

Overall, very well done, with good pacing and rhythm. The descriptions of the heroine's emotions and fantasies could be clearer. The last three lines at the end of the story are excellent, probably the best of any of the entries.

1 / 8

Translated by Adam Kuplowsky

By the Shore

Kashimada Maki

The woman's day begins when she wishes it would end. She has a man, and he must be fed. So she cuts up vegetables and sausage, throws them in a pot, and pours in stock to make a ^{* 1}*pôt-au-feu*. *Pot-au-feu* is really quite simple. She figures she could have made something more difficult, something that would have satisfied her desires. But she is making what *he* asked her to make. And that will not satisfy her desires.

The woman stares at the chaos in the pot. Oh, she says, I've seen this before. It is a *déjà vu* of the chaos she has felt ever since she was a young girl; that strange exuberance brought on by the secret, prideful and self-conscious behavior of other young girls. Unable to comprehend it, she dispassionately played her part through a vague mist of solitude and depression. She recalls the suffocating stench of her classroom, its air heady with antiperspirant, hair gel and madeleines, how it made her feel like a snake crawling round on its belly. But her recollection is imperfect owing to the chaos and anguish of those days...

You know that young teacher? He keeps ogling me. But I don't like him at all!

I was a fan of that singer before they were big. Now everybody likes them, so I don't listen to them anymore.

Yeah, yeah, everyone says she's cute, but I don't care for her looks. She's not beautiful. She's cute, which is to say: she's not pretty.

Mindless chatter, all of it. And frothy like meringue. No, *it really was meringue*—light and frivolous, yet of the utmost importance to young girls. A means of seeing to what extent they could expend their excess of hormones. The woman recalls swallowing this excess like a goldfish sucking in oxygen, her belly swelling up as though she were becoming pregnant, and the subsequent crisis of her body about to burst.

She recalls a teacher's words. *Is everything all right? You look pale. Are you in pain? Then again, you also seem distant, distracted even. Tell me, what's on your mind? Are you having trouble concentrating?*

*** 1**

Rather than Anglicizing the Japanese for pot-au-feu, it might be better to say "beef stew," since that fits the description of being a simple dish to prepare. Use of the French word here suggests that the dish is actually rather exotic.

The woman knew. She knew that what she was feeling was a sort of rapture that comes before the body revolts. It was in this enraptured state that she came of age and met the man. Thinking that she would no longer have to listen, as she had in her girlhood, to that bitching and moaning that was so much like meringue, she befriended him. And without stopping to consider whether or not she loved him, she made her life with him.

But one day the man says to her, Nothing you say makes any sense. It just vanishes like foam. Honestly, I feel like I'm grabbing at clouds when I listen to you talk.

Foam. Clouds. She thinks, That's what I used to call "meringue," back when I was in school. That empty hormonal release. She listens to the man and begins to fear that the swelling ball of oxygen that had once caused her such pain and anxiety is now swelling inside of her again, and is making her nauseous.

So she apologizes, her face as pale as it was that day she stood before her teacher. But what she is apologizing for, she cannot say. Only she is apologizing to keep this man who had given her shelter from leaving. To defend herself.

I'm sorry, she says. I suppose I'm feeling off today. But you're right. When a person says something, it should make sense. It should be architecturally sound. Like a monastery. Anyways, I'm sorry. I'm just feeling off, that's all.

To be sure, the woman had been feeling *off* ever since she was a young girl, but she acted like the feeling was momentary. I have to, she reasoned, or this person who has given me shelter will leave.

A monastery. She feels guilty for having said it. But she has long thought of the man in this way: as a stone structure. Large and impressive, yet lacking warmth—cold, really. She had come to him to gain a sense of security, but there was something about him that still made her feel afraid. Who is he, she wonders, and what is this vague uncertainty I feel in his large presence?

She senses it dimly. A dark cloud brooding over a stone monastery, throwing down cold rain and sparks. Growing fearful, she thinks, It's all going to crumble, and I'm going to be swept away. He makes me uneasy. He's cold and unfeeling. But I have no one else. I depend on him. I am an addict. He is my drug.

There was a crime. An act of passion. A woman loved a man, and murdered him. Laced his drink with poison. She would have killed herself too, by leaping into the sea, had she not been caught in the act. The idea must have come to her suddenly, for everyone had only good things to say about her and the man. Nobody thought her the kind of woman who'd plot a murder-suicide. They claimed she was much too shy. Besides, she kept house with what could only be described as great integrity: the man's shirts were always crisp and white, and the kitchen ventilator gave off the sweet smell of soy sauce.

Indeed, the woman seemed happy. True, she was shy, but she always smiled. She would take out the garbage first thing in the morning, in the lavender apron the man had bought her for her birthday. I am really glad he bought it for me, she would say. I will cherish it forever. These words were a habit with her.

She loved soap operas and popular fiction. She apparently talked about them all the time with her neighbors. Don't you wonder if such sad and beautiful things happen to real people, she'd ask them, and her eyes would be red or watery, as if every time she visited those fictional worlds, she'd been able to find some sort of emotional release.

Such a quiet one, her neighbors said, and such a loving wife. How could she have done such a thing? But I suppose you never can tell. Trading gossip, they brought up the woman again and again, as if it pleased them. Again and again, like the waves that had crashed against her body on that day she had leapt into the sea.

One day the woman had asked her neighbors, Why is the ocean formless? Why does it ebb and flow, yet remain unchanged? It's strange. Her neighbors must have wondered why she had brought up the ocean all of a sudden.

Waves repeat the same motions, but for what? It's like us. We cook and clean, day after day. But no matter how many times we repeat this, we're left with nothing, only time passing. You know, I've come to feel that I haven't really learned anything, haven't discovered anything, or come to any realizations. It's like I haven't grown up emotionally. In fact, I'm starting to doubt this kind of life is healthy.

She let out a sigh.

Then again, do I really have it so bad? After all, men have to work so hard. And I should consider that everyday is something of a revolution for them. Yes, when I think of things that way, I suppose I should be grateful for my peaceful life.

But the sea makes me so uneasy, the woman went on, what with its waves coming and going, day after day. Maybe it's this repetition that makes it seem so cold and pale. Actually, I wonder if there isn't something there that is making a slow and stealthy approach. If the sea itself is not going to suddenly collapse one day.

Her neighbors figured this was merely her fancy, that she had too much time on her hands, and was spending it all on her soaps. That's what made her imagine such things, they reasoned. Captive to the discontent which they felt towards their own children and husbands, they paid the woman's dark vision no mind.

So every time the woman finished one of these flights of fancy, she'd return to normal life as if she were a wave, rolling in and out, without her neighbors taking notice.

For none of them saw it coming, that indescribably large thing making its slow and stealthy approach. Not even the woman saw it. No, none of them took notice of that thing equal in scale to the "revolution" that their men faced everyday at work.

Such was the unremarkable lead-up to the murder-suicide. And no matter how hard people tried to dig up the facts, it seemed they would stay buried for some time. The mystery was like asking the question, *Why do waves ebb and flow?*

The woman was no different from her neighbors. Pregnant with anxiety, they all drudged from one day to the next. And whenever they came upon each other throwing out the trash or bringing in the papers, they called out, Good morning! My, what lovely weather we're having. Only if there was something different about the woman, it was that she'd say, I'm grateful for this lovely weather we're having. *Grateful*. To whom? Perhaps to something as large as the ocean, though she was only vaguely conscious of its enormity.

The woman reads about the incident in the newspaper. What's that, asks the man. I thought you didn't care for news. The woman folds up the paper as if she's done something

wrong. It's nothing really, she says. Only there's an article about knitting that caught my eye. Anyways, what do you want for dinner?

She is clutching the folded newspaper. She feels it robbing her of her warmth, and as if there'd been a momentary and inexplicable rush of blood to her head, followed by a sudden retreat, her body begins to cool down. What could it be, she wonders, I've never felt this way before. ^{*2} Her two black cats brush up against her legs, as if to sympathize with her. Just then, the pressure-cooker boils over.

Oh dear, says the woman, turning off the element. I must have been dreaming. Sorry sorry sorry. She is always apologizing to the man, even when she has done nothing wrong. She thinks, I would fall apart if he left me. And that would be like the end of the world. Of course, they say it keeps turning after you're gone, but I don't believe it. For my number one priority is myself. So when I come to an end, so does the world. That's why I apologize to him. Because I want him to keep sheltering me under his wings. I don't want the world to end.

But I get it, the woman says to herself, clenching the newspaper tightly, why the person in this article killed her husband and threw herself into the sea. She was suffering from having to think about him all the time. That's why she wanted to end it: to cut off all ties with him, with the world, with everything.

I can see that all his priorities can't be my own. Which is why I'm addicted to him, why I suffer from withdrawal. And because this withdrawal is so painful, I feel I should kill him and myself right now!

Days pass. The woman begins carrying a clipping of the newspaper article around with her, her mind frequently returning to its contents. She watches the red-hot pressure cooker, thinking to herself: I wonder what poison she used? How did she get her hands on it? How was she able to sneak it into his drink?

I wonder, she goes on, how she felt when she threw herself into the sea? Why did she choose to end things that way? How cold was the water? How painful was it to choke on the water? How awful, really, is it to die?

* 2
No, it's one black cat. It belongs to the two of them.

The man speaks. Dinner ready yet? And the woman stops thinking. She listens to him as he tells her about his colleagues, about his work, about global finance. Eating the meal she has prepared, she nods or makes utterances to indicate that she is listening. But in her head, she is thinking about the murder-suicide incident, her inner voice speaking in *basso continuo*.

One day she says, Let's go to the beach. What, now? says the man. It's too cold. You'll only see gray water and white waves crashing on the rocks.

I don't mind, says the woman. I still want to go. Even if it's cold. Besides, it's not like I'm planning on swimming. I just want to see the ocean.

The man does not register the ominous proposal. Look, he says, tipping his glass of cold sake towards her, the moon in my cup. What a beautiful night. Yes, says the woman, it really is. Nights are always beautiful and calm. But in her head she goes on, Because I always want to scream during the day.

The woman turns pale. Tell me something, she says. Do you love me? The man looks at her, surprised. What are you going on about? If I didn't love you, we wouldn't be together, right? That's not what I meant, says the woman. And she falls silent and thinks, That ordinary love won't satisfy me. I don't want you love me the way you'd love an ordinary woman. I want you to love me some other way.

She thinks, I don't even want you to want my womanly parts. I want you to look back to before I became a woman, to my girlhood, to that time when I was suffocating. I want you to bring order to my thoughts, to love me and make me feel secure. Oh, how wonderful it would have been had you been able to love all of me, including my past.

You don't love me, do you, she says in a low voice. But the man is not listening. Her words do not reach him.

Women everywhere are reflecting themselves in mirrors. Combing their hair, applying lipstick, spritzing on perfume. Not for somebody else's sake, not even for the men in their lives, but for themselves only. Each woman delights to see herself reflected in her own mirror, knowing full well that if the image of her girlhood self were to suddenly

appear there, she would gobble it up entirely. She imagines how satisfying it would be to consume her own image without it ever being sullied by a man.

Soft and light, in thin summer dresses, the women frolic and laugh and play. They are at the height of pleasure, as if there were no pain, no past and no future. Divvying up their pastel-colored macarons, they throw mischievous glances at each other as if to say, What shall we get up to next? Like those young girls on the beach at ^{* 3} Balbec, each bears a remarkable resemblance to the other. A group of girls without individuality.

These girls will never age or decay. Having lost all individual qualities, they will probably go on playing forever. And should they be touched by some nauseatingly unclean hand, they would likely retaliate with the supreme cruelty of oblivion and disregard, acting as though they had never been sullied in the first place.

For the only thing that can touch them is the holy affliction of frigidity. And the reason they will not decay is that they are composed of some incredibly inorganic substance. Even still, as they float here and there, they are seized by the ominous signs that float about them, to which they also belong: creeping black shadows of melancholy; a dispassionate hysteria transmuting their bodies into something other than flesh.

Even the woman who attempted the murder-suicide was once one of these virgin girls of the sun. And though she never imagined that she would throw herself into the sea, she danced towards her future at a steady pace. And whether or not she was loved by her husband, the act that she committed seemed to her, a woman carrying on a tenuous relationship, something familiar, as if she had been driven to act, as if her pressure cooker had boiled and screamed as soon as the element was lit.

But for many women, too much determination is required to purchase poison; and a knife feels too heavy in the hand. So they must live out their entire lives being rocked by the waves of anxiety and ominous premonition.

That is why the woman heats up the pressure cooker and dreams about the murder-suicide with a feeling of pleasure, peering into the cloudy water as if she were watching a soap opera. That is her number one priority. No longer having the drive to turn her thoughts

* 3
Balbec: I'm glad you got the Proustian reference, several others didn't.

into action, she imagines them. Terrible, she says. And to herself, To think I might do that someday. But she cuts her imagination short. *Terrible.*

One day the woman is taking out the trash, and notices her neighbors, a family of three, heading towards their car. The mother and father are carrying duffle bags. The child is shouldering a backpack. We're going to the beach, says the wife. Of course, it's too cold to go swimming, but our son—our little prince—is dead set on having a picnic.

I see, says the woman. But it really is cold—freezing even. So take care. If you were to get caught in the waves this time of year, you'd be in trouble.

The husband interrupts. You all right? You don't look so well. Your lips are ^{* 4}blue.
Not eating? Trouble sleeping?

Why yes, actually, says the woman. I haven't been feeling well recently. One minute I'm hot, and the next I'm cold.

The wife turns to her husband. How can you be so dense, she says. We're not spring chickens, you know. Our bodies are going through all sorts of changes. Really, I can't believe you said that!

She apologizes to the woman. Sorry about him. I know how it is.

Come on, whines the boy, pulling at his mother's dress, the beach!

Oh dear! What am I going to do about our little price? Well, have a nice day.

You too, says the woman.

The family gets into their car and drives off.

^{* 5}Take care, murmurs the woman as she watches them go.

*** 4**

Blue: good, because that's what むらさき corresponds to here. It seems obvious but several others translated it as 'purple.'

*** 5**

"Take care" is the perfect word here.

I was impressed by the richness of the vocabulary. This translation also has a good flow, partly because of the added connecting words like "naturally," "later," "indeed," "however." There are several small mistakes.

1 / 8

Translated by Adam Kuplowsky

On Bowling

Mukoda Kuniko

It's been ten years since I bought my answering machine.

Nowadays, what with the seeming ubiquity of these devices, I get fewer accidental messages than before. Still, I can recall many delightful ones from those early days.

"Hello, this is so-and-so Coffee House. Could you send over two kilograms of your Mocha Mattari and one kilogram of your Blue Mountain beans right away?"

"So A--ko says she's gonna leave home for sure. And y'know what? Huh? Hello? You there? Hellooo? [*Blows into receiver*]. Huh. That's odd. Testing. Testing..."

But such are just the tip of the iceberg.

Once I got yelled at.

"Goddammit!" shouted a voice from my machine. "Don't treat me like a fool! What are you, too much of a wuss to even make excuses about the money you owe? You have to hide behind some woman and pretend you're not home? Now get me my 300,000 thousand yen by the end of the day—or else!"

Of course, these were merely innocent misdials. But in my recorded greeting, I had given my surname, added that I was unable to answer the phone and left clear instructions for callers to leave their name and message on the answering machine within one minute of the tone, so I have no idea why this sort of thing should have happened at all.

Finding one minute to be too short, some people would call back to leave a "Part II". Miss Kuroyanagi Tetsuko provided me with a particularly amusing example.

"Mukoda? It's Kuroyanagi."

Seeming to think that if she didn't start with these words, the rest would not follow, she said them quickly.

"This is my first time speaking to one of these machines," she went on with even greater rapidity, "so bear with me. I'm finding it hard to talk. I mean, it would be weird to speak to it with any sort of emotion, yet just as odd to speak like I was reading the news..."

And just as she was expressing how she was at a loss over what to do—*Click*. A minute passed, and she was disconnected.

There followed another message.

“Mukoda? It’s Kuroyanagi,” she began again, just like before. “This is a continuation of my previous message. Gosh, a minute isn’t very long, is it? I wonder how everyone manages...”

And just as she was expressing how exceedingly smart everyone must be, and how stupid she felt in comparison—*Click*. A minute passed.

Again.

“Mukoda? It’s Kuroyanagi. I’m calling from a control room at NHK Studios. And since I’m the only one talking here, everybody’s looking at me funny, as if I’d flown the coup or something...”

But as soon as she had finished describing the circumstances in which she found herself, she was disconnected yet again.

And so in this manner she babbled on, her words flowing like water from a tap, for the length of nine voicemail messages, before she finally changed her mind and decided that she would just wait to tell me what it was that she had to say in person. Taken all together, her messages made for a most delightful nine-minute sketch.

Now I am of the mind that a good thing should not be kept to oneself. So I have played this tape for the entertainment of every director and guest who has come to visit me, though I feel sorry about not getting Miss Kuroyanagi’s permission first. Needless to say, her one-woman-nine-minute-serial-voicemail is a record yet to be broken.

As for the coldest voicemail I have ever received—that would be from my father.

“Hmph!”

The message begins with a loud and inexplicable grunt.

“This is Mukoda Toshio!” my father barks out. “You are to call my office right away. Our telephone number is XX-XXX!”

Thinking I had done something wrong, I called him back in a panic, only to discover that he had been trying to reach me for a perfectly banal reason: that is, to tell me

that my Noh tickets had arrived, and that I could pick them up. My father passed away eight years ago, and this was the only time I ever heard his voice on my answering machine.

By way of comparison, my mother, who is now well acquainted with answering machines, had her own peculiar understanding of them when I first got mine.

I remember one message in particular.

“Kuniko? This is your mother. I can see you’re not in...”

She sounded terribly upset.

“Well that’s fine,” she went on in a huff, “but what good is my speaking to a machine going to do? All right, I’m hanging up now.”

To be sure, I have had many unique messages over the past ten years, some intentional and some not, but my favorite message of all is the message I received from what seemed to be ^{*1} a middle-aged housewife.

“Good afternoon,” the woman began in an elegant whisper that hinted at a great embarrassment. “I fear I am not worthy to give you my name. However, I appear to have misdialed, and am not quite sure what to do about it.”

There was a thin sigh, a pause.

“Please accept my apologizes for any inconvenience I may have caused you.”

And the sound of the receiver being gently put down.

Ah, so this is modesty, I thought, and tried to visualize the person at the other end: how she looked, what clothes she wore, what sort of family she had.

I concluded that she must have a graceful bow.

About six months ago my mother’s heart began acting up. *Paroxysmal tachycardia*, we were told, which means that her heart rate will abruptly exceed two-hundred beats per minute. While not life-threatening, it was enough to give her and the rest of our family a good scare, so she was admitted to a hospital for testing. Now my mother, ^{*2} who is turning seventy this New Year’s Eve, has always been blessed with good health. And aside from the times when she was in labor, she has never been off her feet. So her stay at the hospital

*1

"middle-aged housewife," is not quite right, but the part after that, "Good afternoon...gently put down." is brilliant.

*2

She is using 数え年 kazoedoshi so quite hard to get this right. Probably better to say "turning seventy this year," so it does not sound like her birthday in the Western sense is December 31.

was a novel experience for her. Naturally, she told us not to worry, that she'd be out in a month, but I later found out that she had gone in prepared to make her journey to the other side.

Her first two days at the hospital were full of excitement. In the evenings she would take a handful of 10-yen coins to the hallway payphone to report to the family on the day's events.

She told us what a thrill it was to live without worrying about regular meals; how the food was made with ample consideration given to the tastes and nutritional needs of the elderly; how thoughtful the nursing staff was. Indeed, her reports were as lively as those you would expect to hear ^{* 3} from a seasoned news reporter.

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| <p>*3 Sentence omitted after "news reporter."</p> |
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However, on the third day, her report saw a dramatic decline in energy and length. On the fourth day, she stopped calling entirely.

After a week had gone by, I took a day off work to visit the hospital.

I found my mother sitting in bed, her face looking smaller than I remembered it. On that day, my four siblings were present, including my sister who was married and no longer lived at home. When it came time to go, I found it terribly hard to leave.

I glanced at my younger brother's watch.

But before I could suggest we get going, my mother spoke up.

"I think I'd like to rest now," she said cheerfully; and hopping out of bed, began to divide the flowers and fruits she had received from well-wishers.

After some squabbling, we were sent packing with more loot than we had brought with us in the first place.

"Now look here," my mother lectured. "There are people at this hospital who don't get any visitors whatsoever, which makes things awkward for me when you all show up at once. So please don't visit for the time being."

The tiny woman led her four adult children down the hospital corridor.

"I mean it," she said firmly as she shuffled us into the elevator, "don't bother."

But just as the doors were about to close, she added, with a low bow:

"Thank you for coming."

Up to this point, she had been speaking to us rather brusquely. Now it seemed as though she had become an entirely different person, bowing to us deeply, like an elevator girl on the first floor of a department store.

^{* 4}
As the doors closed on the large hospital elevator, I watched my mother lower her pale face, the matcha-green stole my sister had knitted her draped over her nightgown. She seemed to have become even smaller than she looked when I had arrived. In the end, I fought back the impulse to open the doors and call to her.

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| <p>*4 "gurney" omitted.</p> |
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My siblings and I rode down from the seventh floor in silence.

Before we reached the lobby, my brother let out a groan.

“She’s too much,” he said.

“She’s always like that,” my youngest sister chimed in. Apparently, even though she visited everyday, and my brother checked in every three days, our mother would unfailingly walk each of them to the elevator and bow, the angle of which, my brother alleged, changed depending on the number of people present.

“That’s why her bow was so deep today. Because we all came.”

How like her, we laughed and walked towards the parking lot, taking special care not to look at each other’s tear-filled eyes.

That was the second time my mother made me a formal bow.

The first time was two years ago. I had decided to treat my sister and mother to a six-day vacation in Hong Kong.

“Father will be rolling in his grave,” she protested. “It’s bad karma!” However, I knew that she would be happy as soon as I had gotten her out of the house, despite her leaving it kicking and screaming. After all, she had always been an appreciator of delicious foods and was still very curious for her age.

At the airport I watched from behind a plastic partition as my mother and sister opened their carry-on luggage for the security officer.

“Any knives or sharp objects?” said the officer mechanically. Naturally, I expected my mother to answer in the negative.

She did not.

“Why, yes,” she said matter-of-factly, and pulled out a large pair of sewing shears.

My sister and I nearly fell over from shock.

“Mom!” I shouted. “What’d you bring that for?”

“What?” said my mother, her words directed at no one in particular. “I figured that since we’d be away a week, I’d need to cut my nails.”

The security officer smiled and waved her through. In the departures lounge I scolded my mother for not bringing a nail clipper.

“I thought about it when we were leaving,” she said in her defense, “but you were in such a hurry to go!”

She sighed.

“Your father would have scolded me too.”

Feeling a little sorry for her, I quietly stepped away to a flower stall to have an orchid corsage made up. After getting the florist to knock off 500 yen from the 3,000-yen fee, I handed the corsage to my mother.

“Really!” she exclaimed, indignantly. “Who do you think you are, wasting your money like that?” And she demanded I send the corsage back.

“Mom,” interceded my sister, “just let her treat you for once.”

So my mother calmed down, and I fastened the corsage to her lapel, at which point the boarding announcement for her flight was made.

My mother and sister joined a line of other passengers. Then, just as they were about to enter the gate, my mother stopped and turned round to face me. Certain that she was going to wave, I raised my right hand.

But my mother made a low bow.

So I bowed too, my right hand still raised, like the Emperor.

After my mother had boarded her flight, I bought a ticket for the observation pier and went outside. Although it was still winter, the sun was warm and bright. Beneath the deep blue sky, one point of which was sparkling like a piece of mica, planes could be seen taking off and touching down.

My mother's plane slowly began to reorient itself on the tarmac.

I felt my chest tighten.

Please don't ^{* 5}fall, I felt like praying. And if you must ^{* 5}fall, do it on the way back.

A moment later, the plane had made its ascent, and was circling the high air. There was no more cause for concern. Yet for some reason, my eyes were filling with tears. She is only going to Hong Kong, I chided myself. And recalling the shears and the corsage, I let out a loud laugh, while my tears rained down like a sudden sun shower.

*5
The temptation is to translate literally as "fall," but actually it means "crash."

My grandmother died some thirty-five years ago, just before the war got serious. I was in my second year of girls' secondary school.

At her vigil I remember somebody shouting from our front hall:

"The president of the company is here!"

My father, who was seated by my grandmother's casket, jumped to his feet and rushed to the door, brushing past all the mourners as he went. Then, pressing his palms firmly to the front step of the entrance hall, he bowed to a middle-aged man.

Perhaps *bow* is not the right word. Rather, he *made himself prostrate*. You see, back then, gasoline was being rationed, and ordinary citizens did not use their cars for non-essential travel. Moreover, the company my father worked for was a large one, affiliated with an influential family; and as he was but a mere section chief at the time, he probably never imagined that the president himself would attend his mother's vigil. At any rate, that night my father revealed to me a side of him I'd never seen before.

For as long as I can remember, my father was a ^{* 6}bully. The kind of man who shouted at his wife and kids, who raised his voice even at his own mother. And while I have always seen him as the proud branch manager who occupied the head of our table, his back to the family alcove, on that night he bowed in a manner that seemed almost servile to me.

*6
"bully" is a good translation of "ibatte ita."

How I hated my father's despotism.

He who had never bought a single piece of jewellery for my mother—why was it that he alone left our house each day in a starched white-linen suit? Why, when his subordinates came to visit, ^{* 7}did he treat them with such disrespect? How is it that whenever

*7
mistranslation—the meaning is actually the opposite, that he treated his subordinates with so much respect.

my siblings or I came down with measles or whooping cough he never cared to stay home, even for a few hours?

Indeed, on that night I felt I had glimpsed the reason for his self-made success at that company he had entered as an office boy with a middle-school education. Although I had been close with my grandmother, having shared a room with her for a time, the sadness of her all-important vigil disappeared, leaving me with only the image of my father, his head bowed low. It was a side of him he'd never shown us—the side with which he'd fought through life. At that moment I decided I would forgive him for always taking an extra side-dish for dinner, and for the times he beat us whenever one of ^{* 8}his contracts fell through. Even now, when I picture the way my father looked that night, I feel a throbbing pain in my chest.

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| <p>*8 another small omission, 保険</p> |
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My mother bowed to her children. But because my father died of a sudden heart attack at the age of sixty-four, prior to his retirement, he never got the chance to. To be sure, he softened somewhat in his later years, but he managed to keep our heads bowed down to his scolding and shouting to the very end.

It's a complicated thing, seeing one's parent bow.

It's not so much awkward or confusing as it is funny, sad and a little bit infuriating.

Even if a parent knows that to bow to one's offspring is, like growing old, an inescapable fact of life, how sad this fact is for the child!