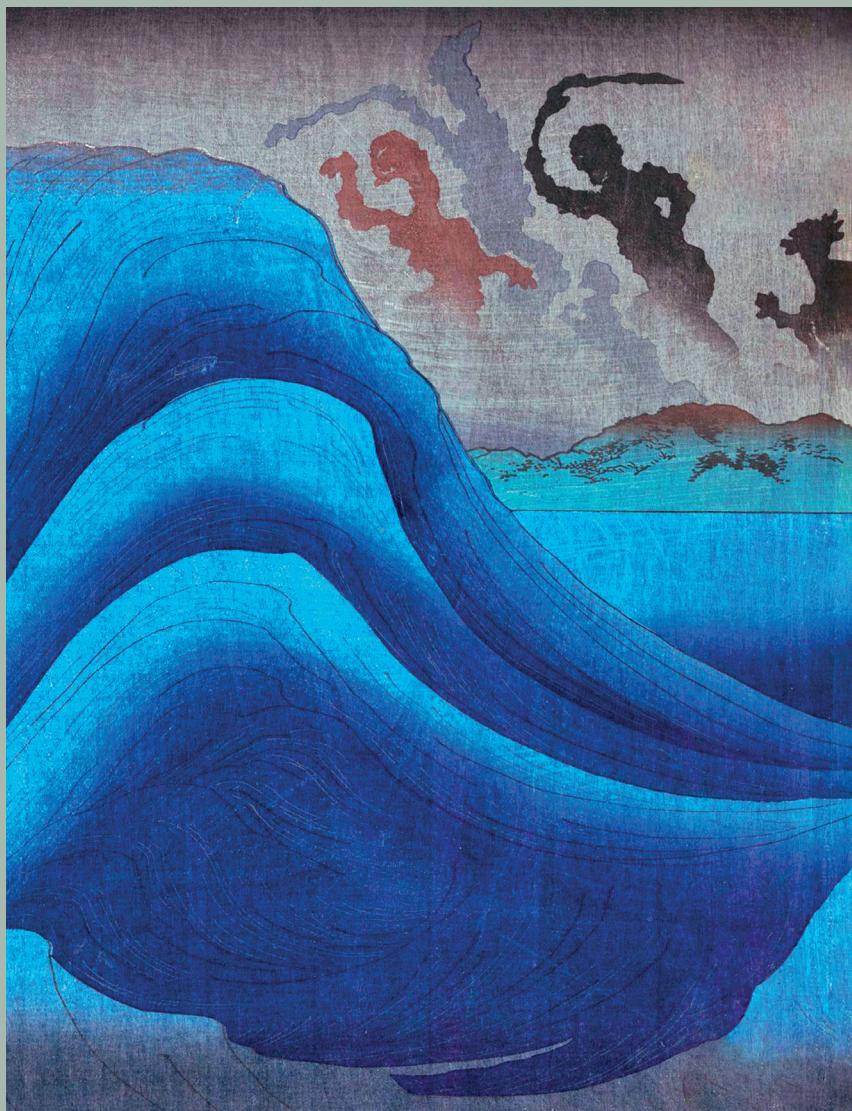


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Yukio Mishima

Voices of the Fallen Heroes
and Other Stories



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Voices of the Fallen Heroes

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YUKIO MISHIMA

Voices of the Fallen Heroes

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Introduction

Yukio Mishima wrote in a frenzy, as if his demons arrived with stories that he was compelled to tell in order to placate them. Though he was only forty-five when he died in 1970 by his own hand – suicide seems too mild a word for *hara-kiri* – he wrote dozens of books of essays and forty plays – all lavishly staged – thirty-five novels – nineteen ‘serious’ and fifteen ‘popular’, often working on one of each simultaneously – and published 170 short stories – twenty-five volumes’ worth.

The fourteen stories collected here are ‘late’ Mishima (if one can speak of late work from an author who evolved as precipitately as he did), written between 1962 and 1969, the last decade of his short life. Six of them – ‘The Strange Tale of Shimmering Moon Villa’, ‘The Peacocks’, ‘True Love at Dawn’, ‘Companions’, ‘Voices of the Fallen Heroes’ and ‘From the Wilderness’ were written in 1965 and 1966, extraordinarily busy years even for Mishima. During that time he finished most of *Spring Snow*, the first volume of his tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility*, wrote one of his best-selling romance novels, *That Complicated Fella*, and a three-act play, *Madame de Sade*. He also secretly wrote, directed and starred in a horrific thirty-minute film based on his earlier story, ‘Patriotism’, and spent two months with his wife, Yoko, travelling to New York, touring Europe from Gallimard in Paris to Stockholm, where he did what he could to lobby for the

Nobel Prize, and stopping in Thailand to research what would become the third volume of the tetralogy, *The Temple of Dawn*.

Mishima's short stories, a large, variegated canvas of subjects and moods, open a small window on his creative process. They seem to have been written impulsively, dashed onto the page in a single session or two, a respite from the labour of erecting the edifice of a novel. Often enough, they represented a memorialization of moments in his life he wanted to preserve. 'The Flower Hat' (September 1962), for example, recalls an afternoon in San Francisco's Union Square on the way home from a trip to the US. The sea is present, as it often is in Mishima's stories: 'Over there lay the sea. Here was life.' But sunlit pleasure was never of much interest to Mishima. As he sits on a park bench surveying the tranquil scene, the narrator recalls that Dag Hammarskjöld has died unexpectedly in a plane crash the day before. Abruptly, his implacable imagination halts all motion, freezing time to reveal a still picture of a moment poised on the brink of annihilation, a preview of the world coming to an end.

'Cars' (January 1963), in which a brief, romantic interlude begins at the driving test centre, was written shortly after Mishima finally managed to pass his own driver's test. The eighteen-year-old who offers her 'pouty lips' to the middle-aged dandy, Kuki, who has tempted her with a promise to buy her an MG, is a car maniac; the story is chock-a-block with technical talk and car jargon that enhances its reality. Mishima was a tireless researcher. As he wrote 'Cars' he was spending time at the Yokohama docks with old sailors in preparation for writing, that same year, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*.

'From the Wilderness' (October 1966), is an unusual example of what may be close to unvarnished autobiography. The narrator, a novelist named Mishima, speaking in the first person as though in an I-novel, relates an incident which actually befell the author and his family in April of that year, when a deranged

fan broke into their home at dawn, insisting on a meeting with him. The language is spare for Mishima, the story relatively unembellished, almost journalistic. Japanese critics weren't sure, but it does seem possible in this eccentric story that Mishima let slip his protean mask.

'Companions' (January 1966) is a veiled foray into the supernatural. From the opening lines, indefinably, there is something unsettling afoot: a father and his young son, the narrator, walk the foggy night-time streets of Dickens's London in search of 'a house to Father's taste'. They encounter a rich man, still young, who takes them to his house and entertains them. They return frequently; and one night are disappointed to find the man away, the house in darkness and the door locked. 'Drawing me by the hand, he stepped through the door.'

From this moment, with no explanation, the natural world of the story morphs into the eerily unreal, a tale at once comic and grotesque, with ominous overtones. The story's chilling effect is achieved by the young narrator's impassive, matter-of-fact account of what occurs after the door has been breached; a narrative strategy that vaguely recalls Henry James's in *The Turn of the Screw*.

The title story, 'Voices of the Fallen Heroes' (June 1966), very much the longest, is presented as a séance at which the spirits of the young officers in the Imperial Army who staged an abortive uprising on 26 February 1936 bitterly reproach the emperor for having branded them as rebels. Later they are joined by their 'younger brothers', the kamikaze pilots of the Second World War. For the young officers in Mishima's fantasy, the emperor's refusal to sanction the insurrection carried out in his name was responsible for postwar Japan's spiritual decline. The kamikaze pilots lament that their sacrifice was rendered 'futile' by Hirohito's proclamation in January 1946, 'In fact, I was a human being.' Their refrain, 'Why did our divine sovereign lord become

no more than human?’ expresses not only a patriotic but a personal grief that seems to have animated Mishima as he swerved into his own idiosyncratic ultra-nationalism.

Mishima wrote about the story, certainly a tour de force, that he had ‘borrowed’ the structure of a demon play from Noh theatre. He intended the kamikaze pilot’s final descent in life as he nosedives his plane into the enemy aircraft carrier to represent the penultimate scene in a demon play, the *kakeri*, the ‘dance of anguish’, and he beautifully evokes the delirium associated with that perfervid dance: ‘The thing is to look. Simply to look with dagger-like intensity . . . I devote all my strength to clarity of vision. Look, look, look and penetrate to the core.’

‘Voices’ was viewed as Mishima’s first overtly political fiction. The community of left-wing writers criticized it as inflammatory; the far right objected angrily to its implied criticism of Emperor Hirohito. To this day, Mishima continues to provoke controversy along this same axis.

In a note he appended to ‘The Peacocks’ (February 1965), Mishima wrote:

The story is dear to my heart: A beautiful youth who achieves eternal life as a murderer of beauty. *This represents for me an idée fixe that will not let me go.* The beauty of the peacocks is an attribute of the youth himself, an attribute he must continually murder. This is the opposite of Dorian Gray in Wilde’s novel; in order to preserve the adolescence of the beautiful youth, it is the portrait in the painting that must absorb the ugliness of Dorian’s sins and his decline, whereas in ‘The Peacocks’, in order to prolong the useless life of an idle, no-account man, the beautiful youth in his fantasy must commit ceaseless murder.’ (Italics mine.)

An astute critic of his own work, Mishima identifies here a fixation that dominated his imagination from the beginning of

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his career. 'The Peacocks' is a dramatic throwback to his earliest years as a writer, just after the war, when in Mishima's vision beauty and death – even murder! – walked hand-in-hand. At the time the Japanese reader, grateful for having survived, was focused on recovery: Mishima's obsession with murder as art was repellent, out of sync with the national ethos. Here he is in 1947, in a grim tone-poem titled 'Excerpts from the Philosophical Diary of a Habitual Murderer in the Middle Ages': 'The murderer disdains the passion for recovery. He doesn't murder in order that a flower can flower again. He becomes a murderer so that a flower can be a flower eternally.' Twenty years later, in 'The Peacocks', he wrote, 'Only by being killed could a peacock be complete. The lifelong extravagance of a peacock was drawn like a bow towards the point of its slaughter . . . Peacock killing was not a rupture but the sensual intertwining of beauty and destruction.'

'True Love at Dawn' (June 1965) is a variation on the same morbid preoccupation. Asked to explain his impulsive murder of the couple he observes kissing in the light of dawn, the disaffected young man, Takeshi, explains: 'Because they were beautiful and real. That's it. That's why. I didn't have a single other reason to kill them.'

There is no beauty in 'Clock' (January 1967), a study in unredeemed physical and moral squalor; but there is death, with murder ominously implied. A young woman lives in a shabby room in an inn with a violent ne'er-do-well who has become her pimp. She badgers him to marry her. The story ends on the beach with crashing waves and a razor 'ringing' in his pocket.

Readers will note the omnipresence of the sea in Mishima's writing (even in 'Cars', the ocean is 'right nearby' the driving test centre). His symbolic configuration of the sea appears to be another *idée fixe*, related to his obsession with death and beauty. In his first full-length work, *A Forest in Full Flower*, written when

he was sixteen, he ascribes to the sea in its 'terrible repletion' the power of destiny itself. A madwoman races to the beach (the poetics of even this early passage will be familiar):

Now for the first time the whale-rich sea engraved its image on the woman's heart. As pain rarely accompanies a violent wound at the moment it is inflicted, the woman's feelings in that instant bore no resemblance to the fear she had expected. She was enfolded in the mysterious ecstasy of the moment just before the murderer strikes when we are conscious that we are about to be murdered. It was a moment of unmistakable premonition but a premonition which held no meaning for the present.

'The Strange Tale of Shimmering Moon Villa' (January 1965) is a lush evocation of perversion in a narrative style that is reminiscent of another master of decadence, Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. But the elements that Mishima assembles in this 'bizarre tale', including a gruesomely imagined murder, are unmistakably his own: the remains of a villa overlooking the sea that was burned down forty years ago; a young girl, the village idiot, who has been cruelly wronged; a dissolute marquis who commands his retainer to commit a brutal act while he looks on with 'large, limpid eyes'; the old caretaker who relates the story, formerly the faithful retainer, a man with a 'dark, beastly soul'. 'The Strange Tale' reveals Mishima's taste and gift for what a Western writer might have turned into Grand Guignol but in his hands is lyrical, muted horror.

'The Dragon Flute' appeared in the monthly literary magazine, *Gunzō*, in November 1969, exactly one year before Mishima's death. It is a gorgeously elaborated moment that may have occurred – it feels almost bespoke – while Mishima was in the mountains near Mount Fuji on 'military manoeuvres' with his

private corps of cadets, the Shield Society. The cadets, hardy young men in Mishima's thrall, largely recruited from rural areas, were pledged (with a blood oath) to act as a shield between the emperor and any threatening harm. Mishima formally inaugurated the society on 25 February 1968. Twice a year, during the two years of life that remained to him, he led groups of twenty to thirty of his ninety-eight cadets for two weeks at a time to a boot camp in the mountains run by Japan's Self-Defence Forces (how he managed to obtain permission from the SDF to play soldier at an official installation remains a mystery). Ten years earlier, in 1956, he had revelled in an experience similar to the one he describes here, joining a group of neighbourhood lads in the Merchants' Association shouldering a heavy shrine down the festival streets. In a photo taken at the time, standing in the midst of his fellow celebrants, exhausted, dripping with sweat, their muscled young arms around his shoulders, he appears exuberant, an enraptured smile lighting up his face. Photographed ten years later in his military fatigues as he wolfs a bowl of plain rice with his brothers-in-arms, he seems no less content but in a quieter, deeper way.

'The Dragon Flute' takes place in the barracks one evening after manoeuvres when one of the cadets, 'tall and fit . . . with a face that would have matched the world a thousand years ago', performs on a Japanese transverse flute an ancient air about a prince who was so gentle and refined of aspect he was obliged to wear a fierce mask into battle. (Mishima wrote later, invoking a homoerotic undertone that is largely suppressed in the story, 'It is said that Alcibiades declined to play the flute lest it mar the beautiful shape of his lips but the Japanese flute appeared to pose no such danger.') Listening to the flute, the narrator is transported back to a time when the Japanese warrior embodied both fierceness and delicacy, a contradictory

amalgam that had tugged at Mishima's imagination since his childhood.

'The Dragon Flute' alludes to two Noh plays but omits mention of a third, well known to Mishima, that bears even more directly on his story. *Atsumori*, a fourteenth-century work by Zeami, is derived from an episode in *The Tale of the Heike*, an epic account of the battle for supremacy between Japan's two most powerful clans. On Suma Beach the warrior Naozane brings to bay and unhorses an enemy, Atsumori. Tearing off the youth's helmet, he beholds the refined features of a beautiful face that puts him in mind of his own son. He then discovers a flute in a brocade bag that the boy has carried with him into battle and reflects that none of his uncouth comrades from eastern Japan would think of doing such a thing. Reluctantly, in tears, hearing troops from his own side galloping towards him and wishing to take the boy's life compassionately himself, he beheads him; and subsequently becomes a Buddhist monk.

An informed Mishima reader encounters a singular challenge, dragging his work from the shadow of his final act, with its centripetal pull on the imagination, to assess it on its own merits. 'The Dragon Flute' is perhaps a case in point. Is the critic to be excused, knowing that Mishima was already laying plans for his awful demise a year later when he wrote it, to be moved by a poignancy that transcends the text?

A word about translation. Mishima has been served well by his translators. He is theoretically amenable to translation in a way that, for example, Nobel Laureate Kenzaburō Ōe is not. Ōe considered himself a liminal figure in Japanese society and, accordingly, evolved a language that constituted an assault on traditional Japanese. Mishima conceived of himself as the ultimate insider, heir to a long tradition of Japanese beauty: his writing, reflecting this image of himself, is in harmonious accord with the inherent, unalloyed genius of the Japanese

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Introduction

language. A word master, he was also a meticulous mosaicist. The translator need only find precisely the right verbal stones and install them in comely sentences, and Mishima's voice will emerge. Easier said than done.

John Nathan
5 February 2024
Mammoth Lakes, CA

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Strawberry

I

Though the festival was the next day, the area around the Jitōda dry dock, separated from the village only by a tunnel, was very quiet.

The tunnel was at the base of a promontory. There was a departure and landing spot for the Tōkai Steamship line, which formed the only 'bridge' joining Tago village, a fishing port in western Izu, to the outside world. Of course, there were also buses on the land route, but they took so long to reach the village after crossing the rough, steep mountain roads that they were used almost entirely for short-distance travel.

People gathered near the landing spot when it was time for a ship to arrive or depart, but the area beyond the tunnel was truly quiet. The dry dock too was closed for now. The calls of the birds that the locals called 'beach shrikes' could be clearly heard.

A steel ship of over 200 tons and a wooden one of about 150 tons were in the dry dock. Today there were no workmen painting the hulls; and, like an only partly painted canvas, the sides of the two ships displayed their freshly painted sections and their old rusty ones in stark contrast under the harsh glare of the late summer sun. The people of the village were on holiday for the festival; and, though the ships' painters must all have been from

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elsewhere, they seemed to be relaxing and taking time off, just like the locals.

The complicated wooden frameworks that supported the ships cast their reflections on the dark pools of water that the high tide had left behind. Alongside were clumps of sturdy weeds. Among the weeds a huge black screw lay discarded. The nearby path was lined with heavily rusted cylinders of oxygen used in welding.

And beyond, one's gaze was filled with the shining sea.

Ryūji and Tomoe met at midday in the shade of the two ships.

Tomoe smiled when they met, but then her eyes quickly filled with tears. When Ryūji asked why, she said:

'You know an artist has been staying with us for ten days now, right? His name is Mr Yagura, and they say he's famous and all, in Tokyo. He's really old, and he's always cracking jokes, but I just don't like him. This morning, as usual, when I was in the kitchen, Mum told me to take some strawberries to Mr Yagura. So up I go to the second floor with strawberries and sugar for him. He begins stirring the strawberries around with his paint-covered fingers, finds one that's half white, and picks it up and shows it to me. "Hey, look! This strawberry's you!" he said, with a big laugh.

'Well, I was so mad . . . So mad I couldn't help myself, so I took the strawberry and ran down to the kitchen with it. And I asked Mum, "Why is this strawberry me?"

'When Mum heard the whole story, she said "It's your fault" and burst out laughing.

'It seemed that everyone was making fun of me, so I got really mad, and went and found Big Brother and told him about it.

'Well, he laughed and laughed and finally told me, "Mr Yagura speaks the truth!"

'I got so angry then that I wanted to see you more than

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anything!’ As if all her frustration had flooded back to her, Tomoe took a little strawberry from her apron pocket and dropped it onto Ryūji’s sturdy palm.

The little strawberry was hardly red at all. It didn’t lack freshness, but there was only a faint spot of redness at its tip. Its general whiteness blended gradually into the green of the calyx, and that green deeply coloured each and every pore of the strawberry, as if inserted with a sharp needle.

Ryūji straightened his white T-shirted shoulders as he silently tossed the strawberry into a pool of water beneath the keel of the dry dock.

Tomoe gave a cry of surprise.

‘Don’t let little things bother you,’ said Ryūji. ‘Tomorrow’s the festival!’

This was a kind of rough solution to the problem, but not one that entirely convinced Tomoe, so she pouted a bit and fell silent. Yet the moment that the strawberry fell from Ryūji’s hand, tracing a clean arc under the summer sun, left an impression of refreshing power in Tomoe’s heart, which no other man’s action could have done.

Until recently Ryūji had only had relations with young widows in the village, or with thirty-something women with rather bad reputations, so now that he had come back after the fishing season was over and had begun to date this childlike girl, his pals subjected him to merciless kidding. And he himself could not have explained how this had happened. But this slip of a girl’s brusque way of talking and her habit of showing her real feelings, despite her general timidity, were tremendously appealing to him.

Tomoe had delicate features, like a ‘palace doll’. Her lips were a little full, and her front teeth were a trifle prominent, so their whiteness could be seen even if she wasn’t smiling. She was a large girl, large enough to be a member of the all-girl

firefighting team that took over from the boys during the fishing season. Still, she was timid, and would burst into tears at any unexpected threat. When ghost stories were told, she covered her ears and bent forward until her eyes were almost on a level with the *tatami* floor. Her friends would look at one another and sneak from the room. When she realized she had been left completely alone, she would begin to bawl loudly. On the other hand, she was a good mimic and her clever impressions of people's regional accents made everyone laugh. When teased, she grew red in the face, which was all right; but then, all of a sudden, she would get really angry, so most people stopped teasing her to avoid that. The only ones who carried on teasing her were her family members.

Childish as she was, the other girls tended to leave her alone. Ryūji, though, found her intriguing from the very beginning, and would talk with apparent seriousness on topics that appealed to a young girl's taste. Soon, Tomoe seemed to trust only Ryūji, and he came to realize that he would have to take care of the seeds of girlish liking that he had sown half in fun. He began to develop the clean attitude of a serious older brother.

Now Ryūji had always been a frank, powerfully built lad who could tell vulgar jokes with the best of them; and he knew his looks were attractive to women. As time went gently on, he began to think of his relationship with Tomoe in a pleasantly melancholy way, as a consolation that might come to a man who had already tired of mere sensual pleasures, and of life itself.

Ryūji's hand rested so lightly on her shoulder that it was hard to tell if he was touching her or not, but Tomoe jumped up, startled as usual, declaring, 'My, it's hot!' She made a point of fleeing from the shade of the ship to a clump of grass on the sun-baked midday beach.

Ryūji raised his head, on which he had knotted a small towel as a headband, and looked up, dazed by the bright sunlight, at the young girl standing in the summer grass. Her white thighs, which her skirt had kept entirely from the sunlight, were reflected in the pool of water in the grass at her feet. The pool was all that was left of a great wave of water from several days before, now protected by a depression in the rock, surrounded by earth. It showed no signs of drying up, despite the scorching rays of the sun.

Ryūji tossed in a pebble he had found at his feet, thinking to disturb the surface of the water. He hoped that ripples would appear on Tomoe's white thighs as reflected there, as if through the motions of a gleaming, playful finger. But Tomoe, always surprised by the smallest things, might think that the pebble had been thrown at herself and run away in tears.

Ryūji didn't know what to do. Might it be possible to ruffle the surface of that pool there in the grass which his hand couldn't reach in such a way that Tomoe wouldn't notice?

2

It was the day of the festival.

There were some eighteen ships anchored in the bay, and all of them flew colourful flags and had branches of bamboo grass stuck in their prows, with pennants of various hues and decorative paper balls attached. Fireworks had been set off, starting in the morning, and in the brilliantly clear sky their smoke hung in small clouds, disappearing only little by little.

From the metal frames of the large fish market, newly constructed on the beach, waved the flags of many nations. Its concrete columns were wrapped in red-and-white cloth, in which bamboo fronds had been arranged. In one corner was a

temporary stage with a brightly coloured curtain donated by the Fishery Cooperative. After the young men of the village had, with tremendous energy, prepared all this, the vast, empty concrete floor became a playground for the local children; and the numerous straw mats that the adults had spread out on the floor, with names attached by way of reserving space, were kicked and scattered any which way.

The stage performance would not start until night fell. All that could be seen from the temporary theatre in the market were gaily decorated ships afloat on the expanse of water. The only things that obstructed this view were several of the red-and-white columns adorned with bamboo leaves. To an observer, it felt as if all the decorated ships in the bay were about to make a slow, stately entrance into the theatre. The shouts and laughter of the children were more shrill than usual, and it was obvious that it was, most of all, these children who were overcome by the extraordinary excitement of the festival.

On a jetty to the left, some people could still be seen working to prepare the firework display. There, too, children gathered; when they got in the way, the workmen chased them off.

The village's main road was covered with a canopy of artificial flowers and hand lanterns. A tangle of electrical cords ran among the artificial flowers, and above that, the sky was still blue. The children, gazing up at what they could see of the sky, ran back and forth any number of times beneath the twenty-metre-long canopy. At the temporary resting places for the gods' portable shrines, papers with the names of donors on them were blown about by the sea wind, and a miniature child's *mikoshi* shrine and a low cart with an image of a *bonito* fish on it were displayed. Temporary stalls had been open since the morning and were doing a brisk trade in floating rubber balloons, candyfloss and goldfish.

Tomoe had not seen Ryūji yet today. The custom at this local festival was for all the young men to wear women's light cotton *yukata*, but since Ryūji had no sisters, he would have to have borrowed such a *yukata* from someone unrelated to him. Tomoe was well aware of this and, fearing that he would borrow it from some other woman, she was eager to lend him one of her own. But if she gave him the *yukata* her mother had recently bought for her, it would be too noticeable. Finally, though, she hit on a plan: she would take out her precious savings and buy the cloth for a *yukata*, with a bright morning-glory pattern. Ryūji would only pay to have the *yukata* made up. Ryūji was of course delighted at her kindness, but he, so used to having older women buy things for him, was amazed that even such a young girl would want to give him a present.

It was 6 p.m., the hour at which the large paper ball that hung down from one end of the canopy over the main road would be broken open. Almost all the villagers had gathered beneath it and were waiting for the mayor to pull the cord.

The sky was still light, and from the red-and-white paper ball, yellow, pink and white festoons of artificial flowers hung down almost to the road. Tomoe too was gazing at all this, her heart a-flutter with excitement.

The paper ball was rocking slightly in a curious way against the backdrop of the blue evening sky, as if from some inner force. The mayor took in his hand the end of the hempen cord that hung from the paper ball. Then the ball began to rock all the more, as if in anguish, and the long strands of artificial flowers slowly drew a circle in the air.

The cord was taut, so the mayor bent his legs slightly and, looking steadily up at the sky, pulled with all his might. The paper ball broke open! A flood of colourful slips of paper and rubber balloons fell out, and a single dove flew up, its wings

brushing past them. Having butted itself against the canopy of artificial flowers once and made the light wooden frame shake mightily, the dove then flew high into the evening sky.

Everyone clapped and shouted their approval. This marked the beginning of the festival, and was the signal to start the pulling of the great float.

Hampered by the feet of the children struggling to pick up the balloons that had dropped onto the road, Tomoe had eyes only for the float that loomed up beyond the crowd. It was huge, with two levels, and wide enough to have space for as many as five *tatami* mats to be spread out on it.

Its form was traditional, handed down in the village for generations; but the actual float had been newly constructed a few years earlier, so both its yellowish background and its brilliantly coloured carvings of peonies and Chinese lions still looked very fresh. There were five wheels on both the left and right sides, and the first level was occupied by the musicians. The upper level was open to the skies, and a very low railing was heavily adorned with artificial cherry blossoms. In the centre of the upper level was a large standing paper lantern surrounded by thin willow branches with small, roundish rice-dumplings attached to them.

The height of the float, up to the very top of the central lantern, was actually at the level of the second-floor eaves of the houses that stood along the road. The float would be pulled along by two thick ropes of red-and-white, and at the back there was a narrow set of stairs leading to the upper level. The upper level was thronged with young men, and some were even clinging to the centre of the set of stairs, waiting for the pulling of the giant float to begin.

The musicians' drums beat faster. 'It's going to move!' shouted the bystanders, as they herded the children out of the way to safety. Several tens of young men, shouted all together

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'*Shomuke, Shomuke!*' And from on top of the float came the answering cry '*Shomuke, Shomuke!*'

'Eei yaa!' The chief youth leader, wearing a fine festival *yukata* and with a traditional round woven hat covered with artificial flowers tied to his back, turned around and lifted an open fan.

The float gave a great shudder, and the young men packed into the upper level seemed about to fall off, barely holding on to the low railing. The wheels of the heavily overloaded float didn't turn smoothly, so several young men bent their upper bodies right over, placed their hands on the wheels, and pushed.

The float swayed as it approached, like a great clumsy beast making its way through the crowd. Its appearance was both impressive and half-frightening. Tears came to Tomoe's eyes as she was pressed by the crowd.

When the float came near Tomoe, the rhythm of the music grew faster and wilder, and the youths on the upper level danced a rough, devil-may-care kind of dance in time to it.

'*A, kōrya*' they shouted, stretching out their hands, sticking out their tongues, and making faces all together. They were all drunk, and the motion of the wheels was unsteady. Each time they stretched out both hands in time to the music, they staggered dangerously, but still kept on chanting '*A, kōrya*' in splendid unison.

The onlookers broke into laughter as they looked at the young men's appearance. Some were wearing women's *yukata*. Some were wearing women's long red underrobes. Some wore skirts. Some wore one-piece dresses. Some looked uncomfortably hot, wearing crimson coveralls in a chessboard pattern over their near-naked bodies. And almost everyone wore rouge and white powder make-up to one degree or another on their perfectly tanned, tough and manly faces. But the make-up remained only in patches here and there due to the dancers' drunken sweat, although the floats had only just begun to move.

Among them, Tomoe unquestionably caught a glimpse of Ryūji wearing the morning-glory *yukata*. He had rolled up the hem of the *yukata*'s skirt, tucking it into his waist-sash, and had also bared one shoulder and half of his chest, revealing the top of his bleached cotton belly-band. The face that rose above his darkly tanned chest had been covered in pure-white powder, and his lips thickly rouged, but his high-bridged nose and the area around it already showed his natural colour, the white powder having been washed off by his heavy sweat. Tomoe felt a closeness that she had never experienced before in this comical figure of Ryūji. Even when he was at his most gentle, there had been something dangerous about him before. Now, though, he shouted 'A, *kōrya*' along with the others, gestured comically and made faces; and Tomoe felt deep relief seeing that he was, in fact, wearing the morning-glory *yukata* she had given him, and she was able to laugh in a soft, completely unaffected way. She was laughing from her heart. She then called out 'Ryūji-saan!' in such a loud voice that the people nearby turned to look at her.

But the wild music didn't permit her voice to reach Ryūji's ears. One youth started to fall from the upper level of the float, and the crowd stirred. Immediately a young man who had been walking beside the float carrying a log thrust the end of the log towards the feet of the youth who was falling. He set his feet on the log-end and righted himself. Then he moved to the back of the float and started to dance.

Tomoe suddenly began to worry. What would she do if Ryūji fell off the float? There had been someone in the past who had fallen off and suffered a serious injury while doing the comic dance. The young men were drunk, fooling around, and losing all control, so who knew what might happen?

Tomoe felt that she had to keep on following the float for as long as it took, and watch over Ryūji. The special dress she had

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