

ひみつ #1

白い布が櫓の木の下に落ちている。近寄っていったとめくると、中からこどもがあらわれた。

「何すんの」

こどもは睨んだ。

目の細いこどもだった。眉は対照的に太い。男の子なのだか女の子なのだか、よくわからない。「あ、どめん」

謝ったけれど、こどもは睨みつづける。かくれんぼとか、してるの？聞くと、こどもは首をぶんぶん横に振った。

「住んでるんだよ、ここに」

大きなふろしきほどの布である。こどもの足もとには草がぼうぼう生えている。

あとじさって、背を向けた。離れてゆく間も、こどもの視線を背中に感じた。こどもはうぶ毛が濃かった。

次の日も、布は櫓の木の下にあった。めくるもんか、と思っていたら、めくる前にこどもがぴょんと飛びだした。「行こうよ」こどもははきはきと言い、先に立った。つきしたがうつもりはなかったけれど、部屋への帰り道と同じ道すじをこどもがゆくので、自然にしたがうかたちになってしまう。そのままこどもは部屋の扉の前まで迷わず歩いた。はやく鍵、あけてよ。

こどもは威張った調子で言った。逆らえなくて、こどもごと部屋に入った。そのままこどもは住みついた。こどもは小食だったので助かった。聞き上手なもの、予想外のことだった。仕事の失敗や、つれない恋人のことを、ふんふん頷きながら熱心に聞いてくれるのだった。

Secret

A white cloth was draped underneath a Pine tree. As I approached the tree and turned over the cloth, a child appeared from below. The child glared at me. “what are you doing?”. The child's eyes were thin, but eyebrows thick. It made it hard for me to tell whether it was a boy or a girl. “Ah, sorry”. I apologized, but the child continued to glare. “Are you playing hide and seek or something?” The child shook its head side-to-side.

“No, I live here”

A big cloth about the size of a furoshiki. The boundless grass grew around the child's legs. I took a step back and started to leave. I felt the child's gaze on my back as I walked away. The child's hair was downy and strong. The next day the same cloth was draping from below the tree. I thought to myself there was no way I would pull the cloth off, but just then the child sprung out. “let's go!” Promptly said the child before turning to head down the road.

It was not my intention to follow them, but the child was heading down the same path back to my room. Naturally I decided to follow along. The child just walked up to right before the room door and then waived. “open the door” the child arrogantly said. The child's tone made it hard to go against letting them in. We entered the room together. The room became a place to settle down. The child did not eat much, which saved me. The child was also unexpectedly a good listener. The child would listen to my stories of job failure, indifferent lovers and eagerly nodded while listening.

#2

こどもはシャワーをあびたあと、興がのる。裸でへんな踊りをおどりくるう。小さなちんちんが、こどもの動きにつれてはねる。こどもは男であるらしかった。

こどもはふいと出てゆくことがあった。一週間くらい帰ってこない時は、櫓の木の下にゆくと、白い布の下で眠っている。

「どうして出ていったの」

と聞くと、こどもは、よくわかんない、と答える。

こどもは人間なのだろうかと思う。まあ、どちらでもいいのだが。

そのままこどもは三十年いつづけている。

三十年たってもこどものままだ。小食と聞き上手は変わらない。へんな踊りもずっとおどっているし、ふいと出てゆくところも変わらない。

こんなに変わらないのだから、人間ではないのだと納得した。

人間の方は変わってしまう。

こどもにくらべて歳をとった。最初は可愛くもなんともなかったこどもを可愛く思うようになった。へんくつになった。マンションを買った。犬を一匹飼った。猫は三匹飼った。死ぬことが恐くなった。

犬も猫も死にたえて、こどもだけは残っている。そのうちこどもだけが残るのだ。

「どうしてここに来たの」

いつか聞いてみたら、こどもは少し考えてから、「ひみつ」

と答えた。

Secret cont.

The child gets excited after taking a shower. They would dance wildly across the room while naked, their small weiner bobbing up and down. He seemed to be a boy after all. At times, he would suddenly go out. Sometimes he would be gone for a week, so I would return to the Pine tree and find him below the tree, underneath the white cloth, sleeping.

“Why did you leave?” I would ask

“I don't know” he often answered

I was starting to doubt if he was really human or not. Well, nevertheless it didn't matter to me.

He continued just like that for 30 years. After 30 years he is still here. He hasn't changed, he still eats light and is a good listener. After his showers he still does that strange dance and the way he suddenly disappears hasn't changed either. Because there hasn't been much change after all these years, I was certain that he can't be human.

Humans change over time.

That means I am definitely a human. Now I am older and stubborn. Despite that I have become fond of the child, though that was not the case in the beginning.

I bought an apartment. I owned a small dog. And three cats. I became scared of death.

The dog died, and the cats too. Leaving only the child and I. One of these days the child will be the only one remaining.

“Why did you come here?” I once asked him

The child thought about it for a second.

“It’s a secret” he finally answered.

にわとり地獄 #3

「にわとりをいじめると落ちる地獄でね。大きなにわとりがやってきて、火をはきかけてきたり、つついてきたり、踏みつけてきたりする。それが永劫に続く」

おじさんが言うのを、聞いていた。おじさんはこのあたりでいちばん大きな農家の分家筋の人だった。農家といっても、開発が進んでほとんどの耕作地は売り払い、そこに団地や建売住宅がたくさんできていた。

おじさんの庭では山羊とにわとりを飼っていたけれど、本家ではもう誰も農業はせずに、若い者はみんなサラリーマンになって新橋やら品川やらに通っているのだった。

にわとりは十羽ほどいた。とさかの立派なのもいたし、よれよれのもいた。

「強いのが、弱いのをつつく」

おじさんは教えてくれた。つつかれているにわとりを見たくて、いつもじろじろ眺めていたけれど、だめだった。にわとりはちりぢりになって、互いがそこにいるのかどうだか、関心なさそうにみえた。

おじさんは片目がなかった。戦争でなくしたんだと言っていた。義眼がはまっていて、そちらのめだまが動かない。ほら、と言いながら、出してみせてくれたことがあった。大きなビー玉よりももっと大きな球形の、白くにぎった色のものだった。

おじさんは義眼をのせた右手をつきだしてきて、「ほらほら」

と、すごんだ。怖がっているのを知っているのだった。

この前大きな美術館に行ったら、にわとり地獄の絵が飾ってあった。おじさんのでまかせなのかと思っていた。地獄草紙。平安時代。国宝。胸にうろこのある巨大なにわとりが両翼を広げている。

おじさんは時々になわとりをいじめていた。

餌を餌箱に入れると、にわとりが群がってくる。わざと邪陰に払ったり蹴ったりしていた。機嫌が悪い時には、追いかけてまわしておどかしていた。

にわとりはたくさん卵をうんだ。竹の籠におじさんは盛り上げた。もの欲しそうに見ても、一回もわけてくれなかった。卵をうまなくなったにわとりも、おじさんはずっと生かしていた。しめるのが嫌いなんだと言っていた。

死んだにわとりを、裏庭に埋めているのを見たことがある。食べればいいのにと言ったら、自然に死んだのは食べないと、おじさんは言った。

おじさんが今どうしているのか、知らない。中学生になると、おじさんを訪ねなくなって、それきりだ。おじさんの家があったところは、白い小さなビルになって、一階のテナントにはアンティークのお店とケーキ屋が入っている。ケーキ屋は、モンブランがおいしい。

Chicken Hell

“There is a hell that people get banished to for picking on chickens. If you get sent there, there is a big chicken that appears and spits fire on you, pecks at you, and tramples you for an eternity” said the old man and I listened.

The old man and his family are the biggest branch of farmers in this area. They are called farmers but they had to sell most of their land. And now there are lots of apartment complexes and housing developments on the land they once owned. The old man took care of the goats and chicken in his yard, but the main family had nothing to do with agriculture. All the younger people went on to become office workers in central Tokyo at places such as Shinbashi and Shinagawa. He had about 10 . Some chickens were fine and nicely combed, while the others looked worn out and shabby. “The strong chickens peck at the weak ones.” he told me.

I really wanted to see the chickens get pecked, but no matter how intensely I watched, it was of no use. Rather they would scatter across the field, one after another seemingly without a care where the others are. The old man was missing an eye. He told me he lost it in war. He wore an artificial eye that never moved instead. Sometimes he would say “Look!” as he took his eye out and showed it to me. The eye was a cloudy white and was bigger than the biggest marble I’ve ever seen. He knew that it terrified me so he would yell “look! look!” as used his right hand to push it towards me. I had recently gone to a big art museum and saw the art exhibit painting of chicken hell. Here this whole time I thought the old man was making it up. Pictured in the 12th century Hell scroll. A national treasure. It pictured a giant scaly-breast rooster with both its wings spread.

Sometimes the old man was cruel to his own chickens. When he would put the feed in their feeding box and they would come gathering, then he would deliberately kick them away. When he was in a bad mood, he would scare the chickens by chasing them around. His chickens laid a lot of eggs, which he would just let pile up inside a bamboo basket. I never got a single one no matter how yearningly I looked. Once a chicken stops producing eggs the old man keeps the chicken alive. "I don't like killing them," he said. I once saw him bury a dead chicken in the back yard. I proceeded to ask him "Isn't it good to eat?". "I won't eat them if they died naturally" he replied. I don't have a clue what he is doing these days. I stopped visiting him around middle school and that was it. Now a small white building stands where his house once was. The first floor is filled by an antique shop and pastry shop. Their Mont Blanc cake is delicious.

おばあちゃん Grandma #4

名前は覚えていない。「おばあちゃん」と呼んでいたけれど、今になって考えてみれば、まだ四十代のなかばぐらいだった。小学校から帰ると、三日に一回はいつも「おばあちゃん」の家に遊びにいった。友だちと遊ぶよりも、ずっと、よかった。友だちは、野蠻だから。

おばあちゃんは、いつも一人だった。おるすばんしてるのよ、あたし。おばあちゃんはそう言って、招き入れてくれた。広い家だった。何回か、わたしより年下の男の子の姿を見たこともあったけれど、すぐに奥の方にひっこんでしまった。おばあちゃんの部屋には、こたつと千代紙と花札とお茶セット（ポットにきゅうす、茶碗に茶筒）があった。二人で、いつも花札をした。本来は三人でするものなのだけれど、二人でするので、最後は手札がなくなって、ただ場札をめくるだけになった。三人でやっている時はめったにできない四光や五光や赤短青短がすぐにできて、豪華な感じがした。

I can't remember her name. "Grandma" is what is used to call her, but, now that I think about it, she could have been in her mid forties. Every two to three days I would always stop by her house on my way back from elementary school. Playing with her was much more fun than playing with my friends. My friends were savages. Grandma was always alone. She told me that she was just house-sitting and that I should come in. It was a big house. There were a few times when I saw a little boy younger than I, but he always scurried to the back of the house.

Grandma's room had a kotatsu, colorfully intricate origami paper, hanafuda cards, and her tea set (a teapot, teacups, and a tea caddy to store her tea. The two of us always played cards. Originally, Hanada is supposed to be played with three people, however since there were only two of us, the cards in our hands ran out pretty quickly so we had to flip the cards on the table. When three people play, you rarely get any of the bonus cards like the four and five cards or the red and blue ribbon card, but since it was the two of us we ended up collecting them all ourselves.

おばあちゃんは、ときどき「十円ちょうだい」と言った。持っていなかったので、次の時に持参したら、ほめられた。それからいつも十円玉を一つ持って行くようになったけれど、また「ちょうだい」と言われた時、いばった気持ちでさしだしたら、「ふん」と言われた。

ものすごくおばあちゃんが不機嫌な時もあった。むっつりと黙りこんで、千代紙で福助とハカマを折っていた。千代紙柄の派手な福助に、違う派手な柄のハカマをはかせて、ぎらぎらした袴をいくつも作っては、部屋の隅にほうり投げた。

From time to time, grandma would ask "10 yen please?". At the time I didn't carry money on me, so the next time she asked for money, I already had it with me. She praised me that time and after that I started to carry one 10 yen coin around, but yet when she asked for it all I was met with was a "hmpf" after handing it to her with great pride. Sometimes grandma was extremely grumpy. She would sit there sullenly, not saying a word while folding fukusuke dolls, a big headed dwarf, dazzlingly dressing them in kamishimo ceremonial costume and a hakama made from a paper of different design but just as flashy. Then she would toss them all into the corner of the room.

「地獄」という言葉を人の口からはじめて聞いたのは、おばあちゃんの部屋でだった。[地獄はねえ、肝油の匂いがするんだってね]おばあちゃんは、突然言ったのだった。肝油は、学校のお昼休みに、

申しこみをしてお金を払った人が、保健室でもらうことになっていた。「肝油、のみたい」と言ったのに、母は「もったいない」と一蹴した。げーっ、まずい、と言いながら保健室から帰ってくる赤井キヨシやかなえちゃんが、うらやましかった。

「肝油って、におい、するの」と聞くと、おばあちゃんは「くさいよ」と言った。

くさいのなら、肝油は飲まなくていいやと思った。おばあちゃんは少し前から、へんな髪型にしていた。ひさしのように前髪をはりださせて、ぼんのくぼのあたりに小さな髷をつくっていた。「前髪、さわって、いい」と聞くと、にらまれた。おばあちゃんはじきに招き入れてくれなくなった。「あそぼうよ」と言っても、窓の隙間から顔をちょっとだけ出して、「だめ」と、つれなく断った。

Grandma's room was where I heard the word "hell" for the first time. "You know they say hell smells like fish liver oil" she suddenly said one day. During school lunch break, cod liver oil was given out in the infirmary, but only those whose parents applied and paid for it. "I want some" i would say, but my mother said it was "a waste of money" and flatly rejected the idea. When Kyoshi Akai and kanae came back from the infirmary they said "ugh, this is nasty" and that I was lucky.

"Does cod liver have a smell?" I asked grandma.

"It smells stinky," she replied.

If it's smelly, then I am glad I don't have to drink it, I thought. Grandma had been wearing a weird hair style for a little bit. Her bangs sticking out like a visor, all while a small bun is surrounding the nape of her neck.

When I asked, "Can I touch the front?", she glared at me. Not too long after that I stopped visiting grandma. I would say "let's play" to her from outside her window, but she would just crack the window enough to stick her face through, and say "No", in a cold, indifferent tone.

おばあちゃんはしばらく入院した。死んでしまうのかと思っていたら、退院してきた。またときどき部屋に招き入れてくれるようになったけれど、三年生になっていたのもうあんまり訪ねなくなった。「病院で、肝油、のんだ」と聞いたら、首を横にふった。そんなカンタンな気じゃないのよと、えらそうに言った。おばあちゃんはその後二回入院して、二回退院した。それからは急にふつうのおばあちゃんになって、庭の手入れをしたり道の落ち葉をはいたり子供をかわいがったりするようになった。

Grandma was hospitalized for some time. I had thought that she was dying, but I guess she was well enough to be discharged from the hospital. I started to visit her again once in a while, but by then I had already become a third grader, so I didn't visit often. "Did you have to drink fish liver oil at the hospital?" I asked her, but all she did was shake her head. "It's not that simple" she said to me in a conceited tone. She was hospitalized two more times after that, and both times she was discharged. After that, she swiftly became a normal old lady, taking care of the garden, racking the fallen leaves on the path, and taking care of children.

事務室、と、おにいさんは呼んでいたけれど、そこは公園のあずまやだった。おにいさんは学校にあまり行っていなかった。古い学生服を着ていた。ふつうの黒いものではなく、羊羹みたいな色のものだった。近くに寄ると、ナフタリンがにおった。おにいさんはあまり喋らなかった。「ハンコおしますか」「ケツサイおねがいします」「きょうはよくふりますね」、その三種類くらいしか口にできなかった。どんなに晴れていても、「よくふりますね」だった。

He called it his office, but really it was just a gazebo at the park. Even though he barely attended school, he always wore the old school uniform. The usual black color of the uniform had faded, it was so old it looked the color of a yokan. When you would get closer, you'd catch the smell of mothballs. He rarely ever spoke. He had about 3 kinds of phrases he would say, "Would you like me to stamp?", "Please settle the payment", and "It sure is raining a lot today isn't it?", that was it. No matter how sunny it was, he would always say, "it's raining a lot, isn't it?".

事務室に、おにいさんはいつもざぶとんとノートを持ってきた。ちびた鉛筆で、おにいさんはノートに絵を描いていた。
おにいさんはざぶとんを敷かず、あずまやのベンチに正座していた。そばに寄ってゆくと、ざぶとんを勧めてくれた。裏返しにしながら、こちらに押しやるのだった。一人でおにいさんに話しかけるのはこわかったの、いつもかなえちゃんと一緒にいった。かなえちゃんは少し意地悪だった。二の段の九九言ってみてよ。おにいさんに命令したりした。おにいさんは「ハンコおしますか」と小さな声で言ったきり、黙ってしまった。

He would always bring a flat floor cushion and a notebook with him when he went into his office. He would then draw pictures on his notebook with a short stubby pencil. He would sit criss cross on the bench in the gazebo without laying the cushion down. When I would approach him closer, he would offer me the cushion. He would turn the cushion over and slide it toward me. I was scared to talk to him alone, so Kanae and I would always go together. Kanae was a little mean. She would even boss him around, ordering him to recite the 2-times tables. "Should I stamp here" he would mumble, then go silent.

おにいさんのところに一人で行ったことが二回だけある。一回目はひどい台風が来るという予報の出した日だった。心配になって覗いたのだ。おにいさんはいなかった。二回目はそのすぐ後で、給食の残りを持っていった。揚げパンをおにいさんの膝の上に置いたら、突き返された。「ケツサイおねがいします」と、おにいさんは言った。せっかくおにいさんのために残しておいたのにと、くやしくなって足をふみならしたら、おにいさんはびくっとした。目をつむって、耳をふさいでいた。

I only ever went to see him by myself twice. The first time was when we got news that a severe typhoon was about to come. I became worried about him and went to check on him, but he wasn't there. The second time I went to visit him alone was right after that, when I brought him leftovers of deep fried bread from my school lunch. I placed the bread on top of his knee, but he pushed it away and gave it right back to me. "Final payment, please," he said. I was kind enough to save what was left for him so obviously I was upset, so I stomped my foot. He flinched. Then he shut his eyes and covered up his ears with his hands.

おにいさんが四歳年上なだけだと知ったのは、中学に入ってからだった。そのころはもう事務室におにいさんは来なくなっていた。おにいさんとはときどき道で会った。こんにちはと言うと、おにいさんは「ハンコおしますか」と聞く。いいですよと答えると、「それではケツサイおねがいします」とつづけるのだった。その後は、はいと頷いてもいいえと首をふつても、いつもおにいさんはすたすた行ってしまう。

I only found out he was four years older than I when I entered junior high. By that time he had stopped going to the office. Sometimes we would encounter each other on the street. I would say “Hello” and he would say “should I stamp here?”, “Okay” I would answer “Final balance, please” he would continue. After that, even if I shook my head “no” or “yes”, he would always quickly walk away.

おにいさんの絵の展覧会を児童会館でやっていたので、かなえちゃんと一緒に見にいって。画用紙の画面いっぱい、動物や船や花がクレヨンで描かれていた。上手か上手でないかはわからなかったけれど、すごいと思った。おにいさんはテレビに出るようになって、ほんの少し有名になった。もう学生服は着ておらず、かわりにジーンズのつなぎと縞のシャツを身につけるようになっていた。道で会ったとき、おにいさんはあいかわらず「ハンコおしますか」と聞いた。ある時、何も答えずにじっとしていたら、おにいさんは「アゲパンおいしいです」と言った。はじめて聞く、いつもの言葉以外のおにいさんの言葉だった。わたしの答えは聞かずに、おにいさんはすたすた行ってしまった。

He had an exhibition of his drawings featured at the children's center, so I went with kanae. The sheets of drawing paper were filled with drawings of animals, ships, and flowers drawn in crayon. Were they good, were they not good, I wasn't sure, but I still thought they were amazing. He had started appearing on TV and had become slightly famous. He also stopped wearing his school uniform and started wearing denim overalls and striped shirts. When we ran into each other on the street, as usual, he asked “should I stamp here?”. At one point, I didn't answer at all. “Deep fried bread is delicious,” he said. It was the first time I heard him say a phrase other than what he usually says. He walked away quickly without hearing my answer.

おにいさんは三十三歳で亡くなった。死後に画集が一冊出て、それはずいぶん売れたそうだ。本屋で立ち読みしたけれど、いつか児童会館で見たほんもののおにいさんの絵にくらべると、画集に印刷された絵はなんだかいやにひらべったかった。

He passed away at the age of 33. After his death, a copy of his collection of pictures was sold, surprisingly it sold well. I browsed through the book while at a book store, I compared the pictures to the ones I had seen at the children's center at one point, but the art book print was oddly flat.

かなえちゃんにはお姉さんがいた。髪をまっすぐにたらし、目玉の青みがかかったお姉さんだった。外国人みたいな目の色をしているけれど、顔はひらべったくて日本人そのものだった。「あれはお姉ちゃんじゃなくて、他人」と、かなえちゃんは時々言った。かなえちゃんの、いつもの意地悪である。お姉さんはかなえちゃんよりも二つ年上なのに、いつもおどおどしていた。かなえちゃんの家は二階建てだった。階下に居間と台所があり、二階には子供部屋と両親の寝室がある。寝室には、当時は珍しかったダブルベッドがすえてあった。

Kanae had an older sister. Her hair was long and straight, and she had eyes that were a tinge of blue and green. The color looked like a foreigner but, she had various different eyes on her but, her flat face itself was definitely japanese. "That person is not my sister, that's a stranger" kanae would say once in a while. Kanae was always mean. Despite Kanae's older sister being 2 years above her, she was always the one who was timid. Kanae's house was two stories high. The living room and kitchen were located on the lower floor, while the children's and parents' bedrooms were upstairs. The parents' bedroom had a double bed, which in those days was uncommon.

こっそりとしのびこみ、ものすごい勢いでかなえちゃんと二人してベッドの上でぴよんぴよん跳ぶのが楽しかった。ある日もそうやって盛んに跳んでいたら、扉の陰にお姉さんが立ってじっとこちらを見ていた。「おかあさんにいつけたら、仕返しするからね」かなえちゃんは怖い声を出した。お姉さんは身をひるがえし、階段をかけおりて行った。すぐにお母さんが上がってきて、扉を全開にした。もちろんかなえちゃんもわたしも、すでにベッドからおりていた。なに食わぬ顔でベッドの横に座り、お人形遊びをするふりをしていた。お母さんの足音が聞えたので、いそいでかなえちゃんの部屋から人形を持ってきたのだ。寝室を追いだされて子供部屋に行くと、お姉さんがいた。仕返しよ、と言いながらかなえちゃんはお姉さんをくすぐった。わたしも一緒になってくすぐった。愉快的遊びなのかと思ってどんどんくすぐっていたら、お姉さんの様子が妙な感じになってきた。最初はけいれんするような笑い声をたてていたのだけれど、そのうちにしゃっくりのような、おえつのような、苦しそうな声になってきた。

I looked forward to secretly sneaking in with kanae and jumping on the bed. One day while we were energetically jumping on the bed, I saw Kanae's sister standing in the doorway watching us. "If you tell on me to mom, I'm going to get pay back", Kanae let out in an eerie voice. She turned around and ran down the stairs. Their mother immediately came upstairs, and swung the door open. Of course Kanae and I got down from the bed already. Next thing you know she was sitting next to the bed with an ignorant face, pretending to play with dolls. Because we had heard their mother footsteps, kanae hurriedly brought the dolls from the room. Driven out of the room, we went to the girl's room, her sister was there. "Time for revenge" said Kanae and then started to tickle her sister. Together, we began to tickle her. I thought we were having an enjoyable time as we continued to tickle, but the look on her face began to feel strange. At first, it sounded like convulsive laughter but soon it turned into a distressing sound, like hiccups or weeping.

最後にはお姉さんはぐったりと床に長くなってしまった。弱いよね、お姉ちゃんこれに。かなえちゃんは軽く言い、うつぶせになっているお姉さんをひっくり返し、あおむけにさせた。よだれが少しだけ口のはたから垂れていた。ちゃんと目は開いていて、息もしていたので、安心した。青っぽい目玉が、うるんでいた。しばらくたってから、またかなえちゃんの家に行った。かなえちゃんはどこかに遊びにいつてしまっていて、お姉さんだけがいた。

上がらない、と言われた。なんとなくさからえなかった。子供部屋に行き、お姉さんは机のひきだしから小さな箱を取り出した。ぱこりという音をさせて、お姉さんはふたを開いた。

At last, when we stopped, she was laying stretched out on the floor. “You’re weak compared to this big sister”, Kanae said lightly, flipping her sister who was laying face down to face up. A little drool was dangling from her mouth, but her eyes were open and she was still breathing, which gave me peace. Her bluish green eyes were cloudy. After a while , I went back to Kanae’s house. Kanae had gone somewhere to play and it was only her older sister there. “Don’t enter” she said to me, for some unknown reason, I couldn’t resist. We went into the girls room, she pulled a small box out of the desk drawer. With a ‘pop’ sound she opened the lid.

白くてぐにやぐにやしたものが入っていた。何それ、と聞くと、のうみそ、とお姉さんは答えた。人形のうみそ。ほら、あの棚の上にあるタミーの。お姉さんが指さした先には、この前寝室で人形遊びのふりをした時にかなえちゃんが手にしていた金髪のタミー人形が寝かせられていた。うそつき。わたしは言い返したけれど、お姉さんはうっすら笑っていた。階段をかけおりて、外に出た。靴のかかとを踏んだまま走った。一度靴が脱げた。あわててつかけて、また走った。人形のうみそは、まっしろではなくて、でも隅のほうはくろずんでいてなんだか汚かった。

Inside was something white and flabby. When I asked her what it was she answered “brains”. “Doll brain’s”. Look. They’re from Tammy, up on that shelf. She pointed at the blond doll that Kanae had last pretended to play with in her parents bedroom the last time I was there. “Liar” I said back, but Kanae’s sister was just faintly smiling. I ran down the stairs and went outside. Trampling the heels of my shoes while I ran. One shoe slipped off, but I hurriedly put it back on and continued running. The doll brains were not pure white; they were darkened and filthy around the edges.

クロは凶悪だった。クロとは、赤井キヨシの飼っている黒い犬のことである。赤井はクロのことを「ジョン」と呼んでいたけれど、ぜんぜん「ジョン」のようではない。ただの日本のありふれた黒い犬なので「クロ」としか呼んでやらないのだ。クロはよく吠える。吠えるだけではなく、噛みつく。甘噛みすることは少なく、たいがい本気で噛んでくる。噛まれると血が出る。こんなに血が出て。どうしてくれるんですか。しょっちゅう誰かが赤井の家に怒鳴りこんできていた。でも赤井も赤井のおかあさんも平気な顔をしていた。

Kuro was vicious. Kuro was the black dog owned by Kyoshi Akai. He called the dog “John”, but there was nothing “John” like about the dog. He was just like any ordinary Japanese black dog that could only be called Kuro. Kuro barked a lot. Not just barking, but biting too. And when he bit, they weren’t gently playing kind, they were serious bites, the kind that drew blood. There was so much blood. There would be victims that would run into Akai’s house yelling “What are you doing about it?” all the time, but Akai and his mother would always look unconcerned.

夕方になるまで赤井はいつもクロを放ちっぱなしだった。自分の縄張りを巡回するように、近所の一軒一軒をクロは見てまわる。生垣に鼻づらをつっこみ、ふんふんかぐ。人がいると勢いよく吠える。逃げると追いかけてくる。さらに逃げると追いついてきて噛みつく。クロはもちろん嫌われていた。大きな犬がやってきてクロに吠えかかると、みんなが大きい犬を応援した。そういう時クロは何回か吠え返してから、さっと向きを変え、走り去る。しっぽが尻にたくしまれている。いいきみだと、みんなで言い合った。でも大きな犬はあまりこのあたりにはいないので、たいがいはクロの天下だ。クロを毒殺しようと清水くんのお兄さんたちが計画した。肉の中に洗剤をしこんで食べさせるというのだ。昼間クロが放たれている時をねらって、お兄さんたちはクロに肉をやった。肉を全部たいらげたけれど、クロは元気だった。洗剤は効かなかった。

Akai would always let kuro roam free until the early evening. Kuro would go look around the neighborhood and patrol each and every house like it was his territory. He'd thrust his muzzle into the hedges, sniffing continuously. If he happened to find you, then he would bark furiously, and if you tried to flee, he would chase after you. If you kept running, he would eventually catch up and bite you. Whenever a big dog would come up to kuro and bark, everyone would root for the big dog. In moments like that, kuro would bark back a few times, then he would quickly change his direction and run off. His tail tucked between his rear. "It serves you right", everyone would say. But there weren't many big dogs within the neighborhood, so Kuro ruled most of the territory. Shimizu's older brother devised a plan to kill Kuro by poisoning him. They planned to put detergent inside the meat and have him eat it. It was planned that during the day while Kuro was out, Shimizu's older brother would give Kuro the laced meat. He ate all of the meat, but was still perfectly fine. The detergent didn't work on him at all.

クロが泥棒をつかまえたことがある。かなえちゃんの隣の隣の家に空き巣に入ろうとしていたところを、クロがものすごい勢いで吠えたのである。泥棒はあわてて家を飛びだした。クロは噛みついた。いつもならば噛みついてからすぐに離れるのに、ずっと噛みついたまま泥棒の足を離さなかった。泥棒は泣いていたそうだ。痛え、痛え、と言いながら泣いていたそうだ。「だらしのない泥棒だぜ」と、清水くんのお兄さんたちは言っていた。でもそれ以来クロの毒殺計画は無しになってしまった。

Kuro once caught a thief. Two houses down from Kanae's house a burglary was taking place and Kuro barked at the thief with incredible force. When the thief tried to hurry up and bolt out of there, Kuro just bit down. Usually whenever he would snap at someone he would immediately let them go, but this time he continued to bite, not letting go of the thief's leg. Apparently, the thief began to cry. He kept saying "it hurts, it hurts" while shedding tears. "Heh, what a sloppy thief" said Shimizu's older brother. But after that, Kuro's poison scheme was scrapped.

クロは泥棒をつかまえてから三年後に死んだ。大通りでダンプにはねられたのである。赤井は怒ったような顔でクロの墓を庭に掘っていた。赤井のことは、クロと同じく、みんな嫌っていたのだけれど、その時は少し同情した。でもそのあと、赤井が庭のクロの墓のそばにへんな像みたいなものを据えたので、もうみんな同情しなくなった。像は粘土でできていた。どうやらクロをかたどったものらしかった。赤井は図工が苦手なので、像はひしゃげていた。クロには全然似ていなかった。あぶら粘土で作った像は、雨や風にさらされて、じきにこわれた。こわれた粘土を、赤井はまたくっつけて像にした。ますますクロには似なくなった。赤井は何年かたってから引っ越していった。大きくなったらものすごくいい男になって演歌歌手としてデビューしたという噂を聞いたことがあるけれど、ほんとうかどうかは確かではない。

Three years after catching the thief, Kuro passed away. He was hit by a dump trunk on the main street. Akai dug a grave for him in the garden with an angry look on his face. Everyone disliked Akai in the same way they disliked Kuro, but when that happened, we kind of felt sympathy for him. But after that, to get everyone to stop feeling sorry for him, he soon placed a weird statue-like thing near Kuro's grave in the garden. The statue was made out of clay and seemed to resemble the appearance of Kuro. Akai had always been bad at art and crafts, so the statue was all squashed. It also did not resemble Kuro in the slightest. After being exposed to the wind and the rain, the oil clay made sculpture soon started to fall apart. Akai would take the broken clay and attach them back on the statue. It started to resemble Kuro less and less. Several years later Akai moved away. I've heard rumors that Akai grew up to be an incredibly handsome man and even debuted as a enka singer, but I don't know if it is true or not.