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Two Kageyama Tamio Translations

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abstract

"Missing Marilyn" (*Maririn-ni aitai*) is a story of deception and delights, in which the protagonist dodges accusations of infidelity with a foreign floozy while concurrently having to suggest "the unthinkable" to his spouse. But another unthinkable outcome reveals itself in an O. Henry twist ending. "The South Seas" (*Nanyo hoteru*) opens as a travel tale, but quickly evolves into a horror story laden with satire and cultural criticism. Both stories are included in the collection *Tokyo Nights* (*Tokyo naitokurabu*. Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1992) by Kageyama Tamio (b. 1947 d. 1998). Kageyama's language is fresh, playful, and colloquial, which charges the translator with invigorating the target language text with equivalent stylistic adventurism. The translator must paradoxically diverge from the source language while faithfully adhering it; that is what, at any rate, the strategy that has been applied to these translations.

Translation 1

1 | Missing Marilyn
Maririn-ni aitai

My wife Haruko growled, “Where did you get these matches?” to which I sat up on the futon, holding my head throbbing with hangover. I honestly didn't feel like dealing with this.

“Huh, what matches?”

“Don't mess with me! Yesterday, you said you'd be coming home late because you'd be working overtime on some kind of a report and you'd be taking the last train home. So I thought it was a little funny when you came in and you were stinking of liquor and you couldn't speak clearly.”

“That's what I was trying to tell you last night. After I sent off the report, I made pit stop with Mr. Shiba—you know, the section chief at Nakata. He wanted to thank me for my work.”

Propping myself on my side slowly, I shook my head and sipped the cold green tea near my pillow. Haruko did not prepare it for me. Last night, after coming home good and drunk, I made two cups of the deep green tea for myself for the morning. I put some ice into a jar and then put that together with two cups of tea on a tray on the floor beside my pillow.

“Are these matches from the club you're talking about?” Haruko asked sarcastically, waving the small box of matches at me. “Did you really go there with Shiba? You did say he invited you to go there just last night, didn't you? If that's so, then why is it you came home with the same matches as last month and the time before that? What do you have to say about that? I mean, it's kind of funny that you keep coming home with these Club Puppy matches.”

“It's just a coincidence. That's all. That sort of thing happens all the time. I went there last month with Mr. Tosa. You know, he works at Somisawa, that machine company I was telling you about. Tosa and Shiba know each other from an athletic club, so we decided to go to their usual spot.”

As I spoke, I was thinking I had wanted to retrieve some matches from another place. I keep blowing my cover when I keep bringing the same matches from there. Since Marilyn never brings matches to my table, probably after I got drunk, I grabbed some from next to the register on my way out. I try to be considerate of the hostesses by not smoking at all in the club and have trained myself to light up just as I leave. Feeling anxious about a smoke, I took the matches without thinking about it.

“It would be one thing if you drank on business, then wrote it off as an expense. But you misplace the receipts. What you're doing affects our household budget. Can't you stop your lies? Are you satisfied that you get drunk and tell

lies?" Haruko growled.

Yes, very satisfied. Incredibly satisfied! I was thinking that there are more gratifying times at the club than at home, which frankly speaking is at the bottom of a dog pile. Marilyn is the most gratifying of all things. Of course Marilyn is not her real name. To say so would be indiscreet. Actually I can't remember it, though when I first met her, the club manager told me what it was—that is, the name she was rewarded with. At any rate, it was a very long name, some district in England, I think.

"Hey, what's this?" Haruko inquired as she picked a long strand of hair from the shoulder of the dark blue suit I was wearing the day before, now hanging from a hook on the bedroom wall.

Uh oh! I sprang from the futon. Damn! I had it wiped with a garment brush at the club before leaving, didn't I?

"This is a blond hair, isn't it?" Haruko said as she scrutinized the strand of soft wavy hair she held between her fingertips.

"Which? Let me see." I took the half-foot strand of hair from her fingertips as nonchalantly as possible. It was undoubtedly one of Marilyn's, which likely came off when she snuggled up to my shoulder last night.

"This is not necessarily a blond hair. I mean, it seems a little darker. In fact, I'd say blond hair is a lighter, more golden color."

"Don't mess with me," Haruko snarled. "I didn't ask for the definition of blond. And what's your explanation for the name of the bar printed on these matches? You've been going back and forth to that dubious place all this time, haven't you?"

"What's that supposed to mean, a dubious place?"

"You know that Toshiharu is getting ready to take his high school entrance examination. It's an important time now. And you're out drinking like a lush at a bar with a foreign woman I don't know anything about. If... if you bring AIDS into our home!"

"This is ridiculous!" At that point, my anger overtook the hangover loitering in the deeper recesses of my skull. I stood up abruptly. "You don't believe your own husband, do you? When did I ever bring AIDS into our home? I mean, you actually think I'm having an affair with a foreign hostess. You don't believe a word your husband says. Unbelievable! Get out of here!"

"No, you get out of here!" Haruko howled with the countenance of a demoness. "Well, what do you think of yourself? You are the son-in-law, and my father is the owner of this condominium. We live here rent-free. There's no other way we could live in the city center on the salary you bring home."

"Well, I do not *necessarily* like living here," I spoke back reflexively. I probably would not have said anything more, but since *necessary* was Haruko's stock description for living in the condo, I said something. On the other hand, I might have done so because Marilyn's sweet vision was just then pulling on my

heartstrings. “And when is such a box of concrete a house? The meaning of a house is something that has some land—a yard, *tatami* mats, and a veranda for the birds. That is a house. If we had been provided with a place like that, I might be able to demonstrate a respectable indication of appreciation to your father. But this apartment of his is not a house, not a home. It's a measly 2LDK. I can't call a thing a home in which you cannot keep even one potted plant on the veranda.”

It is strictly prohibited to keep potted plants on the veranda. In the opinion of the owner—Haruko's father's—it is a terrible inconvenience to clean the drain spouts, which get stopped up with the overflowing mud from the potted plants during the rainy season. In fact, he is not only against keeping potted plants, but also against having cats or small birds. If we did, he'd probably evict us.

“Where isn't it bad for you? I don't understand how you can say *get out of here*, since you give one reason—that we can't keep potted plants. In spite of that, you still get to live in an apartment only four stations from Shinjuku without paying a cent. If you like garden plants so much, why don't you live on a mountain in Tanzawa?”

Maybe that's not such a bad idea. How happy I would be to live in a place surrounded with greenery, in a cabin along a clear stream in Tanzawa, however, not alone as Haruko seemed to suggest, but with Marilyn.

“Are you arguing again?” Toshiharu said while looking in. “Dad, you drank too much again. Mom, lunch box!”

“I put it on the table in the kitchen,” Haruko shouted back. “And don't cut out of your lessons after school; I know you've been stopping in at the arcade on the way there. Your mother knows everything.”

“Oh, be quiet!” wiping the white pimple cream from his cheek with some tissues, Haruhiko responded. When I learned that my son spends an hour and a half in front of the mirror every morning—washing and grooming his hair and pampering his skin, though he is a male and a junior high school student—it made me ashamed to think about it, and it brings tears to my eyes, though he is my son. Marilyn hardly uses cosmetics and those sorts of things. But how that lustrous blond hair glistens!

“Hey, I need a shirt!”

It was approaching 8 A.M. when I looked at the clock. I'd be late for work if I went too slowly, though our place is only four stations from my company, in Shinjuku.

“Which suit are you wearing today?” Haruko asked.

“The one I wore yesterday will be fine.”

“You mean, the one with someone's sweet smell on it?” she said incredulously. But I was soon relieved, since she left to put away my shirts in the dresser only a moment after dramatically smelling my navy blue suit.

It was at 8:20 A.M. when I arrived at the station. Somehow or other I

managed to get there on time. The subway I take is a direct line to my company in Ote-cho. Because I missed breakfast as usual, I slugged down a bottle of milk at a station kiosk before jumping onto the first train that pulled up to the platform. I couldn't stop thinking about Marilyn as the commuter train, crowded beyond capacity, rocked from side to side. If I could just make my language intelligible, then I could truly communicate my heart to her. I was on the verge of tears when I thought about the warmth of Marilyn's touch upon my lap last night and the penetrating gaze of her lucid eyes, staring into mine, messages which cannot be communicated with language.

When I got off the subway in Ote-cho, I began to wonder if Haruko would call the number printed on the matches. While employees arrive at the club early, at around 5:00, I would still be in my office at that time. Surely, whoever answered the phone wouldn't carelessly say something about me. More than likely Master Murase would answer, and he had full knowledge of my situation, so I'd be alright. Then again, by the remote chance that an attendant answered, they may let slip something about the girls, whose cries can sometimes be heard through the telephone. No matter how little Haruko knew about that world, she would recognize the unique character of the club I've been going to.

I arrived at work at 8:55 sharp. When I clocked in on the first floor, considerable anxiety filled my heart. I should have taken the matches from Haruko. I managed to grope my way to my desk. After my subordinates greeted me in their customary manner—*Morning Chief!*—the ritual through which I go every day, I made a pretense of heading to the restroom, but instead went to the pay phone next to an underground kiosk. I knew Club Puppy's number by heart. I only called to make a reservation. I wasn't sure who would answer on such a morning, but I just felt compelled to call.

The phone rang two times. After a "click" sound, I could hear a voice which I quickly recognized as the master's recorded voice: "Club Puppy. I'm sorry, but we are not open. Reservations are required. Please call back after 6:30 if you have the need to speak to someone directly. We greatly appreciate your call." When the answering machine said to leave a message after the prompt, I reflexively made a reservation for Marilyn at 7:00. When making the call, I didn't have that specific intention, but this evening too I ended up going to meet Marilyn.

When I returned to my desk, I quickly read through the documents I had my subordinates working on the night before. Since there weren't any problems, I sent them on to the business section. I then telephoned Mr. Akita, the head of the business section, to discuss the results of the Nakata negotiations.

"Business, Section 2, Kai here."

"Hey, how goes it? How were the negotiations with Shiba?"

"We almost came to an agreement. But, in fact, this isn't so much about that. Still, could I steal a few minutes of your time?"

"Sure, come up in ten minutes. But, I don't have a lot of time. Mr.

Airedale from Newfoundland Bank will be here at 10:00.”

“It won't take more than 20 minutes.”

In actuality I ended up staying for more than 20 minutes. Though the conversation concerning the Nakata business report did not last long, we yapped afterwards for quite some time. I have the same distinctive tastes as Akita, so our conversations invariably go on a long time.

“Well, did you go there as usual ... the club?”

“Yes, I've been crazy about it since you first told me about it. Actually, I went there with Shiba last night ... to ... properly consummate our business.”

“Oh, it seems you've become a true company man. You know, you don't need to clock out early if you're going to discuss business there,” Akita said with a roguish smile. “Really, now, it's the only establishment of its kind in Tokyo for such affairs.”

“Actually, it's not. I mean, I thought so, too. But then last night Mr. Shiba told me that there's another in Hamamatsu-cho.”

“Hamamatsu-cho? That seems a bit of an odd area.”

“Well, it isn't in a building like most bars, in one of those ordinary places crammed with lounges and strip joints. Anyway, because of the soundproofing concerns, there was the *necessity* for a spacious, out of the way location. If it were in an area where the neighbors could complain, the authorities would shut it down.”

“True enough, true enough. So it's opened as a secret club, has it, now? Has Shiba ever been to this club in Hamamatsu-cho?”

“No, he just heard about it. It seems that it's in a remodeled building on the waterfront, split into separate first and second floor areas.”

“Is there some particular reason for that?”

“Well—and this part's intriguing—the second floor is genuine Japanese style, where they've collected only Japanese stock of the highest pedigree, who are selected very...”

The intercom on the desk rang out, interrupting my speech: “Mr. Airedale of Newfoundland Bank has arrived.”

“Please show him in,” Mr. Akita announced to the intercom, then looking disappointed, turned to me: “Let's continue this conversation the next time we have the chance. If possible, I'd like to go to that club with you and Shiba.”

“I'll see what I can do.”

I left the room with a bow. At the elevator I passed a foreigner of average height on his way up—a white, middle-aged American banker with short white whiskers. After I got back to my desk, I couldn't work. Only able to think about how long it would be until I saw Marilyn, I gazed at my wristwatch.

“Chief, don't you have an appointment with some clients?” my assistant inquired, interrupting my thoughts.

When I finished my work on the contract negotiations with the clients, it

was finally lunchtime. I was thinking I would eat alone, but then I thought again. Maybe I could have a word with Tanishi, a young member of the staff, who started working at the company three years ago. I seemed to recall that he was from Atsugi.

"Tanishi, how's it going? Hey, if it's not a problem, what do you say about grabbing a bite to eat together today? There's something I'd like to ask you."

After I said that, he frowned openly, though he was a junior employee. "I don't really like to talk about work during lunch."

"Don't worry about that; it's got nothing to do with work. You're from Atsugi, aren't you? You see, I'll be going there with my family for a drive in a couple of weeks, so I was hoping I could ask you a thing or two."

"Then it's early enough for you to look at a road map or a guide book, don't you think?"

He was not endearing by any stretch of the imagination. And he had no respect for his seniors.

"Come, come, now. So, what do you say, how about I treat you to a Western-style *anguratei* lunch set? And I'll see if I can't pry a bit of information from you."

It was very unpleasant treating this punk to a special 1,200 yen lunch set. However, I do not play golf, so of course I did not have good knowledge of the Atsugi area. The fact is, I do not play golf on my days off, in consideration to my wife. On the other hand, the reason why I was considering the Atsugi area was because my wife's bitching at me in the morning had initially planted the idea of Atsugi in my head.

Tanishi started crudely wolfing down his food with his chopsticks without saying "*Itadakimasu*." Such Western-style lunch sets are not popular with your average salary-man because they're comparatively expensive. My god, this vulgar man has no manners! Marilyn never eats the food set on the table until I give the command. The word "discipline" stands for being beautiful in body and mind, but the younger generation, people like Tanishi, do not know this.

"So, I understand the wilderness areas around Atsugi are getting gobbled up. Is that right?"

"Well, there's not much in the city itself anymore, since all the public housing complexes and big factories started going up near the highway. My house is on the way to the Iiyama spa, which is 30 minutes outside the city, so the river is still beautiful there."

"I bet it's real clear there, eh? But I didn't know there was a spa so near Atsugi."

"It's called a spa but technically it's not. The water temperature isn't quite hot enough. It only seems hot because the air temperature there is so low. Anyway, it's mostly a spa for stag parties."

"So, how about the upper reaches of the river?"

“Smack in the middle of the mountains. Fly-fishermen go there in their four-by-fours. When I was kid, hunters used to go there to shoot the wild boars. I once found a dog that a hunter had abandoned.”

“What did you say?” I leaned forward in spite of myself.

“Hunters go to the mountain with their dogs. Then, some of the dogs get lost from the pack. Since it's a lot trouble for the hunters to look for them, even though they are rather good dogs, they get left behind; they get like wild dogs in packs. Mine was an expensive setter. Once when I went to the mountains to look for *matsutake* mushrooms I found this mangy, trembling dog, infected with worms. I brought it home. It was hard work, but I managed to get it to a veterinarian.”

I was beginning to reconsider my opinion of Tanishi a little. I didn't think he had such a kindly disposition. At least he wasn't an animal hater.

“Do you still have the setter?”

“Actually, he died. There are zillions of mosquitoes there. They gave him heartworm. After he died, the veterinarian opened him up and found an incredibly long worm in his heart. That's what got him in the end.”

“Why didn't you give him treatment for it sooner? You know, if you give preventive medicine to a dog, you can protect most of them from heartworm.”

“It's too late, what you say. I mean, I already heard that speech ten years ago. Hey, Chief, why are you so worked up?”

“Oh, I'm, sorry. It's just that I had a dog a long time ago and was just reminiscing about her. So, it's possible to live in the upper reaches of the river?”

“Live there? What?” Tanishi responded while gouging away with a toothpick—Z-z-Z-z-Z-z. He brandished the weapon with a wad of gunk clinging to it; so I only got through half my lunch.

“People, that is.... And log-houses and the like. You know, they're quite popular these days.”

“Well, I don't see why not. Hey, my father still has a bunch of land in the area. I suppose he'd let you have it cheap if I asked. Say, Boss, are you thinking of building a vacation house or something?”

“No, I was just thinking about how I might spend my retirement in a place like that...” with Marilyn. I stood up, taking the bill, while murmuring this to myself. Tanishi stood up in front of me and headed for the exit without saying “I enjoyed the lunch very much” or “Thank you.”

My heart wasn't in my work that afternoon. I was dreaming of life with Marilyn in a log cabin along a mountain stream, like the one Tanishi was talking about. Marilyn looks like she's built for swimming. I'm sure she'd leap into the river during the summer. Maybe, I'll just watch her splashing about in the clear, blue water from the riverbank, since I'm not much of a swimmer myself. Anyway, I was thinking that would make me perfectly content. What would the price tag for a spot in such a mountain location be these days? If I took my retirement pay

- 1 At the 1986 exchange rate, approximately US \$70,000.
- 2 bowl of rice topped with a chicken omelet and *donburi* sauce

early, would that be enough? Or if I added to that the money I'd get from canceling my life insurance? Until clock-out time at five, these are the only thoughts that went through my head.

After I left work, I inspected the magazine *Outdoor Life* at a bookstore in the underground mall below a building nearby. I only found out that a log house could be built for less than 10,000,000 yen.¹ However, I couldn't find the price for a parcel of land in the mountains of Chichibu or Tanzawa. I went to a soba shop in the same building and had a set dinner of soba and *oyakodon*,² which to my mind does not exactly constitute a proper dinner. When I finished eating, I loosened my belt one notch. This 42-year-old body of mine has definitely been putting on weight around the middle. If I continue living this way, I'll only get fatter and fatter. On the other hand, Marilyn has never given middle-aged me a look as if she disliked the way I looked, not even once. By the remote chance that I could live with her, I would exercise more, and I'd be able to be liberated from some of this middle-aged corporal real estate. All these dreams connected with Marilyn in my mind.

I took the subway to Tokyo Station and transferred to the Yamanote Line. When the subway passed over the Shinagawa River, my chest began to feel constricted. I felt a numbing sensation begin to rise up along my spine from its very base. I became aware of a sweet-sour something rising up. Undoubtedly, it was love. Yes, I fell in love with Marilyn like a high school student on a summer day.

When I got off the train at Meguro Station, my heart had started beating incredibly fast, so I rested for a moment against a pillar on the platform. The closer the physical distance between Marilyn and me was, the more violently my heart beat. When I left the station, I looked at a clock. 6:15, too early for my reservation. It wouldn't take more than five minutes by taxi to Club Puppy in Shiraganedai. I went into a bookstore in front of the station and browsed through a magazine. When I saw a color photograph of a face that was a look-alike to Marilyn, I thought my heart would stop. But, as I looked again carefully, the photograph was not of Marilyn. Marilyn has a more graceful face than the one in the magazine by far. And her teeth were not so perfectly straight like Marilyn's. I turned to the back pages, where there were photographs of youngsters with beautiful blond hair, who I imagined were just like Marilyn when she was young. So, I bought the foreign magazine. I didn't intend to read it, though; I only wanted the pictures of those tykes.

Then I had a thought suddenly: I went to a quick-stop photo shop and bought a disposable camera that I'd seen on a television commercial, the kind with the lens built into the film's cardboard box, the type that's really easy to use. Why hadn't I thought of taking a picture of Marilyn until now? It is banned to take pictures in Club Puppy, in order to keep the privacy of the clients. But this time, if there were only a few clients, Master Murase might agree to take pictures of

Marilyn from a discreet angle.

The clock struck 6:40. It would probably be alright now, arriving just a little early, no more than 10 minutes. So I caught a taxi in front of the station. I got out of the cab at a place on a heavily tree-lined street in Shiraganedai. From the front, I could see the luxuriant shrubbery of the large inner garden and the high brick wall surrounding the two-storied concrete Club Puppy building. The outside of the building gave the appearance of no less than a grand residence. There was neither signage nor otherwise ubiquitous neon lighting. After I gave my name, membership number, and reservation time to the video intercom at the electronically-controlled iron gate, it opened slowly. It occurred to me just then that I hadn't smoked even one cigarette in the last two hours. To tell the truth, I had better stop smoking altogether. But that was certainly not the time to try and stop smoking, as it was the only way for me to relax living with Haruko and Toshiharu.

But, oh, to live with Marilyn!

I knocked on the door with a heavy brass knocker shaped like a lion's head. I thought I could hear Marilyn at that moment from the inner recesses of the building. The door opened. Murase was standing there in jeans, a washed out dungaree shirt, and knee-high black vinyl riding boots. When I first came to the club, I was surprised that the manager was wearing such odd attire. I mean, he should have been wearing a coat and tails. However, it was natural when I thought more about the character of the club itself.

"Welcome, Mr. *Kai*. We are pleased to see you this evening. May I beg your permission to fetch Miss Marilyn?" Murase saying so, and bowing all the while, led me to the Grande Hall to the left of the entrance. In this club the bitches are kept in a holding area on the second floor, where they wait for clients. It is the most thrilling time, waiting for them at your private booth in the Grande Hall.

"Would you like something to drink?" inquired an attendant, attired as Murase.

"I keep a bottle of Chivas Regal. Please bring some water and ice with it. I don't need anything to eat, but you can bring a serving of chicken heads for Marilyn. A wedge of processed cheese, too. Please don't take off the plastic wrapper. I enjoy peeling it off and feeding it to Marilyn myself."

"As you like, Sir," he said and withdrew.

It seemed that a few other customers had already arrived before me, but I couldn't see them well because of the high sofa backs.

Marilyn came. Her whole body was writhing, her beautiful shiny blond hair swaying. Pulled along by Murase, the dog trotted elegantly to my booth. When Murase removed the leash from her collar, she jumped onto the sofa effortlessly, first giving me her right forepaw, then her left. Then she barked so happily, put her chin on my shoulder, and with her long, thick, soft tongue, licked my cheek.

►3 Akita, Tosa, Shiba, and Kai are Japanese dog breeds as well as surnames.

“Enjoy yourself,” from Murase

I asked him to take one picture of Marilyn before he left.

“Ah, if the other customers do not mind. But only one.”

When the camera flashed, it surprised a Saint Bernard on the sofa to the left and a Siberian Husky on the right, who looked down at me reproachfully. Next to me, my beautiful Golden Retriever cried out as if to say, “I’m sorry.”

Then, Mr. Akita, who came to the Grande Hall for his favorite Doberman Pinscher, said, “Hey, you’re here already.”³

Translation 2

2 | The South Seas *Nanyo hoteru*

As soon as I stepped out of the Boeing 737 and onto the concrete runway, the powerful floral aroma of the tropics and intense heat of the South Seas enveloped me. The stagnant hot humid air was suffocating. The glaring sun, compounded by its reflection off the runway, was brutal. It felt to be about 35 degrees centigrade. Though I couldn’t feel any breeze at the moment, palm trees were swaying leisurely beside the runway.

“Wouldn’t you know it, it’s hotter’n hell. There’s no competition between Tokyo and this place. I guess it’s always kind of like summer here, huh?” Yoshino, my camera assistant and assistant director, said light-heartedly, turning a circle to inspect the cloudless blue sky. A corner of the runway appeared to be swelling from the heat.

Actually, I didn’t really want to go there. Though I’ve made something of a name for myself in Tokyo, producing commercial videos of the islands, I’d not once visited this one, in spite of the many times I’d been asked to take the job. I’d previously refused all offers, though it takes no more than two and a half hours from Narita Airport. In fact, it is the nearest foreign vacation destination from Japan, a convenient location for a cheap honeymoon or for office girls to visit on short holidays. But, of course, the proximity is not the reason I’d been avoiding the job. Some say it is the best island in the South Seas to capture footage of the sunset, and diving magazines claim that the lagoon can be included among the top ten bodies of water in the world because of its exceptional transparency.

Another cameraman who works in the same office as me was actually supposed to take the job, but he fell off a cliff and broke his leg while on assignment two days before the departure date, giving me no choice but to take the assignment. So, like I said, although I really would like to have turned it down, I couldn’t. Anyway, I had just purchased a new Hasselblad, which my employer loaned me the money for, and I was recently divorced and had to pay a lot of

alimony. Besides, it looked to be a straight-forward job, producing a video for a store window display, and the guaranteed take-home pay of five hundred thousand yen was pretty tasty bait, too. In the end, I agreed to the job and jumped on the next available flight with my passport and equipment.

Thanks to the free beer on the plane, I passed through the glaring light in the terminal with a splitting headache. The white three-storied building, which I'd seen any number of times as a transit passenger, was filled with strangely cold, stagnant air, despite the hot breeze outside. An overweight immigration officer, an overweight island native to be precise, tossed my passport on the counter without a word after looking at it uninterestedly. I sympathized with him because of his undoubtedly boring job as an immigration officer on this island, which tens of thousands of Japanese tourists crowd to every year.

I thought I would be passing through customs easily, as I'd already gotten a business visa in Japan for the purpose of filming. Why should I have a problem, when so many girlie pictures taken on this island appear in the ubiquitous monthly magazines intended for Japanese young men? Besides, our documents were properly prepared for the temporary import-export of camera equipment. For this particular job we were using nothing more than a Beta cam-cord, a tripod, and some blank video cassettes. There is no big difference between what we brought and your usual home video equipment. The customs officer showed interest only in the address for the place we would be lodging at, which we had entered on our entry cards.

"You staying South Sea Hotel, eh?" observed the customs officer, who looked to weigh well over 100 kilograms.

"Yes, the travel agent took care of it for us," I answered as I reached for my passport.

"Japanese not usually staying South Sea Hotel," the customs officer said, pinning it to the counter. "Japanese staying Inter Continental and Hyatt. Maybe you know shower in South Sea Hotel using ocean water, eh?"

"No, I didn't know that. But we have coupons for the South Seas Hotel. We can't stay anywhere we please. Anyway, we're here on business, not holiday."

"South Sea not hotel Government Travel Bureau want for Japanese."

"Maybe so, but we don't have reservations at another hotel. The travel agency made our reservations by telex, so I think we have to stay there."

"Japanese not suppose stay there," the customs officer, knitting the eyebrows on his dark shiny face, said as he released my passport.

"Are there any other problems besides the saltwater showers?" I asked in response.

But the customs officer only grumbled to himself, then called out "Nex'!" to the tourists behind us.

The uniform which Japanese young women wear when visiting the South Seas consists of loose-fitting pedal pushers that dangle just above their knees,

never culottes or Ghurka shorts. A good three-quarters of them wear those sorts of breeches with pink tops and accessories. After passing through customs, today's group pulled along their matching suitcases and boarded the tour bus waiting for them. Their plump, snow-white legs were propped upon feet shorn with pampas sandals. When they come back to the airport after their three-night-four-day or four-night-five-day stay, no doubt they'd be suffering from severe sunburn. I entrusted Yoshino to load the equipment into the taxi, as I took the Nikon out of my baggage to snap some shots of them. This, of course, is to be expected. Which is to say, this is simply the cameraman's wont: when something grabs his attention, he is going to take a picture of it at that moment.

After climbing into the old Cedric taxicab, I told the leathery, darkly-complected driver, who looked to be at least sixty, what our destination was: the South Seas Hotel. He looked at us sternly.

"Nanyo hoteru?" —South Sea Hotel?—he inquired in Japanese.

"Yess!" Yoshino responded loudly in English. He not only has a big mouth, but to go along with it, a big heart. It is this innocent attitude of his that makes him quite open to new faces and places. And though it might be a bit much to say he is a master of social intercourse, his character really is helpful to me as an assistant. The somber, brooding type doesn't have one advantage for a cameraman.

"Nanyo hoteru, tomaru desuka?" —You stay South Sea Hotel?—the driver asked again in Japanese. He didn't seem to have learned his Japanese during the last seven or eight years of the tourism boom. The Japanese army occupied the island soon after World War II broke out, but there were also many Japanese civilians living on the island before the war. He likely learned at that time.

"Nanyo hoteru, tomaranai hou-ga ii ne." —It better you no stay at South Sea Hotel.

I was getting a little fed up, and squeezing a cigarette between my teeth, inquired, "Why do you say that it would be better if we didn't stay at the South Seas?"

"There lot other good hotel. South Sea very old," the driver laughed, as we overtook a truck loaded to capacity with sugar cane. However, this was not an answer to my question.

"I heard that the sunset over the lagoon in front of the South Seas is one of the most beautiful in the world."

"Red, red sunset. Color sky same color blood," the driver said, still not answering my question.

Then, I could make out the sea ahead, on the left-hand side. Standing in the water at waist level, a lone figure was launching a net, though he was quite far offshore. The sea surrounding the island, like a great lagoon, was apparently shallow for a good distance from the shore. I noticed something that looked like a large black boulder. I'd never seen boulders in the lagoons of the islands I'd

visited before.

“What’s that big thing that looks like a rock over there?” I asked.

The driver answered my question seriously this time: “That tank. Yes, that Japanese army tank there. There American tank more north.”

This island was home to one of the hardest-fought battlefields during the Pacific War. Though *gyokusai*—honorable death—sounds auspicious in Japanese, not only soldiers died, but half the civilian Japanese who lived on the island were forced to commit honorable deaths by throwing themselves from a cliff into the sea when the American forces arrived. That’s the reason why I kept from coming before. There are scars of the Pacific War on every island in the seas from the Mariana Islands to New Guinea. But the ones on this island are especially hideous.

On old newsreels, I’ve seen Japanese throwing themselves one after the other from a cliff facing the open sea, called “Banzai Cliff.” It is in that film that a woman wearing traditional garments and embracing an infant throws herself from the cliff as the voice of an American soldier calls over a loudspeaker for the Japanese to surrender. My generation, born right after the end of the war, often watched documentary films of the war like this newsreel, though I’m not sure where and why I watched them. I’m sure the girls who came to the island on the airplane with us have never seen these films.

“Peoples staying South Sea Hotel only ash-collectors peoples,” announced the driver.

Trees with deep red flowers lined the sides of the road. The locals call them “flames of the forest.” Sure enough, their flowers were blooming upward like flames. With my mind always on my work, I imagined good close-up shots of these flowers with the sunset in the background.

Yoshino spoke to the driver at that moment: “You mean, only the Japanese who come here to gather the remains of soldiers who died in battle stay at the South Seas?”

“Yes, that right. Ash-collectors peoples coming here long time. It just newly that peoples start coming here to holiday. They don’t stay South Sea Hotel.”

“Are the groups that gather the remains still coming?” I asked.

Remains of the dead are still found scattered about Okinawa, more than some forty years since the end of the war. It only stood to reason that a great quantity of remains would be found if the sea floor here were dredged.

“They don’t coming much anymore. Because honeymooner coming, they don’t coming,” the driver answered.

I understood the intent behind the driver’s words. Japanese travel agents and the island’s Travel Bureau want to eradicate its image as a place of hard-fought battlefields. I was thinking that this was probably the reason they didn’t want us staying at the South Seas, which had been around since before the war.

There is no doubt that the government's intention is to develop the economy by promoting the island as a tropical paradise, to appeal to as many tourists as possible, that they want to send visitors to the modern hotels, the ones run with American and Japanese capital, not to historic old hotels like the South Seas. When I thought about it, it made sense why the customs officer reacted like he did.

"We here. This South Sea Hotel," the driver said as he slid the taxi into the graveled entrance way. The hotel itself is a three-storied, colonial era building, white plaster walls, and all. Given the style of the building, it truly looked like it had been there since before the war. To either side of the front entrance, huge palm trees soared upwards, their fronds bending with the breeze.

"Maybe you change mind about hotel, call me," the driver said and gave me his card. "I get you room at Inter Continental or Hyatt soon. I got good connections."

After acknowledging his offer, Yoshino and I walked to the front desk with our equipment, which we had unloaded from the trunk of the taxi ourselves. It looked like the warped wooden front desk had not changed since the hotel was built. The Mahogany balustrade was polished to a shiny black with the oil of the many hands which have passed over it through the years.

"Hello. I am Hanezawa. This is my assistant. We have rooms booked for four nights," I said slowly and clearly to the male clerk, as I rested my elbows on the balustrade. "I believe a reservation was sent by telex from the Asahi Travel Agency in Tokyo."

"Yes, that's right." This fellow, who was wearing a black director's suit and looked to be of Chinese descent, responded tersely. His right eye was clouded over. The flesh from above the brow to below the cheek was swollen with what looked to be a hideous scar. "Two twin rooms; each for single occupancy; four nights. Is that correct?" the cloudy-eyed desk clerk said in polite British English, before snapping his fingers sharply.

Rolling her broad shoulders, a Chamorro woman behind the counter handed us our room cards.

"May I trouble you Gentlemen a moment for your passports?" The clerk, checking over them, noted the relevant information on our accommodation cards, then handed us the room keys, each attached to a tree limb. "I am sorry, Gentlemen, but we do not employ a bellboy. We humbly request that you carry your baggage to your rooms yourselves."

Mine was 108, on the first floor. For no obvious reason, Yoshino's was 206, on the second floor.

"Did you notice? The key board was totally empty except for our room keys. It looks like we're the only ones staying here tonight," said Yoshino, as he slung the equipment over his shoulder, starting up the stairs. "That's probably why we were put on separate floors."

“Hmm ... and I suppose that attending to so much geography would put an excessive burden on a bellboy,” I proposed, as I headed for my room.

The room was quite a bit larger than I'd anticipated. Beyond the twin bed, the writing desk, and the lounge set, the space was more than ten *tatami* mats in size. There was a cast iron porcelain tub in the bathroom. I sat down on the sofa and from my carry-on bag took out the bottle of Old Parr that I had bought in a duty-free shop at Narita Airport. I poured some into a glass from the bathroom and drank it straight off. As I was pouring the second glass, the phone at the side of the bed rang. Yoshino spoke: “Hello, I have something to talk to you about. Can I come to your room?” I told him he could, then rushed into the shower. Just as I was washing my face and hair, I heard a knock at the door. Yoshino, having changed from jeans to jogging pants, was standing there.

“What's going on? No matter, come in.”

“Nothing happened in your room?” Yoshino said as he sat down on the twin bed, looking around the room restlessly.

“What's that? What do you mean? Of course nothing happened.”

“No one here, huh? Well, some guy was standing next to my bed when I went in my room.”

“What's up with that? Maybe he was staying in the room before we arrived and just came back to look for something.”

“No, no. It's not like that. Some *thing* is there.”

Unable to disguise my anxiety, I blurted back, echoing his words, “Some *thing* is there?” What Yoshino was talking about only added to the anxiety I felt from the moment we arrived at the hotel.

“Then there was a noise. It sounded like a board splitting. It happened when I was in the middle of putting my bags in the closet.”

I deduced that it was the sound that accompanies the appearance of a spirit. Such a visit from a different dimension of space influences the molecular structure of this world as it enters and produces the ear-splitting sound of a tree splitting.

“And then I saw a whitish thing shooting past the corner of my eye. That's what it seemed like, anyway. When I looked back, the guy was gone.”

“Sounds to me like the sun's getting to you. Maybe you had a mild heatstroke when you baked your head in the sunlight at the airport,” I said, endeavoring to keep a calm tone.

“So, nothing happened in your room?” Yoshino looked 360 degrees around the room like a camera panning. “Really, not one thing?”

As soon as he said that, we heard a something like wood splitting in the vicinity of the ceiling. It seemed that my suspicions were being confirmed: Yoshino had come to my room and brought along the whatever-it-was from his.

“There it is, that sound. You heard it, didn't you?” Yoshino looked up at the ceiling, clinging to my arm.

"It was probably just a board in the ceiling. I turned the air conditioner on high right after coming in. Maybe when the air became dry suddenly, it caused the wood to warp in a particular way to make that noise," I speculated. Of course, I didn't believe my own words. It was undoubtedly the sound of a phantasm. After all, I do have a constitution disposed to seeing these sorts of things. Both in Japan and in foreign countries I have witnessed things like this. Since I was a child, I've been able to clearly see these things which nobody else can. This ability seems to be hereditary. My mother never told me, but I know she also often saw such things. Take for instance an incident from my childhood: my mother was talking to herself in the corner of our room at a hot-spring resort my family stayed at when I was a youngster. It's clear that she was trying to persuade a phantasm in the room to go away. That's why I didn't want to come to this island: I knew that the spirits of the numberless Japanese who died during the war would be floating about.

"Would you mind if I slept in your room? There are two beds here, after all. Would that be alright?" Yoshino whined.

"Are you kidding? You know I don't like sharing my room."

"In that case, maybe we should change hotels. We'll ask that taxi driver from before to take us to another place."

"If you want, you go to another hotel. You can go ahead alone, but you're going to have to pay yourself. Our coupons can only be used here." I was convinced it would be the same, no matter which hotel we stayed at. The spirits on the island had already marked us. The ones that resided in the South Seas would be sure to cling to us and come along if we changed hotels. And, unfortunately, artless people like Yoshino are easily possessed by spirits. In fact, in this room in which I didn't feel any indication not long before, I found was rapidly filling with the metaphysical energy of the otherworld.

"I don't mind paying myself. I'm sorry, but I'm going to change hotels. Let me have that taxi driver's card," Yoshino said. As I was looking at the telephone number on the business card, which I had just removed from my pocket, Yoshino sat on the bed and picked up the telephone receiver. When I looked over at him, a chill ran up my spine. He ordinarily has very short hair, but in an instant his hair had become shoulder-length.

When I noticed this, the air consistency between us started fluctuating. Ribbons of dense air were snaking through the comparatively thin air already in the room. If you were to compare it to something, it would be like gum syrup flowing into water, in which the weight of the syrup is heavier than the water into which it is flowing, yet the transparency is the same. The consistency of the air was certainly changing, but there was no movement in the air, a phenomena which is ordinarily generated by physical forces. There was only a strange transparent energy moving through the room.

"Shit! Something happened to the phone." Yoshino cursed, slamming

down the receiver. “The message says to dial 9 then the number for an outside call. But every time I dial 9, the line becomes disengaged.”

“You’d better dial zero and place the call through the operator,” I advised. As I spoke, I felt the flesh from my lower back to the top of my shoulders crawl. But it was not from fear *per se*. My body’s physiology always reacts like this in the presence of spirits.

Yoshino started to speak in broken English after dialing zero: “Ah ... hello ... local call ... please....”

Before he could finish, there was a flash outside the window. A moment later, an earsplitting crack of thunder roared. The sky, which was perfectly clear not long before, had become utterly dark. Then it started raining rapid fire like a machine gun.

“Local number is...” Yoshino began to say, as he read the number from the card, then shouted, “What the...?”

“What’s wrong?”

“This is ridiculous! Apparently, all the telephones on this friggin’ island are out. Probably a bolt of lightning struck near the telephone company and the line was cut, or something like that.” Yoshino shrugged his shoulders and threw down the receiver again. His hair had returned to its normal state in that short period of time, and the consistency of the air in the room also returned to its usual condition. For the time being, they were thinking that they’d succeeded in making us stay in this hotel and that they could watch us from a distance.

“In any case, we only need to stay here tonight. Tomorrow we’ll see if we can find another hotel. You know, we did come here to work.”

“I know that,” Yoshino said as he looked me in the eye incredulously, “but you mean I can only come here to sleep?”

“Yup, that’s right. You’ll have to stay in your room to charge the batteries. If you charge them here, it’ll be too noisy.”

“I’ve already started charging them. So, I can stay here with you, can’t I?”

I only nodded in assent. I knew it would be dangerous for him. He could be easily possessed if he were near me, since I have this constitution which attracts spirits, and he’s so damned thin-skinned. But telling this to Yoshino, who was wearing such a fearful expression, would obviously have been a bad idea. So I didn’t say anything.

When we finished our dinner at the hotel restaurant, we went back to my room and started guzzling the Old Parr. According to my experience, I don’t see spirits when I’m really drunk. Or maybe it’s that I see them but don’t care. After pouring two-thirds of the bottle of whiskey down our throats, we became rather sleepy. As I tried not to think about the spirits, I crashed on the bed with my trousers still on. Yoshino flopped down on his bed at the same time.

Around midnight, I had the feeling that someone was wondering around

the hall. But thanks to the alcohol, I fell back to sleep easily, with no more thought of it. I woke quite early the next morning with a dry throat. The sunshine, which made me think of summertime in Japan, was streaming in through a space between the curtains.

"Hey, wake up!" I yelled to Yoshino on the bed beside me, who was then sleeping on his stomach without a blanket, before reflexively letting slip out: "Oh, shit!" He had the same long hair hanging from his head as the night before. His eyes had become sunken and had dark rings around them. Thin, boney cheeks protruded sharply from under the rings. "Hey, wake up. Are you all right?" I grabbed his shoulders and shook. Slowly, he forced open his eyes (which had been stuck closed with gobs of mucus), blinked, then gave them a good rub and wearily raised the upper part of his body.

"Man, my head is killin' me. God, I hate hangovers," Yoshino said in a gravelly voice. This relieved me a little, as it seemed his mind was not damaged as much as his worn-out body.

"You don't look so good. Take a look at yourself in the bathroom mirror."

"I had a dream that I fell down a steep cliff into the sea. I wanted to stop but I couldn't. So many people were coming, one after the other. I was bumping against rocks the whole time, then down into the sea. I couldn't get to the surface because I got tangled up in this really dense seaweed. The more I struggled to get to the surface, the deeper I went. Then from under the water I could see somebody at the surface staring down at me. It was me! As I reached out and was about to touch fingers, you woke me up," he said while staggering to the mirror. Then a shout: "Ahhh! ... What's going on? What happened to me? Eee ... my hair ... all of me!"

At last, he too saw his own long hair and new face. My skin crawled when I got a look at him staggering back from the bathroom. A human shape was overlapping his body. It was a woman wearing a splashed-patterned kimono and other Japanese garments. Her arms were wrapped around his shoulders as she clung to his back. Moreover, she had no face. Only torn, bloody flesh was dangling from her bleached skull.

"Don't come any closer! Keep away!" I shouted as I stuck my hands out to push back the thick air surrounding Yoshino's body.

"My head is really killing me. And my face feels like it's on fire. Come on, you have to help me. Please... help me..." His voice was changing. It was becoming deep and heavy, like a sound emitted from the bowels of the earth. Somehow, though, I could tell it was a woman's voice.

"Help me, help me, help... help..."

I picked up a pillow from the bed and hurled it at Yoshino. He stopped for an instant, and at that unguarded moment I took up my waist pouch from the sideboard and rushed past him to the door.

When I was close to coming in contact with his body, I found the air

around him was cold and clammy. He smelled like dried seaweed. Yoshino's and the woman's voices harmonized as he pursued me down the corridor: "Please take me to Japan with you. Please take me home to Japan ... to Japan ..."

I ran past the reception counter feverishly and jumped into a taxi waiting for customers, yelling to the driver, "The airport!" I wanted to leave the island as fast as possible. My passport and wallet were in the waist pouch. The equipment was, of course, important. But I was in a panic to escape.

From the window of the taxi, as we passed down the avenue of flaming trees, I got a good look at the wrecked tank in the lagoon, which I had seen yesterday. It was in flames, and a figure enveloped in a ball of fire was struggling to crawl out from the upper hatch. I could see the airport at that point. Then, when the taxi stopped for a traffic signal, a Japanese platoon straggler in a tattered uniform crossed in front of us, using his infantry rifle as a crutch. A corpse whose bowels were protruding from his bloody stomach and another who had lost more than half her skull stared fixedly at me in the taxi as they followed close behind him.

When I arrived at the airport, I made my way to the Japan Airlines counter, which had a flight departing in two hours. I flung my credit card on the counter and bought a first class ticket, as the flight's economy seats were sold out.

Gripping my boarding pass, my attention was drawn to a group of young women crowding into the lobby. Each one, showing a pair of sunburned legs from under her baggy pedal pushers, carried a Japanese soldier or dead civilian on her back. And the other tourists, who were clambering at a duty-free shop, also carried on their backs the spirit of a Japanese who died an honorable death on this island some forty years ago.

Finally, I understood why so many tourists were drawn to this island: the spirits of the Japanese who died here were calling out to bring them back to Japan. As I entertained this idea, Yoshino entered the terminal building. The spirit of the woman on his back had totally assimilated with him. Now, with no face and wearing a splashed-patterned kimono and other Japanese garments, Yoshino bellowed, "Take me to Japan!"

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