarily realized in the simultaneity of at least two series.*” (author’s italics)²⁷ One example of this “synthesis of the heterogeneous” in *Yume* is the repetition of the color of the sky that Ai seems to be constantly staring at, and its effect on the reader’s sense of time. The time of day almost always seems to be just when the sun is rising, or just as it is setting, but the different times possess the same sense; they are ascribed with the same ominous, diffuse orange glow, and with the same ambiguous sense of past and future—something beginning and something ending. At the same time, presumably distinct differences in times of day and the light they emit seem to lose all distinction of feeling in one description of how Ai often finds herself at the onset of a dream: “on the bed in some room in a house obscured by the thickness of night, or, in the dim light close to the hour of daybreak, or, in the sun-blazing afternoon...”²⁸ What follows, regardless, is the exact same scene; it doesn’t seem to matter at all what time of day it is.

The same diffuse orange light Ai sees in the sky also illuminates the hallways of the Kagami Palace Hotel that Ai must navigate when searching for the clock tower of the hotel. Having been invited there by a mysterious man she has yet to meet, Ai has to make two attempts to find the room, ending up the first time, back where she started. She makes a second venture following the exact same instructions, but with a different result. There being no reason for the result to have been different, neither is there a clear reason

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 36.

²⁸ Kanai, 1992, 235.

to believe there were actually two different attempts. Rather, Ai may be only remembering the same experience from two different, simultaneous perspectives.

Ai's recounting of her recurring dream is a further example of this serializing pattern. The fixed theme of the labyrinth is modified by displacement of details. "That labyrinth and that building, then me and that person in the car, and my invisible pursuers, always appear in the dreams. . . . The details change from time to time. . ." ²⁹ Even this explanation of how she has this recurring dream is later repeated, with only some details of possible outcomes added.

Ai's habit of gazing out the window of her room, an activity which occupies her almost exclusively once she reaches Kagami ("Mirror") City, also operates as a fixed, serialized theme. This theme actually develops from the outset of the story to its conclusion. The reader's initial visual image of Ai is of her gazing at the sky through a window, and in our last vision of her, she has come to a position of looking into a window, only to see what may be her own image, looking out in turn. In one instance, she looks out, pondering her connection to many imagined people:

Ai stood by the window, gazing at the city at night. She thought of all the kinds of people out there, and that most people had nothing to do with her. Like the hospital staff, the grocer, publisher, brewer, hotelier, her relatives, her cousins, let alone casual acquaintances (all these kinds of people that it was possible she might have to call on the phone sometime). What kind of connection did she have with the hospital, or the grocer selling booze on a night such as this? ³⁰

Ai's gaze directs her toward a feeling of alienation, which is understandable. She rarely leaves her room or interacts with any person, and spends most of her time asleep and

²⁹ Kanai, 1992, 238.

³⁰ Ibid., 292.

dreaming, or remembering dreams. In the next scene of window-gazing, we can identify similarities in both emotion and structure:

Rain fell outside the window. The curtains were left open, so the conditions outside were easily seen. At times the buildings, the shapes of trees, and the tiny raindrops ceaselessly falling to the ground in the dark became clearly visible in the headlights of passing cars. The whitish orange beams of the headlights would create images on the ceiling like moving foot-lights of dancing girls in the room lit by only a desk lamp. Ai's room was on the second floor. Across the asphalt street from the window facing south, there were a dentist, an offset printing warehouse, an auto mechanic, and Blossom House Cleaning.³¹

In this passage, like in the previous, Ai is creating a catalogue of the things she sees and imagines seeing, but this time, she focuses on the buildings rather than the people who inhabit them. The intermittent orange glow of headlights creates the same sense of disconnection. This is only the beginning of a very long list of all the structures, all the flora and fauna that she can recall ever seeing in the vicinity of her window, and it ends with the somber realization that, "Right now rain was falling on all these things."³² This parallel creates the effect of casting these two moments as possibly co-existing. There is no perceptible difference in the feeling with which the subject gazes; the only difference is in what she thinks about, and then, not even in the manner (cataloguing) in which she thinks.

This is precisely the kind of serializing technique that Deleuze describes Alain Robbe-Grillet adopting, which he describes as, "states of affairs and rigorous designations with small differences," and "having them revolve around themes which, although fixed, are nevertheless suited to almost imperceptible modification and

³¹ Kanai, 1992, 297.

³² Ibid., 298.

displacement in each series.”³³ Indeed, this repeated action of wandering the hotel halls is strikingly similar to the principal action in Robbe-Grillet’s novel, *Djinn* (1981), in which the protagonist follows a set of complicated instructions, administered by strangers, down a narrow alleyway, finding a slightly different result on each pass.

Likewise, *Yume no jikan* bears a remarkable resemblance to the 1961 *nouvelle vague* film, *Last Year at Marienbad*, directed by Alain Resnais, and written by Robbe-Grillet, who happens to be a writer who is frequently mentioned when critics compare Kanai’s work to that of others. Each work employs temporal ambiguity and forces its characters to navigate their confusing landscape with imperfect, dream-like knowledge. In each, one character insist on possessing intimate knowledge of another, of knowing them (or some version of them) from a past encounter, while the counterpart maintains no recollection of such a meeting. Each uses the corridors of a building (a hotel in *Yume*, a chateau in *Marienbad*) to suggest the difficult labyrinth of memory. Like the protagonist of *Djinn*, Ai often seems to be trapped in looped time, the repetition caused at least in some part by multiple and simultaneous iterations of her uncertain memories.

There is one eventual inkling of temporal and emotional progress for Ai in this window-gazing act, though. The last scene finds her again staring out at the window at night, again it is raining, but this time, she manages to discover something with which she can finally connect. She suddenly and deeply empathizes with an old beggar woman, swaying and singing in the pouring rain. For a moment, there is a glimpse of hope that she has found a connection to someone, which may have been all she was searching for

³³ Deleuze, 1990, 39.

the whole time, but the final, haunting image leaves the reader with a powerful feeling of separation.

CHAPTER V.

WHICH DREAMED IT? THE BORDERLESS TEXT

Kanai's insistence on indeterminate identity permeates the pages of *Yume no jikan*, but also extends well beyond its narrative boundaries. As I have implied previously through comparisons to the work of Lewis Carroll, intertextuality looms large in Kanai's work. Intertextuality plays a major role in forcing the reader to question not only the integrity of a narrator's or character's identity, but the integrity of the boundaries of the text as well. Much of Kanai's work seems to argue for the idea of a borderless text, in which all of the author's oeuvre and influences (perhaps even all literature) are but fragments of the same ongoing project.

The close correlation between the respective adventures of Ai and Alice is only a single dimension of the stratified intertextual play through which Kanai is operating. As I alluded to above, Kanai had already begun an intertextual history with Humpty Dumpty prior to writing *Yume no jikan*. Her very first published poem was titled, "Obsessing About What I Would Say to Humpty Dumpty," and for the epigraph of her first published short story, *Ai no seikatsu*, she chose the final three couplets of Humpty Dumpty's song from *Through the Looking-Glass*. The selected lines read as follows:

I took a corkscrew from the shelf:
I went to wake them up myself.
And when I found the door was locked,
I pulled and pushed and kicked and knocked
And when I found the door was shut,
I tried to turn the handle, but——³⁴

³⁴ Carroll, 1971, 168.

The dash that abruptly concludes the verse suggests an unfinished thought, and gives the impression that what follows it might as well be a continuation of that thought. Reading the epigraph in this manner, the novel could be interpreted as interacting with Carroll's text in a number of ways. The proposition might be that Kanai's story reveals what was behind the door; it could simply pick up where the verse leaves off. Either way, this is precisely the kind of barrier-stripping that Kanai has deliberately invited the reader to engage in while reading her own work.

A clear example of such insistence on the permeability of the membrane of the text, is Kanai's novel *Yawarakai tsuchi o funde*, (*Stepping on Soft Soil*, 1997), which begins and ends with the same title phrase, and ends with a comma (which is part of the title). The simple stroke of unconventional punctuation subverts the notion the the novel has a proper beginning and end, as well as the notion that the text is complete. Either the novel circles back around on itself, like the "eternal Samsara" that [NAME] described, or it lingers in wait, inviting its continuation by any storyteller that might take it up.

When Kanai deemphasizes the identity of the narrator by offering virtually no physical description of her, she is also working against creating definitive borders or permanence for her narratives. In the only moment when the reader does catch a glimpse of Ai, she is looking in the mirror, stricken with the feeling that the woman in it is not even herself. She is given a name, but it is deliberately very simple, and ambiguous. Such obfuscations allow us a more flexible, polymorphic vision of the character which we are invited to project onto additional narratives—not only seeing her as a possible reanimation of *Alice*, but perhaps as the narrator of other Kanai stories.

In addition to the allusion and direct interaction with texts of her own and others, or creating a virtually interchangeable narrator, Kanai also engages in intertextuality through recurring motifs. In the introduction to his recent (2011) book on Kanai, Yoshikawa Yasuhisa identifies one of her most prominent and pervasive thematic links as what he calls *fuzai*, or “absence”. When *Yume no jikan* was published in book form, it was accompanied by two additional stories of similar length, *Kimyôna hanayome* (The strange bride) and *Moeru yubi* (The burned finger), each with a protagonist named Ai, who is/are also in search of a mysterious, absent person. The *fuzai* theme injects intertextuality that is directly related to the problem of identity. Yoshikawa argues that Kanai’s work almost always includes a protagonist in search of this mysterious, nameless other. In *Yume no jikan*, as well as in some other stories, the character is called *ano hito*; it is often referred to as *anata* (“you”), or assigned an initial, like “F” in *Ai no seikatsu*. As in *Yume*, these figures are never distinctly revealed. Instead, they will appear faceless (as in Ai’s dreams in *Yume*), their face may be concealed (by bandages in *Moeru yubi*), or their identity is otherwise concealed.

The following excerpts should help demonstrate how these figures of absence are always almost, but never truly found, and how their identities are a constant subject of inquiry.

From *Yume no jikan*: I can never say for certain who it is because I can never see his face. . . in the dream I am ceaselessly crying, my whole face is covered in tears. . . He is so familiar he brings me joy, but he’s someone I have never seen before. Who could he be? I wonder... Who are you? My father? Brother? Are you even “you?” Someone I don’t know ? There are times when your face has appeared, but it’s always dark, as though in a cave, melting into the surrounding night.

From *Kimyôna hanayome*: The next time Ai opened her eyes (probably less than thirty minutes had passed), she saw a man's figure standing next to the bed. She looked up at the man, wondering whether she were still dreaming, and questioned in a meager voice, "Who... who is it? Is it 'you'?"

From *Moeru yubi*: This man with the burned finger, this face that looked at once like an old man and a child, or perhaps not like a man at all, this unfamiliar face—who could it be?³⁵

As we can clearly see from these examples, it is not only her own identity that confounds our protagonist(s). Further complicating the uncertainty surrounding the absent other is the appearance of a character that may or may not function as a kind of red herring, what Yoshikawa refers to as, "intermediary between the subject and the absent object."³⁶ Before Ai meets "the original author," for example, she and the reader are led to believe that he and *ano hito* are one and the same. She learns about him through an intermediary, the painter. The narrative proceeds, however, to join Ai and "the original author" anticlimactically, without any sense that a mystery has been solved. Ai and "the original author" eventually end up searching for *ano hito* together, and the character that was once seen as the absent object, becomes yet another intermediary.

Kanai's expression of the borderless text does not stop at even her very open approach to intertextuality. In her story, "The Voice" (*Koe*, 1978), for example she takes deconstructive steps to create a truly borderless text, wherein the author herself can jump onto the page, and right back off of it. Here she outrightly erases the assumed difference between the first person narrator and the flesh and blood writer. She makes many autobiographical references, such as attending an exhibition of her sister's art work, and

³⁵ The passages from *Kimyôna hanayome* and *Moeru yubi* are my own translations of excerpts chosen by and reprinted in Yoshikawa, 2011, 15-16. The former passage is from my translation of Kanai, 1992, 274.

³⁶ Yoshikawa, 2011, 19.

then solidifies the suggestion of autobiography by using her own name in the story. And yet despite these seemingly indubitable details, because identity of any kind is suspect for Kanai, she still manages to cast doubt upon whether the “I” telling the story as if she were Kanai, really is Kanai.

The titular voice of the story, in an unsolicited, enigmatic phone call, raises the question: “It would ask repeatedly whether the person now on the phone ‘was really the author Miss Kanai, or not.’—this in an urgent tone.”³⁷ Just like Ai and many of Kanai’s first-person narrators of indiscernible identity, she takes unnecessary heed of this anonymous threat to her authority. As the voice persistently badgers her, she is consumed by the absurdity of the challenge and acquiesces to the assertions of the interrogator. She is suddenly burdened by a dilemma, saying, “I found it quite impossible to say, ‘I am the novelist Kanai Mieko;’ but I felt the voice was trying to get me to say precisely those words.”³⁸

The author’s impotence in the act of identifying herself echoes Deleuze, when he says, “literature begins when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say ‘I.’”³⁹ Kanai seems to surrender to this premise, converting this loss of power into a meticulous mode of operation. She extends this doubt of her own authorship to a specific instance of it that was brought to her attention by someone else. She inlays a poem that ends with the lines:

It’s through our gazes
rather than our bodies

³⁷ Kanai, 2009, 80.

³⁸ Ibid., 81.

³⁹ Deleuze, 1997, 227.

That we come together⁴⁰

These are words that the (possible) Kanai in “The Voice” is told were her own, that were then quoted in a poem by another (real) author, Yoshioka Minoru, and yet she doesn’t recall ever writing them. The fallibility of memory complicates the writer’s ability to identify with her own words. And although she is flush with a sense of liberation in imagining that she didn’t write those words, they certainly sound like her words.

And still, Kanai’s own identity as singular author, existing in one space at one time, becomes dubious when one asks the question, Who is “the voice?” In subsequent phone calls, it comes to light that the voice is a twelve year old girl who is an avid reader of everything Kanai publishes. One might see this young girl as symbolizing “the Reader,” but things become more complicated when the voice starts accusing Kanai of having “stolen her future,” and insisting, “You’ve written about me in your stories endless times, and have appropriated my past.” Considering this accusation along with Kanai’s somber confession later in the story, that, “To tell the truth, I would like to have spent my whole life as a reader,” it is easy to interpret the voice as that of the author’s twelve-year-old self, embittered that the present author stole her peaceful future as a reader, and thrust her into a turbulent, anxious future as a writer.

In *Yume no jikan*, Kanai is proposing this same question of who the “real” teller of the story is, or to take it a step in the direction of Carroll, “which dreamed it?” In the final passage of *Through the Looking-Glass*, when Alice has awoken from her picaresque

⁴⁰ Kanai, 2009, 82.

dream, she wonders about the source of the dream visions:

‘Now Kitty, let’s consider who it was that dreamed it all. This is a serious question, my dear, and you should *not* go on licking your paw like that—as if Dinah hadn’t washed you this morning! You see, Kitty, it *must* have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too! Was it the Red King, Kitty? You were his wife, my dear, so you ought to know—Oh, Kitty, do help to settle it! I’m sure your paw can wait!’ But the provoking kitten only began on the other paw, and pretended it hadn’t heard the question.

Which do *you* think it was?⁴¹

It is this particularly Carrollian way of interrogating the authenticity of what has unfolded, especially in terms of identifying a dreaming self, through which Kanai operates when she tears Ai’s gaze from her own assumed body, yet insists on the possibility of her infinite and intangible self. Unlike Alice, though, Ai does not even have the benefit of being certain of what is dream, and what is reality. She does not get to “wake up” at the end of the story and reflect, with a clear head, upon the odd experiences she has just had. Kanai, as a rule, it seems, denies her protagonist and her readers even this small measure of certainty.

⁴¹ Carroll, 1971, 208.

PART TWO:

DREAM TIME

CHAPTER VI.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION: BEING A GOOD UTOPIAN

Translating the prose of Kanai Mieko's, *Yume no jikan*, into what I present below as, *Dream Time*, was sometimes a disorienting journey through language, not altogether dissimilar to the labyrinthine dreamscape that the protagonist of the story is forced to navigate. Precisely because of the content of the story, in which the boundaries between dream and reality, between subject and object, are often blurred, the deciphering of the already complex prose style can be an extreme challenge. In his dialogue, "The Misery and the Splendor of Translation," José Ortega y Gasset asserts that translation is ultimately impossible, a truly utopian endeavor. The acceptance of this impossibility is what marks a good utopian from a bad utopian, who believes that whatever is desirable is possible. "The good utopian, on the other hand, thinks that *because* it would be desirable to free men from the divisions imposed by languages, there is little probability that it can be attained; therefore it can only be achieved to an approximate measure."⁴² It is with a certain affinity and respect for the richness and difficulty of Kanai's text, through the eyes of a good utopian fully aware of the limitations of his actions, that I perceive my responsibility. Even with these limitations, however, I wanted to be ambitious with this translation, taking inspiration from Ortega y Gasset, who laments that faced with a rebellious text, the translator, "will be ruled by cowardice, so instead of resisting grammatical restraints he will do just the opposite: he will place the translated author in the prison of normal expression; that is, he will betray him."⁴³ This dilemma gets to the

⁴² Jose Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendor of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2004), 50.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 50.

crux of perhaps the most major problem in translating *Yume no jikan* (and probably most of Kanai Mieko's fiction), which is how to render her flowing, elongated, complex syntax into readable English without betraying her. Readability itself, however, is a theoretical problem. *Difficulty*, for example, may be an element of the author's personal style. And though style may be the most prohibitive thing to translate of all, one must at least make his or her best effort.

For the translator, style is an issue of both global strategy and local strategy. On the macro level, in the case of *Yume no jikan*, I have to ask myself, 'If the source text is relatively experimental, to what degree should my translation read as experimental?' The bad utopian answer would of course be, 'to an equivalent degree.' But on the question of target audience, to what degree, if any, is it acceptable to "betray" the author in the service of the audience by presenting them with a more "readable" text? Nabokov would argue that no such betrayal is acceptable. "The clumsiest literal translation," he writes, "is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase."⁴⁴ Nabokov dreams of footnotes piled to the sky. I would agree with this tendency toward faithfulness, but as Jay Rubin clearly illustrates in his essay, "Translating Murakami," by showing what an actual word-for-word literal translation looks like, true literal translation between Japanese and English simply is not possible.

So acting from an unavoidable underpinning of betrayal, I have tried to do what is possible. For example, Kanai takes advantage of the of the verb-terminating grammatical structure of Japanese in combination with the copious employ of the continuative verb

⁴⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, "Problem of Translation; 'Ogenin' in English," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2004), 71.

form (*renyōkei*). This is a conjugation that English does not possess, which when used as Kanai uses it, often acts as an invisible “and”. Usually followed by a comma, this tense gives the reader the impression that although a thought is grammatically complete, it is fundamentally connected to the next. Lacking an equivalent grammatical structure, this synthesis of closure and continuity must be achieved with a delicate balance of diverse tools, such as colons, semi-colons, em-dashes, and liberal use of the word, *and*. However, even my best implementation of these tools can not always do justice to the musical flow that Kanai achieves with the tools available to her in Japanese. What is generally possible, though, is to imitate the sense of a surging river of language and thought unbound by conventions. It is by this method that I hope to, as Ortega y Gasset explains, “force the grammatical tolerance of the [English] language to its limits.”⁴⁵

The complexity of syntax is not the only element of style that poses difficulty in translating *Yume*. The dream-like quality of the prose is also a result of frequent, sometimes seamless changes in point of view, both brazen and subtle. Point of view may change from passage to passage, from a close third person to first person, and back. These shifts are usually obvious and easy to navigate. There are some passages, however that greatly convolute focalization by mixing direct discourse and indirect discourse with very little in the way of signposts. Take the following passage, for example, in which Ai is just laying around, thinking:

彼女はじっとしながら、自分が誰であるのかを考え、なぜ、ここでこうしているのかを考えはじめる。むろん、そんなことは埒もないことであって、自分が誰であるかとか何故ある場所である事をやっているのか等々を考え

⁴⁵ Ortega y Gasset, 2004, 63.

はじめることは、迷宮へ入り込む最初の一步であるのに違いなかった。あたしはあたしである、とアイは同義反復で答え、それから、でも、あたしはここにいるの？と小さい声でいい、誰かに語りかけるように言葉をめぐらした。⁴⁶

My rendering of the same passage reads like this:

Lying still, she began to think about who she was and why she was here like this. Of course, starting into such thoughts as ‘who am I?’ and ‘what am I doing here?’ was no different than taking that first step into a labyrinth. ‘I am I,’ Ai answered tautologically, then, ‘But, why am I here?’ she said in a low voice, and repeated those words as if she were speaking with someone.

Looking at the second sentence in this passage, the omission of a subject makes it impossible to discern without a doubt whether this is Ai’s free direct thought or the narrator’s commentary about Ai’s thinking, especially considering the clauses are almost exactly the same as the indirect thought in the preceding sentence. I decided the best action in this case was to maintain the ambiguity of the point of view rather than try to assign the thought to one or the other. I did choose to insert quotations that are not in the original to mark the more obvious direct thoughts and speech. My reasoning for straying from the more difficult, unmarked structure, is that I perceive the insertion of these types of phrases seamlessly into English sentences as far more disruptive to the natural flow of reading than it is in the source text. So in this case, copying the style doesn’t necessarily result in equivalence of style.

Further, in the course of translating, some seemingly minor, micro level choices struck me as possible points of theoretical interest. Vinay and Darbelnet point out that “many borrowings enter a language through translation.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, many

⁴⁶ Kanai, 1992, 273.

⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet: A Methodology for Translation,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2004), 85.

Japanese words that have come into common usage in English, such as *sushi* or *futon*, were explicated or adapted by translators for a long time. The result is that these translations can sometimes seem dated and ridiculous. So, for the sake of the posterity of my translation, I prefer to do as little explicating as possible, and to borrow liberally. Two Japanese games, for example, are mentioned in the text: *go* and *shogi*. *Go*, to my perception, is widely known in the West, is sold in most stores that sell board games, and therefore, requires no explication or cultural equivalent. I feel that *shogi*, on the other hand is rather obscure. The impulse, then, might be to add some kind of explicating tag to the name of the game. But in this fast paced global market, it is perfectly plausible that any day there could be a big surge in the stateside popularity of *shogi*. In the end, in order to avoid possibly sounding ridiculous in the near future by over-explaining a now ubiquitous import, I would rather borrow such a term, for which the meaning is nevertheless relatively easy to learn for a curious reader. Through this method it may also be possible to expand the boundaries of the English language, however modestly. This is one of the minute steps I feel I can take toward becoming the “good utopian.”

Another decision I have made at the semantic level is one that stems from my identification (rightly or wrongly), of what Vinay and Darbelnet refer to as a “metalinguistic parallelism,” between *Yume no jikan* and the discourse of psychoanalysis. This term simply means that multiple texts share a common discourse subject, the linguistic implication being that specific discourses possess their own idiosyncratic vocabularies. I express this parallelism chiefly through the decision to utilize the word “gaze” perhaps more so than it would usually seem natural in quotidian English. Kanai

uses a few different verbs to indicate prolonged looking (*mitsumeru, shisen, jirojiro miru*), but for the above reason I chose to render these as “gaze” as much as I could without feeling it was disagreeably repetitive. Likewise, if this were proletarian literature of the Taishô period, for example, I would try to employ the vocabulary of Marxism as much as seemed appropriate.

Ortega y Gasset’s idea of the good utopian translator, who surrenders to the improbability of the desirable, and interprets this as an endless opportunity to do better, has helped me greatly in my struggle to translate this dense, dreamy text. Instead of obsessing about the desirability of duplicating for my reader the precise experience of the Japanese reader of *Yume no jikan*, I was able to concentrate my efforts on what *is* within my faculties. This translation is a compilation of possibilities—at best, a good utopian betrayal.

CHAPTER VII.

DREAM TIME

Ai was tired and hungry. She hadn't eaten a thing since daybreak. She sipped her hot coffee and gazed at the sky through the window as a young man filled up her tank at a gas station on K. Street. The eastern sky, still engulfed in its blue-gray gloom, had just begun to brighten. Ai shivered in the glass-enclosed tea room, but not from the chill of dawn; to others, she probably seemed like nothing more than an ordinary woman driver sipping her coffee, but in truth she could be a criminal embezzler of public funds, or even a killer, (Was it matricide? Did she kill a husband who betrayed her?), and now she could be waiting for a fill-up so she can make her getaway—no, they aren't going to mind her in the least, calming her wildly dancing heart with a warm, fragrant drink.

From her seat in the tea room, Ai watched the cars streak by like laser beams of red, yellow, and orange light shooting out of a monster's eyes, and sensing a faint trembling in her fingertips she carefully steadied her cup with both hands, slurped her coffee, and her spirits rose so much she wanted to whistle. Ai's trembling fingers were due to overexcitement at the anticipation of taking a long trip. Her whole body was nervous—she was nauseous, had chest pains, she licked her lips repeatedly, her ears rang, and though her mind was clear, she couldn't string together a single thought.

Ai had left her house at precisely three in the morning, while the sky covered the city like the sea at dawn, peacefully, profoundly swaying, wearing a faint tinge of pale red that was gradually shifting, spreading out toward the dawn horizon, an hour when all the still peaceful, sleeping houses seemed like giants crouching in a deep slumber. A

milky liqueur was settling in her veins and belly—to dilute it out as much as possible, she had pulled out a 3-pack of milk from the refrigerator, drank them all to the last drop, and drinking them rather quickly, the cold liquid that flooded her chest and stomach brought pain along with it, and it took some time before the crashing waves in her gut calmed. She arrived at a glossy blue alcohol sky she'd never ventured to before and she shoved all the items she felt necessary into a travel bag she'd never used. Ai switched off the light in her room, locked the door, descended the stairs, walked through the darkness for about fifty meters, went into the parking garage, put the key into the door of a white car, and drove it out with a loud racket. She was cheerful, but with half a sense of hazy, dark foreboding. In the approaching dawn, the strength of will that propelled Ai, this still unidentifiable feeling, was like some seed of untraceable origin, like a music that came from, and yet remained vaguely suspended in, the depths of time.

Now she looked at her watch and saw that it was eight in the evening. She'd been driving straight through since three in the morning, as if she were escaping. If she took even a brief respite now, she would be caught. She recalled that having kept on driving, lured by a strange volition, all she had to eat along the way was a sandwich she bought at the K. Street gas station and the juice from three cans of peaches. As she put the sandwich and peaches in a brown paper bag, the clerk with an adorable squint and radiant smile enthusiastically lifted her voice and said, with burning cheerfulness, "It's so beautiful out today! Thank you! Have a fun and safe drive!" Ai sympathized with this girl, three or four years her junior, who was stuck working at the gas station while every day she saw people enjoying themselves on their road trips, and Ai thought that someday, she would invite the girl to go on a drive with her. This girl, this passing acquaintance she

had just seen today for the first time, how was she raised, what kind of world view does she have, what does she think about? Ai didn't know a thing about her, obviously, but perhaps she would talk with the girl about such things someday.

She saw the sunrise from inside her speeding car, and of course, the squinting girl was right about the weather—the colors in the sky were slowly changing, the pale grayish blue and violet shifted, the clouds spread out beyond the road, painting the edge of the morning orange. The sky swirled with gray, blue, violet, orange, and peach, as the cold morning wind blew against her face, and Ai thought, not in my whole life have I ever felt the morning, no, the *dawn* wind like this on my face, but soon checked herself, thinking, what an uninteresting thought. The truth is, there are many kinds of mornings—various mornings and various nights, and among those, in an entire lifetime there are very few that will be special. Ai believed that surely, this was one such special morning. Ai gazed at all the buildings, forests, cars, and large billboards. Old houses, new houses, pre-fab houses, the yellow fields and phone poles—forest—field—bus stop—the many colors and shapes of cars as they whizzed by, so many huge, richly colored billboards flew past—cola and chocolate, Ôta stomach medicine and color TVs—on and on she continued. On and on as if possessed.

She's lying in her bed, let's say; she opens her eyes and gazes at the ceiling. She can imagine him in any number of ways. For now, it's like this: she opens her eyes, a faint smile floats to her lips, and then perhaps, someone sees her, and Ai thinks, did I look like I wasn't looking at anything? Ai's eyes open and seeing something, her irises take on a strange, brown glow; her lips stretch out to each side, with an almost imperceptible

smile, and then, she can think about him, or a memory of him. Every time, he flares up, sparkling in white light in the night, the night as deep as a black ocean, and laughing at Ai, reaches out his hand, or else, lies down beside Ai on his naked, olive-colored back, pulls his body towards her, but all without looking at her. Somewhere in here is the dark side of consciousness that governs the relationship between two people who are too distant, yet too close; the two together are one when touching each other's body parts—hands, fingers, arms, legs, chests, heads—but in touching these parts, each individual maintains them as their own among similar figures. They are like extremely rare objects.

Beside her own body is another's flesh that is surely alive. And just then a wind begins to blow. A wind from primordial seas and rivers, or from a forest, blows around the room, and somewhere far away from there, something happens, someone dies; how far can tears or blood flow, how long can a flame burn, *or*, how does the whole world move on the road outside the window? All is quiet and the dense night air completely enshrouds the warm earth and the surface of the sea, and they feel something advancing toward them, from a place unseen from their room. And in this room time lingers quietly, heavily, and before long they bond their bodies entirely together, and as they wander the maze of pleasures of one another's flesh, in the infinitesimal space where each is bonded to the other's skin, all the senses radiate like electricity, and in that space, they exist only by responding to the other's flesh—shivering, faint, at times convulsing with a terrible shock, fixated, consuming sweat, scents, and voices, like peeping into the deepest interior of the bonded flesh. Beyond the horizon out at sea, a cloud cluster flies away, blown by a crushing gust, the stars glimmer like shards of ice, and wrapped in up-floating, dimly

white sheets, they rock together continuously, folding the most distant expanses of space into the minute distance between their bonded bodies.

Most of the time, Ai makes a discovery: her own body lying down and another body right next to it, on a bed in some room in a house obscured by the thickness of night, or, in the dim light near the hour of daybreak, or, in the sun-blazed afternoon. It's a strange, mysterious thing. And lying there, they talk. At times the conversation will carry on, Ai lifting her laughing voice and playfully wrapping her arms around his neck. Instead of the language of excessive dreams and deep meaning that people demand of one another, they insist on gibberish. Language is a beam of light that illuminates the thick darkness, reveals it as a stratified space, the deepest original gesture that governs their every action. Whether Ai imagines him in his absence, or when she considers him in his presence, in their exchange of communication, they always prevent even a seed of precision. They drive it away into the deep, hollow dark.

An unspeakable language. Not even an unwitting gesture or image remains. Something within Ai is like a hollow sea or sky, and within it, she becomes suspended. And then, in the face of everything, she is *zero*. A clamoring language.

In this darkness, in this ocean, this sky, a vaguely white, flowing *obi* sash bridges a galaxy of milky white vomit; in the dead of night a bolt of lightning rips through the sky with a violet flash and thunder rolls across. The thunder roars like all the sky and earth has formed into a single giant cylindrical musical instrument.

She suddenly began to feel pain in her eyes and the appearance of the sky began to change; the wind coming in the window imported moisture; above the hills ahead and to her right, a cluster of gray clouds began to move, and she was overcome by a heavy

sense that it would rain. The road continued still further beyond, deep into a darkness where her headlights could not shine. Fatigue that had gathered in her, stretched across all the muscles in her body, and then concentrated itself in the fundus of her eyes; she desired to sleep rather than bear the pain. How had she kept her good mood until just moments ago? Slowly, out of the ominous dark, rain started falling with the sounds of massive drops. The initial drops of rain pounded against the windshield, making little watery polka-dots that flowed down the surface of the glass. Needles of chilly rain entered through the side windows, soaking Ai's head, hands, and hair.

Innumerable splashes of rain danced above the wet black asphalt and water formed rivers on its surface. The rain commenced beating on the roof of the car, ran down and fell to the earth, making the whole land like a river. The water flowed on the ground; the rice plants in the darkened fields bowed their heads in the falling rain, stirring like livestock.

She stopped the car, rolled up the windows, and placed a cigarette between her lips. She was now completely confined in this tiny space, the rain beating against the glass, streaming down. The rain pummeling against the glass made it so she couldn't see outside at all; it fell fiercely upon the road, the fields on either side, the woods, and upon the husk of the car that carried her. She couldn't hear anything except for the sound of the rain that imprisoned her in that tiny space—she turned on the wipers, resting her head in her arms on the steering wheel, and drifted into the deep darkness of sleep. Then, as if falling into a deep chasm, like being severed from time, sinking voicelessly into the swamp of black sleep, she saw for the briefest moment, nightmare images of swamp snakes and toads waiting there for her. . . .

—All is large, tumbling stones. The road becomes a tapestry of pebbles scattered across its entire surface. She has to run away fast, but though she hurries, she can't gain speed. This is the labyrinth of her dream's woven tapestry. Before she knows it, Ai's car drives into this familiar ghost town, and her car is barreling down a narrow lane barely avoiding crashing into the buildings, as if going to great pains to escape something. Ai always gets short of breath at this point. After that she discovers a large, abandoned building, she and her companion hide the car in the shadows of its crumbling stone walls, and enter the dilapidated structure. The building is made of cold, coarse stone, and almost two-thirds of its mosque-like dome is collapsing, but somehow, a single steel support structure holds it together. It's like looking up at the bottom of a coffee cup cracked down the middle. Tons of pebbles have fallen to the floor, and looking up the big hole that had collapsed from the dome was exactly like being at a planetarium, looking up at a freezing, fustian sky full of stars. Despite wrapping themselves in blankets, they are still very cold. In a noisy gust of wind, the pebbles and sand on the floor float up, the grass flutters with an eerie whistling sound, and the blankets wrapped around them flap and clap.

That labyrinth, that town, and that building, then me and that person in the car, and my invisible pursuers, always appear in the dreams. . . . The details change from time to time. . . . Sometimes before I know it, I am going into a building that resembles a school. Those times, I'm with him up until we get to the entrance. It's a dusty wooden place with a moldy smell, and actually, we go there because somebody calls us there. It's

some kind of rendezvous—some important meet-up that I have to get to—but the place looks run-down like nobody has set foot in it for ages. It seems as though we know that our pursuers have picked up our scent. I can't really tell what it is about the place that seems like a school. A sour smell of dust rises up enough to make me want to vomit—actually, I'm always smelling that stench in the dream. At the front entrance there are staircases going both right and left from the landing. I go up to the right without the slightest hesitation and I assume that he simply follows behind me—I assume it's only natural that he does. At least, that's what I think. But then I get up to the second floor, turn around, and he's not there, and the whole building takes on a creepy, cavernous silence. I climb up and up. Up and up a staircase like a long, warped winding tree. . . . And then suddenly I hit a dead end in a dimly lit, dusty-smelling room. A rope ladder hangs down from a square opening in the ceiling. I climb it. The ladder is unstable and I feel like I am being dangled in deep space; it's very scary, very unnerving, but I climb with frantic desperation, and when my hand finally touches the dusty other side of the ceiling, I lose all the strength in my body. To make matters worse, once I've got my feet into the upper room, the rope ladder suddenly slips away, and from the pinnacle of this pagoda-like building, it descends all the way to the bottom. The floor is covered with dust—it is easy to see that nobody has set foot in there for some time. I survey my dark surroundings, start walking in the direction of a skylight. I think that, if anything, maybe I can see outside through that window. But before I reach the window, I find in the dark room (my eyes have fairly adjusted by this time) these very odd, disturbing skeletal bodies, and I stop, speechless, my knees buckling beneath me. I feel my heart in my throat. One of the bodies is hanging from the ceiling with a rope around its neck; the

other is sitting at a small, round table, clutching a rice bowl and chopsticks and is wearing a soldier's uniform and a headband bearing an emblem of the Japanese flag. Retreating in fear, I step back into that square opening from where the rope ladder was lowered, and screaming, I steadily, steadily, fall. I nose-dive into a bottomless darkness. . . . As I fall, fear envelops my entire body, sweeps me into the abyss.

And also. . . . Other times, he and I spend the night in the deserted stone basement of the mosque, wake up early before dawn ready to set out. The morning feels fresh with a briskness in the air. I feel small icy drops touching my waking skin, and in the dream, my eyes pop wide open. We get into the car and before we know it, we're surrounded by fog; we can only indistinctly make out the buildings and trees around us in the milky gray mist. The road ahead is already completely invisible, the mist obstructing the vision of any travelers like a dense cluster of milky gray clouds, and the road behind us, too, is covered in the same dense mist. We are completely engulfed in the murky milk-gray world, and nothing can be done about it. Then, although I had been completely consumed by our predicament, I suddenly fly into a panic, wondering what that predicament is, exactly—and then, as if remembering what it was, my panic intensifies, and I ask him, What day is it, today? He answers that it is the 17th. And I, yet again in a startled panic, say, I have a manuscript deadline on the 18th! What do I do? I haven't written a single page. Why am I in this place? I should have been writing at my desk last night and today. I should be writing. How did I end up here with you being chased by someone, needing to escape?—I say all this, wondering whether this is really my present situation. And I have no idea why I am being pursued (though I think that *he* must be well aware of the reason); all I know for sure is that if we are caught, we'll have to fight. I know that, and

what's more, I understand that this determination to fight is a perfectly natural thing. On one hand, I believe that if I had to, if my back were against the wall, I could fight like a born Amazon. But, on the other hand, when I think about how I should be writing, about what I'm expected to write, I absolutely cannot comprehend the situation I am in, or how on Earth I got to such a place. I grow infuriated with the absurdity. Why? Why should I have to suffer? I used to be a writer—I don't recall ever killing anyone, chasing anyone, or anything like that. The more I think about it, the more infuriated I become, and my body burns and stiffens with fear and discomfort; he calmly and coolly threatens, "Don't be such an idiot. Right now this is a matter of life and death. If your manuscript is fucked, well then, it's fucked." I have to agree with what he is saying, so I load bullets into a gun with a trembling hand, slightly regaining my composure. In the dream I'm not the least suspicious about the fact that I can handle a gun with sure hands. After that, I think that if he and I can get away, we will get married and live peacefully into our golden years. . . . Before we know it, we're in a maze of a townscape with low-roofed buildings, standing with our backs against each other, our pistols at the ready. We are unable to see our pursuers. A frightfully white sky stretches out to the edge of town, and seeing that, I realize I am standing all alone in the shadow of a house. I don't see him anywhere, and I still can't see my enemies, but my mind is made up. Even if I have to do it by myself, I will kill as many of my enemies as possible before they kill me. . . . So when the indistinct dark forms of these pursuers appear from behind some houses, I blaze away. It looks like I drop some of them, but even still the shadowy figures press toward me, and finally, capture me. At that, my head is very simply placed on a stand, for some reason I put up no resistance, and I think, Ahh, now I die, but there's still so much I haven't done.

Closer and closer, a big, thick, cold blade comes down, and waiting for the final moment of truth, I retrace my memories in quick succession; I see a great many things. Though I am dead, my consciousness goes on ceaselessly. . . .

When she opened her eyes she was in an odd, unfamiliar place. It took her some time to realize that it was a rock quarry, though she couldn't imagine it being anything else; it was a quintessential quarry. Ai looked around her with a feeling of emptiness and perceived that she was curled up asleep on the front seat of her car. Gotta wake up, she thought, and the instant she raised her head, it hit the windshield, and without cursing, she yelled, "Son of a gun! What is this, some kind of gangster's car?" She turned her heavy head to each side a few times to loosen up her numb neck. The rain had lifted, and a thin blue-gray cloud blew fluidly around in the high, deep indigo sky. The Big Dipper shined above a mountain that towered over the quarry like a beat-up vertical folding screen, and Ai spotted Polaris right away like an explorer or sailor. Nothing could be heard but the busy sound of insects in a thicket of grass. The air was getting bitterly cold as a chill wind blew in. When she stepped out of the car, Ai looked at the mountain in the darkness, saw that it was immense, and held within it some bizarre and malicious power to oppose humanity; all was deadly silent.

Shivering from the cold, Ai grabbed her jacket out of the car and put it on, and pressed to her body, the jacket seemed horribly wrinkled, but on this deserted night, she could hardly worry about such things as wrinkles. Ai looked at her watch. It had stopped at 5:05, but as to what time it was now, she hadn't the slightest idea. It was self-winding, and she always wore it on her wrist, so this time the watch was probably done for. But Ai

wasn't really concerned about her watch stopping—behind the small dial was a mechanism of countless hidden minute gears and parts, and other than to tell *time*, she never really trusted it in the first place. Nor did she think it was that important what time it was. She was terribly hungry, and on top of that, she'd been in the same position for a long time, so moving her body was unpleasant, and once more she fell asleep; the next morning, when she was finally ready to get up and go, Ai's car, out of the blue, would not start, and she was at a loss, roasting under the sun in a deserted rock quarry.

Not only was the road drizzled with last night's rain, the soil around it was mixed with clay, so her delicate moccasins were soon muddied. The strong autumn sun drew steam up from the earth, the overgrown weeds, and rocks in the carved out space of the sheer vertical mountain; it was mid-September, but it was still a viciously hot day. Ai inspected the car, but she didn't have the slightest idea what the malfunction was, so in resignation, she walked over to a crumbling hut about thirty meters away to wash her hands in the well beside it. Her hands felt disgusting, filthy with grease from fooling around with the engine. The first several times she moved the iron pump up and down, she felt only a heavy resistance, like air pressure; slowly but surely water began to flow, and as she continued to pump, the water suddenly spilled out vigorously like the pump had just taken ill, splashing off of the concrete scullery, getting Ai's pants and shoes wet. The grime on her hands was oil-based, so she had a hard time getting it off. Ai grabbed some of the clay-mixed soil and rubbed it into her hands as she rinsed them. It worked better than using the well water alone, but she got a clump of dirt caught underneath a hangnail.

Ai went back to the car, rested her head against the seat, and gazed at the bleak, red-tinged surface of the mountain in the ruins of the quarry, the mountain of piled-up stone debris, the thicket of weeds, gazed at the crumbling hut. She thought of a time when the quarry was flourishing. . . . The days when giant boulders were ripped from the mountain, when numerous men worked in the scorching hot sun as they were showered with debris and dust. The sound of drills rang out around the mountain, cranes for moving huge rocks would occasionally break down, and suddenly the jaws of a crane that were supposed to tightly clench the stones loosen and stones fall onto the heads of the laborers. Of course, the workers are helplessly crushed. With complete inhumanity, with complete simplicity. Their heads and bodies crushed like boiled potatoes, their flesh and blood scattered all over the rocks. And even still, that stone being of exceptional quality, they washed away the blood and pieces of meat, and undoubtedly used it for the construction of an Olympic facility, or some such thing.

Mist rose from the dampened earth, the neglected mountain surface, the pebbles; the scent of wet grass tickled Ai's nose.

Feeling she had no alternative, Ai pulled her travel bag out of the back seat and started walking. No matter the odds, she had to get to a road where she could catch a bus; she had to get into town; she had to eat something. Ai walked along the muddy mountain road until after some time she came to a place where dozens of newly built, modern homes stood all in a row. The feeling that some civilized human life was going on in each of those houses calmed her, but at the same time she was somewhat disoriented. The street was completely deserted. As she walked around for a while, she saw that there were about three large single story buildings that looked like a hospital or a school, and across

from them was a kind of all purpose grocery store doubling as a tobacco shop with a red soda machine placed out in front, and next to that was a small, box-shaped bus stop. Ai went into the grocery store and bought three bottles of milk, two sandwiches, and some cigarettes, and sat down on the bus stop bench, prepared to enjoy her cold milk and sandwiches. Receiving her gift from the plump, amiable matron of the grocery in the flowery cover-all apron, Ai asked about the bus into town. The matron looked at the clock hung on a pillar at the back of the store and answered that a bus would be along in about thirty minutes. Then she looked at Ai's muddied shoes and travel bag and asked, "You don't look like you're from the Cultural Village; where did you come from?" hinting at a sly curiosity that was concealed by the quality of her hospitality, and Ai vaguely shook her head, asked if she could see a phone book, and meaninglessly floated a forced smile to give the stranger a decent impression. Still maintaining her sly curiosity, the fat matron, as if she was afraid of losing someone to talk with to stave off boredom, produced the phone book with alacrity, while Ai intently observed the movements of this woman standing so close to her. Ai chose four numbers for auto repair shops and called them in the order they were written. All four, however, refused to come out to the quarry to fix her car, claiming they were shorthanded; asked by one repair shop what the malfunction was, Ai answered timidly that she couldn't guess and the guy on the other end responded quite unkindly with an overt sign of dissatisfied scorn, like a spoiled child. "What model?" he said. "It's a 1960 wagon, domestic..." Ai said in a sheepish voice, and hearing this, the mechanic said, like some kind of proclamation, "We don't do repairs on domestics here. We don't have the parts, so it's impossible." At any rate, Ai found it possible to swallow the notion that there was nothing to do but leave her car behind, and

thought it didn't matter if she had to abandon ship at this point. It would be best to just sell the car. With a "thank you," Ai hung up the phone, and looking at the building across the way, she asked the shop matron, "What is that?"

"Oh, that's just an old folks home called Blossoming Gardens," she answered with a frown. "Don't you think having an old folks home in the middle of a residential quarter of the Cultural Village is disharmonious? It would be difficult to come to a sense of peace for an old person living there, with their old family home right within view." Ai nodded vaguely, exited the shop, and walked to the bus stop.

The bus stop in front of the Blossoming Gardens Nursing Home was a stop on the shuttle route between the town and the Cultural Village. Ai took a seat on the bench of the small wooden bus shelter, bathed in the autumn sun, and let out a little yawn. On the bus shelter wall, a small, elliptical, plastic board numbered one to ten that appeared to be meant for hanging umbrellas was mounted. Above that was another plastic board. The following was written on the white plastic sign, indicating the plastic umbrellas were supplied by the Cultural Village Residential Council:

For everyone's convenience, please return umbrellas to where you found them!!!
The umbrellas belong to everyone.

- Cultural Village Residential Council

It seemed that there should be ten umbrellas, but there were only three—seven were not brought back to where they belong. The Residential Council's well-intentioned deed, Ai thought. These things always collapse from the inside! Don't even try to propose putting umbrellas at a bus stop! Everyone's umbrellas?! Really?! Just look at this. Are we not currently missing seven umbrellas? Even in the Cultural Village? Even the Residential Council?

At that point, two women with the appearance of young wives heading out to go shopping approached, carrying on a conversation, each bringing back two yellow plastic umbrellas, while throwing glances over at Ai eating her sandwich and drinking her milk. They sat on the bench and resumed their conversation. Now there were seven umbrellas. Could the remaining three perhaps be safely returned? she thought, getting excited. Will they make it back before the bus comes? Let's make a silent wager, Ai thought.

An older man, an office worker type, came out the gate of the nursing home, bringing back one umbrella—two to go. No bus yet. When Ai finished eating her sandwich and drank down the last bottle of milk, she lit a cigarette, pulled out a pocket flashlight, and flipped the switch on and off, creating a ring of light on the ground, outshined by the bright light of day. The women continued their conversation. They talked about shopping—an easy, inexpensive little side dish they figured out how to make, how rain leaked in right on the bed thanks to a design flaw—no, I really can't make it to the afternoon show—the story of the newly released novel is so entertaining and the author photo on the book jacket—he's so handsome he could be an actor and I heard he has two dogs and a wife and a daughter—etcetera.

Finally the bus pulled up to the stop and seven or eight wildly laughing little girls in sailor outfits got off, two of them carrying a box piled so full of stuff the lid was popping open, and they set in on the ground. There was a time when Ai knew this group of girls very well. Faint yellow sweat stains in the armpits of the thick white cotton summer clothes, and emanating from beneath that, the mixture of the sweet odor of old hair removal cream and a strong body odor. Definitely one or two of the group, or perhaps all of them, would be discharging blood between their legs. They passed in front

of Ai with tanned arms and legs, laughing boisterously, each of them with some paper or plastic bag dangling on her arm with a handkerchief or sanitary products, or some odd thing in it, red faces with puffy cheeks glowing with cheer, walking sluggishly like bears in the zoo, with their full buttocks swaying under pleated skirts. *Just like them*, Ai thought. But not quite—using the phrase ‘little girls’ would be a serious misnomer. They probably go to a *girls* high school. The girls’ high school students milling around Ai emitted a powerful smell of armpit odor and wore small patches reading “JRC” on their chests.

The school girls had been the only passengers on the bus, so Ai and the two women from the bus stop with her were the only riders. The girls’ armpit odor intermingled with other body odors, leaving behind an indecent, acrid smell. Ai sat in the very back seat which was slightly raised; the bus took off with a violent u-turn that almost made her bite her tongue, and twisting her neck back toward Blossoming Gardens, she saw that the school girls had picked up the box and were carrying it to the nursing home. Now that I think of it, today is Respect-Your-Elders Day, I see, I see, they were thinking of the elderly, Ai thought, as the rumbling of the bus jostled her head about.

On the bus, Ai closed her eyes, and surrendering her body to its undulations, she let out a slight yawn. Her eyes teared up a little, she started to brainstorm about what she should do from here, but it was too taxing, and she gave up. As long as I have money, she figured, I can use it, and beyond that, there’s no need to think about anything else. Ai started to nod off, and when it seemed like she was about to fall fast asleep, she opened her eyes to see the bus had entered the city. She got off at the last bus station, and walked away with her travel bag. A breeze with a scent particular to towns near the sea blew

through the plaza in front of the station, and as she took a whiff, she had the vague feeling that she'd come close to her destination.

Ai confirmed the location of a hotel at the tourist information center. "It's the Kagami Palace Hotel. Do you want a single? A twin? Singles go from two to three thousand yen. Ah, you want one for two thousand? Please hold one moment." The tourist center clerk spoke with a faint accent, and while she continued her work briskly, phoning the hotel, Ai gazed at a technicolor sightseeing map hanging on the wall. The tourist center looked like it was always slow, rarely getting any visitors, and the building itself was tiny, more like a tourist *bar*. Across the counter, two office workers were playing a game of *shogi* while a female co-worker watched. The wall of the tourist center facing the street was all glass, the afternoon sun shone through, illuminating the smooth surface of a travel poster, and its glowing white reflection made it so that from where Ai was standing, she couldn't tell if anything were written on it. At any rate, there was a model dressed up like a native girl (perhaps she really was from there) in a technicolor landscape background, inviting you to go someplace on a package tour, seductively flashing the viewer a phony, robotic smile to satisfy some primitive urge. Around the world tours, trips to Hong Kong, trips to Hawaii, Guam, discounts available, etcetera. But no "trip" to there. A shining silver streamline jet, an artificially blue sky, a sparkling blue sea, the bronzed girl, these objects shimmering too beautiful to tolerate, reflected frigidly on this oversized poster in the afternoon sunlight. That seaside paradise, that woman, that jet—they were so painfully distant. The office workers cast quick glances at Ai, the agent set down the receiver and gave her directions to the hotel, smiling radiantly.

— Go right on this street in the opposite direction of the station, then there will be a three-way intersection where you turn left. Then when you see an arcade, turn left at the second four way stop; walk a bit and you'll come to the edge of the moat of Kagami Castle. When you get there, turn left and follow the canal until you see a bridge, cross that and turn left; at the first corner (there's a building under construction there so you'll recognize it easily) turn right and continue straight ahead; it's a big building next to a government office, so you can't miss it.

That day was an odd one. Before she'd walked three hundred meters, Ai saw three old persons urinating on the side of the road. Standing on corners, against telephone poles, craning their necks, keeping perfectly composed, with slovenly, grayish kimono hems, very slowly, pissing. Wasn't today Respect-Your-Elders Day, Ai thought. Is that why I come across three old folks pissing in the road? Suddenly someone called out to Ai and she turned around. "Say, say, young lady. Hundred yen for the train? The train. The train home. Hey, hey, young lady?" Ai looked at the old lady with surprise, blushed with embarrassment, and her gaze fell upon the hands of this old person with deep brown, thick, wrinkled skin who came up to her chest, hands she hadn't washed after pissing just a moment ago; she took a hundred yen coin out of her pocket and pinching it in her fingertips, dropped it in the woman's hand. "Thank you, young lady. Thank you. You've surely done a good thing. Thank you," the old lady said, averting her sunken, muddy, jaundiced eyes, adjusting her slovenly, disheveled kimono that was revealing her breasts, and bowing her head over and over. The old lady didn't look like she was starving, but at the very least, she was not living a leisurely, care-free retirement; in all likelihood, she

was an addict living off of panhandling like this. At that time, Ai grimaced, overtly disturbed—she wouldn't even spit in the street because it was distasteful. Or at least she thought so. Oh, could I live like that if I had to? She imagined becoming an old bag, wearing an old, long tweed skirt, a wool jacket with the armholes stretched out, and a discolored sky blue handkerchief over her head, tied under her chin, saying. Hey, hey, young lady, spare a hundred yen for the train. The train to Mejiro. Please a hundred yen.” I couldn't go on living if I turned into a beggar lady!

I have to go to the ocean! Surely there must be something good there. It's no guarantee, but maybe there is something good. It's hard to believe in, but if there is something, something good, doesn't it matter?!

At the hotel there was a big, dreary garden like a school playground, huge ginkgoes, live oaks, and beech trees were planted in one corner. In front of the building was something like a wisteria trellis, with a white bench and a table set up below it. Additionally, on the near side of it, a flower bed and a token amount of grass; also, the wide flat ground between the brick wall and gate and the grass, however you looked at it, was a playground; over by the wall on the city hall side, was a horizontal bar and sandbox, and by the wall on the opposite side were lined up three small houses with red roofs.

Ai crossed the grounds, pushed open a large glass door below an overhanging roof supported by marbled stone pillars, and entered the building. The front of the lobby was a staircase with large doors on either side. The door on the right had a brass nameplate attached to it, reading “The St. Francis School,” and the door on the left, too,

bore a brass plate that read, “Seiyaku Pharmaceuticals Temporary Office.” On the gatepost was an iron sign imprinted with embossed letters, “KAGAMI PALACE HOTEL,” which confirmed that this must be the place, but the doors on either side of the high-ceilinged lobby she stood in led to a school and a drug company, and coming from the door on the right she could hear the many voices of school children reciting out of a textbook. And from the drug company door, she could faintly hear the sounds of workers bustling around and phones ringing. She looked up at the staircase—sunlight streamed in from round, Spanish-style stained glass windows at the upper part of the wall of the landing causing her to narrow her eyes as she ascended the stairs. At the top of the stairs was a cloakroom, and on the other side of the counter, a door, perhaps to an office, and on either side were long hallways, but nobody was around. The wall on one side of a wider hallway was lined with three Spanish-style glass doors on each side of a staircase in the center, and opposite the doors was a terrace. The ceiling, which looked like wood-framed boxes on an application form covered in cream-colored cloth, was ornamented by intermittent pillars decorated with plaster chestnut shapes at their tops, and the hall was centered by a large, crystal chandelier, that is to say, the three Spanish double doors on both the right and left had symmetrical arches painted over them, and in the center of everything hung a very simple chandelier, some doors were on the wall on the other side; shooting off to the side of the cloakroom, the staircase continued, covered in the same red carpet as the hallways.

Standing at the front desk, Ai looked for a service bell among the items placed on the counter—telephone, ashtray, cards, pamphlets, and ink jar—eventually she found the bell hiding behind the phone, and with her index finger she pressed down on its apex. The

door opened and a man in black appeared with a sleepy face like a horned owl awakened in the afternoon, and said, “Welcome!” Ai said she thought the travel center had contacted them, and the cloak clerk courteously replied that yes, they’d been waiting for her, and, How long do you plan to stay? while pushing a registration card and ballpoint pen toward her, and then, “Please fill this out for the time being.”

“I’m not really sure how long I’m going to stay. Um, is the hotel full now?”

“Oh, not so much that it should matter.”

“Ok then, for now I’ll say two... three nights.”

“That’s perfectly fine. Thank you very much.”

Ai filled out the card bewilderedly while exchanging some such conversation. The cloak clerk took it from her, pulled a key with a plastic number plate attached out of a key cupboard behind the counter, and handed it across to Ai, saying, “Your room number will be three-seventeen.” The cloak clerk pressed the buzzer once more (this was next to the key cupboard) and a bell boy in a white and black uniform with gold buttons was suddenly standing behind Ai, bowing to her. “Welcome. May I take your bags for you?” And the cloak clerk ordered the bell boy, in a somewhat demanding tone, “Show our guest to room three-seventeen.”

The third floor had a mysteriously bizarre air to it, there was door after door on either side of one long hallway that ran straight down the center, and other hallways crossed the long hallway perpendicularly, giving the impression that it was somehow mismatched, as if someone had divided up what was originally a single, huge room, with hallways, to create a bunch of smaller rooms. At the top of the stairs, on the wall all the

way at the other end of the hall, facing the garden, there were windows on either side about a foot and a half square, but (in between these two, truncated half-windows, there was one about three feet square) they were obviously reduced from their normal size because the other halves were inside the rooms on each side of the hall. Further, as she continued down the hall, she could tell that the whole inside of the building was criss-crossed with hallways. Room three-seventeen was some distance from the staircase; Ai was once again forced to reassess the enormity of the Kagami Palace Hotel. To get to three-seventeen, she took a right from the stairs, turned left at the second hallway, took another right and it was the last room at the end of that hallway.

The bellboy placed her travel bag at her feet and asked if he could do anything else for her. “Oh, I think I’m fine,” Ai said, scanning the room; she handed him a tip and pushed open the window overlooking the garden. The wisteria trellis, flower bed, lawn, and playground were all there before her eyes; she could see the adjacent city hall building, the castle ruins floated in the air like a forest or a big park in itself in a transparent orangish dusky autumn sunlight, and an orange light glimmered on the top of the trees of varying height along a white lane. Ai was just a little bit sad. She felt a bitter pain in her chest, and this faint, vaguely transparent light began to wrap around Ai’s head. Ai remained there next to the window, staring out at the castle and hotel garden, feeling the faintest omen of the beginning of nightfall in the clear blue sky. She was now completely alone in an unfamiliar town, in an unfamiliar cave in this labyrinthine hotel.

— You know, it’s been a month, already a whole month since I’ve written a single thing.

Ai spoke as if to someone in particular as she turned toward the bed covered with a beige, coarsely woven hemp blanket. Above the right side of the bed, a glassed picture frame was hanging on the wall, which was pasted with a blue flower pattern wallpaper, but from where she stood, the glass reflected the sun, making the picture invisible behind a beam of light. Ai stared at the vacant bed, spoke once more.

— You know, it's as if I've done something like this before. . . .

Yes. Didn't we come to a room exactly like this one? No, I know for certain we did. We came by train that time, of course, we departed on an extremely early train, around three in the morning. The train traveled closely along the sea, the sky took on a funny appearance, and eventually it began to rain. Nobody else was on the train car we were riding, the other cars were empty, too, but at one station stop along the seaside, a number of peddlers with empty tin boxes fixed to their backs for collecting fish they bought down at the sea, boarded the train, laughing, joking in some muddled dialect; the car was instantly filled with the intermingling odors of fish and ocean, the sanguinary odor of the peddlers; we suddenly felt like vomiting from the intolerable smell, so despite the rain blowing in, we opened a window. The peddlers took out pears, apples, and still-green mandarins, yammered away in loud voices as they began to eat with slurping and chomping sounds; they even started to talk to us, and offered us big juicy pale green pears.

When the train arrived in Kagami, every single peddler stepped off onto the platform, and after them, we too disembarked on the dark, rainy platform.

The rain was relatively light that day. Between the platform and the tracks, the rain was misty, the concrete edge of the platform was wet-black, the many peddlers left

wet, diffusing footprints leading to the ticket gate. How could she possibly remember it in such detail? One of the peddlers slipped in his wet boots, his empty tin box slammed to the ground with a startling crash, we squeezed each other's hand, petrified.

The peddlers all got on a bus bound for Nekunihama. We hailed a taxi, and we came here, didn't we? This is definitely the place. Definitely. It is. Surely, surely. . . .

Then we drank hot coffee in this very room. Then, I stared out at the heavy, gray sky, and though I knew it was early morning, I lost my sense of time because of the rain, I stared at the wetted street, garden, trees, and—that's right—you were lying on your back on the right side of the bed, your right arm propped up behind your head, your left hand holding a cigarette. I turned to look at you and you were just lazily staring at the ceiling. Then, I said it just like this. . . .

— You know, it's been a month, already a whole month since I've written a single thing.

You shot a look at my face, and said, Well then? — Well then? But I couldn't understand what you meant by, Well then? I had no reason to write. That was that.

It's cold here. It's too cold. . . . What time is it? What *time* is it?

— It sure has been a long time since a guest stayed in this room. The maid spoke in a light tone as if the words just floated out of her mouth, and then she shut herself up with a look on her face like she'd let something slip. With her back to the window, Ai watched the maid make the bed, thinking of why the room wouldn't have been used, and asked the maid, curious as to how she would respond. The maid stopped moving her hands as if suddenly disturbed, said, "Yeah, I wonder why it is, since about a year and a

half ago, when a certain person stayed here, the room hasn't been used," but of course Ai wasn't satisfied with her answer, asked a leading question, "I wonder, why is that? Isn't this a good room? Was there a double suicide in this room, or something like that?"

— That's ridiculous. The maid shook her head. It's nothing like that. If there were a double suicide, we wouldn't get any guests coming to this hotel at all. You must know that. The cliffs beyond here at Nekunihama are famous for suicides and double suicides, though.

— Well then, why? Why isn't this room used?

— Well, there aren't many normal guests that come stay here. There are a lot of weddings and banquets and such.

— Is that it? The guest that stayed here before, were they alone?

— Yes, a single guest. Stayed a rather long time.

After that the maid fell silent, quickly fixed up the room, and asked, in a business-like manner, Is there anything else I can do for you? Ai answered, Nothing in particular, and after the maid exited, she sat down in the chair next to the window, pulled some whiskey out of her travel bag, and drank. There was a thermos filled with cold water and two cups set up on the end table, one of which Ai poured about one-third full of whiskey, then added cold water until it was about four-fifths full. She began to slowly drink her whiskey. There was plenty of time. Ai stared at the thin frost of the crystal water glass. Plenty of time—almost too much time. She could see the tops of the tall trees swaying in the wind outside the window. In the garden, the young children of the St. Francis School seemed to be practicing some kind of folk dance for an upcoming field day. Quiet strains

of a “Korobushka” record played, and she listened to the sound of the many children clapping hands.

—There’s plenty of time, but tomorrow, or the day after, I should go to Nekunihama. I’ll take the bus across the Kagami River. I’ll go to the sea. And then, for no reason, her whole body shook with a chill.

The maid crossed the room with careful steps delivering breakfast, set the platter on a tea table, and asked if it would be permissible to open the curtains. “Sure, sure, please open them. And could you please open the window while you’re at it? Is it nice out today, I wonder?” “Very nice. The weather is wonderful. Invigorating weather!” Ai looked at the sky out the opened window, then looked over at the breakfast on the table (coffee with cream, bread, butter, jam, oatmeal, boiled egg, grapefruit) thinking how she wasn’t the least bit hungry. Last night she had asked for breakfast to be brought at 10am and ordered what she wanted, but now that she looked at it, her appetite couldn’t handle any more than the coffee, and she didn’t feel well for lack of sleep. The maid spoke to Ai in the manner of a doctor or nurse.

— Did you sleep well?

— Not really. I couldn’t sleep. Looks like my insomnia came back. I slept a ton the first two or three days of my trip, but after that, not much.

— Oh, now, that’s no good. Sleep is the most important thing to keep you healthy. You have insomnia, do you?

— Yeah. I’m pretty sure it’s a neurological thing.

— You're exactly right! Insomnia is neurological in nature. There's a neurologist here, a wonderful man, he's in residence here, so how about if you pay him a visit once? I've been to see him once myself!

— This doctor, he's a guest here?

— No, there's a clinic in this building.

— What? That's bizarre. There's a doctor's office with a neurologist in the building?

— An OB/GYN, too, and a physician, and a surgeon. People who need inpatient care use the hotel rooms. The place doubles as a kind of sanatorium.

— Do mental patients of the neurologist stay here, too?

— Yes, of course they do.

— Oh, I see. So are there more patients here, or regular guests?

— Right now, more patients. A person who got a stomach operation, two young women that came to get abortions, one with gall bladder stones and two with them in their kidneys, one patient with hypertension, and about five patients with mild neuroses.

— Well, in that case, I'm not sure if this is a hotel or a hospital.

— Sure, but those are our managerial policies—we have to have some distinctive feature, don't we? So, in a sense, we have both deluxe suites, and rooms like hospital rooms. The doctors are always saying that people really come here to get the kind of treatment they can't get at a normal hospital. It's not that it's more homey or relaxing than a hospital, but there you can't patiently take the time to recover from an illness that requires a long time to heal. That's why we see all kinds of patients that come from a long way away to stay here.

— Really? I had no idea. I mean, that such a system even exists. So, was the person that stayed in this room before a patient?

— No. The guest stayed for about two months, he occasionally got prescriptions for sleep-aids, but he was staying here for work.

— Work, you say? I wonder what he did, probably not a plain old businessman, or salesman, right? I doubt if he was a surveyor, or. . . .

— You're right, he was a writer. And he wrote poems, too.

— What? A writer? Then if he was here for work, he must have been writing a novel. Of course.

— Yes, he was a great intellectual. And very kind.

— I see, I see. A great intellectual.

— Did you happen to read the poem that he wrote on the wall?

— No, I didn't know. I hadn't realized it was there.

— I decided not to erase it and leave it like it was. I'm in charge of this room, so I leave it there to remember him by. At any rate, he did write a novel while he was here. I took the best care of him that I possibly could.

The maid spoke of the writer in this way, casting a mysterious smile at the wall, and though they were thoroughly immersed in conversation, she left the room, saying, "You should consult the doctor at least once." Ai lazily stared at the lines of poetry written on the wall above the bed. She couldn't make out much more than a small, narrow smudge, and couldn't imagine that it could even be writing. Ai brought her face so close to the wall she practically smashed her nose, at which point she could make out some lines, but the characters still weren't readable; to be clear, there were three

horizontal smudges like pencil scribbles rubbed over by a finger, within that gray blurry mark, she could barely manage to confirm the traces of something like writing.

Then, Ai began again to drink her whiskey, and fell asleep, yet again.

It was three o'clock when Ai opened her eyes; she was understandably starving. She lay around considering going to the second floor dining hall. Her head hurt and the odor of alcohol permeated her mouth. Her own body being a bit difficult to manage, she sluggishly arose to take a shower.

When Ai returned from the dining hall, there was a peach-colored envelope slipped under her door. She opened it and pulled out a single sheet of paper that was torn out of a sketchbook. In horizontal writing, it said the following:

I know the person for whom you are searching.

Please call the number below:

(21)6942

Ai read the word words written in green felt-tip pen, and spoke out loud, "I know the person for whom you are searching." How could the person who wrote this letter know that I'm looking for someone? She did have a hunch that she would meet someone here in the city. I received a letter the first time. His letter was delivered that morning. He's the only person that could have written that kind of letter. I definitely received a letter that morning. It was a cloudy day, was it morning, or evening, I'm really not sure. The sky was grayish with a light orange tint and laden with moisture; it was a day when a cat's fur coat would respond sensitively to the moisture in the air with a silky sheen. I

woke up to the mail carrier's loud cry of, "Special delivery!" Was that in the morning? Or evening? And after that, I went back to sleep and woke up in the middle of the night. I remember that clearly. And I remember what happened before the day I received the letter. How many days before was it? That incident... A week, or, six days before? Anyway, that day, at three in the morning, I left.

Nevertheless, she was holding the letter in her hand. Surely it must be his second letter. Ai called the operator, and asked for (21)6942. She put the receiver up to her ear, stared at the letter, and thought, "69 for 2": this must be some kind of promotional flyer for a dating club or escort service aimed at tourists mistakenly placed under her door, but something about this angular, green writing struck her as the stuff of an important, confidential message. "You are now connected," the operator said, and Ai heard the lively voice of a man answer, "Hello." Ai said, "I called this number because of a letter I received." "Oh, it's you! I've been waiting for your call," the man answered. Ai had never heard this voice before, but it appeared that he knew her, which took her by surprise. "Who is this?" she said. The man let out a stifled, throaty laugh. "Whoever I say I am, there are times when I don't know my own self. Was it Breton who once said, 'If I am asked, *who are you*, I first think of all the people I'm associated with?' Anyway, *who are you?*" he said, and laughed again, softly.

— Who am I? At a loss for words, Ai repeated his words back.

— Yeah. You.

— I am. . . .

— You would rarely answer, ‘I am a writer,’ or ‘I am a poet,’ would you? To a stranger. Me neither, I rarely say, ‘I am a painter.’ Though there may be some exceptional cases. . . .

— So then, you’re a painter? If I can assume so from what you’re saying. . . .

— *You* might debate whether or not I’m a *painter* according to the strict definition of the word. At any rate, I make my living by selling paintings.

— Indeed, that’s really a difficult thing to do, isn’t it? That’s incredible.

— No, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that... but, well, you’re right, it’s incredible.

On the other hand, I couldn’t really say something like this—I couldn’t say, ‘I am *Painting*.’ Nor could I say, ‘the world is *Painting*.’ If I could, I would, but *world* is just a word, too, isn’t it?

— Yeah, right, that’s a splendid point of view, but, what about the letter you wrote? Do I know you?

— Oh, that’s right. Please excuse me for talking about myself.

— That’s ok, it’s not a problem.

— I know the person you are looking for. You could say that we are friends.

We’ve even traveled together. He. . . .

— The judgement you’ve made, that this is the same person who you say is your close friend, who you’ve taken trips with, you must have some kind of evidence on which to base this judgment? Like, did this person tell you something about me?

— No, not really. He didn’t say anything about you.

— Really. Then, what reason do you have to think that he is the person I'm looking for? Is he really the person I'm looking for? Can you say for certain?

— Without a doubt, it's the truth. How do I know, you ask? After you came to this city, you started looking for him, didn't you?

— I considered looking, but I didn't know a good way to go about it. So it's impossible for some stranger to determine that I was looking just by observing my actions.

— Even still, I understood as much as soon as you arrived in the city. It's likely you received a letter from him, yes? A letter saying something like, "Please come to the Kagami Palace Hotel in Kagami City. . . ."

— How do you know that?

— Because he and I are friends.

— Well then, what is he doing? Why doesn't he show his face? Why did he send me that letter?

— He's away, on a trip.

— A trip, to where?

— Well. That, I don't know. It's *him* we are talking about, after all. People who come to this town looking for someone—they are all looking for him.

— ... I don't get it. Why is he even here? What reason would he possibly have to send me a letter?

— I would assume it's because you thought you wanted to meet him.

— I did want to meet him. But, how would he know that? Does he know me?

This is really. . . .

— I understand. Your concern is totally natural. I understand completely. You felt that you wanted to meet him. And at the moment when that urge reached its peak, you got his letter.

— Is that what happened? Really?

— Well, isn't it?

— You say you know him very well? I want to talk to you, so, can we meet somewhere?

The voice on the other end chuckled and said, I live in the clock tower of this building.

— Clock tower?

— Sure, there's a stairway about halfway down the corridor. It leads to the tower. If you go up that, there's a door—you'll see it. You're in room 317, right? *He* stayed in that room when he first came to Kagami.

— Quite a coincidence.

— It sure is. Well, maybe it is... How do like the hotel, by the way?

— I'm not sure yet. It's certainly not a bad place, but it's got its odd points... the dining hall was rather odd. A string quartet was playing. Their repertoire was really quite good, I was just taken by surprise. Some of diners seemed like they despised that sort of refinement, and when the performance ended, they overtly disapproved, while there were some people among them who threw out tips. I was really astonished. The performers

held their instruments, gave this formal bow like something from the imperial court days, gathered their money, and announced how much they got.

— That's normal, no reason to be surprised at that sort of thing. Anyway, tonight, would you come to my room at about seven? I have work to do until then.

Having been invited to the painter's room, Ai responded that, yes, she could call on him around seven. At five past seven, she walked down the maze-like corridor and went up to the clock tower. The numbers posted on the doors didn't seem to make any sense, and having no indicator as to how far she needed to go, she got lost trying to find the stairway to the tower. The hallway was submerged in a dim, orangish light that immersed the space a stifling weight, and when Ai took stock of where she was, she noticed that she was standing in front of her own door. She started once again from the beginning, and this time, she came upon the stairway surprisingly easy. She ascended the narrow, dimly-lit, iron spiral staircase leading to the tower, and when she reached to top, there was another hallway about six meters long; on the east side was a small window, and below that a wash basin. On the basin was a portable gas stove and two oil cans were placed in the corner of the hallway. It seemed that this was the painter's kitchen; the faint odor of cooking oil, meat, bay leaf, and vegetables lingered. She could see that he was in his room from the light shining through the gap in the door. Of course, he had invited her, so there was no reason to expect he would be away, but, Ai was relieved by seeing the light emanating from the door, and she knocked. There was no answer, and for a moment Ai was at a loss for what to do, but then she resolutely tried turning the knob, which rotated with a ridiculously loud noise; she pulled the door open and entered.

On a bed next to the east-facing window were the painter and a woman in an oddly intertwined position; startled, Ai turned to bolt from the room, but a voice rose up, saying, “Oh, hey, don’t worry about it. Please come in. We’ll be done in a minute.” The painter’s tone implied that Ai should stay and watch this intimate act, and strangely, Ai felt as if she had to do as the painter said. She watched their movements with a kind of diligent, sincere enthusiasm, thinking that this must be the work that the painter mentioned. They continued to move together like a slow, gentle dance; she watched them, puzzled, her elbows propped up on the table, a cigarette between her fingers, thinking, What a strange way to meet someone for the first time.

“This is called ‘The Ruined Pine Needle,’” the painter said dispassionately, like a docent at a natural history museum stating the name of some famous antique artifact, and the image of a plate decoratively painted with withered pine needles popped into Ai’s head. “From a pornographic point of view, it’s a rather orthodox position.”

Eventually, they put some clothes on, came over and sat at the table with Ai, gazing at her with enigmatic, intimate smiles on their faces. Ai saw that the woman was actually the maid from her room, and seeing that she was wearing her navy blue, white-collared uniform, realized that she must still be on the clock. “Greetings,” the maid said. “I still have work to do, so... please, enjoy yourselves.” As the maid was leaving the room, the painter said, with a casual nod, “Ok, see you later.” Once she was gone, Ai looked across the table at the painter looking back, and remained that way for some time; she placed both her hands down on her knees, completely rigid like an innocent young girl. Ai wouldn’t normally act that way, but in such face to face situations, she didn’t

know what to do with her body other than obstinately tense up and fall silent like a little child.

The painter explained: the person you are looking for will certainly come here, but you do realize that before that, he has to meet with other people just like you who have been waiting for him in this city? I have the feeling that you all undoubtedly want the same thing. He came to this hotel, too, stayed in the same room as you, was served by the very same maid. Surely you mean to get something from him when you meet? More often than not, one has to wait for a long time before they meet who they're looking for. Right now he's lodging in the upper floor of a sweets and tobacco shop here in town, running a *go* parlor there. He came here some ten years ago. At that time, you were probably still in elementary school, and he was an up-and-coming author just beginning to make a name for himself. That's when he came here... looking for someone. According to what he told me, he made it about halfway by car, but it broke down in a rock quarry, and he walked the rest of the way. He looked completely like a vagrant, worn out and filthy. Impossible to tell he was some successful writer! Face, hands, and feet covered with motor oil and mud, soaked from the rain. When I noticed him in town, I struck up a conversation. He said he'd just come back from Nekunihama, that he'd returned here for the second time to start writing another novel. That was last year. Of course, he was looking for someone, and he received a letter saying that he could meet up with that person here. He is working right now. We can't really say he's messing around doing nothing. He may not be writing a novel, but as I see it, he is the *original* author, so to

speaking, and ever since you approached the entrance to this city, you really reminded me of him. I could easily see that you weren't at peace, that something was eating at you. You're that type of person, right? There are many like you, to be honest. Most people go home after two or three days, one day in rare cases, but you, with your anxiety, your aimless wandering around town, buying a bunch of worthless crap, keeping to yourself, you've already been here a week. You're easy to read.

Then, the artist was quiet for a while, until he suddenly started up again. "Incidentally," he said, licking his lips, "what sort of life did you lead back home? Assuming that you lived here, aren't there a lot of things that we should know about each other? Although, my status in this town is nothing to brag about. So we may understand each other better, and so we may have the wisdom to live better lives, I have a lot of questions I want to ask. May I have your cooperation?" Ai was shocked that he spoke as if she had already decided to live in this town. Then, as if he were going to take an official statement, he pulled out a thick notebook and began his questioning in the tone of a government official or a policeman.

— What time do you wake up and what time do you go to sleep? Generally speaking, what is a very ordinary day for you? How do you pass the time?

— What is your favorite food? Least favorite?

— How many times in a month do you go to the cinema?

— Do you have a lover? How is your sexual relationship?

— What is your oldest memory of your father? What is your most recent memory?

— What is your oldest memory of your mother? Most recent?

Etcetera. . . .

Ai was wiped out; she didn't know what to do, how to answer. She went on answering, telling stories, like a patient might do, confessing before a psychiatrist.

When Ai woke up it was already close to noon. Shining from above the clock tower, the white light of the autumn sun burned the skin of the children on the playground; it was around that time when the sweat starts to build up under their white uniforms and their stomachs begin to grumble. At first, Ai was unsure of where she was; for an instant, she reached out a hand into thin air as if groping for the dream she was just seeing, the clean smell of soap mingled with body odor, she brought wrinkled sheets up to her lips, stretched her legs, and still lying down, stretched her lower back. In the short time before she realized she was in the painter's room, in a fluctuation of consciousness between sleep and wakefulness, she was not in any particular place, nor in any particular time. The window was carved out at the same height as the headrest on the bed, the shutters and glass were opened, and she saw nothing but a rectangular cut-out of cloudless, transparent sky. The instant she opened her eyes she was enveloped by that sky in a trance-like feeling of happiness. Then, memories of the previous night slowly came to her, she realized the painter wasn't there, and she was just a little bit confused. He had gone out. Probably to work. He must have to work some time.

Ai remained for a long time curled up into a ball with her arms wrapped around her body. She felt wonderful there, her body balled up. Lying still, she began to think about who she was and why she was here like this. Of course, starting into such thoughts as ‘who am I?’ and ‘what am I doing here?’ was no different than taking that first step into a labyrinth. ‘I am I,’ Ai answered tautologically, then, ‘But, why am I here?’ she said in a low voice, and repeated those words as if she were speaking with someone.

The dream, the dream I always have... I am escaping, every time... I don’t know who is after me, but I’m running away. First—is it every time?—my body freezes up, I fall into this darkness, it’s horrible, I’m scared. And suddenly I’m in a ghost town; it is definitely night time and someone is with me. I can tell that it’s a man, maybe someone I have known for a long time, but I can never say for certain who it is because I can never see his face. But, it’s a familiar person... It’s like a feel safe next to him; I even feel something like happiness, like being a small child in another’s arms, gentle and sweet; in the dream I am ceaselessly crying, my whole face is covered in tears, these tepid tears flood my nose and mouth. He is so familiar he brings me joy, but he’s someone I have never seen before. Who could he be? I wonder... Who are you? My father? Brother? Are you even “you?” Someone I don’t know? There are times when your face has appeared, but it’s always dark, as though in a cave, melting into the surrounding night. Your face is nothing but darkness from the neck up, but in the dream it’s not really that troubling. A gentle darkness? And we are running away the two of us, together. You are at the driver’s wheel, and without fail, we are hurled into a maze in the wilderness of night. Then, as we drive around—it’s strange—even though we always enter the same maze again and again,

we can't find our way out of it. And in the dream, I trust you. Of course, I don't tell you as much. Although, for the me that is next to you driving that car, in the actual space-time of the dream, isn't it my first time being lost in that maze? Even still, my dreaming self is very familiar with the maze. I am well-acquainted with it. It is the charted course of a well-rehearsed dream. Yet, I have this fear of being chased, I am unsettled by the structure of this maze, my whole body is cold, my heart is jumping into my throat, I am suffocating. And I know for certain that if captured, my only possible fate is death.

“I haven't died yet,” Ai said aloud. She looked up and with only her head turned toward the window, she stared at the blue sky. She gazed a long time until her eyes hurt and started to tear up. Tears trickled into her nose and mouth, a stream of tears ran down her cheek with a lukewarm tickling sensation. She yawned and a new tear welled up, spreading thinly over the surface of her eye like a translucent freckle, blurring the blue sky. What do I do now...? I'm hungry, but, eating is such a pain. What should I do? What do I do with myself...? Steeped in listlessness, Ai didn't want to do anything; she had no desire to pick herself up, but it would be inappropriate to stay sprawled out in the painter's room forever. Every corner of the room was marked with the smell of the painter (mixture of odors: the slight scent of underarm sweat, something like dry sherry, nicotine, peppermint, glue, beeswax, and turpentine). It wasn't an unpleasant smell, but—she couldn't quite explain it—there was something completely different about it, and she began to sense something shady and indecent about the smell, like it was of an entirely different animal, or like she realized the space in the room itself was composed of the smell, a subtle, but deeply ingrained body odor. To be clear, the miscellaneous items, the

overlapping canvasses shoved against the wall, the easel, table, bed, mirror, down to the chair, all were tied to the room's resident by an extremely close connection; these were all imbued with the scent, and this began to make Ai uncomfortable. Being alone in someone else's room made her fidgety. Ai got up out of bed, put her clothes on, grabbed her cigarettes off the table, put one between her lips, poured some brandy into a cup, and drank it down with a grimace. Ai thought of the words, "the freewheeling life of the road." She felt that wherever she was going, whatever ill-will the place may have against her, that is where she is destined to be.

Ai sat down in the chair, her elbows on the table, sipping brandy. In the large mirror hanging on the wall sat a woman with her elbows propped on a table. She was wearing a pullover the color of milky coffee; her short-cropped hair outlined a pale, weary face that somehow gave the impression that her spirit had been removed from this place. Her eyes were bloodshot from sleeplessness and alcohol. Her lips fastened tightly, she held a cigarette in her left hand which had burned down about a third of the way, the ash remaining precariously intact, ready to fall off at any moment. Ai stared at her own figure in the mirror, her bloodshot eyes showing a kind of passionate intensity. Then, she turned the pages of an art book that was left on the table. Ai thought she should snuff out her smoke on the polished white ceramic surface of the ashtray to avoid the ash falling on the table.

Right now, I am a traveler in a strange land for the first time... Yet that strange land is always a familiar maze. Repeatedly I come here, to this land surrounded by a motionless, timeless ocean, a space of primordial wind and light, and night, to this

landscape where a traveler is controlled by a feeling of déjà vu. Sometime, sometime. . . I have definitely been to this place. Sometime... when was it... precisely... vaguely...? The bizarre sense of déjà vu governs the traveler in this unknown city. A city in a dream, or, a city in a dream within a dream. Or, a real city in an ideal reality.

Ai was considerably tired of the fact that in order to have a proper meal in the original author's place above the sweet shop, she had to go downstairs to use the elderly owner's kitchen, and use bread, canned food, and fruit that the original author bought at a nearby market. The original author harbored no interest in eating warm meals; he might make a hole in an eggshell and eat the egg raw, or shake a little salt on raw vegetables and crunch away at them.

He would eat such meals twice a day, afternoon and night, and Ai, too, took up that habit. Ai sat up in bed and stared at the milk, bread, and fruit on the table with disdain. She was taken by a vision of the old folks in the next room eating bento lunches and all the side dishes that came with them. Rice sprinkled with seaweed, then another layer of rice on top of that, again sprinkled with seaweed, fried egg, some kind of boiled fish, probably some soft boiled taro root in there, too. Ai looked over at the original author drinking his milk and said, "Why don't we go somewhere to eat? Let's eat somewhere else. Do you know that place, Cafe de Paris, down the alley to the left of the Shinanoya bookshop on Cygnus Road? It's run by a chef that used to work at the Palace Hotel. I went there once and the food was pretty good."

“I know it,” the original author answered. “Why don’t you go ahead. You’ll get to know the city better, and besides, I don’t like eating out, so I’ll only hold you back.”

“Oh? Well then. I’ll go by myself,” Ai said in a rather cutting tone, put on the blue corduroy trousers she was wearing when she arrived in the city, thrust her hands in her jacket pockets, and left. As Ai was leaving the sweets and tobacco shop, the old owner spotted her, and said, “So you’re going out?” Red-faced and smiling, Ai answered with a meaningless, “Yeah, not far.”

—That’s a nice color. Suits you very well. Makes you look seventeen or eighteen. Has that sort of look to it.

Ai was slightly angered by the sarcasm of the old-timer, but when she thought about it, the insult was maybe justified, and she said, “Thank you,” in a low voice, with a dopey, vague smile on her face. She didn’t want to ruin the shop owner’s mood, and taking into account that her current situation was not exactly the picture of wholesome morality, she felt it was necessary to smile at the original author’s landlord to the point of exhaustion. At any rate, Ai was no more than a mere tourist in the city, and her goal on this trip was to fit in and not raise the suspicions of its citizens. But after she suddenly arrived at the original author’s lodging, and started coming frequently, the old folks from the *go* club and the elderly shop owners started talking about her all over town. The old folks hanging their clothes from second story windows facing the narrow street, those leaning from their windows holding bento boxes and chopsticks, all of them, without exception, stared at Ai as she walked away. She walked with both hands in her jacket

pockets. What do I do now? she thought, but couldn't come up with any good ideas, and she was miserable.

Ai turned over in bed and looked at the man sprawled out next to her. It was morning, the man was still asleep, the smell of early morning drifted in the opened window. The dust of night had settled on the ground; the slight dampness in the air made her nostrils quiver. Already the milk and newspaper delivery trucks were making their rounds in the city. Ai's body shivered from the cold air and she went to close the window, but left it cracked a few inches. The cold morning air was delightful. Ai gazed at the sleeping man for a considerable length of time. Then, she stared up at the ceiling with a blank expression in search of a certain image.

“That is why.” When she was little and couldn't sleep at night, Ai would very deliberately turn this phrase over in her mind, and these words only would escape her lips: “That. Is. Why. That is why...” Ai was lying face down with the right half of her face pressed against the pillow so the hair right under her cheek was poking into it and kind of hurting, but she didn't mind it greatly. Her head, ear, and right cheek pressed into the pillow, her right hand slipped underneath it, her protruding elbow bent in an L-shape down to her shoulder, the joint of her left arm extended in the opposite direction, and her neck, had all been hurting for some time having been in the exact same position for too long. But this sort of pain wasn't a big deal, Ai thought passively. Then one more time, to hear herself think it clearly so she could make up her mind about it, she thought, ‘this

kind of pain is nothing at all.’ This kind of pain, you can’t even call it pain—just a little stiff elbow, shoulder, neck—nothing compared to being bit by a lion.

What if a lion or tiger escaped from their cage at the circus and came into town, if wild beasts escaped from the zoo and came? Ai thought. With their fiery eyes, the power in their bulging muscles like a symbol of vitality, their sharp claws for attacking other animals concealed beneath their paws, treading on asphalt, steadily approaching the city at night. Or else, their bodies hidden on the roofs of buildings, like they were in the jungles they came from, leaping nimbly from rooftop to rooftop, radar ears peeled back tightly, in an unfamiliar city, holding their breath, distinguishing between danger and safety with characteristic animal instincts—lions, tigers, leopards everywhere. And then, with their uncanny body strength, will the wild beasts break down all of the doors and windows of the houses and attack the humans? Claws out, mouths opened shockingly wide in anger and fear, exposing the red flesh of their mouths, tongues, and throats, saliva dripping down from between their fangs, their agile, whip-like flexibility, making whoever sees them tremble with awe and admiration, their bowed bodies flying up, extending straight out, and with one bite, chomping off the heads or limbs of humans. Absolutely!

Ai certainly had no recollections of doing lions any favors, removing any thorn from a paw like the Roman fugitive, Androcles, so the lion wouldn’t act as it did when it licked the palm of the fugitive’s hand with its large, sandpaper tongue. No, there is no way Ai would survive. Eyes glaring, burning like golden stars, nostrils filled with night air, mouth opened unbelievably wide like a beast hungry for blood—no, exactly that, a

beast hungry for blood—the lion would strike Ai down with a single blow of its front paw, and taste the soft flesh of a child. After all, there’s no mistaking, young flesh is the tastiest of all kinds of flesh. If it were a bear, perhaps she could play dead and it would pass right by, but that wouldn’t fool a lion, tiger, or leopard. Or else, she could lay down on the ground, turn her round, swelling belly to the sky, thick with short, soft fur, like a puppy displays submissiveness to a big, ferocious dog, four legs flailing, tail spinning around, then maybe, just maybe the lion would spare her. Lacking a combative spirit, perhaps it would turn its back and walk away, disappointed.

Does this pain compare to the whimpering cries of children going hungry (no, already so weak that they cannot manage to cry, already closing their eyes, numb with cold, awaiting death)? To the body with arms, legs, and other parts severed in combat, their guts struck by a bullet, split open, their pink and pearly gray entrails dangling out? I don’t know myself about such things, but what is this compared to true pain? True pain is a face turning ghostly pale from agony, pupils permanently dilated, the whole body convulsing, a very strange whistling sound coming out of the back of the throat—*whoot, whoorough, whoroot, oough, aaieee*—and just before the moment of losing consciousness, a darkness swoops down before the eyes, blurring them with the color of black blood, and then, you are truly gone.

The right side of Ai’s face was pressed against the pillow, so half of her face felt a heaviness like blood congestion; the pressed flesh of her cheek was pushed toward her lower eyelids and touched her upper eyelids when she blinked, her eyelashes fluttering against her cheek. Casting her eyes downward, she could see her nose and the round

bulge of her left cheek just below her eye. She couldn't see it perfectly clear—the contour line dissolved in the faint light under the white sheets, and she thought, My own nose and cheek are somehow strange things. Ai moved her hand from underneath her body and touched her nose and cheek. Her nose felt a little bit hard and beaded with sweat. Her cheek was very soft, and pushing down firmly, it was clear that there was bone beneath the soft skin and flesh. Ai started thinking about bones. She tucked her hand back underneath her, bent her left elbow, and felt her ankle bone. For a while, Ai poked at her ankle; next she traced the big L-shape along the edge of her elbow, then went to feel the bone in her knee, but knocked her knee hard against the wall, and let out a soft yelp. She remained still for some time. She listened intently to her pulse ticking away in her temple against the pillow. She touched her tailbone. Then with the tops of her fingers, she pushed gently on the sinews between each and every vertebrae as if taking account of them; she wanted to bring her hand all the way up to the large tendon above her top vertebrae, but do to so she had would have to bend her whole body backward, and bring her upper arm all the way up her body, so she couldn't pull it off well. Ai tried this who knows how many times until she wore herself out.

On the bed in the dim room, little Ai imagined herself as many different animals. A big black flatfish asleep at the bottom of the ocean. An alligator bathing in the waters of a river in a tropical jungle, cooled by the unbroken shade of trees. And then a giant python. Lying in bed, Ai shivered, enduring the growth of scales over her body, the cooling of her blood. She had to possess the body of a snake before she could think like one. Coiling herself up, stretching out her long, cavernous body, slithering along the

surface of the earth, flicking out the tip of her tongue, wriggling around, silently rubbing her long body against the earth and the tops of trees—that must be how the snake thinks. It thinks about the panther and the lion, and after swallowing such enormous prey, stretching out in a peaceful spot while the long digestion process takes place, baking in the sun drowsily—the snake thinks of its own vanquished prey, the lion or panther, the honorable struggle it gave to its dying breath, satisfied by its body’s own power of constriction, its beautifully gleaming scales. The snake thinks of the jungle, of its prey, and of honor!

And then little Ai started thinking about the wound that would come from being bitten and torn apart by the sharp teeth of a lion. Inside the flesh, bloodied red like a large flower petal, is the white (yes, probably white) bone... and then what? Bones are rather strange. Putting all her strength into the tip of her finger, she tried feeling around her arm, and the hard bone felt very strange. The bones, organs, and blood in my own body, the gathering stench of the remnants of all I’ve eaten in my stomach. Aren’t these strange things?

She thought deeply about this problem. Then she began to think of herself as a little mouse nearing death. A terrible, sinister desperation spread like a raincloud from her gut up to her head, and she thought, That’s me, that dying mouse letting out a wretched groan. Just one little female mouse, nibbling on a crunchy dumpling laced with rat poison, or a bean-shaped poison pellet, my body tumescent with the circulating toxin. Her mouse family and mouse lover will noisily scuttle around looking for her, missing since

the night before, and she'll die on the blue and white checkered linoleum of the humans' bright kitchen, die in agony from the poison, bubbles and drool streaming from her mouth. Finally, one of the family of the house, a cute, frizzy-haired boy awoken by hunger, comes in to the kitchen early in the morning and discovers her body on the floor by the refrigerator door. Shocked, the boy draws back his bare feet, squats down, examining her corpse with round, wide eyes; he reaches out a finger to touch her, but suddenly recoils just a centimeter short. The boy is moved observing the body, bloated, shrouded in gray fur, with its tiny ears and nose, with its whiskers and long tail, and he calls out loudly, "Mama! Mama! There's a dead mouse in the kitchen! There's a dead mouse in the kitchen! Come look! It's cute. A cute mouse!"

Her mouse family and lover—how would they know how she died? "She had bad luck. The girl's curiosity got the best of her." "She probably ate something poisoned. She had radical morals and she was always being frisky. She'd go right up to a human's plate just to eat poison, that's why." "But to me she was nevertheless a good girl. She was such a gentle mouse. She would risk danger to bring me the bread I like. And her whistling was so skilled she could have been a real songstress. Before her, music was meaningless to us." "Yes, yes, Mother. You're exactly right. She was a gentle mouse. When she whistled, it was a beautiful thing. It's like I can see her now. Her fur, it had a sheen like ermine... Mother, I... I really loved her with all my heart! I can't believe something like this could happen to her." "Oh Tadataro. She loved you too, and I know you made her happy." Eventually, the family will see new baby mice born one after the other; her

family, and her lover, too, will completely forget her. In such a society, deaths are too numerous, so one can't go on grieving forever.

In the end, her dead body will be roughly wrapped in newspaper and the frizzy-headed boy will take it to the public health center. He'll swap her corpse for a bar of Shiseido Olive Soap, jam the soap into a rubbish-filled pocket of his blue nylon jumper, and walking back home, kicking a rock down the road, he'll boisterously sing, "It's bathtime, it's bathtime soap!" to the tune of Toy Symphony. And he, too, will soon forget about her. How long could he go on wasting feelings on one little dead mouse? He won't be leading such a care-free life. He'll be very busy, with so many things.

Ai slowly fell into a deep, deep sleep. The edge of her dark pit of sleep was covered over with flower petals. She stepped upon them, and into the pit she plunged. Down, down, into the depths of slumber. . . .

They kept still, their bodies bonded together. Ai tenderly stretched out her body like an infant, entangling herself with the body of the original author, blinked her eyes a couple of times, and spoke in a very relaxed tone.

— Laying here like this makes me feel six inches taller.

— Why is that?

— Why? I don't know, but it happens all the time, I think. When I'm sleeping alone in the dark. Suddenly, I get the feeling that I am much bigger. I have to stay absolutely still. If I move even a little, just barely turn my head or curl my pinky, it goes

away. In the blink of an eye, I return to my normal size. And sometimes, only my legs get bigger, or only my head gets bigger. It's the weirdest sensation, but if I keep still like that, the back of my head slowly grows numb, and I hear a sound like the faint flapping of tiny wings. For some reason, it makes me feel really happy. I stay motionless, waiting to grow bigger, but before long I get utterly frightened. Because my head is getting numb, you know? I can't think at all, and in the darkness time has stopped; it seems like my body is simply filling a void in space, but I also have the rather odd feeling that I am leaving my body, that it's a far away object, and yet it is unmistakably my own body. I've felt it often, ever since I was little. It's kind of like a dream that I have when I'm wide awake. I guess you could say that my body experiences itself as an illusion. I mean, you know, have you ever had that kind of experience?

— I have. Quite often. Just like that. Is it happening to you right now?

— No. This is different. It's not that, it's... it's... I think it's like this: It's like your body is making my body pliable, like leather being tanned, and my back is being stretched out. Does that make sense?

— Ah, well, I understand it on a sensual level. Our own physical bodies are a strange thing. Actually, my left hipbone is positioned about one inch askew from my right. I don't know why, but when I was a kid an orthopedic surgeon told me and my mother so, showing us some X-rays. My body's current weakness all started with these lame hips one inch askew; I had to wear a corrective steel corset while my bones were still tender. And once I squeezed into that unbending steel brace, I must have worn it for a year. I was completely left out of doing things boys should be doing because of it. The

contraption made it totally impossible to bend my upper body; I was completely covered from my chest down to my crotch, so all year I had to stand at attention. When I was in junior high school, the military training officer would praise me for my erect posture not knowing about the corset, and would bark orders at everyone, “This is the posture you want! Straighten those backs! Pull in your behind!” But when you think about it I was pretty lucky because I could freely skip training. I wouldn’t really say that I was embarrassed about the misalignment of my pelvis at the time, but a word like *pelvis* had an imprudent ring to it—it reminded me immediately of the womb that the pelvis protects. Back then, my sister had a baby—my mother and other female relatives gathered around talking about it. My sister had a very difficult labor. Mariko was so skinny, it was impressive that she gave birth with that body; she really had to be strong. They said her pelvis was too narrow. So it was then that I started hearing something embarrassing in the word *pelvis*, and when the doctor told me my pelvis was askew, I was shocked. I always considered that to be only part of a woman’s body.

Yeah, so that corset notwithstanding, my alignment is still off, but I’m not always conscious of the fact. If what the doctor said was true, all of my current ailments are probably because of my pelvis, but I’m used to trouble with this and that body part. After the war, when I would walk around with an empty stomach, I started to realize that I was dragging my right foot, but now I don’t do it at all. Before long, once I started eating regularly, that slight handicap subsided. Although, after that I did still catch myself dragging my foot from time to time. I absolutely guarantee that no one else could tell, but I felt it distinctly. Now I walk handicap-free. It happened at night for me, too. Not

always, but when I would walk at night, I would suddenly realize it. And when I did, I suddenly couldn't walk; I felt like one foot was tripping over the other.

It's really strange. Each time I was reminded of *The Little Mermaid*. Why would I think such a thing? I could feel it distinctly in my body: right now I am limping—the position of my pelvis is off by an inch, I just know it. My body is very distinctly and completely see-through, like a skeletal specimen, or a Hans Bellmer drawing of overlapping transparent bodies. The area of the skewed alignment and the white bones themselves are see-through.

The two continued speaking of many different things. Lying on the bed, heads on the pillow, looking at the ceiling, smoking cigarettes.

— There was a girl just like you, way back when, more than ten years ago, at the sea beyond here, the original author said suddenly, staring intently at Ai without reservation. Then they were silent for such a long time that it made Ai uncomfortable. She looked at his hand. The original author's hand was thin and white, and in their silence, supported his chin. Ai observed this until finally his left hand separated from his chin and he laughed with a voice like a scratchy flute.

— It's strange that you haven't changed much since then. Though of course you are bigger, and older. What happened to that young girl? We were always together; she was always following me around. Why would you two follow me around? That's odd, when you think about it. What were the two of you thinking, doing such a thing?

— I... we... followed you?

— You don't remember? You followed me around with a look on your face like a great child detective in an adventure story.

Puzzled, Ai blinked her eyes rapidly, thinking perhaps that *did* happen. She began to feel as if, *yes*, that two youths had shadowed a certain man. Actually, she was sure of it.

She stared out the window, thinking. I will surely be living in this town until he comes. Living together with this original author? It was he who had an appointment to meet someone here. I don't know if we are waiting for the same person, but regardless, I've decided that must be the case... Having never doubted the existence of someone called "him," she and the original author accepted that staying in this city was the only thing they could do. They had to meet "him" no matter what. She felt like "he" was all she ever spoke about with the painter and the original author. In all this uproar about this singular thing, Ai and the original author each forgot who they were themselves. Ai had mostly lost the volition to return to the city where she had lived; it was impossible for her to think of returning in a positive light.

Ai began to be troubled once again with the feeling that she was, just as the original author, a licentious, anxious, even worthless human being. She hated everything about the city and often felt that her thinking had been all wrong, that on second thought, she had no idea why she was there. Whenever she would wander lazily, half in a daze around Kagami City, as she encountered the many passersby, she wouldn't look at their faces, but she would stare at the necks, backs, and legs of those walking in front of her.

For example, the color of the clothing of three ladies in front of her—the woman on the left in a light purple coat, in the middle, a bright green sweater over a black skirt, and on the right, a blue wool dress; at first glance, the color of the clothes on these lady insurance agents gave her a subtly uneasy feeling; she had to restrain herself, though, taking these things in stride. Or, like the original author, she avoided going out on the town as much as she could... To stay as far away from this world of these girls and boys, men and women, who laugh so boisterously as they walk. She wanted to go somewhere, but, was it even possible?

Ai stood by the window, gazing at the city at night. She thought of all the kinds of people out there, and that most people had nothing to do with her. Like the hospital staff, the grocer, publisher, brewer, hotelier, her relatives, her cousins, let alone casual acquaintances (all these kinds of people that it was possible she might have to call on the phone sometime). What kind of connection did she have with the hospital, or the grocer selling booze on a night such as this? Their brilliant, sparkling world covered in glass and aluminum, everything flowing along on the orderly surface of vigorous, overflowing conversation; all its people exceedingly ordered, exceedingly tedious, and bustling about day and night no matter what. They would kindly, intimately smile at Ai, their disapproval sometimes revealed on their faces.

— He's building more apartment buildings out of *platinum*.

— Where?

— I heard in places like Den'enchôfu and Sannô. . . I heard there was one property going for fifty-eight million! Wouldn't it be nice to borrow a tenth of that, even one million! What a bunch of bullshit. My own brother!

— Why? What a cheap bastard! Is it so much to ask? Oh sure, now *Platinum* Haruko struts around with that 'private school PTA' look on her face, but after the war she was starving right alongside me. It was terrible. We had heads ridden with lice and caught scabies; if we ate a snack, we ate it out of sight like we'd stolen it from someone. Everyone was going hungry back then, so it's understandable, but that girl was particularly bad. She was the very picture of a street urchin! She really did suffer—the exact opposite of her now. And there were three of us children at home to feed. Once when our older brother made good, he came to get Haruko. His wife came with him, too, saying, 'Oh, thanks for everything you've done. Here's a hundred grams of sugar!' They've got more sugar, rice, and chocolate at home than they can possibly eat and they bring a measly hundred grams. And then to top it off, she says, 'Oh dear, Haruko's gotten so thin!' Said it like I was the one depriving her of food. When they came over, I was in rags, full of lice, inflicted with scabies, but I was able to mend an old outfit from my younger days into a dress for the occasion. I just couldn't accept anything from them—I gave back the sugar. And you know what? The refusal forced them to give me some respect. After that, I cut off all relations with them. If Haruko could only think about her own lousy days, she wouldn't go around so cheerfully.

— Everyone at the private schools acts like that. Incidentally, my sister-in-law got uterine cancer. Akiko called the other day and told me she had surgery. They removed her ovaries, too.

— It doesn't matter, though. She stopped having her period a long time ago— same difference, whether she has her ovaries or not. The fact that it went that far in the first place is only because of her carelessness. She was a mess from the beginning. Too stupid to even recognize that her bleeding was from cancer.

This was the way her relatives would gossip, bad-mouthing people; that's how everybody would gossip. Gathering together, always, without fail.

She sat in the chair. She shifted in it again and again trying to find a leisurely position. Whatever position she tried, she couldn't relax, and all her body parts ached like they were being squeezed. Her back, shoulders, gut, arms, legs, and neck. Even laying down and stretching out did nothing to help. In bed, she had turned over in her sleep, fruitlessly searching for a pleasant position. It proved impossible, however. She might stay a while face down, with both hands under face, only her elbows sticking out from her straight body. Like that she could close her eyes and think about everything ranging from the most quotidian matters to death. When she would very abruptly wake up in the dark, Ai would vigorously lift her upper body, touch her feet to the floor, and only in that moment she felt as if the darkness were torn apart. Ai looked at the numbers on the clock glowing in the dark by her pillow, felt around for her slippers with her feet, and searching

by touch in the darkness, she grabbed hold of a book. Whatever book it was would do. It was her choice to search blindly (sliding her finger along the spine of the book, she'd mostly forgotten where the books were arranged on the shelf)—was it *Yacht Sailing vol. 1? Four Seasons of Southern French Cuisine? Introduction to Semantics?* Without caring either way, Ai began to read from a page she opened up to haphazardly.

Ai moved with extremely sluggish gestures. This small room she was in existed apart from everyday buildings and the world—the numberless polished surfaces, flat and inclined, metallic, vinyl, plastic, wooden, concrete, and glass. Though in this seamlessly enduring time, it seemed even more certain than her slow movements, that no matter where she was, it was Ai that was disappearing. In this way, with this certain acquiescence, she opened her body to the universe. Her thoughts and desires separated distinctly from her own perceived authenticity; inundated by the uncertainty of everything, she chose a random book, and what did it mean to read it? All manner of words, drama, objects, structures were in the space of these books, both density and sparsity. Turning such uncertain thoughts around in her head, Ai thought of the extent of her own passion for the books, characters, and pictures inside herself. For what could she have passion? She existed here and now according to the pain in her physical self, the many garments that wrapped up her vulgar flesh (underwear, skirt, blouse), and the space of the room that enveloped her, pressed down upon her; she sat in the room filled with the dense, wet odor of the rain, looking mindlessly at something. A poet, Ai thought, once

wrote, 'The color of the rain was dry, and it fell like marbles.' But it was never so. Rain isn't dry. It has no color. It's never anything like marbles.

"Everything is random," Ai said to herself, as if spewing a vague curse upon the world. The spicy curry she had eaten that evening, with floating oil shimmering on the surface, was troubling her stomach and she had half an inclination to despair. She was nonplussed by the dull pain in her gut; she swallowed down two sugar-coated pills, waited for the effects of the medicine, believing unreasonably in its power. According to her theory, if it was true that pain comes from spiritual energy, wouldn't the medicine's efficacy be exhibited in the belief in the medicine's effects?

So Ai put all of her efforts toward believing in the healing power of the two little pills. If she were an insomnia specialist, let's say, when she thought she could pull herself out of the depth of the sea of sleep, she could take medicine, sending a component into her stomach that would numb the sensation, and what's more, the component would go from her capillaries to all the arteries in the body and commingle, would be the same as injecting an anesthetic directly into her veins. The same choice would likely do for physical stress, too, she thought, unconsciously rubbing her stomach. As opposed to the stumbling approach of the slowly creeping feathers of sleeplessness, the sleep caused by taking medication, that uncomfortably sudden sensation of falling, the deep, bizarre, unnatural descent into sleep, was closer to what she really desired.

Rain fell outside the window. The curtains were left open, so the conditions outside were easily seen. At times the buildings, the shapes of trees, and the tiny raindrops ceaselessly falling to the ground in the dark became clearly visible in the headlights of passing cars. The whitish orange beams of the headlights would create images on the ceiling like moving foot-lights of dancing girls in the room lit by only a desk lamp. Ai's room was on the second floor. Across the asphalt street from the window facing south, there were a dentist, an offset printing warehouse, an auto mechanic, and Blossom House Cleaning. The dentist was directly across from the sweet shop, and below the dentist's window, a little patch of grass behind a whitewashed iron railing with some morning glories entwined around it, and also growing there, three cycad palms, three hemp palms, and a single large hackberry tree. Next to it on the left, on the corner, was the Nomura Printers building, from which extended a rather wide road to the south. Straight down that road were a flour mill, a middle school, tennis courts, and the large cisterns of a gas company. Under the direct rays of the summer sun, the three gas cisterns stood like monuments to something, functionally ornamented by spiral staircases, catching the light on their silver metallic orbs giving the impression of launched space capsules. By the faded grass and white lines of the tennis courts, the court supervisor (in the old days, he made it all the way to the national men's doubles championships, but now he was a gloomy thirty-eight year old bachelor with a peg leg and dark glasses) was in the management office; there was a dressing room made of knotted cedar planks with a tin roof and a never-used shower, bleachers that were more like cement stairs, and behind them a pine tree, the garden of the adjacent elementary school, and a pool. The blue

painted building of a flour mill, a gritty gray storehouse with big numbers on it painted in red, and six sandalwood trees. And all kinds of trees nearby (mostly ginkgoes, sycamores, Himalaya pines, oaks, and chinquapins) and flower beds in the gardens of the school, the mill, and the gas company, the scarlet and yellow canna flowers standing out most among the blossoms. Right now rain was falling on all these things. Quietly, as if breathing inside everything, rain like narrow nylon threads, glowing.

And then she's standing by the window once again. The building that housed the print shop on the corner had an odd shape. Where the ridge line would normally come to a right angle on the corner, it was cut off, making an isosceles triangle shape with two equal sides about a meter long where the walls of the building would extend out. That created a very small, triangular empty space on the street corner, and on that spot stood a community bulletin board. The print shop lot was bordered by a concrete base about a foot high, so the small triangle facing the corner was a popular place for beggars who came to the city to take a rest. Next to the entrance to the print shop on the corner was a red, cylindrical mail box. On the bulletin board, a poster read: "Self Defense Forces Recruitment!!! Come all!!! Young men, the nation's defense is in your hands!!!" A paper flyer was there with, "Neighborhood Children's Association presents Summer Break Film Festival at the Municipal Assembly Hall. Starts at 6pm!" written in red, green, and yellow magic markers. On the poster, Self Defense Force soldiers posed with faces and fists raised, the spirit to combat an imaginary aerial enemy brimming between their thick, dark eyebrows.

The auto repair shop was on the right side of the dentist's office, emitting sounds of engines and the howl of welding torches morning to night. At the dentist, the sound of that disagreeable drill rang out like the wings of a swarm of insects abuzz in the air. The sounds of cars, motors, the dentist's drill, bawling children and their scolding mothers. In Ai's ears, all this noise would mix with the dust kicked up by cars, the exhaust in the air, and the stirring vapors of melting asphalt, to create one big integrated sound, and then collide and disperse into a chaos of fragments again as if they had never mixed. She sat in the chair by the opened window staring out into the street. Between a gap in the dusty, sky blue blinds in the window of the dentist's office, she could see the examination room, a mother standing behind her child receiving some instruction. Over at the auto shop were men wearing oil-stained uniforms covered in sweat, while another man in blue jeans spoke loudly while examining the engine of a red coupe. Trucks, bicycles, motorcycles, would sometimes pass by, mothers pushing strollers, NHK bill collectors, salesmen carrying big suitcases, groups of children heading to the pool carrying plastic bags, and every day at the same time, a black dog with a skin condition would go trotting by while Ai watched it all from her chair, smoking cigarettes. Two young workers from the print shop wearing head bands came out and hung a big red banner at the entrance, reading, "Workers On Strike!" in large black letters. The printers union went on strike regularly once a month, putting up the red banner without fail and everyone was accustomed to it. Once, the operator of the press, a young woman with a fine reputation of the community, spoke to Ai in earnest at the nearby greengrocer, saying, "It is a necessary evil. Just like a woman's menstrual cycle, if this ceases, so does the company. Because our union works

hard, and our members over at Sony are given preferential treatment.” Then, the thirty-two year old divorced woman, pointing up with her black spectacles in her left hand, a gesture of emphasis that made her look like a capable executive, said to Ai in a hushed voice, “But it’s very strange.” Ai, stared at the arrangement of vegetables, responding with a non-committal, “Uh huh.”

Today’s Specials!

Tomatoes ¥100 each

Cucumbers ¥100 each

Eggplant ¥50 each

Lettuce

Salad Greens

Beets

Romaine

Celery

Mushrooms

Onions

Red Cabbage

Pearl Onions

Etcetera.

The vegetables were arranged very pleasantly. The men of the greengrocer's yelled out, "C'mon in! That's it, thank you! Ok, one tomato, one cucumber, two celery, one head of lettuce, altogether, 415 yen! Out of 500, 85 is your change, come again... Fresh lettuce! Fresh lettuce! Tomatoes are cheap! Ok, ok, it's the deal of the day!"

"It's a regular thing. It's odd, but we go on strike about once every month, like clockwork."

"Sometimes it's random, but it seems like it always happens every twenty-eight days."

"You're right! That's it exactly. Writers have such keen perceptions. When you're gazing out the window every day, you're not merely gazing. That twenty-eight-day cycle coincides with my own menstruation. Sometimes it's off, but those times, so is my period. How could that be, I wonder?"

"It must be. . . ."

"Must be?"

"I guess you and the company have some rare, intimate connection."

"I guess. But that means I'm risking my life for the company."

"That's incredible. What if all women are connected to a company's business? A strike could go on for three months, couldn't it? That would mean you're pregnant, wouldn't it? Amazing. The company has a very regular period."

Now it was as if every sound were silenced. No, Ai thought, that's not what I want to say, exactly. All the sounds, voices, and language that fill up the day must go somewhere at night—like the birds probably go back to their peaceful nest to rest. The rain that started this evening marked the end of summer. Flinging open the window facing the road, she could hear the sounds of rain, the TV noise coming from the dentist's waiting room, one of the carrier pigeons the dentist raised on his roof called out two or three times in a soft, milky voice; Ai rested her hand on the window frame, gazed at the isosceles triangle corner where the asphalt, print shop, and mail box were lit by a street lamp. Rain flowed along the surface of the wet, black street. It is like the black sheen on a hippo's back when it rises with a splash over the surface of river in the hot, damp savannah, or, the street at night is a river, and if you cross that river, there is a totally undiscovered tropical jungle, and pushing through the jungle you find a flowing tributary. It's possible, isn't it? Further and further upstream you go in a canoe hollowed out of a giant log, not knowing where the river ends, carrying water in a leather pouch, wine, cured pork, dried cooked rice, coffee, coffee pot, and a sleeping bag. And I'll be there with him, too! And not just then, but I'll be with him always. Always, always, always... Even now, in my imagination, in my words... Together... Because the world is a river of words... With no expectation that he was really there, she wrinkled her nose and scowled at him in his absence, and faintly laughed. The rain makes the city seem like a river, doesn't it? Just like a river. . . .

The air in the room was heavy and damp. She sat in the chair pinching a pencil between her fingers and drew a single line in a notebook. Then she drew another line, and

several shorter lines. This became a map. She went on drawing a map of an unfamiliar, unreal place.

Ai walked around the room at a slow pace, balancing on her tiptoes, or, sliding along the floor with the whole soles of her feet. The soft fibers of the carpet felt good against her feet, the carpet was still pulled up from a fresh vacuuming, and with the rough feeling it gave her skin, absent of any kind of filth, Ai managed for a while to taste a sense of happiness. Circling the room, her feet would occasionally hit a mound of magazines, a book, an empty soda can; she kicked them violently, and after she was done pacing the room, she scattered the magazines and books all over. She remembered having heard some saying like, “If you step on a book, you’ll be crippled right quick,” and looking at the books she herself had stepped on, she began to crawl around the room, pretending to be crippled with a feeling akin to regret. Lying on the floor, both arms fanned out at her sides, she stared out the window, then closed her eyes, trying to imagine the most unpleasant thing she could think of, but she had little success. As a girl, she would lay in bed in the dark pretending to be dead, her body slowly swaying, thinking about how in every moment time was slipping away. I should write a letter. I’ll write a very long letter to him. Like I used to, like I always do, like I’ve done every time. . . .

Again, Ai stood by the window watching the rain fall. On the corner by the print shop, she saw someone’s shadow in the lamplit triangle, a medium-sized suitcase set down next to it. The figure squatted down in the vacant space. The person wore something like a long-sleeved kimono which was soiled and soaked by the rain. It looked

as though a surprisingly bright red dye was used over what was originally a brown garment; the crimson of the wet kimono clinging to her body was melting in the rain and it looked like streams flowing through soil bathing in bitter orange sunlight. This beggar woman was soaked through and through, swallowing down rain, the water running all over her skin as though each rain drop was aiming to enter into her pores. The beggar woman's downcast profile, illuminated by the orange glow of the street lamp, had water dribbling down the nose and cheeks. She was leaning down, both hands on her knees, her sleeves on each side like the spreading wings of a wounded water fowl, soiled with rain and mud. The beggar woman rocked back and forth in that position singing a song.

Ai stuck her head out of the window, getting a better look at her, and yelled across to her, "Maaaa'am, maaaa'am!"

The beggar woman took no notice of Ai's voice, and kept rocking slowly back and forth, continuing her song.

Suddenly, as if this beggar woman was the wide open lack in Ai's existence itself, as if she were the emptiness in Ai's soul, exposed to this endlessly falling slush, or, the strange sense of absence and unrest that was spreading in her body from her abdomen up to her throat, as if the true root of the silence and heavy distress of death that was creeping up behind her, was this woman, Ai trembled with yearning and love, calling out repeatedly, "Maaaa'am, maaaa'am!" staring at the beggar lady, who never once looked her way.

Tears running down her face, her voice grew gradually softer, weeping, "Ma'am, ma'am." Standing behind her, the original author placed a gentle hand on Ai's shoulder.

Ai turned around, and weeping heavily, bounded down the stairs and out into the street. Pelted by rain, Ai walked toward the beggar lady; turning back, she looked up into her second floor window to see the man standing there, and thought vacantly, 'I'm looking at my own figure.' And then, gazing at myself, I thought, 'What would *he* do?'

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