

## Spring Sleepers

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*Kyoko Yoshida*

*The most fearsome part of the sickness of insomnia was not the impossibility of sleeping, for the body did not feel any fatigue at all, but its inexorable evolution toward a more critical manifestation: a loss of memory.*

—Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Spring had come. As an eighth century poet from Hubei on Chang Jiang River sang, spring sleepers never see the dawn. Spring is the time to drop off into an endless doze under the gentle brush of the low sunlight through soundless whips and snaps of the cotton gauze curtains. Outside, the cherry blossoms were snowing, carpeting the surface of the ponds, streets, and meadows. The hills blushed powdery pink. The skylines of the mountains were dim, blurred from the dusty Western breeze which brought the powder-fine loess from the Gobi. The smells of ashes, misty rains and shy violets under snappy clover flowers and the Chinese milk vetch blended the spring perfume. A speedwell, a germander, *Veronica didyma*, *Veronica persica*. The soil was soft, warm, damp and ready to suckle the seeds and the roots.

The garçons in white cotton Mao jackets opened all the windows half way before the club was open. Occasional flurries of pearly pink cherry petals strayed into the smoking room. The wind was still chilly. The last hot *sake* of the year and the warm plum wine were served in Portuguese hand-blown cups. The low whispers of gossip and grief were muffled behind the drapes of the scarlet velvet curtains. The only clear sound was the click of the Portuguese glasses. The purple-gray smoke of cigars and pipe tobacco mingled in the air, swirled up to the balcony, and exposed the paths of the afternoon sunlight.

Up on the balcony were two young men: Yuki was sitting on a cherry-wood chair sipping soda with a blue striped straw, and Haru was sighing and licking the edge of the icy martini glass with the tip of his thin tongue. Then he put the glass away on the Chinese side table and leaned against the rail at his back, twisting his narrow trunk in his violet kimono with a silver-gray sash to listen to what those downstairs were chatting about.

The conversation in the club that evening was about insomnia. The gentlemen were boasting with each other who slept the less. Haru's black straight hair dropped to hide his pale profile. He turned away, then pulled a lattice-worked sandalwood fan out of his kimono sleeve. He gradually spread the fan as he held it in front of his heart. His movement was so flowing that Yuki did not notice the fan until the fresh scent of white sandalwood tickled his nostrils a few seconds after the fan became fully open. Yuki unbuttoned the collar of his dress shirt. The perfumes of Caribbean tobacco and the sandalwood made him do so. Haru started to click-clack the hardwood floor, the parquetry of windmill stars, with his pearl-enameled sandal toe.

"I haven't slept for eleven days. This'll be my twelfth night. I always have a slight nausea around midnight that prevents me from sleeping," Haru grieved.

"Oh well." Yuki shrugged. "Don't worry, I haven't slept for two months and I've been feeling great."

"Two months?" Haru raised his right eyebrow with a disgusted look. His amber ringed hand holding the sandalwood fan dangled. He looked at Yuki: this large-boned, stiff, simple-looking (and also probably simple-minded), rich, boring, young chap hadn't slept for two months?

"I don't care," Yuki said cheerfully, "As long as I feel fine. I am far healthier than ever before."

Haru spread his fan again, this time in front of his soft, long face, sidling away from Yuki.

"Don't you touch me, Yuki." Though his whispering voice was tender. "You'd better see your doctor." Then he left and did not speak another word to Yuki for the rest of the evening.

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"That is genuine insomnia."

At last Dr. Goto spoke, the next morning, after lighting up Yuki's pupils, knocking his chest, searching his belly, hitting his knees, sniffing his urine, et cetera. "It infects by physical contact. Any definite cure has not been discovered yet. All I can do for you is to introduce you to a sanatorium. Go there. Here's a return trip ticket. And remember: do not touch anyone."

The doctor squeezed his hands into a pair of latex gloves and handed a piece of paper to Yuki. It was the air ticket, which had a perforated line in the middle, dividing the "AWAY" side and the "HOME" side. On the back was an advertisement of a sheep counting machine. Yuki thanked Dr. Goto and left the clinic. The doctor saw him off at the door.

If you spend time in a sanatorium, you need some summer clothes, for it must be located in a place of warm climate. Yuki stood gazing down into an empty suitcase spread open on his bed, raking together the scattered fragments of unseen recuperational images. Sunshine but cool under the green shades. Breeze from mountains, zephyr from the sea. Transparent lake water. Stars in the evening blue-crimson spectrum. Loneliness. Exchanges of rubbish words with a retired man. Occasional visits of remote acquaintances. Sunbathing in early morning in his babyblue pin striped cotton night shirt. A walk along a path in pine woods. The hypnotizing laps of waves far from the bottom of the night. He needed a pair of Turkish leather slippers, a pair of linen pants, a panama hat, a pique polo shirt, sun-tan lotion, a long, long sleeping shirt and books to read for one thousands nights and one night to come without sleep.

Yuki carefully lined up the things on the edge of his star-quilt-covered mission bed in order of the colors. Then he walked around in the bedroom for a while until he added a light woollen cardigan as the last item just in case. After a light lunch of toast with butter and marmalade and black tea in his breakfast room, he told his dead grandfather's butler Gen'ichiro that he was going to visit his friend in the South who had just lost his wife and needed company to share her memories.

"I won't be back for a while. Take care, Gen'ichiro." Yuki wanted to pat Gen'ichiro's shoulder, but he refrained.

Yuki walked out of the front door, seen by two housemaids—both had worked so long for his family that they looked like identical twins—and three Borzois, one white, one black and white, and one almost black, and Gen'ichiro. His mind was clearer, his footsteps lighter, and his heart merrier. It was strange to think that he was heading to a sanatorium. He trotted to the airport humming Hawaiian songs, rolling along the skyblue suitcase, grasping his air ticket in the other hand.

It was a weekday. The airport was rather empty. As Yuki checked in, a compact woman in a tight navy suit swiftly slid out from behind the counter. "Mr. Minami? My name is Barbie. Dr. Goto asked me to attend you on board. Please follow me. Oh, don't check in your suitcase, sir. You must carry it with you."

Barbie walked so fast that Yuki had to run to catch up with her once every minute. His suitcase became heavier and heavier. He tripped over it several times before they reached gate Q49. Yuki wiped his forehead gasping for breath. She had never turned back to see him. Barbie opened the gate immediately with a frozen commercial smile, which was perpetually carved on the lower part of her face.

The aircraft was a jumbo jet. There was no one inside. Before Yuki seated himself, Barbie locked the exit, and the aircraft was in smooth motion.

"Aren't there any other passengers on board?"

"No." Barbie replied merrily, "This aircraft is specially chartered for you, sir."

Barbie looked at Yuki, whose face froze at this information.

"Oh my," said the stewardess with a carefully-made cute voice, "Haven't you heard that?"

Yuki said nothing. Soon Barbie disappeared into the cabin galley.

As the gravity pressed Yuki into his seat, his skyblue suitcase, which was too bulky to put on the shelf, began to skid. By the time he stood up to hold it, it was rolling, roaring. The plane took off the ground, Yuki lost balance, and he and his suitcase tumbled down the aisle to the stern restroom. Barbie poked her head out of the galley curtain for a second, gave him a cheerleading, but not cheering, smile, and went back to her work. Yuki crawled back to his seat, number 2B, leaving the suitcase behind. Rubbing his limbs and head, he felt caves and spongy nubs on his skull.

Barbie reappeared out of the galley in her white chef outfit with a tall cook hat, freshly powdered. She cat-walked toward Yuki and handed him a menu.

Meal on board is the highlight of flight. Yuki's mouth watered as he opened the menu, which was written, however, in wriggling letters he had never seen before. The structure of the manuscript told him that the meal consisted of six parts. That was all he could guess. Yuki gazed through the strange letters, among which he most admired a flowery letter, a composition of four circles, or rather four balloons tied together at the center, like a rose, or a cross. Barbie came back pushing the drink wagon. Yuki asked for a glass of fresh orange juice. She cut three oranges into six hemispheres and squeezed them in front of him. She served it with a straw, at which Yuki began to stare intensely. He pinched the delicate plastic tube covered with fragile paper out of her hand. "What do you want me to do with this thing?"

Right away, Barbie grabbed the thing and put it back in her pocket, saying, "Never mind." And she went away. Yuki and his orange juice were left behind. He grabbed and drained the glass.

The meal was fine, but did not make him drowsy. Yuki sat upright in the seat, staring at the stars outside the window. Meanwhile, Barbie came back in her dragging pink negligee and curlers, holding a ruffled pillow under her arm.

"Good night, sir." She rubbed her eyes, still keeping her smile. Informing him that she would present him an audiovisual entertainment tomorrow after breakfast, she retired into the cabin.

Yuki wanted to ask her how many hours they would fly, where they were heading, and if it was not a direct flight, where and when they would stop. At least he could ask when the breakfast would be served. But he always had trouble asking for such information casually. Before he calmed down his heart to ask her, the low vibration of her snore trailed down the aisle from the cabin to his seat.

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John Huston's *Moby Dick* was the only movie on board. When the credits appeared on the twelve monitors for the twelfth time, Yuki politely asked Barbie in her movie theater apparel if she could put off the program and she was nice enough to do so. Yuki patiently waited for the moment the sand would get into his wide-open eyes without a blink. The sandman did not come. He rested his head on his arms folded on the tray attached to the back of his front seat. Through the 10 x 8 windows on his right, he saw no light. The aircraft was chasing the night. It was always in the dark hemisphere. The waning moon and glittering stars led the plane. There was no indication of time's passing except the waxing and waning and Barbie's regular disappearances into and reappearances from the cabin. Barbie said three good-nights to Yuki in her three night costumes. By the time he saw the city lights for the first time, after the three days' sitting, every fiber of his muscles was in a state of rigor.

The city was on the water—whether a river, a lake or the sea, he could not tell. Among the dark silhouettes of square buildings crammed by the water, colonies of smokestacks here and there stuck out. Heavy white columns of smoke boiled into the darkness and screwed themselves into the leaden clouds sheltering the city. Yuki felt himself upside down, for the sight reminded him of long-necked bottles pouring a creamy drink into a basin. The amber of the sodium-vapor lamps, which lined highways and streets, glimmered in the smoke and glared in the dark. It was snowing. The trees were naked. The city was brownish over all except the roads which were pale gray and covered with snow, whose cotton surface was absorbing amber lights at regular intervals. As the plane approached the water, there were more tall buildings. Some of them were at least built in the last century. The surface of the water appeared as black and thick as oil. It did not even look like fluid.

Now the plane was low enough for him to examine the details of the town. Among the old, tall stone buildings were clock towers and some pinnacles of churches, or of former churches, whose crosses on the top had been replaced with lightning rods. The plane flew over a large bridge (or viaduct?), over which a square clock tower with four faces stood; there were the only things in the town lit up by the fluorescent lights, that welcomed Yuki. The

clocks told him one to eleven. As the plane landed softly on the cotton-snow-covered runway, he felt he heard the clocks peel out eleven o'clock, forty-four times in total. He knew it was his hallucination. Still he was sure he sensed the silent vibration of the air. Just then he found his skyblue suitcase had slid back to his side.

On descending the ramp, a gust of wind pelted needles of sleet against Yuki, who hugged his luggage, clinging to the rail. The sleet pierced into his soft skin, congealing his cardigan. This was not the place he was supposed to come to, he told himself. This is no place of recuperation. Yuki looked up: farewell-dressed Barbie was smiling as usual only with her lips, waving a lacy handkerchief. He looked down: a small man with a brown knit cap was waiting at the foot of the ramp. He looked like a mole lost in the bright snow. Beside him was a brick-colored Buick. Indeed, Yuki found later, half of the brick color was rust. The man called Yuki's name. Before he said yes to the call, he slipped and his buttocks landed on the snow-covered ground, which turned out not to be as soft as it seemed to be. The mole man held out his hand saying, "Mr. Minami. I will take you to the clinic." Yuki threw off the hand of help. "Thank you, but you shouldn't touch me."

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Before Yuki's hand reached the knob, the door banged open hard in his face. His sight blacked out for seconds. Yuki squatted down on the porch covering his nose with his hands.

"Here you are!" Yuki's restoring senses caught a spanking voice over his head. "What are you doing sitting in such a place! Stand up and come on in! I've been waiting for you, Mr. Minami. I'm your doctor! I am Dr. Springman! Nice to meet you! Oops, we don't shake hands! Dr. Goto set out everything right for you!"

Inside the clinic, which rather appeared like an elementary school library, with all the colorful books on the shelves and posters and cards scattered around on the floor, Yuki found story books by Hugh Lofting and Karel Capek amongst the pictorial books of anatomy and the medical journals. A mobile of papier-mache tropical fish was dangling above the doctor's yellow plastic desk, on which he had been folding paper cranes. The tiny cranes in rainbow shades were staring at Yuki, who had been wondering why the mobile kept swaying even though there was no wind in this room. Soon he noticed vapor steaming up from Dr. Springman's shiny forehead, which radiated the extra heat energy, the by-product of his enthusiastic gestures, and the heat generated an updraft to swing the fish mobile.

While Yuki was absentmindedly observing this thermodynamic phenomenon, Dr. Springman boasted about his splendid career, waving his arms up and down. He drew Yuki's attention by taking out a narrow plastic tube covered with thin paper.

"Now, what is this?"

Yuki suddenly became perplexed. He suffered. He had never seen such a thing before. He started to knock his head. The doctor threw the thing away and told him to forget it, then he solemnly announced that Yuki had genuine insomnia. The doctor was totally bewildered by the patient in front of him. His arms started to swing more wildly. He said that it was a very rare disease and he had seen it only in a novel. He explained the first symptom of the genuine insomnia: after a couple of wakeful months, you forget the word and the meaning of "straw" (at this word, Yuki turned even more restless), then follow chair, suitcase, sanatorium, clip, sunscreen, watch, toothbrush, etc. etc.. He also said that there was nothing he could do to bring back his lost memory like he could with an amnesiac.

"So forget the forgotten." He said, "Think about the remains of the memory which you are capable of losing in the future. Otherwise, the virus just continues to erase your memory until it totally whitens your brain out. Recently, I succeeded in developing a revolutionary method to maintain your memory, which is called 'Printin Mnemonics. . . .'"

While Dr. Springman went on and on, Yuki could not help speaking up. "Doctor. I want to sleep. I came here to sleep."

The doctor stopped talking and waving his arms and stared at this poor client as if he were a strange creature.

"Sleeplessness causes no harm to your health. In fact, the better you are feeling, the longer you've been awake."

Yuki nodded.

"See? Imagine how many people wish to be like you in this world." And he sighed dramatically.

"But I want to sleep. Dr. Goto told me there is a sanatorium where I can sleep."

Dr. Springman was irritated because he was just about to talk about it. The Somnus Sanatorium was in the castle on Mt. Fumin, which was at the north end of the city.

"But it is no use," he said, "Because you will completely forget the word sanatorium before you reach there. So there is no way you can get to the sanatorium. If you want to sleep so badly, you may try the medication I developed. This amazing tablet contains chloroplast as an active ingredient and transforms the Solar energy into the Somnus energy. The brighter the sun, the better you sleep. You'll sleep soundly as long as the sun shines upon you. You must

not forget to put on sunscreen before you fall asleep otherwise you'll be burnt red. It works perfectly until you forget the word 'sunscreen' which comes next to. . . ."

Yuki said no thank you for the medicine and left the clinic heading north. The mountain lay far away.

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The traffic signal turned green. People started to move forward like a herd of cattle. Yuki missed the start and tripped, being pushed by those behind. A man with sunglasses held Yuki with his arms. He smelt of ash.

"Thank you," said Yuki gasping, "But you'd better not touch me."

"Rose is a rose," the man asserted still holding Yuki's upper arms with his gold ringed slender, but firm hands. Yuki looked up at his face, but the sunglasses were too dark to see through to his eyes. The man was wearing a tuxedo and a ruffly shirt even at this early time of the day.

"Rose-Is-A-Rose" He whispered into Yuki's ears. This time he bent his head down so that Yuki could see his eyes through the space between his nose and sunglasses. Yuki was startled at his turquoise eyes, which turned up at him with a mischievous smile.

"Rose is a rose?" The man patiently repeated.

"Is a rose?" Yuki raised an awkward voice. On hearing that, the stranger's lips spread wide in a flowery smile. Yuki thought that he was a good looking man.

"Yes!" He jerked Yuki up and made a gesture to convey that he should follow him. After walking several steps away, he turned to Yuki and said, "Come on, follow me."

Yuki went after him.

He took him into a candle-lit, exclusive French restaurant. Yuki felt embarrassed wearing a cardigan. A waiter who appeared out of the darkness behind the oak screen seated the man at a reserved table at the darkest corner. By the table, Yuki remained standing.

"Have a seat," the man said, still wearing his sunglasses. Half listening, Yuki looked around in the restaurant with his mouth slightly open. He gazed down at the man in the chair with blank eyes.

"Okay. Never mind." The man shrugged and waved his hand which stopped within reach of Yuki's hand. Yuki looked at the hand and then the man. "Tell me my code name."

Yuki guessed. "Rose?"

"Right!" The man gave a contented smile. "And yours, pal?"

"I'm Yuki."



"You're my partner from South, aren't you?" Rose's right hand was still in the air waiting for a shake.

"What partner?" Yuki's voice sounded almost angry. A moment after, he added. "You don't touch me."

Rose put his hand back into his pocket without a word. "Do you remember this?" He pinched out a small pin between his thumb and index finger from his pocket. It was a miniature crusader shield in ultramarine enamel with a vermilion cross. Under the cross it read, "S.S.". Yuki bent over and drew his face close to the pin.

"It's a Sunday School pin. I remember that. They gave it to me when I was nine."

"No," Rose said, "It's a secret Spy School pin. Don't you remember, pal?"

Yuki was not sure.

"I'm not a spy." That was all he could say.

"Everybody says so at first," was Rose's reply.

"I am an invalid. I came here for medial treatment."

"If you are a genuine spy, you must play sick really well." Rose sipped some red wine the waiter had brought. "You'll do an excellent job if you pair with me."

Yuki felt giddy. "I must go," he said.

"Yes. Good spies know when to leave." Rose raised his hand for the bill. "Remember, we will maneuver separately for the execution of this project. This is the first and the last contact between us. Good luck and watch out for their shadows."

Rose put some money on the table and left the room, giving Yuki a casual salute.

Yuki headed north again.

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A tall man and a small boy were selling drugs on the Mome Bridge on the River. On the yellow rug spread on the ground were various sizes of small glass bottles which, you could tell at a glance, had been gathered from trash cans along alleys.

The tall, tattered man had hip bone length gray hair tied into a horse tail with a red rubber band behind his ears. Over his red shirt, his long white gown's sleeves were too short for his bony limbs. The elbows were threadbare. On the back of his gown was a scribble in red, "CHEMISTORY."

"Born unwise, die wise," he yelled in a ringing, deep voice, like a maestro on stage. "At last! A medicine to cure stupidity! Medicine for fools!"

"Medicine for fools." The boy echoed in an anemic voice, dangling his legs over the parapet. He was dressed more nicely than his leader, in his school boy black with a stand-up collar and a hat. His cheeks were apple red, small mouth silverberry red. He was rubbing his frostbitten hands in his white breath, trembling.

"Master," the boy whimpered, "I'm freezing. I'm hungry. Nobody buys the thing. Let's go home."

The man called Master cast a quick, stern glance at the poor boy before he threw himself in front of a pale man coming down the bridge in his summer clothes.

"Good afternoon, gentleman!" The chemist shouted, "I suppose you are a novelist!"

Yuki froze staring at this lean man who was grinning or rather snarling at Yuki. It took him a moment to say, "No."

"But you are a storyteller, am I right?"

"No. I'm..."

"Call me Master." The man shut up Yuki.

"Ma, Master, I am not a..."

"I shall sell you a great secret of novel autoproduction." Master stood upright with his chin in the air. Yuki gave up claiming his identity. The boy sighed on the parapet.

"Time is a father, Place is a mother, and their child is a Story!" Master jumped onto the parapet and started to swing himself. "As Time passes by, Place becomes pregnant. Combinations are infinite. A place of wilderness; a time of betrayal. A place of fraud; a time of river. A place of water; a time of evolution. A place of crocuses; a time of Cinderella. A place of tears; a time of mandarin orange. A place of snow; a time of clouds."

"A place of needles." Yuki murmured.

"Yea! You are getting it. A Time of Manila envelope."

"A place of cat and a time of dog." The boy followed them.

"Marriage of Time and Place. That is the secret." said the man.

"But Master," Yuki interrupted. "Where are the characters? Where are human beings in the story?"

"Human beings?" The man's voice turned harsh suddenly. He jumped off the parapet, bumping on the bridge. "Who cares about them? They are always everywhere, no matter how hard you try to get rid of them. We didn't ask them to be there and then, but here they are to mess up everything. O, they are so helpless, don't you agree? Didn't you learn the first thing at elementary school that they have nothing to do with Time and Place?"

"But Master,"

"Stop but. And quit calling me Master! I ain't no teacher, no employer, no captain, no leader, no father, no heir, no owner, no keeper, no bartender of yours." And the man took deep breaths, heaving. His disciple was giggling behind.

"But Master, I need no novel autoproduction. I just want to cure my insomnia."

"I have a fine medicine for you." The former Master reached into his pocket to pull out a small blue glass bottle. "These amazing tablets contain chloroplast as an active ingredient to transform the Solar energy into the Somnus energy, and..."

Yuki politely said no thank you.

"O, you don't want that?" But he was not disappointed for long. "I can teach you a marvelous method to keep thy memory fresh as long as possible. The method is,"

"The Printin Mnemonics." The two voices coincided.

"Do you know it?"

"Just the name." Yuki said.

"It is so simple. Remember your teachers made you recite poems when you were little? you learnt not by 'heart'; you learnt by 'mouth'." The chemist raised his forefinger slowly like a symphony conductor to touch his cerise lower lips. Then he pointed to Yuki's plump lips as if to cast a spell on Yuki, who stood still, being mesmerized. He started slowly: "Repeat a word until it becomes your lips' memory, instead of your heart's. Repeat it again and again so that your mercurial memory remains upon your lips, not in your floating mind." He walked on the parapet with a mincing gait.

"Feet, stamp." He waved his arm at the two to repeat after him like a music teacher.

"Feet. Stamp." They repeated in chorus.

"Eyes, look." He rolled his eyes.

"Eyes. Look."

"Ears, listen." He closed his eyes.

"Ears. Listen." The boy began to clap his hands with joy.

"Stars, shine!" He waved to the dusky sky. Venus had appeared.

"Stars. Shine."

"Dog, run." A dog ran across the bridge.

"Dog. Run."

"Shadow, chase."

"Shadow. Chase."

"Snow, freeze." Snow began to fall.

"Snow. Freeze."

"I, repeat."

"I. Repeat."

"Song, sing."

"Song. Sing." A sharp whistle was heard from the farther end of the bridge. Then busy, random footsteps.

"Police!" Someone shouted, "Police!"

"Who's selling drugs here?" The voice in the distance said.

"Police!"

The chemist and his disciple wrapped up the bottles with the yellow rug and rushed away like a whirlwind. When a couple of police officers reached the place, Yuki stood alone repeating the words. He started heading north, reciting and tottering.

Road Lead

Sun Light

Moon Reflect

River Flow

Wind Blow

## II

The world had had three dimensions. The World had been crammed with details: shapes, colors, lights, shades, odors, soundwaves, sandwiches, atmospheres, temperatures. When his eyes opened, they had sucked in an orange dog trotting by the ditch hemmed with veronica, patches of infinite grays on an abandoned farm house, anxious whispers of willows swinging in the damp gale, tanned, barefeet of a boy under the tree gazing into a tin bucket, in which water reflected and crawfish scratched, a smile on an old woman through the frosted glass, and all the omens to foreshadow and all the mementoes to flashback. He had been choked up by nouns and adjectives, verbs and adverbs, exclamations and more nouns and even more adjectives. He had needed a blindfold to breathe, earplugs to speak, a nosepeg to swallow. So many flowers' names to remember and so many constellations to chase after.

Being sleepless, it was as if walking through dark woods—like a brother and a sister left in Schwartzwald—scattering pieces of bread behind, the bread of his life, or dropping torn and crumpled pages of a dictionary, his dictionary of memory. Birds and goats followed him silently helping themselves. There was a constant rustle of sand as he walked. He was shouldering a sandbag. It had an invisible hole. As he walked, the burden became lighter and lighter. He was liberating the past as he walked. Or was the past freeing him as it pushed him through the woods? When he passed through the woods, over the bridge, another world opened up. The liquified world, the disassembled

world of pieces and fragments, all the more vivid than before. Buildings and houses backdropped the paper-cut silhouettes of dogs and people. There was no distance to the stars. They stuck on the hard, black cardboard wall of the night. There was no distance, but they were unreachable stars. The city was now composed of lines and segments, angles and curves. Triangles, circles, squares. The world now turned two dimensional; it was made of a disconnected series of planes hanged vertically from the heavenly ceiling.

During the days, he was nervous. Just a thought of another night coming burned him with anxiety. At night, he was bored. Night was forever. It was so concrete that it would never break into dawn, he thought every night. Counting the nights he walked through and to imagine more sleepless nights ahead—just to imagine thousands of boring nights pathetically bored him.

### III

Cheers and chatters of children turned the corner of the flat building. Short papier-mache puppets surged against him onto the bridge. They were paper figures made of circles, triangles, and segments. They were identical. They were stick people. Each of them had a small mouth. It was round and moved busily like a goldfish snapping for food. It screamed, Fireworks! Fireworks! Fireworks in mid-winter! It was still snowing. The wind was gone. Fluffy snow had turned into powder snow. Children came after and after. There must be hundreds of stick children hidden behind the flat building. A spring of stick children. Maybe they were born there. They raced with each other. They surely did not want to miss the fireworks. Meanwhile, they all passed the bridge. Their voices and steps died away.

It was quiet again. When he started to walk again, he heard a sob. He found a circle sticking out from behind the flat building. It was another papier-mache kid. It was sobbing behind the building.

He asked it what the matter was. It said to him that its mother did not let it go to the fireworks because its family was poor and could not afford a coat for it to go out on a freezing night. It thought of bangs and cheers it could never share with its rich stick friends. Crystal marbles dropped out of a pair of its round eyes. It wanted to go to the fireworks so bad.

He told the stick child to take his cardigan. It hesitated. He himself appeared cold in his garment. The child's cheeks shone, but it shook its circle head. He pulled off his cardigan. Underneath was a pique polo shirt. He put the cardigan on the stick child. Its sleeves dangled from the child's hands. He knelt and buttoned up the cardigan for the stick child. Its face brightened. He patted its tummy. It laughed.

The stick child thanked him and ran away. As it passed the bridge, it turned back to him three times before the arch of the bridge hid its figure.

He sat on the shoulder of the street. A black dog came up to him and sniffed his legs. Powder snow melted on his bare arms. He sneezed. The dog was scared away.

The stick child came back. He could tell it was the stick child because it wore his cardigan. The remains of the sleeves swung as the stick child ran. It ran pit-a-pat toward him. It poked out its arms to him. He saw a small red ball on the child's palms. It must be an apple. The ball was not a perfect sphere. It had a dent. The stick child must have had a bite.

The papier-mache child told him that the apple was all it could offer. He took the apple. The child was delighted. It thanked him again and ran away. It turned back to him and waved at him three times before the arch of the bridge hid its figure.

He remained sitting on the street. He held the red ball in his hands. He sniffed. It smelt like spring. He had a bite and threw up. It was a bitter apple. He stared at the ball in his hand. He had another bite. This time he did not vomit. He ate it all. He enjoyed it slowly. He swallowed all the juice and all the crisp flesh. A core remained. He put it in his pocket. He mused for a while. He started to feel like he could sleep. He closed his eyes. Powder snow brushed his cheeks gently. He told himself to sleep but he could not. He felt pathetic. Then he heard thunder. The fireworks had started. He opened his eyes. He saw a distant red dahlia over the bridge.

On the bridge was a figure. It was not a papier-mache figure as the others. It was a three dimensional human being. It held fireworks upon its head like a halo. The brightness of the background turned the figure dark. It was approaching him. Slowly. He looked at it. It gave him a chill. He realized all at once it was him. Himself. The biggest firework bloomed, followed by a bang. It showed the face. It was his face. It was a woman. She was in a summer dress. She was barefoot. Her limbs were all bone and skin. Her eyes were sunk deep in their hollows. They were sharp. They cut straight into his brain and kneaded his encephalon. She did not stop walking toward him. She smelt of end.

Another icy flower flashed and stuck to the blackboard for a moment. She told him that there had been no such thing as sleep from the beginning, from the beginning of the world.

He denied her.

His double sneered at him and said, Then let us assume, as you claim, that there has been such thing as sleep in this world, if it makes you happy. Her voice was a direct voice. A straight voice to his eyes and nose and lips. She reached her arms to his neck. They were ice. She pushed him onto the ground.

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The double said, You sleep every night. You sleep so well every night that you would never notice you are sleeping. You never dream of you sleeping. She was heavy. She was a rock. He was flat on the ground. He could not breathe. A rock was on his back. He had to say something. He buried his face in the sleet, grabbing for words. Words. Blah, blah. Many words. Blah, blah, blah. But he could only say, Another firework.

No.

No.

No.

He raised his face shouting. She was gone. The bridge was empty. On the blackboard of the sky remained the rainbow segments of firework particles. He knew there had been sleep in his life. He knew he had been sleeping during certain periods of his life. He knew it had been something nice, something precious. But he did not remember why and how it had been precious. His double must be cheating him. She must be stealing his sleep out of his memory. How did he sleep? He closed his eyes.

A hot bath filled with sweet-flags. The three Borzois' tails tapping on the Danzu carpet. A dark bedroom filled with steam. A cup of mint tea with ram. Flannel pajamas. A down comforter. Piles of silk pillows. An arched window to gaze at stars.

He closed his eyes. He remembered none of those. When he closed his eyes, his eyeballs would turn inside and they would show him a muddy emptiness in his skull, not a complete vacuum, but an emptiness half filled with distorted associations of sounds, letters and meanings. He felt he could sleep if he kept his eyes open. He ran to the airport. He wanted to go home because home was the place to sleep.

\* \* \*

The airport was busy with segments, yields, parallel lines, perpendicular lines, acute angles, obtuse angles, circles bouncing around murmuring a foreign tongue, flamboyant triangles, and shivering squares. Papier-mache dolls were running about.

He approached the nearest counter.

Home. Home. He said the word again and again. It must have sounded like an old woman mourning over a grave. Home. Home. Go. Home. I. Go. Home. I. He said.

I need your ticket, a papier-mache figure said in a female voice.

He searched his pants' pockets for the remaining half of his air ticket. And his shirt's pockets. When he turned his pants' pockets inside out, a chip sound of metal rolled on the floor. It was a small ultramarine piece of metal

with a vermilion cross. A moment after, a yellow piece of paper flatteringly touched down beside the pin. It said HOME.

He stepped forward and bent down.

Somebody yelled at him and knocked him down.

Then the sound, "Crack! Crack! Crack!"

As the crowd dispersed screaming, the world was restored with details again. The furious clatter shook the air terminal. The brutal mass of human feet trampled the slow ones. The violent jostle rumbled the floor like agonized dancers' steps. A howling panic as sirens ruffled their eardrums. A pool of dark, oily liquid was growing underneath a woman in a navy uniform lying prone. Among the frantic crash and shriek, a sinister shadow of a nimble figure clacked its tongue and glided out of the pandemonium. The jolting din of waugh and boom was taken over by the roars and whistles of the police squad, then the mourning of old women came after. Meanwhile the floor was wiped up, the corpse carried out, and the terminal building was deserted, except a young man lying spread-eagled on the cold linoleum floor.

\* \* \*

Through the glass automatic door, came in a man dressed in tuxedo with sunglasses. The transparent walls and high ceiling echoed his swift pacing toward the man on the floor. He stopped at the lying man's feet.

"I told you to watch out for their shadows." Rose spoke to Yuki with the blank voice of a shrewd spy. He slowly circled around Yuki's body, murmuring in a musing manner. "You did a good job, pal. You played sick very well. A fabulous invalid, you are. A genuine spy." Then Rose stopped his dress-shoed steps at Yuki's peaceful face, and slightly poked Yuki's soft cheek with the tip of his shoe. Yuki's head rolled aside.

"Hey. Listen. You're awake, right?" Rose kneeled down to push his ear against Yuki's chest. As he rolled up his bright eyes, his brows gathered. Then pushing the floor with his palm, he stood up. A calm smile stretched his lips and narrowed his eyes.

"Sweet dream, pal. Rest in peace," he whispered and walked away.

Outside, it was snowing. Large fluffs of snow were covering the streets, the runways and the glass ceiling. Yuki remained still, spread-eagled, eyes closed, hands loosely opened, lips slackened.

Soon the snow would whiten out the sight. ◆