



2017



the art issue

C - The Art Issue

This issue was conceptualized as a means to display the varied talents of expats living in Japan. They come from many different creative backgrounds and develop many others still while in Japan. Enjoy their work, and check out each contributor's links for more.

Issue Concept and Design

Ashley Hirasuna

Copy Editing

Lilian Diep

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Contact information for each contributor has been provided at the beginning of their spread, so please address each contributor individually with inquiries.

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People are Watching, People are Talking

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**Nancy Ngo
Toyama**

The Town We Share

Originally published in Toyama's Tram.

Email
Facebook

How you talk to other boys at open bars about openly fingering girls like it's open season.

How you called me fat and ugly seconds after hitting on me because I told you not to fucking touch my head - you cheating bastard - while you cooed, "You're so cute..."

How you fed me drinks to get as drunk as you, slept with me (although you allegedly love your girlfriend), and made me swear to secrecy as the stench of your rancid body permeated my sheets.

How you rated me - your latest - a "3 out of 10" at a party where my lips were dyed red from your jungle juice and my neck covered with faux flowers - not tulips though, but plumerias - to a friend who knows about us (who you don't know knows)

How you stayed in our relationship texting other girls who lived days when it was your nights wishing they were yours, instead of wishing to be mine

How you still messed around with me, yet went steady with another girl you were dating on the side (or were you dating me on the side?! the week after you said you "weren't looking for a serious relationship"



How you messaged my friend on Tinder a month into
sharing a home together

How you - after months of trying to tie me down - dumped
me when the trains stopped running, forcing me to stay at
your house, and offered me your cold floor for the night

How you tried to pin me as a Byronic heroine "who's too
afraid to open up because you have been hurt in the past"
- you were looking for someone who cheated in all their
past relationships like you have

How you violated me (but someone could say *technically*
we were both too drunk to consent or to know what we
were doing)

by carrying me back to your place - after I vomited in
the gutter outside the bar - and proceeded to fuck me (I
guess, you did know what you were doing after all?)

How you humped me with your morning wood and I lied
there feigning sleep

How you spoke with me for an hour every night up until I
found out from Instagram - yes, totally stalked you - that a)
you had a girlfriend and b) you moved to Australia together

How you get touchy when you drink, but can't handle the
truth when you're sober

How you spent weekdays biking and weekends sleeping
beside me, only to announce that you "don't date girls in
the countryside"

How you made it a priority to speak to me every day, but
the daily ちゅっ
stopped coming because you ghosted me after getting
what you wanted

How you (*literally*) passed me - clearly inebriated -
around...back and forth...
and back again in the seediest all-you-can-drink bar of
this town before your friend's almost lifeless body came
crashing down, taking a set of table and chairs with him

How you unintentionally make me feel guilty because you
haven't gotten laid in years,
yet it scares me when you can pick up my body like it
weighs nothing

How you pushed me to get drunk on a Tuesday night,
scratched my pan,
and shouted "wait for it" before every goddamn punchline

How you pulled me aside and demanded an answer for
why I wouldn't date you

How you want to know who I fucked the past weekend
(and what's it to you?)
because it seems that I have gotten myself a reputation

How you trap me in dark corners to convince me that I
should
give you a chance because you're "a nice guy"

How you guilt-tripped me/trapped me by holding your
hand against the door into
giving you a blowjob (in tears) after I discovered you were
married

How you showed off the girl you're so devoted to from
back home a week
before I saw your tongue down the mouth of the new
transplant from down under

How you promised me that you don't have the slightest
clue as to how you contracted HIV



How you suggested that I be your girlfriend for tonight
since your girlfriend of 8 years was out of town (it's okay, I
took your friend home that night)

How you casually name dropped your wife's name
on a long, and soon silent, drive to my house after months
of dating

How you kissed and ran your fingers across my skin last
summer along the riverbank away from the droves of
people and fireworks and cried after about how much you
still love your girlfriend - but would "love if we could still
stay friends"

How you told me to stop victimizing myself and that I
deserve to be having a mental breakdown

How you think our future can't be real because we barely
know
how long a moment is - you can't love me when you're
sober

How you planned our future adventures, reminded me
daily how much you love me,
but then confessed that you never did, not even for a
second or a minute



How you made it clear that me being out of your life brings
relief and you being out of mine brings chaos

And how I just let it happen.

How I feel powerless.

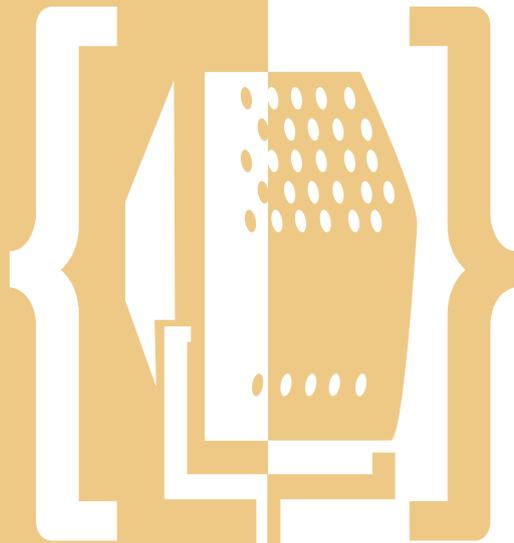
How I tell my girlfriends about it.

How I think about how little this all matters to you.

And say nothing to you. Never say anything to you.

And how this repeats.





Jenn Winterbine Ishikawa

Experimenting with 35mm Film in Japan

Shinjuku, Tokyo

Yakushima, Kagoshima

Shirakawago, Gifu

Kamikochi, Nagano

Gunkanjima, Nagasaki

Kawaguchiko, Yamanashi

Kanazawa, Ishikawa

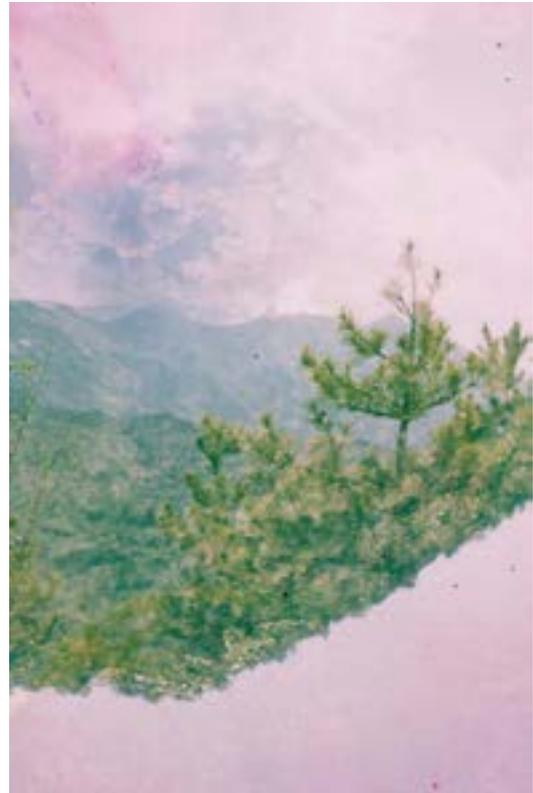
Echizen, Fukui

Nara City, Nara

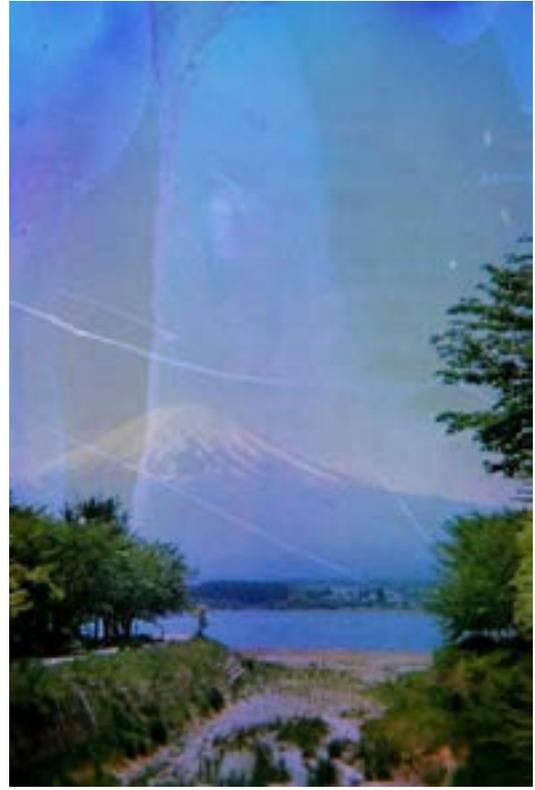
Miyajima, Hiroshima

Instagram

Facebook











Leia Atkinson
Tokyo

March

Exit

Circle

Ordinary

Tunnel

Depth

Hands

Rocks

Flowers

Fire

Linkedin



非常口

















Lilian Diep Toyama

Connection

I now have an aversion to leaving my apartment after midnight

Originally published in [Toyama's Tram](#).

Wattpad

"That'll be 1853 *yen*," the clerk said in a cheery voice while bagging the items.

"Yes, yes," I said absentmindedly while I was fishing around in my wallet, looking for the exact change. I dumped all the contents of the change section in my wallet into my hands, pushing coins aside as I tried to add up all I had. I ended up being short 12 *yen*, so I pulled out a 10,000 *yen* note. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I said apologetically to the elderly man as I handed it to him. He just smiled and said it was no problem. As he was breaking the note, I looked around me and noticed I was the only person in the convenience store. I guess it shouldn't come as a surprise, since it was practically 3 a.m.

"*Hai*, here is your change, miss." I snapped back around to face him. As he held out the bills in front of me, I tried shuffling my belongings to make it easier for me to put things away faster. I managed to awkwardly have my stuff moved around in time for when he finished counting the bills back, and I tried stuffing them in my wallet as quickly as I could. I wanted to hurry so as to not be a bother, but life didn't want me to leave, so I had issues folding my money and putting it in my wallet. The simplest concept can be difficult. Those times when I try to rush because it felt like I was taking too much time. His hand was already suspended in the air with my coins and the receipt right before I finished. "I'm sorry," I said apologetically as I held my cupped hand out.

"No, no, thank you very much!" he said with a warm smile as the money fell into my hand. I dumped my change into the coin section of my wallet, making it bulge with almost 1,000 *yen* in small change. I shuffled my wallet a little bit to spread the coins out to make it a little less bulky, I didn't want to take up any more of the clerk's time. Finally I left the store saying, "Thank you very much," with my bag in my hand. I looked back at the old man as he yelled, "Please, come again!" with a smile in the empty convenience store. Then I had a momentary feeling of *déjà vu*. I stood there for a bit looking around trying to remember when I last felt like I experienced it before, but brushed it off and turned around, shifting the weight of my backpack.

Before me was a white scarred face, with staring black eyes. I leapt back with a scream, my heart racing. I realised that the convenience store was now dark and broken, most products gone and the shelves littering the floor. Whatever was left of the ceiling was either cracked or on the ground. Glass from the windows blanketed the linoleum floor next to the entrance along with broken beams and rubbish. I looked to my left and noticed that the clerk was replaced with a cracked counter, stained in a dark color. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a movement and my head snapped back around to face the man, closer now with an outreached arm. I dropped my bag of snacks as I stepped back, trying to get away, spilling the contents all over the floor.

"Are you alright, miss?"

I turned to face the clerk in the brightly lit convenience store. His face was genuinely worried as he peered at me over the clean counter. "Are you alright?" He repeated as he came around the corner to me, and bent to pick up my purchase. I looked down and saw my snacks at my feet, and then I looked around me to see everything neat and tidy; no broken ceiling or glass, the food and clothes on the shelves, the refrigerators hummed with a chilly whir, and the floor was spotless.

The clerk straightened up to look me in the face.

"Are you okay?" He repeated, more worried.

"Yes, yes, yes, I'm sorry, I think I'm just really tired," I replied back, embarrassed, as I reached for my bag.

"Yes, it is after three o'clock right now."

"I think I should get home. Thank you very much."

"Will you be okay walking by yourself?"

"Yes, yes, yes, I'm sorry for making you worry. I'm sorry I dropped my food."

"No, no, don't worry about it. Are you sure you will be alright?"

"Yes, yes, thank you very much." I made my way to the door, bowing myself out the door to the elderly clerk as he stared at me in concern.

The chilly air hugged my neck as I walked backwards into the night. The streets were empty, save for a man walking towards the tobacco vending machine across the street. I looked back into the convenience store and saw that the clerk was still rooted to the spot, watching me as if I would fall over. I bowed again and turned towards my apartment, walking as briskly as I could.

"I'm getting too old for this," I muttered to myself, shuffling my belongings hurriedly to the other arm to free the hand closest to my keys, then swung my backpack around again to drop my wallet into its compartment. "I probably shouldn't go out anymore." Back in America, I would have never gone out at 3 a.m. to a convenience store to purchase late night snacks. However, I thought that Japan had felt safer. My walk was mostly lit, and the convenience store was 24/7, just ten blocks away. I usually don't keep snacks in my apartment, so a late night walk didn't seem too bad of an idea to me. However, as a girl, I grew up in a society with anxiety as a constant companion, whether late at night or in empty streets. Anxiety had walked me to the store, now anxiety walked me home.

I felt an itching feeling along my spine, a sense that I was being followed making the hairs on the back of my neck stand. I stopped under a streetlamp, and turned tensely to look behind me. The streets were empty, with nothing making a move nor a sound. Slightly satisfied, I

turned around again to make my way back home.

Before me stood the man with the white scarred face, standing sentry. I screamed. I screamed as hard as I could, dropping my bag of snacks. My heart pounded against my rib cage. I backed away from him, almost tripping over myself, before turning to run back to the direction I came from. The man was already there. My heart beat harder and harder. I turned to run the other way only to find him barring my way again. Tears formed in my eyes as I gripped my shoulder strap.

I'm going to die. I'm. Going. To. Die.

"Please," I pleaded in English, forgetting myself, "please." I tried backing away again, clutching my backpack close to my front as an attempt to bar myself from him, and turned on my heels and started running, hoping against all hope that he wasn't there again. He was there. Two feet in front of me, he stood standing there, but I had already started running, and couldn't stop. I braced myself with my eyes closed for the oncoming impact, but nothing came except a crashing wave of icy coldness. I shivered, opening my eyes and breathing heavily. I looked back to see him standing where I was, looking at me, and I kept running, clutching my backpack close to me like it was my armor.

The convenience store. Convenience store.

I broke out onto the street where the convenience store stood, and reached the door

before I realised where I was. The street was dark again. Debris lay scattered on the walkway and in the streets, broken glass strewn around dark lamp posts. Doors of the shops and stores were broken into, leaving bent metal and cracked glass littering the entrance. I backed away, eyes fixated on the store. I felt a chill against my back, and froze. I closed my eyes and prayed silently that I was still alone.

Please. Please, please, please, don't be there.

I turned around slowly, and let a quivering breath as I saw him. He stood there silently, eyes fixated on me. I took a cautious step back, glass crunching against my shoe, locking eyes with him. I felt my hand hit the metal frame of what was left of the front door, and I stopped. I waited for what was a long minute, neither one of us moving.

I need to get out of here. I need to find somebody. Anybody. Where do I go?

I tried to steel myself to run again as I desperately tried to remember where the nearest police department was. As I brought my hand from behind my back, I raked it against some jagged glass. I exclaimed in shock as I brought my hand forward, and saw a piece of glass protruding out of my palm. The man began to move towards me, and I immediately tensed up again against the metal frame, completely forgetting my escape plan.

"Please," I whimpered out again in English,

"please don't hurt me." I held my hands feebly in front of me in an attempt to protect myself.

The man reached out a hand and I instinctively shut my eyes out of fear.

This is it. This is how I die. I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I'm going to-

I felt an intense chill on my hand. I shivered, and peeked at my hand, afraid of what was going to happen. The man turned my defensive hand palm up, and forced my tense fingers flat. Curiously, I watched him, my body rigid out of fear and anxiety. Head bent, he studied my palm and the jagged piece of glass. Blood had already pooled and ran, leaving cracked lines down my wrist and around the back of my hand. The man brought his other hand around, and pinched the glass between his fingers.

Is he going to...?

I braced myself. From what I saw in movies and shows, I knew it would hurt. The man at first slowly pulled the glass up. I let out a gasp in exclamation, and he stopped. He lifted his head up and his black eyes met mine. I recoiled, shivering at his look. My body tensed up again, waiting for what might happen.

A scene of him shoving the glass further down into my hand flashed across my mind. Using his free hand, he grabs my neck, lifting me off the ground. He plucks the glass out of my palm, and slices my throat. Or gouges my eyes. Or he

transforms into a huge monster, attacking me, and my screams fill the night. I was going to die. I. Was. Going. To. Die.

He bent his head back down when he saw that I wouldn't put up any resistance, and proceeded on extracting the glass from my palm. I couldn't feel it coming out either due to shock, my freezing hand, or it couldn't be felt at all. I wouldn't know; I've never had glass stuck in my palm before. He let the piece of bloody glass drop to the floor and raised his head to meet my eyes again. I froze immediately at his stare. I realised that he was done, but my hand was still in his. I slowly drew my hand back towards me, unsure of what was going to happen next.

"Thank you," I muttered in Japanese, inclining my head. My hand let out a fresh wave of blood now that nothing was in the way.

I wonder if I need stitches. Can I still get stitches? I've never gotten stitches. Will I have to put in my OWN stitches? I might as well just die.

"You're not from here."

My head snapped back up to the man standing in front of me. He was now standing a little farther away from me, hands by his side, but looking intently at me.

"N-no, I'm not." I replied back. I realised that I had replied back in English, and my curiosity took over my fear for a little while. "You...can speak in English?"

"Yes." His mouth moved almost imperceptibly.

My mind raced, trying to think my way out of the situation while simultaneously curious as to who he was and why I was still alive. Questions raced around in my head, trying to push their way out of my mouth.

"Who...who are you?" I asked hesitantly. I waited, but he didn't reply. He stood there, staring at me, seemingly ignoring my question. "Are...are you a...spirit? A ghost?" I asked him. And again, nothing.

Am...I being rude? Or just weird? Rudely weird? I really should be leaving.

"Where am I?" I asked out of hope.

"You are in Japan," he replied back this time, his English unimpeded by his accent. I let out a gasp of exasperation.

Wow. Are we serious now?

"Why, then, why is everything...run-down? Broken? Where is everybody?"

"They're gone."

I looked at him, measuring his response. "Then why am I here?" I asked, finally.

He looked at me for a while, not saying anything again. I ran through possibilities of what to do.

If everybody really is gone, than what am I to do? I can't get help. I can't get stitches. I am going to die. I'm going to die alone.

"You should fix your hand up," he finally said, gesturing to my still bleeding hand. "There might still be some plasters inside."

I looked behind me into the convenience store. The shelves were haphazardly knocked over or empty. Some products were still left on the displays while others were spilled all over the floor. I looked back at him, trying to predict what would happen when I turned my back, what would happen if I started looking for some supplies. I decided to give it a shot and ducked into the dark store. I reached for my phone to see if I could get any light shown to where I was going, but my phone wouldn't turn on.

Apocalypse. Right...

I looked back over my shoulder to see if the man had followed me. Much to my surprise, not surprise, he was already right behind me.

"For-seriously! Can you STOP doing that?" I yelled at him exasperatedly, forgetting that I'd thought of various scenarios where he could kill me just moments before. He still stood there, silently, before going around to a different aisle. I stared at his retreating figure in odd wonder—how he moved normally like a person, yet soundlessly across the debris on the floor; the coldness that surrounded him; how used to his presence I had become in a short amount of

time whereas earlier my body would tense up; the lack of fear I now felt towards him. I turned around to resume looking, only to find him standing there wordlessly again.

"Gee-really?!" I yelled, jumping back. "Are you TRYING to scare me to death?" I crouched down onto my haunches, trying to steady my heart and breathing again. *I think my heart's aged at least ten years after all that's happened so far.*

"Here."

I looked up to see that he was holding out a flashlight towards me in one hand and a few packages of batteries in the other. I looked at him incredulously before reaching out to take the stuff from his hands. I opened the flashlight then the correct pack of batteries gingerly with my wounded hand, and began filling the compartment. I switched on the flashlight and directed the light towards my palm. The blood was dry and had crusted over my wound.

At least it looks like I stopped bleeding for the most part.

I straightened up, looking around me to see what I could use. I glanced back at the man warily before making my way to another dusty aisle, looking up and down before I found the correct one. There were basic first aid kits and antibiotic sprays. I half contemplated the idea of running water, then thought better of it. I rummaged around the store and grabbed a

first aid kit, a spray, bottle of water, and a towel.

What if I'm somewhere in apocalyptic future, and everything's gone bad?

I looked down at the dust covered things I grabbed and spilled everything onto the broken countertop. I walked behind the counter to look for the moist towelettes they usually pass out, and opened a packet.

Dry. Must mean it's been at least some time then...

I headed back towards the aisles now, glancing towards the silent man, and went to the alcohol section, grabbing the clearest alcohol available under some knocked over shelves, looking at the proof.

I know this'll sting. It better sting.

I went back to the counter and readied myself. I cleaned my palm of the blood as best I could, the wound smarting already as I rubbed the dried blood off as gingerly as I could with the now wet towelette. Fresh blood seeped through due to the disturbing movement. I dried my palm off, and braced myself over the sink as I opened the bottle of alcohol. I took a deep breath and dipped my hand, pouring the alcohol over the wound, wincing in pain as I felt a shock go through my hand and up my arm.

Yep, still stings. Still stings. Still stings. Still stings.

I bit my lip to prevent myself from making any

noise as my eyes watered in pain. I grabbed the towel again to press against my palm to stifle the ripples of pain I felt. Peeling the towel away, no fresh blood came out. I turned around to the first aid kit to find the man opening it up for me.

"Thank you," I said, a little surprised at his gesture. I found a medicated cream packet, and smeared some over my palm hoping against all hope that it could possibly still work. A small roll of gauze came included, so I wrapped that around my hand, sealing it with some tape. The tape was still sticky to my surprise.

Either I'm not too far into the future, or this is good quality.

I look up to realise that the man was watching me as I dressed my wound. Noiselessly, he tidied up the contents of the first aid kit and handed the box over to me. I took it and dropped it into my pack that I shockingly still had on me. I looked outside and noticed that the sky was still hazy dusk, not darkening or lightening.

"Why am I here?" I asked quietly, not expecting much when I faced him again. He just looked back at me, neither breaking his gaze nor making any noise. A gnawing fear started forming in my gut again.

I...I'm stuck here. I'm stuck here until I die. Or...?

"Am I still alive or did I die, somehow?" I asked tentatively. I was afraid to know the answer

either way, knowing that the outcome to both would be the same.

"You're still alive," he replied back, unfazed.

"Then why am I here?"

Again, no response.

"Why. Am. I. Here?" I asked again, trying to keep my voice steady. "Did you bring me here?"

Again, no response.

"You CAN'T just keep silent the whole entire time!" I yelled indignantly. *There must be a reason why I'm still here, why he's keeping me alive. Why he's still here.* I looked around me and into the streets. I looked back at him out of the corner of my eye. "Are we alone?" I asked slowly, quietly.

Again, no response.

That's not what I wanted to hear.

"So there are other people here besides me? And...whatever you are? You said that everybody was gone."

"Everybody is gone," he finally said.

Then...?" Then, who's here?"

Again, no response.

We both stood there for a pregnant minute, staring at each other fixedly, his face still as stone while mine went from angry, to scared, to confused, and back to angry again, staring him down.

"Why am I here? What is this place?" I asked again, hoping that I would get an answer out of him. I didn't. I let out an exaggerated breath, and looked around me.

Apocalypse time. What do I need? What can I use? I looked at my backpack on the counter and looked inside. I took out what I thought would be unnecessary to me, stashing it underneath the counter, and started walking around the store and seeing what was left that I could use. I grabbed a couple of things here and there, and braced myself before I opened the door of the toilet. It was dirty, but not gruesome. I looked around to see if anything was of use, saw some tools in the cupboard, and took those too. I shifted my backpack to try to get used to the new weight, and pushed out into the store again. The man was where I had last seen him, eyes fixed in my direction. I gave him a weary glance, and walked around the store once more. I wasn't hungry, but I doubt that would last long. I tried looking for what was left, and trying to guess what was still good. I spied some CalorieMates under a knocked over display, and stashed them in my backpack, lightly wondering what I would do when I would get thirsty.

I made myself back to where the man had

stood, and gave him a once over.

"What do you do in your free time?" I half-jokingly asked.

"Hide."

I froze, and stared at him, processing that one simple word over again in my head.

"I'm joking," he said to me when I hadn't said anything.

I stood there trying to comprehend those two words over again in my head. On top of everything that had happened, I was never as confused as I was then. I looked past him into the streets, wondering what I was supposed to do. Panic started creeping into me again, and I felt anxious. I turned to the man. *If he won't tell me what I want to know, what will he tell me?*

"What do you suggest I do with myself now that I'm here?"

"Hide."

"Are you joking again?"

"Kind of." He stared at me again. Or at least it looked like he was staring at me; he hasn't blinked at me yet..

I ran through what I wanted to do. *Should I go to the hardware store and find a better weapon? Should I go to the grocery store to see if there*

was anything there I could get? Should I look around to see if there was anybody left? What if he's lying? What if everything he said wasn't true? What if it's all true...?

I started making my way out of the store and into the streets. The sky was still dark, but it was light enough for me to see my way. With the flashlight in my injured hand, I headed back to my apartment building, picking my way through the streets and the alleys. I walked gingerly, hoping not to make too much noise, checking cautiously around the walls for any danger. I fished my Swiss army knife from my backpack, and opened a blade, clutching it in my right hand. I peeked behind my shoulder and saw the man striding towards me, just a couple feet back. I turned and faced him. *Why does he stay with me? Can't be that he's lonely. Wait...actually...I'm alone too...*

"What can you tell me?" I asked, taking a different approach.

"Find somewhere safe," he replied, once he caught up.

"Okay...is...my apartment safe enough?"

"Should be. The longer you're out here, the more exposed you are."

"To what?"

Again, nothing.

I'll broach that again later...I guess...

I turned on my heel, and peered around the corner again. After ascertaining that it was relatively safe enough, I crept out and walked down the alley, taking in my surroundings. The buildings were crumbled down or caved in. A rain gutter lay exposed on the side; the black coating on the inside seemed to have eyes following me. It took what seemed like an hour to walk the ten blocks back home, crouching behind corners and checking to see if it was safe, always peering around me. The man stood there silently, watching as I crept around. I passed by my bag of snacks, seemingly untouched. I gingerly opened it to peek inside and everything looked normal enough aside from my drinks. I took out the questionable perishables and shoved the rest of the contents into my backpack before moving on. My tense body heaved a sigh of relief when I saw my building, mostly intact on the fifth floor where I resided.

The whole first floor had all the windows broken, and the doors were ajar. It seemed whatever was around didn't bother going up past the third floor judging by the looks on the outside. I fished my keys from my pocket, and opened my lock as noiselessly as I could. *Windows unbroken, door unopened; so far so good.* I looked at the man that stood beside me before I took a huge breath and cautiously opened the door. Peering inside, I tried listening for any movements, and saw none. The inside was darker than it was outside, so I couldn't see

anything, I opened the door a little wider and stepped inside carefully. I kept my shoes on as I stepped in through the hallway carefully, peering around me. I opened up every door that I came by cautiously, scared of what I might find. Checking the toilet room and the shower room with trepidation, I was relieved to find nothing out of the ordinary, save for a lot of dust and some mold growing. Nothing was under the bed, or in the closet, so I felt safe enough to use the flashlight to look around better. A thick layer of dust had settled onto everything, but nothing looked disturbed from last I saw it. Some mold had sprouted along the windowpane, the humidity in Japan making it easy for condensation to collect; dust was everywhere, but I didn't know if that was due to lack of airflow or time. I wiped my right hand against my bed; dust. I half-contemplated shaking things off to make it cleaner when I saw the man enter my room, looking around. One never really thinks about tidying up before being whisked through time to an apocalypse.

"Do you think electricity still works? I can try tidying up," I jested towards him. I looked for any reaction, but didn't receive any. "Do you... want to...sit?" *Can you sit?* I cleared one side of my bed to free some space, disturbing the dust. I shielded my face as the dust settled back down again. He moved to the corner and sat more out of propriety than out of necessity. I sat on the same side, but farther away. We stared at each other again. The more that I looked at him, the less scary he seemed; the pale face marred by the long scars was almost

transparent, his arms resting awkwardly over his lap, his feet spread slightly apart, his back straight. Unsure of what to say to him, we kept quietly staring at each other, my mind running through what I could ask him that I could get an answer from.

"What can you tell me?" I ventured again, hoping to get some more information this time.

"You should stay here for the night."

"How do I know when night's over?"

"When the sun comes up."

I looked around at the dim room, unsure if any light had left or came in since I've returned. I looked back at the man again, measuring all that I've been through.

"Can I trust you?" I asked, a little timidly.

"Yes."

"Why me?" I expected nothing, again, but instead I got an awkward look on his face.

He broke his gaze from mine finally, and looked around him, the first time he looked unsure.

"I...used to live here..."

"You what?" I asked him, eyebrows raised, thinking I might've misheard his words.

"I used to live in this apartment."

"I just moved here two weeks ago. You used to *live* in *this* apartment?"

"...Yes."

I looked around me, again, in disbelief. *If he was...here...two weeks ago...where am I?* I turned towards him again. "What can you tell me?"

He didn't look directly at me again, this time his answer was directed to my wall. "I need your help."

"With what?"

"I need your help to help me leave."

I sat there, waiting for more to come from him, but no other explanation followed. "You. You want my help? To leave?" I asked, enunciating each word, both in English and Japanese. Just to make sure. "You want MY help to LEAVE this place, in which I. HAVE. NO. IDEA. HOW. I EVEN. GOT. HERE?" I almost yelled. I was practically livid, almost ready to scream if not for fear of whatever was out there.

I got up off the bed and started pacing in front of my bed. His head hung between his shoulders. I stared at him, through him even. "You want my help, MY help, to leave this place. You brought me here. Weren't you the one who brought me here? Is that why you were being so quiet every time I asked you for any information?" It hit me

that a possibility of his silence was his shame.

He was ashamed. Was he ashamed? I seethed. All the frustration I had felt in the past few hours bubbled inside me. "Why am I here?"

"I need your help to escape," he replied, not looking up.

My eyebrows twitched in vexation. "How did I get here?"

"I brought you here."

My face almost scrunched up in a snarl. "Where am I?"

"My hell."

Sarah Pragnell

Hyogo

Summer: Light Trails

Autumn: Fallen Colour

Winter: Tracks

Spring: Home Bound

Four Seasons Across Japan

Website

Flickr

Instagram







Korellia Schneider
Miyagi

Sunday Morning, DMV
For April, In Blue
Spare Moments
daughters

Email



Sunday Morning, DMV

A show of hands

Skinny, bangled arm
bayside
bearing no pores and
no care for catching sun

The gentleman
near the corridor
tanned, bent at the elbow

We are all here for deliverance

Strangers huddled in a space
to listen and perhaps even hear
each other's sniffles or prayers
in the morning, interrupted

I'm thinking about angel-hair pasta
and harp strings and which
brushes closer to the membrane
of heaven

And how squid ink stains teeth
with grotesque and beautiful
impermanence

We are all here for redemption
and for self-preservation
in our own unapologetic ways



For April, In Blue

I know others would praise how strikingly the green
brings out your dew-drop eyes, the brimming of your being
in the way grass cranes to majesty unmatched in a single day

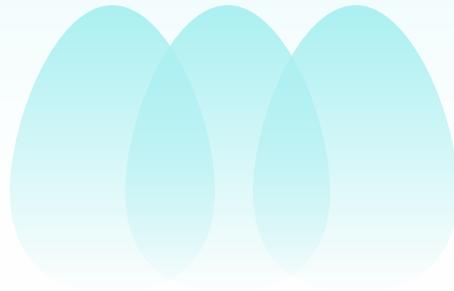
But I have always thought you most resplendent in blue
where you hatch from the shell of morning, in full regalia

Velvet mantle sweeping over the trail carved as you wander
deluge of life fluttering from the hollows of flowered steps

Juno sends her finest gifts in gently wrapped parcels
the birds and their babies sing unto you and yours

But please don't abide this silly thought, or only in part
please take it with the spoonful of cream in your tea

You wear every color like it always belonged to you
and you become what you always have been



Spare Moments

In spring dusk
I disrobe myself
of worry
floor-length
chasing my feet
in tatters

Piercings
of levity
where
birds of paradise
sink their talons
let drops of light
trickle
through
the ceiling

In essence
carbonic
enough to lift
but not to fly
with the birds

To pause
the prowl
of tomorrow

daughters

roots dive deep into earth's tissue
in the space, they weave their own

pearled columns and pillars
baby teeth become shooting stars

straight hair and sloping bodies
flatland and rivermouth make way

growing nest of vessels and channels
pantheon of spikes, swirls, and spins

in the shadow of mother mountain
until they rise to case their own





Steven Boar

Hiroshima

A Fall Breeze

A modern recreation of one of Harunobu's classic woodblock prints.

Facebook 1

Facebook 2



秋きぬと目にはさやかに
見えぬとも風のをとにぞ
おどろかれぬる

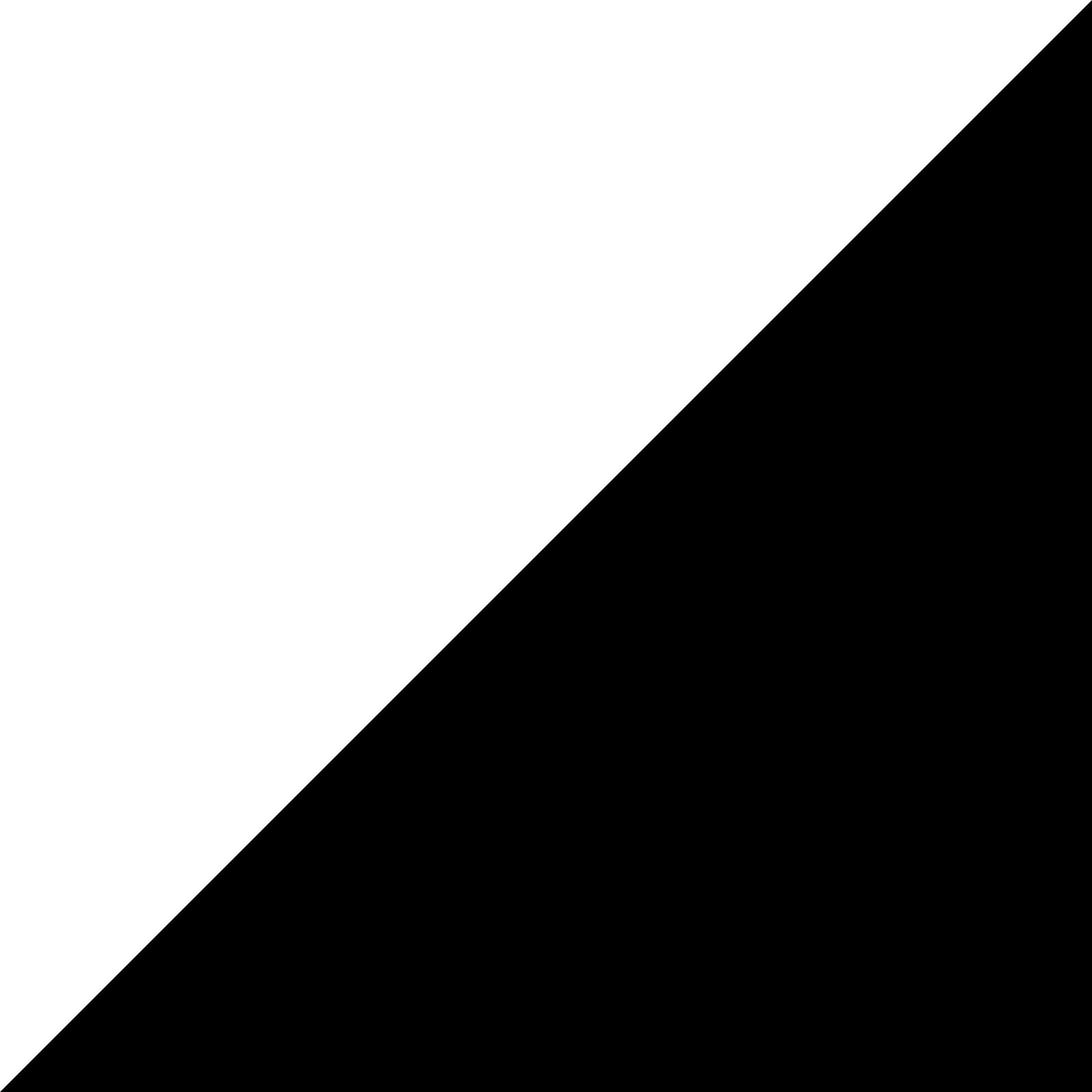
絵道一干浦

Ever since the first time that I saw his work, I have thought that Harunobu's style was quite similar to mine. So, I wanted to try to recreate one of his old Ukiyo-E prints to see what it might have looked like if it were made in modern day. This specific piece features a poem which talks about a woman being surprised by a sudden breeze, signaling the start of fall. However, the poet's true intent was to express the feeling of aging and the loss of beauty, a concept simply known as 物の哀れ in Japanese. The poem is truly about this woman realizing her youth has passed, and her coming to grips with the sorrowing knowledge of her aging.

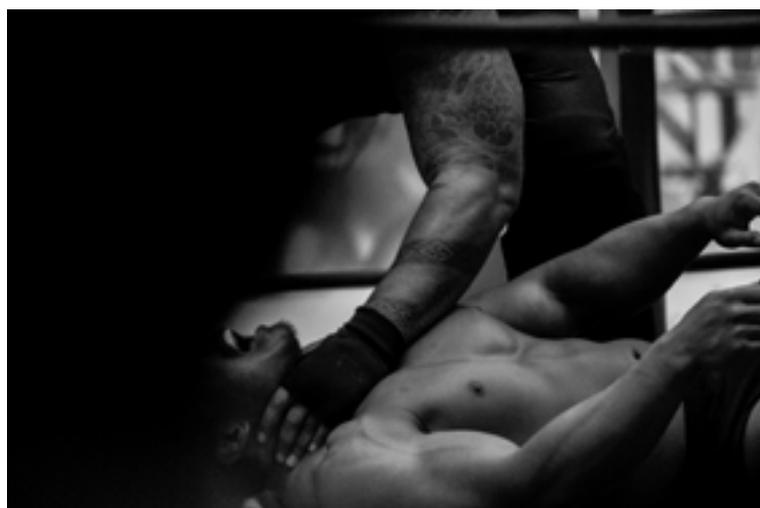
**Tamaya Greenlee
Ishikawa**

Body and Soul

Instagram







Cara Lam

Niigata

Shine on Me

Does the beauty lie on the faded background, or the shining protagonist?

Firework

Like fireworks, yozakura glows the brightest at night.

Surrounded

"Like a fairytale," said she.

A Thousand Colors

Three magical colors in one tree. Simply awe-inspiring.

The Little Ones

Yoku ganbatta ne, my little guys!

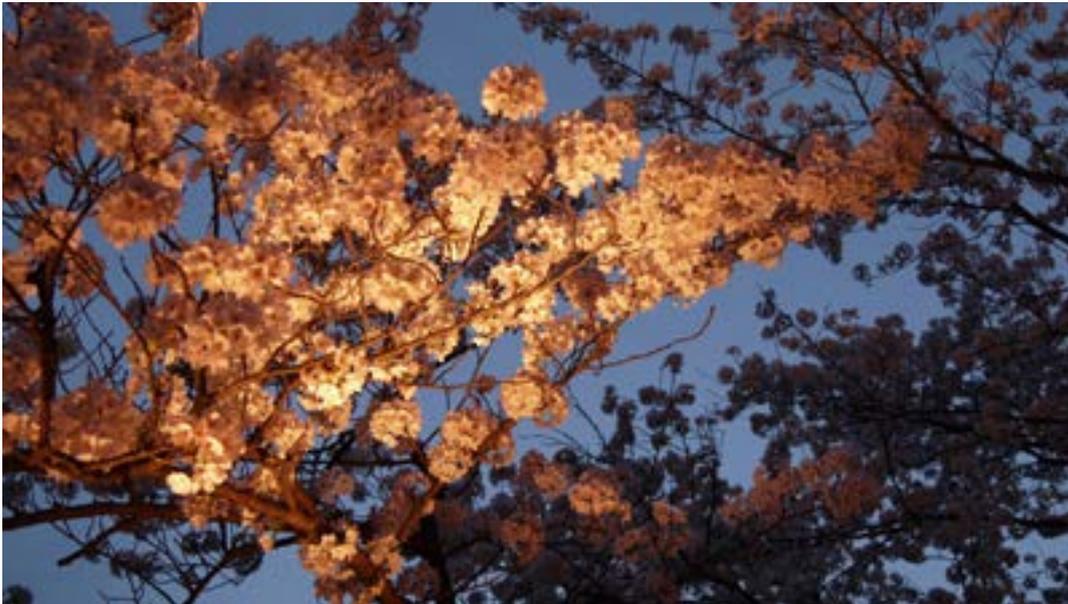
Arigatou

Only one week at a time; only one time a year. Enjoy it while it lasts xx

Instagram

Youtube

Facebook











Kelly Pieterse

Hiroshima

Japanese Summer
That's Japanese Flavour

Painting the world one object at a time.

Blog
Twitter
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Email



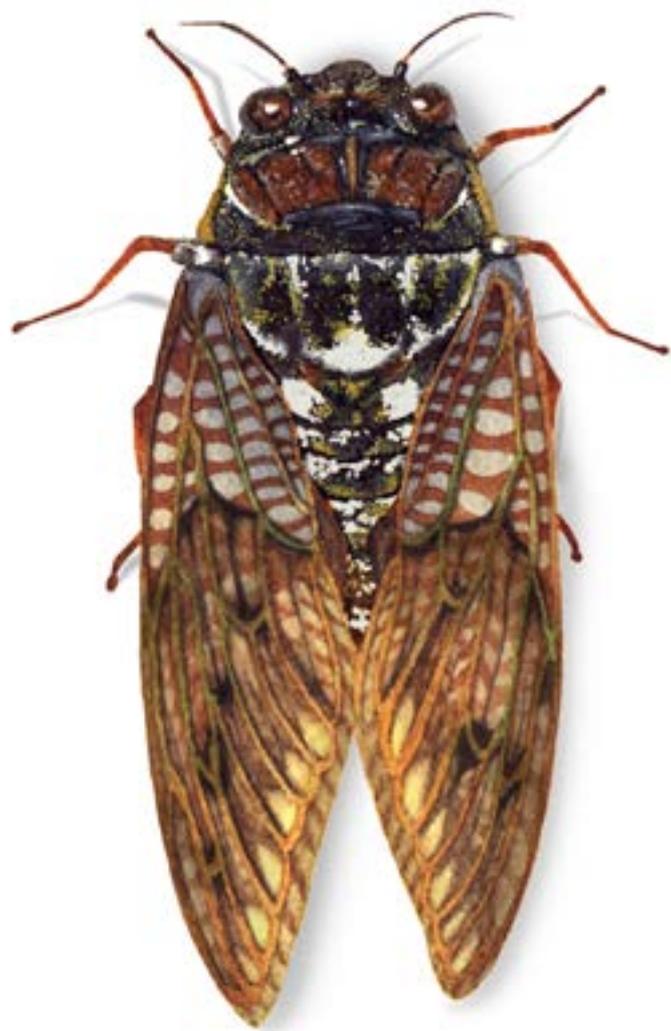
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香辛海苔

3

COOL CHOICE

2











Illaura Rossiter

Shizuoka

Standing Stones

Festival Lights

Riding the Float

Girl on Red Wall

Model: Jaz Lau

Urban Mt. Fuji

Photo of an art installation in Roppongi

Atami

Drying Rice

Leia's Kyber Crystal

Chrysanthemum

She is the one...

Slit Mouth Girl

From the "Slit Mouth Girl series."

Ami I Pretty?

From the "Slit Mouth Girl series."

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Clayton McIntosh

Hyogo

Summer School

Yama no Hi

You can't help yourself

Flowers from Okurayama

Cash McIntosh

Instagram

Website

Behance

Email

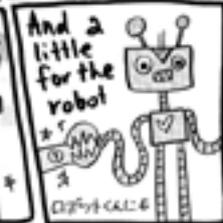
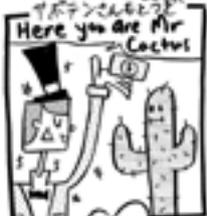




Well when I was in Japan...







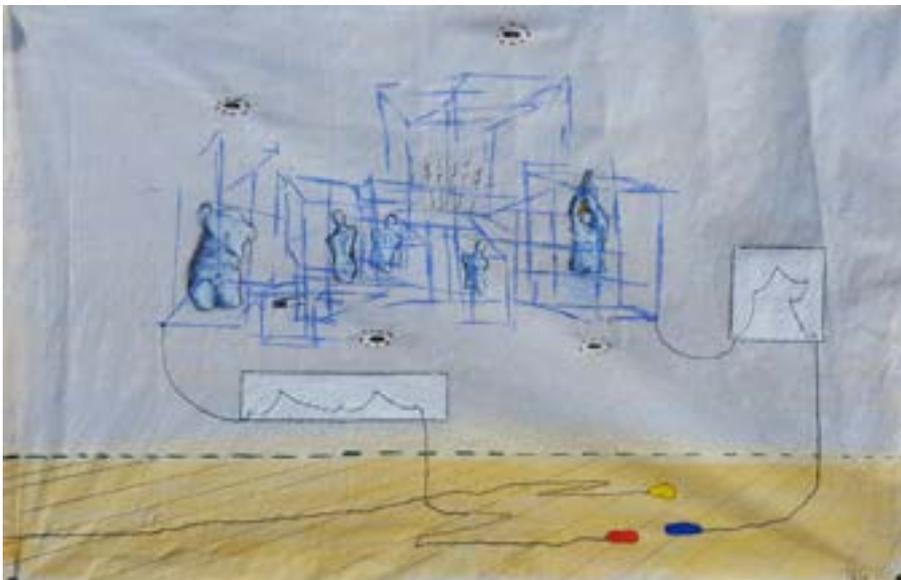
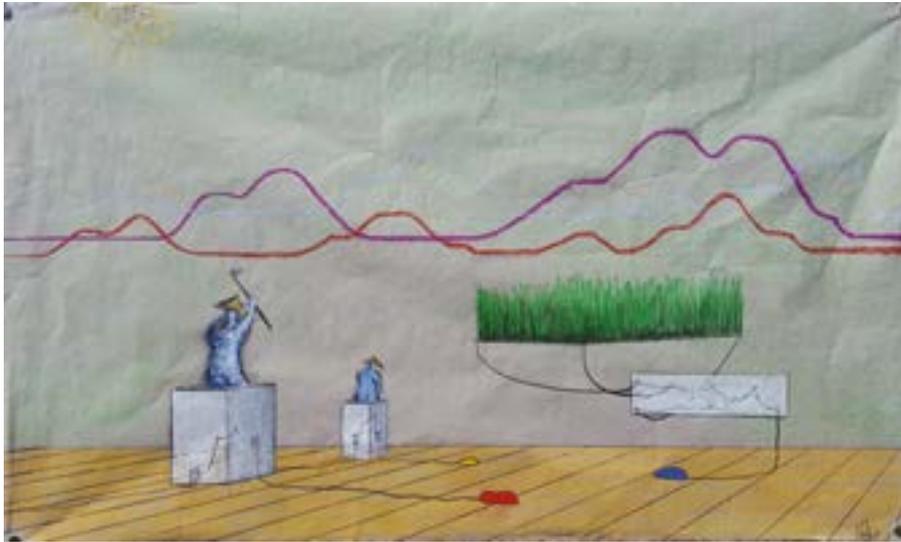
Nils Johnson

Nagano

Field Cycle Nagano 01
Another Lazy Sunday

2017. 180cm x 110cm. Pastel on washi.
2017. 180cm x 110cm. Pastel on washi.

Email
Blog 1
Blog 2



Alana Mango Toyama

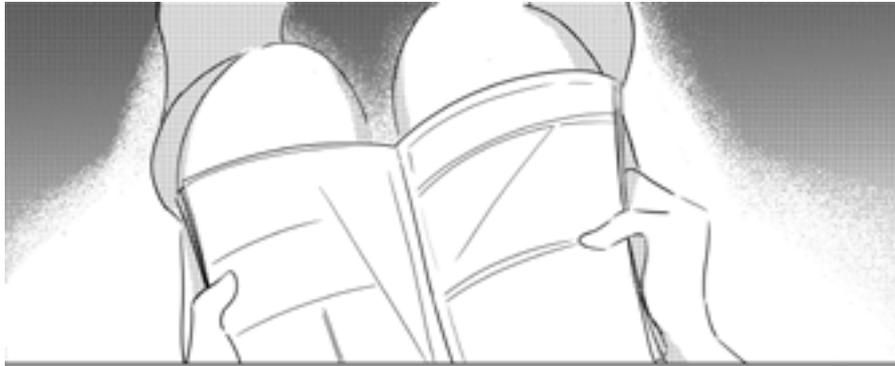
Zircon Rose

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Tumblr



Read left to right -->



Read left to right -->











Read the full comic at zircon-rose.tumblr.com! Updates every Monday!



Jonathan Cosgrove Toyama

Goodbye Again

Twitter
Email



My house is full of knives. My father's. I stand in the bathroom, sleep still in my eyes, and try balancing one on my finger. It clatters to the floor. I stoop to pick it up and find myself looking around sheepishly for my dad's appraising gaze, just like when I was a kid. As if he'd been anywhere near me in the last thirty years.

He comes back most vividly whenever I do things he would have done. Like stand bare-chested in front of the bathroom mirror. I see him with one of these same long blades scraping every follicle of hair from his skull.

Watching him back then it looked like he'd hold the knife so tightly to his skin he might tear it away. Reveal what was underneath. And I'd take unconscious steps forward as if to stop him. He'd noticed me then in the mirror, lift the blade from his head and wash it beneath the tap. A little smile playing on his face. Our secret.

Nothing to it, he'd say, hitching his belt up as he went over to the scarred tree trunk, pulled the knife out of it for the thirtieth time that afternoon. Another Saturday, coming to a close, full up on one-too-many beers and Yul Brynner movies. Yul Brynner the only bald ruskie in the west. The most unlikely of cowboys and the most badass according to my dad. People thought it was their shaved pates that made him such a fan.

I'd believed that, too. But lying on the couch every Saturday with my head resting on his chest, his arm draped across me,

twitching along with the movements of the man on screen, that illusion couldn't last.

I learned to pretend I didn't know because Dad got mad when I asked questions. Questions like, how exactly could this guy be who he said he was? This suave well-spoken gentleman amidst sweaty, unshaved, broiling-in-their-own-sweat bandits and bounty hunters.

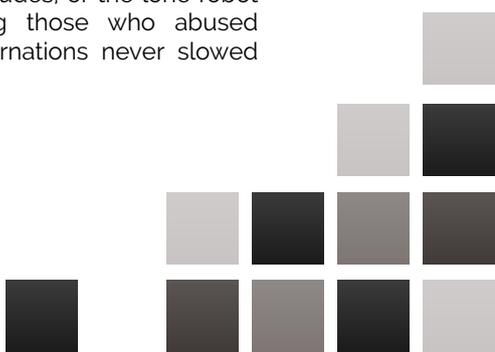
Why not? My dad would say. A beat. Well, look at him, I'd say. And then he'd get angry. He'd strap one of the knives to his leather boots and head into town.

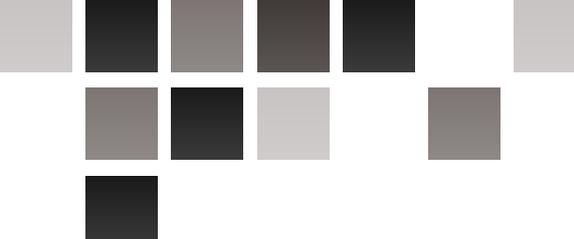
Luckily, pretending is in my blood.

But these questions were scraping back the skin of his lies. When he got back I'd be asleep but would wake up long enough to hear him yelling at my mother or sister. I never made out what he said, didn't need to, what else could it be?

When I'd come down in the mornings after nights like those my mum wouldn't meet my eyes. Covering her face with her hair or her hands or big dark sunglasses for days at a time just so I couldn't see her guilty eyes.

If you'd have sat inside on as many sunny afternoons as I did, watching as closely, maybe, you'd have figured it out, too. The story that hummed inside my head every time I saw him handle one of those knives. About the man who was more than he seemed. Like the outlaw who saved a town from bandits along with six other dudes, or the lone robot gunslinger murdering those who abused him. Both these incarnations never slowed





down, never let anyone in. Because nobody saw them for who they really were, no one looked hard enough, too focused on their own supporting roles. But I saw.

Television sets. That was the trick, I realized. Nobody had a television in those movies. Those supporting characters could never get a bird's eye view on what was happening to them or others before them. They couldn't see the patterns.

That's why Dad became so absorbed in those same movies over and over. That's why this world, this life, was so dangerous for him. From studying those movies he realized, that in this dimension at least, his secret could get out. These screens we had, allowing a view onto another reality.

I could have set his mind at ease, if my questions hadn't made him so angry. Told him that no one would ever realize. That most people leaned too far into the story to get a better look around, heads hooking past the frames of their sets. Lies are easier to swallow when you've exposed your neck like that.

I didn't lean forward. I hung back to watch the expression change on Dad's face. His feelings reflected in Yul Brynner's. Memories. Feelings he never showed to anyone else. Made me feel good to know they were in there, at least.

My father. Watching Yul Brynner. Watching himself.

Lives lived before. Which raised more questions, like how long had it been since this new movie started? The one featuring me,

my mum, and sister in supporting roles. How could anyone be sure he'd not just dropped down into this story five minutes ago?

Time, then, became something to be concerned about.

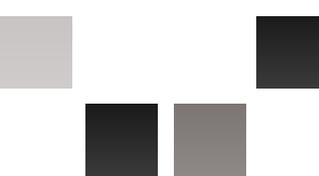
At first I used the knife he gave me to scratch notches in the bedpost. He'd given me a pair of leather boots just like his, too, but I was young and grew out of them fast. Those notches gave me comfort for a while. I'd check them every day, making sure there were still as many as there should be. That we hadn't jump-cut in time somewhere.

But if there was a flashback or something, wouldn't set design change, too? For continuity? So the only way to be sure was to mark myself in a place where they couldn't change.

After watching Yul hit men at fifty yards with his knife. My dad would look out into the garden, hitch his belt like always, and start flinging knives. Sometimes slamming the knife into the wood all the way to the leather handle, like he'd been doing it all his life. Like he'd spent a lot of time practicing it in life or death situations.

And on those days, when he seemed like a true cold-blooded killer, my stomach would disappear inside me. I'd have to run inside, lock myself in the bathroom and roll up my pant leg. Start counting.

He taught me to throw the same way. In his heart of hearts he saw I'd never catch up. Never be as good. There was probably



a wide-angled shot of his face at that time, squinting from me clumsily picking up the knife then panning out towards the middle distance, a sunset, his silhouette still in view, a cue to let the audience know that he wasn't long for this life.

My mum, sister and, me must have just been an opening scene. Just a set up to ground his character, make the audience feel something for when the time came when he'd step out into a dusty street with only the jingle of spurs for company. They'd feel it even more then.

This scene, if it ever played out like that, came years after I'd stepped out of my supporting role. By then I was just some forgotten kid he might have talked about in a way that made women pause. Reconsider the dark stranger before them.

I wonder if he mentioned mum. If he did it'd be in those forlorn sentences that made women feel weak. The haze shifting across the screen, eyes wet, surging violins, a violent kiss.

The unspoken belief that this woman, not my mum, this new woman would be the one to change him.

When he rode into the sunset for the last time I heard about it from my mother. The police called. Informing her because she was the only person that answered their calls. I didn't get the details. Didn't need them. I'd seen it enough times in my mind already.

People've said I looked like him for

years. I went bald early. But I shave my head every day, searching with my knife for any stray follicles. In fact I can't remember a time when I didn't shave my head. Or the first time I strapped one of my knives to my ankle before going out for the night. I lean my head forward into the bathroom sink, wash my face, turning my face to look up at the mirror, running a hand down my raw, stretched-out neck. Then stand back, the knife still in my hand.

Out of the corner of my eye I see my son just outside the door, watching me. He regards the blade, my head, tells me to be careful. I smile and look away.

It's our secret we share.

