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Until Snow Falls (1) —田辺聖子「雪の降るまで」*—

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要旨：主人公の以和子は大阪の服地問屋で働く、いわゆる「ハイミス」の女性である。京都の小さな料理旅館を舞台に、大庭という中年男性との逢瀬が描かれている。以和子が旅館に到着して大庭と床をともにするまでの短い間に、一見単調な日常生活の背後に隠れた以和子のパーソナリティーのもう一つの側面が、さまざまな感情の起伏をともなって豊かに表現されている。

キーワード：田辺聖子、翻訳、メタファー、異文化理解、ジョゼと虎と魚たち

Introduction

“What a dark inn,” she thought. The gate was half rotten and narrow as branches draped over it, as if the trees covered its mouth with leaves. Thick moss covered the steppingstones completely.¹ No nameplate was on the darkened front door.

Out came a woman, about 40, who was dressed like a typical housewife with a sweater, skirt, and on her feet, white socks. Iwako said, “I’m here for Oba.”

“Come in please. He’s already arrived,” the woman spoke naturally, without any insincerity. Her expression was so calm that Iwako thought she must be accustomed to dealing with customers.

Inside the inn was very cool and damp, as if steeped in river mist. It seemed to be quite an old place. The hallway was very dark, and although the sliding doors of some rooms were closed, nobody seemed to be around. Iwako felt a terrible chill in the soles of her feet from the floor of the hallway.

Suddenly they turned the corner to the left, saying, “Here we are.” The woman knelt down and announced, “She has arrived.” The woman courteously opened the faded sliding door with both hands.²

Oba was sitting by the window. After the

woman left the room, Iwako took off her coat and said, “I’m sorry, I am late. Have you’ve been waiting long?”

She always speaks in a small voice. Iwako works at a wholesale fabric shop in Azuchi-machi, Osaka, and her coworkers often commented on it. Actually, her voice is crystal clear, so despite the smallness of her voice, people aren’t troubled by it. Whenever Iwako sits in front of Oba, her voice gets a lot smaller.

“No, not really.” Oba said calmly. Nevertheless, Iwako assumed that he had been waiting for a long time.

“What a dark inn!”

“That’s right, but it serves good food. I’ve already been here a couple times, and I definitely wanted you to try it.”

Oba, who is 51 this year, has a forceful, youthful voice, probably because he has been learning Noh chants. Oba tries to invite Iwako to Noh performances, but she always turns down his invitation, saying,

“That’s not really my thing,” and avoids the issue. He said he has also been leaning tea ceremony with his wife, but Iwako has never been interested in that. In the past, she demurred saying, “I’m not really the sophisticated type.”³

“Not that type of “sophistication,” he replied

mischievously, "Women who are truly sophisticated are ones like you who enjoy a good lay... No, not only women, it might be true for all humans. True "sophistication" means people are care-free enough to enjoy everything fully."

"Well, that comes with age," Iwako said, "People who become 46 like me become less concerned with convention, don't they?"

"Actually, it's very hard to find such broad-minded girls. If you tried to find one downtown, you could be involved in relationship for money... if you went out with a normal girl, you might be trapped by the ties of convention."

Iwako giggled.

"You are the only woman, Iwako. There is no one else like you."

Even now, her heart bounds with joy, although Iwako has only been with Oba for one year. Whenever she meets this special man, for the first few moments, eye-contact makes her feel shy. When Oba gazes at her with a smile, she lowers her eyes, and then, tears well up. Her feelings are a mixture of joy and shyness. They rise to such a peak of extreme arousal that the emotional tension cannot be endured, and then it suddenly collapses and spins out of control, so that she feels she should not have come to meet him. At these times, Iwako's skin slowly flushes with the color of confused blood.

She looks slender because of the way she wears her kimono and her aesthetic poise, but in reality she is solidly built. Her skin is a rich white color similar to aged porcelain.⁴ When she meets Oba, her smooth skin glows promiscuously, as if a light has blinked on inside her.

As Oba pulled her closer, Iwako whispered, "...the woman might come back... soon..."

Oba ignored her and said in a smiling tone, "It doesn't matter. In this inn, everybody is slow at their job. Very slow indeed. This cold is unbearable to me, I need to warm myself..."

The house seemed very old-fashioned and the room was only warmed by a small electric heater.

Oba is lean and muscular. He is tall with a large frame for a man of his age. He is so well built

that he looks like a giant. Oba once said that he was considered relatively tall in the past, but now, younger people grow taller. When she is held by Oba, Iwako is always impressed by "how exactly we fit together."

She feels the way he holds her and the tender kiss on her lips like a warm snow resonate in her. Her feelings are probably caused by something in Oba perfectly matching her. It is not just their physical connection, but it might also be a connection of their souls.

In reality, the body of Oba is firm, but Iwako does not feel it is that way. His arms, tongue, and lips are unbelievably soft.⁵ It doesn't seem like a man's body at all but an elemental force of life. The body itself is a blissful sigh, and Iwako feels she is wrapped within that sigh.

She has never felt these kinds of feelings for any of the several lovers she has had in the past. Before she went out with Oba, Iwako was seeing a 38 or 39-year-old man named Kuno.

Iwako has been doing accounting work at a wholesale fabric shop for 10 years or so. About 30 or 40 employees work at that shop, which is low-paying but has family-like atmosphere.

Iwako looks modest and quiet, and people in the shop think of her as a drab and featureless female clerk. Like her elder sister, people may have the impression that she is a gloomy old maid who has lost the chance to get married.⁶ But it is only experienced men who could notice the spontaneity that exudes from within and floats around her, so it was the playboy Kuno who approached her.

Iwako has secretly chosen and had relationships with the men who can see through her facade and approach her. Since she has no plans to marry, her affairs with men are enthusiastic and make her life full.

She thinks that she would like to go out with men until she is 70, or 80. Iwako is satisfied with the idea that she can burn with love even when she gets old. To have affairs with men is one of her hobbies.

When Kuno slept with Iwako for the first time, he whispered in a hoarse voice with deep

satisfaction, "You're just as I had expected, after all."

"What do you mean? What was just as you had expected?"

"Your skin. I was looking at your face and I've been thinking that you have clear, fine skin. And your voice."

"My voice."

"Right. Your lustful voice."

"...Nobody has ever said that to me."

"Those idiots don't know. People who know, notice."

"I didn't mean to make such sounds..."

"That's not what I mean... what can I say... your voice stirs men's imagination. It arouses the Buddhist concept of *evil thoughts* such as 'Does she know this position?' or 'Can I try this move?' When men imagine something, it always comes back to evil thoughts."

"But I was never that kind of woman."

"You're kidding me! You're far too filthy-minded. You could hardly be anything else."

Indeed, the man named Kuno was an idiot, but he got some points for using the Buddhist phrase *evil thoughts*, and in smelling out her desire, Iwako thought. But Iwako got tired of him soon because his playboy personality was often superficial. Kuno's blood never ran as hot as Iwako's. She would like to say to Kuno that his passion should burn hotter.

People say "A hunter chasing deer cannot see the mountain." Speaking generally, hanging around with too many women makes men unsophisticated, and then they cannot see a woman's heart. Although, there are some who are born with such sophistication. (It was clear when she compares Kuno with Oba.)

Iwako was not that amusing when talking with Kuno. After getting out of their bed, Kuno was a dull man who had a habit of jiggling his knees nervously. He worked at a small printing shop and was not special in anyway. His body shaking in excitement, he would gossip about stories he heard secondhand concerning the local religious organization. Kuno's mother and wife were members of

that community. He was also forced to take part in it to increase his customers, but he only talked trash about the leader of the organization.

Iwako quickly lost interest in Kuno. He might have thought that he ditched Iwako, but in reality, Iwako cast aside Kuno with utter disappointment.

He was a cocky, attractive womanizer, good-looking, wearing glasses with thin rims. He was so aware of his own attractiveness that Iwako sometimes enjoyed his unnatural, theatrical manner.

It is true, everyone pales in comparison with Oba. For the moment, Iwako was totally immersed in Oba, as he intertwined his legs around her⁷.

Oba runs a lumber business in Kuzyo neighborhood, Kyoto. Iwako once went to Kyoto to learn flower arrangement, and she met Oba in a classroom for the Sagagoryu style flower arrangement.⁸ At that time, Oba was there with his wife and gave the excuse "My wife forced me to come..."

His wife was a beautiful Kyoto woman. She wore glasses but had fair skin, plump cheeks, and a nice personality. They seemed to be happily married.

Kyoto is so famous for traditional Japanese art forms, and not only women, but also many young and old men were in the flower-arranging class. Iwako came to Kyoto on her teacher's recommendation, but she decided to quit the class because she could not manage to find time to go. She learned flower arrangement not because she wanted to become a flower-arranging teacher or because she wanted to get a flower-arranging license, but only for her amusement. Therefore, she felt free to start or quit at her own pleasure.

"Oh, are you going to quit the class? We are going to miss you so much, Iwako," Oba said to her. For almost a year, Oba and Iwako's exchanges had only consisted of greetings such as "Good evening," "It's sweltering today," or "It's freezing today."

Oba said in a soft tone, "I would like to see you again." and, unexpectedly, her hands were

wrapped in his.

Although it was cold at the time, she had not been wearing gloves. She felt the warmth of his hands. It was the first time for her to be enveloped by the warmth of a man's hands in this way, as he carefully held her hands in his. She had no experience of having her hands held this way when she slept with men.

At that moment, she felt that he was "tender."⁹

Clinging to her as if in a different life Oba were a barnacle on a rock, Iwako thought about how tightly his body fits hers. He fits her perfectly.

However, at that time of their goodbye, Iwako could not find it in her heart to have relationship with Oba. After a year or so, she got a call from Oba, "I've just arrived at Osaka," he continued, "I have important business to do in Yokohori, Osaka." She met Oba in South Osaka, and they started their relationship that night.

They have dated secretly once a month, or three times in two months, but they do not stay together overnight. They have been meeting for about a year and a half. Iwako has begun to realize the meaning of the expression "the happy days passed like a dream."

On the surface, she is in the same old rut. The Yamatake fabric shop had a veteran in accounting who was related to the owner of the shop, so Iwako has few responsibilities. She is well received by customers, and is considered to be a convenient middle-aged lady in the right place. She is called "the Yamatake clerk," and, as her job at Yamatake, she ostensibly goes for errands to the bank, calculates paycheck slips and balances finances.

Iwako keeps the same hairstyle, has an old handbag, buys bag lunch, and commutes by subway. Everyone in the shop knows that she lives in a cheap municipal apartment in Sagisu, buys one lottery ticket at a time and always puts it in her wallet. When she is required to work overtime, she does not protest.

Iwako eats udon noodles at the cafeteria for employees with gusto, slurping the soup to the last drop. Then, she removes the bowls from the table

and rinses them out in the kitchen. She is a dependable female employee in the shop. Sometimes young women are hired, but they quit because of their marriage or new jobs or something, people see that Iwako is unfailingly there.

People in the shop and the customers are reassured by her consistency. That is her way.

For that reason, as long as people at the bank see Iwako responding to "the Yamatake clerk!" nobody can see the contents of her life or understand her dreamlike "happy days."

Whenever Iwako thinks of her relations with Oba, she almost gets lost in her plaintive, unbridled passions. (She did not want to use the word "sex" as young people nowadays do, because that word is less than convincing for her. Rather, it would be better to call it an "intimate relationship.") At that moment, she feels she can ascertain the presence of her womb.

As an old poem said, "We clearly know the presence of our stomach by the movement of cool water falling down our esophagus into it." In the same way, she feels her womb.

Since Iwako's period came at a young age, she thinks she might also go into menopause earlier. She has worried little about getting her period in the last year. She has almost forgotten about it. She started forgetting that she bleeds every month. She always thinks to herself, "Now is the best time of my life." So even when she goes into menopause, she will not feel deeply about it. In the same way, she wouldn't feel any emotion if her womb were removed. Iwako felt she can ascertain the presence of her womb. And "her womb" is not a physical one, but the life force of herself as a woman.

It is the core proof of a women's life.

Every time she thinks about the pleasure of sleeping with Oba, she feels a powerful, lukewarm drug slowly infuse her body. She does not know when she will break up with him, but she will always retain a sense of contentment, like recalling happy days and smiling "I was happy I could meet such a good guy..."

It is only natural that Iwako does not have a

desire to get married with Oba. She knows Oba also feels that way. It is natural for Iwako that Oba gets along with his wife and is a well-balanced man.

Just as Iwako does not give any attention to being labeled “the Yamatake clerk” at the bank counters for the last few decades, she does not give attention to the label of “married” for Oba. That makes no difference to her at all. For Iwako, that label seems only one more daily reality like the bank transfer or depositing money in a bank account.

“Would you mind opening the window?” said Iwako in a small voice. After one kiss, she can come out of her shell easily as if the ice in her heart has melted. But she always feels waves of embarrassment at the beginning of the date, as if this was their first meeting.

Oba once said to Iwako, “You don’t restart things from the point you ended. You bring an end to each event, and begin something anew.” Iwako admits to herself that her behavior is unreasonable. She is unsure what to do, but she cannot help being shy in front of Oba.

“It’s cold,” Oba said, and opened the paper screen covering the window. Mt. Arashiyama could be seen rising over a grove of cypress and Japanese cedars. The sky was gray and the discolored trees in some areas looked like tiger stripes against deep green of the mountainside.

“The coldest place, in the coldest season in Kyoto,” Oba laughed.

But chill in Kyoto was not uncomfortable for Iwako. People say that when you sharpen swords, or polish mirrors using water from the coldest season, they glitter brighter. The bitter cold in Kyoto is a good feeling.

(to be continued...)

Notes:

* この翻訳は田辺聖子「雪の降るまで」(『ジョゼと虎と魚たち』(1985年初版)所収)に基づいている。

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1 枝で門が口を塞がれていたり、飛び石が苔で埋まっ

ているのは、二人の関係が表面から見えないことのメタファー。短編を通していくつかの対比的概念が見られるが「見える・見えない」の対比はそのうちの一つである。

- 2 「くすんだ」は dingy などが考えられるが、dingy は “dark, dirty, and in bad condition” (LDOCE 5) など、状態が悪くぼろぼろという意味を含む。faded は色あせるという意味。
- 3 日本語の「教養」は漠然とした概念である。一般に educated, cultured などが対応するとされるが(『新和英大辞典』第4版)、ここでは知識量の多さというよりも、経験に裏付けられた懐の深さであり、物事の本質をよく理解した自由さがあると捉え、sophisticated を用いた。この短編のキーワードの一つである。
- 4 white がもつ色のイメージに注意。以和子の肌の色が物語後半で毛髪や、表題の「雪」のイメージにつながっている。
- 5 大庭の魅力は、以和子によって「かたい・柔らかい」の対比で語られる。特に大庭の身体は「かたい」が、彼の声・京都方言での女性的な話し方、また精神的な部分は「柔らかい」。
- 6 以和子の日常の「見える」面の描写。
- 7 日本語では「彼女が大庭に搦め捕られている」という以和子の視点からの受動的な表現が自然だが、英語では、例えば *Iwako is intertwined by his legs. のような表現は自然ではない。
- 8 作者の卒業した「樟蔭女子専門学校」(現・大阪樟蔭女子大学)では、学園設立当初より華道は嵯峨御流であった。
- 9 大庭が「柔らかい」と表現されているが、“...he was soft.” では、soft は “having a body that is not in a strong physical condition” (LDOCE 5) の意味になり、弱々しさを含んでしまう。

Comments for Readers:

The translation of this short story was complicated by the very nature of the story itself. From the physical setting, to the main character’s speech, to assumptions made in the thoughts of the characters, Ms. Tanabe weaves aspects of Japanese culture and identity throughout the tale while also maintaining a distinctive narrative rhythm. Therefore, deciding how this work could be translated for readers with only a basic knowl-

edge of Japanese culture was a difficult task. Words that have a broad cultural familiarity such as “kimono” or major city names were left as is in the text. Other cultural words were translatable, such as “sliding door” for “襖,” although some nuance was lost. Difficulties arose with more culturally specific words and phrases, such as dialects or religious concepts. An effort was thus made to create a balance of giving readers additional context without changing the rhythm or tone of the writing excessively.

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