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KEIKO'S ADVENTURES ON THE *PATH OF DREAMS*
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Introduction

Path of Dreams is a collection of twenty-one short narratives, seventeen of which are connected by the appearance of the female protagonist, Keiko. Another unifier of this collection is communion with the “other” world, or the spirit world inhabited by people who have gone to Hades (or *Yomi* in Japanese). The title of the volume, *Path of Dreams*, which is placed last in the collection, hints at how visits to the other world occur.

In this series of narratives, Kurahashi Yumiko (1935–2005), reaches back into history, resuscitates people, such as emperors, poets, writers, and so on, to cavort with Keiko in racy adventures. Flowing throughout all the narratives are flagrant displays of sexuality and forays into taboo topics such as bestiality, incest, vampirism, and the like, to explore uncharted territories. It is writing in the fantastic mode at its best with escapades designed to keep the reader’s attention engaged.

The first three short narratives I translated from the *Path of Dreams* were published in *Mānoa* in 1994.¹ The first, “Beneath the Blossom,” centers on Satō Norikiyo better known as twelfth-century poet, Saigyō, whose claim to fame lies in a poem that predicted his death under a cherry tree in full bloom under a full moon in the second lunar month. The second, “Blossom Room,” focuses on the relationship between Lady Nijō, author of *Towazugatari* (*Confessions of Lady Nijō*), and the sovereign she served at court, Retired Emperor Go-Fukakusa (1246–1305). The third, “Castle in the Sea,” again features Lady Nijō, but this time the scene changes from Japan to England where the legend of Tristan and Isolde unfolds.

Included here are the fourth through seventh narratives from the *Path of Dreams*. The fourth, “Love Potion,” refers to the elixir imbibed by Tristan and Isolde transported to Japan and this time placed into the hands

¹ S. Yumiko Hulvey, trans., “Three Stories: Kurahashi Yumiko,” *Mānoa: Mercury Rising* 15/1 (1994): 119–129.

of Kamakura-period poets, Fujiwara Teika (also known as Fujiwara Sadaie, 1162–1241) and Princess Shokushi (also known as Shikishi Naishinnō, 1149/50–1201), to fulfill a dream of unrequited love. The fifth, “Dream of Jidō,” again features Fujiwara Teika, who returns this time to “play” with Keiko in the guise of the 2,800-year-old Chinese immortal known as the Chrysanthemum Youth (Kiku Jidō). The sixth, “Eternal Traveler,” focuses on a modern poet Nishiwaki Jun’zaburō (1894–1982), who wrote poetry in foreign languages and then translated them back to Japanese, playing with language as he does with Keiko. The final narrative, “Hell in Autumn,” continues with Nishiwaki’s missives from “hell,” but engages the topic of the Nō Theatre populated by ghosts, much like the inhabitants of the “other” world that is the dominant theme in this series.

These brief narratives by Kurahashi remind me of poetry collections like the *Shinkokinshū* (The New Collection of Ancient and Modern Japanese Poetry, 1205), which links short 31-syllable poems by association and progression and *honkadori* (allusions to poetry from earlier anthologies) into sequences that expand the limit of individual poems into something greater than the sum of its parts. In addition, these intertextual allusions to classical Japanese poetry, Nō plays, Western culture, and the like, expand the boundaries of these short narratives onto the world stage. Further fueled by scientific images of dark holes, dark matter, and celestial bodies floating in space, the venue expands into the universe. I recommend these stories be read by savoring the echoes of topics, themes, characters, and situations from the past that resonate in the present and prognosticate the future, defying both time and space.²

“Love Potion” (*Biyaku*, by Kurahashi Yumiko, 1989)

It was early afternoon at the height of summer when the air itself burns white, just like the *haiku*-topic called “blazing midday.” Since Keiko was to meet someone for lunch at a restaurant near her company, she walked a few minutes in the city’s “blazing midday.” Actually Keiko had

² The last three translations were originally translated in collaboration with Shigeki Nakanishi, but after many years of teaching these texts in JPW 4130 Readings in Japanese Literature at the University of Florida, they evolved into my own translations; Text, with permission: Kurahashi Yumiko, *Yume no kayoiji* [Path of Dreams] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1989).

decided to share the love potion that sealed the fates of Tristan and Isolde that she had acquired during her recent trip to Cornwall. Though it was called a love potion, it looked exactly like red wine with the dark ruby color of a Medoc. Pouring portions of about two glasses into a small vial, she was going to give it to a certain couple intending to have them drink it. Keiko was to hear the detailed story later at leisure.

Differing from the appearance of blazing midday at fields or riverbanks, the blazing midday emitted by buildings, cars, and crowds in city centers have elements of madness that shimmer like burning hell. Affected by the heat, Keiko felt she was losing her mind and regretted not having had the car brought out even though her destination was close. When she thought that the line of cars climbing a sharp incline slowed for a moment, suddenly a deep-black mass gradually came uphill. She had never seen such a large truck. It gasped like an animal, emitting hot breath while approaching her, wrapped in wavering, shimmering heat waves. Oppressed by a feeling of heaviness and dizziness, Keiko felt that along with the dizziness she had entered the other world.

What was approaching was not a truck, but a black ox. It was an ox-drawn carriage like those seen in narrative scroll paintings of the Heian period (794–1185). When she realized what it was, she immediately recalled a poem by Fujiwara Teika (d. 1241):

<i>Yuki nayamu</i>	Suffering as he goes,
<i>ushi no ayumi ni</i>	the walking ox
<i>tatsu chiri no</i>	causes dust to rise,
<i>kaze sae atsuki</i>	even the wind is hot—
<i>natsu no oguruma</i>	small summer carriage. ³

³ Poem by Fujiwara Teika (1162–1241) found in two collections: *Gyokuyō[waka]shū* 14.407, the fourteenth imperial poetry anthology, and *Fūboku wakashō* 16.15707, a private poetry collection compiled around 1310 by Fujiwara Nagakiyo, a follower of Kyōgoku Tamekane of the Kyōgoku-Reizei school of innovative poetry. *Fūboku[waka]shō* contained 36, rather than the usual 10 or 20 books, and also included *imayo* (popular songs). The headnote indicates that the poem was one of 120 poems written in the seventh year of Kenkyū (1197) on the topic of summer. Teika was one of the compilers of *Shinkokin[waka]shū*, the eighth imperially

Another poem immediately following it came to Keiko's mind, but by that time the ox had closed in right before her eyes:

<p><i>Tachinoboru</i> <i>minami no hate ni</i> <i>kumo wa are do</i> <i>teru hi kuma naki</i> <i>koro no ōzora</i></p>	<p>Rising up from the extreme south, even though there are clouds, the sun shines unblemished— great sky of the season.⁴</p>
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The black mass of flesh noiselessly thrust itself at her. Keiko was taken into the flesh like asphalt melted by the heat. When she came to, she was inside the ox.

Rather than being swallowed by the ox into its stomach, she felt as if she were trapped inside a cloud of flesh. The heat disappeared, replaced by comfortable warmth, and she could hear only the sound of the ox's heart and breathing; no sound from the outside world penetrated within. Keiko thought that perhaps this might have been how it felt inside the womb before birth. All around her was a wall of dark rose-colored flesh, but she could not touch the flesh even when she extended her hands. In any case, this was a strange vehicle. Keiko lost track of time as she was thus conveyed to the other world.

Suddenly it grew light before her eyes and when Keiko felt herself released from the body of the ox, she found herself standing in someplace like the precinct of a temple. Judging from the arrangement of the trees and rocks, it made her think this was some renowned temple in Kyoto. There was a pond, an Azumaya [small garden viewing pavilion]-like structure, and she could hear an outburst of crickets chirping from trees behind these. It seemed to be summer in the other world too. However, without the incandescent sun in the sky and being filled with a peaceful pearly light and

commissioned poetry anthology and was the sole compiler of the ninth royal anthology, *Shinchokusen[waka]shū*.

⁴ Another poem by Fujiwara Teika in *Fūboku[waka]shō* 16.8060. Although Kurahashi Yumiko writes that this poem “follows” the first poem, it is clear that the opposite is the case by referring to the numbers in the collection of *Fubokushō*. Perhaps another collection yet to be identified contains both poems in sequential order.

comfortable warm air, Keiko was made to think of these as proof that this was the other world.

Keiko decided to walk halfway around the lake and rest in the Azumaya. There was a guest inside. Without a trace of make-up, there was a woman about thirty years old. For a moment Keiko thought she was to meet again Nijō of *Towazugatari* (*The Confessions of Lady Nijō*), but on closer inspection she realized it was not Nijō. Her kimono-clad figure resembled the robes of rustic women in Nō plays. Her long hair was parted in the middle, bound covering her ears, and hung down her back. Since it would have been rude to stare, Keiko bowed to her, and sat a little removed from where the woman was sitting and gazing at the pond.

“Excuse me, but where might you be from?” asked the woman in a genteel voice as she sat continuing to gaze at the pond. Neither her voice nor her manner belonged to that of a rustic. Keiko felt a peculiar air surrounding the woman that marked her clearly as a member of the nobility. However, it was not a quality that made people feel tense, but rather invited thoughts of strange nostalgia.

Keiko told her how she had encountered a strange ox-drawn carriage in the mid-summer heat of the city and how she had been brought to this place in a state between dream and reality and even included Teika's poems that had come to mind.

“It seems after all to be the Kyōgoku middle counselor's trick.” The woman somehow guessed Keiko's situation and smiled.

“By Kyōgoku middle counselor, do you mean Fujiwara Teika?” Keiko asked.

“Yes. He must have discovered that article in your possession.” Keiko was surprised and checked to make sure the small bottle was still in her bag. “I brought this medicine is called a philter back from antiquity in the West,” explained Keiko, avoiding the use of “love potion.” “Did you perhaps hear about this philter from Lady Nijō?”

“In our world whatever happens is transmitted directly to us,” said the other looking at Keiko with an innocent smile. “It is what you call telepathy in your world.”

“You even know about such words. By the way, from what you said previously about the Kyōgoku middle counselor, I gather that you must be the royal Princess Shokushi.”⁵

“I have already forgotten about such great status. Only I am at my wit’s end about still being entangled in Teika’s strange fate,” said Princess Shokushi, her face darkening at the thought. Keiko thought that she had to be Princess Shokushi from what she had heard so far.

“Even I am familiar with the story from the Nō play entitled *Teika*.⁶ So its contents were true after all.”

According to the Nō play *Teika*, Teika brooded over royal Princess Shokushi, who ranked above him in both court status and age. After his death, it was said that his obsession grew into a vine and twisted around the deceased princess’ stone monument and would not go away.

After Keiko related the story, Princess Shokushi said with a smile, “Is it the ‘usual *Teika Kazura* (Teika’s Vine) story’? So I suppose that is how people in your world regard Teika’s shameful behavior.” Suddenly she became serious and fixed her eyes directly on Keiko. “Is this special medicine of harmony transmitted from the West splendidly efficacious?”

“Yes, it is touted as being so. But unfortunately, I’ve never had the opportunity to verify it.”

“I wonder if you might not share a little with me.”

⁵ 式子内親王: Princess Shokushi (or *Shikishi*), a daughter of Emperor Go-Shirakawa, served as *Itsuki no In* (or *Saiin*) at the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto, never marrying until her death in 1201. She was known as a poet with almost 400 extant poems.

⁶ The Nō play *Teika* is in *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū*, in *Yōkyoku*, vol. 33.1 (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1973): 302–13. Princess Shokushi (also *Shikishi Naishinnō*), the unnamed *shite* of the first part of the play returns in the second part of the play to announce her name and to lead the priest to her own grave. Her gravestone depicts the vine known as Teika’s Vine tenaciously growing on her tomb. The name of Kurahashi Yumiko’s collection, *Yume no kayoiji* (Path of Dreams), is a variation of a line found in the play, *kumo no kayoiji* (Path of Clouds) on p. 308, line 12; see Hioraki Satō and Burton Watson’s, *From the Country of Eight Islands: An Anthology of Japanese Poetry*. New York: Anchor Books, 1981: 241–253 for an English translation.

Keiko was surprised by the unexpected course the conversation had taken. Princess Shokushi herself had proposed this surprising request because she had decided that she and Keiko would conspire to block Teika's plan, in other words, his plot to captivate the princess's mind by the power of the "love potion" since she would not yield to Teika.

"Yes, I would be honored to present it to you. Are the two of you planning to drink it?"

"Originally while I was alive, I disliked people like Teika. Rather, I hated him and he knew I did, so there was no deep association between us. But when it comes to our association after coming to the other world after death, I cannot continue saying such things. If we drink the "love potion," then even I would come to love Teika and if that happens, then I would not be forced to exchange pledges as I had up to now, and then at that time, I too might be able to taste pleasure. That is why I asked this favor of you."

Keiko admired Princess Shokushi's honest way of speaking. She thought even the way the princess called him "Teika" was filled with intimacy and kindness.

When Princess Shokushi received the small bottle of the "love potion" from Keiko, she was shy like a young girl, with a flushed face and a happy, excited voice, saying, "Then, I would like to try this immediately, so please wait here for a little while," and disappeared.

Princess Shokushi changed clothes and finally appeared wearing a small-sleeved robe in a resplendent Tang-style weave suitable for a noblewoman. Beyond her there stood a young nobleman with a slender face. Keiko kept an eye on the man wondering if he were Fujiwara Teika, but the two of them were wrapped in brilliant colors as they began to dance, so she could not distinguish detailed facial features. Furthermore, Teika placed himself behind the princess' shadow from beginning to end, manipulating her movements exactly as if she were a puppet. At first, Keiko thought that she was watching something like the dance of redemption shown by the main actor in the second part of the Nō play *Teika*, but Keiko realized that this was not the case since there was clear sexual meaning in their movements. Or rather, this dance was the very movement of the two thus engaged. As Teika moved the princess' body as if she were a doll, he guided her toward intoxication. The puppeteer's hands grasped the princess' body beneath her clothes as if his fingers had become innumerable tentacles connected to her nerves, playing the princess' senses like a musical instrument. Keiko perceived this from the color of ecstasy that floated in the princess' eyes and the enchanting music that escaped her lips.

There was incomparable eroticism in the lovers' naked embrace as the two floated in this fantasy that made Keiko feel as if she would melt away just watching them.

After Keiko barely managed to leave the place, she entered a stand of trees that spread out beyond the Azumaya and an outburst of crickets chirping fell and showered her body as she came upon the temple's cemetery. There was an old gravestone that appeared to have a history. Although Keiko saw a strange odd-shaped vine that couldn't be considered a plant wrapped around the gravestone, she wasn't surprised. However, was it waiting to astonish Keiko that Teika's Vine suddenly was made to bend back and forth, and burst into flames? The stone monument convulsed, was wrapped in flames, and melted away.

Keiko was convinced of the dramatic efficacy of the love potion. When Keiko came to herself after a momentary lapse, she was in front of the promised restaurant. She looked inside her bag, but the small bottle with the love potion she was going to hand over was no longer there. Keiko wondered how she was to explain its loss.

“Dream of Jidō” (*Jidō no yume*, by Kurahashi Yumiko, 1989)

That summer Keiko met Fujiwara Teika a number of times. Together they shared meals or went out to musical concerts. Whenever he appeared in this world, he looked like a music or art critic with long hair that was more than half gray and a sharp nose line, wearing clothes that seemed to have been cut from a men's fashion magazine. Since he called Keiko by her first name as if they were old friends, she also called him Teika, the Sino-Japanese reading of his first name, rather than by his last name, Fujiwara.

“Teika, it's surprising that you like Beethoven,” said Keiko. They were at dinner after hearing a piano recital by a young Polish pianist performing two late sonatas by Beethoven.

“You probably thought I only liked Debussy or some such, didn't you? Well, it isn't so,” said Teika. “I like to see powerfully constructed structures rather than a floating haze of sound in delicate colors.”

On another day when they went to the Nō Theatre, Teika didn't seem very pleased. He said that words in Nō librettos were vague and that when he saw a few plays, he grew tired of its monotonous style. “Then I'd like to say it's no different with the rock music you hate. Viewed from someone like me from the past, there is too much noise even in Nō and rock.”

“Are you saying that it isn’t considered art?”

“It seems I am a person who only has interest in the art of words.”

However, Keiko saw the probable relationship between Teika’s hostility toward Nō plays that emerged in later generations and the usual *Teika* play that took up his obsessive love for Princess Shokushi.

“No matter what, it’s unbearable,” said Teika resentfully. “It is a vulgar delusion at best, and further, quite absurd.”

“That’s what I also think. But after the two of you went to the other world, isn’t it all right to have an association based on poetic exchanges? Wouldn’t it be more enjoyable that way?”

“Well, that’s a different matter,” said Teika insistently. “Even living in the other world, there are such things as privacy. So I have no comment on that topic.”

Keiko thought that Teika was always thorny about his private affairs, looking like an animal in discomfort. His knowledge was profound, his conversations were witty and amusing, and his critiques of this world’s new customs were sharp. He even held opinions about sensitive pillow talk between men and women and even invaded the domain of dirty jokes without qualms. However, when the conversation actually turned into thorns that might strike him personally, he sensitively dodged it. While Keiko was trying to figure out what he wanted from her, she jumped to the conclusion that he did want something from her, and avoided rudely touching his thorns. He also avoided touching Keiko’s body, but he looked as if he were irritated while doing so.

So that is why Keiko and Teika talked about taxonomical variations of love like “secret love” and “lustful love” and discussed the technology of sexual pleasure as they spent long hours over dinner. One time when asked what she would like to experience once, she said she would like to cavort with an incredibly beautiful youth you can’t find in this world and taste ecstasy. Teika had been smiling while he listened, but suddenly he looked serious and said he would introduce her soon to someone suitable.

“Lord Genji as a young man would be good,” she said as a joke.

“He was not that incredibly beautiful. He doesn’t seem to be your type. Well, just leave it to me,” he said with a somewhat expectant attitude.

At the end of summer, Keiko took her children to the summerhouse in the highlands. By that time she had forgotten about the conversation with Teika, but the punctual Teika had been doing his utmost to fulfill his promise. One day, a letter arrived from Teika hinting at their

former conversation and suggesting tonight would be the time for the rendezvous. With that in mind she was waiting with her children asleep, when around midnight the moon emitted its characteristic, mysterious light, and she saw a hazy ball of light about the size of an armful approaching from the forest. Keiko thought it was clearly the movement of children the way the ball bounced and danced with a curious rhythm threading through the trees like “Golliwogg’s Cake-walk.” In the past, her children also had skipped and hopped in the snow in just that way.

When the ball of light drew near until it stuck to the window, it clearly assumed the shape of a human being. Certainly it was the face of a youth—and below the neck, his body and limbs. He moved his lips and seemed to say, “Good evening.” Then when Keiko smiled and opened the window, he jumped lightly and stood on the floor.

“Welcome. Are you Teika’s messenger?”

“Yes. I’m Jidō,” replied the high voice of a boy soprano.

“You mean *Kiku Jidō* (Chrysanthemum Boy) or *Makura Jidō* (Pillow Boy) of Nō Theatre . . .?”

“In the past, I served King Mu of Zhou (976–922 BC).”

“In the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) you were said already to be eight hundred years old, so are you not a ghostly apparition that seems to be a beautiful youth?”

Keiko recalled the phrase in the *Taiheiki* (*The Great Peace*)⁷ that stated, “Until over the age of eight hundred, Jidō still retained the face of a youth and, moreover, his figure was without decay.” If two thousand years had passed since the Han dynasty, the boy must now be—she stopped calculating and looked at his face again.

He was a handsome youth who exceeded even the ideal of a handsome youth. His face was erased of approximate individuality, and he did not resemble in any way singers popular today. If Keiko had to compare his face to anything, she felt she might have seen his face among Nō masks. His face resembled most closely the mask called “Jūroku” (Sixteen) used in

⁷ In *Taiheiki* Book 13.1 (not included in Helen Craig McCullough’s translation) contains mention of Kiku Jidō. See Paul S. Atkins article (“*Chigo* in the Medieval Japanese Imagination,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67/3 (2008): 947–979) which suggests the legend was the invention of Tendai monks in Japan without any reference to Chinese historical sources.

the play *Atsumori*⁸ but without the expression of sorrow, and there floated a coquettish pathos that looked like female masks. Legend has it that Jidō had been the beloved of King Mu. Keiko thought that if Jidō had captured the affection of a man, he might also have possessed some feminine elements.

At any rate, he was a purely cold, handsome youth, as if a beautiful Nō mask had acquired flesh. Keiko forgot the sordid jokes and such that she had exchanged with Teika and listened to Jidō's personal history as if she were listening to a distant relative who had dropped by for a surprise visit. Although he was exiled for the crime of stepping across the king's pillow,⁹ Keiko was moved when his face became colored with grief and tears glistened in his eyes while he was telling her such things as writing on a chrysanthemum leaf two sacred verses he had received from King Mu of Zhou, floating these verses on water that turned it immediately into an elixir of immortality, and by drinking this elixir, his face had remained that of a handsome youth for 2,800 years. The desire to make him her own child was borne, and in the next moment, she was captured by the so-called realization that Jidō was in fact her own son.

"I brought this for you," he said as he presented something like chrysanthemum elixir sloshing around in a gourd container. Keiko poured it into a glass and took a sip. It had no taste or smell. If a cold orb like the moon liquefied, it would taste like this.

"Perhaps I should have you drink this to thank you," she said as she poured the last drops of the love potion of Tristan and Isolde into a wine glass. Jidō innocently drank it with a face that told her it was sweet.

"Shall we go to bed," said Keiko flustered because she had almost added the next words, "with Mother." More surprising, however, was that Jidō called her "Mother" as if he had read her mind. "Mother, before going

⁸ Alludes to *Atsumori*, a Nō play by Zeami Motokiyo, in Royall Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas* (New York: Penguin, 1992): 37–48.

⁹ Royall Tyler interprets this phrase, to step across the king's pillow, as a euphemism to indicate that Jidō had slept with the queen, consort, or concubine, for which he could have been sentenced to death, but was exiled instead to a distant location. However, Paul S. Atkins in "Chigo in the Medieval Japanese Imagination," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 67/3 (2008): 957–961, suggests homosexual relations like that of *chigo* who served Buddhist monks as the core of the relationship between older and younger men.

to bed, I'll do you a favor by writing the sacred verses that I received from King Mu of Zhou on your back. If I were to do so, you would not need to drink the potion because you would be able to live forever young.”

When Keiko offered her back to the youth, he recited the sacred verses while beginning to write Chinese characters with his finger on her back:

具一切功德	Possessing all the merits,
慈眼視眾生	I watch all sentient beings with merciful eyes.
福壽海無量	Fortune and life-span are as boundless as the sea,
是故應頂禮	I should thus prostrate myself before the Buddha. ¹⁰

As Keiko tried to decode the movement of his fingers, she was overcome gradually by a comfortable drowsiness. For some reason, it seemed as if a young child were playing mischievously with the body of his naked mother. But it was not mere drowsiness. While her mind sank into a dream, parts of her body awakened here and there, and began vibrating and playing delicate, heavenly music. When she realized it, Jidō's hands that had been writing characters transformed into countless hands that extended over her entire body playing her like an instrument.

Keiko rolled over and tried to embrace face-to-face the person who had been at her back. At that instant, she suspected that it was all Teika's trick and that the person beside her was Teika wearing Jidō's mask. She put her hands on his face and peeled off the face as if it were the Nō mask of a handsome youth. Like a mask the face came off easily, but there was no face behind it. Rather than say there was nothing, she found only dark matter instead of a head. She also thought of a black hole. She regretted her insensitive act, but the face was nowhere to be found. And after that, fraternization continued between someone who appeared to be a handsome youth and a Keiko filled with maternal feelings. Keiko thought that a

¹⁰ I am indebted to my colleague, Richard Wang, for his guidance in identifying this Buddhist *gatha* in the form of a pentasyllabic poem, and for providing an accurate translation (Personal communication, August 27, 2011).

mother-son incest dream might be realized like this, but wondered if the cynical Teika granted her desire for a handsome youth with yet another strong dose of spice.

“Eternal Traveler” (*Eien no tabibito*, by Kurahashi Yumiko)

A letter from Nishiwaki arrived at Keiko's house just as she was thinking it was almost a year since he passed away. Because she was used to such things, she was not surprised especially. He always travels, so going to the other world was probably a continuation of his travels, and this time Keiko decided to think that he might have wanted to see her while he was on his journey. He wanted to walk near the lighthouse, send greetings to the late summer ocean, and eat some rare fruit together. According to the letter, it seemed he intended to visit her summerhouse at the beach. Or, he might already be there waiting for her. Immediately she got into the car alone and departed for the summerhouse with an ocean view.

It was a sunny day on the autumnal equinox.¹¹ A passage came to mind that she felt might have come from one of Nishiwaki's poems:

<i>Hisashiburi ni</i>	After a long time
<i>tōku no yama ga</i>	distant mountains
<i>hakkiri mieru</i>	clearly can be seen...

She thought this passage remarkably prosaic for him. He was a poet. His hair had become entirely silver and he looked like what one might imagine an immortal Greek god to look like if he had aged temporarily and become a tall, divine elderly man. Even so he never stopped creating poems that caused enjoyment in her brain and reading these poems gave birth to music in her head. If Keiko were made to say, there was no other poet like Nishiwaki, either before or after him. Other poets seemed merely to complain noisily with piercing words, rather than playing the complicated neurological wires in her brain as if they were strings on a harp.

This year the summerhouse had been used only once in July by Keiko's younger sister and her family, and unexpectedly a fresh sea breeze welcoming the end of summer was blowing inside when she felt the presence of a dear friend. While thinking, “Nishiwaki's here,” she gazed at

¹¹ Autumnal equinox occurs around September 22nd in the northern hemisphere.

the now empty beach through the window that was flung open. White lace-like waves moved with monotonous repetition where the bow-shaped sand met the sea. In the room, the refrigerator raised a faint growl like the flapping of insect wings. On the table, there was some tropical fruit she had never seen before emitting a sweet and sour fragrance. Thinking these might be the “rare fruit,” she felt the air move behind her at that time and turned around to find Nishiwaki standing there.

“I was sleeping on that bed over there and just woke up.”

She was about to give her condolences on his passing, but she managed to put a smile on her face. He looked more like an eternal traveler than the departed.

“Are these the rare fruit you mentioned in your letter?”

“These are fruit I brought from South America as a present. Unfortunately, it seems they have begun to spoil. Instead of these, I would like to treat you to some truly rare fruit. Would you like to go for a walk?”

The late summer afternoon ocean was shining like a blue jewel. On one occasion, Keiko had led Nishiwaki on a walk along the path to the lighthouse on the cape, but today Nishiwaki stepped ahead taking the lead as they climbed the sloping path filled with rocks. When she remembered the lightness of his body resulted from losing flesh of this world for one peculiar to the realm of Hades, sorrow spread over her heart like cold, clear water. But Nishiwaki advanced at a cheerful gait along the meandering path through the shrubbery. When suddenly he turned around, stuck his fiery red tongue out as if teasing her and laughed.

Through a gap in the shrubbery, she saw a purple-colored eggplant field. Beyond the field was a beach where pale Japanese horse mackerel were being dried. The ocean’s gentle breeze, shining noon, and crooked, collapsing lighthouse—all were reminiscent of scenes in Nishiwaki’s poem.

“O you hot-tempered traveler,” Keiko recited, remembering a poem he composed while he was young:

*Nanji no fun wa nagarete
hirubenia no umi
hokkai atoranchisu*

Your excrement flowed
through Hibernia¹² (Ireland),
North Sea, Atlantic, and

¹² According to recent editions of Iwanami Bunko and Kodansha Bunko, Hirubenia is a misspelling of Hiberunia, the Latin word for Ireland. A command to die by jumping from the cliff might be implied.

<i>chichukai o yogoshita</i>	Mediterranean Sea—polluting all.
<i>nanji wa nanji no mura e kaere</i>	You, return to your village.
<i>kyori no gake o shukufuku</i>	Bless the cliffs of your village.
<i>seyo</i>	
<i>sono hadaka no tsuchi wa</i>	That naked earth
<i>nanji no yoake da</i>	is your daybreak.
<i>akebi no mi wa nanji no</i>	The fruit of the <i>akebi</i>
<i>reikon no gotoku</i>	is like your soul,
<i>natsuju burasagatteiru</i>	hanging throughout summer.

(‘Traveler’ from *Ambarvalia* by Nishiwaki Junzaburō)¹³

“Seems like someone else’s poor poem,” he smiled grimly as he looked back.

“Speaking of which, there were many *akebi* hanging in the thicket at the top of that cliff in the past.”

“Ah, they’re the fruit of souls,” he said happily. “Let’s go over there to eat some.”

So saying he took both her hands. Somehow Keiko felt happy as if “recess” was about to begin in kindergarten of the past, but Nishiwaki kept on leading Keiko by the hand as before until they emerged above the sea. It was as if they had jumped over the sea and moved to a different world: the cliffs, olive trees, and the color of the sky made her think she was in ancient Greece or some such. But the scenery completely changed again and she came to a place like a tropical garden.

Lively rare fruit was hanging overhead. Various colored fruit that looked like *akebi* and tamarillos, or kiwis and mangos, was hanging with strange, funny shapes.

“They are cute and look like they’re playing.”

“They are the fruit of souls,” he said and easily plucked one, split it in two and gave her half.

¹³ Nishiwaki Junzaburō (1894–1982), modern poet who compiled a 1947 anthology, *Tabibito kaerazu* (Travelers Do Not Return), that Kurahashi twists ironically into ‘Eternal Traveler’ as the title of this narrative. He also played with the concept of translation.

At the center of the cream-colored flesh was a vivid red color, around which spread blurred vermillion flower shapes encircled by a golden ring around the edge. “It looks like a cross-section of the sun. Is this the soul of a human being?”

“Based on its flavor, I wonder if might be that of a Cretan.”

“What an indescribable taste.”

“It is the taste of eternity. Besides, there are swine souls, shark souls, and the like. As you can see, varieties abound with different flavors, colors, and shapes. There was once a time when my soul was hanging like this one summer. Though it was eaten by a bird long ago,” he said, smiling like a boy.

“But what would happen if you were to eat a soul?”

“Nothing would happen. In the first place, no matter how much you eat you would never get full. Although it will not prolong your life, it will not poison you with evil spirits and cause you to die. If you squeezed its juice into a nectar, it’s the stuff the gang on Mount Olympus often drank.”

Keiko, feeling that she had become a nymph, got naked, and bathed in the spring. Nishiwaki, pretending to be a centaur or something, went chasing after the nymph Keiko. The spring, surprisingly vast as she was escaping and diving in the water, kept expanding to who knows where and seemed to continue to the sea. As she was swimming in the water, she saw several things that looked like cities that had sunk to the seabed. When she came to, she was standing on a familiar looking beach. Wearing clothes she wore for the walk, she was not wet anywhere. Only Nishiwaki was holding three or four of the aforementioned fruit of souls in his hands.

That night Keiko and Nishiwaki lit an old lamp in a room with an ocean view, put some fruit of souls into each long-stemmed glass, and poured wine into them. They drank as they talked about people in the other world. He talked about many things including Andromeda, the female apprentice of Epicurus, *Liezi*, and dream of the prehistoric shark *Cladoselache*, while Keiko talked about Satō or Saigyō, Nijō, and so on; each time their eyes met, they smiled and raised their glasses as if toasting.

Eventually however, her back started to itch. Sometimes she rubbed it against the back of the chair. When Nishiwaki saw her doing this, he asked, “What is it? Let me look at it.”

Keiko stripped to the waist and had him examine her back.

“Something that looks like an incantation is written here:

具一切功德	Possessing all the merits,
慈眼視眾生	I watch all the sentient beings with merciful eyes.
福壽海無量	Fortune and life-span are as boundless as the sea,
是故應頂禮	I should thus prostrate myself before the Buddha.

It seems like a passage from a sutra. Is this the magic formula for perpetual youth and longevity?"

The Buddhist verses that Jidō had written with his finger the other day still remained. The words rose red to the surface. She told him in detail about Jidō's visit.

"Even if this spell helps me live forever, this so-called eternity is an itchy business," Keiko laughed.

"'Eternity' is sad. I want to pour tears on the 'eternity' on this goddess' back."

So saying, he dripped something cold on her back.

"Ah, that feels good. What was that?"

"Just water. A water spirit that oozed from rocks."

So while saying this, he rubbed her back with his warm hands. Unbelievably the itch disappeared completely.

"Now you have regained the goddess' marble back."

Keiko thanked him and continued talking while revealing her naked breast and back like a Greek goddess in the glow of the lamp. When the night grew late, they drank green tea he had brought as a present. Nishiwaki picked the tea "Chashuwang" (*pu-erh*) that Zhuge (Liang) Kongming planted when he went south on an expedition to Yunnan province.

The next morning, after completing preparations for his journey, he came to say goodbye to her.

"Where are you going?" Keiko asked.

"I may take a peek at hell," he answered.

As she watched him with a look of concern, he stamped his foot hard on the floor like a Nō actor. The floor split easily and she saw from there a space that could not be distinguished as either the blue ocean or sky. In the blue far beyond, a heavenly body that looked like the Earth was sinking. As Keiko controlled the spontaneous dizziness she felt coming on, she heard Nishiwaki's final words, "See you later," and saw him disappear into hell. Hurriedly, she tried to peek inside, but all she saw was the normal floor.

“Hell in Autumn” (*Aki no jigoku*, by Kurahashi Yumiko)

While Keiko was still feeling the heat of late summer badly in the daytime, she received tidings from Nishiwaki. Written in bold characters on a postcard of handmade Japanese paper washed with what looked like thin blood, she assumed it was “from hell” since he had written it at the end. She read the legitimate postmark, “Central,” that indicated it was sent from some central post office two days ago, so she didn’t expect to find postmarks like “Hell of Black Thread” or “Hell of Avici:”

Here there is no summer, no late summer heat, nor city noise; what is here is only the voice of the wind. Speaking generally of hell, there are such words as “scorching hell” with heat that tortures people as the selling point, but there aren’t such things. There are no ogres or demons. Those that live here blown by the wind as if floating are only the spirits that have moved here from over there. I met Rokujō,¹⁴ Saigyō, Nijō, and Teika with whom you are familiar. There are some other spirits that would like to meet you. I think they will visit you before long. Commonly, these are those who cannot go to nirvana. In fact, I am one of these, and I am going to peek into the Realms of Animals and Asuras to consider a place to settle down.

From Hell

Because she had read the letter, she began feeling hesitant about attending this month’s regular meeting of the Nō Theatre Association. In any case, gods, ghosts, and mad women frequently appear in Nō. If residents of hell that Nishiwaki mentioned were to come in succession to this world borrowing the Nō stage, she would become exhausted keeping them company. In itself, it required preparations to associate with people from the other world. Thus she felt a bit depressed.

¹⁴ Kurahashi published “Hana no shita,” “Hana no heya,” and “Momijigari” in 1987, the latter in which Rokujō is introduced, but when the collection, *Yume no kayoiji*, was published in 1989, “Momijigari” was placed last (or seventeenth), making readers miss Rokujō’s introduction had it remained in the sequential order of publication.

The month's program was *Kayoi Komachi* (Visiting Komachi).¹⁵ The eldest son of the head of the Nō School was to play the principal role of Lesser Captain Fukakusa and the second son, the supporting role of Komachi. The brothers were good looking. Keiko's late father had been a friend of the head of the school. She had known the brothers since they were children and had been a fan of theirs. Though both were good looking, if the eldest had features that begged being called "bewitching" even though he was a man, it was as if he were Prince Niou in *The Tale of Genji*, then the serious and handsome features of the younger was as if he were Middle Captain Kaoru. Keiko concluded this because Mrs. Hanada and other members of the club had told her about a rumor that the brothers were rivals over a certain woman.

"The other day I saw Masao walking with a woman wearing a shocking vermilion mini-dress," said Mrs. Hanada.

"Was that the woman in question?"

"Without a doubt. I went around front to make sure I saw her."

Mrs. Hanada, again brought up the usual story of Masao, the older son, on the verge of being disowned by the head of the school if he continued seeing the woman who was originally the fiancé of Sadao, the younger brother. Keiko only had a nodding acquaintance in the dressing room with the brothers and their father, the head of the school, so she wasn't about to get to the bottom of the scandal that so excited Mrs. Hanada's curiosity. Actually, when Keiko had exchanged greetings that day with all three of them, father and brothers, she had not sensed any hostile atmosphere between them. The three had smiled warmly at her.

That day when she had seen three plays and gone out, it was still a little too early for dinner. Keiko parted from Mrs. Hanada and the others in front of the Nō theatre and climbed uphill away from the train station. Though the declining afternoon sun still burned flaming red, a dry wind blew through the city in the heat of late summer. She wanted to be alone at that bright and lonely time she liked best, when the dry wind blew along with time. Further, she had a hunch that something was about to happen as a sensation flickered in her head, just like an epileptic might feel before the

¹⁵ *Kayoi Komachi* (Komachi and the Hundred Nights) by Kanze Kiyotsugu Kan'ami is translated by Eileen Kato in *Twenty Plays of the Nō Theatre*. Ed. by Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970): 51–63.

onset of an attack. She was right. In the autumn light and wind strangely she sensed the presence of someone not of this world approach from behind and catch up to walk beside her.

The person was still wearing the costume of Lesser Captain Fukakusa from a while ago. If so, was this the actor Masao, playing the main character? However, the person wore the mask “Magojiro,” so it seemed as if the young Komachi appeared before her.

“Are you Komachi or perhaps the Lesser Captain?” Keiko asked, although she meant to ask whether it was Sadao playing Komachi or Masao playing the Lesser Captain. The person didn’t answer but said, “I would like to speak to you.” She could not tell whose voice was coming from behind the mask. She could not tell if the voice was male or female.

Keiko was about to say that being on such a street and still being in those clothes...but it came out strangely. A character from the Nō stage walking in the street dressed in costume was a strange spectacle from any perspective, but for some reason nobody passing by found it surprising. When she recovered her senses, she and the others had come to a world that was different from this one without realizing it.

“Where are we? Who are you?” Keiko said, although she knew there was no use asking. She thought that if she had come to a different world, she had to be somewhere in “hell.” There was nothing in the surroundings that looked frightening; it looked terribly neat like the Nō stage. Or it might be like a bedroom nobody comes to in a different world. Keiko wondered if the greeting a while ago, “I would like to speak to you,” implied “what I would like to do in this bedroom.” If that were the case, it would have been good to be prepared.

“Did you meet Nishiwaki?” The person tilted the mask and nodded. The gesture was like that of the Nō stage.

“Why don’t you remove that mask?” Keiko said, but he shook his head and refused. She felt a sense of foreboding. Keiko extended her hands and grasped the chin of the mask, but the flesh seemed connected to the mask and would not detach easily. That being the case, Keiko concluded that it was probably unreasonable for clothes to be removed. If one were to say something, she thought that denizens of hell were not bound by the ridiculous protocol like ordinary human beings in this world of getting naked and putting on clothes one had taken off. They didn’t even need language for fraternization...

Certainly, when she refrained from speaking, no obstacles stood in the way. When they embraced just as they were—he wearing a bulky Nō

costume and even a mask, and Keiko wearing a firm bodysuit, dress, and high heels— in fact, she felt more naked and free than when she was actually naked. Was making love like this when wrapped in twelve-layered robes (*junihitoe*)? Or, was this close to making love shut inside a cocoon? In any case, the atmosphere was enveloped in an ecstasy more dense than golden honey, and Keiko felt like she was swimming in a dream while she was united with the body of this mysterious man.

Then there appeared a change in the face of the Nō mask Komachi. The mask of “Magojirō,” with an expression that was neither crying nor laughing, convulsed and seemed to change into the face of a madwoman. Keiko was fascinated by this eerie transformation. Actually, it changed into the face of a dying woman. It was a rare experience during which she observed in detail how the climax of ecstasy during intercourse was shifting to death.

At the climax, the mask “Magojirō” closed its eyes. Then it reverted to a regular Nō mask and fell off like a leaf. What appeared was the face of an ogre. It was nothing other than the grotesque face of an ogre with burning golden eyes in a lump of red blood and flesh. Strangely, she felt neither fear nor disgust. Rather, she felt something akin to relief at finding what she had anticipated.

“You are Lesser Captain Fukakusa after all,” she said. The ogre’s face instantly turned pale and reverted to the face of a young man. She could not discern the face as Masao or Sadao, but if that were the case, she would think of this person as Lesser Captain Fukakusa.

“It’s just as you might have guessed,” the person said.

“Finally you seem to be free of the possessive spirit.”

“Oh, this,” the captain said and picked up the dropped “Magojirō” mask. “Somehow I couldn’t take this mask off my face. Probably due to this delusion, I mean I was obsessed with Komachi and behaved eccentrically, visiting her house for almost a hundred nights. But why did I come here?”

“From hell you emerged on stage, and just as you were, chased after me, wearing that mask and exaggerated costume.”

“So it seems. Then, I’ll take off these things,” the Lesser Captain said and tried to remove the red hunting robe (*kariginu*) and lavender corded trousers (*sashinuki*), but the clothes would not leave the body.

“Keiko,” the person called her name with the tone of an ordinary young man. “Please help me. Please take me away from here.”

“Unfortunately, this discussion isn’t possible, is it? I can’t bring you to this world and live with you, can I? Please go back just as you are.”

“Go where?”

“To hell,” she said. Then she grabbed the mask from him and pressed it onto his face. The mask stuck to his face, reverting to the face of Komachi. It looked like the smiling face of a young woman.

Keiko walked away without even looking back. Blown by a dry wind, while she walked downhill to the train station, she saw the flaming red evening sun, sensed the unmistakable autumn color, and felt the lid to hell close neatly behind her back.